



hiGed sda sGwaansang "closely related" or "working together" by Robert Davidson

Discussion Guide for Potlatch as Pedagogy

Learning Through Ceremony

Haw'aa for your interest in *Potlatch as Pedagogy: Learning Through Ceremony*.

In 2022, the documentary *Beyond Being Silenced – Gyaa Isdlaa* was released. This 22-minute film features *Potlatch as Pedagogy* co-authors, artist Robert Davidson and educator Sara Florence Davidson, and lawyer Terri-Lynn Williams-Davidson, each sharing their knowledge of the Haida potlatch ceremony. The video includes footage from the Gyaa isdlaa (potlatch) that took place in October 2018 in Hydaburg, Alaska. The video also contains footage of Robert Davidson and other artists, including his son, Ben Davidson, carving a totem pole in Robert's studio on unceded Semiahmoo Territory.

We recommend watching this film for additional background information before reading *Potlatch as Pedagogy*.

Find a link to the film and additional resources below the discussion questions.

Discussion Questions

Introduction

1. What elements of Indigenous (Haida) protocols do you notice in the introduction? How does the enactment of these Protocols impact your understanding of the stories being shared?
2. How might the smallpox epidemic have impacted the sharing and transmission of Haida knowledge and culture?

Chapter 1: Two Working Together

1. What aspects of intergenerational learning and sharing of knowledge are described in this chapter? What responsibilities are associated with this kind of learning?
2. How are Indigenous literacies reflected throughout this chapter? How does this influence your current working definition of "literacies"?

Chapter 2: The Story of sk'ad'a

1. In this chapter, we learn more about the nine sk'ad'a principles, which are based on co-author Robert Davidson's childhood learning experiences. What do we learn about the educational priorities of those who were teaching him? What might we infer about Haida community values based on these stories?
2. How do these principles compare to the First Peoples Principles of Learning currently used in the BC public education system? (See Chrona, 2023 or the FNESC website [link below] for more information.)
3. What do you know about the local education priorities of the land where you currently live and/or work? How might you learn more about these in a respectful and good way?

Chapter 3: “We Were Once Silenced”

1. This chapter describes ways in which the Haida people were silenced by the Canadian government’s attempts to assimilate Haida and other Indigenous communities and Nations. What evidence can you find of resistance and resurgence in this chapter?
2. Examine the image of the Haida pole “We Were Once Silenced” on page 26 or on Robert Davidson’s website (link below). What story is being told with this pole? What is the role of Indigenous art in reconciliation?

Chapter 4: “Celebrating one more time in a way they knew how”

1. Robert Davidson often describes the Haida pole as a catalyst for cultural (re)learning. What evidence can you find in this chapter to support his description?
2. Watch the short film *This Was the Time* from the National Film Board (link below). This 15-minute documentary from 1970 by Eugene Boyko depicts the raising of the totem pole and the potlatch held to celebrate. Compare the ways the pole raising is described in the film with how it is described in *Potlatch as Pedagogy*. What do you notice about the similarities? The differences?

Additional Resources

- Boyko, E. (Producer & Director). (1970). *This was the time*. Canada. NFB. <https://www.nfb.ca/film/this-was-the-time/>
- Chrona, J. (2022). An Indigenous-informed pedagogy: The First Peoples Principles of Learning. In *Wayi Wah! Indigenous pedagogies: An act for reconciliation and anti-racist education* (pp. 115–176). Portage & Main Press.
- Curwen Doige, L. A. (2001). Literacy in Aboriginal education: An historical perspective. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25(2), 117–128.
- Davidson, R. Totem poles. [Eagle of the Dawn website]. <https://www.robertdavidson.ca/totem-poles>
- First Nations Education Steering Committee. (2006). *First Peoples Principles of Learning*. <https://www.fnesc.ca/first-peoples-principles-of-learning/>
- Ostroff, J. (2017, August 1). How a smallpox epidemic forged modern British Columbia. *Macleans*. <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/how-a-smallpox-epidemic-forged-modern-british-columbia/>
- Schliessler, T., & Wilkenson, C. (Producers), & Wilkenson, C. (Director). (2022). *Beyond being silenced – Gyaa Isdlaa* [Motion Picture]. Canada: Shore Films. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkAXWgv6A14&t=842s&ab_channel=RavenCallingProductions

Chapter 5: “That Pole Doesn’t Belong to You Anymore”

1. Reread the first two paragraphs at the top of page 49. What is the role of “letting go” in the context of teaching? How can the description of what remained with Robert Davidson after this experience of “letting go” guide educators in their teaching practice?
2. On page 10, there is a teaching from Claude Davidson (Robert’s father): “We have to look back once in a while to see where we came from, so that we can always find our way back.” How does this quote relate to Chapter 5?

Chapter 6: Born “in the Nick of Time”

1. This chapter describes several potlatches Robert Davidson hosted and co-hosted over the years. What examples of pedagogy can you find within the descriptions? How can these examples guide your own teaching practice?

Chapter 7: Potlatch as Pedagogy

1. What learnings from the sk’ad’a principles and associated practices can guide non-Indigenous educators?
2. This book was written primarily to support educators in beginning to understand the depth of Indigenous Knowledges. What are some of your new understandings of Indigenous Knowledges? How might these understandings inform your own teaching practice?