

The background features a watercolor-style design with soft, blended shades of light blue and white, accented with numerous small, golden-yellow dots and larger, irregular golden spots. The overall effect is ethereal and organic.

# IN OUR NATURE

Connecting with Inner Wisdom for Collective Wellbeing

Heidi Widmer (B.A., M.A Env. Ed. & Communication)

Program Co-ordinator & Environmental Educator

Biosphere Institute of the Bow Valley

[education@biosphereinstitute.org](mailto:education@biosphereinstitute.org)

# OVERVIEW

## What is this work?

**This work is about reconnection.** The following activities, conversation guidelines and resources are informed by the field of Ecopsychology. This guide is about transforming thoughts and relationships by way of four-fold spiral (Macy, 2014). Please share this work and these resources at conferences, meetings, kitchen tables in community halls or social gatherings as seeds for reconnection!

## Why this work?

In this time of ecological crisis, eco-anxiety and grief, **we need connection.** There are 3 Stories of Our Time: Business as Usual, the Great Unravelling and the Great Turning. When we engage with the Work that Reconnects and reframe our thoughts with the four-fold spiral (Macy, 2014), we remember ourselves as expressions of the Earth, innately connected and can actively participate in the Great Turning.

# THREE STORIES OF OUR TIME

BUSINESS AS USUAL



GREAT UNRAVELLING



GREAT TURNING



Slide provided by: Dr. Hilary Leighton, Professor, Registered Clinical Counselor  
School of Environment & Sustainability, Royal Roads University

JOANNA MACY  
MOLLY BROWN

THE UPDATED GUIDE TO *THE WORK THAT RECONNECTS*

— FOREWORD BY MATTHEW FOX —

COMING  
BACK TO  
LIFE



Four Fold Spiral (Macy & Brown, 2014)



Illustration: Dori Midnight

# ECO ID POETRY

*Activity created by Heidi Widmer (2023). Please share and credit far and wide!*

Ask participants to:

- Find a piece of paper and a pen
- Trace their dominant hand with their non-dominant hand
- Close their eyes, connect with their breath.
- Think of a time when they felt fully alive in nature

- connecting to that memory, feel, sense, taste, listen to what it was like there. Make the memory as vivid as possible
- choose one **adjective** from the memory to describe what you are FEELING and write it in the thumb position.
- choose one **noun** from the memory to describe what you are SEEING and write it in the index finger position.
- same memory and write a **verb** to describe what you are DOING and write it in the middle finger position.
- same memory and write an **adjective** to describe the VILLAGE of humans in your life at that time write it in the ring finger.
- finally, one **noun** to represent a LANDSCAPE feature you see (i.e. river bank, lake, rolling hills, mountain) and write it in the pinky finger.
- Finally, assemble your words according to the 'fill in the blanks' slide that follows



# Fill in the Blanks

Like (a/an)

\_\_\_\_\_

(thumb)

\_\_\_\_\_

(index)

who is

\_\_\_\_\_ ,

(middle)

I am (a/an)

\_\_\_\_\_

(ring)

\_\_\_\_\_ .

(pinky)



## Conversation Questions and Ideas

*Adapted from* Coming Back to Life: The Work that Reconnects (Brown, M. & Macy, J., 2014)

### *Begin in Gratitude*

Objective: Gratitude is grounding. We begin by reminding ourselves of the joy in life. When we are grounded, we can begin to open up and explore our emotions.

Questions:

- Where did you experience joy, connection, or wonder lately?
- How did those moments make you feel connected to yourself? To the earth? To others?
- What gave you energy recently?

Open-ended sentences:

- A moment in my life when I felt intensely alive was....
- A place that is magical for me is...
- A person who helped me to believe in myself was/is....
- I enjoying doing/making....
- What I appreciate about myself is....
- What I appreciate about my life is...
- When I walk in nature, what I realize is....
- I feel full of joy when...

## *Honouring our pain for the world*

Objective: Stage Two of the Spiral is honoring our pain for what is happening to our world and to the many people and beings that are suffering. Before we can do something about what is happening, we learn to accept that we are in pain, and how we can share our suffering.

Questions:

- What are your fears about the future?
- How have you dealt with the pain that you feel for our world, in the past?
- How have you avoided this pain?

Open ended sentences:

- What concerns me most about the world today is...
- When I see what's happening in our world, what breaks my heart is....
- When I think of the world we will leave our children and grandchildren, it looks like...
- Feelings about all this, that I carry around with me, are...

### *Seeing with new (or ancient) eyes*

Objective: This section is about the importance of acknowledging and sitting with discomfort in order to move forward.

Questions:

How do we envision something different without feeling like we need all the “right” answers?

Can you imagine a different future?

What perspectives have your gratitude and grief been inviting you into? These might be new ideas, or historical (elder) wisdom (old ideas).

### *Going forth with active hope*

Objective: The work doesn't stop here, it ripples outward. Here, we explore perspective shifts that might occur as a result of this conversation

Questions: How can we reciprocate everything that the earth offers us?

What small actions can lead to more connection?

Ideas or examples:

Learning the name of a tree in your yard

Tuning into the natural world when I first wake up. What's the first sound I hear?

Making time to go for a walk over lunch break

Activity:

Write down your “small action that can lead to more connection” and take it with you.

Closing activity (Whole Group)

Invitation to share your Intention with the whole group

Facilitator to say after each share:

“We hear and see you\_\_Name\_, we invite you to go forth with that”

“How, in our modern world, can we find our way to understand the earth as a gift again, to make our relations with the world sacred again?”

Robin Wall Kimmerer

## BREAKOUT BLANKET QUESTION PROMPTS

### **Sense of Belonging and sense of self:**

- Where do you feel a sense of belonging? Explain why.
- What is your earliest memory of belonging in place?

### **Gratitude: Reciprocity, connection:**

- A question from Robin Wall Kimmerer: “How, in our modern world, can we find our way to understand the earth as a gift again, to make our relations with the world sacred again?”
- How do you engage yourself/students in witnessing nature’s gifts and diverse intelligences?

### **Nature as co-teacher:**

- How do you teach in, for and with the land? What inspires you most about teaching outside?
- How does the natural world where you live inform your practice? Describe the dynamic between you, your students and the natural world.

### **Tending to relations with the natural world:**

- Geneen Marie Haugen asks: “What if...we simply practiced honoring the wild Others as if they could hear us, as if they were responsive, and as Earth depended on this reciprocity for continued flourishing?”
- How do you see/experience yourself as nature and/or nature as you? How might you include this as a daily practice?

### **Navigating the collective grief and pain for the world:**

- The earth holds grief, too. How can we, as educators and members of a broader community, collectively and effectively address our shared grief for the Earth?
- What practices have you found most effective to manage your own grief and pain?
- What makes you feel most hopeful about the future?

# ONLINE RESOURCES

Amiro Freeman

Reclamatory Environmentalism Audit

Down to Earth: Discussion Cards

Eric Magrane

Various Instructions for the Practice of Poetic Field Research

# RECOMMENDED READING

- *An Ecology of Gratitude: Writing Your Way to What Matters* (2021), Lorraine Widmer-Carson

If you are curious about a journaling practice, this book is for you. It supports habit-formation for positive thinking through gratitude.

- *Animate Earth: Science, Intuition and Gaia* (2006), Stephan Harding

An essential to wrapping your mind around systems thinking

- *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (2013), Robin Wall Kimmerer

Quintessential and delicious reading to understand how to weave Western and Indigenous ideologies for healthy relationships.

- *Coming Back to Life: the updated guide to The Work That Reconnects*, Joanna Macy and Molly Brown (2014)

A book filled with MANY activities for personal and classroom use. Most of the workshop activities are outlined here!

- *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature* (2016), Jon Young, Ellen Haas, Evan McGown

Fantastic resource for authentic outdoor learning through the sneaky mind of Coyote.

- *Handbook of the Canadian Rockies* (2019), Ben Gadd

Few questions about the Canadian Rocky Mountains go unanswered with this resource.

- *Hope Matters: Why Changing the Way We Think Is Critical to Solving the Environmental Crisis* (2020), Elin Kelsey

If you experience anxiety for the world or need something to stay positive for, this is a book for you!

- *Perseverance* (2010), Margaret J. Wheatley

Pickup this book in a moment or read it cover to cover; there are thought-changing passages for any moment!

- *Take Me Outside: Running Across the Canadian Landscape That Shapes Us* (2021), Colin Harris

A fantastic example of the positive change through perseverance we can all be part of!

- *Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World* (1993), produced by the Tracking Project and Tree of Peace Society

A pocket-size book for a moment or in the field. The words that come before all else.

- *The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess* (2008), edited by Alan Drengson and Bill Devall

Essential ecopsychology reflections and relevant for any age of the human species. Explains the ecological self.

- *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-human World* (1996), David Abram

This book makes real how we are designed to converse with place through our sensing bodies.

- *World As Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal* (2012), Joanna Macy

Great reading for reframing any ecological anxiety and remaining fit for this world!

- *Wild Mind: A Field Guide to the Human Psyche* (2013), Bill Plotkin

Insightful read into how we come to know ourselves and how to reorient ourselves along this forgotten path.