

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH JEANNETTE ARMSTRONG

“Land is a Constant Teacher”: Jeannette Armstrong on writing “Land Speaking”

Read, Listen, Tell: Indigenous Stories from Turtle Island (pp. 141-155)

Interviewer: Natalie Knight

<https://vimeo.com/196594994>

Outline of Video Interview

0:00 - 4:20	Jeannette Armstrong reads from "Land Speaking" and her poem "Grandmothers" (pp. 142-144)
4:21 - 5:28	"Growing Up in My Language"
5:29 - 7:33	"Language and Worldview"
7:34 - 9:37	"On Indigenous Languages and Literature"
9:38 - 12:32	"Mixing Poetry and Prose"
12:33 - 16:00	"What I Mean When I Say Indigenous"
16:01 - 16:50	"Knowledge is What Makes Change Happen"
16:51 - 18:50	Poem: "The History Lesson" (by Armstrong)

Summary

Jeannette Armstrong is a Syilx/Okanagan poet, novelist, writer, professor, and activist. She is a prominent advocate for Syilx/Okanagan traditional knowledge, as well as language, N'silxchn. This advocacy is a major theme in the video interview, "Land Speaking." In this interview, Armstrong explains the importance of Indigenous languages and the role they play in changing how both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people view the world and the environment.

Questions to Consider While Listening

1. In reading from "Land Speaking," Armstrong says: "All my elders say that it is land that holds all knowledge of life and death and is a constant teacher" (142/01:03). What importance does language play in learning lessons from the land? Why does

Armstrong believe N'silxchn is more useful than English when learning from the land?

2. Armstrong explains the impact that learning two languages, English and N'silxchn, had on her youth. In what way does she believe that learning the two languages and understanding their differences was a "formative kind of concept" (05:28) in her life?
3. Armstrong argues that the N'silxchn language contains a "philosophical construct that is really needed in our century, particularly because of the things that are going on in the environment" (06:40). How could understanding Indigenous languages and literatures help realize environmental justice?
4. Armstrong points out that "English and French literature are not the only literatures in Canada, there really needs to be clear support for Indigenous literatures" (08:03). What are some of the challenges to building support for Indigenous literatures? What should be done to support Indigenous literatures in Canada?