

## Indigenous Youth Self-Representation at Standing Rock and Beyond

As scholars of children's literature, we recognize that, in contrast to other sub-fields of literary studies, we define the body of literature we study by audience rather than authorship. And because we are, for the most part, *not* studying texts by child or adolescent authors, we have given significant attention—at the lead of Mike Cadden, Roberta Trites, and others—to the unequal power dynamics at play between adult authors, young readers, and ourselves. Yet, sometimes it *is* time to engage texts by youth creators themselves. While I have spent several years studying children's and young adult literature by Native American and Canadian Aboriginal authors, this presentation represents my first substantive turn toward texts not just by Indigenous authors but by Indigenous children and young adults themselves. Arguably the most vulnerable demographic in North America, Indigenous youth are particularly subject to repressive power dynamics in the literary world and beyond. It is therefore particularly important that we listen to their voices. In keeping with the conference theme, the majority of this presentation focuses on the youth water protectors at Standing Rock. I examine video footage, images, social media texts, poetry, and music by children and adolescents who are enrolled members of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe as well as by members of the International Indigenous Youth Council. These two groups began the Water is Life movement at Standing Rock, drew international attention to the movement, and—more than any other groups involved—consistently (re)directed the movement to remain grounded in its peaceful, prayerful origins. I analyze the ways these young people represent themselves in relation to water, land, prayer, inspirational historic figures, intergenerational trauma, and intersections among environmental degradation and other forms of oppression. I argue that their self-representations reflect specific understandings of childhood and adolescence rooted in Oceti Sakowin as well as intertribal traditions. And I highlight challenges these representations and understandings pose to dominant notions about childhood, adolescence, Indigeneity, and the relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world. Finally, I challenge all of us to extend this methodology, to pay more attention to Indigenous youth voices not just at Standing Rock but also in Texas and everywhere else on Turtle Island.