

The First Story of the Paddle

Chief Shawn Atleo (A-in-chut),
Vancouver Island University's first Chancellor,
wanted a gift that signified a journey because
he comes from a canoeing and whaling culture.
Paddles signified moving together, pulling
together, working together in a canoe. When



in big water, people are completely relying on others in a canoe. The paddle represents the journey in both a physical and spiritual sense: when the paddle is being stroked in the water, we can only see half of it. The spiritual side we cannot see. Being part of a team in the water is something that touches a person forever, just like the experience of attending school.

The paddle was made by Brian Bob, Qwuyutsapulth of the Coast Salish/Ucluelet, who now lives in Sna naw as (Nanoose). The gift of the paddle represents the journey people go on while following their educational goals. It is made of yellow cedar, and although it is very beautiful, it is functional. The salmon were included to signify the journey. They leave, but travel upstream to come home. That is why we educate our youth with the hope that they will bring back their learning to their communities. The copper points are the eggs of the salmon glinting with suggestion at the connection to the next generation.

Although this paddle is beautiful artwork, it is given with the hope that it will be used. Dip it in the water the first day of a significant journey; dip it again on the last day. Use it as a talking stick or in ceremonies. Keep it where people can touch it, feel it, and hold it. It will start to turn, fade, as part of its journey, and this honours the living culture.