
Visual Storytelling: Stories about Nature Connections

Ásthildur Jónsdóttir astajons@gmail.com

Ellen Gunnarsdóttir ellen@simnet.is

Based on a workshop in the Nordic House Reykjavík

18 – 22 March 2026



Anykščių
L. ir S. Didžiulių
viešoji biblioteka



The Nordic House



Funded by
the European Union

Visual Storytelling: Stories about Nature Connections

© 2026 Ásthildur Jónsdóttir, Ellen Gunnarsdóttir / Nordic House

This methodological material was developed within the Erasmus+ project “2025-1-LT01-KA210-ADU-000353280 *Stories about Nature Connections* and is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 (CC BY-NC 4.0).

The material may be used for non-commercial purposes, provided that appropriate credit is given to the authors.



Anykščių
L. ir S. Didžiulių
viešoji biblioteka



The Nordic House



Funded by
the European Union

Adult learning cycle: Experience → Reflection → Integration → Application

Workshop conceptual place-based adult learning framework

- Storytelling bridges personal experience and ecological awareness.
- Adults learn through reflection on lived experience rather than instruction alone.
- Nature is approached as a relationship, not a resource.
- Creative expression supports emotional engagement, memory, and meaning-making.

SEE Learning (Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning) is a pedagogy developed by Emory University that expands traditional social-emotional learning by integrating **ethical awareness, systems thinking, and global responsibility**. It is grounded in cultivating three core capacities—**awareness (of self and others), compassion (as a trainable skill), and engagement (acting wisely in the world)**—across personal, social, and systems domains. SEE Learning emphasizes experiential practices such as reflection, dialogue, and attention training, helping learners understand how their emotions, relationships, and actions are interconnected within broader social and ecological systems. Rather than prescribing values, it supports learners in developing the skills to make **informed, compassionate, and responsible decisions**, making it especially relevant for sustainability and global citizenship education.



Melting Moments: A Visual Storytelling of Melting Ice

Glaciers are highly sensitive indicators of climate change because they respond directly to shifts in temperature and precipitation. When temperatures rise, glaciers lose more ice through melting than they gain from snowfall, causing them to retreat. This makes them a visible and measurable signal of warming trends over time. By tracking changes in glacier length, thickness, and mass, scientists can observe how climate conditions have evolved, often over decades or even centuries.

In addition to their physical changes, glaciers also preserve valuable historical records of the Earth's climate. Layers of ice accumulate year after year, trapping air bubbles, dust, and other particles. By drilling ice cores from glaciers, researchers can analyse past atmospheric conditions, including greenhouse gas concentrations and temperature patterns. These records provide a long-term context that helps scientists understand how current climate changes compare to natural variability in the past.

Finally, glaciers influence and reflect broader environmental systems, making their changes especially important. As glaciers melt, they contribute to sea level rise and affect freshwater availability for ecosystems and human populations. Changes in glacier behaviours can also impact weather patterns and regional climates. By studying glaciers, scientists gain insight not only into local changes but also into global climate dynamics and the far-reaching consequences of a warming planet.



The aim of this project is to use a conceptual layer, linking embodied experience with environmental awareness and making the activity both reflective and meaningful.

1. Begin with observation and inspiration

Start by looking at works by Þorvarður Árnason, paying close attention to how ice, light, and subtle colour shifts are represented. Þorvarður who runs the University Glacier Research Centre thinks of the glaciers as his friends. Discuss why it is important to be friends of nonhuman nature.

Notice the presence of blue tones in the glacier ice. This blue colour occurs because ice absorbs longer wavelengths of light (reds and yellows) more than shorter wavelengths. The structure of frozen water, particularly the oxygen atoms in H₂O, affects how light is scattered and absorbed, allowing blue wavelengths to be reflected back to our eyes. This is why dense, compact ice can appear vividly blue.

His images can be found here: <https://www.cryophilia.is>

Melting Moments: A Visual Storytelling of Melting Ice



The photo series by Þorvarður Árnason of Hoffells-glacier was taken over an eight-year period from 2008 to 2015, with the images arranged so that the highest row represents 2008 and the lowest row 2015, and the months aligned from January on the left to December on the right. Across the series, we can see that in the earlier images the photographs are taken close to the glacier, while in the later ones the glacier has retreated, and a glacial lagoon has formed in its place.

Melting Moments: A Visual Storytelling of Melting Ice



2. Direct sensory engagement and reflection

Take a piece of ice and hold it in your hand. Feel its temperature, texture, and weight. As the ice melts in your hand, consider this moment as a metaphor. Your body heat accelerates the melting, just as human activity contributes to the warming of the planet and the melting of glaciers. Reflect on this connection: how does it feel to hold something that is disappearing because of your own warmth? This small, immediate experience can open a space to think about the larger, less visible impacts humans have on glacial environments and climate systems.

3. Paint on the ice

Using water-based colours (such as watercolour or diluted ink), gently apply colour directly onto the surface of the ice. Try to match the colours you observed, especially the subtle blues, but also any greys, whites, or reflections. Let the paint interact with the cold, wet surface and notice how it behaves differently than on paper.



Melting Moments: A Visual Storytelling of Melting Ice

4. Let the ice melt onto paper Place the painted ice onto watercolour paper and allow it to melt naturally. As it melts, the pigment will transfer and spread in unpredictable ways. Observe how the melting process creates marks—soft edges, flows, and traces that reflect both movement and time.

5. Reflect on the marks Once the paper is dry, take time to look closely at the marks left behind. Notice variations in colour intensity, shape, and texture. Each print will be unique, shaped by the melting process and your earlier observations.

6. Respond creatively Finally, respond to your work in one of the following ways: Write a single sentence capturing your experience. Compose a short haiku inspired by the melting ice. Or simply sit with and appreciate the marks without adding words.

Materials: Ice cubes, watercolour, watercolour paper and brushes



A tear drops from the glacier

The Spirit in the Line: Visual Storytelling of Sacred Places

Place-based learning is an approach that grounds education in the local environment, encouraging learners to engage directly with the places they inhabit. Rather than treating knowledge as abstract, it invites students to explore the relationships between people, land, culture, and ecology through lived experience. By paying attention to specific landscapes, their histories, sounds, textures, and rhythms, learners develop a deeper awareness of their surroundings. This kind of learning fosters care, responsibility, and a sense of belonging, as individuals come to understand themselves as part of a larger ecological and cultural context.

The philosophy of Arne Næss, known as deep ecology, offers a meaningful framework for place-based learning. Næss argued that all living beings have intrinsic value, independent of their usefulness to humans, and that humans are not separate from nature but deeply interconnected with it. Deep ecology encourages a shift from an anthropocentric worldview to an ecological one, where the well-being of the whole system is prioritized. Through this lens, engaging with a specific place becomes not just an educational activity, but an ethical practice, one that nurtures respect, humility, and a recognition of the complex interdependence of life.

Within both place-based learning and deep ecology, the idea of “sacred places” plays an important role. A sacred place does not need to be religious in a formal sense; rather, it is a place where a person feels a strong connection, meaning, or sense of presence.



These places can help individuals experience the harmony of nature in a direct and personal way. By returning to and reflecting on such places, people can cultivate a deeper emotional and sensory relationship with the natural world. This connection can inspire care and responsibility, supporting a more sustainable and respectful way of living in relation to the environment.

The Spirit in the Line: Visual Storytelling of Sacred Places

1. Writing a personal memory

Begin by writing down a personal memory from a place in nature that is meaningful to you. This could be a landscape, a moment, or an environment that has stayed with you over time. Focus on capturing the feeling, atmosphere, and sensory details of the experience.

This project invites participants to connect with a place in nature that holds personal meaning and to explore it through storytelling, listening, and visual expression. Take a moment to return to the place you have written about and recall its qualities, what makes it significant to you.

2. Describing the place through the senses

Working in pairs, participants describe their chosen place without naming it directly. Instead, they evoke it through sensory details such as sounds, smells, textures, light, and atmosphere. Each person has five minutes to tell a story about their place, while their partner listens closely.

Taking time to describe a place slowly and in detail allows memory to unfold more fully. When we rush, we tend to stay at the surface, naming general features rather than noticing what makes a place personally meaningful. Spending more time invites deeper reflection, helping small and often overlooked details emerge: the way light shifts, the rhythm of sounds, or the feeling of being there. This extended attention strengthens the connection between the person and the place, making the experience richer and more grounded.



Smells, sounds, textures, temperature, and movement are powerful triggers for recalling experiences. A certain scent or sound can bring back a moment more vividly than an image alone. By searching through all the senses, participants access layers of memory that might otherwise remain hidden, leading to more authentic, nuanced, and emotionally resonant descriptions.

This sensory and time-based approach also deepens awareness of our relationship with the environment. When we recall a place through the body and senses, we begin to understand it not just as a location, but as a lived experience. This can foster a stronger sense of connection, care, and responsibility toward that place.

The Spirit in the Line: Visual Storytelling of Sacred Places



3. Drawing through listening As they listen, the partner draws an intuitive, continuous line using a coloured water-soluble pencil chosen by the storyteller. This line is not meant to represent the place directly, but to respond unconsciously to the rhythm, emotion, and imagery of the story. The listener may gently support the storyteller by asking open-ended questions that deepen the description.

4. Sharing and exchanging interpretations After both participants have shared and drawn, they exchange drawings and attempt to describe each other's places, revealing what they understood and imagined.

5. Deepening the personal story Using the drawing they received, each participant then tells a more personal story connected to their place, building on memory and reflection.

6. Finding and expressing the spirit of place From this deeper reflection, participants begin to search for the “spirit” of the place—its essence, mood, or presence. This spirit is then expressed visually by painting or drawing into the existing line work. The response can be abstract or figurative, intuitive or detailed.

7. Sharing sacred places The project concludes with participants sharing their images of these meaningful places. Together, the works form a collection of “sacred places,” expressed through memory, imagination, and collaboration, where listening, storytelling, and mark-making intertwine.



Materials
Colour pencils
Paint brush
Dry pastels
Watercolours
Watercolour paper

The Spirit in the Line: Visual Storytelling of Sacred Places



Sitting in a circle while telling stories creates a shared and inclusive space where everyone is equally visible and present. There is no front or back, no single person in a position of authority, which helps dissolve hierarchies and encourages openness. In this arrangement, each voice carries equal weight, and participants are more likely to listen attentively and speak with confidence. The circle supports a sense of trust and collective engagement, which is especially important when sharing personal memories and experiences.

The circle also holds symbolic meaning through its connection to patterns found in nature. Circles appear in cycles, seasons, ripples in water, tree rings, and planetary movements, forms that represent continuity, balance, and interconnection. By sitting in a circle, participants physically embody these natural patterns, reinforcing the idea that they are part of a larger ecological and relational system. This can deepen awareness of how individual stories are connected to broader rhythms of life and environment.



Finally, the circle emphasizes equality and belonging. Everyone occupies the same position, facing one another, which can create a stronger sense of community and mutual respect. In the context of storytelling and creative work, this shared space helps participants feel seen and heard, while also reminding them that their experiences are part of a collective whole. The circle becomes not just a seating arrangement, but a meaningful structure that supports connection—between people, stories, and the natural world.

Meteorological Reports: Stories of Weather



1. Participants are shown [Josefina Nelimarkka's](#) works on weather systems, atmospheric processes, and climate change through immersive, often abstract visual forms that translate scientific phenomena into sensory experience. Drawing on data such as wind patterns, temperature shifts, and environmental flows, she creates installations, moving images, and textile-like surfaces that evoke the dynamic, constantly shifting nature of the atmosphere. Her work highlights the invisibility yet omnipresence of climate systems, inviting viewers to feel how humans are embedded within these forces. By making climate processes perceptible and experiential, Nelimarkka encourages a deeper awareness of interdependence, vulnerability, and responsibility in the face of environmental change.

2. Three participants are grouped around each table. Each participant relates a memory of encountering extreme weather, whether it be extreme heat or cold or wind. One participant summarizes the story on paper while the other practices radical listening. Radical listening is the practice of listening with full presence, openness, and a willingness to be changed by what is heard. In educational and community settings, it fosters trust, empathy, and deeper connection, creating space where people feel genuinely heard and where new understanding can emerge collectively.

Collective efficacy in sustainability education emphasizes the power of groups to work together toward shared environmental goals, fostering confidence that collective action can create meaningful change. By building collaboration, shared responsibility, and mutual support, it helps learners develop the skills and mindset needed to address complex sustainability challenges.

Watch [Josefina Nelimarkka](#) discuss her work

Meteorological Reports: Stories of Weather



Fréttir ▾ Útvarp ▾ Sjónvarp ▾ Meira ▾ (⋮)

Reykjavík 3° RÚV English

Lithuania sets new heat record f 27

B BNS
2024.07.01 17:37



Heatwave in Lithuania | Ž. Gedvila / BNS

A new heat record was set in Lithuania last Friday as the mercury rose to 34 degrees centigrade in the southern resort town of



Hitamet þessarar aldar slegið

Hitamet þessarar aldar var slegið þegar hiti náði 29,8 stigum á Egilsstaðaflugvelli. Óvenjuhlyr loftmassi fór yfir landið með hveli í gær, hita á Austurlandi en þrumuveðri á Suðvesturlandi.

Þorgerður Anna Gunnarsdóttir
16. ágúst 2025 kl. 16:50

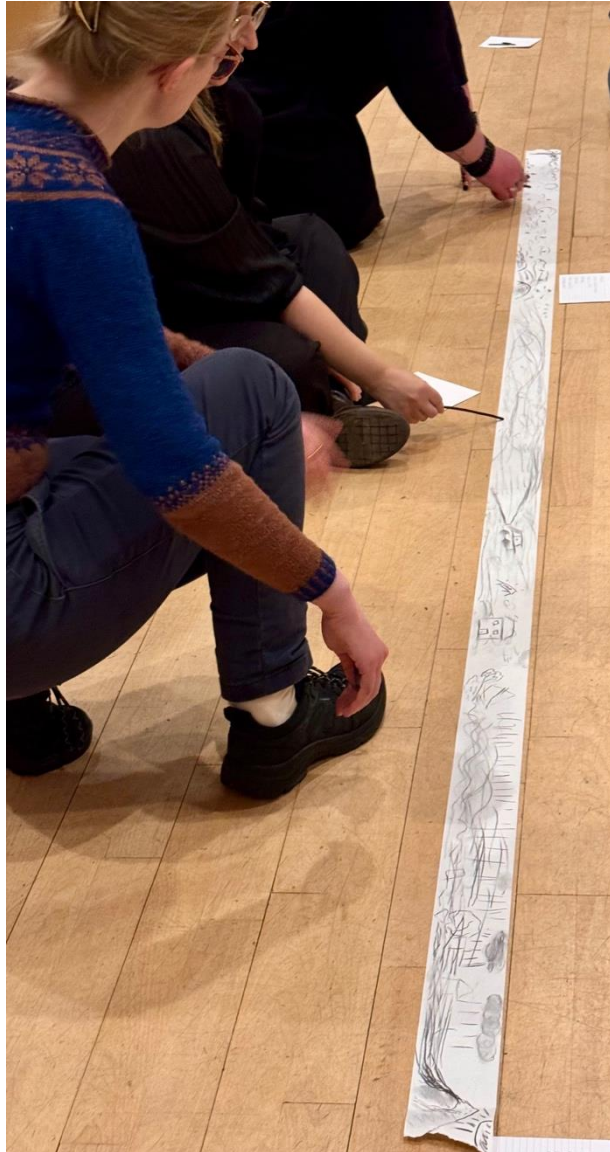


⚠ Þessi færsla er meira en 7 mánaða gömul

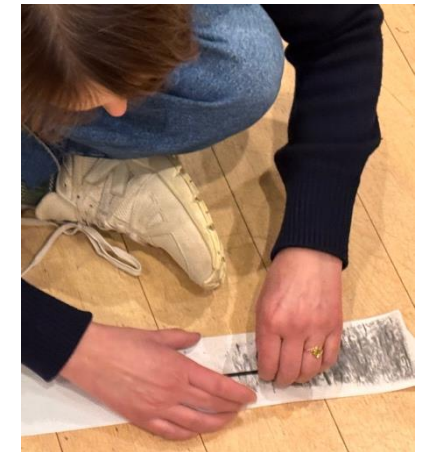
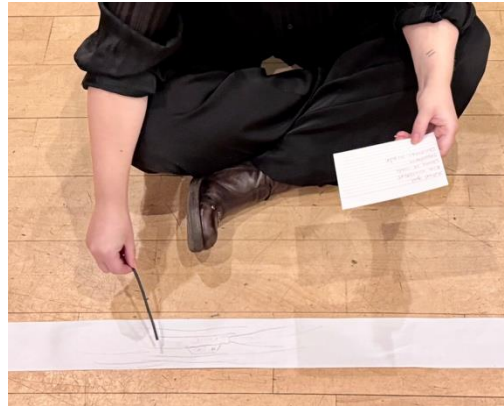


Find weather reports from your local area that show how the climate is changing with weather becoming more extreme.

Meteorological Reports: Stories of Weather



3. Each group of participants is provided with a long narrow roll of paper which they can place on the table or on the floor as they work. They are provided with charcoal and asked to express their weather memory in images. This is their meteorological report. Each participant decides where they should place their illustration so that the contrasting weather memories they described can meet and connect.



Meteorological Reports: Stories of Weather

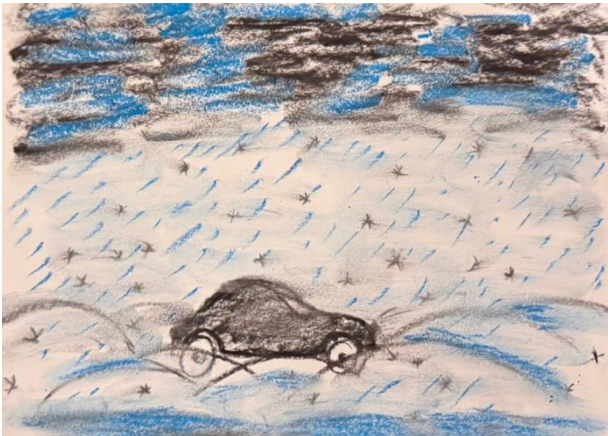
4. Once they have completed their illustrations, the rolls of paper are placed on the floor alongside one another, and participants tell the stories related and how they contrast and connect.

5. Each participant creates an image of weather memory using charcoals and one selected dry pastel colour to give full expression to their weather memory.

6. Participants discuss each other works.

Using charcoal to work with weather is particularly effective because it has rich, deep tones that can capture the drama of dark clouds, storms, or mist, and it allows for a wide range of mark-making, from soft, subtle smudges to bold, intense lines. This flexibility makes it ideal for representing the dynamic and often unpredictable qualities of weather, such as shifting winds, rain, or swirling fog.

Charcoal also responds directly to touch and pressure, which allows users to translate their sensory experience of weather into visual form. By varying how hard or lightly they press, or by blending and smudging, participants can evoke textures, movement, and mood, creating a visceral connection between the drawing and the lived experience of the environment.



Meteorological Reports: Stories of Weather

Translating sensation into charcoal language

Before making a full piece, explore **mark-making as weather vocabulary**:

- **Wind** → sweeping, directional strokes, smudged gradients
- **Rain** → vertical marks, erasure lines, dripping gestures
- **Fog / mist** → heavy blending, soft transitions, erased highlights
- **Storm** → contrast, pressure, fragmentation, layered chaos
- **Cold** → sparse marks, sharp edges, empty space
- **Warmth/sun after rain** → light emerging through erasure

You can also try to work with scale and the body

Charcoal invites physical engagement.

Try:

- Large paper on walls → whole-arm gestures (wind, force)
- Small, intimate formats → close, quiet weather (fog, snowfall)


Instead of one scene, invite **temporal layering**:

- What happened *before* the storm?
- What lingered *after*?

Students can:

- Build multiple layers and partially obscure earlier ones
- Combine different moments into one surface
- Let conflicting marks coexist (calm vs chaos)



A winter landscape scene with a semi-transparent text box in the center. The scene shows a person walking in the distance, a large tree on the right, and a semi-transparent text box in the center containing the text "Weather memory from the Nordic House". The background is a hazy, overcast sky with a mountain range visible in the distance. The foreground is a snow-covered area with some low-lying bushes and a paved area with parking lines.

Weather memory from the Nordic House

Autobiographical Collage: Nature as Story Source

Creating a collage is a powerful way to tell an autobiographical visual story, especially when drawing inspiration from Indigenous storytelling traditions, because it allows for a non-linear, multi-layered approach. Unlike a single image or linear narrative, a collage can bring together fragments of memory, symbols, textures, and materials that reflect the complexity of personal experience. Each element can represent a different entry point, a moment in time, or an aspect of identity, and the relationships between pieces can shift depending on how the viewer engages with the work. This mirrors Indigenous narrative practices, which often move fluidly through memory, place, and experience rather than following a strict chronological order, allowing the story to honour intuition, ancestral knowledge, and the interconnectedness of life.

1. Slow Observation Walk

Participants walk silently for 20 minutes.

Instructions:

Move slowly, notice details, follow curiosity, choose one “non-human teacher”

Examples:

moss – wind – stone – bird – water -urban tree



*Nipersuaq – There Is a Lot of Noise Around Here,
2015 (digital photocollage)*

[Explore works by Ivíngvak' Stork Høegh](#) who makes digital collage reflecting on life in Greenland. Look at the [video](#) of her talking about her works.

Discuss indigenous worldviews and traditions of storytelling. Indigenous worldviews across the Arctic and the Indigenous cultures are deeply rooted in long-standing relationships between people, land, water, animals, and seasons. While diverse across cultures, many share core principles shaped over thousands of years through lived experience in specific environments. Indigenous cultures generally view humans as part of a living system, not separate from it.

Autobiographical Collage: Nature as Story Source

2. Take photographs on your phone of images in nature which textures, colours and forms call out to you. Try to capture a fresh perspective or a close-up so that the natural element appears in a new light, even unrecognizable. You might imagine these images as a representation of your inner character

Field Notes

Participants record: What did I notice? What noticed me? What surprised me? What emotion appeared?

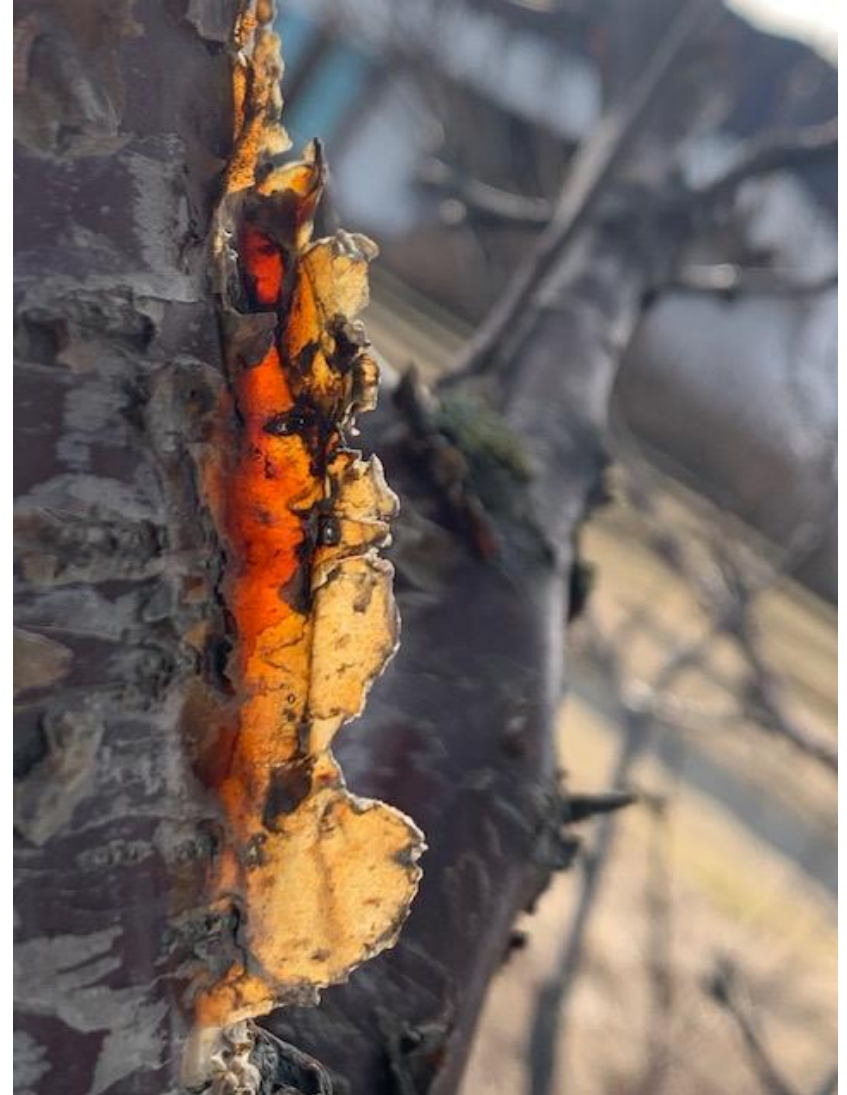
Object Story

Each person selects a natural element, shows the photograph they took and completes: “If this element could speak, it would say...”

3. Consider cyclical time and patterns Think about time as cyclical rather than linear. Observe and reflect on seasonal changes, animal migrations, and recurring environmental patterns.

Note how Indigenous Arctic cultures, such as Inuit and Sámi communities, depend on close attention to these cycles for survival.

Recognize that many Indigenous peoples organize knowledge and ceremonies around seasonal return and renewal.



Autobiographical Collage: Nature as Story Source

4. Reflect on relationships with the natural world Consider how land, animals, and natural forces can be understood as relatives or beings with agency. Reflect on the values of reciprocity, respect, and responsibility toward the environment rather than control or extraction.

5. Select images for your collage Choose a photograph of your special place in nature. Find or cut out seven additional images that represent your relationship with nature and its cyclical patterns. Consider images that evoke memory, feeling, or personal connection.

6. Create the collage Arrange your photograph and the seven selected images into a visual composition. Allow the arrangement to reflect your personal story, intuition, and the non-linear, layered approach of Indigenous storytelling. Focus on the interplay between images and how they convey cycles, relationships, and connections.

7. Discuss and interpret each other's work Share your collage with a partner or group. Discuss the choices, connections, and stories behind the images. Reflect on what you notice about each other's relationships with nature and how cyclical patterns are represented. Use this discussion to deepen understanding and appreciation of personal and cultural perspectives.



Materials:

Printed photographs, journals, glue,
firm paper base (250 g)



Autobiographical Collage: Nature as Story Source



Collective Storytelling and Care Through Embroidery

1. Participants explore the works of Sami artist Britta Marakatt-Labba centered on narrative embroidery that weaves together Sámi history, mythology, and everyday life into intricate visual stories. Using fine threads on fabric, she creates detailed scenes of reindeer herding, Arctic landscapes, and spiritual worlds, often blending past and present to express a cyclical sense of time and memory. Her monumental work [Historjá](#) tells the story of the Sámi people across generations, functioning as a kind of textile archive of culture, resistance, and ecological knowledge.

2. Between three and four participants are arranged around a table covered with a tablecloth. They are instructed to think of elements and places in nature they would like to protect. They are also encouraged to reflect on the slow, relational form of storytelling that echoes Indigenous approaches to knowledge and memory.

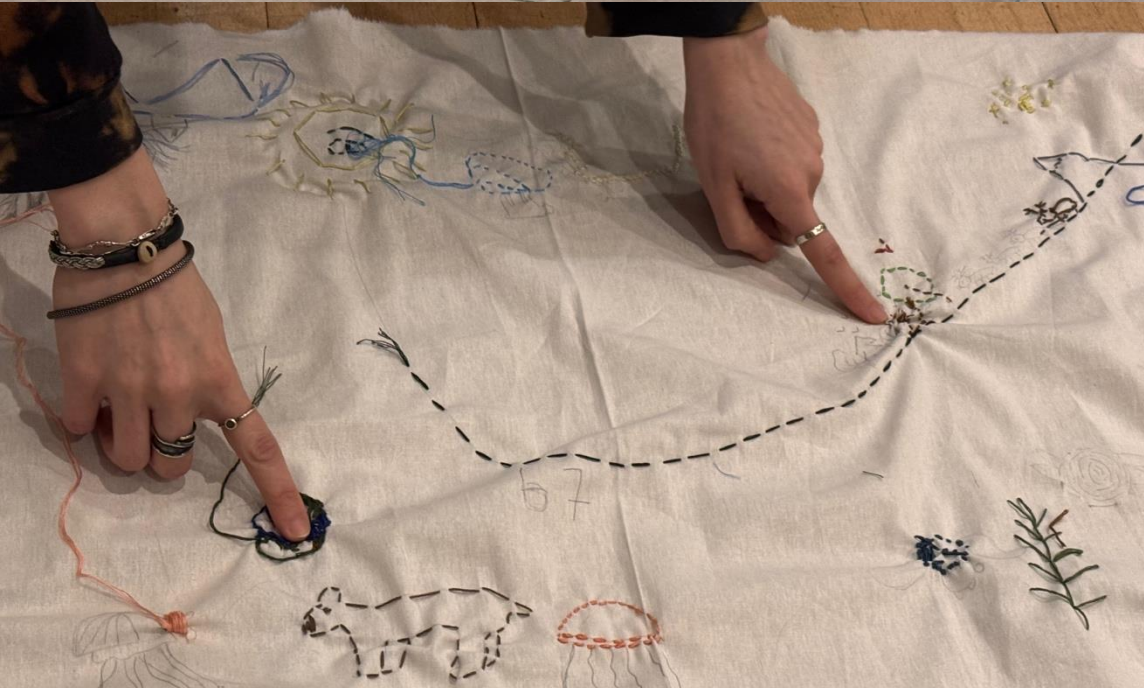
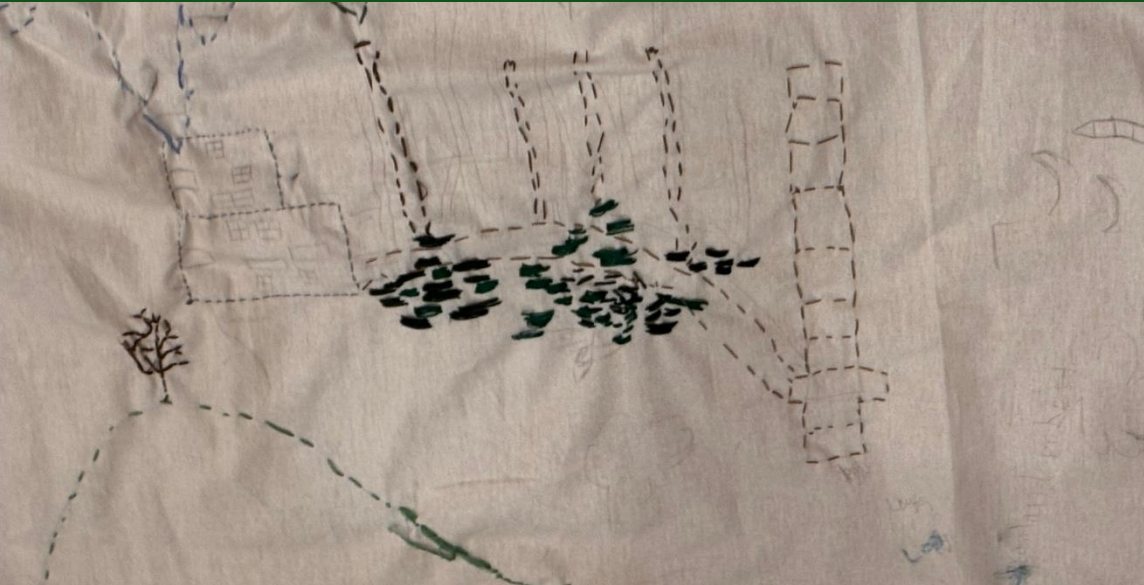
As individuals stitch landscapes, animals, and seasonal moments, their stories are layered together, creating a shared textile that reflects interconnection and continuity rather than isolated narratives. The circular, repetitive act of stitching mirrors the **cyclical flow of life—return, change, and renewal—while the tablecloth itself becomes a living archive of collective care for place.

Gathered around it, participants contribute, witness, and revisit stories over time, reinforcing a sense that humans are embedded within ongoing ecological cycles, and that protecting these places is part of an enduring, shared responsibility.

Watch this video showing part of the work [Historjá](#) by Britta Marakatt-Labba

Through her slow, meticulous process, Marakatt-Labba highlights themes of connection to land, environmental change, and Indigenous resilience, making her work both poetic and politically engaged. She uses her intricate embroidery to advocate for Sámi rights, cultural preservation, and environmental protection, often highlighting the deep relationship between her people and the land. Her work serves as a form of quiet activism, documenting histories of resistance and drawing attention to the impacts of colonization and ecological disruption on Sámi communities.

Collective Storytelling and Care Through Embroidery



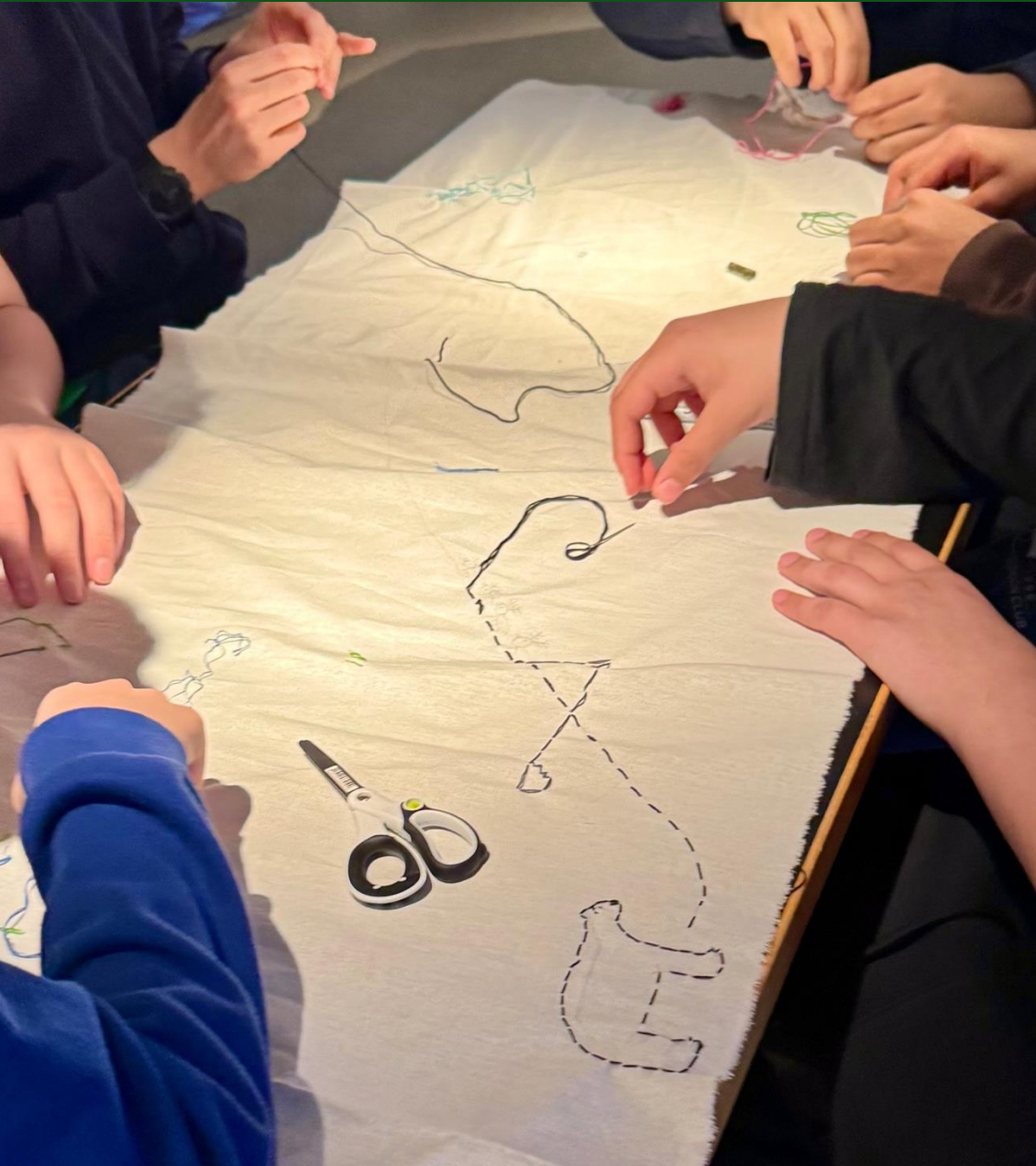
3. Provided with pencils and different colored threads and needles, participants first sketch and then stitch their special place, even stitching towards each others' special places so that they may connect and support one another. As they stitch, participants discuss and describe their places and the memories connected to them, reflecting on continuities and similarities.

4. Once their work is finished participants gather around each others' tablecloths to share the stories embroidered, finding collective threads that connect them in communal love and care for their environment.

Materials:

Textile, needles, thread, pencils

Collective Storytelling and Care Through Embroidery



Sharing stories while embroidering a communal tablecloth creates a space where individual experiences become collective meaning, strengthening trust, belonging, and shared purpose. As participants stitch and speak, they witness each other's values and concerns for the environment, gradually building a sense that "we can act together"—a key foundation of collective efficacy.

The visible accumulation of threads and stories reinforces that small contributions matter and can be woven into something larger, mirroring how sustainable living depends on coordinated, community-based action. This process transforms sustainability from an abstract goal into a shared, lived commitment, grounded in relationships, mutual support, and a growing confidence in collective agency.

Mapping Communities: Visual Storytelling with Clay



3. Participants sit in a circle around the table covered with paper. Each participant is given a lump of natural clay or soil. They are instructed to create one or more of the places and elements written on the paper with soil or clay.

4. Once all the participants have finished creating their places with clay, they discuss how to connect them into a working community. They find connections between their creations and slowly a community is formed composed of all the elements needed to foster well-being and balance with nature. They use soft pastel or crayons to add color and further natural elements to their community map.

Materials:

Roll of paper

Clay or soil

Soft pastel and crayons

Mapping Communities: Visual Storytelling with Clay



5. Participants stand in a circle around the table and observe the community they have created. Each participant tells a story of the people who live in the community and how they are connected to each other and to the natural world.

6. Participants take a photograph of their story from their chosen perspective on the map. Remember that each place has multiple stories and perspectives; encourage noticing how your view fits within the larger community.

7. Final step is a joint wisdom web. Participants reflect on what they have learned during the visual storytelling session. Connecting ideas, insights, and relationships discovered through story telling, observation, and collaboration.

