Chapter 6

Contextualizing Native American Literature

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Native American Literature is not a subfield literature.
It is not confined to the English language.
It is hemispheric in dimension.
J. Forbes, 1987

The Cultural Roots

The study of Native American literature begins with an introduction to the extinct and living cultures from which indigenous literatures derive and in which these literatures still most animately reveal themselves. In the United States today, these cultures comprise approximately two million people and are reflected in about 750 related and diverse tribal groups and communities that are now bound together by recent federal-tribal events and relations.[1]

To accept the above population figures, and to consider only tribal nations in the United States as having "Native American literature," is to ignore the hemispheric presence and network of indigenous literatures, which have a long and stable history that has not yet been established in the modern developing nations of the Americas. The pre-Columbian oral roots of indigenous literatures are in Alaska, Canada, Mexico, and South America, as is the future.

The present national boundaries of the modern countries of the Americas separate the extant tribes and have very effectively resulted in the appearance of nonexistent, isolated, and fragmented literatures, disconnected from each other and unintelligible and insignificant to societies and cultural groups other than their own. As a result, students think that Native American literature is recent, shaped largely or solely by the dominant language and society in each modern country. Such thinking frames the study of indigenous literatures in most schools. As long as indigenous literatures are introduced and studied from within national boundaries, a distorted view of them will prevail.

Although members of tribal nations became American citizens only in 1924 and were given the right to vote even more recently, they have been on this continent for thousands of years. When indigenous literatures are permitted to unfold on their own terms, they show not only the knowledge of peoples in the near and distant past but also the long relationships of peace or conflict that they have had with others.

Indigenous literatures generate practical thinking and problem solving about how their societies and cultures have communicated and coexisted with each other in the Americas over long periods. They encourage knowledge of the earth and sky that has always been necessary human survival. The long-term existence of indigenous cultures in the Americas that make indigenous literatures what they are: bodies of knowledge that can serve all humanity. Native people are storytellers with stories passed on from generation to generation. Although effectively capturing the oral tradition can be difficult, many Native authors are successful at conveying the necessary nuances to make the story live in the reader's mind. Paula Gunn Allen's collection, *Spider Woman's Granddaughters* (1989), includes traditional tales and contemporary writing by Native American women. Allen's introduction to the book also discusses Native literature in the oral tradition and what she calls "told-on-the-page" stories that are included in her collection. An excellent example of the ability to capture the oral tradition on the page can be seen in Athabascan author Velma Wallis's *Two Old Women* (1993). Wallis retells a story, told to her by her mother as they gathered wood for the winter, about two old Athabascan women who were abandoned by their tribe during a winter of poverty and extreme hardship. Rather than give up and accept death, the two old women decide to fight for their survival alone in

the Alaskan wilderness. The women's courage and determination to survive parallels the history of Native American people as a whole, whose resistance in the face of persecution has prevented them from becoming the vanishing race they were often described as being.

The ability of indigenous peoples to map their physical and spiritual relationships non-geographical boundaries in old and new generations is a distinctive feature of indigenous life through all periods of time. Of the hundreds of unrelated indigenous groups in the United States alone, all express intimate and specialized knowledge of the continent. This is mirrored in indigenous languages and is evident in English indigenous literatures as well.

Indigenous groups are still inclined to view the land from perspectives other than those of modern political nation-states, or falling or rising countries inclined toward war or peace in particular eras as well as in the future. They demonstrate perceptions of this continent that have troubled modern American governments, as well as foreign governments in the Americas, since European contact.

In indigenous experiences and literatures, the continent is more than the old and modern nations that have been formed on them. The continent cannot be contained in political blocs or territories or in time; it is experienced as vibrantly alive and under no human or societal control. This view of a timeless animated cosmos has always been disconcerting and threatening to outsiders, who have tried to change or eradicate it since it was first expressed by indigenous peoples. Wars have been fought because indigenous peoples would not let that perception go; they have therefore suffered for it greatly.

Indigenous expressions of an animated land have led to ideas about the development of human consciousness, human existence, and human rights upon the continent. These ideas, which became fundamental indigenous teachings, were set in motion long before indigenous peoples met Europeans. Indigenous philosophies, laws, and sciences sprouted in this soil. Furthermore, the behaviors of these indigenous groups were consistent with their beliefs about their connection to the land. This was repeatedly witnessed by the early European colonialists.

These continued teachings about the land in indigenous literatures still mark indigenous peoples as they move in modern American society and the other countries of the Americas. The teachings are

the basis for their ideas of beauty, ideal human behavior, humor, and health.

These perspectives of the relationship between the land and the existence and welfare of indigenous peoples have been literal and spiritual for many generations. They show that indigenous peoples have been taking longer and broader views of human and nonhuman life, as they observed them in the Americas, long before what is often taught as the "beginning" of civilization here. This was "global awareness" before the term was coined and it became trendy.

The visions of a whole, timeless land had integrity even during periods of war and after boundaries were drawn. The strength and truth of this vision remained while many political states rose and fell. Using this storehouse of information enabled indigenous groups to survive the onslaught of human destruction over the millennia.

The natural world is considered to be the best teacher in indigenous literatures, because all species of life have an order and a pattern of behavior that express wisdom and purpose simply by their fulfillment. The unique species of plants and animals, some of which are now extinct, represents libraries of information held by indigenous peoples. All nonhuman life was a source of knowledge for indigenous peoples. Their ideas about the natural world are complicated and serious, not the silly caricatures in many books where animals mimic human beings and are depicted without divine dignity or grace. This is what happens when indigenous literatures are interpreted in another cultural framework.

Today all the dimensions of indigenous literatures are not realized or are missed because they are approached in a very Westernized way of thinking and constructing meaning. Not only have the bodies of indigenous literatures been given their momentum only recently in American society—as seen in best-selling novels by Native authors, such as Susan Powers' *Grass Dancer* (1994), a multigenerational story of life on the Sioux reservation in North Dakota—but being indigenous and communal are presented solely within the cultural framework of American society and its European antecedents. This does not serve deep thinkers or human society, now or in a thousand years.

Indigenous perspectives on this continent have always been accessible to modern Americans, for many scholars have devoted much time to collecting them. The irony of having collected all these materi-

als is that this storehouse of knowledge has never been used by modern American society (or other countries in the Americas) as credible ways of learning how to live throughout all nation-states, time periods, and crises.

The credibility and integrity of indigenous literatures in American society are now influenced by the small number of indigenous peoples and the historical image of them as opponents of American advancement. *Small* is not beautiful or valued in American society, and a historical foe is difficult to trust.

Throughout the Americas, however, indigenous tribal literatures are the foundation upon which modern nations stand, whether or not this is acknowledged. The legacy of indigenous literatures for modern countries is large and immeasurable. They remain a force in American history and society whether they are wanted or not. This legacy has often been transformed in American society and has become covertly mainstreamed along the way. Perhaps this is easier to see with a critical eye in a neighboring country rather than one's own. That modern nations in the Americas stand upon indigenous literatures is a given. The English language as it is used on this continent contains indigenous words, place names, and regional historical terms. American society was built on this framework, yet the influence of indigenous knowledge on American culture is minimized in texts and curricula. Teachers can infuse existing curricula with little-known details from reference materials such as Weatherford's *Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americans Transformed the World* (1988), which informs readers about the social, cultural, and political contributions of Native Americans to contemporary society.

Indigenous peoples have undergone transformations but have yet to become full, mainstream American citizens. Although they represent only a fraction of the entire American population, these tribal groups reside within U.S. borders and participate in the American educational system. Extremely cognizant of modern times and trends, indigenous nations have pertinent ideas about issues now engaging American society. Any action taken by the American government affects them too, for better or worse.

The continuation of indigenous peoples in the Americas is a given, no matter how small their population. This thinking is expressed in their literatures: Indigenous continuity does not depend upon exter-

nal societies or agencies but upon their own resources. The extent of the inclusion and participation of indigenous peoples as citizens in modern countries is not so clear.

School texts do not show the network of indigenous peoples, with their ancient ties to one another, or the range and scope of their literatures beneath the surface of the "New World." How can this be so in the United States, the most highly educated country in the world? Indigenous peoples themselves know their links under the surface of modern countries in the Americas. They often consider themselves members of multiple communities, in and out of American society. In the past, they interacted very openly with the world to teach about human survival and the land as they know it. Interacting with different cultures before and after becoming American citizens gave them a voice and information in affairs that would eventually affect them.

It may come as a shock to most modern Americans that any people, indigenous or not, who reside here would want to interact with the larger world as anything but American citizens—especially people who appear to have no sociopolitical power among themselves. What could possibly be the source of the grandiose idea that indigenous peoples in the United States could meet citizens of the world as equals and that any other community in which indigenous people hold membership could be more powerful than the United States?

The answer is indigenous sovereignty. Before the creation of modern American society and the disenfranchisement of tribal nations, these nations were fully sovereign. New governments never dispelled the tribal memory of it even as they acknowledged it and expressed the right to destroy it.

The visibility of indigenous peoples in the Americas is influenced by both their low numbers and the modern attitude that indigenous groups function in their societies in a static manner. These two factors have joined together to dismiss indigenous literatures or transform them into mainstream experiences in the other countries of the Americas.

As indigenous literatures are taken into the classroom, educators should consider all these points. They must look outside the academic setting and try to see indigenous literatures in the context of the entire hemisphere, the indigenous communities themselves, and the ways

in which indigenous literatures can influence modern American society now and in the future.

Anything less than this will not do.

Legal Cultural Features in the United States

> Contemporary Indian communities, both reservation and urban, represent the continuing existence of a particular group of people who have traditionally had a moral and legal claim against the United States. The fact that many Indian tribes continue to exist unassimilated is not due to the practice of traditional ceremonies as much as it testifies [to] the complex of legal and political ideas that have surrounded Indians for two centuries and made them understand the world in much different terms [than] any other group of American citizens. (Deloria & Lytle, 1984, p. 102)

Indigenous nations are uniquely themselves within American society. Members of indigenous nations hold a dual legal identity that has been quite evident throughout American history. Individuals usually hold a legal membership in an indigenous group that has centuries-old ties to the modern American government, and these individuals are also American citizens. Through these legalities, tribes govern themselves, determine their own membership rolls and criteria, and often interact with representatives of state and federal governments in the interest of their tribal members. These sociopolitical and legal relationships of indigenous peoples arise from the concept of tribal sovereignty, a complex idea in Indian law stemming from the fact that indigenous groups have held certain rights on this continent for centuries, long before the building of modern American society. This is why the newly formed American government entered into treaties with them. From the time of contact, indigenous nations began to assume a single "Indian" identity in the eyes of the federal government has that spread to society as a whole.

In relation to each other, however, tribal groups continue to be autonomous, just as they were in the distant past. Some tribes are related, but many are not. Most often they are classified according to linguistic families or assigned to specific geographical areas by out-

siders. In a few cases, some tribes have lived in proximity to each other for centuries but have retained very different cultures and languages, which exist to the present day. Although individuals and groups do join current international and national organizations, these affiliations are of a different nature and duration.

Most tribes have very different histories from each other, from pre-Columbian times to the unique steps taken toward living in modern American society. The profusion of various tribal languages, and dialects within those languages, supports the idea that many developments overlapped with each other. Native American literature springs from this storehouse of peoples' visions of themselves and their place on this continent and in the universe. Thus, indigenous literatures reflect distinctive individual group values and experiences. These languages continue to be principally oral 500 years after European contact.

Modern tribal nations in the United States are united by their long, documented existence on this continent, their extended relationships with hostile and friendly groups, some parallel sociopolitical developments from paleolithic to preindustrial times; and a shared historical experience of European colonization.

A single "Indian" identity was reinforced in American consciousness by federal policies that addressed the legal relationship of the indigenous peoples with the federal government. However, there is probably not just one cause for that mistaken identity.

Defining Native American Literature

> The image we have of ourselves as Indian people is crucial to who we will be in the future. Who we have been determined to be, according to Euro-American culture and thought, has often been the wrongest [sic] idea of who we are, simply to serve a purpose not our own, a purpose that's external or outside of ourselves. Most times that image has served them, the proponents of Euro-American culture, and it has not served us at all. (Ortiz, 1993b, p. 38)

The term "Native American literature" is a legal fiction. For the purposes of this chapter, it is used to refer to a base of indigenous literatures from North America in indigenous and English languages and to modern literary developments that extend those collective tribal

aesthetics and values more fully into American society. This chapter refers only to literary traditions and their modern adaptations as they are treated by indigenous peoples now. Thousands of manuscripts have been written from *external* viewpoints about indigenous peoples in the United States alone, and this is a significant body of work that has had a great impact on American society and has found a lasting, cherished place in American history and experience. This chapter focuses on teaching issues surrounding a more unfamiliar and frequently more inaccessible body of literary traditions that describe *internal* viewpoints of indigenous peoples in the Americas, from ancient times to the present. Lastly, "literature" is used more inclusively here than "Native American."

Multicultural Issues

> The battle for inclusion in the canon of World Literature has to do with more than having your writing sandwiched between Norman Mailer and Joan Didion in some publisher's collection. If Indian literature is not included in the canon of American letters, if it is not studied in our colleges as legitimate literature, then Native peoples remain invisible in society, and the teaching in our grade schools and high schools will not improve.
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> Just making requirements, however, does not seem to me to be the answer. Having a cultural diversity requirement does not mean good material will be taught. Indeed, ill informed teachers, perhaps with the best intentions, may simply perpetuate stereotypes. So we don't want a niche, a token work, or class separated from the core of the curriculum. We don't want mere inclusion and we don't want marginal status. Instead we want the influences of tribal literatures on the general categories of American literature and world literature recognized. (Blaeser, 1993, p. 36)

When indigenous peoples of the Americas do not appear in classroom texts *in their own words* concerning their lives in the modern countries of the Americas, something is deeply wrong in the schools and the democracies of those countries. When the ancient living literatures of an entire hemisphere are omitted in modern schools—even

though they are a legitimate body of knowledge with value and relevance for the future well-being of all humanity—it becomes very clear that indigenous populations are not considered part of those modern societies. The absence of indigenous literatures in modern schools ensures that a cycle of ignorance about indigenous peoples in the Americas will be perpetuated from generation to generation.

Knowledge of indigenous peoples in the Americas by modern European Americans is no greater than that of their great-great grandparents. This is the heart of the matter. Indigenous peoples have an obscure and ambiguous place in American society; consequently, Native American literature is ambiguous, at best, in the educational system.

Americans simply do not know about indigenous peoples in the United States. They are therefore unable to make simple connections between themselves and indigenous peoples, as American citizens or as human beings, because these possibilities are not taught in our schools, either as real behavior or as scholarship. Most Americans consider themselves well educated even though they lack any knowledge of indigenous peoples or exposure to indigenous literatures. They credit American schools for their education, their ideas of citizenship, leadership, community and global awareness, and their identity. Some Americans have even indicated, in print and other media, that indigenous peoples do not have literature because there is no evidence of intellectual and literary forms that qualify as literature, as it is produced by other civilizations. Some of these people don't know that they have *seen* the evidence.

Others do think that the literature exists, but only in English. Because English is external to indigenous peoples, these forms of literature must also be external to them. Therefore, out of necessity, so called "Native American literature" has been and will continue to be produced best—or even only—by everybody *but* indigenous peoples. Such people point to regions and marketplaces that specialize in this. Historically, there have been periods when *no* contemporary indigenous writers at all were included in the genre, which consisted mainly of imagined views of indigenous life and experience. Indigenous writers were conscientiously excluded from producing Native American literature for mainstream society. This is still happening, especially in some regions and marketplaces.

Schools play a major role in shaping and fostering these perceptions by building curricular units solely from that body of external

material about indigenous peoples and not teaching the literatures of indigenous peoples themselves. Most information about indigenous peoples used in all the educational institutions of American society comes from "experts" and authority figures who claim "objectivity" and have academic credentials. These "experts" then become role models for students on how to think about and transmit information on Native Americans. Such teaching styles, ideals, and practices profoundly affect human relations for many generations. They are counterproductive to all peoples on this planet, who have to coexist as equals in any truly democratic society.

Integrating Native American literature thoughtfully and constructively into curricula is one way to address these issues. On a national scale, however, this has yet to happen. There are strong reasons for the way schools are in this country. Native American literature might dilute a curriculum that is already too full, and it might also weaken core American values and chip away at the one large "American" identity that schools have worked so hard to forge.

In *The Owl's Song* (1974) Janet Campbell Hale reveals how misinformation can lead children to hold inaccurate ideas about the lives of contemporary Native people. In her novel, Billy leaves the Benewah reservation in Idaho. His experiences in a public high school are filled with taunts from students who want to know where his teepee is and why he was allowed to leave the reservation. They want him to do a rain dance and make whooping sounds as he passes them in the halls. Hale's novel captures the pain that Billy feels as he struggles to develop his sense of identity.

Native American literature that comes from indigenous peoples themselves often presents views of this country that are alien to American values and experience. It seems to reach out to "bite the hand that feeds it" in its commentary on specific events and values at the very core of modern society. Why should educators want to bring that into school curricula, especially when the integration of indigenous literatures requires a lot of work and appears to have little gain for American society?

All the diverse groups that are represented in Native American literature present another hurdle. They seem to go against the grain of the "melting pot" envisioned by the Founding Fathers of this country. Besides the fact that the cultures are not well known, the argument is

that the groups seem unmanageable because they are "too many." Perhaps the solution is, they could all be put into one bag and managed that way?

This is not a new idea: Remove the tribal base or community of each indigenous group and encourage a purely academic approach. This has possibilities, and it is the way that "Indians" and "Native American literature" has been studied up to now, when they *have* been studied.

As if all this were not enough to consider, there is also the commotion from indigenous peoples about the term "Native American literature" having the connotation of English-only usage and being too restrictive for all indigenous literatures. Don't literate societies and their intellectuals know what *really* constitutes literature?

All these points have a bearing on the inclusion of indigenous literatures in American schools. Such a bold step requires more time to ponder everything. In the meantime, those who claim to know about indigenous peoples in the Americas are taking care of everything, they say. Isn't that enough?

Bridging the Gaps

> The educator who sees education as culturally neutral is similar to the spouse of an alcoholic who denies the alcoholism. There are implications for the practice, self-concept, and feelings that both are unable to face. Perverse ignorance is a particular form of the defense mechanism of denial. . . . It is understandable that the educator with a self-concept bound to the ideal of helping children, with a preparation that does not include multicultural education competence, a curriculum that ignores or systematically distorts the culture of his or her students, and unresolved personal issues of racism and ethnocentrism would be unable to face the extent to which education is not only culturally bound but actively hostile to children. (Hampton, 1993, p. 264)

The climate in American schools is now transitional and requires educators to be more responsive and accountable to the various groups that they serve. This means making Native American literature a part of curricula in a way that will inspire positive multicultural communication among all students and provide practical opportunities to demonstrate more harmonious means of coexistence.

Developing or augmenting the curriculum to include Native American literature involves deciding how and when to integrate it so that the curriculum is seamless, substantive, and constructive. This step requires trained educators who know the literatures and the peoples and who are committed to quality teaching.

To make informed and effective selections of material for classroom use, teachers must know the characteristics of individual indigenous groups as well as their literary styles and aesthetics. Educators may decide to seek more formal training if they become overwhelmed by the volume and diversity of indigenous literatures.

Teaching Strategies

> The United Nations International School has about 1,400 students, ranging from kindergarten through twelfth grade, from countries all over the world. Approximately half of them are from families affiliated with the United Nations, while the others come from local families in New York. From the earliest grades, the school cultivates a global perspective among students. One of the school's goals is to provide an educational experience that reflects the values and perspectives of those cultures.
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> Native American cultures embody traditions that emphasize balance and harmony, and the interrelationship of living things rather than acquisitiveness and the exploitation of resources. With this in mind, in 1984, I began a project to collect Native American stories and poetry for integration into the already existing literature, social studies, and environmental studies programs in the elementary schools. (Cutforth, 1993, p. 38)

Fortunately, there is no one right way to teach Native American literature. The purpose of education is to teach all students to read, write, and think about what it means to be human in any place or at any time and to demonstrate the personal development of knowledge and skills in successful relationships. Native American literature poses the same challenges.

Some schools have integrated Native American literature into their curricula in a number of creative and stimulating ways, depending

upon their educational philosophies and the structure of their curricula, but English and Social Studies are probably the most common routes. Thematic study units are also a doorway. Creative and well-trained teachers are critical to the successful integration of all multicultural literature. Native American literature is not often an area in which secondary teachers have been trained, and so they must either train themselves or get help from others. Native American literature is becoming a more frequent component of teacher training, especially for teachers going to reservation settings.

Where Native American literature is not included in teacher training, it must now become a focus area, and schools must commit the resources to train teachers when necessary. Teachers, like anyone else, are products of their times, and it should now be clear that teacher training programs did not foresee a time or place in which indigenous literatures would fit into American schools. Some teachers do not teach Native American literature of their own volition. They take on the assignment unfamiliar with the field and try to make the best of the situation. In general, few teachers think that there is enough time to do well all that is asked of them. Whether writing a lesson plan or guiding a discussion on the most recent reading assignment, teachers need adequate time to give full attention to the task at hand. Teaching Native American literature, even when the job is loved, suffers from teacher workloads. Native American literature in particular requires teachers to be attentive and familiar with communities and cultures that are reflected in various literary forms.

Ideally, the curriculum ought to include credible first-person accounts and perspectives of indigenous peoples in their cultures, within American society, and in the modern world. A fine example is the autobiography of Polingaysi Quoyawayma, a Hopi woman born in 1892. In her autobiography, *No Turning Back: A Hopi Indian Woman's Struggle to Live in Two Worlds* (1964), Quoyawayma recounts her life, from her childhood in old Oraibi to her return to the abandoned village as an adult. Along the way, she describes encounters with "Bahana" (the White man) and eloquently describes the rituals and daily activities of Hopi life. Curious about the White man's ways, she willingly leaves her village to attend school. She eventually becomes a teacher, struggling to provide Indian children with an education that honored their identities while providing them with the necessary skills

to excel in the White man's world. Throughout her travels, Quoyawayma returns home and describes the tremendous conflicts between her culture and the White culture. Another fine addition to personal accounts is Patricia Riley's collection, *Growing Up Native American: Stories of Oppression & Survival of Heritage, Denied & Reclaimed: 22 American Writers* (1995). In this volume, 22 Native American writers recall their childhoods in their native lands. Such authenticity is critical because anything less dismisses and minimizes the actual experiences of indigenous peoples.

Classrooms are constructed; in many ways, they are not natural settings for learning. They are often the first meeting place for students of diverse interests and backgrounds. Similarly, most students will have their first exposure to indigenous peoples and literatures there. Students from indigenous cultures must make adjustments to teachers who are not from the same economic, social, or political backgrounds. They must also adjust to Native American literature in the classroom, where it is studied rather than lived. The parameters of knowledge surrounding Native American literature in this environment suddenly shift away from them and into another domain.

Native American literature must not become equated with the formal classroom. It does not always have to be taught and appreciated in a mainstream way. The classroom setting and mainstream teaching strategies leave little room for other ways of interacting with the indigenous knowledge contained in the literature. Some critics call this trend "colonization." It is important to remember that Native American literature is linked to indigenous ideas of education and many other things. Indigenous societies in everyday situations operate very differently than a formal classroom does. Their use of and relationship to literature is not academic; it is functional and integrated into their collective and individual experiences in nonacademic ways.

Teachers will have to do some research to prepare themselves to teach the materials they have selected. How indigenous peoples express their identities and lifestyles goes beyond pseudo-anthropological research. The process of selecting teaching materials often causes good teachers to be introspective. They are concerned with standards of literary merit and genius and often scrutinize their own subjectivity and knowledge of indigenous cultures when making these selections.

When presenting material in the classroom, most teachers find it helpful to frame the selection with an introduction. The origin of the material, the historical and social influences on the literary style or form, and the relationship of the work to the students are possible places to start. It is better to avoid an "anthropological" stance here.

Unwritten as well as written forms may be used, depending on the focus of the class and the level of skill development of the students. For example, in a reading class teachers may select stories or essays to help students practice their reading skills. As the level of student abilities increases or expands, so should the complexity of the selections. Teacher selections should also strive to include more balanced views of key events in American history—views that present Native people as people and not as the savages they are most often depicted as being. In the context of war, for example, both sides commit cruel and inhumane acts. In *James Printer: A Novel of Rebellion* (1997), Jacobs presents a well-balanced historical account of King Philip's (the British name for the Wampanoag leader, Metacom) War. Through the eyes of Bartholomew, a young boy whose family operates a printing press at Harvard College, Jacobs cleverly tells the story of James Printer of the Nipmuck tribe and his role in King Philip's War. The courage, pain, and horrors of cultural conflict and warfare as experienced by both the Native people in New England and the colonists are skillfully presented. The early American printing press figures prominently throughout the story. An Afterword also provides readers with details about Jacobs' research of Printer's life.

Native American literature must be shown to have its own standards, merit, forms, and aesthetics. Teaching Native American literature requires teachers to be able to identify material that is not stereotypical. Teachers can develop a sense of discernment regarding authenticity by immersing themselves in material about a specific tribe and reading in depth about that tribe. Volumes such as Sando's *Pueblo Nations: Eight Centuries of Pueblo Indian History* (1992) provide rich background information that can inform a teacher's selections of literature about Pueblo Indians. The work of Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Indian Heritage in America* (1968) is broad in scope but a worthwhile reference. So too is Ruoff's *Literatures of the American Indian* (1991), which can be used in the classroom as an introductory overview of the many forms of Native American literature. When Native Ameri-

can literature is taught as a body of skills and aesthetics that serves a purpose other than what it serves in indigenous societies, its nature will be misunderstood.

There is always a connection to a core of tribal teachings in Native American literature, even when it expresses distance or alienation from that core. In the academic setting, Native American literature is studied more for the craft of writing and for the intellectual truths it reveals. This way of knowing stresses "objective" reflection on the meaning of writing and indigenous experience. In indigenous settings, older forms of indigenous literatures are actively involved in the creative, critical, and subjective thinking and being of the people on a daily basis.

Because much of what Native American literature contains will be new to most students, teachers must devise ways to get early feedback on student understanding and processing of information. If the student has a problem comprehending the material, this can be more easily remedied the sooner it is realized. When different ideas about the universe or human experience are introduced to anyone, a moment of pause is required to let those new ideas sink in. Most of the suggestions here are simply sound and productive teaching practices that depend on teacher and student rapport. Native American literature can be taught in more lively and interesting ways from what is usually planned. Drama and video productions, for example, can move the study of Native American literature beyond reading and written responses. A word of caution, however: At no time in the study of indigenous peoples or their literatures should students be encouraged to "play Indian" or to create their own "ceremonies" as part of their study. That would seem to be obvious, but it happens often in schools.

It should also be emphasized that half of all Native American literature expresses humor and humorous situations. Very few people in modern American society know this trait of indigenous peoples. Native Americans should also be understood within contemporary settings. Frosch's edited volume, *Coming of Age in America: A Multicultural Anthology* (1994), includes a short story by Creek author Durango Mendoza and D'Arcy McNickle, a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes of Montana. Mendoza's short story, "Summer Water and Shirley," concerns siblings, illness, and the pros-

pect of death. McNickle's piece is a delightful story of friendship and conversations shared among young people who ride to school each morning in a buggy. It offers an introspective look into how a teenage boy comes to understand the love of his parents and his first crush. Another excellent anthology with a blend of short stories and poems is *Multicultural Voices: Literature From the United States* (1995).

Native American literature should be taught with consistent formality and attention in schools. A one-hour class on one day is not enough. When the proper effort is initiated, educators will become increasingly aware of their curricula. Strategies that undermine Native American literature include superficial attention, misrepresentation, and framing it in the values of Europe or mainstream U.S. culture. Its purpose in the classroom is not to conform to English language conventions or American perspectives of who "Indians" are. Its purpose in the classroom is to open up a portal through which indigenous peoples speak for themselves without censorship about life in the Americas in the past, present, and future.

Some educators have already considered all these suggestions. They have felt the presence of indigenous peoples in the United States and the other countries of the Americas and have responded in the classroom by quietly teaching Native American literature for some time. They have developed curriculum materials, invited writers and other speakers into the classroom, evaluated and selected teaching texts, and shared teaching strategies, triumphs, and disappointments with others engaged in these activities.

Their accomplishments are a beginning. After 500 years, perhaps the work has begun in earnest. Now we must ask, how soon will we see the quality and effects of this expansive movement?

The Texts

> More than 30,000 manuscripts have been published about American Indians, and more than 90 percent of that literature has been written by non-Indians. (Fixico, 1996, p. 30)

The texts that are available may present a confusing mass of information to the already overwhelmed teacher. Teachers should look for texts in which indigenous peoples appear in all walks of life and speak, without a middle person to interpret or "help" the speakers, on what

it means to live in all their communities. Teachers must be well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of texts and consider other options when texts are nonexistent or inaccessible. Speeches, biographies, histories, indigenous language texts and tapes, autobiographies, photojournalism texts, myths, legends, folktales, interviews, and essays have all been produced, along with novels, poetry, short fiction, and literary criticism. Numerous anthologies of modern forms, several of which specialize in selections from oral traditions, translated into English, are also available.

Indigenous language texts are usually published by tribal entities or institutions, such as the Navajo Nation. There are some exciting developments in the production of these texts, but not enough. Yet what has been done and what is now underway in recording languages and creating new material is inspiring. While large publishers still do not publish manuscripts in indigenous languages, a handful of small presses, regional presses, university presses, and academic presses do. A few English-speaking writers of indigenous backgrounds speak and write fluent indigenous languages, and more writing in indigenous languages is forthcoming. An example is the Princeton Collection of Western Americana publication, *saad* (1995) by Rex Lee Jim, written entirely in Navajo.[2]

Texts are also accessible on the Internet, as well as other kinds of teaching support and information.

The Forms

Washington

Oh, how do I long for my native woods.
This place has no charms for me;
the choicest wisdom of this great
American republic gathers here,
around the great National Council fire,
but what I care for that?

This is a city which shines like the ice
which covers rivers in the Long Night's Moon.
Great steps lead up to the Capital,
but my feet hesitate to make the climb.

It is from this place
the decrees have emanated
dooming my hapless race to the grave.
There are markers here for the white
honored dead, but my people are to become extinct
without even leaving a monument
that they once existed a happy race . . .

Ely Parker, February 1846,
after first visit to Washington, D.C.[3]
(Brochac, 1985)

All elements of indigenous literatures cohere within literary forms, which are shaped by indigenous aesthetics and cultural chronologies that vary from tribe to tribe. Acculturation and colonization may also show up in the forms, which have been ordered and arranged by chants, prayers, songs, stories, poetry, and so on for scholarly study. Explaining the forms often becomes pedantic and tiresome, and the categories themselves get in the way when they are put before the expressed form. This activity misleads students into thinking they are studying indigenous literatures when they are actually reproducing a way of knowing that has little if anything to do with indigenous peoples or literatures.

A more useful approach to both oral and written forms is to place them within the cultural chronologies of individual indigenous groups. Only after European contact did some indigenous experiences and literary developments converge in English thought and construction.

The diversity of indigenous communities and groups in the Americas, and the hundreds of tribal languages spoken here in addition to Spanish, French, and English, present literally thousands of forms and innumerable teaching possibilities. Deciding what to select from this vast body of literature may be intimidating.

The parameters of oral traditions are different from those of written texts. They require the active and reciprocal involvement of all participants, and sometimes they appear to be "loose" or "uncontrolled." Although participatory control shifts, there is a definite structure, which might even be quite rigid according to the people's standards. These forms challenge the senses and the intellect in other ways as well. They are often more difficult to access logistically across

cultures. Modern written forms tend to gain more acceptance in schools because they are more recognizable and less distant from the norms of American society. These bodies of record have therefore gained more renown, credibility, and authority, especially since they are in English.

Resources

The Canadian Journal of Native Studies is an international Native studies periodical published twice a year in Brandon, Manitoba, Canada. The journal publishes articles and reviews concerning indigenous people and indigenous affairs in Canada, the United States, and other countries of the world.

Indigenous communities are the best resources. Teachers would help themselves by finding out where these are and what is happening there. Tribal peoples are often willing to visit classrooms. Schools and teachers in reservation settings are usually very attuned to how literatures manifest themselves in and sustain the local communities, but this is not always true. Tribal schools and organizations also produce and publish some helpful guides and materials. A handful of colleges and universities publish pertinent information on Native American literature and teaching through their Native American Studies departments. The Newberry Library has offered a very comprehensive summer institute on Native American literature, directed by Dr. Lawana Trout. These teachers know the works of noted Native American authors, such as Leslie Marmon Silko's critically acclaimed *Ceremony* (1977) or the poetry of Joey Harjo. They are also able to share cultural insights about the work of Sherman Alexie, Louise Erdirch, Linda Hogan, Thomas King, D'Arcy McNickle, N. Scott Momaday, Simon Ortiz, Gerald Vizenor, and James Welch (his work is more appropriate for adult readers). Periodically, a university with a large enrollment of indigenous students will offer training on a one-time basis. Indigenous organizations in urban centers are also good resources.

In the long run, most teachers will have to compile materials themselves, according to their own teaching styles and idiosyncrasies, and keep communication flowing in regard to training opportunities, new materials, and strategies. Some textbook publishers have also published teaching units, such as *Plains Native American Literature* (1993) by the Globe Book Company, which teachers should examine.

Teachers are also encouraged to look beyond their country's borders and discover that other nations are wrestling with the same issues in teaching multicultural literature. American educators and education don't have all the answers.

Summary

> At the initial point of contact, we were on the eastern shore of North America. Since then, there has been a great decimation of our numbers, language, and culture. In the average American citizen's mind, there is no Indian existence on the eastern shore any longer, which is sad, because once people get out and find the reality of our existence and see that it is there, they are amazed at the durability, survivability, and sustainability of people who have been able to continue after so many hundreds of years and after so many attempts at devastation. They are amazed at the adaptation that occurred under all those conditions, even to the point of our being written out of history. It is really a great statement to the spirit of the people that we have been able to survive at all. (Chavis, 1993, cited in Farlay, p. 104)

The study of multicultural literature is the study of paradox—the whole human community and its parts. It is the one voice speaking through the many. The very presence of indigenous peoples in the Americas is a study in paradox, reflects several kinds of "Native American" identities that do and don't exist. Native American literature is both old and new, ever changing and ever stable. It is part of many modern nations, although its life flow does not depend upon the continuity of those modern nations; rather, it depends upon the survival of the land and the indigenous peoples and their languages. This literature precedes modern American literature by centuries or even millennia; it is founded in tribal languages and expresses intimate and specialized knowledge of the land. It not clearly and openly part of modern national American literature. Its history is extensive—too extensive to be written in detail, if indeed it can be written at all, given its nature. That task is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter.

Studies of oral traditions and modern literary adaptations of indigenous peoples have been produced and reproduced in American society and universities, but they have brought indigenous peoples no closer to other Americans and have done very little to affect the sociopolitical status of indigenous peoples in any modern countries of the Americas—except maybe to reinforce the status quo.

The survival of indigenous peoples in the modern countries of the Americas has been gauged in many ways by themselves and by the larger, newer societies in which they reside. In American society, indigenous peoples have been asked for more than 500 years to transcend themselves and become "Americans." Now America must do what it has asked each of its ethnic groups to do: transcend itself and become all its peoples.

Native American literature is not the study of "Indians." If it is a study at all, it is a study of the Americas and the forces in the land that have brought forth human subsistence and history. Nor is the study of indigenous literatures the study of "Indians." It consists of human beings looking both outward and inward for truths about themselves and the universe.

Volumes of scholarly works analyzing Native American literature for academia should not be the end result of teaching it or integrating it into school curricula; that is not the reason indigenous peoples want it included in curricula. Native American literature is larger than that. Some new thinking, some new behavior must come out of the teaching and integration that will benefit this continent and all the societies that dwell here.

Mainstream American education faces many crises today. It has not solved the problems of the world or even of its own society. In some ways it has created as many problems as it has solved. Perhaps no one educational system will meet with everyone's satisfaction; perhaps it will take many systems, working cooperatively and in collaboration with one another, to do this. Yet schools continue to teach the same content in the same way and expect American society to be okay, fully aware that its shortcomings and failures are as numerous as its "successes."

One culture is not more appropriate for a particular time period than another. Cultures exist because they are viable and stand the test of trials and time. The study of all the literatures in the world, "civi-

lized" and not, will only benefit humanity if it moves the learner to become self-educating and critically thinking and acting in a community other than the modern nation-state. It must be lived, not merely theorized.

Notes

1. The 1990 census gives American Indians a population figure of just under two million. Depending upon the sources of information, the number of tribal groups vary. Some sources identify only tribes that have legal recognition. There are others that have functioned as tribal groups for a long time but have lost legal status in America. There are also tribes that were never legally recognized or did not seek legal recognition.
2. Many tribes are producing writers who use tribal languages, but the Navajo Tribe is most conspicuous because of its size and its use of the Navajo language in most of its agencies and schools. As a result, Navajo writers such as Luci Tapahonso and Irvin Morris appear to be very comfortable with both English and Navajo.
3. Ely Parker was a Seneca, born in 1928. He was highly educated and became General Ulysses S. Grant's military secretary. He also recorded the surrender terms at Appamattox.

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