

## Land-Based Reflection: Sitting with the Lake

On a clear, bright afternoon in late October, I spend two hours at Williamson Park near the docks. It is about 2:45 pm, the temperature around ten degrees, with a light wind moving in from the northeast that brushes gently against my face and hands. I find a large, cold rock near the edge of the lake and decide that this will be my place. As I sit, the chill from the rock seeps through my clothing, grounding me into the moment. From where I am, I can hear the faint, steady hum of vehicles from the highway about a kilometer away, blending into the background like a distant echo. The wind moves through the trees, rustling the few remaining leaves, while others skitter and scrape softly across the parking lot rocks. Most of the trees stand bare now, their branches exposed, their green leaves long blown away, leaving behind a quiet openness that feels both still and alive.

The lake reflects the blue sky above, its surface shifting as small ripples move outward with each passing gust of wind. Light catches on the water, creating a soft shimmer that appears and disappears just as quickly. On the far side, I notice a man running his dog near the playground, their movement small against the distance. The dog runs ahead, then circles back. After about fifteen minutes, they leave. I am alone.

The lake and the calm of the park bring a sense of relief, though at first it is hard to sit still. My thoughts remain full, coursework, responsibilities, the constant vibration of everyday life lingering in my mind. For the first half hour, I feel it in my body, a restless energy that hasn't settled, as if I have carried the noise of the world with me into this space.

As Marcus (2023) explains, “a landscape often shows traces of older forms and symbols, not just recent features. Therefore, what exists in any given place are multiple layers of meaning that are waiting to be revealed, interpreted, and understood by those who encounter them” (p. 126). Sitting by the lake, I begin to feel these layers rather than just think about them: the distant sound of the highway slowly softening into the rhythm of the wind, the cool air brushing against my skin, and memories of time spent here with family rising quietly to the surface. There is a stillness, but it is not empty, it feels full, carrying stories the land holds.

In those first moments, I notice how hard it is to be still with the land rather than simply on it. I catch myself asking: What am I supposed to feel? What am I supposed to learn? My thoughts move quickly, searching for something to hold onto. I want to engage more deeply with the land, with intention, instead of just visiting because I have been here before. This time feels different. I am approaching it with a new lens of inquiry, wondering how long it will take for my body and mind to soften and release into the moment.

This spot has always been a place of solitude, a place that breathes. I can feel that breath in the movement of the wind across the water. It carries teachings from the past and present, and it holds life for future generations yet to come. It is not just a place; it is a vessel of strength and identity. Many Indigenous families gathered here, living in respectful relationship with the land, taking only what was needed to sustain their families, while caring for all that lives on it.

As I sit on the cold rock, earlier moments begin to return to me, moments I didn't give much attention to at the time. I think back to arriving here earlier today and stepping out of my car. A crow greeted me, squawking from a nearby tree, circling once before flying off. I didn't pause with it then. My thoughts were louder than the wind. Now, as I begin to sink more fully into the

space, the moment comes back to me differently. I find myself returning to the crow with more attention, wondering if it had been a kind of welcome.

It takes about forty-five minutes before my senses begin to ease. Slowly, the sound of the highway fades into the background hum of the wind. I begin to feel the warmth of the sun on my back and the softness of the breeze across my skin. My breathing slows, becoming deeper and steadier. It feels as though the land is teaching me how to be still again, how to listen.

Marcus (2023) writes about how layers of meaning exist within a place, how the past stays folded into the land itself. Sitting here, I begin to sense those layers around me, alive in the quiet. I take off my boots and socks to feel the earth beneath my feet. Each step into the grass and sand feels like a quiet exchange, the land holding me, teaching through touch rather than thought. I notice how my movements begin to align with the rhythms already present: the wind moving across the water, the distant calls of birds, and the gentle curve of the shoreline around me.

Sitting on the grass, my attention begins to shift, and I find myself thinking of my husband's late grandmother, Mrs. Soto, who lived just a few kilometers up from the park. Her presence feels close here. I can see her big, light grayish-blue house in my mind, the wooden porch stretching out front, and the garden she tended each spring, potatoes, carrots, beets, and onions growing in the soil she cared for year after year.

I can almost smell the bannock baking in the oven, warm and steady, and see the gentle steam rising from her small coffee pot. She would greet everyone with kindness, always ready to share what she had, offering smoked fish or fresh bread, depending on who had come to visit and what was prepared that day. There was always enough, and everyone was welcomed in.

I hear the creak of the porch boards beneath our feet as we step outside to sit in her lawn chairs, the wood already warm from the morning sun. Her voice carries softly as she tells stories, about her parents, her siblings, and the families who fished and traded along the lake for generations, including my grandfather and his parents, long before I was born. These are not just stories; they are connections, carried forward. Her eyes would light up when she spoke of summer gatherings, the long days of children running across the yard, laughter moving across the water, and the smell of wood smoke rising from the stove, blending with pine and earth. There was a gentleness in her eyes and a calm presence in her voice. She was never one to speak just to fill space; her words came with intention. In the pauses, in the silences between what was said, there was meaning. When she spoke, it felt as though she was breathing life into her words, and into me, offering something to carry, to remember, and to hold onto.

Sitting at Williamson Park, I begin to feel those stories around me, not just as memory, but as presence. In the warmth of the sun on my back, the texture of the grass beneath my hands, and the movement of water at my toes, there is a sense that these connections continue. The land holds them, and for a moment, I am held within them too.

Gaudet (2019) describes Keeoukaywin, “the visiting way,” as a spiritual and relational practice that connects people, land, and all beings. Visiting carries responsibilities across generations and within all relations. The home becomes a place where knowledge is shared and carried forward, through teachings, guidance, food, and connection (Gaudet, 2019).

Reflecting on Mrs. Soto, I understand her ways of visiting, through cooking, sharing stories, and preparing food for others to take home, as living expressions of Keeoukaywin. These were not separate acts, but ways of maintaining relationship and care across time and family lines.

Sitting by the lake, I begin to understand visiting the land in a similar way: not as observation, but as relation. It requires listening, respect, and awareness of interconnectedness. In this understanding, land is not separate from visiting, it is part of the relationship itself.

By the end of my time, I feel grounded, calm, and grateful. What begins as an assignment to simply “sit” becomes a journey of remembering, visiting, and reconnecting. The land reminds me of where I come from, the people and places that have shaped me, and the responsibilities carried within those relationships. In the quiet, I come to understand that my sense of place is also my story. The land and I are intertwined. Sitting here, I feel both my restlessness and my roots, and through Keeoukaywin, I am reminded that visiting the land is not separate from life, but part of living with meaning and understanding ways of knowing.

I spend the remainder of my time journaling, noticing thoughts and feelings as they surface, and making connections to the readings for this assignment.

Leaving the lake, I feel lighter and more centered. The hum of the highway no longer pulls at me; instead, it becomes part of the wider rhythm of everything alive, the wind, water, grass, and my non-human relatives. This place has always offered space to simply be, and that stillness is what I needed. I leave with a renewed sense that connection is not about how far you travel, but how fully you arrive.



## Reference

- Gaudet, J. C. (2019). Keeoukaywin: The visiting way, Fostering an Indigenous research methodology. *Aboriginal Policy Studies*, 7(2), 47–64. <https://doi.org/10.5663/aps.v7i2.29336>
- Marcus, A. P. (2023). Using “autogeography,” sense of place and place-based approaches in the pedagogy of geographic thought. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 47(1), 71–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2021.1991290>