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Storytelling, Identity Development, and Decolonial Pedagogies: Frameworks for Teaching Indigenous Literatures of the Great Lakes to Young Adult Readers

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STORYTELLING, IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT, AND DECOLONIAL PEDAGOGIES:
FRAMEWORKS FOR TEACHING INDIGENOUS LITERATURES OF THE GREAT LAKES
TO YOUNG ADULT READERS

by

Katie M. Cary

A Dissertation Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

STORYTELLING, IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT, AND DECOLONIAL PEDAGOGIES: FRAMEWORKS FOR TEACHING INDIGENOUS LITERATURES OF THE GREAT LAKES TO YOUNG ADULT READERS

by

Katie M. Cary

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2022
Under the Supervision of Professor Margaret Noodin

This project examines Dakota and Anishinaabe literatures of the Great Lakes region with an emphasis on themes of homeland, identity development, community, violence, transformation, and healing. Each chapter of the dissertation focuses on a specific genre, medium, or theory, such as nineteenth-century autobiography, young adult literature, comics, and Two-Spirit critiques, along with pedagogical practices that can be incorporated into English curriculums to help educators teach Indigenous literatures more effectively. This dissertation provides teaching frameworks and suggestions for activities and discussions that other educators can adapt and model in their own secondary school or university classes. I consider texts by Zitkala-Sa, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Angeline Boulley, Elizabeth LaPensée, and Joshua Whitehead to model close readings through the lenses of New Historicism, decolonialism, and queer theory. The work of this project seeks to help educators engage with Indigenous methodologies and student-centered pedagogies, thoughtfully reflect on and research tribally specific histories, cultures, and contemporary issues, and choose Indigenous texts focusing on themes that resonate with young adults and which can be read in a way that helps students develop their identities. The chapters of this dissertation work together to argue for a greater inclusion of Indigenous literatures within English courses and other disciplines.

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“The truth about stories is that that’s all we are.”

Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories* (2003)

Introduction

In a series of lectures published together as *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King suggests that “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (2). Originally spoken orally to his audience, King’s lectures demonstrate the Indigenous oral tradition of storytelling, emphasizing the ways in which stories change and adapt based on their teller, their audience, the time, and place. King illuminates the wondrousness of stories yet also exposes the dangers of storytelling: “For once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told” (10). Many Indigenous cultures have certain parameters for telling stories and believe that telling a story at the wrong time can have real consequences. Telling an Anishinaabe story about the trickster Nanaboozhoo, for example, is reserved for the winter. Telling a story about this trickster out of season, or when there is no snow on the ground, will affect the weather and result in a snow storm. Stories can change the physical environment of a place, but more broadly they have the power to alter society and the ways in which we view history. What stories of colonization are being told and taught in American education systems? Whose voices are we most likely to hear? King questions whether the stories we choose to tell are a true reflection of our world, or if “we simply start[ed] off with the wrong story” (26). In comparing the well-known Genesis creation story of Adam and Eve with a lesser-known Indigenous creation story of the Earth Diver, King questions the difference between stories society has deemed as sacred versus secular. Instead of viewing Indigenous stories simply as myths, we as a society need to recognize the value and power of Indigenous stories and the oral tradition. If the story recorded in the book of Genesis is sacred, so is the story being told of the Earth Diver. This way of understanding stories, and the power and sacredness each of them contain, will guide each chapter of this

dissertation as I analyze written and illustrated Anishinaabe and Dakota literatures of the nineteenth century to the present day.

Although numerous writers, storytellers, and scholars would agree with King's claim that stories contain a type of sacred power, there is a common belief that myths, such as Indigenous creation stories, are entirely fictitious and less important than the Bible's secular stories which King describes. Carolyn Dunn, in "Deer Woman and the Living Myth of the Dreamtime", takes issue with this belief and defines "myth" through her own Indigenous perspective: "Creation stories, talk stories, foundations of culture, foundations of language, the basis from which all social and cultural definitions come forth and define a people, a language, a system of belief, a way of knowing, a way of being" (Dunn). She argues that when a culture is defined by its creation stories, and those stories are "primitivized" and determined to be "myths", then that culture's world view comes to be "based upon falsehoods". Dunn views myths in the same fashion King understands stories; rather than being simple, fictitious stories, creation and spiritual myths are sacred and relevant to a community's ways of being. Similar to King, Dunn believes, through her Cherokee/Creek/Seminole/Choctaw world view, that "any way of speaking, be it in speech or in writing, becomes a living, breathing entity that once spoken, cannot be taken back". Stories change throughout time and space, transforming and becoming more relevant as they pass through generations and travel with the movements of their community: "They take on a life of their own; the myths are the truths of a people whose existence has been spoken and breathed into being for thousands of years." Dunn's essay encourages a redefining of the word 'myth' and a respect for Indigenous creation stories and the cultures they have shaped.

Carol Zitzer-Comfort similarly articulates the power of creation stories and addresses their relevance to a classroom or academic environment. When teaching Indigenous creation stories to students, Zitzer-Comfort explains that these stories “draw on students’ prior knowledge since most students have heard at least one version of such a story” (164). She notes, however, that many students struggle with understanding how creation stories can be more than fictitious myth, the definition of ‘myth’ that Dunn takes issue with and challenges. According to Zitzer-Comfort, many students “are unwilling to read any creation story, other than that of Adam and Eve, as alternative accounts of the beginning of life. For many students, the only real creation story or myth that they have been told is the myth of Adam and Eve. (Even using the word *myth* about Adam and Eve causes dismay among some students.)” (164). Like how King discussed the differences between the Earth Diver and Genesis creation stories, Zitzer-Comfort explains that her students often view Indigenous stories as “myth” or false while Christian stories, existing as written texts, seem more plausible: “Only a Christian god, it seems, could have created the earth and the quadrants. Spider grandmother? MYTH! Virgin birth? TRUTH!” (164-165). She asks her students “to respect the creation stories and those who are telling them and to redefine their idea of myth, to consider a myth as a story that has been told for generations and is being told to us (as readers)” (165). Rethinking the term myth prompts students to respect the stories and consider perspectives that differ from their own.

This dissertation explores the power of Indigenous stories and considers the broad category of Indigenous literature(s). According to David Treuer in *Native American Fiction: A User’s Manual* (2006), “Native American fiction does not exist” (195). Treuer argues that interpreting the actual literature itself and analyzing the (usually Western) writing techniques authors use is more important than discussing a writer’s culture or intention. He claims that “by

ignoring the identity of the author and all the ways the author constructs his or her authority outside the text, we will be better able to ascertain the true value of that text” (3). According to Treuer, defining Indigenous literature by the ethnicity of its writers and storytellers “says more about politics and identity than it does about literature” (4). He explains that his “user’s manual” is “not concerned with questions of authenticity[...]Rather, this is a book about interpretation: about what is gained and what is lost when we interpret Native American fiction with more stress placed on ‘Native’ than on ‘fiction’” (4-5). This dissertation challenges Treuer’s view on Indigenous literatures, as I read Indigenous stories through the lens of New Historicism and argue that the writers’ historical, political, social, and cultural contexts are relevant and essential for understanding the nuances of the literatures.

Treuer’s arguments are outdated, and Daniel Heath Justice provides a more contemporary argument about Indigenous literatures in his 2018 text *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. According to Justice, “literature as a category is about what’s important to a culture, the stories that are privileged and honoured, the narratives that people – often those in power, but also those resisting that power – believe to be central to their understanding of the world and their place in relation to it” (20). Justice provides a broad and include definition of literature that includes stories that are told through art forms such as “cane baskets, wampum belts, birchbark scrolls, gourd masks, [and] sand paintings” (22). Indigenous stories exist as a variety of forms and mediums, and because of this diversity, Justice uses “the plural ‘literatures,’ as these texts and traditions are far too diverse and multifaceted to neatly fit the presumptions behind the idea of the monolithic category of ‘literature’” (21). I will similarly use the plural ‘literatures’ throughout this dissertation, as the plural encompasses the diversity of genres and acknowledges

differences between the stories of diverse nations, which allows for comparisons between Anishinaabe and Dakota literatures.

Indigenous Methodologies

As a current and future educator of Indigenous literatures and American Indian Studies, it is essential for my work and teachings to be grounded in an understanding of the five Rs of Indigenous research and methodologies: respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility, and relationality. This framework was developed by Verna J. Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt in their 1991 text “First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R’s – Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility”. Jioanna Carjuzaa and Kay Fenimore-Smith added the fifth R in their 2010 essay “The Give Away Spirit: Reaching a Shared Vision of Ethical Indigenous Research Relationships”. Carjuzaa and Fenimore-Smith explain that the five Rs are “requirements for promoting more equitable relationships and interactions between Indigenous peoples and the academy” (7). Candace Brunette-Debassige and Pauline Wakeham argue that this framework can “guide students and teachers of literature to reflect upon their subject positions, assumptions, and the responsibilities they have to engage with Indigenous stories with care” (22). The research and analysis I have conducted and included in the four main chapters of this dissertation engages with each the five Rs as I have carefully selected each text, respected each story, and reflected on the historical and contemporary needs and experiences of Anishinaabe and Dakota communities. Brunette-Debassige and Wakeham suggest activities English teachers can use to encourage their students to engage with Kirkness and Barnhardt’s initial four Rs, which I will cite in this introduction, and I conclude the work of this dissertation by providing my own suggestions for how to include this framework in classrooms. This dissertation’s conclusion reflects on the

genres and theories of the four main chapters, providing ideas for discussion, activities, and grading policies that focus on student engagement with and enjoyment of texts while simultaneously teaching students to respect Indigenous communities and stories. I contribute to Brunette-Debassige and Wakeham's suggestions by stressing the importance of offering students a variety of options for assignments and activities to fulfill course goals, allowing students to choose the pedagogical method that is most accessible and comfortable for their particular learning needs.

The first of the five Rs is respect, which involves academics and educators respecting Indigenous stories, knowledges, and ways of being. Carjuzaa and Smith explain that "Practicing respectful research within Indigenous communities demands a research methodology that addresses cultural standards of the community and a repositioning of the researcher from interpreter to listener with an openness to learning from Indigenous perspectives rather than appropriating or judging their cultures and knowledge" (8). The second chapter of this dissertation emphasizes respect as I analyze the protagonist of Angeline Boulley's *Firekeeper's Daughter*. In this young adult novel, the FBI struggles to accept and respect the Anishinaabe protagonist's traditional healing knowledges and commitment to her community. Unlike this novel's FBI characters, educators and students should learn to respect the experiences, knowledges, and values of other cultures even if those knowledges do not align with, or seem in opposition of, their non-Indigenous understandings of the world. Echoing Zitzer-Comfort's thoughts on myth, it is important for students and educators to respect the stories and teachings of Deer Woman and Nanaboozhoo, recognizing the power and potential of these stories, even if they firmly believe in a creation story that does not support the existence of these beings. My dissertation as a whole demonstrates a respect for Indigenous literatures as I distance my work

from traditional Western methodologies and modes of literary analysis and stress the importance of reading and teaching Indigenous stories with an awareness of historical and cultural contexts and through an Indigenous framework.

Teaching students Indigenous literatures in a respectful way, which in turn encourages students to respect Indigenous communities and cultures, first requires an awareness of tribally specific historical contexts. When teaching the principle of respectful engagement, Brunette-Debassige and Wakeham provide students with historical context “about the ways that Indigenous peoples, as well as their languages, knowledges, and stories, have been profoundly disrespected within academia and beyond, often relegated to the realm of the primitive and illiterate” (24). Explaining historical, social, and cultural contexts before reading Indigenous literatures allows students to better understand the “knowledge hierarchies and assumptions embedded in certain scholarly discourses” and to read Indigenous stories differently (24). After providing students with context through group discussions and critical readings, class activities can further address the goal of respecting Indigenous peoples and stories. Brunette-Debassige invites students to reflect on stories of their own personal experiences or stories they have heard family members recite. The goal of Brunette-Debassige’s activity is “to help students reimagine storytelling as a personal, collective, and relational process” (24). She asks her students to consider questions such as, “Do animals or the land play a role in any of your stories? What do these stories teach you about your life?” (24). After sharing and reflecting on personal or familial stories, Brunette-Debassige then asks her students to consider how they might feel if she took those stories and started telling them without the students’ involvement. She instructs her students to imagine what would happen if she took their stories out of the context in which they were shared, rewrote the stories in different ways, and took away the students’ power to control

or access their stories. Brunette-Debassige explains that this class exercise is an attempt to “personalize the colonial context” in a way that allows students of diverse backgrounds to “understand the impacts of colonialism and how power relations operate in literary studies” (25). The act of sharing personal stories and reflecting on one’s ability to control the way those stories are told helps students recognize the importance of respecting Indigenous literatures and engaging in Indigenous methodologies.

The second R is relevance, which is about ensuring that educators teach materials and concepts that are “relevant and responsive” to the needs, experiences, and practices of Indigenous individuals and communities (Kirkness & Barnhardt 9). Carjuzaa and Fenimore-Smith argue that “Learning from Indigenous perspectives implies an acknowledgement of the value of Indigenous knowledge and listening to what is important in their perspectives. Historically, this was never recognized” (8). Using the principle of relevance to read and teach Indigenous literatures allows educators and students to recognize “the value of Indigenous knowledge” and “question Western standards” of research and textual analysis (9). The third chapter of this dissertation addresses relevance as I model critical content analysis of Elizabeth LaPensée’s comics. The text and visual images of LaPensée’s comics work together to illustrate the importance of listening to traditional stories, remembering the past, and learning from the stories and actions of ancestors. In the world of LaPensée’s futuristic “They Come for Water”, a potential post-apocalyptic dystopia, Western society could have benefitted from an understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems before its collapse. In our current world, it is similarly important for academia to recognize traditional Indigenous knowledges and encourage allyship with Indigenous communities.

My dissertation is relevant and responsive to Anishinaabe and Dakota communities because each chapter argues for an inclusion of traditional storytelling practices, tribal languages, and Indigenous knowledges within academic fields in colleges and secondary schools. Indigenous stories and the knowledge and lessons they contain can benefit numerous disciplines and should be consulted not only in English literature or composition classes but in fields such as the sciences, gender studies, and religion/mythology as well. The Indigenous stories educators select to use in classrooms should be analyzed carefully to ensure they are created (written, spoken, or drawn) by Indigenous authors, rather than by non-Indigenous authors who might be falsely claiming a tribal affiliation, retelling a story they have not been given permission to tell, or writing about a history and culture in which they have no prior knowledge of. Teaching and reading Indigenous stories, as well as scholarly texts, by Indigenous authors encourages relevance within academia by emphasizing authentic Indigenous voices and listening to their own histories, experiences, and communal needs.

In the classroom, Wakeham has demonstrated relevance by encouraging students “to reflect upon the ‘cultures of reading’ in which they had been trained” (29). She showed her students a PowerPoint presentation and asked them to respond to each slide by writing down their first thoughts when they saw an image or word on the screen. The words “text,” “literature,” and “story” appeared on consecutive slides, followed by the Anishinaabemowin words “aandisokaanan” and “dibaajimowinan” (meaning sacred stories and personal stories) and slides that contained unlabeled images of a two-row wampum belt and petroglyphs (29). After the PowerPoint slideshow, Wakeham compiled a list of student words and responses on the whiteboard and “facilitated a group discussion reflecting on the vocabularies, assumptions, and hierarchies embedded in Euro-Western terms used frequently in literary studies” (29). Wakeham

taught Indigenous scholarship alongside this activity and discussed Daniel Heath Justice's *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* to define "literature" more broadly, which I discussed earlier in this introduction. Wakeham suggests that "reimagining this English word in a more capacious sense breaks down the colonial binary between orality and textuality" (30). Her classroom activity helps students recognize that there are many different types of stories, not all of which fit within the typical Western definition of literature, and gain a better understanding of how to analyze Indigenous literatures through the frameworks of their specific cultures. This understanding allows students to respectfully listen to and respond to Indigenous needs and goals.

The next of Kirkness and Barnhardt's Rs is reciprocity, which "implies a give-and-take within the research process that has largely been absent in Western research methodologies" (Carjuzaa and Smith 9). According to Brunette-Debassige and Wakeham, reciprocity ensures that pedagogies and curricula "are ethically and relationally attentive" to the needs and goals of Indigenous communities (22). Kirkness and Barnhardt explain that teaching and learning are "two-way processes" where reciprocity is achieved between teachers and students "when the faculty member makes an effort to understand and build upon the cultural background of the students, and the students are able to gain access to the inner-workings of the culture (and the institution) to which they are being introduced" (10). Although numerous researchers, writers, and scholars do not give back to the Indigenous communities that have contributed to their work and provided stories or traditional knowledges, reciprocity "demands collaboration, interchange of ideas, sharing power, learning *from* the other [...]" Recognition of ever present issues of power and privilege are necessary for the researcher to successfully engage in truly collaborative and reciprocal research" (Carjuzaa and Fenimore-Smith 9). The first chapter of this dissertation

addresses reciprocity as I analyze nineteenth-century Indigenous autobiographies or personal narratives and explain how the literature of this time period often included tropes such as the “Vanishing Indian” and “Noble Savage”. Many non-Indigenous writers of the century were including popular stereotypical and sympathetic “Indian” characters in their writings, which did nothing to benefit Indigenous communities and only perpetuated harmful myths. Although some writers proclaimed themselves to be activists and allies of the Indigenous peoples, they did not consider the actual needs and experiences of Indigenous communities. Authentic and accurate Dakota and Anishinaabe accounts of history and personal experiences can be found within the writings of Zitkala-Sa and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft.

The work of this dissertation seeks to promote reciprocity as I provide teaching suggestions and guides to help other educators model Indigenous methodologies in high school and college classrooms. Each chapter analyzes carefully selected Indigenous texts, but I have not taken the stories, retold them out of context, or shared them without permission. My work respectfully responds to each story, encourages individual interpretations and healthy discussions, and offers modes of reading that align with Indigenous frameworks rather than traditional Western standards. The conclusion of this dissertation engages with Indigenous methodologies to provide insights into each genre and theory discussed in the main chapters and suggestions for classroom activities and policies.

Brunette-Debassige and Wakeham encourage reciprocity in their classrooms by “emphasizing that academics must not only *collaborate* with Indigenous communities but also *credit* Indigenous communities as full-fledged partners in knowledge co-creation” (32). They ask their students to complete citation exercises, learning to credit Indigenous ideas and voices fairly, and they explain that some of the knowledge and stories they receive from Elders or guest

speakers can be cited in their own work after receiving permission. Students learn that oral sources can be cited alongside written texts, and Brunette-Debassige and Wakeham explain that the principles of “respect and reciprocity mean attending carefully to Indigenous peoples’ words and representing their ideas accurately. However, there are some stories in Indigenous communities that are not meant to be written down or circulated beyond certain contexts” (33). They discuss with their students the importance of respecting cultural traditions and avoiding cultural misappropriation, teaching students that “listening carefully to how speakers share their knowledge and the protocols they teach about how to use that knowledge, therefore, becomes key to accepting the gifts Indigenous stories offer” (33). Teachers and students engage in reciprocity by respecting the power of the stories that have been shared with them and by citing, retelling, or analyzing them fairly, in appropriate contexts, and through Indigenous frameworks or theories such as decolonialism.

Responsibility is the fourth R, and “the most important responsibility for researchers is a willingness to learning *from* rather than *about* Indigenous peoples” (Carjuzaa and Smith 10). Responsibility involves making sure that schools and universities are accountable to Indigenous communities by “shifting to a policy, posture and practice of actually working with First Nations people” (Kirkness and Barnhardt 13). The fourth chapter of this dissertation illustrates responsibility as it advocates for a greater inclusion and awareness of queer Indigenous literatures within academia. Joshua Whitehead’s novel *Jonny Appleseed*, featuring a Two-Spirit Oji-Cree protagonist, provides a positive representation of queer and Indigenous identities that can help young readers discover, accept, and find confidence in their own identities. Joshua Whitehead, like his protagonist Jonny, is Two-Spirit and Oji-Cree. Reading his novel and recent scholarship allows one to engage in the principle of responsibility because readers can learn *from*

Two-Spirit Indigenous peoples rather than *about* them; instead of reading about Two-Spirit identities in a text authored by a non-Indigenous writer, teachers and students can learn about Two-Spirit and Indigenous queer identities and struggles from an individual's own lived experiences. It is crucial that Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous voices and perspectives become more prevalent within literature and academia so teenage and young adult students who identify or have yet to identify as queer can find positive role models within school and outside readings.

All four main chapters in this dissertation work together to illustrate responsibility as they share the goal of helping educators teach students how to learn about Indigenous histories, cultures, and contemporary issues by reading and analyzing tribally specific literature written by Indigenous authors. This dissertation seeks to guide teachers and students in recognizing Indigenous literatures (using Justice's broad definition), learning *from* that literature, and respecting the power each story contains. By practicing responsibility in academia, non-Indigenous learners will actively listen to Indigenous voices, rethink the accuracy of historical and canonical texts, and challenge the use of Western pedagogies when reading Indigenous literatures.

Brunette-Debassige and Wakeham suggest students participate in community engagement activities while learning about responsibility. In their own classes, Brunette-Debassige and Wakeham ask their students to attend at least one local event outside of class that has been organized by Indigenous communities or features Indigenous speakers. Brunette-Debassige and Wakeham work with their students to find and generate a list of possible Indigenous events, which are open to the public, that they could attend. They suggest that instructors prepare their students to respectfully participate in these events by addressing student questions and providing information about specific protocols they should follow while attending.

Brunette-Debassige and Wakeham argue that this type of “assignment helps non-Indigenous students to learn about the Indigenous communities that they live in proximity to every day” (27). It is important for students to learn about local communities along with the significance of place for these communities and the history of their geographical location. For this reason, my dissertation focuses on Indigenous nations within my own region and stresses the need for teachers to include Indigenous texts from their own areas in their curriculum.

Along with student participation in Indigenous events, Wakeham asks students to reflect on Indigenous stories and scholarship while collectively brainstorming ways in which they, as students, can respect Indigenous literatures and demonstrate responsibility in their own research and writing. Wakeham provides examples of student responses to this group discussion, which include the following ideas for respectful and responsible engagement with Indigenous communities:

practicing careful self-positioning and reflexivity; foregrounding Indigenous scholarship and voices in citational practices; attending to authors’ self-identification practices; approaching literature through culturally specific rather than homogenizing paradigms; and thinking carefully about what topics and research questions are appropriate for differently-located critics (28).

After students generate their list together, Wakeham combines and types up their responses, recirculates the list to the class, and asks them to refer to it throughout the course as they complete assignments. This collaborative exercise helps students to be accountable to their own work and to the stories and communities they are learning from.

The last of the Rs, the fifth R proposed by Carjuzaa and Smith, is relationality, emphasizing the importance of relationships. Many Indigenous communities stress the

significance of relationships between humans, ancestors, future generations, animals, and nature. According to Carjuzaa and Smith, the first four Rs address practices that promote positive relationships between researchers and Indigenous communities, but “it is relationality that will allow both parties to create intimate, on-going relationships and is the key to understanding and embracing Indigenous ways of knowing” (10-11). Each chapter of this dissertation highlights Indigenous relationships: Chapter 1 focuses on Anishinaabe and Dakota connections to nature and land; Chapter 2 emphasizes relationships between family, ancestors, and community members; Chapter 3 explores the relationships between humans and figures of myth as well as relationships across time and space; Chapter 4 addresses the ways familial relationships are grounded in thoughts of home. All four chapters are related and connected to each other through common themes of identity, place, and communal healing.

This dissertation seeks to promote healthy relationships and a building of alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and fields within academia. It is a call for a change in pedagogical practices – a change from traditional Western modes of literary analysis to an inclusion of Indigenous knowledges, theories, and methods. This change will help students and educators of English, especially Indigenous literature courses, to better understand not only literature as it has come to be defined in academia (as written works, books, and printed material) but literature as a more broad and inclusive term that includes stories created in forms specific to a given culture. In short, this pedagogical change will help us read the world around us.

My dissertation demonstrates each of the five Rs of Indigenous methodologies, and I would like to propose another five Rs to ground the work of this dissertation in the storytelling forms of Indigenous literatures. Kirkness and Barnhardt’s four Rs, plus Carjuzaa and Fenimore-Smith’s fifth, should be demonstrated while engaging with Indigenous communities and stories

throughout academia and beyond; the five Rs I offer are specific to working with Indigenous literatures in English classes. My first R is retelling, which encourages students to read Indigenous retellings of history that provide a counternarrative and alternative viewpoint to the histories provided in standard Western textbooks. Many students are not exposed to Indigenous literatures and only receive a brief overview of Indigenous histories; it is therefore crucial to bring Indigenous voices into the classroom so students can recognize another side of the histories they have been taught and become aware of other cultures, identities, and stories within their social and environmental landscapes. Indigenous literatures can provide a retelling of Westernized stories by including traditional knowledges, using Indigenous languages, and not conforming to the typical conventions of standard genres and literary forms.

My second R is recognition, which emphasizes the goal of helping students recognize their own identities, along with learning about and accepting identities that differ from theirs, in the characters featured within the literatures in which they are engaging. Indigenous representation within literature can provide strong role models for Indigenous youth to look up to, and Indigenous students can feel a sense of belonging by reading about characters who have similar identities or who are overcoming or being challenged by similar issues. The characters, plots, and themes present within Indigenous literatures can help Indigenous students recognize and develop their own identities. Indigenous literatures can similarly help non-Indigenous students, who might not have prior knowledge of tribal nations, recognize the personal experiences and communal histories of Indigenous peoples.

Rhetoric is the third R I propose, and this concept addresses the complexities of authorship and writers' goals. Students in composition classes learn to analyze the rhetorical situation and strategies of a text, and I argue that students reading Indigenous literatures should

also think critically about the text's author (Are they Indigenous? Are they providing accurate and authentic information? Do they have permission to tell the story?), intended audience (Is the author using their tribal language? Is the story meant to be told orally? Is their target audience Indigenous or non-Indigenous?), purpose (What are the author's goals and motives for telling a story?), timing (Is the story modern and relevant? What is the story responding to?), and genre (Can the story be contained within a Western genre, such as a novel or poem, or is it a culturally specific form such as a wampum belt? Does the story follow Indigenous storytelling structures? How does the story's genre and medium contribute to our understanding and interpretation of the story?). Rhetoric also deals with rhetorical sovereignty, a term Scott Richard Lyons defines as "the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles and languages of public discourse (449-450).

Following a class discussion of rhetorical sovereignty and an analysis of rhetoric, the fourth R I encourage teachers and students to engage with is reflection. Reflecting on Indigenous literatures, theories, and scholarship allows learners to recognize their own learning needs, research goals, personal beliefs and assumptions, and privileges or lack of privilege. The practice of reflection (being provided time in which to mentally reflect or write down personal thoughts) also promotes metacognition, as students become aware of their own learning and thinking processes. A reflection of Indigenous histories and stories can help students understand any potential biases or prejudices they have and any harmful stereotypes they believe.

The fifth and final R my dissertation considers is that of region. Each Indigenous story I analyze and reflect on in this dissertation is rooted in concepts of place; the storytellers come from areas around the Great Lakes and their texts depict this landscape. The importance of place

and the sacredness of land are embedded within each story. The authors emphasize the sense of belonging within a community and the feeling of returning home. The work of this dissertation is specific to my own geographical region and I encourage other educators to similarly teach texts from Indigenous communities near their own schools and universities. Including the voices of local Indigenous communities in curricula helps students understand the diversity of their world.

Each of the Rs Kirkwell and Barnhardt, Carjuzaa and Fenimore-Smith, and I have proposed guide the work of this dissertation and the work of current and future educators of Indigenous literatures. Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, in “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education” (2005), developed another methodology that my dissertation draws upon. Brayboy’s Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) is based on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and, adding to other theories like LatCrit and AsianCrit, specifically addresses Indigenous issues in the United States. Originally, Critical Race Theory was developed “to address the Civil Rights issues of African American people” and is therefore “oriented toward an articulation of race issues along a ‘black-white’ binary” (429). According to Brayboy, Critical Race Theory “centers race and racism” and CRT “in education is activist in nature and inherently must contain a commitment to social justice” (428). Brayboy explains that “Scholars utilizing CRT in education explicitly argue that their work must move toward eliminating the influence racism, sexism, and poverty have in the lives of students and faculty” (428). CRT can then be used as a framework for reading Indigenous literatures, but it does not address the specific needs of Indigenous tribes and peoples. Brayboy’s TribalCrit is an extension of CRT that acknowledges that “colonization is endemic in society” and provides a “new and more culturally nuanced way of examining the

lives and experiences of tribal peoples” and listening to the needs and goals of specific communities (430).

Like King, Brayboy recognizes the power of Indigenous stories and the ways in which stories can guide current and future members of a community. He reflects on listening to the stories of Indigenous graduates during a graduation celebration, noting that these students were outlining theories of sovereignty, self-determination, and self-education. They were not simply telling ‘stories;’ rather, they had clearly shown me that for many Indigenous people, stories serve as the basis for how our communities work. For some Indigenous scholars (and others), theory is not simply an abstract thought or idea that explains overarching structures of societies and communities; theories, through stories and other media, are roadmaps for our communities and reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities (427).

Stories are also the “guardians of cumulative knowledges” that teach new generations about community traditions and retain the memories of ancestors and historical moments (440). With an understanding of the lessons, histories, and knowledges contained within Indigenous stories, Brayboy lists nine tenets of TribalCrit. I will address the last three as these are the most relevant to the work of this dissertation. These tenets can be acknowledged in English courses to help students understand and work with Indigenous literatures and theoretical frameworks.

Brayboy’s seventh tenet asserts that “Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups” (429). I argue throughout the work of this dissertation that understanding Indigenous literatures first requires knowledge of nation specific histories, practices, beliefs, and languages. Educators must provide

relevant cultural materials and theoretical texts alongside Indigenous stories to prepare students for the work of reading about and analyzing complex contemporary themes, issues, and identities. It is also important to note that the category of Indigenous literatures can be divided into more specific groupings; while this dissertation claims to explore Indigenous literatures, it more specifically addresses Anishinaabe and Dakota literatures. Teaching students to recognize the differences between Indigenous communities and their stories is just as important as helping students identify common patterns and structures, such as non-linear or cyclical storytelling structures, within Indigenous literatures.

The eighth tenet Brayboy defines states that “Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being” (430). Traditional Indigenous knowledges and oral stories contain important lessons and truths that guide practitioners and listeners in living and interacting with the world. Western histories and sciences are not the only accurate forms of knowledge, and Brayboy’s eighth tenet honors the value of Indigenous storytelling and knowledge systems. He explains that stories “do not have to be told by accomplished academics or writers” to contain value and truths; any storyteller, such as a community’s Elders, can pass on prominent stories and cultural traditions to current and future generations (439). According to Brayboy, “TribalCrit recognizes that the legitimacy given to ways of communicating (written and verbal) prioritized by schools, colleges and universities does not necessarily mean that oral story-telling should be devalued. Oral stories remind us of our origins and serve as lessons for the younger members of our communities” (439). The four chapters of this dissertation do not explore spoken or orally recited stories, but the oral storytelling tradition has shaped the structures and patterns the literature I examine follows. Although my work does not directly discuss them, traditional oral stories, if recorded or given to

students during a class discussion or outside event, can be listened to and examined through the same frameworks, methodologies, and theories that I incorporate in this dissertation.

The ninth and final tenet of TribalCrit that I will address claims that “theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change” (430). Like Critical Race Theory, TribalCrit must include “a component of action or activism”, and “no research should be conducted with Indigenous Peoples that is not in some way directed by a community and aimed toward improving the life chances and situations of specific communities” (440). This tenet aligns with Kirkness and Barnhardt’s principle of relevance, as it is crucial that educators, students, and researchers address relevant issues and respond to specific problems and needs of Indigenous communities. My dissertation calls for pedagogical change, action, and allyship that will benefit Indigenous individuals and communities; changes in academia will promote a balance between Western sciences and Indigenous knowledges within disciplines as well as an inclusion of positive Indigenous representation that will encourage students’ identity growth and development.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is meant for an audience of current high school teachers, college instructors, and pre-service teachers. The audience is not limited to English teachers, as I argue throughout the dissertation that other departments can benefit from an inclusion of Indigenous stories and literatures. My goal in writing this dissertation is to help these educators and future teachers teach Indigenous literatures better: to help educators engage with Indigenous methodologies and student-centered pedagogies, thoughtfully reflect on and research tribally specific histories, cultures, and current issues, and choose Indigenous texts focusing on themes

that resonate with young adults and which can be read in a way that helps students develop their identities. The audience is also not limited to educators and students in Wisconsin and around the Great Lakes; while my dissertation focuses on literatures created within my own geographical location, the teaching suggestions I provide can be adapted to work with literatures from any Indigenous community in North America. Each chapter begins by introducing a specific genre or theory (nineteenth-century personal narratives, young adult literature, comics, and queer theory) and the author(s) whose work I engage with throughout the chapter (Zitkala-Sa, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Angeline Boulley, Elizabeth LaPensée, and Joshua Whitehead). The chapters then provide relevant scholarship on the genre, theory, or selected texts, followed by my own textual analysis or close reading of the authors' works. I discuss suggestions for teaching this literature and model those suggestions as a guide for other educators to utilize.

I have organized this dissertation into four main chapters along with a separate introduction and conclusion. The Indigenous methodologies, frameworks, and worldviews that are outlined in this introduction will guide the research presented in the following chapters. Through this introduction, I argue that the five Rs of Indigenous methodologies need to be practiced when reading, teaching, and researching Indigenous literatures. I also argue that theories such as Brayboy's TribalCrit should be read and discussed as part of the curriculum so as to help students better understand the diversity and specificities of Indigenous nations and stories. My hope for this introduction is that it articulates the importance of respecting Indigenous stories by reading them through culturally specific non-Western frameworks and by providing historical and social contexts to help learners understand the storyteller's culture. The chapters of this dissertation work together to argue for a greater inclusion of Indigenous literatures (using Justice's broad sense of the term) within high school and college curricula, and

offer both teachers and students possibilities for an awareness of and engagement with Indigenous literary, scholarly, and theoretical texts.

Of the genres and theories discussed in the four main chapters of this dissertation, the first chapter examines the earliest: nineteenth-century autobiographies. The first chapter begins the dissertation with a discussion of historical texts, while the latter three chapters explore recent contemporary literature. Chapter 1 argues that nineteenth-century Indigenous personal narratives (a less Westernized term than autobiography) can help students understand historical events through an Indigenous individuals' own lived experiences. Indigenous voices provide a much needed counternarrative to the more prevalent and familiar non-Indigenous writers' accounts of history that students are frequently taught. The Indigenous perspectives present within these narratives provide students with valuable insight into another version of history if taught alongside non-Indigenous nineteenth-century texts, such as in a nineteenth-century literature course. They can also provide students with essential background information about the century's policies, laws, and stereotypes (e.g. the "Vanishing Indian") to achieve a better understanding of the experiences of Indigenous communities from Contact to the present (this timeline of events is helpful for students taking an Indigenous literatures course as it sets up the issues and themes students will encounter when reading modern Indigenous literatures).

Each chapter of the dissertation considers the theme of identity, either by analyzing the identity of a text's characters or supporting the development of a young reader's own identity through the reading of a specific text. The first chapter examines the identities of Indigenous nineteenth-century women writers through their narratives' references to land and place. I argue that the writers' inclusion of specific place references helps students understand the Anishinaabe and Dakota connections to land and how the natural landscape shapes individual and communal

identities. I also argue that nineteenth-century Indigenous personal narratives promote a learning *from* Indigenous individuals and communities rather than *about* them. This chapter uses New Historicism to analyze texts by Zitkala-Sa and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft and argue that an awareness of the writer's social and cultural contexts is needed in order to fully comprehend the complexities of Indigenous literatures.

The second chapter of the dissertation focuses on Angeline Boulley's *Firekeeper's Daughter* and the benefits of teaching young adult literature in high school and university classrooms. This chapter provides a close reading of Boulley's YA novel to argue that the Anishinaabe protagonist's identity is being shaped and informed by her Indigenous language, her connection to home and place, and the traditional knowledges and values of her community. I draw on pedagogy such as literature circles and reader-response criticism to argue that the inclusion of YAL in secondary schools and university English courses promotes active student engagement with texts and an enjoyment for reading.

In Chapter 3 I argue that the genre of comics is valuable and relevant to young adult students. As they learn how to read comics, high school and college students will gain experience with analyzing multiple modalities and reflecting on textual components other than words, such as images, colors, and blank spaces. Comics can be a challenging yet accessible genre for students, as they require a reading of both dialogue and graphic images on a page and an analysis of the ways in which these components fit together and create meaning. This chapter uses Linda Tuhiwai Smith's theory of decolonialism to examine three comics written by Elizabeth LaPensée. I argue that the comic "Deer Woman" depicts the transformation of trauma into healing in the images and shadows between panels, and comics of Indigenous Futurisms

similarly demonstrate the healing power of Anishinaabe spirits, ancestors, and current matriarchs.

While the first three chapters focused on a particular genre or medium (e.g. autobiography, YAL, comics) while employing New Historicism, decolonialism, and close readings, the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation diverges from that format to consider a main theory rather than one genre. I focus this discussion on queer theory and Two-Spirit critiques, arguing for more inclusion of Two-Spirit critiques in queer theory, gender studies courses, English classrooms, and American Indian Studies. Many young adult students are now identifying as LGBTQIA2S+, and these students can benefit from seeing their own identities being accurately represented in the literatures they are reading and studying. I turn to Joshua Whitehead's novel *Jonny Appleseed* to argue that Indigenous stories featuring queer, trans, or Two-Spirit characters can help students discover, develop, and accept their own identities. Reading these texts in English classrooms could benefit Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by providing them a safe space to openly discuss LGBTQIA2S+ themes, issues, and identities, and creating a feeling of belonging or community they might not find within their own home. The work of this dissertation emphasizes the voices and experiences of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit peoples; I made the choice to focus solely on these identities because of the historical and contemporary silencing of and violence against Indigenous women and people who identify with the LGBTQIA2S+ community.

Later in this project I discuss the importance of positionality, of explaining to readers or listeners your own social and cultural contexts and identities, so it is necessary that I disclose my own position as a writer, teacher, and researcher before the main body of this dissertation. As a white woman pursuing a doctorate degree in English, I do not speak for the Indigenous

individuals or communities that have created the literatures I have read and reflected upon in the dissertation. I have no Indigenous affiliations or connections to a particular nation, but I have worked closely with Indigenous instructors and learned from Indigenous students. The experiences I have had learning about Indigenous histories, languages, and stories in the university and through cultural immersion experiences have prepared me to practice Indigenous methodologies in my own research and to teach Indigenous literatures through non-Western frameworks. I am an ally for Indigenous voices, and I strongly advocate for queer voices of all cultures and genders. The work of my fourth chapter is especially meaningful for me, as I belong to the LGBTQIA2S+ community. Although I am not Indigenous and therefore do not personally identify with the literatures I discuss in the first three chapters, in the final chapter I am a part of the non-straight community in which I am writing about.

This project serves as a starting point to help educators discover and learn about authentic Indigenous literatures. The scholars I cite and the resources I reference throughout the dissertation can be consulted for further teaching ideas. Daniel Heath Justice believes that “Indigenous literatures matter because *Indigenous peoples matter*” (211). I hope this dissertation begins to address the reasons why we should teach this important literature and how we can go about doing so respectfully.

I

Nineteenth-Century Personal Narratives

Each of the first three chapters of this dissertation focus on a particular genre or medium of Indigenous literature. I have chosen specific texts by Anishinaabe and Dakota writers to demonstrate close readings of the genre or medium and to provide models instructors can utilize when they incorporate Indigenous literatures into their own curricula. While I focus on Indigenous stories from my own geographic region, the guides and suggestions provided in this dissertation can, and should, be adapted for the stories of any Indigenous nation in North America. Of the genres analyzed in these chapters, it is logical to begin with the earliest: nineteenth-century autobiographies (I will refer to these texts as Indigenous personal narratives throughout this chapter, as that term is a better fit with Indigenous methodologies than the literary genre of autobiography.) This chapter explains the importance of teaching personal narratives by Indigenous women in nineteenth-century literature classes alongside the works of non-Indigenous women writers. The Indigenous voices in this literature provide a counternarrative to popular and harmful tropes of the century such as the “Vanishing Indian” and “Noble Savage”. They also illustrate Indigenous knowledges, oral storytelling structures, and the connection between one’s land and identity (individual and communal).

I also argue that teaching personal narratives as a genre helps students connect with the stories, empathize with the authors and characters, and discover parts of their own identities while recognizing their own struggles in others’ accounts of life. I will use Zitkala-Sa’s (Yankton Dakota) and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft’s (Ojibwe) writings as the primary examples of this chapter, as their personal narratives, in short stories and poetry, strongly illustrate Indigenous values and communal identities. The work of this dissertation’s second chapter analyzes young

adult literature and shares many connections to the first, as Zitkala-Sa's boarding school narratives held appeal for young readers in the nineteenth century. All four main chapters of this dissertation revolve around literature that helps students (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) recognize their own identity and become aware of other cultures and realities within their world. After citing recent scholarship on how and why English educators should teach students about empathy and counterstories, this chapter concludes with an examination of place-based theories and an analysis of the cultural value of land for Dakota and Anishinaabe communal identities depicted within the writings of Zitkala-Sa and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft.

Teaching Empathy and Indigenous Personal Narratives

Many texts of the nineteenth century included romanticized and stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples, depicting tropes such as the sympathetic "Vanishing Indian" and the primitive "Noble Savage". When teaching nineteenth-century writings that include inaccurate representations of Indigenous peoples, or any other cultural group, it is crucial to also present students with counternarratives so they can read alternative accounts of history from the perspective of the community being misrepresented. In *Letting Go of Literary Whiteness: Antiracist Literature Instruction for White Students*, Carlin Borsheim-Black and Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides define counterstories as stories that "feature perspectives of people whose voices historically have been marginalized or silenced. They call into question problematic racial ideologies, exposing the often invisible or insidious ways that racism works" (78). They further explain, "Counterstories are not counterstories simply because they are told by people of color; they are counterstories because they challenge dominant narratives about things like the American dream or meritocracy" (9). Nineteenth-century narratives such as Catharine

Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* and Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* are examples of non-Indigenous texts that feature prominent Indigenous characters. Providing authentic Indigenous voices to counter the perspectives of these characters allows students to better understand the social and cultural contexts of the time period.

Writers of the nineteenth century often felt sympathy towards Indigenous peoples, who were considered to be a “vanishing” race and depicted with sympathetic imagery in literature. Having sympathy for Indigenous peoples during this time meant that one felt bad about their conditions, and in wanting to “rescue” them, placed oneself higher above them on a social hierarchy. Having sympathy therefore assumes the position of rescuer who, because of a higher social status, has the power to help an “inferior” person. The sympathetic rescuer, however, will usually not be able to help the supposed “inferior” escape from their lower status conditions but will instead only provide them with some type of charity that they believe the “inferior” needs or wants. While sympathizing is typically done by people in privileged positions, empathizing is done by individuals who understand or seek to understand the needs and wants of people struggling with issues of racism, poverty, or other cultural constraints. With empathy one is able to understand, or at least try to understand, another's perspective while stepping away from their own perspective and preconceived notions.

Nicole Mirra, in *Educating for Empathy: Literacy Learning and Civic Engagement*, advocates for teaching students lessons in empathy. She questions what role educators should take in fostering empathy in students and argues that “the development of empathy in students (and teachers) should be considered a primary goal of education because it offers an organizing principle for our field grounded in hope, love, and commitment to a more equitable society” (3). According to Mirra, empathy is the ability to “see the world from [another] person's perspective.

Empathy often is confused with sympathy, compassion, and pity, although it differs in subtle but crucial ways” (3). She believes that when people are able to empathize with others who share different perspectives, then those people are less likely to be selfish and more likely to care about the needs and interests of others. Mirra argues that English teachers specifically are in a position to “help students navigate relationships with others and think about empathy” (5). She notes,

English teachers occupy a uniquely powerful position when it comes to educating for empathy because they are charged with shaping literate individuals – an awesome responsibility that encompasses not merely teaching the skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, but also mentoring students to use these skills to carve out professional, and civic identities; grapple with the enduring joys and sorrows of what it means to be human; and contribute to the continuing conversation about how we should best live together in this interconnected society (5).

As English educators, we can help our students by participating in a new practice which Mirra calls critical civic empathy. The practice or theory of critical civic empathy is not only about understanding individuals with different life experiences or perspectives than our own, it is also dealing with the recognition of social positions, powers, and privileges that result in different experiences. Mirra believes that “Taking a critical perspective on empathy encourages us to interrogate what we each bring to the table when we seek to empathize with others and to acknowledge the fact that the ways in which we are privileged (or marginalized) in public life inevitably influence how we interpret the experiences of others” (7-8).

By incorporating Mirra’s theory of critical civic empathy in English literary instruction, educators are able to connect the class readings and subject matter to their personal lives and to their world outside of school. Mirra argues that this connection can help students understand

their own position in society and recognize that they are “developing citizens of a democracy badly in need of their energy and leadership” (9). Mirra provides examples of how educators might choose to encourage a classroom dynamic emphasizing empathy, such as holding class debates where students must consider multiple sides and perspectives in order to develop strong and convincing counterarguments. She also claims that reading novels or creative works allows students to “identify with characters who represent groups to which they may or may not belong, and take these identifications out into the world with them as they interact with fellow citizens and make decisions about social issues that impact us all” (20). Furthermore, the creative form of literary texts “offers openings through which readers can break away from cold, hard facts and the seeming intractability of the way things are, to imagine new and different possibilities for society” (20-21). In defining both the critical and civic components of critical civic empathy, Mirra writes,

The critical aspect emerges from the use of social theories to interrogate literary texts and from reflection about our positionality as members of social groups that we bring to our experience of reading. The civic aspect highlights the ways that literary texts contribute to discussions about current social issues and can jumpstart discussions about opportunities for public engagement to address these issues (23).

Discussions and debates in literature classes can encourage students to reflect on their own positionality and the roles and responsibilities they have within society. Reading counternarratives, such as the authentic Indigenous personal narratives, alongside White accounts of history is a way to provide students with an awareness of perspectives and experiences that are different than their own, which can promote active engagement with critical civic empathy.

Like Mirra's theory of empathy, Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides' focus on counterstories and antiracist literature instruction challenges students' prejudices and Western standards of pedagogy. They propose "antiracist literature instruction as a framework" for educators to use in literature classes, which involves "deliberately challenging racist structures in and through our curriculum and instruction" (2, 6-7). They explain that "antiracist education focuses on rectifying these gaps and silences in White students' educational experiences by providing students with understandings of the larger societal and historical contexts of racism" (8). They further explain that antiracist instruction "encourages teachers to challenge curriculum that overrepresents dominant racial perspectives with alternative points of view designed to more accurately and fully represent history and society" (9). Like Mirra's take on empathy, Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides "encourage English teachers to foreground the perspectives of people of color as a way to think about how specific canonized stories might look different when told from different racial perspectives" (57). They suggest the use of counterstories in English classes to "expose Whiteness and disrupt taken-for granted thinking about race" (58). When counterstories are paired with White-authored, canonical texts, any "underlying racial messages" and themes become more visible (58). Students can apply the lens of Critical Race Theory, or TribalCrit, to literary texts "to understand the relevance of race and racism to the subject matter" (116). White teachers and students can also use these theories and frameworks "to 're-see' our own Whiteness, to understand our own White racial identity in new and deeper ways" (119). I agree with Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides and support the inclusion of counterstories in English classes. The four chapters of this dissertation focus on authentic Indigenous stories and encourage current and future educators to include these texts, or other Indigenous voices, in their course reading lists.

Laura Beard explains that non-Indigenous teachers of Indigenous literatures must always be aware of their own identity and privilege in order to foster a safe, engaging, and respectful classroom environment. Beard points out that “The system in which we teach all too often mirrors the colonial dominance of the past” (110). I agree with Beard and argue that while teaching Indigenous literatures, we must consider Indigenous methodologies and frameworks rather than Western pedagogies in order to challenge the norms within society and academia. According to Beard, “Our own identities – racial, gender, social, class, sexual, and so forth – are more present when we teach a course that involves matters of diversity[...]and we need to be comfortable discussing those matters honestly and ethically if we expect our students to address them as well” (110). Beard offers suggestions “for non-Native scholars on how we might keep power, ethics, responsibility, accountability, and resistance central to our teaching of Indigenous literatures” (110).

Beard suggests that Indigenous autobiographies, such as Zitkala-Sa’s, “resist easy classification into traditional generic categories, demonstrating narrative resistance in their form of construction as those who tell their life stories resist the conventions and language of the traditional Euro-American autobiography” (111). Indigenous autobiographies could be used in high school or college classrooms to show students the ways that authors resist genres and rewrite colonial narratives through this resistance. As I previously noted, my definition of Indigenous personal narratives includes poetry and songs, since these texts often reference significant moments, lessons, or experiences from the writer’s life. Beard points out that Craig Womack similarly considers all Indigenous stories to be autobiographical in nature because, through the oral storytelling tradition, all recited stories are performative, communal, and passed down to the next generations. Beard suggests that “Rather than taking European-based

definitions of autobiography and applying them to Native texts, we may find it more useful to use tribally specific definitions of autobiography and its various key concepts (self, life, body, person, memory) in our teaching” (112). Kathleen M. Sands similarly explains that the terms ‘autobiography’ and ‘genre’ are Western creations that do not accurately describe many Indigenous literatures. Sands refers to Indigenous autobiographies as personal narratives instead, and I use this term throughout my dissertation as I agree that many Indigenous stories resist and defy Western genre conventions.

One suggestion Beard provides for teaching Indigenous personal narratives is to begin a class by asking students to come up with terms they could use to describe elements of their personal and communal identities. As they read Indigenous texts throughout the course, students can compare and contrast their own terms with words they find in the stories that describe individuals and communities. Beard hopes that activities such as this would encourage students to recognize that, while an individual’s identity may be recognized and valued, “the sense of family and tribal identity” often takes precedence within Indigenous communities and literatures (112). Students may struggle to understand land-based concepts, especially students living in urban and suburban landscapes who may not have deep connections to place or the natural world. To help students understand the significance of land that is often represented in Indigenous autobiography, I would add to Beard’s suggestion and encourage teachers to use theoretical texts like Agnew’s, Cresswell’s, or Tuan’s alongside the literary texts. Beard explains, “To take territorial lands away from a people whose spirit is so connected to the lands they live on is to dispossess them not just of their lands but of their life, breath, and blood. For students who live in suburbs and cities, moving from apartment to apartment, such a connection to a land where ancestors have lived for generations is not always easily grasped or deeply

understood” (114). Adding Johnson’s discussion of Indigenous place-based knowledges to the curriculum would help students further understand the differences between Western views of land and Indigenous perspectives.

Beard refers to Womack again as she questions the definition of Indigenous literature. She explains that to Womack, “what makes a Creek literary work is not just that it is written by a Creek person but that it depicts a ‘geographically specific Creek landscape and the language and stories that are born out of the landscape’” (114). Using Womack’s definition of Creek literature, I argue that each of the texts I analyze in this dissertation are Anishinaabe or Dakota literatures. Zitkala-Sa’s personal narratives depict her mother’s home on the Dakota reservation, and Schoolcraft’s poetry illustrates the natural environment of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, home to Anishinaabe communities. According to Beard, “Native autobiographies often reflect that sense of belonging to a place, where the place is not just a setting for the story or the life, but a part of the story, a part of the sense of identity of the character or narrator” (115). Zitkala-Sa and Schoolcraft both include their landscapes in their stories not just as a setting but as animated elements. For example, the pine tree that greets Schoolcraft when she returns home, and the healing power of trees that Zitkala-Sa had forgotten.

A I will argue in my analysis of Zitkala-Sa’s and Schoolcraft’s texts, land is connected to language and identity, and Beard discusses this connection. She explains, “To be a part of the community is to stand on that land, to speak the words in that language” (117). Many students may not fully understand the connection an individual or tribe has to place or to a native language, but Indigenous personal narratives often emphasize this connection or the loss of their home or language. Beard asserts,

A historical understanding of how territorial lands were taken from Native peoples in the Americas, how children were taken from families and communities and sent to residential schools where they were forbidden to speak their languages or practice their cultures, and how government policies in the United States and Canada attempted to destroy Native languages, cultures, and traditions helps us to understand the literary works. (119)

If a student has not been raised in a culture that encourages them to listen and learn from stories, Beard believes they might not initially find much value in the stories (re)told in autobiographical literatures. Because of cultural differences, when teaching Indigenous personal narratives, including communal stories, it is crucial to also teach students about tribally specific histories, cultures, and languages. Students cannot read Indigenous personal narratives by themselves; they should be taught alongside theoretical and historical texts so students can learn about places, laws, and events or struggles of the time period in which the autobiographical text was written.

Another suggestion Beard provides for teaching Indigenous personal narratives is to choose a text written from the region where one teaches. I agree with this suggestion, as the work of my dissertation focuses on literature from the Great Lakes, an area I am familiar with and hope to continue teaching in. Reading and discussing texts that originated nearby and contain local landmarks, languages, and histories is a way to keep students engaged and interested in the course materials and topics. Students will recognize other cultures in their state or city and become conscious of political and social issues in their local communities. Beard notes, “All of us who teach courses involving race and ethnicity have experienced both the challenges of dealing with such frustrated or angry students and the challenges of dealing with the white students who, uncomfortable with the topic of race, unconsciously, or not quite consciously, turn the topic to another form of oppression more comfortable for them” (129). Addressing issues of

whiteness and reading counterstories can help students confront their own privileges or lack of privileges and consider alternate perspectives on history.

Place, Space, Landscape, and Home

Land, as both a natural environment and the concept of home, is and always has been important to many Indigenous communities. Many traditional Indigenous stories reference specific locations and acknowledge the life of beings such as trees, rocks, and water. Throughout America's history, white patriarchy has often supported and perpetuated violence against, or destruction of, our land's natural environment. Land is frequently likened to women with concepts such as Mother Nature, and later chapters will explain the historical and contemporary violence against Indigenous women. I have chosen to analyze texts by Zitkala-Sa and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, as these writers provide insight into the personal experiences of nineteenth-century Indigenous women. It is important for students to read Dakota and Anishinaabe accounts of history rather than seeing only romanticized Indigenous characters from non-Indigenous writers of the time period. By reading personal accounts of boarding schools and removal, students will also learn about historical events that are crucial for understanding contemporary issues facing Indigenous nations. Non-Indigenous nineteenth-century women's narratives most often depicted women who were supposed to resemble the True Woman, a figure content with being contained within the domestic sphere (Welter). For a nineteenth-century True Woman, her husband's house was the primary, and ideal, landscape. Their lives and identities were not strongly connected to the land or their natural environment because their ancestors had not lived in the area and they did not have stories, such as creation stories, to help them understand their physical environment and the beings living within it. Indigenous women in the

nineteenth century, however, frequently referenced specific places and environmental features that were prominent within their traditional oral stories. For these women, the land was alive and home, and these Indigenous perspectives can be seen through an examination of their personal narratives. Before analyzing the literatures of nineteenth-century Indigenous women, it is important to note the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of viewing the land.

Many scholars have attempted to define the concepts of place, space, and home, and Tim Cresswell argues that “Place is not a specialized piece of academic terminology” but a word used in everyday life (6). He explains that specific locations such as New York City, the Earth, and a child’s bedroom are all places because people have given them a meaning: “they are all spaces which people have made meaningful. They are all spaces people are attached to in one way or another. This is the most straightforward and common definition of place – a meaningful location” (12). Cresswell addresses John Agnew’s three aspects of place: location, locale, and sense of place (12). Jay Johnson similarly explains Agnew’s definition of place. The first aspect refers to “place as a location or specific point on the earth”; the second deals with “place as locale or the setting and scale for everyday life”; the third and final element is “a sense of place or the subjective feelings people have about places including the roles that they play in identity formation” (830). According to Cresswell, Agnew’s first aspect of place, location, is how place is most often used in the English language to refer to a specific location in the world. He states, “When we use place as a verb for instance (where should I place this?) we are usually referring to some notion of location – the simple notion of ‘where’” (13). The second part of Agnew’s definition relies on the meaning an individual or group has given to a certain location. Cresswell explains, “As well as being located and having a material visual form, places must have some

relationship to humans and the human capacity to produce and consume meaning” (14). Finally, Agnew’s sense of place refers to “the subjective and emotional attachment people have to place” (14). With the three aspects of Agnew’s definition, it is clear that ideas of place are rooted in social meanings and personal attachments, not unlike Indigenous perspective of the land. Cresswell explains the idea of “placelessness”, noting that “It is commonplace in Western societies in the twenty-first century to bemoan a loss of a sense of place as the forces of globalization have eroded local cultures and produced homogenized global spaces” (14). This concept, like Agnew’s definition of place, is a feeling that is shared by Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

After confidently defining place, Cresswell explains that the concept of space is more abstract than that of place, and it relies on movement and areas or volumes. Cresswell’s understanding of space is based on Yi-Fu Tuan’s definition of both concepts. According to Tuan, “Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other” (3). While place is a geographical location that people can physically interact with and assign meaning to, space is more difficult to classify. Tuan explains that “‘Space’ is more abstract than ‘place.’ What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (6). A space has the potential to become a meaningful place; there is transformative freedom in space as any individual or community can designate a space as a place of value. Tuan further argues that “if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (6). With Tuan’s definition, a place could become home, a location that provides rest, support, and communal comfort. Space is perhaps an area to pass through, a physical or metaphorical space

that encourages transformation and growth (like the blank spaces or gutters of a comic, which will be analyzed in Chapter 3).

Cresswell provides examples of how a space might become a place, arguing that naming a space is one way to create meaning and transform it into place. He discusses Jonathan Raban's travel narrative *Passage to Juneau* (1999), in which Raban recounts his trip along the shoreline between Seattle and Vancouver. Raban compares his own travels with the voyage of Captain Vancouver in 1792, who was tasked with mapping and (re)naming, in English, points along the coast. Vancouver's journals documented the movement of Indigenous peoples across the sea, and he believed these sea routes of the Indigenous canoeists to be complicated and nonsensical. However, as Cresswell notes, "To the native canoeists their movements made perfect sense as they read the sea as a set of places associated with particular spirits and particular dangers. While the colonists looked at the sea and saw blank space, the natives saw place" (15). The colonists believed the lands of North America were unoccupied, uncivilized, and free to be taken, claimed, and owned; the land was a space that could be transformed through empire into the colonist's ideal civilization. The Indigenous peoples, however, had always known the land was a place, rather than space, and did not understand the concept of land ownership. Indigenous tribes recognized their lands as living beings that could support or endanger human life, and significant geographical features, along with the animals prevalent in the area, were often a part of tribes' traditional stories.

According to Cresswell, "When humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way (naming is one such way) it becomes a place" (16). I both agree and disagree with Cresswell's statement. Many Indigenous communities traditionally referred to their environment by its physical appearance and characteristics, rather than naming it

in a colonizing sense. While I agree that providing something with a name is one way to create meaning or value, I argue that Cresswell's approach to the concept of place stems from Western methodologies rather than Indigenous viewpoints. Naming a space is an act of claiming or colonizing a landscape, and colonists often used the names of important people or leaders while naming the spaces they had "discovered". The naming of Bde Maka Ska in Minnesota after John C. Calhoun is one example of this colonial renaming.

Although I agree with Cresswell's definitions of place and space, I argue against his idea of landscape, which does not position the land within an Indigenous framework. I will redefine landscape, as each chapter of this dissertation stresses the significance of geographic regions as well as environmental and social landscapes on Indigenous identities within literary genres. Cresswell imagines art and landscape paintings to argue that "Landscape referred to a portion of the earth's surface that can be viewed from one spot" (17). While he believes that "places are very much things to be inside of", landscapes differ because they are "an intensely visual idea. In most definitions of landscape the viewer is outside of it" (17). He adds, "We do not live in landscapes – we look at them" (18). Cresswell's opinion of landscapes is an extremely Westernized viewpoint that the analyses within my dissertation do not support. Landscape is not a static or unchanging image, such as the world in a painting, and it is not something that is merely observed. Indigenous stories have always featured the landscape, and the physical features and characteristics of a region have been central to Indigenous peoples' daily lives and communal roles. Aspects of Cresswell's landscape, parts of nature that a painter might illustrate, such as stones, trees, and rivers, are not merely objects to view from a distance. Indigenous tribes often recognize these features of the land as alive and sacred; they provide resources and safe travel, and are therefore worthy of respect and may be given offerings as thanks.

While colonists perceived the natural landscape as an image to admire as well as a space that could be changed, transformed, and used for personal gains, Indigenous peoples have always respectfully moved within their landscapes. Victoria Brehm, in *Star Songs and Water Spirits*, would similarly disagree with Cresswell's definition of landscape. She explains that "The settings of the traditional literatures have always been hunting/gathering/agricultural landscapes that concentrate on activities, not on the contemporary aesthetics of appreciation. Looking at a landscape as 'beautiful,' or as a subject for painting or photography, is a result of urbanization, where most people do not live in direct contact with the natural world" (12). According to Brehm, many traditional Indigenous stories are concerned with the challenges of traversing a landscape, often during a particular season, and if a landscape is described as "pleasant", it is typically because of the resources or safety the land can provide. Unlike Cresswell, Brehm argues that the landscape "is not an aesthetic object of reverence" and the natural environment "is not separate from the sky or the underworld" (12). Like the physical features of the land, the stars are not only a subject of paintings to be viewed and romanticized, but a collection of living spirits who informed Indigenous peoples "when planting should begin or ceremonies be held" (12). Brehm notes that "One great constant in the three-leveled universe of sky, land, and water is the ability of things to change into something else, to metamorphose. Anything that is animate, or alive, can change, including particular rocks, trees, and stars" (12-13). Spaces can act as sites of transformation or as locations that encourage development, growth, or healing.

Throughout this dissertation's discussions of land, I will refer to landscape as the living and animate physical environment that consists of all aspects of the natural world, such as plants, animals, waters, and stars. Landscape is not merely an artistic vista, something to behold but never encounter; it is the natural world that one is living within and interacting with on a daily

basis. The landscape, its features and seasons, shapes the identities, movements, and traditions of Indigenous peoples and is not something to be colonized or owned. Space is then an area of movement that encourages discovery, growth, transformation, and sometimes healing. Place is a home, a location that is easily recognizable for the individual or community who has filled it with value and meaning. Place is sacred space that offers support and safety.

Although I disagree with Cresswell's definition of landscape, I support his view of home and its relationship to place. He argues, "Home is an exemplary kind of place where people feel a sense of attachment and rootedness. Home, more than anywhere else, is seen as a center of meaning and a field of care" (39). He further argues that "Home is where you can be yourself" (39). Although this idea of home initially appears to be a source of comfort and positive identity development, feminists have questioned the role of home as a place. Gillian Rose, a feminist geographer, points out that even though a home does not need to consist of a family unit, images of the domestic home are prevalent within humanistic geography: "This enthusiasm for home and for what is associated with the domestic, in the context of the erasure of women from humanistic studies, suggests to me that humanistic geographers are working with a masculinist notion of home/place" (Rose 1993, 53). Rose argues that many women do not have a positive view of home as place or the domestic household, and Cresswell notes that "homes can be and often are places of drudgery, abuse, and neglect" (40). According to Rose, many women would not find home to be a place that is "conflict-free, caring, nurturing and almost mythically venerated by the humanists" (Rose 56). Like Rose, bell hooks would question the view of home as place, as she has written about home as a site of resistance. Cresswell explains, "To hooks, home and the activities that go into making home can have significance as forms of resistance in an oppressive white world. Home may indeed act as a particular kind of safe place where (some)

people are relatively free to forge their own identities” (41). The concept of home is often connected to identity, and the work of this dissertation explores literature that depicts the ways significant locations affect and shape one’s identity.

Like my own distinctions between place, space, and home, Jay T. Johnson grounds his place-based pedagogies in Indigeneity. He uses Agnew’s three aspects of place to focus his arguments on “two conceptualizations of place: first, place as a way of understanding, knowing and learning about the world; and second, as the embodied location of everyday struggle for meaning; political, cultural and economic” (830). Johnson notes that his conceptualizations of place do not quite fit within Agnew’s framework or mainstream human geography, but they do “fit well within a broadly defined Indigenous conceptualization of place” (830). The natural environment, along with its seasonal changes, plays a significant role in many traditional Indigenous stories as communities depended upon the land to survive and learned how to navigate within and cooperate with their geographic landscape. Land has also always been central to historical and contemporary struggles between Indigenous communities and the federal government, such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the proposed Keystone XL pipeline. For Indigenous communities, place may be more than a physical location endowed with meaning. Place is often a central figure within origin stories and myths, which teach of the community’s connection to the animated natural world and powerful spirits. Place strengthens communal identity through the long history community members share with ancestors on their traditional homelands or the regions their tribes were relocated to after Removal.

Gwen Westerman understands the significance of place for Indigenous identities. She argues, “To understand Dakota life it is necessary to understand the pattern of seasonal subsistence activities[...]the Dakota names for the seasons related to the land: winter moons or

months connected to animals, while the names for the summer months described horticultural or gathering activities” (89). Victoria Brehm, in *The Great Lakes Reader* similarly explains that the telling of stories relies on seasons and weather. There are two main types of Anishinaabe stories, which Brehm describes as “either myths (auwaetchigum) which conveyed important cultural information and could be told only in winter when the creatures discussed were underground and could not hear and be offended, or tales (daebaudjimowin), chronicles of personal experience which often illustrated exemplary personal behaviors and could be told any time of year” (17). In order to understand the connections Indigenous literatures make to seasons, land, language, and identity, one must first recognize that Indigenous ways of viewing the world have always been different than the colonist’s perspective.

Johnson’s theories of place are grounded in Indigeneity, and he argues that everyone is capable of giving meaning to the places within our daily landscapes. When he teaches the concept of place to undergraduate students, he first asks them to reflect on their weekend outings “and how they have described them later to those not present. The ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘when’ of these events inevitably becomes attached to the ‘where’. These events, remembered attached to a place, forever alter the memory of that place” (831). However, he argues that our places are missing “a connection to the significant cultural histories and moralities which, once upon a time, were stored within our storied landscapes” (831). According to Johnson, the meanings Western society creates for a place are “thin” and do not contain the same depth which Indigenous oral societies gave their landscapes. He argues that Western society and modern historians “no longer use places as the primary repositories for their narratives”, but we do still remember significant events in our history “by remembering their place names”, such as Gettysburg (831). I agree with Johnson, as I argue that Western society remembers the history

and potential meaning of a place from the name it was given during colonization, for example, the naming of Lake Calhoun or the town of Gettysburg after settler Samuel Gettys. This way of naming and remembering a place only honors a historical figure in North America's colonization, and the Indigenous names and meanings are often overlooked within Western society. Indigenous place names must be remembered and recognized, as these names often describe a place's physical characteristics or refer to stories and significant incidents that occurred in the area. The place name of Oconomowoc, for example, is likely an Ojibwe word that translates to 'they are building dams', which would refer to the work of beavers in the region (Files). Johnson similarly believes that Western society has a lot to learn from Indigenous place-based knowledge systems.

Turning to the field of science, Johnson acknowledges that Western science is not a universal or "placeless" science, as biologists and physicists have realized that "experiments always vary to some degree from location to location" (832). He argues, "By detaching our histories, our stories and *our science* from place, Western science has developed an arrogance which seeks to elevate it above other knowledge systems, particularly those knowledge systems which have remained more attached to place" (832). Place is not only central to Indigenous oral stories and literatures, but also to histories, languages, sciences, medicines, and healings. Although Western society attempted to erase Indigenous histories and meanings of place, creating a "blank landscape" for European colonists to paint their new, ideal image of America, Johnson argues that modern science and academia need to engage with and learn from Indigenous knowledges (832). He suggests that Western society should help Indigenous communities revitalize their languages, recover place names and the stories associated with each name, and protect place-based knowledges and connections. Engaging with conceptualizations of

place that are grounded in Indigenous methodologies will benefit people of all cultures and social groups. As Johnson suggests, “We can look out across our landscape, seeing a series of place names, remembering the stories associated with creating and recreating our culture” (833). Recognizing the meanings given to a place will allow individuals to personally connect with their own histories and cultures and have a deeper understanding of the diversity of their world.

Land and Identity in the Writings of Zitkala-Sa and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft

Laura Beard argues that Indigenous autobiographies are often works of narrative resistance. Martha Cutter takes the same position, as she argues that Zitkala-Sa did not adapt or adopt white models of autobiography, but instead she “crafts a work which calls generic standards of autobiography into question by refusing to conform to them”. Sandra Kumamoto Stanley similarly argues that Zitkala-Sa’s autobiographical texts were revisionist because they were not modeled after Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*, “the classic American secularized conversion narrative” (64). She suggests that autobiographies of the nineteenth century that used Franklin’s conventions “inevitably affirm the values of the predominant culture; for the individual is empowered (transforming her rags to riches) insofar as that individual can harness cultural authority, aligning her identity with the dominant culture’s identity” (64). Zitkala-Sa, however, reclaims “the authorial voice of the Native American identity, insisting to speak for herself as well as her people” (66). When she changed her birthname, to the Sioux name signifying Red Bird, she was “claiming the right to resist predetermined linguistic and social categories of identity” (66). Amanda J. Zink argues that Zitkala-Sa’s personal narratives show how “American Indian women writers carve a space for a feminine domestic ideal that highlights and reinforces systems of power where Native women exercise tribal influence” (58).

Mandy Suhr-Sytsma analyzes Zitkala-Sa's work as children's literature, noting that others scholars of children's and young adult literature have not yet taken up Zitkala-Sa's narratives. She states, "By publishing in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Zitkala-Sa reached a largely white, middle- to upper-class, reform-minded audience that was heavily invested in the romantic childhood ideal" (138). Like the highly romanticized trope of the "Vanishing Indian", themes of childhood and coming of age stories were popular in the nineteenth century. Suhr-Sytsma argues that Zitkala-Sa understood that Indigenous children needed their own people to educate them in own histories and cultures, and her work (her writings and activism) helped "to empower the children as coeducators and coactivists" (137). I will analyze contemporary young adult literature in the second chapter of this dissertation, and my suggestions for teaching YAL could also be used while teaching Zitkala-Sa's personal narratives.

While scholars have analyzed numerous aspects of Zitkala-Sa's stories, the work of this dissertation adds to the conversation by using theoretical conceptualizations of landscape, place, space, and home to argue that Zitkala-Sa moves through each of these areas over the course of her personal narrative's journey. In my analysis, I define an Indigenous personal narrative as any story, spoken orally or written, that is based on true experiences from the writer or speaker's life and can be formatted according to the conventions of any Indigenous or non-Indigenous genre (e.g. a novel, short story, speech, poem, or song).

Zitkala-Sa's "Impressions of an Indian Childhood" opens with an image of her Dakota landscape: "A wigwam of weather-stained canvas stood at the base of some irregularly ascending hills. A footpath wound its way gently down the sloping land till it reached the broad river bottom; creeping through the long swamp grasses that bent over it on either side, it came out on the edge of the Missouri" (68). As a young girl, Zitkala-Sa explored and worked within

her environmental landscape. She recognized a field of sunflowers as “nature’s garden” (106), and knew that a strange, misty smoke appeared every morning “over a pit surrounded by an impassable sinking mire” (81). Her elders told her that “the smoke from this pit had never failed a single day to rise heavenward” (81). Zitkala-Sa learned about her landscape’s features through her community and was taught where and when to harvest food. In the summer, Zitkala-Sa dug for sweet roots with her friends and searched for “crystal drops of gum” beneath a plant’s yellow blossoms: “Drop by drop we gathered this nature’s rock-candy” (75). In autumn she gathered corn with her mother and aunt: “From a field in the fertile river bottom my mother and aunt gathered an abundant supply of corn” (82). These memories depict a young Indigenous girl growing up within her natural environment and interacting with the elements of her landscape. Time and seasons are also a part of Indigenous landscapes, as certain activities could only be done during specific seasons or times of day. Zitkala-Sa reminisces on the stories her neighbors told her in the evening: “I loved best the evening meal, for that was the time old legends were told. I was always glad when the sun hung low in the west” (71). Her Dakota landscape included the physical features of the region, such as corn and flowers, and determined when communal activities would be held, such as gathering corn and telling legends.

Place, defined by Cresswell as a location endowed with meaning, is represented in Zitkala-Sa’s personal narratives through her connection to the Dakota reservation and the land where her family has been buried. Her mother points to the hill where Zitkala-Sa’s uncle and sister are buried as she exclaims, “the paleface has stolen our lands and driven us hither. Having defrauded us of our land, the paleface forced us away” (69). The land where Zitkala-Sa’s family is buried and where her ancestors resided holds personal significance for Zitkala-Sa as well as communal meaning for her tribe’s history. Zitkala-Sa recalls another place of burial, a warrior

buried beneath a plum bush: “Eyeing the forbidden fruit, I trod lightly on the sacred ground” (80). Despite not knowing the warrior buried in this spot, she recognizes the sacredness of the land the nature growing from this death. Many of the locations Zitkala-Sa explored in her childhood could be considered place as she recalls fond memories from each. Playing among the hills with her friends, Zitkala-Sa writes, “we were like little sportive nymphs on that Dakota sea of rolling green” (76). She recognized that this land was significant to her community, it provided resources and safety, and it supported her individual identity as she felt free to be herself while within this environment. Many of her lasting impressions and fondest memories involved elements of the land, such as the rainbow reflected in ice and the “little stranger with a black-and-yellow-striped coat that used to come to the drying corn” (82). Although she did not remember many moments from the winters of her childhood, “chiefest among [her] early recollections of autumn is that one of the corn drying and the ground squirrel” (82).

If place for Zitkala-Sa is the safe and sacred land of her youth, her Dakota landscape filled with memories, support, and community, then space is her days spent at school and travelling between worlds. Space is a transitory area, one that could foster growth or potentially induce trauma. Zitkala-Sa initially believed the world of the missionaries would be a “Wonderland” (84). She dreamed of riding the “iron horse” (87), the train that would take her from the land of her mother to the school where she would stay for three years while becoming an educated woman. However, once she arrived at the school, the “massive brick building” was unlike the dwellings she was used to, she “had never seen so large a house”, and was “as frightened and bewildered as the captured young of a wild creature” (86). Throughout her education and teaching career, Zitkala-Sa excelled but never felt as though she truly belonged in that world. She regretted losing her connections to the Dakota landscape of her childhood: “I had

lost all consciousness of the nature world around me” (111). She had “forgotten the healing in trees and brooks” and given up her mother and her mother’s “simple view of life” (112). To gain an education, Zitkala-Sa gave up a part of her Dakota identity and was no longer able to feel at home in either of her two worlds: “Like a slender tree, I had been uprooted from my mother, nature, and God. I was shorn of my branches, which had waved in sympathy and love for home and friends” (112).

When Zitkala-Sa references ‘home’, it is always her mother’s home and not her own, signifying that she can no longer consider the landscape of her childhood to be a place with the meaning of home. During a trip to visit her family, she states, “I started toward my mother’s home. The intense heat and the sticky car smoke that followed my homeward trail did not noticeably restore my vitality” (106). If she still felt at home in the place she used to live, the thought of returning would have “restored her vitality”. Since she still feels “homeless and heavy-hearted”, as she had previously described herself, the home of her mother is no longer a source of healing (101). I would argue that, despite no longer being home, her childhood land is still a place rather than space because it still invokes feelings of happiness and nostalgia. Upon returning, Zitkala-Sa explains, “The cloud shadows which drifted about on the waving yellow of long-dried grasses thrilled me like the meeting of old friends” (106). While this land is still a meaningful place for Zitkala-Sa, it can no longer be home because she has given up part of her Dakota connections and communal identity. Like the first time her mother took “a farther step from her native way of living” (83) and had “to live, a foreigner, in a home of clumsy logs” (84), Zitkala-Sa’s disconnection from her physical landscape makes her “a foreigner” without a place to call home. Zitkala-Sa’s landscape helps her understand the world and find political and cultural meanings within her environment. The academic setting of Zitkala-Sa’s childhood

education and future teaching, her time learning at the boarding school and teaching Indigenous children, helped her navigate the world outside of her Indigenous community.

Jane Johnston Schoolcraft similarly utilized her landscape to understand her drastically different worlds and to make meaning within both her Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Her Ojibwe landscape in Sault Ste. Marie helped her connect to her community's culture, history, and language. Like Zitkala-Sa, Schoolcraft's writings contained Indigenous themes of land and identity. Like other women of her time, Schoolcraft was oppressed because of her status as a woman poet, but she was also marginalized because of her Ojibwe ancestry. With an Irish father and white American husband, Schoolcraft's writing was often overshadowed by or credited to the white male figures in her family. Schoolcraft was never published during her lifetime; her writings only appeared alongside her husband Henry's works and he received the majority of the credit. She wrote prose and poetry in English as well as her Ojibwe language. Her eloquent English poems were reminiscent of the poetry written by her contemporaries and often used the traditional Western structure. Her use of Ojibwe words helped her express her Indigenous identity and preserve her tribe's culture and traditional stories. Schoolcraft wrote her poem titled "On leaving my children John and Jane at School, in the Atlantic states, and preparing to return to the interior" as four stanzas in the Ojibwe language. She did not translate this poem into English, but her husband included a "free translation" when he published it in his *Personal Memoirs*. An accurate translation of the original poem provided by Robert Dale Parker shows that the true poem is much shorter than Henry's free translation. Henry's poem contains six long stanzas beginning with "Ah! When thought reverts to my country so dear, / My heart fills with pleasure, and throbs with a fear" (Parker 141). The accurate translation of Schoolcraft's first stanza, however, is, "As I am thinking / When I find you / My land / Far in the west / My

land” (142). These changes illustrate the issues involved with non-Indigenous writers translating and rewriting Indigenous texts. Schoolcraft’s words have been altered and drastically rewritten to fit the ideals of white men.

As seen in her Ojibwe verses of “On leaving my children John and Jane at School”, Schoolcraft’s poetry depicts significant natural elements within her landscape. Like Zitkala-Sa, Schoolcraft moves through each of the concepts of landscape, place, space, and home, and this movement is detailed throughout her personal narratives in the form of poetry written in Ojibwe and English verse. Schoolcraft’s landscape is depicted in “To the Pine Tree”. The poem begins with the note, “on first seeing it / on returning from Europe” and continues to describe Schoolcraft’s experience of returning to the place she calls home. The first few stanzas, in the English translation, exclaim, “The pine! the pine! I eager cried, / The pine, my father! see it stand, / As first that cherished tree I spied, / Returning to my native land” (89). In this poem Schoolcraft is expressing the joy she felt upon returning to a familiar landscape. After spending time away overseas, in an unfamiliar country, her first sight of the pine tree reminds her that she is connected to the region of the Great Lakes, and the pine tree symbolizes her home and her Ojibwe community. Another natural element of her landscape is depicted in “To the Miscoedeed”. Here she describes the flower known as the miscoded in Ojibwe or *Claytonia Virginica* in Latin, one of the first wildflowers to appear in the spring in Schoolcraft’s region. She writes, “Sweet pink of northern wood and glen, / E’er first to greet the eyes of men / In early spring, - a tender flower / Whilst still the wintry wind hath power” (91). This poem depicts a prominent feature of Schoolcraft’s landscape, the land’s flora, and illustrates how the land changes throughout the year’s seasons.

For Schoolcraft, the concept of place can be found within Sault Ste. Marie and the land of the Great Lakes. She travels through many spaces, such as overseas to Ireland and England, as well as throughout North America to Detroit and New York. Although she has some connections in these places, such as her Irish ancestors and the friends she visits, none of these cities are inscribed with as many meanings and memories as the Great Lakes area. The cities and countries she travels to are then spaces that allow for progress, transformations, and interactions with family and friends, but she does not stay in them and returns to her “native land”, the place where she feels the most at home. Her poetry includes descriptions of specific islands and prominent geographical features, which roots her narratives in the land of the Great Lakes. Her poem, “Lines written at Castle Island, Lake Superior” describes “her native inland sea” and the “rocks and skies and waters blue” where “nature only reigns” (92). Another poem, “On the Doric Rock, Lake Superior”, written as a letter to a friend, describes the natural environment of this place she is familiar with: “Unveiled the grandeur of Superior’s show / Where nature’s forms in varied shape and guise / Break on the view, with wonder and surprise” (94). Specific places around the Great Lakes hold meaning for Schoolcraft, as she describes this natural landscape in her poetry and writes about the land to her friends. In “To the Pine Tree”, she addresses this land as her “mother land”, suggesting that this is the place she feels a sense of comfort and belonging: “Ah beauteous tree! ah happy sight! / That greets me on my native strand / And hails me, with a friend’s delight, / To my own dear bright mother land” (89). Although Schoolcraft’s Ojibwe and Irish family members and homelands complicated her identity, her personal narratives reveal that Sault Ste. Marie and Lake Superior were the places she most strongly identified with and considered home.

The personal narratives of Zitkala-Sa and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft contain Dakota and Anishinaabe perspectives of place. The concept of home, or the lack of one true home, is connected to individual and communal identity. Autobiographical texts, or personal narratives, written in other time periods by Indigenous writers from other nations can similarly be taught in literature classes to help students recognize theories of place and Indigenous methodologies. I use New Historicism to analyze the texts of this genre because it is crucial to understand the writer's culture and history. By reading Indigenous personal narratives through the lens of New Historicism, we can recognize the ways in which Indigenous personal narratives differ from other autobiographies of the nineteenth century and listen to counterstories they present, their own version of history told in their own voice and language. When teaching nineteenth-century literature, educators can consult Indigenous texts to provide students with an authentic Indigenous voice that counters stereotypical or romanticized images of Indigenous characters.

II

Firekeeper's Daughter and Young Adult Literature

Angeline Boulley (Ojibwe) emphasizes themes of language, homeland, and identity in her debut novel *Firekeeper's Daughter*. Sometimes referred to as an Indigenous Nancy Drew story, her fictional novel is classified as young adult literature recommended by the publisher for readers age 14 and up. Loosely based on a true experience, a friend's mention of a new student at school who turned out to be an undercover narcotics officer, Boulley wanted her story to provide Indigenous teenagers with a role model and "a hero who looks like them, whose greatest strength is her Ojibwe culture and community" (491). Published in March of 2021, the novel has not yet received much scholarly attention. Reviews, however, are extremely positive. *Firekeeper's Daughter* debuted as no. 1 on the *New York Times* Bestseller list, became a Reese Witherspoon YA Book Club pick, and is currently being adapted for Netflix by Barack and Michelle Obama's Higher Ground Productions.

Trisha Collopy, in *TCA Regional News*, comments on the prominent use of Anishinaabemowin in Boulley's text: "Boulley has found a compelling vehicle to introduce readers to an Upper Midwest experience that is often invisible to non-Natives. She complicates the white default of the U.P. and immerses us in Anishinaabe language and culture." She continues, "By the end of *Firekeeper's Daughter*, readers have been plunged into an Anishinaabe world that is rooted in place and includes powerful roles for women as judges, herbalists, healers, and tribal leaders." Like the narratives of Schoolcraft and Zitkala-Sa, *Firekeeper's Daughter* highlights traditional values, Indigenous languages, geographical features, and women's identities and roles within the community. With a lack of published

scholarship, the work of this chapter presents my own analyses of Boulley's protagonist, Daunis Firekeeper, and her connections to her tribal stories, language, land, and family.

I will begin this chapter by exploring the current conversation surrounding the use of YAL in secondary and university English classes. I will discuss the representations of and issues involved with racial and ethnic representation in YAL that Hintz and Tribunella have written about, and I will support the use of Paris and Alim's culturally sustaining pedagogies. The scholarship cited in this chapter acknowledges and encourages teaching strategies such as reader-response criticism and literature circles to promote active student engagement. The work of this chapter ends with a close reading of Boulley's novel in which I argue that Daunis' identity is rooted in her Anishinaabe community's traditional knowledges, language, and connection to Sugar Island.

Teaching Young Adult Literature to Young Adult Students

Before analyzing the novel, it is essential to define young adult literature and explain its origins. Young adult literature, or YAL, is a distinct genre that appeals to teenage readers and typically adheres to certain criteria; the main characters are often teenagers, the point of view is usually first person, and the narrator is typically using an accessible language and contemporary vocabulary. John H. Bushman and Kay Parks Haas, in *Using Young Adult Literature in the English Classroom*, point out the following characteristics many YA novels share: "Conflicts are often consistent with the young adult's experience, themes are of interest to young people, protagonists and most characters are young adults, and the language parallels that of young people" (2). Teenagers and young adults often enjoy reading this type of literature because it can be a quick read, they find the characters and their issues relatable, and the central themes and

plots invite thought-provoking discussion. The genre of YAL, however, is not as easy to classify as some scholars like Bushman and Haas claim.

Carrie Hintz and Eric L. Tribunella, in *Reading Children's Literature: A Critical Introduction*, note that "Not all scholars of children's literature share this thinking about children's literature as a distinct genre with a set of consistent qualities" (53). They argue that "The definition of children's literature is an unstable and contested one. Ultimately, the definition one chooses at a given moment – and we must allow for the possibility of making different choices at different moments – will be determined largely by one's purpose" (52). Novels may be classified as YAL for marketing purposes, and certain texts may be listed as both adult and young adult literature in different situations. Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, for example, was originally published for adults in Australia but is sold as a young adult novel in the United States. In a New York Times book review, John Green notes that "some will argue that a book so difficult and sad may not be appropriate for teenage readers." Green "strongly suspect[s] it was written for adults" and believes that many "adults will probably like it" as much as he did. Instances like this reclassification from adult to young adult literature muddy the definition of YAL and show that the intended audience for YAL, the recommended age range a text is deemed most appropriate for, is not always easy to classify.

Gail Zdilla has remarked upon the history of YAL as a genre and its intended audience. Originally targeted at a slightly younger audience, readers as young as 12 or 13, there has been a shift in recent years to older readers; the new ideal audience is between the ages of 14 and 21. According to Zdilla, this shift has occurred because YAL is now often tackling heavier themes such as "sexual content, references to drug use, violence, and other topics that are typically considered to be appropriate for adult audiences only" (192). Many authors of this genre are

wanting to or feeling the need to write about contemporary issues that are prevalent in our society and among teenagers: “some authors have focused their writing on tough issues, such as domestic violence, rape, drug addiction, suicide, sexuality, cults, and so on” (196). Boulley’s YA thriller explicitly deals with these types of issues, and she has expressed in interviews her belief that this novel exists on the border of YA and adult literature. Adults can find as much enjoyment and relevancy in the text as younger readers, and some topics and scenes may be triggering or challenging for a younger audience to read. The novel revolves around the FBI’s investigation into drug trafficking and the harmful effects the making, buying, and distributing of methamphetamine is having on Daunis’ community. Throughout the text, we see characters dealing with alcoholism, we learn about missing and murdered Indigenous women, and we witness a scene of rape.

YAL is frequently used to help young readers make sense of their world, overcome internal and external conflicts, and find individual and communal identities. Zdilla argues that YAL is constantly changing “based on the needs and values of the current society” (194). In the nineteenth century, domestic novels such as Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* were popular choices for teaching young women readers the expectations of womanhood, marriage, and family life. As Mandy Suhr-Sytsma points out, boarding school narratives such as those written by Zitkala-Sa, also held appeal and contained lessons for young people. These well-known texts addressed the nineteenth-century’s societal hierarchies and values in the hopes that readers would find a piece of themselves in the characters. Boulley’s novel similarly works through contemporary Indigenous issues from the perspective of an Ojibwe role model who teaches readers about her culture and, despite encountering setbacks, never loses her focus on helping her community.

Mandy Suhr-Sytsma, in *Self-Determined Stories*, argues that it is difficult to determine a starting point for Indigenous YAL: “Indigenous teens have been listening to stories and engaging written texts (texts like wampum belts, petroglyphs, and birchbark scrolls along with alphabetic texts) for as long as those stories and texts have been around” (xv). While Boulley’s novel is one of the most popular recent additions to Indigenous YAL, books such as Joseph Bruchac’s (Abenaki) *Code Talker*, Cherie Dimaline’s (Metis) *The Marrow Thieves*, and Christine Day’s (Upper Skagit) *The Sea in Winter* are other notable texts that fall into this category and could be used for teaching authentic Indigenous literatures. Much of Indigenous YAL includes references to nation specific traditions, spiritualities, and communal events or ceremonies. Contemporary Indigenous literatures often depict ways that these traditions have become updated or modernized over time. For example, in Kathleen Tigerman’s anthology of *Wisconsin Indian Literature*, Ho-Chunk storyteller Dawn Makes Strong Move depicts a traditional trickster character in a modern setting (driving a vehicle with animal passengers) in “Wak’djuni’aga and the Car.” Boulley’s novel similarly illustrates the ways in which Ojibwe traditions have evolved to fit into our modern, technology-filled society.

Many scholars have written about the benefits of using YAL in high school and college classrooms. While many argue that the language of YAL is not as literary, academic, or elite as the frequently taught classic novels, poems, and plays, other critics and teachers find value in teaching this literature to their diverse groups of students. Janet Alsup, in the introduction to *Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Identity Across Cultures and Classrooms*, notes that YAL “has been taught in American schools since the 1970s” (1). Bushman and Haas argue that “High school students need literature to which they can connect, literature that has moral and ethical issues for them to confront” (8). Since most YAL is easily relatable to teenagers’

struggles, such as issues with bullying, fitting in with peers, discovering identity, and growing into an independent person, incorporating these texts into classrooms (in high school and beyond) is a logical choice. If students can connect and engage with the literature they are reading, they will be more likely to meet the reading goals set by the teacher and to contribute their own meaningful thoughts and questions to discussions. Bushman and Haas state, “We feel strongly that the fundamental purpose of any middle or high school literature curriculum is, through developing the love of reading, to promote lifelong reading” (55). I would agree with their statement and add my own perspective. If secondary school teachers can foster a love for reading, then students will be better prepared for the work required in college English courses, work that asks them to think critically about texts, pose complex questions and explore all sides of the issue, put authors into conversation with one another, and discuss their own experiences and opinions.

Each semester I ask my composition students about the texts they read. I ask them what types of texts or genres they enjoy reading and if their level of enjoyment has changed since their childhood. In every class the majority of my students, in what is typically their first or second semester of college, relay to me that they only read “for school”; any reading outside of assigned school work is usually only done on social media. In a section of English 215: Introduction to English Studies, I asked my students at the end of the semester which was their favorite and least favorite of the texts we had read. The class unanimously agreed that Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* was their least favorite; the language was challenging, it was the oldest of the texts chosen on the syllabus, and they did not relate to the characters. The text they chose as their favorite was varied. Some enjoyed Noelle Stevenson’s graphic novel *Nimona*, while others liked Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West*, and one chose Joseph Conrad’s “The Secret Sharer”. While none of the texts

I taught that semester were classified as YAL, student responses showed me that the texts they liked best, and the ones in which they wrote final papers on, were the ones they related to and found the easiest to read (“easiest” not just because of language, but because they were invested in the story). Like many of the scholars and fellow teachers I cite in this chapter, I believe that choosing texts young adults will enjoy is essential for their success in the classroom and beyond. Scholars Zdilla, Alice Hays, and Kelly Blewett, have conducted studies of YAL use in the classroom and published their significant findings.

Zdilla explains that students in her classes “really enjoyed being able to understand the writing style and vocabulary in YAL” and that “the stylistic flow of YAL writing was natural or what they were used to using/hearing” (198). One student in Zdilla’s class compared reading YAL to Shakespeare, stating that in order to connect with the text, “the language has to be current” (198). Young adult students find language, its ease of understanding and relatable slang, to be an important aspect that can determine whether or not they connect with and find enjoyment in a text. Because of this connection to language, it is even more important for authors like Bouley to include their own Indigenous languages in their writing. Seeing Indigenous languages represented in YAL and other texts will not only help Indigenous students from that tribe learn their own language but will also make non-Indigenous students aware of other languages and ways of speaking.

Zdilla also points out that students often believe “the books assigned in their regular English classes must have been selected because they were considered classics in our culture. They recognized that these titles were somehow important to history” (199). This common belief shows that high school and college classes often depict only one side of history. Students recognize that canonically taught texts are important but struggle with determining the

significance of Indigenous literatures, all because they have not received prior education in Indigenous histories (accurate histories told by Indigenous storytellers), cultures, and current issues. Zitzer-Comfort also addresses this lack of education on Indigenous cultures. She explains that the majority of her own students “were unfamiliar with images and archetypes that are pervasive in American Indian literature, such as coyote, trickster, and deer woman. The students were much better prepared to discuss African American literature and had in fact already read some of the major African American authors” (161). She continues to note,

Students were best read in works that represented their own ethnicity, in most cases.

Since American Indian students account for less than 1 percent of the population on most university campuses, it is not surprising that most of us who teach American Indian literature are teaching nonnative students new ways of seeing the world and new ways of seeing conquest and imperialism in our own communities (161-162).

Zitzer-Comfort provides a list of recommended texts and authors, which includes Zitkala-Sa, Paula Gunn Allen, and Joy Harjo, among others. I would add Boulley’s *Firekeeper’s Daughter* to this list, as it is a recent and authentic addition to Indigenous young adult literature.

Bushman and Haas express the significance of Rosenblatt’s reader-response theory (1938) and student-centered teaching. They explain, “Rosenblatt’s perspective on the relationship between the reader and the text opens an opportunity for students to partake in an active process whereby they must accept responsibility for much of their literary experience” (54-55). With this approach to teaching, students themselves “contribute to the knowledge pool by providing personal reactions” (55). Bushman suggests the use of literature circles as a part of reader-response theory. Literature circles are composed of small groups of students, and each group is allowed to decide which text they read. The members of each group then take on

different roles, assigning them before the initial reading of the text. Some potential responsibilities of the students that Bushman defines include the discussion leader, literary laminator, experience connector, and illustrator (71). Literature circles encourage students to take responsibility for their own analyses, share their personal interpretations with others, and gain confidence in their reading. While Bushman and Haas advocate for a literature circle that assigns each student a specific responsibility, there are multiple ways of conducting literature circles. Faye Brownlie, in *Grand Conversations, Thoughtful Responses: A Unique Approach to Literature Circles* (2019), explains that her approach to literature circles is different than the traditional way they have been done in the past because she gives students more freedom in what they read, how they read, and at what pace they read. She argues that assigning roles “can lead to rather contrived conversations and can be an organizational challenge” (7). Her students, therefore, “are not assigned roles in their discussion groups”, and she believes that this approach “grows strong, thoughtful, sophisticated readers” (1).

Brownlie suggests that teachers who want to follow her version of a literature circle provide students with a choice of around six books, which allows them to choose a book they are interested in and want to engage with. Each group consists of students who are reading the same book, and Brownlie asks each student to prepare for a group discussion with “a passage from the book to read aloud as a conversation starter” (5). Every student in the Brownlie’s groups is given the chance to respond, acknowledging every student’s voice and unique perspectives on the reading. One goal of group discussion in Brownlie’s class is to “encourage students to notice how each person’s thinking can be very different from another’s thinking and how our own thinking is enriched by others” (9). She suggests that teachers “reinforce the idea that different people may notice different things in a [text] and respond in individual ways, based on the

experiences they bring to the act of reading” (9). Alice Hays similarly writes about using literature circles as pedagogy “because the approach is student oriented and supports reader-response-based engagement” (37). She argues that “literature circles enable students themselves to create the questions and discussion based on their prior experiences” (39). Hays’ teaching methods provide a model for reader-response and student-based practices that can be used when incorporating Indigenous YAL into high school or college classrooms. This pedagogy prompts active student engagement with the texts and encourages critical discussions and analyses.

In Hays’ ENG 471 class, an upper division literature course required for English education majors, students read Eric Gansworth’s (Haudenosaunee) *If I Ever Get Out of Here*, a YA novel featuring an Indigenous seventh-grader protagonist living on the Tuscarora reservation in New York in 1975. Hays was curious to determine “to what degree students were vicariously experiencing the culture in the story and if students would be able to unpack their white privilege in order to deeply understand the inequities inherent in the society Gansworth describes” (37). Hays argues that Indigenous and non-Indigenous students will benefit from reading authentic stories like Gansworth’s: “Native American students’ self-esteem and self-efficacy may be positively impacted through the inclusion of authentically authored literature throughout their education, while non-Natives will also benefit from the inclusion of accurate stories” (41). Through her teaching of this text, Hays discovered that students related to the characters and issues presented within the novel, and she is now confident advocating for YAL in literature courses because of this positive connection. She states, “While the novel is semi-autobiographical fiction, the respondent’s self-identification with the situations demonstrates a powerful component of how YAL can mirror back to students who they are. Another strength of

YAL can be its function as a window through which students may more accurately see others” (45).

Although Hays’ inclusion of this YA novel in her curricula was based on reader-response theory and the recognition of the need for greater awareness of Indigenous literatures, her findings suggested that not all students understood the novel’s authenticity and its relevance to their world. In student responses to the novel, Hays found that Indigenous students wrote about many important elements of the story, while non-Indigenous students had difficulties finding significance beyond their own personal experiences and connections to major themes. She notes that “While the Indigenous participants identified the novel as realistic, only one participant out of the 33 non-Native respondents mentioned the novel’s authenticity in any way” (45). This finding shows that while Indigenous students understand the issues of authenticity and the lack of accurate (re)tellings of tribal histories and stories, non-Indigenous students were less informed. Hays then suggests that “it is important that readers see the issues as realistic and relevant to the world outside the pages of this novel. If non-Native students who may become teachers do not recognize the novel’s authenticity, there is a danger that Indigenous people will continue to be relegated to the liminal space of the politicized classroom” (45).

Hays believes her students’ lack of understanding might have resulted from the methods she used, or rather didn’t use, to teach Gansworth’s novel. She explains that “literature circles may not be enough to help all students understand the more nuanced, or even obvious, components of a text if they do not bring prior knowledge or experience about an issue to the conversation” (51). If students are not provided with supplemental historical and theoretical texts to help them analyze the context of the literature, and if they are not asked to conduct their own research in order to produce a more informed analysis, they will be unable to fully understand

the layers (authorship, histories, contemporary issues, etc.) of Indigenous YA literature. Hays also believes that teaching Indigenous YAL with student-centered pedagogies should encourage students to reflect on cultural awareness and their own privileges. She states, “Understanding the role whites play in perpetuating systemic racism generates discomfort for many in the dominant white culture, which may be a component of the stubborn resistance to address the issue of race head-on” (52). According to Hays, “The novel and literature circles alone are not enough to generate productive discomfort – the moment when participants recognize the power of the dominant culture and the ways in which this power contributes to social inequities” (52). Again, instructors incorporating Indigenous literature in their curricula should assign, and read themselves, texts on Indigenous theories and methodologies such as Brayboy’s TribalCrit and Carjuzza and Fenimore-Smith’s five Rs.

Kenan Metzger and Wendy Kelleher also address the need for more Indigenous YAL in education. They argue that reading tribally specific literature is especially beneficial for Indigenous students who may be physically unable to connect with their community, for example, those students, like Daunis, who might venture away from their homeland to attend college: “Sometimes students may not be able to go back to their tribe or community, because it is difficult to participate in all ceremonies and celebrations. However, students can read about it and it can have a positive effect on their lives” (39). Despite including positive role models and helping Indigenous students learn about their culture, Indigenous literature should not include certain aspects of a culture that are not appropriate to be told to or known by outsiders. Metzger and Kelleher explain that there “are topics that are not supposed to be spoken of outside the culture. A book written about a Native student going to a basketball tournament would be culturally appropriate, since basketball is very popular among Native men and youth. If a

character were to narrate the sacred events of traditional rituals and dances, however, that would not be appropriate” (39).

Metzger and Kelleher suggest that Indigenous YAL should be highlighted in classrooms throughout the school year, not just in November which is Native American Heritage Month. They argue that “If this culturally relevant literature is not included, students may feel that their own stories are not worth telling” (40). However, in a study of first-year writing students, Metzger and Kelleher discovered that not all Indigenous students wanted “to have their culture emphasized in school for fear they would be singled out (41). Some of these students “pointed out that just because literature was from an Indigenous perspective did not mean it was culturally relevant to them. Perhaps there is a need to draw on the resources of diverse Native communities to create literature using the language, customs, and culture that is appropriate to share” (41). It is for this reason that I argue that instructors need to address differences in tribal histories, cultures, and languages, featuring a diversity of stories from tribes in their geographical location. Highlighting authors and stories from tribes close to the region they reside in will offer the greatest possibility that Indigenous students relate to the literature and non-Indigenous students will become more aware of other cultures residing in their shared space.

High school English and college literature classrooms are not the only places where YAL could be an effective teaching tool. Roberts et al. believe that YAL can be used in any classroom, such as those of history and science, because of its accessibility and ease of use: “The primary function of using YAL across all disciplines is to help students connect with and better understand what they are learning in class” (95). Major themes of these texts could help students learn class materials and better understand course concepts. Kelly Blewett, in “YA Fiction and Intermediate Composition”, similarly believes there is a place for YAL in composition

classrooms. She discusses the positive engagement her composition students had with Sherman Alexie's (Coeur d'Alene) *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, while noting that she understands the controversy surrounding this author. While the intended age group for Boulley's YA novel is high school to adult, Alexie's audience is slightly younger. Blewett explains that while the intended audience of this book is middle-schoolers, "the topics it addresses – including bullying, sexuality, racism, poverty, alcoholism, depression, disability, cultural appropriation, and death" can be mature and have led to censorship and banning of the book in schools (149). Students in Blewett's class enjoyed the novel, and "half made statements in writing that explicitly identified or sympathized with Alexie's protagonist" (151). Like many other readers of YA novels, Blewett's students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, found ways to relate to the text's characters.

Perhaps the most positive and encouraging feedback Blewett received to teaching Alexie's novel was from a student named Aminata. Blewett quotes Aminata's personal written response to another classmate in a discussion of the text:

That was tough for me growing up the majority of my friends was white and due to that the other students felt as if I didn't belong. I was too white, or didn't seem black enough. I didn't realize that the way I talked or dressed showed what race I was . . . I felt like I was always in an inbetween state (151)

Blewett notes that Aminata, who grew up in Ohio and whose ancestors are from west Africa, had initially asked Blewett, "her white instructor, to call her Amy on the first day of class, yet she signed the letter to her classmate by her full name" (151). Aminata's response was significant for her own identity, as Blewett believes she was "performing her identity"; the reading and discussion of Alexie's novel helped Aminata find confidence and comfort in presenting her true

self to her peers (151). Blewett wants “the shift between Amy and Aminata to be something on the table for discussion during a unit about literacy” (152).

Although I do not suggest reading or utilizing Alexie’s novel in any classroom, other Indigenous YA texts can help students like Aminata discover and become more aware of their own identities, their connections to their cultures and heritage, and their social privileges. Blewett suggests that students’ “own privilege (or lack of it) shaped their reading and writing experiences in school” (152). The addition of a YA novel into composition classrooms could help students meet the goals of these classes by encouraging them to think critically about their own life experiences and the choices that shape their identities and their societies. Composition instructors can help students reflect on rhetoric and explore their worlds by learning how to put class readings (literature as well as theoretical and scholarly texts) into conversation with one another. Including creative works alongside academic texts can allow students to see the ways in which texts work together to inform them, to diversify and broaden their knowledge, of other histories and cultures. Blewett suggests that it is important for us as instructors to “make our own pedagogy more vibrant and relevant” (154). Including tribally specific Indigenous literature in high school and college classrooms, in English and other fields of study, is one prominent step in making our curricula more diverse, relevant, and accessible to all identities.

In “Language, Identity, and Social Reality in Twenty-First-Century American Indian Young Adult Fiction”, Margaret Noodin et al. discuss the challenges and benefits with teaching texts like Alexie’s YA novel. Students in Laurie Barth Walczak’s class “frequently do not recognize Alexie’s novel as just one voice from the Spokane-Coeur d’Alene community. Thus, Laurie sees her challenge as to provide more options for readers” (Noodin). Noodin et al. write, “Whereas Alexie’s *Absolutely True Diary* may be a starting place for students’ voice and choice,

helping them discover other books not only puts more diversity of American Indian literature in their hands but may also urge them to confront their own discomfort, seek more stories different from their own, and resist divisive social forces” (Noodin). I agree with this statement, as I believe that the, despite the controversies surrounding Alexie’s book, it can serve as a starting point to help students become more aware of Indigenous literature and to pursue further readings.

Hintz and Tribunella discuss the history of racial and ethnic representation in children’s and young adult literature. They explain that throughout its history, children’s literature has sometimes “worked to reproduce and reinforce racial and ethnic hierarchies” (345). Hintz and Tribunella note that much of the literature produced during the nineteenth century featured characters of color “as secondary to white protagonists and as stereotyped caricatures” (346). Like I discussed in the previous chapter, many white writers of the time period, authors of adult as well as young adult literature, were perpetuating harmful stereotypes and degrading tropes by representing people of color inaccurately and unfairly. According to Hintz and Tribunella, “The twentieth century saw an increase in ethnic children’s literature, and writers of color began to make their own significant contributions that combated the mostly racist and stereotyped depictions of the nineteenth century” (348). As I argued in Chapter 1, I believe there were still “significant contributions” being made during the nineteenth century, with Indigenous writers such as Zitkala-Sa and Schoolcraft voicing their own experiences and perspectives, and these texts are as worthy of study as later twentieth-century literature. Hintz and Tribunella address Indigenous representations in children’s literature and suggest a reason for the often inaccurate and harmful imagery: “Perhaps because of the troubling association of Native Americans with savagery [...] and the prominence of American frontier motifs in children’s culture and games,

some of the most canonical children's books in both Britain and the United States have included American Indian characters" (352-353). J.M. Barrie's 1911 novel *Peter Pan* is one classic example of a popular children's story featuring Indigenous caricatures and an Indigenous woman, Tiger Lily, who is unable to provide "female companionship" because she "does not perform the ideal role of True Woman [...] and simply functions as a romanticized character upholding the nineteenth-century image of a 'Vanishing Indian'" (Barrie 31, Cary 322).

Addressing the stereotypes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, Hintz and Tribunella explain the terms "race" and "ethnicity". They note that the "notion that people *have* something we call 'ethnicity' is a relatively recent invention", beginning in the 1940s (354). While the term "race" works to imply "some natural or essential differences between groups, the concept of ethnicity foregrounds the ways these differences are cultural, historical, and constructed[...]One's ethnicity or ethnic identity is linked to cultural practices and markers" (354). Every human has an ethnicity, even if they are not always aware of their own ethnic identity; the term is not limited to communities of color. According to Hintz and Tribunella, "Although discussions of ethnic literatures might typically be understood as defined by attention to minority ethnic groups and their cultures and identities, this approach reinforces the sense that some cultures are normal and normative while defining others as deviant or deviations" (355). They add that "some works for children, in depicting ethnic or racial minorities, suggest that the 'ethnic' child or family is really just like the unmarked 'mainstream' family underneath superficial cultural differences, while other works emphasize the uniqueness of identity and experience" (355). Angeline Boulley's *Firekeeper's Daughter* is an example of the latter, as it highlights Anishinaabe beliefs, values, language, and traditions.

Hintz and Tribunella list six main issues or controversies that are associated with ethnic literature. The first controversy deals with authorship and ownership, or “who has the right to represent people of different races or cultures” (358). The second issue is with the text’s audience: “the reader’s familiarity with a cultural, racial, or ethnic group can affect how a work is received or interpreted” (358). The text’s perspective, which could be limited or “create negative impressions”, is the third issue Hintz and Tribunella describe: “Even when a work appears to be sympathetic to a group, it’s narrative perspective can undermine its sympathy and result in problematic consequences” (358). Reclamation is the fourth controversy, and Hintz and Tribunella ask, “Can classic works with problematic or overtly racist elements be reclaimed and repurposed effectively?” (358). The fifth controversy is about a text’s authenticity and accuracy: “How do authenticity and accuracy affect the meaning or composition of texts?” (359). Hintz and Tribunella describe the last issue as dealing with artistic freedom and ethical responsibility, questioning, “What responsibility do authors have to represent other races accurately?” (359). When choosing young adult novels with ethnic representations to incorporate into the classroom, educators should ask the same questions posed by Hintz and Tribunella to determine if the text is appropriate, authentic, and accurate. The Indigenous texts I discuss in this dissertation are written by Indigenous peoples, deal with Indigenous themes, and use Indigenous languages.

The first chapter of this project examined stereotypical representations and sympathetic imagery of Indigenous characters in nineteenth-century literature, suggesting authentic alternatives and counternarratives for teaching, and this chapter moves the dissertation forward to explore contemporary literature written by Anishinaabe creators and storytellers. As I noted in my introduction to this dissertation, this project is not meant to provide a list for what texts *not* to teach. Although I briefly address some of the controversies explored by Hintz and Tribunella,

such as question of author perspective and sympathy, which I discussed in Chapter 1, this dissertation does not focus on these issues or suggest to educators which texts they should avoid. This work is already being done effectively by critics such as Debbie Reese, as she provides helpful resources and reviews in her blog *American Indians in Children's Literature*. This project does, however, seek to provide options for authentic Indigenous texts that *should* be read and consulted and to offer ideas for activities and discussions educators can adapt and include in their own curricula while teaching these authentic texts.

As I write this chapter, the most recent post on Reese's website, from March 24, 2022, is a statement about Carter Meland's Facebook post from two days prior. Reese's post is titled "Carter Meland's Call to Read Ojibwe Writers" and includes a link to Meland's post on social media. In his post, Meland recommends Boulley's young adult novel, among other books by Anishinaabe writers, stating that these "works are by Anishinaabe writers that center Anishinaabe characters in stories that center Anishinaabe cultural, social, and/or spiritual values not to translate them in some quasi-anthropological/educational way to non-Native audiences, but to share the power of Anishinaabe story and storytelling with those who want to hear more." Reese responds, "You know – and I know – that the field of children's literature is changing. That change includes letting go of the Tony Hillerman's and the William Kent Kruegers and so many other white writers who misrepresent Native peoples. Their appropriations and misrepresentations contribute to a cycle of harm. Let's disrupt that cycle. Read Native Writers." I hope this dissertation is a similar call to action and awareness. My goal is to help educators learn (perhaps by utilizing the guides available on Reese's site) how to recognize and choose authentic Indigenous texts to read in their classrooms, texts that are unproblematic and are not determined to contain the controversies of authenticity and perspective that Hintz and Tribunella identify.

In helping educators teach ethnic and Indigenous literatures to young adult students, I believe that theories, such as TribalCrit, and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (CSP) should be consulted. In a literature review on culturally-based pedagogy, Donna Pasternak et al. note that incorporating students' own cultures into a curriculum can be an effective teaching method, but this inclusion "alone does not ensure student success, especially if teachers' practices are embedded in Eurocentric pedagogy, regardless of their cultural backgrounds (Emdin, 2016)" (3). They then define Django Paris' *culturally sustaining pedagogy*, a term "to represent transformative schooling that seeks to sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism" (3). Paris, in "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies and Our Futures" (2021), poses the question: "What does culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) mean as families, educators, and communities care for young people, elders, each other, the lands, as we face a global pandemic and an ongoing uprising for racial and decolonial justice?" (364). In our current post-2020 landscape, it is essential to engage with pedagogies that help our students navigate the world while retaining their unique identities and connections with their cultural communities. CSP recognizes the specific needs and experiences of communities, and asks White educators to divest "from whiteness and the ways whiteness casts White normed practices and bodies as superior" (368). One of CSP's key features is that it works "to be in good relationship with the land, the people of the land, with students and communities (this means developing reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities, the lands and places of work, and with each other in learning settings)" (367).

Paris, in "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies in the Project of Black and Indigenous Solidarities on Turtle Island" (2020), argues that CSP is a name for something Indigenous and Black communities have always been doing: "there is nothing *necessarily* coalitional about

culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), though the project of sustaining our communities through education is shared across time immemorial for Native people and across centuries on Turtle Island for Black people (24). While communities have already been enacting sustaining practices, academia has traditionally been built on Western standards and frames of whiteness. Paris and H. Samy Alim question: “What if, indeed, the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms but to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their heritage and community practices?” (86). They advocate for a repositioning of current pedagogies to focus on the needs, knowledges, and practices of communities of color, and urge that we, as educators, demand “explicitly pluralist outcomes that are not centered on White, middle-class, monolingual, and monocultural norms of educational achievement” (95). Paris and Alim argue that the pedagogies we use “can and should teach students to be linguistically and culturally flexible across multiple language varieties and cultural ways of believing and interacting” (96). Teaching Indigenous literatures, such as the ones presented in this dissertation, may involve learning and teaching students about Indigenous languages, as many authors choose to incorporate their own language in their writing.

Teresa McCarty and Tiffany Lee propose a new term, culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (CSRP). Similar to how Brayboy’s TribalCrit makes Critical Race Theory specific to the needs of Indigenous communities, McCarty and Lee adapt Paris and Alim’s CSP to focus on supporting Indigenous students. They define CSRP by three key features, arguing that it “attends directly to asymmetrical power relations and the goal of transforming legacies of colonization”, “recognizes the need to reclaim and revitalize what has been disrupted and displaced by colonization”, and “recognizes the need for community-based accountability” (103). Teaching

Indigenous languages in classrooms is a culturally sustaining and revitalizing practice as it helps younger generations learn the lessons of their Elders and prevents languages from being lost. McCarty and Lee explain that “Sustaining linguistic and cultural continuity and building relationships are central CSRP goals, premised on respect and reciprocity” (117).

Renee Holt’s *rezilience* is another version of CSP that specifically addresses Indigenous communities. She explains that her term *rezilience* includes Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and is “a land- or place-based framework that comes from a specified location on a reservation, band, village, or community” (72). Holt proposes that this term “is also a way of knowing in which Indigenous people work to reclaim, relearn, and reconnect with their ancestral ways of being that involves teaching and learning” (72). She argues that *rezilience* is similar to IKS in that it “is not something one can easily find written about in books. It is a practice and found in relationships – on *and* with the land, in community, in ceremony, and in language” (73). Like McCarty and Lee’s CSRP, Holt’s *rezilience* emphasizes language revitalization and teaching Indigenous languages in schools. She explains that *rezilience*, as a part of CSRP, specifies alternative ways of teaching and learning that sustain Indigenous communities and their languages. These alternative approaches to teaching attend “directly to asymmetrical power relations and the goals of transforming legacies of colonization” (73). They also recognize “the need to reclaim and revitalize what has been disrupted by colonization” and “the need for community-based accountability” (73).

Teachers using YAL in their curricula could focus on different aspects of the reading based on the age range of their students. High school teachers could ask their students to analyze the standard literary elements, such as plot, characters, setting, themes, point of view, and style. Bushman suggests other literary elements that would also strengthen a students’ textual analysis:

metaphor, simile, flashback, foreshadowing, humor, imagery, personification, symbolism, hyperbole, allusion, and the role of main character as writer. I agree that these are all significant textual elements that secondary teachers could ask their students to find and analyze in YAL. I would add that college instructors can require their students to perform a deeper analysis and research important themes from the text. When reading Indigenous YAL, students should be provided with important historical and theoretical information to help them understand the complexities of the text and the specificity of each nation represented in the literature. For example, a reading of *Firekeeper's Daughter* could include supplementary material such as Brayboy's TribalCrit theory and sources on criminal justice and tribal, state, and federal laws dealing with crimes such as sexual assault against Indigenous women.

Spirits, Elders, and Traditional Knowledges

My close reading of Boulley's *Firekeeper's Daughter* begins by with an examination of the ways in which Daunis expresses her identity through her traditional Anishinaabe knowledges. I argue in this section that Daunis' identity is shaped by Anishinaabe stories and by the respect she has for her community's Elders, ancestors, and spirits. Daunis, the 18-year-old narrator of *Firekeeper's Daughter*, frequently articulates her cultural beliefs and the importance of keeping traditions alive. Early in the novel, she teaches us about the Seven Grandfathers, whose significance is referred to during numerous moments throughout her tale: "The Seven Grandfathers are teachings about living the Anishinaabe minobimaadiziwin – our good way of life – through love, humility, respect, honesty, bravery, wisdom, and truth" (32). At crucial points in her investigation with the FBI, working as a confidential informer to gather information about potential hallucinogenic mushrooms that may have been added to a new version of meth,

Daunis prays for one of these teachings, whichever one she needs for the day ahead. The Seven Grandfathers are Daunis' connection to the Firekeeper side of her family, her Ojibwe father, and are paralleled by another grouping of seven, the seven steps of the scientific method: "observe, question, research, hypothesize, experiment, analyze, conclude" (202). Daunis excels at chemistry and was taught this method by her uncle, her white mother's brother. These two different teachings, the Seven Grandfathers and the seven scientific steps, not only effectively symbolize the two sides of Daunis' identity, her Firekeeper and Fontaine families, but they also illustrate the juxtaposition of traditional healing with modern science. Daunis' ultimate goal, after attending college in a different state, is to return home to her community where she will become "a traditional medicine practitioner and scientist" (484), showing that these two sides of her identity (tribal traditions vs. modern science) can work together to benefit her Ojibwe people. Other members of her community similarly mix two sides of their identities, as Daunis notes, "Some Nishnaabs blend their religious faith and traditional Ojibwe spirituality, like adding semaa to the incense during mass" (287). This mixing of religion and spirituality does not lessen either belief but rather strengthens the believer's bonds to multiple aspects of their identity and is a refusal to let either tradition die.

Boulley carefully crafted her novel into four main parts, each part aligning with a direction of the Ojibwe medicine wheel. Daunis' story begins in the East (Waabanong), where "all journeys begin" (3). Ten months after the major events detailed in the fourth and final section of the book (Kewaadin – North), after death, dreaming, and rebirth, Daunis comes full circle and stands "at the eastern door" in her healing jingle dress (488). Boulley's decision to structure her novel in this way highlights her community's traditions, storytelling structures, and the significance of space. After spending more than a year grieving the deaths of her Uncle

David and best friend, Lily, Daunis is able to participate in the powwow. Her regalia and the power of dancing symbolize her own cycle of trauma and healing, and she is now prepared to begin a new journey that will take her briefly away from her home.

Daunis' powwow regalia, her red jingle dress, "represents healing" and the jingle dance she participates in at the story's end is meant for all the "Indigenous women and girls who are murdered or missing" (487). While Daunis comes to personally know some of these women over the course of her investigation, before she knows the truth of Jamie's identity, she explains to him how each woman receives her jingle dress. The dancers are given their regalia one piece at a time, and each part of it connects her to her ancestors, family, and teachers. Daunis understands that "If you know the story of her regalia – who and where and why each item came to be – then you know her" (69). The 365 cones on her own dress tell the story of "the year Auntie spent teaching me about being a strong Nish kwe," and the other bits of her regalia were given to her by important people in her life, such as Gramma Pearl, Teddie, and Eva (486). Knowing her own story, as well as the stories of each of the Indigenous women this dance becomes dedicated to, is crucial for Daunis' healing. She gathers strength from her family, the spirits of her ancestors, and the strong matriarchs she knows and has known. The drumbeats of the powwow are also a form of medicine (98), like the cedar bush, Gizhik, which she uses and asks for protection (118). These traditional medicines, along with the act of remembering and telling stories, allow Daunis to restore her community, heal her family, and move past her own traumatic experiences.

In Collopy's review of *Firekeeper's Daughter*, she mentions the prominent role of Ojibwe Elders: "The elders turn out to play a crucial role in the plot, one that relies not just on their traditional knowledge, but also on their ability to learn new skills from young people who are knowledge carriers as well as recipients." Like the parallels Daunis creates between the

Seven Grandfathers and the scientific method, the story's Elders and teenagers work together to accomplish mutual goals. Angeline P. Hoffman explains that in her Apache community, they "use oral narratives to teach children, particularly how our children should conduct themselves as Apache people, with dignity and respect for all things, especially their elders. In our culture, the elders are our teachers and professors; the knowledge they have gained throughout the course of lifetimes is important to pass on to the next generation" (82). According to Hoffman, the main goal of retelling traditional stories is to teach the younger generations about their cultural identity and origins, and the community's elders are the ones with access to this knowledge. Retelling stories, perhaps with modern elements, keeps these traditions and knowledges alive. Like the accessibility of YAL, stories told to children by elders are meant to be relatable, to contain valuable life lessons and morals, and to encourage positive identity growth. Daunis shows a great respect for her Elders, patiently listens to them recite experiences from their youth, and offers *semaa* as thanks when she specifically requests information in the form of a story.

Daunis receives valuable knowledge from her Elders that helps her navigate through her young adult life and assist her community during the FBI's investigation. On the ferry ride across the river, Granny June teaches Daunis that the water's "constant flow means it's a new river each time we cross, and we should honor the journey" (137). To honor the changing and living river, Daunis follows the Elders' traditions of throwing tobacco into the breeze above the water. After realizing that sometimes you "need to hang in there to find the teaching in his meandering, animated anecdotes," Daunis learns from Jonsy the key to collecting bottles at the landfill and discovers a place that leads to hints about the meth distribution. Leonard Manitou tells Daunis a story about the Little People, and with that knowledge she uncovers the truth of the investigation. The FBI is looking for a hallucinogenic mushroom because they do not believe the tribal stories

of the Little People. However, to Daunis, the facts are simple: “the Little People are real” (322). Her tribe’s stories hold truth and power, and if the Elders say the Little People are real, then they are. Daunis knows that the meth users did in fact see the Little People in the woods, not a hallucination, but the FBI is unwilling to accept the plausibility of this traditional “myth” because it does not seem logical or fit with their understandings of modern science. Boulley herself has remarked that stories of the Little People are not exclusive to Anishinaabe peoples. Many Indigenous tribes and other cultures have similar stories of Little People, most often seen as benevolent or helpful and sometimes mischievous.

A comic told and illustrated by Beckee Garriss and Andrew Cohen, “The Yehasuri: The Little Wild Indians,” depicts the Little People as trickster-type characters. The Catawba people of South Carolina recite tales of Little People who “are famous for causing and creating a lot of mischief, especially for the unaware traveler or the naughty child” (138). These tricksters “especially enjoy taunting misbehaving children,” which is similar to the Ojibwe descriptions Boulley presents in her novel (140). While Auntie and other community members, most of whom had never heard anything negative about these beings, left food and other offerings outside at night for the Little People, Travis and the teens in Minnesota had angered the Little People by partaking in bad medicine. The lesson at the end of the Catawba comic tells children, “If you don’t want to get tricked...watch your step and don’t stray off the beaten path” (142). Carolyn Dunn, in “Deer Woman and the Living Myth of Dreamtime”, explains a similar moral at the end of the Little People stories: “There are stories we were told when we were younger — that the Little People would come from the earth and swallow us up if we weren’t good.” She shares the lessons and teachings she had been told by emphasizing that “Power must be respected, must be obtained and maintained in traditional, healthy ways. The Little People teach

us to do just that: use our power in a good way or else we will be lost.” There is a similar lesson presented in the stories told by Daunis’ Ojibwe Elders. The Little People are harmless and will keep lost children safe, but straying from the teachings of the Seven Grandfathers is dangerous.

The novel’s Elders teach Daunis their Ojibwe culture, language, and histories through storytelling, and she provides them with more than a traditional gift of tobacco in return. The Elders unsurprisingly struggle with comprehending and using modern technology in our advanced world. Jimmer informs Daunis that his grandson gave him an iTunes card and asks, “What the hell am I supposed to do with that?” (184). In response, Daunis helps the Elders locate their favorite songs in the iTunes catalogue and burns CDs for them to listen to. At the end of the novel when Daunis is in dire need of help, the Elders work together to provide a resource she “never anticipated” (453). The Tribal Youth Council, like Daunis, had helped each of the Elders learn about society’s new technology so they were prepared to use cell phones and send group texts. After this unexpected rescue, Daunis is “reminded that our Elders are our greatest resource, embodying our culture and community. Their stories connect us to our language, medicines, land, clans, songs, and traditions. They are a bridge between the Before and the Now, guiding those of us who will carry on in the Future” (453).

Language and Place

While the young adult protagonist develops her identity through her community’s knowledges and values, the way Daunis perceives herself is also informed by the Anishinaabe language and her connection to the land. Many reviews of the novel highlight Boulley’s use of Anishinaabemowin, which she was adamant on including and using correctly. Daunis explains to Jamie, an enrolled Cherokee who is unconnected to his people, homeland, and native language,

the names for her people and their language: “Anishinaabe means the Original People. Indigenous. Nish. Nishnaab. Shinaab. Mostly we’re referring to Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi tribes from the Great Lakes area. Ojibwe language is called Anishinaabemowin or Ojibwemowin” (48). Through her explanations, Daunis helps Jamie understand why and how her tribe’s language affects her identity, and her work as the novel’s narrator explains key terms to readers. In the novel’s first sentence, Daunis mentions semaa, tobacco which is placed as an offering: “I start my day before sunrise, throwing on running clothes and laying a pinch of semaa at the eastern base of a tree, where sunlight will touch the tobacco first” (5). While the sentence implies that the semaa is her Ojibwe word for tobacco, she does not define the word until page 133 in a discussion with Ron and Jamie. This lack of obvious definition helps Boulley incorporate Anishinaabemowin seamlessly throughout the novel and Daunis’ use of the language, spoken in her mind as well as aloud, feels natural.

The first page continues this use of Anishinaabemowin as Daunis gives “thanks to Creator and ask[s] for zoongidewin” because she will need courage (5). Daunis articulation of her language the thoughts that follow help readers recognize the meaning of her words. When Daunis is acting as our narrator rather than directly translating words for Jamie to understand, Boulley’s sentence structure is an accessible formula for our own understandings. Like the first two uses of Anishinaabemowin found on the first page, the third instance follows the same formula when Daunis speaks of Sugar Island: “‘Ziisabaaka Minising.’ I whisper in Anishinaabemowin the name for the island, which my father taught me when I was little. It sounds like a prayer” (6). Daunis speaks/thinks an Ojibwe word or phrase and immediately follows it by using the English word of the referenced noun or place. As we become familiar with the words Daunis uses often, the need for these translations disappears and

Anishinaabemowin words and phrases begin to appear by themselves. The novel ends with a song which Boulley first presents as six lines of Anishinaabemowin, followed by a paragraph consisting of four lines in the shorter English translations.

Although Daunis appears to have a strong knowledge of her Ojibwe language, she knows it well enough to teach it to others, there are still words she does not know and expresses the desire to ask Auntie what these words are, if they even exist: “Maybe there’s a word in Anishinaabemowin for when you find solid footing in the rubble after a tragedy” (10). These moments show that even though Daunis is transitioning from a girl into a strong Indigenous woman, independent and confident while still valuing her family and community connections, she is still learning and gaining a greater awareness of her culture and language. At the Elder Center, Granny June, Minnie, Jimmer, Jonsy, and Seeney discuss how they determine if someone is fluent in the language. Their definitions of fluency range from being able to “tell the difference in dialects”, knowing “which words are animate or inanimate because you just know which ones are alive”, to “when you dream in the language” (291). With the theories posed by each Elder, it is difficult to judge whether Daunis would be considered fluent in Anishinaabemowin, but I would argue that she is. She still asks for help understanding and learning certain words, but she is able to teach others the language.

Anishinaabemowin is not the only language that holds significance for Daunis. She has also become fluent in her mother and uncle’s secret language they had invented together as children, a language Daunis describes as “a hybrid of French, Italian, abbreviated English, and made-up nonsensical words” (8). This language connects Daunis to her Fontaine family members, and is also the key to earning her uncle’s story by deciphering his hidden research notes. Daunis’ identity and the way she speaks are also influenced by the geographical region she

calls home. When Jamie questions her use of “yous” instead of “you”, she explains that “Yous is the Yooper version of y’all” (48). Her use of Anishinaabemowin connects her to her Ojibwe ancestors and the Firekeeper side of her family, while using an unfamiliar-to-Jamie version of “you” roots her in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Sugar Island, the place Daunis calls home, has major influences on her identity and shapes her vision of the world. Wendy J. Glenn analyzes ideas of space and place in *YAL*, arguing that “Where we are located can influence our way of doing and being in the world” (379). She continues, “The emotional and mental space we inhabit is intimately bound to the physical place in which we reside” (379). This connection is made clear in *Firekeeper’s Daughter* by analyzing the identities of Daunis and Jamie. The novel’s protagonist, despite dealing with internal conflicts and external traumas, remains fiercely loyal to her family and her culture. Helping her community is more important than aiding the FBI with their investigation, an investigation which she believes will end with no positive influences on her world. She knows her language and her Elders’ teachings, and she respects traditional medicines found within her landscapes. Jamie, however, knows his tribe but not his family. Being adopted out of his community, Jamie has no true connections to his culture or his land and has never lived in one place long enough to call anywhere his home. Unlike Daunis, Jamie does not know himself and has not yet determined or become comfortable with his own identity. This lack of identity is evident in the text, as we as readers, along with Daunis, never learn Jamie’s true name.

According to Glenn, reading *YAL* can help teenagers understand their own connections to place: “Examinations of the intersections among space, place, and identity in story have the potential to reveal the complexities inherent in locating one’s self. This is an especially important process for young adult readers who are moving toward greater independence and autonomy as

they work to define their own place in the world” (379). Young Indigenous readers might see themselves in Daunis’ character, someone deeply rooted in their region’s landscape and cultural values. Like Daunis, they might understand the need to leave their community for a time to grow as a person and accomplish their goals, with the ultimate plan of returning home, possibly in the hopes of affecting positive change. Other Indigenous readers might identify with Jamie, a person who is still unsure of his identity and wishes to seek out cultural knowledge that could assist his personal growth. Characters in Boulley’s novel have numerous concerns that are typical of Indigenous youth, such as being or not being an enrolled member of a tribe, being separated from and outside of one’s community, speaking the language, and living on the reservation or in an urban setting. *Firekeeper’s Daughter* can help Indigenous youth recognize and form their identities, and it can also have a positive effect on non-Indigenous readers. Glenn claims that reading YAL “might serve to help young people challenge misconceptions and romanticized views and build more complex understandings of communities and cultures” (392).

Gerrit W. and Barbara S. Bleeker share Glenn’s opinion on the effect a character’s landscape has on their identity. They explain that teenagers living in urban or fluid spaces can experiences “feelings of disconnection and alienation” and that teens need to find “clear anchors in family, community, and institutions like schools to forge a coherent identity” (84). Their definition of a literary landscape includes aspects of the “physical, social, and cultural”, and they provide six reading prompts to use “as a framework for analyzing the relationship between ‘place’ and identity” (84). I will put this framework into practice and utilize each of their provided prompts to analyze the relationship between Daunis’ landscape and her Indigenous identity. Gerrit and Barbara Bleeker’s first prompt encourages an analysis of “distinctive physical/geographical features of space/place” (84). Daunis’ story details life on a real island on

the border of Michigan and Canada. While making frequent trips between the two countries is normal for people where Daunis lives, she reflects on history and points out that the Ojibwe “were here before that border existed” (243). She similarly thinks about her ancestors during a ferry ride across the river, wondering “if it was the same when my ancestors crossed the choppy water in birchbark canoes. If their hearts lightened because they were coming home” (29). The river provides Daunis a passage home and serves as a point of connection between her Firekeeper and Fontaine families. While most of the novel’s major events occur in the Upper Peninsula, other states of relevance to the FBI investigation are Wisconsin and Minnesota. The natural environment not only holds significance for the FBI, who are looking for an undocumented type of mushroom native to the island, but for Daunis as well, as she knows the area and is able to locate and gather plants used in traditional medicines. While collecting with Jonsy, Daunis also notices the environmental pollution that has resulted from the landfill. The birch trees have absorbed contaminated groundwater and can no longer be used to make medicine, and the black ash trees, whose rings “hold a story for every year” are unfit for basket weaving (144).

The second reading prompt asks for discussion of the “distinctive characteristics of the cultural/ideological (traditions, habits, values, beliefs) landscape” (84). I previously examined many of these Ojibwe beliefs, such as the Little People stories and respecting Elders, but one tradition that relates more specifically to language and identity is the new name given to people after death. Four days after Lily’s death, her fourth and final day, Daunis hears her best friend’s new name, Liliban, for the first time: “I choke up at the sound of Lily’s new name, indicating she is now in a different time and place. We traditionally add ‘-iban’ after someone has changed

worlds” (114). Here Daunis notes an Anishinaabe tradition as well as the way words change in her language.

The third prompt is for analysis of the “ways in which social and interpersonal relationships help shape the protagonist’s identity” (84). With the two sometimes competing sides of Daunis’ family, there are many social interactions and conventions to analyze. Not long after being introduced to Daunis as the story’s narrator, she tells us that she “learned there were times when [she] was expected to be a Fontaine and other times when it was safe to be a Firekeeper” (11). Referring to her GrandMary’s disapproval of her Firekeeper family and their Ojibwe culture, Daunis recognized at a young age (7 years old) that she had to alter or hide parts of her identity when in certain social situations. As a light-skinned Ojibwe, Daunis also experienced certain criticisms and privileges among her peers. She states, “I am so pale, the other Nish kids called me Ghost, and I once overheard someone refer to me as ‘that washed-out sister of Levi’s.’” (13). She further explains that “there is an Acceptable Anishinaabe Skin Tone Continuum, and those who land on its outer edges have to put up with different versions of the same bullshit” (13). Daunis and Lily, whose skin was darker, both experienced issues with their identity because of their skin color. Both friends were also unenrolled members of their tribe because of social factors: “We are descendants – rather than enrolled members – of the Sugar Island Ojibwe Tribe. My father isn’t listed on my birth certificate, and Lily doesn’t meet the minimum blood-quantum requirement for enrollment. We still regard the Tribe as ours, even though our faces are pressed against the glass, looking in from outside” (18).

In a private conversation with Jamie, Daunis shares this information about her father and enrollment status. Jamie empathizes with her and says, “It’s hard when being Native means different things depending on who’s asking and why[.]It’s *your* identity, but it gets defined or

controlled by other people” (55). This statement reflects Daunis’ earlier comment to her cousin Pauline: “you can be a princess even without a boy saying so” (37). Daunis takes control of her own identity, defining who she is on her own terms. She may not be an enrolled member of her tribe (at least at the beginning of her journey), but she knows she does not need that status to be Anishinaabe (This confidence will be further explored while examining the sixth and final reading prompt). To further establish her Indigenous identity on her own terms, Daunis thinks about her Spirit name: “The name that begins my prayers to Creator. The name I will only reveal to someone worthy of me” (381). Certain characters throughout the novel know and refer to her by differing names (for example, TJ is the only person who calls her by her middle name, Lorenza), but her Spirit name is the most personal and sacred. She will allow someone special to know it once she is ready, but for the duration of the novel, this name remains private and a meaningful part of her identity that is only for herself to know.

The fourth reading prompt has already been addressed in my earlier discussion of language. This prompt seeks to know the “ways in which cultural and/or sub-cultural linguistic patterns (dialects, slang, neologisms) help shape the protagonist’s identity” (84). Daunis’ identity is clearly shaped and influenced by her knowledge of Anishinaabemowin, and her connections to place determine the way she speaks. The fifth prompt questions the “ways in which the protagonist’s identity is shaped by place/or by [their] struggle to reject or escape place” (84). Daunis is disappointed that she was not able to go to the college she wanted, and she feels like she does not always belong in her town: “even with such deep roots, I don’t always feel like I belong” (33). However, at the end of the novel when she leaves, she expresses that she will return after college graduation.

The sixth and final prompt addresses what is perhaps the most important connection between a character's place and their identity, which is the "means the protagonist uses to search for and discover [their] own place and identity" (85). With this prompt we can analyze ways the character is actively trying to realize their identity and find meaning within their landscapes. I argue that the most notable example of this exploration in *Firekeeper's Daughter* is when Daunis recalls the story of the daughter of the original firekeeper. Jamie questions why Levi, Daunis' brother, had called her Firekeeper's Daughter, which shows that the story is already connected to her familial identity. Daunis explains that she dislikes the story because the daughter "doesn't even get her own name in it. Her identity is in relation to her dad, Firekeeper, and then her husband, First Man, called Anishinaabe, and then her sons, named after each of the four directions" (176). After this explanation, Daunis then thinks about her own name that she uses in her prayers. Along with her Spirit name, she has added Firekeeper's Daughter to help Creator know who she is. However, she realizes the contradiction in this prayer; just like the original daughter, she has defined her identity by a connection to her father. Daunis then tries to recall the Anishinaabemowin word "for the beams of light you can see when the sun hides behind clouds. In science, they're called crepuscular rays. I think the word is *zaagaaso*. If I'm right, that's what I'll call Firekeeper's Daughter from now on. Her own identity: *Zaagaasikwe*" (176). In this moment, Daunis actively fights against an assigned identity, or rather the lack of individual identity and agency, by creating a name, in her Indigenous language, for the daughter of the firekeeper. By naming *Zaagaasikwe*, Daunis provides her own type of counter-story to the traditional story told in her community. Rewriting this story, even just by changing one name, allows Daunis to free herself from the ties restricting her own individual identity. She remains connected to her family and community in numerous other ways, but through this story and the

removal of the name Firekeeper's Daughter from her prayers, Daunis is able to take pride in her identity and grow into her own womanhood.

Before her nineteenth birthday, Daunis is given the gift of being able to officially enroll in her tribe. Her narration informs us that she has "wanted this ever since [she] understood that being Anishinaabe and being an enrolled citizen weren't necessarily the same thing" (236). She has previously acknowledged, before the events of the novel, that her culture, as well as her connection to her ancestors and the original firekeeper's daughter, does not change or become less significant because she is not enrolled. She confidently articulates, "it changes nothing about me. I am Anishinaabe. Since my first breath. Even before, when my new spirit traveled here. I will be Anishinaabe even when my heart stops beating and I journey to the next world" (237). Gerrit and Barbara Bleeker propose that as teenagers read YAL, "they will see and/or reexamine connections or disconnections between their own 'place' and their own emerging identity" (90). When Indigenous and non-Indigenous teens read *Firekeeper's Daughter*, I believe the Bleekers are correct. Young readers can engage with a relatable text and find their own similarities and divergences with well-developed and likeable characters. Daunis, might sometimes struggle with the questions many others her age ask, feeling like she does not quite fit into either of her two main worlds, but she stays true to her beliefs and herself, posing as a hero and role model for other teenagers, especially Indigenous ones, to admire.

Boulley's text illustrates the role an individual's cultural traditions, language, and landscape play in shaping their individual identity, and it also addresses the value of a close community. Daunis consistently chooses to put her community first, which is sometimes in direct opposition of the FBI's goals. YAL most often features characters who come of age during a crucial journey, exploring and growing into their new adult identities, perhaps with the

assistance of close friends or family. Suhr-Sytsma argues that Indigenous YAL often places a stronger emphasis on communal growth than non-Indigenous YAL: “As Indigenous YA texts render individuals’ growth as more communal than most other YA texts do, they also reveal that concerns related to communal sovereignty are often actually intertwined with issues of personal identity” (xx). Daunis finds it difficult to imagine a life without close relatives, as she is always surrounded by family and matriarchs. Her identity, like the stories in her jingle dress, has been given to her and shaped over time by the members of her community. Macmillan Publishing has provided a useful online teacher’s guide to the novel that contains questions for student discussion. Many of these questions, specifically referring to the second part of the book (Zhaawanong – South), prompt students to reflect on the differences between Daunis’ traditional view of community and the FBI’s professional one. Daunis explicitly acknowledges their opposing opinions during numerous scenes in the novel.

At Tahquamenon Falls State Park, Daunis first thinks to herself that the way the FBI view her community and their drug investigation is not a positive perspective: “I take pride in the spectacular beauty of this place. Jamie and Ron are here to investigate something horrible. To shine a light on the bad things. That’s not the entirety of our story” (133). While Daunis, like other members of her Ojibwe family, can appreciate the beauty of their natural environment and encourage the community to heal from within, Ron and Jamie can only see the negatives. Unguided by the Seven Grandfathers, the federal agents believe they are helping Daunis’ community without considering the needs, desires, and values of the tribe. Unable to recognize the entirety of the community’s story, as they have done nothing to earn it, Ron and Jamie “want bad stuff without knowing the good stuff too” (217). Daunis believes that “If the community were an ill or injured person, the FBI would cut out the infection or reset the bones. Amputate if

necessary. Problem solved. I'm the only person looking at the whole person, not just the wound" (217). While Daunis is able to use the teachings of both the Seven Grandfathers and the scientific method, the FBI only understands science. Ron and Jamie want to find a mushroom that was responsible for a group hallucination, but Daunis wants "to know if the kids are okay" (158). As a future traditional medicine practitioner, Daunis cares about and shows compassion for other teenagers, even if they are outside her own community. She shows respect for her cultural traditions by listening to others and being receptive to their needs

Through the course of her journey, Daunis prays for each of the Seven Grandfathers in turn. By the time she has come full circle and is once again facing East, ready to dance at the powwow and begin a new adventure, she has embodied each of these seven teachings. With one side of her brain being grounded in science, she parallels the traditional teachings by conducting experiments and working through each step in the scientific method in her investigation and exploration on Duck Island. These scientific steps are helpful in shaping Daunis' understanding of the world, as she frequently shows off her intelligence by spouting scientific facts, but the Seven Grandfathers are a more prominent part of her identity. Ron and Jamie, on the other hand, only display knowledge of the scientific method and conduct their business without regard for the long-lasting effects it will have on Sugar Island and surrounding areas.

The number seven is a powerful number in *Firekeeper's Daughter* as well as in many Indigenous cultures. Alongside the Seven Grandfather teachings, Daunis relays another powerful 'seven': the next seven generations of her community. She explains the significance of this thought: "People say to think seven generations ahead when making big decisions, because our future ancestors – those yet to arrive, who will one day become the Elders – live with the choices we make today" (237). Because Daunis is thinking about future descents and the world she will

leave for them, she understands her need to be a part of the FBI's investigation. Ron and Jamie are not thinking about this future or of the Seven Grandfathers, and Daunis knows that she, along with the rest of her community, needs to take responsibility, fix their issues, and "be part of the solution" (289). Instead of having the mindset of "saving" the community, like the FBI's perspective, Daunis recognizes her tribe's resilience and survivance, and realizes that they are the ones who will promote positive change and communal growth.

Violence against Indigenous Women

Kathleen C. Colantonio-Yurko, Henry "Cody" Miller, and Jennifer Cheveallier address the difficult theme of sexual violence in YAL. As previously noted, the recommended age range for YAL has slightly increased due to more adult content being presented in this literature. Colantonio-Yurko et al. suggest that "students should understand the issue of sexual violence as a traumatic and real part of the lived human experience, especially because young adults are heavily represented in sexual violence statistics" (2). According to the CDC's website, "more than 1 in 3 women have experienced sexual violence involving physical contact during their lifetimes[...]One in 3 female rape victims experienced it for the first time between 11-17 years old and 1 in 8 reported that it occurred before age 10" (CDC). Colantonio-Yurko et al. argue that because of these statistics, novels that depict scenes or references of sexual violence should not be banned or left out of the classroom. Students need to be aware of the harsh realities of this situation, but they suggest that offering this literature "as a choice might be the right option for some teachers" (4). They provide further suggestions for educators, such as assigning non-fiction and news stories to go along with the literary texts. Looking "at examples of sexual assault from

the media” in their home state and local areas gives students a greater understanding of the events happening around them (5).

The statistics the CDC provides become even more alarming when we turn specifically to Indigenous women. According to the *Native Women’s Wilderness* website, Indigenous women are murdered at a rate “10x higher than all other ethnicities” and “More than half of Indigenous women have experienced sexual violence (56.1%)”. Suhr-Sytsma also addresses this violence against Indigenous women:

“In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, violence against Indigenous women in the United States and Canada continued at a rate unparalleled by any other demographic, an unsettling reality that cannot be disentangled from the still deeply entrenched discourse of colonialist heteropatriarchy, over hundreds of years, that sexualizes and degrades Native women’s bodies along with their lands” (xx).

Firekeeper’s Daughter depicts this violence as Daunis knows of numerous women who have been murdered or are currently missing. She later experiences this violence firsthand and begins the healing process by attending a communal ceremony. She recognizes many women from her tribe, who she learns have all shared similar traumas, and is grateful for all the women who are not in attendance.

Early in the novel, discussions of blanket parties foreshadow the ending’s healing events. Daunis informs us that “A blanket party is when a guy does something bad to a woman and her female cousins take him into the woods, rolled in a blanket, and beat the moowin out of him. I asked Auntie when I first heard about it; she called it Nish kwe justice” (34). When Daunis expresses her desire to join her aunt at a blanket party, Auntie reveals that the women who partake in these parties “know that violence firsthand” (78). Auntie hopes that Daunis can avoid

that violence, and she believes that certain privileges Daunis was born with could keep her from experiencing sexual violence: “I keep hoping your privileges will keep you safe. Your last name. Your light skin. Your money. Your size, even” (79). However, these parts of Daunis’ identity are not enough to keep her from being a part of the CDC’s statistics.

Colantonio-Yurko et al. suggest that educators can use YAL to invite healthy and open discussion of the sexual violence that is portrayed in the fictional texts as well as the violence that is occurring where they live: “Teachers can prompt students to think about power dynamics within a literary environment by posing questions for students to discuss[...]students should begin to apply their new understandings of sexual assault, rape, the rape myth, and victim blaming to assigned literary works” (7). They provide sample discussion questions for potential teachers of YAL, and I will address the two questions I believe are the most important for analysis of *Firekeeper’s Daughter*. Colantonio-Yurko et al. propose the questions: “How are the perpetrators of assault and violence treated by institutions? Why?” and “How does race impact how survivors of assault and violence are treated?” (16). These questions could have vastly different answers depending on the culture at the center of the novel. Since *Firekeeper’s Daughter* focuses on a young Indigenous woman, issues of federal, state, and tribal laws and politics come into play.

Feeling angered that she, and many other Indigenous women, will never get justice for the violence against her, Daunis tells Ron: “I think Grant Edwards planned to rape me as soon as he heard about my enrollment vote. He knew the resort was on tribal land. He counted on the federal government not wasting resources going after non-Native guys like him. They knew the tribal court couldn’t touch him” (473). Knowing these governments would never be able to provide her with the justice she needs, Daunis thinks of a more traditional means to achieve her

healing justice. She recalls the blanket parties she has heard of and imagines Grant as their victim: “I picture Grant Edwards rolled up in a blanket, in the trunk of a car deep in the woods on Sugar Island. My female cousins lift the heavy roll and drop it on the ground” (473). In the hospital, Daunis suggests a blanket party, demanding that Auntie finally bring her with. Auntie recognizes Daunis’ need and accepts that Indigenous women still face the reality of violence despite having assumed privileges like Daunis’.

Auntie’s character in the novel parallels the Ojibwe spirit Deer Woman. Dunn describes Deer Woman as being one of the Little People, and just like the stories of Little People, Deer Woman is not exclusive to one Indigenous culture. According to Dunn, “The Deer Woman spirit teaches us that marriage and family life within the community are important and these relationships cannot be entered into lightly. Her tales are morality narratives: she teaches us that the misuse of sexual power is a transgression that will end in madness and death.” In *Firekeeper’s Daughter*, Auntie acts as a version of Deer Woman, giving male abusers the punishments they deserve. Daunis remembered stories she was told of Auntie in her younger days, one where she had punched a man, and discovered that there is a “scary version of Auntie” (35). This version of Auntie, like Deer Woman, delivers justice and protects the women of her community. Zitzer-Comfort explains that Deer Woman has the power of transformation: “The one constant of deer woman stories is the power of deer woman to transform those around her” (165). We see this type of transformation in the way Auntie helps the women of her community transform their pain into comfort through traditional healings and good medicine.

III

Deer Woman and Indigenous Futurism Comics

Angeline Boulley's young adult novel *Firekeeper's Daughter* depicts Indigenous characters (the community's matriarchs) with transformative powers similar to those of Deer Woman, but the spirit Deer Woman herself never directly appears in the text. Elizabeth LaPensée (Anishinaabe) has compiled stories of Deer Woman in her 2017 comics anthology *Deer Woman: An Anthology*. These stories, told in the medium of comics where words work together with visual imagery, highlight Indigenous women's survival, healing, and resistance after trauma. Like the protagonist and the Auntie of *Firekeeper's Daughter*, the women in LaPensée's anthology portray the transformative and empowering qualities of Deer Woman. The previous chapter discussed the benefits of teaching YAL in high school and college classrooms, and I argued that Boulley's *Firekeeper's Daughter* is an accessible yet complex text that will encourage students to continue reading literature (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and help them understand historical contexts and contemporary Indigenous issues within their regional communities. This chapter analyzes the similarly accessible yet often complex medium of comics, and argues that, like Indigenous YA novels, Indigenous comics have much to offer students, as well as teachers, in literature classes as well as beyond the field of English. Like the work of my first two chapters, this chapter emphasizes the stories of Anishinaabe artists and my analyses can serve as a model for reading and teaching comics created by Indigenous artists of other nations.

I begin this chapter with an examination of current scholarship on teaching comics in the classroom, addressing both *why* and *how* educators utilize the medium. I draw on Scott McCloud's classic text *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* and Hillary Chute's *Why Comics? From Underground to Everywhere* to provide a brief history of comics and a definition

of the medium's terms and ways of reading. Teaching comics to young adult students encourages them to think critically and rhetorically about the author's choices and purposes, actively engage with multiple modalities, and consider how those modalities work together to create meaning. I argue throughout the chapter that teaching comics, including asking students to *read* comics as well as *create* them, helps students communicate effectively through multiple modes and offers them new possibilities for reading and recognizing the diverse world around them. The chapter then explores three comics written by Elizabeth LaPensée, and I argue, through the lens of decolonialism and critical content analysis, that the comics' gutters, the blank spaces between panels, are sites of trauma, transformation, and healing. This chapter continues the conversation on violence against Indigenous women that began in Chapter 1, as the comics' protagonists, all Anishinaabe women, demonstrate resistance against patriarchal and colonial powers and survivance through transforming themselves and their community by listening to ancestors, spirits, and traditional knowledges. Indigenous stories presented through the medium of comics often closely resemble traditional oral storytelling practices, as the form relies on non-linear time as well as audience participation and interpretation. Reading and analyzing the text and images of Indigenous comics allows students to not only learn about comics form but about Indigenous communities and the structures of traditional stories as well.

Elizabeth LaPensée, Ph.D. is Anishinaabe, Metis, and Irish and has received awards for her work in video games, such as "Thunderbird Strike" which won Best Digital Media at imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival in 2017. Much of her work focuses on Indigenous women's resistance, language revitalization, and Indigenous Futurisms (a term coined by her mother, Grace Dillon, which I will further address at the end of this chapter). This chapter analyzes three of LaPensée's comics: "Deer Woman", appearing in the *Deer Woman* anthology,

which features the Deer Woman spirit and acts of Indigenous women's resistance; "They Who Walk as Lightning", published in *Moonshot* volume 2, which focuses on a protagonist fighting to protect and support her community from pollution spread by chemical facilities; and "They Come for Water", collected in *Moonshot* volume 3, depicting a future dystopian world where toxic water has turned most of the population into zombie-like creatures. I have selected these three comics for analysis because they each contain words and images emphasizing themes of Indigenous identity, place and space, transformation, and healing, all of which are discussed throughout this dissertation and can prompt student discussion and engagement with multimodal texts.

Teaching with Comics

Aaron Kashtan, in *Between Pen and Pixel*, discusses the rising popularity of comics in academic study and the digitization of comics' future. He notes, "Formerly dismissed as mere pop culture for children, comics have increasingly been recognized as one of the central literary and visual art forms of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries" (12). According to Kashtan, comics studies in North America primarily consists of a small canon of texts; Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Marjane Satrapi's *The Complete Persepolis*, and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* have received the most scholarly attention and are regularly taught in university courses (12). Many students' first experience with reading comics happens in an English classroom, and this encounter prepares them to analyze multimodal texts. My own introduction to comics was an English theory class during my second year of college; although I had never read comics before, I was excited to explore this genre when I saw the books listed on the syllabus. In this class we read Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, an essential tool to guide new and experienced

comics readers, alongside Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* and Satrapi's *Persepolis*. My experience with these texts was a positive one, and I now include comics in my own teaching, as mentioned in my previous chapter.

The students in my Introduction to Literature class where we read Stevenson's *Nimona* similarly left with a positive view of comics. They reflected on visual elements in the text and engaged in discussions that a word-only text could not have prompted, such as the symbolism of a panel's color scheme and the emotional effect of lines and spaces. Because of my students' enjoyment and creative insights into this text, I encourage other instructors to consider including comics in their curriculum as well. There is value in teaching these texts and, like YA novels, comics can be a relevant part of a student-centered pedagogy. This chapter therefore seeks to explain the benefits of teaching comics in academic fields and illustrates how students can learn about their own identity as well as the identities of other social and cultural groups through the images and words on a comics' page.

When many people think of comics, especially those unfamiliar with them, they likely imagine superheroes. Marvel and DC superhero comics are especially popular with the comics fanbase and wider audiences, as recent releases such as *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, Marvel's *What If...?*, and *The Batman* have been praised by reviewers. Even Stevenson's fantasy *Nimona* features hero and villain characters, although these characters continually resist and invert traditional archetypes. While superhero stories may be prevalent within comics, there is a much greater diversity of genres and themes. According to Hillary Chute, in *Why Comics?*, the comics medium "still often gets mistaken for its most popular genre: superheroes. Fantasy is a *genre*, humor is a *genre*, romance is a *genre* – a style, a category that comes with a set of approaches and expectations. Comics, on the other hand, is a *medium* in its own right – not a lowbrow genre

of either art or literature, as it is sometimes understood – and it can be about anything” (1).

Comics, since they can be written in any genre, are not all comedic in nature despite often being associated with single-panel cartoons and comic strips. Chute explains that “in Italy the form is called *fumetti*, which means ‘little puffs of smoke’ and refers to speech balloons. In France the form is called *bandes dessinées*, which means ‘drawn strips.’ Both of these designations, unlike the English iteration, refer to formal elements” (2). In the English language, the word ‘comics’ does not reflect the components of the medium, and the use of other terms has created some confusions about the definition of comics. According to Chute, “*Comics* encompasses the newspaper *comic strip*, which began in the United States in the 1890s; the *comic book*, which began in the 1930s; and the so-called *graphic novel*, which began as such in the 1970s” (5).

Many of the comics frequently taught in university courses are defined as graphic novels, a description that Chute notes “seems to confer a certain bookish sophistication” and which “is preferable to something baser like ‘comics’” (5). While the phrase “graphic novel” typically refers to a longer work meant for adult audiences, a novel written in comics form, Chute explains that many cartoonists and comics creators do not associate their own work with the phrase because “it can seem pretentious” and because “novel” typically “implies fiction” although many book-length comics are nonfiction, like *Persepolis* (19). For this reason, Chute, along with other scholars, prefers *graphic narrative*, “which is inclusive of both fiction and nonfiction” (19). Throughout this chapter, I will consistently use the term “comics” rather than graphic novel or graphic narrative to eliminate potential confusions.

As Chute noted that much of comics work today is nonfiction, Kashtan also explains that comics, particularly those studied in academia, are often autobiographical in nature or dealing with themes of childhood memory. He notes, “Almost all the works in the academic canon are

graphic memoirs or works of graphic journalism, and they tend to deal with issues of memory, trauma, history, and ethnic and queer identity” (13). The comic I had the opportunity to teach, *Nimona*, despite being set in a fantasy world, certainly deals with a few of these topics, and the stories gathered together in LaPensée’s *Deer Woman* anthology address every issue in Kashtan’s list. Before I analyze the stories of *Deer Woman*, it is important to define comics form and the terms used within comics studies. Students are often encouraged to read McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* before or during an initial reading of another comic. Bart Beaty points out that McCloud’s text “ranks in the top one hundred works taught on American campuses with nearly twelve hundred courses using the material”, according to research collected on university-level course syllabi by the Open Syllabus Project (54). Upon analyzing this research, Beaty concludes that *Understanding Comics* is “one of the most commonly paired books” for almost every other comic that ranks high on the list, “which indicates that when any comics are taught in a class, McCloud is taught alongside them” (55). As I did in my literature class, and as many other instructors do in theirs, I will pair McCloud’s text with LaPensée’s comics to define the comics form and common terms such as “gutter” and “closure”. I will reference his work throughout my discussion of “*Deer Woman*” to support my own reading and claims.

In *Understanding Comics*, written in the form of a comic, McCloud attempts to define the comics medium. He notes that a previous definition, one the artist Will Eisner famously used, was simply “sequential art” (5). McCloud adds to this short definition, arguing that “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence” is more fitting (9). These images are “intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (9). A comic then contains both words and images depicted in a series of panels or frames, each panel separated by a line or space called the gutter. Because of this sequence, McCloud notes that a single-panel

comic does not fit into his definition of a comic and is instead a cartoon. Chute explains that “comics readers encounter the space of the page in a different way than they would a novel, and in a different way than they would a canvas” (20). Reading comics requires attention to both text and image, as these components work together to articulate meaning. Chute describes the process of reading comics as open and non-linear: “the words and the images each move the narrative forward in different ways the reader creates out of the relationship between the two. How one ought to read comics often feels like an open question – which it is. For a reader navigating the space of the page, reading comics (even highly conventional comics) can feel less directive and linear than reading most prose narrative” (21). The gutter between panels, despite often being overlooked and receiving less scholarly attention than other images on the page, is perhaps one of the most important aspects of comics. According to McCloud, “the gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics” (66). I agree with his statement, and in my analysis of “Deer Woman” I will argue that significant moments of trauma and healing occur in the blank spaces between images.

McCloud, and other comics theorists, define the gutter as being the space that separates panels and closure is the process that connects them. He states, “Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality” (67). While reading comics, the brain automatically processes the actions that are happening in the gaps, giving the reader their own power of interpretation. For example, McCloud illustrates two panels, the first of which depicts a character being chased by another with an axe. The second panel shows a nighttime cityscape with the scream, “EEYAA!!” (68). To demonstrate how the reader enacts closure, McCloud explains, “I may have drawn an axe being raised in this example,

but I'm not the one who let it drop or decided how hard the blow, or who screamed, or why. That, dear reader, was your special crime, each of you committing it in your own style" (68). The medium of comics requires closure and allows the reader to process events and visualize their own interpretation of the moments between panels.

Comics theorists tend to agree that the pages' gutters separate images in a space of transition, and closure connects them, but I take a slightly different stance, arguing instead that both closure and the gutter are equally connective forces. If the gutter only serves to separate and transition between panels, it becomes merely a blank space or colored line devoid of true meaning. The gutter instead holds limitless potential, possibly containing some of a comic's most vital moments, and is more than just a transitory space moving from one idea to the next. In the following analysis of LaPensée's comic, I provide a close reading of the gutter along with other key imagery to illustrate the potential of this "blank" space.

The comics fanbase, including writers and readers, has historically been predominantly white and male. New artists and audiences, however, are quickly diversifying the medium, and McCloud points out, in *Reinventing Comics*, that comics could, and should, "appeal to more than just boys and be made by more than just men" and "comics could appeal to and be made by more than just straight white upper-middle class males" (11). According to Chute, the field of comics "has shifted dramatically" (278). She notes that the field "is trending toward diversity and inclusion on all levels, and the cultures of creativity it stands for and engenders have positive effects in wider culture" (410). More comics are being created by women, and "smart comics *for* girls, not only about them, is a newly thriving area of the field" (279). Although still not as popular and mainstream as superhero comics, stories featuring strong female characters such as Deer Woman are diversifying the medium. Marvel has recently expanded the superhero world

with the release of *Marvel's Voices*, which includes special issues such as “Indigenous Voices”, “Identities”, and “Pride”. McCloud suggests that “Comics, like other minority forms, are vital to diversifying our perceptions of our world” (19). Comics, as a part of popular culture and entertainment, have the potential to reach a broad audience and make readers aware of other cultures and identities. Previously, the use of comics in the classroom was not always supported or encouraged, but today comics are frequently taught in college English classes.

Susan E. Kirtley, Antero Garcia, and Peter E. Carlson, in their introduction to *With Great Power Comes Great Pedagogy: Teaching, Learning, and Comics*, note that “comics studies has indeed struggled for legitimacy within the academy, and as many scholars and educators have witnessed first-hand, it is often maligned for the popular nature of its subject matter” (3). Despite comics’ past and the form’s exclusion from academic settings, ““Scholarly books on comics are regularly published by university presses. Peer reviewed academic journals devoted to comics studies are flourishing. Courses on comics are now being offered on numerous college campuses, and some universities boast comics studies programs and courses of study” (4). Chute similarly points out that “librarians and professors are now outspoken champions of the form” and “comics is a feature not only of mainstream popular culture, but also of university culture, the art world, and even global politics” (4). In a society where books are still being banned in schools because of their content, which some view as being explicit, inappropriate, or too mature for younger students, the comics medium “has substantial resonance in cultural debates in America. This is particularly the case in education, because of the affective force of its visuals, a feature of especial concern in the age of ‘trigger warnings’ and censorship dustups” (5). Chute references controversy over the teaching of Bechdel’s *Fun Home* at Duke University, when students in 2015 refused to read the comic because “of its explicit – and gay – content” (5). She writes, “The

idea of comics as common reading – which is to say, the idea of literature that *shows* something, for instance, sex, in addition to describing it verbally – sparked numerous conversations in print and online about the goals of college education and the differences between looking and reading, activities the medium of comics productively intertwines” (5). In addressing these conversations in relation to LaPensée’s comics, I suggest that the themes and images presented in the stories of *Deer Woman* are not appropriate for children and teenagers in secondary schools and should therefore only be taught to adult students in university courses. While depicting scenes of blood and violence that are too mature for younger students, I argue that *Deer Woman*’s most explicit scenes, those in which characters commit acts of rape and murder, happen in the gutters between panels and are left to reader interpretation.

As comics studies has become more popular within academia and teaching comics in college classrooms is accepted and encouraged, many scholars are advocating for comics’ inclusion and sharing their own experiences with and suggestions for teaching. Kirtley et al. argue that “one of the hallmarks of comics studies is its interdisciplinary nature, which makes the field extremely exciting, innovative, and difficult to locate within institutions” (4). They explain, “Comics pedagogy examines ways in which comics can be used in various learning contexts, and the area is thriving as educators, scholars, and creators work together to understand how comics can encourage visual literacy and multimodal thinking for students. Comics are worthy of study in classrooms in and of themselves” (5). While comics can be “used in classrooms as tools for communication and a way of thinking through ideas in any discipline and at any age range”, the work of this chapter focuses on university-level classes and adult students (5). While the texts I explored in the dissertation’s first two chapters could be read by younger students in secondary

schools, LaPensée's comics would be more appropriate for older students who are prepared to tackle challenging themes, issues, and relevant scholarship.

Teaching effectively requires an understanding of students needs and an awareness that teaching strategies and practices that worked well for one student or class might not be effective for others. Kirtley et al. raises this point by discussing pedagogical content knowledge, which “includes knowing the best approaches for conveying a particular topic, the best ways to tailor such information for a particular class or set of students” (13). They explain that the conventions of the comics form have changed over time and can be interpreted differently within different cultural contexts. New readers of comics will not always interpret the medium's conventions in the same way; similarly, students encountering Indigenous literatures for the first time will be unaware of significant contexts without previous background information and instruction. When teaching Indigenous comics, such as LaPensée's, I argue that instructors need to recognize their students' diverse needs and prior experiences to determine methods of instruction and engagement that will be most effective for learning how to read comics and interpreting cultural contexts.

Nicole Flynn utilizes comics in her literature classes as she teaches young English scholars to think critically and creatively about texts and the world around them, developing skills that will lead to “empathetic action in the world” (2). Rather than only reading comics in Flynn's courses, students are tasked with creating their own comic as a final project: a comic narrating their own identity as English students or a comic interpreting and adapting an assigned course text. Flynn argues that engaging creatively with comics helps students understand different modalities and their rhetoric, a key element of many literature and composition courses: “Discussions of multimodal literacy or multiliteracies have touted comics' ability to prepare

students for engaging with twenty-first century texts” (3). Students today are continuously exposed to texts that use multiple modalities, from social media posts to podcasts to websites with hyperlinks. Kirtley et al. similarly claim, “It is clear that our students are increasingly immersed in an image-based culture, and visual literacy is key to communicating in contemporary society” (6). They argue that “graphic narratives merit attention in educational settings alongside more traditional texts. Comics can also provide a window into other disciplines, a way of approaching a variety of subjects[...]comics can be used as ways of communicating and thinking, utilizing text and image to study and render the world, relying on visual and verbal modalities of expression” (12). Teaching multimodal texts, such as comics, gives students the tools they need to interpret the information they are presented with and to understand the affordances and constraints of each mode, medium, or genre. Flynn addresses the benefits of multimodal literacy, stating that “Comics require students to engage with several modes simultaneously: textual, visual, spatial, aural, and possibly digital. They offer a valuable balance of accessibility and difficulty” (4). Students unfamiliar with comics may find their initial reading experience challenging, but numerous studies suggest that students are able to connect with comics and generally find them more accessible and enjoyable than canonical literature. One possible reason that students often connect with comics is because they are taught *how* to read comics, when instructors pair other readings with McCloud’s text; with a better understanding of how to read the text, students often have an easier time interpreting and analyzing its content and nuances.

Gabriel Sealey-Morris, with a focus on composition pedagogy, echoes Flynn’s discussion of multimodal literacy while suggesting that comics present unique challenges for readers. Like Flynn, Sealey-Morris believes that “Comics literacy can play a part in preparing students for the

complex work of making meaning in an increasingly fragmented and multivocal rhetorical world” (45-46). While these multimodal texts benefit students by preparing them to make sense of their complicated world, Sealey-Morris argues that “Immersion in a comics page is more difficult than in prose, which is temporal and necessarily sequential, or in the presence of image only, which is static and visible within a self-centered context” (38). The different modes used in comics require students to analyze numerous textual elements, and students may feel overwhelmed or unprepared to think deeply about the relationship between the pages’ words and images. Despite presenting potential challenges, and finding comics less accessible than Flynn, Sealey-Morris sees the value in teaching comics: “reading comics well requires work that closely resembles the work of interpreting real life – with its cacophony of images, words, sounds, and states (emotional, mental, physical). A reader cannot read comics on one level only” (38). Students who experience and learn about new modes through comics are perhaps able to better understand the rhetoric of their world, dealing with concepts such as purpose and audience. Like Flynn’s final writing project, Sealey-Morris also believes that encouraging students to create their own comics “opens up a whole new understanding of authorship and authority that may have transformative effects” (48). Students who produce comics are encouraged to reflect on their own purpose for creation and the power they have as an author.

In detailing her comics assignment, Flynn explains that students gained insight into the genre and learned creative skills from reading McCloud’s *Understanding Comics*. Before creating their own comics, her students discussed McCloud’s writing on “closure, building effective transitions, creating a balance between adding and subtracting, and combining words and pictures” (7). While certain end-of-term projects feel daunting to students, Flynn explains that the majority of her students found the experience of writing a comic about their identity or a

piece of literature enjoyable: “When they were struggling to find time to study for all their exams and write all their final papers, they devoted more time to this assignment since it required a different, even enjoyable kind of work. In the survey, 92% of my students said they preferred this project to a traditional writing assignment” (6-7). Not only did these students find the project enjoyable, they also learned valuable analysis skills and reflected on their own writing and strategizing processes. The comics medium “enables students to reflect on learning that is not necessarily linear and certainly not a closed discourse” (10). Producing their own comic, like conducting research, is discursive and requires students to move in unpredictable ways between planning, writing, and drawing. As McCloud noted, reading comics is not a linear experience, and neither is producing one.

Molly Scanlon and Alexandra Gold similarly support the inclusion of multimodal texts and popular culture media in composition classrooms. Scanlon suggests that “the nature of multimodal collaboration extends work we already do in the classroom, such as teaching conceptions of audience and genre” (107). Teaching comics exposes students to a medium they might have no prior knowledge of, one they may come to appreciate, and encourages them to analyze an artist’s choices and rhetorical appeals. Gold argues that writing curricula often require “students to engage in self-examination through self-assessment, written reflection, and extensive drafting processes” (158). Scanlon and Gold, like Flynn and Sealey-Morris, have used popular culture to help their students learn rhetorical concepts while simultaneously reflecting on their own identities and cultures. In Gold’s classroom, students were asked to analyze multimodal, popular texts and create a nontraditional essay or an alternative genre from this analysis. Multimodal texts of popular culture, such as comics, film, or podcasts, typically appeal to young adults and the majority of students find them accessible. These students appreciate

having the opportunity to analyze numerous modes, rather than only one mode they might not feel confident or comfortable with. For example, my own students often find the assigned textbooks to be notoriously challenging, but they appreciate the ability to listen to an audio podcast (where they can hear the rhetor's vocal tone and inflections) or view maps, graphs, and other images on an interactive website (which help them visualize the information they are reading in an adjoined article).

Gold also suggests that composition classrooms can “function as inclusive, intimate spaces that foster such moments of (self)recognition, reinforcing the aims of feminist and cultural theories” (158). She further explains that her students often “produced the most provocative conversations and writings when they discussed (often for the first time) their encounters with issues of gender, sexuality, discrimination, and privilege” (158). As evident in my analysis of *Deer Woman*, Indigenous comics certainly encourage students to think about feminist and cultural theories, encouraging them to also contemplate their own place in the world and the privilege (or lack of privilege) they have in that world. According to Gold, “students can consider their own places and those of others in the wider socio-cultural landscape. They can recognize how certain voices and perspectives are echoed or silenced. Finally, they feel more empowered to act as advocates and allies in their speech and writing” (158). Using *Deer Woman* not only in an Indigenous literatures class but also in other or more general literature or composition courses will teach students about Indigenous histories and contemporary issues, encouraging them to consider their own privileges and how they can resist stereotyping.

Like Flynn's final comics project, Gold's alternative genre assignment “forces students to contend with the choices they have to make in writing: selecting the appropriate tone, language, level of description, and so forth given any audience or genre” (167). Students must pay attention

to their own rhetorical decisions, focusing on the needs of their intended audience and adhering to the common features of the genre they are designing. Gold promotes this assignment by pointing out that “while popular culture continually overlooks certain identities, sexualities, or voices, a creative or first-person assignment can better reflect the real diversity of voices in the classroom and can then help to allay certain social differences among students” (159). She further explains that students’ “sense of themselves may be transformed as they become more confident cultural translators and writing subjects” and this creative project allows them a freedom “from the constraints and trepidations that coincide with more traditional essays” (168). The inclusion of alternative assignments like Gold’s, as well as less traditional texts like comics, enhance a literature or composition curriculum by fostering diversity and an awareness of other realities, histories, and cultures.

Kashtan similarly asks his students to design a final project in a creative format. In his courses, Kashtan assigned multimodal or digital readings that “asked the students to think about books not simply as vehicles for text but also as artistically or rhetorically designed objects, whose meanings emerge from the combination of their textual content with their material rhetoric” (190). He argues that “every feature of the book is important – the book is not just a container for the narrative, but an artifact whose physical and material properties affect the readers interpretation of it” (191). The final project prompted his students to create their own multimodal texts and to critically reflect on their own rhetorical choices. At the end of my own composition classes, I ask students to create their own genre based on all the research they have conducted throughout the semester. One goal of this assignment, similar to Kashtan’s, is to show students that each genre is created for a specific reason with a certain audience in mind. For example, an artistic piece such as a comic might persuade an informal audience by appealing to

their emotions through the use of dark colors and solemn images. A professional audience, however, might be more concerned with an academic genre such as a journal article and the data and statistics it presents. Teaching multimodal texts helps students understand the uses of each genre and which genres benefit in particular situations. Each semester I have conversations with students who have come to believe that non-academic texts and genres are not acceptable to use in college; when conducting research, some students believe that all the texts they select must be scholarly or peer-reviewed articles. However, this belief limits students from the wide array of other genres and mediums that may still be credible and beneficial for their research purposes. Teaching comics in the classroom, then, shows students that texts not typically considered as academic can still hold valuable information and be worthy of scholarly study. I believe comics and other popular or multimodal texts can benefit students and their own research as long as they learn the importance of recognizing a text's credibility, such as by deciding whether or not an author exhibits ethos.

Talmadge Guy, like Gold, supports popular culture in education. He shares Gold's opinion that popular culture can create strong allies and advocate for social change: "although popular culture can be a powerful mechanism for shaping us, it can also be a vehicle for challenging structured inequalities and social injustices" (15). Guy also discusses the origins of popular culture. He explains that popular culture "emerged as a concept in nineteenth-century England and was taken to mean the culture of the masses. It was frequently used in contrast to 'high culture'" (16). It later referred to the wisdom and everyday experiences of the "folk" as they sought communal and individual meaning in their lives (16). Guy argues that popular culture, most importantly, "teaches us about race, class, gender, and other forms of socially significant difference" (16). Texts of popular culture reach a much wider audience than

scholarship and academic literature, which gives popular culture the ability to inform and have a greater impact on a larger group of people. Guy states, “most Americans are exposed to the products of culture industries much more than to traditional educational content” (17). However, like Gold addressed, much of this media portrays stereotypes or incorrect histories, or even avoids representations of minority groups or cultures altogether. This is why it is especially important for teachers to promote the pieces of popular culture that do include positive, authentic, and accurate representations, such as *Deer Woman* and *Firekeeper’s Daughter*.

Lisa Shade Eckert surveyed a group of 160 secondary English teachers and asked them to describe their experiences with teaching comics. One response suggested that comics “help students become stronger readers of all types of literature because they have to read between the lines and pay special attention to explicit symbols” (138). As I will discuss in my analysis of LaPensée’s comics, many events in comics occur in the gutters “between the lines” of the panels, so students gain practice with processing and interpreting plot points that are not clearly defined. Other teachers argued that comics “have a great appeal to many readers, especially reluctant readers” and they offer “opportunities to teach values and the truth behind historical events” (138). Young adult literature and comics, both historically perceived as popular culture rather than academic literature, appeal to students and young adults because they are accessible and deal with relatable themes such as the search for identity and coming of age.

Perhaps the most insightful response of Eckert’s survey stated that, “The visual aspect of graphic novels helps to make imaginative literature accessible and enjoyable for this generation of students. It makes it easier to bridge the students’ world with the world of the text. The graphics can prompt interesting discussions about interpretation, and many students love the opportunity to create their own graphic interpretations” (138). Eckert agrees with this response

and believes that teachers can help students connect their own personal experiences to the characters and themes within a text. She suggests that young adults identify with comics because of the connection the medium allows between reader and author and cites McCloud's *Reinventing Comics* to explain this relationship. According to McCloud, "The partnership between creator and reader in comics is far more intimate and active than cinema, while comics' symbolic static images may cut straight to the heart without the continual mediation of prose's authorial voice" (39). Comics provide students with opportunities to visualize the creative process, to question the creator's choices as well as their own, and to voice their own perspectives on the world. The addition of comics in curricula can also help teachers support the different ways students learn best, becoming more flexible with their definitions of academic success and providing a variety of activities that include both visual and textual analysis.

While reading scholarship on comics and young adult literature for this chapter and the previous, I was not surprised to find that numerous scholars, such as Eckert, analyzed or mentioned teaching Sherman Alexie's YA novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. This text was a popular choice among teachers who wanted to introduce Indigenous literatures to their students, and I first read it while enrolled in an undergraduate Indigenous autobiography course. While some of this scholarship was written while Alexie was still a frequently taught and unproblematic author, other works, such as those by Blewett in Chapter II, briefly mention the issues involved with teaching this controversial text. The popularity of Alexie's novel in English classes is one of the reasons why the work of this dissertation is so important; many educators are unaware of alternative texts, so this work offers options from Anishinaabe writers. I suggest including Boulley's and LaPensée's texts in college curricula rather than outdated, unauthentic, or controversial Indigenous literature. The YA literature and

comics this dissertation recommends will benefit an English class because they contain traditional Anishinaabe teachings while emphasizing contemporary values, identities, and issues. If taught in an Indigenous literature class, students can use these texts to learn about a specific Indigenous nation and analyze the structures and aspects of Indigenous storytelling. If used in other English courses, students could be asked to think critically and creatively about plot, characters, themes, and rhetorical choices.

Dale Jacobs argues that when teaching comics “it is necessary to think not only about narrative and themes (as one might in a literature class), but also about how meaning is created through the comics form, how artistic tools such as line, color, and shading operate (in terms of aesthetics, narrative, theme, and so on), and the relationship between all of these considerations at the textual level” (29-30). He raises questions for teachers and students to ponder together, such as: “How is our reading different if we encounter a comics narrative as single issues, in collected print form, or as a digital version? [...] How, for example, does touch affect the way we engage with a comic and the way we ultimately make meaning from it?” (30). Questions such as these help students reflect on multimodalities and the ways in which engagement with texts differs based on its medium. In an upper-level course titled “The Rhetoric of Comics”, Jacobs further questioned his students, “What is the relationship in these texts between the writer and his or her social context, and how is that represented by the visual codes and multimodal rhetorics of these texts?” (32). In another class he called “The History of the Comic Book in North America”, Jacobs posed the following questions: “How do word and image work together to create narrative within the comics medium? How does the sequential nature of comics work to create meaning and structure narrative? [...] How do stories function within comics and how have they functioned over the history of the comic book?” (34). The types of critical questions Jacobs

posed in his courses elicit a careful engagement with the texts, and students are able to make claims about the writer's purpose and the comic's meanings.

Nick Sousanis provides a suggestion for other educators who wish to include comics in their classrooms. He encourages his students to tell stories in a way that can only be done through the comics medium: "This can include taking advantage of the spatial nature of comics, it might mean exploring time in a particular way, playing with the concept of simultaneity across panels, using panel-breaking, or the role the very structure of the composition can play on storytelling" (102-103). An activity that has worked well for his students is "an independent-collaborative three-person exercise" with "super simple" instructions (109). In a group of three, students take turns creating their own comic and telling an original story. The first person in the group is asked to create a panel structure, only drawing the lines and sequence of the panels without filling them in. The blank panel structure is then passed to the second member of the group, who is tasked with adding words to the panels in the form of dialogue bubbles, captions, or sound effects. The final group member finishes the story by drawing images to give the words meaning. Sousanis states, "There's something almost magical about how the disparate elements come together with these, and I think it speaks to the importance of constraints and collaboration to accelerate the creative process" (105). In the conclusion of this dissertation, I provide ideas for a similar activity, as I believe this type of collaborative approach to creation facilitates Indigenous methodologies and community-based learning.

Frederik Byrn Kohlert and Nick Sousanis co-taught a university course on comics and asked their students to spend a few minutes drawing a comic in response to a brief prompt at the end of every class. They asked their students, most of whom had no art or drawing experience, to participate in this activity because they believe "that students working on comics gain a deeper

appreciation of comics by producing work in the form itself” much like how students learn about literature by writing traditional essays (228). Kohlert and Sousanis used drawing activities “as learning tools corollary to our readings and discussion, employing them in ways intended to give additional insight into the process of making a comic, but in terms of grades they were purely about participation” (228). Students were not required to be great artists or to design the best comic; instead, the goal of the assignment was to help students recognize their own authorial choices and to learn that “how stories are told is intrinsically bound up with their meaning” (234).

Despite McCloud’s foundational text being almost three decades old, it is still praised as an introductory tool for learning about comics. Johnathan Flowers, however, in “Misunderstanding Comics”, challenges McCloud’s view of race and ethnicity. Flowers addresses issues of whiteness similar to those discussed by Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides, which I cited in Chapter 1 of this project. He argues that “McCloud, like many other white people, does not view himself as white or positioned as a result of his whiteness: he is simply human” (208). In McCloud’s description of his narrative avatar in *Understanding Comics*, he claims to be “practically a blank slate”, even suggesting that his reader would not question what his views on politics are (37). According to Flowers, through this description McCloud “fails to recognize that it is his own whiteness that is amplified through simplification of his avatar. It is only because whiteness goes unnoticed as a consequence of what George Yancy calls ‘the social ontology of whiteness’ that McCloud can present his avatar as a blank slate” (210). He further explains that “the social ontology of whiteness renders whiteness and the white body as unremarkable, unnoticed: it is what enables McCloud’s comic avatar to be represented as a ‘blank slate’ onto which a reader may project their understandings” (211). However, this

perspective normalizes and makes whiteness the “default”, Othering all other orientations and identities in the process (211). Flowers argues that “a nonwhite or nonmale reader would not have the same orientation towards the comic” and their experiences are therefore not accounted for in McCloud’s act of “understanding” comics (208). As discussed in earlier sections of this dissertation, addressing prejudices and biases within literature as well as respecting the specific needs and experiences of minority groups helps promote effective teaching strategies and encourages acts of respect and listening that are a part of Indigenous methodologies.

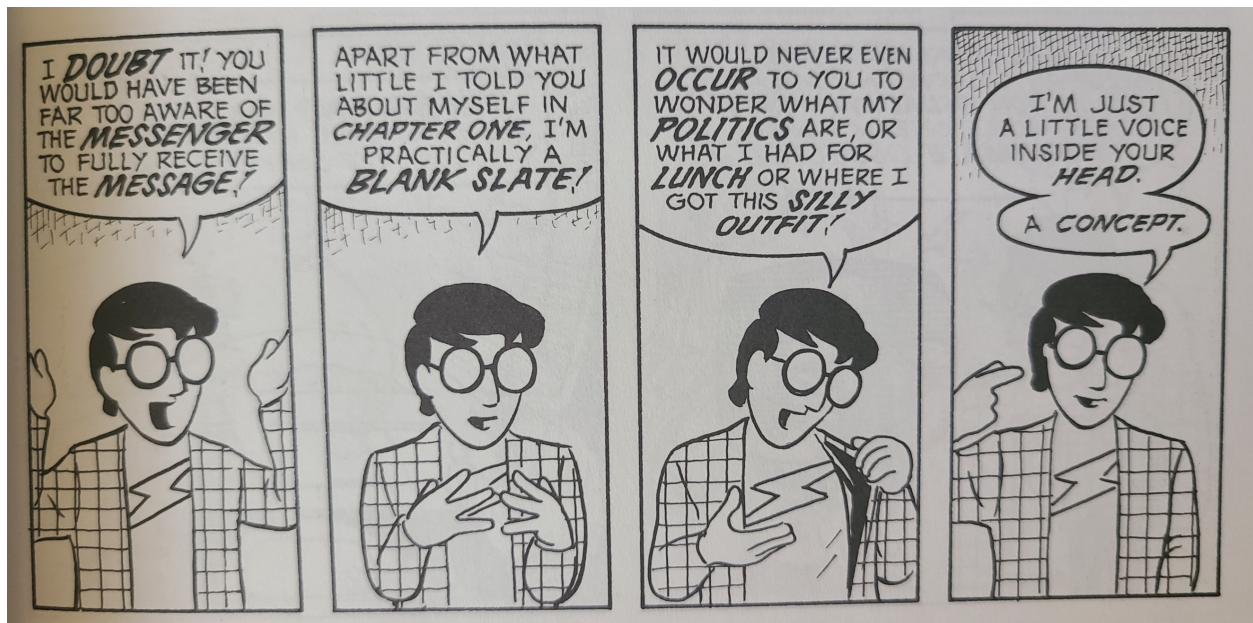


Figure 1: McCloud’s Avatar in Understanding Comics

Carol Zitzer-Comfort addresses the importance of teaching Deer Woman stories alongside cultural theories and informational resources. While reading Joy Harjo’s “Deer Dancer”, Zitzer-Comfort’s students “were all over the page trying to find hidden examples of white racism while they missed the resilience and survival that is the power of the poem” (166).

The comics medium perhaps works to make themes such as resilience and survival more clear; instead of students searching for hidden meanings, visual images on the page help students recognize the most significant parts of the story. Zitzer-Comfort also believes that students need prior knowledge of the history of colonialism in order to fully understand modernized traditional stories:

To read ‘Deer Dancer’ without any knowledge of deer woman or to read *House Made of Dawn* without an understanding of federal policies of relocation and termination would be like reading Toni Morrison’s (1987) *Beloved* with no knowledge of slavery. What power would *Beloved* lose if read by someone who had no awareness of the horrors of slavery? What power is lost by the hundreds and hundreds of American Indian texts going unread and untaught? (168)

Zitzer-Comfort’s final question is one reason why the work of this dissertation can benefit English classes and prove useful for educators. Rather than providing a list of inauthentic, inaccurate, or racist books that should be avoided in classrooms, this dissertation seeks to provide suggestions for texts that *should* be included in class syllabi. Indigenous stories are valuable in many academic fields, and I encourage more educators to learn about and teach these literatures.

In Flynn’s final project, she asked her students to reflect on three questions after they had created their own comics. Questions prompted them to identify their comic’s thesis statement, to reflect on their goals for the comic, and to analyze their own comic as they would any literary text. These questions work together to show the student’s understanding of their argument and the issues or themes they hoped their comic would convey. If this final project were to be used in an Indigenous literature class, I would add one final question to Flynn’s list: “How does your

comic show your own knowledge of Indigenous communities (tribally specific histories, cultures, stories, languages, and contemporary issues)?” This question would encourage students to reflect on aspects of their comic such as the depiction of non-linear time, the use of Indigenous languages in text, and the inclusion of images illustrating nature or spiritual beings.

Transformation and Healing Between the Panels of “Deer Woman”

The previous chapter introduced the shapeshifting Deer Woman, and this chapter explores her presence more thoroughly. Kurt Russow reiterates that stories of Deer Woman exist in numerous nations throughout North America, such as the Ojibwe, Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek nations. These stories are most often told through the oral storytelling medium rather than existing in a print format: “The Deer Woman narratives thrive primarily in oral culture, which testifies to their social function” (28). According to Russow, Indigenous youth and young adults are typically the primary audience for these stories, as they contain cultural teachings and moral lessons. Deer Woman narratives often involve a male victim, usually a young unmarried man or unfaithful husband, “whose sexual desires are at conflict or negotiation with their social identity” (29). In the stories, these men encounter and pursue a beautiful woman and do not recognize her true, powerful identity as the Deer Woman. The stories then serve as a warning to youth, instructing sexual values and cautioning against being led “away from communal values through erotic obsession” (30). Like the Little People of *Firekeeper’s Daughter*, Deer Woman is not a malevolent being to be feared as long as one is staying true to their community and traditional values. Russow suggests that Deer Woman stories “emphasize the importance of using one’s energies to benefit the natural and tribal communities” (29). Rather than fearing an encounter

with Deer Woman, Indigenous youth can remember the values of their Elders' teachings and, like Daunis, use their own energies and identities to support their social and natural landscapes.

Carolyn Dunn also addresses the goal of recognizing Deer Woman rather than fearing or ignoring her presence. She states, "To know the story and act appropriately is to save oneself from a lifetime lived in pain and sorrow; to ignore the story is to continue in the death dance with Deer Woman". Traditional myths and stories are adapted to fit within a modern society and current communal needs, and the tales of Deer Woman are no exception. The statistics provided at the end of Chapter II, those showing the realities of violence against Indigenous women, suggest that Deer Woman is still needed in our world. The comics in LaPensée's anthology *Deer Woman*, all written by Indigenous women and featuring Indigenous stories, work together to share Deer Woman's transformative power and healing medicine with all Indigenous women. An introductory note from the publisher states that Indigenous women's voices are "systematically silenced" and left unheard: "The eroticization and marginalization of Native women to fulfill colonial fantasies of power is a common theme running through literature and comic books" (4). LaPensée's anthology is meant to give Indigenous women hope and the chance to respond to violence against themselves and their communities.

Deer Woman: An Anthology begins with LaPensée's comic "Deer Woman: A Vignette" illustrated by Anishinaabe artist Jonathan R. Thunder. In her introduction, LaPensée explains that her vignette contains true stories and begins with a story from her youth, one in which she asks herself the question of "What if?". She imagines alternate scenarios of crucial moments in her life where she herself transformed into Deer Woman, questioning how events might have played out differently if she "had realized the Deer Woman in [her]self" (9). According to LaPensée, Deer Woman is beautiful and deadly; she "lures men from fires" and her "deer legs

are hidden by the light and shadows of the flames until she leads a man off from a gathering far enough to stomp him to death” (9). As LaPensée reflects on Deer Woman’s power, she refers to a personal encounter with Deer Woman, one in which the supernatural being recited the stories that are now illustrated in her comic. The vignette is “a call to awareness” and is “situated along the Great Lakes where young women and many others are involved in sex trafficking via boats” (9). While depicting a “brutal” and “unrelenting” story, “Deer Woman: A Vignette” also illustrates the “serene chaos” of Deer Woman and her power to heal individuals and communities (9). Like LaPensée’s intimate visit with Deer Woman, Dunn believes she was in the presence of this powerful being as well: “A chance encounter with a deer moving down a slope to drink water from a river could be just that: an encounter in the woods with an animal. But I knew differently— trusted the stories and the myths as truth, and I knew what the message was—to recognize Deer Woman for what she is”. Stories of Deer Woman, such as those presented in LaPensée’s anthology, are a call to awareness: the awareness to recognize Deer Woman in her true form, to understand her power and the violence she represents; and the awareness to recognize the *need* for Deer Woman, to understand why Indigenous women need Deer Woman’s empowerment, her resilience, and her transformative abilities to heal from trauma and for their voices to be heard.

The first page of LaPensée’s “Deer Woman” contains five panels connected by a black gutter. Only the first two panels contain text, which reads “He told me he’d introduce me to everyone at the party. Only no one was there” (10). The first three panels depict imagery of a male character driving a woman to a secluded park and attempting to violate her. In the gutter between panels three and four, the woman transforms into Deer Woman. The fifth and final panel of this page is the only panel that uses color, as we see the male victim’s hand next to a

pool of red blood, the black silhouette of a deer in the background. Hillary Chute describes comics and the gutter by stating that the comics form “is built on the ongoing counterpoint of presence – in frames or panels – and absence, the white space between frames where a reader projects causality and that is called the gutter” (108). I argue that this initial page of “Deer Woman” does not depict absence in the gutter, which uses black ink rather than white space, but instead contains a powerful and transformative presence. The third and fourth gutters, the black lines between the final three panels, contain the page’s most critical moments, events our brain interprets through the process of closure. These gutters contain trauma, in the form of sexual violence, as well as death, as Deer Woman kills her victim. Moments such as these would be made even more graphic and triggering if they were put into words and visuals, which is why they have been relegated to the darkness of the gutters. However, there are also moments of transformation and healing occurring within these spaces. The woman’s first transformation into Deer Woman, her own realization that Deer Woman is a part of her identity, begins the process of healing that is needed to overcome and resist male violence.

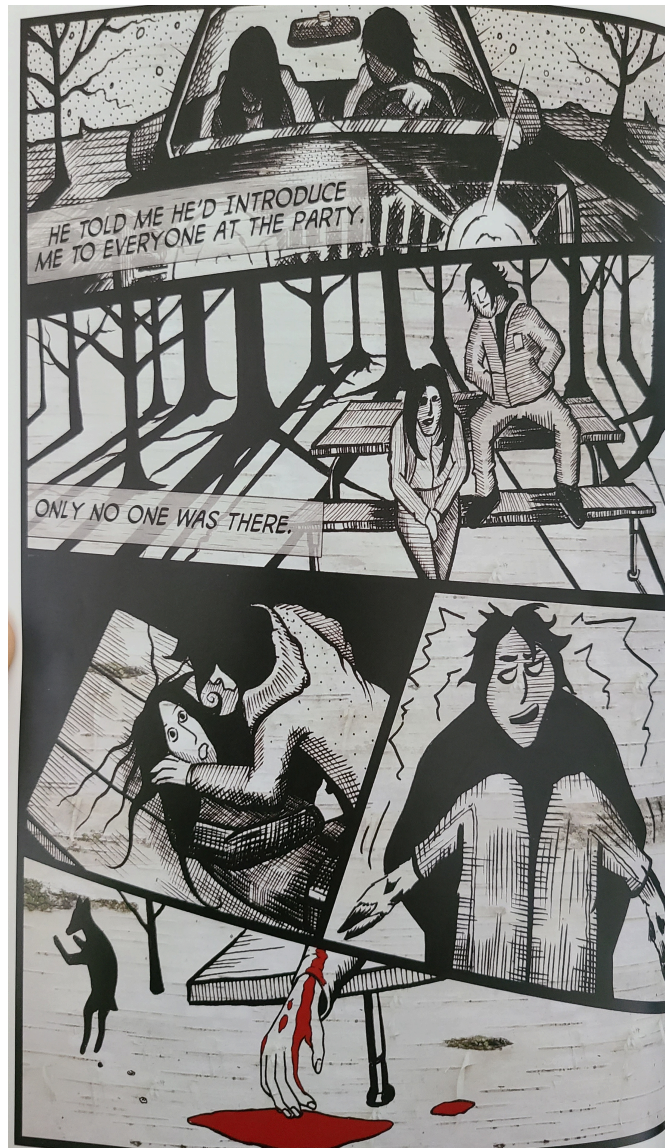


Figure 2: Deer Woman's Transformation in "Deer Woman"

LaPensée's "Deer Woman" illustrates a presence within the absence of the gutter. The comic is heavily saturated with black, and only three panels utilize color (the only color that appears is red). I argue that the black ink of the gutters represents the shadows and the fire in which Deer Woman hides her true identity, and the darkness of the trauma that calls for Deer

Woman's presence. Deer Woman resides in the gutters of the comic, her presence is always in the darkness of the page, as evidenced by images of Deer Woman's shadow in multiple panels. When her true image appears in the comic (for example, a deer's eye in the tenth panel and a deer's ear in the forty-fifth panel), Deer Woman emerges from the shadows into the whiteness of the panels to initiate healing. The white spaces of the panels represent the hope and healing that Deer Woman has brought from the darkness between panels. Deer Woman's potential is always on the page even if not directly visible. In another introduction to the anthology, Patty Stonefish articulates that the stories they have gathered "remind you of what you already possess – a light which refuses to die out. Empowerment which lies just beneath the surface waiting to be reawakened" (5). I argue that for the characters of "Deer Woman", this light and empowerment can be found within the comic's gutters, bleeding into the panels when the women need Deer Woman's strength.

Comics, like Indigenous storytelling, do not follow linear time. Chute notes that comics form "relies on space to represent time, carving punctual moments out of the space of the page" (108). McCloud explains that when reading a comic, the panel you are currently looking at represents the present. Any panel before the current one represents the past, and all panels after represent a future time. However, as a reader's eyes move around the page, sometimes skipping ahead to future panels or looking back at previous ones, the lines of the past, present, and future blur: "unlike other media, in comics, the past is more than just memories for the audience and the future is more than just possibilities! Both past and future are real and visible and all around us" (104). Ayo Okikiolu and Keah Hansen suggest that this blurring of time in comics allows readers of "Deer Woman" to interpret and process violence at their own pace. They argue that the comics form "enables readers to witness acting-out while also always giving the reader a degree

of control over the way in which they process and witness the violence”. The reader is able to “glimpse at future action, therefore making the violent episode known to the reader before the event occurs”. Traumatic moments in “Deer Woman” often happen off-panel, in the gutter where the reader determines their own version of events, to make a brutal story more accessible for readers. The comics form similarly supports accessibility by giving readers control of the action and offering multiple spaces and modes for interpretation.

The use of color in “Deer Woman” aids in this viewer response, as the only three panels that use color immediately draw our attention. Using color in comics is a rhetorical choice that relies on pathos and elicits an emotional reaction from the reader. McCloud argues that “The invisible world of senses and emotions can also be portrayed either between or within panels” (121). Two of the three panels using color depict the red of spilled blood, while the third instance appears on the last page as a ladybug. These moments of color are significant and represent major changes in the protagonist’s identity. Okikiolu and Hansen suggest that the scenes of red blood connote “shocking violence” and even “Indigenous-achieved justice, as the colour red symbolizes Indigeneity”. It is important to note, however, that only the first two scenes depicting blood and death use the color red (three later scenes include images of blood but are only drawn in black and white), so I argue that the color red plays a larger role in the comic than what Okikiolu and Hansen suggest. While I agree that the bright red images of spilled blood primarily indicate violence, blood has further significance in Indigenous cultures, such as the concept of blood memories and the blood quantum requirement for enrollment in many nations.

Blood not only represents violence (the violence against Indigenous women as well as the blood of wars and colonialism), it also symbolizes resistance and survival. In Boulley’s *Firekeeper’s Daughter*, Daunis explained to Jamie and the novel’s readers her Anishinaabe

understanding of blood memories and her tribal history: “It wasn’t just generational trauma that got stored in our blood and passed along, but our resilience and language, too” (199). In LaPensée’s comic, I argue that the first two images of blood (colored red) symbolize the protagonist’s individual trauma and her identification with Deer Woman while the final three images of blood (colored black) represent resilience and communal support. “Deer Woman” begins with shocking action as the first scene depicts the protagonist’s initial transformation into Deer Woman after experiencing sexual assault. The events of the first scene are shocking to the protagonist, as she has endured trauma and her transformation has come as a welcomed surprise, one that has potentially saved her life. Readers also share the protagonist’s initial shock, as the comic’s illustrator has drawn the audience’s attention by placing a bold emphasis on the color red after the male perpetrator has been killed. The protagonist then realizes that she can transform her trauma and use her new identity to help her community. The comic’s next few panels depict the protagonist, now back in her human form with the shadow of Deer Woman cast beside her, reflecting on her experience and deciding that she will survive and transform “so that it never happens again. To anyone” (11). The next scene of blood (saturated in red ink like the first scene) illustrates the protagonist’s transition from saving her own life to saving other women from similar trauma.

In this scene, no words are used to describe or narrate the comic’s action. McCloud describes this type of scene, often a sequence of panels with little to no words, as picture specific. The opposite of a word specific combination, “where pictures illustrate but don’t significantly add to a largely complete text”, picture specific sequences contain panels “where words do little more than add a soundtrack to a visually told sequence” (153). Of the 48 panels in “Deer Woman”, I have concluded that 34 are picture specific; the comic relies on very few

words to tell its complete story. The remaining 14 panels are what McCloud refers to as interdependent, “where words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone” (155). The comic’s first panel, for example, is interdependent, as the text “He told me he’d introduce me to everyone at a party” is juxtaposed with the image of two people in a car driving through a secluded landscape (10). While the faces of the people in the car are hidden in shadow, it can be inferred that the narrator, the protagonist giving voice to the frame, is the woman in the passenger seat. The darkness of the panel along with its text create an uneasy or foreboding feeling in the reader; this panel relies on both text and image to foreshadow the traumatic events that will soon occur.

When the protagonist killed the man in the first scene, it was an unplanned act of self-defense; Deer Woman came to the protagonist in her moment of need. In the next scene of blood and death, the protagonist, now a fully realized Deer Woman, seeks out justice and intends on killing any man who attempts to assault a woman. The comic follows the protagonist, in her human appearance, as she walks to a party in the city, her Deer Woman shadow still following behind. At the party, the protagonist witnesses a man grab a woman and Deer Woman is again called to action. The protagonist seduces the man and lures him into the bathroom, where her high-heeled shoes transform back into hooves and a pool of red blood forms on the floor. In this moment, the red blood still represents trauma and sexual violence against Indigenous women, as Deer Woman prevented a reoccurrence of the comic’s first scene. Going forward, the protagonist’s goal is to seek justice by helping members of her community. She continually encounters abusers and violent men, and her new Deer Woman identity does not hesitate to kill them. The last three scenes depicting blood are not colored in red, perhaps because these events are no longer shocking (the audience is now accustomed to seeing graphic and disturbing

images, and the protagonist herself has accepted Deer Woman's goals), or perhaps because they symbolize the power of Deer Woman to support and protect her community. In the final three scenes depicting Deer Woman's justice, the protagonist not only prevents women from being sexually assaulted or murdered, she saves the men of her community from abuse as well.

The protagonist states that "everywhere there's light that's kept from shining" as a police officer assaults an Indigenous man (20). Published in 2017, LaPensée's comic is still incredibly relevant in our post-2020 landscape as police brutality is a major concern for many Indigenous communities. Teran Powell investigates the CDC's statistics on firearm deaths from legal intervention between 2009 and 2019 and notes that "Native people were 2.2 times more likely to be killed by police than white people and 1.2 times more likely than Black people". Deer Woman seeks justice for violence committed by people in power. At the beginning of the comic, the protagonist learned how to process and overcome her own trauma, adjusting to her new responsibilities as Deer Woman. The red blood portrayed on the bodies of her victims was meant to show her taking control of her own narrative. The red color in the scenes contained her individual and generational trauma, memories of victimization that she needed to transform so she could benefit her tribe. The next instances of blood, although still violent, emphasized Deer Woman's inherent strength and resilience, and the hope that her presence could empower all members of her community as long as they act according to traditional values and teachings.

The third and final use of red in "Deer Woman" appears in the final panel as a ladybug. This image, like the first two, is representative of the protagonist's individual identity and transformation. In another interdependent panel, words and images show the protagonist's true identity as Deer Woman. She stands on concrete, her back against a wall, as a combination of human woman and deer: her head is the head of a deer with large antlers, her arms and torso are

human, and her legs and hooves belong to a deer. There are cracks in the concrete spreading from her hooves, and the shadows on the wall depict vines and leaves. A red ladybug crawls on the shadow of a leaf. The panel features text that reads, “And in the end, whatever we have experienced...we always return to ourselves” (24). By the comic’s end, the protagonist has become the truest version of herself, a modern persona of Deer Woman, and recognized her connections to her community, her culture, and traditional stories. Like the Little People in Boulley’s young adult novel, the Deer Woman in LaPensée’s comic is a real being. Her story encourages a reimagining of history and power structures, questioning “What if” Indigenous women could become their own versions of Deer Woman in order to overcome individual and communal traumas?

The final image of the comic also connects the natural world with the concrete, modern world of the protagonist’s city. Throughout the comic, cracks appear in sidewalks and foundations, and the final image suggests that these cracks are places where nature, including Deer Woman, can permeate the man-made world. The cracks also blur the lines of the past, present, and future, as they are sites where the traditional stories of Deer Woman adapt to fit changing times and contemporary needs. Deer Woman’s presence can still be recognized by individuals and communities who remember the teachings of her stories. The cracks she leaves behind in the pavement suggest that both the natural and supernatural worlds have always existed and will continue to be present even if man-made buildings and social structures are destroyed.

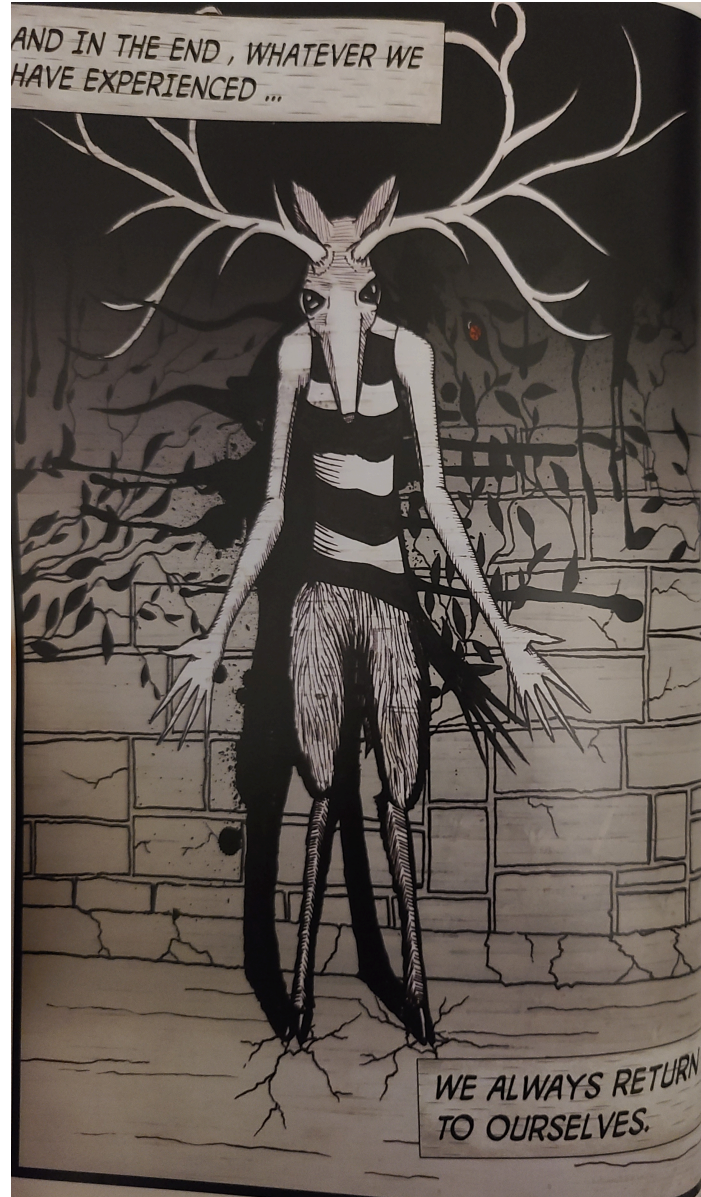


Figure 3: Final Panel of “Deer Woman”

Panel sequences of “Deer Woman” work to define the protagonist’s true identity. Chute explains, “Comics can express life stories, especially traumatic ones, powerfully because it makes literal the presence of the past by disrupting spatial and temporal conventions to overlay

or palimpsest past and present” (109). She also states that “comics has the ability to powerfully *layer* moments of time” by arranging time “in space on the page in panels, which are, essentially, boxes of time” (24). This overlapping of panels can be analyzed in “Deer Woman” when the image of a young girl on a swing cuts into and appears on top of another panel. On the left side of the panel, the protagonist is shown sitting alone on a park bench, remembering “what it is to be innocent again” (15). The right side of the panel is interrupted, as a smaller panel detailing the protagonist’s childhood memory appears over it. These connected panels represent the protagonist’s earliest version of her true self, the innocent and carefree youth of her childhood. Panels such as these overlap throughout the comic, and I argue that each of these smaller overlapping panels represents a form of the protagonist’s true self. The first overlapping panel appears on the second page of the comic, when the protagonist first understands her need for survival and transformation. A small panel of a deer’s eye appears on top of a larger panel depicting the protagonist training next to workout equipment. Two pages later, and again eleven pages later, a panel of a human ear with white lines depicting sound vibrations cuts into a larger panel depicting the beginnings of sexual assault. The final overlapping panel contains a deer’s ear also during a moment of assault. These panels symbolize the protagonist’s true identity, as the images of her human ear show that acts of violence have drawn the attention of Deer Woman who will shapeshift out of her human form when she is needed. Images of the deer’s eye and ear also illustrate that Deer Woman is present in her community, watching and listening to the people around her and making sure they follow traditional teachings.

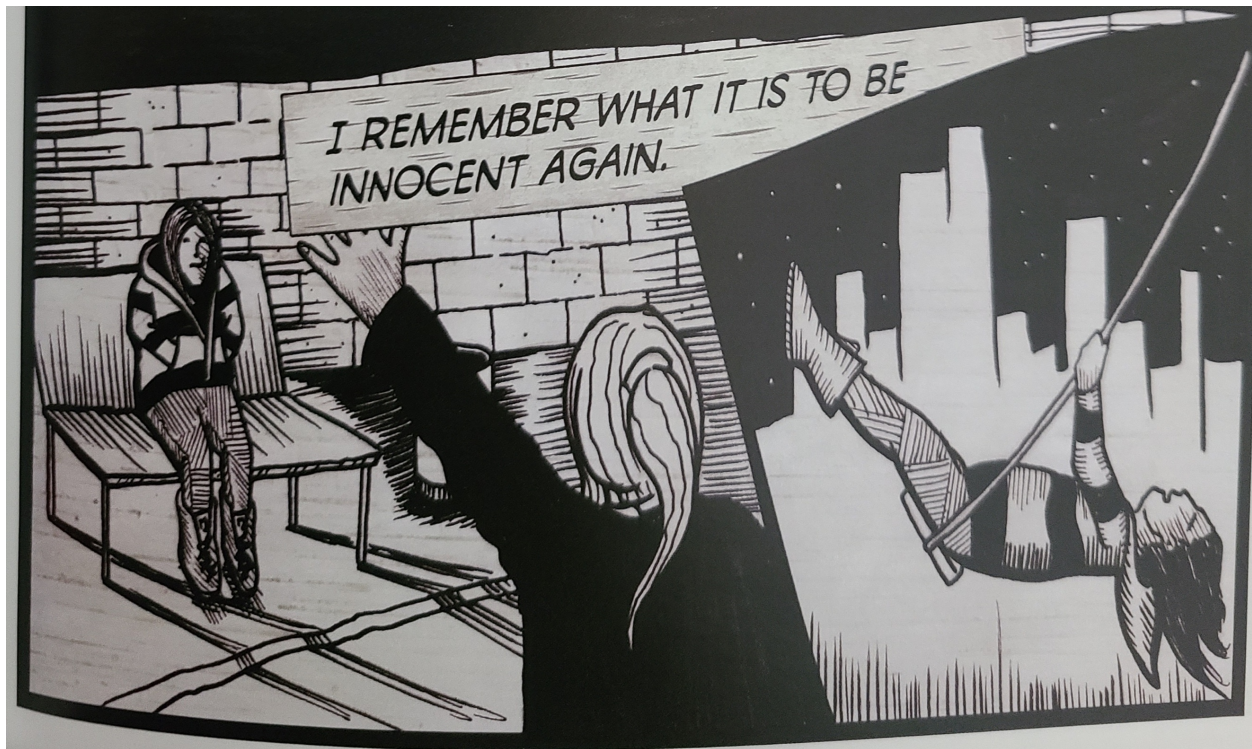


Figure 4: Overlapping Panels in “Deer Woman”

Okikiolu and Hansen suggest that the protagonist “gains strength through understanding the enduring power Indigenous women have long demonstrated to overcome the gendered violence of colonialism”. I agree with this statement, as my analysis suggested that the protagonist of “Deer Woman” has processed the trauma of the first scene and uses her privilege (the power of her new, supernatural identity) to support other Indigenous peoples. Okikiolu and Hansen also suggest that graphic novels “serve as accessible entry points for a wide range of literacy levels into narratives of violence against Indigenous women”. Comics such as “Deer Woman”, although dealing with mature themes and depicting violent images, leave space in the gutters for personal interpretation so readers can avoid witnessing traumatic events firsthand. The comics medium can then be an accessible option for teaching and learning about difficult

topics or painful histories, and students are able to use both images and text to help them construct their own analyses and arguments.

Time and Indigenous Futurisms

Kathy G. Short provides a framework for reading and analyzing visual imagery in books. In Short's book, critical content analysis as a methodology is used specifically to analyze children's books and young adult literature with pictures, but this method can also be applied to the comics medium, which I will demonstrate with close readings of two other comics by LaPensée. According to Short, "The visual images do not just enhance a story told in language or provide some additional information, they are integral to the reader's experience and understanding of a book" (6). Because images can contain as much or more meaning than text, my analysis of LaPensée's "They Who Walk as Lightning" and "They Come for Water" will focus on the visual imagery of picture specific and interdependent panels. Short argues that critical content analysis is often used to explore issues of power within literature. I will use this methodology and the framework Short provides to argue that the images depicted in LaPensée's two comics, both of which deal with water and environmental rights, illustrate the healing and transformative powers of Anishinaabe communities and the rhetorical sovereignty they maintain to shape a healthier future world. Critical content analysis of comics can be performed in a classroom to help students understand contemporary issues and power structures within societies and recognize different cultural values and identities.

The first of critical content analysis is to decide on a research purpose and questions. Short notes that in a classroom setting, research questions will often "arise from current events and media portrayals that affect the lives of youth" (11). She also expresses the importance of

including counter-narratives in curricula, as these narratives offer “representations of a cultural community that resists and speaks back to mainstream depictions” (10). I offer the following potential research questions to guide readers of LaPensée’s comics: How do these two stories use visual imagery to portray an Anishinaabe community? How do these two texts work together to illustrate an Indigenous view of non-linear time? Who are the water walkers and why is their role significant for their community? In what ways do these two stories address current events and political issues? How do they utilize themes of power, healing, and transformation?

Short introduces the next step of critical content analysis, to select and read possible texts for analysis, by noting that “Although critical content analysis is often associated with a negative critique of representations in a text, researchers can also select texts that offer positive portrayals or potential insights for readers” (11). As I mentioned in my introduction, there are already numerous lists of negative representations and readings to avoid, inauthentic and inaccurate Indigenous stories and histories. This work of this dissertation is not meant to add to these lists, which is why I will not examine visual images of negative representations in this chapter. The aim of this work is to recommend texts that *should*, rather than should not, be taught in high schools and college classrooms and to model appropriate ways educators can read and assign these texts. For this second step of critical content analysis, I then suggest selecting comics such as *Deer Woman* (to be read in college literature classes as it deals with mature themes and graphic visual images) and *Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection*. The second volume of *Moonshot* features LaPensée’s “They Who Walk as Lightning”, while Volume 3 contains “They Come for Water”. Critical content analysis requires multiple readings of each selected text; the first of which should be done before conducting research and deciding on a critical theory to frame the analysis. Short explains that this initial reading coincides with Rosenblatt’s reader-

response theory, as the text should first be read “from an aesthetic stance, to immerse ourselves in the experience of the story, rather than standing back to observe the story and get information” (12). This reading can also allow students to find initial enjoyment reading a comic or YA novel before more difficult texts (challenging reading levels or genres and difficult to process texts such as news articles depicting harsh realities of current events). During the initial reading, students might also make personal connections between the text and their own lives, as well as use their own skills of interpretation and deduction to process the story’s plot and themes without help from outside sources.

The third step in critical content analysis is to “select and read deeply within a critical theory frame” (12). The second reading of a text for critical content analysis will help narrow a students’ focus and make their own research goals and theses more clear. My own reading of LaPensée’s comics in *Moonshot* will use the lens of decolonization, but other critical theories that pair well with these texts are TribalCrit, New Historicism, and feminisms. Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s decolonization theory is a better fit for Indigenous texts than postcolonialism, which, Smith argues, is a term and theory that allows the colonizers and oppressors to retain power. Angeline Hoffman believes that decolonization as a critical theory “gives agency to Indigenous people to take initiative to solve issues of oppression and colonization” (91). Reading texts through the frame of decolonization allows for an analysis that revolves around Indigenous perspectives and world views and highlights tribal sovereignty and survivance.

According to Short, the next step in the process is to “research the relevant sociohistorical and cultural context” (13). She explains that one “purpose for careful research is to challenge our own perspectives and biases” (14). The oral storytelling tradition is one example, which appears in *Moonshot*’s comics, of a cultural context that outsiders may not fully understand. Without a

complete understanding of this context, researchers might not view oral stories as accurate or reliable histories since they have not been written down or preserved in a printed form. When teaching LaPensée's comics in *Moonshot*, it is important for educators to help their students understand the specific Anishinaabe context LaPensée was writing within. Students should be aware of cultural elements and values specific to Anishinaabe peoples, such as figures from traditional oral stories, the significance of geographical locations and homelands, and the structure of a matriarchal society.

Before we can analyze the text through a close reading, Short suggests narrowing the theoretical frame to focus on three or five theoretical tenets that are most relevant to our research focus. From a decolonialist perspective, I choose to focus my close reading on the processes and conditions Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes in *Decolonizing Methodologies*. Using the metaphor of ocean tides, Tuhiwai Smith visualizes four directions and four major tides to illustrate processes and states of being that Indigenous communities move through. The four directions Tuhiwai Smith names are decolonization, healing, transformation, and mobilization. She notes that decolonization is political, social, spiritual, and psychological. Healing can be physical, spiritual, psychological, social, collective, and restorative. Transformation could refer to changes or improvements in the psychological, social, political, economic, or communal landscapes. Mobilization might be about local, national, regional, or global movements (121). These directions "are not goals or ends in themselves. They are processes which connect, inform and clarify the tensions between the local, the regional and the global. They are processes which can be incorporated into practices and methodologies" (120). My close reading of *Moonshot*'s comics will follow Indigenous characters as they work through each of these processes, moving, adapting, transforming, and healing their communities. Tuhiwai Smith describes the four major

tides as “survival, recovery, development, and self-determination. They are the conditions and states of being through which indigenous communities are moving” (121). LaPensée’s comics in *Moonshot* feature each of these states, and I will argue that water and the natural environment help the comics’ Indigenous characters survive, recover, development strong relations and communities, and reach a goal of self-determination by the story’s end (which becomes a positive beginning to a new, yet-to-be-told story).

It is crucial to read related research studies as the final step before our own critical analysis can begin. Reading scholarly sources gives researchers and students insights into past and current conversations surrounding their topic. Other scholars’ methodologies and arguments, in agreement or opposition of the researcher’s own, can provide ideas and evidence to strengthen the researcher’s own readings and claims. To model this step, before my own analysis of LaPensée’s comics, I explored scholarly texts that examined video games LaPensée has designed. Although not directly relevant to the work of this chapter, these texts broadened my knowledge of other genres and informed my research as the games included similar themes and issues that were prevalent in the comics. For example, LaPensée’s comic “Those Who Walk as Lightning” and her video game “Thunderbird Strike” both feature traditional Thunderbird beings, who protect and revive wildlife, as the stories work to protest the construction of pipelines and chemical facilities across Indigenous lands.

When examining each text through close reading within a theoretical frame, Short points out that researchers (educators and students) must reflect on their own positionality, their personal experiences and stances on the research. Short believes that if a researcher’s positionality is made clear and explicit, readers will be able to recognize any potential biases in the analysis. Short also believes that as researchers “we are also challenging ourselves to become

aware of our perspectives and biases in order to interrogate ourselves and to take steps within our research process to bring in other perspectives” (16). I agree with Short and believe that it is important to be aware of our own positionality, especially when writing about communities and cultures you are not a part of. Students can confront and define their own privileges, or lack of privilege, and reflect on Carjuzaa and Fenimore-Smith’s five R’s of Indigenous methodologies. Understanding one’s own lived experiences, viewpoints, and biases, as well as how they may be different than the positionalities of the diverse people around oneself, is a step in the direction of conducting thoughtful and respectful research.

As Short noted before, critical content analysis frequently focuses on issues of power, and she further explains that Botelho and Rudman recommended considering broad issues of power before moving onto a closer reading. The three broad issues Botelho and Rudman defined consist of focalization (“Whose story is told? Who sees? From whose point of view?”), social processes of characters (“Who has power? Who has agency?”), and closure (“How is the story resolved? What are the assumptions in the story closure?”) (16). My close reading of these comics will begin with a brief analysis of these broad points. After reflecting on broad issues of power that are depicted within the language or visual images of texts, Short suggests the next step in analysis is to “determine the unit of analysis (16). She explains that selecting a few key illustrations to track within the text can make it easier to follow significant moments and engage with a closer focus. The final steps of critical content analysis are to revisit the critical theory and scholarship on the text and write theoretical memos on the analysis.

My close reading will follow the steps provided by Short as I juxtapose LaPensée’s “They Who Walk as Lightning”, published in *Moonshot* volume 2, and “They Come for Water”, appearing in the third volume of *Moonshot*. While these two volumes highlight slightly different

themes, LaPensée's comics both illustrate similar topics such as healing a community, physical and psychological transformation, and the protection of Earth's waters. The introduction of *Moonshot* volume 2 informs readers that each comic is "meant to be in the present, highlighting that Indigenous culture is not from the historical record. It is here, now". *Moonshot* volume 3 emphasizes comics stories of Indigenous Futurisms, a term that often includes science fiction. Grace Dillon, in *Walking the Clouds*, questions, "Does [science fiction] have the capacity to envision Native futures, Indigenous hopes, and dreams recovered by rethinking the past in a new framework?" (2). Dillon's genre of Indigenous Futurisms, modeled after Afrofuturism, often considers Indigenous past histories, present realities, and imagined futures within the context of sci-fi, post-apocalyptic and dystopian stories, or speculative fiction.

In an interview with Darren Lone Fight, Elizabeth LaPensée describes Indigenous Futurisms' often non-linear view of time: "Indigenous Futurisms reflects not merely the future from a linear worldview, but rather non-linear past/present/future spacetime". She also clarifies that Dillon, from her Anishinaabe perspective, is concerned with "work that doesn't seek to imagine futures in which we leave Aki (Earth), but rather always relates back to the wellbeing of Aki and reinforcing nationhood". LaPensée's comics in *Moonshot* depict this healing of Earth and the power of community and cultural traditions. "They Who Walk as Lightning" is a story set in our present society, a time of activism and advocating for environmental protection and water rights. The Indigenous characters of the narrative look to the traditions of their ancestors to understand their current role in protecting the land's plants and animals from toxic chemical leaks. "They Come for Water", set in a post-apocalyptic world, imagines a moment in time when humans have brought contaminated water from another planet back to Earth. The Indigenous

community depicted depends on their “warriors” (the matriarchs and water walkers) to heal the waters and return home.

Dillon divides the genre of Indigenous Futurisms into specific elements of science fiction that are reimagined through an Indigenous perspective. These subcategories include Native Slipstream (dealing with time travel, alternative histories, and multiverses), Contact (a reimagining of Contact, conquest, and colonization), Indigenous Science and Sustainability (juxtaposing Western science with Indigenous knowledges to argue for sustainable practices), Native Apocalypse (imagining a reversal of the apocalyptic trope and an optimistic future where Indigenous peoples “win”, becoming centered in the narrative), and Biskaabiiyang (featuring an act of returning – to home, to oneself, to cultural traditions – after destructive or harmful events) (3-10). Both of LaPensée’s comics are narratives of *biskaabiiyang*. Dillon notes that this is “an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of ‘returning to ourselves,’ which involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world” (10). Dillon compares this process to decolonization, which “requires *changing* rather than *imitating* Eurowestern concepts” (10). Indigenous communities must use their own teachings, histories, and methodologies, such as the five Rs, to move through the processes of decolonization, healing, and transformation, returning to a sense of belonging, home, and balance.

LaPensée’s “They Come for Water” features the Native Apocalypse before the characters are able to return home. According to Dillon, Indigenous apocalyptic storytelling is often about a state of imbalance and the need for *bimaadiziwin*, a return to balance. These stories focus on resistance and survival, showing “the ruptures, and scars, and the trauma” in an effort to provide

“healing and a return to bimaadiziwin” (9). The comics I will analyze in these two volumes of *Moonshot*, like “Deer Woman”, contain past traumas while including spaces that allow for the possibility of transformation along with present and future healing. James Leask, in the introduction of *Moonshot* volume 2, states, “We not only survive, but thrive. We’re not victims. We are protectors” (7). Like Deer Woman, the Indigenous women centered in these comics are powerful figures (mothers, daughters, sisters) who protect their landscapes and use traditional knowledges to heal their communities.

In following Short’s guidelines for critical content analysis, I begin my close reading of LaPensée’s comics by determining a research purpose and questions. The questions I offered previously focus on the comics’ cultural and historical contexts and use of the visual modality. I suggest that educators with an interest in teaching Indigenous comics focus on tribally specific research methods and generate discussion questions that ask students to pay attention to the author’s tribal affiliations and the communities discussed in the text. The purpose of this close reading is to determine how the visual imagery of the comics helps illustrate themes of power, healing, and transformation. My guiding questions are: How do the comics’ texts and images work together to accurately and authentically portray Anishinaabe communities, histories, and current issues? How do these comics help Indigenous and non-Indigenous young adults discover their own identities or become more aware of other identities and cultures within their social landscapes? How do these comics illustrate, through images of water and the natural environment, Tuhiwai Smith’s four processes and four states of being?

After deciding on research purposes and questions, educators should read their chosen comics for the first time paying particular attention to the narrative, the plot, and characters. This step is especially important for high school teachers, who may want to focus class discussions on

these elements of the story (plot, character analysis, simile, metaphor, foreshadow, etc.) rather than on a complex analysis of more mature themes and their relations to contemporary political issues (federal laws, water rights, sexual assault, etc.). After the initial reading, educators can decide the primary critical frame for their own analyses and for their students to engage with. My close reading uses the frame of decolonialism, as this is the most appropriate for Dillon's subcategory and the Anishinaabe process of biskaabiiyang. Using this theoretical frame allows me to analyze the comics from the perspective of the Anishinaabe communities they portray; scholars, educators, and researchers must step back from their own Western understandings and non-Indigenous methodologies to use the five Rs. In respecting the Indigenous communities that created or are depicted in literatures, scholars can form a greater awareness of the communities' needs and experiences. The communities of LaPensée's comics all have the power to survive, transform, and heal themselves internally. Despite colonization and laws that intended to make Indigenous communities "vanish", characters present within Indigenous literatures portray determination, adaptability, and resilience. The characters in LaPensée's comics, like Deer Woman, insist on their voices being heard and refuse to stop fighting in either the present or future worlds.

The Anishinaabe characters of LaPensée's comics are powerful members of their communities. In addressing Botelho and Rudman's questions on power, it is clear that the Indigenous characters have agency, sovereignty, and self-determination. The comics tell Anishinaabe stories, of the past, present, and future, from an Anishinaabe writer's perspective. LaPensée has argued that "works must be self-determined and come from Indigenous voices to truly be referred to as Indigenous Futurisms". With this definition, along with Dillon's descriptions of subgenres, LaPensée's comics in *Moonshot* clearly belong in the realm of

literatures known as Indigenous Futurisms. At the end of each comic, the Indigenous community is not only surviving but “thriving”. After destructive or cataclysmic events threaten the earth, its waters, and its inhabitants, the Indigenous communities restore balance and heal themselves and their environments. In near-apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic worlds, the comics’ protagonists ultimately “win” against non-Indigenous corporations, preventing the destruction of the earth and their homes. The toxic chemical facilities of “They Who Walk as Lightning” are not stronger than the Thunderbirds and the storms they control. The greedy humans of “They Come for Water”, who have been infected and transformed into Wiindigo- or zombie-like creatures, are similarly no match for the community’s Water Walkers and their healing songs.

In my close reading of LaPensée’s comics, I will track the visually recurring elements of water and natural landscapes to argue that communal healing occurs as the protagonists interact with sources of water and traverse their physical environment. Like “Deer Woman”, these two comics use colors, panel imagery, and gutters to depict acts of transformation. Through the frame of decolonialism, I focus my reading on the four processes Tuhiwai Smith outlines; decolonization, healing, transformation, and mobilization. I argue that the Anishinaabe communities depicted in these two comics use their knowledges of water, land, and past events to survive, heal, and transform their physical and social landscapes. The comics illustrate acts of survival, recovery, and development (the four conditions Tuhiwai Smith describes) to end with community self-determination, a re-balancing of the landscape, and a return to traditional practices and home.

The background text presented before the first panel of “They Who Walk as Lightning” informs us that Thunderbirds are respected in Anishinaabe communities such as the Batchewana First Nation in Ontario, Canada, as they contribute to the balance and wellbeing of Earth: “They

have been called on to help the waters threatened across the world, taking form in storms, art, and action” (10). The fourth page of the comic depicts protestors near Lake Huron holding signs that say, “Protect Water”. The next panel, on the fifth page, depicts a fenced-in facility, which the characters refer to as “Chemical Valley”, and a note in the upper right corner of the panel marks this as a place close to or on land belonging to the Aamjiwnaang First Nation in Ontario. These textual notes locate this comic in a specific time and place: the present world where Anishinaabe communities near the Great Lakes are fighting against environmental pollution and health risks from petrochemical facilities.

The panels of “They Come for Water” do not contain references to any specific place, perhaps because place names have changed in this future society. The landscape of this dystopian world has certainly become unfamiliar over time, as the panels depict an all-brown terrain with no evidence of plant or animal life; mountains in the background are the only recognizable geographical features. Despite having no specified city, reservation, or location for its setting, the comic clearly represents an Anishinaabe community. In the tenth panel, and again in the nineteenth, the words “Mino bimaadiziwin” are displayed on a building marked as the health center. A sign depicting the medicine wheel, with its colors of red, yellow, black, and white, stands next to the building. The sign suggests that this building sits on Indigenous land, and the Anishinaabemowin phrase “mino bimaadiziwin”, referring to “the good life” or “the good way of life”, shows that the building is a place of healing, medicine, and balance for an Anishinaabe community.

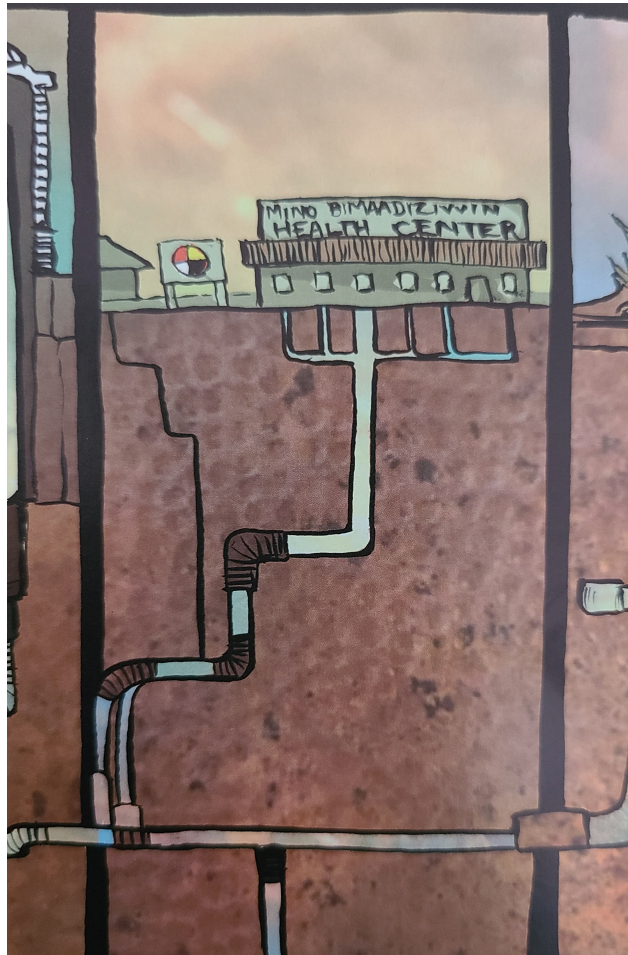


Figure 5: Anishinaabemowin in “They Come for Water”

Water plays a central role in the communities of both comics, and the significance of water is represented through both written text and visual images. “They Who Walk as Lightning” contains a total of thirty-five panels, seventeen of which contain images of water (either in its liquid form or as hail from a storm), and four panels include the word ‘water’. “They Come for Water” contains a similar amount of water references; of its thirty-four panels, ten include images of water and the word ‘water’ is used eight times. Many of the panels depicting water in images or text are interdependent panels; without both the image and coinciding text, readers

would be unable to fully comprehend the role water plays within the comic. Interdependent panels appear on page sixteen of “They Who Walk as Lightning”. The top of the page contains three consecutive panels depicting aspects of nature: two butterflies on a branch in the first panel, a turtle surrounded by grass in the third panel, and a bird diving to catch a fish in the water in the third panel. Without context, these panels would only serve to set the scene, showing the natural landscape of this Great Lakes community. However, a dialogue bubble at the top of the middle panel states, “This is what we’re here to protect” (16). The meaning of these panels being laid side by side is then to show that the members of this Anishinaabe community are continuing their ancestor’s traditions of protecting the plants, animals, and water that share the land.

Immediately beneath these three panels of nature is one long panel depicting a group of women carrying buckets to the edge of the water. Without knowing the cultural context of the original Anishinaabe Water Walkers, this image would not be easily understood. Another dialogue bubble helps makes the action of this scene more clear, as one of the leading women explains to the protagonist, “Our responsibilities as Anishinaabekwe include walking for the waters” (16). The final three images of the page, below the long middle panel, continue this conversation, as the protagonist and her community’s women empty the healing water in their buckets into the lake: “Singing to help the waters remember herself as she was. Carrying the gift of healing” (16). These women are walking together and transporting water to protect and heal their natural landscape; the act of singing and the women’s movement transforms the water and allows for a recovery and re-balancing from pollution.



Figure 6: Nature in “They Who Walk as Lightning”

“They Come for Water” contains similar interdependent panels emphasizing the role of the community’s Water Walkers and the importance of listening to traditional stories. Gathered around a table in the health center, tribal leaders discuss their plans for surviving in a world filled with contaminated waters and cannibalistic humans. Rather than healing the earth’s contaminated waters, non-Indigenous leaders brought back water from a nearby planet and restricted access; they believed this water was clean and uncontaminated and would not allow the

Indigenous tribes to access it. However, because of the leaders' greed, destruction, and lack of concern for the Red Planet they stole the water from, the spirits from the Red Planet had traveled through the water and turned the humans who drank it into zombies or wiindigo creatures. An Elder in the health center suggests, "We know exactly what to do...if we listen to our stories" (54). The next panel changes locations; instead of existing inside an urban landscape of buildings, water reservoirs, and underground pipes, the community is now depicted sitting around a campfire at the base of a mountain. A text box explains, "And so we returned to live within the mountains as told in stories from generations ago" (54). Although the natural environment, its trees, plants, and animals, may have been polluted and destroyed by "greedy" humans, the Anishinaabe community of this future world still recognizes their landscape and have the knowledge to return home.

The next page of the comic relies on dialogue to explain the images of the Water Walkers, who appear wearing long skirts and carrying buckets much like the appearance of the women in "They Who Walk as Lightning". A tribal Elder explains to another woman that although the water at home is toxic, "it doesn't carry the infection. Only few people can go so as not to draw attention" (55). The woman informs the Elder that the Water Walkers volunteered to transport and heal their waters, to which the Elder replies, "Who are the real warriors now, eh?" (55). The next panels depict the women, the community's matriarchs, "warriors", and Water Walkers, walking single file away from the mountain to begin their journey of healing the land. The final scenes of the comic show the women physically fighting the wiindigo humans, like Deer Woman attacks her community's abusers, and returning with healed water to a calm and peaceful landscape.

LaPensée's two comics begin with an Anishinaabe community that is threatened by government leaders and corporations; water is polluted, plants and animal species are in danger, and the land is being colonized and destroyed. The protagonists of each comic are the Water Walkers, who must remember traditional stories and rely on their community's healing knowledges to protect their water and save the planet. Both comics depict mobility as the women walk for their water; they move their bodies as they travel between locations and bodies of water, they sing to, carry, and transport buckets of cleansed and healed water, they volunteer to take action against pollution and infections, and they adapt to their community's needs as their physical and social landscapes change over time. Through the acts and movements of the Water Walkers, the community survives, recovers, grows stronger, and develops deeper connections with their ancestors, neighbors, and lands.

Each community heals when they are able to return home. The region of the Great Lakes is a meaningful place for the Anishinaabe peoples of these comics, and there is a healing power that comes with reuniting with the sacred space of home. The protagonist of "They Who Walk as Lightning" has travelled via airplane and automobile to return to her homeland, a trip her mother had never had the chance to make. She sings and walks to heal the water and plants trees to help restore the balance of the ecosystem. The last dialogue bubble of the comic states, "It's a lot of hard work, but it's all worth it when we get to fly" (17). Her ancestors were Thunderbirds, beings that continue to protect the community in the form of storms and activism, and she will one day fly as a Thunderbird as well. The final panel of the comic depicts a group of Thunderbirds in the form of lightning flying above a skyline of industrial facilities. The Thunderbirds are presumably about to strike as lightning and destroy the facilities that have endangered the earth and its living creatures. Being able to "fly" is symbolic of the community reaching their goal of self-

determination; they have the power to govern themselves and heal the earth and its living inhabitants. The protagonist and her community have transformed into a powerful force and become the center of their own narrative.

Healing begins in “They Come for Water” the moment the community returns to their original home in the mountains. While transformation for other characters in the comic only resulted in their downfall, the physical transformation into cannibal wiindigos, the Water Walkers spread positive transformations to themselves and nature. They became powerful healers like their ancestors and helped their community not only “surviv[e] but ‘thriv[e]” (57). After apocalyptic events, this Anishinaabe community might be the only group still alive and thriving in the desolate landscape. The comic ends with self-determination and hope; the community has eradicated all sources of contamination and purified their lands. They will rebuild their society, while remembering their histories and stories, and the nature’s wildlife might return.

This chapter’s analysis of “Deer Woman” provided a close reading of the comics medium as I considered McCloud’s work on the gutter, panel sequences, and color while also paying attention to Anishinaabe and other Indigenous histories, cultures, and issues. Critical content analysis of LaPensée’s two comics from *Moonshot* breaks down the process of analysis and research into steps so other educators can model the work in their classrooms. Teaching Indigenous comics encourages students to engage with multimodal texts, read between the lines, and consider another culture’s world view.

IV

Jonny Appleseed, Queer Theory, and Two-Spirit Critiques

The final chapter of this project turns to queer Indigenous literatures and queer theory, as I consider the ways in which Two-Spirit critiques add to queer theory. I examine Joshua Whitehead's (Oji-Cree) 2018 novel *Jonny Appleseed* paying attention to themes of home, movement, transformation, and fluid identities. I argue that Two-Spirit critiques can add to current understandings of queer theory in much the same way TribalCrit works to make CRT specific to the needs and experiences of Indigenous peoples. This chapter begins with a literature review of Two-Spirit critiques, followed by a close reading of *Jonny Appleseed*. I argue, through the lens of queer theory and the addition of Two-Spirit critiques, that Whitehead's protagonist Jonny explores his Two-Spirit identity and discovers his meaning of home through "constant movement" and transformation (148). Unlike Zitkala-Sa and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, who found home to be the place of their families and ancestors, Jonny does not always feel at home within his community because his Two-Spirit identity is not widely accepted or understood. Throughout the novel, structured through Jonny's non-linear memories, home becomes both fluid and static. Like Jonny's identity, which he believes is similar to the fluidity of water, his home is often in motion and in stages of transformation; he finds a feeling of home internally within himself. Although Jonny's home is not one specific place within his physical environment, I argue that pieces of Jonny's concept of home are scattered throughout his landscape. The grave of his kokum, her empty house, and their family photo album are specific sites and objects that, through the recollection of memories, elicit feelings of home within Jonny.

Teaching queer Indigenous literatures in university English courses can provide LGBTQIA2S+ students with authentic representations of their own identities that they may not

encounter through reading traditional and canonical texts. Aubrey Jean Hanson notes that the literary “canon sets out literary works that have withstood the test of time, that hold artistic merit, that convey within them so much of what is beautiful and powerful about creative writing – the expression of humanity through words well aligned” (69). However, as a teacher, Hanson noticed a “mismatch” between the texts of the canon that she felt pressured to teach and the identities of the young adults in her classroom: “I had a rainbow of young people before me and I was showing them the world using only a palette of two or three colours” (69). More young adult students are now self-identifying as LGBTQIA+ than in the past; our societies and cultures are beginning to recognize more identities, sexualities, and genders and are becoming more accepting of identities different than the “norm”. Educators can work to make academia more inclusive and diverse by including queer literatures in course curriculum. Jacqueline Bach explains that including queer theory and literatures in English classrooms helps students question and challenge dominant norms, such as whiteness and heteronormativity that I discussed in previous chapters. Bach argues, “Queer pedagogy is one way of disrupting the normalizing processes that can come through course curriculum, texts, and activities” (920). To promote this disruption and challenging of norms, Bach believes it is crucial to provide students with access to, or suggestions for, texts with queer characters and themes. She argues that educators might not need to teach these texts, only introduce and recommend them to students who are interested: “A simple conversation about contemporary books may lead to conversations about many themes, including sexual orientation and gender identity, without teachers having to be direct or didactic. The point is adolescents have access to a wide range of books that feature LGBTQ and gender variant themes and characters” (919). Spreading awareness of queer literature, making it

known to students that these texts exist, is one step toward fostering inclusivity and respect for diverse identities.

After recognizing the mismatch between canonical texts and the diversity of her students, Hanson questions, “How might English teaching be shifted so that future students could experience a literary world that validates who they are?” (69). She adds, “What is the potential impact for young people if they never read a story or poem that speaks to who they are as queer and Indigenous youth?” (70). Hanson’s questions guide my work throughout this chapter as I argue for an inclusion of Two-Spirit critiques within the fields of English, American Indian Studies, and Women’s and Gender Studies and an inclusion of queer literature like Whitehead’s novel in university English courses (like the comics of *Deer Woman*, the explicit scenes and mature content of *Jonny Appleseed* would not be appropriate for teaching younger students in high school).

Two-Spirit Critiques

Qwo-Li Driskill, in “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies,” challenges queer studies by expressing the need for Two-Spirit critiques. The term ‘Two-Spirit’ was coined in 1990 at a spiritual gathering near Winnipeg and “indicates the presence of both a feminine and a masculine spirit in one person” (72). This term is meant to function in the English language as an intertribal term encompassing all Indigenous LGBTQ people. Two-Spirit’s inclusivity and fluidity also includes people who identify with tribally specific identities or use their own tribal languages. Driskill also emphasizes the plurality of Two-Spirit critiques as there are numerous perspectives to include. While there is no one singular or definitive approach to Two-Spirit critiques, Daniel Heath Justice, in “Notes Toward a

Theory of Anomaly,” addresses the history of Two-Spirit peoples in Native communities. Justice points out that there is a common assumption “that queerness was honored in all tribal communities before the arrival of Europeans” (Justice 214). Although many Native communities, such as the Lakota, Cheyenne, Zuni, and Navajo, do have records (either written texts or oral histories) of Two-Spirit or gender-variant people, Justice explains that hundreds of other tribes have no evidence of “queer-friendly traditions” (215). Even if many tribes were not historically accepting of Two-Spirit people, the term ‘Two-Spirit’ is still meant as an umbrella term to include Two-Spirit individuals affiliated with any Indigenous community.

Two-Spirit critiques attempt to be inclusive of all tribal communities, and Driskill poses crucial questions for their readers located in what is now known as the United States and Canada: “whose land are you on, dear reader? What are the specific names of the Native nation(s) who have historical claim to the territory on which you currently read this article? What are their histories before European invasion? What are their historical and present acts of resistance to colonial occupation?” (71). They then respond by stating that the majority of people living in Canada and the United States cannot answer the questions they posed. Like Driskill, I find this fact problematic and disturbing. I agree with Driskill in suggesting that queer studies should be challenged and urged to pay attention to Indigenous histories, cultures, and colonial realities. Driskill explains that Two-Spirit critiques share similarities to queer critiques as they challenge gender binaries and heteropatriarchal dominance, but Two-Spirit critiques specifically draw on Native perspectives and experiences:

Two-Spirit critiques diverge from other queer critiques because they root themselves in Native histories, politics, and decolonial struggles. Two-Spirit critiques challenge both white-dominated queer theory and queer of color critique’s near erasure of Native people

and nations, and question the usefulness to Native communities of theories not rooted in tribally specific traditions and not thoroughly conscious of colonialism as an ongoing process. Two-Spirit critiques, and this essay, ask for queer studies in the United States and Canada to remember exactly on whose land it is built. (71)

Driskill's statement here is a powerful reminder that Native stories and perspectives should be included in fields of women's and gender studies as well as throughout academia as a whole.

Native histories are often ignored and overlooked within contemporary American society and academic fields. Driskill suggests that scholars need to "integrate Indigenous and decolonial theories into their critiques" (78). Like Driskill, I argue that Indigenous histories and cultures should not be confined to the realm of Indigenous studies but should be incorporated into other academic fields that can benefit from this knowledge, such as women's and gender studies.

Academia as well as mainstream culture frequently perpetuates an erasure of Indigenous peoples, but if more scholars and educators included Indigenous knowledges in their critiques and teachings, the stereotype of the "Vanishing Indian" could become less prevalent.

Because of the still-prevalent belief that Indigenous peoples are meant to vanish from North America or have vanished already, I believe it is important to take a decolonial approach to my writing and teaching. According to Angela Haas, "Decolonial methodologies and pedagogies work to replace the harmful perceptions of colonial influence and support "the coexistence of cultures, languages, literacies, memories, histories, places, and spaces," encouraging a "respectful and reciprocal dialogue between and across them" (297). Driskill similarly defines the term 'decolonization' as the "ongoing, radical resistance against colonialism that includes struggles for land redress, self-determination, healing historical trauma, cultural continuance, and reconciliation" (70). Decolonization processes do not have a fixed or

predetermined goal, Driskill suggests, but rather ask scholars and activists to reimagine the future by weaving together Indigenous studies with queer critiques. Driskill illustrates the process of doubleweaving, a basket-making metaphor which emphasizes the need for a merging of Indigenous and queer studies.

In the Cherokee tradition, doubleweaving is a weaving technique that results in the weaver creating two baskets with two independent designs, one pattern on the outside and a separate pattern on the inside. One basket is woven into the other basket, and the two then share a common rim. Driskill uses the doubleweave as a metaphor, suggesting that Indigenous studies is one basket while queer studies is the other. Together, both baskets (Indigenous and queer studies) form Two-Spirit critiques. Driskill's approach to queer theory relies on Indigenous studies and is informed by their own Cherokee perspective. They explain, "Indigenous gender and sexual identities are intimately connected to land, community, and history" (73). In order to understand and respectfully approach Two-Spirit critiques, we must understand Indigenous methodologies and connections between tribes, lands, and histories. Like the "Vanishing Indian" image, Driskill notes that "Part of the colonial experience for Native people in the United States is that we are constantly disappeared through the stories that non-Native people tell, or don't tell, about us" (79). By being inclusive of many different tribal experiences, Two-Spirit critiques build on queer and queer of color critiques to give Indigenous identities a voice within academia. Driskill argues, "These critiques not only serve to disidentify with queer of color and queer diasporic critique; they also create more robust and effective interventions in systems of oppression from which both Native studies and queer studies can benefit" (79). The field of Indigenous studies can benefit from the inclusion of queer studies, which has often been neglected in Indigenous studies discussions. Queer studies can similarly benefit by incorporating

Indigenous perspectives and decolonial struggles, working towards more prominent Two-Spirit critiques in the future of the field.

Daniel Heath Justice, in “Notes Toward a Theory of Anomaly,” illustrates the inclusion of traditional Native stories in queer theories. Justice, an enrolled member of the Cherokee nation, incorporates Indigenous storytelling into his essay by telling tales of animals and anomalous beings. Like Driskill, he also defines a relevant term within Indigenous studies: “*Tradition* is too often an empty word, devoid of intelligible meaning, though incredibly powerful as a speech act. It’s generally employed without being defined, as though everyone understands what it’s intended to mean or what values it’s supposed to convey” (213). While all Indigenous nations have their own cultural traditions, Justice explains that the term ‘tradition’ is “also about maintaining responsibilities, relationships, and affinities with distinctive worlds of meaning and ways of being that connect us to this land and its histories” (214). Indigenous cultures are rooted in ideas of place and the natural world, and Indigenous stories often discuss the importance of animals, land, and transformation. Justice discusses how certain animals and supernatural entities can be classified as anomalies, and how these creatures define what is considered ‘normal’.

In traditional storytelling fashion Justice informs his readers that bats and flying squirrels are anomalous beings because they cannot be classified as a four-footed mammal or a bird. According to Cherokee stories, animals competed against birds during a ball game, and the bat and flying squirrel “were honored for their skillful use of their anomalous features” (219). Similarly, bears are considered one of the most powerful anomalous creatures in Cherokee stories because they share certain traits with humans. Modern bears are said to be descended from a human clan that chose a “more leisurely life afforded by a bearish existence in the

wilderness” rather than the busy, complex life of humans (214). Anomalous beings, not fitting inside one clearly defined category, can also be extremely powerful or fearsome creatures, such as the Uktena, a water snake with a cougar’s head and deer antlers. Justice explains, “Neither good nor evil, potentially helpful or harmful to established social categories and hierarchies, the anomalous body in pre- (and sometimes post-) Christian Southeastern traditions represents profound powers and transformative possibility” (220). Despite having fixed categories of definition such as “four-footed, winged, swimming people, plant people, and so on,” anomalous beings blur the boundaries between categories and offer more flexible definitions (220). Like Driskill’s Two-Spirit critiques, Justice creates a theory of anomaly, explaining that his theory does not reject queer theory but engages in conversation with queer theory while emphasizing tribal histories and placing “queer Native people at the center of concern” (224).

Justice further clarifies his theory of anomaly by explaining the differences between ‘normal’ and ‘anomalous’. He argues that what is considered ‘normal’ for LGBTQ people is always considered anomalous to the heteropatriarchy. What is deemed ‘anomalous’ by physical, mental, biological, or sexual classifications, is constructed by the dominant culture and society. LGBTQ and Two-Spirit people are then victims of cultural construction, but Justice argues that there can be a reclamation and transformation of the term ‘anomaly’ among Indigenous communities. Instead of viewing ‘anomaly’ as a negative term, it can be transformed for a more positive meaning highlighting the presence of fluid and flexible identities. Justice argues that his theory of anomaly honors historical diversity and “cultural specificity of tribal knowledges. It asserts that although our differences are important, difference is not synonymous with deficiency; it affirms the inclusive bonds of kinship and values of respect and responsibility”

(232). By including this theory in both Indigenous and queer studies, these fields can become more accepting of differences and inclusive to “anomalous” identities.

Lisa Tatonetti’s “Visible Sexualities or Invisible Nations: Forced to Choose in *Big Eden*, *Johnny Greyeyes*, and *The Business of Fancydancing*” analyzes Two-Spirit characters in film. Like Driskill and Justice, Tatonetti challenges queer theory and supports Two-Spirit studies. Adding to Driskill’s definition of Two-Spirit critiques, Tatonetti adds: “As a mode of study in which intersectionality is inherent, Two-Spirit studies represents a nuanced lens through which to analyze interactions between and among diverse sexual orientations, genders, and cultures” (175). Two-Spirit studies is inclusive of all tribal affiliations and identities, but Tatonetti recognizes a common problem within Indigenous communities. Within the films she has chosen to analyze, Tatonetti argues that Two-Spirit characters are “forced to choose between sexual and national affiliations” (158). Using Driskill’s doubleweave metaphor, Two-Spirit people in Indigenous communities often have to choose between identifying with their Indigenous culture or their Two-Spirit identity; these aspects of themselves often cannot be easily woven together. Tatonetti’s analysis of the film *Big Eden* suggests that the film’s Indigenous characters perpetuate the “Vanishing Indian” myth as there are no references to contemporary Indigenous nations. Although focused on Two-Spirit characters, the film erases specific tribal identities, instead representing only Berkhofer’s image of “the white man’s Indian” (160). Tatonetti explains, “Berkhofer’s thesis that such simplistic and subsequently damaging narratives reflect more about the whites who create them than they do about Indian people still holds true in the twenty-first century” (160). This misrepresentation is common throughout American society and mainstream culture and was historically used to control and assert dominance over Indigenous people and their tribal lands.

According to Tatonetti, characters in the film *Big Eden* exist as a stereotyped Indigenous Other. Like the “Vanishing Indian”, these Othered characters become commodified, meant “to be eroticized and consumed by members of the dominant culture” (160). Tatonetti connects the trope of the “Vanishing Indian” with that of the “tragic queer”. She explains that the film *Johnny Greyeyes* not only highlights Indigenous suicide rates and the brutality of prison systems, it also follows “the convenient literary trope of the tragic queer in which, like the vanishing Indian who falls away in the face of manifest destiny, the queer is fated to either a literal or a symbolic death” (167). This trope has commonly been used by writers who wish to acknowledge sex and gender diversity without needing to fully address how queerness challenges the heteropatriarchy. The death of an LGBTQ character allows their partner to be “freed” from their queer identity. While Tatonetti discusses the deaths of fictional characters, and how those deaths translate to heteropatriarchal values, she also examines contemporary violence against Indigenous women. Indigenous women have historically endured trauma by having their bodies regulated and policed by non-Indigenous men, such as through boarding schools and forced sterilization. According to Tatonetti, “This ongoing violence against Indigenous women is a direct and enduring legacy of settler colonialism; cycles of physical and psychological abuse, whether perpetrated by whites directly or by Native people themselves as a result of their ongoing relationship to colonization, can be traced to ideologies of conquest that subjugate, degrade, and kill Indigenous people” (164). Indigenous women in the United States and Canada “are incarcerated at rates much higher than their percentage of the general population” and endure violence from Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous men (164).

Chris Finley, in “Decolonizing the Queer Native Body (and Recovering the Native Bull-Dyke)”, examines the history of this violence against Indigenous women. Like Driskill and

Justice, Finley notes the general absence of queer theories within Indigenous studies and expresses hope that these fields will combine in the future. He states, “Throughout the imposition of colonialism in the United States, one of the methods Native communities have used to survive is adapting silence around sexuality. The silencing of sexuality in Native studies and Native communities especially applies to queer sexuality” (32). Despite this silence in Indigenous communities, sexual violence is prevalent on tribal lands. Non-Indigenous men are often the perpetrators due to flaws in the legal system and will often not be held accountable for their crimes. While bell hooks wrote about African American men and women, her argument from *Ain’t I a Woman* holds true for Indigenous women as well: “White women and men justified the sexual exploitation of enslaved black women by arguing that they were the initiators of sexual relationships with men. From such thinking emerged the stereotype of black women as sexual savages, and in sexist terms a sexual savage, a non-human, an animal cannot be raped” (hooks 52). African American women were historically viewed as “sexual savages” and targeted by white male rapists. Indigenous women are similarly targets of assault by white men because of their over-sexualization in popular images like Disney’s Pocahontas as well as their connection with the natural environment.

While non-Indigenous men often target Indigenous women on tribal lands, Indigenous men also assault Indigenous women because of the image prescribed on them by the heteropatriarchy. According to Paula Gunn Allen, in “Angry Women are Building: Issues and Struggles Facing American Indian Women Today”, the image of the “bloodthirsty savage” is partly responsible for crimes against women:

Often it is said that the increase of violence against women is a result of various sociological factors such as oppression, racism, poverty, hopelessness, emasculation of

men and loss of male self-esteem as their own place within traditional society has been systematically destroyed by increasing urbanization, industrialization and institutionalization, but seldom do we notice that for the past forty to fifty years, American popular media have depicted American Indian men as bloodthirsty savages devoted to treating women cruelly (Allen 43).

Throughout history Indigenous men have been stereotyped as the “bloodthirsty savage”, the “noble savage” and the “vanishing Indian”, all of which depict men as violent, tragic, or succumbing to a vanishing fate. Finley explains that heteropatriarchy, although not natural to many Indigenous communities, has become “internalized and institutionalized as if it were traditional. Heteropatriarchal practices in many Native communities are written into tribal law and tradition” (34). The colonial narrative of the dominant heteropatriarchy suggests that the bodies of Indigenous women must be controlled, as they have historically been. Through the control of this narrative, Indigenous women must not reproduce with Indigenous men, in order to fulfill the “Vanishing Indian” myth. The bodies of Indigenous men must then “be queered as sexually unavailable object choices for Native women” (36). Finley suggests that because of this narrative, “Native men are seen as sterile members of a dying race that needs a ‘genetically superior’ white race to save it from the ‘unavoidable’ extinction” (36). In this colonial narrative both Indigenous men and women are meant to “vanish” through the policing of their bodies and sexualities. Two-Spirit critiques challenge queer studies to understand this violence against Indigenous people. An inclusion of Two-Spirit critiques in Indigenous studies would similarly challenge Indigenous communities to stop the silencing of sexuality and to be supportive of Two-Spirit identities.

Home and Transformation in Jonny Appleseed

Joshua Whitehead's protagonist Jonny Appleseed, a "self-ordained Injun glitter princess" and Two-Spirit Oji-Cree, narrates his coming of age and self-discovery through family stories, personal dreams, and memories (79). Throughout his childhood and teenage years he felt shame towards his body and sexuality and experienced acts of violence because of his femininity. His kokum, or grandmother, is the first to recognize and fully accept him as Two-Spirit, stating "You's napewiskwewishot, m'boy, Two-Spirit" before Jonny even understood that identity himself (48). He reflects on this memory and remembers that he had wanted to ask her "what she meant by Two-Spirit", indicating that this was the first time he had heard the term and was unaware that it matched his own identity. Kokum promised to tell Jonny a story about who he is, and years later when he leaves the reservation she promises to share more stories about his identity when he returns, but he does not make it back in time to hear these stories before her death. Jonny regrets not being able to listen to the stories his kokum wanted to share, and without the valuable knowledge his kokum could have imparted through these stories, he is left to discover himself alone. The search for identity and a feeling of home pervades Jonny's memories; by the end of Whitehead's novel, he discovers both. I argue that his identity and his idea of home are fluid, mobile, and adaptable and are informed by his family, his past traumas, and his geographical place in the world.

Jonny's kokum taught him what it means to be Two-Spirit as well as traditional practices like the gendered role of rubbing the breath out of a person's belly after their death. Jonny remembers, "My kokum taught me long ago when my aunty died, that we need to rub the breath out of the belly of the dead" (109). Kokum explained to Jonny, "That's what us women do – we help them on their way back home" (109). When Kokum dies in a room alone with Jonny, he

assumes this feminine role, showing that he identifies with the female members of his family and that his kokum was accepting of him performing this spiritual act. While his kokum immediately understood and recognized the power that came with Jonny's Two-Spirit identity, Jonny's mother also accepted his sexual and gender orientations but warned him that he did not belong on the Peguis reservation: "you girl and you boy and that's fine with me, but what's not fine is you selling yourself short. You gotta leave if you wanna survive" (63). The matriarchs of Jonny's family realize that he needs to experience life off the reservation so he can fully explore his identity and avoid the abuse of community members who do not agree with his orientations.

As Jonny recounts his memories, he reflects on the shame he often felt about his body and being Two-Spirit. Thinking of one early memory, he notes, "I still always felt a wave of shame rush through my body whenever someone might associate me with being Two-Spirit" (131). He similarly told Roger, his stepfather, "of the shame [he] felt when [he] was naked" (175). Daniel Heath Justice explains this feeling of shame and lack of belonging that many Indigenous and queer peoples experience: "Queer and Indigenous alike, we have all been taught that we don't belong – not only among the powerful, but among one another. One of the greatest tragedies of colonization, transphobia, and homophobia is a belief that we're unworthy of pleasure, absent of beauty, undeserving or incapable of love" (107). Jonny received love from the women in his family, but the community's men wanted him to conform to their ideal notions of manhood, which resulted in Jonny feeling conflicted and experiencing a collision of his masculine and feminine spirits instead of a cohesion. He explains this feeling by stating,

I'm expected to chop wood for ceremonies rather than knead frybread, learn how to hunt with my uncles rather than knit with my aunties, perform the Fancy Feather dance when I really want to do the Jingle Dress dance. 'Man up' was the mantra of my childhood and

my teenage years, because the dick between my legs wasn't enough proof of ownership of NDN manhood. There are a million parts of me that don't add up, a million parts of me that signal immodesty. When I think of masculinity, I think of femininity (79).

Jonny's lover Tias endures similar reactions from his male family members who react negatively to his queer identity, although "he always says he isn't gay" (33). Julia Siepak explains that "Tias's father refers to the stereotypes of masculinity that emphasize stamina, toughness, and roughness, excluding expressions of emotionality and experimentation with one's body. The tiniest shred of effeminacy in a male body is punishable" (501). Both Jonny and Tias are unable to fully realize or perform their queer identities while living with family, needing to suppress their femininity to avoid punishment by male family and community members.

By the time Jonny finally returns to the reservation for Roger's funeral, towards the novel's end, he no longer feels shame about his body or his job as a sex worker. He states, "I may not have the best body but I do have *a* body – and it's a body that deserves to be touched and loved and owned" (154). Jonny realizes that the trauma of his past can be healed and transformed into something positive. After a school dance where Jonny danced with a boy for the first time, Roger abused him, shouting "'Boys don't' – *smack* – 'dance with' – *smack* – 'boys' – *smack*" (173). Although hurt, emotionally and physically, from Roger's assault, Jonny turns his pain into pleasure: "Not only was that my first encounter with Roger's mean streak, but it was also the awakening of my queer body. The trickle of blood, the splitting of skin, the pain on my ass cheeks, the full-body pleasure of an ejaculation – I felt as new as those rare trees split wide open after a storm, all tender and wondrously ravaged" (174). Lydia Cooper notes that Whitehead's novel "unflinchingly depicts violence against non-masculine bodies as a particular vulnerability of Indigenous experience, while simultaneously refusing to reify trauma in that

body” (498). Despite the punishment he received for displaying his queerness in a public setting, Jonny discovers the pleasure of masturbation and begins the process of identifying as queer. Cooper explains that a “dual awakening happens in his body in a way that names the trauma but without erasing the possibility of pleasure” (498). Jonny claims that “that’s sometimes the strangest thing about pain, the sites of trauma, when dressed after the gash, can become sites of pleasure” (179). Similar to Deer Woman, Jonny demonstrates resilience and survivance by healing himself and transforming his trauma. The painful experiences of his past strengthen his own identity and help him recognize his own power to heal and become a source of good medicine for others. Cooper argues that “Resilience is not an erasure of trauma; it is instead living and thriving, fierce and relentless, in the ongoing presence of colonial violence. It makes sense, then, that fluidity – the merge of aspects of being, material and immaterial – represents an important attribute of survivance” (498). Throughout Jonny’s memories, he often describes acts of resilience and transformation that have shaped his identity in the real world as well as the identity in his dreams and in the digital realm.

In Jonny’s job as an online sex worker, clients pay him to play specific roles, to act and become the person they want him to be. Jonny claims that he “can inhabit so many personas” and has “so much power when [he] transform[s]” (26). With trickster-like qualities of transformation, Jonny takes pride in his ability to adapt to his clients’ wishes and to change his appearance and persona. Rather than feeling shame and the negative emotions of his past abuse, Jonny embraces both his masculine and feminine spirits. When thinking about how he presented himself as feminine early on in his relationship with Tias, referring to himself as Lucia, he explains that he is okay with presenting himself as either masculine or feminine to lovers and clients: “I’m fine either way, to be honest. I’m like an Etch-a-Sketch – every cell in my body is yours to define”

(33). According to Cooper, Jonny's survival is "tied to the capacity to create imagined selves, but more importantly, those imagined selves are creating an imagined future – a *version* of Jonny, of Peguis, and of Indigenous experience that is amorphous, adaptable, and answerable to the sovereign citizen alone" (508). Not only does Jonny easily switch between genders, he also displays varying degrees of his Oji-Cree ancestry.

With a light skin tone, Jonny can pass as white, and he uses this privilege (as Auntie referred to Daunis' light skin in *Firekeeper's Daughter*) to his advantage. Some of his clients want Jonny to act out their vision of the stereotypical Indian. For these situations, he explains: "I bought some costumes a few Halloweens ago to help me: Pocasquaw and Chief Wansum Tail. Once I know what kind of body they want, I can make myself over. I can be an Apache NDN who scalps cowboys on the frontier, even though truthfully, I'm Oji-Cree" (25). Siepak argues that "Performing sexuality is here tightly tied to performing ethnicity. The fantasies that white men project on a queer Indigenous body reveal the desire to secure invader masculinity. However, Jonny's conscious decision to perform them shifts the balance of power and allows him to exploit his clients' lust for financial profit" (506). While Jonny sometimes portrays himself as a stereotype for money, he does not always inform his clients or friends that he is Indigenous. He says that whiteness "lets [him] transform into different people on Snapchat because white is the base in every colour" (42). His light skin tone helps him perform alternate identities, like a shapeshifting trickster figure, and easily adapt to the roleplaying situations his job necessitates. According to Jonny, he doesn't sell sex, he sells "fantasy and companionship", and the color of his skin helps him accomplish that transaction(45). Off the reservation, in Winnipeg, Jonny is able to find a sense of community with others who identify as queer, but they hold racist prejudices and Jonny again must hide an aspect of himself: "I played straight on the

rez in order to be NDN and here I played white in order to be queer” (44). Throughout Jonny’s memories, he often struggles with accepting all aspects of his identity because of local prejudices and biases. Jonny’s mother, grandmother, and Tias are the only people in his life who provide him with a sense of belonging, as they understand who he is and do not judge him for being true to himself.

Jonny’s traumas and transformations have played a part in shaping his fluid identity and his concept of home. According to Siepak, Jonny “has to negotiate between two different places of (non)belonging to search for what he might call home” (503). Jonny does not feel as though he truly belongs on the reservation or in the city, and thoughts of home constantly pervade his memories. At the beginning of his story, Jonny explains that “home isn’t a space, it’s a feeling. You have to feel home” (20). He does not necessarily associate home with any particular landscape or natural environment but rather perceives the concept of home as something that he can feel internally within himself: “I’ve found a home in my self” (45). He describes his home as being “full of hope and ghosts”, and when he moves off the reservation he compares his living situation to that of a pigeon who has built its nest, a “home in a dead place” on the ledge of his building (23). He questions, “I wonder if the bird thinks the same of me, if, in its own pigeon-head, it’s saying: what a silly man, making a home on the land of ghosts. We are both two queer bodies moving around in spaces that look less like a home and more like desperate lodgings” (23-24). If home for Jonny is an internal feeling, then this reference of ghosts and death implies that at this point in his life, Jonny has not found a sense of belonging, acceptance, or comfort. Like the pigeon alone in the city, free to travel and take up residence anywhere, Jonny is able to find a temporary home (a place to live) but is not connected to nature or to the land on which he left his family.

Although the city provides Jonny the chance to explore his queer and Two-Spirit identity and to heal from his past abuse, he is not able to find the idea of home he dreams of. The city does not become his home, and the reservation where he grew up also “didn’t feel like a home anymore” (183). I argue that the closest Jonny gets to a feeling of home, before returning to the reservation for Roger’s funeral, is through remembering his kokum’s food. Throughout the novel, references to and stories of food and cooking connect Jonny’s memories with his kokum and his childhood on the reservation. After driving Jonny to Winnipeg, Tias makes him perogies. Jonny says, “They reminded me of home and my dear departed kokum” (184). For Jonny, the feeling of home is always connected to thoughts of Kokum. He also cannot stop buying a particular brand of corn syrup because it reminds him of being in Kokum’s house: “Every time I’m sick, I still take a spoonful – and when my taste buds fizz with that familiar sweetness, it feels like I’m with Kokum again in her too warm home” (139). Jonny finds home in the familiarity of Kokum’s traditions and the good medicines she gave him during his youth. Despite not feeling a strong connection to the land of his family, Jonny’s stories often involve descriptions and metaphors of nature. In initially describing his idea of home, Jonny thinks, “it’s home because the bannock is still browning in the oven and your kokum is still making tea and eating Arrowroot biscuits[...]And, given time, it becomes mobile – you can take those rituals with you, uproot your home as if it were a flower. Yeah, maybe home is like a flower, a sunflower whose big bright head follows the sun” (20). Jonny’s memories and realizations do prove that his home is mobile; his home consists of all his memories and his love for his kokum, which exist internally and move with Jonny. I argue that another scene involving food supports the mobility of home and its impact on Jonny’s identity.

According to Jonny, his mother always made the best rice pudding. He recalls the ingredients, the order in which they were added and the steps required in the mixing process. Jonny thinks, “I also liked to help with the stirring. ‘Constant movement,’ she used to tell me, ‘helps to blend all of the flavours together and thicken the liquid’” (148). While scenes of cooking, and the taste and smell of food, are prominently featured in Jonny’s memories, this scene is symbolic of Jonny’s own movement to find himself. Like the “constant movement” and stirring of the rice is good for the pudding, Jonny himself needs to leave the reservation and pursue a journey of self-discovery in order to understand his identity, his stories, and his scars. Jonny is constantly moving through the world, able to shapeshift into varying personas and transform trauma into pleasure. He compares himself to water, stating that “water was a mentor to me” and “I moved too much like water” (65, 209). The connection Jonny feels to water emphasizes his fluidity, his ability to shape his own identity and the impact the lives of the people he loves, as water shapes the earth, and his adaptability, able to adapt to the needs and roles of any situation. Cooper similarly argues that “water exemplifies fluidity and changeability and so provides an apt metaphor for a child who mediates masculine and feminine, who merges and moves fluidly between identities and sensualities” (499). When Jonny thinks of water, he often compares the water to an absence of gender and sex: “my boy body was genderless in the tub”; “we must have looked like aliens there, no genitals, just flat, sexless bodies” (67, 161). Jonny’s perspective on how water affects the human body, hiding or taking away parts of his identity, illustrates the possibilities Jonny has for becoming whoever he wants to be. Like a trickster or shapeshifter, Jonny can define himself by his own terms and begin new processes of healing and transformation.

Jonny also recalls an encounter with the Little People during his childhood. After seeing shadows in his bedroom at night, Roger tells him stories of the Little People: “it was a blessing to see the mannegishi. They say that only children and medicine people can see them” (166). According to Roger’s grandmother, “you can never get rid of them, [they] follow families around when they move” (167). Like Deer Woman moves with her community, appearing when and where they need her, the Little People of Jonny’s childhood are said to travel with families. Although Jonny makes no mention of seeing them as an adult or of continuing his offerings of jelly beans, based on his family’s traditional stories it is likely that the Little People are still around Jonny as he travels through the world. Whitehead’s novel frequently emphasizes themes of movement and malleability, which strengthen Jonny’s belief that home is a feeling and something mobile. Spirits like the Little People are mobile, Jonny’s personal and familial stories are mobile, and his memories are mobile; he takes these things with him throughout his life, reflecting on them during crucial moments of his life and his journey for discovery. Like the movement of water and the stirring of rice pudding, Jonny’s identity is fluid and constantly transforming; he becomes stronger and more aware of himself over time. His vision of home is also a fluid and mobile concept, as it is dependent on Jonny’s memories of Kokum; he can remember the nostalgia of his childhood and the tastes, scents, sights, and sounds of his kokum’s house at any time to feel a sense of home. I argue that aspects of Jonny’s home are also static as they are grounded in specific places on the land and returning to the reservation is what makes him understand the meaning of home.

When Jonny returns to the reservation for Roger’s funeral, he realizes that he has finally found home again: “I was home now, I felt it in my bones” (203). While Jonny needed to explore himself away from his family’s home, upon returning he is able to recognize that his family, their

stories and their love, is how he defines home. He thinks that leaving home “always hurts”, which suggests that even though Jonny takes those memories and his feeling of home with him as he travels, he is still connected to a specific place. Therefore, I argue that home for Jonny is a feeling, as he believes, but also the geographical location where he grew up. While Jonny finds a sense of home in reliving his memories, home is also the birthplace of those memories; he cannot separate his memories and stories from the land on which they were given to him. Kokum’s grave and her empty house are especially important sites for Jonny’s understanding of home. Jonny’s apartment in Winnipeg and the pigeon’s nest on its ledge were associated with negative feelings about ghosts and death; his home in the city did not bring about feelings of hope but instead reinforced his sense of un-belonging. At the novel’s end, Jonny’s home is again connected with ghosts and deaths, but this time in a positive light representing hope and the continuance of life through remembered stories.

While visiting Kokum’s grave, Jonny is able to strongly feel her presence and he apologizes for never getting the chance to thank her for all the stories she shared with him or for showing her how he has changed: “I’m sorry I never got to show you how I transform” (218). As he walks away from her grave, he notices her ghost in the shadows: “And then I see it in the elongated shadows barreling from the east: a hunched woman holding my hand made from that illusive prism sky. When I look down at my hand, I see only my T-shirt there – a shirt full of dried sweat and blood and phlegm” (218). After this moment of grieving, Jonny realizes that Kokum is still alive and well in his memories; she lives on and will always be with him in the stories and lessons she gave him. At the beginning of the novel, Jonny wonders if his kokum “still remembers how to cook rice pudding” (21). Despite her death, her spirit is still present at her grave, within the landscape of the reservation, and inside Jonny’s mind. Kokum’s house sits

empty, and Jonny describes it as a “big old haunted house planted there in the middle of the rez, windows lined with dust, lights stained that old yellow hue, thin filaments on their last legs” (214). Unlike the “dead place” of his home in the city that contained no memories or community connections, Kokum’s house is full of ghosts and the memories of important events and people. Here references of ghosts and death signify hope and a grounding in community and family values.

After Roger’s funeral, Jonny and his mother take out their photo album. Jonny remembers that his kokum “had a story for every photo” and “there are blank pages” for him and his mom. Since they are still alive, the blank pages represent possibilities, showing that they still have time to create new memories and define their own lives before they become a story within the photo album. As Jonny looks through the photos, he thinks,

I see my family come alive; I see their youth, but I also see them aging and dying and living their lives. It’s overwhelming to think about all the stories that we’ve made, helped to tell, helped to create – our bodies are a library, and our stories are written like braille on the skin. I wouldn’t trade it for the world; I love the noise, the liveliness of voices that are laughing, arguing, bingo-calling, and telling stories in a too-packed home. In fact, I’d say, that’s my world (219).

Jonny’s fluid identity and his home are mobile, capable of adapting and moving through time and space as Jonny develops and transforms. Although he initially believes home is a feeling, I argue that his identity and home are also grounded in ideas of place. Kokum’s grave and empty house are locations where her presence and the hope of continued life is felt most strongly, and Jonny finds comfort in the memories and ghosts of the past. Jonny finds a sense of peace and belonging when he reconnects with Kokum’s spirit upon returning to his family’s home.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation I have advocated for the inclusion of Indigenous literatures within secondary and university classrooms. The four main chapters of this project examined specific genres, mediums, and theories that can be taught in academic settings (autobiography, young adult novels, comics, queer theory); these were chosen because they encourage active student engagement and a recognition and development of personal identity. Nineteenth century Indigenous personal narratives provide a counterstory to romanticized and stereotypical representations of Indigenous identity and history written by non-Indigenous authors. Young adult literature is an accessible genre that can serve as a starting point for students' love of reading and future engagement with other Indigenous literatures. The comics medium, perhaps the medium most closely resembling Indigenous oral storytelling structures, requires a critical reading of multiple modalities, preparing students to become better communicators in our modern, digital world. Queer literatures and Two-Spirit critiques help educators challenge dominant norms and assumptions of whiteness and heteronormativity while providing LGBTQIA2S+ students with representation of their own identities in literature.

In this dissertation, I cited the work and experiences of other scholars and educators, and I provided my own close readings to demonstrate the ways TribalCrit, New Historicism, decolonialism, and queer theory can be used as lenses to understand Indigenous literatures. Themes of land and place, individual and communal identity, and violence against Indigenous women and Two-Spirit peoples were addressed throughout this project, and I argued that the Anishinaabe and Dakota identities of the texts' writers and characters are shaped by their homelands, their ancestors, their communities, and their languages. I also chose these specific texts because each story I explored features prominent activists for their communities: Zitkala-Sa

worked as an activist for Indigenous rights and to sustain her community; Jane Johnston Schoolcraft included the Anishinaabe language in her writings during a time when Indigenous peoples and their languages were meant to “vanish”; Daunis Firekeeper remains loyal to her community while using her own traditional knowledges to help protect them from drugs; Deer Woman and the Water Walkers become heroes as they resist patriarchy and colonization; Jonny Appleseed finds himself and his home through his family’s stories and his own mobility and transformations.

Each chapter of this project explored multiple genres and mediums to provide educators with numerous ideas and options for teaching Indigenous literatures. I encourage teachers to include in their curriculums texts that are relevant for young people in our post-2020 society. The following pages of this conclusion provide further teaching ideas that other educators can utilize and model for their own teaching purposes. The suggestions I provide are specifically catered to Indigenous literature university courses but can be changed and adapted to fit with any other English class or academic field. My suggestions can be further adapted to reference specific Indigenous communities; rather than the Dakota and Anishinaabe literatures I examined because of my own location in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, educators in Oklahoma could consider literature from the Choctaw nation, for example. These activities can also be switched or used together to provide students options and allow them to choose the activity that best fits their personal learning needs. This project acts as a starting point to help educators teach more Indigenous literatures and to teach them respectfully.

Nineteenth-Century Personal Narratives (Zitkala-Sa, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft)

For teaching Indigenous nineteenth-century personal narratives, I suggest an activity that asks students to recite a chosen poem, song, or prose piece and analyze its context in a written essay. This type of activity helps students recognize a counterstory and understand what makes it a counterstory. Students may choose to compare texts written during the same period by Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers. This comparison would prompt discussions and questions about authenticity, accuracy, and perspectives of historical events. Students might also encounter Indigenous languages in this unit, and they might choose to work on translation or pronunciation activities along with their recitations. Teachers could choose to focus on empathy during this unit, using Mirra's theory of critical civic empathy to foster respectful discussions and understandings of the writers' historical, social, and cultural contexts.

Young Adult Literature (Angeline Boulley's Firekeeper's Daughter)

After reading a young adult novel with Indigenous languages included, I suggest students demonstrate knowledge of that Indigenous language. An activity asking students to find and translate Indigenous words used in a text will help them understand how Indigenous languages differ from English and what they add to the meaning of the story. Students can be asked to consider why the author chose to write certain words or phrases in their own language. They might also be asked to research language revitalization efforts of nations in their region.

Comics (Elizabeth LaPensée)

Like many of the scholars and fellow educators I cited throughout this dissertation, I encourage students to design their own comic after reading one. McCloud's text can help them understand how to design and format their comic. The goals of this unit are to help students

understand their own authorial choices, to think creatively rather than critically, and to engage in their own creation or production of materials rather than analysis. Designing their own comic will give students a better appreciation for the comics they read, and they will gain a better understanding of storytelling forms and structures.

Queer Literature (Joshua Whitehead's Jonny Appleseed)

After reading queer Indigenous literature that emphasizes personal stories and identity, I would encourage students to tell their own story about identity or a meaningful place. This unit's focus is on respecting the stories, perspectives, and experiences of others, and the students must collaborate to receive their final grade. All students in the class will share their story, carefully listening to each other and participating in respectful discussions. Once everyone has told a story, they will earn a passing grade for the activity. This type of activity not only demonstrates respect but also encourages collaboration over competition.

Grading Policies

Activities that focus on Indigenous literatures and methodologies could stress cooperation over competition. Rather than viewing assignments and activities and a competition of who can create the best piece or earn the highest grade, students can learn to work together in small or large groups by earning the same grade as their groupmates. All students in a group (or even a whole class) must work together to create a comic or share a story; if all members in a group participate in writing and drawing a comic, or if every student in the class tells a story (handing in a written story is acceptable when students are English language learners or cannot speak in large group settings), all students receive a passing grade. These activities would pair well with

pass/fail grades, to stress the concept of cooperation as no group will earn a higher grade than any other group.

A grading contract may be another option that encourages students to work with the instructor to determine their own level of engagement with the class and to set their own goals for the class or a particular unit. Educators may choose to design a contract detailing the basic requirements for each grade based on the course or unit's goals and learning outcomes. Students would then fill out and sign the contract, writing down the grade they hope to achieve, the personal goals and strategies that will help them earn their desired grade, and any challenges they think they might need to overcome along the way.

Including the Five Rs of Indigenous Methodologies

Students learn *respect* by collaborating with each other on activities and through grading policies focused on cooperation (which entails respect) rather than competition. Sharing stories in small or large group settings encourages students to respect other voices in the classrooms as they listen to each other, make connections, ask questions, and reflect on other perspectives.

Students can understand *relevance* by writing exploratory essays or examining contemporary issues within Indigenous communities. Activities like an exploratory essay require research to help the student understand an issue and to see the entire conversation surrounding their topic (language revitalization, water rights, etc.). Students are then able to recognize the specific needs and goals of Indigenous communities and respectfully respond to the current issue.

Students can engage with the principle of *reciprocity* through accurately citing Indigenous voices and by writing a bibliographic essay. Daniel Heath Justice acknowledges that

“a number of Indigenous feminists and other scholars of colour have advocated powerfully for a more mindful and ethical consideration of our citational practices in academia” (241). He does not include a traditional bibliography, reference page, or works cited list in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, choosing instead to cite his sources in an essay. Justice believes this practice is more inclusive and accessible (he includes author last names in bold font for easy reference), and it allows for a conversation to form between sources. Encouraging students to participate in this citational exercise allows them to make stronger connections between their sources, noting relationships amongst them, and to be more aware of accessibility and diversity within academia.

Responsibility can be practiced by helping students relate Indigenous stories to their own lives and recognize personal connections they have to their own culture or community. An activity that encourages responsibility is asking students to visit (or communicate via phone call, video meeting, or handwritten letters if distance is a factor) older family members, such as aunts and uncles or grandparents, or local elders (perhaps at a church, nursing home, or local community event) if students do not have connections to family. Students could share details about their class and their assignment and ask for an exchange of stories. Sharing personal stories with family or local elders can help students understand the responsibilities they have to sustain familial or cultural traditions or experiences.

Educators can encourage *relationality* by helping students make connections and identify similarities and differences between the literatures they are reading and between specific Indigenous communities. Relationality can also be practiced by encouraging students to make connections from the literature to their own lives, reflecting on ways that the reading of Indigenous stories, and the teachings they offer, might benefit the individual student, people they know, or places they have been.

The additional five Rs I proposed in relation to the work of this dissertation can also be practiced in literature courses. Educators and students can find authentic *retellings* of Indigenous history by searching for counternarratives. If a course includes readings of nineteenth-century texts by non-Indigenous writers who included stereotypical depictions of Indigenous peoples, works such as those by Zitkala-Sa and Schoolcraft can be read alongside them to provide a more accurate perspective of Indigenous experiences and identities. The act of *recognition* requires students to reflect on their own learning and conduct analyses of major literary elements such as the plot, characters, and themes. Through this type of analysis, students will better understand the textual elements of the stories and may be able to recognize their own identities in characters or become more aware of the diverse experiences of the people around them.

A rhetorical analysis paper or short activity will help students learn *rhetoric*. This analysis asks students to think more critically about the author, the author's purposes, the intended audience, the authenticity of the story, and the authority of the writer. Following this critical thinking, students can *reflect* on Indigenous methodologies and their own personal assumptions, biases, and potential privileges. Rhetoric and reflection prompt students to engage deeply with a text, and to question or challenge existing norms within society and academic disciplines. The final R I proposed in this project is *region*, which students can engage with by reading Indigenous literatures written by local authors or produced by communities within their own geographical regions. Students might also be encouraged to attend local Indigenous events that are open to the public, which allows them to interact with and participate in Indigenous communities and conversations.

The Power of Stories

The chapters of this dissertation raise the question, “Does reading literature make students better people?” While I cannot answer this question, I do believe that literature has the power to change us and to alter our future. Maybe English classes and the exposure to literature do not make us better humans; writers and teachers are not didactic, all-knowing, or perfect beings. But, returning to Thomas King, all we are is stories. We are a collection of all the stories we have heard and read throughout our lives. Our current knowledge comes from our pasts, our histories, and our families and shapes our understandings of the world around us. Stories become parts of our memories and our dreams and our visions for a better world. Teaching Indigenous literatures helps students recognize how personal, communal, and cultural stories stay with us, adapting and transforming through time and space based on our individual current needs and those of our society. The stories we tell each other matter. As Daniel Heath Justice says, Indigenous literatures matter. Respecting and acknowledging the power of stories, and the moral lessons and teachings contained within them, matters. As a teacher of Indigenous literatures, I hope I can show my students why these stories matter and how they affect our present world.

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