

## Unit 1

# NATIVE VOICES

*Resistance and Renewal in American Indian Literature*

### Authors and Works

#### **Featured in the Video:**

Luci Tapahonso, “They Are Silent and Quick,” “A Breeze Swept Through” (poetry)

Simon J. Ortiz, “My Mother and My Sisters,” “8:50 AM Ft. Lyons VAH” (poetry)

Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (novel), *Storyteller* (short stories, poetry, photography)

#### **Discussed in This Unit:**

Louise Erdrich, “Fleur” (short story)

Chippewa songs (songs)

Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (autobiography)

Ghost Dance songs (songs)

Stories of the Beginning of the World (oral narrative)

Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* (language primer)

Thomas Harriot, *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (ethnographic report)

■ How are Native American oral traditions shaped by the landscapes in which they are composed?

■ What role does the land play in oral tradition?

■ How does the notion of time in American Indian narratives compare with notions of time in Western cultures?

■ How does the chronology of particular narratives reflect differing notions of time?

■ How do Yellow Woman stories and the Nightway or Enemyway chant influence Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* and *Storyteller*?

■ How do Navajo chantways influence the poetry of Luci Tapahonso?

■ How does the Ghost Dance influence the vision of Black Elk?

■ How does the Ghost Dance challenge nineteenth-century European American notions of Manifest Destiny?

■ How do Yellow Woman stories subvert the genre of captivity narratives?

■ How do the poems of Simon J. Ortiz challenge the notion of what it means to be an American hero?

### Overview Questions

■ What is the relationship between Native American identity and American identity?

■ How does Native American literature reflect or help create a sense of what it means to be Native American in the United States?

■ What does this literature help reveal about the experience of having a multicultural identity?

■ How does the conception of American Indian identity depend upon the writer’s identity?

■ What is Native American literature?

■ What makes Native American traditions from different regions distinctive?

■ How has Native American literature been influenced by politics on and off the reservation?

### Learning Objectives

After students have viewed the video, read the headnotes and literary selections in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, and explored related archival materials on the *American Passages* Web site, they should be able to

1. identify some of the genres, meanings, and purposes of American Indian oral narrative and song;
2. recognize the ways in which contemporary American Indian writers draw upon and transform the oral tradition in their written texts;

3. generalize about typical themes, concerns, and narrative forms in contemporary American Indian literature;
4. compare the migration legends and creation myths of the European explorers and the Iroquois and Pima Indians;
5. sketch out some differences between the values, beliefs, and assumptions of Native North Americans and Europeans at the time of first contact during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

## Instructor Overview

Native American traditions are rich and varied. There are over five hundred Native American languages, each one as different as English is from Arabic and as Arabic is from Swahili. Each Indian nation has its own myths, its own histories, its own personal stories. As Native American author N. Scott Momaday writes, “The voices are all around us, the three voices. You have the mythic and the historical and the personal and then they become a wheel, they revolve, they alternate. . . . Myth becomes history becomes memoir becomes myth.” What unites these Native American cultures? What does it mean to study American Indian literature? To answer these questions is to begin to consider what it means to be American and Native American simultaneously.

The definition of Native American literature is closely tied to what people think constitutes the essence of Native American identity. Three views stand out in this highly contested debate: those of legal bloodlines, cultural traditions, and bicultural production. As literary critic Kenneth Lincoln notes, one “working definition of ‘Indian,’ though criteria vary from region to region, is minimally a quarter blood and tribal membership”; Native American literature, then, would be those works written by someone who legally is Native American, regardless of their content or style. A second perspective links Native American identity and literature with the preservation of cultural traditions. Literary critics who rely on this view focus on aspects of “traditional” Indian culture in contemporary American Indian literature, such as the continuance of oral traditions. A third trend in Native American studies defines American Indian identity and literature *not*

in terms of what it preserves (whether it be blood or culture), but rather as a bicultural mixture of Native and European American people and traditions. Some Native Americans have argued that since their indigenous cultures have always assimilated aspects of other cultures (including those of other American Indians), to be Indian is to be bicultural, or multicultural.

Many American Indians define themselves not primarily as “Native Americans” but as members of a specific tribe. It is important as you read the authors in this unit to remember that what you know about the Navajo and their religious traditions probably will not apply to the Chippewa, a people geographically, linguistically, and culturally separate from them. Some scholars have suggested, however, that Native American communities within a particular geographic region tend to be culturally more homologous because they are often from the same language family and because cultures are often shaped by the landscapes out of which they emerge. There are several key regions in Native American studies: the Southwest, Plains, California, Midwest, Northeast, Northwest, South, and Southwest. The video focuses on the Southwest; however, in the unit you will find information about the other regions. You will also find a balance between information that is specific to the tribe of each author and information about qualities that are shared among American Indian peoples.

Oral traditions vary by region and tribe, and scholars have tended to examine the influence of the American Indian oral tradition upon contemporary American Indian written literature in two ways: (1) the content and (2) the style. When people explore how the content of the American Indian oral tradition has influenced contemporary literature, they usually turn to the stories and songs of American Indian peoples. These stories tend to focus on particular characters and to include standard events and elements. Some of the most common tale-types include gambler, trickster, creation, abduction, and migration legends. Contemporary authors can use these tale-types in their works: for example, Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* retells Yellow Woman stories—a Pueblo Abduction Cycle. In addition to looking at the content of the stories, scholars have looked at the style of contemporary American Indian literature to examine the influence of the oral tradition. Oral style has been characterized as

empathetic, participatory, situational, and reliant on repetition. In the oral tradition, repetition is crucial both for ceremonial reasons and because it aids in the process of memorization and provides narrative cohesion. To repeat words is also to wield a certain power. Perhaps most importantly, the oral tradition is tied to the land: as author and critic Greg Sarris explains, “The landscape becomes the bible and each stone, each mountain, each set of trees or a river, or a section of the river becomes a text, because they become a way of remembering stories, and stories associated with that place.”

The video, the archive, and the curriculum materials situate the writers featured in Unit 1 within several of the historical contexts and artistic movements that shaped their texts. Together, these materials articulate the diverse genres and cultural traditions that comprise and inform Native American literature.

## Student Overview

Native American traditions are rich and varied. There are over five hundred Native American languages, each one as different as English is from Arabic and as Arabic is from Swahili. Each Indian nation has its own myths, its own histories, its own personal stories. As Native American author N. Scott Momaday writes, “The voices are all around us, the three voices. You have the mythic and the historical and the personal and then they become a wheel, they revolve, they alternate. . . . Myth becomes history becomes memoir becomes myth.” What unites these Native American cultures? What does it mean to study American Indian literature? To answer these questions is to begin to consider what it means to be American and Native American simultaneously.

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written by someone who legally is Native American, regardless of their content or style. A second perspective links Native American identity and literature with the preservation of cultural traditions. Literary critics who rely on this view focus on aspects of “traditional” Indian culture in contemporary American Indian literature, such as the continuance of oral traditions. A third trend in Native American studies defines American Indian identity and literature *not* in terms of what it preserves (whether it be blood or culture), but rather as a bicultural mixture of Native and European American people and traditions. Some Native Americans have argued that since their indigenous cultures have always assimilated aspects of other cultures (including those of other American Indians), to be Indian is to be bicultural, or multicultural.

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## Video Overview

- **Authors covered:** Luci Tapahonso (Navajo), Simon J. Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo), Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo)
- **Who's interviewed:** Greg Sarris, author, professor of English (Loyola Marymount University) (Miwok chief) (Pomo); N. Scott Momaday, author (Kiowa); Simon J. Ortiz, author (Acoma Pueblo); Paula Gunn Allen, author, professor of English (University of California, Los Angeles) (Laguna Pueblo/Sioux); Joy Harjo, poet/musician, professor of English (University of California, Los Angeles) (Muscogee/Creek); Rex Lee Jim, author (Navajo)
- **Points covered:**
  - American Indian oral traditions link people to the culture, myths, and land. Traditionally, the oral storyteller is a human individual who relates the mythological to others. Contemporary American Indian written literature draws on oral traditions even as it translates them into European forms. These stories are necessary for the culture to survive in the era after European contact. A kind of “cultural contact,” this written literature deals with the interaction of Native and European cultures and identities. This video focuses on three Native American writers from the Southwest: Luci Tapahonso (Navajo), Simon J. Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo), and Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo).
  - Luci Tapahonso's poems “They Are Silent and Quick” and “A Breeze Swept Through” draw on and are a product of Navajo language, tradition, and landscape.
  - Simon J. Ortiz's writing reflects a renewed transmis-

sion of Acoma Pueblo cultural memory, as in “My Mother and Sister.” It also conveys the often fractured and besieged state of being a Native American today, as in his poem “8:50 AM Ft. Lyons VAH.” These poems reflect the bicultural world of contemporary Native Americans.

- Like “8:50 AM Ft. Lyons VAH,” Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* deals with the post–World War II experience of Native Americans. The novel attempts to reintegrate the shattered experience of its protagonist, Tayo, with the old stories and worldviews. The Laguna ceremonies must be adapted to cope with the current world, or else the old ways will die. In *Storyteller*, Silko demonstrates the ways in which language does not merely reflect the world, but can directly affect it.
- Native American literature is particular to tribal people in its invocation of the concrete power of language to heal and guide, but it is also like all American literature in probing what it means to be American.

### PREVIEW

**Preview the video:** Contemporary American Indian writers creatively employ and adapt native traditions even as they address contemporary American Indian life, and therefore American life in general. Luci Tapahonso, Simon J. Ortiz, and Leslie Marmon Silko are three writers who draw on their different southwestern native heritages

## Video Overview (continued)

to keep the old ideas and cultures alive in the form of new, relevant stories.

- **What to think about while watching:** What are some of the characteristics of Navajo and Pueblo oral traditions? In what sense do these writers draw on native oral traditions and beliefs? How do they speak to the experience of being American Indian? What does their written literature hope to do or achieve?
- **Tying the video to the unit content:** What are some

specific Navajo or Pueblo oral traditions or beliefs that you can see reflected in the written literature of these writers? What do these writers seem to be doing, or trying to say, by employing these traditions? How does Native American history, and the history of the contact between natives and Europeans, affect their contemporary writing? How are their texts a combination of Native American and European literary traditions?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE VIDEO

	<b><i>What is an American? How does American literature create conceptions of the American experience and identity?</i></b>	<b><i>What is American literature? What are its distinctive voices and styles? How do social and political issues influence the American canon?</i></b>	<b><i>How do place and time shape literature and our understanding of it?</i></b>
Comprehension Questions	What are some differences between traditional Native American and European ways of seeing the world?	What are some elements of the “oral tradition”? What are some of the ways in which traditional Native American and European storytellers might differ? What social issues appear in Silko’s <i>Ceremony</i> ?	What part of the United States are Tapahonso, Ortiz, and Silko from? What tribe is each writer from? What part does World War II play in Silko’s <i>Ceremony</i> ?
Context Questions	How do elements of a specifically Native American worldview inform the work of the writers featured in the video?	How do the contemporary writers featured in the video draw on the oral tradition in their works?	How do the tribe, landscape, and environment with which each writer is familiar affect his or her work?
Exploration Questions	How much do you know about Native American history and culture? To what extent is it important for non–Native Americans to know these traditions? What do you gain by learning about them? What would you lose if you didn’t know them?	What topics, styles, or ideas would you expect to see in a contemporary Native American written text? How do you imagine the text might differ from—and be similar to—literary works written by Americans with European, African, or Asian heritages? Would the absence of typically Native American concerns in a book by a Native American affect your judgment of that book?	Why do you think it might be important for these writers to incorporate the specifics of their own time and place into their texts? What would be lost if they did not incorporate such elements?

## TIMELINE

Texts		Contexts
1490s		Columbus lands in the Bahamas, returns to Spain with first Indian slaves (1492)
1500s		Geographer Martin Waldseemüller names the “new” land “America” for Vespucci (1507)
1510s		Spanish Laws of Burgos forbid enslavement of Indians and advocate Christian conversion (1512)
1550s	Bernardino de Sahagún, <i>Florentine Codex</i> (c. 1558–85)	
1580s	Thomas Harriot, <i>A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia</i> (1588)	Spanish begin settling New Mexico (1582)
1590s		First Spanish colony on the Rio Grande, establishing control over Pueblo Indians (1598)
1600s	Garcilaso de la Vega, <i>The Florida of the Inca</i> (1605)	
1620s		First Indian uprising in an English colony: Powhatan Confederacy attacks Jamestown (1622)
1630s		Pequot War (1637)
1640s	Roger Williams, <i>A Key into the Language of America</i> (1643)	
1670s		King Philip’s War decimates native tribes in New England (1675–78)
1700s		Approximately fourteen hundred Indian slaves in the North American colonies (1708)
1750s		French and Indian War establishes English possession of Northeast (1755–63)
1760s	Samson Occom, <i>A Short Narrative of My Life</i> (1768)	Pontiac’s War (1763–75)
1770s		Continental Congress establishes first treaty with Indian tribe, the Delaware (1778)
1780s		Northwest Ordinance approved by Confederation Congress (1787)

**TIMELINE** *(continued)*

<b>Texts</b>		<b>Contexts</b>
1790s		Congress enacts first law regulating trade and land sales with Indians (1790)
1810s		War of 1812, the last war in which Indians fight with a foreign colonial power against the United States (1812–14) First appropriation by Congress of a fund (\$10,000) to “civilize” the Indians (1819)
1820s	Cherokee Memorials (1829–30)	Bureau of Indian Affairs established (1824) Cherokee Nation ratifies its new constitution (1827–28)
1830s	William Apess, “An Indian’s Looking-Glass for the White Man” (1833)	Congress passes Indian Removal Act, legalizing removal of eastern Indians to west of the Mississippi (1830) Cherokees travel the Trail of Tears (1838–39)
1840s		Mexican War; Southwest is ceded to the United States (1846–48) Bureau of Indian Affairs shifts from War Department to the Department of the Interior (1849) California Gold Rush (1849)
1850s	John Rollin Ridge (Yellow Bird), <i>The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit</i> (1854)	United States war against Plains Indians (1854)
1860s		Standing Bear court case establishes that Indians are “persons within the meaning of the law” (1868)
1870s	Cochise, “[I am alone]” (1872) Charlot, “[He has filled graves with our bones]” (1876) Lorenzo Asisara, “Punishment” (1877, 1890)	Congress appropriates first sum earmarked for federal administration of Indian education (1870) Congress passes a law putting an end to further treaties with Indian tribes (1871) General Custer and his Seventh Cavalry defeated by Sioux and Cheyenne in Battle of Little Big Horn (1876) Congress appropriates first funds for Indian police (1878) Carlisle Indian School founded (1879)
1880s		Geronimo and his band of Apaches captured, ending Indian fighting in Southwest (1886)

**TIMELINE** *(continued)*

	<b>Texts</b>	<b>Contexts</b>
		Dawes Severalty (General Allotment) Act redistributes tribally held lands (1887) Paiute Wovoka inaugurates Ghost Dance religion (1889)
1890s	Franz Boas, <i>Chinook Texts</i> (1894) James Mooney, <i>The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890</i> (1896)	Massacre of nearly 300 Indians at Wounded Knee ends Indian resistance to U.S. government (1890) Curtis Act dissolves tribal governments (1898)
1900s	Zitkala Ša (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), "Impressions of an Indian Childhood," "The School Days of an Indian Girl," "An Indian Teacher among Indians" (1900)	
1910s	Frances Densmore, <i>Chippewa Songs</i> (1910) Selin Williams, "The Bungling Host" (1910) Charles Alexander Eastman, <i>From the Deep Woods to Civilization</i> (1916)	
1920s		Congress makes all Indians U.S. citizens and grants them the right to vote (1924)
1930s	Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, <i>Black Elk Speaks</i> (1932) Ella Cara Deloria, <i>Dakota Texts</i> (1932) Mourning Dove, <i>Coyote Stories</i> (1933) D'arcy McNickle, <i>The Surrounded</i>	Congress passes Wheeler-Howard (Indian Reorganization) Act, ending Dawes era (1934)
1940s		Founding of National Congress of American Indians (1944) Congress establishes Indian Claims Commission to judge all tribal claims (1946)
1950s	Paul Radin, <i>The Trickster</i> (1956)	Congress adopts House Concurrent Resolution 180, declaring its intent to terminate treaty relations with Indian tribes (1953)
1960s	Hugh Yellowman, "Coyote, Skunk, and the Prairie Dogs" (1966) N. Scott Momaday, <i>The Way to Rainy Mountain</i> (1969) Alexander Posey, <i>Poems of Alexander Lawrence Posey, Creek Indian Bard</i> (1969)	

**TIMELINE** *(continued)*

	<b>Texts</b>	<b>Contexts</b>
1970s	Vine Deloria, <i>God Is Red</i> (1973) John Bierhorst, <i>Four Masterworks of American Indian Literature: Quetzalcoatl, The Ritual of Condolence, Cuceb, the Night Chant</i> (1974) Simon J. Ortiz, <i>Poems from the Veterans Hospital</i> (1977) Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Ceremony</i> (1977)	American Indian Movement members occupy Wounded Knee and battle FBI agents (1973)
1980s	Joy Harjo, <i>She Had Some Horses</i> (1983) Louise Erdrich, "Fleur" (1986) Paula Gunn Allen, <i>The Sacred Hoop</i> (1986) Luci Tapahonso, <i>A Breeze Swept Through</i> (1989)	
1990s	Joy Harjo, <i>In Mad Love and War</i> (1990) Gerald Vizenor, <i>Landfill Meditations: Crossblood Stories</i> (1991) Simon J. Ortiz, <i>Woven Stone</i> (1992) Luci Tapahonso, <i>Saanii Dahataal: The Women Are Singing</i> (1993) Greg Sarris, <i>Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream</i> (1994) Joy Harjo, <i>The Woman Who Fell from the Sky</i> (1994) Diane Glancy, <i>Firesticks</i> (1993)	Congress passes Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, protecting Indian remains and sacred objects (1990)

## AUTHOR/TEXT REVIEW

### Luci Tapahonso (b. 1953)

A Navajo woman born in Shiprock, New Mexico, Luci Tapahonso grew up on a farm within the largest Indian reservation in the United States. For the Navajo, or Dine, as they call themselves, kinship and lineage define one's sense of self: Tapahonso's father was from the Bitter Water clan, her mother from the Salt Water clan. Tapahonso emphasizes the importance of her family to her craft: "When I write I can always hear their voices and I can hear the way that they would talk and just the beauty of how they structured stories and their expressions and their faces. So, my primary literary influence has been my family and my relatives."

Tapahonso's first language is Dine, the Navajo language, and Dine frequently appears in her poetry. Indeed, she often conceives, writes, and sings her poems entirely in Dine, translating them into English only for publication. This practice highlights the typical Native American conception of literature as **performative**, living, and inextricably linked to the specifics of culture, language, and place. For the Navajo, Tapahonso explains, language is powerful: "[The Navajo] say that when a child is born . . . the first breath they take is a holy thing, that it means that the power of the winds in the air that make up the universe are a part of you so that when you breathe you can actually feel your breath; that means that there's a sense of the holy imbued in you. So that each time you say something then . . . you can change things. . . . You can change the course of whatever it is that you're going to do." She goes on to explain that this belief in the efficacy of language makes all of the Dine careful speakers: "There's not really a way to say . . . you're sorry so . . . people have to be very careful about what they say and . . . you understand that words do have power and that you have the power to create or . . . the power to destroy. You have the power to heal, to comfort, to make people laugh." For the Dine, the poet or wordsmith has a special status. Tapahonso notes, "A person that speaks beautifully is thought to have . . . a really good upbringing . . . a lot of people [having] loved them, a lot of people [having] invested in them to make sure that they speak well. . . ."

Tapahonso received her B.A. and M.A. in 1980 and 1983, respectively, from the University of New Mexico, where she studied under Leslie Marmon Silko. She has taught as an assistant professor of English at the University of New Mexico and the University of Kansas, Lawrence, and currently teaches at the University of Arizona. Her books of poetry include *A Breeze Swept Through* (1989), *Saanii Dahataal: The Women are Singing* (1993) (in which "They Are Silent and Quick" appears), and *Blue Horses Rush In* (1997). In the preface to *Saanii Dahataal*, Tapahonso writes of two literary issues that appear as concerns for many other American Indian writers. First, she notes the centrality of storytelling to Indian life: "There is such a love of stories among Navajo people that it seems each time a group of more than two gather, the dialogue eventually evolves into sharing stories and memories, laughing, teasing. To be included in this way is a dis-



[6157] Nancy Crampton, *Luci Tapahonso* (1980–2002), courtesy of Nancy Crampton.

## TAPAHONSO WEB ARCHIVE

**[5957]** Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Navajo Shiprock Fair Exhibit* (c. 1934), courtesy of Pacific Alaska Region, National Archives and Records Administration. This fair, held every year in Shiprock, New Mexico, is the oldest fair in the Navajo Nation. Luci Tapahonso was born in Shiprock; her recent book, *Songs of Shiprock Fair*, describes one child's experiences at the fair.

**[5959]** Terry Eiler, *Shepherding on the Grounds of the Utah International Mine on the Navajo Reservation* (1972), courtesy of Still Pictures Branch, National Archives and Records Administration. Luci Tapahonso, the middle child in a family of eleven, grew up in this area. Tapahonso is a Navajo who composes much of her poetry in her native language, Dine.

**[6157]** Nancy Crampton, *Luci Tapahonso* (1980–2002), courtesy of Nancy Crampton. Altering, adapting, and drawing from the Dine (Navajo) oral tradition, poet Luci Tapahonso carves out a space in American literature for a diverse yet distinctly native voice.

**[6158]** Nancy Crampton, *Ortiz, Silko, Tapahonso Group Photo* (n.d.), courtesy of Nancy Crampton. All three of these prominent Native American writers come from New Mexico. Each shares the traditional Native American emphasis on storytelling, and each emphasizes the importance of developing a respectful relationship with the land.

**[6533]** Kenji Kawano, *Navajo Grandson, Grandma, Horse* (2001), courtesy of Kenji Kawano. A young Navajo man stands with his arm around his grandmother. Herself a Navajo, Luci Tapahonso draws inspiration for her work from the lives of those she knows best and from the landscape of the Southwest.

**[6590]** Joel Grimes, *Traditional Navajo Dancing during Fourth of July Fair* (1992), courtesy of Joel Grimes. The Navajo have a long tradition of dancing. Navajo Luci Tapahonso attempts to tell the history of her people's culture in her writings and to contextualize it in terms of the present.

tinct way of showing affection and appreciation for each other.” Tapahonso's words highlight the way in which stories are an essential aspect of maintaining Indian culture. Second, she de-emphasizes herself as a singular creative voice, as the “author” of her poems in the traditional Western sense. Rather, her writing is itself part of the web of an old culture—as is Tapahonso herself—and works toward the continual renewal of that culture. As Tapahonso explains, “Like many other relatives, [my paternal grandmother] had a profound understanding of the function of language. This writing, then, is not ‘mine,’ but a collection of many voices that range from centuries ago and continue into the future.”

Tapahonso has served on the board of directors at the Phoenix Indian Center, has been a member of the New Mexico Arts Commission Literature Panel, and has been on the steering committees of the Returning the Gift Writers Festival, the Kansas Arts Commission Literature Panel, the Phoenix Arts Commission, and the Telluride Institute Writers Forum Advisory Board. She was also the commissioner of the Kansas Arts Commission.

## TEACHING TIPS

■ The number 4 is important for Tapahonso's verse. As Tapahonso points out in her *American Passages* interview, many Navajo songs have four stanzas and ceremonies are structured in fours, as are many ordinary things. Play the excerpt from Tapahonso's interview in which she elaborates on the significance of the number 4, and then have your students read one of her poems that uses repetitions of 4. What meaning does the number bring to the poem?

■ Show your students the segment on the Navajo Reservation from the documentary *Winds of Change: A Matter of Promises*, narrated by N. Scott Momaday. How do the Navajo strategies for adapting to cultural change compare to the strategies used by Tapahonso? This segment of the video, which introduces Navajo veterans and chantways, is also useful to set up Ortiz and Silko's work.

■ The traditional Navajo dwelling is called the hogan and is constructed out of earth and wooden poles according to instructions given from Talking God. Hogans are a good way to introduce students to some of the basic principles of Navajo oral tradition and chantways; as anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu reflects, the house is “a microcosm organized according to the same oppositions which govern all the universe.” The entrances to hogans always face east. As Tapahonso explains, “In Navajo thinking everything begins in the East. So the beginning of day, the beginning of life . . . is seen as being situated in the East. The hogan given by Talking God is also the home of Dawn Woman, or Changing Woman, wife of the sun.” Have students look at the image of the hogan in the archive. How is it different from a Western-style house? How does it reflect the values in the poem “A Breeze Swept Through”? Students may also enjoy “Starlore,” Tapahonso's poem about a hogan, from *Blue Horses Rush In*.

## QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** The location of a poem or story—its setting—almost always conveys important information about its overall meaning. Where does “They Are Silent and Quick” seem to be set? Where are the narrator and her daughter, and where are the narrator’s parents?

**Comprehension:** “A Breeze Swept Through” retells a Navajo creation story. Who or what is the “first born of Dawn Woman”?

**Comprehension:** What is the significance of the narrator’s Navajo mother saying, “There’s nothing like that in Navajo stories” in the third stanza of “They Are Silent and Quick”? How does this statement affect the narrator, her “aching,” and her feelings about constituting one of three generations of women in her family? What do these emotions have to do with the setting of the poem?

**Context:** Why would Tapahonso compare dawn with birth in “A Breeze Swept Through”? What does her comparison suggest about the place of humans in the natural world?

**Context:** In *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe*, anthropologist Gary Witherspoon argues that for the Navajo, “the earth and its life-giving, life-sustaining, and life-producing qualities are associated with and derived from Changing Woman [Earth Mother]. It is not surprising, therefore, that women tend to dominate in social and economic affairs. Women are the heads of most domestic groups, the clans are matrilineal [i.e., they trace their descent through the maternal line], and the land and sheep traditionally were controlled by the women of residential groups.” What role do women play in Tapahonso’s poetry?

**Exploration:** The narrator of “They Are Silent and Quick” says, “There are no English words to describe this feeling.” What do you think she means by this statement? At what point in her narrative does she switch from English? That is, where do the “breaks” occur in her English consciousness? You might compare these moments to when Gloria Anzaldúa (Unit 2), for example, switches to Spanish, or when writers like Jean Toomer (Unit 10) switch dialects.

**Exploration:** The Navajo is a matrifocal society; that is, in certain ways the community revolves around women (for example, families tend to reside with the mother’s clan). In “A Breeze Swept Through,” images of the female are vital to the force of the poem. Why is the poem gendered female? Would you describe the poem as empowering to women, especially Native American women? Why or why not?

**Exploration:** Compare the Navajo creation story in “A Breeze Swept Through” to the creation story in Genesis. How are humans characterized in each? How is the divine characterized? What are the relationships between the human and the divine in each story?

**[6850]** Edward S. Curtis, *Head-and-Shoulders Portrait of Navajo Woman, Facing Front* (1904), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-103498]. This woman’s clothing is an example of bicultural production: while influenced by European dress, it also incorporates a Navajo blanket influenced by the designs of baskets and pottery. Sheep, who provide the wool for blankets as well as a source of food, are a crucial part of Navajo culture.

**[8007]** Luci Tapahonso, Reading: “They are Silent and Quick” (2002), courtesy of Annenberg/CBP and *American Passages*. This poem shows (Dine) Navajo poet Luci Tapahonso moving between the English and Navajo languages. In the poem, Tapahonso discusses the importance of the oral tradition and storytelling.

**[8963]** Edward S. Curtis, *Navajo Hogan* (1905), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-105863]. The hogan, a traditional Navajo dwelling, is constructed out of earth and wooden poles according to instructions from Talking God.

**[9074]** Luci Tapahonso, Reading: “A Breeze Swept Through” (2002), courtesy of Annenberg/CBP and *American Passages*. This poem shows (Dine) Navajo poet Luci Tapahonso moving between the English and Navajo languages. In the poem, Tapahonso retells the creation story of Dawn Woman.

**[9080]** Luci Tapahonso, Interview: “The Number Four and Its Significance” (2002), courtesy of Annenberg/CBP and *American Passages*. A recording from an interview with Tapahonso in which she discusses the number 4 and its significance in her poetry and for the Navajo; other interview excerpts can be found in archive [9076] through [9083].



**[5887]** Ansel Adams, *Looking across the Street toward Houses, "Acoma Pueblo"* (1933), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, Still Pictures Branch.

### **Simon J. Ortiz (b. 1941)**

Simon J. Ortiz's world is one of mixtures and doublings, of multiple identities: he has an American name and an Acoma name, Hihdruutsi; he is from the Southwest but lives in Toronto, Canada. Born and raised in the Acoma Pueblo community in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Ortiz received his early education from the Bureau of Indian Affairs school on the Acoma reservation. He later attended the University of New Mexico. Ortiz currently teaches in the department of English at the University of Toronto.

Storytelling has always been a part of his life. As he explains, "I think that because storytelling is a

process, that is a dynamic of culture. . . . [I]t was with that first utterance of sound that your parents or those who are closest to you in your family utter that first sound or that first word and you first conceive of it as sound that has meaning. It could be a murmur, it could be a song, it could be your name." His poetry explores the significance of individual origins and journeys, which he, like many American Indian writers, sees as forming a vital link in the continuity of life. Drawing on American Indian oral traditions, his poems emphasize orality, narrative, and the actual worldly effects of language. As Ortiz explains, storytelling is about more than just the style of the poetry: "The purpose of that story sharing or storytelling is . . . conversing, and the story listeners are conversing with us. We are sharing, or participating. And it's the storyteller participating by his telling, and the listener participating by his or her listening. So it's an exchange. It's a dialogue. It's an event."

Ortiz's poetry is also influenced by the sounds of the oral tradition and by the way that he conjures up concrete images and uses repetition. His poems, therefore, feel like they are being transmitted through the spoken word more than the written word. He has said that "Indians always tell a story. . . . The only way to continue is to tell a story and there is no other way. Your children will not survive unless you tell something about them—how they were born, how they came to this certain place, how they continued." Ortiz advocates a political literature, eschewing the idea that poetry should be above or beyond political concerns. While this is less obviously true of the poems featured in the video, it is more evident in such poems as "At the Salvation Army" (from *From Sand Creek*).

Perhaps most crucially, Ortiz's poetry grows out of his experience with the Pueblo landscape and the cultures that live with it. Like fellow Pueblo poet Leslie Marmon Silko, Ortiz expresses concern through his work that Western worldviews treat the land as a property to be used rather than as a life-force to be respected. Ortiz's books of poetry include *Going for Rain* (1976), *Poems from the Veterans Hospital* (1977) (in which "8:50 AM Ft. Lyons VAH" appears), *From Sand Creek* (1982), *Woven Stone* (1992) (in which "My Mother and My Sisters" appears), *After and Before the Lightning* (1994), and *Out There Somewhere* (2002).

## TEACHING TIPS

■ Most students have heard little first-hand testimony from veterans about their experiences with war. Have your students interview veterans about their experiences, either veterans in their families or those at local VA hospitals. They may want to read them the poems that Ortiz has written and ask the veterans to comment on them.

■ Have your students write in their journals about some central family memory or legend as in “My Mother and My Sisters.” What purpose does the dissemination and repetition of the story serve in their family? Is this story community-forming? Confidence-building? If the story is funny, as many such stories are, what purpose does the humor serve?

■ In his interview with *American Passages*, Simon J. Ortiz reflects that even though the Pueblo didn’t have a written language before the arrival of the Spanish, they had “art forms and art objects, that communicated, that served as expressions of knowledge.” Ask your students to focus on the image of the women creating pottery in “My Mother and My Sisters.” What linguistic strategies does Ortiz use to let us know that what the women are doing is more important than just throwing and painting pottery?

## QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** What is “the building” in “8:50 AM Ft. Lyons VAH”?

To which “three American wars” does the narrator probably refer?

**Comprehension:** The narrator of “My Mother and My Sisters” says that his mother paints “with movements whose origin has only to do with years of knowing.” What does this description mean?

**Comprehension:** What is the relationship between the building and the geese in “8:50 AM Ft. Lyons VAH”? What does Ortiz seem to be saying by including them both in one brief poem?

**Context:** The VA Hospital in Albuquerque is located on over 500 acres on a high mesa and is designed in a village layout in Spanish-Pueblo architectural style. What is the significance of the architecture of the hospital in Ortiz’s poem? What difference would it have made if the building were built in a style that imitated a pueblo or a kiva, the traditional site of Pueblo healing?

**Context:** “My Mother and My Sisters” includes two segments, the narrator’s description of his mother and sister making pottery, and his mother telling the story of looking for pinons. What do these two segments have in common, or how do they illuminate each other? Consider the relationship between pottery-making and story-telling as art forms: how do they both involve the expression and transmission of cultural values and assumptions?

**Context:** Examine the jars from Acoma and Santo Domingo Pueblos featured in the “Singing Mothers” Web Archive in this unit. Describe the shape of the jars. What potential uses might they have had? How has the potter used shape and geometry to create a sense of balance and rhythm? Compare the harmony-seeking principles in the pottery to those in Ortiz’s poems.

## ORTIZ WEB ARCHIVE

**[5876]** Ansel Adams, “Church, Acoma Pueblo” Corner View Showing Mostly Left Wall (1933), courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration. The Acoma Pueblo community of Albuquerque, New Mexico, was the childhood home of poet Simon J. Ortiz. Ortiz’s poetry deals with political concerns and bears the marks of his oral heritage.

**[5887]** Ansel Adams, *Looking across the Street toward Houses, “Acoma Pueblo”* (1933), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, Still Pictures Branch. Acoma Pueblo, the home of the Acoma Indians, is believed to be the oldest inhabited village in the United States. Atop a 367-foot mesa, this “Sky City” is well defended against enemies. Dwellings are built around a plaza that serves as the community’s sacred center. The interconnectedness of the houses reflects the social bonds of the community.

**[5891]** Henry Kyllingstad, *Daisy Pino, an Acoma Girl, during On-the-Job Training at Brown’s Cafe, Albuquerque, N. Mex.* (1951), courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration. During the 1950s poor living conditions and high unemployment led many Native Americans to seek work off the reservation in cities. N. Scott Momaday, Sherman Alexie, and others write about the hardships and alienation experienced by “urban Indians.”

**[5971]** Nancy Crampton, *Simon Ortiz Portrait* (n.d.), courtesy of Nancy Crampton. Simon J. Ortiz was born in the Acoma Pueblo community, to the Dyaamih clan. In Ortiz’s native language there are no words for extended family members; everyone is either “father,” “mother,” “sister” or “brother.”

**[8304]** Simon Ortiz, *Pottery in Acoma Pueblo Culture* (2002), courtesy of Annenberg Media and *American Passages*. Pueblo pottery is considered some of the most beautiful, and it has deep ties to storytelling traditions. In this excerpt from a poem by Simon Ortiz, we learn of the power of pottery in Acoma Pueblo culture: “That’s the thing about making dhyuuni; / it has more to do

with a sense of touching / than with seeing because fingers / have to know the texture of clay . . .”

**Exploration:** Poetry often invokes the five senses in order to make its message more vivid and immediate. There are two senses at work in “8:50 AM Ft. Lyons VAH”: the Wisconsin horse’s sighting of the geese and the sound the geese make. What is the relationship between sound and sight in the poem? What does the persona reflect on when he hears, and what does he reflect on when he sees? Which is more “healing”? Compare Ortiz’s use of sensory impressions to that of other contemporary poets such as Li-Young Lee and Sylvia Plath.

**Exploration:** Poetry is often addressed to an audience—a “you.” The second, brief stanza of “My Mother and My Sisters” is written in the second person—that is, it is addressed to some “you.” Who is this audience? What is the relationship between the reader and the narrator as a result of this pronoun? How does the second stanza affect your understanding of the poem? How does its inclusion support Ortiz’s claim that poetry is a “dialogue” or “conversation”? You might contrast Ortiz’s use of the pronoun “you” to that of other poets in such poems as “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath and “Black Art” by Amiri Baraka.

### **Leslie Marmon Silko (b. 1948)**

Leslie Marmon Silko was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in the house where her father was also born. She grew up in Old Laguna, a town formed several centuries ago by Pueblo tribes. Her family is of mixed descent, with Plains Indian, Mexican, and European ancestors. She has both Laguna and white ancestors on her father’s side and Plains tribe blood from her mother’s side. Even the Laguna part of her heritage is multicultural: Hopi, Jemez, Zuni, Navajo, and Spanish peoples have influenced its culture and oral traditions. Like Louise Erdrich, Silko explores mixed identity in many of her works, particularly the situation of being “neither white nor fully traditional Indian.” Silko received her B.A. from the University of New Mexico—graduating *magna cum laude* in 1969—and after three semesters of law school decided instead to become a teacher and a writer. She published *Laguna Woman*, a collection of poems, in 1974 and her first novel, *Ceremony*, in 1977. In many ways *Ceremony* was a Laguna answer to N. Scott Momaday’s Pulitzer prize-winning *House Made of Dawn*. Like Momaday, Silko weaves myth, history, and personal recollection, but in *Ceremony* the importance of the feminine landscape replaces the more male-centered story told by Momaday.

In *Ceremony*, Silko tells the story of Tayo, a mixed-blood Indian who fights in World War II and returns to Laguna physically intact but mentally fractured and deeply in shock from post-traumatic stress syndrome. As critic Greg Sarris puts it, the novel “is about a man who is displaced in World War II, taken away from his home, away from the stories, and about having to come home and acquaint himself with, if you will, the landscape of who he is, his stories, what he knows from the landscape. And as he acquaints himself with the landscape and the stories, he sees that his experience even in World War II was



**[6113]** Rudi Williams, Korean War Army Veteran Ted Wood, an Abenaki Indian, in Full Dress Uniform (1998), courtesy of DefenseLINK News, U.S. Department of Defense.

never disconnected. That in fact, from the one place we can see all places.” This reconnection begins with the opening, in which we find Thought Woman, a mythic godlike figure, and Spider, creating a story. As the novel progresses, language heals both the characters and the readers; stories from the Pueblo oral tradition are interwoven with contemporary updates of traditional healing rituals and discussions of the development of the atomic bomb and uranium mining.

Among Silko’s other works are *Storyteller* (1981), a collection of stories and poems; *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), a blistering, apocalyptic epic of North American minority, marginal, and underworld figures and their struggles for power; and *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), which takes place around the turn of the twentieth century and explores the Ghost Dance and the cultural dismay of a young Laguna girl as she is taken in by a well-to-do white couple. Despite their often dark and disturbing qualities, all of Silko’s works address the possibility of renewal or regeneration, particularly of American Indian cultures, values, and ways of life. This hope always rests in part with developing a nurturing and respectful relationship with the landscape of the Southwest. Place is never merely a “setting” in the Western sense; rather, it is inextricable from the life, values, and culture of a people—and their stories. The Laguna are a matrifocal community, and this worldview infuses Silko’s work, which often retells female-centered myths around the figures of Yellow Woman and Thought/Spider Woman. Silko has said, “[Storytelling] is a way of interacting . . . a whole way of seeing yourself, the people around you, your life, the place of your life in the bigger context, not just in terms of nature and location but in terms of what has gone on before, what’s happened to other people. It’s a whole way of life.”

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ In her book *The Sacred Hoop*, author and critic (and cousin of Silko) Paula Gunn Allen makes a rather bold statement about the position of women in American Indian cultures: she argues that “Traditional [American Indian] tribal lifestyles are more often **gynocratic** [governed by women] than not, and they are never patriarchal.” Other scholars have refuted aspects of this statement (for example, people have argued that the Sioux and other Plains tribes were in fact patriarchal). However, it is clear that Allen’s statement is important for understanding American Indian communities such as the Pueblos that were **matrilineal** (descended through the maternal line) and/or **matrifocal** (female-centered). Allen and others have argued that readers should pay attention to the way gender functions in texts by writers from gynocratic communities since gender is constructed differently in such communities than it is in mainstream American culture. As your students read *Ceremony*, you might want to ask them how gender is being constructed in this novel. How does Tayo compare to traditional European American male icons (e.g., John Wayne) or even to Black Elk? How do the female characters compare to female cultural icons in American culture?

## SILKO WEB ARCHIVE

**[5741]** Anonymous, *Two Navajo Shaman Dry Painting to Cure an Illness* (n.d.), courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History. Navajo sand paintings, or “dry” paintings, are meant to summon and embody the spirits of the holy people and are therefore wiped away immediately after the Night Chant ceremony.

**[5882]** Boyd Norton, *Orange Mallow, Showe Desert Flower* (1972), courtesy of Still Pictures Branch, National Archives and Records Administration. The desert is home to a surprising variety of plants and animals. Much of Leslie Marmon Silko’s work examines the relationship of humans to the natural world, which she sees as holding the key to spiritual renewal and regeneration.

**[5970]** Nancy Crampton, *Leslie Marmon Silko Portrait* (n.d.), courtesy of Nancy Crampton. Leslie Marmon Silko is a writer of mixed heritage—European, Mexican, and Native American—and she grew up in the ancient Pueblo town Old Laguna.

**[6113]** Rudi Williams, *Korean War Army Veteran Ted Wood, an Abenaki Indian, in Full Dress Uniform* (1998), courtesy of DefenseLINK News, U.S. Department of Defense. Abenakis originally come from New England and Canada. Ceremonies honoring veterans are common at Native American powwows, and many communities have adapted special ceremonies (like the Navajo Enemyway Chant) to help heal veterans. Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel *Ceremony* portrays the recovery of a mixed-blood Indian who fights in World War II and returns to Laguna physically intact but psychologically shattered.

**[6532]** Kenji Kawano, *Navajo Navy Vet* (2001), courtesy of Kenji Kawano. A sizable proportion of the Native American population served in World War II. In her best-known work, *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko tells the story of Tayo, a WWII veteran whose horrific war experiences intensify the estrangement he feels because of his mixed background.

**[6626]** Joel Grimes, *Yeibichei Rocks at Monument Valley* (1992), courtesy of Joel Grimes. The beauty of a sunset at Monument Valley, a part of the Navajo

■ Some readers have suggested that Tayo’s encounter with Ts’eh in *Ceremony* resembles a Yellow Woman story. Told by the Pueblo people of the Southwest, **Yellow Woman stories** dramatize how humans interact with spirits in the world once it has been created. Although there is always variation, Yellow Woman stories often involve a young married woman who wanders beyond her village and has a sexual encounter with a spirit-man; sometimes she is killed, but usually she returns to her family and tribe having grown spiritually, and therefore has an empowering influence on the people in general. In her influential essay “Kochinnenako in Academe,” Paula Gunn Allen points out that Yellow Woman stories are “female-centered, always told from the Yellow Woman’s point of view,” and that they generally highlight “her alienation from the people,” but that her apparently transgressive acts “often have happy outcomes for Kochinnenako [Yellow Woman] and her people.” This suggests, Allen argues, “that the behavior of women, at least at certain times or under certain circumstances, must be improper or nonconformist for the greater good of the whole.” Like many Native American stories, these narratives have the communal function of both drawing socially important boundary lines and observing where they sometimes need to be transgressed. In particular, according to Allen, they emphasize “the central role that woman plays in the orderly life of the people.” Leslie Marmon Silko frequently draws from the Yellow Woman tradition when she writes of empowered (especially sexually empowered) and empowering women like the spirit-being Ts’eh. Why do you think Silko includes Tayo and Ts’eh’s encounter in her novel? What is the purpose of the Yellow Woman story? How does she update the story? What is the purpose of Silko’s novel? What is the role of the oral tradition in general in *Ceremony*?

## QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** As the novel begins, what are some of the reasons Tayo is so miserable?

**Comprehension:** List as many “ceremonies” as you can from the novel. That is, if you think of *Ceremony* as a spiritual journey for Tayo, how many stages does it have? Who are his guides on the journey?

**Comprehension:** What exactly do the different ceremonies give to Tayo? How has he changed by the end of the novel?

**Context:** What is the role of Ts’eh in the novel? Can you compare her to other women characters in the novel? What about Fleur and Pauline in the story by Louise Erdrich? Does it matter that the main character of *Ceremony* is a man? How would the novel be different if the main character were a woman?

**Context:** Compare Silko’s portrait of Native American veterans to Ortiz’s presentation of the issues surrounding veterans in “8:50 AM Ft. Lyons VAH.”

**Context:** Do a close reading of Betonie’s ceremony. How does Betonie’s

ceremony compare to the Navajo Nightway chant? What is the goal of each? What is the significance of innovations in the ceremony?

**Exploration:** How are time and space represented in the novel? How does Silko suggest characteristics of a “ceremonial” time and space, as opposed to the everyday European American senses of time and space? Indeed, it is worth keeping these questions in mind when reading all of the texts in this unit.

**Exploration:** In what sense is the novel a “ceremony” for the reader as well as for Tayo? How do you imagine Native American readers would respond differently to this book than would Americans of European heritage? What about readers of African or Asian heritages?

**Exploration:** Write your own modern Yellow Woman story using the theme of abduction and the traditional elements one would expect to find in Yellow Woman stories.

### Stories of the Beginning of the World

Myths—deeply traditional stories that explain the origins of a phenomenon or cultural practice—serve as some of the foundational narratives for the stories told by a people. When authors re-create or adapt these myths for their own purposes, their audience must have a firm understanding of the myths in order to understand the stories that retell them. For instance, Herman Melville begins his novel *Moby-Dick* with the line “Call me Ishmael,” which invokes the Bible. Similarly, the main characters in Native American literatures often refer back to classical tales from the oral tradition, such as coyote tales, cultural hero stories, migration legends, and **creation stories**. Each of these stories has a standard set of characters, events, and elements. Knowing these original stories can help you better understand the written literature that preceded them.

Like other Native American oral narratives such as **cultural hero** and **trickster** stories, creation stories have etiological features or tags; that is, they describe how some familiar characteristic of the world came to be. Often the particular landscape and environment of the tribe enters into such stories; sometimes the location of the tribe is identified as the center of the world. The ceremonies that accompany these creation myths often enact a ritual return to a combined sense of origin and center, where healing and renewal can be found.

Like the biblical account in Genesis, Creation stories tell about the beginning of the world and how the people first came to be. Predominant among the tribes of what is now Canada and the eastern United States were earth-diver stories, which tell of how the world was created by beings who gathered mud from beneath the waters created by a great flood. Common in the Southwest and elsewhere were **emergence stories**, which often describe how the people originated in the womb of the Earth Mother and were called to the surface by Sun Father. Despite the many differences among various tribes’ versions of these stories, they generally establish how the world was created, how

Nation, is captured in this photograph. The traditional Native American reverence for the land is a cornerstone of the thinking of many contemporary writers as well as conservationists.

**[6635]** Skeet McAuley, *Fallout Shelter Directions* (1984), courtesy of *Sign Language, Contemporary Southwest Native America*, Aperture Foundation, Inc. Nuclear weapons were tested throughout the Southwest. Such weapons testing, for writers like Leslie Marmon Silko, does not accord with the respect that humans should show to the natural world if we are to retain our hopes for renewal and regeneration.



**[8113]** Huron tribe, Pair of dolls (1830–50), courtesy of the Portland Art Museum, gift of Elizabeth Cole Butler [88.43.6-7].

**"STORIES OF THE  
BEGINNING OF THE  
WORLD" WEB ARCHIVE**

**[8008]** Greg Sarris, Interview: "Coyote" (2002), courtesy of Annenberg/CBP and *American Passages*. Greg Sarris, author, professor of English, and Pomo Indian, discusses the trickster Coyote.

**[8113]** Huron tribe, Pair of dolls (1830–50), courtesy of the Portland Art Museum, gift of Elizabeth Cole Butler [88.43.6-7]. Dolls like these, made by the Huron tribe in the mid-nineteenth century, played a number of roles in traditional Native American culture, including being used to teach children their people's history. The dolls were made from wood, wool, and cotton cloth and were adorned with metal and glass beads, leather, and real hair.

**[8115]** Iroquois, Cradle board (back side) (1830–50), courtesy of the Portland Art Museum, gift of Elizabeth Cole Butler. The "Iroquois Creation Story" speaks of the infants in Sky Woman's womb. Cradle boards were common for infants throughout Native North America. One distinctively Eastern Woodlands technique was quillwork embroidery, which was later imitated using beads or paint. Cradles were often decorated with protective symbols to guard babies against human and supernatural adversaries.

people developed out of ambiguously formed beings (who often had both animal and human characteristics), what each tribe took to be the basic relationships among people and between people and nature, and the origins of important tribal customs and structures.

Trickster tales, one form of creation story, vary according to their community, but they also share certain basic qualities. Tricksters are more than deceivers or trick players who make us laugh with their scatological humor: by crossing society's boundaries they both break rules and show the importance of rules after the world has been created. They are also creators in their own right. Navajo storyteller Yellowman explains that he must tell about the trickster Coyote because, as he says, "If my children hear the stories, they will grow up to be good people; if they don't hear them, they will turn out to be bad. . . . Through the stories everything is made possible." As you read trickster tales, notice their unique characteristics. Consider the presence of traditional elements, such as animals (e.g., buffalo, coyote, spider, salmon), vegetables (e.g., corn), minerals, landscape, weather, colors, directions, time, dances, and the supernatural.

**TEACHING TIPS**

■ It is important that students begin to have a sense of the traditions of their own region. Investigate what resources are available from Native American storytellers in your area. If possible, invite a local Native American storyteller to your class or play a recorded performance from an audio- or videocassette. Your reference librarian should be able to help you locate resources.

■ Students can learn about the performative nature of storytelling by telling stories themselves. Have students pick one of the legends, memorize it, and recite it *as an engaging story* to the class. You may want to have students work in groups so that they can coach one another or work on smaller segments.

**QUESTIONS**

**Comprehension:** What is a creation story? How does it differ from an emergence story?

**Comprehension:** What is a trickster? What does a trickster do?

**Comprehension:** What according to the Pima and the Iroquois existed at the beginning of time?

**Comprehension:** In the Iroquois creation story the monsters are concerned when Sky Woman sinks into the dark world. What does their reaction tell us about the nature of monsters and the lower world?

**Comprehension:** In the Pima emergence story, Juh-wert-a-Mah-kai had to rub his palm four times before the world was created. What else has to be done four times in the Pima stories? What does the number 4 come to mean by the end of the stories?

**Context:** Listen to the audio clip about Coyote [8008]. Compare him to the trickster figures found in the Winnebago, Sioux, Koasati,

Coville, Clatsop Chinook, and Navajo stories. Which of the trickster figures does he most resemble? Which does he differ from the most?

**Context:** What are the themes and elements of some of the trickster tales? How do these compare to the gambler tales as described in the Extended Context “Sacred Play: Gambling in Native Cultures”?

**Context:** Examine the Iroquois Cradle [8115] and the Huron Dolls [8113]. Do these appear to have been created by the good or bad mind of the Iroquois creation story? How do you know?

**Exploration:** Is the Iroquois creation myth still an Iroquois text if it has been translated into English? Does such a translation so alter the meaning that it is no longer accurate to speak of it as Iroquoian, or should the fact of translation merely make readers more cautious, less eager to assume that they understand it? Is it better for non-Indians to have no access to such texts than to have texts that may be contaminated or inaccurate?

**Exploration:** The theme of rival twins is widespread in the Americas and in the Bible. What cultural anxieties or issues does this theme address? What might account for its popularity?

### **Louise Erdrich (b. 1954)**

Born in Little Falls, Minnesota, Louise Erdrich is a member of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa tribe of North Dakota. The Chippewa are also called the Ojibwa, or, in their own Algonquian language, the Anishinabe, both of which terms appear in Erdrich’s work. Erdrich’s French-Chippewa mother and her German-American father were teachers for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Wahpeton, Minnesota. Her maternal grandmother was tribal chairwoman on the Turtle Mountain Reservation. After attending Dartmouth College (where she studied under her future husband and collaborator, Michael Dorris), Erdrich received her M.A. from the Johns Hopkins University in 1979 and later edited the Boston Indian Council’s newspaper, *The Circle*. Erdrich also held a variety of other jobs, such as lifeguard, waitress, prison poetry teacher, and construction flag signaler, which she has said greatly helped her writing. The winner of numerous prizes for her literature, she has published both fiction and poetry.



In 1984 Erdrich published both her first volume of poetry, *Jacklight*, and her first novel, *Love Medicine*. The novel, a series of discrete stories spanning the years 1934 to 1984, is told by seven narrators and follows the relations among three Chippewa families: the Kashpaws, the Lamartine/Nanapushes, and the Morriseys. A number of Erdrich’s later novels, including *The Beet Queen* (1986), *Tracks* (1988), *The Bingo Palace* (1994), and *Tales of Burning Love* (1996), focus on various members of these same families and their lives in and around a reservation in the fictional town of Argus, North Dakota. As do many writers of American Indian descent, Erdrich attributes her interest in literature

**[7427]** Linde, *Five Ojibwa Indians: Man, Woman, and Three Children in Canoe*—[“Typical Natives”] (c. 1913), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-101332].

in part to her cultural heritage. She has said, “People in [Indian] families make everything into a story. . . . People just sit and the stories start coming, one after another. I suppose that when you grow up constantly hearing the stories rise, break, and fall, it gets into you somehow.” *Tracks* (Chapter 2 of which was published as “Fleur” in 1986) is typical of her novels in emphasizing how events are always understood and told by people with particular points of view, with their own assumptions, quirks, and belief systems. The story of the powerful Fleur Pillager is told by the fearful and confused Pauline Puyat, who later in the novel becomes Sister Leopolda and acts as an antagonist to Fleur. “Fleur” (subtitled “Pauline” in *Tracks*) explores both Fleur’s power and Pauline’s self-deception.

Many of Erdrich’s novels are interwoven with characters or motifs from the Chippewa oral tradition. For the Chippewas the ultimate sources of existence were the **manitos**—extremely powerful beings who might be roughly characterized as spirits or gods that provided people with food (through hunting) and good health. In addition to Pau-Puk-Keewis, the Chippewa gambler, windigos, Nanabozho (the Chippewa cultural hero/trickster), and the underwater manito—all manitos from the Chippewa oral tradition—appear in Erdrich’s work. Windigos are cannibals made of ice or people whose insides are ice. In other novels in the *Love Medicine* series, we learn that members of the Nanapush family (including Fleur) may have gone “windigo” during starving times long ago. Nanabozho was important to Chippewas as hunters, and he helped Chippewa culture. Critics have argued that Erdrich’s character Gerry Morrisey is based both on this trickster/cultural hero (hence his supernatural ability to escape) and on Leonard Peltier—the Chippewa hero and activist. The underwater manito could both save people who fell through the ice and drown those who wandered—one of the worst ways that a Chippewa could die. Fleur encounters the underwater manito and survives, which tells us something about her power.

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ Have your students write a character sketch of Fleur. Does she change or surprise us, or is she constant? At what point do we know that Fleur is different from the other characters in the story? What linguistic and literary devices does Erdrich use to call attention to this difference?

■ It may be helpful to fill students in on some background about Fleur and the stories that people in her community tell about her, such as the idea that during a starving time she went windigo or that she met with an underwater manito and survived. One ethnographer reports that the Chippewa of Parry Island say there are spirits everywhere, “or there were until the white man came, for today, the Indians say, most of them have moved away.” Ask students to consider what it means that Fleur maintains this close relationship to the spirit realm even in the face of white settlement. What role does the supernatural play in the story?

## QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** Why is Fleur so threatening to the men? How do they respond to this threat?

**Comprehension:** By the end of the story, who does it seem did the actual locking up of the men in the meat locker?

**Context:** How are we meant to evaluate Fleur? How do the initial supernatural hints inform our feelings about her? What are we to make of her impossibly lucky poker playing? What is her relationship to her Chippewa heritage?

**Context:** How are we meant to evaluate the narrator, Pauline? What are we to make of her rejection of the Chippewa, her assertion that she “was made for better”? Why does she not help Fleur?

**Exploration:** What do you make of the fact that the story as originally published is “Fleur,” but that its appearance in *Tracks* is subtitled “Pauline”? If possible, read the novel to answer this question; however, you might speculate about this apparent interchangeability based simply upon the events and narration of the story.

**Exploration:** Why does it matter that the main characters here are both women? You might think of the story as an exploration of the range of options that Chippewa women in 1913 had to exercise power. In that case, consider the varying forms of power that both women display and speculate on what you think Erdrich is saying about gender.

## Chippewa Songs

Frances Densmore collected these Chippewa songs between 1907 and 1909. The songs reflect the culture of the Chippewa peoples who once lived along the shores of Lake Huron and Lake Superior, across Minnesota, and west to North Dakota. The Chippewa are Algonquian Indians; that is, they speak a language that is related to those others classified as part of the central Algonquian group. Chippewa and Ojibwa are the same word pronounced differently. They are composed of numerous tribes and bands, including the Turtle Mountain Band of which Louise Erdrich is a member. The Chippewa were the largest Great Lakes tribe and one of the most powerful tribes in North America. Because the Chippewa did not possess good farming lands, white settlement in their homelands was minimal, and hence they have been able to maintain much of their language and culture. Chippewa culture varies with geographic location: on the plains, for example, the Chippewa hunted buffalo. Most Ojibwe lived in the northern Great Lakes region and cultivated crops and supplemented their diet with hunting and gathering. They were skilled hunters, trappers, and fishers. The lakes and the spirits of the lake—the underwater manitos—became a central part of their cosmology.

Like other Algonquian peoples, the Chippewa lived in tipis. Theirs were dome-shaped and were made of birch bark that could be rolled up for easy transportation. Clothing was made out of buckskin and furs that were dyed. Today the Chippewa are renowned for their beautiful beadwork, particularly their beaded bandolier bags, named for

## ERDRICH WEB ARCHIVE

**[7178]** Vera Palmer, Interview: “Erdrich and the Captivity Narrative” (2001), courtesy of Annenberg Media. Vera Palmer, a distinguished American Indian activist and scholar, earned her Ph.D. from Cornell University. In an *American Passages* interview she talks about Louise Erdrich’s poem “Captivity.”

**[7427]** Linde, *Five Ojibwa Indians: Man, Woman, and Three Children in Canoe*—[“Typical Natives”] (c. 1913), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-101332]. For the Chippewas the ultimate sources of existence were the manitos—powerful beings who might be roughly characterized as spirits or gods. The underwater manito could both save people who fell through the ice and drown those who wandered.

**[7590]** George Catlin, *Sha-Co-Pay (The Six)*, [Chief of the Plains Ojibwa] (1842), courtesy of Tilt and Bogue, London.

“The chief of that part of the Ojibbeway tribe who inhabit these northern regions, and whose name is Sha-co-pay (the Six), is a man of huge size; with dignity of manner, and pride and vanity, just about in proportion to his bulk.”—George Catlin. This painting is one of 520 that resulted from an eight-year expedition during which Catlin visited over forty-five different tribes, participated in buffalo hunts, and observed ceremonies, games, dances and rituals.



**[7428]** Anonymous, Rocky Boy (Stone Child), a Chippewa Chief, Three-Quarter Length, Standing, Dressed in Ornate Costume (n.d.), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, Still Pictures Branch.

the bandolier, an ammunition belt worn over the shoulder and across the chest. These decorative bags served many utilitarian purposes. The Ojibwa often passed the time and entertained each other with stories and songs such as the ones in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*.

It is important to remember that while some songs are sacred and were both received and sung in a ceremonial context, others were not. As Frances Densmore, who collected a wide variety of songs among the Chippewa, explained in her 1915 article in *The Musical Quarterly*: “Among the Chippewa it was the custom for medicine men to build ‘nests’ in the trees, where they waited, fasting, until they secured a dream and its song. A man was very proud of a song received in this manner. . . . A medicine man always sang his principal dream song and related the dream before he began to treat a sick person.” For Densmore, love songs were wholly removed from this more sacred and traditional context. She identified three levels of songs: “First, there still remain some of the old songs, sung by the old singers. . . . Second, there are old ceremonial and medicine songs belonging to men now dead, but which can be sung, and sung with reasonable correctness, by men who heard them given by their owners. . . . Third, there are comparatively modern songs, which represent a transitional culture. If differentiated from the really old songs, these are not devoid of interest, though it is scarcely worth while to collect a great many of them.” Love songs were in this third “modern” category.

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ Play your students some of the music from the Chippewa songs in the archive. What is the tone of the music? How does it compare to the tone of the Chippewa songs in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*? Using Densmore’s categories as a starting point, have students create their own categories for the types of music.

■ Early musicologist Frances Densmore has this to say about the thirty love songs she recorded: “Only one was inspired by happiness. All these songs were comparatively modern. Too frequently the words contained the information that the singer intended to drown disappointment in liquor. On moonlight nights one hears wailing songs of this kind issuing from the barred windows of the agency guardhouse. Let us hope that future students of Indian music will pass them by. Weird they are, and melodious they may be, but representative of true Indian character they assuredly are not.” Ask students to refute Densmore’s claim. Upon what assumptions is it based? What does she mean by “true Indian character”? Why does she think that these songs would be less worth collecting?

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** Musicologist Frances Densmore claims that the Chippewa love songs are “comparatively modern songs, which represent a transitional culture.” Where do you see aspects of tra-

ditional Chippewa culture in these songs? Where do you see European American influences?

**Comprehension:** What is the tone of each of the songs? How does the tone compare to love songs you hear on the radio?

**Comprehension:** Why are there several Chippewa songs about Sioux women? What do Sioux women represent?

**Context:** Compare the more whimsical Chippewa love songs to the more ceremonial Ghost Dance songs. What rhythmic or linguistic clues help the reader know that the Ghost Dance songs are more serious in nature?

**Context:** How are women represented in the songs? To what extent are these representations consonant with traditional Western stereotypes about women, and to what extent do they challenge those stereotypes?

**Context:** Compare the vision of love presented in the Chippewa love songs with that in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* or *The Bingo Palace*. What does Lipsha mean by love?

**Exploration:** During the Renaissance, the Italian poet Petrarch refined a series of conceits that came to epitomize the way Western poets talked about the beloved. These include the idea of love as a battle or hunt, the power of the beloved's gaze being like a ray, the beauty of the beloved's person being like flowers or jewels, and the comparison of the beloved to a sun or star. Identify and examine Chippewa love conventions.

**Exploration:** Love is often depicted as a battle or hunt, in which the true test of passion comes in the pursuit. Compare the tension between the singer and the beloved in English poet Thomas Wyatt's "Whoso List to Hunt" and Chippewa poet Louise Erdrich's "Jacklight."

## "CHIPPEWA SONGS"

### WEB ARCHIVE

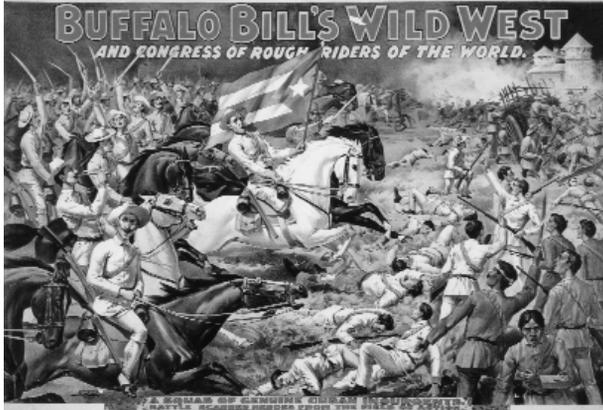
**[7428]** Anonymous, *Rocky Boy* (Stone Child), *A Chippewa Chief, Three-Quarter Length, Standing, Dressed in Ornate Costume* (n.d.), courtesy of the National Archives, Still Pictures Branch. Native American "Chief Songs" were sung by community members in praise of and to their chief. Fancy dress such as the outfit worn by Rocky Boy (Stone Child) reinforces authority and status in American Indian cultures. Rocky Boy was a famous chief, and the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation in Montana is named after him.

**[9087]** Cal Scott, *Music of Chippewa Songs* (2002), courtesy of Cal Scott Music. This is a sound recording of the music for the Chippewa songs featured in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*.

**[9106]** Thomas Wyatt, "Whoso List to Hunt," from *The Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (1913), courtesy of University of London Press. English poet Thomas Wyatt here reflects on the relationship between hunting and loving, a relationship that is also posed in contemporary poems like "Jacklight" by Louise Erdrich.

## Black Elk (1863–1950) and John G. Neihardt (1881–1973)

Born into the Oglala Lakota, Black Elk was an important Sioux visionary and religious leader. As a young man he received a Great Vision in which the Six Grandfathers—powers of the West, the North, the East, the South, the Sky, and the Earth—appeared to him. This vision was powerful enough to remain an important part of his consciousness as he grew up, and he became a shamanic healer in his late teenage years. When, in 1886, Black Elk joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, he became an Episcopalian, because all employees were required to be Christian. Though he later converted to Catholicism (in 1904), he passed on his vision to poet John G. Neihardt, and the record of this interaction became the 1932 book *Black Elk Speaks*. Much of the extant record of Native American narrative, poetry, and myth comes from transcriptions and translations often made by late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century, non-Native American anthropologists. John G. Neihardt, however, was not an anthropologist, and he did not speak Lakota; thus, his account of Black Elk's vision is not only filtered through several translators and transcribers but has been altered to fit Neihardt's own interpretation of Black Elk's world. These prac-



**[2251]** Anonymous, Poster for *Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World* (c. 1899), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-2943].

tices make *Black Elk Speaks* problematic if viewed as an authoritative American Indian text. In spite of these problems, the book has been—and continues to be—enormously influential.

John G. Neihardt, poet laureate of Nebraska, had a literary rather than a purely scientific motivation for speaking to Black Elk: he was gathering research material for the last volume of his epic poem, *A Cycle of the West*. In 1930 and 1931, he made several trips to Black Elk's cabin outside of Manderson, South Dakota, where they discussed poetry, spirituality, and Black Elk's life. *Black Elk Speaks* is also a product of the political upheavals of the 1930s. Even as *Black Elk Speaks* recounts the earlier period of

renewal during the Ghost Dance Movement, the authors are speaking and writing during another important period of American Indian rejuvenation—the years leading up to the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) or “Indian New Deal” of 1934. John Collier, the mastermind behind the IRA, suggests that the “Indian New Deal . . . held two purposes. One was the conservation of the biological Indian and of Indian culture, each with its special purposes. The other . . . was the conservation of the Indian's natural resources.” As an acquaintance of Collier (and later an employee of the Bureau of Indian Affairs [BIA]), Neihardt was intimately acquainted with the movement leading up to the IRA. It is clear that the more bellicose aspects of Black Elk's story were excised by Neihardt in an effort not to offend white readers. The relationship between the two men was, however, reciprocal: while Neihardt found in Black Elk a fertile resource for understanding Native American culture, Black Elk saw in Neihardt someone who could disseminate a prophetic vision he had experienced some sixty years earlier.

During the 1960s and 1970s, *Black Elks Speaks* became an important text for Indian activists who wanted to access earlier visions of power. Vine Deloria went so far as to call it the Indian Bible. For literary scholars, however, the text raises questions about the limits of autobiography (how can an autobiography have been written by someone else?) and the oxymoron at the heart of the phrase “American Indian autobiography.” As Arnold Krupat pointed out in 1981,

Autobiography as a particular form of self-written life is a European invention of comparatively recent date. . . . [W]e may note that the autobiographical project, as we usually understand it, is marked by egocentric individualism, historicism, and writing. These are all present in European and Euro American culture after the revolutionary last quarter of the eighteenth century. But none has ever characterized the native cultures of the present-day United States.

Mixed-blood critic Hertha Wong has argued that precontact written texts—as well as the oral tradition—help explain one of the fundamen-

tal differences between American Indian and Western autobiographies. Wong argues that the pictographic writings of the Sioux and other Plains tribes tended, like the oral tradition, to tell stories about the self which might be more accurately described as “communo-bi-oratory” (community-life-speaking) rather than “auto-bio-graphical” (self-life-writing), since they were about the person’s life in the context of their human, spiritual, and natural communities and the writings were intended to be part of an oral recitation, rather than to stand on their own. *Black Elk Speaks* provides an opportunity to question our assumptions about the genres of biography and autobiography more generally.

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ Have your students pair up and interview one another about their lives. Then have them write an “autobiography” for their partner. Follow this up by having the interviewee write a short comment on his or her “autobiography.” This activity illustrates the point that there is always a selection process in autobiography and also shows how the choice is lost when one is no longer the writer of the work.

■ In the oral tradition, repetition is crucial both for ceremonial reasons and because it aids in the process of memorization (which is how oral texts are preserved). In contrast, in written texts, we can turn back to earlier information if we need it; hence, repetition is less necessary. Ask students to pay attention in *Black Elk Speaks* both to what gets repeated and to how many times the repetition occurs. (In the Bible, the numbers 3, 4, and 7 are important. What numbers are important for Black Elk and why? What are their religious associations?) For many oral cultures, words have a great power to harm, heal, and create (think of the opening of the Bible, for example—originally an oral text.) Thus, to repeat words is to wield a certain power. What kind of power does language have in *Black Elk Speaks*? In addition to its ceremonial uses, repetition is also a crucial way of providing narrative cohesion in oral narratives. Repeating aspects of a story enables items to be linked in the minds of the listeners: what events and ideas does Black Elk link in his text and with what effect?

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** Who is Black Elk? Why does he receive the vision?

**Comprehension:** What seems to be the purpose of the Grandfathers’ council that Black Elk attends? What do the Grandfathers want to teach Black Elk?

**Comprehension:** What are the “four ascents” that Black Elk encounters?

**Context:** Consider the recurrence of the hoop in Black Elk’s vision. For the Sioux, circles stand for the cyclical, interconnected nature of life itself. Given this, how does the appearance of the hoop affect the significance of *Black Elk Speaks*?

#### BLACK ELK AND JOHN G. NEIHARDT WEB ARCHIVE

**[2251]** Anonymous, Poster for *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World* (c. 1899), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-2943]. As a young man, Black Elk took part in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. This poster shows a band of Rough Riders battling Cuban insurgents. The famous charge at San Juan Hill had taken place the previous year.

**[7418]** Anonymous, Boy’s moccasins, Lakota (n.d.), courtesy of the New York State Historical Association, Thaw Collection. Reservation-period (post-1880) beadwork on these dress moccasins shows how the American flag motif was incorporated into Native American design. This motif has been read as a sign of assimilation or as a way to capture the power of the enemy.

**[8117]** Mandan and Plains Indians, Moccasins (c. 1850–70), courtesy of the Portland Art Museum, gift of Elizabeth Cole Butler. Typical Plains clothing included buckskin aprons, leggings, and moccasins for men and buckskin dresses for women. Buffalo-skin robes were worn in cold weather. Decorated moccasins are common in portraits and photos of Plains Indians.

**Context:** Black Elk’s revelation occurred when he was nine years old, in 1872—seventeen years before the Ghost Dance religion came to the Sioux nation. How does Black Elk’s vision compare to the motifs present in the Ghost Dance songs and Wovoka’s “Messiah letters”?

**Context:** What is the relationship between *Black Elk Speaks* and the policies of the Indian New Deal (e.g., does it affirm, respond to, complicate, or negate such goals)? Does Neihardt (or Black Elk) believe in the “continuity of the group”? What must be continued? What “certain kinds of changes” should be induced and which should be controlled? What “traditions” must be “conserved”?

**Context:** Examine the Lakota boy’s moccasins decorated with American flags [7418] and compare them to the Plains moccasins [8117]. Is one of these more “traditional”? What are you assuming “traditional” means? How do you think Black Elk would have understood each of these artifacts?

**Exploration:** Consider the vision from *Black Elk Speaks* as literature. In what way is it like other literary texts with which you might be more familiar and that are more clearly fictional? Is this text “fictional” in any way? To what extent should we consider what we could call the text’s multiple-authorship when interpreting it?

**Exploration:** Compare this vision with one or both of the most famous prophetic visions in the Western tradition, the biblical Books of Daniel and Revelation. How does Black Elk’s vision compare to those granted to Daniel and John of Patmos? What are the most compelling clues in Black Elk’s narrative that signify that he experienced a non-Western revelation (again, think especially of the hoop imagery)?

### Ghost Dance Songs

One of the most tragic events in Native American history was the massacre of some two hundred Sioux men, women, and children at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, on the Pine Ridge reservation, on December 15, 1890. The slaughter of the Sioux was provoked in part by the Seventh Cavalry’s reaction to a multiday ceremony known as the Ghost Dance. A combination of traditional native religion and Christianity, the Ghost Dance religion had begun when a Paiute man, Wovoka, also called Jack Wilson, had a vision in 1889 shortly after a solar eclipse. After collapsing with severe scarlet fever, Wovoka found himself spiritually transported to a village where all the ancestors lived peacefully, surrounded by the old environment and engaging in the old activities. This precontact world would be soon restored to the indigenous people, God told Wovoka, so they should prepare themselves for its coming: they should live in peace, work, not lie or steal, and dance a Ghost Dance that would hasten the



**[4219]** Western Photograph Company, *Gathering Up the Dead at the Battlefield of Wounded Knee, South Dakota* (1891), courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.

return of the old world: the buffalo would again be plentiful and the Europeans would be swept away.

When Wovoka emerged from his fever, he began to spread this prophecy, which traveled widely among Plains Indians (as it had on a smaller scale in California in the early 1870s); before long 20,000 Sioux had begun to engage in the dance. Because this spiritual movement foretold the imminent destruction of the European invaders, it made U.S. officials extremely uneasy, and tensions reached the breaking point at Wounded Knee. By 1889, American Indians had already experienced several hundred years of physical and cultural violence, including the 1871 Congressional termination of treaties with native nations which opened the door even wider for decimation of the land, destruction of the buffalo, and starvation of the people. The Ghost Dance offered a hope for a new world, in the form of the old world of the ancestors, but that hope largely vanished after the Wounded Knee massacre. The Ghost Dance songs accompanied the dance itself, which was a version of the communal dance form long present in North America. The songs generally involved apocalyptic visions experienced by the Ghost Dancers, but they also incorporated native customs and images, as well as aspects of the daily life of the tribe. In its *syncretism* (its combining of different spiritual traditions), the Ghost Dance thus illustrates the American Indian value of keeping rituals currently relevant to the life of the tribe.

Like most traditional Native American songs, the Ghost Dance songs were never meant to be written down, but were intended to be experienced in an oral, ritual setting as an accompaniment to physical movement. Here literature is meant to act on the community, to affect the world in which it is performed, rather than to be passively consumed by individual audience members. Records of the Ghost Dance Movement and of Wounded Knee appear in *Black Elk Speaks* and in Charles Alexander Eastman's *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, as well as in James Mooney's *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*.

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ In his book *A Little Matter Called Genocide*, American Indian Movement (AIM) activist Ward Churchill places images of stacked bodies from Wounded Knee next to images of bodies from German concentration camps in World War II. These images have some shocking similarities and force the question: was Wounded Knee a genocidal act? More importantly, what are the implications of calling it one? Ask your students to define the word “genocide” and then to debate when we should limit the use of the word.

■ Have your students read either Black Elk's or Eastman's description of the Ghost Dance movement before they read the Ghost Dance songs. Why were the whites in the area so scared? You may want to have your students read the sections surrounding the description so they know what led up to the incident.

**GHOST DANCE SONGS  
WEB ARCHIVE**

**[4219]** Western Photograph Company, *Gathering up the Dead at the Battle Field of Wounded Knee, South Dakota* (1891), courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution. U.S. soldiers standing in front of a wagon full of dead Sioux. A blizzard delayed the burial of the dead. Eventually the Sioux were buried in a mass grave, with little effort made to identify the bodies.

**[8102]** Blackfeet Tribe, Shirt (c. 1890), courtesy of the Portland Art Museum, gift of Elizabeth Cole Butler. [86.126.32]. Shirts such as this one were worn by practitioners of the Ghost Dance religion. Clothing varied from tribe to tribe, but many believed that the shirts protected wearers from bullets and attack.

■ Unlike the Chippewa songs included in this unit, the Ghost Dance songs were highly ritualistic and performative: they were intended to bring about the deeds they describe. If we take these songs seriously, this would be disastrous for many of their readers. What does it mean, then, to read these songs respectfully? Use this as a problem-solving activity for students. How can an audience respond to literature that may, at its heart, want to end that audience's very existence? How does the text change when read by those who identify with the author, those who are targeted by the author, and those who are not directly implicated by the text? (Amiri Baraka's "Black Art" poems pose issues related to these questions.)

**QUESTIONS**

**Comprehension:** What is the purpose of the Ghost Dance songs? How did they aim to accomplish this goal? In what context were they first performed?

**Comprehension:** According to the songs, what exactly is "approaching" or "coming"?

**Context:** Repetition is an important part of most Native American rituals. It can, for example, emphasize ideas and strengthen the bonds of the community. What is the effect of the repetition in these songs? Given that the "message" of the words could be conveyed without the repetition, how would the songs be different without it?

**Context:** Why do the songs evoke both imminent change in North American power structures and the details of traditional tribal ways of life (for example, the processing of meat)?

**Exploration:** Mixed-blood critic Hertha Wong has argued that the pictographic writings of the Sioux and other Plains tribes tended, like works in the oral tradition, to tell stories about the self which might be more accurately described as "communo-bio-oratory" (community-life-speaking) rather than "auto-bio-graphical" (self-life-writing). In other words, they were about the person's life in the context of his or her human, spiritual, and natural communities and the writings were intended to be part of an oral recitation, rather than stand on their own. How is Black Elk's narrative "communo-bio-oratory"? Is Black Elk's story community-centered? If so, how and who is his community? What is the role of the spoken word in his text?

**Exploration:** Compare these songs with both Black Elk's vision and the Book of Revelation. Keeping in mind that "apocalypse" is a transliteration of the Greek word for "revelation," consider how the Ghost Dance's vision of apocalypse compares to that in other works.

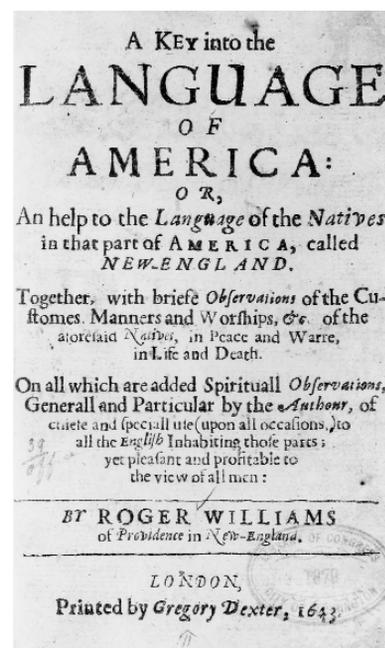
## Non-Native Representations of Indians

### Roger Williams (c. 1603–1683)

Although we do not have written texts by Algonquian Indians from the very early contact period, we can learn about their language and culture from the way it is presented by such Europeans as Roger Williams, who lived among native communities. A Puritan whose unorthodox views alienated him from both the Massachusetts Bay and the Plymouth colonies, Williams has been reclaimed by some contemporary scholars as a democratic and pluralistic hero. Born in London, Williams studied at Cambridge, where he received his B.A. in 1627, but which he left in 1629, without having completed his M.A., to become a Puritan chaplain. He sailed to the New World on December 10, 1630; there tensions almost immediately arose between him and various members of the Puritan hierarchy (including, at different times, William Bradford, John Winthrop, and Cotton Mather—writers featured in Unit 3, “Utopian Promise”).

The primary theological and political position that distinguished Williams was his assertion that church and state should be separate entities, with neither one having jurisdiction in the matters of the other. This was the first American articulation of the separation of church and state, appearing some 150 years before Thomas Jefferson’s, and it did not sit at all well with the Puritan oligarchy (though it is worth noting that, unlike Jefferson’s, Williams’s concern was that the *church* not be corrupted by the *state*). In particular, Williams argued that the Massachusetts Bay Puritans should distance themselves from England (and therefore from English material support) by becoming Separatists, that their royal charter was invalid since Christians had no right to heathen lands, and that civil authorities should not meddle in spiritual affairs. When he was charged with subversion and spreading discord, he moved from Boston to Plymouth, where he established friendly trading relations with the Indians. Williams soon became pastor to Salem, where he continued preaching his subversive doctrines and in 1635 was indicted for heresy and divisiveness and sentenced to be banished. He escaped this fate only by fleeing to an Indian settlement, where he purchased land from the Narragansetts and founded Providence. This city became a haven for exiles and outcasts, from Anne Hutchinson to Baptists, Seekers, Antinomians, Quakers, and Jews.

Throughout his life Williams held important offices and fought for Native American rights, acting as negotiator for the Narragansetts during King Philip’s War (which did not prevent them from being all but decimated by the end of that war). Although he produced various texts, his most famous is *A Key into the Language of America* (1643), which is in part a promotional tract for New World settlement in the tradition of Thomas Harriot’s *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*. *A Key into the Language of America*, however, is much more complicated ideologically: it is also an ethnographic study of Native American culture, a grammar of Native American languages, a defense of Native American cultures in the face of European allega-



[5219] Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* (1643), courtesy of the Rosenbach Museum & Library.

## WILLIAMS WEB ARCHIVE

**[1210]** John Underhill, *The Figure of the Indians' Fort or Palizado in New England and the Manner of the Destroying it by Captayne Underhill and Captayne Mason* (1638), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-32055]. In 1636, the English settlers engaged in a campaign to wipe out the Pequot tribe of New England. Captain John Underhill chronicled the Pequot War in his *News from America* (1638), providing this sketch of the Puritans, along with their Narragansett allies, encircling and destroying a Pequot village.

**[1232]** Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent, of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience, Discussed, in a Conference Betweene Truth and Peace* (1644), courtesy of the Library of Congress. Roger Williams's *Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* was a plea to the Massachusetts legislature for freedom of conscience for himself and others in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

**[5219]** Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* (1643), courtesy of the Rosenbach Museum & Library. Williams held important offices and fought for Native American rights, including acting as negotiator for the Narragansetts during King Philip's War. In 1643 he published *A Key into the Language of America*. *A Key*, which deals with Narragansett language and culture, is an unusual and sympathetic mix of ethnography, grammar, and promotional tract.

**[6942]** Christopher Moses, *Photo of Statue of Roger Williams, Providence, Rhode Island* (2002), courtesy of Christopher Moses. A Puritan whose unorthodox views alienated him from both the Massachusetts Bay and the Plymouth colonies, Roger Williams has been reclaimed by some contemporary scholars as a democratic and pluralistic hero.

tions of immorality, and a lament for the “false religion” of the natives. Although Williams shared the common European assumption that only Christianity could save souls, this text does reveal his interest in analyzing American Indian language and culture on its own terms rather than by Western standards alone. Williams, like many Puritans, subscribed to the theory that Indians were ancestors of one of the “lost tribes” of Israel, applying a falsely Eurocentric view of native genealogy. Still, Williams remains one of the most powerful seventeenth-century European voices of sympathy and admiration for the American Indian.

## TEACHING TIPS

■ Have your students write a natural history of, or promotional tract for, a place in which they have lived, using the standard structure of Renaissance travel literature. How does their work compare to Harriot's or Williams's?

■ Have your students write a first-contact narrative about meeting the Narragansetts or Wampanoags from a Puritan point of view. What is likely to have concerned them? What differences are they likely to have noticed? How is their text a **bicultural production**?

■ Ask your students to compare the Puritan creation stories (Genesis, for example) to those of the Native Americans in the East. What does each tell us about how they view humans? How they view the supernatural? How they view the relationship between the two?

## QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** What does Williams say about the religion of the natives?

**Comprehension:** According to Williams, why did he write *A Key into the Language of America*?

**Context:** What is the effect of Williams's constructing his book as “an implicit dialogue” that “respects the native language of it”? Keep in mind that there was a range of seventeenth-century opinion about how the Indians should be treated, with some advocating negotiation and partnership and others arguing for their elimination. Do you think Williams implies a value judgment when he describes the Narragansett language as “exceeding[ly] copious”?

**Context:** Compare Williams's attitude toward the Indians with Thomas Harriot's (below). What message about Native Americans does each try to convey to his Renaissance English readers?

**Exploration:** To what extent is Williams “ethnocentric”? That is, to what extent does he seem to assume that European culture and beliefs are true and correct and that, therefore, alternative cultures and beliefs must be inferior?

**Exploration:** Compare Williams's portrait of the Narragansetts to Mary Rowlandson's (Unit 3). What, besides circumstance, seems to account for his greater sympathy?

**Exploration:** Spanish American grammars of the New World from the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries tended to be organized in the same format as Latin grammars. Williams's grammar, on the other hand, is startlingly new in that it organizes its linguistic information by situation. What impact does this structure have upon the message Williams hopes to make?

### Thomas Harriot (1560–1621)

Born in England and educated at Oxford, Thomas Harriot was employed as a young man by the explorer Sir Walter Raleigh. In 1585 he accompanied Raleigh's New World expedition to Roanoke, where, as a naturalist, he collaborated with painter John White to study the landscape and its inhabitants. Although Harriot must have kept notebooks, none survives. The existing record of his observations is *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588), an optimistic account of native culture that seems to have been written at Raleigh's direction. Although this work lacks candor—Harriot avoids mentioning how the colonists fled a brutal storm by ship—it does acknowledge how the Indians were gradually devastated by disease and provides detailed descriptions of these native peoples in their soon-to-be-changing natural environment.

Harriot's account provides some of the only information we possess on the Roanoke people, who perished from disease soon after the Roanoke colony ceased to exist. South of the Potomac River the Virginian Algonquian peoples were united in the Powhatan Confederacy in the late 1500s. The leader of this confederacy, Powhatan, would eventually pledge his daughter to John Rolfe; and, if we are to believe John Smith, this same Indian princess, Pocahontas, saved Smith's life. Harriot's and John White's accounts provide us with important cultural information. Colonial accounts by travelers such as Harriot contribute to our limited understanding of the Native American communities whose own records have not survived.

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ Have your students write an ethnographic account of their own family, class, or school as if they were outside observers. You may want to have them do this in two stages: first, have them compose a description of behavior and practices without any analysis; second, have them switch papers with another student and analyze the “meanings” of the group. This short-circuits students' assumptions that they already know these meanings, and it can viscerally implant the sense of unease or even invasion on the part of the object of the ethnography.

■ Students often assume that Renaissance explorers used our own understandings of race and “otherness” when categorizing Native Americans, even though our notions of race today are much indebted to Enlightenment (i.e., eighteenth-century) thought. Show your students Konrad Kolble's map of the New World, which depicts four famous European explorers at its corners, and ask them to identify what makes these figures, literally and conceptually, different from



[7429] John White, *The Manner of Attire and Painting Themselves, When They Goe to Their General Huntings or at Their Solemne Feasts* (c. 1585), courtesy of The British Museum.

#### HARRIOT WEB ARCHIVE

[1368] Konrad Kolble, *Replica of a Map of the Americas with Portraits of Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, Ferdinand Magellan and Francisco Pizarro Around Border* (1970), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-89908]. In Konrad Kolble's facsimile of a map published in 1600 by Theodor de Bry, we see four of the most famous European explorers framing the New World, a testimony to its assumed possession by the Old.

**[1900]** John White, *The Manner of Their Fishing* (c. 1585), courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University. One of John White's drawings not taken directly from real life: he shows a dip net and spear (daytime fishing techniques) and a fire in a canoe (used to attract fish at night). White combined disparate New World fishing methods and a mix of species in this and other paintings.

**[7429]** John White, *The Manner of Their Attire and Painting Themselves, When They Goe to Their General Huntings or at Their Solemne Feasts* (c. 1585), courtesy of The British Museum. This is a portrait of an Algonquian Indian (either Secotan or Pomeiooc) from Virginia. Elite families and chiefs were elaborately decorated with paint, beads, and quills to signal their status and power. The pose, taken from sixteenth-century European portraits, emphasizes the importance of the subject and the occasion.

the depictions of Native Americans? What does this map infer about what makes someone civilized or savage? How are these categories reflected in White's drawings and Harriot's descriptions?

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** What does Harriot emphasize about North America and its native inhabitants?

**Comprehension:** What precisely does Harriot object to in the religion of Native Americans?

**Context:** *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* is largely an advertisement for European settlement in the New World. How do you see Harriot constructing his description of the New World in order to make it seem attractive to ambitious Europeans? How does his view of the New World compare to Williams's?

**Context:** To what extent is *A Brief and True Report* a conduct book for the English? Conduct books were manuals that sought to inculcate proper etiquette, behavior, and therefore values in their readers. In what ways does Harriot advise the English to behave in the New World?

**Context:** Compare Harriot's description of the Roanokes' dress with "The Manner of Their Attire and Painting Themselves" [7429]. Has White taken any liberties or filled in any gaps?

**Exploration:** Like Bernal Díaz del Castillo (Unit 2), Harriot emphasizes that he is giving a "true" report. How does Harriot establish the veracity of his report? Does he give any clues to what a false report might be? How do his attempts at establishing authority compare to those of Díaz del Castillo?

**Exploration:** How do Harriot's objections to native religion show his unspoken assumptions about what is spiritual and what is material?

### Suggested Teaching Pairs

#### LUCI TAPAHONSO AND LOUISE ERDRICH

Both Luci Tapahonso and Louise Erdrich emphasize the relationship of female power to Native American culture. Tapahonso's poems explore the relationship among generations of women, the image of birth as a renewal and a healing, and the power of such mythical female figures as Dawn Woman. She explores a worldview that itself emphasizes connection and change. You may want to contrast this female-centered space with the white town in "Fleur." At the beginning of "Fleur" Erdrich casts the male Chippewa as frightened by the spiritual connection Fleur has to nature, marked most clearly by her supposed multiple deaths and resurrections. Fleur (whose very name implies a link to nature) makes the men panic. Even Pauline, although a less sympathetic character than Fleur, manages to have a profound effect on her world and certainly can't be considered weak or yielding. You may also want to compare Tapahonso's verse style with the light-

hearted Chippewa love songs, or compare their view of gender relations with that in Erdrich's work.

#### **LESLIE MARMON SILKO AND SIMON J. ORTIZ**

In their works Leslie Marmon Silko and Simon J. Ortiz engage with the intersection of modern warfare and native cultures. Tayo, the protagonist of Silko's *Ceremony*, takes a journey away from the European American contexts of World War II and alcoholism toward the native contexts of the Ts'eh, a mountain spirit. This journey is healing, a movement away from the corruption and destruction of the West and toward wholeness, harmony, and peace. Ortiz paints a powerful yet simple image of European American violence in "8:50 AM Ft. Lyons VAH": the straight line of the hospital wall blocks the view of the geese. That line stands not only for the hospital built to cope with the ravages of Western war, but also for the entirety of the West's antinatural worldview, where the living contours of the land and its creatures are cut and divided by the rigid measures of an arrogant technology. Both writers emphasize the power of the oral tradition and its constant adaptation to new contexts and experiences. Have your students compare the differences between the oral traditions of these closely related communities.

#### **STORIES OF THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD AND THE NARRATIVES OF ROGER WILLIAMS AND THOMAS HARRIOT**

Stories of the Beginning of the World and the narratives of Roger Williams and Thomas Harriot provide two different views of the world and of native peoples. In the Stories of the Beginning of the World, we hear, through translators, of the cosmographies of the Iroquois and Pima peoples. These accounts contrast with Harriot's and Williams's views on how native cultures (specifically the Narragansett and Roanoke) are structured and what the communities value. It is worth calling students' attention to the differences in content and form of these accounts. In addition, you may want to discuss the different goals of the stories and Renaissance travel accounts. While the creation stories aim to integrate the listener into the community and its worldview, both Williams's and Harriot's works are in a sense advertisements for European settlement of the New World. While neither author's narrative is virulently racist and ethnocentric in the ways of many of their contemporaries' works (compare, say, the works of John Smith and William Bradford, two important Englishmen who have little or no sympathy for the Indians), they still aim to assimilate the "other" into the European cosmography.

#### **BLACK ELK AND GHOST DANCE SONGS**

Black Elk's narrative is usefully read alongside the Ghost Dance songs. It recounts the period of the Ghost Dance and the devastating experi-

ence of Wounded Knee, and it provides important contextual information on the goals of the Ghost Dance movement. Black Elk’s vision might also be usefully compared to that of the Ghost Dance songs, as in many ways it signals the continuing renewal of Lakota culture, long after the Ghost Dance movement has ended. Students should pay attention to the use of repetition and significant numbers in both the vision and the songs. These texts illustrate the ways in which native spiritual traditions often appropriated and reinvented Christianity. Students should pay attention to the messianic nature of the Ghost Dance songs and their use of the Shaker (Christian) tradition, as well as to Black Elk’s own continuing dedication to a Lakota brand of Catholicism. These texts provide a superb opportunity to discuss the problems inherent in translation. To what extent is the power of vision in the songs lost in the movement into English and into a Western “literary” form?

## CORE CONTEXTS

### “God Is Red”: The Clashes and Contacts of Native Religion and Christianity

Although Vine Deloria Jr. argues in his classic and polemical book *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* that Christianity and Native religions are polar opposites, since the very first days of European-Indian contact, many Native Americans have adopted and adapted Christianity for their own purposes. As scholars have noted, native religions always sought out new forms of power that could be incorporated into their religious practices. Thus while white New England missionaries often assumed that they were converting natives into “red Puritans,” practitioners of Native Christianity most often created an **emergent religion**: one that added new spiritual practices to an existing framework.

Although there are probably as many different forms of Native Christianity as there are Native Christians, a few basic generalizations provide an important starting point for understanding the forms taken by this melding of religions. For instance, Deloria argues that the fundamental difference between Christianity and native religion is an orientation to time in the former and an orientation to space in the latter. That is, Christianity is a time-based religion, predicated on the ideas that the universe has a definite beginning and a definite end and that human life is a sort of “dress rehearsal” for the last judgment and afterlife-placement. Native religion, Deloria claims, is space-based: it grows out of and accounts for the particular landscape of the tribe, has no conception of a primordial time when humans were pure but then fell into sin, and anticipates no future of a radically different order (as Christianity posits will come about at the Second Coming of Christ). For native religion, humans have always been and will always be the way they are, and the world will always be more or less as it is;



[2466] John Eliot, First page, *Genesis from the Holy Bible: Containing the Old Testament and the New* (1663), courtesy of the Annenberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania.

even the afterlife is primarily a pleasant version of life in the tribe. Our job, writes Deloria, is to deal ethically and responsibly with each other and with the web of all creation to which we are here and now connected—the land, the animals, the plants, the spirits of the ancestors—rather than to prepare for some future moment in which all will be transformed. Deloria’s generalizations do not hold true for all native cultures: some tribes such as the Pomo of California do speak of a time in which the world was radically different. Even though Deloria’s abstractions have been hotly debated by scholars, this healing vision of spiritual practice is reflected in the work of many contemporary Native American writers, especially and most elaborately in Silko’s *Ceremony*, but also in the poetry of Ortiz and Tapahonso.

Native versions of Christianity often present a mixture of these two religious outlooks. For example, a popular story for missionaries was the idea that Native Americans were one of the lost tribes of Israelites. This story fit with the notion of Christianity as a time-based religion: from the missionaries’ perspective, American Indians’ history began with the arrival of the whites and moved forward with conversion and the eventual return of Christ. For early Native American Christian converts, however, the story was not so simple. Many, such as Guaman Poma of Peru and William Apess (Unit 4), argued that Native Americans were already Christians upon the arrival of the whites—in fact, they were much better Christians than the Europeans! This notion reflects the perspective that humans have always been and will always be the way they are and that the world will always be more or less as it is. Similarly, movements such as the Ghost Dance combine Christian apocalyptic thought with a basic faith in the interconnectedness of the land, the animals, the plants, the spirits of the ancestors. By appropriating elements of Christianity, Ghost Dance dancers and singers aimed to fight the enemy with its own weapons, in this case with religious firearms.

The history of Christianity and Native American communities has not always been uplifting. Since the earliest days of European settlement, Native Americans have been the object of strenuous conversion attempts that nevertheless failed to guarantee them equal treatment either before the law or in American religious life. Indeed, Native American converts were often viewed with suspicion both by their own communities and by European settlers: for example, Mary Rowlandson (Unit 3) has only unkind things to say about “Praying Indians” and indeed most praying Indians were forcibly interned and starved on an island in Boston Harbor during King Philip’s War. Samson Occom (Unit 3), a Mohegan from Connecticut who was converted to Christianity at sixteen and later became a popular preacher in America and England, recalls similar mistreatment. In his *A Short Narrative of My Life* (1768), he sums up the years of discrimination and abuse he suffered: “I must Say, ‘I believe [my mistreatment by white Christians] is because I am a poor Indian.’ I Can’t help that God has made me So; I did not make my self so.—”



**[4210]** Anonymous, *John Collier and Hopi Men* (c. 1920), courtesy of CSULB, National Archives.

#### “GOD IS RED” WEB ARCHIVE

**[2059]** N. C. Wyeth, *The Suppliant* (1919), courtesy of Reed College Library Special Collections, Portland, Oregon. Illustration from the N. C. Wyeth edition of *Last of the Mohicans*. Here Cora pleads with the Delaware sachem Tamenund for the life of her sister, Alice. The theme of white women at the mercy of “savage” natives was made popular by early American captivity narratives.

**[2466]** John Eliot, First page, *Genesis from the Holy Bible: Containing the Old Testament and the New* (1663), courtesy of the Annenberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania. This translation of the first page of Genesis into Massachusetts an Algonquian language, was done with the help of John Sassamon (Massachuset), whose murder in 1675 for being an English informant began King Philip’s War.

**[2836]** Bernard Picard, Illustration from *Cérémonies et Coutumes Religieuses des Peuples Idolâtres* (1723), courtesy of the Jay I. Kislak Foundation, Inc. European depictions of Native American ceremonies, such as this one from Picard’s six-volume masterpiece on world religions, often tell us more about Europeans and their anxieties than about the actual experiences they record.

**[3249]** Joseph-Francois Lafitau, *An Iroquois Funeral as Observed by a French Missionary, Early 1700s* (1724), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Rare Books and Special Collections. Detail from *Moeurs des Sauvages Amériquiens Comparées aux Moeurs des Premiers Temps* (Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times [in Europe]). This drawing provides insight into Iroquois death rituals.

**[4210]** Anonymous, *John Collier and Hopi Men* (c. 1920), courtesy of CSULB, National Archives. Indian Commissioner John Collier helped fight the U.S. government's assimilationist policies and argued for the protection of American Indian cultures, religions, and languages. He is best known for the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934.

**[6783]** Edward S. Curtis, *Altar Peyote with Rattle (Osage)* (1930), courtesy of the Library of Congress [E77.C97]. The Osage Indians of Missouri were ardent practitioners of the Peyote Religion. Ceremonies include a prayer meeting in a house designed for the ritual and the singing of Peyote songs. Taken from a cactus, peyote buttons have hallucinogenic properties. Peyote cults entered the United States from Mexico in the nineteenth century.

**[7588]** George Catlin, *Dog Feast*, from *The Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians* (1842), courtesy of Tilt and Bogue, London. In Letter no. 28, Catlin remarks, "The dog-feast is given, I believe, by all tribes in North America; and by them all, I think, this faithful animal, as well as the horse, is sacrificed in several different ways, to appease offended Spirits or Deities" (*Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*).

## QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** According to Deloria, what is one basic difference between Native American religions and Christianity?

**Comprehension:** In what way does the Ghost Dance religion display the influence of Christianity?

**Comprehension:** What is an emergent religion?

**Context:** Find all the moments where the contemporary native writers in this unit blur the sacred and the secular. For example, is Tapahonso's "A Breeze Swept Through" a religious poem? Why or why not? In what sense might Ortiz's "8:50 AM Ft. Lyons VAH," despite its basically secular surface, be religious in a native sense?

**Context:** Using Ts'eh as an example, discuss the role gender plays in Pueblo religion.

**Context:** Reformer John Collier (1884–1968) created the American Indian Defense Association in 1923 to fight the assimilationist policies of the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887, and he was instrumental in salvaging religious rights for Indians. Consider the archive image of him and two Hopi men: what does their body language say about their relationship, and by extension the relationship in the early twentieth century between white and native cultures?

**Exploration:** You may never have seen a version of the Bible written in a nonmodern language, as in the archive image of the Bible translated into Massachusset, a native language. The Bible was originally written mostly in ancient Hebrew and Greek, so even the contemporary versions with which you might be more familiar are translations and therefore at some distance from the original. How do you think translation of sacred texts might affect their meaning? Does this "Indian Bible" seem less strange than, say, Chippewa songs in English?

**Exploration:** Compare Mary Rowlandson's vision of the Narragansetts and "Praying Indians" to Roger Williams's vision of the Narragansetts. What is the relationship between Puritanism and Narragansett religion in each text? What is the potential for conversion?

**Exploration:** Why do you think someone like Samson Occom would have converted to Christianity? How is it that a person can be brought up with one worldview and then later change it? Occom says that he was never really treated fairly by white Christians, but in what ways do you think he might have nevertheless benefited from being a Christian?

**Exploration:** Challenge Deloria's claims about Native American religions. For example, to what extent is myth an example of a "primordial time"?

## Healing Arts: The Navajo Night Chant (Nightway)

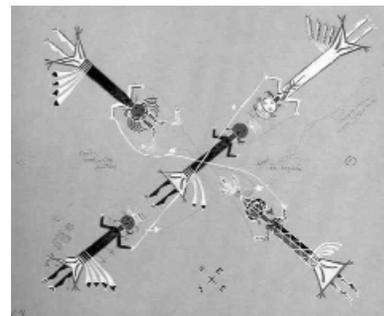
Healing songs and chants are an important genre in Native American oral traditions. As a general rule, songs and chants seek to re-create a state rather than an event. Songs and chants are also rarely told in a

vacuum: the Night Chant, for example, is composed of a whole series of practices—including dances, the construction of sandpaintings, and the use of prayer sticks—that constitute a nine-day healing ceremony traditionally performed by the Navajo. Although the Night Chant is specific to the Navajo, it provides an important example of the interrelatedness of language, healing, and spirituality in native traditions. It is one of the great masterpieces of the oral tradition.

The Night Chant is a “way” insofar as it attempts not just to break into the natural course of an illness, but in fact sets the “patient” on the path or way toward reestablishing the natural harmony and balance that allow for health. For the Navajo, who migrated to the Southwest from the northern lands sometime between seven hundred and one thousand years ago, the Night Chant is one of many ceremonial chants meant to affect the world in some concrete manner. The Night Chant is a healing ceremony, a treatment for illness, especially paralysis, blindness, and deafness. In the words of anthropologist and ethnographer James C. Faris, Night Chant practices are those that “order, harmonize and re-establish and situate social relations.” Hence the ceremony emphasizes humans’ ability to control their world and their responsibility to use that control in the service of balance, respect, and healing. If the Holy People—the ancestors or the spirits—inflict suffering, it is because people have broken the rules; the Night Chant attempts to put the rules back together, to restore the conditions conducive to order, balance, and health.

The ceremony begins at sunset when the chanter, the medicine man who conducts the ceremony and the only one with the knowledge of proper Night Chant practice, enters the home of the patient, the one who is to be cured. After a ritual call for participation (“Come on the trail of song”)—which emphasizes the role of not only the patient but all guests present to form a community of healing—the patient sits to the west of a fire. There follow elaborate chants, songs, and dances. The first four days are devoted to purification, after which the Holy People are called upon. On the sunrise of the ninth day, the patient is invited to look eastward and greet the dawn, representative of renewal. The chant is fundamentally narrative, although not necessarily continuous, and its specific details and enactments vary greatly among different medicine men and the particular needs of the patient. Faris emphasizes the flexibility and fluidity of the elements of the story. There is no central episode that must be retold in all cases for the ceremony to be effective; rather, specific episodes arise from local situations, and no single medicine man possesses the knowledge of every possible episode. But there is generally a basic storyline, which tells of a long-ago cultural hero of particular visionary power who gathers the details of how to properly conduct the ceremony from the Holy People. The Night Chant is therefore in part a perpetual retelling of itself; it is neither entertainment nor abstract teaching, but the ritual reenactment of its own origin. In this origin is the way toward order, which is the way toward healing. Through this retelling the singer aims to bring about **hózhó**, or holiness, harmony, beauty.

The sandpaintings reflect this goal of balance and harmony seek-



[5951] Anonymous, *Rattle Shock Rite* (1980–2002), courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona Photo Archives.



[5953] Anonymous, *Whirling logs* (n.d.), from J. C. Faris, *The Nightway: A History and a History of Documentation of a Navajo Ceremonial* (1990), courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona Photo Archives.



**[5742]** Anonymous, *Navajo Shaman Drypainting a Remedy* (n.d.), courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History.

#### HEALING ARTS WEB ARCHIVE

**[5741]** Anonymous, *Two Navaho Shaman Dry Painting to Cure and Illness* (n.d.), courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History. Navajo sand paintings, or “dry” paintings, are meant to summon and embody the spirits of the holy people and therefore are wiped away immediately after the Night Chant ceremony.

**[5742]** Anonymous, *Navajo Shaman Drypainting a Remedy* (n.d.), courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History. The Navajo Night Chant is a nine-day healing ceremony that includes dances, sandpaintings, and prayer sticks. Sandpaintings reflect the Navajo value of *hózhó*, or holiness, harmony, beauty.

**[5743]** Anonymous, *Navajo Shaman Puts Finishing Touches on Remedy Painting* (n.d.), courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History. The Navajo use sandpaintings in an elaborate, nine-day ceremony designed to cure illness by restoring order, balance, and harmony. The paintings are wiped away as soon as the ritual is complete.

ing. Created for the ceremony and immediately wiped away, the sandpaintings elaborately echo some of the main patterns and images of the chant. As sacred artifacts, they are not intended to be recorded through film or painting. Because they are designed specifically to attract the attention of (and eventually embody) the Holy People, it would be a dangerous violation to allow them to exist after the proper time for spiritual contact had passed. Those included in the *American Passages* archive were painted by a priest based on sketches taken from the work of a medicine man who authorized them to be shown to the public. Reproductions such as these have usually been altered to diffuse their power. Surviving notes suggest that there are several inaccuracies in the Rattle Shock Rite image; for example, the owl feathers on the central figure should be spotted and decorations should be added to the belt of the central figure. Like the multiple levels of transmission that Black Elk’s narrative went through (see above), the various mediations these images have undergone continue to define a communal center of identity and knowledge in opposition to the outsider—however sympathetic he or she may be.

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** Which tribe is the Night Chant associated with?

**Comprehension:** What is the Night Chant used for?

**Comprehension:** What acts does the Night Chant involve?

**Context:** In Silko’s *Ceremony*, Betonie is a mixed-blood Navajo healer.

In what sense can you see the Night Chant or something like it being used in this novel? How is what Tayo goes through like the ritual described above? To what extent does his ceremony take into consideration contemporary sources of illness? How does it seek to deal with these sources of pain?

**Context:** Examine one of the sandpaintings in the archive. How does it seek to achieve harmony and balance? How does it exemplify *hózhó*? Compare the strategies it uses for achieving harmony and balance to those in Tapahonso’s poetry.

**Context:** Examine the Rattle Shock Rite image in the archive. Note that it is centered around four figures that represent gods of the North, South, East, and West. Why might these figures be important in *Ceremony*? Why do you think four might be such an essential number for many Native American beliefs (as opposed, say, to the three and seven of Christianity)?

**Context:** Compare the text of the Night Chant to that of the Ghost Dance songs. What strategies does each use to achieve harmony and balance? How are these strategies related to the goal of each text?

**Exploration:** Why might a Navajo not want a non-Native American to know the details of the Night Chant? Does this seem reasonable to

you? Are there things about your life you wouldn't want others to know, even though their knowledge would not affect your life? Navajos believe that knowing things about people *can* affect people. If knowledge could give people power over you, would you be less likely to give people access to personal information?

**Exploration:** Do you think the sandpainting images in the archive are aesthetically pleasing? How do you know “good” art when you see it? For example, to what extent is it reasonable to assume that realistic figures constitute good art?

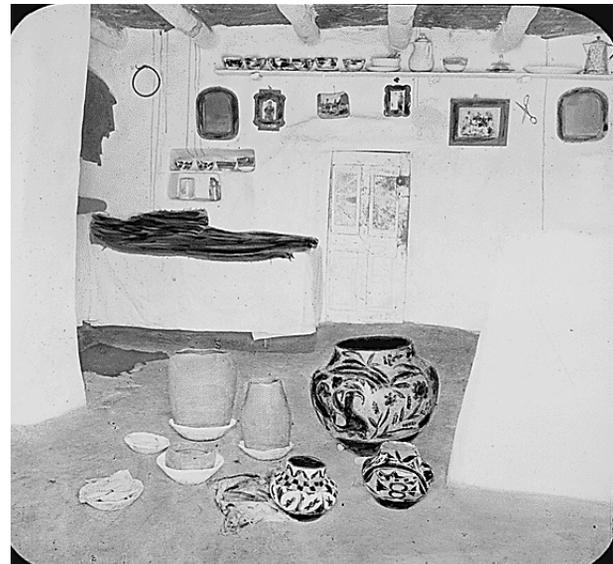
### **Singing Mothers and Storytelling Grandfathers: The Art and Meaning of Pueblo Pottery**

Pottery is an important Native American art form that dates back thousands of years. As Simon J. Ortiz notes, “[Pottery making] has more to do with a sense of touching than with seeing because fingers have to know the texture of clay and how the pottery is formed from lines of shale, strata and earth movements.” Pueblo pottery is considered some of the most beautiful, and it has deep ties to storytelling traditions. Pueblo cultures, along with those of the Navajo and Apache, constitute the dominant native traditions in the American Southwest. Pottery dates back over fifteen hundred years to the Anasazi period, but in the past few decades there has been a tremendous revival in pottery-making among the Pueblo people, led in part by the Cochiti Pueblo potter Helen Cordero and her Storyteller dolls. Cordero's pottery challenged the appropriation of Native American art by white art collectors.

Native works of art and craft have a troubled history in mainstream American culture. Like so much of native culture, objects such as bowls and dolls were at least potentially sacred: if used in certain ritual contexts, they acted as embodied prayers to ancestors or gods. The kachinas in the archive are good examples of this: they are dolls, but they embody a ritual significance as well [8110, 8209]. As such, they were not to be handled and scrutinized by curious Europeans, even investigative anthropologists. Nevertheless, soon after the introduction of railroads into the Southwest, Indians (many of whom found themselves desperately poor after having their traditional ways of life disrupted) began producing pottery and other artifacts for European commercial consumption. This trade, which began in the 1880s, allowed a modest income for many Pueblo and other native peoples. In most cases, the objects differed in subtle but profoundly significant ways from the ones intended for tribal use, and so did not directly endanger the tribe's traditions: this practice continues to be a concern for some native writers who incorporate traditional material in their work.

**[5951]** Anonymous, *Rattle Shock Rite* (1980–2002), courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona Photo Archives. Sandpaintings are used in Navajo ceremonies and are designed to attract the attention of the Holy People. This reproduction has been altered to diffuse its power.

**[5953]** Anonymous, *Whirling Logs* (n.d.), from J. C. Faris, *The Nightway: A History and a History of Documentation of a Navajo Ceremonial* (1990), courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona Photo Archives. This reproduction of a Navajo sandpainting differs from the original in subtle but significant ways. The story told in Nightway Chant changes with every shaman and patient. Sandpaintings like this often reflect main themes or images from the narrative thread of the ritual.



**[5890]** Henry Peabody, *Pottery in the Interior of an Acoma Dwelling, New Mexico* (c. 1900), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

**SINGING MOTHERS**  
**WEB ARCHIVE**

**[5890]** Henry Peabody, *Pottery in the Interior of an Acoma Dwelling, New Mexico* (c. 1900), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Pottery is an important part of Pueblo culture. Even clay is believed to be endowed with a “spirit” of its own. Here we see the inside of a traditional Pueblo home in which one family’s roof was another’s floor.

**[6756]** Anonymous, Frontispiece from *The Land of the Pueblos* (1891), courtesy of J. B. Alden, New York. Although Pueblo pottery has long been considered sacred and used in rituals, many pots today are made for the tourist trade and for non-Pueblo collectors. Potter Helen Cordero, however, rejects the Western sense of “art” as ornamental or merely entertaining.

**[7312]** Anonymous, Video of corn dancers (c. 1940), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. The people of Acoma have been making pottery for centuries, both for everyday use and for rituals such as the Corn Dance. The Corn Dance is held annually at a tribal site near Albuquerque, New Mexico. The dance was given by the supernatural Mother, who wanted her people to have a public dance which all could enjoy. Prayer sticks are used in the dance to bring legendary hero Koshari. Sacred clowns painted in black and white join the dance.

**[8113]** Huron Tribe, Pair of dolls (1830–50), courtesy of the Portland Art Museum, gift of Elizabeth Cole Butler [88.43.6-7]. Dolls like these, made by the Huron Tribe in the mid-nineteenth century, played a number of roles in traditional Native American culture, including being used to teach children their people’s history. The dolls were made from wood, wool, and cotton cloth and were adorned with metal and glass beads, leather, and real hair.

**[8116]** Acoma and Santo Domingo, Jars (c. 1900, 1920), courtesy of the Portland Art Museum, Elizabeth Cole Butler Collection. Soon after the introduction of railroads into the Southwest,

Commercial production had the effect of making native-made objects into either mysterious oddities or “artworks” whose consumers had no sense of their sacred origin. Hence, for much of the twentieth century, many Indians felt invaded and exploited by the dissemination of their artifacts into white America.

As anthropologist Barbara Babcock and photographers Guy Monthan and Doris Monthan detail in their book *The Pueblo Storyteller*, in the late 1950s Helen Cordero began producing pottery that recaptured and transformed the traditional Pueblo ways of art. Cordero turned to the traditional construction of objects that possessed deep cultural significance: these are called fetishes (if used in ceremony), figurines, or effigies. Traditionally, clay for the Pueblo was a living substance with its own spirit, so that anything constructed from clay acquires, as Babcock writes, “a kind of personal and conscious existence as it [is] being made.” All Pueblo ceremonies used clay objects, which are closely associated with the original creation of life in every known Pueblo creation story. Some of these objects were vessels and some were human figures—for example, those known as “kachina dolls.” The dolls stand for kachinas, masked supernatural spirits who are said to enter into the bodies of Pueblo dancers during ceremonies and act as conduits between the world of humans and the world of spirits or gods.

Another such figure was the “Singing Mother” found among the Cochiti. These figures, which may not have been ceremonial but certainly partook of the Pueblo assumptions that made ceremonies possible, are the ones that Cordero’s Storyteller dolls echo and revise. The figures of a mother singing to her child evoke fertility; as Babcock writes, they make “the connection between human reproduction and other, life-giving forms of generation.” As such, childbirth and child raising are linked to the passing down of stories and songs across the generations, emphasizing the interlinking of all creation, including the inextricability of human culture and the natural world. Between 1900 and 1960, Pueblo artifacts made for trade were weak in quality and few in number. But Cordero first created a figure that evoked the Singing Mother on commission for a white folk art collector, and in the process managed to transform the old tradition into a living art form for the present. As always in native traditions, she emphasized the local and the specific: she changed the mother figure to a male, modeled on her grandfather whom she remembers as a powerful storyteller, and she added multiple children to the figures (there are as many as thirty on some pieces). None of her hundreds of figures are identical, nor are the many figures created by Pueblo potters inspired by her work. They are images of the passing down of tradition that are themselves the evolution of tradition. For potters like Cordero, the importance of the clay and its relationship to the stories of the oral tradition help keep the art traditions alive.

## QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** What does the Singing Mother represent?

**Comprehension:** What is a kachina?

**Comprehension:** When and why did Helen Cordero begin producing her pottery?

**Context:** How can you see Native American artistic traditions being kept alive but transformed in the contemporary writers discussed in this unit? For example, how is *Ceremony* not only a reiteration of healing rituals but also a specific comment on the effects of World War II on Native Americans? What is Betonie's relationship to the Navajo community? How does this inform the way he uses ceremonies?

**Exploration:** It is a curious fact that there is very little evidence of Pueblo figurative ceramics from about 1500 to about 1875. This happens to correspond to the period of intense Spanish colonialism in the American Southwest. Why do you think we have this gap in the historical record?

**Exploration:** How is passing down traditions analogous to childbirth? In what ways are these acts similar, and in what ways different?

**Exploration:** Could those Pueblo who made pottery for white tourists be considered to be "selling out"? Would you have done the same thing? Does our contemporary culture show examples of once-sacred objects or ideas being used for profit?

## EXTENDED CONTEXTS

### Native Weavers and the Art of Basketry

He breathed on her and gave her something that she could not see or hear or smell or touch, and it was preserved in a little basket, and by all of the arts of design and skilled handwork.

—Kotai'aqan, *Columbia River Basketry*

Basketry, like pottery, is an art that is found in numerous Native American cultures but differs greatly from tribe to tribe. As Mary Dodge Schlick, the author of *Columbia River Basketry: Gift of the Ancestors, Gift of the Earth*, points out, for centuries baskets have been part of vast trade networks in which friends and acquaintances meet, gamble, and trade food stuffs and goods: baskets are one way of carrying these valuables. Baskets also play important roles in spiritual and medicinal rituals, as attested to in Greg Sarris's work on Pomo basket weaver and healer Mabel McKay. McKay wove her baskets for collectors and for general consumption, and all were made under the guidance of a spirit who taught her healing songs and imbued her baskets with a spiritual power. Baskets like the Pomo feather baskets featured in the archive [6303, 8118, 8119] should be thought of as spiritual, as well as material, objects.

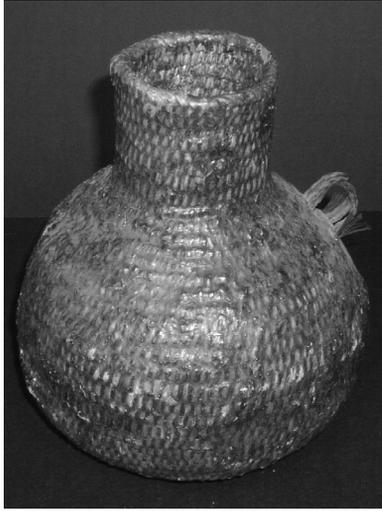
As archaeologist A. L. Kroeber and many others have noted, Pomo

Indians (many of whom became desperately poor after having their traditional ways of life disrupted) began producing pottery and other artifacts for sale.

**[8122]** Santo Domingo Tribe, Jar (n.d.), courtesy of the Portland Art Museum, gift of Elizabeth Cole Butler [1481]. Native American pottery, traditionally sacred or utilitarian, began to be produced in its contemporary "decorative" form in the late nineteenth century. In the 1920s and 1930s, dealers, archaeologists, and tribal members formed the Indian Arts Fund to collect traditional Pueblo pottery and encourage its production.



**[6303]** Anonymous, Pomo feather gift basket (n.d.), courtesy of the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College.



**[6307]** Anonymous, Water jar, pitched with horsehair lug handles (n.d.), courtesy of the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College.

#### NATIVE WEAVERS WEB ARCHIVE

**[6303]** Anonymous, Pomo feather gift basket (n.d.), courtesy of the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College. The series of quill stitches in this coiled Pomo basket indicates the weaver's desire to continue her work during a menstrual period, which would be bad luck if she did not substitute bird quills for plant materials.

**[6307]** Anonymous, Water jar, pitched with horsehair lug handles (n.d.), courtesy of the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College. Basketry objects found on the North American continent have been dated to as far back as 9000 B.C.

**[6310]** Anonymous, Coiled basket tray, rattlesnake design (n.d.), courtesy of Reed College, Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery. Like pottery, basketry is important for storing and transferring food and other supplies.

**[7416]** Anonymous, Tray, Apache, San Carlos, Arizona (n.d.), courtesy of the New York State Historical Association, Thaw Collection. Beginning in the late 1800s, many Native Americans used the American flag as a decorative motif in their arts and crafts. Notice the crossed

baskets are among the finest in the world. He writes, "To the Pomo, these served as gifts and treasures, and above all, they were destroyed in honor of the dead." The Pomo live in Northern California and are known for the intricacy of their baskets, particularly their beaded baskets, feather baskets, and miniature baskets [6303]. Sometimes the baskets held medicines, but other times nothing at all; as Susan Billy, a Pomo basket weaver, explains, "People frequently ask me what these ceremonial baskets hold. They did not have to hold anything, because the basket itself was all that was needed. The basket contained the prayers and the wonderful, good energy that made it a ceremonial basket." Gift baskets were given to people of stature or people with whom one wanted to cement a relationship [8081, 8119]. Small gift baskets were sometimes worn.

Other Native American communities, including the Nez Perce of Oregon and Washington, also wore baskets. Baskets hats, such as the one in the archive [8118], play a part in the oral tradition of the Columbia River peoples. For example, in one Wishxam myth, Grandmother uses a basket hat to teach Little Raccoon about the consequences of misbehavior. In many Native American communities, baskets play an important role in women's culture. Knowledge of how to make a basket hat, among other skills, was a sign that a young woman had reached adulthood in Columbia River culture. Women still wear these hats at powwows and other ceremonies.

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** How is basketry like pottery in its significance for native cultures?

**Comprehension:** How are Pomo baskets potentially spiritual as well as material objects?

**Context:** In his book *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss argues that gifts must be reciprocated in honor and prestige, if not in kind. How might the Pomo gift baskets create a reciprocal relationship with the giver? How does this compare to other instances of giving, in, say, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*?

**Context:** Look carefully at one of the baskets in the archive and take note of the strategies it uses to create order and harmony. Compare it to one of the coyote or trickster tales in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. How does Coyote undo society's order? Is balance reinstated by the end of the tale?

**Exploration:** If baskets such as the Pomo gift baskets have a "wonderful, good energy," do we have any right to keep them in museums? What do you think happens to this energy in museums? How should items with spiritual significance be displayed? (You may want to read the essay by Greg Sarris, "A Culture Under Glass: The Pomo Basket," in *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*.)

**Exploration:** What women's traditions exist in your family? How are they passed along from one generation to the next?

## Sacred Play: Gambling in Native Cultures

Gambling has long been a part of Native American cultures. Hand games, like gift exchange, are an important way to redistribute goods among community members. Gambling is not all fun and games, however. In the oral traditions of native peoples, gambler figures, like tricksters, tend to be threshold figures who can move between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Gambler myths, however, tend to have a more gothic edge than trickster tales. Gamblers often preside over the world of the dead, rather than merely visit it, and they are often associated with the end of the world. In contrast, the transgressive nature of the trickster is often a creative or generative force. Thus, gambler stories often are about an individual or community facing fear of annihilation. In Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, for example, the tribes' Cultural Hero challenges the Gambler. The stakes are high: the Hero works on behalf of the community, but wages his life. These crucial encounters dramatize the people's belief about how the original world was altered to its current form.

As Kathryn Gabriel points out in *Gambler Way*, gambling can be seen as a way of tapping into cosmic forces. At times an attempt to gain insight into or even control the otherwise unpredictable future, the outcomes of games can suggest what the cosmic forces have in store. Dice and other gaming equipment are even sacrificed on Hopi and Zuni altars. As Gabriel says about gambling in these communities, "It is likely that the rites were performed to discover the probable outcome of human effort, representing a desire to secure the guidance of the natural powers that dominated humanity." Various native games, such as dice or hoop and pole, invoke and elaborate basic assumptions about the universe, from the nature of causality to the constant tension between opposing forces. Moreover, the communal nature of the games fosters identity within the group. Still, the games are competitive: winning was often seen as a blessing and an assurance of continued order and balance—hence the high stakes and profound meaning of native gambling (medicine men sometimes perform ceremonies to invoke the aid of spirits in winning). Many native myths involve gambling, where divine power helps the protagonist win games of chance over antagonistic opponents. Because these are sacred rites, tribal members are reluctant to discuss their details. The Navajo, for example, fear speaking about gambling away from sacred times and places, lest doing so bring down the wrath of the cosmic forces (much as they would be loath to casually discuss the Nightway). In cultures where there is no need for a straight-edge distinction between the sacred and the secular, practices like gambling both reveal and maintain profound cultural values and beliefs. Never trivial or merely parasitic to "real" or "productive" activity, gambling always conveys deep meaning in native culture.

These traditional associations of gambling are present in contemporary debates over bingo palaces and Indian casinos. Because Indian Nations are sovereign states, gambling is legal on tribal ground. For

flags in the design of this Apache basket.

**[8081]** Pomo tribe, Gift basket (c. 1930), courtesy of the Portland Art Museum, Elizabeth Cole Butler Collection. The Pomo are a coastal native group in Sonoma County, California. The basket is made of willow, sedge root, clam shell beads, abalone shell, meadowlark feathers, quail feathers, mallard duck feathers, flicker feathers, and dogbane. Pomo baskets are known for their spiritual, ceremonial, and healing properties.

**[8118]** Plateau Indians, Basketry hat (c. 1900), courtesy of the Portland Art Museum, Elizabeth Cole Butler Collection. Nimípuu (Nez Perce) women wore fez-shaped basket hats as part of their everyday clothing. This hat is made from vegetal fiber, wool yarn, and a leather fringe. The Nez Perce were one of the tribes encountered by Lewis and Clark during their search for the Northwest Passage.

**[8202]** Yokut, Basket (c. 1900), courtesy of the Portland Art Museum, gift of Elizabeth Cole Butler. Yokut Indian women (Central California) learned to weave at an early age. Baskets were indispensable to Yokut daily life. Yokut baskets are known for their ornate designs, including human figures and animals. This basket is made of sedge root, red bud, bracken fern root, grass, and quail feathers.



**[6693]** Anonymous, *Bone Game, Makah* (c. 1900), courtesy of Larry Johnson and the Washington State Historical Society.



**[1092]** William J. Carpenter, *Life on the Plains* (1915), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-99804].

#### SACRED PLAY

#### WEB ARCHIVE

**[1092]** William J. Carpenter, *Life on the Plains* (1915), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-99804]. Navajo and cowboy playing cards. These cards show the type of interethnic male-male bonding seen in James Fenimore Cooper’s novels. Interaction like this largely died out when white males started to bring their families to settle in the West.

**[6651]** Anonymous, *Men Playing a Game in Subterranean Lodge at Chino Village* (n.d.), courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library. In what looks not unlike a ritual or ceremonial formation, these men are engaged in game-playing in an underground lodge. In Native American cultures, gaming is a sacred activity that in some cases allows the players to tap into cosmic forces.

many native communities, such as the Pequot of Connecticut, casino revenues have led to an economic and hence cultural renaissance. Libraries and museums as well as educational and language programs are now available where none existed before. Critics, however, argue that legalized gambling in any form is merely a way of taxing the poor and disenfranchised.

Indeed, Indian gambling has long had its detractors. Europeans settlers professed shock when confronted with the intensity of native American gambling. In 1775, Captain Bernard Romans said of a Choctaw hoop and pole game that it was “plain proof of the evil consequences of a violent passion for gaming upon all kinds, classes, and orders of men.” And indeed, from a Western point of view, the

stakes of native gaming seemed high; traditionally, players would sometimes continue betting until losing everything they owned (even including the clothes on their backs), and Captain Romans notes that several Choctaw committed suicide after such losses. Gambling in most native cultures is not an idle pastime and certainly is not understood as vice or bad habit. First, it is a very pragmatic way of redistributing goods and food without the bloodshed of fighting or even war. But more profoundly, gambling is a form of what has been called “sacred play”; like many aspects of native life, it is inseparable from spirituality.

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ Although Longfellow based his *Song of Hiawatha* on Iroquois history and mythology, chapter 16 on the gambler Pau-Puk-Keewis is based on the Chippewa oral tradition (as collected by Henry Schoolcraft in the first half of the nineteenth century). Kathryn Gabriel considers Pau-Puk-Keewis “the nearly perfect archetype of the destructive Native gambler”; she notes that he is “derived from *Paup-pu-ke-nay*, the Ojibwa/Chippewa trickster grasshopper who has the ability to shape-shift.” Ask your students to read the excerpt from *Hiawatha* in the archive and use it as a backdrop for discussing Native American Gambler figures and for understanding the characterization of Fleur in Erdrich’s story.

■ Lawrence Johnson’s 1999 documentary *Hand Game* is an excellent introduction to traditional Native American gambling practices. *Hand Game* looks at eight Indian communities including the Crow, Spokane, Flathead, and Blackfeet. It investigates the world of bone, grass, or stick game—the most widely played gambling game in North America. This video includes interesting interviews with gaming participants and could be usefully paired with stories about gambler figures.

## QUESTIONS

- Comprehension:** Why was gambling important to many Native American cultures?
- Comprehension:** What are the main attributes of a gambler figure? How does Silko's gambler fit within this paradigm?
- Comprehension:** Compare gambler and trickster figures.
- Comprehension:** What is the relationship between the gambler and the cultural hero?
- Context:** Why do the men in "Fleur" react so strongly to Fleur Pillager's uncanny winning of the game? How do gender politics and religion operate in the story to provoke the men's rancor?
- Context:** Read the Winnebago trickster tale. How does the Winnebago trickster compare to the gambler? What is the role of each in creating culture?
- Context:** Compare the depiction of gambling in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and Louise Erdrich's *The Bingo Palace*. What role does the oral tradition of the Pueblo and Chippewa, respectively, play in each?
- Exploration:** Imagine that you are an advertising executive who has been asked to design a campaign to gain acceptance for a new Indian gambling facility near your community. What rhetoric will you employ? What claims will you refute?
- Exploration:** Compare the role of gambling in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* to the role of gambling in the high society novels of Edith Wharton and Henry James (Unit 9). To what extent is gambling in these novels also about characters' attempts to control the otherwise unpredictable future? How do their experiences differ?

## ASSIGNMENTS

### Personal and Creative Responses

1. *Journal:* First, freewrite in your journal on whatever you know about Native American literature and cultures. Then, write a narrative from the point of view of a person of your own age who has just encountered Native American culture for the first time. What do you imagine that person would be thinking? What would he or she find most memorable? What emotions would he or she be feeling? What would he or she say to or ask the Native Americans (assuming communication could occur)?
2. *Poet's Corner:* Use one of the poems by Tapahonso or Ortiz as a model for a poem about an experience of your own. What about this model is helpful to you in expressing yourself? What seems to interfere or be bothersome? If you have written poems in the past, "translate" one of them into this form so that it echoes elements of the oral tradition. How does changing the form of your poem affect what you understand to be its meaning?

**[6693]** Anonymous, *Bone Game, Makah* (c. 1900), courtesy of Larry Johnson and the Washington State Historical Society. This game, called the "bone game" by the Makah Tribe of the Pacific Northwest, is often referred to as the "hand game" or the "stick game." The activity is guessing which hand is holding a piece of bone, but the game is complex and involves drumming, singing, and trickery.

**[8225]** Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Pau-Puk-Keewis," from *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), courtesy of Ticknor and Fields, Boston. The sixteenth chapter of Longfellow's famous *Song of Hiawatha* tells the story of the gambler Pau-Puk-Keewis. Although Longfellow based this work on Iroquois history and mythology, Pau-Puk-Keewis comes from the Chippewa oral tradition.

3. *Doing History*: Stage a fictional dialogue between Wovoka, the Paiute prophet of the Ghost Dance religion, and a thoughtful, middle-class white person in the Midwest United States, in which they try to explain themselves to each other. Imagine this exchange takes place in early 1890, after the Ghost Dance has begun to spread but before the catastrophe of Wounded Knee. Wovoka is preaching a peaceful yet clearly anti-white spirituality (read the Wovoka selection in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* before you do this assignment). The white person, sympathetic to human suffering and not prejudiced against Native Americans, is both anxious about the subversive potential of the Ghost Dance and unavoidably implicated in the society that has nearly decimated native culture. What can these two people say to each other that might build a bridge between them?
4. *Multimedia*: As Paula Gunn Allen says in the video, virtually all objects and practices in traditional American Indian life are “messages”: “content-laden information that you can read.” Using the *American Passages* image database, construct a multimedia presentation in which you analyze the images of such items as pottery, baskets, sandpaintings, masks, and dances. What “argument” about their culture do they seem to be making? In what sense can these objects or practices be seen as *messages*, indicating the values or beliefs of the culture that produced them?

### **Problem-Based Learning Projects**

1. You are a United States congressperson in 1924, speaking in favor of the act to grant citizenship to American Indians. Using texts and cultural artifacts from at least three different communities, prepare a presentation for Congress using images as well as testimony on why American Indians deserve to be full citizens.
2. You are a spokesperson for a museum that has been asked to return to a local tribe the five-hundred-year-old human bones and burial objects in its collection. What will the museum do with these objects if they aren’t returned? How should the museum present information about Native American cultures if it doesn’t use the burial objects? Help design a new exhibit for the museum.
3. You are part of a team charged with composing a new American history textbook for high school students. You have been asked to provide a brief sketch of the effects of European colonialism on Native American culture. How would you write such a sketch? Where would you want your reader to feel sympathy, anger, frustration, satisfaction? What is our current responsibility toward evaluating the actions of people in the past? Are the Europeans the bad guys? Are the Indians the good guys? Should our judgments be more complicated? Is there reason to believe any of us would have acted more ethically had we been alive four hundred years ago? Consider, as you write, that your audience will consist of readers from European as well as Indian backgrounds.

## GLOSSARY

**bicultural production** A text or object that retains the nature of the creator's original culture as well as influences from other cultures.

**creation stories** American Indian narratives of how the world or the tribe began. The biblical book of Genesis also contains two creation stories, but Native American creation stories tend to emphasize the number four, the humanlike nature of the original gods, a race of proto-humans, the essential connectedness of all creation, and the centrality of the tribe in question to the cosmic order.

**cultural hero stories** Stories involving a hero who is human or has human characteristics and works on behalf of a community. These stories help dramatize the native people's belief about how the original world was altered to its current form.

**emergence stories** Stories that describe how the people originated in the womb of the Earth Mother and were called to the surface by Sun Father. Despite the many differences among various tribes' versions of these stories, they generally establish how the world was created; how people developed out of ambiguously formed beings (who often had both animal and human characteristics); what each tribe took to be the basic relationships among people and between people and nature; and the origins of important tribal customs and structures.

**emergent religion** A religion in which new spiritual practices are added to an existing framework.

**gynocratic** Governed by women, as opposed to patriarchal, meaning governed by men. American Indian communities such as the Pueblos were **matrilineal** (i.e., traced their descent through the maternal line) and/or **matrifocal** (female-centered).

**hózhó** A Navajo term meaning holiness, harmony, or beauty. This term is used to describe Navajo art, song, and ritual that seeks balance and harmony.

**manitos** Extremely powerful beings in the Chippewa cosmology who could be characterized as "spirits" or gods. Manitos provided people with food (through hunting) and good health. They include Pau-Puk-Keewis, the Chippewa gambler, windigos, Nanabozho (the Chippewa cultural hero/trickster), and the underwater manito.

**oral tradition** The tradition of songs, stories, chants, and performances that comprised pre-Columbian Native American literature (actually "traditions," for each community had its own set of traditions). "Literature" is problematic here, however, insofar as these cultural events were never written down, frequently sacred, and always community building. Many contemporary Native American writers employ themes and structures from the oral tradition in order to keep those traditions alive.

**performative** One or more words that have immediate, concrete effects in the world. In the West, phrases such as "I now pronounce you husband and wife" or "Case dismissed" are examples of performative utterances. For many Indian cultures, much of the oral tradition was inherently performative—for example, it was used to cure or to invoke the spirits.

**tale-types** Groups of stories that tend to focus on particular characters and include standard events and elements. Some of the most common tale-types include Gambler, Trickster, Creation, Abduction, Migration, and Women's stories. Contemporary authors can use these tale-types in their works: for example, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* retells Yellow Woman stories—a Pueblo Abduction cycle.

**trickster** A common Native American legendary figure, usually male, but occasionally female or disguised in female form, and notorious for exaggerated biological drives and well-endowed physique. Partly divine, partly human, and partly animal, he is an often amoral and a comic troublemaker. Because stories about Trickster often represent him as transgressing cultural mores, they serve to explain and investigate the origins and values of those mores.

**Yellow Woman stories** Told by the Pueblo peoples of the Southwest, these stories dramatize how humans interact with spirits in the world once it has been created. Although there is always variation, Yellow Woman stories often involve a young married woman who wanders beyond her village and has a sexual encounter with a spirit-man; sometimes she is killed, but usually she returns to her family and tribe having grown spiritually, and therefore exerts an empowering influence on the people in general.

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