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"Your Dissecting Judgment Doesn't Hurt Me as Much as My Own"

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heritage as “mixed” because her family incorporates traditional ancestral beliefs along with mainstream Christian practices. After trying to discover herself at an American university, she comes to the conclusion that “those of us who are Indian understand that it is the telling of stories, our very breath, that brings forth tribal identity and defines purpose. Our oral tradition, which is both ceremonially sacred and ritualized through the

connect with other tribal members and people outside of their tribe. Fools Crow bonds with his tribe over stories because he becomes acquainted with older tribal members by hearing and eventually telling stories to the youth in hopes of inspiring them. Despite the copious examples of storytelling between tribal members, the characters within Welch’s narrative do not generally tell their stories to people outside of the tribe. Instead,

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use of language, is also living thought.”¹⁷ She describes stories as living entities that help American Indians retain their past culture in a present-day setting. Similarly, Lee Francis believes that the identities of American Indians are “inextricable, interwoven in the stories they were told. For Native People, story was and continues to be essential to an individual’s identity construction and development.”¹⁸ American Indians can literally reclaim their identity through storytelling. Contrary to Lucci-Cooper and Francis, another American Indian author Gerald Vizenor does not believe stories merely define a person, but that “the real world exists in stories,” and that the act of storytelling liberates the mind through these language games.¹⁹ Stories not only define American Indians by the role they play in the storytelling process—as shown through Fools Crow’s maturation and name changing—but stories actually create a world where American Indians can experience their traditions and

Welch himself acts as the character who shares a part of himself and his culture with his readers by introducing his audience to the life of a Blackfeet in 1870. Since the majority of his audience probably identifies themselves with mainstream culture, Welch shares the past of his people, the Blackfeet, with outsiders. He provides his readers with a detailed description of ceremonial events like the Sun Dance, incorporates elements of trickster discourse through Fools Crow’s interaction with Raven, and examines the painful history of the Blackfeet characterized by war, disease, and infractions within the tribe. More specifically, Welch bases the ending of *Fools Crow* on the historical event of the Marias River Massacre in the winter of 1870, where a small group of renegades targeted women and children, killing a total of 173 Blackfeet in hopes of halting the white settler’s raiding. Welch heard about this tragic event through the stories of tribal members, but on a more personal level, he learned about

the massacre from his father, whose mother survived the event and told her son about it.²⁰ The tales of his tribe’s history were verbally passed down through his family, and he shares these personal, meaningful stories with his audience through the characters and events in *Fools Crow*. By presenting society with his story of *Fools Crow*, Welch gives his readers a part of himself through the creative spirit in his writing of the story, but more importantly, his gift invites his readers to experience the personal, heart wrenching past of his tribe that lives in his story.

Conclusion

Looking back on the gift of Fish sticks, I still struggle to understand Shorty’s gift, but I do realize that the tangible gift of sticks pales in comparison to his gift of stories involving the sticks and the cultural practices surrounding the Fish games. Shorty accepted us into his culture, even if it was just for that night, but now we must reciprocate. We must pass his story, our new story, onto others; we must continue the tradition.

we came as just a group of white college kids who hid from one another on campus, nearly touching shoulders as we passed by, too busy texting on our cell phones and listening to our iPods. always looking down as we pass, avoiding conversation, interaction. adopting avoidance out of fear of our differences, even though we all look and act the same. cultured to rush, to ignore.

we left as just some white kids. the same white kids, yet transformed by friendship. we try to understand, are learning to understand our story, and how our story intertwines with others. others who trust us, open their arms, open their culture. we accept hesitantly. in sincerest awkwardness, we honor them, him. the drumming begins again, not calling us home. we are not indian. we are just white kids drumming out the rhythm of our steps, hoping to share our story, give you our story. this was our story.

ARTWORK



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