

Outdoor Learning Space

Valley View School and Ian Bazalgette School

Spring 2025



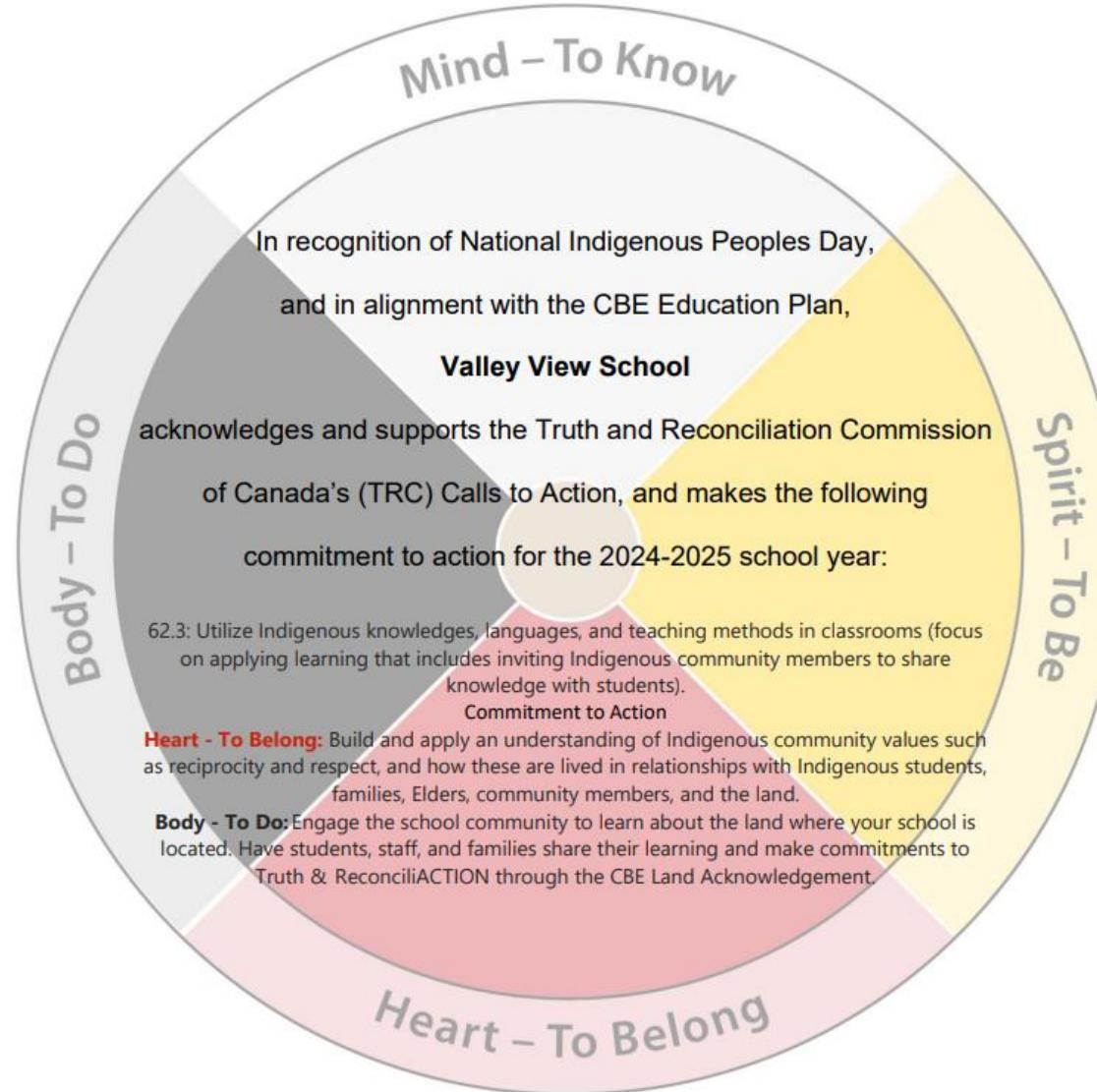
Land Acknowledgment

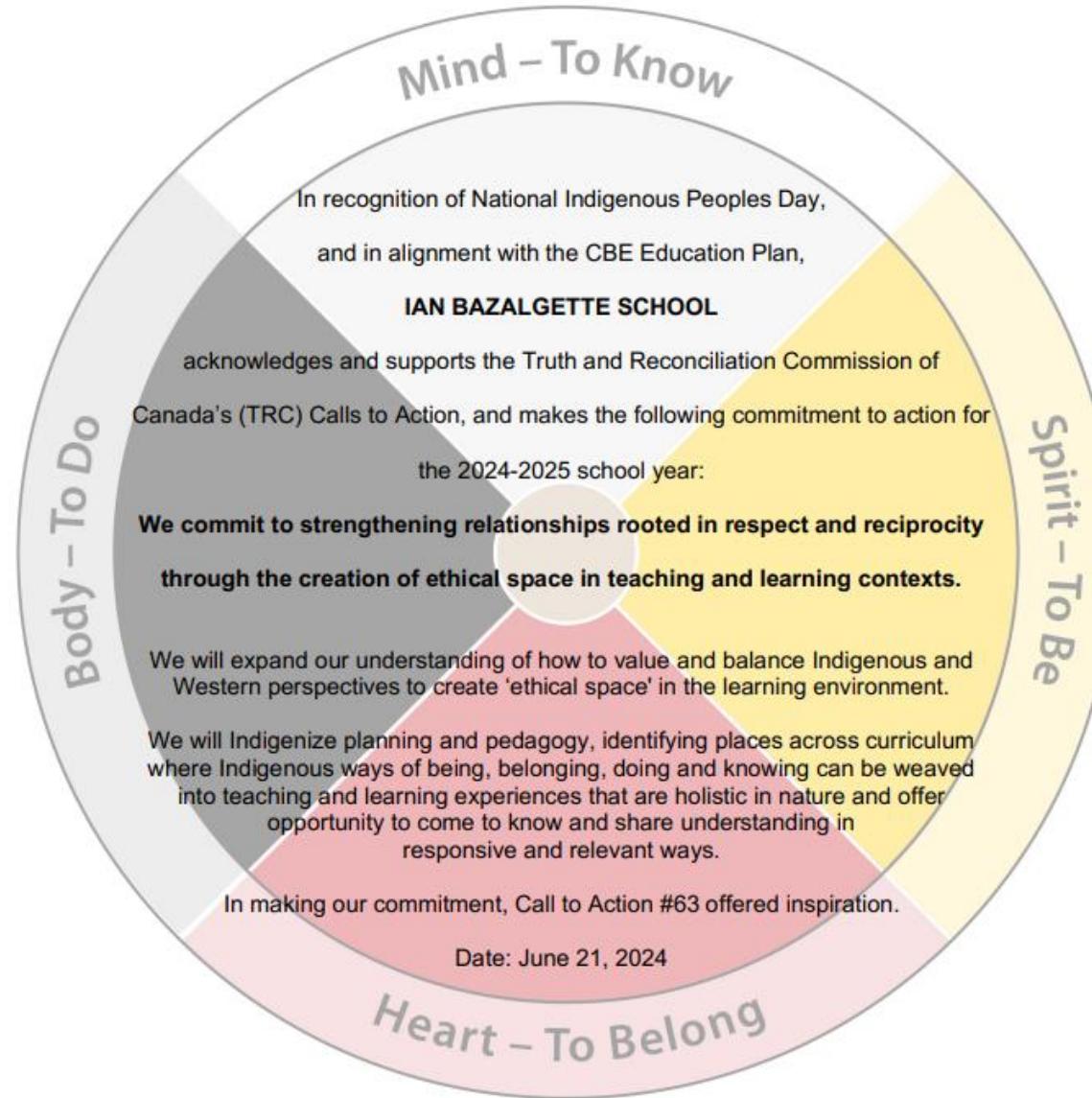
Oki, Dādánast'áda, Âba Wathtec, Tânisi, Taanishi, Bonjour, Hello

The Calgary Board of Education acknowledges the traditional territories and oral practices of the Treaty 7 Nations, including the Siksikaitsitapi, comprised of the Siksika, the Kainai, the Piikani, and the Amskapi Piikani Nations. We acknowledge the Tsuut'ina Nation, the Îyârhe Nakoda, comprised of the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney Nations, the Métis Nation within Alberta, and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of southern Alberta.

This land on which we gather is traditionally known as Moh'kinstsis (Blackfoot), Guts'ists'i (Tsuut'ina), Wîchîspa (Nakoda), and otôskwanihk (Northern Michif & Cree).

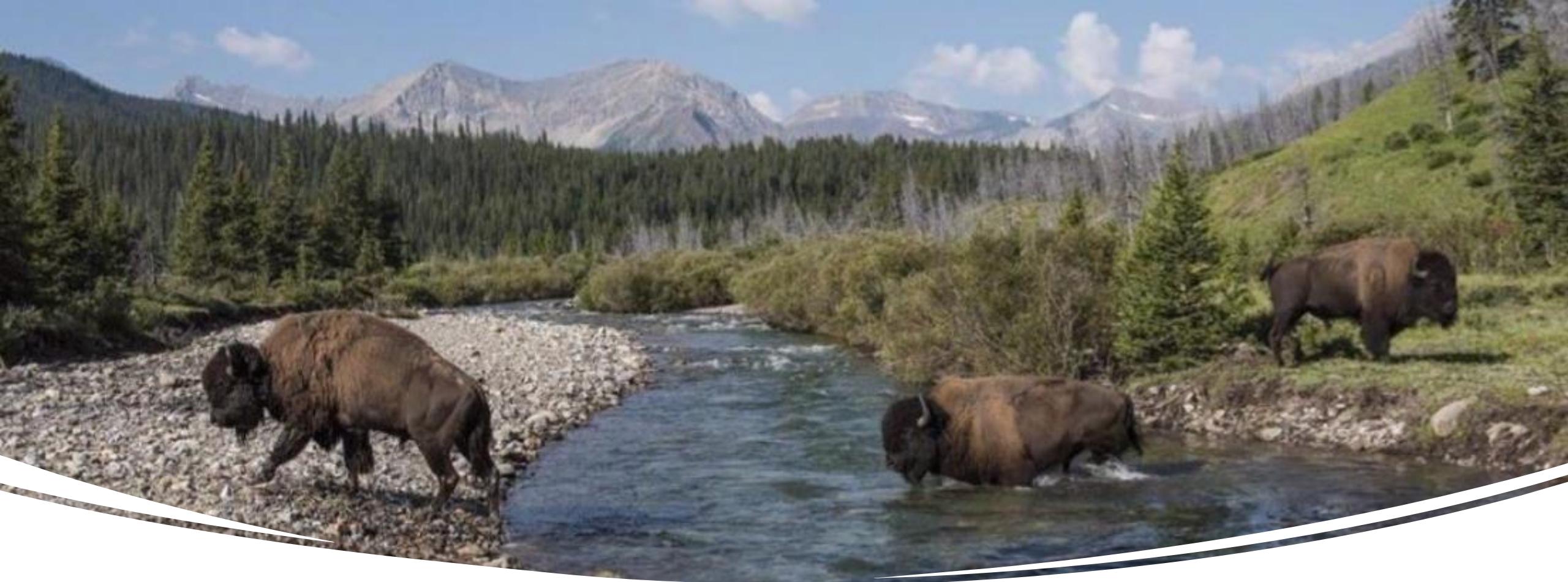
As a learning organization, we are committed to advancing the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action focused on Education for ReconciliACTION.





PART 1





Coming to Know Place Through Indigenous Names

Learning about This Land We Call Home and the People Who
Have Stewarded These Places for Time Immemorial

Who Are the Treaty 7 Nations?

- The **Siskisaitstapi** (Blackfoot speaking real-people), **Îyârhe Nakoda** (peoples of the mountains), and the **Tsuut'ina** (many people/beaver people) are Indigenous Nations located within the Treaty 7 region of southern Alberta.
- Their traditional lands extend through prairie landscape, the foothills, and the Rocky Mountains.
- These Treaty 7 Nations have a rich history connected to the land and have traditional place names connected to stories, relationships, and lived experiences. These are shared through stories and traditional teachings.



What Are Place Names?



Place names are names given to locations like mountains, rivers, and valleys.



These names are **important** because they tell stories about the land, animals, plants, and history.



For Indigenous communities, place names are part of their **language** and **culture**.

Why Are Indigenous Place Names Important?



Indigenous place names help us understand how Indigenous communities lived and connected with the land.



These names describe **natural features, stories, and events** that are important to the First Nations' cultures.



The names also show how the land was used, for example, for hunting, gathering, or spiritual ceremonies.

Examples of Indigenous Place Names

The City of Calgary

At the centre of the city is the confluence. This is where the rivers meet. The Bow and the Elbow river meet at what was a place of significance for all Treaty 7 Nations.

- **Niitsitapi** (Blackfoot) know this place as **Moh'kinstsis**, which means Elbow.
- **Îyârhe Nakoda** (Stoney) know this place as **Wichispa Oyade**, which translates to “Elbow City”. The definition for Wichispa is down where the city is presently, along the river it's shaped like a person's elbow, positioned that an angle so Wichispa Oyade is Elbow City (Lazarus Wesley, August 5, 1987) (Chiniki Place Names Report 1987, p. 64).
- **Tsuuti'ina** know this place as **Guts'ists'i**.

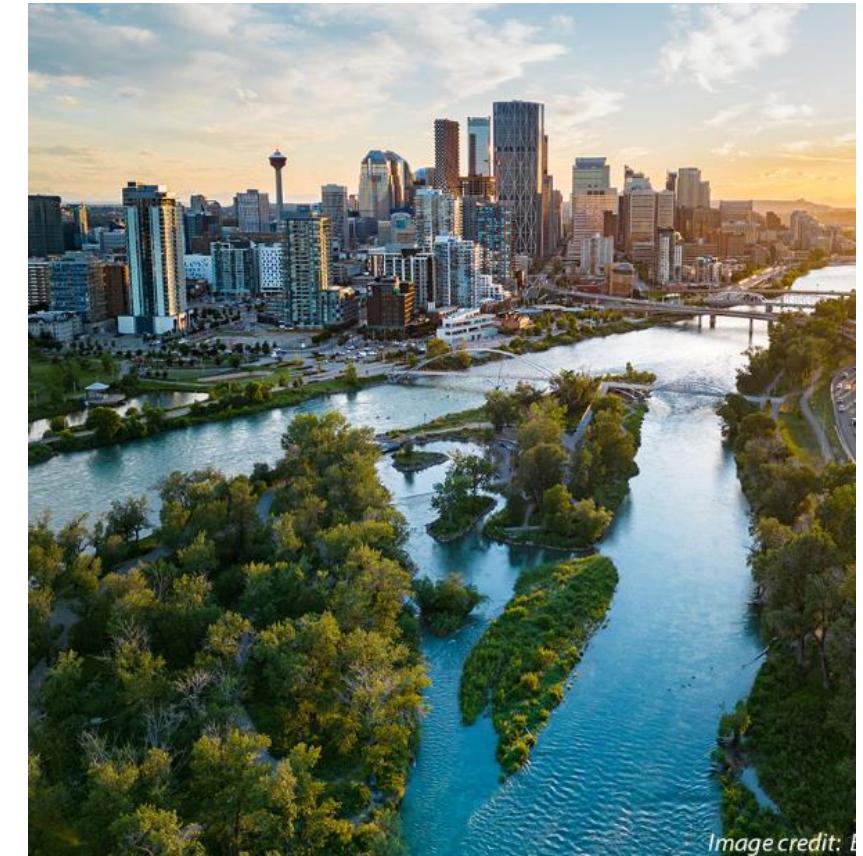


Image credit: B

Examples of Indigenous Place Names

Learn about The Confluence through teachings and stories from Indigenous voices.

<https://www.theconfluence.ca/exploring-the-confluence>

Elbow River

- **The Îyârhe Nakoda** call the Elbow River **Mnotha Wapta** (translated to crackling river). “It is named for the crackling sound it gives out whenever there are small rapids along the creek. The sound of the water flowing over these small rapids produces a crackling sound so therefore, Mnotha Wapta” (Frank Powderface) (Chiniki Place Names Report 1987, p. 71).
- Presently, the Elbow River is home to the Elbow River Camp, a significant part of the Calgary Stampede and this place’s relationship with Treaty 7 Nations and Indigenous communities

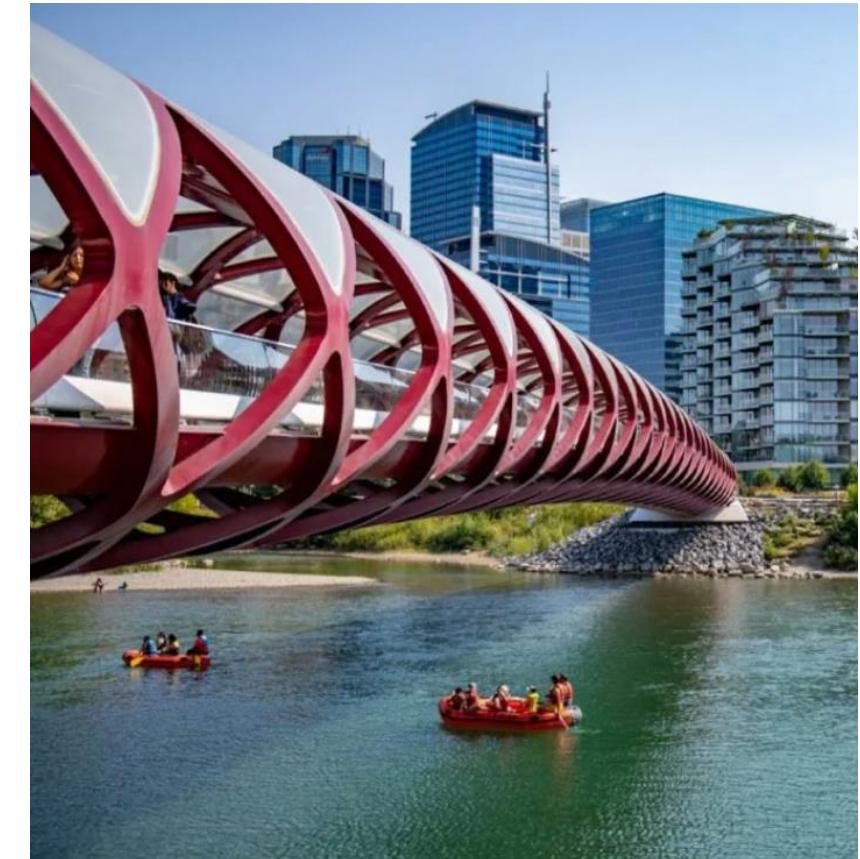


Examples of Indigenous Place Names

Bow River

- Miisksika'am, Clarence Wolfleg, from **Siksika Nation**, shares Blackfoot teachings about the Bow River
- **Mini Thni Wapta**, translated to “Cold River” or “Bow River”, by the **Stoney Nakoda**
- **Ijathibe Wapta** is another **Stoney** name for the river, which translates directly to “**Bow River**”. Elder Wallace Ear explained, “The Stonies use the saskatoon saplings that grow along this river to make the bows they used for hunting” (Wallace Ear April 16, 1987) (Chiniki Place Names Report 1987, p.10).

<https://dictionary.stoneynakoda.org/#/E/bow%20river>



Learning From Place Names

- The Niitistapi, Îyârhe Nakoda, and Tsuut’ina have used place names for generations to pass down their knowledge.
- By learning these names, we can understand how people **cared for the land, honored animals, and lived together**.
- Place names are a way to **respect and preserve** the history and culture of First Nations.



Place Names Today

- Today, Indigenous communities continue to use traditional names to connect with their history and traditions.
- These place names are also a way to teach **younger generations** about the land and its importance.
- Many place names are shared in schools, communities, and through art to help everyone learn about Indigenous cultures.



How Can We Respect Place Names?

- **Learn about the names and histories** of places around you.
- **Respect the land** by learning about its stories and the people who have lived on it for thousands of years.
- When you visit places, remember the stories behind their names!



How Can We Respect Place Names?

- Indigenous place names teach us about the **deep connection** between First Nations Peoples and the land.
- By listening and learning, we can all understand and appreciate the **histories, stories, and wisdom** these names carry.

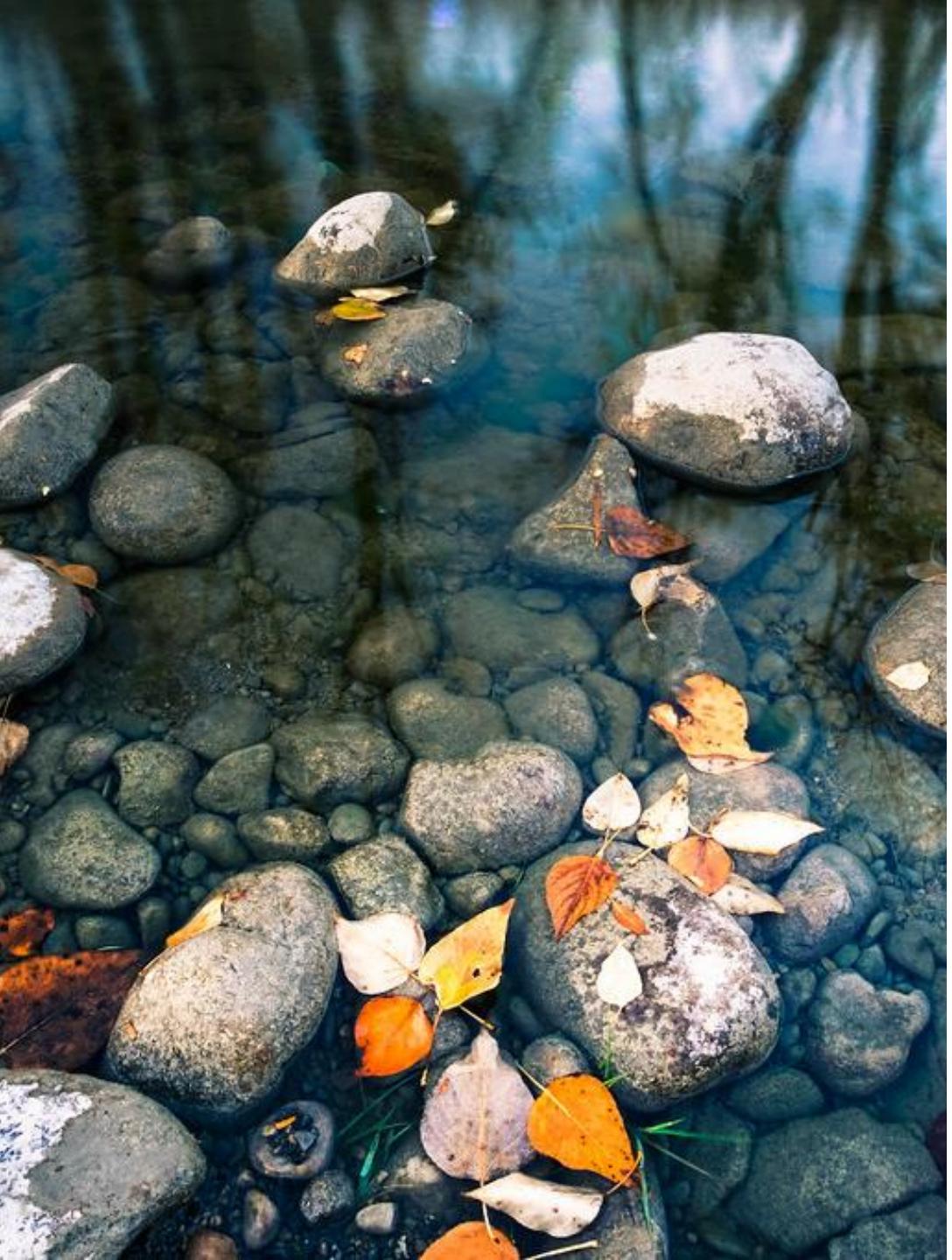


Nose Hill

Ootssapi'tomowa (Look Out Hill)

- Sacred place of the Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot People); this is where the **sunwheel** landmark is situated today. [Learn](#) more from Kainai Elder, Saa'kokoto and the informational [document](#) created by City of Calgary
- Nosehill has been important for about 9,000 years and has many signs of past use (archaeological features).
- Nosehill is very important to the Stoney Nakoda people. It was once a camping spot and a lookout point where they could see the land around them. From Nosehill, the Stoney Nakoda could send signals to other groups.





Fish

Creek

Fish Creek has a history of human use dating back to 6,500 BC, with archaeological features protected by its steep slopes.

- Indigenous communities hunted buffalo and gathered food/medicines in the area surrounding Fish Creek for thousands of years.
- The **Tsuut'ina** know Fish Creek as **Wolf Creek**. The southern side of the creek on Tsuut'ina land is the burial place for Chief Bull Head, who signed Treaty 7 in 1877 ([Making Treaty 7 Cultural Society](#))
- The **Îyârhe Nakoda** call Fish Creek "**Chase Waptan**," meaning "muddy waters." Historically, the Stoney Nakoda camped, hunted, and harvested in Fish Creek, and it is the site of the sacred Sundance ceremony, making it spiritually significant. The area is important for wildlife habitat and was frequently visited by the Stoney Nakoda for harvesting medicinal plants.
- Today, visit the **iiststii'ik** (Listening Garden) at Fish Creek Park, which was imagined and created with guidance from **Blackfoot Elders**

PART 2





Outdoor Learning Space Journey

Last year, we started this work and, through school engagement, came up with our top list of what we want to see in an outdoor learning space. We asked: **What should an outdoor learning space look like, sound like, and feel like?**

Here's what we heard:

- Plant relations
- A place for animal friends, observing nature
- Bird baths
- Opportunities to build birdhouses
- A quiet and calm space
- Available as a learning space
- Shaded areas and trees
- Stumps and rocks for varied seating; circular
- Language presence; greetings for Blackfoot, Stoney, Cree
- Plant aspens with their names in Blackfoot
- Community involvement in caring for the space



The Sacred Circle

One key element of our outdoor space is the Sacred Circle.

The **Circle** is a sacred symbol in many Indigenous cultures. In some communities, it is referred to as a Medicine Wheel. Not all circles represent the same knowledge in the same ways.

It represents wholeness, balance, and the interconnectedness of all things in the universe. It represents the sacred number of four: four directions, seasons, aspects of Self, natural elements, and more.

It will be a central part of our learning space, where we can reflect on our place in the world, teachings of our Elders, and the stories that come from land.

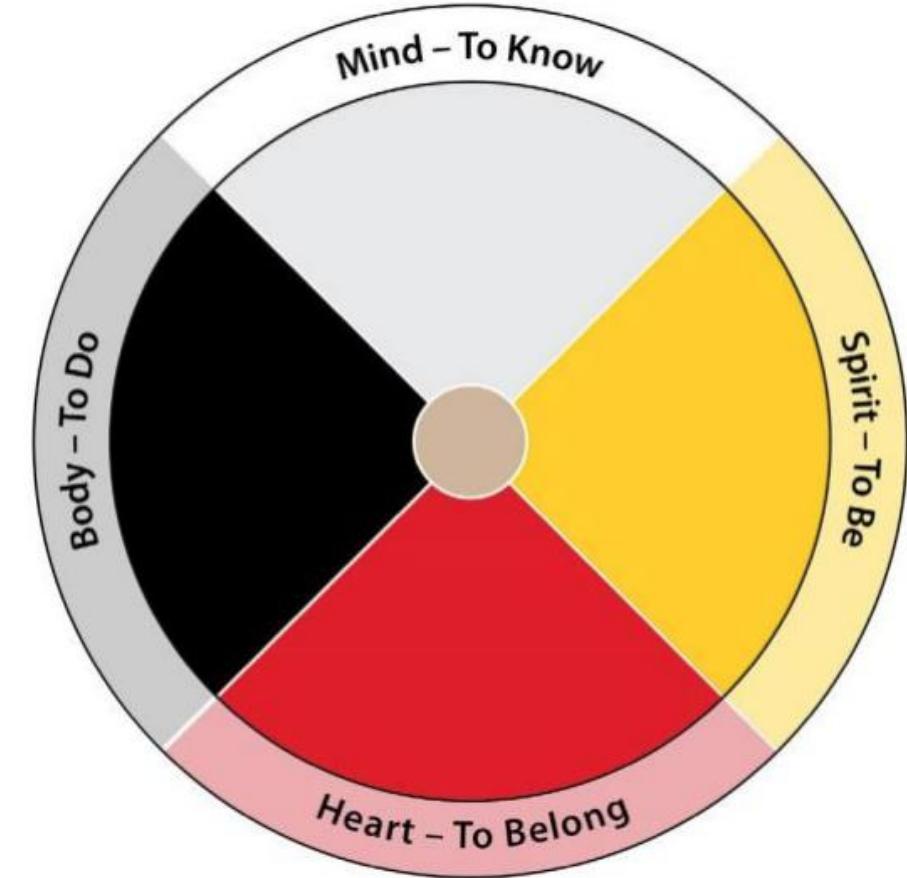


Image: CBE Indigenous Education Holistic Lifelong Learning Framework

Connecting Our Outdoor Space to the Land

As we build our outdoor learning space, we are **building a relationship** with the land. This space will allow us to:

Learn about and from the plants, animals, and natural features of the land.

Share teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Respect the cultural significance of this land and its **history**.

Our vision is to create a space where we can learn, reflect, and connect to the land and each other, just as the Niitsitap, Iyârhe Nakoda, and Tsuut’ina have done for generations.

Design Thinking Challenge: Let's Create Our Outdoor Learning Space!

Challenge: Now it's your turn to help design the outdoor learning space that we will share with our community!

We will use **Design Thinking**, a creative approach to solving problems, to help us build a prototype of the space.

In this challenge, you will work with your classmates to **ideate**, **prototype**, and **share** your ideas for the outdoor learning space.

Step 1 - Empathize: Understand the Needs of the Space

- First, let's think about the **needs** of the outdoor learning space. Here are some guiding questions:
- **What should the space look like?** Think about the features we want, like trees, stumps, and shaded areas.
- **What should the space sound like?** Consider peaceful sounds like birds chirping or wind rustling through the trees.
- **What should the space feel like?** Think about whether it should be quiet and calm or inviting and interactive.
- **Remember:** This space needs to honor the land and the traditions of the Stoney Nakoda and Blackfoot peoples.



Step 2 - Define: What Is Important in the Design?

- As a class, we will **define** what is most important for the design:
- The space should be a **learning space** that allows us to observe nature, reflect, and connect.
- It should include elements like **circles, bird baths, seating areas, and language presence** (Blackfoot, Stoney, Cree).
- Think about **community involvement** and how we can care for the space together.
- How will the outdoor learning space be maintained in the future?
- Think about who will use the space both during school and after school?



Step 3 - Ideate: Brainstorm and Create Ideas

- Now, it's time to **brainstorm** as a class. Let's think about different ways we can design the outdoor learning space:
- What kinds of **plants** should be included? Are there certain trees or plants that are significant to the Stoney Nakoda or Blackfoot Nations? Do these plants require a lot of care, or can they live and thrive in Calgary's natural environment?
- How can we create a **quiet and calm space**? Can we use rocks, trees, or circles to help with this?
- How can we include **community involvement**? What does that look like in the design?
- **Think big!** There are no bad ideas. Write or draw everything that comes to mind.



Step 4 - Prototype: Build Your Mural Design

- Now, you and your classmates will work together to **create a prototype** of the outdoor learning space on a large piece of mural paper.
- **Use drawings, symbols, and materials** to show what your space might look like. Include:
 - **Paths, seating areas, shaded spots, and plants.**
 - **Elements of nature, like trees and water features.**
 - **Space for gathering, like circle seating and medicine wheels.**
- Think about the **stories** you want the space to tell and how it can honor the land.



Step 5 - Share: Present Your Prototype

- Once your group has finished your design, you will **present** your prototype to the class.
- Talk about the **ideas** behind your design. Why did you choose certain elements like the medicine wheel or the trees?
- Share how your design **reflects the needs** of the space and the **teachings** from the Stoney Nakoda and Blackfoot Nations.
- The best part? **Your prototype** will be shared with a **potential vendor** who will take these ideas and help turn them into the **final design** for our outdoor learning space!



Step 6 - Reflect: What Did We Learn?

After the presentations, we will take a moment to **reflect** on what we've learned from this process:

How did the **ideas** evolve as we worked together?

What did we learn about the **land, tradition, and community** through the design process?

How can we make sure the space is **welcoming, respectful, and educational** for everyone?

This process helps us build a connection to the **land, the Elders, and the knowledge** of the Stoney Nakoda and Blackfoot Nations.

Conclusion

- Through the Design Thinking Challenge, you are helping to create a space where we can learn about the land, honor its history, and share teachings from our Elders.
- Your ideas will help shape the future of our **outdoor learning space**, a place where all students can learn and grow in connection to the natural world.



Student Self-Assessment



Me: Why am I alive?

Old Woman: Because everything else is.

Me: No. I mean the purpose.

Old Woman: That is the purpose. To learn about your relatives.

Me: My family?

Old Woman: Yes. The moon, stars, rocks, trees, plants, water, insects, birds, mammals. How you're moving through time and space together. That's why you're alive.

~ Richard Wagamese, Embers