# Creative Land Acknowledgment and bannock

## Cultivating decolonizing spaces in the classroom

Hyejung Jessie Yum with Matthew Kitchen, Nathaniel Salmon, and Nour Bach Tobji

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>
> *–Excerpt from Matthew Kitchen's reflection on "Bannock"*

### Introduction: A personal story of Creative Land Acknowledgment

It was in my first doctoral class in 2016 in Toronto that I, Hyejung Jessie Yum, encountered a land acknowledgment for the first time. Although I had lived in the United States for about six years, I had never experienced such a practice before. I soon realized that land acknowledgments were not limited to the classroom but were also integral to other public settings—such as theaters and churches—where gatherings began with this recognition. This practice became more widespread in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's report and its Calls to Action in 2015. Moreover, Emmanuel College at the University of Toronto, where I had my academic formation, was committed to decolonizing education. The intellectual and pedagogical climate of this environment has profoundly shaped both my research and teaching. Since then, as I have pursued peace theology through a postcolonial lens, I have engaged critically with questions of Indigenous rights in the settler-colonial structures of North America, where I live as an immigrant. This ongoing engagement continues to inform both my scholarship and pedagogy.

In 2021, I had an inspiring experience with my students in the Social Justice and Theology in Context master's class at Emmanuel, where I taught my first course as a sessional instructor. I began each session by reading a land acknowledgment. That same year, the unmarked graves of Indigenous children were discovered at the former residential school in Kamloops,

an event that profoundly shaped our collective reflection.[1] To honor and remember the forgotten children, my students and I collaboratively created a land acknowledgment poem titled "I Will Not Forget."[2] Each student contributed a sentence in the chat box during our online class amid the pandemic. This small and collaborative act became a heartfelt expression of remembrance and solidarity with Indigenous Peoples. The experience reinforced my conviction that mutual learning is not merely a pedagogical approach but lies at the heart of a transformative, decolonizing education. It rests on the recognition that students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active agents in the process of decolonization.

To demonstrate how a land acknowledgment can operate as a decolonizing practice within the classroom, this article first introduces the motivation and meaning behind Creative Land Acknowledgment. It then briefly presents the work of Matthew Kitchen, Nathaniel Salmon, and Nour Bach Tobji—"Bannock"—created for the Creative Self class at Concordia University in Montréal, as an example that embodies this practice.

## Creative Land Acknowledgment: Cultivating intentional spaces for decolonizing learning

Since the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in the mid-2010s, offering a land acknowledgment at the beginning of public events has become an important and widespread practice across Canada. However, scholars have critiqued the way that these gestures, when institutionalized, often risk becoming performative—serving settler comfort and reconciliation narratives rather than embodying genuine relationships with Indigenous Peoples or decolonizing intent.[3] Acknowledging these critiques, I propose that reimagining the practice through creativity can transform it into a meaningful entry point into decolonizing education. When approached this way, a land acknowledgment opens space for active reflection on our colonial histories, Indigenous cultures, and the lands we inhabit, as well as on our accountability and solidarity in our own contexts. In this sense, it invites both educators and students to engage

1 Courtney Dickson and Bridgette Watson, "Remains of 215 children found buried at former Kamloops Indian Residential School, First Nation says," *CBC News*, 27 May 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/tk-eml%C3%BAps-te-secw%C3%A9pemc-215-children-former-kamloops-indian-residential-school-1.6043778.

2 "I Will Not Forget," poem collaboratively written by students in Social Justice and Theology in Context class (Summer 2021), Emmanuel College, Toronto, unpublished classroom project.

3 Joe Wark, "Land Acknowledgements in the Academy: Refusing the Settler Myth," *Curriculum Inquiry* 51, no. 2 (2021): 191–209.

in mutual learning as an ongoing endeavor of relational responsibility on Indigenous land.[4]

As an educator in theological studies, I developed Creative Land Acknowledgment in a classroom as an intentional effort to engage directly with the Calls to Action—the 94 recommendations issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in 2015. In particular, Calls to Action 59 and 60 emphasize the need for sustained education regarding the church's involvement in colonization and the residential school system. They further call upon theological and religious institutions to develop curricula that cultivate respect for Indigenous spiritual traditions and actively work to prevent ongoing forms of spiritual violence.[5]

Instead of simply reading the assigned land acknowledgment at the beginning of each class, I invite students to lead a Creative Land Acknowledgment by engaging critically and creatively with settler-colonial realities, learning from Indigenous Peoples and cultures, and acknowledging the land we inhabit. Students have explored diverse themes such as the settler-colonial histories of Concordia University and Montréal, the works of Indigenous artists, ceremonies like the Powwow and Sundance, cultural appropriation during Halloween, and tensions between settler institutions and Indigenous communities in local contexts.[6] Unlike visible and direct forms of violence such as war, colonial violence functions as structural violence that often remains invisible, as conquest and its enduring effects have been legitimized and normalized within systems of colonial sovereignty.[7] Only through continuous and intentional engagement with colonial realities and Indigenous Peoples and their stories can we begin to discern the workings of colonial violence and recover silenced histories that have too easily slipped into the realm of the "normal."

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4 As a racialized person engaged in anti-racism, I often observe that the responsibility for education is placed disproportionately on survivors, under the guise of privileged ignorance, adding further burden to those already harmed by the system. While it is crucial to respect and center Indigenous voices, settlers—both white and racialized—must also undertake a continuous process of self-education to recognize and assume their own responsibilities in settler-colonial structures.

5 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action* (2015), 7–8, https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls_to_action_english2.pdf.

6 The Creative Self class, taught by Hyejung Jessie Yum, Department of Theological Studies, Concordia University, Montréal, Winter 2024 and Fall 2025, unpublished classroom material.

7 Hyejung Jessie Yum, "Unsettling the Radical Witness of Peace: A Decolonizing Investigation of Mennonite Migration from Russia to Manitoba in the 1870s," *Anabaptist Witness* 7, no. 2 (Oct. 2020): 93–113; Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2012), 38.

At the beginning of each class of the Creative Self in the Winter 2024 and Fall 2025 semesters at Concordia University, students led a Creative Land Acknowledgment, a ten-minute activity designed as part of an ongoing decolonizing practice. This exercise invites students to introduce their classmates to various aspects of Indigenous cultures, spiritualities, and colonial histories, fostering awareness of the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism. Through creative formats such as video, poetry, song, collective reading, or experiential exercises, students are encouraged to engage critically and respectfully with themes of Indigenous presence, decolonization, and settler-Indigenous relations. The activity not only promotes understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural expressions but also cultivates habits of reflection, relational accountability, and mutual respect in the classroom.

## Creative Land Acknowledgment: "Bannock" by students in the Creative Self class[8]

On September 19, 2025, Matthew Kitchen, Nathaniel Salmon, and Nour Bach Tobji led the Creative Self class with their Creative Land Acknowledgment on bannock. They incorporated visual aids, including photographs and a video, cited Salmon's original poem on bannock, and shared homemade bannock prepared from Kitchen's mother's recipe, which originates from the Moose Cree First Nation. This recipe is included at the end of this article.

The following is a transcript of the recording of their Creative Land Acknowledgment.

*Introduction of bannock*

Okay, let us get this bread. So our project is about bread.

We chose to do our Creative Land Acknowledgement on bannock. It is a key thing in Indigenous cuisine. It is referred to as *palauga* in Inuktitut, *luskinikn* in Mi'kmaq, *ba'wezhiganag* in Ojibwe, and *pahkwêsikan* in Cree. But this is just a small example of the different Indigenous groups that have some variation of bannock, when, in reality, pretty much everyone in North America—Turtle Island, if you will—has some variation on it. So this begs the question, what is it exactly?

*What is bannock?*

So bannock is a fried bread food with just a few ingredients, flour, water, and fat, and it's kind of similar to biscuit texture. When it is cooked in an

8 Matthew Kitchen, Nathaniel Salmon, and Nour Bach Tobji, Creative Land Acknowledgement Presentation: "Bannock," *THEO 245: The Creative Self* class, Concordia University, Montréal, September 19, 2025.

oven it has more of a dense, chewy texture, and when it is fried, it has a more crispy texture.

*Where does it originate?*

So pre-colonization Indigenous communities had similar cakes and breads made with *camas*, which is wild hyacinth and dried fern roots, which were then mashed and roasted on the pit fire. The modern wheat-based Bannock was introduced by Scottish fur traders in the eighteenth century, and it eventually got adopted by Indigenous hunters due to its practicality and versatility as a calorie-rich, carbohydrate-rich, portable food source. The ingredients were light to carry and it was quick to be prepared and cooked, so it was super convenient when traveling nomadically.

*Bannock's relationship to settler-colonialism: Cultural exchange or colonization?*

As you can see, modern forms of Bannock result from the arrival of Europeans, which makes it a tricky subject when it comes to its place in Indigenous culture. On one hand, you can see aspects of cultural exchange in that fur traders brought new ingredients which filled a need for carbohydrate-rich food sources, as these can be hard to come by in cold months, especially when they were living nomadically. Many Indigenous hunters adopted it for this reason. On the other hand, once the reservation system was imposed and Indigenous Peoples were forced to conform to a sedentary lifestyle divorced from traditional food knowledge, Bannock became more of a necessity for survival, as food was limited to rations based on the European diet—namely wheat flour, baking powder, lard, salt, things like that.

*Symbol of resilience or legacy of colonialism?*

As such, it can be a bit controversial. Many Indigenous communities embrace bannock as a cherished food, viewing it as a cultural touchstone shared among a variety of Nations on Turtle Island, as well as a way to share their culture with the world. In this way, bannock can represent reclamation of something imposed upon them, as well as a source of pride and resilience, despite the tragic circumstances.

Others reject it as a colonial food that doesn't necessarily represent Indigenous culture. They may opt to use traditional ingredients like corn or plant flowers like the ferns or hyacinth we mentioned before, and preparation methods to decolonize their relationship to bannock. For them, it symbolizes the erasure of traditional ways. As Dr. Yum said, these things are never quite black and white, and there's always a nebulous sort of gray area. But either way, today bannock plays a big role in modern Indigenous cuisine. Bringing it to modern day, we have a video of Jeanette Posine, who is an Ojibwe woman from Pays Plat First Nation in Ontario, and she is the Bannock Lady herself.

*Watching video: "The Bannock Lady | Thunder Bay"* [Added by Yum]
The video titled "The Bannock Lady | Thunder Bay," produced by SKIP, features Jeanette Posine, an entrepreneur from Pays Plat First Nation and the owner of the Bannock Lady, a restaurant in Thunder Bay that specializes in Indigenous cuisine. Posine explains that bannock—a traditional Indigenous bread made from flour, baking powder, and water—has been passed down through generations in her family. Originally a staple in her upbringing, she modernized the recipe by deep-frying it to create a light and fluffy texture. Her journey began when she noticed a lack of Indigenous food representation at a local festival, inspiring her to perfect her recipe and share it with the public. Over time, her participation in community events led to growing popularity and eventually to the establishment of her restaurant. The Bannock Burger and the Indian Taco have become the most popular menu items. Posine expresses pride in offering a space that celebrates Indigenous heritage and welcomes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to experience and appreciate traditional foods.[9]

*Bannock today*
So yeah, today bannock serves as a way to share and preserve Indigenous culture, both interculturally and intraculturally. So it's a staple in Powwow gatherings and is a part of the growing Indigenous food industry. It's way more mainstream now. People have heard about it outside of Indigenous communities. There's the Kekuli Cafe that is quite popular, and yeah, so many families pass down their recipes generationally, therefore creating a link to their ancestors through shared food.

*Matthew-made bannock shared with the class*
And Matthew's mom is Cree, and she shared her recipe with him, and today we'll share it with the class.

So I [Kitchen] made some bannock to share with everybody from my mom's recipe. I'm not going to say it's like a generational recipe, but it's definitely representative of the bannock that would be eaten in northern Ontario, where she's from the Moose Cree First Nation on James Bay.

So I brought jam to eat with it too because it's baked, so it's kind of dense, a bit dry, so I'll pass it around. And as it's going around, Nathaniel is going to read a poem which he wrote inspired by Bannock.

*Nathaniel Salmon's poem "Bannock"*
Okay, so I [Salmon] made this poem about bannock. But one thing I will say, though, is it's the first time I ever made a poem on bread. So bear with me.

9 SKIP, "The Bannock Lady | Thunder Bay," *YouTube* video, 3:59, October 26, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BorlchHeWlM.

BANNOCK
by Nathaniel Salmon

A bread, which has a complex history,
Forgetting the struggles would hurt their culture like an injury.
A necessity for Indigenous Peoples, confined to their limited lands,
This bread marked the symbol of strength they claimed with their own hands.

Made with ingredients such as fat, water and flour,
Food rations were scarce, limited access left them to cower.
Resilience; a word to describe Indigenous Peoples,
This bread prevented starvation which helped move the needle.

From light to fluffy, golden brown,
The taste shapes your frown upside down.

Fried or cooked,
We don't get taught these things in our textbooks.
In schools or presentations,
Their culture should not receive discrimination.

We offer this land acknowledgement, for this bread not to be forgotten like a wish,
Their absence will make the impact their presence could not accomplish.

The Indigenous culture is something that has been brought to light in these troubled times. This poem was made to bring awareness to not only their culture but the people as a whole, so they may be respected and remembered. Words can only mean so much; thus, I [Salmon] hope they resonate with you so it can manifest into something greater.

## Matthew Kitchen's reflection on the Creative Land Acknowledgement "Bannock"

I am Matthew Kitchen, and I am a third-year student in theological studies at Concordia. When we were assigned the Creative Land Acknowlegment in Dr. Yum's class, I proposed to my group to highlight bannock as a way of sharing an aspect of my own Cree heritage, as well as a tangible part of

a variety of Indigenous cultures, with our class. My mother is from Moose Cree First Nation in Northern Ontario, and our family has a complicated history with this identity.

My mother spent her formative years learning traditional ways of food and hunting from her grandmother, but her own mother felt ashamed of her heritage and wanted to keep us, her grandchildren, ignorant of it. Sadly, this seems to be a common dynamic I've heard from others I've spoken to of different First Nations backgrounds. It wasn't until relatively recently that our family was even recognized as Cree by the Canadian government due to generations of colonial erasure. The first documented ancestor we can find is simply listed as an "Indian woman" in a marriage registry, as she married a Scotsman working in the fur trade. Most of our subsequent ancestors are listed in census forms as "half-breeds" due to this, despite being Cree speakers living on ancestral lands.

Bannock, even with its complicated history, was a way in which my mom was able to give my brothers and me a link to our relatives and ancestors while we grew up far away from ancestral lands in New Brunswick. This is among many small acts of resistance on her behalf to keep her ancestors alive and acknowledged through her own children. Sharing bannock for me is a way to share a forgotten history with the world and to honor my mother's fight to keep our cultural history alive, even if it's a messy one. We also chose to highlight bannock as a way of demonstrating a contemporary, even possibly mundane aspect of First Nations culture.

Often, I find that land acknowledgments portray historicized, tragic images of Indigeneity. While it is certainly important to acknowledge these things, a holistic approach to land acknowledgments should also bring awareness to the joys of Indigenous culture despite tragedy. My family certainly has fond memories of sharing bannock among their relations, both Cree and not, and it is something that keeps our ancestors alive for us.

Her recipe, the one I made for the class, is as follows:

6 cups of flour
1 ½ cups of lard [I substituted vegetable shortening]
3 tablespoons of baking powder
1 tablespoon of salt
3 to 4 cups of water

1. Mix together the flour, baking powder, and salt.
2. Cut in the lard to the dry mixture.
3. Add just enough water to moisten and mix (I lightly kneaded mine after mixing).

4. Place the dough into two 8-inch square pans and bake at 425 degrees Fahrenheit for 30 to 40 minutes.

## Conclusion

As Kitchen, Salmon, and Tobji shared creative baking, stories, and a poem on bannock with the class through their Creative Land Acknowledgment, this practice demonstrates how small yet meaningful acts of remembrance, creativity, and sharing can transform education from a space of knowledge transmission into one of mutual learning toward decolonization. This brief gesture—about ten minutes in each class throughout the semester—creates an intentional space to reconsider what we have taken for granted in a settler-colonial society, to invite students to become active agents in decolonizing work, and to reflect on how we can participate in decolonization in our daily lives. This embodied response to the Calls to Action is not an endpoint but an initiation to connect Indigenous histories, peoples, and lands where we are residing. I hope this will continue to grow in meaning and practice in students' own contexts and future fields, just as I once experienced land acknowledgments as a student and now carry them forward in my own classrooms as a teacher.

## About the authors

Hyejung Jessie Yum is a faculty member at Concordia University in Montréal, committed to fostering decolonizing and intercultural relationships and dialogue across differences.

Matthew Kitchen is a student in the department of theological studies at Concordia University, interested in researching mysticism and relational theological frameworks.

Nathaniel Salmon is a third-year student attending Concordia University in Montréal, pursuing his education in English literature and hoping to inspire others with his writing.

Nour Bach Tobji is an English literature student at Concordia University in Montréal who is interested in the intersection between literature and philosophy.