

4TH EDITION • AUGUST 2023

Miaja

Adisokedan
TELLING OUR STORIES

.....

Kiteisakik

Artwork by
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This report is the result of a collective effort, inspired and nourished by the wisdom and knowledge of many voices. To honor this spirit of community, no individual credits are entered: together we sign this achievement.

Tribute to Kitcisakik

By Ejinagosi Kistabish



I will always remember September 12, 1980. It is an important date in my life.

There had been a lot of flooding in and around Montreal. They had planned to raise the dams in Abitibi to control water levels. One of the projects was to raise the waters of Grand Lac Victoria, which is also a reservoir.

The Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement had held hearings regarding this project.

I was a young man. It was when I became Grand Chief of the Algonquin Council of Quebec.

Donat Papatisse, who was Kitcisakik's Chief, said: "The Bureau d'audiences publiques is asking us to submit a brief."

All I could come up with was: "They're the ones with no memory! [Tr's note: Pun on the French homonym mémoire (memory; memorandum or brief)]

Donat told me: "Organize it as you want, but let's do it our way."

We brought in the seventeen members of the BAPE board. They all came to Kitcisakik for a five-day trip.

We told ourselves: "Let's not talk too much, let's just show them what Grand Lac Victoria is all about."

They boarded an eighteen-foot canoe, they got aboard at Jackson's Landing. It took them four hours to cross the entire lake to Kitcisakik.

That's when it happened, when they stepped ashore.

The Grand Lac Victoria in front of them, with the 1862 steel-paneled church. And small black log cabins. Maybe fifteen of them.

The BAPE officials stepped ashore, and their jaws hit the ground.

They could not believe that people were living like that, smack in the very heart of Quebec. They were astounded.

We didn't say much.

The people of Kitcisakik had prepared for their arrival. They fed them with meat they had hunted. Everyone got a hot meal. No electricity, no running water, just wood.

That was our message, and it put an end to water-raising projects in Abitibi. It was the people living there who showed them.

That is Kitcisakik. The last place left for us to remember our nomadic way of life and to experience Adisokedan, which still existed in this community.

We must pay tribute to the people of Kitcisakik, those who always refused to be put in reserves.

I want to pay tribute to all the extraordinary people in Kitcisakik. They have always taken care of me and have taught me so much.



Adisokedan: stories to continue passing on what we are

On August 23 and 24, 2023, members of the Anicinabe Nation and their allies met in Kitcisakik for the MIAJA Gathering. A time for sharing and inspiration, this nomadic event is synonymous with pride and healing. At this fourth edition of MIAJA, Anicinabe culture was approached from the angle of our oral tradition.



Adisokedan was a time to gather after living at the rhythm of the territory. By sharing stories, the Elder of the group passed on his life experience and teachings to his children and loved ones. It was also a moment of sharing between Elders. They would recount events that, while often amusing, were also a food for thought.

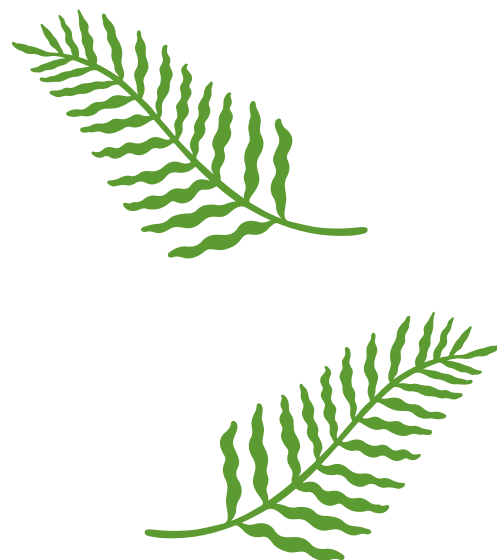
Sharing stories is inherent to the way we live and connect with everything that surrounds us. Our stories, our legends, our songs teach us ways of knowing, being and behaving. In the time and space of shared words, our language and culture are asserted and regenerated. Telling our stories is contributing to the ongoing process by which life renews itself.

The ancestors' ways of being and doing give us the strength needed to face the challenges of the present. They guide us in the implementation of projects that Minwashin has been undertaking for several years, notably the project to revitalize the Anicinabe language, which coincides with UNESCO's International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032).

By honoring the wisdom of those who came before us, we will continue, together, to pass on who we truly are.







Adisokedan

By Ejinagosi Kistabish

Adisokedan is a time to talk, a time to tell stories.

During the summer season, we share all that has happened since our last gathering and all the practical information we need to know about life. We take stock and look to the tasks ahead.

It is at this time that the responsibilities, obligations and duties of each person are assigned.

This cycle has sustained us as a Nation over millennia.

This activity, essential for the quality of our lives, has been taken away from us.

We have been reduced to immobility, preventing us from thinking and projecting ourselves into the future. This has led to social disorder.

But we continue to move forward, just like our ancestors, who were always creative in developing their own technologies from what was available to them.

Adisokedan will help us carry on where we left off.

Telling our stories is about overturning the loss of the language and the knowledge associated with it.

These stories are all about transmitting our knowledge, our values and our culture. And you cannot tell stories without being connected to the language.

Telling our stories, naming who we really are, in our own words, is knowing who we are.

It is reclaiming our identity.





“Adisokan is a way of transmitting knowledge through stories, tales and songs. Adisokan is also passed on in the woods, in canoes, on snowshoes, on the move. That’s what oral tradition is all about. It is still alive, but it needs to be learned again.”

— MAURICE J. KISTABISH

Adisokan: stories for living together

The term adisokan refers as much to the stories themselves as to the practice of oral transmission of Anicinabe knowledge and values. Sharing stories is passing down the Anicinabe universe.

First and foremost, stories recount how the world came to be, and how living beings came to live together on earth. Stories teach us about how plants, animals and humans must interact and respect each other so that all beings in this world can live together in peace. Many stories deal with the way in which each being must face up to the consequences of their actions, depending on whether they conform to the principles ensuring balance in the world. In this way, stories serve as legal tools for governing collective life and settling disputes.

As Maurice J. Kistabish reminds us, Anicinabe legal orders were never extinguished. Rather, they were denied by the Canadian and Quebec states. However, they are now starting to gain recognition.



Adisokan: stories for learning to live

Stories form the basis for the transmission of Anicinabe knowledge from one generation to the next.

Learning is rooted in experience: knowledge and action are based on observation and sensations. Stories accompany the daily gestures that punctuate the traditional way of life: if a beaver is seen nearby, the knowledge holder will name, describe and explain the teachings related to this animal.

Learning takes place in action, in movement. It engages all five senses and encompasses all personal dimensions: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. Learning is also about relationships: we learn through awareness of the interdependence of all living beings, human and non-human. We grow in our connection to the earth and to the community. Transmission involves family, ancestors and the whole universe.

Grandparents play a very important role in the transmission of Anicinabe culture. They pass on to the next generation the teachings they received from their own grandparents. All these teachings are designed to prepare children for living their life.

From one story to the next, Anicinabe values settle in children's hearts and minds. These values will guide them throughout their lives along a path to a harmonious life, in balance with the beings surrounding them.



At the heart of the transmission of Anicinabe culture, Roger Wylde identifies the following values:

- Sakiwin, love and empathy
- Tepwewin, truth and honesty
- Manatcitisowin, respect for oneself, others and all that surrounds us
- Sokitewin, courage and bravery
- Tapasenimitisowin, humility and equality
- Witcitinaniwin, mutual support
- Minwacin, beauty, kindness and fulfillment

It is important to note that access to these values through English or French alters the perception of Anicinabe values, insofar as categories of Western thought cannot be superimposed on Anicinabe concepts.

It is essential to express our values in our own words, while respecting our culture. The wording we adopt here is therefore an invitation for all to reflect on how to express and translate Anicinabe values into the official languages. Minwashin is committed to deepening this reflection by bringing together bearers of Anicinabe culture to further discussions.

The wisdom of stories

At the MIAJA gathering, knowledge bearers shared a number of inspiring stories about the laws that keep the world in balance.

Stories are about the laws of life, explaining why the lynx eats the hare and why the beaver, bear and duck must store up fat to travel across lakes and rivers. Oral transmission reveals the coherence of the world, one story at a time.

In Anicinabe oral transmission, animals are regarded as teachers. They have access to knowledge that human beings can, in turn, acquire by observing and learning from them.

The story of bats:

One day, the bat arrives in a clan of birds, because it flies.

“You can’t be here, you don’t have feathers,” the clan replies.

The bat is rejected and sad.

So it goes to a place where the animals have hair. “You can’t stay here, because you have wings,” the hairy animals respond.

And this is why the bat only comes out at night: because it is embarrassed to have been rejected by those who have feathers and those who have hair.

Told by Frances Mowatt, available online:
Minwashin.org/en/decade-indigenous-languages





“The canoe journey continues, we make portages, we gather, we keep going. We need to keep the gatherings alive, to celebrate and to let the stories, the experiences, the legends, the music be heard.”

— ROGER WYLDE

Adisokan: stories to revitalize the Anicinabe language

Our gatherings reawaken the power of our stories. These stories guide us in the revitalization of the Anicinabe language – Anicinabemowin - a project undertaken by Minwashin as part of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.



A DECADE TO CELEBRATE THE ANICINABE LANGUAGE AND TO HONOUR OUR STORIES.

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages. The year’s recommendations and calls for action prompted the General Assembly to continue its efforts by proclaiming the period 2022-2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. For Minwashin, this decade represents an opportunity to showcase the stories that keep the Anicinabe language and culture alive.

The MIAJA event invites us to share our stories and look at the future together. The legacy of our ancestors is an endless reservoir of inventiveness, calling on us to design the present with the new tools available to us. Each trace of creativity is added to our collective history and to the stories that bind us together.

THE CARRIER (LA PORTEUSE)

The carrier (La porteuse), a performance by Wanda Crépeau-Etapp since 2022, to echo the creation of the NIN exhibition, was presented at the MIAJA gathering in Kitcisakik.

During this performance, Wanda took out of a tikinagan a blanket made from red ribbons on which the youth of the Anicinabe communities had written their wishes for the future of their language. She read several of these words as she unfurled the blanket loaded with this precious legacy, which she hung from the branches of a tree. With this performative gesture, she injected life into all the hopes entrusted to her by the children who took part in the NIN exhibition.

The story of The carrier (La porteuse) is the story of these hopes. The story of a young Anicinabe woman. The story of a language reconnecting with its lifeblood on the occasion of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. A story that illuminates the present and guides the future.



WECKATC NIKAMOWIN, STORIES THAT RESONATE

The album Weckatc Nikamowin, co-produced by Minwashin and Musique Nomade, was released during the MIAJA gathering.

This collective project was born from the mobilization of nineteen artists from all over Anicinabe aki: Kebaowek, Kitcisakik, Timiskaming First Nation and Pikogan. They recorded songs handed down to them by Elders, to pass on to future generations. The resulting compilation is an amalgam of Anicinabe storytelling, country-folk and traditional music set to the beat of the drum.

Oral transmission embraces new forms as technical possibilities become available. Our stories fuel the creativity needed to project orality into the contemporary world.



NIPAKANATIK, STORIES TO DECOLONIZE ARCHIVES

The MIAJA event also provided an opportunity to track the progress of the Nipakanatik project, the virtual library dedicated to the Anicinabek archives.

This online database is fed by an ongoing process of archive repatriation carried out by Minwashin with museum institutions and archives centers. Nipakanatik virtual collections also include personal and family archives entrusted to us by members of the Anicinabe communities. In the summer of 2023, a tour was organized for the first wave of archive digitization.

The use of new technologies makes it possible to honor the archival heritage of the Anicinabe Nation and that of the ancestors, by gathering images, stories, written documents and Anicinabe knowledge. This collection of information contributes to the process of resurgence of the Anicinabe language and culture. Its purpose is to ensure the continuity of the transmission of knowledge to future generations. The development of a thesaurus in the Anicinabe language will optimize access to archival documents, while taking into account the diversity and dialects present.

The collective inventory proposed by the Nipakanatik project is inseparable from the collection of stories associated with each archive. Oral tradition provides the context for an object, placing it in a human, family and collective memory. Collecting these stories means contributing to the process of restoring the collective memory of the Anicinabe Nation. It means taking an active part in the work of decolonizing archives.





“Knowledge is not data. Data is information, but knowledge is heritage. It’s the link with the ancestors; it’s a spiritual and emotional relationship with the archives”.

— NANCY WISCUTIE-CRÉPEAU

Adisokedan: bringing oral tradition to life

Adisokedan, the theme of this gathering, invites us to bring the legacy of our ancestors to life in the present, while ensuring that it is passed on to future generations.

From this perspective, a workshop was held to take the discussion a step further, by asking the following question: *What are the challenges and possible solutions for preserving and maintaining the transmission of Anicinabe knowledge while respecting systems of oral transmission?*

The collective brainstorming exercise led to the identification of possible solutions in three areas: the practice of the Anicinabe language, the importance of links between communities and the challenges associated with the use of new technologies.

Promoting the transmission of Anicinabe knowledge means promoting the Anicinabe language.

The main challenge identified is connected to the sheer vitality of the Anicinabe language:

- the presence of a sufficient number of speakers in each community is essential for a language environment conducive to transmission;
- speakers are mainly Elders. As they age, the language becomes more fragile;
- more often than not, there is no continuity between school, home and community. Anicinabemowin is not present in all spheres of children's lives, and this represents an obstacle to its transmission;
- we also note that dialectal variations in the language from one community to another represent a challenge for its transmission.



It is important to support both the vitality of the language and oral transmission:

- generalize the use of the language in all areas of daily life and in all sectors of community life;
- develop cultural and linguistic summer camps;
- record stories passed on by Elders;
- support genealogical research;
- share traditional teachings while ensuring that their spiritual dimension is passed on: pow-wows, ceremonies, feasts, songs, traditional medicine, adisokan, tepacimowin;
- develop programs reconnecting with traditional practices, such as childbirth guidance sessions;
- develop “training” or coaching sessions for teachers and educators, with mentorship provided by Elders;
- restore the places back their Anicinabe names, explore the territory with young people to pass on this knowledge.

The transmission of knowledge is a collective task that takes place throughout the Anicinabe Nation.

If we are to meet the challenges of transmission together, we need to move beyond isolation to enable a better flow of Anicinabe resources and knowledge between communities.

The distance between communities is a major challenge. The lack of networking and connections between communities creates isolation. Added to this are bureaucratic limitations that generate immobilism.

To address these challenges, we need to maintain our links and keep moving to create a collective learning dynamic:

- create links between communities, network and share best practices;
- work as a team and promote consensus;
- create and maintain spaces conducive to sharing and exchange.





New technologies can help us honor our stories by reformulating them for new generations.

The omnipresence of technology has transformed the reality of young people, urging us to consider new avenues for preservation and transmission.

- the amount of time young people spend in front of screens can act as a roadblock to language transmission;
- technology has its advantages, but it doesn't do everything. Some participants point out that many Anicinabe learning applications are incomplete or already outdated;
- the clash between generations represents a challenge: this clash is not only linked to the importance of new technologies in the lives of younger people, but also to the very different contexts in which they live. How can we transmit Anicinabe knowledge in a modern-day context?

We need to embrace change, drawing on our culture to innovate. We also need to restore the bond between generations, in particular by creating the following tools:

- linguistic content that can be transmitted via new technologies;
- new digital tools in Anicinabemowin that would be developed in collaboration with younger generations to ensure they are reached;
- Anicinabe vocabulary and visual resources for use on social networks;
- wildlife conservation programs (sustainable development) that respect Anicinabe knowledge;
- a map of the territory based on Anicinabe place names. This would include QR codes redirecting users to audio recordings.

These observations, born out of our discussions, guide our actions and invite us to move forward.

Mitonentamok

Think about it.

**Mawisak
ocitodan**

*Let's make it
together.*

Mikwenimik

*Let us remember
our elders and
ancestors.*

Mikitan

Get to work.





“Sharing history is important. It’s how we nurture our spirits, how we nurture our children.”

— ADRIENNE ANICHINAPÉO

Kitcisakik: a shared memory

The collective memory of the Kitcisakik community was celebrated and honored at this fourth MIAJA gathering.

FUELING THE PRESENT

Photographs of Kitcisakik displayed on the MIAJA stage were the starting point for several oral testimonies related to Kitcisakik’s history. The stories brought to mind the importance of dog teams in nomadic life, the skills involved in tanning hides, the role of the Elders in the transmission between generations, and the precious moments of family life.

Emphasis was also placed on the need to gather the voices of the Elders. More than ever, we need to document the knowledge inherited from our ancestors. We need to remember their lives, their stories and their words.



Children and dogs

Photograph of four children playing with two dogs in the snow. They are the children of the Papatie family and Toby Anichinapéo. (photo extracted from the Nipakanatik database)

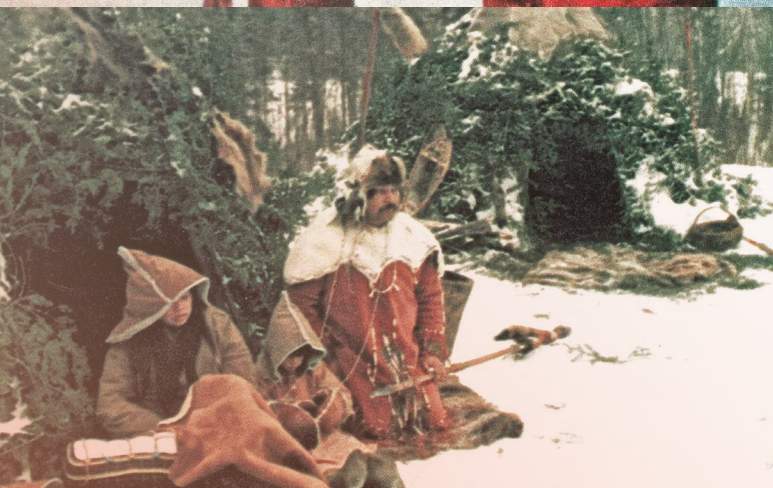


Image from the film *Le retour de l'enfant*

BRINGING MEMORY TO LIFE

French director Daniel Bertolino shot several films in Kitcisakik between 1979 and 1982: *Le retour de l'enfant*, *Moowis, où es-tu Moowis?* and *La famille Papatie*.

The first two films, part of the Indian Legends series, feature Anicinabe stories collected in collaboration with the Kitcisakik community. Community members played the characters. The third film is a documentary about Marc Papatie's choice to teach his children, Guillaume and Hélène, the traditional way of life. The documentary alternates between shots filmed in the territory, at the school of Anicinabe life, and footage shot in the school system.

Recognizing the documentary and historical value of these films, the Minwashin team approached Daniel Bertolino for access to these images, which, over and above the director's artistic choices, contain precious Anicinabe knowledge. The Indian Legends series was one of the first initiatives to transpose oral tradition to the screen. Moreover, Anicinabe expertise is present in every detail of the project, since members of the community also validated the choice of clothing and objects used in the films.

In response to Minwashin's request, Daniel Bertolino thawed the film reels and digitized them. Digital copies of all three films are now available on the Nipakanatik virtual library. The MIAJA gathering provided an opportunity to view these images forty years on. For some, the films revived memories of loved ones who are no longer with us. For others, the films helped them discover members of the community they had never met. For all, these images have created a deeply moving common space of remembrance and commemoration.

By embarking on these cinematic projects, the Kitcisakik community, as it existed in the late 70s, left an important legacy to the entire Anicinabe Nation. Today, Daniel Bertolino's films are a source of inspiration. They show us that technology can offer new ways of transmitting our oral heritage to future generations. By rephrasing them in the present, our stories honor past and future generations.





Our culture: a source of pride and openness

At the heart of the Anicinabe AKI, Minwashin is a non-profit cultural organization whose mission is to support, develop, and celebrate Anicinabe arts, language, and culture. To promote and revitalize Anicinabe culture, bring people together, and promote it, Minwashin creates spaces for the Anicinabe language, arts, and culture as a whole.

minwashin.org

March 2025