



OTTAWA-CARLETON  
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Inclusive, Safe and Caring Programs  
FNMI Education

## First Nation, Métis, Inuit (FNMI) Literature List

This is not a comprehensive list, but, rather, a starting place for those looking for books, films, and web resources to incorporate into their secondary English courses.

### Book Companies

**Good Minds.** <http://goodminds.com/> An excellent book company that stocks the most up to date and extensive list of Aboriginal authored and/or themed fiction and non-fiction books around. Most of the books on this list, and many other excellent books, can be purchased through Goodminds.

### Novels

#### **Beatrice Culleton Mosionier**

##### *In Search of April Raintree*

Due to their parents' alcohol abuse, Cheryl and April Raintree, two Métis sisters growing up in Winnipeg, Manitoba, are separated from each other and their family. Life in a variety of foster homes is typified by neglect, ill treatment, and shame at their Native heritage. Throughout much of the narrative, Cheryl maintains pride in her ancestry, but early on, April decides to deny her Native self as much as is possible. Over the years, distance develops between the two sisters. April's marriage to a wealthy white man offers a glamorous life in Toronto and financial comfort but emotional impoverishment. Divorcing her husband brings April temporary freedom and the opportunity to repair the breach which has developed between her and Cheryl. But Cheryl's pride has failed to sustain her; now a prostitute and alcoholic, she is not the sister April remembered. After a horrific accident of mistaken identity, which April survives, but Cheryl does not, April's search for self is over, and her life begins anew.

#### **Catherine Knutsson**

##### *Shadows Cast By Stars*

Two hundred years from now, blood has become the most valuable commodity on the planet—especially the blood of aboriginal peoples, for it contains antibodies that protect them from the Plague ravaging the rest of the world. Sixteen-year-old Cassandra Mercredi might be immune to the Plague, but that doesn't mean she's safe—government forces are searching for those of aboriginal heritage to harvest their blood. When a search threatens Cassandra and her family, they flee to the Island: a mysterious and idyllic territory protected by the Band, a group of guerilla warriors—and by an enigmatic energy barrier that keeps outsiders out and the spirit world in. And though the village healer has taken her under her wing, and the tribal leader's son into his heart, the creatures of the spirit world are angry, and they have chosen Cassandra to be their voice and instrument...

## **Drew Hayden Taylor**

### *The Night Wanderer: A Native Gothic Novel*

A novel for vampire/gothic enthusiasts. The novel lives up to its subtitle, delivering shivers and chills in an Anishinabe setting. The protagonists are Tiffany Hunter, a 16-year-old resident of the fictional Otter Lake Reserve in current-day Ontario, and Pierre L'Errant, a mysterious man of Anishinabe ancestry who arrives from Europe. Tiffany's got problems with her dad, her schoolwork, and her non-native boyfriend. Pierre's waging an elemental good vs. evil battle as he seeks an honourable end to his existence as a vampire. They are drawn into each other's lives when Pierre becomes a boarder at Tiffany's home.

**Gord Hill.** 2010. *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book*. This graphic novel by Kwakwaka'wakw artist and activist Gord Hill offers students an 80-page perspective on Indigenous Peoples resistance movements to European colonization of the Americas. This graphic novel takes a large chunk of history and breaks it into three sections: Invasion, Assimilation and Resistance. This new approach to Indigenous Peoples' history in the form of a graphic novel is an exciting development.

## **James Bartleman**

### *As Long as the Rivers Flow*

The novel follows one girl, Martha, from the Cat Lake First Nation in Northern Ontario who is "stolen" from her family at the age of six and flown far away to residential school. She doesn't speak English but is punished for speaking her native language; most terrifying and bewildering, she is also "fed" to the school's attendant priest with an attraction to little girls. Ten long years later, Martha finds her way home again, barely able to speak her native tongue. The memories of abuse at the residential school are so strong that she tries to drown her feelings in drink, and when she gives birth to her beloved son, Spider, he is taken away by Children's Aid to Toronto. In time, she has a baby girl, Raven, whom she decides to leave in the care of her mother while she braves the bewildering strangeness of the big city to find her son and bring him home.

## **Joseph Boyden**

### *Through Black Spruce*

This is a powerful novel of contemporary aboriginal life, full of the dangers and harsh beauty of both forest and city. When beautiful Suzanne Bird disappears, her sister Annie, a loner and hunter, is compelled to search for her, leaving behind their uncle Will, a man haunted by loss. While Annie travels from Toronto to New York, from modeling studios to A-list parties, Will encounters dire troubles at home. Both eventually come to painful discoveries about the inescapable ties of family. *Through Black Spruce* is an utterly unforgettable consideration of how we discover who we really are.

### *Three Day Road*

This tells the story of a pair of James Bay Cree, Xavier and Elijah, who become famous snipers in the Canadian Army during the First World War. And telling stories is also a large part of what it's all about. The narrative is a tag-team performance. When Xavier returns home, missing a leg, addicted to morphine and obviously dying, his Auntie Niska picks him up at the train station and together they begin a three-day canoe journey home (meant to suggest the "three day road" of the title, which refers to death). Niska hopes to sustain Xavier on the journey with stories of her own and Xavier's childhood. In turn, Xavier tells the story of what happened on the Front and Elijah's descent into madness.

## **Louise Erdrich**

### *Tracks*

Set in North Dakota at a time in the past century when Native peoples were struggling to keep what little remained of their lands, *Tracks* is a tale of passion and deep unrest. Over the course of ten crucial years,

as tribal land and trust between people erode ceaselessly, men and women are pushed to the brink of their endurance—yet their pride and humor prohibit surrender. The reader will experience shock and pleasure in encountering characters that are compelling and rich in their vigor, clarity, and indomitable vitality.

### **Richard Wagamese**

#### *Indian Horse*

Saul Indian Horse has hit bottom. His last binge almost killed him, and now he's a reluctant resident in a treatment centre for alcoholics, surrounded by people he's sure will never understand him. But Saul wants peace, and he grudgingly comes to see that he'll find it only through telling his story. With him, readers embark on a journey back through the life he's led as a northern Ojibway, with all its joys and sorrows. With compassion and insight, author Richard Wagamese traces through his fictional characters the decline of a culture and a cultural way. For Saul, taken forcibly from the land and his family when he's sent to residential school, salvation comes for a while through his incredible gifts as a hockey player. But in the harsh realities of 1960s Canada, he battles obdurate racism and the spirit-destroying effects of cultural alienation and displacement.

#### *Keeper 'N Me*

When Garnet Raven was three years old, he was taken from his home on an Ojibway Indian reserve and placed in a series of foster homes. Having reached his mid-teens, he escapes at the first available opportunity, only to find himself cast adrift on the streets of the big city. Having skirted the urban underbelly once too often by age 20, he finds himself thrown in jail. While there, he gets a surprise letter from his long-forgotten native family. The sudden communication from his past spurs him to return to the reserve following his release from jail. Deciding to stay awhile, his life is changed completely as he comes to discover his sense of place, and of self. While on the reserve, Garnet is initiated into the ways of the Ojibway -- both ancient and modern -- by Keeper, a friend of his grandfather, and last fount of history about his people's ways.

#### *Ragged Company*

Four chronically homeless people seek refuge in a warm movie theatre when a severe Arctic Front descends on the city. During what is supposed to be a one-time event, this temporary refuge transfixes them. They fall in love with this new world, and once the weather clears, continue their trips to the cinema. On one of these outings they meet Granite, a jaded and lonely journalist who has turned his back on writing "the same story over and over again" in favour of the escapist qualities of film, and an unlikely friendship is struck. A found cigarette package (contents: some unsmoked cigarettes, three \$20 bills, and a lottery ticket) changes the fortune of this struggling set. The ragged company discovers they have won \$13.5 million, but none of them can claim the money for lack proper identification. Enlisting the help of Granite, their lives, and fortunes, become forever changed.

### **Sherman Alexie**

#### *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

This is the story of Junior, a budding cartoonist growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation. Determined to take his future into his own hands, Junior leaves his troubled school on the rez to attend an all-white farm town high school where the only other Indian is the school mascot. Heartbreaking, funny, and beautifully written, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, which is based on the author's own experiences, coupled with poignant drawings that reflect the character's art, chronicles the contemporary adolescence of one Native American boy as he attempts to break away from the life he thought he was destined to live.

### *Reservation Blues*

"Many may remember the tale of Robert Johnson, the musician who sold his soul to the devil at the crossroads in exchange for being the best blues guitarist around. What many may not know is that Johnson ended up in a small town on the Spokane Indian reservation in Washington state—at least that's how author Sherman Alexie tells it. Alexie spins the fictional tale of Johnson's adventure in a small town called Wellpinit, Washington. It is here that he comes to seek out Big Mom, a local medicine woman, and, in so doing, leaves his famous guitar in the hands of misfit storyteller Thomas Builds-the-Fire. Thomas Builds-the-Fire takes up Johnson's magical guitar and, along with two of his friends and two Flathead Indian sisters, goes on to build a reservation blues band that takes the Northwest by storm. The band members seem to take on the gamut of problems faced by Indians on the reservation today, battling everything from alcoholism to violence, political corruption to sexual abuse.

### **Thomas King**

#### *The Truth About Stories*

"Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous." Thomas King explores how stories shape who we are and how we understand and interact with other people. From creation stories to personal experiences, historical anecdotes to social injustices, racist propaganda to works of contemporary Native literature, King probes Native culture's deep ties to storytelling. With wry humor, King deftly weaves events from his own life as a child in California, an academic in Canada, and a Native North American with a wide-ranging discussion of stories told by and about Indians. So many stories have been told about Indians, King comments, that "there is no reason for the Indian to be real. The Indian simply has to exist in our imaginations." That imaginative Indian that North Americans hold dear has been challenged by Native writers - N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louis Owens, Robert Alexie, and others - who provide alternative narratives of the Native experience that question, create a present, and imagine a future. King reminds the reader, Native and non-Native, that storytelling carries with it social and moral responsibilities. "Don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now."

#### *Green Grass, Running Water*

Strong, Sassy women and hard-luck hardheaded men, all searching for the middle ground between Native American tradition and the modern world, perform an elaborate dance of approach and avoidance in this magical, rollicking tale by Cherokee author Thomas King. Alberta is a university professor who would like to trade her two boyfriends for a baby but no husband; Lionel is forty and still sells televisions for a patronizing boss; Eli and his log cabin stand in the way of a profitable dam project. These three—and others—are coming to the Blackfoot reservation for the Sun Dance and there they will encounter four Indian elders and their companion, the trickster Coyote—and nothing in the small town of Blossom will be the same again...

#### *Medicine River*

Medicine River is a small town near an Indian reserve in Western Canada. Narrated by the town's only Native American photographer, the loosely woven episodes revolve around Harlen Bigbear, whose specialty is providing "general maintenance" to his friends and acquaintances. There is humor and warmth, whether Harlen is persuading Will—who is over 40—to play on the all-Native basketball team or to court Louise Heavyhands, or whether he is arranging the lives of his neighbors and friends. Interwoven into the story are the narrator's bittersweet experiences of growing up with his brother, James; enduring the eccentricities of his Native American mother; and wondering about the white father he doesn't remember.

## **Waubgeshig Rice**

### *Midnight Sweatlodge*

Midnight Sweatlodge tells the tale of family members, friends and strangers who gather together to partake in this ancient healing ceremony. Each person seeks traditional wisdom and insight to overcome pain and hardship, and the characters give us glimpses into their lives that are both tearful and true. Rice captures the raw emotion and unique challenges of modern Aboriginal life. It's a hard-hitting and genuine look at the struggles First Nations people face.

## **Plays**

### **Drew Hayden Taylor**

#### *Toronto At Dreamer's Rock/Education is our Right*

In these two plays, Drew Taylor delves into the past and speculates about the future as he examines the dilemmas facing young Native Canadians today. *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* is a moving portrayal of a teenage boy who is torn between the traditions of his people, which he only vaguely understands, and the lure of modern life. His magical encounters with two members of his tribe - one from 400 years in the past and one from the future - make him aware of how little he has thought about what it means to be an Indian. *Education is our Right* borrows from the familiar story of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, but in this version the spirits of Education Past, Present and Future attempt to show the Minister of Indian Affairs the error of his ways. Drew Taylor combines humour, passion, spirituality, and tough realism to create a hopeful vision of the future that will appeal especially to young adult readers. Both plays have toured extensively to schools in Ontario and Quebec

#### *Girl Who Loved Her Horses/The Boy in the Treehouse*

In this collection of two plays about the process of children becoming adults, Drew Hayden Taylor works his delightfully comic and bitter-sweet magic on the denials, misunderstandings and preconceptions which persist between Native and Colonial culture in North America. With these two plays, Taylor rediscovers an issue long forgotten in our "post-historical" age: the nature of, and the necessity for, these rites of passage in all cultures.

*Dead White Writer on the Floor* uses two literary conventions — theatre of the absurd and mystery novels — to create one of the funniest and thought-provoking plays ever about identity politics. In Act One, six "savages", noble, innocent, ignorant, fearless, wise and gay, respectively, find themselves in a locked room with the body of a white writer, which they stash in a closet. None of them can figure out how he died or which of them might have killed him. They realize as they point fingers at each other, however, that they are all profoundly unhappy with their lives. Gradually, they figure out that the latest iteration of Gutenberg's invention buzzing like a beehive on the dead writer's desk is actually a dream-catcher, which they can use to rewrite their lives in the image of their own inner beings. Imagine their surprise when they reappear in the same locked room in Act Two as Mike, Jim, Bill, John, Sally and Fred—attending an A.A. meeting and bickering among themselves about reserve politics, unmanageable family relationships and whether Bingo has a place in their new air-conditioned casino — and realize the white writer must still be very much alive in their community; his body in the closet is still warm!

### **Tomson Highway**

#### *The Rez Sisters*

The play takes place during a summer in 1986, on the fictional Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve (referred to by residents as "Wasy") on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, and provides the portrait of seven "Rez sisters" who are all related by birth or marriage. The distinct personalities of each character are used to offer the audience a different attitude towards life and their role on the reservation (Napierkowski). The seven women arrange a road trip from their Indian reserve to Toronto to participate

in “THE BIGGEST BINGO IN THE WORLD”; each woman dreaming of winning the bingo jackpot and what life changing fortunes it will bring them; Pelajia hoping for paved roads and their beloved Nanabush to return, Philomena a big white toilet, Marie-Adele her own island for her family, Annie Cook every one of Patsy Clines records, a new record player, and to sing with Fritz the Catz, and Veronique St. Pierre a big new stove. These characters display the natural desire to rise above their surroundings and create a better environment for their children and each other. Although the reserve can be viewed as a place of misery, with little hope, and where there is nothing to do but “drink and screw each other’s wives”, the screenwriter uses optimism and humour in his characters and includes the positive values taught in Indian mythology. Each “Rez” sister has their own personal demons and tragedies and hopes that winning the world’s biggest bingo game will be the answer to all their problems.

## **Poetry**

### **Margaret Sam-Cromarty**

*Cree Poems and Stories and Indian Legends and Poems*

Drawing her inspiration from her upbringing, her life in the bush, from Mother Earth and her family, Chisasibi poet Margaret Sam Cromarty uses her poetry to share her culture with others and to communicate with the elders.

### **Rita Joe**

*We are the dreamers: recent and early poetry*

*We are the dreamers* is really two books: Rita Joe’s later poetry and her rare, long-out-of print first book, called "Poems of Rita Joe." Together, these poems offer evidence of her continuing journey to understand and to share the unique combination of native spirituality and Christianity that is her daily life. She faces the pain and joy of our lives together, the elements we share, and the gifts we have for one another and she writes with remarkable clarity and sympathy. There is nothing soft here. Rita Joe is a survivor of her own "gentle war," a reporter from the front lines. Her poems are small, tough monuments, left in our care. "I am only a housewife with a dream, To bring laughter to the sad eyes of my people, And trusting the anchor we live by, To complete the woven tale we are still telling."

## **Short Stories**

### **Matt Dembeki (compiler, editor & illustrator)**

*Trickster*

In *Trickster* more than twenty Native American tales are cleverly adapted into comic form. Each story is written by a different Native American storyteller who worked closely with a selected illustrator, a combination that gives each tale a unique and powerful voice and look. Ranging from serious and dramatic to funny and sometimes downright fiendish, these tales bring tricksters back into popular culture in a very vivid form. From an ego-driven social misstep in “Coyote and the Pebbles” to the hijinks of “How Wildcat Caught a Turkey” and the hilarity of “Rabbit’s Choctaw Tail Tale,” *Trickster* provides entertainment for readers of all ages and backgrounds.

### **Sherman Alexie**

*Ten Little Indians*

This is a collection of nine poignant and emotionally resonant new stories about Native Americans who, like all Americans, find themselves at personal and cultural crossroads, faced with heartrending, tragic, sometimes wondrous moments of being that test their loyalties, their capacities, and their notions of who they are and who they love. In Alexie’s first story, “The Search Engine,” Corliss is a rugged and resourceful student who finds in books the magic she was denied while growing up poor. In “The Life and Times of Estelle Walks Above,” an intellectual feminist Spokane Indian woman saves the lives of

dozens of white women all around her to the bewilderment of her only child. “What You Pawn I Will Redeem” starts off with a homeless man recognizing in a pawn shop window the fancy-dance regalia that was stolen fifty years earlier from his late grandmother. Even as they often make us laugh, Alexie’s stories are driven by a haunting lyricism and naked candor that cut to the heart of the human experience, shedding brilliant light on what happens when we grow into and out of each other.

### **Thomas King**

#### *One Good Story, That One*

*One Good Story, That One* is steeped in native oral tradition, led off by a sly creation tale, introducing the traditional native trickster coyote. Weaving the realities of native history and contemporary life through the story, King recounts a parodic version of the Garden of Eden story, slyly pulling our leg and our funnybone. A collection of short stories that is rich with strong characters, alive with crisp dialogue and shot through with the universal truths we are all searching for, *One Good Story, That One* is one great read.

### **Films**

#### *Reel Injun*

Native American and Aboriginal peoples have long played a part in Hollywood filmmaking, but the picture presented of them was not always flattering or accurate. Most westerns of Hollywood's Golden Age presented "Indians" as either ruthless savages with no sense of honor or fools who were lost without the help of the white man. (Adding insult to injury, they were usually played by white actors in make up.) However, as issues of Native American rights came to the forefront in the 1960s, more filmmakers stepped forward to offer a more positive and thoughtful portrayal of Aboriginal characters on screen, and Native American performers were given a greater opportunity to present the story of their people in television and the movies. Director Neil Diamond (a member of Canada's Cree community) offers a look at the past, present and future of Native People on the big screen in the documentary *Reel Injun*, which includes interviews with actors Adam Beach, Graham Greene and Sacheen Littlefeather, filmmakers Chris Eyre and Zacharias Kunuk, and artists and activists John Trudell and Russell Means; Clint Eastwood and Jim Jarmusch also speak about Hollywood's history and their own experiences in presenting Native Americans in their films. Produced in cooperation with the National Film Board of Canada, *Reel Injun* was an official selection at the 2009 Toronto International Film Festival. ~ Mark Deming, Rovi

#### *Muffins for Granny*

The sad history of the Canadian government’s residential school program has had a profound effect on First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples across the country. For filmmaker Nadia McLaren, its personal history as well; her Ojibway grandmother was forced into a residential school and its repercussions have echoed through her family. Looking to understand her loving but troubled grandmother, McLaren interviews seven First Nations elders about their experiences in residential schools. Mixing stark animated moments with human faces and home movie footage, *Muffins For Granny* is a raw and honest documentary about a difficult chapter in Canadian history; a chapter that, for some, is not over.

National Film Board of Canada: <http://www3.nfb.ca/enclasse/doclens/visau/>

Many excellent films and clips can be found here—all from Aboriginal perspectives.

## Websites

Association of Book Publishers of British Columbia: <http://books.bc.ca/resources/for-teachers-librarians/>

Lists of FNMI books for schools. Many, though not all, titles are from Aboriginal authors.

B.C. Ministry of Education, Shared Learnings: Integrating Aboriginal Content:

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/shared.pdf>

For high school English curriculum strategies and resources, see pages 71-74 (in digital format)

Canadian Center for Digital Media and Literacy: <http://mediasmarts.ca/>

Search “Aboriginal people media awareness”. Provides excellent articles and lesson plans on the portrayal of Aboriginal people in mainstream media.