

# The Water Walk

Information for this lesson comes from <http://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com>

## Part 1 – I can talk about the Water Walk



### What is the water walk?

The Mother Earth Water Walk was started in 2003 by Josephine Mandamin, an Anishinaabe grandmother. She and a small group of adults from different clans wanted to raise awareness of their relationship to the waters by walking around Lake Superior.

### Why did they focus on water?

Water is one of the basic elements needed for life to exist, yet it was being polluted by chemicals, vehicle emissions, motor boats, sewage disposal, agricultural pollution, and leaking landfill sites.

### Where did the walk begin and end?

The walkers began and ended at the Bad River reservation (Wisconsin) on the South Shore of Lake Superior. Bad River reservation is one of the Ojibwe-Anishinaabe communities well known for environmental protection programs.

### How many days did it take to complete the walk?

The 1,300-mile walk around Lake Superior took 36 days. That's an average of 36 miles each day.



### Why did they carry water from all over?

Walkers carried a copper bucket of water from four directions to recognize the spirit of four directions in everything they do. All the waters around Turtle Island are at various levels of pollution and Lake Superior is the largest body of fresh water, so it is a gesture to call attention to the role humans have in keeping our waters fresh.

### What happened at the end of the walk?

At the end of the walk there were ceremonies for the walkers and for the water. The water was added to Lake Superior.

**Read excerpts from the journal Josephine Mandamin kept during the Water Walk in 2003.**

“Each day began with a cleansing of the pail of water and the eagle staff, at 5:00 a.m., and ended approximately 6:00 or 7:00 p.m., again the cleansing with the medicines. The eagles have shown themselves to us to remind us of their work also and the work of the feathers on the eagle staff that travelled with us. We shared our thoughts with the Creator as we prayed for the sick and the less fortunate. The offering of our Pipe each fourth day reminded us where we came from and connected us with our ancestors and the Creator.



The water we carried in our copper pail always reminded us of Mother Earth, giver of life. Without our mother the earth and her water, life would be arid and dead. The numerous, daily water songs we sang for the water are now forever embedded in nature. The words of the water songs made us ever humble as we walked with the copper pail of water. The copper reminded us of its element from the universe and how it formed to be a part of Mother Earth in her tender beginnings.

The heaviness in our hearts was unbearable when we saw the destruction of the forests, the earth being gouged by machines, the rivers and creeks dying in the human filth amid green slime and brown, poison fluid flowing into the cleaner rivers. The death along the highways was sickening. These scenes always reminded us that progress has no value for life. We can be knocked down at any time for getting in the way.

The experience was humbling in that I knew at last what we were doing. Words cannot fully describe what we were doing. We did it for the water, for the earth, for the animals, for the insects, for the trees, for all the two-leggeds. To remind all those we came across, that the walk was for them. Not us. When the walk got tiring and painful, this was ever on my mind that I walk with the water for whomever needs it. Not one of us was separate. We walked as one.

It was not all as serious as it sounds. We had many memorable, precious, moments which we keep in our hearts. It was with great joy to have people walk with us and show their support. We want to acknowledge the group of young people who came from Minneapolis to join us a few days; the lovely, mature ladies who sacrificed themselves to walk a distance with us; the people who walked and gave up their homes for us to spend the night; the casinos that provided accommodations and meals; the organizations who offered their lodging for a few days and pampered us with soothing foot baths and feast food. The food we were given kept us well fed. The medicines for our aching muscles and bandages for our blisters, the water we were given by generous people, and money that people gave to help us for gas and other necessities. The police who were ever watchful as also the eagles in the sky, watching for our safety and verbally encouraging us with kind words.”

**Video:** [Learn more about lessons from the Water Walks told by Josephine Mandamin.](#)

**The Water Walk**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 2 – I can connect the Water Walk to my personal life**

Josephine Mandamin and others walked to call attention to the importance of taking care of the waters of the Great Lakes, not for themselves but for generations to come. After reading about the Water Walk and entries in Josephine’s journal, choose 3 questions to answer using details.

1. Would you have wanted to join the Water Walk? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What role do you think music played in their walking? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What role do you think music played in their hopes for what would happen with the water?

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4. Can you think of another social cause in history where music is or was important?

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5. Figure out a destination that is 18 miles from your home. Now imagine walking there and back every day for more than a month. What would you need to make that possible?

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### Part 3 – I can sing Nibi Song

This song was written by Doreen Day at the request of her grandson, Mashkoonce. Doreen and Mashkoonce give written permission (via the website below) for everyone to share this song... sing it to the water every day. Verbal permission to use this song in Minnesota classrooms was obtained by Lyz Jaakola.

This is the story of the Nibi (Water) Song, as told by Beatrice Menase Kwe Jackson, Migizi Clan.

Doreen attended a conference about the water in which the internationally known speaker, Dr. Masaru Emoto said, the very least we should do every day, is to speak to the water:

*Water, we love you. We thank you. We respect you.*

So she did this. Every day on their drive to drop Mashkoonce (Little Elk) at school, they passed a body of water. And every day they said those words to the water as they drove by. They made games by saying it in different voices and then would say it as fast as they could.

Then one day Mashkoonce, said, “Nokomis why can’t we say this in our language?” So, Doreen asked her daughter’s language teacher to write it in Ojibwemowin. Doreen had the words taped to the car visor as they learned the words.

One day Mashkoonce said, “Nokomis why don’t we sing the words, don’t you think the water would like it to be sung?” So she thought about it and came up with the tune. They sang this song to the water every morning on their drive to school. It is sung like a lullaby and doesn’t use shakers or drums.

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Nibi Song (pronounced Nee-bee)

[http://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com/?attachment\\_id=2244](http://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com/?attachment_id=2244)

Click the link above to listen to Nibi Song. Follow the words. Join the singing. Move your hand to outline the shape of the melody. Where is ornamentation used in the melody?

#### Nibi Song

**Ne-be Gee Zah-gay-e-goo**

**Gee Me-gwetch-wayn ne-me-goo**

**Gee Zah Wayn ne-me-goo**

#### Translation

Nibi = water

Gee = you

Zah-gay-e-goo = we (inclusive) love you

Me-gwetch-wayn ne-me-goo = we (inclusive) thank you

Zah Wayn ne-me-goo = we (inclusive) respect you

Final thoughts? Discuss these statements with a partner or in a small group.

- Singing songs is a way to honor something we respect.
- Music can be a part of expressing what is important to us.