**Elbow Lake Nature walk September 30th, 2024.**

**Reflection question: What were the single most interesting insights that you had on the field trip in relation to the course themes of interconnectedness, and impermanence, and why were these two insights so interesting to you?**

1. One of the most interesting thoughts I had was how interconnectedness depends on impermanence. I was looking at the lily pads on the water and thought about how in only a few weeks they will no longer be there, at least in that form, but they will be decomposed food for microbes. The temporary nature of what we think of as a lily pad lives on in the decomposed particles that go to the microbes, which produce chemicals other organisms will use, showing how everything is connected through recycling of material. I think it's so interesting because generally when we think of temporary, we think of it sadly, hoping things could last forever, but the temporary nature of things allows things to be recycled and reused, keeping us all connected.

The other interesting insight I had was when I was walking over the soft dried pine needles. The feeling of them was so soft and they muffled the sounds of footsteps. I thought about a song about whether anyone can hear you if you're alone and falling in a forest. I realized that the pine needles can surely feel our footsteps, as well as the earth and stone. The trees are always listening, and they can hear us walking across the needles. I think this was so powerful because I've walked in the woods many times alone, and often felt alone, but really, I have never been alone because I'm connected with everything, and they are listening or watching.

1. During my reflection upon this field trip, I realized how much I enjoyed the whole experience from the silent walk to the teatime after. Pretty much whenever I am walking anywhere, I have earbuds in and am listening to music or a podcast, completely unaware of the beautiful noises surrounding me. The "silent" phoneless walk (I am using air quotes of course because it wasn't completely silent due to the amazing sounds of the environment) really made me feel disconnected from my phone and in a great way made me feel much more interconnected and immersed with my environment. By listening to every sound in the forest, from the constant rustling of leaves in the wind to the sudden flapping of a spooked bird's wings, I really began to acknowledge the impermanent nature of each and every moment I was experiencing, each one completely unique from the others. Lastly, it was extremely interesting to have this experience in a location I have spent so much time at as I worked at Elbow Lake for the summer of 2023. Even though we were only there for a few hours, I gained a completely different perspective and memory of the property than the one I had formed over an entire summer there.
2. One of the most interesting moments for me at elbow lake was when I first saw an Eastern white cedar tree; I remember being fascinated by the way it looked so different from its adjacent trees, almost like the bark was painted on. When Dr. Grogan was reading the text about impermanence, the story emphasized how all the elements on our earth have been used by every being who has ever lived on it; from dinosaurs to the sunflower’s growing on the ground. We all use the same resources to sustain our lives, all entirely interconnected, as displayed by the various species of trees on our walk. Additionally, I was reflecting after how I don’t think I have truly ever walked in silence – I typically use my headphones to listen to music, podcasts, or make some phone calls. I was nervous to walk in silence, although after, I realized this walk was in fact not silent. I had the privilege of listening to the sounds of our earth – the birds chirping, leaves ruffling, and water flowing. I found these sounds grounding and allowed me to truly understand the meaning of being interconnected with the elements around us.
3. Surprisingly, what stood out to me in relation to interconnectedness came from within our group, and not from myself to the environment. We moved through the forest as one and walked the same path, yet we all still drew different meanings and beauty out of the same landscape and experience.  I have walked many paths with people before but never actively took the time to reflect on how we are all taking different meanings from the journey, and yet still reaching the same destination in the end, so doing so brought a new sense and meaning of interconnectedness to me.  Alternately, when thinking of impermanence, it was my connection to the environment that brought a new way of thinking, because as I walked the trails and took in the sights, I thought on how what I was seeing can never be seen in the very same way again.  I reflected on how the trail I walked going forward would look and be different from the very same trail if I turned around and walked back. This reflection led me to a new reason to value things in the moment as they are because everything is fleeting and ultimately impermanent.
4. Regarding impermanence, one insight is how nature is in a state of constant change. I noticed the slow, subtle decay of fallen leaves as the seasons changed, and rippling patterns in the water as the wind passed by. This reminded me that nothing stays the same forever, urging us to appreciate life as the short, beautiful experience that it is.

An insight about interconnectedness could be seen in how non-physical elements, like sound, link the various elements of the ecosystem. The distant bird calls, wind rustling through the trees, and water lapping against the shore represent the communication, interaction, and movement present in nature. These auditory signals connect organisms across space, allowing for their interaction without direct physical contact.

1. I visited the same area and walked the same path a couple weeks ago for a field trip in a different class; on the trail, my professor pointed out a very large dead tree on the forest floor that had been blown over in a wind storm some 15 years ago. When we walked past it yesterday, it left me thinking about impermanence: based on the size of the tree, it had probably been growing for roughly 100 years (give or take a few decades)—100 years of growth, storms, fires, pests, people, and all it took was one big enough gust to uproot it. However, it also made me think about interconnectedness because as the tree grew, its roots spread deeper and wider under the ground, intertwining themselves with the roots of the surrounding trees. So, when the big tree was uprooted, it took the other surrounding trees with it. First, this was interesting to me because it got me thinking about impact and legacy: even after 15 years, there’s still a gap in the tree canopy where the tree once stood, and it will likely be decades before this gap is filled again. While perhaps a bit cheesy and metaphoric, it made me think about how even though we are impermanent—just as everything, including the universe is—we can still have an impact on others that while it won’t last forever, it could still last a lifetime. Secondly, these insights were interesting to me mainly because I haven’t thought about nature quite so deeply before; I grew up hiking and spending time outdoors, but I’ve never truly taken the time to reflect on the innerworkings of nature and how much it can teach us about living our lives.
2. When embarking on our field trip to Elbow Lake, I didn’t consider the impact that leaving my phone behind would have on my experience. Although I see myself as outdoorsy, I hadn’t been in the woods without a phone since childhood. Without it, I became more attuned and felt more a part of nature: hearing the wind, seeing the sun’s reflection on the lake, and feeling the water’s chill. This experience made me reflect on my impermanence; a theme introduced to me by *Buddhist* *Biology*. The fallen leaves we walked on were the perfect example of life’s transience and the natural balance between life and death. What began as a simple hike turned into a profound experience, deepening my connection to the natural world and its inevitable changes.
3. During the silent nature walk, one of the most interesting moments for me was observing the seasons shifting into fall. I think this beautifully shows both interconnectedness and impermanence in nature. As the leaves fell to the ground, I was reminded that they don’t just disappear but that they return to the earth, going back into the soil and providing nutrients for future growth. This cycle reflects the concept of interbeing and interconnectedness, where every part of the ecosystem is connected in a larger web of life. The falling leaves also represented the impermanence of all things. The leaves, which once budded in the spring and grew all summer, were now changing colours and falling as the seasons changed, reminding me that nothing is permanent. The act of walking in silence and observing Elbow Lake connected me to the themes of interconnectedness and impermanence and brought them to life.
4. While walking in the same path as so many people without sharing a single thought, I reflected on interconnectedness throughout the environment as well as with each other. Everything in nature depends on everything else, every single thing in that forest is connected to at least one other factor. Trees need the sun and the water to grow, animals need the trees to live and produce food, we are connected with each other from birth to death whether we realize it or not, which I find beautiful.

I think what really solidified impermanence for me was seeing the leaves in all the different stages, knowing inevitably they would all fall, go brown and decompose. It is similar to humans ageing, getting sick and dying. We know it is going to happen, we have to live with the fact of impermanence. Even the trace of us being there is impermanent, the leaves will cover our tracks and all that will be left is memory. It reminded me that accepting the inevitability of change can help us embrace life more fully.

1. First, I would just like to thank you for taking us to Elbow Lake—I found that it really helped me slow my mind’s chaos and gave me a break from all the external noise I had grown *so* accustomed to that I had forgotten it was there. During the walk, I found myself watching all the colourful leaves fall peacefully from the trees and felt it was reminiscent of the cycle of life, death, and reintegration into the earth, which everything in nature, including ourselves, are victims of and fortunate enough to experience. The leaves didn’t simply die or disappear, ceasing to exist—they underwent a transformation by returning to the ground from which they came and decomposing into their fundamental units, nurturing new life.

Buddhists are right; reincarnation may exist but instead of our consciousness living on, our matter will ‘live on’ the same way the matter of things that came before us ‘live on’ in us today. We are all one indeed. Looking around in the forest I also realized how arbitrarily we separate everything and that nothing truly stands alone. It became abundantly evident that the trees were not independent entities, but deeply and physically connected via underground networks and shared resources. I also noticed everything was a system (all rocks and trees were covered in moss, fungi, among many other organisms) and in that moment I realized that it seemed almost foolish and irrelevant to separate them into their components because none could truly exist independently. All things are deeply interwoven, and every moment is transient but contributes greatly to the larger whole.

1. My own impermanence did not feel so daunting when I felt like another part of

nature at Elbow Lake. It drew my attention to the influence that lifestyle has on

our relationship to ideas of our interconnectedness and impermanence—and our

ability to accept our interconnectedness and impermanence as realities of our

existence. Walking silently on the trail and engaging all of my senses in the

present moment interconnected with the rest of nature, it felt easier to accept

my own impermanence because I was reminded that people don’t just disappear

when they die (as it can sometimes feel when we don’t recognize our connection

with the rest of nature), rather people go back into the earth and the parts that

make us up are cycled into other forms of life. Interconnectedness is all the more

true because of our impermanence: if we never died, we'd never be dispersed

into new forms that recycle the elements we held while we lived.

1. The most interesting insights I had on the field trip regarding interconnectedness and impermanence were looking at the trees around me, both the living and dead ones and how connected they are with the world around them even after death. A big tree in an area that might be a staple of that area will eventually die, but it continues to exist in the sense of its organic matter, re-entering the soil and providing for other living things around it. In addition, that fallen dead tree might be harvested to make it into a home for a human rather than for an animal, or the plant the tree's organic matter helped to grow is harvested to be eaten by a human or another living thing. I already understood and had thought about these ideas of how interconnected and impermanent these natural features are, but I tend to forget about them in my day-to-day life. Going out and seeing the different stages of life the trees are in and how each one provides a unique thing to the area and will continue to do so even after its death is always a very impactful moment.
2. Although initially the forest seemed very serene, still and silent, as we made our way along

the path I noticed how dynamic everything was. Whether it was birds or insects flying, the

wind rustling leaves, grasses swaying; everything was, in one way or another, in motion.

Everything is always changing; plants are absorbing sunlight and CO2, and releasing oxygen, fungi are metabolizing decaying matter, and from one minute to the next, whether we see it or not, everything is different; absolutely nothing is constant except maybe impermanence itself.

I also noticed how intricately connected the cycles of life and death are. As much as there was so much beautiful life surrounding us on our walk, there were also equal amounts of decay, visible in the fallen leaves, decaying trees and plants, and surely through innumerable other things we couldn’t see. And yet all the decay and death nourishes and tends to what’s alive, helping it grow and flourish (e.g. the fallen leaves help to enrich the forest floor); all life is so deeply interconnected that even in death we provide for one another.

**Reflection question for those who did attend the field trip: Are there significant linkages between our course themes of interconnectedness and impermanence, and the harm brought to Indigenous Peoples through the residential school system that was being highlighted by today’s National Truth and Reconciliation Day. Explain your reasoning.**

1. There are significant linkages between what we have been discussing in class and how those themes, topics, and discussions relate to the deconstruction of culture and identity that was inflicted on Indigenous peoples. Interconnectedness is one of the core foundations of Indigenous culture and mindset when it comes to interacting with the rest of the world and viewing oneself as being part of nature rather than being separate from nature. In Indigenous culture the ideas that eventually you will pass on but that you also have a duty to the earth to care for it for future generations really highlights the concepts of impermanence with one’s time on earth eventually coming to an end. Indigenous culture, ideas, and concepts were attacked and dismantled by the residential school system and were condemned as being wrong, uncivilized, or was something that needed to be unlearned by many Indigenous children. The ideas of interconnection and impermanence conflicted heavily with the course established ideas of Westernized thinking of progress, exploitation, and the ideas of the present being the only thing of importance and thus was considered to be wrong and thus forcibly changed through the residential school system to dismantle those foundations of Indigenous ways of thinking and knowing.
2. The damage inflicted by the residential school system is closely related to the concepts of interconnectedness and impermanence. The passing down of customs and knowledge was disrupted by residential schools, which severed the close relationships that Indigenous children had with their families, communities, cultures, and sense of self. Indigenous Peoples are still deeply impacted by the generational trauma caused by this. So, although residential schools are now closed (i.e., were not permanent), the lingering effects of the schools is still present today. Thus demonstrating how an impermanent occurrence, such as the residential school system, can leave a legacy that influences and shapes future generations.