The Importance of Naming

Naomi Bird



Rock Painting located on Reindeer Lake Saskatchewan in a place called masinahikansepesisihk, rock painting river. It is approximately 20 km north of Southend Saskatchewan.



“We understood that we are all related and that our actions affect our environment; that the mere observance of a thing changes it. Therefore, we must care for our environment in order to care for ourselves.”

Absolon & Willett, 2004

Absolon, K., & Willett, C. (1). Aboriginal Research: Berry Picking and Hunting in the 21st Century. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 1(1), 5-17. Retrieved from https://fpcfr.com/index.php/FPCFR/article/view/5

Indigenous Language



The language is living



The language is connected



The language is a lens



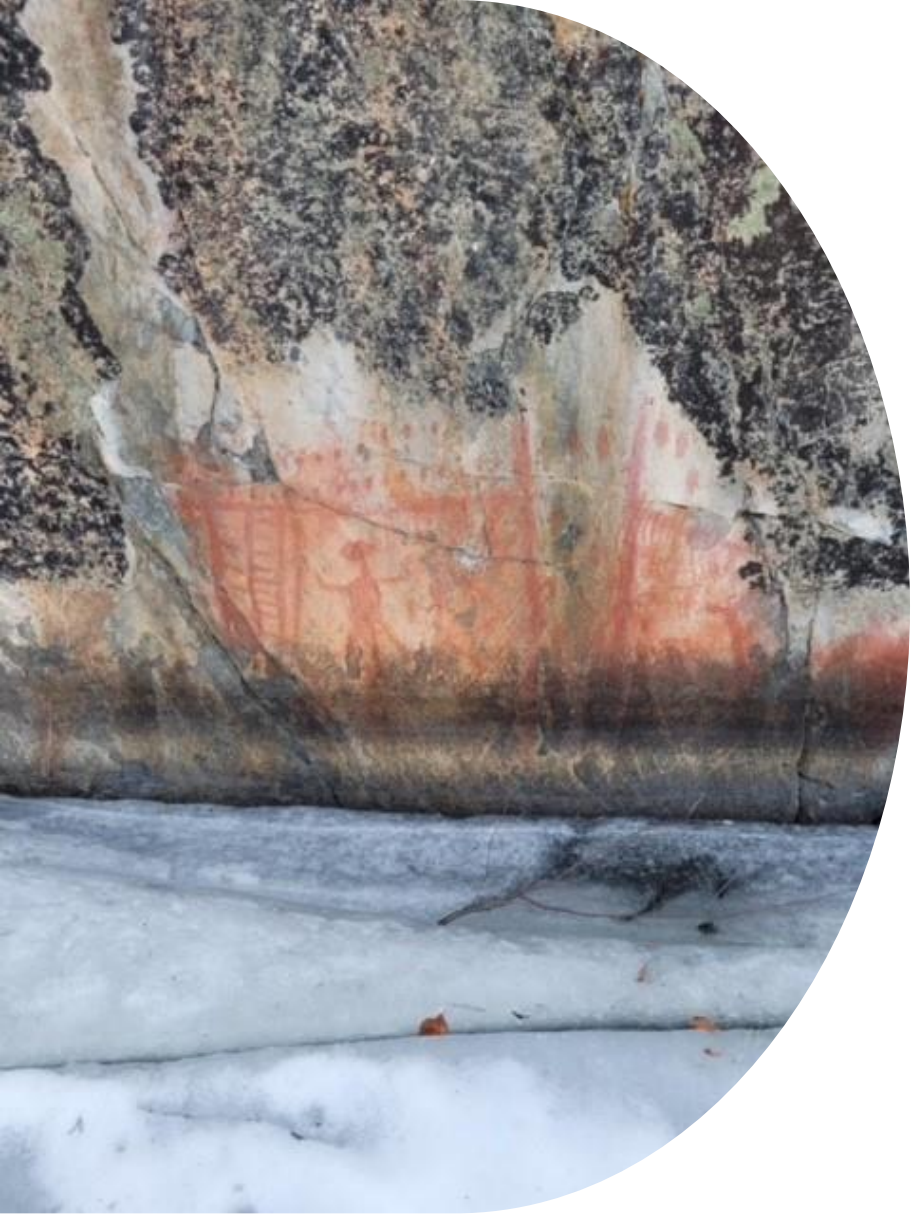
The language holds history



The Language is Living

"When the land changes, the language changes."
Dr. Lorna wánosts'a7 Williams

- As the environment changes, the language adapts. This is why we have names for current and modern technology. This is also why we must honour and preserve this history, to maintain and sustain the connection.
- Living things evolve and adapt to the environment, much like our languages.
- It is said that the language is sleeping when there are non-speakers, not that they lost the language. It was not lost, it knows where it is and where it can be found.



The Language is Connected:

"Go back to the land, go back to the portages, because that's where our languages come from."
Issac Murdock

- The language changes from community-to-community based dialect, culture, experience, and land.
- The language connects us to our experiences and our histories.
- We can distinguish where a person comes from based on their language, dialect and even their accent.
- These distinguishments sustain the puzzle pieces needed by those needing to re-connect when they were pulled away from the land or forced to assimilate.

Rock Painting located on Reindeer Lake Saskatchewan in a place called masinahikansepesisihk, rock painting river. It is approximately 20 km north of Southend Saskatchewan.



The Language is a Lens:

"Many Indigenous people have a spiritual connection to their language that not only has to do with their ancestors, but also with the ground beneath them, often referred to Indigenous communities as Mother Earth."
Onowa McIvor

- Learning the language requires an interaction with the lands and environment. These connections are enhanced on the land. We need a social interaction to find the value in the language.
- How we interact with others, and our environment is guided through our language. The words we use for children is not less than, but rather "little man" or "little woman". Understanding this allows for those in care of the children to know eventually these little people grow up.

McIvor, O. (2020) Indigenous Language Revitalization and Applied Linguistics: Parallel Histories, Shared Futures? In *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* (2020) 40, 79-96. doi:10.1017/S0267190520000094



The Language Holds History:

"That is the power of the story. We are and always have been in the story, in negative and in positive ways."
Helen Armstrong

- Who we are and what we have come to know is within our language. Separating ourselves from our language removes our connective tissues to our histories.
- The story of Grandmother's Bay connects the community to their history. A seemingly insignificant place on the map but the name of the place holds resilience, ingenuity and strength of a people's roots. Their story defines why their community is where it is.
- If we lose our language, we lose our histories.

Armstrong, H. (2013). Indigenizing the Curriculum: The Importance of Story. In *First Nations Perspectives:* 5, 1 (2013): p. 37-64. https://mfnerc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Section3_Indigenizing-the-Curriculum-The-Importance-of-Story.pdf

Land and Language

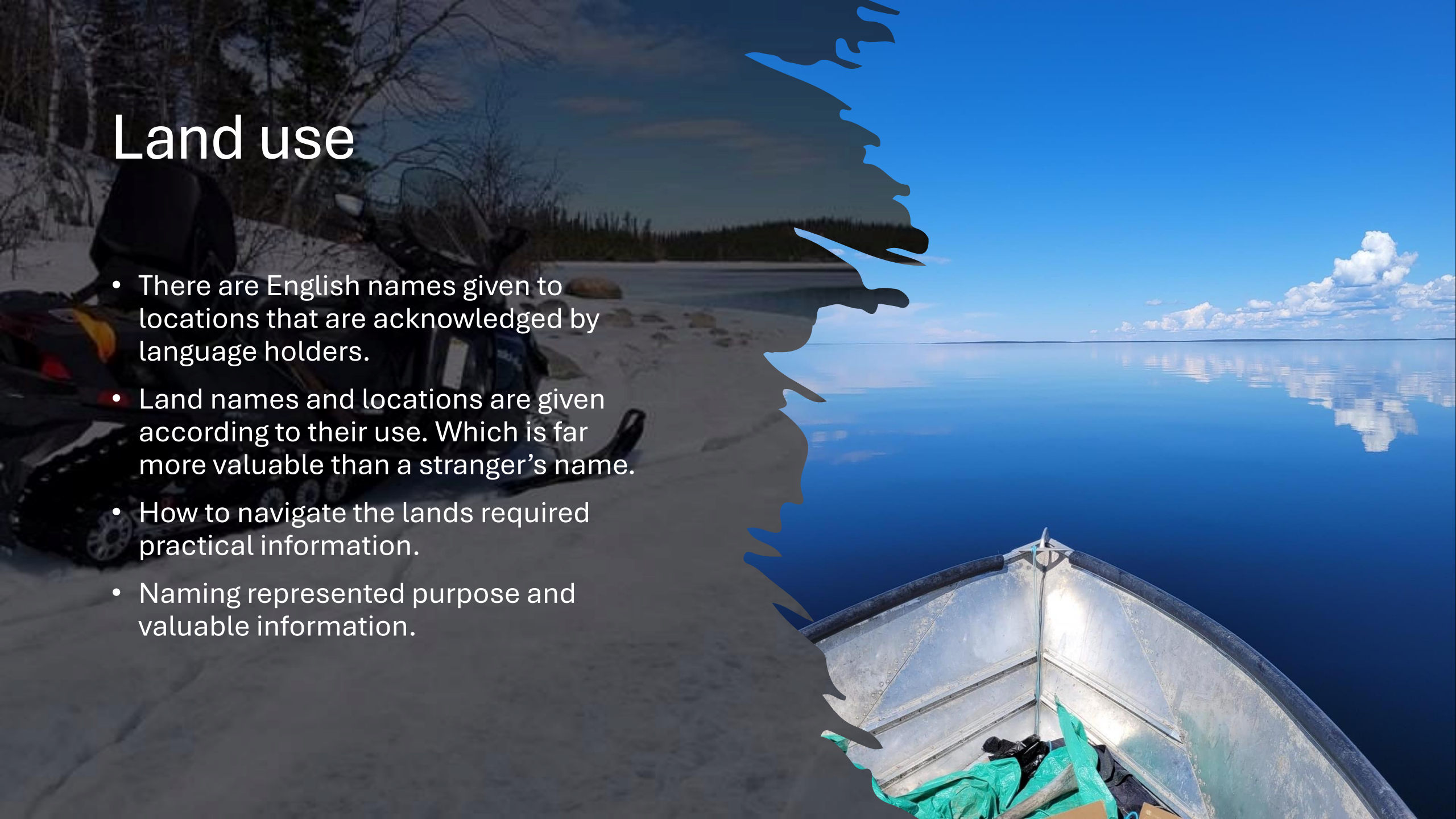


Language is Connected to lived experience

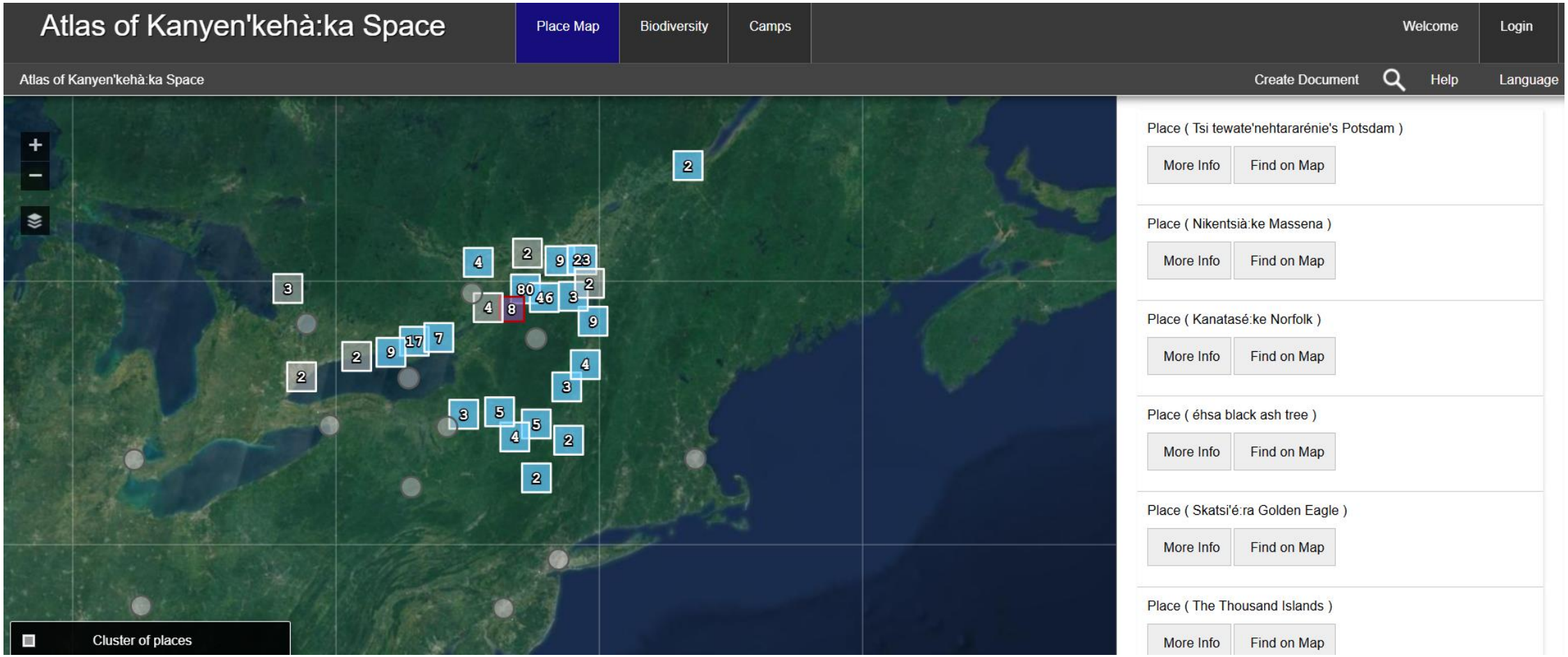
- Our histories are documented through stories, on rock paintings, in landscapes and geography. These stories were not told in English or written in English. They held within them important values, lessons, and traditions that directly applied to your current actions.
- The implications of the Residential School experience and the multiple assimilation processes in Canada severed the connection to oral history but not entirely. The history survives in place names, rock paintings and written oral accounts from gifted and appointed story keepers, maintaining these critical pieces of history still awaiting to be reconnected.
- To learn our languages requires a need to be in the environment and learn in tandem to land.

Land use

- There are English names given to locations that are acknowledged by language holders.
- Land names and locations are given according to their use. Which is far more valuable than a stranger’s name.
- How to navigate the lands required practical information.
- Naming represented purpose and valuable information.



Atlas of Kanyen'kehà:ka Space



Naming Ceremonies and Naming Practice

- Many Indigenous communities within Turtle Island have naming protocols.
- These protocols are not to be discussed externally as they are a traditional process. However, there is a difference between a ceremonial name and given name. If a name is given in ceremony that name also has protocols for its use.
- A given name is just like any other name but holds a connection to your identity and to the person who gifted it to you.
- Often these given names are gifted at birth or later in life when the person’s characteristics and nature show.

Risk of Renaming Spaces and Items

The names of locations are purposeful and hold stories. There are markers identified within those names.

It lays claim to an object, place, or person.

Consultation is a requirement as it acknowledges title.

Repatriation to appropriate communities.



The Found Photo

Activity



Backstory

- The plate that had the photo was discovered on the back of another older photograph. It was used primarily as a backing for an old photo. It was only discovered when the person who purchased it decided to get the broke frame repaired.
- The photo was made into prints and given to the family members who the owner happened to know.
- The plate was given to the Glenbow Museum for safe keeping and storage.
- Photo on the left is the picture that was in circulation and the one on the right was the found photo.



Provide a name of the photo and description using information gathered from this code



What are your descriptions?



Naming error by the Glenbow Museum

- **Current description:**

“Head and shoulders image of Cree Chief Thunderchild (Pa-sic-wasis) (1849-1927) of Battleford, Saskatchewan; wearing a feather headdress and a treaty medal, and holding a eagle feather fan. The medal was presented to him on behalf of Queen Victoria for his loyalty during the 1885 Northwest Resistance.”

- **Previous description and acknowledgement of error:**

“This copy is incorrectly annotated "Chief Sweet Grass" on the front, and "Chief Sweet-Grass / Chief of Stoneys / Battleford 1883" on the back. Description updated based on more complete description of Glenbow and LAC copies. Note also that Chief Sweetgrass (Wee-kas-kookee-sey-yin) died in 1877.”

https://memorysask.ca/chief-sweetgrass-chief-of-the-stoneys-battleford-1883?sf_culture=en#:~:text=Head%20and%20shoulders%20image%20of%20Cree%20Chief,his%20loyalty%20during%20the%201885%20Northwest%20Resistance.



Why was it damaging that the photo was incorrectly named?

- There was a similar picture in existence that they neglected to compare or consult with community.
- The Cree and the Stoney Nakoda people were war allies. To this day they have family ties. Which explains why he travelled with the Stoney.
- It is offensive to the Stoney because they have their own Chiefs.
- It is offensive to Sweetgrass who also have their own chief.