

A Place of Many Grasses

Gordon Reeve, Sculptor. This site is dedicated to all First Nations and to Shawnee warrior and leader, Tecumseh, who died nearby on October 5, 1813 trying to end the genocide against his people. Wisdom (the sculpture you see) sits on a mound reminding us that First Nations have lived here for over ten thousand years. Its lines suggest trees arching overhead, the structure of longhouses, the ribs of a canoe, the skeleton of a turtle. Tecumseh's name means Panther That Crosses the Sky and, like his namesake meteor, his life-light burned briefly and brightly, a beacon to all who love freedom and the Earth. In the upper part of the sculpture, ten north-travelling clan images silhouetted against the sky tell of the terrible journeys of generations of indigenous people driven from their ancestral lands, carrying only their oral history. Many distinct types of grass share this site, just as First Nations have always shared Turtle Island, disparate in language and history yet as one in the knowledge of the Earth Mother. Ahead is a path honouring Guswenta, the Two Row Wampum treaty of 1613, and nine benches. Cut into the benches are the words of living First Nations leaders, artists, elders and a young girl, some who carry on Tecumseh's struggle and others who share earth's wisdom that we might all flourish.



Chatham-Kent

Canada

Barbara Croall, I am Odawa. Musician and composer. My great-great-great grandfather knew Tecumseh and fought alongside him. He saw Tecumseh fall from that shot and witnessed his death. There was much chaos and confusion that day near Moraviantown. But then Tecumseh disappeared. Aaniindi Tecumseh? (Where is Tecumseh?) My grandfather had mementos from battles passed down from his grandfather. One object was the tip of an arrowhead, broken from its shaft, covered in blood and human hair, and kept inside a glass jar. Grandfather said it was from an important battle. Whose blood was on that arrowhead? My grandfather gave it away to a white man, a collector, but no one knows where it went. Aaniindi ezhyaayin, Tecumseh? (Where are you going, Tecumseh?) How did Tecumseh become one of our strongest and bravest leaders? First he was a great hunter and provider for his family and community. Of all activities he preferred hunting. He only fought to keep our lands so that our people could still have a place to live and food to eat. Where is this man called Tecumseh? Where did he go? Giin awe giyoose na? (Is he gone hunting?) We see his footprints everywhere here on this earth. Gagwe-minjimendan inagakeyaa gaa-pi-izhaaying, mii go 'iw ji-wanishinang giishpin. (Try to remember which way we came, or else we will get lost.) Giwii-wiijiwin, Tecumseh. (Tecumseh, I want to go with you.) One day, another leader - a man or woman - will follow Tecumseh's dream for us all to live in peace, a United Nations of all Indigenous people to take care of the Earth for future generations. Geget igo da-inakamigad. (It really will happen.) Ishipiming I'iw agaamishkode danawazo Tecumseh. (Tecumseh is warming himself up there on the other side of that fire.)

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Ben Barnes, I am Shawnee, Second Chief of the Shawnee Tribe. My hope is that the people who come here remember that Tecumseh was just a man; a father, a son, a brother and a Shawnee leader. Too often, we create a mythic figure out of him. He came about during a time when leaders had tried and failed to find solutions in dealing with the violent displacement of their families and forced removal from their territories. He was, like many young people today, a severely disaffected youth tired of seeing infighting amongst his own people and the waffling back and forth of elder statesmen, like Blackhoof, about supporting either the British or the Americans; powerful enemies who wanted everything that meant life to our people. In Shawnee communities, leaders arise, they aren't necessarily chosen. You cannot speak of Tecumseh's ascent to leadership without discussing his brother. They were two sides of the same coin. While Tenskwatawa, The Prophet, was gathering many people to his "sermons" about a return to Native ways, Tecumseh was espousing armed uprisings and a coalition of nations. Tecumseh was with his father at Boonesborough and fought many other undocumented engagements, so from an early age he was experienced in battle. Like Tecumseh, thousands of young men, and not just Shawnees, were angry and they coalesced under his leadership. He realized the only solution was to stand together, to rally as a League of Nations. It is safe to say that he assumed the "mantle" of war chief because others saw him as "that man that can get it done." That is how I hope he is remembered.

"I am Shawnee. My forefathers were warriors. Their son is a warrior. From them I take only my existence."

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R. Carlos Nakai I am Ute, I am Southern Athabaskan, I am A:shwiwi also called Zuni. I am also Northern Spaniard Celt. I play the North American flute. Only 180 of the original 400 American Indian languages survive. Many of those, Shawnee among them, are endangered. There are no written languages. They are all passed down, word of mouth. Just as I did, Tecumseh likely sat with an elder, what they call a medicine man or historian chanting and learning his language in a series of songs. And these would be rendered into stories of how we became human beings, how we find food and water. You have to make sure you get it just right, because it tells you how to live and to survive. When you lose your way as a Native person, you go back home and find a historian, and they remind you of who you are and of all the suffering and travail we have gone through to be where we are today. We hunt as Tecumseh did making food out of things around us. Sometimes we have to cry about those things, like the deer and the elk because, like us, they give their lives so that we can stay alive. After getting the animal down he too would go and sing a little prayer into its ear and if it was still breathing, breathe in its last breaths so it would become him and he would become a part of the life that is ebbing away. And then he would thank it because one day he too would feed everything that surrounds us.

Hozho'ogo da hino naa' do, ado saah naaghai bikeh hozho. Hozho'ogo nahaasdlii. Be One in beauty in long life and happiness. In Beauty it Returns.

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Greg Peters, I am Lunápeew, Chief of the Delaware Nation - Moravian of the Thames. Listen quietly and you will hear the voices of our ancestors, the people who stood here with Tecumseh so many years ago. They speak about a way of life that followed the Two Row Wampum path and a land where we all shared the gifts from the Creator. They also tell the story of my people and their steadfast resilience to rebuild after American soldiers rode, in the hours following the battle at this place, into our community and burned it to the ground. They speak of an Indigenous homeland, where we could live our lives, independent, strong and free. I have always believed that each of us holds the spirit of Tecumseh in our heart. That spirit is the love you feel for your people; the willingness to fight for what's right. Lift your gaze and behold all that those who came before us so willingly gave their lives to preserve for future generations!

Morgan Jacobs, I am Lunápeew, of the Delaware Nation - Moravian of the Thames. I am eleven years old. I work really hard to learn my language, Lenni - Lenape, and know my culture. I first started to learn my language when I was four years old and I am still learning. When I start speaking I just switch and start to see eagles, dreamcatchers and feathers and stuff.

Weemaweëniik peetooteëwiit yoón táli, chii wanusiwi eelaáwsuyeengw. To everyone who visits this place, never forget your culture.

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Joagquisho / Oren Lyons, I am Wolf Clan, Onondaga Nation, Haudenosaunee, 2015. Five days ago, before our brother from across the sea made landfall on Turtle Island, we lived in peace with one another and in peace with the lands that sustained us. Four days ago our brother came to our lands in a ship with sails, great white wings that moved with the winds flying the royal Dutch flag of the Netherlands. They came up our great river that flows in both directions, to speak with us about trade. We sat. Our leader said "It's been a day since we observed your activities, it appears to us that you are making camp, that you intend to stay. Therefore we suggest that we establish a relationship before we speak of trade. So it was that our wise grandfathers spoke to your grandfathers about peace, and a brotherhood, that would last as long as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, as long as the rivers run down hill, and as long as the grass grows green. We tied your ship to our shore and it was agreed that we would share the river of life as brothers, you in your ship, we in our canoe, side by side. We would not interfere with your ship and you would not interfere with our canoe. We would bind ourselves together with a chain of silver with three links, peace, friendship, for as long as the grass grows green. We made a wampum belt called the GUSWENTA (the Two Row belt) and this became the emblem of this treaty and the grandfather of many subsequent treaties. Two days ago our brother Tecumseh fell in pursuit of peace and justice for our peoples. It is now the duty of this generation to sit and polish this great covenant chain of peace and friendship so that our children seven generations hence will know the peace that we seek today.

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Ovide Mercredi, I am Cree, Former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. What is the meaning of belonging? Tecumseh understood it to mean the survival of his people and their freedom to live on Mother Earth without oppression, displacement or exploitation. Belonging is a human desire and a need as necessary as food, clothing, shelter, and the air we breathe. Tecumseh understood that belonging is about people, culture, society and governance. For him, as it should be for all of us, belonging is also about sacred space, connection to our heritage and ancestry. He was a thinker, not just a leader and warrior, who knew that building relationships with neighbours and strangers was essential to maintaining territory, freedom and peaceful co-existence. We can understand his passion and fight for the survival of Indigenous Nations. His mission was to protect his people and ensure that their connection to Mother Earth was not severed by the flood of foreign settlers and the takeover of Indigenous homelands. He was not just a patriot or hero. He believed in belonging! Ancestral dreams of preserving our connection to Earth have been modified and restricted by imposed Nation States but our Creator-given rights to land and Nationhood can never be removed from the face of Mother Earth. We shall prevail and rise up to reclaim our inheritance of a good life. My people know that we belong to the land. We shall help to save our shared Earth from the mindless, invasive disrespect for her Creator-given right to survive. Like Tecumseh's dream, the sacred will of our people to belong cannot be extinguished, even by death. It is our destiny to belong.

Kakiskitanow ketom ta miskamuk miinopimatisiwin! (We shall once again find the good life!). Mouna wekatch kapakichinow. (We shall never give up).

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Rick Hill Sr. I am Tuscarora, Six Nations Legacy Consortium - Tecumseh was a complex character. Many did not like him. Many have made too much of him. There seems to be a need to define a single hero to symbolize our struggle. Both Brock and Tecumseh were killed because, in the heat of battle, they made a foolish move. You have to wonder what would have happened if Tecumseh simply fled the danger to mobilize an attack later. It is true Tecumseh denounced his own leaders for the treaties they made; treaties which the current generation hold religiously. I wonder how well we really understand his vision. He was not the first Native leader to try to defend our territorial rights. Others like Metacomet, Pontiac, Sitting Bull, and Geronimo were also defeated. Are we only heroic in defeat? After the war both the Americans and our British allies forced more and more Native Nations from their lands. Tecumseh's death did not end this. While we have lost much since 1812 I think Tecumseh would be heartened knowing that the Original People of this land still speak their languages, put through their ceremonies, govern themselves according to their own law and uphold the relationship to the sacred earth as best they can. So it is with sadness more than celebration that I think of Tecumseh. He provides a great mirror for us to look at ourselves. Are we the kind of people he envisioned?

"Tó kenhské tsi wesewarihwā ronke tsi nahō ten nihoya'tawēn'onh. Truly you heard the news of what happened to him. Í se ó ni sewa'nikonhrēn ton So your minds have also become heavy. Ne káti nón wa e'tho wahatiwennayē ra'te, tóhsha aeyesahryē nenhte ne tsi atera'swaksēhtshera nisewaya'tawēn'onh So now they direct their words over there, don't let it overburden you because of the tragedy that has happened to you."

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Winona LaDuke I am Anishinaabe, economist, writer, grandmother, patriot of the land - not a flag. We are told that in the time of the seventh fire, as Anishinaabeg we must choose between two paths, the one worn and scorched - the other green. On the scorched path the ice melts, acid rains from the sky and we cause destruction. Land, air and sacred water are poisoned. Our relatives, with wings, fins, roots, and paws perish. We know this path well and know that it is time to move to the path of survival, away from the road of conquest. Return to minobimaatisiwin, the good life. Creator put each of us here in this moment and outlined a covenant between our ancestors and Mother Earth that could allow us to prosper for generations. That covenant requires courage, prayers and vision. Be respectful, be strong, take only what we need and replenish that which we have been given. The question is who determines the destiny of the land and the people - those who prey on the land or those who pray for the land? From Tecumseh we learned that we must unite to protect Mother Earth. At this moment, the last thrashings of the fossil fuel, the predator economy, the wasichu economy are upon us. It is time to summon all our strength to stand against the mines, the pipelines, the black snake, the nuclear waste, and the military. It is time to become the people that our ancestors dreamed we would be and that our descendants will count on. Protect the sacred. Honor the Earth.

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Alanis Obomsawin O.C., Waban'aki, filmmaker, singer, songwriter and printmaker. When all the leaves are gone. My papa got tuberculosis of the bones. The doctor says I should never be in the same room with him because I might get it too. In the fall this year, mama said, "Look out the window at the tree in the backyard. When all the leaves are gone, if your father is still here it means we will have him for another year." Papa says the cruellest torture is that our country was stolen and our languages were silenced. He says someday our people will have a voice again. No one can take away what is in our hearts, our spirit and our dreams. Papa... the sun is rising. I am dancing. Can you see me?

Mon papa a attrapé la tuberculose des os. Le médecin dit que je ne devrais jamais être dans la même pièce que lui parce que je pourrais l'attraper moi aussi. À l'automne cette année, maman dit « regarde par la fenêtre, tu vois l'arbre dans la cour? Quand toutes les feuilles seront tombées, si ton papa est toujours là, cela veut dire qu'il sera là encore une autre année ». Pour papa, la plus cruelle torture, c'est le vol de nos territoires et l'élimination de nos langues. Il dit qu'un jour, notre peuple aura de nouveau une voix et que personne ne peut nous enlever ce qui vit dans nos cœurs, dans nos esprits, dans nos rêves. Papa... Le soleil se lève. Je danse. Est-ce que tu me vois?

N'dadan mannach8go wji wskanikok. Nojipolewad idam 8da nd'achowaldamowen kassiwí al8msagok spiwi agma wz8mi nia kizilla mezna achi. Tagw8gwiwi pamigadek, nonon idam, « Kina kwajemiwi ta8z8ganek abazik kwelbiwi wigw8mn8k. 14 Angitta mziwi benibaga, chaga k'mit8gwes askwa pm88zo idamoo k'waj8n8bnaji agma mina wji ngwejjaden». N'dadan idam chit8mamagahodw8gan niga nd'ahkinna kmodnap ta nd'18dwaw8ganawal chigabikhan8p. Idam t8m8 nd'aln8banawak n'waj8nemenanji lal8mow8gan mina. 8da nd'legwasaw8ganawaikok. N'dadan- S8khipozit kizos ta n'pmeg8. K'paz8bii?

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