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## Grease Trail Storytelling Project Creating Indigenous Digital Pathways

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Article abstract

Background: Indigenous learners and community members are often excluded from online learning environments, as both consumers and producers of knowledge, resulting in an educational digital divide. Further, Indigenous knowledges represented through digital practices and online spaces risk misrepresentation and appropriation, which leads to stereotypes and deficit thinking about Indigenous people, their histories, and their current realities. There is a need for educational approaches that give space, voice, and agency to Indigenous people. Aim: This article is a reflection on a teaching enhancement project that weaved together local land-based learning, Indigenous storytelling, and digital media. Project Overview: Indigenous pre-service teachers created an open educational resource, the Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project, to enhance the preservation and accessibility of Indigenous histories, stories, and memories embedded in local landscapes. Their approach to Indigenous digital storytelling uses the principles of respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity to document and curate their digital storytelling practices and Indigenous knowledge traditions. Discussion: The Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project may serve as a helpful resource for those interested in learning how Indigenous digital storytelling could be approached for the preservation of Indigenous intellectual traditions that bring together land, story, and memory in online spaces and integrated as a tool for teaching and learning in school and community settings.

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## TEACHING REFLECTION

# *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project:* Creating Indigenous Digital Pathways

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**Background:** Indigenous learners and community members are often excluded from online learning environments, as both consumers and producers of knowledge, resulting in an educational digital divide. Further, Indigenous knowledges represented through digital practices and online spaces risk misrepresentation and appropriation, which leads to stereotypes and deficit thinking about Indigenous people, their histories, and their current realities. There is a need for educational approaches that give space, voice, and agency to Indigenous people. **Aim:** This article is a reflection on a teaching enhancement project that weaved together local land-based learning, Indigenous storytelling, and digital media. **Project Overview:** Indigenous pre-service teachers created an open educational resource, the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project*, to enhance the preservation and accessibility of Indigenous histories, stories, and memories embedded in local landscapes. Their approach to Indigenous digital storytelling uses the principles of respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity to document and curate their digital storytelling practices and Indigenous knowledge traditions. **Discussion:** The *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* may serve as a helpful resource for those interested in learning how Indigenous digital storytelling could be approached for the preservation of Indigenous intellectual traditions that bring together land, story, and memory in online spaces and integrated as a tool for teaching and learning in school and community settings.

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**Keywords:** Indigenous People; Digital Storytelling; Place-based Education; Indigenous Education; Oral Narratives; Information and Technology (ICT)

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## Introduction

Indigenous learners and community members are often excluded from virtual learning environments, as both consumers and producers of knowledge, due to a lack of access to internet and technology, resulting in an educational digital divide. Further, Indigenous knowledges that are represented through digital practices and online spaces risk misrepresentation and appropriation, which can lead to stereotypes and deficit thinking about Indigenous people, their histories, and their current realities. Jennifer Wemigwans (2016) discusses the significance of adhering to cultural protocols in online spaces to avoid this misrepresentation and appropriation and of regarding online Indigenous knowledge projects as “digital bundles” that can support resurgence and reflect Indigenous social movements. Digital storytelling practices, for instance, have become important modes of expression for Indigenous people and communities to restore, generate, document, and archive their own histories, truths, and life worlds. In fact, digital stories have been described as “living breath” connecting Indigenous people to their ancestors, sacred homelands, diverse languages, cultural teachings, and future generations (Manuelito 2015, 2).

Within Indigenous storytelling traditions, “people keep the spirit of a story alive by telling it to others and by interacting with the story” (Manuelito 2015, 149). Retelling stories both ensures the continuity of intellectual and spiritual traditions and promotes change and growth in Indigenous life worlds. Digital storytelling allows for creative expressions of Indigenous storied traditions through audio, video, and multimodal narrations, which can help foster pride and understanding among Indigenous educators and learners. Digital storytelling has thus become an important educational tool that gives space, voice, and agency to Indigenous people, especially as this mode of expression can support and uphold oral traditions.

This paper is a teaching reflection about the *Grease Trail Storytelling Project*, an Indigenous storytelling project that engaged a group of Indigenous pre-service teachers to imagine, plan, and produce land-education digital stories that drew from the ancestral homelands of the T̓silhqot'in, Dakelh, and Secwépemc First Nations people of north-central British Columbia, Canada. The *Grease Trail Storytelling Project* was developed in collaboration with the T̓silhqot'in National Government's Education Department to address a community-identified need for open-access teaching and learning resources for Indigenous communities in the north-central region. Their stories counter dominant understandings of local histories by using cultural memory to reinterpret landscapes. They seek to reinscribe Indigenous lands and places with historical and contemporary narratives from Indigenous storytellers, contributing to decolonization and reconciliation efforts in Canadian education. Guided by the framework of the four Rs, which emphasize respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity (Kirkness and Barnhardt 1991), the pre-service teachers' creation processes suggest ways that digital storytelling can respectfully represent Indigenous knowledges and bridge the educational digital divide that Indigenous learners often face.

A respectful way to work with Indigenous peoples is to locate oneself within the project and in relation to community (Kovach 2009). The authors of this article are part of the Faculty of Education's NITEP – Indigenous Teacher Education Program at the University of British Columbia, which is characterized by its community-based field centre approach. Johanna is a proud member of T̓silhqot'in Nation from north-central British Columbia. As the NITEP Cariboo Field Centre Coordinator and Lecturer, she not only utilizes digital technology for teaching but approaches digital tools from Indigenous pedagogical perspectives. Her innovative approach to blended learning is as much about using digital tools thoughtfully as deciding when not to use digital tools while taking into consideration the impact of technology on Indigenous learning. Corly is of Secwépemc First Nation and German ancestry. As an Indigenous pre-service teacher, Corly has been a Digital Peer Mentor with the NITEP Cariboo Field Centre in the Faculty of Education. She creates a sense of connectedness by engaging other Indigenous teacher candidates with in-person support, online platforms, digital media, and Indigenous storytelling. Jan is Anishinaabekwe from the M'Chigeeng First Nation in northern Ontario. As Director of the NITEP – Indigenous Teacher Education Program, Jan continually seeks new ways to engage pre-service teachers at the NITEP field centres with local knowledges and traditions, knowing that it is their lands, languages, stories, and Knowledge Keepers that uplift these students in becoming teachers. She recognizes that nurturing Indigenous students' identities is about creating relationships to land and place.

## Digital Storytelling

For over two decades, digital storytelling has been utilized in education and health community development projects (for examples, see StoryCenter at <https://www.storycenter.org>). *Digital storytelling* refers to digital media combining text, images, voice-over narration, and other audio (Robin 2016). Other terms for digital storytelling include digital documentaries, digital-based narratives, digital essays, electronic memoirs, and/or interactive storytelling (Robin 2021). That is to say, digital storytelling weaves together the tradition of storytelling with multimedia, including images, audio, video clips, music, and online publishing (Robin 2021). Cunsolo Willox and colleagues (2013) describe digital storytelling as a way to celebrate lived individual experiences and collective co-creation of local narratives. Digital storytelling provides learners with the opportunity to work together with peers as well as share and listen to stories with others, and it allows a rich and nuanced tapestry of local voices to create localized narratives and community experiences (Cunsolo Willox et al. 2013).

In his article on digital storytelling in the twenty-first-century classroom, Bernard R. Robin summarizes the seven essential elements of digital storytelling developed by the Center for Digital Storytelling: point of view, a dramatic question, emotional content, the gift of the storyteller's voice, the power of the soundtrack, economy, and pacing (2008, 223). “Point of view” refers to the key ideas of the story and the perspective of the storyteller (Robin 2008, 223). Storytelling is a powerful and essential practice and “should be respected as a way of sharing lived experiences, exploring personal beliefs and values, and discovering place-based wisdom” (Cunsolo Willox et al. 2013, 133). “A dramatic question” keeps the viewer's attention, while

“emotional content” raises awareness of a particular topic by making the story “come alive in a personal and powerful way” for the audience (Robin 2008, 223). The “gift of voice” refers to the storyteller’s ability to personalize their digital story and assist audience members to better understand context (Robin 2008, 223). Digital stories can also be enhanced with sound or music (the “soundtrack”), and the concept of “economy” means taking into consideration how much content is required to effectively tell a story “without overloading the viewer” (Robin 2008, 223). Finally, “pacing” refers to the way a storyteller regulates how quickly or slowly a story unfolds (Robin 2008). These various digital storytelling elements were used as the guiding process to create projects in the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project*.

## Indigenous Digital Storytelling

The *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* allowed stories to be located in time and place for the storyteller and listener/viewer. There is a need for educational approaches that give expression and agency to Indigenous people to tell their own stories, decolonizing the historical and contemporary narratives that persist in education about Indigenous realities. Indigenous digital storytelling is a potentially powerful tool for social impact because it helps to identify community viewpoints and priorities (Iseke and Moore 2011), and it provides Indigenous educators with the opportunity to counter stereotypical representations of Indigenous people in public education. Digital stories created by Indigenous people are also counter-narratives intended to rewrite the narratives of settler societies (Adelson and Olding 2013) played out in media, popular culture, or education. These dominant discourses shape society’s understandings of Indigenous people’s lives, with negative consequences for Indigenous-settler relations. By harnessing digital practices, Indigenous people can rewrite dominant narratives, asserting their own truths of the past, present, and future. Such stories critique colonial encounters and give space to express contemporary Indigenous identities (Hare et al. 2017). For other Indigenous storytellers, their digital productions are less about countering narratives. Rather, their motivations for using technology to tell their stories are oriented towards building and envisioning liberation and sovereignty for Indigenous people and communities (Manuelito 2015). This use of digital tools allows Indigenous communities to revitalize their language and cultures and reclaim their lands.

Furthermore, Indigenous storytelling has provided opportunities to create relationships among Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers and youth. Increasingly, Indigenous youth are taking up digital storytelling as both pedagogy and research to creatively represent their lives. This youth- and community-centered approach has implications for programs and policies impacting young Indigenous people. For example, Yvonne Poitras Pratt (2019) documents Métis youth and Elders working together to collectively imagine, plan, and produce digital stories that take up their histories and livelihoods in Fisher River. What stands out in the project is the restoration of intergenerational exchanges through contemporary media and technology. Also demonstrating the intergenerational impacts of digital storytelling is a research project by the University of Victoria Centre for Youth and Society titled *Residential School Resistance Narratives: Significance and Strategies for Indigenous Youth* (2020), which strengthens intergenerational relationships by acknowledging different types of resistance that enabled family and community members to survive Indian residential schools located on Vancouver Island. Seven digital storytelling projects comprise this project, each ranging in duration from three minutes to ten minutes. The stories examine the harmful legacy of residential schools and the ongoing negative impacts affecting Indigenous young people, families, and communities. This project promoted awareness of resistance acts and strategies as well as intergenerational healing.

In addition to the ways that it contributes to social justice efforts and nurtures intergenerational relationships in communities, digital storytelling is also an effective pedagogical tool for engaging Indigenous learners because it involves a supportive environment and culturally revitalizing approach. These projects provide personal and cultural expression as well as nurture learners’ technical skills. Kristen Ali Eglinton, Aline Gubrium, and Lisa Wexler (2017) describe how Alaska Native youth (ages ten to eighteen) across rural communities engaged in digital storytelling as “arts-inspired inquiry” about self-identity, aesthetics, and voice. Digital stories offered these young Indigenous people opportunities to share culture, values, and gendered ideas of selfhood. The project’s training sessions were organized into two phases. The first phase focused on the story writing process (e.g., scripts). Story Circles were held to create a sense of belonging for individuals to present their initial idea or draft of their stories. The Story Circles also provided an opportunity for participants to mentor each other in the digital storytelling process and collaboratively construct the digital story (Eglinton, Gubrium, and Wexler 2017). Next, in the second phase, training focused on technical components of digital storytelling, and individuals learnt how to work with digital editing software to put together their stories (Eglinton, Gubrium, and Wexler 2017). There was a specific workshop on how to create a digital story by incorporating visual and oral components into a non-linear video sequence. Additionally, individuals

learnt other digital skills such as creating soundtracks, titles, credits, and other special effects. Each project was screened at the end to celebrate their accomplishments (Eglinton, Gubrium, and Wexler 2017).

Indigenous digital storytelling thus offers multiples benefits to learners. It provides a way to connect with ancestors, sacred homelands, diverse Indigenous languages, and cultural and spiritual teachings, encouraging the listener to live in balance and wholeness. Indigenous digital storytelling can provide counter-narratives of colonialism, highlighting the atrocities of genocide against Indigenous people, as well as help to envision liberation and sovereignty for Indigenous people and communities, in part by fostering intergenerational relationships between youth and Elders. For all of these reasons, in addition to the artistic and technical skills it promotes, digital storytelling is a highly effective pedagogical tool for teaching Indigenous learners. Indigenous stories in multimodal forms were at the heart of the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project*, which enhances Indigenous knowledge in teacher education.

### **An Indigenous Framework for Digital Storytelling: The Four Rs**

In order to document and curate digital practices and Indigenous knowledge traditions, the *Grease Trail Storytelling Project* draws on the cultural framework put forward by Verna J. Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt (1991) of the four Rs: respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity. These foundational principles have become an institutional philosophy for decolonizing spaces of higher education. In accordance with the four Rs, Indigenous storytelling traditions that attend to *respect* honour Indigenous knowledges and recognize the diversity of Indigenous peoples' languages, traditions, and ways of knowing. For Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), respect is about including Indigenous peoples' knowledge traditions and challenging the Western/Eurocentric paradigms that operate in mainstream institutions. The implication for Indigenous digital storytelling is an emphasis on local histories, worldviews, or contemporary concerns. Recognizing how narrative constructions of Indigenous people's lived experiences and realities open up space for lesser-heard voices and stories, in new forms, is essential to practices of Indigenous storytelling (Poitras Pratt 2019). The principle of respect gives focus to specific Nations, their histories, lands, worldviews, and stories.

*Relevance* ensures that stories are drawn from the Indigenous community and students' lives and build on their aspirations or interests. Relevance in digital storytelling allows the community and students to be makers of culturally distinct stories that aid in negotiating social priorities and contemporary needs (Iseke and Moore 2011). This approach assists viewers and listeners to interpret the stories from within the cultures and communities in which stories are produced.

For Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), *responsibility* within Indigenous contexts is about accountability to people, place, and knowledges. Since Indigenous digital storytelling integrates Indigenous stories, sacred sites, and artifacts of the cultures in innovative ways (Iseke and Moore 2011), the storyteller has a responsibility to community perspectives and local knowledges. Because many Indigenous people face difficult conditions and stereotypes, with limited opportunities to share their voices, maintaining the integrity of Indigenous perspectives in multimodal representations requires responsible approaches to crafting, narrating, editing, and sharing these works. Embedded within these development processes is attention to cultural protocols.

*Reciprocity* within Indigenous digital storytelling practices means honouring Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing while building Indigenous participants' skills, leadership, and experiences of curating and producing multimodal narratives (Stanton et al. 2017). As producers of their own stories, Indigenous people also learn together and share what they produce, reciprocating the knowledge that they receive from the land, community, and people. Students producing these stories make meaningful, tangible contributions, taking what they curate and using their works and materials in educational spaces to increase access to local knowledge and perspectives.

The *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* was situated in the four Rs framework of Indigenous knowledge. For respect, the project aimed to understand local Indigenous knowledges to expand Indigenous-focused digital learning resources. For relevance, the project developed digital storytelling as an instructional tool to enhance teaching and learning. For responsibility, the project provided land-based learning opportunities for pre-service Indigenous teachers. For reciprocity, the project created open Indigenous digital storytelling resources to be used in schools and Indigenous communities. Overall, the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* used the four Rs Indigenous framework to document and curate digital storytelling practices and Indigenous traditions in teaching and learning.

### **Grease Trail Digital Storytelling: Locating the Project in Territory**

The *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* was situated on unceded territories of T̓silhqot'in, Dakelh, and Secwépemc First Nations. In particular, T̓silhqot'in people are part of a large language family group of



Dene (also known as Athapaskan, Athabaskan, and Athabaskan), whose neighbours are the Nuxalk (Bella Coola), Dakelh (Carrier), and Secwépemc (Shuswap) in the north-central area of British Columbia (First Peoples' Cultural Council 2016; see interactive First Peoples' Map of British Columbia [here](#)). Reciprocity in relationships with Knowledge Keepers involves respecting communities and sharing oral histories. As part of this respectful and reciprocal community partnership, the School District Aboriginal Resource Teacher, along with a Tsilhqot'in Elder School Advisory, shared with the Cariboo Field Centre Coordinator that educational resources with local Indigenous knowledges and languages were needed in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region. In response, the Cariboo Field Centre Coordinator led a Talking Circle with Indigenous students to gain their insight and determine their educational goals, which resulted in the creation of the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* to meet the needs of Indigenous community members and learners.

## ***Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project Overview***

The ancestors are continuously present today on the landscapes. They have left us ancient names, hand tools, and trails. We bring them to life in singing their songs and telling their stories. We continue to use their language and we are acquainted with their cherished places. The past and the present merge together into the future.

Linda Smith, Tsilhqot'in Nation (2008, 15)

The *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* was a land-based experiential learning opportunity for Indigenous pre-service teachers in rural communities of north-central British Columbia to engage in traditional Indigenous storytelling practices in digital teaching and learning contexts during the 2019–20 and 2020–21 academic years. Across generations, the Nuxalk-Carrier Grease Trail has been an essential exchange corridor. Its name is from when oolichan grease stained the route. Today, Indigenous people and settlers still use the trail to connect with each other and the land (see Grease Trail Map [here](#)). The Nuxalk-Carrier Grease Trail is located on lands that have been travelled and occupied by Indigenous people from the north-central interior to the Pacific coast for millennia. Since time immemorial, Indigenous oral traditions have been an intergenerational way to promote learning transformation, so an important aspect of the Nuxalk-Carrier Grease Trail is stories of ancestors, animals, families, landscapes, and culture. Through the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project*, we consider the importance of Indigenous storytelling about the Grease Trail and reflect on strategies for creating digital storytelling resources.

The *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* was guided by the Tsilhqot'in National Government. Representatives emphasized a priority for the creation of Indigenous language resources to promote language revitalization among younger generations. Further, the Tsilhqot'in Nation Government Education Department assisted with inviting Elders and Storytellers to Talking Circles.

Preparation for the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* involved the creation of four online learning modules about digital storytelling by the Cariboo Field Centre Coordinator, assisted by two Indigenous teacher candidates. Each learning module consisted of a monthly one- to two-hour commitment by Indigenous teacher candidates to work on their digital storytelling projects. For each module, there was also at least one in-person Talking Circle located in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region, which allowed teacher candidates to learn about local traditions and oral histories. Activities were experiential in nature, using a combination of Talking Circles, in-person demonstrations, museum visits, and structured online activities. The *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* included education and social and wellness supports such as Elders visits, wellness workshops, digital mentoring outreach, and cultural teachings. The *Grease Trail Storytelling Project* relied on Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members and faculty for their expertise.

Tsilhqot'in and Dakelh Knowledge Keepers explained story protocols for how to respectfully share stories in educational settings. At the opening Talking Circle in 2019, Tsilhqot'in and Dakelh Knowledge Keepers encouraged Indigenous teacher candidates in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region to explore traditional stories and land-based practices. Tsilhqot'in and Dakelh Knowledge Keepers shared that traditional stories told on the Grease Trail are about survival, living in a good way, and interconnectedness with all relations. Tsilhqot'in and Ulkatcho Knowledge Keepers told many stories related to the Grease Trail to Indigenous teacher candidates to help them learn about local histories and stories connected with the vast territory. An Ulkatcho Knowledge Keeper closed the Talking Circle with a traditional Dakelh song. The Talking Circle came to an end with a small feast together.

Enriched with the knowledge shared in the Talking Circle, the teacher candidates selected topics related to the Grease Trail over the next few weeks and started to plan their digital stories. Indigenous teacher candidates benefited from using digital storytelling as a powerful way of sharing personal experiences in a way

that can communicate Indigenous ways of knowing. For the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project*, Indigenous teacher candidates used their personal mobile devices and laptops to record and edit their digital projects, and they gained technical skills related to effective digital storytelling: setting clear goals; identifying target audiences; and capturing their stories. The most meaningful stories were personal, authentic, and offered insights from Indigenous ways of knowing. These stories also model approaches to decolonizing historical and contemporary narratives of Indigenous lands and places and contributing to reconciliation efforts in Canadian education. The next section provides exemplars of digital storytelling projects completed by Indigenous teacher candidates enrolled in the NITEP Cariboo Field Centre.

### **Our Stories: Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Episodes**

We hope that this reflection on a teaching and learning enhancement project will provide some guidance about Indigenous digital storytelling in the classroom as well as best practices for weaving together land-based learning, oral histories, digital media, and Indigenous knowledges. In the first year of the project, there were twelve Indigenous teacher candidates enrolled in the NITEP – Indigenous Teacher Education Program's Cariboo Field Centre, who worked on a *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* between October 2019 and April 2020. Teacher candidates were provided with the option of working individually or in pairs throughout the project. The *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* website (<https://nitep.educ.ubc.ca/field-centres/williams-lake-quesnel/greasetrail/>) provides a basic description of each project, including duration (with each story between ten and eighteen minutes), story location, and date of production. Selected *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling* episodes were repeatedly reviewed and assigned additional attributes that included topics (e.g., issues and activism, historical events, cultural traditions, use of Indigenous languages).

We have selected three stories (out of a total of eight) for inclusion here, based on a review conducted by the Cariboo Field Centre Coordinator and the Indigenous Teacher Candidate Digital Peer Mentor. After uploading the digital stories onto a shared online password protected file, the Cariboo Field Centre Coordinator and the Indigenous Teacher Candidate Digital Peer Mentor independently listened to each digital storytelling project to identify ideas, perspectives, and community issues and compiled a shortlist of three episodes based on the following criteria: 1) representation of multiple communities; 2) emphasis on local perspectives; 3) use of Indigenous language; and 4) quality of episode (e.g., length, audio, pace, and engagement). We then met as a team to share our overall impressions and to discuss our top three selections. Upon review, the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* demonstrated a range of topics, themes, and Indigenous knowledges that connected to land in contemporary and historical perspectives.

### **“Canada’s Genocide: Highway of Tears”**

Alyssa and Ashley are both from the Wet’suwet’en Nation, specifically Hagwilget Village, which is located in Hazelton, British Columbia. They both worked at elementary schools as Indigenous Education Support Workers. Their digital storytelling project, titled “Canada’s Genocide: Highway of Tears,” challenges the dominant history told about Indigenous women and girls who have been targets of violence along Highway 16 in northern British Columbia. The episode is approximately eleven minutes in duration and was recorded in Quesnel, British Columbia, in April 2020 (listen to episode [here](#)). The intended audiences are educators and secondary students. The main theme of the episode is Indigenous feminism and activism.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) in Canada are linked to a broader topic seen as the dark legacy of Canada’s past: forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples. Historically, as a result of patriarchy, Indigenous women have been treated as less than and often portrayed as subhuman and sexualized in comparison with non-Indigenous women (Amnesty International 2004). Denise Lajimodiere, an Indigenous scholar, explains, “although all Native Americans suffer from stereotypes, Native American women were and are especially romanticized and abused” (2011, 60). Colonial policies have had a detrimental impact on the lives of all Indigenous people; however, they have disproportionately affected Indigenous women and girls (Lajimodiere 2011). A national inquiry focused on MMIWG noted that “while the Canadian genocide targets all Indigenous peoples, Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA people are particularly targeted. Statistics consistently show that rates of violence against Métis, Inuit, and First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people are much higher than for non-Indigenous women in Canada” (National Inquiry into MMIWG 2019, 3). The historic and continuing detrimental effects of colonialism on Indigenous peoples, such as the legacy of residential schools and child welfare policies, increase the likelihood that Indigenous women and girls will experience violence.

MMIWG are even more frequent in some regions, especially when there is a myriad of vulnerabilities (National Inquiry into MMIWG 2019). This is the case of the infamous Highway of Tears, a name given to a stretch of highway in the Pacific Northwest area. Tragically, for over five decades, this northern British Columbia highway corridor has had a disproportionate number of murders and disappearances of Indigenous

women and girls (National Inquiry into MMIWG 2019; see the Highway of Tears Map [here](#)). The high number of violent incidents targeting Indigenous women and girls may be motivated by racism or due to societal indifference to the safety and well-being of Indigenous women, which often enable perpetrators to elude justice (Amnesty International 2004). Further, many rural and remote Indigenous communities lack public transportation between north-coastal and central interior regions (National Inquiry into MMIWG 2019). Sadly, many Indigenous women and girls in this territory have limited to no public transportation options to access healthcare, visit friends or family, or attend school. When Indigenous women and girls are faced with transportation barriers, they become forced to use hitchhiking as a method of travel between communities.

The episode “Canada’s Genocide: Highway of Tears” aims to bring to light the tragedies happening along the infamous Highway of Tears, which has a personal connection for both Alyssa and Ashley, as their home community falls along the Highway of Tears. Alyssa and Ashley discuss current social justice movements happening in today’s society to honour MMIWG and advocate for social change. Calls to action from Amnesty International’s “Stolen Sisters” report in 2004 and the Sisters in Spirit Vigil initiatives of the Native Women’s Association of Canada (2010) have contributed to understanding MMIWG as an act of genocide (National Inquiry into MMIWG 2019). The “Stolen Sisters” report influenced the commencement of the annual Sisters in Spirit Vigil, which gathers community members to raise their voices and demand action to prevent the loss of Indigenous mothers, aunties, sisters, and daughters (Native Women’s Association of Canada 2010). More recently, as discussed by Alyssa and Ashley, a popular social justice movement relies on social networking sites to share pictures of a red handprint on the face as well as a red dress with the hashtag #nomorestolessisters. This contemporary social justice movement is promoting awareness of MMIWG, not only along the Highway of Tears but across all of Turtle Island.

Indigenous social media social justice movements occupy digital space within dominant settler colonial structures in online platforms (Gallagher 2020). Digital media shared on social networking sites can be viewed as a form of Indigenous resurgence and resistance. It is truly powerful and empowering for Indigenous people who are using their voice and mastering social media platforms, especially when Canadian news stations and other media sources are not shedding light on MMIWG. Moreover, Indigenous art is considered integral to Indigenous survival, as it can disrupt current status quo portrayals of Indigenous women and girls (Gallagher 2020), and recent research has shown a connection between Indigenous art and activism dedicated to raising awareness of MMIWG. Gail Gallagher’s (2020) REDress Project helps raise public awareness through social activism and may help better unite Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities across Turtle Island. Furthermore, social justice art projects such as the REDress Project use Indigenous ceremonies to foster healing within communities and in families (Gallagher 2020). In their project, Alyssa and Ashley discuss how they believe that Indigenous people are moving toward more open displays of cultural resurgence and identity. They acknowledge the strength that Indigenous people have in exercising their voice, being loud, learning their culture, and standing up for their inherent rights. In this *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling* episode, the key topics that emerge from the narrative include a call to action to raise awareness about MMIWG, specifically through social media campaigns. The overarching theme is Indigenous feminism and activism. The episode narrators encourage audience members to educate themselves and others about becoming involved to end violence against Indigenous women and girls.

### “Lhin Desch’osh (Stone Dog) Legend”

Lorianne is a proud member of the Yunesit’in Government of T̓silhqot’in Nation and worked as a T̓silhqot’in Language Teacher for School District #27. The digital storytelling project titled “Lhin Desch’osh (Stone Dog) Legend” incorporates Indigenous knowledge and content to create an informative story about the values of T̓silhqot’in oral traditions (listen to episode [here](#)). The episode is approximately eighteen minutes in duration and was recorded in Williams Lake, British Columbia, in April 2020. The intended audience is educators as well as secondary students. The main themes of the episode are Indigenous land rights, oral traditions, and language.

Indigenous storytelling has been and remains a powerful and primary means of oral history and a traditional method to preserve intergenerational knowledge (Poitras Pratt 2020). Although Indigenous oral histories continue to be shared in most communities, often told by Elders or Knowledge Keepers, it is essential to recognize that Indigenous traditions and storytelling were severely oppressed by colonialism (Poitras Pratt 2020). For instance, the Indian Act made it illegal for Indigenous people to practice their traditional customs and forcibly displaced them from traditional territories. Those colonizing tactics resulted in a yearning among young Indigenous people for traditional oral stories that would allow them to learn about their ancestral roots, inherent land rights, and Indigenous languages (Poitras Pratt 2020). Past scholarly writings highlight racial tensions and misrepresentations in colonial renderings of Indigenous peoples in Canada



(Poitras Pratt 2020). As a proud and fiercely self-determined First Nation, T̓silhqot'in people faced grave atrocities due to the Chilcotin War of 1864 (T̓silhqot'in Nation 2019). As a lasting legacy of the Chilcotin uprising, there was a silencing of their stories and forcible land dispossession (T̓silhqot'in Nation 2019). Recently, T̓silhqot'in people have started to right this historical oppression through a resurgence of storytelling in their community.

In 1989, as part of reclaiming their ancestral territory, T̓silhqot'in National Government began legal proceedings against British Columbia to end the illegal harvesting of timber in the Tachelach'ed (Brittany Triangle) as well as the traditional Trapline Territory, which became geographically known in the Canadian court case as the T̓silhqot'in Claim Area (*T̓silhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia*, 2014 SCC 44, [2014] 2 S.C.R. 256). Commonly referred to as the T̓silhqot'in Decision, the court findings allowed for full ownership, benefit, and control of the Claim Area by the T̓silhqot'in people. From these legal proceedings, the Supreme Court of Canada declared that British Columbia did in fact breach its duty to consult with the T̓silhqot'in people in its planning and forestry authorizations. The T̓silhqot'in Claim area was partly established by T̓silhqot'in Elders who told traditional stories as evidence in the legal proceedings. One of the traditional stories told by Elders included the Lhin Desch'osh (Stone Dog) legend, which is "the legend of how the land was transformed and the animals made less dangerous" (Borrows 2015). Importantly, the Lhin Desch'osh creation story, along with other traditional stories, were submitted by T̓silhqot'in Elders in the Supreme Court of Canada (*T̓silhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia*, 2014 SCC 44, [2014] 2 S.C.R. 256) as oral evidence of the nation's rights to the land. This story has remained alive for generations through the main historical figures, which are tied to the landscape via place names that indicate the historical boundaries of T̓silhqot'in territory. As the Supreme Court decision notes, "the Lhin Desch'osh legend prominently features additional landmarks that further define or bound the Proven Title Area: the Tsilhqox (Chilko River) and Gwetsilh (Siwash Bridge) form the northern corridor of the Proven Title Area; Tsilhqox Biny (Chilko Lake) lies at the heart of the Proven Title Area; and the Dasiqox (Taseko River) provides an eastern boundary" (*T̓silhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia*, 2014 SCC 44, [2014] 2 S.C.R. 256, 9). Specifically, Lhin Desch'osh sits in fossilized form along the Chilcotin River (Smith 2008; see image of Chilcotin River [here](#)).

This digital storytelling project raises awareness of the role of T̓silhqot'in oral histories in the resurgence of traditional storytelling and the reclamation of ancestral land rights and Indigenous self-determination. This particular digital storytelling episode is thus part of that resurgence of T̓silhqot'in traditional oral stories that has helped the nation reclaim its land rights and title. "Lhin Desch'osh (Stone Dog) Legend" is a story narrated by Lorianne in both English and T̓silhqot'in.

### **"Sqilye Te Secwépemc – The Shuswap Sweathouse"**

Valarie is proudly from the Secwépemc Nation of Esk'et, located in the north-central interior of British Columbia. Valarie was raised on reserve, which provided her with many cherished memories of time spent with family members learning cultural and traditional practices of the Secwépemc people. She aspires to implement positive, culturally responsive curriculum changes and to promote the use of Indigenous languages within the public education system. Valarie's digital storytelling project, titled "Sqilye Te Secwépemc – The Shuswap Sweathouse," encourages traditional ceremonies and spiritual wellness among Indigenous youth (listen to episode [here](#)). The episode is approximately sixteen minutes in duration and was recorded in Williams Lake, British Columbia, in April 2020. Some of the key topics that emerge from this *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling* episode include the revival of holistic wellness, the use of sweat lodges, and language revitalization.

Intergenerationally, wellness has been approached holistically among Secwépemc people. A holistic way of life includes caring for the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs of oneself, family, and community. The relationships between Secwépemc people and the land are equally important. Maintaining a balanced connection with all relations is necessary for the well-being of Secwépemc people. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) reported a deterioration of traditional wellness practices among Indigenous peoples after colonial policies destroyed many cultural traditions and languages (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). Traditional ceremonies and ways of living by Indigenous peoples were outlawed in the Indian Act (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). Further, residential school Survivors have explained the deteriorating well-being of Indigenous peoples as a "broken heart" resulting from being torn away from their community, families, and the land (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). Due to Canada's residential school system and forced assimilation policies, Indigenous peoples were unable to maintain a traditional holistic way of life and well-being (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). This *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling* episode discusses how Secwépemc sweat lodge practices were affected by colonialism, which resulted in the higher use of community-based sweat baths in comparison to ceremonial sweat lodge protocols.

This digital storytelling episode shares the healing journey of the Secwépemc people toward the revival of holistic wellness practices, including sweat lodges and language revitalization. The learning opportunities in sweat lodges are endless. Sweat lodges are greatly beneficial for Indigenous youth, who not only learn cultural practices and responsibility but gain the opportunity to pass on the knowledge to our future generations. By sharing the holistic wellness practices of Secwépemc people, this episode allows the audience to learn how holistic wellness is being revived in community. Further, audience members may reflect on their own holistic well-being. This digital storytelling project speaks to the strengths of Secwépemc people as well as the promotion of a healthy life balance. The principle of holistic wellness as a goal for Indigenous people involves living in balance with all relations, culture, language, traditions, spirituality, physical fitness, and the land (First Nations Health Authority et al. 2013). The revival of holistic wellness may include Traditional Healers, storytelling, prayers, sweat lodges, and feasting (First Nations Health Authority et al. 2013). Within many Indigenous communities, holistic wellness can be further revived, showing future generations how to live in a good way with a balance between mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of well-being.

## Closing Circle

This article reflected on a teaching and learning enhancement project to create a multimodal series of student- and community-produced land narratives, based on Dene-Athabaskan Indigenous worldviews, that will form an educational curriculum for schools and Indigenous communities located in north-central British Columbia. The purpose of the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* was to create local open access to Indigenous learning resources in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region of British Columbia. The project combined face-to-face Talking Circles with digital media tools, which intertwined with land, culture, traditions, and oral histories. Indigenous digital storytelling projects connect culture, landscapes, and local oral histories. The *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* may serve as a helpful resource for those interested in learning how Indigenous digital storytelling could be approached for the preservation of Indigenous traditions that bring together land, story, and memory in online spaces and integrated as a tool for teaching and learning in school and community settings.

Digital storytelling as a culturally revitalizing teaching practice focuses on weaving together technology and Indigenous storytelling. Digital storytelling projects can be shared with learners to introduce content and capture learners' attention when sharing ideas (Robin 2008). While learning about digital storytelling, the emphasis is on storytelling itself and the means of constructing the narratives, using traditional oral traditions with new digital media. The strengths associated with using digital media as a tool for Indigenous storytelling arise from the ability to include personal narratives, Indigenous language, and music components within digital storytelling projects.

Indigenous pre-service teachers benefited from the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* approaches, which allowed them to collaborate with local Knowledge Keepers to learn songs and stories associated with the Grease Trail. Indigenous pre-service teachers were able to create a story after participating in Talking Circles that gave them an opportunity to learn from peers, Knowledge Keepers, and Elders. Talking Circles were an essential component used to bring together teacher candidates with local Knowledge Keepers and Elders, which was a similar approach taken in other Indigenous digital storytelling projects (Eglinton, Gubrium, and Wexler 2017). The purpose of Talking Circles was to create a sense of belonging among Indigenous pre-service teachers. At Talking Circles, Indigenous pre-service teachers presented their initial idea or draft of stories. Further, Talking Circles provided a safe and comfortable space for Indigenous pre-service teachers to share difficult experiences and to gain peer insights and discuss possible solutions. This experience established a collaborative process for both developing story narratives and working on digital media components of the project. Indigenous pre-service teachers thus had the opportunity to learn experientially and situate Indigenous stories in local context.

The *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* applied the work of Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) four Rs—relationality, responsibility, respect, and reciprocity—which provided a useful lens to reflect on Indigenous digital storytelling. Relationality, the concept that knowledge is relational, was critical to the development of the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project*. Through the project, Indigenous pre-service teachers were able to foster relationships with local Knowledge Keepers and Elders who were passionate about language and culture revitalization. The *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* was grounded in local communities and developed collaboratively with T̓silhqot'in National Government's Education Department. It was designed to develop open educational resources that addressed a community-identified need—in particular, open-access local Indigenous learning materials. Responsibility arose from relationality. Indigenous pre-service teachers felt responsibility to their surrounding communities. The *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* was undertaken from a position of respect for the T̓silhqot'in, Dakelh, and Secwépemc peoples and their languages, cultures, and values. Reciprocity, conceptualized as sharing with community, was also central to the *Grease*

*Trail Digital Storytelling Project*. Digital stories were developed with the central aim of providing for community needs. In the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project*, Indigenous pre-service teachers used the land to create stories; however, the purpose of taking land-based stories was to give to communities and provide for future classroom learning, which the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* has done by creating podcasts that communities and schools can use.

We will continue with the Grease Trail digital storytelling pathways that have been established in the local school district and more broadly in Indigenous education. The *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project* threads together counter-narratives to colonial portrayals of Indigenous people, and there are many more places along the digital Grease Trail to share stories and connect with the land. How can Indigenous educators and learners further develop and create digital trail systems that weave together oral histories and land-based learning in online spaces?

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