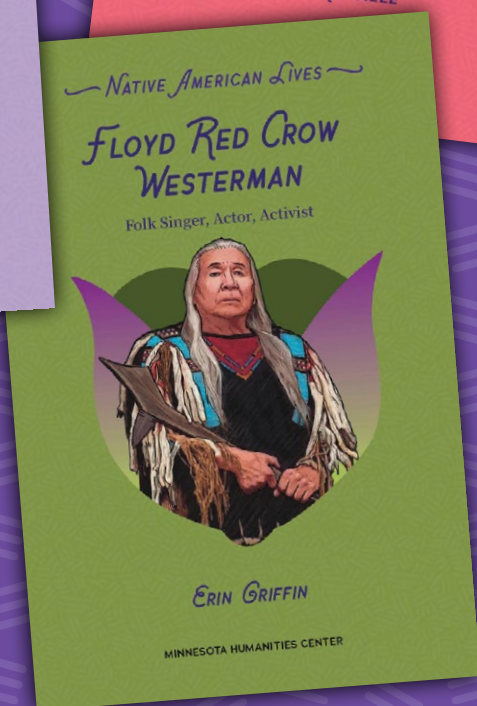
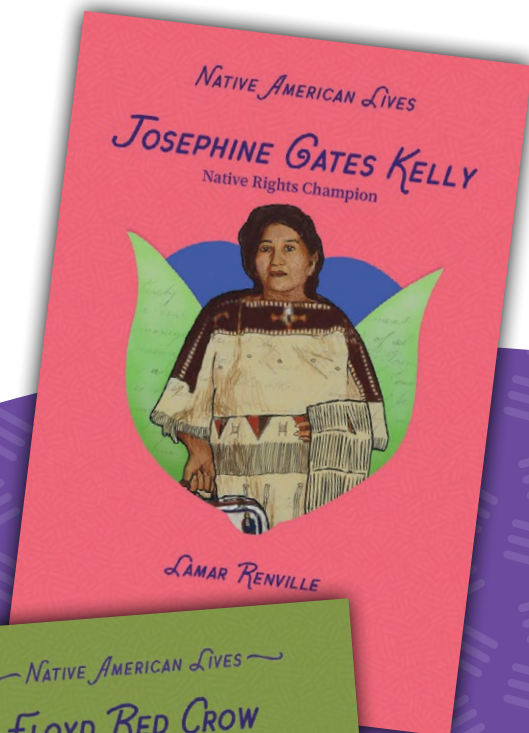
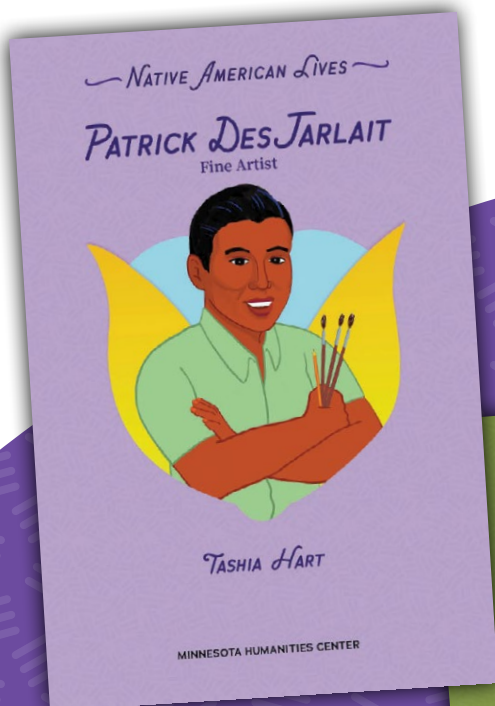


Teaching the Native American Lives Series



Minnesota
Humanities
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SHAKOPEE MDEWAKANTON
SIOUX COMMUNITY



UNDERSTAND
NATIVE
MINNESOTA



**CLEAN
WATER
LAND &
LEGACY**
AMENDMENT

This guide was developed by the Minnesota Humanities Center, with generous support from the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (SMSC) through its Understand Native Minnesota campaign, and is also funded in part by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund that was created with the vote of the people of Minnesota in November 4, 2008.

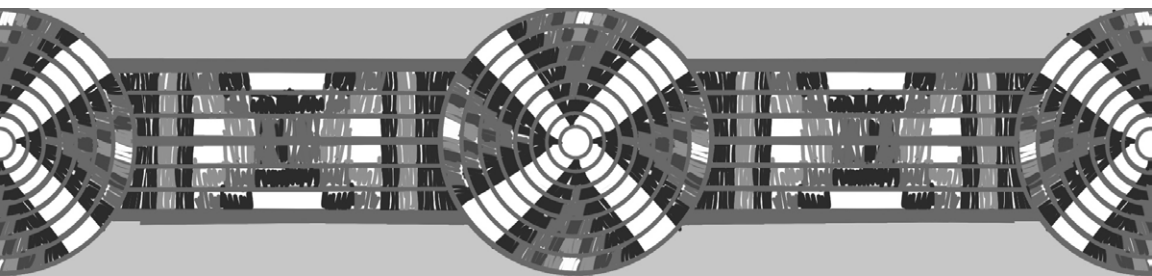


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Teaching the Native American Lives Series

Each biography in the *Native American Lives Series* highlights individual resilience and creativity, as well as the challenges Native people have faced. The courage of such leaders continues to shape Native nations today. These stories invite students to see how individual lives reflect larger histories of Native survival, sovereignty, and cultural contributions. Together, the biographies show that Native nations are not only part of the past, but are sovereign, living communities whose leaders continue to shape American life.

Guiding Principles

When teaching these biographies, keep the following principles at the center:

- **Present Native people as whole human beings** – leaders, artists, athletes, family members, and community builders.
- **Connect personal stories to collective histories** – each life reflects the survival, cultural continuity, and knowledge systems of Native nations.
- **Highlight enduring sovereignty** – these biographies are part of the ongoing story of sovereign Native nations and their role in shaping the Americas today.
- **Create space for reflection and dialogue** that acknowledges challenges such as assimilation and racism, while also highlighting strength, resilience, and persistence.



Approaches to Teaching Through Inquiry

The *Native American Lives Series* is well suited to inquiry-based instruction. The following practices can help educators design meaningful, student-centered learning experiences:

Begin with Primary Sources

Spark curiosity and deeper questioning by introducing photographs, maps, oral histories, or artifacts before reading the biography.

Develop Compelling and Supporting Questions

Frame each biography around a big question (e.g. How do individuals contribute to the strength of their communities?) and use supporting questions to guide exploration. Use the Big Ideas identified for each biography to frame your questions.

Situate Stories in Historical Contexts

Connect each biography to local, state, or national histories so students see both continuity and change.

Integrate Multiple Perspectives

Pair each biography with other Native voices, community stories, or tribal nation resources to highlight diverse experiences.

Facilitate Reflection and Dialogue

Create respectful classroom conversations that help students process complex topics and connect them to their own lives.

Conclude with Informed Action

Encourage students to demonstrate learning through civic or creative action, such as exhibits, reflections, or peer teaching.



Extended Learning Resources and Support

The end of each book includes:

Historical Context

Background on the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples, emphasizing their deep connections to Minnesota.

Chronological Framework

A detailed timeline of Native American history spanning from 900 CE through the 20th century.

Reference & Classroom Supports

A glossary of key terms, background information, and teaching suggestions, along with additional resources to deepen understanding of Dakota and Ojibwe history and culture.

Student Learning Extensions

Activities that build on the book's themes, offering opportunities for writing, discussion, and visual projects.

Creator Profiles

Biographical notes on the authors, illustrators, and series editors, all of whom have strong ties to Indigenous communities and storytelling.

Explore more:

Access additional resources, professional development opportunities, and updates about future titles at the *Native American Lives* series webpage

mnhum.org/program/native-american-lives-series



Minnesota Academic Standards Connections

The *Native American Lives Series* connects to many areas of Minnesota's academic standards. Below are examples of Social Studies and English Language Arts anchor standards that align with the series. These titles can also be used to support learning in art, science, and other subjects. We encourage teachers to explore multiple content areas and make connections that fit their classroom.

For complete standards language and grade-level benchmarks, visit the Minnesota Department of Education: education.mn.gov/med/dse/stds/.



English Language Arts Standards (2020 MN Standards)

Because ELA standards emphasize skills rather than specific content, the *Native American Lives Series* can be connected to nearly any standard within a unit of instruction. The anchor standards below provide especially strong opportunities for connection.

Reading 3 Read and comprehend independently both self-selected and teacher-directed complex literary and informational texts representing perspectives of historical and contemporary Dakota and Anishinaabe people..

Reading 4 Read critically to comprehend, interpret and analyze themes and central ideas in complex literary and informational texts.

Reading 6 Analyze influences on content, meaning and style of text including fact and fiction, time period, and author perspective and identity, including Dakota and Anishinaabe perspective, in complex literary and informational texts..

Writing 2 Write routinely for various purposes and disciplines, representing one's own personal perspective, identity and voice.

Writing 7 Engage in inquiry-based learning and research processes to create texts and presentations for a variety of purposes and audiences

Listening, Speaking, Viewing and Exchanging Ideas I Exchange ideas in discussion and collaboration, as listener, speaker and participant, A) including the voices and perspectives of Dakota and Anishinaabe people as well other perspectives, identities and cultures like and unlike their own, and B) expressing one's own ideas, stories and experiences.



Social Studies (2021 MN Standards)

Specific titles that connect particularly well have been listed after each standard.

CITIZENSHIP AND GOVERNMENT

- 2. Democratic Values and Principles** Explain democratic values and principles that guide governments, societies and communities and analyze the tensions within the United States constitutional government. *Gates Kelly, Westerman*
- 6. Tribal Nations** Evaluate the unique political status, trust relationships and governing structures of sovereign Tribal Nations and the United States. *Westerman, Desjarlait, Gates Kelly*

GEOGRAPHY

- 14. Places and Regions** Describe places and regions, explaining how they are influenced by power structures. *Gates Kelly*
- 17. Culture** Investigate how a sense of place is impacted by different cultural perspectives. *Desjarlait, Westerman*

HISTORY

- 18. Context, Change, and Continuity** Ask historical questions about context, change and continuity in order to identify and analyze dominant and non-dominant narratives about the past. *Desjarlait*
- 19. Historical Perspectives** Identify diverse points of view and describe how one's frame of reference influences historical perspective. *Desjarlait, Gates Kelly*

ETHNIC STUDIES

- 24. Resistance** Describe how individuals and communities have fought for freedom and liberation against systemic and coordinated exercises of power locally and globally. Identify strategies or times that have resulted in lasting change. Organize with others to engage in activities that could further the rights and dignity of all. *Westerman, Desjarlait, Gates Kelly*
- 25. Ways of Knowing and Methodologies** Use ethnic and Indigenous studies methods and sources in order to understand the roots of contemporary systems of oppression and apply lessons from the past in order to eliminate historical and contemporary injustices. *Gates Kelly*

Patrick Desjarlait: Fine Artist

Author: Tashia Hart
Illustrator: Robert Desjarlait
Recommended Use: Grades 4–8;
adaptable as read-aloud for 1–3

Overview

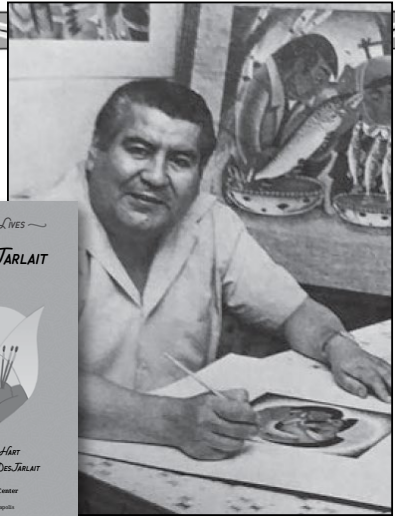
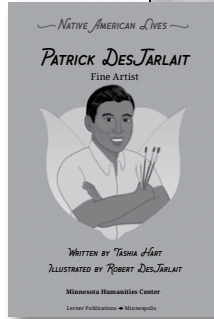
This book tells the story of Patrick Desjarlait (1921–1972), an Anishinaabe artist born on Red Lake Reservation. Desjarlait grew up in a traditional Anishinaabe way of life, developing his skills as an artist by sketching his observations of the environment and seasonal lifeways on Red Lake Reservation. He developed his own distinctive artistic voice despite facing pressure to conform to a single style of “Native” art during his time in art school. His signature style was informed by his love of home and resistance. Desjarlait used dense watercolor paints and inventive brushwork to tell the story of Anishinaabeg life on Red Lake. Reservation He worked as both a freelance and full-time artist across multiple mediums including illustration, mural painting, graphic design, and animation, always drawing on Anishinaabeg worldview as his inspiration.

Student Learning Goals

Analyze how Desjarlait’s artistic style was shaped by his upbringing and Anishinaabeg lifeways on Red Lake Reservation.

Examine how Desjarlait resisted forced assimilation and how Native people continue to resist settler colonialism today.

Evaluate Desjarlait’s legacy and influence on modern art.



Big Ideas to Explore with Students

Anishinaabeg Lifeways – Desjarlait’s art expresses the ways land, season, and people’s daily activities shape the Anishinaabe worldview.

Art as Resistance – Despite pressure to conform, Desjarlait stayed true to his artistic vision, showing how Native people resist colonialism in creative ways.

Shared Experiences of Injustice – Desjarlait connected his experience as an Indigenous person to the treatment of Japanese Americans during WWII, showing how movements for liberation can be linked across communities.

Storytelling – Each of Desjarlait’s paintings tells a story about Anishinaabe life, showing that culture can be communicated in many forms.

Intergenerational Legacy – Desjarlait’s legacy lives on through his children, who continue to make an impact in the Native community today.

Geographic Context

Patrick Desjarlait was born in Red Lake Nation, in what is now northern Minnesota, on Upper and Lower Red Lake. This Anishinaabe homeland shaped Desjarlait’s artistic style throughout his life. He depicted traditional Anishinaabe lifeways such as sugar bush, net fishing, and berry harvests, and each painting told a story about community and connection to land. Even while living across different territories and working in varying artistic mediums and trades, Desjarlait continued to tell the story of Red Lake Anishinaabe land and lifeways through his art.

Political Context

Desjarlait persisted in creating art that shared Anishinaabe culture, even while facing punishment for making art in boarding school and pressure to conform to prevailing movements in the art world. His art also led him to connect with other communities facing oppression. During World War II, when Japanese Americans were forcibly incarcerated, Desjarlait worked as an art supervisor at a Japanese American incarceration camp in Arizona. His own experiences of assimilation and confinement in boarding school helped him build empathy for Japanese Americans facing similar treatment. Facing racism in the commercial art world of the 1950s, Desjarlait continued to incorporate Red Lake Anishinaabeg perspective into his work, which allowed him to become remarkably versatile across the art field.

Historical Context

Although he died only a few years after the beginning of the Self-Determination Era, Desjarlait’s later-life experiences as an Anishinaabe person shaped his artistic style throughout his life. The art movements of his era, from American Regionalism to fresco painting and studio style, rarely portrayed Native people accurately. Desjarlait’s development of his own unique style was itself a form of Indigenous resistance, as he continually pushed back against pressure to conform to these prevailing styles.



Josephine Gates Kelly : Native Rights Champion

Author: Lamar Renville

Illustrators: Holly Young and
Awanigiizhik Bruce

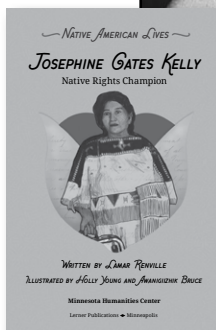
Recommended Use: Grades 4–8;
adaptable as read-aloud for 1–3

Overview

This book tells the story of Josephine Gates Kelly (1888–1976), a Dakota political leader and Native American rights advocate, born on the Standing Rock Reservation. Gates Kelly held a lifelong commitment to protecting and advancing Dakota culture and political rights. In 1909, at age 21, she graduated from the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, having spent seven years there. Gates Kelly then returned home to Standing Rock, where she received her Dakota name, Wačhínoyapi Wín, meaning “The Tribe Looks to Her for Help Woman.” She used her knowledge of American culture, language, and customs to help her tribe navigate the impacts of settler colonization, including organizing against the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. After four years on the tribal council, she was elected tribal chair — the first woman to hold that position. As chair, she advocated for women’s rights and protected Standing Rock’s self-determination by opposing the Termination Act, which sought to end federal recognition and legal status for tribal nations. Throughout her life, Gates Kelly held to the ideals of the United States while also working to protect the treaty rights of Native Americans.

Student Learning Goals

- **Understand** the government-to-government relationship between tribal nations and local, state, and federal governments.
- **Examine** how federal policies in the 1930s affected tribal nations and the actions tribes took to protect their sovereignty.
- **Recognize** Gates Kelly’s leadership and lasting impact on tribal politics and governance.



Big Ideas to Explore with Students

Native Women's Leadership – Gates Kelly was the first woman elected tribal chair, paving the way for American Indian women to shape the political relationship between tribal nations and the U.S. government.

Intersecting Identities – Gates Kelly's advocacy for tribal sovereignty was tied to her advocacy for women's rights, showing how her identity as both a Dakota woman and a tribal leader shaped what she chose to fight for.

Complexity of U.S. Policy – The Indian Reorganization Act ended allotment but also pressured tribes to adopt governance structures modeled on the U.S. system, showing how a single federal policy can both strengthen and undermine tribal self-determination.

Land, Water, and Sovereignty – The damming of the Missouri River, which flooded Standing Rock and other tribal lands, reflects a broader pattern of infrastructure disproportionately harming Native nations compared to non-Native communities.

Geographic Context

Gates Kelly was born on the Standing Rock Reservation, which is surrounded by prairie land that straddles the border of what are now North and South Dakota. Citizens of Standing Rock belong to the Ojibwe and include people from both the Dakota and Lakota nations, who speak both Dakota and Lakota dialects. In her role on the tribal council and as tribal chair, Gates Kelly traveled extensively throughout the United States, building relationships with other Native nations to form coalitions of resistance.

Political Context

Gates Kelly's early years took place during a period when the genocide of American Indians shifted away from overt U.S. warfare and toward systems of assimilation and administrative control. The 1934 Indian Reorganization Act ended allotment, but it also pressured tribes to adopt governmental structures modeled on settler society and away from traditional forms of governance. In 1953, the U.S. government passed the Termination Act, an attempt to end tribes' federal recognition that affects many tribal nations today. Through the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. also built dams along the Missouri River, flooding numerous tribal nations' lands and further dispossessing Native Americans from their homelands.

Historical Context

Gates Kelly's early years were shaped by stories of land loss and dispossession — but also by stories of strength and resilience, particularly from her grandfather, Chief Mato Numpa. At age 14, Gates Kelly attended the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Like her Dakota relatives before her, she resisted by holding to her Dakota identity while gaining knowledge of settler society. Following the Great Depression, she used this knowledge to organize against the Indian Reorganization Act.

Floyd Red Crow Westerman: Folk Singer, Actor, Activist

Author: Erin Griffin

Illustrator: Awanigiizhik Bruce

Recommended Use:

Grades 4–8; adaptable as
read-aloud for 1–3

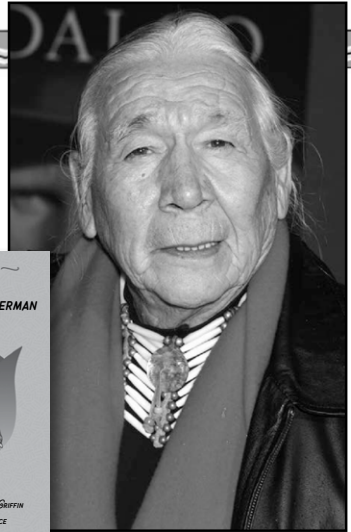
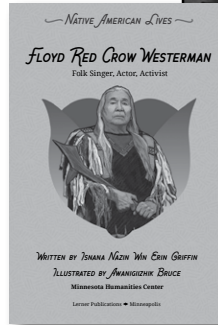
Overview

This book tells the story of Floyd Red Crow Westerman (1936–2007), a Dakota musician, actor,

and activist born in the Dakota Homelands on the Lake Traverse Reservation of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate. As a child, Westerman was forced to attend the government-run Wahpeton Indian School, where teachers and administrators tried to strip away his language and culture. Despite this, he maintained his Dakota identity, which later shaped his work as a musician, actor, and activist. Westerman used his music to critique and make visible U.S. policies of Indigenous removal, forced assimilation, and cultural erasure. He recorded his first album, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, to accompany his close friend Vine Deloria Jr.'s book of the same title. Encouraged by his friend Will Sampson, Westerman began acting in film and television. Later in life, he became involved in environmental activism, traveling the world to build relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Westerman opened the door for generations of Native American actors and musicians to use art as a form of resistance through self-representation and truth-telling.

Student Learning Goals

- **Understand** how Westerman's experience in boarding school shaped his life as a musician, actor, and activist.
- **Analyze** how music and art are used by Native people as a form of resistance to assert the self-determination of American Indian tribal nations.
- **Recognize** Westerman's contribution to advancing representation in film and television, most notably as Ten Bears in *Dances with Wolves*.



Big Ideas to Explore with Students

Resistance Through Art – Supporting fellow activists in the Red Power Movement and American Indian Movement, Westerman’s work illustrates how artistic expression can function as resistance and activism in response to injustice.

Representation in Film – Westerman opened the door for future Indigenous peoples to be represented in complex roles in film and television.

Environmental Activism – Protecting the land and water is an act of Indigenous sovereignty, rooted in a deep relationship with the earth — a belief Westerman carried from his music and acting into a lifetime of global environmental advocacy.

Geographic Context

Westerman was born in the Dakota Homelands on the Lake Traverse Reservation of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate. Today, Lake Traverse Reservation shares geography with what are currently South and North Dakota. The Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate have long been defenders of their land, the Dakota language, and traditions, which shaped Westerman’s childhood and later life as a musician, actor and activist.

Political Context

Westerman’s early life was shaped by forced assimilation and termination policies directed at tribal nations by the U.S. government. The assimilation and termination eras of U.S. and American Indian history involved forcing Native children into government boarding schools and making Native American spiritual and cultural practices illegal. As a way of asserting tribal sovereignty, Native American leaders and communities organized within the Red Power Movement and the American Indian Movement, helping bring about the Self-Determination Era. This era marked a shift toward greater tribal control over community life, governance, and services, reflected in key 1978 legislation such as the Indian Child Welfare Act and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

Historical Context

Westerman’s early life unfolded roughly 70 years after the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, which resulted in the forced exile of Dakota people from Minnesota. In the decades that followed, U.S. policy shifted from genocide by violence to genocide by assimilation and termination of federally recognized tribes. While the policy language changed, the underlying goal remained the same: access to Indigenous land. Westerman belonged to a generation of American Indians who lived through boarding schools and assimilationist policy firsthand. That generation built the movements for tribal sovereignty and self-determination, and helped bring about the Self-Determination Era.



Building Background Knowledge

Use these resources to build your own understanding and to give students richer, more accurate perspectives when teaching the *Native American Lives Series*. While these resources are not comprehensive or limited to Dakota and Ojibwe sources, they're meant to spark ideas and share examples that can help you begin exploring how to teach Native lives in broader, more inclusive ways.

Overall Background Educator Resources

Smithsonian Native Knowledge 360° – Comprehensive background materials and inquiry lessons from Native perspectives.

<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/lessons-resources/search-resources>

PBS Molly of Denali – A children's program and resources that highlight Native voices, stories, and cultures in engaging ways for younger learners.

https://static.pbslearningmedia.org/media/media_files/b362cb0f-09f9-4666-a290-705c826f6a52/dal8c97e-700f-445e-96e4-ecaa58001261.pdf

Brenda Child - *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900–1940* (1998)

Minnesota Department of Education – “American Indian Literature Resources” – A starting point for educators to incorporate American Indian literature, with a focus on Anishinaabe and Dakota, into their classes.

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/indian/teach/>

Minnesota Department of Education – “Essential Understandings About Native Arts in Minnesota.”

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/Arts/>

Understand Native Minnesota – Publications to Support Teaching of Native Content – Produced by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, this guide provides K-12 educators in Minnesota with reliable and culturally respectful teaching resources aligned with Minnesota's K-12 academic standards.

<https://www.understandnativemn.org/publications/>

Enhancing Background Knowledge on Each Book

These resources are illustrative rather than exhaustive and are not confined to Dakota and Ojibwe sources. They are offered to encourage broader thinking and provide starting points for teaching about Native lives.



Patrick Desjarlait

Anishinaabeg Perspectives, “The Artist as Boarding School Student” https://anishinaabeperspectives.weebly.com/blog/the-artist-as-boarding-school-student?utm_source=chatgpt.com

MPR News, “‘Dreaming’ big: Minnesota exhibit explores connections and rich history of Indigenous painters” <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2024/02/01/dreaming-big-minnesota-exhibit-explores-connections-and-rich-history-of-indigenous-painters>

Twin Cities PBS, “Is the Land O’Lakes Maiden a Racist Trope or Symbol of Native Pride?” https://youtu.be/CO_fVqr4d3I?si=_vtCqwGpZHlo7dMt



Josephine Gates Kelly

New York Times, “LETTERS; An Indian Leader” <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/06/18/garden/l-letters-an-indian-leader-223187.html>

Nick Estes, “Our History is the Future” <https://www.versobooks.com/products/600-our-history-is-the-future?srsltid=AfmBOoowUx3EcW2Nvvail0QSvS78T8GEHdpJzPIgFLEiYAS5Iaaqe7-0>

North Dakota Humanities Council, “Josephine Gates Kelly: Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Leader” https://turtletalk.blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/secthought_thinkindian.pdf



Floyd Red Crow Westerman

Sounding Mindful Media, “Floyd ‘Red Crow’ Westerman - famed actor, activist, & musician - Gwich’in Nation ANWR Benefit, 1992” <https://youtu.be/4tAq3tVekro?si=kvRxpGo619Tzm20>

NPR, “Floyd ‘Red Crow’ Westerman Balanced Acting with Activism” <https://www.npr.org/2007/12/17/117310692/floyd-red-crow-westerman-balanced-acting-with-activism>



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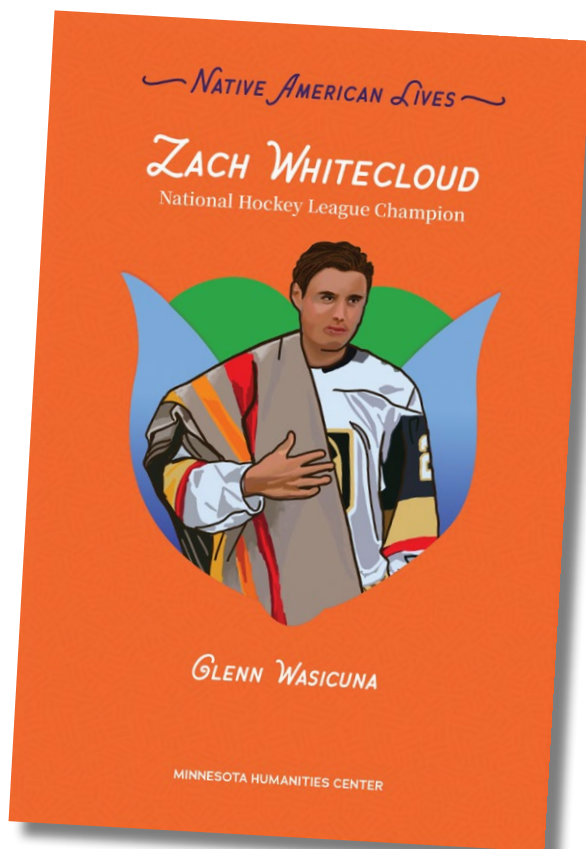
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