

Representations of Higher
Education in
Contemporary American
Indian Fiction

Michelle Nicole Boyer

American Indian Studies, MA
University of Arizona



What are *AI* authors writing?



How can AI novels shape audience perceptions?



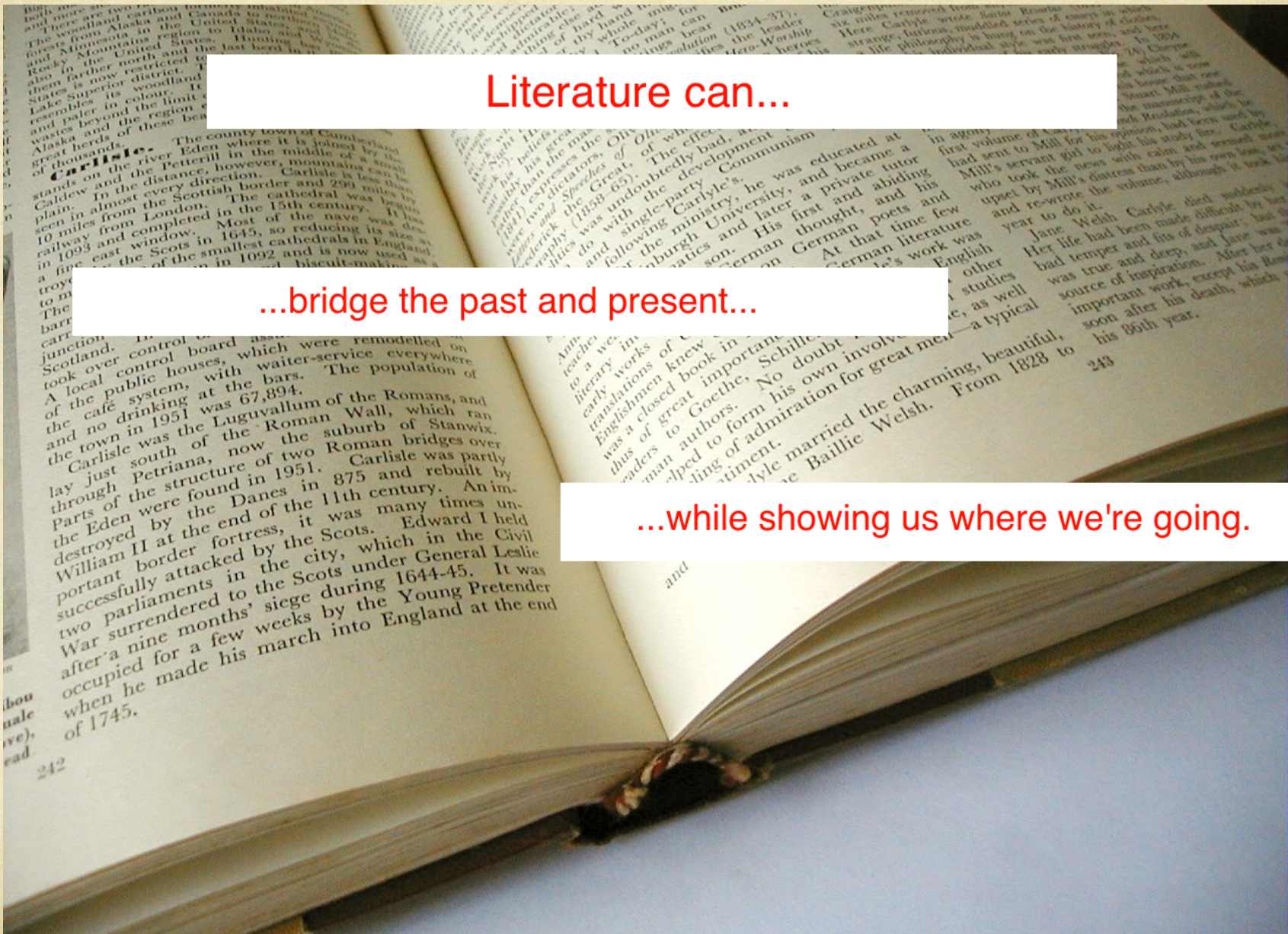
What Is AIL?

- American Indian Literature
 - “Literature about Indians, by Indians” (Velie & Kidwell)
 - A body of meaning taken from a specific context

Literature can...

...bridge the past and present...

...while showing us where we're going.



Pre-Contact AI Education

- Existed!
- Based on life-stage learning modules
 - Fulfillment of prior lessons needed before advancement, but no set timeline to learn each lesson
 - Self-paced
 - Gendered
- Knowledge is its own living, breathing entity
- Community values were in the “curriculum”
- Community valued above individualism



Mentor: Eileen George, Choctaw



Master of Ceremonies: Randy Edmonds, Kiowa-Caddo

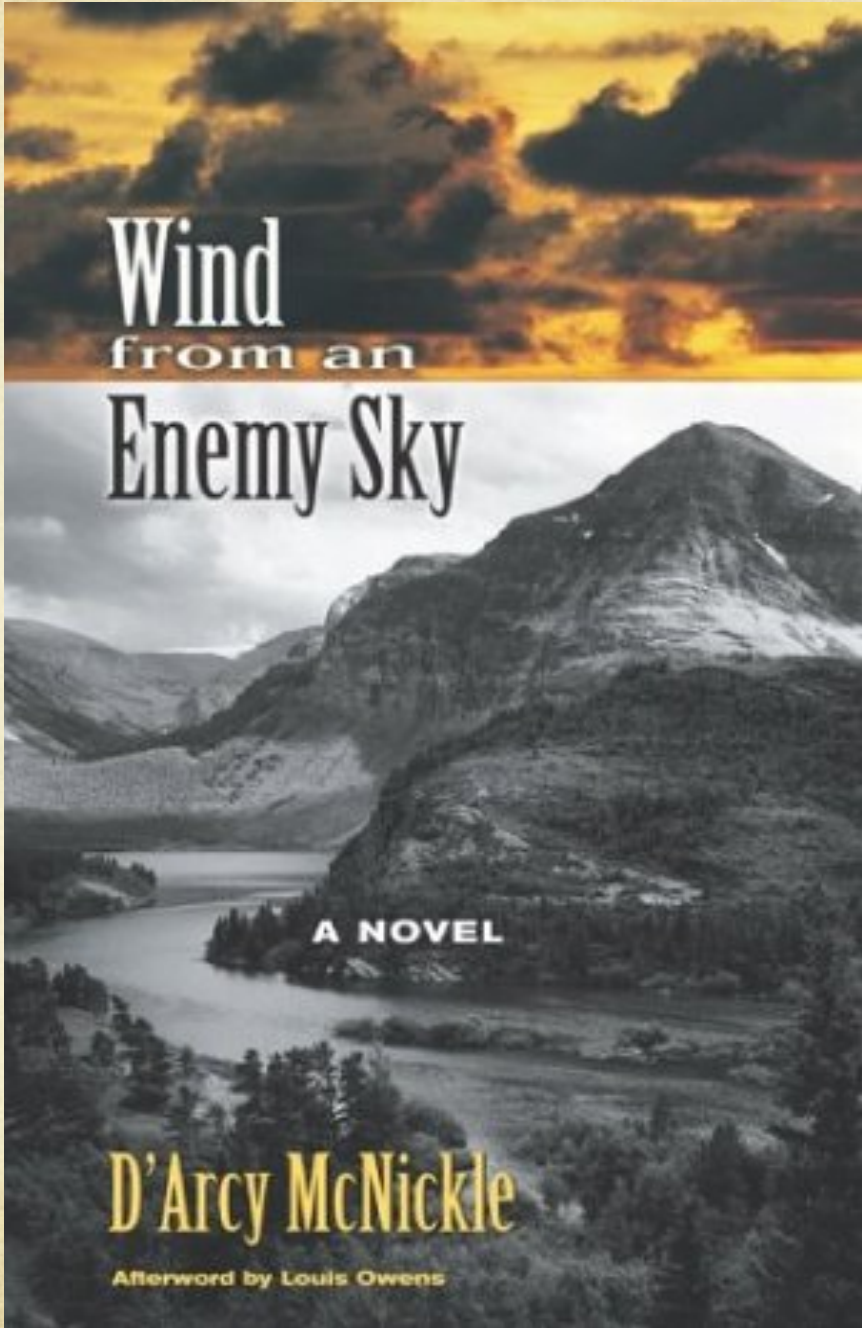


Tina Morales, Chippawa-Cree (mentor), Frank Castellum, Yuki (mentor)

Western Education

- Individualistic
- Forced upon Native peoples
- Negative perceptions from negative events
 - Families separated; children forcibly taken
 - Horrible treatment, including death
 - Language and cultural loss





Wind
from an
Enemy Sky

A NOVEL

D'Arcy McNickle

Afterword by Louis Owens

McNickle & *Wind from an Enemy Sky*

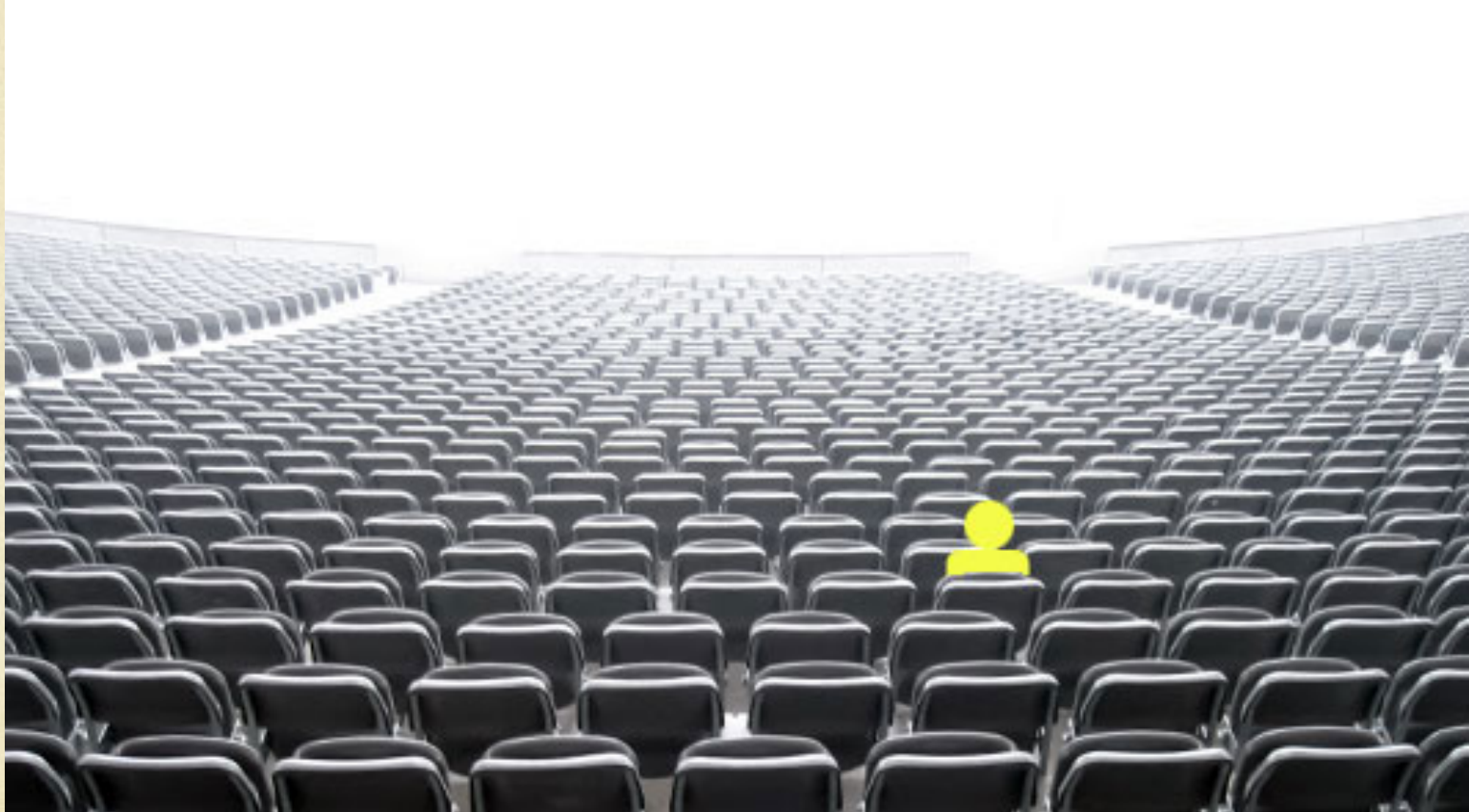
- Threat of colonialism for Chief Bull and the Little Elk people (fictitious, but not 'imagined')
- Antoine
 - Returns from government boarding school with land-loss and language-loss as part of his identity
 - No translation between white-Little Elk culture
 - Historical trauma

Iron Child says...

- *“White men were coming in to our country, taking our land, killing the game, and sending our children away”*

(McNickle 84).

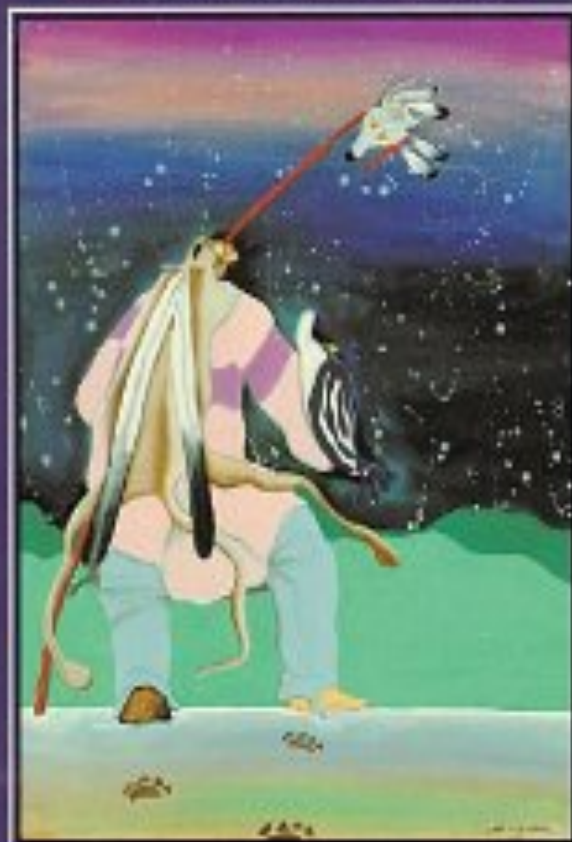
Overall Message:



Click to **LOOK INSIDE!**

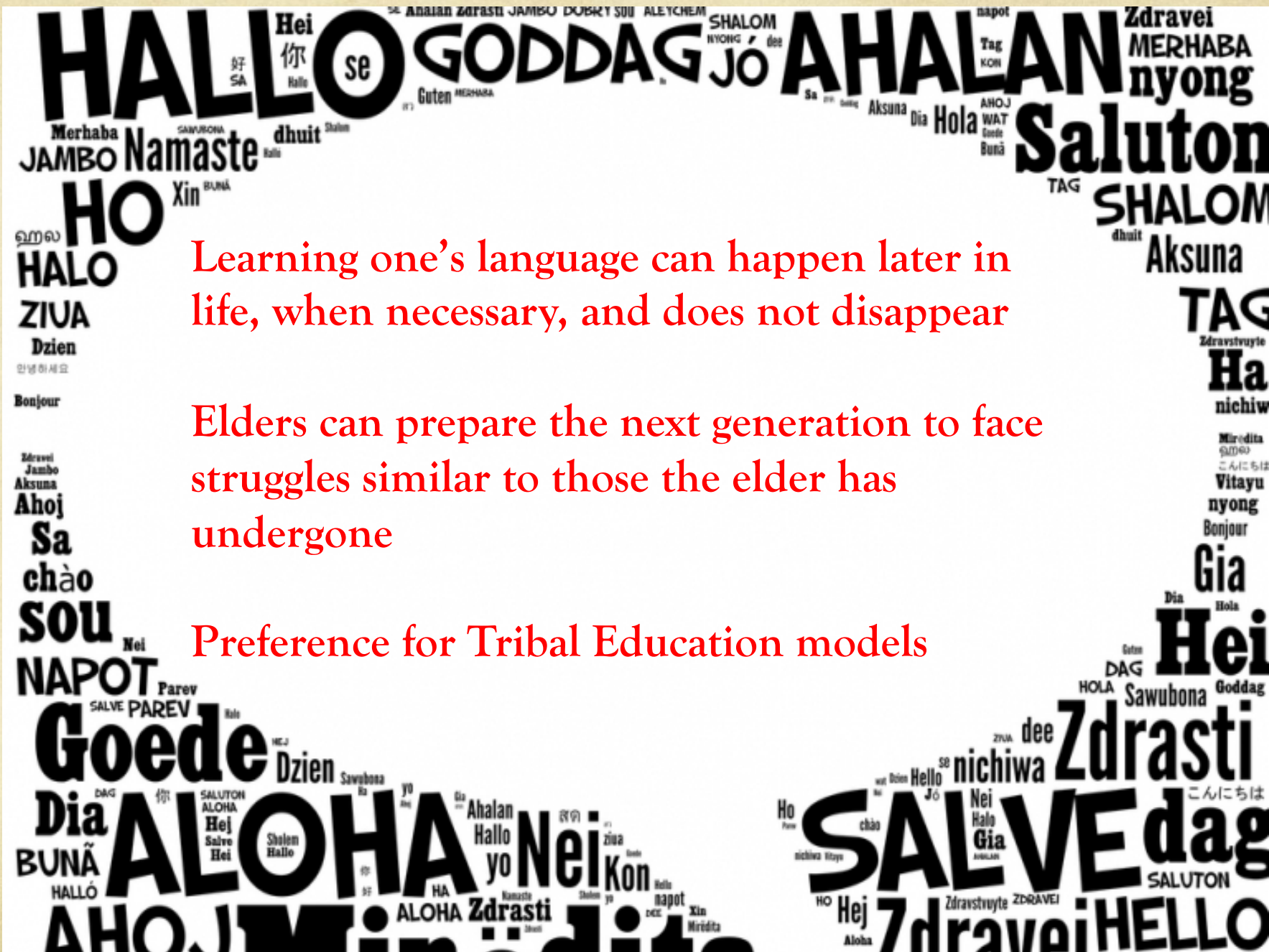
WOLFSONG

A NOVEL BY LOUIS OWENS



Owens & Wolfson

- An elder reflects, “there was so much that he, himself, had never learned” because of the time he spent in the realm of white education (Owens 5).
- And, “In the government school they cut out the tongues of Indians, sewing in different tongues while the children slept” (Owens 5).

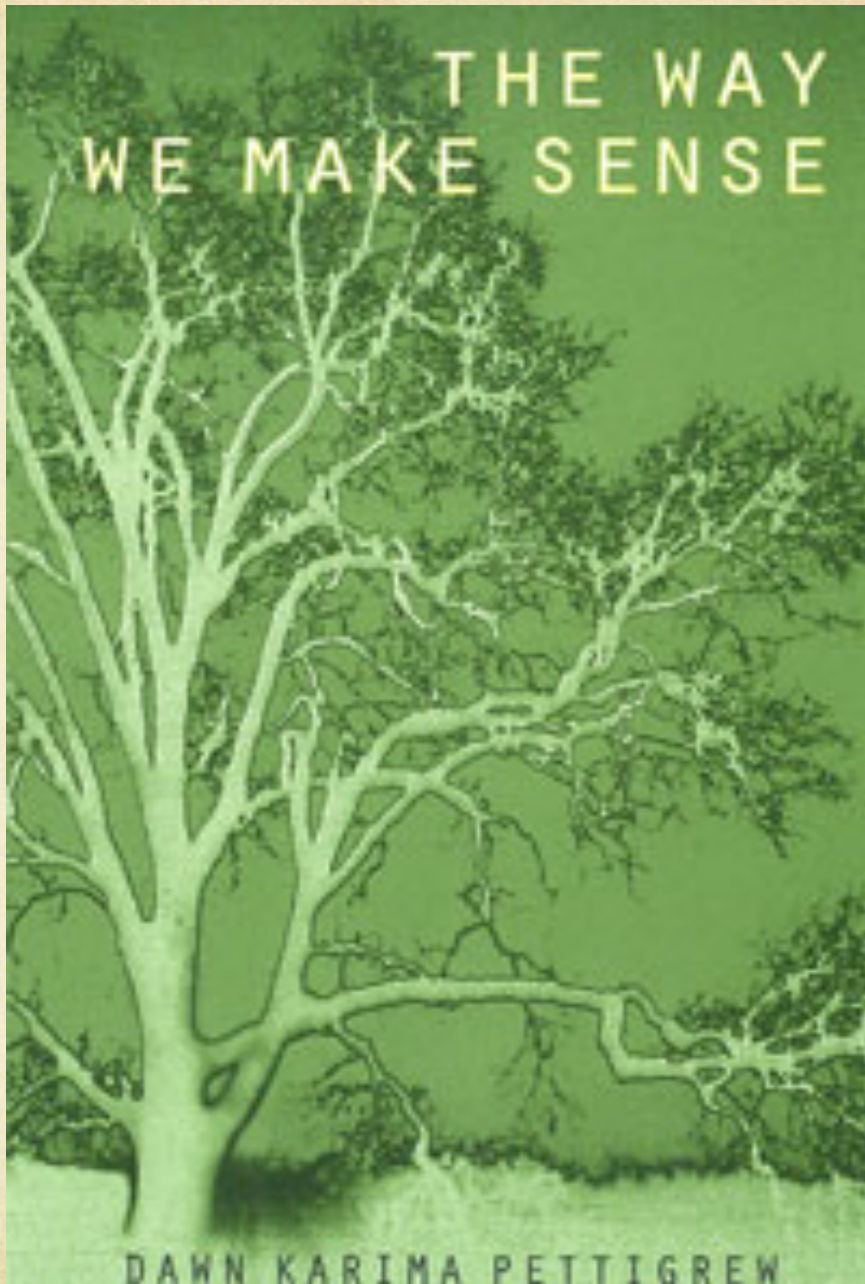


Learning one's language can happen later in life, when necessary, and does not disappear

Elders can prepare the next generation to face struggles similar to those the elder has undergone

Preference for Tribal Education models

THE WAY
WE MAKE SENSE



DAWN KARIMA PETTIGREW

Pettigrew & *The Way We Make Sense*

- Oral tradition transforms into a poem about abstract pencils
- “Arrow of the New World” (Pettigrew 53)
- English as the “tongue of those in charge” (Pettigrew 53)
- Reflections to historical trauma that plagued families when children were forcibly taken to school



WINNER OF THE FIRST BOOK AWARD

Night Sky, Morning Star



Evelina Zuni Lucero

Lucero & *Night Sky, Morning Star*

- English is, “full of inconsistencies, irregularities, and bastardized phrases. When a Native came to rely on it like I had, thoughts could get lost, wandering soulless and expressionless in vicious circles” (Lucero 58).
- English as part of a displacement that occurs at the end of Western education

A NOVEL

FACES IN THE MOON

BY BETTY LOUISE BELL



AI Women in Higher Education

- What does the typical college student look like?
- Self perception and American Indian identity
- *Faces in the Moon* by Betty Louise Bell → identity is at the forefront, stemming from education
- Negative perceptions
- *Generational* issues attributed to Higher Education

New York Times
Bestseller



A Novel

LOUISE
ERDRICH



The ROUND
HOUSE

Youth in Erdrich's *The Round House*

- 13-year-old Joe as a narrator
- Self-education as an emerging trend
- Challenging Western education by learning how to combat what Western civilization contends is “normal”

The Future

NEXT EXIT



Where Do We Go From Here?

- Western education has flaws -this needs to be admitted and addressed, and from that reshaped into something of benefit
- Women that become teachers
 - Helping the next generation
 - Proving the current stereotypes wrong shapes the future
 - Inhabit the world of Western education, and can navigate it
- Elders
 - Teachers, cultural preservers, language restorers
- Symposiums, Research, etc.

“Balance”

- Representations: Negative
 - Historical trauma still exists
 - English as an enemy
 - Removing children from their culture/home
- Representations: Positive
 - Education IS accessible for AI students
 - Teachers and Elders ARE guides for the future generations
 - Self-education IS education
- Further studies are needed

Thank You!