

Community: sharing one skin

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



The Okanagan people, also spelled Okanogan, are a First Nations and Native American people whose traditional territory spans the U. S. -Canada boundary in Washington state and British Columbia. (Wiki, 2011) Known in their own language as the Syilx, they are part of the Interior Salish ethnological and linguistic groupings, the Okanagan are closely related to the Spokane, Sinixt, Nez Perce, Pend Oreille, Shuswap and Nlaka'pamux peoples in the same region. (Wiki, 2011) When the Oregon Treaty partitioned the Pacific Northwest in 1846, the portion of the tribe remaining in what became Washington Territory reorganized under Chief Tonasket as a separate group from the majority of the Okanagans, whose communities remain in Canada. (Wiki, 2011) The Okanagan Tribal Alliance, however, also incorporates the American branch of the Okanagans, who are part of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville, a multi-tribal government in Washington State. (Wiki, 2011)

The bounds of Okanagan territory are roughly the Basin of Okanagan Lake and the Okanagan River, plus the basin of the Similkameen River to the west of the Okanagan valley, and some of the uppermost valley of the Nicola River. (Wiki, 2011) The various Okanagan communities in British Columbia and Washington form the Okanagan Nation Alliance, a border-spanning organization which includes American-side Okanogans resident in the Colville Indian Reservation, where the Okanagan people are sometimes known as Colvilles. (Wiki, 2011) A group of Okanagan people in the Nicola Valley, which is at the northwestern perimeter of Okanagan territory, are known in their dialect as the Spaxomin, and are joint members in a historic alliance with neighboring communities of the Nlaka'pamux in the region known as the

Nicola Country, which is named after the 19th Century chief who founded the alliance, Nicola. (Wiki, 2011)

This alliance today is manifested in the Nicola Tribal Association. As in the reading, you can imagine how spiritual and well-being play a huge role in their culture. Every word in their culture has a very important meaning for their way of life. Jeannette Armstrong refers to her culture and the word “Okanagan” in a lot of deep and emotional depth. Armstrong explains the word Okanagan comes from a whole understanding of what they are as human beings. They can identify each other through that word in their interaction, prayer, and they identify themselves as human as well, different from birds trees and animals. The first part of the word refers to the physical realm. The second part of the word refers to the dream or the dream state, but Okanagan doesn't precisely mean “dream. It actually means “the unseen part of our existence as human beings.” They are dream memory and imagination.

The third part of the word means that if you take a number of strands, hair, or twine, place them together and then rub your hands and bind them together, they become one strand. Use this thought symbolically when you make a rope, twine, or weave a basket. They are tied into a part of everything. “I know my position and my responsibilities for that specific location and geographic area, which is how I introduce myself. The Okanagan people identify themselves as four main capacities that operate together: the physical self, the emotional self, the thinking-intellectual self, and the spiritual self. The Okanagan people teach that each person is born

into a family and a community. No person is born isolated from those two things.

As an Okanagan you are automatically accepted. You belong. You are them. Wouldn't this be nice in our current society here in the U. S. The Okanagan refer to relationships with others using a word that means "our one skin." This means that they share more than a place; they share a physical tie that is uniquely human, that the many that became before the Okanagan and the many ahead of the Okanagan share their flesh. Community comes first, then family and finally the individual. This is interesting to me. Do you think we as a population have this line of thinking? I would have to say a big percent of us think of ourselves in this society. Indigenous people, not long removed from their cooperative, self-sustaining lifestyles on their lands do not survive well in this atmosphere of aggression and dispassion.

The Okanagan word they have for extended family is translated as "sharing one skin." The concept refers to blood ties within community and extends the instinct to protect our individual selves to all who share the same skin. Armstrong knows how powerful the solidarity is of peoples bound together by land, blood, and love. This is the largest threat to interests wanting to secure control of lands and resources that have been passed on in a healthy condition from generation to generation of families.

Armstrong goes on to saying she is pessimistic about changes happening; the increase of crimes, worldwide disasters, total anarchy, and the possible increase of stateless oligarchies; borders are disappearing, and true sustainable economies are crumbling. However, she has learned that crisis

can help build community so that it can face the crisis itself. Since time immemorial, the history of the Okanagan began, long before the arrival of the Europeans. They are the Syilx-speaking people - the original inhabitants of a vast and beautiful territory that encompasses forests, grasslands, lakes and desert.

For thousands of years, the Okanagan people were self-reliant and well provided for through their own ingenuity and use of the land and nature. They lived united as a nation with a whole economy, travelling the breadth and depth of their territory, hunting and fishing, growing and harvesting, crafting and trading to meet their needs. Since reading this chapter of the Okanagan people, I have learned a lot about these very fascinating people. I also believe if every culture was like the Okanagan people, our planet would be a much peaceful, spiritual, and well respected place.