



People used to be afraid to talk about mental health. Today, we understand that we all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. Sometimes we have mental health problems, just as we sometimes have physical health problems. For example, do you ever feel stressed, anxious, sad, distracted, angry, confused, hopeless, or frustrated? We all feel these emotions from time to time. Some of us might, at some point in our lives, have other mental health issues. Or we might know family members and friends who are dealing with mental illness.

There are many ways to deal with mental health problems. Sometimes people need the help of experts. But there are lots of things we all can do. We can talk about mental health. We can recognize how mental health affects us – at school, at home, with our friends, in the community. We can learn what we can do to be mentally well. We can empathize with people who are struggling with mental illness.

That's why Pearson developed this series of books called Well Aware. Through these stories and information texts, you'll learn about how a variety of people have dealt with mental health. You'll be able to talk with your teacher and your classmates about what you read. You will be able to think about how these stories and ideas might apply in your own life.

This is an excerpt from one of the books in the series that will get you talking and thinking about mental well-being. We hope you enjoy the reading and have some great conversations. We hope you will become more Well Aware.

	<p>Canadian Mental Health Association <i>Mental health for all</i></p>	<p>PROUD SUPPORTER OF CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH WEEK MAY 4 - 10, 2015</p>
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Welcome to the Circle

Larry Loyie with Constance Brissenden



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For teaching ideas related to this book, see the Teacher's Resource.

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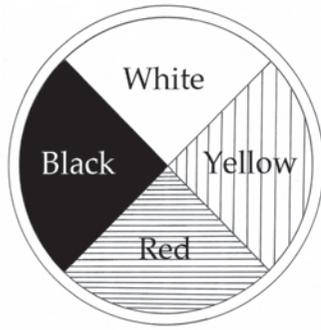
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PEARSON

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PEARSON

The Four Directions



*A new day has dawned
The sun rises, warming everything
The universe responds
The four elements
Of earth, air, fire and water
Bless each of the four directions*

Four is an important number in Cree life. Traditionally, we believe that four elements combine to create life: the sun, the earth, water, and the moon. These elements are often shown in a circle with four equal sections. This shows that the four elements are in balance. In the same way, people feel better when the things in their lives are in balance.

We face the four directions to give thanks for their gifts to all life. Each direction has its own special colour. The colours remind us of our connection to Mother Earth:

From the east ... comes peace and light. The colour of the east is yellow.

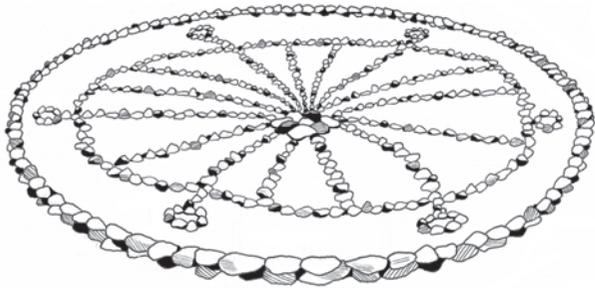
From the south ... comes growth and trust. The colour of the south is red.

From the west ... comes the ability to look within. The colour of the west is black.

From the north ... comes wisdom. The colour of the north is white.

Some First Nations peoples believe the four directions also stand for the stages of our lives. We start our life's journey in the east. It is a time of new beginnings, like the sun rising in the east each day. Next, we journey through life (the south). As we do, we experience new things. We learn who and what to trust. Then we reach a stage where we look within ourselves (the west). We consider the positive things in our lives. We also think about things we can change for the better. Finally, the journey ends in the north, with wisdom.

The Medicine Wheel



Come explore with me

At the medicine wheel

Its stones are the days of your life

Your good thoughts are the centre of the wheel

They anchor tomorrow's goals

A medicine wheel is another circle. But it isn't the usual kind of wheel, or the usual kind of medicine. Picture a bicycle wheel with spokes radiating from the centre. Now picture a very, very large wheel on the ground made of stones.

Medicine wheels were first made thousands of years ago. Many First Nations, including the Cree, still create medicine wheels using stones. When the wheel is completed, we bring our deepest thoughts and feelings to it.

All things are connected through the wheel. They join together at the centre.

One section of the wheel faces the cold north. This section is said to lead to cleansing and purity. Another section faces the warmth of the south, leading to trust, and love. In the west lives the brown bear, who seeks shelter for the winter months. And in the east is the eagle. The eagle can soar high, which allows it to see clearly and develop a deep understanding of things.

Many Cree believe the medicine wheel is a place of respect for all human beings. When you visit the wheel, bring a calm heart and thoughtfulness. Think about your hopes, your dreams, and even your fears. When you leave, take away new and positive ideas that come to you. This is the medicine of the medicine wheel.

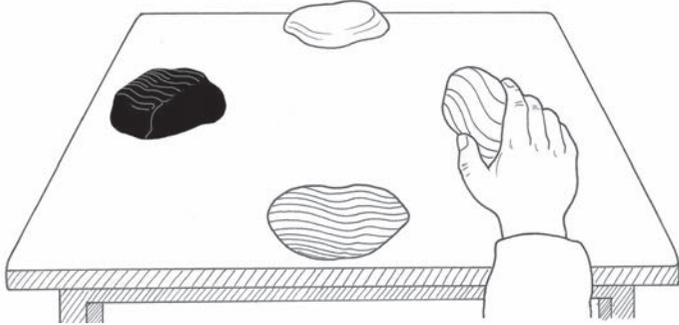
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DID YOU KNOW...

Traditional medicine wheel ceremonies begin with a smudge to honour the sacred place. A smudge is a mixture of dry materials, such as sage and sweetgrass, that is lit to create smoke. As the smoke rises to the sky, it takes your wishes with it.

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Make Your Own Medicine Wheel



You can make your own medicine wheel. Start with four pebbles. Paint each pebble one of the colours of the four directions. Then place the yellow pebble in the east position, the black one in the west, the white one in the north, and the red pebble in the south. You could do this on your desk or bedroom floor when you need “time out” to think.

For a class or group project, everyone could bring a rock and place it to form a wheel. Each person could share why they chose the rock they did and why they placed it where they did in relation to the four directions.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. This book mentions the rules that are in place so talking circles can be performed in a respectful way. What do you think might happen if there were no rules? What rules do your classroom and school have that encourage people to show respect?
2. Receiving an eagle feather is a high honour. Who do you think is worthy of an eagle feather? (The person can be someone you know personally or a celebrity.) Why do you feel this person deserves to be honoured?
3. The author introduces storytelling as an important way to teach others. Share an example of something important you have learned from a story, novel, or movie.
4. The author says that many Cree believe that people should bring a calm heart and thoughtfulness when they visit a medicine wheel. Where do you feel the most calm and thoughtful? Why?