



IRM Research and Evaluation Inc.  
&  
Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women  
**Final Report: Mending the Blanket: The Star Blanket Teachings**  
May 01, 2020 - September 30, 2021

Canadian Heritage-Celebration and Commemoration Program,  
Commemorate Canada Component

Submitted November 2021

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**Project Title:**

Mending the Blanket: The Star Blanket Teachings

**Project Objectives:**

1. Increase Awareness and commemorate the history and legacy of residential schools;
2. Honour residential school survivors, their families, and communities.

**Project Summary:**

The Mending the Blanket project has developed a full-day training/teaching event that focuses on sharing that Star Blanket teachings with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The full-day event involves a hands-on experience of the star blanket teachings, seasonal teachings, sweat lodge teachings, age and stage teaching, and life cycle teachings. The star blanket is a blueprint of nehiyaw worldviews, language, ceremony, teachings, and Indigenous science. The Star Blanket is considered the blueprint for indigenous peoples- teachings on our connection to land, language and syllabics, rites of passage ceremonies, and stages of life are all embedded in the star blanket.

The one-day event has been scripted and piloted once with the non-profit organization *Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society*. The script was adapted as needed and will be delivered to community agencies in the new year. There has been a delay in delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic gathering restrictions. There was talk of adapting the project to be delivered online however, due to the nature of the project, we recognized that this needs to be a hands-on experience. We honor our nehiyaw language, our ancestors, our history, and more and the Star Blanket experience does not have as great an impact online as it does in person.

We plan to deliver the Star Blanket Teachings a minimum of four times over the next year with a target audience of 20-40 people per event. We have lined up a few presentations within the new year already including one with the *Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women* in January 2022.

General

**Financial**

See attached breakdown:

*Financial statement for Star Blanket Project- IAAW*

**Full Grant Amount \$24,000.00**

<b>Expense Items</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Expense</b>
Elder Honorarium for Knowledge Sharing (Ten full day meetings @ 600.00 per meeting honorarium includes travel expenses)	100 hours of videos and Power Points sharing teachings	6000.00
Star Blanket Diamonds	4 sets – Plasticworld, Ontario	1474.65
Star Blanket Materials	Pens/Markers/erasers from uline	801.36
Star Blanket Development Meetings (5 meetings – January 27, March 3, June 3, June 22, October 3)	Meeting Room Rent (600.00) at Hampton Inn and rooms for two team members St. Paul	1245.44
Leona Makokis honorarium	5 meetings @ 300.00 per meeting	1500.00
Ricki Makokis honorarium	5 meetings @ 300.00 per meeting	1500.00
Lunch's/Coffee/Snacks per meeting	5 meetings @ 100.00 per meeting	500.00
Online development of Star Blanket Teachings (video, editing, site creation and maintenance)	40 hours @ 100.00/hour (as per quote)	4500.00
Script Development	60 hours @ 35.00/hour	2100.00
Two In-person Pilot Presentations (post-covid AHS Restrictions)	Site rental, snacks, coffee, parking, miscellaneous 2 @ 500.00 each	1000.00
Vinyl Back Drops (four backdrops)	Wannasign, Wetaskewin	588.00
Power Point Star Blanket Presentation Development	Compensation paid to Amanda Torres and Selby Quinn for creating Power Points	1500.00
<b>Total Expenses</b>		<b>22,709.45</b>

### **Project Overview:**

As outlined in our application, we have created a script/manual with the Star Blanket teachings which incorporates the nehiyaw language. More than just adding some Cree words into the presentation, we incorporated Indigenous syllabics as well as the syllabic creation story. The Star Blanket Experience has participants actively engage in Indigenous language learning by having them use syllabics to create, write, and speak the nehiyaw language.

The Star Blanket manual provides an overview of the Star Blanket creation story *atayohkewina* (Sacred Stories) as well, goes over many teachings that are incorporated within the star blanket such as; The four primary directions, seasons, colour, inner and outer Star Points, and other ceremonies and teachings that are encoded within the Star Blanket.

We have attached the Star Blanket manual as part of our report. The manual provides insight into how we are using these teachings, why we are using these teachings, how they are relevant to healing and recovery and how we are honouring Indigenous language, history, teachings and legacies.

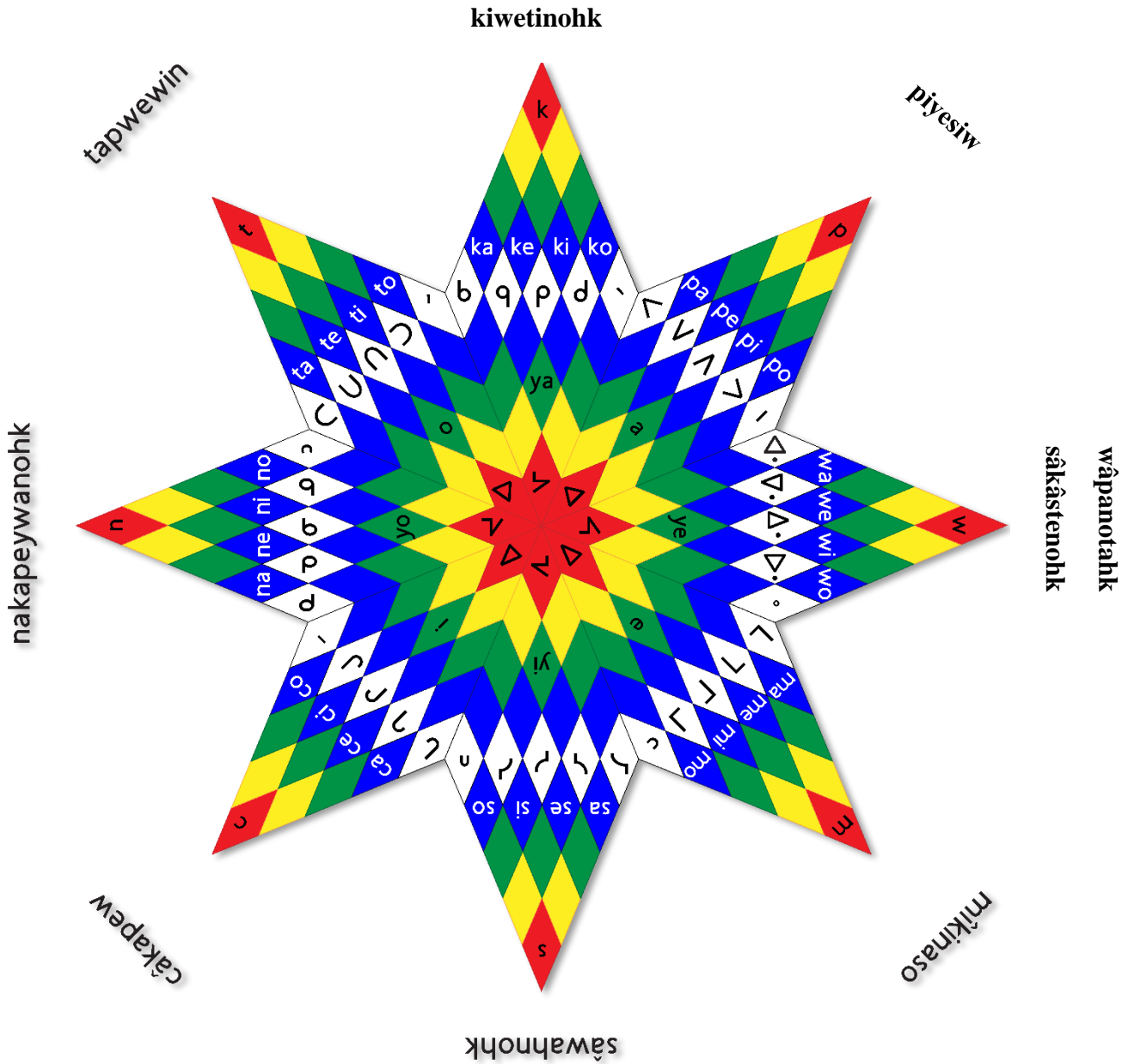
Please note that we have chosen to call this the Star Blanket Experience and not “exercise”. We have chosen to title it this way because of the impactfulness of the Star Blanket teachings. We have brought our history, our stories and our traditions back to our Indigenous peoples and because of this, it is so much more than just an exercise, it is an experience that stays with you. Once you know these teachings, you live by them. Hiy-hiy.

*The Star Blanket Experience*

**“Mending the Blanket” - Star Blanket Teachings**

Guidelines and Instruction Manual

Teachings Shared by Jeff, Leona, Ricki, Wilfred Buck  
Materials and Manual Preparation: Selby Quinn, Kristina Kopp, Brenda Irvine  
Supported by IRM Research and Evaluation Inc



### **General Guidelines**

1. The Star Blanket Experience (SBE) requires a space large enough for the Star Blanket Backdrop (SBB) to be placed on a bank of tables and for the participants. (The backdrop is 10' by 10' so, for example, ten 2' by 6' tables could be used) It is not appropriate to lay the Blanket on the floor.
2. It is recommended that the maximum number of participants be set at or below 32 (the number of Blue stars in the “gifts” layer of the circle) in order that the “gifts” exercise in the presentation uses primarily the Blue Stars.
3. The leaders should arrive well before the SBE, as there is some setup required.

### **Pre-Set up:**

1. Arrange the vinyl Star Blanket Backdrop (SBB) (three panels) appropriately on tables with:

*kiwetinohk* (going home place/north) to the north direction of the room.

*piyesiw* (Thunderbird/Northeast/in ceremony – where the Thunderbird Spirit lives))

*wâpanotahk* (East, towards the dawn ); *sâkâstenohk* (where it is “coming up”)

*mikinaso*

*sâwanohk* (South); *apîtakîsikanohk* (where it is “halfway”)

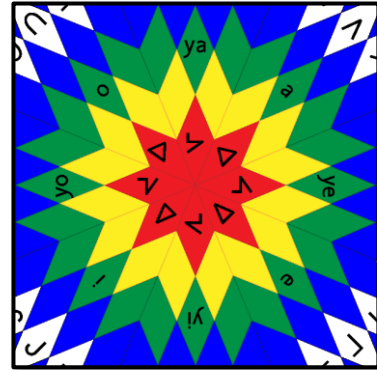
*câkapew*

*nakapeywanohk* ( ); *pahkisimôtâhk* (where it “goes down”)

*tapwewin* (truth)

2. Hang up the sewn Star Blanket on a convenient wall.
3. NOTE: the individual pieces of plastic shapes are referred to as “stars” within the Star Blanket. As confusing as that may be, it does not feel right to refer to them as “diamonds” or, more accurately, as a “diamond rhombus shape” which would actually be the “western” designation.

- Place the red **syllabic** stars (C = 8) in the centre of the SBB. The correct orientation of the syllabics is as if viewed from the point of the star opposite the vowel. This holds for all of the stars. In the illustrations in this manual, “north” is always towards the top of the page for the illustrations, however all the syllabics etc. are correctly viewed from the star point opposite. (*Figure 1*)



When placing the red spirit sounds, the following shapes and directions should be followed:

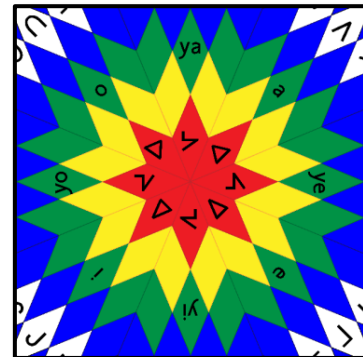
**ya -↗ ; a -↖ ; ye -↘ ; e -↙ ; yi -↗ ; i -↖ ; yo -↘ ; o -↙**

*Figure 1*

Note: You may have to slide the middle panel back and forth to reach. (We will be explaining the meaning of these stars later in the process.)

- Place the 16 yellow stars next to the red syllabic stars at the centre of the SBB. (*Figure 2*)
- Place the 24 green stars next on the SBB ensuring that the syllabic vowel sounds are in the correct placement:

**(ya -↗ ; a -↖ ; ye -↘ ; e -↙ ; yi -↗ ; i -↖ ; yo -↘ ; o -↙)**



*Figure 2*

and double check that the spirit sounds are correct with the vowels. Again, in the illustration to the right, all the syllabics and the spirit sounds are oriented to be read from directly across the star blanket.

- Next, place the green stars into the points of each star (three per point = 24). (*Figure 3*)



8. Then place the two yellow stars in each star point (16), followed by the single red star (8) in each point. Please ensure that the red star points are oriented appropriately with “**k**” to the north, followed by (travelling as the sun does) **p, w, m, s, c, n, t**.

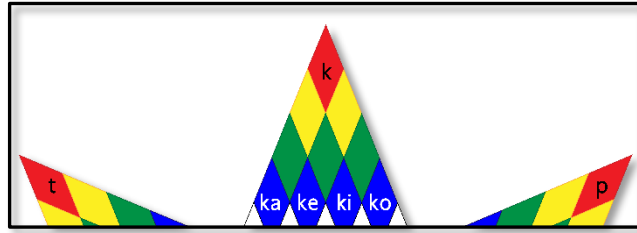


Figure 3

9. The remaining stars will be placed during the presentation.
10. Have other stars, pens, erasers, wet wipes, flipcharts and markers in place.

### **General Introduction to Each Other and to the Day**

The facilitators will introduce themselves and welcome everyone. The facilitator introduces the Elder present and offers tobacco. The facilitator or Elder may explain why we offer tobacco.

1. Begin with smudge, prayer and/or song (decided by the Elder who is involved).
2. Facilitator(s) can mention why we use circle's and what the circle represents.

Circle meaning: The circle represents life, the cycle of the seasons and the cycle of life to death to rebirth and the four elements (Mental, emotional, physical and spiritual realms)

3. Introductions: The facilitator(s) will ask the participant sitting to the left of the Elder to lead off the introductions and then go around the circle and have everyone briefly introduce themselves.
4. Let participants know about timing and process for the day, potential breaks, and location of coffee and washrooms. Ask the participants to please shut off the ringers and vibrators on their phones for the next few hours. We are spending this time with the ancestors and it is important to be respectful.

**Introduction- Star Blanket:** *acahkos akohp* (<L"j<sup>o</sup> <Lj<sup>m</sup>)

Although you can buy a Star Blanket in a craft store, these blankets are often made by people who have not received the teachings or have made the blankets without knowledge of the blanket teachings. The star blanket teaches that this is where our life began for our people. It talks about how we came to this world; it is a spiritual story of creation. In the western world, the story of Adam and Eve would be viewed as the story of where humans came from, in the *nehiyaw* world, we have the Star Blanket teaching. First, we will talk a little about the creation story of the syllabics, and then share the creation story about the Star Blanket, Sky Woman, and Spider Grandmother.

1. The star blanket is a blueprint for all of our ceremonies & stories. We share our stories with the star blanket.
2. The blanket is a law system, a blueprint and a spiritual story that tells us where we belong, how we must harvest from Mother Earth and how we should look after and care for our families. The blanket is a blueprint so we honour it by hanging it on our wall so it will remind us of how one must live their life.
3. There are 8 structures for the natural world and 8 structures for the spiritual world. We have the four directional ones (North, East, South, and West) which is the four doors. Then we also have the “in-between” doorways (Northeast, Southeast, Southwest and Northwest)
4. Once the facilitator has given a general introduction into the Star Blanket and what it is, the group can begin to explore the Star Blanket in more depth. While the facilitator is speaking, helpers can be placing the stars that correspond with the topics. The facilitator can explain why some stars have writing on them; these are the syllabics and are the physical and spiritual foundation of *nehiyaw* concepts and words. Explain to the participants that we will be using the syllabics to practice language.



Stevenson relates a similar story shared in 1959 by Raining Bird:

The spirits came to one good man and gave him some songs. When he mastered them, they taught him how to make a type of ink and then showed him how to write on white birch bark. He also received many teachings about the spirits which he recorded in a birch bark book. When the one good man returned to his people, he taught them how to read and write. The Cree were very pleased with their new accomplishment, for by now the *moniyaw* were in this country. The Cree knew that the white traders could read and write, so now they felt that they too were able to communicate among themselves just as well as did their white neighbors."

At this point in time, it is unsure if it was the Cree- and Ojibwe-language experts and English missionaries in Norway House who created the syllabics or if the syllabics were a gift from the ancestors to Calling Badger and his people and were adopted and adapted by the missionaries. Creation stories have their own meanings – and whether you believe one or the other (or both) is up to you. Perhaps Calling Badger was given the gift of the syllabics and the missionaries “borrowed” them to write out the hymns or perhaps the missionaries used their knowledge of the science of “shorthand” to create a Cree hymnal. Either way, for 180 years now, Rev. Evans has been assigned with the creation story of the syllabic system and the story of Calling Badger is seldom, if ever, mentioned.

Personally, I’m going with Calling Badger on this one.

### **Star Blanket Creation Story – *atayohkewina* (Sacred Stories)**

The lights in the night sky are Spirits (*acahkos* - ᐱᐱᐱᐱ) and every culture has its own teachings, shapes, and stories about the spirits. What the West calls the Pleiades, (the Seven Sisters) the Cree called (*pakone kisik* - ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ) (the hole in the sky) and the original Blanket Pattern had only seven points, one for each star of the *pakone kisik* (Pleiades). The hole, in English, would be understood as a “worm hole” – a connection between two dimensions. The Cree were aware of quantum physics.





*sahkastenohk*, *apîtakîsikanohk* and *pahkisimotâhk*, you would have been clearly understood. The fact that the words north, south, east and west are so unilaterally used now is a consequence, in Canada, of the success of the colonizing process.

And, what exactly do the terms “north, south, east, and west” mean? It appears that the word/term north may be “a derivative of the German word Nord, or it could also come from a Sanskrit word meaning “left” cause when you face the rising sun, north is to your left.” Does anyone know what east, south or west really mean?

In the Star Blanket, it’s very different.

However, before we can pick a direction with which to go forward, we need to go backwards a bit, and talk about language. (Share the conversation of noun/verb, gender, animate/inanimate factors of the Cree language)

And now, having gone backwards, we can resume our directional journey forwards! In *nehiyaw* what are the directional terms, and what do they mean? Are they nouns or verbs? And how do we know the terms are directional? In *nehiyaw*, if a term ends in -ohk (-ᐅᐃᐅ), you can often assume you are dealing with something directional – or, in colonial terms, a locative suffix.

So, lets have some directional fun with *nehiyaw*!

In this direction (point to the east star point), we have *sâkâstenohk* (ᐱᐅᐅᐅᐅ) which is a term indicating direction and “where it is rising out”.

Then we have *apîtakîsikanohk* (ᐱᐅᐅᐅᐅ) remember the directional indicator – ohk and a term that means “where it is halfway.”

Then we have *pahkisimôtâhk* (ᐱᐅᐅᐅᐅ), the direction indicator changes slightly due to vowel issues, but the term still ends with -hk. This term means “where it is falling down.”

Finally, we have *kîwetinohk* (ᐱᐅᐅᐅᐅ) which, by process of elimination, must mean north.

However, if we have “where it is rising, where it is halfway, and where it is going down” – what

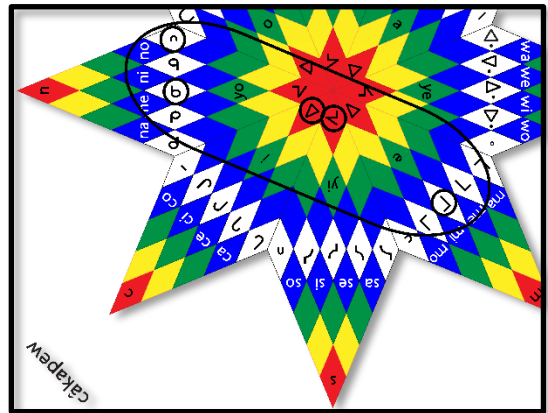
is left? Our final direction can be understood to mean “where it is going home” which is, truly, our final direction.

## 2. Seasons

The blanket also carries teachings about the seasons of the year. We have spring in *sâkâstenohk* (ᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂ), summer in the *apîtakîsikanohk* (ᐱᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂ), fall in *pahkîsimôâtâhk* (ᐱᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂ) and, finally, winter in *kîwetînohk* (ᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂ).

Let’s have some *nehiyaw* fun with seasons, words and blueberries.

The *nehiyaw* term for blueberry is **iyinimin** (ᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂ) (iyini refers to healing and min refers to berry). Please write out the word and syllabics on the flip chart. Point out the spirit sounds that create the word “blueberry”.



The facilitator will point out to the group that the syllabics needed for the word blueberry all come from the spring/summer/fall seasons of the Star Blanket.

Figure 4

## 3. Colour

The facilitator can also provide a brief teaching regarding the many colours in the Star Blanket, for example:

- a. Yellow - is a place of new beginnings - and represents Grandfather Sun who sits to the east.
- b. Red – represents giving thanks to the gift of water and to Grandmother the Thunderbird who sits to the south.
- c. Green and or Blue – provides offerings to the grandfather Bear Spirit to the west who is the keeper of Mother Earth and as well as the ceremonies and those who carry the ceremonies. We acknowledge Grandfather Bear Spirit for her/his courage while keeping ceremony safe and alive.

- d. White – honours Grandfather Wind to the north with the gift of breath and air.  
Grandfather Wind as takes care of the men and two-spirited people. Grandfather Wind also brings about change and guides us through that change and the work that we do.

When we present cloth and tobacco to an Elder for a ceremony, we are using the colored cloth to acknowledge, invite and honour all the Grandfathers to the ceremony.

#### **4. Inner and Outer Star Points**

The eight inner points of the Star Blanket represent us, as human beings, on our human journey. The eight outer points represent various ancestors, grandmothers and grandfathers and protective spirits.

#### **5. Other Ceremonies and Teachings Encoded Within the Star Blanket**

- a. Medicines and their meanings and teachings.
- b. Berries, plants, and tree's meanings and uses.
- c. Sweat Lodge Teachings, for example
  - 1. The 16 yellow stars near the centre tell us that we can build and use a 16-ancestor lodge (8 for the natural world and 8 for the spirit world)
  - 2. The 24 green stars are for a 24-willow lodge with 24 rocks
  - 3. The same with the 32 blue stars and the 40 white stars guide us in the willow lodge and the Big Bear Lodge.
  - 4. Depending on the section of the star blanket that is how many rocks or willows we would use, the size relates to the lodge in each section of the star blanket.

#### **6. Other Elements in the Star Blanket**

- a. The seasons - winter, spring, summer, fall.
- b. The stages of life – children, teens, adults and the elderly.
- c. The four elements – earth, air, fire and water.



## 7. More Fun with Language and the Syllabics

- a. Facilitator will show page on flip chart with the word *wahkohtowin* only (no syllabics) and talk about the teachings of *wahkohtowin*.
  1. The way of people living together and everyone being related and connected through community and family and interconnected through roles. Kinship beyond the family.
  2. Walk participants through the SBB to locate the syllabics for *wahkohtowin* (◀"ᑭ"ᑕᑭᑭ)
- b. Facilitator will flip to a second page on the chart with these syllabics printed out (ᑕᑭᑭ°) ask the participants to sound out the word and derive it's meaning. (Let the group figure out that the word is *moniyaw*.)

**NOTE:** Let people know we are about to take a break and ask for any brief feedback at this point. Interesting/Boring? New/Heard Before? Expected/Surprising? How would/could this relate to work, personal life, ideas they have for their future work?

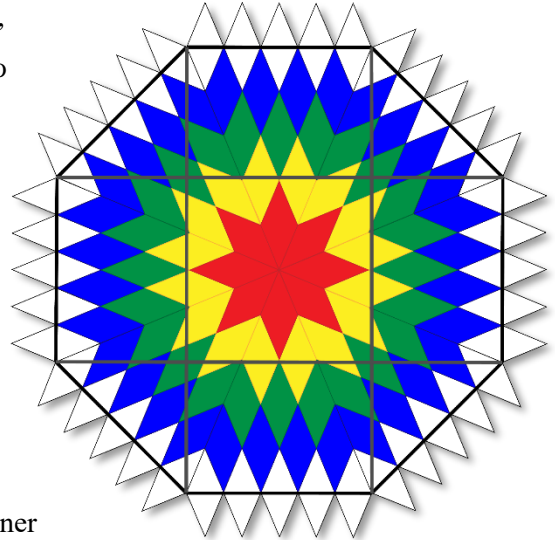
### **BREAK TIME**

**NOTE:** This can be a brief coffee break or, depending on timing, a half hour lunch break. To be determined by facilitator, context and perceptions of group process.

After break, as participants return, have facilitator and helper hand provide each participant with one blue star and shared erasable pens. Ask participants just to hang onto them for a bit while we go through the next part.

### Stages of Life: Using the Star Blanket- 10 *nehiyaw* stages:

The facilitator will give a brief overview of the *nehiyaw* stages of life and, unlike many Western models, that these stages are not chronological stages (not based on age) of human development. Each of the *nehiyaw* stages reflects a child's spiritual growth, development and what children, women, men, Elders grow to learn, comprehend, and experience through ceremony, language, the teachings, protocols, and connection to the land, the ancestors and the community.



The facilitator will explain how the star blanket is divided into 8 sections in the centre; this represents the natural world. Explain that we travel through the star blanket during our life stages- move onto the *nehiyaw* stages. This is the “inner lodge” of the Star Blanket and reflects our journey on Mother Earth. Each star is NOT a fixed period of time – it is an event, or sequence of events, that can shift in time, timing, duration, or order for every individual. Rather than using a chronological process, through our creation stories of how we come and maintain that relationship is clear that we are here to have a relationship with the environment, the land, and what this Mother Earth has to offer. The *nehiyaw* term is *kawahkotamak aski*

In this teaching, there are ten stages of life. Facilitator will need 10 red stars and some assistance in placing the stars on the SBB. Select any entry door (or star point) on the SBB and replace the red star with a blank red star. Working across the SBB, the facilitator or assistant will gradually remove each star and replace it with a red star at the appropriate position.

The Facilitator begins:

The first star in our journey begins at one of the outer star points on the SBB. If we were doing our own personal journey, we would begin from the star point for the season where we experienced birth. One of the things the *nehiyaw* people have returned to, because of the traditional teachings and ceremony, is being able to talk about life and life-giving as an open and spiritual process, rather than thinking about a man and woman coming together as a sin, or that sex was inappropriate to talk about.

One of the terms that is used is *masiwewin* ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ (sexual intercourse), when this occurs, it refers to a spiritual process when a man and a woman together, it is no longer being sinful, it is a teaching that explains how a spirit comes into this world when a man and woman come together (*masiwewin*), and it teaches about the spiritual strength and power that happen when a male and female come together in that physical and spiritual process to create that spirit. And when this occurs the next stage happens...


Stage 1: This first star in our journey is “*awaces*” - ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ. This is a spirit gifted from the Ancestors and, in the teachings, the spirit chooses the family and community it will come to – to have its gifts honored and to experience love. The *awaces* is a spiritual entity that descends to the *iskwew* during her moon time. If, at the same time, a man and woman come together to create *maskawahew* ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ - a strong or solid physical connection, then the spiritual entity may continue on with its spirit/human journey. If a man and woman do not come together at this time, then the spirit returns to the ancestors, to return at a future date.

- a. Women are gifted with their moon time. Each month of the 13 moon cycles the *awaces* is received by a woman. It is a spiritual (egg) being that descends into the woman at this time.
- b. One of the terms that the Elders talk about is the spiritual strength and power that can occur when a man and woman are together sexually. The *neh yaw* term for this experience is *maskawahew* ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ – (she/he places her/him solidly) something that is spiritually powerful and has great strength to it.

Stage 2: The next star on our journey is “*wâwi*” - ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ. The facilitator can explain that *wâwi* is a *neh yaw* term for “egg” however, more specifically, it means a fertilized egg. At this stage it is understood that there is now a spiritual “egg” inside of the womb.

- a. This process is often termed “conception” in the western world.
- b. For the next nine months the woman is now being connected in a deeply spiritual process until, after nine months, when the spirit will be separated from the woman.

- c. When we cut the umbilical cord, this is when we the spiritual disconnection occurs, the “*awâsis*” becomes a physical being.
- d. Within the womb, six elements that are created during this time. The six elements include the two legs, the two arms, the torso, and the head. There is also a seventh element, the element of the spiritual world.
- e. After nine months, the spirit now enters into the world as an “*awâsis*”.

Stage 3: The next star is the “*awâsis*”-  – a verb, that can be understood as a small spirit engaging in (or engaged in) a human journey. “A small spirit on a human journey”

- a. When we cut the umbilical cord, this is when we the spiritual disconnection occurs, the “*awâsis*” becomes a physical being.
- b. It takes thirteen moons for the top of the head, the soft spot, or the fontanelle, to close and there are three important teachings during this time: we do not allow another spirit to enter that portal by making sure we do not leave a child laying on a ground or by leaving them unattended.
  - 1) We do not let the head get dry or itchy – it is the connection to the spirit world, so it is cared for all the time.
  - 2) The soft spot fontanelle is called “o-pee-ge-pan”.
  - 3) After 13 months have passed, the soft spot closes and this is when the next stage rites of passage and ceremonies occur.
- c. Within the “*awâsis*” stage, shortly after birth, there is a placenta ceremony. In the placenta ceremony, we take the placenta and bury it under or beside a tree. This is seen as the first connection the *awasis* has to the earth.

- 1) Another ceremony associated with this stage is the belly button (or umbilical cord) ceremony. Once the “*mitisiy*” or belly button/umbilical cord dries up and falls off, it is offered to the land.
- 2) For a young boy, “*napesis*”, the *mitisiy* (umbilical cord) could be hung on a tree, so he would know how to have a relationship with trees and with wood. He would learn and know how to gather wood, start fires and build lodges.
- 3) For a young girl, “*iskwewis*”, the *mitisiy* could be hung two places - the first place was often near the fire to maintain the young girls connection to *iskotew* (fire). From this she learns a relationship and spirituality with fire, she learns to cook, prepare food and how to tend the home fire. The second place could be on an ant hill to ensure she would be a good, hard worker. This is how we connect to the land and ensure that *awâsis* has a relationship to mother earth, through ceremony.

Stage 4: This stage, “*mistawasis*” (we do not say a “little big child” actual term is “little big spirit” because of “*awa*”). In this stage, *mistawasis* is still connected to the spiritual world (children would speak to something that is not there, ex. imaginary friends, children could still physically see these unseen beings of the spirit world.

- a) A ceremony associated with this stage is a “walking out ceremony” this is done to bring the child onto the land. The ceremony celebrates a child’s rightful place to the land and celebrates the value and relationship *wahkohotowin* we have to land. This stage and ceremony begin when a child takes their first steps, again it is not determined by age.
- b) They would learn through sound and song and some of these sounds comes from certain directions from the grandmother within the Star Blanket Teachings and syllabics.
- c) After this stage, they were taken on the land because there are evolving our stories around this *mistawasis* around the hardships they would come to experience.

- d) In this stage, we are taught by observations (we were carried by others – our parents, grandparents etc. as they walked) During this stage, we learn on the land, and carry responsibilities about what the teachings were and the oral history through the language.

Stage 5: This stage is “**oski ne-kwi/ oskinihkew/ oskinikiskwew**”: (oski “brand new”) In this stage, the child is coming into the natural world and they are able to comprehend the language and its surroundings. They are able and ready to be taught. Obedience is taught in this stage- however, the obedience teachings begin in the *mistawasis* stage. Obedience is a spiritual process to be accountable to our actions and what we say.

- a) The land-based teachings begin in this stage. We are taught how to take life from the land. The first kill of a moose was given to the community, it is always about sharing. One of the Cree syllabics for the M sounds (L) reminds us that what-ever comes down and gives us life is now shared this way (down and then over). It is our spiritual process and teachings around sharing what comes down or what we are gifted with from Creation and moving it to the people.
- b) At this time, we take the young men out and teach them about the trees and where they are situated (Ex- pine tree, long branches point to the south towards the sun, shorter to the north, so these young men know their directions, the water directions, the tree directions, the land directions). We teach our young ones to respect the land.
- c) Females and males were now separated – this is when young woman began having their moon cycles and were developing. It is now girl’s time to become a woman and we needed to respect that.

Stage 6: This stage “**oskapew/ oskiskew/ oskapew ekwa oskiskwew**”: The facilitator needs to explain that during colonization, this stage was taught to be dirty and sinful to talk about.

- a) Pre stages of manhood, we were taught during this stage. Both men and woman were taught about their reproductive cycles. Colonization kept these dirty, sinful, and dormant.

- b) Male and female helpers – we were taught to look after our younger siblings, parenting roles, it wasn't abuse, it was a teaching (not parentification, parentified), bathing, and skills to compose us and prepare us for the next stage.
- c) We were taught about the fire, to watch the ceremonial fires, what woods to use, example not pine, it sparks, especially in the wind, and we would do the tobacco offerings and those teachings.
- d) Woman were introduced to the fire, to work with the coals, to prepare the foods, they were mentored in this way (spiritual teaching behind this)
- e) We were not afraid of the land; we had a relationship with it. Today our *oskapew* are afraid and same with our young woman.
- f) After this stage, we also maintained our skills and dispersed what we had gathered back to the community or people (kindness and sharing)

Stage 7

*“napawi/ napew ekwa iskwew”*

- a) We are now prepared to come together, with all the teachings, protocols, ceremonies, and skills we learned to bring life into this world and engage in that reproductive process again. We would choose a partner, we now have the skills, hunting, gathering, and child rearing, and we had skills to start this process over again.
- b) Today this is not happening.  
*napew* (translate to man, strong, tough – this term talks about the envisioning of the direction you are going and understanding where you came from) today we have a different perception.
- c) Many of our children in care come from this stage and the *oskapawi* stage- they were not mentored, taught our skills, etc.

Stage 8

**“*kehte napew ekwa kehte iskwew*”**

- a) This stage does not happen by a number, it occurs when you become a grandparent, have a grandchild (39, 49) not when you are 65. Once your child has children, you become a *mosom* or a *kokum*.
- b) It is time of becoming spiritual ripe and more spiritual (grey hairs)
- c) This stage of our life prepares us (menopause) (Male menopause- andropause) certain things you have to start putting away, meaning your sexuality is going to leave you (bye!).

Stage 9

**“*kehte yatis*”**

- a) Being mentored by these ones that live this process of life.
- b) To live by your heart now (cree term) to live by that virtue. We are still mentored by the old ones (next stage to come- *kiseniw ekwa nocokwesiw*)
- c) There is a bridge between our young ones and these old ones, we have a detrimental situation as these ones are not connected (5 hand example “able to touch all” start with *mistawasis*)
- d) Young people aren’t being mentored by the older generation.
- e) Teenagers and adults belong to 5 types of elders (traditional Elder, community Elder – opening/closing prayer, environmental Elder (land), Transitional Elder (stuck within their healing), Christian Elder. These groups cannot seem to come together, this creates animosity... *wahkohtowin ekwa wahkomotowin* is no longer a value, this is why we are not able to come together. – Leona



Stage 10 “*kiseniw ekwa nocokwesiw*” (*kiseniw* humble, kind ones (male elder) practices *kisey-e-wat-seen* lives by his heart, not by his thoughts.)

- a) *nocokwesiw* (fill her home (teepee) with so much love, relationships, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and experiences so there is no room for her so she protects all she has created).
- b) Demonstration: Outline the ten stages on the Star Blanket and describe our spiritual journey and transitions at each stage (how connected we are to spirit at each stage).
- c) Octagon is the natural world to us and represents those transitions (see images below). Where you enter depends on when you were born (for example: springtime (Cree new year - we follow a different calendar, fall time etc...))
- d) “Once you become a part of this, it becomes a part of you – part of our responsibility”

**Sharing Circle: Go around with participants and have everyone discuss their gifts:**

Be very clear, it's not what's good in your life, it's a personal gift YOUR gift that the ancestors gave you. The Facilitator will explain how you were prepared with a gift, chose the community and family so that you can share your gift. Explain how we all have a gift, what do we mean when we say "gift", Ask participants to write down their gifts on a blue diamond. Once they have done this, we can go around have everyone say what they wrote while they place the diamond on the star blanket. It can be placed wherever they feel like it belongs, there is no wrong placement.

- Each *awâsis* comes with a gift and some direction around gifts in each realm.
- Encourage them to think of one from each realm (psychical, mental, spiritual, emotional) this could help you decide where you put your diamond.
- Ask participants to think about their gifts and if they connect to any of the outside point teachings. They should come up with 2 or 3 possibilities so not everyone is under one point.
- The facilitator will ask participants to share what gift they wrote on their diamond and have the participant place their diamond in one the points they feel connected to.
- Explain that your diamond could be placed and could be connected to syllabics, season you were born in, put your diamond where you feel like it belongs.
- If you have more than one gift that belongs somewhere else in the circle, take another diamond.
- Fill in remaining diamonds. - If facilitator picks their diamond pick again or pick a diamond closest to it.
- Discuss how gifts can be tied into the stages
- Talk about season of birth and how that places them in star
- **Third word; really long word** ᐱᑎᑦᑦᑦ ᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ (kitiwam asimina kawapamitan)  
(Goodbye/I will see you again)

1. **Wrap up:** Giveaway: Facilitator can pick from a random syllabic and whoever has a gift there will be given the giveaway prize. The participants will win a poster for their office.
2. Closing: The facilitator will ask the Elder to do a closing prayer.
3. Elder present will do a closing prayer and we will conclude the star blanket experience.

## EXTRA MATERIAL

The following material is part of Elder Jeff's presentation, however is beyond the scope of the Star Blanket teachings for this presentation.

(Write *weyahsowaywin* on the flipchart)

1. This term, *weyahsowaywin* talks about why we must adapt and go back to our law system. Our creator granted rights and laws. Through our knowledge keepers and our language, we have come to understand what natural laws are and how we must adapt to achieve a good life for people of this land.
2. Understanding *weyahsowaywin*: Our ancestors through their language have afforded us the knowledge and understanding to these laws that they live by through spiritual stories and ceremonies they define what is law to our people and what we must live by. The key element to these laws are using the sound (WIN) To achieve *mi-yo-pi-ma-ti-so-win* "a good life" in order to want to comprehend these traditional laws one must be able to speak the language of this land. Our elders continue to stress on the importance of language to the fact that the laws of our people were structured within the tongue (language)

### Wesakaychak Material

IMPORTANT NOTE: The name of *wesakaychak* can **only** be used when there is snow on the ground.

Otherwise, use the term *nehiyaw teacher*.

*wesakaychak* (or *nehiyaw teacher/loving spirit*) is referred to as the teacher or trickster. When you refer to his/her name in the language it means "a loving spirit". He taught what and how to live in this world through the teaching of language. He taught that, when we were to speak to creator, we were given three things: our spirit, our body, and our minds and, in order for us to speak to creator, we had to use these three things.

*wesakaychak* (*nehiyaw teacher/loving spirit*) also teaches that everything has two sides, a side that gives life and light a side that brings dark. We also have two sides, for example, day or night; or love and hate; or happy and sad, and we try to be in balance. Our language talks about a loving spirit, this is what he taught us. *wesakaychak* (loving spirit) also teaches us about the four directions. He always points to the direction of the north star; this is the only star in the universe to stay still. This is where we get our knowledge from.

(Write *mache* and *wache* on the flipchart) *macheyihtakwan* (despicable)

1. The key “terms” that identify law are “*mache*” (meaning a dark side) and “*wache*” (meaning a light side.)

*mache* is a term that is used for nothing to be given honor or respect

*wache* defines the word that gives the highest honor or respect.

2. All the ceremonies we do today are based on the principle of what the star structures tell us.

- (WIN) is found in all “law structure system” words. E.g. Wahkohtowin
- Taught in later stages in life – oskapewis

Wachi (the light that gives life)

Sakitowin love

Tapewekaynimowin

Kisewatisiwiwin

Kistentakoswin

Tapatenimowin

Matinamakewin

Kiskentamowin

Wakootowin

Wakoomitowin

Miyo opikinawasowin

Minoekiskinawmawasowin

Machi (dark life)

otaynimitowin envy

kakwaynimitowin jealous

kekamitowin

kikamitowin

kinaskiwin

insiwanachetowin destroy each other

nipaitowin

waypintowin

pakamowtowin hit each other

takamitowin stab each other

meneekwaywin alcohol

Keyskwaypaywin drunk

Machimamawatssiwin gangs

Machiopikinawasowin

machikis

- Move people from dark to light

## Ceremonial Laws

Isechikewin Ceremony  
Ospwakan Pipe  
Cistemaw Tobacco  
Wekusk  
Iskotew Fire  
Wepinasowin prayer cloth  
Nepakewaysomowin  
Niskisomiwin Goose Dance  
Pawastesimowin (Dream Dancers) Pow Wow  
matoutsan sweat lodge  
matietowin giveaway ceremony  
kosapiychikaywin shake tent  
mensichikewaywin berry ceremonies  
Nepakwaysimowin sundance lodge

## Environmental Laws

Askiweyahsowaywin	environmental laws
Intaminnowin	hunting small game
Machiwin	hunting big game
Natuykikaywin	harvesting medicines
Miysowin	picking berries
Manataywin	harvesting wood
Pansawaywin	cutting and preserving wild meat
Paskochiwaywin	plucking wild birds and ducks
Pasamehmaywin	drying and smoking meat
Osekinosaywin	preparing fish
Kotawanekaywin	making and working with fire
Kapesiwin	knowing where to camp
Manokewin	knowing where to set up ceremony
Waneekaywin	trapping wild game
Kanchechikaywin	keeping the land clean

- Facilitator will go through the nouns, verbs and vowels within the language- pointing out to the participants that the *neyhiaw* language is not noun based like the English language. Example; if you were to say “ceremony” in Cree you would technically be saying “ceremonialing”- the act of doing ceremony”
- The facilitator will explain animate and inanimate
- The facilitator will explain the concept of gender in western ideologies versus the concept of gender in *neyhiaw*.
- The facilitator can explain the impact of the language and how it differs from western language. Explain the importance of the language and how language is used in ceremony and found within the blanket.

#### References

- Bruce Peel, "How the Bible Came to the Cree," *Alberta Historical Review* 6,2 (1958), 15, 16.
2. John McLean, James Evans: Inventor of the Syllabic System of the Cree Language (Toronto: William Briggs, 1890)' 163.