

# UNDERSTANDING THE FIRST HARM:

An Activity to Accompany "Towards Right Relationships with Native Peoples"

RestorativeTeachingTools.com

"Because settler colonialism (a structure that harms) and RJ (a framework that addresses harms) intersect in settler states, I challenge RJ theorists and practitioners alike to address this intersection with another fundamental principle: *the mandate to undo harm caused by wrongdoing*. This challenge to settlers and others in RJ is what I call 'Undoing the First Harm.'"

- Edward Valandra, "Undoing the First Harm: Settlers in Restorative Justice,"  
*Colorizing Restorative Justice*

## OBJECTIVE

This activity is intended for people who acknowledge they are living on colonized land. Often called settlers or colonizers, we are people whose lineage is not native to the land where we currently reside.

Learn more deeply about the extent of harm suffered by Native peoples as their lands were colonized and their rights, resources, and ways of life were stripped away. Consider what actions you can take toward restoring right relationship with Native peoples.

## MATERIALS

Journal or notebook.

Register for the online workshop "Roots of Injustice, Seeds of Change: Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples." Upcoming dates can be found at the website <https://friendspeaceteams.org/upcoming-events/>

We respectfully request that you honor this crucial work by making a suggested donation of \$20 - \$50 when you register for the online workshop with Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples (TRR). The minimum donation is \$5.

## INSTRUCTIONS

First, participate in the online workshop "Roots of Injustice, Seeds of Change: Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples." Immediately following the workshop (within 24-48 hours if possible), further integrate what you learned through this reflective activity.

## 1) Reflect

- Take time to reflect on the workshop with TRR. Consider going outside and lying on the earth if that is safe and accessible to you. Pause. Take time to be silent. Connect with the natural environment. How does the earth feel beneath you? How does the air feel against your skin? What do you see when you look up? What do you hear? Smell?
- Write about any of your initial thoughts, feelings, and questions. What are 2-3 new things that you learned? How has this new information affected you and your understanding of the history and current reality of Native peoples?

## 2) Reparations

Take your reflection one step further by thinking about reparations. While it will never be possible to fully repair the harm caused to generations of Native peoples, the practice of taking responsibility for repair is essential to an effort to be in right relationship with the people who are the rightful owners of the land many of us inhabit in North America (and around the world). Making meaningful reparations requires commitment to a long journey of repair.

For restorative practitioners, this question is crucial. In *Colorizing Restorative Justice*, Edward Valandra asks:

“How can settlers in RJ, while citing RJ/RP’s Indigenous roots and committing themselves to repairing harms, live on land stolen from Indigenous Peoples through genocide and not act to undo this catastrophic harm? How can settlers in RJ credibly hold children accountable for stealing others’ property or personal belongings and not hold themselves accountable for the mass fraud and crimes that their settlement in North America involves – crimes from which settlers benefit and Indigenous Peoples suffer every day?”

These questions address the core issue of integrity in restorative justice as a movement and each of us as movement participants.

Possibilities to get you started on the long journey of reparations:

- Visit <https://native-land.ca> and enter the name of your city or town. You will have access to in-depth information about which Native people’s territory you are living in, the languages spoken, and treaties affecting that area. The site also provides extensive resources about land acknowledgement and a guide for teachers.

“If we think of territorial acknowledgments as sites of potential disruption, they can be transformative acts that to some extent undo Indigenous erasure. I believe this is true as long as these acknowledgments discomfort both those speaking and hearing the words. The fact of Indigenous presence should force non-Indigenous peoples to confront their own place on these lands.”

– Chelsea Vowel, *Beyond Territorial Acknowledgements*

- Participate in the Land Back movement. How can settlers take responsibility for the first harm by returning stolen lands to Native peoples? If you are not able to physically return stolen land yourself, make financial contributions to the Land Back Movement, and invite others to do the same.
- Become educated about violated treaties with Native peoples. What actions can you take to advocate for honoring the treaties?
- Contact representatives from organizations of Native peoples in your region. Inquire about educational opportunities, events, and ways to support them.
- How can you be a more intentional steward of the earth? How can you support environmental justice efforts to sustain natural diversity, particularly those led by Indigenous activists?
- How can you share what you learned with others and encourage them to reflect on their responsibility for reparations as well?

Pay attention and reflect on what the act of long-term responsibility for reparations brings up in your body.

- What sensations arise with the idea of complex, sustained repair?
- Practice sitting with any discomfort or tension that arises. Be gentle and loving with yourself in the discomfort. How can you be kind to yourself, while still rising to the call for accountability?

## DEBRIEF

Set a reminder in your calendar to circle back to these reflections – maybe in 1 week, 1 month, 3 months, 6 months. With those reminders, take time to check in about intentions you had when you first completed the workshop, and where you are now with them. Give yourself grace and return to commitments that may have faded. Consider scheduling time talk with a friend or colleague who will both support you and hold you accountable in your journey.

## LESSON

Paulo Freire, philosopher and author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, reminds us that we must put truth-telling at the center of praxis. In restorative practices, this often means listening to others' truths in the form of naming impacts, harms, and taking responsibility. In the context of restorative responses to historical harms, we must seek out opportunities to uncover truths not typically shared in classrooms and textbooks. From there, we can engage in praxis for reparations. This engagement will be sustained and complex, and may take different shapes over time. Our responsibility is to remain committed and compassionate in our efforts to respect and make repairs with Native peoples as we pursue greater understanding of their past and present realities.

### **Additional Resources:**

Land Acknowledgment Guide: <https://nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/>

Native American Rights Fund: <https://www.narf.org>

Transforming Teaching and Learning about Native Americans:  
<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360>

IllumiNative Changing the Narrative about Native Nations: <https://illuminatives.org/Apache-Stronghold>: <http://apache-stronghold.com>

Honor the Earth: <https://www.honorearth.org>

Article - Return the National Parks to the Tribes (Audio Included):

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/05/return-the-national-parks-to-the-tribes/618395/>

Book - *Colorizing Restorative Justice* (In particular Chapter 18 by Edward Valandra "Undoing the First Harm: Settlers in Restorative Justice." The entire book is required reading for Restorative Justice practitioners.)

\*Note on Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples:

We encourage you to inquire about bringing a TRR workshop to your school or community group. Please contact Paula Palmer, [paularpalmer@gmail.com](mailto:paularpalmer@gmail.com).