

"The dream world of North American Indian mythology is inhabited by the most fantastic creatures, beings, and events. Foremost among these beings is the 'Trickster,' as pivotal and important a figure in our world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology. 'Weesageechak' in Cree, 'Nanabush,' in Ojibway, 'Raven' in others, 'Coyote' in still others, this Trickster goes by many names and many guises. In fact, he can assume any guise he chooses. Essentially a comic, clownish sort of character, his role is to teach us about the nature and the meaning of existence on the planet Earth; he straddles the consciousness of man and that of God, the Great Spirit. . . . Without the continued presence of this extraordinary figure, the core of Indian culture would be gone forever" (Tomson Highway, *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, Fifth House: 1989).

'When we stopped being ourselves and started to become
something we aren't, it turned bad.'

(Yellow Robe, *Mix Blood Seeds* 1-4-43 [unpublished play])

The course will focus on writing by a small sample of American Indian authors from different nations, and on versions and renderings of stories from a few American Indian oral traditions. It's important to understand that we are barely dipping our big toes in the ocean of American Indian studies and literature. My hope is that the course will orient you in this very rich field so you can knowledgeably continue exploring on your own.

We will use all the resources we can garner to locate these readings in their social, historical, and cultural contexts. As a rule I will give you printed excerpts from articles and put the complete version of the article on internet reserve.

Two visitors and an on-line friend will help us. Assiniboine playwright William S. Yellow Robe, Jr., has given us permission to read his unpublished children's play *Hate: Old Ways Learn a New Way*. Yellow Robe will speak with us about the play on our Wednesday, October 3rd, class, and will follow up with a reading/lecture that afternoon at 4 in Diamond 122. **His afternoon presentation on Oct. 3rd is required; please make arrangements so you can attend.**

Penobscot Neana Neptune will speak with us on October 24 after Fall Break. She will talk about her choices and spiritual practices as a woman in the Penobscot community.

Blackfeet Leslie Shaw, who lives on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, will be available online to answer questions and provide perspectives. Leslie is well connected in her community and is a wonderful resource for us. Funnel your questions through me (I can't give her email address to all of you) and I will give you her response -- unedited, I promise.

Note on terms: "Native American" was popular during the Reagan years, but people struggled with the term because, while having the virtue of emphasizing "native" -- as in, "here first" -- the term is overly general. Professional journals use "American Indian." Either term is fine; both are problematic in that they may imply a false unity or similarity among groups of people who have always been and still are vastly different from each other.

My email is paonion and my office hours in Miller 235 are from 1-3 on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

Texts:

Sherman Alexie (Spokane), *Ten Little Indians* (2003)
Flight (2007)

Gisolfi D'Aponte, ed. *Seventh Generation: Native American Plays*

Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, *American Indian Trickster Tales*

Louise Erdrich (Chippewa), *Tracks*

Joy Harjo (Creek), *In Mad Love and War*

Tomson Highway (Ojibway), *The Rez Sisters*

D'Arcy McNickle (Flathead), *The Surrounded*

Paul Radin, *The Trickster* (Winnebago)

Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), *Storyteller*

Brian Swann, ed. *Native American Songs and Poems*

Drew Hayden Taylor (Ojibway), *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth*

William S. Yellow Robe, Jr. (Assiniboine), *Hate: Old Ways to Learn a New Way* (\$3, get from Prof Onion)

Provisional Syllabus ("provisional" means we will try to stay on course but might get off now and then.)

9/5 Introduction

9/7 Come prepared to discuss the "Appendix" at the end of this syllabus. Read also Vine Deloria, "Native Wisdom: A New Respect for Old Ways" (*American Indian* fall 2004 32-37). We will assign specific commentators for both.

9/10 *Winnebago Trickster Cycle*: be sure to read Radin's notes on each episode.
 9/12 *Trickster Cycle*, continued
 9/14 readings from *American Indian Trickster Tales*; student work from previous years. Story told on *Powwow Highway*.

9/17 Trickster Story Due*** Prepare to read before classmates.
 9/19 McNickles, *The Surrounded*
 9/21 McNickles

9/24 McNickles concluded/ Intro to Erdrich
 9/26 Erdrich *Tracks*
 9/28 *Tracks*

10/1 *Tracks*, concluded; intro Yellow Robe
 10/3 William S. Yellow Robe, Jr. speaks with class
 10/5 Discuss Yellow Robe's play and lecture; **paragraph due**

10/8 "Columbus Day" reading; Silko, *Storyteller*
 see and read Silko's comments on storytelling: <http://wordsandplace.arizona.edu/storytelling-porchtalk.html>
 10/10 *Storyteller*
 10/12 *Storyteller*

10/15 *Storyteller*
 10/17 *Storyteller* **ESSAY #1 DUE**
 10/19 Swann, *Native American Songs and Poems*; Deborah Miranda readings

10/22 FALL BREAK
 10/24 NEANA NEPTUNE TALKS WITH OUR CLASS
 For a brief intro to the Penobscot nation, visit the museum site at
<http://www.penobscotnation.org/museum/Index.htm>
 10/26 *Body Indian* in Seventh Generation **paragraph on Neana Neptune due**

10/29 *Body Indian*
 10/31 *Only Drunks and Children* in Seventh Generation
 11/2 *Only Drunks and Children*

11/5 Tomson Highway, *The Rez Sisters*
 11/7 *The Rez Sisters*
 11/9 *****ESSAY #2 DUE**: perform dialogues in class

11/12 Harjo: *In Mad Love and War*
 11/14 *In Mad Love and War*
 11/16 Deborah Miranda (poet who will later visit Colby)

11/16 Thanksgiving: Chrystos, "Thank You," myth
 --THANKSGIVING BREAK

11/26 Stories from *Ten Little Indians*
 11/28 from *Ten Little Indians*
 11/30 *Poetry*

12/3 *Flight*
 12/5 *Flight*
 12/7 Conclusion
ESSAY #3 DUE at the end of reading period in my office or electronically.

There will be a Final Exam on Thursday, December 13, at 9A.M (Exam 4). I will give you questions for study in advance. You may bring one sheet of notes, single-spaced on one side or double-spaced on both side, to the exam.

I have never successfully devised a single system for engaging everybody in a large class, so we will improvise with many ideas -- and one of them is hand-tailored for you! Students will give dramatic readings; some days students will start discussions; some days students will give analyses worked through in group discussions; some days students will interact with our silent helper Leslie Shaw; or do dialogue readings, dramatic readings, 4-corner readings, research reporting. Sign up for your preferred choices on the sheet I pass out.

Written work:

- 1) Trickster story told to the page due 9/17. Handout forthcoming.
- 2) 5-7 page essay in response to page of prompts, due. I'm happy to talk with you at any time about directions for essays. Handout forthcoming.

- 3) Cross-cultural dialogue and essay on the dialogue. For this assignment you will compose a dialogue (2-3 pages) between two (maybe three) people struggling across Colby campus cultures: economic/social; athletics/non athletic; drinking/non-drinking; religious/atheist; nationality/different nationality; male/female; gay/straight; shopper/ascetic, and so on. In addition to the dialogue you will write a (4 pages) essay locating your chosen conflict within the conflicts revealed in our readings.
- 4) Final 8-10 page essay on any topic of your choosing, or any related problem you want to explore. Handout forthcoming.
- 5) Paragraph responses to specific questions. I will not put these on the syllabus ahead of time, although you will see a few exceptions where a response is obviously appropriate. Paragraphs due in class will be assigned on the preceding class. Written or electronic. Probably 5-6.

Mechanics:

**If you let me know why you can't make class, I will be happy to help you cover the missed material and assignments.

**Grades: two essays and final: 60%
trickster story 10%, and dialogue essay 15%
paragraph responses and participation 15%