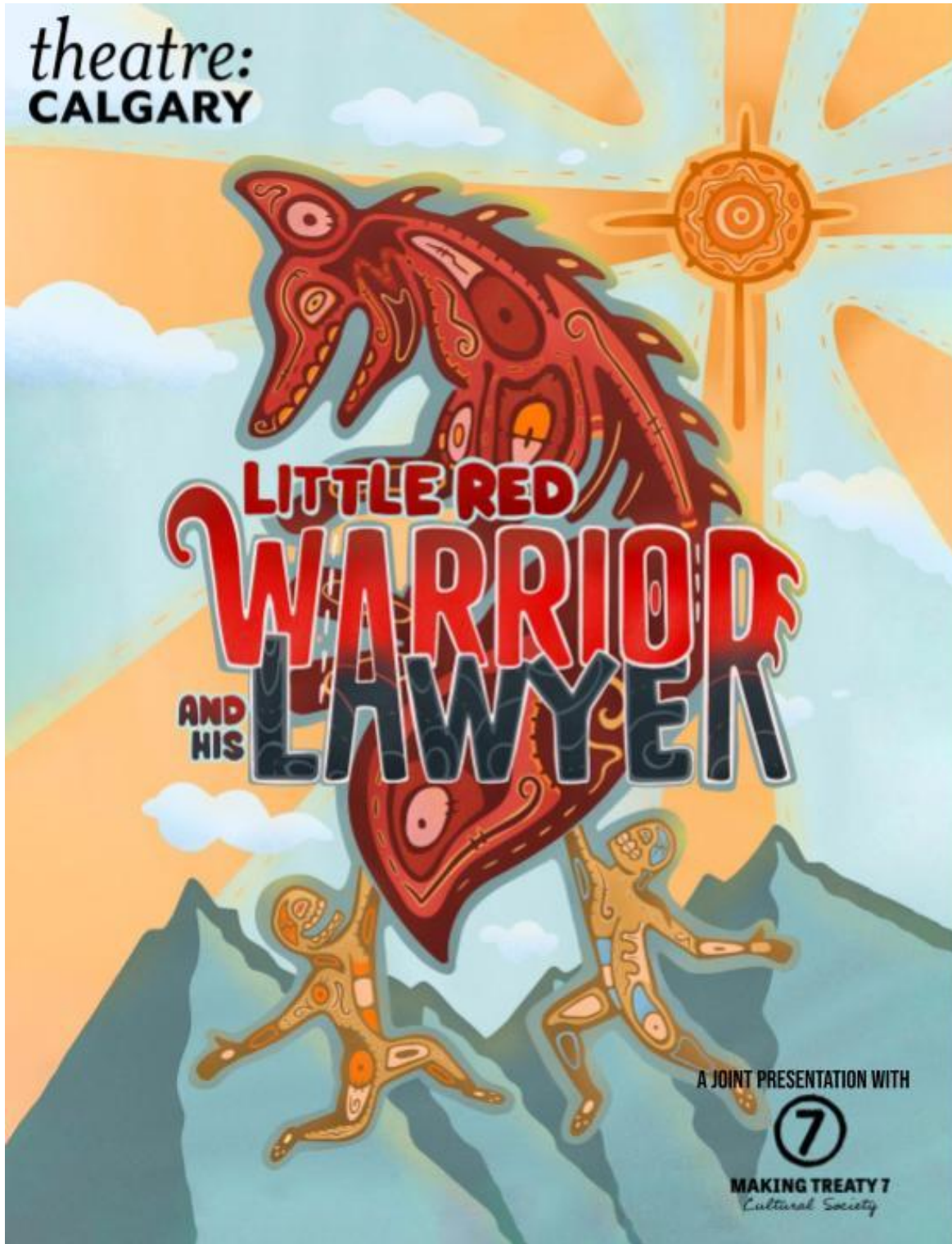


THE BELFRY THEATRE (VICTORIA) IN A JOINT PRODUCTION WITH SAVAGE SOCIETY (VANCOUVER)
IN ASSOCIATION WITH NAC INDIGENOUS THEATRE (OTTAWA) PRESENT




A TRICKSTER LAND CLAIM FABLE

BY KEVIN LORING

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Artwork by Caleb Ellison-Dysart (Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation). Caleb is a nīhithaw/Woods Cree multidisciplinary artist living on unceded xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) & səłilwəta? (Tsleil-Waututh) territories.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome educators!

Theatre Calgary's 2022-2023 Play Guides are intended to support your students' experience at Theatre Calgary this season. We encourage you to use some or all of these materials to provide context for your students before, during, and after their visit to Theatre Calgary. While not mandatory for students to enjoy the production, research shows that where young people are given opportunities to connect a work of art to their personal lives and experiences, the more deeply they are able to understand and appreciate the piece.

With that in mind, each guide provides you and your students with a range of contextual material. You will find background information on the play and playwright; social, linguistic, and historical context; expectations for the theatre; activities for you to lead in the classroom; and reflection questions to guide discussions. You'll find activities that connect to current events, are interdisciplinary, tie to your curriculum, and can be facilitated for various lengths of time.

Pages marked with a ★ can be photocopied and distributed to students.

We hope that you and your students enjoy your experience at Theatre Calgary this year!

ABOUT THE PLAY

SUMMARY

Floyd, the narrator, enters and begins to tell the story of Little Red Warrior, the last remaining member of the Red Warrior Tribe. We learn that his village has been taken over by construction equipment. Floyd transforms into several characters throughout the play starting with a construction engineer and explains to Little Red that developers have taken over his Land. Unable to control his rage, Little Red hits Floyd, and he is immediately taken into custody by the authorities.

Once he has been arrested, Little Red encounters his court-appointed lawyer, Larry, who conducts matters in a very business-like manner—devoid of compassion for Little Red. Larry is insistent that Little Red should blindly follow his instructions in order to stay out of jail, but Little Red is understandably resistant. As Larry packs up his things and prepares to give up, Little Red admits that he needs Larry's help. Larry agrees to file a Land Claim on behalf of Little Red, bails him out of jail, and invites him to stay at his home.

We meet Larry's wife, Desdemona, also a lawyer. She is intelligent and confident to a fault. He reveals that he's offered to house Little Red, and we see Desdemona's true colors—uncaring and ruthless. There are clearly differences in their legal ethics and life plans. Out of greed, and probably an attempt to shut him up, Desdemona agrees to allow Little Red to stay in their basement.

When Little Red arrives, he offers Desdemona a gift of fermented salmon eggs, a delicacy in his culture. She receives this less than enthusiastically, and after an awkward moment of introduction, he begins to examine her face closely. He points out a "slightly lazy eye," which sends Desdemona into a fit of panic that she should be anything less than perfect.

STORY WHOOSH

is an interactive storytelling technique that enables any kind of plot to come alive, even without participants having prior knowledge.

- The teacher facilitates the shared storytelling by bringing individuals and groups in and out of the action.
- As soon as characters, objects, places, or events in the story (i.e., servants, bad thoughts, ships, etc.) are mentioned, the first students step into the circle and make a shape or pose that represents what has been narrated.
- At any time the teacher can say "Whoosh!" and students quickly return to their 'places' in a circle.
- Continue the story around the group, so that different students get to play various characters and everyone gets a chance to try several roles, regardless of gender.

Time passes as Little Red moves into the basement and preparations begin for the trial. Floyd, now transformed into the Judge, asks Little Red for proof that the Land is his. Little Red presents the femur bone of his ancestor, as a means of proving that he has a right to the Land. The Judge laughs at the absurdity that Little Red could win a Land Claim in his lifetime. The Judge straps (or hits) Little Red's hands. Driven to fury, Little Red attempts to use the femur bone to 'smash' the Judge, but Larry intervenes before more harm can be done.

WHAT IS THE SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF?

Little Red Warrior and His Lawyer is a satire—meaning it is written to highlight the absurdity and inequities of the world. The play is theatrical, so actors play multiple roles and the audience is asked to 'suspend disbelief' and buy into what the narrator of this play, the character of Floyd, is telling us.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BREAK THE FOURTH WALL?

When the audience watches a play, they traditionally 'spy' on the action as if they're in the same room, through what is considered the fourth wall—as if the fourth wall of a room has been removed and replaced with an audience.

An actor who pauses the action of the play to speak directly to the audience is 'breaking the fourth wall.' They are removing the invisible barrier that exists between actor and audience.

That night in Larry's home, we see Little Red's hands bandaged and Desdemona in an eye patch to attempt to correct her newly discovered weakness. Little Red is invited to join them for dinner, and Larry leaves his wife alone with his client to pick up takeout. Downing glasses of wine, Desdemona hits on Little Red. He looks into her eyes again and calls her out on her self-absorbed behavior and the empty life she is living. But when she tries to kiss him, he leaves the room.

During dinner we see Larry growing more and more confident in his ability to win Little Red's case. His white savior complex becomes more obvious until he passes out in his bowl. (*Learn more about the term 'white savior complex' on page 9*) Desdemona has drugged him, so she can be alone with Little Red again. They leave Larry unconscious at the table, where Floyd appears to him in a dream.

The next time we see Desdemona and Little Red, they are in his bed, where he shares the story of his family, and as she expresses greater interest in his background, she begs to "see the world" as he sees it. He tells her that her name is 'Flannel Dancer.'

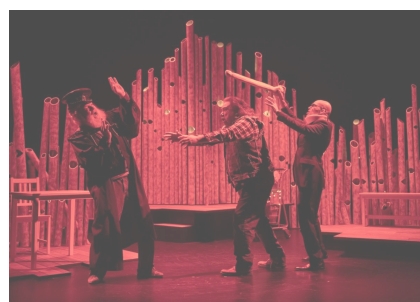
As Larry immerses himself in his case, Little Red immerses himself in a sordid relationship with Larry's wife. And Desdemona is finally getting the life and freedom she's never afforded herself—as she walks the fine line between appreciation and appropriation.

When we return to the courtroom, it is revealed that Desdemona is actually the opposing counsel and will be fighting to take Little Red's Land. Larry insists that they can't be on opposing sides, so as the play becomes more and more absurd, Desdemona requests a divorce from the Judge, and it is granted. The Judge then proceeds to declare that he will make his decision on the Land Claim following just one minute of argument on each side.

In an effort to demonstrate how little such Claims are taken seriously, the remainder of the trial is a series of blah-blah-blahs, laughter, and absurdity. Obviously the court rules in favor of the developer without even hearing Little Red's side of the argument. The decision is then immediately upheld by the appeals court, as well. In his fury, Little Red summons the Queen of England, who appears as a campy caricature of herself—fabulous and larger than life. In allegiance with Little Red, she demands the court give him his Land back, and so it does.

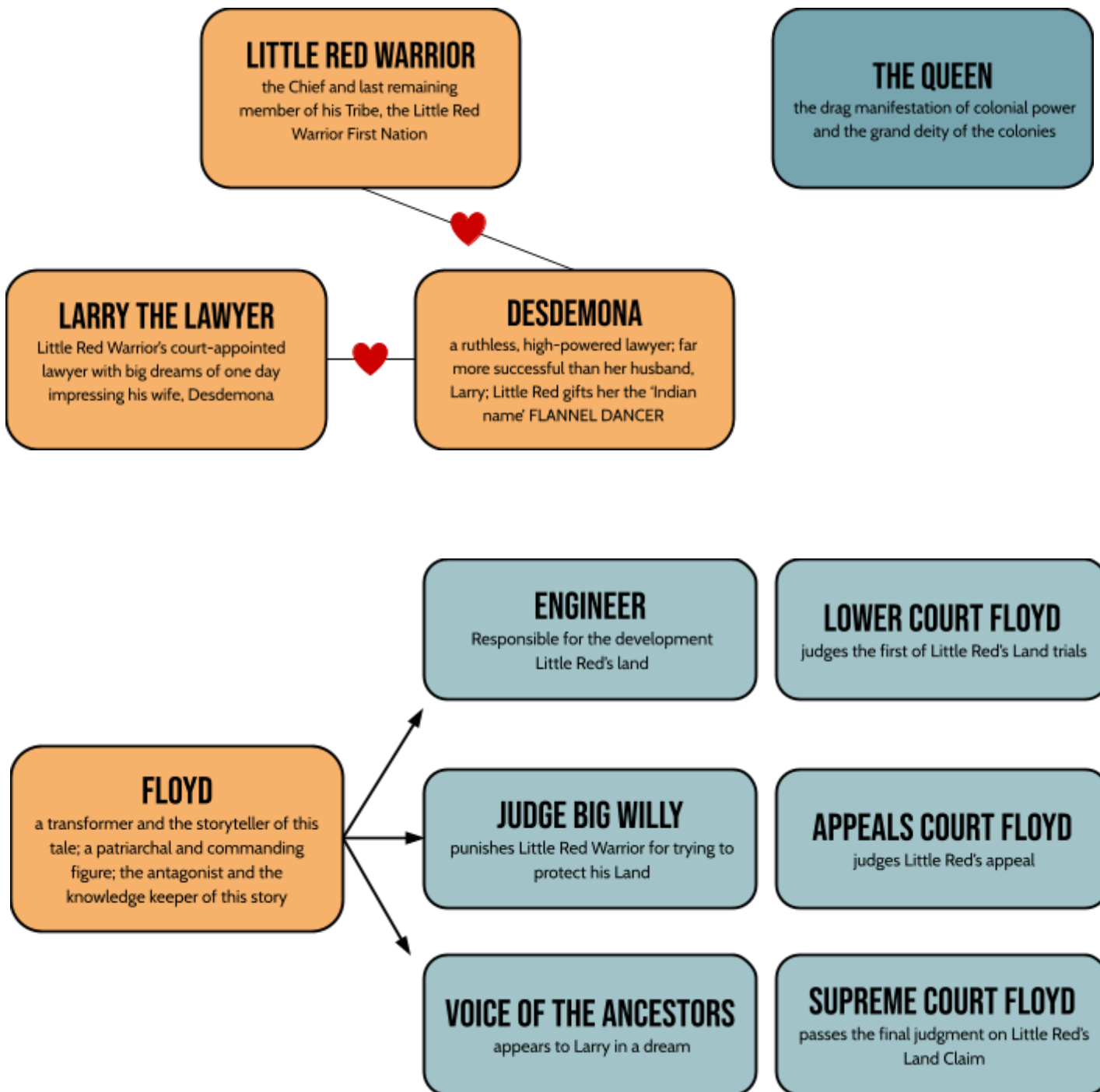
To everyone's surprise, Little Red immediately identifies a large uranium deposit beneath the Land and his plans to strip it to make way for a pipeline. And, it turns out, he lied about being the last remaining Little Red Warrior. Following a verbal and physical altercation, we discover that Desdemona is pregnant—and there was only one way that could have happened.

In the end, Floyd tells us of the futures of Little Red, Larry, and Desdemona and the drastic changes their lives underwent. The final image of the play is the Queen, in all of her fabulous glory.



Little Red Warrior and His Lawyer photo credits (clockwise from top left): (1) Sam Bob, Luisa Jojic; (2) Gordon Patrick White, Shekhar Paleja, Luisa Jojic; (3) Kevin McNulty, Sam Bob, Shekhar Paleja; (4) Kevin McNulty, Gordon Patrick White. All photos by Emily Cooper

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN.



HISTORICAL + SOCIAL CONTEXT.



THE ROLE OF THE TRICKSTER IN INDIGENOUS STORYTELLING

The play, *Little Red Warrior and His Lawyer*, is subtitled, “A Trickster Land Fable.” It is based on Nlaka’pamux (pronounced *in-ko-pah- muck*) story traditions— specifically, that of Trickster snk’ yép pronounced *shin-k-yap*) or Coyote. The Nlaka’pamux reside in the south central interior of the region known as the British Columbia. In this culture, the Coyote “embodies the worst of human character.” Transformation is possible; nothing is certain, and no one can be trusted. “In Trickster Stories, no one walks away unscathed,” says Kevin Loring.

The Trickster behaves in ways that are opposite to the Customs and Beliefs of the people. The Coyote character in Nlaka’pamux culture is vain, selfish in the extreme, cunning, lustful, arrogant, foolish, greedy, and vengeful. And that makes him funny. But he is also a powerful transformer, a shapeshifter, and a conjurer.

This play is inspired by these ancient, hilarious, absurd stories, reflecting the Beliefs and Laws of the people. The character of Floyd represents the Coyote in the ways that he takes on various character roles throughout the story.

The playwright wants us to ask ourselves, “*What would Coyote do if his Lands were being threatened?*”

What we mean when we say **WHITE SAVIOR COMPLEX**

The *white savior complex* centers white people in general, and North Americans, specifically, as seeing themselves in a position to “rescue” IBPOC (Indigenous, Black, People of Color), consciously or subconsciously.

Examples of white saviorism in media include stories like:

- *The Help*
- *Blindside*
- *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- *Green Book*

The *white savior complex* imposes the notion that the white person knows what communities of color need, rather than listening to how they can truly be of help. Those who want to help first need to consider what systems are in place that might be influencing the health and well-being of IBPOC. They should take a backseat and listen to members of those communities.

WATCH & LISTEN **KEVIN LORING**



Meet the National Arts Centre’s Artistic Director of Indigenous Theatre



Kevin Loring talks about the play, *Little Red Warrior and His Lawyer*

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATRE



An open mind.

Let the performance surprise you! Stay open to what can happen. Look for moments of theatrical magic (how did they change that costume so quickly?) and unexpected dialogue.

Assigned seats.

Every seat in the theatre offers a unique perspective on the action. Appreciate what you can see from your seat that someone else might not.

Live actors.

The performers on stage can see you, hear you, and feel your energy. And actors love student audiences! Laugh when something is funny! Gasp when you're surprised! Applaud when you're impressed! The actors thrive on audience reactions.

A break from reality.

Theatre-makers ask the audience to "suspend their disbelief." If someone on stage says the red ribbon is blood, then it is! If an actor takes flight, then imagine you can't see the strings. This is what the actors ask of the audience. Embrace the magic of theatre.

Questions.

Listen carefully to the story being told. If you have a question, keep your voice to a whisper so it doesn't disturb others. (See the call out on Q + As to help you form great questions for the team behind the show.) Let yourself be challenged by the content. What new ideas or perspectives are you hearing?

Disconnection.

Put your phone away and immerse yourself in the technology of the theatre. The sounds and lights from your device are distracting to the actors, fellow audience members, and you! Plus, the law says that photos and videos aren't allowed, anyway.

PREPARING Q'S FOR A Q + A

While you watch the show, consider how the creative team (see pg. 11) brings the story to life on stage for you.

Consider questions about the process:

- How did the lighting / set / costume / sound designer...
- What made the director choose to...
- How did the playwright decide to...

Ask questions about the story:

- Why did [character] make the decision to...
- Can you explain how...
- Why didn't _____ happen?

Learn more about each job:

- Why did you decide to become a...
- What do I need to do to become a...
- What has been your favorite...



THEATRE TEAM TALKBACK

Theatre is a 'team sport,' and it's not the actors alone who bring a production to life. After your show, you'll have a chance to ask questions of the creative team. Here are some of the folks you might expect to speak with:

The Playwright writes the script—sometimes from an original idea, and sometimes adapted from a book or story; decides what the characters say and gives the designers guidelines on how the play should look.

The Director creates the vision for the production, how it will look on stage, and works closely with the actors, costume, set, and lighting designers to make sure everyone tells the same story.

The Actors use their bodies and voices to bring the playwright's words and the director's ideas to life on the stage.

The Designers imagine and create the lights, scenery, props, costumes, and sound that will compliment and tell the playwright's story in a way that matches the director's vision.

The Stage Manager assists the director during rehearsals by taking detailed notes and making sure the actors and designers understand these ideas. They run the show during each performance by making sure the actors' entrances and exits and the lights and sound all run smoothly.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

IF YOU HAVE 15 MINUTES...

Move as If...

The character of Floyd in Little Red Warrior and His Lawyer, shapeshifts between characters throughout the play. This activity gets students moving their bodies and transforming their movements to take on a variety of physicalities.

Focus Question. How do actors move their bodies to portray different characters?

Objective. Students will respond to a variety of prompts as they move about the space to take on different characteristics and movements.

Procedure.

- 1 Create an open playing space in your classroom, and spread students across the room.
- 2 Establish a safety vocabulary for the activity regarding speed, personal space, etc.
- 3 Have students begin to move in a neutral way around the space. Prompt them to fill all of the space and keep their distance from others.
- 4 As they move, use the following prompts—as a starting point—to challenge them to move differently throughout the space. Consider other ways they can demonstrate these differences using facial expressions, sound, etc.

Move as if you are:

- Pushing through molasses
- On clouds
- A hurried business-person
- Caught in a terrible rainstorm
- ...& rain will cause you to melt
- A military general
- A frantic babysitter who's lost track of their charge
- 90 years old
- Having the best day ever
- Having the worst day ever
- 50% animal / 50% human
- Pushing through Jell-O
- A powerful politician
- An inept politician
- A famous movie star
- Afraid of other people

- 5 Allow time for reflection about what changed as they shifted from prompt to prompt. *How did they adjust their movements or pace?*

IF YOU HAVE 30 MINUTES...

Tell a Trickster Tale

Little Red Warrior and His Lawyer is subtitled “A Trickster Land Claim Fable” and is a satirical story that reflects the traditional storytelling practices of Indigenous communities. (You can learn more about the role of the Trickster on page 9 of this guide.) This activity will give students the opportunity to share an Indigenous trickster story using theatrical storytelling elements.

Focus Question. How can we continue the storytelling tradition?

Objective. Students will utilize storytelling elements to share a Trickster story in small groups.

Procedure.

- 1 Divide students into groups of 3-5. Each group can be assigned one of the four provided Trickster tales **OR** they can be given all four and asked to select one as a group.

[Rabbit Plays Tug-of-War](#) (Creek/Muscogee)

[Coyote and Golden Eagle](#) (Sylx and Secwepemc)

[How Raven Brought Light to the World](#) (Haida)

[Wesakechak and the Origin of the Moon](#) (Cree)

- 2 Students will read their story and answer the following questions before getting on their feet:

- What is the role of the Trickster in this story?
- Review the Storytelling Elements linked [here](#). Which three elements will best tell this story?

- 3 Each group will incorporate their Storytelling Elements and rehearse their retelling.

- 4 Have a few groups share their interpretation of their stories and discuss how the Trickster represented differently in each sharing.

IF YOU HAVE AN HOUR...

Acknowledging the Land

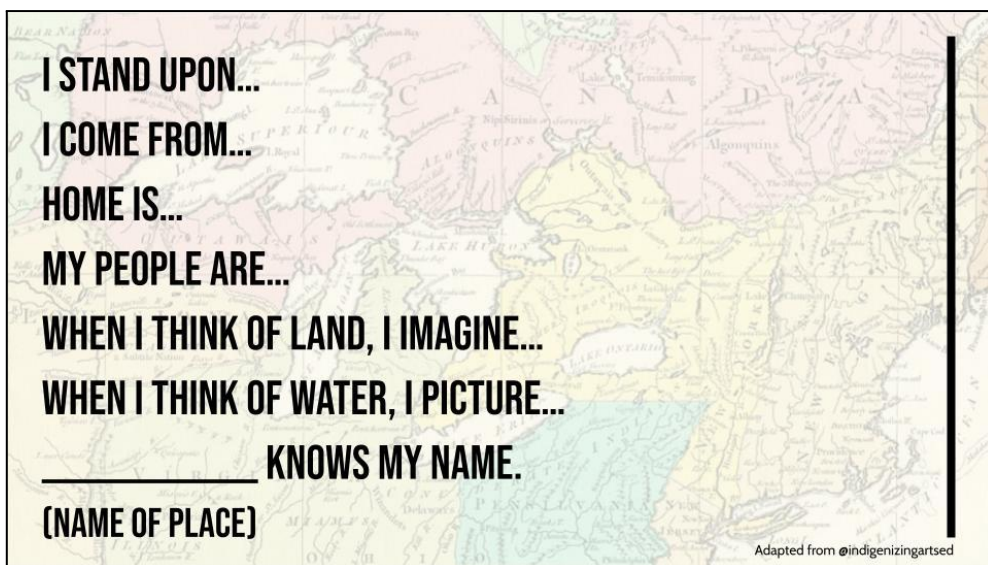
In the spirit of reconciliation and honoring those who came before us, this activity will help students make the connection between Little Red Warrior and His Lawyer and the land acknowledgments they are accustomed to hearing.

Focus Question. How can we honor our identities, connection to the land, and those Indigenous peoples who lived on this land before us?

Objective. Students will identify their own people and collaborate to create a statement that honors the Indigenous caretakers of our physical spaces.

Procedure.

- 1 Begin by sharing the prompt attached [here](#). Have students complete the sentences to create their own Identity Poem. Invite students to share in pairs, small groups, or with the whole class. Honor their past and celebrate their responses. Note that students don't need to know their family history to complete this poem. Their answers can be more abstract.



- 2 Use native-land.ca or indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca to discover the Indigenous territories and languages that existed on the geographical site of your school. Take time to explore the results of this search.

3 Share the following quote to discuss how all of these pieces come together as the Land Acknowledgments they hear at school or community events:

“If we think of territorial acknowledgments as sites of potential disruption, they can be transformative acts that to some extent undo Indigenous erasure.”

– Chelsea Vowel, Métis

Break students into smaller discussion groups to consider the following questions:

- Why do acknowledgements happen?
- How do acknowledgements relate to us at school?
- What is our relationship to this territory? How did we come to be here?
- How does our land acknowledgment reflect our responsibilities to each other as a community?
- In what ways can we use our Land Acknowledgment to disrupt and dismantle colonialism beyond this statement?

4 Have each discussion group collaborate to write a Land Acknowledgment that reflects their discussion and additional research they may need to complete. They can start with or modify the following prompts (adapted from careaboutclimate.org), or they can use their own:

FIRST ACKNOWLEDGE

- Today I would like to acknowledge the following people whose land we are on today: _____. I would like to acknowledge their ancestors, _____, who lived in _____ areas and were _____ (i.e. removed from here, etc.).
- I live on the traditional lands of _____. *(Include a sentence describing why they no longer live here, i.e. were removed by colonialism).* _____ have rights to these lands even today.
- _____ sits on the original homelands of _____.

THEN EMPOWER

- Today we commit to _____ to support _____.
- I plan to support _____ initiative to aid the current generation of _____.
- As someone on this land, I am obliged to _____.

5 Have each group share their statement. Ask students to reflect on similarities and differences. Take time to reflect on discoveries they made throughout the activity and their implications for the larger community they belong to.

BONUS: Revisit these statements throughout the year.

- How do seasons change our responsibilities in our communities?
- Are there specific days in your community you should acknowledge (e.g. Louis Riel Day) and can students adapt their statements to reflect this?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

A theatrical experience is not complete without reflection. What is the audience talking about when they leave the theatre? Here are some questions to pose to your students following their experience with *Little Red Warrior and His Lawyer* at Theatre Calgary.

- 1 What made you laugh in this play? Why do you think it was funny?
- 2 If you were the Judge, would you have accepted Little Red Warrior's evidence (the bone of his ancestor) that the Land was his? Why do you feel that way?
- 3 Why does Little Red give Desdemona the name "Flannel Dancer?" What is the implication of this act?
- 4 How were Indigenous people depicted in this play? Is this similar or different to other depictions you have seen?
- 5 What is an action you can take to continue sharing Kevin Loring's message?

THEATRE CALGARY PLAY GUIDES DEVELOPED BY

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