Protocols

Acknowledge the political historic relationships of your people, their relationships with the local Host Nations where you live or have lived, and any role they may have played out to either preserve and uplift, or interrupt the lifeways of the Host Nations

- do you have a mess to clean up, or a torn relationship to repair?
- do you have relationships and ways of being and skills to reclaim?

Consider how you can gift back the teachings (without virtue signalling or transactional exchange) and be in service to *Rematriation* of Indigenous lifeways

Do not relate what you learn here to making money

Gift the leather or something you make with the leather

Respect your role in the cycles of death and rebirth of the animal and the land by returning any guts, membranes, fur and scales to the land or the water

Approach the animal skin with reverence - it is your *Elder*[1]

Practice listening with curiosity, patience, and dedication

[1] Elder - a biological being or material which holds certain principles within its very nature that teaches through the natural limitations one meets by being in relationship with it and learning how to use it appropriately. Also can be an individual who takes responsibility for guiding others according to lived experience with the principles that exist in nature.

Research Questions for Reflection

Before

Research the local Indigenous communities' relationship with fish.
How has the infrastructure of the town or city you live in altered the local community's capacity to be in relationship with fish?

Research what uses the host Nations had for fish, and its role in the community.

You are invited to hold one of your own patterns of thinking / behaviours / habits (a passenger within you) in mind that you are challenged by, and perhaps wish to transform. Allow your work to soften, stretch and relax your mind into a new shape. Dedicate the transformation to the spirit of *Rematriation*.

Instructions: Making Fishskin Leather with Black Tea Tannins

Day 1: SCRAPING

Materials:
-raw fishskin
-50-90 Red Rose or black tea bags
-1 L mason jar
-boiled and cooled water
-teaspoon of salt

*to pull the skin off of a fish, it is easiest when the fish / filet is half-frozen or nearly defrosted. Make a small slit where you are going to start pulling (pull away from the head), use a paper towel to grip the edge of the skin, and just pull towards the tail.

1. First you want to scrape the flesh (pink), membranes (grey) and fat (sparkly white) off the inside of the fish skin. Use a spoon or butter knife or small uloo, and press harder than you think - fish skins are quite strong. Scrape towards the tail, and scrape until the skin is as smooth and white as you can get it.
2. Dunk the skin in cold water to clean it off, then flip it over to scrape the scale side. This time, scrape away from the tail. Use less pressure on this side in order to keep the scale pockets intact.
3. Dunk it in water again and rub your finger along the skin away from the tail to feel if there are any scales still stuck in the skin, and pull them out with your fingers or keep scraping.
4. Wash the skin in soapy water.
5. Store the fishskin in cold water with a little bit of salt until you are ready to put it in your cold tea bath.

MAKING THE TEA BATH

Day 1: 5 teabags + 1 teaspoon salt
Day 2: 10 teabags
Day 3: 15 teabags
Day 4-6: 20 teabags

1. Boil enough hot water to fill your jar ¾ of the way full. Add 5 teabags and 1 teaspoon of salt and let the water cool.
2. Once the water is cold, put your fishskin in (this solution is strong enough for up to 2 fish skins), tighten the lid, and shake it. Shake it at least 3 times a day, or every time you walk by it.
3. In the evening, make a new teabath with more teabags in it, and let it cool overnight. It will be ready to use in the morning.
4. Dump the used teabath and toss the used teabags in the compost, and add your fishskin to the new teabath. You can leave the new teabags in the jar because they might still have some tannins soaking out of them, or toss them for more room.
5. Repeat for 4 days, and on the 4th or 5th day cut a small piece off an edge of the skin to see if the fish has been tanned all the way through. If there is a white line in the middle, do one more day of teabath with 20 bags.
6. If it is tanned all the way through, you can take it out of the teabath, rinse it under running water for a minute to wash the tannins out, and let it dry.

Day 5 or 6: SOFTENING

Materials:
-dried fish skin with tea tannins soaked in
-olive oil
-dishsoap
-bowl
-paper towels or cloth
-pumice stone

1. Rehydrate your fishskin, which now should be a lot thicker and feel like dry leather, by soaking it in a warm bath of water with soap in it.
2. Roll the fishskin up in a paper towel or cloth to press as much water out of it as you can.
3. Pour a few tablespoons of oil into a bowl, and drip your fishskin into the oil to slather it all over both sides, then wipe excess drips back into the bowl.
4. Massage the oil into the fishskin with your fingers, pulling in all directions.
5. Once the oil has been massaged in well (at least 5 minutes), you can lay it down on a table or hang it to dry for a while. If there is a lot of moisture still in the skin, you can leave it for intervals of 15 -30 minutes, and just keep picking it up to stretch it out a bit every once in a while.

6. When the skin feels like it is starting to dry, you will know because it will stretch out and hold its shape more than it did when it had a lot of moisture in it. Once it is drying, you don't want to leave it sitting for very long. Continue to massage and pull at it in every direction.
7. The last 10% of moisture is the most important to keep massaging the skin until it is totally dry. You can dip it in more oil or spray water on it if it is starting to dry out too fast or getting hard. Rub the membrane side (opposite the scales) with a pumice stone or on the edges of benches, chairs, skateboards, rocks, etc to help break the fibres and soften it.
   *Don't rub the scales side with tools because it will break the pattern of scale pockets, which is what makes fishskins so beautiful!
8. You will know the leather is totally dry when you put it to your cheek and it is not cool to the touch anymore.

Research Questions for Reflection

During (included in Video Instructions)

Consider this fish as a relative and ancestor.
Consider that this fish lived a life, and now you are tending its death.
How are you tending it?

What thoughts, feelings, memories and images arise within you and drift into the space around you as you work?

With what quality of intention and attention are you tending this fish skin?

What is your relationship with time right now? How did you engage with time to arrive at this moment of tending a fish skin? What was required of you to get to this moment? Who helped you arrive at this moment? What relationships did you need to engage in order to be here with this fish?

Consider that the spirit that animated the fish whose skin you are tending is gone, but its skin still holds the memory of its life, and it holds teachings for us about life. This fish is now your Elder. What are you learning from this fish? How is it communicating with you? What is communicating with you?

After

Research your own family's and lineage's relationship with fish, as far back as you can track. How has it altered the fish's relationship with their ecology?

Consider your ancestors' role in altering the lifeways of the host nations where you live. If they did not live where you currently live, consider the role they played in their migrations. Consider the role your ethnic kin played, and that humans have played. Consider the impact of your lifeways currently on the fish's lifeways.

Research ecological restoration initiatives that are being carried out in your community, and consider the layers and perspectives that may or may not be involved - who is leading? What is the role of the host nations in the initiative? Are there any cultural teachings?

What is the next most responsible action you can take towards restoring the lifeways of the Indigenous host nations with their *fish kin* and *ancestor*? What actions toward *Rematriation* and the *Land Back Movement* can you take?

How can you apply the same care and dedication to hospicing this fish's form to being with the people, stories and forms that are dying or have died in your life?

Return the fish scales and membranes and guts to the forest or waters so they can cycle back into the land in a good way.