

POETRY AS MEDICINE

Medicines Talk

This series of readings from poet Shannon Webb-Campbell share the story of Mary - a Mi'kmaq midwife.

Listen to the audio recording for *Medicines Talk*, read by Shannon Webb-Campbell, then ask yourself the questions provided below to challenge your way of thinking about medicine. The transcript for this recording is also provided on page 2.

Questions: Review these questions before listening to the audio recording or reading the transcript. Answer these questions below, in a journal, or blank page.

1. What does Mary's knowledge offer an understanding about health, and how has colonialism invalidated Mary's worldviews?
2. Draw a picture of all of Mary's knowledge and reflect on your own systems of knowledge and ways of seeing the world.
3. Imagine Mary is admitted to a 21st century Emergency ward – how might her whole self always be validated?
4. How could Mi'kmaq medicines inform or help support Western medicine?
5. How does Mary change your thoughts on what is or isn't medicine?



Mary Webb

Medicines Talk - Audio Recording -

Click the button to go to the audio recording.



Shannon Webb-Campbell

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National Collaborating Centre
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Mary wakes up before dawn and prays to the Creator. She asks Creator to help her begin the day in a good way. She thanks him for the gift of being alive while she greets the rising sun. At the kitchen table there's a glass of water, a jar of homemade blueberry jam, a piece of half-eaten bread, salt n' pepper shakers, an eagle feather and a smudge bowl. Mary smudges her eyes, ears, mouth, heart, body and mind and prays out loud, alone in her little house. Mary only prays in Mi'kmaw. It's how she knows the Creator will understand her. She stopped saying the rosary years ago and was taught by her Elders to pray every morning and listen to your body and pay attention to what it has to say. Listen to your spirit and hear its voice. Listen to your heart and always speak from this place.



Like many who came before her, Mary dreams in Mi'kmaw. Her ancestors come to her while her body is midnight swimming in realms of unconsciousness. In the early waking hours, Mary thinks in Mi'kmaw first and translates to English or Gaelic or French so others can understand her. She speaks slowly and is careful with each word she translates. Thinking about what each word means. Words mean different things in Mi'kmaw than in English, and some things don't translate.

Today is a new moon, a time of renewal. She tries to teach the youngsters: how you treat your medicines is how they will heal you. Mary knows that medicines talk. Sweetgrass is the sacred medicine of the East direction. It grows wild across Turtle Island. When burning it smells like sweet smoke. A braid of sweetgrass is the hair of Mother Earth. Sage is the sacred medicine of the South. It smoulders when burning and attracts good intentions and repels spirits that intend harm. Juniper is our medicine of the West direction. It's cleansing, fresh and invigorating. Fungi are the traditional medicine of the North direction.

Mary smudges her eyes, her ears, her mouth, over her head and pushes smoke down past her heart. In Mi'kmaw, she thanks the Caribou for love. She thanks the Eagle for respect. She thinks of the Bear and asks for bravery so that she won't be afraid to do her work. She asks for honesty so that no one will harm her or anyone else in her community. Mary asks for humility so no one will be superior to another. She asks for truth so that she will see the Creator in the future and will meet him with a clean heart and spirit.

Mary lets the smoke drift throughout her little house as the sun grows stronger.

After she finishes smudging, Mary tosses the chicken bones from last night's soup stock out for the eagles to eat. She smiles to herself as she sees the new buds bloom on the trees, hears the birds chirping, and she calls out to the old dogs to give up their barking. Her neighbour is coming up over the hill with a bag of eels and smelts for her to fry up. A gift from the sea. Another form of medicine. Breakfast.