Teaching Indigenous Literatures

“Indigenous literatures have dramatically changed the literary, cultural, and theoretical landscape of English studies in Canada” – Emma LaRocque (Cree-Métis)

Thanks to the prodigious output and brilliant creativity of Indigenous writers and scholars, there has been increased academic attention to, and interest in, Indigenous literary works. Indigenous artists not only have garnered much attention through major Canadian literary awards, they also have been at the forefront of literary innovation. For scholars less familiar with Indigenous literatures, these works offer an exciting new foray into literary study. The experience, however, can also be challenging, especially for non-Indigenous scholars who aspire to engage with, and to teach, Indigenous literature in a culturally-sensitive manner.

For those who aspire toward such an ethical approach, this list is an excellent starting point. Though far from exhaustive, it provides an overview of Indigenous writings from Turtle Island (North America), thus acting as a gateway into the complex network of Indigenous literatures in its various styles, genres, and subject-matters. In addition to well-known works, new works from emerging Indigenous writers are also identified. This annotated bibliography thus attempts to offer a diverse glimpse of the historic, thematic, and cultural breadth of Indigenous literatures emerging from centuries-long traditions of story, song, and performance – something representative of hundreds of different nations and tribes on Turtle Island. Since it is impossible to name works from all of these multinational voices, this list aspires merely to identify a broad range of writers from various Indigenous nations, albeit with a strong local focus on Anishinaabe, Cree, and Métis authors, upon whose territories and homelands the University of Manitoba is located.

While this list is organized according to genre, many works resist such classification, thus inviting readers to critically rethink preconceived notions of literature. These works also engage with important Indigenous issues, such as one’s relationships to the land, to other species, to urban Indigenous communities, and to traditions and innovation. Indigenous authors address such issues with a strong focus on their people’s resilience and resurgence, while also reflecting upon such traumas and systemic racism as the residential school system.

The following table of contents offers an overview of the titles recommended in this list. If you are interested in learning more about a specific title, please click on it to be redirected to its abstract farther down in the document.

**Short Story Collections**

Novels


Graphic Novels

- Robertson, David Alexander (Cree)/Scott B. Henderson (Canadian). *7 Generations*. 2010-2011.

Poetry


Non-Fiction


Plays


Film

- *Firebear Called Them Faith Healers*. Directed by Kelvin Redvers (Deniniu K'ue), based on a story by Richard van Camp (Tlicho).
ABSTRACTS FOR EACH TEXT LISTED ABOVE

Short Story Collections


Haisla/Heiltsuk author Eden Robinson is best known for her 2000 novel, *Monkey Beach*. Her short story collection *Traplines* in many ways sets the foundation for *Monkey Beach*, as well as for her 2006 novel, *Blood Sports*. *Traplines* is a collection of three short stories and one novella. The short story “Queen of the North” focuses on characters that reappear in *Monkey Beach* and offers insight into the family trauma and sexual abuse that is rooted in Canada’s residential school system. Adelaine, the Haisla teenager around which “Queen of the North” centres, is abused by her Uncle Josh, who himself appears to have been sexually abused in residential school. Robinson’s novella “Contact Sports” introduces the characters Tom and Jeremy, who later become the central focus of *Blood Sports*. In the novella, Robinson again focuses on dysfunctional and destructive family structures, as well as on asymmetrical power relations and abuses. The short story “Seven and Counting” illuminates the traumatized mind by depicting a serial killer’s daughter, who reconstructs her violent mother’s story via flashbacks – and who fears inheriting her mother’s dangerous traits.

In this collection, Robinson explores how violence progresses intergenerationally, with her stories illuminating such (often resultant) complexities as drug abuse and alcoholism. Her works also assume many vantage points, with “Queen of the North” set on a Haisla reserve, for example, while “Contact Sports” centres on Euro-Canadians in urban Vancouver. A hallmark of Robinson’s writing throughout is the use of non-linear narrative and a play with form, something that can disorient and challenge her reader.


Leslie Marmon Silko is a Laguna Pueblo writer who, along with N. Scott Momaday, is considered one of the most prominent representatives of the Native American Renaissance (1968-1995) – a literary period evidencing a strong focus on questions of Indigenous identity and cultural authenticity.

Silko’s *Storyteller* is a compilation of poems, short stories and family photographs, almost all of which were taken by her father. The text was published after Silko’s best-known novel, *Ceremony*. Critics note how *Storyteller* defies Western notions of genre in blurring the lines of fiction and autobiography. Specifically, *Storyteller* includes personal and cultural artifacts, and can thus be described as having a scrapbook approach. As Dean Rader argues “*Storyteller* defies the foundational roles of text and image [because] a basket, a poem, a photograph, a letter, a Pueblo tale, a contemporary short story all tell stories at the same time on the same level. It is not that one is subservient to the other; it is that one is interchangeable with the other” (Rader in Cox/Justice 312).
The book self-consciously reflects upon the process of storytelling and narrativization as keys to finding meaning in life. Specifically, Silko emphasizes the role of cultural survival via storytelling in the Laguna Pueblo community. She not only tells her own story, however, but also those of her family and her people. *Storyteller* thus engages with such themes as memory, orality, life-telling, and the family.


*Ajjiit* is a short story collection that draws upon traditional Inuit storytelling traditions in an attempt to create new, contemporary Inuit stories. As the characters Tinsley and Qitsualik state in the preface of this collection, they “were not retelling any pre-existent Inuit stories; not playing the role of mythologists, but only writers”, who created their own stories by drawing “upon Inuit culture and lore, writing original fiction utilizing the unique creatures and concepts that Inuit once (and, in some cases, still do) fear or revere” (1-2). “Ajjiit”, as the authors explain, is an Inuit expression meaning ‘likeness’, something denoting that this fantasy fiction is based upon – but nonetheless diverges from – traditional folktales (3). The nine stories in the collection revolve around interactions between people, animals, mythic creatures, and monsters.

A prominent theme is that of community, with several stories – such as “Elder” and “Drum’s Sound” – depicting a hero figure saving her culture from erasure. For instance, “Elder” portrays the enslavement of “Humble People”, whose dreams create a coveted cloth that is appropriated by others – imagery ostensibly commenting on the tyranny of colonialism. The manner in which the Humble People are forced by their masters to strip the land similarly suggests how colonial practices are exploitative of our life-giving, natural environment. Other stories, such as “Oil” and “The Qallupiluq Forgiven,” describe shapeshifting creatures and an inversions of asymmetrical power relationships, thus creating allegorical works in which nothing is as it seems.


Richard van Camp is a writer of Tlicho heritage. As such, most of the nine stories in this collection are set in the Northwest Territories. The stories centre around such themes as masculinity, identity, and northern Indigeneity. “The Night Charles Bukowski Died”, mimics oral storytelling through a complete lack of punctuation. Other stories, such as “Snow White Nothing for Miles”, illuminate the essential role of Elders and tradition in a contemporary world, thus criticizing the appropriation and commercialization of Indigenous culture.

The short story “Why Ravens Smile to Little Old Ladies as They Walk By” alludes to the transcription of traditional oral and ‘trickster’ stories, thereby upsetting any readerly expectation of the genre. Another work, “the uranium leaking from port radium and rayrock mines is killing
us”, explores the resultant pollution of uranium mining and its effects on people of the North. The compilation is described by reviewers as both painful and healing, since dysfunctional relationships and violence abound in an otherwise close-knit community focused on the family.

**Novels**

**Dimaline, Cherie. The Marrow Thieves. Toronto: Dancing Cat Books, 2017.**

Métis author Cherie Dimaline’s latest novel, *The Marrow Thieves*, has been highly successful in both Canada and the US, receiving the Governor General’s award for Young People’s Literature, as well as the Kirkus Prize. It is a dystopian young adult novel set around the year 2070, with Canada’s population decimated by the global warming effects of extensive resource extraction. In this post-apocalyptic world, non-Indigenous Canadians have lost the ability to dream. With environmental exploitation as one of its main themes, the novel describes how non-Indigenous Canadians develop a lethal method of extracting and harvesting Indigenous peoples’ dreams – which are stored in their bone marrow – via factories modelled after Canada’s residential school system.

The novel tells the story of Frenchie, a Métis teenager who has been separated from his family. He finds a new community when travelling with a group of children and young adults in an attempt to learn about his Indigenous heritage and about surviving off the land in a manner of reciprocity rather than exploitation. His is a coming-of-age story, with Frenchie developing into a responsible man who cares for his community and even finds love, despite an otherwise difficult life.

Dimaline says she wrote the novel with a young Indigenous reader in mind, hoping to emphasize and inspire qualities of resilience and resurgence for that audience. This is nevertheless also a rich text for non-Indigenous readers, who can learn much from it about Indigenous cultures and allyship. As an example, the novel emphasizes the importance of oral storytelling as a means of teaching history and culture (including Métis stories), something that champions cultural revitalization through the use of language. The novel also engages with ideas of (alternative) communities and gender.


Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* is a highly intertextual, narratologically playful work that challenges Western ideas of the novel, as well as ideas of Western canonical texts. Scholars have categorized this work as postmodern because of its self-reflexive awareness as a story, as well as its intertextual and fragmented form. Postcolonial scholars contend that the novel re-writes canonical Western classics, such as Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, and James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*. King himself would likely argue that the novel emerges neither from postmodern nor postcolonial contexts,
but rather from traditional Indigenous storytelling traditions that preceded (rather than responded to) colonialist literature (see Thomas King’s essay “Godzilla vs. Postcolonial”).

The way in which the novel emerges from a tradition of oral storytelling is apparent in the opening chapter, when two characters – a narrator and the trickster figure Coyote – take turns telling the tale. Just as the text thereby establishes differing narratological levels, it also quickly deconstructs them, with Coyote frequently crossing identity boundaries by appearing in various stories under many guises. Green Grass, Running Water consists of four interwoven plot lines, one of which tells of the rivalry between two Blackfoot men vying for the same Blackfoot woman while journeying to a Sundance ceremony. Another plot line follows four elder Indigenous men, who seem at times to change their sex – something exhibiting the shapeshifting quality of many King figures. The men leave a mental institution in the US and – much like Coyote – cross various boundaries easily (including the literal boundary of the US-Canadian border) in order to achieve their goal “to fix the world.” The third plot line describes the struggles of an Indigenous man who refuses to leave his land under threat of flooding by a new dam. The fourth plot line follows the adventures of characters from the canonical texts mentioned above, as well as from Indigenous creation stories and Genesis.


Mosionier’s *In Search of April Raintree* is credited as one of the first novels published by an Indigenous author in Canada. Together with Maria Campbell’s *Half-Breed*, the novel marks a resurgence of Indigenous writing in Canada. Mosionier’s work is grounded in her Métis background and in having been separated from her family as a child, living in foster homes and losing two of her sisters to suicide. *In Search of April Raintree* is thus highly autobiographical in telling the stories of two Métis sisters, April and Cheryl, who are taken away from their parents when they are six and four years old, moving subsequently to an orphanage and then to various foster homes in Winnipeg. They are variously separated and only periodically reunite at Child and Family Services during brief visits with their parents. The novel reflects highly on the issue of Indigenous identity. Specifically, April does not look Indigenous and is disinterested in her cultural heritage. By contrast, Cheryl appears Indigenous and embraces her Métis heritage, becoming increasingly politically active over the course of the novel. Cheryl endures much hardship, however, such that April must later assume the care of Cheryl’s son.

*In Search of April Raintrees* addresses colonial issues, such as Canada’s 60s-Scoop, and remains a highly relevant work since, according to the *Globe and Mail*, 90 per cent of Manitoban children in care are Indigenous. This novel poignantly illuminates the struggle of young Indigenous women growing up without family.

Anishinaabe writer Waubgeshig Rice, a former CBC journalist in Winnipeg, draws from stories he’s heard about Indigenous families suffering the loss of relatives under tragic circumstances. The novel centres around Eva, a young Anishinaabe woman who leaves her reserve to attend university in Toronto. After spending an evening with friends, Eva is killed by a non-Indigenous student in an alley. Subsequent chapters depict the stories and perspectives of family members affected by this tragedy. Eva’s four siblings for instance – Stanley, Maria, Norman and Edgar – each narrate different chapters of the novel, thus offering a variety of perspectives relating to the family trauma, commemoration, healing, and even retaliation. Most chapters are set on the fictional Birchbark Indian reserve, where Indigenous characters struggle to reconnect with their Anishinaabe traditions amid the painful, often violent effects of colonialism and racism.

*Legacy* highlights the obstacles encountered by Indigenous people trying to navigate the city and academia amid oppressive stereotypes. The text also examines the Canadian justice system, which lets Eva’s murderer off with only a mild sentence. The book’s reflection upon white privilege and the legal system are sadly relevant in light of such as recent murders as those of Colten Boushie and Tina Fontaine. For classroom teaching, this book provides an opportunity to address and discuss many Indigenous issues, not the least of which is the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada.


While Anishinaabe author Roby Slipperjack’s novel *Silent Words* is often considered by scholars to be a Bildungsroman, she nevertheless brings her own Anishinaabe storytelling perspective to the genre, thus subverting traditional coming-of-age stories. Specifically, her approach is one of “coming home” rather than of “leaving home.” The story foregrounds the journey of Danny Lynx, an Anishinaabe boy who grows up in a Northern Ontario Anishinaabe community. He and his father are forced to leave their traditional life on the trapline, however, and must move to town, where Danny is confronted with racism in school and abuse from his stepmother.

Danny subsequently runs away to find his birth mother, a journey that teaches him how to navigate and interact with the land. Upon returning home, however, he learns he was never truly alone on his journey, since his family and friends secretly knew his whereabouts and ensured his safety along the way – a commentary on the closeness of Indigenous communities. Some prominent themes of the text are cultural restoration and relationship renewal. Nevertheless, Danny is confronted with much trauma and loss in witnessing the deaths of friends and family members. For instance, the novel ends with the death of Danny’s father, a great loss that nevertheless enables and inspires Danny to move forward on his journey.

Tlicho author Richard van Camp’s novel *The Lesser Blessed* is a coming-of-age story set in the small northern town of Fort Simmer in the Northwest Territories. The main character and first-person narrator is Larry Sole, a Tlicho (Dogrib) youth who, in grade eleven, befriends a rebellious newcomer, a young Métis man named Johnny. Johnny becomes like an older brother to Larry, an only child. The novel highlights the trauma suffered by Larry years earlier, something revealed only through flashbacks toward the end of the novel. Specifically, Larry was sexually abused by a father he subsequently killed before burning down the family home.

The Canadian residential school system lurks in the background of the story, since Larry is a second-generation residential school survivor vulnerable to the (often intergenerational) effects of the system – lateral violence and dysfunctional relationships within families and communities, something often exacerbated by drug and alcohol abuse. While the novel explores dysfunctional and complex relationships, it is also a hopeful, emphasizing Larry’s great ability to love, create and overcome, something highlighted by his romantic relationship with his classmate, Juliet Hope.


Anishinaabe author Richard Wagamese tells the fictional life story of Saul Indian Horse who, while enduring the trauma of residential school, becomes a star hockey player. The novel illuminates an intense racism working against Saul both during and after his residential schooldays. While Wagamese himself did not attend residential school, he nevertheless draws from his own experience as a 60s-Scoop survivor.

The novel opens with a description of Saul’s close-knit family and their traditional life in the bush. When his parents leave Saul behind with his grandmother as they depart on a journey to bury his dead brother, he is captured and forced into residential school. Wrenched from his family and forced to renounce his Indigenous heritage, Saul’s experience only worsens as he both suffers and witnesses the physical abuse of residential schoolchildren. Saul finds relief in hockey, something at which he excels. On his journey to becoming a professional player, however, Saul realizes the racism and violence of the residential school system proliferates in the larger community.

This novel illuminates the residential school system and is very accessible for students. It may also be taught through its film version, which was supported by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in 2018. Wagamese explores themes of Anishinaabe culture and tradition, community, residential school trauma, sexual abuse, masculinity and identity, and it depicts the intense, persistent racism to which Indigenous people are subject within Canada.
**Graphic Novels**


*7 Generations* is a series of four graphic novels, which tell the story of a young Cree man, Edwin, an intergenerational residential school survivor, who attempts suicide in the first part of the series. When he is hospitalized after the attempt, Edwin’s mother decides to tell him about his people and their past. In the first book of the series, *Stone*, the mother tells Edwin about Cree life before the arrival of Europeans and colonization. Her story focuses on the lives of two Cree warrior brothers, one of which sets out for revenge after the other is killed. The story depicts the Cree as proud warriors, without romanticizing their lives – illuminating the horrors of war and the power dynamics between different Indigenous cultures. In the second book of the series, *Scars*, the mother tells the story of White Cloud, a young Cree boy who is orphaned by the smallpox epidemic initiated by European contact. In the third book, *Ends/Begins*, Edwin starts to reconnect with his father, James, who left the family years before. James explains his own personal trauma of residential school and the witnessing his little brother’s death there. The fourth book of the series, *The Pact*, expands upon James’s life after residential school and describes how Edwin then embarks upon his own healing journey.

Cree author David Alexander Robertson writes for a young audience, with his works intended to educate Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth about historic and contemporary atrocities, as well as the resiliency and resistance of Indigenous people. His graphic novels emphasize the importance of storytelling in education, since most of Robertson’s works are framed by a storytelling structure in which an older person orally teaches a younger one.

**Poetry**


Louise Halfe is a Cree poet and a survivor of Blue Quills Residential School in Alberta. In her poetic work, Halfe engages with such themes as memory and history in relation to colonialism, trauma, and healing. While much of her work is informed by her own residential school experience, Halfe emphasizes that residential schools were only one part of the colonization of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The poems in *Blue Marrow* depict various other violent acts inflicted upon Indigenous people under colonialism, noting the insidious collusion in which settler society was allowed to impose such violence.

*Blue Marrow* is Halfe’s second collection of poetry and, while it engages with the effects of colonialism and historical trauma, it is also a celebration of Halfe’s Cree heritage. Halfe has made it her life’s work to reclaim this heritage, interspersing her texts with Cree expressions not only to offer layers of meaning, but also to provide more insight into Cree culture. A strong
theme in the collection is the relationship with, and the connection to, grandmothers and ancestors. Halfe’s poetry revisits the time of first contact and the arrival of European settlers on Turtle Island, allowing the reader to witness the initial impacts of colonialism, such as illness, Christianity, and racism. Halfe’s work also provides insight into Indigenous feminisms through its emphasis upon the strength, resiliency, and power of Indigenous women.


Gregory Scofield is a Métis poet, who intersperses his works with Cree language. The collection’s title for example, *Kipocihkân*, is Cree slang for someone who is mute. The book, which contains poems from all of Scofield’s published collections, chart the author’s own journey from silence to becoming one of the most powerful Indigenous poetic voices of our time. *Kipocihkân* was published in 2009 and includes poems from the following collections: *The Gathering: Stones for the Medicine Wheel*, *Native Canadiana: Songs from the Urban Rez*, *Love Medicine and One Song*, *I Knew Two Métis Women*, *Singing Home the Bones*.

Scofield’s poetry reflects upon Indigeneity – specifically Métis identity – with many of his early poems depicting the struggle of feeling neither white nor Indigenous enough. His poems also reflect upon the urban life of Indigenous people, and they describe Métis identity as being in-between – as never enough of one particular cultural identity. Other poems engage with such issues as pain, alcoholism, violence against women, intergenerational trauma, and sexual abuse in residential schools. In later poems, Scofield traces his ancestry and heritage, critiques settler heteropatriarchy, and connects the physical body to the landscape. Scofield’s voice draws from Indigenous song in its rhythm and structure, thereby furthering the poet’s embrace and honouring of his Métis identity.


*North End Love Songs* is Métis author Katherena Vermette’s debut poetry collection, which focuses on Winnipeg’s North End neighbourhood. Vermette draws from her own experience in this community, from which her brother went missing. Her poems illuminate how the disappearance of Indigenous people is downplayed and poorly-investigated – something in stark contrast to the treatment of white victims. Vermette includes a trigger warning in her book, stating that it engages with “some very hard things—sexual exploitation, depression, shame, missing relatives, loss and grief.” At the same time, however, she emphasizes that the book “also talks about strength, resilience, survival beyond victimization and some of the beautiful things I’ve found in our amazing community, so even though it goes to some tough places, it doesn’t stay there too long.” Such themes – as well as her depiction of Indigeneity in the city and life in Winnipeg’s North End – are echoed in Vermette’s GG award-winning novel *The Break*. 
*North End Love Songs* may be used to teach students about the dynamics of one’s social and physical space, as well as the idea of urban Indigeneity. In short, it is a text through which Winnipeg students can learn more about the complexities of their own community. Vermette’s poems focus mostly on North End women, who fall in love, who grieve, who are mothers, or who are young girls. Movement and flight are common themes of the collection. *North End Love Songs* not only highlights urbanity, but is also highly attentive to the ways in which the land is present in the city.

**Non-Fiction**

**Campbell, Maria. *Half-Breed.* Halifax: Goodread Biographies, 1983.**

First published in 1973, Métis author Maria Campbell’s autobiography is credited as one of the first major literary works by an Indigenous author in Canada (or, to be more precise, one of the first texts *acknowledged* as a literary work by the non-Indigenous Canadian publishing industry). Campbell’s autobiography has inspired much Indigenous Canadian writing over the past 30 years. Her work begins with a broad history of the Métis people and the Red River and the Northwest Resistances. She then tells the history of her community before finally introducing herself, in Chapter 3. This approach provides the reader with the context necessary to understand certain developments in Campbell’s life. It also emphasizes the importance of Campbell’s Métis identity in the story she is about to tell. The autobiography is clearly written with a goal of educating the reader who, at times, is addressed directly.

Campbell describes her early life in a caring family and close-knit community that is grounded in loving relationships. At the same time, however, she describes the alcoholism, violence, and discrimination that abounds. Campbell not only illuminates tensions between Métis and non-Indigenous people, but also the complex relationships between Métis and First Nations people, emphasizing the distinct and separate identities of these groups. The life story Campbell shares with her reader is a difficult one, characterized by drug abuse and violent relationships, but also by hard work and familial love. Storytelling plays an important role in the book, with the autobiography consisting of many smaller life stories. The book ends much like its beginning, with a focus on the Métis as a people and a description of Métis politics in the 1970s. Campbell ends her story with a view of the future as one of change and hope.

**Freeman, Mini Aodla. *Life Among the Quallunaat.* Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1978.**

Mini Freeman is an Inuit writer and her autobiography, *Life Among the Qallunaat*, was first published in 1978. However, this first edition was not circulated widely. The book was only recently republished by the University of Manitoba Press’s *First Voices, First Texts* series, and was prefaced by an interview with Mini Freeman conducted by Keavy Martin. In her
autobiography, Freeman recounts the experience of being separated from her land and community. As a child, she was sent away to residential school and spent much time in Indian hospitals. As a teenager, she trained as a nurse and then worked as a translator in Ottawa. Life Among the Qallunaat opens with her time in Ottawa, and Freeman wittily highlights the difference in lifestyle between the Inuit and the Qallunaat, the non-Inuit Southerners. The book nevertheless showcases how Inuit wisdom and tradition helps Freeman navigate the non-Inuit south.

Unlike traditional autobiography, Freeman’s work is not chronological. Rather, it begins in adult life – with her position as a translator in Ottawa – and works back to her childhood in the North. Such form can be read as an act of coming home. The theme of ‘home’ is prominent throughout the autobiography, with Freeman maintaining familial and cultural ties by sending loved ones material objects in the mail. Life Among the Qallunaat is also a highly political work, illustrating how the Canadian government (mis)treats Inuit people and how the Inuit must endure systemic racism and oppressive stereotypes. Throughout the book, however, Freeman manages to counter such prejudice with her perseverance and kindness, something apparent in her writing style.


Leanne Simpson’s book blurs the boundaries between story and theory. In her work, Simpson reflects upon Anishinaabe resurgence and its relation to stories. She focuses on two kinds of stories in Anishinaabe culture: Aandisokaanan (traditional, sacred stories) and Dibaajimowinan (personal stories). She argues that the first category – Aandisokaanan – encodes theories of Anishinaabe resurgence, while the second category – Dibaajimowinan – gives personal expression to such theories. Simpson’s book chronicles her own personal process of decolonization and resurgence, a journey defined by Simpson’s learning the Anishinaabe language and traditions. The author highlights how language encodes worldviews, thus demonstrating a need for personal and communal resurgence.

Simpson critically engages with ideas of tradition by, among other things, examining conventional gender roles. She also offers readings of several traditional Anishinaabe stories, illuminating how they encode strategies for resurgence. Simpson emphasizes that Indigenous people have always resisted colonialism and have worked tirelessly to sustain their cultures.


Anishinaabe writer Richard Wagamese’s For Joshua is a memoir in the form of a letter to his son. Because of his own drinking problem at the time, Wagamese lost custody of his young son,
Joshua Wagamese constructs the memoir as an introduction to his son and an explanation of his paternal absence. *For Joshua* describes an Anishinaabe ceremony meant to introduce a child to the world, explaining how s/he (inter)relates to the world and all its beings. Wagamese re-enacts this ceremony through writing, thus initiating Joshua into the Anishinaabe (Ojibway) culture. Wagamese facilitates such literary ‘ceremony’ by describing his own cultural return. A child of the 60s Scoop, Wagamese was separated from his family and consequently denied his heritage. As a visibly Indigenous person, however, Wagamese was nevertheless subject to oppressive stereotypes and racism. Wagamese describes how such treatment contributed to his struggles with identity, an inability to stay in one place for long, and eventually a problem with alcoholism. *For Joshua* is thus also Wagamese’s own healing story and ceremony, as it is only when he meets with the Elder John that he reconnects with his heritage and Anishinaabe culture.

The book is structured according to the Medicine Wheel, a powerful Indigenous symbol throughout North America. Wagamese explains its meaning, thereby helping readers better understand his life story. The text’s form is similar to other works by Wagamese, such as *Keeper’n Me*, which tells the story of a young Anishinaabe man who reconnects with his family after being separated in Canada’s 60s Scoop. *For Joshua* reaches out to non-Indigenous readers so that they can learn about Anishinaabe culture and understand the impacts of colonialism, with an emphasis upon reconciliation.

### Plays

**Highway, Tomson. The Rez Sisters. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1988.**

Tomson Highway’s play, *The Rez Sisters*, is the first in a trilogy referred to as his “Rez Cycle” (the other two plays are *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* and *Rose*). All three plays are set on the fictional reserve Wasaychigan Hill, which consists of Anishinaabe and Cree members. The play focuses on seven women, who journey to Toronto in hopes of winning the biggest bingo jackpot in the world.

This work addresses various colonial issues, such as poverty on reserves, violence against women, and the ways in which heteropatriarchal settler values have been imposed upon and now influence “rez” characters. Nevertheless, the play is a celebration of Cree and Anishinaabe culture, something demonstrated by Highway’s use of the Trickster figure, Nanabush. Nanabush – who is described as travelling between his own mythical realm and the realm of the humans – demonstrates the interconnectedness of the two realms, thus offering insight into the worldviews about which Highway writes. Yet, Highway’s works have been criticized for their depictions of violence against Indigenous women. For instance, *The Rez Sisters* recounts how a young woman named Zhaboonigan is violently and sexually abused by various non-Indigenous men. Zhaboonigan’s story is reminiscent of the murder of Helen Betty Osborne, whose life was taken near The Pas, Manitoba, close to where Highway himself attended residential school. Rather than focusing on the victimhood of Indigenous women, however, Highway emphasizes their
resilience, demonstrating the important role of Indigenous women in the family and community. The characters of *The Rez Sisters* are strong women, who claim agency over their own lives.


Monique Mojica’s play, *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, is a satire illuminating colonialism and racism while revising history in giving a voice to Indigenous women. The play includes 17 different characters, the stage version of which suggests that all characters are played by only two actors. The 13 installments of the play are referred by Mojica as 13 “transformations”, suggesting that each character is interrelated with the others. The play enacts decolonization by writing back to colonial narratives and giving a voice to those who went otherwise unheard – Indigenous women. The two main characters are contemporary Indigenous women, who travel back in time to revisit and possibly heal from stories of their women ancestors. The play includes prominent historical Indigenous characters, such as Pocahontas, but counters colonial myths about them. For instance, Pocahontas is contrasted with a character Mojica calls “Picture Book Pocahontas: The little Indian Princess from the picture books, friend of the settlers, in love with the Captain, comes complete with her savage-Indian-Chief father.”

The play upsets various colonial myths in sophisticated and funny ways meant to enlighten the audience about the absurdity of such cultural constructions. *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* also addresses the contemporary issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls by incorporating references to the story of Mi’kmaq activist Annie Mae, who was murdered because of her political activism. By juxtaposing the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women with historical Indigenous women characters whose lives and life stories have become distorted by colonial fantasies, *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* demonstrates how MMIWG are connected to colonialism and its narratives. This text consequently can be read through the lens of Indigenous feminisms theories.

**Film**

*Firebear Called Them Faith Healers. Directed by Kelvin Redvers, performances by Katerina Bateman, Christine Clarke, and Roger Currie, Crosscurrent Productions, 2009.*

Richard van Camp wrote this as a short story – which Kelvin Redvers later made into a film – featuring seven people from different ethnic backgrounds (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) who tell the same story about a dream. However, after seeing Redvers’ movie, van Camp decided not to publish the written text, because he felt film was a better vehicle for the story.
Richard van Camp’s and Kelvin Redvers’ *Firebear called them Faith Healers* reflects upon the process of oral storytelling and its functions. Each storyteller contributes different parts to the story, together compiling a complete work. In this way, the film highlights the interconnectedness between storytellers and the idea of building community. The natural flow from one teller to the next also evokes a sense of continuance that is necessary for the survival of oral traditions. In presenting a traditional form of storytelling through the contemporary medium of film, a new genre is proposed, something the audience is inspired to embrace and champion when, at the film’s end, the audience is told, “the story is yours now”.
