

## **“Native Skywatchers: Kapemni – As it is Above, It is Below”**

Written by Annette Lee, January 26, 2014

Two 2-hr *Native Skywatchers* Art Workshops led by Annette Lee

---

### **“Kapemni – As it is Above, It is Below”**

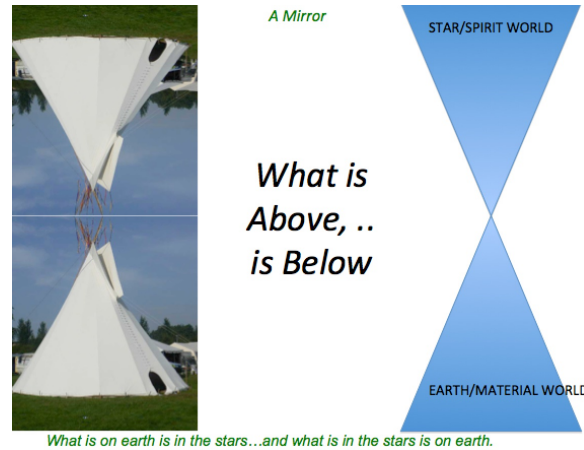


Figure 1-Image by Annette S. Lee

In D(L)akota star knowledge there is one overlying idea, *kapemni*. Imagine two tipis lined up vertically so that the tops are touching. The top triangle is the spirit world or the star world; the bottom triangle is the material world or physical world. The idea is when we can create a mirroring of the star world with what’s happening on Earth (or vice versa), a doorway is created and opened between the worlds.

This workshop will use the Dakota star map, *Dakota Makoce Wicanhpi Wowapi*, to teach students the native constellations that are visible sky tonight’s sky. Then participants will visually tell the story of their own connections to the stars and the season.

**Part 1** – Students discuss a star painting by artist Annette Lee, *Fall Stars* using ‘Descriptive Review Protocol’<sup>1</sup>. (This is a guided inquiry that works best if lead by someone other than the artist, an assistant for example.)

- Observations
- Questions
- Predictions

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mcae.k12.mn.us>

**Part 2** – Artist Discusses and Presents. The artist leads a follow-up discussion:

- Briefly discuss the star painting, *Fall Stars*. Answer any student-generated questions.
- Present the Dakota Star Map, *Dakota Makoce Wicanhpi Wowapi*, to the sixth graders.
- Teach basic movement of the stars with each season
- Discuss two Dakota teachings: the Pipe Ceremony in the Stars and the Cord Ceremony as it relates to the night sky and *kapemni*



Figure 2-Fall Stars, painted by Annette S. Lee 2014

**Part 3** – Students make a star painting.

- Given a rectangular sheet of paper that is easily divided into two sections vertically. This creates a top and bottom that is symbolic of *kapemni*: above and below.
  - For example, the top half is black scratch-off, the bottom half is the white of the paper.
- A. **On the top half**, each student creates a visual representation of the night sky. Conceptually this can be one of the following:
- a. The Seasonal night sky (fall, winter, spring, summer)  
OR
  - b. The stars the night/season they were born

To aid in the student's creation of their pieces, printed color copies of the Dakota Star Map, *Dakota Makoce Wicanhpi Wowapi*, will be used. Using colored chalk (white), each student covers the backside of the star map. Placing the star map printed side up; the constellations can easily be traced using a sharp pencil (mechanical pencils work well). Tape can be used to hold the star map in place while tracing. After all items are transferred, the student should continue to develop the night sky (above) portion of the piece.

Reminder: the students' artwork is not an astronomical map, but rather each person's **interpretation of the night sky**. It is anchored in what can be seen in the night sky on a clear night, but should also have some abstraction.

- B. **On the bottom half**, each student creates a visual representation of one of the following:
- a. Something remarkable that happened to you this season (fall, winter, spring, summer), a seasonal memory.  
OR
  - b. What your star plan is....what you came here to do...what you are good at....what you are meant to do....what you are interested in...what you want to be when you grow up...what is remarkable about you!
- C. **Connection between top and bottom halves**. Take time for each student to think about how to connection the story of the night sky (above) with the personal story (below). Carefully choose a visual representation to make this clear connection. For example, in D(L)akota we have *kapemni*, the two triangles. They connect where the apexes meet in the middle; they connect because they are both triangles and mirror reflections. Students should use line, color, texture, symbols...or whatever makes sense to connect these two worlds. To make this story their own.

Note: One useful symbol of connection is a tree. In every season, a tree looks different and yet they always have a similar structure: branches above - roots below. If students are having trouble, encourage them to use a tree at the center of the image to connect above and below.

#### **Part 4** – Sharing

- Traditionally sharing takes place standing or sitting in a circle facing each other (ideally, depending on space & time). Each person says their name and if willing shares their artwork. In particular, the story that they are telling in the bottom half and how a connection to the stars is portrayed. Note: If limited on time, then ask for volunteers as time allows.

#### **Notes to the Instructor:**

- **Time constraints**. This lesson was originally designed for an all-day workshop. It has been simplified and condensed into this shorter, two-hour format. If able, it would be best to have a longer time for this lesson.
- **Protocol**. This material is deeply rooted in Dakota/native culture. All efforts should be made to present the material with the cultural authenticity. The ideal way to accomplish this is to have a native person (preferably D(L)akota) to present in collaboration. Seek out elders or cultural teachers in your area.
- **Spectrum of Choices**. Intentionally a spectrum of choices is presented to allow for more structure if some students need more guidance, and less structure to encourage students to think creatively and make it their own.

**TIME BUDGET**

<b>Part 1 - Students Discuss</b>	<b>10 min</b>
<b>Part 2 - Artist Discusses &amp; Presents</b>	<b>50 min</b>
<b>Part 3 - Make Art</b>	<b>50 min</b>
<b>Part 4 - Sharing Stories</b>	<b>10 min</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>120 min ~ 2 hrs</b>

**Standards:**

**Identify the specific MN State Art Standard/Benchmark this lesson addresses:**

- 6.1.3.5.1 Compare and contrast the connections among visual artworks, their purposes, and their personal, social, cultural and historical contexts, including the contributions of Minnesota American Indian tribes and communities.
- 6.1.3.5.2 Analyze the meanings and functions of visual art.
- 6.2.1.5.1 Create original two-and-three-dimensional artworks in a variety of artistic contexts.

**Identify the specific MN State Science Standard/Benchmark this lesson addresses:**

- 3.1.3.2.1 Understand that everybody can use evidence to learn about the natural world, identify patterns in nature, and develop tools. For example: Ojibwe and Dakota knowledge and use of patterns in the stars to predict and plan.
- 3.1.3.2.2 Recognize that the practice of science and/or engineering involves many different kinds of work and engages men and women of all ages and backgrounds.

**Identify the specific MN State Social Studies Standard/Benchmark this lesson addresses:**

- 6.4.4.15.1 Compare and contrast the Dakota and Anishinaabe nations prior to 1800; describe their interactions with each other and other indigenous peoples. (Before European Contact)

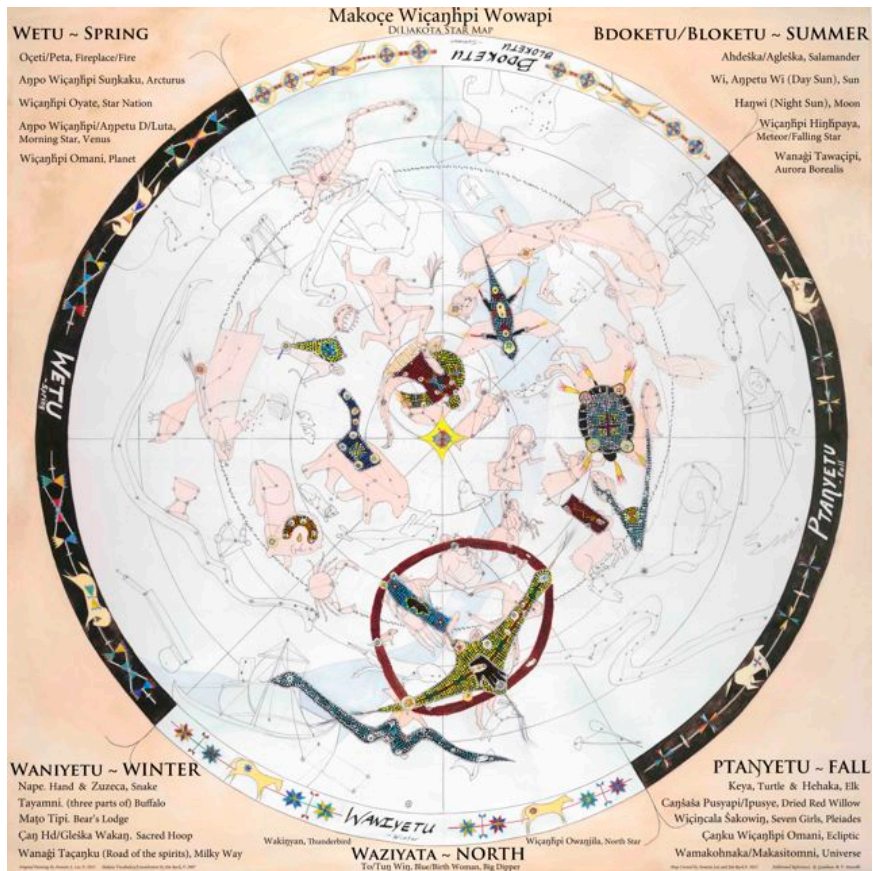


Figure 3 - Dakota Star Map, *Makoce Wicahpi Wowapi*, created by Annette S. Lee & Jim Rock, 2012