



# AMONGST RELATIVES

OVER  
THE LEVEE

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UNDER  
THE PLOW

AN EXPERIENTIAL CURRICULUM

These cards contain a series of interactive prompts. The prompts accompany the field guide *Amongst Relatives*, a booklet based on conversations I had with Lakota plant caretaker Cante Suta Francis Bettelyoun and Ho-Chunk Knowledge Keeper Rhonda Funmaker. The prompts aim to invite you into an embodied present; one that is in relationship with more-than-human communities. Each of us come to these cards with different histories and affinities. The prompts are made to flex to your needs and desires.

The cards were influenced by Lakota, Dakota, and Anishanaabe writers including Mary Sissip Geniusz, Kim Tallbear, and Nick Estes. They were written on unceded Dakota lands in so-called Minneapolis, surrounded by the homelands of the Dakota and Anishanaabe people. They were also inspired by the poet CA Conrad's somatic rituals. Conrad's rituals aim to create embodied presence, which serves as research fodder for their future poems.

While performing these prompts, or immediately thereafter, you may take notes. These notes may then turn into poems, lyrics, zines, videos, prints, letters, or graffiti. They may turn into motivation to engage in local organizing or incentive to start an affinity group. They may foster a reorientation to your more-than-human entanglements and relatives.

We are permeable beings endeavoring to breathe in the Anthropocene. We are perpetually affected by our changing ecosystems. In the midst of the ecocidal violence of settler colonialism and capitalism, these cards question: how do we each honor the nature-cultures of mutual aid that surround us and support us?

Corinne Teed

The background of the page is a dense field of hand-drawn, orange-toned microscopic cells. These cells vary in shape, including circles, ovals, and elongated forms, many with internal structures like nuclei and organelles. In the upper right corner, a white rectangular box with a thin black border contains a large, bold black number '1'.

**1**

# **ENCOUNTERS**

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**AMONGST RELATIVES**

Mary Siisip Geniusz (Anishanaabe) continually refers to plants as who and whom, honoring their subjectivity, imparting the Anishanaabe belief that “plants are alive and cognizant.”

Choose a plant that you know to be native to an area where you like to walk. Slowly, over days, weeks, or months, build your relationship to this plant.

Learn the English name for the plant. Learn a name for the plant in a language native to the land you live on.

You may draw the plant. Notice their physical characteristics. Notice their surrounding habitat, and with whom they grow. Ask a friend about their stories of the plant. Ask an elder. Research any medicinal properties and how communities native to your land use this plant.

Ask the plant’s permission to take a cutting (as long as the plant is not threatened in that ecosystem), bring it home, and place it next to your bed. Sleep next to the plant and when you awake, write down your dreams.

After spending significant quality time with this plant, write a story. Sissip writes that in the Anishanaabe tradition, story is “one of the most powerful methods of storing knowledge.” Write a story about your first encounter and how the plant called to you. Or write a character portrait of the spirit of the plant. Or write speculative fiction or nonfiction in which this plant is essential to a society experiencing an apocalypse.



2

**IN ABSENCE**

**AMONGST RELATIVES**

Consider a being whom has lived in your local ecosystem that is not currently present due to habitat degradation, hunting, resource extraction, environmental toxins, and/or settler colonialism. Select a once-upon-a-time inhabitant of your current landscape who is absent.

Whom you choose may not be entirely absent, but instead struggling to maintain their presence in an environment that has caused them harm or become actively hostile. You may choose human communities, predators, trees lost to disease, songbirds, fish, plants sensitive to temperature shifts, or waterways buried for development.

Mary Ruefle writes:

*The origins of poems, prayers, and letter all have this in common: urgency. They each originate in the pressing need to make a message directed at something unnear, that the absence of the unnear be made to appear present – that the presence of absence be palpably felt – that consciousness create consciousness.*

Write the disappeared one a letter. Acknowledge the history of harm and the urgency of this moment. Write about how you feel their absence. Read the letter out loud to them in a place of your choosing.



**3**

**EMBODIED ACTS**

**AMONGST RELATIVES**

Allow seven consecutive days to complete this prompt.

Think of a more-than-human being that you feel particularly connected to in your surrounding community. For one week, practice embodied acts of love for this relative: be it plant, animal, a body of water, stone, fungi, or microbes.

On the first day, decide on a way to acknowledge the past history of harm this relative has endured from development, damaged habitats, environmental toxins, or changing climate.

On the second day, write about why you chose this more-than-human relative. What significance have they played in your life?

For the rest of the week, invent your own embodied act of love for each day. These could include:

- ⋮ Visit a place where you feel the presence of the relative. Spend quality time together.
- ⋮ Research their history and their role in their ecosystem.
- ⋮ Learn current threats to their survival and health.
- ⋮ Leave an offering.
- ⋮ Write them an ode and read or sing it to them.

On the last day, consider what the Dakota term *wotakuye* ("being a good relative") means in relation to this other. Make commitments to them for how you will work to be a good relative.





**4**

**WITH WHOM**

**AMONGST RELATIVES**

Stand alone in a field or a forest or a room and shake your body like a dog relieving stress. Attempt to disentangle any assigned identities within heteropatriarchal-capitalist-white-supremacist society. Continue for as long as desired, imagining burdens you experience from these identities traveling out the tips of your fingertips, the top of your head, and the soles of your feet. Feel your own warm core of life and imagine the pulsing life surrounding you.

Once finished, find a place to sit and write. Begin writing a list of shared identities with nonhuman beings around you. You can start with the simple ones – to be mammal, to be two-legged, to be four-limbed, to be terrestrial.

For example:

*I am four-limbed like the frog.*

*I am terrestrial like the milkweed, rooting into the earth for sustenance.*

Allow the poetic to enter as shared traits reveal themselves to you.

For example:

*I am soft and essential like the moss that cushions the sharp rocks, providing stability to those around me.*

*I am collaborative like the microbe, recognizing that my survival depends on mutual aid within my community.*

Write at least 20 shared characteristics with your surrounding ecological communities.

A line art illustration of a plant, possibly a species of ginger or similar, featuring large, elongated leaves with prominent veins and several clusters of small, bell-shaped flowers. The illustration is rendered in a light orange or tan color against a white background.

**5**

**ENTANGLEMENTS**

**AMONGST RELATIVES**

Ecological relationships are a form of interdependence. The monarch cannot reproduce without the milkweed. The beavers build dams that enrich the great blue heron's hunting grounds. The mycelium networks of fungi transport nutrients and water between tree communities.

Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate) writes "Non-humans are agential beings engaged in social relationships that profoundly shape human lives." Humans are not at the center, but greatly depend on the collaborative work of countless more-than-human relatives. This work is both visible and invisible to the human eye.

Consider the more-than-human species that enable your existence, whom profoundly shape your life. Make a list of at least ten of those whom you know are central to your health. This is your list of primary supports. It may include the bee, the backyard silver maple, or the foraged oyster mushrooms. Research which species are in symbiotic relationships with your primary list and create a list of secondary supports. Try to include some more-than-human relatives that are invisible to the human eye, like microbes. Then create a list of tertiary supports. Continue in however many iterations you would like to create your entanglements with more-than-human community.



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## IN DIALOGUE

AMONGST RELATIVES

Choose a local extractive industry to research. Possibilities include fisheries, mining, pipelines, industrial agriculture, factory farming, dams, or lumbering.

Learn the impact of that industry, who is most at risk to those impacts, and the current regulations that curtail the growth of that industry. Learn what commodity market this resource supports. Is it used to make cell phones? Is it used to fuel cars?

Choose a friend, colleague, comrade, or lover to have a conversation with regarding the effects of the extractive industry. Invite them to do some research of their own or choose someone who you know to be previously knowledgeable.

Plan a walk or picnic together in an affected area. If they are distant, plan to be in the affected space while talking on the phone.

Discussion topics may include:

- : Who benefits from this industry?
- : Who suffers the negative impacts of this industry?
- : Who is engaged in the struggles to change this industry? Who isn't?
- : What do you learn from other species about this industry?
- : What do you see or feel in the affected area?



**7**

# **OBSERVE AS YOU GO**

**AMONGST RELATIVES**

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The Dakota use the saying *akita mani yo* - to observe as you go - to describe an ideal of relating to our environments. These observations may be of both the external and the internal.

Choose a place to walk where you can witness flora, fauna, and/or bodies of water. Bring a way to write down reflections with you.

Once present in your chosen place, begin to walk in no particular direction with no plan of a destination. Be quiet as you go. Respond intuitively to your immediate environment. Pause to observe anything that catches your interest. Make decisions of where to go based on curiosity in the moment.

As you walk, *akita mani yo* – observe as you go.

Maybe you will witness the perseverance of a red headed woodpecker as it taps against bark, hunting grubs. Or the new sprouts of spring and their steady, slow arching towards the sun in the lower canopy of a forest. Or the protective shell of the black walnut and the thorns of the nettle – the ways that species protect themselves, armor themselves for the known battles that they will face.

After time spent walking and observing, find a place to sit and write reflections on your observations.



A line art illustration of a plant, likely a species of Melancholia, featuring large, elongated leaves with prominent veins and several clusters of small, five-petaled flowers. The illustration is rendered in a light orange or tan color against a white background.

**8**

# MELANCHOLIA

**AMONGST RELATIVES**

Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands describes the current psychological state of late stage capitalism in relationship to environmental loss as “melancholia, a state of suspended mourning in which the object of loss is very real but psychically ‘ungrievable’ within the confines of a society that cannot acknowledge non-human beings, natural environments and ecological processes as appropriate objects for human grief.”

Reflect on how you feel environmental grief and loss in your body, how you mentally process it, how you understand it historically.

Settler colonialism and capitalism ask us to believe that it was always slated to be this way, that rampant industrial development, environmental degradation, and genocidal settler colonialism were forgone conclusions of an inevitable march forward of progress.

But other futures were possible.

There are few public rituals of mourning of these *ungrievable* losses.

Create a ritual of mourning that involves a human public. You may wheatpaste a manifesto of grief or obituary in a public place. Or gather friends around a fire, honor those lost through reading odes or obituaries you write for them. Or maybe create a series of postcards that acknowledges a particular loss and send them to friends, acquaintances, or strangers.