

Exploring Cultural Appropriation from Indigenous Perspectives

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For English and Cultural Studies undergraduate course

Background

I developed and delivered this lesson as part of a new *Indigenous Women and Orality* course (ENG 270) offered at Huron College University in Fall 2017. In this undergraduate course, students were introduced to Indigenous storytelling within the context of historical and ongoing colonialism centering on Indigenous women storytellers of Turtle Island (North America). The course also spent time exploring issues of (mis)representation and (mis)appropriation of Indigenous peoples' voices and knowledges in literature and research. This lesson was delivered as a one and half hour class which focused on the topic of appropriation. Using a critical pedagogical approach, I strived to unpack the colonizing nature of representations of Indigenous peoples in literature and privilege Indigenous peoples' perspectives on this issue of appropriation. I also employed various instructional strategies to take up a current controversy using a think pair share activity, image deconstruction and graphic organizer, which aimed to move students from independent reflection to whole group discussion. The content and pedagogical approach of this lesson has application for other disciplines including: Indigenous Studies, Women's Studies and Education.

Lesson Outcomes

1. Students will define appropriation and misappropriation, identify its historical and socio-political challenges as it relates to Indigenous peoples in the context of historical and ongoing forms of colonialism.
2. Students will uncover underlying and conflicting differences between liberal (individual) notions of the imagination and Indigenous (collective) notions of ethics in storytelling and Indigenous knowledges.
3. Students will take up a recent controversy on the issue of appropriation and apply an Indigenous decolonizing theoretical lens to critique and analyze the controversy.

Key Concepts

- Appropriation/misappropriation

Prior Knowledge

- Indigenous peoples
- Colonization/decolonization
- (Mis)representation and stereotypes

References

- TWUC Equity Task Force. *Statement from the TWUC Equity Task Force in response to WRITE MAGAZINE editorial "Winning the Appropriation Prize"*.
<https://www.writersunion.ca/sites/all/files/Amended%20Statement%20from%20the%20TWUC%20Equity%20Task%20Force%20May15.pdf>
- Fee, Margaret. "The Trickster Moment, Cultural Appropriation and the Liberal Imagination." In Reder, Deanna & Morra, Linda. *Learn, Teach and Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literature*. 2016, pp..
- Niedzviecki, Hal. "Winning the Appropriation Prize." *Write Magazine*. Union Writers of Canada. 2017.
- Ritchie, Scott. "My Native Struggle." Used with permission of the illustrator.
- Rogers, Janet. "Can'tlit (My Stories)". Canadaland website. <http://www.canadalandshow.com/janet-rogers-cultural-appropriation-prize/> Accessed 15, May 2017.

Lesson Plan

Timing: (45 minutes)

Instructions

1) Opening Teaser – Image deconstruction (4 min)

- a) Hand out a post-it note to every student.
- b) Post the comic image (see attached) on the smartboard.
- c) Ask students - What tensions and/or issues is the illustrator highlighting?
- d) Ask students to write their initial thoughts on the post it and bring it to the front of the class.

2) Think Pair Share –Article review (8 min)

- a) Introduce and define appropriation and misappropriation.
- b) Share the 1-page article “Winning the Appropriation Prize” (see attached) and ask students to read and reflect on the article independently.
- c) Invite students to share their initial thoughts with their elbow partner.
- d) Invite 1-2 students to share their discussions with the larger group.

3) Small group – Article activity (15 min)

- a) Divide class into 3 small groups to read and analyze short response articles to the controversy “TWUC Equity Task Force” and “Can’tlit (My Stories)” by Janet Rogers.
- b) Instruct each group to present their article to the class and answer the following questions.
 - Who are the author(s) and what are their positions on the issue?
 - How did the author’s talk about appropriation and its impacts on Indigenous peoples?

4) Short video – (10 min)

- a) Show short video that takes up the appropriation prize controversy.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxymaqQUgcU>

5) Whole Group - Graphic organizer – (10 min)

- a) Fill out the graphic organizer start with questions 1-3 (see attached) and capture students points live on the smartboard.
- b) To conclude, engage students in answering the final question 4 on the graphic organizer chart which involves deconstructing underlying ideologies and epistemologies that inform the different positions to help students unmask hidden assumptions and ideologies.

Required Resources

- Photocopies of the articles
- Flip chart paper and markers
- Internet access for video
- Smartboard technology for graphic organizer whole group exercise
- Graphic organizer and image on a USB key and a white board marker

Extension Activities

- Responsible and ethical approaches to taking up Indigenous knowledges and stories.