

# THE WAYS OF KNOWING PARTNERSHIP

## TURTLE ISLAND CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

The Toronto Zoo's Ways of Knowing Partnership Turtle Island Conservation programme shares the hopes and goals of First Nation partners in our commitment to the preservation of wild life and wild places for those yet to come. The Turtle Island Conservation programme at the Toronto Zoo partners with Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee First Nation communities, in the province of Ontario, Canada to incorporate Traditional Knowledge into turtle and wetland conservation programming.

The intention of this partnership is to bring together Keepers of Traditional Knowledge, Elders, First Nation community members and Turtle Island Conservation programme team members to support community cultural and natural history priorities incorporating Traditional Knowledge while building awareness with non-Aboriginals.

The programme employs First Nation youth and is guided by a First Nation Advisory group. All teachings and knowledge remain with our partner communities for their decisions on how it is to be used.

### Mission

Turtle Island Conservation partners with First Nation Communities to preserve cultural and natural landscapes.

### Vision

Preservation of First Nation Ways of Knowing will be utilized to preserve Traditional Knowledge to guide communities for generations to come.

### Our Objectives are:

1. To foster respect for self, community, Mother earth and the Creator.
2. To recognize and record significant landscapes valued by First Nations communities.
3. To integrate traditional ways of knowing with western science to monitor, protect, respect and restore landscapes.
4. To integrate language, art, and crafts to sustain traditional ways of knowing and living.
5. To facilitate understanding of the diversity of First Nation culture and way of knowing among non-Aboriginals



For further information and companion resources available from this programme please visit:

[www.turtleislandconservation.com](http://www.turtleislandconservation.com)

[www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/FrogWatchOntario.asp](http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/FrogWatchOntario.asp)

[www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/TurtleTally.asp](http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/TurtleTally.asp)

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# CHAPTER IMAGE EXPLANATIONS

### COVER IMAGE

It was important to me to emphasize two main topics, a cultural and content identity, in the cover illustration. My feelings about this image were that it had to be reflective of the content, but also representative of the key information and characters who share knowledge with us in this book. *Miskwaadesi* is the focal point, and her wisdom had to be portrayed clearly.

I opted to create a scene where the reoccurring characters, some of whom play vital roles in the *Anishinaabe* traditional teachings of the book, would be depicted listening intently to *Miskwaadesi*. Even the loon seen off to the very left appears eager to be included, perched as if on tiptoes stretching closer to hear what *Miskwaadesi* has to say. *Nanaboozhoo* holds a central position in the image as he is both an important cultural figure to the *Anishinaabe* people as well as a personal favourite of mine.

### CHAPTER 1

The Morning Prayer in my opinion is one of the most important ceremonial practices conducted by First Nation people. It is at this time that we give thanks for everything we are about to receive during the course of the day, and give thanks to all that continues to sustain our well being and our livelihoods. This acknowledgment not only develops a perception of our place amongst the living populaces of this earth, but helps remind us that we live co-dependently.

It was in this image I strived to reflect wholesome interconnectedness that is a gentle and spiritual practice. My main focus here was the central figure of the person making the offering. The key element is the heart which is directly connected to the hand which is offering the tobacco. The hand is connected to the turtle, fish, and water reinforcing acknowledgment of the inter-dependence between the species. I deliberately painted the rays of sunlight as connection lines that are touching everything.

### CHAPTER 2

Every creature has its medicine and its own teachings. Each teaching is always given to us from the heart. I wanted to depict the turtle with the heart showing figuratively within its belly shell (plastron) reminding us that teachings are always from the heart, and given directly to our own. The spiral encloses and points toward the heart reflecting the focus of these emotions and their importance.

### CHAPTER 3

I wanted to convey the urgency and attention this chapter reflects on species conservation. Extinction is far more than just losing something forever. It is a direct reflection of our ignorance, cruelty, and selfishness that begins a chain reaction within an entire ecosystem. Nothing creates more sadness for me than to realize that the selfishness, of some people, who think their overindulgent life styles take precedence over the very earth that created them.

The internal decorations are symbolic of the abundance of life these species have, and are drawn from the local environments they call home. The connection lines connect them with the land, yet their bodies are not as decorated as the one firmly on the land mass. This was symbolic of the dependence that these creatures have to the land, yet there are those that are being driven to extinction due to loss of habitat and are slowly becoming disconnected and fading away. The vibrant reds in this image stand out in stark contrast to the blues seen throughout the series of images produced for this project as a reminder that perhaps it should remain just as visibly important in our own minds.

## CHAPTER 4

The title of this chapter made me re-think a basic fact of life: Our neighbors whatever species they may be are ALSO our friends. It's easy to forget that fact in our modern day living as we constantly block ourselves from our neighbors with fences and walls, where "privacy" has become an issue even in political debates. We forget that nothing is actually independent of anything. The commonly held contemporary outlook is to view nature and the natural world as something to be exploited and disconnected from ourselves, is uneducated and simply an incorrect perception. Our livelihoods depend on interconnected values of everyone working together in a community. Be it human and/or non human, we are all related to one another in some way. In this image I wanted to capture a very intimate friendship between the inhabitants of the wetlands, and their connection's to one another.

## CHAPTER 5

A good habitat is one that can provide any species with all that it needs: Shelter, Food, and abundance. These things let all creatures thrive peacefully, with the capacity to create families of their own. I wanted the focal point of this image to be

the bright white of the eggs in the ground which is a pure indication of the healthy and abundant landscape that the turtle lives in. I included the Loon in this image for a symbolic reason as I was taught that the Loon is the protector of children. Sitting on top of the log is both a symbol of the relaxed and peaceful environment, as well as a Loon guardian for the turtle's children. The fish is a representation of the food chain and co-dependence of each species with one another.

## CHAPTER 6

Storytelling and Oral Traditions have always played a key role in the culture of First Nations people. To me it is the heart of perpetuating the culture so I wanted the fire to be the main source of the image, as well as the smoke turtle design. Symbolically these images represent the essence of life that propels First Nations cultural values forward. It is also the element that gathers the community around much like oral traditions.

## CHAPTER 7

The Sacred Circle's teachings remind us of the; unity of our world, ethnicities and cultures, as well as life stages, seasons and plays a key role in the understanding of our relationships with the world. As an image that represents all the turtles that exist in our entire world, I thought it would be important to incorporate this symbol as the key element that sets the stage for the image to unfold upon. The turtles chosen for this chapter image relate to the traditional colors within the circle: Yellow Belly Slider, Red Ear Slider, Black Tortoise and Albino Sea Turtle.

## CHAPTER 8

I wanted to highlight the First Nations traditional responsibility of women as Keepers of the Water. I drew association both physically in form while utilizing the figure of a woman. Her hair and body merge with the flowing wavy patterns of the ripples in the water. The nurturing quality of the water connects the female figure, with arms

over her breasts and heart, as a gesture of caring while depicting the concept of "Mother Nature" in the female form. We even see the womb bearing life- in this case a turtle which supports the concept of women and water as the fetus is carried and guarded by a water sac.

## CHAPTER 9

This image focuses solely on the water while providing an introspective moment to value its fundamental importance, our use of it, our dependence on it, and lastly our responsibility for it. This image is a simple one visually highlighting the most common gesture humans take with water which is the cupping of hands beneath a falling cascade of liquid. It's such a simple gesture and yet it isn't unlike praying with our hands as they are raised to our faces while in deep thoughts of our proceeding actions. This is such a simple gesture yet striking in that it might soon come to an end if we are not careful with our resources. There may come a time when the simple task of washing our face or freely enjoying the pleasure of quenching our thirst will be looked upon as a past luxury with envy and regret if we do not take action towards the preservation of our water now.

## CHAPTER 10

Frogs and Turtles enjoy more than just environmental connections they are also close friends in an ecosystem that depends on each other for survival. Both are environmental indicators and their health and abundance in a specific ecosystem can indicate the overall health or danger of an ecosystem. They become key factors and facilitators in keeping those ecosystems alive and well. My image focused on this connection and relationship to each other. Their poses indicate a circular, cyclical and whole form where each is dependant, a part of, and completing the other.

## CHAPTER 11

I was thinking about "Stackable turtles" when I was considering the concept of "Tallying the numbers". Like many other things we stack for the sake of numerical clarity, I recalled that turtles themselves could be viewed as "stacked" upon one another. This gave way to a comical image of a "Babushka Doll" made up of turtles in my creative mind. I also wanted to share another message about the fundamental dependence on water and show that Life was given to us by water which allows us and all living things to grow and multiply

## CHAPTER 12

The focus of this image is to depict a special bond between Human and Turtle. When a friend is hurt we often ask them "what can I do?" Reflecting on this, I wanted to create an image where the Human engages the Turtle with the same inquiry "What can we do?" Turtle and Human are connected by the universe in a more enlightened way rather than with words. I wanted to convey that knowledge is the key way we can help, by educating ourselves utilizing the wisdom of the Turtle and by learning ways of conserving them.

## CHAPTER 13

This illustrated image was created with the intent of sharing visually as much awe and joy as a celebration can. The central figure of the turtle is our focus. Around the turtle all the water folk are creating a dazzling celebratory dance presentation of life. Colors were kept light hearted to emphasize this joyous occasion.

# BERNICE GORDON

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Born and raised in Toronto, Canada Bernice Gordon has been drawing since she was two and a half years old. While growing up she developed a passion for animals, science fiction, cartoons, and ancient cultures. These subjects of interest have become the center stage for her images and illustrations.

Bernice is a graduate of the Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning in Ontario and uses a wide variety of mediums to express all of her interests visually, sometimes merging the traditional with contemporary.







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