

**What we want the children to understand from this work:**

Recognizing the importance of Indigenous women and girls in families and communities.

Recognize the importance of matriarchs and the matriarchal system

Recognize the connection and importance of family over generations

**Background Information:** I invite you to learn about Indigenous matriarchal systems that have been in place since time out of mind. Please take the opportunity to investigate the communities where you live and see how they have been structured and the roles of women in their community.

In many Indigenous communities' women are the centre of the community structure. Women are seen as the life givers, knowledge holders, and leaders of the community. Our bloodlines run through our mothers, and our mother's families. Since contact of European settlers Indigenous governing systems have been decimated and replaced with the patriarchal system. The colonial powers sought to impose their systems of governance and patriarchy, which devalue women's rights and roles. Land dispossession and forced assimilation was aimed to destroy Indigenous autonomy and self-governance. The colonial political system has placed Indigenous women in a vulnerable position where they are more likely to experience violence, sexual assault, and family separation.

Through learning about Tess's story of love, family, and loss, I encourage you as an educator/parent to explore the matriarchal system and all that is built upon to see how Indigenous communities and world views differ from the systems in place today.

**Understanding the role of women and matriarchs in Indigenous communities:**

- Women are life givers in community. Carrying the sacred responsibility of bringing life into the world and nurturing it.
- Being a life giver, gives women a strong connection to the land, water, and natural cycles.
- Matriarchs are the keepers of Indigenous languages, cultural teachings, and a story book of their lived experiences.
- Their role is to pass the stories and culture on to the next generation with all they know. They help preserve the culture, language, and songs of their communities. They also hold the story of the land and know migration patterns, life patterns, and water patterns in order to be able to make decisions on where to live, where to move to, and when the time is right to move.
- Women also play a central role in Indigenous governance and decision making, they support the males in community. Women are decision-makers and contribute to the overall well-being and prosperity of their communities.

- Many Indigenous woman leaders have started movements like Idle No More, and the land-based resistance to pipelines, water protectors and the Kanesatake Resistance (Oka)
- Reclaiming Indigenous matriarchal roles is a vital part of healing and resurgence for many Indigenous communities today.

**Preparation:** Please read Tess's Story of her Red Dress first and select sections that you will focus your questions on about connection, family, and love. Please review the lesson to help see the connections.

**Materials needed:** wool pieces, art material to make paper figures and decorations, one premade piece, 3 women cut out set- connected by a piece of wool showing the connection of family.

**Lesson:**

- Have students gather at the carpet. Let students know we will be talking about Indigenous communities, connections to family, and the land.
- To support students in their learning, ask them to think about some connections they can make to their own life. You could ask them to think about their connections, or maybe have a few students share, or talk to an elbow partner about the people in their lives.
- Sample Questions:
  - I would like you to think about the people in your life, who are the people that you spend a lot of time with?
  - What are some things that you do together, like going on walks, going to the playground, cooking together, playing together, etc.
  - Are these people you see everyday? Or could they be just as important to you if you don't see them all the time? Like family that lives far away from you?
  - Are they older than you? Younger than you?
  - I am wondering what makes them important to you?

**Introduction to the book-** Tess's red Dress, please make sure you name the author and illustrator. It was written by Carolyn Roberts and Illustrated by Kelsey Mata Foote.

- As you are reading the book, pick some stop points that make connections to the relationship between Tess and her mom, Mom's relationship with her sister, Mom's relationship with her mom, and Tess's relationship to her grandmother.
- After you have read the book- what are some ways that you can see the connections of family in the book? Connections to Tess, Mom, Mom's sister, and Grandmother.
- Why do you think that the stories told are important to Mom? Why are the stories told important for Tess to hear? What are the connections to family in the story?

- Mom telling the stories of growing up with her sister, helps mom in remembering her sister and their life together. It also helps to keep her sister alive and part of the family.
- By talking about her sister and how she and her sister were raised, helps Tess see and understand the meaning of family.
- Understanding that when people in our family are no longer with us, we are missing a rich part of our history, culture, and connection. This impacts the whole family and generations to come.
- Seeing the love within the family is so important to see because when Indigenous stories are told, we usually only hear about the trauma and not about the love. This book focuses on love, family, and healing.
- Always remember to teach Indigenous Brilliance.
- Ask the students if there is something that they have learned from a mom, auntie, grandmother, or sister? What was it?
- Have prepared an example: 3-4 decorated women cut outs, make sure that there is a hole in each cut out to put the wool through. As you talk about Indigenous women and their role in community (look at the list above), put the wool through the holes, connecting each cut out together. The end piece should have the wool connecting the pieces that show visually the connections to each Indigenous woman cut out.
- Share with the students some of the facts about how Indigenous women are seen within Indigenous communities (as seen in the above list)

### Activity

Give student options:

#### Step 1

- They could decorate premade woman cut out pieces
- Or they can create their own cutout woman figures

#### Step 2

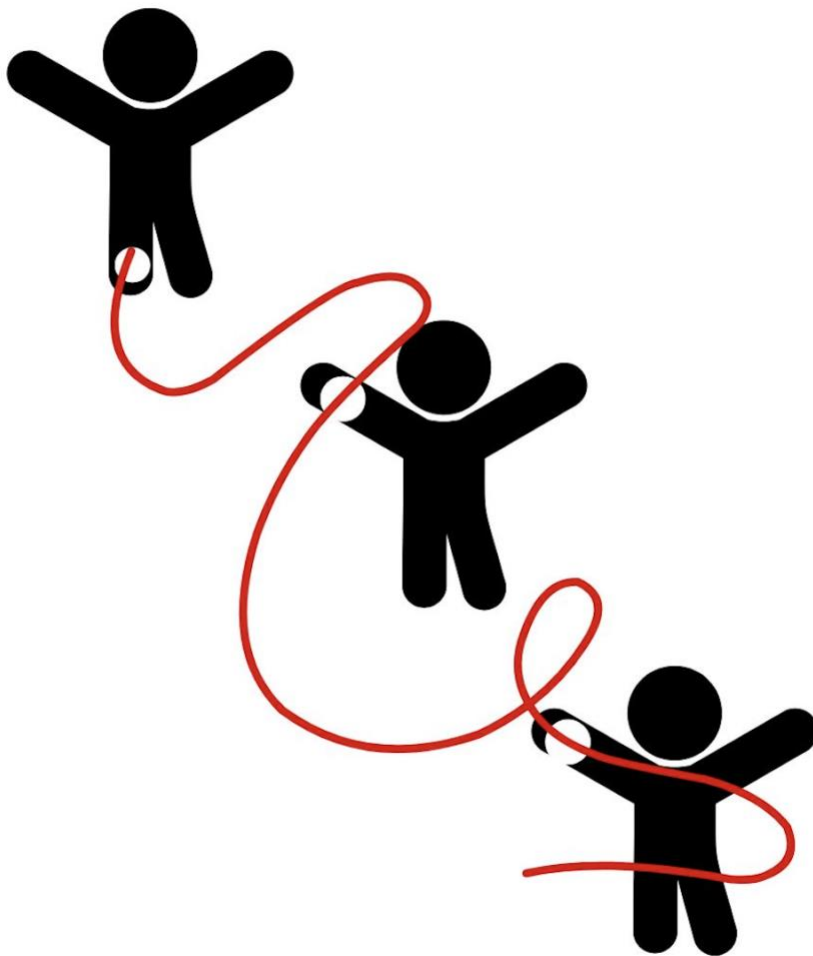
- Students can create women in their lives they are connected to
- Or students can make a 3-generation woman cut out based on the story

### Once completed check for students understanding of the lesson:

- You can ask them verbally what they learned about Indigenous women and communities? Why do they think the connection to women in Indigenous communities is important?
- You can ask them who they are connected to in their family and why it might be important?
- Ask questions that relate to the outcomes at the beginning of the lesson:

- Recognizing the importance of Indigenous women and girls in families and communities.
- Recognize the importance of matriarchs in Indigenous communities
- Recognize the connection of family over generations

**Example of the wool connecting the generations of women.**



**Example of a cut out to decorate:** You can also look online to find ones that work for you. I would suggest a very basic design that students can put their own ideas into like the one below.

