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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2016 Volume I: Contemporary American Indian History

Dreaming from the Margins, Living in the In-Between: Identity, Culture, and the Power of Voice

Curriculum Unit 16.01.01, published September 2016
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Introduction

It goes like this:

"Name some authors you've read." I wait patiently. The silence stretches to 15 seconds, 30 seconds, a lifetime. It is, after all, the first day of school, and although many of the students know *of* me, they do not *know* me. I am really good at waiting.

Finally, a brave soul raises her hand. "You mean like *any* books?" I note the look of relief on their faces and know what they are thinking: *Now we're going to get a few minutes reprieve because she's going to do what every other teacher does. She's going to launch into a lecture.*

"I asked for authors, not titles, but titles will suffice for now." And I wait. Smiling.

Silence. Finally, I hear barely discernible mumbling. "Shakespeare." "*Catcher in the Rye*." "*Romeo and Juliet*." The voices get louder. "*All Quiet on the Western Front*." "*Lord of the Flies*." "*House on Mango Street*." "*Like Water For Chocolate*." "*Candide*. Well, kinda." "We read that one thing about people eating babies! That was some strange s***t. Sorry!" *"Hunger Games*." And this listing continues. I record their answers on the whiteboard. They even throw out titles of children's books and, much to their surprise, I quickly write those, too. Children's literature is, after all, a genre all its own. By the time I stop them, the board is covered with titles, and sometimes authors, they have read.

Why do I do this? Because I want them to see that contrary to what they may think, they are a community of readers. However, in all the years I have done this, not one student has ever named a Native American author or a title by a Native American writer. Not one. This is unacceptable. And it is something I hope to change with this unit.

Rationale

I teach English because I love literature. Discussions about books often set my English teacher heart a pitter-patter. In fact, most of my juniors and seniors know this, so when my eyes widen and I lean forward and my hands begin to fly, some smile and nod understandingly, others roll their eyes and maybe giggle. Some even, with the boldness of the young, state, "You're weird," but because they're nice kids, they quickly follow up with, "But that's okay!" Unfortunately, the vast majority of my students, including my students in AP English Literature and AP English Language, do not share my enthusiasm for the written word. Few, if any, read for pleasure, and more than a few unabashedly admit they do not like to read. They do so reluctantly only because I have assigned it—and if I am honest, sometimes they do not even do that. Part of the reason is they do not see English as something that will help them in the future. It is simply something to "get through," something they must endure to get where they really want to be: on the path to prosperous careers in STEM. What they do not realize and what I have not done a good job of is conveying to them is the importance of language. What I have failed to do is make them understand the power of language.

In this increasingly global society, language is everything. It is how we convey to others our opinions, thoughts, ideas, desires. Central to this ability to communicate effectively is voice. Tone, word choice, and all the other rhetorical decisions made that make a voice unique and a message clear. And who we are individually and culturally depends on language. It is how we maintain and pass on our culture, our traditions, our heritage to those who follow.

Language is also power. We are judged by how we use language, spoken and written. Those who wield it skillfully are more likely to have their needs met, their desires fulfilled. Too often, those whose native language is one other than English, find themselves on the losing side of such a power struggle. It is something my students know all too well.

In Silicon Valley, 21% of residents possess a graduate or professional degree (compared to 12% of California and 11% of the United States). Additionally, 30% of households earn $150,000 or more annually, compared to 26% of California and 11% of the United States. In the midst of this affluence is San Jose, once the Valley of Heart's Delight and now the heart of Silicon Valley. It is the third largest city in California and the 10th largest in the United States. And in San Jose a mere 15-20 minutes away but a world removed from some of the nation's highest-achieving high schools and its elite universities sits William C. Overfelt High School. Situated in a predominantly working-class neighborhood bounded by high poverty and high crime—a "gang hotspot"—it stands in stark contrast to the prosperity that surrounds it.

Latinos make up nearly 80% of the student population at Overfelt, but only 26% of Silicon Valley as a whole. While less than 8% of Silicon Valley's population lives below the poverty level, and just under 22% live above the poverty level but below the Self-Sufficiency Standard,[1] 90% of Overfelt students are socio-economically disadvantaged. Only 12% of those in Silicon Valley have less than a high school education, whereas the number of Overfelt parents with less than a high school education is 55%.

Of the approximately 80% Latino students, the majority are of Mexican heritage, from homes where Spanish is the home language, and who did not learn English until they entered school. They often act as interpreters for their parents and grandparents but often struggle with expressing themselves both verbally and in writing.

Given this, how can a curriculum unit on contemporary American Indian history be relevant in an English

classroom in a school where of 1455 students only one is American Indian? I have asked this question of myself many times. Though including Native voices is a more natural fit for AP English Literature, it seems *apropos* for AP English Language, too, because of its focus on rhetorical choices and non-fiction. Nevertheless, I have struggled with how to incorporate fiction into a course that focuses on short, non-fiction writing to examine rhetoric and the ways in which authors use language. Can it be done? Do novels even have a place in an AP English Language course? Will my students find novels by American Indian authors relevant to their own lives?

Yes. And they do this by making connections.

Because so many Overfelt students are first-generation Americans or first-generation immigrants, their connection to the customs and traditions of their parents' birthplaces is closer. This temporal proximity will allow them to see the similarities in some of their own experiences with discrimination and marginalization. And although some of their experiences will be very different in some respects, they should also recognize the parallels between their own culture and those of Native Americans, especially in the efforts of the "majority" to erase or eradicate their sense of identity and culture in the name of assimilation. However, it is important that in exploring these themes of identity and marginalization, as well as the tensions between both their worlds, students do not come away thinking of themselves as victims. Rather, a goal of this unit is to inform students how historically language was used to divest Native Americans of their powers as sovereign nations and how Native nations are now using that language to regain some of what was lost or stolen. This is empowering. Additionally, through their inquiries, students will see language not as static but evolving, and that this evolution can be a way of preserving culture, not only Native American but their own as well.

It will not be easy, but I am not just preparing my students for the AP English Language Examination in May. I am working to prepare them to be college and career ready after they leave high school. And they are looking for ways to build their confidence and find their identities as successful, productive members of our society and their own communities.

Content Objectives

The focus of the AP English Language course is rhetoric: those choices made by writers and speakers to reach most effectively a particular audience for a particular purpose. The course should "engage students in becoming skilled readers of prose written in a variety of periods, disciplines, and rhetorical contexts, and in becoming skilled writers who compose for a variety of purposes."[2] In AP English Literature, students also engage in reading closely and practice critical analysis, but the emphasis is on imaginative literature rather than non-fiction texts. Another difference, but not unrelated, is the focus on analysis "to deepen their understanding of the ways writers use language to provide both meaning and pleasure," considering "a work's structure, style, and themes, as well as its use of figurative language, imagery, symbolism, and tone."[3]

One may not think contemporary Native American history belongs in an English classroom, especially an AP English Language and Composition class; however, what both English exams focus on—the ways authors of non-fiction and of imaginative literature use language to achieve a particular end—can be taught in the English classroom if crafted carefully. Such a unit can prepare students for exams that require they be well-versed readers and writers in four major rhetorical modes: narration, description, exposition, and

argumentation and persuasion, and in the more traditional skill of literary analysis. That is the goal of this unit.

Additionally, Common Core describes students who are college and career ready as independent, "able to build strong content knowledge," can "comprehend as well as critique" an author's message, "use technology and digital media strategically and capably," and "understand other perspectives and cultures" (Introduction to CCSS for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, p. 7). This unit meets requirements of both the College Board and the Common Core.

While not a traditional AP English unit, students will 1) engage in analysis of texts they otherwise might not encounter, 2) learn the skills necessary for success on the AP exam, and 3) broaden and deepen their understanding of peoples that too often are relegated to short chapters in too often outdated history textbooks. Finally, it integrates Native American studies in a way that is engaging, relevant, and accessible AND meets the requirements of the Common Core.

Essential Questions

> "…[A] majority of students come to postsecondary American Indian literature courses with a dearth of prior knowledge about native worldviews, tribal diversity, and myths and themes that appear in much of literature."—Carol Zitzer-Comfort[4]

My district is pushing all teachers to use essential questions as part of their daily lesson plan. We are encouraged to post one or more essential questions to frame our work for that day, that week, or the next several weeks. The rationale is that these questions help students make connections to issues beyond just learning what they learn because we make them learn it to earn a grade. The following Essential Questions and Enduring Understandings may be used in part or whole to frame the unit, or modified to better meet the focus or approach of the particular classrooms and student populations.

1. What part does language play in determining power structures?
2. How has the legal status of Native American impacted their social and cultural traditions?
3. How can a culture or society maintain its traditions and thrive in the modern, Euro-centric society?
4. Can one live in both the traditional world and the contemporary world, and if so, how does one reconcile this "clash of cultures"?
5. How can language bridge differences?
6. How does language affect one's sense of identity?

Enduring Understandings

1. Tradition and progress need not be mutually exclusive.
2. An authentic voice has power.
3. History is made in the present.

> "Native American cultures and their respective literatures are not ornamental and historical artifacts of America's past, but are both ancient and ongoing—and as complicated as those of any other of the world's peoples."—Michael Dorris[5]

There is no easy way to remedy the "dearth" of students' knowledge or experiences with Native American literature,[6] and with the Common Core's emphasis on informational texts in English and social studies, the job just got harder. But it's not impossible. Our responsibility as educators is to find ways to provide our students what they need to make meaning from the information we give them. Sometimes, that means doing what needs to be done, despite or in spite of the curricular standards *du jour*. Carol Zitzer-Comfort argues that teaching American Indian literature is important because it "broaden[s] [students'] perspectives of American history, colonialism, and imperialism."[7] Though students may know it exists, they too often think of American Indian literature existing "back then" as opposed to "nowadays." However, in the introduction to *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, an anthology of writings by Native American women writers, Joy Harjo argues, "We are still here, still telling stories, still singing whether it be in our native languages or in the 'enemy' tongue." [8]

In this unit, the non-fiction texts will provide context for Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* and Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, the foundational texts for this unit. For students to have a deeper understanding of both novels, they must 1) have a basic understanding of Native worldviews and 2) know how American Indians' relationship with federal and state governments evolved. Not until they have this foundation can they begin to understand the complexities found in the novels.

Native American Worldview

There is no one worldview that all Native Americans share, just as there is no single Western worldview. However, there are characteristics common to how Native Americans view the world that stand in contrast to a general non-Native vision of how the world works and our relationship with it.

Whereas the Western relationship with land is rooted in the idea of dominion over property that is owned and put to use, historically American Indians have had a communal sense of the land. Rather than ownership, they had stewardship over it. This relationship is tied to their view of nature in general. They see themselves not as separate from nature but as a part of it. Their stories are rife with images of animals and other natural entities, such as the sun or the earth, that have human characteristics, virtues and foibles. This view of the natural world is illustrated in a recollection by Gloria Bird in the introduction to *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*. When she took her aunt to see Mt. St. Helen after it had erupted, as they were looking at the mountain, her aunt commented, "Poor thing." Bird realized that her aunt

> … spoke of the mountain as a person. In our stories about the mountain range…our relationship to the mountains as characters in the stories is one of human-to-human. What was contained in her simple comment on Mt. St. Helen's, Loowit, was sympathy and concern for the well-being of another human being—none of which she had to explain.[9]

This way of orienting themselves within the world also informs their sense of community. While the American concept of family is tied to the nuclear family, American Indians' definition of family is more expansive. It includes the extended family. Everyone is related. This concept of the extended family as simply family is one my students will relate to because it is something they experience every day. It is not unusual for them to share housing with aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. Though they may not be able to articulate it, they know that divisions between immediate family and extended family are merely a social construct of one society of which they are members, but not the one to which they claim membership and to which they feel most loyal. As Kenneth Lincoln argues:

> To Indians tribe means family, not just bloodlines but extended family, clan, community, ceremonial exchanges with nature, and an animate regard for all creation as sensible and powerful. Tribe means an earth sense of self, housed in an earth body, with regional ties in real things.[10]

These characteristics of American Indian worldview are by no means universal. There are variations amongst the tribes. However, these provide a good overview of a general native worldview.

The Government Giveth, and the Government Taketh Away: Sovereignty and United States Supreme Court Cases, Federal Laws, Acts, and Policies

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> "Sovereignty is a pivotal concept for Native communities, and for most, if not all, American Indian writers, it is a concept that must be addressed implicitly or explicitly from within the specific context of that writer and his or her community."[11]

The concept of sovereignty informs and is a common theme that runs through much of American Indian literature. According to Frederick E. Hoxie, "[t]he struggle over sovereignty—over control of individual lives, ideas, and community narratives as well as over institutions—speaks to the condition and perspective of Native actors and Native communities,"[12] and, indeed, "can be an element of any aspect of Native life, of intellectual and cultural life as well as of political institutions or economic resources."[13] In this context, the voices of American Indians' struggles to assert their sovereignty is embodied in their literature—narratives, short stories, poems, novels. In her article "Rhetorical Sovereignty and Rhetorical Alliance in the Writing Classroom," Lisa King asserts that "[t]here is no neutral story, but instead many stories weighted with the implications of their time and place,…."[14] One cannot begin to fully appreciate the complexity of works by Erdrich or Alexie (or other seminal writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko, Michael Dorris, or N. Scott Momaday) without knowing how tribes were divested of true sovereignty and how, unlike "other marginalized groups, [are not] fighting for inclusion in the democratic imaginary but, rather, for the right to remain distinct, sovereign, and tribal people."[15] Therefore, to understand why the theme of sovereignty permeates American Indian literature requires one be familiar with the laws and policies that have shaped and continue to govern American Indians' complicated relationships with the federal government and states.

The body of Indian law, including case law and policy, is vast and complex, fraught with the struggle largely over power and which entity—tribal, federal, or state—has control over land use, rights to water, rights to control what happens on Indian lands. In other words, sovereignty. Though not an exhaustive list, the following U.S. Supreme Court cases and Congressional Acts bear directly on American Indians' status in American society. Three cases decided from 1823 to 1832 established the legal status of American Indians in the United States. Each one penned by Chief Justice John Marshall and collectively referred to as the Marshall Trilogy, these cases have come to define the unique legal space that American Indians occupy in American society. They form the cornerstone of American Indian law and help to contextualize the literature of Native peoples.

In the first of the three cases, in *Johnson v. M'Intosh*,[16] the Court addressed the issue of Indian title to land, specifically whether American Indians had the right to transfer land title to individuals. To decide that central issue required that the Court resolve the question of whether Native nations were sovereigns with all the rights and privileges inherent in such entities. After an extensive discussion of the history of the arrival of European nations' in North America, their relationships and dealings with each other and with Native nations via treaties, the Court found that although American Indian tribes were considered sovereign nations, the discovery doctrine restricted tribes' rights to a more simple right to possess and use the land as they saw fit. Chief Justice Marshall reasoned:

> … [Native nations were] the rightful occupants of the soil, with legal as well as just claim to retain possession of it, and to use it according to their own discretion; but their rights to complete sovereignty as independent nations were *necessarily diminished*, and their power to dispose of the soil at their own will to whomsoever they pleased was denied by the original fundamental principle that discovery gave exclusive title to those who made it [emphasis added].[17]

Marshall continued to diminish tribal sovereignty in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*.[18] In this case, the Cherokee nation petitioned the Court to enjoin the state of Georgia from executing laws passed by the state. Although the Court did prevent Georgia from acting on its laws, Marshall also held that the Court had no jurisdiction to hear the case because the Cherokee Nation had erroneously filed as a foreign nation. He cited the Commerce Clause of the Constitution that "empowers Congress 'to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes.'"[19] This language, he argued, clearly indicated the intent of the Framers to treat Indian tribes as something other than foreign nations.

> In this clause, [the Cherokee Nation is] clearly contradistinguished by a name appropriate to themselves from foreign nations as from the several States composing the union. … The objects to which the power of regulating commerce might be directed are divided into three distinct classes—foreign nations, the several States, and the Indian tribes. [20]

Rather than foreign nations, he argued the Indian tribes were more accurately described as "domestic dependent nations" that relied upon the federal government for "protection," "its kindness and power," and "appeal."[21] He further characterized the relationship between the two entities as "resembl[ing] that of a ward to his guardian."[22] He cemented this characterization a year later in the last of the trilogy cases, *Worcester v. Georgia*.[23]

In this case, Samuel Worcester petitioned the Supreme Court after his conviction by the state of Georgia was upheld after he was convicted for failure to obtain a license to reside on tribal land.[24] In reversing Worcester's conviction, the Court reaffirmed the quasi-sovereign status of Indian tribes. Finding that the state of Georgia had overstepped its bounds, Marshall wrote:

> The Indian nations had always been considered as distinct, independent political communities, retaining their original natural rights as the undisputed possessors of the soil from time immemorial, ... The very term "nation," so generally applied to them, means "a people distinct from others.[25]

He further reasoned that by virtue of having entered into treaties sanctioned by the government, Indians tribes had been "admit[ted] to [the] rank among those powers who are capable of making treaties,"[26] *i.e.*, sovereign entities, since it met the characteristics of such entities.

> The Cherokee Nation [was]…a distinct community occupying its own territory, with boundaries accurately described, in which the laws of Georgia [had] no force, and which the citizens of Georgia [had] no right to enter but with the assent of the Cherokees themselves, or in conformity with treaties and with the acts of Congress. The whole intercourse between the United States and this Nation, is, by our Constitution and laws, vested in the Government of the United States.[27]

These three cases have formed the heart of Indian law. They established both the status of Native nations in relation to state and federal governments as well as the fiduciary duties of the federal government to American Indians. The ramifications of Marshall's words continue to inform federal Indian policy even today. Importantly, Marshall explicitly stated that treaty language, which provided the bases for tribes' challenges to encroachment on their sovereignty, were to be construed in favor of the tribes since it was not "reasonable to suppose that the Indians, who could not write and most probably could not read, who certainly were not critical judges of [the English] language should" understand complex treaty language.[28] Enacted around the same time or following these three seminal cases were several significant U.S. laws that had devastating impacts on tribes.

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 was debated and passed in April by the Senate, followed by debate and passage in May by the House, and signed into law by President Andrew Jackson.[29] It vested in the President the power to move tribes living east of the Mississippi River to lands west of the river in exchange for their traditional homelands, and guaranteed these new lands would belong to the tribes forever. In theory, the removals were allowed only if the tribes consented; in practice, however, the principle of consent was not always followed. The infamous Trail of Tears, for example, was the forced removal of the Cherokee from their traditional lands in Georgia to Oklahoma. These forced removals were in direct contravention of the Court's ruling in *Worcester* that found that although tribes were "wards" of the federal government, they were still independent sovereigns in relation to the states. The law had disastrous effects on tribal populations, which diminished sharply during the approximately 30-year period the law was in force. Unfortunately, the execution of this policy was not the only blatant disregard for the sovereign status of Native nations.

The United States continued to expand westward, including into territories the federal government had decades earlier guaranteed to tribes in perpetuity for leaving their homelands east of the Mississippi. To meet

the demands of pioneers in search of land to settle, the government entered into treaty with tribes. In exchange for tribes ceding territory to the United States and for food and supplies, the federal government established new homelands, reservations on which tribes could live peacefully and untroubled by the ever-growing number of settlers moving west. Tribes resisted, some for many years, but eventually accepted the offer of the federal government (which created reservations by Congressional acts and executive order after the United States discontinued treating with tribes in 1871). However, even these concessions were insufficient to protect Native nations from westward expansion and the need/desire for land that drove it.

The Dawes Act of 1887 (sometimes referred to as the General Allotment Act) divided reservations into individual allotments to tribal members. The goal of this act, named for sponsoring Massachusetts Senator Henry Dawes, was to assimilate American Indians more readily into white American society by making them landowners. In general, the Act awarded up to 160 acres to tribal members, based on one's particular status, *e.g.*, Head of Household, single person over eighteen, orphans under 18, etc.[30] The effects of this Act ran contrary to Native worldview of holding land communally. It also effectively diminished tribal lands because any reservation land not allotted to tribal residents was opened up to the public for purchase. When the Dawes Act was repealed, tribes were left with a significantly smaller landholdings and with non-Indian residents living on the reservation but not on land, which created tremendous jurisdictional problems later.

One of these problems was criminal jurisdiction, and it is that issue that is at the heart of Erdrich's *The Round House*. The seminal case here is *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*.[31] The issue before the Supreme Court in *Oliphant* was whether tribes had jurisdiction over non-Indians who committed crimes on tribal land. In writing for the majority of the divided Court (6-2) that reversed the decisions of the lower courts that found in favor of the tribe, Justice William Rehnquist found that

> …in the [1855] Treaty of Point Elliot [upon which the tribe relied to assert jurisdiction], the Suquamish were, *in all probability*, recognizing that the United States would arrest and try non-Indian intruders who came within their Reservation.[32] … By submitting to the overriding sovereignty of the United States except in a manner acceptable to Congress, Indian tribes therefore necessarily give up their power to try non-Indian citizens of the United States except in a manner acceptable to Congress [emphasis added].[33]

In reaching his conclusion, Rehnquist eschewed the tradition set forth in *Worcester* that ambiguous language should be resolved in favor of the tribe. Further, he characterized tribal courts as primitive, even asserting that

> few Indian tribes maintained any semblance of a formal court system. Offenses by one Indian against another were usually handled by social and religious pressure, and not by formal judicial processes; emphasis was on restitution rather than on punishment.[34]

In essence, after *Oliphant*, too often crimes committed by non-Indians on tribal lands went unpunished. It is this jurisdictional tension that frames the events in Erdrich's *The Round House* and the vestiges of failed federal Indian policies that inform Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*.

Joe and Junior Come of Age on the Reservation

> "I was the sort of kid who spent a Sunday afternoon prying little trees out of the foundation of his parents' house. I should have given in to the inevitable truth that this was the sort of person I would become, in the end, but I kept fighting it."—Joe Coutts, *The Round House*[35]

> "Just take a look at the world. Almost all of the rich and famous brown people are artists. They're singers and actors and writers and dancers and directors and poets. So I draw because I feel like it might be my only real chance to escape the reservation."—Junior (Arnold) Spirit, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*[36]

There is nothing more important or fascinating to teenagers than themselves. They are obsessed with the minutiae of their lives. Both *The Round House* and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* are coming-of-age novels of young boys struggling with identity and adulthood, and each has a decision to make that—we assume—will change the trajectory of his life after we have read the last page. Each novel tells a compelling story of reservation life, from the point of view of Joe Coutts in *The Round House* and of Junior Spirit in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. The similarities and the differences in each of their stories provide us rich material for analysis and exploration of the themes of culture, identity, and how language influences our perceptions of others. The opening chapters of both novels are excellent examples.

In *The Round House*, we meet 13-year-old Joe. He and his father are removing "small trees [that] had attacked [his] parents' house at the foundation."[37] We get the sense from his description—the "rusted old dandelion fork with a splintered handle" and "a long slim iron fireplace poker"[38] —that this is a summer ritual for them. We learn quickly, too, that Joe comes from a family of relative privilege. When his father takes a break from their task, Joe sneaks into his father's, a tribal judge, study and peruses a well-worn and heavily-annotated copy of Felix S. Cohen's *Handbook of Federal Indian Law*, one we assume was handed down from Joe's grandfather to his father, and which Joe will one day inherit along with a library of "books with amber pages and dry leather binding" and filled with "inscriptions."[39]

He is not what we expect of a boy who just two weeks before was twelve years old—not his vocabulary nor his sentence structure. Once he stops prying trees from the foundation of the house, he finds a book to read rather than go off to meet friends. And the book he reads is no comic. Rather, he spends his time

> parsing out the idea [in a court case that] established in other cases and reinforced in this one, that [Indian] treaties with the government were like treaties with foreign nations. That the grandeur and power [his grandfather] talked about wasn't entirely lost, as it was, …, still protected by law.[40]

He feels comfortable enough to tackle a difficult text, something he had obviously done before because he "was trying to get used to the old-fashioned language and constant footnotes,"[41] and mature enough to understand that with such a complex text it would take time. He is a young man who comes from a long line of "tedious Coutts," all of them "responsible, upright, even offhandedly heroic men who drank quietly, smoked

an occasional cigar, drove a sensible car, and only showed their mettle by marrying smarter women."[42] He knows he is expected to follow in their footsteps; however, Joe has other plans. "I saw myself as different, though I didn't know why yet." He is a young man confident in his future, even though he is not sure what it will look like.

Though they are about the same age, Junior, Alexie's protagonist, is no Joe. Junior begins his story with his birth: "I was born with water on the brain," and then confesses, "Okay, so that's not exactly true."[43] The conversational language and rhythm of Junior's speech is quite different from Joe's reflective, mature narration. Where the imagery in the first few pages of *The Round House* implies a sense of order and comfort without excess, we are confronted in Junior's narration with discomfort *because* of excess. He had "too much cerebral spinal fluid," or "brain grease [that] got all thick and muddy and disgusting, and [that] mucked up the works."[44] He had too many teeth—forty-two, which was [t]en more than usual. Ten more than normal. Ten teeth past human."[45] And he had a big head, big hands, and big feet, a "size eleven in third grade!"[46]

Although the novels' protagonists may seem to lead disparate lives, they have some commonalities, besides their age and that they both live on reservations. Both live in two-parent households. Both have extended families in close proximity. Both have a circle of friends, some who are not as lucky as Joe or Junior to have families that clearly love them.

Erdrich and Alexie, each in their own way, are making statements about reservations and the people who live there. Rather than places that Alexie describes as "place[s] where we were supposed to be concentrated and die and disappear,"[47] we see through the eyes of these young narrators both the beauty and struggle present in daily life. Despite the differences in style, both authors are asserting control over the narrative of what constitutes reservation life. They reveal what life is like in the "in-between" as "an Indigenous immigrant,"[48] that duality of existence that comes with being American Indian. They are controlling the language of their stories, what Gloria Bird described succinctly: "One of the functions of language is to construct our world. We are the producers of this world who create ourselves as well as our social reality, and we do this through language."[49]

It is this struggle, this challenge, that makes these two novels excellent reads for this unit. The parallel settings, this "in-between," help us to see the complexity of life on the reservation. In Erdrich's vision, we see a place where customs and traditions thrive alongside the trappings of contemporary life, where the past and the present are not mutually exclusive, where honoring one does not require rejection of the other. In *The Round House*, the reservation is a sanctuary where culture is maintained and honored, relatively safe from a dominant white culture that seeks to consume Native cultures. But it is also a place of insurgency, where quiet and sustained resistance to political forces that seek to eradicate Native peoples and culture is part of every day life. For Joe, the reservation shelters and nourishes him. He knows that, his desire for independence notwithstanding, no matter where he goes, he has a home and a place that will welcome him, a place and a people to whom he belongs. It is the violation of this sacred place, as represented by the Round House, that shatters Joe's innocence and eventually causes him to act in ways that will change forever his life, his perception of the world and his place in it.

Alexie's reservation, too, is one where cultural traditions survive. However, despite the humor, his vision of reservation life is more bleak. It is populated with, as Mr. P tells Junior, the defeated:

> All these kids have given up.... All your friends. All the bullies. And their mothers and fathers have

> given up, too. And their grandparent gave up and their grandparents before them. And me and every other teacher here. We're all defeated.[50]

Without much deliberation, Junior accepts this characterization of the reservation as a place devoid of hope and embraces Mr. P.'s admonition that Junior must leave it for a place where people still have hope. Junior must escape if he wants a chance at a better life. Indeed, as he tells his best friend Rowdy, his life depends on leaving the reservation: "I have to go. I'm going to die if I don't leave."[51] Unlike the sanctuary of Joe's world in *The Round House*, where the characters stay because it is a place that nurtures them, Junior and his sister leave, with Mary "running away to get lost" and Junior running "because [he] want[s] to find *something*" [emphasis in original].[52]

These two visions of reservation life, embodied in the protagonists of each novel, leave readers unsettled. Though both narratives conclude, we are unsure about how the decisions these young men make and the actions they will take will affect them. This uncertainty in the futures of Joe and Junior is symbolic of the uncertainty that surround the issue of Native American sovereignty and self-determination, too often subject to the whims of voices which wield political power at the time.

What students will learn from reading these two different yet similar novels is the way in which the authors use language to portray the same situation differently. Erdrich and Alexie do what Janice Gould states that writing does: "I think of writing as a way to make questions, ponder, meditate, dream and locate powerful truths that may enrich the imagination and deepen our desire to affirm life,"[53] asserting the power to define and redefine identity and culture and what it means to be American Indian. Students will see in the lives and experiences of these two protagonists "mirrors" of themselves, "recognizing, 'Oh wait a second—this person and I have a common journey.'"[54]

Teaching Strategies

The following strategies will allow students to more easily access the complex information that we will be tackling.

Direct Instruction

Before we begin, I will provide 1) a short overview of the general elements of Native American world views in contrast with general element of Western/American world views, and 2) summaries of the Marshall Trilogy and *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*. This is necessary because my students will not be familiar with any of these things that are necessary for them to have a chance at understanding the complexity of the issues the novels deal with. Even then, students will need a great deal of scaffolding with the language in order to grasp these very difficult concepts. The strategies below are essential for this to happen.

Close Reading and Annotation

For this unit, these two skills are the foundation for understanding the body of law and policy that informs both novels. Because the language of the law will be wholly unfamiliar to students, we will read excerpts of the

court cases in class so that students learn to navigate difficult texts, particularly the Marshall decisions. We will look at the peculiar rhetoric of the legal world, in particular diction and syntax, and how arguments are organized. Rather than provide them an exhaustive list of legal vocabulary, we will define the words as we go. This will allow us to read and re-read as necessary, something that my students do not because they firmly (or stubbornly, as the case may be for some) believe that if they read something once, then they are done, that there is nothing that merits a re-reading. Conducting the reading in class does not afford them the luxury of skipping that step.

Not only do they not re-read, but they often do not know how to annotate effectively. Their idea of annotation is simply highlighting, and lots of it, the more the better in fact. They do not know that so much learning happens in the margins. This is a skill they will be developing as we move through the unit. We will read and re-read, slowing down to write questions, definitions, reactions in the margins. If this class is particularly strong, I may show them how to analyze, or "brief," a court case using the I.R.A.C (Issue, Rule, Application/Analysis, Conclusion) method[55] with *Oliphant*.

Dialectical Journals

Students will be required to keep dialectical journals for both novels. In dialectical journals, also referred to as double-entry journals, students write responses to specific parts of the text, perhaps a line or phrase or even a short passage. These entries allow students to "dialogue" with the novels, to question, to challenge, to analyze, to make connections. The journals serve another purpose by allowing students who are normally hesitant to jump into the fray that can characterize lively discussions to have something ready to discuss or to use in response to a classmate's comments.

Class Discussions: Whole Class, Socratic Seminar, Fishbowl

I was the quiet student in high school, the one who was so shy that I didn't get "Most Shy" because I spoke so little hardly anyone knew me. I can still recall the roaring in my years whenever I heard my teachers call my name. It was a sound so loud that I heard nothing after my name. Given this experience, one might think I would not have discussions as one of my go-to strategies. However, I have also learned that it is important for students to learn to express their ideas, verbally and written. It is one reason class discussion is one of my favorite strategies to get students thinking and talking about literature and ideas in a meaningful way. While students find it easy to argue with one another, they are at a loss when it comes to academic discussion and debate. To ease them into graded, formal discussions, we begin with informal whole class discussions with me as the discussion leader. I pose questions and ask follow up questions that require more specific, detailed responses than the general, unsupported ones they are accustomed to providing. I even provide them with a list of phrases to use during discussion, phrases that help them converse in the language of literary criticism. At first they are uncomfortable with what seems to them overly polite introductory phrases; however, they come to appreciate them and find them useful for framing comments in thoughtful ways. They especially come in handy when we transition to Socratic seminars and fishbowl discussions.

The Socratic seminar is an exercise in endurance. Because students are required to remain in the discussion circle for the duration of the period (on a regular day a minimum 45 minutes and on a block day 85 minutes), students must come to class ready to discuss the topic, generally based on a reading. In preparation for the discussion, their homework the night before is to generate at least five questions. These must be open-ended questions that move discussion. Having these questions ready is especially useful for the first few times they participate in Socratic seminars. Since they are generally uncomfortable with silence, the questions give them

something to fill the void in discussion that is inevitable, especially during their first forays into this kind of discussion. The journals allow them to ground their comments, questions, and observations in the text. As they gain more experience, the conversation becomes more organic. They learn to sustain the conversation with questions that are authentic to what is being discussed at that moment. They learn to move more fluidly from one topic to another, and to draw connections between them. It is a beautiful thing to see—when it works.

The fishbowl discussion begins with 10 students in a circle. As in the Socratic seminar, they bring their questions and journals. However, rather than remain in the discussion circle for the duration of the period, students may only leave when they are "tapped out" by another student not currently in the circle but who wants to enter the discussion, where he must remain until he is tapped out and replaced by a classmate. Students become better listeners because they must be able to join the discussion with as little disruption to the discussion as possible.

All three types of class discussion require students to become adept at putting their thoughts in order quickly and articulating them clearly, and when someone does not understand, to find different ways to say them. And they learn to do this using academic language.

Classroom Activities

This curriculum unit may be used in my 11th -grade AP English Language course or my 12th -grade AP English Literature course. Depending on the skill level of students, it may span five to six weeks in the first semester.[56]

Weeks One and Two: To provide some foundation, I will conduct a very general introduction on Native American history and worldviews. We will then begin our readings. The first week will be dedicated to Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. It is the more accessible text, making it possible for me to assign some reading of the novel as homework and be reasonably assured students *will read*. Requiring them to keep a dialectical journal of their reading will put added pressure on them to read. Beginning with a novel students are more likely able to read independently will also allow me to conduct whole-class close readings of federal statutes and case law that define the relationship of tribes to the federal government and to states. Students will learn how these documents shaped and frame current Federal Indian policy of sovereignty and self-determination and defined American Indians' unique relationship between these three entities and how they frame contemporary Native perspectives on assimilation and marginalization. This is a necessary scaffold to prepare students for Week Three.

Weeks Three and Four: We will read Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*. Arguably one of her most powerful and accessible texts, it provides students another view of contemporary American Indian life on a reservation and the complicated jurisdictional issues that arise as a result of the complex relationship between the federal government and Native nations. We will begin class each day with a short quiz to hold students accountable for keeping up with the reading. These quizzes also work as informal formative assessments of whether students are understanding what they read. Students will keep a dialectical journal as they read and may use it during class discussions in the weeks following.

We will not, however, simply read and annotate. To help them process these very difficult concepts, students will participate in Socratic seminars and other forms of class discussion. When necessary, I will guide discussion so that students are examining the essential questions (see above), first as text specific examinations and then as broader discussions of culture and identity. Additionally, we will explore the different mediums of language and voice by reading *Dreaming in Indian*. We will examine what each author is saying about identity and culture and analyze how they convey those messages to their audience. *Dreaming in Indian* will allow students to develop the skill of "reading" visual texts, something they will do on the AP English exam.

Week Five (and, if needed, Week Six): In their culminating activity, students will apply what they have learned about rhetorical choices. They will choose one piece from *Dreaming In Indian* and create their own work that explores their own sense of identity and culture. If their medium of choice is a piece of visual art, they will also be required to include a short expository essay about it. This will allow me to assess their mastery of the rhetorical techniques we've studied.

Appendix A: Implementing Common Core State and College Board Standards

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Both the Advanced Placement English Literature and the AP English Language courses must address curricular requirements set forth by the College Board. Additionally, they must satisfy the Common Core State Standards (CCSS or Standards) for English-Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Studies. Though not the only ones applicable, the primary standards specific to this unit are:

College Board: While the focus of the AP English Language and Composition course is "the rhetorical analysis of nonfiction texts," students in AP English Literature will "focus[] on reading, analyzing, and writing about imaginative literature (fiction, poetry, drama) from various periods." Because this unit deals with both types of literature, it can be modified to fit the focal needs of each course and classroom situation. For Language, court opinions are not typical non-fiction; however, they do meet the requirements that texts be persuasive and possess a specific rhetorical situation. In Literature, both Sherman Alexie and Louise Erdrich appear as "representative authors" in the course description. With both works, students will "they read deliberately and thoroughly, taking time to understand [the novels'] complexity, to absorb [their] richness of meaning[s], and [] analyze how [those meaning[s] [are] embodied in literary form." Both novels will provide students ample opportunity to "reflect on the social and historical values [the novels] reflect[] and embod[y]' through [c]areful attention to both textual detail and historical context provides a foundation for interpretation, whatever critical perspective are brought to bear on the literary works studied." The writing requirement is satisfied through literary response essays as well as by keeping the journals and annotating.

CCSS Reading Comprehension: By reading and annotating the court opinions, students will analyze "both the features and the rhetorical devices" used and the "way[s] in which authors use those features and devices" (2.1), "the way in which clarity of meaning is affected by the patterns of organization, …syntax, and word choice…" (2.2), and the "implicit and explicit philosophical assumptions and beliefs about a subject" (2.5).

CCSS Literary Response and Analysis: This standard requires that "[s]tudents read and respond to historically or culturally significant works of literature that reflect and enhance their studies of history and social science."

Through class discussions and journals of both novels, students will engage in analysis of “the way[s] in which the theme[s] or meaning[s] … represent[] a view or comment on life, using textual evidence to support” their claims (3.2).

CCSS Speaking Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics): The culminating project will require students to “[d]eliver reflective presentations [that] [e]xplore the significance of personal experiences, events, conditions or concerns, using appropriate rhetorical strategies” (2.1(a)). Additionally, class discussions requires students respond verbally to literature” and “[d]emonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the significant ideas of literary works.”

Appendix B: Academic Discourse Sentence Starters

Ms. Aguada

AP English Literature/Language

Academic Discourse

Sentence Starters

New Idea/Expanding on an Idea

- I would like to propose …
- Your point brings to mind…
- That raises the question…
- To your point, I would add/argue…
- That’s an interesting point you make. It made me think…
- I’d like to explore the idea that…

Disagreement

- I beg to differ…
- I want to push back on your idea that…
- You make a valid point; however,…
- I have to disagree with [name] that…. I think…

Agreement

- I have to agree with [name] that…
- [Name] makes a good point….
- I like [name]’s idea that…
- [Name] was right when she said that…

Clarification

- I’m not sure I understand your point that…. Will you clarify for me?

- I think you're saying that...
- Are you claiming/asserting that...?
- Will you clarify for me...
- Let me ask you to go into a little more detail about...
- Explain for me what you meant when you said...

Inviting someone into the discussion

- [Name], I can see your mind working. What do you think?
- I would really like to hear your ideas, [name].
- [Name], do you have anything to add?

Endnotes

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1. *2016 Silicon Valley Index*, p. 27. "The Self-Sufficiency Standard defines the amount of income necessary to meet basic needs without public subsidies or private/informal assistance. The federal poverty limit for Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties in 2012 ranged from $11,170 for a one-person household to $38,890+ for a household with eight or more people. The poverty limit for a family of four was $23,050. | Data Source: Center for Women's Welfare; United States Department of Health & Human Services | Analysis: Silicon Valley Institute for Regional Studies."
2. College Board, "Overview of Advanced Placement English Language and Composition," https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/ap/ap-course-overviews/ap-english-language-course-overview.pdf
3. College Board, "Overview Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition," https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/ap/ap-course-overviews/ap-english-literature-course-overview.pdf
4. Carol Zitzer-Comfort, "Teaching Native American Literature: Inviting Students to See the World through Indigenous Lenses," *Pedagogy* 8, no. 1, 160 (2008 Winter).
5. Michael Dorris, quoted in Kenneth Lincoln's *Native American Renaissance*, p. 2.
6. Zitzer-Comfort, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
7. Zitzer-Comfort, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
8. Joy Harjo and Carol Bird, "Introduction," *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writing of North America*, p. 31.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
10. Kenneth Lincoln, "Sending a Voice," *Native American Renaissance*, p. 8.
11. Lisa King, "Rhetorical Sovereignty and Rhetorical Allicance in the Writing Classroom: Using American Indian Text," *Pedagogy* 12, no 2, 218 (2012 Spring).
12. Frederick E. Hoxie, "Sovereignty's Challenge to Native American (and United States) History," *The Journal of Nineteenth-Century* Americanists, Spring, 2, no. 1 (2014): 141, accessed July 12, 2016, doi:10.1353/jnc.2014.0002.
13. *Ibid.*
14. King, *o.p cit.*, p. 218.
15. Sandy Maria Anglás Grande, as cited in King, *ibid.*, p. 219.
16. *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, 21 U.S. 548 (1823).
17. *Ibid.*, 574.
18. *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. 1 (1831).
19. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, p. 17
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Wooster v. Georgia*, 31 U.S. 515 (1832).
24. *Ibid.*, p. 531.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 559.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 561.
28. *Ibid.*, 552.
29. "Indian Removal Act of 1830." Primary Documents in American History From Library of Congress, *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Indian.html*
30. The Dawes Act of 1887, Acts of Forty-Ninth Congress, Chapter 119, Sec. 2.
31. *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*, 435, U.S. 191 (1978)
32. *Ibid.*, 207.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
34. *Bid.*, p. 197.
35. Louise Erdrich, *The Round House*, p. 5.
36. Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, p. 6
37. Louise Erdrich, *The Round House*, p. 1.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
43. Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, p. 1.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
46. *Ibid.*, p.2, 3.
47. Bill Moyers interview with Sherman Alexie.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Harjo and Bird, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
50. Alexie, *op. cit.*, 42
51. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
53. Harjo and Bird., *op. cit.*, p. 52.
54. John Hockenberry interview with Sherman Alexie, "Sherman Alexie: How Storytelling Can Create Social Change," *The Takeaway*.
55. Law schools students learn early in their first year how to brief a case, *i.e.*, identify the basic elements of a case: 1) the *Issue*, or the question that the court must decide, or in layman terms, what the two side are fighting about; 2) the *Rule*, or the relevant law the court must apply to the facts of the case in order to render a decision; 3) the *Application/Analysis*, or the court's discussion of the relevant law to the facts of the case; and 4) the *Conclusion*, or the decision of the court, the "who won" statement.
56. If the unit is taught in AP English Language, I am hoping to coordinate with colleagues who teach AP U.S. History, even regular U.S. History, so that I am teaching my unit while they are teaching Native American history in the context of U.S. history.

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