

TOOLKIT FOR SE'SI'LE'S SEVEN SISTERS CAMPAIGN

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Massachusetts Institute of Technology is located on the traditional and ancestral land of the Massachusett, the original inhabitants of what is now known as Boston and Cambridge. We pay respect to the people of the Massachusett Tribe, past and present, and honor the land itself which remains sacred to the Massachusett People.

PROJECT SUMMARY



Background:

The Lummi Nation, also known as the Lhaq'temish or "People of the Sea," are the original inhabitants of Washington's northern coast and San Juan Islands, situated in the Salish Sea (Lummi Nation, n.d.). In 1855, the Point Elliott Treaty was signed between the Coast Salish tribes in the Washington Territory and the U.S. government, which entailed ceding over 54,000 acres in exchange for reservations and the guaranteed right to fish, hunt, and gather in "usual and accustomed areas" ("Treaty of Point Elliott, 1855 | GOIA," n.d.). The Lummi Nation became a federally recognized and self-governing tribe upon signing this treaty.

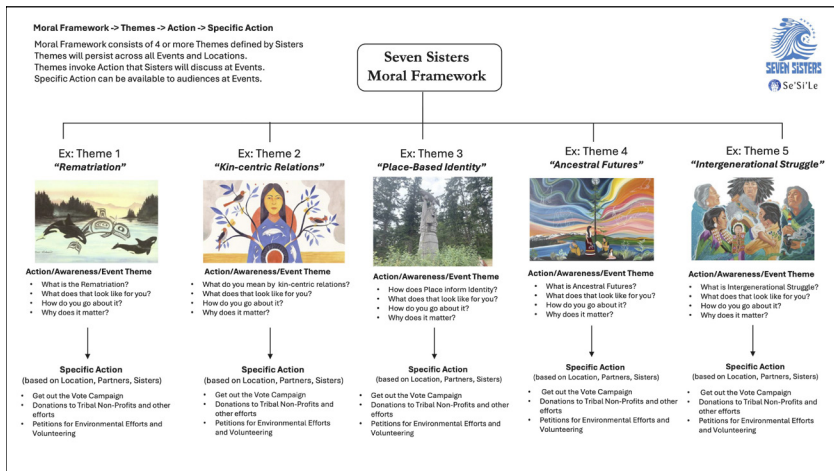
For thousands of years, The Lummi Nation has had a strong connection to the Salish Sea. The majority of the Lummi Nation live on the coast, depending on the sea for survival, "including hunting, gathering, and fishing" (Earth Law Center 2019). Their relationship to the native Southern Resident killer whale, commonly known as the orca, is inextricably linked to this way of life. The Lummi were greeted by the Southern Residents upon their arrival and have called them their kin ever since. Like the Lummi, who have long relied on fishing, the orca preferentially preys on the Chinook salmon, the biggest salmon in the Pacific. Orcas also live in lifelong family groups, sharing food, distinct dialects, ceremonies, and culture. It is for these reasons that they call the local orca their qwe 'lhol mechen or "relations under the waves" (Atmos 2019).

Partnership with Se'Si'Le:

This project was completed in partnership between this course and Se'Si'Le. Se'Si'Le is an Indigenous environmental justice non-profit.

Se' Si'Le's mission is to "utilize Indigenous ancestral knowledge for the benefit of Mother Earth, Indigenous lifeways, and for future generations."

Their specific work includes offering strategies and plans to protect Indigenous sacred sites, areas, resources, and landscapes," including the restoration of the Salish Sea ecosystem (Se'Si'Le 2026). Their current project, the Seven Sisters Campaign 2026, invites environmental and faith-based community members to uplift the voice of Indigenous women who are addressing "intersecting crises of biodiversity loss, climate disruption, and environmental injustice" (Se'Si'Le 2026). The campaign will feature five themes: (1) rematriation, (2) kin-centric relations, (3) place-based identity, (4) ancestral futures, and (5) intergenerational struggle. Programming during the campaign will invite each sister to share their stories, and how each value is integrated into their life. The campaign will run from June to November 2026, and meet in WA, DC, and NY.



Seven Sisters Moral Framework by SeSi'Le

Theoretical Engagement: Art as Activism

There is a long-standing tradition of art in advocacy and activism to address societal or political injustices. The applications of art are two-fold: (1) bringing people together under a collective cause and (2) exercising the imagination to build visions of better futures.

Abdul Hadi touches on the first point in her book *Take Care of Yourself*. As an artist-curator, she argues that her practice is ultimately "rooted in the transformative power of art, imagination, and curation born out of the diverse struggles of deeply rooted communities with the potential to heal and empower." A quintessentially human trait is our ability to collectively experience and process our emotions, both our sorrows and joys. Channeling this belief, artists use their craft to bear witness to the stories of their community. Further, Robin Wall Kimmerer believes, in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, that "imagination is one of our most powerful tools. What we imagine, we can become" (Kimmerer 2013). SeSi'Le's mission resonates with this belief. In the *Spirit of Right and Respectful Relations*, Kurt Russo, executive director of SeSi'Le explores how the "decolonization of the imagination" can

bridge human and other-than-human relations (Russo 2026). In this way, the role of the artist is not so different from an activist—they both imagine and push for worlds that can accommodate a level of kindness and care that does not yet exist. Artists who often find themselves on the frontlines of a movement embodying the role of an artist-activist, one that merges creative practice with political or social action to directly address power structures and impact change.



Artwork by Abdul Hadi

Artist-Activists and Environmental Justice

One such societal injustice artists-activists have had a critical role in advocating for is environmental justice. In Julie Sze's "Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger," she highlights the role of art against the Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipelines (Sze 2020). During the 2016 protests near Standing Rock, North Dakota, artist-activist Cannupa Hanska Luger started the Mirror Shield Project, giving activists cardboard shields with a metallic coating (Swiss Institute, n.d.). These mirrors' objective was to reflect the humanity of the law enforcement officers back at them, forcing them to see their own images while they were in dehumanizing riot gear. After construction had resumed, the Whitney Museum hosted an event called "Words for Water," where Native women artists were invited to present "written and musical pices in honor of the land, water, and people working to protect them." Moreover, during Harvard's most recent ArtsFest in May 2026, artist, activist, and educator Kat Owens hosted a workshop titled "Make Art: Sew a Whale," where participants signed up to collaborate on sewing together a "life-size portrait of an 80-foot fin whale, one of the hundreds of sea animals harmed by plastic" (Harvard College Calendar, n.d.). These are just a few instances among the broader long-standing tradition of art, storytelling, and environmental justice.

Proposing a Framework for Relational Storytelling

In this spirit, I embodied the role of an artist-activist in the Spring of 2026. Since February, I meet weekly with Asta Roseway, Kurt Russo, and the Seven Sisters to discuss the needs of Se'Si'Le and the Seven Sisters Campaign. My positionality as a non-Indigenous person emphasized the importance of remaining committed to Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) methodology, prioritizing trust over the outcome. Conversations were centered around the five themes featured in the Seven Sisters Moral Framework, which I learned was born from the collective and embodied history of the Lummi Nation. Weekly meetings introduced an iterative nature to this collaboration. The result is a set of five 5x7

postcards for the Seven Sisters Campaign, each card is double sided: the front features artwork, and the back features a written resource with definitions, contexts, and current efforts for the value. These postcards will be distributed to attendees of the campaign route.

I believe in art because it visually engages with attendees through color, form, and shape in a way that a written paper cannot. The goal for this project is for the artwork to *generate* inspiration, and for the resource will *actualize* it, ultimately translating moments of interest from something abstract into tangible action. More holistically, the hope of this toolkit is two-fold:

(1) Identify how these values relate to our lives as non-Indigenous peoples, and

(2) Provide resources attendees can engage with to embody the themes, acknowledging how Se'Si'Le's work has been inseparable from the environment and all that inhabit the land.

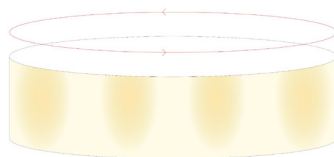
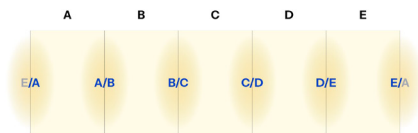
As Kurt has centered in all our conversations, this campaign is about provoking a "decolonization of the imagination" and explore that it means to be both human and other-than-human (Russo 2026).

Design Methodology

More on the design methodology and process, traditional artwork aims to preserve cohesion and singular focal points. Centrality is prioritized over edges, which are often under-considered. Framing techniques balance between subject and edge to create tension, focus, or breathing room, yet subjects rarely reach the total edge, for fear of discomfort or distraction.

However, early in the collaborative process, relationality emerged as a clear throughline. *Relationality* is defined loosely as the

Framework For Relational Storytelling



Conceptual framework for relational storytelling

philosophical and social condition of being defined, constituted, and connected by relationships with others, emphasizing that entities, whether it be people, places, objects, or communities, do not exist in insolation but within a “web of relationships.” It highlights interdependence, reciprocity, and how connections shape identity, knowledge, and action (“Relationality” 2022). The opportunity to listen to Kurt and the Seven Sisters embody this ethos inspired the basis for a framework for relational storytelling.

The framework for relational storytelling directly translates this ethos of relationality into a visual format by using engaging form as a vehicle for meaning making, as a means for drawing connections between different themes. Consider a project with five themes labeled A, B, C, D, and E (this number is flexible). In addition to creating individual art of each of them, their intermediaries and edges (A/B, B/C, C/D, D/E) are also highly considered. By reconsidering the normative purpose and form of artwork, connections, whether it be spatial, chronological, or causal, can be expressed and live upon the edges where each theme meets. In this way, the liminal is brought to the forefront and continues to do the important work of storytelling. Moreover, relational storytelling is best emphasized when the edges of the drawing fold in over itself, meaning that E/A also connect. In this way, the illustration transcends the 2-D threshold by creating a non-fragmented, and continuous cylinder.

Relational storytelling is salient for several reasons. First, as suggested above, this design choice provokes us to consider the connective tissue that may be hidden yet essential to the functioning of our lives.

It is the semi-colon that takes the place of a period, the circle that emerges from a line, and the story that emerges from a scene.

Relationality provides the space for us to ask broader questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how? Second, because there is no center nor hierarchy as the postcards rotate in continuity, each value carries equal weight. This effect reflects on the responsibility of an artist-activist: art that exists in the realm of the imaginary does not have to abide on pragmatism, legislation, or constraints. Instead, it allows us to move beyond zero-sum thinking and imagine a world where values are not mutually exclusive, where nothing must be sacrificed for something else, and where A, B, C, D, and E, can co-exist and build on one another. Historian Robin D. G. Kelley describes this as “freedom dreaming” in his book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, the practice of using radical imagination to envision a future rooted in joy, justice, and liberation, moving beyond just resisting oppression to creating new and thriving worlds (Kelley 2022).

Applied to my collaboration with Se'Si'Le, the designed postcards for their Seven Sister's Campaign uses the sea, land, and sky to weave a breached dam, mangroves, salmon, orca, constellations, sage, sweat lodge, and totem pole together. Several elements—including the salmon, tree, flowers, and constellations—are also present across different values.

The most poignant effect of the relational storytelling framework is its ability to tell a causal story: salmon swim upstream to lay their eggs in mangroves, before becoming a critical food source for the orca (see Appendix A for more details). It also provides commentary on the generational impacts of colonialism and community efforts to remediate the harm. Importantly, I believe this holistic story would otherwise be limited by the linear format of an academic paper.

As such, in the following pages, you will find a toolkit that takes place in two flights:

- 1. the set of five postcards**
- 2. a guide for framework for relational storytelling**

Both are an honest attempt at relational storytelling, one in which the distinction between human and non-human is collapsed, and where Se'Si'Le's goal of "decolonizing the imagination" is brought closer to reality.

TOOL

REMATRIATION

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RELATIONS

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STRAL
URES

INTERGENERATIONAL
STRUGGLE

PLACE-BASED
IDENTITY





REMATRIATION

Definition:

Rematriation, often synonymous with the LandBack, is an Indigenous-led movement focused on returning ancestral lands to Indigenous stewardship. Unlike “repatriation,” this term emphasizes restoring matrilineal systems, honoring Indigenous women’s leadership, and reversing the impacts of patriarchal, colonial, and extractive industries.

Context:

In addition to LandBack, an important form of rematriation for the Lummi include breaching dams, which represent colonial interference that has flooded sacred sites, displaced people, and disrupted traditional ways of life. For the Lummi Nation who live along the Salish Sea, four dams on the Lower Snake River, constructed between 1955 and 1975, block migration routes to spawning grounds, destroy habitats through reservoir creation, and alter water temperatures and flow regimes. As a result there has been a 90% decline in the salmon population, or loss of 5 to 11 million fish annually. This concern has been further exacerbated by overfishing, pollution, and climate change.

Current Efforts:

1. Returning Government-Owned Lands

This method often involves large-scale transfers, such as national parks or conservation areas, to federally recognized tribes, frequently returning the land to a “trust” status. 185,000 acres around the Grand Canyon National park was returned to the Havasupai Reservation. 18,800 acres of the National Bison Range was returned to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

2. Cities Returning Territory

City governments can return municipal lands, such as parks, vacant lots, or cultural sites, to tribal nations. Minnesota returned 18 acres of land to the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe in 2025; California returned 2,800 acres to the Shasta Indian Nation in 2024.

3. Land Trusts Buying Back Land

Land trusts are non-profits that acquire through buying land from private owners, gifts, or conservation easements to hold, manage, and protect land. The Sogorea Te’ Land Trust in the Bay Area facilitated the first return of city land to a non-federally recognized tribe. The Native Land Conservancy (NLC) in Massachusetts was the first Indigenous-led land trust in the East.

4. Breaching Dams

Breaching dams includes removing hydroelectric dams, restoring ancestral lands, water, and ecosystems. Removals allow for tribes to reconnect with rivers, allow fish migration, and act as a form of “landback.” Removing 4 dams on the Klamath River in 2024 restored over 400 miles of historic salmon habitat, decreasing toxic algae and heavy metals in the river. Advocates are now pushing for the four Lower Snake River dams to be breached.





KIN-CENTRIC RELATIONS

Defintion:

Kin-centric relations is an Indigenous worldview viewing humans as part of an extended ecological family, sharing ancestry with plants, animals, and other natural elements. It emphasizes that recognizing non-human beings as relatives creates reciprocal, respectful relationships necessary for sustainability.

Context:

The Lummi have a strong connection to the Salish Sea. Many depend on the sea for survival, “including hunting, gathering, and fishing”. Their relationship to the native Southern Resident killer whale, commonly known as the orca, is inextricably linked to their way of life. The Lummi were greeted by Southern Residents orcas upon their arrival and have called them their kin ever since. Orcas live in lifelong family groups, sharing food, distinct dialects, ceremonies, and culture. It is for these reasons that they call the local orca their *qwe 'lhol mechen* or “relations under the waves”. However, roughly 270 orcas were captured between 1964 and 1976, more than 50 of which were kept for captive display. They have all since have passed, and only 73 orcas remain in the wild. The artwork features a statue of Tokitae, also known as Lolita, who was held captive at the Miami Seaquarium in Florida for over 50 years. The statue also pays homage to Talequah, who has gone on two “tours of grief,” carrying two newborn calves who passed separately, for 17 days in 2018 and 11 days in 2025. Their passing can be attributed to food scarcity and malnutrition. Without enough Chinook salmon, mother’s cannot produce enough nutrient-rich milk. Given kin-centric relations, the declining population becomes a threat towards the existence and survival of the Lummi Nation too.

Current Efforts:

1. Salmon Restoration

Increasing the availability of Chinook salmon through dam removal such as on Snake River, habitat restoration, and increasing fish hatchery production.

2. Regulations & Enforcement

Washington State Legislature requires boaters to stay at least 1,000 yards away from orca. NOAA Fisheries has also designated critical habitat for the species.

3. Contaminant Control

Efforts are ongoing to reduce toxic pollutants from entering the Puget Sound, including managing sewage waste, agricultural runoff, and industrial pollutants that bioaccumulate in orcas.

4. Noise Reduction and Vessel Reduction

Programs like “Quiet Sound” facilitate voluntary, seasonal slowdowns of large commercial vessels, which have reduced noise by roughly 50% when orca are present.





ANCESTRAL FUTURES

Defintion:

Ancestral Futures represents a worldview where ancient wisdom, cultural traditions, and stewardship responsibilities are actively used to guide, protect, and define the future for generations to come. It is a proactive approach to maintaining cultural identity and sovereignty, and ensuring that *Schelangen* or "Way of Life," continues.

Context:

The Lummi Nation's *schelangen* is rooted in a "seven-generations principle," meaning that decisions made today should ensure the survival, cultural integrity, and environmental health of descendants seven generations in the future. This philosophy emphasizes sustainability, stewardship of ancestral waters, and a deep connection to non-human relations, ensuring a "living" legacy. Key actions include reconnecting youth with cultural practices, protecting biodiversity, and utilizing oral traditions to transmit knowledge.

Current Efforts:

1. Legal and Ethical Protections

Advocacy for land rights, recognition and financial support from the UNDP, and the return of cultural objects and remains are central to maintaining future sovereignty.

2. Land Stewardship and Conservation

Indigenous peoples, who manage 22% of Earth's surface and protect 80% of its biodiversity, use traditional practices like controlled burning, clam gardens, and ecosystem monitoring to manage land and water. Organizations like Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps reconnect youth with these practices.

3. Cultural and Language Preservation

Efforts focus on transmitting oral traditions, storytelling, and language to younger generations to keep history alive. Reclaiming and honoring traditional art and artifacts play a key role in connecting the present with the past.

4. Indigenous Futurisms

Art installations like *Ancestral Futurism: Looking Back to Repair the Future* by Favianna Rodriguez, and exhibitions featuring Northwest Coast artists highlight the intersection of heritage, technology, and ecology.





INTERGENERATIONAL STRUGGLE

Definition:

Intergenerational struggle refers to trauma, disadvantages, and unresolved grief that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Root causes are often systemic and historical, including forced removal from ancestral lands, boarding/residential school systems designed to erase culture and language, disrupted traditional parenting, and children forcibly taken from families, and other impacts of colonialism.

Context:

The Lummi Nation faces intergenerational struggle, which manifests today through substance abuse and poor mental health. The ongoing impacts are documented in Rueben George's, part of the Tseil-Waututh Nation and Coast Salish people, book *It Stops Here*. Nonetheless, the book also takes an optimistic approach. Importantly, George emphasizes how "his grandfather, Chief Dan George, always taught the younger generations to be proud of who they were and to remember the importance of their connection to the inlet." The phrase "time immemorial" signifies an indefinite period stretching back before recorded history or European arrival and predating Western archaeological timelines, highlighting Indigenous people's enduring presence and stewardship.

Current Efforts:

1. Longhouse Rebuilding and Restoration

Lummi longhouses, which serve as physical and spiritual anchors that connect the tribe's 10,000 year history to future generations. Longhouse reconstruction efforts are being led by Indigenous tribes and cultural institutions to create a space for healing, cultural education, and community gathering. The Lummi Nation in Washington has collaborated with Western Washington University (WWU) to build a "House of Healing" longhouse, which will address intergenerational trauma and support student learning. Separately, the Kasaan Haida Heritage Foundation in Alaska is working on a restoration project focusing on stabilizing and repairing structural elements of historic longhouses, such as the Whale House, using traditional hand-adzed timbers.

2. Sweat Lodges

Sweat lodges are a vital intervention for addressing intergenerational trauma and substance use disorders. Ceremonies facilitate healing by reclaiming cultural identity by being sites of Indigenous knowledge transmission.

3. Other Healing Approaches

Many organizations provide resources, advocacy, and clinical frameworks to address collective trauma. For instance, the Seattle Urban Native Nonprofits (SUNN) collaborative advances advocacy and leadership to improve the health of the urban Indigenous community in Seattle King County. The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition use oral history to help survivors and descendants of boarding schools process historical trauma.





PLACE-BASED IDENTITY

Defintion:

Place-based identity refers to a profound and inextricable connection between culture, language, spiritual identity, and specific geographical land. It signifies that identity is deeply rooted in ancestral landscapes, where land is not just property but a living entity that shapes both individual and collective existence. Identity is rooted in the ancestral connection to land as original inhabitants. The feeling of identity is fostered through ritual, daily practices, stories, and knowledge production that are directly tied to specific environments.

Context:

One way the Lummi Nation express place-based identity is through totem poles, monumental cedar carvings created by Pacific Northwest First Nations to document history, ancestry, kinship, and honor important individuals, serving as landmarks of family lineage and status. They represent a clan's connection to land, often featuring stylized figures like Ravens, Eagles, Wolves, or Frogs that act as crest animals. Today, they are also used for diplomacy to highlight Indigenous rights and environmental concerns. The illustration depicts the Healing Pole created by the Lummi Nation after the September 11 terrorist attacks. The monument is 13-foot-high and carved from a 140-year-old red cedar log by master carver Jewel Praying Wolf James and the house of Tears Carvers. The Bald Eagle (top) represents fathers who died at the World Trade Center, the Bear (center) represents mothers, and the Bear Cub (bottom) represents healing through hope and the future of those surviving. The Healing Pole has been permanently relocated to the Sterling Forest State Park.

Current Efforts:

1. Land-Based Cultural Revitalization

Communities can hold "land camps" to connect Elders and youth with the land. For example, the Salish-Pend d'Oreille Culture Committee runs language immersion schools to strengthen identity.

2. Legal Personhood and Management

Indigenous groups are establishing legal personhood for nature to reassert stewardship, such as for the Whanganui River in New Zealand and the Magpie River in Canada.

3. Policy and Traditional Knowledge

Federal agencies are increasingly integrating Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) into environmental management and conservation.

4. Tribal Colleges and Education

Tribal colleges and K-12 schools are delivering "place-based" education, revitalizing pre-board school forms of learning.



GUIDE TO RELATIONAL STORYTELLING

Guiding Principles

Se Si'Le's Seven Sister's Campaign

Worksheet

1: Identify Key Themes

Consider a movement/cause that you would like to explore.

- What are its key tenets that the movement would not exist without?
- Are there specific morals or ethics that are core to their story?

2: Representation

Ideate ways to represent your selected themes.

- Are there any figures, events, items, rituals that you associate your theme with?

3: Finding Connection

Think about how each theme and visual representation can be woven together.

- Are they chronological, casual, spatially related?
- Do they share any similar visual features?

Reorder values based on connections.

4: Illustrating

This is the fun part! Visually represent your connections between each theme.

- What colors would you like to use? Do you have a style that would best represent your story?
- Which materials do you want to use?

1: Identify Key Themes

Rematriation

Intergenerational struggle

Place-based identity

Ancestral Futures

Kin-centric relations

2: Representation

Rematriation: breaching a dam, salmon

Kin-centric relations: familial ties with orca

Ancestral futures: community gathering

Intergenerational struggle: sweat lodge ceremony

Place-based identity: totem poles

3: Finding Connection

- dams and orca are both in the water, community gathering and sweat lodges are on land.
- salmon help the orca population
- consultations represent the seven generations
- the tree is also a mangrove that connects sea and land

4: Illustrating

- sunrise and sunset represents the cyclical nature of time
- bright colors represent hope and optimism
- a watercolor texture represents proximity to the Salish Sea

1: Identify Key Themes

2: Representation

3: Finding Connection

4: Illustrating

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