



SPEAKING OUR TRUTH

A Journey of Reconciliation

TEACHERS' RESOURCE GUIDE

WRITTEN BY TASHA HENRY

Handout # 10 (2 pages)**“Ribbon Skirt”** by Kelsey Leonard

I wear you to pray
 For humility
 For Power
 In the sway of my skirt
 I can feel my ancestors tug
 Gentle resurgence of love
 Carrying millennia of tradition in each step
 keenly aware of the way
 this imperial cloth brushes my thighs
 Yet balanced with the vibrancy of my ribbons
 cut, ironed and sewn just right to breathe
 Indigenous knowledge into my existence
 so when the other looks at me
 They look confused
 But still I stand
 Humble in prayer
 in Power
 in Resistance
 Building waves of survivance
 With my sway
 So that my babies unborn are awakened in a world that claims
 Their spiritual existence
 And on the days when I am tired and weak
 My sway
 soothes my weary soul
 And reminds me that
 I am descended from warriors
 I am a carrier of tradition
 And am their living breath eternal
 with each sway of my step
 I am Love.

Suggested Reading Activities

1. Read the poem out loud, alternating speakers/readers. Try using just female readers.
2. Read about Kelsey in *Red Rising Magazine*: <http://redrisingmagazine.ca/tag/ribbon-skirt>.

Written/Oral Responses

1. How is the ribbon skirt a symbol of Kelsey's connection to her culture?
2. How is her skirt a symbol of Indigenous connection to the land and water?

3. What is the significance of regalia in First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures?
4. How does Kelsey redefine resistance through her imagery of her ribbon skirt?
5. What gives you strength on tough days?

Visual Response

Draw a picture of a piece of clothing, regalia, accessory (watch, knife, ring, etc.) or family treasure that has been passed down to you that has sentimental or cultural meaning. What does this object represent to you?

Tasba's interview with Kelsey

1. If the land or water had a message to youth, what would it be? *The land and water remembers. It is our relative. It cares for us. Tell it your thoughts, hopes, dreams and prayers. The land and water will pass those hopes, dreams and prayers on to future generations. It connects across time and reminds us that we are one strand in the greater web of life. We are not alone. We are still here. We are resilient.*
2. What does reconciliation mean to you? *An Elder said to me once, "There are many, many things that they told us about this time." They said that "at this time you would see young people with old spirits." They said, "You are going to see healers—the red, the yellow, the black and the white—and that each healer is given a talent and a gift. Some are given the gift to write, some to talk, some to lead, some to do art. Each one would have a gift." They said that "no gift alone could do it, no gift by itself could heal the peoples of the earth. But all the gifts together could bring about that healing." For me, reconciliation is the realization of this prophecy that we begin to heal the land and water by healing ourselves. We recognize and find our unique gifts the creator has given each of us and work to collaborate with others in our global world to use those gifts collectively for the betterment of our communities.*
3. If you were to write a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau from the point of view of the land/water, what would you ask for? *I think, as nature, I would write the letter to all the leaders of the world's nation-states and tell them to listen to Indigenous peoples and to value Indigenous science and knowledge. These peoples, the river, ocean, tree, etc. are all my relatives. They have lived with me since time immemorial. They have adapted to my changes, and their knowledge is key to my protection for future generations.*

Sense Poem by Kelsey Leonard

I am Shinnecock (People of the Shore)
 I hear waves lapping
 I see whales' tails offshore
 I taste saltwater in the air
 I smell sage, cedar, sweetgrass
 I feel loved
 I know we are resilient
 I am here.

