



LEARNING MATERIALS

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(What They've Been Taught)

By Brit Hensel with Keli Gonzales (Cherokee Nation)

MEANING



Reciprocity

**The way of life that centers mutual
exchange and sharing amongst all beings
— past, present, and future,
seen and unseen — and the Earth**

ARTISTS

A balanced perspective of what reciprocity means to our people

ARTISTS' STATEMENT

"It is important to us that this film included the perspectives of western and eastern Giduwa (Cherokee) people. Although our communities are separated by distance, our collaboration on this film offers a balanced perspective of what reciprocity means to our people and how it's actualized in our lives. This film was brought to life by a team of all Giduwa people, in front of and behind the camera, and was shot on lands that have shaped us." - Brit and Keli



Brit Hensel
Cherokee Nation

Brit Hensel (Director) is an Oklahoma based writer and award-winning filmmaker. A citizen of Cherokee Nation, her work largely explores traditional Cherokee values, language, and her peoples' connection to land in Oklahoma (former Indian Territory) and in her ancestral homelands of North Carolina (Qualla Boundary). Previously, Brit directed the documentary films, Zibi Yajdan (2019) and Native and American (2017). She was a producer for Osiyo, Voices of the Cherokee People, crew member on the FX series, Reservation Dogs and was awarded the 2022 Tulsa Artist Fellowship and 4th World Indigenous Fellowship. Brit continues to use her love for storytelling to help amplify the voices and values of her community. Most importantly, she hopes her work honors and makes Cherokee people proud.



Keli Gonzales,
Cherokee Nation

Keli Gonzales (Associate Producer)
Keli ᎠᎵᎦ Gonzales is a Cherokee artist from Welling, OK. She merges pop culture and traditional Cherokee cultural images to make personal statements. Women are central figures in her work. She also incorporates the Cherokee syllabary into her work with the hope that it will inspire people to learn to read syllabary and possibly learn the Cherokee language.

FILM SYNOPSIS

A Commitment to Maintaining Balance

Filmed on the Qualla Boundary and in Cherokee Nation, **ᎠᎾᎾᎾ** (What They've Been Taught) explores expressions of reciprocity in the Cherokee world, brought to life through a story told by an elder and first language speaker. **ᎠᎾᎾᎾ** circles the intersection of tradition, language, land, and a commitment to maintaining balance. This film was created in collaboration with independent artists from both Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.



THEMES

Caring for the Land, Nurturing the Language

CHEROKEE

Today's Cherokees are organized into three federally-recognized tribes: Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians. As with most of the films in this series, language and culture convey how Indigenous peoples interact with the land and enact reciprocity.

THE LANGUAGE OF ART

Language teacher Tom Belt (Cherokee Nation) demonstrates how Cherokee worldviews are embedded in the language itself. Oftentimes, these concepts do not easily translate into English. For instance, traditionally there was no word for decorative art; when artists create something with its source in the natural world, they are not creating something new, but simply remaking that material into something else that might be useful. This is how Cherokees use the word 'nvneha', which Tom mentions in the film. However, languages are dynamic and Cherokee language-keepers have decided on a word that many would say means art in today's context of decoration: 'ditlilosdodi'. "Art" is thus both a medium for creative cultural expression and that which connects humans to the natural world through the transformation of natural materials into something useful.

WE'RE HERE AS GUESTS

Tom also shares another key perspective, that the world does not belong to humans. He tells us the ownership of the world belongs to those who came before humans, making humans merely guests who have "to be as careful and responsible as we can be."

GRATITUDE AND GIFTING

This film further exposes how gratitude and gifting are intertwined as necessary ingredients of reciprocity. Did you notice in the beginning of the film the offering of tobacco as the tree was taken so the masks could be made? In Indigenous cultures of the United States, the offering of tobacco is an almost universal element of thanksgiving. Other things could be given as an offering as well. By assuming responsibility and respect for what is being taken, the offering constitutes an act of reciprocity and gratitude.

QUESTIONS

Discussion Questions

LEARN

What did you learn about the Cherokee perspectives and values you saw in this film?

THINK

What do you think is the meaning of the following statements made by the film's narrator?

- You are making it into a thing, you are not making a thing
- Real human beings don't do that
- We are here as guests

REMIND

According to the film's narrator, what do human beings need to be reminded of with every cycle of the moon?

DIFFERENCE

What is the difference between the way tobacco is used in this film and the way tobacco is commonly used by non-Native people?

RESPONSE

What response did you have to the masks that appeared at the beginning and end of the film? What questions do you have about Cherokee masks?



Additional Learning Resources

For information about the three federally-recognized Cherokee tribes

- <https://www.cherokee.org/>
- <https://www.ukb-nsn.gov/>
- <https://ebci.com/>

Epidemics and Cherokee Resiliency (OsiyoTV)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5cnbN5kP-IY&t=2s> (beginning at 1:46)

Patterns of Health and Wellbeing: Prayer and the Spiritual in Health Ways (seminar by Tom Belt)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RDRVqUaPC8&t=627s>

To learn more about Cherokee Booger masks, see Booger mask history:

- https://www.wcu.edu/library/digitalcollections/cherokeetraditions/people/Carvers_AllenLong.html
- https://www.cherokeephoenix.org/culture/cochran-shares-booger-mask-history/article_9f503145-0960-5ec9-9888-d255cc78179b.html
- <https://visitcherokeenc.com/blog/entry/many-faces-a-cherokee-mask-exhibit/>

Presented by UKB artist and mask maker, Roger Cain

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKjyqDyeLKw>

Cherokee Nation CCO Cultural Presentation Booger Masks with UKB mask maker, Roger Cain

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CYuZYPBjl4>

INFINITY OF NATIONS: Art and History in the Collections of the National Museum of the American Indian

- <https://americanindian.si.edu/static/exhibitions/infinityofnations/woodlands/237839.html>
- <https://theonefeather.com/2020/06/08/many-faces-mask-exhibit-opens-at-museum-of-the-cherokee-indian/>

Cherokee Dance and Drama, Frank Gouldsmith Speck

- <https://books.google.com/books?id=QecWjms4pTkC&hl=en>

Cherokee Booger Masks



➤ Mask by Allen Long
<https://www.maskmuseum.org/mask/cherokee-bison/>



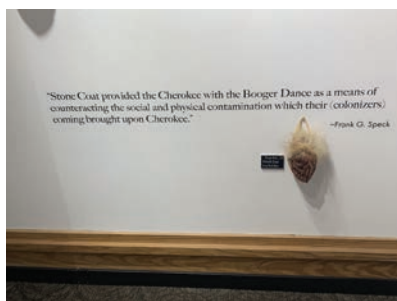
➤ Cherokee Booger Mask made out of gourd
<https://americanindian.si.edu/static/exhibitions/infinityofnations/woodlands/237839.html>



➤ Qualla Arts and Crafts. Snake mask by Allen Long
<https://quallaartsandcrafts.org>



➤ Repatriated Cherokee Booger Masks entrusted to Museum
<https://theonefeather.com/2019/08/20/repatriated-cherokee-booger-masks-entrusted-to-museum/>



➤ From the Many Faces Cherokee Mask Exhibit at Museum of the Cherokee Indian in Cherokee, North Carolina, 2021.
<https://visitcherokeenc.com/blog/entry/many-faces-a-cherokee-mask-exhibit/>



Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. Mask by Allen Long. 2021.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Production Crew



Keli Gonzales, JP Johnson, Nick Buttram, Blake Brown, Brit Hensel, and Loren Waters



Nick Buttram (Cherokee Nation) films booger standing in front of a waterfall. Photo By: Loren Waters



Nick Buttram (Cherokee Nation) films Elwood Gloyne as he colors at his desk. Photo By: Taylor Hensel



Blake Brown (Cherokee Nation) filming booger hiding in the bamboo. Photo By: Taylor Hensel



Tom Belt (Cherokee Nation) as he sits in front of camera during interview. Photo By: Taylor Hensel

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Resources

REQUEST

Request an educational screening or someone to speak online to your class

LISTEN

Listen to a pre-recorded introduction to the film and post-screening conversation

NEXT EPISODE

ÓṢḂṖ is the second of seven episodes in the Reciprocity Project, Season One. In the next episode, viewers can see SŪKŪJULA TEI (Stories of My Mother), about a Wayuu family and their ways of sharing and caring for one another.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

This discussion guide was written by Dina Gilio-Whitaker and Mishy Lesser, Ed. D. in consultation with the filmmakers and Reciprocity Project producers

CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS



The Reciprocity Project embraces Indigenous value systems that have bolstered communities since the beginning of time. To heal, from the climate crisis, we must recognize that we are in relationship with Earth, a place that was in balance until the Industrial Age. This short film series and multimedia platform, made in partnership with Indigenous storytellers and their communities worldwide, invites learning from time-honored and current Indigenous ways of being.

<https://www.reciprocity.org/>



Nia Tero is a US-based non-profit working in solidarity with Indigenous peoples and movements worldwide with a mission of securing Indigenous guardianship of vital ecosystems. Nia Tero is committed to an antiracist and inclusive culture centering Indigenous rights, wisdom, practices, worldviews, and protocols.

<https://www.niatero.org/>



Upstander Project encourages decolonization and upstander behavior through compelling documentary films and learning resources. Upstander Project's goals are to overcome indifference to social injustice, develop the skills of upstanders, and contribute to action-oriented campaigns in response to vital social issues.

<https://upstanderproject.org/>

In Association With



Recreational Equipment, Inc. also known as REI, is an American retail and outdoor recreation services corporation. It is organized as a consumers' co-operative and dedicated to outdoor education. Across films, podcasts, and editorial programs, REI Co-op Studios develops and produces stories that entertain, enrich, and explore the power of time spent outside, while complementing the co-op's broader climate and racial equity, diversity, and inclusion commitments.

<https://www.rei.com/newsroom/article/rei-co-op-studios>



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[reciprocity.org](https://www.reciprocity.org)