

ORIENTATION: *The exercise you are about to do with your table groups and chairs represents the change from a “land use” system to a “land ownership” system.*

Native Americans. Like the chair you are now sitting in, you “own” it while you’re in it, but it is not really yours as it would be if you bought, sold, or rented it. While you are in the chair or desk, you are supposed to take care of it. If you don’t, the right to use it can be revoked. Also if someone else comes in and takes it over (uses it instead of you — the rightful “user,” but not the “owner”) you can have access again another time. This new “user” doesn’t own the property either.

Now imagine this situation on a scale of mountains and valleys, rivers, and forests. You don’t own them, but they are yours to use and to continue using as you and your people have done for hundreds or thousands of years. Myths and legends of your people that have been told and retold tell of your ancestors’ arrival into your lands. All your people know exactly where your area is, its boundaries, and who the neighbors are. Other areas have not been claimed or are not in use. Some boundaries are very definite, like the side of a mountain and the valley of a river. Other areas are not so definite and have a kind of neutral zone around them.

Imagine now that you and your people have fished, hunted, traded, and built your summer and winter homes in the same places for hundreds or thousands of years. Sometimes your neighbors make raids on the areas you are using to take them over for their use. Your people will fight and defend the lands of your ancestors.

Some of the areas are very sacred. They have been used to bury your ancestors. The grave sites are remembered for a very long time. Other sacred areas in your lands are the places that your people go to get close to God or the Great Spirit. These are special places.

If you are from the salmon cultures, your people have waited for the salmon to return to their birthing places every year for thousands of years. No one knows for sure how long ago your people started to fish for the salmon, and no one knows who figured out how to predict and wait for the fish to return. But the answer is at least 40,000 years old. If there are five generations every 100 years, a group would have fifty generations in one thousand years, and 2,000 generations in 10,000 years.

The salmon have become so central and so important to your people that throughout the year almost all activities are timed or tied to the life cycle of the salmon: their return to lay their eggs, die, and enrich the waters for their children and yours. You are so close to the cycle that you call yourselves the children of the salmon.

Europeans. Now imagine you are a member of another culture, Europeans from across the Atlantic Ocean. You and your people have had a system of land ownership for thousands of years in Europe. No one knows exactly when your people started to own land. Not everyone could own the land at first. The leaders or the most powerful and the most wealthy could own land, such as forests and valleys, and the waters, such as rivers and

lakes. Owning it meant you could hunt there, fish there, use it any way you wanted. You could cut down the trees, or let no one cut down the trees. You could sell the land or the waters, and you could rent them to others.

You defended your land from those who wanted to take it from you. You might have many soldiers to help you fight to keep your land, or you might use your soldiers to take land away from someone else. If you do not actually own some land, you might be among the many people who live in an area as renters. You might pay rent with the things you grow or harvest from the land, or with money you make. The rent might be called taxes, whether it is for the land, the house you live in, or just for living and working on the land.

Your people cross the ocean and find another world, which they call the New World. The native people in the New World are very different from you and your people. Your people at first claim the new land for the Kings and Queens back home across the ocean. As more and more Europeans come, many of them want to claim the land for themselves and not the Kings and Queens back home in the “old country.”

Many battles are fought against the old governments back in Europe, and the Kings and Queens relinquish the rights to the new land. Your people “own” the New World. But the natives fight for their lands. Your people expect this because it is often the way land is acquired. In your culture, the losers lose the ownership of their land, and the winners take all. But the natives have never lost their lands. They have moved around over them for thousands of years; boundaries changed, but no one had “owned” the land or the waters.

In the Pacific Northwest, the salmon-based cultures were forced to give up most of their lands (most of the uses of their lands). They never gave up the salmon, and their treaties include exclusive rights to take fish in streams running through or bordering reservations and to “share in common” fish in all “usual and accustomed” places outside reservations. Courts have interpreted “usual and accustomed” to mean equal shares of the salmon fishery.