Redeem the Animist Soul

Re-enchantment and Relationship Education in the U.S. English Classroom

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*Don’t bother the earth spirit who lives here. She is working on a story. It is the oldest story in the world and it is delicate, changing. If she sees you watching she will invite you in for coffee, give you warm bread, and you will be obligated to stay and listen. But this is no ordinary story. You will have to endure earthquakes, lightning, the deaths of all those you love, the most blinding beauty. It’s a story so compelling you may never want to leave; this is how she traps you. See that stone finger over there? That is the only one who ever escaped.*   
 *Don’t Bother the Earth Spirit – J. Harjo*

*All that exists lives   
All that lives is worthy of respect*

*-G. Harvey*

Abstract

This paper began as an examination of current values and messages predominant in secondary public schools across the United States around relationships, sexuality, pleasure, and love. Using methods of observational data in and out of the classroom, conversational data, lived experience, and review of research and literature, I considered the ways that a history of religious oppression and settler colonization has created a legacy of trauma, sexual violence, and poverty (lack of land resources, culture, ceremony, hand skills, and language specifically). I realized that Cartesian Dualism, mind vs. body, and the values of our Protestant Puritan ancestors are two central ontologies whereby citizens of the United States view the world and construct meaning. Both ontologies have colonized consciousness as settlers and religious leaders systemically persecuted relationally-centered ways of living i.e. animistic/indigenous. Writing about the lack of comprehensive sexuality education in the United States public educational system without first addressing the ontologies that shaped the system was like putting the cart before the horse. One’s experience of life, and therefore of love and sexuality, cannot be separated out from **any** of our relationships. I realized my identity as an animist informs my way of seeing the world and my practice as an educator. Could this way of being create more equity, depth of learning, critical thinking, healing and love in a classroom? This paper therefore proposes a move away from teaching pedagogies and practices that reinforce dualism and oppressive Puritan values and offers an animistic, culturally sustaining pedagogy that affirms a human’s natural inclination towards care of all. It closes with examples of non-canonical texts to use in a secondary English classroom that seek to disrupt a materialist worldview, sustain and remember cultures and history, and remind us that all of life is about right relationship.

Keywords: animism, culturally sustaining pedagogy, colonization, dualism, Protestant Puritan

Acknowledgements

I want to name some of what has gone into this paper: fury-fueled bicycle rides past the flat farmlands of Whatcom County where brown-skinned farmworkers live in trailers across from 6,000 square foot “houses,” and where pesticides used on fields next door flow through our property where I plan to grow organic medicinal herbs; tear- stained journal pages, hours of conversations with my mother, my partner, and my coven, for their capacity and willingness to bear witness and help deepen my thinking. Coffee beans grown south of here and flown by jet fuel extracted from under Earth, cream and butter and milk from grazing Cows; Kale, Chard, Squash, Carrots, Onion, Garlic, Potato and many more; Turkey, Chicken, Cow, Sheep, Pig and the farmers who tend them; Apple, Orange, Lemon, Blueberry, Grapefruit, and many more; Corn, Wheat, Rice; Nettle, Rose, Reishi, Yarrow, Chaste tree berry, Elderberry, Devil’s Club, Ocotillo, Valerian, Shatavri Root, and California Poppy. Gasoline to commute back and forth from the Anacortes ferry terminal to Bellingham and Everson, WA twice a weekend for the past year and a half. The economic system and religious persecution that drove my earth-loving ancestors from their homelands. The economic system that forces me to subvert my innate inclinations towards Earth worship, community, cooperation, love, and generosity. Grief, Sorrow, and Heartbreak continue to be companions on the road, keeping my heart open, and thus, still alive in the face of the insanity of this neo-liberal, untethered, dismembered, and oil-addicted, consumer culture. This paper is offered in deep love and gratitude because of and in service to: the WWU MIT fall co-hort of 2017, Ashton Anderson, Makayla Henry, Garrett Knoll, Aliina Lahti Locklear, Nick Mellander, Merritt Michelbrink, Angelia Thornton, Courtney Witter, and Daniel Wojcek; and Professors Victor Nolet, Molly Ware, and Francisco Rios, of Woodring College of Education who generously gave their time and deeply wrought considerations and criticisms to what this paper initially thought it wanted to be. May you who read this paper be simultaneously heartbroken and heartened by that which it attempts to wonder after.   
*Missionizing, Mind vs. Body*

Dualism is a way of viewing the world that can be traced back to Descartes. To understand the current position of public schools in the United States regarding relationally centered and culturally sustaining education in general, or the lack thereof, we must remember Descartes, French Jesuit philosopher. Though Descartes was not the first person to contemplate the notions of separateness, self/ego, and humans’ place in the cosmos, his *Meditations on First Philosophy* published in 1641, and the writings therein, particularly his famous phrase, “Cogito, ergo sum,” meaning "I think, therefore I am,” forever shaped the way modern day humans think about the world.

He had in fact, given expression to the most basic error: to equate thinking with Being and identity with thinking…. Identification with your mind creates an opaque screen of concepts, labels, images, words, judgements, and definitions that blocks all true relationship…. It is this screen of thought that creates the illusion of separateness, the illusion that there is you and a totally separate ‘other.’ (Tolle 1999, p. 15)

This dualistic thinking, where mind is glorified, and body ignored, is a key theme found in religious traditions across the globe. Missionary priests indoctrinated by this dualistic thinking spread this ideology to earth-based, animist, first nations/indigenous peoples everywhere. As I will explain later in the paper, a theme central to earth-based traditions is a world view where spirituality is placed-based, where all things have a spirit, and therefore every being is honored. I once a heard a story that when the Spanish priests invaded some of the native tribes of Mexico, who had a pantheistic view of the world, (meaning honoring multiple gods and therefore being much more tolerant of diversity in general), the villagers welcomed the priests by saying, “Of course your god is welcome here,” and they made a little place on their altar to include this other god. Unfortunately, the way monotheism works is there is one god and one god only, and slowly but surely Catholicism took hold in most of Mexico and Latin America. Both Catholicism and other forms of Christianity are monotheistic: one God with a capital G. This one god does not belong to any certain time, place, or season; this one god therefore is a disembodied god. Despite this god’s lack of allegiance to season, place, affinity for other gods, this one god is sole purveyor of morality, guidance, and justice. This god is the one who takes life and gives life. Prior to Christian or Catholic contact humans had rich spiritual customs and myths that reflected their own sophisticated ways of being with the earth, as well as understanding their place within the cosmos. Brebeuf, a French Jesuit priest on mission to the traditional lands of the Huron people (now Ontario), wrote in 1635:

They resort to the idea that their country is not like ours, that they have a quite different God, different heaven, and in a word, different ways.

55. They tell us now the woman *Eataentsic* fell from heaven into waters that covered the earth and that little by little the earth became dry. I ask them who created this heaven where this woman could not remain. They remain silent and remain so when I press them to tell me who formed the earth, seeing that it was beneath the waters before this woman fell on it. (Campeau 1987, p. 42)

The trouble is that they are so attached to their old customs, that even though they now know the beauty of truth, they are content to approve it without embracing it. Their usual reply is *oniondechouten*—‘Such is the custom of their country.’ We have challenged this excuse and have taken it from their mouths, but not yet from their hearts. Our Lord will do that when it shall please Him. (Campeau 1987, p. 57)

Here he notes that though these people have their own god and their own customs, that “our Lord” will still have the last word. Such is his indoctrination into the Jesuit tradition that Brebeuf, like missionaries around the world, is never fully able to “see” the Huron people for who they are. Anyone willing to know our history must know that colonization could not have happened without the missioning project. “Even prior to Confederation and the emergence of the first statute entitled the ‘Indian Act in 1876,’ the colonial enterprise in Canada had enforced a system of Eurocentric policies, beliefs and value systems upon First Nations. The earliest missionaries, for example, were determined to "civilize" the Indian populations by attempting to indoctrinate a Christi, an ethos and patriarchal familial structure.” (Canon 1998, p.2) This is one example of the materialistic view of the world, in which spirit is separate from matter.

*Puritan Protestant Norms*

If you stopped a citizen on the street and asked them if they believed in God, chances are they’d say yes (Ullmann et al. 2011), but if you asked them if they identify with the Puritans, you’d be hard-pressed to get an affirmative “Amen.” However, if you were born and raised in this country, the impact of our protestant ancestors might still be informing your views on the world, more than you’d care to admit. Many of the earliest Americans came from especially devout subcultures of Europe, feeling from religious persecution. The isolation of the America and the devout religiosity of these early settlers contributed to the heavily religious culture of early America (Uhlmann et al, 2011). The conservative viewpoints on work, religion, and sexuality of these founding settlers are still alive and well. In a research article published in 2011, a team of researchers hypothesized that morality, divine salvation, and cultural identity bind work and sex morality into an overarching American ethos. The researchers noted that a consequence of America's Puritan-Protestant heritage is that not only sexuality but also hard work falls into the moral/religious domain. “Our argument is not that American culture is religious only at an implicit level. Rather, we argue that because American culture is explicitly religious, even less religious individuals often absorb such values implicitly. This is based in part on prior research indicating both children and adults implicitly absorb their local culture.” (Ulhmann et al, 2011, p.313). Three studies paired groups of white Americans with Asian Americans, white French Canadians, and white British students. All those who identified as American when primed with their “American” identify were more likely to endorse conservative values around sexuality, work, and religion, values more in line with America’s founding Puritan settlers, than any of the other groups, who do not identify first as “American.” Additionally, a sampling taken from students enrolled at two of the most prestigious universities in the world: Yale University, 71 % white (Yale 2016) and Oxford College, 82% white (Ethnicity, 2015), exemplifies the race demographic in this country who continues to benefit from unearned power and privilege, as well and England, original home of so many of the puritan’s ancestors. Numbers from 2016-2017 confirm this:

* Ten richest Americans: 100 percent white (seven of whom are among the ten richest in the world).
* US Congress: 90 percent white; US Governors: 96 percent white.
* Top military advisers. 100 percent white.
* President and vice president: 100 percent white.
* US Freedom Caucus: 99 percent white
* Current presidential cabinet: 91 percent white.
* People who decide which TV shows we see: 93 percent white.
* People who decide what books we read: 90 percent white
* People who decide which news is covered: 85 percent white
* People who decide which music is produced: 95 percent white
* People who directed the one hundred top-grossing films of all time, worldwide: 95 percent white
* Teachers: 82 percent white
* Full time college professors: 84 percent white
* Owners of men’s professional football teams: 97 percent white

(DiAngelo 2018, p. 31)

These numbers represent every structure of power that inform all facets of daily life in the United States, i.e. public education, books published, news stories etc. It stands to reason then that in accordance with the conclusions the research team made, inherent in “whiteness” or identity as “American” are Puritan Protestant norms about work, sexuality, and salvation. “While many major religious faiths condemn sexual promiscuity, Protestantism is distinct in its characterization of hard work as a moral and religious calling.” (Uhlmann et al, 2011, p. 317). Perhaps even more problematic is the fact that, “Unlike religions such as Catholicism, which sanctioned the accumulation of capital by the faithful, Protestantism promoted it. Non-Western cultures also did not share this ideological belief in the relation between material success and spiritual righteousness.” (Ulhmann et al, 2011, p. 315). It should come as no surprise then that materialism and consumerism, at the expense of finite resources, are byproducts of the founding ideologies of the United States. From this understanding, health then is equated with success, which, in the United States continues to be predicated upon the accumulation of material wealth. Non-monotheistic and earth based cultures viewed health as predicated upon the health of all those who share the place where you make home. In cultures where materialism and thinking are not deified, health is measured in more practical ways: is everyone fed? Are the salmon abundant? How are the waterways flowing this season? It makes sense that in more relationally-based societies, the accumulation of material wealth was not only frowned upon, but dangerous to the health of the community; these peoples understood that no one can be truly wealthy when someone else, a neighbor, is poor. People who understood and honored their non-human relationships would think it insane to slaughter forests to build strip malls, a common occurrence in the United States.

*Honoring Kin*

Western Red Cedar, *thuja plicata*, is one of the most prolific trees in the Pacific Northwest. It grows in dense forests, along mountain sides, in forest swamps and streambanks within a range that includes the coastal regions of Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska. “Western red cedar and yellow cedar were extraordinarily useful trees to the aboriginal peoples of the northern Pacific coastal region and played key roles in their cultures. From these two cedars, aboriginal people obtained the materials to provide themselves with shelter, clothing, tools and transportation. Cedars provided for these peoples from birth until death, from cradles to coffins.” (Mackinnon, Pojar 2004, p. 41) Northwest Coastal Native People fashioned longhouses, swift and rot-resistant canoes, durable clothing, watertight baskets, cordage, tools, and art; medicinally, Cedar’s leaves are used for incense, infused in oil to combat fungal conditions, in teas, steams, and/or extracted in alcohol for the healing of respiratory conditions. “The power of the red cedar tree was said to be so strong a person could receive strength by standing with his or her back to the tree. It is called the ‘tree of life’ by the Kwakwaka’wakw and is still held with highest respect by all North West coast peoples for its healing and spiritual powers.” (MacKinnon Pojar, 2004, p. 42). This tree is what made so much of life possible for the coastal Salish peoples, and cedar continues to be a revered building material, weaving fiber, and for herbalists like myself, potent medicine. By placing an ode to the western red cedar tree here, my purpose is to center the reader in the specific bio-region that provides me and many others our homes, livelihoods, and communities. Thus, while I am in relationship with many beings, Western Red Cedar has been integral to my own life and understanding of this bio-region; Cedar has been used for the comfort and health of my family- from boughs used for a floor covering in summer, to kindling to tend our fire, to oil used to sooth sore muscles, to shade and shelter during hikes on long summer days. After a decade of life in this region, I have become kin to Cedar, and therefore Cedar deserves a proper mention. By introducing one of my non-human kin to the reader it is my intention to remind the human reader of his/her/their proper place in the order of things, and place Cedar and human on equal footing. I ask that the reader consider this paper from an animist, non-hierarchical, earth loving lens and framework; please understand that humans exist only and because of their relationship to their non-human kin, and that there are dire consequences for all when we forget how to honor these relationships.

*Importance of Place*

Place is central to a human being’s understanding of who, what and how they came to be, how they create meaning, and how they conduct their daily lives. Humans exist because of place. Anthropologists use the term Northwest Coast to refer to the groups of Indigenous peoples residing along the coast of British Columbia, Washington State, parts of Alaska, Oregon, and northern California. Indigenous is an adjective that means “born or originating in a particular place;” it comes from Late Latin: *indigenous* "born in a country, native," from Latin: *indigena* "sprung from the land, native," as a noun, meaning "in-born," or "born in (a place);" from Old Latin *indu* (prep.) "in, within" + gignere (perfective genui) "to beget, produce," from PIE root *\*gene*- "give birth, beget," with derivatives referring to procreation and familial and tribal groups. Unfortunately, in Western contemporary society today, “indigenous” often conjures trite images of beaded, feathered, brown skinned people who live close to the earth and in tribes or village settings; these generalizations are indicators of the ever present and sustaining trauma of settler colonialism. “The successful settler colonies ‘tame’ a variety of wildernesses, end up establishing independent nations, effectively repress, co-opt, and extinguish indigenous alterities, and productively manage ethnic diversity.” (Veracini 2015, p. 3) What current conjuring brought forth by the word *indigenous* seem to exclude pale skinned, “white” people; there is little understanding that all humans everywhere came from place-based intact cultures at some point in their ancestral lineages. By considering the true meaning of the word *indigenous,* “being born or of originating of a place,” it can be understood that no particular group or ethnicity or type of person has claim to this word.

*Cultural Orphans*

The world many teenagers are now growing up in is one primarily of homelessness, whether through lack of access to affordable housing, common spaces and wilderness, or lack of shared cultural practices. An orphan in the true sense of the word means someone with no parents, but orphan is also used in the case of those displaced (i.e. by natural disaster), or deprived of certain protections or advantages, (orphaned by war for example, orphaned by enslavement). It can also be understood that though you have parents, you are orphaned if you don’t remember from *whom* you come and *who* or *what* **actually** keeps you alive (plants, animals, water, minerals). In the wake of settler colonialism, any memory of an ancestral home, of earth-based living, has been erased from familiar or collective memory, “whereas colonialism reinforces the distinction between colony and metropole, settler colonialism erases it. (Veracini 2015, p. 3). The modern-day conundrum of orphan-hood, and the consequences that follow, are beautifully summed up here:

Being an orphan means not knowing where you are, ancestrally speaking, and not even knowing where to start looking. It doesn’t mean having no ancestors, nor does it mean that you get to choose the ones you’d prefer. If you understand yourself to be the descendant of a tidal wave of involuntary immigration, people fleeing the old country, you can’t imagine how anything of merit might come from where you’ve come from — a place worth leaving. So when you go looking for merit or enlightenment or the grandparent you’re sure you deserved, you kneel at the feet of someone who doesn’t look like you. It’s like saying, “What of value can possibly come out of my mouth?” It’s self-hatred, which is how the orphan who’s never claimed feels. It’s toxic, and I deal with it all the time. I’m trying to redeem that self-hatred with “wisdom.” You’re an orphan, yes, but there is wisdom in that misplaced, unclaimed tradition. But you’ve got to claim your own clan. Enough of ripping off Native Americans, Africans, and everyone else. Imagine instead that it is your own elders, your own ancestors, who need claiming, who need a home among us as much as we surely need them among us.” S. Jenkinson. (“As We Lay…” Hoffner)

Educators can begin to redeem the self-hatred Jenkinson speaks of, by helping young people understand their place in the order of things. If all of life is about relationship, then young people need to understand where they come from, and who they come from. Through the honest teaching of the historical, cultural, and political contexts (for example, the trauma of religious persecution on first nations populations, the history of black slavery, or the systemic erasure and assimilation of groups like the Irish and the Italian into “whiteness”) we live in the wake of, young people can deepen their sense of self by understanding their place. By centering relationship in education, a young person may begin to feel more as they learn deeply the truth of history. This allows a possibility of new ways of thinking, one of which might be the skill of broken heartedness, or the skill of critical thinking, or the skill of remembering how to be together. Such skills are often found in animistic societies.

*Animism- a new old way of seeing*

The word *animism* is often used to describe the intricate relational and spiritual ways of life reflected in indigenous peoples around the world. Etymologically speaking, *ane-* is the Proto-Indo-European root meaning "to breathe;” while *ism* comes from Greek -ismos, a noun ending signifying the practice or teaching of a thing. This understanding is found in old Scots-Irish, Anglo Saxon, and Northern European roots as well- Old Irish *anal*, Welsh *anadl* "breath," Old Irish *animm* "soul;" Gothic *uzanan* "to exhale," Old Norse *anda* "to breathe," Old English *eðian* "to breathe.” Etymologically, one can see that humans across the globe come from ancestral traditions that were most likely animistic in nature. The framework of the culturally sustaining pedagogy is one that embraces and celebrates human’s animistic roots, key to which is a diverse and respectful way of seeing and being in relationship with the non-human world.

Here in the Pacific North West, peoples such as the Duwamish, Stillaguamish, Lummi, and other Coastal Salish tribes have inhabited these lands and waterways, “since time immemorial.” One way of tending to their non-human relationships can be found in their stewardship of waterways and lands, as well as in their worship of salmon and cedar, two of the most important kin for the peoples of this area, for their lives depended on them.

Salmon is as important to the Lummi people as the air we breathe: it sustains our schelangeng (way of life). Since time immemorial, our people honored the salmon each year by holding a salmon ceremony to respect the gift that the Salmon Woman provides to us, the sacrifice of her salmon children, and to pass down the tradition of respect taught to us by our elders. Over recent decades, however, many of our traditional ways had been lost or supplanted by new ideas and attitudes. The bounty of Salmon Woman's gift was taken for granted. And as our stories have warned, the salmon declined. (“First Salmon Story,” 007).

To note in this passage is that salmon is named as Salmon Woman; the language here clearly indicating the honor and importance that Salmon Woman has to these people. Looking back at the Old Irish word for soul, “anim,” is a clue to language lovers like myself (white, with an Irish surname of Burke) that perhaps my ancestors too had ways of being that honored the soul. I began to wonder, what does it mean to tend to the soul? Are there best practices? For if something is alive it must have a soul? As a student and teacher of language I began to realize that language is a living thing, and thus must be treated as such. By understanding animism and indigeneity my students and colleagues could benefit, considering that, “Rejecting animism places humans and the rest of the world into a dichotomous relationship which ultimately has not stood the Earth in good stead.” (Mereweather 2018, p. 4).

*Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy*

From a“Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy” come a set of values and disciplines that offers a bridge between an animistic world view and a modern day dualistic view. From an intellectual standpoint these values can be understood by anyone; from an embodied standpoint they offer clear instruction on how to practice them. These values and disciplines place education in its proper place- in relationship with and informed by history and Life. As outlined by Holmes and Gonzalez, “A Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy” is composed of 13 key values and disciplines, shared by Lakota elder R. Thunder in “Finding Sustenance, An Indigenous Relational Philosophy*”* (Paris, Alim 2017, p.223). They have been summarized here for clarity and brevity:

1. **Ethical Usefulness**- emphasis on survival as ultimate test of knowledge
2. **Collective-** the individual is located within the greater good; the individual’s life purpose holds the People at its heart.
3. **Visiting**- Having discernment and perception to make time for others in your life
4. **Perception**- to be able to perceive without being asked to; acuity to pick up on nuances and slight changes (in the weather, landscape, behavior of animals, climate, people, and ceremony); critical thought, intuition, paying attention to the world.
5. **Slowness and Deliberateness**- to go with care, perception, discipline and reflection. These are most embodied by elders and best learned by spending time with them.
6. **Consistency and Dependability**- You can be counted on. Keeping one’s word, honoring commitments, and being there for others.
7. **Honor, Integrity, and Honesty –** Words are chosen carefully and with precision, because language holds great power and speaking is an enactment of that power; doing right, no matter the hardship; relationality with self, community, and spirit.
8. **Noninterference-** Self-determination out of recognition of the integrity, distinctiveness, diversity of all individuals, and nations; all of life is fundamental.
9. **Orality-** Clarity and coherence in listening, speaking and remembering. Past, present, future, ancestors, and unborn, as well as physical, spiritual, mental and emotional worlds are engaged at once.
10. **Generosity-** the greatest gift is to give, to let go, which invokes the understanding that nothing in life is really ours in the first or last place and that everything has been given to us by our Mother Earth. Recognize gifts and ensure they are shared.
11. **Humility and Gentleness-** This value recognizes our interconnectedness, and how critical it is not to stand out as apart, but within the circle of relations.
12. **Responsibility and Reciprocity-** Integrity and accountability to self and group, as well as to the interconnected web of the Universe, which helps nurture relationships of co-creation**.**
13. **Relationship-** Respect, care, and consideration for the ways one carries oneself, are integral to self, in a nonhierarchical circle of existence.

These 13 Values create a framework that any educator can use in order to create curriculum, classroom, and best practices to help young people thrive. Relationship is central to each and every one of these values. Given that the primary focus of settler colonialism is to obliterate all aspects of indigenous culture, including those associated with animist practices, can any of these aspects be recovered? What are the practices we need to create and to sustain healthy communities and cultures? What can we learn from these values and disciplines listed above? What role do educators play in teaching modern day students about the erasure of cultures and their own history, given the impact this has had and continues to have on all their relationships?

*Enchantment*It is necessary to reimagine the world as animate, and thus enchanted. Young children, if allowed and encouraged to play, are innately enchanted by the world. They coo over animals, shout with glee at eagles flying overhead, turn sticks into digging tools, pick up rocks and marvel over them, splash in puddles, delighted by the power of the stomp and water splashing, soaking clothes and skin of anyone nearby. Expressions of emotion come and go quickly. In both my practicum placement and my teaching internship I see teenagers who no longer seem to possess the young child’s sense of enchantment. They rarely marvel at the sheer delight of holding a pencil to paper and forming words. They no longer know the names of trees outside, or bird songs. In a lesson on poetry and imagery rich language I asked a student to think of a specific kind of tree, and they looked at me blankly. Hand skills where a tool is the extension of the body- a knife to carve a chicken, a planer to shape a piece of wood, a hatchet to split kindling, a needle to guide thread to mend a hem, where this tool is in direct relationship with a non-human counterpart, are rapidly disappearing as home economics classes and woodworking give way to STEM classes. Life learning is now euphemistically referred to as “Experiential learning” which is relegated to a handful of days if students get them at all. Recently, I emailed the administration of the high school where I am completing my student teaching internship asking to take my 10th grade English class on field trip to visit the organic farm I once apprenticed on. My students are reading the book *Animal Farm*. None of them have any food growing experience or animal husbandry skills from what I can tell so far. Thus, their descriptions of characters in the book are superficial: “Oh Mr. Jones’s he’s a drunk.” They don’t understand what it take to run a farm, the skill it takes to care for animals like horses, and how in an economic system that devalues food growing, bankruptcy as cause of a drinking problem might be view upon with compassion, as opposed to ignorant teenage scorn. A farmer knows that his ability to be enchanted by the seasons is key to his life- for a farmer knows very well that Wind and Water can destroy that which gives him his health in a matter of minutes. Instead, my student scroll endlessly on their devices, enchanted no longer by the non-human world which grants them their life, but by a man-made device.

“The same summer I was on Lewis, a new edition of the Oxford Junior Dictionary was published. A sharp-eyed reader noticed that there had been a culling of words concerning nature. Under pressure, Oxford University Press revealed a list of the entries it no longer felt to be relevant to a modern-day childhood. The deletions included acorn, adder, ash, beech, bluebell, buttercup, catkin, conker, cowslip, cygnet, dandelion, fern, hazel, heather, heron, ivy, kingfisher, lark, mistletoe, nectar, newt, otter, pasture and willow. The words taking their places in the new edition included attachment, block-graph, blog, broadband, bullet-point, celebrity, chatroom, committee, cut-and-paste, MP3 player and voice-mail. As I had been entranced by the language preserved in the prose‑poem of the “Peat Glossary”, so I was dismayed by the language that had fallen (been pushed) from the dictionary. For blackberry, read Blackberry. (Macfarlane 2015).

Could it be that when the names of our non-human relationships are pushed out of the very textbooks young people are asked to read and consider as “fact,” that they lose the capacity to be enchanted? Try saying Acorn, Adder, Heron, Lark, Otter, or Pasture out loud right now to yourself. Then say committee, bullet-Point, mp3 and blog. Which words conjure joy, peace, and mystery? Which words conjure anxiety and boredom? Dare I say that a by-product of a human centered world is a profound loss of our ability to be enchanted by the world around us? It is relationship to our non-human kin which animates our own life. The administration of the high school emailed me back hearty thanks for my consideration of my students; they then asked me how a visit to a farm would be tied to my instruction time and how this field trip, which would take place on 1 day out of the 180 days my students are mandated to attend public school, might impact standardized testing. A chance to walk a field, stroke a cow’s soft backside, identify weeds that double as medicine, forage for nettles in the woods behind the farm, plant a tiny start of lettuce, feed pigs, feel Wind and Sun are their cheeks, are no match to the materialist and human centered focus of present day public education.

*Relationship Centered Education in the secondary English Language Arts Classroom*

By centering relationships though, there is still a chance to re-animate your classroom, and by enchanted by the world once again. By learning to utilize an animist viewpoint, English teachers (as well as teachers of other content areas), will be able to develop curricula that is inclusive, holistic, honest, and empowering. By employing the “13 Key Values of the Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy,” students and teachers both begin to live and create learning environments that are rich with meaning and depth. By deepening into understanding that the quality of any relationship impacts so much more than ourselves, it becomes impossible not to see the correlation between social issues and the lived experiences of our students. To begin to reimagine an English canon that is culturally sustaining and affirmative of all beings, one can make sure that when teaching canonical texts which reinforce materialism and dualism, (Applebee 1989, p.3-9) educators do so by providing the cultural, historical, and political contexts in which the texts were written. Educators can commit to teaching texts that promote an Earth centered view, where animals and humans are valued alike. This could also include, but is not limited to cultivating classroom community building activities like mindfulness and embodied practices to develop values and disciplines like the gift of perception. Public speaking is the discipline of orality. Addressing climate change and getting to know the local eco-systems s about responsibility and reciprocity. To celebrate diversity, the value of non-interference and respect and to push back against materialism, educators can commit to celebrating body positivity, diversity of genders, races, cultures, and sexual orientation. Luckily for English teachers, almost any text can be adapted to the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts. Here are some of my favorite examples from a variety of texts and forms: poetry, fiction novel, non-fiction book, song lyrics, and Young Adult fiction, to be used in a high school English Language Arts class. These examples include and highlight an array of perspectives and voices that align with several of the key values and disciplines of a culturally sustaining pedagogy and animism, as well as some problematic viewpoints.

*Relationship with animal kin, Value of perception:*   
From *Wise Child*:

“On that day, as on many others, I was carrying Moon asleep in my pocket. I slowed my horse, and though I knew the owl hated bright daylight I pulled him out. He fluffed his feathers, blinked crossly, and said again (I could see his beak moving), ‘Don’t go…don’t go.’

‘You can talk, Moon!’ I said,

‘Of course,’ he replied wearily. ‘But now I want to go back to sleep.’   
 (Furlong 1990, p. 28)

*Queer perspective, nature of body, body as nature:*

From the poem *Temporary Landmark*:

do not look at the mud-hard scarves around my shoulders or the outcast  
sky that follows

you should lose your bearings altogether  
 your broken touch: a temporary landmark

my body weary of all the thunder rumbling through the chest the way  
 her wineglass is weary of holding wine

what is the difference between a calendar

& our breathing

continues to scar  
this white wing  
in the center of my eyes

(Jesiolowski 2017, p. 17)

*Aging, sickness, intergenerational love*

*A Story about the body*

The young composer, working that summer at an artist’s colony, had watched her for a week. She was Japanese, a painter, almost sixty, and he thought he was in love with her. He loved her work, and her work was like the way she moved her body, used her hands, looked at him directly when she mused and considered answers to his questions. One night, walking back from a concert, they came to her door and she turned to him and said, “I think you would like to have me. I would like that too, but I must tell you that I have had a double mastectomy,” and when he didn’t understand, “I’ve lost both my breasts.” The radiance that he had carried around in his belly and chest cavity-like music-withered quickly, and he made himself look at her when he said, “I’m sorry I don’t think I could.” He walked back to his own cabin through the pines, and in the morning he found a small blue bowl on the porch outside his door. It looked to be full of rose petals, but he found when he picked it up that the rose petals were on top; the rest of the bowl--she must have swept the corners of her studio--was full of dead bees.

(“The young composer,” 1994, Hass)

*Communion with the cosmos:*

From *Wherever You Sit*

Stars moving in other heavens, wanting to help those   
 of faith—

If you lift up your skirt, you may catch one falling,   
 as they sometimes do.

All in world is inseparable from us.

-Rumi (Ladinsky 2012, p. 18)

*Ecstasy of Learning, Relationship to Learning, Pleasure positivity:*From *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

“‘You read a book for the story, for each of its words,’ Gordy said, ‘and you draw your cartoons for the story, for each of the words and images. And, yeah, you need to that that seriously, but you should also read and draw because really good books and cartoons give you a boner.’

I was shocked: ‘Did you just say books should give me a boner?’   
 ‘Yes I did.’

‘Are you serious?’

‘Yeah…. Don’t you get excited about books?’

‘I don’t think you’re supposed to get **that** excited about books.’

‘You should get a boner! You have to get a boner!’ Gordy shouted. ‘Come on!’”

“’Well I don’t mean boner in the sexual sense,’ Gordy said. ‘I don’t think you should run through life with a real erect penis. But you should approach each book—you should approach life—with the real possibility that you might get a metaphorical boner at any point.”

(Alexie 2007, p. 96-97)

*Shapeshifting, Voice of plants, Seasons:*From *The Wild Iris*:

SNOWDROPS

Do you know what I was, how I lived? You know  
 what despair is; then  
 winter should have meaning for you.

I did not expect to survive;   
 earth suppressing me. I didn’t expect  
 to waken again, to feel   
 in damp earth my body  
 able to respond again, remembering  
 after so long how to open again  
 in the cold light of earliest spring—

afraid, yes, but among you again  
 crying yes risk joy

in the raw wing of the new world

(Gluck 1992, p.6)

*Self-Pleasure, Dualism, Love:*From *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf:*

*lady in blue*

we deal wit emotion too much  
 so why don’t we go ahead & be white then/  
 & make everythin dry & abstract wit no rhythm & no  
 reelin for sheer sensual pleasure/ yes let’s go on  
 & be white/ we’re right in the middle of it/ no use  
 holdin out/ holdin onto ourselves/ lets think our  
 way outta feelin/ lets abstract ourselves some families  
 & maybe tonite/ i’ll find a way to make myself  
 come witout you/ no fingers or other objects just thot  
 which isnt spiritual evolution cuz its empty & godliness  
 is plenty is ripe & fertile/ thinkin wont do me a bit of   
 good tonite/ i need to be loved/ & havent the audacity  
 to say  
 where are you/ & dont know who to say it to

(Shange 1977, p. 44-45)

*Healthy Relationships, Racism*

Maverick and Lisa Carter, the parents of protagonist Starr Carter in *The Hate You Give*, by A.Thomas, exemplify good parents who are openly affectionate, talk honestly to their children about systemic racism, sex, and relationships, among many other important topics. There are several moments in the book where the parents leave the room after having a moment of connection or flirtation, with the implication from the teenaged narrator that they are disappearing to have sex.

From *between shades of gray,* set in 1941 during the Stalin deportation of Lithuanians, *Value of   
Gentleness*:

“She ignored me and continued. ‘Well, I can see you’re upset. Jonas that you were nasty to Andrius. That’s unfair. Sometimes kindness can be delivered in a clumsy way. But it’s far more sincere in its clumsiness than those distinguished men you read about in books. Your father was clumsy.’” (Septys 2011, p. 160)

*Reinforcement of scarcity in relationships, Punishment of liberated woman:*

“‘It’s your fault she’s dead.’ His face wrecks. I go on. ‘I blame you.’ I’m the wrecking ball now. ‘She didn’t love you. She told me she didn’t.’ Wrecking and wrecking him and I don’t care. ‘She wasn’t going to marry you.’ I slow down so every word sinks in, ‘She wasn’t going to ask my father for a divorce. She was on her way to ask him to come home.’” (Nelson 2014, p. 342)

Popular young adult novel *I’ll Give You the Sun* won the prestigious Printz Award and garnered praise from major media outlets like National Public Radio, and the New York Times. Most teachers teach this book as a coming of age story. The climax of this book centers on a “tragedy” that threatens the close relationship between twins Jude and Noah. However, in all the reviews of this book, of all the college students I talked to who have read this novel, no one picked up on the story of women’s sexuality this “tragedy” reinforces. Was the author aware of this when the book was written? The killing off of mother Diana, because she falls in love with another man, and chooses to leave her monogamous marriage with the twins’ father, reinforces a world view where a woman’s sexual desires, and the liberation that comes because of loving and being attracted to a man who is not her husband, are dangerous and wrong. Therefore, she must be punished. Everyone in the novel is rendered heartbroken because of this death. Not once is there any mention of a new story of relationship, of love, of desire, being possible. Instead, Nelson reinforces the idea that sexuality is shameful, and love and desire for another outside of the bonds of marriage (a religious understanding) is wrong; therefore, the woman who attempts to free herself from such constraints is deemed unworthy and murdered in a dramatic car crash.

*Place based words, Beauty of language, Value of orality:*

From *Landmarks:*

*Dusk, Dawn, Night and Light*

***aurora borealis*** Northern Lights: the phenomenon whereby   
 bright streamers and curtains of coloured  
 (reddish, greenish) light dance and swirl in the  
 atmosphere, caused by charged particles from  
 the sun interacting with atoms of the upper  
 atmosphere **metrological**

***benighted*** overtaken by darkness while walking or  
 climbing **mountaineering**

***blinter*** dazzle, but with a particular sense of cold  
 dazzle: winter stars or ice splinters catching  
 low midwinter sunlight **Scots**

***burr*** mistiness over and around the moon,  
 a moon-halo **East Anglia**

***eawl-leet*** twilight, dusk (literally ‘owl-light’) north  
 **Lancashire**

***faoilleach*** *last three weeks of winter and first three weeks of spring* **Gaelic** (Macfarlane 2015, p. 223)

*Anger, Grief, Reconciliation, Purpose, Value of Honor, Integrity:*

From *Build a Bridge:*

I said I rep the misfits, not society

We struggle with housing, drugs, and sobriety

We're not from here, but born here respectively

Immigrated cause America raped my country

My bridge ain't built with no white-man money

I'm on Indian time, you know you cannot rush me

I can be vicious, malicious, and ugly

A danger to darkness, you better run quickly

What we know is what we're owed

Can't be too careful, shoot flaming arrows

Hitting them wicked, burning them bridges

Said, what we know is what we owe

Can't be too careful, shoot flaming arrows

Hitting them wicked, burning them bridges, said

I've come to build a bridge

So come, let's build

Build, build, build

I have come to build a bridge

So come, let's build

Build, build, build

(N. Bear 2016)

*Animism, Practice of bringing something inanimate to life:*

From *Ceremony:*

Bring a beautiful pottery jar  
 painted with parrots and big   
 flowers.  
 Mix black mountain dirt  
 some sweet corn flour  
 and a little water.

Cover the jar with a   
 new buckskin  
 and say this over the jar  
 and sing this softly  
 above the jar:  
 After four days  
 you will be alive  
 After four days  
 you will be alive  
 After four days  
 you will be alive  
 After four days  
 you will be alive  
 (Silko 1977. p. 71-72)

*Redeem the Animist Soul*

Animism is neither monist nor dualist, it is only just beginning when you get beyond counting one, two…At its best it is thoroughly, gloriously, unashamedly, rampantly pluralist.   
  
Animism is just over the bridge that closes the Cartesian gap by knowing how to   
answer the question, what is your favourite colour? Perhaps it is the bridge. Perhaps   
there is no gap and animists are people who refuse to collude with the illusion. Animism is often discovered by sitting beneath trees, on hills, in rivers, with hedgehogs, beside fires…Animism is better communicated in trickster tales, soulful songs, powerful poems, rousing rituals, and/or elemental etiquette than in manifestos. (Harvey 2012)

All of life is about relationship. Relationships are intricate, diverse, challenging, inspiring, heartbreaking, and wonderfully complex. Relationships include human and non-human kin. When we forget this, pain and hardship ensue. Could it be that public education continues to reinforce an ontology that tells us relationships don’t really matter when everything in our beings tells us nothing could be further from the truth? I’d like to believe that we have as much to learn from our animist ancestors, as we do from modern day poets. We all know the power of language and what comes alive when we read a poem or when we say “I see you,” “I love you,” “I’m so sorry I hurt you,” “Welcome,” or, “You’re no good,” “Private property, Keep Out.” When I stand next to Cedar, my body pressed up against Cedar’s rough skin, I feel such peace, such joy, at home in my body; I remember my place in the natural order of things- not better or higher or smarter than Cedar, just different. Our non-human kin have so much to teach us about relationship and reciprocity. Our non-human kin are the reason we are alive, and it’s long overdue that we show some reciprocity and respect by fighting against the materialist, dualistic viewpoints that are wreaking havoc across the globe. By centering education in this larger context of relationship, educators push back on the dualistic way of viewing the world so many of us have inherited. Our current indicators of pain - species extinction, ocean acidification, sexual violence, mental illness, homelessness, incarceration, suicide - show us that our relationships are tremendously out of balance. By considering our relationship to *all* things - history, language, trees, waters, and yes, other humans - and asking the question: “How is my relationship to…..cooking, tending, my body, my grandmother, poetry, Nooksack River, bald Eagle, Nettle, my teacher, or my classmate?” we begin to right things, and bring them back into balance. By drawing on an understanding of animism, and employing the 13 key values and disciplines of the culturally sustaining pedagogy presented by Homes and Gonzales, educators will be more able to “…look beyond schools and classrooms as sites of deep learning and powerfully reject binaries that devalue ‘out-of-school’ or nonacademic knowledge.” (Paris, Alim 2017, p. 221). When we practice care - holding the door open for an old person, listening deeply to a person ranting, planting a garden, cooking a meal, comforting a crying baby - we are in relationship. When we celebrate pleasure - through touching, making love, singing, talking to trees, swimming in wild waters, or breathing in Air deeply - we are in relationship. Every act of living is an act in service of relationship. Thus, education is not a matter of subverting body to mind, it is an extension of relationship, a natural expression of the body’s inherent wisdom as informed by the world which keeps it alive. When we can live from this place of soul tending, enchantment, and embodiment, we give our youth a chance to be happy, healthy, and attentive to the world around them, knowing full well their place in the family of things.

*Wild Geese*

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body

love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain

are moving across the landscapes,

over the prairies and the deep trees,

the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,

are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

the world offers itself to your imagination,

calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—

over and over announcing your place

in the family of things.

- (Oliver 1992, p.110)

-*In memory of, September 10, 1935 – January 17, 2019.*

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