

Learning from a kindergarten dropout

By Romola Vasantha Thumbadoo

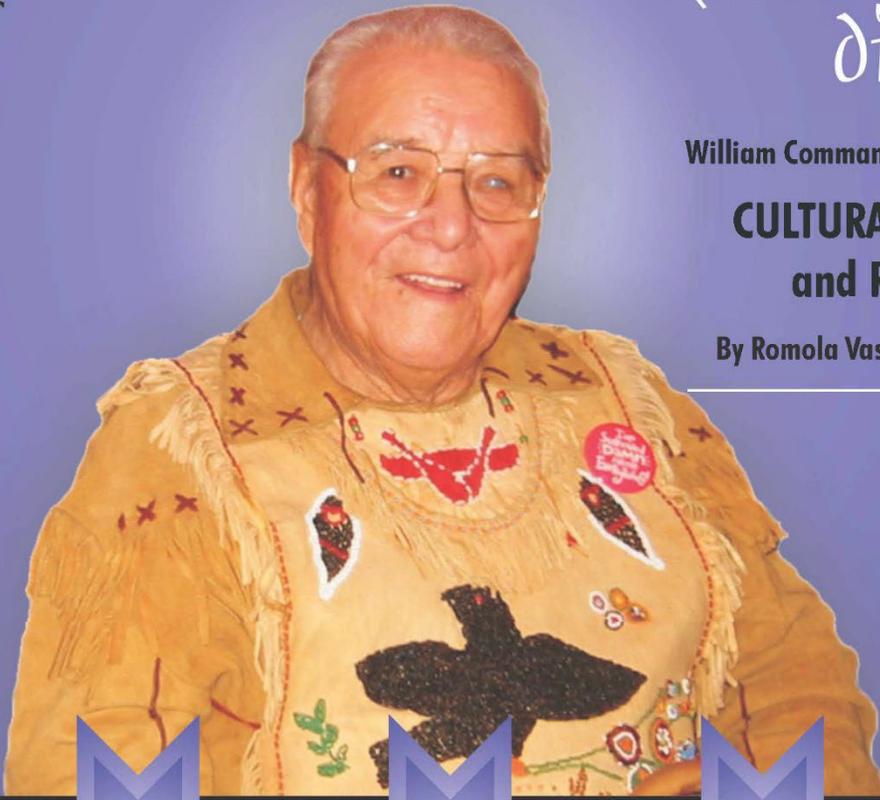
LEARNING

from a
kindergarten
dropout

William Commanda - Ojigwanong

**CULTURAL SHARINGS
and REFLECTIONS**

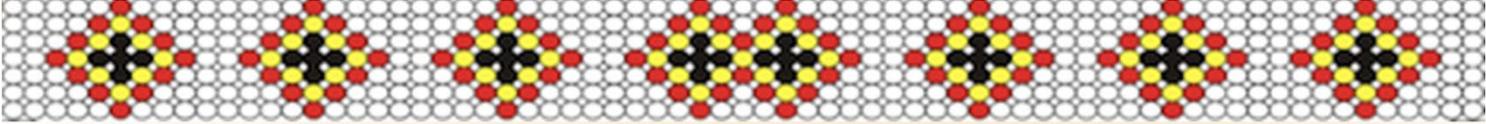
By Romola Vasantha Thumbadoo



A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE



COMPLEMENTARY WORKBOOK 1 2023



Learning From A Kindergarten Dropout: A Reflections Workbook

Zaineh Harahsha & Romola Thumbadoo
Faculty of Science; Health Science Department

Introduction

Learning From A Kindergarten Dropout is a collaborative experience of William Commanda & Romola Thumbadoo. It is a reflection on Elder William Commanda's work while at Kiche Anishnabe Kumik; Kumik Elder's Lodge from October 24 – November 5, 2004.

Aim

Inspired by the book, the objective was to ensure future readers can deeply reflect on the Elder's teachings and apply them in their everyday lives.



The Circle of All Nations new landing page can be found at <https://circleofallnations.ca/new/> for additional materials used for the inspiration and making of this workbook.



“We must come together with one heart, one mind, one love, and one determination to create A Circle of All Nations, A Culture of Peace.”

Process

Each day/chapter was analyzed to create an optimal reflection that captured the essence of the main theme. Reflections were combined to create the workbook and readers are encouraged to explore different ways to express themselves (e.g., writing, photography, drawing, painting, etc.)

Outcome

The book's design allows for chapters to be broken into separate days and presented as individual micro workshops. Reflections and activities may be completed alone or in groups, through many different formats, and for different age groups and learners. Readers will learn about several Indigenous concepts and through this workbook be able to apply and integrate them on a personal level.



Carleton
University

Teaching and Learning
Services



Zaineh Harahsha
Students as Partners Program (SaPP)
Carleton University
2022 - 2023

Passive reading can entail rushing through readings, forgetting material immediately after reading, falling asleep, texting, or watching TV while reading. To promote the formation of connections and long-term memories leading to a deeper understanding of reading materials, readers must remain stimulated and engaged.

This workbook was developed as complementary material to the *Learning from a Kindergarten Dropout* book by Romola Vasantha Thumbadoo. It serves to engage readers with the book's material and promote reflection on the teachings of Elder William Commanda by asking them to complete a short reflection/activity at the end of each chapter. The beauty in *Learning from a Kindergarten Dropout* is its accessibility. The book's design allows for chapters to be broken into separate days and presented as individual micro workshops. As such, reflections and activities may be completed alone or in groups, through many different formats, and for different age groups and learners. Readers are encouraged to explore different delivery approaches (e.g., writing, drawing, picture-taking, oral presentation, etc.) with their reflections. Presenters are also able to adjust the complexity in which they wish to deliver the material thus making the teachings accessible to an even wider range of audiences, and a separate file of resources are available to facilitate this. Readers will learn about several Indigenous concepts and through this workbook be able to apply and integrate them on a personal level.

The Circle of All Nations new landing page can be consulted at <https://circleofallnations.ca/new/> for additional materials used for the inspiration and making of this workbook.

This workbook is a collaborative project by Romola Vasantha Thumbadoo and Zaineh Harahsha.

LEARNING FROM A KINDERGARTEN DROPOUT

a ninety year old's guide to the good life



Circle of All Nations

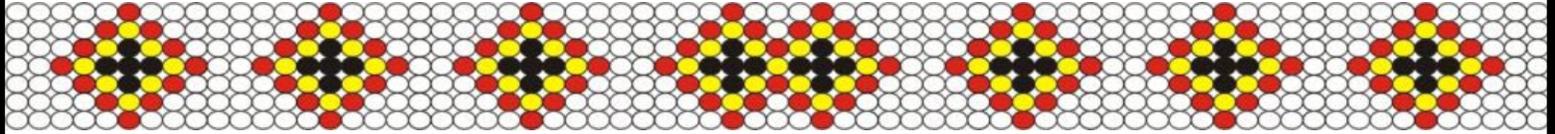
www.circleofallnations.ca

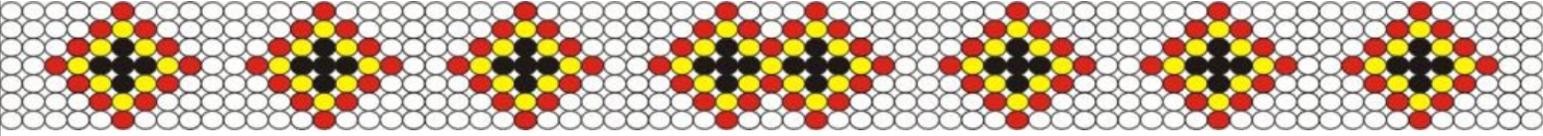


A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE

This is the website dedicated to sharing the work, activities, passions and perspectives of William Commanda. It is organized by Romola Vasantha Thumbadoo, volunteer co-ordinator of the Circle of All Nations. The web master is Scott Towaij.

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DAY TWO

THE GROUNDING IDEOLOGY

KEY FOCUS – A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SOME INDIGENOUS CONCEPTS

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The photographs selected link the theme of Origins: the red ochre-coloured backdrop is of a cave in Manitoulin Island, the largest island in the Great Lakes landscape and original home of William Commanda’s people where remains of ancient people were found. The alert eyes and energy of connection is already evident in the William Commanda of six months. The exposed root of the tree at the Sacred Point on William Commanda’s lake serves as a reminder that Nature, connecting past with present and future, is alive and always watching. The other photographs continue the theme of relationship and community underlying the vision for a *Circle of All Nations, a Culture of Peace*.

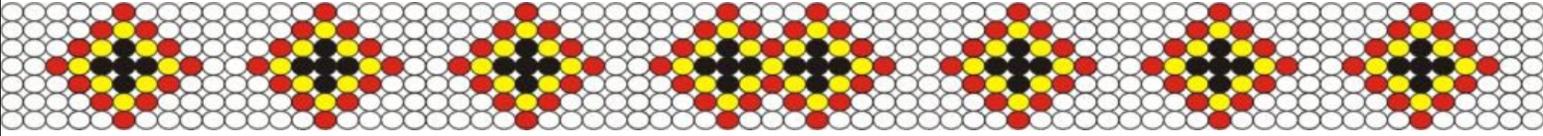
The text presents the community building relational priorities of William Commanda. Emerging from the fundamental earth generated value of respect and responsibility, grounded in a deep understanding of biodiversity, and it points to his passionate commitment to teaching. The discussion of *A Few Fundamental Values and Concepts of Pagan* and Earth/Nature- based Ideologies* is constructed to present critically important themes: *The Way of Life is Inextricably Connected with a Fundamentally Spiritual Foundation; The Symbol of the Circle, the Medicine Wheel or Mandela, All My Relations: We Are All Related, Individuality versus Individualism, Individual Rights versus Community Responsibility, The Individual and the Community, and Harmony and Balance*. Derived from the Laws of Nature these themes constitute the framework of William Commanda’s epistemology, which, like Nature, evolves and regenerates.

REFLECTION

The Medicine Wheel is a fundamental Indigenous Concept that incorporates a cyclical view of life. As mentioned, there are many variations of the Medicine Wheel and its teachings are complex and endless. Some of its representations are outlined in this chapter however, as mentioned it can represent much more. Are the teachings of the Medicine Wheel incorporated in your daily life? Propose a new *personal* representation of the Medicine Wheel that is not mentioned in the book.

Please write your response here:

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DAY THREE

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

KEY FOCUS – MINI BACKGROUNDEERS ON WILLIAM COMMANDA AND HIS PEOPLES

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The photographs selected explore the topic of historical roots and integrate Nature in this lens into history: the dwarf birch is believed to be the earliest tree specimen in the continent emerging from the ice age, and is used in the creation of canoe, points to the journey of motion of the Algonquin ancestors. The particular landscape is that of the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, the mouth of the river birthed in Lake Superior and place of first encounter. The other photographs depict sharing of the history with high profile people like the Queen of Denmark, representative of the Vikings, Prime Minister Trudeau and William Commanda evoking the spirit of the Welcoming and Sharing Wampum heritage, and members of his global family.

This chapter commences with William Commanda's integration of Indigeneity, relationship and respect for the *Mother Earth*, history and politics. It then presents a synopsis of his personal history and priorities followed by a concise history of Aboriginal Peoples and the earliest settlers, the French and English in the context of the colonial history, land rights and justice, and continuing present day struggles and aspirations. It also presents the moral, physical and mental health challenges facing non-Indigenous peoples

REFLECTION

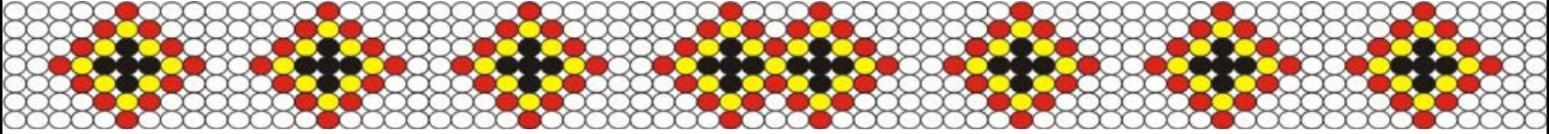
Choose one of the following bullet points outlined under the *Current Reality for Aboriginal Peoples*:

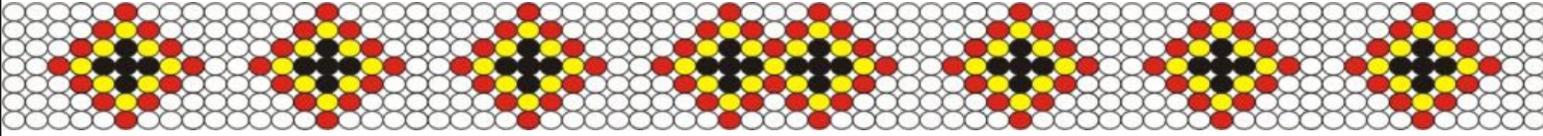
- The poorest, and struggle with homelessness or impoverished living conditions, both on and off reserve
- Suffer significant health crises, and struggle with debilitating substance abuse, fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effect
- Experience the highest youth suicide rates
- Experience the highest school dropout rates
- Struggle with unemployment, on and off reserves
- Have more single mother families
- Suffer high rates of sexual, physical, and mental abuse

Reflect on the Indigenous concepts that have been introduced and elaborate on how Indigenous concepts can be used to amend your chosen bullet point. You may choose to develop a program to deal with your chosen issue. Who would you present it to, how would you present your Indigenous concepts as a solution, etc.?

You may also use one of the following *new ways of understanding* outlined in the chapter to include in your reflection:

- Our relationship with Mother Earth (sustainable development)
- Our relationship with each other (restorative practices)
- Health (holistic healing)
- An all-encompassing, integrated spiritual dimension





DAY FOUR

BREATHING LIFE INTO MYTHOLOGICAL HISTORY

KEY FOCUS – ANIMATING THE SEVEN FIRES PROPHECY WITHIN A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The photographs selected commence with the natural waterslide rapids in the ancestral vision quest Spirit Mountain renamed *Diablo* by the church. Followed by the ancient sacred mnemonic *Wampum* artifacts of prophetic dimension of the Algonquins, and the contemporary articulation of this heritage in the *Circle of All Nations Culture of Peace* logo. In view of his peace building priorities, *The Frog Principle* Instructive Graphic Illustrations were developed to demonstrate how peace is potentially attainable, and *The Wolf Project* references the linked awards initiative to advance racial harmony and education (<http://www.wolfproject.com/>).

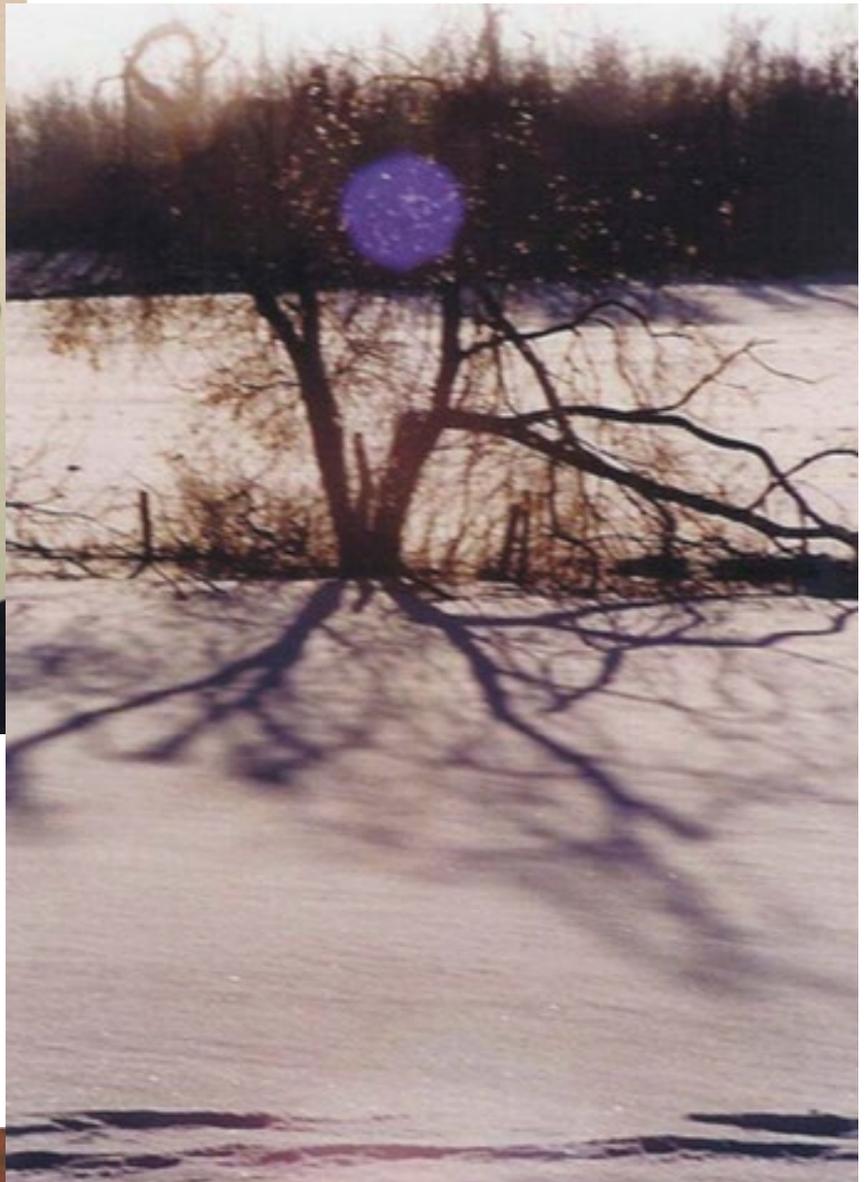
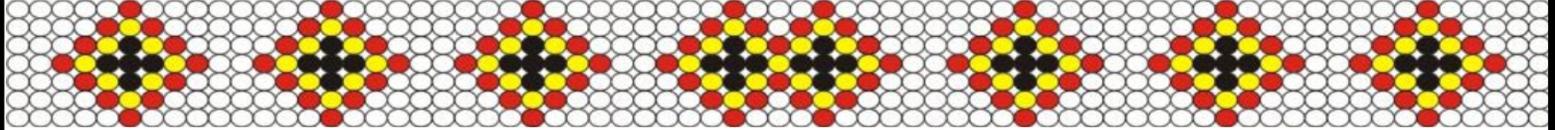
The text discusses the sacred Wampum heritage that guided William Commanda’s work from 1970 and explains how he animated an ancient intangible orally transmitted heritage for a huge diversity of peoples in contemporary times. A heritage that centres Indigenous in the lands of their birth, raises awareness about the critical issues of the day such as, environmental crises, climate change, racism and war, the urgent need for global transformation, and it notes the ominous implications of 9/11 and 2001 for the youth of today, who are growing in a global reality of interconnection and unprecedented fear. The text also presents ideas for personal and communal enlightenment through *The Frog Principle* discussion and graphic instructional tool, consistent with his responsibility as a prophetic spiritual leader.

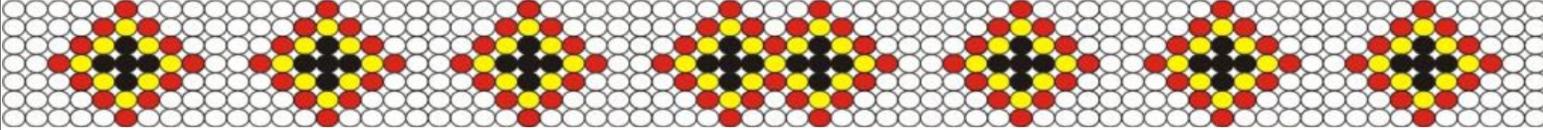
REFLECTION

The Seven Fires Prophecy Belt’s final message was one of choice, about our relationships with each other and with all creations of Mother Earth. Each prophet in the prophecy came with a message and we saw how eventually through the wrong choices we succumbed to many unfortunate events. Reflect on different choices that could have been made that could have instead led us to the more hopeful Circle of All Nations, A Culture of Peace that Elder William Commanda was working to achieve.

Please write your response here:

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DAY SIX

ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

KEY FOCUS – THE LAW OF NATURE AND PLANNING THE MEDICINE WHEEL WAY

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The photographs selected here commence with the Circle of All Nations logo and conceptual medicine wheel imprinted in a tee shirt gifted to workshop participants in 1998. Other photographs include those that trace cyclical time, cosmic light refraction, the Grandmother Spider drum beat, colleagues from diverse lands in ceremony and connection, nature-based medicine, illustrative conceptual symbols, and cyclical graphic planning models, moving from vision/planning to animation/action to reflection/quality control to synthesis/epistemology, consistent with the medicine wheel. The final photograph depicts an ancient vision quest site reflective of the Laws of Nature.

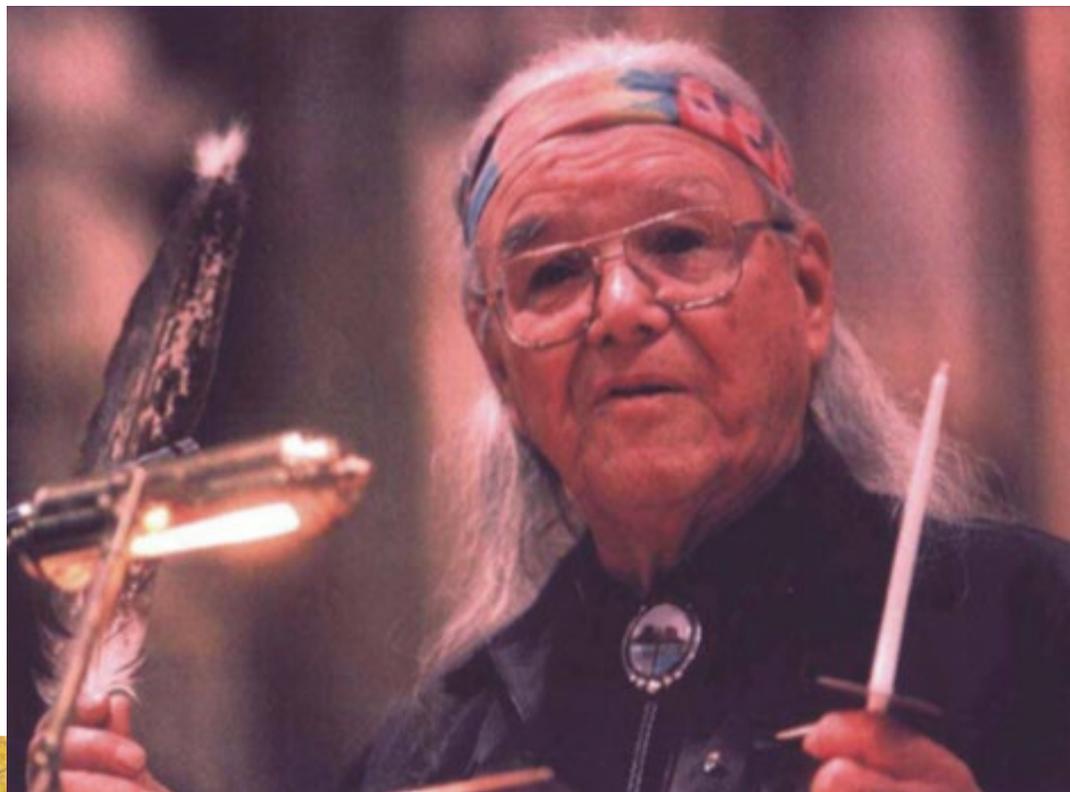
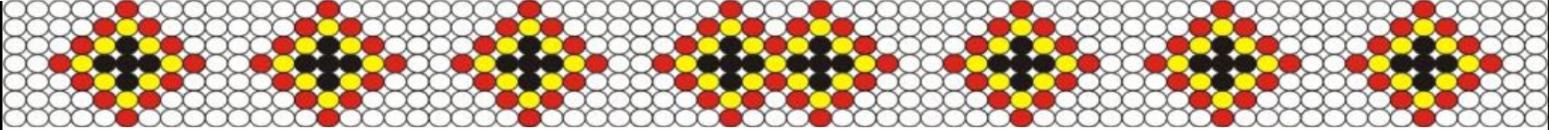
The Laws of Nature dominate the explorations and teachings, giving substance to the differing conceptual thinking introduced on Day Five. Consistent with discussions of nature and spirit, dream and nature intermesh to determine William Commanda’s decisive action at a Forestry Conference, and that illustrative example leads to a storytelling discussion of the key natural elements of fire, earth, water and wind; to a comprehensive expose on escalating anthropocentric driven environmental crises precipitating unprecedented climate change, and devastating health and social challenges. It also reflects on the critical importance of the animal teachers. Discussion of the epistemological import of the conceptual medicine wheel follows, and its cyclical planning approach is presented in complementary graphic format.

REFLECTION

Elder William Commanda demonstrated the connection between the four elements and how our harsh exploitation of Mother Earth leads to disastrous outcomes for humans (e.g., wind exacerbating fires, clear-cutting worsening the effects of floods). Reflect on a recent environmental event, or the area around you and similarly, make a connection between the four elements and how they contribute to the event, or the state of your current environment. What actions may have led to this state, what steps can be taken to amend the consequences, what steps can be taken to avoid future issues, how can we reconcile our relationship with Mother Earth according to William Commanda?

Please write your response here:

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KEY FOCUS – THE INDIGENOUS PEACE-BUILDING CENTRE AND THE VISIONARY ARCHITECT

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The photographs selected include an image of the ocean, recalling the ancient seas that were once present on the site of the proposed peace centre, William Commanda at a global anti-racism event and earth-based reflections and text-based graphics. The collage references visually the needs for healing and peace building discussed in the narrative, as presented by some of the key players.

The text presents the development of the Commanda vision, inspired by his prophetic wampum heritage, for the creation of the Asinabka international Indigenous healing and peace building centre at the ancient sacred Chaudière site on the Ottawa River and its prioritization of the healing of Indigenous Peoples relations with each other and with earth (i.e., the integration of environmental and peace themes under the Indigenous umbrella). It also discusses the struggles and visionary work of world-renowned Indigenous Architect. (Unfortunately, despite much challenge, the sacred site was privatized, and the vision thwarted, and global environmental crisis and war has escalated - www.asinabka.com)

REFLECTION

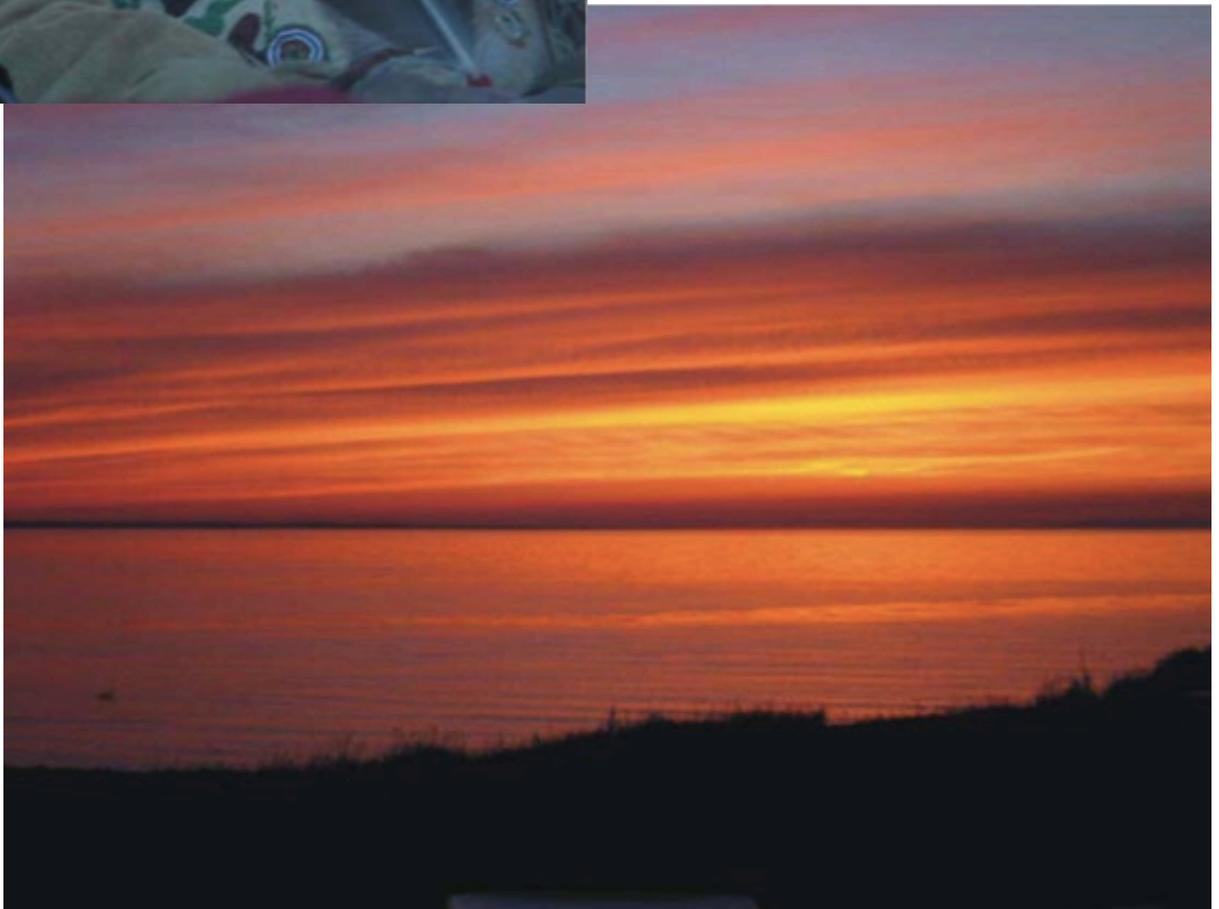
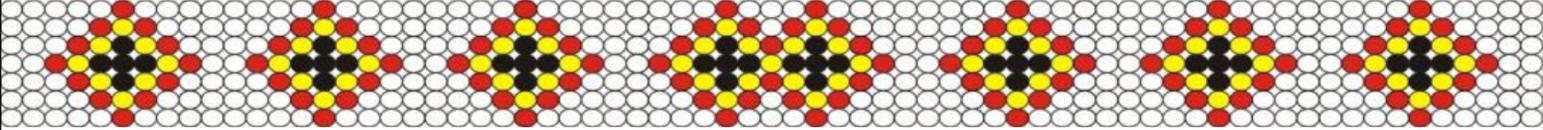
The overview of the Victoria Island Indigenous Healing and Peace-Building Centre included preliminary ideas for the focus of such a centre such as:

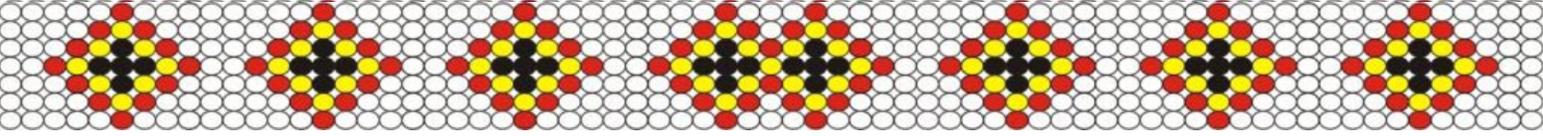
- Healing of the Mother Earth and environmental and sustainable development
- Individual and community healing: spirituality, substance and sexual abuse treatment, language retention, arts and crafts, cultural revival
- Healing programs for offenders
- Indigenous education
- Youth empowerment
- Anti-racism, and nation-to-nation peacebuilding

Choose one of the following and discuss in which core objective it will fall, and in which section of the two-pronged strategic plan you would include it in. Follow this up with a discussion detailing how you will incorporate it into the centre you chose (e.g., through a program, class, conference, etc.). How will your suggested plan of action help reach the core objectives?

Reminder of core objectives:

- To re-awaken Indigenous ideology to advance healing at three fundamental levels:
 - Healing, strengthening and unifying indigenous peoples
 - Healing individual and collective relationships with Mother Earth
 - Healing relationships with all others





DAY TWELVE

RACIAL HARMONY

KEY FOCUS – TAKING ONE’S RIGHTFUL PLACE

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The photographs selected link the theme of movement and change in the restlessness of the ocean and the cyclical flow of melting ice against a vast backdrop of earth, as indicative of the flux between challenge and conflict. Other photographs point to the challenge of racism through workshops and projects that promote harmony and peace building, with youth, peace builders in South Africa and Wolf Project leadership. One text image presents joint projects of Circle of All Nations and the Wolf Project.

Global warfare has played a critical role throughout William Commanda’s lifetime; he was birthed on 11 November 1913, on the eve of the First World War. This violence, as well as the personal cost of the colonial history experienced by his family and ancestors led him to affirm that humanity needs to come together with one mind, one heart, one love and one determination to create a Circle of All Nations, a Culture of Peace. He dedicated his life to both single handed and collaborative engagement in activities to promote racial harmony and peace building, via international and local work and outreach, and involvement with the Wolf Project.

REFLECTION

Take the time to find a video of an opening prayer/ceremony performed by an Elder (make sure it is authentic and translated for your understanding). Reflect on this prayer and consider the following:

- What was the message conveyed?
- How did it make you feel?
- Were any calls to action made (similar to elder William Commanda’s opening prayers that touched on current issues)?
- At times, presenters did not understand the implications of asking for an opening prayer; how can we inform the people to avoid unintentional disrespect with future prayer requests?

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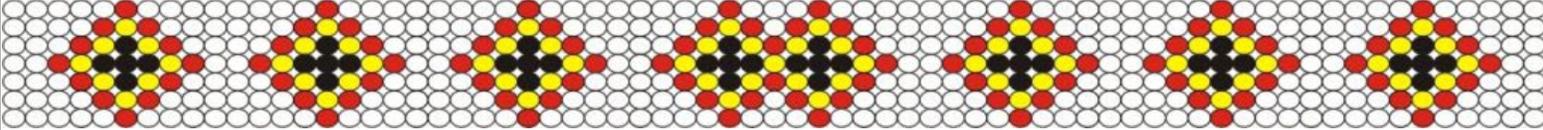
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VISION

The Sacred Wampanoag Belt

Vision For Victoria Island

William Comandara

A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE

This page features a scroll titled 'The Sacred Wampanoag Belt' and a map of Victoria Island. It includes a quote from William Comandara: 'I am proud to be a member of the Circle of All Nations...'

COMMUNITY

Gatherings

Outreach to South Africa

The Wolf Project

William Comandara

A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE

This page features several photographs of community events and a quote: 'I am proud to be a member of the Circle of All Nations...'

HEALING

Healing Through the Spirit of Mother Earth

William Comandara

A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE

This page features a collage of images related to healing and nature, including a quote: 'I am proud to be a member of the Circle of All Nations...'

WISDOM

The Circle of All Nations

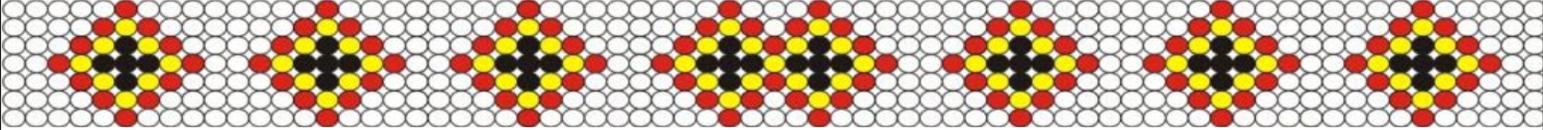
The International Circle for Indigenous Peoples

William Comandara

A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE

This page features a central circular graphic and several photographs of people. It includes a quote: 'I am proud to be a member of the Circle of All Nations...'





DAY THIRTEEN

LIVING IN THE MOMENT

KEY FOCUS – ALMOST 91 AND STILL WORKING

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The photographs selected feature the rocks and rapids and the vast landscape of William Commanda’s ancestral land, and the key photograph shows him celebrating his Remembrance Day birthday in a traditional garment from Central America. Other photographs show him with high profile people and his diversity of friends. His vision of “the good life” is depicted in a series of posters as well as in three text graphics. The two final pages include two collages - one indicative of the overall work, and the other of key members of his family.

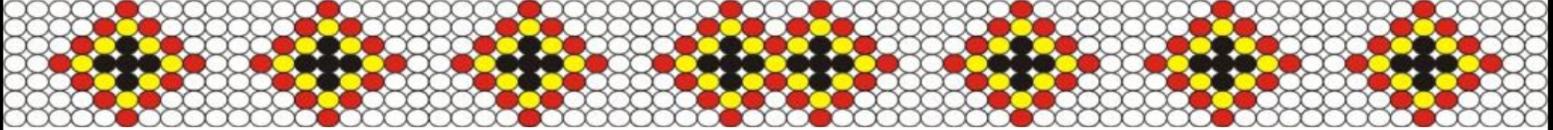
The text presents the temporal/spatial concepts of living actively in the present moment, to transform the past and create the future. As such, despite all the hardships of his long life, William Commanda also shares with all an irrepressible and infectious zest for life. Text graphics highlight the priorities of his work during the Indigenous Decade of Indigenous Peoples, and also present a synopsis of the work undertaken with colleagues from South Africa. Finally, it reflects on World War 1, Indigenous Veterans, including Uncle Gabriel Commanda, founder of the last gold rush town, Val d’Or, and then the William Commanda birthday celebrations and affirmation of a Circle of All Nations, a Culture of Peace.

REFLECTION

Elder William Commanda was described as having the capacity of the truly wise – to live actively in the present moment, informed by the past, and projected for the future, but still, engaged fully in the now. Take the time to reflect on your own course of life; do you focus on and let one path influence you more than others (i.e., how some people are said to live in the past vs others who don’t consider the future and are too focused on the now)? Through Elder William Commanda’s teachings in this book, what strategies can you apply to your own life path to help you find a similar balance between the past, present, and future?

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LEARNING FROM A KINDERGARTEN DROPOUT

BONUS

KEY FOCUS – FINAL THOUGHTS AND REFLECTION

REFLECTION

Reflect on your experience and the knowledge you gained through the many teachings of this book and elaborate on your favourite/one concept that stayed with you.

Please write your response here:

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How can reading and reflecting on this book contribute to Reconciliation as proposed in the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

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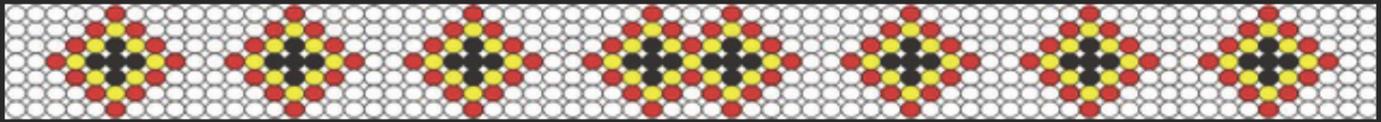
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Do note the info about the course on “*Learning from a Kindergarten Dropout*” on the pages that follow. Please contact romolavt@gmail.com for more information.



CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS

20th Anniversary of the Millennium Gathering

Circle of All Nations

Training

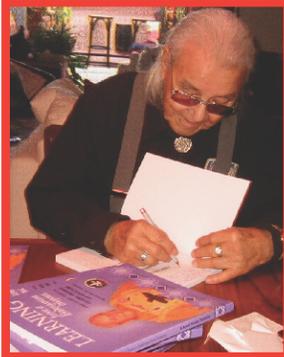
Education

Advocacy

Communications

Healing

CAN TEACH 2020



THE LEGACY OF ALGONQUIN ELDER
L'HÉRITAGE DE LAINE ALGONQUIN

Dr. Mishomis Commanda, OC
(1931-2021)

"We must come together
with one heart, one mind, one love
and one determination to create
A Circle of All Nations
A Culture of Peace."

"Nous devons nous unir avec un seul
cœur, une seule âme et une volonté
pour créer un cercle de toutes les
Nations et une culture de paix."



www.circleofallnations.ca | www.asinabka.com



Circle of All Nations
Global Eco Peace
Community Founded
by Mishomis William
Commanda



**Virtual Sacred
Asinabka Chaudiere
Site**
Legacy Vision for
Ancient and Historical
Gathering Place



William Commanda
Carrier Sacred
Wampum Heritage,
Honorary and
Researched PhD,
Officer of the Order of
Canada

A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS COURSE GROUNDED IN THE TEACHINGS OF
LEARNING FROM A KINDERGARTEN DROPOUT: WILLIAM COMMANDA OJIGKWANONG
CULTURAL SHARINGS AND REFLECTIONS By Romola Vasantha Thumbadoo
The Topics and Reflections Raised in Each of the Daily Teaching Sessions in the Table of Contents below are re-
presented and explored via a cybernetic lens to facilitate bridge building between Indigenous, grass roots and academia

**DAILY TABLE OF CONTENT
TEACHING SESSIONS**
Note also - the photographs were
selected to facilitate knowledge
transmission despite language and
cultural barriers within the *Circle of
All Nation's* global eco community

- Day One**
The Nomad – Mamiwinini Energy
Key focus – The Journey
- Day Two**
The Grounding Ideology
Key Focus – A Brief Overview of
Some Indigenous Concepts
- Day Three**
The Historical Context
Key Focus – Mini Backgrounders
on William Commanda and his
Peoples
- Day Four**
*Breathing Life into Mythological
History*
Key Focus – Animating the Seven
Fires Prophecy within a *Circle of All
Nations*
- Day Five**
Ideological Differences
Key Focus – Differing
Perspectives on Child Raising and
Moon Cycles
- Day Six**
Organizing Principles

- Key Focus – The Law of Nature
and Planning the Medicine Wheel
Way
- Day Seven**
Dreamcatcher Network
Key Focus – Reflecting on
Aboriginal Justice
- Day Eight**
*Strengths Inherent in Traditional
Values*
Key Focus – Reflecting on a Few
Fundamental Indigenous Values
- Day Nine**
A Place for All
Key Focus – The Indigenous
Peace-Building Centre and the
Visionary Architect
- Day Ten**
The Transformative Value
Key Focus – Some Thoughts
about Forgiveness and Healing
- Day Eleven**
A Grounding Prayer
Key Focus – Finding Strength in
the Spirit of this Land
- Day Twelve**
Racial Harmony
Key Focus – Taking one's
Rightful Place
- Day Thirteen**
Living in the Moment
Key Focus – Almost 91 and Still
Working

A WILLIAM COMMANDA/CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS COURSE

Learning from the Land as Instructed by the Indigenous Elder

Applying an Academic Lens to the Knowledge, Wisdom and Teaching of Elder Commanda, as related in *Learning from A Kindergarten Dropout*.

This course explores the teachings, knowledge and wisdom of the Indigenous Elder William Commanda, Algonquin of the Ottawa River Watershed, Wampum Belt Carrier, Canoe Maker, recipient of two honorary doctorate degrees, appointment as Officer of the Order of Canada, Lifetime Aboriginal Achievement Award, through the lens of the book, *Learning from A Kindergarten Dropout, Cultural Sharings and Reflections*.

It is a transdisciplinary, inter-cultural and comparative approach to exploring multiple ecological, socio-cultural, economical-political dimensions and challenges of contemporary local, national and global geographies born of six centuries of colonizing enterprise. This is undertaken by repositioning multidimensional respect, relational responsibility and reconciliation through his *Circle of All Nations* lens, guided by his *Wampum Epistemology of Prophecy, Indigenous Welcome* and *Bridging Building*.

The course explores interlocking temporal and spatial concepts that present challenge and opportunity for relationship with Earth and her inhabitants in times of postcolonial global connection, cultural diversity, climate change, extreme weather and cyber-storytelling, by decoding identity, inclusion and exclusion, personal and institutional power markers, knowledge, truth, representation and relations, and addressing a series of critical contemporary issues via a comparative review of ideology, literature, theory, methodology and practice. The following intersecting thematic discussions, extracted from the book, *Learning from a Kindergarten Dropout*, are explored in concert with contemporary research on geographies of space, place, culture, climate, cartography, Cybercartography and storytelling and the spiritual, to bridge, equalize, animate and dynamize grassroots and academic knowledge creation.

Sessions are structured for circle discussion, multiple perspectives, contestation, and syntropic dynamism at varying scales, and include readings, videos, art and cybercartographic digital atlas creation.

1. Geography: Time, Space and Movement and *Mamiwinini/Nomad* and Mobility
2. Web of Knowledge, from Petroglyphs and Pictographs and Orality: Geo Narrative, Geo Creative, Art Script and other Ideological Foundations
3. Historical Narrative, Identity, Colonialism, Activism, Indigeneity, Immigration, Bilingualism and Multiculturalism
4. Vision, Early Warning Signals, Prophetic Animation and Generative Discursive Practice
5. Ideological Differences - Identity, Gender, Children, Women, Men and Activist Geo-animation
6. Cyclical and Spiraling Principles of the Discursive Medicine Wheel – a conceptual methodological tool
7. Reflections on Justice, Environmental Exploitation, Capitalism, Inequalities and Violence
8. Deepening Critical Reflexivity: *Ginawaydaganuc* and Indigenous Relational Values
9. Geo/Eco/Peace and Reconciliation, Environmental Challenges, Climate Change and Evolution
10. Dreamcatcher, Storytelling, Cartography, Transformative and Trans-mutative Perspectives and Healing
11. A Contemporary Geo Narrative and Virtual Portal, from Colonial Cartography to Cybercartography and Digital Atlas Multimodal Storytelling Mapping
12. Rightful Place, Diversity, Migration, Trans-borders, Securitization, Global Connections and Place
13. Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities

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