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This Ground is Not Neutral: Knowing Through Place and Introduction to Native American & Indigenous Studies[2]

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Abstract

This article proposes a place-based pedagogical approach which we call "knowing through place," which guides our teaching in Introduction to Native American and Indigenous Studies. Through this approach, students unsettle previously learned histories of time and place, understand how Indigenous theories position people and place, and re-interpret the places they live and study through these frameworks. Ultimately, knowing through place scaffolds opportunities for students to develop an ongoing practice of challenging dominant settler epistemologies. Our goal is for our students to see that a world beyond the settler episteme is and has always been present, and that another is possible—one where Indigenous ways of knowing inspire personal and collective transformation. We conclude by calling for our institution, Ithaca College, to commit to centering Indigenous knowledge, lands, and peoples across the curricula and college structure as an act of decolonization.

Keywords: placed-based pedagogy, Native American and Indigenous Studies, decolonization, settler colonialism

For approximately four minutes in April 2024, a total solar eclipse drenched portions of Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih (Haudenosaunee) lands in darkness.[3] These lands included the Cayuga/SHARE Farm,[4] near the eastern shores of Cayuga Lake (central New York). There, behind a white farmhouse, we gathered with members of the Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih and others on lawn chairs and picnic blankets for a potluck and fellowship. Immersed in place, Elder Tom Porter (Kanien'kehá:ka)

[2] Mellifluous thanks to Alicia Swords, Enrique González-Conty, M. Nicole Horsley, and Sean Eversley Bradwell for their insights and support in writing this piece.
[3] This paper follows orthographies used by the Gayogohó:nǫˀ Learning Project, except in cases of certain proper nouns, such as Cayuga Lake, or the Cayuga/SHARE Farm. "Cayuga" is an Anglicization of Gayogohó:nǫˀ. See https://gayogohono-learning-project.org/ for more information on the Gayogohó:nǫˀ Learning Project.
[4] Maintained by Dan Hill (Gayogohó:nǫˀ), the Cayuga/SHARE farm recovers traditional Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih foods and agricultural practices with the support of Gayogohó:nǫˀ people, the broader Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih Confederacy, and settler volunteers.

chronicled how the Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih Confederacy formed, under the auspices of another solar eclipse. In 2001, non-Indigenous settlers purchased this farm with the goal of land rematriation, an act we read not as saviorship or charity, but a calculated resistance against settler colonial institutions—in this case, loans and mortgages (LaDuke, 2005). Importantly, the late Heron Clan Mother Bernadette "Birdie" Hill (Gayogohó:nǫˀ) noted that returning the land offered a place and a way to practice traditional Gayogohó:nǫˀ ceremonies and language learning (Olson et al., 2001). The Cayuga/SHARE farm serves as living testimony for the slow work of healing: for settlers in understanding what can be undone and given life, and for the Gayogohó:nǫˀ, returning to their land, language, and ceremonies in their original homelands.

Since 2022, we have taught Introduction to Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS) in the Center for the Study of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity (CSCRE) at Ithaca College.[5] As non-Indigenous educators, it is our responsibility to learn in place on Native lands, and to create opportunities for relationships to land, place, and people. What if, instead of continuing the genocidal logics our students have been exposed to in this settler colonial, racial capitalist system, we challenge them to think critically through Indigenous ways of knowing? We follow Yellowknives Dene Glen Sean Coulthard's notion of grounded normativity for our students, or the "modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13). Attentive to our context of racial capitalism and settler colonialism in mainstream U.S. educational spaces, we developed a pedagogical approach called "knowing through place." Through this approach, students unsettle previously learned histories of time and place, understand how Indigenous theories position people and place, and re-interpret the places they live and study through these frameworks. Ultimately, knowing through place scaffolds opportunities for students to develop an ongoing practice of challenging dominant settler epistemologies.

First, we identify the two places our work directly concerns—Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih lands and Ithaca College, and demonstrate the ways knowing through place shapes the pedagogical imperatives that structure the Introduction to NAIS course. Then, we discuss how we scaffold knowing through place via place-based assignments in and out of the classroom. Finally, we address the limitations of supporting a NAIS minor through one course in our particular institutional context, and share our vision for NAIS beyond the classroom.

Knowing Through Place: Gayogohó:nǫˀ Lands and Ithaca College

Since its founding, Ithaca College has occupied unceded Gayogohó:nǫˀ land and benefitted from settler colonial and racial capitalist structures and policies (Grande, 2018). As Burrow, Brock, and Dove write, "settler colonialism operates through ontological foreclosures that obfuscate Indigenous ontologies of land" (Burrow et al., 2018, p. 58). To refuse these obfuscations, we proceed from an Indigenous understanding of place as two-fold, first "as a way of understanding, knowing and learning about the world; and second, as the embodied location of everyday struggle for meaning; political, cultural and economic" (Johnson, 2012, p. 830). Place is not just location, but a way of knowing. In our context, then, our foremost goal is to reorient students to Indigenous

[5] Native American & Indigenous Studies is distinct from Ethnic Studies, because Indigeneity is not an ethnicity, and Indigenous Nations are sovereign bodies.

worlds that have and continue to make meaning in these lands and elsewhere. To this end, we begin our essay with a brief history of Gayogohó:nǫˀ lands and NAIS at Ithaca College that privileges Indigenous ontologies and highlights struggles over meaning in these places.

When Sky Woman fell from the sky, she landed on a turtle's back. The animals realized she needed land to live on, so they dove to the bottom of the waters and brought mud back for her, which grew into the Earth. This Creation story, of which there are many versions, corresponds with the thousands of years of continuous Indigenous presence in the Finger Lakes region of New York, including the Onoñda'géga' (Onondaga), Onyota'a:ká (Oneida), Gayogohó:nǫˀ (Cayuga), Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), Onöndoa'ga:' (Seneca) and the Ska:rù:rę' (Tuscarora), all members of the Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih Confederacy. The archeological information indicates human presence here as early as 11,000 BCE, involving established patterns of yearly cyclical migration that covered hundreds of miles (Jordan, 2022). As archeologist Kurt Jordan (2022) has written, "mainstream settlers are rarely taught about the long-term residence of Indigenous people on these lands, or how Indigenous people transformed their ways of life during the millennia prior to contact" (p. 5). This idea parallels Roxane Dunbar-Ortiz's (2014) calls for a "new periodization of US history . . . that traces the Indigenous experience" (xiii). Much of the history Jordan provides serves to challenge ideas about Gayogohó:nǫˀ people in these lands. He complicates narratives about how the Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih Confederacy formed, stating that ". . . [t]he late Gayogohó:nǫˀ knowledge keeper Hadagigręta˒ (Jacob Thomas) has asserted that the Confederacy is 2–3 thousand years old," surpassing previously suggested dates by thousands of years. He "notes that some of the standards used by non-Indigenous scholars are likely too strict: political arrangements could take different forms, and emerge in a different order, than the standard model" (Jordan, 2022, p. 31). In essence, he models how to think through a Gayogohó:nǫˀ periodization of these lands, rather than from a settler epistemology.

A Gayogohó:nǫˀ periodization asserts Indigenous survivance, rather than obliteration. Jordan highlights how General George Washington ordered U.S. troops to destroy Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih settlements, including homes, animals, and stored crops, during the Clinton-Sullivan Campaign of 1779. Because of these actions, to this day, the Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih refer to the President of the United States as Hanadagá:yas, or "He Who Destroys Villages." This scorched earth campaign led to genocide by exposure and starvation, as many Gayogohó:nǫˀ were unable to stay on their lands. Clan mother Birdie Hill remembers, "There were thousands of us. Now there's around 500 of us in Western New York" (LaDuke, 2005, p. 155). The survivors sought refuge at the British Fort Niagara (Jordan, 2022). While settler history narrates the Campaign as a complete annihilation, Jordan reminds us that the Gayogohó:nǫˀ returned to their lands at the northern part of Cayuga Lake as early as 1790 (Jordan, 2022). However, New York state later violated the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua, which had allocated a reservation of 64,000 acres to the Gayogohó:nǫˀ. This violation again dispersed the Nation's people. Today, apart from trying to regain treaty lands, the Gayogohó:nǫˀ face internal tensions between traditionalists and non-traditionalists, which translate into ongoing land disputes. Despite attempts to erase Indigenous history and presence in these lands via genocidal dispossession, since 2014, Stephen Henhawk (Wolf Clan) has taught the Gayogohó:nǫˀ language in this area, and in 2021 formalized the program through the Gayogohó:nǫˀ Learning Project, which supports Gayogohó:nǫˀ language and lifeways on this land.

The last two decades in Native American and Indigenous Studies at Ithaca College also reveal tensions, erasures, and survival strategies. In 2002, under public anthropologists Brooke Hansen

and Jack Rossen, the Native American Studies program began and operated through the Department of Anthropology.[6] In Fall 2013, Native American Studies transferred to the CSCRE and faculty re-shaped the minor to match the Center's curricular structure, including a course titled Introduction to Native American Studies.[7] During this time, there was no full-time faculty line dedicated to Native American Studies.

After four years, in Fall 2017, Iokepa Casumbal-Salazar joined the Center in a joint appointment with Anthropology as a full-time, tenure-track Indigenous faculty member, and the minor became Native American and Indigenous Studies. Casumbal-Salazar built a robust program in NAIS, which included courses such as Decolonial Intersections: Gender, Race, and Indigeneity; Indigenous Politics; and Popular Culture and Indigenous Futurities. He also co-organized the 2018-2019 CSCRE Discussion Series, "On Native Lands: Decolonization, Solidarity, & Resurgence." Attracted by these activities, at one point, 17 students were enrolled in the NAIS minor. In 2020, however, Casumbal-Salazar left the institution. COVID-19 budget constraints, the College's concern with an impending "demographic cliff," an Academic Program Prioritization process in 2021, and other institutional priorities suspended the search for his replacement.[8]

When we were hired in 2022, Introduction to NAIS had not been taught in two years. The job advertisement for the Latinx Studies position required that Pam teach Introduction to NAIS once a year. Currently, the Introduction remains the only NAIS-specific course taught through the CSCRE.[9] At the college level, the overwhelming majority of students enroll because it fulfills a Diversity requirement for the Ithaca College Integrative Core Curriculum (ICC). It is their only exposure to NAIS. Yet, for us, the importance of NAIS is two-fold: first, it is essential to an academic center focused on the intersections of knowledge and struggle of people of the global majority; and second, beyond the academic curricula, it should serve as a pathway to build relationships with the Indigenous peoples of this land.

We applied for, and received, Ithaca College's Center for Faculty Excellence Instructional Development Award to support a course redesign that would include a culminating site visit, because we could not envision a NAIS course that never left the classroom. Drawing from our academic training, experiences, and position as non-Indigenous educators, we center relationship-building at every turn, to create space for the relationality critical to NAIS yet often absent from higher education's business-as-usual. For financial and curricular reasons, we co-developed the course, but alternate teaching it to balance the curricular demands within our department. Nevertheless, our partnership challenges institutional structures that silo educators and disciplinary fields--we support each other in the site visit and are in constant dialogue over course materials, students, and future ideas for the course. Our pedagogical approach reflects a core principle of knowing through place: It must be engaged in active practice, because NAIS is not a field dissecting an over there, or an Other, but one fundamental to understanding our home places and how we exist collectively as part of them.

[6] See Hansen and Rossen (2007, 2017) and Rosen (2008).
[7] Personal correspondence with Dr. Sean Eversley Bradwell.
[8] For more on the APP process, see Ithaca College's "The Shape of the College: Report and Recommendations of the Academic Prioritization Implementation Committee" (February 17, 2021) at http://tiny.cc/appIthacaCollege.
[9] Other courses, such as "Subject to Paradise: Race, Place and Power in the Pacific Islands" and "Policing the Borderlands," incorporate NAIS topics and frameworks in the context of Asian American and Latinx Studies.

The constraints of budget, faculty lines, and institutional priorities over the past three years has shown us that, with just three faculty teaching full-time in the CSCRE, we are still operating on a survival strategy. Curricularly, there is no financial or faculty support to expand the coursework offered in the minor, which has remained stagnant over the last five years. We operate in a broader context of critical absence: Our status as non-Indigenous faculty of color; a vacant NAIS faculty line; the post-COVID-19 budget deficit that leaves it vacant; and a student body that in 2024 identified as 0.002% "American Indian or Alaska Native" or "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander" (Ithaca College, 2024).

By contrast, the Gayogohó:nǫˀ people, on whose unceded lands the college stands, have never been absent. Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih land right remains, as does the settler responsibility to act accordingly—to understand land and place so that these responsibilities are an active practice. Understanding settler colonial systems and how they have structured prior and ongoing knowledge/knowledge-production is a relational imperative we must meet in order to decolonize. The course and its syllabi prioritize Indigenous thinkers and cultural productions, in addition to settler colonial frameworks. However, the need to continue to create places of co-resistance—or rather, rework *all* places to become them—also emphasizes the limitations of a single course, and the urgency for commitments to NAIS that expand beyond their introduction.

Introduction to Native American & Indigenous Studies

Since 2022, thirty students have enrolled in Intro to NAIS every spring. We organize the course into five units, each shaped by the imperative to engage NAIS as an active practice:

1. "What is NAIS?" serves as an introduction to the field, as well as to settler and Indigenous epistemologies;
2. "Native Space" emphasizes Indigenous land relation and Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih political sovereignty;
3. "Native Presence & Indigenous Presents" contextualizes contemporary Indigenous activism within histories of resistance and survivance;
4. "Museums & Memory" examines coloniality and Indigenous cultural sovereignty; and
5. "Indigenous Futures" focuses on decolonial theory and praxis.

Here, we highlight four manifestations of knowing through place: a semester-long project, Hometown History; an experiential Get Lost Day; course readings that synthesize our place-based approaches; and a site visit to the Skä-noñh Great Law of Peace Center. Our goal is for our students to see that a world beyond the settler episteme is and has always been present, and that another is possible—one where Indigenous ways of knowing inspire personal and collective transformation. Decolonization may be an "elsewhere" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 36), but the *work* is to bring this elsewhere home.

Bringing Elsewhere Home: Hometown History

In January, we begin by asking students to think through multiple places--Ithaca College, on unceded Gayogohó:nǫˀ lands; and their hometowns, which are also on Indigenous lands. In their Hometown History, they engage NAIS as an active practice in a place they "know," to begin

discussions of settler and Indigenous epistemologies that they continue to build throughout the course.[10] Inspired by Danika Medak-Saltzman's assignment in Women's and Gender Studies at Syracuse University, our Hometown History is a three-part, semester-long project.[11]

Hometown History 1 asks students to choose a location of origin for themselves (town, state, or country) and discuss its history of colonization. In doing so, they consider their temporal relationship to place and colonialism and settler colonialism's legacy on multiple communities. It serves as a starting point for them to critique who writes histories, identify what gaps exist in those histories, and ask questions about their implications for decolonization in the present. For students, regardless of whether they are guests or people Indigenous to this land, this is one of the hardest parts of the course, because they re-examine their relationship to the settler state. For example, as we read Dunbar-Ortiz's work and her definition of genocide, students articulated how they thought the conflict in occupied Palestinian territories reflected the same framework. The framing, which was focused on Turtle Island, allowed them to see settler colonialism and Indigenous survival elsewhere.

These examinations lay the groundwork for Hometown History 2, where students hone in on a specific aspect of settler colonialism in their hometown to analyze. This second assignment leads into Hometown History 3, where they revise their essay into a visual, public-facing form, drawing on the "Museums & Memory" module and their visit to the Skä-noñh Great Law of Peace Center. "Hometown History" pushes students to think about NAIS not as something separate from their lives, but as an intertwined part of their existence and responsibility to place.

Embodying Place: Get Lost Day

In February's deep winter, we send our students on an embodied exploration of place—this time, on Gayogohó:nǫˀ lands. The idea that Indigenous presence must be unearthed is a misnomer. It is part of a counter-reality that maintains the settler colonial state, a facade built into the environment so as to appear natural and quotidian.[12] "Get Lost Day" asks students to "lose" their normative navigational bearings. For Get Lost Day, our students independently locate local murals painted by Indigenous artists; street signs written in Gayogohó:nǫˀ; or county historical markers, and unravel the primacy of Ithaca's settler colonial counter-reality. Drawing from Natchee Blu Barnd's *Native Space: Geographic Strategies to Unsettle Settler Colonialism* (2017), which analyzes of street symbols and their capacity (or lack thereof) to create Native Space, students consider: How does the symbol they've found create or refuse Native Space?

Knowing through place requires getting outside, and the answers are embodied as much as they are analytic. Winter weather comes up often in our students' writing—bracing winds, treacherous ice, and a below-freezing encounter with place. It's rarely their first time downtown, but often the first time they've stopped to look at a sign or mural. Finding them is harder than they expected.

[10] The examples and stories shared in this essay amalgamate our Intro to NAIS courses from Spring 2023, 2024, and 2025. Direct quotes and images of student work have been used with permission.
[11] Pam was Medak-Saltzman's Teaching Assistant in 2019. While the original assignment is a one-time essay, we have expanded it into a semester-long project.
[12] In *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (2019), Manu Karuka defines settler power as "counter-sovereignty," which positions Indigenous sovereignty as the pre-existing norm. Our use of "counter-reality" derives from this logic.

Critically, it's strange to realize how different the world is when one goes looking for what's hidden in plain sight. Painted by Nani Chacon (Diné) as part of a program facilitated by CSCRE in 2019, one of the murals emblazons Ithaca College's Campus Center. Nevertheless, some students claimed they'd never seen it—rather, they'd seen, but not seen. This is often the first revelation.

The second is that seeing differently is not the end. New ways of knowing beget new ways of questioning. Delving into the history of the mural, one of our students found that the mural was created to celebrate student activism. Yet, they hesitate, "it is this emphasis on the local community that makes me question the work's success as a reclamation of Indigenous space." While the goal of the mural may not have been to create Native space to begin with, this student concedes, it feels like a missed opportunity. "As much as college officials like to say that the institution values a variety of disciplines, recent budget cuts show that the humanities are less valued by them than they claim," our student reflects. As their focus moves from the institution's willingness to display a mural but not to effect grander engagements with Indigenous presence alongside it, they identify a future that has failed to materialize. Students bridge the separation between object/observer: a desire to critique one's own realities, to locate one's position in place, and to understand our collective responsibility to Turtle Island.

Reading Across Place: *Northern Light* & *Braiding Sweetgrass*

March is a month of synthesis, where seeds sown at the start of the class grow together in multiple places. We incorporate "slow reads" of longer texts throughout the course, weaving their contents across units to emphasize settler colonial critique and active engagement with Indigenous ways of knowing.

In Mika's version of the course, Kazim Ali's memoir, *Northern Light: Power, Land, and the Memory of Water* (2021) offers a touchstone through which we trace the interconnectedness of key topics in NAIS, from the Red Power Movement to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives. Ali considers his "hometown history" in a hydroproject town on Pimicikamak Cree Nation lands (Manitoba), narrating his family's complicity in Indigenous dispossession; his belonging to and alienation from the land; the Indigenous peoples who were there before him, and never left. Ali's self-examinations inspire students to ask similar questions in their Hometown Histories. How does one occupy settler identity as an immigrant; a person of color; a queer person? One student highlighted the layered experiences of colonialism, as in Ali's "immigrant family facing the effects of colonialism back home [in India-Pakistan] while also benefiting from colonialism in Canada and the U.S." Another wrote, "I wouldn't expect to get so much out of a non-indigenous perspective, but I think that is part of what is so engaging, because he is expressing his inner conflict, asking honest questions, and taking responsibility." Navigating settler responsibility drives our students' Hometown History revisions, as they center Indigenous worlds and narrate their positions within them—positions from which they might continue to learn from and with, as opposed to learning about.

In Pam's version, students read and journaled about Citizen Potawatomi Nation Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*, a memoir of using Indigenous knowledge from elders and community to shape her research in Western science. Kimmerer writes, works, and lives in Hodiṇǫhsǫ́:nih lands; her essays highlighted course themes related to ways of knowing via the environment, land, and language. An aspiring outdoor educator, who took the class on a whim,

reflected that Kimmerer fundamentally changed his whole approach to the outdoors and the kinds of knowledge and care he wanted to practice with his future students.

In critiques of racial capitalism and settler colonialism, *Braiding Sweetgrass* fell short. Kimmerer does not contextualize the sidelining of Indigenous knowledge within broader discussions on genocide, settler colonialism on Turtle Island, which we did collectively in the classroom. Moreover, when we read chapters from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, one student stated that Simpson's tone was much more direct than Kimmerer's—it was one that privileged Indigenous sovereignty, written for an Indigenous audience. By discussing the absence of anticolonial Indigenous thought in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, students engage NAIS frameworks as an active practice.

Knowing With: Visiting Skä-noñh and Hometown History 3

April in Ithaca heralds rain, and the damp of too many tall bodies crammed into minivans. Intro to NAIS heads north, following the rivers toward the Skä-noñh Great Law of Peace Center on the shores of Onondaga Lake.

"Did you see that road sign just now? For Tully?" Mika shouted from the driver's seat. They didn't, nor did they remember Tully's significance. Knowing through place also means acquiring fluency in particularity. Tully is home to the headwaters of Onondaga Creek, which flows into Onondaga Lake; they are sacred to the Onondaga Nation. In late 2024 these waters and 1000 acres of land were returned to the Nation (Onondaga Nation, 2024). I'd shown them the maps, and they'd dutifully taken notes, snapped photos of Google Slides. But it didn't truly translate into place until we shambled out of the vans and stood across from Onondaga Lake.

Nyaweñha skä-noñh, the phrase that welcomes every visitor to the Center means "I am thankful that you are well" (Skä-noñh Great Law of Peace Center, 2012). At Skä-noñh, Onondaga Nation members build relations with visitors through oral history, and this is an important component to NAIS as an active practice.[13] By the time students arrive at Skä-noñh, they have identified the absences carved by settler structures. Our students' knowledge of the frameworks allows them to focus on the particular—the fine details of history and living culture, but also the ways these stories are told—by whose decisions, with whose knowledge, in what format, and to what ends?[14] All these mechanisms are particularly salient in Skä-noñh's own history of place. For two years in the 17th century, the French claimed these Onondaga lands for a fort and mission. In the 20th century, Onondaga County Parks and Recreation used the location for many decades as an interpretive site called Saint Marie Among the Iroquois—a name that centers the French settler perspective even as it alleges relationship with the Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih. In 2015, the Onondaga Nation reclaimed this violent colonial artifact as the Skä-noñh Center. Settler society as-is is anything but a foregone conclusion.

[13] The Onondaga Nation is the spiritual and political core of the Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih Confederacy (Skä-noñh Great Law of Peace Center, 2012).
[14] Our discussions of these questions are in dialogue with work in NAIS and museum studies from Amanda J. Cobb (Chickasaw), Amy Lonetree (Ho-Chunk), and Monika Siebert.

History begins with the Creation Story, and this is where our tours of the Skä-noñh Center begin as well. Aspects of the story encircle the entryway on all sides, including a painting of Sky Woman, supported by a flock of geese as she falls toward Turtle Island. In our three trips to the Skä-noñh Center from 2023 to 2025, each of our three docents has conducted a different tour based on their own history and relationship to the story, whether they grew up in the Onondaga Nation, or returned to the Onondaga Nation and language later in life, after growing up outside the culture. In their reflections, our students highlight their collective experience of Indigenous cultural narratives as embodied and individual. "It was also good to hear the stories from someone who had been hearing them for their whole life," recounted one. "Having the guided tour from Emerson [2025], and hearing the meaning behind each display in what felt like one connected story, was so immersive," said another, of Emerson Shenandoah (Snipe Clan, Onondaga), the Director of the Skä-noñh Center.

The Skä-noñh Center does not supply our students with their only dose of local Indigenous knowledge, as though an inoculation against ignorance (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The core narratives presented at the Skä-noñh Center align with those we've explored in class. But as in the words of Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih Elders, repetition of story is not a waste, but a means of polishing (American Indian Law Alliance & Onondaga Nation, 2025). "Hearing our guide talk about his grandparents who were victims of residential schools and who, as a result, didn't want to pass down their language was an important thing to come face-to-face with," reflected one of our students. They connected this observation to a previous conversation with filmmaker Erica Tremblay (Seneca-Cayuga) about language revitalization and residential schools, honing in on the ways that attempted genocide continues to reverberate through generations, into the present. Another shared that Skä-noñh "emphasize[s] the ongoing presence of the Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih Confederacy. Throughout the class, we talk about the Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih Confederacy . . . but the Center really helps to synthesize all of that and connects so many things that we talked about in class."

This is the vantage point from which students approach the final iteration of their Hometown History. For their final project, we invite them to re-envision their History in a new, multimodal form: Drawing on our readings and their analysis of Skä-noñh, how would you design a Hometown History museum?[15] Answering this question requires imagining a different world—specifically, a desired future. We challenge students to re-narrate their relationship to their hometown, and their hometown's relationship to its settler and Indigenous histories. The assignment asks them to position themselves within broader narratives while also decentering the self, and to think about what new forms and structures might actively support a decolonial "Hometown History." The confluence of form and story is dramatic: One student wrote a whitepaper detailing the ways the objects would be cared for and rotated out (not as a static collection but as borrowed items that return to their communities and continue their active usage). Another developed a café menu that highlighted the native plants and traditional preparations, and outlined desired partnerships with local growers and food sovereignty projects. A third student made a museum that navigates the waterways of N'Dakinna by boat. Traveling the rivers, museumgoers make landfall in "classrooms" that focalize uneasy clashes in Indigenous-settler relations:

[15] Skä-noñh is explicitly a Cultural Center, not a museum. This nomenclature emphasizes its exhibits as part of an ongoing culture, rather than prehistory caught in amber. In their Hometown Histories, our students consider their own uses of terminology, as well as the additional community functions they want their imagined "museums" to serve.

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> There are large whiteboards at the front of each classroom that echo these settler colonialist narratives and then the other walls in the classrooms are plastered with Indigenous history, artwork, writing . . . that counteract those narratives and tell a more complete story of this land and its people. As you progress through the rooms, they become more crowded . . . This will increase the feeling of overwhelm and invasion as visitors learn more about how settler colonialists have tried to overwrite and erase Indigenous presence. I hope that this will add a more urgent and visceral aspect to the physical experience of the space and that it will push people to do more than just "decolonize their mind."

This student's desire to evoke embodied experiences through their imagined museum draws inspiration from their own experience of knowing through place. For them, cognitive revision exceeds the "mind"; it inculcates via the body, and the relationality of body and place.

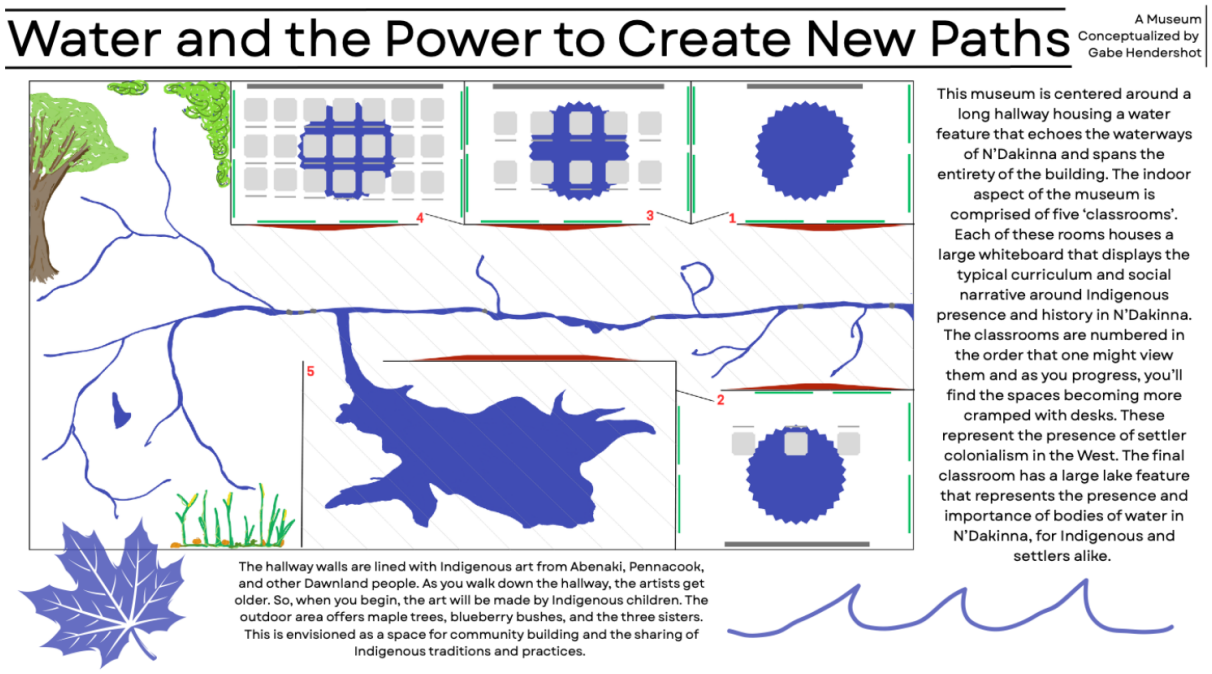

Figure 1. *Hometown History 3*. Waterways serve as both subject and storyteller in this student's Hometown History museum, emphasizing knowing through place as a practice of knowing *with*, rather than solely *about*.

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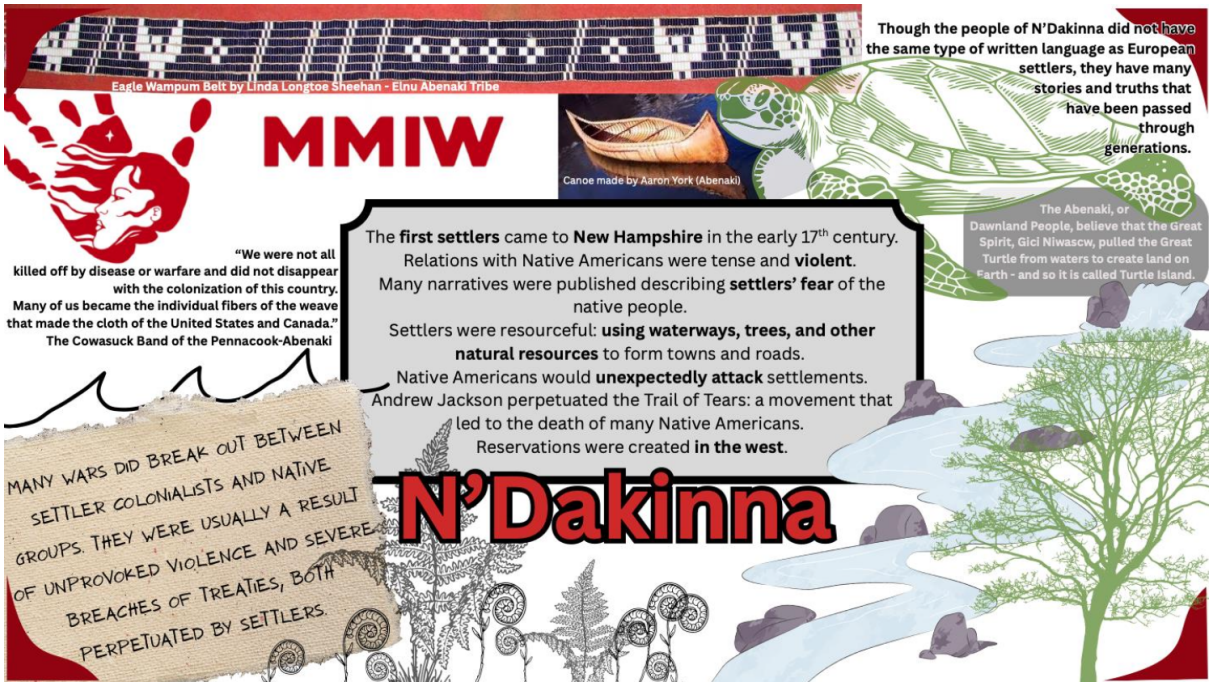

Figure 2. *Hometown History 3.* The center plaque of this "classroom" whiteboard displays a colonizer's history of New Hampshire. They juxtapose this colonial counter-reality with Indigenous art and text that challenge settler epistemologies.

Desired Futures

Ultimately, one class does not unmake the College's settler occupation of the College, nor does it constitute a whole Native American and Indigenous Studies program. Settler colonial power persists through its hegemonic insistence on itself, but we are also cognizant that overemphasizing critiques of settler colonial power risks suggesting it is the end-all of NAIS, or of Indigenous cultures entirely (Byrd, 2014). The potential to decolonize always exists. In our essay, we have emphasized how our placed-based approach allows students to focus on relations with land and people, and to push them toward thinking through decolonial futures. Students' reflections capture why knowing through place as a pedagogical approach can serve as a springboard for personal and collective transformation: "I feel like the most important thing is that I've spent a lot of the semester trying to figure out how I can get involved with the Indigenous people from where I live," shared one student. "I think the site visit [to Skä-noñh] gave me a direct link to this world. . . . It's like a door being opened." These transformations cannot be limited to the classroom, or to campus. As their understanding of place expands, so do their responsibilities. This is the ultimate goal of grounded normativity—that we should "be in respectful diplomatic relationships with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations with whom we might share territorial responsibilities or common political or economic interests" (Coulthard & Simpson, 2016, p. 254). As our students suggest, "Ithaca College is on Hodiṇǫhsǫ́:nih land, and as students of this institution, we should be made aware of and learn the history of the rightful inhabitants of this land." They begin to see Ithaca College and their own lives as part of a settler structure as an ongoing process to be challenged. Their reflections demonstrate a personal transformation through the collective experience of the class, and a desire for more from the College.

As part of the institution, we are part of the settler colonial and racial capitalist apparatus that relies on dispossession for its continuance. At the beginning of this piece, we asked:

> What if, instead of continuing the genocidal logics our students have been exposed to in this settler colonial, racial capitalist system, we challenge them to think critically through Indigenous ways of knowing?

We have thus approached this through the student experience, but our desired future is far more capacious. We call for Ithaca College to commit at the institutional level to integrate decolonial Indigenous ways of knowing into its every aspect.[16] Having a program in NAIS requires that the settler colonial institution participate. The institution's values are only as meaningful as the actions that embody them, and these actions must be in relationship to Indigenous land. We must begin to seed and re-build a long-term relationship with Gayogohó:nǫˀ through the Cayuga/SHARE Farm, and be in relation with Gayogohó:nǫˀ and the Hodinǫhsǫ́:nih Elders. Finally, our goal is that through these seeds, alongside student and faculty shifts, the institution centers Indigenous lands and people; commitment to and support for full-time faculty in NAIS, as well as for Indigenous faculty, staff, and students; changes in the curriculum across all departments; and actions toward decolonization. We hope "knowing through place" can serve as a model for K-12 and university educators to approach Indigenous ways of knowing in settler colonial and racial capitalist institutions, as a method of challenging the structures in which we live.

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[16] Following the release of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015, Canadian universities have been strongly encouraged to "Indigenize" their institutions (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Many of the proposed Calls to Action—see McGill University's iteration documented at https://www.mcgill.ca/indigenous/calls-action—translate powerfully to a U.S. context. However, Canadian reconciliation approaches have also been met with resounding critique (Daigle, 2019). Although beyond the scope of this paper, envisioning what forms Indigenization might take in the context of the U.S. university (and in the continued absence of a formal Truth and Reconciliation process at the nation-to-nation level) is uncompromisingly a part of our call.

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