



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1991 Volume IV: Recent American Poetry: Expanding the Canon

Finding New Voices: Native American Poets

Curriculum Unit 91.04.01
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My curriculum unit for the seminar on contemporary American poets looks at the works of Native American writers. The goal of Finding New Voices is to learn from this particular ethnic minority how the individual establishes personal and collective identity within the multiethnic spectrum of modern American society.

These new voices are young and exciting. They have emerged in the last two decades as a result of a “crash program of education” initiated in 1954, after 88 years of neglect by the federal government. The year 1970, then, became a landmark for the first generation of Amerindian college graduates. Another seminal year was 1962 when the Institute of American Indian Arts opened in Santa Fe, New Mexico. A combined academic high school and art institute, it has become the cradle of an indigenous American literature. (Allen xvi) As they find new voices, these new poets combine the traditional and modern to tell us who they are and what it is to be Indian. As a result, they are windows for our understanding. Their ranks include such noted poets as Leslie Silko, winner of a prestigious MacArthur Foundation award, Pulitzer Prize winner N. Scott Momaday, Simon Ortiz, Vendy Rose, Phil George, Joy Harjo, Alonzo Lopez, and many others. All of them have experienced the alienation, exile, prejudice of an outcast people. All of them have reached beyond this experience to find a greater interrelatedness, one common to all tribes of the earth. They have much to teach us.

This unit will be taught to students in the eighth grade at Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School, itself a laboratory of cultural diversity, where an integrated emphasis on the arts seeks to encourage new ways of seeing, feeling, understanding and communication. As in most urban public schools, Betsy Ross students represent several minority groups and, at the same time, they also represent the universal teenager who is beginning to ask the question, “Who am I?” How do I find out? How do others?

I believe that the study of a minority group offers our students a new and meaningful approach to that question. This curriculum unit will provide the opportunity to explore parallels with the American Indian who, in a struggle of epic proportions, has managed to preserve a unique personal and cultural integrity. How has this been achieved after more than four hundred years of dispossession and dispersion? How has the modern, mainly urbanized American Indian maintained a sense of self and tribe?

According to Kenneth Lincoln in his book *Native American Renaissance*, the commonly accepted estimate is that there were once five hundred distinct Indian cultures and as many languages in what is now the United States of America. Today there are eight or nine primary cultural groups of North American Indians, according to H.B. Alexander in *The World's Rim*. The current official tally counts three hundred and fifteen tribes; of

these only some thirty-eight percent of perhaps a million and a quarter Indians now live on tribal lands. The largest Indian population lives in California where it is a mix of Navajos, Pueblos, Lakota and Apache numbering more than 200,000 in the 1980 census. (Lincoln 185)

Removed, dispossessed, transplanted and relocated by federal fiat, how do these Indians maintain the old ways while adapting to the new? Much has been lost, according to Lincoln. Language and ceremonies, for example, have disappeared as Indians adapted to new ways. Much has been gained, however. Just as change is part of the American dynamic for all ethnic groups from Brooklyn to Bremerton, and just as the Navajo once adapted to horses in the sixteenth century, today's Indian adjusts to the tribal reality of the moment. "They worry about trading older Indian ways and values for short term benefits in a modern world." (Lincoln 185) The central issue for Native Americans is to redefine their Indianness in terms of the new and the old. The question of new and old is integral to Native American literature.

But first, who are the Native Americans? According to the current definition, a Native American is someone who is quarter blood Indian and a tribal member. Only an approximate seven hundred thousand Native Americans survive as full-bloods or as "breeds" with one non-Indian parent. To escape the prejudice against them, more than a half million blooded Indian people live as whites. Being an Indian is "tribally granted and personally carried out." (Lincoln 188) It is as much attitude and choice as it is for anyone, according to Wendy Rose, poet of this first generation of published Indian poets. We did not speak our native language, we were not raised on our ancestral land and we had no literary tradition of our own, she said. "There is only literature that is written by people who are Indian and who, therefore, infuse their work with their lives the same way that you do." (Lincoln 184) Being an Indian, then, is a process; it is a complexity of attitudes, choices, tribal endorsement, geography, gender, history and tradition.

The point here is that, in order to understand American Indians and how they define themselves, we must begin by relinquishing all inherited stereotypes. We must start afresh just as the young American Indian poets of the 1960s did when they set out to define their personal versions of native experience. The pioneer poets of that decade were a new breed, indeed. Like one of their first stars, N. Scott Momaday, they began to ask the question "Who am I?" They were a college generation of post-World War II artists who learned new ways from such modernists as Eliot, Stevens, Pound and many others.

At the same time, like Momaday in search of his ancestors, they began to learn about their own cultures in a revival of the quest. In the process, they began to fuse the old with the new. They retained or perhaps even developed their sense of tribal connectedness, the interrelatedness within the Medicine Wheel which is symbolic of the Native American renaissance. The wheel, or circle, is where the tribal Native American seems to find power. The natural circle of the earth horizon, the sacred hoop, the sun, the moon, the rainbow and star—all of it is material for the song-poet who "sings of kinship in the tribal circle. . . and rejoining the circle is the song that binds tribal America." (Lincoln 59)

By listening to these new voices—the Navajo, Hopi, Creek, Kiowa and others—students will begin to recognize the challenges as well as the values of cultural diversity. Themes of alienation, of family, and community will emerge as reference points for personal experience. Students will discover through these new voices that the quest for identity is universal and on-going.

OBJECTIVES

To learn about American Indian culture and specifically to learn from that culture

how the Amerindian establishes personal identity
how the Amerindian establishes collective identity
how the contemporary voice expresses that identity

These objectives will raise many questions. For example, there is the question of the role of tradition, of family and tribe. What is the approach to language, to nature, to the cosmos? Questions such as these will surely arise in the context of individual works, thereby providing considerable material for discussion. That brings us to strategies.

STRATEGIES

To approach any culture, we need to have some general idea of the way of the people. In his book *Seven Arrows*, Hyemeyohsts Storm explains the word “way” as meaning simply a path or direction or an entire philosophy or a Way of Perceiving. The Indian perceives who he is, Storm continues, “within the circle of an entire People as a whole.” (Storm 4) Since our goal is to learn who we are from the Indian model, our first strategy is to learn within the classroom circle. In current pedagogical terms, that means to learn by way of the cooperative process. The five major features of this process are:

- 1) *Positive Interdependence* . The class will be divided into small groups. . . tribes within the nation, as it were. . . to promote a keener sense of interdependence.
- 2) *Face-to-face Interaction* . Each student will be encouraged to state his or her own ideas, to ask peers for help when necessary, to encourage others, to question incorrect or ambiguous information, and to provide reason and examples to support ideas.
- 3) *Individual Accountability* . Students will be assigned roles to promulgate accountability and to help them stay on task. For example, the chief keeps the tribal council on task, and the scouts report on the tribe’s findings.
- 4) *Interpersonal and Small Group Skills* . Groups will seek consensus through several methods. For example, they could be asked to choose a simile or a metaphor to describe a poem or to collaborate on a letter describing the poet, or to compose a tribal song-poem.
- 5) *Group Processing* . Each tribe, or group, will evaluate their learning progress, the group’s effectiveness and their social skills. When these five features are successfully implemented, cooperative learning approximates the Indian Medicine Wheel in that it provides an environment in which everyone can contribute to the creative process.

This leads to the second major strategy, shared inquiry. It is a strategy that will help develop creative thinking skills, which are perhaps better known as critical thinking skills. Creative thinking begins with a question in

order to clarify concepts and debate issues. Storm emphasizes that questioning is vital to understanding in Indian culture. Without questions, the Medicine Wheel does not move. So the techniques of shared inquiry are appropriate indeed to this unit. The question will be the heart of the lesson—for the leader as well as for the students.

There are three types of questions used in the shared inquiry approach developed by The Great Books Program. I have found this program to be very successful in the classroom; I believe it will transfer well to poetry, open as it is to so many individual insights of interpretation. The three questions are:

- 1) the question of *evaluation*
- 2) the question of *interpretation*
- 3) the question of *fact* .

The answer to the first is based on the participant's personal discretion and values in a similar situation. Interpretation has more than one correct answer possible based on the text. The answer of fact has only one correct answer based on the text. In its short story curriculum, The Great Books Program stresses that text must always substantiate the answers. In combination with questions of fact and evaluation, the interpretive question is, of course, the key strategy. It promotes the development of creative thinking skills by drawing forth the ability to reason and to recognize assumptions, to name only a few. In the poetic text, this means that the nuance of rhythm, line and image will be departure points for discussion, as will simile and metaphor, concept and theme. Our shared inquiry will establish an enabling environment in which everyone can contribute to the creative process.

In addition, as ideas are stimulated in discussion, students will develop good listening skills as well as the skills of recall, comprehension, and the ability to work with and learn from others. Following the discussion, time will be set aside for the students to write a letter describing the poet, and/or personal reflections and reaction to the material we have discussed. Letters written after the first and second discussion—more if time permits—are answered individually by the teacher to correct and encourage. I have found this letter-writing strategy to be very effective because it personalizes communication, builds confidence and boosts self-esteem. It also makes for appreciation of the writing process, promotes communication skills and is definitely worth any extra effort involved for the teacher. Students assimilate new ideas during discussion but too often time runs out for their expression. I also believe it is important for students to learn the value of putting their own ideas on paper. It is not an objective of this unit to have students write poetry, but as enthusiasms develop, students will certainly be encouraged to write their own poems.

The class will meet twice weekly for this unit, which will contain approximately 20 lessons to cover the third marking period. Because each lesson is self-contained, there will be no homework assignments. However, students will be encouraged to write their own poetry, essays, or to do independent research projects for extra credit. Such projects could include the history, arts, rituals of an Indian tribe.

The unit will be presented (and described below) in six sections as follows:

- 1) The Introduction
- 2) The Voice of the Quest
- 8) The Voice of Exile
- 4) The Voice of the Tribe
- 5) The Voice of the Heart
- 6) The Voice of the World

These sections are thematic. They emphasize the diversity of voice, and, as we listen to variations on a theme, they also provide for comparative analysis. One poet's quest turns to family, another poet turns to place, another to tribe. There may be some overlapping but I think the thematic approach allows for sharper focus on universal experience as against focus on the poems/poets themselves. The purpose is to stimulate conversation about the themes common to all people, in whatever ethnic group. Some students may identify more keenly with one theme, an individual preference to be cultivated perhaps. All students will consider how exile is experienced and communicated, why and how quest is undertaken, how relationship to tribe, place and persons develops answers to the question of identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The unit will begin with an introduction to the concept of the Medicine Wheel, what it is, what it means to Indian culture and why it is important to our inquiry. It will reinforce the strategies of cooperative learning and shared inquiry. It will allow us to understand different points of view, the value of individual insight as it is shared within the collective.

Hyemeyohsts Storm explains the Medicine Wheel this way: if you and I were sitting in a circle of people on the prairie, and if someone placed an object in the center of the circle, each of us would perceive that object differently. "The perception of any object, either tangible or abstract, is ultimately made a thousand times more complicated whenever it is viewed within the circle of an entire People as a whole." (Storm p. 4) Our place within the Medicine Wheel, in the world and in the universe itself, determines our unique perception of the feather or drum in the center of the circle. However, we cannot understand our individual perspective until we are acquainted with many levels of perception. To answer the question "Who am I?" Storm continues, the Indian undertakes the perceiving quest, also known as the Vision Quest. In this search he finds relationship with the world beginning with earth, air, water, fire, plants, animals, brothers, sisters, family, tribe and finally all the spirits of the universe.

This sense of relatedness is what Kenneth Lincoln calls the fulcrum of Indian literature. Indian literature is tribal, he explains in *Native American Renaissance*. "To Indians tribe means family, not just bloodlines but extended family, clan, community, ceremonial exchanges with nature, and an animate regard for all creation as sensible and powerful. Tribe means an earth sense of self, housed in an earth body, with regional ties in real things." (Lincoln 8)

To understand our relatedness to real things, the class will begin as a Medicine Wheel. (See Lesson Plan #1)

To this circle we will bring earth objects such as a stone, a flower, or a fruit. The object will be placed in the center of the circle and students will be given a few moments to observe it, relate to it, and come up with a phrase or sentence expressing the relationship. Each phrase or sentence will be read aloud, expanding our levels of perception. In this process, we will discover the closeup vision of some, the distant vision of others. If we see only what is in front of us, like the mouse, we miss the mountain peaks. If we see as the eagle does, we miss the grain of sand. So, in order to seek understanding of ourselves, we must learn the many levels of perceiving. Indian wisdom teaches that we are each born with a special characteristic, one of the Four Great Powers. At the south of the wheel, the mouse represents innocence and trust. To the west is the bear, representing introspection. The buffalo at the north stands for wisdom, and the eagle to the east is illumination. (Storm 4-6) When we understand our initial gift, we are ready to explore the other ways to achieve wholeness. We do this in the circle of community, in the clan or tribe or family or classroom.

To conclude the introductory section of this unit, we will study a selection of primary sources found in a book called *Touch The Earth; A Self-Portrait of Indian Existence*. Compiled by T.C. McLuhan, it is a selection of sayings and writings from the sixteenth to the twentieth century by North American Indians. It will give us insight into the Indians' view of history. It will also teach us about their values, in short—the Indian perspective. We will learn of their pain, their pride, their reverence for the land and all creatures. We will consider, for example, the words of a Yuma Indian, who questions the new ways imposed on her people at the beginning of the twentieth century. We will read how the great Indian chief, Black Hawk, retained his dignity and spirit despite the humiliations of conquest. The words of Chief Luther Standing Bear about “going back to the blanket” will reveal the significance of custom within a community. (McLuhan 104). The voices of the past—Walking Buffalo and Ohiyesa and Sitting Bull and many others—will teach us of the heritage sung by the new voices, of living in harmony with the earth and all living things.

In addition, we will look at poetry of contemporary elders of the Taos Pueblo in New Mexico. These works have been collected by Nancy Wood in a volume titled *Many Winters*. The people who speak are members of a tribe that has been in existence at that site for eight hundred years. As they look back on their lives, remembering traditions and ancestors, remembering discoveries of flowers and “newborn” trees and leaves of spring, they teach us the Indian Way. Threatened now by commercialism, tourism and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, their way of life remains intact because, as one elder put it, “everything that mattered” found its way to them. (Wood 59) In the Medicine Wheel, we search for what matters.

2. THE VOICE OF QUEST

N. Scott Momaday stands out as the voice of quest because his work is dominated by the search for his Kiowa identity. Legend has it that this tribe originated in the Yellowstone River country of central Montana. (Yenne 84) By the 1700s, the Kiowas had acquired horses and, lured by the great herds of buffalo in the Central Plains, they migrated to what later became know as Indian Territory, later yet as Oklahoma. Born in Oklahoma in 1934, Momaday moved to the southwest where he grew up on various Indian reservations, particularly the Navajo and Tanoan. (Velie 245) He was educated at Indian schools, graduated from the University of New Mexico, and earned his doctorate at Stanford University in 1969. That same year he won the Pulitzer Prize for his novel, *House Made of Dawn*, which was later made into a film. (Niatum 86)

Our interest will focus on Momaday's prose poem, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, his account of what it is to be Kiowa. Momaday undertook this personal odyssey to resolve the question of his own Indianness, mixed as it was with Cherokee ancestry on the maternal side and blended with the cultural experience of growing up with several southwestern tribes. The journey began when time was running out; few remained of the people who

had actually lived the Kiowa history. Retracing the route from Montana to the Plains, Momaday finally came to the grave of his grandmother at Rainy Mountain. From this intimate link and aided by the memory of Ko-sahn, a one hundred year old Kiowa woman, (Velie 245) Momaday found his place in the Medicine Wheel. The grandmother connection provides a personal link for many students close to their grandparents. As they recognize themselves in Momaday's work, they will be encouraged to explore their own intergenerational history.

For illustration, let's look at page thirty-three of *The Way to Rainy Mountain* where Momaday describes the simple enjoyment of watching his grandmother's face as she says the word for something bad. In this experience, Momaday learned a profound value—the power of language to express our discrimination between good and evil. The passage prompts discussion of the simple things students enjoy and what we learn from such experiences. Examples might be: from a baby's smile, tenderness; from a grandmother's frown, what? In another passage, on page thirty-one, Momaday describes a secret place on the Washita River where, in close observation of nature, he finds himself in a process of individuation that begins in the microcosm of dragonflies and water striders, rippling outwards to the "great open land beyond." From childhood's simple blanket tents to a favorite tree perch, almost everyone has a secret place that this passage will bring to mind for enriching discussion. Other recommended passages are found on page forty-seven, a poem of love for his grandfather, on page sixty-seven discovering the "thousand points of view" in nature, on page seventy-seven, respecting the power of a fine horse, on page eighty-three, relating to a landscape.

For balance and variety, several other poets will be included in this section. They include Leslie Silko, Phillip George, S. Roberto Sandoval, Dolly Bird and Alonzo Lopez. The selections are, for the most part, short but powerful poems that will allow us to explore style, content, image and theme. In "Pots," by S. Roberto Sandoval, for example, twelve lines go to the heart of a son's finding his way in the path traced by his father as he shapes a clay pot. Leslie Silko journeys back to the deep sandstone walls of "Slim Man Canyon" to find where she comes from. In "Favorite Grandson Braid," Phillip George plaits his hair in homage to his grandparents. In Alonzo Lopez's search poem, "Directions," a grandparent once again guides the young man's quest. In "Ancestors," Grey Cohoe remembers the dust of kin who roamed the windy plains. Others like Dolly Bird, pick up and leave the asphalt cities to go back where John Wayne never roamed and "Gunsmoke came out of your gun." (Katz 99)

Since our exploration will take us from Dolly Bird's Miami to Leslie Silko's sandstone canyon and Cohoe's grassy plains, it will be necessary to understand some geography as well as some tribal history. We also need to study artifacts such as the baskets of George's grandmother, a Nez-Perce tribeswoman, and the clay pot of Sandoval's Pueblo father. A number of art books can be used to elaborate on Bill Yenne's *The Encyclopedia of North American Tribes*, which is well illustrated with photographs and drawings. Another way we can learn more about Indian life is to visit Yale's Peabody Museum. We could, in fact, spend considerable time on this first section with many a fascinating side-trip into art, history, literature, myth and legend. In addition, this unit could be coordinated with English, social studies and art departments for further enrichment according to individual situations, needs and preferences.

3. THE VOICE OF EXILE

Turning from poems of quest, we come to the voice of exile, beginning with the work of Alonzo Lopez. Born in Pima County, Arizona, Lopez is a Papago, an agricultural people noted for their exquisite basketry (Yenne 124). Lopez studied at the Institute of American Indian Art at Santa Fe, New Mexico, spent an interim year at Yale and then transferred to Wesleyan University expressly for the curriculum in American Indian studies and

also to study the Navajo language. Four short poems selected from Terry Allen's *The Whispering Wind* include "Endless Search," "Untitled," "Separation" and "I See a Star." The poet's seemingly endless search makes the transition to the sense of separation, alienation exile experienced by Lopez as he sought his identity in two cultures, the Indian and the white. In the poem "Separation," Lopez appears to be cut off from all relationship with others, self, the earth and even its seasons until, in "I See a Star," he finds his grandmother patiently weaving a star in her basket. The opportunities for discussion and activities are covered in detail in Lesson Plan #2.

Another voice of exile is found in the poem "Name Giveaway" by Phillip George. The story of his people is one of dauntless spirit and, in the end, of tragic giveaway on the part of the federal government. A member of the Nez-Perce nation at Lapwai, Washington, Phillip George received from his great-grandmother the Indian name of (translated) Two Swans Ascending From Still Waters. The teacher at Fort Lapwai named him Phillip, which in Greek means "lover of horses." (Bruchac 45) Denied the use of his true name, the poet experiences a painful loss of identity that I believe students can understand because I have seen the pride they take in their names, many derived from tribal origin. Name poems would be one activity of this class. In the next session, George's "Prelude to a Memorial" goes from acute loneliness to exultation of tribal identity, as it sings "I am Nemipu (and) we are alive." (Bruchac 50)

To conclude this section, we will read an untitled poem by Simon Ortiz, member of the Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico. The poem, found in his book *from Sand Creek* on page 53, describes an incident at the Salvation Army store where Ortiz is humiliated by the clerk who suspects him of theft. Lamenting inwardly that it is his life that has been stolen, Ortiz buys a sweater to reassure the clerk and then escapes. In our discussion, we will consider how his life has been stolen. For Hopi poet Wendy pose, it was not until her songs became quiet that people stopped waiting to see if her "red hands" would steal from the museum shelves. This similar experience of isolation and hostility is expressed in her poem "How I Became a Graduate Student." (Katz 167) Do we have to shed our identity, muffle our song, to be accepted? Other exile poems we might consider, time permitting, are Simon Ortiz's "Relocation" found in *Voices from Wah'kon-tah* and Fred Redcloud's "A Tale of Last Stands" in the same anthology. In each section of this curriculum unit, it is important to remember to include background information on each poet, tribe, its history, and geography.

4. THE VOICES OF THE TRIBE

Despite an acute sense of alienation, or perhaps be cause of it, the American Indian has turned to tribal roots to find his identity. Simon Ortiz looks to community in an untitled poem on page three of *from Sand Creek* . In this brief poem, Ortiz urges his people to "strive for significance," to develop their unique talents, which are symbolized in seeds of grass and "another strain of corn." The strength of the people must be nourished by the old ways as well as the new.

Liz Sohappy, a Palouse of the Yakima tribal group in Washington, finds there is much practical work to be done for her people in "The Indian Market." Found in Allen's *The Whispering Wind* , this poem celebrates the path that leads home and the daily tasks of living close to the land. Another Sohappy poem in this anthology, "Once Again," gathers tribal memories in cornhusk bag and iron pot. The cornhusk bag has stories to tell in "Talking Designs" (Niatum, *Dream* , 10) and grandmother's fingers teach of tears and joy in "Grandmother Sleeps." (Niatum, *Dream* , 11) In "The Parade," (Allen 16) tribes gather from south and east as the same poet recalls the echoes of ancient drums. Alonzo Lopez rejoices in "Celebration" (Allen 3), and each poet finds home in the tribal games, the chants, the feasts, the daily routines of village life. What songs, what feasts, what daily crafts and customs are unique to our students? Questions and activities are detailed in Lesson Plan

#3.

5. THE VOICE OF THE HEART

In this section, we look at the love poems of the American Indian. These are poems that unequivocally express the poets' love as in Phillip George's "Child Rest" or "Song of a New Cradleboard." (Allen 116-177) In the same anthology, Grey Coho sings of motherlove in "Mom" and, in "Alone Together," of his love for nature, and a great tree that stands valiant and alone. "My Father's Song" by Simon Ortiz (Harper 46) trembles with emotion in recollection of his father and a nest of baby mice. Pure happiness radiates "The Serenity in Stones" in which Ortiz holds a turquoise in his hand, in his eyes, in himself. (Niatum, *Dream* , 156)

By listening to the voice of the heart, students will be able in this section to explore their own feelings. We will also listen to the heartbreak and anger in several poems by Simon Ortiz. He expresses his anger in several untitled works in *from Sand Creek* . On page thirty-nine, Ortiz admits his anger, while at the same time he is "unwilling to be mad." On page forty-nine, he feels with deep sorrow the pain of the betrayed Indian and, on page eighty-three, his emotions in the Veterans' hospital rise like thunder. Poets like Ortiz show us how, through the written word, we can confront and transcend our feelings. To introduce each poem in this section, I plan to use an Indian drum to emphasize listening skills and as a way of tuning into the heart of the poet as well as to our own hearts.

6. THE VOICE OF THE WORLD

The unit concludes in this section with three poems: two by Joy Harjo and one by Ricardo Sanchez. Two of these works are the longest in the unit, so we will begin with the short "Eagle Poem" by Harjo, (Harjo 40) a Creek Indian, born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. As she describes how a great eagle sweeps across the sky, the poet brings us back into the "true circle of motion," to the Medicine Wheel of all life. Harjo exhorts her reader to find "the voice that is you" and "to find kindness in all things." (Harjo, *Mad Love* , 65) Another poem by Harjo reminds the reader that "you are all people and that all people are you." This wonderful poem, "Remember," brings us into the circle of relatedness to all things, stars, wind, plants, animals, tribes and nations. (Harjo, *Horses* , 40) It also gives us the opportunity to consider how the sciences—biology, chemistry, and astronomy, for example—fit into the wheel of study and how they teach us about the world and our relationship to it.

The final poem is authored by an artist whose Indio-Hispano-Chicano/Mestizo roots trace back to a maternal grandmother born in the San Juan Pueblo of New Mexico. "In a fusion of languages and cultures," Ricardo Sanchez speaks for many tribes and for the world in his poem "Drum." (Bruchac 159) His drum beats a universal sound, "a majestic human call" to be the fulfillment of "all we must be." For a poet schooled, as he says, in the barrios of Texas and in both the Texas and California Prison Systems, (Bruchac 158) Sanchez's exultant voice confirms that "rejoining the circle is the song that binds tribal America." (Lincoln 59) With this concluding poem, we have come full circle.

LESSON PLAN #1

To understand the Indian way, the class will study the concept of the Medicine Wheel. The Wheel represents the world, the tribe, the people. By understanding the Wheel, we learn about ourselves. The Wheel teaches us about levels of perception, and how to understand our relationship with all things from stars to a grain of sand.

OBJECTIVES

1. To learn about the Medicine Wheel.
2. To understand relationships within the Wheel.

MATERIALS

1. Any earth object such as a stone, a flower, a feather, etc.

STRATEGIES

1. Class forms a circle.
2. Teacher informs class that each student will be called on to contribute.

PREPARATION

1. Brief introduction to the concept of the Medicine Wheel (Storm 4-5).
2. Brief discussion of circles: family friends, community, tribe, nation, etc.
3. Define goals (see objectives above).

DISCUSSION TOPIC

1. The object that has been placed in the center of the circle is studied quietly for a few moments.
2. Teacher may remind students of the symbolic, scientific, informational, personal and/or collective perceptions possible regarding the object.
3. Students are instructed to write a phrase or a sentence about their relationship to the object.
4. Each student is called on to read phrase or sentence aloud.

CLOSING

1. Teacher explains the Four Great Powers (Storm 6).

2. Students discuss objectives:
 - a. what they have learned about the Medicine Wheel.
 - b. what they have learned about levels of perception.
 - c. what they have learned about relationship to things.

LESSON PLAN #2

From the poetry of Alonzo Lopez, I have selected four poems that address our questions concerning the voice of exile. Born in Pima County, Arizona, Lopez is a Papago. He studied at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico and spent an interim year at Yale. He then transferred to Wesleyan College expressly for the curriculum in American Indian studies and to study the Navajo language.(Allen 1)

OBJECTIVES

1. To learn how the American Indian establishes personal identity.
2. To learn how the American Indian establishes collective identity.
3. To learn how the contemporary voice expresses those identities.

READINGS—Four Poems by Alonzo Lopez (From *The Whispering Wind* edited by Terry Allen.)

1. "Endless Search"
2. "Untitled"
3. "Separation"
4. "I See a Star"

MATERIALS

1. overhead projector

2. transparency of large-type print-out of each poem
3. xerox copies of poems
4. map of United States
5. pictures of Navajo baskets

STRATEGIES

1. shared inquiry as described above
2. listening rule: a speaker must not be interrupted
3. cooperative learning: after introduction of each poem, students will pair in partnership for two minutes' discussion of poem.

PREPARATION

1. brief introduction of author
2. questions re Navajo, Papago, Arizona
3. define lesson goals (see objectives above)

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. "Endless Search"—This is a quest poem, describing in nine brief lines a restless and relentless search for self. The poet does not know how to end the search in which, day and night, he surveys the world to no avail. "Forever searching. . . (but). . . never finding", he cannot find himself. Discuss
 - a. why "never finding"?
 - b. why does the search never end?
 - c. does the poet explain?
 - d. where does the poet seek and why?
2. "Untitled"—In this poem, Lopez addresses a child with the advice to awaken and go the lands of his people, to "lead them in traditional song . . . (and) . . . ceremonial dance." The poem expresses the tribal voice with the advice to go to the Ancient Ones who will recover "all that has

been lost.” They must awaken the old ones so that the traditions and legends may be recovered. The child is to let others know that the young were only sleeping, but now they, too, have awakened and will fulfill their obligations to the people. The poem raises these questions:

- a. who is the child?
- b. what has happened?
- c. is tradition important and why?
- d. is this poem personal, collective or both and why?

3. “Separation”—This poem describes exile, but whether it is personal or collective is not entirely clear. It seems that a disagreement has separated two people who were once happy together, but even the seasons and the earth itself pass him by. Why is he alone? The poem raises many questions as to the cause of separation:

- a. whom does the poet address?
- b. how do we know?
- c. what is a “thing untrue”?
- d. why “Separation”—exile?

4. “I See a Star”—Lopez relates to his mother in this poem about a star and a basket. As his mother weaves a black star in the “white sky”, the poet watches her hands “make it grow.” How does the poet find his identity

- a. in relation to his mother?
- b. what does the basket represent?
- c. how can a star be gentle and why?
- d. what are devils’ claws?

CLOSING

The shared inquiry closes with a review of the objectives framed as questions:

- a. which poem illustrated personal identity and how?
- b. which poem illustrates collective identity?
- c. which is the most universal poem, the most Indian?
- d. write a short letter to me describing Alonzo Lopez.

LESSON PLAN #3

Tribal themes are the very ground of Indian literature. As Kenneth Lincoln explained, tribe means relatedness not only to family and clan but also to the earth, to history, to real things and to self. (Lincoln 8) The poets selected for this unit tell us about the grandmothers, customs, crafts, ceremonies, dances, food, tasks, and games that have enhanced their sense of Indianess. For this lesson plan, we will look at Alonzo Lopez's poem "Celebration," found in *The Whispering Wind*, edited by Terry Allen.

OBJECTIVES

1. To learn about the role of tribe in relation to self-knowledge.
2. To identify celebrations, music and dance unique to our individual sense of community.

MATERIALS

1. Audiotape of Indian music such as S. Fitzgerald's "Thunderdrums."
2. *Native American Crafts Workshop*, by Bonnie Bernstein & Leigh Blair. See pp. 84-85 on celebrations, and 48-52 on musical instruments.

STRATEGIES

1. Begin with audiotape of music.

PREPARATION

1. Introduce the topic of celebrations. List some of the of the Indian ceremonies such as thanksgiving for harvest and successful hunt, for naming a child, for the change of season.
2. Read Lopez poem and discuss.

DISCUSSION TOPIC

1. Lopez does not inform us what is to be celebrated; we know there will be feasting and dancing and games will be played and, most importantly, that the author will be “a part of it.”
2. Why has the author written this poem? What is important?
3. What is going to happen? How does he create the sense of anticipation and excitement?

CLOSING

1. Students list celebration important to them.
2. Student list events that occur in these celebrations—dancing, feasting, music, games?
3. Students describe celebration in poem or paragraph.

TEACHER BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexander, Hartley Burr. *The World's Rim: Great Mysteries of the North American Indian* . Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953.

How ritual interprets life and how the Indian world vision is expressed in ceremony is explained in this series of studies of rituals developed by the Indians of North America.

Allen, Terry, ed. *The Whispering Wind: Poetry by Young American Indians* . Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1972.

The works of students of the Institute of American Indian Arts comprise this volume. A short biography introduces each poet. Some, like Liz Sohappay, had yet to finish their college education. These very young voices are sure to inspire students of all ages.

Bruchac, Joseph, ed. *The Next World; Poems by Third World Americans*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1976.

This excellent anthology is a collection of the young poets of the seventies, voices of many ethnic groups from Chinese-American to Puerto Rican and Filipino and Native American and others. Each writer is introduced with an autobiographical sketch and photo. If there is a theme, it is that similarities can be found in differences.

Dodge, Robert K. and McCullough, Joseph B. *Voioe from Wah'kon-tah: Contemporary Poetry of Native Americans* . New York: International Publishers, 1974.

Published shortly after the Wounded Knee encounter of 1973, this volume presents poets whose works link Chief Joseph and Russell Means and the spirit of Wah'kon-tah, sum total of all things. With an introduction by Vine Deloria, Jr. it is an enriching collection.

Harjo, Joy. *In Mad Love and War* . Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1990.

Poems and some prose writings focus in large on women's concerns.

———. *She Had Some Horses* . New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1983.

The dispossessed dreamer finds herself in the power of emotions bridled by poetic form.

Katz, Jane B. ed. *I Am the Fire of Time: The Voices of Native American Women* . New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977.

Author of two books for secondary school students and writer of curriculum materials, Katz presents a collection that gives us insight into the creative role of Indian women, past and present. It is an excellent source.

Lincoln, Kenneth. *Native American Renaissance* . Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

For an understanding of the literary history and tribal poetics of the Indians of North America, Lincoln's book is essential. Indexed and with a bibliography that is a gold mine of information.

Lourie, Dick, ed. *Come to Power: Eleven Contemporary American Indian Poets* . Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1974.

This is one of the early anthologies of new poets. It presents eleven of the finest, Niatum, Silko, and Russell among them. The poems selected by Lourie were not chosen on the basis of trends, developments, etc., but because the editor/poet himself liked the works. An excellent source.

Momaday, N. Scott. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* . Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969.

Momaday's prose poem describes his quest for tribal identity.

Niatum, Duane, ed. *Harper's Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry* . New York: Harper & Row, 1987.

This anthology offers a spectrum of 36 distinct tribal voices that express a common cultural heritage of kinship, nature and survival. Brian Swann's introduction gives a fine survey of Indian literature from the oral tradition to the contemporary song-poet. Biographies are included plus an index of titles and one of first lines.

Highly recommended.

———. *Carriers of the Dream Wheel: Contemporary Native American Poetry* . New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

Edited by poet and prize-winning author Duane Niatum, this anthology has been one of the best known books on contemporary Native American poetry. Essential to any collection on the subject, it includes biographies, photos and a glossary of Indian words.

Ortiz, Simon. *from Sand Creek: rising in this heart which is our America*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, c 1981.

This is a collection of poems in which Ortiz attempts to analyze what it is to be an American, an Indian, a citizen and how we learn from each other.

Rosen, Kenneth, ed. *Voices from the Rainbow: Contemporary Poetry by American Indians* . New York: Viking Press, 1975.

A collection of poems by twenty-one American Indian poets who, according to the editor, exhibit a strong sense of self. Most of these poems were published for the first time in the Rosen anthology. Seven women and fourteen men represent tribal affiliations across the nation. Contributors' biographical notes are included.

Storm, Hyemeyohsts. *Seven Arrows* . New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

The introduction helps us to understand the concept of the Medicine Wheel. Storm then presents Indian stories and legends to teach the meaning of the Sun Dance Way.

Velie, Alan R., ed. *American Indian Literature: An Anthology*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979.

The tales, songs with musical scores, memoirs and poetry of American Indians were chosen by Velie not for sociological relevance but for literary excellence. (7) With index and illustrations by Danny Timmons and introduction by Velie.

STUDENT BIBLIOGRAPHY

From the Teacher Bibliography see the anthologies edited by Allen, Bruchac, Dodge, Katz, Lourie, Niatum and Rosen.

Bernstein, Bonnie and Blair, Leigh. *Native American Crafts Workshop* . Carthage, IL: Fearon Teacher Aids, 1982.

More than just crafts are presented in this handsomely-designed book which gives, in addition, the history and detailed description of how various articles were used. Illustrated with bibliography.

Carter, Forrest. *The Education of Little Tree* . Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, c 1976.

Carter remembers his Cherokee boyhood and growing up with his grandparents in a tale not to be missed by students or teachers.

“Cobblestone: The Magazine for Young People.” Vol. 11, Number 9, September 1990. Joseph, a Chief of the Nez Perce.

Chief Joseph’s story, in his words, and the story of his people’s flight for freedom are featured in this issue which also includes how to make a beadwork medallion.

“Cobblestone: The Magazine for Young People.” Vol. 10, Number 7, July 1989. Dine: The People of the Navajo Nation.

Students can learn Navajo code, or how to build a hogan, weave a rug, or make a Navajo taco in this issue that includes stories, a myth and more in this issue.

Ney, Marian Wallace. *Indian America: A Geography of North American Indians* . Cherokee, NC.: Cherokee Publications, 1977.

Bold, easy-reading text accompanies each brightly illustrated map on the facing page to give a clear picture of the location of various tribes and Indian confederacies.

Oliver, Louis Littlecoon. *Chasers of the Sun; Creek Indian Thoughts* . Greenfield Center, NY.: Greenfield Review Press, 1990.

Poems, legends, and autobiographical sketches by the Muskogee/Creek author pass on the Indian traditions in a delightful collection and excellent primary source.

Schneider Bill. *The Flight of the Nez Perce* . Billings, MT: Falcon Press, 1988.

Although a brief thirty-two pages, this booklet is a useful introduction to Nez Perce history, and part of a series of similar histories by Falcon Press. Illustrated.

Wilson, Gilbert L. *Waheenee: An Indian Girl’s Story as Told By Herself to Gilbert L. Wilson* . Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, c 1981.

The story of a Hidatsa girl born in 1839, this primary source describes tribal daily life in rich detail. Illustrations, glossary, and notes.

MATERIALS

Audiocassettes

Fitzgerald, Scott. “Thunderdrums.” The Nature Recording Reference Series. Vol. XXII., Friday Harbor, WA.: Nature Recordings, 1989.

Fitzgerald’s music is inspired by Native American and African percussion and combines a variety of sounds from nature.

Nakai, R. Carlos. “Earth Spirit.” Phoenix, AZ: Canyon Records Productions, Inc., 1987.

R. Carlos Nakai is of Navajo-Ute heritage. He is a nationally known composer and performer of the Native American flute. Tape includes traditional Kiowa chant, impressions of Canyon De Chelly and soaring eagle.

——— . “Journeys.” Phoenix, AZ: Canyon Records Productions, 1986.

Side one includes a children’s song, a children’s dance and one song “my cat enjoys.” Side two has seven improvisations.

———. “Sundance Season.” Tuscon, AZ: Celestial Harmonies, 1988.

A recording designed to “bring forth the Native People’s music as it is today.”

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