

Phoenix Roundtable

Title for my Remarks: Reading and Teaching *The Birchbark House* through an Anishinaabe Lens

Abstract: In an Anishinaabe worldview, children are seen as responsible contributors to their communities. They are encouraged to cultivate the innate wisdom they bring with them at birth by carefully listening to, observing, and sitting in silence with their environment, their relations, and themselves. In my short remarks for this roundtable, I read Omakayas's experiences in *The Birchbark House* of spending time alone outdoors through this Anishinaabe lens, arguing that these experiences play a major role in fostering Omakayas's resiliency and, ultimately—looking ahead to the later books in the series—her and her family's survivance. (The concept "survivance" comes from Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor and speaks to survival, resistance, and resurgence in the face of genocide. While I won't have time to discuss their work in detail, I will reference Vizenor and the other Anishinaabe scholars, including Lawrence Gross, Leanne Simpson, and Margaret Noodin, whose work informs my reading). I conclude by describing an assignment (adaptable for any age group) that invites students not to *appropriate* but to *appropriately* learn from some of the specific Indigenous epistemologies reflected in *The Birchbark House*.

Amplifying Indigenous Literature and Activism Panel

Panel Abstract: This year's conference proposal asks how can we "listen to and amplify voices that have historically been silenced or ignored due to marginalization in its many forms?" As Dawn Quigley (Turtle Mountain Ojibwe) discusses in her 2016 essay "Silenced: Voices Taken from American Indian Characters in Children's Literature," Indigenous voices continue to be silenced, including in K-12 classrooms dominated by inaccurate, destructive white-authored books about Indigenous people in which the American Indian characters literally do not speak. In contrast, this panel amplifies Indigenous authors, stories, and approaches to activism. Come listen.

Mandy Suhr-Sytsma Paper Title: Who is Activism For? Indigenous Resurgence in *Give Me Some Truth* and *The Marrow Thieves*

Abstract: In the 2018 YA novel *Give Me Some Truth* by Eric Gansworth (Onondaga), Tuscarora protagonist, Carson, leads a protest against a racist white restaurant owner. The protest fails to change the behavior of the man or his white customers. And these aren't the only white characters who disparage, dismiss, and/or exploit their American Indian neighbors. In fact, unlike in *If I Ever Get Out of Here* (2013), Gansworth's earlier YA novel set in this same world, *Give Me Some Truth* places very little emphasis on positive white/Indigenous relationships. The 2017 dystopian YA novel *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline (Georgian Bay Métis community) is even more pessimistic about the possibility of changing the colonialist ways of white individuals and institutions. This book focuses on the experiences of a group of Indigenous people in a future version of Canada who are literally being hunted by colonizers who want to exploit and then destroy them. Beyond simply acknowledging the refreshing lack of nice white people in these books, I draw on the work of Indigenous scholars, including Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, Alderville First Nation) and Kahente Horn-Miller (Kanien:keha'ka/Mohawk), to read these novels as depicting and contributing to what Simpson terms "resurgence," the holistic rebuilding of Indigenous communities from within. Activism in *Give Me Some Truth* and *The Marrow Thieves* may fail to change colonial reality, but it succeeds in empowering Indigenous individuals and communities. These characters should inspire our admiration and allyship along with our empathy.