

SONG GROVE:

Honoring the Ancestors

“When we connect with our ancestors and put their wisdom into action, we are evolving our collective consciousness. We are transporting the ancient truths of our collective past and birthing them into our future. What we create out of those truths extends the wisdom of all those who have gone before us, and it provides a guide for all those who will follow.”

**— Sherri Mitchell Weh'na Ha'mu Kwasset,
Penobscot Nation**





We Remember You

By: Juliana Murphy

Part 1:

We remember you
We remember you
Come and be feasted, come and be fed
We remember you

Bright Ones, Shining Ones
We remember you
Come and be honored, come and be fed
We remember you

Part 2:

We remember you (x2)

Listen to the song: <https://soundcloud.com/jumutx/sets/we-remember-you-a-chant-to-honor-the-ancestors>

Roots: Julianna says, "This one came in for me a couple of years ago for a Samhain ceremony and is also by the ancestors!"

Activity ideas: This song is particularly suited to an Ancestor Supper or Feast gathering. See the ERAFANS October 2023 blog post for suggestions of how to hold such a gathering, often in transition between warm and cold seasons (end of October/beginning of November).



Voices of the Ancestors

Original by Sandy Vaughan, lyric variations by oral tradition

I hear the voices of the ancestors calling me
Wake up, wake up, they say wake up, wake up! Listen, listen! Listen listen!
May the waters all run clear,
May the mountains be unspoiled,
May the air be clean,
May the trees grow tall,
May the Earth be shared by all.

Can you hear the voices of the ancestors calling?
They say wake up, wake up, listen, listen!
May the children all run free,
May the circles go unbroken,
May the walls fall down,
May the fires burn,
From each other we will learn

Listen to the voices of the ancestors calling.
They say wake up, wake up, listen, listen!
May we live respectfully free,
May we share with those in need,
May we live in tune, by the sun and the moon,
And in sharing we will bloom.

Listen to the song: <https://youtu.be/U6hYKvkjDto> (original)

Wilderness Awareness School:

<https://archive.org/details/heyanake1/07+Wake+Up!+Listen!.mp3>

Activity idea: As you can see in the lyric examples above, this song has gone through many variations through the folk sharing process. Invite your group to create lyrics based on what your class/community imagines would be your ancestors' wishes for the world.



We Are

By: Sweet Honey in the Rock

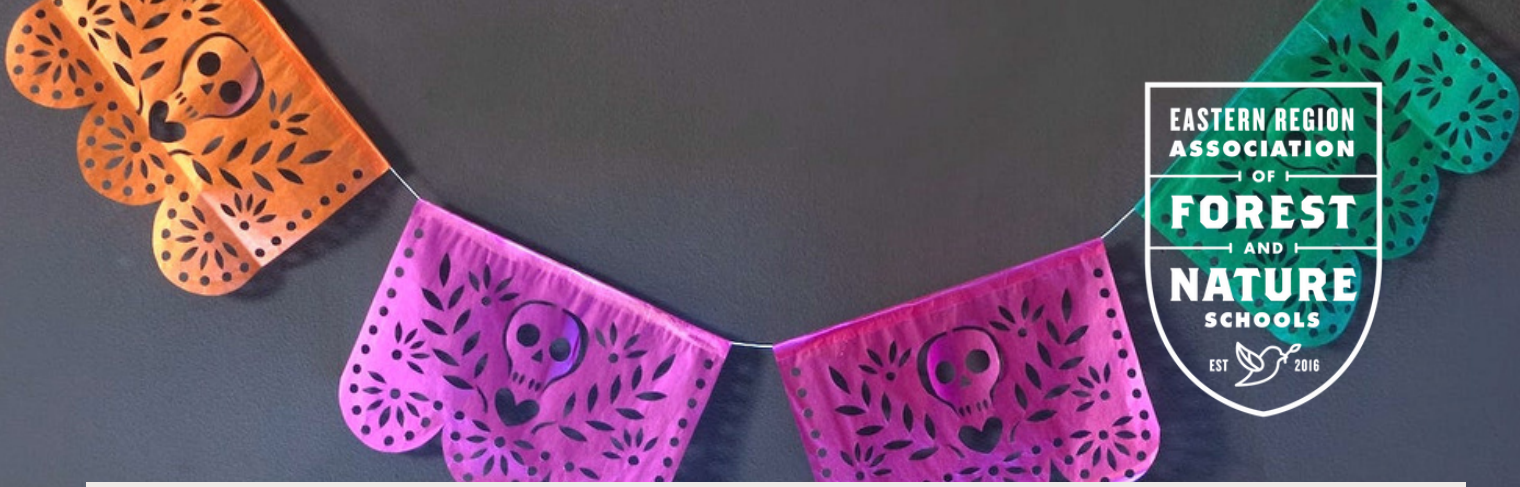
For each child that's born *Dm*
a morning star rises and sings *Dm - Gm*
to the universe who we are *Dm A Dm*
(repeat a total of 3 times)

We are our grandmothers' prayers *Dm*
we are our grandfathers' dreamings *Gm A A7*
we are the breath of the ancestors *Dm*
we are the spirit of Love *Gm F A Dm*

Listen to the song: <https://youtu.be/hWaw-tQ4W7w?si=z8cU4qSro25aRfSU>
<https://youtu.be/YCZiztxp0HI?si=1dLaX2hNEaPIOEYq>

Activity ideas: This song has additional verse lyrics that could be taught to older children, teens and adults with more extended practice. The *Sweet Honey* song *Breaths* and the Harry Belafonte song *Turn the World Around* are also lovely.

Note: The rights to these songs need to be obtained to perform them in public concerts.



Las Calaveras

Por el group Scherzo de Querétaro, México

Al sonar las doce de la noche
Las calaveras salen a pasear
Muy contentas se suben a su coche
En bicicleta y también a patinar.
Tumba, tumba, tumba vacía
Ciérrate ya que viene la fría
Jajaja que risa me da
Jajaja no me alcanzará.

*At the stroke of midnight
The skulls go out for a walk
Happily they get into their car
On bicycle and also skating.
Grave, grave, empty grave
Close up with the cold weather coming,
Hahaha how it makes me laugh!
Hahaha they won't catch me!*

Listen to the song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpqpO7LkgF0>

This is a similar song with more lyrics, good for practice with numbers/times and other vocab, depending on the singers' level: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXi2iMq8HDU>
English language version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awdJ5ccy7wE&t=0s>
Sugar Skulls song for preschoolers and older: [Calaverita de Azúcar](#)

Roots: This is a song for Día de los Muertos/Day of the Dead, a now global holiday originating in Mexico during which people honor those who have gone before – los antepasados/las antepasadas – with food, drink and celebration. Read the ERAFANS Oct. 2023 blog to learn more.

Babethandaza

Traditional South African song

Sin nje nje nje ngemi thandazo (x2)

- We are like this, like this, like this because of prayer

Ngemi thandazo, Ngemi thandazo (x2)

- Because of prayer, because of prayer

Oo mama bagudala, Babethandaza (x2)

- Our mothers/women of old (ancestors) would pray

Babethandaza, Babethandaza (x2)

- They were praying, they were praying

Listen to the song: <http://thebirdsings.com/babethandaza/>

Roots: A traditional song in the public domain, many people beyond South Africa learned this song from the gorgeous version by *Sweet Honey in the Rock* on their album *In This Land*. The arrangement in the above teaching recording with melody, high, and low harmonizing vocal parts is adapted from the arrangement by Ysaye Barnwell, a long-time member of Sweet Honey in the Rock.



Caim

By: Te Martin

Part 1:

Caim, protect me
Caim, surround me

Part 2:

Ancestors surround me

Listen to the song: <https://soundcloud.com/temartinmusic/caim-gaelic>

Roots: Caim is a Scots Gaelic word pronounced "kyem," translated as sanctuary. More specifically it's an invisible circle of protection, drawn around the body with the hand, to remind one of being safe and loved, even in the darkest times. Theresa "Te" Martin (they/them) is a community organizer, song-keeper, and friend of the earth. Te believes deeply in the power of song to build resilience and to inspire change. They are currently the lead organizer of Thrive Street Choir.

"I was moved to discover a word in my lineage that describes something I've found powerful throughout my life: to draw an invisible circle around the body with the hand for safety and protection in challenging times. This song honors my ancestry. I welcome you to sing this song remembering your own roots. Who are your people? What language(s) did they or do they speak? What are the songs of your ancestors?"

Activity idea: Try having the group walk in a circle, and/or invite individuals to draw their own personal circles



Ancestor Sky People

Lyrics by Mischa Saez, music by Harmony Grisman, movements by Sharee Anderson

Ancestor Sky People all here today
Hear our Heart Song
Hear our Respect
Hear our Love

Hear our grateful tears fall
I am truly blessed (oo - oo),
You are truly blessed (oo - oo),
We are truly blessed.

Listen to the song: <https://harmonygrisman.bandcamp.com/track/ancestor-sky-people>
<https://soundcloud.com/songforest/ancestor-sky-people>

Roots: Composed as a circular Dance for Universal Peace with lyrics by Mischa Saez Art Director at Camp Sunburst for children and families with HIV/AIDS in the early 90s, music by Harmony Grisman, and original movements by Sharee Anderson. Dances of Universal Peace as a form was envisioned to be a method to create peace through the arts, and has since spread throughout the world.

Activity Idea: taking inspiration from the Dances of Universal Peace form in these videos, create a circle dance suited to your group's development level to go with the music.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qxlTz_ly2k

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJ6hpYWxVI0>



Seven Generations

By: Marston Blow

Part 1

Seven Generations backwards
Seven Generations forwards

Part 2

Healing ourselves, healing our ancestors,
Healing ourselves, healing the future

Listen to the song.

Roots: This song came to Marston while supporting the people of Standing Rock. In the recording you'll hear her playing a singing bowl for accompaniment. The fundamental teaching of the Seven Generations principle is shared in some form by many indigenous peoples around the Earth: what impact will your words and actions have on the 7th generation coming after you? And what will be the impact on the seventh generation who came before you?

The Haudenosaunee ("people who are building the longhouse," sometimes called Iroquois) Confederacy established a league of five nations based on The Great Law of Peace, which includes this principle. Benjamin Franklin learned the Mohawk language and carried their phrase, "We the People" as well as fundamental aspects that influenced the design of U.S. Constitution including the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches. The Haudenosaunee require unanimity in all decisions, and rely on a Council of Grandmothers to determine whether chiefs are tending their responsibilities in a way that appropriately cares for all beings, including the ancestors and future generations.

Activity idea: when making plans - big or small - as a group, practice including this principle.

Fly, My Soul

By: Dana Indāne - Surkienē

Fly my Soul, fly, fly to the Sky, take me back to the Roots of mine
Fly my Soul, fly, fly to the Sky, take me back to the Roots of mine
Fly, fly, fly, high, fly, fly, fly high.

Fly my Soul, fly, fly to the Sky, take my Love to the Past of mine...

Fly my Soul, fly, fly to the Sky, take my Love to the Future Times ...

Fly my Soul, fly, fly to the Sky, take my Love to my Ancestral Line ...

Fly my Soul, fly, fly to the Sky, take my Love to the Beloved of Mine...

Fly my Soul, fly, fly to the Sky, take my Love to the Child of Mine ...

Fly my Soul, fly, fly to the Sky, take My Love to the Friends of Mine...

Fly my Soul, fly, fly to the Sky, take my Love to the Darkest Night ...

Fly my Soul, fly, fly to the Sky, bring My Heart to Eternal Light

Fly my Soul, fly, fly to the Sky, bring My Heart to Eternal Light

Fly, fly, fly, high, fly, fly, fly high.

Listen to the song: <https://youtu.be/PGh-qL16WNs>

Roots: This community song was created by Latvian voice improviser and singer Dana Indāne - Surkienē. A group of like minded friends, family members and musicians gathered to give their voices to this song as a Choir of Friends. This video was created, presenting documentation of the process of recording the song and bringing listeners closer to meet the musicians and feel the simple togetherness of singing and friendship.



We Raise You Up

By: Heidi Wilson

Part 1

We Raise You Up
We Raise You Up
We Raise You Up in a song song song
Life will surely shift her shape*
And you live on in a song

*Life will surely shift and shake (alternate lyric)

Part 2

Oh, thank you
Oh, thank thank you
Oh thank you
Thank you *trees***
(repeat)

Listen to the song

Roots: This song weaves a story to tell the children in Heidi's program at EarthWalk in Vermont after some unexpected logging had been done near their Sit Spots.

Activity ideas: The two parts of this song can be sung as layers on top of each other, or as a round/canon. **The final word can be modified to honor the transition of any particular being, or the ancestors of any/all species, "Thank you ancestors!"



Oh Grandmothers

By: Wind Daughter

Oh, Grandmothers Hear us calling
We, your children Need healing
(repeat)
Power, power
Your love is our power
(repeat)

Oh, Grandmothers Hear us calling
We, your children Receive healing
Power, power
Your love is our power

Oh, Grandmothers Hear us calling
We, your children Give healing
Power, power
Our love is your power

Listen to the song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZBkPCfwFdo>
<https://youtu.be/ha4sUVCbjSI>

Roots: a song by Wind Daughter (Creek, Ojibwe, Lakota), Keeper of the Black Lodge, Medicine Chief of the Bear Tribe Medicine Society since 1996, which was founded by the late Sun Bear, of Ojibway descent. Then in late 2006, after receiving guidance through prayer, reflection, and consultation, Wind Daughter gave name to her own vision, the Panther Lodge Medicine Society along with the Black Lodge. Continuing today, Wind Daughter carries the Medicine Bundle and these Teachings forward into a new era as she has joined the two together as the Medicine Chief of the Panther Lodge Bear Tribe Medicine Society. We have permission to share this song widely. The recordings above are close to the original tune, with lyrics modified.



I Did Not Come Here Alone

By: The Peace Poets

I have not come here alone:
I carry my people in my bones
I did not come here alone
If you listen you can hear them in my soul .*

**Additional verse lyrics in the recording*

Listen to the song: https://youtu.be/_UUZztT0kAs?si=TONxIIYdvPxYXMG3

Roots: The Peace Poets are family born of Hip Hop, heart, and hope in New York City. Some have been friends since as early as three years old and over time they have built an artist collective of poets, Hip Hop performers, and educators founded on this friendship and their common love for community and creative expression. Grounded in the power of personal narratives and community, The Peace Poets create and have shared *Spoken Word* poetry, rap, and *Movement Music* that responds to social and political crisis in over 40 countries.

Activity idea: This song goes well with movement - whether dancing in place, or walking .



Ancestors

By: Mica Whitney and Graham Remocaldo of Swamp Trees

All of my ancestors live within me, within me, within me, within me
(lead continues while group repeats "within me, within me..." until the next repeat word/phrase)

Within me I can feel a spirit rising, rising, rising, rising

Rising up above to where the birds sing, the birds sing, the birds sing, the
birds sing

The birds sing their songs to the stars at night, at night, at night, at night
At night I dream with all of my ancestors, ancestors, ancestors, ancestors

And all of my ancestors live within me, within me, within me, within me

Within me I can feel a spirit rising, rising, rising, rising

Rising up above to where the stars shine, the stars shine, the stars shine, the
stars shine

The stars shine their light down to us at night, at night, at night, at night

At night I dream with all of my ancestors, ancestors, ancestors, ancestors

And all of my ancestors live within me, within me, within me, within me

fading out on repetitions/harmonies of "within me"

Listen to the song: <https://swamptrees.bandcamp.com/track/ancestors>

Roots: SwampTrees centers around the music of Mica Whitney and Graham Remocaldo and has included many of their friends who have joined them along the way. They are part-time musicians, part-time farmers who sing songs about the earth and our connection to the land.

Activity ideas: This song goes well with movements/gestures the group can create together to express each line.

Ways to Carry These Songs

Transmitting songs to the next generation offers an opportunity to pass along regenerative cultural patterns, too. Here are some ideas:

Practice 'Feeding the Songs'

"In some community song circles, the practice of "feeding the song" means that rather than thanking the song leader after a song has come to completion, those in the song circle are invited to speak words or phrases that reflect something they have recognized in or received from the song, and in so speaking, give a gesture of reciprocity between the singers and the song directly. Some people might just say "Thank you, Song" or "Thank you, Song, for..." "Thank you Song for reminding me of..."

Many community songleaders also invite the circle to pause and hold silence together for a few moments after singing, before beginning to feed the song." (Excerpt from [Honey Sweet Harmony](#)).

Song Tracking & The Web of Interconnections

"After swimming in the waters of community singing for some years, it's become clear that these waters are the territory of oral tradition. In the oral tradition, we rely completely on the carrier of the song to faithfully transmit not only the tune, words, and feeling of singing the song, but also the name of the author, the story behind the song, the original intention and spirit as well as later interpretations--and particularly the deep honoring of the song as a living thing born of a rich web of connection that holds the author, the land, and the other wild beings (known or unknown) who participated.

We acknowledge that this is a lot to transmit! We've had discussions with other song carriers about the extent to which transmitting all of this is desirable or even possible. Even though it's a lot to remember, and even though it isn't always the time or place to divulge all of this at once, it's our responsibility to try to honor each song as faithfully as we can--not only because the song actually isn't "ours", but also because the backstory and changes made to the song (which are so often the part that gets lost in translation) are central to reclaiming what is ours.

What is ours is the rich web of connection, the threads that bind people and place and all together, and that is where songs (and so many other good things) come from. So with each song, as much as we can, we choose the practice of passing on a story (not the story) which honors how the song is born of not only a person or a moment in time, but of a rich web of connection and change and beauty. This, some believe, is the true importance of songs and music--that they speak to us from a sacred place that is deep in the heart of things--and that they remind us that we are not just tourists meant to use songs and land and our voices as we will, but are deeply embedded in a rich fabric to which we belong, and which we are meant to tend and use and enjoy as stewards...

...the "Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How?" of song tracking. Asking these questions, I'm repeatedly honored to hear the story of how a song moved from inspiration to manifestation, from inside to outside, from land to person, and from person to people. I get to witness over and over again the amazing fact that each single person and each single square foot of Earth do a spontaneous, mysterious dance that is ongoing and ultimately unexplainable. I repeatedly find myself looking through a dazzling window into the web of connections that underlies all things. In this way song tracking reminds me that a song is a powerful cord connecting us deeply to the person and the place it came from. In this way the humble, earthy seed of a song sprouts its roots into the great mystery, the great dance." (Excerpt from [The Song Forest Tenders](#).)

Support these Musicians and Songcatchers

This Song Grove includes links to the websites of musicians and songcatchers who have generously shared these songs. We encourage you to consider purchasing tracks, giving to their Patreon or Tip Jar, and/or interacting with their social media.