**Elbow Lake Nature walk October 17, 2022.**

**Reflection question: What were the two most interesting insights related to the course theme that you had on the field trip, and why were they so interesting to you? Please think deeply, but keep your answers very concise.**

Along the theme of impermanence I was very interested to see the leaves on the ground on our nature walk. This reminded me that the environment is constantly changing around us in ways we cannot control (weather, temperature, etc.). Physically seeing the leaves along the trail is a visual reminder that these changes are occurring now and that we are living and experiencing the period of change.

Another aspect of the field trip I really enjoyed was that we were silent during the walk. Initially, I was expecting to have a difficult time as I would rather speak out loud than reflect to myself about my surroundings. I surprised myself as I was able to not speak, allowing myself to really take in the surroundings in a way I had never thought I could. Tying into the course idea of more wisdom, because I had the clarity to reflect to myself, I was able to take in more of my surroundings.

I think that one of the parts of this trip that resonated the deepest with me was the concept of “just passing through” which I connected to our earlier connections wherein we discussed the “pale blue dot” and the fact that on the grand scale of things we are so small, but have somehow convinced ourselves that we are the most important and need the most resources.

I also really found myself reflecting on the maternal nature connected to sustainability from Olivia’s seminar. I saw a bird’s nest and this got me thinking about maternal care and then just deepened my reflection on the ways that that Sustainability is often viewed as ‘feminist’ (e.g. multiple concepts described in Braiding Sweetgrass including Skywoman, the mother Earth perspective etc; all of which resonate with our class’s strongly female demographic).

The nature walk at Elbow Lake was a very unique and special experience. The insights I gained on this trip are related to connection with our surroundings and mindfulness. I do not often spend time in silence. I typically feel the need to be filling silent air with my own voice or those of others whether it be through conversation, music, or podcasts. In silence, there is room to experience what I find myself so often trying to cover up - the natural world. Though not directly intentional, filling the sounds of the natural world with those of my own is a way that I disconnect myself from the Earth. I found that in this silent walk I was able to feel myself immersed to a level that I otherwise would not have reached. I feel that as a society we are too often looking for ways to speed up, fill in, and move through our lives, as if we wish to escape them. When I go for a walk, the first thing I reach for is my phone to fill my ears with sounds separate from the natural world - I look for it as a way to escape the hustle and bustle of my life. However, this has the opposite effect. By doing this I am further removing myself from the natural world and instead towards my own head, towards those thoughts of anxiety created by life’s busyness. On our silent walk at Elbow Lake, I felt at ease and at peace. By allowing myself to listen to sounds within silence, I felt quiet in my mind.

I also felt that I was able to embody the effects of intention. Listening to the Thanksgiving Address prior to this walk allowed me to create a personal intention for myself on this walk. This intention was related to how I perceive my presence in nature. Logically I know that being mindful in my life and surroundings is important, but it is rare that I go to the effort to actually do this - to focus on, and only on, the events happening right at that moment. Creating this intention reminded me that how we perceive ourselves in our life profoundly affects our own experience as well as those around us.

The main takeaway I had from today's trip was a simple reminder of the role that humans have in nature. I feel as though in our day-to-day lives we do not truly feel interconnected with nature and the functioning ecosystems around us. However, taking an hour-long walk through the forest in silence forced me to really take in my surroundings and observe the connections between all the parts of the forest ecosystem as well as myself.

The second takeaway I had from today's trip is more related to human evolution and Indigenous peoples, but I kept circling back to the fact that we were walking through the rain and how disconnected I felt from the rain. Prior to going on the trip, I was anticipating an email from you cancelling the trip based on the weather as in modern society rain is seen as a nuisance or an annoyance. However, we did not let the rain stop us today, and it reminded me that rain can be seen as different things to different people and throughout different periods of time. A simple example is the rain farmers would hope for after a dry spell to avoid their crops going bad. Today was a reminder that all biotic and abiotic factors have a role within the ecosystem whether or not they impact humans positively or negatively.

Being more interconnected to each other and to nature doesn’t always mean doing grand things – reframing your mindset and listening (instead of talking) can create bonds to each other and the earth. I have always felt like I needed to be doing things to make this connection, but I learned that just being a part of nature - and even waking up every day and thinking of what I’m grateful for - can be a big step.

Really being able to silently reflect on the changes going on around me in nature made me more excited at the idea that I will change too, as I am a part of nature. Even when you can’t see it, things are always growing and changing, and I think accepting this for ourselves can help us be more mindful.

One interesting insight I had on the trip related to the course theme was the aspect of interconnectedness. The abundance of rain placed me on the brink of feeling discouraged and not wanting to participate in the field trip. However once on the walk, I felt extremely connected to the environment, as we were both experiencing the same climate and day – together. The rain also added a beautiful touch to nature, as it seemed to make everything more green and bright.

Another interesting concept to me was impermanence. The overwhelming feeling of change as the dead leaves covered the ground during our walk, I couldn’t help but wonder how beautiful Elbow Lake was during other seasons – having a whole different appearance and at a new cycle of growth. We both experience 4 seasons.

The field trip to Elbow lake allowed me to further deepen my understanding of interconnectedness and impermanence. Although it was a fairly gloomy and rainy day, I believe this added to the experience and what I took from it. As we were walking through the forest under the rain, I started to think about how rain is not always deceiving. I ended up appreciating the weather as it showed me its role in nature and importance to its survival. As the Thanksgiving address mentions, storms can renew life with water and the wind brings the changing of the seasons. Storms in the Fall also allow for leaves to fall on the ground, helping the earth to replenish its nutrients, and furthering the interconnectedness of the environment.

Furthermore, during the walk, I started thinking more in-depth about the concept of changing seasons. This made me think of impermanence and how the leaves and rain are not permanent in the environment. They come and go, just like people you meet throughout your life. The impermanence of one thing can lead to a new beginning for another. The action of coming and going allows one to learn from the experience and move on with the added value of the lessons learned. This further allowed me to see impermanence's importance when discussing interconnectedness.

The first thing that I found very interesting was the marsh that we saw over the cliff around the halfway mark of the trail. To me this was the coolest view out there. It seemed untouched by humans. I felt like the view captured natural environmental evolution over decades. The trees must’ve taken years to grow, yet all we see are their stumps blackened over time. We might infer that beavers swamped the land, and they may have been responsible for cutting down those trees in the first place. To me this moment captured the idea of impermanence. Nothing stands forever, not even something as strong and sturdy as a tree.

The second most interesting insight about the trip was the walk itself. I thought it was so interesting that we walked through the forest, following each other like ducks, without speaking a single word. If someone saw us in the woods, they might’ve thought it was a strange sight. I think that this showed interconnectedness on a human level, we were all doing the same activity, watching each other point at different mushrooms and frogs, and maybe we even held the same thoughts. We were one on the trip without sharing a single word, and I think that was special.