

Dr. Susan Gardner, Spring 2009

If only I were an Indian, suddenly alert, on a galloping horse, leaning against the wind ... (Franz Kafka, 1883-1924)

[T]he Indian...is a product of literature, history, and art, and a product that, as an invention, often bears little resemblance to actual, living Native American people. (Louis Owens, Cherokee/Choctaw novelist and critic)

Let us put our heads together, and see what life we will make for our children.
(Tatanka Iotanka/Sitting Bull)

As I originally conceived of this course, I wanted it to be useful to an audience of teachers, future teachers, school library/media specialists, and parents (and I still do). It was, in fact, first taught as an intensive, three-week summer institute for teachers in 2000. But soon I realized that anyone interested in Native America could benefit, because my intent is to enable you to learn to evaluate resources (in print or electronic media, **and in the community**) for yourselves. No American is immune from the major sources of stereotyping American Indians: the electronic media, advertising, and children's literature. All of these play powerful roles in the socialization of youth; it is hard to outgrow these images and fantasies. Although I came by various ways to my present specialization in Am. Indian Literatures, I realize that my own fascination stems from my father's boyhood reading. My great-grand-aunt Ida gave him a children's book popular in the 1920s, *American Indian Fairytales* (not that any such genre traditionally existed!), and he used to hide in his grandparents' barn on summer vacations in Iowa to read it. After he died in 1998, I found among his personal papers an unpublished novel he had written about the Iowa frontier, including Am. Indian characters.

Thinking further, I remembered that traditional Native American Indian societies, in their oral storytelling (dating back at least 30,000 years), had little concept of what we call "children's literature" which, interestingly, is defined by its audience: the "protected class" of modern childhood in the Western world. Traditional Native American conceptions of "the self" locate its origins in ancestral time out of mind; children are the ancestors reborn; the notion of an "individual" attains significance as a function of kinship placement and membership in a prior and overarching social whole, the People. Moreover, in the world's non-Western, traditional societies, it was assumed that understanding the stories grew with time; endings did not have to be happy. Nor were certain subjects taboo, and oral narrative/storytelling was **the** means by which cultures preserved their memory, history, knowledge, wisdom. As one elder has said, "We are Indian people because we tell each other Indian stories."

Yet modern Native writers have adopted the Euroamerican genre: do their stories for children and adolescents differ significantly from those told by writers from the mainstream culture? Or from American Indian literature written for adults? A further consideration in structuring the course was Native American children as audience: like all American children, they are exposed to the mainstream society's cultural offerings, including popular culture. But they walk in two worlds, or, as a Lumbee friend once expressed their reality, "with a sneaker on one foot and a moccasin on the other." What kinds of stories would delight and instruct them, while addressing the mainstream culture's children at the same time?

There are further preliminary considerations. During the Treaty-making era, although treaties in international law are conducted between sovereign entities, federal law had already classified American Indians as "domestic dependent nations." A predictable rhetoric perceiving them as children or wards under the Great Father's protection ensued, particularly when land cessions became involved. No other American ethnic "minority" is paternally administered by a sub-cabinet agency, in this case the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the U.S. Dept. of the Interior.

In the later nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries, when assimilation and forced deculturation within government and church-run boarding schools were federal policy after the confinement of Native Americans to reservations, an unforeseen effect of suppressing Native languages and cultural practices was the development of pan-Indian identities and a nascent literature in a new, shared language: English. One way to address a mainstream audience, nineteenth century Indian writers discovered, was via "children's literature." The entrance of American Indian-authored stories into the Euroamerican literary mainstream was thus by dint of their infantilization: (Salishan) Mourning Dove's *Coyote Stories* sanitized the great Trickster; (Dakota) Charles Eastman and his Euroamerican wife Elaine Eastman's *Wigwam Evenings* domesticated traditional narrative; one of (Mohawk) performing artist E. Pauline Johnson's audiences was mass-circulation magazines for children and their parents. The same applies to some of (Yankton Dakota) Zitkala-Sa's work, which we will be reading this semester.

During the same time period, English-born artist Ernest Thompson Seton started the Woodland Indian societies for Canadian and American white youth. In England, the Boy Scouts (founded in 1908) and the Girl Guides (1910) were negligibly influenced by Seton's model, but in North America *The Boy Scout Handbook* evolved from Seton's *The Birch-bark Roll of the Woodland Indians*. This imitative trend survives in YMCA summer camps where Euroamerican children acquire "Indian" names, clan affiliations, and survival skills. However honorable the values taught, Euroamerican children are only playing at being Indians, during "down" time. In the boarding schools, American Indian children were not playing at being white. They had no choice in the matter.

A heavily propagandistic literature took aim at graduates from boarding schools for American Indian children, to ensure that they would maintain the intended allegiance to white nationalism and Christian values. Novelist Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), doyenne of American Indian women writers of the Southwest, recalls *Stiya: the Story of an Indian Girl*, published by the U.S. War Dept. in 1881 and written by a white woman, Marion Bergess (masquerading as "Tonka," a meaningless name). Bergess had been a teacher and dormitory matron at the notorious Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, PA, whose former military founder Richard Pratt's philosophy was "to kill the Indian to save the child." Silko's great-grandmother and her Aunt Susie had been educated there, and the novel "was the cause of the only big quarrel my great-grandmother ever had with her daughter-in-law, Aunt Susie" ("Books" 161):

The U.S. government had taken every precaution to sever the Indian students' ties with their families and tribes. Children were taken by force, if necessary, put on the train, and sent thousands of miles to the boarding school.... The government did not allow the children to return home for visits in the summer. Instead [they] were hired

out to Carlisle families for domestic and farm work. The government policymakers believed that if the Indian children were kept far enough away from their families and homeland long enough, the Indian School graduates might...melt into the cities in the East to work as maids and farmhands....

[*Stiya*] was written from the point of view of a young Pueblo girl...after she has returned home...and struggles to maintain her new identity and 'civilized' ways despite growing hostility and pressure from her family and from the Pueblo community.... Bergess projected all of her own fears and prejudices toward Pueblo life into her *Stiya* character.... [She] has no affection for any family member; every aspect of Pueblo life is repugnant; vile odors and flies abound. *Stiya* is filled with self-loathing when she remembers she grew up in this place. (161-63)

Although, Silko comments, "[t]he old-time Pueblo people abhorred confrontations, especially with family members" (161), a battle royal erupted between the old lady and her daughter-in-law:

Aunt Susie was a scholar and a story-teller; she believed the *Stiya* book was important evidence of the lies and the racism and the bad faith of the U.S. government... Grandma A'mooh didn't care about preserving historical evidence of racist, anti-Indian propaganda; a book's lies should be burned just as witchcraft paraphernalia is destroyed. (164)

In the end, Aunt Susie salvaged the novel, but "Books like *Stiya*, purportedly written by Indians about Indian life, still outnumber books actually written by Indians.... As Vine Deloria has pointed out, non-Indians are still more comfortable with Indian books written by non-Indians than they are with books by Indian authors" (165.) Portions of Silko's 1999 novel *Gardens in the Dunes* take place at another (in)famous off-reservation boarding school in California.

So much by way of background for the time being! Your texts for this course are: Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene), *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (winner of the National Book Award for Young People's Literature in 2007); Barbara Duncan, ed., *The Origin of the Milky Way: Living Stories of the Cherokee*; Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Anishinabe), *The Birchbark House* and *The Game of Silence*; Luther Standing Bear (Lakota), *My Indian Boyhood*; Zitkala-Sa (Dakota), *American Indian Stories*, and two graphic novels developed by the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe in Minnesota. All of these are available on course reserves/ereserves, except for Standing Bear's autobiography.) Two indispensable internet resources will be www.oyate.com (a Native organization in Berkeley, CA, providing critical evaluations of books and curricula with Indian themes) and <http://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.net>. The webmaster, Dr. Debbie Reese, is an enrolled member of the Nambe Pueblo (in northern New Mexico), and teaches in the Native Studies Program at the University of Illinois. The site offers "critical perspectives on indigenous peoples in children's books, the school curriculum, popular culture, and society-at-large." You will be contributors to this website!

My selection guidelines were to focus on YA novels; to show tribal specificity and continuity between traditional oral tales and print retellings; to use materials mainly by American Indian authors; and to achieve gender parity (the Hollywood "Indian" is almost always a Sioux, on horseback, and male). In addition to these texts, we will read additional materials in connection with nearly all of them, view some DVDs and, above all, benefit from the presence of four American Indian guest-speakers from the Charlotte area and elsewhere in North and South Carolina. Lumbee storyteller Barbara Locklear will visit us on January 28th; Lumbee community advocate Wanda Carter will join us on February 23rd. The others are storytellers Keith Brown (Catawba Nation) and Freeman Owle (Eastern Cherokee); dates to be set.

As previous students in this course expressed their expectations, it became apparent that most of them wished to fill a gap in their education and to take away from it what I had also envisaged: a project for practical use, for or about American Indians. I realized that I was fortunate to have students who, working together, created a true learning and sharing community. Instead of a final paper you will produce a final project, presented online, so that everyone (not just me) can learn from your work. Past projects included evaluating websites concerning Am. Indian youth; visiting school or public libraries to survey their collections of children's literature about Am. Indians (most woefully out of date and stereotypical) and to make recommendations for adding to these collections; producing a curriculum (one student created a community college course in Am. Indian literature); organizing story-telling projects. Student creativity always overwhelms me: I encourage you to develop projects on your own, and you may also work collaboratively, subject to certain guidelines.

COURSE POLICIES:

All students are bound by the University's student academic integrity code; the full university policy statement is at http://www.legal.uncc.edu/policies/ps-1_05.html. There is also a new university website: <http://integrity.uncc.edu>, with a student tab included. Our departmental multicultural policy is currently under revision, so I have borrowed the College of Education's statement:

The College of Education at UNC Charlotte is committed to social justice and respect for all individuals, and it seeks to create a culture of inclusion that actively supports all who live, work, and serve in a diverse nation and world. Attaining justice and respect involves all members of our community in recognizing that multi-dimensional diversity contributes to the College's learning environments, thereby enriching the community and improving opportunities for human understanding. While the term "diversity" is often used to refer to differences, the College's intention is for inclusiveness, an inclusiveness of individuals who are diverse in ability/disability, age, economic status, ethnicity, gender, language, national origin, race, religion, and sexual orientation. Therefore, the College aspires to become a more diverse community in order to extend its enriching benefits to all participants. An essential feature of our community is an environment that supports exploration, learning, and work free from bias and harassment, thereby improving the growth and development of each member of the community.

For the university academic calendar, go to www.uncc.edu and click on "Calendar" at the top of the page.

Blackboard Vista: All students need to use Blackboard Vista for this course, with its mail, discussion, calendar and grade book features. You access the course home page by logging in with 49er Express on the UNCC home page and clicking on "Access Blackboard Vista." If you haven't used Blackboard before, go to <http://bbvista.uncc.edu> for information and trouble-shooting. You will receive email from me often, **so check at least once daily, and always on the day class meets (preferably the night before)**. I will post periodic updated reading schedules on our Blackboard Vista course page. Mozilla Firefox 2.0 is more stable than Internet Explorer for accessing Blackboard: you can download it for free. (There is a Mozilla Firefox 3.0, but it doesn't work so well with Blackboard.) To run Blackboard (which uses pop-ups) properly, you also need to use Java Environment 6, update 3 (this is not the most recent version of Java, but it is the most compatible). Other materials will be on library reserve (hard copies) or e-reserves. To access these, go to the UNCC homepage and click on "library," then on "course reserves, e-reserves."

Attendance: You are allowed **three** absences (for whatever reasons), but any thereafter will impact your final grade at my professional discretion. I don't differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. If needed, I will express my concern about absences to you **once**. Keep in mind that you may well get sick (last spring, my classes were devastated by flu and sounded like hospital wards), or have an unavoidable, important conflict at our class time, so please budget your absences for these possibilities. Please allow enough time for commuting and parking if you need to!

Lateness of more than five minutes will count as an absence. After five minutes or so, entering the classroom simply disrupts it. I prefer instead that you contact me later (or beforehand, if possible). Please keep in mind, though, that my responsibility stops when I tell you what we covered and if you missed any assignments. For lecture notes, you will have to rely on your fellow/sister students. My least favorite questions are, "Did I miss anything important?" and "How many absences do I have?" I am expecting you to keep your own "absence log,"+ as **I want you to take responsibility for your own absences, and not always ask me if you have "too many."**

I do not accept any assignments after their due date, unless a genuine emergency or conflict occurs and if, at all possible, you notify me beforehand.

If you have a disability documented in the Office of Disability Services which may affect your learning, please avail yourself of the resources available at that office. They will advise me as to how I can accommodate your needs.

A written learning contract: Just as I have a contract to teach (of which this syllabus is a part), you will have one to learn. I will collect these word-processed, spellchecked documents (submitted in a sheet protector or pocket/wallet folder) at the beginning of class on Weds. Jan. 21st. In it state:

- (1) why you were interested in this course (or, at least, why you wound up in it);
- (2) how you learned about it;
- (3) what your goals are in taking it (what skills or content do you hope to learn?);
- (4) how you intend to achieve these goals, including the concrete steps you will take to obtain the grade you want;
- (5) what rumors you've heard about it, from others or from websites such as RateMyProfessor.com! (One student wrote: "Dr. Gardner is fine, as long as you do your work." DUH!)
- (6) your expectations of me as a teacher;
- (7) your expectations of yourself: what will **you** do to help create a successful class?
- 8) your expectations of your peers;
- 9) your computer skills: Do you use social networking sites? Do you have a Second Life avatar? Games?

You will revise these goals at mid-term, when I will inform you of your progress so far, and again, at semester's end. With hard work, you and I should agree. Write the contract carefully, for it will be an important basis for your final assessment. Please include any other information, such as previous literature or other related courses you may have taken (as well as what critical reading or writing skills you learned in them), what you like to read/view for pleasure; anything else you think it would be helpful for me to know about you (including, if you have a job, how many hours/week and where; the distance you commute to the university). Feel free to approach this requirement creatively: some students have written theirs in "last will and testament" style! One student wrote hers in "Horton Hears a Who" format! The livelier the better!

Grading will be based on a 100-point scale: micro-themes (40%), contributions to our Blackboard Vista discussion board (20%), contributions to Dr. Reese's blog (15%) and your final, online project (25%). Each microtheme is worth 5 points, and you are required to answer all of them. Each contribution to the discussion thread is also worth 5 points, and you are required to answer all of them. The grading scale is: an A=90-100; a B=80-89; a C=70-79; a D=60-69. **Those of you enrolled in 5050 will also teach a class, which will involve formulating a microtheme topic and a discussion question deriving from the topic you choose to present.** At semester's end, you will have the opportunity to revise one microtheme and one discussion.

Micro-themes, a form of brief essay, may well be a new experience for you, as they initially were for me. I was impressed with the results! They make splendid preparation for discussion, whether in small groups or a whole class setting. Neither you nor I have to endure extensive reading journals, lengthy research or position papers, massive group projects, or what my former colleague Dr. Jacoby (from whom I borrowed and adapted this technique) called "knuckle-whitening oral presentations." Because they are written in a small space (5x8, and **only** 5x8, index cards -- I won't accept any other size, or hastily scribbled, last-minute themes on a ripped-out sheet of paper!) -- you become practiced in stating your ideas clearly and concisely. The themes may be typed, word-processed, hand-printed or hand-written (if legibly, and **only** in dark ink). You will probably use both sides of the card, but you may not write on more than one card. All microthemes must have your name and the microtheme number in their upper right hand corner. Although these are not formal papers -- therefore, you don't need to bother with

introductions and conclusions -- they must be neatly presented, with correct spelling and grammar. I will collect them at the very beginning of class, another reason not to be late!

I'll be providing you with rubrics for writing microthemes and discussion posts, and posting to Dr. Reese's blog.

I'm also encouraging you to attend one public literary-cultural event, on campus or off: such events -- very many of them free -- take place at bookstores, community centers and other venues, including on campus (the English Dept's Creative Writing Reading Series at the Ritazza in Fretwell is quite popular). Of course, any events by or about American Indians would be most appropriate, and I will keep you posted about any that I know about. I'll award **5% extra credit** if you attend and describe one literary/cultural event, in a format that I call "report/relate/reflect," which I will discuss further and make available on the course site on Blackboard. You will post your report to the whole class. Sometimes this extra 5% makes all the difference with borderline grades. Please do not wait until the end of the semester (I will not accept reports during the last two weeks of class). You are welcome to attend an event I'm unaware of, but check with me first.

Despite the draconian syllabus tone (what I call my "bitch/monster persona" -- 49%--the other persona, 51%, is an angel), I do encourage you to be in touch with me as often as you like. You may contact me at my office (Fretwell 290H), by voice mail (704/687 4208) or via e-mail (which I prefer): sgardner@uncc.edu . If you call me, make sure to leave your phone number, and speak it slowly! I will announce my walk-in office hours soon; if these are not convenient, you may also make an appointment at another time (give me some alternative meeting times). Please do not hesitate to consult with me outside class at any mutually convenient time. You may also leave notes or coursework in my mailbox at the English Dept. main office (275 Fretwell). Take care that such materials go into my box, not Dr. Gargano's!

I know, from every course concerning American Indians that I've taught over the last eighteen years, that your interest was probably long-standing before you entered this classroom, and will endure long after you leave it. Thank you for your interest in this course, and I hope you will enjoy it as much as I do!

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