

NIHIL DE NOBIS, SINE NOBIS: TEACHING MINNESOTA AMERICAN INDIAN  
LITERATURE

by

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**Disclaimer**

Certain terminology used toward people that identify as being part of the indigenous populations of the Americas has changed many times. Currently, there is great debate surrounding the terminology used to describe people indigenous to the Americas. As someone whose heritage comes from those indigenous to Latin America, for the most part, I have seen Native American as being the most widely accepted term used. I have chosen to use the term “American Indian” to stay consistent with the terminology used in the most recent 2010 edition of the Minnesota State Standards. I have also chosen to substitute N----- for the N-word when quoting classic literature. This choice was made as to not alienate readers. I apologize for any inconvenience either of these choices may cause for future readership.

Finally, when quoting directly from the 2010 edition of the Minnesota State Standards, I will be using the quote in full, original text. The parts of the quote highlighted are as they are to be seen in the 2010 edition of the *Minnesota State Standards*.

**Abstract**

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For the past nine years, English Language Arts teachers have been required to teach Minnesota American Indian Literature. However, the inclusion of Minnesota American Literature in school curriculum has proved to be difficult for many educators. This capstone project has been created to answer the question, *How can Minnesota American Indian Literature, that follows the Minnesota State Standards, be used in a culturally responsive manner to replace literature that is traditionally taught in the classroom?* The research for this capstone project include topics regarding Western literary canon, the importance of Multicultural literature, culturally responsive literature, and the cultural surrounding Minnesota American Indian Literature. This project concludes in the creation of a website meant for educators and students in secondary English Language Arts classroom settings to assist in the learning and discussions surrounding Minnesota American Indian Literature.

*Keywords:* American Indian Literature, Native American Literature, Minnesota Literature, teaching secondary Minnesota American Indian Literature

## CHAPTER ONE

**Introduction****Research Question**

Literature is a core aspect of the English language arts classroom setting. In the past, the Western literary canon was widely accepted as an accumulation of the important texts to be taught to students. The idea of a highly educated person was one who had been well-versed in literature deemed important by academia (Bloom, 1994). As time went on, this concept of the canon began to be questioned.

Recently, there has been a shift in the usage of the Canon in secondary English language arts classrooms, which is especially true in Minnesota. In 2010, standards regarding Minnesota American Indians were added to the Minnesota State Standards. This can be seen as a direct challenge to what has been traditionally taught in the classroom; the Western literary canon.

Since I was in school, I have seen the Western literary canon both be challenged and changed. As a child, I remember being taught a wide variety of canonical texts that lacked diversity in both authorship and content, such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *A Christmas Carol*. In high school, I noticed the broadening of the Western canon. I was told authors such as Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison were generally accepted canonical writers. Finally, in college, I was taught historical problems of the canon; the lack of women, people of color, and those who identify as gender, sexual, or romantic minorities. I was finally able to see the harm of not only teaching, but also the danger of a single story (Adichie, 2009). There has been a history of generational trauma due to colonialism throughout the world. This systemic trauma of colonialism has led to only a limited number of texts being deemed traditionally appropriate for

the classroom. When this idea was pointed out to me, I began to challenge the Western literary canon.

The educational system in Minnesota has played a large role in this shift of the Western literary canon. In particular, the addition of teaching American Indian literature, even more specifically Minnesota American Indian literature in some grade levels, has been required by the Minnesota State Standards (Minnesota State Standards, 2010, p.70). This idea is a huge challenge to the generally accepted Western canon. And in many cases, this is a challenge yet to be addressed by many educators, for a multitude of different reasons. In this capstone, I decided to tackle the challenge of asking, *How can Minnesota American Indian Literature, that follows the Minnesota State Standards, be used in a culturally responsive manner to replace literature that is traditionally taught in the classroom?*

### **What is the Western Literary Canon and How is it Changing?**

Before understanding new literature that is to be taught in the classroom, it is important to address what has been traditionally taught in the classroom. As stated previously, the most commonly taught literature has been literature accepted into the Western literary canon. How is the canon defined?

The Western literary canon is defined as a list of literature that is deemed to be more regarded by field experts than all other text (Ross, 1998). Traditionally, educators of English Language Arts have used the Canon in their classrooms. The concept of the Canon was created in the Middle Ages in Europe as a base point of the educated elite powers (Kolbas, 2018). The creation of the Canon separated the literate from the educated. Any person could potentially be literate, but only the educated would know the canonical texts. Those who sought to be educated

needed to know most of the works of the Literary Canon. Many works widely accepted to be a part of the original literary canon include the Greek Philosophers and the Christian Bible. Over the centuries, it has changed and developed to include other texts, such as those by Mark Twain, William Shakespeare, and Leo Tolstoy. The vast majority of the Western Canon includes literature written by white men either from Europe or the United States (Bloom, 1994). A few exceptions over the years have been made to the white man rule. For example, the works of Jane Austen and Frederick Douglas are now usually considered to be part of the Western literary canon, though I would argue works written by minority groups, which have been accepted as part of the Canon, are few and far between.

As a person of Indigenous Andean, African American, and European descent, I felt excluded from the Canon in school. I could never quite put my finger on it, but I knew that there was something off about the texts I was reading in school. This led me to read as much classic literature as I possibly could. I was obsessed with literature, from the ancient Greeks, to the Gothic writers of Europe, and to the American Modernists. It was not until my first literary theory class that I realized my discomfort with the canon came from not seeing myself represented in the canon. Most texts from the canon come from singular backgrounds and tell an equally singular story. When I came to this realization, I began speaking with my peers of color. Mostly people said they hated English class. They hated that it was all the same “boring stuff” and it was not “relatable.”

There were a few peers of color who, like me, saw reading as an escape from the world around them. They loved to read in school, especially when they were able to choose the text they were able to read. What they did not like was reading about race in class. Now, one would

think that people of color would like to see their culture being represented in the classroom through someone such as Maya Angelou or Harper Lee. I would argue the problem with these authors is that the underrepresented culture being depicted in the text is not being positively represented. Take Harper Lee and her novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I had to read it my sophomore year of high school and I hated every moment of it. The atmosphere that was created in the classroom was damaging for me and still affects me negatively to this day. I was the only African American student in my class, and one of only two in my entire grade. The teacher did not think it was necessary to address the usage of the word N-----. Looking back, I think she assumed that students today would have the sense not to use racial slurs. This was not the case. Everyday at school, I felt humiliated by my peers and powerless to stop it. If I had said anything, all they needed to say was, "I was just talking about the book." I began to hate *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Instead of my peers learning that racism is bad, they learned how to find a loophole.

One of the most popular texts critiquing the Western Literary Canon, Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon*, implies the Canon, as it once was, is now dead (Bloom, 1994). In fact, the first chapter is titled, "An Elegy for the Canon." Bloom (1994) argued that although the Canon is dying, it was ultimately a good thing and should be kept alive for as long as possible. I completely disagree with this. In 2010, the creators of the Minnesota State Standards made a first step, whether knowingly or unknowingly, to rectify damage created by the Canon.

### **Minnesota State Standards**

In 2010, Minnesota educators decided to create state standards that addressed Minnesota American Indian Literature for the secondary classroom. Two of these standards relating to literature state, Standard 9.9.1.1 and 11.9.1.1, state:

[9.9.1.1] Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, including those by and about Minnesota American Indians*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010, p.70)

[11.9.1.1] Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, including those by and about Minnesota American Indians*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010, p.70)

There are no other racial or ethnic groups addressed in the standards. I see the addition of these Standards as a means to address literature of those indigenous to Minnesota in order to have teachers address literature by a group that has been historically marginalized in Minnesota. Although there have been many marginalized groups here in Minnesota, there is something unique about the marginalization of indigenous tribes. When I worked as a historical interpreter at Historic Fort Snelling at Bdote, I was able to teach the public about the atrocities American Indians in Minnesota had to face. I was surprised that the vast majority of the public did not know about these atrocities, and it made me think about what exactly students were and still are

learning in school. This is addressed later in chapter two, where I discuss the history of American Indians in Minnesota.

### **The Problem**

In my experience, I have yet to see a single secondary classroom that addresses these Standards properly. I have worked with three of the largest school districts in the state and I did not meet an educator who was addressing these Standards in a culturally responsive way. I do not believe this is being done intentionally and I, of course, do not write any of this to belittle my colleagues. Instead, I want to help other educators find ways to teach these Standards so that the public will know about the horrors many American Indians faced in Minnesota and how it affects tribes today. There are two major problems I have experienced when addressing Standards regarding American Indian literature. First, that most teachers are unaware of these Standards. Second, those who are aware of the Standards, are unaware of proper culturally responsive literature.

Clearly, something needs to be done to better address Standards 9.9.1.1 and 11.9.1.1. Teachers are unaware of the Standards, do not know how to apply the Standards, and if they are teaching American Indian Literature, they are not meeting the Minnesota aspect of the standard. Minnesota American Indian Literature is not being properly addressed and in doing so, we are harming our students.

### **The Solution**

Some teachers are making strides toward changing classroom curriculum. In the spring of 2018, the Duluth Public School District in Minnesota made a radical change to their district classroom curriculum by removing Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Mark Twain's *The*

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The removal of these texts was due to the heavy usage of racial slurs (Kaczke, 2018). Duluth Public schools are not alone in taking action. In the fall of that same year, the largest school district in the state of Minnesota, the Anoka-Hennepin School District, followed suit by removing *To Kill a Mockingbird* from the high school curriculum, an act which was later overturned. Schools and districts are now beginning to see how damaging the Western Canon is and are taking action. However, the removal of Canon texts has led to another problem: what do we use to replace these texts?

We, as Minnesota educators, have the obligation to teach students the Minnesota State Standards. In my experience, there are two Standards not being taught properly. As these traditionally-taught texts are being removed from the classroom, I see an opportunity to enact change. There is a void being left by these texts which can easily be filled by texts that meet Standards 9.9.1.1 and 11.9.1.1.

For my project, I created materials for my colleagues to use so they can better teach Minnesota American Literature in ways that are culturally responsive. These materials are easy for teachers to access and incorporate into their curriculum. I also provided documents to educate parents about the removal of Western Canon Literature and why it is a good thing. I decided to take on this change and create materials for students, teachers, and families so schools are able to teach these Standards in an equitable way. The Western literary canon has done enough damage and it is time to make some changes.

## **Conclusion**

It has been argued that, “authors like Shakespeare, Milton, Tolstoy, Austen, and Dickens certainly deserve their rightful places among the lists of ‘bests’,” and therefore are supposed to

remain in the classroom (Otte, 2010, p. 1). It was once widely accepted that the Western Literary Canon was all students needed to know.

Times have changed. The Minnesota State Standards have changed, and will be changing yet again. Classrooms have become more and more diverse over the past sixty years. We, as educators, need to ask ourselves, “what should be taught in the classroom?” The classics have always been taught. How many students do not complete their classroom readings, due to their lack of interest? However, how many classics are not taught each year? Are students’ lives worth any less for not having read a classic text? Do students in a secondary education classroom feel like they can be represented by a roughly seven-year-old growing up in the Jim Crow south? Do they easily connect with a teen, who has some sympathies towards slavery in the 1840s? Should they? The answer is probably not. The truth is the times have changed and what is taught in the classroom needs to change with it.

### **Summary**

Standards 9.9.1.1 and 11.9.1.1 need to be addressed more thoroughly in secondary English Language Arts Classrooms. As traditionally taught texts are being removed from classrooms, I saw an opportunity to address the Minnesota State Standards regarding American Indian Literature. For this project, I am asking *How can Minnesota American Indian Literature, that follows the Minnesota State Standards, be used in a culturally responsive manner to replace literature that is traditionally taught in the classroom?* After doing so, I provide materials for teachers and their classrooms that allow them to teach Minnesota American Indian Literature in an equitable way.

The following chapter addresses the academic literature surrounding the Western literary canon and the achievement gap, the importance of multicultural literature and how it is used in the classroom, culturally responsible and sustainable literature, what's going on in classrooms with regards to Minnesota American Indian Literature, and a history of Minnesota American Indians and their literature. This is followed by a chapter explaining the methods behind this project. Finally, a reflection and references list concludes this paper.

## CHAPTER TWO

## Literature Review

**Research Question**

As stated in the previous chapter, literature is a core aspect of the English language arts classroom setting. The Minnesota State Standards have begun to address the changes in the definition of literature and exclusivity that comes along with the Western literary canon. The addition of Minnesota American Indian Literature as a requirement of Minnesota teachers directly challenges the concept of a Western Canon. However, it appears that some teachers do not know about these Standards and others do not know how to address these Standards in a culturally responsive manner.

In this capstone the question is being posed, *How can Minnesota American Indian Literature, that follows the Minnesota State Standards, be used in a culturally responsive manner to replace literature that is traditionally taught in the classroom?*

**Introduction**

In the previous chapter, the changes school districts in Minnesota are facing were introduced. Literature that is part of the Western Canon is being removed due to issues regarding cultural responsiveness and Minnesota American Indian Literature is being added as requirement of the Minnesota State Standards.

In this chapter, the relationship between the Western literary canon and the achievement gap will be addressed. This will then relate to how the State Standards regarding Minnesota American Indians are being addressed in the classroom. Next, the importance of multicultural literature and how it is used in the classroom will be addressed along with the burgeoning area of

culturally responsiveness and sustainability. Finally, the tragic history and dynamic literature of Minnesota American Indians is introduced and why it is important to teach their literature.

### **The Western Literary Canon and the Achievement Gap**

“Of every 100 Asian [American] kindergartners, 94 will graduate from high school... Of every 100 black kindergartners, 87 will graduate from high school...Of every 100 Latino [American] kindergartners, 62 will graduate from high school... Of every 100 white kindergartners, 91 will graduate from high school” (Williams, 2003, p 13).

There is an achievement gap in the United States. This gap is now being seen as not just an urban problem, but a larger societal issue (Williams, 2003). This achievement gap has been a concern for educators for decades. Some of the largest concerns stemming from the achievement gap pertains to reading. For example, “by the time they graduate from high school, black and Latino students are reading on the same level as white 8th graders” (Williams, 2003, p 28). It is also true that “only 1 percent of black 17-year-olds can comprehend information from a specialized text” (Williams, 2003, p 28).

Historically, the Western literary canon has been the collection of literature that experts have decided is more important than other texts (Ross, 1998). It was created in the Middle Ages in Europe as a base point of the educated elite powers (Kolbas, 2018). The Canon was meant to be divisive, inherently separating the literate from the educated. Initially, the Western Canon was made up of texts by Greek Philosophers and the Christian Bible. Today it includes texts by many others, such as Shakespeare and Edgar Allen Poe. The vast majority of the Western Canon includes literature written by white men either from Europe or the United States (Bloom, 1994). Historically, these have been the authors that have been considered most valuable. Due to the

culture the Western Literary Canon was created in, it has led the Canon to become inherently racist, sexist, homophobic, and classist. It was created based on principles that were inherently divisive (Kolbas, 2018). Students being hurt by the achievement gap are also hurt by the Western Canon. By creating State Standards for the English Language Arts secondary classrooms that are directed at educating students on American Indian Literature in Minnesota, educators are embracing non-canonical texts and working towards closing the achievement gap.

Not only is the concept of the Canon exclusive, but many canonical authors held views that are considered abhorrent by today's standards. For example, the views of celebrated Georgian writer of *Ivanhoe*, Sir Walter Scott, have come into question in the United Kingdom. In some of his writings, Scott referred to Queen Charlotte as looking like an "ape", due to her African ancestry, (Blakemore, 2018). In the United States, people have begun to question the morality of teaching American poet, Robert Frost, a known abuser of women (Charles, 2013). With the revelations about these authors coming to light, a new question has arisen: Should these authors continue to be considered to be as highly regarded as they once were?

There are educators that believe canonical literature has a place in the classroom, especially in an urban setting (Otte, 2010). They believe the classics represent all of society and therefore should be the only things taught in the classroom. It has been argued that, "we need to teach more selectively, searching for the few who have the capacity to become highly individual readers and writers. The others, who are amenable to a politicized curriculum, can be abandoned to it" (Bloom, 1995, p 17). So what if the Canon is mostly written by old dead white men? Not all of them are dead, and even some of them, like Gabriel García Márquez, are Latino (Bloom, 1995, p 37).

Although it would be impossible to argue that Shakespeare and Twain have no literary merit; on an ethical level, their cultural relevance must come into question. In the past, classrooms have been built upon addressing mainstream culture, that of predominantly white, straight, Christian men (Kolbas, 2018). However, over the last few decades, the needs of other students have begun to be met by educators. Classrooms are being desegregated, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, plus (LGBT+) community is being celebrated, and the value of women's education is being addressed. However, the classroom literature remains the same.

Authors of color, such as García Márquez, that have become commonplace in classrooms are usually tokens of color. Their integration in the classroom has not been fully addressed. "... the ideal of integration was more often the reality of tokenism..." (Tatum, 2007, p 2), meaning that just because a text is used in the classroom, does not mean the culture from which it comes fits in the classroom.

There have been a few ways education has attempted to incorporate non-canonical literature into the classrooms. This is especially true in Minnesota where the State Standards require educators to teach Minnesota American Indian Literature, which is comprised of literature that has been historically marginalized by the Western literary canon. However, as stated previously, teachers are not properly teaching these State Standards. Instead the Canon is being pushed forward.

### **The Importance of Multicultural Literature and How it is Used in the Classroom**

Multicultural literature is important because it gives the reader a "broader view of the world" (Landt, 2006, 691-692). It is a way for students to not only see into the lives of others, but builds upon how they can relate to others. For a student, or anyone for that matter, to be

interested in a text, they must first find a way to have a relationship with the character. To do this they must either empathize or see themselves in the character (Colby, 2004.)

Multicultural literature options in classrooms change this cycle of forced empathy. When students read about characters and themes they can relate to, they are far more likely to read a text (Colby, 2004, p. 24). Arguably one of the major goals of an English teacher should be to get their students to enjoy reading so that they will read more.

Usually when one thinks of diverse or multicultural literature, one thinks about texts that are racially or ethnically diverse. However, it is also important to remember women's literature and LGBT+ literature. Although LGBT+ literature only started to become widely accepted by Western culture in the 1970s, it has been around for thousands of years (Fone, 1998). It is something that ought to be celebrated by and for those students who feel represented by the LGBT+ community.

Diverse literature does not only benefit students from underrepresented communities. All students benefit from multicultural literature (Colby, 2004, p 26). The world is becoming more and more accepting of diversity and there are more and more multicultural texts out there and students are aware of this. They want to celebrate the diversity in the world (Dilg, 2010). These diverse texts need to be utilized in the classroom so that students can not only relate to classroom texts more, but also a more broad world and life experience.

Many teachers have not been using culturally responsive literature. Each year, more of society has become aware of the benefits of diversity, which is especially true in urban classroom settings. Teachers are also becoming more aware of the fact that diverse literature not only helps in the English classroom, but also in other fields as well (Lawrence, 2007). It is widely accepted

by teachers that there is a need for diverse literature, and yet there seems to be a void when it comes to the implementation of said literature. Teachers want to teach diverse literature, but lack the tools to implement it (Castañeda, 2004). A sort of conflict has been created in society with regard to diverse literature; because teachers were not taught diverse literature they cannot teach it.

There also seems to be a societal barrier between thoughts and actions. It is key for teachers to show the importance of diverse literature by implementing it into the classroom (McKoy, 2013). If a teacher does not implement diverse literature into a classroom setting, there is a high chance students will never be made aware of diverse literature.

In the end, diverse literature should be taught as a way for students to experience the lives of others (Lujan, 18). It is a way to open a window for students to the world around them. If English teachers do not open this window, students might never learn just how diverse our world is. However, most ideas about implementing diversity in the classroom have been simply that, ideas. Something solid, something real needs to be created for teachers to use to more easily diversify the literature in their classroom.

### **Culturally Responsive and Culturally Sustainable Literature**

Culturally responsiveness, or cultural relevance, is a way for teachers to more broadly impact students from historically underrepresented communities by using examples from said communities (Ladson-Billings, 2014). For example, if teaching Minnesota American Indian students, an educator might use literature from that community. It is important for teachers to be culturally responsive because it is a way of both engaging students and celebrating the cultures of students in the classroom.

Cultural responsiveness is also important when looking at the human brain and how it develops (Hammond, 2014). The way the brain works is similar to that of a computer and at the very core of it, it tries to “avoid threats to safety at all costs and seek well-being at every opportunity” (Hammond, 2014, p. 37). The brain can see ideas and practices that are not culturally responsive as being threats. This forces students to mentally shut down in class. This is especially true for those from collectivist cultures, such as American Indians, due to their cultural development of relationship building (Hammond, 2014).

One example of an area where teachers in Minnesota can be more culturally responsive is in teaching Minnesota American Indian Literature. Earlier in this literature review, it was mentioned that there has been an attempt at some schools to teach American Indian “myths” and/or “legends”. This is a phrasing concept that has been deemed highly controversial and is addressed with regard to cultural responsiveness and sustainability. Many teachers do teach Native American myths and legends, however doing so is not culturally responsive. One American Indian educator stated, “For many of us these are not Myths and Legends in the way that we talk about them from a Western Perspective...our TRADITIONAL STORIES are considered TRUTH” (Meyers, 2018, p. ?). The terms myth and legend can be considered derisive by American Indian students. When one refers to a story as a myth or a legend, it implies that one no longer believes in it, which is just not true.

Teachers need to practice cultural responsiveness. Culturally responsive teaching practices will not only engage more students, but also help those who have faced racial and ethnic trauma. When teaching Minnesota American Literature in particular, teachers need to remember that cultural responsiveness is vital, both for American Indian students, who deserve proper

representation, and non-American Indian students, who deserve to learn properly about their peers.

### **What's Going On In Classrooms?**

As stated previously, there is a lack of Minnesota American Indian Literature being taught in classrooms. This could be due to the importance of globalization by society in general (Lauck, 2017). This means that the focus of literature has evolved from that of being Western based to being based around from all over the world. Because of technology, more literature has become easily accessible for classroom teachers. There is no longer a need to buy expensive books because so much literature is out in the public domain and free to teachers. Some believe that there is far too much for it to all be taught in schools (Bloom, 1994).

However, Minnesota American Indian Literature is required to be taught in secondary classrooms, according to Minnesota English Language Arts Standards (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010). Two of the standards regarding Minnesota American Indian Literature, again, state:

[9.9.1.1] Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, including those by and about Minnesota American Indians*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (Minnesota Department of Education, p.70)

[11.9.1.1] Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, including those by and about Minnesota American Indians*, building

on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (Minnesota Department of Education, p.70)

### **A History of Minnesota American Indians and Their Literature**

We may be generally brown (we can be and are Black), but we are not immigrants, forced or otherwise, and we do not have a uniform racial identity. We are, like more and more Americans, distinct groups who claim our own particular mix depending upon our lands and borders because we are, foremost, political entities. Nations. Nations built in bodies. (Shin, 2016, p.113)

The history of American Indians is deeply entwined with American Indian literature (Murry, 1985). This is due to the oral tradition of much of their history and literature (Murry, 1985).

Before understanding Minnesota American Indian Literature, one must understand the historical context of their people.

The history of Minnesota American Indians starts at Bdote; the place where the two waters meet (DeCarlo, 2016). These two waters are known today as the Mississippi River and the Minnesota River (DeCarlo, 2016). Located in St. Paul, Minnesota, Bdote is traditionally thought to be the place where life began by the Seven Council Fires, or the Dakota (DeCarlo, 2016). According to archeologists, the Dakota arrived in what is today Minnesota around the year 8000 BCE (DeCarlo, 2016).

Another common group of American Indians living in Minnesota today is the Ojibwe. They immigrated here about 1,500 years ago (Minnesota Historical Society, n.d.). By the mid-1600s, the Dakota had come into contact with European goods, due to trade with the Ojibwe (DeCarlo, 2016). Since they were living on what is now the Northeastern border of the United

States and the Southeastern border of Canada, the Ojibwe came into contact with Europeans much earlier than the Dakota (Minnesota Historical Society, n.d.). The Ojibwe informed the European fur traders of the Dakota communities of the west (DeCarlo, 2016).

In the 1800s, the United States government decided to take charge of the fur trade in Minnesota (DeCarlo, 2016). As the century went on, the need for the fur trade declined and treaties were created with both the Dakota and Ojibwe. Traditionally, American Indian lands were exchanged for farming equipment and other necessary materials. Due to the American Civil War, the United States government was unable to fully fund their part in the treaties. In the summer of 1862, war broke out after four Dakota men were accused of killing five settlers. That fall, the Dakota lost the war and those who fought were arrested. All those who did not fight were taken to an encampment near Fort Snelling where they were to remain all winter while their fates were decided. Today the encampment is considered to have been a concentration camp, due to the fact that people were held there against their will and without a trial. Roughly 200 Dakota died over the course of that winter.

During the Spring of 1863, legislative acts began to pass that would remove Dakota and Ho-Chunk people, another American Indian group traditionally from Minnesota, from the state of Minnesota (DeCarlo, 2016). It is still illegal for Dakota to live in Minnesota (Dakota Wicohan, 2017).

In the 1960s, American Indian Literature as a whole was facing a Renaissance (Early Native American Literature, n.d.). Not only were traditional stories coming to light, but contemporary authors were beginning to face a broader fan base (Early Native American Literature, n.d.). Many of these newly popularized stories incorporated traditional characters,

such as the trickster, or the contained autobiographical descriptions of hardship and cultural discrimination.

Today, many Minnesota American Indians believe they face racial inequality in Minnesota, even though it is generally understood that race is not biological (Shin, 2016, p. 3). Many feel like outsiders, even though they were born and raised in Minnesota (Shin, 2016). The harm of this can be better understood when addressing the viewpoints of those from historically marginalized communities in Minnesota. Some people of color and American Indians believe that White Minnesota is nice and tolerant, but it is not culturally responsive and accepting (Shin, 2016). There is a lot of tension in Minnesota between the white and non-white populations. Traditionally racism has been seen as an overt problem, however it is seen by people of color and American Indians in Minnesota as being more subversive, (Shin, 2016). This concept can be seen in much of their literature today. Because of this it is important to remember when race and racism addressing Minnesota American Indian literature in the classroom, especially when teaching in a way that is culturally responsive.

### **Conclusion**

There is great promise in our ability as educators to teach Minnesota American Indian Literature in a way that not only meets the State Standards, but is also inclusive and culturally responsive. There has been a history of trauma in the Minnesota American Indian community, and there is no need for our teaching practices to add to it.

For this project, materials need to be created for teachers to use in order to better teach Minnesota American Indian Literature. These materials will need to be culturally responsive and

convey an understanding of not only contemporary Minnesota American Indian Literature, but also an understanding of Minnesota American Indians as they are today.

### **Summary**

The Western literary canon has created a divide, as part of its intent, between students in the classroom, which is a contributing factor to the achievement gap. The Literary Canon has been constantly changing and some are beginning to argue that it is no longer needed. The State of Minnesota is now requiring texts to be taught from the Minnesota American Indian community. However, teachers do not appear to be teaching these Standards in a culturally responsive way.

In Chapter Three, a project was created to address more specifically, *How can Minnesota American Indian Literature, that follows the Minnesota State Standards, be used in a culturally responsive manner to replace literature that is traditionally taught in the classroom?*

## CHAPTER THREE

## Methods

**Introduction**

Minnesota educators have chosen to include Standards in English Language Arts classrooms, which requires secondary educators to use literature by and about Minnesota American Indians. The base question for this project is *How can Minnesota American Indian Literature, that follows the Minnesota State Standards, be used in a culturally responsive manner to replace literature that is traditionally taught in the classroom?* In this project, materials were created for Minnesota educators to use in secondary classrooms. The following chapter will explain the methods behind the project itself and its design.

**Project Description**

There are those that argue the literary canon should be revised (Guillory, 1993). Due to the subjective conclusions that are drawn on the literature, there is some room for arguments to be made. Some may disagree whether one is able to unequivocally replace texts with other texts. This project is meant to assist teachers, English departments, and school districts when considering replacing a canonical text with a Minnesota American Indian text. According to the literature review in Chapter Two, there is a need for something constructive that can help them bring Minnesota American Indian Literature into their classrooms. This project includes an online categorization of American Indian literature and materials for secondary educators to use. The collection is online so that it can be easily accessed by teachers, English departments, families, and school districts all across Minnesota. For these materials to be sustainable in classrooms, all of the materials should meet all of the following requirements:

- Related to the standards
- Culturally responsive
- Easily accessible for teachers

**The standards.** As stated previously, the secondary Minnesota State Standards regarding American Indian literature in the English language arts classrooms state:

[9.9.1.1] Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, including those by and about Minnesota American Indians*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (Minnesota Department of Education, p.70)

[11.9.1.1] Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, including those by and about Minnesota American Indians*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (Minnesota Department of Education, p.70)

Materials that follow these Standards must be grade appropriate, allow for discussion, and be open ended enough for students to be able to work together to formulate ideas. Requiring materials to follow these guidelines ensure that the materials provided in this project are of quality.

**Culturally responsive.** Being culturally responsive in one's teaching practice is important to physical and emotional health (Darling-Hammond, 2014). This is important in an English language arts classroom when teaching literature and its cultural or historical context. In

order to be culturally responsive when teaching Minnesota American Indian literature, educators must remember that Minnesota American Indians are represented in classrooms, and teachers must be respectful when teaching their stories.

Saying that traditional American Indian stories are mythological can imply that American Indians no longer exist. Colloquially, the terms “myth” and “legend” hold the implications that the cultures that once believed in these stories no longer exist (Meyers, 2018). For example, Greek and Roman traditional stories are taught as mythology, because, for the most part, people do not still believe in Greek and Roman mythology. The people who once believed gods lived atop Mount Olympus have been dead for a thousand years. In the United States, it is a common stereotype that American Indians no longer exist (Shin, 2016). Because of this, categorizing American Indian literature as mythology is not culturally responsive and is addressed in this project.

**Teacher accessibility.** It is important for this project to be readily accessible for teachers in the field. The website link itself is: <https://salterk7.wixsite.com/mnnalit>. The website is well-organized, first by grade level, then by text, and finally by type of activity or lesson to use with the text. This organization was used in order for teachers to be able to easily access materials.

The appropriateness of texts has been taken into account. Texts were divided up by relevance to students and texts with more adult themes were placed in older grades. Each text was given a brief summary and controversial plot points or themes were noted, such as politics, race, and sexual content. This is meant to help teachers when selecting a text that is going to be taught in the classroom. A further reading page and contact information were both added to the

website, so that any previously unaddressed information can be reported on the website as more texts are added and more teachers teach the literature.

Well thought-out lessons and units are provided for teachers on the website. Each grade has a few recommendations based on the literature that students will be reading. All recommendations are meant to include options for student choice. These options grow as students advance in grade levels. For example, students in ninth grade are allowed to pick from only two different novels, while those in twelfth grade get to pick from a large range of novels.

### **Project Design**

This project is a web-based collection of materials for teachers to use in their secondary English language arts classrooms. All materials will be provided at no cost to teachers and other educators. This is important, because teachers need support in diversifying their classrooms and should not have to pay for something that is not only moral, but required by state standards.

The website is organized into three large categories; grade level, text, and type of lesson or activity to use with the text. Multiple options of texts are provided by grade level, and following that, multiple types of lessons and activities are provided to teach alongside the text.

Most of the lessons and activities are discussion-based in order to align with the state standards. Since the specific standards this project is addressing are about group discussion, the vast majority of the assessments are able to be done in small or large groups. Discussion topics progress in their difficulty in the upper levels of this project.

**Audience.** The primary audience for this project is secondary teachers of English Language Arts and their students. The materials are organized by grade level in order to be more easily accessible to teachers.

A smaller portion of this project is dedicated to those who wish to learn more on the subject of Minnesota American Indians and their literature. This section of the website is on the homepage of the website, in order to give background information on the texts listed on the website.

**Website.** This project is a web-based collection of materials for teachers to use in their secondary classrooms. It is organized by:

- Context
  - About this project
  - A History of Minnesota American Indians
  - About the author
- 9th Grade
  - Texts
    - *Apple in the Middle* by Dawn Quigly
    - *Takini: Lakota boy alerts Sitting Bull* by Kenneth Thomasma
    - *Everything You Wanted to Know About Indians but Were Afraid to Ask* by Anton Treuer
  - Assessments
    - Write an essay about the theme of Coming of Age.
    - Write a short story about a Coming of Age experience you have had.
    - In a discussion group, compare and contrast the events of the novel with sections from the Treuer's text.
    - Write alternate endings for a novel.

- Read selections from Treuer's text and discuss in small groups.
- 10th Grade
  - Texts
    - *American Indian Stories* by Zitkala-Sa
    - *The Essential Charles Eastman (Ohiyesa)* edited by Michael Oren Fitzgerald
  - Assessments
    - In a group, compare the similarities and differences between the stories by the two authors.
    - Have students research traditional stories from their own cultures and discuss how they are similar or different to those of the Dakota.
- 11th Grade
  - Texts
    - *Ojibwe Sky Star Map Constellation Guide: an introduction to Ojibwe star knowledge* by Annette S. Lee, William Wilson, Jeffrey Tibbetts, and Carl Gawboy
    - *D(L)Dakota Star Map Constellation Guide: and introduction to D(L)Dakota star knowledge* by Annette S. Lee, Jim Rock, and Charlene O'Rourke
    - *Walking on Earth and Touching the Sky: poetry and prose by Lakota youth at Red Cloud Indian School* edited by Timothy P. McLaughlin and illustrated by S.D. Nelson

- Assessments
  - Star Map Unit. Have students read both Star Map texts. In small groups, students discuss the similarities and differences between Ojibwe and Dakota constellation stories. Compare these beliefs to other culture star maps, such as Greek, Chinese, and Norse.
  - Vignette Unit: Students read *Walking on Earth and Touching the Sky*. Have students break off into groups. Each day, have students write poetry and prose about different themes from their everyday lives. Have students share these vignettes with their small groups. Compile a collection of vignettes and art work as a class in a way that is similar to the text.
- 12th Grade
  - Texts
    - *The Grass Dancer* by Susan Power
    - *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline
    - *A Good Time for the Truth* edited by Sun Young Shin
  - Assessments
    - Pre Assessment: Use *A Good Time for the Truth* as an introduction to students on difficult topics of race. Students will read selections from that and then discussing in small groups some of the problems people of color face in Minnesota. This can be tricky because of some of the concepts addressed in the text.

- Main Assessment: The main assessment for this unit is something creative, similar to an Individual Oral Presentation in an IB program. Text 1 and Text 2 are tricky due to their sense of magical realism and timelines, which are both concepts uncommon in contemporary Western Literature. Many students are used to more linear plot lines, so a creative project will help them understand the broader themes of the text. Students would then have to present their creative work and analyze how their creative work fits in with the themes of the text.
- Further Reading
  - Dakota
  - Ojibwe
  - Maps
  - General American Indian
  - Literature
- Contact

**Literature.** For this project, all of the texts were created by people whose backgrounds are from one of the major tribes of Minnesota or are about the tribes of Minnesota. These texts include those by and about Dakota and Ojibwe authors, due to the fact they were historically the two largest tribes in Minnesota. Only one of the authors is white and a few of the editors or other contributors are of unidentified cultural backgrounds.

The literature selected for this project is highly diverse with regards to style and genre. These are texts that can be accessible to all types and levels of readers in English classrooms.

The texts are categorized by grade level. The ninth and tenth grade literature addresses the ninth and tenth grade standards, while the eleventh and twelfth grade literature addresses the eleventh and twelfth grade standards. Within each grade level, there are a few options for teacher choice. It includes Minnesota American Indian literature that is fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. This way, teachers, English language arts departments, and school districts can select what types of literature is similar to the canonical texts they are removing from their classrooms.

**Classroom activities and lessons.** The classroom materials include activities and lessons to coincide with the literature. These materials are organised by grade level. Differentiated materials are also provided for supported classes and honors classes. The activities are generally summative assessments in order for teachers to use best practices of standards, based on grading. This also allows for teacher choice when adding in formative assessment, which will then be inficutralized based on classes and teacher at discretion.

### **Effectiveness and Timeline**

The question being asked for this project is *How can Minnesota American Indian Literature, that follows the Minnesota State Standards, be used in a culturally responsive manner to replace literature that is traditionally taught in the classroom?* Because of this, the effectiveness of this project will be seen through English language arts teachers and school districts usage of this website. In order for teachers and districts to know about this website, awareness will need to be spread.

In the fall of 2019, contact will be made with the Anoka Hennepin School District, Minneapolis Public School District, and the Saint Paul Public School District. These three districts have been chosen first, because they are three of the largest districts in the state. Plans

will be made with the offices in these districts for the following year to address best ways for the content on the website to be shared with staff. In the spring of 2020, attempts will be made to reach out to the greater Twin Cities area school districts, such as the school districts located in Woodbury and Edina. Plans will also be made to find ways to inform teachers of the website. Finally, in the summer of 2020, plans will be made to travel to as many of the rural Minnesota public school districts as possible, starting with, due to its size, the Duluth Public School District. Within the following five years, it is hoped that most districts will have heard of this website. Plans would then be to speak with students that are studying to be teachers would be made, so that a new generation of teachers would be informed of the website.

Another goal to see the effectiveness of this website would be to continuously be updating it. As the years come to pass, more and more texts will be written by and about Minnesota American Indians. For this website to remain culturally responsive, it will also have to maintain its relevance. The way relevance will be measured is if the website is updated with a new text or information every six month to a year. This way teachers are not constantly inundated with new texts, but new ideas will be readily available when necessary.

### **Summary**

This project consists of a website that provides educators with materials to better teach Standards 9.9.1.1 and 11.9.1.1. These materials are categorized by grade level, texts, and classroom activities and lessons. The vast majority of the authors and content contributors come from communities that are Minnesota American Indian or has roots that are traditionally from Minnesota, such as the Dakota. The ultimate goal of this project was to create a curriculum that

is culturally responsive and addresses the Minnesota State Standards and because of this, most projects are based on group discussions or group projects that lead to discussions.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Reflection

**Introduction and Research Question**

Minnesota American Indian Literature and the standards requiring teachers to teach it have been overlooked in the secondary classroom. There is a void being left in classrooms as canonical literature is being removed. Within these two problems, I have found a solution. Throughout this project, I have been asking, *How can Minnesota American Indian Literature, that follows the Minnesota State Standards, be used in a culturally responsive manner to replace literature that is traditionally taught in the classroom?* In my research, I have found that teachers need to be provided with materials in order to help them teach Minnesota American Indian Literature.

**The Western literary canon and the achievement gap.** In the first section of my literature review, I addressed the fact that there is an achievement gap in the United States. The achievement gap has been a concern for educators for decades, and the largest of these concerns stem from reading (Williams, 2003). Historically, the Western literary canon has been the collection of literature that experts have decided is more important than other texts (Ross, 1998). The canon was meant to be divisive, inherently separating the literate from the educated. The vast majority of the Western canon includes literature written by white men, either from Europe or the United States (Bloom, 1994). Due to the culture the Western literary canon was created in, it has led the canon to become inherently racist, sexist, homophobic, and classist. It was created based on principles that were divisive (Kolbas, 2018). Students being hurt by the achievement gap are also hurt by the Western canon. By creating State Standards for the English Language

Arts secondary classrooms that are directed at educating students on American Indian Literature in Minnesota, educators are embracing non-canonical texts and working towards closing the achievement gap.

There have been a few ways education has attempted to incorporate non-canonical literature into the classrooms. This is especially true in Minnesota, where the State Standards require educators to teach Minnesota American Indian Literature, which is comprised of literature that has been historically marginalized by the Western literary canon. However, as stated previously, teachers are not properly teaching these State Standards. Instead, the Canon is being pushed forward.

**The importance of multicultural literature and how it is used in the classroom.** In the second section of my literature review, I addressed the importance of multicultural literature. The basic importance of multicultural literature lies in students' abilities to see themselves in what they are reading or in their ability to empathize with a character (Colby, 2004.) I concluded with the idea that diverse literature should be taught as a way for students to experience the lives of others (Lujan,18).

**Culturally responsive and culturally sustainable literature.** In the third section of this literature review, as addressed how cultural responsiveness affects not only the classroom community, but the greater social community as a whole (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Due to the representation of American Indians in Minnesota and how cultural responsiveness can affect them and their peers through representation, it is important to take care when addressing Minnesota American Indian cultures. This is because of the numerous historical traumas Minnesota American Indians have faced and are still facing.

**What's going on in classrooms?** In the fourth section of my literature review, I addressed the lack of Minnesota American Indian Literature being taught in classrooms, even though there are standards that require Minnesota American Indian Literature to be taught in secondary classrooms.

**A History of Minnesota American Indians and their literature.** In the fifth section of my literature review, I covered the history of American Indians and how their history is entwined with their literature (Murry, 1985). I addressed many of the historical atrocities Minnesota American Indians faced over the past few hundred years, the most important being the Conflict of 1862 (DeCarlo, 2016). This conflict made it illegal for the Dakota, one of the major tribes of the area, to reside in Minnesota (DeCarlo, 2016). Finally, I addressed the revival of American Indian Literature in the 1960s and since then, more and more literature by American Indian authors has become popularized ( Early Native American Literature, date).

**Website.** This website consists of a few different layers. The homepage has a brief history of Minnesota American Indians. It is written in a way that is easy to access for all secondary students. The next layer consists of the different grade levels and within each grade level, I supplied a number of texts and materials that are at a range of ability levels.

For this project texts have been chosen that are highly diverse within the realm of Minnesota American Indian literature. The tenth grade literature is meant to build off of the basics of ninth grade. Eleventh grade is meant to build off of the information learned in tenth grade, and twelfth grade is meant to build off of eleventh. The ninth grade portion of the project and been dedicated to being an introduction to Minnesota American Indian literature. The tenth grade portion of the project, which is meant to be taught the following year, addresses more nuanced or

detailed aspects of Minnesota American Indian literature through the usage of traditional stories. In eleventh grade, students are meant to study astronomy and creative aspects of Minnesota American Indian literature. Finally, in twelfth grade, contemporary novels with more adult themes are paired with contemporary commentary on race in Minnesota.

### **Benefits**

I am excited about the benefits of this project because it has the potential to help teachers include Minnesota American Indian literature in their content and it will help students that are not American Indian have a broader perspective of the history and culture of Minnesota.

Finally, and most importantly, it allows American Indian students to see their culture being represented in the classroom literature in a positive way. This project is important because without the inclusion of their literature, students are missing out on cultures that have impacted Minnesota for the past 10,000 years.

### **Limitations**

The major limitation of this project could be the lack awareness of this project to teachers. I will need to make sure that school districts and teachers are aware of my website. I have already spoken with a few people from the Anoka-Hennepin school district and they are interested in learning more about my website once it is completed.

Another limitation will be the revision of the state standards. The standards are being rewritten this summer for the first time in roughly ten years. A possibility exists that the standards requiring teachers to teach Minnesota American Indian literature could be removed.

**Summary**

The project has the potential to help teachers in Minnesota address the standards regarding Minnesota American Indians and their literature, and because of this, it will allow for more diverse voices to be heard in the classroom, which will benefit all students, whether or not they identify or do not identify as Minnesota American Indians. Even if the state standards that address Minnesota American Indian literature removed, I see this project as a way for teachers to be better at being culturally responsive in their classrooms.

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### **Appendix**

The website created for this project can be found at: <https://salterk7.wixsite.com/mnnalit>.

As stated in Chapter Three, the website will be continuously updated, multiple times a year.