

# SECTION SUMMARY: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

All games have a story and can connect us back to the land with which we interact.

## LACROSSE (DEYHONTSIGWA'EHS)

Deyhontsigwa'ehs (lacrosse) is a sport that was given to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Tuscarora, Seneca, and Cayuga) by the Creator, and therefore is referred to as the Creator's Game by many Indigenous Peoples. Deyhontsigwa'ehs somewhat translates to "they bump hips" in the Onondaga language. It is believed that lacrosse has the ability to heal and is also known as a Medicine Game.<sup>1</sup> The game has roots in healing, ceremony and connection to land.<sup>2</sup>

## THE LACROSSE STICK—CONNECTION TO THE NATURAL WORLD

The lacrosse stick in itself connects people with the natural world, including land and animals. Lacrosse sticks were originally made of hickory wood with the netting made of deer sinew. The stick, made from a tree, creates a direct connection to the gifts of the land (Mother Earth). Often a stick was adorned with hawk feathers or fur from a wolf. Hawk feathers symbolize strength of vision, while the wolf fur symbolizes speed and agility.<sup>3</sup>

## TROPHIES—CONNECTION TO THE NATURAL WORLD

The trophy featured in the [digital book's "LAND"](#) educational activities is made of an antler from an animal indigenous to this land—moose. It is common among various Indigenous Peoples, when traditionally hunting, to give thanks to the animal for providing sustenance. Every part of the animal is used, which reflects values relating to sustainability and reciprocity. Hunting was never done for sport; animals provided not only food, but also warmth, shelter and artistic mediums, as is the case for this trophy.

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<sup>1</sup> Onondaga Nation. (2021). *Lacrosse*. Retrieved from Onondaga Nation:  
<https://www.onodaganation.org/culture/sports/lacrosse/>

<sup>2</sup> CHIN. (2002). *The Social Role of Lacrosse*. Retrieved from VirtualMuseum.ca:  
<http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/edu/ViewLoitLo.do?method=preview&lang=EN&id=11711>

<sup>3</sup> Dassele, E. (n.d.). *History of Lacrosse Sticks*. Retrieved from The Evolution of the Lacrosse Stick:  
<https://emmadassele.weebly.com/history-of-lacrosse.html>

## CEREMONY, MEDICINE, HEALING

Indigenous trees, plants and foods sustained Indigenous Peoples for tens of thousands of years. Many trees and plants are considered sacred and used for various medicinal, healing, and ceremonial purposes.<sup>4</sup> For example, the white pine tree is known as Skaęhetsi'kona (The Tree of Peace) and is considered sacred to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.<sup>5</sup> The wisqoq (ash tree) is considered sacred to the Mi'kmaq.<sup>6</sup> The red willow tree is used by many Nations as a medicine, for ceremonial and everyday structures. The cedar tree is also considered sacred. On the West Coast, it is interconnected to many aspects of life and used both ceremonially and artistically.

## RECIPROCITY

Reciprocity, and sustainable harvesting and hunting, are values and practices embedded in many Indigenous ways of knowing and being. When gifts from the land are harvested within Indigenous circles, there are protocols in place specific to each FNMI group that occur. Giving thanks to the land for providing to us is often done in exchange for what is being used. For example, tobacco, along with prayers of gratitude and intention, are offered back to the earth for the use of the rocks, plants, medicines, trees or animals. Reciprocity is evident in ceremonies as well. Many FNMI groups offer prints and gifts at ceremonies.

## SPORT

Each sport played by the Indigenous Hall of Famers also connects back to the land because they are games that are played on the land. The land provides healing in many ways. Throughout Turtle Island (Canada), there are many gifts of healing that the Creator has provided. Indigenous foods and medicines grow throughout this vast landscape that many now call home. Connecting with nature has a way of healing the mind and spirit when we take the time to appreciate and respect it.

Ceremonies, as well as food and medicine gatherings, were once outlawed at one point in Canadian history under the Indian Act. Access to food and medicines was severed due to forced relocation and confinement to reserves. Colonization tactics, policies (such as the Sixties Scoop and Residential Schools), racism and industrialization all forced Indigenous Peoples off their ancestral territories and have impacted their health and wellness. The love of Mother Earth and family is embedded in original ways of knowing and being.

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<sup>4</sup> Haudenosaunee Confederacy. (2021). *Culture & History: Symbols*. Retrieved from Haudenosaunee Confederacy: <https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/symbols/>

<sup>5</sup> Haudenosaunee Confederacy. (2021). *Culture & History: Symbols*. Retrieved from Haudenosaunee Confederacy: <https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/symbols/>

<sup>6</sup> Maguire, D. (2016). *Traditional Knowledge: Secret Powers of the Ash Tree*. Retrieved from <http://wisqoq.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Secret-Powers-of-the-Ash-Della.pdf>

The severing of the mother from child, family bonds, community, child-rearing practices, ceremony, and connection to land continues to impact the transference of Indigenous ways of knowing and being to this day. Reflecting on his Residential School trauma, Hall of Famer Chief Wilton Littlechild has said:

*"In my case, my grandparents' bond was almost severed by Residential School. That was a very serious trauma from many perspectives, whether it was the physical separation or the mental isolation from your own family, to the spiritual and cultural separation. Because, as you know, we weren't allowed to speak our own language or practice our own culture; in fact, they were outlawed completely."*

Although lacrosse originates with the Haudenosaunee, there was a time in history that players were excluded from national tournaments because they were Indigenous. Racism towards Indigenous Peoples persists today both on and off the field, yet these Hall of Famers have been able to transcend the hate to achieve **greatness in sport** and do **good in their communities**.