

TEACHER GUIDE

Reflecting on Roles and Responsibilities



Overview

In this **30-minute** lesson youth will reflect on their roles and responsibilities within the Mill Creek socioecological system. They will begin by reading and discussing a few excerpts about gifts and reciprocity from Robin Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Then, in small groups, they will create and share an artistic artifact (poem, drawing, eco-art, etc.) to communicate their ideas about gifts they might give to Mill Creek.

Connections to NGSS

- Crosscutting Concepts:
 - Systems and System Models
- Science and Engineering Practices:
 - Obtaining, Evaluating, and Communicating Information
- Disciplinary Core Ideas:
 - LS2.A: Interdependent Relationships in Ecosystems
 - LS2.C: Ecosystem Dynamics, Functioning, and Resilience
 - ESS3.C: Human Impacts on Earth Systems

Purpose

Science, Place, Story

Youth will:

Reflect on interconnectedness and interdependence within the Mill Creek watershed by creating artistic artifacts to communicate their personal roles and responsibilities to the Mill Creek socioecological system.

Teacher Background Information

Why is this important?

TBD

Centering culturally relevant and equitable practices

TBD

Lesson Timeline

PART	TIME (MIN)	ACTIVITY/TASK
1	10	Group Reflection on Roles and Responsibilities In small groups, youth read excerpts from <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> to spur reflection on the gifts they receive from Mill Creek and on their role within the Mill Creek socioecological system and the responsibility they have to care for it.
2	20	Creating Artifacts In small groups, youth create artistic artifacts (poems, drawings, eco-art, etc.) to communicate their role and responsibility.

Teacher Preparation

- Print the [6"x4" cards with Robin Kimmerer quotes](#)
- Divvy up materials for artistic artifacts (paper, paints, writing utensils) into one set per group of ~5 youth.

Printed Materials
☐ 6"x4" cards with Robin Kimmerer quotes – 1 set per group of ~5
Other Materials
☐ Paper ☐ Watercolor paints ☐ Pens/markers/pencils ☐ iPad or smart phone (to take a picture/video if youth create something ephemeral for their artistic artifact)

Lesson Instructional Sequence

Part 1 - Group Reflection on Roles and Responsibilities (10 min)

In small groups, youth read excerpts from *Braiding Sweetgrass* to spur reflection on the gifts they receive from Mill Creek and on their role within the Mill Creek socioecological system and the responsibility they have to care for it.

1. Read and discuss Robin Kimmerer quotes. Introduce Robin Kimmerer—an Indigenous botanist, professor, writer, and mother who wrote a book called *Braiding Sweetgrass*, which brings together Indigenous and (Western) scientific ways of understanding nature. Explain that you'd like to read a couple short excerpts from the book to introduce this activity. Invite a volunteer to read the quote on Card 1:

- a. "Strawberries first shaped my view of a world full of gifts simply scattered at your feet. A gift comes to you through no action of your own, free, having moved toward you without your beckoning. It is not a reward; you cannot earn it, or call it to you, or even deserve it. And yet it appears. Your only role is to be open-eyed and present. Gifts exist in a realm of humility and mystery—as with random acts of kindness, we do not know their source. Those fields of my childhood showered us with strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, hickory nuts in the fall, bouquets of wildflowers brought to my mom, and family walks on Sunday afternoon. They were our playground, retreat, wildlife sanctuary, ecology classroom, and the place where we learned to shoot tin cans off the stone wall...I experienced the world in that time as a gift economy, "goods and services" not purchased but received as gifts from the earth." (Kimmerer, 2013, pp. 23–24)
- b. Invite campers to share what they take away from this excerpt. Then invite them to share their thoughts about gifts they receive from Mill Creek.
- c. Invite volunteers to read the quotes on Cards 2 and 3:
 - i. Card 2: "Gifts from the earth or from each other establish a particular relationship, an obligation of sorts to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. The field gave to us, we gave to my dad, and we tried to give back to the strawberries." (Kimmerer, 2023, p. 25)
 - ii. Card 3: "The most important thing each of us can know is our unique gift and how to use it in the world. Individuality is cherished and nurtured, because, in order for the whole world to flourish, each of us has to be strong in who we are and carry our gifts with conviction, so they can be shared with others." (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 134)
- d. Invite campers to share what they take away from these excerpts.
- e. Highlight how we are all part of the larger Mill Creek system, and have responsibilities to reciprocate the gifts we receive from it, however, the ways we act

on these responsibilities might look really different for different people since we each have unique gifts/skills/personalities.

Part 2 - Creating Artifacts (20 min)

In small groups, youth create artistic artifacts (poems, drawing, eco-art, etc.) to communicate their role and responsibility.

- 1. Introduce art activity.** Explain that youth will have ~20 minutes to collectively create some sort of artistic artifact that reflects their thoughts on their roles and responsibilities within the Mill Creek watershed. In other words, they will create something to represent the gifts they can reciprocate to Mill Creek. Point out the resources youth may use to create their artifacts—watercolors, pens/pencils/markers, paper, found objects. Note that they may also use their bodies to represent their gift (e.g. through dance, skit, or embodied sculpture). Remind them that if they use found objects, they should be careful to be gentle and kind to the plants and animals in their surroundings.
- 2. Distribute materials and give youth time to create.** Let them know when they have 5 minutes left. Encourage them to create an “artwork label” like one might see next to a painting at a museum to explain their artwork.
- 3. Collect or document youth’s artwork.** If youth created an ephemeral piece of art (e.g. something with their bodies, a sculpture of found objects), take a picture or video of it. Otherwise, collect their artwork (and artwork label) and save it for a later showcase.

Assessment Opportunities

TBD

Strengths/Funds of Knowledge Youth Bring to the Activity

TBD