

# Reading the Indigenous Archive

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Originally presented as part of the Simon Fraser  
University Conference: “Developing Minds Through  
Reading and Writing: Practical Strategies for Critical  
Thinking in the Curriculum”

Strategy#1:  
Begin each  
term by  
following local  
protocols—  
and consider  
these to be  
models of  
intellectual  
practice.

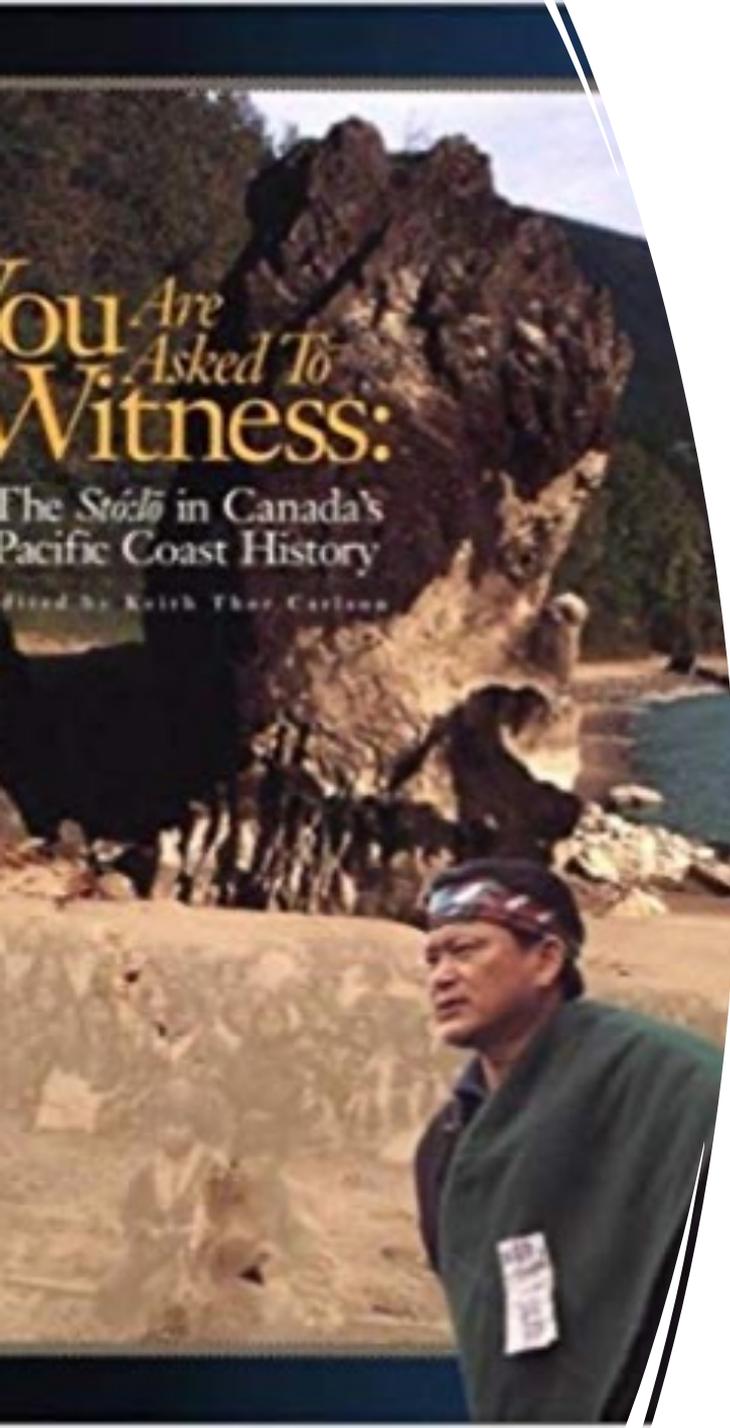
## Coast Salish Protocols teach me to:

- identify myself in relation to  
my family history
- identify myself in relation to  
the land I have lived on and  
the land I am currently on
- identify myself in relation to  
those who first lived  
here
- demonstrate respect

Strategy#1:  
Begin each  
term by  
following local  
protocols—  
and consider  
these to be  
models of  
intellectual  
practice.

Embedded in Protocols are complexities that still need to be grappled with:

- Unceded (some parts of Canada have a treaty history—much of British Columbia does not)
- Guest (multiple meanings including uninvited visitor and someone who acknowledges no long-term claim to the territory)



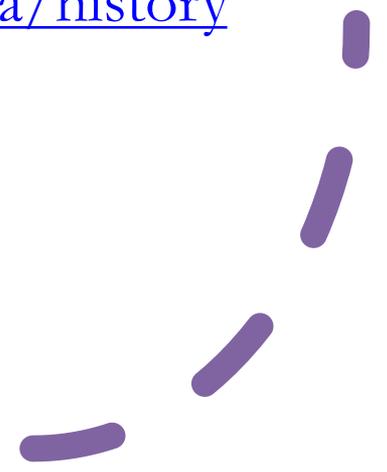
## #2: begin with where you are

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- learn what you can about the names of the traditional territories you live on, the people who live on this land, the local literature and orature
- teach this

Examples  
of websites  
with  
Indigenous  
content  
relevant to  
where I am

- <http://www2.moa.ubc.ca/musqueamteachingkit/teachers.php>
- <https://slcc.ca/history/>
- <https://twnation.ca/our-story/>
- <http://www.stolonation.bc.ca/history>



**#3:**  
Recognize  
that teaching  
Indigenous  
texts is not  
supported by  
conventional  
educational  
curriculum.

See “Socially Responsible  
Criticism: Aboriginal Literature,  
Ideology, and the Literary  
Canon”

by Jo-Ann Episkenew

(excerpted in *Read, Listen, Tell*)

- Literary Scholars teach about the context of the books being studied all the time.
- But often, information about Indigenous contexts can be incomplete or even inaccurate.



- An anthology of classic and new articles of Indigenous literary criticism, suitable for an upper undergraduate-graduate classroom
- Released by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016

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- An anthology of short stories by Indigenous authors from Canada, the USA and Mexico

- Designed to be taught in a first-year university classroom by non-experts



#3 b:  
Recognize  
that teaching  
Indigenous  
texts is not  
supported by  
conventional  
infrastructures  
that support  
the teaching  
of literature

This goes beyond the lack of training in university, the lack of high-quality resources, the lack of recognition that history of Indigenous peoples is foundational to the understanding of Canadian history.

For example, the Library of Congress cataloguing system—the library system adopted by research libraries across North America—files books according to categories that use incorrect terminology or obscure Indigenous presence.

Library of Congress cataloguing system

**Why are these book given these call numbers?:** it helps to know that the entire of E99 is classified by Nation. So if you want to look for information about Cree people, for example Joseph Dion's *My People the Crees* you would go to **E99 C88 D56**. **E99** stands for everything that happened in the America's before the colonization of America –that's E100-- and **C in C88 stands for Cree**.

*Unipkaaqtuat Arvianit: Traditional Inuit Stories from Arviat* (2009)  
**E99 E7 K126 2009**

*Indian School Days* (1988) by Basil H. Johnston  
**E99 C6 J56**

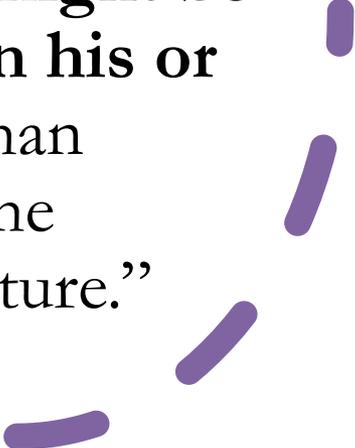
*You Call Me Chief: Impressions of the life of Chief Dan George* (1981)  
**E99 S2 G465**

*These Mysterious People: Shaping History and Archeology in a Northwest Coast Community* (2010) by Susan Roy  
**E99 S21 R69 2010**

#4:  
recognize  
that the  
stakes  
feel  
higher

Episkenew continues:

“Indeed, any class on Shakespeare would not be complete without a comprehensive examination of the political and religious situation in Elizabethan England, no doubt comprised of information that the instructor has gathered from books in the library. **These scholars need not worry that there just might be an Elizabethan enrolled in his or her class** and that Elizabethan student just might dispute the information given in the lecture.”



#5: value  
self-  
awareness

Episkenew concludes:

“When analyzing literary works, most scholars are very conscious that ideology is embedded in the text; what they often forget is the ideology that they bring to their reading.”





**#6: the lack of information, the misinformation and the resulting emotions unsettle the classroom and strain the teacher-student relationship**

# HOW DO YOU TALK ABOUT INDIGENOUS ISSUES IN THE CLASSROOM?

What happens when class discussions become challenging?

There are better outcomes and this project can help . . .

**Read More**

Communications Professor and Stó:lō scholar Karrmen Crey, after her first degree, worked on a project called “What I Learned in Class Today,” which is available online. Now newly hired by SFU, Dr. Crey will be working on an updated version. For now, however, the first project is still available as a resource. See:

<https://inthearts.arts.ubc.ca/>

**#7: value  
humility and  
encourage  
generosity**

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**Indigenous**

**Inuit**

**Aboriginal**

**First Nations**

**Native American**

**Métis**

**Ojibway or Anishinaabe?**

**Nootka or Nuu-chah-nulth?**

**Mohawk or Haudenosaunee or Six Nations or Iroquois**

**Indian**

**Native**

# #8: bring in Indigenous writers and artists to the classroom

Or create opportunities to take students to  
community events.

NOT as “experts” but rather as a way to build  
reciprocal, responsible and relevant relationships.

**#9: Create space  
for Indigenous  
literatures,  
theories,  
students and  
faculty by  
imagining them  
as essential parts  
of every  
conversation.**

To quote Anishinaabe scholar  
Dr. Niigaan Sinclair:

“Responsible criticisms of  
Indigenous Literatures honestly  
imagines an audience that *includes*  
real-life, modern, Indigenous  
peoples in it.”

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#10: the history of colonialism is an inevitable influence and topic of analysis in Indigenous texts but Indigenous languages and epistemes can also provide varying interpretations.

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Responsible and ethical criticism of Indigenous literatures respectfully considers Indigenous-centred literary approaches as fruitful possibilities (191).

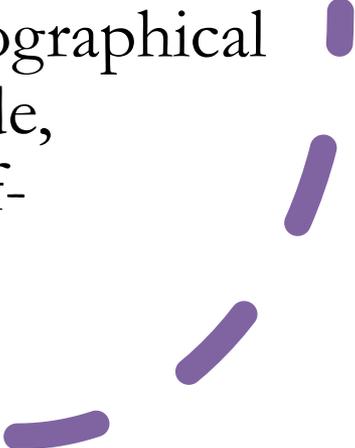
Sinclair, Niigaanwewidam James. "Trickster Reflections." *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaches to Indigenous Literatures*. Eds. Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2016.

# For example

Cree-Métis writer Dawn Dumont's hilarious set of short stories based on her own life, called *Nobody Cries at Bingo* (2013) can be discussed as humour subverting colonial expectations

OR

as *wawiyatâcimowina*, a subgenre of Cree stories that are autobiographical and comical, sometimes rude, sometimes risqué, often self-deprecating.



dawn dumont



Nobody Cries At  
**BINGO**

WHY CALL THESE

*wawiyatâcimowina*, funny little stories?

- WHY NOT JUST CALL THIS A BOOK OF SHORT STORIES?
  - Assumptions about the intended audience of a text affects our understanding of it
  - It's a manoeuvre to privilege, recognize and recuperate Cree philosophical thought
  - Contributes to the vitality of Cree communities
  - Supports the study of the Cree language

# Imagine the possibilities

**Imagine** reading Eden Robinson’s “Terminal Avenue” through the lens of Haisla/Heiltsuk storytelling traditions rather than through the conventions of science fiction or of the gothic.

**Imagine** reading Alootook Ipellie’s “Summit with Sedna” as a creation out of a contemporary Inuit imagination and read it comparatively with the work of Aviaq Johnston, Sean Tinsley and Rachel Qitsualik, and Tanya Tagaq.

**Imagine** learning the Stó:lō stories of the local landscape—as famously told to us by Stó:lō elder and historian Sonny McHalsie—and then being able to read the vistas the way that you can read a text.



Sophie McCall,  
MATE Director 2018-2022  
Deanna Reder,  
past MATE Director 2016-2018



- Tamara Hansen,
- Sentinel Secondary School,
- SFU MATE alumni



# Read, Listen, Tell: TEACHING INDIGENOUS STORIES TO IMAGINE A BETTER FUTURE

Across Canada, the integration of Indigenous knowledge and literature into curricula is becoming commonplace. However, many educators continue to feel uncomfortable and unprepared to teach these topics. As a non-Indigenous teacher and scholar how can I challenge my colleagues, students, and community to step beyond their comfort zone?

Within the new anthology of Indigenous short stories *Read, Listen, Tell: Indigenous stories from Turtle Island* (2016), a growing number of Indigenous writers are reimagining common narratives, and holding a mirror up to colonial Canada, asking both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers some pointed questions about the reality in which we live, and about the future we envision.

I propose teaching these stories within the high school classroom. To do this effectively I have begun to develop curriculum to support teachers in BC classrooms.

The road toward justice and equity for Indigenous people in Canada will require much more than literature. Nevertheless, these stories are a great starting point for imagining a better future and developing our praxis.

**READ • LISTEN • TELL**  
INDIGENOUS STORIES FROM TURTLE ISLAND

Sophie McCall, Deanna Reider, David Gaertner,  
and Gabrielle Chironde-Hill, editors

## Proposed curriculum includes:

Introduction: Teaching *Read, Listen, Tell: Indigenous Stories from Turtle Island*

- Who am I? Why do I care? & Vocabulary 101
- Activities to start: Positioning activity; Stereotypes activity; Vocabulary activity

English 9 Mini-Unit Plan:  
"The Way of the Sword" by Dawn Dumont

English 10: Mini-Unit Plan:  
"You'll Never Believe What Happened' is Always a Great Way to Start" by Thomas King

English 11 Mini-Unit Plan:  
"Tatterborn" by Daniel Heath Justice

Each story unit plan will include:

- Curricular Connections
- Proposed Scope and Sequence
- Quick Questions
- Extensions activities
- Possible Cross-Curricular Connections
- Handouts

Special activity with "Tatterborn" alongside Lou Cornum's "The Space NDN's Star Map"



### Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee)

In "Tatterborn" Justice imagines a prequel to L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, centered around a queer Indigenous narrator. Justice challenges readers with his personal motto "Imagine Otherwise."



### Dawn Dumont (Plains Cree)

In the mostly autobiographical "The Way of the Sword" Dumont repositions the potentially problematic comic book character, Conan the Barbarian, as an Indigenous hero.



### Thomas King (Cherokee)

In "You'll Never Believe What Happened' is always a great way to start" King discusses creation stories, the stories we tell ourselves, and what stories tell us about the values of the people and societies that believe in them.



### Lou Cornum (Diné)

In the non-fiction essay, "The Space NDN's Star Map" Cornum outlines the qualities of Indigenous futurisms and the "Space NDN" in speaking back to colonial narratives within the SF genre.

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*Read, Listen, Tell* editors Sophie McCall, David Gaertner, Deanna Reder, and Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill