INTRODUCTION

This resource is for K–12 teachers interested in exploring the sculpture Okciyapi (2021) by Angela Two Stars. It includes information about the artist and her practice, details about the artwork and Dakota language, discussion questions, a post-visit activity, and a list of additional resources for further research.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Twin Cities–based artist Angela Two Stars (Dakota, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, b. 1982) is known for artworks in public spaces that invite participation. She creates sculptures and installations that focus on Indigenous language revitalization, a process she describes as a healing medicine that strengthens Dakota culture and identity.

Early in her career, Two Stars worked in printmaking and drawing, and in recent years has been increasingly drawn to the wide-reaching impact of public art. Prior to her commission for the Walker Art Center, she collaborated with Sandy Spieler and Mona Smith to create Zaníyaŋ Yuthókča: Brave Change (2019), an installation located along the shores of Bde Maka Ska in Minneapolis. The project commemorates Ḧeyata Oṭuŋwe, a 19th-century Dakota agricultural community on the banks of the lake, and Dakota leader Mahpiya Wičašta (Cloud Man). Like Okciyapi, the work also includes Dakota language and serves as a gathering space.

For the past 10 years, Two Stars has also been working as a curator, educator, and arts administrator. She is the director of All My Relations Arts in Minneapolis, an organization founded by the Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI). She received a BFA from Kendall College of Art and Design in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

A gathering place and welcoming site of reflection, Okciyapi (pronounced “oak-chee-YAH-pea”) makes poetic connections between land, water, language, and people. This sculpture by Angela Two Stars is the first public artwork by a Native artist to be sited in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden. Focusing on Indigenous language revitalization, Okciyapi (which translates to “Help Each Other” in English) was inspired by the legacies of her grandfather and treasured elders working in language revitalization efforts.

The rings of seating elements are based on patterns of rippling water and symbolize relationships between individuals and communities. Just as one drop of water creates ripples that flow across a lake, one speaker’s shared knowledge can spread to future generations. In the sculpture’s center, a water dome mirrors the sky and makes a reference to the Dakota name Mni Sóta Makoce (Minnesota), which means “land where the waters reflect the clouds.”

Throughout the work, Two Stars offers ways for us to experience Dakota language both as written and spoken words. Some are engraved into the benches—woksapé (wisdom), wóohoda (respect), and wóohitika (bravery), while a set of audio recordings features stories, anecdotes, and readings in Dakota.

To hear the recordings, visit walkerart.org/two-stars or use the camera on your phone to scan the QR code in this guide and on the artwork label (see page 11).
DAKOTA LANGUAGE
Two Stars describes the process of learning the Dakota language as a journey. The artist notes that Dakota is a living language, the language itself is alive. Originally, Dakota was exclusively a spoken language, without a written alphabet. However, shortly after the arrival of missionaries in this area in the mid-1800s, Dakota became both an oral and written language.

WORDS & PHRASES
Whether engraved on the cast-concrete benches or painted on enamel signs, Dakota words are visible throughout this artwork. They express Native values while also offering words of encouragement to all.

Each of the Dakota words and phrases in Okciyapi were read and recorded by Two Stars as part of her own language journey. To learn their pronunciations, visit the audio recordings web page and scroll toward the end. A translations key for the words is in this guide on page 6.

AUDIO RECORDINGS BY TREASURED ELDERS
The artist has included a set of audio recordings by fluent Dakota and Lakota speakers as part of the artwork. This collection features the voices of treasured elders, who share traditional stories, remembrances, anecdotes, and insights. Two Stars has said that these recordings could be seen as a gift from the elders.

An integral part of the sculpture, the recordings help connect us to past, present, and future generations through language and storytelling.

MORE DAKOTA PLACENAMES
In addition to Mni Sota Makoce, the origin of the name Minnesota, you’ll find many more Dakota words used as placenames today! Here are just a few:

- Anoka (“on both sides”)
- Chanhassen (“gray-white trees”)
- Chaska (male name for firstborn child)
- Mahtomedi (“bear lake”)
- Mankato (“blue earth”)
- Mendota (bdote, a place where the waters run together)
- Minnehaha (“curling waters”)
- Minnetonka (“big water”)
- Owatonna (“straight”)
- Shakopee (“six,” sixth child)
- Wayzata (“to the north”)
- Winona (female name for firstborn child)
THEMES & MATERIALS

WATER
At its center, the sculpture features a unique water vessel. Reflective and dome-shaped, the fountain makes circular patterns as the water flows into the bowl with a quietly calming sound. Water imagery appears in the work in several places, including the blue design on the enamel word panels.

The mazelike shapes of the benches are based on rippling water. With openings at the four directions—East, South, West, and North—they encourage us to find our way in, whether to explore and play or relax and take a seat.

STARS
The ground within the sculpture is covered with gravel that contains glow-in-the-dark pebbles. As the sun sets and into the evening, these small rocks look like stars. The artist notes that this material and effect is a reference to the Milky Way.

The stars have deep meanings in Native cultures. In early Dakota/Lakota stories told over time, it is said that Dakota people are made in part from the stars.

NATIVE PLANTS
Another living part of Two Stars’s sculpture are the beds of native shrubs and grasses along the work’s outer edge. The artist chose these plants, which she considers plant relatives, for their healing properties. One example found here is sage, which has long been used by Indigenous people as a medicine as well as in spiritual ceremonies and blessings.

LAND OF LAKES
The lakes Bde Maka Ska, Wíta Tópa Bde (Lake of the Isles), and Bde Unma (Lake Harriet) are a few of the bodies of water located near the Walker Art Center and the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden.

In fact, the Walker is located on the contemporary, traditional, and ancestral homelands of the Dakota people. Once an area of marshland and meadow, this site holds meaning for Dakota, Ojibwe, and Indigenous people from other Native nations, who still live in the community today.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION

Two Stars’s work was chosen for the Walker commission by the Indigenous Public Art Selection Committee, a group of seven Native artists, curators, writers, and knowledge-keepers based in Minnesota, South Dakota, and New Mexico. The group was formed to ensure community representatives had a forum to voice their opinions about the commissioning and presentation of a work by an Indigenous artist in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden. The committee worked collaboratively with the Walker to shape the process, review the proposals, and select the final work.

An open call to artists (the first in the Walker’s history), resulted in more than 50 proposals submitted by a pool of national and international artists, from which Two Stars’s artwork was selected.

For more information about the commission process and media stories about the opening, see the Additional Resources section is this guide.

OKCIYAPI OPENING CELEBRATIONS
The official opening and community unveiling of the new sculpture took place in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden in October 2021. The celebrations included ceremonial blessings and drumming, remarks by the artist and community members, presentations by the Kit Fox Society, and an art-making activity inspired by the artist’s work.

WHAT IS A COMMISSION?
• An art commission is the act of requesting an artist’s service for the creation of an artwork by private individuals, businesses, museums, or the government.
• A private commission is when a specific artist is asked to create new artwork.
• An open-call commission is when individuals or artists are invited to submit their ideas for a work, then one is selected after all the submissions have been reviewed.
Use this diagram to explore Dakota language included in the sculpture Okciyapi in Minneapolis Sculpture Garden. To listen to artist Angela Two Stars read these words and phrases, visit walkerart.org/two-stars.

Illustration and diagram: Eric Papenfuss
VALUES
1. Wówićake  
   Truthfulness
2. Wótheȟiŋda  
   Love
3. Wóohitika  
   Bravery
4. Wóksape  
   Wisdom
5. Wóyuonihaŋ  
   Honor
6. Woohoda  
   Respect
7. Wicowahba  
   Humility
8. Wóoh’anwašte  
   Generosity
9. Wówauŋśida  
   Compassion
10. Wawokiya  
    Help others
11. Wosnapi  
    Sacrifice
12. Wówaditake  
    Fortitude
13. Wówaciŋtaŋka  
    Perseverance
14. Wówaciŋya  
    Dependable
15. Bdiheca  
    Ambitious
16. Wówahbana  
    Gentleness

PHRASES
17. Nišnana śni  
    You are not alone.
18. Wićaić’ida  
    Believe in yourself.
19. Otákuye  
    Be a good relative.
20. Ihduhaić’iya  
    Keep yourself in a good way.  
    Do the right things.
21. Aŋpetu iyohi Dakota i a  
    Speak Dakota every day.
22. Taŋyaŋ awanjič’ihlaka  
    Take care of yourself.
23. Dakota íapi kin onahun waste  
    It’s good to hear the Dakota language.
24. Dakkód íapi kiŋ he wakháŋ  
    The Dakota language is sacred.

ENGRAVINGS
25. Taku cistinnasta Dakod iab he niunkiyapi kinhan  
    he taku ecamun —Orsen Bernard  
    If I can do something even in my own small way to save my language,  
    then I have done something. —Orsen Bernard.
26. Tunkansina, Wakantanka, tona ded hib hena wicayuwaste  
    Grandfather, Great Spirit, bless all who enter here.
27. Okciyapi  
    Help each other.
DISCUSSION PROMPTS

FOR ALL STUDENTS

• The Dakota word “Okciyapi” means “help each other.” Based on what you’ve learned about the sculpture, why do you think the artist chose this title?
• One of the engravings featured in the sculpture is a quote from the artist’s grandfather, Orsen Bernard, who said: “Taku cistinnasta Dakod iab he niunkiyapi kinhan he taku ecamun.” (“If I can do something even in my own small way to save my language, then I have done something.”)

Why do you think Two Stars included this quote in her sculpture?
• Why is it important to learn Dakota words and phrases?
• Why is language important to one’s identity?
• How do you think this sculpture will help Minnesotans and visitors to the Walker learn more about the Dakota language? What new information have you learned?

FOR OLDER STUDENTS

• Two Stars has said: “My work acts as a learning tool meant to engage a younger audience who are the potential future of our language. I employ an interactive element to my work to address how learning a language requires active participation. By interweaving the English and Dakota language, I address the duality that Native Americans experience, one side honoring traditional values and culture, the other adapting to Western civilization.” What do you think Angela Two Stars means by “the duality that Native American experience”? Can you think of any other situations where one may have to balance multiple identities?
• In 2014, when Two Stars moved back to the Lake Traverse Reservation in Sisseton, South Dakota, where she was born and raised, she notes that there were fewer than 70 fluent Dakota speakers and their average age was 78 years old: “My desire is to raise awareness of the endangered status of my tribe's language, which in turn resonates with other Native American languages. By incorporating the Dakota alphabet, words, phrases, songs, prayers, and stories within my artwork, I am bringing attention to the need for revitalization efforts within my tribe to retain the existence of our Dakota language.”

One of the reasons Dakota and other Indigenous languages have become endangered or lost is due to racist federal policies in the 19th and early 20th centuries that attempted to assimilate Dakota people into Euro-American ways of life. During this time, the US government removed Native children from their families and forced them to go to English-speaking boarding schools designed to purge their language, culture, spirituality, and identity. This resulted in the widespread loss of language fluency in Native communities and has left a legacy of intergenerational trauma. What steps can we take to rectify this loss, both individually and as a society?
POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: CREATE A LANGUAGE MOSAIC

After learning about Angela Two Stars’s practice and her use of Dakota language in Okciyapi, invite students to explore the language further by creating a project inspired by the artwork and someone important to them.

FOR ALL GRADES
You will need: printed Dakota-English word templates, markers, crayons, or colored pencils, recycled paper scraps, and glue sticks. To download the Dakota and English word templates, visit bit.ly/WAC_ATS_WordTemplates

STEP 1: Ask students to think about a person who inspires and/or is important to them. This could be a family member, friend, or someone they look up to!

STEP 2: Have students choose one of the five printed templates to use as a base. Each template has a different word in both Dakota and English, all of which are featured in Angela Two Stars’s sculpture:

- Wóthehiŋda / Love
- Wóohitika / Bravery
- Wówićake / Truthfulness
- Wóksape / Wisdom
- Wówauŋśida / Compassion

STEP 3: Provide students with an array of recycled paper scraps to decorate their templates. Suggest using at least three different colors and textures that remind them of the word and/or person they selected! Students should cut or tear the scraps into smaller pieces and then glue them onto the paper.

STEP 4: Use markers, crayons, or colored pencils to embellish the template collage with drawings or words inspired by the person they selected. When they are finished, have students share with a classmate why they chose the person and word they did.
ABOUT ANGELA TWO STARS & THE COMMISSION

• Artist’s Website, www.angelatwostars.com/.
• Artist Talk: Angela Two Stars in Conversation with Darlene St. Clair, Walker Art Center, July 6, 2022, youtube.com/watch?v=BmoFIQUX0oI.
• Walker Art Center short film on Angela Two Stars, youtube.com/watch?v=4ux7vi05dok.
• Audio Recordings from Okciyapi, walkerart.org/two-stars.
• Website for Bde Maka Ska Installation: Zaniyaŋ Yuthókc̣a (Brave Change), bdemakaska.net/.

ABOUT DAKOTA LANGUAGE & HISTORY

• Dakota Language Society, dakhota.org/.
• Dakota Wicohan, a Dakota cultural resource center, dakotawicohan.org/.
• Mni Sota Makope Curriculum (Lesson 6, placenames) from Dakota Wicohan, dakotawicohan.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/L6-Dakota-Place-Names-1.pdf.
• Dakota Land Map by Marlena Myles, marlenamyl.es/project/dakota-land-map/.
• Dakota Dictionary Online, University of Minnesota Department of American Indian Studies, https://filemaker.cla.umn.edu/dakota/.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

To further support engagement with this artwork, we recommend the following references for teachers and students:
Angela Two Stars  SISSETON WAHPETON OYATE, B. 1982
Okciyapi  2021

cast concrete engraved with Dakota language, enamel on steel, fountain, bound aggregate with embedded luminescent pebbles, native plantings, audio recordings

Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis
Commissioned by the Walker Art Center, with funds from the T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, the Friends of the Falls, and Russell Cowles, 2021
Recordings of treasured elders transcribed by Neil McKay

walkerart.org/collections/artworks/okciyapi
walkerart.org/two-stars

WHERE IS THE SCULPTURE LOCATED?
Okciyapi is #37 on the Walker’s Garden Map. The sculpture is located near the Cowles Pavilion and across from the fountain-sculpture Spoonbridge and Cherry by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen. As the artist describes, Okciyapi is a space for learning and sharing culture as well as a work that visitors can engage with, play on, and touch.

MINNEAPOLIS SCULPTURE GARDEN TOURS
For questions about booking a tour, visit https://walkerart.org/visit/tours-field-trips/, email us at tours@walkerart.org, or call 612.375.7609.

TEACHER RESOURCES & LESSON PLANS
For additional resources for teachers and lesson plans, visit walkerart.org/visit/education/resources-for-teachers/.

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