

# Placed-Based Writing

Photo by Shannon Velbauer, Columbus High School

Montana  
Writing  
Project

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## Publishing with Students

**Submission Deadline: February 1, 2009**

**Publication Date: March 2009**

“Publication is important for all children. It is not the privilege of the classroom elite, the future literary scholars. Rather, it is an important mode of literary enfranchisement for each child in the classroom.”

—Don Graves

Publishing has always been an important piece of the writing process for professional writers, but it continues to become increasingly common with writers of all ages and levels. Technology is playing a huge role in changing the ease and implications for publishing, giving students opportunities to reach worldwide audiences online and create professional looking books, pamphlets, or movies inexpensively even at their own homes. Teachers and students are able to access technologies only available to professionals only a decade ago and teachers of very young writers to those at the college level are adapting these technologies for their classrooms. Yet even with all these options, some of the best publishing venues still require nothing more than paper, pencils, and good writing. In what genres and formats do your students publish? How do you use publishing to increase the quality of student writing? How is technology impacting how you have students publish? How do you manage a classroom where students have more familiarity with current publishing options than you do or where students don't see publication as a final step in writing (as many teachers do) but as one of the first or only steps? What solutions have you come up with to troubleshoot problems that arise when you have students' work available to a wider audience? What are the benefits you've noticed?

Please consider sharing your teaching ideas, experiences, and resources.

*The Montana Writing Project Journal* welcomes submissions for any of the following areas. Of course, there is also always room for quality work that does not fit the categories or the current thematic issue.

*The Practice of Teaching:* As you work to teach writing, what methods get results? You might build an article from a demonstration lesson or a successful classroom unit. Reflect on what pedagogical practices have proven effective and share some ideas or strategies we can put into play in our own classrooms. The length of the submissions for this section could vary wildly. They might be brief pieces of no more than a paragraph or two that outline a successful lesson but might also materialize as lengthier pieces that explain a whole unit and give some theoretical background or support for your work.

*Fresh Insight:* What is happening in education that you feel you must say something about? Use this as a forum to share your views on writing education. There are many things going on at the classroom level up to the national level that we as teachers are thinking about, wanting to change, or are hopeful or angry about. This is a platform to expand and articulate some of those ideas. What important issues are those around us (or are we ourselves) not thinking enough about?

*Teachers as Writers:* Amid the daily chaos of teaching, what personal writing have you been able to do? What are you ready to publish? What better way to encourage all of us to continue to be writers than to offer one another some of the work we are doing. Submissions of any genre are welcome.

*Book reviews:* What titles have you found useful when working on writing? Consider reviewing one of your favorite texts to give others an idea of the content and approach that they can expect from the author. We would be especially interested in fairly new releases with which others may not yet be familiar.

*Original Photography:* Share images from your classroom, professional development, or photos that complement any of your writing submissions. Images should be sent as jpeg image files with a resolution of at least 1200 by 1800 pixels. Anyone who appears in the photo should be identified, along with any other relevant caption information such as a brief explanation of what is depicted, the photographer's name, and an approximate date the photo was taken.

*Announcements/ Upcoming Events:* Please pass on any information about upcoming events, opportunities, or any other information that would be of interest and use to the Montana Writing Project Community.

### Upcoming Issues

#### Highlights from the Rural Writing Conference

Submission Deadline: May 1, 2009

Publication Date: June 2009

#### Implementing Indian Education for All through Writing

Submission Deadline: August 1, 2009

Publication Date: September 2009

### Submission Guidelines:

- Send any submissions to [montana.writing.project@gmail.com](mailto:montana.writing.project@gmail.com).
- Manuscripts are only accepted in digital form saved as an RTF, Mac Pages, or Microsoft Word file.
- Do not embed image files or diagrams in your text files. Please send them as separate attachments.
- In general, manuscripts should not exceed 2,500 words.
- Please list your name, address, academic affiliation, and e-mail address on your manuscript.



# Teaching Where We Are

Merrilyne Lundahl

## What is place-based education?

Place-based education is using our local place as the jumping off point for academic study. There are many terms that describe “place-based education.” Other names by which it is known include community-oriented schooling, place-conscious education, bioregional education, sense of place education, and ecoliteracy. One of the standard definitions is from David Sobel:

Place-based education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students’ appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of the school (Sobel 2004).

Place-based language arts include the literature of a place or region as well as writing and other literacy tasks that serve to connect students to place. Such tasks can be reciprocally beneficial. When people connect to place and make it personal, they become committed to it. Place informs identity and can fuel writing that is self-selected, relevant, descriptive, and meaningful.

## Why take a place-based approach?

For democratic ideals of community, responsibility, and inquiry: In a time when education often functions to create consumers in a capitalist market, place-based education has potential to work toward creating citizens in a participatory democracy. In an era of national standards, local knowledge and its value tends to be lost, but place-based education reverses that loss to build and restore communities. One purpose for a place-conscious approach is that, “It often employs a process of re-storying, whereby students are asked to respond creatively to stories of their homeland so that, in time, they are able to position themselves, imaginatively and actually, within the continuum of nature and culture in that place” (Lane-Zucker 2004). In the storying and re-storying of their places, students become a part of their cultural and natural landscapes. Such integration into place helps students become better citizen-stewards. Additionally, getting to know our “place”—the natural, cultural, and historic—grounds us as we expand circles of inquiry into other places.

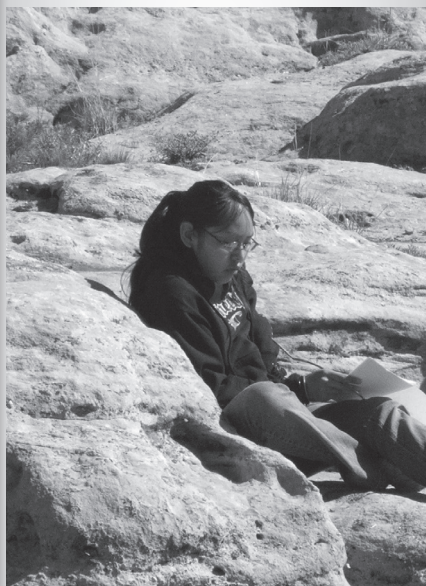
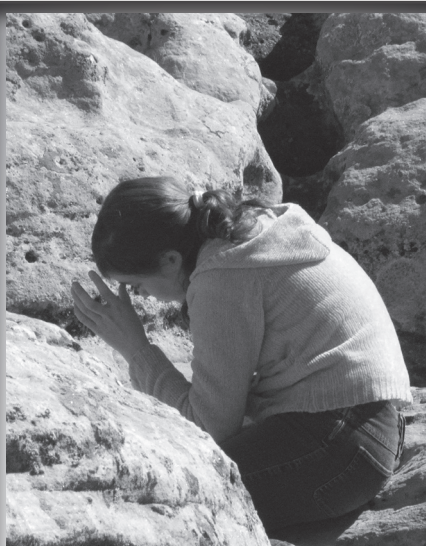
To more effectively reach and support students: If the educational situation of Alaskan Natives and American Indians in Alaska has any parallels to Montana and its efforts with Native students and education, there is substantial evidence supporting the “efficacy of a place-based strategy in strengthening rural schools and teachers and improving student achievement” (Emekauwa 2004). Additionally, the potential exists for place-based strategies to validate individuals who choose to stay in their local places against the advice that tells them that success depends on getting away from their home places (Dehyle 1995, Kipp 2006). Returning or staying home has potential to maintain and restore communities.

For the health of individuals, communities, and the planet: There are other compelling reasons for implementing place-based methods. The field of environmental psychology contends that disconnection from nature leads to ecologically destructive behavior that is a root cause of ecological crisis; assorted types of individual human suffering; and various forms of social and collective suffering potentially including racism, sexism, violence, and alienation from society (Scull 1999). Place-conscious education serves to connect and reconnect people and their natural environments. In so doing, we create a more just and sustainable world. Environmental issues are social justice issues.

To connect students to place through writing and engage students in writing through place: Place-based writing encompasses many of the elements of good writing instruction when it is self-selected, relevant, descriptive, and meaningful for students and their communities. Pablo Neruda wrote, “Pardon me, if when I want/to tell the story of my life/it’s the land I talk about.” We don’t need to



Merrilyne Lundahl (pictured above somewhere in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge) is a master’s candidate in environmental studies at the University of Montana-Missoula. She taught language arts in Blanding, Utah, before deciding to try her hand at teaching field science and residential environmental education. Since graduating from the Professional Residency in Environmental Education at Teton Science School in 2006, she has sought ways to combine passions of writing, natural history, and teaching.



Above, Merrilyne's students at Albert R. Lyman Middle School write near Blanding, Utah

excuse our students who want to tell such stories, but rather encourage their place-based identities and give them opportunities to explore and express them.

### Some ways to get "place" into our classrooms:

#### *Write a class "I Am From" poem.*

Have students include their name and some characteristic of where they are from. That characteristic could be about others who live there, about the history of the place, its culture, geology, food, art, plants, animals, commodities—anything. A way to think about this is what makes the place you are from what it is—what is Missoulian about Missoula, Montanan about Montana, American about America? My contribution to a communal I Am From poem would be: "I am Merrilyne, from Mormon and coyote country."

#### *"Reading Like a Writer" with place-based picture books.*

This activity is a good introduction to ways that "sense of place" can function within texts. Is it more than setting? Can place function as a character? Read *Harlem* by Walter Dean Meyers. There are numerous other texts that rely heavily on place—be careful not to privilege one "idyllic" setting, but to provide a variety of places: urban, rural, wild, suburban. Discuss how "placeness" functions for the author, the characters, the text, and you. Alternatively or additionally, you might adapt Katie Wood Ray's noticing, theorizing, naming, relating and envisioning strategies of reading like a writer through the lens of "sense of place."

#### *Create a map that includes places of significance.*

Maps can give students access to memories and stories and can help them construct and articulate a sense of place. Published memoirs and fiction frequently include maps in the front matter. Some ideas to get you going include David Sobel's *Mapmaking with Children: Sense of Place Education for the Elementary Years* and Hannah Hinchman's *A Trail Through Leaves: The Journal as a Path to Place*.

#### *Offer invitations for speculative writing about place.*

Students can respond in their writer's notebooks to questions that get at the value of place and how it informs them.

For example: Do you have a "place of enchantment?" What is a sense of place? Where is the place that you consider home? What makes a place a place and not just a spot on Google Earth? Has place affected the person you are, and if so, how?

#### *Have students do research specific to their local place.*

I've compiled some questions that quiz knowledge about a place. To answer these questions, students must depend on local knowledge and pay attention to their physical world. See page 28 for more information.

#### *Make place personal through metaphor; connect inner and outer landscapes.*

When I worked as a naturalist-ranger at Grand Teton National Park, one of my duties was to lead a geology hike. I love science, but am also numerically inept. I couldn't keep my million-years-agos and ice-ages straight and frequently was mixing up metamorphic and igneous formations. To compensate for this, my "interpretive hike" became about making place personal. We talked about succession, cycles, time, relationships, communities, composition of rocks, journeys of water molecules, erosional forces at a personal level. When I taught at Teton Science School, I did the same thing—tried to get students to relate in a real way to what we studied. See page 27 for more details.

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# Writing Ourselves: An Argument for Place-Based Personal Writing

Elliot Jacobs

Daniel walks quietly into my Language Arts class. He dresses casually—Carhartts and t-shirts—and takes his seat with a sincere nod to his neighbor. He is tall and pencil-thin, and, though he rarely says much, when he does I'm surprised by how gentle, almost timid, his voice sounds. His most striking feature is his huge nest of blond dreadlocks which frame his angular face and fall down almost to his waist. If I were tallying, Daniel would have the worst participation grade in the whole class—he speaks reluctantly when confronted. The rest of the time, Daniel follows class raptly, with an inscrutable smile.

When Daniel writes, these are the kinds of things that he says:

Many people live their whole lives in one place, never really looking around them to see what their environment has to offer. The concrete jungle can quickly become the only jungle people can see. In my view, this way of life isn't very full-filling and can quickly become monotonous. I was on this same path as a fifteen-year-old in my hometown of Columbia Falls, Montana. I was constantly roaming the streets looking for something that would make me happy, but coming up short almost every night. My friends and I started doing stupid things like breaking into abandoned buildings at night, destroying as much shit as we could, and leaving before the cops got there. Surfing through town on my skateboard, I was becoming more and more aware of the repetition and lack of variety that town life had to offer. I started wandering further away from town every day until I found the rock that would end up changing my entire way of thinking.

This was one of the first pieces of student writing that I ever responded to—the first major paper in my first semester as a teacher. What struck me about the writing was just how *good* it was. Daniel, in his brief response papers about the readings, had previously sounded distant and awkward—as though he were writing to me from underwater or through an international phone call. When I got this writing, however, he was in the same room—his life had taken on vivid colors and some kind of *he* that had been previously missing had suddenly appeared.

This observation, along with an essay that I read some weeks later by Carolyn Matalene entitled “Experience as Evidence: Teaching Students to Write Honestly and Knowledgeably about Public Issues” prompted me to ask, “Why is Daniel's piece so good, and how can I encourage all my students to write this way all the time?”

One challenge and joy of teaching arises from the knowledge and expertise that derive from the diverse backgrounds that students bring to class with them everyday. It's as though the student that you see every day is the point of a triangle, trailing the ever-widening and constantly-shifting breadth of the vertices extending beyond them into their past. The way that the triangle is oriented determines how well they'll be able to hit what we point them at. That is, as Matalene says, “some speakers are more adept in joining the conversation yet maintaining their own freedom than others” (Matalene 182). Writers are necessarily guided by the orientation and breadth of their past experience, though, as teachers, we only see the boat, not the wake behind it.

One conversation that *all* students can join is a conversation about themselves, grounded in a place that they know. Of course, I don't think that this will be easy for all students, or that what they discover, unearth, or express in doing so will be uniformly positive. However, students can learn to write meaningfully about themselves and their place on the planet, and from that, they can extend outward. By asking students to double back on themselves—to speak of the past and their place—students, by definition, write from a position of authority. With this authority comes agency, and with that, the willingness to make their voice heard in new genres and spaces. Place-based personal writing is one way to do this—fostering reflection, connection, and, ultimately, action.

## Experience As Evidence

How—and what—students ought to write is controversial. George Will satirically represents one side of this debate in his vitriolic essay, “The ‘Growth Model’ and the Growth of Illiteracy.” “Education in the new era of enlightenment,” writes Will, “was to be not a matter of putting things into students—least of all putting in anything that suggested a hierarchy of achievement—but of letting



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## Journal of the Montana Writing Project

things out. Nothing must interfere with the natural, undirected flowering of the student's personality" (Will 9/95). Some of Will's concerns are echoed by other conservative teachers and literacy experts—do we want our students to join an "academic" conversation or a "confessional" one?

Will, of course, sets up a false dichotomy here—that you can write about yourself or the world, but not both. We know that this isn't true. Paulo Freire tells us that the purpose of education is for learners to "develop the power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves. . ." (Freire 83). Praxis requires reflection and action; the world and the word are inseparable. Here Matalene describes it very well:

Most students quickly learn that the easiest, safest, least risky method is to keep private and public separate. This seems to me seriously wrong . . . we should be encouraging many voices, not turning them all into one. Surely, teaching students that they have the right and the responsibility to add their own unique voices to the American conversation is why we teach writing anyway. Surely, we want to strengthen their individual, private voices so that one day they may speak, not just listen, and act, not just watch. So that one day they will sound like Vaclav Havel, not White House speech writers. (Matalene 189)

Matalene articulates the fundamental rationale for encouraging students to write from experience—it honors their voice, encourages their efforts, and, ultimately, follows Paulo Freire's idea of praxis from reflection to action to make better citizens. Not only that, it's often better writing. Richard Hugo tells us "That all truth must conform to music"—meaning emerges from language, not the other way around (Hugo, *Triggering* 3). And for the student, writes Katherine Bomer, it "creates possibility that the present and future can be different than, better than, the past, through the belief that each person matters in the history and evolution of the planet" (Bomer 195).

I think that this partially explains why Daniel can write so vividly and honestly about himself—because he has something to say, and because it matters. Daniel believed these things because he was *invited* to do so by the assignment, which asked him to speak personally, and to reflect unflinchingly. I tried to honor his success at doing so by not backing away from the intensely personal project that writing about yourself for an audience necessarily entails.

Not all of my essays turned out this way. Will does raise a salient point about the risks of having students write from personal experience. Inexperienced writers do risk slipping into solipsism—especially with inexperienced instructors like me—when attempting to convey genuinely meaningful experiences. Here's a piece by another one of my students, Brian, which illustrates the dangers of mistaking repeating for reflection:

The biggest lesson that I learned was that if you know that you gave your best and worked your hardest that is all that matters. No matter what the outcome, even if it is losing three football games three years in a row with less than three minutes on your home field. Never hang your head at anything in life. . . That is why I live my life by never hanging my head at anything. No matter how bad the situation was or is. As long as you know that you gave your best and worked your hardest that is all that matters.

The problem in this piece isn't just that Brian clearly doesn't have the mastery of language that Daniel does. Indeed, Daniel's early drafts showed far more problems with

syntax and flow than Brian's. The problem is that Brian has substituted a slogan on a locker room wall for genuine reflection. This dichotomy is what brings me to the next part of my argument: there are no slogans on trees. In a culture that consistently thinks for us—tells us what a fourth-quarter loss *means*, regardless of what it *means to us*—place-based writing is one arena where students can have genuinely unmediated reflection on experiences.

### Writing Our Place, Writing Ourselves

Daniel continues, writing about the boulder that he discovered:

It was jutting out of the earth at an extremely intense angle, yet strangely able to keep itself from rolling into the river. I got the impression that it was patiently waiting to reunite with the river, as it was the same blue-green color as the water below. Upon reaching the boulder, we noticed there was about five feet of soil between the base of it and the cliff. As we anxiously raced to the top, we were greeted by an immense landscape of towering mountains and the mighty Flathead River flowing right beneath us.

The view from atop the boulder was one that gave the illusion of an untouched piece of earth. We were high, but not high enough to see all of the houses and office buildings. The only things that were allowed to enter our sight were the mountains, the river, and a seemingly endless valley of green and yellow trees. It seemed like my hometown had been swallowed up both by the mouth of the river and the canopy of trees. I couldn't believe that this was the same place I grew up in. How could I have missed this for all of those years?

There are oceanographers who spend time studying what are called "convergence zones." These are areas of the ocean where two water bodies meet—say, the current from the Northern California Bight and the Arctic Pacific. Characterized by a divergence in water temperatures, oxygen levels or salinity—these convergence zones are the most productive part of the ocean. When two water bodies meet, deep water—sometimes as deep as 100 meters—is thrust towards the surface in a process called upwelling. This upwelling makes these areas incredibly active—birds swoop to eat the fish which come to eat the plankton drug-up from the cold, sub-surface water.

I believe that the nexus of place and person is a little bit like the oceanic convergence zones. Where the person that we are and a place that helped shape us meet is an area of great creative and psychological activity. In the same way that, according to Matalene, "rationality *follows* rhetoric, emerges *from* discourse," meaningful writing both grows out of and reflects back on a connection with place. This explains, I think, why Daniel's essay succeeded rhetorically while Brian's is less successful. Daniel writes about himself within the context of a meaningful place.

Robert Brooke and Sandy Bangert describe this nexus in *Rural Voices*; all writers "need ways to connect their literacy to the world around them—to the places, people, and interests that make their world personally meaningful" (Brooke 23). Expanding on this, I believe that the reason that place-based writing (and place-based education as a whole) is both essential and transformative is because of its dialectical nature. The boulder gave Daniel context to write about his experience and vice-versa. The intertwining, recursive nature of place to person, person to place, provides



the upwelling that makes for vivid, personal, powerful writing. David Orr speaks to this exactly with his observation that, “in a way, *Walden* wrote Thoreau” (Orr 85).

This also explains why Daniel’s previous writing was disembodied—it was disconnected from both him and the land that sustains that conception. By grounding his writing, literally, in the land, Daniel was able to speak meaningfully about himself without talking, strictly, *about* himself. Orr describes this phenomenon as “the potential lying untapped in the commonplace, in our own places, in ourselves, and the relationship between all three” (Orr 86). Further, Ann Zwinger reminds us that, “Getting to know home is the most human and necessary of occupations. To give that power of observation to students is to give them something of infinite value and importance—something to do with the rest of their lives” (Tallmadge xi).

This, of course, raises the question of what kinds of places facilitate meaningful writing—are all places created equal? After all, the Polson Pirates Athletic Complex that Brian describes is also a place. Writing about meaningful places shouldn’t be merely the luxury of students with the ability to access them, or students who live in rural areas. Powerful and reflective writing about place is possible in any location. Richard Hugo’s poem, “What the Brand New Freeway Won’t Go By” provides a striking example of how a writer can ground their inquiry within an urban context—in this case my home, Seattle:

*What the Brand New Freeway Won’t Go By*

The block is bare except for this five-story  
ugly brick hotel. Perhaps the bulk  
frightened stores and homes away. Age is clear  
in turrets and the milk on window sills.  
The new name and the outside coat of paint  
must have raised the rent. As you drive by  
the rooms seem yellow and the air inside  
is stale because a roomer, second floor,  
in underwear, unshaven, fries a meal.  
To live here you should be a friend of rain,  
and fifty with a bad job on the freights,  
knowing the freeway soon will siphon  
the remaining world away  
and you can die unseen among your photos—  
swimmers laughing but the day remembered cold.  
Rooms have gas. The place was in the papers.  
Police have issued statements about cancer  
and the case is closed, but not the jokes  
passing boys are drilling through the walls.  
Top-floor renters look down floors of sweat  
to traffic that might stop were they to go.  
Some rooms are paid for in advance with shock.  
If, when the freeway opens, a man  
afraid of speed still takes this road,  
the faded Under New Management sign  
might mean to him: we are older too—  
live here—we’ll never treat you badly again.

Before we read too much into this poem, however, I think that it’s important to note (and Orr makes this clear as well) that some places are better than others. Hugo’s poem about Seattle managed to ground itself firmly in place, but it does so almost in spite of the location. Indeed, one of the most striking elements about the poem is the sense of loss brought on by the change of a unique—though shabby—part of Seattle to the speed and uniformity of the freeway. Additionally, we need to remember that Richard Hugo is a poet of immense talent. Like Brian, not every writer can find,



*Crossing the Strait of Georgia*



*Winded-in, the students use the afternoon to write in their journals*



*These photos were taken on or near Orcas Island, as part of an environmental education and wilderness trip program Elliot worked with which was based there. Students typically come for four-days of place-based education, including marine science, nature journaling, team-building and ecology. They live and study in groups of 12 or less, with one teacher from their school and one environmental educator.*

as effectively, a way to speak about urban or suburban space on the human scale.

Daniel, for example, makes clear that one of the features about the boulder that spoke to him, particularly, was the *distance* from the distractions of Columbia Falls. “The view from atop the boulder,” he writes, “was one that gave the illusion of an untouched piece of earth. We were high, but not high enough to see all of the houses and office buildings.” It’s precisely the unique, specific and personal nature of the place itself that both draws Daniel to it, and allows him to write powerfully about it. In a culture that has, for the last forty years or so, waged a very successful battle *against* unique places—transforming quirky storefronts into Best Buys, and replacing Aurora Avenue with I-5—it’s difficult to find an experience like Daniel’s without open space.

Which, of course, isn’t to say that we shouldn’t be trying. There are a number of great strategies for incorporating place-based education into urban and suburban settings, and these should be used and expanded upon. However, I do believe that there is an intrinsic value—and pedagogical value—to places that are “wild” (I hesitate to use this word) and more specifically, unbranded. One of the biggest challenges of teaching writing is helping students separate what they think from what they’ve been told that they should think. In open space, students are more likely to find meaning and less likely to be told it.

Daniel’s introspection takes a turn towards the dramatic in his final paragraph, when, over the course of the summer (but not at the boulder),

I was approached by a wolverine the size of a small bear cub. Instead of feeling afraid and running, I stood my ground, feeling blessed for being able to see an animal that most wildlife biologists go their whole careers without seeing. If I hadn’t been immersed for the past few years in the beauty and peacefulness of nature, I think I probably would’ve run and possibly been attacked.

Would I have mentioned the wolverine in my conclusion? Probably not—it seems like a stretch. But that’s the point—it’s *his* story. It is interesting to note that Daniel credits the time spent at the boulder—fishing, napping, watching deer—with saving his life. Perhaps he would have said the same thing even if a deadly carnivore had not crossed his path. The opportunity to know a place, to be a steward, and then to write about it, has made all the difference.

## The Boulder

In the end, I think that Daniel’s image of the boulder, precariously balanced “yet strangely able to keep itself from rolling into the river,” could serve as a useful metaphor for the kind of writing that we should ask our students to do. To write personally—to climb on the boulder—is always a risk. What if it tumbles into the river? What if I expose myself and my writing is ridiculed, or, perhaps worse, ignored? Tom Romano reminds us that writing takes *courage*. As educators, our goal is to invite our students to take that risk.

One productive invitation for our students is to ask them about place and identity, to fish in the convergent zone where place and personhood come together. However, this is just one way that we can encourage student’s voices—there are probably better ones. Whatever happens, though, I want to make sure that when they choose to climb on the boulder, it stays rooted a little longer, and that the vista that they look out on is their own.

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## Learning the Language of Place

Donna Miller

Even though the writing classroom setting poses as artificial and sometimes contrived, we teachers consistently work to create an environment that encourages students to write with a this-really-matters-to-me feeling. The challenge is finding writing portals for students to access voice. As we implement the Indian Education for All mandate, we also want to ensure we are including our Indian as well as our non-Indian students in the work.

In his text *What a Writer Needs*, Ralph Fletcher stresses the importance of place as a starting point for writers:

I usually start writing with something I know: a detail, an image, a snatch of overheard conversation, a story, a person. A place. Place is an excellent starting point because places live in the deepest parts of us. In one sense, we never leave them: We soak them up, carry them around, all the various places we have known (114).

Because place strongly influences identity, personal stories reside in place. One project I have used successfully in the classroom actually gets students outside; we take a writer's field trip. In her book *A Crow Doesn't Need a Shadow*, Lorraine Ferra suggests one way to become familiar with nature is to go on field trips exploring the natural world by observing rocks, plants, or animals, then preserving thoughts about them in poems. She asks: "Can you remember a summer day when you were lying on your back in cool grass, watching clouds float overhead? If they seemed more like a flock of sheep grazing in a blue meadow than clouds, you were thinking like a poet, and your thought was a poem" (12).

A writer's field trip involves observation and writing. I present the following suggestions to students:

### Trip #1:

Choose a plant or flower; sit beside it for awhile. What does it smell like? Are its leaves and stem smooth or fuzzy? What about its color? Are the petals thick, delicate, or velvety? What do the plant's different parts remind you of? You might compose a few similes, metaphors, or other simple analogies before you put the ideas together. As you draft your response, remember that trying to find a rhyming word can sometimes ruin the idea you started out with; don't give up language to rhyme. You are better off using poetic tricks like alliteration. Also, pay attention to delineation. Words that stand alone or words that are at the beginning or end of a line get more attention, so end on the image you want to carry the idea. Drawing out with specific words will transmit the message.

Standing straight as soldiers,  
Tulips decorate the garden  
In never-ending rows.  
Their varying hues make them  
A colorful parade.  
Smooth, wavy leaves taper-off into  
Soft waxen petals  
Encasing a bee's tasteful treat.

--Kristina Dukart, Grade 11

### Trip #2:

Weather is another endless source of ideas for writing. Think about how clouds, rainbows, fog, lightning, and other weather phenomena often look like other things; then write about them as if they are those things: "Rain is the petals falling off a daisy." Or, you might consider transforming your subject into an animal, a tree or flower, a tool, a person, a musical instrument, and then including all five categories into your poem. Another way to explore the weather is by imagining how you would feel and what you would do if you were a streak of lightning, a patch of fog, a thunderhead, a sunbeam, or a snowflake. You might even utilize personification. Start by making a list of action verbs associated with people (yawns, paints, erases, carves, weaves, kneels); then make a list of action verbs associated with animals (gallops, hibernates, perches, slinks, slithers,



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## Journal of the Montana Writing Project

pounces). Choose two or three verbs from each list and write.

Raindrops fall,  
And keep the beat of the drum,  
Pounding, pounding to the ground,  
And I watch and wait  
As lightning and thunder sing backup.  
But soon the music ceases,  
And only the pitter patter  
Of the storm's feet lingers  
Until it fades away.  
As the storm ends,  
A curtain of clouds covers the stage,  
Only to return again soon for an encore.

--Brittany Williams, Grade 11

The calming familiarity of rain soothes,  
like the rhythmic relaxation produced by Bob Marley  
or the company of an old friend,  
less obnoxious than the sunny energy  
of a new acquaintance,  
warmer than the confining, snowy confusion  
of words unspoken.

Dark, heavy storm clouds carry  
the misunderstood melancholy  
which comforts and understands more than  
the sun's attempts to blindly cheer  
or the snow's tendency to cause uneasiness.

--Ashley Weinheimer, Grade 11

### Trip #3:

You could fill notebooks with poems about the shapes, sizes, various colors, and enchanting songs of birds. You might begin writing about a bird by using a comparison method. Concentrate on different parts of the bird's body and what those parts look like. Also, think about the bird's graceful or awkward movements and about the similarities between bird behaviors and human habits. Use precise, descriptive language. Strong, vibrant words keep the poem moving. To further enhance rhythm, don't end-stop more than half the lines in your poem.

A vibrant red breast bounces on top  
of the spongy green grass.  
The robin travels a few paces west,  
a couple of hops north,  
listens intently,  
then suddenly plucks a worm  
from the soft brown Earth.  
How he knows the worm's location  
will remain a mystery.

--Shardae Johnson, Grade 11

### Trip #4:

Acquaint yourself with the varieties of wildlife that inhabit your area. Write about these fascinating neighbors as a way to celebrate their presence. You might consider writing, "Through a rabbit's eyes you will see" or "With a rabbit's ears you will hear." Remember to use vivid words for the actions and appearance of the animal you are writing about. For example, in a poem about a horse, the writer doesn't say the horse is "running down a road." He has the horse "trotting along a dusty lane." Appropriate word choice helps a poem come alive by appealing to the senses. Stay simple, concrete, sensory, and real. Look for the extraordinary in the ordinary.

The antelope gracefully leaps across the summer fallow,  
leaving hoof prints to unveil her path.  
Her canvas shade blends in with the earth,  
as she gazes at her offspring, struggling to learn to walk.  
Her watchful eye protects the fawn from all harm coming their way.  
The antelope stands tall with her white-chested shield  
as she leads her herd.

--Kristina Dukart, Grade 11

### Trip #5:

Begin your final nature experience by listening; pay attention to detail. Close your eyes and give your attention to the buzzing and droning of insects, the rustling of grasses and reeds. Be as alert and quiet as a mother duck guarding her eggs in the tangles of cattails and ferns. After you have given yourself time to absorb the sounds of nature, start listing them. Think about other things that make similar sounds and create your own comparisons. Could the twittering of swallows darting for caddis flies over the surface of the water seem like aspen leaves chattering in an autumn wind? In your writer's notebook, make a list of the actual sounds you hear on the left side of the page. On the right, list your comparisons for those sounds. Select your favorites to compose your response:

- Ducks slip through the quiet pond like raindrops landing gracefully on a silent rooftop.
- Spiders weave their little trampolines.



•Sunlight sleeps on the backs of cows and on the petals  
of poppies in the park.

Little stained glass windows  
flutter in the air  
drifting lightly toward  
the delicate petals of a daisy.  
While resting,  
the soft spring breeze whispers its secrets,  
then the butterfly floats away,  
blushing.

--Shardae Johnson, Grade 11

Shaded by a canopy of summer's green,  
spot-lighted with rays of midday,  
a tropical illusion arises on the arid plain.  
Deep turquoise pools glitter like diamonds  
as the sun reflects the clarity of the rocky bed  
and reveals the brilliant, peppered pink of the Rainbow  
Trout.  
Effortless bolts of lightning break the surface,  
play-like in their hungry desire  
to devour swarms of mosquitoes  
basking in the sizzling sun.

--Whitney Lybeck, Grade 11

Blossoming Crab Apple trees  
curtsy awkwardly with the donning of white flower  
gowns,  
while branches of lilac bushes  
bow under the weight of elaborate purple petals.  
And so the relaxed, fragrant dance of Spring begins  
before the drab weight of Summer  
when heat replaces cool breezes and makes tired and  
heavy  
the light swaying of the season before.

--Ashley Weinheimer, Grade 11

If you become interested in something but are not sure  
about how to start writing, you could begin by writing  
an acrostic. One form of an acrostic is a poem in which  
you write the name of something in capital letters going  
vertically down the left side of your a page in your writer's  
notebook. Then you start building a poem about the subject  
with words that begin with each letter. Let's say you spot a  
spider web but don't know what to write about it. Write the  
letters SPIDER WEB down the left side of your notebook  
and let each letter stimulate a thought about the web.

After your various visits, writing about nature should  
come more naturally to you. A writer, who stands under a  
sky filled with "whispering stars," notices that a river "talks  
in splashy ways" and that rain "recites prayers against the  
window pane." Writers learn a new language by giving  
their full attention to the world around them. Step inside this  
world with your pencil, paper, and imagination and learn a  
new way of knowing.

Rainbow Trout  
A lazy prairie stream meanders  
beside a lush downhill trail.

While the initial work for these field trips occurs in  
the writer's notebook, students later workshop the pieces,  
massaging them into poems, prose snapshots, or miniature  
narratives. I eventually invite them to submit their pieces  
in a booklet with artistic enhancement. Such enhancement  
can come through photographs, sketches, pictures cut from  
magazines, or computer generated images. This portfolio  
of poetry provides a published record of artistic observation  
and a testament to how place connects to identity.

## One-day Open Institute in Place-Based Writing

*"Getting to know home is the most human and necessary of occupations. To give that power of observation to students is to give them something of infinite value and importance — something to do with the rest of their lives."* --Ann Zwinger

**WHO:** For teachers and preservice teachers across the curriculum in K-16-life

**WHAT:** Instructional and field-based workshop to build community, share ideas  
for engaging students, and save the world through place-based writing

**WHEN:** Spring 2009...stay tuned for details

**WHERE:** Based from University of Montana, Missoula

\*OPI Renewal Units available

# Place-Based Education and Indian Education for All: A Rationale

Heather E. Bruce, Director, Montana Writing Project

It is a simple equation. Place + people = politics.

—Terry Tempest Williams, *Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert*

Either all places are holy, or none of them are.

—Wes Jackson, *Becoming Native to This Place*

No one culture has dominion over birdsong. We all share the same sky.... Navajo stories have been my guides across the desert. I have trusted them because I could find no others. They are rooted in native soil. To these people they are sacred. Truth. To me, they are beacons in a nation suspicious of nature... I can look for my own stories embedded in the landscapes I travel through. A story allows us to envision the possibility of things. ...I am not suggesting we emulate Native Peoples—in this case, the Navajo. We can't. We are not Navajo. Besides, their traditional stories don't work for us. It's like drinking another man's medicine. Their stories hold meaning for us only as examples. They can teach us what is possible. We must create and find our own stories... with symbols that bind us to the world as we it today. In so doing, we will better know how to live our lives in the midst of change. ...I offer you a sampling of the Navajo voice, of my voice, and the voice of the land that moves us. We are told a story and then we tell our own. Each of us harbors a homeland. The stories that are rooted there push themselves up like native grasses and crack the sidewalks.

—Terry Tempest Williams, *Pieces of White Shell: A Journey to Navajoland*

The above epigraph from Terry Tempest Williams's *Pieces of White Shell* capitulates a rationale for examining place-based learning in light of indigenous understandings as a location for we Montana teachers to move forward with our commitment to implement "Indian Education for All." In the preface to their edited volume, *Place-Based Education in the Global Age*, David Gruenewald and Gregory Smith explain how they have long been concerned about the division between environmental educators and those who direct their attention to matters of social justice and equity (vii). Along with others working in place-based education, they argue that human welfare will depend on the ability to reconcile these two domains in the coming decades because reversing the slide into social and environmental degradation will require a heightened awareness of place. This awareness sometimes leads to "a process of decolonization," which is, "coming to understand and resist the ideas and forces that allow for the privileging of some people and the oppression of others—human and other-than-human" (viii). Place consciousness means learning how to reinhabit our communities and regions in ways that allow for more sustainable relationships now and in the long run both for Indian and non-Indian peoples.

By finding ways to confront oppressive institutions and to more deeply connect children and young people to the places where they live, Montana Writing Project sees a deep point of connection between the objectives of both place-based education and of "Indian Education for All." By acknowledging and exploring these connections, we can find the interstitial links through which the caring, knowledge, responsibility, and skills required to make Montana places healthy and humane can emerge. This vision of health, bio- and cultural diversity, humanity, and beauty drives forward work that connects place-based understandings with the objectives of reconciliation promised by "Indian Education for All." An educational process grounded in place and "Indian Education for All" will: help us counter the power of unsustainable globalization; help us grow numbers of young people who grasp the nature of their situation and possess the skills, understandings, and devotions required to live well in place; and may help us to repossess the combination of determination and intelligence required to construct something different for our shared and common futures. To do this, we must reclaim the significance of the local in the global age. Localism (Gruenewald & Smith) recognizes that economic globalization under corporate capitalism is, potentially, economically devastating, culturally homogenizing, and ecologically destructive to local communities. The new localism embraces a kind of place-conscious economic development that will benefit the inhabitants of local communities today and for the long term in much the same ways as some Indian nations and activists have advocated with varying degrees of success for years (Grossman 2005).

Place-based education and "Indian Education for All" both are community-based efforts to reconnect the processes of education, enculturation, and human development to the well-being of community life. Both introduce children and youth to the skills and dispositions needed to regenerate and sustain communities. Both draw on local phenomena as the source of at least a share of student's learning experiences, helping them to understand the processes that underlie the health of natural and social systems essential to human welfare. Both systematically induct students into the knowledge and patterns of behavior associated with responsible community engagement. The core concerns of both place-based education and "Indian Education for All" pull our attentions toward place, all places that deserve our attention, respect, and care. Both place-based education and "Indian Education for All" ask us to search for answers to these questions: "What educational forms promote care for places?" "What does it take to conserve, restore, and create ways of being that serve people and places?" "What does it take to transform those ways of being that harm people and places?" By committing to the particular Montana places that we share in common, both Native and non-Native Montanans (Indian and non-Indian alike) can embark on projects that protect natural resources, create sustainable economic opportunities, and preserve the integrity of established human communities despite the stasis encountered in most transnational organizations.

Recently I attended the 2008 Western Rhetorics and Literacies Conference at Montana State University in Bozeman. The keynote speaker was Scott Richard Lyons (Leech Lake Ojibwa), Assistant Professor of English at Syracuse University in New York. Lyons recalled a story that illustrates the intersections between place-based education and "Indian Education



for All” which we might mine for our own understanding of the connections. The people on Lyon’s own home reservation of Leech Lake had fished out the lakes. At a tribal meeting called to address the problem, a tribal wildlife officer talked about the need for sustainable fishing practices. Apparently, some Ojibwa had taken to catching all the fish they could find and selling Walleye fillets from the trunks of their cars for \$1 a fillet. During the officer’s admonishment of the practice, an elder member of the community talked about the need to recover an honoring ceremony of thanksgiving feasts. He told a story about the lake beneath the lake where the fish went when they were not being honored, thanked for their sacrifice by the Ojibwa. The wildlife officer listened to the elder’s story, but when he finished, she restated her position about the need to curb overfishing if the fishery was to be protected. The elder said, “That’s just what I said.” Lyon’s story illustrates the analogy Williams forwards above, that indigenous knowledge in the form of story can act as a guide across the landscape. These are stories we can trust because there are few others rooted in so indelibly in native soil. Indigenous stories illustrate the truth of the land and become beacons in a nation suspicious of nature. They help us to look for our own stories embedded in the landscapes that we inhabit and those we travel through. Such stories allow us to envision the possibility of things. Seeing the commonalities between place-conscious education and “Indian Education for All” allows us all to gain necessary insights toward our survival.

An education in place and in “Indian Education for All” acquaints students with the ways in which our own health and security are codependent on the health and security of everyone and everything around us. Montana Writing Project teacher-consultant Woody Kipp is fond of pointing out the ways in which traditional indigenous knowledge holds the keys to understanding practices that will curb global warming and reinstate sustainable living. This is knowledge Indian peoples have held since time immemorial, and it remains embedded in the language and culture of Native peoples on all continents. This knowledge of interdependence, now reemerging in societies across the globe, must come to inform all human decisions if people currently alive hope to pass down to their offspring places worthy of inhabitation (Gruenewald & Smith *xxi*). “Interdependence is not an abstract idea, Gruenewald and Smith write, “but a lived experience of all people in all places, best understood through the study of the commons that we share with human and nonhuman others” (*xxi*). These commons include natural systems such as air, water, and forests; cultural systems such as public spaces and the legal protections that keep them public; and civic associations found in mentoring and intergenerational relationships (Bowers).

An education based in place and in “Indian Education for All” connects teachers and learners to the life of the wider community – identifies, conserves and restores our ecological and cultural commons. An education in place and in “Indian Education for All” must not be tuned to the nostalgic or homogenous images of the local, but to local diversity, the diversity within places and the diversity between places. Place-based education and “Indian Education for All” challenge conventional notions of diversity in education, or multiculturalism or culturally responsive teaching, which too often take for granted the legitimacy and value of an education that disregards places in all their particularity and uniqueness. Critical issues of race, class, gender, and other aspects of culture can become abstractions unless these issues are grounded in concrete experience, experience that always takes place somewhere. Place-based education leans toward “Indian Education for All’s” understanding of diversity and multiculturalism by reconnecting these themes with the rooted experience of all people in their total environments including the ecological. These rooted experiences have both a spatial and temporal dimension; place-based education, therefore, includes “Indian Education for All’s” consciousness of the historical memory of a place, the traditions that emerged there, and whether these have been disrupted or conserved. Finally, place-based education and “Indian Education for All” embrace an education in ethics. Both provide an awareness which fosters wholeness and life and that which fosters division and harm. As Montana Indians make decisions about which technologies to accept or reject on the basis of their communal consequences, so do all people need to begin accepting or rejecting the products of human imagination and inventiveness according to their impact on the welfare of other humans and other beings and the vast natural systems that support life. Grounded in such understandings, our students will be in a better position to determine which of the aspects of the emerging global civilization are worth preserving and which would be best to abandon. Wes Jackson argues that either all places are holy, or none of them are. By consciously blending place-based education with implementation of “Indian Education for All,” the politics of place and people can work together to save the places that all Montanans, both Native and non-Native, Indian and non-Indian, hold dear. We can realize in shared goals, the peace of knowing that “No one culture has dominion over birdsong. We all share the same sky” (Williams *Pieces*, 2). We can write our stories of the “last best place” in order to save them and ourselves from destruction.

**“An education based in place and in ‘Indian Education for All’ connects teachers and learners to the life of the wider community – identifies, conserves and restores our ecological and cultural commons.”**

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# Intertwining Self-Identity, Native Culture, and Place Through Place-Based Writing

Casey Olsen

## The Writing Marathon

I had an eventful summer this past year, planning and taking part in the Montana Writing Project Summer Institute in Columbus, Montana. This institute gave participants the means to fulfill the promises of Indian Education for All through inquiry-based learning and best/promising practices. For three weeks we toiled, learning the native history of Stillwater County, becoming versed in all perspectives on that history and applying these perspectives to our current distance and separation from the native culture who once called this county home—the Crow.

Among my duties as site co-director was planning the two “writing marathons” our participants took part in. A marathon consists of a group of people, often several groups of people, traveling from one location to another while writing at each of those stops. These stops can span across a central campus or site, across a city or neighborhood, or across a particular geographical region. At the conclusion of the marathon, everyone in the group shares at least one piece from their day. Listening to this sharing gives a diversified picture of the experience—a collective experience and understanding through sharing.

Writing marathons got their start in the National Writing Project in 1992, when the Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project began conducting what they called the New Orleans Writing Marathon. The Louisiana folks drew from the advice Natalie Goldberg gives in her book *Writing Down the Bones* (which I highly recommend):

Everyone in the group agrees to commit himself or herself for the full time. Then we make up a schedule. For example, a ten-minute writing session, another ten-minute session, a fifteen-minute session, two twenty-minute sessions, and then we finish with a half-hour round of writing. So for the first session, we all write for ten minutes and then go around the room and read what we’ve written with no comments by anyone...A pause naturally happens after each reader, but we do not say ‘That was great’ or even ‘I know what you mean.’ There is no good or bad, no praise or criticism. We read what we have written and go on to the next person...What usually happens is you stop thinking: you write; you become less and less self-conscious. Everyone is in the same boat, and because no comments are made, you feel freer and freer to write anything you want. (150)

But the Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project took this idea one step further by leaving the confines of the classroom to write in New Orleans, using their surroundings as their prompt. They use the rich scenery and sites of the city to inspire their writing. Groups are given a set amount of time for the entire marathon, but they are left to their own discretion the amount of time spent in each location they visit. Simply, they are to attempt to visit 3-4 locations. From this model, the Montana Writing Project has been conducting writing marathons at their site in Missoula for the past few years with much success, visiting Front Street, the Clark Fork River, Fort Missoula and other distinctly Missoula locations. In 2007, Browning summer institute participants took part in an encampment on the Blackfoot reservation, writing while immersed in Blackfoot culture—an extended marathon of sorts—and each year as the writing is shared from the Missoula and Browning summer institutes, it becomes increasingly evident that the true moments of inspiration lay in the power of place.

## The Power of Place

The power of place has long been overlooked in education. We feed our students the myth of the isolationist writer who locks herself or himself up at the desk in the office to tap away at a keyboard to produce their great writing. Likewise, most student writing is isolated within the walls of a classroom or banished to the home place to be created as homework without the help or ear of anyone else around. But the evidence produced by the writing marathons conducted by MWP over the past few years tells us that writers produce better writing and better understandings when they’re out amongst people, places, and things—even nature—surrounded by other writers.



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In his essay “The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place,” David Gruenewald outlines the wide parameters offered by place-based education: “It’s practices and purposes can be connected to experiential learning, contextual learning, problem-based learning, constructivism, outdoor education, indigenous education, environmental and ecological education, bioregional education, democratic education, multicultural education, community-based education, critical pedagogy itself, as well as other approaches that are concerned with context and the value of learning from and nurturing specific places, communities, or regions.” But as wide-ranging as Gruenewald’s list is, these categories of place-based education are not mutually exclusive. Because of this, we are able to incorporate indigenous education, multicultural education, community-based education, and ecological education together to help young people find a way to add their own stories to the history of the places they reside.

Paulo Freire combines these concepts of self-identity and place in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, saying that “People as beings ‘in a situation,’ find themselves rooted in the temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark... Human beings *are* because they are in a situation.” How then do we create these situations for our students “which mark them and which they also mark”?

Now with the reinvigorated emphasis of Indian Education for All in our state, MWP has embarked on another investigative journey into place-based writing, writing marathons, and the development of empathy in our students. During my summer institute experience in Columbus in July and August, I ran across the book *Open Minds to Equality* by Nancy Schniedewind and Ellen Davidson, where the two stated, “We believe that for young people to truly appreciate diversity and understand democracy, our classrooms need to become places where students experience equality as part of their daily lives.” After rolling this belief statement around in my head for quite some time with those from Gruenewald and Freire, I’ve decided that I would add that we need to expand our notions of what exactly a classroom is—we need to allow our classrooms to be places beyond the bureaucracy and the institution, where they can be out in the real world creating real writing. We must immerse our students in place, taking them to places where real history happened. Because we occupy that place, we share it with all those who have been there before, and through that we are connected—to the place, to the people, to the history. As an illustration of this, there is a great difference between reading a history of the Baker Massacre near the Marias River versus having your students stand at the site itself, telling them that women and children were massacred at their feet.

I know that Montana has played a central role in the development of my identity. Simply put, I identify myself partly by the places I have inhabited. I was raised for much of my childhood near the Canyon Creek Battlefield north of Laurel, Montana where the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry pursued the Nez Perce as they attempted to reach Canada in 1877. Not far from my childhood home sits a battlefield marker that we kids murmured was stained with blood—I don’t know what truth there was to any of that, perhaps we invented it; but the Nez Perce were victorious that day. They held off the cavalry from the rimrocks that were ever-present in my skylines as a boy, and at one point in the battle just one young warrior held off the entire 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry from the cover of the sandstone boulders while his people escaped. Single-handedly, he pinned down the soldiers until he too



The photos of Casey's students during their writing marathon on this and the following page were taken by Shannon Neibauer, Columbus High School senior.

slipped away, just a young man—perhaps a boy as I was when I walked where he did. I was always astounded by that courage.

I lived there. I knew what happened—some of it from books—but mostly because I knew and loved the place. I saw what the Nez Perce saw, the topography that lent itself to a courageous defensive maneuver, and God it was brilliant. I rode those rims and saged side-hills, I heard their voices on the wind, and obviously the experience has never left me.

### Self-Identity, Place, & Native Culture

This weaving together of self-identity, place, and native culture serves us as educators on a number of fronts: one, fulfilling our duties and obligations as defined in the promises of Indian Education for All; two, using the layered connections to place possessed by our students and intertwining native connections to the very same place to make this subject matter relevant for our students; and three, helping our students shape and develop their own individual identities in terms of place.

Ratified in 1972, the Montana Constitution promised to recognize “the distinct and unique cultural heritage of the American Indians” and set forth educational goals committed to “the preservation of their cultural integrity.” To fulfill these goals we must move beyond the cookie-cutter lesson plans and cut-and-paste curriculums that are popping up with increasing frequency in response to Indian Education for All, and instead we must embrace a rationale that allows our students to understand the complicated past, present, and future we now face in Montana—righting wrongs, restoring voices, opening eyes and ears.

Also, a study of the places in our students’ individual pasts and presents serves as a vehicle to understanding self. Place is an incredible controlling factor in defining self for each and every person; and, like writing, place can be ego-based—especially in the western United States: What does it mean to be Montanan? What does it mean to be from Butte? From eastern Montana? From western Montana?

Likewise, these same notions of place as a defining factor in self hold true for native cultures too. It is a short adjustment by degrees to shift a student from focus on the defining characteristics present in their own places and situations to a focus on the effect place has had on native cultures—especially when they’re the exact same place. I’ve found that my own connection to the places that hold value to me were substantially complimented by the additional knowledge of whom else had connection to these places, especially those who held and hold them so dear as the native cultures of Montana.

In preparations for the marathons undertaken at the Columbus Summer Institute 2008—and thanks to the knowledge and insight of outstanding team members Lorrie Henrie-Koski (Columbus Middle School), Donna Miller (Chinook High School), and Brenda Johnston (Browning High School)—MWP established what we believe to be essential ingredients for genuine Indian Education for All curriculum, which in turn produces genuine writing:

- Develop student/participant perception of and connection to self through memoir writing.

- Develop student/participant connections to place through memoir/memory writings focused on place.
- Introduce and develop student/participant understanding in regards to native connections to local places.
- Apply student/participant’s acquired understanding and connections to native culture, values, and places through place-based writing.

The marathons thoroughly tested these ingredients, and the inspired written pieces that followed are displayed on pages 18-23 in this issue of the *Montana Writing Project Journal*. The initial marathon took participants around the town of Columbus, touring cultural and historical points of interest. The second marathon was a day spent touring three separate locations throughout south-central Montana: the Four Dances Recreation Area outside Billings, the Little Bighorn Battlefield near Crow Agency, and Chief Plenty Coups State Park near Pryor.

Shannon Horton—a fellow Montana Writing Project teacher-consultant and Columbus Public Schools staffer—partnered with me to apply these ingredients in a public school setting this fall. Shannon teaches World History to the tenth-grade class, while I have the same students for language arts. Borrowing destinations from the second summer institute marathon, we set our sights on a student marathon visiting Chief Plenty Coups State Park and the Four Dances Recreation Area (which includes the Sacrifice Cliffs). To prepare for this venture, we front-loaded it with multigenre memoir writing (including memoir pieces inspired by favorite places in each student’s past), studies of Crow tribal culture and history, and readings from *Plenty Coups: Chief of the Crows*, *They Gazed on the Beartooths* (a collection of historical writing on early Stillwater County) and *Rethinking Columbus*. Discussions regarding the Crow influence on the shaping of Stillwater County, small-pox, the evolution of the Crow reservation and its borders, and current relations between the residents of the Crow reservation and Stillwater County gave a wealth of teaching moments that resulted in a deeper understanding and empathy shared amongst all of the students involved.

The morning of the marathon, students were divided into groups and rotated between three sessions at the Plenty Coups State Park. One session took students on a tour of the park grounds with an interpreter from the Crow tribe. The second and third sessions provided writing opportunities: one on the park grounds, and the other in the park museum. After each writing session students gathered with their group members to share what they wrote.

In the afternoon, students trekked through the Four Dances Recreation Area to the Sacrifice Cliffs, the site where two young grieving Crow warriors mourned the loss of their loved ones at the hands of small-pox, eventually taking their own lives by riding their horses over the cliff’s edge. This moment would serve as the title inspiration for Stanley Gordon West’s novel *Blind Your Ponies*. A passage from the novel prompted the students to sit amongst the sage and sand on the very cliff the two Crow youths made famous.

What follows on page 17, and additionally on page 26, are samples of student responses.

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## The Most Beautiful Place

Austin Dayton

I watch the ripples cross the spring  
the reflection off the water  
the birds sing  
I watch water bugs create peaceful chaos  
Never in my life have I witnessed something this clear  
I see straight to the bottom  
The invisible stream  
you cannot notice where it comes in and where it leaves  
I would build a house and spend my days here  
like the inspirational man who was here before me  
But my chair wouldn't be at the house or porch  
it would be right here  
at the spring  
The most peaceful place

*Austin Dayton is a tenth-grade student at Columbus High School. He lives in Columbus just a block away from the school with his mother and their dogs Pepper, Bailey, and Chloe. He has an older brother and sister who are away at college. He loves to play basketball and football. In his free time he likes to swim in the Yellowstone, snowboard, and hang out with his buddies.*

## Plenty Coups Piece

Isaac McNally

It's interesting to learn so many new things about the Native Americans. Throughout elementary and middle school we were taught very little, no specifics. Whites came into America, mistreated native peoples, and took their land that meant everything to them. This is the sum of what we were taught. To be able to look at Native Americans from their perspective is necessary to our historical education. To look at a specific tribe, the Absolooke, is definitely a good way to change our Caucasian opinions. It's good to be able to look at a specific person's life, Chief Plenty Coups, who dealt with the many trials experienced by the Indians and develop a better understanding for what they've gone through. On the other hand, it's saddening to look back at specific stories like *Blind Your Ponies*. Even though it may seem saddening, at the same time it is also encouraging that even those that have had their families murdered would still have great enough faith to ride their horses off of a cliff with the belief they were going to join their loved ones.

To me it seems that the less is known about the Indians, the easier it is to be critical of them. The fact is that a majority of the Caucasian race doesn't know what it's like to be thought of as someone lesser or less meaningful to most of those around him because of their race. When the Europeans moved in to America years ago they thought of the Indians as they did the blacks; they thought that they were like animals, only here to benefit the whites. The truth is that God created all people equal. However, he did not create us all the same. So even though we are not all the same, we need to learn to treat one another equal.

*Isaac McNally is a tenth-grade student at Columbus High School. He lives in Columbus with his parents, brother, and sister. In his free-time, he enjoys hunting, fishing, and most sports.*

## A Trip to Chief Plenty Coups' House

Jessica Brophy

I did not feel like the old log house was really the Chief's. I almost felt like the house on the reservation was a fake; like the employees just built it recently to add to the serenity. Even though I knew that this was not true, I couldn't help but feel a little uneasy about walking around the scarce innards of the house. When I went inside, the empty rooms felt cold, and without life like a small museum, with no one to own it and care for it.

It was the nature around the strong house, however, that felt alive and knowing. It was completely different from the house. Just by looking around, I was caught in a peace that I usually do not feel in Montana. An older, more wise peace that has lived its time before mine. And maybe that is because the chief did not love his house like he did the natural world. Like he did the spring. Maybe Plenty Coups managed to unknowingly sprinkle his peace around his home, and some of it still exists to this day. Just like the cool water in his spring, just like the warm sunlight that streams through the huge cottonwoods, and just like curvy hills that surround the meadow, Plenty Coups' peace will live on for a long while.

*Jessica Brophy is a sophomore in Columbus High School. She lives in Columbus, Montana with her parents, sister, and countless animals. Her favorite things to do are draw, ride horses, sing, and follow her dreams.*

## Sacred

Walter Johnson

Bright sun aiming down at me, but I can still see.  
A sacred spring surrounded by plants and color,  
but my focus isn't the water or the trees.  
Slowly and silently she plays with the water,  
admiring it.

It's such a nice day, a clear sky,  
and everything is bright.

It's crazy how one place and one person can hold history,  
like pages in a book.

The non-spoken words that their eyes whisper,  
secrets, stories with details that no book could ever hold.  
Will I ever bear such a gift?

*Walter Johnson is a tenth-grade student at Columbus High School. He lives with his mother Brenda and his sister Jessica in Columbus. In his freetime he plays sports and spends time with his friends.*



# Crow Country Writing Marathon

## Columbus Summer Institute

summer 2008



### The Power of Place

Brenna Sundby

Overlooking Billings and what is known to the Crow as the Elk River from the Sacrifice Cliffs, one can only imagine the peace of earlier existence. Accessing the Four Dances Recreation Area is not easy; no bikes, cars, or four-wheelers are allowed past the fence beyond the peregrine falcon informational sign. Today one must hike, heart pounding, through a fence and up a moderate incline to access the Sacrifice Cliffs on the eastern edge of Billings overlooking the Yellowstone River. Is access limited on purpose? Does it keep out those too ignorant or too lazy to appreciate the significance of sacrifice? Standing on the edge of the Sacrifice Cliffs on a hot morning in July, I listened for the first time to a story of Crow hunters returning to the cliffs to find families decimated by smallpox. I listened only to hear that the hunters, overcome with grief and fear of spreading the atrocity, blinded their faithful ponies and ran over the cliff. What have I learned from this single experience? As a teacher today, I ask myself why I have just in the last couple of years begun to teach about some of the atrocities that the Sioux, Crow, Blackfeet, and Nez Perce have been put through at the hands of my ancestors? Why, just this week am I seeing that the genocides in Europe and Africa are more well-known to our students than the genocide that took place in what we call home? Why am I as a teacher stunned that I must make comparisons of world wars most commonly studied to help students understand wars that took place in what we call Montana? Shouldn't they compare their own place's histories to events around the world? Why has the peace of earlier existence disappeared? It's always been about resources. Land, oil, minerals, technology: all just variations of resources that have been used as excuses for genocide, holocausts, and wars. Why all the sacrifice of time, energy, and human life just to gain resources? Aren't we clever enough to work with available resources and to work with other people to help each other? Contemplating an act of sacrifice is not easy. Is this why our country, free and brave, claims to fight for democracy and against genocide in other parts of the planet, because we know from experience what can happen? Even as we often ignore that it did happen? What is the future of these cliffs? If this first view from the cliffs and this one Crow story is enough to evoke these questions, how many experiences of the same caliber can I provide for my students?



*"Flowers" by Brenna Sundby*



## Monument

The soldiers have gathered again in neat rows  
beneath the blue eternity of sky atop this hill,  
guarding their white stones and their plots of earth  
against the charging winds  
threatening from all directions.

Custer stood here.  
This battlefield, now named for the river,  
bore his name for more than a hundred years.

Watching the Lakota, the Cheyenne, and the Arapaho  
burn up the hillside toward him  
like wildfire in the sage and the grass,  
he might have noted the wind,  
feeding the flames, licking at his red hair,  
his hat fallen into the dust.

Two-Moons, the Cheyenne warrior,  
told his people: "We circled all around them—  
swirling like a river round a stone."

A few years after the battle,  
the government erected a monument  
at the top of this windy hill  
to honor Custer and his men,  
carving their names into the smooth stone.  
A river of tourists swirls around it now,  
snapping photos framed in blue sky.

At the ground-breaking for the Indian Memorial,  
built just a few years ago across the road,  
the honored guests of the three tribes  
turned shovels full of loose, dry earth.  
The dust blew far into the valley  
like smoke from a fire.

The winds sweeping through this sage  
daily carry the dust of our bones  
from one hillside to the next,  
and the river in the valley below  
revises its course by degrees,  
pressing its palms against the rocky banks,  
until even the rocks on which we carve our stories  
are as smooth as sky.

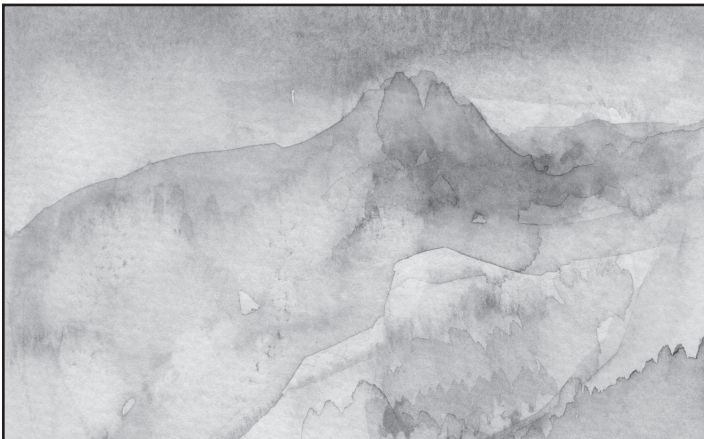
Brent Scott



## A Different Picture!

Joni Meier

Sitting here at "Four Dances", I think of Indian warriors, young and old, looking out across the valley for guidance. What they saw, the picture that I paint is so much different than the picture I imagine they would paint. Buildings and roads stretching out as far as the eye can see. The constant roar of vehicles resonate below, planes cascading over head, grinding train brakes, and the dull sound of machinery fill the air around me. The ignorance of people fills my soul, passing by this sacrificial cliff without even a second thought. I'm left to only imagine and envy the picture that they may have colored. A portrait of birds singing and soaring over head, and wild-life roaming the wide-open spaces below stopping for a swallow of the rushing Elk River below fills my consciousness. This leaves me pondering, what these same warriors that sat up here, much like I am right now, would think of the sight of their homeland now. Would they be disgusted at the way we have taken care of the land and the lack of appreciation we have for it?



*Little Bighorn Battlefield by Brent Scott*



Journal of the Montana Writing Project  
Little Bighorn Battlefield  
Thoughts from the Cemetery  
Norma Glock

Tragic irony.  
Enemies laid side by side.  
Later fought as friends.

If only we learned  
From mistakes of past conflicts.  
Would troops die today?

Clashing of cultures.  
White markers as reminders.  
What could we have changed?

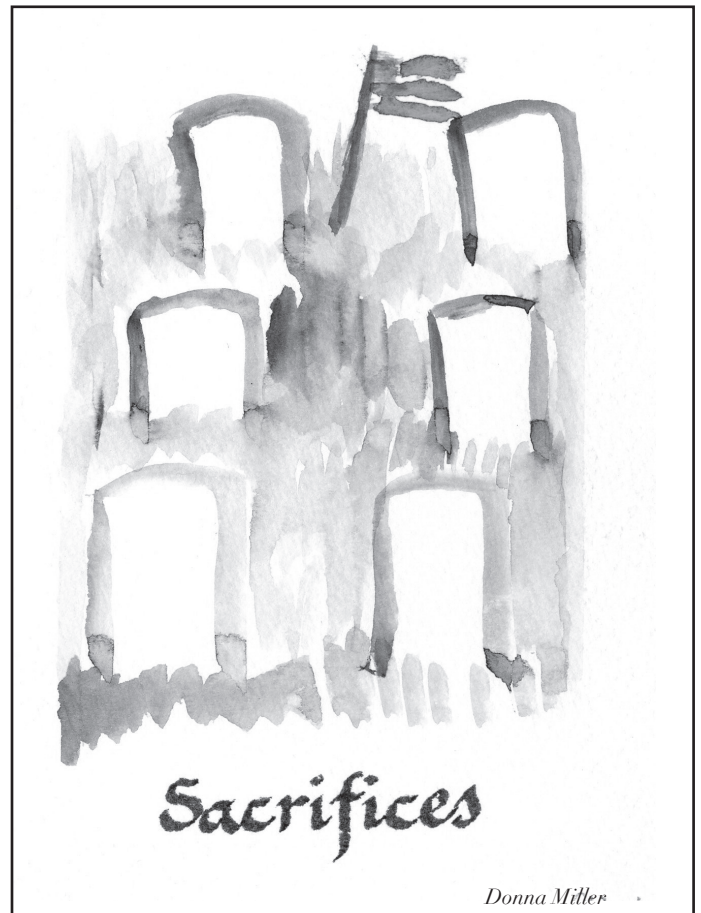
Tall trees shading graves.  
The serenity misplaced.  
Foreboding stillness.

Battleground markers  
So now we can remember  
What happened that day.

Bullets through the heart.  
How utterly ironic  
To call us human.

Some think of bravery.  
I think of all the killing.  
How can it be stopped?

As time marches on  
Some view the cemetery  
Through different eyes.



## BATTLE CRY

There's a tear in the fabric of time.  
I sit cross-legged  
Listening to stories  
As old as the world.  
Echoes rise from the ground beneath  
Spiral through my blood  
To reach my heart.

There's a tear in the fabric of life.  
Inverted blue bowl of sky  
Embraces the trampled ground of earth  
Where soldiers battle the People.  
Bold brushstrokes of red  
stain the ground beneath  
Blood intermingled in death  
Paints my heart with sorrow.

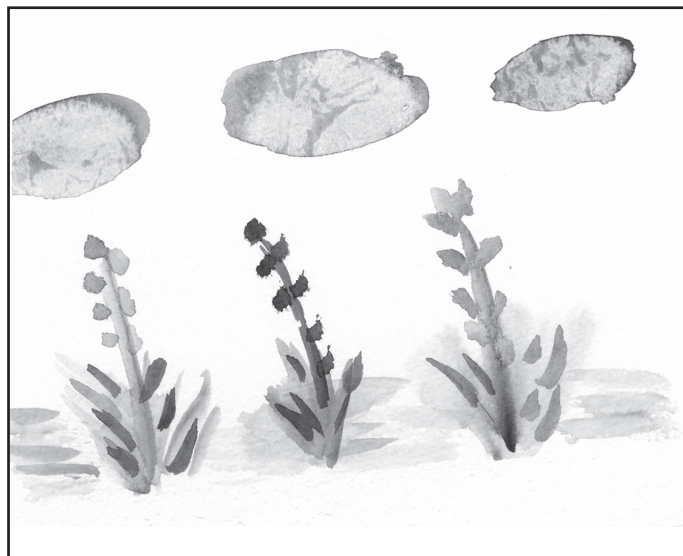
There's a tear in the fabric of brotherhood.  
Misguided men seek victory  
Brave souls seek peace.  
No one notices the tear  
Until the fabric of earth splits  
With the weight of fading hopes,  
lives, dreams  
Soaked by tears from my heart.

Pam Swain, 2008



## My Reflection

### Brenda Johnston



*Sweetgrass by Brenda Johnston*

Blackfeet country is renowned for the strong winds that sweep down off the mountain front, and certainly while those winds are a destructive force at times, they can also be our friend. My late step-father always bragged that the wind made this country what it is. It opened the land. After a deep snow, he looked forward to the wind, that his cattle would once again be able to forage on last summer's grass that is rich in nutrients. As I debated whether to participate in the Montana Writing Project's Columbus Institute, I was like a tree being tossed back and forth in strong gusts of emotion. Working with Writing Project would require a sacrifice on my part that I was not sure I was ready to make. Finally, with encouragement from family members, I committed.

I began reading with a focus on Native American literature. Every opportunity I had to visit a book store, I seized. My reading list included older works such as *The Surrounded* and *The Middle Five*, and newer pieces of writing including *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and *Women on the Run*. My role in Writing Project was to help the teachers understand why IEFA is important and assist in its implementation in the classroom. On July 20, 2008, I arrived in Columbus with a trunk load of books and the few personal items I would need for the next three weeks.

As week one of the institute progressed, it became clear that the focus of IEFA at the Columbus Institute had to be the Crow Tribe, which is rich in history. Participants learned that Crow Agency was originally located on Mission Creek, east of present day Livingston, then moved south of Absarokee, and later was moved to its present site south of Hardin. We read that Robert Yellowtail, at the request of Chief Plenty Coups, spent seven years fighting an attempt to open the Crow Reservation to homesteaders. In 1919, Yellowtail returned to Washington, D.C., to advocate for Crow rights. It would be five years before Congress finally gave American Indians the right to vote. The class was also given information on the Dawes Act and the history of the Yellowtail Dam.

On Wednesday of week two, we went on a writing marathon. The first stop was at the Sacrifice Cliffs, where Crow warriors rode their horses over the cliff after discovering their loved ones had been decimated by smallpox. I was reminded of a time many years ago when I was in college and attended a conference at what was then Eastern Montana College. After the conference was over, young Native American students from all over the state ascended the cliffs overlooking the city of Billings to sing and dance until the morning sun appeared on the eastern horizon. I felt at peace and knew nothing of the grieving warriors at the time.

Our next stop was the Custer Battlefield, and I made a silent vow to stay away from anything that honored Custer. I visited with a lady from Crow Agency that works in the visitor center. Her son is married to a woman from Browning, so we hit it off right away. When she was called away to answer the questions of tourists, I retreated outdoors even though the temperature must have hovered close to 100 degrees. I climbed the hill to view the battlefield before crossing the road to the Indian Memorial. There I read the quotes of Indian warriors who gave their lives, a quote by Bloody Knife, a Lakota guide, was especially beautiful. When my time comes to leave this place, I hope I am strong enough to show the same courage Bloody Knife displayed.

"I shall not see you (sun) go down behind the mountain tonight....I am going home today, not the way we came, but in spirit, home to my people."  
-Bloody Knife, June 25, 1876

Our last stop was at Plenty Coups Memorial. In the visitor center I again found myself in conversation with a local woman that was working as a guide. She had a soft voice and delicate features; I thought she was beautiful. Time was now running late, so I had to hurry to the two story log house that once belonged to Chief Plenty Coups. It was a short distance away and is situated in the middle of a meadow. Hay grass that had been cut and baled dotted the landscape. Birds could be heard calling from the branches of enormous trees that are found only on river bottoms. A gentle breeze combined with intermittent cloud cover made for a reflective afternoon. I can't find the words to describe my feelings as I walked through Chief Plenty Coups's home. Awe? Humility? Sorrow? Maybe it is enough just to feel. Maybe there is really nothing to explain.

The writing marathon inspired me to see more of the Crow Reservation. Instead of traveling to Cody, Wyoming the next weekend, I spent Saturday and Sunday driving to sites we missed on Wednesday. This included the Yellowtail Dam, which is an impressive work of man and nature. I went to Crow Agency and walked around the pow-wow grounds, longing to be able to attend the Crow Fair in August. I met a third woman at Crow Agency; she directed me to sites that she thought I should see. I also drove to Lodge Grass, discovering the cemetery and the grave of Robert Yellowtail, which made him all the more real. Before leaving Montana for Medicine Wheel National Monument in Wyoming, I drove through Wyola, the last town on the Crow Reservation. I am grateful I had the opportunity and took the time to learn about Crow history.

The Columbus Writing Institute will come to a close in a few short days, when I will return home. The Crow and Blackfeet were enemies a long time ago, but I felt a kinship to the three Crow women I met last weekend. We share a history. It is important that this history be known throughout the classrooms of Montana.

## Traveling Through Crow Country

Casey Olsen

It is difficult, once our eyes are opened, to close them again.

“Don’t you just love their names though?” the middle-aged mother of two says, hands on hips, strolling through the Native American memorial at the Little Bighorn Battlefield. “There’s a reason, you know, . . . for their names. See? Young Skunk, Many Lice, . . .” With that she laughs in front of her children, then reads more names aloud.

I cringe.

“So it looks like some of the Indians became friends and joined the white men?” she continues. “They were smart.”

“What do you mean?” her son asks.

“They were smart. You know . . . they didn’t want to die,” she answers.

Her son looks over to his brother, “But they all did die, . . . didn’t they?”

*Man, we can be an ignorant race*, I think to myself. I sit to write, surrounded by quotes, names of native warriors who participated in the battle, a monument to peace and understanding. I need to tap into this, to find some truth, to grow.

“Excuse me, sir,” another tourist asks above the brim of my palm leaf hat; I’d worn it today to blend in, and it apparently wasn’t working. I tilt it upwards as he finishes, abrupt and impatient, “Could you step out of the way for a second so I can get a picture?” I put my pen behind my ear and oblige.

*What are we honoring here?* I want to ask these people. *What drew you here in the first place?* Honor, courage. We say the words, and I know we possess them at times, but we’re obviously oblivious.

The gift shop wants to paint Custer as a martyr. Book titles shout words like “Custer: Cavalier in Buckskin.” Children clamor for cavalry caps. Elderly women consider books on Native American wisdom—Funny, I’ve never seen anyone thumb pages of white wisdom before. We say we honor courage and that we are courageous in honor, but why then do we run a paved road and sidewalk within a few feet of the exact spot where Custer and the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry died? This road, intrusive and unwanted, divides Custer’s marker from the Indian marker of peace and bravery—a highway through a battlefield! I cringe again.

*Brave men on both sides rode through here—evil men too. We should learn from this place!*

The buzz of people brings me back from the past. The din of shuffling shoes and summer voices.

*There is a solemnity to this place! It deserves your silence!*

“Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Bighorn Battlefield,” a nasally park ranger huffs into a microphone, beginning his memorized synthesis on white perspective, telling stories of defeat as victory. We, the white race, lost this battle. Our privilege, though, gives us power—even in defeat. We write the history and school books. We give the official tours and explanations of how it happened. We print book covers with Custer in color, Sitting Bull in black and white.

These people don’t even grasp that this reservation, these people who work here descend from a tribe who helped Custer find this place. They were an ally, now lumped in with the enemy. “These Indians” or “Those Indians.” They survived a moment that the blue coats couldn’t—they made it out alive.

*This place is more complicated than any of you could ever imagine!*

And I don’t mean to degrade these blue coats. Most were immigrants, fresh off a boat and hungry themselves. All were told they would be doing what was right.

But we pervert their honor; we pervert their courage. We hobble around with our love handles and awkward hats and learn nothing. We take nothing with us but our white pasty legs in tube socks and the ignorance and the bias we arrived with. This is our legacy. This is what we feed our children. I had visions today at Little Bighorn Battlefield of starting fistfights with ignorance. I’m mad and my anger means *nothing* because it’s white anger about white ignorance.

“Is this the way to the museum?” a man asks in passing, camera in hand.

“Yes,” I answer, though I didn’t know and didn’t care. I don’t mean to be rude pretentious, but this place has me bothered. It’s easier to say “yes” when you’re bothered rather than exhaust the time in a parking lot explaining 150 years of guilt.

“‘Bout how far? Half mile?”



"Yeah," I answer and there it is again. White ignorance. We assume we know the answer before we ask our question.

*There must be some questions we can ask that don't have easy answers—only then can we really learn what this place says. How do we overcome this? How do we do right? Where's our "Golden Rule" now?*

My questions are free-flowing now. *What do we value?* We erect monuments to other Indian war campaigns here, perhaps to deafen the noise, the buzz of defeat that still echoes beneath the sound of car engines and tourist conversations—

"To the officers and soldiers  
killed, or who died of  
wounds received in action  
in the territory of Montana,  
while clearing the district  
of the Yellowstone of hostile  
Indians.  
—Bearpaw Monument,  
1881"—

But "Bearpaw" I recognize as the site of defeat for the retreating Nez Perce band in 1877. Retreating, trying to make it to Canada—how can we use that word "hostile" to describe them here? The cold, the hungry, the starving. They had courage. They had honor. They had nothing to do with Little Bighorn.

*Hostile? What do we really honor? Monuments so important, we can't change them if they're wrong? A 5-inch notecard on paper placed in the lawn to explain how the 1966 Historical Preservation Act prevents us from removing or changing an ignorant memorial? Is this really our legacy?*

Perverted honor. Perverted courage.

Red Wing said, "A scout is like a lone wolf that must be looking, looking, looking all the time." I feel him here. I channel him, me the lone wolf apart from the rest, scouting, looking, observing.

Perverted honor.

Two men approach, slowed by age, turning toward each other. "The bottom-line," one says, "is the army just didn't know how many damn Indians were here."

But it's not that simple anymore. It's just not that simple.

God help us. God help us.



### A Reflection Upon a Visit to Chief Plenty Coup State Park Shannon Indreland-Horton

This place emanates history;  
it is a teaching place.

Under a massive cottonwood,  
hand-planted in its infancy  
by the great chief himself,  
I sit.  
By his sacred pool,  
decades of honor  
anointing the surrounding trees,  
I stand.

Chief Plenty Coup State Park,  
foothills of the Pryor Mountains,  
historic home of the Little People.

Chief Plenty Coup,  
dark-eyed patriarch of the Crow people,  
he had a vision in his youth—  
a vision that struck him  
in the Crazy Mountains;  
I perceive a connection in this.

The Crazies,  
fierce and sharp,  
hold my great-grandfather's roots—  
a young seeker from Norway  
a seed blown in  
and watered with native tears.

Far north, that place  
kindles a hot family pride  
like that place must also ignite  
in the breasts of children here.

But this place is open;  
where that place is still closed.

This is a teaching place.  
We have a lot to learn.

**“Whether we winterized our homes with grass and mud daubed into crevices to insulate against the piercing winds of the plains [...] or we were lulled to sleep by flashing neon lights and the sounds of sirens, places have shaped us.”**

## Nurturing Voice through a Sense of Place

Donna L. Miller

Randy Bomer refers to voice as “a slippery word” because so many in the field of literacy argue about its meaning. Yet, voice surfaces as one of the valued six traits of writing, and we all know none of us has some original personal sound that springs from our DNA. Thus, I embarked on an inquiry: How do I teach voice to adolescent writers? Anecdotal research reveals that voice emerges when a writer presents us with information learned within a particular life history. “The writer shows us how he/she understands this information within the framework of his/her own experiences and values” (Bomer 185).

Writing workshop research by Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi further suggests that choice leads to voice. Young writers work best when they feel a sense of ownership or have personal investment in their writing. With self-generated topics, the passions, idiosyncrasies, media influences, and peculiar humor of youth will flavor the writing.

However, empowering voice is a slow process. It begins with teaching students to value and to record their own experiences and perceptions. According to Barry Lane, “Students with the strongest voices often have kept journals for years. They have learned to translate their thoughts into words without letting the audience block them out. They sense the importance of what they are saying and struggle to say it better” (159).

But in helping students discover their voices, we must not cling to the romantic tradition that claims an authentic voice, the essence of self, a well-spring of power, lies buried waiting to be unleashed. William Strong suggests if we hold out such a promise of transcendence as students shed “phony” voices, we insinuate students have been voiceless since birth or that a single voice has greater power than multiple voices. Strong calls such notions “outright lies” or “giant exaggerations.” In most areas of our experience, we realize multiple resources are an asset, not a liability. We all use multiple voices because we have lived--and continue to live--in many different worlds (109). To focus on a single voice makes for limited language education. Multiple voices empower us by extending our repertoire of language skills. They give us access to other worlds, and reconstructing these worlds helps us to understand ourselves as storytelling creatures and as creatures of story (110). Strong acknowledges the idea of a core voice and understands its expression is essential to one’s sense of centeredness. He does not suggest abandoning this voice but favors the notion of helping students think of their smaller selves as faces of a multi-faceted identity. He invites us to consider whether one’s voice as teacher is any more--or any less--real than one’s voice as a parent, a spouse, a walleye fisherman, or an aromatherapy aficionado.

Although voice is not something that can be taught in a step-by-step process, teachers can create an environment that encourages students to write with a this-really-matters-to-me feeling. So, the challenge seemed to be finding writing portals for students to access voice. This concept grew increasingly important to me as I began to implement the Indian Education for All mandate. I wanted to ensure I was including my Indian as well as my non-Indian students in the work.

When I read *What a Writer Needs*, I saw Ralph Fletcher stressing the importance of place as a starting point for writers:

I usually start writing with something I know: a detail, an image, a snatch of overheard conversation, a story, a person. A place. Place is an excellent starting point because places live in the deepest parts of us. In one sense, we never leave them: We soak them up, carry them around, all the various places we have known (114).

Because place strongly influences identity, personal stories reside in place. Whether we winterized our homes with grass and mud daubed into crevices to insulate against the piercing winds of the plains where buffalo once roamed or we were lulled to sleep by flashing neon lights and the sounds of sirens, places have shaped us. When I recently attended an Indian Education for All seminar at Fort Belknap College, a White Clay elder said, “We are a lost people unless we know our origins, our names, our identities.” Stories of place often take us home. Once there, we can celebrate our linguistic heritage and cherish our culture. Story is a means of connection, of creating opportunities for voice, of preserving history and memory, of engendering cultural pride. These stories work like a sweet grass smudge, easing away dark feeling, or they open wounds that weep with raw



emotion.

When we hear people's stories, when we share intimate aspects of self and tribe and culture, when we accept new ways of knowing, we pierce the balloons of old thought to allow prejudice to dissipate. Thus, we may learn to perceive a Chevy pickup, rusting and abandoned in a weed-choked backyard as an adventurous neighborhood playground site rather than as a signpost for poverty.

Inviting the story of home and heritage into the classroom invites students to build a sense of community; such a practice honors the notion that all cultures contribute, that all voices deserve to be heard. Hopefully, ignorance will erode with such sharing and learning.

From my reading of Katherine Bomer, I knew the power of memoir as an art form, which, like sculpture, music, dance, and drama, offers an avenue for self-exploration and self-expression: "Writing memoir is one way to recapture some of that sensual mystery and luxuriousness of time spent catching lady bugs and smelling their sharp grassy scent on our hands" (xiii). She further shares a rationale for teaching this genre. We write memoir:

- to break the silences surrounding who we are
- to make meaning of our lives and, by doing so, to heal them
- to awaken the "I" and come to know who the "I" is
- to give the gift of personal and family history to loved ones
- to record what must never be forgotten
- to bear witness
- to help us understand broader social and political realities.

I had found the right pair: place and self-exploration. However, I knew I couldn't just say, "Let's write memoir" or "Let's write about place." Simply throwing a topic or a genre at students doesn't produce good writing. However, I wanted to show students that the ordinary foods, customs, and keepsakes of a family can create personal poetry or prose of place. Living in a small community, which often seems boring to the youth of that locale, may seem ordinary, but normal isn't nothing. I wanted to help students turn the ordinary into the extraordinary.

To begin the memoir process, I ask students: What is a family story or history you wish to see carried on? After students ponder that prompt and list some ideas, I use models to further elicit memories. Students can imitate these models, which provide a scaffold for their ideas, or they can simply use them to further stimulate detail for writing. The finished product can be a poem, a short non-fiction story, or some other memoir based anecdote. I readily rely on models since I believe apprentice writers need the masters to learn and work from. We can craft powerful sentences through imitation of structures and patterns, since by studying the shape of a text, we access different ways to put language together. Imitation also encourages writers to take risks with language. With a model to follow, we are less afraid of failure as we experiment with new rhetorical strategies. When form and structure are provided, our minds are free to access content. Without a model, we might not otherwise have thought to arrange words in such a pattern. Researchers have noted improved writing quality when students "are encouraged to analyze [models] and to emulate the critical elements, patterns, and forms embodied in the models in their own writing" (Graham and Perin 20). Imitation is not

plagiarism. We are not copying content; we are imitating style, structure, and form. Writers can master these skills of rhetoric through imitation. So, I had simply to locate texts worthy of emulation, texts with dynamic voice features.

One such text, Kelly Norman Ellis' poem "Raised by Women," possesses a host of fertile features that beg for imitation, encouraging students to use their home vernaculars and to recall childhood influences. I discovered this poem in an article by Linda Christensen, whose job philosophy statement aligns with my own beliefs: "Part of my job as a teacher is to awaken students to the joy and love that they may take for granted, so I use poetry and narrative prompts that help them 'see' daily gifts, to celebrate their homes and heritages" (14).

To approach an unfamiliar piece of literature, I often encourage students to use the Katie Wood Ray protocol:

- Notice** something about the craft of the text.
- Talk** about it and **make a theory** about why a writer might use this craft.
- Give the craft a **name**.
- Think of **other texts** you know. Have you seen this craft before?
- Try and **envision** using this crafting technique in your own writing (120).

Such an examination of the poem will reveal that each stanza delineates diverse detail while preserving the local color of language. Stanza one recounts gustatory influences, stanza two focuses on hair, stanza three examines physical features like skin color and clothes, the fourth shares strong opinions, the fifth celebrates music, the sixth responds to audacity, and the seventh remembers professional mentors. This poem talks; it has rhythm and attitude and dialogue. Although I encourage students to borrow all of these best elements of the poem and to even consider a refrain or repeating line, we also brainstorm other possible influences: religion, video games, athletics, languages, family stories/legends, games, and past times. Just as Ellis does, I persuade students to summon snapshots of mentors and idiosyncratic family members, to paint their pieces with lively personality.

Additional successful pieces come in the form of children's books by Cynthia Rylant, Marie Bradby, and David Bouchard. All three of these authors' texts provide memoir portals by describing special people, places, rituals, and surroundings from childhood.

Finally, I use many of the vignettes from Sandra Cisneros' book *The House on Mango Street*; my favorites are "Those Who Don't" and "My Name." Recently, I added Sherman Alexie's tribalism idea from *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. On page 217, Arnold lists all of the tribes to which he belongs, so I invite students to develop their own tribal affiliations lists.

After all of this writing, students select which pieces they wish to polish for their portfolios. The pieces endure much massaging and revision as students imitate elements of each writer's craft: strong verbs, compound adjectives, proper nouns, parallel series, sensory imagery, alliteration, adjectives shifted out of order, and other brushstrokes. They can grow any or all of these seed ideas into final drafts; and let me tell you, these pieces sing, shout, and whisper a cultural pride, a deep-rooted sense of place. With these selections, I know my students have discovered their voices.

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## At the Clark Fork River

Elliot Jacobs

The river is high this week; high for the last four weeks. Almost the color of chocolate milk, and running now with a visible determination to get downhill—downstream—home—it swirls and gurgles and trips over itself. A fisherman friend tells me that the change in the river level upsets the fish, as it would us if we woke up in a thick haze, or with our lawns somehow over our houses. The fish—he tells me—stay below the surface and wait it out.

As for me, I'm not content to wait out the high water. My most direct interaction with the river is kayaking, and while the water is fast and unpredictable, I have to paddle with care. Two weeks ago, at Brennan's Wave, two other paddlers in the eddy pointed frantically upstream and I was just able to avoid a tractor tire, half-submerged, in the current.

The junk coming downstream is both the result of the spring runoff and something even more rejuvenating, something longer awaited. This April, the Milltown Dam, which segregated the Clark Fork from the Blackfoot River, was breached. Two long-separated lovers were rejoined for the first time in one-hundred years. It was not without conflict: heavy metals that were integral in keep the two apart washed downstream—cadmium, nickel, even mercury—killing the fish and closing the river to people.

If you go to Milltown, to Bonner, and look at the breached dam, it looks like chaos. A bridge lies on its side, spanning nothing. Tattered rebar and chunks of concrete litter the bank, and heavy machinery fouls the air. The Blackfoot, twisting through a diversion channel, almost reluctantly, trickles back into the Clark Fork. What looks like destruction may, downstream, closer to the source, really be progress. Silt from the Blackfoot muddies the Clark Fork, new sediment over the old.

## Blind Your Ponies

Breanna McKay

I have no more to live for.  
No one to wake up to in the morning.  
No reason to get up and do anything with this day.

I stand all alone,  
still thinking maybe, just maybe  
its all a dream....More like a nightmare.

I wait for someone I know and love  
to come and tell me it will all be okay,  
we will get through this,  
But nobody comes to comfort me.

I have a feeling I could be waiting a while  
if I don't do something about it now.  
With my horse by my side,  
I make a decision, one that will bring us  
back together

*Breanna McKay is a sophomore at Columbus High School. She lives in Columbus with her mom, dad, and brother.*

## Sacrifice Cliffs

Melissa Eder

I see for miles  
The city of Billings.

I imagine how it would look  
With nothing below me.

No Interstate  
No Buildings  
It could be peaceful.

With rims on my right  
And rolling hills on the left  
Amazing...

I could stay for forever  
With the breeze blowing my hair.

A powerful place  
Needs a powerful name  
Sacrifice Cliff fits.

The grass and weeds  
Brown and Frail  
Remind me of Papa's Ranch.

To see wheat blowing in the wind  
Was somehow peaceful.  
Like the ocean  
With never-ending waves.

Lost in thought  
For what seemed like eternity  
Would end abruptly  
And bring me back to the real world.

Here classmates surround me  
I am not distracted.  
Nothing could distract my thoughts  
At this peaceful place.

I know that nothing  
Even Interstates and Buildings  
Could take away this power  
Because it's already within me

*Melissa Eder is a tenth-grade student at Columbus High School. She lives in Columbus with her dad, mom, and sister, Emily. She enjoys reading and hanging out with friends in her free time.*



# Making Place Personal by Writing the Extended Metaphor: Inner-Outer Landscapes

Merrilyne Lundahl

Inspired by Barry Lopez's discussion in "Landscape and Narrative" of inner and outer landscapes, and by my experiences working at Teton Science School, I have tried to develop a writing invitation that could help students connect their own inner and outer landscapes. It is my belief that when we make a place or an ecological concept personal, we understand it better, understand ourselves better, and will act in ways that treat both landscapes respectfully. Metaphor is one vehicle for exploring this. I start with excerpts from Barry Lopez:

I think of two landscapes—one outside the self, the other within. The external landscape is the one we see—not only the line and color of the land and its shading at different times of day, but also its plants and animals in season, its weather, its geology, the record of its climate and evolution....

The second landscape I think of is an interior one, a kind of projection within a person of a part of the exterior landscape. Relationships in the exterior landscape include those that are named and discernable. . . and others that are uncoded or ineffable. That these relationships have purpose and order, however inscrutable they may seem to us, is a tenet of evolution. Similarly, the speculations, intuitions, and formal ideas we refer to as "mind" are a set of relationships in the interior landscape with purpose and order; some of these are obvious and many impenetrably subtle...The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of an exterior landscape; the shape of the individual mind is affected by land as it is by genes....

Beyond this—that the interior landscape is a metaphorical representation of the exterior landscape, that the truth reveals itself most fully not in dogma but in the paradox, irony, and contradictions that distinguish compelling narratives—beyond this there are only failures of imagination: reductionism in science; fundamentalism in religion; fascism in politics.

After reading and reflecting on this piece, students are invited to play with the concepts of having an inner landscape, and how it might be shaped by the exterior landscape. It is probably a good idea to provide some springboard material for students. After briefly brainstorming, I came up with the following possibilities:

- cycles: water, nitrogen, hydrogen, fire, etc.
- history: places and individuals are shaped by those who came before
- communities: the building blocks of ecosystems, made up of individuals
- progression/succession: the movement from rocks to lichen to dirt to plants to trees...
- diversity: the variety of species
- interactions and relationships: between abiotic (such as wind, slope, aspect, etc.) and biotic (living) factors; between individuals and species—mutualism, parasitism, competition, predation, etc.
- geologic processes: erosion, weathering, mountain building events, compositions of rocks, faults and earthquakes
- change and disturbance: after natural disasters (fire, tsunami, hurricane, etc.) or as a result of human management or interference (extraction industries, grazing, development, etc.)

Provide examples as needed. A favorite of mine, for middle-school students, involves engulfer macroinvertebrates, such as the giant water beetle that pierces its insect prey and then sucks out all its fluids. Do students hang out with people like that, people who are energy and life sucking forces?

Another good example that is easy to see is relationships, say, for lichen. Lichen is made up of fungus and algae, with the fungi providing the structure and the algae making the food. They are dependent on each other. Working jointly, the algae and fungus break down rocks and make soil. What are examples students have that deal with similar mutually beneficial relationships, where working together gets more done than working alone?

The extended metaphor goes beyond comparisons between self and some natural part of the exterior landscape. It can be a good way for moving a narrative, for reflection, for vivid imagery, for a way in to a piece of writing.

This invitation seems to elicit some deep responses from students, taking them sometimes to painful places. This happens for me when I make metaphor out of the landscapes of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and my inner landscape. I compare my traumas and struggles to the creation of the Teton Range, with its upheavals, stretching, snapping, ice, glaciations, water, time. The eroding forces were building forces too, and I realize that in my life, as with these rugged peaks, nothing beautiful happens easily.

Using metaphor to connect students and the natural world has the potential to make them think differently and ultimately to help them make place or nature personal. This is but one instance of what might be considered place-based writing, particularly if it is done using local landscapes and phenomena.

## A Place-Based Research Project

*Students can research answers to some or all of the following questions in order to gain knowledge about their local place. Adapted from compilations by Steve Archibald and C.E. Knapp.*

Think back 200 years ago. What group or groups of people lived in the general area that you call home?

If there were human inhabitants in your area 200 years ago, are their descendents there now? If not, where did they go and why?

Currently, is the moon waxing or waning?

What phase is the moon in today/tonight?

Looking out the main window of your home, what direction are you facing and what do you see?

From which direction do most of your storms come?

What direction does your prevailing wind blow?

List three birds you might see on any given day, year round, near your home. List three birds you might see in summer but wouldn't typically see in winter.

List three large mammals that are native to your area.

List three rodents that are native to your area.

List any animals that once lived in your area that are now gone.

What is your annual average precipitation?

If humans hadn't (or haven't) altered your area from its natural state, what plant community (conifer, riparian, aspen, sage/grassland, etc.) would be found in the location of your home?

List three or more conifers that are native to your area.

List three or more deciduous trees that are native to your area.

Name three (or more) plants growing wild that were brought to the United States from another country and now live near you.

Can you name three wild plants in your area that can be eaten safely?

What spring wildflowers are among the first to bloom in your area?

After what date in the spring is it safe to plant a garden, i.e. when is the last frost?

What is the primary rock type (metamorphic, sedimentary, igneous) in your area?

Was your area ever covered by ice sheets called glaciers? If so, when was the last one?

Think of the mountain range closest to your home. What is its name, what direction does it tend, and what is the elevation of its highest peak?

Where do you get your drinking water?

What do you do with your garbage? If someone takes it away, where does it go?

How did the town nearest your home get its name?

About what percentage of the food that you eat is locally grown?

List any food items that you eat that are native to the place you live.

-Submitted by Merrilyne Lundahl – adapted from a 2008 Rural Conference Presentation-



# Place-Based Encaustics on the Flathead Indian Reservation

Eileen Zombro

*“When Teaching for Indian Education for All, I suggest you start with a passion.”*

Heather Cahoon, IEFA Consultant for the Montana Writing Project

Melted beeswax actually smells like honey. This little tidbit of information and much more came from one of our weekly Montana Writing Project “writing marathons.” The writing marathon was a once per week, all afternoon writing field trip, where project participants visited predetermined sites, reflected and wrote. Our June 24, marathon took us on a tour of Missoula’s art galleries. One particular stop was the Missoula Art Museum (yes, there is a Missoula Art Museum). Among many excellent exhibits ranging from stick/video sculpture to beautiful glass vases, I spotted a group of encaustic paintings. Encaustics, if you do not know (I didn’t) are an art form that uses beeswax as the primary medium, encaustic art has been around for thousands of years according to the Missoulain’s feature article on this exhibit.

*Beginning around the first century B.C. a group of Greek artists working in Egypt began painting funerary portraits, hundreds of these paintings survived and were recovered in the 1800’s (Missoulain, July 2008, p. E5).*

*Prior to this, Greek shipbuilders were using the hot wax to fill cracks in ships. When pigment was later added the ship’s hull became an art form ([www.mollycliffhills.com/encaustic-technique.php](http://www.mollycliffhills.com/encaustic-technique.php)).*

Encaustics are basically paintings or collages that use beeswax for coating and painting. Pigments can be added to the wax, layers scrapped off or added on, three-dimensional objects “glued” and coated with wax, and —viola— a really beautiful and potentially long lasting art form. The Missoula Art Museum featured about six different encaustic artists this past July; Leslie Van Stavern Millar was one of these artists.

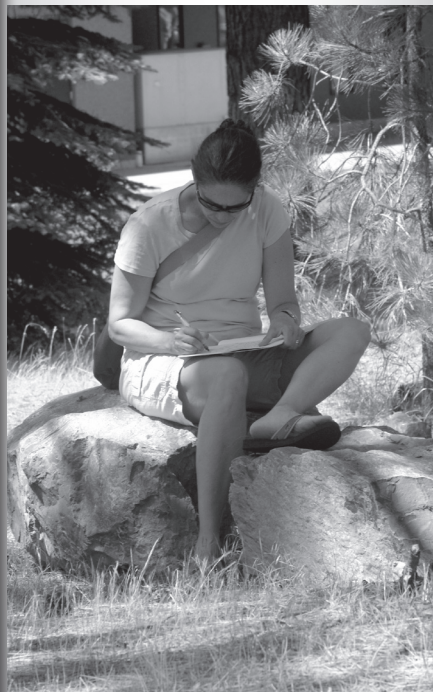
*Millar’s encaustic paintings took Montana species (butterflies, insects, and plant matter) that had been identified as “of special concern.” Millar was interested in taking images of those species that might not be here in 50 years and embedding them in wax. Millar explains: “So there’s this strange dynamic of possibly preserving in wax—in a medium that has proven to be exceptionally durable—an image of something that might not be here soon.”*

*“This series of work is integrating my love of photography, my interest in science, concern about loss of species from global warming and development, and my pleasure with working with a very tactile medium” (Missoulain, 2008).*

It was here, looking at Millar’s work that Dave Christensen and I gained the inspiration for using the encaustic process at a writing marathon field trip to Flathead Indian Reservation. Heather Cahoon, our IEFA consultant, planned our day touring the St. Ignatius Mission and Salish Kootenai College, Heather coordinated with us to include outside stopping points for creating our encaustic artifact representations on 4”x 4” wood blocks. Prior to the trip Dave and I had planned the supplies we would need in order to create encaustic representations of the St. Ignatius Mission site. (See the supply list at the end of this article.)

The idea for using encaustic in a place-based writing marathon came from a “wondering” Dave had on the walk home from the museum. That particular day, participants had simultaneously done water coloring and writing at each gallery stop. The mini gallery of watercolor art our class produced, along with the written reflections of the day’s experiences added a visual richness and, to our great surprise, we discovered among us talented painters. These colorful impressions of the day and our writing connected us all to the many art galleries, parks, and downtown settings we had visited that day. It was serendipitous to the days before when project participants were involved in two place-based teacher demonstration lessons. One demonstration was lead by Merrilynne Lundahl and the other from Elliot Jacobs. These MWP consultants are both MAET students at the U of M.

Merrilynne Lundahl, a Montana Writing Project consultant from Utah, guided our group through a number of place based writing exercises. Her lessons and her passion about place-based writing had me rethinking my teaching practice, thinking of ways to connect people to place, helping students to articulate and



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During the writing marathon on the Flathead, participants began their encaustics after exploring the grounds of the St. Ignatius Mission, writing there, gathering materials for the project, and making the first layer on their wood blocks.

honor their place through writing and sharing. Her lesson, which guided students through an articulation of their own “places” was life changing for me, until that point I had not realized to what degree I was connected or disconnected from my own “places.” Her comprehensive handout starts with this quote: “connecting students to place through writing and engaging students in writing through place.” Merrilynne also highlighted these words by David Sobel, from *Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education* and *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities*.

Place-based education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students’ appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active contributing citizens. Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of the school (Sobel 2004).

Elliot Jacobs, a current project participant, from Washington proposed a demonstration lesson in which “smaller scale, deliberate observations” could instill ecological literacy and writing. He says: “It is in the spirit of inquiry that I looked for an easy and fun way to help students narrow their focus to observe, describe, and eventually, seek to change or preserve what is around them. Elliot proposes that one way to narrow focus is through field observations. His demonstration lesson exemplified this notion for writing project participants as we scattered in the grass around the LA building. Drawings and written observations on Norway spruce memorial trees, the life span of a fly, ancient stumps and mammoth squirrels exemplified his notions of focus and preservation. Our shared drawings and writings assisted us in carefully isolating naturally occurring objects and processes we all tend to walk by passively and carelessly. Both Merrilynne and Elliot are passionate about this genre of writing, their commitment and thoughtfully led engagement process was more than enough to me thinking about ways to apply their teachings to our pedagogical practice.

Working with encaustics, the fusion of artifacts preserved with a natural wax, and place-based writing reflections seemed a perfect way to connect to the history and natural surroundings at the Flathead Indian Reservation. Despite our utter ignorance of the encaustic process and lack of supplies we did what good teachers do: research and read, reflect and act. There are many websites that explain the encaustic process, along with a slew of contemporary artists who are into this medium. It is popular enough to have an “Encaustic Society.” Simply Google “encaustics” and you will have a fairly decent background, description of process and directions for purchasing supplies.

On the days before our writing project group was headed out to the Flathead Indian Reservation, we told participants to wear clothing that “could be destroyed” but also to look nice. This juxtaposition of fashion sense built up the drama nicely. We kept the encaustic project a secret, the clothing



hint was all anybody knew, and even Heather and Donna were out of the loop. Worried looks and inquiries about bringing aprons or hairnets followed all week. Dave told the group that “divulging the secret would mean certain death, so please stop asking.” Meanwhile Dave and I were trying to figure out how to melt beeswax at two roadside stops. It turns out making (our version) of encaustics was quite easy (see directions at the end of article). What follows is a recap of our “encaustic writing marathon.”

The day of the marathon brought good weather (a definite plus for encaustic art). We were psyched to “reveal” our project at the first site, but just jumping into a cool art project would not be appropriate, not until we had gained focus. In the van we started with a “Ritual Read” by Amy Borgen, from Superior. She chose *Suddenly a Gate* by Michael Posluns, a Shuswap. This is a selection from *Native American Testimony* by Peter Nabokov. Amy read at the border of the Reservation, next to an interpretive sign where we had pulled the van over for a look. The Poslun passage described a time when Poslun’s grandparents had discovered restricted access to old foraging grounds by way of a gate and a barbed-wire fence. Then Elliot led us in the “Writing into the Day” he read to us from N. Scott Momaday’s *American Land Ethic* for our “Writing into the Day.” At this point we had de-vanned at the newest casino on the reservation, we found a circle of rocks near two porta-johns and began to “write into the day.” Our reflective writings helped to center our thoughts for the day, to acquaint us in our journey, which for some of us, including myself, was a new place. It was at this point that I realized the power Ritual Reading and Writing into the Day was going to have on our place-based encaustic project. Speaking only for myself, I will say that these two exercises helped me to create a focal point for my thoughts, that of indigenous peoples here at time were there were no boundaries, no gates, a sovereign nation intact. I imagined that if you were to recreate this lesson with a classroom of students, the centering process of using pre-readings and writings would be help students focus on their connection to place.

The St. Ignatius Mission was our second stop. The mission is located in the center of the Flathead Indian Reservation, behind the church are the Mission Mountains. They are rugged and strong, snow was still heavy in places way up high, and the setting was glorious. The Jesuits built the church in 1854. The bricks, clay, and lumber used to build the structure were all locally produced; the Native American guides helped the missionaries build the church. Murals which cover the inside walls were done by an Italian Jesuit between 1853 and 1919. There are remnants of a mill and a school, both now used for interpretive centers along with a gift shop and museum.

In the gift shop/museum there were stark reminders of two nations, two religions sometimes clashing, sometimes cooperating. A garish crucified Jesus lay in one glass case. Across from this was a small round table displaying a plastic Kateri Tekawitha, Lily of the Mohawk’s doll, a replica of an Algonquin Indian woman who is currently in the pending stage of canonization for sainthood in the Catholic church. On this display table is also a book and petition for any known evidence supporting her possible sainthood. Around the perimeter of the room are other artifacts from the Salish and Kootenai tribes as well as other tribes. These are all in shoulder height glass cabinets, each item has a hand written number pinned to it, though I could not find the key which revealed the historic information.

In the guide books and on the internet I later noticed that these items are described as Flathead Indian artifacts. It was our consultant Heather who helped me understand that there was no actual “Flathead” tribe. There are in fact the Salish, Kootenai, Pend d’Oreilles, and Chinook tribes. Heather, a member of the Pend d’Oreille tribe, explained that Flathead refers to the confederated tribes on the reservation, Flathead is the name of the reservation, and it is also a name white men gave to the Salish tribe in the 1800’s. In front of the mission are cars, some trailer homes and small gardens, to the east a modern skateboard park and picnic area, to the west a residential area and health center, to the south the Mission Range and more homes. After touring the mission, project participants met in a shaded picnic area for reflective writing and our encaustic project. It was in the picnic area, that we made the first and only encaustic of the day.

Dave set up the stove and began heating the wax, this process was much quicker than we had expected. While the wax became liquid, we passed out the wood blocks and sand paper. During the sanding (an optional process) we explained the history and process of encaustic art, and its purpose for our writing marathon today. We asked the participants to find artifacts that would “speak” of the place, historically, politically, naturally, or in any way they felt connected. We directed the students to use portions of the free pamphlets found in the church, purchased post cards, grasses, flowers or leaves which had fallen, or even bits of trash. Sean Keogh, a writing consultant originally from Massachusetts, found a clover; Jackie Gorshe, from St. Regis, a photo from a postcard; Wendy Morical, from Bozeman, a picture of Mary from a postcard; Jamie Feely from Broadview, a flower; Wendy found the leg portion of a plastic army soldier wedged in the picnic table, I used this as part of my encaustic. These artifacts served as the first, second, or third layers of our encaustic collage. Participants scraped the wax for a relief effect, some dripped wax on in a smooth coat, and others used the bristles of the paintbrush to make a “cross-hatch” texture. The finished encaustics were placed in recycled pizza boxes for safekeeping until our return to Missoula.

The following day back in room LA 133, Dave placed the woodblocks around the room for a gallery walk, when ready we commenced to write about our day. What follows are three entries from shared writings.

## #1

*“In this mission, this church, there were so many things that were familiar, so many things I have seen for four decades of practicing Catholicism. I know this place so well, the rules, the rituals, and the dogma. But, if you look really closely and you know what to look for, there are some different things here, things that tell of the people who use this church. In the sacristy, near the altar where the priest mixes water and wine into the blood of Christ, there is a small teepee holding the sacraments instead of the usual golden curtained circus tent with cross on top. The New Year candle tall and white still has the Greek letters, but around the circumference are small wax eagle feathers forming a ring around the long white wax tube. Sitting in a pew, the hymnal is in two languages, both Salish and English. The confessional on the opposite side of the room is very traditional; two booths attached by the priest’s booth, which sits in the middle, this way the priest can hear two confessions at once (double the sinning pleasure). This confessional seems to be out of service, as there are folding chairs filling up the spaces for*



Dave Christensen demonstrates applying the beeswax to enclose his objects on his wood block.

*seats. It is here that I see my past and another past, I have rejected parts of my Catholicism, other parts I love so much they cannot ever be purged from my personality. In truth, I live this church."*

## #2

### "Layers

*Soft brushstrokes slide their way Through time. The honey colored wax does its best to cover the imperfections of the past. Yet, those voices*

*are still there. Nature jumps off the page. Dimensional three by three, the leaves, flowers, cones jut off the block nestled beside the iconic imagery of a testament To God."*

## #3

*I placed the small plastic legs of an army soldier on my encaustic, they were found in the crevice of the picnic table slats. I wanted to use these hidden soldier legs because I have been thinking and reading of the Native American contribution to our armed services: Ira Hayes the Pima*

*Indian from Arizona in the book Flags of Our Fathers served during WWII in Iwo Jima and Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow of Lodge Grass, Montana served in the army during WWII in Germany, France, and Italy. Medicine Crow is 94 and recently wrote a book about his wartime experiences in a young adult book called Counting Coup. Also, the movie about Navajo code talkers during WWII, with Nicholas Cage, made me think of the language I heard my neighbors speaking when I lived in Northern Arizona—it was clipped, interesting, and it probably enhanced the quality of my life to some extent. I began to realize that these are well publicized....*

There were more of course, and on the day of the gallery walk, I was amazed at the differences and similarities of our experiences, yet how that place connected to all of us. Heather Cahoon told our class to start with a passion if you are going to teach Indian Education for All. She said that it is critical that our students see themselves in the curriculum, that it is authentic and culturally relevant. My passion is art, I am a painter, I am visual, and I love to be outside to go to new places. The encaustic process, an artistic endeavor utilizing the place-based collection of artifacts to support understanding of indigenous cultures seemed an organic process rather than strained detached book learning. I will use this method in my teaching practice next year. I hope to share more with you about this process as the year unfolds.

## Supplies:

- Block of beeswax (Dave got this at Michael's for \$15.00 per block, he bought three blocks, with our party of 13, we only used one block).
- Small camping stove (Dave got one for \$20.00, and a can of propane for about \$3.00. This came in a very cute and compact case.)
- Three "trim" paintbrushes that can never be used for anything else, ever.
- Small, non-stick saucepan.
- 4"X 4" wood blocks (cut from long slabs bought at Lowe's for about \$3.00, I cut about 40 blocks

from two slabs) You can use any size wood board you want, we sanded ours, but later realized this is not needed unless you want rounded edges.

- Crayons to melt in for color (optional).
- Scraping tools, sticks work great as do fingernails.
- Artifacts found at site (if working with children, please remind them what is appropriate to take).

## To assemble your encaustic:

- Collect some artifacts from your "place." Postcards, pamphlets, grasses, dead insects, flowers are all good representations. If postcards and pamphlets, tear small pictures or key works; work into a collage with other media.
- Paint one layer of beeswax on the wood block; this will act as the "glue" for placing the first layer of artifacts.
- The "idea" is to layer artifacts as they present themselves through out the day; this makes a chronological layering of the day's events.



Donner Miller examines the sculptures at Salish Kootenai College.



## Place-based, Place-conscious Education Resources

compiled by Heather Bruce, Merrilyne Lundahl, Christa Umphrey, Lorilee Evans-Lynn, &amp; Donna Miller

**Anderson, Lorraine, Ed. *Sisters of the Earth: Women's Prose and Poetry about Nature*, Vintage, 2003.**

This collects the voices of over 100 women, covers multiple centuries, and includes essays, fiction, and poetry all about nature.

**Bigelow, Bill and Bob Peterson, Eds. *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, 2002.**

"This comprehensive 402-page book from Rethinking Schools helps teachers raise critical issues with students in grades 4 - 12 about the increasing globalization of the world's economies and infrastructures, and the many different impacts this trend has on our planet and those who live here. Rethinking Globalization offers an extensive collection of readings and source material on critical global issues, plus teaching ideas, lesson plans, and rich collections of resources for classroom teachers."--Rethinking Schools blurb.

**Brooke, Robert, Ed. *Rural Voices: Place-Conscious Education and the Teaching of Writing*. Teacher's College Press (Columbia University, New York) and National Writing Project (Berkeley), 2003.**

The sacred text of place based writing full of all the good stuff that writing projects have to offer. It is written by elementary and secondary writing project teachers in Nebraska. The volume describes the theory and practice of place-conscious education - using one's local place to build real, lasting connections to learning. The teachers describe the development and implementation of rich classroom writing programs that link learners with their rural communities and can serve as models for both public engagement and pedagogy.

**Dixon, Terrell and Scott Slovic, Eds. *Being in the World: An Environmental Reader for Writers*. Longman Publishing Group, 1992.**

This anthology is especially good as it is organized by region, theme, rhetorical strategies, etc. It is specifically for writers and has all sorts of useful questions/prompts for writing and for ways of reading the various pieces.

**Dobrin, Sidney. *Saving Place: An Ecocomposition Reader*. McGraw-Hill Humanities, 2004**

This is designed to be a college composition text, and would certainly work well in that role, but it is also great collection of thematically-grouped essays, stories, and excerpts that could be useful in choosing texts for high school students or as background reading for adults. All of the readings also have discussion questions and writing prompts that might be useful for some audiences.

**Ferra, Lorraine. *A Crow Doesn't Need a Shadow*. Peregrine/Smith, 1994.**

This is one I enjoy for place-based writing ideas. From it I have devised various projects, including writer's field trips, calendars of place, and year-long special place essays.

**Gruenewald, David A. and Gregory A. Smith, Eds. *Place-Based Education in the Global Age*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2008.**

This book is organized into three sections; each section begins with a brief introduction by the editors. The first section, Models for Place-Based Learning, is a collection of success stories from around the United States. Here, practitioners in diverse rural, suburban, and urban environments tell how a focus on place contributes to everyone's learning while supporting the larger goal of democratic participation for the public good. Section two, Reclaiming Broader Meanings of Education, explores some of the reasons for pursuing place-based education. The authors argue that if educators are concerned about the well-being of diverse communities, they need to begin paying more attention to the relationship between community well-being and the process of schooling. The third section, Global Visions of the Local in Higher Education, shows how educators from such diverse places as New Mexico, Israel, Australia, and New England are using place as a focal point for developing community leaders, understanding the tensions between Israel and Palestine, fostering connection and consciousness-raising in the bush and in the city, and for showing teachers the power of place-based learning.

**Hasselstrom, Linda, Gaydell Collier, and Nancy Curtis. *Leaning into the Wind: Women Write from the Heart of the West*. Mariner Books, 1998.**

"The editors of this anthology spent several years collecting writings by women of the High Plains states: North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming. The final product contains the work of over 200 authors. Poems and short prose fragments are gathered into chapters by general themes, such as working with livestock or family life." School Library Journal blurb

**Hugo, Richard. *Making Certain It Goes On: The Collected Poems of Richard Hugo*. W.W. Norton, 1991.**

I think of Richard Hugo as the father of poems of place. Virtually any of his poetry, I think, exemplifies how place informs good writing.

**Hugo, Richard. *The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing*. W.W. Norton, 1992.**

The book is made up of compiled lectures and essays about poetry and writing. Placed into chapters, these teachings make the book into a type of guide for creative writers who want to use their surroundings to strengthen (and inspire) their work.

**Leslie, Clare Walker, John Tallmadge and Tom Wessels. *Into the Field: A Guide to Locally Focused Teaching*. Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 1996.**

*Into the Field* provides middle school through undergraduate teachers with curriculum ideas for engaging students

in natural and cultural history of their communities through reading, writing, observing, sketching and learning. The activities described can easily be used by teachers of English/language arts, science, social studies, history, geography, or art, and can be adapted to one-day trips or year-long projects. Tallmadge outlines a process for teaching writing as a means to better seeing and knowing the landscapes of home. Leslie describes how field sketching, with an emphasis on journal-based work, can strengthen relationships with and affinities for the home grounds. In addition, Tom Wessels writes about how to connect students with the ecological and cultural heritage of their home places.

**Lopez, Barry and Debra Gwartney, Eds. *Home Ground: Language for an American Landscape*. Trinity University Press, 2006.**

Lopez and Gwartney offer contributions from 45 writers (Barbara Kingsolver, William Kittredge, Arturo Longoria, Jon Krakauer, among others...) who present a series of definitions, arranged alphabetically, of "landscape terms and terms for the forms that water takes." These definitions average a dozen lines apiece, with some entries longer and others shorter. The volume is part reference, part artful prose.

**Louv, Richard. *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2006.**

This book provides some sobering statistics and rationales that account for the staggering divide between children and the outdoors. Written by journalist and child advocate Richard Louv, the book directly links the absence of nature in the lives of today's wired generation to some of the most disturbing childhood trends: the rise in obesity, attention disorders, and depression. The book brings together a body of research indicating that direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development and for the physical and emotional health of both children and adults. Although Louv romanticizes nature and has trouble defining what he means by "nature," the book is provocative and provides educators at all levels with a reason to incorporate ecological literacy in whichever subject they teach at whatever level of education.

**Orr, David. *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment and the Human Prospect*. Island Press, 2004.**

Orr is a prophet of place-based education and an engaging writer who comes across as both realistic in his assessments and believing in the power of education to make a positive difference for the planet and all its communities of life. He describes the problems of education from an ecological perspective but then goes on to offer ideas about how to rearrange the curriculum. Orr also wrote *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to the Post-Modern World*.

**Sobel, David. *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities*. Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 2004.**

Part of the Nature Literacy Series published by the Orion Society, this short text has a terrific forward by Laurie Lane-Zucker, followed by Sobel's version (which is revered in this field) of what place-based education is and how it can be implemented. Place-Based Education challenges the meaning of education by asking seemingly simple questions: Where am I? What is the nature of this place? What sustains this community? Place-based education employs a process of "re-storying" whereby students are asked to respond creatively to stories of their home grounds so that, in time, they are able to position themselves, imaginatively and actually within the continuum of nature and culture in that place. They become part of the community, rather than a passive observer of it. Place-based education is not simply a way to integrate the curriculum around a study of place, but a means of inspiring stewardship and an authentic renewal and revitalization of civic life. This book is the most comprehensive review of place-based education to be published, an eloquent layering of pedagogy and practical examples taken from practicing classrooms—urban, suburban, and rural—from coast-to-coast. It offers scientific and anecdotal evidence that place-based education is successfully meeting, and in many cases, surpassing the various standards and mandates that are increasingly a part of educational reform in this country as it develops classroom work around best literacy teaching practices.

**Sobel, David. *Mapmaking with Children: Sense of Place Education for the Elementary Years*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.**

Sobel explains how basic mapmaking is accessible to all of us, including children. He then follows with several age-specific ideas about engaging children in the process of making maps. Ultimately, mapmaking leads to the making of meaning about our place and the world around us.

**Stone, Michael K. and Zenobia Barlow, Eds. *Ecological Literacy: Educating Our Children for a Sustainable World*. San Francisco: The Sierra Club, 2005.**

The thinkers and educators behind this ground-breaking book take as their project reorienting the ways human beings live on earth by educating children to their highest capacities. Both endeavors must be viewed and pursued in the context of systems: familial, geographic, ecological, political. Efforts to build sustainable communities cannot succeed unless future generations learn how to partner with natural systems to our mutual benefit—the objective of ecological literacy. The many contributors to this volume outline projects that marry theory and practice based on the best thinking about how the world actually works and how learning occurs. Teachers everywhere, in every subject, across the grade levels can find in this volume creative efforts to develop new curricula and improve students' ecological understanding.

**Theobald, Paul. *Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997.**

Theobald addresses his comments to a rural audience writing an impassioned, yet clear-headed defense of rural schools and rural communities. He helps us to understand what we in Montana know by heart—the fate of small towns is vitally important to the future of our nature. As Paul Gruchow remarks, "Paul Theobald offers a penetrating analysis of the differences between the agrarian and the industrial world views, rescuing a vital but largely lost piece of American history....this is the best analysis of what has gone wrong in the countryside and what might be done to save it since Wendell Berry's *The Unsettling of America*." Like Louv, this book is more background reading than pedagogical offering; however, it provides teachers with food for thought in thinking about ways to encourage rural students to maintain a hold



on their way of life over seeking “out” in flight toward the contemporary urban mentality.

**Trimble, Stephen, Ed. *Words From the Land: Encounters with Natural History Writing*. University of Nevada Press, 1995.**

Among these 15 pieces are excerpts from John McPhee’s *Basin and Range*, Barry Lopez’s *Arctic Dreams*, and Peter Matthiessen’s *The Snow Leopard*. Trimble also interviewed nine literary naturalists about their work practices.

**Welch, James. *Riding the Earthboy 40*. Penguin, 2004.**

Riding the Earthboy 40 is the only volume of poetry written by Montana Native American novelist James Welch. The title of the book refers to the forty acres of land Welch’s father once leased from a Blackfeet family called Earthboy and all the writing is deeply rooted in the land and surroundings.

**Williams, Terry Tempest. *The Open Space of Democracy*. Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 2004.**

This volume provides a fabulous guide for place-based rhetorical efficacy. Williams offers us skills in commencement, ground-truthing, and engagement as rhetorical guides for fearless confrontation with doubt and self-doubt as she provokes our responsibilities to protect and defend our nation’s wild places.

**Williams, Terry Tempest. *Pieces of White Shell: A Journey to Navajoland*. Albuquerque, NM: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1983.**

In this volume, Williams offers a strong rationale for building the connective tissue between Indian Education for All and place-based education (see Heather Bruce’s rationale on pages 12-13).

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