

SHAPED BY RIVERS

OVER
THE LEVEE

UNDER
THE PLOW

AN EXPERIENTIAL CURRICULUM

How can we foster mutual and creative relationships between landscape, waterways, and inhabitants?

How can we center respect and care in visions of community and ecological health?

These cards, designed to accompany the booklet *Shaped by Rivers*, pursue these questions through embodied knowledge and remembrance. They resist settler-colonial amnesia.

They are an encouragement to expand knowledge, understanding, and memory through research and embodied experience, to expand what it means to *find out*.

Heather Parrish

1

INTRODUCTIONS

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During a discussion at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve during the 2019 *Over the Levee, Under the Plow* mobile seminar, participants began by answering the following question provided by Margaret Noodin (University of Wisconsin Professor and teacher of Anishinaabemowin):

Can you introduce yourself and include in your introduction the bodies of land and water that have given you life and are now protected and acknowledged by you?

Take the question up at regular intervals over a self-determined period of time (such as, once a week for six weeks).

What is your initial response to this question? Write it on the top half of the front of this card. At the end of your designated time, write the last iteration of your response on the lower half.

How does your self-introduction transform over time, with reflection, with research, with new actions? What connections does it expose for you? Where are there gaps? If there are gaps, how would you choose to fill them?

Broach this question to one or more close companions. Find an opportunity to ask a new acquaintance. Notice how this exchange impacts the quality of your connection in these various relationships.

2

EVIDENCE

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1

Take a walk near a waterway of your choice. What traces of water do you observe? Look closely at the lower edges of buildings, around water drains, or lines of debris left on the banks or shores. Are there any official markers of historical floods that you observe?

2

Try accessing the water from where you are. What navigation does it take? How is access to the water being enabled or disabled by the surrounding area? When you are as close to the water as you can get, within your eyesight (up & down on the same side of the waterway; on the opposite side), list all the materials you can see and identify there. What evidence of human intervention (such as structures) are there? What plants are there? Inventory each identifiable material with a little picture and text. Imagine what materials, chemicals, or creatures might be there that you cannot see. List them and make a drawing representing what they might be. Use the front of this card or your own notebook.

3

Find out if it is safe to swim there. One way to do that is to visit the EPA website *How's My Waterway* (www.mywaterway.epa.gov) and enter your zip code.



3

WATER PROTECTORS

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What would it take to protect the waters in your area?

Protect from what?

From whom?

For what?

For whom?

Are there advocates for the ecological health of your local waterways? Who are they?

Consider these question regarding the content/composition of the water, and regarding the flow of the waters.

Think about the waters you can see (rivers, ponds, streams) and the water you can't (pipes, drainage, in industry).

4

INFRASTRUCTURE

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Find a structure that mitigates flooding and erosion in your area and go there. (For example: a levee, dike, seawall, spur, or retention pond)

Who cares for this structure?

Who is most invested in the care of those structures? Who benefits/who is at risk? Identify corporate interests, government agencies, human populations and other-than-human inhabitants.

What did the waterway look like before the structure was built? Do you know how to find out?

Was its course altered? If so, why? Who benefited? Who did not? When considering this question, try to think beyond human experience.

Do you know what and who populates these waters? How large are the entities that you can you identify? How small? Does this change with seasons?

Draw the structure you observed from the previous exercise on the front of this card.

On top of your first drawing, use a different color and your imagination, to draw what this waterway might have looked like 500 years ago.

Using a third color, draw what it might look like 500 years in the future.

5

STORIES FROM THE FLOOD

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1

Visit the Stories From the Flood website

www.wisconsinfloodstories.org

2

Go with a companion to a water-side place.

3

Ask each other the following questions and listen:

Do you have stories in your life that involve flooding?

Where were you?

What age?

Who was with you?

What do you remember smelling, hearing, sensing on your skin and feeling emotionally, before the flood?

During and directly after?

Months after?

Years after?

Who else in your life shares this memory? Where do your memories of the experience converge and diverge?

4

Speak the story to the waterway, understanding that all water is connected.

Listen to the water in return.

What do you hear?

6

IMAGING FLOODS

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Referring back to a remembered flood from the previous exercise, or a flood that you know occurred in your area, look for photographs that documented it. Try looking up the flood on the website of a local newspaper, or searching newspaper archives at your local library. Other online image searches, such as Google, can also be used.

Who took the photographs that you found?

Were they taken for a newspaper? For insurance documentation? Personal memorabilia? Some other purpose?

Can you find that area today? If so, take a picture of it.

Place your image and one of your found images side by side.

What differences and/or similarities do you observe?

What is the reason for those difference and/or similarities?

If you could not find images or places, what prevented you from doing so?

INTERSECTING RIVERS OF EXPERIENCE

We are drawn to water, attracted magnetically, yet the water carries potential for danger. It can even be life threatening.

Think about specific experiences you have had with water.

Can you describe those experiences with a shape or mark?

Can you describe the relationship between the different experiences? Do they overlap, intersect, collide? Are they distant in time/space, yet similar in the way they affected you?

Draw some of these experiences, and their relationships on the front of this card.



HOSPITALITY OF THE
LANDSCAPE

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1

What are the topographical features of your region? Is it flat? Mountainous? Hilly?

2

Identify known pre-colonial indigenous settlements in your region. If you are not already familiar with any particular sites, you can try consulting the websites of tribal organizations from your region or locations documented in an archaeological record.

Can you identify any relationships between the topography and the location of these sites?

3

What is the relationship between contemporary, settlement and the region's topography? How have residential, industrial, and recreational areas been developed relative to topographical features?

4

Identify flood maps for your region. You can search for maps using this website tool www.msc.fema.gov

Where are documented "flood hazards" in the region? Do any of these noted hazards surprise you? Are there more, or less, floods there than you would expect, based on these maps?

For whom do these maps seem to be created? Who uses them?

Read the following short article that explains the meaning of flood risk.

www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/8/28/16211392/100-500-year-flood-meaning