

# *Kanenon:we - Original Seeds*

**Educator Handbook**





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# Educator Overview



## Introduction

Storytelling is integral to Indigenous culture and the transfer of knowledge across generations. Colonization attempted to eradicate Indigenous people by attacking their bodies, cultural lifeways, languages, education, and food systems.

This interrupted the transfer of traditional knowledge from one generation to the next, including the sharing of seeds and land stewardship practices that maintained the balance of ecosystems around the world.

**Kanenon:we - Original Seeds** (pronounced Ga nah-seed, ooh we-original) is a documentary short that tells the stories of three Indigenous women from different Native Communities who are reversing this attempt of erasure. They are reclaiming their ancient role as seed keepers, regenerating, protecting, and rematriating sacred and endangered heirloom seeds for future generations. The film offers an opportunity to listen and learn from Indigenous women sharing their practices of seed stewardship and their work to rebuild and strengthen Indigenous food sovereignty by sharing knowledge and restoring their ancestral ecosystems.



**"The seeds do better when they grow on the land they are familiar with the most and surrounded by their own songs and their own language."**

— Angela Ferguson, *Kanenon:we - Original Seeds*

**"We wanted to create a safe space for people to come and a safe space for our seeds to come home to and for our community and extended communities to learn about re-establishing our relationship with our food relatives."**

— Rebecca Webster, *Kanenon:we - Original Seeds*



**"Indigenous peoples are 5 percent of the world's population. They inhabit about 1/4 of the surface of the globe. Inside of those Indigenous communities is 80% of the planet's remaining biodiversity. The Indigenous land and seed stewardship are these enclaves of culture and climate sanity."**

— Rowen White, *Kanenon:we - Original Seeds*



## Filmmaker Biography

Katsitsionni Fox is an artist, filmmaker and educator from the Mohawk Nation Territory of Akwesasne. Her films highlight Indigenous women who are stepping into their power. Her award-winning documentary films include: *Ohero:kon - Under the Husk* (2016) and *Without a Whisper - Konnon:kwe* (2020). She directed Indigenous Women's Voices Series focused on healing and empowerment of Native women released in 2020. Katsitsionni was a 2021 Nia Tero Storytelling Fellow. She directed the film *Tentsitewahkwe* for the Reciprocity Project Season 2. Katsitsionni was a mentee for the PBS Ignite Mentorship for Diverse Voices in 2023-24. Her most recent film is *Kanenon:we - Original Seeds* a documentary following Indigenous women reclaiming their ancient role as seed keepers, regenerating, protecting and rematriating sacred and endangered heirloom seeds for the future generations.



## Film Summary

*Kanenon:we - Original Seeds* brings viewers into the grassroots Indigenous seed sovereignty movement led by Haudenosaunee women. It offers a glimpse into the challenges facing the world related to food security.

Before European contact, there was a vibrant diversity of foods, with women primarily responsible for the caretaking of the seeds. Genocidal practices including, boarding schools, land theft, forced relocation, imposed religion and even food warfare contributed to a disconnection from our traditional foods and seeds. *Kanenon:we - Original Seeds* features three Haudenosaunee women who are stepping back into their sacred responsibility as seed keepers. These women honor the work of our ancestors by regenerating and rematriating sacred seeds for future generations.

(Runtime: 27 minutes)



*Haudenosaunee foods prepared by Oneida Chef Arlie Doxtador.*



## Who's Who in *Kanenon:we* - Original Seeds



### Angela Ferguson

Angela Ferguson, Onondaga Eel Clan, grew up on the Tuscarora Nation territories in western New York, where she learned about the care and preparation of traditional foods. A dedicated grower, today Angela is the Supervisor of the Onondaga Nation Farm. The farm practices all aspects of Food Sovereignty for their community. Her many passions include Haudenosaunee Traditional Agriculture, Seed Caring, Bee Keeping, Foraging, Traditional Cooking Methods, Maple Tapping, Knowledge Sharing, Haudenosaunee Nutrition Education, Youth Mentorship, and Traditional Hide Tanning. She also loves to cook Traditional foods for the people and leaders of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. She travels across Turtle Island to expand and share her knowledge about Indigenous heritage seeds and ancestral food preparation. She is also one of the founding coordinators of Braiding the Sacred, an all-Indigenous network of corn growers across Turtle Island.

### Dr. Rebecca Webster

Dr. Rebecca Webster is an enrolled citizen of the Oneida Nation. She is also an Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of American Indian at the University of Minnesota, Duluth. Her research interests focus on tribal governance and food sovereignty. Her philosophy is that every time an Indigenous person plants a seed, that is an act of resistance, an assertion of sovereignty, and a reclamation of identity. With these goals in mind, an Oneida faithkeeper named their 15-acre homestead Ukwakhwa: Tsinu Niyukwayayathoslu (Our Foods: Where We Plant Things). Based on their farming practices, they started a YouTube Channel called Ukwakhwa (Our Foods) where they share what they learned about planting, growing, harvesting, seed keeping, food preparation, food storage, as well as making traditional tools and crafts. In 2021, her family formed a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, Ukwakhwa, Inc., to advance their goals of helping share knowledge.



### Rowen White

Rowen White is an Indigenous Seedkeeper and storyteller from the Mohawk community of Akwesasne, as well as a passionate community healer in service to Indigenous seed and food sovereignty. She finds purpose and joy in cultivating intercultural collaborations to seed imaginations of a more equitable, relational, kin-centric food landscape that centers a deep sense of belonging, connection, and liberation for all relatives, human and more-than-human. Rowen founded the Indigenous Seedkeepers Network, which is committed to restoring the Indigenous Seed Commons across North America through restoring seed kinship routes. She is the Director of Sierra Seeds, an innovative organic seed organization focusing on Indigenous seed stewardship, education, and mentorship. [www.sierraseeds.org](http://www.sierraseeds.org)





## Terms and Definitions

**Food sovereignty:** Indigenous people should be able to: 1) access healthy and culturally appropriate food, 2) engage in sustainable food production, and 3) safeguard their agricultural practices including planting, harvesting, and preservation.<sup>1</sup>

**Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO):** GMO seeds are created in labs for desirable traits by injecting seeds with genes from another plant. To learn more: [World Health Organization, Food, genetically modified](#).

**Haudenosaunee:** The Haudenosaunee Confederacy (also known as Iroquois) was originally made up of five nations: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The Tuscarora joined the confederacy in the early 1700s, making it six nations in total.

**Heirloom seeds** come from open-pollinated plants that pass on similar characteristics to the offspring plants. Depending on how they are grown, heirloom plants can be organic or non-organic. To learn more: [Why You Should Grow Heirloom Seeds - EcoWatch](#).

**Historical trauma:** The accumulative emotional and psychological pain over an individual's lifespan and across generations as the result of massive group trauma (Yellow-Horse Brave Heart, 1995). [Historical Trauma, Stanford Medicine, Ethnogeriatrics](#).

**Indigenous Seed Bank:** An indigenous seed bank is a collection of traditional crop varieties that Indigenous peoples carefully cultivate. These seed banks are important for preserving culture, promoting food security, and protecting biodiversity. [Seeds of Resilience: The Power of Native Seed Banks](#).

**Regenerating:** Improving a place or system, especially by making it more active or successful. [REGENERATION definition | Cambridge English Dictionary](#).

**Seed rematriation:** a movement to return Indigenous seeds and their knowledge to their communities of origin.

<sup>1</sup> Webster, R. M. (2018). Food Reservations at the Reservation. In B. Fiedler (Ed.), Translating National Policy to Improve Environmental Conditions Impacting Public Health Through Community Planning.



## Additional Historical Context

### The Clinton-Sullivan Campaign of 1779

Washington's orders to General Sullivan regarding the Iroquois were direct in a letter to the general dated May 31, 1779. Washington wrote,

***"The expedition you are appointed to command is to be directed against the hostile tribes of the six nations of Indians, with their associates and adherents. The immediate objects are the total destruction and devastation of their settlements and the capture of as many prisoners of every age and sex as possible." He added, "...to lay waste all the settlements around with instructions to do it in the most effectual manner, that the country may not be merely overrun but destroyed."***

He made note on laying waste to all food supplies for the present and future, ***"...It will be essential to ruin their crops now in the ground and prevent their planting more."***

The Clinton-Sullivan was the forced removal of The Oneida Nation from their ancestral lands to what is now Wisconsin. Here is a short historical overview:

In the middle of the American Revolution, George Washington ordered two Generals, John Sullivan and James Clinton, and more than 6,200 men 'roughly 25% of the entire rebel army' to clear-cut and burn these resisting or then neutral Iroquois nations from one of Earth's most fertile regions by 1779. They should 'not merely be overrun,' Washington insisted, 'but destroyed.' And England, for its part, couldn't and/or wouldn't send forces enough to defend its Indian allies' homelands against the Sullivan-Clinton Campaign. According to Sullivan's Official Report, the army burned 40 towns and their surrounding fields; consuming at least 160,000 bushels of corn, 'with a vast quantity of vegetables of every kind.' A study (1969) by Anthony Wallace concluded that the Campaign destroyed 500 dwellings and nearly 1 million bushels of corn. Drawing on extensive records, a history (1978) by Allan Eckert estimated at least 50 towns and nearly 1,200 houses were burned. All this before the worst winter in recorded memory.<sup>2</sup>

Learn more at [Our Precious Corn Yukwanénste](#),  
Rebecca M. Webster.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpted for clarity and brevity from [What is the Sullivan-Clinton Campaign](#).



# Curriculum



## Lesson Overview

Bringing this documentary into elementary and high school classrooms invites all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to understand, appreciate, and honor the importance of heirloom seeds and apply this new knowledge and practices to sustain and celebrate Indigenous ways of life.

In doing so, we move one step towards returning ancient wisdom and agricultural practices to our planet. As Angela Ferguson shares in the film, *"I think part of our healing is through the foods, sharing the seeds, sharing the knowledge. We want to help bring it back to the forefront or else we won't survive."*

## Topics Explored

- 👁 Indigenous storytelling
- 👁 The relationship of seeds for Indigenous peoples
- 👁 Seed variety and diversity
- 👁 History of seeds used in farming
- 👁 Functions of seed banks
- 👁 Indigenous food sovereignty movement
- 👁 Relationship between climate change and seed diversity
- 👁 Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)



## Watching *Kanenon:we - Original Seeds* and using these lessons, students will:

- Learn about agrarian traditions of seed collecting, planting, harvesting, and eating as vibrant assertions of Native identity and community
- Understand the health benefits and cultural importance of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement across the United States
- Examine the life cycle of a seed and learn about the symbiotic relationship between seeds, soil, and plants
- Apply this new knowledge to support the work of Indigenous peoples safeguarding their seeds and growing food for future generations



## For Educators

Watch [Seed Mother: Coming Home](#), a 7-minute video from Rowen White, before bringing these lessons and *Kanenonw:we - Original Seeds* into your classroom.

### K-2: Every Seed Has A Story

#### Essential Questions

- Why do we tell stories?
- What do we learn by sharing stories?
- What role do stories hold in different cultures?
- What can we learn about seed stories from Indigenous people?

### 3-5: Dig In: Three Sisters Planting

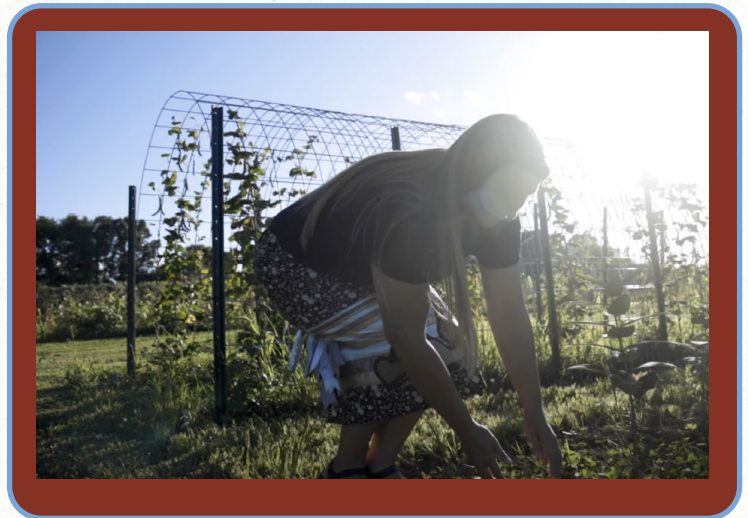
#### Essential Questions

- Why are seeds important in Indigenous communities?
- What do we learn about Indigenous seed collecting and seed banks from *Kanenonw:we - Original Seeds*?
- How is Three Sisters planting an expression of Indigenous culture?

### 6-8: Seeds and Indigenous Food Sovereignty

#### Essential Questions

- What is Indigenous food sovereignty?
- What role do seed banks and rematriation play in Indigenous food sovereignty?
- Why are seed saving and seed banks important?
- What are genetically modified seeds?
- What are the challenges to Indigenous food sovereignty today?



Still images from "Seed Mother: Coming Home"



## Resources

- [Braiding the Sacred](#)
- [Cornhusk Collective](#)
- [Cultural Conservancy](#)
- [Dream of Wild Heath Community Garden](#)
- [First Nations Development Institute](#)
- [First Nations Gardens](#)
- [I-Collective](#)
- [Indigenous Seed Keepers Network](#)
- [Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance \(NAFSA\)](#)
- [Native Seed Pod](#)
- [Native Seed Podcast: Seed Rematriation with Becky Webster](#)
- [Native Seeds/SEARCH](#)
- [Northwest Indian Storytellers Association](#)
- [Onondaga Nation Farm](#)
- [Seed Mother: Coming Home: A beautifully animated story with Rowen White](#)
- [Sierra Seeds](#)
- [Ukwakhwa \(Our Foods\)](#)
- [Wisdom of the Elders](#)



## Book Links

- Ray Fadden and Tehanetorensn [Legends of the Iroquois](#)
- Arihohonni David, [The Good Game](#)
- Arihohonni David, [Who Will Win?](#)
- David Kanietakeron Fadden, [Sacred Song of the Hermit Thrush](#)
- David Kanietakeron Fadden, [Kaherīio's Wampum Project](#)
- David Kanietakeron Fadden, [Kaherīio's Lacrosse Stick](#)
- Joanne Shenandoah, Douglas M. George, John Fadden, [Skywoman: Legends of the Iroquois](#).
- Dr. Rebecca Webster, [Tribal Administration Handbook: A Guide for Native Nations in the United States](#), Michigan State University Press.
- Dr. Rebecca Webster, [In Defense of Sovereignty: Protecting the Oneida Nation's Inherent Right to Self-Determination](#), University of Wisconsin Press.
- Dr. Rebecca Webster, [Our Precious Corn: Yukwanénste](#), Michigan State University Press.







# APPENDIX



## Next Generation Science Standards

Use this outline as a guideline to align *Kanenon:we - Original Seeds* within the K - 8 classroom.

### Kindergarten

#### Interdependent Relationships in Ecosystems: Animals, Plants, and Their Environment

- [K-LS1-1](#). From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes. Use observations to describe patterns of what plants and animals (including humans) need to survive
- [K-ESS3](#). Earth and Human Activity
  - [K-ESS3-1](#). Use a model to represent the relationship between the needs of different plants and animals (including humans) and the places they live.
  - [K-ESS3-2](#). Ask questions to obtain information about the purpose of weather forecasting to prepare for, and respond to, severe weather.
  - [K-ESS3-3](#). Communication solutions that will reduce the impact of humans on the land, water, and air and/or other living things in the local environment.

### First Grade

#### Structure, Function, and Information Process

- [1-LS1-1](#). From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes. Use materials to design a solution to a human problem by mimicking how plants and/or animals use their external parts to help them survive, grow, and meet their needs.

### Second Grade

#### Interdependence in Ecosystems

- [2-LS2-1](#). Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, Dynamics. Plan and conduct an investigation to determine if plants need sunlight and water to grow.
- [2-LS2-2](#). Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, Dynamics. Develop a simple model that mimics the function of an animal in dispersing seeds or pollinating plants.
- [2-LS4-1](#). Biological Evolution: Unity and Diversity. Make observations of plants and animals to compare the diversity of life in different habitats.
- [2-PS1-1](#). Matter and Its Interactions. Plan and conduct an investigation to describe and classify different kinds of materials by their observable properties

### Third Grade

#### From Molecules to Organisms: Structure and Processes

- [3-LS1-1](#). Develop models to describe that organisms have unique and diverse life cycles but all have in common birth, growth, reproduction, and death.



### **Heredity: Inheritance and Variation of Traits**

- [3-LS3-1](#). Analyze and interpret data to provide evidence that plants and animals have traits inherited from parents and that variation of these traits exists in a group of similar organisms.
- [3-LS3-2](#). Use evidence to support the explanation that traits can be influenced by the environment.

### **Fourth Grade**

#### **Next Gen: Structure, Function, and Information Processing**

- [4-LS-1](#). From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes. Construct an argument that plants and animals have internal and external structures that function to support survival, growth, behavior, and reproduction.

### **Fifth Grade**

#### **Next Gen**

- [5-LS-1](#). From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes. Support an argument that plants get the materials they need for growth chiefly from air and water.

### **Sixth-Eighth Grade**

#### **Next Gen**

- MS-LS1-5: Students construct scientific explanations for how environmental and genetic factors influence the growth of organisms. For example, students might consider how different varieties of seeds grow at different rates in different conditions.
- MS-LS1-6: Students construct scientific explanations for the role of photosynthesis in the cycling of matter and flow of energy into and out of organisms. For example, students might learn that plants use energy from the sun to make food from water and carbon dioxide.
- MS-PS1-3: Students gather and make sense of information to describe how synthetic materials come from natural resources and impact society.



# Common Core

## Kindergarten

- [English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature » Kindergarten](#)

## Grade 1

- [English Language Arts Standards » Writing » Grade 1](#)
- [English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature » Grade 1](#)

## Grade 2

- [English Language Arts Standards » Writing » Grade 2](#)
- [English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature » Grade 2](#)

## Grade 3

- [English Language Arts Standards » Writing » Grade 3](#)
- [English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature » Grade 3](#)

## Grade 4

- [English Language Arts Standards » Writing » Grade 4](#)
- [English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature » Grade 4](#)

## Grade 5

- [English Language Arts Standards » Writing » Grade 5](#)
- [English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature » Grade 5](#)

## Grade 6

- [English Language Arts Standards » Writing » Grade 6](#)
- [English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature » Grade 6](#)

## Grade 7

- [English Language Arts Standards » Writing » Grade 7](#)
- [English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature » Grade 7](#)

## Grade 8

- [English Language Arts Standards » Writing » Grade 8](#)
- [English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature » Grade 8](#)



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