

PEGUIS FIRST NATION READS NATIVE LITERATURE: TOWARD A COMMUNITY BASED THEORY

by

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Abstract

Peguis First Nation Reads Native Literature: Toward A Community Based Theory

My thesis will first discuss the motivation for my project. I will talk about my personal experience with Native literature and its impact on me as a Native person. I discuss what Native scholars and writers have said about why they write and what they hope Native literature can do for Native readers, people and communities. As a Native person carrying out a research project in my home community I struggled with how I could approach this endeavour in a respectful way. I share my thought process and journey throughout this thesis. This is my methodology.

In chapters four and five, I present the responses of community members to Native literature, their thoughts on what Native literature did for them and what it can potentially do for other Native people and communities. I draw out and share my thoughts on what I believe to be is an important point made by each participant and the commonalities I see among participant responses. And while it may be my interpretation of these responses that presents community based theory at the end of this thesis, at the heart of that interpretation lies the words of each participant. All I can do is offer how I see things and what I know.

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I send a deep appreciation to the many Native authors and scholars who worked diligently to clear the way for those after them. Your words will remain with me forever and I am dedicated to sharing them with others.

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Donna – Standing Rock Woman

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Introduction

As a young person growing up in my community, Peguis First Nation, I was not exposed to any Native literature other than Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree*. It was not until I reached university that I came to know how much Native literature was actually out there. It was in university that I also came to know the terms colonization and decolonization. While it is not my intention to deem anyone colonized or decolonized what I can do is share my journey with you. How I came to know these terms and how they have informed my life, my thinking and my experiences. In doing this, I am not saying that this is the experience of *all* Native people, of my community, or the community members who participated in my project. The motivation for my project is based on *my own* experience, but each Native person and community is one in its own. How I may see things as a Native person may not be how another Native person sees it, what I may have experienced may not be what another has experienced, and how I may interpret those experiences may not be how another interprets theirs.

This is difficult for me to admit now because I am now and have been for quite some time a different person, but when I was in my teens I was ashamed to be Native. I tried so hard not to fit the stereotypes of Native people. I was not resisting those stereotypes, nor working to empower myself – I was ashamed. Upon my entrance into university and enrolment in various Native Studies courses, I began to hear the words colonization and decolonization, and it was many years later before I was able to apply them to my own life and experiences. As a young person, I did not know about the history of Native people, thus I did not understand what was at the root of the many socio-economic ills in Native communities.

As I studied more I came to understand that my shame came from internalizing racist notions about Native people. Similar to that of Indigenous activist and scholar, Cherríe Moraga:

“I ha[d] internalized a racism...where the object of oppression [wa]s not only someone outside of my skin, but the someone inside” (473). So where does this type of thinking come from? A huge eye-opener for me was reading *Prison of Grass* by Howard Adams, particularly the chapter titled “The White Ideal and the Colonized Personality” (141). It was like he was writing about me, although I never would have been able to articulate my feelings or where they came from prior to reading his book. My thinking was what Adams referred to as “the white ideal” (144) and what Albert Memmi describes as “Negrophobia in a Negro or anti-Semitism in a Jew” (122). I had internalized a “mythical and degrading portrait [of myself and my culture]...[and I had] accepted and lived with” it (Memmi 87). What I also came to realize, though, is that the self-hate was not my fault, nor was it my parents’ or grandparents’ fault.

I was raised in what I will refer to as a Christian home. I was fearful of my own Ojibway and Cree cultures. My grandmother had once told me that she did not teach any of her eight children to speak Cree in fear of them sounding like a ‘dumb Indian’. Now I am not saying that my family was not proud of who they are because I am sure they were and are, but as Okanagan author Jeannette Armstrong puts it, “imagine at what cost to you psychologically, to acquiesce and attempt to speak, dress, and worship, like your oppressors, simply out of a need to be treated humanely....[and] assimilate so that your children will not suffer what you have” (Armstrong 240). It seems that many times it may have just been *easier* to assimilate so that those you love would not have to endure what you had.

Of course, nowadays, things have changed, Native people are embracing who they are, where they come from, and they are passing this on to their children. Many have come to understand our history and the damage inflicted upon us by colonialism. At the same time, many of our communities and people still suffer from many of the socio-economic ills rooted in

colonization. Native literature helped me to better understand myself and my history. I related to a lot of it and was able to apply it to my own life. It was nice to see Native people and their experiences represented in books written *by* Native people. And as my knowledge about Native literature increased I began to ask myself these questions:

“How would my younger years have been different if I had access to these books growing up?”

“If Native literature did this for me, can it do the same for others?”

“Certainly, Native scholars and those in university are reading Native literature, but are members of our communities reading this literature?”

It is for this reason that I wanted to take Native literature out into the community, to connect more Native people to Native literature and see what their response was; what Native literature did for them and what they felt it could potentially do for others. I know that many people will not have had the same experience as I, for we are all different; we see things differently and we are raised differently. Not every Native person will have experienced or will experience Adams’ white ideal from *Prison of Grass*, Garnet Raven’s encounters with the foster care system from *Keeper’N Me*, or the abuse of the Okimasis brothers in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* because “not all of us grew up confused or alienated from our homes, [cultures], languages, or lands” (LaRocque 220), but the chances are that someone in our lives has or will.

I believe that we need to see ourselves in books. We need to see Native people writing these books. We need to see that we are theorists, writers, scientists, architects and more. Native literature needs to reach the people and the communities that it is largely written about; through the voices of our own people, we need to learn about the forces that shape us, our history, our values, our customs (whether we choose to practice them or not), and our language (National Indian Brotherhood 202). I could sit at my desk and theorize about colonization and

decolonization all day long stating what I think Native literature can do for Native people and communities, but why wouldn't I just ask *them*? And that is what my project aims to do: present a community-based theory on Native literature.

Peguis First Nation

I carried out my project in my home community of Peguis First Nation which is approximately 190 kilometres north of Winnipeg, Manitoba. It has a population of 7200 people of both Ojibway and Cree descent (peguisfirstnation.ca). About half of the population live off-community including myself. Many of my participants live off-community, but at some point have also lived in the community as well; many moved to Winnipeg to pursue education and career goals, but many told me that once they are done (or are older) they will return 'home'. Peguis is the largest First Nation community in the province of Manitoba and is currently realizing a Treaty Land Entitlement Agreement and Surrender Claim with the Crown for the 1907 illegal land surrender (relocation of Peguis peoples) in the area near Selkirk, Manitoba (peguisfirstnation.ca). Its amenities include a Nursery to Gr.12 school, Health and Dental Centre, a hospital, fire hall, RCMP detachment, a shopping mall, hardware store, senior centre, community library, post office, bank, many restaurants, treatment centre and community hall. I decided to do my project with Peguis because it is my home community, people know me there, and despite its many amenities there still exist various socio-economic and relationship-building challenges. Of course, things like this take time to change but my hope is to help in ways that I know how, and even if there is small change, that is plenty.

Terms

As for the terms that I use in my paper to identify Native people, I will use for the most part Native person/people. Many Native people in Canada use the term Aboriginal, some use

Indigenous, and some still use the term 'Indian'. Where the term 'Indian' is used in my project, I will be placing it in quotations to demonstrate that it is not a term I use in reference to myself or other Native people, but in an effort to write in the voice of participants; I will be placing it where it is used. I am still the most comfortable with the term Native and so I will be using it more than other identifiers given that I am a student of what is still called the Native Studies Department.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

I had originally planned to do my thesis on how Native literature can contribute to the process of decolonization for Native people, but when I thought more about the terms colonization and decolonization I recalled that I had not even heard those terms until I was probably in my second year of university, and it was not until many years later that I was able to apply those terms to my own life and experiences. My journey towards decolonizing myself (which is ongoing) is different from others, but having said that, many people just do not use the terms colonization and decolonization in everyday language; these terms, for the most part, in my experience, are used in academia. That is not to say people outside of academia cannot come to know and understand these terms, or that I do not value what these terms mean or the hard work scholars have put into bringing these concepts to life, or that I am minimizing the colonial experience as it pertains to Native people. I think people certainly understand that there are issues in our communities and I think they get that there is a lot to be done, but many do not use these terms to describe what has happened to Native people or what has to happen. And when all is said and done not everyone will attend university and learn these terms; if and when some do, not all will take Native Studies. With that, I decided to take a small step away from these terms, not because I do not view them as important or important for everyone to learn, but because I was not comfortable using these terms at a micro level – other than in my own experience.

However, because these terms have become important points of reference in my work as a graduate student I should clarify my understanding of colonization and the decolonization processes. Colonialism is the European encroachment and expropriation of resources of

Indigenous lands (Smith 42). It is the establishment of a system of ideas, rules, and order that secured European hegemony, that is, European power (Smith 42). The subjugation, colonization, of Indigenous peoples and their lands was justified by dehumanizing them through historical misrepresentation (LaRocque 43). Native (Indigenous) people were portrayed as pagans, heathens and savages who worshipped the land, animals, and earth, and who roamed rather than inhabited; thus, we were lucky the European came along to *save* us (Jennings 15). This ideology has continued over time affecting the way we, and others, see ourselves and our cultures. It has become a “taken for granted” ideology meaning that it is so entrenched in our minds (Native and non-Native) that many of us are not even conscious that it is there (Smith 44). This ideology positioned European knowledge, customs, religions, and values at the dominant centre and everything Indigenous to the side (Smith 53-54). In this way, “a whole past [wa]s ‘created’ and...given the authority of truth” (Awatere qtd. in Smith 67). Consequently, this is the history that has been entrenched into the minds of society including Native people.

These images of Native people have been internalized by both the colonized and the colonizer. Many times in the case of the colonized, these images of ourselves can manifest into the socio-economic issues and social ills we see in our communities. That is not to say *all* colonized peoples are unaware of how we have been impacted for many Native people are making great strides toward sovereignty – whether it be through artistic expression and resistance, community and relationship building, or cultural and language revitalization – and they are passing this on to their children. Hence, we *are* purging ourselves of these false images and history. This is where I come to discuss what I mean by *decolonization*.

Decolonization is not an overnight process for it involves the purging of over five hundred years of colonialism. It is a “long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural,

linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power” (Smith 98). This does not necessarily mean that the only way to decolonize is to get a Native Prime-Minister, dance powwow, learn a few Cree words, or even be able to define the terms colonization and decolonization. There is so much to decolonization (and colonization) that it is overwhelming, a huge project, but a *part* of decolonization is “*coming to know the past*” (Smith 34). And this is what Native literature can present to Native people and communities because a lot of it shows how colonialism has impacted us spiritually, physically and psychologically (Smith 149). That is not to say that Native literature cannot do the same for non-Native people because certainly “our discussion of issues and ideas...are universally applicable;” however, my focus for now is on Native people (LaRocque xviii).

The representation of Indigenous (Native) peoples and the way they see themselves and their reality is the “project of indigenous artists, writers, poets, film makers, and others who attempt to express an indigenous spirit, experience or world view” (Smith 151). More often than not, Native readers will see themselves, their communities, their experiences (or the experiences of someone they know) in Native literature; they can relate to the characters, the real people and the situations within these texts. Native writers of all ages, backgrounds and nations are writing. When asked why they write, here is what Native writers have said:

My words are meant as empowerment to you...my people. –Jeannette Armstrong, Okanagan. (241)

Being strangers in our own land is a sad story, but, if we can speak, we may turn this story around. That is why I write today: Let us have our say. –Rita Joe, Mi’kmaq (14)

As I grew older, I realized that nobody was writing about my life....I wanted to show the troubles, humour, tragedy, and also the resiliency of the Dene people like the Dogrib people. -Richard Van Camp, Dogrib (298)

I hope they [Native people] get something out of it...that will make me happy..[e]specially the unwritten communication between the lines. –Ruby Slipperjack, Anishinabe (qtd.in Lutz 213).

In the writing of these stories I tried very hard to draw the reader into the centre of the story....as a listener/reader, you become the trickster, the architect of social transformation at whatever level you choose. –Lee Maracle, Salish (13)

Great stories challenge the status quo...Storytellers hold the core of a counter memory and offer another political possibility. Neal McLeod, Cree (99-100)

I wanted to give my grandchildren what I felt...I wanted give it to them from our perspective, as truthfully as I could. –Jeannette Armstrong, Okanagan (qtd.in Lutz 14-15).

That's how you change the world, really. One story, one voice at a time. -Richard Wagamese, Ojibway (203).

Thus, Native literature can be a “counter discourse” and a “corrective lens” for which Native people can finally see themselves through the eyes of other Native people (LaRocque 4). Maori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith tells us how important writing is for Indigenous peoples: “[We] want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes....[we have] a very powerful need to give testimony to and restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world [that has been] fragmented” (Smith 28). It is literature that “counter[s] the dominant society’s image of Indigenous peoples” and “express[es]...[our] spirit, experience or

world view” (Smith 151). It is writing in which Native people can finally see themselves, their experiences and communities represented through new eyes.

Before I continue I should state here that it is not my intention to homogenize Native authors (or the voices and responses of project participants) nor their individual writing style. Each author (like that of any other writer) has their own purpose, own aesthetic, own experiences and many simply “write for the love of words” (LaRocque 168). However, I do wish to present Native literature to members of my community and see what their response to it is.

I have presented what some Native writers have said about *why* they write, what they *hope* Native people will get out of their writing, and I will definitely look at whether these correspond to reader responses received in this project, but what theories have been written in Indigenous academic circles regarding what Native literature can do for Native people and Native communities?

Metis scholar, Jo-Ann Episknew believes that Native (Indigenous) writing has the power to “restore a spirit” to Native people and their cultures (28). She contends that Indigenous writing has the ability to “inspir[e] social regeneration” (Episknew 75) among Native readers because “the narrative becomes real to them” (76) and they are induced “to examine their own stories” (74). This has been true in my experience. In his book titled, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community*, Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver discusses his ideas on this very thing. He states that Native literature enables “the Indian reader [to] becom[e] the insider, privileged, and empowered” (Weaver 36) and “prepares the ground for recovery, and even re-creation, of Indian identity and culture” (44). In the same vein, Daniel Heath Justice writes that Native literature and writing can “speak to the living realities of struggle and possibility among Indigenous peoples” (5) and “rene[w]...kinship ties and

responsibilities” (10). Native readers can identify with the intricacies of characters and community in Native literature; and in Native non-fiction writing many can come to know more about their history and their selves from the perspective of a Native writer. Cree scholar, Neal McLeod writes in his book, *Cree Narrative Memory*: “Words...have transformative power and can help Indigenous people come home” (67). My understanding of McLeod’s words is that by discovering more about themselves and how colonialism has impacted their lives more Native people can begin to understand and restore their identities – this was true in my case. Emma LaRocque, a Cree-Metis scholar and writer shares: “[M]any Native students feel an affinity with various Native characters which leads them to new levels of awareness about their experiences” as Native people (216-217). Now I am not saying that a Native person can read one Native-authored book and have an epiphany about his or her life - well, maybe it could happen – but certainly when a Native person sees their self, their experience or their community represented in a book or text written by another Native person there may be feelings of solidarity and empowerment albeit these may not be the words in which these feelings are articulated.

When Molly Blyth brought Native literature into a Native community she says that the students there “underwent a transformation from isolated and fearful individuals into active participants” when they “heard their own voices speaking of their own experiences” in Native-authored literature (110). The students “laughed with delight at such recognition and spoke of empowerment” (Blyth 110). It is this type of “communal identification” (Blaeser 54) with Native literature I wish to give voice to – a Native community’s interpretation and response to Native literature – for, as I mentioned before, we can theorize all day long about what Native literature can do for us as Native people and for our communities, but we need to start taking it to the communities and asking them what *they* think.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

In my project, I am seeking out how Native readers, namely those in my community, respond to Native literature. I am by no means trying to *psychoanalyze* or *save* anyone. I simply hope to present my work and the words of my fellow community members, my peers, in a respectful way. I have tried to “thin[k] critically about [my] writing” of this thesis and carrying out this project (Smith 36). I understand that “writing can be dangerous [for Native people] because sometimes we [may] reveal ourselves in ways which get misappropriated and used against us,” and as a result we may end up further perpetuating stereotypes and vast generalizations (Smith 36). At the same time, it is important for Native writers and scholars to expect critiques of their work by Native (and non-Native scholars).

As I embarked on my project it was also very important for me not to be misunderstood by my community. I did not want them to think that I viewed myself as *superior* because I am *educated* (western education). I understand that my education does not “put [me] in a position of authority or professorship” over anyone (Lewis qtd.in Wilson 110). Being from Peguis, I understand “the rules of how to do things [in my community because I am]...someone who [wa]s raised in and is used to the system” there (Wilson 105). Community work and research “methods have to mesh with the community and serve the community[,] It must not destroy or in some way negatively implicate or compromise...[anyone’s] personal integrity...you [must] contextualize yourself in your community, with your family, with your people...[and this] demands integrity” (Cora qtd.in Wilson 102). I had to position myself carefully and respectfully in a way that demonstrates that I, too, am still learning.

This also holds true in my handling of community responses. In providing my thoughts

on participant responses “[I will] not [be] professing that this is the way it is...[I will merely be]...professing [my] relationship to that which [I am] seeing” (Lewis qtd.in Wilson 110). I make no claims to “certain truths, only interpretations of truths” meaning that I am cognizant these are only *my* thoughts on these responses, as *I* see them (Moosa-Mitha 61). Margaret Kovach refers to this type of research as “self location” in that “[s]haring stories and finding commonalities assists in making sense of a particular phenomenon,” but at the same time I must locate myself and my thoughts on participant responses so that I “qualify [this] knowledge as personal reflection from [my]...own life experience...[and education to demonstrate that I] recognize other truths” (Kovach 111). My word is not the last word.

What is more, I did not give participants any rigid ‘guidelines’ to follow; they were free to interpret and “discover ideas for themselves in their own context” (Wilson 118) and I remained flexible in receiving those responses, “continually adapt[ing]” (Nakasuk 5) my research methods and approach to meet the needs of participants so that they were comfortable and able to speak freely. I approached my project as “sharing knowledge” with community members; they have entrusted and shared with me their stories, thoughts and ideas on what they have read and on Native literature in general (Smith 14). I, too, have learned from them. All participants will be given the opportunity to review my thesis and how their responses were presented within it. They will be able to share with me whether they feel their thoughts and ideas were presented in a respectful way.

My original motivation for this project was to ‘quite simply’ connect more Native people and communities to Native literature because I believe that there is a lack of exposure to these works in Native communities. It seems most engagement with Native literature occurs among what I will refer to as *western educated* Native people. I say *western* education because I believe

that a person can be *educated* in many ways and in many places.

Methods

My project was carried out between the dates of May 13th, 2011 and July 27th, 2011. I managed to engage a total of thirty-one participants; however, the final number of submitted responses was twenty-one. Ten participants did not submit responses. What is more as a fellow community member of Peguis, I decided not to use the last names of those participants who agreed to using their full names in my project. Given the ease of locating people using social media and technology, I wanted to protect the privacy of *all* participants.

My hope was to engage community members of all age groups (youth, adults, elders); of all *western* literacy levels, religious beliefs, and educational and employment backgrounds. However, it proved much harder to engage participants than I had originally thought; on the other hand, those willing to participate in my project were also willing to connect me with others that they thought would help me too. Of course, engaging participants was not without its trials and tribulations, but I was open to changing my methods of engagement and communication according to individual needs and preferences especially since my project occurred during a busy time for many people – the summer; it is a time bursting with buzz for Peguis. It is when we celebrate our annual Treaty Days and this year was particularly special because we were hosts of the Manitoba Indigenous Summer Games 2011.

Peguis Library was one of my first contacts when I set out on my project. The librarian offered to be a participant in my project and assisted me in engaging participants by placing my project poster at the library. Additionally, the staff at the Peguis School Board in their knowledge of my project offered to distribute a mass email to all of their post-secondary students calling for interested participants. Unfortunately, this produced only a handful of responses. Next, I simply

approached community members who I knew would “put [me] into relationship through mutual friends” and family (Wilson 84). Indigenous researcher and scholar, Margaret Kovach, terms this as “a pre-existing and ongoing relationship with participants” in that I already knew many of them or their family and friends (51). This was the most effective way of engaging participants because many, it seems, simply just wanted to help me. I engaged thirty-one participants for my project, but in the end twenty-one submitted completed responses.

Readings Selection

The first method I used to obtain participant feedback on Native literature was to have them read entire works by a Native author; thereafter they would share with me their thoughts, views and interpretations. For my project, it was important to me to have some participants read an entire book. I believed an in-depth analysis of a book by community members along with responses to more condensed versions of Native literature (a newsletter – my second method of obtaining community feedback which I will discuss next) would give my project a more balanced approach. Using entire texts and more condensed versions of texts caters to various community interests in that those who enjoy reading may read an entire book, and those who may not enjoy reading as much have more condensed, on-the-go versions of Native literature. I believed that having options for participants could also result in higher engagement.

For community participant responses to Native literature, I gathered a list of titles and provided participants with the list. They then chose which book they wanted to read based on their own interest (poetry, novel, short story, ‘legend’, comedy, drama, fiction, non-fiction). My criterion for choosing which texts to include was based primarily on offering a wide range of representation in Native authors and genres so that I could cater to participant interests and demonstrate the diversity and creativity among Native writers and literature. I wanted not only

to satisfy their interests but to reduce the likelihood that they would lose interest in their reading.

Along with the title and author of each text, I shared with potential participants the author's nation (Cree, Anishinabe, Métis), the year in which the text was written, and whether it was a non-fiction (autobiography, historical event), fiction, poetry, graphic novel, or children's book. In my personal experience with Native literature I had enjoyed and felt connected to both fiction and non-fiction texts, so I chose to use both in this project.

When writing fiction, Native writers can create stories that contain within them traces of real history and experiences, and at the same time create fascinating, colourful characters. African American writer, Pauline Hopkins, contends that writing fictional histories allows writers to create characters and experiences without the external constraints of 'getting historical facts straight' while at the same time linking those characters and their experiences to that which was experienced by their ancestors (128). Similarly, Native authors can conjure up characters and experiences that convey realities of Native people and communities; this, in turn, can incite empathy from Native readers who relate to them. It is for these reasons that I wanted to include fictional writing in my project.

As I tried to decide *which* fiction titles to include in my project, I thought again about which ones impacted me the most as a Native person. The final list of fictional writings for my project included: *Weesquachak* by Ruby Slipperjack (Anishinabe), *7 Generation Series* (graphic novels) including *Stone*, *Scars*, *The Pact* and *Ends/Begins* by David Robertson, *Shi-Shi-Etko* and *Shin-Chi's Canoe* by Nicola Campbell (Salish/Metis), *A Man Called Raven* by Richard Van Camp (Dogrib), and Thomas King's *Coyote Columbus Story*. I also included Maria Campbells's short story "Jacob" from her collection of stories in *The Road Allowance People*, but unfortunately I was unable to obtain a participant review of this text.

When I read *Weesquachak* I was able to relate to the sense of community in the novel. Slipperjack's construction of dramatic, on and off again relationships, jealousy (people assuming that another person thinks he or she is 'better' than them), and the distance many community members feel from their Native culture paralleled what I have witnessed in my own community. It is important for me to be able to relate to characters, their experiences, and those little community intricacies that make me laugh out loud when I recognize them; this is what I look for when I read a book and what I looked for when I was deciding on which writings to include in this project.

Although it touches on many important issues that have impacted Native people such as residential schools, loss of culture, alcoholism, suicide and disease epidemics – all of which are a result of colonization – I was initially drawn to David Robertson's graphic novel series *7 Generations* because of its genre. Robertson creatively uses an innovative, contemporary way of conveying the historical and current issues that have affected, and continue to affect, Native people today. The main character in this graphic novel series, Edwin, is detached from his culture, his language and the history of his people; he does not understand the issues in his life until he comes to know his past. It is only then that Edwin is able to reconcile within himself and his past, and move on to a brighter future. Each short novel provides a condensed version of how disease epidemics, residential schools and other historical events have impacted Native people by loss of culture, alcoholism and suicide.

I chose to include Nicola Campbell's *Shi-Shi-Etko* and *Shin-Chi's Canoe* because I wanted community members to see that Native authors are also writing literature for children. Having said that, I do not feel that these books are exclusively for children; their stories are significant and appropriate for all ages. I loved how Campbell chose to focus on the strength and

resilience of Native people – namely residential school survivors – despite the obstacles faced and how we have managed to find ways for cultures to survive. Frankly, I felt that these two books were beautifully written and wanted community members to share that beauty.

Richard Van Camp's *A Man Called Raven* is also written as children's literature, but again I do not feel this book is limited to a younger audience. While it is important for Native authors to create children's literature for use in schools, homes and daycares so that Native children see themselves and their cultures represented in literature, adults, too, can walk away from these two books with valuable teachings. Van Camp puts a fresh twist on storytelling integrating contemporary life with the stories told to him by elders. What particularly appealed to me as a Native reader of this story was when the young boys were told by the man: "You don't know this, but you were asking for a lot of trouble when you were beating on that raven. Your parents told me you have never gone out on the land. Well, maybe that explains your actions" (Van Camp 10). Even as an adult, I related to the boys and their actions, for I too did not see any purpose in the raven other than as a nuisance, nor had I ever gone out on the land. I learned that contemporary time, despite its many advantages, can also blur our vision and respect for the land and animals.

In *Coyote Columbus Story*, Thomas King uses humour, trickster Coyote, and like Van Camp integrates history with contemporary times in his subversion of the Christopher Columbus tale that 'Indians' and North America were 'discovered' by Europeans. I liked this book mostly for its clever way of showing readers how Native people wrongfully came to be known as 'Indians' – a term I only use when partaking in humorous banter with other Native people.

My first encounter with Native non-fiction writing was Howard Adams's (Métis) *Prison of Grass* and Harold Cardinal's (Cree) *Unjust Society*, both of which I included in my participant

reading list. The chapter titled “The White Ideal and the Colonized Personality” in Howard Adams’s *Prison of Grass*, despite having been published in 1975, taught me a lot about myself and the way I saw myself. I related to his story because I remembered as a seven-year-old kid rubbing baby powder on my skin in hopes of making it ‘white’ like the kids at school (my mom moved us to Winnipeg for one year when she attended university). How on earth does a seven-year-old kid come to do something like this? Adams’ book explained to me that this mentality was “not rational; it [wa]s subconscious” (144). Based on my own experience, I felt this was a noteworthy piece to include in the non-fiction reading list.

As a Native reader, *Unjust Society* revealed to me how the Government of Canada has furtively manoeuvred and controlled many Native leaders, organizations and band councils. It showed me that as Native people and leaders we may *think* we are working for our communities when in fact we may be perpetuating government practices in fostering system dependency. This, I felt, was a good book to include despite its 1969 publication because it exposes preceding tactics used by the government in its effort to control and hinder Native leaders, organizations and band councils from reaching true sovereignty. Unfortunately, though, the person who was to read this text did not submit a response to me.

In choosing Kwakwaka’wakw writer Gord Hill’s *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book*, I wanted to offer participants a read on how Native (Indigenous) people have fought back throughout history. I found Hill’s preface to his book particularly profound:

The purpose of *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book* is to raise the levels of historical understanding...among Indigenous peoples and others. When we know and understand the history of oppression, we will be able to better fight the system it has created....The strength of the comic book is that it uses minimal text with graphic art to tell the story. This format is useful in reaching children, youth,

and adults who have a hard time reading books or lengthy articles. We use many diverse methods of communication – including newsletters, books, videos, music, posters, stickers, paintings, banners, and T-shirts – because no single one will be successful by itself. (6)

Hill's powerful explanation of why he employed the comic book to transmit Indigenous history may also be applied to David Robertson's opting for the graphic novel in his writings. Additionally, Hill's delineation of why he uses various technologies and methods to reach Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) audiences will be important to remember in later discussions on methods of communication for Native people.

I also wanted to include eyewitness and true story accounts in my project reading list. The titles I chose were: *Song of Rita Joe: Autobiography of a Mi'kmaq Poet*; Illa Bussidor's (Dene) *Night Spirits: The Relocation of the Sayisi Dene* which she co-wrote with Üstün Bilgen-Reinart; Anthony Akapark's (Inuit) *Thrasher*; *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne* (a graphic novel) by David Robertson; *Indian School Days* by Basil Johnston (Ojibway); *Fatty Legs* by Margaret Pokiak-Fenton (Inuit) in collaboration with her daughter-in-law, Christy Jordan-Fenton; and Richard Wagamese's (Ojibway) *One Native Life*. After a rise in non-fiction protest literature in the 1970's many Native "authors turned to facts of biography to humanize the much dehumanized 'Indian,'" sharing their stories of survival and resilience (LaRocque xviii). Autobiographical writing can bring readers to examine their own lives. It can reassure them that someone else has experienced the same and was able to share it with others (Episkew 74).

I also included poetry in the reading list as well as one *legend* (as he terms many of his stories) by elder and storyteller, Louis Bird (Omushkego), titled "Morning Star, a Love Story, and the Spread of the Cree Language." Poems included were: "I Lost My Talk" by Rita Joe (Mi'kmaq), "Indian Woman" by Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan), "The Devil's Language" by

Marilyn Dumont (Metis), and “The Red Road – Revisited” by Duncan Mercredi (Cree). I had also added two poems by Ojibway writer, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm that were read by two participants; however, I was unable to reach these participants for their responses.

I chose to include Louis Bird’s transcribed story for its historical importance in contemporary times. I feel it demonstrates just how far back Native stories go and how creative Native people have always been in our ability to tell and share stories. Bird tells his stories orally but in his efforts to demonstrate that Native people have been here since time immemorial and provide the next generation with Omushkego history he chooses to record and transcribe his stories.

I felt that the poetry I used in the reading list speaks to the ordeals, obstacles and stereotypes that many Native people have experienced and have overcome. I was also interested in how individual readers, namely Native readers, would interpret and respond to poetry because I think people in general are not reading as much poetry as they did in earlier years. Reading has certainly taken a hit in this technological era, but poetry even more so.

There were so many titles to choose from in all genres because Native people today are writing everything! We see above what I believe to be a wide representation of Native writers from nations right across Canada. They are participating in scholarly writing, creative (fiction) writing, non-fiction and autobiographical life writing, children’s literature, graphic novels, comic books, oral storytelling (legends) and poetry. I also tried to include writing from different eras to demonstrate just how long Native people have been writing. I wanted to include both female and male writers from all age groups as well as provide participants with a wide range of titles and genres from which to choose. I also had to consider the cost of purchasing books (for many participants got to keep their readings in hopes that they would *pass it on*), limited availability of

books (out of print, shipping times), and their length so that participants would have enough time to complete their reading at their own pace. I do not want to provide too much of my own interpretations of these texts, for it is the voice of participants that I wish to foreground in this project.

Newsletter

My second method of obtaining community feedback on Native literature was a newsletter. In the time period of carrying out my project I was able to distribute two double-sided newsletters. The title of this newsletter is “I heard ya were talkin about meh” (Appendix A). This newsletter contains passages of the larger texts I used in community book readings. This seemingly funny title is inspired by its common use in my community in situations of disagreement or conflict; it is also evocative of our community vernacular. I thought that the title would amuse and draw the attention of community members peaking their interest and participation in my research. I also felt that this same line had a clever yet creative connection to my studies in Native literature when used in the context of how Native people have been portrayed in history. It suggests that Native people are more aware and responding more and more to those who ‘talk (and write) about them’. We are responding to these falsities by telling and writing our own stories and in so doing confronting and challenging the dominant narrative (Green 86).

I chose a newsletter method because I feel that Native literature rarely reaches rural and remote Native communities, and when it does people rarely have the time or the desire to read because in many cases they are experiencing, firsthand, the socio-economic issues that stem from colonialism. (That is not to say, other Native peoples living in urban centres do not experience these issues nor engage more with Native literature, but given my project is based on my own

experience I have chosen to focus on a rural Native community). Newsletter format also allowed me to condense the works I wished to share and for easier distribution in my community. Furthermore, condensed versions of Native-authored literature addressed the issue of a community member's limited time for reading and perhaps limited interest in reading. It allowed for readers to peruse a variety of Native authors' writing in a short amount of time, and perhaps pique their interest eliciting a desire to know and learn more about a particular author or work. In establishing the *Colored American Magazine*, the "pedagogic role...was considered by staff as a significant aspect of its function; the possibility of being able to 'educate' and expand the horizons of its audience" (Hopkins 127). This also holds true for my wish for a Native literature newsletter in my community: that it may enhance Native readers' knowledge about the wide variety of Native literature out there.

In the first newsletter it was crucial for me, as a community member of Peguis, to position myself and state my intent in initiating the newsletter because community work and research "methods have to mesh with the community and serve the community" (Cora qtd.in Wilson 102). Again, I did not want to be received or misunderstood by the community that I view myself as *superior* because I am *educated* (western education). Accordingly, the introduction I prepared for the newsletter goes as follows:

The idea for this newsletter was born out of a desire to share with my community the great and creative of writing by Native writers especially in a time when the world is consumed by internet, video games & tv. There are more and more Native writers, poets, actors, producers, musicians & artists but more work needs to be done because there is so much untapped talent out there & let's be real...we can never do enough to undo what has been written about us and how we have been portrayed in history books, literature and media. Quoting entire books would be too wordy, so this newsletter gives you short quotes, passages & titles

from Native writers. The following includes fiction, non-fiction (autobiography/history/politics), poetry, short stories, graphic novels, comic books and more!

In the newsletter introduction and in this project overall I wanted to share the work I was doing with “the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood” without any jargon confusing my intentions (Smith 14). This does not mean that I underestimate or undercut anyone’s capacity to understand such language – it is also my personal preference to work in such a way.

The newsletter was distributed – with permission from Chief and Council – to Peguis’s public library, post-secondary sub-office, and band office. Obviously, I chose the library because community members who utilize it generally have an interest in reading and because our librarian there works diligently to provide a vigorous selection of Native literature; thus, I had hoped my newsletter would contribute to her efforts. I chose the local mall because a variety of Native newspapers such as *The Drum* and *Windspeaker* are regularly distributed there; it is a high-traffic waiting area for community members and many partake in reading a magazine or newspaper as they wait. As my project progressed and people shared their comfort levels and preferences in communication based on their schedule and distance constraints, I also decided to utilize social media in order to distribute to and engage with more Peguis community members. I will discuss this further in the next section titled: “Participant Communication.”

Participant Engagement and Communication

I use the term ‘informal’ to describe the ways in which I obtained community responses to Native literature because I did not utilize formal, *western* interview methods. I did not take on the role of a traditional western researcher because that is not how people in my community view me. I did not hold formal interviews with participants. Nor does research “have to be formal”

(Stan qtd.in Wilson 110) because like Linda Tuhiwai Smith I believe that “the quality of the interaction is more important than ticking boxes or answering closed questions” (136). I wanted communication to take place in a “natural situation in which [participants]...[could] sp[ea]k more easily” (Nakasuk 4). That is not to say community members would refuse, or were unable, to participate in ‘formal’ research or that I could not conduct formal research – I simply wished to carry out my project in a way where “scholarship is based on...humanity” (LaRocque 31). It is for this reason I wanted to carry out my research informally, adapting it to the everyday needs and comfort level of participants. And as it turned out due to time, schedule and distance constraints, many of them preferred to share their thoughts and ideas with me via social networking, email and written responses.

As more and more participants proved to have busy schedules, I recognized the need to accommodate them so that they could respond to what they had read on their own time. At this point I decided to put my five questions into a Microsoft Word file in which participants were provided with space after each question to hand-write their response on a hardcopy and submit it to me in person. Many requested that I email the file to them; some typed their response directly into it, printed it off and submitted their hardcopy to me in person; some typed their response into a Word file then returned it to me as an attachment via email; and some typed their responses directly into the body of an email. Two respondents requested that I meet with them and take notes of their responses as they spoke. One sent me a Facebook message to elaborate more on her initial hand-written, hardcopy response. Another participant included additional loose hand-written pages to her hand-written, hardcopy response. All participants, however, did not receive their questions until *after* they had completed their reading. It was important to me that participants do not approach their reading with predetermined thoughts on what to look for.

I wanted them to remain open to everything their reading had to offer them.

As a graduate student in Native Studies, I read many texts by Native and non-Native scholars regarding research in and with Indigenous people and communities. While I read these texts I thought about my own project and wondered whether I had to approach my research utilizing similar methods and methodology as those researchers who write about working with Indigenous communities, not only because I would be working in a Native community but also because I am Native. Certainly, I have used and integrated some of the methods and methodologies shared by these writers, but I believe I would have done so even without reading such texts, particularly in my efforts to foreground the humanity and individuality of participants (LaRocque 31) – nor would I have ever deemed myself an authority over participant responses or in my thoughts on those responses.

However, the difference in my project was that I utilized technological communication resources such as email and the social networking website, Facebook. Does this make my project *less* Native or does it make me *less* Native? I would argue that it does not. As Native people we have a strong oral tradition and history; we have shared and continue to share our stories and epistemologies using orality. As time has passed we have transcended that sharing of stories from the oral to the written (Native literature), and now in a time of computer technology we are acclimatizing yet again (while still holding on to our orality) utilizing these resources – making them our own. I see Native people maintain familial and friendship ties, initiate community-building and information events, and even teach Cree and Ojibway (Saulteaux) words and phrases using social networking websites; and although technology, of course, has its negative side many of our youth today were born into this technological era and we must run with it. We must remind them of and draw on our oral history and traditions, but we must also

use and adapt to what is new in order to communicate our thoughts, views, languages and cultures. In her analysis of the noble savage stereotype regarding Native peoples, Emma LaRocque argues against ossifying ourselves, our cultures and our traditions (137). She argues that in doing so we may further consign ourselves to the stereotype of “primitive” peoples who are “infantile and fixed, or frozen in time or outside time,” thus we run the risk of remaining exactly “where the colonizers would want us... [as]: benign stereotypes” corresponding to only what they have defined *real* ‘Indians’ to be (LaRocque 137). “The underlying assumption and the logical outcome of ossifying Native society is that if Native people change, the Indian will vanish!” (LaRocque 137). That is, we will be made to believe that we no longer exist simply because we do not fit the stoic mould created by non-Native historians in that we utilize new ways of expressing ourselves, our languages and our cultures. I do not know about others, but I still know and feel that I am Native; more specifically, Anishinabe and Cree. While I may be still somewhat distant from my culture and I am still learning my language, and recognize the importance of remembering and maintaining cultural traditions, who says I cannot revitalize and express some of these in new ways? Neal McLeod writes: “The survival of the Cree people depends on the creative powers found within the collective narrative imagination. It is through drawing on the best of our past traditions and the embodiment of contemporary experiences that we can move toward a dynamic future” (100). And I believe Native people, of all nations, are doing this.

As I began my work in engaging community members to participate in my project, I noticed that as I approached many of them in passing asking if they would be willing to participate in my project many of them would say “sure, just email, ‘bbm’ [blackberry message] or Facebook me,” or after many had already submitted their responses, they would forward new

thoughts via text message, email or Facebook. It was simpler and quicker to utilize these technologies in their sharing of knowledge. As more and more participants did this I thought to myself: “Hmmm...I just do not foresee a sharing circle happening here” and I asked myself again whether this made them or me, *less* Native. I once again came to the conclusion of: No, it does not. In fact, this method of sharing could be referred to as a “virtual sharing circle.”¹ Twenty years ago these technologies were not available so one could say that the tools have changed but Indigenous methodology remains the same. We have adapted. I once heard Ojibway writer, scholar and traditional knowledge keeper, Basil Johnston, voice: “I do not need anyone to tell me what being Native is all about, I define that for myself” (Ogamas Festival, October 2010). So, although I practice many of my cultural traditions and ceremonies following cultural protocol, I also define my *Nativeness* for myself, and the participants in my project shared their responses on their own terms.

While many of the protocols, methodologies and methods shared by Indigenous scholars and researchers like Margaret Kovach (Cree and Saulteaux), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori), and Shawn Wilson (Cree) are indeed applicable when working in Native communities and with Native peoples; they are not written in stone. Even Kovach writes: “Not all Indigenous researchers will choose Indigenous research frameworks, nor should that be expected. The tendency to categorize Indigenous people as a homogenous culture, wiping out personal identity, haunts us everywhere” (175). It is good to know and practice Indigenous methods and methodologies in our scholarship and research (for both Native and non-Native scholars and researchers), but it also important to keep an open mind remembering that each community and community member is unique too; accordingly, we must be willing to “continually adapt” our

¹ As a member of my thesis committee, Dr. Warren Cariou used this term in a comment on my thesis.

research methods based on the individual needs of communities and people (Nakasuk 5).

Both younger and older generations are utilizing social networking, cell phones and email to stay in touch. I have an elder friend who uses Skype referring to it as his new ‘smoke signals’. As well, universities and colleges, more and more, are utilizing computer-internet learning technologies that allow them to deliver educational programming to rural and remote communities. Additionally, using technology for communication and knowledge-sharing can reduce expenses, and be more efficient and environmentally-friendly in regards to gas emission and paper use. That is not to say that some participants did not prefer to speak to me in person. There were a few who requested to dialogue in person. The irony in using technology for this particular project, though, is that I actually feel literacy (both Native and non-Native) has been negatively affected by the ease and entertainment of technology; nevertheless, I believe we can exercise agency and use technology as we see fit, “it can be ordered, rearranged or recombined in new and unexpected ways” (McCall 101). Anishinabe scholar and writer, Niigonwedom James Sinclair (who hails from Peguis First Nation as well), opens with a personal story in his article titled, “Tending to Ourselves: Hybridity and Native Literary Criticism;” he describes how once an elder “pulled out a large sheet of insulated blue-padded plastic and placed it on top of the ripped furs” that sat on a ceremonial sweat lodge (239). Niigon was at first surprised by this, believing that things were only to be done the ‘old way’, but he goes on to explain that the experience turned out to be “an essential part of [his] Anishinaabe life, [his] ceremonial existence, and a metaphor for [his] work in Native literary criticism” (239) in that he came to understand Native people *can* change, *can* exercise agency and utilize the tools they see fit when “Tending to Ourselves.”

After distributing the first Native literature newsletter (which I plan to continue beyond

this thesis based on many participant responses indicating that they did not know how much Native literature was out there), I had concerns with paper usage so I contemplated distributing the second newsletter by email and a social networking group. To those who requested it I did distribute the newsletter by email and I created a *private* (only participants who expressed interest in participating in my project) social networking group where I posted the newsletter for group members to read at their convenience. It proved difficult to receive feedback on the newsletter, though. Many people's response to what they thought of the newsletter was a spontaneous comment of "it's good" and "I didn't know there were so many Native authors!" These quick responses did not and do not discourage me from continuing the newsletter.

Native people are just like any other people. We have busy schedules, children, families, work, school, and individual preferences. Many participants preferred to have the questions in hand without me present so that they could write out their answers while alone with their thoughts on their own time, while others wanted me to visit them as well as have the questions in hand (some I hand delivered, others I emailed); and some were just too busy to meet, but were more than willing to participate in my project completing it on their own time. I was also able to discern that some participants were simply more comfortable sharing their personal responses without me being present. This could be explained using Linda Tuhiwai Smith's thoughts on being an "insider" in research (5). As an insider to the community, participants may not want to share – face to face with me – their personal responses; however, this could also mean that they may exclude stories or information they do not want me to know because they are concerned what I will think of them; or that I may reveal their thoughts (in a negative way) to community members. This could further mean that participants may share stories or information with an outsider that they may not share with me because an outsider is someone whom they may never

see again; or, quite simply, participants may be shy or not have the time to meet due to family and work obligations. What I did tell participants, though, was that they need not worry about my bringing up their response in personal conversation, that their responses were for my thesis project and the only way another community member would read them is if they read my thesis. Nevertheless, any research project by any researcher has the probability of participants being selective in what they share and do not share, and forming their responses based on what they think the researcher wants to hear. Either way, my peers have shared some wonderful insights into what they read and I feel very fortunate to be a part of that.

CHAPTER THREE

Respect of Participants

As earlier mentioned my hope in this project was to give voice to community members in regards to Native literature and what they feel it has done for them and can do for other Native people and communities. I see this project as “sharing knowledge” with community members for they are my peers (Smith 14). They have entrusted and shared with me their stories, thoughts and ideas and I have learned from them too (Smith 14). I did not give them rigid ‘guidelines’ to follow in sharing their thoughts and ideas on what they read; I remained flexible, “continually adapt[ing]” (Nakasuk 5) my methods and approach to meet the needs of participants so that they were comfortable and able to speak freely. In looking at their responses, as a graduate student I am obligated to analyse and see patterns but I tried my best to first and foremost “foreground [thei]r humanity” remembering individuality (LaRocque 153) and make no claims to absolute “truths, only interpretations of truths” (Moosa-Mitha 61). This means that I have tried to position myself in a way that demonstrates that these are *my* thoughts on participant responses, as I see them (Moosa-Mitha 61). I “profes[s] [only my] relationship to that which [I am] seeing” in these responses, I am not claiming absolute truths for or about participants, or Native people and communities in general (Lewis qtd. in Wilson 110). I see and understand things in my own way, and I remain cognizant that each person may see and contextualize the world and themselves in a different way. That is to say, I, in my “self-location [wish] to illustrate [that there exist] multiple truths” (Kovach 110). Again, my word is not the last word.

Pastoohowin

Growing up I was always raised to be careful in how I treated or spoke of others; if we did so in a bad way, we were told that it would come back to us in one form or another. Having

been raised in a Christian home we were told that God listened and could see everything that we did, and that even though a person could fool a human, you could not fool God. For me, there was never really a name given for this belief that a bad deed would have repercussions; today many would probably refer to this as ‘karma’. No one ever told me that there was a word for this in the Cree language (my maternal grandmother’s language and the only person close to me who still had their language in tact), but when I met elder and storyteller, Louis Bird, he spoke of this and called it *pastahowin* (as Louis spells it) (115). He described this to mean “commit[ing]...a sin against nature” (115) and breaking ‘Indian’ moral laws (78). Interestingly, as I moved through my studies that year after I met Louis, I came across this word again. Cree scholar, Neal McLeod, shares his understanding of *pâstâhowin* (as Neal spells it) as “when one does something wrong it comes back to him [or her]” (57). He further translates it to mean “retribution” (57). Furthermore, in his book titled *Research is Ceremony*, Cree scholar, Shawn Wilson quotes one of his participants as stating:

Regarding relational accountability [in research], in Cree the words that form the basis of that concept are ‘*otcinawin*’ (breaking of natural law), which means that if a person deliberately mistreats another creature, that action will invoke natural justice. So they will receive similar treatment themselves or their descendents....and the other word is ‘*pastahowin*’ [as Shawn spelled it], which means the breaking of a sacred law. This action also will invoke natural justice and will surely befall the perpetrator. This all means therefore that humans, who are capable of knowing the difference, are accountable for all their actions to all their relations. (107)

When I listened and read all of this I understood it to mean that perhaps I was not that distant from my culture, that although my grandmother did not pass on the Cree language to her children or her grandchildren that she did pass on an epistemology – a belief system, a way she saw and

understood the world. I was comforted in knowing that even though I did not have the language and could not express it in Cree words that the belief system *did* make its way into my generation despite the obstacles faced by my ancestors.

All of this leads me back to how important it is to me to conduct my project and my handling of community responses in a good way and, more importantly, for the readers of this thesis to do the same. It will not only be I who is responsible for the respectful handling of these community responses, but also those who use this thesis as supplemental to their own work. We must *all* be held accountable for the things that we say, do and write. We must *all* be respectful when handling the words and stories of others which is I why I position myself in way that demonstrates my awareness that I hold no absolute truth in my analysis of participant responses. I am merely presenting my thoughts on their individual responses and later drawing from them what I see as commonalities and important remarks in order to put together community-based theory on what Native literature can do for Native people and communities. This will not mean that this is how participants view themselves or other Native people and communities. My word is not the last word. I am not an absolute authority on Native people nor are the participants in this project. All we can do is offer how we see things and what we know.

The Questions I Asked

Coming up with the questions I wanted to ask community members was difficult for me. I did not want to use any gobbledygook or be authoritative when communicating with them. I tried to remain as straightforward as possible in obtaining their responses to what they read and to Native literature in general. I wanted to create questions that were broad and open to participants taking their responses anywhere they wanted to go; however, there were a few participants that did not follow the questions and instead just shared their thoughts and

interpretations about what they read. I wanted them to be free in making “meanin[g] ...of their experiences” in relation to what they read (Moosa-Mitha 61). Many asked if they could keep a journal as they read so that they could jot down how they felt. I told them that they could track their responses in any way they felt comfortable. The questions I offered to participants regarding the readings they completed included:

1. Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? If so, who? If not, why do you think this is?
2. How did what you’ve read make you feel (a connection? Or commonality as a Native person?)
3. Were there any particular passages that impacted you the most? If so, which one/s? Why? How?
4. Do you think what you’ve read, or Native literature overall, can be useful in our community/ies? If so, how? If not, why?
5. Do you have any thoughts on Native literature in general and/or on Native readers? (is there a lack of reading, is our community not exposed to Native literature, or is it just a general disinterest in reading due to technology, etc?) How can we improve this?

CHAPTER FOUR

Participants, Their Responses, and My Thoughts

Alexis is 29 years old and a teacher. She read the children's book titled "Fatty Legs" by Margaret Pokiak-Fenton who is Inuvialuit and her daughter-in-law, Christy Jordan-Fenton (who is non-Inuit). Alexis's experience with Native literature was in her university career as she trained to be a teacher; she graduated about three years ago. In her training, she used a Native-authored text: *Spirit of the White Bison* by Beatrice Mosionier (Metis) and another book she referred to as 'Native literature', *Stone Fox* by John Reynolds Gardiner. Alexis did not recall the authors' names when discussing these two texts. In an informal visit, I hand-recorded Alexis's response to each question (Appendix B):

1. I read *Spirit of the White Bison* and *Stone Fox* to my students and they love them every year, they say they're interesting because there are 'Indians' in them, so I read them every year in my classroom. I've only read them for school, I don't like reading leisurely, but all my studies in university had to have Native content in them because I did my degree at the First Nations University of Saskatchewan.
2. I liked *Fatty Legs*, I liked that it was a true story. I'm debating whether to use it in my classroom, I need to check if it is age appropriate. It will introduce residential schools to my students because many of them have shared with me that their grandparents went to residential school and would like to learn more about it. I loved the message in it. I was brought up in a Christian home and my dad preached about every child has a will and people try to break that will, they curse them by labeling them, labeling is a curse, but the little girl in *Fatty Legs* stood her ground, she kept her language and her culture. I really liked where the child takes a stand and shows her 'will'. My dad told me to never label any of my students as 'bad' because that is like cursing them, that is why I never do that with my students.
3. Alexis said that she felt she answered this question in her previous answer [the part where the child stands her ground].

4. Most definitely [Native literature can be useful in our community/ies]! We can't have the western culture teaching us about our cultures and ourselves, we need our own doing this with Native content so we can find our identities again, our truth, our history. It's impossible to get back to where we were before contact, but it's important to use these things (history, culture) for our kids, our youth.
5. My opinion is maybe people don't know where to look for these things [Native literature] and probably just disinterest [in reading]. I liked that this book had real pictures of her childhood and home. I liked that the author provided definitions of the [Inuvialuit] words and what they were, these were things that I didn't know and learned.

My Thoughts on Alexis's Response:

Alexis uses the teachings in her own life to interpret meaning in what she read. Raised in a Christian home, she takes those teachings given to her by her father and applies them – in her own way – to her work as well. Despite Christianity being a belief system brought to North America by Europeans, many Native people have taken Christianity, intertwined it with their own knowledge systems, and made it their own. I loved how Alexis applied her own life to her reading to make meaning of what she had read, and as you will notice, many other participants do the same.

Unfortunately, the only exposure Alexis has had with Native literature was in university; however, aside from the two titles that she listed she did not name any other Native-authored texts she had read either for her studies, leisurely, or for her work. Interestingly, to my knowledge, John Gardiner, the author of *Stone Fox* was not of Native heritage (that is not to say a non-Native author cannot deliver Native Studies in a good way), for I could not find information where he self-declared as a Native person. Despite Alexis acknowledging how important it is for Native people to start writing their own truths and their own histories, there is the danger of assuming that a book with Native content or characters is good for Native people, but it is

important that we have an awareness to determine whether that book or characters is in fact perpetuating Native stereotypes (Native authors, too, are guilty of doing this). At one time I considered the movie *Dances With Wolves* a real contribution to Native reality, but as I became more informed of theories on ‘going Native’ and romanticization I came to understand this film as contributing to Hollywood stereotypes of Native people.

Alexis shared that she will be incorporating more Native-authored texts into her classroom which is a good start, not only for her own learning but for her students – she has already asked me to assist her in this process to which I gave her a copy of Thomas King’s *A Coyote Columbus Story*.

Deidre is 27 years old and is an Education Assistant in Peguis. Deidre has attended university and plans to attain a teaching degree. She read *Shi-Shi-Etko* and *Shin-Chi’s Canoe* written by Nicola Campbell. Deidre handwrote her response on a hardcopy of the questions, provided extra sheets of paper with additional ideas and elaborated on previous ideas directly in an email (Appendix B):

1. Yes, I’ve read work by Eden Robinson, Tomson Highway, Maria Campbell, Louise Erdrich, Ian Ross and many more.
2. *Shi-Shi-Etko* reminded me of many stories! I related the ‘bag of memories’ in this book to the traditions of our people, [also] to the story of the muskrat’s sacrifice; our way of life depended on that one little piece of land, it was all we needed to get our ways back. The things put into *Shi-Shi-Etko*’s [bag] are the memories our people need to get back to our ways – we need to remember that it was things as simple as berries and land that provided for us. All the things that Shi-Shi-Etko is told to remember are there because they know that she will be ‘presented’ with many new memories at residential school – they want her to try [to] remember that no matter what she is to be proud of herself and

where she comes from. Her bag of memories were left at home because home is where she will be happy again. [Shin-Chi's Canoe], for a child that small to be able to comfort himself by remembering his traditions gives the impression that we (First Nations/Aboriginal people), no matter what we've been through all have that little bit of hope, faith, strength, left in us. It's a powerful book that causes all sorts of emotions. The pictures/illustrations also add a strong outlook – they're done in a cartoon yet lifelike way – kind of how the stories from residential schools should be – cartoon because they [these experiences] shouldn't be real! [And] *Shin-Chi's Canoe* made me feel everything from anger and sadness to disbelief and joy. I think that as a First Nations person these/those emotions are experienced on almost an everyday basis. As a First Nations woman, I believe that a lot of the everyday things we do present us, and others, with certain emotions. For example, if I were to see a First Nations man on the street asking for money/food it would make me feel angry because he's "living up" to the non-Aboriginal people's expectations (and I say expectations because majority of people expect nothing better than that from our people). At the same time, I feel sadness because of my knowledge of the system and what it has done to our people. Many were so traumatized and abused that they were/are led to believe that they cannot be anything other than what mainstream society expects them to be. In the same situation, although rarely, I will pick up a sense of happiness because that person will make a joke or laugh when talking to you. And it's that that I choose to take with me and learn from. No matter what he/she has been through, he still holds the ability to make fun of things. That is my learning from our people, no matter what happened and continues to happen to us we must always be able to bring gestures of happiness to one another. Anything and everything we do will always have opinions.

3. In *Shin-Chi's Canoe* [there is] the reference to the dust from the cattle truck to and from residential school: going to the school was a 'snake' that followed them and going home it was a 'butterfly' leading them home. The snake represents the darkness of the [residential] schools and how their effects slithered their way into the lives of generation after generation of our people. The butterfly, to me, is the representation of how our people need to 'fly' into the positive cycle of life.
4. Anything someone reads can be useful in their lives. Whether it be positive or negative,

or an ‘eye-opener’, it affects people. Books like these help people understand what First Nations [and Aboriginal] people have been through and why it is so important for us to relearn our culture(s).

5. Before starting university, I did not know there were so many wonderful and amazing Native authors out there. So to bring it out more, presentations, an electronic newsletter or perhaps a book club would, I believe, be the best way because they allow for discussions and encouragement.

My thoughts on Deidre’s response:

Deidre shares a beautiful interpretation of the symbolism she sees in her readings of *Shi Etko* and *Shin-Chi’s Canoe*. She also believes that these books as well as other Native-authored texts can contribute to Native people and communities because they can help us to get more in touch with our cultures and our selves. Deidre has a university background with Native literature; however, similarly to Alexis, prior to entering university she was unaware of how much Native literature existed.

Deidre articulates how important it is for Native people to read books like these because they can help Native (and non-Native) people understand what we have been through and how critical it is for us to reconcile with our past and move on to a brighter future. At the same time, she also believes that Aboriginal people experience emotions of sadness, disbelief and anger (as well as joy) on a daily basis. She expresses concern that some Native people are living up to the stereotypes perpetuated by western society, yet at the same time Deidre understands and acknowledges that the socio-economic issues Native people face are effects of colonization. I have had these same feelings as well, but what I have come to question of myself is whether I still need to purge other forms of internalized racism. Why do I get angry at other Native people for how society views them, for if I am informed as to how stereotypes and racist notions about

Native people are created and perpetuated, as well as from where these socio-economic issues stem, then why wouldn't I focus my energy on educating other Native people and society in general on these issues?

Deidre also touches on Native people's "ability to make fun of things. That is my learning from our people, no matter what happened and continues to happen to us we must always be able to bring gestures of happiness to one another." I agree with Deidre's take on Native people's sense of humour. Despite the many obstacles faced by Native people many hold an incredible love for laughter and teasing. When my grandmother passed away at the age of ninety-four years old I was asked by my aunts and uncles to prepare the eulogy for her funeral. She lived a long life but it was still hard to let her go as she had been the only grandmother I had really known (remembered), but as I wrote the eulogy I found myself remembering her sense of humour and the way she teased each of her family members right up until the last months of life. Thus, at her funeral, our large family – despite having lost the matriarch of our family – was able to laugh as part of our healing in the loss of our mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and great-great-grandmother. She left that legacy with us.

Karen is 54 years old and a writer and scholar. She read Richard Van Camp's book, *A Man Called Raven*. I met with Karen in person where she provided me with a hardcopy of her typed response to only the first three questions (Appendix B):

1. [I've] read a lot of Indigenous authors: Joseph Boyden, Richard Van Camp, Jeannette Armstrong, Beatrice Culleton, Louise Erdrich, Maria Campbell, Basil Johnston, Leslie Marmon Silko, Eden Robinson; also anthologies and poetry [by] Gregory Schofield, Louise Halfe, Neal McLeod, Al Hunter, Kevin Paul. I like to read literature by our people because I feel connected to the situations, the way the words are presented: like

our people talk, not all English grammar and correct...I feel that our authors have a responsibility to write in the way our people talk and to reflect the way our language has evolved from original languages to English, but still maintaining our sense of rhythm of speech...singsong style of Cree, for example, that Louise Halfe and Gregory Schofield present.

2. I believe that our literatures are similar in the scope to the storytelling of the past, where histories and mapping and medicines and knowledge w[ere] passed down to the listeners. In our literatures, many authors are contributing to this tradition by including old stories, language, a sense of place, traditions, ceremonies, our sciences and other aspects of our way of life. This is how our people learned...hearing, remembering and talking about the stories gave people a sense of who they are, where they come from, about self, culture, beliefs, values, experiences and memories. Even the modern stories that reveal poverty, incest, abuse and other atrocities are a way to reveal what is really happening in our lives. And now we have stories of the adoptions, residential schools, alcoholism and drug abuse...things that have had a real impact on the lives of our people. These stories are coming to light now and our people are reading them; others are reading them and this will offer a lot of understanding to the "WHY questions." Why do our people drink? Why do our people use drugs? Why do our women allow themselves to be abused? Why do our men abuse? All these awful things that we do to ourselves comes from learning these behaviours, seeing them and recreating them. But are the people who NEED to read these stories actually reading them? If not, how do we get them to read these stories, to read about the transformation from abused to finding self-esteem [here, Karen seems to ask the same question I do]. I notice that a lot of children's authors seem to focus their writings on the past, old stories, old traditions and I think this is a good thing because this brings stories and knowledge to the parents who buy and read these books and to the children to hear them and look at the pictures and might hear language and other kinds of knowledge.
3. Basil Johnston has had a huge impact on me. It was reading his non-fiction book *Ojibway Heritage* that changed my life around. I finally found some answers to the questions that had haunted me about being 'Indian'. Am I NDN because of a treaty number? That was a big question for me. I read all his books and they really gave me a

sense of who I was as an Anishnabe woman. Although I am more Cree, it was hard to find any books by Cree authors at that time. I have since found that Louise Halfe's poetry gives me a good sense of my Creeness.

Also, reading Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* back in the 70's gave me a real look at the poverty, abuses, and hard life that I saw so many women going through in silence. That book gave voice to their pain, their suffering and it made me stand strong against any abuse from men, and women too. I was able to understand what made these women stay in these relationships and why they found it so difficult to step away from that role of the beaten woman.

Our literatures are contributing to the process of decolonization in many ways. Firstly, having our stories out there gives voice to a people who have long been subject to a silencing...perfect example is the residential schools. There are stories now that are being told and our people who never went to those schools, Canadians, as well as other people around the world, are hearing them for the first time. Our world-view – the way we see the world around us – is linked to the land and the elements- air, water, plants, animals. Without a voice to show this, we haven't been able to make that connection. Now, many of our authors are naturally writing about this connection...whether it be Joseph Boyden writing about that journey down the river with her addicted grandson and how the water helps him to remember and heal...or, Eden Robinson taking us into the coastal forests to walk among the great cedar trees and sleeping on soft moss...or even Richard Van Camp as we hear the squawking of the ravens...all of these are natural to our people, things we do in life. But for many people, that is no longer the case. We don't go pick sweetgrass, or go fishing for food anymore...we go to the store for all these things now. But these authors are reminding us that this is our way, and they are teaching us how to do these things again...just as the stories of old used to do.

I wish our education system would catch up to the visions of our authors. This is where our literatures of our people could have a real impact on the transmission of knowledge, our social, cultural and political situations, and our ways of life, histories, identities, cultures and languages. As you know [here, Karen is speaking to me], much of what is learned depends on the context that it is learned in...if our children were reading our literatures rather than, or should I say in addition to those non-Indigenous authors...they

would have a tremendous influence on their own conception of self. When we deprive our children of reading the voices of their own people, we are denying them access to our theories, our consciousness, languages and identity. The educational systems are not respecting, affirming or encouraging our literatures because the people in positions of power have not taken the time or the effort to legitimize our own growth as a people. There are still old ways of thinking and doing things...that becoming English is better...that being 'Indian'/Indigenous/Cree/Anishnabe is going to hold us back in some way. Yet, look at all the MA thesis, the Ph.D. dissertations by our people now...including yours, that speak to the very heart of our loss of identity, culture, language, histories...these scholars are trying to find a way to assert the position that "We cannot know who we are until we understand where we come from."

Where knowledge survives, the language survives. Northern communities still have language. They still have hunters, fishermen, trappers, gatherers. What has been done in Peguis to ensure the survival of language. NOTHING. It is so clear to many of us who are pursuing 'higher education' [my quotations] that our heritage is tied to our knowledge of language, culture, customs, etc. Yet, what impact have we had out in Peguis? NONE. Allowing our children access to our literatures, our knowledge keepers, our language speakers would give them a chance, a better chance than we had, to learn about their own people, their own identity, their own nationhood. With this chance, they might not have to question who they are until they are in their 30's, 40's, 50's and even older as some of our people still do. And yet, there is access to literatures by many of our people now...money to buy books, see the films, watch APTN...but are we? If you ask anyone what the latest Indigenous author they read, or show they watched, they will most likely say they haven't read any...or maybe watched North of 60 back in the day. Sad, but true, that Indigenous authors and film makers are not gaining the attention of their own people in a meaningful way. When the people in positions of power deny or limit access to these works that in itself is a process of colonization: internal colonization.

To say that all of our people should read only Indigenous authors is NOT what I'm saying, but we should make an attempt to support and encourage the writing of OUR stories and in that way, to share OUR way of thinking, our world-view.

My thoughts on Karen's response:

Karen is very knowledgeable in Native literature and authorship. She emphasizes the importance of Native literature, language and cultures when it comes to continuance of Native people. She states that Native literature can contribute to Native people and communities for it allows for Native readers of all ages to see themselves and learn about their history, languages, cultures, theories, consciousness and identity; that is, these texts help in the transmission of our knowledge. Karen believes this is particularly important for young people, so that they do not have to go through the same questions at a later about who they are and where they come from. She believes that for Native people integrating education with our culture is the key to our moving forward.

Karen briefly touches on her concerns with Native people possibly associating themselves with stereotypical notions of 'Nativity' in movies and television or believing that these are satisfactory representations of Native people, and I mentioned this in my thoughts on Alexis's response. She does not believe that our people are receiving Indigenous (Native) literatures and other forms of artistic expression in a meaningful way, and she feels that there remains a lot of work to be done.

Karen discusses the ongoing socio-economic and political issues in Native communities and asks the same question I did when I pursued this project: Are the people who need to read these stories (Native literature) actually reading them? That is, the people who are experiencing these issues firsthand in our communities – those who may need a positive change in their lives and circumstances.

Karen also touches on how many Native leaders are afraid of the educated people in their communities which can in turn hinder our ability to move forward as Native people. This

phenomenon may be a result of colonization and Native people's experience with western education – perhaps for many there still exists distrust. This distrust for western education may also be a factor in why Native people are not engaging with Native literature – and reading in general – in higher numbers.

What may also be playing a role here is something that I discussed in a paper I wrote for a course at the University of Manitoba titled: “Colonization/Decolonization” where I presented on a form of internalization that can manifest itself into insecurity and jealousy among colonized people (Beyer 12). I go on to discuss Métis scholar, Howard Adams's take on this type of internalization: “Discrimination and its brutal effects...leave scars of hostility and a self-consciousness about ourselves that is difficult to overcome,” (Adams 148) and as a result the colonized may become “somewhat suspicious of a ‘successful’ Métis or Indian” (Adams 149). Many times instead of pushing each other up, colonized peoples will pull each other down. Instead of celebrating achievements, achievements are snubbed and many times viewed as haughtiness. Scholar from the Tsimshian Nation in B.C., Calvin Helin describes these behaviors as “prevalent in Aboriginal communities” and is a “phenomenon [known as] ‘lateral violence’...[which] is a product of colonization. ...This violence can take the form of shaming, humiliating, damaging, belittling, and sometimes violent behavior directed toward a member of a group by other members of the same group” (Helin 125). This is not to say, Aboriginal people are incapable of conceited (or jealous personalities) because surely they are (just like humans of any race); however, my contention here is that two forms of internalization may be coming to a head in this situation (Beyer 12-13). Here we can see that it is Native writing (non-fiction) which has informed me of how colonization has impacted our relationship with one another as Native people and why I believe it can potentially do the same for others thus triggering social

change.

Bonnie is 53 years old. She is a student in Business and Indigenous Studies, and works part-time as an Office Clerk. Bonnie became interested in my project by means of Peguis School Board's assistance in engaging other Peguis post-secondary students. Bonnie has never lived in-community, but by all means is a part of Peguis. An avid reader, Bonnie chose and read three texts including the chapter titled "The White Ideal and the Colonized Personality" from Howard Adams' book, *Prison of Grass; Thrasher* by Anthony Akapark; the poem, "The Red Road – revisited" by Duncan Mercredi; and on her own initiative also read Ila Bussidor's, *Night Spirits: The Relocation of the Sayisi Dene*. Bonnie emailed her typed response to me in a Microsoft Word attachment (Appendix B):

1. I personally have but it was difficult initially to find books of any kind. This may be due to the fact that Native authors are not as publicized as others and the possibility that Natives were not versed enough in the actual act of publications as opposed to oral histories, which as an art form is almost lost. In particular, I think that many of the Native authors are deliberately shunned or disregarded by bookstores, retail and others as Natives are a minority group. Also, with all of the changes for the betterment of Native reserves, people are up-at-arms already about Natives of Canada.
2. As a Native female having been raised off reserve and without any of my heritage or culture, I at first found it hard to become accustomed to the way of thinking. This quickly changed when I put myself into the picture of the stories and applied them to "real life". The question became "what would I feel and what would I do?" and I became a part of the stories and the musings. The associations I made were, for myself, life altering in that I no longer felt outside of my own cultural group and became a part of my own heritage. It provided me with a desire to learn more and more of my own past and integrate it all into my present and forge it as a part of my future. In other words, I became one with my own distant past and developed understanding in terms of myself &

family: an assimilated way of life that I find myself leaving behind in my pursuit of culture and heritage. It is also causing a rift within the family in that I am embracing my heritage and culture while the rest of my family is not.

3. I was deeply impacted by both the Night Spirits and the Thrasher autobiographies. Both spoke to me deeply regarding a way of life lost and the merging into a new one that is not necessarily easy or even wanted. As a child, I witnessed much of the same devastation that others on reserves were witness to or a part of: the alcohol abuse, abuse by family members perpetrated on any and all alike. The loss of the culture and heritage of a nation of people left naked without a replacement for their losses except a culture and language that they could not understand. I was raised 95% without my culture and suffered throughout my life attempting to find out what it was that defined “me”. The ‘me’ that should have existed, steeped in culture and heritage, but fully capable of surviving in the new world around me equipped with the tools necessary (language and understanding) to comprehend and compete in the new world. In this respect the article “The White Ideal: Prison of Glass” touched me deeply. It defines some of the issues that I experienced in my life and travels.

One quote that I would like to include is from Thrasher: “Only the wind cries for my people who suffer. No one knows about them.” This quote hit hard and hit home as it speaks of many nations and peoples that have suffered the same loss. Thrasher is indicative of many people who still wander lost and will pass away to be remembered only by the wind – my family included.

4. Definitely. The books/articles that I read provide those who suffer in silence and shame with the knowledge that they are not alone. Also, it provides even Aboriginal [people] with the knowledge that yes, these things really happened to an entire nation – on and off-reserve members. For myself, as an assimilated individual breaking free of bonds that I have discovered that I felt shame in my heritage. Overcoming that is a daily and lifelong struggle. I come from a proud heritage... [my ellipsis – due to not fully understanding what Bonnie meant in the next part of this line, and I did not want to misrepresent her].
5. Definitely agree that we are not reading enough of Native literature in particular and that we are not reading enough overall. We are not exposed to Native literature but I can’t

say that is because of technology but rather a lack of knowledge that it is out there for us to find. There exists no advertising or campaigns to advertise Native literature. That would be the way to improve it as well, advertise it! Promote it everywhere and in every way possible especially schools. Children might be inclined to read more if it has some relationship to them.

My thoughts on Bonnie's response:

Bonnie shares that from her readings she learned about the internalized shame many Native people experience due to colonization. She has come to better understand how colonialism has impacted her and other Native people spiritually, physically and psychologically (Smith 149). She recollects how she witnessed alcohol and abuse (socio-economic issues) among many of the people she knew. She has read Native literature, placed herself in the shoes of characters, and in doing so made cultural associations that, for Bonnie, were life altering. This was also true for me when I read about internalized shame and learned how it stems from internalizing racist notions about Native people as a result of colonization. I was able to understand a lot of the feelings that I had and like Bonnie I became "equipped with the tools necessary (language and understanding) to comprehend and compete in the new world" around me. Native literature has impacted Bonnie in a meaningful way, she has come to feel more in touch with her Native heritage and identity, she is beginning to break free of bonds, and integrate the past with the present in order to forge ahead.

Next, is **Cynthia** who is 54 years old and is self-employed as an Aboriginal facilitator and consultant in the areas of research, education and health and wellness. She read Nicola Campbell's (Salish/Metis), *Shi-Shi-Etko*. Cynthia typed her responses to the questions directly into an email (Appendix B):

1. I have read several Native Canadian authors mostly for my own research and work in the area of education and health. The most influential include: Marie Battiste, James Sakei Youngblood Henderson, Vine Deloria Jr. and Gregory Cajete. I have also enjoyed Pat Ningewance's writing style on the Ojibway language.
2. I felt proud to read these books and many other books by First Nations, Aboriginal or Indigenous authors because of the spiritual aspect of their writing processes (especially Vine Deloria Jr., Gregory Cajete, Michael Hart, Marie Battiste); their descriptive, narrative writing styles; and their analysis of research findings through a First Nations/Aboriginal/Indigenous cultural lens. My connection to their writings has been all about the common experience of being Indigenous i.e. our life experiences, our shared history, trauma, humour, spirituality. I have also enjoyed reading Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori). Even with Indigenous peoples from other lands I have found a connection of similar history & life experiences and shared perspectives. The book I read for your project was entitled *Shi-shi-etko* by Nicola I. Campbell. It was a lovely book. When I was reading it, I could feel the main character's excitement of going away to school and hoping it was going to be a good ending. This made me emotional, because the innocence of the character came through. I visualized the end of her journey - to the residential school and imagined what might await her, hoping she would be one of the few who could have a positive experience. I enjoyed reading most about the innocent carefree lifestyle she lived; the love she was surrounded by; and the message of how she could remain connected to who she is and where she comes from. Great book! Although the experience was west coast, I could relate to it through my own experience of playing in the bush back home at an early age and playing by what seemed like such a big river, which is now so small.
3. Vine Deloria Jr. has always resonated with me because of the spiritual aspect of his writing. He was one of the first Indigenous authors I read (*God is Red*). He validated many of my own beliefs that I was working on reconciling earlier in my life. Pat Ningewance introduction to her book *"Talking Gookom's Language"* was beautiful - it was like having tea with Pat when I read those pages i.e. "my worldview was quite different from my classmates" she hooked me; and the way she talks about a learner's emotional experience at trying to re-claim/relearn their First language. This is exactly

how I have felt in my early school years away from home and later as an adult in the many introductory Cree and Ojibwe language classes I have taken over the years. She acknowledges the inner struggle, its connection to identity and mourning language loss. Marie Battiste writings about First Nations education has also had a major impact on my work life as I share many of her thoughts on what it is we need to do to improve education outcomes for First Nations students. I also like Marie Battiste's writing style because she can incorporate the narrative and traditional teachings with the academic; much like John Burrows when he writes about First Nations historical relationship with other peoples.

4. [Cynthia seemed to answer questions 4 & 5 in this response) Firstly, we must recognize that we do come from a culture that values and nurtures the oral tradition. While our languages may be at risk, the cultural practice of the oral tradition is not. Stories and teachings continue to be shared in the oral tradition by parents, grandparents, Elders, cultural teachers and other knowledge keepers. Reading literature of any kind seems to remain in the realm of education or in the immediate needs of everyday life. It is something that doesn't seem to be valued as much.

I believe that literacy is a huge factor in our community's capacity to read, which is reflective of the lower education outcomes among First Nations/Aboriginal students. These types of outcomes continue to be reported on and acknowledged in such sources as Statistics Canada Census data and the Auditor General's Reports.

Access to and affordability of print materials is an economic issue for our peoples who suffer from under-education and who are underemployed.

In terms of exposure to our own literature - I believe that local education authorities especially have a huge opportunity to encourage teachers to identify First Nations/Aboriginal literature/authors for use in the schools. The growth of libraries in some of our communities also provides another excellent opportunity to grow this awareness and encourage reading circles for both children and adults. (Our Peguis Librarian...is wonderful! [Another community member] was also doing some promotional events at Peguis featuring local and other First Nations/Aboriginal writers (i.e. Lawrence Bear) The libraries also provide an opportunity to form Review

Committees, representative of our people, to read and review First Nations/Aboriginal print, video, audio materials and begin a recommended reading list.

I believe the most effective reading materials are the local Anishinaabe publications i.e. The Drum, First Perspective, Sweetgrass...people do read these papers, because they are short, filled with pictures (of people we know sometimes) and relevant content as to who we are. They speak to us and our relationship with other peoples.

Social media is a great tool to consider to promote reading and awareness of reading i.e. listing short reads [at the time of providing her responses, Cynthia did not know about my Native literature newsletter I had been distributing in Peguis], i.e. articles, magazines (i.e. SAY), children's books for parents, where to go to get free books or to read books. Local events that draw people in could also be a strategy but it requires sustained leadership; where different types of literature/publication are used as tools and people are read to then given an opportunity to read on their own; or bring something in as a shared reading. Urban environments provide a greater opportunity but they also struggle with the apathy of the people - getting people out. I found that great draws among our people are food, short focused drop-in type venues (1-2 hours), and use of role models i.e. First Nations/Aboriginal people in the media willing to promote literacy as a means of decolonization. It is hard to make a commitment to something when a large segment of our people are struggling with the pressures of daily living, not to mention the inter-generational impacts of colonization.

My thoughts on Cynthia's response:

Cynthia, too, is well-read on Native literature and uses it in her work regularly. She shares that she has been able to relate to many Native-authored stories she has read, and many have reminded her of her own experiences. Again, we see that Native readers can and do see themselves and their similar experiences in many Native-authored texts which in turn stimulates all kinds of feelings and thoughts. In Cynthia's case she "relate[s] [Shi-Shi-Etko] to...[her] own experience of playing in the bush back home at an early age and playing by what seemed like such a big river." It seems that many times there is an "Aha!" moment that Native readers

experience when reading Native literature. We can finally “read about [our] experience[s] as...Aboriginal p[eople]” (Van Camp 299). We can see ourselves, our communities and experiences represented in these texts; and this is important for Native people as many strive to overcome the many obstacles in their way as a result of colonization.

Cynthia’s thought on why Native literature may not be reaching more Native communities and why more Native people are not reading Native literature is our people are struggling with the pressures of daily living and many are simply trying to survive in a busy world, not just as a Native person, but as a person. Like anyone else, Native people have bills to pay, work to do, and places to go. As well Cynthia mentions that Native people still value and nurture in their own ways our oral traditions while books, perhaps, remain associated with education and school.

Denise is 45 years old and a registered nurse (remote northern nursing). She travels to various First Nation communities providing much needed quality medical services. Denise chose to read David Robertson’s graphic novel series *7 Generations: Stone, Scars, The Pact* and *Ends/Begins*. Denise typed her responses to the questions directly into an email (Appendix B):

1. No, I have never read literature by a Native person. If I have it was by chance coming across it. I don't think that I have because I have never really looked for literature specifically authored by a Native person – I pick topics of interest and I rarely look at the author, just topics of interest.
2. I felt so connected with what I was reading. The literature was written in such a way that the message was paralleled with life activities and the person being spoken to was provided with information about life lessons in a story book kind of setting. As a Native person I have attended many gatherings and teachings, and the way that Native people bring wisdom into a person’s life is by telling stories to make understanding easier.

[This] makes life lessons easier to apply to personal life. They tell a story and leave it out there for you to figure out and take what you need at that time and apply it to your personal life. I feel as a person ages one realizes that important things in life is a sense of belonging and a sense of who we are.

3. The short stories series was very interesting; I enjoyed the storytelling of lessons and how I can apply that to my life. I believe that there are lessons that can be learned with anything that we read. Very easy reads. I am currently reading Calvin Helin's [Tsimshian], *Dances with Dependency*, this is such an eye-opener for me to see Native people from this perspective and the effects of colonialism on our people. Sad reality. Makes me want to help our people become stronger. First I have to change in my life, my family's lives and then the community members' lives. I have always told my family that with education you can and will be self-sufficient, if only the community members will believe that.
4. Yes, I do think that literature can benefit the community. There are many life lessons that can be learned through the literature that I read. People just have to take the time to read. When we read the literature of Native authors it opens up a world of possibilities for the potential to learn about life.
5. To tell you the truth, I did not know many Native authors until you mentioned those names to me. What attracts me to a book is the cover and a brief synopsis [similar to what my Native literature newsletter offered to readers] of a book. If it is interesting and the topic can be applied to my life and I can learn something about my life then I will read it. Education is battling technology and we need to implement this technology with the learning that is to occur in our children's lives. We have to work with what is going on and advance with the world to become leaders of tomorrow.

My thoughts on Denise's response:

Denise shares that she has never read any Native literature (this is probably aside from Native-owned newspapers for many of these circulate in Peguis) and did not know of many Native authors until participating in this project, but states this may be because her selection of books is based on interest, not author nor heritage. However, upon reading David Robertson's

graphic novel series, Denise felt very connected to what she read and enjoyed his style and genre of writing. She understands the importance of telling stories and how Native people have always used this method as a means to provide life lessons to younger people in hopes that they would apply those teachings to their own life and experiences. Denise has shared with her family the importance of attaining an education; she has attended many cultural events, and has integrated education with these cultural practices as means to strengthen herself and her family. Despite being almost middle-age, Denise feels that she can still walk away from Native literature with valuable lessons and teachings that she can apply to her life and family, she feels that knowing who we are and where we come from becomes more important as a person ages.

Now we come to **Janet** who is 33 years old and is employed in the field of Child and Family Services. Janet chose to read Omushkego (Cree) elder and storyteller, Louis Bird's, story (or 'legend' as he sometimes refers to his storytelling): "Morning Star, A Love Story, And the Spread of the Cree Language." Janet typed her responses to the questions directly into an email (Appendix B):

1. I've read literature by Native authors prior to this, but all of it has been while in school taking some form of a Native Studies course. The type of literature varied on the course, we read some plays and short stories by various authors to nonfiction, political science type books.
2. I liked the ease of speech that was used in the sense that it was more like reading a conversation rather than a short story. I also related to the language used, in that it wasn't "proper" English. It felt more like common conversation.
3. There are no particular authors I relate to, I think it has to do with the fact that I just don't know enough of them to do so. I would love to read more though.

4. I enjoy reading Native literature, I find the short stories and plays that I've read are written with a humour that is indicative of Aboriginal culture – that being cheeky and self-deprecating [ability to laugh at one's self and the trials of life]. They manage to find humour in the everyday and are able to express to the reader why it's funny.
5. I think people aren't reading as much as they used to across the board, and it's not just Aboriginal people. I do believe it has a lot to do with the internet and ease of access to information. But also that our society has placed little importance on it. Reading in general has been de-prioritized in families' busy schedules. People are so busy nowadays that when they have some free time they want to do something fast and entertaining. Society has catered to that need in the form of movies, video games, concerts, etc. I think a lot of communities should use Native literature in the classroom. Lack of knowledge about what's out there in terms of authors and types of literature are the biggest issue in my eyes. I think introducing authors to the youth so they can develop an appreciation while they are young would help.

My thoughts on Janet's response:

Again, we see here that most of Janet's exposure to Native literature was in university. She did not comment on any interpretations of lessons that she took from Louis Bird's story, however, she related to the language used in the story (it is transcribed from the voice of Louis) referring to it as more conversation-like. Janet expresses that she enjoys reading Native literature, particularly those pieces that communicate what she refers to (similar to previous participant, Deidre) as Aboriginal humour. In recognizing and identifying with this "humour that is indicative of Aboriginal culture" (Janet) Janet and earlier respondent Deidre seem to become what Jace Weaver refers to as "the insider [and] privileged" Native reader of Native literature (36).

This "Native humour" that Janet and Deidre discuss in their responses is conveyed in many Native-authored texts; it has the ability to draw in more Native readers *if* they become

more aware that these texts exist. Janet attributes a lack of knowledge about Native literature as the biggest obstacle in connecting more Native people to Native literature, but if we are able to make this connection at a young age, the next generation may be better informed than those before them.

Lois is 48 years old and a librarian in Peguis. She chose to read Nicola Campbell's *Shi-Shi-Etko* and Thomas King's (Cherokee) *Coyote Columbus Story*. Lois shared that because of her profession and her education/studies, she has read a lot of Native literature and many times has been the only Native person in her literature classes. As a librarian, Lois had her own copies of the reading list and did not follow the questions provided; in an informal visit I took notes of her response to the readings:

I felt that Shi-Shi-Etko left out the 'heart' of the residential school experience, that it 'trivialized' the experience. The images in the book were hazy, cloudy, soft; no harsh reality of a child leaving home from their parents for a year or longer, it didn't seem real, everyone is unique and different though and I guess so was their experience, this could be based on a point of view and perhaps the author's intended audience is a factor here too, [it is] for younger kids; [it is] more of a poetic form in writing story. [There was a] memory message in the book. But the residential school experience "wasn't like that at all" – as kids we always felt safe cause we stayed with our parents, we didn't go to residential school, but people I know did, we slept safely with our parents but I wonder about other people's experiences and thoughts because I know kids who ran away from residential school and those who cried when the bus came to take them to residential school. I loved [Coyote Columbus Story] and thought it was hilarious. It's a good spin on the Columbus story; different spin on the "romanticizing" of Christopher Columbus. It's a really important book for First Nations and non-First Nations to share, read and think about, it offers another point of view on "so-called history."

My thoughts on Lois's response:

I was very surprised at Lois's interpretation of Nicola Campbell's *Shi-Shi-Etko* because my original reaction to this book was admiration for how beautifully written it is; in fact, I did not see the things that Lois did, but as I listened to her speak I was able to see what she meant as she expressed her thoughts on the book. Personally, I liked how Campbell chose to focus on the resilience and strength of residential school survivors and Native people, in general – how she chose to forefront the ways in which many children managed to survive the many years at residential school by holding on to memories of home, their families and their culture. My interpretation of *Shi-Shi-Etko* was that Campbell exercised her power and agency as an author and Native person by not placing the ugliness of residential schools at the centre of her story; however, I can definitely relate to Lois's interpretation as well. Maori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith warns us: "Writing can be dangerous [for Native people] because sometimes we [may] reveal ourselves in ways which get misappropriated and used against us," (36). There is a risk in the way Campbell writes about the residential school experience for non-Native readers may interpret it as 'not so bad' and begin to ask the question: Why are all these Native people complaining then? Or in Lois's case, as a Native reader and person, she felt this Native author was minimizing the residential school experience; but these observations seem to speak to the diversity of Native authors, their perspective and their writing as well as the observations of Native readers reading Native literature.

Lois shared that she knows people who went to residential school and she does not feel that this book speaks to their experience. However, Lois recognizes that the author may be looking to inform a particular audience (children) about the residential school experience, or may be writing from a different point of view – a different experience. Lois and my's different views

on this text as well as Campbell's approach in writing this story demonstrates that Native people, as well their experiences and the way they see things, can and do differ.

Next, is **Trish's** response. She is 27 years old and is a teacher. Trisha chose to read *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book* by Gord Hill (Kwakwaka'wakw Nation). Trish typed her responses to the questions directly into an email (Appendix B):

1. I thought the comic book was awesome, the information in there dates right back to our early years and up to the present issues our people face. I would like to use this with my class, because I think it would give my students a different view on the issues, rather than the basic readings that are available. I think that some students will connect more with the book, because of the way it is written. In high school, I do not remember reading a book by a Native author..sadly. However, when I got to University I read quite a few books by Native authors: *Night Spirits* by Illa Bussidor, *April Raintree* by Beatrice Culleton, *The Mishomis Book* by Edward Benton-Banai (a Peguis community member referred this book to me, and I used it with my class), [and] *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. I used all of these books with my students and this was the first time they heard of them, but they enjoyed the books.
2. Most of the books content had issues that we face in our daily lives and I like to read books like that, especially if they have a positive ending. These books show that no matter what troubles you go through, you can overcome them. On the other hand, I would like to read more books that have a positive, real-life spin on a Native person, rather than the usual "issues".
3. The book that impacted me the most was *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*. The author compared life on a reserve and in a city, most experiences I can relate to. In the end, Sherman Alexie's message was to never give up on your dreams no matter what happens.
4. Yes, I think that all of the books I listed previously can be useful in our communities, because most cover the same issues, experiences and they would also give our people a

deeper insight on how people handle these issues. These books can also make the readers feel like they can connect to the author and think "okay, well if they can do this, get through this, so can I." These books can also inspire others to share and possibly write their own books and express themselves in others ways: art, music, etc.

5. Living on a reserve, I see a lot of reasons as to why the community members do not read as much as they should. One big reason, [as Trish believes] is people have low literacy skills and they are embarrassed to let others know that or ask for help, this is why most parents are unsupportive with their children's education. Another reason is the use of technology: cell phones, internet and video games, again some parents do not encourage their child to read and they allow them to spend hours on end playing games, etc. I think in order to improve these issues, we strongly need parents to be on board, we need to get active in the community and make this more aware. Educators have been doing their part in the school, but what happens when the child goes home? I think we should provide community-wide incentives for reading, such as: having an annual bingo, or cash prizes, furniture, grocery shopping sprees, etc. I'm not one to bribe people [Trish writes here that she laughs], but I think this may be the only to get our people involved. My in-law works on an isolated reserve in Alberta and that community provides incentives for parents and students that attend school. Everyone also enjoyed it when Richard Van Camp came to our school [this was a visit organized by University of Manitoba's Centre for Creative Writing and Oral Culture, Renate Eigenbrod, and myself] and did his readings, maybe that can be done once a month [author visit]? Another idea that can be done is to create a school-wide biography of each student and put that together as a part of the history of Peguis.

My thoughts on Trish's response:

Trish's response reveals that her experience with Native literature, too, was not until she attended university. She enjoyed the comic book format of Gord Hill's book and believes this genre will be useful for working with future students. Trish is actively using Native literature in her classroom and plans to continue doing so. She seems to be a strong believer in dreams and

success no matter what the obstacles which is certainly a positive outlook on life; however, the socio-economic issues that Trish mentions briefly cause many Native people to be without the resources, supports and encouragement required to move ahead. Many of these issues are deep-rooted and not easy to escape, but perhaps the presence of these usual issues in our writing can also attest to our resiliency and perseverance even though there may be a long way to go.

Trish also discusses her views on low literacy among many community members; she believes this plays a role in why many parents appear or are unsupportive of their child/ren's education. This may also be a factor as to why there are not more Native people reading Native literature. Literacy is an ongoing issue for many Native communities and schools; we are falling behind non-Native communities and schools. There are many reasons for this: Native people, as aforementioned, have had a hostile relationship with western education; Native people face socio-economic issues in greater numbers than non-Native people; and Native people complete high school in lower numbers than non-Native people. As previous respondent, Cynthia, stated: "a large segment of our people are struggling with the pressures of daily living, not to mention the inter-generational impacts of colonization," thus it is not surprising that our literacy levels are lower than that of the non-Native population. However, it is for this reason that we must make greater efforts to connect more Native people and communities to Native literature in hopes of increasing literacy and providing them with literature that they relate to.

Vicki is the next respondent. She is 39 years old and is a network administrator and private business owner in Peguis. Vicki did not follow the questions provided. She sent me her response and interpretations to "The Red Road – Revisited" by Duncan Mercredi (Cree) and *Shin-Chi's Canoe* by Nicola Campbell in a Microsoft Word attachment via email (Appendix B):

I kinda just wrote down points and my personal thoughts on th[is] book and poem. The Red Road revisited [I found] even the title is disturbing....it made me think of death, beginning to the end of life or something, or perhaps end of a spiritual life anyways. It talks about pitfalls and deadfalls....and that this red road is or was full of them. It seemed as life was impossible (trying to fit square pegs into round holes). Forced to change with no choice, feeling helpless, sad, angry, and disrespected. They felt like they were exposed for others' curiosity/amusement. Being forced to worship in the catholic way.....even though they were forced too, they never forgot the truth, their way of life, the way their parents and grandparents lived. [R]eading this poem brought/emerged a lot of sad feelings, thinking of the awful experiences my mother had to endure going to residential school. Shin-chi's Canoe [w]as an awesome book...I guess it's kind of a pleasant way of telling the unpleasant/disturbing/troubling way our parents and grandparents were treated when they were confined to these residential schools. Shin-chi's canoe was a symbol of hope/home/love for him, being so young and being taken from his parents, this canoe his father made him gave him some solace. It's disturbing to know that people can be so cruel to children.....because they were never fed enough they had to steal food, you can see from the picture in the book....the children eating in a dark, sad environment and the teachers in another room light up with steaming food. Not being allowed to speak to another or speak their language is why a lot of the residential survivors lost their Native tongue. It was a very costly price they all paid emotionally, spiritually, and mentally to attend these schools, and I'm sorry and very sad what each of them had to endure to learn how to read, write, cook, clean, farm, carpentry, etc [and]

No I have never read literature written by anyone Native....no reason. If I find a good book, I read it.

My thoughts on Vicki's response:

Vicki, too, shares that she has never read any Native literature (that she recalled during her response). Vicki is aware of the many issues that have been brought on by residential schools and connects her readings of *Shin-Chi's Canoe* and "Red Road – revisited" to the experience of her own mother having attended residential school.

Vicki also interprets Shin-Chi's canoe as a symbol of hope and "solace" that Shin-Chi keeps close to him when he is far away from his family, home and culture. To take Vicki's interpretation further, the canoe may also be a symbol for Native culture (home, language, family, customs); that culture is a means for Native people toward positive change.

The next respondent chose to remain **anonymous**; she is 32 years old and works for Peguis Health Services. She read a chapter from Howard Adams's book, *Prison of Grass* titled "The White Ideal and the Colonized Personality." She handwrote her response on a hardcopy of the questions (Appendix B):

1. Yes, I have read one other book [written by a Native author], Lawrence Bear's *Dreams of Glory*. [Lawrence is a community member of Peguis First Nation, he lives and works in the community].
2. [This reading] made me understand that there are a lot of Native people that struggle to 'be equal' [my quotation marks] with the white society, or how hard it is to be accepted as an equal to the white society.
3. The line: "it crushed me into inferiority; it emphasized my Indianness," made me feel how desperately Native/'Indian' people are trying to be accepted as 'equals' [my quotation marks].

4. I think Native literature can be useful in our community because there are a lot of Native people that feel inferior to the white society. Seeing more Native literature in the community can inspire people to try and reach life goals, to better their lives and themselves.
5. I think Native literature could do a lot for our community if we were more exposed to it. Until a short time ago, I wasn't aware of any Native authors/books. I think promoting Native literature in our community may interest a lot of people in reading. People need to understand that reading gives people more knowledge in life.

My thoughts on this anonymous response:

This person does not share how and when she gained more knowledge regarding Native authors and literature, but states that aside from the reading she did for this project she has read only one other Native-authored text. She talks about how hard it can be to feel equal with white society, but does not clarify whether she views it as an issue for a Native person in feeling equal to white society, or whether it is an issue of white society recognizing that Native people *are* equal – perhaps she means both. She believes that even today (despite the publication date of Adams's book) many Native people view themselves as inferior to white society (perhaps unconsciously). She adds that Native literature can do a lot for Native people and our communities, by seeing themselves represented by other Native people they can be inspired to bring about change in their lives; and most importantly, see themselves through a new set of eyes, that is Native eyes. For too long, Native people have only read about themselves from the perspective of non-Native writers and historians, but now Native authors in greater numbers are writing fiction and non-fiction representing Native people in ways that Native readers can relate to as we can clearly see in participant responses up until this point. Native readers relate and come to “know these people, these situations, this humor, and this tragedy [present in a lot of Native literature and writing]” (Van Camp 303) and may in turn better equip them with the tools

they need to forge ahead.

Germaine is 27 years old and a stay at home mother formally employed in the area of Child and Family Services. She chose to read Rita Joe's (Mi'cmaq) non-fiction book, *Song of Rita Joe: Autobiography of a Mi'kmaq Poet*. Germaine also had a copy of the first Native literature newsletter distributed in Peguis for this project; after reading it, she requested to read Anthony Akapark's, *Thrasher*. Germaine handwrote her response on a hardcopy of the questions (Appendix B):

1. Yes. In grade ten I read *April Raintree*. When I went to college I read a few books by and about Aboriginal people. One sticks out in my memory though because it has residential school stories in it from survivors. It's pretty graphic, it took me awhile to read due to the emotional aspect of it. It's called *Stolen From Our Embrace*. I've read other books about and from Native people, but I just can't remember them specifically.
2. Honestly. I felt mad at Rita because she kept having kids and it seemed she had a hard time taking care of them. She kept giving them away! I see that so much in Native communities and when I used to work with CFS. Parents not knowing how to parent and putting themselves first. Rita eventually 'got it' [my quotation marks] which is great but I think things like that happen these days because families are different than they were back the "old days." Residential school really changed a lot of things.
3. The part where Rita's mother died [is what impacted me the most]. I cried my eyes out thinking how hard that be for a child to go through. I thought: "what if [my daughter] had to go through that?" Morbid, I know, but that's what came to my mind.
4. Yes because hearing other's experiences and what they felt and learned can impact people to change and better their lives.
5. Start with parents. I saw my parents reading so I enjoyed reading as a child and didn't even think of it as "work." I think kids in general of any ethnicity aren't reading as much due to technology and media. It's easier and "funner" to watch tv than it is to read a book. That can be changed though. It just might take time.

In an informal visit, Germaine also shared some other thoughts on the book she read so because they are not a direct response to the questions I will set them off here using italics. I recorded her using handwritten notes:

I wonder about how much Rita Joe endured hoping for a better tomorrow, maybe that's something to be admired, how strong she [wa]s. She let people walk all over her, like her husband for example. He was horrible to her and she stayed [with him]. Things were different back then though, people mostly women had to stay married no matter what. In the end, he changed though.

My thoughts on Germaine's response:

Germaine associated Rita Joe's way of writing ("soft") with her personality; she felt that Rita was too tolerant and compliant, and these qualities were reflected in her "soft" way of writing about awful experiences. Germaine also briefly touched on the abuse that Rita endured at the hands of her husband (and others). Germaine seemed appalled that anyone would put up with such abuse, but applied this to the time in which Rita lived. Having said that, we do live in a different time, and women – namely Native women for the purpose of my focus on Native people – do not have to (and never should have had to) endure these things. In our visit, Germaine also shared that she knows of a woman (Native) who stayed in a bad marriage all her life and of another woman who left; Germaine confidently expressed she would never put up with what Rita did.

Germaine also relates to Rita Joe's experience with what she has witnessed in her own community – the large presence of Child and Family Services; however, Germaine appears cognizant that residential schools play a huge role when it comes to this issue. Residential schools, for many Native people, played a primary role in the breakdown of Native families. By

separating Native children from their parents, grandparents and siblings there would be a breakdown in the family structure and relationships. Native children did not learn proper parenting skills, many lost their Native language, and many were made to be ashamed of their Native heritage.

Germaine does believe that Native literature can positively impact Native readers and communities in that they can potentially see how other Native people have dealt with similar experiences and perhaps use that knowledge applying it to their own life.

Margaret is 36 years old and a post-secondary student working toward her teaching degree. She chose to read Basil Johnston's (Ojibway), *Indian School Days*. Margaret handwrote her response on a hardcopy of the questions (Appendix B):

1. Yes, I had read some Native literature written by Maria Campbell and also some short story and poems by Basil Johnston. The only reason why I read these pieces was because it was requested for a course I was taking at university. I was never really exposed to Native literature before.
2. Basil Johnston's memoir gave me (the reader) a glimpse of the life of a residential school survivor. His story.
3. Basil Johnston's memoirs about his experience at residential school w[ere] enlightening. I perceived that his experiences w[ere] not as rough as some of the other survivors but he also experienced some of the common emotional turmoil from family separation.
4. Native literature can be beneficial to our youth. It can give the youth possible career options and also it can give individuals a glimpse into our ancestral history.
5. In our community, there [is] not m[uch] Native literature being made available either at our local library or being taught in our school system. The most common piece of literature is the story "In Search of April Raintree," or "April Raintree," I think the ELA teachers in Native communities should focus on more Native authors and should be aware of the different materials that are out there.

My thoughts on Margaret's response:

Here again we see that Margaret did not get exposed to Native literature until she went to university. This is troubling for me because as mentioned before, what if a person does not go to university? They will be missing out on quite a lot, and looking at the profundity of community responses so will we. Margaret completed her reading of this book in one day and offered to read more books however all the texts for the project had been handed out. Perhaps this demonstrates that our communities would read more if we take the literature directly to them and they are able to connect to it.

Olive is 55 years old; she is a retired social worker. She read Anthony Akapark *Thrasher*. She handwrote her response on a hardcopy of the questions (Appendix B):

1. Yes. *Dreams of Glory*, author [is] Lawrence Bear.
2. It made me feel proud because a Native person wrote this book and there are not a lot of Native authors out there that I'm aware of.
3. The passage that impacted me the most was their [Inuit] way of life in that day and age is similar to our [Anishinabe] way of life in those times. The hard life, to survive was a lot of hard work every day. Today it is different and a lot of our young people do not know how to work or hunt and are lazy and unmotivated.
4. Native literature in our community could be useful as it could help educate our people and give them knowledge.
5. Our communities are not reading as much as in the past. The younger people show lack of interest due to technology, they do reach items on the internet which are not always educational.

My thoughts on Olive's response:

I liked how Olive connected Anthony Akapark's experience and way of life as an Inuit

man to our way of life as Anishinabe. This cross-cultural connection is important in that Native people should not just read literature specific to their nation, but literature that comes from many of the Aboriginal nations across Turtle Island.

Next, is **Evelyn** who is 35 years old and is in customer service. She chose to read Ruby Slipperjack's, *Weesquachak*. Evelyn kept in contact with me as she read the book, even sharing that she did not think she could finish it because she felt it was too "scary and didn't like it." I shared with her that I was not looking for readers to like what they read, but to just share their thoughts whether negative or positive; with this, she completed her reading and happily shared that she "was happy [she] finished it and liked the ending." Evelyn's previous comments in quotation marks were spontaneous comments (recalled from my memory) made about her reading when we ran into each other in Peguis. Below are her responses which she provided in handwritten form on a hardcopy of the questions as well as in a facebook message where she elaborated on her hardcopy responses (Appendix B):

1. I have not read literature authored by a Native person. I think it is because it is hard to find the books. I just remembered *April Raintree*, that was a good book.
2. I felt sad reading the book then all of a sudden happy by the end. Reading this book and all the things I read was so true about Native people and romance. It made me a little mad in the romance part where it was okay that he would leave her and come back whenever he wanted and for how I know this a few friends live like this and they seem to think that it is ok!!!! I don't think sooo! I never experienced what the book was about but I know that people do every day on the reserve. It is sad because I as a Native person it is opposite, I will never let that happen, my love or husband run around and drink and have other women, but for some it is ok. The book also did have a very dark side to it. I had a feeling inside the book there was someone else talking but there was no character for that person made me wonder throughout the book who it was.

3. Evelyn wrote N/A for a response to this question.
4. Well yes, because it is so real. With reading Native literature it makes you go into character and believe it is yourself.
5. Exposing more books to Native people especially Native literature is good. I think having more books where people can put themselves into it they would want to read more. All Native literature can help us get into the character not only this book but the few that I read. I think it is awesome to read Native literature, it is so interesting. I am so glad that I can help you out. Was going ask u a favor when u have some time can u give me a list of Native literature books and maybe where I can buy them. If you have any to lend can I borrow? you will get them back

My thoughts on Evelyn's response:

Evelyn believes that *Weesquachak*'s representation of relationships in a Native community is similar to that in her community. In her own way she says that a lot of Native women she knows have normalized unhealthy relationships but maintains that she, herself, would never tolerate the same treatment as illustrated in *Weesquachak* nor what her friends endure. She says as a Native person (woman) she would never let these things happen. It appears that Native-authored writing (fiction or non-fiction) can present Native people with experiences that we do not want for our own lives. Omushkego (Cree) elder and storyteller, Louis Bird tell us "stories that were terrible and horrible, they stayed in our minds. They were created for us young people to remember – to help us avoid going into the kinds of situations that are described in the stories. They do not teach us to become the horrible people that are in the stories – they try to teach us *not* to" (4). This idea can perhaps be applied to other writings by Native authors and storytellers; by reading (seeing) the negative consequences and circumstances of certain situations, Native readers can discern for themselves negative and positive choices in life as told from the perspective of a Native author.

Melissa is 30 years old and recently completed her first year of social work studies. She refers to community support as her “forte” and shared that she has a diploma in Child and Youth Services as well as Community Centred Therapy. She chose to read David Robertson’s graphic novel titled, *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne*. When I delivered the book to her, Melissa shared with me the reason she chose to read this particular book was because she won the Helen Betty Osborne Memorial Award; an educational, monetary award granted to Aboriginal (female) students who demonstrate hard work and financial need. Melissa typed her response directly into the Microsoft Word file and returned it to me as an attachment via email (Appendix B):

1. I loved to read ever since I was a little girl. My sister taught me to read at age 3. One of my favorite books as a child was a poem book written by Doreen Day. It was a book given to my granny as a gift at a ceremony in the United States. I kept it. I remember thinking about who wrote these poems and knowing it was a Native woman made the book that much more special. I think I was around the age of 7 or 8 when I read that particular book, I can’t remember the title. In grade six, I read the *Spirit of the White Bison* by Beatrice Culleton, I remember being able to match up what the story was to some of the oral traditional stories I had heard in ceremonies. It was pretty cool at that time to have that book in our school teachings. In grade seven, I read *In Search of April Raintree* also by Beatrice Culleton. This book really hit home for me. I could relate to the characters’ struggles in almost every aspect. Deep issues that had been kept quiet for a long time impacted me, things like foster care, alcoholism, shame of being Native, pride in being Native, and suicide. This was the first book I read about that I could directly relate to the events of my own life. It was a really good read. More recently, I have read *The New Buffalo* by Blair Stonechild. This was a more advanced book than the others I have read from Native authors. He talks about the pursuit of education being the new way of survival for Native peoples. In my university one course we were asked to do some research relating to education. My question was: Why do some Native students get funding for education while others do not? Stonechild’s book was able to offer answers

to that question. He went through the history of Native peoples and making treaty rights as it pertained to education. Stonechild's book contains excellent information for Native people to be aware of. Finally, I come to read – *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne*, a graphic novel by David Alexander Robertson.

2. When I read the graphic novel about Helen Betty Osborne, I liked that the story focused on her life and her dreams for the future. Although she died a tragic death, that was not the focus of the book, I liked that. I previously read the book, *Conspiracy of Silence*, and the whole focus of that book was about the gruesome details and the racism of the community. It portrayed the detective working on the case as a hero because he was solving a crime. In the graphic novel, it was much more about the life of Helen Betty. I felt more in touch with her aspirations, her dreams and her personality. I could relate because I also have a similar mindset. I could relate to her struggle with pursuing her education.
3. I really liked the part when Helen Betty continued on despite getting a F on her test, she never quit. Overall, I really liked the whole book.
4. I think this book is a great resource for youth and I will be passing it along.
5. I think as long as we keep encouraging each other, literacy will spread. We need to keep being good role models for reading.

My thoughts on Melissa's response:

Melissa shares with us that as a child she was exposed to some Native literature and this may be reason for what I think is such a wise response to what she read. She saw a lot in David Robertson's book. I liked how Melissa compared this version of the Helen Betty Osborne story with that in the *Conspiracy of Silence*. While it is important to reveal the tragedies and racism surrounding Helen's story, Melissa sees Robertson's version as focusing on the *real* person Helen was – her life, her personality and her aspirations. So even though Robertson uses the genre of a graphic novel to tell Helen's story, he still manages to creatively capture Helen's humanity and spirit – at least for Melissa's reading of this book. Melissa relates to Helen's hard

work, perseverance and struggle in pursuing an education; from Helen's story she takes with her the lesson that even an 'F' does not mean you have failed nor that you should quit.

The next community participant is **Chloe** who is 23 years old and a post-secondary student. She chose to read Richard Wagamese's non-fiction, autobiographical book titled *One Native Life*. Chloe typed her response directly into the Microsoft Word file and returned it to me as an attachment via email (Appendix B):

1. Yes, I have and such literature has been authored by the likes of Beatrice Mosionier, Joseph Boyden, Thomas King, Henry Pennier, and Mark St.Pierre and Tilda Long Soldier. With that said, however, I have only been introduced to the above authors recently, and that has been through my university experience. Prior to that, I was almost never exposed to the work of Native peoples.
2. What I read made me feel upset and overwhelmed. Yet, at the same time I felt encouraged and proud that Native peoples are taking it upon themselves to heal and reconnect. In terms of a connection or commonality as a Native person, while I have never experienced the influence of Child and Family Services, I did grow up away from my family and away from my community. I too was often confused about my identity and what it meant/means to be a Native person. My struggle to understand myself and other Native peoples has been ongoing; however, what I enjoyed most about Wagamese's memoir was his ability to demonstrate that feeling alone, misplaced, or even empty is something many Native peoples encounter. It is the result of generations of governmental policy, and at times, such pain is necessary for it enables us to look deeper into ourselves, our history, and why we face the conditions that we do.
3. [Chloe did not respond to this question, but perhaps her previous response demonstrates how the book impacted her.]
4. Yes, I think that at the very least, Native literature can help those who are isolated from formal "education" to understand the impacts of colonization; how being removed from ones family and community can affect individuals, families, and communities.

5. I think Native literature is very important. It helps us to interpret our past and present conditions, and thus, what we need to do individually and as a community to move forward. I find that often when we see each other struggling, we blame ourselves because we don't understand how colonization has impacted us. Especially for those who choose not to pursue a higher education; hegemonic thoughts remain when we are uninformed. Writers like Wagamese are able to offset such thoughts by sharing their life's story and connecting their struggles to the impacts of colonization. When looking at Native readers themselves, I think that while we are not reading as much Native literature as we should, people are interested. When reflecting upon my high school experience, I don't ever remember being encouraged to read work by Native peoples; I was completely unaware that I would even be interested in such work because no one had asked me to or it was never required of me. That was until I began university, and I now wish that I had understood all that I do now years ago. I think it is just a matter of encouraging youth and adults alike to become informed, and that could be accomplished through youth councils, book clubs, Native history classes (on reserve), etc. We all have something to share, and when a Native author is willing to share his or her story, we begin to realize that we are not alone. Communication is needed, and I truly believe that Native literature can start the conversation if we let it.

My thoughts on Chloe's response:

Here, again, we see that Chloe was never exposed to Native literature prior to university and even states that she does not recall ever being encouraged to read it when she was in high school. Chloe, like me, wishes she could have been exposed to this literature in her younger years so that she could have understood everything she does now.

Chloe feels that Native literature can provide those, who choose not to attend or have no means of attending university, (and are also not learning these things at home) with an 'education' about Native history and realities. In this way, Native literature can be a form of education just as storytelling (and orality) was throughout our history.

Anita is 42 years old and is a guidance counselor. She chose to read Illa Bussidor's *Night Spirits: The Relocation of the Sayisi Dene*. Anita handwrote her response on a hardcopy of the questions (Appendix B):

1. I have read books by Native authors for university classes. I find that only lately Native literature is becoming more available. The stories are becoming more contemporary with issues related to Aboriginal people.
2. The story was heartbreaking: the government moving a whole community where the residents become displaced at what cost! It angers me to think about most Aboriginal communities (like Peguis also) are moved to accommodate other people. I see a connection between the displacement and the issues of colonization amongst our people: pushed aside when we are people of the land.
3. The whole book! It was so sad to see and read about the [Sayisi Dene] people. In the beginning of the story it showed that they depended upon their culture and the land to survive and they were content. It was awful to read the horrific abuses the people suffered. It is an unfortunate event to impact a whole community.
4. Yes, Native literature is useful for our communities: through reading our people can remember our past, document our history (since our traditional stories are not being shared for other reasons). Reading Native literature can also provide awareness to other worlds.
5. Yes, I think reading is lapsing in our communities for many reasons: technology reading/literacy issues. Reading Native literature should become available on ebooks, videos, song, etc. We should have more advertising for Aboriginal authors and literature [Anita, at this time, had not seen a copy of the Native literature newsletter I distributed in Peguis].

My thoughts on Anita's response:

Unfortunately Anita, too, did not have much exposure to Native literature other than in her university studies. She connects the experience of the Sayisi Dene people with that of Peguis for our ancestors were also relocated. Anita acknowledges that displacement (relocation) plays a

huge role in the social issues that are present in various Native communities and that Native literature can provide Native people with a means to learn about and remember – through their eyes of a Native person – our past (good and bad).

Ryan is 32 years old and works in broadcasting. He read a poem titled “The Devil’s Language” by Marilyn Dumont (Metis). Ryan typed his response directly into the Microsoft Word file and returned it to me as an attachment via email (Appendix B):

1. No, I don’t recall ever reading any Native literature before. I think this is because it is not a part of the school curriculum when I was going to school.
2. [This poem] made me feel that everything revolves around the “white” persons’ society. That only the white way was the right way and our way was wrong.
3. my father doesn't read or write
the King's English says he's
dumb but he speaks Cree
how many of you speak Cree?
Th[ese] [lines] impacted me the most because my dad spoke his language and was very proud of his traditions. He went to residential school and he was scolded for speaking his language. He grew up to be a very intelligent man who could read and write even though he spoke his language. My dad was a very proud Dakota- Sioux ‘Indian’ [my quotation marks].
4. I think it can be very useful in our community. It can show the youth that they can be authors and write poetry. Story telling is a part of how we keep our past and traditions alive and this is very important for the future.
5. I feel that we aren’t exposed to Native literature at all in school and this is where it should start at a young age. Technology is taking over. I would personally rather watch the movie than read the book, but my wife would rather read the book because it is more detailed.

My thoughts on Ryan's response:

Ryan connects his dad's experience to what he read in Dumont's poem. Ryan's dad held on to his language and culture despite having attended residential school, and he passed on that pride to Ryan. This corresponds to Emma LaRocque's contention that "not all of us grew up confused or alienated from our homes, languages or lands" (220). Ryan's understanding of this poem and his dad's experience speaks to the Eurocentric way of believing that any way other than European was/is inferior; when in fact having the ability to speak a Native language and understand the epistemology (belief system) that goes with it is a truly a gift – a gift not many hold. Ryan's story also reveals that the colonizer's plan at completely disempowering Indigenous peoples was not as successful as they would like to think because not only did they teach his dad to read and write in English, they failed at stripping him of his language and culture; thus, he became equipped with the ability to communicate in both languages and function in two cultures.

Next is **June** [no age provided] who works in Aboriginal Education. She read "I Lost My Talk" by Rita Joe, "Red Road – Revisited" by Duncan Mercredi, and "Indian Woman" by Jeannette Armstrong. June typed her response directly into the Microsoft Word file and returned it to me as an attachment via email (Appendix B):

1. Yes, I have read many books by Aboriginal authors, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, plays. I enjoy reading Louise Erdrich, I can relate to the characters she writes about. I also like Jeanette Armstrong. As an English and Native Studies teacher I prefer to use literature by Aboriginal authors so that my students can look to them as role models.
2. With Louise Erdrich's books, I can relate, she is a writer and a scholar, like myself. I like the humour she uses, and her depiction of life on a reserve and the characters she creates

are so typical of many in any First Nation community, Canadian or American. I don't particularly like Drew Hayden Taylor's writings, I find them too urbanized and like he's trying too hard to be a famous Aboriginal writer.

3. I have read many books by Aboriginal authors, but some passages that impact me the most are the old stories and legends that are re-told in many writings. Some versions will vary, but overall, even though you may have heard a particular legend or story before, it still impacts you in a different way. Old stories and legends can always be re-told but there is always a different message that can be interpreted at different times and by different individuals.
4. Yes, it helps young Aboriginal people understand a bit of their culture and identity. Aboriginal authors and writers also serve as role models for young Aboriginal people.
5. I think that there are not enough teachers out there promoting good reading by Aboriginal authors in First Nation schools. I think that they need more professional development in how to critique children's and youth literature for Aboriginal students. Sometimes, the books can be too stereotypical and lack real authenticity. The media also needs to be more involved in promoting and recognizing good Aboriginal stories, i.e. promoting them or turning them into plays, television shows and movies, so that young people and all people appreciate it.

My thoughts on June's response:

June's response demonstrates her caution in approaching Native literature. She is aware that not *all* Native literature or literature with Native content can be good for Native people because society and Native readers can further internalize stereotypes and false images of Native people and communities. She tells us that Aboriginal educators should take it upon themselves to be informed of these stereotypes so that they can detect and critique which books, Native and non-Native, perpetuate these images. If Aboriginal educators do not properly educate *themselves* on these stereotypes they may further perpetuate these in their classrooms and among Aboriginal students. Additionally, we should also be teaching Aboriginal students how to discern these

stereotypes for themselves so that they too are better equipped to forge ahead.

The last respondent chose to remain **anonymous**; she is 33 years old and has recently returned to university to pursue a teaching degree. She read the chapter titled “The White Ideal and the Colonized Personality” from Howard Adams’s book, *Prison of Grass*. This response was typed directly into the Microsoft Word file and returned it to me as an attachment via email (Appendix B):

1. Yes I have. [I read] Howard Adams’s *Prison of Grass* and *A Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization*....unfortunately that’s the extent of my “Native author” knowledge.
2. [This response is included in her thoughts on question number three]
3. Howard Adams - *Prison of Grass* has definitely had an impact on me. Misunderstanding and ignorance towards our own became obvious within myself. I used to question....just like so many others I’m sure...why are we like this? Why can’t we just move on? It was my lack of understanding and knowledge that led me to ask these questions...even if I never asked them out loud they were there. Shame. I think deep down inside there was always a little bit of shame...we look around and we see our First Nation people living in poverty, drinking, drugs, prostitution, children becoming wards of cfs...but we fail to realize that our history has played such a significant role in our lives. In *Prison of Grass* Howard Adams talks about his “shame” the inferiority of being an “Indian” the stereotypes that have been placed on us throughout history and how we’ve been inclined to adjust our lives according to these stereotypes. Adams states “confused by their state of powerlessness and oppression, native people sometimes turn to social behavior consistent with racial stereotypes.” (42). Reading passages such as this puts a lot of perspective on my own feelings...the questions... the shame... and now the guilt. Guilt for feeling the way I did, even now when I see a native person struggling on main street and that little ting of shame starts to creep up I remember...I remember our history and I ask different questions...what’s his/her history? Did they go to residential school? Did

their parents? How has their/our history impacted their life? Because although they may not have had the initial physical impact of residential schools...the generational and emotional impact is just as great and apparent throughout our nation. Howard Adams straight forward and perhaps sometimes harsh writing style has given me greater insight, better understanding, the knowledge to ask different questions, and has placed a desire in me to expand my knowledge...to grasp it, to use it and to share it.

4. I think Native literature is an eye opener...I think it's the first step to realization...realizing we are not "just this way" that our history has played a significant role in our existence. The negative history that has been bestowed upon us has determined where we sit in a predominantly white society. The negative effects of our history is apparent when we look at our communities and the turmoil that often surrounds them. Poverty, alcohol and substance abuse, and family violence are unfortunately a reality within our communities. When I look at our young people I think they are our responsibility, we are the ones who need to step up and make the necessary changes within our school systems. I believe bringing Aboriginal literature in the early years would be a positive step. Taking the words of Aboriginal authors and historians and placing them within our classrooms explaining their significance would at the very least give our children an introduction to our history.
5. I think that technology plays a huge role in the lives of....everyone. Children, teenagers, adults, grammas, papas...everyone is connected in some way to some form of technology. While technology has made our lives easier...the simplicity of our lives has also been altered. Even for me before I returned to school I very rarely picked up a book to read...but as a child and teenager that's all I wanted to do. I can't say for certain that there is a disinterest...I think that if people picked up a book like *Prison of Grass* there would be more understanding and perhaps more desire to gain more knowledge. Bringing Native Literature into our school systems is our responsibility, and I believe if we start with our young people we give them the foundation to begin an understanding of colonization and the impact it has had on us. I believe that teaching our young people the effects of colonization is vital for future generations. Having an understanding of our history and how it has impacted us for generations is essential in our healing. I definitely think we have a long ways to go in terms of decolonization...how? How do we end these

things? I don't know....I don't even know how to decolonize myself.....I definitely think that reading Native Literature is an essential tool in the process of decolonizing....but what next...I don't know....

My thoughts on this anonymous response:

This person has taken a lot from her readings; however, she too has not had much exposure to Native literature yet acknowledges how important it is for us to expose more Native people and communities to Native literature. She feels that is it *our* responsibility as Native people to make sure this happens in our communities. No one else will do it for us – we must do this for ourselves and for our children.

After her readings, this person now looks at the individual experience of each Native person instead of generalizing that the social issues we experience in our communities make all Native people *just this way*. This is what Native literature can do for Native readers. They can come to understand why in our community we experience in greater numbers than non-Native populations the socio-economic issues that we do instead of attributing these to our being *just this way* – which is exactly what supporters of colonialism would like us to continue believing.

CHAPTER FIVE

Community Based Theory

While this project was motivated by my own experience with Native literature, I did not want to assume that other Native people would have absolutely the same experience in reading Native literature. However, many did share that similar to my experience they were not exposed to Native literature until either they went to university or participated in this project. Participants shared with me their individual experience and interpretation of what they read and offered their thoughts on what he or she felt Native literature did for them, as well as what it could do for other Native people and communities. Obtaining this information was the purpose of my project because as aforementioned we can theorize all day long about what Native literature can do for our people and our communities, but if it does not reach them or we do not ask *them* what it does for them how can we know what their experience is or what *they* think of Native literature? As I stated earlier it is not my wish to homogenize Native writing or the voices of participants, but in this project I wanted to draw out what I believed to be important points in each of the twenty-one responses to Native literature, and then continue on in this section locating what I see as commonalities among the twenty-one responses.

As I read participant responses I found myself very moved by their words. Many times in a largely *western* world we come to believe that only older or *educated* people, or scholars (Native and non-Native) in particular, can give rise to theory and philosophy – but that is closed thinking. That is not to say everyone thinks in this way. Many are aware that a great number of philosophers and theorists are without a *western* education but because of the modes and methods typically associated with what western academia qualifies as theory and philosophy, these voices are rarely heard.

In making meaning of what they read many participants related their own experience or the experience of someone they knew. They shared personal experiences and stories. In her essay titled “*Honouring Ni’Wahkomakanak*,” Janice Acoose writes “Oh no, here she comes dragging her whole tribe along with her” when referring to her methodology (Indigenous) in “perform[ing] theory” about Native literature (217). In this thesis, participants and I have done the same – we made sense of what we read using our own experiences and stories. Margaret Kovach would refer to this as an “infusion of Indigenous knowledge systems” and methodology with Western ways of knowing (12). Although Western knowledge and epistemology tend to “relegate story to a historic cultural method that lacks currency within contemporary knowledge centres,” (Kovach 96) it is my contention that if I am expected to learn Western ways of knowing, it is only fair that Western ways of knowing come to know me and the way that I make sense of the world.

Omushkego elder and storyteller, Louis Bird, once shared with me and a classroom full of people an oral story that was handed down to him by his elders. It was a story about “Wisakaychack” (as it is spelled in Louis’s book) and how he wanted to be a goose (175). Within this what may be thought of as a seemingly simple story is a complex worldview, although not all people will possess the ability to perceive it. As Louis told the story he talked about the biological makeup of geese. He spoke about the eyelids of the goose and how they protected it from snow-blindness. He spoke about how the geese flew in what he referred to in Swampy Cree as *ayhamnet*; he described this as an air pocket or jet stream in the sky that allows geese to fly quicker and more efficiently in their migration. Louis shared that the Cree word *ayhem* translates to English as *long spider net*, and that the Omushkego people paid close attention to the flying patterns of geese and this is how they obtained such specialized knowledge

(Beyer 5). Along with myself, a visiting Ph.D. student from India paid close attention to this story, then he thoughtfully said that this knowledge would be referred to by *western* education as aerodynamics. Louis agreed but reminded us more than once that Omushkego people were not scientific (in the western sense) but paid close, meticulous attention to not only geese but the environment that surrounded them and thus acquired very specific knowledge (Beyer 5). Perhaps at first listen (glance), to the untrained ear (eye), this story would appear to be only about Wisakaychack wanting to be a goose, but there is much more to it than that. Louis's stories reveal Omushkego epistemologies; just as the stories of other Indigenous nations and people reveal theirs.

An interesting phenomenon came out of this project on Native literature. A majority of the participants were female however I did not do this consciously. It seems that Aboriginal women responded in greater numbers to this project than Aboriginal men. I had engaged eight men to participate, but only one submitted a response. Of twenty-three women, only three did not submit a response. In her book titled *The Strength of Women: hkam yimowak* Priscilla Settee writes "Indigenous women are the unrecognized backbone of our communities, who build social support networks and keep our culture intact through their struggles to establish relevant education institutions and keep our languages alive" (V). Many Native women "sustain families single-handedly, and become educated in order to provide for their families," they are completing high school and post-secondary education in higher numbers than Native men (Settee V). According to Statistics Canada 2001 Survey of Aboriginal people, 24 860 Aboriginal women completed a college diploma or certificate and 9540 completed a university degree; compare that to the number of Aboriginal men who completed a college diploma or certificate at 13 365 and 3585 who completed a university degree. Although this survey is ten years old, I

believe it is still true that Aboriginal women are completing post-secondary education in higher numbers than Aboriginal men; and perhaps this phenomenon transpiring from the results of my project attests to Aboriginal “women hav[ing] taken the lead in community-based and higher-education initiatives in their communities” (Settee 96). This is *the strength of women*.

Another observable fact arising from participant responses is that most of them believe that awareness among Native people and communities (and schools) about Native literature must be increased, along with our literacy levels and reading interest. One anonymous participant (age 33) maintains that it is our responsibility as Native people to do so because no one else will do this for us. We need to make greater efforts in connecting and exposing our communities to Native-authored literature. Almost every participant stated how important Native literature can be for Native people and communities. They spoke of how Native readers (of all ages) would be able to relate to much of what Native literature illustrates, and how they saw themselves or the people they know in what they read. Native literature can teach us more about ourselves, our history, and cultures; it offers us “a corrective lens” for which we can finally see ourselves through the eyes of other Native people who in many cases have had the same experiences (LaRocque 4). This can only enhance the image we have of ourselves particularly for our young people – our future generations. And if our self-image is improved there is a chance that other facets of our lives will also improve.

Most participants felt that many people, not just Native people, are not reading today. Participants attribute this problem as it occurs in Native communities to living in a more technological era; general reading disinterest; lack of exposure and knowledge about Native literature (maybe we would read more if the stories within them pertained to us and our experiences); as well as reading not being a part of home life due to literacy and/or other issues.

Stemming from all of this is the question: “So how *do* we get more Native people reading Native literature?”

In Cynthia’s response to this question she said: “It is hard to make a commitment to something when a large segment of our people are struggling with the pressures of daily living, not to mention the inter-generational impacts of colonization.” She also took into consideration that Native people’s “historical relationship” with education and/or writing (residential schools, language loss, false images and stereotypes of Native people in history books) may be a factor in why more Native people do not read; not to mention, Aboriginal people come from cultures that value and nurture *oral* tradition.

While these are all well-founded reasons for Native people to be wary of *western* education, the English language and writing at the same time Native people are exercising agency and power in using these things to their own advantage (eg. my discussion on social media). In her analysis of Shirley Sterling’s *My Name is Seepeetza*, Native Studies scholar Renate Eigenbrod discusses how the main character Seepeetza “wrap[s] up’ [her] journal...in a buckskin cover with beaded fireweed flowers – a symbolic, or ceremonial, gesture trying to undo the harm caused by the oppressive and brutalizing environment in which writing in English was taught” to Native children (3). Eigenbrod’s interpretation of this gesture is reminiscent of how Native writers are accosting the English language and combining it with their own ways of knowing and communicating.

Here are just some of the things that Native writers and scholars have said about orality and writing and about Native writers taking the power of the written word as their own:

Contemporary Native authors work to translate not only language, but form, culture, and perspective. And within their written words, many attempt to continue the life of the oral reality. –Kimberley Blaeser, Anishinabe (53)

Native peoples in North America have a long and often vexed relationship with the unpredictable power of the written word...those marks on paper...have served as both tools of liberation for Indigenous communities and as weapons of devastation used against them....[but] written words – those of Indigenous mother tongues as well as those of the invader tongues have been indigenized by centuries of use by Native peoples. –Daniel Heath Justice, Cherokee (4-5)

That is why this book has come out – to emphasize that – to teach us the teaching system of the Omushkego people....to understand the Omushkego cultural experience, and also to show our Omushkego history. –Louis Bird, Omushkego (4-5)

I have sought to master this language so that it would no longer master me. –Emma LaRocque, Cree/Metis (xxvi)

Word-arrows have transformative power and can help Indigenous people come home. –Neal McLeod, Cree (67)

Inside our texts, inside our oracy and our literature is the necessary cultural knowledge that can address our liberation, and I believe we are ultimately responsible for our own liberation. –Lee Maracle, Salish (95)

I now walk with one moccasin and one high heel. –Maria Campbell, Metis (lecture)

These are all very powerful words from a diverse representation of Native authors and scholars who view our ability to integrate both worlds into their life and work as powerful. This does not mean we have lost, given up or need to give up on oral traditions. Melissa, in one of her responses to the questions in this project, states: “In grade six I read *The Spirit of the White Bison* by Beatrice Culleton, I remember being able to match up what the story was to some of the oral traditional stories I had heard in ceremonies.” Melissa’s experience with this story in both the

oral and written tells us that it is important for Native writers to write down these stories and capture them on paper so that others may learn about us, and so that we may learn about ourselves.

So again we come back to the question: “So how *do* we get more Native people reading Native literature?” Participants in my project shared some wonderful ideas in better connecting Native people and communities with Native literature. These ideas included: “more advertising” (Anita) and “promoting it everywhere” (Bonnie) including in “social media” (Cynthia); “presentations, an electronic newsletter, or perhaps a book club” (Deidre) or “reading circl[e]” (Cynthia); and “our education system...catch[ing] up to the visions of our authors” (Karen) in that “local education authorities...encourage teachers to identify First Nations/Aboriginal literature/authors for use in the schools” (Cynthia). Participant Trish also shares many of her ideas in engaging more Native people to read Native literature such as “community-wide incentives for reading...[like] cash prizes, furniture, grocery shopping sprees.” Interestingly, this idea could work to engage those community members who face more of the socio-economic issues mentioned by respondent Cynthia and at the same time stimulate their interest in Native literature, so that perhaps eventually these monetary incentives would no longer be needed for community members to engage with Native literature. Trish also offers up ideas on hosting monthly author visits in Native communities and/or schools and “creat[ing] a school wide biography” that would engage students to write their own stories and perhaps pique their interest in further engaging with Native literature.

Participants in my project certainly offer up some amazing ideas on how to engage more Native people and communities to read Native-authored literature, but most importantly their responses demonstrate that as members of a Native community they *do* view Native literature as

important and contributing to Native people and communities. This corresponds to the aforementioned theories that have been written by Native scholars. Unfortunately almost all of these community members share that they also believe there is lack of exposure and knowledge about Native literature in their community, thus it is important that we continue our work in making these connections. As we can see from the community responses in this project Native literature can offer Native readers “a sense of selfhood and community loyalty [as Native people which can be] powerful enough to fuel survival” (Blaeser 54). By reading it we can “begin to understand our position in the long history of our people” (Blaeser 54) and this is critical because in order for Native people “to understand where we’re going, we need to understand where we’ve come from” (Scofield 290). This has been true in my experience. Native literature and writing has enlightened me in terms of knowing the history of my ancestors and how that history has informed my present – from the perspectives of other Native people.

Twenty-one people have generously taken the time away from their lives and work to take part in this project that endeavoured to collect the voices of Peguis First Nation community members and their thoughts on Native literature. Reading these Native-authored stories, poems and other forms of writing has drawn from them personal stories about their life and their experiences. These writings prompted them to discuss their thoughts and ideas on Christianity, culture, language, loss, oral traditions, stories, writing, Aboriginal women, relationships, humour, resiliency, education and history as they pertain to Native people. Their participation in my project has allowed me to present community based theory on Native literature centred around their thoughts and ideas. They have confirmed that there remains much work to be done in connecting Native people and communities to Native literature. They have offered their ideas in how to do so and they have shared with us the issues that we may come up against. Their

words and participation are so important when it comes to all work being done in Native communities and for Native people by both Native and non-Native researchers because again we can theorize all day long about what we think can be good for Native people and communities, but what good is this if we do not go to them and ask them what “[they] know, what [they] feel, what [they] see, and what [they] trust”? (Van Camp 299)

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I heard ya were talkin about meh

a native literature newsletter (side one)

The idea for this newsletter was born out of a desire to share with my community the great and creative of writing by Native writers especially in a time when the world is consumed by internet, video games & tv. There are more and more Native writers, poets, actors, producers, musicians & artists but more work needs to be done because there is so much untapped talent out there & let's be real...we can never do enough to undo what has been written about us and how we have been portrayed in history books, literature and media.

New!

Quoting entire books would be too wordy, so this newsletter gives you short quotes, passages & titles from Native writers.

The following includes fiction, non-fiction (autobiography/history/politics), poetry, short stories, graphic novels, comic books and more!

Quotes from some great writers...

Nicola Campbell, author, Shuswap

Quote from her Children's book: **Shi-Shi-Etko**

"My girl, we will not see each other until the wild roses bloom in the spring and the salmon have returned to our river. I want you to remember the ways of our people. I want you to remember our songs and our dances, our laughter and our joy, and I want you to remember the land"

Anthony Apakark, author, Inuit

Quote from his autobiography: **Thrasher, Skid Row Eskimo**

"I hope the younger generation of my people read my story. They will be easy targets, like me, if they are not warned."

Richard Van Camp, author, Dogrib

Quote from his children's book: **A Man Called Raven**

"You don't know this but you were asking for a lot of trouble when you were beating on that raven. Your parents told me that you have never gone out on the land. Well, maybe that explains your actions. But I want to tell
The Seventh Generation Series

Recommended Reading List



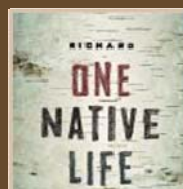
Shi-Shi-Etko

Author: Nicola Campbell,
Shuswap, Children's Literature



The Seventh Generation Series

Author: David Robertson, Cree,
Graphic Novel (Teens)



One Native Life

Author: Richard Wagamese,
Ojibway, Non-fiction
(autobiography)

Newsletter Contact Information

Who to contact:

Donna Beyer

ihywtam@gmail.com

Fatty Legs

Teacher 29

Reader and Newsletter Questions (write on back if you need more room ☺)

- 1) Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? If so, who? If not, why do you think this is?

Spirit of the White Birch
Stone Fox

- read them to my students bc they love them every year (say it's interesting bc they like that they're 'Indians' in there)
- read them every year (Mr. G)

Just for school / teaching degree

- don't read leisurely
- all my studies had Native content
First Nation Lit. of Sask.

- 2) How did what you've read make you feel (in regards to a connection or commonality as a Native person, if any)?

I'm debating whether to use the book in my classroom, need to check if it's age appropriate - it will introduce residential school to my students bc many of them have their grandparents went to resid. school. ^{liked the story}
- loved msg in it / brought up in Christian home & dad preached abt. every child has (good grand) - kept ^{her} / a negative a well & ppl. try to break culture that/curse them / don't label - that's a curse
- really likes it

Alexis - Donna^{hand} recorded her responses

Alexis

→ email a list of books to Dolly.

- 3) Were there any particular passages that impacted you most? If so, which one/s, why, and how?

— See last question
 — where she said takes a stand
 (a "will")

- 4) Do you think what you've read, or Native literature overall, can be useful in our community/communities? If so, how? If not, why?

Most definitely - we can't have the
 western culture teaching ~~at~~ us abt
 our cultures - we need an awareness of
 Native culture.

- we'll find our identities again our truth,
 our history / it's impossible to get back to where
 we were before contact but it's important to use
 these things (history, identity) for our kids/youth

- 5) I'm also looking for community members' thoughts on Native literature in general, and on Native readers (or lack thereof - are our communities not reading as much as we should? Is it because we aren't exposed to our own/Native literature or just a general disinterest/as many are today due to technology etc)? How can we improve this?

My opinion is maybe ppl. don't know
 where to look for these things & probably
 just disinterest

→ liked real pictures in book / images / childhood &
 her home pictures (definitions of words & what
 things were) - things I didn't know that I learned.

responses hand recorded by Donna

Deidre

Reader and Newsletter Questions (write on back if you need more room ☺)

- 1) Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? If so, who? If not, why do you think this is?

Yes. I've read ~~Eden~~ work by Eden Robinson, Thomas King, Maria Campbell, Louise Erdrich, and Jan Ross and many more.

- 2) How did what you've read make you feel (in regards to a connection or commonality as a Native person, if any)?

#3 → I'll answer #2 on the back) Shi-Shi-etko reminded me of many ~~old~~ stories/traditions of our people: the bag of memories ~~as~~ I related to the story of the ~~current's~~ ~~memory~~ ~~and~~ ~~for~~ ~~us~~ ~~but~~ ~~our~~ ~~way~~ ~~of~~ ~~life~~ ~~depended~~ ~~on~~ ~~that~~ ~~one~~ ~~little~~ ~~piece~~ ~~of~~ ~~land~~, it was all we needed to get our ways back. The ~~memories~~ things put into Shi-Shi-etko's are the memories our people need to get back to our ways - we need to remember that it was things as simple as berries and land that provided for us.

Deidre

#2. Shin-chi's canoe made me feel everything from anger and sadness to disbelief and joy.
I think that as a First Nations person these/those emotions are experienced on almost an everyday basis.

Deidre

- 3) Were there any particular passages that impacted you most? If so, which one/s, why, and how?

Shin-Chi's scene - ~~the reference to the dust from the cattle truck to a from residential school~~ going it was a "snake" that followed them there and going home it was a "butterfly" leading them home.

The snake represents the darkness of the schools and how their effects slithered their ways into the lives of generation after generation of our people. The butterfly to me, is the representation

- 4) Do you think what you've read, or Native literature overall, can be useful in our community/communities? If so, how? If not, why?

Anything someone reads can be useful in their lives. Whether it be positive or negative, ~~(or even if it's negative)~~ or an "eye-opener" it affects people. Books like these help people understand what First Nations people have been through and why it is so important for us to re-learn our culture(s).

- 5) I'm also looking for community members' thoughts on Native literature in general, and on Native readers (or lack thereof - are our communities not reading as much as we should? Is it because we aren't exposed to our own/Native literature or just a general disinterest/as many are today due to technology etc)? How can we improve this?

Before starting University, I did not know there were so many wonderful and amazing Native authors out there. So to bring it out more, presentations, an electronic newsletter or perhaps a bookclub would, I believe, be the best way because they allow for discussions and encouragement.

APPENDIX B

of ^{how} our people need to "fly" into the
positive cycle of life.

—
—

Deidre

Shi-shi-etko

Deidre

all the ~~as~~ things shi-shi-etko is told to remember are there because they know that she will be "presented" with many new memories @ Residential School - they want her to try remember that no matter what, she is to be proud of herself and where she comes from.

→ her bag of memories were left @ home because home is where she will be happy again.

Shun-chi's canoe

Deidre

for a child that small to be able to comfort himself by ^{remembering} using his traditions gives ~~the~~ the impression that we (First Nations/Aboriginal) ^{people} no matter what we've been through all have that little bit of hope/faith/strength left in us.

→ the dust comparison

in the beginning its referred to as a "snake" that follows them to Residential school and in the end it is a big beautiful "butterfly" following them home.

- what a ~~beautiful~~ subtle way to describe the feelings/thoughts of Residential school.

→ its a powerful book that ~~also~~ causes all sorts of emotions ~~like~~; anger, sadness, joy and disbelief to name a few.

The pictures/illustrations also add a strong outlook - they're done in a cartoon yet lifelike way - kind of how the stories from Residential Schools should be - cartoon because they shouldn't be real.

APPENDIX B

In addition to Deidre's hand-written response she emailed me the following – typing this additional response directly into an email.

to donnambeyer@[REDACTED].com

Date Tue, Jul 26, 2011 at 1:06 PM

Subject RE: elaborate

mailed-by hotmail.com

As a First Nations woman, I believe that a lot of the everyday things we do present us, and others, with certain emotions. For example, if I were to see an First Nations man on the street asking for money/food it would make me feel angry because he's "living up" to the non-Aboriginal peoples expectations (and I say expectations because majority of people expect nothing better than that from our people). At the same time, I feel sadness because of my knowledge of the system and what it has done to our people. Many were so traumatized and abused that they were/are led to believe that they cannot be anything other than what mainstream society expects them to be. In the same situation, although rarely, I will pick up a sense of happiness because that person will make a joke or laugh when talking to you. And it's that that I choose to take with me and learn from. No matter what he/she has been through, he still holds the ability to make fun of things. That is my learning from our people, no matter what happened and continues to happen to us we must always be able to bring gestures of happiness to one another.

Anything and everything we do will always have opinions.

Deidre Garson

Karen

Native American literature: A Powerful Force in the Process of Decolonization for Native People

1. Read a lot of Indigenous authors: Joseph Boyden, Richard Van Camp, Jeannette Armstrong, Beatrice Culleton, Louise Erdrich, Maria Campbell, Basil Johnston, Leslie Marmon Silko, Eden Robinson
Also anthologies and Poetry: Gregory Scofield, Louise Halfe, Neal McLeod, Al Hunter, Kevin Paul,
I like to read literature by our people because I feel connected to the situations, the way the words are presented: like our people talk, not all English grammar and correct...I feel that our authors have a responsibility to write in the way our people talk and to reflect the way our language has evolved from original languages to English, but still maintaining a sense of the rhythm of speech... singsong style of Cree, for example, that Louise Halfe and Greg Scofield present.
2. I believe that our literatures are similar in scope to the storytelling of the past, where histories and mapping and medicines and knowledge was passed down to the listeners. In our literatures, many of authors are contributing to this tradition by including old stories, language, a sense of place, traditions, ceremonies, our sciences and other aspects of our way of life. This is how our people learned... hearing, remembering and talking about the stories gave people a sense of who they are, where they come from, about self, culture, beliefs, values, experiences and memories.
Even the modern stories that reveal poverty, incest, abuse and other atrocities are a way to reveal what is really happening in our lives. And now we have stories of the adoptions, residential schools, alcoholism and drug abuse... things that have had a real impact on the lives of our people. These stories are coming to light now and our people are reading them; others are reading them and this will bring a lot of understanding of the "WHY questions". Why do our people drink? Why do our people do drugs? Why do our women allow themselves to be abused? Why do our men abuse? All these awful things that we do to ourselves comes from learning these behaviours, seeing them and recreating them. But are the people who NEED to read these stories actually reading them? If not, how do we get them to read these stories, to read about the transformation from abused to finding self-esteem.
I notice that a lot of children's authors seem to focus their writings on the past, old stories, old traditions and I think this is a good thing because this brings stories and knowledge to the Parents who buy and read these books and to the children who hear them and look at the pictures and might hear language and other kinds of knowledge.

Karen

3. Basil Johnston has had a huge impact on me. It was reading his non-fiction book Ojibway Heritage that changed my life around. I finally found some answers to the questions that had haunted me about being Indian. Am I ndn because of a treaty number? That was a big question for me. I read all his books and they really gave me a sense of who I was as an Anishnabe woman. Although I am more Cree, it was hard to find any books by Cree authors at that time. I have since found that Louise Halfe's poetry gives me a good sense of my Creeness.

Also, reading Maria Campbell's Halfbreed back in the 70's gave me a real look at the poverty, abuses, and hard life that I saw so many women going through in silence. That book gave voice to their pain, their suffering and it made me stand strong against any kind of abuse from men, and women too. I was able to understand what made these women stay in these relationships and why they found it so difficult to step away from that role of the beaten woman.

Our literatures are contributing to the process of decolonization in many ways. Firstly, having our stories out there gives a voice to a people who have long been subject to a silencing... perfect example is the residential schools. There are stories now that are being told and our people who never went to those schools, Canadians, as well as other people around the world, are hearing them for the first time. Our world-view – the way we see the world around us – is linked to the land and the elements – air, water, plants, animals. Without a voice to show this, we haven't been able to make that connection. Now, many of our authors are naturally writing about this connection.. whether it be Joseph Boyden writing about that journey down the river with her addicted grandson and how the water helps him to remember and to heal...or, Eden Robinson taking us into the coastal forests to walk among the great cedar trees and sleeping on soft moss... or even RVC as we hear the squawking of the ravens... all of these are natural to our people, things we do in life. But for many of our people, that is no longer the case. We don't go pick sweetgrass, or go fishing for food any more... we go to the store for all these things now. But these authors are reminding us that this is our way, and they are teaching us how to do these things again..just as the stories of old used to do.

I wish our Education systems would catch up to the visions of our authors. This is where the literatures of our people could have a real impact on the transmission of knowledge, our social, cultural and political situations, and our ways of life, histories, identities, cultures and languages. As you know, much of what is learned depends on the context that it is learned in... If our children were reading our literatures rather than, or I should say, in addition to those non-Indigenous authors... they would have a tremendous influence on their own conception of self. When we deprive our children of reading the

Karen

voices of their own people, we are denying them access to our theories, our consciousness, languages, and identity. The educational systems are not respecting, affirming or encouraging our literatures because the people in positions of power have not taken the time or the effort to legitimize our own growth as a people. There are still the old ways of thinking and doing things... that becoming English is better... that being Indian/Indigenous/Cree/Anishnabe is going to hold us back in some way.

Yet, look at all the MA thesis, the PhD dissertations by our people now..including yours, that speak to the very heart of our loss of identity, culture, language, histories... these scholars are trying to find a way to assert the position that "We cannot know who we are until we understand where we come from".

Where knowledge survives, the language survives. Northern communities still have language. They still have hunters, fishermen, trappers, gatherers. What has been done in Peguis to ensure the survival of the language? NOTHING. It is so clear to many of us who are pursuing a higher education that our heritage is tied to our knowledge of language, culture, customs, etc. Yet, what impact have we had out in Peguis? NONE.

Allowing our children access to our literatures, our knowledge keepers, our language speakers would give them a chance , a better chance than we had, to learn about their own people, their own identity, their own nationhood. With this chance, they might not have to question who they are until they are in their 30's, 40's, 50's and even older as some of our people still do. And yet, there is access to literatures by many of our people now... money to buy books, see the films, watch APTN... but are we? If you ask anyone what the latest Indigenous author they read, or show they watched, they will most likely say they haven't read any.. or maybe watched North of 60 back in the day. Sad, but true, that Indigenous authors and film makers are not gaining the attention of their own people in a meaningful way. When the people in positions of power deny or limit access to these works that in itself is a process of colonization: Internal colonization.

To say that all of our people should read only Indigenous authors is NOT what I'm saying, but we should make an attempt to support and encourage the writing of OUR stories and in that way, to share OUR way of thinking, our world-view.

Bonnie's response sent to me as a Microsoft Word attachment using email.

1) Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? If so, who? If not, why do you think this is?

I personally have but it was difficult initially to find books of any kind. This may be due to the fact that Native authors are not as publicized as others and the possibility that Natives were not versed enough in the actual act of publications as opposed to oral histories, which as an art form is almost lost.

In particular, I think that many of the Native authors are deliberately shunned or disregarded by bookstores, retail and others as Natives are a minority group. Also, with all of the changes for the betterment of Native reserves, people are up-at-arms already about Natives of Canada.

Read:

- ***Night Spirits, The Relocation of the Sayisi Dene***
- ***Thrasher: The Three Lives of Thrasher***
- ***The Duke of Windsor, Poems of Duncan Mercredi***
- ***The White Ideal: Prison of Grass***

2) How did what you've read make you feel (in regards to a connection or commonality as a Native person, if any)?

As a Native female having been raised off reserve and without any of my heritage or culture, I at first found it hard to become accustomed to the way of thinking. This quickly changed when I put myself into the picture of the stories and applied them to "real life". The question became "what would I feel and what would I do?" and I became a part of the stories and the musings. The associations I made were, for myself, life altering in that I no longer felt outside of my own cultural group and became a part of my own heritage. It provided me with a desire to learn more and more of my own past and integrate it all into my present and forge it as a part of my future. In other words, I became one with my own distant past and developed understanding in terms of myself & family: an assimilated way of life that I find myself leaving behind in my pursuit of culture and heritage. It is also causing a rift within the family in that I am embracing my heritage and culture while the rest of my family is not.

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3) Were there any particular passages (or author/s) that/who impacted you most? If so, which one/s, why, and how?

I was deeply impacted by both the Night Spirits and the Thrasher autobiographies. Both spoke to me deeply regarding a way of life lost and the merging into a new one that is not necessarily easy or even wanted. As a child, I witnessed much of the same devastation that others on reserves were witness to or a part of: the alcohol abuse, abuse by family members perpetrated on any and all alike. The loss of the culture and heritage of a nation of people left naked without a replacement for their losses except a culture and language that they could not understand.

I was raised 95% without my culture and suffered throughout my life attempting to find out what it was that defined "me". The 'me' that should have existed, steeped in culture and heritage, but fully capable of surviving in the new world around me equipped with the tools necessary (language and understanding) to comprehend and compete in the new world. In this respect the article "The White Ideal: Prison of Glass" touched me deeply. It defines some of the issues that I experienced in my life and travels.

One quote that I would like to include is from Thrasher: "Only the wind cries for my people who suffer. No one knows about them." This quote hit hard and hit home as it speaks of many nations and peoples that have suffered the same loss. Thrasher is indicative of many people who still wander lost and will pass away to be remembered only by the wind – my family included.

APPENDIX B

Cynthia's responses sent to me via email - she typed her responses directly into an email.

To Donna Beyer donnambeyer@[REDACTED]

Date Tue, Jun 21, 2011 at 2:57 PM

subject Re: completed readings

mailed-by telus.net

Important mainly because it was sent directly to you.

hide details Jun 21

Hi Donna:

Well, here are my responses. Let me know if you need anything more.

Talk to you soon, Cyn

----- Original Message -----

1) Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? yes If so, who? I have read several Canadian authors mostly for my own research and work in the area of education and health. The most influential include: Marie Battiste, James Sakei Youngblood Henderson, Vine Deloria Jr. and Gregory Cajete. I have also enjoyed Pat Ningewance's writing style on the Ojibway language. If not, why do you think this is?

2) How did what you've read make you feel (in regards to a connection or commonality as a Native person, if any)? I felt proud to read these books and many other books by First Nations, Aboriginal or Indigenous authors because of the spiritual aspect of their writing processes (especially Vine Deloria Jr., Gregory Cajete, Michael Hart, Marie Battiste); their descriptive, narrative writing styles; and their analysis of research findings through a First Nations/Aboriginal/Indigenous cultural lens. My connection to their writings has been all about the common experience of being Indigenous i.e. our life experiences, our shared history, trauma, humour, spirituality. I have also enjoyed reading Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith (Maori). Even with Indigenous peoples from other lands I have found a connection of similar history & life experiences and share perspectives.

The book I read for your project was entitled Shi-shi-etko by Nicola I. Campbell. It was a lovely book. When I was reading it, I could feel the main character's excitement of going away to school and hoping it was going to be a good ending. This made me emotional, because the innocence of the character came through. I visualized the end of her journey - to the residential school and imagined what might await her, hoping she would be one of the few who could have a positive experience. I enjoyed reading most about the innocent carefree lifestyle she lived; the love she was surrounded by; and the message of how she could remain connected to who she is and where she comes from. Great book! Although the experience was west coast, I could relate to it through my own experience of playing in the bush back home at an early age and playing by what seemed like such a big river, which is now so small.

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3) Were there any particular passages (or author/s) that/who impacted you most? If so, which one/s, why, and how?

Vine Deloria Jr. has always resonated with me because of the spiritual aspect of his writing. He was one of the first Indigenous author's I read (God is Red). He validated many of my own beliefs that I was working on reconciling earlier in my life.

Pat Ningewance introduction to her book "Talking Gookom's Language" was beautiful - it was like having tea with Pat when I read those pages i.e. "my worldview was quite different from my classmates" she hooked me; and the way she talks about a learner's emotional experience at trying to re-claim/relearn their First language. This is exactly how I have felt in my early school years away from home and later as an adult in the many introductory Cree and Ojibwe language classes I have taken over the years. She acknowledges the inner struggle, its connection to identity and mourning language loss.

Marie Battiste writings about First Nations education has also had a major impact on my work life as I share many of her thoughts on what it is we need to do to improve education outcomes for First Nations students. I also like Marie Battiste writing style because she can incorporate the narrative and traditional teachings with the academic; much like John Burrows when he writes about First Nations historical relationship with other peoples.

APPENDIX B

Denise's responses sent to me via email – she typed her responses directly into an email.

To Donna Beyer <donna@mcBeyer@██████████>

Date Fri, Jul 1, 2011 at 3:30 AM

Subject Re: thoughts on readings

Important mainly because it was sent directly to you.

hide details Jul 1

- Show quoted text -

Hello Donna Just getting to answer your questions:

1. No is have never read literature by a native person. If I have it was by chance coming across it. I don't think that I have because I have never really looked for literature specifically authored by a Native person-I pick topics of interest and I rarely look at the author-just topics of interest.

2. I felt so connected with what I was reading. The literature was written in such a way that the message was paralleled with life activities and the person being spoken too was provided information about life lessons in a story book kind of setting. As a native person I have been to many gatherings, teachings and the way that native people bring wisdom into a persons life is by telling stories to make understanding easier. Makes life lessons easier to apply to personal life. They tell a story and leave it out there for you to figure out and take what you need at that time and apply it to your personal life. I feel as a person ages one realizes that important things in life is a sense of belonging and a sense of who we are.

3. The short stories, series was very interesting, I enjoyed the story telling of lessons and how I can apply that to my life. I beleive that there are lessons that can be learned with anything that we read. very easy reads.

I am currently reading Calvin Helm Dances with Dependency this is such an eye

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opener for me to see native people from this perspective and the effects of colonialism on our people. Sad reality. Makes me want to help our people become stronger. First I have to change in my life, my families lives and than the community members lives. I have always told my family that with education you can and will be self sufficient, if only the community members will believe that.

To Donna Beyer <donnamcbeyer@[REDACTED]>

Date Sat, Jul 23, 2011 at 2:41 PM

Subject Re: two more questions

Yes I do think that the literature that I read can benefit the community.

There are many life lessons that can be learned through the literature that I read. People just have to take the time to read. When we read the literature of native authors it opens up a world of possibilities for the potential to learn about life.

To tell you the truth I did not know many native authors until you mentioned those names to me. What attracts me to a book is cover and brief synopsis of book. If it is interesting and the topic can be applied to my life and I can learn something about my life than I will read it. Education is battling technology and we need to implement this technology with the learning that is to occur in our childrens lives. We have to work with what is going on and advance with the world to become leaders of tomorrow

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Janet's responses sent to me via email – she typed her responses directly into an email using a blackberry phone device.

janet[REDACTED]@hotmail.com

to Donna Beyer <donnamcbeyer@[REDACTED].com>

subject Re: questions to ponder

mailed-by hotmail.com

1) I've read literature by Native authors prior to this, but all of it has been while in school taking some form of a Native Studies course. The type of literature varied on the course, we read some plays and short stories by various authors to nonfiction, political science type books.

I have no idea who wrote this article.

2) I liked the ease of speech that was used in the sense that it was more like reading a conversation rather than a shorty story. I also related to the language used, in that it wasn't "proper" english. It felt more like common conversation.

3) There are no particular authors I relate to, I think it has to do with the fact that I just don't know enough of them to do so. I would love to read more though.

4) I enjoy reading Native literature, I find the short stories and plays that I've read are written with a humor that is indicative of aboriginal culture-that being cheeky and self deprecating. They manage to find humor in the everyday and are able to express to the reader why its funny.

I think people aren't reading as much as they used to across the board, and its not just Aboriginal people. I do believe it has a lot to do with the internet and ease of access to information. But also that our society has placed little importance on it. Reading in general has been deprioritized in families busy schedules. People are so busy nowadays that wen they have some free time they want to do something fast and entertaining. Society has catered to that need in the form of movies, video games, concerts etc.

I think a lot of communities should use native literature in the classroom. Lack of knowledge about what's out there in terms of authors and types of literature are the biggest issue in my eyes. I think introducing authors to the youth so they can develop an appreciation while they are young would help.

Sent from my BlackBerry® smartphone

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Trish's responses sent to me via email – she typed her responses directly into an email.

tlsp[REDACTED]@hotmail.com

to donna beyer <donna[m]cbeyer@[REDACTED]>

date Sun, Jul 17, 2011 at 11:21 PM

subject RE: readings

mailed-by hotmail.com

Hi Donna,

Thanks again for asking me to be part of your thesis. I have finished the book, finally. I thought the comic book was awesome, the information in there dates right back to our early years and up to the present issues our people face. I would like to use this with my class, because I think it would give my students a different view on the issues, rather than the basic readings that are available. I think that some students will connect more with the book, because of the way it is written.

As for the questions below, I will answer them in order:

1) In high school, I do not remember reading a book by a Native author..sadly lol. However, when I got to University I read quite a few books by Native authors: Night Spirits- by Illa Bussidor, April Raintree- Beatrice Culleton, The Mishomis Book-

Edward Benton- Banai (Carl [REDACTED] referred this book to me, and I used it with my class) The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian- Sherman Alexie. I used all of these books with my students and this was the first time they heard of them, but they enjoyed the books.

2) Most of the books content had issues that we face in our daily lives and I like to read books like that, especially if they have a positive ending. These books show that no matter what troubles you go through, you can overcome them. On the other hand, I would like to read more books that have a positive, real-life spin on a Native person, rather than the usual "issues".

3) The book that impacted me the most was "The absolutely true diary of a part time Indian". The author compared life on a reserve and in a city, most experiences I can relate too. In the end Sherman Alexies message was to never give up on your dreams no matter what happens.

Hopefully this helps Donna, if you need more information I will be in the city July 25th, that's when I start my new job at [REDACTED]

We should get together sometime!!

tlsp[REDACTED]@hotmail.com

to donna beyer <donna[m]cbeyer@[REDACTED]>

date Mon, Jul 25, 2011 at 4:24 PM

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Subject RE: two more questions

mailed-by hotmail.com

Hi Donna,

Here are the answers to the other two questions:

4) Yes I think that all of the books I listed in the previous email can be useful in our communities, because most cover the same issues, experiences and they would also give our people a deeper insight on how people handle these issues. These books can also make the readers feel like they can connect to the author and think "okay, well if they can do this, get through this, so can I. These books can also inspire others to share and possibly write their own books and express themselves in other ways: art, music, etc.

5) Living on a reserve, I see a lot of reasons as to why the community members do not read as much as they should. One big reason is people have low literacy skills and they are embarrassed to let others know that or ask for help, this is why most parents are unsupportive with their children's education. Another reason is the use of technology: cell phones, internet and video games, again some parents do not encourage their child to read and they allow them to spend hours on end playing games, etc. I think in order to improve these issues, we strongly need parents to be on board, we need to get active in the community and make this more aware. Educators have been doing their part in the school, but what happens when the child goes home? I think we should provide community-wide incentives for reading, such as: having an annual bingo, or cash prizes, furniture, grocery shopping sprees, etc. I'm not one to bribe people (lol), but I think this may be the only way to get our people involved. My in-law works on an isolated reserve in Alberta and that community provides incentives for parents and students that attend school.

Everyone also enjoyed it when Richard Van Campe came to our school and did his readings, maybe that can be done once a month?? Another idea that can be done is to create

a school-wide biography of each student and put that together as a part of the history of Peguis...oh wow I have so much more ideas Donna...if you need more text me, I will be in the city from now on.

Hope this helps- Trish

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Vicki responses sent to me as a Microsoft Word attachment via email.

vicki [REDACTED]@hotmail.com

to Donna Beyer <donna[m]c[beyer] [REDACTED]>

Date Mon, Jul 11, 2011 at 11:06 AM

Subject RE: questions about readings

mailed-by hotmail.com

hi donna sorry for the delay....i've read both and i've been brainstorming and writing down my thoughts.....will have to write them up and should have it to you by tomorrow or wed morning for sure. :)

Vicki

Yellowthunderbird Woman

vicki [REDACTED]@hotmail.com

to Donna Beyer <donna[m]c[beyer]@ [REDACTED]>

Date Tue, Jul 12, 2011 at 11:31 AM

Subject RE: questions about readings

mailed-by hotmail.com

Here are somethings that came to mind when i read the items....hope it helps call me if you have any more questions [REDACTED]. i will be home until thurs...then home again on sunday

Vicki

Yellowthunderbird Woman

hi donna! :) awesome reads

i kinda just wrote down points and my personal thoughts on the book and poem.

The Red Road revisited:

Even the title is disturbing....it made me think of death, beginning to the end of life or something, or perhaps end of a spiritual life anyways. It talks about pitfalls and deadfalls....and that this red road is or was full of them. It seemed as life was impossible (trying to fit square pegs into round holes). Forced to change with no choice, feeling helpless, sad, angry, and disrespected. They felt

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like they were exposed for others curiosity/ammusement. Being forced to worship in the catholic way.....even though they were forced too, they never forgot the truth, their way of life, the way their parents and grandparents lived. By reading this poem brought/emerged a lot of sad feelings thinking of the awful experiences my mother had to endure going to residential school.

Shin-chi's Canoe:

Was an awesome book.....I guess it's kind of a pleasant way of telling the unpleasant/disturbing/troubling way our parents and grandparents were treated when they were confined to these residential schools. Shin-chi's canoe was a symbol of hope/home/love for him, being so young and being taken from his parents, this canoe his father made him gave him some solace. It's disturbing to know that people can be so cruel to children.....because they were never fed enough they had to steal food, you can see from the picture in the book....the children eating in a dark, sad environment and the teachers in another room lite up with steaming food. Not being allowed to speak to another or speak their language is why a lot of the residential survivors lost their native tongue. It was a very costly price they all paid emotionally, spiritually, and mentally to attend these schools, and I'm sorry and very sad what each of them had to endure to learn how to read, write, cook, clean, farm, carpentry, etc [and] No I have never read a literature written by anyone native....no reason. If I find a good book I read it.

Well this is what I have so far....if I think of anything else I will send it to you. Please call me if you wanna talk about it somemore.... 😊

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This is an anonymous response – age 32 years old.

Reader and Newsletter Questions (write on back if you need more room 😊)

- 1) Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? If so, who? If not, why do you think this is?

Yes, I have read one other book
written by Lawrence Bear - Dreams of Eloy.

- 2) How did what you've read make you feel (in regards to a connection or commonality as a Native person, if any)?

It made me understand that there
are a lot of ~~poor~~ native people that
struggle to be equal with the white
society, or how hard it is to be
accepted as an equal to the white
society.

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- 3) Were there any particular passages that impacted you most? If so, which one/s, why, and how?

"It crushed me into inferiority; it emphasized my Indianness." made me feel how desperately native/Indian people are trying to be accepted as equals.

- 4) Do you think what you've read, or Native literature overall, can be useful in our community/communities? If so, how? If not, why?

I think native literature can be useful in our community because there are a lot of native people that feel inferior to the white society. Seeing more native literature in the community can inspire people to try and reach life goals, to better their lives and themselves.

- 5) I'm also looking for community members' thoughts on Native literature in general, and on Native readers (or lack thereof - are our communities not reading as much as we should? Is it because we aren't exposed to our own/Native literature or just a general disinterest/as many are today due to technology etc)? How can we improve this?

I think Native literature could do a lot for our community if we were ^{more} exposed to it. Until a short time ago I wasn't aware of any Native Authors/Books. I think promoting native literature in our community may interest a lot of people in reading. People need to understand that reading gives people more knowledge in life.

Germane

Reader and Newsletter Questions (write on back if you need more room ☺)

- 1) Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? If so, who? If not, why do you think this is?

~~I don't~~ Yes. In grade 10 I read April Raintree. When I went to college I read a few books written by & about Aboriginal people. One sticks out in my memory tho it has residential school stories in it from survivors. It's pretty graphic & took me a while to read due to the emotional aspect of it. It's called Stolen from our Embrace. I've read other books about & from Native people but I just can't remember them specifically.

- 2) How did what you've read make you feel (in regards to a connection or commonality as a Native person, if any)?

Honestly, I felt mad at Rita bc she kept having kids & it seemed she had a hard time taking care of them, she kept giving them away! I see that so much in Native communities & when I used to work w/ CES, Parents not knowing how to parent & putting themselves first. Rita eventually got it which is great but I think things like that happen these days bc families are different than they were back in the "old days". Rez school really changed a lot of things.

Germaine

- 3) Were there any particular passages that impacted you most? If so, which one/s, why, and how?

The part where Rita's mother died. I cried my eyes out thinking how hard that would be for a child to go through. I thought "what if Chloe had to go through that?" maybe I know. But that's what came to my mind.

- 4) Do you think what you've read, or Native literature overall, can be useful in our community/communities? If so, how? If not, why?

Yes. by hearing other's experiences & what they felt & learnt can impact people to change & better their lives. ~~communities~~

- 5) I'm also looking for community members' thoughts on Native literature in general, and on Native readers (or lack thereof - are our communities not reading as much as we should? Is it because we aren't exposed to our own/Native literature or just a general disinterest/as many are today due to technology etc)? How can we improve this?

Start with the parents. I saw my parents reading so I enjoyed reading as a child & didn't even think of it as "work". I ~~think~~ think kids in general of any ethnicity aren't reading as much due to technology & media. It's easier & "funner" to watch TV than it is to read a book. That can be changed tho. It just might take time.

Mazack

Reader and Newsletter Questions (write on back if you need more room ☺)

- 1) Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? If so, who? If not, why do you think this is?

Yes, I had read some Native literature written by Maria Campbell and also some short story and poems by Basil Johnston. The only reason why I read these pieces was because it was requested for a course I was taking at University.

* I was never really exposed to Native literature before.

- 2) How did what you've read make you feel (in regards to a connection or commonality as a Native person, if any)?

Basil Johnston's memoirs gave me (the reader) a glimpse of the life of a residential survivor. This story

Margaret

- 3) Were there any particular passages that impacted you most? If so, which one/s, why, and how?

Basil Johnston's memoirs about his experience about residential school was enlightening. I was surprised that his experiences was not as rough as some of the other survivors but he also experienced some of the common emotional turmoil from family separation.

- 4) Do you think what you've read, or Native literature overall, can be useful in our community/communities? If so, how? If not, why?

Native literature can be beneficial to our youth. It can give the youth a possible career options and also it can give individuals a glimpse into our ancestral history.

- 5) I'm also looking for community members' thoughts on Native literature in general, and on Native readers (or lack thereof - are our communities not reading as much as we should? Is it because we aren't exposed to our own/Native literature or just a general disinterest/as many are today due to technology etc)? How can we improve this?

In our community, there are not many native literature being made available either at our local library or being taught in our school system. The most common piece of literature is the story "In Search of April Raintree" or "April Raintree". I think the ELA teachers in Native communities should focus on more native authors and should be aware of the different materials that are out there.

Olive

- 3) Were there any particular passages that impacted you most? If so, which one/s, why, and how?

The passages that impacted me most was their way of life in that day and age is similar to our way of life in those times. The hard life, to survive was that of hard ~~to~~ work everyday today it is different and that of our young people do not know how to work or hunt and are lazy and unmotivated.

- 4) Do you think what you've read, or Native literature overall, can be useful in our community/communities? If so, how? If not, why?

Native literatures in our community could be useful as it could help educate our people and give them knowledge.

- 5) I'm also looking for community members' thoughts on Native literature in general, and on Native readers (or lack thereof - are our communities not reading as much as we should? Is it because we aren't exposed to our own/Native literature or just a general disinterest/as many are today due to technology etc)? How can we improve this?

Our communities are not reading as much as in the past the younger people show lack of interest due to technology they do read items on the internet which are not always educational.

Olive

Reader and Newsletter Questions (write on back if you need more room ☺)

- 1) Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? If so, who? If not, why do you think this is?

Yes, Dreams of Glory, author Lawrence Bear

- 2) How did what you've read make you feel (in regards to a connection or commonality as a Native person, if any)?

It made me feel proud because a Native person wrote this book and there are not alot of Native authors out there that I'm aware of.

Evelyn

Reader and Newsletter Questions (write on back if you need more room ☺)

- 1) Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? If so, who? If not, why do you think this is?

I have not read literature authored by a Native person. I think it is because it is hard to find the books. I just remembered I read April Raintree that was a good book!

- 2) How did what you've read make you feel (in regards to a connection or commonality as a Native person, if any)?

I felt sad reading the book then all of a sudden happy by the end. Reading this book and all the things I read was so true about native people and romance.

Evelyn

- 3) Were there any particular passages that impacted you most? If so, which one/s, why, and how?

N/A

- 4) Do you think what you've read, or Native literature overall, can be useful in our community/communities? If so, how? If not, why?

Well yes, because it is so real. With reading Native lit. it makes you go into character and believe it is your self.

- 5) I'm also looking for community members' thoughts on Native literature in general, and on Native readers (or lack thereof - are our communities not reading as much as we should? Is it because we aren't exposed to our own/Native literature or just a general disinterest/as many are today due to technology etc)? How can we improve this?

I think it is awesome to read Native Lit. it is so interesting. I think it is because of the exposure and the ability to get the books. ex. Book readings, School ~~room~~

Call if you have any more questions.

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Evelyn also sent me a facebook message that elaborated on her responses:

- July 27

Gigi [REDACTED]

- In reading the book it made me a little mad in the romance part where it was ok that he would leave her and come back when ever he wanted and for how i know this a few friends live like this and they seem to think that it is ok!!!! lol I don't think sooo I never experienced what the book was about but i know that people do everyday on the reserve. It is sad because myself as a native person is opposite i will never let that happen my love or husband run around and drink and have other women, but for some it is ok. The book also did have a very dark side to it. I had a feeling inside the book there was someone else talking but there was no character for that person made me wonder throughout the book who it was. I think i meant exposing more books to native people especially native literature. I think having more books where people can put them selves into it the would want to read more. all native literature can help us get into the character not only this book but the few that i read. I am so glad that i can help you out. Was going ask u a favor when u have some time can u give me a list of native lit books and maybe where i can buy them. If you have any to lend can i borrow lol u will get them back...lol

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Melissa's response sent to me in a Microsoft Word attachment via email.

melissa_t_stranger@live.ca

to Donna Beyer <donnaamcbeyer@gmail.com>

date Sun, Jul 24, 2011 at 1:59 PM

subject RE: QUESTIONS

mailed-by live.ca

-----Original Message-----

done.doc

1) Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? If so, who? If not, why do you think this is?

I loved to read ever since I was a little girl. My sister taught me to read at age 3. One of my favourite books as a child was a poem book written by Doreen Day. It was a book given to my granny as a gift at a ceremony in the United States, I kept it. I remember thinking about who wrote these poems and knowing it was a native woman made the book that much more special. I think I was around the age of 7 or 8 when I read that particular book, I can't remember the title. In Grade six I read the spirit of the white bison by Beatrice Culleton, I remember being able to match up what the story was to some of the oral traditional stories I had heard in ceremonies. It was pretty cool at that time to have that book in our school teachings. In grade seven I read in search of April Raintree also by Beatrice Culleton. This book really hit home for me. I could relate to the characters struggles in almost every aspect. Deep issues that had been kept quiet for a long time impacted me, things like foster care, alcoholism, shame of being native, pride in being native, and suicide. This was the first book I read about that I could directly relate to the events of my own life. I was a really good read. More recently I have read The New Buffalo by Blair Stonechild. This was a more advanced book than the others I have read from native authors. He talks about the pursuit of education being the new way of survival for native peoples. In my university one course we were asked to do some research relating to education. My question was why do some native students get funding for education while others do not? Stonechilds book was able to offer answers to that question. He went through the history of native peoples and making treaty rights as it pertained to education. Stonechilds book contains excellent information for native people to be aware of. Finally I come to read- The Life of Hellen Betty Osborne a graphic novel by David Alexander Robertson & Madison Blackstone.

2) How did what you've read make you feel (in regards to a connection or commonality as a Native person, if any)?

When I read the graphic novel about Hellen Betty Osborne I got the story that focused on her life and her dreams for the future. Although she died a tragic death, that was not the focus of the book, I liked that. I previously read the book conspiracy of silence and the whole focus of

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that book was about the gruesome details and the racism of the community . It portrayed the detective working on the case as a hero because he was solving a crime. In the graphic novel it was much more about the life of Hellen Betty. I felt more in touch with her aspirations, her dreams and her personality. I could relate because I also have a similar mind set. I could relate to her struggle with pursuing an education

3) Were there any particular passages that impacted you most? If so, which one/s, why, and how?

I really liked the part when Hellen Betty continued on despite getting an F on her test, she never wavered. Overall I really liked the whole book.

4) Do you think what you've read, or Native literature overall, can be useful in our community/communities? If so, how? If not, why?

I think this book is a great resource for youth and I will be passing it along

5) I'm also looking for community members' thoughts on Native literature in general, and on Native readers (or lack thereof - are our communities not reading as much as we should? Is it because we aren't exposed to our own/Native literature or just a general disinterest/as many are today due to technology etc)? How can we improve this? I think as long as we keep encouraging each other literacy will spread. We need to keep being good role models for reading

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Chloe's response was sent to me in a Microsoft Word attachment via email.

chloe [REDACTED]@hotmail.com

to donnamcbeyer@[REDACTED]

date Mon, Jul 25, 2011 at 10:34 AM

mailed-by hotmail.com

Donna's.docx

13K View

1.) Yes, I have and such literature has been authored by the likes of Beatrice Mosionier, Joseph Boyden, Thomas King, Henry Pennier, and Mark St.Pierre and Tilda Long Soldier. With that said however, I have only been introduced to the above authors recently, and that has been through my university experience. Prior to that, I was almost never exposed to the work of Native peoples.

2.) What I read made me feel upset and overwhelmed. Yet, at the same time I felt encouraged and proud that Native peoples are taking it upon themselves to heal and reconnect. In terms of a connection or commonality as a Native person, while I have never experienced the influence of Child and Family Services, I did grow up away from my family and away from my community. I too was often confused about my identity and what it meant/means to be a Native person. My struggle to understand myself and other Native peoples has been ongoing; however, what I enjoyed most about Wagamese's memoir was his ability to demonstrate that feeling alone, misplaced, or even empty is something many Native peoples encounter. It is the result of generations of governmental policy, and at times, such pain is necessary for it enables us to look deeper into ourselves, our history, and why we face the conditions that we do.

3.)

4.) Yes, I think that at the very least, Native literature can help those who are isolated from formal "education" to understand the impacts of colonization; how being removed from ones family and community can affect individuals, families, and communities.

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5.) I think Native literature is very important. It helps us to interpret our past and present conditions, and thus, what we need to do individually and as a community to move forward. I find that often when we see each other struggling, we blame ourselves because we don't understand how colonization has impacted us. Especially for those who choose not to pursue a higher education; hegemonic thoughts remain when we are uninformed. Writers like Wagamese are able to offset such thoughts by sharing their life's story and connecting their struggles to the impacts of colonization. When looking at Native readers themselves, I think that while we are not reading as much Native literature as we should, people are interested. When reflecting upon my high school experience, I don't ever remember being encouraged to read work by Native peoples; I was completely unaware that I would even be interested in such work because no one had asked me too or it was never required of me. That was until I began university, and I now wish that I had understood all that do now years ago. I think it is just a matter of encouraging youth and adults alike to become informed, and that could be accomplished through youth councils, book clubs, Native history classes (on reserve), ect. We all have something to share, and when a Native author is willing to share his or her story, we begin to realize that we are not alone. Communication is needed, and I truly believe that Native literature can start the conversation if we let it.

Anita

Reader and Newsletter Questions (write on back if you need more room ☺)

- 1) Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? If so, who? If not, why do you think this is?

I have read books by native authors for university classes. I find that only lately native literature is becoming more available. The stories are becoming more contemporary with issues related to aboriginal people.

- 2) How did what you've read make you feel (in regards to a connection or commonality as a Native person, if any)?

The story was heartbreaking: the government moving a whole community where the residents became displaced at what cost! It angers me to think about most aboriginal communities (like Piquis also) are moved to accommodate other people. I see a connection between the displacement and the issue of decolonization amongst our people: pushed aside when we are people of the land.

Anita

- 3) Were there any particular passages that impacted you most? If so, which one/s, why, and how?

The whole book! It was so sad to see and read about the people. In the beginning of the story, it showed that the community depended upon their culture and the land to survive and they were content. It was awful to read the horrific abuses the people suffered. It is an unfortunate event to impact a whole community.

- 4) Do you think what you've read, or Native literature overall, can be useful in our community/communities? If so, how? If not, why?

Yes native literature ~~is~~ is useful for our communities. Through reading our people can remember our past, document our history (since our oral traditional stories are not being shared for other reasons). Reading native literature can also provide awareness to other worlds.

- 5) I'm also looking for community members' thoughts on Native literature in general, and on Native readers (or lack thereof - are our communities not reading as much as we should? Is it because we aren't exposed to our own/Native literature or just a general disinterest/as many are today due to technology etc)? How can we improve this?

Yes, I think reading is lapsing in our communities for many reasons: technology, reading/literacy issues. Reading native literature should become available on ebooks, videos, song etc. We should have more advertising for aboriginal authors and literature.

Ryan's response sent to me as a Microsoft Word attachment via email.

ryan[REDACTED]@hotmail.com

to Donna Beyer <donnamcbeyer@[REDACTED]>

date Mon, Jul 25, 2011 at 11:26 PM

subject Here Yah Go Bubbers:)

- 1) **Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? If so, who? If not, why do you think this is?** No I don't recall ever reading any native literature before. I think this is because it is not a part of the school curriculum when I was going to school.
- 2) **How did what you've read make you feel (in regards to a connection or commonality as a Native person, if any)?** Made me feel that everything revolves around the "white" persons' society. That only the white way was the right way and our way was wrong.
- 3) **Were there any particular passages that impacted you most? If so, which one/s, why, and how?**

my father doesn't read or write

the King's English says he's

dumb but he speaks Cree

how many of you speak Cree?

This impacted me the most because my dad spoke his language and was very proud of his traditions. He went to residential school and he was scolded for speaking his language. He grew up to be a very intelligent man who could read and write even though he spoke his language. My dad was a very proud Dakota- Sioux Indian.

4) **Do you think what you've read, or Native literature overall, can be useful in our community/communities? If so, how? If not, why?** I think it can be very useful in our community. It can show the youth that they can be authors and write poetry. Story telling is a part of how we keep our past and traditions alive and this is very important for the future.

- 5) **I'm also looking for community members' thoughts on Native literature in general, and on Native readers (or lack thereof - are our communities not reading as much as we should? Is it because we aren't exposed to our own/Native literature or just a general disinterest/as many are today due to technology etc)? How can we improve**

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this? I feel that we aren't exposed to Native literature at all in school and this is where it should start at a young age. Technology is taking over. I would personally rather watch the movie than read the book but my wife would rather read the book because it is more detailed.

June's response sent to me as a Microsoft Word attachment via email.

june [REDACTED]@hotmail.com

to donnambeyer@[REDACTED]

date Tue, Jul 26, 2011 at 9:16 AM

subject RE: poems to read :)

mailed-by hotmail.com

1) Have you ever read literature authored by a Native person? If so, who? If not, why do you think this is?

Yes, I have read many books by Aboriginal authors, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, plays. I enjoy reading Louise Edrich, I can relate to the characters she writes about. I also like Jeanette Armstrong. As a English and Native Studies teacher I prefer to use literature by Aboriginal authors so that my students can look to them as roles models.

2) How did what you've read make you feel (in regards to a connection or commonality as a Native person, if any)?

With Louise Edrich's books, I can relate, she is a writer and a scholar, like myself. I like the humor she uses, and her depiction of life on a reserve and the characters she creates are so typical of many in any First Nation community, Canadian or American. I don't particularly like Drew Hayden Taylor's writings, I find them too urbanized and like he's trying too hard to be a famous Aboriginal writer.

3) Were there any particular passages that impacted you most? If so, which one/s, why, and how?

I have read many books by Aboriginal authors, but some passages that impact me the most are the old stories and legends that are re-told in many writings. Some versions will vary, but overall, even though you may have heard a particular legend or story before, it still impacts you in a different way. Old stories and legends can always be re-told but there is always a different message that can be interpreted at different times and by different individuals.

4) Do you think what you've read, or Native literature overall, can be useful in our community/communities? If so, how? If not, why?

Yes, it helps young Aboriginal people understand a bit their culture and identity. Aboriginal authors and writers also serve as role models for young Aboriginal people.

- 5) **I'm also looking for community members' thoughts on Native literature in general, and on Native readers (or lack thereof - are our communities not reading as much as we should? Is it because we aren't exposed to our own/Native literature or just a general disinterest/as many are today due to technology etc)? How can we improve this?**

I think that there are not enough teachers out there promoting good reading by Aboriginal authors in First Nation schools. I think that they need more professional development in how to critique children's and youth literature for Aboriginal students. Sometimes, the books can be too stereotypical and lack real authenticity. The media also needs to be more involved in promoting and recognizing good Aboriginal stories, i.e. promoting them or turning them into plays, television shows and movies, so that young people and all people appreciate it.

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This is an anonymous response – age 33 years old – sent to me as a Microsoft Word attachment via email.

dta[REDACTED]@hotmail.com
to donnamcbeyer@[REDACTED]
date Tue, Jul 26, 2011 at 12:29 PM
subject reading responses again lol
mailed-by hotmail.com

1. Have you ever read literature authored by a native person? If so who? If not, why do you think this is?

Yes I have. Howard Adams - Prison of Grass, A Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization.... unfortunately that's the extent of my "native author" knowledge.

2. Were there any particular passages or author/s that impacted you most based on what you've read? If so which one(s)? Why and how? 3. Were there any particular passages that impacted you the most? If so, which one/s? Why? How?

Howard Adams - Prison of Grass has definitely had an impact on me. Misunderstanding and ignorance towards our own became obvious within myself. I used to question...just like so many others I'm sure...why are we like this? Why can't we just move on? It was my lack of understanding and knowledge that led me to ask these questions...even if I never asked them out loud they were there. Shame. I think deep down inside there was always a little bit of shame...we look around and we see our First Nation people living in poverty, drinking, drugs, prostitution, children becoming wards of cfs...but we fail to realize that our history has played such a significant role in our lives. In Prison of Grass Howard Adams talks about his "shame" the inferiority of being an "Indian" the stereotypes that have been placed on us throughout history and how we've been inclined to adjust our lives according to these stereotypes. Adams states "confused by their state of powerlessness and oppression, native people sometimes turn to social behavior consistent with racial stereotypes." (42). Reading passages such as this puts a lot of perspective on my own feelings...the questions... the shame... and now the guilt. Guilt for feeling the way I did, even now when I see a native person struggling on main street and that little ting of shame starts to creep up I remember...I remember our history and I ask different questions...what's his/her history? Did they go to residential school? Did their parents? How has their/our history impacted their life? Because although they may not have had the initial physical impact of residential schools...the generational and emotional impact is just as great and apparent throughout our nation. Howard Adams straight forward and perhaps sometimes harsh writing style has given me greater insight, better

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understanding, the knowledge to ask different questions, and has placed a desire in me to expand my knowledge...to grasp it, to use it and to share it.

4. Do you think what you've read, or Native literature overall can be useful in our community/ies? If so, how? If not, why?

I think Native literature is an eye opener...I think it's the first step to realization...realizing we are not "just this way" that our history has played a significant role in our existence. The negative history that has been bestowed upon us has determined where we sit in a predominantly white society. The negative effects of our history is apparent when we look at our communities and the turmoil that often surrounds them. Poverty, alcohol and substance abuse, and family violence are unfortunately a reality within our communities. When I look at our young people I think they are our responsibility, we are the ones who need to step up and make the necessary changes within our school systems. I believe bringing Aboriginal literature in the early years would be a positive step. Taking the words of Aboriginal authors and historians and placing them within our classrooms explaining their significance would at the very least give our children an introduction to our history. I think that technology plays a huge role in the lives of...everyone. Children, teenagers, adults, grammas, papas...everyone is connected in some way to some form of technology. While technology has made our lives easier...the simplicity of our lives has also been altered. Even for me before I returned to school I very rarely picked up a book to read...but as a child and teenager that's all I wanted to do. I can't say for certain that there is a disinterest...I think that if people picked up a book like prison of grass their would be more understanding and perhaps more desire to gain more knowledge.

5. Do you have any thoughts on Native literature in general and/or on Native readers? (is there a lack of reading, is our community not exposed to Native literature, or is it just a general disinterest in reading due to technology, etc?) How can we improve this?

Bringing native literature into our school systems is our responsibility, and I believe if we start with our young people we give them the foundation to begin an understanding of colonization and the impact it has had on us. I believe that teaching our young people the effects of colonization is vital for future generations. Having an understanding of our history and how it has impacted us for generations is essential in our healing. I definitely think we have a long ways to go in terms of decolonization...how? How do we end these things? I don't know....I don't even know how to decolonize myself.....I definitely think that reading native literature is an essential tool in the process of decolonizing...but what next...I don't know...