

WHERE HOPE LIVES: AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
PROTAGONISTS AND EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN CONTEMPORARY NATIVE
NORTH AMERICAN YOUNG ADULT FICTION

by

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous children's and young adults' literature remains in the margins of the academic community – either misidentified as multicultural fiction or left aside in favour of critiquing controversial literature produced by non-Aboriginal writers. Through children's and young adults' literature, Aboriginal writers are expressing their own perspectives on the way Western education has affected and continues to affect their lives, and these representations present a significant contribution to the way North American children learn about the history of Aboriginal relations with the dominant society. My thesis examines education issues in a representative sample of contemporary Aboriginal young adult fiction. It is innovative in its application of several forms of Indigenous theory, which provide rich and complex insights into the political and social circumstances of the Aboriginal protagonists. Relationships between land, community, and identity are examined in *The Porcupine Year* by Anishinabe writer Louise Erdrich, *Good for Nothing* by Métis author Michel Noël, *No Time to Say Goodbye: Stories of Kuper Island Residential School* by Sylvia Olsen with Tsartlip community members Rita Morris and Anne Sam, and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Spokane / Coeur D'Alene writer Sherman Alexie.

Drawing primarily on the critical writing of Robert Warrior, Craig S. Womack, and Kimberly Blaeser, this thesis examines issues of land, community, and identity as manifested in education systems affecting Aboriginal peoples. The primary works for this thesis all convey an unresolved paradox of hope and hopelessness through the contrast between the historical and political context and the protagonists' emotional strength and connection to their communities and homelands.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Opening Thoughts

My grandfather's handshake was an unforgettable experience. As a little girl, and even as an adult, I looked forward to trying to match the strength I could feel in his hands. His grip felt like a connection to a part of myself and my history that I could not discover on my own. His handshake was often followed by stories of his life in Canada in the 1920s and 1930s. I was always especially fond of his tales of old British Columbia about running a trap line from Boundary Road and Marine Way in East Vancouver all the way east to Abbotsford. When I read Cherokee¹ author Thomas King's print version of his 2003 Massey Lecture Series for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's radio division, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, I was struck by his comment: "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (153). I realized then that my grandfather's stories are an ideological link to the families and communities that came before me. King demonstrates the power of memories and stories in shaping our understanding of the world.

As a child I was taken by the notion of the "Indian" in the Wild West – characterizations of Aboriginal peoples I discovered in John Wayne movies and television shows like *Bonanza*. I grew up in the 1980s in a predominantly Euro-Canadian middle class neighbourhood in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia. As a member of the Euro-Canadian culture, I had many misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples. My father, however, began to challenge my perspective on the history of Indigenous peoples by discussing with me

¹ Where possible, I have included the nation of the Aboriginal scholar or writer at first appearance, which is in accordance with conventions of contemporary academic writing. In his Master's dissertation, Gregory Young-Ing explains that Aboriginal Peoples wish to be recognized as existing "in a continuum between past and future generations of Aboriginal Peoples" (20). Including the nation of which the scholars or writers are members acknowledges their distinct cultural roots; that they have not been changed by colonization; and that natural cultural change does not mean that they have been absorbed into mainstream society (Young-Ing 20). The spelling of the nation will reflect the spelling provided in the work of the author being discussed. Only the Aboriginal nation is included (for instance, I do not include King's Greek heritage).

the stereotypes and inaccuracies in old Western movies and television programs. I became fascinated by the idea that writers, politicians, and even many of my teachers believed in “TV Indians.”² I wanted to know why TV Indians existed and what Aboriginal peoples’ experiences were actually like throughout history. As a child, I did not find answers to all of my questions.

When I began researching my thesis as an adult, I discovered that many others were also fascinated by the troublesome prevalence of the TV Indian. Researchers investigate stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples as they apply to movies, television, adults’ and children’s fiction, and popular culture among other media. However, I soon discovered that there was very little research addressing Aboriginal peoples’ own stories. When it came to children’s and young adults’ literature, I found only a scant number of published scholarly articles, despite the exponential increase in the publication of Aboriginal literature for children and youth since the 1970s. Clare Bradford’s *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children’s Literature* provides a critical examination of Indigenous children’s and young adults’ texts from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, but it does not give a comprehensive analysis of the representation of education in these texts – a topic of particular fascination for me. Rauna Kuokkanen (Sami) was one of the few scholars I found who gave a detailed discussion of the representation of education in Indigenous children’s books specifically, but her scope only included boarding schools. I decided to explore this gap in the literature.

As I began reading primary texts for my thesis, I kept reflecting on King’s statement about stories. The Aboriginal literature I was discovering for the first time retold parts of

² I discovered this term in Debbie Reese’s article: “‘Mom, Look! It’s George, and He’s a TV Indian!’” It refers to both the Wild Indian and Noble Savage stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples often found in children’s media from the early to mid-twentieth century.

history that I had understood as unfolding in a completely different manner. The research for my thesis has shown me the ways in which my perspective and upbringing as a member of the dominant culture influences the choices I make as a researcher. My grandfather's solitary experiences trapping muskrat in a now vanished wilderness in southwest British Columbia both connected me to a landscape of the collective Canadian memory and made me lament that this history is now paved over with highways and strip malls. His story is the truth about how I came to know my home land, community, and political history. In the researching and writing of my thesis, I worked hard to acknowledge my preconceived notions of land and community while I sought to discover the ways that Aboriginal authors portray home lands, community, political history, and education in their writing.

Purpose and Rationale

Aboriginal authors have been marginalized by the publishing industry and their stories still struggle to find a home on the bookshelves of libraries and schools (Norris 6). Given these circumstances, the goal of analyzing a selected sample of Canadian and American Aboriginal young adult fiction in this thesis is twofold. Primarily, the analysis of fiction *by* Aboriginal authors will provide insights significantly different from analysing the work *about* Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal young adult fiction can speak to the North American history and colonial experience in ways that an outsider perspective most likely cannot capture. Secondly, young adult fiction by Aboriginal authors has experienced a boom in publishing since the 1970s, but it is almost impossible to find scholarly research on this genre. I wanted to research the relatively unexplored genre of young adult fiction, as opposed to the more frequently discussed genres of picture books and traditional tales by Aboriginal authors. This study will analyze selected works of young adult fiction produced by Aboriginal authors to promote dialogue about the political, social, and literary insights of Aboriginal authors.

The focus of my thesis is on Aboriginal and Western education systems; a definition of these terms can be found at the end of this chapter. Few North Americans are fully aware of the residential and industrial schooling experience and history. Residential and industrial schools profoundly affected Aboriginal peoples across Canada and the United States, and has recently been highlighted in the apologies by the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, Kevin Gover (Pawnee), in the United States (September 8, 2000) and by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Canada (June 11, 2008). The literature review in Chapter Two of this thesis contains an overview of Aboriginal education and various types of Western education. Through children's and young adults' literature, Aboriginal writers are expressing their own perspective on the way Western education has affected and continues to affect their lives. The representations of Aboriginal and Western education by Aboriginal authors present a significant contribution to the way North American children learn about the history of Aboriginal relations with the dominant society, and therefore have become the focus of this study.

The failure to educate children about the relationship between the settler society and Aboriginal peoples has been a dominant theme in the research about Aboriginal peoples in children's and young adults' literature in North America. The historic and contemporary stereotyping of Aboriginal peoples in children's literature has contributed to the inability of North Americans to adequately inform children about North American history. Scholarly research has repeatedly shown the deficiencies of books about Aboriginal peoples by non-Aboriginal authors, and the continued difficulties of Aboriginal authors to be represented by the publishing industry in Canada and the United States (e.g., Norris; Reese, *Native Americans*; van Ginhoven; Stott, *Native Americans*; Kwiatek). Concerned members of the public are working to make Aboriginal books accessible (e.g., Reese, *American*; Oyate,

Oyate), because scholars have shown that there is still a lack of children's books by Aboriginal authors in public libraries and schools (e.g., Slapin & Seale, *Through*; Norris). Aboriginal children's and young adults' literature represents important aspects and perspectives of our history as colonized nations, which makes this literature essential to investigate and include in the teaching of Aboriginal and North American histories.

The continual influx of studies demonstrating the inadequacies of literature about Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous authors is an important step to change publishing trends and standards for writing across cultures. However, the focus on non-Aboriginal writing has come at the expense of researching Aboriginal writing. While gathering information for my literature review, I found that most of the work on Aboriginal peoples in children's and young adults' literature focuses on books by non-Aboriginal authors (e.g., Reese, *Native American*; van Ginhoven; Hausfeld; Monroe; Barron; Day; Abington-Pitre) or on the teaching of Aboriginal information by non-Aboriginal teachers in the public education system. I found some exceptions such as Bradford, Kuokkanen, and Deirdre Kwiatek, who analyzes Aboriginal fiction in the early twentieth century, and Barbara Peireda-Beihl, who analyzes female characters as culture bearers in multicultural children's books including books by Indigenous authors. My thesis provides an in-depth analysis of education issues in a representative sample of contemporary Aboriginal young adult fiction, and is grounded in the Indigenous theories of Craig Womack, Robert Warrior, and Kimberly Blaeser. My literature review includes an analysis of the secondary and primary literature on Aboriginal themes in books by non-Aboriginal authors as well as children's and young adults' literature by Aboriginal authors.

Rationale for Selecting the Primary Works

As part of my course work for the Master of Arts in Children's Literature Program at the University of British Columbia, I wrote a paper in the fall of 2006, "Opening the Cache of Canadian Secrets: The Residential School Experience in Books for Children." This paper was inspired by my discovery of Interior Salish / Métis author Nicola Campbell's picture book *Shi-shi-etko*. Campbell tells the story of a young girl reluctantly counting down the days before she is taken to residential school. This part of Canadian history has always troubled me, because it reveals a very disturbing element of Canadian culture often ignored in the public education system. I wanted to further explore books for children about residential school, and initially considered using other picture books as primary texts such as Larry Loyie's *As Long as the Rivers Flow* (Cree), Michael Kusugak's *Arctic Stories* (Inuit), Chiori Santiago's *Home to Medicine Mountain*, and EdNah New Rider Weber's *Rattlesnake Mesa: Stories from a Native American Childhood* (Pawnee). These books balance the child's experience of loss with cultural sensitivity, but the political and historical relationships between the dominant society and Aboriginal peoples were not fully explored in them. Young adult fiction was a more likely fit for the depth of political and historical information that I was seeking. I also found that picture books garnered much more critical discussion than other Aboriginal texts. As Bradford discusses, contemporary young adult fiction often involves a journey undertaken by Indigenous children to colonial institutions, like residential school, or domestic settings, like foster homes, which were "previously invisible because they lay outside the schemata of colonial narratives of settlement and adventure" (*Unsettling* 148). I broadened my focus to include books that take place in any education system to find a wider range of journeys that protagonists make in the name of education. Four novels emerged which emphasized the impact of education on the lives of the young characters: Spokane / Coeur D'Alene author

Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), Anishinabe writer Louise Erdrich's *The Porcupine Year* (2008), Métis author Michel Noël's *Good for Nothing* (2004), and Sylvia Olsen's *No Time to Say Goodbye: Children's Stories of Kuper Island Residential School* (2001) written with Tsartlip community members Rita Morris and Ann Sam.

The primary texts for my thesis emphasize the impact of education on the lives of young characters. Traditional education, residential schools, early public school integration, and contemporary band and public schools are all significant parts of the Indigenous education experience in Canada and the United States. Although the traditional education of Omakayas by Elders and adult community members in *The Porcupine Year* is unaffected by Western education systems, her education is affected by colonialism and the loss of the community's traditional territories in the Midwestern region of the United States. *The Absolutely True Diary* depicts Junior's experiences in band school and his attendance at a public school in a predominantly Euro-American town in the northwest United States; *Good for Nothing* reflects on the impact of residential schools on Nipishish, his experiences in a 1950s public school in a Euro-Canadian town, and his traditional education by Elders and other adults from his reserve in central Canada; Monica's story in *No Time to Say Goodbye* portrays her struggles in a Catholic-run residential school in southwestern Canada in the 1950s. In each of the Western education experiences, the characters face misunderstandings within their community and racism from outsiders. These social experiences and political histories are key components to Craig Womack's Indigenous theory, which I draw on in reading these four primary works for my thesis.

The future is a central concern of the protagonists in each of these novels. The communities have all lost their traditional territories and face colonial oppression from the

Canadian or American governments. Western education systems have been developed to “kill the Indian in the child,”³ which inhibits the characters’ ability to carve out their own vision of their life. In Erdrich’s case, land settlement policies have been put in place to destroy Aboriginal peoples’ way of life, and in effect to limit Omakayas’ choices. There is no way for these characters to return to a pre-colonial Aboriginal way of life given the deep-rooted and long-lasting effects of colonialism. The protagonists want to maintain the integrity of their culture and create a positive change to life in their community, although the ability of the protagonists to do this remains unclear at the end of the novels. For Omakayas and Nipishish, traditional education gives them a confidence in themselves and an understanding of their community that allows them to function in their community with a strong cultural identity. Nipishish’s and Omakayas’ success in connecting to their cultural roots and their awareness of political and social issues affecting their respective communities shows that they have realized their power to create social change and develop their traditions. Junior and Monica, however, have more complicated future outcomes. For Junior, choosing to leave the reservation and attend public school is what he believes will give him the ability to shape his own future, but his choice leads to detrimental rifts with many members of his community who view him as a traitor. The only option given to Monica in *No Time to Say Goodbye* is residential school, and although she resolves to view the school as her chance to help educate her community by becoming a teacher, the social and historical realities of this educational institution overshadow her hopes and dreams. Where Omakayas’ Aboriginal education draws her into her community and culture, the Western education systems the other protagonists experience force them to reevaluate their own communities and their place within them.

³ Although Duncan Campbell Scott, Canada’s Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, is said to have used this phrase when speaking of the residential schools, the phrase likely did not originate with him. The original author of this oft used expression is unknown.

The differences in the historical settings of the primary texts influenced my decision to discuss these four books together. This quartet of stories represents key periods in the history of the education of Aboriginal children, and of the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the dominant society in both Canada and the United States. *The Porcupine Year* is set in 1852, one hundred years before *Good for Nothing*, but both books highlight the community struggles that occurred due to loss of land and political oppression. By reading these two books together, colonialism can be seen as an ongoing process, and the nature of resistance and survival of Aboriginal cultures to colonialism also becomes evident. The fifty year passage of time between *No Time to Say Goodbye* and *The Absolutely True Diary* shows that the colonial mentality found in the creation and operation of the residential school system carried through to the band and public schools of Junior's present-day experience. Because these four books are set in different cultures, countries, and time periods, the broader picture of colonialism can be seen as occurring up to the present day rather than in the distant past. Furthermore, an important aspect of this historical perspective is the unrelenting resistance of Aboriginal peoples to colonial oppression, which *The Porcupine Year* demonstrates in a period of early contact and which is carried through in each of the three remaining novels.

The selected books demonstrate how Aboriginal children found ways to negotiate their own identities through the colonial power dynamics that occurred between Indigenous peoples and the dominant society as manifested in the education systems affecting Aboriginal children. Each of the primary texts stresses the ongoing struggle that Aboriginal peoples face in determining the education of their children. Looking at the education experiences of both Canada and the United States reveals a disturbing universality to the colonial experience of Aboriginal peoples, and provides a picture of the vast and complex forms of systemic oppression facing Aboriginal peoples from early contact onward. I have chosen to discuss the

broader history of this struggle to show that these issues in education remain important for Aboriginal peoples today.

The choice to compare four novels representing different Aboriginal nations and histories does have some limiting factors. Each book focuses on a different group of Native North Americans, which may problematize some comparative elements; however, the cultural differences will help reduce the risk of generalizing or essentializing the education experience of Aboriginal peoples.

The cultural differences will also limit my ability to compare examples of cultural information as they emerge from the text. Alexie and Erdrich write about people living in the United States; Noël's and Olsen's novels are set in Canada. Although both countries have had some similarities in provincial and state education policies towards Aboriginal peoples, the historical unfolding of the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the dominant culture is different, as is discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two. To overcome these limitations, my thesis will focus on the navigation of the protagonists through Western or Aboriginal education systems. This thesis is not, then, a historical excavation or broad social construction, but is instead an analysis of the meaning of education for Native North Americans as it is produced in these specific books for young adults.

Each of the protagonists in the primary texts leaves home at some point, and in Alexie's, Noël's, and Olsen's novels, this journey is in voluntary pursuit of or enforced attendance in a Western education setting. In Erdrich's novel, the journey of Omakayas both disrupts her education to become a community healer, and leads to an opportunity to gain the "greatest part of her education" (Erdrich 104) – learning in a medicine swamp with her grandmother. Omakayas is unable to return to her home, but is able to imagine the possibilities that the new territory north of her traditional homelands in the northeastern part of

present-day Minnesota holds as a home for her community. In *Good for Nothing*, Nipishish leaves his reserve to attend public school and live with foster parents, hoping that this will “free” him from the violence and alcoholism on the reserve. However, by connecting to his territories and the political struggles of his Algonquin community, Nipishish discovers that his reserve is his home. Monica has only her memories and a few letters to connect her to home in *No Time to Say Goodbye*, but believes that she can strengthen her community by returning with the ability to work as a teacher. Despite facing abuse from the school administrators and failing to receive an adequate education in reading and writing, Monica remains hopeful even though her circumstances indicate that her goals may not be possible. Alexie’s Junior decides to attend public school off the reservation, and although he still physically lives on the reservation, he is emotionally separated from his community and cast as an outsider. Junior asserts his own agency by using the Western education system to preserve his own feelings of hope for the future. He integrates into several groups within the Euro-American school community, and he also discovers that he feels strongly connected with the people of his Spokane community. These four protagonists feel the weight of colonialism inhibiting their choices in life, and although they seek to regain control of their futures and the future of their communities, the socio-economic and political realities within the novels suggest their hopes for the future will be difficult to achieve.

Research Questions

In my thesis, I explore how Aboriginal and Western education systems shape the protagonists’ sense of identity and community. I am interested in how the main characters navigate educational systems by asserting their own agency, and what effect their decisions have on their lives. How are the identities of the characters affected by the education system they are part of? What political implications is education afforded in the texts? How do the

characters navigate Aboriginal and Euro-American communities and education systems?

What hopes or suggestions for the future of the education of Aboriginal children and youth are being shown?

Definition of Terms

The language of the European colonizers arguably had a stronger impact on Native North American communities than any rifle or weapon. By imposing European languages on Native North Americans through treaties and residential schools, cultures, perceptions, and attachments to land were appropriated. Words themselves come with connotations and implications that create, reflect, and define power relations among groups of people, and, therefore I have carefully chosen the terms I will use to describe key concepts featured in my study. Some of my choices were difficult and were made in order to suit the needs of my thesis. I list the key terms for my thesis in alphabetical order.

Aboriginal Education refers to the education systems of Aboriginal peoples. For the purposes of my thesis, this term will refer only to education systems under the full control of Aboriginal peoples and will not refer to education systems developed for Aboriginal peoples by outsiders.

Aboriginal Peoples will be used to signify the real or fictional Indigenous people being discussed where a culturally specific term (e.g., Anishinabe) is not used. I will not, for reasons of accuracy, change the terminology used within quotes from other sources. A capital letter is used with this term to signify that the people being referred to are part of a nation.

Contemporary Native North American literature refers to the publication date of the primary works (they were published after 2000) and not the historical setting of the novels.

Dominant Culture signifies the non-Aboriginal people involved in the histories and narratives of the books, often Euro-Canadians and Euro-Americans.

Indigenous Peoples will be used to signify the historical or fictional people being discussed where a culturally specific term (e.g., Anishinabe) is not used.

Indigenous (Literary) Theories signify the critical literary theories developed by Aboriginal scholars. The scholars I discuss are primarily North American. The term is plural to indicate the many voices and different approaches emerging in the field at this time. This term will be used interchangeably with “Native North American Critical Theories.”

Native North American will be used to signify the real or fictional people being discussed where a culturally specific term (e.g., Anishinabe) is not used.

Native North American Critical Theories signify the critical literary theories developed by Aboriginal scholars. This term will be used interchangeably with “Indigenous (Literary) Theories.”

Settler Society signifies the non-Aboriginal people involved in the histories and narratives of the books, often Euro-Canadians and Euro-Americans.

Ways of Knowing refers to the worldview of the characters whether Aboriginal or of the dominant culture.

Western Education signifies systems of education imposed upon Aboriginal people by the dominant culture or outsiders to the Aboriginal community. This includes residential schools and public schools. As the literature review indicates, many band schools are at present hindered by the administrative policies of the Canadian and American governments, a hindrance which is also demonstrated in *Good for Nothing* and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. The band schools under discussion are not controlled in full by Aboriginal peoples and fall under the category of Western education for the purposes of my thesis.

Western Theories refer to theories derived from European schools of thought.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Aboriginal children's and young adults' literature is representing history and social issues in ways that challenge misconceptions and misinformation that dominate popular literature and common beliefs about Aboriginal peoples. The first section of the literature review, "Remembering and Redefining: A Brief History of Education and Aboriginal Peoples," outlines the history of education systems affecting Indigenous peoples in North America. This section begins with an overview of traditional Aboriginal education followed by discussions of Western education systems including residential schools, integration into public schools, and band schools and public schools today. The historical summary examines the existing scholarship about education and Aboriginal peoples in order to give a context for the historical information in the primary sources analyzed in my thesis, and to address the specific social realities that the books comment on in regard to education. I believe that understanding the struggles Aboriginal nations face requires knowledge of historical and contemporary colonial practices and the resistance of Aboriginal nations to these practices. Therefore, I have included the history of North American education of Aboriginal peoples in my review.

The second section, "Rooting Colonial Myths: Indigenous Themes in Children's Literature," explores the use of stereotyped images of Aboriginal peoples, cultures, and histories in children's literature. This section is included to provide an understanding of how Indigenous peoples have been represented in children's literature, and to address the significant role that children's literature has had in shaping North American history. The final section, "Debunking Colonial Myths: Indigenous Children's Literature," reviews developments in Aboriginal writing for children and young adults to establish the place of

Sherman Alexie, Louise Erdrich, Michel Noël, and Sylvia Olsen among contemporary Aboriginal writers for children.

Remembering and Redefining: A Brief History of Education and Aboriginal Peoples

This section discusses traditional Aboriginal education, residential schools, integration into public schools, and finally band schools and public schools today.

Aboriginal Education

Education was a life-long process that began at birth and continued on through to later life. Through it, each person learned who they were, who their people were and how they needed to relate to each other and the physical world around them. (Hare 412)

Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States used traditional teaching methods before and after the missionaries and settlers arrived in North America. As James Rodger Miller writes in *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools*, the Aboriginal nations across North America did not have a homogenous method of teaching and learning, but they did “share a common philosophical or spiritual orientation, as well as a similar approach” (16). Ernie Crey (Sto:lo) and Suzanne Fournier also emphasize the diversity among Aboriginal peoples in North America and the “remarkable commonality” (52) in approaches to child rearing in *Stolen From Our Embrace: The Abduction of First Nations Children and the Restoration of Aboriginal Communities*. Crey and Fournier note that children were placed “at the heart of a belief system closely aligned with the natural world” (52), and they credit this philosophy with the economic and social survival of Indigenous nations that relied on the ability to pass down spiritual and practical knowledge to the young. This valuing of children as integral parts of the community led to many similar features in child-rearing in Indigenous nations across North America.

Among the commonalities found in Indigenous education was a more informal and holistic approach to teaching. Spirituality was seamlessly integrated into the instruction given to children (Miller 16; Indian, “Gathering”). Miller also considers “the three L’s” – looking, listening, and learning (16) – to be vital components of Aboriginal education, because children were expected to watch and listen to the adults of the community and then apply what knowledge was gained to their own routines and way of being. In *First Nations Schools: Triumphs and Struggles*, Verna J. Kirkness (Cree) and Sheena Selkirk Bowman also note the role of all members of the community as teachers of the children. She further explains that silence was considered “the cornerstone of character” (6), thus making listening an important skill and part of teaching. Children were not taught in school rooms or in a contained space disconnected from their communities, but instead learned from multi-modal forms of teaching that occurred throughout the day – through drumming and singing, among other methods. Storytelling was one form of imparting teachings central to a child’s development and to cultural transmission. It was used as a way to develop the whole character of the child: intellectual, physical, spiritual, and socio-emotional (Indian, “Gathering”; Hampton 8; Castellano, Davis, and Lahache xiii; Sterling 116). Most Aboriginal nations have stories about tricksters, such as Nanabush and Raven, and these figures continue to teach children traditional values, such as humility, honesty, courage and kindness (Kirkness and Bowman 6) by wittingly or unwittingly reinforcing social values, often through comic events⁴.

Children were expected to learn from adults, and so adults were expected to model appropriate behaviour to the young (Miller 17; Sterling 116). Miller describes the adult role as the “shaping of behaviour by positive example in the home, the provision of subtle guidance

⁴ The trickster does, however, hold more importance than revealing social values through humour for Indigenous cultures. For more information, see Gerald Vizenor “Trickster Discourse: Comic and Tragic Themes in Native American Literature.”

through games [...] and, as the child neared early adulthood, the utilization of more formal and ritualized ceremonies to impart the rite-of-passage with due solemnity” (17). Inter-generational respect was the foundation of this subtle guidance in childhood development. Land-based learning was also an important component of Indigenous teachings. As Kirkness and Bowman describe it, the land was considered the mother of the people (5). The land was connected to survival, history, spirituality, and way of life among other things, which made teaching in the environment necessary in order to pass on vital information about the land (Hampton 8). The “Gathering Strength” section of the *Indian and Northern Affairs Canada Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996) explains that in the teaching of children, dreams, visions and legends were given as much significance as practical instruction in boat building or other skill-building activities (n.pag.).

This brief description of common features of Aboriginal teachings reveals a stark contrast to the teaching practices and concepts of childhood that the missionary schools and most European educators would bring with them. In Indigenous education, there is no separation of teaching and learning from everyday life, or between play and education (Miller 38), which is in opposition to the formal schooling system of the European settlers in North America. Furthermore, the tendency of the missionary schools to employ harsh punishment, which would later be coupled with the militaristic routine of the residential and industrial schools⁵, constituted features of European instruction that came into direct conflict with Aboriginal education. The harsh punishments were meant to “civilize” and convert the young students (Lomawaima, “The Unnatural” 14). Crey and Fournier also note the European concept of women and children as “chattels of the patriarch” (53) through the seventeenth and

⁵ In Canada, schools that required Aboriginal children to live away from family for several months at a time are generally referred to as residential schools or boarding schools. In the United States the terms “industrial schools” or “boarding schools” are more commonly used to denote this type of school.

eighteenth centuries as a particularly destructive aspect of the European education of Aboriginal peoples because this belief rendered women and children important for market value and as economic supports rather than as integral members of their communities. In “Quaslametko and Yetko: Two Grandmother Models for Contemporary Native Education Pedagogy,” Shirley Sterling (Interior Salish) interviewed her mother about her grandmothers and found that they had fears that the “white school” would not accept their children for who they were and, perhaps even worse, that their children would become like the colonizers and forget their traditions (115). The advent of European-style schooling by the colonizers was recognized, early on, as an attack on Aboriginal cultures. Yet despite the shift in education that was to come with the European colonizers, Aboriginal nations resisted domination by the settler society and have continued to develop their cultures, traditions, and educational practices.

Residential Schools

A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one [. . .] In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man. ~ Sir Richard Henry Pratt (1892), Founder of Carlisle Industrial School in the United States (Pratt n.pag.)

The residential school took my culture language and my freedom. I know my language and culture and I am still scared to use it to this day. It hurts deep inside. I am willing to take it a day at a time. ~ Anonymous survivor of Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia, Canada (Anonymous qtd. in Jack 66)

In North America, education is considered an essential part of individual success and personal growth, and yet for the Indigenous peoples of North America, education systems

have been deliberately used to impede Indigenous success and strength. The earliest settlers used day schools to convert Indigenous peoples to Christianity and to correct what they felt were the “inferior” or “savage” attributes of Indigenous peoples and cultures. Residential schools and industrial schools were then developed with the outright goal of annihilating Indigenous cultures. In the autobiographical novel *Halfbreed*, Métis author Maria Campbell shows the ways in which the public school system of the dominant culture taught young Indigenous children to hate their parents and communities. For Campbell, this negative attitude changed when her *Cheechum* (great grandmother) explained that turning Indigenous communities against each other was a “more powerful weapon than anything else” (47) for the colonizers. For Aboriginal communities across North America, the school has been a site of pain where the settler society could reinforce disenfranchisement and attempt to eradicate the traditions, spirituality, and lifestyle of Indigenous peoples.

In Canada, the commitment to develop residential schools was made after the Nicholas Flood Davin report⁶ of 1879, but as John Milloy reveals in *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879-1986*, the roots of the system were in place much earlier. Day schools, usually run by Christian missionaries, were in place in eastern Canada and the United States as early as the 1600s (Furniss 17; Reyhner and Eder 19). In *American Indian Education: A History*, Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder explain that after 1611, the Jesuits established missionary schools across southeast Canada and the northeast United States (19), and, as with the later residential schools, they focused the curriculum mainly on prayer and religious instruction with minimal education in reading and writing (20). The work of the day schools, above all, was to convert Aboriginal students to the religion of the missionary, and as such, education in reading and writing was given little attention. The

⁶ *Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds*

oral tradition and teaching practices of Aboriginal communities were not considered legitimate and therefore were not incorporated into the instruction of students at the missionary school.

In “The Unnatural History of American Indian Education,” K. Tsianina Lomawaima (Muskogee-Creek) notes the trend of missionaries to characterize Native North Americans by their propensity for work (14). The missionaries focused on manual labour and vocational training and ignored the arts and sciences. By the 1700s and 1800s, there were Protestant, Quaker, German-speaking Moravian, Russian Orthodox, Presbyterian, and other denominations of missionaries in Canada and the United States (Reyhner and Eder 34). Reyhner and Eder also note that these missionaries did not care to understand Aboriginal child-rearing practices, and instead regarded Aboriginal peoples as “barbarians” who failed to establish discipline and use punishment when raising their children (15). However, scholar William M. Clements observes that a few Jesuit missionaries in northeastern Canada admired the oral storytelling and oratorical skills of the Indigenous peoples they encountered (52). Although the day schools did not enforce the aggressive policy of assimilation that boarding schools did, many missionary workers held colonial attitudes of superiority and sought to eradicate the behaviours and values they felt were barbaric in the Aboriginal communities they worked with.

In Canada, government and religious groups came to feel that day schools could not be successful as “the influence of the wigwam was stronger than the influence of school” (Davin qtd. in Milloy 24). The Bagot Commission of 1842 reported that reserve communities were in a “half-civilized state” (qtd. in Milloy 12), which led to a belief that children would not be able to “civilize” while under the influence of the adults of whom it was believed that “little could be done” (Davin 2). The Davin Report promoted this belief and urged the establishment of a residential school system, which Davin argued would civilize children and provide

Aboriginal peoples with the “better” moral grounding, spiritual outlook and value system of the colonizers (14). In *Victims of Benevolence: The Dark Legacy of the Williams Lake Residential School*, Elizabeth Furniss attributes the paternalistic attitude of Euro-Canadian community members and officials (like Davin) to a refusal to acknowledge Indigenous governments, social and political institutions, technologies and intellect, and artistic traditions. Instead, they perceived a “child-like, savage race” (Furniss 15). The attitude of superiority and the desire to destroy Aboriginal cultures and value systems found in the two reports were key factors in Canada’s creation of the residential school system.

The Indian Act of 1876 also played a significant role in the rise of the residential school system in Canada. The Act made Aboriginal children wards of the state (Furniss 22; Kuokkanen 701) and abolished self-government of Indigenous peoples in Canada, thus placing Aboriginal children under the control and so-called responsibility of the federal government and its education system. The Act granted exclusive authority of the government of Canada over Indigenous peoples and the lands reserved for them. The inclusion of education as a governmental responsibility was also meant to affect Indigenous land holdings. Crey and Fournier note the land concerns of new European homesteaders across Canada and their fears of the Aboriginal population in the 1820s, which began a movement in the government to find more inventive ways to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land (Crey and Fournier 53; Furniss 19). In “The Education of American Indians: Policy, Practice and Future Direction,” John Tippiconnic III (Comanche) corroborates that this also occurred in the United States, as he argues that education was an attempt to force Indigenous peoples to relinquish their land, to accept a European concept of individual ownership of land, and to assimilate them into mainstream society (182). The discovery of gold in many parts of the United States led to conflict with the Cherokee in 1828 and with the Lakota and Cheyenne in 1873 among other

tribes whose territories contained gold. The discovery of gold in Indigenous territories also strengthened the desire of the Euro-Americans to take ownership of the land. The possibilities of using an off-reserve Western education system to facilitate the land grab became increasingly appealing as an alternative to warring with Aboriginal nations (Reyhner and Eder 68). By removing Aboriginal children from families and homes, the federal governments of Canada and the United States could break the younger generation's ties to land to make room for new settlers who desired an end to the so-called "Indian problem."

In the United States, boarding schools were in place much longer than in Canada. Davin reports that the policy of "aggressive civilization" (n.pag.) in the United States began with the opening of the Carlisle Indian School under Sir Richard Henry Pratt in 1878. However, when the United States government initially signed treaties with some Indigenous nations including the Cherokee, free public education was included in the negotiation, although it was education deemed "appropriate" for Indigenous peoples as decided by the Europeans (Klug and Whitefield 31; Hale 14). Most schools emphasized farming, industrial, and religious education; however, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, some schools used as instructors tribe members who placed a high value on learning the written language both in English and Aboriginal tongues, especially among the Choctaw and Cherokee (Klug and Whitfield 31). Many Indigenous peoples of this era considered the written word as a way to negotiate culturally, politically, and socially with the settler society and to maintain their own culture in the changing North American landscape. However, Aboriginal peoples did not view writing as a replacement for the oral tradition as a form of cultural transmission. The teaching of tribal languages in a written form was stopped in the late nineteenth century by Commissioner of Indian Affairs J.D.C. Atkins, who abolished the use of tribal languages in school (Klug and Whitfield 31). As in Canada, a host of factors led

to the creation of the boarding school system. An American lawyer and editor, John O’Sullivan, wrote in 1845 that it was “[the American settler society’s] manifest destiny to overspread and possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given [them] for the development of the great experiment in liberty” (qtd. in Hale 4-5). The assumption of superiority in Euro-Canadian settlers is found as well in the Euro-American settlers of the same time.

Tsianina K. Lomawaima argues that the United States industrial schools of the late 1800s and early 1900s were modeled after the Spanish Missions, which focused on manual labour (“The Unnatural” 14). She also argues that Canadian schools were based on the model of Carlisle (14); however, although Davin praised Carlisle in his report, this boarding school model did not become the standard for the Canadian residential schools (Milloy 13). The partnership between Church and State was a key feature of the Canadian system, a partnership that was not followed as rigorously in the United States⁷. In the United States, however, there were two types of boarding schools – namely the more prevalent state-directed schools and the contracted church-run schools (Furniss 25-26). Tippiconnic explains that the main “civilizing” goals of the industrial schools in the United States were to implement training programs based on “individualism, sedentary farming, and reading and writing in English” (182), and were less concerned with religious conversion.

Carlisle Indian School was the first off-reservation government-run boarding school in the United States (Reyhner and Eder 132) and was housed in old army barracks in Pennsylvania. Pratt believed that he could civilize students, in effect “kill the Indian [...] and save the man” (Pratt n.pag.); he easily gained the support of the town and government to

⁷ In his report, Davin argues in favour of the partnership between church and state (unlike the Carlisle Indian School) despite the fact that his research indicated the church and state-run schools in the United States had a noted lack of resources to provide food and adequate conditions for (Furniss 26).

create this school. He had great difficulty, however, in persuading the Lakota and other Aboriginal nations to come to the school (Reyhner and Eder 133). The publicity about Carlisle led to the opening of more schools using Pratt's as the prototype, and then the Haskell Institute became the flagship when the advent of World War I forced the closure of Carlisle (Katanski 2; Reyhner and Eder 149; Hale 16). Although the United States government did institute a boarding school system for Native North Americans, these schools required parental permission to take children out of state after an 1894 policy revision (Reyhner and Eder 149). This was not the case in Canada, where children were routinely moved across provincial and territorial borders without permission of their parents or guardians.

The coming of World War I, and thus the need for army barracks, led to the closure of Carlisle in 1918, although other industrial schools remained open in the United States. Reyhner and Eder note that at this point in history many Americans felt that the idea of removing Aboriginal children from their homes was no longer a solution to the "Indian problem" (147). The report, "The Problem of Indian Administration" (1928), more commonly known as the "Meriam Report" after the team leader, Lewis Meriam, was a key factor in turning opinions against boarding schools in the United States (Stahl n.pag.). Wayne Stahl notes that the report found the schools did not adequately equip children for college (n.pag.), but he fails to acknowledge the report's urging of a school curriculum based "on local Indian life, or at least written within the scope of the child's early experiences" ("Meriam" qtd. in Reyhner and Eder 5). As Tippiconnic notes, the Meriam Report did make educational change, but the policy of assimilation still remained intact at this time (182). The boarding schools were used purposefully to counter the philosophies and teachings of Native North American communities, and as such had a detrimental impact on Aboriginal peoples.

The assimilationist education policies developed in the late 1800s and early 1900s were merely the beginning of the traumas inflicted upon students by the residential and boarding school systems. Physical, sexual, spiritual, cultural, and emotional abuse marked many students' experiences at the schools, as did the inability to be with family. The legacy of residential and industrial schools continues to reverberate through Indigenous communities in a number of ways including alcoholism, suicide, sexual abuse, loss of language and culture, loss of parenting skills, and dependency issues (Furniss 31). On September 8, 2000, the United States' Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) made an apology to the Indigenous peoples in America for the misdeeds of the Agency, including the industrial school system. The Assistant Secretary of the BIA at the time, Kevin Gover (Pawnee), apologized for the acts committed against children in the industrial schools known for "brutalizing them emotionally, psychologically, physically and spiritually" (162). Eight years later, on June 11, 2008, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper stood before Parliament to apologize for the federal government's role in the residential school system of Canada. This apology recognized the long-term damage that the schools caused and the government's role in the mission to assimilate Aboriginal peoples, in effect to "kill the Indian in the child" (Scott qtd. in Harper n.pag.)⁸. The apology, as Harper has acknowledged, has the potential to create a more positive relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, "a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history" (n.pag.), but for some survivors, Harper's statements were an unwelcome reminder of the trauma and pain they had suffered. In the United States, Gover's apology was not backed by the rest of Bill Clinton's administration, which led Christopher Buck to observe that "the moment was golden, but the silence was deafening"

⁸ As previously noted, Duncan Campbell Scott, is said to have used this phrase when speaking of the residential schools, although the original author is unknown. In 1920 Scott made it mandatory for all Aboriginal children between 6 and 15 to attend residential school, and threatened jail terms for parents who refused to comply.

(98). There is also something unusual about an Aboriginal man, Gover, apologizing for the crimes committed against him and his people that makes the American apology unsettling.

Despite the painful ironies of the apologies, they reminded North Americans of the significance of the history of the education of Indigenous peoples. The apologies also provided a hope to “really begin the healing” (Buck 123), and for all Canadians and Americans to understand the pain and trauma caused by the industrial and residential school systems.

Assimilation and Public Schools

To deny the past and to refuse to recognize its implications is to distort the present; to distort the present is to take risks with the future that are blatantly irresponsible. (Indian Tribes of Manitoba, qtd. in Abele, Dittburner, and Graham 3)

Resistance to the residential and industrial schools began at their inception in both Canada and the United States. Furniss notes that by the 1860s there was a strong Aboriginal resistance to Christian missionaries (21), and Reyhner and Eder also describe discontent and protest among the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek students in missionary schools in the early 1800s (36-37). This resistance continued on through the residential and industrial school era with many parents withholding or hiding their children from the schools (Kuokkanen 699; Hale 17). This resistance was so prevalent that the government of the United States instigated a policy to withhold rations and annuities from parents who did not send their children to industrial school (Reyhner and Eder 47), and in Canada, jail terms were given to parents who did not comply and send their children away. Students also resisted the residential school system by running away, practising their culture in secret, and rebelling outright against the school authorities (Kuokkanen 699). In *Learning to Write “Indian”: The Boarding School*

Experience and American Indian Literature, Amelia V. Katanski describes the ways students constructed the written language to project a tribal worldview as a means of resisting the agenda of assimilation, and as a way of maintaining a voice when the system was attempting to silence them. The struggle of students to maintain identity within the residential and industrial schools often came with a harsh punishment if they were caught (Haig-Brown 82)⁹, and yet many students resisted the authorities despite this. Eventually, this resistance would create a change in the education policies for Aboriginal peoples of Canada and the United States.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the drive to integrate Aboriginal students into the public schools increased exponentially. The economic impacts of World War II rendered the industrial and residential schools more dilapidated and neglected than ever; the lack of financial resources in the United States and Canada broke the governments' resolve to maintain the system; and the African American, Chicano, and Aboriginal civil rights movements were changing perceptions about minority groups across North America (Furniss 30; Milloy 192; Reyhner and Eder 8). Jan Hare (Anishinabe), in "Aboriginal Families and Education: Coming Full Circle," also notes that Indigenous resistance was responsible for putting pressure on the Canadian government to end the residential school system (419), which also occurred in the United States. In the 1950s, the United States government was terminating its responsibility to Native North Americans, which would at once end the separate school system and nullify the land rights of Aboriginal nations. In 1951, amendments were made to Canada's Indian Act, which stated that whenever possible Aboriginal children should be educated with other children (Milloy 189). Although the other amendments to the

⁹ In *Resistance and Renewal*, Celia Haig-Brown details the many acts of rebellion in residential schools and sometimes the punishment that came as a result. The discipline was harsh, with survivors recalling whippings (on the bare bottom in public), withholding of food, wearing of a wetted bed sheet on the head (all day), and head shaving as some of the common practices.

Act shut down any hopes for Aboriginal self-government, education proved to be an exception from the other more restrictive amendments wherein a shift from residential schools to integration was being made.

The closing of the residential schools progressed more slowly in Canada than the United States. Although many schools closed throughout the 1950s and then the 1970s, a number remained open, with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, in “Backgrounder: The Residential School System,” citing the last federally run school as closing in 1996. Kirkness and Bowman note that this plan was “introduced and continued with little or no consultation with First Nations parents and children or the non-Native community” (12). Furthermore no adjustments to the public school curriculum were made for the Aboriginal students entering them (Kirkness and Bowman 12; Milloy 195). Milloy cites a lack of planning and consultation as a hindrance to the success and expediency of integration (190), and Andrea Bear Nicholas (Maliseet) further explains that the colonial attitude had not changed. The residential school system was recommended for closure because it had failed to assimilate Indigenous students – not because of the prevalence of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse in the schools (Nicholas 13). No program was put in place to link Aboriginal communities with local non-Aboriginal school boards and churches, and the Catholic Church was insistent on maintaining a culturally segregated education system (Milloy 190). Kirkness and Bowman describe this early integration period as a “program of assimilation” (14) and Milloy supports the argument that “education remained assimilation” (195), especially given the lack of preparation and accommodation for Aboriginal students and continuation of control by the non-Aboriginal authorities and leaders (Nicholas 14).

In the United States, a small number of government reports produced recommendations that slowly changed the policy on industrial schools, beginning with the

Meriam report in 1928. Although the report advocated for relevant curriculum, when the closure of boarding schools began post World War II, this recommendation was ignored and has only started to be implemented in recent years (Klug and Whitfield 34). As in Canada, many boarding schools remained in operation for years after the initial push to terminate them, but “rapid progress” was made through the Johnson O’Malley Act, which created a contract system with Aboriginal bands to subsidize education, medical attention, and other services provided by the United States government (Reyhner and Eder 248-249). The move toward integration was riddled with problems, as the decision was made from a position of superiority and paternalistic control. The United States Congress believed it would be setting Indigenous peoples “free” by terminating their reservations, and ending their status as wards of the state (Reyhner and Eder 235). This meant that the states were to assume responsibility for the education of Native North Americans through public schools, a practice which began in the 1950s (Reyhner and Eder 236). The termination policy also meant that many Aboriginal tribes lost their reservation lands. Again, education was wrapped into a plan to extricate Aboriginal peoples from their lands. In the 1970s, protests and civil lawsuits led Congress to declare that the termination policy was a failure, but many tribes had already lost their land permanently (Reyhner and Eder 236).

The social justice movements of the 1960s and the work of advocates like Martin Luther King led to more funding for equal educational opportunities for minorities in the United States (Hale 30). The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) was created in 1969 to “give American Indians and Alaska Natives a national voice in their struggle to improve access to educational opportunity” (National n.pag.). However, the integration process in the United States was marked by staggering dropout rates and a lack of planning to adjust the school curriculum for Indigenous students (Klug and Whitfield 44; Hale 33).

The literature shows that the period of integration in Canada and the United States was in fact another attempt to assimilate Aboriginal peoples into mainstream culture. It was another form of colonial expansion in which education served to further disenfranchise Native North Americans. More importantly, Aboriginal communities and organizations from across North America began to protest the injustices of colonialism at this time. The continued resistance of Indigenous communities to the governments' policies on education played a role in ending the residential and industrial school systems, and Indigenous peoples remained vocal during the assimilation period through civil rights activism and the organization of the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations or AFN) in Canada and the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the United States. While the approach to protest of these organizations in the 1970s would change over the years, they would continue to instigate change in the education systems for Aboriginal peoples in North America.

Band Schools and Public Schools Today

[Indigenous] independence education will be based on a marriage of the past and the present. It will honor our cultures, which include our values, our languages, and our peoples' contributions to the development and progress of this vast country. Most importantly, you will have found in your quest for a meaningful education for your school or community that the answers you have been seeking can be found within yourselves, within your own communities. (Kirkness, "Our" 15)

The 1960s marked a pivotal shift for Native North Americans and their struggle to regain control of their children's education. Social activism through the AFN and AIM brought attention to Aboriginal issues, and education remained high on the list of both groups' priorities. Education was included in the controversial "Trail of Broken Treaties 20 Point-Position Paper" created by AIM in 1972, and the AFN specifically addressed education in the

1972 report “Indian Control of Indian Education.” Despite the significant shift in the government and public mindset in the 1960s and 1970s, Indigenous peoples continue in this first decade of the twenty-first century to struggle to gain the ability not only to control, but also to redefine education for their children so that it aligns with their own cultures, traditions, and value systems.

In 1969, the “Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy,” or the “White Paper,” relinquished control of residential schools from the federal to the provincial level (Battiste viii). The government’s White Paper sparked a tough response from the AFN. They established a committee to create a national position on education to be expressed in the Red Paper Policy, which was subsequently turned into the report, “Indian Control of Indian Education” (Battiste viii; Kirkness and Bowman 15). The policy was based on two main principles, namely parental responsibility and local control (Kirkness and Bowman 15), and stated that the purpose of the education of Indigenous children was to salvage Aboriginal languages, cultures, and societies, and to transmit those cultures and distinctive worldviews to the future generations (Battiste ix). In 1973, the Canadian government accepted “Indian Control of Indian Education” in principle (Battiste ix; Calliou 1), and yet real change to the system has been slow to occur.

In the United States, the Kennedy Report of 1969 termed the Bureau of Indian Affairs and school system for Indigenous peoples a “national tragedy” (Tippiconnic 184). In fact, several reports from Meriam onward reveal the same level of failure and irresponsibility. Tippiconnic argues that these documents had little impact on changing the “national tragedy,” because they were politically motivated and focused on funding and spending rather than teaching and learning (184). The integration was in many ways just pushing the students from one institution to the next without changing over administration and control to Aboriginal

bands (Reyhner and Eder 258). Many students did demonstrate and protest against the problems that arose from the lack of planning, and some, as in the case of four public schools on a Navajo Reservation in Arizona, were able to enforce more control of education for their communities through this protest (Reyhner and Eder 258).

Tribal leaders were also displeased with the lack of change to the curriculum (Hale 33), so in the United States they took advantage of the political climate of the 1960s to make a partnership with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to create tribal schools (Hale 35). Little progress was made in actually changing the control of education even with the Tribally Controlled Schools Act of 1988 that reiterated the need for tribal control in education in the United States (Hale 74). Tippiconnic notes permanent administrative positions in education were not given to Aboriginal peoples in the United States until 1987. The funding and conditions in band schools remain insufficient, and the governance and community control of these schools are still contested in the United States (Klug and Whitfield 47).

In Canada, in 1988, the AFN completed a three-year study discussed in the report *Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future. A Declaration of First Nations Jurisdiction over Education*. The study found that Indigenous communities had been given little control over education, and that what was given had only been on an administrative rather than restructuring level (Battiste xi; Nicholas 16). Marie Battiste (Mi'kmaq) cites insufficient funding, underdeveloped services, and a lack of funding for redefining education (xii) as hindering the band and public school systems. Many also argue that a Eurocentric worldview pervades the structure and teaching within band schools, which leads to high dropout rates and an overall failure of the education system to work for Indigenous students (Battiste xi; Hampton 8; Sterling 13). Ron Mackay and Lawrence Miles cite forty-two issues as giving rise to the high dropout rates of Aboriginal students, including lack of focus on

language skills, parental support, and home – school communication as the key issues for stakeholders (161).

The work of scholars in Canada and the United States shows a continued failure of the education system to meet the needs of Aboriginal students and the hopes of Aboriginal communities. This is especially evident when Indigenous peoples are unable to restructure the nature of education in band schools and when there is inadequate funding in place. The findings repeatedly demonstrate that Aboriginal education must be controlled by Aboriginal peoples to reflect the distinctive cultures, languages, and worldviews of Aboriginal communities.

Rooting Colonial Myths: Indigenous Themes in Children’s Literature

Many of the Images we hold as adults are obtained in childhood and are never abandoned: the Imaginary Indian is very much an Indian of childhood. (Francis 144)

Throughout North American history, Western education policies were developed to systematically “kill the Indian in the child.” Cultural appropriation through the production of the images of the Wild Indian and Noble Savage was also a strategy of the dominant culture to “kill the Indian” and to re-imagine the role of the settler society in history. These images developed the identity of the settler society as just and deserving, and attempted to destroy the authentic identities and cultures of Indigenous peoples. Children’s literature became a vehicle for the mass production and distribution of these images, and embedded these false identities in the Canadian and American psyches. Representation of Indigenous peoples in popular culture, the media, and literature by non-Indigenous authors has been so insidious that generations of North American children were deluded into believing that the main occupation

of Native North Americans was to “kill people”¹⁰ (Hirschfelder, Molin, and Wakin 4). Scholars and critics such as Debbie Reese (Nambe Pueblo) and the members of Oyate, an online Aboriginal children’s literature organization, have dedicated much of their work to exposing this proliferation of misinformation in children’s literature in accessible online websites, journals, and books. However, flawed children’s literature of the past continues to be used in the present where it is promoted as “classic” literature, and the publishing industry also continues to support literature stereotyping Indigenous peoples.

From the early times of colonial exploration came an intense fear and fascination with the peoples of “unknown” lands. In *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner (Robinson Crusoe)* written in 1719, Daniel Defoe uses this fear and fascination to create what is often referred to as the first English novel. The book was read by children from its earliest publications in chapbooks, and fuelled the image of the Wild Indian through the cannibalistic and violent tendencies of the Indigenous inhabitants portrayed therein. According to Deirdre Kwiatek in her Ph.D dissertation, *Playing Indian: A Consideration of Children's Books by Native North Americans, 1900-1940*, *Robinson Crusoe* created a model of literature based on the notion of a vast expanse of land inhabited by a dangerous and elusive group of uncivilized heathens (21). In Canada the model of Defoe’s isolation story is explicitly evident in Catharine Parr Traill’s *Canadian Crusoes: A Tale of the Rice Lake Plains*, published in 1852. This novel is considered the first Canadian children’s book by Sheila Egoff and Judith Saltman (6). Egoff and Saltman concur with Kwiatek’s assertion of Defoe’s model as a standard for children’s literature, albeit through a colonial perspective of literature and history, when they note that the “unfriendly natives” (6) of

¹⁰ In *American Indian Stereotypes in the World of Children: A Reader and Bibliography*, Arlene Hirschfelder, Paulette Fairbanks Molin, and Yvonne Wakin cite a study conducted in 1974 in which kindergarteners repeatedly described Native North Americans as killing people as part of their daily activities. Fifth graders used less overtly hostile diction to describe Indigenous peoples, but still described warlike and “wild like” activities (Hirschfelder, Molin, and Wakin 4).

Trill's novel are the "irresistible stuff of the isolation story" (6). The descriptions in Trill's novel of Indigenous peoples who "regarded deeds of blood and cruelty as among the highest of human virtues" (174) have played an unfortunate role in perpetuating colonial myths about the history of North America and the Aboriginal peoples who live in Canada. Defoe's conceptualization of Indigenous peoples and unexplored lands would also become the basis for the popular dime novels produced for children in the 1800s. The most common theme of these books was of savages terrorizing the settler society in a bloodthirsty, sexualized, and graphically violent manner (Kwiatek 19; Zimmerman n.pag.).

James Fenimore Cooper and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow were prominent authors in the production of books for children about the Wild West, and their work served as precursors to the motifs and themes found in the dime novels. Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* was published as an abridged children's classic in 1900, and many other similar novels began to appear in abridged editions around this time (Kwiatek 12). In the Stanford online resource, "Guided Tour of a Cover," Linda Zimmerman explains that Cooper also set the precedent for dime novels through *The Leather Stocking Tales*, a collection of stories that romanticized colonial expansion and encroaching civilization (n.pag.). Because of these books, Kwiatek writes, "the Native American Indian had become synonymous with adventure" (13), a sense which was heightened by the assumption that Indigenous peoples were emotionally and psychologically children themselves (Kwiatek 13; Francis 144). For these reasons, the Native North American adventure was considered, by educators and the general public of the time, as a perfect model to fit with the intellect and capacity of children.

Kwiatek explains that in 1860, *Seth Jones; or The Captives of the Frontier* by Edward Ellis (more commonly known by his pen name Captain James Fenimore Cooper Adams) was met with great popularity. Ellis' dime novel depicted Native North Americans as intensely

violent, emotional, and aggressive (Kwiatek 18). Kwiatek argues that *Seth Jones* was born from the stereotype of the savages created over one hundred years before in *Robinson Crusoe*, continued in the works of Cooper, and intensified in the dime novel genre (17). The barbaric image of the Native North American in *Seth Jones* was then to become a pillar of the dime novels about Western expansion and the Native North American (Kwiatek 17), a genre in which the myth of Native savagery was to reach epic proportions (Barclay n.pag.). Kwiatek argues that the “Indian was an exotic and exciting character to keep the reader turning pages and buying books” (17). Zimmerman further demonstrates that the idea of western expansion was an equally exciting motif of the books. She attributes the popularity of Buffalo Bill in dime novels between the 1860s and 1880s to the rapid westward expansion by Euro-Americans of the time. The embellished accounts of Buffalo Bill’s life and exploits in the dime novels, therefore, became a platform from which to reassert “the values and attitudes of an increasingly capitalist, urban, industrialist society” (Zimmerman n.pag.). The settler society forcibly removed land from Aboriginal inhabitants, and then created a myth of the “Indian” in children’s literature to make the exploits of colonization palatable, and to make history marketable.

The dime novels and abridged editions reflect the historical belief in Manifest Destiny and Anglo superiority; they serve not only to justify the genocidal actions taken against Aboriginal peoples by the settler society of North America, but also to erase them from cultural consciousness. The Civil War in the United States and rapid industrialization in the 1880s led to a decline in popularity of the Western stories in dime novels, which were replaced instead with stories of urban life (Zimmerman n.pag.). However, Indigenous peoples and history would continue to be shaped to suit the needs of the dominant culture over the next one hundred years in children’s literature and latterly in popular media for children and adults.

In *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, Daniel Francis explores the ways in which public symbols and images have shaped the way non-Aboriginal people view Native North Americans. He looks at everything from the Pontiac car to the wooden-Indian of cigar stores, and laments the tendency of non-Aboriginal people to create an understanding of Indigenous peoples from what they see “in books, at public performances, at country fairs, in museums and schoolrooms, at summer camps and in the movies” (86).

Francis presents the case of Edward Thompson Seton who wrote *Two Little Savages* in 1903, in which a young boy, Yan, “escapes his heartless domestic world by going native” (146).

This book departed from common beliefs of the day about Indigenous peoples in that Seton promoted Native North Americans as appropriate models for children, because he felt they lived in harmony with nature and shared within their community more than other people (Francis 149). Francis argues that Seton and author E. Pauline Johnson (Mohawk) shifted attitudes about Indigenous peoples by encouraging and bringing to popularity a desire to preserve and enjoy the wilderness. Furthermore, these authors created a belief “that the Indian retained qualities that the ‘modern man’ had lost” (Francis 154). Although this new colonial attitude brought forward by the writing of Seton acknowledged that something could be learned from Indigenous peoples, it did so by inventing a new stereotype of the Native North American as a reaction to the fears of living in an increasingly industrial society.

The environmental beliefs and colonial attitude of Seton also reflect the common stereotype of Aboriginal peoples as Noble Savages, but as Francis notes, the school reading materials for children (and most materials for children) still favoured the barbaric image instead. Textbooks have played a large role in creating a myth of colonialism in North America as a just and honourable mission by European settlers and missionaries. Francis found Canadian textbooks at the turn of the twentieth century tended to include very little

information about Aboriginal peoples, and that most of it was negative (161), a tendency that Hirschfelder, Molin, and Wakin have found still remains in children's textbooks today and continues to impede the education of North American children (128). In Francis' view, the textbook authors followed a "patriotic agenda" (161). This agenda mirrors the belief in Manifest Destiny of the American settlers and the similar attitude of superiority found in Canada. This patriotic agenda in textbooks erased the history of aggression by the settler society with a similar stylistic approach to writing as the dime novel publications and other children's literature produced about Indigenous peoples and colonial expansionism. The nonfiction texts and popular stories were made to reinforce a particular type of Canadian and American identity that represented the members of the settler society as both the heroes and natural inheritors of North America.

The myth of North American history perpetuated by children's literature has had far-reaching consequences. Indigenous children and peoples have been bombarded with degrading images and writing about who they are, and much of the dominant society has grown up believing these stereotypes. The images found on television programs and in children's media, through characters like Chief Thunderthud and Nightwolf¹¹, make a lasting impact on how children view Indigenous peoples (Francis 144) and how they view the history of North America. The 1950s was a decade that solidified colonial myths about Indigenous peoples and history through the popularity and use of two distinct images. These images of the stoic and Noble Savage were popularized through characters like Tonto as he appeared in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto* television and book series for children. At the same time, images of barbaric and Wild Indians were reinforced through skirmishes and encounters between the so-called heroes and the Aboriginal population, as in the representation of the Comanche

¹¹ Chief Thunderthud was on the *Howdy Doody Show* and Nightwolf is a character in the game *Mortal Combat*.

Nation in John Ford's 1956 movie, *The Searchers*. Beverly Slapin recalls that the images in popular media at this time were so prevalent that she had nightmares of being attacked by Aboriginal peoples ("Introduction" 1). Counter to the research revealing the themes of the Noble Savage and Wild Indian in children's literature of the mid-twentieth century, Donald Barclay believes that books of this era go "too far" in presenting favourable images of Native North Americans (n.pag.). He argues that alcoholism and poverty are ignored, and critiques the idea that Indigenous children are "willing participants in subsistence living" (Barclay n.pag.). Although he concedes that "sugar coating" of family life is common for children's literature before the 1970s, he fails to acknowledge the research that directly contradicts his assertion of "favourable" presentations (eg., Francis; Kwiatek; van Ginhoven; Norris; Stott, *Native*; Reese; Oyate; Monroe; Day; Abington-Pitre). Barclay also fails to acknowledge that the social problems he mentions are a product of injuries caused by the settler society, rather than part of an inherently "complete picture" (n.pag.) of Indigenous life.

The 1950s and 1960s were also characterized by a growing number of Aboriginal myths being rewritten for children by authors like Christie Harris, James Houston, and Dorothy Reid (Wolf and DePasquale 90). In "Home and Native Land: A Study of Canadian Aboriginal Picture Books by Aboriginal Authors," Doris Wolf and Paul DePasquale (Mohawk) reveal the significance of Tse-Shaht author and illustrator, George Clutesi, as he began to reconnect Aboriginal peoples to their cultures and traditions through the retelling of myths in his first book, *Son of Raven, Son of Deer* (1967). They believe that the publication of tales and legends in the past forty years has played a large role in the resurgence of Aboriginal identity and cultures (Wolf and DePasquale 90). However, the frequent retelling of myths by non-Aboriginal authors and illustrators has been a great point of contention, with some believing that stories cannot be owned and must be shared, while others believe the cultural

and spiritual significance of Indigenous stories cannot be shared adequately or appropriately by an outsider. Jon C. Stott also argues that the “western literary tradition is essentially a product of patterns of thought which have dominated European life for so long, it can never be an appropriate vehicle for presenting any other culture” (“Spirit” 199). The important role of Indigenous myths to convey cultural material and traditions, coupled with the insidious roots of non-Aboriginal representations of Indigenous peoples, makes the retelling of myths by non-Aboriginal authors like Paul Goble yet another disturbing perpetuation of the colonial mindset.

The American civil rights movement and worldwide activism of the 1960s spawned a change in attitudes about children and books because many educators came to believe that all children have a right to see their identity and culture reflected positively in reading materials (Seale 11; Haun 36). Although more appropriate cultural diversity can be found in children’s materials published today, educators and publishers continue to hold tight to literature that is deemed “classic” or canonical work. The 1941 novel, *The Matchlock Gun* by Walter Edmonds, which contains intensely stereotypical characterizations of Aboriginal peoples, made the “We the People Bookshelf on Courage” on the 2003 / 2004 American Library Association (ALA) and National Endowment for the Humanities reading list. Even more unfortunate has been the publication of *My Heart is on the Ground: The Diary of Nannie Little Rose, a Sioux Girl* (1999) by Anne Rinaldi, a book whose cultural and historical errors have left children’s literature scholars in disbelief (eg., Molin; Grant; Oyate; Reese, *American*; Thompson). Barclay argues that “one person’s stereotype can be another person’s cultural virtue” (n.pag.) and asserts that there may be something to learn from stereotypical materials of the past. Melissa K. Thompson, on the other hand, wonders whether adults are actually “learned enough themselves to recognize the racist stereotypes, lack of historical context and prevalence of the white supremacy myth in their children's books on Amerinds” (369). From

Seth Jones to Rinaldi's highly controversial work, the myths of the history of colonization persist. Images of Aboriginal characters that are violent, ignorant devil worshippers, or part of a vanished noble race continue to exist in what is produced for children today. These images promote, as they always have, a colonial myth that the settler society's actions were and always have been honourable and just.

Debunking Colonial Myths: Indigenous Children's Literature

Native writers are helping native readers use the power of story to recover a past, define a present, and envision a future. (Stott, *Native Americans* 176)

While at conferences or speaking with educators in the Vancouver community, I am frequently told that Indigenous peoples are part of an oral culture incompatible with a writing oriented culture. These colleagues are implying that it is not the fault of educators or publishers that Aboriginal voices are not well-represented on bookshelves, because Aboriginal peoples *tell* stories, they do not *write* them. In truth, Aboriginal peoples have been writing stories and struggling to be published for many years. Although some Indigenous writers are published, even more find that their voices are pushed aside for the many non-Aboriginal authors who write about Aboriginal cultures and history (Keeshig-Tobias 99; Byler 47; Norris 6; Murray 161). Despite these difficulties in the publishing industry, writers like Francis La Flesche (Omaha), E. Pauline Johnson (Mohawk), and Luther Standing Bear (Lakota-Sioux) began publishing books for children and youth over a century ago. The numbers of Aboriginal authors writing children's and young adults' fiction has steadily increased, especially in the past thirty years, as has the entire children's literature industry. The growing quantity of Aboriginal children's and young adults' literature is unlike Aboriginal literature for adults, which many consider a "literature of protest" (eg., Blaeser; Cook-Lynn; La Rocque; Pulitano;

Ruffo; King; Wolf and DePasquale; Warrior; Womack). Instead, Aboriginal children's literature addresses colonialism in an understated manner by focusing on cultural survival and community. Young adult literature holds a stronger connection to the protest literature found in adult writing, which can be seen in the stories written about the education systems imposed on Aboriginal peoples by the dominant society.

The production and publishing of Native North American literature, particularly in the novel form, increased exponentially after N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1968 for *House Made of Dawn*. In *Native Americans in Children's Literature*, Jon C. Stott argues that before Momaday's work Indigenous writers believed that the novel genre was a literary vehicle for Europeans to express their views (146), and therefore was not an appropriate vehicle for Indigenous perspectives. After Momaday's breakthrough, the door was opened for writers such as Louise Erdrich (Anishinabe), Gerald Vizenor (Anishinabe), Maria Campbell (Métis), Jeanette Armstrong (Okanagan), and Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo) to use the novel form to express their own particular worldview. Aboriginal picture books remain the fastest growing genre of Aboriginal children's literature (Wolf and DePasquale 87), but young adult fiction is increasingly found in the novel form.

Early Aboriginal writing for children and youth can be found in the late 1800s and early 1900s in the works of Francis La Flesche, Luther Standing Bear, and Zitkala-Sa (Yankton-Sioux) among others. Kwiatek notes the influence of early publishers in manipulating Indigenous writing to turn it into works for children. For example, Mourning Dove (Interior Salish) envisioned a "sophisticated collection" of legends (Kwiatek 56), which the editors, Lucullus Virgil McWhorter and Heister Dean Guie¹², changed to produce a manuscript more in line with fairy tales and fables commonly associated with children's

¹² McWhorter and Guie were independent editors and requested the advice of the manager of Lowman and Handford's book department on where to submit the manuscript once they had completed it (Kwiatek 66-68).

reading (Kwiatek 59). Kwiatek attributes this occurrence to two factors: first in the belief of the time that Aboriginal peoples were themselves like children, and second, that myths or Native North American stories were considered more appropriate for children than adults. Despite attitudes of the publishing industry and dominant society, some Aboriginal writers were able to publish children's and young adults' literature that they had created intentionally for those age groups (e.g., La Flesche; Standing Bear; Zitkala-Sa).

Wolf and DePasquale spent four years working on a comprehensive bibliography of Canadian Aboriginal children's literature by Aboriginal authors. They included books published from 1967¹³ to 2007, and have found approximately 300 books by over 125 different authors with seventy percent being fiction and seventy-five percent of all of the books being picture books (Wolf & DePasquale 89). This pattern suggests that young adult novels are developing at a much slower rate than other genres for Aboriginal writers, although writing for young adults has increased rapidly since the 1970s. Wolf and DePasquale's work does show a marked increase in the publishing of Aboriginal works since the 1960s as compared to the more scant Aboriginal writings that Kwiatek discusses in her examination of publications from the early 1900s.

In "The American Indian Renaissance and Contemporary Young Adult Literature," Paulette Molin (Minnesota Chippewa) also traces a rise in writing for a young adult readership by Aboriginal authors from 1974 to 2004 in the United States and Canada. She refers to the intense social activism that occurred in Canada and the United States in the 1960s and 1970s as a factor leading to the increase of the writing output of Indigenous authors (28). She notes that this increased social activism ignited a literary resurgence through authors like Momaday, whose writing now serves as a standard of tribal literature. Writers like Momaday, Vizenor,

¹³ 1967 was chosen as it was the year Tse-Shaht author, George Clutesi, published *Son of Raven, Son of Deer*.

and Armstrong were soon to be joined by a new generation of authors that included Sherman Alexie, Richard Van Camp (Dogrib/Tlicho), Thomas King, Tomson Highway (Cree), and Susan Power (Standing Rock Sioux), who emerged in the 1990s. These writers have greatly increased the publication of young adult books and many, like Alexie, Erdrich, and Van Camp, write for both adults and young adults.

The dramatic increase of children's and young adults' literature by Aboriginal authors in the 1970s and 1980s can also be attributed to the development of small publishing houses designed specifically for Aboriginal authors. In 1980, Theytus Press of Penticton, British Columbia opened as the first Aboriginal-run publishing press in Canada, and along with a growing number of other independent publishers, like Pemmican, Indian Country Communications, and Curbstone, they have worked to replace the colonial contexts in which the publishing of Aboriginal stories occurred. However, in her Ed.D dissertation, *The Unheard Voices on Turtle Island: A Participatory Research Study*, Áine J. Kyne Norris investigates the absence of books by Native North American authors in libraries and in publishing for children in the United States, and finds that the demand for so-called marketable books, books that publishers believe will sell to a mass audience, forces Indigenous authors to go to small publishing presses, which inevitably decreases their opportunity to be heard and read by a large audience. Norris' participatory research with Native North American children's authors is a fresh approach to the problems faced by Aboriginal authors, and illustrates the multitude of barriers for Aboriginal writers. Through the use of interviews, Norris also brings the voices of the authors directly into the academic discussion of Aboriginal writing. Her findings demonstrate that although small publishing presses have made significant strides in getting Indigenous authors published in their own words, this route may also mean that the books have less access to the mass market.

Indigenous literature can reflect the distinct cultures, languages, and histories of the different Indigenous Nations of North America. In “Cultural Literacy, First Nations and the Future of Canadian Literary Studies,” Renee Hulan and Linda Warley urge literary scholars and educators to accept that Indigenous writing is a distinct literature integral to the study of literature at any grade or academic level in North America. They quote Sauteaux author, Janice Acoose, who explains the important role of Aboriginal authors and their response to non-Aboriginal authors: “Indigenous writers positively and knowledgably construct aspects of their cultures that have been previously misrepresented by outsiders” (qtd. in Hulan and Warley 31). Armand Garnet Ruffo (Ojibwe) also describes some features of Indigenous literature, including a tendency for this writing to be spiritually based, to make a call for liberation, and to affirm cultural survival (“Why” 663). He urges scholars to give the historical / secular in Aboriginal writing the same attention that the mythic / sacred has received in the past (Ruffo, “Why” 667) because the stories reflect cultural survival from colonialism while conveying cultural traditions and information.

Survival and cultural affirmation remain central to Aboriginal writing, although many other ideas are integrated into these themes. In an analysis of the poetry of Simon Ortiz, Jane Hafen describes his writing as “centered on Indigenousness – land, language, and survival” (66), reiterating the significance of worldview through language; the connection to culture and identity through the land; and the survival of these cultural elements as a part of what is Indigenous. Furthermore, Janette Murray and Armand Ruffo argue that Aboriginal writing does not just reflect this survival or connection to land as a general idea. Instead, this literature reflects a specific time and place because the physical environment and history are important to the construction and understanding of Indigenous cultures (Murray 161; Ruffo, “Why” 669). The stories reflect specific peoples, not the Wild Indian or Noble Savage, and as

such they relate to a “specific piece of Mother Earth” (Ruffo, “Why” 669) and the specific cultural and historical information of a Nation, both debunking colonial myths and telling the stories of a particular group of people.

Aboriginal writing not only reflects the stories of Aboriginal peoples, but also the impact of and relationships with the dominant society. Alienation and cultural conflict often arise in Aboriginal writing (Murray 161; Ruffo “Why” 669), which can be seen in stories featuring a young man (and sometimes a female protagonist) who must decide how to live life given their experiences in the dominant society and within their own particular Indigenous culture. Ruffo notes that the return to the community is a common theme as it reaffirms cultural survival from colonialism (“Why” 669). The return to community further shows the struggles that Indigenous peoples face and the ability of Aboriginal peoples to reconnect with their roots after a prolonged absence, which is a theme common to narratives about the residential school experience or about urban Aboriginal peoples living off the reserve. One of the primary texts for this study, *Good for Nothing* by Michel Noël, reflects this journey away from the reserve through residential school and urban living and then the return to the community.

Young adult fiction carries many of the same elements found in the writing for adults by Aboriginal authors, and also seeks to “adapt and redefine” (Wolf and DePasquale 88) Western literary forms. Emma LaRocque (Métis) notes the need to recover land, language, voice, and knowledge as themes in young adult fiction, and Louise Erdrich contends that stories reflect contemporary survivors while at the same time they celebrate the “core” of cultures that have struggled through colonialism (qtd. in Molin 30). Indigenous literature for adults and young adults alike incorporates the ongoing struggle against oppression while centering the stories on the cultural foundations of the author. Wolf and DePasquale note that

while many of the darker themes in adult writing are omitted from children's literature by Aboriginal authors, children's and young adults' literature still reflects the element of protest through secular and political allusions (93). *The Secret of the Dance*, a picture book by Judge Alfred Scow (Kwakwa'wakw) and author Andrea Spalding, depicts Alfred's childhood experience watching his family's potlatch, which was forbidden by law at the time (1935). The book addresses the political struggle of the Kwakwa'wakw nation from the oppressive laws of Canadian the government and Indian Agents. Young adult novels like *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Alexie and *The Heart of a Chief* by Abenaki author Joseph Bruchac engage in political issues by revealing cultural conflict and the strength of the Aboriginal protagonists in overcoming historical, social, and political obstacles.

For children's and young adults' fiction, the most powerful political and historical content can be found in stories exploring the connection between family and land. Both Ruffo and Murray describe family relationships as a means of discovering the strength of the Aboriginal experience and of affirming Aboriginal identity. Wolf and DePasquale confirm that this theme is central to children's and young adults' literature. They argue that the bourgeois patriarchal concept of the family in colonial society was a destructive force affecting Indigenous kinship relations, which were regarded as unnatural by the settler society (Wolf and DePasquale 94-95). Therefore, Aboriginal books for the young "seek to intervene and disrupt" (Wolf and DePasquale 95) the colonial imposition of this Western family concept by presenting culturally relevant models of family and community. In *The Porcupine Year*, Erdrich does this by having the adult characters, including Omakayas' mother Yellow Kettle and Nokomis (her grandmother), participate in adult discussions about leaving their home and protecting themselves from enemy raiders. When the men leave in search of two lost boys, the women remain behind to take care of the children, but "Yellow Kettle knew that she and the

other women might put up a good fight” (Erdrich 79). Yellow Kettle also devises a clever plan to throw their enemies off in case they were to arrive for a surprise attack on the women. Erdrich here develops a female character who plays an important role in decision-making and in protecting and securing the family from violent threats. The character of Yellow Kettle transforms the typical Western notion of the male as taking the lead role in matters of safety. Positive images of Indigenous family relations are here a means of opposing colonial concepts of familial relations and, more importantly, of presenting specific cultural information about family and community.

While many scholars have debated the features of Aboriginal literature for adults (eg., Ruffo, “Why”; Murray; Hulan & Warley) or critiqued the content of Aboriginal themes in books by non-Aboriginal authors (eg., Francis; Hausfeld; vanGinhoven; Monroe; Day; Abington-Pitre; Haun; Nodelman, “At Home”), very few have looked at Indigenous writing for children in its own right. Wolf and DePasquale provide a richly detailed analysis of Indigenous literature, especially of picture books, while Molin directs her book to educators who may be using Indigenous literature in their classrooms or libraries. The online forums of Reese (*American*) and Oyate provide invaluable information for educators, and Reese frequently reviews and critiques books by Indigenous authors. Despite these resources, Indigenous children’s and young adults’ literature remains in the margins of the academic community – either misidentified as multicultural fiction or left aside in favour of critiquing the controversial literature produced by non-Aboriginal writers. Lorelei Cederstorm writes that scholars must study Aboriginal literature because focusing on non-Aboriginal authors does not yield greater insight into Aboriginal literature (145). Furthermore, the history of colonialism can be found in Aboriginal literature, which provides a different perspective and insight into North America’s past. Indigenous perspectives are necessary in order to fully

understand the relationship between the settler society and Aboriginal peoples, and even the true nature of American and Canadian culture. Research into Aboriginal children's and young adults' literature will help deflate the colonial myths found in historical and contemporary books about Aboriginal peoples by non-Aboriginal authors. Furthermore, this literature provides children with rich, complicated, and culturally accurate stories about Indigenous peoples and as such demands our attention. I have chosen to analyze works of Aboriginal literature for my thesis in order to learn from the voices of Aboriginal writers who are providing important insights into North American history, contemporary society, and Indigenous cultures in their writing for children and youth.

Education is the focal point of my analysis, because of the significant role of education in the historical and contemporary struggles of Aboriginal peoples. As Battiste writes, Aboriginal peoples "see community based education as a fundamental responsibility and requirement" (vii), and in many cases as an even more important issue than self-government (vii). Many Indigenous writers of children's or young adults' literature have tackled historical, political, or social themes while emphasizing their cultural survival through school settings. Bruchac is one of the most published Indigenous writers of children's and young adults' fiction, and has addressed the issue of racism and education in *The Heart of a Chief*, *Hidden Roots*, *The Warriors*, and *Eagle Song*. Lee Maracle (Salish-Cree) looks at oppression in the schooling system in *Ravensong* and *Will's Garden*. In *Little Voice* by Ojibwa author Ruby Slipperjack, the protagonist Ray is teased at school for her Aboriginal heritage and poverty, but regains her internal strength during a summer of traditional learning with her grandmother in the wilderness. In my research, I found that a large number of books, especially picture books, have been written about the residential school experience including *Shi-shi-etko* by Nicola Campbell and *Arctic Stories* by Michael Kusugak. A number of middle

grade books such as *The Middle Five* by Francis LaFlesche, *My Name is Seepeetza* by Shirley Sterling, and *Goodbye Buffalo Bay* by Larry Loyie with Constance Brissenden reflect on the residential school years. Many adult books about this education system are also being used in high school classrooms including *Indian School Days* by Basil Johnston and *Kiss of the Fur Queen* by Tomson Highway. Aboriginal and Western education systems provide a platform from which to compare Aboriginal controlled education systems to Western education systems, a contrast that can be as subtle as young Shi-shi-etko trying to remember every detail of her home and culture before leaving for a place where all of that would be absent. Aboriginal authors continue to write what much of the dominant society repeatedly fails to convey, the more complete story of North American history and contemporary society.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORY AND METHODS

Overview

This chapter first examines the implications of using theories based in Western schools of thought, especially postcolonial theory, in analyses of Aboriginal literature. The second section of this chapter outlines Native North American critical theories. I first provide an overview of the discussion before moving into the major contributors to the field; the issues of importance to the Aboriginal theorists I draw upon; and lastly the methodological approach I employ in reading the primary works I have chosen for my thesis.

Western-Derived Theories and Aboriginal Literature

Western theories applied to Aboriginal literature are being critiqued by many Aboriginal scholars as another form of colonial appropriation (eg., Blaeser, “Native”; Cook-Lynn; Champagne). Theory, like the literature it responds to, is a means by which scholars can see what they want to see; the issues that a scholar feels are important will likely be the ones he or she sets out to research. Theories deriving from the Western tradition, such as postcolonial or postmodern theories, support the values, concepts, and ideas perceived as important to scholars of the Western tradition. Therefore, many of these theories direct their attention to elements of Aboriginal literature that Aboriginal scholars and writers may not deem significant. Lorelei Cederstorm argues that what is actually needed is “a critical approach that places Native values and culture at its centre” (146). Because theory reflects the mindset and values of the cultures it derives from, many Western-based theories are an extension of the colonial tradition of shaping history and cultures to suit the needs of the dominant society.

The problems associated with Western-based approaches are linked to a form of dominance over Indigenous peoples being (re)enacted by the settler society. According to

Kimberly Blaeser (Ojibwe), “Native stories may be changed or taken out of context” (“Native” 61) through a Western theory, and so they can lose their integrity and social and cultural meaning. In “American Indian Studies is for Everyone,” Duane Champagne also finds that non-Aboriginal approaches are “usually driven by theoretical or disciplinary issues that abstract segments of Indian history or culture for analysis, and often do not reflect the study of the culture as an holistic entity” (78). This form of analysis means that “Indian issues” (Champagne 78) are not being addressed; instead, the theoretical interests of the non-Aboriginal researcher are emphasized. In “Home, Homelessness, and Liminal Spaces: The Use of Postcolonial Theory for Reading (National) Children’s Literature,” Clare Bradford and Mavis Reimer comment that with an increased use of theory in the discipline of children’s literature, “the question of what we see cannot be separated from the question of what we’re looking for” (215). Although they believe the “in-between” locations, such as schools and neighbourhoods where cultures interact, yield greater insight than focusing on the end meaning or final outcome of a story, their statement also implies that a researcher’s interpretation of what should be investigated will determine what new insights are discovered. Bradford and Reimer also emphasize the role of theory in both guiding our understanding and findings as researchers. Clearly, the works of Indigenous writers and illustrators can become mediated by the ideas, perspectives, and interests of the researcher. Indigenous theories offer important opportunities for non-Aboriginal academics to focus on the issues and ideas considered essential by Aboriginal scholars.

Some scholars argue that the use of Western theories by non-Aboriginal people is a way to change the meaning of an Aboriginal culture so that it aligns more closely to Western ideology (eg., Stott, “Native Tales”; Swisher; Kulchyski). In “From Appropriation to Subversion: Aboriginal Cultural Production in the Age of Postmodernism,” Peter Kulchyski

suggests this form of appropriation is evident in the way the dominant culture chooses to support and critique particular forms of Aboriginal (especially Inuit) art that exemplify “dead” Aboriginal culture (615). In the process, the Aboriginal culture of the past is romanticized, and the modern Aboriginal culture is, by default, considered non-existent or as integrated fully into the dominant society. Jon C. Stott analyzes the re-writing, editing, and publishing of particular Aboriginal stories in “Native Tales and Traditions in Books for Children,” and determines that Western elitism coupled with the hierarchical Western worldview favours inaccurate representations of Aboriginal peoples (375, 378). Champagne similarly argues that “Indian issues” are being ignored so that non-Aboriginal critics and scholars can satisfy their own curiosities and ideas about Indigenous cultures. In promoting these outdated perceptions of Aboriginal peoples, the dominant culture ignores Indigenous peoples’ survival through colonialism and cultural development. Inevitably, this ignorance has caused resentment among Indigenous scholars and skepticism about the intentions and possibilities of Western theories and ideologies.

Perhaps the most important question regarding the application of Western theories and ideologies to Aboriginal literature is whether or not they reveal informative insights for Indigenous peoples. Most often the answer of Aboriginal academics is no. However, combinations of Western and Indigenous ideologies have been a key strategy for many of the most prolific Aboriginal scholars¹⁴. Louis Owens and Gerald Vizenor argue that Western theories are – and always will be – a part of their knowledge and interpretation of the world. They also acknowledge that to create positive changes in representation, understanding, and cultural revitalization of Aboriginal peoples, a Western worldview must function with an

¹⁴ Paula Gunn Allen combines feminism, or what she terms a gynoscopic perspective, with her own concept of tribal theory. Greg Sarris transforms reader response theory by infusing his own sense of tribal theory, and Kimberley Blaeser, Louis Owens, and Gerald Vizenor have all drawn on postmodern and postcolonial theory even when advocating for an Aboriginal-centered literary theory.

Indigenous worldview. The goal of this duality is to negotiate different cultural values to best address the needs of Aboriginal peoples in ways that will be effective for all communities, whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. By including non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal schools of thought in a theoretical approach, scholars can constructively address the land and political issues that frequently emerge in Aboriginal writing. However, many Indigenous theorists are advocating for new methodological approaches that recognize the unique writing styles, political motivations, and concerns of Aboriginal peoples (eg., Cook-Lynn; Blaeser; Owens; Ruffo, "Introduction"; Cederstorm). Postcolonial theory comes from the perspective of a writing-oriented culture that historically has had "unrestricted power to describe Indians as they choose" (Shanley 30). This power has not only existed, but it has also been repeatedly abused, which is especially evident in the treatment of Indigenous peoples in children's and young adults' literature and media. The abuse of representation and interpretation of Aboriginal peoples by many in the dominant society has led to a distrust of Western theories, such as postcolonial theory, and a lack of faith in their ability to work for Aboriginal studies and literature.

In North America, postcolonial theory has been widely applied to Aboriginal fiction, and is often considered the most useful as it exposes the tenets of colonialism. As Clare Bradford notes in *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature*, this theory "consider[s] how texts inscribe the shifting relations in power and knowledge [...] [and] resist[s] universalizing interpretations" (8). In this way, postcolonial theory is able to expose racial tensions and power struggles without generalizing about or trivializing diverse groups of people. Heather Scutter also argues that researchers "need postcolonial decentering and destabilizing of received wisdoms" (172). However, before discussing the implications of postcolonial theory with Indigenous writing, as Bradford herself acknowledges, is the problem

with the term postcolonial itself, in which the prefix “post” implies that colonialism is something of the past. Colonialism still exists for Aboriginal peoples and, arguably, even for all children themselves (Nodelman, “Illustration” 120)¹⁵. Aboriginal peoples continue to struggle for land rights and control over child welfare and education among other issues, but have often been unable to dispute these issues on Nation to Nation terms. The implications of words like postcolonialism are important because they reflect how we understand other people and their cultures; Armand Ruffo explains that for Indigenous peoples “language has not only compounded the problem of meaningful communication between Native and non-Native peoples but has resulted in dire consequences for Native people in the ‘real world’” (“Why” 666). Therefore, the controversy over the term “postcolonial” is an example of the power that words have to create or perpetuate misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples and their historical relationship with Euro-Americans / Canadians. Despite the limitations I have acknowledged about postcolonial theory and Western theories as they are applied to Indigenous writing, much of my research and reading have been informed by postcolonial theory.

Postcolonial theory is effective in looking at children’s literature, particularly works featuring Aboriginal content, because it analyzes power structures, language, and place. Bradford and Reimer discuss homelessness and liminality in children’s literature about Aboriginal peoples to “make visible the designs of the children’s texts of the settler society” (201). In Bradford’s section of the essay she has co-authored with Reimer, “Liminality and

¹⁵ Nodelman argues that “books in the second category [books that encourage children to what is considered ‘natural behaviour’ rather than adult-like behaviour] teach children *how* to be child-like, through what commentators like Jacqueline Rose (1984) and [Nodelman himself] (1992) have identified as a process of colonisation: adults write books for children to persuade them of conceptions of themselves as children that suit adult needs and purposes” (120). Books in the first category are ones that encourage so-called civilized social behaviours.

Cultural Engagement,” she adapts Homi Bhabha’s notion of liminality¹⁶ as a temporal space without a specific location, and instead looks at liminality as it relates to specific places with historical and cultural contexts (207). Bradford chooses to analyze schools and neighbourhoods where cultures and people meet and interact. In looking at the young adult novel *Will’s Garden* by Lee Maracle, Bradford analyzes the school cafeteria as a place where Will exchanges with other students ideas and information, and examines how his experiences in this part of the school compare to his experiences on the reserve. She finds that the experiences in other liminal spaces are echoed in Will’s school experiences. For instance, Will changes the way he negotiates the relationships he forms in the school cafeteria based on his own visions of his great-grandfather coming to an understanding of other cultures while working in a multi-cultural road-gang (Bradford and Reimer 211). By grounding the theoretical concept of liminality in real life locations, Bradford makes the discussion of literature and cultural engagement meaningful to cultural, social, historical, and political discourse. Following Bradford and Reimer’s example, my own work focuses on school and educational settings as places where cultural exchanges play a role in forming the identity of the protagonist and his / her understanding of community.

The work of Reimer, Bradford, Scutter, and others notwithstanding, the use of theory in the discussion of any children’s literature has developed only over the past thirty years. In the introduction to *Unsettling Narratives*, Bradford writes that there is little postcolonial research of children’s literature being done today (7), although the 2000 publication of *Voices of the Other: Children’s Literature and the Postcolonial Context*, edited by Roderick McGillis, has helped to bring this theory into the field. Ruffo also notes a lack of critical

¹⁶ Bradford describes liminality as “the postcolonial concept of an interstitial space, a domain ‘in-between’ cultures, languages and subjectivities, where individual and group identities are formed through dialogue between cultural and national forms” (206).

analysis of any Aboriginal literature, despite the increased publication of Aboriginal writing since the 1960s (“Introduction” 5). Most criticism of children’s and young adults’ literature draws on “liberal humanist modes of thought, which foreground the concept of self-determining individuals engaged in a process of self-actualization [. . .] a paradigm that leaves little space for more historicized and politicized readings” (Bradford 7). A liberal humanist approach also leaves little room for critical analysis because it instead focuses on supposed truths about the human experience, which does not promote a detailed investigation of socio-political realities of specific cultures, histories, or places. In “Teaching American Literature from its Real Beginning: Native American Stories,” Alethea Helbig promotes the use of myths with young students as they are “good stories” (259) that could teach North Americans about their “roots” (261). Where a critical literary analysis would uncover the complexities of Indigenous literature and myths, Helbig instead only discusses the nature of the oral stories of Aboriginal peoples as being “good.” She further compares and searches for likenesses between and among Aboriginal myths, the Bible, and Western literary traditions. Her discussion includes no mention of the controversial history of the translation and publication of Indigenous myths in North America. Rather than assessing the complexity and depth of the materials she describes so that teachers and their students can discover more than a “good” story in working with the texts, Helbig simply urges that it would “be good for [students]” (265) to read Native North American tales and traditions.

Other researchers focus on negative representations of Indigenous peoples by non-Aboriginal writers, which is important in revealing stereotypes. However, this approach tends to bring attention and publicity to the books in question, rather than bringing appropriate books by Indigenous authors to the fore through critical analysis. Laura Herbst analyzes images of savage, noble, or inferior Indigenous peoples in writing by non-Aboriginal people,

but provides no alternative fictional or critical resources by Indigenous peoples in her chapter. Elizabeth Noll also critiques the tendency of non-Aboriginal authors to misrepresent Aboriginal cultures of the past, but does not move her discussion into the positive work being done by Aboriginal scholars and writers. R. Clark Mallam, in contrast, researched the representation of Native North Americans in elementary school literature from Kansas, and along with his exposure of the stereotyped and inaccurate content, he provides a number of alternative children's books by Aboriginal authors in light of his findings at the school. The work of Mallam exposes the more obvious stereotypes found in literature from the 1960s and 1970s and also draws attention to Aboriginal works available for educators. This is one example of how research can both critique fallacies in the representation of Aboriginal peoples and illustrate the alternative resources that Aboriginal scholars and writers are producing. The work of scholars such as Bradford and Reimer and Debbie Reese reveals that a critical analysis framework can further uncover the more subversive and less visible colonial representations in the literature of the settler society.

Both the lack of critical theory and the application of Western theories to Indigenous writing have become a concern for many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars. The opposition to postcolonial theory and other Western theories is not only a form of resistance to the possibility of colonial dominance, but is also a struggle to have Indigenous theories recognized in the academic community. Working towards the acceptance and use of Aboriginal-centered theories is also an effort to show that Aboriginal voices and perspectives have a legitimate place in the academic world and in North American culture at large.

Native North American Critical Theories

Overview

Native North American critical theories are increasingly being discussed in the academic community and are born from the perspectives and writing styles of Aboriginal writers and scholars. Given the diversity of Aboriginal voices from numerous and different tribes, communities, and academic backgrounds, the existence of a unified, pan-tribal Native North American literary theory remains contested. Discussions about Indigenous theory, however, have increased among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars. Concerns that Western theories, such as postcolonial theory, will lead to appropriation of Indigenous voices have led to a desire to map out and explore this field (e.g., Krupat; Blaeser; Cook-Lynne; Owens). However, Indigenous theories have not just developed from a resistance to the impositions by the dominant society, but also from the theoretical perspectives developed by Aboriginal scholars (e.g., Allen; Warrior; Sarris; Womack).

The following sections reflect my own interpretations as a non-Aboriginal researcher of the writing produced about Indigenous theories. First, I provide a brief overview of the major contributors to the discussion of Indigenous theories in the last twenty years. Second, I describe the issues that Aboriginal scholars have cited as key to analyzing Indigenous literature, and which are compatible with a discussion of education. Finally, the third section breaks down the methodological approaches to be used in the reading of the primary texts for this thesis.

Major Contributors

Although Indigenous theory appears to be new in literary discourse over the past twenty years, it has roots in the early Aboriginal writers of Canada and the United States. In “A Single Decade: Book Length Native Literary Criticism between 1986 and 1997,” Craig S.

Womack (Oklahoma Creek-Cherokee) provides a detailed account of how the historical development of Aboriginal theories unfolded. While he traces Aboriginal-centered criticism back to the critiques of early Aboriginal writers like Mourning Dove and E. Pauline Johnson in the late 1800s and early 1900s (10-11), Womack finds that the 1960s and 1970s political movements were to cause the greatest shift in the way Aboriginal literature was approached by scholars (12). The political movements of Aboriginal activists, including the more radical work of organizations like AIM and the more moderate work of individuals like Gerald Vizenor, were to change the critical analyses of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal literature by bringing a new consciousness to the public and academic community about who Aboriginal peoples are. Womack's assertion that political activism changed the way academics wrote about Indigenous peoples reflects the work of Marie Battiste on the band and public education systems and Doris Seale on children's literature; both also claimed this period was responsible for significant change in the way Aboriginal peoples were discussed, represented, and treated.

The political activism of Indigenous organizations and individuals in the 1960s and 1970s raised the consciousness of how Aboriginal literature was read, interpreted, and accepted, because their voices were accessible through media and were vocal about the misrepresentation of their cultures. And because Aboriginal writers began writing more novels that were being published and read at this time, the academic and public understanding of Aboriginal literature was expanded beyond the oral tradition and folk tales. Despite the changing perceptions of Aboriginal peoples and their writing throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Womack finds that the theoretical efforts in the 1980s by Aboriginal scholars ignored the problems of addressing Indigenous literature as a unified body (rather than acknowledging the diversity of Indigenous cultures), and failed to include Christian Aboriginal writers or fully assimilated Aboriginal writers in the dialogue (19). History, politics, and language were not

accounted for in these early critiques, rendering the discipline steeped in “cliché” (Womack 19), an approach that Womack believes is still evident in Aboriginal literary studies today (19). My thesis includes an in-depth discussion of history and politics in the literature review in Chapter Two and in the analysis of the primary works. Language is also discussed in relation to colonialism and loss in *The Porcupine Year* by Louise Erdrich and *No Time to Say Goodbye* by Sylvia Olsen with Rita Morris and Ann Sam.

Although the efforts of scholars in the 1980s to develop critical analysis of Aboriginal literature are heavily critiqued today, the research of this time laid the groundwork for future developments in Indigenous theories. A turning point in Native North American literary thought occurred with the publication of *The Sacred Hoop* in 1986 by Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo), which is considered by Womack, Elvira Pulitano, and other scholars as the “wonderful and thorny beginning” (Womack 24) of Indigenous literary criticism. Allen writes from a feminist perspective in *The Sacred Hoop* and emphasizes the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, especially the ethnocentric ways of thinking she perceives in Euro-American academic culture which ignore the complexity of Aboriginal cultures and peoples. Allen further argues that the patriarchal culture of the colonizers erased the role of women in Aboriginal cultures. In *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*, Pulitano criticizes the separatist stance of Allen, which Womack also critiques because it does not acknowledge Indigenous diversity (22). Regardless of the many criticisms scholars have of Allen’s work, *The Sacred Hoop* is a seminal piece that played a role in developing an academic discussion about Indigenous theory.

Another pivotal book interpreting Aboriginal stories was *Keeping Slugwoman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts* (1993) by Greg Sarris (Pomo). His research breaks down the identity binaries, namely the polarization of cross-cultural discussions by

ethnicity and culture, found in the work of scholars like Allen, and instead emphasizes a multiplicity of meanings. Sarris draws on reader response theory to implicate himself as a researcher interpreting stories, and looks at a broad range of stories that may not have been considered by outsiders. *Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature* (1993), edited by Jeannette Armstrong, was published in the same year as Sarris' book, and was the first collection of literary analysis on Aboriginal literature by Indigenous academics. *Looking at the Words* is important because it reflects the diversity of Indigenous scholars' critical understandings of Indigenous fiction. Some of the scholars, such as Kimberly Blaeser, outline the "possibility of dominance" ("Native" 59) that theory holds as a mediator between the researcher and the text. Blaeser's statement emphasizes voice appropriation as a problem that reflects imbalanced power dynamics as well as the misrepresentation of cultural values and concerns. This collection would be followed by a 2001 book, *(Ad)dressing our Words: Aboriginal Perspectives on Aboriginal Literatures*, edited by Armand Ruffo, which was created to provide "fresh and provocative" ("Introduction" 7) critical writing by Aboriginal scholars and writers. Although Ruffo argues that Aboriginal literary criticisms remain diverse, he also tentatively notes a common theme of de-colonization in the analyses of the scholars (7).

Robert Warrior (Osage) published *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* in 1995, and was the first to incorporate a discussion of public policy and politics in relation to his analysis of Indigenous fiction. Pulitano argues that his writing does not account for the influence of Western theory and pits non-Aboriginal people against Native North Americans (189). However, Warrior's analysis is culturally appropriate because it looks beyond the identity of the individual protagonist to consider the community as central to his discussion (Womack 61). Warrior's theorizing of Indigenous literature is significant

regardless of his feelings about Western traditions, because he begins a trend of investigating the politicized nature of Indigenous writing now found in the writings of many Indigenous scholars (e.g., Womack; Cook-Lynn; Wolf and DePasquale).

Gerald Vizenor is considered a pioneer of contemporary Aboriginal literature and criticism. Throughout his career, Vizenor has written fiction, poems, and plays and has engaged in critical discourse of Indigenous literature; as Blaeser notes in *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition*, his work is “multigenre, anti-form, [and] intertextual” (203) in character. Vizenor’s work also relies heavily on silence and shadows to “compensate for the inadequacies of the written language” (Blaeser, *Gerald* 13). This is a technique that David Moore, in “Rough Knowledge and Radical Understanding: Sacred Silence in American Indian Literatures,” considers a dialogic space from which cross cultural readings can be ethically broached (657), because sacred information is kept within the community and yet the importance of the sacred content is conveyed to outsiders. The silences provide an example of an ethical approach to cultural knowledge for outsiders to follow. Blaeser sees silence as “sacred presence and as active communication (*Gerald* 21); it reflects traditional custom, expresses who has or does not have power, and functions as a dramatic device. Silences can also be considered a rhetorical strategy from which meaning is made through participatory reader response as readers are elicited to fill the silence, thus drawing on the oral tradition. By finding ways to incorporate elements of the oral tradition into the written word, namely through reader participation, Vizenor demonstrates a method of Indigenous writing that draws on the traditional roots of Aboriginal knowledge and expression.

In 2008, Womack edited *Reasoning Together: A Native Critics Collective* to attempt to more clearly map out Native North American literary theories. This book reflects on the history of Indigenous theory and considers the possibilities for the future. *Reasoning Together*

is similar to *(Ad)dressing Our Words* as they are both collections of various Indigenous scholars' interpretations of Indigenous literature. Womack's collection, much like Ruffo's and Armstrong's, illustrates diversity among these scholars. Womack himself refuses to accept the idea of a "unified" Native North American literary theory (100) – that is a single definition of Aboriginal literary criticism. He does, however, feel continuity exists between the essays in the collection through the grounding of theory in social practice, and he further emphasizes the "need to do much more historical work" (100/101) by incorporating relevant political and social content into examinations of Aboriginal writing.

The political and social importance of history in literature, as discussed in the writing of Ruffo, Womack, and Warrior, had a great influence on the research for my thesis. I included the history of education, the history of non-Indigenous children's and young adults' literature about Indigenous peoples, and the history of Indigenous children's and young adults' writing in my literature review in order to address the political and social histories that directly bear on my thesis topic.

Issues

Resistance to colonialism is a central concern of many Aboriginal scholars, who therefore direct their analyses of Aboriginal literature to issues related to resistance and decolonization. Many Aboriginal scholars provide highly focused analyses of the representation of land, and of political, social, historical, and cultural space (eg., Blaeser; Cook-Lynn; Ruffo, "Why"; Womack). These issues reflect the values and concerns of these scholars. Where a Western postcolonial theory may tend to analyze the effects of social structures on the individual and his or her identity, an Aboriginal-centered approach, as in the case of Warrior's work, may focus on the community instead. By altering the theoretical approach to address the issues central to Aboriginal writing, the cultural traditions and

diversity and the political issues affecting Aboriginal peoples can better be addressed. My thesis focuses on education as a political institution, land rights and issues, and community development because these are issues that Aboriginal scholars have addressed as central to understanding Indigenous literature. They further are central to the education of Aboriginal peoples. Although I focus on the individual protagonists, I do so by looking at the effects of the political institution of education on their relationships to land, community, and cultural heritage. In the case of *The Porcupine Year* by Louise Erdrich, I look at the effects of colonialism on traditional education.

In Womack's analysis, the subject matter moves between history, politics, social movements, and literary works to demonstrate the significance of politics in Indigenous literature and its reception and criticism. Blaeser and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Crow Creek Sioux) also emphasize the need to focus on topics such as land, politics, and community relationships. By including in my literature review the history of education, children's books by non-Aboriginal authors, and children's books by Aboriginal authors, I have attempted to include the political and historical landscape of the main topics for this thesis, namely Aboriginal young adult fiction and education systems affecting Aboriginal peoples.

As I have mentioned in the literature review, political issues are not addressed as openly in Indigenous writing for children and young adults as they are in Indigenous writing for adults. However, I found that writing about educational settings is a way for Indigenous authors to reveal political issues that have affected Aboriginal peoples in a way that is accessible to a young audience. Given the significance of politics in Aboriginal literature and criticism (eg., Ruffo; Wolfe and DePasquale; Womack; Blaeser; Cook-Lynn), I explored the history of education in my thesis. Furthermore, in accounting for my position as a non-Aboriginal researcher, I have taken the advice of Pulitano who believes in the "necessity of

displacing the margin-centre opposition” (14) by implicating oneself in the political landscape. I included my background information in the introduction and have continued to acknowledge my position as a researcher to ensure that my critical understanding and literary interpretations are clearly referenced as those of an outsider.

In “American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story,” Cook-Lynn stresses the significance of political activism in writing (70) especially as it relates to land ownership. In her view, land is an essential element in contemporary Aboriginal literature as the struggle for land and reparations is a foremost concern of Aboriginal peoples today. In this spirit, I address the land displacement that all of the child protagonists face in the primary texts I have chosen. Blaeser argues that mixing traditional narratives with the contemporary, interweaving realities, transgressing genre, writing cyclically, and invoking audience participation (“Like Reeds” 564) are essential features of Aboriginal literature. For my own analysis, I address Blaeser’s features by focusing on stories and the memories of the protagonists as a connection to the past and the relationship of the child protagonists to their communities.

Methodological Approaches

Methodological approaches differ among Aboriginal scholars, and in this spirit of multiplicity, I have drawn from the work of a variety of scholars, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to construct my own approach. Many of the Aboriginal scholars breaking from Western methodologies are not only focusing on issues like land and community, but also on various techniques of Indigenous writing that they argue are important to understanding or analyzing this literature. My thesis includes an analysis of the protagonists’ relationship to land and community and references to political, social, or historical content relating to the primary texts.

In *Keeping Slugwoman Alive*, Sarris emphasizes the importance of a multiplicity of meanings through the implication of the researcher in the process of research. He demonstrates the need to break down binaries and seek deeper meanings, which he himself does by addressing his own perspectives in his interpretations as they are initially shaped and then reshaped in his “dialogue within and between people” (4)¹⁷. In my first reading of his work, Sarris’ “multiplicity” felt like a never ending web of social and cultural interpretations. However, he also acknowledges the significance of the researcher in working with social, political, and cultural histories and shows how, despite differences between the socio-cultural background of the researcher and writing in question, meaningful work can be done with reflexivity and the recognition of the position of the researcher. In short, by including the position of the researcher in the analysis, embedded interpretations and assumptions can become a part of the work rather than attempting to separate the researcher as a supposed objective body. This approach is one that I have adopted in including reflections of my own position in the Introduction and Conclusion of my thesis.

In reading Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*, Sarris exposes his own interactions with the story as it made him reflect on his own community (144). Because I am not from an Aboriginal community, my reading will not have the connection of the text to “home” that Sarris’ reading reveals. However, his particular adaptation of reader response theory is still important to my work as a non-Aboriginal researcher by keeping me aware of my interpretation of texts from a culture and community different from my own. Furthermore, Sarris’ emphasis on the role of storytelling in theorizing is a way for me to bring in experiences or knowledge of my own that have influenced my analysis. I have chosen to include a few stories about my grandfather in the Introduction and Conclusion because they

¹⁷ He frequently reflects on his conversations with a Pomo medicine woman, Mabel McKay.

reflect on how I have understood the issues I analyze in the primary texts: home land, community, and history. I do not incorporate criticism as story in my thesis, but I have included stories of my grandfather to give insight into my socio-cultural background.

Womack applies a holistic method to his critical writing by dividing his analysis between history, politics, policies, and literature. He plays with conventional academic writing to express his own views on how history and literature function, and to debunk an academic belief that writing must follow a specific pattern and style. The idea that writing must be organized in a certain way implies that the people in control of this writing method express themselves in the “right” way – namely the mode of the dominant culture. Womack chooses to disrupt his literary discussions with specific types of historical information in order to re-think and re-define the shape of history, literature, and literary criticism. While my own writing does not weave these elements together with the depth that Womack has done, I have incorporated history and politics into my literature review and analysis to address the broader context of my thesis and to explore the way Indigenous writers for children express political histories.

The multi-genre approach is also evident in *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, by Thomas King. Each chapter opens and closes with a variation on the story of Creation; in revising this way, King draws heavily on the oral tradition by invoking and engaging the audience and relating a traditional narrative. He also includes personal stories, other narratives, and critical discussions within each chapter. Addressing the importance of the oral culture through writing style is an essential part of many scholars’ ideas about Native North American critical theory, and often, even of their own writing styles (eg., Vizenor; Cook-Lynn; King; Blaeser). While I recognize the importance of the oral tradition in Indigenous writing, I have chosen to research and incorporate political and social information

into my work under the influence of Womack and to include reflective stories as in the case of Sarris rather than to incorporate traditional or fictional stories into my work.

Although I do not employ elements of the oral tradition into my particular style of writing, as does King, I am aware of the significance it has in Aboriginal writing. In *The Porcupine Year*, Louise Erdrich inserts stories of the grandmother and of the Ojibwe culture in a different font and text size to emphasize the oral tradition and the importance of storytelling. Michel Noël demonstrates the significance of the oral tradition in *Good for Nothing* by describing the power that the elder Tom's stories have on Nipishish and the community (212). Sherman Alexie uses a colloquial writing style that invokes the sense of oral storytelling and sharing in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. The inclusion in Alexie's book of cartoon drawings by Ellen Forney with written commentary also incorporates a multi-genre approach to storytelling. Although not to the extent of Alexie's work, *No Time to Say Goodbye* also includes sketched images by Connie Paul (Tsartlip), and Sylvia Olsen uses a conversational tone to make the reader feel closer to the stories being told.

The oral tradition is also important in the sense that many Aboriginal voices have been marginalized and ignored by the media, publishing, and general print culture of the dominant society. In "Ethics and Responsibilities in Writing American Indian History," Donald Fixco urges the importance of including oral information into academic discussion (34), and emphasizes the importance of respecting work from an oral tradition. I have taken care to research a variety of transcribed oral accounts of Aboriginal school experiences in my historical research through books such as *Residential School: The Stolen Years* collected by Linda Jaine and *Stolen from our Embrace: The Abduction of First Nations Children and the Restoration of Aboriginal Communities* by Ernie Crey and Suzanne Fournier. These books

include interviews, poems, and transcribed accounts of the often unheard voices of Aboriginal community members who have been affected by North American education systems.

While trying to understand history and literature through the methodological approaches of Womack and Sarris, I am also aware of the way Western theories have influenced my interpretations. Allen, for example, comes from a feminist perspective in *The Sacred Hoop* and Vizenor's cross-cultural approach merges "Native epistemology with Western literary forms" (Pulitano 186). The frame of reference that these authors use is a Western one, and yet they blend Western and Aboriginal ways of knowing. Louis Owens argues that the "multicultural frontier" (55) must remain open to dialogue between and among cultures for deeper meanings and analyses to emerge. However, Owens warns critics to "mediate without violating" (56). Vizenor, Allen, and Owens are entangled in the discourse of the dominant culture, but this does not mean that Indigenous theories cannot exist as a separate discipline. The writings of Vizenor, Blaeser, Owens, and many other Indigenous scholars show a resistance to the dominant culture while using Western theories. In *Mixed Blood Messages*, Owens notes that this dialogue is an important factor for all critics as

the challenge facing the critic is to avoid the error of imagining the encounter with Native American texts as a "meeting with the unknowable and untouchable other" (David Murray qtd in Owens 56) and to simultaneously escape the temptation to believe in the "unproblematic translatability, and . . . transparency" (David Murray qtd in Owens 56) of other texts and cultures. (Owens 56)

For my own writing, I have already acknowledged the influence of the postcolonial scholar, Clare Bradford, on my research.

The cultural differences that can occur between a researcher and the literature in question are important to recognize as this conflict has the potential to enlighten literary discussions. As a non-Aboriginal researcher, I cannot imagine that Western ideology could be blocked out from my own understanding of the world; furthermore, an analysis disconnected from Western thought would close the dialogic space that Owens discusses. This disconnection would also assume that Aboriginal cultures and identities have been unaffected by over five hundred years of colonialism. Womack believes that an Aboriginal-centered analysis can be done and claimed as purely “Indian” by “searching for meaningful aspects of essentialist viewpoints, and other strategies, that allow for personal experience to be claimed for its insights” (101). As an outsider lacking “personal insights” from within an Aboriginal culture, my own thesis can only bridge Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal theories and methods that are accessible to me given my cultural and social background.

Drawing primarily on the critical writing of Warrior, Womack, and Blaeser, my thesis examines issues of land, community, and identity as manifested in education systems affecting Aboriginal peoples. As my thesis focuses on education systems, political issues are a focal point as they relate to the social, historical, and land-based issues key to Womack’s and Warrior’s discussions. Drawing on Blaeser, I take a close look at community relationships, which play a strong role in the education of the protagonists. When I began looking into Indigenous literary theories, I believed there was one theory with defined boundaries and methods. I soon realized the true diversity and richness that this field holds – that there are many Indigenous theories and methods. Although I do not hold an “insider status” (Womack 101) that would enable me to write with an Indigenous perspective, I have tried to address what many Indigenous scholars and writers feel is important to understanding Indigenous

literature, and apply the information and tools they discuss to the best of my ability as a non-Aboriginal researcher.

CHAPTER 4: LAND, COMMUNITY, AND HISTORY IN *THE PORCUPINE YEAR* AND *GOOD FOR NOTHING*

Overview

In “American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story,” Elizabeth Cook-Lynn observes that scholars of Aboriginal literature have failed to address attachment to land with a nation-to-nation approach, which in turn signifies that “Indian homelands” are a lost cause (66). She argues that focusing on the devastating impact of colonialism does not account for the work of Aboriginal nations to counter colonialism and articulate their longstanding rights to traditional lands. This chapter addresses both the effect of and resistance to colonialism of the Aboriginal peoples in *The Porcupine Year* by Anishinabe writer Louise Erdrich and *Good for Nothing* by Métis author Michel Noël. Aboriginal and Western education systems are discussed in relation to the land and community of the protagonists.

***The Porcupine Year* by Louise Erdrich**

About the Book

The Porcupine Year by Louise Erdrich was published while I was researching my thesis topic. This is the third book in the *Birchbark House* series, of which the first book, *The Birchbark House*, was a National Book Award Finalist in 1999 and the second, *The Game of Silence*, won the Scott O’Dell Award for Historical Fiction in 2006. *The Porcupine Year* changes some of the patterns of the first two books in the series by running the text continuously, rather than sectioning the novel by the seasons. This modification highlights the disruption that land displacement causes Omakayas’ family. Despite this stylistic change, Erdrich still focuses the story on family and community.

Scholar Elizabeth Gargano notes that Erdrich’s writing for children “implicitly critiques Euro-American assumptions of humanity’s supremacy over nature and the importance of individualism” (28) by incorporating what she terms Ojibwa story cycles.

Erdrich further revisions the relationship between individuals and nature by demonstrating the connection between Omakayas' community and the land, and the emotional, physical, and cultural struggles that emerge after their separation from the Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker. Melissa Kay Thompson comments that Erdrich's writing also centers on "family life and relationships" (369), which creates a culturally specific depiction of the Anishinabeg. Erdrich's focus on relationships further reveals an Aboriginal education model between the adult and child community members.

The Porcupine Year takes place in 1852 in northern Minnesota. Omakayas (or Little Frog) is twelve-years-old and learning to become a healer through the teachings of her grandmother. The United States government decides to create a reservation system for Aboriginal peoples and forces her family to leave their beloved home on the Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker, and they eventually decide to head north to live with Omakayas' Auntie Muskrat. This first section of this chapter of my thesis analyzes how the identity of Omakayas and her community – a community that is shaped by a particular landscape – is maintained when that land is lost.

Education amidst a Changing Community and Landscape

The Porcupine Year incorporates intensely political language to describe the way that "Omakayas' family was sent from their home by the United States government" (Erdrich xi). In this way of telling the story, Erdrich provides a context for children to understand the history of the westward expansion of European settlers. To show the survival of Aboriginal cultures through this political context, Erdrich depicts the continuation of cultural values through the family and their attachment to their homelands. Land and community play a significant role in Omakayas' development in *The Porcupine Year*. Robert Warrior sees "the categories of land and community and their relationship to each other" (45) as "literary critical

keys” (45) to understanding the history and concepts found within the writing of John Joseph Mathews and Vine Deloria, Jr. In using these concepts to examine Erdrich’s writing, complex forms of resistance to colonialism become evident. Erdrich shows that by turning towards community, Omakayas is able to maintain her sense of self and identity as an Anishinabe person despite longing for her home on the Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker. Omakayas maintains her connection to her family’s traditional territories through her pursuit of traditional knowledge and customs.

Although Omakayas and her family are forced to leave their land, they maintain their cultural traditions by drawing on community knowledge about it. The efforts of the United States government to create a reservation system for all Aboriginal peoples forces Omakayas’ family and many other Anishinabeg families to leave their traditional territories. Omakayas and her brother, Pinch, become lost on their journey to find a new home through *Bwanaag* territory, and Pinch observes that if they were back on their Island at least they “would know where [they] were” (Erdrich 11). Indeed, the “exile” from their land and travel through enemy territories has put the children and community into a very dangerous situation. Although in this territory the family is still able to “collect supplies of dried fish, meat, and berries” (Erdrich 30) and hunt, they cannot establish roots in the new place. The family’s cultural survival through this circumstance is visible in what Elizabeth Cook-Lynn terms “tribal Indigenusness” (66), namely the focus on communal strength and cultural property. Omakayas’ relationship to her grandmother, Nokomis, best exemplifies the transmission of the community’s cultural material. Nokomis wants to plant her garden as the seeds in her “bark pack are longing to be set in the earth and sprout” (Erdrich 45), which metaphorically demonstrates the uprooting of the family from their home. Nokomis’ seeds are stolen when raiders attack the family on their journey north. The family becomes completely physically

separated from their territory, which highlights the desperation of their predicament.

However, Nokomis takes Omakayas to a “great medicine swamp” (Erdrich 104) near their temporary camp and teaches her what to gather and how each plant, root, and reed is used (Erdrich 104). For Omakayas, this is the “greatest part of her education” (Erdrich 104), and is what prepares her to be a healer in the future. Although Nokomis’ seeds are her “life’s work” (Erdrich 103) – her connection to her ancestors, territories, and the future of her community – Omakayas is also her connection to the future of Anishinabe culture and traditional practices. Nokomis here turns this tragic part of their colonial experience into an important learning opportunity for Omakayas. Together they continue to develop their culture, knowledge, and connection to the land by ensuring the knowledge of Nokomis is passed to Omakayas. As Erdrich’s narrative investigates land and community, the hope and resiliency of Omakayas’ family becomes evident even where the political contextualization in the writing reveals a sense of hopelessness in the settler society’s oppression of Aboriginal peoples. Erdrich demonstrates that even without their traditional territory, the family can share knowledge to maintain their traditions and connection to the land.

Gargano argues that scholars need to move beyond the content of Erdrich’s individual books to look at the importance of her worldview and how it represents Anishinabe culture (29). Indeed, Erdrich demonstrates the interconnectedness of the community by including the reader in it. She breaks from the narrative of Omakayas’ family to explain particular parts of their culture, which creates a more intimate relationship between the reader and the culture. For instance, Omakayas wants to ask Nokomis for a story but knows that she must wait until the “snakes and frogs [are] sleeping” (Erdrich 35). The narrator continues on, explaining that “the Ojibwe only told stories in the winter” (35), which is for the benefit of the reader only as it is clear that Omakayas is already aware of this. This approach to writing is in contrast with

the style of many Indigenous writers of adult fiction, such as Gerald Vizenor who “employs the power of silence to engage the reader” (Blaeser, *Gerald* 22); according to David Moore this silence maintains secrecy around cultural property to involve the reader in a “rough knowledge of the unknowable context” (637). Erdrich’s explanations of cultural content suggest a forthright approach to Aboriginal cultural property is a more effective means of engaging children and youth. The explanations also stress the intricacies of community knowledge by sharing specific features of traditions and customs with the reader. This sharing is seen when Omakayas’ father, Deydey, asks the family to build a sweat lodge as part of a name-giving tradition for Omakayas. Each family member is described as working on his or her part in the creation of the lodge. The narrator then explains that “first the women would use the lodge, then the men” (55). By including such descriptions of Ojibwe traditions and customs, *The Porcupine Year* involves the reader in the community culture.

Aside from the inclusion of the reader into the community customs, *The Porcupine Year* also reveals the relationship between learned social interactions and survival in the landscape. Omakayas’ family has learned how to communicate and interact in more subtle ways than outsiders may be used to. Omakayas and her family face many difficulties with people outside of their community, such as the *Bwanaag* and raiders, on their journey. The adults’ fears about their journey from the Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker to the north is only known to Omakayas when “her attention [is] caught by the talk from the grown-ups” (Erdrich 42) one evening when she is meant to be sleeping. Otherwise Omakayas’ learning and understanding of adult concerns centres around her participation in the community work by cooking and trapping animals among other tasks. However, the ability to communicate effectively proves to be a matter of survival when the family must quickly hide in the woods from the *Bwanaag* after being “motioned” (Erdrich 74) to do so by Old Tallow.

Even without a verbal cue, Omakayas' toddler brother Bizheens "knew better than to make a sound when everyone was tense and quiet" (Erdrich 74). Susan, an orphaned Euro-American toddler the family adopts, is unaware of the change in the family mood, is the "only one who might give their position away" (Erdrich 74), and is beaming with "smiles" (Erdrich 74). Susan is roughly the same age as Bizheens, but her inability to understand Old Tallow's communication or the shifting mood of the family highlights the intimate and subtle forms of expression they use. This suggests that learning occurs by watching and mimicking adult behaviours, and that listening is a matter of survival as well as bonding and education. Understanding between the adult and child community members is so strong within the community that even young children like Bizheens know how to listen and adjust to the changes in the adults' moods and actions. The relationship between community and land here proves to be a learned matter of survival and lifestyle.

While Bizheens' ability to communicate without verbal cues reveals the significance of social relationships to the Anishinabe lifestyle, these social patterns in Omakayas' family are contrasted with Euro-American kinships. In analyzing community relationships, Warrior urges that the "first question to ask in our contemporary context, then, is what is the chaos we [Aboriginal peoples] face?" (112). He further argues that this can be done by embracing community traditions and resistance (Warrior 113). The community traditions of Omakayas' family are best understood in juxtaposition to the Euro-American colonizers. In analyzing this historical context, the "shattered lives" (Deloria qtd in Warrior 112) of colonialism, namely Deydey's colonial experience, is shown to have greater political implications. Although Deydey was raised by his mother in an Anishinabe community, he was also taught how to live in Euro-American society in preparation for the day he would meet his Euro-American father. The lessons Deydey received in Euro-American culture do not provide any assistance to living

in the wilderness. He learns French as well as how to bow, shake hands, smile, and look into people's eyes (Erdrich 68), which are practices that provide no assistance and bear no relation to living in the North American wilderness. They emphasize the foreignness of Euro-American settlers to the natural and cultural setting. By focusing on the alienation from the land of Euro-American customs and culture, Erdrich's writing reinforces the Anishinabe connection to and longstanding claim of the land. This politicized depiction of the settlers is followed by a critique of their treatment of Aboriginal peoples, specifically of Deydey who, despite his training, is scornfully laughed at by his father, "the rich trader [. . .] [who is] smoking after a meal with his friends" (Erdrich 68), when he introduces himself. Deydey's experience becomes one of the many reasons he does "not trust white people" (Erdrich 67), because social customs only have value in the Euro-American community if one is of full European descent. Although Deydey is a Métis, he is adopted into his mother's Anishinabe community and loved by his Uncle "as a father does" (Erdrich 67). As an adult, he allows his family to be "enlarged by two" (Erdrich 70) when they discover the Euro-American orphans, John and Susan¹⁸. The contrast between the Euro-Americans' lack of kinship with Deydey's acceptance of John and Susan reveals the significance of strong community relationships in Anishinabe culture and survival in the landscape. Although Susan has yet to learn how communication works in Omakayas' family, she is loved and cared for as a family member. By analyzing land and community, the detachment of the Euro-American community from the North American landscape and Aboriginal cultures within the region emerges as a political statement validating Aboriginal land ownership. Furthermore, Deydey's resistance to Euro-American culture shows both the "painful stories of Native people who have suffered and

¹⁸ John and Susan's names "came out [. . .] Zahn and Zozed" (Erdrich 79) in the Anishinabe tongue, which reverses the common pattern in children's literature to change Aboriginal children's names to English names (e.g., Nipishish's name becomes Pierre when in Euro-Canadian settings). The modification of the children's names by their pronunciation in the Anishinabe language suggests that Euro-American cultures have been affected by Aboriginal culture just as Aboriginal communities have been changed by Euro-American culture.

continue to suffer” (Warrior 113) as well as the “terrible beauty of resistance” (Warrior 113) in his acceptance and continuation of Anishinabe values and culture.

Deydey’s learning of Western customs reflects a separation of Euro-American culture from the land. Omakayas and her sister Angeline also try to learn about the settler society through the written language, but their learning is merely an attempt at memorizing “squiggles and dots that held meaning” (Erdrich 40). At this time, writing bears no meaningful connection to their lives or community, and yet ironically the writing in the treaties of the government have led to a plan for “one big homeland for all of the Anishinabeg” (Erdrich 45). Learning how to write does not help Omakayas and her sister to connect to or understand the *chimookomanag*, literally “big knife” meaning “white person or non-Indian” (Erdrich 186). In Deydey’s case, however, his knowledge of the French language has helped him to trade goods with Euro-American traders in *The Birchbark House* and *The Game of Silence*. Although this strengthens his ability to care for the family and connect to other communities, it does not protect him or his extended family from being sent from their homes. Deydey’s language skills only create a positive relation with the settler society when they can aid that society through goods and services, but they do not give him respect or equality in the larger picture of the government’s plans for the Anishinabe people. In contrast, Nokomis’ work teaching Omakayas about the medicines in the swamp and the continuation of family traditions allow the family to thrive as a community in a changing landscape.

In reading *The Porcupine Year* with a focus on Warrior’s critical concepts of land and community, the tragic loss for Omakayas’ family given the historical and political context is softened by the hope found in their ability to maintain their cultural identity as a community and their connection to the land. The representation of the community’s relationship to the

land, especially in contrast to the Euro-American settlers, asserts Anishinabe claims to the land while pointing out the unfair treatment they have received by the government.

***Good for Nothing* by Michel Noël**

About the Book

Good for Nothing by Michel Noël won the Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People in 2005, was short listed for the McNally Robinson Aboriginal Book of the Year Award in 2005, and made the IBBY Honour List in 2006 and CCBC Our Choice list in 2005. Noël transforms historical fiction for young adults by weaving strong and direct political and social commentary into his writing. Not all reviewers agreed with the praise given to Noël's book: *CM Magazine* reviewer Joan Marshall berates the story for its uninspiring approach, and tedious plot movement and characterization. Marshall argues that the book "is completely historical fiction" (n.pag.) and so takes place in a Canada that teenagers "will not recognize" (n.pag.), which for me only underscores the need for young Canadians to read this story. Despite Marshall's review, *Good for Nothing* has received mainly positive attention from critics, with a starred review in the *School Library Journal*.

Good for Nothing was originally written in French and was distributed as three separate novels in a series. The English version, translated by Shelley Tanaka, is compiled as one novel separated into three parts. *Good for Nothing* spans a period from May 1959 to November 1960 in Quebec. The fifteen-year-old Métis protagonist, Nipishish, is kicked out of residential school and lives on a reserve called Maniwaki, but he has difficulties reintegrating with his community and the band administration fears he may stir political tensions with his mother figure, Manie. The band administration finds him a foster home and public school in Mont-Laurier, a Euro-Canadian city, which Nipishish accepts as he finds reserve living too difficult to adjust to. Mont-Laurier does not offer the escape or freedom Nipishish hoped it

would; he is treated as an outsider in the school and community, which prompts him to return to Maniwaki. Back in his reserve community, Nipishish learns from the land with the help of an elder, Tom.

In my discussion, I analyze the decisions that Nipishish makes about education and how his learning experiences change him. Focusing on Robert Warrior's critical concepts of land and community reveals the difficulties that Nipishish faces in reconnecting with his ancestral home after prolonged absence. Analyzing land and community in *Good for Nothing* provides insights, as Warrior describes, "[into] a deep perception of the conflicts and challenges that face American Indian people and communities" (85). The complexity of challenges facing Nipishish and his Algonquin community are revealed in his struggle to reconnect with his identity as an Aboriginal person. These difficulties reintegrating into the Maniwaki community are not only the result of the imposition of colonial systems like formal education disrupting his connection to land and community, but are also the result of his own perception of his people and his inability to accept his ancestral and colonial histories. Understanding the political history of his community helps Nipishish participate in that community.

Education amidst a Changing Community and Landscape

While *The Porcupine Year* shows how early westward expansion affected Aboriginal peoples, Noël shows the ways in which colonialism continued for the Algonquin of Northern Quebec after the initial loss of land in the historical past. Nipishish's understanding of history and his culture are essential to his ability to reconnect with his community. In "Like 'Reeds through the Ribs of a Basket': Native Women Weaving Stories," Kimberley Blaeser observes that Aboriginal stories are about

intricately linked relationships, about intersections. Spatial, temporal, and spiritual realities of Native people reflect a fluidity that disallows complete segregation between experiences of life and death, physical and spiritual, past and present, human and non-human [. . .] they are reflected in cycles that involve return, reconnection, and relationship (557)

Her observations are reflected in Nipishish's journey back to his community in *Good for Nothing*. Nipishish attempts to separate himself from his past, his community, and the history of his community – even going so far as to avoid visiting his friend from residential school, William, because they “remind each other too much of those dark years” (Noël 67). He eventually comes to recognize that he must know and accept the relationships between past-present-future and political and social history to know himself and find his place in the world. Nipishish's experiences with Aboriginal and Western education systems become catalysts for his discovery of himself and his community. Noël further reveals the residential school system and the “stolen years” as a colonial practice enacted by the settler society to extradite young people from the land and break their attachment to it. However, *Good for Nothing* also shows the survival of Aboriginal cultures and traditions from the assimilatory policies developed by the Canadian government. As with *The Porcupine Year*, this novel creates a contradictory balance between the hopelessness of the political and historical context and the hope in the protagonist's ability to return, reconnect, and develop relationships within his community and amid changing cultural and territorial landscapes. This paradox highlights the aggressive history of colonialism and its impact on Aboriginal communities as well as the continued resistance of Aboriginal peoples against colonial practices.

Nipishish's attendance at St. Mark's residential school disrupts his relationship with the people of Maniwaki, and his emotional separation from this community proves to be his greatest obstacle to reconnecting to his heritage. Nipishish has a difficult time because he initially feels like an outsider as a Métis, like the metaphorical stereotype comparing the Métis and an apple, "both have red skins, but they're white on the inside" (Noël 75). His experiences at residential school in Quebec disconnect him physically and emotionally from the reserve. An elder, Basile, explains that the residential school turns the children of the community into outsiders because the "[residential school students] don't recognize us anymore, and we don't know who they are" (Noël 20). Unlike Omakayas who has not experienced a Western education, Nipishish has a broken sense of community and cannot turn inwards to gather strength and comfort as Omakayas does. Instead, he feels "trapped all over again" (Noël 12) while living on his reserve where "life is completely different" (Noël 12) from what he recalls of his pre-residential school years.

In "What Is Native American Literature?" Janette Murray argues that Indigenous literature featuring a protagonist suffering from cultural conflict within his or her own community "offer[s] little in the way of resolution" (161). Nipishish's disconnect reflects the detrimental impact that residential schools had on Aboriginal communities and further reveals the socio-historical impact of the policies of the Canadian government. Warrior writes that Aboriginal peoples educated in a Western education system must "take control of their own minds" (111), and Nipishish's complex issues with the Maniwaki reserve demonstrate his process of regaining control of his mind. Warrior further argues that critical work must "make the connections between what is going on in communities and the various factors of influence we [Aboriginal peoples] encounter" (112), and in examining Nipishish's struggle to return, the

connection between Western education and his lack of pride and disconnect from his community becomes evident.

Nipishish attempts to complete his disconnect from Maniwaki by striving to erase the parts of his identity connected to colonial history. He wants to “forget the residential school” (Noël 74) and so rejects the agenda of assimilation that this education system held, yet he is also unaccustomed to his Algonquin community and cannot understand the socio-economic condition of the reserve. When the government comes to the reserve to build housing without first consulting or taking into account the needs of the Maniwaki people, Nipishish and his community “feel as if [they’ve] been ripped out by the roots” (Noël 54). Although he feels politically wronged, he does not link the political actions of the Euro-Canadian community to the deep-rooted social problems, like violence and alcoholism, which he says turn the reserve “into a living hell” (Noël 61). Nipishish asks “why doesn’t someone do something” (Noël 61) to help the Maniwaki community, but he does nothing to alleviate their predicament either. Nipishish is unable to connect the history of Euro-Canadian – Aboriginal relations to the condition of the reserve, nor is he able to connect the community of the reserve to the community of his ancestors. The emphasis on his disconnected and segregated understanding of temporal and communal realities after residential school supports Blaeser’s assertion of the important linkage that these realities have in cycles of return. Nipishish cannot return to his community until he gains a relational perception between his people and their history.

Nipishish rejects the contemporary reserve community, but ironically feels powerfully connected to his ancestors of the past. He finds the reserve “filthy” (Noël 62), and a “living hell” (Noël 61) in the evenings when women and children cry, men scream, and gunshots go off in the night (Noël 61). Although Nipishish recognizes that living on a reserve is an unnatural state imposed by “the ministry” (Noël 63), he feels no compassion for the general

community. Instead, Nipishish longs to connect to the “old life” (Noël 57), which he idealizes as a time when people would move around on pathways through the forest and “greet each other” (Noël 57) as they moved from tent to tent around a territory. Although he believes that the ministry and its officials have disrupted and destroyed the old way of life, he does not connect this understanding of history to the social issues found on his reserve, which hinders his ability to develop a relationship with his community. Nipishish’s cycle of “return, reconnection, and relationship” (Blaeser, “Like” 557) cannot be completed until he can relate his ancestral past to his contemporary community.

When Nipishish leaves the reserve to live in Mont-Laurier with a foster family, he strives to “put the reserve behind him once and for all [...] to stop thinking about the past” (Noël 75). The narrator does not distinguish what “past” this is, which suggests that by avoiding the colonial past that has traumatized the reserve community and Nipishish himself, he must also leave the old ways of his ancestors. The tension Nipishish feels on the reserve and his inability to understand the alcoholism and violence of his people drives him to the Euro-Canadian world of Mont-Laurier. His Algonquin community itself is divided by tensions between the band office, which Nipishish doesn’t “want anything to do with” (Noël 69), and activists, like Manie, his mother figure, who struggles against the imposed authority of the government and logging corporations. Throughout Nipishish’s journey to reconnect with his roots, Manie encourages him and the entire reserve to “bring back [their] pride in [their] past, [their] history and culture” (Noël 75). She views the world through the intricate relationships between distant and near histories, and culture and community, whereas Nipishish must learn to recognize the significance of these relationships. By analyzing his perception of the community through Blaeser’s “intricately linked relationships” (“Like” 557) and Warrior’s political approach, his inability to develop Indigenous pride, identity, and

resistance to colonialism is shown to correlate to his inability to understand his community's political history.

Nipishish's struggle to reintegrate with his community suggests that freedom from colonial oppression can only occur by embracing Indigenous identity, including ancestral traditions and contemporary changes to culture. Despite Manie's urging the community to revitalize the old ways and become active agents of their future, Nipishish looks to use a Western education from a public school in the Québécois town of Mont-Laurier to make himself "educated" and "free" (Noël 103), which he believes will allow him to "leave the miserable reserve" (Noël 104). The only part of Nipishish's identity that he initially values is his father, Shipu. He longs to tell his public school classmates about Shipu, especially that he was "a great moosehunter [. . .] a friend to the animals, the wind, the sun" (Noël 103).

Nipishish is not successful in achieving his freedom in public school because he wants to remember the traditional past of his father, but to make "a break from [his] past, leaving [his] reserve" (Noël 80) and forgetting the history that his people have with the government of Canada. Cook-Lynn argues that "mixed blood" authors tend to discuss "the connection between the present 'I' and the past 'They,' and the present pastness of 'We'" (67), which implies that focusing on individual alienation and longing for ancestral heritage leads to a representation of a dead culture. She further argues that this trend in writing offers "few useful expressions of resistance and opposition to colonial history" (67). However, Nipishish's struggle to reconnect exemplifies the effects of colonialism for young audiences and reveals the hope for the continued survival of Indigenous cultures through his eventual return to his community.

At public school in Mont-Laurier, Nipishish faces an educational system that is based on the same colonial model as the residential school. He is not only hindered from achieving

his goal to be free by his own lack of acceptance of his history, but also by the stereotyping practised by the school's teachers and administrators. His heritage is not accounted for in the curriculum, and the other students are not reprimanded by the teacher for mocking his ancestry by "tapping their mouths and beating out a war cry" (Noël 104). Noël's narrator, however, also shows that most of the class is neglected and treated badly by the teacher, Monsieur Croteau, who openly displays contempt for the students whom he is "disappointed [in]" (Noël 139). *Good for Nothing* further shows that lack of success for Aboriginal students in the public school system was not only due to the dysfunctional teacher-student relationship, but also to the school administration, which institutionalized stereotyped beliefs about Aboriginal cultures and peoples. Nipishish is placed in a "special" class (Noël 100) meant for low level students, despite the fact that his grades from residential school indicate that he is an "intelligent boy" (Noël 249). The experience of moving into a Euro-Canadian community does not create opportunities for Nipishish, and it does not free him from the roots he has on the reserve and the unsettling history of his community's relationship to the government.

For Nipishish, gaining an education in both residential and public school systems gives him no equal status with Euro-Canadians. However, prejudice is not limited to the Euro-Canadian community and is inherent in some members of the Algonquin community, including himself. William, his friend from residential school, uses his school learning and some extra classes to secure employment in the band administration. When William comes to warn Nipishish that the administration has labeled him "strong-willed" (Noël 178), Nipishish describes William's blushing cheeks as "red as a ripe apple" (Noël 177), ironically drawing on William's earlier joke about Métis peoples and apples where "both have red skins, but they're white on the inside" (Noël 75). Despite Nipishish's own hope that attending a public school in Mont-Laurier would free him, he mocks William for achieving his own goals using his

education. William represents a possibility for the future because he overcomes his alcoholism (Noël 67) and turns the negative experience of residential school into a new life working for the band. William also protects Nipishish by hiding an axe he used to break into the band office (Noël 212), and walks “with a firm step, head high” (Noël 212) in a community protest against a logging corporation. Although William does not seek out the traditional ways of life with the desire and intensity that Nipishish does, he still comes to respect and reconnect with his people. The significance of Warrior’s “chaos” in Aboriginal community life can be seen in the complex relationships between William and Nipishish – two residential school survivors. The political context has caused them to forget their connection as members of the Algonquin tribe, which hinders their ability to work towards unity and change within their community.

Although Nipishish does not see the value in pursuing William’s use of Western education, he does gain some agency through his own Western education by coming to terms with the potential of the written word to have negative or positive effects on Aboriginal peoples. In “Writing American Indian Politics,” Sean Teuton argues that Aboriginal peoples gain a “political identity” (113) when they “lay claim” (113) to experiences of political subjugation and cultural destruction. Nipishish gains a political identity in part by “coming closer” (Teuton 113) to his colonial experience with the government’s written records about himself and his people. He learns about the power of writing when he discovers that the band office has a cabinet with a “file on each one of us” (Noël 71), which the band manager confirms by explaining there are “no secrets from the government [. . .] everything is written down” (Noël 72). He further learns that Aboriginal peoples can be “ordered” (Noël 86) as if from a catalogue because their information is held “in black and white” (Noël 72, 86) for the use of government, teachers, foster parents, and other outsiders – but not for Aboriginal

peoples themselves. Nipishish's realization that the Ministry of Indian Affairs records nearly everything about Aboriginal peoples' lives because they like "quiet Indians" (Noël 179) finally drives him into political action wherein he breaks into the band office to "take what belongs to [him]" (Noël 199). His political identity as a Métis person is awakened by his recognition of the connection between the "miserable filth" (Noël 179) on the reserve and the community's need to start "preparing" (Noël 179) a future for the next generation.

Along with taking political action against the government's record system for Aboriginal peoples, Nipishish also determines to use the power that writing offers. A kind teacher in public school, Monsieur Thibeault, explains that a letter is "like magic" (Noël 119), and more importantly that "the simple act of taking a piece of paper and writing can do us enormous good. Writing things down lets us talk to ourselves, understand who we are, where we come from, and what we are heading for" (Noël 120). Monsieur Thibeault's explanation of writing reflects, in part, on Blaeser's statement on "intricately linked relationships" ("Like" 557) because he describes a continuum between past-present-future. Nipishish recognizes this positive power that writing can hold, and chooses to write for his own benefit. He decides to write to his lost love from residential school, Pinamen, and this act provides a cathartic release of his residential school experience that had caused him to feel "ashamed" (Noël 122) of his identity. The act of writing thus emotionally reconnects Nipishish to Pinamen. They are then able to reunite, develop their relationship, and eventually have a child together.

Despite Nipishish's discovery of writing, the public school system as a whole is not a place where he can escape his past or prepare for the future. Nipishish realizes that a Western education will not make him free after his teacher throws a report he has written in the wastebasket claiming it "[is] not even worth mentioning" (Noël 140), and Nipishish makes the decision to "never set foot in this [public school] again" (Noël 140). Nipishish is kicked out of

residential school, but in public school he decides to leave and end his “big adventure” (Noël 140) away from the reserve given the oppressive nature of this institution. He recognizes that he will never be able to mask his history and his status as a Métis person. Again though, Nipishish wants to “forget” (Noël 142) his experiences with his foster parents, teachers, and employment in a bowling alley. Despite having learned that “memories stick to [his] skin” (Noël 122), he is still resistant to accepting the political and social aspects of his life and his community’s history in a colonized Canada. Nipishish does, however, accept “the land of [his] childhood” (Noël 143) and his roots in the Algonquin territory as they relate to his “ancestors” who “have walked over these same spots for thousands of years” (Noël 149). He imagines an Algonquin community of the past and refuses to accept the effect of colonialism on his community. He does not initially view the rest of his community as connected to his ancestors, but Nipishish begins to learn how to live in traditional ways and reconnect to his land and community through two men from his community, Manie’s older brother and experienced hunting guide, Sam Brascoupé and the elder named Tom.

For Nipishish, the history of his people is “inscribed in the landscape” (Noël 150), but because of his placement in residential school by the government and with foster parents in the city by the band administration, he has very little skill and ability himself to practise a traditional lifestyle. Furthermore, Nipishish dreams of one day teaching his children his language and to fish and hunt, but he still wants to “live in peace” (Noël 156) without taking up the fight for his community’s rights. Nipishish remains averse to working towards his community’s political rights, which is connected to his own dependency on “the check that Manie gets from the government” (Noël 173) which ultimately hinders his ability to be a “proud Indian, free as the air” (Noël 173). Still, learning from Sam and Tom helps Nipishish to reconnect to the skills he learned from his father as a boy, and more importantly, gives him

the feeling that he is “capable of doing something of value” (Noël 153). Nipishish’s socio-political struggle with his identity suggests that Blaeser’s theory on relationships is not complete. Adding Warrior’s political contextualization of communities to the concept of cycles of return addresses the full complexity of Nipishish’s struggle.

While the experiences with Tom and Sam re-connect Nipishish to the fishing and hunting traditions of his people, they also show him what has been lost. The men discover that Tom’s “hunting territory has been completely destroyed” (Noël 168); the trees are logged, his cabin is turned into a holding shelter for empty gas barrels, and the environment is destroyed. Tom is devastated because this forest is his “memory” (Noël 168), especially an old red pine that has been there since the birth of his ancestors (Noël 168). The depth of Tom’s loss demonstrates how the land is interconnected with learning, memory, community, history, and ultimately, the future. After this tragedy, Nipishish begins to realize the connection that the land has to community. Through the hopelessness of his people’s political situation, he gains a will to fight for their rights and he thus becomes the hope for the future. His anger arrives “as if it is coming out of the ground” (Noël 169) beneath his feet, which reveals the connection between his reinvigorated love of the land and his feelings about the plight of his community. The learning opportunities that Sam and Tom provide on the land, Manie’s urging for political activism, and recognizing the political situation of Aboriginal peoples become integrated in the way Nipishish views his community. By addressing Warrior’s socio-political community issues, Nipishish’s reconnection with his culture, sense of pride, and community is shown to require political activism to complete his emotional journey home. His realization of the interconnected relationships between history, land, and community allows him to believe in his place in the world and regain a sense of pride and empowerment.

Nipishish's journey to reconnect reflects both Blaeser's interconnected relationships and Warrior's socio-political and historical discussions of community. In the end, Nipishish still believes the reserve is "as dirty as ever" (Noël 171), but he also comes to see it as "sad" (Noël 171). He gains compassion once he realizes the connection that land, history, and politics have had on the development of his Algonquin community. Tom also explains that the community is "ashamed of what [they] have become" (Noël 172), indicating both the history of colonialism that has led to this point and the role the community has had in developing and perpetuating social dysfunction and disconnection from their cultural roots. Nipishish further comes to recognize the link between the men who took the pelts they had "trapped in the winter on [their] hunting grounds" (Noël 173) to the Hudson's Bay store to the men who now collect government cheques at the same store. The failure of the Western education systems to empower Nipishish as a student and as an individual exemplifies the problems associated with the education of Aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, Nipishish's failed attempt to assimilate into Euro-Canadian culture reveals that equality cannot be gained by mimicry of the Euro-Canadian community, and that Aboriginal peoples have continued to resist the colonial structures affecting Aboriginal lives. However, he does come to recognize the power of writing and learns to use this power to his advantage. Nipishish's experiences with Western education systems thus suggest that memories cannot be erased by hiding from heritage and identity, and Tom reinforces the idea that cultural and historical knowledge must be remembered.

Tom speaks at a logging protest in the Algonquin language. He talks about their ancestors, landscape, animals, and allies; he "brings them back into [their] memory" (Noël 212). Nipishish learns from this event and from Tom's words that he must remember and understand the political, social, historical, and environmental parts of his history and his

community to create a future for the people of the reserve. Indeed, Nipishish feels “as if a new day is beginning” (Noël 319), showing hope for the future of both Maniwaki and the “Anishinabe nation” (Noël 319). Blaeser’s concept of interconnected relationships reveals a complex cultural history, and Warrior’s concepts of land and community reveal a challenging political situation for Nipishish and his community to overcome. However, Nipishish and Pinamen, his girlfriend, will soon have a baby “boy, [who] will be called Shipu” (Noël 320). *Good for Nothing* shows hope for the future in the new life that they have created. By linking their baby to the past by giving him Nipishish’s father’s name, Shipu, they demonstrate Blaeser’s important notion of cycles of reconnection that are dependent on the relationships between temporal, communal, spiritual, and physical realities.

CHAPTER 5: IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY IN *NO TIME TO SAY GOODBYE* AND *THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN*

Overview

The literature review in Chapter Two reveals the ways in which systems of education were developed by the governments of Canada and the United States to eradicate Aboriginal cultures, languages, and traditions. Aboriginal scholars like Armand Ruffo note that Aboriginal literature is engaged in a project of decolonization (Introduction 7). This project can be found in the way young adult fiction addresses the issues of Western education systems. In “A Single Decade: Book-Length Native Literary Criticism between 1986 and 1997,” Craig Womack urges the importance of including a historical analysis in researching Aboriginal literature (100), an approach which counters misconceptions about the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the dominant culture and reveals the continued resistance of Aboriginal peoples against the ethnocentric policies of the Canadian and American governments. This chapter addresses the complexity of resisting Western education systems in *No Time to Say Goodbye: Children’s Stories of Kuper Island Residential School* by Sylvia Olsen with Rita Morris (Tsartlip) and Ann Sam (Tsartlip) and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Spokane / Coeur d’Alene writer Sherman Alexie. Western education is analyzed through the protagonists’ perception of their identities and their efforts to develop communities around themselves.

***No Time to Say Goodbye: Children’s Stories of Kuper Island Residential School* by Sylvia Olsen with Rita Morris and Ann Sam**

About the Book

No Time to Say Goodbye: Children’s Stories of Kuper Island Residential School was nominated by the Saskatchewan Young Readers’ Choice Awards for a Snow Willow Award in 2003. The book was also adopted by the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation in 2002. *No*

Time to Say Goodbye was written by Sylvia Olsen who became interested in Kuper Island Residential School through her mother-in-law and father-in-law, who both attended the school (188). Olsen married a member of the Tsartlip First Nations at the age of seventeen, and has raised her four children within the Tsartlip community. She believes that many people, including herself, belong to various cultures, and comments that she “write[s] stories about the things [she] know[s], while honouring the things [she] does not” (qtd in *Girl*). Olsen wrote *No Time to Say Goodbye* in collaboration with six Kuper Island residential school survivors. Rita Morris and Ann Sam recorded the memories of the survivors and helped with the revision of the subsequent stories. A review on the nonprofit Aboriginal children’s literature information website, *Oyate*, states that “children who read *No Time to Say Goodbye* will know, as much as anyone can who has not been [to residential school], what it was like” (“Grades” n.pag.). By writing five separate stories about different characters within the same school, Olsen captures a broad range of residential school experiences.

No Time to Say Goodbye is based on the oral histories of the residential school survivors, but is a fictional account of the separate stories of Thomas, Wilson, Joey, Monica, and Nelson, who were all sent to Kuper Island residential school in the 1950s. This was a school built on Kuper Island, a part of the chain of the Gulf Islands in British Columbia. My analysis focuses on the story of Monica who experiences racism and sexual abuse in the school but who resolves to shelter her father from her suffering and use her education to become a teacher in the future. As a student with no other options but to attend residential school, Monica’s resistance is complex. I analyze how her resistance to systemic oppression takes shape and yields no clear hope for the future.

Identity and Community in an Education System Away from Home

In reading *No Time to Say Goodbye*, I was surprised by the hope in Monica's dream of becoming a teacher despite the lack of support from the institution and by the hopelessness in the allusions to the cyclical problems caused by the residential school system. Children's literature about residential schools is a literature of trauma. The children were not only stolen from their land and communities, but many were also physically, sexually, and emotionally abused. Katherine Capshaw-Smith argues that "unspeakable stories must be spoken" (115) despite the difficulties in conveying these stories to children. Monica's story approaches the "unspeakable stories" of sexual and emotional abuse in residential school by indicating a seemingly contradictory future full of hope and hopelessness. As Adrienne Kertzer warns in writing about the Holocaust in literature for children, the "challenge of writing [. . .] lies precisely here: resisting the well-intentioned impulse to construct an unambiguously hopeful lesson" (245). The awareness that there is no fairy tale ending is necessary, as Kertzer further notes, because it gives children the power and knowledge to ask questions (245). Trauma literature comes with a responsibility to be representative of a complicated historical narrative. Although Monica develops her own agency, courage, and self-determination within the confining system of the residential school, her suffering at the school and the future difficulties she may face as a result of the school system are also embedded in the text.

Monica's many negative experiences at Kuper Island, including verbal and sexual abuse, are often countered by her connection to her home community. Monica cherishes her family's belief in her potential as a person and her "special gift" (Olsen 127) for learning, both of which allow her to hold onto her dream of becoming a teacher. Even when it becomes apparent that very little time will be given in the classroom to learning reading and writing, Monica asks "around to find books to read" (Olsen 130). Her proactive efforts to learn

maintain her goal that one day people can say that “Monica Sam is a teacher” (Olsen 132) in her Tsartlip community. This dream to return home as a teacher is Monica’s way of connecting to home while at Kuper Island, a strategy which demonstrates the process of homing in that other stories of residential school have employed to reveal resistance and cultural survival. In her discussion of *My Name is Seepeetza* by Shirley Sterling, Rauna Kuokkanen finds that Seepeetza “homes herself in” (718) by writing journals. Like Seepeetza, Monica never relinquishes her emotional connection to her community. Her determination to learn reading and writing also demonstrates that some residential school students resisted the plan of the schools to stream Aboriginal children into manual labour positions through vocational training, such as learning “how to mop and sweep and polish” (Olsen 132) and also, in the girls’ case, how to become a “good wife” (Olsen 131) by knowing household chores. Instead, Monica continues to plan alternate futures within the confines of the institution.

Monica’s physical separation from culture and community while attending residential school will have a long-term impact on her life; however, by remembering her family and cultural values, she preserves her Tsartlip identity. By blending Warrior’s politicized community definition with Kimberly Blaeser’s belief that Aboriginal writing is grounded in temporal, spiritual, and relational connections, the complexity of the impact of the residential school on Monica’s identity and community becomes evident. Before she passed away, Monica’s mother had called her hair a “gift” to be worn with “pride” (Olsen 126), but Monica is forced to cut her hair as part of her attendance at Kuper Island. She is traumatized by this first introduction to the school. She initially copes with this trauma by disconnecting from the environment and refusing to look at her shorn hair, “making sure the mirror did not reflect her image” (Olsen 124). Olsen’s narrator suggests that this disconnection will be long-term when

the girls leave the dressing room and “their hair, forever” (125). The cutting represents a symbolic loss of the spiritual and cultural part of the girls’ lives, which is a loss that will always affect them. While lying in bed after her haircut, Monica remembers her “mom’s soft voice” (Olsen 126) while she holds her “invisible braids in her hands” (Olsen 126). Monica has her memories, but they, like her braids, are now “invisible” in the school community where cultural conformity is now an enforced part of her life. Monica’s cultural and spiritual loss within the school is complicated, because it is at once “forever” but also retained in memories. This complication alludes to the difficulties Monica will have reintegrating with her community and rediscovering her traditions and pride after she has completed her education.

The political structure of the residential school system is shown to be flawed and corrupt, revealing the government’s unfair treatment of Aboriginal peoples and the hopelessness of Monica’s situation. Monica’s story juxtaposes the hope of her father to the lies of the Indian Agent to depict the corrupt nature of the political system of residential schools. Her father writes in a letter that “*she has a special gift*” (Olsen 127) in her keenness to learn and that her community needs her gift (Olsen 127). Learning to read and write is something that appears to come naturally to Monica, and her father believes that the school “*will teach [her] everything*” (Olsen 128). The letter reveals the political significance of the Indian Agent in Canada who, in this case, “*did not give [them] time to prepare*” (Olsen 128) to be separated as a family and who lied, claiming the school was “*filled with books*” (Olsen 128). The support of Monica’s family for her gift of learning is tempered by the systemic oppression and manipulation as seen in the actions of the Indian Agent. The paradoxical depictions of the hopeful and hopeless situation in *No Time to Say Goodbye* reflect Robert Warrior’s assertion that there are often “conflicting political, social, and cultural concerns of

American Indian people and communities” (44), particularly in her father’s support of a colonial institution. This paradox is necessary to expose the history of political injustice Monica faces and the resistance and survival of her culture. Her future plans are shaped by the love and support of her family, her own self-determination, and by her reactions to the oppressive institution of education imposed upon her. Monica’s father’s support of her education and future potential breaks misconceptions of Aboriginal parents as unconcerned about or uninterested in their children’s education and future. In looking at the political content of the writing as per Warrior and Womack, the overarching barriers affecting Monica are shown to be as strong as her familial support. She realizes that “the shelves [are not] filled with books like Agent MacDonald had promised” (Olsen 130), reflecting the reality of most residential schools, which spent little time on academic instruction and focused instead on vocational training. This lack of academic instruction does not deter Monica, who recognizes that the teachers “didn’t expect much from the students” (Olsen 130) and continues to read books provided by the teachers / administrators, Sister Mary Louise and Brother Eubieus (Olsen 130). Monica’s self-awareness and higher expectations for herself maintain her desire to acquire more from her education in residential school and to plan for her future.

While attending Kuper Island residential school, Monica is sexually abused by Father Maynard, which is a crushing reminder of the criminal failure of the residential schools. Ironically, Sister Mary Louise, who provides Monica with extra reading, comes to Monica’s “bed at night” (Olsen 139) and “says that Father Maynard wants to see his little princess” (Olsen 139). As a final insult the Sister “swears” (Olsen 139) at Monica and tells her that she’s “dirty” (Olsen 139) when returning her to her bed after she has been abused by the priest. The fleeting helpfulness the Sister shows in providing Monica with extra reading is

complicated by her betrayal of Monica's well-being, tainting the hope that Monica will achieve her dreams through the provision of resources by the Sister.

In *The Porcupine Year* by Louise Erdrich and *Good for Nothing* by Michel Noël, land plays a critical role in the community development, but in the institutional setting of the residential school, the Aboriginal student community deteriorates from both the absence of cultural connection to land and home communities and the oppressive circumstances of the school. Here, Warrior's critical concepts of land and community do not function together, however his political community concept reveals the students' internal struggle to resist the school authority. Monica represses her experiences of abuse and tries to "*forget about it*" (Olsen 137), but is forced to reconcile with her situation when the students begin to perpetuate in their own relationships the aggressive power dynamics that they have witnessed within the school. The girls in the dormitory begin taunting her about being Father Maynard's "little princess" (Olsen 137). They follow the behaviour model of singling out and abusing vulnerable girls set by priests like Father Maynard and nuns like Sister Mary Louise. In fact, Sister Mary Louise is so comfortable with verbal abuse that she joins in asking "what LP stands for" (Olsen 136) although she is well aware of the abuse Monica experiences at the hands of the priest. In one of the book's sharpest ironies, Monica's best friend from her community, Dusty, tells her that "Indians gotta stick up for ourselves, and whites got a few things to learn" (Olsen 134) before betraying Monica and turning the dormitory against her. Dusty is a girl who "will never get used to being pushed around" (Olsen 126), a girl who "change[s]" (Olsen 133) after having her haircut at the school and subsequently makes new friends, leaving Monica behind. Dusty and her new friends are "best left alone" (Olsen 134) because in hardening towards the school they have also hardened towards the other students, like Monica, who show less visible signs of resistance. Dusty has lost all sense of community,

which is reflected in her betrayal and public “taunts” (Olsen 139) against Monica. Dusty replicates the pattern of abuse she has learned, rather than drawing strength from the knowledge of community and family at home as Monica does.

Monica’s story supports Warrior’s assertion that true “consciousness” (111) and freedom of Aboriginal peoples must come with community development and rebuilding. Without the physical connection to land and cultural traditions, the students at Kuper Island struggle to develop a cohesive community; however Monica is eventually able to develop a community spirit by turning the dormitory against Father Maynard and in doing so regains confidence and inner strength. Although many girls in the dormitory taunt Monica for the abuse she experiences from Father Maynard, the toughest girl in the school, Vivian, softens her attitude. The night after the dormitory has quieted down and the other girls have gone to sleep, Vivian offers advice to Monica, which becomes Monica’s opportunity to change the dynamics of the dormitory community. When Vivian tells Monica that her suffering at the hands of Father Maynard will be over as soon as another new girl is brought to the school, Monica becomes distraught because she doesn’t “want it to happen to any other girl” (Olsen 139). While Monica lacks the emotional strength and hardness that Vivian possesses, her perspective remains communal rather than individualistic. Monica is able to persuade Vivian that taking care of each other is just as important as taking care of herself or her close friends and to “do something” (Olsen 139) to stop Father Maynard, which Vivian accomplishes by coercing the priest into leaving the school for the time being. Monica lives by Dusty’s belief that “Indians gotta stick up for ourselves” (Olsen 134) by seeking to develop a community based on support and protection among the girls in the dormitory. Once Vivian tells the other girls not to make fun of Monica, they begin to increase their own power within the school. Sister Mary Louise is in a “fluster” (Olsen 142) when the girls are “silent” (Olsen 141),

refusing to tease Monica at the nun's prompting. In the absence of homelands and while under intense cultural, political, and spiritual oppression, anti-colonial resistance becomes a uniting factor for the Aboriginal students. And Monica begins to see the weaknesses in the administration and also the power the girls have when they act as one. These scenes show that for the "first time" (144) at the school Monica feels "strength creep up her spine" (144) and gains the courage to tell the Sister that she "didn't do anything wrong" (144) but that Father Maynard and the Sister herself are the "trouble" (Olsen 144). By developing a new sense of community among the students with Vivian, Monica gains the emotional strength to defend her integrity. Her transformation suggests the importance of both reconciling the experiences of residential schooling to her identity and developing a cohesive student community.

For Monica, accepting her colonial experiences as part of her memory and identity is painful but necessary in order to develop her future aspirations as a Tsartlip person and teacher. As with Nipishish in *Good for Nothing*, Monica must acknowledge her colonial history as well as her understanding of her home community. The letter from Monica's father discussed previously reflects Blaeser's concept of "fluidity" (557) between past-present-future. He tells her to "*remember where you are from*" and "*concentrate on where you are going*" (Olsen 128), because the goal is for her to "*learn everything [she] can*" (Olsen 128) from the Euro-Canadians and "*bring it back home*" (Olsen 128). Her father also writes of her grandfather who urges her to remember her SENCOTEN language and who cannot understand the "*need to learn English*" (Olsen 128). The letter suggests that the cultural history of her community is vital to her ability to return, and that she must also gain the ability to bring Euro-Canadian skills home. In Kuokkanen's analysis of residential school stories, she finds that there is a "fusion of survival and resistance" (720) in which the protagonists must maintain their sense of belonging within their culture and resist the authority of the school.

Monica is not assimilating by striving to learn within Kuper Island, but is resisting by working to “make it” (Olsen 132) in the world on her own terms. She has the potential to “*help [the Tsartlip] people*” (Olsen 128) by bringing the knowledge of Western schooling and the English language home so that the community can redefine its own education. This hope is overshadowed for me as an adult reader by the knowledge of the political realities that Aboriginal communities have faced since the 1950s. The residential school experience in *No Time to Say Goodbye* is academically poor and limits the students’ opportunities for the future, leaving Monica with little room to choose a future beyond being a “good wife” (Olsen 131). Olsen avoids an “unambiguously hopeful lesson” (Kertzer 245) by allowing a contradiction to remain between Monica’s and her father’s dreams and the reality of the residential school system and governmental policies regarding Aboriginal children.

Monica resists the residential school agenda to “kill the Indian in the child” by resolving that reading and writing will give her the ability to strengthen her own Tsartlip community. She is disappointed that most time is spent on “bells, prayers, lineups, kitchen chores, and laundry” (Olsen 130) rather than school work at Kuper Island, but she maintains her belief that “Indian girls can do whatever any other girls do” (Olsen 132) and works in her spare time to keep reading so she can become a teacher. Monica is not impressed with the way “class work was easy” (Olsen 130) or that the nuns were “more strict about how they cleaned the floors” (Olsen 130) than how they completed their school work. Her awareness of the pitfalls of the school’s pedagogy provides a hope that this part of her education will not be repeated if she is able to become a teacher herself. Furthermore, Monica’s belief that reading and writing will be a way back into her community emphasizes her connection and dedication to her Tsartlip culture and community.

The residential school system left many young people completely disconnected from their community and sense of self. Dependency, abuse, and dysfunction are the markers of this school system for many families in part because the return to home is marred by both the colonial beliefs imposed upon children at the school and the effects of long-term separation. Monica plans her return from the beginning of her journey. Her plan is for the betterment of the community's situation in a colonized Canada. When Monica responds to her father's letter, she chooses to exclude the abusive experiences she has faced and the lack of academic education, because her father "only knew what she wrote" (Olsen 149). Monica uses the power of the written word to protect her family and in doing so she disconnects from her Tsartlip community. Her identity is altered by becoming more politically aware of her circumstances, but her acceptance of Kuper Island is again balanced by her new place in the cohesive school community. Monica has become "part of the group" (Olsen 146) within the school, and another student's relative, Auntie Nora, is on the "lookout" (Olsen 149) for the girls' safety. Although Auntie Nora is able to take Nellie home, Monica would likely not be allowed to be removed from the school whether or not she told her father about her abuse. Even with a police investigation into Father Maynard's abuse, he is merely "going to another school" (Olsen 145), rather than facing a trial or being removed from the care of children. Again, the hopelessness of the system is at the fore of Monica's story despite her unyielding belief in herself. Monica's formation of a community within the school and her continual planning for her future at home provide a hope that she can change the life of her community. The continual reminders of the tragic realities of the residential school system provide an opportunity for child readers to ask questions and learn more about this part of Canadian history. The book maintains a paradox between the historical context and Monica's struggle for cultural survival. Scholar Kimberly Roppolo (Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek) argues that

paradox is often found in Aboriginal literature and that “confusion can be a positive value” (307) because it is a “nexus of growth” (307). In Monica’s case, the hopelessness is necessary to convey the severity of the residential school history to young readers, but the hope within Monica’s character is also needed to demonstrate the resilience and resistance of Aboriginal cultures affected by this system.

***The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie**

About the Book

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie was the winner of many accolades including the 2008 Pacific Northwest Book Award, the 2007 National Book Award for Young People's Literature, and the Horn Book Fanfare Best Books of 2007. As teen reviewer Jana Siciliano remarks, Alexie’s book “is such a magnanimous stew of reality and hope [. . .] that you can't possibly put it down, no matter how sad, disgusted or freaked out it makes you” (n.pag.). I read Alexie’s book all in one sitting the first time I encountered it. I laughed, cried, and felt utterly “freaked out” by the brutal truths that Alexie wove into his story. Alexie maintains that he wants to write books that “challenge, anger, and possibly offend” (qtd in Grassian 14), and this bold approach creates the “stew of reality and hope” that Siciliano discusses.

Alexie sets his contemporary novel in Wellpinit, a Spokane Indian reservation in Washington State. The fourteen-year-old protagonist, Junior, decides to leave his reservation school, Wellpinit High, and attend Reardan High, a “white” school in Reardan. Similar to *No Time to Say Goodbye*, *The Absolutely True Diary* yields no clear-cut solutions given the reality of contemporary education system for Aboriginal peoples. Junior’s decision and the consequences that follow are the main focus of my discussion.

Identity and Community in an Education System Away from Home

While *No Time to Say Goodbye* depicts the institutionalized removal of children from their homes to be educated in residential schools, Alexie instead depicts the story of Junior who chooses to attend a school outside of his own community. Junior's decision challenges Rauna Kuokkanen's assertion of the importance of William Bevis' idea of "homing in" (718) in Indigenous literature, because Junior chooses to leave home to attend a school "twenty-two miles" (Alexie 54) away. Although Junior still lives in Wellpinit, his parents are described as losing him "to the outside world" (Alexie 89). In "Coming Home Through Stories" Neal McLeod argues that "stories act as vehicles of cultural transmission" (31) and that Aboriginal peoples in residential school, especially the Cree, "were able to find their anchor and to 'come home' through stories and narrative memory" (34). Junior's school story is indeed an attempt to find a place "wherein the experiences of the present can be understood as a function of the past" (McLeod 33). However, Junior transforms the idea of coming home by broadening the concept of home to include cultural outsiders.

At Wellpinit High, the school community is divided by Euro-American teachers and the Spokane students, which inhibits the learning opportunities of the students in the school. Junior describes the teachers as "Jekyll and Hyde" (Alexie 30), depending on whether they are "do-gooders" or "missionary saviors" (Alexie 30). Alexie here emphasizes that educators are drawn to the reservation school based on their beliefs about Aboriginal stereotypes. The do-gooders come to the school to bring the students "closer to the earth" (Alexie 30), drawing on the stereotype of the Noble Savage. The missionary saviours come to save the students from "minions of the Devil" (Alexie 30), drawing on the stereotype of the Wild Indian. Junior's humorous interpretation of his teachers further exposes the prevalence of colonial attitudes in the reservation school system. His teacher Mr. P fits in neither of the teacher categories, but he "sometimes forgets to come to school" (Alexie 29) or comes to school in his pajamas. His

lack of attention to his duties as a teacher suggests that although he is not a Jekyll or Hyde figure, he still does not believe in his students or the community of the reservation enough to be awake and ready to teach the students each day. The pitfalls of the band school system are evident in Junior's interpretation of his teachers, and a change in this situation seems unlikely in the context of his experiences.

Despite the lack of support from teachers, Junior, like Monica in *No Time to Say Goodbye*, maintains his desire to obtain an academic education. In Mr. P's geometry class, Junior discovers that his textbook "belong[ed] to Agnes Adams" (Alexie 31), his mother. The thirty-year-old book hits Junior's "heart with the force of a nuclear bomb" (Alexie 31) and reminds him that his school and tribe "are so poor and sad" (Alexie 31). Junior does not romanticize his poverty; instead he describes the conditions that poverty imposes upon his school as the "saddest thing in the world" (Alexie 31). The textbook becomes a symbol of the Euro-American governments' treatment of Aboriginal peoples, representing the neglect of education systems for Aboriginal peoples and, more importantly, the colonial belief that the welfare of Aboriginal children and communities is not worth investing in. For Junior, the realization of the educational barriers that Wellpinit High imposes on him as a student manifests in his physical response wherein he "smashed Mr. P in the face" (Alexie 32) with the textbook. Junior responds so strongly to the textbook because he is a different kind of student at Wellpinit High; he is "excited about life" and "excited about school" (Alexie 28). Junior has "hope" (Alexie 43), which suggests that he perceives the possibilities that school holds for his life in general. Alexie juxtaposes Junior with his sister, Mary Runs Away, who "faded year by year" (Alexie 40) in high school and then "froze" (26). Although she remains "beautiful and strong and funny" (Alexie 26), she stops working on her writing in school but maintains her "dream of being a writer" (Alexie 39). Junior, in contrast, believes in a link

between his education and his ambitions for his life. When Mary Runs Away eloped and moved to Montana, she was “trying to LIVE a romance novel” (Alexie 90) although she does later start to write her “life story” (Alexie 133). She also brings the alcoholism from her community in Wellpinit to her new life, instead of ending the dysfunction and discovering a healthier concept of community. Unlike his sister, Junior seeks a new kind of community that draws on inner strength and support. Junior’s mode of “homing in” is visible after his sister burns to death in a fire after she passes out, and he longs for a “room full of sober Indians, crying and laughing and telling stories about [his] sister” (Alexie 212). Junior both abhors the alcoholism and poverty in his community and refuses to “disappear” (Alexie 216) on a reservation. He resists the impositions of colonialism by leaving Wellpinit high school and in effect his reservation community, where the impacts of colonialism are reverberating with no end in sight.

The struggles of Mary Runs Away and other Spokane community members are always balanced by the narrative content revealing the systemic pressures affecting the community. Mr. P explains that the government and Euro-American goal was to teach Aboriginal students to “give up being Indian” (Alexie 35), and he further recognizes his role as part of a system that has tried to eradicate the “songs and stories and language and dancing” (Alexie 35) of Junior’s culture. Mr. P admits that this system is “wrong” (Alexie 36), but ironically he does nothing to rectify or change the roots that this early system put in place for contemporary education. The well-planned assimilatory Western education systems of Mr. P’s early days may no longer exist in their original form, but they have morphed into something new and equally detrimental. The new reservation school system for Aboriginal students has left the teachers and students “defeated” (Alexie 42). In this way, Wellpinit High is the site of the

intellectual and spiritual demise of many teachers, students, and members of the community, and there is no solution to this downfall found in *The Absolutely True Diary*.

The defeatism of the reservation school system is, like alcoholism and poverty in the novel, shown to be a cyclical pattern plaguing the Spokane community. Robert Warrior argues that in analyzing literature, scholars can “see the mistakes of the past as we analyze the problems of the present” (2), and indeed Junior’s contemporary struggles in band school reflect not only a cyclical problem within the community but also a longstanding problem associated with the way past generations did not sustain a struggle against systemic oppression. This pattern is evident in Junior’s best friend Rowdy who is described as having “given up” (Alexie 42), which is demonstrated in the way he “likes to hurt people” (Alexie 42). Although Rowdy cherishes his relationship with Junior, Mr. P suggests that Rowdy may eventually “give up” (Alexie 41) on Junior as he becomes “meaner and meaner” (Alexie 41). Rowdy’s defeatism suggests that even the strongest bond between friends is not enough to change the nature of the community at Wellpinit High or even in Wellpinit itself. In the same way he allows the other students to “pick on” (Alexie 41) Junior, Mr. P is aware that “Rowdy’s dad hits him” (Alexie 41) and does nothing to protect him. The familial abuse on the Spokane reservation has infiltrated the school system through characters like Rowdy and Junior’s bullies, and the school setting perpetuates the violence due to the lack of involvement of the teachers. The Spokane reservation has in a sense lost its spirit as is evident in the assertion that the even “grandparents gave up and their grandparents before them” (Alexie 42). Alexie suggests that the education system on the reservation is a hub for the cyclical abuse and defeatism found in the peripheral characters of the novel.

Although Wellpinit High reflects deep-rooted social and political problems, the off-reservation public school Reardan High that Junior attends after Mr. P encourages him to

“leave the rez *forever*” (Alexie 42) also has social problems of its own. His science teacher, Mr. Dodge, “wasn’t even a real science teacher” (Alexie 86); he was not trained in science. Junior attributes the placement of Mr. Dodge in a science class to “small town schools” (Alexie 86) where suitable teacher replacements can be hard to come by. Junior’s observation indicates that off-reservation schools have their own problems with the structure of administration. Mr. Dodge is particularly problematic because he has preconceived ideas about Junior and the reservation. After Junior corrects an explanation he gives of petrified wood, Mr. Dodge sarcastically remarks that “there’s so much amazing science on the reservation” (Alexie 85). His statement suggests that he has no idea that reservation schools remain under the fiduciary responsibility of the government and are often still administered by non-Aboriginal people. His lack of political awareness is coupled by his belief in what constitutes “amazing science,” which clearly does not include any Aboriginal approaches to or knowledge of the natural world.

The negative attitude of Mr. Dodge and some of the other students towards Junior transforms Junior’s understanding of himself. He describes himself as becoming “something less than Indian” when he leaves the reservation for Reardan and “something less than less than Indian” (Alexie 83) when he arrives at Reardan High. Junior’s perception of his place in Reardan and Wellpinit suggests that the systemic failure of Western educational settings is not the only challenge imposed upon Aboriginal students. Most of the Spokane community, including Rowdy, believes that Junior has become a traitor. As Junior explains to his Reardan High friend, Gordy, “some Indians think you *become* white if you try to make your life better, if you become successful” (Alexie 131). However, Junior imagines he would fight “for truth, justice, and the Native American way” (Alexie 131) with Gordy and Rowdy, if Rowdy could only understand his need to educate himself at Reardan High. Although Junior has chosen to

leave the reservation for a school better suited to his needs, he has not left his desire to be an advocate for Native North Americans. His future goals and ambitions include “fighting” for Aboriginal peoples and remaining a part of his tribe, and by reconnecting with Rowdy at the end of the novel and having “survived” (Alexie 226) his first year at Reardan, he has begun to approach the realization of his goals.

Junior’s resistance to the current systemic oppression and past problems that have manifested in the community is radically different from the rest of the Wellpinit community members, which implies that they have given up their own struggle. Before a key basketball match between Reardan and Wellpinit, Junior declares in a television interview that he is “never going to quite living life this hard [. . .] never going to surrender to anybody” (Alexie 186). His statement is directed at those in his Spokane community who have turned against him and think he has become an “apple” (Alexie 131). His decision to leave Wellpinit has placed him in a role that Kimberly Roppolo describes as “the capacity of a cultural go-between” (307). Roppolo explains the cultural go-between’s role can “express how some cross-cultural interaction has affected the people” (307); by using the term “surrender” specifically when addressing his community, Junior alludes to the ongoing resistance to colonial oppression that is necessary for his community’s survival. His word choice has greater potency given his act of leaving to find freedom in the outside world in part because “reservations were meant to be prisons” (Alexie 216). He implicitly accuses his Spokane community of surrendering, of giving up and allowing themselves to be defeated. By making this statement on television, Junior is able to justify his own decision to his tribe and implicate them in their own demise as a community.

In an analysis of Alexie’s writing, Daniel Grassian finds that “basketball remains an empowering constant” (140) in the unstable home lives and reservation conditions that Alexie

depicts. In *The Absolutely True Diary*, basketball plays a key role in Junior's ability to develop a community at Reardan and ironically pushes him further away from his Spokane community. Junior is aware of the "ghosts" (Alexie 188) of his past – death, family alcoholism, and poverty – but he also looks to the future and imagines how he will live and resist the pressures from both the Euro-American and Spokane communities. But despite his awareness of the past and future, Junior temporarily loses sight of the present situation of his Spokane and Reardan communities. During the basketball game in which he has determined never to "surrender" (Alexie 186), he fails to keep in context the poverty, alcoholism, and other factors affecting the basketball players from Wellpinit. Junior becomes overly aggressive and decides he wants to "demoralize" (Alexie 192) Rowdy while checking him. In essence, he becomes mean, like Rowdy, mocking and "sticking [his] tongue out" (Alexie 187) after successfully pulling a head-fake on him. After Reardan beats Wellpinit the crowd and Junior are cheering, but in the "quiet-faced" (Alexie 195) response of his father, Junior recognizes that he has mistaken who is "David" and who is "Goliath" (Alexie 195) in the basketball tournament. Indeed, basketball is empowering for Junior, but he also loses himself in this unreal battle between his team, a team where all the seniors "were going to college" (Alexie 195), and the Wellpinit Redskins, a team where "none of them were going to college" (Alexie 195). As Junior watches the Wellpinit team line up at the other end of court after the game, he recalls the difficult socio-economic situation of the Spokane students, and becomes "ashamed that [he'd] wanted so badly to take revenge on them" (Alexie 196). In a sense, basketball remains a "constant" (140) as Grassian terms it, because playing against his tribe reminds Junior of the condition of the reservation and his reasons for leaving. The basketball game reminds Junior of his roots and his place as a person between two cultures.

Junior's ostracization from his Spokane community and ability to develop a supportive community at Reardan change his perception of community and home. He recognizes that in a sense he has "left the rez" (Alexie 131), given his decision to attend school in Reardan, even though his plans for the future include remaining a part of his tribe. After the death of his grandmother, the Spokane community stops treating him as a "villain" (Alexie 160), because as Junior describes, "each funeral was a funeral for all of [Aboriginal peoples]" (Alexie 166), suggesting that loss is a uniting factor for his community. Because "so many of [Junior's] community members were slowly killing themselves" (Alexie 216), the community can understand the pain that death causes despite their lack of ability to understand Junior himself. However, the death of Mary Runs Away prompts Rowdy to accuse Junior of killing her because he "left" (Alexie 211). Junior does partly believe that "she burned to death because [he] had decided to spend his life with white people" (Alexie 211), which reveals the level of guilt that Junior experiences based on his decision to leave, and how significant loss has become to his life and identity. He rejects the people who get "drunk and stupid and sad and mean" (Alexie 211) to honour his sister after her death, and instead returns to school and finds solace in being "important to [. . .] and loved" (Alexie 212) by the students of Reardan High. Although Junior still loves his Spokane community, he also recognizes that the Reardan school community has "learned to care about [him]" (Alexie 212) and that he has also learned to transform his early suspicions into more positive emotions for the Reardan community. His acceptance into the "white" school demonstrates a shift of his concept of his own belonging in a community. Junior does not "home in" but rather "homes out" to find his place in the world.

Through writing and drawing, Junior is able to both escape and reconnect to the world around him. Like Monica, he believes in the potential of writing and drawing to transform communities. Writing and drawing cartoons is a way for Junior to "talk to the world" (Alexie

6) and “have the world pay attention” (Alexie 6); he is empowered by the potential that cartooning holds to give him a voice in his own community and the world beyond the Spokane reservation. His cartoons make him feel “important” and give him an “escape from the reservation” (Alexie 6). Junior feels powerful by representing himself and those around him on paper, which further suggests that writing and drawing are a link to outsiders. Although he describes his cartoons as an escape, after the death of family friend Eugene, Junior also uses his writing processes to create a “grieving ceremony” (Alexie 178). By writing lists of the people and things that give him the most joy and “writing and rewriting, drawing and redrawing, and rethinking and revising and reediting” (Alexie 178), Junior here uses his talents not to escape but to re-enter the world after being lost in grief. Through death and loss Junior again finds a way to create stability and constancy in his life. This emotional resiliency is tempered by his knowledge that he will be away from his Spokane community and “[will] always love and miss [his] reservation and [his] tribe” (Alexie 230). Junior’s hope in life and love for his people represent his connection to the world and to his heritage and also the inevitable sense of loss he will continue to experience by living his life, “moving all over the world” (Alexie 230).

In leaving Wellpinit, Junior discovers a new idea of home beyond his reservation and Spokane community. For Junior, “staying on the rez would have killed [him]” (Alexie 216), although leaving the reservation seriously damages his relationship with Rowdy and most of his band. Junior’s predicament suggests that there are few easy options for him, and that any choice for his education would have had serious consequences for his future. While many in the Spokane community “have forgotten” (Alexie 217) that reservations were intended as “death camps” (Alexie 217), Junior remembers and refuses to surrender to the colonial systems affecting Aboriginal peoples. He represents the new resistance to both the negative

aspects of Western education systems and the alcoholism and death he witnesses on the Spokane Indian reservation. By focusing my analysis on the relationship of the protagonist to community in the vein of Kimberly Blaeser and Robert Warrior, Junior's rejection of the social dysfunction of his community emerges as contrasted by his deep connection to and empathy for his tribe. His perception of community changes as a result of his new understanding of his place within the Spokane Indian reservation. He believes that he belongs to many tribes of people, including bookworms, cartoonists, Pacific Northwesterners, and funeral-goers (Alexie 217). This suggests that Junior accepts the many influences in his life as a part of his identity and plans for the future, but does not mean that he has abandoned his Spokane community. The great sense of loss that comes with Junior's broader understanding of community complicates the sense of hope the novel creates through his resiliency and determination to thrive in the world around him.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Final Thoughts

My grandfather passed away the month I began researching my thesis in earnest. The day he died, my husband and I had been to visit in the morning. I held my grandfather's hand, but his inability to eat or drink over the past week had rendered him very weak. He gave my hand a good squeeze, and I was grateful for the chance to feel his now legendary handshake one final time. On our way home we drove by his trapping territory along Marine Way in Vancouver, which is now either highway or industrial and housing developments. The land has been converted for urban and agricultural needs, but nature shows a sign of resistance in the asphalt along Marine Way that is sunken in many spots due to the marshy bog-like environment underneath. I wanted to feel connected to the piece of land that helped shape my grandfather's life, but there was little left in the environment to hold on to. His stories, instead, create the memory of land and community.

After reading all of the primary texts for my thesis, I discovered that each of them contained the death of a very important figure in the protagonist's life. My loss was paltry compared to the "forty-two funerals" (Alexie 199) Junior had been to in his fourteen years of life in *The Absolutely True Diary*, the death of Monica's mother in *No Time to Say Goodbye*, the brutal death of Omakayas' mentor Old Tallow in *The Porcupine Year*, or the passing of Nipishish's mentor Tom in *Good for Nothing*. The primary texts were all important to me at the time, because they reminded me that reading, writing, drawing, and sharing stories of loss are a way to counter the finality of death. As Thomas King writes in *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (153). The four novels discussed in my thesis all reveal the importance of stories in connecting to the past, present, and future.

Although I was emotionally connected to the primary texts when I began my thesis, I had great concerns about discussing Aboriginal literature as an outsider. Well-intentioned scholars perpetuate colonial ideas in the way they analyze or discuss Aboriginal fiction. I had doubts that I would be able to develop a meaningful discussion without committing some kind of injustice to the works in question. As I sifted through research about children's and young adults' Aboriginal literature, I soon realized that much of the academic community was avoiding Aboriginal writing entirely and instead discussing the representation of Aboriginal peoples in non-Aboriginal works. I was troubled by the apprehensiveness of scholars to address Aboriginal fiction for children and youth, and decided I did not want to avoid the literature because of fear.

The more engaged I became in my research, the more committed I became to Aboriginal literature and issues. I began to pay more attention to news and media about the struggle for land that the Musqueam, Tsawwassen, and other bands were involved in near my home in Vancouver. The more I learned about Aboriginal struggles for land, the more I was able to recognize the political issues related to land in Aboriginal literature for young adults, as exemplified by Deydey in *The Porcupine Year*, who refused to live on a reservation as planned by the United States government. Aboriginal young adult fiction also counters misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples as demonstrated by Junior's refusal to romanticize poverty as a condition that will "give you strength" (13), which he instead says "only teaches you how to be poor" (13). Aboriginal fiction for youth differs from the information distributed by much of the media and found in books about Aboriginal peoples by non-Aboriginal writers. Seeing the link between the primary texts and political issues, community development, history, and cross-cultural understanding did not dissolve my apprehension of the mistakes I could potentially make as an outsider. Recognizing this link did, however,

convince me of the need to educate myself and to consider how my own understanding of land, politics, and Aboriginal peoples has influenced me as a researcher. My discomfort at being an outsider to Aboriginal literature reminded me to ask questions about my own understanding and to consider elements of the literature that I might have otherwise overlooked.

Learning about Indigenous literary theories has given me new insights into the political nature of Aboriginal writing for young adults, and especially of the interconnected relationships between past-present-future and between community members. When I began my thesis I believed that the dominant societies and Aboriginal communities were in a binary opposition. However, Junior did not view communities and cultures as engaged in a dichotomous power struggle in the end, and instead broadened his concept of community so that he saw himself as a member of many tribes. I also expected the protagonists in the primary works I studied to reject Western education systems outright, but was surprised to discover that Junior chooses to work within the public school system. Although Monica is not given a choice about attending residential school in *No Time to Say Goodbye*, she does resolve to use her learning within the confines of residential school to work towards her goal of becoming a teacher. Even Nipishish in *Good for Nothing* and Omakayas in *The Porcupine Year* believe that written words in the language of the colonizer will hold some power for them in the future. At school, Nipishish comes to believe that writing can convey information to his advantage, whereas his previous encounters with writing through the government and band administration had disempowered him. He is able to regain control of his future in part through his ability to use writing to serve his community and his own needs. My own perception of the resistance of Aboriginal peoples to the policies of the Canadian and American governments did not include the complex community relationships and depth of

challenges facing Aboriginal youth. I realize now that resistance to colonial policies has come in many forms, and that meaningful change to education systems for Aboriginal peoples requires innovation and new ways of approaching education.

In *The Porcupine Year*, *Good for Nothing*, *No Time to Say Goodbye*, and *The Absolutely True Diary*, hope lives in the strength of community; in the ability of communities to change and learn from history; and in the protagonists who come to believe in themselves. As Alexie, Erdrich, Olsen, and Noël demonstrate, hope for Aboriginal children and families remains complicated by the great political and societal challenges that Aboriginal children and youth face when it comes to their education. When I began my thesis, I believed that hope for a true realization of Aboriginal rights and control of education lay in the work of Aboriginal peoples. Now that my thesis is in the final stages and I understand the ways in which the indirect or direct beliefs of the public affect policies for Aboriginal peoples, I also believe that outsiders, like myself, must, at the very least, turn that hope into engagement in Aboriginal issues.

Further Research

Research in Aboriginal children's and young adults' literature has much room for development and exploration. In writing my thesis, I found there were many topics that I was unable to discuss or develop given the scope of my thesis. Aboriginal fiction for children and youth is an exciting and yet under-developed field in academic studies, and so I have included a sample of topics that I hope to consider in the future.

From a literary perspective, there were some patterns and concepts I discovered in the primary literature that have the potential to reveal important insights into Aboriginal writing. For instance, I was struck by the home-away-home pattern of Aboriginal literature and would be interested to know how this pattern differs from the same pattern in non-Aboriginal books

for children and youth. Story cycles, stories within the story, and letter writing are also prevalent in Aboriginal fiction for youth and warrant further attention.

From an education perspective, I would like to analyze the use of Aboriginal fiction in the classroom, and especially how issues of trauma are and can be presented to students. Aboriginal fiction contains very politically, culturally, and emotionally sensitive content and so assessing how teachers teach Aboriginal histories of trauma is important.

Looking at Aboriginal fiction from an information studies perspective, I would like to examine why Aboriginal young adult fiction has developed more slowly than picture books and why this genre has received so little critical discussion. There are an abundance of possibilities for disciplinary approaches to and further research in Aboriginal fiction for children and youth that require the attention of the academic community.

Indeed, the TV Indian remains an unfortunate part of North American culture today, and as such, listening to Aboriginal voices tell their story of history is an essential step towards debunking stereotypes and colonial myths of Aboriginal peoples. Media for children and youth have played a pivotal role in perpetuating false representations of Aboriginal peoples and the colonizers from Daniel Defoe's *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* to Ann Rinaldi's *My Heart is on the Ground*. Aboriginal authors continue to rewrite this same history of colonialism for children and youth, and their words demand our attention.

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