

CULTURAL APPROACHES

to Environmental Education at Tryon

Written by Betty Bryant,
Field Trip Coordinator

For nearly 50 years every spring, fall, and winter Tryon staff and volunteers welcome hundreds of youth, teachers, and chaperones to the park for school field trips. This long-standing program offers an immersive experience for students to broaden their curiosity about nature and deepen their understanding of forest ecology. As leaders in environmental education Friends of Tryon Creek have realigned our field trip program to reflect our four main organizational values: relationships, investment, reciprocity, and authentic narratives.

Friends of Tryon Creek has been hosting Nature Educator Trainings at the park to help inform the community and educators on our work, place-based learning, and cultural approaches we use. In February of 2023, Education Program Coordinator, Betty Bryant hosted an all-day event at Tryon Creek State Natural Area in which educators, professionals, students, and community members gathered to learn about the organization, philosophy, and the land itself. One large concept that was discussed was the Relational Worldview, created by Dr. Terry Cross of the National Indian Child Welfare Association.

The relational worldview is an Indigenous way of looking at our mind, body, spirit and context in a more holistic and connected way. It has different values that help us contextualize the world around us and



recognizes that we are always changing and rebalancing ourselves to adapt to our surroundings and our needs at any given time. It is a non-linear way of creating harmony in our lives that can serve the individual, community, organization and more. We also had a guest speaker from the National Indian Child Welfare Association who shared lessons of Mother Nature from their Positive Indian Parenting curriculum.

In our training, we unpacked equity, justice, implicit bias, cultural proficiency and learning styles in small and large group discussions. Our field trip program that serves mostly K-5th grade students in the local area and beyond was also shared in detail. Hands-on run-throughs of some of our most popular curriculum, our format and teaching philosophy was a focus as well. The attendees took a hike through the forest, using all of our senses, to do some plant ID of native and non-native (or displaced relative) plants, first foods, talk about the original stewards of the land using authentic narratives, and reflect on how we can be reciprocal with the land.



INDIGENOUS CULTURE DAY

Culture Day is a celebration of the reclamation of traditional lands for Indigenous Peoples that provides an accurate cultural experience for the whole community. This free, all-ages event offers the chance to listen and learn from Indigenous educators in the culturally rich land now known as Tryon Creek State Natural Area. This annual event reflects our Tryon Land Acknowledgement in action.

In a short forest walk, participants can go from the Nature Center classroom and trails to see first-hand the traditional lifeways of Northwest Tribes. Indigenous leaders and educators will share cordage making, carving, basketry, first foods, language, and storytelling. The opening ceremony starts at 9 am in the Friends Circle.

Saturday, May 4 • Find details at tryonfriends.org/culture-day

As a group, we discussed the concept of seasonal rounds, which is also a display you can see in the nature center. The four seasons we are lucky to have here in the PNW create opportunities for harvesting and gathering during which subsistence are available throughout the natural ecological cycle. They may include things like hunting, solstices, equinoxes, etc. where plants for food, medicine, tools, shelter, and clothing are gathered and processed, according to the appropriate season and in the manner passed down from their ancestors. Connectedness was also a large theme.

Friends of Tryon Creek will continue to reach beyond Tryon Creek to support others in the process of decolonizing environmental education. In February 2024, a similar training took place, including our new cultural restoration plans and culturally proficient communication.

Below are some of the resources used as learning tools for you to explore as well.

- *Braiding Sweetgrass for Youth* – available for purchase in the Nature Store
- Fresh Banana Leaves: Healing Indigenous Landscapes Through Indigenous Science
- Overview of Culturally Responsive Practices: The Culture Tree Colorado Department of Education. Search for article at www.sitesed.cde.state.co.us
- Film PLACE: People, Lamprey, And Cultural Ecology. Search for video at www.vimeo.com
- Cultural Competence Continuum
Adapted from a paper by Terry Cross, "Through Indigenous Eyes: Rethinking Theory and Practice". Search for video at www.youtube.com
- Robin Wall Kimmerer Talk with Confluence Project. Search for video at www.youtube.com

