

SECTION SUMMARY: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

JERSEYS

Clothing worn by athletes has transformed throughout history. Present-day sports include clothing with specific colours and designs that represent an individual or team's sponsor, values, and overall spirit. At the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, each athlete's and/or team's uniform is typically represented by the colours and symbols on their country's flag. Jerseys are created using design elements like that of flags. Design elements are also used in creating Indigenous traditional and current clothing, regalia, and artefacts that may represent kinship, spirituality, clan, nation, stories, historical facts, connection to the natural world and ceremonial significance.

REGALIA

Regalia is the traditional clothing, accessories, jewellery, and artefacts that have specific design elements unique to the owner, family and Indigenous group. Many regalia designs have been passed down through generations and are specific to a distinct Indigenous group. There is often a deep spiritual connection to the regalia. Types of regalia vary depending on when and where they are being worn. Today, regalia is most often worn during celebrations, ceremonies, specific events, and to honour cultural ways of life.

There was a time in Canadian history that ceremonies and cultural objects, including regalia, that had been practiced for generations prior to the creation of Canada, were outlawed by the newly formed government who forced control over the land and original inhabitants of the land. Cultural objects, including regalia, were confiscated, stolen, or pillaged, often being put into museums, sold, destroyed or ending up in homes of non-Indigenous families through the Potlatch Ban in an amendment of the Indian Act. Efforts are underway to repatriate items by restoring artefacts, family heirlooms, ceremonial and sacred items, and human remains back to families and communities.

FLAGS

Flags representing the conquering and ownership of land are not representative of original Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

A type of marker or symbol of family, clan, story or territory can be seen in Tipi flap designs, eagle staffs and totem poles, for example. Natural formations, such as rivers, were also used to distinguish ancestral territories and continue to mark some Treaty territories. Colours, pattern designs, artefacts and symbols are used to distinguish various Indigenous groups. Flags are used today as one method to represent distinct Indigenous groups.

First Nations were forced onto reserves with each nation creating their own flag with distinct design elements that represent themselves. Flag symbols that represent Indigenous groups of today may relate to designs and patterns that predate Canada. The Haudenosaunee flag features the colours of [wampum shells](#) and originates from the [Hiawatha Belt](#). Treaty groups also have distinct flags that represent their understanding of the Treaty. The Métis flag predates the Canadian Flag and continues to represent the Métis people. Inuit groups have distinct flags with distinct colours and symbols. For example, Inuvialuit features a stylized gyrfalcon, which has design elements

common to their distinct artistic style. Like the regeneration of the almost endangered bird they, too, are rising again.¹

PLACE NAMES AND TOPONYMS

Indigenous Peoples survived and thrived on this land prior to the creation of the current country, provinces, territories, cities, towns, and reserves. There are many original place names that continue to be found on maps within what is now Canada, and Indigenous language speakers continue to pass on knowledge of original place names, cultural and natural places of significance.

Currently, there are close to 30,000 official Indigenous place names used in Canada². Some names are more familiar than others. Saskatchewan derives from the Nêhiyaw (Cree language) word *kisiskâciwan* which translates to “fast-flowing or swift current”.³

The forced displacement of Indigenous Peoples and colonization of the land resulted in European toponyms becoming the most widespread identifiers of land borders and places, though some Indigenous place names still remain. Many places across Canada are making efforts to restore Indigenous original place names.

Treaty borders extend beyond provincial borders as they were entered into prior to the creation of provinces. Treaty borders are often designated by specific rivers. Reserves did not exist prior to the Indian Act. Ancestral territories are vast and often designated by natural landmarks and in some cases specific artefacts and symbols.

Land, water, and sky knowledge was vastly and deeply known to Indigenous Peoples with this knowledge most predominantly being passed on through oral, symbolic and experiential learning traditions. Water-based travel and trade routes were navigated through landmarks, transportation, and star knowledge. Many Knowledge Holders continue to share land, waters, and sky knowledge, although violent assimilation policies have severely fractured knowledge transference.

ORIGIN STORIES

The original occupants of what is now known as Canada, which some Indigenous People refer to as Turtle Island, have names for the land which included places of natural or cultural significance. There are many stories from many nations that center on turtles. Turtle Island’s creation story is one that is based on an Anishinabek oral history teaching. There are drawings that depict the shape of a bird’s-eye view of a [turtle overlaid with the shape of North America](#). The name Canada itself originates from an Indigenous word “KANATA,” which derives from the Haudenosaunee (Iroquoian) language family meaning “village” or “settlement”.⁴

Many nations have creation stories in relation to the natural world. Some creation stories have been shared online through videos or text, yet connecting with local communities and seeking those who hold the gift to share

¹ Illasiak, L. (2021, June 21). *Welcome from our Inuit Elder!* Retrieved from Aboriginal Awareness Week Calgary: <https://www.aawc.ca/inuit/>

² Government of Canada. (2021, July 6). *Indigenous Place Names*. Retrieved from Government of Canada: <https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/earth-sciences/geography/indigenous-place-names/19739>

³ *Indigenous Saskatchewan Encyclopedia - Indigenous Languages*. (n.d.). (University of Regina Press) Retrieved from University of Saskatchewan: https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/indigenous_languages.php

⁴ Government of Canada. (2020, June 8). *Origin of the name "Canada"*. Retrieved from Government of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/origin-name-canada.html>

creation story is ideal for learning about ways of knowing and being connected to specific nations. There are protocols for sharing stories that are unique to each Indigenous group.

Indigenous Hall of Famers are all connected to a place they call home and have stories rooted in their ancestral connections. There are many traditional land uses and creation stories, sacred sites, and places of cultural significance across Turtle Island (Canada). It is integral to work closely with local Indigenous Peoples to learn and help ensure experiences are respectful, authentic, and meaningful.

WATER

Water connects us to each other. Currently, in Canada, there continue to be many Indigenous place names connected to water. Water was and continues to be used for everyday sustenance, ceremony, trade and travel. “Water is life” is a phrase that is often used in Indigenous circles to emphasize its importance and Indigenous Peoples’ interconnection to it. Respect for the natural world is embedded in original ways of knowing and being. Water is considered sacred and as having spirit. Water in the womb protects and sustains a baby’s growth before entering the world with breath. All life will perish without clean water. Water interconnects and sustains all living beings. Water teaches us that “we can have great strength to transform even the tallest mountain while being soft, pliable, and flexible. Water gives us the spiritual teaching that we too flow into the Great Ocean at the end of our life journey.”⁵

Water sources have been depleted and polluted near many current Indigenous communities, which can be seen as ecocide – the destruction of the natural environment by deliberate or negligent human action, therefore negatively impacting the livelihood of Indigenous Peoples. Ecocide and genocide are interconnected because the destruction of the ecosystem correlates with destruction of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, which are interconnected with the natural world. Access to clean water is an inherent right. Indigenous Peoples have been forcibly separated from water sources through colonization, which continues to trickle into the present realities of this country. Through forced relocation, confinement, pollution, and industrialization many Indigenous Peoples do not have access to clean water sources, which contributes to the legacy of trauma and overall health and wellness.

SPORT

Athletes need water to survive and thrive, as do all people and sentient beings. Access to clean water reflects healthy lives. All people need access to clean drinking water, which should be an inherent human right free from restrictions such as culture, finances, or social status. Water connects people, like rivers and streams connect with large bodies of water. Disconnection to water correlates to the disconnection of a sense of belonging.

Although jerseys are a far stretch from traditional regalia and cultural objects, elements of design can inspire the interconnection to streams of thought that celebrate and deepen knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Currently, many sports teams are changing their teams’ logos and names to not project continued misrepresentation and mockery of Indigenous Peoples. For example, the “Cleveland Indians” baseball team plans to change their name and logo to the “Cleveland Guardians,” and the “Edmonton Eskimos” football team changed their name to the “Edmonton Elks”.

⁵ *Honouring Water*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Assembly of First Nations: <https://www.afn.ca/honoring-water/>