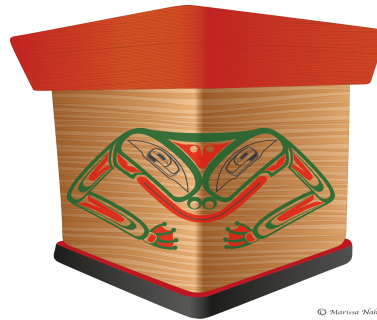


Indigenous Storywork Give Away for Educators

Dr. Amy Parent & Dr. Jeannie Kerr



A Gift

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To begin, I raise my hands high to the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Peoples for allowing me to live, study and work as a guest within their traditional and unceded traditional territories. My name is Amy Parent and my Nisga'a name is My Nisga'a name is Noxs Ayaaw'ilt. This name connects me to my mother and means "her mother's mother" and signifies the importance of the matrilineal culture that flows through my bloodlines. My mother's side of the family is Nisga'a from the House of Ni'isjoohl and we belong to the Ganada (frog) Clan. On my father's side, I am French and German. I am committed to working with Aboriginal youth, Indigenous communities, and institutions in order to identify proactive ways to transform the educational opportunities available for all learners. This give away has been undertaken in this spirit.

My name is Jeannie Kerr, and I would also like to start by sharing my appreciation and acknowledging the generosity of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and particularly Elder Larry Grant for welcoming me to study and work as a guest on their ancestral, unceded and traditional territories when this document was put together. I now live and work on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Nêhiyawak, Dakota, Oji-Cree, and Dene peoples and homeland of the Métis Nation, on Treaty 1 territory. I am a second generation settler and my mother is from the Couch family of Cork County Ireland, and my father is ancestrally from the Kerr Clan of the Scottish Borderlands and more recently from Glasgow. I am committed to working with educators to help create educational spaces that work to repairing and renewing relations between Indigenous communities and peoples, and the waves of settlers/immigrants that have come to what is known as Canada over hundreds of years.

¹ This image was created in collaboration with Marissa Nahanee of the Squamish & Nisga'a Nations for Amy Parent's doctoral research. Marissa has given permission to use this image for educational purposes to enhance the well-being of Indigenous youth. Marissa retains copyright to this image and asks that it not be used for other purposes.

This give away was originally developed by us for our students in teacher education classes at UBC many years ago. The instructions for engaging this document back then and now, is that this giveaway is meant to be thoughtfully shared for educational purposes with fully crediting the authors. This giveaway is free to share for non-commercial educational purposes in whole (not in part) as it acknowledges our teachers and includes the artwork of Marissa Nahanee which may not be used outside of this giveaway. This giveaway is derived from the generous mentorship and teachings of Dr. Jo-ann Archibald in *Indigenous Storywork* (2008), and our personal and professional experience working in Indigenous organizations and diverse educational contexts. It is also based on our understanding of the First Nations Educational Steering Committee's (2012) "In Our Own Words: Bringing Authentic First Peoples Content to the K-3 Classroom"; as well as our collaborations and on-going discussions with each other.

This giveaway is intended to provide a beginning pathway in incorporating Indigenous stories and resources into your classroom. By following the suggestions provided here and remaining open to respectful dialogue and meaningful consultation *with* members of local Indigenous communities connected to your school, you will not only benefit your students, but will hopefully expand your own comfort in working with Indigenous stories, knowledges and pedagogies. Many teachers are wary of making mistakes due to lack of cultural knowledge or authority when engaging Indigenous stories. It is important to remember that there is no perfect and assured way to do this important work, but it would be a much greater mistake to omit Indigenous stories and or not take steps to engage with them in more knowledgeable ways (FNESC, 2012).

Story, "Legend", and "Myth"

According to FNESC (2012), due to the connotations often associated with the terms "legend" and "myth" (i.e., fiction), it is preferable to use the term "story" or "traditional story." In the 1997 *Delgamuukw* decision of the Supreme Court of Canada Chief Justice Lamar recognized in law that oral histories both embody historical knowledge and express cultural values (Grant, 2007). With this being said, it is still quite common to find older literature that utilizes terms like legend or myth, even when it has been written in collaboration with Indigenous peoples and communities. As more communities work toward protecting and revitalizing Indigenous knowledges, they have also chosen to reframe and reposition these incredible sources of knowledge as stories. They do so in order to move away from any misunderstandings about the power and truths that are embedded in the stories. Hereditary Nuu-chah-nulth Chief Richard Atleo explains that the stories are also not considered to be metaphors or representational, but are embodied truths from place that transcend a binary of spiritual and empirical understanding (Atleo, 2011, p. 2).

If students ask “Is the story true? Did this really happen?” there are a number of responses that might be appropriate, depending on the specific story, the context, your knowledge of the story, and the age of the children. The FNESC resource suggests you consider the following replies:

- “Sometimes you have to figure out for yourself what you believe to be true. Here’s what I think is true ...”
- “There is more than one way of understanding the truth. In many Indigenous cultures multiple truths and understandings of a story can exist. Nevertheless the story always maintains a consistent core that endures through time”
- “This story has many layers of understanding. I understand one of the key purposes/moral of this story to be _____, and that’s the most important truth.”
- “Many of the Chehalis people [for example] believe this story to be true.”
- “This story is so old that no one can say if it is true or not.”
- I wasn’t around when this story came about so I cannot tell you if it is or is not true, but I hope you enjoyed it, or learned something from it.”
- “According to many Indigenous cultures, the great spirit [or Creator] gave us all the gifts that we have, and we are all individuals with different ways of seeing. That’s why we have differing beliefs, practices, clans, crests, and Nations.” (This response is of particular relevance when discussing any differences in the teachings of two or more stories) (adapted from page10).

Storywork Do's



Avoid...

Appropriating Indigenous stories, songs, dances, designs, crests, audiovisual materials and dances.

For example, if you do not introduce the source of your story, the community from which it originates, and whether or not you have been given permission to share the story, you will be appropriating it. It is important to recognize that local cultural protocols exist. Permission for use of First Nations cultural materials or practices such as stories, songs, designs, crests, photographs, audiovisual materials, and dances should be obtained from the relevant individuals, families, Elders, hereditary chiefs, Band Councils, or Tribal Councils (FNESC, 2012). First Nations Peoples and communities themselves contain the most accurate and authentic source of teaching about First Nations — their traditions, environments, ecologies, directions, priorities, etc. Authorization should be obtained prior to the use of any educational plans or materials. Consult your local district Aboriginal contact for advice and assistance in approaching the appropriate person(s). It is also important to distinguish between private and public stories. Some stories are sacred and cannot be shared with outsiders. Most stories that have been published can most likely be shared for classroom use, and no additional permission is required. Although, demonstrating for students the protocol of providing the genealogy of the story and your reasons for sharing the story are still required, as well as sharing the location of the territory, historical relationships and some of the community's values. Also, many stories have been published without permission or knowledge of the community and you should continue to use the points of assessment of published stories and educational materials that are provided in this giveaway. Also highly recommended, is that you read all of Jo-ann Archibald's seminal book *Indigenous Storywork* (2008).

The “Beads and Feather” Approach

Also known as the “Add on Approach” or the “Add and Stir Approach” describes an attempt to enrich curricula and pedagogy by adding Indigenous content. This approach attempts to dress up pre-existing methods at a superficial level to make it appear culturally relevant for Indigenous learners. Adding a lesson on “Aboriginal culture” (notice the “s” is missing) and using Indigenous cultural information as the context for the teaching of subject matter is an example of this approach. According to Richardson and Blanchett-Cohen (2000) it is an approach that “does not require fundamental change. In essence it is a pragmatic approach which may offer a mild sense of inclusion to Aboriginal students in majority culture educational settings” (p. 19). This approach is aligned with the tenets of multiculturalism and is seen as a way to include ‘Aboriginal culture’ into mainstream institutional structures (St. Denis, 2011). Therefore it requires the least effort to implement and does not require fundamental systemic transformation. An example of the “beads and feather” approach is sharing a Nisga’a origin story and then having students participate in a written exercise that asks them to identify all relevant nouns that can be found in the story. Another common example includes asking students to make toilet paper totem poles after reading a Haida story that was illustrated by Bill Reid. The difference between a multicultural ‘beads and feather approach’ and a respectful Indigenous Knowledge (IK) centred approach is that the first is framed with a “learning about” orientation whereas the latter is a “learning from” or being “taught by” approach. It is important to frame our activities so that

students are not just “learning about” the Haida Peoples, but instead implement practices within the classroom that allow us to invite students into a conversation about Haida knowledge and perspectives – to learn from or be taught by Haida knowledges. We can collectively think about global and local challenges in a way where we learn from the Haida about such things as sustainable land practices, ethical living, child rearing etc. The important distinction from an IK centred approach is that we are being taught by Indigenous knowledges and peoples. In this way Indigenous peoples are knowledge holders and not objects of study. This involves framing our educational framework around important questions and consulting multiple perspectives on how to understand and address our collective questions – recognizing that perspectives of Indigenous peoples on the territory and in the region where questions are raised is a priority.

□ **Trying to separate spirituality from Aboriginal stories and Indigenous knowledges.**

Any attempt to understand IK must begin by acknowledging the sacred ecology of Mother Earth that relates the human and more-than-human beings and the Creator. Whether the topic is science or art, all learners must acknowledge the importance of spirituality as a fundamental aspect of IK. This wholistic conception clashes with contexts that value secularism, segmentation, polarization, fragmentation, and abstraction, and is foundational to the discourse and curriculum in Western educational spaces. Awareness of this contrast, instead of the dismissal of this difference, should be a focus of the educational conversation in the classroom. We recognize the inherent tensions of differing world views in classroom spaces, and suggest an approach based in ethical relationality that does not work to deny difference, “but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other (Donald, 2012, p. 535).

□ **Missing out on utilizing important pre-recorded audio visual resources to help convey key stories and IK principles**

It is important to engage multiple Indigenous perspectives in the classroom. There are rich on-line resources that can help you engage with the incredible diversity of Indigenous perspectives. It is often a common desire by educators to bring in an Elder or First Nations community members to make appearances for people that want to learn directly from them, and to bring a sense of authenticity to educational activities. You will also find many high quality resources that suggest bringing in an Elder or Community member for IK educational related activities. At the same time, we need to recognize the incredible and unsustainable demand of asking Elders to spend their time in unpaid work to educate non-Indigenous peoples. Many Elders and First Nations community members are choosing to spend their time teaching their community members as a priority as they reclaim their practices, territories and languages. It is important to first consider the places you would be likely to teach and the ways the voices and perspectives have been recorded or sustained for educational purposes. For instance, the Musqueam First Nation partnered with the Richmond Museum and Heritage Centre to provide an educational resource to be used in classrooms to provide Musqueam perspectives and values to people outside the community. Also, the Musqueam First Nation has established a Cultural Centre that is

open to field trips. The Museum of Anthropology is also active in partnering with First Nations communities with exhibits and educational resources. School Boards have connections through district and school personnel that you can connect with to enrich your educational plans. There are also community events open to the public that you can attend and help to make yourself more personally knowledgeable, and start to make your own relationships based in reciprocity. The important point is that relationships with Indigenous peoples and Nations should not be forged instrumentally or lightly, but are a long and sustained commitment that will happen over time. When asking Elders or Community members to come to schools we need to think about how their work and commitment will be compensated.

How do we know if a resource is appropriate?

Deciding whether or not to use a resource that centres Indigenous knowledges, perspectives or stories can be difficult without some ways to think about the resource and your own ability to understand if it might be appropriate for the classroom. Based on ideas from Marie Battiste (2008) the following points should help you in your journey of looking at the available resources.

Author Introductions: The authors should clearly identify themselves, elaborate connections to other organizations, identify themselves with specific communities, and provide some legitimate or specific reasons for sharing the content. There should be some specific indication of “who we are” and “why we are sharing” that benefits Indigenous communities.

Providing a Context: The authors should not portray content as being authoritative knowledge of all Indigenous peoples, but should provide perspectives that are specific to the authors’ interests, affiliations and background. The content should have a history and context. You might want to ask the following types of questions: Which Nation or community did this come from? What is the history of this knowledge in its context with this Nation or community?

Complex and Contemporary Portrayals: The content should be free of language that places IK as being simple, quaint, exotic, and/or a relic of the past. The language should reflect cultural knowledge as alive, fluid, complex and applicable in a contemporary context. Indigenous peoples should be portrayed in human complexity in the resources, and not as cultural stereotypes. Information should highlight the diversity among Indigenous peoples and communities that stems from differing histories, cultures and traditions.

Avoid “Issue” Language: First Nations peoples and cultures should not be referred to as being an “issue”. Materials with a negative bias should be absolutely avoided.

Seek out Recommendations: Look for recommendations of the resource from Indigenous community Elders and organizations that have a history of service to First Nations communities such as the First Nations Education Steering Committee, Aboriginal Healing Foundation and partnership organizations such as British Columbia Teachers Federation, or from mentors that you would trust. Despite the importance of the recommendation, you should question any materials that seem to not hold to the above points. Finding a resource on a large website (however reputable the host of the site is) does not constitute a recommendation.

In closing

We hope that this resource is helpful and would request that when you share knowledge from this resource you follow the protocol of giving the genealogy, and share the entire resource.

All good wishes in your important educational work,

Amy Parent and Jeannie Kerr

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