Listening Through Storywork: Source Selection for Erasure Poetry in Decolonial Praxis

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Abstract

This reflexive practitioner inquiry examines how we selected Indigenous-authored passages for an erasure poetry activity within an arts-based decolonial praxis. Guided by Jo-ann Archibald's Indigenous Storywork methodology, we approached the sources as living entities. We came to see source selection itself as a form of teaching—foregrounding emotional resonances, identity exploration, and responsibilities. Two key learnings emerged: first, the importance of honoring passages as existing decolonial pedagogy; and second, the necessity of situating our own narratives within pedagogical practices. This account demonstrates how settler educators might take up Indigenous Storywork to encourage ethical relationality in practice.

Introduction

This paper begins with responsibility. As settler educators working in Canadian higher education, we are accountable for promoting sincere engagement with Indigenous knowledges. This responsibility is part of broader commitments to decolonize and Indigenize education (Congress Advisory Committee on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, & Decolonization, 2021), and takes on added significance in classrooms like ours, where many newcomer international students are encountering Canada's colonial realities for the first time. Guiding pedagogical encounters with Indigenous knowledges requires careful attention to how stories/texts are approached, acknowledged, and carried forward. Battiste (2013) importantly reminds us that Indigenous knowledges have long been excluded, appropriated, or fragmented within settler education systems. To work otherwise demands a sustained practice of holistic, relational engagement (Donald et al., 2025).

We focus on a pedagogical experience that stems from this responsibility: an arts-based praxis that invites newcomer international students to consider their role in decolonization. We examine this praxis to reflect on how one pedagogical decision—selecting stories/texts for an erasure poetry activity—surfaced deeper learnings. We wonder:

1) What does it mean for settler educators to approach classroom stories/texts as a site of decolonial responsibility?
2) How do commitments to ethical relationality shape how knowledge is brought forward through Indigenous stories/texts?

To explore these wonderings, we braid together literature, narrative, and practice to carry out a reflexive practitioner inquiry (Dana et al., 2025). We begin by outlining our educator stances and describing the arts-based, decolonial praxis that frames this study. We then engage literature on story/text selection as source materials for erasure poetry, with attention to the extended responsibilities settler educators hold when working with Indigenous-authored stories/texts. We next explain how Archibald's (2008) articulation of Indigenous Storywork guides our selection process, including our initial difficulties in enacting the framework. In particular, we describe how we came to honor source passages as existing decolonial pedagogy and came to situate our own narratives within the praxis. These points structure the discussion that follows, wherein we consider implications for similar pedagogical work.

Through this reflexive inquiry, we present a situated account of how settler educators' decolonial responsibilities can take form through ethical relationality. Drawing from Donald (2016) and Madden (2014), such relations cultivate affirming connections between Indigenous-authored texts and stories, students, educators, and the knowledges generated together to create trust and mutual respect. We invite readers to further consider the conditions under which ethical relationality becomes possible in pedagogy, which can deepen holistic engagement with Indigenous knowledges in higher education.

Reflexive Practitioner Inquiry

As part of our reflexive practitioner inquiry (Dana et al., 2025), we take up our pedagogical practice here as the site of systematic study, generating knowledge through sustained and intentional reflection on what shapes our teaching and learning. Reflexive practitioner inquiry is grounded in the premise that educators are uniquely positioned to investigate their own practice in context, producing situated knowledge that is responsive to the complexities of educational settings (Dana et al., 2025).

A reflexive, applied methodological approach aligns with our overall focus on story/text selection as a pedagogical and decolonial act, where meaning emerges through situated decisions. It also requires an ongoing reflexive stance, wherein we examine how our positions as settler educators shape what we notice, how we interpret responsibility, and how we engage Indigenous knowledges in the classroom. Reflexive practitioner inquiry provides the methodological frame through which we document, interpret, and learn from our practice in this way, and is sustained throughout the sections that follow, including our educator stances, understanding of Indigenous Storywork, and analytic reflections on the story/text selection process.

Our Educator Stances

As reflexive practitioners (Dana et al. 2025), we begin by situating ourselves within the Lands, labor, knowledge, and institutional context of this inquiry (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2019). Our relations and histories inform how we take up Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork and decolonial orientation that guides this work.

Kaye (Kathleen) is a white settler whose family arrived in Canada during early waves of colonial migration. Her schooling was shaped by the naturalized presence of whiteness, Anglo-settler values, and nationalism. As a domestic white faculty member, she benefits from privileges of respect and deference not extended to colleagues of color, while also working to unlearn colonization and white supremacy. She is often questioned about her choice to teach at a private institution primarily serving international students, as though her role there requires justification.

Gitanjaly is a Punjabi woman and recent settler in Canada. Her early education took place in an English-language boarding school run by German and Indian nuns in Northern India, shaped by missionary and colonial systems. As a faculty member with a background similar to many of her students, she navigates expectations to represent Punjabi culture and Sikhism, requests for special treatment, and the complex responsibility of countering racism by modeling academic achievement.

Our differences remain present in this work; we negotiate divergent approaches while building mutual understandings. We are committed to decolonizing higher education by stimulating dialogue and collaboration across cultures and backgrounds in our global classrooms (Wang et al., 2025), while continuing to learn how to be in affirming relations with Indigenous peoples and Lands in Canada. This project reflects our shared effort to approach decolonial teaching with care ethics (Shefer, 2020) and to remain in relation with the questions it raises.

Situating Story/Text Selection for Erasure Poetry

In light of our settler educator responsibilities, we created an arts-based praxis for newcomer international undergraduate students at University Canada West to learn about de/colonization and Indigenous knowledge(s) in Canada. Our institutional Indigenous Action Committee advised on the project. The first half of the two-hour session introduces key concepts such as Indigeneity, holism, and reconciliation, alongside student discussion and curated video materials. Key scholars include Dr. Brooke Madden, Dr. Pam Palmater, and Dr. Taiaiake Alfred. The second hour invites students to reflect on the question: What do you see as newcomers' role in decolonization and reconciliation in Canada? To help engagement with this complex question, students reflect using erasure poetry and discussion. The source/text selection process we reflexively focus on here is grounded in picking materials for use in the erasure poetry activity.

Erasure Poetry

Erasure poetry is a creative practice where an existing text is partially deleted so that the remaining words form a new poem. We understand erasure poetry through Nyman's (2018) framing of it as a practice of double/crossing that disperses meaning across multiple dimensions. In Nyman's framing, erasure is a practice that thickens meaning and makes visible/experiential processes of presence and absence. Schaefer (2024) similarly describes how erasure poems oscillate between presence and absence—retained words, erased marks, and newly created compositions set against the absence of the larger text. We think about this oscillation as a poetic way of attending to what remains, what is removed, and what

is created through processes of de/colonization, reconciliation, reconstruction, and Indigenization. For us, erasure in our decolonial praxis is an embodied and political practice of engaging meaning, power, presence, voice, and memory (Hare, 2021).

Stories/Texts/Sources

The term “text” is often used to describe fixed sources such as policy documents, archival materials, or literary excerpts, whose meanings are shaped through redaction to create erasure poetry (Nyman, 2018). Texts are typically treated as discrete and manipulable, and can be used in whole or in part. For the remainder of this paper, we use the term *source*—what we have referred to as stories/texts to this point—to reflect a broader understanding of these materials. By source, we mean the full works we selected (for example, books), and by source passages we mean the shorter passages drawn from those works used in the praxis. This distinction allows us to name both the integrity of the full work and the partial nature of the excerpts used, while attending to the storied and relational qualities these selections carry.

From a storytelling practice perspective (Galla & Goodwill, 2017), our selections carry teachings, relationships, and responsibilities. In this sense, the sources and source passages are both textual and storied. Like Madden (2019) observes, “stories make space for multiple, nuanced stories of under- and misrepresented peoples and experiences” (para. 10). The source passages orient how students might make meanings of their words and begin to think about ethical relationality.

Selecting Sources

We view source selection as a site of decolonial intervention. Panofsky et al. (2023) remind us that settler educators must stay attentive to both the potential and the pitfalls of engaging Indigenous knowledge systems. Stein et al. (2021) show that decolonization can reproduce colonial logics when Indigenous content is treated as thematic instead of relational. This guided us to see sources as invitations to engage with Indigenous authors, values, and worldviews. We follow Donald’s (2016) teaching of ethical relationality, which calls for seeing how all peoples, places, and histories are connected while also respecting their differences. Our stance reflects calls in Canadian education to move beyond “empty metaphors” and toward practices grounded in relationships between humans and more-than-human worlds (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Dion, 2016).

Indigenous Storywork

Recognizing the stakes of this work, we sought guidance from Jo-ann Archibald's (2008) *Indigenous Storywork*. Indigenous Storywork understands stories/sources as engaging the "heart, mind, body, and spirit" (p. 12), offering us a holistic approach and framework to engaging with Indigenous sources in educational contexts. Indigenous Storywork is comprised of seven principles: respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (Archibald, 2008). Following Leddy and Miller (2023), Dlouhy-Nelson and Hanson (2023), and Davidson (2019), who model the use of Indigenous Storywork in settler-colonial institutional settings, we take these principles as teachings. Table 1 outlines the principles in our own words.

Table 1

Principles of Indigenous Storywork

Principle	Explanation
Respect	The principle of respect means engaging meaningfully with a story and presenting it in an appropriate context. We understand sources as connected to their origins, cultures, and histories as "living entities" (Archibald, 2008, p. 25).
Responsibility	The principle of responsibility includes ensuring accuracy and cultural appropriateness of the pedagogy. It means to honor the originality of story and its meanings to facilitate an understanding of Indigenous peoples' experiences (Scarcella, 2021).
Reverence	The principle of reverence emphasizes approaching stories with respect and with the intention of building deeper connections. Engagement can work well when approached with care, emphasizing respect and dialogue (Hickey & Riddle, 2024).
Reciprocity	The principle of reciprocity focuses on the multi-directional passing and sharing of knowledge with peoples and communities via the project. Drawing from Battiste (2010), we see it as focusing on giving back in ways that can encourage the uptake of Indigenous knowledges.
Holism	The principle of holism focuses on the interconnections of the ecosystem such as Land, memory, peoples, knowledge, and culture. Holism reminds us that decolonial issues affect all parts of ourselves (Battiste, 2013).
Interrelatedness	The principle of interrelatedness emphasizes placing oneself in the story and recognizing that stories are part of a larger culture connected to many others.
Synergy	The principle of synergy emphasizes creating deeper understandings of stories and recognizing that multiple perspectives can expand meaning, while remaining unique. It involves a holistic connection of mind, body, and healing. We see synergy growing naturally rather than by force.

Note: Adapted from Archibald, 2008.

Process and Praxis: Selecting Sources with Indigenous Storywork

With this understanding of Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork, we now reflexively examine how these principles were engaged during our source selection process. This process included identifying the books (sources), reading the books together, and then selecting the final source passages. Along the way, we also worked through challenges and developed guiding questions to navigate pedagogical decisions.

In narrating this work, we interweave two reflections as negotiated, relational, and epistemologically meaningful (Clandinin, 2019), with lived experience taken up as a central site of inquiry. Kaye reflects on source book selection; together, we reflect on working as a team; and then Gitanjaly reflects on source passage selection. These reflections function as analytic moments within this inquiry, including how we encountered, interpreted, and worked through challenges as settler educators, guided by Indigenous Storywork. Like Kuly (2021) writes, "story-based pedagogy lives in the gap between self and other" (p. 235). These reflections share how we lived within that gap and may resonate with educators working through similar responsibilities in other contexts.

We would like to clarify that this reflexive inquiry does not draw on classroom artifacts or student reflections (i.e., participant data). While we hold an institutional ethics approval for the larger study (University Canada West REB – 202416), the present inquiry is based on our own reflections. These reflections were initially captured through our planning notes, online chat discussions, and memories, in alignment with Dana et al. (2025). Our analytic approach is iterative, returning to these materials to trace how meaning evolved over time. The events presented here have been reconstructed as narrative accounts (Clandinin, 2019).

The Source Books

For the sources, we decided to foreground the voices of Indigenous authors and to create openings for contesting colonial discourses (Masta & Grant-Ashbaugh, 2025) by working with memoir or related work. Other possibilities we considered included policy documents, the *Indian Act*, and political speeches. As protocol for deciding what specific materials to bring into the praxis, we followed the First People's Principles of Learning (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2007). Accordingly, we decided to use published documents to ensure that what we brought into the praxis has been intentionally shared by Indigenous authors for broader dissemination and learning, aligning our use with the purposes for which the works were originally made available. This decision became more significant as we considered the historical de-valuing of Indigenous knowledges. Battiste (2013) shows how settler-colonial education systems suppress Indigenous epistemologies through assimilationist narratives centered on Euro-Western texts. Attending to this context, we worked to pick passages from four source books written by young Indigenous people living in Canada, whose works bring forward knowledge and experiences in ways that are both personal and pedagogical. In Table 2, we give a brief overview of each source book.

Table 2

Source Books for Passage Selection

Title	Author	Genre/Story Form	Summary
Making Love with the Land	Joshua Whitehead Oji-Cree, a member of Peguis First Nation in Treaty 1 territory, Manitoba	Essay collection	Explores Indigeneity, queerness, mental health, and the connection between Land and body through personal and cultural reflections on healing and storytelling.
Bad Cree	Jessica Johns Nehiyaw (Cree), a member of Sucker Creek First Nation in Treaty 8 territory, northern Alberta	Novel (literary horror)	Blends horror and reality as a Cree woman navigates grief and memory through vivid dreams that connect her to her family's past, guided by the spiritual.
Half-Bads in White Regalia	Cody Caetano Anishinaabe and Portuguese, with Anishinaabe roots from Saugeen First Nation, Ontario	Memoir	A funny and poignant reflection on growing up as an Indigenous and Portuguese child in a complex family, exploring identity, survival, and the complexities of relations.
A Mind Spread Out on the Ground	Alicia Elliott Tuscarora, a member of the Six Nations of the Grand River, Ontario	Essay collection	Examines colonialism, intergenerational trauma, and mental health in Indigenous communities by weaving personal experiences with broader social and scholarly insights.

Note: Summaries adapted from the published works by Whitehead (2022), Johns (2023), Caetano (2022), and Elliott (2019).

Kaye's Story: Why These Books?

My storywork began with a question about the source books—asked by an Indigenous Advisory Committee member when consulting on the praxis development: "Why these stories or books?" I thanked her and admitted it was an oversight to not include this reasoning in the original praxis, and then committed to adding the content. I thought she was asking about the books' suitability for decolonial teaching and learning. So, I added longer author bios, fuller book summaries, and learner prompts to show how I connected the books to the praxis and why they were pedagogically justifiable.

We consulted again. And I was surprised when she asked the same question. I thought I had answered it. But this time, she asked differently. She asked: "Why these specific stories? Why did you think they were the right books for the workshop? Were they just any books?" In a synergistic moment, I realized she wasn't asking about the appropriateness of the books; she was asking about my/our relationships with them.

This time, I explained that these books came from years of personal reading, part of my own effort to learn about colonization and Indigenous voice in Canada. About five years ago, I started to think much more seriously about what colonization meant to me. My ancestors were part of the earliest waves of colonial settlement in Canada, and because of that, my family and I have benefited a great deal—through Land, wealth, and opportunities that continue to shape our lives today. It is not an easy thing to sit with, knowing that so much of what I have comes because others were displaced and harmed. To let that discomfort start to change the way I understood my own history, I decided to read stories written by Indigenous people who were close to my age, but whose lives unfolded in very different relationships to Canada's borders. I wanted to understand what it meant for them to grow up on these same Lands, during the same years I was alive. That is where the memoir-style books came from.

The books I chose for the project were ones that stayed with me long after I had finished them. I did not read them with this project in mind. But when the time came to select sources, I thought of them. As the person on the project who was more familiar with Canadian literature, I felt a sense of reciprocity and responsibility to bring forward what I had already been learning. Choosing these books as sources was a way of carrying my own reading into the shared work of teaching and learning with others.

Finally, the books were also the stories within which I saw the students we teach. At our institution, I often find myself as the only white person in a room of international students from the Global South. Teaching in those rooms, I feel the weight of my position in a new way, especially when those students are coming to terms with the hard reality of experiencing Canada as it really is, not as the glossy version promoted to them by a recruiter. I also listen to students dealing with being pulled in different directions, toward home and away from home, while trying to create a new home. I try to hold reverence for the connections I hear in students' liminality—stories of leaving their homes in search of safety or opportunity, while still longing for a reality where leaving their Lands would not have been necessary. And like in the passages from these sources below, I see moments, tensions, recognitions as students try to conform to colonialized academia in Canada with the hope they will one day stay here for a different future, although coming to realize it all might just be temporary.

Source Passage One

In my diaspora class we often talked about the
experience of diaspora: remembering your past in
your former home and constantly measuring it
against your present in your current home, knowing
you can never again re-enter the time and space you
left, knowing you have lost access to that possible
future forever, knowing your home will change
without you, knowing you will change without your
home—and knowing, in some instances, none of that
was your choice. Jamison wasn't exactly right. There
aren't only two ways to consider a place. It isn't just
about those who choose to be there and those who
don't. What about those who had never chosen not to
be there? What about those who were forced out?

Alicia Elliott
A Mind Spread Out on the Ground

Fig. 1: Direct excerpt from Elliott, 2019, formatted to mirror the printed activity materials used during the workshop.

Source Passage Two

Without borders of genre or form, we
reclaim the sovereignty of story, the orality
of voice, for richer soils of decolonization—
and can posit ourselves as ancestors in the
making, while ancestrally speaking too. We
are inheritors of story, even when these are
found in the wound or the rupture, and
our concepts of temporality posit us as speakers
to that which we might consider the dead
or forgotten. We are forever positioned in the
rich membrane between material and
immaterial worlds.

Joshua Whitehead
Making Love with the Land

Fig. 2: Direct excerpt from Whitehead, 2022, formatted to mirror the printed activity materials used during the workshop.

Reading Together and Encountering Challenges

With the source books selected, we entered the next phase of identifying source passages. Our idea was to build pedagogical relations through mutually understanding the stories in their wholeness. We wanted to consider together how passages might guide us—and our praxis participants—toward decolonial thinking, teaching, and learning. In this, we were guided by Kuly's (2021) reminder that "the strength of stories challenges me to think, to examine my emotional reactions . . . to question and reflect on my behaviours and future actions, and to appreciate a story's connection to my spiritual nature" (p. 235).

We began with a series of collaborative reading sessions in which we engaged each text as a whole. Our original intention was to co-select passages iteratively through discussion, sharing impressions, interpretations, and embodied responses. Yet after several sessions, many parts of the stories had been discussed, but only one excerpt had been identified. While we understood that getting lost in meaning is part of working with story, the process had stalled.

This stalling reminded us of how easily settler educators can fall back into familiar pedagogical habits, even when committed to engaging differently (Kerr & Adamov Ferguson, 2021). Assessing what was happening, we recognized that our focus had become overly fixed on locating a "good excerpt" rather than staying present with the stories. As settlers still learning to think holistically—beyond linear objectives or thematic categories—we had become disoriented. We had lost sight of the methodological and epistemological commitments of Indigenous Storywork.

Converging via Questions

To move differently, we returned to Archibald's framework and supporting literature to figure out how we might structure our engagement in a way that remained accountable to Indigenous Storywork, while also having more familiar direction for our process. Guided by Kovach's (2009) insight that "story is a relational process, and it is the relational that brings meaning to individual experience" (p. 94), we decided to develop some guiding questions to support and focus our continued reading. Through discussion, we came up with three questions that we felt flowed to and from the seven principles:

1) What does the story do?
2) What does it call us to consider, carry, or hold?
3) Who are we in relation to this story, and what responsibilities arise from that relation?

These questions helped clarify our orientation to the texts and provided a consistent structure for identifying source passages. This helped us span the epistemological gap we were encountering and allowed us to make our selections with greater clarity and care.

We paused the collaborative sessions and each applied the questions individually, in our own time, to the readings. We decided that we would each focus first on sections that spoke to us directly. This process helped create conditions for more situated engagements. When we later reunited as a duo to share the source passages we had selected, we found that they held strong relational resonances with each other.

While we had anticipated needing to revise or co-select again, the passages aligned in ways that required no further changes. We had selected 12 source passages that we believed would work well for the project holistically and individually.

The Source Passages

To help explain the source passage selection process, Gitanjaly shares a reflection from this time and how she drew on Indigenous Storywork alongside our three guiding questions above.

Gitanjaly's Story: Why These Passages?

Stories are ways to connect and cultivate collaborative understanding which create relatability, empathy, new perspectives, and compassion. I was introduced to these source books by my dear friend and colleague, Kaye. I had to select source passages, one or two from each text. Selecting source passages was not a process of a conscious effort of analyzing it from the standpoint of relevance, authority, date, accuracy, or reason for writing (Mandalios, 2013). It grew out of my interest to explore these texts for our praxis.

While reading these texts, I was naturally drawn to certain passages. At times, I felt like the stories were mine. At other times, they felt like the stories of all of us—those of us who have been colonized, decolonized, those who long to explore the world, to connect with our cultures, to find ourselves. The way I selected passages emerged organically. It aligned closely with Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork, especially her principle of holism. I experienced the stories as part of a larger, interconnected whole.

In asking what the story does, my line of thinking engaged with the story's emotional context of how some experiences in life shape an individual's state of calming self. How a biological requirement of a body to sleep is hampered or altered due to our spectrum of extreme emotions. How similar all our experiences are: me as an immigrant myself, Indigenous peoples, and our international students; each one of us carrying our unique stories yet shared varied experiences. That resonated deeply with me, as I am very emotional. It reminded me how all of us are together—how we all carry stories, and, sometimes, how we all struggle to sleep in our stories.

In considering what the story calls me to carry, hold, and attend to, engaging with the story's relational context, it made me repeat the idea that nothing exists in isolation. There is an understanding that as humans we are all interconnected, irrespective of any borders that may humanly separate us; the Indigenous voices, my experiences, my colleague's/co-author's experiences, and our students' experiences are all connected in some way or another. We are holism. Our existence is an understanding of being in relational context with each other. As I reflected on who I was in relation to the story, I found myself wondering how my own disturbed sleep connects me to others who also lie awake, just staring up at the sky in a similar situation.

Source Passage Three

At first, I have trouble falling asleep. I toss and turn on the blow-up mattress, now somewhat deflated from a couple of days' use. I turn on a podcast on my phone, but the voices grate in my ears until I turn it off. Finally, I stop trying to force myself into sleep and just lie there. I look out at the stars from my mattress and think about Sabrina skipping across the sky.

Jessica Johns
Bad Cree: A Novel

Fig. 3: Direct excerpt from Johns, 2023, formatted to mirror the printed activity materials used during the workshop.

Engaging with these words, emotions, and experiences, I wanted to create a more action-oriented, ethical, and responsible synergy with the ecosystem. Therefore, we carried these passages to our workshops, where the students connected with the Indigenous voices while finding their own voices. These passages carried forward the Indigenous voices, knowledges, cultures, echoes across generations, and my vicarious experiences. When taken to the classroom these passages blended the Indigenous identities, my identity, and mirrored the consideration of Indigenous founding (Worrell, 2024).

Source Passage Four

Your story is the one thing in life that is truly yours. Story is what red-rovers us to one another, spirit to spirit. Everything has a little bit of story in it, even the changing weather and birdsong, even big team battles and trampoline sessions. Story is what happens when we fall in the thrall of the Play-Doh of it all and feverishly reach for life. Story is what transforms us through the lush valleys of becoming, rolling around in the gutters of raw, pure energy. The afterimage of good living. Story happens when you spear the future tense and embrace yourself for the robot invasions, increasing temperatures, and troll-filled dungeons that the Creator will task you with surmounting, on the roadside trails that open your skin, in the gardens you mend, around fires that spider your hot dogs, in your video game and movie marathons.

Cody Caetano
Half-Bads in White Regalia: A Memoir

Fig. 4: Direct excerpt from Caetano, 2022, formatted to mirror the printed activity materials used during the workshop.

Learning via Storyworks

Reflecting further on what this practitioner inquiry may offer other settler educators or allied scholars, two central learnings have emerged. We agree with Archibald's (2008) idea that the story and the process of storywork can become the teacher. Indeed, it is from this orientation that we developed our guiding questions. These questions emerged from the principles and served as a way for us, as settlers, to make sense of and work with them in ways meaningful to us.

What we had initially viewed as a preparatory step—the process of source selection—became a significant site of learning. It shaped how we understood our responsibilities in the project, how we approached ethical relationality in our pedagogy, and how we felt ready to invite students to create decolonial erasure poetry.

Learning 1

To detail our first learning, we return to the challenges detailed in the "Reading Together and Encountering Challenges" section. We had set out to read together, identify resonant moments for decolonial learnings, and co-select passages. The process was organized, intentional, and slow, but after several sessions, we had chosen only one passage. What we were doing did not feel right. As Coyle (2023) also describes, erasure poetry can replicate hierarchical reading practices when sources are shaped to meet external aims without attending to where the story comes from and what it carries.

Returning to Indigenous Storywork, we recognized that our process had begun to treat sources as material for shaping later teaching, rather than recognizing them as already "living" and "being" teaching and learning (Archibald, 2008). As Popp (2018) shows, texts teachers select—and how they frame them—shape students' epistemological access to the discipline. Still, we had assumed we needed to make that connection explicit when this was unnecessary. Said in the context of our inquiry, the erasure poems begin long before the first word is blacked out. Decolonial work already exists within Indigenous histories that birth contemporary stories. The ethical relationality of the praxis was not bounded by our decisions of what to include and how learners might make meanings. Each passages could be synergistically taken up as an opening for reflection and holistic connection.

With this recognition, the pressure eased. Our task shifted to finding passages that captured our attention and letting them teach. This was supported by returning to the questions we had developed, which helped us stay with what the stories were doing and how we were positioned in relation to them. We are not teaching decolonization and Indigenization through the praxis; we are decolonizing to enable Indigenization to happen.

This realization also deepened an earlier decision. We were engaged with sources that extended beyond the limits of "text" and into story. Although the literature distinguishes this, we had not dwelled on its significance. Through the process, we came to understand why it matters. Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) write that decolonial research requires rethinking "how we come to know, whose knowledges are recognized, and how we are implicated in their use" (p. 3). Indeed, Indigenous stories require a different

orientation. They are authored, situated, and often rooted in lived experience, Land, and memory. In using the term "source" as settler educators to name these stories, we are connotating something grounding and something teaching. A source Indigenous story need not be conceptualized as a product tailored for our uptake and use; it is an offering for many meanings to be made.

Learning 2

Our second learning developed alongside the first: our own stories matter. At the beginning, we thought staying in the background would show respect. We thought that minimizing our presence would demonstrate respect and protect the integrity of the Indigenous stories we were working with. We have seen many a settler (normally white) discuss their settler history, views, and identities at length in efforts to decolonize, in ways that overtake and fill learning spaces to the edge. But as Archibald (2008) states, "the story cannot be separated from the storyteller, the listener, or the context; all are part of the storywork" (p. 15). Our histories, perspectives, and meanings were already shaping how we approached the sources, which passage we found suitable, and how we talked about their relevance. Returning to the questions—particularly in asking who we are in relation to the story—made this shaping more visible to us. Bringing our narratives into the process via Indigenous Storywork principles allowed us to acknowledge our roles, take responsibility for their effects, and engage in reciprocity.

Naming our presence also helped us remain accountable to the ethical relationality guiding our praxis. As Kerr and Adamov Ferguson (2021) explain, engaging stories requires "being present to the way story reaches us, affects us" (p. 94). Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) further note that critical reflexivity must extend to "the web of relationships that enable and constrain research" (p. 4). Speaking from our own stories made those relationships visible and allowed us to work more transparently. This also then carried into how we engaged passages pedagogically, inviting learners to consider their own place within these relations.

Listening, in this sense, required more than hearing the words on the page. As Archibald (2008) explains, "listening to stories involves more than hearing words; it requires taking up responsibilities that flow from what the story teaches" (p. 23). We realized that sharing our own stories where they fit was not a distraction from respect, but part of what the stories were asking of us.

Taken together, these two learnings—about the stories as already living pedagogy and about storying our own presence in praxis—reshaped how we, as settler educators, understood source selection. As settler educators, we focused on creating a space where we could rethink what we know and envision what could be (Calderón, 2024). The stories and passages have pointed us toward ideas, feelings, and not-yet-materialized moments that are still calling us to stay longer, to return, or to begin again. We carry forward the understanding that not all meanings have yet arrived, and there may be conversations about more sleepless nights.

Conclusion

Indigenous Storywork is, as Archibald (2008) reminds us, “a decolonial methodology” that reclaims voice, honors relationships, and affirms the knowledge systems that colonialism has sought to erase (p. 371). In this project, what first appeared as a preparatory step became a site of teaching in itself. Guided holistically by Indigenous Storywork, through this reflexive practitioner inquiry, we came to understand the sources as already-living pedagogy, carrying teachings and responsibilities shaping how we engaged.

Our learnings align with Archibald’s (2008) reminder that both the stories and the processing of those stories matter. This also echoes Donald’s (2016) framing of ethical relationality, which calls us into pedagogical encounters grounded in trust, reciprocity, and respect. Taken together, these teachings shifted our role as settler educators. Our task was not to frame the stories into pedagogical use, but to remain present with them through story, accountable to what they asked of us, and open to the ways they shaped our relations with students and with each other. As Archibald (2008) writes, “the power of storywork to make meaning derives from a synergy between the story, the context in which the story is used, the way that the story is told, and how one listens to the story” (p. 84). We offer this account as one example of how storywork can guide teaching, reminding us the many ways Indigenizing curricula requires ongoing commitment.

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