



## The Making of an Owinge

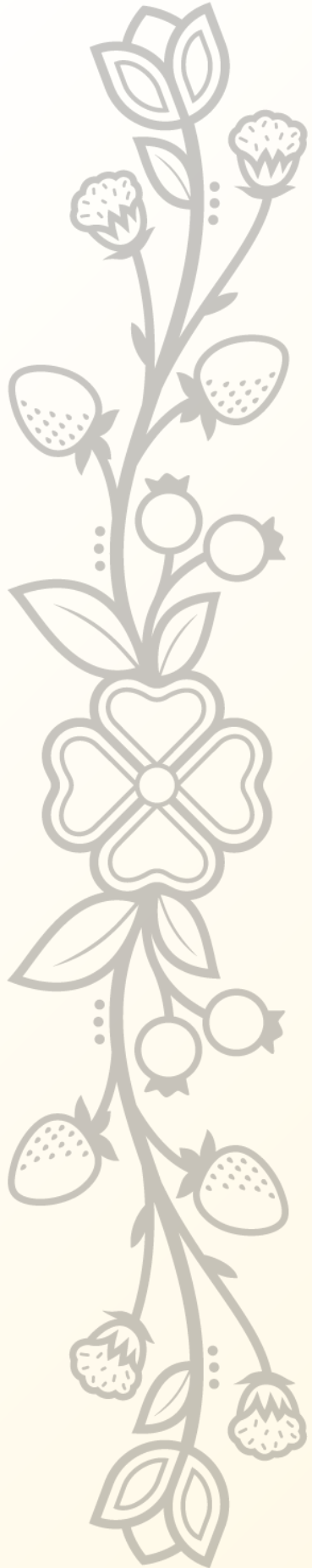


# The Making of an Owinge

- Organizing Themes: Identity, Community-Led and LBHL
- Imagine: Kha’p’o Community School, Santa Clara, NM

## Patch of earth in front of the Cultural Arts classroom

- 14 second graders quicken their pace, almost bolting, to get to Ko’o Eliza’s classroom. Their eager faces beaming with excitement as they bound the corner and see her waiting to greet them. They slow their pace, remembering her expectations to demonstrate their “readiness” to enter the classroom space. Today they are outside, working on their “owinge,” their village, their model of an ancestral village made out of dirt, clay, straw, ..... “adobe mud.”
- Materials are strewn across the ground where they left them from the last building session. The atmosphere softens as the students eyes meet Ko’o’s eyes and the air goes still. “Senghitamu ene! It’s so good to see my precious children today. My heart warms. Are we ready to get started building our owinge today?” Their eyes brighten, sleeves roll up, as they each find their areas they want to continue to build. Some students inspect their areas to see if anything has changed, weathered from the elements, animal or human visitors as it is nestled up to a walkway. Others rush to the recycled buckets of Po’o, water, and dirt to begin to make the adobe mixture and fill mini adobe brick molds.
- At first the students talk in quieter voices, almost a mixture of focused silence, then chatter. As they engage with the mud, voices get louder and the language changes from English to Tewa. Ko’o Eliza slowly glides in and joins smaller groups, asking students about their structures, their designs, the uses of each, made in the style of their ancestors homes, their homes and kivas.





**Quintina Pavisook**  
A Powerhouse 31 year old "Rez Kid"

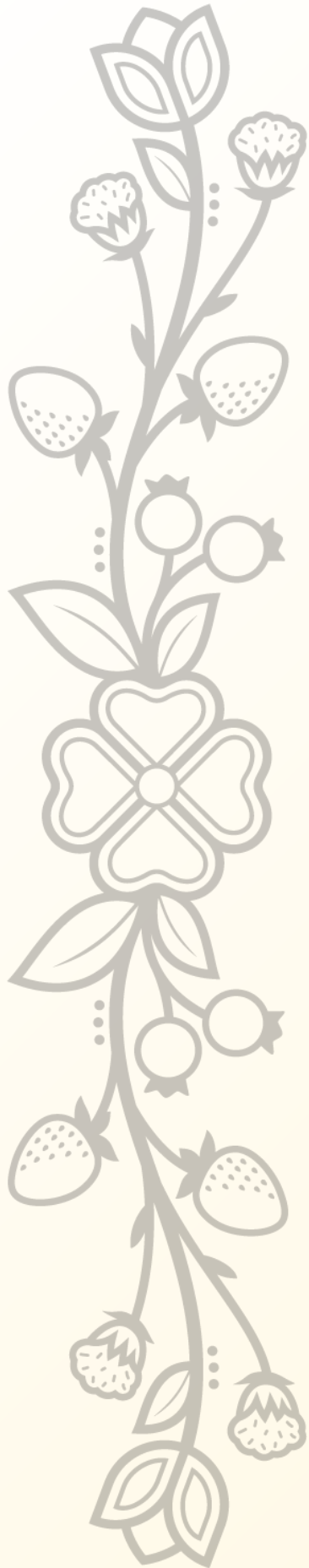


# Quintina Pavisook: A Powerhouse 31 year old “Rez Kid”

- Organizing Themes: Identity, Community Led, and Academic Relevance
- Imagine: Ute Mountain Ute Community Center in Towaoc, Colorado

Early spring evening, packed Community Hall for a KCA Talking Circle to gather community input on their Graduate Profile and Capstone Curriculum

- The hum in the space grows louder as the elders float in, steadying each step with the arm of a loved one. Their eyes are deep and bright. Community gathers, finding their seats and socialize with friends and family. Staff scurry around getting ready for their first school Talking Circle. Quintina greets the elders in her language, Ute, filled with energy and smiles! I approach Quintina and she says, “What can I do to help?” I know she doesn’t like public speaking, preferring to be behind the scene, but we need a team member to walk community members through the Graduate Profile. She sucks in her breath, arches up on her tiptoes and ponders. As she exhales, she hesitates, about to say no, but says, “No, you know what? I can. I can do this! Where do you need me?”
- Quintina invites elders them to join her to offer their thoughts and questions about the mission and Four Big Ideas of the Kwiyaqat Community Academy hanging in a glossy laminate on the firm, painted wall of the community hall. As the elders approach, Quintina fidgets slightly, her ribbon skirt draped around her midsection, her black sneakers pressed firmly into the earth. “Our school’s mission,” she begins in Ute, “is grounded in Four Big Ideas that hold together holistic wellness, identity development, academic relevance, and community leadership as guiding principles that weave through everything that we do.” Quintina’s eyes begin to actually sparkle. Her collarbone and shoulders relax proudly and her smile opens as she speaks.
- You see, Quintina is not usually the one to speak first in her family. “When my niece was in royalty I was around the community a lot, I would listen when the meetings took place.” In the past, she preferred to observe closely, to soak in what was said in her community from a space and distance that felt safe to her. Now, she says, “I am the one doing the talking in a good way.” She continues passionately describing the mission of the school.



# NACA Radical Poets





# The NACA Radical Poets

- **Organizing Themes: Identity, Empowerment, Agency and Academic Relevance**
- **Imagine: a room filled with chatter that slowly lowers to a hum as the NACA Radical Poets prepare to take the stage. The audience straightens their posture awaiting the words from Manuel Gonzales, one of their leaders.**

Sarita Sol Gonzalez, his daughter, a UNM student of Theatre and Chicano Studies, describes this as a “life changing experience for herself, not only the kids. The trips have showed me how much I love working with youth. How incredible inspiring they can be. If you give them the space & confidence to do it- anything- they can! They inspired me to figure out what I live to do!”

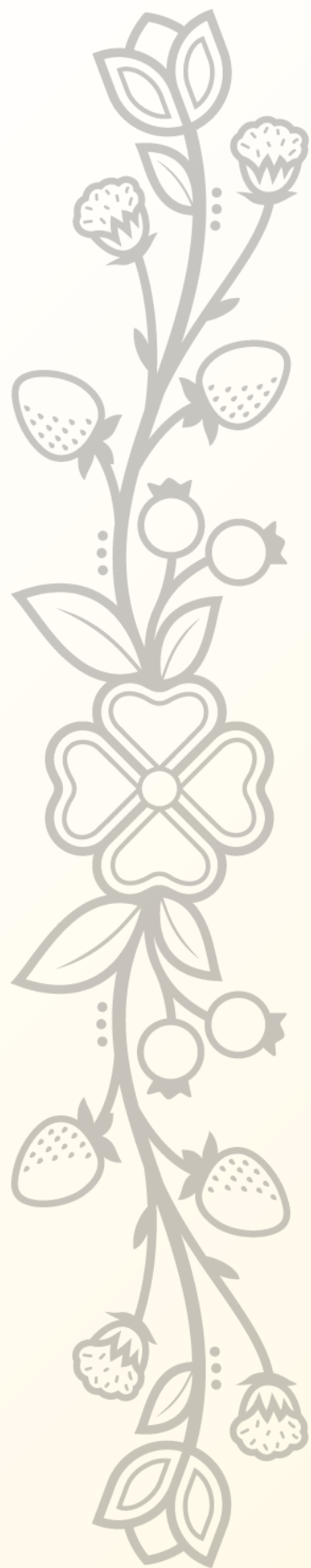
Shale Yazzie, a young Navajo poet born in Shiprock shares, “the writing I do has never been INWARD, it’s always been fiction, fantasy, things I made up. I never liked to acknowledge myself. It was uncomfortable at first. I was really scared. I felt others would be better than me. I’ve been doing this, writing, since I was 4. A friend encouraged me.....” As she shared her story she BEAMED! I did it! I got a row of 10’s, a perfect score!” In the background, her fellow poets hooped and hollered loudly- Oh yeah! In the HOUSE!”

Zander Cheromiah, a young poet from Laguna/Acoma, has been writing since he was 12 in MS “as a way to get some of the things around me out. I find a lot of joy, like where we were in Madison,WI, where you are around a lot of people, so beautiful, amazing people, in poetry, you find joy. Communicating, making new friends, doing something you love- SPINNING POETRY! It’s not just words, it’s MEDICINE. Taking words, turning bad situations in life, into something better... it can help people. I find joy in poetry.”

Manual Gonzales, one of the coaches/teachers, holding the NACA Radical Poets “Torch” since Jessica Helen Lopez of NISN began the work, said the “poets have become leaders, writers, more of who they are through this work.” He shared that they walk through the halls of NACA different, with their heads held high and a twinkle in their eyes!

# Indigenous Science Initiative Summer Gathering 2024



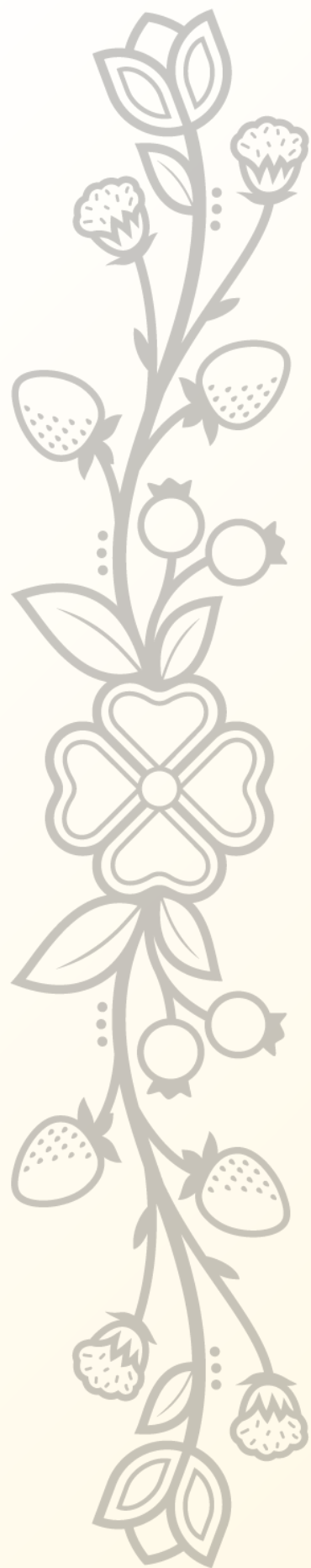


# Indigenous Science Initiative: Summer Gathering 2024

- **Organizing Themes: Indigenous Genius by Design (emphasis on Community Led Design & Place, Identity, Joy)**
- **Imagine: Learning and Planning in Place**
  - A group of educators and community members gather at the Indigenous Farm Hub in Corrales, New Mexico on a balmy July day. It's cool to start, but the summer sun is already rising in the sky.
  - We start with a story from Michael Garcia from Santa Ana; we learn about the seasons and the times of day; we learn about names.
  - Then, we visit with the land, picking potatoes! carrots! squash!
  - Our labor leads to Indigenous Cooking with Mayahuel. Along the way, we learn about the cooking methods, the relationship between us and the land, between each other.
  - Then we walk to the banks of the Rio Grande, sharing story and names along the way. *What do you learn from the land? How are you in relationship with this place?*
  - We gather like this to prepare our bodies and minds to design curriculum.



**Indigenous Science Initiative Fall Gathering 2024**



# Indigenous Science Initiative: Fall Gathering 2024

- **Organizing Themes: Indigenous Genius by Design (emphasis on Community Led Design, Identity, & Joy)**
- **Imagine: at the Poeh Center in Pojoaque**
  - It's Fall in New Mexico now and the mornings are chilly. There is wood smoke in the air as we prepare a space for educators and community members to come together.
  - We meet and share stories of curriculum; community members rotate between grade levels to listen and provide insights, critique, ideas ... educators listen and ask questions, make connections for the future.
  - We visit the Poeh Center and learn how a community strives to maintain and grow their way of life.
  - All the while, good food from local chefs, who share their stories and deepen our appreciation for nourishment.

Day 6 10-2-19

Strategy creat a flow chart.

① Around Twelve o'clock we went to ADC.

② The girls and boys were in separate rooms to work in.

③ The girls worked on their dresses to get done.

④ We all lined up to go back to KCS so we can't write what we did at ADC.

Day 6 10-2-19

Draft a summary of today's lesson. Include supporting details and illustrations.

Summary

Around twelve o'clock PM we went to ADC. When we got there the girls and boys were seperated in different rooms. When the girls got to the room we all worked on finishing our dresses. Around one o'clock PM we lined up to go back to KCS. I had fun at ADC.

What I learned

I learned to use a sewing machine.

Illustrations



# Kha'p'o Students: Intergenerational Exchange

- Organizing Themes: Identity, Joy, Place, Relevance
- Imagine: at Kha'p'o Owinge
  - 6th grade students walk from their school campus to the Adult Day Care. This is a weekly visit, a chance to learn from their elders, their aunties and uncles, grandmas and grandpas.
  - Greetings with respect, listening, teasing, laughter, teaching.
  - Sewing mantas, making rattles, baking in the earthen oven ...
  - Keeping patterns as old as time.



**Who is a teacher?**

**Everyone has gifts and knowledge to share.**

**Take time to be in community with each other.**



# The Native Lit - Indigenous Science Symposium



# The Native Lit & Indigenous Science Symposiums

- **Organizing Themes:** the power and impact of stories - from students, about the land, about connections to, with, and through all of the people and places.
- **Imagine:** Learning spaces that include walls, tables, and chairs, but also water, skies, and other than human relatives.

“The gathering itself was steeped with our core values that we practice in our Indigenous/POC cultures. Together we honored the communities that we come from and we made new community together.”



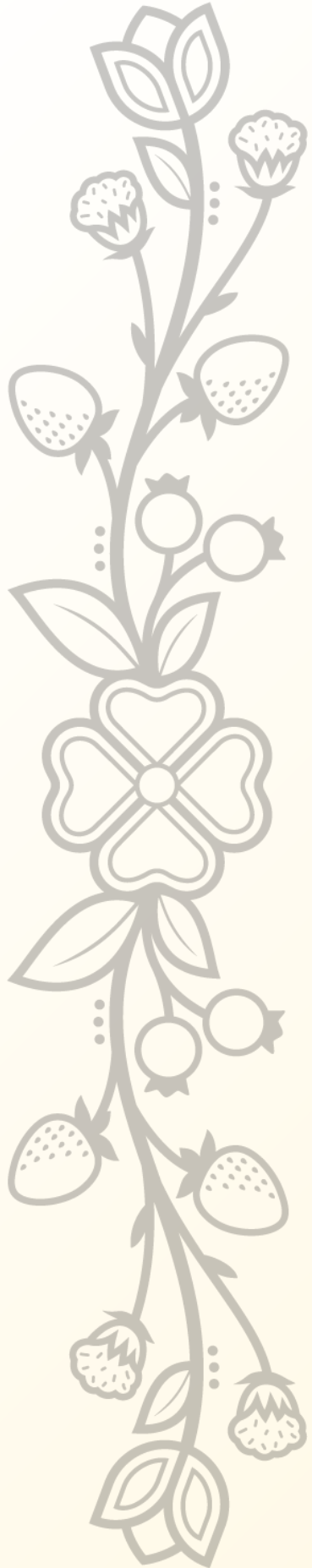


## NACA Land-Based Healing and Learning



# The Land-Based Healing and Learning

- **Organizing Themes: Identity, Empowerment, Agency**
- **Imagine: A crowded rambunctious classroom at Native American Community Academy**
  - Rooted in Joy: Grew up hiking, stargazing, and laughing with my dad — my teacher, my sunshine.
  - Loss & Disconnection: His passing severed my ties to family and culture, leading to years of depression and wandering.
  - Returning Home: Covid brought me back to teach at a Native charter school — a step that quietly changed my life.
  - Healing Through Community: A baby carrot prank during a plant medicine workshop reminded me that laughter, curiosity, and connection are sacred — and that I had finally found home.

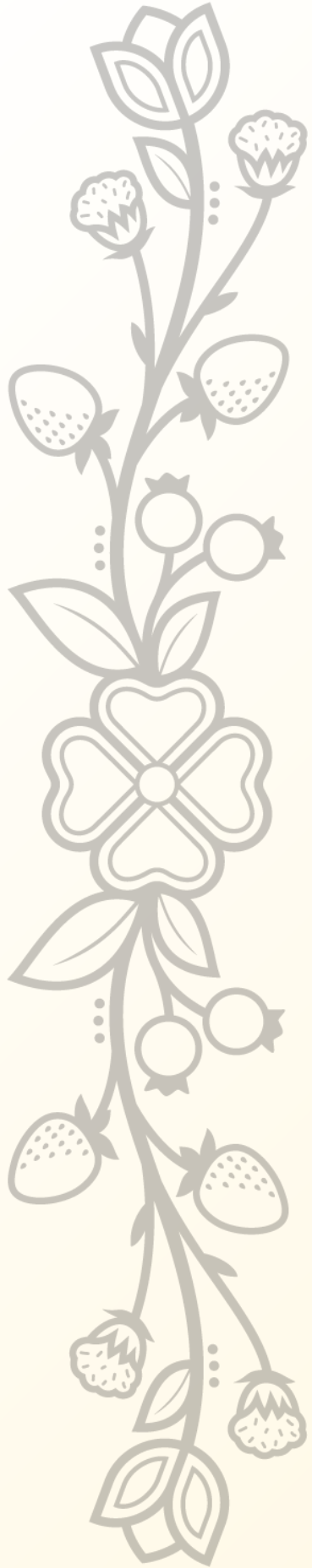


# The Indigenous Farm Hub

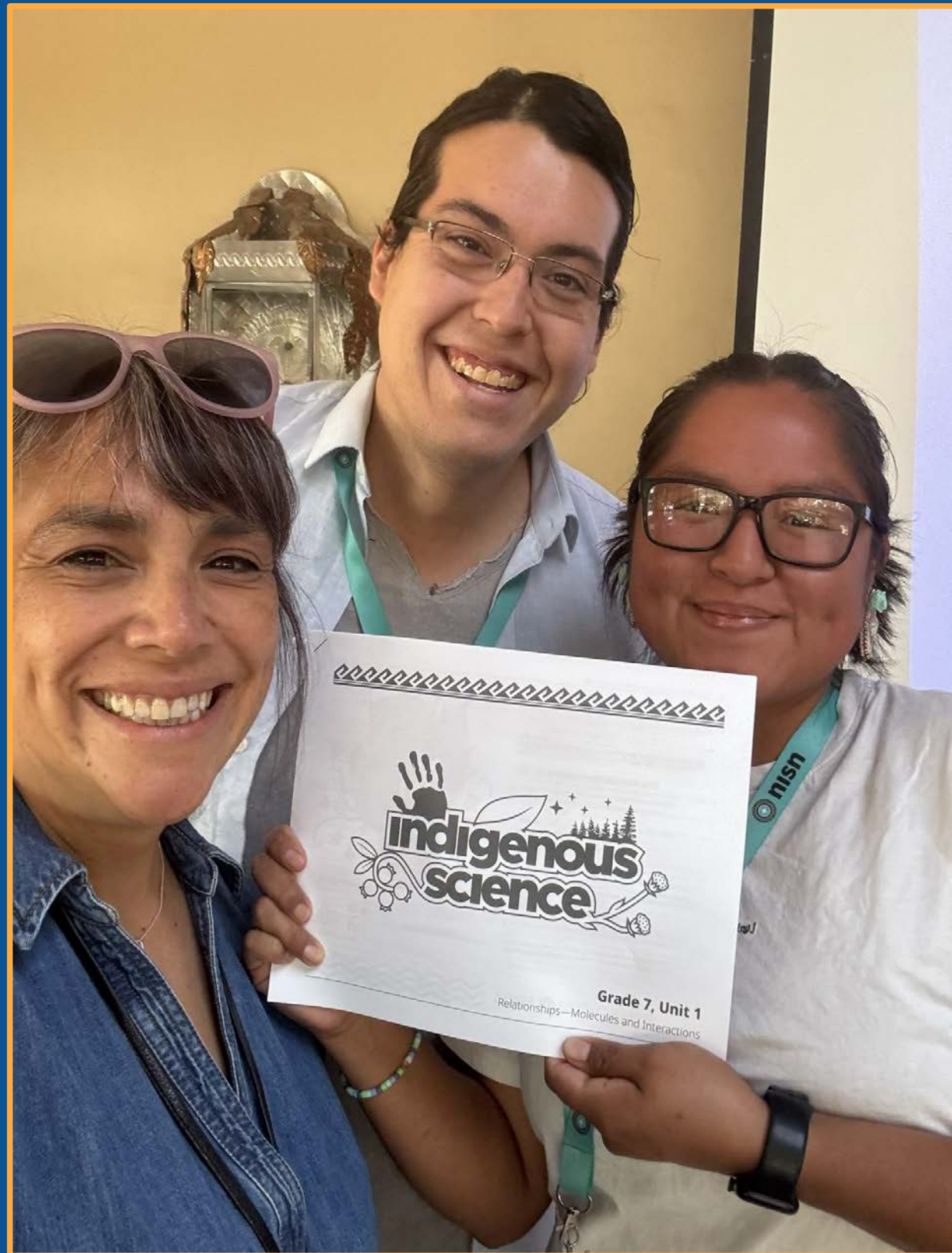


# The Indigenous Farm Hub

- **Organizing Themes: Resilience, Holistic Wellness, Reciprocity**
- **Imagine: A farm full of veggies with children exploring and working**
  - The learning is in the doing: A moment when the work felt too hard - the sun too hot, but we kept going anyway because we knew it was food for our community
  - River Prayers - At the end of a long day, we go to the river to play. What do you say in your prayer as you sent it downstream?
  - The quiet ride home - The ride home from the farm when everyone falls asleep - from K all the way to 12th grade.
  - Seeds are promise- Thinking beyond the plants - what else grows at the farm hub?



# The Land Based Healing and Learning Team





# The Land-Based Healing and Learning Team

- **Organizing Themes: Community-led, Academic Relevance**
- **Imagine: A young woman and her students in the garden**
  - **Science With Barriers:** Faced sexism and microaggressions while navigating science with an Indigenous lens - often dismissed or misunderstood.
  - **Seed of Change:** A college professor, Dr. Lambert, opened a path to joyful, heart-centered science that honored connection to land and self.
  - **Full Circle in Mentorship:** Now mentoring Victoria, a former student turned educator, who leads with Indigenous knowledge, curiosity, and care.
  - **A Living Legacy:** Through Victoria's joyful, relational teaching, I see the next generation thriving - proof that our way of knowing belongs in science.

# Growing Together Fellowship





# Behind the Scenes...

- **Organizing Themes: Planning Work that's Joyful, aligned with Holistic Wellness and is Community-led**
- **Imagine: Growing Together Fellowship**

You're all here to learn, share, and grow as leaders, but I want to pull back the curtain on the joyful work that makes our GTF Gatherings happen at NACA Inspired Schools Network. It's not just about logistics; it's about crafting an experience that lifts our group up, and it's a labor we pour our hearts into.

Before these programmatic events, our team completes some deep planning. We choose Indigenous-owned lodging options where possible to honor and support nearby tribes. We spend time coordinating with local caterers or venues, ensuring every meal—nourishes both body and spirit, with options for every diet.

Then there's transportation, a puzzle all its own. We act as conductors orchestrating flights, rental cars, and carpools to get all attendees to the event without a hitch. No one left waiting at an airport, no one scrambling for a ride—that's our promise. And the activities? We planned land-based healing to root everyone to the location: whether it's a walk at a sacred site, mindfulness sessions that sync your breath, or workshops weaving cultural knowledge into our experience.

My team's role is to be the backbone. While the program lead guides you through transformative discussions, we're behind the scenes, ensuring on time arrivals, hotel rooms are ready, meals are hot, and the schedule hums along. A delayed flight? A last-minute dietary need? A question about tomorrow's itinerary? We're on it, with calm smiles and quick fixes, so no one sweats the small stuff. Our goal is to free our programmatic team and fellows to dive into the heart of their gathering—those moments of insight, those sparks of connection that are carried back to schools.

This work isn't just mechanical; it's joyful. Every late-night email, every checklist, every call to confirm a detail is fueled by care. We're not just moving people from point A to point B; we're holding space for growth, wellness, and community. Our gatherings are more than an event—it's a tapestry of care, woven with intention. And for my team, that's the joy: knowing we've created a space where people thrive, connect, and return to schools renewed.

# NISN Staff Gathering





# Behind the Scenes...

- **Organizing Themes: Planning Work that's Joyful, aligned with Holistic Wellness and is Community-led**
- **Imagine: NISN Staff Gathering**

Now you've heard how we craft our GTF Gatherings at the NACA Inspired Schools Network with care. Let's move to covering the joyful work behind our staff gatherings, where we come together twice a year as relatives. These aren't just events—they're our spaces to connect, grow, and thrive, woven with intention.

Like GTF, we plan months ahead. We do very similar planning, but also include land-based and/or community activities.

What sets staff gatherings apart is relationality. We're community-centered, and catching up as relatives is as vital as training. Balancing travel, training, and team needs is tricky, but we meet it with creativity. We've tried unique approaches: one year, a zoo trip for our fiscal year wrap-up, with teams leading lively discussions outdoors. Another time, we served our community, sharing winter wear and snacks with those in need, grounding us in purpose. We learned from overloading an agenda with organizational change, finding balance by mixing computer work with outdoor activities.

Now, we use hybrid agendas, focusing in-person time on key trainings and land-based healing—like cultural workshops—to stay connected to each other and the earth. We shift computer work to virtual sessions later, easing travel and honoring family time. Our values shine through: holistic health for wellness, land-based learning for grounding, relationality for connection, and family to respect our personal time.

My team acts as a backbone here as well. While facilitators lead, we ensure smooth arrivals, ready rooms, hot meals, and a flowing schedule. That's the magic. Our staff gatherings are a labor of love, where we thrive as relatives, ready to bring that energy to our work and our schools.

Thank you all for listening and I hope this shines a light on the joy behind the scenes.



# Pride in Identity at Dream Diné





# Pride in Identity at Dream Diné

- **Organizing Themes: Identity Development, Academic Relevance**
- **Imagine: A Community Auditorium in Shiprock, NM**

It's a cool morning in late May. The auditorium is buzzing with excitement as parents and family members greet one another and make final touch-ups on their children's' outfits. Soon, Mrs. Chatto steps up to the microphone and makes an announcement for all Dream Diné students to come to the stage—the ceremony is about to begin. Students file onstage, giggling and whispering to one another while Mrs. Chatto and Ms. Thomas show them to their seats. The students range in age from 5 to 11 years old, grades K through 5. This is their end-of-year celebration: an awards ceremony for the whole school, and the promotion ceremony for the graduating 5th graders, many of whom have attended Dream Diné since Kindergarten themselves.

When the ceremony begins, the attention is immediately placed on the students: Dr. Shepherd, the Diné Language and Culture teacher, signals to the students who start a series of mantras in Diné Bizaad. The students follow Dr. Shepherd's lead seamlessly, their recitations complete with smiles and giggles at the end of certain lines. Many of the students are dressed traditionally in their moccasins and jewelry, some wearing Navajo-style skirts or velvet shirts, and a few with their hair tied back in a tsiyééł, a traditional Diné style of bun.

Once the students have finished their recitations, they are called to the microphone one-by-one, starting with the very youngest—a pair of twins from the Kindergarten class. As each student approaches the microphone, they take a deep breath and begin their traditional introductions: their name, their four clans, their parents' and grandparents' names, and where they were born—all in their Diné language. They identify where they go to school, how old they are, and the promoting students share favorite memories from their time at Dream Diné. Each student receives certificates honoring their academic achievements, and are dismissed back to their seats, beaming with pride.

# Sending It Curiously at Dził Dítł'ooí School of Empowerment Action and Perseverance





# **Sending It Curiously with DEAP Charter School**

- **Organizing Themes: Holistic Wellness, Identity Development**
- **Imagine: A Campground Surrounded by Pine Forest in the Zuni Mountains**

It's early on a crisp Saturday morning in September. The campgrounds are waking up as the sun rises, revealing the start of the taped off race course that quickly disappears into the trees. Young athletes from all over the state of New Mexico are riding mountain bikes through the campsite, jerseys on, ready for the race to start.

The race starts are staggered, organized by age, gender, and experience. When it's time for the Middle School Boys' Single Lap, a race usually reserved for first time riders and athletes recovering from injuries, two boys in black and orange jerseys with DINÉ COMP are chatting nervously in line. They have been practicing since the beginning of August, attending every after-school ride and weekend practice session—just last weekend, they rode another trail in the Zuni Mountains not far from here and crushed it. But they weren't racing anyone then, and now the pressure was on.

It was not long before they were lined up at the race start and the race director, a tall woman wearing a hat shaped like a red chilé, started the countdown from ten. Both boys leaned forward in their saddles, put their feet on the pedal at a 45° angle, and squeezed their breaks. Then, she shouted "GO!" And both boys were off, maneuvering carefully between the other boys in their race.

The boys both pedaled hard through all 4.7 miles of their first race, shouting encouragement to one another and their fellow competitors along the way. As soon as they crossed the finish line, they filled their water bottles and turned back to the race course to cheer on the other boys that they had raced alongside, all the while talking about the different features of the race course and asking their coach if they could keep practicing for the next race.

# Cornfield Studies at DEAP Charter School





# Cornfield Studies at DEAP Charter School

- **Organizing Themes: Land-Based Healing & Learning, Community-led Design**
- **Imagine: Standing in Shin-Deep Red Clay Mud at Sunset**

When DEAP's founders were talking to community members about what they wanted for students in the Navajo, New Mexico community, one topic kept bubbling up to the surface: agriculture. Navajo, NM and the Red Lake Chapter area has a long history as a farming community. However, elders in the community were concerned that there weren't any young farmers coming up and learning to tend the fields, raise the sheep, and continue feeding the community. Moreover, there was a great need for healing the land after half a century of ecological destruction resulting from the logging industry.

The cornfield became integral to the rhythms of learning at DEAP. Students in grades 6 through 12 grade learned how to prepare, plant, maintain, irrigate, and harvest a variety of crops, but especially corn. One of the challenges in the high desert environment is, of course, water; with low levels of precipitation throughout the summer, and no built-in irrigation system, DEAP students and staff learned all about setting up a flood irrigation system the old fashioned way.

Some of my favorite memories are from irrigation time. After all, who doesn't want to play in the mud all day? While it was hard work, it was fun and rewarding, and gave us an opportunity to build relationships with one another. Each year, we would work together to dig irrigation ditches through about 2 acres of cornfield. When it was our turn to pump water from the lake, we would spend entire days helping the water along, adjusting the irrigation ditches to shift flow direction, and stomping around in the mud. While we were learning, both by doing the work in the cornfield and through the teachings about water rights, the science of growing corn, etc. We were also having a lot of fun and healing through our work in the land.



# Playing Stickball in Čanšayapí



# Playing Stickball at Čanšayapí

- **Organizing Themes: Holistic Wellness and Community-led Design**
- **Imagine: An Open, Grassy Field in Morton, Minnesota**

It's midmorning on a cool day in late March; members of the School Design Fellowship Team have been meeting with a pair of fellowship candidates who are interested in opening a Dakota immersion elementary school for the Čanšayapí Community. After spending the morning speaking with teachers and language interns, we drive the fifteen minutes from their current facility—a language nest and head start program—to a local high school where the two candidates teach Dakota Language and Culture.

Across the parking lot from the high school is an open, grassy field with two wooden posts on either end. A pair of interns from the school unload two large duffel bags filled with traditional Dakota lacrosse sticks and tennis balls. They review the basic skills quickly—picking up the ball, throwing, and catching—and put us in pairs to practice. A few of our team had played before, but this was my first time playing, and catching the ball was proving to be very difficult. We practiced for probably ten minutes before a group of high school students joined us, and soon we had counted off into teams and were circled up on the field, ready to start.

It didn't take me long to get into the rhythm of playing and find my home on the field as a defender. The students didn't take it easy on us, and neither did the fellowship candidates or the language interns. Within the first few scores, everyone on the field was trash talking, cheering each other on, and laughing about mistakes. One of my coworkers easily picked the game back up and scored back to back points; I managed to box another one out and steal the ball before losing it to one of the high school girls. We played for the entire class period until their lunch bell rang, losing track of the score long before the game ended.

# Equity-Based Leadership at Thompson Island Cultural Camp





# Equity-Based Leadership at Thompson Island Cultural Camp

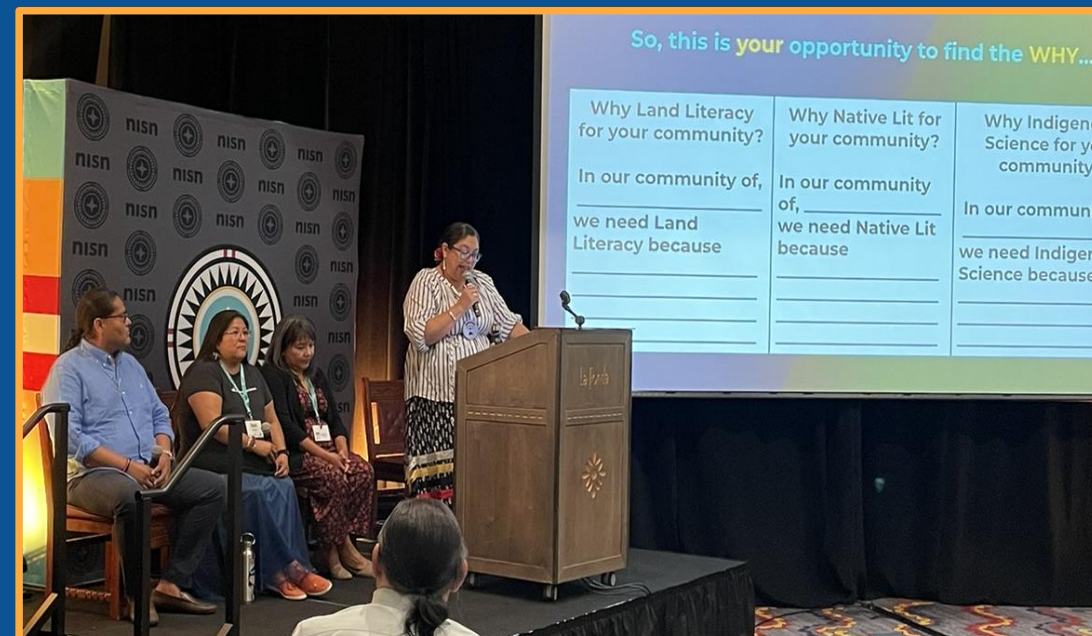
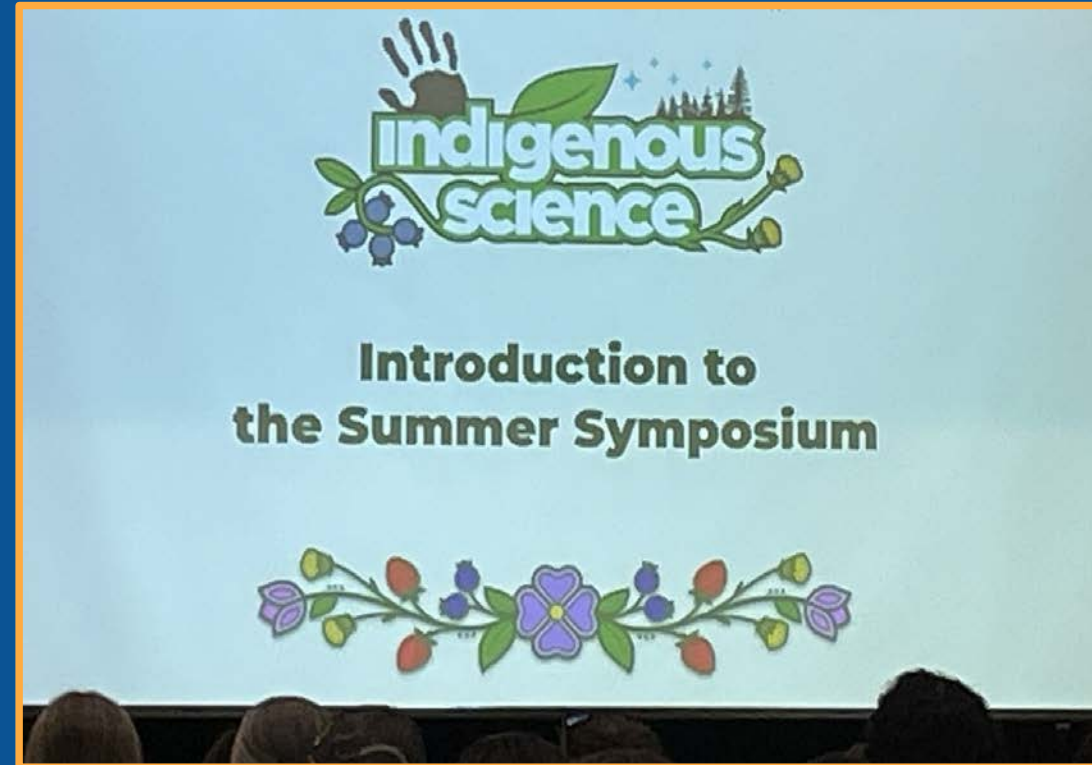
- **Organizing Themes: Leadership Development, Land-Based Healing & Learning, Equity & Wellness**
- **Imagine: A Cool, Humid Afternoon on a Lush, Green Island in Ontario**

**“Who gets to participate in Land Based Healing and Learning?”**

This question is posed in the opening circle before the group of approximately 40 school leaders, teachers, and community partners are turned loose for two hours of free time at the Thompson Island Cultural Camp in the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation. There’s no shortage of activities available on the island: many members of the cohort make a beeline for the kayaks and canoes, wasting no time at getting in the water and paddling out into the Saint Lawrence River. Others set out on a nature walk along a muddy trail in the dense woods bordering the camp—not far down the trail, there’s a scream and then a wave of laughter as a black snake seemingly levitates across the path. There are fishing rods available, and the camp groundskeeper shows off a fresh sturgeon that he’d caught earlier that day, pointing out the unique armor-like features of the fish’s body. One school leader excitedly sets about preparing the sweat lodge, inviting two others to join him once it’s ready; a few others post up in a cozy cabin by the fire, settling in for meditations and maybe even a short nap.

With two hours to work with, everyone has an opportunity to explore as many activities as they’d like. On the water, two of the community partners, attending the gathering to provide authorizer feedback on design plans for two new Indigenous community schools, capsize their canoe in the river. With the help of the other boaters, they’re quickly turned right-side-up again and laughing about the mistake. Another group of kayakers races out to a metal tower structure in the river—the last to touch the base is responsible for drinks later that night.

After the two hours ends, the group reconvenes and reflects on the question of who gets to participate in experiences like the ones they’ve just had, considering how Land Based Healing and Learning is related to equity for students and adults alike.



# Community-Led Design Indigenous Advisory Collective

# Community-led Design Indigenous Advisory Collective

- **Organizing Themes: Community-Led Design develops organically and leaders emerge to share their quiet power**
- **Imagine:**
  - **A space where Indigenous knowledge is respected and valued**
  - **Opportunities to learn from Indigenous elders and organic intellectuals (Gramsci)/scholars of Indigenous knowledge**
  - **A foundational practice of relationality and relationship building that is dynamic, living, changing, and honors quiet power**

**Michael Garcia (Santa Ana Pueblo) (life of a rez dog podcast / storyteller & language teacher) narrates his story of how he joined the ISI Advisory Collective and the power of story**

**Shayai Lucero (Acoma & Laguna Pueblos) (Indigenous ethnobotanist and business owner) narrates her story of coming into her power as an Indigenous scientist and the power of story**

