

TRACING ROOTS

Study Guide

*A documentary film by
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FILM & GUIDE OVERVIEW

“Tracing Roots” is a heartfelt glimpse into the world of Haida Elder and weaver Delores Churchill. This film is a portrait infused with her passion and curiosity. It is a story that shares her dedication to learning, mastering and teaching the art of basket making and to linking the past to the present.

The film follows Delores on a journey to understand and replicate the spruce root hat found in a retreating glacier with the remains of a man, known as the Kwāday Dān Ts’inchī (Long Ago Person Found) discovery. Her search to understand the roots of the woven hat crosses cultures and borders, and involves artists, scholars and scientists.

In creating a film about Delores, film maker Ellen Frankenstein is telling a story about beauty, legacy and ageing, and the revitalization of weaving. In the region where the film is set, weaving involves artists throughout Southeast Alaska and part of Canada and the U.S. Northwest, as they combine a contemporary aesthetic with traditional methods. The documentary also raises challenging questions about understanding and interpreting ownership, knowledge and connection. After watching an early version of the film, Delores described it as being about “connection” to where we live, the art we make and the people we teach.

CURRICULUM APPLICATIONS

“Tracing Roots” is suitable for middle school, secondary, college, and university students taking courses relating to:

Anthropology, Archaeology, Culture Studies, Indigenous Studies, Northwest Coast Art, Heritage and History, Art, Culture, and Law, Intellectual Property and Repatriation, Canadian Studies, Ageing and Gerontology, Environmental Studies, Museum Studies, Ethics.

This study guide is designed to help teachers and students develop an understanding of Indigenous history, heritage and contemporary artistic tradition. Discussion points, classroom activities and assignments, and additional resources are provided to assist in delving deeper into some of the issues raised in “Tracing Roots,” including: the links between heritage and the perpetuation of culture; the concepts of stewardship and caretaking; the protection of and control over artistic works as intellectual property; and the role of Elders in teaching and learning traditional cultural practices.

BACKGROUND

As the filmmaker narrates: “I was asked to document a travelling Northwest Coast art class. As I watched Delores share her

knowledge of an art that could have been lost, I realized it would be easy to tell a story focused on all she’s done, a chronology of her past — but what about a story that went forward? I wanted to take a journey with Delores, and see her in action. That’s when Delores told me about the Long Ago Person Found man and his hat. That’s when Delores told me she’d studied the hat before, but wanted to see it again. And so our journey began.”

The Kwāday Dān Ts’inchī (Long Ago Person Found) individual was a healthy young traveller. Carbon dating and other studies suggest that he was alive about 200 years ago. He died in snow, which turned to ice, and his body was eventually revealed on the edge of a retreating glacier, in a time of rapid warming. What was unusual is that his hat and other materials were preserved so well.

Delores, a Haida master weaver, was drawn to see the hat at first because she wanted to study how it was made. Every basket or hat tells a story about who created it, how it was used, and where it came from. After Delores took part in a DNA study and she learned she had a connection to the Kwāday Dān Ts’inchī man, her interest in the hat and the young man who wore it increased greatly.

This film documents Delores’ journey to see the Long Ago Person Found hat, under the care of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations and housed in the Conservation Laboratory in Whitehorse, Northern Canada, with public access to it restricted out of respect for the deceased.

This documentary is telling Delores’ story, and shows how she interprets the DNA results and, subsequently, the meaning that she attaches to them. Along the way, critical issues are explored concerning heritage, stewardship and protection of culturally sensitive material, the role of Elders in Indigenous society, and the legacy of colonialism in North America. Every answer raises more questions and, like Delores’ own baskets, the story woven is a complex and intriguing tale of reconnecting with history, heritage, and, ultimately, with oneself.

BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

Heritage is who you are and where you come from. It’s comprised of the stories, memories and places that make up a culture. It’s also the family stories, practices and genealogy that are shared within a community. Finally, heritage also includes



the physical things that embody these stories, passed on from generation to generation, and the tangible places that are visited over and over again. Heritage is all things from the past that continue to be made meaningful in the present.

Heritage is a pretty complicated idea, and it’s pretty personal. After all, it’s tied in with how you view your place in the world and your identity, and having a strong sense of your heritage can make you feel secure in your knowledge of your past, and therefore present and future.

Think about your own heritage. Who are you? Where do you come from? What is the history of your family, of your community? What stories have you heard over and over in your lifetime? What places are important? What things have been passed on through generations? What is your identity?

Now, think about the parts of your heritage story that aren’t quite clear — the parts that people aren’t sure of or have been forgotten. How would you feel if new information came to light to fill in those gaps in memory? What if that knowledge challenged your heritage or conflicted with the stories you are so familiar with?

Imagine that an heirloom relating to your community’s history was discovered. Would you feel connected to it? Would it be important to your family? How might it change the way you think about your heritage?

These are the questions that are explored in “Tracing Roots,” so keep in mind your thoughts and feelings about your own heritage while watching the film, and enjoy!



Sketches by Dave Rubin.

THE STORY IN OUTLINE

This section provides a time-stamped summary of the different stages of the film, with the key themes developed and discussion questions relating to each of these themes. This enables instructors to pause the film to discuss what has just happened in the story, or to review the film sequentially after watching it in its entirety.

0:00 to 4:00 / INTRODUCTION

The film opens with scenery of glaciers with a score of acoustic music. Delores describes the discovery of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî hat and her connection as a weaver. Delores is shown collecting roots with a younger woman and speaking to a child, giving instructions. Various people remark on how they feel about Delores and her role in the community. Ellen introduces the film as about a travelling Northwest Coast art course, focused on Delores’ experience with the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî discovery.

1. Cinematography

Think about the imagery used to introduce this story. What does it contribute to creating a sense of “place” in the film? How does the music contribute to this?

2. Personality of the central figure

How does the film introduce Delores Churchill? What do people say about her? What does she say about herself?

3. Knowledge and inter-generational teaching and learning

As an Elder in her community, what roles does Delores hold for her community, and for younger people?

4. Connecting with heritage

When Delores is speaking about the discovery of ancient human remains, she says “the first thing that happened was the hat flew up in the air.” What is the significance of this to her?

4:00 to 6:00 / THE KWÄDAY DÄN TS’INCHÎ DISCOVERY

The Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî discovery within a melting glacier is described, and the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations is introduced. Frances Oles describes what is known about the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî individual. Lani Hotch, of the Chilkat Indian Tribe, also describes her knowledge of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî man. Scenery of vast expanses of landscape is shown.

1. Discovery of ancient human remains

Frances Oles describes that the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî, or Long Ago Person Found, discovery was made in “the traditional territory” of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. What does this term mean and why is it important?

2. Significance of language

Some people use the term Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî while others use Long Ago Person Found to describe this find. Is the choice of which term to use significant? Why or why not?

3. Caretakers

The Champagne and Aishihik are described in the film as “caretakers” of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî individual and associated objects. What rights might this give them, and what responsibilities follow?

4. Scientific study

Think about how the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî man is described. What is known about his age, health, diet, culture, and origins? What remains uncertain about him.

6:00 to 10:00 / WEAVING

Delores is shown handling basketry, describing how it is made, and the variety of uses it has had. Delores discusses her view of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî hat and her desire to view it again.

1. Basketry

Describe some of the aspects of weaving that Delores talks about. What is important in this process? What were the baskets used for?

2. Artifacts and identity

Delores had previously completed a detailed analysis of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî hat. What remarks does she make about the hat? Would other analyses be useful to learn more about it?

11:00 to 16:00 / TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Delores describes her childhood and how she began to learn about basketry from her mother. She discusses the various teachers she has had and how she has tried to pass on her knowledge of weaving.

1. Language

Delores describes growing up in British Columbia and Alaska and moving across borders. She notes her first language was Haida and she remains a fluent speaker. How does language relate to culture?

2. Sharing knowledge

Delores had many teachers who guided her knowledge of weaving. Who were some of these teachers? Do you think knowledge shared within families might differ from knowledge shared between clans, or cultures? Why or why not?

3. Cultural survival

Why did people from other cultures teach Delores their styles of weaving?

4. Weaving and environment

What is Delores’ approach to gathering roots for weaving? What does this say about her view of the environment?

17:00 to 22:00 / THE HAT

The journey to see the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî hat begins, and Delores describes her experiences growing up in the Prince Rupert area. Her specific interest in the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî discovery and her desire to identify the hat’s cultural connections are discussed.

1. Artifact vs. human remains

Access to the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî hat is restricted because it is not classified as merely an “artifact” but as something found with human remains. Why might this be the case? What are the differences between these two categories?

2. Indigenous oppression

Delores describes her experiences attending school and visiting restaurants in Prince Rupert. What was significant about these experiences? How might they have been different for someone of non-Aboriginal descent, and why?

3. Control of images

After long and careful discussion, Delores and Ellen are given permission by the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations to view and photograph the hat, but not to include the images in this film. Why do you think that may be?

4. Connecting with heritage

What was Delores looking for in viewing the hat that might help her determine the cultural origin of its maker? What did she find?

22:00 to 25:00 / AUTHENTICITY

A series of woven baskets in museum collections are depicted as Delores describes details about them. She discusses the process of creating a replica of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî hat.

1. Learning from artifacts

Delores describes attending many museums to view their collections of baskets. How was this important in her learning? Why is Delores so excited when she is viewing the baskets in the archive?

2. Replica vs. authenticity

A replica of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî hat was created by Delores. How did Delores feel about weaving this replica? How is an “authentic” artifact different from a “replica?” Do you think this is important, and why or why not?

3. Weaver’s identity

What does Delores suggest about who might have made the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchî hat? Why is she still uncertain?

25:00 to 29:00 / BIOLOGICAL HERITAGE

Delores took part in a DNA study to see if she was genetically related to a different individual found at the On Your Knees Cave Site located on the Prince of Wales Island. The results from the DNA study surprised her. The study showed that Delores, along with thousands of other Aboriginal people, belong to the same haplogroup as the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí man. A haplogroup refers to specific genetic markers shared by people with a distant common ancestor on the matrilineal or patrilineal line. This means that Delores and many others share a distant connection to the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí individual. This study, which focused on understanding genetic relationships on a broad level, was led by Dr. Brian Kemp and is discussed in the film. Upon learning of her distant connection to the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí individual, Delores describes how this knowledge has changed how she views the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí man, his hat, and weaving in general, a tradition that was almost lost.

A separate and independent “community DNA” study led by the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations had a different goal from Dr. Kemp’s study: it aimed to connect Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí on a person-to-person basis and to identify any direct living relatives. Aboriginal individuals from Southeast Alaska, Northwest British Columbia, and the Yukon participated in the community led DNA study. Ultimately, 17 “living relatives” were found. A living relative refers to people who have identical or very similar specific genetic sequences to the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí individual. These two studies demonstrate that there are different degrees of genetic relatedness: while many people, including Delores, belong to Haplogroup A, only a fraction of these individuals are considered to be living relatives of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí man.

1. DNA study

Delores participated in a DNA study that showed, to her surprise, a distant connection to the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí man. How did this change her view of herself, and of weaving? How might this have been different had this study not shown a connection?

2. Biological vs. cultural heritage

DNA is a form of biological heritage. What are the differences between this and cultural heritage? Which one do you think is more important, and why?

3. Visualizing Relatedness

A haplogroup is made up of many thousands of people who share a unique genetic marker, passed down from a common ancestor. Delores was found to belong to the same haplogroup as the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí individual. The community DNA study found 17 living relatives of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí man. These two studies show that while the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí individual may have many relatives, some are much more closely related than others. Can you draw a picture to represent the different genetic connections between the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí man and his many relatives? Think of those belonging to Haplogroup A as a tree trunk and the 17 living relatives of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí man as a separate branch coming off that tree. Can you think of other ways to visualize this relationship?

4. Losing traditional knowledge

What reasons does Delores give for why weaving was almost lost amongst her culture? What other factors can you think of that might have contributed to this loss?

29:00 to 34:00 / CONCLUSION

Ellen discusses her sense of glaciers as fluid, and reflects on the sensitive nature of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí discovery. Delores provides details for how the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí hat was likely made and its cultural connections. She describes a Haida origin story and the importance of learning from ancestors.

1. Cinematography

The narrator and director, Ellen, discusses the nature of glaciers as without boundaries, always shifting, changing, and retreating. How does this image relate to the story being told in this film?

2. Knowledge as power

Delores wanted to see the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí hat again so she could find out from which culture it might have originated. What impacts might this knowledge have for (a) the group who created the hat, and (b) the groups who did not?

3. The hat’s origin(s)

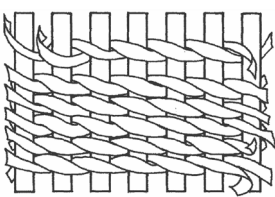
What does Delores finally conclude about the cultural origins of the hat? How does this relate to her views on teaching and learning the traditional practice of weaving?

4. Place and heritage

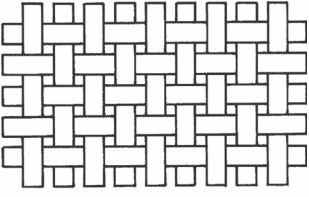
The film concludes with Delores describing the origin place for her people, as well as places she used to gather foods and roots. What is the role of “place” in understanding cultural origins? How does place relate to heritage more broadly?



Examples of different weaving styles; Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí’s hat was made using the twining method (images created by and used with permission of Kathryn Bernick).



Twining



Plaiting

Weaving, Traditional Knowledge & Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Delores’ identity and role as a weaver are at the heart of “Tracing Roots.” As a human technology, weaving has been around for at least 27,000 years, with the earliest evidence so far found in the southeastern Czech Republic (Fowler 1995). Imprinted into fired clay, this early weave used a “twining” method, where the weft is twisted around the warp.

The Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí hat was made using a twining method that continues to be used to make cedar-bark hats by Haida, Tlingit, Tsimshian, and other Indigenous peoples on the Northwest coast of North America (Hansen 2012). The differences in method are subtle to the unfamiliar, but can also be challenging to discern even for the master weaver, as Delores Churchill discusses in her attempt to identify the cultural origin of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí hat.

The intricate knowledge of weaving has been passed down through generations, each generation contributing something new towards the technique, form, and style while preserving the ancient tradition. In this way, weaving may be viewed as a form of traditional knowledge (TK), which collectively forms a community’s cultural and even spiritual identity (WIPO 2014). Because weaving relies on knowledge about which plants to gather, where, and how, it may also be considered a form

of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), which is knowledge about environmental relationships derived from experience and tradition (SER 2014).

The role of Elders in sustaining TK and TEK is essential. They are, after all, the knowledge-holders, the ones with lifetimes’ of experience, of watching their Elders collect plant materials and prepare them for weaving. They are teachers of “tradition, knowledge, culture, values, and lessons” and are role models (FNPO 2014). Where there are relationships between Elders and a culture’s youth, these traditions may be taught and built upon. In the absence of this direct relationship, other means may be necessary to revive cultural knowledge.

As in the case of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí hat, this TK is encoded in the physical object created and, made tangible, becomes available for others to learn from. This is one way that Delores learned about weaving — by looking at baskets in museums and reverse-engineering the process. However, access to knowledge about certain techniques or styles was also restricted within families and kept from other groups — protected as trade secrets. Today, the risk of having TK appropriated and commodified by outsiders to be sold on the mass market is prompting Indigenous groups to look at protecting their cultural heritage as intellectual property.

Sources:

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EXPLORING KEY THEMES

“Tracing Roots” follows several key themes interwoven throughout the film. These include concepts of weaving, heritage, elders in society, cultural property and colonial politics. This section outlines short assignments that can be used to explore these themes a bit further, in relation to the film specifically or as a topic to consider more broadly.

WEAVING

1. Describe the value of weaving to Delores. What does being a weaver mean to her, to her family, and to her culture?
2. In the film, Delores describes the “right way” to collect spruce roots, to prepare them, and to weave them. What is the relationship of a weaver to the land, to the trees, and to the basketry in its final form?
3. Think about the process of weaving a basket. What are all the different roles that weaving plays in a culture?

HERITAGE

1. How is the theme of heritage being taken, lost, and found developed throughout “Tracing Roots?” How might this be particularly relevant for Indigenous communities?
2. What is heritage? What does it include? How would you describe your own heritage? How do you feel about it? Who will you pass on your heritage to?
3. With a friend or family member, make a list of the key elements that you feel are part of your heritage, and then trade your lists. Are there similar things on both lists? What stands out as being different? What factors influence what each of you put on your lists?

ELDERS IN SOCIETY

1. Delores is an Elder in her community. What does this role entail in Haida culture? What rights and responsibilities do Elders have?
2. Consider how Elders in Haida society are viewed. How does this compare with the roles that Elders play in North American society more broadly? What are some of the similarities, and the differences?
3. Make a list of the people you have known who you would

consider to be Elders. What qualities do they share in common? Why are these qualities important to you?

CULTURAL PROPERTY

1. Describe how access to and representations of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchj hat have been controlled. Who was involved, what were their positions on the issue, and why? Do you think the protocol would have been different if the hat had not been found with human remains? What differences does this make?
2. What roles do museums play in collecting and housing artifacts from Indigenous communities? How was this practice beneficial? How was it harmful? How are relationships between museums and Indigenous communities whose heritage is held in museums changing today?
3. Make a list of the groups who might have an interest in the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchj discovery. Think about the possible perspectives, priorities, and protocols of each group in dealing with his remains and associated material culture. Who might share similar views, and why? Who might feel differently, and why?

COLONIAL POLITICS

1. Colonialism in Alaska and British Columbia underlies many of the issues raised in “Tracing Roots.” What are some examples of how colonialism affected Indigenous peoples?
2. Delores described living in Alaska, visiting Haida Gwaii, and growing up in Prince Rupert. How might the international border between Canada and the United States have impacted the Haida people, who live in both countries?
3. What is colonialism? What does this term include? How do you think colonialism is experienced similarly and differently by a) Indigenous peoples, b) newcomers, and c) government officials? How has colonialism shaped your life?



Archaeology of Glacial Landscapes

The history of the earth has seen tremendous fluctuation in climate with corresponding environmental changes. Plants and animals that thrived under the cooler conditions of ice ages, or glacial periods, suffered when temperatures rose during the ensuing interglacial periods. Plants and animals learned to adapt and evolve or suffered extinction, as in the case of the woolly mammoth.

The most recent glaciation ended around 10,000 years ago and, for a period of a few thousands years following that, climatic conditions were variable as the vast ice sheets covering much of the polar areas of the hemispheres melted, causing rising seas, increased storminess, and shifting coastlines. Today, glaciers continue to exist in high elevation areas and at the extreme poles, and these ice masses ebb and flow with cycles that are both local and global, short-term and over long periods.

Despite their harsh conditions, people have long and regularly traveled across glaciated landscapes (Reimer 2000) and archaeologists examine these areas for signs of early human culture. Human materials deposited in such areas can, over time, be covered by ice; prevented from natural decay, these materials are literally frozen in time. It is this context in which the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchj individual was found, and this preservation is the reason why Delores Churchill was able to study his hat.

Similar finds have been made elsewhere in the world, such as in the Alps near the Austrian-Italian border where the ancestral remains of a man who had died in the mountains were found by passing hikers. Ötzi the Iceman, as he came to be known, had been naturally mummified and all of his belongings — fur and leather clothing, and a bag with medicinal plants — were preserved (Chazan 2008). Dating back over 5,000 years,

Ötzi and his belongings are rare, and represent for archaeologists a unique opportunity to learn more about the past.

The exceptional preservation of human remains in frozen contexts can be unsettling, for such discoveries bridge the distance between the ancient past and people in the present who, as in the case of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchj individual, feel closely connected to this person, spiritually, culturally, and emotionally. The responsibility of caring for such individuals and the items they carried with them is even greater, and care must be taken to ensure they are treated with respect in the manner they would have wanted.

While this discovery is viewed today as unique, finds like it may become increasingly common (Curry 2013). Glaciers are melting at an unprecedented rate due to human-caused global warming global warming. In one sense, this global environmental crisis may represent “something of a boon for archaeology” (Doyle 2013). However, as the opportunities for glacial archaeology increase, much of the world’s shorelines — the most densely populated areas today and throughout history — will be inundated with the melted glacial waters, meaning that many important archaeological sites in coastal areas will be submerged. Such conservation challenges raise questions about how people relate to the past and what “saving it” might look like.

Sources:

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FILM DESIGN & CINEMATOGRAPHY

By Ellen Frankenstein

CONTENT AND THEMES

As I got to know Delores, I was struck, as many others are, by her dedication to basketry, her generosity for sharing what she knows, and her passion to grow and learn more. It also seemed like making a film focused on what she had done, a past tense biographical portrait, wouldn’t do justice to the story we wanted to tell about Delores. I wanted to tell a story that wasn’t focused on her past. We needed a journey, a quest that embodied Delores and showed her in the process of learning something new. The Long Ago Person Found individual and his hat intrigued her and it intrigued me.

Framing the film as a search to understand the Long Ago Person Found hat, I felt, would both serve as a portrait of Delores in action and represent a different kind of model for how we tell stories of aging. Delores, who was born in 1929 and was in her eighties during the making of the film, does not portray her age as a time of decline or loss. She embodies what studies show leads to longevity and optimal health, including a sense of purpose and strong connections to family and community.

I haven’t made many films that focus on one person, but instead I tend to take on more broad stories of communities and issues. As this project developed, some of the broadness, such as the questions around intellectual property and ownership and the underlying issue of climate change, emerged. These are themes that interest both Delores and I. The reason I narrate is to help bring out those issues and to explain not only what happens, but what doesn’t. For example, when we were asked not to show the images of the hat in the archive, we had to both think about it and explain it.

REPRESENTATION

The question about depicting the hat in the film gave rise to discussions about cultural protocols and the right to represent — the right to tell stories. As a filmmaker, representation is central to my own craft, and it isn’t always clear how to proceed where there are tensions between stories. For example, in “Tracing Roots,” I narrate how a DNA investigation sparked Delores’ journey. Delores was particularly intrigued by DNA research on ancient remains found in a cave on Prince of Wales Island. That study of Shuká Kaa, also known as On Your Knees Cave, was organized by Sealaska Heritage Institute and conducted by Dr. Brian Kemp, who appears in the film, in order to explore the relationship between the individual found in the cave and the Tlingit people of southeast Alaska. The results indicated that

Delores had no genetic link to that individual. To her surprise, however, they suggested that she shared a distant genetic connection with the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí man. A short film can’t include all details — we make narrative choices even in documentaries, which are reality-based stories. One issue not talked about in the film is that there have been several relevant mitochondrial DNA test studies conducted in Alaska and Canada. The results of a different study, organized by the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, based in the Yukon Territory and Northern British Columbia, sought to identify any living relatives of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí individual. Involving over 240 people in Canada and Alaska, the results identified many who are distantly related, but named 17 people as living relatives of the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí man. Delores was not on this list.

Process in art is more than arriving at a finished product. It’s about understanding materials, their origins, and contextual significance. As a result of discussions about these DNA studies and about showing the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí hat, important questions have been raised concerning the rights and responsibilities of storytellers. As discussed in the section on “DNA and Biological Heritage,” these questions of heritage and identity are both sensitive and complex.

STYLE

For the core of the film, I’m traveling and working with Delores alone. The filmmaking style is simple, “run and gun.” In a few scenes, there are other people helping and that allows for more control of sound and lighting. Working with a crew can also take away from some of those moments that happen when you work one on one. Over the years making the film, the project shifted, too. Delores has been interviewed and videotaped a lot. But in this project, I kept asking her not just to be in front of the camera but to help shape what we made, to look at rough cuts, to talk about how to solve issues, and to think about where we should share and show the final film.

The sound design is an important element in “Tracing Roots.” I choose to score the film and work with a composer to bring out a sense of the journey, of Delores’s sense of wonder and eagerness to learn, and to underscore tension, mystery and somberness. Enhancing natural elements, like adding sounds of ground squirrels, ravens, eagles and wind are typical to this style of documentary filmmaking. Since this film is in part about making art of out of the environment, really hearing the places we travelled to or pulled roots from is as valuable as hearing words of narration or interviews.



DNA and Biological Heritage

Research into deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA, has only been around since the 1950s and represents a fast-growing field of genetic research today. These complex molecules form chromosomes and direct the development of an organism. The more closely related two people are, the more DNA they will share in common. However, even a slight difference in DNA can make a big difference, such as in the case of humans and chimpanzees, which share about 99% of their DNA (Gibbons 2012). 99% might sound like we are very closely related, and yet our common ancestor existed millions and millions of years ago.

The kind of genetic mapping that Delores Churchill underwent relies on mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), which is inherited maternally — meaning, women will pass it on to their sons and daughters, but only their daughters will pass it on to their children. Dr. Brian Kemp, the molecular anthropologist who spoke with Delores in Tracing Roots, determined that Delores and the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí individual share a long ago maternal ancestor. The limitation of mtDNA is that it is difficult to know how long ago that maternal ancestor lived — only that there is a genetic relationship between them. In this case, the genetic study showed that both Delores and the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí man are at minimum related by mtDNA Haplogroup A, which is the most common Haplogroup shared by Indigenous people in Northern America and people in East Asia. This means the maternal ancestor they share could have lived many, many thousands of years ago. Determining how closely related two people are genetically is thus very challenging. There are also questions concerning the accuracy of mtDNA and, more broadly, about the dangers of relying on biological understandings of “origins” (IPCB n.d.).

Today, with expanding genetic technologies, there is increasing interest in DNA mapping on contemporary populations to identify biological relationships between groups. With this technology come some significant social and ethical issues to consider, including ensuring that genetic material is collected with informed consent, and clarifying the bounds of DNA as intellectual property (NHGRI 2014). Cultural

protocols must be followed to ensure any study completed is respectful and done in the right way.

Genetic mapping also raises the issue of how people think about their identity. Corporations such as ancestry.com (2014) promise that you can “discover your ethnicity” and “connect with new relatives” through DNA testing. This raises several questions concerning the difference between biological and social or cultural identities (IPinCH 2014). For example, is a biological relationship more “real” than a social one? If you are adopted into a family, are they not your “real” family because you do not share a genetic connection? Or are they your real family because of the ongoing love, respect, and care that are involved in that social relationship? If you are raised Irish Catholic, and learn that you have a Native American maternal ancestor, should you give up your Irish heritage and take on a new cultural persona? Does a biological relationship necessarily give one the right to join a different social community?

It also raises questions concerning the ethical responsibilities of individuals and organizations who participate in DNA studies, and the potential impacts on those who might be affected by the results generated. All humans are biologically related, and establishing the distance of relationship through DNA mapping is complicated. The results can be very challenging for how people view themselves and their heritage and, for some, a newfound biological relationship can be seen as threatening their cultural identity. For Delores, learning that she shared a distant ancestor with the Kwäday Dän Ts’inchí man made her feel more comfortable in teaching people from other regions, because she felt she was connected to the knowledge she was sharing — a result of her biological heritage. How would you feel, in Delores’ place? How might she have felt if this DNA study had not shown an ancestral connection?

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Intellectual Property & Cultural Heritage

Intellectual property (IP) is a term used to refer to legally-recognized exclusive rights for creations of the mind. Conventionally, it includes such tools as copyright, which prevents unauthorized duplication of text and images, trademark, which is a way to brand a product, and patents, which ensure that the knowledge behind a creation cannot be duplicated (Wikipedia 2014).

So what does IP have to do with cultural heritage? This is precisely what the Intellectual Property Issues in Cultural Heritage (IPinCH) project set out to assess. A seven-year international research initiative based out of Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, IPinCH sought to explore how cultural knowledge may be considered, and protected from misuse, as a form of IP.

For example, intangible forms of cultural heritage includes the knowledge behind songs, dances, traditional food recipes, medicines, ceremonies, traditions, places of significance, food-gathering sites, artworks, craft styles, and more. It is the knowledge behind culture, and the culture itself. As IPinCH scholars suggest (2014a), “heritage only exists and is perpetuated by virtue of the meanings people assign to it.” This means that heritage is living, and must continue to be lived in order to remain meaningful.

The movement towards considering cultural heritage in terms of intellectual property stems from concerns with its inappropriate or offensive appropriation and commodification, largely by people outside of the culture (IPinCH 2014b). This is particularly a concern for Indigenous peoples globally, as their heritage is vulnerable to being taken over or destroyed by dominant groups within settler societies (IPinCH 2014a). It can also affect relationships between Indigenous groups, as the rights to heritage and to control knowledge as IP may be unclear or even hotly contested between such groups. There is also the question of individual versus group rights, with respect to rights to cultural heritage, and the uncertainty concerning who can legitimately speak for a group to give informed consent.

As a result, Indigenous groups are seeking ways to protect their heritage both through conventional legal IP tools — such as creating trademarks for rock art images, and copyrighting songs — and through traditional or extra-legal means like creating new use-licenses (LocalContexts 2014). Viewing cultural heritage as intellectual property may be a compromise as it relies on a Western view of what constitutes “property,” but it may also help to ensure that the descendants of culture remain its stewards.

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FURTHER INFORMATION & RESOURCES

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FILM GUIDE CREDITS

This film guide was created by Marina La Salle with the input and direction of Ellen Frankenstein and members of the Intellectual Property Issues in Cultural Heritage (IPinCH) project, and representatives of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. Layout and design by Kristen Dobbin. The guide should be considered a living document and may be updated in future. It was first published in September 2015.

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Please contact us for information about Tracing Roots. We welcome your questions, feedback, and responses to the film and the guide. You may also contact the filmmaker regarding a screening or discussion with viewers via Skype or other video chat and conferencing tools.

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