



Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story: Teaching American Indian Rhetorics

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Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story: Teaching American Indian Rhetorics is a significant intervention in the development of pedagogical practices for an understanding of Indigenous literatures. This anthology offers crucial insights into classroom methodologies that can negotiate and challenge racial stereotypes and cultural appropriation. A confluence of native rhetorics that are emblematic in art, song, oral testimonies, literature, and activist perspectives foregrounds the necessary juxtaposition of lived experiences within the ivory towers of academia. With a beautiful book cover entitled “Rainbow Crow” by Robert J. M. Latora, the book aptly acknowledges the story of Rainbow Crow, a Lenape legend of selfless service and sacrifice to the community of the one “who carried the fire from the heavens to the freezing Peoples below.”

The list of acknowledgments is followed by a poem entitled “Waking in the Dark” by Koyangk'auwi Maidu writer Janice Gould. Like the night wind that explains “the necessity of movement/proposing a purpose,” the collection emerges from workshops at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and develops a trajectory from Thomas King’s understanding of native literature in *The Truth About Stories* to Gerald Vizenor’s concept of “survivance.” In her foreword on “Alliances and Community Building: Teaching Indigenous Rhetorics and Rhetorical Practices,” Rese Crane Bizzaro writes: “This text allows teachers to demonstrate indigenous ways of knowing and habits of mind that permit the development of an integrated psyche, focusing on mind, heart, body, and spirits” (xii-xiii). Indigenous language, writings, and experiences contribute greatly to the debate and study related to Indigenous perceptions of the world.

The authors in this book engage with processes of erasure and inclusion, the politics that inform the choices of Indigenous authors, artists, teachers, knowledge holders, storytellers, and activists, and they focus on the agency of Indigenous peoples in such cultural productions. In a very detailed and useful introduction entitled, “Careful with the Stories We Tell: *Naming Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story*,” Lisa King, Rose Gubele, and Joyce Rain Anderson reinforce a call for “challenging the colonial stories that framed the discipline of rhetoric and composition” (4) through processes of community networks between Native and non-Native allies. In chapter 1, “Sovereignty, Rhetorical Sovereignty, and Representation: Keywords for Teaching Indigenous Texts,” Lisa King provides a historical analysis of one of the key concepts of Indigenous studies, “sovereignty.” It attempts to draw a connection between sovereignty as a continuous struggle for independence and justice within Indigenous communities through long battles with the state, and with sovereignty as a philosophical concept integral to indigeneity. Significantly, this analysis features the instructor and the student as partners who should work as a unit towards unpacking “sovereignty”—historically and also as a personal journey. It is also necessary to negotiate with stereotypes perpetuated through history, which is why Sundy Watanabe in chapter 2,

“Socioacupuncture Pedagogy: Troubling Containment and Erasure of Indigeneity in the Composition Classroom,” uses the first-year classroom as a case study on the practice of cultural deafness within Euro-American academic frameworks. She writes that socioacupuncture facilitates the subversion of institutionally sanctioned boundaries and power structures and “highlights indigenous peoples’ abilities to act for themselves, bypassing traditional praxis for creating and composing knowledge,” thus ensuring a “deliberate process of critical resistance to colonizing practices” (51).

Such resistance may be manifest in counter-colonial pedagogical practices within the classroom, as exemplified by Qwo-Li Driskill in chapter 3, “Decolonial Skillshares: Indigenous Rhetorics as Radical Practice.” According to Driskill, students should have an understanding of Indigenous languages as well since “Indigenous languages not only carry cultural memory, because language is so central to rhetoric, they also change the way we think about rhetoric and how rhetoric works” (67). The conversation on rhetoric is continued in chapter 4, “Performing Nahua Rhetorics for Civic Engagement,” by Gabriela Raquel Ríos. She provides a case study of the Nahuatl *difrasismo* (a Mesoamerican pairing of metaphors) in *ixtli in yollotl* (a heart, a face) to facilitate a rhetorical framework for a first-year writing course. Gubele in chapter 5, “Unlearning the ‘Pictures in Our Heads’: Teaching the *Cherokee Phoenix*, Boudinot, and Cherokee History,” offers an analysis of Indigenous print texts through history as they emerged from contact with Euro-American forms of literacy. Kimberli Lee expands the definitions of Indigenous rhetoric by associating it with contemporary Indigenous artists’ music in chapter 6, “Heartspeak from the Spirit: Songs of John Trudell, Keith Secola, and Robbie Robertson.”

The study of Indigenous rhetoric as an integral part of indigeneity should also be extended to graduate level study, as asserted by Andrea Riley Mukavetz and Malea Powell in chapter 7, “Making Native Space for Graduate Students: A Story of Collective Indigenous Rhetorical Practice.” As they weave stories of empowerment, these authors inform us that “Practicing indigenous rhetorics requires a recognition of the degree to which the entire university system...is a tool for the continued colonization of indigenous peoples” (157). Similarly, Joyce Rain Anderson in chapter 8, “Remapping Colonial Territories: Bringing Local Native Knowledge into the Classroom,” provides a case study of her own classroom and university and highlights the significance of Indigenous epistemology within that framework.

Chapter 9 focuses on the category of survivance as it may exist in rhetorical practices within language and literary systems. In “Rhetorical Sovereignty in Written Poetry: Survivance through Code-Switching and Translation in Laura Tohe’s *Tseyi’/ Deep in the Rock: Reflections on Canyon de Chelly*,” Jessica Hoover observes the impact of colonial education on the reception of Indigenous texts and the necessity for alliances between American Indian authors and texts and classrooms that facilitate processes of listening and rethinking. The discussion on Indigenous rhetorics is aptly concluded in chapter 10, “Towards a Decolonial Digital and Visual American Indian Rhetorics Pedagogy.” In this chapter, Angela Haas provides instances of Indigenous decolonial digital and visual rhetorics that seek to redress colonial scripts and “decolonize our habits of mind when interfacing with digital and visual representations of Indianness and indigeneity and with all representations of American Indian technological practices” (191).

The volume concludes with a poem by Janice Gould entitled “Holy Wind” and with an “Epilogue in Three Parts” by the editors as “The Story that Follows”—a narrative strategy to include diverse genres that exemplifies both the theoretical premise and practice of Indigenous rhetorics. With an emphasis on building community and creating linkages across diverse media, this book offers suggestions for future research with supplementary material available at <http://www.survivancesovereignty.org>, and it discusses methods of incorporating Indigenous epistemology within the classroom curriculum.

The outcome is a deeply reflexive process that offers a plethora of experiences and encounters scrutinized from Indigenous perspectives. *Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story* highlights erasure and resistance at different levels—psychological, social, familial, and, finally, physical. The articulation of specifically Indigenous emotions and desires, and the loneliness of certain political/personal choices, unravel emotional contradictions, costs, and expectations of Indigenous communities. Highlighting discourses and practices of complicity, assimilation, and subversion, this book projects an Indigenous politics that destabilizes and contests meaning.