

# HOW TO LOSE EVERY- THING

A CURRICULUM GUIDE

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# INTRODUCTION

“First, your heart will break.”

When I was writing the final passage of my memoir *How to Lose Everything*, it immediately took shape in my mind as an animated film. Animation seemed a perfect medium for grief – animation, like grief, can be so abstract and shifting, real and surreal, and it’s simply so time consuming. There is no fast way to create an animated project except frame by frame, no way through grief except moment by moment.

The idea was swimming in my mind when I saw a short animation by bekkie O’Neil on social media, and I knew right away: that was who I wanted to animate my text.

We were so incredibly lucky to receive funding through the Creation Accelerator program from the Canada Council for the Arts and CBC. Through that fund, bekkie and I were able to produce a short film based on that final section of my book. Cris Derksen composed an original score and our film *How to Lose Everything: A Field Guide* came to life.

Concurrently through that fund, along with my co-producer Michelle St. John and support from our executive producer Grazyna Krupa, I developed a series idea with eight other Indigenous artists to create and share personal stories of loss that would be connected thematically but also each stand on their own independently. Those artists were writers Archer Pechawis, Tara Williamson, Smokii Sumac and Taqralik Partridge and animators Terril Calder, Chief Lady Bird, Meky Ottawa and Megan Kyak-Monteith. Composers Melody McKiver, G.R. Gritt and Inge Thomson joined the project as well.

And that’s how one short film about grief grew into a five episode series.

That and thousands of watercolour images, hundreds of oil pastel lines, and one rotoscoped grass dancer; *How to Lose Everything* the series premiered on CBC Gem in 2023 in both English and Indigenous language versions. The Indigenous languages versions reflects the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action 14, importantly, while also powerfully reflects each writer’s culture and story. Additionally, it is an offering to Indigenous communities to see another aspect of themselves in the storytelling.



After the launch of the series, educator Cory Silverberg reached out to me to ask if I was creating curriculum guides. The idea hasn't occurred to me, but I loved it! Cory was instrumental in helping me understand what that could look like, and then in another way this incredible project organically grew into something bigger and bigger, I was introduced to Shannon Winterstein who brought her expertise to writing and creating this guide.

Through these guides, I hope the stories in this series continue to plant seeds and grow into other ideas, art, conversations, and more stories; I hope that we all feel more connected and less alone in our grief by sharing those stories.

– Christa Couture



Photo by Jen Squires

# USER GUIDE

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the "How to Lose Everything" curriculum guide, a resource designed to support educators in facilitating meaningful and engaging learning experiences by exploring this powerful short film series. This guide is thoughtfully organized to cater to different age levels—grade school, junior or middle school, high school, and post-secondary education—ensuring that the content and activities are developmentally appropriate and impactful.

## STRUCTURE OF THE GUIDE

Each section of this guide is tailored to suit the needs of various educational stages. Whether teaching younger students or leading discussions with more mature learners, this guide provides flexible options for integrating the films into your curriculum.

- **Grade School:** Activities and discussion points are simplified and focus on fundamental concepts that younger students can grasp and explore.
- **Junior/Middle School:** This section builds on foundational ideas and introduces more complex themes suitable for pre-teens and early teens.
- **High School:** The guide delves deeper into the themes for older students, encouraging critical thinking and more nuanced discussions.
- **Post-Secondary:** Activities and discussions at this level are designed to challenge students with complex, interdisciplinary approaches, fostering advanced analysis and reflection.

## VIEWING THE EPISODES

The curriculum is designed to be flexible, allowing educators to present all five episodes or select specific episodes that align with their learning objectives. After viewing, students engage in various activities tailored to reinforce and expand their understanding of the themes presented in the films.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Each episode is supported by a variety of activities, categorized into four primary learning modalities, each represented by a unique icon:



- **Verbal:** These activities focus on discussion, debate, storytelling and other forms of verbal communication.



- **Auditory:** These activities focus on active listening, music, and other auditory-based learning experiences.



- **Kinaesthetic:** This category offers interactive and physical engagement for students who learn best through movement and hands-on activities.



- **Visual:** Activities incorporating imagery, drawing, and visual interpretation of the film's themes support visual learners.

Educators are encouraged to select activities that best meet their students' needs. In a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) classroom, this guide provides an excellent opportunity to empower learners to choose the learning modality that resonates most with them.

## INVITING COMMUNITY GUESTS



Some activities within this guide are marked with a *Guest Icon*, indicating that they may touch on themes or practices where cultural sensitivity is paramount. To ensure that these activities are conducted respectfully and avoid cultural appropriation, it is recommended that a guest from the Indigenous community be invited. Their presence enriches the learning experience and fosters a deeper understanding and respect for the cultural contexts explored in the films.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Throughout the guide, you will notice a *Cursor Icon*. Clicking on this icon will take you directly to an external resource relevant to the explored activity or topic. These links provide additional insights, materials, or support for the suggested activities, offering a broader context or deeper understanding of the themes.



It is important to note that the best way to learn about Indigenous Peoples is directly from Indigenous Peoples themselves. Whenever possible, working with the community is considered best practice. Indigenous knowledge and time are invaluable, and it is crucial to approach this work with respect and integrity. Where possible, efforts should be made to compensate Indigenous Peoples for their contributions, ensuring their expertise and cultural teachings are recognized and honoured.

For a deeper understanding of aligning learning outcomes with Indigenous ways of knowing, refer to the article [“Switching from Bloom to the Medicine Wheel: Creating Learning Outcomes that Support Indigenous Ways of Knowing in Post-Secondary Education.”](#)

## **ASSESSMENTS**

While Western assessments often follow a linear approach, Indigenous pedagogy views learning as a cyclical process. This perspective allows students multiple opportunities to engage with the material, receive feedback, and revisit the learning outcomes. By embracing this approach, educators can create an environment that honours the ongoing nature of learning, encouraging students to grow and develop their understanding over time rather than seeing assessment as a final endpoint.

## **UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL)**

This guide is rooted in Universal Design for Learning (UDI) principles, an approach that draws from Indigenous pedagogies. Indigenous pedagogies often emphasize flexibility, inclusivity, and meeting learners where they are in their educational journey. By allowing students to choose how they engage with the material, educators can create a more personalized and practical learning experience, ensuring that all students can access and benefit from the curriculum.

## **GETTING STARTED**

To begin, select the guide section corresponding to your student's age level. Review the episodes and activities available and decide whether you will present all episodes or focus on specific ones. Then, choose the activities that align with your teaching goals and the needs of your learners. Whether you follow the guide as written or adapt it to fit your unique classroom dynamics, this resource is designed to support you in fostering a rich and meaningful exploration of the "How to Lose Everything" film series.



The background of the entire page is a vibrant yellow color with a repeating floral pattern. The pattern consists of various types of flowers, including clusters of small blossoms and larger, more detailed blooms, all rendered in a lighter shade of yellow. The flowers are interspersed with green leaves and stems, creating a dense and decorative texture.

**EPISODES**

**OVERVIEW**

# How to Lose Everything: A Field Guide



DIRECTED BY **CHRISTA COUTURE & BEKKY O'NEIL**  
WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY **CHRISTA COUTURE**  
PRODUCED BY **CHRISTA COUTURE & MICHELLE ST. JOHN**

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# How to Lose Everything: A Field Guide tânisi kesiwanihtâyan kahkiyaw kîkway

**Directed by:** Christa Couture and beky O'Neil

**Written & Performed by:** Christa Couture

**Animated by:** beky O'Neil

**Composed by:** Cris Derksen

## SUMMARY:

In the first episode of the series "How to Lose Everything," entitled "A Field Guide," we are presented with a stirring and reflective piece written by Christa Couture. This episode delves into Christa's narrative of enduring a series of profound losses—her leg, her children, and her marriage. She explores the multifaceted nature of grief and the journey toward healing with honesty and compassion. Christa presents us with the notion that the onset of grief brings a torrent of sorrow that can manifest both as an overpowering force and a paralyzing numbness. She advocates for embracing this agony, underscoring the necessity of giving oneself over to the shock and pain initially following a loss.

In her work, Christa likens grief to the ebb and flow of the ocean waves—sometimes daunting, sometimes subdued—but consistently present. She discusses sorrow as an emotion intricately linked to joy, one capable of comprehending both happiness and pain. The metamorphosis one undergoes after substantial loss often leaves a person more vulnerable in some areas and resilient in others.

Complementing the narrative's depth, beky O'Neil's animation elevates the experience through her artistic expression. beky's work in the film employs a dynamic interplay of movement and colour, presenting watercolours not merely as static images but as a fluid and engaging medium that captures the audience, drawing them into a visual interpretation of Christa's words. Her paintings, each a frame in this visual journey, harmonize seamlessly with the thematic essence of Christa's words, making the animation an integral component of the storytelling.



# A BEAR NAMED JESUS



DIRECTED BY  
**TERRIL CALDER**  
WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY  
**ARCHER PECHAWIS**  
PRODUCED BY  
**CHRISTA COUTURE & MICHELLE ST. JOHN**

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# 2

## A Bear Named Jesus maskwa Jesus kâ-isiihkâsoyit

**Directed by:** Terril Calder

**Written & Performed by:** Archer Pechawis

**Animated by:** Terril Calder

**Composed by:** Melody McKiver

### SUMMARY:

In the second episode of the series "How to Lose Everything," entitled "A Bear Named Jesus," Archer Pechawis presents a poignant and surreal tale that metaphorically delves into the profound effects of cultural dislocation and forced religious conversion on Indigenous communities. The narrative follows the abduction of his mother by a cult of rabid bears, led by a bear named Jesus, which leads her to renounce her traditional beliefs and disappear. This tale speaks to the loss of culture at the hands of an imposing belief system in a manner that is as disorienting as it is symbolic.

Terril Calder complements the story with mesmerizing stop-motion animation, giving life to the tale's complex characters through intricately detailed artistry. Each element represents deeper themes of loss, identity, and the struggle to maintain cultural integrity against the tide of homogenizing forces. Utilizing an array of mixed media, the animation's tactile quality pulls the viewer deeper into the story, uniting the visual and narrative elements that reflect the complexity of Archer's narrative.

The concluding irony is that the evangelist mother fails to recognize Jesus when he's with her child, which speaks volumes about the nature of belief and recognition. The bear, who finds refuge in the narrator's shed, becomes a comforting figure, sharing in traditional practices and fostering a sense of connection to the past that the mother has rejected. This film creates a compelling commentary on the complexities of reconciling one's culture with the impact of external influences.



# Heart Like A Powwow

DIRECTED BY **CHIEF LADY BIRD**  
WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY **TARA WILLIAMSON**  
PRODUCED BY **CHRISTA COUTURE & MICHELLE ST. JOHN**



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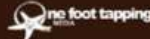
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# 3

## Heart Like A Pow Wow Niimidi'iwin Ode'

**Directed & Illustrated by:** Chief Lady Bird

**Written & Performed by:** Tara Williamson

**Animated by:** bekkyy O'Neil

**Composed by:** Tara Williamson

### SUMMARY:

The third episode of the series "How to Lose Everything," titled "Heart Like a Pow Wow," delves into themes of loss, connection, and cultural preservation. This compelling short film features Tara Williamson's poignant narrative and Chief Lady Bird's evocative art, drawing us into the imagery and sounds of the sky, thereby linking us to our ancestors, creation, and future generations.

"Heart Like A Pow Wow" explores grief through an Anishinaabe lens, emphasizing love and family. It invites viewers to appreciate how Spirit is revered within Indigenous cosmologies, where dance, memory, community, and Indigenous bodies are pivotal in celebrating life. Employing music, poetry, Anishinaabemowin, and vibrant visuals, the film intricately weaves relational dynamics to explore the transformation of Spirit into physical form. At its core, the narrative is a prelude to love, foreshadowing the grief that follows.

The film's narrative also portrays symbolic elements like thunderbirds, rumbling storms, and the genesis of life, reflecting the deep emotional and spiritual struggles encountered. As the storm intensifies, it depicts a healing journey through traditional practices, with scenes of hands repairing wounds with clay and bone, symbolizing a restoration of community and cultural ties.

This healing journey is enriched with whispered prayers and traditional songs, underscoring the importance of ancestral knowledge and practices in both healing and identity formation. The film concludes with a vibrant community dance, each movement and sound strengthening a sense of belonging and renewal. Chief Lady Bird's artistry encapsulates the narrator's path towards reconnecting and reclaiming their cultural identity.

# THERE ARE HIERARCHIES OF GRIEF



DIRECTED BY **MEKY OTTAWA**  
WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY **SMOKII SUMAC**  
PRODUCED BY **CHRISTA COUTURE & MICHELLE ST. JOHN**

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# 4 There are Hierarchies of Grief

## Ya·qaqa'ki na 'a·kinmiyit

**Directed by:** Meky Ottawa

**Written & Performed by:** Smokii Sumac

**Animated by:** Meky Ottawa

**Composed by:** G.R. Gritt

### **SUMMARY:**

In the fourth episode of the series "How to Lose Everything," entitled "There Are Hierarchies of Grief," we experience a heartfelt tribute to mothers who have endured the profound loss of a child. This installment weaves a poignant narrative that balances themes of resilience and mourning, creating a space for collective healing and remembrance. Through Smokii Sumac's eloquent discourse, we explore the complex human connections that transcend conventional definitions of affection, acknowledging a duality of care—imbued with both sorrow and joy.

The narrative not only shares a mother's profound sorrow but also invites us to witness the emergence of a bond characterized by profound depth, integrity, reciprocity, and heartfelt affection. The mother's story of perseverance mirrors Smokii's own reflections following a deeply disappointing political outcome. Feeling the weight of grief, Smokii looks to those who have faced "mornings worse than this one"; the mothers in his life who have grieved the loss of their children. Through their stories, the video illustrates the enduring nature of resilience and how we find inspiration and strength in the example of others.

Meky's animation adds a delicate touch, using moments of stillness to deepen the audience's engagement. Synchronized with the musical score and the cadence of the narrator's voice, the animation draws the audience into an intimate tale of loss, grief, compassion, and unyielding resilience. This piece serves as a love poem to bereaved moms and to all who may feel hopeless, reminding us that no matter how isolated we may feel, we are not alone in our grief.





# Grape Soda in the Parking Lot




DIRECTED BY  
**MEGAN KYAK-MONTEITH & TAQALIK PARTRIDGE**  
WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY  
**TAQALIK PARTRIDGE**  
PRODUCED BY  
**CHRISTA COUTURE & MICHELLE ST. JOHN**

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**EPISODE  
GUIDES**

**GRADE SCHOOL**



# How to Lose Everything: A Field Guide

## tânisi kesiwanihtâyan kahkiyaw kîkway

**OBJECTIVE:** Introduce students to the concepts of loss, emotions, and coping mechanisms.

### ACTIVITIES:



#### Story Time:

After watching “How to Lose Everything: A Field Guide” have your class sit in a circle to answer the following questions:

- What are the main emotions displayed by the character in the episode?
- How does the character handle their feelings of loss?
- What are some ways people show their feelings when they experience loss?



#### Art Activities:

- Have students create a support tree, having them write the names of those they can reach out to for support onto leaf cutouts. Students can create their own tree or you can create one as a class. (Handout #1)
- Have students create and ‘Emotion Wheel’ using different colours to represent various emotions. (Handout #2)



#### Role-Playing:

- Have students pair up and act out a scenario where one person is comforting a friend who has experienced a loss, such as losing an important item or moving away from friends.



#### Music Activities:

- Have student use classroom instruments to create a piece that expresses different stages of grief. They could work in groups to compose short pieces reflecting emotions like sadness, confusion, and hope.



# A Bear Named Jesus

## maskwa Jesus kâ-isiihkâsoyit

**OBJECTIVE:** Explore storytelling, metaphors, and cultural identity.

### ACTIVITIES:



#### Story Time:

After watching “A Bear Names Jesus” have your class sit in a circle to answer the following:

- How does the Story of “A Bear Named Jesus” show us the importance of culture?
- Can you identify any symbols in the film that represent the character’s culture?
- Why is it important to respect different cultural beliefs and practices? Can you think of an example from your own life?



#### Art Activities:

- Have students draw a map of their culture. This could be an accurate map of their neighbourhood or an imaginary map of what makes up their cultural identity.(Handout #3)
- Have students create a class puzzle, each student completes one piece sharing about their culture, then all pieces are put together. Themes could be explaining their names, languages, or traditions. (Handout #4)



#### Role-Playing:

- Students act out a scenario where they have to explain a cultural tradition of theirs to someone who is just learning.



#### Music Activities:

- Have students create simple melodies using a digital music app or classroom instruments that they feel could represent the film’s cultural themes. They can think about how music elements (like tempo and rhythm) can reflect cultural identity.

# Heart Like A Pow Wow

## Niimidi'iwin Ode'

**OBJECTIVE:** Discuss grief through the lens of Anishinaabe culture and traditions.

### ACTIVITIES:



#### Story Time:

After watching “Heart Like a Pow Wow” have your class sit in a circle to answer the following:

- What role did community play in this story? How are our ancestors part of our community?
- What images stood out for you? What did you like about them?
- How did the music in this episode make you feel?



#### Art Activities:

- Have students create a night sky of their ancestors. If they don't know their ancestors, ask them to imagine who they might have been. (Handout #5)
- Have students draw, write, or use cutout examples, to [differentiate between costumes and regalia](#). (Handout #6)



#### Role-Playing:

- Students in groups create a short skit showing how a community comes together to support someone who has experienced a significant loss. (Handout #7)



#### Music Activity:

- Have students participate in a drum circle - either big drum or hand drums. This could be facilitated by an Indigenous guest speaker.



# 4 There are Hierarchies of Grief

## Ya·qaqa'ki na 'a·kinmiyit

**OBJECTIVE:** Learn about community support and nature's role in coping with grief.

### ACTIVITIES:



#### Story Time:

After watching “The Are Hierarchies of Grief” have your class sit in a circle to answer the following:

- How did friends help each other in the film?
- What role did nature play in helping people feel better?
- What can you do to help a friend who is feeling sad?
- What do you like to do outside that makes you feel happy?



#### Art Activity:

- Nature Helps Us Heal - Ask students to draw their favourite place in nature where they feel happy and calm, such as a park or the beach. (Handout #8)



#### Nature Walk and Collage:

- Take a walk, discuss nature's comforting aspects, and do a nature journal page. (Handout #9)



#### Music Activity:

- Students choose a song or piece of music that they think represents the concept of community support in times of grief, as explored in the film. The students can present their chosen song to the class and explain why they chose it.

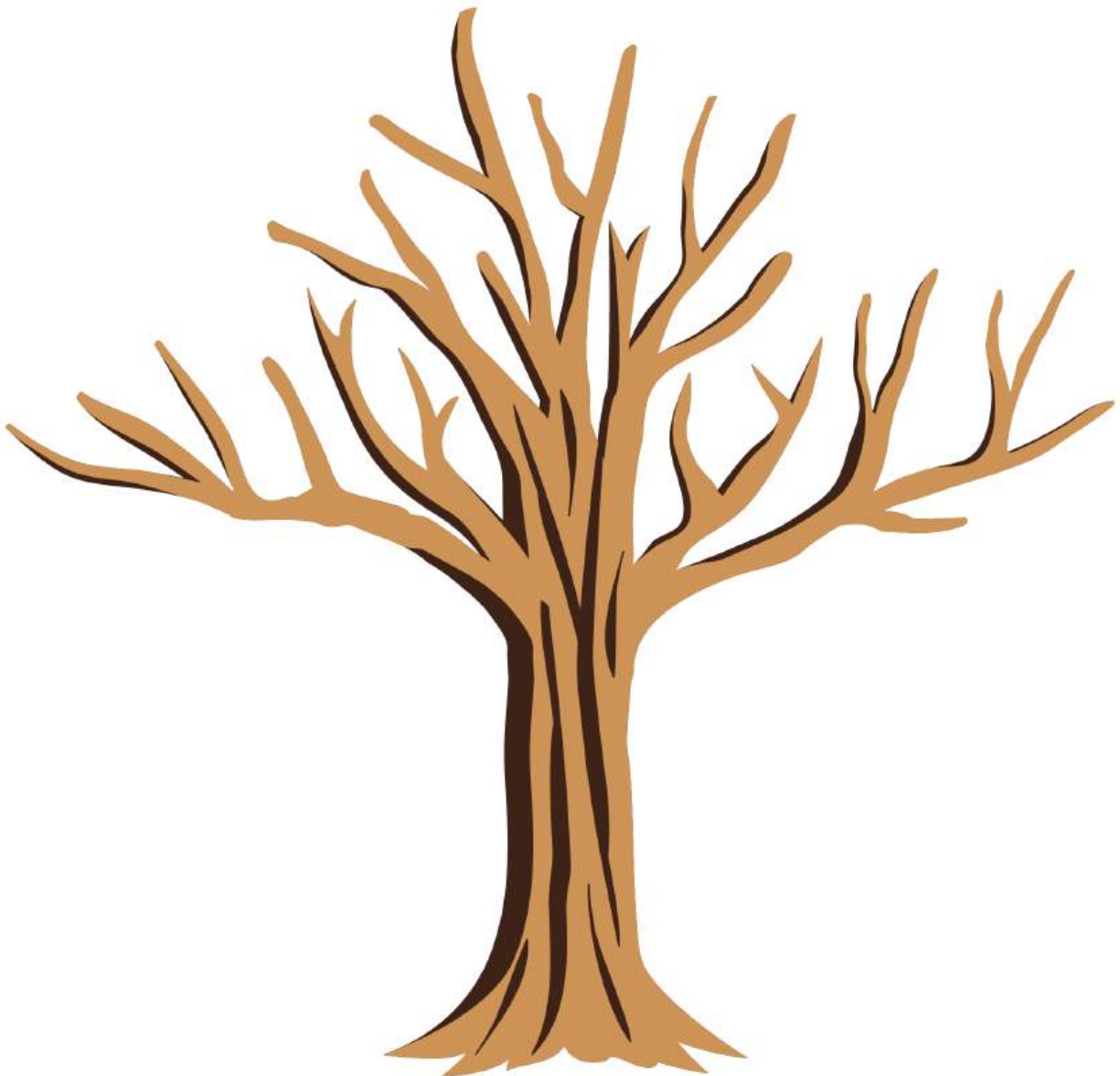


**HANDOUT #1**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

**Support Tree:**

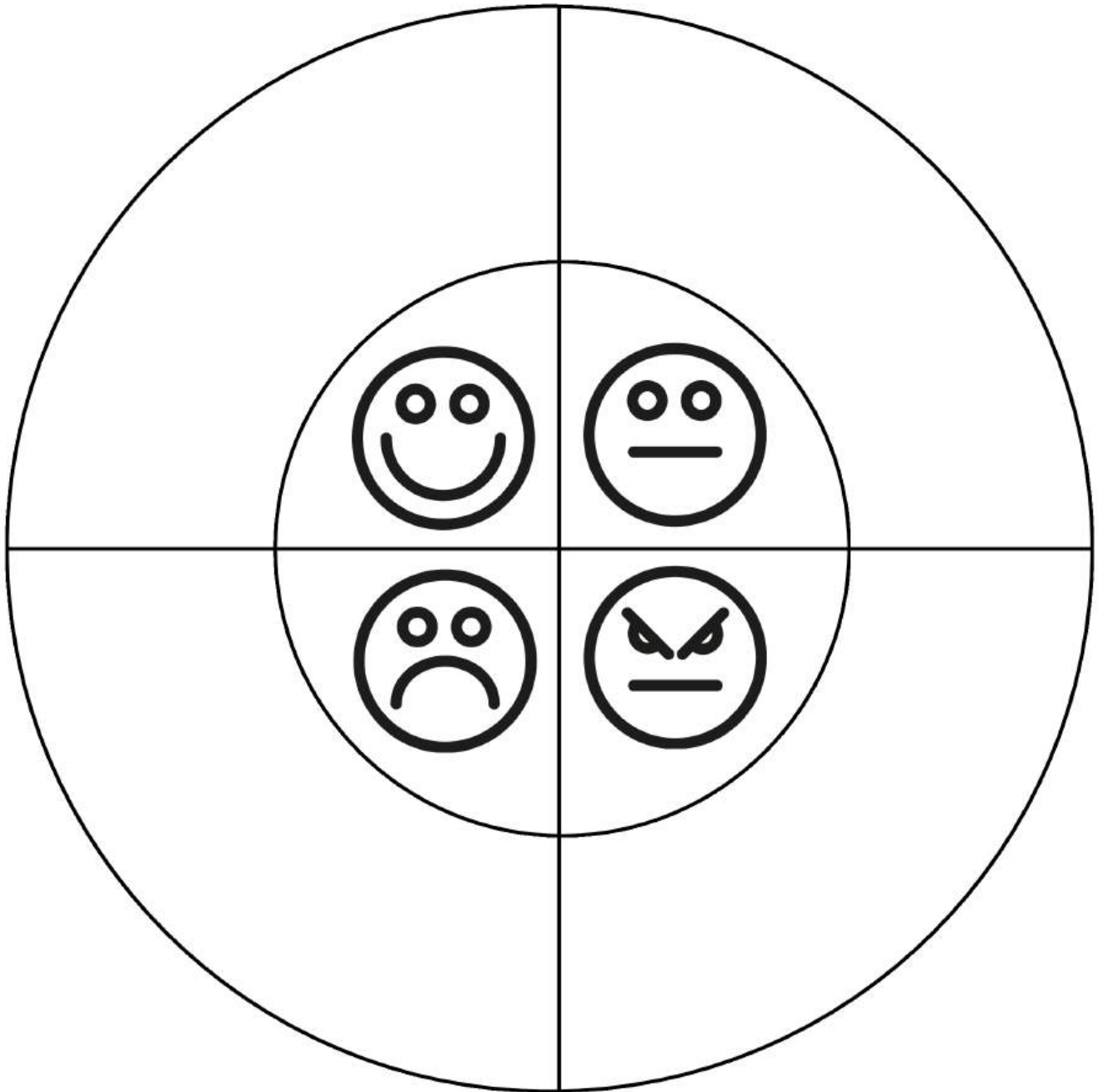
Draw leaves with the names of those who you can reach out to for support.





**Emotion Wheel:**

Choose a colour for each part of the wheel. In the outer circle, write what feelings you think go with each face.



**HANDOUT #3**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Identity:**

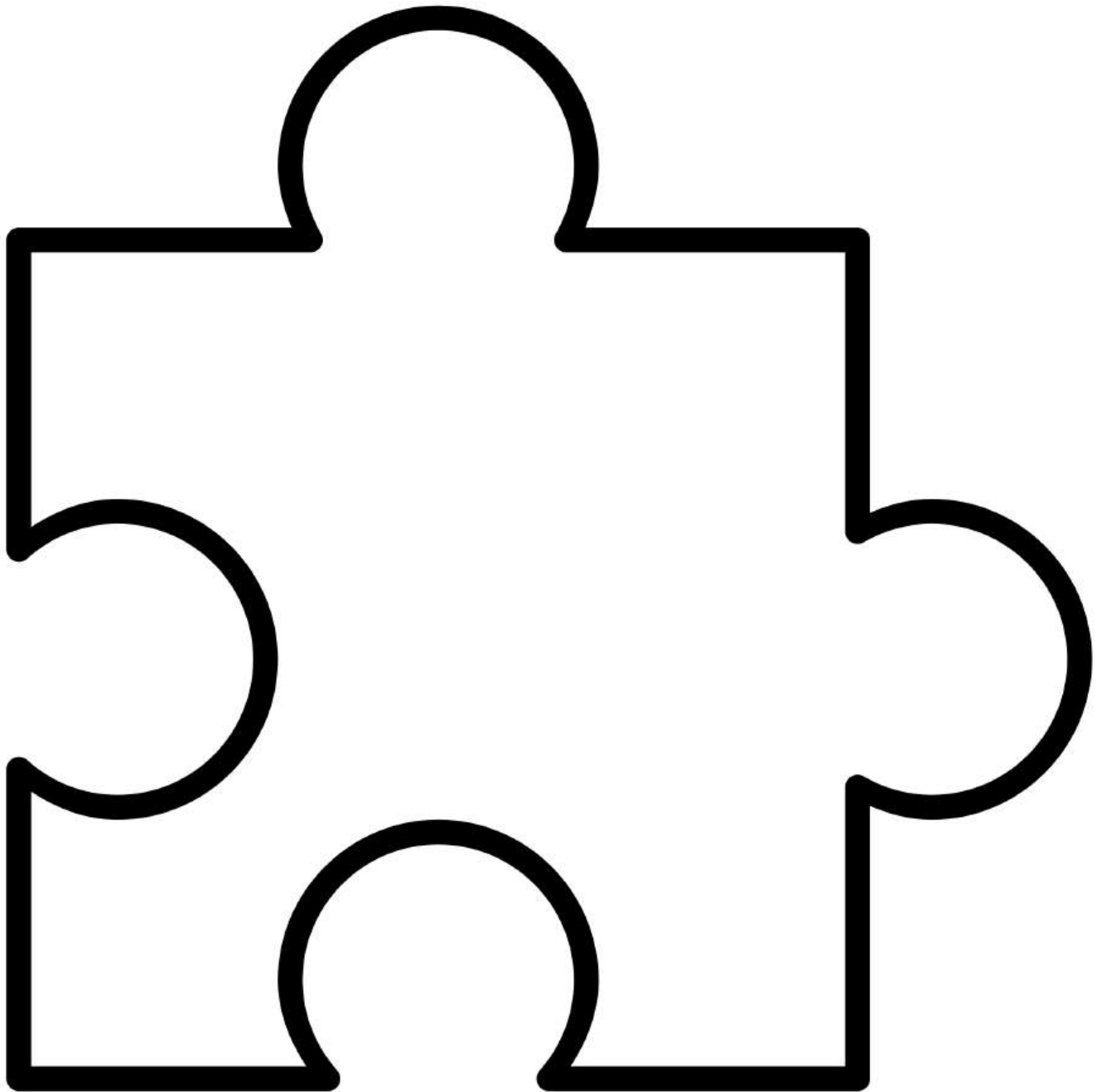
Draw a map of what makes up your cultural identity.

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a black border, intended for drawing a map of cultural identity. The box is centered on the page and occupies most of the lower half of the document.

**HANDOUT #4**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

**Class Community Puzzle**





**HANDOUT #5**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

**Ancestor Sky Map**

Write the names of your ancestors on each star.



**HANDOUT #6**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

**Culture is not a Costume**

Draw, write, or use cutout examples of regalia and costumes, identifying them correctly

**REGALIA**

**COSTUME**



**HANDOUT #7**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

**Planning a Playscript**

Name of your play:

[Large rounded rectangular box for writing the name of the play]

Who will be in your play?

Characters:

[Large rounded rectangular box for listing characters]

Where will your play take place?

Scene 1:

[Rounded rectangular box for describing Scene 1]

Scene 2:

[Rounded rectangular box for describing Scene 2]

What happens in your play?

Plot:

[Large rounded rectangular box for describing the plot]

Scene 3:

[Rounded rectangular box for describing Scene 3]

Scene 4:

[Rounded rectangular box for describing Scene 4]

Scene 5:

[Rounded rectangular box for describing Scene 5]



**HANDOUT #8**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

**My Favourite Place in Nature**

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a black border, intended for a drawing or written response. The box is centered on the page and occupies most of the lower half of the document.

**Nature Walk**

Draw or write about items you saw on your walk today that you found calming.






# **EPISODE GUIDES**

**JUNIOR/ MIDDLE  
SCHOOL**



# How to Lose Everything: A Field Guide

## tânisi kesiwanihtâyan kahkiyaw kîkway

**OBJECTIVE:** To help students understand the complexities of grief and learn effective coping mechanisms.

### ACTIVITIES:



#### Class Discussion:

Engage in a discussion about what grief is, how it affects people differently, and why it's important to manage emotional responses in a healthy way.

- What coping mechanisms were in the film? Did you identify with them or do you have your own ways to deal with loss?
- What does resilience look like in the film? How do the characters show strength or find support during tough times?
- How do you think community and culture affects the way we experience grief?



#### Art Activity:

Engage students in creating visual art that expresses personal experiences with loss or their understanding of grief.

- Have students create memory boxes or collages that represent their journey through grief or transformations they have observed in themselves or others.
- Have students draw storyboards or comics that narrate a story of overcoming grief, incorporating elements like the stages of grief, emotional responses, and eventual healing. (Handouts #1 and #2)



#### Self-Care Workshops:

Conduct a workshop where students participate in activities that promote self-care, such as guided relaxation exercises, simple stretches, or crafting projects like creating personal stress balls.



#### Music Activities:

- Have students compose a short piece of music that captures their interpretation of grief as portrayed in the film. They can use digital music tools, traditional instruments, or voice.

# 2 A Bear Named Jesus

## maskwa Jesus kâ-isiyihkâsoyit

**OBJECTIVE:** To help students understand and appreciate cultural identity and resilience in the face of external influences.

### ACTIVITIES:



#### Class Discussions:

Engage in a discussion about the impact of external influences like colonialism on cultural identity.

- What does the bear symbolize in this film? Discuss how the bear's journey or actions reflect the cultural struggles of the characters.
- What are some key symbols you noticed in the film, and what do you think they represent? How do these symbols help us to understand the characters' feeling or challenges?
- The film shows us how external influences can impact a community. Can you give examples from the film where you see these influences affecting the characters?



#### Art Projects:

- Have students create visual metaphors that represent cultural identity and the impact of external influences. This could be through drawing, painting, mixed-media or other visual mediums.
- Have students design or create a quilt or a series of textile panels that incorporate symbols, imagery, and text that depict their own identities.



#### Role-Play Scenarios:

- Have students write and deliver a skit on the impacts of colonization and cultural resiliency. (Handout #3)



#### Music Activities:

- Have students create a class playlist of songs from their cultural backgrounds or that they feel reflect their identities.

# Heart Like A Pow Wow

## Niimidi'iwin Ode'

**OBJECTIVE:** To explore grief, cultural identity, and resilience through the lens of Anishinaabe traditions, emphasizing the importance of cultural practices and symbolism in dealing with loss.

### ACTIVITIES:



#### Class Discussions:

Engage in discussions about Anishinaabe cultural practices, particularly focusing on Pow Wows and their role in communal healing.

- What do Pow Wows represent in the film, and why do you think they are important to the characters? How do they maintain cultural identity and community?
- What symbols did you notice, and what meanings might they hold? How did these symbols contribute to the film's portrayal of the characters' emotions and cultural heritage?



#### Art Project:

- Have students create visual art pieces that depict the symbolism used in the film to represent grief and healing.
- Introduce the [Seven Grandparent Teachings](#) (sometimes called Seven Grandfather, or Seven Sacred Teachings) and discuss how they can help us to process grief. The students can match the Seven Grandparent Teachings with the Seven Stages of Grief. (Handout #4)



#### Storyboarding/Scripts:

- Have students create storyboards that summarize the film's portrayal of grief and resilience, highlighting how cultural traditions influence these processes. (Handout #2)
- Have students write and deliver a skit about grief and resiliency in their own lives. (Handout #3)



#### Music Activity:

- Have students participate in workshop where they learn about and practice traditional Pow Wow drumming, dancing, or singing.



# 4 There are Hierarchies of Grief

## Ya·qaqa'ki na 'a·kinmiyit

**OBJECTIVE:** Explore the nuances of grief, the importance of communal support, and personal strength.

### ACTIVITIES:



#### Class Discussion:

Engage in a discussion about the varying experiences of grief portrayed in “There Are Hierarchies of Grief.”

- The film’s title, “There Are Hierarchies of Grief,” suggest that not all grief is experienced the same way. Can you discuss what this might mean?
- How do different characters in the film experience and express grief differently?
- How does community support or lack of it affect the characters’ ability to cope with their grief in the film? Give examples of how community influence the grieving process for one or more characters.



#### Art Activities:

- Have students analyze the use of metaphor in the film and create visual art pieces that symbolize personal or communal support.
- Have students create an “Emotion Wheel” or “Emotion Jars” to help better understand their emotions. Watercolours work well for this activity. (Handout #5)



#### Nature Walk:

- Have students participate in a guided nature walk where they explore and discuss the natural symbols of grief and growth, such as seasonal changes, the lifecycle of plants, and the persistence of life through adversity.



#### Music Activities:

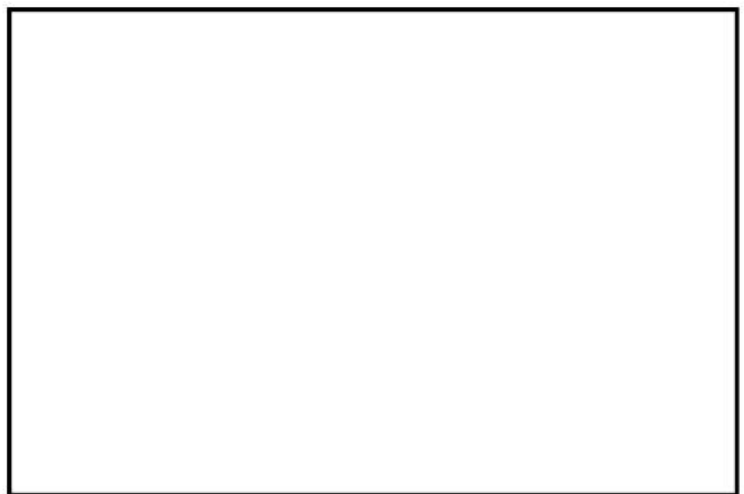
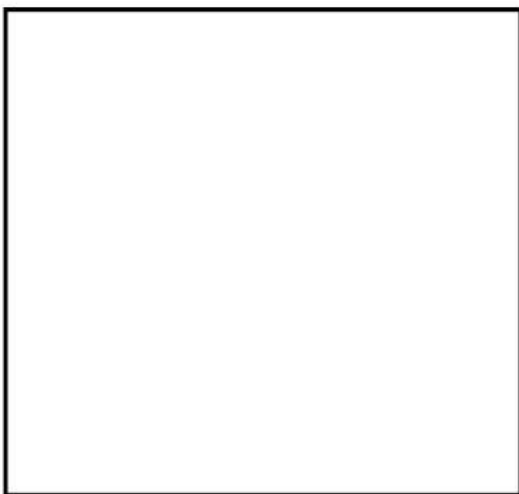
- Have students write a song or poem that begins with “on days like these...”



**HANDOUT #1**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

**Comic Book Template**



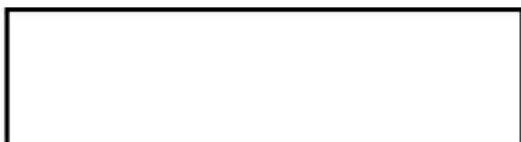


## HANDOUT #2

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

### Storyboard Template - Film

Use the large boxes to draw an image of the scene and use the small boxes to provide a scene description.



**Planning a playscript**

Name of your play:

Who will be in your play?

**Characters:**

Where will your play take place?

**Scene 1:**

**Scene 2:**

What happens in your play?

**Plot:**

**Scene 3:**

**Scene 4:**

**Scene 5:**

**HANDOUT #4**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

**Match the Seven Stages of Grief and Seven Grandfather Teachings**

SHOCK

DENIAL

ANGER

SADNESS

TESTING

DECISION

ACCEPTANCE

TRUTH

RESPECT

HONESTY

WISDOM

LOVE

HUMILITY

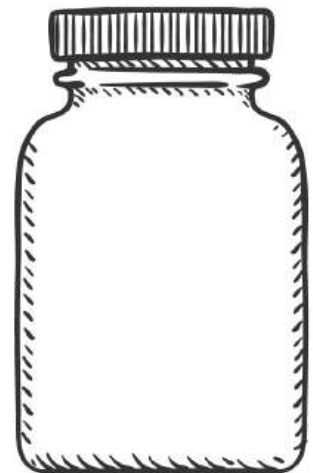
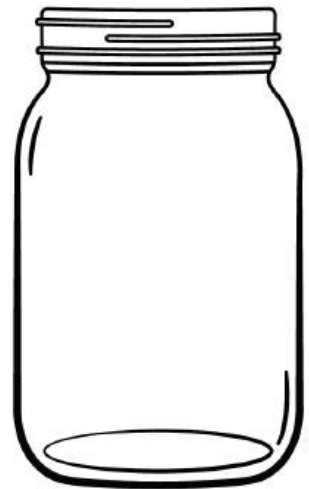
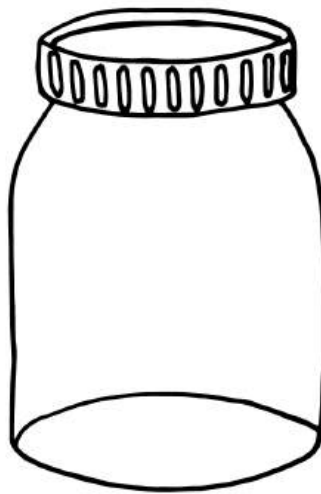
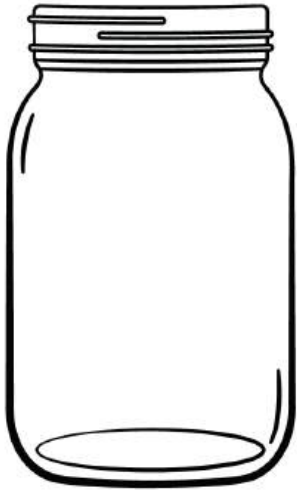
STRENGTH/COURAGE

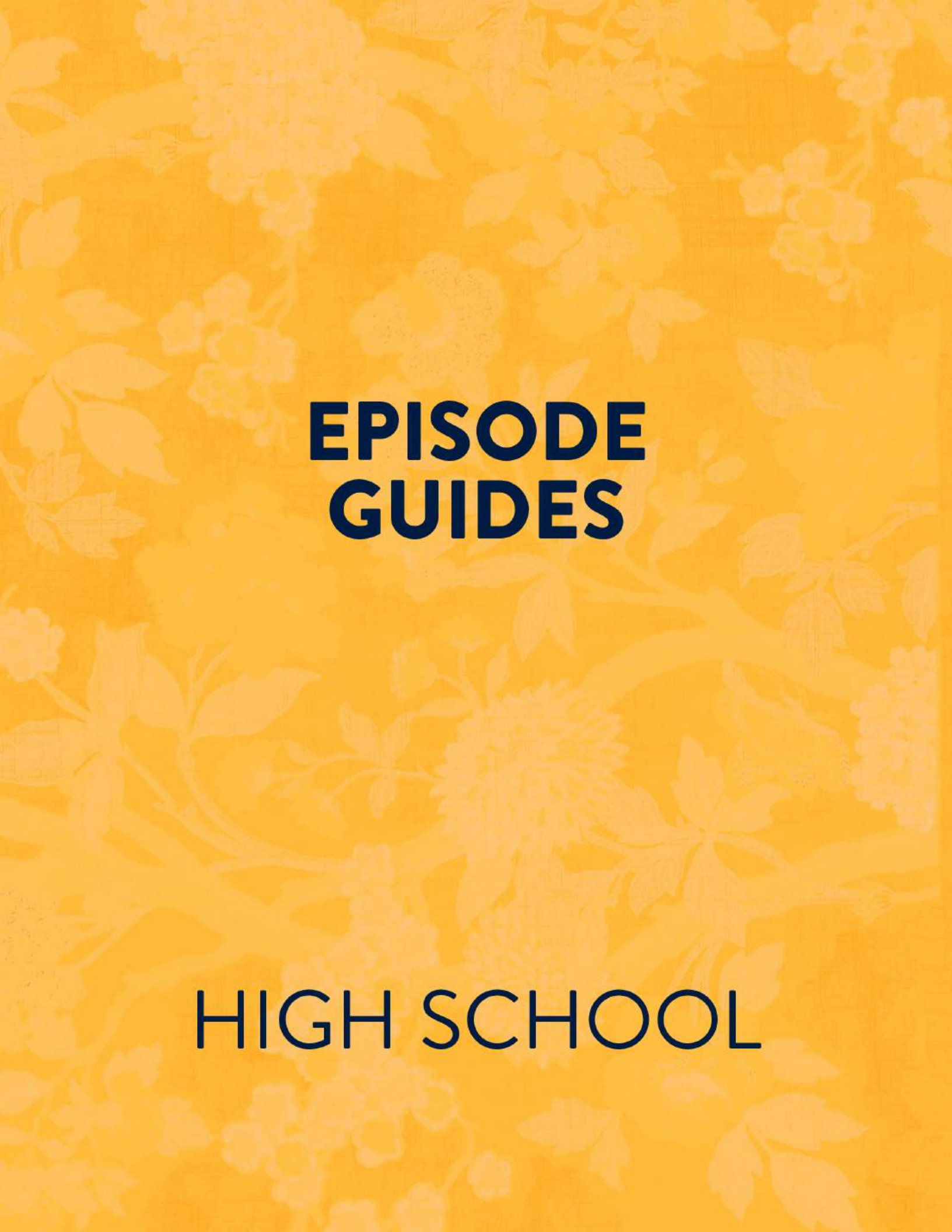


**HANDOUT #5**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

**Emotion Jars**



The background is a solid yellow color with a subtle, repeating floral pattern. The pattern consists of various flowers and leaves, rendered in a lighter shade of yellow, creating a textured, wallpaper-like effect.

# **EPISODE GUIDES**

## **HIGH SCHOOL**

# How to Lose Everything: A Field Guide

## tânisi kesiwanihtâyan kahkiyaw kîkway

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will develop a comprehensive understanding of grief and its impact on individuals and communities, and they will demonstrate this through reflective practice, creative projects, and class discussions.

**ACTIVITIES:**



### Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- What are the different ways grief is portrayed in "How to Lose Everything: A Field Guide"? How do these representations relate to real-world experiences?
- How effective are the coping strategies discussed in the film? Which strategies could be applicable in your own life or in your community?
- Discuss the psychological and emotional changes a person might undergo after a significant loss. How important is community support during such times?
- Evaluate the portrayal of grief in the film. Does it offer a realistic view of how people cope with loss? Why or why not?



### Grief through Photography:

- Have students create a photo essay that captures images symbolizing various aspects of grief and healing. They will take photographs that represent loss, pain, recovery, and eventually, acceptance, accompanied by short narratives explaining their significance.



### Interactive Grief Mapping:

- Have student create an interactive map, using the different stages of grief. Consider making a large floor diagram. Each student places markers or notes at various points that represent personal or observed experiences of grief, facilitating a discussion on how grief is experienced differently by individuals.



### Soundtrack Analysis:

- Have students listen to the film's soundtrack separately from the visual elements. Discuss how the music contributes to the narrative and emotional tone of the film. They should identify specific moments where the music impacts their perception of the story or characters.



# 2

## A Bear Named Jesus maskwa Jesus kâ-isiihkâsoyit

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will demonstrate an understanding of how cultural identity is influenced by external forces and portrayed through metaphors, and will express this understanding through analytical discussions and creative projects.

### ACTIVITIES:



#### Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- How does "A Bear Named Jesus" use metaphors to explore themes of cultural identity and external influences?
- Discuss the impact of colonialism or other external influences on the cultural identity of the characters in the story.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the storytelling techniques used in the film. How well do they convey the complex themes of cultural change and resilience?



#### Metaphor Art Project:

- Have students create visual art pieces that represent the key metaphors used in the film. They might choose to create paintings, sculptures, or digital artworks that symbolize concepts like cultural identity, resilience, and the impact of external influences.



#### Colonial Policies Timeline/Revitalization:

- Have students use Post-Its, white board, etc, to create a large timeline of colonial policies that contributed to language and culture loss. Continue the timeline to include advocacy and reclamation efforts by Indigenous Peoples.



#### Sound Effects Analysis

- Have students listen to the film with the visual element minimized or turned off to focus exclusively on the sound effects and environmental sounds used throughout the film, such as nature sounds, and other non-dialogue audio elements. Students should take notes on what they hear during specific scenes and discuss how these sounds contribute to the overall narrative.

# Heart Like A Pow Wow

## Niimidi'iwin Ode'

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will understand the complex interplay between cultural identity, grief, and resilience within Anishinaabe traditions and articulate their insights through creative and analytical means.

### ACTIVITIES:



#### Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- What role do Anishinaabe cultural practices, especially Pow Wows, play in the community's healing processes?
- How does the film use symbolism to discuss themes of cultural identity and resilience?
- Evaluate the depiction of grief in the film. How effectively does it convey the emotional and cultural responses to loss within the Anishinaabe community?



#### Symbolism Art Project:

- Have students create visual art pieces (paintings, digital art, sculptures) that explore the symbolism in the film. They should focus on how these symbols represent aspects of grief, healing, and cultural identity.



#### Cultural Expression Workshop:

- Have students participate in a workshop focusing on Anishinaabe cultural expressions such as storytelling, dance, or crafting. This hands-on activity helps students experience the culture directly and understand its resilience mechanisms. This may require a guest speaker.



#### Pow Wow Music Timeline:

- Have students listen to traditional Pow Wow music, noting its characteristics and the emotions it evokes. Have them research the historical context of Pow Wow music, focusing on periods when it was banned and how it has been integrated into popular culture today.

# 4 There are Hierarchies of Grief

## Ya·qaqa'ki na 'a·kinmiyit

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will demonstrate an understanding of the complexities of grief, analyze the role of community in the healing process, and apply these insights to create projects that reflect personal and collective responses to grief.

### ACTIVITIES:



#### Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- What are the different forms of grief shown in the film? How does community influence the grieving process?
- Discuss the effectiveness of community support shown in the video. What methods were most impactful and why?
- How do the personal experiences of grief presented in the film compare to theoretical models of grief you have studied?
- Evaluate the concept of 'hierarchies of grief.' How does this notion impact the way we perceive others' suffering?



#### Grief Expression Collage:

- Students will create visual collages that represent the different stages of grief and the types of community support depicted in the film. If they don't already know, introduce the [Seven Grandparent Teachings](#) (sometimes called Seven Grandfather, or Seven Sacred Teachings) and discuss how they can help us to process grief.



#### Grief Expression Through Movement:

- Have students participate in a guided movement workshop where they express various stages of grief. Student could also prepare a dance performance depicting grief.



#### Score Study:

- Have students listen to the film with the visual element minimized or turned off to focus exclusively on the sound effects and environmental sounds used throughout the film, such as nature sounds, and other non-dialogue audio elements. Ask the students if they can identify scenes where music plays a key role in setting the tone or enhancing the emotional landscape of grief.



# 5 Grape Soda in the Parking Lot

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**OBJECTIVE:** Evaluate the impact of language on cultural and personal identity and express their understanding through reflections and creative media.

## ACTIVITIES:



### Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- How does "Grape Soda in the Parking Lot" illustrate the impact of language loss on personal and cultural identity?
- What role does language play in maintaining cultural heritage according to the film and your own experience?
- Discuss the effectiveness of different language preservation strategies. Which seem most viable and why?
- How can individuals and communities combat the effects of language loss? Share examples from the film and other personal experience.



### Creative Film Project:

- Have students create a short film or visual essay that explores themes of language loss and revitalization; they could explore local or international experiences.



### Language Reclamation:

- Have students participate in an Inuktitut workshop or another Indigenous language. Activities include learning basic phrases, exploring cultural contexts, and discussing revitalization efforts.



### Indigenous Languages:

- Have students listen or watch to "Grape Soda in the Parking Lot" twice: once in English and once in Inuktitut. After viewing, ask students to discuss how the language affects their understanding and emotional connection to the film's themes of cultural identity and language loss. Discuss the importance of the films being available in Indigenous languages.



## ASSESSMENT:

### Create a Short Animation on Complex Social Themes

**ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW:** Develop a short animation that explores the interconnected themes of grief, cultural identity, colonialism, community, and resilience. This creative project will allow students to express their understanding of these themes visually and narratively.

**LEARNING OUTCOME:** Students will effectively articulate and analyze the intricate themes of grief and community support, demonstrating a comprehensive understanding through detailed examples and critical reflection on the material presented.

#### ASSIGNMENT STEPS:

**Theme Selection and Research:** Select one or more specific themes from the "How to Lose Everything" film series that resonated with you.

**Storyboard Creation:** Create a detailed storyboard that outlines your short animated film. Include scene descriptions, key dialogues, and notes on visual elements.

**Script Writing:** Write a concise script for your animation. This should include character dialogue, scene directions, and descriptions of the visual and auditory elements.

**Animation Production:** Using animation software (like Adobe Animate, Blender, or Scratch for simpler projects), create the animation based on your storyboard and script.

**Sound Design:** Select or compose suitable background music and sound effects that enhance the emotional impact of your animation.

**Editing and Post Production:** Edit your animation for pacing, flow, and coherence. Ensure that the transitions are smooth and that the final product aligns with your initial vision.

**Presentation and Feedback:** Present your completed animation to the class. Include a brief discussion of your creative process and the choices you made to represent the themes of grief and community support.

The background of the entire page is a repeating floral pattern in a light pink color. The pattern consists of various flowers, including what appear to be daisies and smaller blossoms, interspersed with green leaves and stems. The overall aesthetic is soft and decorative.

# **EPISODE GUIDES**

## **POST SECONDARY**

# How to Lose Everything: A Field Guide

## tânisi kesiwanihtâyan kahkiyaw kîkway

**OBJECTIVE:** Explore the multifaceted nature of grief and loss, and analyze the therapeutic processes involved in dealing with profound personal tragedies.



### Class Discussion:

- How does the film depict the psychological and emotional stages of grief? Discuss how these stages reflect or differ from established psychological theories of grief.
- In what ways does the film use its narrative structure or cinematic techniques to enhance or reflect the themes of loss and healing?
- Discuss the role of personal storytelling in coping with loss. How effective is this approach in the context of the film, and what implications does it have for real-world grief counseling?

# A Bear Named Jesus

## maskwa Jesus kâ-isiyihkâsoyit

**OBJECTIVE:** Analyze the impact of cultural and external influences on personal and collective identity, as explored through metaphorical and narrative elements in the film.



### Class Discussion:

- Explore the metaphorical use of the bear in the film. What does it symbolize about cultural identity and external pressures?
- How does the film address the theme of cultural resistance against assimilation and loss of identity? Discuss the effectiveness of these portrayals.
- Consider the intergenerational dialogue within the film. How do different generations perceive and react to the threat of cultural erosion?



# Heart Like A Pow Wow

## Niimidi'iwin Ode'

**OBJECTIVE:** Examine the cultural significance of Pow Wows in Anishinaabe traditions, focusing on their role in community healing, cultural resilience, and identity reaffirmation.



### Class Discussion:

- Analyze how pow wows serve as a mechanism for cultural preservation and community healing within the film. What elements of pow wows are highlighted as most significant?
- Discuss the portrayal of intergenerational relationships in the film. How do these relationships contribute to the resilience of cultural traditions?
- How does the film address the theme of resilience in the face of cultural and personal grief? What messages does it convey about the power of community and tradition?

# There are Hierarchies of Grief

## Ya·qaqa'ki na 'a·kinmiyit

**OBJECTIVE:** Critically evaluate the different expressions and experiences of grief as depicted in the film, considering the social and cultural hierarchies that influence these experiences.



### Class Discussion:

- What does the title "There Are Hierarchies of Grief" suggest about the societal views on grief explored in the film? How are these 'hierarchies' depicted?
- Analyze how the film portrays the complexities and variances in grieving processes among different characters. What factors influence these differences?
- Discuss the role of community and social support in the film. How are these networks portrayed in terms of their effectiveness in aiding the grieving process?



# 5 Grape Soda in the Parking Lot

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**OBJECTIVE:** Investigate the themes of language loss and cultural identity as explored in the film, analyzing the broader societal implications of language extinction.



## Class Discussion:

- Discuss the symbolic significance of language in the film. How does language loss affect the characters' cultural identity and community cohesion?
- How does the film depict the struggle to preserve cultural heritage through language? Evaluate the methods shown in the film and their potential real-world applicability.
- What does the film suggest about the role of younger generations in the revival and preservation of endangered languages? Discuss the challenges and opportunities they face.

## **ASSESSMENT:**

### **Analyzing and Synthesizing Themes of Human Experience in How to Lose Everything Short Film Series**

**OBJECTIVE:** Analyze and synthesize the themes of grief, cultural identity, resilience, and community as presented in the films to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding and articulate these concepts through a chosen medium (written or creative).

#### **Suggested Written Assessment Prompts:**

- Analyze how themes of grief, cultural identity, resilience, and community are developed across the films, synthesizing these insights to discuss their collective implications on understanding human experiences and societal structures.
- Evaluate the representation of cultural identity and the impact of external pressures in two or more of the films, discussing how resilience is portrayed as a response to these challenges.
- Critically analyze the depiction of grief in two or more of the films, integrating psychological theories and sociological perspectives to assess the authenticity and impact of these portrayals.

#### **Suggested Creative Assessment Prompts:**

- **Interdisciplinary Documentary:** Produce a documentary that integrates analysis of a key theme such as cultural loss or resilience from the films, supported by real-world examples and expert interviews.
- **Mixed Media Art Installation:** Create a mixed media installation that explores and synthesizes the theme of resilience as depicted in the films, incorporating elements that invite viewer interaction and reflection.
- **Thematic Short Film Series:** Develop a short film (or a series as a class) that focus on analyzing and synthesizing a specific theme from the films, such as grief or community support.



**EPISODES**

**TRANSCRIPTS**

# How to Lose Everything: A Field Guide

## tânisi kesiwanihtâyan kahkiyaw kîkway

This is what I know—first, your heart will break. You will lose a partner, a sibling, a parent, a child, your health, your home, your work, your voice.

You will start by staying in bed—being awake is the first and hardest thing to get through, and you may ache every minute of the hours in between the relief of sleep. The ache will overwhelm you at times. The ache will press on your chest so hard it might be difficult to move. The ache will shake through your body in uncontrollable sobs. The ache will numb you to all feeling. The ache will want to break things. The ache won't care what does break.

Try to wait.

The early days of shock need to pass. Fill those days and waking hours with something, anything—it doesn't matter what, as you probably won't remember. If you can, find something that doesn't hurt you or others. That might not be possible. I recommend hours of serialized television. Seven seasons of something. Don't worry if you don't move from the couch or your bed.

Wait.

Forgive yourself.

Remember that disconnection can protect you when you need it, and joy is not a denial of your loss. Eventually, being awake won't hurt as much. This may be months later, or a year, two years. But one day, you will be awake, and it will be okay. For moments. And then for hours. I can't tell you that it will get easier, but you will adapt. You will get used to this loss, and you will find ways around it and with it.

Some forms of grief will run their course. Some will never leave you. Some days, when grief comes toward you as a wave, you will have to stand still and let the impact roll into your body and there will be no choice but to welcome its presence. Some days, you will see grief coming, and you will be able to say, "Now is not a good time." And it will listen. Sorrow can be a stubborn friend, but also a patient one. Know that sorrow evolved from joy—that she knows and remembers happiness as well as she understands where tears come from.



For that, sorrow is a powerful and wise emotion, and you will be wiser with her. You will be tender in new spots and harder in others. You won't be the same person as before—I'm sorry, that, too, is a loss. I will not tell you that which doesn't kill us makes us stronger. I will not tell you your loss is for the better. You will lose everything, and it will be different.

Remember: you have the right to honour. To honour the memory of the person, place, time and potential you lost. To remember, as often as you need, what you love, what you miss, what still brings you joy, what still hurts your heart.

And—you have the right to forget. Truly. The most painful memories are yours to let go of, when you're ready. You are not dishonouring those memories by letting them go. Trust me. If you like, find a place for them, for safekeeping. Tell a person close to you and let them know you are telling them this story for them to remember and you to forget. Write a letter and drop it, unaddressed, in a mailbox or into the flames of a fire or under a mound of dirt at the base of a tree. Walk into the woods, dig a hole and cry or sing or sob or tell your most painful memory into the earth.

Or tell me. Tell me right now to this page, and I will remember for you. I will remember the name of your child. I will remember the laugh of your sister. I will remember the place where your home stood—just as you will remember me.



# 2 A Bear Named Jesus

## maskwa Jesus kâ-isiyihkâsoyit

My mother got lost in the woods and never came back.

She went to Auntie Gladys' funeral, and at the service a pack of rabid bears broke in and took my mom. Rabid bears! Right here on the rez! One of the bears was named Jesus, but I'm not sure he was directly involved, it was more like the other bears invoked his name, which obliged him to show up. At any rate the rabid bears swore they were followers of the bear named Jesus, even as they were dragging him away. He seemed embarrassed by it all.

The rabid bears took my mom and the bear named Jesus to their cave deep in the woods, and forced the bear named Jesus to convince my mom that he was the only light, the only way, the only. I don't know how bears can compel the Son of God, but that's what happened. And even when his heart isn't in it the bear named Jesus is pretty convincing, so I don't blame my mom for falling for it. Kinda.

But I kinda do. Anyway these rabid bears were exactly the sort that give nice bears a bad name, and the next thing I knew this person who looked and sounded like my mom had stumbled out of the wilderness saying all sorts of weird things that made no sense, at least not coming from my mom. This person claimed (vehemently!) that following the bear named Jesus was the only way to Heaven. I countered that this might be difficult, as the bear named Jesus had been tranquilized by a Conservation Officer and relocated to the bush about a hundred miles north of Stanley Mission. That's a long walk back to Mistawasis reserve.

Undeterred, this person who looked and sounded like my mom insisted that our ceremonies were the work of the Devil, and anyone doing them was damned for eternity, and that the bear named Jesus would re-appear shortly. She said he was our only hope. I said I hoped he'd stay off the highways.

Imagine my surprise when I heard a tap at the window in the middle of the night. There was the poor old bear named Jesus, all skinny and bedraggled with mats in his fur. He had a bad puncture wound in his side, but it seemed rude to ask where he got it. I let him in and fed him maskihkiy wapoy and pahkwesikan, brushed out his fur and washed his wounded, bloody paws. He was tired and sad, and kept apologizing for the rabid bears, who he said had good intentions. It may have been unkind, but I reminded him how the road to Hell was built.



Then I made him a bunk in the shed. It's not good to let bears sleep in the house.

As for my mom, I haven't seen her since that fateful day in 1997. The rabid bears continue to abduct people, while the bear named Jesus is collecting CERB and still sleeping in the shed. I tried to get him a job with the rez but he's not a band member. I've come to love having him around, at night we drink tea and smoke our pipes and laugh while he teaches me how to pray in Cree. As for the person who looks and sounds like my mom she still makes half-hearted attempts to convert me, but I just pull out my pipe and puff away until she gets frightened and leaves.

Funny thing, even if he's sitting at the table drinking tea with me she doesn't seem to recognize the bear named Jesus at all.



# Heart Like A Pow Wow

## Niimidi'iwin Ode'

Thunderbirds roll across belly  
Deep rumbles shake awake hunger

Acid burns through stomach lining  
Holes form and deepen

Body becomes a sieve  
Life seeps out

Sit in the grass, aki\*  
There is medicine here, omaa\*

Hands work quickly, gently  
Caressing blood and dirt

Clay out of sand  
Bone out of stars

Whisper prayers, old songs  
Patch a body quilt

This is the only work that matters  
This is the only work that matters

It sounds like a pow wow  
Certain  
Full of summer's heat  
Young men  
Hats off  
Hair sticking to the sweat on their foreheads  
Look to each other  
Affirming  
Reassuring



The lead  
Eyes closed  
Tilts his head  
And then you are right there  
Dancing in the dusk  
Each step greeting each beat  
Each blade of grass  
Bending  
Bouncing back  
The women are singing  
The whistle blows  
Each arm of each man  
Striking in rhythm  
A mighty nation  
Dance in me, abinoojiiyens\*  
We surround you like an arbour  
The singers are waiting  
And your heart sounds like a pow wow



# 4 There are Hierarchies of Grief

## Ya·qaqa'ki na 'a·kinmiyit

on days like these my heart thinks of you;

when the rest of the world grieves for a world they think is gone,  
when we've awoken to a nightmare we didn't think was possible,  
when I'm afraid that I can't make it to the next sunrise and I don't know if the tears will ever  
stop, when smiling seems like it might be a failure.

On days like these I find strength in your presence—like a lighthouse on fire in a storm I  
couldn't find my way out of alone.

You once told me the kitchen floor is the best place to cry; recommended crawling to the  
refrigerator and crying to the beat of its hum. Gave us all songs to introduce us to the grief  
you fell in love with, your generosity flowing from fingertips on that piano you don't play, in  
poems and recordings, wrapping its arms around me, and telling all of us we can stay. It's  
possible even when you've known a grief such as this.

you told me i was like your child, so close to his age; opened the door and hugged me, let  
me lie hungover on your couch until I got sober again. Texted "I need you" and trusted me  
enough to ask for help. You were honest when you told me you needed to go to his  
gravesite alone; it's his mommy time. You gave me the only picture I have of he and I  
together told me stories of memories I don't have anymore, and you gave me three more  
cousins, too, to hug and to hold and to laugh with, and even if I don't see you enough you've  
given me family here.

and on days like these i think of you, my girl;

the length of you wrapped in scarves and borrowed jewellery, a skirt made of stars.

I think of the trust you refuse to stop giving as you get in the car on the bus on the plane, I  
think of the ocean your voice keeping us warm like the mediterranean sun. Back in  
september when I went to the west coast I found some little path to the ocean between  
great big houses on our way to the ferry so I could swim for you both.

I think of shooting stars – of our star – of the way you laugh and how you get quiet.

I think of how you taught me to carry and take care of the feathers, and showed me where your little star so strong brought down a tree so we could be with the water.

On days like these, my girl, I close my eyes and listen for your harmonies ,as we learn to sing together in North Dakota, in Flint, Michigan, somewhere in Wisconsin, where you kept us warm and I kept us covered, where you kept us fed and I kept us moving.

On days like these my heart thinks of you and the love I am filled with because you are here. And I know there have been mornings worse than this one. I know that there is more strength in us than we can ever imagine. I know that the only truth is the sun will rise and fall and rise again, spring will come and winter and fall again, and I'll keep giving and loving and singing and crying and swimming and visiting.

I'll keep on.

husukʔq̄ukniʔaʔka manaʔa

Thank you, our mothers. I love you.





# Grape Soda in the Parking Lot

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Grape soda in the parking lot is what marks my one memory of my grandmother. Four years old. I sat on her knees just briefly and I remember she smiled and then it was grape soda in the parking lot.

When she died, a relative said it was us kids fighting that caused it. But I didn't feel any specific way about that idea. I still don't. I didn't know her.

She was six feet tall and apparently left-handed. She eloped with my grandfather who was decades older and not six feet tall. I have only one thing that belonged to her. My grandmother.

Scottish Gaelic died along with her – with them. At least in our family. Lost to English.

If she could not give Gaelic to her children, she could give her resentment of everything English. So they despised their own tongues and refused to speak to each other for days, or years, or forever.

I could list so many other things lost to English. We could be here all day. It wouldn't even be funny.

But this is supposed to be about my mother's grief – not mine. I call it 'an accessory to my grief', because I do not know its full size or shape.

She loved a good short story. A good chocolate. Raspberry jam. My mother.

She took the Gaelic courses, she bought the tapes. She learned the lyrics – maybe even the Irish ones. There's a video clip somewhere of her singing Scottish washing songs and doing the motions.

And of course, she went to Scotland. The Scotland of my childhood is a picture of my young mother in a kilt, seated on a low stone wall in the highlands. She went again, and again.

I went there too – last summer – to my grandparents' village. If I have anything interesting to say about that trip, it is this: The land may look something like the arctic, but I didn't see any berries, so I don't know if I could have been happy there.

This is what my mother would say: Bloody English. Bloody English.

And in her youth, my mother sought refuge in French. Moved to Quebec and there met, of course, my father, who had his own history with English.

My father, sent away with tuberculosis, for years and years until his family thought him dead.

Lost his language so he spoke only English. Nearly sent back to the wrong Inuit community, in an arctic as vast as many countries. Found his tongue again, but never lost the taste of English in his mouth.

I could list so many other things lost to English. We could be here all day. It wouldn't even be funny.

But this is supposed to be about my father's grief, not mine. I call it 'a memory of his memory' because I do not know its full size or shape.

He loved the movies. He loved Bruce Lee. He talked about aliens like he couldn't wait to meet them. My father.

You want to think in your language. You want to use it in love, in joy, in sadness and in anger. You want to be able to describe any room you find yourself in, from the floorboards to the light fixtures, so anyone else who knows the same language can enter and look around. You want to know all the names of places as they have whispered it themselves to the people who have listened long enough.

You want to dream.

What if, what if (as in dreams), every language that had been lost to English, every word, every syllable grew up out of the ground in flowers, flowed around us like rivers and took its place again in the minds and mouths of all its speakers. What if it danced across pages and in movies and love stories and even on everyday things like toaster manuals. What if we relearned all the terms for ideas that English does not understand? What would we say? Would it be too much? Would it take too long to say anything? Would we have to sacrifice words like efficiency and productivity and intergenerational trauma? We could be here all day. It wouldn't even be funny.





