

Indigenous Literatures: Cultures of Storytelling, Cultures of Reading
English 9161
Department of English and Writing Studies
University of Western Ontario

Contact Information:

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Class Meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. (30-minute lunch break at noon)

Class Location: Lawson Hall Room 2205

Course Description:

As a graduate-level survey of Indigenous literary and intellectual traditions and innovations, this course will consider diverse practices of Indigenous storytelling including “orature,” poetry, short stories, novels, drama, non-fiction writing, and film. With a particular focus on Indigenous cultural production across Turtle Island (or North America), the course will examine both the specificity and remarkable breadth of Indigenous cultures of storytelling as well as the scholarly cultures of reading that have developed in response to these practices. In other words, the course explores how the work of reading and literary-critical interpretation is shaped by cultural perspectives—often those of Western academia—and how practices of Indigenous storytelling and the interventions of Indigenous intellectuals have prompted the development of alternative methods of reading and scholarly engagement that are respectful of and informed by Indigenous epistemologies and lifeways. Through engagement with a range of genres, methodologies, and critical debates, the course will consider the following questions: How does Indigenous cultural production conceptualize and practice diverse forms of storytelling? How might literary studies be re-imagined in relation to the specificity of Indigenous intellectual and cultural production? What kinds of practices of reading and literary analysis enable reflexivity about the cultural lenses each scholar brings to the study of Indigenous literature and, in turn, prompts more ethical forms of engagement with Indigenous thought and art?

Course Texts:

- Most readings are available online or via the course OWL site.

Assignments:

- Two 4-page response papers [**12.5% each for a total of 25% of final grade**]
- One 30-40-minute seminar presentations and subsequent leading of class discussion. [**30% of final grade**]
- One original research paper between 18-20 pages in length [**35% of final grade**]
- Participation in class discussion (please see guidelines described below). [**10% of final grade**]

Guidelines for Class Participation:

- The participation grade for the semester will take into account attendance and attentiveness in class meetings, evidence of preparedness for class (i.e. demonstrated detailed engagement with the readings, questions about readings brought to class), as well as the quality of verbal contributions to class discussion.
- Students should have carefully read and thoughtfully engaged with the assigned readings prior to class.
- At the graduate level, students are encouraged to assume the stance of professional learners—ones who have the critical maturity to be open to broadening their intellectual horizons and to engaging with a diverse range of scholarship across multiple disciplines.
- Effective participation in a graduate course involves being open to asking questions about things one doesn't understand, thoughtfully engaging with the course readings, remaining attentive to the comments of other class participants, and debating ideas with respect and sensitivity to both the subject matter and all participants in the discussion.
- The quality of a student's contributions is more important than sheer quantity, though speaking regularly in class is a goal to work towards. At the same time, effective participation in a seminar course also, in certain cases, means learning when one has contributed enough to a particular discussion and providing opportunities for others to share their thoughts.

Guidelines for Response Papers:

- Over the course of the semester, students are required to write **four** 4-page response papers to the assigned readings for the week.
- Students are able to choose which weeks they would like to submit their response papers. Please note, however, that students are not eligible to submit a written response paper on the readings for which they have agreed to present a seminar.
- Response papers should be submitted via email (as Microsoft Word or RTF attachments) to pwakeham@uwo.ca no later than **24 hours** prior to the class in which the texts will be discussed. Response papers for the assigned readings for the week will not be accepted after this deadline.
- The goal for these papers is not to offer a comprehensive summary of all the points expounded in the readings. Instead, the responses should succinctly outline the main argument of each assigned reading for the week (where applicable) and then proceed to critically analyze the texts and draw connections or reflect on points of divergence between them. In this sense, the goal is to put the assigned readings for the week together in critical conversation. Students might also wish to raise a question or two for further thought or discussion.

Guidelines for Seminar Presentations:

- Seminar presentations should succinctly and briefly outline the arguments developed in the critical essays and analyze key themes and strategies of the readings assigned for the day. A strong presentation, however, should go much further than merely rehearsing the articles' arguments or the plot and structures of a cultural text. Seminar presentations should engage thoughtfully and critically with the readings, analyzing the connections and points of divergence between the texts as well as reflecting upon the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments.
- In other words, a seminar presentation should have an argument—a nuanced and thoughtful analytic position on the readings/cultural texts assigned for the week. Linking the readings to previous texts studied in the course and/or previous class discussions is also a useful strategy.

- Presentations should also consider how the arguments expounded in the readings could be developed further and, most importantly, how the texts relate to the broader questions under investigation throughout this course. Lastly, presentations should conclude with at least two thoughtful and engaging questions for class discussion.
- Please also note that your presentations will be timed and should not exceed 30 minutes.
- After the presentation, the seminar presenter will also be responsible for leading the ensuing class discussion for about 15 minutes.
- Students will be asked to submit a hard copy version of their seminar presentation notes (whether they be just point form notes or a scripted paper—if you like to talk without a set script, that is certainly fine and can make for a very engaging seminar) to the Professor on the same day that their presentation is given orally.
- Please note that plagiarism rules apply to oral presentations. Oral presentations should clearly signal when a speaker is quoting someone else's words. The majority of a presentation should be offered in the speaker's own words.

Important Information Regarding Assignments:

- Any assignments submitted after the scheduled due date will be assessed a late penalty (2% per day, including weekends). Assignments (with the exception of the weekly reading responses) must be submitted in hard copy. Email and faxes will not be accepted.
- Extensions will be granted only with medical certification or under other extenuating circumstances and should, when possible, be arranged in advance.
- All assignments should be submitted on 8.5" x 11" paper, with 1" margins, double spaced, and in a 12-point font (preferably Times New Roman). The title page should include the following information: the title of the essay, your name, the course number, and the date.
- Please retain one hard copy and one electronic version of each essay you submit in this class. As well, please retain all returned, marked assignments until you receive your final grade for the course.
- All bibliographic notation should follow the MLA method of parenthetical citation and essays should be accompanied with a Works Cited page.

Academic Offences:

- Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf
- It is crucial that students create all assignments (both written and oral) using their own ideas and their own words. If a writer uses a concept, idea, or phrasing from another source, it is imperative to signal the direct borrowing of words with quotation marks and to register the borrowing of ideas and concepts via the use of explanatory footnotes and parenthetical citations (or verbal explanation in the case of seminar presentations).

Graduate Course Health and Wellness:

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on-campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are

offered throughout the year. For example, please check out the Faculty of Music web page (<http://www.music.uwo.ca>) and our own McIntosh Gallery (<http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>). Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html.

Schedule of Readings

Please Note: The Professor reserves the right to make minor changes to the schedule throughout the course of the academic term. Any changes will be announced in class.

Section 1: Locating Indigenous Literary Studies, Locating Ourselves

May 15: Introductions

Daniel Heath Justice, "Introduction: Stories that Wound, Stories that Heal"
Chelsea Vowel, "Just Don't Call Us Late for Supper: Names for Indigenous Peoples"
Chelsea Vowel, "Settling on a Name: Names for Non-Indigenous Canadians"
Leanne Simpson, "Please be Careful When You're Getting Smart"
Gregory Scofield, "The Dissertation"
Sam McKegney, "Writer-Reader Reciprocity and the Pursuit of Alliance Through Indigenous Poetry"

May 17: Land as Pedagogy

Leanne Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy"
Leanne Simpson, "Leaning In"
Leanne Simpson, "Plight"
Jeannette Armstrong, "Land Speaking"
Gloria Alvernaz Mulcahy, "through the eye of the eshkan ziibi"

May 22: Appropriation of Voice: Lessons for Literary Critics

Margery Fee, "The Trickster Moment, Cultural Appropriation, and the Liberal Imagination in Canada"
Lenore Keeshig, "Stop Stealing Native Stories" (available online at: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/cultural-appropriation-stop-stealing-native-stories/article35066040/>)
Kateri Akiwenzie Damm, "The cultural appropriation debate is over. It's time for action." (available online at: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/the-cultural-appropriation-debate-is-over-its-time-for-action/article35072670/>)
Chelsea Vowel, "What is Cultural Appropriation? Respecting Cultural Boundaries"
Hal Niedzviecki, "Winning the Appropriation Prize"

May 24: "What About You?": Critical Self-Reflexivity and Responsible Literary Criticism

Kristina Fagan, "What about you?": Approaching the Study of 'Native Literature'"

Emma LaRocque, "Preface or Here Are Our Voices—Who will Hear?"
Kimberley Blaeser, "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Centre"
Jo-Ann Episkenew, "Socially Responsible Criticism: Aboriginal Literature, Ideology, and the Literary Canon"
Sam McKegney, "Strategies for Ethical Engagement"

May 29 and 31: Class Cancelled for the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences

Section 2: Literary Critical Methods

June 5: "Orature": Attending to Orality in Textuality

Kimberly Blaeser, "Writing voices speaking: Native authors and an oral aesthetic"
Wendy Wickwire, "Introduction" to *Nature Power: In the Spirit of an Okanagan Storyteller*
Harry Robinson, "Captive in an English Circus"
Maria Campbell, "Jacob"
Anna Mongibello, "'Translators of the old ways': the reinvention of Canadian English in 'Jacob' by Maria Campbell"

June 7: Oral Storytelling on Stage: Indigenous Performance Cultures

Tomson Highway, "On native mythology"
Floyd Favel Starr, "The artificial tree: native performance culture research, 1991-1996"
De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group, *The Gift*

June 12: Native Literary Nationalism

Craig Womack, "Introduction: American Indian Literary Self-Determination"
Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior, "Splitting the Earth: First Utterances and Pluralist Separatism"
Kristina Fagan et. al., "Canadian Indian Literary Nationalism?: Critical Approaches in Canadian Indigenous Contexts--A Collaborative Interlogue"

June 14: Native Literary Nationalism in Practice: Nishnaabe Cultures of Storytelling

Leanne Simpson, "Gdi-Nweninaa: Our Sound, Our Voice"
Leanne Simpson, "Niimtoowaad Mikinaag Gijiying Bakonaan (Dancing on Our Turtle's Back): Aandisokaanan and Resurgence"
Leanne Simpson, "pipty"
Leanne Simpson, "nogojiwanong"
Leanne Simpson, "gezhizhwazh"

June 19: Trans-Indigenous Literary Studies

Chadwick Allen, "Introduction" to *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*
Alice Te Punga Somerville, "The Lingering War Captain: Maori Texts, Indigenous Contexts"
Kelly Joseph, "Transient"

June 21: Trans-Indigenous Literary Studies in Practice

Thomas King, *Truth and Bright Water*

Kaitlyn Debicki, "Returning to the Kaswéntah River: A Trans-Indigenous Reading of Land-Centred Citizenship in Thomas King's *Truth and Bright Water*"

Daniel Heath Justice, "Readings in Contemporary Cherokee Literature"

June 26: Indigenous Futurisms and Speculative Storytelling

Grace L. Dillon, "Imagining Indigenous Futurisms"

Scott Conrad, "(Indigenous) Place and Time as Formal Strategy: Healing Immanent Crisis in the Dystopias of Eden Robinson and Richard Van Camp"

Eden Robinson, "Terminal Avenue"

Richard Van Camp, "On the Wings of this Prayer"

June 28: Indigenous Futurisms and Speculative Storytelling

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*

Lee Maracle, "Conversation 12: Response to empathy from settlers"

Lee Maracle, "Reconciliation and residential school as an assimilation program"