

INDIGENOUS INTEGRATION:
NATIVE TEXTS IN THE SECONDARY CLASSROOM

By

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Indigenous Integration: Native Texts in the Secondary Classroom

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The ultimate goal of this project is to demonstrate the ways in which Native literature can supplement the secondary classroom curriculum in a way that benefits both Native communities and students alike. In order to achieve this goal, the supplemental material must be presented in a way that makes it logistically simple to integrate into the classroom setting. In order to create a plan for instruction in Native literature and culture, it proves beneficial to model integration in a replicable fashion so that teachers can easily implement the content. To ensure that this contextual information and the models demonstrating integration are accessible to teachers, I created a digital component to house the bulk of this project's content. In considering accessibility, I determined that an online resource would function most efficiently because it likely has the farthest potential for geographical reach and is also the most convenient to access on a recurring basis if needed. If an expectation is placed upon teachers to incorporate Native literature into their classrooms, it becomes imperative for scholars to provide the framework to assist teachers with implementation; without such a bridge, the expectation will inevitably fall flat.

DEDICATION PAGE

To my late grandfather, Paul E. Gooding, for telling me stories of our own Native ancestry and sparking in me a desire to learn more. May my research and my teaching speak to the legacy you left to generations of students. You are forever my inspiration.

“Stories are bigger than the texts and the bodies that carry them.

When absent, they leave gaps that communicate as surely as the presences”

-*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* by Daniel Heath Justice

Education inevitably exerts power, whether upon the subject of its instruction or the object of its teaching. This power is particularly exemplified in the experiences *of* and education *about* Native Americans. Diane Glancy writes about the powerful nature of education in her book *Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education*. She tracks the educational experiences of the Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche, and Caddo prisoners as they were transported from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, to St. Augustine, Florida, following the Southern Plains Indian wars in 1875. Glancy’s work identifies an undoing of identity and cultural knowledge that accompanied colonial attempts to assimilate the Natives, whose daily lives looked so drastically different from those of the settlers. In many ways, through efforts such as these as well as those made by Indian boarding schools, the process of learning has harmed Native culture in significant, long-lasting ways.

Similarly damaging is the way non-Natives are educated about Native history and literature. Critical Race Theory (CRT) analyzes an element of Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which, “with roots in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s...struck against the fundamental belief that the law was essentially fair and served the interest of all people equally. Arguing that the law is not value-free and that context mattered, CLS asserted instead that the law was a tool of oppression wielded by those in power to help maintain their place in the social hierarchy” (Krueger 302). CRT examines race and racism as an extension of CLS in an attempt to “work toward efforts in democracy and engaging

difficult truths in society” (Krueger 303). Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit), therefore, functions as an extension of CRT, examining specifically Native American experience through the theory’s lens. In addition, it analyzes education itself through that lens, asserting that one of the tenets of TribalCrit is that “Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation” (Brayboy 429). Connecting this tenet to Native education--and education *about* Natives--helps frame the way Native literature is seen today.

Ever since English colonizers arrived in the Americas, Native peoples have consistently been portrayed as lacking, animalistic, primitive, and ignorant; to find depictions aligned with the aforementioned characteristics, one need not look further than Jan van der Straet’s iconic drawing “Discovery of America: Vespucci Landing in America” (ca. 1587-1589), which depicts “America Vespucci’s first encounter with America, represented as a nude indigenous woman in a hammock. In the background cannibals roast human flesh and exotic animals roam.” This early depiction, followed by many others, sets the tone for how settlers would come to know Native people. The results of such representations span into the present day, affecting the way even contemporary learners understand Native identity and history. In some classrooms, perhaps the Native narrative is absent, leaving students to either wonder about Native identity or assume it is nonexistent altogether. In other classrooms, perhaps the Native narrative is skewed, painting a falsified image for learners about what it means to be Indigenous. Finally, in yet other classrooms, perhaps the Native narrative begins and ends in years past, giving no voice to contemporary, modern works of Native literatures, art, or

cultural expression. The result is that many students possess an antiquated understanding of Native existence hardly parallel with contemporary reality. In her article “Hybrid Positioning and Student Agency in the Post-Colonial Americas,” Julie Bolt writes, “The lack of knowledge of living American Indian people is quite stunning, reinforcing the inculcated notion that American Indian people are relics, dead, and a faded chapter in a 1950s textbook of American history. Somewhere in their institutional or cultural education these students were taught that the genocide had been completely successful and the colonial project fulfilled” (14).

English Language Arts classrooms provide an ideal environment in which the narrative regarding Native existence can be reshaped. In particular, the narrative can be reshaped by integrating contemporary, Native-authored texts into the secondary English classroom. Contemporary texts written by Native people can provide the same amount of substance and literary exposure as their non-Native, canonical counterparts. In his article “Out of the Cupboard and into the Classroom,” Jim Charles points out that “We can turn to the work of American Indian people themselves to help dispel the myths previously described. Their works provide the necessary information and perspective to better inform a child’s understanding of American Indians. The body of American Indian-authored oral and written literature is formidable, and it is growing” (176). Charles also emphasizes, appropriately, that in educators’ attempts to indigenize their classrooms, it is important to avoid texts that perpetuate the very myths and stereotypical assumptions they are attempting to dispel: “If we really want to teach our students about the American Indian experience, we should turn primarily toward Indian-authored literature and away from literature that perpetuates and reinforces myths and stereotypes” (179).

The goal of this study is twofold; first, it seeks to affirm the importance of Native American literatures, as a continuation of Daniel Heath Justice's work *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Education that integrates Native-authored texts and Native themes proves powerful for both Native and non-Native students. Kenan Metzger, Andrea Box, and James Blasingame, in their article "Embracing Intercultural Diversification: Teaching Young Adult Literature with Native American Themes," emphasize that "students not only need to see their cultural heritage acknowledged but can also benefit from having their culture included as part of the learning process" (57). Providing historical context for Native existence and also situating Native culture in a contemporary context provides non-Native students the opportunity to develop a more thorough foundational understanding of American history. Second, this project seeks to provide a tangible example of how Indigenous literature can--and arguably should--be included in secondary educational settings. The latter goal of this project suggests that the concepts, themes, and linguistic properties in both historical and contemporary Indigenous literature can serve the same purpose that more traditional, canonical texts do, while providing an even more culturally-enriched foundational understanding for readers.

Justice's work suggests many reasons why Indigenous literature is important, but the common theme he uses to tie the works together is humanism. He artfully connects storytelling to the human experience, leveling the literary playing field and making an imperative connection between many different genres: "The struggle to understand and articulate our humanity is at the heart of most literatures, customs, laws, faiths, nationalisms, identities--understandings of that existential question and the ways it has fascinated, frustrated, and frightened all human cultures throughout our varied histories"

(Justice 36). Indigenous literatures, in their own way, contribute to this “struggle to understand and articulate our humanity” that Justice identifies. The canon of Native works is full of poems, novels, oration, and stories that many inadvertently push to the side in an attempt to focus on more traditional, canonical texts. This study attempts, in a small way, to bring several of those works up to the surface and demonstrate the ways in which they complement, complexify, and enrich our already-existing canon of traditional literature. While there are already Native texts present in mainstream culture, such as Sherman Alexie’s well-known Young Adult novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, there are still more containing literary themes and elements that beg for inclusion in secondary classrooms.

Through discussion of [Native] texts, we examine how storytelling recovers and revitalizes broken histories, linguistic and otherwise, reinventing and repossessing in the process...As we read post-colonial American Indian writers, students are presented with landscapes of struggle, multiplicity, and resistance, but not of consensus and coherence. Silko presents stark realism. Alexie piles on humorous contradictions to disrupt reader assumptions. Erdrich creates multi-generational reservation epics. None of these writers expresses a singular view on what it means to be “Indian.” (Bolt 16-17)

The authors Bolt mentions complicate the idea that Indigenous literature is one solitary concept or a collection of stories which all fit into the same framework. Indigenous literature is diverse in thought, idea, literary content, and theme. Exposing students to its vastness destroys the narrative that Indigenous literature is monolithic.

In English Composition 2 at Rutgers University-Camden, second-semester freshman students are asked to write a “Discourse Community Profile,” a paper that explains different elements of a particular community; the students are asked to conduct primary research and explain how the community functions. As an instructor, I have added an additional requirement to the students’ papers when teaching the course. I ask my students to explain what the “single story” of their Discourse Community is, a reference to the well-known TED Talk given by Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story.” Justice, too, refers to this TED Talk in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. He emphasizes that “Single stories are shallow, but easily mobilized to support inequality, bigotry, and self-interest. Complexity challenges manipulation--it’s why the most cynical politicians and talking heads go out of their way to evade complexity and opt for the sound bite, or, when that fails, excessive volume” (Justice 37). In English Composition 2, students are prompted to explore the way their community is viewed by mainstream media, popular culture, and other individuals or groups outside of the community. At the end of their papers, the students must determine whether or not they believe the “single story” of their community is false, stereotypical, or simply incomplete. In the field of contemporary Native Studies, many have suggested that the mainstream understanding of Natives, their literature, and their history consists of a single, narrow story. While that notion is affirmed in this project, it is important to add complexity to the national understanding of contemporary Native existence. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to increase awareness of contemporary works of Native literatures and model ways in which those works can be incorporated into secondary curriculum across several genres.

The ultimate goal of this project is to demonstrate the ways in which Native literature can supplement the secondary classroom curriculum so that it benefits both Native communities and students alike. In order to achieve this goal, the supplemental material must be presented in a way that makes it logistically simple to integrate into the classroom setting. This project does not aim to merely propose theoretical possibilities, but instead focuses on providing tangible examples for classroom integration. In order to create a plan for instruction in Native literature and culture, it proves beneficial to model integration in a replicable fashion so that teachers can easily implement the content. To ensure that this contextual information and the models demonstrating integration are accessible to teachers, I created a digital component to house the bulk of this project's content. In considering accessibility, I determined that an online resource would function most efficiently because it likely has the farthest potential for geographical reach and is also the most convenient to access on a recurring basis if needed.

It became important in the early stages of the project to survey high school curricula to identify which literary elements are deemed imperative for secondary students to learn in English courses. Common Core standards were analyzed from three different states in various geographical regions: New Jersey, Ohio, and Florida. Taking into account standards from a variety of states ensures that the generalizations derived from the standards are, to a degree, nationally agreed-upon. The documents published by each state indicate the core competencies that high school students are expected to develop throughout the academic year in grade 10 specifically. These core standards are remarkably similar and, indeed, in many cases identical. Below is a table detailing the similar standards found amongst Common Core requirements in New Jersey, Ohio, and

Florida. While several of the standards differ in syntax slightly, the content of each one aligns with those of the other states. These tables do not present a comprehensive list of the Common Core standards, but instead demonstrate several similar standards in each category that can be fulfilled through literature read in the classroom, Indigenous or otherwise. This table, in providing a small sample of statewide competency requirements, identifies which concepts--in reading, writing, and language standards--are taught at this particular level of secondary education.

Table 1. Common Core Standards.

	New Jersey	Ohio	Florida
Reading	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis 2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development 3. Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings 5. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it, and manipulate time 6. Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States 7. Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events 8. Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums 9. Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis 2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development 3. Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings 5. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it, and manipulate time create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise 6. Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States 7. Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums 8. Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis 2. Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development 3. Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas/events 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text (figurative, connotative, technical) 5. Analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone 6. Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sections of text 7. Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view/purpose 8. Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums 9. Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance, including how they address related themes and concepts
Language Standards	<p>Students should demonstrate knowledge of and capacity to use:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parallel structure 2. Various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) 3. Correct spelling 4. Context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase 5. Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech 	<p>Students should demonstrate knowledge of and capacity to use:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parallel structure 2. Various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) 3. Correct spelling 4. Context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase 5. Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech 	<p>Students should demonstrate knowledge of and capacity to use:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parallel structure 2. Various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) 3. Correct spelling 4. Context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase 5. Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech

Several curriculum maps specific to their school districts were also analyzed to determine how districts incorporate certain themes, genres, and cultural concepts to meet the state-wide standards. For example, the table below details a sample of 10th grade

English curriculum from Highland Regional High School (HRHS), of the Black Horse Pike Regional School District in New Jersey. The curriculum breaks down a school year into four marking periods, each with a theme to be explored. At HRHS, the four themes are “The American Experience: Individual Identity,” “The American Story: Our Literary Identity,” “Argument and The American Dream,” and “The Dream vs. Reality.” For each marking period, standards are divided into four categories: Reading (Fiction & Nonfiction), Writing Expository, Speaking & Listening, and Language. Within each category, various Learning Targets are specified, among which are detailed below.

Table 2. Highland Regional High School Curriculum.

Marking Period 1	Marking Period 2	Marking Period 3	Marking Period 4
Reading: theme, thematic elements, character analysis (conflict, events, theme), setting, word choice, use of figurative language, expository structure, style choice, cultural perspectives portrayed through literary and rhetorical devices	Reading: analyze author’s message about identity and how it reflects/contributes to American identity, theme development, citation of textual evidence, character development as reflective of various versions of American identity, analyze cumulative impact of word choice & connotative meanings, effectiveness of figurative language and literary devices, authorial structure choices and their effect on mood/genre, relationships among events in text	Reading: analyze author’s claim development, analyze themes connected to American Dream, citation of textual evidence, analyze authorial introduction of ideas/claims, analyze word choice & connotative meanings, effectiveness of figurative language, analyze how claims/ideas are developed with certain paragraphs, sentences, etc., determine authorial purpose and analyze how rhetoric is used to achieve that purpose, analyze and evaluate arguments for claims/reason/relevance/fallacy, analyze and reflect on the American Dream as it emerges from important US documents	Reading: analyze development of theme and how it is affected by character actions, plot events, etc., character development/interactions/conflicts/motivations, cumulative impact of word choice & connotative meanings, effectiveness of figurative language, analyze choices author makes to order events and manipulate time, analyze a cultural experience and its impact on the feasibility of the American Dream, analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics

The Learning Targets align with New Jersey’s Common Core standards; the themes, however, are not designated by the state, and vary among districts. The table below demonstrates that while Common Core is implemented nationwide, there is often

thematic variation allowed within those standards. While the instructor who developed Highland Regional High School's curriculum designated marking period themes herself, there are other districts in which most ELA instructors are not allowed input regarding the curriculum they teach. For that reason, inclusion of non-canonical texts and introduction of settler colonial frameworks in the high school classroom proves tedious and daunting for many instructors. Not all instructors are given the opportunity to adapt curriculum on a district-wide or school-wide scale, and therefore might not have much flexibility within their lesson planning. For those instructors with significant input regarding their district or school's curriculum, implementing themes similar to the ones in Table 2 might be plausible. For others, who are subject to the thematic variances of school administrators, the inclusion of Indigenous literature can take place on a smaller scale, perhaps by including a Native-authored poem or speech within the context of a themed marking period.

Teachers maintain different levels of influence depending on their position, which means that the implementation of Indigenous literature will look different amongst instructors. It is, however--as the HRHS instructor demonstrates--possible to integrate Native American texts into the classroom even when state standards do not necessarily lend themselves to the process. For example, Mesa Public Schools, in the mid 2000s, partnered with Arizona State University to develop a Native American Literature course for high schoolers that "met the Arizona Department of Education Standards for the English Language Arts and satisfied the expectations of the MPS administration" (58). Since standards tend to remain somewhat constant across states, as Table 1 (above) suggests, efforts made similar to those of Highland Regional High School, Mesa Public

Schools, and this project can--and should--be adapted, replicated, or templated to fit in a variety of classrooms across the country. For example, in the article published by Metzger, Box, and Blasingame, which details the development of the Native American Literature course at Mesa Public Schools, several appendices are provided at the end of the piece. Appendix A is a “List of Books Used in the Native American Literature Curriculum” (61) and includes an alphabetized list of each text used in the course; it details over 50 different texts. Appendix B details several questionnaires that are posed to the students during the course. One questionnaire contains questions that focus on students’ own Native identity, experiences, and expectations; the other focuses on prior knowledge of Native culture/literature and course expectations. Prior to the creation of the Native American Literature course at Mesa Public Schools, “Kenan Metzger, a researcher from a university, conducted a pilot study in 2008 at Westwood High School in Mesa, Arizona, in a multicultural literature of 30 students” (57). The pilot study determined that “studying multicultural literature helped them [students] to understand their own and others’ culture, which in turn increased not only tolerance but also understanding in important social contexts in school and in their lives after school” (57). Appendix C details the survey questions that were asked of students during that pilot study, primarily focusing on inquiring about students’ experiences with reading and their experiences with reading Native American Young Adult literature specifically. Metzger, Box, and Blasingame’s article is formatted in a way that openly presents information and resources that other educators, researchers, and academics can utilize. The production of works that lend themselves to reproduction is vital to support classrooms of secondary teachers; there is a need to provide replicable resources that are not excruciatingly burdensome to

teachers who, oftentimes, already manage a substantial workload. If an expectation is placed upon teachers to incorporate Native literature into their classrooms, it becomes imperative for scholars to provide the framework to assist teachers with implementation; without such a bridge, the expectation will inevitably fall flat.

As is evident by the many aforementioned sources in this discipline, this is not the first time an academic has written about the inclusion of Indigenous literature in the classroom, and it is certainly not the first time the importance of such works has been analyzed. In many ways, this research serves as a continuation of the work many in the contemporary Native Studies field perform. One aspect, however, that differentiates this project from the next is translation into a digital project. As both a student and a teacher myself, I understand the disconnect between academic research and educator practicality that so often results in stagnation. Pouring over the research suggesting that secondary instructors *should* change their method of instruction does little to demonstrate *how* they might make that instructional shift. It proves imperative to demonstrate to educators *how* implementing a concept like the settler colonial framework in their classrooms might benefit their students, instead of explaining to them *why* they should do it; many instructors simply do not have the extra time or energy to facilitate that heavy lifting themselves in addition to their daily course load. Justin Krueger echoes this reality in his aforementioned article: “Teachers often do the best with what they have as far as resources and materials. Caught somewhere in the limbo of standardized testing, finite resources, shortsighted curriculum portrayals, and limited perspectives of teaching materials is their work reality” (Krueger 295). He goes on to suggest ways in which educators can work to integrate Native resources into their classroom: “Accessing

indigenous-oriented professional development opportunities, utilizing Native American-generated curriculum materials, and teaching about indigenous people throughout the entire school year are but a few ways for teachers to improve their own content knowledge and also offer students' different perspectives and context in their learning" (Kreuger 296).

Kreuger notes that in order to engage in such adjustments, teachers must undertake the task of "curriculum mining" (305). He deems this process "a necessary process by which to extract greater meaning and context about Native Americans" (305), explaining that teachers must engross themselves in the content matter in order to find and expose the value of Native American education. He writes, "Because it is likely that there will never be a time when teachers are freely given the resources and materials needed to engage more nuanced and critical understandings of Native Americans, ambitious teaching via curriculum mining is vital" (306). Educators, however, are not always able to conduct this mining process on their own due to the aforementioned deficit of time and resources available to them. This project's digital component seeks to conduct some "curriculum mining" itself in its attempt to provide teachers with tangible, replicable ways to incorporate Native American texts into their classrooms.

Digital Project Access

<https://emmaeduncan.wixsite.com/indigenoussliterature>

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