

## **Activism as an Incentive to Read: Resistance Role Models in Indigenous Middle Grade and YA Fiction**

During the summer of 2016, students at a public high school on the Tohono O'odham reservation struggled to comprehend the events occurring on their land, in Indian country in general, and in the United States as a whole. The July injunction to stop construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline and the growing protests on the Standing Rock Sioux reservation were calls to action for a group of Tohono O'odham teens. Standing Rock and the fight for water justice helped to surface thoughts and emotions that were dormant or not yet developed in these young adults. Additionally, rhetoric surrounding the building of the border wall between Mexico and the United States (especially on tribal land), together with the 2016 presidential campaigns, excited a desire to fight against injustice and oppression. Reading Indigenous fiction for youth was a form of personal and intellectual activism for students, and a catalyst for real world action.

With a focus on Young Adult literature written by Indigenous Authors, we began our practice of reading, writing, and discussing. The backdrop of Indigenous resistance in students' lives shaped the readings. Novels became manuals of resistance, inspiring the understanding that Indigenous youth do not have to accept oppression without taking action against it.

*Footsteps of Crazy Horse* by Joseph Marshall III, *The Lesser Blessed* by Richard Van Camp, Tim Tingle's *How I Became a Ghost*, *Killer of Enemies* by Joseph Bruchac, *Crazy Horse's Girlfriend* by Erica Wurth, and *If I Ever Get Out of Here* by Eric Gansworth were some of the YA and middle grade novels students were reading. Additionally, *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich was a vital part of this text set of resistance. Although the novel was published as an adult novel, the adolescent narrator makes it a novel that is on the cusp of YA literature.

In this presentation, I will highlight the forms of resistance taking place in each novel, bring the absolute necessity of culturally relevant literature for Indigenous youth into the discussion, and make connections between fiction and action in the lives of young readers.