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January, 2016

Valuing Native American tribal elders and stories for sustainability study

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Middle School Journal

Valuing Native American Tribal Elders and Stories for Sustainability Study

--Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	MSJ5551
Full Title:	Valuing Native American Tribal Elders and Stories for Sustainability Study
Short Title:	Valuing Native American Tribal Elders and Stories
Article Type:	Original Submission
Keywords:	sustainability curriculum, place-based learning, tribal elders, Native American literature, alternative textbooks
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VALUING NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBAL ELDERS AND STORIES

Abstract

This article outlines a framework the authors have used to infuse sustainability study into humanities teaching at the middle school level. Native American tribal elders can act as co-teachers in such classrooms, and the place-based stories that shaped their views of the environment can serve as important classroom texts to investigate sustainable philosophies. Middle school students can learn to read with a sustainable lens and learn to use the narrative wisdom of tribal elders to read across texts for sustainability themes and messages. Respect for Native American culture flourishes in such an environment. Examples of Native American storied resources for sustainability are offered in this article.

Keywords: sustainability curriculum, place-based learning, tribal elders, Native American literature, alternative textbooks, narrative ways of knowing

Valuing Native American Tribal Elders and Stories for Sustainability Study

Salmon and Coyote are wise and taught us how to live. Our elders said to respect them and learn and never hunt or fish all the animals, but there would come a time when they would disappear. Damming up the rivers is just like cutting off the blood to your arm or leg. You can live for a while without some parts of your body; but keep cutting off the flow and sooner or later you'll die. That's how it is with rivers and salmon...

Andrew "White Eagle" George, tribal leader and Palouse medicine man, (1905-1989)

Contemporary Native American tribal elders in the Pacific Northwest learned to value nature from stories passed down to them by their elders. Consequently, these tribal elders have served as environmental activists to preserve the natural world for the benefit of future generations. Middle grades education must take on greater responsibility for teaching environmental and sustainable education. It makes sense to us as teacher educators specializing in the pedagogical preparation of middle school teachers to understand how Native American environmental activists became so passionate about understanding and saving the environment. We wish to unpack and emulate the best practices of their environmental learning and pass their knowledge to our students.

We are a multi-disciplinary team of teacher educators. Author 1 specializes in English language arts teacher education. Author 2 specializes in social studies teacher education. Author 3 is a librarian who finds curricular resources for in-service and pre-service teachers. Author 4 is a Palouse tribal elder. Author 5 works with novice teachers in an administrative capacity for a school district. We are concerned with the current state of middle grades education and a lack of emphasis on interdisciplinary environmental and sustainable education. We know that tribal

elders have considerable knowledge in this area and should be potential resources for improving this oversight.

Author 4 observes that the basic premise of sustainable education rests is that human beings should leave the earth in better shape for future generations. "We share the same challenge," she notes, "Before we were forced to go to non-Indian schools, we also had children to teach." She affirms that the sustainable stories told to her by her elders have served her throughout her lifespan, and she is generous in sharing those stories with our pre-service and in-service teacher candidates in the Pacific Northwest. We wish to pass her generosity with future teachers to further sustainability study, particularly in the humanities classrooms of language arts and social studies.

Defining Sustainability Education

UNESCO defines sustainable education as "including key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning; for example, climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction, and sustainable consumption. It also requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behaviour and take action for sustainable development. Education for Sustainable Development consequently promotes competencies like critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way." (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-sustainable-development/>). More locally, addressing sustainability principles with students across content areas is one of the newest curriculum opportunities in the state of Washington. Sustainability education as defined by our Integrated Environmental and Sustainability Education Learning Standards, involves considering the interconnectedness of ecological, social, and economic systems (Wheeler & Vavrus, 2009). The goal of sustainability

education is that students will be able to consider all three areas and make informed, respectful decisions about living their lives to “promote ecological health and better serve quality of life for all humans” (Wheeler & Vavrus, 2009, p. 4). It is important for all children to have sustainable education because the world is interconnected and environmental decisions in one part of the world may eventually affect the well-being of others who live in different places.

We have developed a framework for enhancing sustainable education that we believe can be adapted throughout the United States. It involves five steps which we will describe throughout this article:

- 1) Invite environmental activists into our classrooms to explain to students why they do what they do.
- 2) Find the narrative texts that influence them to act as wise stewards of natural resources.
- 3) Teach students how to read with a sustainable lens.
- 4) Read widely across text looking for multiple points of view on sustainability.
- 5) Develop appreciation for Native American contributions to environmental activism.

We believe that best practices in sustainable education mean that it is local, collaborative, culturally responsive, and emphasizes narrative ways of knowing.

Place-based Sustainable Learning

Sustainability concepts and practices thrive in place-based learning. Because it uses local history, culture, economics, environment, and circumstances as the basis for a curriculum, place-based learning capitalizes on and respects the setting in which students live. In a book theorizing what educating adolescents should look like in the 21st century, Jackson and Davis observe that an aspect of quality middle school education should include “adding value to others in the school

and community” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 37). Even more specifically, place-based learning can be leveraged “to increase students’ appreciation of their local environments with the ultimate end of helping students learn ways to sustain their local environments” (Jennings, Swidler, & Koliba, 2005, p. 50). For us, place-based learning starts with using local environmental activists as co-teachers. Local newspaper articles and news stories around environmental concerns serve as primary texts to examine as activists, in our case, tribal elders, share their solutions to environmental problems.

Collaboration around Environmental Inquiry

Sustainability study should involve interdisciplinary teaching and learning, inquiry instruction, critical thinking and problem solving, and cooperative learning (McEwen & Greene, 2009) because this kind of learning mimics the way environmental activism is done in the real world and scaffolds future action. We believe that the oral myths passed to tribal elders can act as the glue to incite inquiry, critical thinking, and collaborative problem solving.

Culturally Responsive

Sustainability study should be culturally responsive. Culturally responsive teaching affirms the contributions of a multicultural society and appreciates the prior knowledge of all students. Culturally responsive teaching is compatible with the ideologies of middle school education that affirm "deep knowledge of others cultures" as an educational goal (Jackson, 2009, p. 2). Texts providing affirming depictions of Native Americans foster such an environment.

Narrative Ways of Knowing

Environmental and sustainable action finds strength in narrative ways of knowing. Bruner (1986) defines narrative ways of knowing as making sense of the world through stories. Great

teachers, including Jesus, Ghandi, and inspirational tribal leaders such as Chief Seattle, have used stories to encourage people to make humanitarian and just choices for the benefit of others. Learning through narratives looks different from learning through expository textbooks. Smagorinsky (2008) observes, “Narrative does not rely on...logic, verification, and rational proof. Rather it is connected with verisimilitude, the likeness of truth, the creation of characters and events that represent emotional and social truth but need not replicate them” (p. 13). Narrative ways of knowing allows students to examine stories in a manner that encourages affective decision-making especially if they explicate their decisions in narrative writing (Smagorinsky, 2012). Ramsey explains how Native American myths create verisimilitude: “For the stories are, on one level, thoroughly didactic: they are designed to convey social and moral instruction as well as delight – indeed the two purposes generally at odds in our [European] literature, strike a remarkable imaginative balance in them” (Ramsey, xxix, 1977).

Our Sustainability Framework

Invite Environmental Activists into Our Classrooms

The first recommendation of our sustainability framework is to invite local tribal elders into our classrooms. We pick those elders who have served as environmental activists to support local ecosystems even when their views were unpopular. Author 2, a former middle school teacher and local historian, travelled the Columbia Plateau, casting enduring friendships with tribal elders deeply concerned with local environments. From them he learned that nature can be a teacher to humans. He also learned that understanding one's place in a local environment can help citizens make better decisions about natural resources.

Introduce Texts that Instructed Environmentalists

We find great environmental insight in the myths shared by classroom visitors who are tribal elders. "Salmon Man and the Wolf Brothers" (Appendix A) is a love story about nature rich in themes of ecological, social, and economic sustainability. It was told to Author 2 by the late (1905-1989) tribal leader, Andrew "White Eagle" George. Andrew George was a Palouse medicine man who loved stories and told them especially well. This particular story was passed down orally from his ancestors. Author 2 recorded it in November of 1980 when he had the privilege of meeting Andrew George on the Yakima Indian Reservation. Author 2 has used it as a text to teach sustainability for many years even after Andrew George died.

Before informing our students that their purpose for reading is to find ecological themes, we tell the students about Andrew and how he would interpret truth from the story. We inform students that Andrew George valued two important motifs in creation myths: 1) nature can serve as teacher and 2) regional identities allow humans to be better stewards of the environment. Students are then told to annotate their copy of "Salmon Man and the Wolf Brothers" to support these themes.

The plot of "Salmon Man and the Wolf Brothers" is deceptively simple at first blush. The hero, Salmon Man, is desired by many maidens, but he only has eyes for the sister of the Wolf Brothers. The Wolf Brothers benefit from the labors of their sister, so they plot to kill Salmon Man. Wiser characters refuse to aid in their murder plot. "Why hurt someone who does not bother me?" questions Grandfather Coyote. Finally, Rattlesnake is tricked into wrongdoing. Like Adam and Eve banished from the Garden of Eden, Rattlesnake must flee his home. But Salmon Man does not die. His remains become smolt which transform into Young Chinook.

After showing nobility in restoring the accidental damage he has done to Sandpiper, Young Chinook weds the sister of Wolf Brothers.

“Salmon Man and the Wolf Brothers”

Retold by Andrew George (Tipiyeléhne Xáyxayx/White Eagle, 1980)

In the time of the Animal People
there was a big village
down along the river.
Salmon Man lived there.
Many maidens wanted him
because he was strong and brave.
But Salmon only had eyes for
the beautiful sister,
the sister of the Wolf Brothers.

Salmon Man thought it over
When the Wolf Brothers were away.
They were away,
Gathering firewood for sweatbaths.
Salmon made up his mind
to go to their sister's lodge.
he wore a fancy headdress,
feathers green and red.
He stood outside, and she knew.
She could tell by the sound of his walk
and his pleasing scent.

Salmon Man waited outside.
He stood at the Wolf Sister's door
for a while.
Then he decided to leave.
But the Wolf Sister knew he was there.
She pulled back the door.
"Do you want to visit me?" she asked.
Salmon Man told her, "I want you
to come with me. If you want to come,
then get ready to leave."
The Wolf Brothers were jealous
of Salmon Man.
He knew they would try to get him.

The Wolf Sister gathered her things
while Salmon Man watched outside.
Soon she was ready to go
and called for his help
to carry the bundles.
But one of the Wolf Brothers returned,
[he] came along the river with firewood.
He saw her clothing wrapped in hides.
“Are you planning to go with him?”
The Wolf Sister saw he was angry,
so she walked over to Salmon.
“You belong with us,” her brother said.
Salmon Man says,
“She is coming downriver with me.”
And they loaded the bundles in a canoe.
“They will not get far!”
the Wolf Brother told the others.
He ran off to tell his brothers.

The Wolf Brothers made plans,
they wanted to kill Salmon Man
for taking their sister.
They ran to Old Lady Spider,
all of them, and said to her,
“You can do anything;
your poison can kill Salmon.
But the old lady said,
“How can I do this to my friend?”
So they went to Grandfather Coyote.
They said, “You must help us,
Salmon Man took our sister.”
“You are all my relatives,” he said.
“How can I hurt anyone in my family?”

The Wolf Brothers went on,
they traveled faraway
to Rattlesnake’s lodge.
“You can kill Salmon Man
with a single bite,” they told him.
He thought it over, he told them,
“Why hurt someone
who does not bother me?”
The Wolf Brothers told Rattlesnake
that Salmon had wronged them.
They told him, that is why.

They offered him warm furs
for winter, and other goods.
He agreed to help.
The Wolf Brothers put Rattlesnake
in the front of Salmon's canoe
where it rested by large rocks.
Salmon Man did not see.

Salmon Man stepped into the canoe.
He was carrying a bundle
of the Wolf Sister's belongings.
He felt a sharp sting,
the pain of Rattlesnake's bite.
Salmon Man turned around;
he fell onto a flat rock.
A Wolf Brother drew his bow.
He shot Salmon Man in the head.
The others fell upon him,
cutting with flint knives,
and threw the pieces onto the sand.
That is how a tiny piece
fell in the water, and floated away.

When Rattlesnake and the Wolf Brothers
had killed Salmon Man,
they decided to travel back upriver.
The brothers were jealous
if anyone else was interested,
and wanted their sister.
She did much of the work.
She worked around their camp.
Rattlesnake had killed Salmon Man,
and did not return to his lodge.
He found a cave on a rocky cliff,
high above the river.
This became his home.

Rain fell for five days and five nights.
The little piece of Salmon Man
that fell during his death struggle
was carried down the river.
Life soon moved inside.
A smolt grew and began to swim.
Faraway it went and became stronger,
faraway beyond the mountains.

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Young Chinook grew in the ocean.
One day he was ready to return home.
He brought the warm air
of the great waters.

Young Chinook became strong
and made a bow and arrows;
carried them toward the mountains.
He knew his father had been killed.
He swam past Celilo and found
the familiar waters of the big river.
Sometimes he walked along the shore,
and then returned to the water.
He came to the lodge of Old Lady Spider
and saw her spinning in the corner.
“What are you doing there?”
“Just making clothes,” she said.

Young Chinook continued upriver.
He heard a noise and found
Coyote sitting on a rock.
He was splitting kaamúukii.
“What are you making?”
Coyote said, “I’m making a net
to catch lots of fish
when they pass by here.”
Young Chinook remembered
to avoid that place.
And he kept on going
along the river.

Young Chinook reached
his father’s old home.
He stepped ashore and
onto Sandpiper’s nest.
He broke Sandpiper’s leg.
“Tell me where the Wolf Brothers live;
I will fix your leg.”
Sandpiper told him
and warned of Rattlesnake
living in a high canyon cave.
Young Chinook fashioned a leg
from a twig for Sandpiper.
He traveled a long time

and saw Rattlesnake's home.

Young Chinook made his way
up the rocky slope.
He saw Rattlesnake
sunning himself nearby.
Young Chinook aimed an arrow.
Rattlesnake pleaded for his life.
"Don't hurt me, Nephew;
I know why you have come."
"I have power you need
to defeat the Wolf Brothers."
Young Chinook put down his bow.
Rattlesnake kept his word.
He took out some of his teeth
for Young Chinook
to put into his mouth.

Young Chinook traveled
to the river's faraway headwaters.
He saw smoke coming up
from the Wolf Brothers' camp.
Their sister cried as she worked.
They only went outside
to drink from the river.
Young Chinook hid in the water.
One by one, he bit them
on the mouth as they came.
Rattlesnake's poison
worked its power.
Before one could howl,
pulled beneath the waters.

Young Chinook, powerful and brave,
yelled his victory song!
The Wolf Sister heard the shout
and ran from the lodge.
She recognized his voice
and went to greet him.
Young Chinook took her as his wife
and they returned together.

Learning objectives of the myth and other narrative sustainable texts can be taken from middle school Common Core learning targets for literacy and social studies. For example, the following Common Core State Standards for seventh grade work well with the place-based text we have introduced.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.3 (Reading Literature) Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2 (History/Social Studies) Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Showing Students a Native American Lens of Indigenous Myths

The third step in sustainability study is to share with students how current and deceased tribal leaders and environmentalists interpret George's story. When he was still living, George explained that the character of Coyote was especially important for him as a moral teacher in creation stories:

I learned lots of things growing up about our history and Coyote stories – how the land was made and how salmon came to the rivers. It was all the Creator's plan, Just as it says in the Bible although they didn't have it. The Indians knew these things too, just like it says in the Bible about the great flood. There was dry land, then, on top of Steptoe Butte. We heard their stories over and over again and the elders had us repeat them just like we heard them, so we got it right. Our history is our stories, and you can see them in the rocks.

George explained that nature can serve as a teacher. He believed the creation myths he learned verbatim from his elders allowed nature to tell its story. Andrew George explained:

It's a good thing to study and share knowledge to help others. But nature is our teacher. You can see God in His creation, and we should watch and learn. Scientists try to know about nature, but to know nature is something different. The plants, the animals, the rocks, are all there to teach us if we watch and listen and respect them...The books say that these Coyote Stories are from people who imagined, but to me

these things are true to fact.

Place-based learning occurred for George at the intersection of story interpretation and first-hand encounters in nature.

I have seen for myself where things happened in Coyote's time, the shape of rocks and rivers and lakes. The history of my family and people has been told by my uncles and other elders and is written in the ancient rocks. You can't read it all in a book or understand it all; you can only see it....Listen, you can hear them. Truth is the same everywhere.

Contemporary Palouse tribal elder, Author 4, notes that the character of Coyote is pivotal to developing a sustainability lens when interpreting the meaning of oral legends in the Native American tradition. She has spent considerable time translating deceased tribal elder Cleveland Kamiakin's 1956 explanation of the importance of Coyote in Sahaptin. "This is how it was," explained Kamiakin, "Spilyai (Coyote) made everything. Whatever he said, he did it just like that. We come to know such things through stories."

Native American literature scholar, Ramsey (1977) further observes that Coyote was a cultural hero across Northwest tribes, but his heroism looked different across myths. In our text, Coyote is a background character who offers sage advice, but in other stories he plays a major role. In some myths, Coyote creates the Columbia River or invents cultural rites such as salmon fishing. In other stories, he manifests himself as a trickster who can be outsmarted by heroic, collective thinking humans (Ramsey, 1977). For example, see Matt Dembicki's *Trickster: Native American Tales* in the appendix of this article. Ramsey concludes that Coyote helps tribes affirm community norms and provides natural explanations. He also personifies the harm of selfishness, which, in the short run, can be enjoyable.

Stories such as this one can be integrated across language arts, science, social studies and math. For example, in language arts, the literary element of characterization can be introduced with Coyote being a primary unit of analysis. In social studies, local Native American values towards nature can be introduced. In a science class, local environmental concerns can be addressed. Math classes can emphasize authentic numeric problem solving contextualizing place-based environmental concerns. We know of a local teacher middle school math teacher who used the backdrop of sustainability to determine when deforestation was likely at the current state of logging in his community.

Teaching Students to Read across Texts for Sustainability Themes

The fourth step in our framework is to offer students opportunities for wider reading of indigenous narratives and to find agreement or disagreement with the points of view of tribal elders. Ultimately, we want students to make their own assertions about sustainable philosophy and practices in texts, but we want to first offer them a Native American lens for reading. In order for students to affirm or reject Kamiakin and Ramsey's conclusion about the character of Coyote, for example, students read across texts, looking for similarities and differences in how Coyote manifests himself. Students also read across the stories of various indigenous tribes in order to compare how sustainability lessons stay the same or differ across tribes and geographical locations.

We suggest a smattering of texts in the Appendix that support a sustainability curriculum by offering indigenous lenses of human interactions with nature.

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To scaffold authentic inquiry informed by a Native American interpretation of a text, we encourage students to read Andrew George's comments about the stories he was told growing up.

We ask them to reflect on the following questions:

What beliefs does Andrew George have about nature?

Why does he think Coyote is important?

As students read "Salmon Man and the Wolf Brothers" we have developed a reading outline to set a purpose for reading:

What advice about nature does Coyote give?

What actions of characters go against Coyote's advice?

Take two column notes summarizing the action and how it goes against Grandfather Coyote's advice, "How can I hurt anyone in my family?" Attach your notes to this paper.

Coyote's Advice: _____

Character Action How It Goes Against Grandfather Coyote's Advice

Character Action	How It Goes Against Grandfather Coyote's Advice

We want students to think about what this particular story might mean about the importance of nature for both Native Americans and for themselves, so we introduce the following prompts:

What role (creator, advice giver, or trickster) might Andrew George think Grandfather Coyote plays in "Salmon Man and the Wolf Brothers"? Explain your reasoning for the role you selected.

What lessons does nature teach us in "Salmon Man and the Wolf Brothers?" Defend your answer with textual evidence.

What are the clues in this story that this is a story from the Pacific Northwest?

After wider reading, we want students to develop a greater sense of Native American literature from beyond our region as we pose the following questions based on wider reading:

What role (creator, advice giver, or trickster) does Coyote play across stories? To answer this you must name the story and the role played.

What lessons about nature can be learned in additional reading?

Do Native American stories across the United States emphasize the theme that nature can be our teacher? Explain.

Developing Appreciation for Native American Contributions to Sustainability

The fifth step in the sustainability framework is to guide students toward appreciation of how Native American tribal leaders have helped enhance local ecosystems. When Palouse tribal elders led an environmental movement to stop government engineers from impounding the Snake River for hydro-electricity, they had deeply entrenched values behind their actions. Saving the river was a spiritual duty deeply connected to tribal identity. Local newspaper, film documentaries, and news television clips portrayed the actions of tribal leaders and served as additional texts to examine tribal elders' lenses of ecological care as contrasted with local developers who were not thinking in terms of sustainability (Marston, 2000).

Finally, to move students to form authentic assertions about stewardship of nature, we have taken news stories that deal with how natural resources are being used and ask students to come to decision making about sustainability:

What is the sustainability dilemma is presented in this news story?

What advice do you think Coyote would give for solving this dilemma? Explain.

What advice do you think local tribal elders would give for solving this dilemma? Explain. Do you agree or disagree? Defend your answer.

Variations of this curriculum can be implemented across the country. We picked meaningful texts for important local environmentalists. However, environmentalists across the country may have different stories and textual influences. In place-based learning, an important task of teachers and students is to find and investigate these stories and the truths behind them.

The beauty of our literacy curriculum is that it teaches sustainability principles and is also highly respectful to Native American philosophies and culture. Textbooks tend to offer two historical lenses of Native Americans: either dead-and-buried or with a “cultural tourist” approach that views Native Americans as exotic or highly different than the student reader (Lomawaima, 1995; Sanchez, 2007). Such presentation ultimately does not translate into respect for Native American views (Lomawaima & McCartney, 2006). Textbook depictions of modern Native Americans tend to be associated with owning or working in casinos, or living isolated lives on reservations (Hawkins, 2005). Pedagogical exercises following textbook treatment of Native Americans have a disproportionate number of recall questions (91 percent) rather than critical thinking exercises (Lavere, 2008). Since the point of our place-based curriculum is to result in fostering critical thinking, traditional textbooks are not generally compatible with sustainability study.

Author 2 has been implementing place-based sustainability curriculum for many years. As part of his doctoral work, he implemented this curriculum in fourteen middle level (5-8) classes from four Northwest districts. Using classroom standardized test results for reading, mathematics, and social studies, results from these classrooms were compared with fourteen other classes in the same schools using conventional curriculum and instructional approaches. In no instance did place-based curriculum classrooms achieve at a lower level compared to control group mean scores for the year. Three place-based curriculum classes showed no statistical

difference in achievement, but eleven of the fourteen classes accrued higher gains on standardized test scores.

Conclusion

Because traditional textbooks are not good tools to support sustainability inquiry, we use Native American myths to introduce sustainability themes. Because our stories are local, they provide place-based learning and a solution to textbooks that tend to ignore local problems. Both our students and Native American co-teachers have observed that our approach is authentic and respectful, so literacy engagement tends to be high. Author 2 and Author 4, who have been engaging in this curriculum for a few decades, observe that students remember what they learned many years after middle school.

We end with Chief Seattle's beautifully transcribed words expressed in "Brother Eagle, Sister Sky". It succinctly reminds middle school students, and their teachers, why Native Americans tribal elders often express commitment to preserving and protecting local ecosystems and why everyone should care: we are all connected (Chief Seattle, 1991).

Brother Eagle, Sister Sky: A message from Chief Seattle

How can you buy the sky? Chief Seattle began.
How can you own the rain and the wind?
My mother told me,
Every part of this earth is sacred to our people.
Every pine needle.
Every sandy shore.
Every mist in the dark woods.
Every meadow and humming insect.
All are holy in the memory of our people.
My father said to me,
I know the sap that courses through the trees
as I know the blood that flows in my veins.
We are part of the earth and it is part of us.
The perfumed flowers are our sisters.
The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are our brothers.

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The rocky crests, the meadows,
The ponies -- all belong to the same family

Appendix

Dembicki, Matt. (2010). *Trickster: Native American tales: A graphic novel*. Colden, CO: Fulcrum Pub.

Trickster tales have a long history of juxtaposing humor and challenge within the same story. This graphic novel includes the standard trickster protagonists, including Coyote. This geographically broad collection covers tales from the Yup'ik Eskimos of Alaska to the Penobscot Nation of Maine. Editor and illustrator Dembicki has assembled a talented array of illustrators and Native American storytellers such as Joseph Bruchac, Joyce (Childers) Bear, and Joseph Stands with Many to create a rich compendium of tales. The graphic novel covers a range of topics from how the lights of heaven were created to the humorous tale about why one should not kick deqs (sea animals). This anthology would serve to provide a rich vocabulary experience to any language arts class. Additionally, the common character of Coyote allows for comparisons of sustainability ideas across different indigenous settings. (See framework questions on page 25).

Alexie, Sherman. (2007). *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*. New York, NY: Little, Brown, and Company.

Wildly popular with adolescents, *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian* includes raw language, bullies, edgy issues, and comical illustrations enabling it to draw in even the most reluctant reader. This young adult novel explores Indian identity from the perspective of fourteen year-old Arnold Spirit. Growing up on the Spokane reservation, Arnold (more affectionately known as Junior) makes a command decision to transfer from the reservation (“the rez”) school to Reardon--the white school. Junior’s brave decision results in his being labeled an outcast and traitor by his compatriots on the reservation. Undeterred, Junior bravely navigates the complex world of the rich white school and in the process discovers a lot about what it means to be an Indian in America. He begins to understand the depressing fact that it “sucks to be poor, and it sucks to feel that you somehow deserve to be poor. And because you’re Indian you start believing you’re destined to be poor.” He also learns to value his family and community and to turn to nature for comfort in the midst of heartache. Sustainability discussion can focus on the importance of nature for psychological balance.

Martin, Rafe & Shannon, David. (1992). *The Rough-face Girl*. New York, NY: Puffin.

A Cinderella tale with a Native American flavor, *The Rough-face Girl* offers a brief retelling of a much longer traditional story while addressing the need for humility in living our lives. This Algonquin tale of the handsome Invisible Being and the Rough-Face Girl is beautifully illustrated by David Shannon and re-told by Rafe Martin. While the Rough-Face Girl slaves away feeding the fire, her cruel sisters set their sights on marrying the seductively handsome Invisible Being. With lying lips, they manage to wheedle their way into the Invisible Being’s tent. The Invisible Being’s overly protective sister, however, thwarts the cruel sisters’ designs to

marry him by exposing their inability to see him. Only those who can actually see the Invisible Being are able to marry him. The Rough-Face Girl, on the contrary, sees the face of the Invisible Being everywhere in nature. With great humility, the Rough-Face Girl pursues the Invisible Being, marries him, and they live happily ever after.

Social studies teachers might use this Cinderella tale to model the important part a humble spirit plays in the preservation of our earth. Lacking the humility of their younger sister, the self-focused, proud, and haughty intensity of the cruel older sisters, preclude them from being able to see and appreciate the beauty of the earth around them. This, in turn, leaves them bereft and without “great gladness.” This picture sheds light on the psychology behind sustainability advocates: the earth is our teacher if we have enough humility to recognize this.

Friesen, John W. and Virginia Lyons Friesen. (2010). *And Now You Know: 50 Native American Legends*. Calgary, CN: Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

Organized into four parts: Origin Stories, How Stories, Why Stories, and Ten Tricky Trickster Tales, *And now you know*, offers 50 Native American Legends for fostering critical thinking about the interconnectedness of ecological, social, and economic systems. Gleaned from the Mandan, Cherokee, Peigan, Salish, Pueblo, Cree, and numerous other Native American societies, this collection of 50 short tales offers a profusion of delectable stories. A particularly poignant story in this collection is “How Whale kept his promise.” This Haida legend models the import of humanity cooperating with nature. In this tale, a group of Indians save Whale from being stranded on a beach in the Canadian West Coast. Because the Indians were willing to befriend Whale and save him, Whale fulfills his promise by sending rain to quench the raging forest fires, enabling the Indians to continue their way of life in an ecologically delicate environment.

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February 6, 2015

Middle School Journal
Joanne L. Previts, Editor
Dan Bauer, Editor

Dear Editors,

Attached is a revised manuscript for your consideration titled “Valuing Native American Tribal Elders and Stories for Sustainability Study”. An abstract of the manuscript is below:

This manuscript outlines a framework the authors have used to infuse sustainability study into humanities teaching at the middle school level. Native American tribal elders can act as co-teachers in such classrooms, and the place-based stories that shaped their views of the environment can serve as important classroom texts to investigate sustainable philosophies. Middle school students can learn to read with a sustainable lens and learn to use the narrative wisdom of tribal elders to read across texts for sustainability themes and messages. Respect for Native American culture flourishes in such an environment. Examples of Native American storied resources for sustainability are offered in this manuscript.

We have made several recommendations recommended by reviewers including major reorganization of the article, introducing ourselves early on and emphasizing literacy activities, taking out recommended passages, including assessment detail, and close editing. We have also reordered authors based on the amount of work contributed to the manuscript.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kristine Gritter

Richard Scheuerman

Cynthia Strong

Carrie Jim Schuster

Tracy Williams

Running head: VALUING NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBAL ELDERS AND STORIES

Valuing Native American Tribal Elders and Stories
For Sustainability Study

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