

Honour water: Gameplay as a pathway to Anishinaabeg water teachings

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Abstract

Digital games can uniquely express Indigenous teachings by merging design, code, art, and sound. Inspired by Anishinaabe grandmothers leading ceremonial walks known as Nibi Walks, *Honour Water* (<http://www.honourwater.com/>) is a singing game that aims to bring awareness to threats to the waters and offer pathways to healing through song. The game was developed with game company Pinnguaq and welcomes people from all over to sing with good intentions for the waters. The hope is to pass on songs through gameplay that encourages comfort with singing and learning Anishinaabemowin. Songs were gifted by Sharon M. Day and the Oshkii Giizhik Singers. Sharon M. Day, who is Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe and one of the founders of the Indigenous Peoples Task Force, has been a leading voice using singing to revitalize the waters. The Oshkii Giizhik Singers, a community of Anishinaabekwe who gather at Fond du Lac reservation, contribute to the healing for singers, communities, and the waters. Water teachings are infused in art and writing by Anishinaabe and Métis game designer, artist, and writer Elizabeth LaPensée. From development to distribution, *Honour Water* draws on Indigenous ways of knowing to reinforce Anishinaabeg teachings with hope for healing the water.

Key Words: *water songs, water teachings, Anishinaabemowin, mobile games, game design*

Gimaanaajitoomin nibi
We honor the liquid

aabijiwan akiing gakina akeyaa
the entire flowing watershed

ni dagoshinoyang, bi dagoshinoyang
echoing here and there

nibi babaamiwidooyang.
water infusing our path.

Gimanaaji'aanaan Nibi-giizis.
We honor her silver brilliance.

Gimaamwimanaaji'aanaanig giizisoog
We honor both of them, the night and day suns

nookaad nookomis waasaabikizod,
soft grandmother reflecting,

mindidod mishoomis jaagaakizod.
great grandfather burning.

Baanimaa biidanaamoyang biidaaban
After a breath dawns within us

mii maajinanaandawi'iwe-nagamoyang
and a healing song begins

bagaka'amaazoyang, aabida'amaazoyang
we sing clearly and constantly

naadamaageyang nagamong.
in the service of sound.

Gizhaabowemin ezhi-zhaabwiiyang
We accompany our survival

odaminowinan ozhitooyang, mazinitooyang
with games creating, arranging

aanikinotawangwaa dewe'iganag gaye zhiishiigwanag
translating for drums and rattles

minogondaaganewaad mino'anishinaabeyang.

to animate the sound of being good beings.

- “Gimaanaajitoomin Nibi/We Honor Water” by Margaret Noodin

Introduction

Honour Water is a singing game available on iPads created by Anishinaabekwewag (Anishinaabe women) as a means of passing on water songs that can be shared with all people. The inspiration for making such a game, the design itself, the development process, and the methodology and methods for understanding how the game has been received, can offer a model for understanding Anishinaabeg water teachings and how these can be expressed and engaged in through digital means with hope for healing the waters. This research interweaves these myriad aspects of *Honour Water* in an effort to fully articulate the contributions, possibilities, and lessons of this collaborative community-determined work.

Shared Fluidity

Just as water connects us, so too does our term for water, nibi, which runs through many languages including Anishinaabemowin, Cree, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Atikamekw, Montagnais, Kickapoo, Shawnee, Abenaki, Malaseet, Passamaquoddy, Massachusetts and Munsee (Bloomfield, 1946; Costa, 2003). It is used today to mean “water” and also as the term for “plenty.”

Reflecting its plentifulness, water gives us life. Now, we must in turn support the life of water. The wellbeing of nibi is central to concerns for us as Anishinaabeg (Severtson et al., 2002). In our teachings, it was promised that water would always flow down to us as long as we remembered to sing and make offerings to the water. These songs and offerings are especially vital right now as the health of the freshwaters of the Great Lakes is at great risk (McGregor, 2009; McGregor & Whitaker, 2001). While Anishinaabekwewag understand part of their responsibilities to be water carriers (Anderson et al., 2009), these teachings are relevant to people of all forms from all communities, as waters all over suffer the impact of toxins and climate changes.

Digital games are one such way to widely share teachings about the waters and create awareness about how to heal the waters, since gameplay can express Indigenous teachings by merging design, code, art, and sound (LaPensée, 2014). For example, in the suite of touchscreen games *Gathering Native Foods* developed for the Roots of Wisdom museum exhibition, players are asked to gather salmon, wild blackberries, and clams for a community feast, but if players gather more salmon than is needed, or try to grab at berries so quickly that they gather unripe berries, or if they stay too long at the ocean trying to take more clams while the tide is coming in, they risk losing the gameplay. The gameplay guides players to slow down and consider reciprocal relationships with life (LaPensée, 2016). Similarly, *Honour Water* is a game that engages players in reciprocity with the waters that run in, through, and around all. Uniquely, the game structures singing as gameplay to activate this reciprocity (<http://www.honourwater.com/>).

Inspired by Anishinaabeg grandmothers leading ceremonial walks known as Nibi Walks and the need to share water songs, *Honour Water* aims to bring awareness to threats to the waters and offers pathways to water teachings through interactive digital media in the form of a game. *Honour Water*, including how the game was developed, the game’s design, and how players have

enacted the gameplay, serves as an act of resistance and resurgence (Martineau & Ritskes, 2014) in that it draws attention to concerns for the waters while activating the use of Anishinaabemowin. The game welcomes anyone to play by listening to and singing along with three water songs with an option for the player to record their own audio. Anishinaabe singing protocol and ways to represent teachings were delicately addressed during the development process in the context of adapting ceremonial work into a digital game. Ultimately, the hope of this work is to transfer music, language, and teachings between individuals and communities through gameplay that encourages comfort with listening to and activating Anishinaabemowin.

When we sing, we breathe // motivation

When ikwewag (women) of the Oshkii Giizhik Singers gather by the fireplace at the heart of the Ojibwemowining Digital Arts Studio at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, space is warm from the fire, just as our voices are from our collective laughter. For all of us, it is an act of survivance (Vizenor, 1994; 2008) that we are even alive to join together so that we may sing side by side. In this circle, we begin by releasing whatever may be troubling us, from recent moments to the past to what echoes through us from traumas passed down from blood memory. As our voices rise, so do our thoughts, and as our drums resonate with warmth, so do our hearts, for one another, our families, our communities, the waters, and all life.

As pipelines continue to fill the land, toxins spread, oil spills occur, and the waters continue to be neglected, there is a greater need to share songs and teachings with Anishinaabeg wherever they may currently be living and to all waters everywhere. In the summer of 2016, over 300 people came together in council at Garden River First Nation at the Great Lakes Gathering to discuss the waters (Onaman Collective, 2016). Circles of men, women, two-spirited people, and youth shared their perspectives to the Elders Council, which in turn became directions from the Elders for actions all of us can take. Among many vital actions, elders shared that we all must continue to offer asemaa (tobacco) and maintain ceremony when uplifting the waters as well as continue to coordinate water walks and host ceremonies and gatherings for the water. Water ceremonies are to be held in relation to the moon cycles and in sacred places. Our language is to be spoken and our teachings are to be lived by. People from all of these circles have roles in participating in the healing of the waters and thus for the greater community.

In addition to this Anishinaabe-centered call to action, across the world, Indigenous women perceive their role as leaders to be intricately connected to addressing issues with environmental harm and climate changes (Whyte, 2014). *Honour Water* is a droplet in a wider body of collective action led by Indigenous women. As Anishinaabekwewag collaborating with game developers at the company Pinnguaq to bring singing into game form, we recognize the design, development, and implementation of *Honour Water* as an extension of our work as water carriers. During water walks, songs are sung to the waters and amplified through carrying copper pails and copper cups. When the waters held within the copper then carry the resonations of the songs, these waters are gifted back to larger bodies of waters in the hopes that the songs will permeate through the motion of the waters. We regularly walk and sing for the waters with good intentions as well as participate in actions to address issues that threaten the waters. *Honour Water* carries songs from these water walks to many forms of players from many communities.

All communities are called on to do whatever they can to speak up for and speak to the waters. We must work together to change the idea of water as a commodity when in fact water is

living. As Josephine Mandamin has experienced, the waters are still when they are lifeless, and they can be brought back into motion and given life again through asemaa (tobacco) and singing (Anderson, 2010). We need to shift more attention from merely using water to instead caring for water. Together, our intention is to uplift the waters by expressing through a game, *This is how you began, and this is how we hope for you to be again.*



Figure 1. Water Song
Elizabeth LaPensée, 2017

As we create, we enact // approach

Regardless of where we are positioned on Turtle Island, water songs are meaningful for us all and travel with intention. Notably, water songs found their way to Elizabeth LaPensée through friends and family, even as an Anishinaabekwe who was born and raised on the West Coast. Since there are Anishinaabeg living in the Pacific Northwest, she was asked to share these songs at gatherings held at the Native American Youth and Family Center in Portland, Oregon alongside community members sharing language, skills such as beading and moccasin making, and, of course, food.

However, limitations came about when Beth was called back to the Great Lakes closer to Baawaating where her family is from, although she did her best to ensure her urban community could continue learning and singing:

I was asked by elders to record water songs that are allowed to be shared digitally so that they could continue to learn and pass these on when I was away. It was an honor to be asked to help and so I video recorded songs for elder and Intertribal Canoe Family member Mary Renville on her phone, but there was a major flaw in this process that we didn't see coming—when her phone broke, the songs went missing, and I was too far away to be re-recorded by the community. I then asked myself: How can water songs be shared in a better way that can express singing alongside the teachings and the meanings?

Thus, *Honour Water* was in part brought about by these gatherings and the need for remotely sharing water songs and teachings, especially for when communities have difficulties gathering at the same time and place. Fortuitously, Beth had been collaborating with the game company Pinnguaq, and Margaret Noodin and the Miskwaasining Nagamojig, on an Anishinaabemowin version of the singing game *Singuistics*, which started with Inuktitut. While living beside Gichigami in Minnesota, she met Sharon M. Day, who coordinates the Nibi Walks, and Lyz Jaakola, who gathers together the Oshkii Giizhik Singers. And there, in the heart of the place where such vital fresh water is under threat, water carriers, singers, and language speakers came together to work on the singing game *Honour Water* with the hope of sharing songs for healing the waters that can be shared with all people, because the wellbeing of water is vital for all life.

Prior to the development of *Honour Water*, Sharon M. Day began putting together an album of water songs as a form of support for the Nibi Walks. A great deal of discussion around what water songs can be recorded and shared publicly took place in the context of releasing a CD. *Honour Water* was gifted with two songs written by Sharon M. Day, who has been a leading voice for using singing as a way to revitalize the waters. Another song was written collaboratively by elders who joined together at the annual Oshkii Giizhik Singers gathering at Fond du Lac in Minnesota. In all instances, the songs were approved by Anishinaabe communities with the understanding that the game welcomes players from all over to sing with good intentions for the waters.

These good intentions are reflected in the game art creation process. Elizabeth LaPensée hand draws her work and inks layers individually, then digitizes them and lays in textures made from real copper, water, birch bark, and other materials influenced by being Anishinaabe and Michif. While she gathers these materials, she offers asemaa (tobacco) and songs. Gathering of materials usually takes the form of taking digital photos rather than physical removal from the land as a way to ensure their ongoing presence. One photo can be reused and remixed in many ways. Cellular slices of plants and closeups of molecules are woven into scenes alongside symbols imprinted on Grandfather Rocks generations ago. Each artwork subtly represents a multifold of teachings which gently move in the backdrop during the gameplay.

While the creation of artwork was responsive to Anishinaabe teachings, so too was the game development process. Elder input was sought out and helped inform the game design. Songs were carefully selected based on input from community members from singing circles such as the Oshkii Giizhik Singers and Miskwaasining Nagamojig. The way in which players engage in the gameplay emphasizes embracing the experience and entering songs with immediacy, which in some instances facilitates intimacy for players (often those who are Anishinaabe or are at least

Indigenous and familiar with singing), and in others causes discomfort (so far those who are not Anishinaabe and have no prior singing experience) due to the speed and complexity of the songs and Anishinaabemowin. While there are varying player responses, the design reflects Anishinaabe ways of knowing and decidedly Anishinaabe design. With each breath, with each sound, we resonate, and in our resonation is creation.

As sound flows, so does water // about the game

Honour Water is considered a game because it provides a playful and thus safe way to experience water songs and Anishinaabemowin. The game is played by listening to water songs and, depending on the player's preference, either singing along unrecorded or recorded. The songs, which include "Miigwech Nibi," "Gii Bimoseyaan," and "Gizaagi'igonan Gimaamaanan Aki," represent low-, medium-, and high-level singing challenges. The levels are determined by the complexity of Anishinaabemowin in the lyrics, which are sung in Anishinaabemowin, written in Anishinaabemowin in Roman Orthography, and also written in English as translations. Each song shares important water teachings that are relevant to everyone. While the songs are poetic and not necessarily intended to be used directly as conversational phrases, *Honour Water* offers a way to become comfortable with the vocables of Anishinaabemowin and learn about nibi.

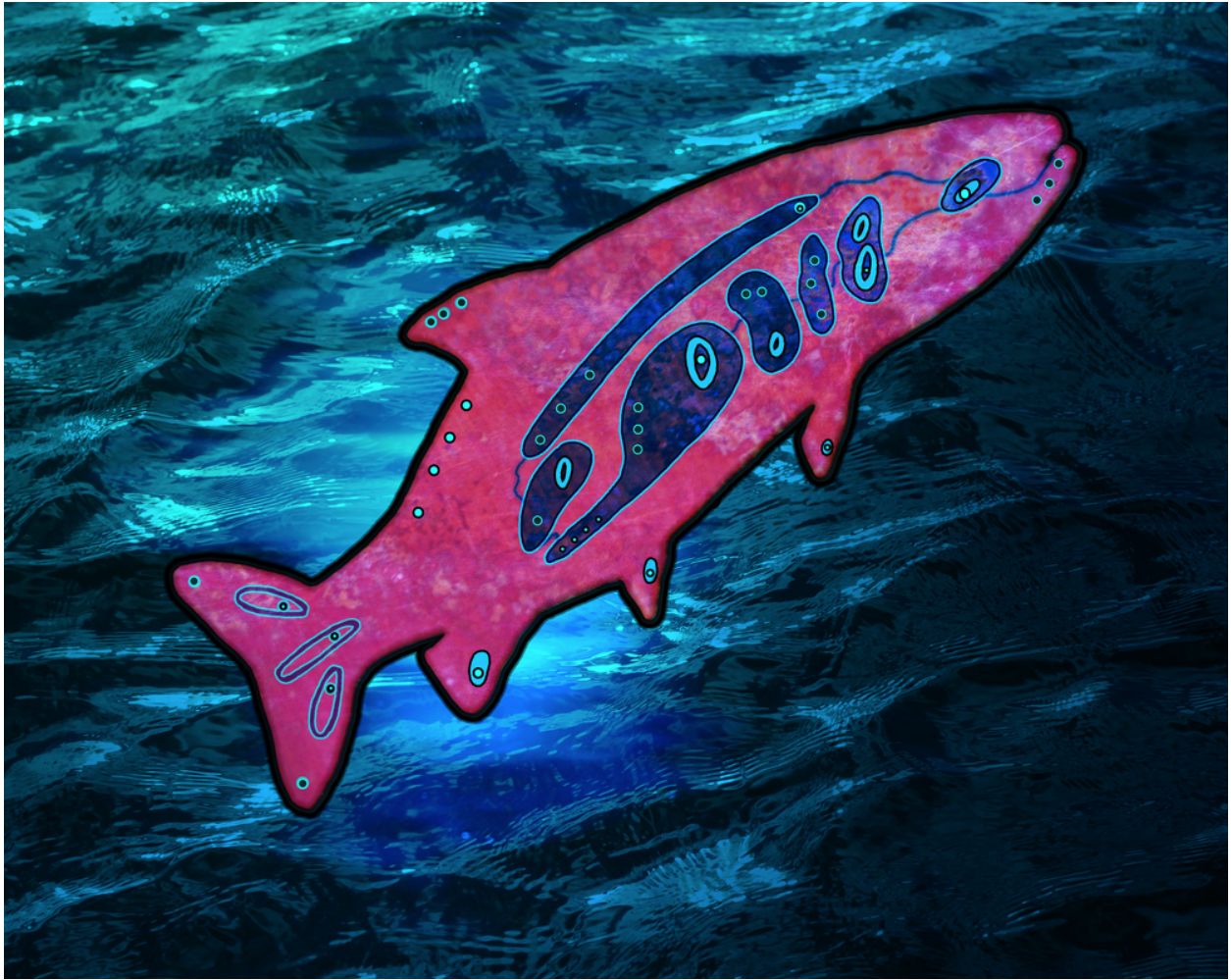
Whether or not *Honour Water* can be definitively described as a game has come up as a question because the gameplay lacks a scoring system which assesses the player's singing. The game very purposefully does not calculate a score based on a player's singing because elders who offered feedback during the initial game design with the team at Pinnguaq felt internal and cross-player competition would detract from the purpose of singing. Instead, the game allows people with a wide range of skills to participate. Players do not need singing experience or fluency in Anishinaabemowin. If they would like to, they can record themselves singing and post their audio directly to social media from the game.

Openly sharing voice recordings of singing requires comfort from players. Anishinaabeg cultural expectations which may or may not be anticipated by the player shape the design. Akin to the shared understanding that a singer must join a song by singing along their best moment to moment in a gathering of Anishinaabekwewag singers even when they may not be familiar with that song, the game jumps right into playing each of the water songs without preparing players with the beat or terms. There are no clear directions, which leaves gameplay open to the player's interpretation. For some players this may be perceived as beneficial to their experience while others may be uncertain until they become familiar with the beat and Anishinaabemowin of a song. Overall, the majority of players understand the design and its expectations for interaction, which then allows the emphasis to be placed on the language and water teachings embedded within the songs.

Players can pause a song at any point and access expanded language details by tapping on an individual term. Each term is broken down to its root, can be listened to repeatedly, as well as seen in a sentence. The player's ability to determine the focus of their interaction and pause during singing gives them a sense of agency in the experience. Agency is vital for feeling, as players have described, comfortable with learning water songs and Anishinaabemowin. This design feature is essential since one of the hopes of *Honour Water* is to share water songs that will be sung beyond the game and encourage familiarity with Anishinaabemowin.

Miigwech Nibi

“Miigwech Nibi” (“Thank You Water”) is a song of gratitude in which we thank the waters for giving the gift of life. It is considered the “low” challenge song due to the repeatable phrases. The song was written by Sharon M. Day for the Nibi Walks and also for any opportunity to sing. The good intentions should even be shared with a glass of water to acknowledge that water is not an object to be consumed; water is a form of life.



*Figure 2. “Resilience”
Elizabeth LaPensée, 2015*

Just as we are influenced by the harm done to the waters, so are the walkers, the crawlers, the flyers, and the swimmers. Fish in waters harmed by toxins show signs of diseases such as malformations. This affects not only the fish, but other life as well, since they are unsafe to eat. Their nourishment has been compromised by the damage done to how they are nourished. “Resilience” (Figure 2) depicts a salmon leaping in water that resonates with serene clarity in a hopeful future of many generations of salmon jumping towards life.

Gii Bimoseyaan

“Gii Bimoseyaan” (“I Walked”) speaks to walking for the waters, all of which is understood to be sacred. The song is a “medium” challenge because of the range of phrases. Sharon M. Day originally wrote this song for the Nibi Walks. It can be sung to water while walking along streams, rivers, ponds, marshes, lakes, oceans, and any other body of water.



Figure 3. “The Water Carries Her, She Carries the Water”
Elizabeth LaPensée, 2016

In “The Water Carries Her, She Carries the Water” (Figure 3), a water carrier’s singing fills the water with the vibrations of sounds that bring molecular healing. Imprints of molecules that have been sung through water songs frame the woman’s face. Just as she sings to the waters, the healing echoes back to her.

Gizaagi'igonan Gimaamaanan Aki

“Gizaagi'igonan Gimaamaanan Aki” (“We Are All Loved by Mother Earth”) expresses love for women in friendship and the love given by grandmothers. The song was written by women elders at Women Drummers of all Native Nations Gathering in 2011, an annual gathering held by the Oshkii Giizhik Singers in Northern Minnesota. During an afternoon singing circle, elders said that they wanted to make a song. Among the fifty women at the gathering, many were expert singers and language speakers. As a community, they discussed and came to decisions on the beat and phrases. The fluidity of this song is honoured in the game’s focus on giving players unmonitored space to record themselves singing without being tracked for tone or correctness, which was particularly important to Lyz Jaakola of the circle of singers and elders:

Every time we sing it, I'm reminded of the beauty in the process that that group of women chose to negotiate through the differences of creative opinion. We came to consensus on the terms by allowing both ‘versions’ to coexist where possible. There is a deep and important teaching in that. We were blessed with more than a song that day.



Figure 4. “The Women, They Hold the Ground”

Elizabeth LaPensée, 2015

“The Women, They Hold the Ground” (Figure 4) is inspired by the Oshkii Giizhik Singers and depicts a community of women in the hopes of recognizing the beauty and importance of women to the wellbeing of the Earth. Six of the women stand on Earth, while another watches over them from the moon. They sing for healing in unison. Our intention as Anishinaabekwewag is to share the teaching that, as we stand side by side and compete only with our own selves, we uplift all who stand with us in parallel.

As songs echo, our hearts warm // community

Insights about player experiences with *Honour Water* are framed within Indigenous research methodology, namely mino-bimaadiziwin (the good life or a good way of living) as methodology (Debassige, 2010). A “good life” in the Anishinaabe sense does not refer to a binary of “good” and “bad,” but rather acknowledges that life is a journey with many paths and that all paths are intended for growth with the hope of healing. Mino-bimaadiziwin, then, relates living in a ceremonial way to the best of one’s ability. In a research context, mino-bimaadiziwin describes a methodology in which researchers’ positionality is centered in work that ultimately serves communities. Specifically, Elizabeth LaPensée is the central researcher for *Honour Water* who is responsible for developing the game and implementing revisions, while both she and Margaret Noodin are responsible for conducting research and disseminating knowledge. As knowledge carriers and singers, Lyz Jaakola and Sharon M. Day are advisors who are respected equally in the process. *Honour Water* contributes to Indigenous research methodology by providing a model for uplifting and respecting all those involved in the work (Kovach, 2009). Furthermore, *Honour Water* is in and of itself a digital transference of ceremonial practices that has been approved to be shared with all people for the sake of the waters. Mino-bimaadiziwin is thus enacted from *Honour Water*’s design to understanding how the gameplay is received by players.

Methods to glean insights into how *Honour Water* is received stem from the roles and ways of grandmothers (Loppie, 2007). Gathering responses to the game involves facilitating gameplay by offering up the game (ideally without creating situations with pressure to sing), then following up by asking a handful of open-ended questions. Much of the work is in listening to players as they process their experiences. Interpretations across all of us as Anishinaabekwewag researchers are collaborative, similar to the process of writing the song “Gizaagi’igonan Gimaamaan Aki” with grandmothers.

Responses from Anishinaabeg players, Indigenous players, and players from a myriad of cultures have been gathered through conversations (Kovach, 2010) with Margaret Noodin and Elizabeth LaPensée, as well as group playtesting sessions accompanied by sharing circles (Lavallée, 2009) and followed up by written responses to open-ended interview questions. A supplemental formal play session with written responses to an open-ended interview available as an online survey was led by Dave Gaertner at the University of British Columbia. Formal play sessions and conversations about informal play are still ongoing. In alignment with Indigenous research and patterned after the social impact game *Survivance* which continues to be played and iterated on since its first demo in 2009 and official launch in 2011 (LaPensée, 2014), *Honour Water* is considered active and continuous, always open to responses and responsive to the interests of players, ranging from addressing access issues, to listening to interpretations, to planning for future design iterations.

Thus far, *Honour Water* has been perceived to generate and reify connections to and respect for Anishinaabe culture, promote awareness of Anishinaabemowin, and honour the waters through the songs and art. Concerns with access for players with limited technology have been addressed, while the speed and complexity of the water songs have been left untouched despite some players experiencing difficulty with following along with Anishinaabemowin. Players are encouraged to first play the game privately and take advantage of the feature to pause the gameplay and look closely at and listen to Anishinaabemowin. The game continues to be played in a variety of contexts ranging from Anishinaabe community gatherings, to intermixed gatherings, to public university events, to private intergenerational gatherings, to privately in homes by individual players. As a game, *Honour Water* is one way of many to honour the waters from an Anishinaabe worldview.

The contributions and lessons from *Honour Water* can be understood by looking at technology access issues, the ways in which the game has been played, how players have connected to gameplay, and player responses the overall game, including layers of art, sound, and language.

Access

Word about the launch of *Honour Water* moved quickly through social media and from community to community. However, several potential players found that they were unable to play because the game is only available on iPads, which was an unintended limitation created by financial restraints since *Honour Water* was developed only with a seed grant from the Pollination Project. Resolving access issues is especially important in the context of making games that are primarily for Indigenous players. Remote territories often have restricted access to Internet and Indigenous community members may have limited access to technology (LaPensée & Lewis, 2011). Elizabeth LaPensée, who was understanding given her own experiences with limited technology access, determined that the best response to meet the needs of communities would be to record gameplay footage videos and post them online. That way, at the very least, the singing and the basics of the Anishinaabemowin therein are shared more directly. The gameplay footage videos are hosted online and can be downloaded by anyone provided they have at least brief access to Internet. Once the videos are downloaded, they can be played anywhere. Soon after the gameplay footage videos were posted, many more people were able to access the songs, and although they are missing the gameplay features, this form of transference nonetheless fulfills the core purpose of the game. Looking at best approaches and responses to inform future work is just as valued as understanding the perceived impact of the game.

Reverberation

Since the launch, the songs have been shared at gatherings by playing the gameplay footage videos as well as pairing the videos with live singing. Whatever way in which they are brought to new communities and events, they have been carried with good intentions. The songs can be played at public gatherings to replace or supplement live singers thanks to the easily accessible online gameplay footage videos of *Honour Water*. For example, the gameplay footage videos were played via a projector at Ciimaan/Kahuwe'ya/Qajak hosted by the University of Toronto's Indigenous Language Initiative Department. Women who had previously but briefly played the game sang along with the videos live. The videos thus provided a backdrop resonance for women who wanted

to share these songs but were not yet very familiar with them. Notably, in some instances, digital photos of asemaa (tobacco) have been offered while organizers make a request to play the videos. The protocol of gifting for songs is still practiced, even if it is in a digital form. The offering is perceived as just as valuable, because it is good intention which carries these songs from one voice to another.

Mother Sound

When played with repetition or when engaged by players who already have an understanding of Anishinaabemowin, *Honour Water* passes on terms which are important to water teachings. Even players who are not experienced in Anishinaabemowin will tend to pick up core phrases. So far, the most transferable and remembered terms are “miigwech” (thanks) and “nibi” (water). The central hope in developing Honour Water was to activate “nibi” in minds and voices, so we are grateful to see that “nibi” carries on with the vast majority of players.

For players who are not familiar with Anishinaabemowin, the game can initially seem intimidating. However, we have determined not to iterate the design and add sing-along style ticks to beats or bouncing visual cues as suggested by players who experience difficulty, all of whom so far are not Anishinaabeg and many of whom are not Indigenous. While the game is open to all players, design choices are geared for Anishinaabeg players and should not be changed in ways that would diminish Anishinaabeg forms of communication and interaction. Additional sounds and markers which bounce above terms would disrupt the resonations carried in singing and the attention currently called on by the moving art. Instead, *Honour Water* maintains its Anishinaabe-centred design as a form of resistance (Martineau and Ritskes, 2014). Players are encouraged to continue to replay the songs until they have enough familiarity with Anishinaabemowin and the drum beats to follow along smoothly and expand their abilities to a point where they can simultaneously pay attention to the designs in the art alongside the phrases in the songs.

Players still need to be cautious of the need to transition their understanding of Anishinaabemowin from singing into speaking. There are discrepancies between the way terms sound when spoken compared to when they are sung, which requires players to access the additional features of the game and listen to individual terms as well as learn about their roots and uses in order to transfer them to conversation. *Honour Water* is intended to be a pathway into comfort with singing in Anishinaabemowin as well as familiarity with sounds so that they may continue expanding their knowledge in Anishinaabemowin by communicating with elders, first language speakers, fluent speakers, and community members, as well as engaging in a wide range of resources, gatherings, and classes. The continuation and resurgence of Anishinaabemowin is both a lifelong and intergenerational process.

Connectivity

The vocal presence inherent in the water songs and the visual expressions embedded in the game’s art have been interpreted as peaceful, serene, and beautiful by players from varying communities. Players who are Anishinaabeg tend to recognize the rhythm of the songs as Indigenous and the art style as Woodlands and immediately make connections when they begin accessing a song through the menu. There is excitement and a sense of reinforcing our continuation in collaboration with technology—rather than in juxtaposition to it—from Anishinaabeg players who describe a feeling of belonging. In one instance so far, a player could recognize sounds of Anishinaabemowin she

had heard from her mother, although she does not consider herself a language speaker. Playing *Honour Water* inspired her to return to learning Anishinaabemowin. In this way, *Honour Water* is an act of survivance (Vizenor, 1994; 2008), a game which exemplifies how we are not merely surviving, but rather thriving. Our teachings can be expressed in many forms, including interactive digital media such as games, in ways which engage us in connecting.

Digital games can also facilitate extensions of connections to the land. Much like in the alternate reality game developed by Elizabeth LaPensée and Squamish herbalist and artist Cease Wyss with guidance from Cree filmmaker Loretta Todd, which draws attention to waterways now hidden under concrete streets (LaPensée & Moulder, 2017), water songs from *Honour Water* have been brought to urban spaces as a way to remember and connect places that were once waterways. Connections between a player and the land are then activated through remembrance and honoring, as the land and the waters have many teachings to share if only they are listened to (Simpson, 2014). The listening practiced in *Honour Water* within the context of a playful and thus safe space (so long as players are able to play privately if that is their preferred experience) can be applied anywhere, ranging from catching songs from singers live, to being on the land and listening to the songs in the patterns of sounds offered up by the waters.

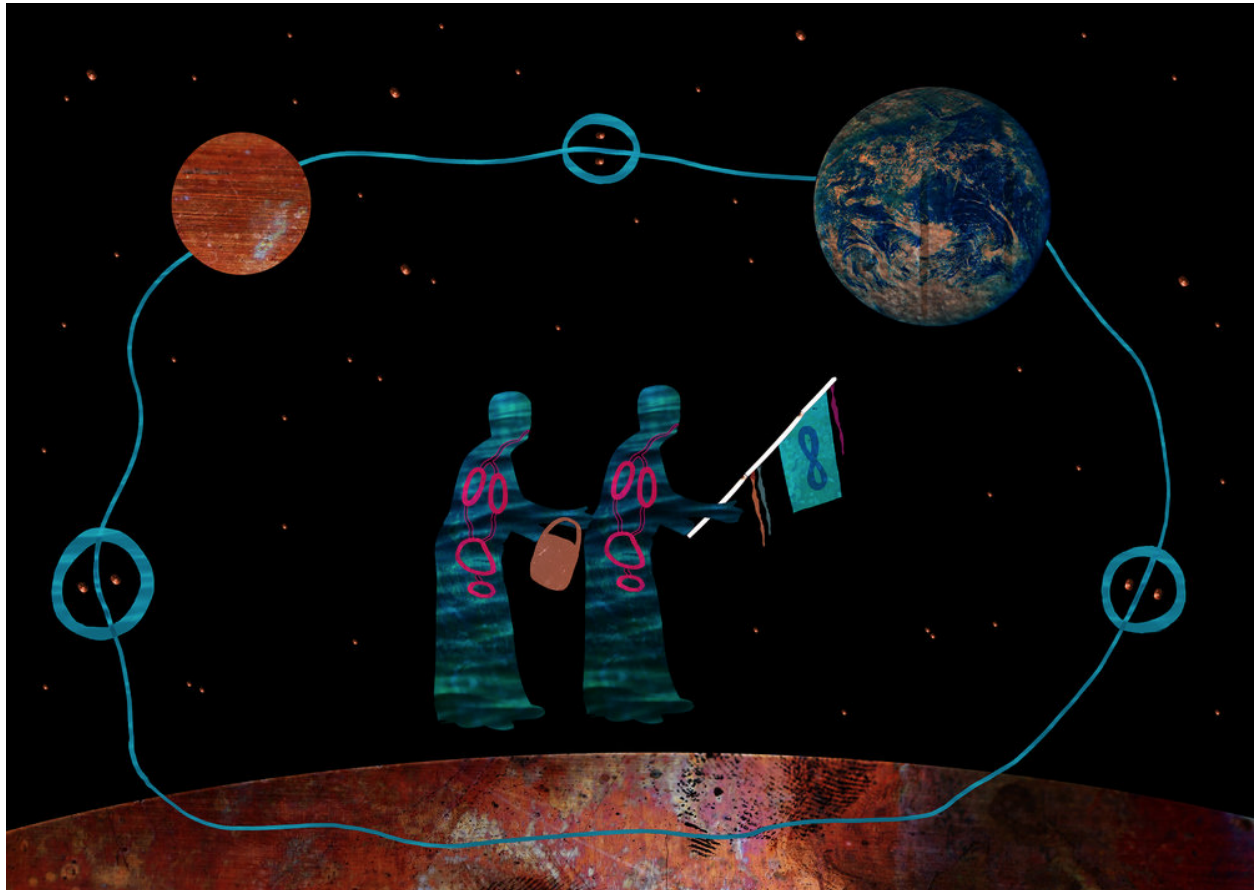


Figure 5. "Our Grandmothers Carry Water from the Other World"
Elizabeth LaPensée, 2016

As we breathe, we create // ongoing work

While games can be designed and developed with hopes for players to take gameplay in particular directions, these connections are still genuinely up to the player to activate. Karyn Recollet (2016) so beautifully describes *Honour Water* as an activation “within and through breath” involving “an act of coming up for air” in which “the breath itself is a worlding process.” As we visit waterways and sing, we realign our bodies and voices in relation to the waters and move in ways that recognize the importance of the waters as well as the land, sky, and stars. These songs can be carried from gameplay to waterways, whether an iPad is brought along or not. In the activation of breath, players electrify and amplify teachings that water is life and connects all.

Although these teachings are pathed by players when they engage in singing as playing in *Honour Water*, it is vital to acknowledge that relationships through sound come from those who came before us. This work and way of being is amplified by acknowledging that “such futuristically ancient activations have always been multiscale” (Gaertner & Recollet, 2016). We are the generations doing our best to enact mino-bimaadiziwin (the good way of life) by sharing and living by water teachings so that they may continue to echo to the next generations. With gratitude for all who pause, listen, and resonate.

Miigwech

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