

Bioregional Ecology: Learning Your Surroundings & History

This handout inspired by and widely revised from a handout from a course on Bioregional Herbalism from the Herbal Academy and a Homework Assignment for non-native folks to reflect upon their role in colonization of the land by the Catalyst Project (Anti-racism for Collective Liberation).

Embedding practices and a community of (non)violence in an ecosystem sounds nice, but what does that look like in practice?

First, it entails knowing the ecosystems with which you interact. Here are some questions to assist in that exploration:

- What are the concrete indications of direct, structural and cultural violence in relation to the natural ecosystem around you? Are/how are those forms of violence spoken about and addressed in your community?
- In which watershed(s) do you live? How are those watersheds named? Who lives on them? Who used to live on them? What is the history of industry on those watersheds?
- How have plants and animals adapted to live in the margins of the human landscape in the place where you live?
- What forest species dominate the land around you? Which species would have been dominant before people deforested the land?
- What is the general condition of the soil in the area where you live? The water sources?
- What is the nature of your relationship/s with beings that are not human who you share space with in your local area (home, neighborhood, wild spaces, parks, wherever)? Do you find you connect with them easily? Some more easily than others?
- Are you engaged with other humans collectively in any practices or rituals of care, connection and repair already? What is that like?
- What are the most dangerous pollutants in your local ecosystem?
- How concretely is your environment impacted by humans?
- Are there communities that are impacted by environmental racism in any particular way where you live? What does that look like? Who is responsible/accountable? How is that being addressed?
- What does economic development look like in your city/town? Who (human and non-human) by that development, in positive and negative ways?
- What plants or animals are in a tenuous or perhaps endangered position in your area, and which are thriving? Which plants and animals are considered invasive, dangerous, or unwanted? Why is that?
- What are the different kinds of landscapes you interact with away from home and how are they different from your local ecosystem?
- How do these different places impact you?
- What are the social histories of the land, and what is your relationship to those histories?
- Who is/are the Indigenous nation(s) that have lived in the place you call home? What did colonization look like on that land? What other social histories of the land are a significant part of the way your place has been shaped?
- Who else is in relationship with the land on which you live, work, harvest, or play that you may not interact with?
- If there were an energy crisis in your community, would you know how to get food?
- What is (positive, negative, or none) your impact/your family's impact/your faith community's impact on the most vulnerable human and other-than-human populations in the place you live?
- What might a practice/s of connection and repair look like in relation to what you are describing here?