For the Field

Indigenous Young Adult Literature: Scholarly and Professional Resources for Librarians

In accordance with the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA-FCAB) has encouraged and supported libraries to advance reconciliation with Canadian Indigenous communities. The CFLA-FCAB Truth and Reconciliation Report and Recommendations (2017) provide a comprehensive set of best practices to promote inclusive service delivery and remove barriers by encouraging the decolonization of library practices, materials, and spaces (CFLA-FCAB). Public libraries across Canada have been encouraged to embrace these recommendations and make efforts to begin “Indigenizing” their collections, programs, and services (CFLA-FCAB, 2017, p. 6)

As a result of these efforts and increased attention from book publishers, Indigenous Young Adult (YA) literature has risen in popularity and demand in library programming and collections. Libraries have sought to promote these works through initiatives like One Book, One Community (London Public Library), through incorporating Indigenous art (Calgary Public Library), and creating Indigenous Advisory Committees (Toronto Public Library). In these works, Indigenous YA authors often draw on the cultural significance of narratives, oral history, and storytelling to examine the historical traumas experienced and contemporary issues felt within the community, such as identity representation. Engagement with these works can provide a valuable opportunity for libraries to partner with Indigenous authors and communities to share

their histories and works with their communities. However, it is vitally important that libraries acknowledge how identity and representation of Indigenous peoples and cultures have been deeply problematic in popular culture, and in addition to remaining mindful of the historical legacies of oppression.

In an effort to promote the awareness of Indigenous histories, cultures, and stories, the following annotated bibliography has been developed and focused on appropriate professional and cultural knowledge competencies that complement engagement with these rising authors and works. The selected entries emerge from a range of disciplines including education, literature, and library and information sciences to offer guidance on inclusion and recognition in library spaces and programming. They are also key sources to aid in the evaluation of authenticity and appropriate representation of Indigenous YA material in literature and library programming. Finally, these resources are complemented with a section on the rise of the #OwnVoices movement in YA literature as this was an understudied topic in professional and scholarly writing at the time of publication.

Authors' Note on Terminology

The authors have adopted the best practice of using the most specific name of individual groups when appropriate or the preferred terminology of the source. Unless otherwise specified, Indigenous is used to refer to First Nation, Inuit, and Métis people of Canada as well as other Indigenous groups around the world.

Annotated Bibliography

Indigenous Identity, Culture and Representation

The resources in this section provide perspectives on Indigenous identity, culture, and representation in literature. A key theme is the historicization of Indigenous characters and inaccurate portrayals that simplify Indigenous histories, identities, and ways of knowing.

Bittner, R. (2014). Hey, I still can't see myself!: The difficult positioning of two-spirit identities in YA literature. *Bookbird*, 52(1), 11-22. doi:10.1353/bkb.2014.0040

In this important work, Bittner explores the representation of two-spirited individuals in Indigenous YA literature. Two-spirit individuals self-identify as embodying both female and male spirits and are distinct from other LGBTQ identities. Bittner notes that the visibility of sexual and gender identity diversity among Indigenous peoples is mentioned in many works. However, two-spirit identities are significantly less represented due to political, social, and spiritual complexities. This article aims to redress this disparate representation with feature interviews of two-spirit identified individuals, a review of scholarly works, and an examination of several novels that underscore the need for greater sexual and gender diversity in Indigenous YA.

Burnett, K., & Leggatt, J. (2016). Bloodsucking colonizers and the undead Anishinabe: History, cultural continuity, and identity in Drew Hayden Taylor's *The Night Wanderer*. *Native American and Indigenous Studies*, 3(1), 96-115.
doi:10.5749/natiindistudj.3.1.0096

In this discussion of *The Night Wanderer: A Native Gothic Novel* by Canadian author Drew Hayden Taylor, Burnett and Leggatt offer key insights into the tensions around the discussions of history and identity in Canada. In particular, they discuss how a temporal setting can enforce or resist discussions of colonization. #OwnVoices novels such as *The Night Wanderer* emerge from a deep experiential form of writing in which identity and background inform the narrative and the issues raised. This article asserts this reality and forces readers to confront the legacy of Indigenous identities in relation to colonizers. For librarians engaging with these works, this often compels utilizing tools of dialogue, reconciliation, and decolonization that acknowledge the darkness of Canadian colonizing history. Thus, their analysis is as much a call for action as it is a review of the novel.

James, L. (2016). Children of change, not doom: Indigenous futurist heroines in YA. *Extrapolation*, 57(1-2), 151-176. doi:10.3828/extr.2016.9

In this article, James examines Indigenous futurism and pays special attention to the portrayal of heroines in this genre. Indigenous futurism is characterized by its incorporation of Indigenous storytelling and ways of knowing within the science fiction genre. This is done through narratives that confront dominant representations of Indigenous identity as a relic of the past. James argues that this should be viewed as a deliberate position to demonstrate the inclusion of Indigenous identities in the present and the intersectionality of its characters. Works in this genre also often question current norms concerning agency, gender, ethnicity, and violence. This article is a useful introduction to Indigenous futurism, its recurring themes, and how these kinds of

portrayals of Indigenous culture and characters can be further adapted into other works of YA literature.

Jones, A. (2018). Native YA. *School Library Journal*, 64(7), 20-23.

In this magazine article, Jones interviews four Native American authors who discuss their works and offer messages for Indigenous young adults on telling cultural stories. The participants strive to convey that their culture, stories, and histories deserve to be heard and respected. This is an important message for readers because it succinctly demonstrates the challenges that Indigenous authors face when they present “the true Native side of the story” (Jones, 2018, p.21). This is a pertinent read for librarians that helps to convey the perspective and intentions of Indigenous authors. It also offers a useful reading list on Indigenous teen experiences and challenges.

Justice, D. H. (2018). *Why Indigenous literatures matter*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

This book is a helpful resource for those interested in an introduction to Indigenous literature and its importance in North American society. Justice explores how Indigenous literature can take many different forms and often include non-literary aspects such as beading, basket-weaving, and wood carvings as part of the storytelling narrative. Justice also offers an overview of the central concepts found within Indigenous cultures such as care for the land, intergenerational connection, and storytelling. However, there are no centralizing cultural aspects of Indigenous work and as such, readers should be mindful of generalizations about Indigenous literatures. Each author in this book represents their own voice rather than speaking for Indigenous

peoples as a homogenous group. Justice also argues that Indigenous literatures ought to matter just as much as non-Indigenous literatures because they represent one's own story – and all stories matter. His work calls for the non-Indigenous population to create space for Indigenous literatures and afford them the same respect that non-Indigenous literature receives in literary and library communities.

Metzger, K., & Kelleher, W. (2008). The dearth of native voices in young adult literature: A call for more young adult literature by and for indigenous peoples. *ALAN Review*, 35(2), 36-42.

Metzger and Kelleher present a strong case in favour of an increase in the volume of YA literature written by and for Indigenous peoples. It is crucial that narratives for Indigenous youth include not only historically accurate details, but also members of diverse cultures to serve as role models. This representation of diversity should aim to reflect the many tribal groups and communities that exist in North America. To achieve this goal, the authors argue that it is essential that more Indigenous authors write literature that is for and about Indigenous youth. The authors argue that works geared toward Indigenous youth are needed to correct the damage done by the misinformed and stereotypical characterizations of them in YA books that are common today.

Suhr-Sytsma, M. (2016). Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* and the Indigenous reinvention of young adult literature. *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 28(4), 25-52.

This article examines the lack of research and attention devoted to Indigenous-authored YA literature. Despite the success of some Indigenous YA works, the question of what Indigenous authors can offer the YA genre has yet to be answered. Suhr-Sytsma

focuses on the work *Slash*, a 1985 novel written by Jeanette Armstrong, to show how it was revolutionary to the genre and contends that the ground-breaking novel has a role in the reinvention of YA. Prior to *Slash*, YA literature had often not dealt socially and culturally with themes around discrimination, poverty, and agency. Suhr-Sytsma argues that *Slash* worked to push the boundaries of the possibilities of the YA genre because of its revisions of the traditional conventions of YA literature at the time.

Collection Evaluation and Development

The following resources are recommended for libraries to use to evaluate the materials in their collections to ensure they are culturally respectful and appropriate. They are also useful for identifying new materials to purchase and can be used to inform programming and service directors.

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. (2018). *Deepening Knowledge: Resources for and about Aboriginal Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/deepeningknowledge/index.html>

This is a vital resource for Canadian educators and librarians on teaching or incorporating Indigenous children's and YA materials into a collection. The website features age and grade appropriate lists of reading materials to bring Indigenous content into classrooms and library collections in a respectful way. In addition to a large range of resources by age and subject area, there is a vast list of resources on first contact, government and Indigenous relations, and residential schools. These suggested activities and guides on discussing residential schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission can be modified for use in YA library programming.

Oyate (2018) *Oyate*. Retrieved from <http://www.oyate.org>

This website is a helpful resource for educators and librarians who would like to expand their collection of Indigenous authors and content. The website offers an expansive online store as well as book reviews and a list of criteria to consider when selecting materials. This list includes suggestions such as how to identify negative portrayals of Indigenous characters and cultural inaccuracies, as well as a set of questions to help avoid works that include cultural appropriation. The site is run by a Native American book publisher who aims to improve access to quality materials about and by Indigenous people in schools and libraries.

Queensland Studies Authority (2007). Selecting and evaluating resources. *Guidelines:*

Indigenous Perspectives, 1-7. Retrieved from

https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/approach2/Indigenous_g008_0712.pdf

This resource provides comprehensive guidelines on selecting texts and materials for children and youth that feature Indigenous content. While it is an Australian-focused resource, it provides relevant evaluation criteria for the selection and assessment of YA Indigenous literature. The suggested evaluation criteria include a list of questions to ask, what to look for when evaluating a resource and what action to take in culturally-sensitive situations. This is a highly useful reading for librarians who may be unsure of the issues surrounding Indigenous representation and how to create respectful collections.

Reese, D. (2018). Critical Indigenous literacies: Selecting and using children's books about Indigenous peoples. *Language Arts* 95(6) 389-393.

Although Reese's work is more applicable to children's literature rather than YA literature, this article touches on many of the key concerns of Canadian authors wrestling with Indigenous issues. Namely, how to present their work as being valid expressions of identity and how to negotiate identities in the context of a long history of colonialist exploitation. Reese (2018) appropriately discusses the "curtain" concept of how some ideas and stories are for the Indigenous community only and not the wider world (p.390). This is an incredibly important point in the context of Indigenous literature and storytelling because having possession of intimate knowledge and knowing its boundaries ensures that the story does not cause further social damage to the community. The advice to librarians is general and useful: choose books at all times of the year and not merely during "safe" times such as heritage celebrations, discuss the Indigenous experience in the present tense, and speak to specific Indigenous experiences (Reese, 2018, p.391). For example, a Haudenosaunee tale of a child growing up in Khanawake will offer a different experience than the story of a Cree child in a residential school at Sioux Lookout, Ontario. The article also recommends popular works that feature authentic Indigenous voices by Canadian YA authors for collection development.

Library Programs and Services

The following resources are useful for libraries to inform programs and services that include Indigenous YA literature. They also highlight the importance of inclusive engagement and best practices in program delivery to Indigenous individuals, communities, and groups.

Hughes-Hassell, S. (2013). Multicultural young adult literature as a form of counter-storytelling. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, 83(3), 212-228. doi: 10.1086/670696

In this influential article, Hughes-Hassell examines counter-storytelling in YA multicultural literature with a focus on marginalized youth and youth of colour. She argues that counter-stories contained in multicultural YA literature challenge the stereotypes and misconceptions that are held by dominant groups while providing marginalized youth with a voice that accurately demonstrates the complexity of their identity. This form of storytelling is a useful tool for librarians in challenging dominant notions like cultural relativism, engaging the library and calling communities to action around inclusivity.

Peters, E. J., & Andersen, C. (2013). *Indigenous in the city: Contemporary identities and cultural innovation*. Vancouver: UBC Press

This scholarly work features a section on Aboriginal urbanization in Canada, with seven essays on topics including the rising urban Indigenous population in Canada, spiritual and cultural considerations for Indigenous people, and examples of successful partnerships with Indigenous organizations in Canadian cities. This work is useful for library professionals because it contains a thorough overview of current issues facing urban Indigenous populations and will assist libraries in evaluating services to better meet Indigenous information needs. These essays are useful to help understand Indigenous perceptions of stereotyping and misjudgement by non-Indigenous Canadians. The work would be helpful for those in direct library service looking to improve Indigenous experiences in urban public libraries.

Roy, L. and A. Frydman. (2013). Library services to Indigenous populations: Case studies. *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions*.

Retrieved from <https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/indigenous-matters/publications/indigenous-librarianship-2013.pdf>

This IFLA professional resource is a collection of 40 case studies on Indigenous librarianship and service in academic, special, and public libraries from all over the world. The case studies provide a good overview of the kinds of programs and services that have been developed. They strongly advocate working alongside Indigenous communities to develop and deliver programs and services. This resource also provides a helpful introduction to librarians on the importance of representing Indigenous cultures and identity instead of attempting to interpret and reflect on it from the librarian's perspective.

Reed, K. (1999). *Aboriginal peoples: Building for the future*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press Canada.

This widely referenced book is an excellent resource that explores Indigenous history, challenges, and culture from the past to the present. It focuses on Canadian Indigenous issues and addresses needs for the communities in the future. While this resource is almost two decades old, it is still endorsed as a bias-free teaching and educational resource by leading Indigenous publishers like Good Minds Books. In addition, this resource includes teacher recommendations that can be applied in the library to improve Indigenous YA selections.

Womack, C. S. (2009). Tribal paradise lost but where did it go? *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 21(4), 20-52.

In this article, Womack addresses Toni Morrison's 1997 novel *Paradise* and focuses criticism on the treatment of Indigenous characters. He also draws on creative works representing Indigenous Americans to demonstrate common issues around Indigenous identity and representation. Through these critiques, he explores the position of being in between Morrison's dismissal of "missing the boat on Indians" and also happy that they are being mentioned in works, regardless of their depictions (Womack, 2009, p.20). This is a good resource to inform the reader of guidelines or considerations for recognizing misrepresentations of Indigenous people in works when examining adult and young adult materials.

#OwnVoices Resources

The #OwnVoices movement is relatively recent and has yet to receive substantial attention in scholarly and professional literature. To date, the movement to include marginalized voices has relied heavily on a series of blog posts, social media posts and web discussions with the first use of the hashtag #OwnVoices emerging in September 2015. While #OwnVoices discourses are highly applicable to Indigenous YA, many popular titles were released before the hashtag came into popularity, so it is not directly associated with the resources. However, robust online discussion around #OwnVoices themes have formed a framework for Indigenous issues and particularly those around identity and representation. The resources in this section provide a comprehensive understanding of the term and its applicability to libraries.

#OwnVoices: Kids and teen books by Indigenous authors and illustrators - The Seattle Public Library. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://seattle.bibliocommons.com/list/share/606674457/725561467>

The Seattle Public Library (SPL) provides an in-depth and enlightening list of #OwnVoices titles written by Native American and First Nations authors. The list includes notable Canadian authors like Wab Kinew and Monique Gray-Smit and covers children, YA, and adult literature. Canadian libraries have similar curated lists, although none offer a comparable list of accessible titles.

Duyvis, C. (n.d.). #ownvoices • Corinne Duyvis. Retrieved from <http://www.corinneduyvis.net/ownvoices/>

Duyvis originated the hashtag “own voices” and was then required to make further clarifications to both defend and illuminate her concept. This hashtag drew attention to the complexities regarding Canadian discourses surrounding Indigenous identity and authorial claims. This adds another layer of complexity which is addressed by Duvvis in the format of this question and answer blog post. This is a highly insightful read for those who are unfamiliar with #OwnVoices and the origins of the movement.

Stivers, J. (2017). The critical piece: Building relationships with teens of color and Native youth. *Young Adult Library Services*, 15(2), 12-15.

This article provides an overview of #OwnVoices, Indigenous, and YA issues from a librarian's perspective. As scholarly writing on #OwnVoices is still in its infancy, the article offers one of the first guides to current terminology and social justice debates that are emerging online and in library contexts. While the content and discussion pertain to

the United States, Canadian libraries experience a similar set of issues and challenges and will benefit from this work.

Winters, A. (2018, October 22). Introducing Own Voices as an appeal term in NoveList.

Novelist. Retrieved from <https://www.ebscohost.com/novelist-the-latest/blog-article/introducing-own-voices-as-an-appeal-term-in-novelist>

This resource is useful to librarians who want to better understand the #OwnVoices Appeal Term search facet in NoveList. NoveList allows users to find titles by YA facet, Canadian origin, date, and Indigenous content. This article describes the ideas surrounding the introduction of the #OwnVoices appeal term and explains how it is used and functions as a search tool.

Conclusion

The diverse perspectives in this bibliography mirror the vast historical and cultural knowledge that Indigenous authors offer through their narratives, characters, and storytelling. The perspectives also exemplify the importance of identity representation and accurate historical portrayals in the spirit of truth and reconciliation. The rising popularity of Indigenous YA literature is an important opportunity for libraries to support these efforts and Indigenous communities with inclusive library programming and collections. Libraries are in the unique and privileged position of being able to promote Indigenous storytelling to represent many voices and stories. To further these aims, libraries must further develop professional and cultural competencies that allow the field to engage with this work while promoting respect and recognition of Indigenous works in our spaces and collections.

Gavin Bennett, Jenna Brancatella, Maneja Joian, Amber Matthews

Bennett, G., Brancatella, J., Joian, M., & Matthews, A. (2019). Indigenous young adult: scholarly and professional resources for librarians. *Emerging Library & Information Perspectives*, 2, 165-179. <https://doi.org/10.5206/elip.v2i1.6198>