

Lesson 1

IN THE BEGINNING: OUR LOVING WORLD

Land Acknowledgement

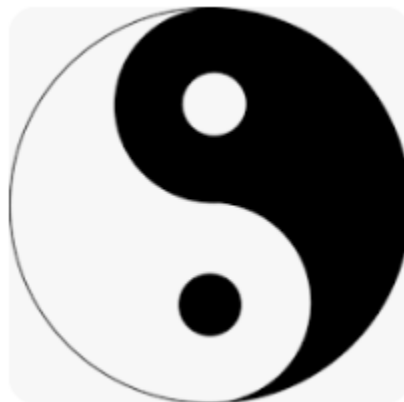
Flushing Monthly Meeting lies within the traditional territory of the Matinecock people, who stewarded the land and water of the Northern Shore of Long Island and used its bounty to fulfill their needs, maintaining a natural ecological balance. Contact with Europeans devastated their way of life, and we ask friends to remember the Matinecock's history and their continuing presence as we proceed with the work before us today.

SUMMARY FOR ADULTS

As individuals Quakers have different conceptions of the beginning of the Universe. Some Quakers with a leaning towards Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and certain Native American beliefs may hold that one God is the creator. Others may believe in the rich and diverse spirits traditionally found among the many ethnic and cultural traditions of our world. Those with a Buddhist bent may believe in the cyclical nature of existence and that there is no beginning or end. Still others who are non-theistic may believe in science and the Big Bang theory. Nonetheless, Friends here at People of Color Worship and Reflection Group generally hold the belief that the presence of a benevolent Divine entity is fundamental to our Christian foundation and the following lesson encourages that viewpoint.

It is also a beginning exercise in Centering, which is the starting point for Quaker practice: a guided meditation on the beauty of the natural world and a recognition of our humility in the presence of its majesty, wonder and mystery.

Quakers have traditionally used the metaphor of Light to describe the divine. However, with an awareness of how “light” and “white” have historically been used to oppress people of color, we suggest two sides of a primal loving force, including both light and dark, similar to the Yin Yang principle in Taoism, emphasizing the importance of maintaining balance and harmony in the world, embodying both positive and negative aspects of existence to reflect a holistic view of life.



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LESSON FOR CHILDREN

Several people in sequence read the following text as everyone is given a piece of dark paper and light paper, scissors, glue, tape, string, clothes hangers and/or shish kebab skewers. Ask them to make a collage, sculpture or mobile that has equal parts light and dark-their own version of the Yin Yang Symbol.

“Here we are sitting with our friends in a quiet room, just like how people downstairs are gathering. Quakers believe in something very special. We believe that there's a powerful and loving force in the universe, kind of like a big, warm hug that's always around us and in us.”

“We believe that this loving force, which we call by different names, created everything and is in everything. It's like an artist painting a beautiful picture or a baker making a delicious cake. This loving force made the universe, the stars, the planets, and even us! When the sun unfurls its rays each morning, it shows us the fragrant forests, the bright flowers with insects dancing around them, the deep oceans and its many silvery creatures, and the majestic mountains where birds soar. We see in the sunlight all the amazing work of this loving force that created the universe and in all its beauty.”

“Now imagine the world when the sun goes to sleep, and darkness gently wraps everything like a cozy blanket. Picture the night sky, where countless stars twinkle like tiny, sparkling jewels, and the moon changes its shape, like a celestial friend saying hello in different ways. During the night, everything becomes quiet and peaceful. All living things, like animals and plants, are tucked into their beds, fast asleep. It's a time when dreams bloom, and nature rests and grows.”

“In this quiet darkness, you can also find a special moment for yourself. Just like how you might sit quietly with your thoughts during a Quaker meeting, at night you can sit in the dark and feel an amazement and connection to how vast and mysterious the universe is. It's like a big, beautiful puzzle waiting to be explored. And as you sit in the peaceful night, you can also feel grateful for the beauty of the night and the chance to rest and dream. It's like getting that warm, bedtime hug from that gentle power. In each of us lives something deeper and unspoken that is bigger and better than anything we can say or do, better than all of us.”

“Spending time in nature, enjoying the beauty and harmony of the natural world around us, helps us feel closer to that loving force, like basking in the sun's warm embrace or wrapped in the deep mystery of darkness. We know that we are a part of this loving force, and just as the Light and Dark nourishes the Earth, taking care of our Earth is taking care of ourselves.”

In beauty I walk
With beauty before me I walk
With beauty behind me I walk
With beauty around me I walk
It has become beauty again
It has become beauty again
Diné – The Beauty Way”

[Read the Lenape Creation Myth or a myth from your local area indigenous people.]

QUERY

How do I see love at work in the natural world around and within me?

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ACTIVITIES

Visit with Maureen Regan of Green Earth Urban Gardens and the Pollinator Garden in the back of Flushing Monthly Meeting for a lesson on the importance and difference of Light and Dark in the natural world.

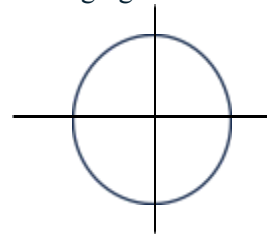
Walk in the garden. Use your journal to record what you see in the garden every time you come to the Meeting House. Identify as many plants, animals and insects as you can. You'll find something new each time. Watch out for poison ivy!

Milk Jug Gardens. Start gardens last week of March. Gather large milk jugs, potting soil and seeds. Cut the top half part way off. If its winter you can use the top half to cover the gardens. If its summer you can cut the top half completely off. Punch 5 holes in the bottom for drainage. Scatter a few pebbles on the bottom if available. Use potting soil to fill 1/3 to half way. Moisten the soil and plant the seeds according to package. This is a project to take home and put in the sun. Water the tiny gardens regularly, usually every day. When the seedlings are an appropriate size according to package, you can transplant to our garden.

Sun Dial. Gather twelve fist size stones, shells or other objects. Paint the numbers 1 through 12 on them. Bring in a straight dowel or rod, about two feet in length (the gnomon). Out in the garden find a spot that gets full sun for most of the day. At twelve noon exactly plant the gnomon, leaning north. (Subtract your latitude from 90 to get the slant degree – NYC is 40.730610, so that would mean tilt it at a 50 degree angle). Place the “12” stone at the shadow. Each hour go out and place the subsequent stones until dusk. (For the committed, the next day repeat at dawn.)

Black and White Mobile. Gather black and white papers and materials and each person makes a personal version of a Tao symbol - equal parts black and white. Hang them all up as a mobile.

Half Citrus Bird Feeders. Gather large oranges, bird seeds, bamboo skewers and string. Cut the oranges in half and carefully scoop out interiors. Eat them. Skewer the orange rind bowls through so as to be able to hang them up with the string. (see diagram). Tie strings to each protruding rod and tie the ends together at the top to make a hanging basket. Fill with bird seed and find a place to hang them outside.



Record the phases of the Moon in your journal. Note the Native American names for each moon. What do other cultures celebrate about this particular phase of moon? What other special celestial events are occurring this month?

Cyanotype Postcard Kits – Cyanotype kits are available online (try Bableu.com) or at Blick Art Supplies.

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FIELD TRIPS

Queens Botanical Garden (or Bronx or Brooklyn Botanical Gardens)

Poppenhusen Institute in College Point, to learn about the local history of the Native American People of this region

American Museum of Natural History, Manhattan, New York

Alley Pond Nature Center, Queens, New York

READINGS AND RESOURCES

Zinn Education Project <https://www.zinnedproject.org/> The Zinn Education Project promotes and supports the teaching of people's history in middle and high school classrooms. Based on Howard Zinn's best-selling book *A People's History of the United States*, the website offers free, downloadable lessons and articles organized by theme, time period, and reading level.

Joseph Bruchac books:

Keepers of the earth : native American stories and environmental activities for children by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac

Return of the sun : native American tales from the Northeast woodlands by Joseph Bruchac

Keepers of the Animals : Native American stories and wildlife activities for children by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac ;

Thirteen moons on turtle's back : a Native American year of moons by Joseph Bruchac and Jonathan London

Keepers of the Night : Native American stories and nocturnal activities for children Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac

Keepers of life : discovering plants through Native American stories and earth activities for children by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac

The Story of the Milky Way : a Cherokee tale by Joseph Bruchac and Gayle Ross

Between Earth & Sky : legends of Native American sacred places by Joseph Bruchac

Native American gardening : stories, projects, and recipes for families Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac

Native American games and stories by James Bruchac and Joseph Bruchac

Seasons of the circle : a Native American year by Joseph Bruchac

The Girl who helped Thunder and other Native American folktales retold by James Bruchac and Joseph Bruchac; (2008)

The Great Kapok Tree by Lynn Cherry (for young children read aloud on YouTube)

The Secret of Platano by Luz Maria Mack

The Vast Wonder of the World: Biologist Ernest Everett Just by Mélina Mangal

Beyond Words: What Elephants and Whales Think and Feel by Car Safina

Wangari Maathai: The Woman Who Planted Millions of Trees by Franck Prevot

Glow by Ruth Forman

POC: Introduction to Quakerism for Families

10/29/25

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Lenape Creation Myth



The Lenape believe that, before creation, there was nothing, an empty dark space. However, in this emptiness, there existed a spirit of their creator, Kishelamakank. Eventually in that emptiness, he fell asleep. While he slept, he dreamt of the world as we know it today, the Earth with mountains, forests, and animals. He also dreamt up man, and he saw the ceremonies man would perform. Then he woke up from his dream to the same nothingness he was living in before. Kishelamakank then started to create the Earth as he had dreamt it.

First, he created helper spirits, the Grandfathers of the North, East, and West, and the Grandmother of the South. Together, they created the Earth just as Kishelamakank had dreamt it. One of their final acts was creating a special tree. From the roots of this tree came the first man, and when the tree bent down and kissed the ground, woman sprang from it.

All the animals and humans did their jobs on the Earth, until eventually a problem arose. There was a tooth of a giant bear that could give the owner magical powers, and the humans started to fight over it. Eventually, the wars got so bad that people moved away, and made new tribes and new languages. Kishelamakank saw this fighting and decided to send a spirit down, Nanapush, to bring everyone back together. He went on top of a mountain and started the first Sacred Fire, which gave off a smoke that caused all the people of the world to come investigate what it was. When they all came, Nanapush created a pipe with a sumac branch and a soapstone bowl, and the creator gave him Tobacco to smoke with. Nanapush then told the people that whenever they fought with each other, to sit down and smoke tobacco in the pipe, and they would make decisions that were good for everyone.

The same bear tooth later caused a fight between two evil spirits, a giant toad and an evil snake. The toad was in charge of all the waters, and amidst the fighting he ate the tooth and the snake. The snake then proceeded to bite his side, releasing a great flood upon the Earth. Nanapush saw this destruction and began climbing a mountain to avoid the flood, all the while grabbing animals that he saw and sticking them in his sash. At the top of the mountain there was a cedar tree that he started to climb, and as he climbed he broke off limbs of the tree. When he got to the top of the tree, he pulled out his bow, played it and sang a song that made the waters stop. Nanapush then asked which animal he could put the branches and the rest of the animals on top of in the water. The turtle volunteered saying he'd float and they could all stay on him, and that's why they call the land turtle island.

Nanapush then decided the turtle needed to be bigger for everyone to live on, so he asked the animals if one of them would dive down into the water to get some of the old Earth. The beaver tried first, but came up dead and Nanapush had to revive him. The loon tried second, but its attempt ended with the same fate. Lastly, the muskrat tried. He stayed down the longest, and came up dead as well, but he had some Earth

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on his nose that Nanapush put on the Turtles back. Because of his accomplishment, Nanapush told the muskrat he was blessed and his kind would always thrive in the land.

Nanapush then took out his bow and again sang, and the turtle started to grow. It kept growing, and Nanapush sent out animals to try to get to the edge to see how long it had grown. First, he sent the bear, and the bear returned in two days saying he had reached the end. Next, he sent out the deer, who came back in two weeks saying he had reached the end. Finally, he sent the wolf, and the wolf never returned because the land had gotten so big. The Lenape claim that this is why the wolf howls, that it is really a call for their ancestor to come back home.