

Course Title:**Approaches to Teaching Native American Literatures and Cultures in the Middle School Curriculum**

This is a sample Master of Arts in Education course for Language Arts/Literacy track
Developed by Deborah Gussman, The Richard Stockton College of NJ, July 2003)

**Note -- I haven't yet taught this course -- I drafted it as a course that I wanted to have included as part of a newly designed MAED program for middle-school teachers at Stockton College. It was accepted as an "elective" -- but more than likely will not be taught until I can be released from other responsibilities to do it!

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Objectives: To introduce students to a variety of Native American literatures and literary forms including oral literature, autobiography, fiction, and poetry; to provide background on the tribal histories and conflicts that inform Native American literatures; to recognize and appreciate the differences and similarities between Native American and European world views; to prepare students to introduce Native American literature into the language arts curriculum.

Methods: Students will read historical accounts of Native American tribal cultures, primary source materials (contemporary fiction, autobiography, poetry, traditional narratives), and theoretical/pedagogical materials. Students will keep reading and response journals and discuss primary and secondary texts in class. At least one paper will be devoted to an extended analysis of a literary text that incorporates relevant secondary source materials. Two possible group projects:

- 1) students will research and present information about the cultural, historical, political and literary concerns of the tribal culture being studied for that class period and be responsible for teaching the other members of the class about that tribe;
- 2) students will create and present curricular materials for teaching "Thanksgiving" and "Discovery of America" with reference to Native American primary and secondary sources materials.

Readings and Topics: (note : Sources marked with numbers 1-3 come from A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, "Selected Bibliography of American Indian Literature and Background Materials for Elementary and Middle School Teachers and Students" prepared for the D'ArcyMcNickle Center at the Newberry Library, 2001; sources marked "oyate.org" come from the Oyate catalog).

Overview:

Ruoff, A. LaVonne Brown. American Indian Literatures: An Introduction, Bibliographic Review, and Bibliography. New York: Modern Language Association, 1990.

_____. Literatures of the American Indian. New York: Chelsea House, 1990. An introduction written for middle- and high- school students.

Jones, Guy W. (Hunkpapa Lakota), and Sally Moomaw, Lessons from Turtle Island: Native Curriculum in Early Childhood Classrooms, 2002, b/w illustrations. (Oyate.org)

Susag, Dorothea M. Roots and Branches: A Resource of Native American Literature—Themes, Lessons and Bibliographies. NCTE, 1998.

Oral and traditional literatures:

Primary: Zuni, "A Talk Concerning First Beginnings"

Secondary: Wiget, Andrew. "A Talk Concerning First Beginnings: Teaching Native American Oral Literature":

http://www.georgetown.edu/ta/mlit/essays/native_am.html

Primary: Max, Jill. Illustrated by Robert Annesley, et al. Spider Spins a Story: Fourteen Legends from Native America. Flagstaff: Northland. Traditional Stories. 2

Mourning Dove/Humishuma (Okanagan), **Coyote Stories**. 1933, 1990, b/w illustrations.

Here is Coyote, the trickster, the selfish individualist, the imitator, fixing up a world soon to receive human beings, teaching us how not to behave. Humishuma's stories, handed down from her people, tell why Skunk's tail is black and white, why Spider has such long legs, why Badger is so humble, why Mosquito bites people. (Oyate.org)

Autobiographical texts

Primary: Eastman, Charles A. (Dakota Sioux), and Elaine Eastman. Indian Boyhood. 1902. New York: Dover, 1971. Intro. Frederick W. Turner, III. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1972. Bison ed. Introd. by David Miller. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P. 2-3 ,

Standing Bear, Luther (Lakota Sioux). Land of the Spotted Eagle. 1933. Foreword by Richard N. Ellis. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1978. Autobiography of life before the reservation period and of the author's experiences at Carlisle and in the white world. 3+

Zitkala-ġa (Gertrude Bonnin; Dakota). American Indian Stories. 1921. Intro. by Dexter Fisher. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1986.

Autobiography, fiction, nonfiction. 3

Secondary: Lakota Teaching Project: <http://www.virtuous.org/lakota-studies/>

Historical revisions 1-Thanksgiving

Apess, William. "Eulogy on King Philip" (1836) reprinted in Son of the Forest and other Writings. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1999. Historical revision of the encounter of Pilgrims and Indians written by a 19th century Pequot Indian.

Dorris, Michael. Guests. New York: Hyperion, 1994. Twelve-year-old Moss is angry that his village has invited strangers (Pilgrims) to the annual autumn harvest feast. Focuses on Moss's struggles to grow up. 2

Grace, Catherine O'Neill, and Marge Bruchac (Abenaki), **1621: A New Look at Thanksgiving**. 2001, color photos. Produced in collaboration with the Wampanoag Indian Program at Plimoth Plantation, *1621* weighs Wampanoag oral traditions and English colonial written records against the popular myth of "brave settlers inviting wild Indians over for turkey dinner." Stunning photographs by Sisse Brimberg and Cotton Coulson, accompanied by simple, thoughtful text, are designed to walk the young reader into the dual perspectives of Native peoples and English colonists in Patuxet/Plymouth. The text, written for a young audience but not solely for children, also offers insights into the relationship of the Wampanoag people to their traditional homelands, and survival into the present. As well, *1621* addresses the harsh reality of the subsequent colonial history. Along with *Giving Thanks* and *Thanksgiving: A Native Perspective*, *1621* is an excellent tool for un-teaching the myth of "The First Thanksgiving." (Oyate.org)

Seale, Doris (Santee/Cree), Beverly Slapin, and Carolyn Silverman (Cherokee/Blackfeet), eds., **Thanksgiving: A Native Perspective**. 1998 edition, b/w illustrations (Oyate.org)

Historical Revisions 2- Columbus and the "Discovery" of America

King, Thomas (Cherokee). A Coyote Columbus Story. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 1992. A fresh and witty book that combines trickster myths with the story of Columbus's arrival. 2

Dorris Michael. Morning Girl. New York: Hyperion, 1992. Delightful story told from point of view of a young girl and her brother; describes life in the Caribbean just before Columbus's arrival. 2

Bigelow, Bill, and Bob Peterson, eds., **Rethinking Columbus: Teaching About the 500th Anniversary of Columbus's Arrival in America**. 1998, b/w photos and illustrations.

The quincentennial is over, but the issues are far from gone. From introductory articles and essays, to discussions of elementary and secondary school issues, to contemporary struggles, to background, context, and historical documents relating to the quincentennial, this is for teachers who want to get some critical thinking going in the classroom.

Fiction

Bruchac, Joseph (Abenaki), **The Heart of a Chief**. 1998 (Penacook).

This beautifully written story deals with some of the many issues confronting Native young people today, on and off the rez: Indian "mascots," leadership, and alcohol abuse. This may be the only story for this age group that realistically portrays a loving extended Indian family trying to deal with alcoholism (Oyate.org)

Erdrich, Louise (Ojibwe). The Birchbark House. Illustrations by the author. New York: Hyperion, 1999. 2-3. Set on an island in Lake Superior in 1847, the novel depicts traditional Ojibwe family and cultural life.

George, Jean Craighead. The Talking Earth. New York: Harper, 1983. Fiction. On the Seminoles by Newberry medal winner. 2-3

Monture, Joel (Mohawk), **Cloudwalker: Contemporary Native American Stories**. 1996, b/w illustrations.

Virgil (Mohawk) finds that he has "cloudwalking" in his blood; Doreen (Apache) continues to learn from her grandfather, even after he has crossed over; Chester (Apsaalooke) discovers that "*everybody is an artist when they create something*"; Louis (Cree) learns from an elder that "*you don't have to go very far to get what you want*"; thoroughly modern Betty (Koyukon) helps to butcher a moose for potlach; and Homer (Sac and Fox) dances at a powwow and honors his brother. These stories are, as the author says, "*from the point of view of Native children, who themselves are learning about their worlds, which seem to rush at greater speeds. If you tip up your ear and listen, you will hear the laughter of falling leaves, the rumble of thunder, the crying of birds. ...And it will sound like our children's voices.*" (Oyate.org)

Poetry

Sneve, Virginia Driving Horse (Lakota Sioux). Illustrator. Thomas Locke. Dancing Tepees: Poems of American Indian Youth. New York: Holiday House,

Hirschfelder, Arlene B., and Beverly R. Singer, eds. Rising Voices: Writings of Young Native Americans. New York: Scribner, 1992. Poems and Essays. 2

TallMountain, Mary (Koyukon), **The Light on the Tent Wall**. 1990.

Mary TallMountain's poems are full of heat and fire, simplicity and compassion, beauty and wisdom. (Oyate.org)

Taphonso, Luci (Navajo), **A Breeze Swept Through**. 1987, b/w illustrations.

These are lovely poems, lyrical and strong, with the beauty that comes from knowing who you are forever. (Oyate.org)