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DECOLONIZING *MOBY-DICK*: NATIVE CENTERED READINGS WITH CLASSROOM  
ACTIVITIES

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in American Indian Studies

by  
Caroline Schwarcz

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

### DECOLONIZING *MOBY-DICK*: NATIVE CENTERED READINGS WITH CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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Master of Arts in American Indian Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Mishuana Goeman, Chair

This thesis performs Native centered readings of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and suggests classroom activities that may prompt discussions of Native sovereignty. This paper utilizes a critical framework rather than a multicultural one that generally does not address the unique aspirations of Native peoples. This critical approach includes showing students how power is embedded in readings of texts, how different readings of texts evince vastly different understandings, and how creating texts of their own may be a tool for combatting oppression in their own lives. Students will also see colonialism in a variety of places that they may have taken for granted: in education, in literacy, in mapping, in tourism, and even tattooing. Teachers must make their best efforts to learn how to see the American literary canon from Native eyes if they are to create an anti-colonial environment for all of their students.

The thesis of Caroline Schwarcz is approved.

Paul Kroskrity

Peter Nabokov

Mishuana Goeman, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles  
2012

## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>BODY.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>48</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Imagine you were one of the teenage students in an Arizona classroom last January on the day their books were confiscated by the school district. Perhaps they were told to drop off their *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* at a designated place, or perhaps someone entered the classroom and wrested Shakespeare's *The Tempest* from their hands. Arizona HB 2281, in effect, a book banning bill, mutes a vast range of voices that invariably describe the experiences of "ethnic" people, or do scholarly work for social justice. In a variety of media, from newspaper articles to YouTube videos, student voices cried out when the bill went into effect. Distraught and traumatized, students lamented the loss of freedom of expression and exposure to diverse perspectives that is putatively the American experience.

For Native American students in particular, Arizona's HB 2281 perpetuates historical trauma stemming from innumerable sources from the missionaries to the boarding schools. It also makes it harder to develop a positive identity as a tribal person when those role models whose achievements are portrayed in books are denied you. The removal of these books diminishes the possibility that all students from learning the truth about colonialism historically and contemporarily, and the ways in which Native peoples resist and revitalize. The Arizona law, understood by its critics to be an attack on Mexican people, is truly another colonial attack to mute the voices of Native Americans. Yet Sherman Alexie strikes back:

Let's get one thing out of the way: Mexican immigration is an oxymoron. Mexicans are indigenous. So, in a strange way, I'm pleased that the racist folks of Arizona have officially declared, in banning me alongside Urrea, Baca, and Castillo, that their anti-immigration laws are also anti-Indian. I'm also strangely pleased that the folks of Arizona have officially announced their fear of an educated underclass. You give those brown kids some books about brown folks

and what happens? Those brown kids change the world. In the effort to vanish our books, Arizona has actually given them enormous power. Arizona has made our books sacred documents now (Daily Kos, 2012).

Sherman Alexie's defiant tenor in the comment above resounds in marked contrast to the grief expressed by the tearful students portrayed in the media. The difference is one of resistance. Teachers who wish to create an anti-colonial space in their classrooms can nurture resistance in their students so that this moment of struggle, like many others in history, can be transformed into change. Resistance, as I will argue in this thesis, is a skill that can be, and should be taught to students. In the English classroom, these tools and skills are a part of what education theorist and activist, Ernest Morrell, calls "critical English education" (Morrell 2005; 313).

A critical English education is explicit about the role of language and literacy in conveying meaning and in promoting or disrupting existing power relations. It also seeks to develop in young women and men skills to deconstruct dominant texts carefully (i.e. canonical literature, media texts) while also instructing them in skills that allow them to create their own critical texts that can be used in the struggle for social justice (Morrell 2005; 313).

In this thesis, I will "unpack," or transform Morrell's definition into classroom objectives. Using Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) by means of example, I will show how a canonical text can be decolonized. With regards to the first objective, showing the relationship between language and literacy and power, I suggest a research activity that reveals how the academy has continuously appropriated *Moby-Dick* for its political aims. I then show how scholars supporting Native political movements have recently been able to unleash the power of this novel for their aspirations.

The second part of Morrell's definition aims to give students critical analysis skills. In order to achieve this, for each passage presented in the thesis I begin with a formal explication that will, at best, evince a multicultural appreciation of the dominant indigenous figure in the novel, Queequeg, the Maori harpooner, and the narrator's closest friend. However, multiculturalism has serious limitations as a framework for the anti-colonial project. As sociologist Jack Niemonen explains,

Antiracist educators characterize multicultural education as a deracialized discourse that understands only superficially the processes that create and perpetuate racism. Its appropriation by liberal and conservative educators blocks its liberator/potential and preserves the privileges of whites. As the counterpoint to the "celebratory multiculturalism" common in high school classrooms today, antiracist education claims to be a liberation project that will eradicate racism by deconstructing what it means to be white" (Niemonen 2007; 150-60).

Therefore I aim to go beyond the multicultural reading and do Native-centered explications instead. I use a variety of strategies in this regard. In some cases, I simply look at the scene from what I imagine is Queequeg's position. In another passage, I look at the episode through a prism informed by Maori epistemology. All in all, I hope to show that without misconstruing the text, this novel can be read in a way that is not only acceptable to Native people, but also meaningful and in service to decolonization. By decolonization, I mean to follow the principles outlined by Native historiographer, Susan Miller, as a "discursive challenge to academic hegemony" to which the traditional interpretations of Melville's masterpiece have contributed:

First, Indian sovereignty derives from inherent powers that predate the U.S. constitution. Second, the land and resources in what now constitutes the United States passed from Indian to non-Indian hands through serial acts of duplicity, violence, deceit, and coercion. Third, European claims to lands belonging to others by virtue of discovery are rooted in racially based assumptions and articulated in a language that characterizes Indians as inferior, savages who lack fundamental rights accorded “civilized” peoples. Fourth, the invaders used this language of racism to rationalize their aggression against unoffending Indians. Fifth, those nineteenth-century discourses of colonialism are entrenched in contemporary academic and legal thought. Sixth, colonialism must be seen for what it is: a crime against humanity (Miller, 2).

I will show that the traditional, or formal readings of *Moby-Dick* reinforce the offending tropes, while Native-centered readings expose them. Once exposed, students can meet the third aim of critical English education which is for them create critical texts of their own. Throughout this thesis I make suggestions about how to bridge my Native readings of the texts to expository writing activities in the classroom as well as projects in local communities, thereby creating a bridge between literature and life. When describing the activities in this thesis, I have a secondary curriculum in mind; after all, *Moby-Dick* is too difficult a read for most middle school students. And generally, I imagine many of my suggestions would be best suited as enrichment opportunities that make up a student portfolio. But I leave the actual design and implementation to the teachers who know their students’ needs best.

The crucial point is that these activities are designed to introduce teachers and students to many of the important ideas about Native sovereignty currently being explored by Native scholars. They include writing-against history, or Native Historiography, encountering

alternative epistemologies and worldviews and literacies. Students will also see colonialism in such improbable places to them: in education, in literacy, in mapping, tourism and tattooing. These ideas, moreover, must find their way to the secondary classroom. Without the voices of Native people present, teachers reify colonial dynamics whether they are aware of them or not. As in the case of Arizona, teachers may not be able to incorporate Native authors into their curriculum, but they will always be able to teach American canonical works. At stake is nothing short of teachers reifying colonial dynamics in the classroom. Let's begin by decolonizing *Moby-Dick*.

The first premise of critical English education is making “explicit the role of language and literacy in conveying meaning and in promoting or disrupting existing power relations” (Morrell, 2005). Teachers can meet this objective by having students research the critical reception of *Moby-Dick* as part of the curricular unit. By connecting reviews or articles about the novel to the historical trends at the time of its publication, students will see the relationship between literature and politics and power. When *Moby-Dick* was first published, for instance, it flopped in contrast to Melville's earlier commercial successes with *Typee* (1846) and its sequel, *Omoo* (1847) that are adventure stories set in the South Seas. Clearly *Moby-Dick's* experimental structure, idiosyncratic digressions, challenging language and complex metaphysics was not appreciated by his earlier audience that vicariously lived with “the cannibals” through Melville's travel writing. Kerry McSweeney in a book-length introduction to *Moby-Dick* puts it succinctly, “The novel ignores and/or subverts dominant nineteenth-century novelistic conventions and the assumptions that underlie them” (McSweeney, 11). More likely, Herman Melville's ideas were ahead of his time; when he died in 1891, he was so long forgotten that he only received a two-line obituary in the New York Times that even misspelled the name of his masterpiece: “Herman Melville died

yesterday at his residence, 104 East Twenty-sixth Street, this city, of heart failure, aged seventy-two. He was the author of *Typee*, *Omoo*, *Mobie Dick*, [sic] and other sea-faring tales, written in earlier years. He leaves a wife and two daughters, Mrs. M. B. Thomas and Miss Melville” (Herman Melville Obituary Notices, 2012).

The more likely reason that Herman Melville fell into obscurity with the publication of *Moby-Dick* is a political one. Written ten years before the Civil War, it was nothing short of an abolitionist manifesto. Michael Berthold writing “*Moby-Dick* and American Slave Narrative” explains, “before and during the Civil War, the whale itself was a popular symbol of slavery and its prophesied eradication” (Berthold, 135). It is generally accepted and a wide number of critiques find that the “Whited Monster,” as Ahab refers to the whale, characterized by its violent drive towards destruction, may be understood to censure the white race’s pursuit of dominance. Melville seems to encourage us to read the text in this manner, or else we shouldn’t read it at all. He is explicit as possible when he writes in the philosophical core of the novel, the chapter called “The Whiteness of the Whale” where he writes: “It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me. But how can I hope to explain myself here; and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be naught” (*MD*, 159).

It wasn’t until the 1920s, however, that the academy canonized *Moby-Dick*. In “Melville Climbs the Canon” Paul Lauter explains why. In 1919, the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters celebrated the centenary of the MLA’s president and poet James Russell Lowell. The hosts of the event, according to Lauter, “wished to use the occasion to underlie the unity of English-speaking nations” (Lauter, 3), and because of Melville’s genteel and European roots, he was appropriated “to model a correct relationship to the ‘primitive’” (Lauter, 1994; 8). The academy embraced Melville at that time as “part of an

ideological conflict which linked advocates of modernism and of traditional high culture values (Lauter, 1994; 6). And, because of its difficulty of style, irregularities, digressions and allusions, Melville's "most deadly treasures would be yielded up, as with other modernist texts, only to leaned initiates" (Lauter, 1994; 18). Therefore, the *Moby-Dick* became a metonymy for a velvet rope that drew the line between the VIPs in the academy and outsiders.

A generation later, Harvard professor Francis O. Matthiessen wrote the highly influential *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941) that included *Moby-Dick* in its discussion of American masterpieces. According to William Spanos, Matthiessen's work is "a response to European fascism" (Spanos 22). Elizabeth Renker, argues similarly in her history of the field of American Studies explaining that American literature achieved institutional maturity during this period because of the historical accident of [WII] redefined its value" (Renker 2007; 38). She explains that in the period in which Matthiessen is writing, the academy "reinforced tendencies toward cultural nationalism and finally consolidated the 'size' and 'virility' of American literature studies. If there is any book that comes to mind when the words "size" and "virility" are mentioned together in a sentence, it is *Moby-Dick*. So this masculine force in *Moby-Dick* was the very image American wanted to project to the world. If America needed a book to downplay "femininity, inferiority, and lack of seriousness," to use Renker's words, then *Moby-Dick* was the book to do it.

Leslie Fiedler, writing in the 1960s, created a scandal in academia when he explicated the novel through psychological and erotic frameworks. He claims: "The failure of the American fictionist to deal with adult heterosexual love and his consequent obsession with death, incest and innocent homosexuality as not merely matters of historical interest or literary relevance. They affect the lives we lead from day to day and influence the writers in whom the

consciousness of our plight is given clarity and form” (Fiedler, 12-3). In that vein, “*Moby-Dick* can be read then not only as an account of a whale hunt, but also as a love story, perhaps the greatest love story in our fiction, cast in the particular American form of innocent homosexuality” (Fiedler, 370). Fiedler actually finds two pairs of bi-racial “innocent homosexual” relationships: Ishmael and Queequeg representing “the redeeming love of man” versus Ahab and Fedallah as a model for “the commitment to death” (Fiedler, 370). Clearly this reading that triangulates race, sex and culture into the reading of literature supports the radical movements and civil rights politics of the 1960s in which Fiedler was deeply invested.

In the debates around Vietnam, *Moby-Dick* also served political uses. In *The Errant Art of Moby-Dick* William Spanos writes:

This multi-situated self-destruction of America’s self-representation constituted an uncanny fulfillment of Melville’s discourse of the complicity – however uneven – of the relay of “American” discourses privileged by his age (Puritan exegesis, Emersonian transcendentalism, natural science, the fiction of romantic realism, the discourse of the republic) and the relay of “American” social, political, and economic practices (the Pequod as state and manufactory) with Ahab’s apocalyptic *monomania* – his “unerring” fulfillment of the (onto) logical economy of self-reliance or self-presence in his disastrous pursuit of the elusive white whale (Spanos, 27).

In other words, the critics of the Vietnam War could point to *Moby-Dick* to delegitimize American military tactics that included violence against people and their communist politics in order to illustrate the tragic consequences of such a venture.

How can one get such differing perspectives from a single work without misconstruing the text? The answer comes from choosing a focalizing character through which to frame the perspective while still adhering to a generally accepted theme. In all the cases above, the theme is self-reliance. The earlier readings focus on Ishmael, and see him as an emblem of self-reliant Americanism in a positive sense, who resists the tyranny of mad Ahab - whether he represents

European fascism or the looming threat of Communism. In contrast, the third phase of scholarship utilizes the self-reliant Ahab in a negative sense to warn readers that we invite destruction on ourselves when we seek to destroy others. My argument hinges on the precedents of being allowed to select a character, as long as it works in concert with theme, and to use the interpretation for political ends. Politics here does not refer to political parties or their activities, but rather, the forces in society that create structures of oppression and mete out power to some at the expense of others. Therefore, we may read *Moby-Dick* utilizing the indigenous character of Queequeg as a center and connect it to the trope of self-reliance as it pertains to Native sovereignty.

This paper is not first to do so, Geoffrey Sanborn models this method in *Whipscars and Tattoos* in which he traces Melville's characterization of Queequeg to the paramount chief, Te Pehi Kupe as described in George Lillie Craik's *The New Zealanders* (1830). By noting "continuity errors" in the characterization of Queequeg, Sanborn argues that Melville encountered Craik's work in the midst of writing of *Moby-Dick* inspiring a haphazard revision (Sanborn, 2011; 105). Sanborn argues, "Queequeg was originally from an imaginary island 'far away to the west and south' (*MD*, 55) and that after reading, sometime in 1850, the Te Pehi Kupe section of *The New Zealanders*, Melville overlaid the ur-Queequeg with Maori attributes" (Sanborn, 2011; 104). The connection is significant because it informs Queequeg's characterization with Maori-specific values, or a distinct Maori worldview, foregrounding a defiant pride and dignity in the characterization of Queequeg.

In this new light, rather than a foil to the rebellious Ahab, (Pagan vs. Christian, uneducated vs. highly educated, cooperation vs. individualism), Queequeg becomes Ahab's partner, and thus structurally equivalent to the protagonist. This alliance, Sanborn argues, can be triangulated with

the eponymous whale. From this perspective, Sanborn goes on, the whale as Queequeg's ancestor, holds a meaningful role in his worldview. This is in contrast to Ahab, who by tragic accident happened to attach greater significance to the whale. Additionally, as lore about this whale testifies throughout the novel, this whale has eluded death by many harpooners. To Queequeg however, the whale may be seen as an undefeated warrior – who through defeat, will earn for Queequeg the Maori warrior's culturally specific form of glory (Sanborn, 2011; 127). Sanborn also reminds us to read this in a contemporary political context, and he discloses his motivation to express his “respect for the Maori people and be a part of the changes that have been taking place in recent years in the direction of Maori needs and aspirations” (Sanborn, 2011; 13). Sanborn is certainly referring to the contemporary movements of *Maoritanga*, distinct Maoriness, and *Mana Maori*, Maori power. This thesis will now build on Sanborn's precedent and apply it for classroom purposes.

At stake is reifying colonialism in the classroom. In the classic, “Regeneration Through Violence,” Richard Slotkin shows that many American classic works are inspired by European anxieties that arise through settling the frontier. In *Moby-Dick*, “all the elements of the hunter myth are developed to their archetypal extremes,” and similarly, “the object of this quest is likewise magnified” (Slotkin, 539). Slotkin continues, “These expansions, which represent the ultimate development of the terms of the hunting myth, in fact restore original elements of the dream of the West that impelled the first discoverers” (Slotkin, 539). Therefore, to read this novel as an American epic is to re-enact the violence done to Native American nations. Conversely, to disrupt that reading by centering Native concerns is to diminish this novel's potential to do harm.

## BODY

Moving generally in chronological order, the first selection from *Moby-Dick* is from the third chapter, “The Spouter Inn.” The setting: a stormy night, well after midnight. The melancholic narrator who asks us to call him “Ishmael,” having quit his job as a teacher, embarks on a quest for meaning via a whaling adventure beginning in New Bedford, a prosperous whaling hub. As the weather is foul, Ishmael inquires about staying at Peter Coffin’s Spouter Inn for the night. As all the rooms are occupied, the landlord with the ominous name suggests to Ishmael that he can share a bed with a harpooner from New Zealand who is still out “sellin’ human heads” (*MD*, 32). Coffin informs the incredulous Ishmael that there is a local market for these items, commenting, “great curios, you know.” (More on “curios” later in the paper.) Coffin increases Ishmael’s anxiety by describing his roommate as a “dark complexioned chap” who eats “nothing but steaks” (*MD*, 28). The reader is meant to understand that Coffin has just insinuated cannibalism. Feeling he has little choice at this hour, Ishmael reluctantly agrees, and takes the room. Before long, Queequeg, returns, but does not initially notice Ishmael in the bed. Ishmael spies on Queequeg as he undresses, prays and prepares for bed. Ishmael, feeling guilty for this voyeuristic impulse tells us

I confess I was now as much afraid of him as if it was the devil himself who had thus broken into my room at the dead of night. In fact, I was so afraid of him that I was not game enough just then to address him, and demand a satisfactory answer concerning what seemed inexplicable in him (*MD*, 34).

That which is “inexplicable” is Queequeg’s tattoo that covers his face and body, or *moko* as it is known in New Zealand; checkered squares on the face and back now underscores Queequeg’s identity as a Pacific Islander. It will be descriptions of the spiral markings later in the book that distinguish Queequeg as a Maori warrior (Sanborn, 2005; 235). Ishmael describes

the body of Queequeg who has yet to talk.

The next moment the light was extinguished, and this wild cannibal, tomahawk between his teeth, sprang into bed with me. I sang out, I could not help it now; and giving a sudden grunt of astonishment he began feeling me. Stammering out something, I knew not what, I rolled away from him against the wall, and then conjured him, whoever or whatever he might be, to keep quiet, and let me get up and light the lamp again. But his guttural responses satisfied me at once that he but ill comprehended my meaning. "Who-e debel you?"- he at last said- "you no speak-e, dam-me, I kill-e." And so saying the lighted tomahawk began flourishing about me in the dark. "Landlord, for God's sake, Peter Coffin!" shouted I. "Landlord! Watch! Coffin! Angels! Save me!"

The landlord rushes in, grinning, and it appears he's had some fun at the expense of his tenants and proceeds to introduce and appease the parties. Once they've settled into bed, Ishmael reflects, "What's all this fuss I have been making about, thought I to myself—the man's a human being just as I am: he has just as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him." He goes on to say one of the most oft quoted aphorisms in the book, "Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian." The chapter concludes with Ishmael's admission, "I turned in, and never slept better in my life."

The following interpretations are typical of explications of this chapter. First, the minor character, whose name is "Coffin," foreshadows the doomed voyage of the whaling expedition. Additionally, the innkeeper's name foreshadows Queequeg's coffin that will provide the buoyant life saving device for the lone survivor of the sunken *Pequod*. Moreover, the presence of this minor character provides comic relief for the anxious Victorian who encounters these two men from different races sharing a bed.

As for Queequeg's tattoos, Melville describes the shapes as "squares." These squares are echoed in the next chapter called "The Counterpane," which is a patchwork quilt. The counterpane will comfort Ishmael, and so the reader may associate Queequeg's characterization with the friendship that is to be the balm to Ishmael's melancholy. Moreover, Ishmael's

“drunken Christian” statement functions inductively so that the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg can be seen as a microcosm for an idealized utopian multicultural society. We can expand, too, from the particular to the general through Queequeg’s “tomahawk.” Since the Maori warrior’s tools were traditionally made of wood, stone, and bone, the tomahawk, in contrast, is distinctly Native American.

This tomahawk, moreover, has a special design: Ishmael tells us it doubles as a pipe and how the pair enjoys a smoke together in bed: “he felt a strong desire to have a few quiet puffs from his Tomahawk. Be it said, that though I had felt such a strong repugnance to his smoking in the bed the night before, yet see how elastic our stiff prejudices grow when once love comes to bend them” (*MD*, 58). In this way, the tomahawk may be seen as a dual symbol with equal potential to cause pain and death, or pleasure and comfort. Additionally, choosing the latter course becomes an epiphany for Ishmael who releases his “prejudice.” Through inductive logic, Melville invites his readers to infer that white men may live harmoniously with Native American men.

But the traditional reading will not reveal why whites and Natives are in conflict in the first place. For this scene is nothing short of a satire of “contact.” Clearly, displacement and dispossession are in play here. The room was, in fact, let to Queequeg; he was there first. However, because the scene is told from the point of view of Ishmael, it appears as if Queequeg had, as Ishmael says “broken into *my* room” (emphasis mine). The landlord, too, for that matter, may be included in the critique. Precisely analogous to seizures of land by American immigrants, Queequeg, though the original inhabitant is portrayed as the “wild” intruder.

Teachers might ask students “Who owns the room?” or “Who has the right to sleep there?” And, “What if Queequeg were from a tribe indigenous to New Bedford, how would that change

the equation?” This activity would be very helpful in teachers getting a temperature reading of the classroom to get a sense if some students have special sensitivities or entrenched deeply in ignorance so to address these potential problems before actually engaging in Native themed activities.

If teachers neglect to challenge students in this way, then they run the risk of reinforcing negative stereotypes because the facile first impression of the “head-peddling purple rascal” will leave most students with the impression of a Native buffoon (*MD*, 34). In “Postindian Warriors,” Gerald Vizenor writes, “The simulations of manifest manners are the continuance of the surveillance and domination of the tribes in literature. Simulations are the absence of the tribal real. The postindian conversions are in the new stories of survivance over dominance” (Vizenor, 329). Queequeg’s is indeed a postindian warrior, however, because our narrator, Ishmael, initially holds a narrow and parochial view towards people of color, while our author does not, Melville is compelled to have Queequeg “play along,” to use Vizenor’s words, with simulated scenarios of Indianness as the “kitchyman” until our narrator has had a consciousness raising experience. And because we first meet Queequeg on Massachusetts and see him last in Pacific waters, the reader may make inferences and generalizations about the portrayal of Native characters both indigenous to the U.S. and abroad.

We might consider going beyond the borders of the continent to analyze this episode from a transnational indigenous vantage point. Shari Huhndorf puts Native studies at the center of American studies in a global context to see not only “critiques of U.S. national myths” but “imperial ventures” to “multisited” locations, and how indigenous people have resisted these efforts (Huhndorf, 3). Because Queequeg comes from the Pacific islands, and the bulk of *Moby-Dick* occurs in “unmapped” international waters, we may expand upon Melville’s critique of

American domestic policy to that of its imperial one. Brander along these lines writes, “As a Polynesian figure, Queequeg stands for more than just American indigeneity...but beyond the borders of the United States but also beyond the borders of the continent (Huhndorf, 15). In other words, through the designation of race we see a global idea transported though the rise of neoliberal markets and propagated by imperialism.

Seeing the United States in a global context would certainly benefit 21<sup>st</sup> century students who ought to hear from indigenous perspectives how U.S. “progress” has impacted their worlds and enable students to think critically about unjust American policies against indigenous peoples on the global scale. This would be an ideal point to introduce to students the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (‘UNDRIP’). One might begin by assigning groups of students a chapter from the *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2009). Chapters are divided by the themes of poverty, culture, environment, contemporary education, health, human rights, and other emerging issues. Students might make oral reports, using visual aids, to teach the class about their area of inquiry.

Another segue to transnational indigeneity is to examine Queequeg’s ethnicity in historical context. Because Queequeg is neither black nor Native American, he signifies the application of the critique of American colonialism. Sanborn writes,

In the mid-nineteenth-century United States, the dynamics of race emerged not only from the labor-focused relations between whites and blacks in the South and the land-focused relations between whites and American Indians in the West but also from the trade-focused relations between whites and the people of the “global south,” both abroad and at home” (Sanborn, 2005; 239)

Therefore, this additional scale will challenge students to not only think critically from the position of peoples traditionally associated by American policy, that is Native Americans and blacks, but also how America is perceived by communities of color abroad.

Along these lines, rhetorically asks whether “the friendship between Queequeg and Ishmael also hides from view the exploitive relations of the global economy” (Sanborn, 2005; 230). How did Queequeg, a Maori chief’s son, find himself “peddlin’ heads” or *mokomokai*? These cured and embalmed heads would have been considered sacred to Queequeg’s ancestors, and originally would have been their heads, or the heads of his tribe’s captives to prevent retaliation and maintain peace (Robley, 133-4). But by the time Queequeg had come to New Bedford, these heads were no longer sacred. Therefore, an analysis of this notation will reveal how colonialism destroyed a sacred element of Polynesian culture.

When early traders came to the Pacific islands, they brought back these “trophy” for “curio” collections and museums. When the demand for these heads increased the Maori began the unprecedented practice of slaying their slaves because the heads could be traded for guns and ammunition. (Robely, 138-9;170). In 1831, the traffic of heads became outlawed in New Zealand, but not before an escalation of violence between Indigenous peoples and their white visitors and the exploitation of a sacred rite for profit. In this way, the shrunken heads become an interstice for circuits of value. Who owns these heads? Can heads be owned? Can bodies be owned? Does it matter if the bodies are alive or dead? What geographical, economic, political conditions exist in order for “ownership” of bodies to occur? What conditions must occur to prevent and abolish this? The aim of these questions may work to prompt the greater discussion about how colonialism’s powerful influence was the transformation of a cultural practice into an exotic commodity that also fit Eurocentric expectations of savagery.

While the capacity to properly respond to these questions might be beyond the high school student, they certainly might be used to prompt a creative writing response. Teachers might assign a narration essay from Queequeg’s point of view titled, “Why I am selling *mokomokai*,”

or a process essay, “How I got to New Bedford” in which students would have to conduct some research, but for the most part engage imaginatively. Teachers might also ask students to visit a local museum, find an object from an indigenous culture, and write its biography. It is important for students to become aware of fact that what they marvel at in museums may have been complicit in the annihilation of entire groups of people. After students gain some understanding of this concept, they may be introduced to NAGPRA, and see that Native peoples today are restoring their possessions and people to their rightful places.

One example that relates to *Moby-Dick* can be found in the article "Maori Retrieve Shrunken Head from French Museum” by ABC news (See bibliography). This report, written on a level easily accessible to a high school student and published about a year ago, illustrates how Queequeg’s activity has contemporary implications. In this article, tribal leaders implement their rituals as they reclaim their *toi moko* from a museum in France. Most importantly, this activity can function as the bridge between an American canonical text and student exploration of museums in students’ local communities to discover what may be in violation of NAGPRA there, and hopefully, learn how to work in solidarity with local tribes.

In addition to satirizing “contact,” the characterization of Queequeg also satirizes literacy. When focusing on literacy, moreover, we reveal the intricate mechanisms that enmesh colonialism and education. On the most basic level, this is the case because English is “the enemy’s language” to borrow from the title of Joy Harjo and Gloria Byrd’s anthology. If this is the case, then one of the primary battlegrounds is the English classroom. Traditionally, English teachers have been charged with the task of determining “right” and “wrong” readings of literature. So when teachers privilege English over tribal languages, academic literacies over indigenous ones or formal methodologies over indigenous ones, they participate in the

assimilation of Native Americans whether they know it or not. Moreover, when they act as gatekeepers, they constrict the awareness of all of their students in direct opposition to their mandate as teachers.

As critical education scholars, Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg, assert that indigenous ways of knowing can be “employed as a constellation of concepts that challenge the invisible cultural assumptions embedded in all aspects of schooling and knowledge production” (Denzin, Lincoln, Smith, 145). They also argue that indigenous knowledges raise important questions about “the nature of our existence, our consciousness, our knowledge production, and the ‘globalized,’ imperial future that faces all peoples on the planet” (Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 136). Brigit Brander Rasmussen points out indigenous knowledges also “stand as markers of alterity and anteriority, testaments of another literary culture belonging to the continent’s original inhabitants (Rasmussen, 112). Moreover this knowledge can be applied both inside and outside the classroom in a variety of contexts and for purposes in the private and public spheres.

At the same time, it is important not to trivialize, essentialize or appropriate Native knowledges, or to frame the experience of these knowledges through subjugation and victimhood. A shortsighted definition of knowledge enables students from ethnic groups being regarded as inferior to whites. Karen Enright, literacy and culture scholar, argues that traditional teachers perceive culturally distinct literacies as “deficit perspectives” (Enright, 83). These “deficit perspectives” are basically rationalizations for why students associated with particular minority groups possess those qualities that prevent academic success. Teachers often feel they avoid racist thinking by saying that it is not the fault of the student, and of course, not his or her race, which can’t be changed, but his or her culture, which can be. In the case of Native American children, this is de facto compulsory assimilation.

In response, Enright insists we must “demand new kinds of literacies that are more hybrid, transportable, and cosmopolitan in nature” (Enright, 87). These literacies, too, are more compatible with the global or 21<sup>st</sup> century conditions in which our students must compete. Critical educators also advocate for alternative epistemologies to be used for a “synergistic dialogue that pedagogically works to create conditions where both intra- and intercultural knowledge traditions can inform one another” (Denzin, Lincoln, Smith, 154-5). In this way, what teachers see as a “deficit perspective” becomes, in contrast, a perceptual advantage. At the very least, students should see that literacy is not an ideologically neutral entity.

This is key for student understanding of the history of colonialism because as Birgit Brander points out, “During the colonial process, literacy became a signifier, as well as the ‘sine qua non’ of civilization” (Brander 2012; 3). Students can then bridge from colonial efforts to make Natives literate to its legacies today. Aotearoan scholar, Jane Simpson makes the same point referring specifically to the Maori, writing, “The Maori became embedded in the texts through work of early missionaries, philologists, ethnologists, and bureaucrats. Their European visitors’ will to textualize was part of an overt will to “colonize and civilize the savage Maori” (Simpson, 56). It is important to emphasize that Melville does not look down upon Queequeg’s being unable to read and crafted him in that manner to satirize literacy as a system of power. It is not a coincidence that Melville notes his characters’ education level, for instance, Ishmael is a teacher and “Ahab’s been in colleges” (*MD*, 78). As for the author, he had little formal schooling and has famously said, “A whale ship was my Yale College and my Harvard.”

Melville enhances his arguments about education by weaving it into his critique of Christianity. Christian motifs are pervasive in the novel: our narrator’s choice of a Biblical name, Ishmael, the protagonist’s name, Ahab, a wicked king, Father Mapple’s sermon on Jonah and the

Whale, the street prophet, Elijah, and at least 50 Biblical allusions – for a satiric effect.

According to Melville scholar Lawrence Thompson, Melville has “consciously worked out stylistic and structural devices which might serve as deceptive sheeptraps and mousetraps, particularly for readers who might otherwise become vituperative heresy hunters” (Thompson, 11). In other words, Thomson finds that Melville played Christian allusions so that the reading public would find them engaging to the extent that they would become so distracted by them that they would fail to notice the scathing critique. This is quite similar to Mark Twain’s use of the “n” word in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Thompson shows persuasively, that Melville employs “naughty” uses of Bible “which may have one meaning in a Christian context and quite a different meaning as controlled by Melville’s anti-Christian context” (Thompson, 3).

Melville additionally critiques biblical precepts through the symbolism of Queequeg’s tattoos. For instance, the Bible prohibits tattoos and explicitly states: “Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I *am* the LORD” (Leviticus 19:28). As Queequeg is covered by tattoos, and is heroically characterized, his body art functions as part of Melville’s Biblical criticism because it is both a violation of a Biblical commandment, and, as I will discuss later, a spiritually coded text in itself. Native scholar Michelle Raheja shows that a bifurcated meaning may be a starting point to introduce students to the concept of visual sovereignty. Michelle Raheja argues for multiple interpretations in her article about the film *Nanook of the North* in which the author unpacks the eponymous Inuit’s smile at the camera. She writes, “Nanook’s smile may register one thing to his non-Inuit audience and another to members of an Inuit community who recognize the cultural code of his smile” (Raheja, 1159). Raheja calls for a “visual sovereignty,” to confront the spectator with the often “absurd assumptions that circulate around visual representations of Native Americans” (Raheja,

1159). Queequeg's tattoo, or *moko*, as a visual text, is a site of struggle to because it can feed into "absurd assumptions" at the very least, aesthetically. Thus the *moko* not only reveals to the dueling cultural codes, but might also be seen as an emblem of visual sovereignty.

The importance of visual sovereignty is that it can be a "way of re-imagining Native-centered articulations of self-representation and autonomy that engage the powerful ideologies of mass media, but that do not rely solely on the texts and contexts of Western jurisprudence" (Raheja, 1161). That is, visual texts can reframe or express differently various imaginings or expressions of sovereignty. Inviting visual texts and welcoming different interpretations into the classroom engenders respect, and hopefully encourages students to use visual tools in critical texts of their own. A teacher may use this part of the text to introduce students to works by contemporary Native artists like Patrician Deadman, Kellly Greene, Shelley Niro, and Jolene Rickard who use the arts to critique colonialism and articulate nuanced variations of sovereignty. Students can then express critical texts of their own by emulating the works of these artists as enrichment or portfolio activities.

If we are eventually going to show students that the privileging of the written over the visual is a hegemonic project, then they must first come to see that visual expression is meaningful and powerful. After that step, teachers may introduce to students the concept that some indigenous communities prefer the visual to the written forms of expression, and that colonialism aims to disrupt that communication in order to weaken the communities. When students begin to take some responsibility for this loss, we may hope they will initiate projects of their own to dissolve the binary between the written and the visual.

Another aspect of alternative literacies is alternative genres. By Melville's spending years in the South Pacific, he realized, though did articulate it using contemporary jargon, that *moko* is

a Maori specific genre of literacy. For those who know how to read it, in the case of a Maori man, the lines and shapes denote a complete text. It is the bearer's biography, it is his resume, it is his family tree, and it describes his ancestor's relationship to his gods who created their land for them (Haami and Robert, 403). This genre of literacy stands in diametric opposition to Western literacy, and therefore, through the logics of binary dualisms, it is devalued by it.

Therefore, the first strategy is to dissolve the binaries that divide these literacies. Among these are written/oral, alphabetic/non-alphabetic and the mediums on paper/on wood or skin. The *moko* then, opposes Western literacies on three scales: first, its content and method is received from the Maori oral tradition; second, it is non-alphabetic; and thirdly, because it is inked into skin and not paper. These binaries of literacy are also inextricable from and complicated by the mind/body or soul/body dualisms in which the emphasis on the body implies a diminished capacity for thought or spirit.

The Native body, as Andrea Smith shows, is a site of struggle. Smith's examples of contemporary abuses against Native women, modulated for high-school appropriateness, can be a way to use the portrayal of the Native body in *Moby-Dick* to introduce how sexual violence is a tool of colonialism historically and today. Some of the examples may include how the crime of rape is not only a physical act, but also a structure inherent in "a wide variety of state policies, ranging from environmental racism to sterilization abuse" (Smith, 3). Additionally, Smith shows how the surveillance structures of prisons and border control also are a form of violence against Native bodies (Smith, 4). To combat this violence, Smith presents a number of anti-violence grassroots organizations and activist strategies that would be an excellent service learning opportunity to incorporate into the curriculum.

Walter Mignolo, too, shows that geo-politics and body-politics are connected because in

order for us to begin “imagining and building democratic, just and non-imperial/colonial societies” requires “ a racially marked body in a geo-historical marked space” to “articulate in whatever semiotic system the urge that makes of living organisms ‘human beings’ (Mignolo, 160). Mignolo calls resisting hegemonic forms of knowledge or “zero point epistemology” that comprises the academic sciences and humanities as “epistemic disobedience” (Mignolo, 160). One example Mignolo provides is the example of Linda T. Smith, as a Maori academic, decolonizing anthropology by her engaging “in knowledge-making to ‘advance’ the Maori cause rather than to advance the discipline) e.g. anthropology” (Mignolo, 172). In contrast, Mignolo continues, the Anglo anthropologist “has no right to guide the ‘locals’ in what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ for the Maori population” (Mignolo, 173). Using the framework of Mignolo’s “shifting the geography of reason” and to perform “epistemic disobedience” in the service of Native sovereignty, I would like to look at Ishmael’s pattern of statements regarding Queequeg’s level of literacy because it is a silence that is rich with meaning and significance.

Ishmael reports on his friend’s inability to read in several instances early in the novel. For instance, in the Whalemens’ Chapel, Ishmael comments, “This savage was the only person present who seemed to notice my entrance; because he was the only one who could not read” (*MD*, 44). Later, in “A Bosom Friend,” the reader sees Queequeg counting the pages of a book:

He

began counting the pages with deliberate regularity; at every fiftieth page - as I fancied-stopping for a moment, looking vacantly around him, and giving utterance to a long-drawn gurgling whistle of astonishment. He would then begin again at the next fifty; seeming to commence at number one each time, as though he could not count more than fifty, and it was only by such a large number of fifties being found together, that his astonishment at the multitude of pages was excited (*MD* 54-5).

For the conventional reading, a typical teacher might turn to the Routledge sourcebook for

*Moby-Dick* that suggests they might use this chapter to prompt a classroom discussion debating whether or not Queequeg's characterization makes him out to be "a noble savage" (Davey, 140). The author argues that on the one hand, in this chapter we see images that characterize Queequeg as primitive, sitting before a fire, his small, wooden idol in hand and the myriad of notations about the harpooner's lack of schooling. Furthermore, Ishmael refers to Queequeg explicitly as a "savage" and describes him as "George Washington cannibalistically developed." Even so, the Routledge guide ultimately determines that Melville's treatment of race and subtle homoeroticism seen in the earlier chapters, and "use of sentiment, which forms the basis for Ishmael's egalitarian relationship with Queequeg" evokes the racist, or at least the condescending stereotype (Davey, 140). However, this interpretation only supports a multicultural agenda that would have people from diverse backgrounds show mutual respect and an appreciation of difference. The problem is, even the convention of "noble savage" perpetuates rigid and static thinking according to Kaja Silverman:

Those of us writing deconstructively about gender, race, class, and other forms of 'difference' have made a serious strategic mistake. We have consistently argued against idealization, that psychic activity at the heart of love, rather than imagining the new uses to which it might be put." Since everyone idealizes—"even," Silverman writes, "that individual who most fully and relentlessly confronts the void upon which all subjectivity pivots"—the theoretical incorrectness of idealization is, in the end, irrelevant. The practical question before us is not how to stop idealizing but how to idealize differently, how to withdraw energies from the wrong kinds of idealizations in order to invest those energies elsewhere (Silverman, 2, 40).

Some of those "wrong kind" of idealizations are uncritical applications of multiculturalism in the curriculum. In her introduction to *The Transit of Empire*, Jodi Byrd claims, "multicultural liberalism has aligned itself with settler colonialism despite professing the goal to disrupt and intervene in global forms of dominance through investments in colorblind equality" (Byrd, xxvi). In other words, the bi-racial friendship between Queequeg and Ishmael might be touted as a

proponent of multiculturalism in a typical classroom. However, this portrayal may be complicit with colonization or “historical aphasia” to use her term, if separated from the “conquest of indigenous peoples” (Byrd xxvi). In other words, students need to see that Queequeg is in New Bedford because of America’s needs to purvey spermaceti, the wax found in the head of the sperm whale. The freedom to roam the seas into areas beyond American boundaries is connected to its dominance. Students therefore should see this novel’s characters in historical context which includes conquest.

Appropriately, Melville alludes to conquest in a meaningful way as the ship that carries the pair and is the setting for the bulk of the plot is dubbed the *Pequod*, and named for the tribe that Melville erroneously thought to have been extinct. This stroke, Richard Slotkin remarks is nothing short of poetic justice: “The Pequot Indians, suppressed by the fathers of these Nantucketers, thus have their final triumph (Slotkin, 544). Note, however, that Slotkin’s “suppressed” falls short of Melville’s implied annihilation of the tribal nation. Melville’s flagrant error may be a springboard for class discussions and activities to investigate why Melville, who relied on much printed history *Moby-Dick*, found false material about the complete destruction of the Pequot tribe. For insight into this problem, Jean O’Brien’s *Firsting and Lasting* makes an excellent resource. Generally speaking, the book finds that the New England colonists wrote that local Indians were extinct even though they remained - and continue to live there (O’Brien, xii). In other words, Indians were physically and imaginatively written off the landscape. She writes:

On one level, their assumptions of Indianness that were shaped by the temporalities of race preconditioned them to understand Indians through the degeneration narrative. But on another level, they refused to recognize them because it was useful not to. Recognizing Indians entailed fulfilling obligations to them with regard to protecting their lands and other resources and attending to their needs under a system of guardianship that had organically developed over more than two hundred years of colonialism” (O’Brien, 148).

Most importantly, O’Brien shows how Indians resist this erasure from colonial times till

today, and students can do likewise. Some classroom activities might include students researching how Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts “extended official recognition of Indians” despite historians claims of their elimination (O’Brien, 145). The historian also notes a great number of Indian men joined the whaling community (O’Brien, 146). One of the Aquinnah harpooners in *Moby-Dick* is Tashtego, from the Wampanoag community of Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts. Students might explore this connection and write-back, creating a critical text of their own. O’Brien also highlights the accomplishment of “Pequot minister, activist and public intellectual, William Apess” (O’Brien, 148). What better way to dispute the extinction of the tribe than by researching the biography of their most famous figure, or reading some of his autobiographical writings?

Melville’s error notwithstanding, in the context of the novel, the Pequod is routinely interpreted as a symbol of multiculturalism because it is a microcosm of the inhabitants of this world carrying Quakers and Christians, blacks and whites, Indigenous people from three continents and a Sino-Persian stowaway crew. Yet it is also significant that this ship is doomed. Melville seems to be saying that this project of facile global unity is likewise doomed to fail because it has violent mission. Byrd would seem to agree, pointing out that “colonizing liberalisms established themselves through force, violence and genocide in order to make freedom available for some and not others” (Byrd, 221). That is, should Queequeg attend church, earn profits for Nantucket and learn to read, he may enjoy a modicum of freedom. However, this freedom was and is still a dire wish for Queequeg’s community in New Zealand. And the point is similarly valid in the U.S. Byrd makes a dire statement that “The United States sits on the precipice, where empire either is now manifested in a deterritorialized sovereignty or is on the verge of apocalyptic environmental collapse.” All but one will survive Melville’s symbolic

apocalypse when the White Whale rams his head into the *Pequod* smashing it to bits, and circles it with sufficient force to make a vortex that sucks the vessel into the depths.

Like the multiculturalism as Byrd defines it, hegemonic literacy is also one of those “colonizing liberalisms” not only because of its assimilationist agenda, but also because it perpetuates the lie that literacy is unidirectional, static and authoritative. Literacy is reciprocal. Therefore, when Queequeg’s *moko* inspires Ishmael to get a tattoo of his own, we see a model of Native participation in the construction of a literacy event. This episode can be an opportunity for teachers to show students how American historians wrote Natives out of history, yet tribal nations always resisted this. Perhaps that is the reason why Melville thought the Pequod tribe extinct, I would encourage students to see Queequeg’s *moko* as a text that contributes to the one narrated by Ishmael.

Another reason that the *moko* is worthy of serious consideration is because the way in which it is describe by Ishmael, it defies material appropriation and can introduce to students the concept of Native cultural property. Melville accomplishes this in the episode where Ishmael comments, in a tone either remorseful or sarcastic, that his own tattoo illustrates nothing but random cetological data:

The skeleton dimensions I shall now proceed to set down are copied verbatim from my right arm, where I had them tattooed; as in my wild wanderings at that period, there was no other secure way of preserving such valuable statistics. But as I was crowded for space, and wished the other parts of my body to remain a blank page for a poem I was then composing - at least, what untattooed parts might remain - I did not trouble myself with the odd inches; nor, indeed, should inches at all enter into a congenial measurement of the whale (*MD*, 346-7).

The conventional read would support Melville’s challenge to the authority of science. The “skeletal dimensions” on his arm, for example, reveals a cold, rationalist worldview and creates a figure “playing” Western - to flip over Vizenor’s concept. His motivation to preserve “valuable

statistics” satirizes Western science for it is uncertain what its aims are. That Ishmael had “copied verbatim” the data emphasizes the kind of tedious and commercial enterprise he felt that writing had become, as he develops more fully in “Bartleby the Scrivener” (Melville, 1853). In this short story, a copyist in a Wall Street law firm utters the words, “I would prefer not to” when asked by his boss to do a rudimentary copying job. This phrase, merely signifying Bartleby’s disobedience at first, escalates through repetition to epitomize a more philosophical refusal to participate in the act of copying which is associated with ruthless commodification.

Teachers may point out that Melville struggled in school Melville because of illegible penmanship. According to Elizabeth Renker, his handwriting was so poor it prevented him from gainful employment as a copyist. Renker also argues that this anxiety formulated Melville’s motif of tattooing because facial tattoos, especially, require a skilled hand for it has permanent effects (Renker, 19-20). Thus Queequeg’s culturally distinct form of literacy requires the very skill the author lacked and sorely longed for. So, having the ability to make “an exact counterpart of a queer round figure,” is to imbue that character with the respect that is neglected him by the ship’s owners who regard him synecdochically as a pagan hand they can exploit for profit.

That Ishmael left “parts of his body blank” for a poem resists this materialism and speaks to the ineffability of his language to express something important or meaningful. This blankness points up the illusion of written language as an ideal medium for finding meaning. In contrast, Queequeg can achieve meaning in ink, glossed as “genealogy,” the *moko* is nothing short of the story of how the bearer’s life fits into the grand scheme of the cosmos. Therefore, as we saw earlier with global equivalence between the friends, we now have linguistic equivalence too. Ironically, then, Ishmael is as illiterate in Queequeg’s linguistic system as Queequeg is in English.

This equivalence is portrayed brilliantly in the episode in *Moby-Dick* in which the Pequod's owners, Bildad and Peleg, hire Queequeg to be the first harpooner for the three-year whale hunt. As Bildad and Peleg are both flatly drawn, hypocritical Quakers, Melville forges an interstice between Christianity and literacy, where we may critique these two tools of colonialism. In the chapter titled, "His Mark," Ishmael describes the moment that Queequeg signs his employment contract to be the first harpooner on the Pequod's three-year mission. Queequeg took

the offered pen, copied upon the paper, in the proper place, an exact counterpart of a queer round figure which was tattooed upon his arm; so that through Captain Peleg's obstinate mistake touching his appellative, it stood something like this: -

Quohog.

his X mark (*MD*, 85)

The conventional high school explication of this passage might focus on Melville's condemnation of Christian hypocrisy. For example, before hiring Queequeg, Bildad and Peleg squabble over whether it is permissible to hire a pagan. Peleg insists, "He must show his papers." And Bildad agrees, "He must show that he's converted" thereby making "Christian" synonymous with having "papers," and the dominant element of the paper/wood or skin binary. And yet for all their erudition through the Bible, which they spout profusely for comedic effect, Bildad and Peleg cannot pronounce Queequeg's name and confuse it invariably with first, a spiny mammal, and then a species of clam. Therefore, the owners of the *Pequod* are characterized as greedy and ignorant through their own speech.

However, the Native-centered reading shows that Melville maintains equivalence between Western and Native literacies, and portrays Queequeg's fierce resistance against economic

exploitation. First, earlier we saw that “Peleg was vainly trying to mend a pen with his jack-knife” (*MD*, 76). Peleg’s pen is to paper as the knife is to wood. Yet unlike Western tattooing that is done with a needle, *moko* is pressed into skin with a chisel or knife-like implement. Thus both Western and Indigenous literacies require the tools of knife and ink signifying equivalence. Thus the act of making the x-mark may at least be thought of as a motif to suggest equivalence between literacy systems.

However, when considering the work of Ojibwe/Dakota scholar Scott Richard Lyons we can find that the author goes beyond equivalence, or the multicultural paradigm to actually resist the “contact” myth. In his book *X-Marks* Lyons defines this notation as a “contaminated, coerced sign of consent made under conditions not of our own [Native] making but with hopes of a better future” (Lyons, 40). Queequeg’s short-term hope in this chapter is to simply to gain employment. The harpooner’s “x-mark” asserts these expectations without relinquishing his greater goals that motivated his journey to America in the first place, or his desire to return home.

Another way to look at the “x-mark” is informed by Mindy Morgan’s study of the Fort Belknap Indian community. In “The Bearer of this Letter” (2009) the author traces resistance to the historical use of literacy in rations, rolls, treaties, and other forms of state control and coercion. English, she writes, was considered “the only language capable of expressing the ideals of the democratic nation” (Morgan, 88). In addition to civic inculcation, Morgan notes how the Jesuits also saw “vernacular training as part of their own missionary work” (Morgan, 117). At the same time that Natives were being coerced by Jesuits to abandon their languages, they were recording orthographies as curios. As Morgan puts it, “Indigenous literacy, therefore, was ultimately conditioned by the underlying ideas about its applicability and suitability; it was

appropriate for use by a scholarly audience but not a Native one' (Morgan, 118). Perhaps, then, we may be encouraged to see Queequeg's x-mark as an act of resistance to utilizing the English language.

This chapter of *Moby-Dick* would make an excellent segue for a unit on the history of treaties and between the federal government and specific tribes to understand better under what circumstances Natives "agreed" to treaties, and what the repercussions were and still remain today. Additionally, we might pause at this point in the text to introduce to students the history of English language transmission to Natives and how the federal government tried "to eradicate tribal life through the institution of school" (Morgan, 87). Whereas multiculturalism celebrates a facile bilingualism, it fails to discern that when European immigrants arrived, they too were compelled to learn English. But, as Morgan points out, unlike the case of American Indian peoples, "no efforts were made to eliminate the use of heritage language in domestic spheres" (Morgan, 87). Educators need to help students think critically about conquest and resistance.

As students begin to see these issues, they will see how language and literacy also convey values. Near the end of the novel, we see a reiteration of the *moko*'s ability to symbolize an alternative to Western values. In the chapter entitled "Queequeg in his Coffin" the harpooner becomes so sick that he asks the ship's carpenter to build him a coffin. After a miraculous recovery, and no longer requiring the coffin for its intended use, Queequeg recycles it as a sea chest, and carves images from his *moko* onto it. As mentioned above, this is the very sea chest that will save Ishmael's life in the novel's concluding pages. In Ishmael's words:

With a wild whimsiness, he now used his coffin for a sea-chest; and emptying into it his canvas bag of clothes, set them in order there. Many spare hours he spent, in carving the lid with all manner of grotesque figures and drawings; and it seemed that hereby he was striving, in his rude way, to copy parts of the twisted tattooing on his body. And this

tattooing, had been the work of a departed prophet and seer of his island, who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth; so that Queequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them; and these mysteries were therefore destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last. And this thought it must have been which suggested to Ahab that wild exclamation of his, when one morning turning away from surveying poor Queequeg—"Oh, devilish tantalization of the gods!" (MD 366-7)

The conventional high school reading would highlight the gothic language in the quotation to evince the theme of death and the mysteries surrounding it. Consider, for instance, the adjectives "grotesque" and "twisted" to increase the effect of anxiety. The words "hieroglyphic" and "riddle" underscore the gothic notions of the exotic "other." The clever instructor might also point out that the words "mysteries not even himself could read" would heighten the voyeuristic arousal of the Victorian reader who encounters Queequeg through reading. The arousal from voyeurism may be implied by Ahab's "wild exclamation" into the scene after "surveying" Queequeg, with that verb's connotations of viewing.

More relevant to multicultural aims, we might consider, the statement that Queequeg "had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth" subverts the trope of salvation through Biblical literacy. Queequeg's oral tradition is inscribed on his body so that he becomes simultaneously an autonomous spiritual being and text - - because Queequeg is in-himself "a wondrous work in one volume, or a "living parchment." Therefore, we are presented with an alternative worldview that facilitates at best, a spiritual equivalence. However, the Native read is far more compelling and critical which Brander's analysis illustrates:

Queequeg's coffin serves as a leitmotif, which seeks not to recuperate categories such as "writing" and "literature" but, rather, to recognize how such categories have constituted

themselves in colonial relations... Queequeg's coffin represents the non-alphabetic, indigenous text in the colonial world, as well as the possibility for recovery and resurgence of subaltern literacies, texts, and knowledges (15-16).

This is especially true because it is the Maori artifact that saves our narrator's life. At the same time, this symbol should not be seen to endorse multiculturalism's idealization of racial cooperation. After all, while Ishmael survives, Queequeg drowns. A Native-centered reading must show the value of this episode for Native peoples. Fortunately, we do see this value here. First, we see a model of collaborative authorship, a practice that challenges Western notions of individual authorship and "originality." As Mignolo insists, we need to "build arguments to confront those who take 'originality' as the ultimate criterion for the final judgment" because it informs colonial thinking (Mignolo, 162). Because the *moko* had been "the work of a departed prophet and seer," who is reiterating Maori spiritual history into a bearer, there a necessary collaboration in a literacy act that defies originality.

Michael Berthold also sees the symbol of Queequeg's coffin as a literary event, writing it "stands as the talking book" and a "sacred text co-extensive with his own body" (Berthold, 141).

He goes on to say

This narrative inscription by Queequeg corrects and amplifies an earlier moment where Queequeg is also an author of sorts. His signing aboard the *Pequod* involves the making of a collaborative text with Captain Peleg... This splitting of Queequeg between a white authority's primary misrepresentation (and animalizing) of him and his own subordinated attempt at writing himself into the registers of Western letters is amended when Queequeg designs his coffin... and is a means of reclaiming the wholeness that the official discourse of a Peleg denies him (Berthold, 141).

In addition to aesthetics of collaboration furthering sovereignty, so too does the presence of the Indigenous oral tradition as part of the act of literacy further Native claims beyond multiculturalism. The information the "seer" chisels onto the face and body comes to him from the Maori oral tradition. According to Haami and Roberts, "All Polynesians (including Maori)

possess oral traditions that reveal sophisticated understandings of the world and their place in it” (Haami and Roberts, 403). Simon Ortiz argues how this tradition connects to the vitality of tribal life. He writes, the “oral tradition has been the most reliable method by which Indian culture and community integrity have been maintained” (Ortiz, 103). Moreover, Ortiz asserts. “It is the by affirmation of knowledge of source and place and spiritual return that resistance is realized” (104). In *Native Liberty*, Gerald Vizenor reiterates this point: “Native presence, survivance, and continental liberty is dynamic, and elusive, as it always has been in Native oral stories and literature” (Vizenor, 5).

Craig Womack, too, in *Red on Red* writes, “the oral tradition has always been a deeply politicized forum for nationalistic literary expression” (Womack, 51) Additionally, the oral tradition has implications for sovereignty in the direct, or legal sense of the word, and also as a platform to imagine possibilities beyond. In the first case, because oral stories predate treaty relationships between Europeans and their hosts, “outright nationhood is assumed, without the qualification of being subsumed by another government” (Womack, 60). In the more expansive view of sovereignty, oral tradition might be utilized by Native nations “as a model for building nations in a way that revises, modifies, or rejects, rather than accepts as a model, the European and American nation. Oral tradition then becomes a useful tool rather than an ethnographic artifact” (Womack, 60).

Ironically, even the Western oral tradition that Athenian tragedians relied upon in their plays can be useful to Native aspirations when analyzing the etymology of the word “tantalize” from the above passage. When Ahab gushes, "Oh, devilish tantalization of the gods!" Melville’s typical reader would probably fall into the Christian “sheep trap” to use Thompson’s phrase, by associating Queequeg’s pagan heritage and the adjective “devilish.” Yet we can see Melville is at

his most satiric by analyzing the etymology of the word “tantalization,” which alludes to the Ancient Greek myth of Tantalus. On the first page of the tragedy, *Orestes* by Euripides, we see the genealogy of Tantalus: “He it was that begat Pelops, the father of Atreus...” whom we find “suspended in mid-air” at the outset of the play. The tragedian explains the reason for the punishment, “Well, Atreus slew Thyestes' children and feasted him (Euripides 1.1). It is significant that the cannibalism associated with Queequeg’s heritage throughout *Moby-Dick* is the identical practice of Western civilization amongst the line of Atreus who begat two heroes of the Trojan War. Though the practice of cannibalism in the West is clearly transgressive, and the Polynesian one sacred, Melville never shies away from an opportunity to expose hypocrisy to any possible extent.

A fourth analysis from “Queequeg’s Coffin” is a Native-centered read that shows the unlikely turn of the novel’s protagonist – against the tools of empire. It is important here to pause to review some basic ideas that comprise Ahab’s characterization. He is shrouded in mystery, first entering the text through the satirically named Elijah, a prophet of the streets, who prophesies to Ishmael and Queequeg about their elusive captain. Our narrator doesn’t even meet the protagonist of the novel until several weeks into the voyage in which he inspires the crew with an inspired exuberance and maniacal charisma to abandon the ship’s mission to accrue three year’s worth of whale oil, the lubricant of choice at the time, and instead to join him in his vengeful chase to hunt down and kill the sperm whale that “dismasted” him. Before long we also learn that Ahab has hired a shadow crew, headed by a Zoroastrian named Fedallah, whose mystical abilities will lead Ahab to the whale.

We gain more insight into Ahab’s motivation through Ishmael’s ruminations:

The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a

heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east revered in their statue devil; - Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred White Whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it (*MD*, 156).

Clearly, this is one crazed and dark character. If Ahab's "general rage" wasn't already sufficiently dangerous, Melville gives him the power tools of nautical navigation. These figure prominently; for example, "The Compass," "The Quadrant" and "The Needle" are chapter titles. Incidentally, these are also the tools of map making and conquest invariably used to search for natural resources, enslave populations or "discover" new lands in which to settle. In this light, when we read that Ahab "surveyed" Queequeg, (*MD*, 367), we may consider its nautical connotations and all the violence that created the hubris of a Nantucket ship mining for oil in the South Pacific.

Yet of all the instruments at Ahab's disposal, the one that he singles out to destroy is the quadrant:

Foolish toy! babies' plaything of haughty Admirals, and Commodores, and Captains; the world brags of thee, of thy cunning and might; but what after all canst thou do, but tell the poor, pitiful point, where thou thyself happenest to be on this wide planet, and the hand that holds thee: no! not one jot more!.... Curse thee, thou quadrant!" dashing it to the deck, "no longer will I guide my earthly way by thee; the level ship's compass, and the level dead-reckoning, by log and by line; *these* shall conduct me, and show me my place on the sea. Aye," lighting from the boat to the deck, "thus I trample on thee, thou paltry thing that feebly pointest on high; thus I split and destroy thee! (*MD*, 378).

Undoubtedly, these practices are also complicit in colonialism as Mishuana Goeman points out:

"maps, travel logs, engravings, newspapers, almanacs, and many other forms of colonial writings formed a systematic practice of confining and defining Native spaces from land to bodies

(Goeman, 296). However, the quadrant has special significance. The quadrant puns with the term for the axes of a two-dimensional Cartesian system that divide the plane into four infinite regions, called quadrants. Thus by association, when Ahab smashes the quadrant, he may be seen to reject Cartesian spatial reasoning.

In “(Re)Mapping Indigenous Presence on the Land in Native Women's Literature” Goeman shows that critical Native feminists conceive of Native spaces “that encourage the dismantling of boxed geographies and bodies defies Cartesian subject status. Engaging both historic attachments to particular geographies and imperial histories that undermine such attachments, Native conceptions of space defy a dominant, Cartesian model of imperial subjectivity in which consciousness emerges out of itself (“I think; therefore I am”), and in abstraction from the particularities of history and geography” (Goeman, 295). Ahab, by shattering the quadrant can be seen symbolically to reject Cartesian philosophy. Moreover, by looking at how he resolves for the other instruments to “conduct” him, and show him his “place on the sea” the language has a quality of repentance. That is, the word “conduct” refers to a way of behaving as does learning one’s “place.” Additionally, because this episode is the last incident of plot to occur before the looming catastrophe of “The Chase,” it effuses with a sense of atonement, as a final resolution before a battle in which the winner will take all but one.

This episode can be an opportunity for students to grasp the idea that doing geography, like literacy, is ideologically loaded. “As much as guns and warships, maps have been the ‘weapons of imperialism,’ J.B. Harley writes, “used for the “containment of subject populations” and to “create myths [to] assist in the maintenance of the status quo” (Huhndorf, 140). Using Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* to illustrate, Shari M. Huhndorf provides several examples of how this novel repudiates colonial mapping. Opening with a 500-year-old map, this

novel “traces the shifting power relations and special formations of the region to a history of colonial violence as it undermines the imperial myths that maintain the territorial status quo” (Huhndorf, 141). *Almanac*’s map, as interpreted by Huhndorf, marks the return of tribal lands, movement of tribal armies and migration and “the forces of ancestral spirits” (Huhndorf, 143-4). It therefore serves as a vehicle for resistance.

We must also look at how canonical literature, in general, is complicit in the act of mapping when it dramatizes encounters between whites and Indigenous peoples globally. Juniper Ellis is highly critical of this “representation of extra-continental spaces.” He writes, “In Melville’s claims to literary and geographic territory, he presents the Pacific as an uncharted, untraversed void, erasing the cultural maps that were already in place in the Pacific” (Ellis, 11). Ellis asserts that both actual and metaphorical maps exist in the oral histories, genealogies, chants, songs, dances, artistic traditions and methods of navigation and cartography of Pacific Islanders” (Ellis, 12). She argues that Melville’s literature, in short, not only erases those maps, and denies “the existence of other systems of perception and evaluation” (Ellis, 13). I believe one would indeed arrive at that conclusion if one fails to recognize that Melville is satirizing official epistemologies, and methodologies whether they stem from Western science or religion.

Brian Thom’s work may also shed light on this potential problem. In “The Paradox of Boundaries in Coast Salish Territories” Brian Thom claims “the cartographic practice of representing indigenous territories as discrete, bounded watershed units held by property-owning groups appears in stark contrast to indigenous narrative practices”(Thom, 1). These practices with the Salish, for example, include understanding territorial boundaries through “property, language, residence, and identity with the actions of the mythic-forming community” (Thom, 15). The resolution of this apparent paradox, Thom suggests is found in employing “dual

strategies” that call for validating their culturally specific relationship to land while “negotiating the legal position of their territories” (Thom, 16). This case shows how mapping is not objective but strategic and ideological.

These strategies and ideologies are quite often motivated by political and economic criteria. In “Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation” linguistics anthropologists Judith Irvine and Susan Gal show how mapping also has implications for linguistic and social differentiation. To illustrate this example, they offer the case 19<sup>th</sup> of century European linguists who described the languages of Senegal. They write, “The way these languages were identified, delimited, and mapped, the ways their relationships were interpreted, and even the ways they were described in grammars and dictionaries were all heavily influenced by an ideology of racial and national essences” (Irvine and Gal, 47). The way these early linguists mapped local languages had “long lasting effects” because of the inextricability between the acts of identifying language and nationhood (Irvine and Gal, 48-9). For Africans, according to Gal and Irvine, this had a direct consequence for the “African’s loss of political autonomy – or at least their right to political autonomy in European eyes” (Irvine and Gal, 50). Two activities that may help show students see worldviews working at cross-purposes follow.

To explain to students why negotiating two cultures simultaneously may be difficult, or “incommensurate” I would introduce this concept while staying with the theme of whaling by reading Mary Goose’s “Whale Song” (Bird and Harjo, 482-3). In this poem, the Mesquaque/Chippewa poet, presumably the voice of the speaker, uses the occasion of seeing a beached whale in the news to prompt a reflection between her soul and the spirits of “her fellow water creatures” and the difference between white and Native views of nature. Meanwhile, two joggers on the beach compare the sun reflecting on the water to “diamonds and gold.” The

speaker tells us that “the last remnants” of “tobacco in [her] hand” that are an offering in prayer are more “valuable” than “diamonds and gold” and believes this prayer will inspire her “whale song,” a metaphor for a tribute to her dying kin.

Another activity is to make “Postcards from the Past with Google Tools.” In this lesson designed by teacher Cheryl Davis, students “use video or digital still photography to enhance lessons on local history and historical change. Students locate historic photos and then re-shoot at that location using a video or still camera. The combined photographic research will record changes that have impacted a community, give students a perspective on the history of an area, and contribute to a communities’ historic record” (Davis). Students might be assigned to create a postcard one specific site so that different relationships to place will be revealed. Alternatively, students might be given the choice to photograph a place of significance to them so to illustrate the emotional attachments people have to place, and how that figures in worldview.

In concert with this paper’s aim to advocate for the centering of a Native character, it also attempts to approach the text via a Native worldview. To center the worldview of the Maori character, we might try a Maori specific framework, through Queequeg’s *moko*; because, the *moko* is glossed as genealogy, and this word glossed back to the Maori is *whakapapa*, which includes not just human genealogies, but is also used as a metaphor for the act of Creation and for the evolution of the Universe and all living creatures within it. In that sense, one can say, that the Maori worldview is framed by *whakapapa*. In fact the only time the word “genealogy” is used in the text is when Ahab makes the following statement after seeing how an electrical storm illuminating Queequeg’s body art “burned like Satanic blue flames on his body” (*MD*, 383).

Oh, thou magnanimous! now I do glory in my genealogy. But thou art but my fiery father;  
my sweet mother, I know not. Oh, cruel! what hast thou done with her? There lies my  
puzzle; but thine is greater. Thou knowest not how came ye, hence callest thyself

unbegotten; certainly knowest not thy beginning, hence callest thyself unbegun. I know that of me, which thou knowest not of thyself, oh, thou omnipotent (*MD*, 383).

The proximity of Queequeg's *moko* to Ahab's comment about genealogy suggests that Melville has inspired Ahab to reinvent himself informed *whakapapa*: "an elaborate cosmogony, which begin with the origin of the universe and of the primal parents, and then continues to trace the descent of all known living and non-living, material and non-material phenomena including humans" (Haami and Roberts, 1). Ahab sees in this moment that the markings on Queequeg's body are connected to the source of light. Moreover, Ahab, for the first time, claims the sun to be his father as in many Native Creation Myths and thereby supplanting the Judeo-Christian story in which God created the world in seven days, and people only have human ancestors. According to Maori worldview, human mortals are the youngest creatures on earth and "do not have the right to dominate" their elders (Cram, 54). Therefore, there is justice when the whale that was attacked by Ahab returned the insult by biting off his leg.

The prosthetic replacement, carved in a stunning act of resistance from the bone of a sperm whale, is the key symbol of Ahab's suffering. With regards to *whakapapa*, "many physiological terms are also genealogical in 'nature'. For example the terms *iwi* can be translated respectively as "bones". For instance, Māori author, Keri Hulme named her prize-winning novel as *The Bone People*: a title linked directly to the dual meaning of the word *iwi* as both 'bone' and 'tribal people'. Consider, then Ishmael's description of the Pequod through the framework of *whakapapa*. And how appropriate as Ishmael describes her as "a cannibal of a craft."

She was apparelled like any barbaric Ethiopian emperor, his neck heavy with pendants of polished ivory. She was a thing of trophies. A cannibal of a craft, tricking herself forth in the chased bones of her enemies. All round, her unpanelled, open bulwarks were garnished like one continuous jaw, with the long sharp teeth of the Sperm Whale, inserted there for pins, to fasten her old hempen thews and tendons to. Those thews ran not through base blocks of land wood, but deftly travelled over sheaves of sea-ivory. Scorning a turnstile

wheel at her reverend helm, she sported there a tiller; and that tiller was in one mass, curiously carved from the long narrow lower jaw of her hereditary foe. The helmsman who steered by that tiller in a tempest, felt like the Tartar, when he holds back his fiery steed by clutching its jaw. A noble craft, but somehow a most melancholy! All noble things are touched with that.

Several allusions to bone facilitate the application of *whakapapa* including “the polished ivory,” “the chased bones of her enemies,” “long sharp teeth,” “sea-ivory,” and “lower jaw.” Furthermore, the allusion to “Ethiopian” signals anti-colonialism because it is located in the “Horn of Africa,” once again connects to bone. Furthermore, Maori aesthetics through the many allusions to “carving” foreshadows Queequeg’s *moko* as central to the themes of the novel.

Ahab ought to be considered as a figure that, alongside Queequeg, rebels against the juggernaut of American nation building by his refusal, firstly, to hunt for a fuel that is market-driven in unsustainable quantities. This is similar to the unsustainable quantities of human heads that were sold like post-cards on the streets of New Bedford. Let’s hunt just one whale, Ahab suggests. And Sanborn provides the rationale for why Queequeg would have willingly agreed with Ahab, in contrast to his earlier gesture of an x-mark: Moby-Dick is “a formidable champion, the highest-seeded opponent on the planet” through which Queequeg might earn his culturally specific form of sacred pride, his *tapu* and *mana* (Sanborn, 2011; 127). Through the Maori worldview the reader may see the fierce defiance of Queequeg’s own desire to test his Maori warrior values against the most malevolent opponent in the universe.

Thus if we may see Queequeg as a symbol vital of the spirit of independence, rather than the harpooner with the tattoos then it is only one practical step further to ask students to investigate the current struggles the Maori are waging for their independence. This activity can be bridged to consider the struggles of Natives in this country. In “The Treaty of Waitangi and

Its Relationship to Contemporary American Sovereignty Issues” Mary Katherine Duffié calls the similarities “striking.” Examples of similarities according to Duffié include the way they share treaty relationships with their respective governments, policy trajectories, sovereignty disputes, and the “fourth world status” of peoples as a result of failed policies. Perhaps Duffié’s most powerful point is ideally suited for classroom inquiry. She asks: “What can American Indian tribes learn from the Tainui's experience? They might benefit from finding an answer to the fundamental questions posed in Article Two of the Treaty of Waitangi. Tribe Speaking:

1. What constitutes all our treasured possessions?
2. What is every thing we value as a community?
3. What are the economic mechanisms through which we can reacquire those that we have lost or forgotten?
4. Once recaptured, how do we institutionalize them for the benefit of generations to come? (Duffié, 58).

I would therefore culminate a classroom reading of *Moby-Dick* by assigning students to investigate answers to Duffié’s questions with regards to the tribes closest to the students’ school. This would certainly offer students a broader understanding and respect of a particular Native culture’s beliefs, and a show of gratitude for providing guardianship for the land under their feet. Understanding tribal specificity is key to a tribe’s own collective expression of nationhood and how that differs from modern state nationalism. By investigating a local tribe’s geography, language, history and values and cultural expressions students will come to see the legitimacy of tribal sovereignty, and hopefully, models of resilience, resistance and revitalization. For these are the qualities needed by students if they are to learn how to fight oppression, wherever and whenever it occurs.

## CONCLUSION

Resistance, as I argue in this thesis, is a skill that can be, and should be taught to students. In the English classroom, these tools and skills are a part of what education theorist and activist, Ernest Morrell, calls “critical English education.” It reveals the connection between language and literacy and power, and it provides students with the skills to analyze texts to expose this connection, and to create their own critical projects. To exemplify this pedagogical strategy, I have used Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851). As the academy has appropriated the novel for its political aspirations when it wished to project an image of American dominance during historical conflicts, I have tried to do likewise, but in the service of Native sovereignty.

Even when education theorists have analyzed the novel using the putatively democratic framework of multiculturalism that advocates for a celebratory, inter-racial unity and egalitarianism, it does not go far enough in noting that when this occurs, it can frequently function hegemonically - erasing the distinct values of the non-white group and perpetuating assimilation. Additionally, Native nations insist upon self-determination and self-sufficiency, a unique position that no other ethnic, racial or immigrant group in the U.S. requires. Therefore, a critical approach works best.

My critical approach alternates between centering an explication through a Native character, or by looking at the text through the prism of a Native worldview or historical experience. In any case, my goal is to read the text in service to decolonization, or as Susan Miller puts it, as a “discursive challenge to academic hegemony” (Miller, 222). Clearly, *Moby-Dick* as a canonical centerpiece of American literature has done harm in perpetuating an ideology counterproductive to the “survivance” of Native communities both domestically and internationally every time this book’s hunting of the whale trope was read as the thing that makes America great. But this harm was done, I believe, not by the book itself, but by the professional

readers of the book: the scholars and the critics. Until now.

I have illustrated how a conventional reading evinces ideas so very differently, and at times, incommensurably, to a Native one. The facile or formal readings of *Moby-Dick* reinforce prejudicial tropes, while Native-centered readings expose them. Once exposed, students can create new texts that build on these revelations and use them to empower themselves against oppression in their own lives. They will also gain an academic edge through engagement with such a difficult text and utilizing critical thinking skills in concert with the experience of their own lived lives. These critical skills in an authentic context will serve students well in resisting oppression.

Sometimes students do experience oppression in the classroom where teachers may privilege a hegemonic literacy over an alternative one. (Sometimes teachers are just racist or stupid). Hegemonic literacy is also tool of colonialism. Students will also see colonialism in a variety of places that they may have taken for granted: in education, in literacy, in mapping, in tourism and even tattooing. More specifically students will see how images of Natives in literature can perpetuate racist attitudes, and that the way in which they engage with the text can change readers' impressions. Students will also learn to be critical about the way humor is used by an author, how the Native person's body is described, what economic circumstances Native characters find themselves in, and how Native characters can be seen to intersect with history. Students will also see similarities between the legacy of colonialism for Native Americans specifically, and Indigenous peoples globally.

In both cases, what students may have assumed to be neutral concepts, that is, oral history, literacy and language, are truly powerful weapons used initially against Native peoples, and now reclaimed, as a means of revitalization and resistance. Additionally, students will see that

different people have different ways of knowing, and these ways differing from the Anglo-European tradition and have been ignored and rejected. Additionally, when alternative epistemologies have been integrated into the curriculum, they have often been trivialized or misappropriated.

Students will see through reading *Moby-Dick* that Melville, too, supported alternative epistemologies and had a deep distrust of any system claiming to hold a single truth. Melville was especially critical of Western science and Christianity because these philosophies purport to hold “the answers.” Students will also see through Melville’s critique that both Science and Christianity were, and remain tools of colonialism. Through Melville’s characterization of Queequeg students will see alternative worldviews that transmit values orally, in collaboration, and holistically. They will see that these values celebrate health and nature and harmony.

Additionally, I suggested several activities for students to enrich and expand upon their readings: they can research the historical context of a novel to see how the academy appropriated it; they can research the background of Native characters in the novel to understand their history; they can write imaginary biographies to emotionally engage with Native characters; they can make digital postcards to become more aware of people’s connection to place; they can develop visual tools to express themselves and value the preferred learning modality of many Indigenous peoples; they will see examples of contemporary Native artist who are deeply interested in communicating ideas about Indianness; they will learn about NAGPRA and find examples of items requiring repatriation in their own communities; all these activities are prompted by reading *Moby-Dick* through Native lenses.

At stake is nothing less than the dangers of reifying colonial dynamics in the classroom.

Teachers must make their best efforts to learn how to see the canon from Native eyes if they are to create a just, moral and anti-colonial environment for all of their students. Native-centered readings, however, are not meant to be a substitute for improving the quantity and quality of Native authored texts on a curriculum. There need to be more selections available as well as teacher training to do justice to them. I would call for increased inclusion of Native American works in the canon if canon formation weren't so problematic: who or what gets included and why? In which canon does it fit, American, World, or Nature? Is the text representative of authors, of many Native groups, of single tribal nations? What is literary merit? Who gets to decide? As this thesis shows, readings of literature are fraught with politics.

Another problem as Robert Dale Parker notes is that when canonized, an author will come to “stand for” the people it describes (Parker, 184). Consider for example, that Sherman Alexie, who is often included in anthologies, frequently draws characters that resent their Native identity and often mock Native traditions. Norton Anthology, for example, includes Alexie's short story originally published in *Ten Little Indians* called "Do Not Go Gentle" (Baym). In this story, a father buys a large, black vibrator he calls "Chocolate Thunder," and uses it as an amulet that mysteriously brings his baby out of a coma. I would not assign this story to my secondary students. Besides the mature content, it might encourage them to generalize that Natives no longer value their ceremonies. Another problem that Parker presents is that what is considered “the best” writing often works in concert with the academy's preference for formalist explications that reveal preferences for Western aesthetics. For example, textual explication will do little to evince the beauty of even “the best” of Navajo chants or oral literature (Parker, 176).

Instead, Parker recommends that teachers “assign historical or theoretical essays about how critics and teachers have selected literature for study, or set up classroom discussions about

competing models of selection” as I have done in this thesis (Parker 187). He also suggests distributing a “long and heterogeneous list of fiction or writers” to “spotlight hundreds of possibilities” (Parker 187) that I hope some day students will come to consider in the course of their English education.

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