

# **Empathizing (Indigenous Religious Traditions)**

## **Sacred Landscapes**

The experience of geographical places is fundamental to the indigenous religious experience. Invite the students to reflect on places in the United States that have at least some overtones of sacredness for people. Alternatively, the students can think of places that function in this way and are unique to their individual lives. Some students may in fact have had the experience of having been somewhere and sensing the presence of God more acutely than usual. This can provide a way of empathizing with the indigenous religious experience.

## **Care for the Planet**

Many people, Christians and non-Christians alike, are concerned about ways in which we're misusing the planet and causing harm to it in the process. Have the students reflect on insights they have gained from their study of indigenous religious traditions that might help people to find better ways of relating to the earth. What steps might the students take themselves to better preserve the planet's resources?

## **The Sacred in Nature**

Invite the students to reflect on what characteristics or phenomena of the natural world might lead someone to attribute sacredness to it. If they need suggestions to get started, they can think about the power of storms and the sublime beauty of a sunrise or sunset. Encourage them to think beyond these typical examples, however, to discover less usual ways they might experience the world as sacred.

## **Oral Tradition**

Passing religious information and lore on in the context of human relationships is a significant feature of tribal or indigenous religion. For most students, the closest analogy to this will probably be the passing down of family stories and lore, along with expectations for life and behavior, from one generation to the next. Ask the students to reflect on a number of questions from this point: What are the relative advantages and disadvantages of oral transmission? What features of contemporary society tend to erode the oral communication of family lore?



## The Vision Quest

Invite the students to identify anything in their own life experience that is analogous to the vision quest. Some relevant aspects of the vision quest include the stripping away of old identity, acquisition of a new identity, verification of this new identity by tribal elders, and a test of courage. One way to approach this is to have the students name and discuss what coming-of-age rituals are present in our culture and if these have anything in common with, or analogous to, the vision quest. Another approach is to talk about Baptism and the “dying and rising with Christ” imagery in this context.

