

SD Nelson: Artist and Storyteller

SD Nelson: Artist and Storyteller

by

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Abstract

SD Nelson has written and illustrated numerous award-winning children's books, most of which focus on his rich Lakota culture. Nelson has a passion for sharing his Indigenous culture and providing his readers with historically accurate information, while at the same time telling enchanting stories through his words and artwork. This thesis is a narrative biography (Kridel, 2021) designed to intentionally honour the ways in which SD Nelson chose to tell his own stories and make sense of his experiences as an Indigenous author and artist. Data was generated through emails and over sixteen hours of telephone and in-person conversations. This biographical thesis contributes to both educators' and children's literature scholars' understandings of SD Nelson's work by obtaining a first-hand account of the processes and drive behind his storytelling and art making. In-depth research into the life and work of S.D. Nelson also contributes to possibilities for educators to engage in more nuanced and contextualized teaching of his books, which focus mainly on Indigenous characters and stories. Biographical research allows SD's personal recollection of the experiences he has lived, so that he can offer his understandings of Lakota culture and his insights into his journey as an artist and storyteller.

Acknowledgments

This process has been a long, rigorous, and rewarding one. I am forever grateful that I have a support system that always kept me on track.

Thank you, Steve, for trusting me with the details of your life and stories and agreeing to work with me on this project. I am forever grateful for our many conversations, emails, the photos that you shared, and of course for graciously welcoming me into your home.

I would like to sincerely thank my advisor Dr. Jennifer Watt. Your guidance, support, and unbelievable kindness has been the breath of fresh air that I needed to feel motivated and energized to continue. I appreciate your honesty and compassion in all that you do. Agreeing to work with me in the late stages was not easy, for this I am forever grateful.

I would like to thank my committee members; Dr. Barbara McMillan and Dr. Karen Boyd for agreeing to work with me on this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Gregory Bryan for the tough but helpful feedback.

To my sister, thank you for always being there to receive my calls and texts and giving me endless encouragement. “I admire you” and “You’re doing awesome” are sentiments that kept me going, especially on nights when I felt like I could not go any further.

Parker and Kaesyn, you are the reasons for so many things. The guilt that I often felt when you asked me to play, but Mama had to work, was heartbreaking. Thank you for your understanding and patience, even at such young ages. You make me want to learn and grow and to be a better person. I felt that I could tackle this feat because of you. You two beauties are my heart.

And finally, Nate who has been my champion through everything. Thank you for always being there to reassure me and to bring me back to reality. From the positive words to taking the

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girls on weekend get-away so I could have a few days to write, to the many times your tech skills have saved me. When things were at their darkest, you became my voice when I was unsure of how to advocate for myself. Your support has been incredible.

Land Acknowledgements

I acknowledge, with respect, that I studied for my M.Ed. degree and wrote this thesis on Treaty 1 Territory, the traditional lands on the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation. I acknowledge with respect the mistakes of the past and in an effort to move forward in collaboration with Indigenous peoples in the spirit of reconciliation. (Adapted from the University of Manitoba Territory Acknowledgement, <https://umanitoba.ca/current-students/first-year/um-commons/territory-acknowledgement>).

I also want to respectfully acknowledge the lands and territories that are sacred to SD Nelson. With respect, I acknowledge the twenty-two Native Nations that have inhabited the lands of Arizona for centuries. These tribal lands are home to the Akimel O’odham, Pee Posh, Navajo, Hopi, Havasupai, Kaibab-Paiute and Hualapai peoples. (Adapted from the Arizona State University Library Indigenous Land Acknowledgement, <https://lib.asu.edu/indigenous-land-acknowledgement>, and Flagstaff, Arizona Culture and Heritage, <https://www.flagstaffarizona.org/things-to-do/arts-culture/culture-heritage/>).

It is with humility and respect that I also acknowledge the lands of the Oceti Sakowin (Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota), meaning Seven Council Fires, as well as the nine federally recognized Native Nations in South Dakota: Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, Flandreau Santee, Lower Brule, Oglala, Rosebud, Sisseton-Wahpeton, Standing Rock, and Yankton Sioux Tribes. (Adapted from the South Dakota State University Land Acknowledgement, <https://www.sdstate.edu/wokini-initiative/land-acknowledgement>).

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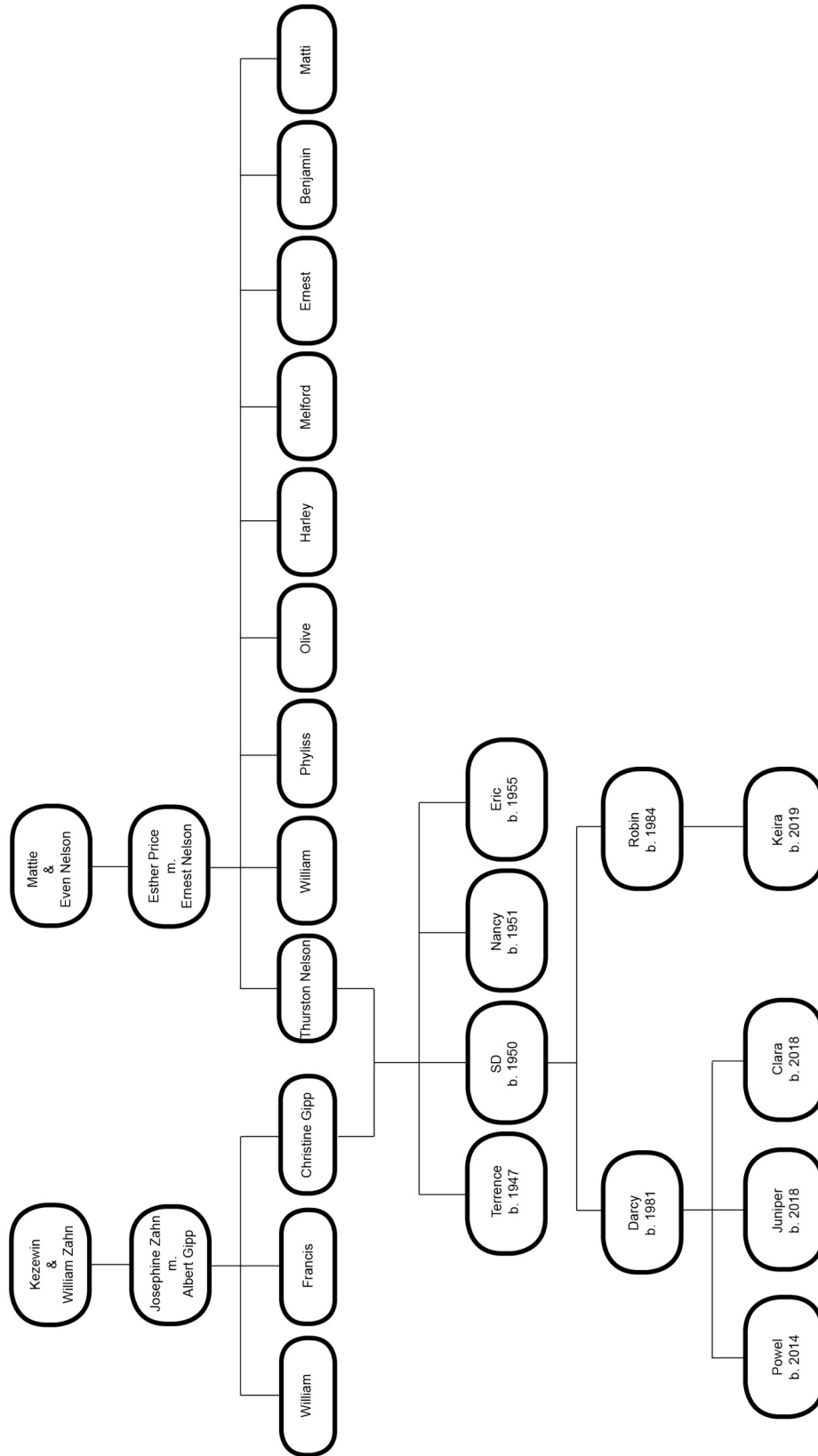


Figure 1 “Gipp/Zahn and Nelson Family Trees”

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Learning and understanding our history is absolutely necessary” (Nelson, 2018).

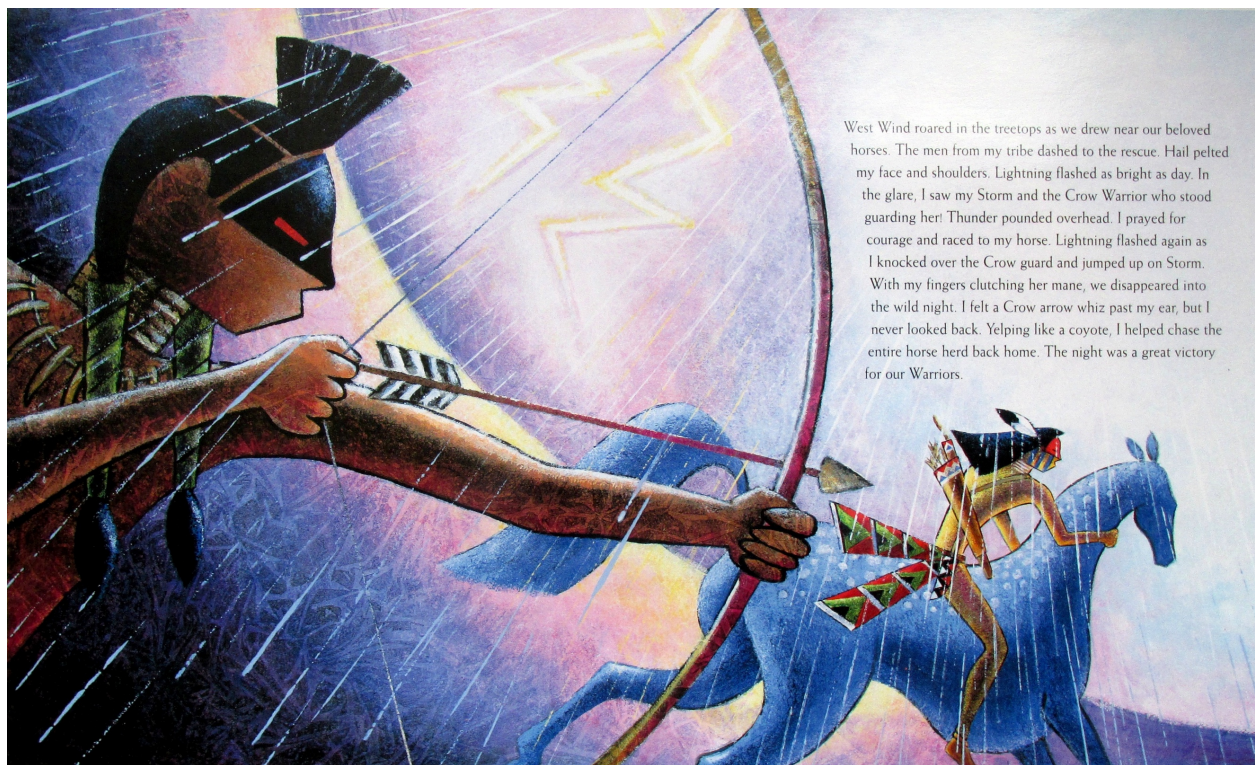
Author and illustrator Steve Nelson, better known as SD Nelson offers his readers a glimpse into the origin of the storytelling and the vision for his artwork in *Gift Horse, A Lakota Story* (2021). In the author’s note to this book, Nelson writes:

My great-great grandfather’s name was Flying Cloud, and he was a Lakota Warrior. I am a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in the Dakotas, descendants of the Lakota Indians about whom this story is told. Many times I have wondered what it was like for Flying Cloud, as a boy, growing up. That is how I came to write this tale. (p. 31)

He further explains how he came to know about Flying Cloud through the storytelling from his more immediate relations: “When I was a child, my mother, Christine-Elk Tooth Woman, often told me about the Old Ones who came before her, including Flying Cloud” (p. 31). In describing his process of writing what is essentially a biography of Flying Cloud in the form of a children’s picture book, Nelson reveals some of his own biographical details—where he is from, what culture he identifies as belonging to, and to read what stories he has heard and from whom, and why he decided to write what he did in the book the reader is now encountering. The biographical revelations continue as Nelson explains his art-making process as illustrator of the book:

My illustrations are done with acrylic paint on wood panel. My style is directly influenced by the ledger book drawings (1865-1935) of Plains Indian artists. In my paintings I connect with Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit. I spread paint and color so that

you might share in my vision. For I have an artist's vision of Father Sky and Mother Earth, of the winged ones, of our four-legged brothers, of the little crawling creatures, and the two-legged humans. I have a vision of the mountains and forests, all singing the song of life, all dancing in a circle, in a good way. (p. 32)



West Wind roared in the treetops as we drew near our beloved horses. The men from my tribe dashed to the rescue. Hail pelted my face and shoulders. Lightning flashed as bright as day. In the glare, I saw my Storm and the Crow Warrior who stood guarding her! Thunder pounded overhead. I prayed for courage and raced to my horse. Lightning flashed again as I knocked over the Crow guard and jumped up on Storm. With my fingers clutching her mane, we disappeared into the wild night. I felt a Crow arrow whiz past my ear, but I never looked back. Yelping like a coyote, I helped chase the entire horse herd back home. The night was a great victory for our Warriors.

Figure 2 "Gift Horse Raid Night"

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We learn not only about the material process and aesthetic inspiration for the style of art in the book, but also about Nelson's understanding of his own "artist's vision" (p.32) through his spiritual connections for the audience. Although the author's note is brief in the book, it begins to reveal glimpses into who SD Nelson is as a storyteller, artist, and as a person—building context and deepening connections to his craft. These small biographical insights can help educators introduce his books in new ways to the learners in their classrooms.

Issues of identity—knowing who someone is and where they come from—are an enduring part of education. As an early and middle years educator I have always focussed on creating a sense of belonging for all my students. In the first couple of months into a new school year, the curriculum becomes focused on establishing relationships and creating a community in the classroom. In doing this, I encourage every student to embrace their uniqueness and that of others. When I read SD Nelson's author's note above, I immediately connected with the SD's words with the important identity work that takes place in classrooms. Knowing one's story and the stories of generations before us help to understand and shape how we see ourselves and where we fit into the world around us. SD Nelson provides rich details about his life and ancestors in his author's notes that enhance the stories and intrigues readers, but also offers an opportunity for readers to relate to and see themselves in his work.

As an educator, I have long been interested in the lives and stories of authors and illustrators. Knowing about the author and illustrator brings more complex layers of understanding to their texts, helping readers uncover new and different perspectives that may not have otherwise been noticed. During my Master's of Education program, I focused on language, literacy, and children's literature, thinking about how readers engage with children's literature and how teachers can influence and enhance this learning. As Reynolds (2011) argues:

Because children's literature is one of the earliest ways in which the young encounter stories, it plays a powerful role in shaping how we think about and understand the world. Stories are key sources of the images, vocabularies, attitudes, structures, and explanations we need to contemplate experience; because when directed to children they are often bound up with education of one kind or another, they can be important carriers of information about changes in culture, present, and past. (p. 4)

While I agreed that children's literature had a "powerful role in shaping how we think and understand the world, I noticed that children's literature research seemed to less often examine the life of the creators of the stories and illustrations, who might be "important carriers" of cultural knowledges from the present and past. As I developed ideas for my thesis, I began to pay attention in new ways to the children's literature that I was using in my classroom and began to wonder more about the authors and illustrators who had created the books I was sharing. I recalled how the young children that I had taught over the years were drawn to the S.D. Nelson books I read to them. I became increasingly curious about how in-depth research into the life and work of SD Nelson could contribute to more nuanced teaching of his books, which focus mainly on Indigenous characters and stories.

This thesis is primarily a biography of SD Nelson as an author and an artist. I knew that the life journey that Nelson has travelled would be a story worth telling. Nelson takes his knowledge of his Indigenous heritage and transforms this knowledge into works of art both in written form and illustrations. This biographical thesis contributes to both educators and children's literature scholars' understandings of SD Nelson's work by obtaining a first-hand account of the processes and drive behind his storytelling, art making, and book creation. This research contributes to a greater awareness of the context, purpose, intent, and aspirations of SD

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Nelson's writing and art, which may be particularly helpful for Canadian educators in the era of Truth and Reconciliation (2015). Biographical research allows SD's personal recollection of his lived experiences, so that he can offer his understandings of Lakota culture and his insights into his journey as an artist and storyteller.

In this first chapter of the thesis, I begin by explaining how biographies are connected to both children's literature and research methodology. After this methodological grounding, I explain how I have conceptualized biographical research for this thesis through relational design that describes the interconnected elements of the author/artist, the work (stories and illustrations), the biographer/researcher, the readers/teachers, and place. I then describe my methods for the biographical research, the limitations of the research and the implications and significance of this thesis. Finally, I provide an overview for the remainder of the thesis, which is a biography of SD Nelson.

Biography: Connections to Children's Literature and Research Methodology

Biography in Children's Literature

Biographies have long been included as a genre within children's literature as described by the authors of *Children's Literature, Briefly* (Tunnell et al., 2016): "The word *biography* renders its own definition: *bio* = life, *graphy* = writing. This specialized variety of nonfiction writing focuses on the lives of human beings—usually, people who are famous" (p. 168).

Writing non-fiction biographies for children "is today's trend in biographies for young readers. Although crafted in expository form rather than narrative (as with novels), authentic biographies can be as vigorous and entertaining as good fiction" (p. 171). Biographies for younger readers can be written as picture books, graphic novels, or chapter books. SD Nelson, the focus of this

biography, is an example of an author and illustrator of biographies for children. His stories focus on Lakota figures that have impacted the history of the United States. His work shares facts about historical figures in language appropriate for younger audiences as well as colourful, detailed illustrations that enhance the story being told (see Appendix G for an annotated bibliography of Nelson's work). Biographies, such as Nelson's, are a vibrant part of children's literature. In turn, biographies of children's authors and illustrators contribute to the field of children's literature and to educational research interested in ways that children's literature can become pedagogical resources.

Biography as Research Methodology

Biographical research is an interdisciplinary methodology with a clear origin in the early qualitative research movement. Biography has been used as a research methodology in the past and continues today:

The use of life histories as research data was enthusiastically promoted by sociologists of the Chicago School during the 1920s and 1930s. The method has never fallen completely into disuse and there has been a recent, quite definite, revival of interest. (Aspinwall, 1992, p. 248)

The origins of biographical methodology have been clearly connected to the emergence of qualitative research, in particular the study of people within a culture or figures in literacy or historical contexts (Aspinwall, 1992; Suárez-Ortega, 2012; Zhao, 2021). Biography has continued to be used as a methodology in a variety of disciplines, including education, but sometimes under different names such as life histories, life writing, narrative biographies, etc.

Biography plays an important role in research as it provides insight and understanding to a person's life that is lived within the context of particular social, cultural, and historical

situations and circumstances. As Suárez-Ortega (2012) argues, “Each individual has a personal dimension as well as a collective one, making it possible to study personal circumstances only in connection with the contexts that endow them with meaning (Davies & Gannon, 2006; Gonick et al., 2011)” (p. 189). This type of research is necessary in order to understand how individuals make sense of their worlds. As with all research methodologies, there are limitations and challenges to biographical research. Not everyone belonging to a specific demographic has the same viewpoints, opinions, or situations:

The biographical method cannot meet all the needs in the writing of either ethnography or historiography. Every community, family, or individual transcends its own “partial (limitation)” and merges with history and the “bigger world” (Wang, 2016).

Nevertheless, from the standpoint of a society, there are too many things in a society which are beyond the understanding of a biography’s protagonist. For them, the social system, laws, organizations, hierarchies, and structures cannot usually be understood subjectively, but that does not mean these factors are nonexistent. (Zhao, 2021, p. 244)

Any subject of a biography will not understand all the influences that shape how they make sense of their lives. Depending on the type of biographical methodology engaged by the researcher, the subject of the biography will have differing roles in exploring and explaining what they believe is influential within their own life stories.

There are various forms of biography. Many researchers who write biographies on historical figures depend on archives and information that has been previously published. I conducted research on a person who is alive and told me his version of his life. This is why I chose narrative biography—to honour the way the person made meaning and told his own story.

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Narrative biography is a form of biographical research that takes the author's viewpoints into account when formulating the story. Kridel (2021) explains:

Narrative biography, represents a dynamic portrayal of a life without the need for absolute facticity or a comprehensive account from birth to grave. Neither is this style burdened by the ultimate interpretation of the subject that must be accepted by the reader. Facts are recognized and some interpretations are accepted as being more significant than others; however, the biographer, though consciously aware of his or her personal emotions and reactions to the subject, acknowledges that the telling of the story is primarily defined by the subject in relation to the reader. (Para. 2 & 7)

This is the approach I took when engaging in biographical research with SD Nelson. I understood biographical research as not simply the collecting of data, but a building of trusting relationships through the research process. As Aspinwall (1992) describes, "the lengthy business of collecting data not only creates a large amount of material to be analysed but also involves spending a great deal of time with the subject of the research" (p. 249). The data collection in a narrative biography is a personal endeavour between the researcher and the person whose life is being studied. Sharing personal details about one's life can at times create discomfort. Through this discomfort and vulnerability, the researcher may experience the emotions and feel empathy for the participant, while at the same time discover how new awareness and understanding are emerging for the participant through the way they are telling about their lives: "In the process of involving individuals in telling and retelling their life experiences the role of the biographical partner must be to help to develop mutual awareness of the power of 'critical subjectivity'" (Aspinwall, 1992, p. 256). Within this lens of critical subjectivity, both researcher and participant must be cognizant of the fact that one person's story cannot represent an entire group, and that no

one individual can be conscious of all the elements that influence their own interpretations of experiences.

Using narrative biography as a research methodology deepens understanding of children's authors, especially within the context of educational research and the study of children's literature. I was introduced to biography as a possible educational research methodology by my initial M.Ed. supervisor, Dr. Gregory Bryan. Bryan (2017) published a biography of children's author and illustrator Paul Goble in his book, *Paul Goble, Storyteller*. I adopted a similar, yet modified, approach to Bryan's process with Goble for this thesis since this was not a book length project. As I began writing SD Nelson's biography, SD and I decided that the focus of the narrative would be on his storytelling and his art. Tunnell and colleagues describe this type of biography as a "partial" biography as it has "a more focused purpose than do complete biographies. It covers only a segment of the subject's life" (Tunnell et al., 2016, p. 172). Within this thesis, I have focused on including the life events that have influenced the trajectory of SD Nelson's storytelling and art.

Relational Biographical Research Design

Writing someone's life story is an honour. Completing this project has been a journey alongside SD to uncover and tell his narrative in a respectful and meaningful manner. My intention was to capture SD Nelson's biographical narrative in a way that honoured the way he wanted to tell his own stories in the ways that he makes sense of his own experiences. Through reflection on the process, I have come to understand that the biographical research design that I developed for this this thesis evolved from a network of relationships; the relationship I developed with SD Nelson throughout the research process; the relationships readers and teachers have with SD's books and what they might know about him as an author; the

relationships SD has with his own writing, art, and culture; and the relationship with the place that grounded all of these relationships. I discovered that the way in which both readers and authors interact with and interpret text is complex. Personal situations, world events, and time and space of experiences are a few of many factors that affect the way a text is read and the way a reader simultaneously constructs meaning from the text.

As I began to explore the different relationships involved in the development of the biography of SD Nelson, I came to understand how multiple elements come in relationship to one another within a biography of an author, especially within the context of educational research. These elements include *author/artist*, *readers/teachers*, *body of work*, *biographer/researcher*, and *place*. I will go through each element one at a time to explore what it contributed to my thesis' biographical research design. These five elements do not stand alone, but rather work together. The relationships between each element describe the importance and significance of learning the stories behind the stories. The interacting relationships in a biography help readers gain a deeper understanding of not only the text or piece of art, the life stories of the author or illustrator, as well as increasing awareness of who and where they are as readers coming to a particular piece.

Author/Artist

Since this is a biography of an author and illustrator, the *author/artist* element is the subject of the biography. This element describes how a biography focuses on telling the life story of the author/artist and attempts to include the author or artist's intentions behind their texts and what they bring to their particular works. Telling the story of the author/artist's life is an attempt to explore contextual details and understand the stories behind the stories. For my thesis, the author and illustrator of children's books that is the subject of this biography is SD Nelson. As is

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clear in the author's note that begins this chapter, SD identifies the importance of who and where he comes from to his work as a storyteller and illustrator. As I explore in the following chapters of this thesis, SD Nelson's Lakota heritage becomes an important part of not only the work that he creates, but the processes for how he comes to create the work.

Writing a biography that explores (at least in part) how SD Nelson positions himself as an Indigenous storyteller and illustrator may be empowering for Indigenous readers who can learn more about Nelson's family and life experiences. Authors and illustrators bring much more to the world of literature than simply their pictures and words:

Indigenous authors', illustrators' and publishers' high quality and growing body of work sends a strong message that Indigenous ways of being in and seeing the world are valued.

These books also counteract the longstanding practice of appropriation of Indigenous stories by non-Indigenous writers of children's literature. (Stagg Peterson & Robinson, 2020, p. 2)

Learning more about the life of an author and illustrator with Indigenous heritage may become an invitation for young people to tell their own stories and share knowledge about their own cultures in their present learning environments or in the future. The Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action (2015) compels teachers to be more active in "developing culturally appropriate curricula" (Truth and Reconciliation of Canada, p. 2). Highlighting for young children the life and works that an Indigenous author has created is potentially a step in the direction for reconciliation. Students who do not identify as Indigenous also require deeper understandings of Indigenous authors and artists so that they too can begin to gain knowledge and be a part of reconciliation beginning at a young age. Using a biography as a catalyst for deeper connections to Indigenous content written by Indigenous individuals can become a part of "building student

capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect” (Truth and Reconciliation of Canada, p. 7).

Readers/Teachers

The way potential readers encounter a biography is another relational consideration in the research design. For this M.Ed thesis, I created a biography of SD Nelson for an imagined audience of readers who are mainly educators. I did not write this biography to be directly read to children, but to inform how teachers might approach Nelson’s work when sharing it with children and to contribute to their own more nuanced understandings of an author’s and illustrator’s process for themselves. As Strong-Wilson (2008) argues:

Teachers are also ‘storied intellectuals’ (Wilson, 2003, p. 18) in that their knowledge is shaped by stories embedded in curriculum and social discourse.

Teachers are learners, too, needing opportunities to reflect on the significance of their storied formations to their teaching. (Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 56)

When educators become more exposed to the life stories of another through a biography and consider the connections to literature and culture, they may reflect on the significance of the stories they have or have not been exposed to in their own lives that have shaped some of their assumptions about storytelling, authorship, and artmaking.

Early and/or middle years teachers may be most familiar with seeking biographical information for their classes as part of an author or illustrator study. In these projects, teachers might first begin with a complete book walk of a text from an author or illustrator, taking time to notice the illustrations and create inferences about the story before reading the words on the page. Once teachers read a book by an author or illustrator, they might share some life details about them before looking at other examples of their work. Reading Rocket (n.d.) describes an

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author's study as:

a unit lesson that gives students the opportunity to delve deeply into an author's life and

body of work. Whether individually, in small groups, or as a class, students can:

- Critically evaluate an author's themes, characters, and writing style
- Make connections between author's life and work
- Make personal connections between their own experiences and those of the author and his/her characters. (p.1)

Using author's studies within a classroom may be beneficial for students for a wide range of reasons, such as those identified by Reading Rocket who claim that an author's study will:

(1) Help students develop their reading skills; (2) Build critical thinking skills; (3) Improve writing skills; (4) Forge a deeper attachment to books; (5) Establish a community of readers; (6) Expose kids to different types of literary voices and styles; (7) Boost information literacy skills; (8) Plug in easily to the curriculum; (9) Make connections across the curriculum; (10) Add fun to the school day. (Reading Rocket, n.d., pp. 2-3)

The benefits for a child are clear from this list, but it is important to notice that the teacher also learns something new with each new author and/or illustrator as well. Each author and/or illustrator has something unique to bring into a classroom, and each child (and teacher) may connect and/or identify with some authors more closely than others.

However, like any pedagogical process in a classroom, author's and illustrator's studies can vary in effectiveness. One limit to the effectiveness of this type of learning experience is the

access teachers may have to accurate and/or compelling biographical information. It is important to note that the kind of biographical research a teacher engages with before the study with the class might be very limited. A quick Google search, a perusal of the information provided on the back or flap of the book, or a read through of an author's note might be the extent of the research a teacher does before providing details about the author to the class. This may provide a very skewed or general sense of who the author or illustrator is, and it is unlikely to give more nuanced understandings of the writing or art-making processes that might help a teacher facilitate more meaningful inquiries into authors and/or illustrators, their work, and the impact of their work in the world. More in-depth biographies such as the one in this thesis may better help teachers consider the complex contexts of the author's/illustrator's lives and the impact on their work.

Body of Work (Stories and Illustrations)

The body of work for a children's author and illustrator is usually their published books and artwork (see Appendix G for an annotated bibliography of Nelson's published work). In the biography in this thesis, I have mainly focused on SD Nelson's journey to becoming a published author and illustrator. During the interviews, SD also invited me to learn stories about more personal visual art pieces that are beyond his published works, especially when I visited his home in Arizona. Exploring relationships to the *body of work* of an author and illustration requires finding out more about how SD Nelson understands his own work. Exploring relationships to the body of work an author and illustrator requires finding out how the artist/illustrator, in this case SD Nelson, understands his own work. However, the relationships to body of work go beyond SD Nelson's insights into this process.

The way in which a text is interpreted by readers, teachers, biographers, and researchers varies and may not be the same interpretation each time the text is experienced. Diving into the various theories within literary criticism about the relationships between readers and texts is far beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is important to note that there is great debate within literary theory about the roles of readers and authors when approaching any text. Famously, in an essay published in 1967, Roland Barthes argued for the “death of the author,” which essentially meant that he believed a text should be encountered without any biographical knowledge of the author or assumptions about the author’s intentions (Seymour, 2018). Others in literary theory argued for the importance of reader response theories —where meaning is believed to only exist when it is created because of the individual or community of readers’ experiences or “transactions” (Rosenblatt, 1938/2016) with the text. Stanley Fish (1987) was particularly influential in the idea of the importance of “interpretive communities, or groups who interpret texts similarly because they share similar social positions and experiences)” (Ott & Mack, 2020, p. 270). Literary theory is constantly changing in its relationships between readers, authors, and texts. Since this is biographical research, I situate myself and my students as readers who benefit from knowing about the life of the author and the context in which the book was created and received. I believe interpretive communities of readers come with their own experiences and lenses as they come to know more about the artist/ illustrator and the author/illustrator’s body of work.

Biographer/Researcher

The *biographer/researcher* is also an important relationship within the design and development of a biography because the context, biases, and stories that the biographical researcher brings to the project will influence how the entire project is conceptualized and

shared. Aspinwall (1992) reinforces this as he states, “biographical researchers are not only close to the data, they are in a very real sense part of the data. However one-sided, a conversation is a two-way process, with the listener providing an important impetus” (p. 255). From the subject or who is chosen for the biography, to how the questions are conceptualized and the nuances of how the questions are asked, to how the data is analyzed and ultimately written, the biographical researcher has a presence within what becomes the final biography. Although some may hope to read a biography where the biographer seems absent from the page or process, the biographer remains an active part of every stage of the process: “As Newberry-winning author James Daughtery (1972) once said, ‘When you’re writing biography, you’re also writing autobiography.’ In other words, how biographers feel about subjects affects, at least subtly, how they portray them” (Tunnell et al., 2016, p. 171). There is no such thing as a neutral biographer, nor is there ever a completely objective biography.

As a biographer, I think it is important to acknowledge my own participation and positionality in this research. I am not an Indigenous person, but I have collaborated on this biography with an author and artist who identifies with his Indigenous/Native American heritage. I am mindful that what I bring to this project as a biographer includes my privileges and my identity as a non-racialized person. Strong-Wilson (2008), a non-Indigenous researcher of Indigenous children’s literature writes:

My position within the research is problematic, given that my storied formation bears the marks of imperialism and colonialism within a dominant and racist White society. Rose (Hopi) (1992) says that a non-Indigenous person can produce another perspective but not an Indigenous perspective. (p. 58)

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The biography I have created shares my perspective of how SD Nelson told his story, but the research project may have been quite different if it had been conducted by someone from within an Indigenous culture or community. For this reason, I have tried as much as possible to remain as close as possible to SD Nelson's own words and interpretations of life events.

Place

The final interconnected element is *place*. Place in this biography refers to the physical locations of the described life stories, but also extends into the places and spaces in which the biographer, readers, and author may be in, which includes mental, emotional, or spiritual spaces. Whether we are mindful of the concept of place or not, humans connect with place in many ways. The land on which a person grew up, a family home, a park bench, a room in an apartment, a specific spot in nature, a location downtown, the spiritual spaces of meditation or ceremonies, and emotional states are all examples of place and space. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) call humans to “more fully consider the implications and significance of place in lived lives” (p. 1). Honeyford and Watt (2020) describe the importance of place and critical place inquiry in unsettling colonial understandings of place by exploring a variety of Indigenous theorists who write about the importance of place (Battiste, 2010; Sinclair & Cariou, 2012; Styres, 2019; Tuck et al., 2014, Watts, 2013).

It was not until after I had written several drafts of the biography and gained feedback from my committee that I realized the importance of place to this biography. SD Nelson tells stories about the many places he has lived in his life and how those places have shaped him as an author and artist. SD identified how visiting specific places was an important part of his research, writing, and art-making processes. Place also influenced myself as a biographer—both in terms of my own social, historical, and cultural reference points and my access to in person interactions

with Nelson. Readers of Nelson's work and/or my biography will also be influenced by their own places.

Place also becomes important to this biography because although SD Nelson is an American author, I am writing this thesis for a Canadian graduate degree and for a primarily Canadian audience. The influence of our differing places can be quite influential to the encountering of the biography in many ways. One example of this is found in some of the language that is used throughout the biography. This thesis was written in Canada, where there are numerous groups that make up Indigenous peoples of Canada, and current preferred terms are First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. However, in the United States, the terms commonly used for Indigenous peoples are Native American. SD Nelson requested the term Native American be used when telling his story, so I consistently chose to honour his language choices for his culture, even though I knew they may be somewhat jarring for Canadian readers. The example of how differently language is used in the two countries is only one of many differences in the historical, cultural, social, and economic factors that impact how Nelson tells his story and how Canadian readers may respond to his telling and interpretations of the people and events in his life.

Methods

The qualitative research for this thesis was completed primarily through informal, semi-structured interviews with S.D. Nelson and with additional close analysis of his books and author's notes. Throughout this four-year research process, SD and I created a trusting relationship, one that began with and continued to be driven by ongoing, informed consent. Out of respect for SD's time, we agreed that I would send him a completed draft for reading and approval rather than sending chapter by chapter, as I have made countless revisions. I felt that reading a final project may be more manageable and enjoyable for SD. Throughout this process,

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SD has been eager to share his stories and insights and has been incredibly accommodating and kind. It has been an honour to listen to his stories and share them in this thesis.

Once SD agreed to work with me on the project, I compiled a list of questions that I categorized by theme to ask SD during our phone and in-person interviews (see Appendix E). Prior to each phone conversation and before my visit to his home in Flagstaff, I emailed SD a list of questions to give him time to prepare and an opportunity to remove or add items. This technique was also used to create a comfortable, safe environment where rich dialogue could emerge. With permission, I audio recorded every conversation and took additional notes during and after the interviews. Many times, SD and I would pick up from previous conversations, and he would add information and detail. Other times, upon reflection, he asked that I remove statements that he had made or would clarify the meaning of his words he had previously used.

As the project progressed, I traveled to Flagstaff, Arizona to meet SD Nelson in person and I was graciously welcomed into his home. It was during a one day visit with SD in Flagstaff when I was able to conduct the most valuable interviews because, I had the opportunity to observe his workspaces, inspirations, and techniques. During our time together, I conducted another 6–7 hours of interviews. SD also took my husband and I for a tour of the town before we sat down and shared a meal together at one of his favourite Mexican restaurants. I treasure this time as we truly had amazing conversations and many laughs.

As I compiled the information and stories from our conversations, which consisted of twelve recordings and over sixteen hours of dialogue, themes began to emerge organically. To organize these themes, I created colour coded boards for each theme topic. For example, I identified the following themes: the importance of SD's maternal grandparents, importance of culture, family, artmaking, book-making process, influential life events. This analysis process

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helped shape the writing process and structure a draft of the chapters of the biography. Further analysis continued through the writing and re-writing process.

With permission from SD, photos of his life and his artwork were included to accompany the written text. These include photos of Nelson and significant members of his family and community, from birth to present day. All the artwork within this thesis is the work of SD Nelson. Photos are from SD's private collection of family photos as well as photos I personally took while in Arizona. Book images have been used with permission from Abrams, Lee & Low, and South Dakota State Historical Society publishing companies.

Limitations

Limitations provide boundaries and scope for a research project. I acknowledge several limitations to my work. First, I acknowledge that I am not an Indigenous person, yet I am researching an author who identifies as having Indigenous heritage. I listened and asked questions for clarification and guidance from SD throughout the process. As a limitation this meant that I could write SD Nelson's story using the information he provided, but I did so from the perspective of a privileged, non-Indigenous person.

Another limitation to this work is the time frame in which we engaged in the research. When I began this thesis in 2017 the social, political, and cultural situation in both Canada and the United States was very different. Since this was a four-year project, many major events occurred at both personal and political levels that affected how SD told his story and how I chose to structure his stories as biography.

The form of interviews is another limitation. SD Nelson lives in Flagstaff, Arizona. I was fortunate to travel there on one occasion, but frequent trips were not sustainable for financial,

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family, and work reasons. Being closer in proximity would have provided me with more opportunities to connect and conduct many more face-to-face interviews. However, the twelve one-hour telephone interviews provide rich data.

An additional limitation is that I only interviewed SD Nelson. I did not interview family, friends, or colleagues to gain other perspectives on SD's life, which is why I chose a narrative biography that acknowledges the importance of SD's own meaning-making of his experiences. We focused our interviews on his artmaking and storytelling. SD chose to share what he felt influenced most in those areas.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that there is great potential for pedagogical exploration of how, why, when, and where to use a biography of SD Nelson or his books in classrooms. While this is a promising future direction for research, it is beyond the scope of this thesis. My contribution to the research is the biography itself.

Implications/Significance

As my research and relationship with SD Nelson unfolded over the years, I soon realized the importance of this work. Simply reading books and observing art created by an individual does not provide well-rounded insight into who that person is. After reading a book, a reader could easily make assumptions about the author's viewpoints, opinions, culture, and perhaps day-to-day life. The stories about SD's ancestors, childhood, family, cultures, experiences, and career coupled with the time I spent with him at his home tell a richer, more holistic narrative of who SD truly is as a person. SD generously shared the driving forces behind his written and illustrated creations and gives insights into his process.

As we navigated through his life, culture, and experiences in the interviews, it became evident that SD Nelson walks, writes, and creates art in two worlds. SD told stories of his

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mother's Lakota family and culture, as well as his father's settler American background. As these two families meet, we begin to see the weaving of the two worlds in which SD walks and how he navigates and negotiates these intertwining identities. He combines his Lakota heritage and knowledge with that of his European roots and life in the western world. He struggles with the injustices facing Indigenous people, but also strives to be part of the healing and change that he sees is necessary for the future. More importantly, he connects with his Indigenous past, telling stories of the land and his people from earlier times, while embracing his position as a role model of how to share his experiences and stories of a contemporary Indigenous life.

Overview of Biography/Thesis

The biography of SD Nelson consists of four chapters that are arranged mostly chronologically, but also explore important places and process in SD's work. The first chapter of the biography focuses on family. SD Nelson's culture, ancestors, and childhood experiences influenced the choices he made throughout his life, including the ways he tells stories and makes art. The second chapter of the biography focuses on SD's journey to becoming an author and illustrator. This chapter describes SD's transition into adulthood, especially focusing on his experiences as a university student and finding a career as a teacher. It also explores significant life experiences such as moving to Arizona and becoming a father and grandfather. The third chapter focuses on SD Nelson's processes as a storyteller and artist within the context of creating and publishing children's literature. The final chapter culminates in an exploration of SD's current life, art, and ways of giving back to his community in Arizona and beyond.

Chapter 2: Family

“I was raised with two different and in some ways similar spiritual understanding of the world we live in” (Nelson, 2019).

“My father, a career army officer of Norwegian descent, embraced the Indian ways and, in the turn of the circle, was fully accepted into my mother’s family” (From the Author’s Note in The Star People, Nelson, 2003).

On the 25th day of January 1950, Stephen Dennis “Dakota” Nelson was born. He would become renowned as SD Nelson, the Lakota picture book illustrator and author. SD’s Native American name is Flying Cloud—*Mahpiya Kiny’An*. He was born to Christine Elk Tooth Woman and Thurston Nelson on the U.S Army Base in Fort Knox, Kentucky. SD grew up in a diverse family as his mother was Lakota and his father was of Norwegian descent. He was baptized as a baby and raised in the Catholic church. SD is also an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, ID # 302-U10297. While having a deep respect for his father and his paternal ancestors, it was his mother’s culture and heritage that he felt strong connections to as a young boy. This cultural connection ultimately shaped and guided his life path.

As an author and illustrator, SD Nelson draws on his own life experiences as well as the stories that have been passed on to him, weaving this knowledge into works of art and captivating narratives for readers of all ages. SD Nelson’s illustrations and storytelling are greatly influenced by his heritage and upbringing. SD’s respect for architecture, farming, and travel stem from relocating many times as a child in a military family and from the family stories he collected from his father. SD’s mother, Christine, shared many cultural stories and traditions that now live on in the art and books that SD creates. As he develops these stories into books, SD spends countless hours researching and learning about Lakota history and culture so that he can represent and tell the stories as accurately as possible. However, SD recognizes that his

beginnings as an artist and storyteller are rooted within his childhood experiences and his family connections.

Christine and Thurston

One fateful autumn night in 1945, Thurston Nelson and Christine Gipp individually decided to take a break from their studies to attend a dance on campus at the North Dakota Agricultural College—a choice that would change the course of their lives. These two college kids would meet at that dance and eventually become SD Nelson’s parents. In the 1940s mixed-race relationships were not as socially accepted as they are today. While Christine’s family may not have been thrilled about the fact that Thurston was not a Native American man, this sentiment soon dissolved with the discovery that he had just returned from war. Like Thurston, both of Christine’s older brothers, William and Francis, served in the military during WWII. The fact that these men all served and fought in WWII helped to form a bond, so that Thurston was “immediately accepted amongst the Native American men” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) on Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in 1946. The camaraderie shared between these war veterans as well as the fact that Thurston was very much attracted to Christine, played a vital role in Thurston’s acceptance into Christine’s family.



Figure 3 "Marriage" Christine Gipp and Thurston Nelson on their wedding day in Fargo, North Dakota, September 4, 1946.

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Christine and Thurston were united in marriage on September 4, 1946. Their first son, Terrence Jesse Nelson was born on June 9, 1947, in Mobridge, South Dakota. Stephen Dakota Nelson (SD) soon joined his older brother on January 25, 1950, at Fort Knox, Kentucky. The one and only Nelson girl, Nancy Rose Nelson was born on September 13, 1951, at Fort Yates on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, North Dakota, and finally Eric Evan Nelson, the youngest of the family entered the world on June 20, 1955, in Fort Riley, Kansas.



Figure 4 “Cousins” SD and first cousin Laura Jo Buffalo Boy Gipp (Sister Girl), 1951.



Figure 5 “Grandma's Kitchen” Grandma Josephine's kitchen, 1958.

As can be seen in the different locations where the children were born, Thurston and his family had to move frequently because of his job in the military. In fact, that by the time SD was twelve years old, the family had moved fifteen times. SD remembers beginning his kindergarten year at a public school in Fort Riley, Kansas, where his father was serving as an army captain. While neither friends nor teachers stand out as significant in kindergarten, nap time does. SD recalls that when it was time for this scheduled routine part of the day, he would lay down on a rug and have a nap surrounded by other children of similar age. This nap time ritual would soon come to an end for SD. Just two short months after starting kindergarten in Fort Riley, his father

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was relocated to Germany. During the Cold War, the US Military stationed officers and their families in Europe in what SD describes as a “show of force” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). In November of 1955, SD walked into a new classroom, with a new teacher, and a new group of military kids on a military post in Bamberg, Germany, where he and his family lived for the next two years. Even as a six-year-old boy, SD remembers “a feeling of being out of place” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) and not belonging. Many of SD’s childhood recollections are riddled with anxiety and disconnectedness which made looking back on school memories unpleasant. While still trying to fit in and desperately longing to feel connected, SD was required to change schools yet again in 1957 as Captain Thurston was relocated to Manheim, Germany.

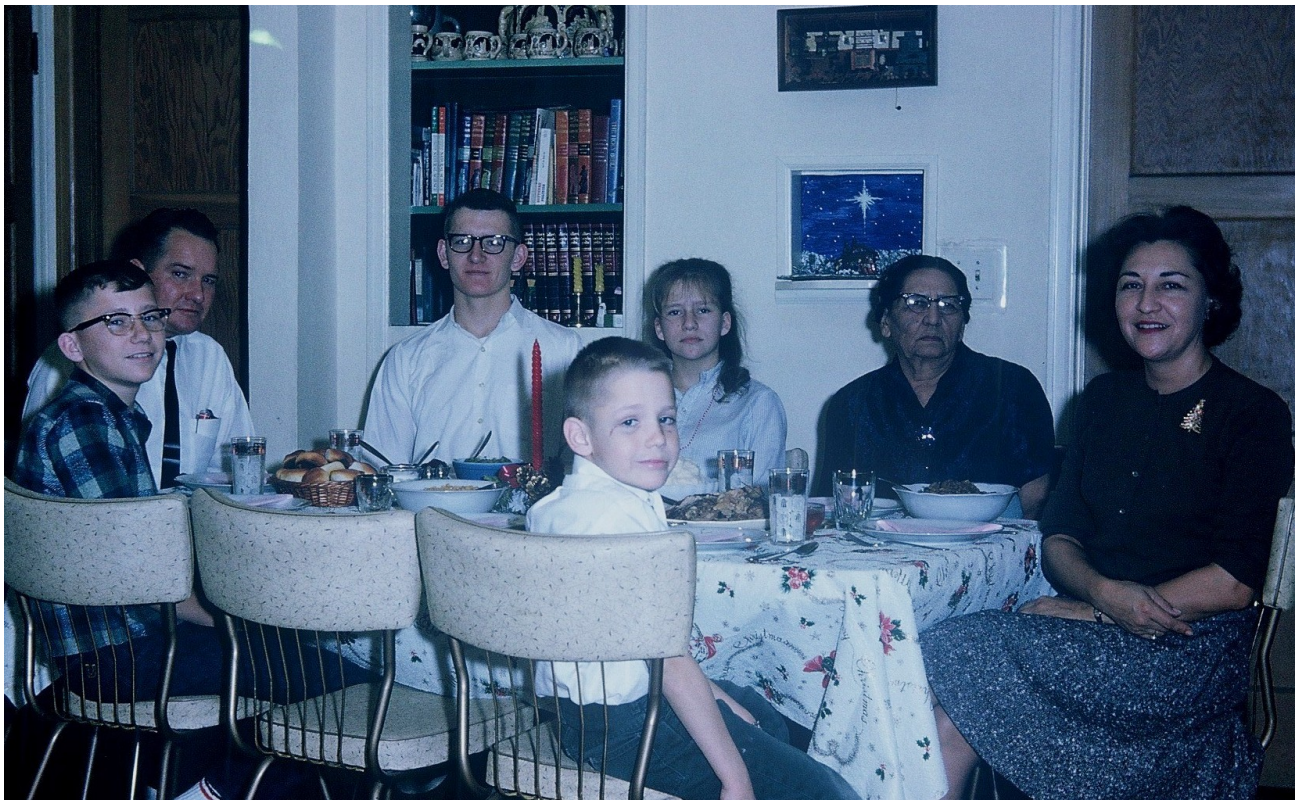


Figure 6 “Fargo Home” (left to right) SD, Thurston, Terry, Eric, (front center) Nancy, Josephine, and Christine, Fargo, North Dakota, 1964.

Although creating relationships with peers and establishing a sense of belonging continued to be a challenge for SD, he recalls the years that he and his family lived in Germany as being amazing experiences filled with many adventures, rich cultural discoveries, and bonding time with his siblings. In 1955, as the Cold War was in full swing, SD, his brothers, and a few other boys from the army base spent some of their free time playing. This group called themselves the “Black Eagles” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) and would go on escapades with toy guns and wielding wooden swords that SD’s brother had fashioned especially for their game. The “Black Eagles” would endlessly role play all around the army base with their weapons, and to their delight, their game would quite often take them into the German forest which was nestled close by the army base.

The Nelsons were like any hard-working family and needed a get away from time to time, especially on a Saturday or Sunday. Road trips into the German countryside are bittersweet memories for SD. The local Germans were always friendly and enjoyable to be around, but this joy was tempered by mixed emotions as SD and his family toured the countryside and witnessed the aftermath of the second world war. Although the end of World War II was ten years prior, the “rubble of bombed out buildings and standing ghosts of buildings” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) remained as a reminder of horrifying times. These reminders soon became part of the landscape and daily life for SD. However, the genuine and kind nature of the people the Nelson family encountered revives warm memories for SD of their time in Europe. Even today, the entire Christmas season brings a smile to SD’s face as he recollects the wonderful time of year. He recalls elaborately decorated trees, storefronts, family homes, and streets, which made the festive holiday an intensely enjoyable one for him as a child.

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Thurston, Christine, and the children often went on camping trips while in Germany. Rather than loading up the family station wagon, Thurston and the other soldiers would pack military jeeps and trucks with tents, food, and other essential camping gear and head into the forest for a weekend of roughing it and bonding. This remains a unique and powerful memory. SD says, “It was like being little soldiers. It was exciting being little warriors” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). SD discovered his love of the outdoors during these family trips in



Figure 7 “Campout” BSA Troop 483 in the Ozark Mountains on a Boy Scouts Campout (left to right) SD Nelson, Steve Herbst, Dan Stam, Albert “Mugsy” Moran, fifth boy unknown, Farmington, Missouri, 1961.

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Germany. Camping adventures were common throughout his childhood, regardless of the country he was living in. When the family settled back on American soil, SD fondly remembers one campout with the Boy Scouts of America in Missouri. SD and his fellow troop members are seen on page 40 as they prepare a meal together in the great outdoors.

Thurston and Christine valued family and longed to provide quality time that would create lasting memories for their children. Whenever Thurston had vacation time, the family took advantage of exploring the area where they were living. It was a common occurrence for the family's 1955 Ford to be loaded up to set out on a new adventure. From exploring major areas of Germany to discovering the majestic sights of Spain, the Nelsons took full advantage of where they were situated in the world, embracing as many cultural experiences as they could. As wonderful as Germany and Spain were, a family trip to Paris, France made an even greater lasting impact on SD. Standing in the Louvre at the tender age of six years old, SD was first exposed to what he describes as "amazing neoclassical art" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). He vividly remembers seeing classical masterpieces and Egyptian statues. Along with the art and culture that Paris offered, the inspirational architecture such as the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower had lasting effects on SD that would drive his passion for art and design later in life.

Another turning point in SD's artistic discovery was due to his mother's passion for art and creativity. Being a mother of four young children, getting out of the house was not an easy feat. Christine was determined to nurture her creative side. During the time the family lived in Germany, she began taking private painting lessons with a man by the name of Heir Schmidt. "This white-haired man with a thick German accent" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) would come to the family home once a week and set up his easel in the living room. Each lesson

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began with the instructor painting a picture while Christine eagerly observed and copied his technique. For each painting session Heir Schmidt brought a sample painting of a landscape or still life, and Christine sat with a stretched canvas on an easel and followed along step by step, replicating the artist's process of mixing, applying, and blending. One week Heir Schmidt and Christine might copy a painting of a vase of roses; they might paint a Swiss cottage in the Alps, or a scene of fir trees reflected in a lake the following week. Looking back, SD realizes that through observing his mother learning an artistic process, he was "taking the painting lessons right along with her" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019).

SD watched intently as paint was squeezed from tubes onto the palette where colours were mixed with a palette knife and then applied to the canvas with a long-handled easel brush. White and blue became the color of the sky. Red mixed with yellow to become golden autumn foliage. Colour turned into snow-capped mountains and clouds. The smell of turpentine and the sound of bristles being pulled over canvas captivated SD. He and his siblings would sit mesmerized. They silently, reverently watched their mother transform a blank canvas, making it come alive with trees, houses, roses in vases, and rich landscapes. He remembers as a child witnessing this and thinking, "This is freaking awesome" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). He marvelled at his mother's works of art as a child and is fortunate to do the same today as he still has many of her oil landscape paintings. SD would absorb the lessons and then scurry off and begin doodling on pages of his own, inspired by his mother and Heir Schmidt. This routine continued right up until the Nelson family moved back to the United States in 1958.

Through different exercises and many hours of practice, he and his mother learned techniques and principles of oil painting. The process and the result were magic. The ability to turn a flat two-dimensional surface into a three-dimensional illusion seemed miraculous. Years

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later SD realizes that Heir Schmidt, the German art teacher and artist, changed his life by nurturing his mother's artistic spirit. Painting was not the only artistic expression in which Christine took part. She was also an incredible seamstress and quiltmaker. Putting her creative talent to good use, Christine could often be found designing and sewing beautiful dresses for her daughter Nancy as well as herself. Nancy was not the only Nelson child who reaped the benefits from Christine's skills, SD and his siblings were kept warm on cold nights tucked under the intricately crafted quilts that their mother made. SD can trace Christine's artistry and her



Figure 8 "Christine" Christine (Gipp) Nelson, Co-founder, Fargo-Moorhead Indian Center, 1970.

dedication to being a loving, resourceful mother to her relationships with her mother and

grandmother.

The Gipp Family

SD's maternal grandmother, Josephine Zahn-Gipp-Pleets (ID # 2724) was Hunkpapa, one of the seven council fires/bands of the Lakota people. She was born on March 28, 1893, on the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota. Her Native American name *Wa-ste Win*, translates to "Good Woman." Josephine attended the Catholic Indian Mission school in Fort Yates. While her experiences at boarding school were not always pleasant, Josephine shared certain aspects of her story with her children and her grandchildren. She told stories about how she was able to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills from the nuns who ran the school. One specific memory that remained with her was how she quickly learned to adapt her natural instincts to use her left hand to write, as the nuns would strike her left hand whenever she was using it. This served as a painful reminder to use the "proper" right hand to write. Josephine passed away on July 1, 1971, in Fort Yates, North Dakota at the age of 76.

SD's maternal grandfather, Albert Gipp was of German heritage. He was born on September 2, 1889. Albert passed away on November 7, 1926, at the age of 37 years. He died when his only daughter, Christine, was just seven months old. It is generally said that he died from a heart attack, but SD describes how close family and friends recognize that his death was a result of complications due to alcohol abuse.

Christine Rose Gipp was born on March 22, 1926, on the Standing Rock Reservation, North Dakota. Christine was the only girl born to Albert Gipp and Josephine Zahn. She had two brothers that were much older. Christine and her mother lived a life of struggles and hardship mixed with survival and accomplishments. Albert provided for his family as a rancher and a cowboy. After her husband's death, Josephine was left to raise her baby girl on her own on the

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Cannonball River in southwestern North Dakota during the times of the Great Depression. Her two eldest sons were grown and had left home. Following Native American tradition, when Albert died, Josephine cut her hair in mourning, which is a “cultural practice to demonstrate a terrible loss” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) in which one experiences extreme anguish and grieving. Along with cutting her beautiful long hair, Josephine gave up all her possessions, which is another custom in Lakota culture. Other members of her tribe would come to her home and take her household goods and belongings. According to traditional Lakota practices, when one lost her husband, “who is the provider and the hunter, the wife needed to go elsewhere, often to someone else’s tipi” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). In this situation at the time, men would often take an additional partner as a means for the newly widowed to “fulfill her role as a woman” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). These roles included being the keeper of the tipi, preparing meals, taking care of the children, making clothes, and creating beadwork. Rather than seeing his mother and infant sister move into someone else’s home, in 1929, Josephine’s eldest son William Louis Gipp, built a one room log cabin with a dirt floor and an outhouse on the bank above the Cannonball River. In the yard Josephine kept and tended a garden and raised chickens to provide for her and Christine. This is where they lived for several years enduring the harsh Dakota winters. Although the cabin is no longer there, SD has visited the site and seen evidence of its existence remaining nearly 100 years later.

SD recalls the stories about his grandmother that his mother passed on. These stories serve as a reminder to SD about how different life was for his ancestors, and the strength of his family as shown in its endurance. Josephine proved her determination to not only survive but thrive. One winter when they had run out of firewood and had no money to purchase more wood, the situation seemed bleak. Without heat from the potbelly stove in their cabin, the chances of

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Josephine and Christine surviving the severe winter were slim. Determined to prevent freezing to death, Josephine wrapped Christine and herself in layer after layer of blankets to protect them from the bitter winter and ventured out in search of firewood. To prevent snowdrifts that would make road travel difficult and dangerous, the government lined the roadways with wooden picket fences. These fences formed a barrier between the road and the blowing snow. The fences were constructed from wire and 3/8 inch wooden laths, the perfect alternative to traditional firewood and a means to keep Josephine and her daughter from freezing. Josephine broke off these wooden laths and brought home bundles to stoke their potbelly stove, ensuring that they would win the battle against the biting cold of the Dakotas.



Figure 9 "Josephine" SD's Grandmother, Josephine Zahn-Gipp Pleets, 1934.

Josephine became a resourceful mother and worked tirelessly to provide for her family. Although they received rations from the government, these commodities were often sparse. Any opportunity to enhance the family's diet was a welcomed one. On one occasion, non-Native-American hunters came to the area of Standing Rock to hunt rabbits. The hunters learned of Josephine's skill and brought their kill to her to field dress, which is the process of removing the internal organs from animals. The hunters paid Josephine for her fine work and left with the skins and furs, which they would sell, but left her with the heads. Josephine took full advantage of the discarded parts of the rabbits. She skinned the heads and put them in a pot on the stove to cook. After the heads were sufficiently cooked, "Josephine cracked the heads open with the handle of a knife and removed the cooked brains and tongues" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). The contents of these heads provided a few hearty meals, where she and Christine eagerly ate everything and wasted nothing. While being resourceful at home was essential, Josephine soon realized that she needed to find a way to earn an income as well. Using the domestic skills that she acquired as part of the Mission school's curriculum, Josephine provided for her daughter by working as a housekeeper for Dr. and Mrs. Rice, a local couple who lived in Solen, North Dakota. Her duties as a housekeeper included washing floors, cooking, and washing dishes. Josephine was also paid to do similar work for other families and a small local hotel.

In contrast to the bleak survival of harsh winters, Christine's stories of the summers on the Cannonball River were filled with sunshine and warmth. This was also a crucial time to prepare and preserve food and gather supplies to survive through the winter. Josephine and Christine received beef rations from the government every two weeks. Having no means to properly store this raw meat, what was not cooked and eaten in the first two days would spoil,

unless it was preserved. In the summer months, they would make *bah-pah*, a Hunkpapa term for dried meat, which is commonly known as jerky. Christine and her mother would hang thinly sliced meat from racks, aiding in the drying and curing of the meat. This is a practice that has lived on with SD for many generations. He remembers as a child that his mother would suspend poles from the cabinets and ceiling in their kitchen to construct makeshift drying racks. His mother taught this technique of drying meat to SD and in turn he taught it to his daughters (see photograph on page 73, where SD and his daughters are hanging meat to dry in his kitchen in his home in Arizona). He continues to make *bah-pah* today.

Another vital summer ritual was the harvesting of vegetables and preparing them for storage. Working the land, planting the vegetable crops, and the steady upkeep of a garden was gruelling labour, but essential for Josephine and Christine as this was the major food source throughout the winter months. Hard work in the summer paid dividends in the winter. During the cold and freezing months on the prairies, Josephine and Christine would make corn soup, which consisted of dried corn, *bah-pah*, and prairie turnips. This hearty soup with its rich earthy flavour, remains one of SD's favourite comfort foods. He still makes it today, although his version has a modern flare as he uses canned corn. Another traditional food that Josephine would make for Christine was fry bread. Using the lard and flour they acquired from the government rations, Josephine would make a flour dough portioning it into donut sized pieces. She heated lard in a skillet on the pot belly stove until it was hot, dropped the dough into the liquid fat, and fried it until the dough was golden brown.

Christine's grandmother, Kezewin and grandfather, William Zahn (Josephine's parents) lived up the road from Josephine and Christine. Grandmother Kezewin would visit from time to time and would bring a little extra food whenever she could. Limited government rations of

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commodities such as flour, sugar, salt, and beef kept Josephine and Christine alive. Throughout the 1930s, the Great Depression, coupled with drought, pushed living conditions to the extreme. At times Josephine and baby Christine were near starvation, and gratefully accepted whatever Kezewin could offer. When visiting her daughter and granddaughter, Kezewin would not stay in the tiny one room cabin but slept in a tipi outside. During these visits she would pass the time with beading. Kezewin would set herself up for beading by arranging the beads into pie tins. Vibrant yellow, sky blue, and white beads would surround her, ready to be become beautifully intricate patterns that she designed herself. She transformed moccasins and other articles of clothing into stunning works of art using a needle, thread, and buckskin. Artistry is a family trait that can be traced back to his great-grandmother. Josephine demonstrated her talent through beading, Christine through quilting, dress making, and art, and SD through storytelling and art. One particularly stunning creation of Kezewin's was a Reservation Period Lakota Dress, which is pictured on page 52. To his dismay, this fully beaded garment, which SD describes as a "kick ass dress," (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) cannot be located. SD has reached out far and wide in attempts to find this missing treasure. His search efforts have included contacting the Smithsonian, museums in Finland and England, as well as other museums in Europe that are known to have extensive Native American artifact collections. SD's inquiries have not been made with the intention of reclaiming his family's property, but in hopes that he may be able to see first-hand the beauty of his great-grandmother's talent and passion. Having the opportunity to physically touch this heirloom and to feel the presence of his ancestor drives his search for this long-lost treasure. SD's heartfelt hope is that this dress is being cared for and cherished, wherever it may be.



Figure 10 “Kezwin” Here she is wearing a fully beaded buckskin “Reservation Period” dress that she made, which is the dress SD desires to locate. Kezwin is holding a hand of dried prairie turnips, Standing Rock Reservation, 1927.

Although Josephine needed her daughter's help to work the ground and contribute to the endless day-to-day tasks, Josephine was determined to allow her daughter to have an education. As such, Christine also grew up attending Catholic mission schools. From the stories Christine shared with SD, her experience at the mission schools differed from many other Native American children who suffered abuse, neglect, and other horrors. Christine remembered learning and engaging in new experiences that were often very different from those in the one-room log cabin on the reservation. Although many of Christine's relatives were victims of sexual abuse that occurred all too commonly at the mission schools during this time, Christine never shared similar stories with SD. In contrast, Christine told SD of "fond memories from both the Catholic mission school as well as public school in Fort Yates" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). The one memory of punishment and ill treatment Christine shared with SD was a whack on the back of the hand with a ruler. What SD remembers hearing stories about were the many occasions when Josephine and Christine did not have enough food to eat on the reservation during the Great Depression. At times like these, both mother and daughter were relieved that the mission school provided Christine with adequate and regular meals at school. After leaving the mission school, Christine went on to continue her education at public school in Fort Yates. Due to her time spent at the mission school, she had the advantage of knowing how to read and write, which were "skills that were not necessarily common among reservation children in the 1930s" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019).



Figure 11 "Communion" Christine Elk Tooth Woman's First Holy Communion, Standing Rock, St. Peters Catholic Mission Church, ca. 1932.

At public school in Fort Yates, Christine developed a deeper love for reading as well as a desire to attend a post-secondary institution. In high school she soon realized she had an interest in cooking and sewing and found the art of setting an elegant placement of crystal, dishes, and silverware fascinating. Having grown up in a log cabin with mud between the logs, Christine was drawn to these foreign rituals. During high school, Christine had a home economics teacher who made a profound impact on her. This teacher offered Christine a “Taste of the modern world and a possibility of a new life” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019), with much greater comforts and opportunities, which not only intrigued her, but inspired her. Christine was determined and strong-willed, not giving up on her goal of attending university. In 1945, Christine Gipp was accepted into and began studying at the North Dakota Agricultural College (NDAC), which is known today as the North Dakota State University. It was here at NDAC, she met Thurston Nelson.

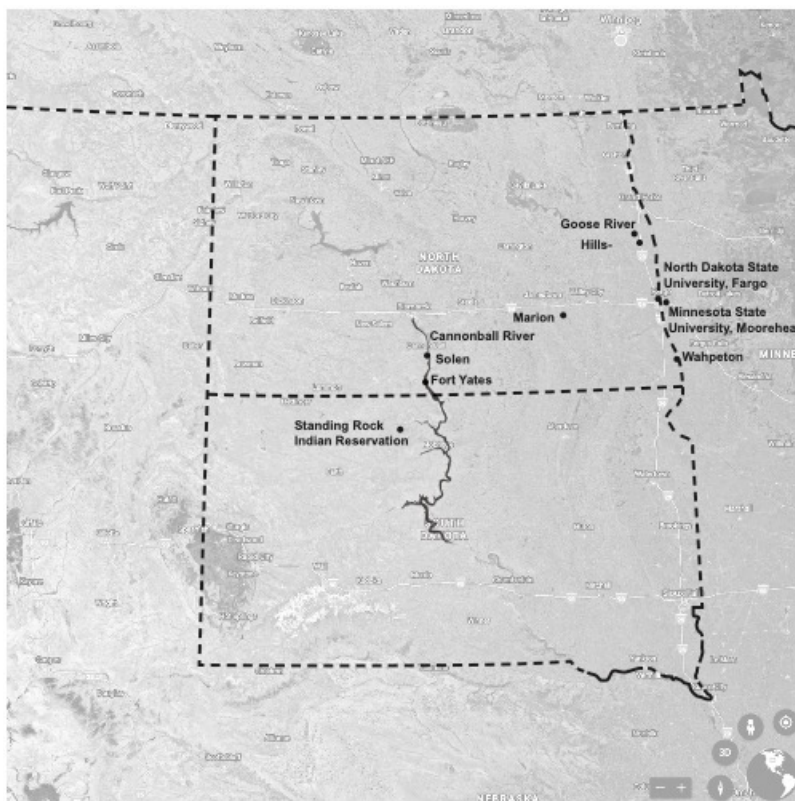


Figure 12 “The Dakotas” Significant locations in SD’s life in South and North Dakota.

The Nelson Family

Even and Mattie Nelson met in 1871 in the Red River Valley after immigrating to the United States from Norway. They settled on the banks of the Goose River near Hillsboro, North Dakota, where they began their family. Their eldest son, Ernest met and fell in love with Esther Price, and they were united in marriage in 1922. On February 18, 1923, they welcomed their first child, Thurston Dennis Nelson (SD's father), who was born in Marion, North Dakota. Thurston spent the early years of his childhood travelling back and forth from Hillsboro, North Dakota to the plains of Saskatchewan in Canada. In 1927, Ernest uprooted his wife and their children and moved to Saskatchewan in hopes of creating a better life. Ernest and Esther, along with many other families, were made enticing offers by the Canadian government that they "would be eligible to acquire a parcel of property for a reasonably low price if they were successful in homesteading and farming the land successfully for a few years" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). This proved to be an extremely difficult endeavour, one which ultimately failed. Ernest built the family a one-bedroom cabin to house himself, his wife, and their seven children. However, during this crucial trial period to prove himself as a farmer and to provide for his family, the Canadian weather did not cooperate. Extreme drought conditions did not work in favour of the Nelson family. Along with brutal winters on the prairies, summer droughts caused a great deal of stress on the family. With poor crops that resulted in little to no income, making ends meet proved difficult. Luckily, Thurston was an accomplished hunter and trapper, a skill he learned from his father, and was able to put rabbit meat on the family's table at mealtimes.

While the family was not successful at farming, Thurston had many adventures and positive experiences growing up on the Canadian prairies. When on hunting excursions, Thurston would come across many treasures left by Native American people many years before.

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Thurston's favourite finds were stone axe heads and arrowheads. Along with these prized artifacts, Thurston often stumbled upon a buffalo wallow while out hunting. A wallow is a circular area of dirt approximately eight feet in diameter where buffalo rolled to dust their hides to get rid of parasites. As SD describes, "being the enormous beasts that they are, after a roll in the meadow, these buffalo created large craters in the prairie grasses" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). Thurston also discovered trails from these wallows that lead to sloughs as well as other sources of water. He was aware the great buffalo herds had been long diminished on the prairies, so upon these discoveries he would invent scenarios, situations, and stories which SD feels created a "romanticized notion about Native American people" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019), and their ways of life. SD believes this was a catalyst in Thurston's attraction towards Christine many years later.

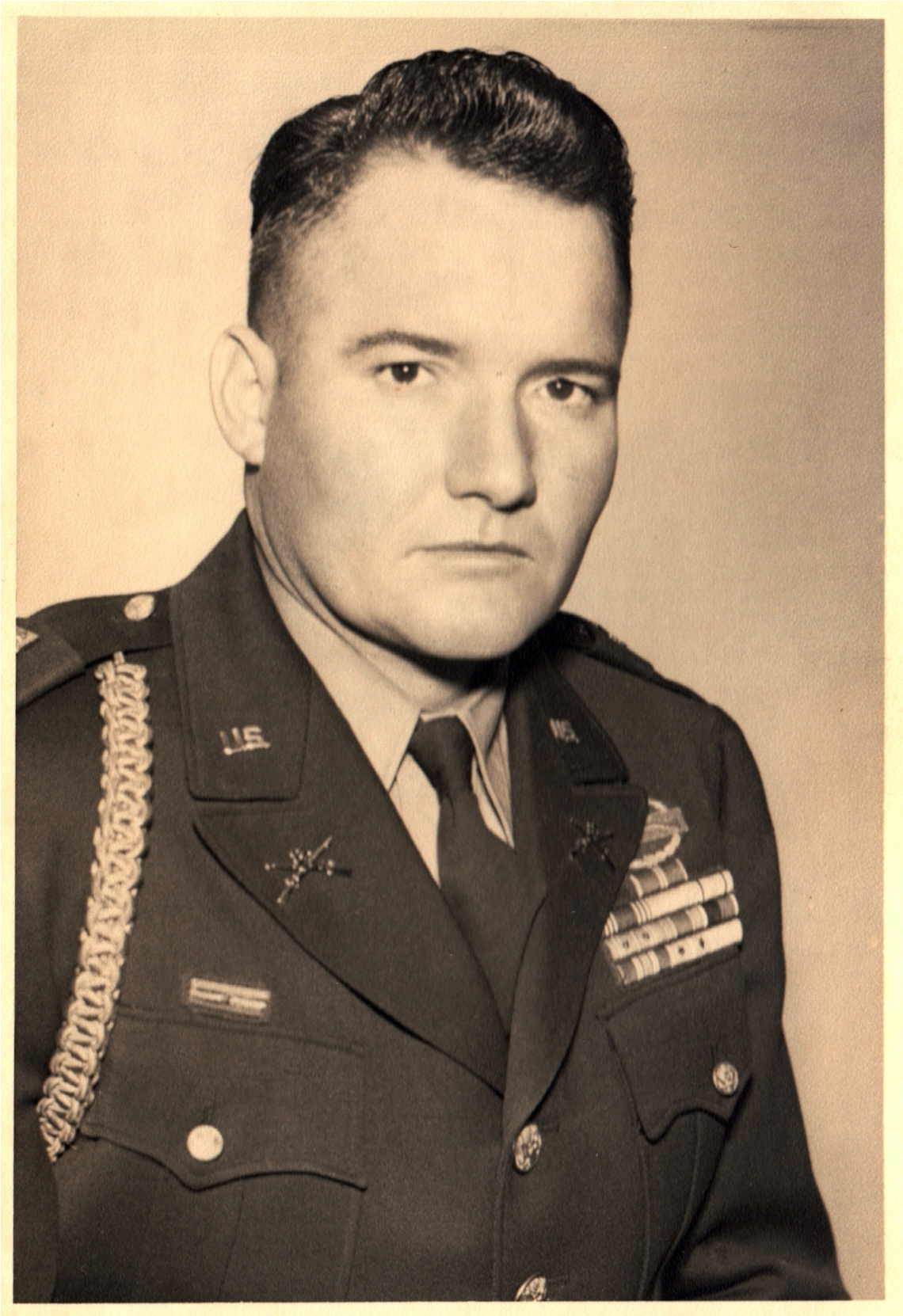


Figure 13 “Thurston” Captain Thurston Nelson, United States Army, 1955.

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Following many years of failed crops, Ernest and Esther understood that they would not make a go of farming in Saskatchewan and made the decision to move back to Hillsboro permanently. In 1937, the family of nine moved in with Thurston's grandparents, Even and Mattie. In the summer of 1938, shortly after returning to the United States, an opportunity was presented to Thurston, which he believed he could not pass up. The North Dakota National Guard was taking applications. Since he was only fifteen, and not the required age, Thurston lied and told officials that he was eighteen years old and signed up at the Armory in Hillsboro. Joining the National Guard ensured a steady source of income for Thurston, something that was hard to come by during these times in Hillsboro. SD recalls how his father, Thurston Nelson, left his family just a boy, but would return home many years later as a man.

After serving in the Army during WWII (Pacific Theater—ND 164th Regiment, Guadalcanal, Bougainville, and others), Thurston returned to Fargo, North Dakota in 1945. Along with many other returning soldiers, Thurston had ambitions to attend university. As part of the understanding when he enlisted seven years earlier, the G.I. Bill helped pay for his studies. What is officially called The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, the G.I. Bill was introduced to aid veterans of World War II. In addition to providing financial assistance for trade and college studies, "under this bill veterans were also granted lower interest mortgage rates" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). Having extensive knowledge in farming and in the outdoors in general, Thurston began his degree in agriculture at the North Dakota Agriculture College the same year he returned from his duties with the army. Not only did Thurston successfully complete his university degree, he also met the love of his life, Christine Gipp, while studying at the NDAC.

Influence of Family Stories

The stories of SD's maternal and paternal grandparents are stories of survival. Stories from his own family are about travel, transitions, and time spent together exploring the land where they found themselves. Family and the places they made home are important to SD, and he wants to share these stories with others in the form of art and text. As SD tells the stories of his early life, he recognizes with humility that he is here today because of the survival of the people who came before him, and he is proud to be honoured to do so. As SD reflects on his relationships with his parents and grandparents, the connections to the origins of his art and stories become more evident. He uses his knowledge and information that has been passed on to him and transforms them into his own beautiful creations. While SD's path to becoming an author and artist was winding, in retrospect, he recognizes the creative processes have drawn upon his family history as well as his life experiences.

Chapter 3: Winding Roads to Becoming Author and Illustrator

“My mother taught me at an early age to see the world with both the curious eyes of a child and the wistful eyes of an old man” (From the Author’s Note in Greet the Dawn, Nelson, 2012).

I remember one particular summer night...cricket song filled my ears. Then, shimmering overhead, the Northern Lights came dancing, pale green at first, then in ethereal robes of red and gold; spiraling ever upward...colors vanishing, only to reappear. Although I was staring directly into the heavens, from the corner of my eye, I saw something. The sacred something that Lakota people believe is within all things. I was only a boy, but I was seeing in a Wakan manner, in a sacred way. (Nelson, 2019)

Instead of discovering a passion for art within the walls of a traditional education setting, SD was inspired through his life and travel experiences, along with witnessing his mother’s dedication to developing her natural creative talents. In fact, SD’s early memories of art in school are of cutting, pasting, and colouring within the lines, rather than using or exercising his creative imagination within the formal education settings. He recalls feeling that he was “not overly engaged or excited about art” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) during his first few years at school nor did he feel exceptionally talented. It was not until he was in the fifth grade that SD noticed a transformation within himself. Around this time, he became aware that as he sat and drew pictures, he was falling in love with the practice. He found himself longing for the process of putting pencil to paper and brush to canvas. He was at peace when he was creating a painting or a drawing. By the time SD was in the eighth grade, this passion grew along with his skill set and he began to excel in his artistic abilities. As his art began to flourish, his development in some other subject areas began to decline. The sciences and geography were interesting and enjoyable for SD, which were reflected in his grades. Math, however, became increasingly difficult for him, especially in high school. SD still identifies as being more “creative-minded than mathematical” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). SD found success and satisfaction in areas where he was able to express his creativity. Although it was

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challenging, he enjoyed penmanship, because he considers it to be a beautiful combination of technique, skill, and artistic ability. SD was emerging from school as a budding artist. Upon high school graduation, SD was excited to further develop his skill and knowledge as an artist through university studies.

University Days

When SD Nelson made the decision to go to university, he did not have the plan to become a successful artist and author of children's books. Like many other young people beginning their adult lives, SD began university with education itself as the goal in mind, rather than a particularly clear vision of his career path. However, throughout university and the year that followed, SD gained work experience and travelled to different parts of the United States,

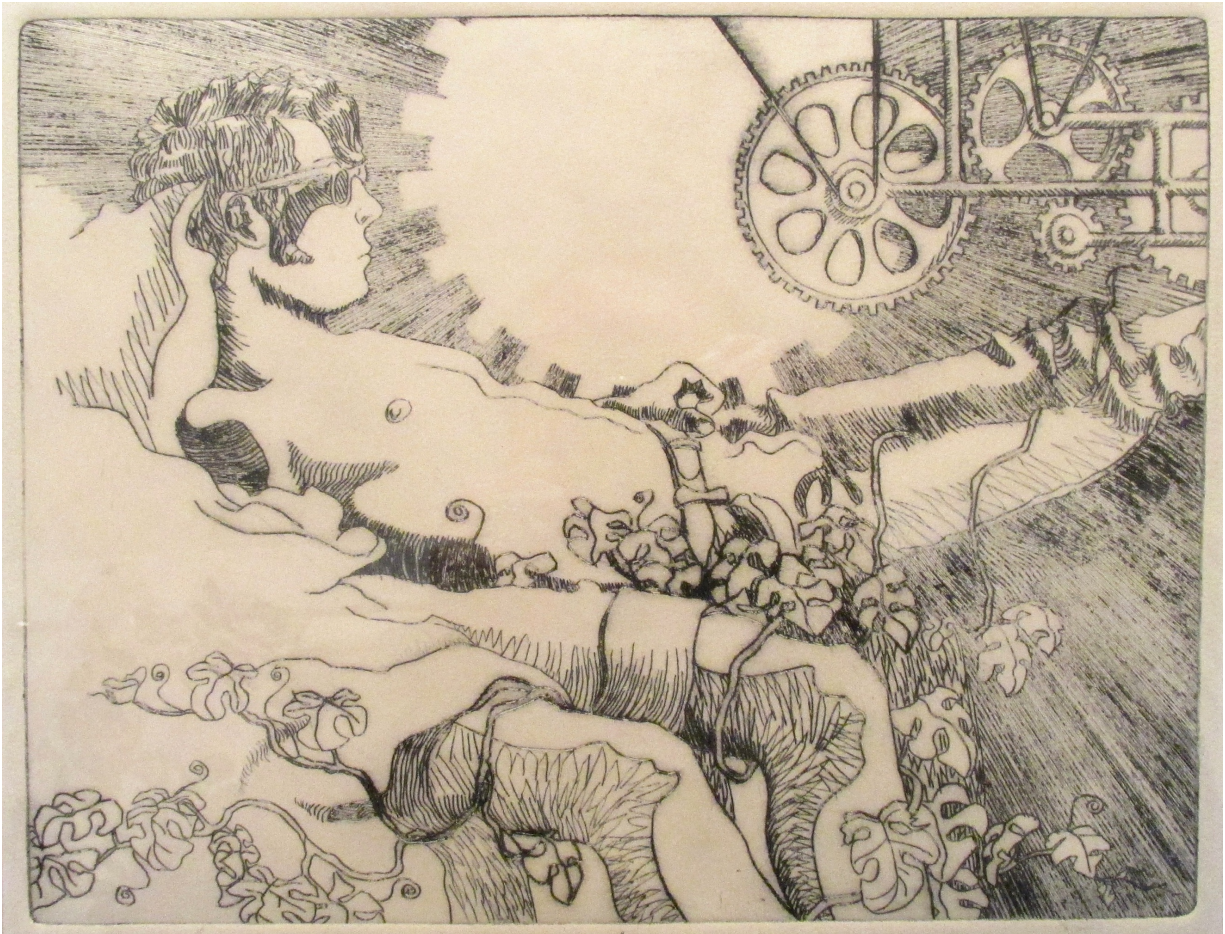


Figure 14 "A Machine to Shoot You Through Space" MSU university work, etching, 1970.

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which ultimately led to his decision to move to Arizona from Minnesota. SD was learning in this stage of his life that things do not always go as planned, but he was discovering important things along the way. One thing that remained consistent throughout his work, learning, and travels, was SD's passion for making time for the arts and creative expression.

In the fall of 1968, SD began his university career at the Minnesota State University in Moorhead. During the four years he spent studying, he learned a great deal and was encouraged by his instructors in the arts program. He experimented with different art media, styles, and techniques through his university days as seen in his etching and acrylic pieces on pages 62 and 63. SD was inspired by the things that he was taught and exposed to in life, which in turn led to him continuing to draw and paint in his personal life.



Figure 15 "The Hobbit, In the Misty Mountains" MSU university work, acrylic, 1972.

Summer Opportunities Working with Youth

Like many university students, when classes ended in the spring, SD took advantage of the break in his studies to find employment. The summer of 1971 proved to be a pivotal moment in his life when he was employed at Standing Rock as a group leader with the Youth Conservation Corps or YCC. The YCC is a summer program that employs youth between the ages of fifteen and eighteen in work in national parks, hatcheries, forests, and wildlife refuges, while learning and adopting a respect and understanding of environmental responsibility. SD recognized how the summer working for the YCC was full of “powerful experiences for a young man trying to find his path in life” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). The Youth Conservation Corps ran the program in 1971 out of an old Episcopal Mission school on the Standing Rock Reservation. This camp was situated on lands rich with personal history and meaning for SD—a place where he felt connected to his Lakota people and culture. The specific location was approximately fifteen miles from where Sitting Bull lived on the Grand River. SD recalls how remarkable it was to be out on the prairies and knowing he was “standing in the place where Sitting Bull lived with his people” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). The feeling of connection gives SD pause today, as it might for his readers who recognize that Standing Bull inspired one of his future biographical children’s books (see Appendix G for description of his books).

A feeling of awe washes over SD when he remembers his connectedness with the land and his people. He realized he was walking the same terrain that his ancestors walked. SD recalls that 1971 was also a summer to remember because the “prairies were rocked with thunderstorms of great magnitude, at times shaking the walls that surrounded us” (Nelson, personal

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communication, 2019). Both the familial and historical connections and the awe-inspiring weather events both shook SD in their own way, leaving him humbled and dedicated to this place and the people who had lived there before. Yet the summer also offered SD rewarding experiences with the youth and his colleagues. Working with young people proved to be hard work, and he was faced with many challenges, but SD was discovering that he found it fun and



Figure 16 "Mom and Dad" SD with his mother, Christine and father, Thurston, outside the Nelson family home, Fargo, North Dakota, 1971.

enjoyable. As SD began to receive positive feedback from both the youth that he worked with as well as his mentors, he was beginning to feel more convinced that a career as a school teacher may be his calling.

SD recalls one of the biggest adventures he has ever had was in the summer of 1972, the year after he had completed his senior year at university. Having graduated from the Minnesota State University with a Bachelor of Science degree as well as an Art Education degree, the twenty-two-year-old was looking for adventure. Having enjoyed working with youth in South

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Dakota the previous summer, it was obvious to SD that he should jump at the chance to work with teenagers again. For the second consecutive summer, he was hired by the government as a mentor in the Youth Conservation Corps. However, this time he worked in the Grand Canyon,



Figure 17 “Summer” Youth Conservation Corps, SD - far right. Grand Canyon, Arizona, 1972.

specifically “on the North Rim and the South Rim down in the canyon” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). During the summer, the high school teens that participated in the Youth Conservation Corps lived in dormitory-like settings as they completed conservation work with SD as a guide. Camaraderie developed as the youth leaders worked closely together and got to know one another. In the picture seen above, SD and his teammates were ready for adventure. Coming from Minnesota to Arizona became pivotal in his life story as he was finding his place in the world in more than one way. He was not only discovering a passion for working with young people, but it was also his journeys throughout this summer where SD “fell in love with

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The Grand Canyon and Arizona” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019), ultimately determining where he would make his home and contribute to his community.

Transition to Teaching and Making Home in Arizona

As the program ended for the summer, SD was faced with uncertainty. He was beginning his life as an adult, and he was no longer a university student. Desperate for hands-on experiences, he returned to Minnesota in the fall of 1972 and began working as a carpenter. He continued this work for the next two years. Not only did his work as a carpenter prove to be a gratifying time in his life, but it also greatly enhanced his skills he could draw upon as a future teacher and artist. He acquired a vast amount of knowledge from this trade before he decided to transition into the classroom.

SD may be able to trace his catalyst for becoming a teacher to the days watching his mother learn oil painting from Heir Schmidt, or to his two consecutive summers working with youth. Whatever the influences, after having two years of carpentry work under his belt, SD felt it was time to enter the world of teaching. In 1975, he accepted a job teaching high school art in Wahpeton, North Dakota, where he worked for one school year. Although grateful for the experiences and opportunities in Minnesota and North Dakota, SD often found himself thinking about his summer spent in Arizona. He knew in his heart that if he stayed in North Dakota for one more year, he would likely remain there for the rest of his life because he would be too rooted in the place and people to be able to seek new opportunities and experiences in new places. Yet SD’s love of the desert, the rich history of the Southwest, and the diverse Native American cultures were strong forces that pulled SD in the direction of moving permanently to Arizona, a decision he has never regretted.

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At the end of the school year in 1976, he resigned from his teaching position in Wahpeton. He loaded up his 1972 Pontiac Ventura and headed out for the American Southwest. SD describes how the “reddish, ruddy colour of the earth that makes the sky seem bluer” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) serves as a daily inspiration and confirmation that SD is where he is supposed to be. He proudly states, “I absolutely love it here” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). He made his home in Flagstaff, Arizona and has resided in the quaint city flanked by forests and mountains since 1976. He continued his teaching career at East Flagstaff Junior High School/Mount Elden Middle School until 2003 when he began his career as an author and illustrator full time.

SD spent the majority of his 28 teaching years at the middle school level in the public school setting. He looks back fondly at his teaching career, recognizing how he was able to share his love of art and educating young minds. SD made it a priority to expose his students to a variety of artistic styles and techniques. Drawing and painting were the traditional art forms that he taught, but throughout the school year SD’s students would also find themselves learning the art of sculpting, weaving, ceramics, traditional beading, sand painting, and even batik. Opportunities for creative art making were diverse and exciting within the walls of SD’s classroom. He was also responsible for teaching art history, which included Greek, Roman, Medieval, and the Renaissance periods. In addition, SD taught about the art of the Plains Indian along-side the ancient rock art of the southwest, due to his vast amount knowledge in this area. He prided himself in using multimodal teaching techniques in his classroom, which included numerous visual representations and often audio-visual components to help his students envision different aspects of art history. By using a variety of media in his classroom, his instruction reached learners at all levels.

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SD often searched for new ways to excite his students and involve them in the art process on a deeper level. Although he gave many opportunities for independent explorations, SD also assigned many group projects where students were required to think and work collaboratively. This combination of experiences taught students how to blend their creative expressions together to create stronger, more authentic outcomes, such as mural projects. SD's students were responsible for many murals within the school as well as out in the community. One such painting, seen on page 70, is on display in the Permanent Collections at the Lowell Conservatory in Flagstaff, Arizona. SD describes the piece created by his former students with pride:

Vesto Melvin Slipher was an American astronomer who performed the first measurements of radial velocities for galaxies. He was the first to discover that distant galaxies are redshifted, thus providing the first empirical basis for the expansion of the universe. (Nelson, 2019)



Figure 18 “Astronomer Vesto Slipher” Artwork by students, East Flagstaff Junior High School, acrylic on Masonite.

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SD also helped students design yearbook covers along with art for the yearbook. Teaching for twenty-eight years offered SD a great gift: he found that his view of art and his vision of art expanded. He feels that he was gifted the ability to express his feelings and ideas in his own personal artwork as a direct result from “sharing his love of art with youth” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). SD left the teaching profession on a high note and did not stop teaching because of any negative experiences or emotions. Another door and opportunity of writing and illustrating children’s books simply opened for him and it seemed like the logical next step.



Figure 19 “Jaguar and Blue Morpho” Greeting card illustration, acrylic on Masonite.

Being a Father and Grandfather

Yet during the process of looking back and telling stories of the transformational moments in his personal and professional transitions to adult life, SD reflected that “without a doubt his two daughters are by far his biggest accomplishments” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). His eldest daughter Darcy was born in 1981. She became a big sister in 1984 when Robin entered the world. Reading with his daughters from a young age was a very rewarding and pleasant experience for him. SD is grateful for the opportunity to share his love for literature and art with his children. SD explains:

My daughters grew up with their father creating Native American themed paintings. They watched me painting on elk hides, making medicine shields, and illustrating books. In my studio they heard CD’s of Indian Pow wow songs and ceremonial music. Of course, they heard my other music as well: Elvis, the Beatles, David Bowie, Pink Floyd, Gregorian Chants, and many other Classic Rock musicians. They watched me make rawhide drums and they joined in lacing glass trade beads to make necklaces and adorn the long stems of clay-bowl pipes that I made. Both Darcy and Robin learned how to cut thin slices of beef and to hang them up to dry (see Robin and SD are seen hanging beef to dry in their kitchen in Arizona on page 73). The resulting jerky or what we call *bah-pah*, became a favorite food for them. They dug prairie turnips on the grasslands of the Standing Rock Reservation in the Dakotas. The dried meat and prairie turnips we combined with corn to make a delicious soup like my mother and her mother made. Both of my daughters participated in Sweat Lodge ceremonies. Darcy has joined in many lodges. Robin, however, finds the intense heat to be too much, as do many people. (Nelson, personal communication, 2019)



Figure 20 “Bah Pah” Robin (top) and SD (bottom) putting up bah-bah, Arizona, 2004.



Figure 21



Figure 22 "Daughters" SD Nelson with daughters, Darcy and Robin, Flagstaff, Arizona, 2014.

Today, Darcy and Robin are still the beautiful girls that listened to music and painted with their father, but now they have given SD an even greater gift. He is a grandfather. Darcy is mother to a son named Powell who was born in 2014 and twin daughters, Juniper and Clara, born in 2018. Robin has a daughter, Keira, who was born in 2019.

Becoming and Author and Illustrator

Passing his knowledge and traditions to his children was one of the most rewarding experiences of SD's life. Along with sharing Lakota teachings, SD took time out of every day to read with his two young daughters at home. Together the three of them would pour over the illustrations and pictures of countless children's books. As a father, he cherished and valued this precious time with his daughters. As he was spending quality time with his children, he was also becoming aware of what "leading illustrators were producing" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019), which in turn influenced his own artwork. SD contemplated becoming a children's writer and illustrator for some time before he began to write letters and send samples of his work to different magazines and record companies.

During this time, he was also heavily involved in numerous environmental efforts and community and conservation organizations. Living in Arizona and being surrounded with enormous national parks and forests, he had the opportunity to discover "all kinds of geology, flora, and fauna" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). His experiences as an avid outdoorsman greatly influenced and enhanced his representational art and illustrations. As an active member of Ducks Unlimited, The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, as well as the Coconino Sportsman Organization, he had ample occasions "to put his familiarity of Mother Nature's creatures to good use by drawing and painting many of these beings" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). He was further encouraged to keep writing during his time as president

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for the Healthy Urban Developments, which was an organization that oversaw the planting of trees and maintenance of natural resources in Flagstaff. As president, he frequently wrote letters to the editor of the local newspaper in Flagstaff. SD received numerous praises from the public for his submissions, which strengthened his desire to write. He was ready for a more public audience for both his stories and his art.

The process of sending his artwork to new audiences proved to be a test of SD's patience. As is the case for many aspiring illustrators, SD's earliest work was rejected. He often did not hear any feedback from the companies he had reached out to, leaving him uncertain and without helpful steps for improving or breaking into a commercial market. However, being a determined individual, SD did not allow himself to become discouraged by the lack of responses or the rejections. He continued to send his portfolios, illustrations, and images. Perseverance and hard work paid off as magazines began to accept his submissions. A record label by the name of Canyon Records, which is based out of Phoenix, noticed the talent and beauty of SD's work, and began publishing his artwork on the covers of numerous Native American music albums. The



Figure 23 "Music" Artwork by SD Nelson for Grammy Nominated Black Lodge Singers for Best Native American Album, 2005.

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Grammy nominated album *More Kids Pow-Wow Songs* by the group *Black Lodge* boasts SD's vibrant artwork as seen below.

In the beginning, SD started with smaller writing projects and submitted artwork locally, but he later began sending his work to larger companies. His talent was soon noticed by the people at Abrams Publishing in New York who eagerly reached out and contacted him because of their interest in his submission. SD fills with pride when he looks back to the day when a staff member from Abrams called him on the phone to tell him that they liked his story as well as his artwork. The publishers were interested in what he had to offer. This is how SD's first book *Gift Horse* came to life. In the next chapter, I will explore the processes that SD engages in as a writer and illustrator of children's books.

As described in the last chapter, SD Nelson's family and culture may have been the earliest influences in his life. However, as he became an adult, the choices he made and the skills he learned greatly contributed to his life and career journey. SD was drawn to Arizona due to his love for the land and the rich Indigenous cultures that are alive in that area. His passion and talent in art were the driving force behind his teaching career and were the keys that opened the door to his career as a children's author and illustrator. Yet, it was also SD's experiences pouring over and sharing gentle moments and books with his daughters that contribute to the ways he has become the gifted storyteller and artist that he is today.

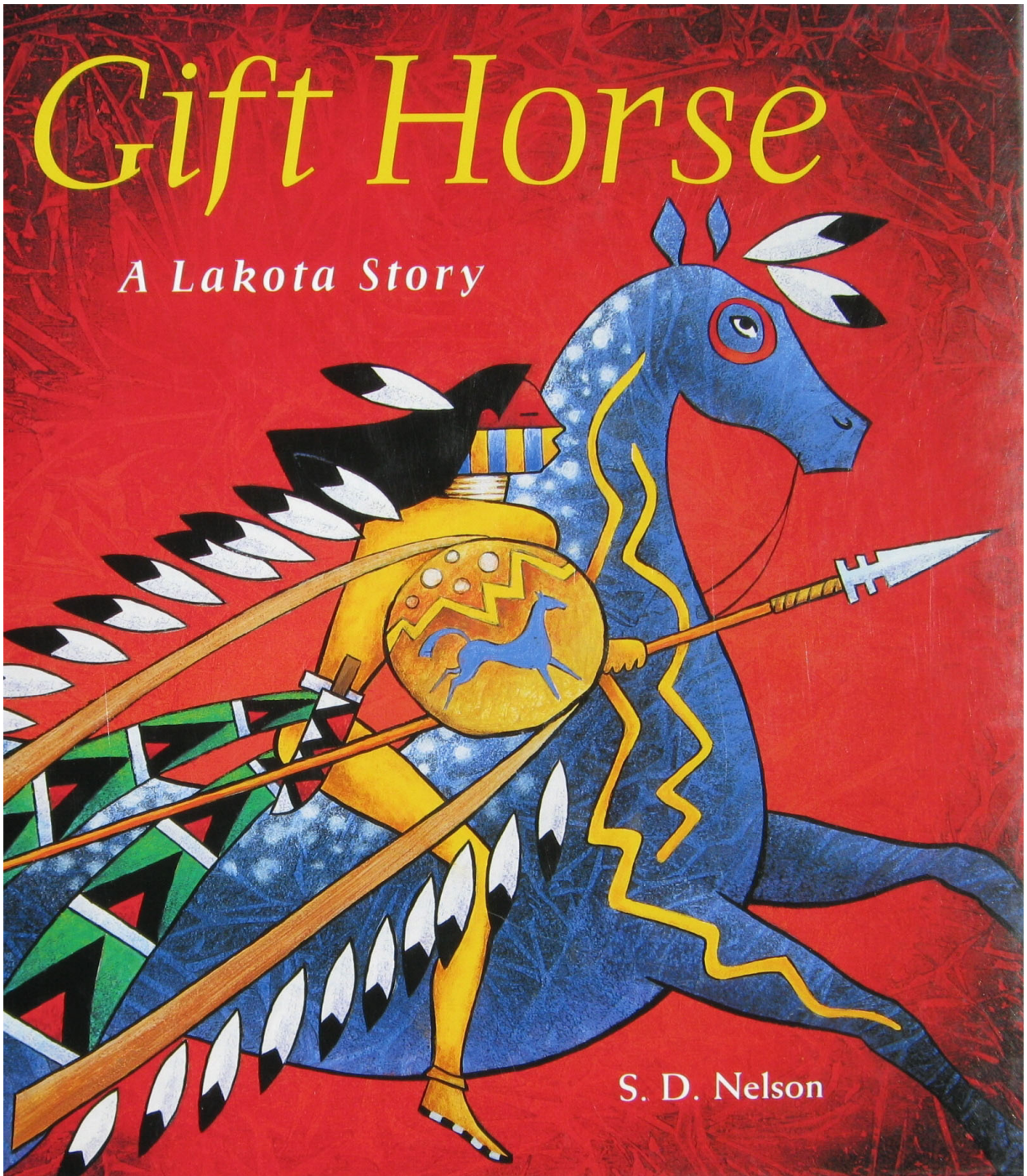


Figure 24 "First Book" Book cover, SD Nelson, *Gift Horse* (1999). Used with permission of Abrams books.

Chapter 4: Process of Making Children's Literature

“The reason I write and illustrate my books is because I love art, I enjoy writing and drawing, and telling stories, but coupled with that is my desire to make a positive difference for the sake of our Native American children” (Nelson, 2019).

“I spread paint and colour so that you may share my vision” (Nelson, 2019).

As described in the previous chapter, the journey to becoming a published author and illustrator is not always a straightforward path. SD Nelson's breakthrough into children's literature was driven by his first and foremost passion: his art. The writing piece involved in publishing books came as a surprise to him, but he discovered that he had a talent in this area as well. As a university student, throughout his teaching career, and now as an accomplished author, one constant that has remained in SD's life has been his commitment to making art. In university, he describes always finding time in his busy student schedule to sit down and draw. As a teacher, he was constantly exploring and experimenting with new forms of artistic creativity alongside his students, but he would make it a priority to paint and draw in his personal life as well. Today, SD illustrates all his own books as well as books for other authors, yet in between sketches or drafts needed for his professional craft, he finds the time to be swept away in creative endeavors that do not have a specific purpose or intention. Art was the passion that guided him towards the writing, illustration, and publication of numerous children's books. Over the years he has come to understand the people, places, and experiences that shape his process in developing children's books from a beginning idea into a published piece.

Following an Artistic Path

SD Nelson's artistic path is a fascinating one. SD experimented with various styles of art, adapting, altering, and even changing his artistic focus and style many times. He did not find his

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niche until later in life. As a child he was interested in illustrations in the comic books he read. As a teenager he was not particularly interested in making art in the style of Native American works of art. His style changed and shifted as SD matured and changed himself.

Personal experiences, world events, as well as local ones, have greatly influenced SD's creative expressions and the pieces he creates. His childhood homes and holiday destinations have impacted how and what he creates today. SD was inspired by talented historical artists, in particular Italian Renaissance art created by Michelangelo and Da Vinci. As a young boy, he remembers being captivated by illustrations in comics, books, and magazines. Vivid childhood memories of collecting and reading comic books with his older brother, specifically a series entitled *Classics Illustrated*, that had a lasting effect on his career as an artist. SD remembers the comics as "being cartoony in the illustrations, however, the stories were based on classics like *Treasure Island*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, and other adventure stories" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). He remembers being fascinated by how the illustrations worked to tell the stories. The illusion that could be created on a flat surface captivated him early on.

It was not until he was in the fifth or sixth grade that he noticed and became intrigued by the beauty of traditional Native American and Plains Indian art. Traditional beadwork also interested him with the intricacy of the technique, the geometric patterns, and the colours they created. Although most of his exposure to this type of art was mostly through books and photographs, it stirred something in SD. Knowing that this was part of his own heritage, made him pursue it further. When Paul Goble's book *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses* was awarded the Caldecott Medal in 1979, it gave SD a "Real incentive in the direction of his children's books illustration" (Bryan, 2017, p. 93). Nelson recalls that when he read *The Girl Who Loved Wild*

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Horses, he was “struck immediately by the boldness of the artwork” (Bryan, 2017, p. 93). When Goble received this illustrious recognition, it lit a spark for SD to eventually pursue his own path of authorship and illustration. Paul Goble has written and illustrated over thirty books based on Native American traditions. SD was inspired by the way in which Goble honours Lakota culture stating that Goble “shared our Lakota tradition and spiritual teachings with the world in a positive way” (Bryan, 2017, p. 179). Although Paul Goble was not Native American, SD feels that in “no way was Goble’s work misappropriated” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). Instead, SD recognizes how Goble has made a personal connection with the Plains Indians by writing children’s books from the heart. Goble’s books and career path showed SD that there were possibilities for pursuing publication of children’s book that would honour Lakota stories and art.

SD’s cultural connection to art has been strengthened through his spiritual and ceremonial connections. In particular, SD has experienced great insight and inspiration in the *Inipi* or Sweat Lodge. There is something basic and fundamental about the *Inipi* that SD finds difficult to articulate, and when given the opportunity, he feels that he would rather not try to explain it. He knows experientially that one can have a wonderful, prayerful experience in the *Inipi*. For SD, the Sweat Lodge is where he feels connected and where he has had the most intense spiritual experiences. His experiences in the Sweat Lodge also have had a tremendous influence on his art and his writing. His appreciation and admiration for traditional art, specifically Lakota art, has grown because of his involvement in ceremonies. SD believes that the ways in which he interprets and expresses his emotions and the inner workings of his mind through his own art has also been greatly influenced by the *Inipi* ceremonies. By participating in these ceremonies, SD has experienced a shift in the way he feels about the world as well as how

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he views it. He has many questions about “this great life” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019), and he does not have the answers to all his questions. SD has come to the revelation that some individuals who follow or belong to a certain religion may “get bogged down” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) and begin to believe that they hold the answers for every question in this “great mystery of life” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). Yet, SD believes that there are many things in life that are quite puzzling and wonderful, even though they can be quite troubling as well. SD reflects: “There are many people with many different religions, Native Americans included, that get so consumed in tradition, but tradition is supposed to help us live in the world today, not separate us from one another” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). Much of SD’s artwork reflects his connection to Lakota spirituality. Some of these pieces are naturalistic and realistic, while others represent spirituality in a very abstract way, showing SD’s reverence for the great mysteries of life.



Figure 25 "Stone People of the Sweat Lodge" Acrylic on Masonite.



Figure 26 "Moon of the Falling Leaves" Acrylic on Masonite.

Persevering to Publication

SD Nelson understands that hearing critiques about his art and storytelling may be unpleasant and uncomfortable but is a part of the publishing process. When he first began to send his work to publishers, he faced having his work rejected on more than one occasion, which was not easy to endure. At times, the rejections became discouraging for the aspiring author, but praise and encouragement from those close to SD kept his spirits alive. However, SD needed to tap into his own internal drive so that he could continue putting his work out to the publishing world. Through the process, he learned he needed determination to succeed in a highly competitive industry, especially at a time when not as many stories about Native American culture were being published as they are today.

Since the publication of his first book in 1999, SD has published on average one book per year. This pace of production seems to fit perfectly with his style, technique, and lifestyle. He acknowledges that there are more prolific writers out there who complete multiple books in a year, however, SD feels that putting a tighter timeline on his creations would only hinder his creativity and would not work in favour of the finished product. Typically, since a publisher invests a fair amount of money into the production of a book, it is preferred for an author to submit a complete polished story first, rather than a draft or an idea for a story. However, since SD has now published numerous books, he is usually asked what topics or ideas he is interested in writing about. This is followed by a conversation with the editor, and then the publishing company offers a contract. This contract is reviewed several times and ideas go back and forth between SD and the editor until they reach an agreed upon story. Once this has been established, the conversations and planning around the illustrations begin.

SD begins the routines that he follows during his creative process. While some authors may find that they need to shut the outside world out to retain focus on a task, SD has not found this to be an issue with his work. To this day, he has not experienced a person or an activity that interferes with his creativity, nor does he feel that he must avoid or alter any aspects of his regular life. SD's processes when writing and illustrating a non-fiction book and fiction book vary, as described in the following section.

Research Process

SD has chosen to write many factual stories and tales about culture and ancestors that have been passed down orally from family members. SD's mother Christine has been a particular influence on the stories he chooses to develop into books. His family stories have become the tools and maps that provide SD with insights into Native American ways of life. To begin the journey of creating a non-fiction book from this source of inspiration, SD embarks on a rigorous process of research, which consists of hours sifting through material in libraries, online searches, consulting his own family history, if relevant, and conversing with "fellow Native Americans who are the keepers of rich history and knowledge" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). Typically, non-fiction stories require a great deal more research for SD than when he is developing fictional stories. With non-fiction projects, there is a need to historically document the past, as well as provide a detailed bibliography of sources. When discussing a recent book project, SD shared that he had to cite at least thirty-five texts in the bibliography but had to read many more to bring authenticity to the story. At the time of the discussion, the book was not near completion and SD indicated that more research would be required.

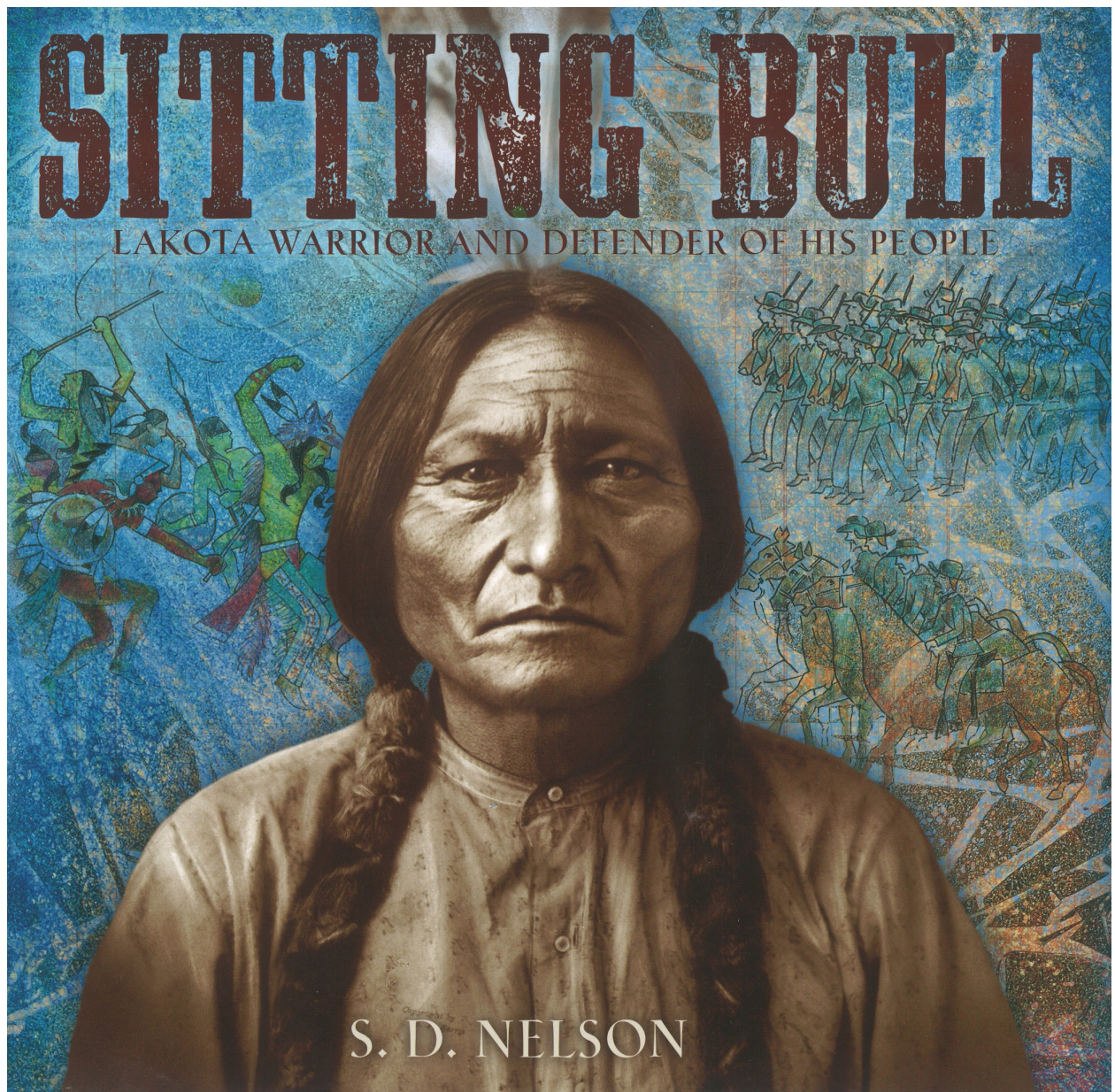


Figure 27 "Sitting Bull" Book cover, SD Nelson, *Sitting Bull, Lakota Warrior and Defender of his People* (2015) Used with Permission of Abrams books.

On numerous occasions SD has travelled to specific locations to draw inspiration and first-hand experience of the sights, smells, and sounds that are connected to the area. He wants to connect to the feelings that are evoked by being present in the place of the story. During his research for *Sitting Bull* (2015), it was important to SD that he not only consult text sources and acquire Native American points of view of historical battles, but also place his feet on the ground where Sitting Bull lived. SD believed this place-based experience was necessary to make the details of specific events as precise and as realistic as possible. To ensure that he portrayed an accurate representation of the Battle of Killdeer Mountain in his story, SD travelled to Killdeer Mountain, which is a mountain range in Dunn County, North Dakota.



Figure 28 "Battles" Northern Plains Battle Map.

SD realized long ago that stories are much more complicated than we initially think. SD wholeheartedly believes a deep understanding of history is “necessary for all people to be able to make healthy choices and move into the future in a constructive way” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). SD finds the history of the Lakota people provides fascinating insights into “who we are and where we are going” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). The countless hours, days, and months of research SD has spent on all his book projects have not only generated new ideas for future endeavours but also strengthened and complicated his views of historical figures. Through rigorous research, SD has gained tremendous insights from what other historians and Native Americans have documented about their lives. SD furthers his understandings through physical presence, walking the ground, and being part of the prairies where these people lived and where the drama unfolded. He feels incredibly fortunate to have canoed on the Missouri River for many days and nights and to have walked the battlefield of the Battle of Little Big Horn, or the “Greasy Grass” as Lakota people call it. His research is not comprised solely of reading historical material, because he knows that this could not possibly capture the complexity of events, ways of life, emotions, or individuals. He combines written material with conversations, hands-on, feet-on-the-ground research which produces rich information and perspectives.

Research has also led him to discover the ultimate truth about the government in the late 1800’s. The U.S. government was set upon genocide—they were determined to exterminate Native Americans if they did not comply with the government. This is a historical fact that SD considers quite frightening. Due to the events that have occurred in the past, many cultures, including Native Americans, continue to live today with the effects from intergenerational trauma (Battiste, 2010), which is suffered at an individual, community, and cultural level. SD

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will be the first to admit that he does not hold a degree in psychology, but he is an educator with a vast amount of knowledge and experience. He recognizes that there is a collective pain or collective suffering that Native Americans have experienced with the conquest and the colonization of America. There is a lingering pain in many people that SD says, “You can see this as soon as you cross a state line into a reservation” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). Native Americans have been on reservations for hundreds of years and many generations, yet SD struggles with the question of why? He wants society to collectively ask: Why does this segregation or isolation still exist today?

Frequent trips to the Dakotas have become opportunities to continue to ask himself these questions as he visits and reminisces with family and friends. SD also uses these trips as a way to “connect with the stories and ways of knowing of ancestors from the past” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). It is invaluable for SD to be physically present on the land that holds a great deal of his personal history and the history of his people. In the stories he tells and the illustrations and works of art he creates, SD strives for the connections, relationships, and love for the land and Native American people.

The Writing and Illustrating Process

Not all aspects of writing and illustrating a book are smooth and seamless. When asked if SD has ever started a story that he did not know how to finish, he answers candidly, “Of course! It’s the story of my life” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). When this stage in the writing process occurs, SD explains that he shifts his thoughts here and considers himself in the great circle of life. While he feels that he is exactly where he needs to be on his journey, and is very happy to be where he is, he states, “I did not choose to enter this world and am unsure of how

things are going to wrap up, although I have made a number of plans in order to give it some direction” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019).

SD acknowledges that there have been stories that have not been published for various reasons. At times he is not satisfied with the plot or the drama. Other times his manuscript has not been accepted by publishers. If his story has been turned down, he explores different options before abandoning the idea altogether. First, there is an attempt to rework the story. If SD thinks that if the integrity of the story is upheld, he will resubmit the manuscript after making changes. Depending on the situation, he may decide that a more successful strategy is to submit the manuscript to a different publisher without revising the original story. Finally, if he has reworked the story and feels it is still not satisfactory or has been turned down by more than one publisher without success, he abandons the story. For the most part SD is content with the projects that do not make it to publication, but on occasion there is a nagging force that drives him to take a closer look at it at another time.

Once a story idea has been proposed and accepted, a contract between the author and publishing company is agreed upon. Typically, SD is allotted a six to eight-month period to complete the illustrations. He generally takes full advantage of the time and completes the illustrations using every minute offered to him, finishing only at the deadline. In the past, he has been given proposals to illustrate other author’s books with timelines that were far too short, and he has chosen to refuse the offers. SD recognizes that “Nelson, personal communication, 2019). However, this is not his style. For SD to create a set of illustrations that reflect his passion and vision, he requires time to work as well as time to reflect on each piece.

Timelines that are too tight are not the only circumstances that have resulted in SD refusing to work on a project. The most straight-forward reason is that when he has another

project in the works, he simply does not have the time to take on another commitment. On occasion, when SD receives a manuscript that he did not feel a connection to, he turns down the opportunity as it is not a good fit. Artwork is a passion, and each time his brush touches the canvas, this passion is transferred into the piece that he creates. If the story does not resonate with him, he does not feel that he can represent the message and intention adequately. When manuscripts have come across his desk that he has not cared for, whether it be the story itself, the way it is written, the development of the characters, the plot, or the setting, the decision not to accept the offer is quite easy. If he is not comfortable attaching his name to a project, he turns down the offer. Illustrating means so much more to SD than simply drawing pictures for a story, it is a labour of love that he does not take lightly.

Development of the Artwork

SD carefully chooses the photos and illustrations that will be included in his fictional books. He believes that the story that will dictate what becomes the appropriate images to include in the book. With non-fiction, the process of photo and illustration inclusion can become more complex in the fact he may need to seek permissions to include archival photographs. There begins a delicate dance of deciding how photographs and SD's illustrations will fit together to enhance the story and determining how these images will best fit into the text.

Although SD has developed a purposeful process that helps him determine what illustrations should be included in a book, he also insists on the importance to continually engage in artmaking, much of which will never have a public audience. Over the years he has done a multitude of studio work drawings with live human figures, many of which are in Prisma colour, pastel, and ink. Most of these beautifully detailed drawings are stored in racks and pushed away

in a corner of SD's home in Arizona. Here in this personal archive is an entire collection of work that has not been exhibited and may never be seen by large groups of people.

The process of creating for oneself rather than an intended audience is “just part of being an artist, in my opinion” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). He has often deliberated about what to do with this body of work that includes nude life drawings and paintings. He acknowledges that these pieces are not intended to have any direct connection with the children's books he writes, but he admits that the public does not always understand that artists need to spend time creating works of art that are secondary to printed, public material. SD strongly believes that “in order to develop one's skill and expressive power, one has to continue to create and do art—not everything is done to be published or for an audience” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019).



Figure 29 "Birchbark House, Talking with Mother Bear" Acrylic on paper, 30" x 16", 2008.

Creating works of art for a specific story is not an easy feat. However, there are times when themes, ideas, and content dictates what illustrations need to be produced. Sitting down to create something without an agenda is what SD likens to “taking a road trip without a map” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). Inspiration for SD comes in many different forms. He can set out with the intention to use a particular media, for example, pastels on paper, which gives him an important direction of where the art is going to go. He could alternatively choose acrylic paint, sponges, and specific brushes which would take the art and experience in a completely different direction. There are times when SD has an intention from the outset, so he sits down with a purpose and an outcome in mind.

Other times, he may sit down in a studio with a model and become inspired to use a particular colour palette of pastels that he does not intentionally select. This is a response which becomes a feeling, resulting in artistic expression, which SD feels “can be really fun” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). When he creates these types of more improvisational drawings, he is often surprised by the results. There are occasions when he creates something that he does not wish others to see because he is not happy with the finished image. Yet he feels content with this when it happens—he trusts the artistic process enough to know that not every work of art ends up being a success. SD is a firm believer that when one is creating art, it is okay to make mistakes, to have flops, and to have things that are not satisfying. When this does occur, his advice is to simply put whatever he is working on aside and move on. SD compares this to fishing; “Some days you catch your limit and fill the net, other days you do not catch a thing and just get rained on. But if you are a fisherman, you show up another day” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019).



Figure 30 "Sister Girl" Greeting card, acrylic on Masonite, 24" x 32", 1995.

The projects that do end up being flops are not always wasted. Many of the pieces that may have been headed to the trash have been upcycled and transformed into a new work of art. SD thinks of these pieces as the foundation of a stronger work of art. There are other times when SD has completed a work of art and he is generally pleased with it but at the same time, does not feel completely satisfied. Walking away from these pieces causes a gnawing inside of him that forces him to follow up and pursue an idea further, until he discovers what his gut has been telling him.

Within his artmaking journey, the challenge and excitement of working on a flat surface (canvas, page, wooden panels, etc.) is something that has always been intriguing for SD. The process calls to him in a deeply personal way. He believes that there is a process of abstraction where one can look at and experience the world three dimensionally but then transpose it onto a flat surface. He explains that a challenge that he encounters at this point in his life is that he no longer wants to try to paint realistically, it simply does not interest him. He feels that “if realism is what I am trying to capture, then a camera is the tool I should use” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). Instead, his objective in making art is to express ideas with colour, texture, line, shape, and form on a flat surface. Wooden panels are a type of flat surface he enjoys manipulating and transforming with his creativity. Ancient archaic rock art is another art form that he holds in high regard with its simple use of line and shape.

Another flat surface medium among his favourites is ledger book style art. What attracts SD to ledger book art is the direct and simple way (although he is quick to clarify that he is not using the term “simple” in a derogatory way) in which Native American artists have interpreted the world that we live in on a flat two-dimensional surface. Observing this type of art leaves SD

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“in a wonderous state of awe” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). Ledger book art has moved SD in such a way that this style of art can be found in many of his books. For example, pictured on page 96 of this thesis, is the dedication page in *Red Cloud* which is done in this ledger book style.



Figure 31 "Ledger Book Art" Illustration and Text written by SD Nelson for Red Cloud, (2017).
Used with permission of Abrams Books.

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SD compares ancient archaic rock art to ledger book art, in that both types of art possess the same quality of abstraction, interpretation, and reaction to the world we live in, although one major difference being that ledger art is done on a flat surface. In *Sitting Bull*, SD (2015)

describes ledger books as the following:

The ledger books were ‘used’, filled with numbers and written lists of merchandise. No longer any use to the white man, typically they would have gone in the trash. The Indian artist was not deemed worthy of a clean piece of paper on which to draw.

Plains Indian artists had a long history of drawing and painting upon buffalo robes, clothing, tipis, their bodies, and even their horses! They quickly made the transition to working on paper. The artists used pencils, pens, and watercolors to create bold images of their vanishing culture, depicting village scenes, battles, ceremonials, and even their imprisonment. The stylized figures of people and horses are mostly drawn in profile. Ironically, and in a visually striking manner, the intentions of the book-keeper and the Indian artist remain separate – like oil and water. The Indian’s images seem to float atop the lined paper of the ‘white man’ with its strange written word and numbers. Sadly, and in the most compelling way the two cultures never seem to connect. In many ways the disconnect continues today. (p. 58)

Ledger art is a beautiful representation of his own family, as he was raised in a family that celebrated both Native American culture as well as European culture. SD skillfully incorporates his blended and diverse family into his illustrations with the use of Ledger art.

SD Nelson has been exposed to and has experienced numerous styles and techniques of art as well as a variety of artists. While his focus today is Native American art, he has not limited himself to this style throughout his life. He creates art that is not intended for an audience. He

paints and draws themes that are not always connected to his books. He values the process of creating art and expressing himself in various forms. He thinks it is significant for aspiring artists to understand that not all artists immediately find their niche.

Collaborations with the Publication Team

As with any project that involves numerous people working toward the same goal, it is not uncommon for authors and publishing teams to have occasional disagreements from time to time. SD feels fortunate that throughout his career as an author and illustrator, he has worked with an enthusiastic team of designers, editors, and publishers. While individual ideas might not always align perfectly, these conversations have always taken place with respect and honesty. SD believes this is the main reason that he and his team have not had any major conflicts. He finds himself in a unique situation as well, as he takes on both the roles of author and illustrator for most of his projects. Typically, the author and the illustrator do not collaborate or interact throughout the process and the editor will act as a mediator between the two. However, SD works directly with his editor when he writes and illustrates a book. On these projects, SD has full authorship as he has a complete understanding of the story, of how it needs to be told, and holds a holistic vision of how to represent the story through the combination of images and text.

When the story has been written and the artwork has been completed, SD will then sit down with his editor and collaboratively decide when an illustration should be full colour, a painting, or a simple ink drawing. Having built a trusting, professional relationship with his editor, SD appreciates this creative process as these discussions can get extremely interesting and exciting. The designers, on the other hand, are different from book to book and come into each project with their own objective views. Designers work with the editor and in turn the editor works with SD as the illustrator. The designer and the illustrator will mastermind where

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photographs will be placed, where a “full spread illustration will go, and where vignettes are needed” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). The designer will then share their opinions with the editor, who then relays this information to the illustrator who will either take the suggestions and begin drawing or choose to go in a different direction. There have been times when the suggestions the designer has given did not sit well with SD. However, the team usually accepts what SD proposes in terms of layout and logistics of images. The team’s conversations then shift to deciding where the story requires illustrations and where text is enough to convey the message of the story. During these negotiations there has been a time or two when SD has felt because the team of editors, publishers, and designers share a common opinion about the end product, but it does not always align with his vision as author and illustrator. In these types of situations, a compromise was reached, and SD believes he at times “needed to accept some ideas that he was not completely in favour of for the greater good of the project” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019).

SD never imagined that he would become a published author and illustrator. He continued to make art and decided to expand and try his hand at storytelling as well. He received praise and encouragement as well as rejection and negative feedback. SD chose to focus on the constructive criticism and the encouraging words, re-evaluating and thinking differently rather than quitting his dream. His life as an artist and storyteller has offered SD Nelson a life where he can immerse himself in his culture and creativity, while giving back to his community.

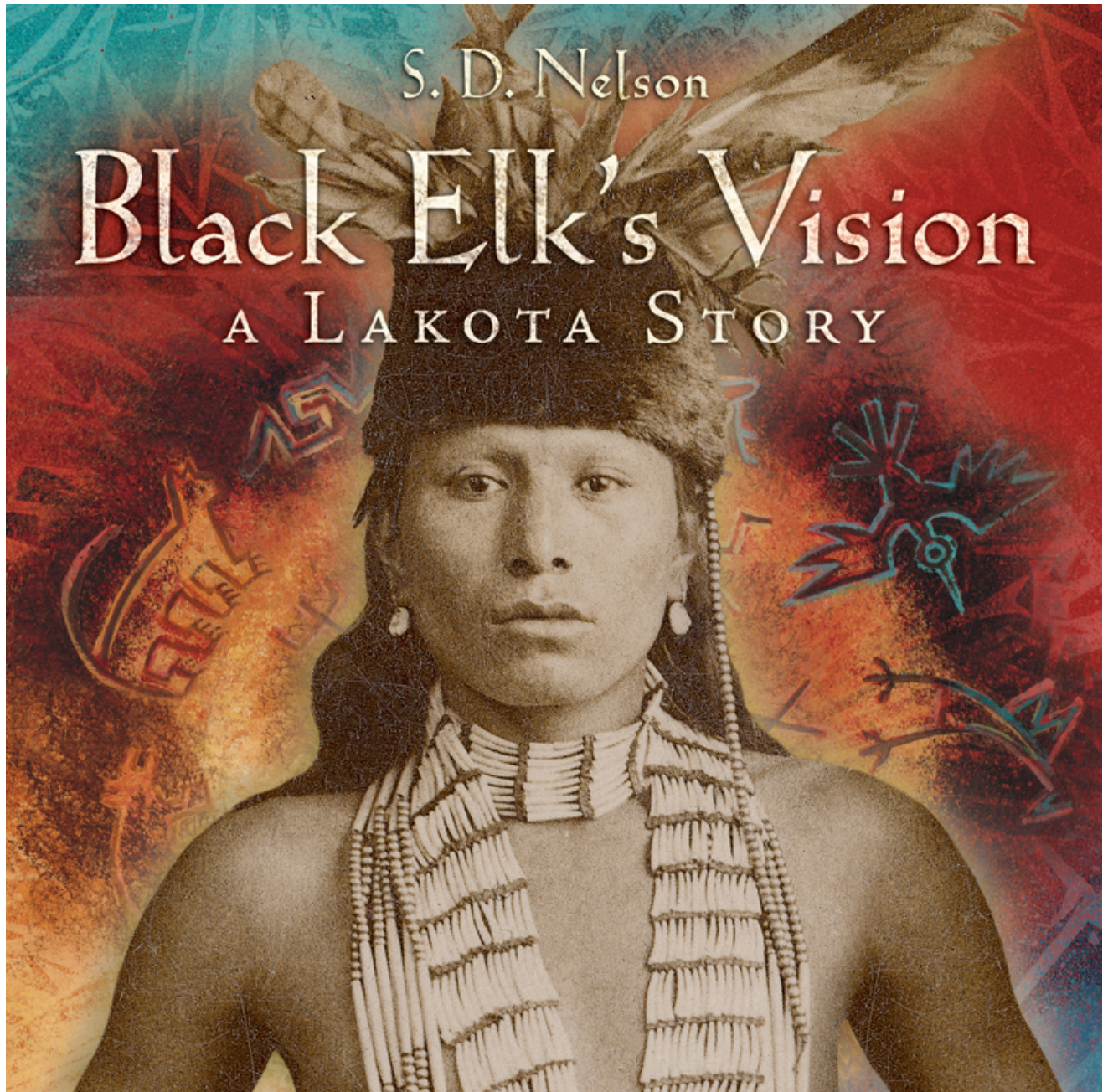


Figure 32 "Black Elk" Book cover, SD Nelson, *Black Elk's Vision, A Lakota Story* (2010). Used with permission of Abrams Books.

Chapter 5: Artist at Home and Giving Back

“I know I am Lakota. When I attend Powwows I feel something in my blood that is wonderful. When I attend the Inipi or Sun Dance, sometimes my eyes well up with tears. I have a real connection to my Lakota traditions, to my family, and their teachings” (Nelson, 2019).

“Today, as an adult, and a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, it is my pleasure to pass on traditional Lakota teachings to young readers. It is my hope that their lives might be enriched by this different world view” From the Author’s Note in The Star People (Nelson, 2003).

As a now established author and artist, SD feels gratitude when he reflects that he lives in a beautiful part of the world which he draws inspiration from daily. Surrounded by mountains, forests, earth’s creatures, and an abundance of culture is something he does not take for granted. He cherishes every moment that he spends in his studio at home in Arizona, creating art and stories, and bringing his passions to life. Readers of SD Nelson are most familiar with the illustrations that have been published in his books, but time spent with SD in his home and community shows how he creates art comes in a multitude of forms and mediums. He does not limit himself to one artistic form but take risks and tries the unknown. SD is influenced by his life experiences, the stories from his ancestors, as well as artists from the past and present. At times he creates works of art in a traditional style, other times he may use a more modern technique, and sometimes a combination of the two are used. Regardless of the style or technique he uses, SD enjoys the process every time his brush touches the canvas, or his hands work with natural materials. The gratitude SD feels for the life he has curated is expressed in how he gives back to his community. SD has made a successful career of authoring and illustrating books. However, he has not lost sight of the person he is—someone who grew up with strong values and traditions. He gives back to his community, makes donations that impact the environment,

promotes his culture, and is continuously working with others to ensure young children are receiving reading material.

Glimpses of the Art of Living

Donning the walls throughout SD's home are constant reminders of both the importance of his culture and the beauty of art that is ever present in his life. Stepping through his front door is like entering a museum of sorts, a glimpse into a curated life through the different types of artworks that are displayed. SD is a proud tour guide—sharing stories of his pieces, especially those he made himself, describing his process of making the pieces and what significance they have in his life. Most of the art is SD's own, while others are inspirations from other artists. Several sculptures from varying periods adorn a tall cabinet filled with memorabilia. A figure of Michelangelo stands among these items which once served as inspiration for an afternoon of drawing and sketching: SD simply placed the statue on the table, studied it, and began drawing.

The painting that was used for the cover of *Buffalo Bird Girl* (Nelson, 2012) sits propped up against a cabinet, while a beautifully bright and bold painting from *Star People* (Nelson, 2003) is situated on the wall to capture the attention of whomever enters the room. The earth tones of many wildlife paintings perfectly balance the vibrant colours of the *Star People* painting.

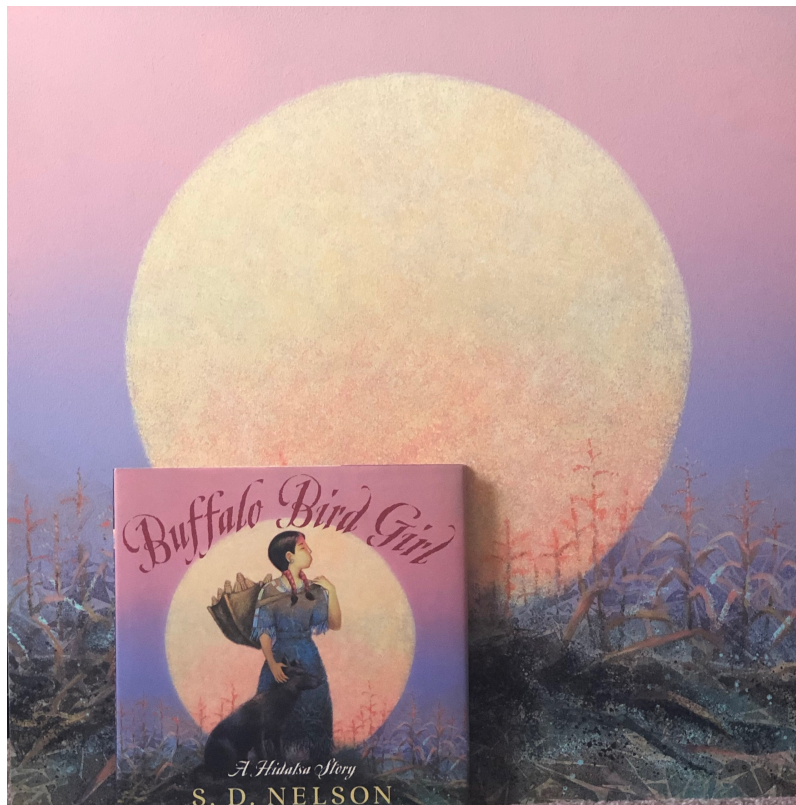


Figure 33 "Buffalo Bird Girl" Book jacket illustration, acrylic on Masonite, 2012.

These paintings are mainly acrylic on Masonite, created with brushes, sponge and splatter technique, and cling wrap. The use of a household item such as plastic wrap is a prominent tool for SD as it creates texture and dimension to his paintings. For this technique, he first applies acrylic paint directly on to the canvas then carefully lays plastic wrap over the paint and “scrunches the plastic until the desired texture and look” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) has been achieved. This plastic wrap technique can be seen in the painting on page 105 entitled “Kokopelli.”



Figure 34 "Kokopelli" Painting on display in SD Nelson's Arizona home. Acrylic on Masonite.



Figure 35 "Big Horn Sheep" Big Horn Sheep art hangs on the wall in SD Nelson's Arizona home.

The skull of big horn sheep (see Figure 35) is a reminder of a river trip SD went on with a group of friends on the Green River in Utah. One night while exploring the canyons, the group stumbled upon the skull. The skull now hangs on a frame on a cross, which is how SD chose to embody the four directions. As SD shared in Lakota culture, each direction has a specific meaning and importance. The west symbolizes the source for water and the end of life as the sun sets in the west. The north represents the winds and the cleansing that is brought on by winds. The east signifies the sun as light emerges each day from the east. The south symbolizes growth and warmth as all life comes from the earth. He further explained that in Lakota culture, three more directions accompany these four. The fifth direction represents Father Sky, or upwards, the sixth direction symbolizes Mother Earth, or downwards, and our divine self, or center is represented in the seventh direction. SD adorned the skull with colourful beadwork inlaid into the skull. To further include his culture into this piece of art, he hung feathers and prayer ties from the frame.

Prayer ties are an ancient Lakota tradition that are still part of the culture today. Individuals use prayer ties as a type of mediation or the setting of an intention. Other times an individual who is struggling with anger, frustration, or despair may create prayer ties with hopes of resolution. Made with small pieces of cloth and tobacco, these bundles are crafted and tied to a larger piece of string. Each bundle is an individual prayer which is spoken as tobacco is placed into the pieces of cloth and tied with yarn or string. Pictured on page 108, SD sits in his studio in his home in Arizona demonstrating the process of making a prayer tie. Many years ago, the cloth would have been traded for animal pelts and the ties would have been made from animal sinew. Today more modern and accessible materials can be used such as cotton or ribbon. These prayer ties can be seen framing the window in SD's studio in various sizes and colours. Each prayer tie

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holds a meaning and represents personal struggles or hopes. Among these is one tie that is not as personal as others, so he felt more comfortable describing its origins. SD created it during a drought in Arizona when crops were suffering as well as livelihoods that depended on these crops. Each bundle was filled with tobacco and tied with a prayer for rain. SD has sat on numerous occasions with loved ones in mind tying and praying for illnesses to leave bodies and hurdles to be overcome. When SD was undertaking his Vision Quest or *Hanblečeya*, he was instructed by his mentor, Allen Jim, to make “Four hundred prayer ties in one continuous string with no cuts” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). On his quest, he completed this using four saplings, one at each cardinal direction, and wrapped the prayer ties around the four poles. Performing the ritual in this manner held great meaning and purpose for SD.



Figure 36 “Prayer Ties” SD Nelson demonstrating how to make prayer ties, Flagstaff, Arizona, 2019.

However, it is the buffalo medicine shield that commands the attention of the room. This awe-inspiring creation was made by SD over thirty years ago. During one of his many hikes through the Arizona forests, he came across a buffalo skull, still intact and miraculously untouched by natural elements. Being far too large to be picked up and carried home, SD devised a plan. He went home and built a frame that could withstand the size and weight of the skull. The following day, he ventured out again in hopes that his treasure was still there, and luckily it was. He proceeded to secure the skull to the frame, strapped the frame to his back, and walked it out of the forest. As seen on page 110, the skull was mounted on a circular shield which SD covered with leather strapping and cloth. The intricate patterns of the skull have been chiseled out and inlaid with trade beads, as he did with the bighorn sheep skull. Turkey feathers cascade down from the shield, which were a gift from a Sun Dancer friend who used to participate in *Inipi* with SD many years ago. This friend was also an avid hunter who shot a bird and gifted the feathers to SD during turkey season.



Figure 37 "Buffalo Medicine Shield"

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Traditional Lakota items are meticulously placed throughout SD's home. On one wall in a bedroom hangs a pipe tomahawk that has been transformed into a work of art. As seen in the photo on page 112, the handle, once plain, is now embellished with peyote stitch beading which was done by SD. Peyote stitch is a weaving technique using beads that is done off-loom. This artifact fascinates SD because it is a multifunctional tool. The obvious use is that of a weapon, however, taking a closer look reveals that the handle has been hollowed out to smoke tobacco in it. SD describes this is a "paradoxical tool" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) since it is a weapon used for killing, but also an instrument for prayer.

Interestingly, on the adjacent wall to the Lakota art and artifacts are drawings that may are not representative of Native American culture in the slightest. Instead, these are SD's childhood drawings: science fiction, space oriented, and fantasy, all done with a steady hand and an eye for detail. SD reflects on the idea that if "someone had purchased one or had taken an interest in this style" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) of these drawings, it might have led him down a very different path. SD was not always interested in Native American art. Looking back when he was in the fourth or fifth grade, like many young boys at the time (especially one coming from a military family), he remembers drawing tanks and guns and then trading with his friends who were drawing similar things. SD ruminates on the fact that he very well could have pursued a career in sci-fi or fantasy art which would have resulted in him never exploring Native American art to the depth that he has.



Figure 38 "Tomahawk Pipe" Artwork that hangs on the wall in SD Nelson's guest room.

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SD readily acknowledges that life experiences influence what or how something is created. He reveals that he has drawn and painted images that are dark and Freudian because he was feeling angry, depressed, or having negative thoughts. He recalls how the events of September 11, 2001, had a strong impact on his art was during that time. Looking back on the images that he created after these attacks, he is reminded of the horror that he and everyone else experienced in one of the most “atrociously evil attacks” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) that SD has ever witnessed. The fear, pain, sense of loss, and anger emerge in the art SD produced during this period. In contrast, SD can also pull out drawings or water colour paintings that bring back images of beautiful days with blue skies and flowering fields, which he describes as “simply wonderful memories from creation” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019).

Although it may not always be intentional when he sits down in his studio, his art is often a way to process occurrences that are either taking place at that moment in his life or are weighing heavy on his mind. Art is one outlet but is certainly not the only emotional outlet for SD to make sense of the world and his place in it. Julia Cameron’s (1992) book *The Artist’s Way: The Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*, was instrumental in why he began the daily ritual of journaling as an emotional outlet. Cameron recommends that authors write and journal every day, which SD did for many years, especially during traumatic times in his life. Stacks of journals accumulated in his studio over time until one day, SD decided it was time to let them go. He gathered them up, walked out to the dumpster, and threw them away. He explained that this was not a difficult task; he wrote these journals for himself, he was now done with them, so it was time for them to go. Literally thousands of words and hundreds of hours of writing were gone in an instant. The journals were a means for SD to write and reflect, and they had served their purpose. In addition to journals, he has thrown sketch books away that he no longer had a

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use for, while others remain tucked away in his home in Arizona. Perhaps one day he will sit down and share these sketches and the stories that are attached to these images with his daughters and grandchildren.

The images that could be found in his personal sketchbooks range in topic and theme. Some are drawings of his mother and father and memories from his early childhood, others are soul-searching images that he describes as cathartic in nature. Through his art, he describes how he worked through the big questions; “Where did I come from? What am I doing here? And where am I going?” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). The sketch books are also a powerful tool for SD to reflect on and work through painful emotions. Many of his books include dark subject matter where violence is present, and people are killing one another. Having created what SD refers to as “Freudian-type drawings” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) that delve into his inner psyche, he is able to bring that experience into his storytelling so that when there is conflict and turmoil within a story, he draws upon personal experiences. As dark as some of his personal pieces may be, he believes that through the illustrations in the books he has created for children, the readers can see and feel a celebration of colour and texture.

Healing and Giving Back

While SD enjoys a comfortable and stable life today, this was not always the case. He too has faced challenges arising from intergenerational trauma. SD struggled with alcoholism, which he believes is a result of his genetics and the depression that his people have suffered through Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He is proud to say to he has been sober for thirty-three years. SD describes facing alcoholism as having to face the demon with his warrior spirit.

SD believes that dwelling on hatred, tragedy, and blame will not help to create a better future for anyone. SD instead focuses his attention on the idea of “healing the bleeding wound”:

My Lakota people cannot live with resentment for past wrongs done to us, including the horror of genocide. I believe we still suffer from memories of the past. This sad condition is called collective post-traumatic stress disorder. It manifests in alcoholism, domestic violence, suicide, never-ending bitterness, and a hopelessness in the eyes of our children. We have not recovered. Instead, we are stuck in a malaise; a kind of Limbo. My people cannot remain ‘forever victims.’ Why does the wound still bleed? [...] We must forgive. Only then will healing come. If we as Lakota Elders stand and forgive, our children will be given the gift of hope. (Nelson, personal communication, 2019)

While “healing the bleeding wound” is one element to the process, SD knows in his heart that conditions for Native Americans will only improve if forgiveness and a way forward begins:

If we truly seek harmony for our children and ourselves, we will forgive the wrongs done in the past. We do not forget the past. We remember and honor our ancestors. By letting go of the wrongs done in the past and by reaching for the future, we live fully in the present. (Nelson, personal communication, 2019)

SD describes how Black Elk, who has been gone for seventy years, spoke of the power of understanding and choice:

Among his people Black Elk was a respected holy man. He lived to be eighty-seven years old and is buried upon the Dakota prairie he loved. In his youth, surrounded by overwhelming destruction, he saw beyond the pain and dreamed a beautiful vision. Among the many lessons found in Black Elk’s vision is this: All human beings have the *power of choice*. Though our actions we choose either to destroy life or to give life. It is no good to live our days with a blaming heart; that way leads only to

suffering. We are not victims of a destiny forced upon us by others. Instead, we are the makers of our people's future. (Author's Note from *Black Elk's Vision*, Nelson, 2010)

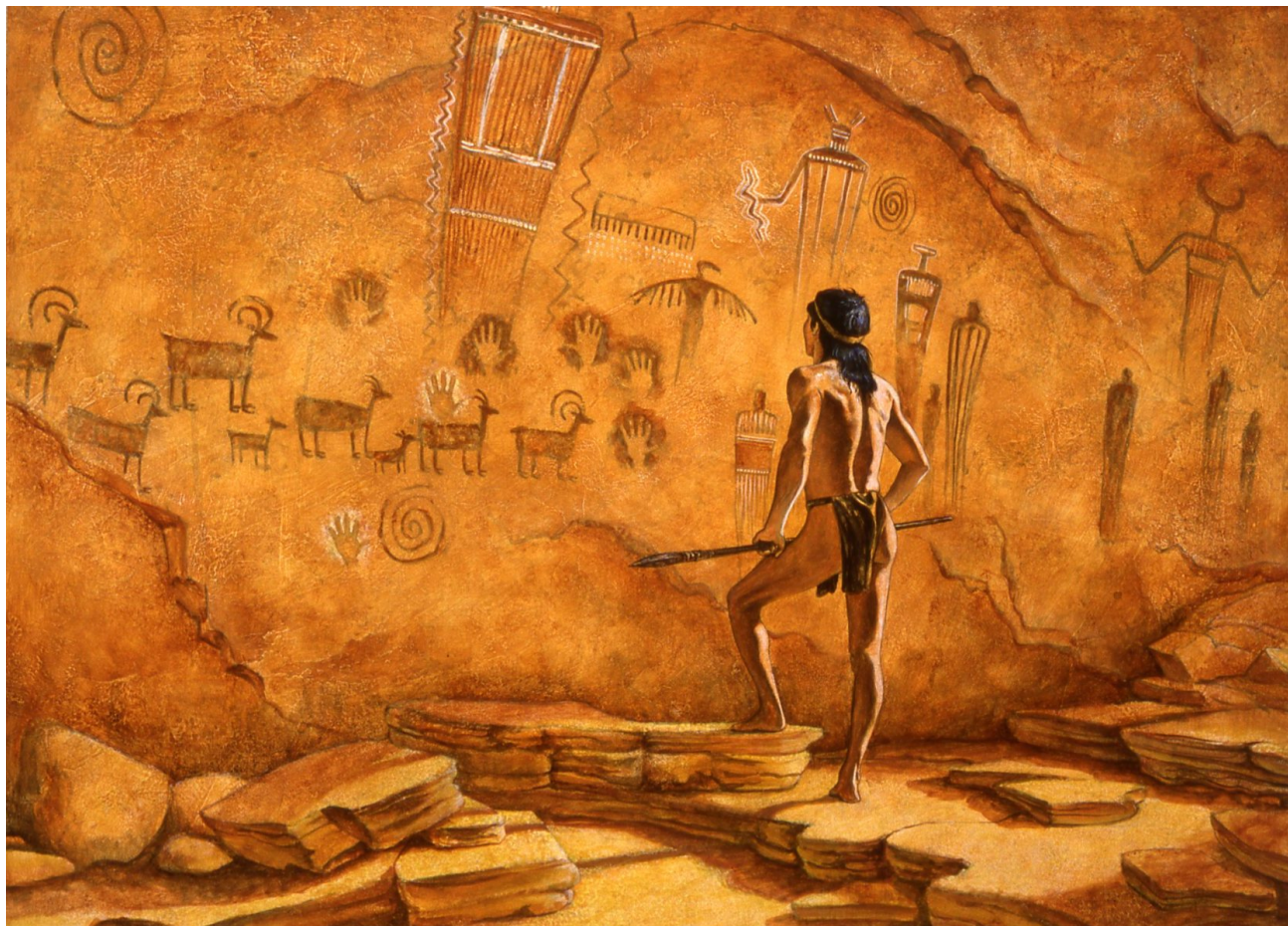


Figure 39 "Talking Walls—Anasazi"

SD has devoted his life to choosing to give life and to being a "maker" of his people's future through his art and storytelling. SD writes and illustrates children's books due to his love of art and the fact that he enjoys writing, drawing, and telling stories. However, SD also writes and illustrates children's books because of a deeper desire to make a positive difference for the sake of Native American children. He wants all children to have the tools they need to reach their full potentials. SD believes literacy offers solutions: creating interest and engagement that instills

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the love of reading in young people and empowers young Native American minds by learning the stories of their people, culture, and connections.

As described earlier, when he was still teaching, SD continued to paint and draw in his personal life. He soon discovered that he was drawn to representational art and illustration. As an artist in his community, he designed brochures as well as silk screen t-shirts for different organizations. Giving back to his community is a priority for SD and often he charitably donates pieces of art to many clubs, organizations, and sports teams in surrounding areas. SD feels strongly about protecting and conserving Mother Earth for our future children: “Our connection to the land is a vital part of our existence” (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). Every year, he donates a few paintings to organizations such as Ducks Unlimited, Coconino Sportsman Organization, and The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. These organizations are involved in stewardship of parklands and wildlife and maintaining the health of public lands which are values he holds very near to his heart. Often the art he donates features elk or deer out in the grassland. These paintings are auctioned with the proceeds going directly back into the organization to aid the environment.



Figure 40 “Crazy Horse and the Greasy Grass Fight” Ledger Painting, Acrylic on Masonite. Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument Collection, Crow Agency, Montana, 2019.

Getting out into communities and giving back is a priority of SD's. He has been donating works of art to various organizations throughout Arizona, the Dakotas, as well as in Canada for many years. His most recent donation was a body of artwork consisting of eighteen pieces that were part of his exhibit at the South Dakota Art Museum. The exhibit entitled *S.D. Nelson: Sharing My Vision*, was displayed from May until September of 2019. The brochure from this exhibit can be seen in Figures 41 and 42. When reflecting on the eighteen pieces of art pieces that SD donated, Taylor McKeown, the Coordinator of Collections at the South Dakota Art Museum states: “We were particularly excited that the grouping represents the breadth of Nelson’s career: an early drawing on panel, works from throughout his illustration career, and the more personal unpublished pieces” (McKeown, personal communication, 2020). This exhibit

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was displayed alongside Paul Goble's work; *A Life's Work: Paul Goble Illustrations of America Indian Stories*. The two exhibits were displayed simultaneously to reflect on the connections between SD's and Paul Goble's art and Native American themed books. The pieces on exhibit consisted of work that SD created over the many years of his career. This generous gift was yet another way SD shares his passion with others and gives back at every opportunity. Earlier the same year, SD donated to the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in Montana, as pictured above. This monument is the location of the Battle of Little Bighorn where Custer was defeated. Each time he visited the monument, SD left with a "profound reaction to what took place in that area was the culmination of years of conflict and clash of cultures" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019). These experiences left him with need to share his Native American perspective through the gift of art.

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S.D. Nelson, *Fire Chant II*, acrylic on Masonite.
Illustration from *Walking on Earth and Touching the Sky: Poetry and Prose by Lakota Youth at Red Cloud Indian School*, 2012.

"On the prairies of Dakota there is only earth and sky. All is grass and clouds, forever. It is a land of brutal beauty, where terrible battles were fought hand to hand, and where at twilight the song of Sister Meadowlark will make your heart cry. As a boy, my mother, who was a quarter-blood Sioux Indian, told me traditional stories about Coyote, the Trickster, and Iktomi, the Spider. I learned that the stars were the spirits of my

ancestors, that my great-great grandfather, Flying Cloud, still rode his snorting horse along the White Road of the Milky Way. If I looked carefully, Mom said, I would see the Great Bear and the Star That Did Not Turn—the North Star. She told me the Life Force, or the Great Mystery, is named Wakan Tanka, that all of creation, the four-legged beings, the tall standing trees, even the wind has a spirit and is alive.

I remember one particular summer night... cricket song filled my ears. Then, shimmering overhead, the Northern Lights came dancing, pale green at first, then in ethereal robes of red and gold; spiraling ever upward; colors vanishing, only to reappear. Although I was staring directly into the heavens, from the corner of my eye, I saw something. The sacred something that Lakota People believe is behind all things. I was only a boy, but I was seeing in a Wakan manner, in a sacred way.



S.D. Nelson, *Dancing Beneath the Stars*, acrylic on 140lb cotton paper.
Illustration from *The Star People: A Lakota Story*, 2003.

My mother taught me at an early age to see the world with both the curious eyes of a child and the wistful eyes of an old man. I learned that morning is the most beautiful time. For at dawn the world is born anew. It is the time when the little flying creatures make their song. The little green growing things are covered in precious dewdrops. At dawn, all is golden. All is beautiful.

I have not forgotten those long ago teachings... 'Walk with your vision in your heart.' The boy with the eyes of an artist was given a gift – to see things in a Wakan manner. In turn, I became a painter and a teller of stories."

S.D. Nelson



S.D. Nelson, *Bus Stop*, acrylic on 140lb cotton paper.
Illustration from *Greet the Dawn: The Lakota Way*, 2012

Figure 41 "Exhibit" Brochure from SD Nelson's art exhibit at the South Dakota Art Museum, 2019.

After graduating in 1968 from North High School in Fargo, ND, S.D. Nelson went on to earn a B.S. in Art from Minnesota State University at Moorhead. He taught art for a year in the Wahpeton public schools in North Dakota before going on to teach for twenty-seven years in Flagstaff, AZ. He is a 2012 inductee of the North High School Hall of Fame.

Nelson's artworks appear in books, greeting cards, and CD covers, and are held in both private and public collections. He has served as the author and illustrator for 11 children's books. His books have received the American Indian Library Association Honor Book Award in 2016; the Spur Award from Western Writers of America in 2004, 2006 (Finalist Awards 2005, 2011, 2016); the Notable Book Award from the American Library Association 2001, 2011; and the Bluebonnet Master List Award from the Texas Library Association in 2011. He has lectured at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC, and was the keynote speaker for Read North Dakota in 2010 (North Dakota Humanities Council).

A member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in North and South Dakota, Nelson's paintings offer a fresh contemporary interpretation of traditional Lakota images. He creates ledger drawings in ink and colored pencil and paintings with acrylics, which he brushes, sponges, splatters and sprays. In addition to this work he has painted extensively on animal skins and bone and has crafted traditional rawhide drums and leather beadwork.

SOUTH DAKOTA *Art* MUSEUM

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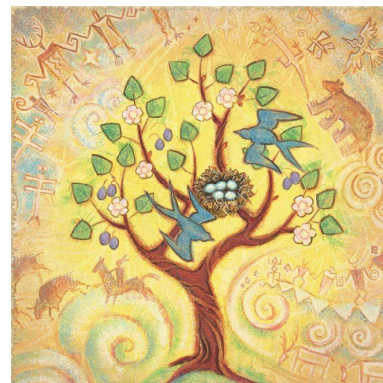
Museum Hours:
Monday through Friday 10 am - 5 pm
Saturday 10 am - 4 pm
Sunday 12 noon - 4 pm
Closed Sundays January through March and all South Dakota State holidays.

Figure 42



May 3 - September 15, 2019

S.D. Nelson: *Sharing My Vision* presents a selection of original artworks by this award-winning author and illustrator. Nelson's fluid style and traditional Native American imagery combines movement, color, and form into a visual celebration of life.



S.D. Nelson, *The Tree of Life*, acrylic on 140lb cotton paper.
Illustration from *Black Elk's Vision: A Lakota Story*, 2013.

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SD has created thousands of pieces of art in various forms, and now is at an age where he would like to see these works of art in a secure location. Over the years, SD's daughters and close friends have requested specific pieces of art, which he happily has given to them. Art collectors have also contacted him with requests to purchase his art. His hope is to continue to donate his artwork to places that he believes are a good fit and align with his values. His desires for his art are that it be exhibited in a safe place where people can continue to enjoy his work, now and for many years to come. He reflects this need to think about the legacy of his art comes in part from the recognition that he is now "closer to the end than the beginning" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019) in his own life cycle.

As described above, SD is passionate about empowering Native American children through the power of reading. SD understands that the books he has created offer diverse readers quality, age-appropriate material that respectfully share Lakota culture and history. In addition to his own authoring projects, SD works directly with Native American families to promote reading and create opportunities to ensure success. SD co-founded the *Read at Home* program with Nancy Bo Flood. He was the president of this organization for the first four years of its existence and is currently the vice president of *Read at Home*. This non-profit organization seeks funding to provide material and professional development support to early childhood programs and schools that serve Native American children in the United States. SD fills with pride as he shares about the *Read at Home* program: "Currently, our organization is providing HIGH FIVE (Highlights) monthly magazine subscriptions to more than 350 Native American Children on the Navajo Nation and the Shoshone-Bannock Reservation" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019).



Figure 43 "Read at Home" Reading material in the hands of children provided by Read at Home



Figure 44



Figure 45 "Students" SD with Shosone-Bannock Students, Arizona, 2017.

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Once the children have spent time exploring these magazines at school with teachers and peers, they then take the reading material home to share with their families. This organization helps to provide tools and resources for families to achieve literary success. Children and their family members show off their reading material provided by the *Read at Home* program in photos on page 123. SD feels strongly that reading is a skill that opens doors and provides opportunities. He is committed to doing what he can to help as many young children as he possibly can. Following his mother's wishes that "if you are able to, always give back to your people" (Nelson, personal communication, 2019).

SD Nelson uses his rich Lakota background, his informal and formal education, historical events and figures, and current challenges and realities to create stories and art that inspires. He sincerely hopes that Native American youth may feel empowered as well as inspired when reading his books. SD hopes his books will instill pride in young readers and serve as a catalyst to celebrate culture and share life experiences. Many young readers may relate to SD's experience of being in a family with a parent in the army and having to move frequently. Other's may find their connection to SD through his strong cultural upbringing and familial roots. Regardless of how he reaches his readers, SD Nelson is an influential individual who is making a difference in the lives of many people. He is creating a legacy in his work that educates, informs, and entertains readers from all walks of life. Some readers see SD's books as powerful educational tools, while others are interested in the themes and stories found within these texts. Still others are drawn to the incredible art that enhances the stories and tell a narrative on their own. Regardless of what connects the readers to the work, SD Nelson's passion and dedication to storytelling is evident in every turn of the page.

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Keene State College, New Hampshire, Literature Gallery.

University of Findlay, Ohio, Mazza Museum.

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Appendix A: Letter of Consent



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September 30, 2018

Research Project: Exploring the Life and Work of S.D. Nelson

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This consent form, a copy of which will be left for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you would like more details about something that is mentioned here, or information that is not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. Your informed consent will be sought prior to any interview through FaceTime, phone, or face-to-face meetings.

Purpose of the Project

To engage in an author study with a final result of creating a biography of you, S.D. Nelson in order to:

- Gain a better understanding of the process involved when creating your books and works of art.
- Tell your story, that of a gifted artist and honour you by recording this information.

Research Procedures and Recording:

Through audio recorded interviews and thorough field notes, the intent of this undertaking is to gain as much knowledge on your life and work as possible in order to create an accurate account that reflects you as picture book author and illustrator. This project will be laid out in chronological order. Each chapter will be dedicated to a specific time period in your life, except for the first and last chapters; these will be an introduction and conclusion. This life narrative will be approximately twelve chapters in length, containing ten to twelve pages in each chapter.

There will be 3 phases of the interview process as follows:

- Phase 1 will approximately 5-10 Skype or FaceTime calls along with phone conversations. These will be no longer than 90 minutes. An outline of the questions will be sent to you prior to these conversations each time.
- Phase 2 will be in person interviews in Arizona. These face-to-face interviews will be no longer than 90 minutes and will be conducted over the course of 2 or 3 days. An outline of the questions that will be asked will be provided to you prior to these interviews.
- Phase 3 will be any follow up phone or FaceTime conversations that may be required to gain more information. There will be approximately 1-5 phone call or FaceTime conversations.

Risks and Benefits

Risks

There are minimal risks as would occur in everyday life associated with this study. Before I begin the interview, I will once again remind you that if you are welcome to answer only the questions you feel comfortable doing so. You are also free to end the interview at any time.

Benefits

There are a number of potential benefits of participating in this study. First, this gives you a chance to talk and reflect about your experiences throughout your life as an author and artist. Engaging in this dialogue may also give you an opportunity to look at your work in a different way. Creating your biography also may appeal to a different audience than your books may have.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

This will not be confidential as it is a study of an author's life and work, therefore, you must be named in order to be acknowledged. Audio files will be removed from the digital device after the interview session and transferred to an encrypted USB drive accessible only with a password. Written field notes, transcriptions of interviews, and participant-checked transcriptions that are returned to me with edits will be treated as confidential. I will store electronic data, which will be kept on two separate memory sticks, as well as this written data in a locked cabinet in my home (35 Kilmarnock Bay, Winnipeg, MB). The only people to have access to the original data will be me, the Principal Investigator, Penny Kasten, and my advisor, Doctor Gregory Bryan. You will have the option to keep any and all recorded interviews and/or transcripts. In the event that you agree to participate in this project, you will not remain anonymous, however, all data collected till be kept confidential. Once the study has been completed, all digital recordings, transcripts, and notes will be destroyed by March 1, 2020, at which time my research should be complete.

Compensation and Participation

I will pay for beverages and lunch for each of the face-to-face interviews. You will also receive a

gift at the end of this process to show appreciation for his time and willingness to participate.

Feedback and Debriefing

There will be a brief debriefing at the end of your interview in which you will be allowed to ask further questions or concerns that may have arisen during the interview. I will send you a copy of the transcription (via email or regular mail, depending on the participant's preference) once the interview has been transcribed. I will ask you to read through the transcription carefully and make changes if I have misstated or misunderstood anything, make additional comments if you feel there is something more that you want to add, or remove anything that you do not want included as data. You will have one week, or longer if you require more time, to review the transcription, make changes, and get back to me. If I don't hear back from you after one week, or the mutually agreed upon time frame, I will assume that my transcriptions are accurate and ready to be analyzed. I anticipate sending the transcriptions within 4-6 weeks of the interview date. I will also provide a brief, non-technical summary of the project (1-3 pages) to the you by March 1, 2020. You will have the option of receiving the summary of the project through email or by regular mail. If you prefer to have the entire project to read over, you will receive this rather than a summary.

Dissemination of Results

The results of this study will be published as a written thesis and may be published as a book, as well as a possibility of academic or professional presentations. This thesis will be online, through MSpace.

Destruction of the Data

The only people to have access to the raw data with identifying information will be me, the Principal Investigator, Penny Kasten, and my advisor, Doctor Gregory Bryan. Data will be stored on an encrypted drive in a locked drawer in my home (35 Kilmarnock Bay, Winnipeg, MB) until completion of this research study. You will have the option to keep any and all recorded interviews and/or transcripts. In the event that you agree to participate in this project, you will not remain anonymous, however, all data collected till be kept confidential. Once the study has been completed and presented, all digital recordings, transcripts, and notes will be destroyed by March 1, 2020.

If at any time you wish to withdraw from this project prior to commencing, you are free to do so up until October 25, 2018.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, on involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board. If

you have any concerns or complains about this project you may contact the above-named person or the Human Ethics Coordinator at (204) 474-7122 or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

I wish to receive the summary by regular mail.
My address is:

I wish to receive the summary by email.
My email address is:

Appendix B: Permissions



ABRAMS The Art of Books
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abramsbooks.com

PERMISSIONS AGREEMENT

PERMISSION AGREEMENT (the “Agreement”) made as of this 11th day of January 2021 between Harry N. Abrams, Inc., a company of Media-Participations Paris (“Licensor”), of 195 Broadway, New York, NY 10007, and Penny Kasten (“Licensee”) regarding the use of titles and their covers as listed on Exhibit A (the “Selection”).

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6. Please sign a copy of this Agreement, scan that, and email a PDF of that to our attention. We will countersign and email you back a copy for your records.

ACCEPTED AND AGREED TO:

Bob Niegowski
Contracts Manager
Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

Penny Kasten

SD Nelson: Artist and Storyteller

Appendix C: Permissions

South Dakota Historical Society Press permission for the use of the cover for *Greet the Dawn*:

If it is the full cover, with title and contributor text, you have permission to use it for your thesis. Please credit the image as coming from the South Dakota Historical Society Press, and send a copy of the thesis to my attention via email or mail.

Kind regards,

Jennifer E. McIntyre
Marketing Director
Associate Editor
South Dakota Historical Society Press
900 Governors Drive
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605-773-8161
Jennifer.McIntyre@state.sd.us
www.sdhspress.com
www.pioneergirlproject.org

SD Nelson: Artist and Storyteller

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We grant permission without charge to Penny Kasten for non-exclusive, non-commercial use of the cover of *Quiet Hero: The Ira Hayes Story* in your academic paper.

Please note in the paper that you are including this cover with permission from Lee & Low Books.

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Please send a copy (digital is fine) of the paper which includes the work for our approval.

Thank you,
Jill

Jill E. Eisenberg
Senior Director of Curriculum & Literacy Strategy

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95 Madison Avenue, Suite 1205
New York, NY 10016

West Coast: San Mateo, CA 94403

212-779-4400 ext. 34
212-683-1894 fax

Appendix E: Interview Questions

	Childhood
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where were you born? (rural/urban?)• Where did you grow up? Standing Rock - describe this area.• What type of community did you live in?• What types of extracurricular activities were available to you as a child?• Who are your parents? What were they like growing up?• Tell me about your Mother who is a quarter-blood Sioux.• Tell me about your father’s European background.• What did your parents do for a living?• Were you raised in a home that was proud of and supported your culture?• Were there any difficulties or issues with the fact that your Mother was Lakota and your Father was Euro-American?• You speak of the “Clash of the Cultures,” did you feel or experience this personally in your own family?• Was there resistance from your mother's family that your father was not Lakota?• Was there resistance from your father's family that your mother was Euro-American?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any siblings? • What were your siblings like growing up? • Who was your best friend growing up? • Did you have any favourite foods as a child? Treats? • Did you have a family pet? • Tell me about your grandparents – culture, traditions... • Did you have any European traditions as well as Indigenous? • Do you have any special memories as a child? • Is writing and artwork in the family? • What are some of the things you did in your free time? • What were your hobbies/childhood interests? • Did you play mostly at home or out in the neighbourhood? • What sorts of games did you like to play? • Did you have any favorite toys as a child? • What was it like moving around so much as a child? • Did you watch television or movies as a child? • What was your favourite movie? Movie character?
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	<p>Education</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where did you go to school?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Were you or any member of your family affected by residential schools?• What are some of your school memories?• In what ways may schooling then and there be different to schooling here and now in North America?• What was school discipline like?• Did you ever get into trouble and if so what was it like?• What were your favorite subjects?• Were you always interested in artwork, writing, and stories in school?• When did you discover art?• When and how did you start to develop your own distinctive style?• What do you think of the word “style” as it relates to your work?• Do you have memories of art classes and teachers at school?• How old were you when you left school?• Did you leave school to go straight into a job?• Did you have a job in high school?• Can you tell me about some of your school friendships?• Did you have a teacher that was memorable? Positive or negative?• Did you ever keep in touch with any childhood friends?• Did you experience love or loss during your childhood?
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	Biggest influences on your publishing career during childhood
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you read as a child? • What was read to you as a child? • What were some other influences on your writing? • What and who were influences upon your artwork? • What were some of your favourite books as a child? Why? • Who are some historical Indigenous figures that you were particularly interested in as a child (Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Tecumseh, Geronimo)? • As a child, were you interested in other Indigenous people and/or non-Lakota people? • As an adult, are you interested in other Indigenous people and/or non-Lakota people?

	Book Making Process
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What made you decide to pursue a writing career? • Looking back to your first book, would you do anything differently? • What was the overall feedback from your first book? • How did you choose the topic for your first book? • What is your process for creating your books including research,

	<p>modifications from original versions, etc. in creating your stories?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell me about your process for revising and editing.• Tell me about your process for creating your artwork, from preliminary sketches through to the final products?• Tell me about the process involved in getting published.• What is a deciding factor in what story gets told and why?• Have you had any change in opinions, feelings, or thoughts on a subject or individual from the beginning of an idea to the end of the finished product?• Once you begin with an idea, are there any people or activities you avoid until you are finished?• Once you begin with an idea, are there any people or activities you consult during the process?• Do you do the art work first or write the story first?• How long does it typically take from an idea to a manuscript submission?• How long does it take from story idea to a published book?• What are some struggles you are faced with in the book making process?• Do you create a timeline for yourself?• Have you ever started a story and was unsure how to finish it?• What are some of your future projects?
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you have any book ideas in the works?• Did you have any ideas for books that you started but did not finish?• What are some of your hopes and dreams for your future writing and artwork?• How do you decide which topic will be your next book?• Does your family have any influence/impact on your next book?• Do you have any ideas on books that are not an Indigenous theme?• Do you get feedback from anyone on your ideas before you begin a book?
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	Personal Favourites
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are your personal favorites from your own work and why?• What do you think is the best book you have written?• Do you think some of your works did not receive the proper recognition?• Do you have work that was completed and never accepted for publication?• What are some of your favourite techniques for your art?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have a favourite medium to work with? • Do you have a preferred size when creating your artwork? • What are some of your favourite materials to work with? • Through visual expression do you try to evoke any other sensory experience? • We grow up learning about the five senses, but your work is much more visual. Can you describe your understanding of sensory experience and it's connection to the spirit?
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	<p>Influences upon your work in writing and artwork</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What influenced you or what were the biggest influences on your artwork? • Where/how did you educate yourself about Indigenous artwork? • As an adult, have you continued to develop and evolve based on new influences? • Who were some of your favourite authors as a child? • Who are some of you favourite authors as an adult?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some of the favourite books you read to your children? • Who is your favourite children’s author? • Who is your favourite children’s illustrator? • Do you have any favourite classical artists and if so, who are they? (Van Gogh, Michelangelo, Renoir, etc.) • Do you have a time of the year, or season of the year that you do most of your writing in? • How does the weather, environment, season affect your creativity? • Do you have family members or close friends that nurture your creativity?
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	<p>Controversies</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me about any of the controversies you have encountered? • Have you had any backlash from Indigenous communities? • Have you had any backlash from non-Indigenous communities? • Have you had any criticism since you do not reside in South Dakota today? • Have you had any criticism due to the fact that your father is not

	<p>Indigenous?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have you had any issues with publishers, communities, or audiences about the content of any of your books?• Have you faced struggles at any point in your life being an Indigenous man?• Have you faced struggles at any point in your life being a person of mixed ethnicities?
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	<p>Later Life</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What would you consider your biggest accomplishments personally and professionally?• What was your most embarrassing moment?• Do you regret any professional choices you have made?• Do you wish you would have begun your writing career earlier in life?• Can you tell me about your association with Indigenous people today?• How have you changed/grown/learned as an Indigenous person after creating your books?

	Educational Studies
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can you elaborate on your experiences as a student obtaining your Bachelor’s degree in art at Minnesota State University in Moorhead?• What impacted your decision to go to university?• Was university an enjoyable experience for you?• What were some of your favourite pass times in university?• When did you know that you would be an author and illustrator of children’s books?• How and when did you decide to be a teacher?• Did you enjoy being a teacher?• How long did you teach?• Who taught you the traditions and customs of Lakota culture?• How did you come to paint on animal skins and bones?• Who taught you to create traditional drums and to bead?

	Personal Life
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell me about your wife Karen. Where did you meet?• Is your wife Indigenous?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where is your wife originally from?• Tell me about your children.• Do your children identify themselves as Lakota?• Have you raised your family with Lakota traditions?• How does your family support your creative career?• Have you or your family had to overcome any health issues?• Can you tell me about any difficult personal struggles you have faced?• Tell me about any extended family members.• How did you come to reside in Arizona? Weather?• Do you have any pets?• Do you have a favourite colour?• What are some of your hobbies and favourite pass times?• What is your favourite food?• Do you have any cultural food that is a favourite?• What holidays do you celebrate?• Do you enjoy film?• Who is your favourite actor/actress?• What is your favourite movie?• Do you enjoy sports? Playing sports? Watching sports?• Do you follow the career of an athlete?• Do you have a favourite sports team?
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Would you consider yourself to be connected to the Spirit World?• Do you participate in Indigenous traditions today?• What term do you prefer to be referred to as, in terms of your culture?• How has your life changed since you began your writing career?• What would you have done differently along the way?• In one of your biography sections you describe the Dakota land as “brutal beauty”, can you explain this further?• Can you speak to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada?• Can you speak about some issues that have occurred with The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in the Dakotas?
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Appendix F: Awards and Accolades

Awards for *Black Elk's Vision, A Lakota Story*:

- Book of Merit - The Five Owls Review, 2010
- Starred Reviews, 2012
- Texas Bluebonnet Master List Award, 2011
- American Library Association Notable Book Award, 2011
- Booklist: Top 10 Religion/Spirituality Books For Children, 2011
- Oppenheim Toy Portfolio Gold Award; Gold Honor - California Reading Association, 2010

Awards for *Sitting Bull, Lakota Warrior and Defender of his People*:

- Notable Book for a Global Society
- Book for a Global Society Award - International Reading Association, 2016

Awards for *Dance in The Buffalo Skull*:

- Mom's Choice Awards - Most Outstanding Children's Book, 2008
- Aesop Accolade - American Folklore Society 2008

Awards for *The Star People, A Lakota Story*:

- Spur Award - Western Writers of America, 2004

Awards for *Jim Thorpe's Bright Path*:

- Choices - Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2011

Awards for *Gift Horse*:

- Parents' Choice Award, 2000

Along with honours and awards, SD has acquired many positive reviews for his illustrations as well as his children's books throughout the years. Just a small sampling, the following reviews demonstrate readers' and reviewers' reactions to SD's work. On the *Children's Atheneum* website, a review of *Sitting Bull: Lakota Warrior and Defender of his People* commending SD for the way in which he takes mature subject matter and transforms it in an approach that is appropriate for young readers, while still maintaining historical and cultural integrity. An unknown author writes:

Telling the history of Native Americas to children, without glossing over the dark details of that narrative is tricky. Many non-fiction books seem to handle this simply by focusing on what the tribe was like. What they ate, drank, lived in etc. Not that this isn't important within an anthropological sense, but it also glosses over the ugly truth. This book did a good job of finding the balance between cultural information and dark facts, making it appropriate for an elementary school reader while still addressing pressing issues. Nelson has once again written a fabulous Native American story that mixes the rich cultural heritage of the Lakota peoples and the dark history that surrounds them (Unknown, 2016).

Lynn Davidson reviews books on her website *Polilla Writes*. She applauds SD for his work in representing culture as he weaves Lakota language with English in *Greet the Dawn*. She writes:

SD Nelson: Artist and Storyteller

S. D. Nelson begins with an introduction that prepares the reader for the wonder about to be discovered on the following pages. Each page is part of the story in motion—fluid, rhythmic, almost alive with the tale being shared. The reader learns a little about the Lakotas and what it is to be in harmony with all of Nature. Some of the story is told in the beautiful Lakota language with English translation. One can almost hear the rhythm of drums and chanting voices (Davidson, 2012).

Appendix G: Annotated Bibliography

Gift Horse (1999)

Gift Horse is a story about young Flying Cloud as he learns the teachings of his people and Lakota ways of life. The tale begins when his father gifts Flying Cloud a horse, which he names Storm. Flying Cloud and Storm spend their days exploring the prairies and discovering what it means to provide for the tribe as they navigate Flying Cloud's first buffalo hunt together. The bond between man and horse strengthens as Flying Cloud realizes that Storm is an extension of himself, coming to know how he is braver, faster, stronger, and wiser when he is on Storm's back. Flying Cloud is tested when enemy Crow steal horses from his tribe, including Storm. As his tribe embarks on a rescue mission Flying Cloud proves himself to be a brave and courageous Lakota warrior. The bold and vibrant illustrations combined make the story of the incredible connection between Flying Cloud and Storm come to life in *Gift Horse*.

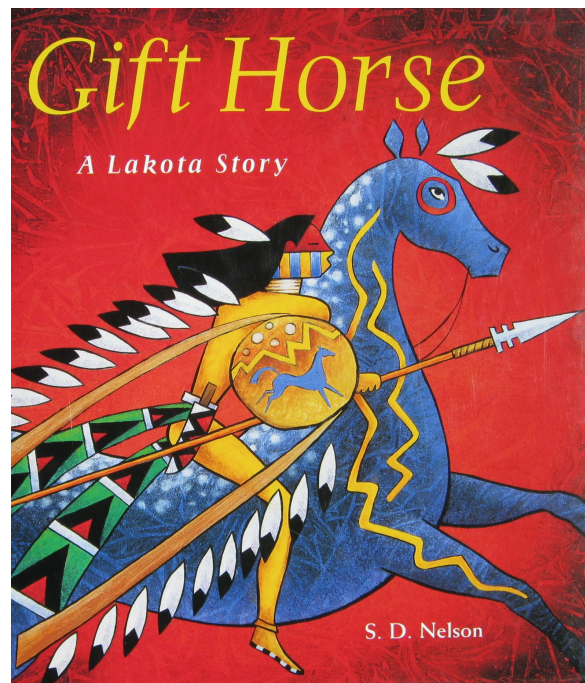


Figure 46 "Gift Horse" Book Cover, SD Nelson, *Gift Horse* (1999). Used with permission of Abrams Books.

The Star People (2003)

The Star People is a touching tale of a brother and sister who become lost as they venture too far out in the prairies. Sister Girl and Young Wolf spend the day exploring and become enchanted with the sky as familiar shapes begin to emerge in the clouds. The two recognize different animals and even faces of family members that have passed away in images from the sky. The sky swiftly changes as a storm ensues and the prairie becomes engulfed in flames, leaving it nearly impossible to find their way home. As night falls, Sister Girl and Young Wolf look to the skies and find comfort in the Star People seeing their Grandmother among the stars. Their dreams are filled with visions and Grandmother's guidance, which remains with Sister Girl and Young Wolf the following day as they reunite with their village. The rich illustrations of *Star People* can tell a story on their own, depicting the connection and importance of family.

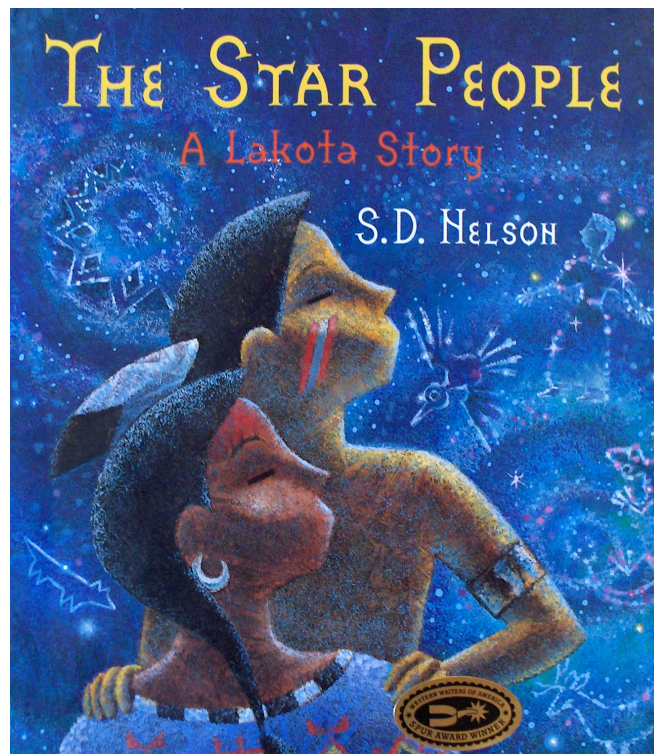


Figure 47 "The Star People" Book cover, SD Nelson, *The Star People* (2003). Used with permission of Abrams Books.

Quiet Hero (2006)

Ira Hayes lived with his parents and three brothers in a one-room house on a remote reservation in Arizona. He attended a boarding school when he was a teenager, enjoyed sports, and was an average student. He was content to blend in with the background. His life drastically changed when he joined the Marine Corps. Private Ira Hayes became a fierce warrior. Ira was among the group of men that erected an American flag on the summit of Mount Suribachi, Japan. Ira was greeted by crowds of cheering people when he returned home, as he was now seen as hero. Rather than feeling like a hero, Ira felt alone without his soldier comrades and soon began to cope with this unease with alcohol. He could not escape this loneliness and tragically died too young, at the age of thirty-two. This true story captures Ira Hayes' courage and honour as he becomes a warrior for his people and his country.

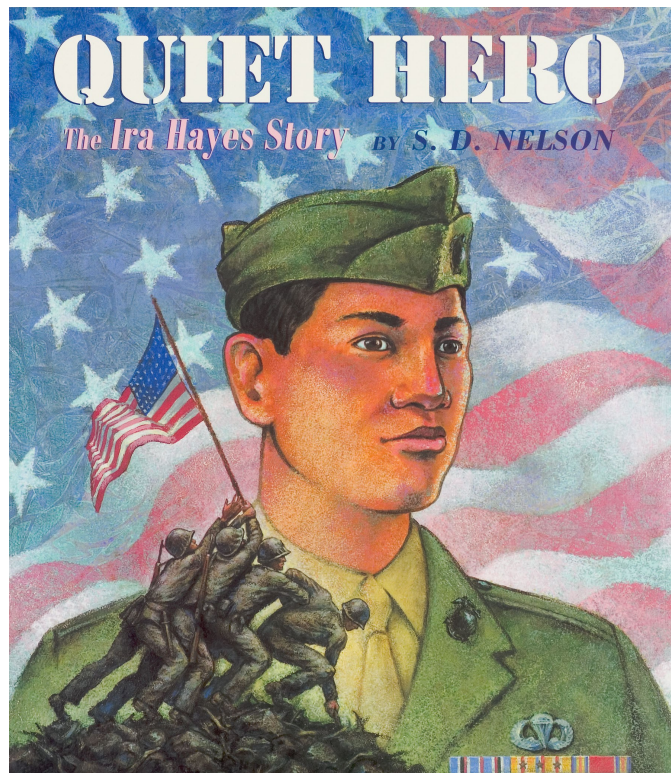


Figure 48 “Quiet Hero” Book cover, SD Nelson, *Quiet Hero, The Ira Hayes Story* (2006). Used with permission of Lee & Low Books.

Coyote Christmas (2007)

Coyote Christmas is an entertaining tale about a Native American trickster, Coyote, who is outwitted by Sister Raven on Christmas Eve. Coyote is on the prowl for his next meal when he spies the home of a family who is about to enjoy Christmas Eve dinner. Well aware that a Coyote cannot simply walk in and sit down to enjoy the feast, he disguises himself as Santa, red sack and all, in order to be invited into the family home. When the meal is finished and the children ask him to stay longer, it is Coyote who is surprised because the empty sack that he came with is now full of gifts. His plan to fill his belly and flee while having the last laugh is spoiled as Grandma, Grandpa, Davy, and Isabel's generosity. He instead stays to open gifts with the family in amazement. *Coyote Christmas* is a humorous tale that weaves Coyote's trickery, Raven's wisdom and kindness, and the warmth of the holidays into one beautiful story.

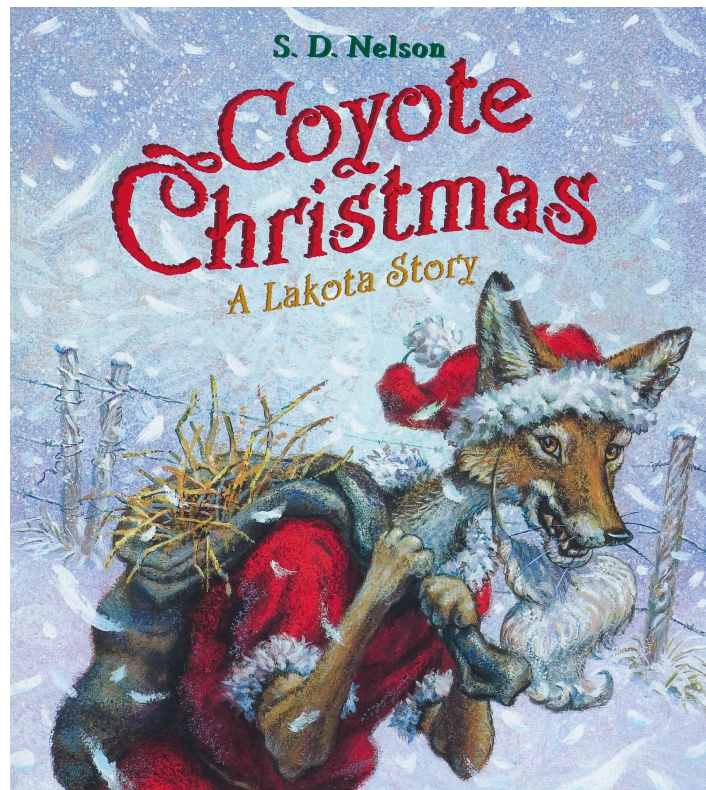


Figure 49 "Coyote Christmas" Book cover, SD Nelson, *Coyote Christmas* (2007). Used with permission of Abrams Books.

Black Elk's Vision (2010)

Black Elk's Vision is told from Black Elk's perspective beginning from a young age. He recalls his mother's warnings of the Wha-shi-choos and the ways of life for Lakota people on the prairies. As a nine-year-old boy in the throes of a fever, he experienced a great vision where many wise Lakota elders came to him. Years later, he recalls the day Lieutenant Colonel Custer led an attack on his village resulting in death, destruction, and eventually forcing Lakota people to surrender and to try and survive without their traditions and culture. Many times throughout his life, Black Elk felt hope that his visions would become a reality, however, the Lakota people continued to be persecuted. This beautiful compilation of photographs and illustrations allow Black Elk's story to come to life with historical facts and gifted storytelling.

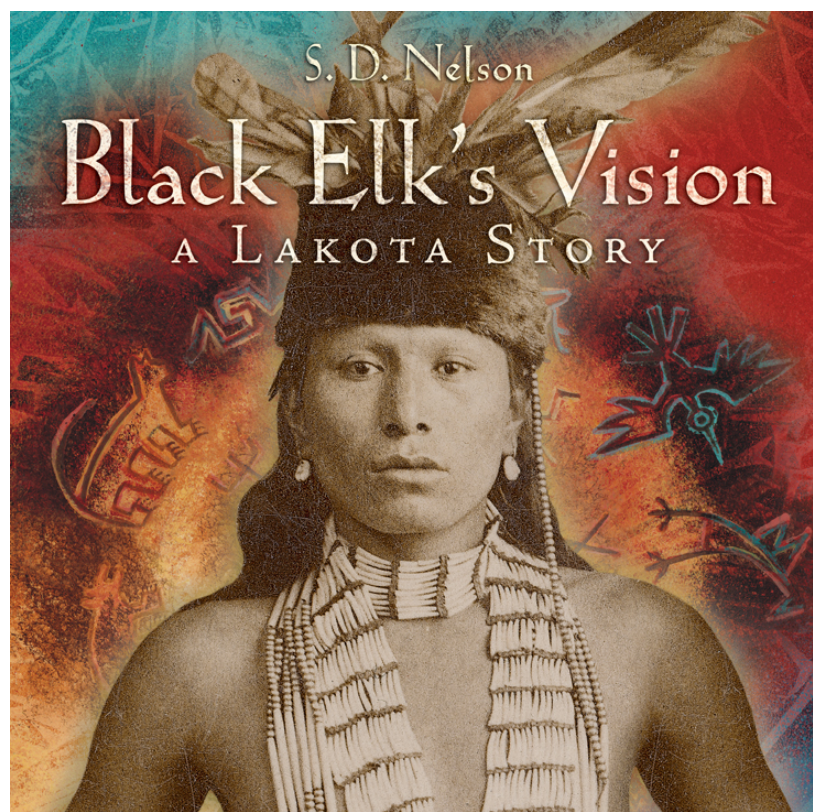


Figure 50 "Black Elk's Vision" Book cover, SD Nelson, *Black Elk's Vision* (2010). Used with permission of Abrams Books.

Greet the Dawn (2012)

Greet the Dawn is a poetic combination of Lakota and English languages that portray the beauty of Mother Earth. From the sun, to creatures both big and small, to the winds and the rains, *Greet the Dawn* is a depiction of gratitude to Mother Nature. Throughout the pages, the cultural traditions collide in harmony with the modern world through the memorable illustrations. *Greet the Dawn* beautifully articulates the power of positive energy and appreciation for all that surrounds us and serves a reminder to taking nothing for granted. The message that tomorrow is a new day comes to life with geometric shapes and bold colours in *Greet the Dawn*.

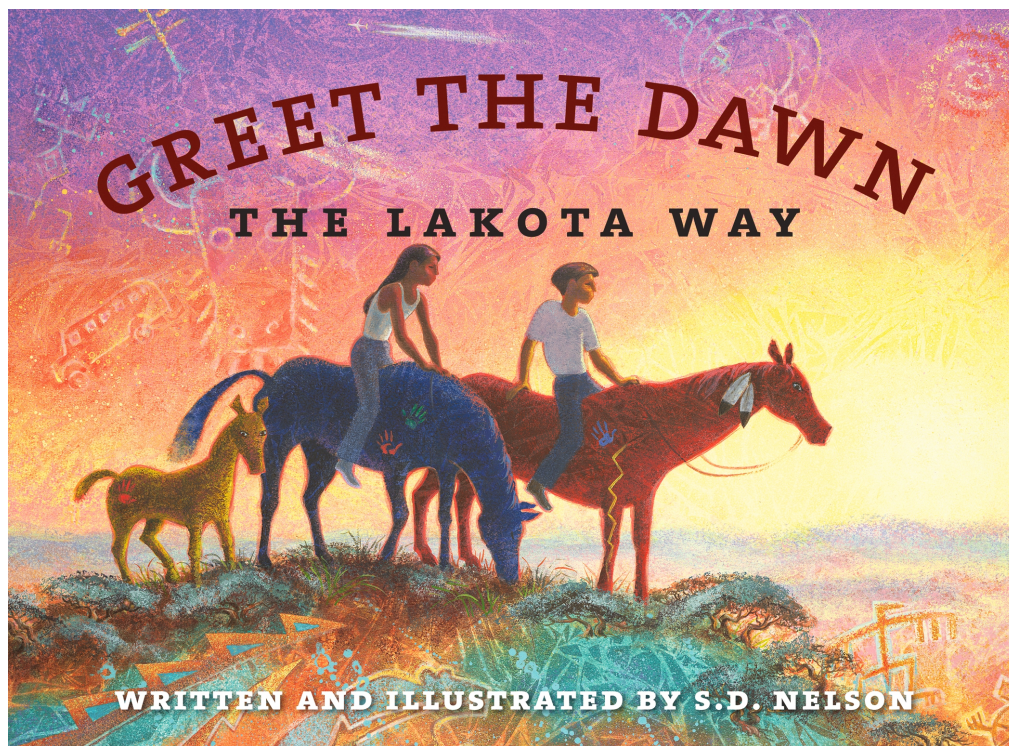


Figure 51 "Greet the Dawn" Book cover, SD Nelson, *Greet the Dawn* (2012). Used with permission of South Dakota State Historical Society Press.

Buffalo Bird Girl (2012)

Buffalo Bird Girl provides a detailed account of the life of a Hidatsa woman. As a small child, Buffalo Bird Girl lost her mother and brother to smallpox, leaving her grandmother to raise her. Buffalo Bird Girl describes her village along the Missouri River and the earth-mound lodges she and her people lived in. Although farming and gardening was the responsibility of the women in the village, it was something she enjoyed as it was a time of bonding. Every year in the late autumn, the village had no choice but to move away from the banks of the river and into the wooded areas for protection against the elements. Through the hardships, Buffalo Bird Girl's spirit remains strong. *Buffalo Bird Girl* captures the way of life of the Hidatsa people with photos and illustrations that complement one another, enriching the story.

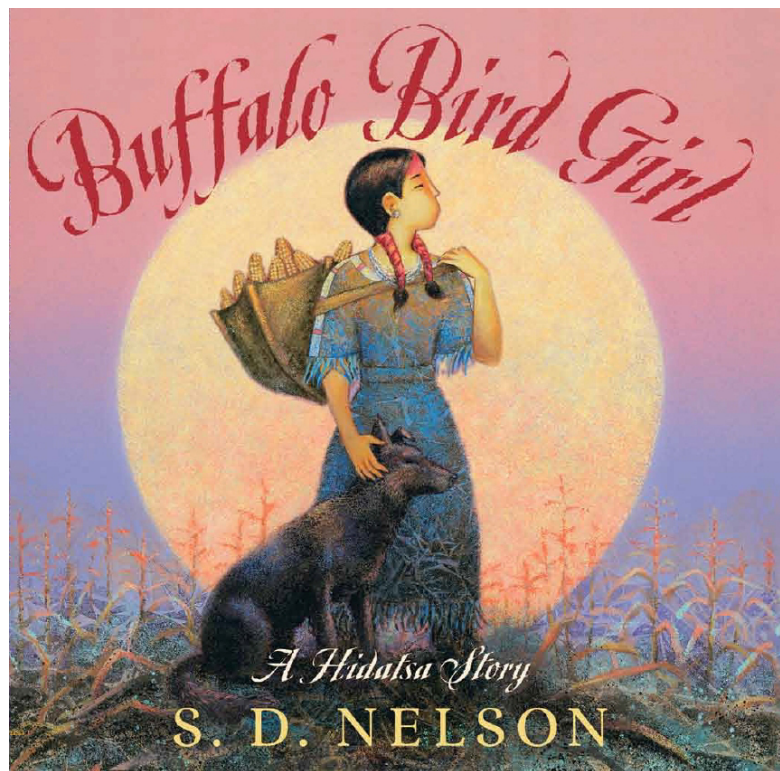


Figure 52 "Buffalo Bird Girl" Book cover, SD Nelson, *Buffalo Bird Girl* (2012). Used with permission of Abrams Books.

SD Nelson: Artist and Storyteller

Digging a Hole to Heaven (2014)

Digging a Hole to Heaven is a story of twelve-year old Conall and his mule Angel. Conall and his brother Danny work grueling days in the coal mines and return home to their parents and siblings each night. Father knows all too well the dangers, having been injured in the mines and being unable to work, the family relies on Conall and Danny for income. One morning, the ceiling collapses in a mine and Conall realizes that Danny is among those trapped inside. Conall takes the lead and organizes the rescue. He and Angel work tirelessly to free his brother and the others before it is too late. *Digging a Hole to Heaven* combines photographs and historical facts about child coal miners in the early 1900s along with illustrations and a fictional story to create a vivid and heartbreaking tale.

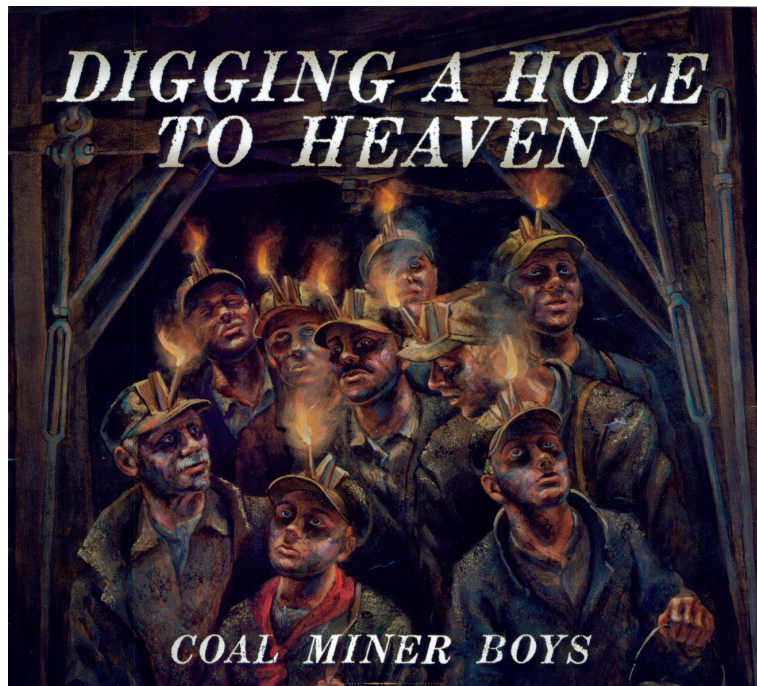


Figure 53 "Digging a Hole" Book cover, SD Nelson, *Digging a Hole to Heaven* (2014). Used with permission of Abrams Books.

Sitting Bull (2015)

The illustrations in *Sitting Bull* are done in Ledger Book Art style, which immediately demonstrates the juxtaposition between European and Native American people. The journey from boyhood to warrior is described through Sitting Bull's first buffalo kill to earning his first feather during a raid. *Sitting Bull* outlines the constant struggles and battles between the American government and Native Americans, focusing on the Battle of Killdeer Mountain and the Battle of Little Bighorn; pivotal events that Sitting Bull was a great part of. Standing his ground and for what he believed in, Sitting Bull's life was taken by Lakota police officers as they came to arrest him. The illustrations in *Sitting Bull* are more graphic in nature and serve to demonstrate to the reader the violence and brutality Sitting Bull and his people endured at the hands of the American government.

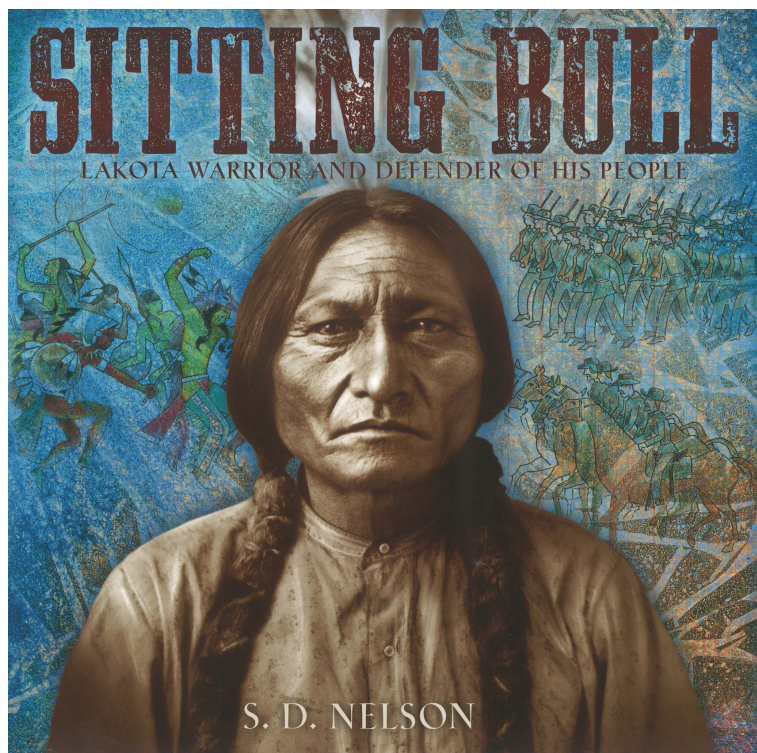


Figure 54 "Sitting Bull" Book cover, SD Nelson, *Sitting Bull, Lakota Warrior and Defender of his People* (2015). Used with permission of Abrams Books.

Red Cloud (2017)

Red Cloud is a detailed account of life for Lakota people before, during, and after the invasion of the Europeans and how their land, way of life, and people were affected. Told from the perspective of Red Cloud, he describes the events of the Fort Laramie Treaty and the violent encounter of The Grattan Massacre. The conflicts between the U.S. government and Native Americans continued throughout the years as Red Cloud became Chief. Treaties were not honoured, and land was taken from the Lakota as they were forced on to reservations. With hopes of ending the battles for his people, Red Cloud eventually surrendered. Done in ledger book style, the illustrations in *Red Cloud* depict the conflict between the United States government and Native Americans, which resulted in violence, while at the same time beautifully capturing the rich Lakota culture.

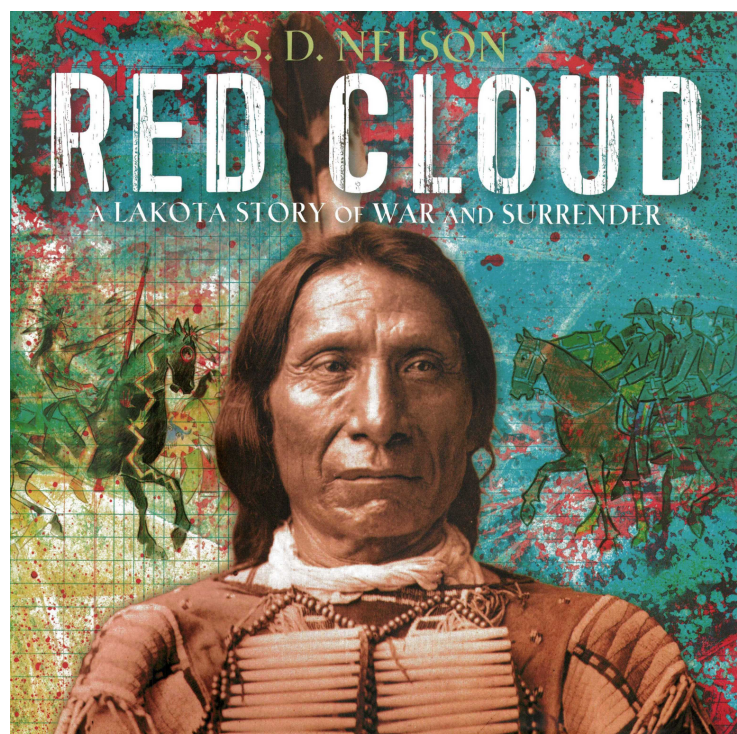


Figure 55 “Red Cloud” Book cover, SD Nelson, *Red Cloud, A Lakota Story of War and Surrender* (2017). Used with Permission of Abrams Books.