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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The University of Wisconsin–Madison occupies ancestral Ho-Chunk land, a place their nation has called Teejop (day-JOPE) since time immemorial.

In an 1832 treaty, the Ho-Chunk were forced to cede this territory.

Decades of ethnic cleansing followed when both the federal and state government repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, sought to forcibly remove the Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin.

This history of colonization informs our shared future of collaboration and innovation.

Today, UW–Madison respects the inherent sovereignty of the Ho-Chunk Nation, along with the eleven other First Nations of Wisconsin.
INTRODUCTION

Reading Across Time and Place

_There There_ is a work of fiction. While a novel can help us to teach culture, history, politics, and so on, no single piece of literature can bear the burden of representing an entire nation, culture, or people. As Tommy Orange makes clear through the twelve different “Urban Indian” perspectives that comprise _There There_, Native Americans are not a monolith. In the area now known as the United States, there exist 574 federally recognized Native tribes (and many more unrecognized tribes), with differing languages, traditions, religious and spiritual beliefs, and ways of life. While we hope that you and your students will enjoy the text’s ability to speak across both time and place, we also encourage you to consider the sociohistorical and cultural conditions that make these characters’ experiences and perspectives unique. Certain sections of the teaching guide, such as Units 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, will be especially helpful in this context.

How to Use This Guide

The material in this guide is intended to provide a variety of approaches for teaching Tommy Orange’s novel and its many contexts. We believe that the historical and cultural background is necessary for understanding this work and the questions it provokes. We also encourage you to teach the text thematically, tying it to related disciplinary issues and regular features of your core curriculum wherever possible.

Recommended Readings

The recommended readings in the guide are intended for teachers, but some are also accessible to students. These readings provide further information for instructors as well as a variety of materials that might aid instructors in creating handouts and supplementing class discussion.

Discussion Topics, Assignments, & Activities

The discussion topics, assignments, and activities provided in this guide are designed to be tailored to the way you teach the text in your own course, as well as your particular time constraints, interests, and goals. The individual units might be taught over one or several days, or over the course of a few weeks. You can mix and match ideas from the various sections to create your own syllabus. Each unit is organized according to themes that include points for lecture and discussion, suggestions for close reading, specific quotes from the text or other readings, as well as in-class activities and assignments that might be used to further discussion.
Close Reading Strategies

The guide assumes that you will have read the entire text, but all units also offer suggestions for specific passages within the text that would benefit from careful and attentive reading, analysis and discussion. During class discussion and for assignments, students should be encouraged to support their interpretations with evidence from the text. Close reading lends itself well to both large-group work and small-group discussions, and it is an excellent way for students to develop their critical thinking skills as they make connections, use textual evidence to support their views, and discuss the impact of various literary techniques.

For close reading to work successfully, it’s important that the teacher always remind the students to point to the passage, line, or occurrence that supports their position when they’re sharing their ideas. Close reading teaches students the difference between “opinion” or “personal reaction” and “analysis.” It also allows students to assess the text on its own merits without essentializing the cultural components of the text or stereotyping based on generalizations.

A Note on Terminology

This guide employs a variety of terms to reference the sovereign peoples who have inhabited this continent from time immemorial. This might be confusing for students who are unfamiliar with these terms, and we encourage educators to briefly describe them.

**Indigenous peoples**: This is an inclusive term that refers to any sovereign peoples inhabiting a place before colonialization. It can be used to refer to Indigenous peoples anywhere in the world, so it often helpful to be specific (e.g., the Indigenous peoples of the US; the Indigenous peoples of Canada, etc.). Because this guide is limited to the US context, the terms “Indigenous” and “Indigenous peoples” are often used to refer to peoples living in the territory now known as the US.

**Native American**: This is perhaps the most familiar term to refer to the sovereign peoples who have inhabited this continent since long before European colonization. Some people do not like this term because it ties Native identity too closely to the US nation state. Still, it is widely accepted and often used in both this guide and the sources this guide recommends. That said, it is important for students to remember that this umbrella term does not describe a monolithic people; it a single term that groups together hundreds of distinct tribal nations and cultures.

**American Indian**: In U.S. law “American Indian” refers generally to the Indigenous peoples living on the continent at the time of European colonization. For many people, the word “Indian” puts too much focus on the painful legacy of colonization, as it was originally popularized by Christopher Columbus and his mistaken belief that he had
reached the shores of South Asia. It is an important legal term, however, and it appears often throughout this guide when referring to US government policies, laws, and acts.

Tips:
- Students should feel free to use the term in the source itself (“Urban Indians,” if discussing Tommy Orange’s characters, for example).
- When in doubt, *non-Indigenous students* should be encouraged to choose the most respectful term (for example: Indigenous peoples or Native American peoples rather than “Indians”).
- Whenever possible and relevant, it is best to use specific tribe names. This will help to remind students that each of the terms above refers not to a single group but to many diverse and heterogenous peoples.

**Addressing Violence in the Novel**

Teaching *There There* promises to be an enriching and exciting experience. Given the sensitive nature of the topics the book addresses, however, it is important to proceed with care.

In the interest of supporting trauma-informed teaching, we begin many sections of this guide with content warnings that alert you to topics—such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, gun violence, and suicide—that some students could find triggering and/or difficult to navigate without prior preparation. Non-Indigenous educators should be aware that Indigenous students might find it difficult to address these potentially triggering topics in the classroom environment. *Indigenous students should never be called upon to speak as representative of all Indigenous peoples, nor should they be singled out to share their experiences or to compare their experiences with those fictionalized in the novel.*

Non-Indigenous students might be troubled by the novel’s description of genocide and the ongoing harms of settler colonialism, Indigenous erasure, and racism. Unit 1 offers tools to help decenter settler guilt and defensiveness as students engage with the book. If educators find that non-Indigenous students are struggling to make sense of narratives that do not center settler histories (or chafe against histories that might conflict with familiar narratives), it will be useful to direct student attention back to primary sources under discussion and/or to direct attention back to the text of *There There*.

Although the novel unflinchingly depicts the harsh realities that many Native communities face today, it is important to contextualize these complicated issues within a long history of settler colonialism and dispossession. Such context will help to avoid
reliance on—and perpetuation of—damaging stereotypes. Unit 3 and Unit 5 will be especially helpful in this regard, as will Units 1, 2, and 4.

Teaching Toward the Student Conference

Schools participating in the 2022-2023 program will bring students to the University of Wisconsin-Madison on Monday, April 24, 2023 to present their work to their peers and meet the author Tommy Orange in person.

Unit 8 in this guide is explicitly devoted to preparing students for a successful conference by encouraging them to challenge themselves with projects that provide critical interpretations of the text in unique and complex ways. There is no limit to the type of project they might prepare. Past projects have included essays, painting, sculpture, weaving, photography, film and other multimedia, dramatic performances, song, dance, and more. The only requirement is that the students’ projects must present a critical analysis of the text.

Students will be required to write a short summary of their projects, which will be submitted to Danielle Weindling (weindling@wisc.edu) approximately three weeks before the student conference. Each school will select one student, or group of students, whose work is exemplary, to present to the entire conference. It’s recommended that the students themselves select (by voting) the “best” project for this presentation, which will be about 3 minutes in length.

It is our expectation that these presentations will be polished, rehearsed, and timed, and that they will provide an opportunity for your school to feel pride and investment in its participation in the program. All other students are expected to present their work in poster sessions during the conference and will have the opportunity to stand next to their projects and answer questions about them from other students and conference participants. Every student who attends the conference should present their work at the conference.

A Note on Embedded Links:

You may notice throughout this guide that recommended readings and other sources contain embedded links. These links are available in the digital version of this guide, which can be found on the UW Madison Center for the Humanities webpage [humanities.wisc.edu].
UNIT 1. UNSETTLING SETTLER HISTORIES

ABOUT THIS UNIT

This unit is designed to support introductory class discussions about settler colonialism in the United States, using the Prologue of *There There* as a touchstone. Unit 1 is meant to serve as entry into key concepts that might be challenging or difficult for students—not intellectually difficult, per se, but difficult in that they might chafe uncomfortably against existing beliefs and assumptions that students (particularly non-Native students) may bring into the classroom. Because mainstream culture in the US tends to privilege Euro-centric and settler-centric narratives, we encourage teachers to spend time working through the first of the three subsections in this unit, “What is Settler Colonialism?” “What is Settler Colonialism?” aims to define settler colonialism as an ongoing social and political structure premised on “the elimination of the native” (to borrow Patrick Wolfe’s formulation) and to familiarize students with brief historical context that will enrich their understanding of *There There*. While many of the threads introduced in this first subsection will reappear with more nuance in later units, “What is Settler Colonialism?” hopes to set the stage in an accessible way that neither white-washes violence, nor traffics in the problematic presentation of Native American peoples as passive victims or relics of an American past.

The following two subsections take on different facets of the Prologue. “Unlearning Native American Stereotypes” addresses popular stereotypes of Native American and Indigenous peoples in US media and culture, the harmful practice of using Native mascots in schools, and the relationship Tommy Orange draws between historical acts of genocide and seemingly innocent circulation of Native stereotypes. “Contesting Settler Histories” focuses on the concept of master narratives and counter narratives. This unit encourages self-reflection and metacognition, unpacking Orange’s Thanksgiving counter narrative (p. 4) that challenges distorted histories popular in US culture and often perpetuated in US educational systems. These two subsections can be taught in succession. Teachers might also choose to select just one subsection to follow “What is Settler Colonialism?” All three subsections are interspersed with sample close reading exercises, discussion questions, and class assignments.

PREPARATORY AND RECOMMENDED READINGS


- Davis-Delano, Laurel R., Joseph P. Gone & Stephanie A. Fryberg. “The psychosocial effects of Native American mascots: a comprehensive review of
empirical research findings, Race Ethnicity and Education.” *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 2020.


**PRIMARY SOURCES**

- Code of Indian Offenses, 1883.
- Governor Peter Burnett. State of the State Address, 6 Jan. 1851.
- Indian Appropriations Act, 3 March 1871.
- Indian Head Test Pattern image.

**OPENING ACTIVITY**

- Whose Land Do You Live On?
  Alternatively, teachers and students might use the Native Land website as an in-class exercise (see here). By inputting the address of the school and choosing the relevant filters, this map can be used to begin research into local Indigenous territories, languages, and treaties. We encourage teachers to show the map with both the “settler labels” and without them, and to invite students to reflect on the experience of navigating the Native Land map: What do they know, if anything,
about the tribes whose land their school occupies? Where could they go to learn more? What feelings emerge when they navigate the map? And, what questions arise? The goal here is to not only get to know the histories of the land the students occupy, but also to honor the present and future of Indigenous communities while taking stock of one’s own relationship to settler colonialism. Additional activities can be found here.

WHAT IS SETTLER COLONIALISM?

Settler colonialism is a particular form of colonialism in which the colonizers come to stay—to replace the original inhabitants. Settlers seize land and resources, impose their own cultural values, religions, and laws, and aim to “destroy and disappear the Indigenous peoples that live there” (Tuck and Yang, 5-6) to claim the place as their own. On Turtle Island (the areas known now as the United States and Canada), settler colonialism is not a story about our distant past. It is an ongoing political relationship. In the words of Patrick Wolfe, settler colonialism is a “structure, not an event.” As a structure it requires “the elimination of the native”: the removal and erasure of Indigenous peoples, political systems, cultures, and ways of life that pre-exist the arrival of settlers.

As a settler colonial nation, the United States of America rests on a foundation of Native elimination. The members of the Continental Congress who declared US independence from British colonial rule saw no contradiction in arguing that “all Men are created equal” and describing Indigenous peoples as dehumanized outsiders—“merciless Indian savages”—whose continued existence threatened the nascent state. By 1776, the Anglo-European colonizers of the so-called “New World” had already been physically, culturally, and imaginatively dismantling Native sovereignty and Native ways of life for centuries.

Tommy Orange begins There There with a Prologue that draws attention to a variety of ways that settler colonialism in the US has worked—and still works—toward Native erasure and elimination, including, but not limited to, genocide and cultural genocide. Before defining these terms and offering brief illustrative examples, it is necessary to note that these histories can be difficult to study. We especially encourage non-Native teachers to tread with both care and forthrightness as they prepare to teach There There; non-Native students may experience defensiveness, guilt, and the impulse to disengage, while Native students may experience the repetition of historical and ongoing traumas as harm. We want to emphasize the importance of balancing any discussion of anti-Indigenous violence with discussions of Indigenous survivance, which Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor defines as “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name” (see Acts of Survivance).
Against white settler stories that either erase Native people as relics of a lost past or contain them as passive victims of tragedy, survivance focuses not just on survival but on acts of resistance, adaptation, and ongoing presence, like those Orange describes in “Hard, Fast” (pp. 8-10). For a more nuanced consideration of survivance (and how survivance differs from resilience, which is a framework that Orange rejects) see Unit 5. While the terms below will provide invaluable introductory context for understanding both the novel and settler colonialism in the historical and contemporary US, it is important to continually assert that the project of Native elimination they describe is neither complete nor inevitable.

**Genocide** is the systematic destruction of peoples through acts committed with the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group” (See the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention). Genocide can take many forms, from murder to starvation, forced sterilization, and other acts that aim to destroy the future lives and lifeways of a particular group. To be clear, Native peoples do not belong to a single, undifferentiated “national, ethnic, racial, or religious” group. Before colonists arrived, millions of Indigenous peoples belonging to hundreds of different tribes with distinct cultures and religions, languages and dialects, traditions, and political systems. These wide-ranging tribes had been living on the North American continent for thousands of years. Because the Anglo-European settler colonial project has aimed to eliminate and replace all Native presence, genocide is an important term to describe one aspect of this process.

US history is filled with genocidal campaigns to eliminate Native and Indigenous peoples. The British colonial military (before US independence) and then the U.S. Armed Forces (after independence) carried out several massacres in Native communities, targeting not only warriors but also the elderly, women, and children at home, in camps, and in villages. As Colonel John Chivington said to the soldiers in his army, “kill ‘em all...nits make lice”; comparing the Cheyenne and Arapaho to lice who would continue to “infest” territory that white settlers claimed for themselves in Colorado. He instructed the army to murder women, infants, and children to eradicate future generations (see *There There*, p. 8).

Killings were carried out by military forces as well as everyday settlers and civilian militias whose actions were both legal and rewarded under US law. In the 1700s, white settlers in what is now known as New England were paid a government-backed “bounty” to hunt, kill, and scalp Native people (see the film *Bounty*, produced by members of Maine’s Penobscot Nation). During King Philip’s War (1675-1675)—when the Wampanoag, Nipmuck, Pocumtuck, and Narraganset joined forces under Wampanoag chief Metacomet (known to colonists as King Philip) to drive out the colonial forces and to reclaim sovereignty over their lands—the going rate for “the head of Indian” was thirty shillings (see *There There*, pp. 4-5). Similar rewards were offered in the mid-nineteenth century to eradicate Native presence on the Western frontier. Peter
Hardenman Burnett, the first governor of California, set aside government money to fund and arm local militias of civilians who were paid to kill Natives in what he called “a war of extermination... waged between the races until the Indian race becomes extinct.” In the 1860s, the territorial Governor of Colorado, John Evans, invited Coloradans to “go out in pursuit, kill and destroy all hostile Indians that infest the Plains.”

In the Prologue to *There There*, Orange draws particular attention to two massacres that took place over two hundred years apart. The Prologue, like this unit, is not meant to offer a complete account of mass killings but to point out a structural pattern that provides context for understanding genocide as one aspect of Native elimination.

First, the narrator describes the destruction and burning of a Pequot village in Mystic, Connecticut in 1637, as hundreds of Pequot people gathered for an annual Green Corn Dance festival. An army of English Puritans (and members of the Mohegan tribe, which had allied with the English) descended upon the fortified village early in the morning, setting fire to the village and shooting everyone who tried to escape the conflagration; the Mohegans present were reportedly horrified by the extraordinary violence of the attack. When news spread that a group of English Puritans in Connecticut had destroyed the Pequot stronghold, the governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony declared a day of prayer and thanksgiving to celebrate the victory over the “savages” (see here for an accessible and thorough account). As Orange writes, thanksgivings happened often in the colonies, particularly in times of war between colonists and Indigenous tribes and “whenever there were ‘successful massacres’” (p. 5). Orange draws attention not only to the violence of war but also to the morbid festivities that came in the wake of Indigenous death: “At one such celebration in Manhattan,” he writes, “people were said to have kicked the heads of Pequot people through the street like soccer balls” (p. 5).

While the Sand Creek Massacre took place in Colorado centuries later, in 1864, it followed a disturbing similar pattern. Amid mounting hostilities, the territorial Governor John Evans, instructed “friendly” tribes to report to the nearest Indian Agent and promised sanctuary for those who did. Eager for peace and trusting the promise of safety, Black Kettle, White Antelope, and some thirty other Cheyenne and Arapaho chiefs brought their people to Fort Lyon and were told to camp forty miles away near Sand Creek. Without warning or provocation, a 700-man cavalry brigade from the Union Army led by U.S. Army Colonel John Chivington stormed the camp in the early hours of November 29, 1864, ignoring both the American flag and the white flag of surrender the chiefs flew. The encampment was largely undefended, and soldiers murdered the elders, women, children, and infants they found with shocking brutality; the soldiers desecrated their corpses, and brought the severed heads, limbs, and other body parts of the women home as prizes.

Orange’s narrator does not shy away from describing the horror of the scene: “Chivington danced with dismembered parts of us in hands, with women’s pubic hair, he
danced, and the crowd gathered there before him was all the worse for cheering and laughing along with him” (p. 8). While Chivington was officially condemned at the time and forced to resign from his post, Orange makes it clear that this massacre should not be mistaken for a single extraordinary event carried out by rogue actors. As Ned Blackhawk writes in “Remember the Sand Creek Massacre,” “Sand Creek was just one part of a campaign to take the Cheyenne’s once vast land holdings across the region. A territory that had hardly any white communities in 1850 had, by 1870, lost many Indians, who were pushed violently off the Great Plains by white settlers and the federal government.” The events at Sand Creek were part and parcel of a much larger pattern—a structure—of Indigenous elimination that is at the heart of the settler colonial project.

Cultural genocide is a set of practices that aim to eliminate Native and Indigenous practices, traditions, languages, and ways of life. Cultural genocide has also been a hallmark of settler colonialism in the US and takes many forms, only some of which are briefly outlined here.

- **The Indian Removal Act** was signed into law by President Andrew Jackson on May 28, 1830. Five tribes were removed from their lands in the Southeast of the US (now called Georgia, Florida, and Mississippi) and relocated to an area that was set aside as “Indian Territory” in what is now Oklahoma. The Removal Act used Congress’s power to steal Native territory and ancestral homelands to “free” the Southeast for settlers to build homesteads, farms, and plantations. Although many tribes lost their homes and ancestral lands to this Act, it is largely associated with the “Trail of Tears”: the violent removal of Cherokee people who resisted removal and the forced march west during which approximately 4000 Cherokee people died. A map spatializing the Removal Act is available at National Geographic. This act was part of longer—and much more extensive—policy of removal that also impacted the Great Lakes Region, including Wisconsin. For more information, we encourage teachers to consult the resources available at Wisconsin First Nations: American Indian Studies in Wisconsin.

In the nineteenth century, with the arrival of American settlers and lawmakers in the area of Wisconsin, conditions worsened for Ojibwe and other Wisconsin tribes. Government representatives forced eastern tribes like the Menominee to declare the borders of their lands and to cede territory in 1827 and 1831. In 1825 US government officials invited Ojibwe, Dakota, and other Native groups to Prairie du Chien for a meeting in which they, too, were obliged to declare their borders and begin negotiations for ceding territory. The 1830 Indian Removal Act signed by President Andrew Jackson declared that all Indians must be removed to areas west of the Mississippi River, with the Chocktaw and Cherokee subjected to deportation already in 1831. In 1832, the Black Hawk War aimed to destroy Native resistance in southern Wisconsin and
forcefully remove these peoples to Iowa. The Potawatomi of Illinois were removed to Kansas in 1833. By 1890, some thirty nations had been removed to Oklahoma Territory. Present-day Wisconsin tribes arrived in Wisconsin as a product of removal and relocation processes: Oneida, Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, and Brothertown. For more information, we encourage teachers to consult the resources available at Wisconsin First Nations: American Indian Studies in Wisconsin.

In the coercive negotiations that aimed to secure lands for white settlement, Ojibwe were forced to cede lands in 1837 and 1843. Ho-Chunk people were removed to Nebraska in 1874 but repeatedly returned to Wisconsin, until eventually, in 1881, the government allotted them scattered forty-acre homesteads in the state. While surrendering ownership of vast tracts of lands in northern Wisconsin, Ojibwe bands reserved the right to continue to fish, hunt, and gather on ceded territory, a guarantee that was again stated in the 1854 Treaty of La Pointe.

- Not long after, The Indian Appropriations Act of 1851 relocated many tribes onto even smaller parcels of land in “Indian Territory” called reservations. Although tribes were still officially considered separate nations from the US, the US government controlled—and severely restricted—the tribes’ abilities to fish, hunt, and gather traditional foods on reservations. Twenty years later, Congress passed the Indian Appropriation Act (1871), which declared that “hereafter no Indian nation or tribe within the territory of the United States shall be acknowledge or recognized as an independent nation, tribe, or power with whom the United States may contract by treaty,” and set in motion a century of policies that stripped away tribal rights to sovereign self-governance. In 1883, the US government passed a law prohibiting Native American peoples from practicing religious ceremonies, participating in what the Office of Indian Offenses called “the old heathenish dances,” and holding intertribal powwow gatherings. Settlers hoped that outlawing the spiritual, religious, and cultural practices of Native Americans people would mean they would slowly die out. See Unit 5 for more information about the Code of Indian Offenses.

- Established in the 1880s both on and off reservations, residential schools (also known as Indian boarding schools) had one primary motive: to “civilize” Native children by assimilating them into Anglo-European culture, values, and belief systems. Native children were often forcibly removed from their families and made to abandon all tribal and cultural signifiers, taking on Christian names, cutting their hair, speaking only English, and replace their spiritual practices with the Christian religion. In the words of Richard Henry Pratt, the US Army official who ran the first off-reservation residential school, the Carlisle Indian School, the goal was to “kill the Indian, save the man.”
• **The Indian Relocation Act of 1956** aimed to assimilate Native peoples into mainstream US settler culture. The Bureau of Indian Affairs promised economic incentives such as vocational training, transportation, and moving expense stipends to people who were willing to leave reservations and to move to certain government-designated urban areas. Once settled into the city, they were expected to become “productive” members of the US society, leaving their Native identities, traditions, and ways of life behind on the reservation. The Relocation Act was part of the **Indian Termination Policy**, a set of US government policies in the mid-twentieth century that encouraged Native peoples to assimilate. As Orange writes, it “was and is exactly what it sounds like,” a mechanism to make Native people “look and act like us [white people]. Become us. And so disappear” (p. 9). But Natives cultures did not disappear, despite the government’s best efforts. In Orange’s words: “we did not move to the cities to die” (p. 11). See **Units 2 and 3 for more on the Relocation Act.**

**Suggested Questions for Discussion:**

1. Why do you think Orange opens this Prologue by invoking a seemingly-innocent “Indian head” that was such a common sight on American TV screens? Look carefully at the image and then re-read the description on the first page. How does Orange show his readers that this image is not as innocent as it might appear? How does it set the stage for the rest of the chapter?

2. With the definition of settler colonialism—an attempt at elimination—in mind, Why do you think that the “Indian head” remains such a popular image in US culture?

**Suggested Close Reading Exercises:**

1. Analyze the similes in the following line: “The Indian head in the jar, the Indian head on the spike were like the flags flown, to be seen, cast broadly. Just like the
Indian Head test pattern was broadcast to sleeping Americans as we set sail from our living rooms, over the ocean blue-green air waves, to the shores, the screens of the New World" (pp. 5-6).

There are at least three similes to unpack in the line above: 1.) The Indian head in the jar, the Indian head on the spike like flags 2.) Television airwaves like the ocean to the “New World” 3.) The broadcast of the Indian Head test pattern like a flag on a ship to the New World.

When unpacking a simile (a figure that compares two unlike things to create a surprising new meaning or an unexpected description), it often helps to start by separating the elements, then comparing them, and finally interpreting the larger significance by putting it in conversation with what you already know about the context of the novel.

○ Separate the elements: For example, start with flags: What is a flag? Who usually flies them, and for what purposes? Why are “cast broadly” to be seen, and by whom? What messages do they send to those who see it?

○ Compare: How might “the Indian head in the jar” and “the Indian head on the spike” be similar to a flag, given what you wrote above? (Who “flies” these heads in the Prologue? For what purposes? Why are they meant to be seen—what messages do they send?)

○ Interpret: In context of the novel and the larger milieu of settler colonialism, Why might it be significant that Orange uses a flag for this simile? What new meanings (about flags, about Indian heads in jars/on spikes) do you think emerge here?

2. Repeat with the next similes! Remember: There is no “right answer.”

In-Class Activity:

As a large group, make a chart that lists every reference to Indian heads that appear in the Prologue.

Separate students into small groups and assign each group 3 to 4 references to study. Ask each group to think of at least three ways these references are similar to one another. Encourage them to look beyond the obvious physical similarities (e.g., they’re all heads).

Invite students to fill out the relevant sections of the chart with similarities they’ve found.
As the chart fills up, ask students to discuss how the motif of the Indian head helps draw connections between obviously atrocious acts of genocidal violence and less obvious forms of violence that the Indian head illustrates/exemplifies? And, importantly, how does this motif in the Prologue set the stage for a novel that will center the voices of twenty-first century Native characters (people who are most definitely not dismembered heads) and who tell their stories from their own unique perspectives.

**UNLEARNING NATIVE AMERICAN STEREOTYPES**

Indigenous peoples in the US have survived centuries of genocidal and cultural genocidal campaigns to eliminate their ways of life. As the popular hashtag on Twitter proclaims, "#WeAreStillHere." Even so, their perspectives and experiences are often erased by the US mainstream culture, distorted into stereotypes, and simplified into cartoonish mascots.

Popular culture in the US is rife with Native stereotypes, from the “merciless savage” described in the Declaration of Independence to the “vanishing Indian” and the “ecological Indian.” The mythology of “the vanishing Indian” portrays Indigenous persons as noble, mystical, and extinct—a relic of a distant past, doomed to disappear when the “superior” white colonists arrived.

The “ecological Indian” stereotype might seem complimentary at first glance. This stereotype imagines all Indigenous people as living in harmony with the Earth, the water, and all of its creatures, endowed with a special and intimate relationship to the natural and more-than-human world. While it’s true that Native cultures, tribes, and ways of life did not rely on the same methods of capitalist extraction that have come to mark Anglo-European and white settler cultures, the “ecological Indian” grows from the 17th and 18th century belief that Indigenous peoples were “naturally” closer to the Earth because they were “wild” and “savage”—they were not seen as “civilized” enough to be considered entirely human. In this way, the “ecological Indian” is a dehumanizing stereotype. Today, many Native American activists and leaders are on the frontlines of environmental and ecological issues; but that reality does not justify the perpetuation of a stereotype that is based on the assumption of Native “savagery” and groups all Indigenous peoples into one simplified vision of “an Indian.”

**Suggested In-Class Activity:**

1. In the Prologue, Orange mentions Iron Eyes Cody, the “litter-mourning, tear-ridden Indian in the commercial” (7), as he lists some of the many stereotypical depictions of Indians in US film and television. Here, Orange is referring to a 1971 public service advertisement for the “Keep America Beautiful” anti-litter campaign in which Italian American actor Espera de Corti dressed in “Indian” clothing and paddled a canoe through an industrial area to showcase the tragedy
of pollution. Interestingly, this campaign was funded by soft drink and soda companies who were actively fighting against environmentalist initiatives at the time. *The short video is available here.*

After playing the video in class, ask student to reflect on the following questions in small groups:

- How does this video rely on the “ecological Indian” stereotype? In what ways? To what effect?
- Tommy Orange emphasizes that this actor is not Indigenous himself but Italian American, dressed up in stereotypically “Indian” clothes and playing the part of “the sad, defeated Indian” (p. 7). Why is this important to the larger argument Orange is making about Native erasure?
- How does Iron Eyes Cody reinforce the stereotype of the “vanishing Indian” and/or Orange’s critique of how a dynamic and complex array of different Indigenous peoples have been reduced to “a copy of a copy of an image in a textbook” (p. 7)?

Mascotting is a particular form of stereotyping. A **mascot** is “a person, animal, or object adopted by a group as a symbolic figure” (Merriam-Webster), and **mascotting** is the distortion of a complex people (or peoples) into a simplified and cartoonish figure. Native mascots have been popular in schools, universities, and professional sports teams in the US for a long time. The use of Native, American Indian, and Indigenous mascots misappropriate sacred traditions (such as drums, tomahawks, eagle feathers, headdresses) and perpetuate a range of racist stereotypes. Mascots also evoke historical traumas and cause psychological and emotional harm to individuals and communities.

A recent study on the “*The psychosocial effects of Native American mascots: a comprehensive review of empirical research findings*” (2020) found that Native American mascots are psychologically detrimental to Native American students, creating “lower self-esteem, lower community worth, less capacity to generate achievement-related possible selves, and greater levels of negative effect.” For non-Native students, mascots “reflect, activate, and reinforce” negative stereotypes and prejudices. In an interview with *Indian Country*, Dr. Stephanie A. Fryberg describes the study she conducted with her colleagues, and argues that most studies about the use of Native American mascots center the debate from “both sides” without focusing on the real and measurable harm of these racist emblems. See Joaqlin Estus’s *Indian Country Today article* for a summary of this study and a short video interview with Fryberg.

As early as 2005, *The American Psychological Association* called for the “immediate retirement of all American Indian mascots, symbols, images and personalities by schools, colleges, universities, athletic teams, and organizations.” The APA argued that studies show mascots have significant negative effects on the self-esteem, well-being,
social identity, and cultural self-representation of Native people. The APA also cited studies that show the negative effects that mascots have on non-Native people by validating racism and encouraging “culturally abusive behavior.” While Native mascots are still in use across the US today, many schools, teams, and organizations have agreed to retire these harmful emblems. In 2021, for example, Washington state passed a bill banning the use of Native American-themed mascots, team names, and other imagery in public schools without the express permission of local tribes.

Suggested Close-Reading Questions:

1. Why do you think that Orange uses the image of the “Indian head” in the Prologue to exemplify both a long history of genocide and stereotypical representation in media and mascotting?

2. Read the following line carefully: “We’ve been defined by everyone else and continue to be slandered despite easy-to-look-up facts. All the way from the top of Canada, the top of Alaska, down to the bottom of South America, Indians were removed, then reduced to a feathered image. Our heads are on flags, jerseys, coins” (p. 7). How does the narrator relate the use of an “Indian head” as a “feathered image” on flags and jerseys to other examples of “Indian heads” that appear in the Prologue?

Suggested In-Class Activities:

In these in-class activities, we encourage teachers not to center the “debate” between anti-mascot and familiar pro-mascot arguments (e.g., “honoring the tribe,” tradition, etc.). If students do want to rehearse these pro-mascot arguments, teachers might encourage students to instead name their own attachments to the Native mascots (tradition, team spirit, etc.) and then put their own attachment aside for a moment in order to listen to what Native American people are saying about the harmful effects of these mascots on their communities, using the video interview by Fryberg and Orange’s Prologue.

The APA draws particular attention to the problem of Indian mascots in learning environments such as schools as they create a racially hostile environment, impede accurate historical education, and reduce respectful relations between diverse groups.

1. Research & Discuss:
   • First, consider the reasons the APA encourages all schools to abandon mascots.
   • Then read the following Green Bay Press Gazette article about the Wisconsin schools that still use Native mascots and the task force that is working to end this practice. Read more about the Wisconsin Indian Education Association’s
Indian Mascot and Logo Taskforce here.

Divide the class into small groups. Each group chooses (or is assigned) a Wisconsin school district that still uses a Native mascot. What is the mascot? What stereotypes does it employ? Using what you’ve learned about genocide, cultural genocide, removal, and mascotting to list the ways in which a seemingly innocent use of a mascot perpetuates a larger structure of Native elimination, racism, and/or violence. Refer to Orange’s Prologue or any other sources, as helpful and relevant.

2. Extension exercise 1: In small groups, students compose a persuasive letter to the Wisconsin district, encouraging them to retire the mascot.

3. Extension exercise 2: In small groups, students use a free Canva account to create an infographic that explains why Native mascots are negative for both Native and non-Native students to an audience of the group’s choice.

CONTESTING SETTLER HISTORIES

We—you and I and everyone—are still trying to absolve ourselves of history. But we don’t want to do it by talking about it. We don’t want the taste of it in our mouths. We’re devoted to keeping it under our place mats. Blackout Wednesday. Gorge Thursday. Get deals Friday. We hide the lie under the darkness of digestion.

—Tommy Orange, “Thanksgiving is a tradition; It’s also a lie”

In an op-ed for The Los Angeles Times, Tommy Orange draws attention to a powerful force in the US American consciousness: the desire “to absolve ourselves of history” by silencing perspectives that chafe against comfortable and familiar stories we tell ourselves about our history and today. The American Thanksgiving story is an important example of this urge to “absolve ourselves of history” because it is both a cultural touchstone and a blatant fiction—a lie, as Orange calls it. It perpetuates a white-washed “master narrative.”

A “master narrative” or a “dominant narrative” is a transhistorical story that is deeply embedded in the dominant culture and serves to uphold the beliefs, assumptions, norms, and values of those in power. A “counter narrative” is an alternative version of events that counters the master narrative by telling the story from a non-dominant perspective and framing events through a different set of beliefs, norms, and values. Counter narratives have been crucial tools in a wide variety of social justice movements because they give voice to what has been erased or misrepresented in the master narrative’s attempts to “absolve ourselves of history.”

In the US, master narratives rely on a set of scripts that distort historical fact to paint settler colonialism in the best possible light. Manifest Destiny, is one such master
narrative with a long history and a troubling legacy. Coined in 1845, Manifest Destiny gave a name to the widespread belief that the United States and its Anglo-European settlers were destined by God to expand their dominion and spread their values (democracy, capitalism, Christianity) through the entire North American continent. This master narrative justified the forced removal of Indigenous tribes from their lands, the creation of reservations in “Indian Territory,” and the elimination of Native peoples through physical and cultural genocide to make room for what was believed to be the inevitable and pre-destined colonization of the continent. The narrative of Manifest Destiny continues to shape how US history is taught and understood today.

For example, the mythology of American Thanksgiving tells a story about a peaceful meal shared between “Indians and Pilgrims” usually focusing attention on the Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony (established in 1620) and the kindness of the noble “Indians” who taught the struggling colonists how to survive in the New World. This master narrative has been repeated so often that it has become woven into the fabric of the national imagination, and today it is usually offered in the spirit of Manifest Destiny—that is, it reinforces the assumption that Christian white settler colonialism was destined to replace Indigenous lifeways. The reality is much more complicated.

By the time the English “Pilgrims” arrived and settled in Plymouth, many area tribes had been wracked by plague brought to shore by other Europeans; thousands of Native people had died from European diseases, others had been kidnapped and sold into slavery, and many tribes, like the Wampanoag, were suffering from staggering losses. While Wampanoag chief Massasoit did ally with the English at Plymouth to secure mutual protection and fair land use, the feast they shared in 1621 was not called “thanksgiving”—for the New England colonists, a day of thanksgiving was a day spent in prayer and gratitude to God, often celebrated, as the Prologue notes, after “successful massacres” of Indigenous people. Shortly after the meal between ninety Wampanoag men and the English Puritans at Plymouth, peace faltered as English colonists continued to flood the territory and tensions between tribes and colonists grew. When Massasoit’s son Metacomet (called King Philip by the English) became chief, relations soon soured into King Philip’s War.

Over the years, many US officials—such as George Washington—continued the tradition of calling for “thanksgivings” during times of tension and war as an attempt to create a sense of national belonging among the US settlers. The US holiday known as Thanksgiving is often traced to President Abraham Lincoln’s Civil-War-era proclamation in which he dedicated the last Thursday in November as a national day of “Thanksgiving and Praise,” although it only became an official federal holiday in 1941.

While the US government developed Thanksgiving as a way to bring a fractured nation together, this national unity was built on a mythology of beneficent white settlers and noble Indians who were fated to disappear. Today, the United American Indians of New
England commemorate this day as the National Day of Mourning in Plymouth, Massachusetts. The National Day of Mourning began in 1970 when Wamsutta Frank James, a member of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah, was asked to give a speech as part of celebration honoring the 350th anniversary of the Pilgrims’ arrival to Plymouth. Instead of celebrating the Pilgrims, he wrote that “We, the Wampanoag, welcomed you, the white man, with open arms, little knowing that it was the beginning of the end; that before 50 years were to pass, the Wampanoag would no longer be a free people,” and described centuries of atrocities, broken promises, and exploitation. The organizers told him that “the theme of the anniversary was brotherhood, and anything inflammatory would have been out of place,” but he refused to alter his speech. Since then, people gather to commemorate the National Day of Mourning, following in James’s footsteps to challenge the national mythology, disrupt the master narrative, and draw attention to the continuance and active presence of their tribes today.

Discussion Questions:

1. After reading Orange’s counter narrative about Thanksgiving in the opening Prologue of There There and learning about the historical distortions in the familiar master narrative about “Pilgrims and Indians” at Plymouth, what surprises you (if anything)? Why? Does the story that Orange tells about Thanksgiving differ from the stories you’ve heard? If so, how?

With these differences (and/or similarities) in mind, reflect on the following quotation from the Prologue: “Some of us grew up with stories about massacres. Stories about what happened to our people not so long ago. How we came out of it” (8). Who belongs to the “us” who grew up hearing stories about massacres? Why do you think Orange emphasizes that this occurred “not so long ago”? Why do you think the stories told to “us” about the massacre also include stories about “how we came out of it”?

2. Read Orange’s op-ed “Thanksgiving is a tradition; It’s also a lie.” With this argument in mind, why do you think the book begins with counter narratives that retell the history of Thanksgiving and the Sand Creek Massacre from a Native American perspective? (For details on the Sand Creek Massacre, see section above on genocide.) What are some reasons it might be important for readers to encounter counter narratives about events that occurred in the 17th and 19th centuries before reading a novel about “Urban Indians” living in Oakland in the 21st century? How can addressing counter narrative challenge the desire to “absolve ourselves of history”? How does the past affect the present?

3. As Tuck and Yang (and many other scholars) argue, the point of counter histories from oppressed and silenced perspectives is not to inspire guilt, even though feelings of guilt and defensiveness are common reactions for non-Native people to experience when confronting difficult histories. In fact, the larger point
is to shift attention away from the feelings of guilt or shame or defensiveness that non-Native people might feel and instead 1.) focus attention on what the often-silenced perspectives have to say and 2.) create a sense of accountability for changing culture that wants to “absolve ourselves of history” and hold on to a defensive posture.

After reading Orange’s opening counter narratives, what are some concrete actions you think you could take in your own life to avoid perpetuating distorted master narratives and to learn more about present-day Native survivance?

Suggested In-Class Activities:

1. In small groups, consider Apsáalooke artist Wendy Red Star’s self-portrait “The Last Thanks.” A digital reproduction of “The Last Thanks” is available [here](#). How does Red Star disrupt the familiar settler mythology of “Indians and Pilgrims at Plymouth” and/or poke fun at the limit of Native American stereotypes?

Pointing to specific examples to illustrate your claims, compare and contrast her methods of re-telling the Thanksgiving story with the tools that There There’s Prologue uses to challenge settler histories. How do Orange and Red Star use both humor and the shock of settler violence—albeit in very different ways—to intervene in master narratives?

Orange’s narrator writes that mascots and other Native American stereotypes rely on a “copy of a copy of the image of the Indian in a textbook” (7). Here, he draws attention to how the master narrative is taught not only in popular culture but also in the US educational system.

In a 2015 study of K-12 U.S. History standards from all fifty states built on previous research, researchers set out to find answers to the following:

- What is the frequency of Indigenous content (histories, cultures, current issues) covered in state-level U.S. history standards for K–12?
- What is the difference between the frequency of inclusion of pre-1900 Indigenous content and post-1900 Indigenous content in the U.S. history standards for K–12?
- How do the standards depict Indigenous Peoples in U.S. history?

Their findings reinforce previous research on how US textbooks present Indigenous peoples through negative stereotypes and minimize Indigenous peoples’ cultures and histories in favor of preserving a Eurocentric narrative. Their findings also show that in the state standards across the US, “Indigenous peoples were largely confined within a pre-1900 context” and were “devoid of any significant voice.” In short, the standards
tend to reinforce the mythology of Manifest Destiny and the stereotype of the “disappearing Native” by treating Native American peoples as relics of the past and 2.) do not incorporate Native and Indigenous voices telling their stories in their own terms.

Activity A: Present this study’s findings to students and ask them to reflect on what they’ve learned in school about Native histories thus far. Do their previous experiences reflect this 2015 study’s findings? In what ways? Given what you’ve learned about how master narratives distort and silence minority perspectives, why might it be particularly important to think about the representation of Native American peoples in school settings?

Activity B: Ask students to share what they know about Indigenous Peoples Day in Wisconsin and (if possible) where they learned about it.

Read or listen to the WUWM news radio story about the creation of Indigenous Peoples Day in Wisconsin, an initiative that began with a group of Wisconsin students at the Indian Community School who were learning about Christopher Columbus and wanted to challenge this incomplete version of the story of colonization. In pairs or small groups, students discuss how Indigenous Peoples Day challenges the master narrative usually taught in schools. Then, invite students to brainstorm a respectful way that their school might commemorate Indigenous Peoples Day and the ongoing contributions of Native American and Indigenous peoples in the US.

UNIT ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS & PROJECT IDEAS

• Create a blackout or an erasure poem using a relevant source text (i.e., a historical document such as the Indian Removal Act, the Indian Relocation Act, a textbook page that depicts Native Americans as “disappearing Indians,” a script from a film scene or commercial that relies on Native stereotypes, etc.). Using white out, a black marker, colored markers, or cut-up images, write a new poem from the existing text by selecting certain words and obscuring the rest. In this project, students experiment with a creative form that allows student/poets to speak back to (and against) the source text, critiquing its assumptions, highlighting its distortions and fabrications, and/or allowing a hidden counter narrative to emerge from within the master narrative.

Keep in mind that an erasure poem uses white-out to erase parts of the source text or scissors to cut away the source text. It is a method that hopes to scrape away or obliterate (erase) the source text and its legacy, and it might offer a commentary on themes such as elimination or disappearance. In a blackout poem, the ghost of the original text lingers on the document, even though it has been blacked out to allow other meanings (and counter narratives) to surface. In a blackout poem, the legacy remains as a reminder or a record of the master narrative. The blackout poem might
also comment on the censorship of documents by officials and authority figures who seek to control information, turning this process on its head by blacking out the official story and letting the silenced story or argument speak its truth.

Write a short essay (~500 words) in which you explain what source document you chose and why you chose it; what method you chose (white-out, black marker, cut-up, etc.) and why you chose it; and how your blackout or erasure poem aims to critique, reject, complicate, or otherwise address the master narrative.

- Create an informational zine to share something particular the student has learned about settler colonialism during this unit. (A format such as “I used to assume … Now I know…” could be a useful organizational strategy.) Students might make use of their artistic skills to draw comics, use needle and thread to sew designs, create multimedia collages from magazines, paint, or other materials, and/or cut-and-paste relevant quotations from Orange’s novel or other Native American authors as they share a particularly surprising thing they’ve learned and want to share with others. The goal here is to practice the importance of being accountable, reflective, and learning from new perspectives without centering one’s own guilt or shame about previous (mis)understandings.

Alternatively, students might create a zine that 1.) visualizes the motif of the “Indian head” that Orange uses in the Prologue; 2.) incorporates quotations from Orange’s novel and other relevant sources; 3.) and offers an analysis of how the “Indian head” helps readers link the history of genocide to seemingly innocent stereotypical depictions. Students who choose this option should not include visual imagery of violence, focusing instead on images of the “Indian head” on the test pattern, coins, logos, mascots, etc.

- Choose one particular issue, concept, theme, or event you’ve learned about during this unit—perhaps Thanksgiving, or the Sand Creek Massacre, or Native American mascots, etc.—and conduct interviews with family and friends. What do the interviewees know about this? Where did they learn it?

To present your findings, choose one of the following: 1.) write a short essay (~750 words) in which you summarize the data, present the conclusions you draw from your findings, and explain to your reader why the knowledge people have (or don’t have) is important; or 2.) create an infographic using a free Canva template (see Nielsen’s recent infographic about Native mascots as an example.)
UNIT 2. THE NEW NATIVE RENAISSANCE & URBAN INDIANS

ABOUT THIS UNIT

_There There_ is a major contribution to an emerging era of US American Literature, “The New Native Renaissance,” in no small part because it centers an often invisible population: Urban Indians. Although 70% of Native American and Alaskan Native people live in cities, the popular image of all Native peoples as rural and living on reservations still circulates widely (and often in dehumanizing ways) in US mainstream media. Authors like Tommy Orange are working to change that.

First, this unit aims to support discussions of Tommy Orange’s novel as one of many exciting contemporary texts that are charting a new direction in Native American (and First Nations) literatures. The opening subsection, “The New Native Renaissance,” provides background information on two eras of Native American literature (in the 20th century and today) and defines key concepts such as “Urban Indian” and “double invisibility.” This subsection encourages students to put Orange’s novel in conversation with poems by Tommy Pico (Kumeyaay Nation), another author of the New Native Renaissance who highlights the diversity and complexity of Urban Indian experiences in the 21st century.

The second subsection, “Termination, Relocation, and Urban Indians,” provides historical context to help students understand the colonial policies that Orange briefly mentions in the novel (such as Termination and Relocation). Future units in the guide will refer to these histories and their ongoing impacts, and we encourage teachers and students to consult this information as often as necessary or helpful while studying the novel. This subsection also invites students to study the world outside the novel by investigating the impacts these policies continue to have on Native communities in Wisconsin and throughout the US.

The final two subsections borrow quotations from _There There_ for their titles. The third, “The City Made Us New, And We Made It Ours,” builds on the second but turns attention away from harmful colonial policies toward Native creativity, intertribal community-building, and survivance practices that shape modern cities and myriad ways of “being Indian” today.

The final subsection, “The Land is Everywhere or Nowhere” considers how _There There_ brings an understanding of relationality—an important aspect of traditional Indigenous ways of knowing and living with human and nonhuman others—into the urban landscape. This subsection invites students to consider how both the characters
in There There and the students themselves belong to their city, how their city belongs to them, and how people make their mark on the places they call home.

RECOMMENDED SOURCES & READINGS


- **Blansett, Kent, Cathleen D. Cahill, and Andrew Needham.** “Indian Cities,” The Metropole.


- **“National Urban Indian Family Coalition,” NUIFC.**

- **Neary, Lynn.** “Native American Author Tommy Orange Feels A ‘Burden To Set The Record Straight,’” National Public Radio, 8 June 2018.


- **Urban Rez, PBS, 2 May 2013.**

PRIMARY SOURCES

- **“American Indian Urban Relocation.” National Archives.**

• Pico, Tommy. Nature Poem, Tin House, 2017. (excerpts; identified by first line)
  o “You can’t be an NDN person in today’s world”
  o “oh, but you don’t look very Indian”
  o “I can’t write a nature poem bc”

• Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Voluntary Relocation advertisements:
  o “Come to Denver” poster.
  o “Family in Waukegan and Elgin” poster.
  o “Chicago Story” (16mm film reel).

THE “NEW NATIVE RENAISSANCE”

"Native people look like a lot of different things, and we are in cities now—I mean, 70 percent of Native people live in cities now. And we just need a new story to build from, and I always wanted to try to do that.” —Tommy Orange, National Public Radio interview

“We’ve been fighting for decades to be recognized as a present-tense people, modern and relevant, alive.” —There There, 141

In a 2018 essay published in The Paris Review, journalist Julian Brave NoiseCat (an enrolled member of the Canim Lake Band Tsq'escen) observed that a new wave of critically-acclaimed Native American and First Nations literature had hit the North American literary scene, dubbing it the “New Native Renaissance.” Novelist Tommy Orange (Cheyenne/Arapaho), memoirist Terese Mailhot (Seabird Island First Nation), and poets Billy-Ray Belcourt (Driftpile Cree) and Tommy Pico (Kumeyaay Nation) are at the vanguard of a new twenty-first century generation of Native and First Nation authors that have inherited and built upon the first “Native American Renaissance.”

The Native American Renaissance, a term coined by critic Kenneth Lincoln, was a literary movement which spanned the latter half of the twentieth century (1960s-1990s) and was marked by the increased mainstream visibility of Native writers such as N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), Joy Harjo (Muscogee Creek), Louise Erdrich (Chippewa), Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), Sherman Alexie (Spokane-Coeur d'Alene) and others who unapologetically addressed the diverse experiences and concerns of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island. Like their forebearers, Orange, Mailhot, Pico, and other authors of the “New Native Renaissance” tackle the complex realities of being Native in the contemporary US (and Canada), both on the reservation and off. As these authors continue the “fight to be recognized as a present-tense people, modern and relevant, alive” (p. 141), they explode stereotypes, challenge deeply entrenched
assumptions, and continue to win significant critical and popular acclaim for their work.

What accounts for the seemingly sudden flourishing of popular Native American and First Nations writers in the second decade of the twenty-first century? Julian Brave NoiseCat writes that the authors of the New Native Renaissance “arrived on the scene at a moment of escalating Indigenous activism,” exemplified by the international fight against the Dakota Access pipeline led by Indigenous water protectors at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in 2016-17. Moreover, Brave NoiseCat writes, “in a cultural moment defined by fear of ecological apocalypse, democratic decline and legitimized white supremacy, newfound interest in Native writers—who speak with the authority of a people who lived through genocide and survived to talk about it—makes sense.” The booming popularity of writers like Orange, Mailhot, Belcourt, and Pico among critics and readers speaks to the fact that audiences (Native and non-Native alike) are hungering for the stories they have to tell. Orange originally imagined that his experimental polyphonic novel about the lives of twelve Indians moving toward a fatal mass shooting at a powwow in Oakland would reach only a small audience, yet the breakout debut quickly became a national bestseller, appearing on a number of “Best Books of the Year” lists (such as the New York Times Book Review’s 10 Best Books of 2018) and collecting prestigious awards (such as the Pen/Hemingway Award).

Another explanation may lie in how the authors of the New Native Renaissance shatter familiar tropes and carve a place for their own stories in a media landscape that has long been dominated by racist stereotypical depictions (on one hand) and a singular vision of Native American life on Indian reservations (on the other hand). In a 2018 interview for NPR, Orange describes his book as an attempt to counter the many misconceptions and simplifications that dehumanize Native people: “It's convenient to think of us as gone, or drunks, or dumb. It's convenient to not have to think about a brutal history and a people surviving and still being alive and well today, thriving in various different forms of life, good and bad. I wanted to represent a range of human experience as a way to humanize Native people.” Orange’s There There is set in Oakland, California—a departure from the rez-centered literature of the first Native Renaissance—and weaves an intricate tapestry from the voices of a dozen Urban Indian characters, each with their own background, histories, and ways of “being Indian” in the city.

The National Urban Indian Family Coalition defines Urban Indians as “individuals of American Indian and Alaska Native ancestry who may or may not have direct and/or active ties with a particular tribe, but who identify with and are at least somewhat active in the Native community in their urban area.” Today, seven out of ten Native people—over 3.7 million individuals—grow up, raise families, work jobs, and create communities in US cities. There There sheds light on this often overlooked demographic. The novel is inspired, in part, by Orange’s own experience growing up in Oakland with a white
mother and a Native father and his desire to see Oakland’s diverse Native community represented on the page.

He describes Urban Indians as caught within a “double invisibility”: “We—Native people—don’t see our representation basically anywhere, unless it’s negative or stereotyped…But then Urban Indians have kind of a double invisibility going on.” On one hand, stereotypes obscure the rich contemporary lives of all Native people, and it’s rare to see mainstream media that represents Indigenous characters with nuance and respect. See Unit 1 for discussion of Native stereotypes and mascotting. Native urbanites face this cultural invisibility as well as an additional erasure: they are often seen as less “authentic” than Native people living in reservations, if they are seen as Native at all. Because so much of the literature that centers Indigenous voices and perspectives takes place on reservations, Orange wanted to write a new kind of story that grapples with a new reality.

In an interview with Marlena Gates (Maricopa), Orange calls for forms of representation that reflect the complexities of urban Native experiences and identities—a literature to counter “double invisibility.” He invokes a long and dynamic history of Native creativity and adaptation, arguing that the reservation itself is not traditional to Native American cultures but is a product of US government policies like forced removal and relocation. Living on the reservation is no more “authentic” than living in the cities, Orange argues, and now that 70% of Native Americans live in urban stories, it’s time their stories were heard:

“A lot of reservation Indians now live in cities, and their children probably will too. There’s not going to be some massive move back to reservations, so we have to forge a new identity that’s related to the city in a way that we bring cultural values and ways with us. We must leave behind some of this narrow-minded thinking on what it means to be Indian, because all this reservation identity-based stuff didn’t exist before reservations, and what did it mean then? Reservation consciousness is an adaptation after removal, after being pushed there. Being Indian meant something totally different before reservations. So we can’t just refer back to reservations like we’ve been on reservations forever. We have to think of the new thing that we’re going to be. How are we going to remain Indian and not have to fall back on tropes and tired stereotypes? We have to make new ways.”

The authors of this new literary movement are not interested in presenting Native characters and Native stories in an exclusively positive light. Even as Orange, and others in the New Native Renaissance, celebrate how Native individuals and communities are already “mak[ing] new ways” beyond the “narrow-minded thinking on what it means to be Indian,” they do not turn away from grim realities of poverty and underemployment, substance use and dependence, suicide, violence, and early death that disproportionately affect Native people living under the long shadow of settler
colonialism. But neither do they accept a narrative of passive victimization or turn a “damage-centered” gaze on their communities.

The concept of “damage-centered research” comes from Eve Tuck (Unangaⱉ), who published an open letter in the Harvard Educational Review encouraging communities, researchers, and educators to stop focusing on the “brokenness” and pain of marginalized communities; even if the intention is to reveal injustice and leverage empathy for resources, such a focus ultimately “reinforces and reinscribes a one-dimensional notion of these people as depleted, ruined, and hopeless” (409).

Rejecting a “damage-centered” gaze is not about avoiding real problems but instead about contextualizing them within the historical traumas of colonization, genocide, and racism and celebrating adaptation, resistance, and survivance (see Unit 1 for definition of survivance). As Tuck writes, “damage can no longer be the only way, or even the main way, that we talk about ourselves” (422). In the New Native Renaissance, authors are grappling with both the long legacy of settler colonial violence and the new kinds of consciousness and identities—the new ways of “being Indian”—emerging in US and Canadian cities.

Suggested In-Class Activities:

1. Close-Reading Activity. Distribute copies of select poems from Tommy Pico’s Nature Poem (see handouts at beginning of this unit). Invite students to consider the following:
   - What specific stereotypes about Native Americans do Pico’s poems challenge?
   - How do Pico’s poems address the problem of “double invisibility” of Urban Indians?
   - What particular challenges does the speaker reference? Does the speaker address these challenges in ways that reject a damage-centered gaze—in ways that contextualize these challenges while also celebrating adaptation and resistance? If so, how?
   - What do you notice about the speaker’s tone and diction (or word choice) in these poems? In what ways might the speaker’s tone and diction choices work in tandem with the larger themes?
   - Discuss Pico’s poems in light of the following quotation by Tommy Orange. How does Pico’s speaker navigate the imperative to “remain Indian” in new ways?

2. Character study. This activity is very adaptable. It can be done with any number of characters, and students need not have read the entire novel to effectively participate.
• Divide class into pairs or small groups. Assign each group a character from *There There*. Focusing on the chapter(s) written from their character’s perspective, students discuss the following: 1.) What specific stereotypes does this character debunk? 2.) What major difficulties does this character face? 3.) When presenting these difficulties, does Orange resist a damage-centered gaze? If so, how? 3.) If this character were a real person sitting in front of you right now, what questions would you ask them?

• Then, ask each group to choose one quotation from the character’s chapter that they think exemplifies an important way that character resists “double invisibility.” A scribe from each group writes their chosen quotation on the board. Each group then takes five minutes to discuss a different group’s character/quotation, considering how (if) they think this character/quotation resists “double invisibility.”

**TERMINATION, RELOCATION, AND URBAN INDIANS**

“I feel bad sometimes even saying I’m Native. Mostly I just feel I’m from Oakland. . . I know there’s a lot of Natives living in Oakland and in the Bay Area with similar stories. But it’s like we can’t talk about it because it’s not really a Native story, but then it is at the same time. It’s fucked up.”—There There, 148

This subsection offers a brief historical overview of Indian Relocation, a key element of a mid-twentieth century US government campaign to assimilate Indigenous peoples into mainstream American society. Although this overview will provide important context for reading the novel—*There There* explicitly mentions Indian Relocation in the prologue—it is important that the shape of this historical narrative does not replicate deeply ingrained depictions of Indigenous peoples as “rural,” “traditional,” and at odds with “modern” metropolitan life. As Kent Blansett, Cathleen D. Cahill & Andrew Needham argue in “Indian Cities,” historical narratives about relocation often “rely on binary racialized constructs” that position rural Native people against white settler urbanites.

Blansett, Cahill, and Needhman point out that urbanity is not actually new to Indigenous peoples, as bustling cities such as Pueblo Bonito and Casa Rinconada, Cahokia and Tenochetitlán, and other urban areas flourished for generations before Anglo-Europeans settler colonists arrived. They also challenge “the mythology that cities are strictly settler spaces organized in opposition to Indigenous identity, politics, and life-ways,” and they do so “by revealing how Indigenous peoples have constructed community in those cities.

From contact to the twenty-first century, Indian city residents challenged destructive policies designed to terminate individual and collective Indigenous rights and identity.” Rather than turning to familiar binaries as we present this subsection on Indian Relocation, we aim to follow Blansett’s advice to “to think capaciously about the
movement, resilience, and innovation of Indigenous city makers and residents,” themes which Unit 3 will also expand upon.

Termination

In the 1950s, the US government instituted The Indian Termination Policy with a singular and explicit purpose: to absorb Native Americans into the “melting pot” of the general population and so complete the long project of assimilation. Indian Reservations had been so poorly managed by the BIA for so long.

Termination rescinded federal support for reservations, dissolved the federal trust system (which assured Indian ownership of Indian reservation land), aimed to disband tribal governments, and began a process to strip tribal status from 109 tribal nations during 11 years of termination legislation. Proponents argued that this policy would “free” Indian Americans from federal oversight. Senator Arthur V. Watkins of Utah, who was then chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, went so far as to liken the federal termination policy outlined in House Concurrent Resolution 108 (1953) to the Emancipation Proclamation (President Lincoln’s Executive Order to change the legal status of enslaved Black peoples during the US Civil War). In reality, the policy had devastating effects, as it gutted tribal sovereignty, disrupted social systems, and threw communities into deeper poverty. Although termination was eventually abandoned as official policy, many of the aftershocks of the Termination Era’s commitment to assimilation—and its threats to tribal sovereignty—continue today.

Relocation

In the early 1950s, The Bureau of Indian Affairs began a program that incentivized Native Americans who were living on rural reservations to move to urban centers. The BIA’s Voluntary Relocation Program promised to not only help people with transportation to their new homes—a one-way ticket by bus or train—but also to help with the transition once they got there. BIA Relocation officers painted a rosy picture of city life: well-paying jobs, good schools for the children, and quality housing awaited people were willing to move to select US cities (such as Denver, Oakland, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Chicago, and others).
Like Termination, Relocation was intended to solve the “Indian Problem” through assimilation and, ultimately, elimination. As one BIA official working on the Navajo reservation put it: “Well, I've always felt that the only real solution for the Navajo was to cease to be a Navajo—to get off the reservation and become a citizen just like everybody else, and make his living in the same way as other people. Forget that he is a Navajo, in other words.” Despite its eugenic overtones, a significant number of American Indians took advantage of the program. After a century of BIA mismanagement, many reservations had high rates of poverty, food insecurity, and unemployment, and people jumped at the chance to make a better life for themselves and their children.

In the first few years of Voluntary Relocation, however, it became clear that many promises were not coming to fruition. According to a 1957 report published by an Indigenous advocacy group called the Association on American Indian Affairs,
participants found themselves placed “in slum housing” with low-paying job
opportunities, if any. Dr. Kasey Keeler argues that “Relocation must be thought of as a
racialized housing policy with a lengthy history, not simply as a federal initiative that
provided job training and employment opportunities in urban environments throughout
the 1950s” (87-88). Although many Native people were led to believe they might
eventually settle in suburban homes, they were often set up in crowded, temporary
housing with little possibility of moving elsewhere. Racist policies made Natives
ineligible to apply for home loans. Even Native veterans of WWII—of whom there were
many, given that Native Americans volunteered to fight at the highest rate of any ethnic
group—were not given access to the same benefits that white veterans enjoyed in the
postwar economic boom. While the GI Bill allowed white veterans to secure affordable
homes in the newly constructed suburbs outside of the urban center, American Indian
veterans were told they were not eligible for these programs and were directed to the
BIA’s Voluntary Relocation Program, which in turn set them up in crowded housing
located in poor and “blighted” areas. One BIA commissioner would later describe it as
“an underfunded, ill-conceived program…essentially a one-way ticket from rural to
urban poverty.”

Culturally displaced, overwhelmed, and without any support to help them transition to a
very different environment, the Association on American Indian Affairs reported that
“Indian men and women are driven to alcoholism by the pressure of city life.” Those who
decided they wanted to return home to the reservation usually could not afford the trip
back: the BIA’s tickets were decidedly one-way. In 1956, Congress passed the Indian
Relocation Act, or Public Law 959. This Act increased vocational training in the hopes of
improving employment prospects and expanded the BIA’s ability to promote and fund
urban location across the country.

Relocation changed the face of both Indian Country and US cities. By 1960, thirty
percent of Native Americans previously living on reservations were living in urban
centers. At its core, it was a settler colonial attempt to eliminate the “Indian Problem,” as
was Termination, and its racist housing policy set a course for generational poverty.
Still, the program created new opportunities for thousands of Native people, even as it
presented significant new difficulties. Its legacy remains a complicated and ambivalent
one.

Suggested In-Class Activity:

- Screen *Urban Rez*, a PBS documentary featuring a variety of Native
  perspectives on the experience of relocation. *The film runs approximately 56
  minutes. For the sake of time management, teachers might also consider
  screening particular interview clips.*
• The BIA produced posters and films to advertise the Voluntary Relocation Program. Invite students to compare this messaging to the experiences that the interviewees describe in Urban Rez.
  o “Come to Denver” poster
  o “Family in Waukegan and Elgin” poster
  o “Chicago Story” (16mm film reel)

• What do you notice about how the BIA advertised the Voluntary Relocation Program? What kinds of new lifestyles were being promoted? What promises do the posters/film seem to make about life in (and near) urban centers? How do these promises align with and differ from the histories and personal experiences you heard about in Urban Rez? [Note: To protect their rights to privacy, the names of individual families are blacked out in the version of the promotional posters available here.]

Suggested Discussion Question:

1. In the words of James Baldwin, quoted in the epigraph to Part III: “People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them” (159). Although the novel traces the lives of characters from the generations after Relocation, this history continues to directly (and indirectly) shape their lives.

What is at least one example of how the lasting effects of Relocation appear in the novel? Which character (or characters) does this affect? In what ways? How does the character deal with this legacy?

Ask students to choose at least one example to write about in their journals, then share in small groups.

“THE CITY MADE US NEW, AND WE MADE IT OURS”

From the perspective of the US government, Indian Relocation was the final stage of a long project of Native elimination; relocation targeted Native American individuals and families in hopes of absorbing them into white settler colonial culture, economies, and value systems. But from the perspective of the many Native American people who participated in BIA’s Voluntary Relocation Program, the story doesn’t end like the BIA had intended. As Orange emphasizes in the Prologue, many Native people who moved to urban areas did not disappear into white culture but instead found ways to adapt, continue, and connect: “Getting us to the city was supposed to be the final, necessary step in our assimilation, absorption, erasure, the completion of a five-hundred-year-old genocidal campaign. But the city made us new, and we made it ours...We did not move to cities to die” (8-9). Many Native urbanities found ways to keep connected to their roots and while also creating new pan-Indian communities. People established Indian
cultural centers, created nonprofits to provide social service support, and began organizing intertribal powwows to celebrate Native traditions.

The Indian Center in There There is largely inspired by the Intertribal Friendship House in Oakland, one of the first Urban Indian community centers in the nation. Founded in 1955, Intertribal Friendship House (IFH) was established to serve as American Indian people who were relocated from reservations to Oakland the Bay Area. This new community was distinctly multi-tribal, comprised of Native people from many different tribes around California and across the entire US. Today, IFH continues to adapt to the changing needs of the growing community, now serving over 8,000 community members from over 100 tribes.

In the words of the organization’s website: “For urban Native people IFH has served as the Urban Reservation and Homeland. In many cases it is one of the few places that keeps them connected to their culture and traditions through powwow dance, drumming, beading classes, and the many social gatherings, cultural events, and ceremonies that are held there. Intertribal Friendship House is more than an organization. It is the heart of a vibrant tribal community.”

Orange’s fictionalized Indian Center plays a similar role in the novel’s multifaceted—and often fragmented—Native Oakland community. The Center becomes an important touchstone in many of the characters’ lives, most notably Edwin, Calvin, and Blue, as they struggle with feeling disconnected from their Native identities and search to understand their own particular ways of “being Indian” in the city. The Big Oakland powwow, organized by the Indian Center’s Powwow Committee, is the center of gravity in the novel. It pulls the various characters—each of whom has a unique relationship to what Orvil calls “Indianness”—into one another’s orbit.

Unit 5 will cover powwows in more depth, offering historical context and additional opportunities to analyze the powwow’s powerful role in the novel. In this unit, we will consider how Native cultural centers in urban areas provided—and continue to provide—connection, tradition, and community.

Suggested Close-Reading Questions & Extension Activity:

1. Close Reading Activity. Divide students into pair or small groups and assign them a single character—Edwin (pp. 243-247), Calvin (pp.144-150), or Blue (pp.197-199). Ask students to answer the following:
   o What is this character’s relationship to the Indian Center? What draws him/her to the Center? What are his/her concerns about it? Why is it important to this character?
Given what you know about Termination and Relocation, Why do you think Orange’s novel shows characters who have such complicated and ambivalent relationship to both the Center and the idea of “being Indian” in the city?

**Extension Activity:** Research the Intertribal Friendship House in Oakland, California to learn more about this organization. To get started, visit IFH’s website.

Alternatively, research an urban Native organization near your own home. To get started, see the “Native Roots” page of Visit Milwaukee website.

- What activities and services does this center or organization provide? What needs does it fill (cultural, material, health, etc.)? What programs specifically target Native Youth?
- For each activity, service, program you list, consider what characters from There There would be drawn to/benefit from it. Explain why, using evidence from the book to support your thinking.
- Present your research in a short presentation, poster, or video.

**“THE LAND IS EVERYWHERE OR NOWHERE”**

Settler colonial perspectives tend to think of land as the strip of dirt beneath one’s feet and the expanse of property that one owns. Indigenous perspectives tend to think of land as a set of relationships of responsibility and reciprocity to all living and nonliving beings. While Indigenous peoples around the world are at the forefront of many important fights to protect forests, waters, and more-than-human lifeways, the abiding mythology that Indigenous peoples live in harmony with the natural world—that they have a special, even mystical, intimacy with nature—is rooted in a simplifying and damaging stereotype. For more information about the “Ecological Indian” stereotype in Unit 1.

In There There, Orange challenges the assumption that relationality—as a way of knowing and living with human and nonhuman others in the world—matters only in rural and wild spaces. Being an Urban Indian does not mean being cut off from relationality as a practice of belonging to a place. Instead, he argues, it means re-thinking what relationality can mean.
Discussion Questions:

Read the following excerpt from a conversation between Orange and Julian Brave Noisecat.

Julian: In an early passage of There There, you write: “Being Indian has never been about returning to the land. The land is everywhere or nowhere.” What did you mean by that?

Tommy: I am enrolled in the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes. But we’re specifically Southern Cheyenne. That’s the difference between Northern and Southern Cheyenne. Difference between Montana and Oklahoma. And then even within that, we know that we’re Suhtai which is—there’s Tsitsistas and Suhtai are two different aspects of Southern Cheyenne history. Growing up in the city knowing that and then working in the urban Native community for so long, it’s just not something that was recognized. Just like tribes become other tribes and join with other tribes and get new names. There was this whole experience of Native people living in the city that I was able to witness and be a part of. And it became its own thing to me. Not that it should be its own tribe, but it should be able to be considered. If people are in the city for over sixty or seventy years, and you still have to think of Indians as belonging to the land.

And I was basically just speaking against the idea that the authentic Native experience has to do with the land. And then also at the same time wanting to really ground the experience of living in the city as an Earth-based experience….I was trying to make a city feel more like something that you can relate to….It’s not about returning to something that was before….The land is right there, and people who have been living there for a long time and have histories with cities.

…It’s hard to separate the idea of land from nature. And it’s hard to look at a building and see it as a part of nature….This building’s not a tree, and we can’t think of it that way either….It’s a philosophy that I have cultivated just from having that relationship with the city. And I think that’s what it comes down to. It’s like people’s relationship to the land in the past and having sort of ancestral land is like, you get to know an area that becomes home in a way that you internalize it and you respect and love it because it’s so familiar to you.

And you have that relationship to it because you spend your time there. That’s the area that you spend your time in. And that’s why people have a tight relationship to the land. It’s familiar to you. And so that’s how I feel about Oakland and the city. In my mind I can walk….I know it so well, in my imagination, I can walk through every part of it and really see it. And that’s a relational thing. And that’s a feeling of belonging and a feeling of home. And I think when it
comes to land and Native people’s relationship to land, a lot of that is related to home and having a place that you belong. And having ways of doing things that go back in your family that have to do with the land and the animals there. Or the bus route that your dad took to go to work. These are all things that have to do with belonging to a place. *The full interview can be found here.*

Compare the quotation from the interview above to the following lines from *There There*.

“Urban Indians feel at home walking in the shadow of a downtown building. We came to know the downtown Oakland skyline better than we did any sacred mountain range, the redwoods in the Oakland hills better than any other deep wild forest. We know the sound of the freeway better than we do rivers, the howl of distant howls better than wolf howls, we know the smell of gas and freshly wet concrete and burned rubber better than the smell of cedar or sage or even fry bread—which isn’t traditional, like reservations aren’t traditional, but nothing is original, everything comes from something that came before, which was once nothing. Everything is new and doomed. We ride buses, trains, and cars across, over, and under concrete plains. Being Indian has never been about returning to the land. The land is everywhere or nowhere.” (p. 11)

1. How does this passage reflect Orange’s “feeling of belonging and a feeling of home” for the city he grew up in?

2. Given what you know about the New Native Renaissance, Orange’s interest in fighting against “double invisibility” of Urban Indians, and the history of Relocation, what stands out to you as particularly important or thought-provoking in the passages? Why? Choose at least three details to discuss.

**Suggested In-Class Activity:**

1. Place Study. In both “Dene Oxendene” (pp. 27-44) and “Thomas Frank” (pp. 211-224), the chapter unfolds as the character rides public transit through the city. We learn about each character’s past in flashbacks that occur as he travels across “concrete plains” on the BART.

   - Divide students into small groups to ask one another questions about how places hold and activate memory, and how they contribute to their sense of belonging. You might offer the sample questions below, although students might also benefit from the free space to develop their own.

     o Think of a significant place in your city. What does this place look like? How has it changed—or not—over time? Does this place, and your relationship to it, contribute to your sense of identity? Or your
sense of belonging to a community? How? Why?

2. Place Study. Graffiti—tagging, in particular—is one of the ways that Dene Oxedene makes his mark on the city. Ask small groups to discuss how tagging is (or is not) a way of asserting that one belongs in (and to) a city. What is Dene’s tag? Where does Dene write his tag? Why? In the world outside of the novel, how does tagging (or other forms of graffiti art) work as an act of belonging, asserting one’s presence, shaping the urban home environment, etc.?

Research extension: ask students to use their phones or laptops to look up popular graffiti artists in Oakland, California, and to discuss what they find. Students could also use this opportunity to sketch what they think Dene’s tag might look like—or to imagine the tags other characters might use, if they were to write into the city.

UNIT PROJECT IDEAS

- Use Google maps to develop a mapping project inspired by There There. Students should feel free to design the shape and purpose of the map. Here are some possible ideas:
  
a. Create a tour through Oakland to track significant locations in the novel. When dropping a pin at significant locations you include in your tour, include a summary of how this location appears in the novel (what happens there, why it’s significant to the book) and links to/images of/descriptions of the real-world Oakland landmark the novel fictionalizes. See here for step-by-step instructions to develop a tour on Google maps.
  
b. Map the journey of a single character’s life, both within Oakland and outside of it. Drop a pin at least six meaningful locations (including locations from the character’s past, the character’s family’s past, and/or the reservations). For each pin, include a quotation from the novel, a summary of what this place means to the character, and an explanation of the larger context that helps map-readers understand the role of this place in Native history.

- Write a review of the novel in which you consider how the novel fits into the New Native Renaissance and/or how it grapples with the demographic reality of Urban Indians. Imagine you are writing this review for your fellow Wisconsin high school students who haven’t read the book yet. Be sure to contextualize the novel in both contemporary and historical information to help make your case. The review might also explain how reading a book about Oakland, California might help students reconsider their own relationships to local Indigenous histories.
• Create a zine that introduces readers to the legacy of the Voluntary Relocation Program (including the cycles of poverty and insecure housing). Your zine should include analysis of how these effects reverberate through the lives of at least three characters in the novel. In this project, be sure to avoid a “damage-centered” gaze.
UNIT 3. LAND GRABS

ABOUT THIS UNIT

At the center of the settler colonial project is the quest for land—or, more precisely, the quest to acquire and transform land into settler property under settler control. This unit aims to help students understand how questions of land and property in a settler colonial nation, like the United States, are never just about a patch of ground. Such questions are also about histories of power, race, Indigenous dispossession, and Indigenous sovereignty. Because of this, we highly recommend that teachers consider using the Land Acknowledgment activity below. While this guide suggests opening Unit 3 with a land acknowledgment activity, teachers could alternatively choose to incorporate it into another unit as necessary, given time limitations and course objectives.

“Land Theft & Dispossession,” the first subsection in this unit, provides historical context about early colonial land grabs—from the Doctrine of Discovery in the 15th century to Manifest Destiny in the 19th century—and encourages students to analyze how There There addresses their long legacies.

The second subsection, “‘We Are Still Here’: The Genocide of California Indians & Indigenous Resistance,” focuses on the history of Spanish and US colonization in California, most notably the “war of extermination” the US waged against Indigenous peoples when settling this state, during and after the Gold Rush. This subsection also turns attention toward an equally long history of Native resistance in California, including the Indians of All Tribes’ Occupation of Alcatraz Island (a catalyzing moment for the Red Power movement, which Orange includes in There There) as well as contemporary Indigenous-led movements like Land Back (taking place right now in Wisconsin and throughout the US).

The final subsection, “Gentrification Urban Land Grabs,” addresses a very contemporary problem facing both the characters of There There and the real-world people who live in Oakland, California in the 21st century: urban gentrification. This subsection defines key terms; provides tools for understanding how processes of gentrification have been changing the Oakland cityscape in ways that disproportionately harm Black, brown, poor, and Native inhabitants; and offers historical context for understanding Urban Indians’ unique relationship to gentrification.

All three subsections are interspersed with sample close-reading exercises, sample discussion questions, and sample in-class assignments. A list of ideas for possible unit projects is included at the end.
RECOMMENDED READINGS


- Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne and Dina Gilio-Whitaker. “*All the Real Indians Died Off* and 20 other Myths about Native Americans*. Beacon Press, 2016.


- “Oakland’s Displacement Crisis: As Told by the Numbers.” *Policy Link*.


PRIMARY SOURCES


- Images of the Alcatraz Occupation, via the Golden Golden National Recreation Area Archive
  - “Indian occupation graffiti,” 1975,” Image from the Golden Gate NRA, Park Archives.
  - Morris, Joseph Leo. “Alcatraz Proved a Point,” Alcatraz Occupation Collection, GOGA 35283, Golden Gate NRA.
OPENING ACTIVITY

Land Acknowledgement
A land acknowledgement is a way to honor the Indigenous people on whose territory you reside and to understand your place within the long history of settler colonialism. A land acknowledgment recognizes that settler colonialism is an ongoing process, not an artifact of the past. When preparing for this activity, we encourage educators to visit The Native Governance Center’s Guide to Indigenous Land Acknowledgment.

Note: A land acknowledgement should not aim to prioritize the comfort of non-Indigenous people. Centering the historical and continuous presence of Native peoples might produce uncomfortable feelings in some students, and that’s okay; this is why research and self-reflection are key elements of the activity.

• If the school already has a land acknowledgement statement, begin class by passing out a printed copy of the land acknowledgement, reading it aloud, and encouraging students to free write on the experience:
  ○ What feelings emerge when they read and hear the acknowledgement?
  ○ What questions arise?
  ○ What did they learn about the Indigenous history of their hometown?
  ○ Does this text meet The Native Governance Center’s criteria for an honest and respectful land acknowledgement that works to celebrate and empower local Indigenous communities without white-washing violent histories of genocide, forced removal, and broken treaties? Could it be improved? If so, how?
  ○ What are some actions that you can take, today, to honor and celebrate Indigenous communities in your area?

• If the school does not already have a land acknowledgment, invite students to collaboratively write one for their classroom. It is important that the students consult The Native Governance Center’s Guide and adhere to tips they offer, including engaging in self-reflection; conducting relevant research (treaties, forced removals; resistance movements); employing appropriate language (avoiding euphemisms for settler colonial violence, using Indigenous place names, etc.); and aiming to celebrate the ongoing contributions of Indigenous peoples.
  ○ We encourage students to begin their research using the tools available at the Wisconsin First Nations website. The map of Native Wisconsin will be particularly useful for this exercise.
  ○ We also encourage students to read examples of land acknowledgment statements as they create one for their classroom. The following example from the University of Wisconsin–Madison could be a generative starting point:
The University of Wisconsin–Madison occupies ancestral Ho-Chunk land, a place their nation has called Teejop (day-JOPE) since time immemorial. In an 1832 treaty, the Ho-Chunk were forced to cede this territory. Decades of ethnic cleansing followed when both the federal and state government repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, sought to forcibly remove the Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin. This history of colonization informs our shared future of collaboration and innovation. Today, UW–Madison respects the inherent sovereignty of the Ho-Chunk Nation, along with the eleven other First Nations of Wisconsin.

LAND THEFT & DISPOSSESSION

At the center of the settler colonial project is the quest for land—or, more precisely, the quest to acquire and transform land into settler property under settler control. As Patrick Wolfe writes in “Settler-Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” “[t]erritoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element” (388). Territory in the US is never just about the ground beneath one’s feet. In the words of Glen Coulthard, “[a] settler-colonial relationship is one characterized by a particular form of domination; that is, it is a relationship where power...has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority” (Red Skins, White Masks, 7). Settler colonial acquisition of property always entails depriving Indigenous peoples of their lands, water, and resources and often challenges tribal sovereignty—that is, the recognition of a Native nation’s sovereign right to make and enforce laws and to practice spiritual and cultural lifeways without interference from the settler government.

This subsection aims to provide context for the role that land theft plays in the novel, tracing relevant histories of dispossession from the 19th century through today. It is important to note that we use the general term land theft throughout, even when discussing territories that tribal nations ceded to the US government through treaties or the US government expropriated through legal means (according to the laws of the settler state). During the 19th-century era of expansion in the US, the settlers’ push westward demanded more and more land. This hunger for territory precipitated a number of treaties and land deals between Native nations and the US government—deals that were overwhelmingly underwritten by the threat of colonial force and backed by explicit violence.

The urge to control territory and to remake it in one’s own image is animated by a series of 15th-century Catholic decrees. Between 1452 and 1493, the Vatican issued a series of Papal Bulls that sanctioned the colonization of lands inhabited by non-Christian people in Africa and the Americas. Together, these pronouncements articulate what is
known as the Doctrine of Discovery. In the 1452 decree, Pope Nicholas wrote that Christian powers were to “capture, vanquish, and subdue the Saracens, pagans, and other enemies of Christ” and “to take all their possessions and property.” The Doctrine of Discovery laid the foundation for Manifest Destiny, a popular 19th-century belief that the United States had a Christian duty to expand throughout the continent of North America, transforming Indigenous lands into white settler property and spreading the “light” of civilization in its wake. To this day, the Vatican has not repealed the Doctrine of Discovery, and its key assumptions, like the key assumptions of Manifest Destiny, have not faded from the mainstream imagination.


Suggested In-Class Activity:

1. Manifest Destiny is perhaps most famously visualized by *American Progress*, an 1872 painting by John Gast. In this painting, Columbia—a personification of the US nation—leads settlers westward, bringing modern technologies like trains, telephone wires, and Anglo-European agricultural methods from the already-colonized East to the “wild” West. Indigenous peoples, buffalo, and other symbols of the “not-yet-civilized wilderness” run deeper into the darkness, as if to disappear off the canvas, replaced by the “dawn” of settler colonialism.
Discuss:

- What does Gast's painting present as “civilized”? What does he see as “wild”? (Be specific and name as many examples as you can.)
- How are light and darkness used as symbols in the painting?
- What is the significance, do you think, of figuring the US as Columbia, peacefully guiding settlers westward? What does her dress remind you of? How might her physical representation underscore certain Anglo-European values?
- Look carefully at how land is presented in this painting. How is land itself—and how various groups make use of the land—being imagined here? Why, do you think? How does this support the kind of thinking in the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny?

Close-Reading Exercise:

In “Edwin Black” (pp. 243-246), Edwin tells Blue a story that he’s been writing about a Native man named Phil and a white man named John. Read Edwin’s explanation of the story—and his conversation with Blue—and consider the following:

1. One way to interpret Edwin’s story is as an allegory for Native land dispossession. What are some examples from this story that could support this reading?
2. Why do you think Edwin doesn’t feel like the story he tells about Phil and John is finished quite yet? What about the ending do you think is satisfying or incomplete?
3. On page 246, Blue says that “taking over” is part of white culture, and she gets annoyed when Edwin (whose mother is white) tries to argue that not all white people do this. What is the difference between white people and white culture that Blue (who was adopted by white people and doesn’t yet know who her Native parents are) is trying to articulate? Why do you think this distinction is important in context of both the novel and the history of land grabs discussed above?
4. Edwin tells this story of dispossession from Phil’s perspective, whereas Gast’s painting tells the story of “progress” from the settler colonial perspective. If Edwin’s story were transformed into a painting—a version of “American Progress” from Phil’s point of view—what do you think it would include? Why?
“WE ARE STILL HERE”: THE GENOCIDE OF CALIFORNIA INDIANS & INDIGENOUS ACTIVISM

California Dreaming: The Untold Genocide of California Indians

The present-day city of Oakland occupies Huchiun, the unceded territory of the Lisjan Ohlone. In the early 1700s, California was home to hundreds of thousands of Native Americans—diverse and heterogeneous peoples from over 200 tribes, with distinct cultural traditions and 80 different languages, who have lived on these lands from time immemorial. When Spanish colonizers arrived, they took control of large swathes of territory, claiming it for Spain. They established Catholic missions that served as plantation-style labor camps where subjugated Indigenous laborers were put to work under threat of force and violence. Colonists infected Indigenous populations with myriad European diseases that ran rampant through their communities. Despite many instances of Indigenous resistance—from revolts to escapes to community survivance within mission walls—approximately 100,000 (nearly a third) of the original inhabitants died as a direct consequence of Spanish colonization.

The above screenshot shows a detail from The California Native American Ancestral Lands map. Oakland, which resides on Ohlone territory, called Huchiun, is highlighted in yellow. See the full interactive map of California Native lands here.

The next wave of colonialism had even more dire effects. By 1848, California was under the control of the US. A white settler named John Sutter had discovered gold in the American River, and the California Gold Rush had begun. White settlers flooded the area in hopes of making their fortunes, and mass violence against Indigenous peoples followed in their wake. The Gold Rush ushered in a state-sponsored campaign that attempted to eradicate California Indians entirely. The new state legislature passed the
Act for the Government and Protection of Indians (1950), which legalized indentured servitude—the veritable enslavement—of Native Americans: white settlers could bind into servitude any Native American who was convicted of minor offences (such as loitering, possessing alcohol, owing debts) or who was known to be an orphan (even if the settler had killed the child’s parents themself). Over the course of just a decade, Californian settlers forced as many as 20,000 Indians (a fifth of whom were children) to work as farm hands, ranch hands, and domestics served under the brutal conditions of unfreedom. In 1850, a group of enslaved Eastern Pomo people revolted against the ranchers who kept them captive. In response, the US military sent soldiers to “exterminate if possible” the rebels, and they killed over 800 Eastern Pomo people—the largest massacre in US history.

With the support of the US Army, Governor Peter Hardenman Burnett amassed an extensive arsenal and distributed the weapons among local militias with the express purpose of eliminating Native people in the state. Local governments put a bounty on Indians—white settlers would be paid a reward if they could bring in body parts to prove they murdered a “savage” (See Unit 1 for how There There addresses this gruesome history). Understood within the framework of the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny, “the war of extermination” was both “destined” and “inevitable.” As Burnett said in an 1851 speech: “That a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the races until the Indian race becomes extinct must be expected. While we cannot anticipate this result but with painful regret, the inevitable destiny of the race is beyond the power or wisdom of man to avert.” Julian Brave NoiseCat writes that: “State-sponsored militias received more than $1 million from the state in the 1850s and '60s, and between 1846 and 1873, they murdered 9,492 to 16,094 Indigenous peoples . . . Elected officials praised these murders as a “pedagogic killing” that taught the Natives a lesson.” At the core of this unimaginable violence was settler colonial lust for land.

The years that followed, California Indians were removed to just 4 reservations, where the livestock, food rations, and other support promised by the US government rarely materialized. The US negotiated a series of treaties with California tribes, but the Senate never ratified these treaties. Despite having negotiated with the federal government in good faith, the tribal nations’ sovereign control over their land, waters, fishing, and hunting rights remained legally unrecognized. In the early 20th century, the “Indians of California”—a legal term that refers to Indigenous peoples from all tribes living in the state as of 1852—began a long campaign to sue the government over lost treaty lands (1928) and stolen lands not covered by the treaties (began in 1946, won in 1972).

By the mid-twentieth century, California cities—notably Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland—had gained an additional Native presence. Through the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Voluntary Relocation Program, thousands of Native people from many different tribes had come to the cities from reservations in California and across the entire US
The BIA had promised access to job training, quality housing, and educational opportunities. In reality, most people who relocated from reservations found themselves trapped in low-wage work, crowded into run-down houses and unmaintained apartments in economically depressed and “blighted” neighborhoods that city officials had long disinvested from, and left with few opportunities for educational advancement. The city, however, also created opportunities for intertribal solidarity, as Native peoples organized cultural centers and social welfare organizations to meet the needs of community members suffering under the BIA’s broken promises. At a moment in time when fights for civil rights were fomenting and gathering momentum throughout the US, a generation of Native activists from a host of tribes—many of whom were young Urban Indians—came together to resist Termination policies (see Unit 2), coerced assimilation, and centuries of settler colonial land theft, exploitation, and oppression.

“We Hold the Rock”: From Alcatraz to #LandBack

"In the name of all Indians ... we reclaim this island for our Indian nations," the proclamation read. "We feel this claim is just and proper, and that the land should rightfully be granted to us for as long as the rivers run and the sun shall shine. We hold the Rock!"—Richard Oakes, 1969

Red Power—a radical pan-Indian protest movement—began with the Occupation of Alcatraz Island. In 1969, a group of young activists reclaimed the island in the name of all Native peoples. The group, which called itself “Indians of All Tribes,” occupied Alcatraz for 19 months and changed the shape of not only Native activism but US Indian policy for the next fifty years.

From the 1850s until the early 20th century, a colonial fort on Alcatraz Island confined Native prisoners in “disciplinary barracks.” Perhaps the most famous among these prisoners were the 19 Hopi men who were arrested and imprisoned in 1985 for refusing to send their children to Indian boarding schools, places rife with abuse, disease, and preventable child deaths. In the 1910s, the US built a military prison on the site. Then, in the 1930s, it was again transformed into the notorious high-security federal prison with a reputation for being “escape-proof.” By 1963, Alcatraz Penitentiary closed its doors, and the Rock (as the island was called) was no longer in use as a federal carceral facility.

The next year (1964) a group of five men, inspired by Bay-area Native activist Belva Cottier (Rosebud Sioux), set up camp on the island to claim the land for the Oceti Sakowin. Note: the Oceti Sakowin are known federally as the Great Sioux Nation, comprised of seven sub-nations speaking Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota languages. Following provisions in the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie in which the US government agreed that lands formally belonging to the Sioux should return to the Sioux if they became “surplus” property, each of the five activists set up camp and staked a claim on
the land. They called for the establishment of a Native American cultural center and a Native university. This first occupation was short-lived, but it set the stage for the much longer and much larger occupation that the Indians of All Tribes (IoAT) would begin just five years later.

On November 20, 1969, Richard Oakes, college students from the American Indian Studies Center at UCLA, and a group of Urban Indians from the Bay Area—over 80 men, women, and children, in all—took a boat to the island and established camp. The Indians of All Tribes set out to develop an expressly pan-Indian community where duties like security, sanitation, childcare and education, cooking, and laundry were distributed among the occupiers. Although the charismatic Richard Oakes acted often as the unofficial “mayor” of the Rock, occupiers established an elected “Indian council” to strategize next steps and represent the interests of everyone on the island. In early negotiations with the federal government, which had set up barricades around the island to block supply shipments of food and other necessities, Oakes and the Council listed their demands: first and foremost, the deed to the island and the return of all stolen Indigenous lands. They also called for the development of a cultural center, an ecology center to stem the destruction of their land, and a museum to honor Indigenous peoples around the globe. All requests the government summarily denied.

Suggested In-Class Activities:

1. The Alcatraz Proclamation
   - Distribute the Alcatraz Proclamation, delivered by Oakes in 1969. Read and listen.
     - Audio
     - Transcript
   - Discuss the following:
     - What were the major goals of the Indians of All Tribes occupation?
     - This occupation was an explicitly pan-Indian movement. Why was that important?
     - What role did land—and relationships to land—play in the Occupation, as it was described in the Proclamation?

2. Image analysis – Pair with Activity 1.
   - Divide the class into small groups. Assign one of the following three images from the Alcatraz Occupation to each group. (Larger images available on the NPS website, “Alcatraz - Indian Occupation Period.”)
     - “Indian occupation graffiti,” c. 1975. Image from the Golden Gate NRA, Park Archives.
o “Alcatraz Proved a Point,” by Joseph Leo Morris, an occupier who coordinated shipments of goods onto the island at one of the piers. Image available in the Alcatraz Occupation Collection, GOGA 35283, Golden Gate National Recreation Area).

o “Indian Land” painted entrance, c. 1970. Image from the Golden Gate NRA, Park Archives.

• Ask students to study the image, describe in detail what elements of the image stand out to them, and discuss how the image reflects, supports, complicates, or otherwise responds to the vision set out in the Proclamation.
• How is land—the theft and reclamation of land—connected to other forms of Indigenous sovereignty?

3. Voices from the Rock – Pair with Activity 1 Alternative

• Educators might instead choose to pair the class’s study of “The Alcatraz Proclamation” with the following statements from six people who were among the original occupiers. Students might find it generative to hear about the first week of the Occupation in the words of the people who were there. The six short accounts are available on Indian Country Today.

• What do you notice about the tone of these first-person accounts? What surprises you? How does reading these accounts enrich how you understand the goals announced in the Proclamation?

• How is land—the theft and reclamation of land—connected to other forms of Indigenous sovereignty?

The Occupation was not without its internal turmoil. Power struggles emerged as some occupiers, unhappy with Oakes’ de facto leadership, made bids for more control over the management and direction of The Rock. Although women played crucial roles in the vision, administration, and daily work on the island—LaNada Boyer (Shoshone-Bannock) was among the original occupiers and has been called by some “the real leader of the occupation”—they were largely banned from holding leadership positions. See Unit 5 for more on patriarchal colonialism and gender relations in American Indian, Alaskan Native, and First Nations communities.

As the UCLA students began to return to campus and as popular interest in the movement grew—in least part thanks to John Trudell’s daily radio show “Radio Free Alcatraz”—non-Native people from San Francisco’s countercultural scene became a larger presence on the island. Young white hippies flocked to the island in search of a refuge, ate the group’s food, and then left, having offered nothing in return (Like a Hurricane, 24). Illicit substance use and substance abuse, instances of physical and
sexual assault, and difficulties of securing enough resources to feed everyone on the island began to take a toll on morale.

On January 5, 1970, Oakes’s 13-year-old stepdaughter Yvonne died from a tragic fall. Her death prompted a vicious and embittered power struggle that ended with Oakes leaving the island. Leadership was in disarray, resources were running low, and after some IoAT members illegally stripped the prison of valuable copper wire in hopes of making money. Public support turned against the occupiers. Many chose to return to their homes on the reservation and in the city. In June 1971, Richard Nixon removed the remaining 20 protestors from The Rock.

Suggested In-Class Activities:

The Alcatraz Occupation makes an appearance in There There. Notably, Orange does not describe The Rock in unilaterally positive terms. Instead, he chooses to frame the Occupation from the perspective of two young women—Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield (pp. 49-58) and Jacquie Red Feather (pp. 108-112) —who encounter a world that is confusing, threatening, and in some ways actively dangerous.

Trapped in a cycle of poverty, experiencing homelessness, and in early stages of the cancer that would take her life, Opal’s and Jacquie’s mother brings them to Alcatraz in the hopes of finding community and building a better world. As she tells her girls, “We’re going to be with our relatives. Indians of All Tribes. We’re going to the cell where they built that prison. Gonna start from the inside of the cell, which is where we are now, Indian people, that’s where they got us, even though they don’t make it seem like they got us there. We’re gonna work out way out from the inside with a spoon” (48). For their mother, centuries of settler colonial dispossession, exploitation, and violence have imprisoned Native peoples into a small cell—she uses the metaphor of a prison cell as the cage that, together, they can work to escape. Soon, however, her idealism wanes. On the island, leadership begins to fray, resources dwindle, and substance abuse seems on the rise. Historically, we can place them in the chaotic weeks following Yvonne’s death, evidenced by the power struggles that led to Oakes’ exile and the allusion to stolen copper wire.

1. First, invite students to peruse these images of Native women at Alcatraz, courtesy of the New York Historical Society’s Women and the American Story Curriculum for K-12 learners. Although many women played a foundational role in the occupation, they are often written out of the histories and images that circulate in mainstream media. This invisibility is one reason why it is so important that Orange highlights the experiences of girls and young women. Showing these images will help to prepare students to make sense of the threats Opal and Jacquie face without relying on pre-conceived stereotypes.
2. Then, ask students to read Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield’s (pp. 49-58) and Jacquie Red Feather’s (pp. 108-112) accounts of their time on The Rock. Consider the following:

- Given that the Alcatraz Occupation was such a watershed moment for Red Power, why do you think that Orange chooses not to lionize the occupiers as one-dimensional heroes but instead draws attention to the internal troubles that ultimately unraveled the Indians of All Tribes’ hold on The Rock? How might this choice fit into the larger project of telling complicated Native stories about full and complex Native characters?

- Violence against women reverberates throughout the novel (see Unit 5 for more on patriarchal colonialism and historical trauma). It is important, however, that we read these moments in context of the entire book—rather than through cultural stereotypes of “drunk Indians,” “savage” Natives, and violated Indigenous women. How do the threats that Jacquie faces, in particular, reflect what Orange describes in the Prologue as “stray bullets and consequences” of settler colonialism that are “landing on or unsuspecting bodies even now” (10)? How does Harvey’s apology shed light on the relationship between his attempts to take responsibility for his own violent actions and the long history of Native dispossession and eradication that the characters are all embroiled in. How does Jacquie respond? Why?

3. Finally, ask students to select a line or short passage from Opal’s and Jacquie’s chapters that somehow engages with one of the questions above. Encourage them to share this line/short passage with the class on the board. As you discuss the lines as a class, help students to draw thematic connections among their choices and between their choices and the unit’s larger topic of “land grabs” as a settler colonial process of asserting dominance over not only territory itself but all forms of Indigenous sovereignty.

Although by no means perfect, the IoAT’s Occupation of Alcatraz remains a significant turning point in contemporary Native history. The growing Red Power movement now had the nation’s attention, and Indigenous rights were suddenly part of mainstream conversations in a way they had not been just a year before. In direct response to the Occupation, President Nixon signed a number of legislative measures that increased federal recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and each tribal nation’s rights to administrate the federal programs that affect their citizens’ lives, including the The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. The Occupation also reverberated through Native communities, emboldening activists and giving shape to a vision of a future in which land was reclaimed and returned. A future where Indian lands were in Indian hands—where they belonged. In the words of Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, “[t]hough Oakes and other occupiers clung to ambitious dreams of
altering the consciousness of Indian children everywhere, they may have had little notion of the hundreds of small ways in which they would stir the hearts of many of their Indian contemporaries (Like a Hurricane, pp. 24-25).

We can see traces of the Red Power movement continue today in contemporary Indigenous movements. As the leaders of Land Back—one of the most visible movements around land reclamation and Indigenous sovereignty today—explain: “LANDBACK is a movement that has existed for generations with a long legacy of organizing and sacrifice to get Indigenous Lands back into Indigenous hands. Currently, there are LANDBACK battles being fought all across Turtle Island, to the north and the South.” We can also, as the quotation above suggests, look to past and re-envision centuries of Indigenous resistance to colonization (resistance to Missions, to indentured servitude, to residential schools, to broken treaties, etc.) as examples of Native activism that has built toward Red Power and beyond.

Suggested Extension Activities—& A Wisconsin Connection

1. Listen to "Red Power: From Alcatraz to Standing Rock,” an episode of the Red Nation Podcast in which Dr. Nick Estes, a citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, marks the 50th anniversary of the Alcatraz occupation. In this episode, he connects the Red Power movement to a longer history of Indigenous and Black resistance and global solidarity.

Then, look at the website for the NDN Collective’s Land Back movement. Read their website’s homepage, their manifesto, and watch their short film.
- Why is land at the center of this resistance?
- What is solidarity? Why does it matter?
- How do these fights affect Urban Indians, like the characters in There There?

2. Research the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, an urban Indigenous women-led land trust based centered in Huchuin, unceded Lisjan Ohlone territory now known as the East Bay, that aims to rematriate Indigenous lands. Read about their history, their vision statement, and their current projects on their website.
- What are their goals? Why?
- How does the rematriation of land work in an urban area like Oakland?
- Choose a quotation from their website. How does this quotation speak to the themes Orange explores in There There? In what ways?

3. Invite students to research an example of Indigenous activism currently in Wisconsin. You might, for example, research Indigenous-led protests against Enbridge Line 3 and Enbridge Line 5, oil pipelines transporting Canadian tar sands/crude oil through tribal
land in Wisconsin (as well as Michigan and Minnesota). The Stop Line 3 website intro and line 5 is a good place to start.

* What tribes are leading the protest, against Line 3? Line 5?
* What are the Indigenous water protectors’ concerns about the pipeline(s)?
* How are their arguments in conversation with what you’ve learned about land grabs and sovereignty throughout this unit?

**GENTRIFICATION: URBAN LAND GRABS**

Today, Oakland, California is embroiled in another kind of land grab: **gentrification**. UC Berkeley’s Urban Displacement Project defines gentrification as “a process of neighborhood change that includes economic change in a historically disinvested neighborhood—by means of real estate investment and new higher-income residents moving in—as well as demographic change—not only in terms of income level, but also in terms of changes in the education level or racial make-up of residents.”

When a neighborhood in a US city gentrifies, low-income residents and residents of color become displaced from their homes and their communities, facing exorbitantly expensive rents, eviction, foreclosure, and increased surveillance and policing. Higher-income (often white) people begin to fill the residences, and the culture of the neighborhood changes as new shops, restaurants, and other amenities crop up to fulfill the desires of the new inhabitants. Such changes are often seen as positive signs of urban revitalization. After all, a city street with brand new condos and sleek coffee shops certainly might seem more “vital” than a street with old buildings in need of repair and shuttered storefronts. But at what cost? This narrative obscures historical contexts that created these conditions and erases the stories of the people who have been—and continue to be—pushed out.

Gentrification narratives ignore years of purposeful government disinvestment from “blighted neighborhoods” and discriminatory redlining practices (in which financial institutions refuse to offer loans or insurance to people in “high-risk” non-white areas). Oakland, a city with historically large working-class and Black populations, has been targeted by precisely these measures. Research by UC Berkley’s Urban Displacement Project found that “83 percent of today’s gentrifying areas in the East Bay were once rated as ‘hazardous’ or ‘definitely declining’ by the federal Home Owners’ Loan Corporation—euphemisms referring to non-white neighborhoods where the financial system refused to extend credit to homebuyers.” After years of divestment and lack of access to fair loans from financial institutions, Oakland’s inhabitants began facing rapid rent increases and evictions from landlords who were eager to replace low-income renters with higher-income tenants. As the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project reports, “Oakland has the fastest pace for gentrification and displacement in the Bay Area.” In the span of a single year, between 2016 and 2017, homelessness increased 36% in
Alameda County. Policy Link’s study on “Oakland Displacement Crisis” notes that communities of color, particularly Black households, have been disproportionately affected.

Much of the news coverage of Oakland’s rapid gentrification points to “spillover” from Silicon Valley, as young white workers in the tech-industry—not to mention the tech company themselves—leave San Francisco to seek new (and more affordable) places to live in the East Bay. These “white boys” appear often throughout Orange’s There There (for example, see page 21). Whereas much of the discussion about Oakland’s gentrification crisis focuses on Black and Latinx residents, Orange turns the spotlight on Urban Indians. Natives have been largely invisible in these mainstream conversations, despite the fact that the Bay Area boasts one of the largest populations of Urban Indians in the country. During and after Relocation in the second half of the 20th century, Native Americans moved to Oakland from a range of reservations throughout the state of California as well from the Southwest, Great Plains, and Eastern Woodlands areas, and they developed a robust Intertribal Indian presence in the city. Growing up in Oakland himself, Tommy Orange has had a front seat to the shifting cityscape, and his characters’ experiences reflect these realities.

As Orange makes clear in There There, gentrification affects Urban Indian communities in unique ways. One on hand, experiencing displacement by a group of (largely white) newcomers echoes—without being identical to—the long history of dispossession and colonial land grabs. Early in the novel, Dene Oxendene articulates how gentrification of the city one calls home hits Native people on at least two fronts. Orange describes a conversation between Dene (who, like Orange himself, is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, and who grew up in Oakland) and Rob, a young white “hipster” (who is moving to West Oakland with his friends because it is “dirt cheap”) When Dene asks him if he’s from Oakland, Rob responds “I mean, no one’s really from here, right?” and then quotes a famous line from the author Gertrude Stein: “There is no there there.” While Rob seems to think Stein means Oakland does not really exist as a homeplace to which people have meaningful and long-lasting relationships, Dene has a very different interpretation:

“‘There is no there there,’ he says in a kind of whisper, with this goofy openmouthed smile Dene wants to punch. Dene wants to tell him he looked up the quote in its original context, in her Everybody’s Biography, and found that she was talking about how the place where she’d grown up in Oakland had changed so much, that so much development had happened there, that the there of her childhood, the there there, was gone, there was no there there anymore. Dene wants to tell him it’s what happened to Native people, he wants to explain that they’re not the same, that Dene is Native, born and raised in Oakland, from Oakland. Rob probably didn’t look further into the quote because he got what he wanted from it. He probably used the quote at dinner parties and made other
people like him feel good about taking over neighborhoods they wouldn’t have had the guts to drive through ten years ago….But for Native people in this country, all over the Americas, it’s been developed over, buried ancestral land, glass and concrete and wire and steel, unreturnable covered memory. There is no there there” (p. 39).

Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. What similarities does Dene draw between these two kinds of land grabs, namely Native dispossession and gentrification? How do both create conditions where people feel there is no there there?
2. What do you think the phrase “unreturnable covered memory” might mean? What does Dene feel has been covered over, and why is it unreturnable?
3. Why do you think Rob’s use of the quotation from Stein makes Dene so upset?

Suggested In-Class Activities:

1. Earlier in the same chapter excerpted above, Dene listens to a song by the British band Radiohead entitled “There There” (p. 29). He is riding the train, on the way to give his presentation to a panel of judges in hopes of earning a grant to fund his film project, a documentary that collects the stories of Native people living in Oakland. In this chapter, he is haunted by memories of his uncle Lucas (who began the film project that Dene hopes to continue) and hounded by feelings of self-doubt. As he rides through the city, passing various train stops, his narrative flickers back and forth between the present moment and his memories.

   • “There There” is the first single from Radiohead’s 2003 album Hail to the Chief. Listen to the song and read the lyrics.
   • What kind of mood or tone does the song create? What specifically about the lyrics do you think resonates with Dene at this particular moment in the book (see There There p. 29)?
   • Keeping in mind the problems of gentrification in Oakland and Dene’s feelings of displacement, how does the song resonate with the Stein quotation? How are they different? What seems significant about these similarities or differences?

2. Urban Indians are often caught in entangled structures of racism and settler colonialism. Throughout the novel, Opal and Jacquie each recall their mother describing home as a spider web—as both a home and a trap.

   • Ask students to reflect individually in their journals on the following passage: “Opal and Jacquie’s mom never let them kill a spider if they found one in the
house. Her mom said spiders carry thousands of miles of webs in their bodies, miles of story, miles of potential home and trap. She said that’s what we are. Home and trap” (p. 163).

- What do you think their mother means? How can a home also be a trap?
- Have you ever experienced this feeling? In what circumstances? Why?

- Divide the class into small groups. Ask each group to select one other character for whom home (whether that’s Oakland, their apartment, etc.) is both a place they belong (a home) and a trap. Discuss how they experience this place as a home. Discuss how they experience it as a trap. What factors make it a trap for them? Why? Then, ask them to use their analysis to help to make sense of a decision this character makes in the book.
UNIT PROJECT IDEAS

- In this project, you will “fix”—edit, annotate, or otherwise correct—*The City of Oakland*’s official description of its own history.

Print it out and use any media you’d like to create a textual college in which you use what you’ve learned about the historical and ongoing presence of Native Americans in Oakland to complicate this version of history. Or, use a digital platform to cross out information, insert information, add hyperlinks, and create a more complete vision of Oakland’s Native presence.

- Choose an Extension Activity that your class did not do together during your study of the novel. Conduct independent research and analysis to complete this activity on your own.

- In this creative writing assignment, research the NDN Collective’s Land Back Art movement—a campaign to increase the visibility of Native presence and support for Land Back by installing billboards featuring Native art throughout select cities. Go to their Twitter or Instagram to see examples of the artistic billboards.

Although *There There* predates the NDN Collective’s Land Back campaign, imagine that at least three of Orange’s characters each encounters one of these billboards in Oakland. Write a short chapter from each of character’s perspective, describing the billboard, how they react to its message, and how it makes them feel/what it inspires them to think about. Include a short essay (250-500 words) in which you explain why you chose this particular billboard and why think each character would respond as they do. Be sure to refer to the novel itself in your short essay.
UNIT 4. ‘WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A REAL INDIAN?’:
URBAN INDIAN IDENTITIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

ABOUT THIS UNIT

This unit aims to support classroom discussions and activities around the complicated question of Native American identity—particularly Urban Indian identities—that Orange addresses in the first three parts of There There: Remain, Reclaim, Return. This unit is divided into four subsections. The first subsection, “Native Identity & ‘Dressing Up Indian,’” focuses primarily on the novel itself, including supplemental biographical information and snippets of interviews with Tommy Orange to provide context for the close study of characterization in the book.

The second and third subsections briefly gloss relevant colonial policies of Native assimilation and Native elimination that underscore the questions of identity that appear in the first subsection of this unit and throughout the novel. “Blood Quantum” explains how a 17th-century colonial law that aimed to assert racial and political control over Indigenous peoples in the US has become both a matter of tribal sovereignty and a complex, hotly debated issue with Native communities. The third subsection, “Family Matters: The Theft of Native Children, Then & Now,” illustrates how centuries of colonial policies targeting Native children and families continue to reverberate today—from the violent assimilation techniques of 19th-century Indian boarding schools to the ongoing concerns surrounding the removal and adoption of Native children and the uncertain future of the Indian Child Welfare Act (1978).

The final subsection, “Identity & Belonging: Searching for History, Finding Oneself,” turns to the ways that 21st-century urban Native people—especially, but not exclusively, youth—are finding and creating new ways of “being Indian.” This subsection encourages students to not only read about characters like Orvil Red Feather and Edwin Black but also to watch and to listen to the contemporary Native dancers and musicians that appear in the book—artists who fuse the traditional with the modern in acts of dynamic survivance and show, in no uncertain terms, how Native American peoples are “modern, present-day peoples” (p. 141).

RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Brown, Jeffrey. “‘Writing out of a loneliness,’ novelist explores the range of native experiences,” PBS News, 26 July 2018.


• Orange, Tommy. “‘Writing out of a loneliness,’ novelist explores the range of native experiences.” Interview by Jeffrey Brown. *PBS*, 26 Jul. 2018.


• TallBear, Kim. “Genomic articulations of indigeneity.” *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 43, no. 4, Special Issue: Indigenous Body Parts and Postcolonial Technoscience, August 2013, pp. 509-533.


**RECOMMENDED PRIMARY SOURCES**

• Carlisle Indian School Digital Resources.


• “Sustain Oneida,” 2021.

NATIVE IDENTITY & “DRESSING UP INDIAN”

“What does it mean to be a real Indian?” When Orvil Red Feather types this question into Google, he is greeted by a host of confusingly diverse—and sometimes hostile and judgmental—opinions. The novel itself grapples with this knotty question from a variety of perspectives. Some characters do not know their tribes because they aren’t in contact with their Indian parent.

Throughout *There There*, many characters (Orvil Red Feather, Blue, Edwin Black, Calvin, and Thomas Frank) worry they are not “Native enough”—that they don’t know how to be (or are not) authentically “Indian.” Some, like Thomas, feel caught between worlds—part white, part Indian, and uncertain where they belong. Some grew up without their Native parent, like Edwin and Calvin, and so feel entirely disconnected from their tribe. Others, like Blue, were adopted by white families and are searching for answers about who they are, where they come from, and how they fit into Native communities. Still others, like Orvil, are growing up in Native families, but without learning much about their heritage. And some, like Tony, wrestle with the traumatic histories they carry in their bodies. Twelve-year-old Orvil is certainly not the only character asking “What does it mean to be a real Indian?,” as multiple facets of the questions swirl throughout the book.

Tommy Orange is no stranger to the identity questions his characters navigate, and he set out to write a novel that addresses these disorientating fears and worries head on. As he explains in an interview with Jeffrey Brown:

> When people think the only way to be Native or the only way to look Native is based on a historical, head-dressed feathered image, you have already disappeared—you’re already gone before you can even start. There's something powerful about seeing yourself on the page or on the screen. And we don't have very much a good, positive version of that. Native people have—we have a lot of stereotypes that we battle against or negative ideas that we're dumb or we're drunk or—so, I was sort of writing out of a loneliness.

Orange identifies as a mixed-race Urban Indian. His father is American Indian (Cheyenne/Arapaho), and his mother is white. His parents divorced after his mother converted to evangelical Christianity (a lineage Orange shares with his character Thomas Frank). In interview and book talks, he often describes experiences of feeling
Teaching There There in Wisconsin

Great World Texts: A Program of the Center for the Humanities, University of Wisconsin-Madison
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lonely and “doubly invisible” (see Unit 2), out of place in both worlds he belongs to: not
**Indian enough** when visiting his Native family in Oklahoma and **too Indian or not Indian at all** when mistaken for Mexican, Chinese, Korean while among white and non-Native peers in Oakland.

*There There* refuses to yoke Native identity to a strict vision of “authenticity,” particularly in light of his experience as an Urban Indian: “They used to call us sidewalk Indians. Called us citified, superficial, inauthentic, cultureless refugees, apples. An apple is red on the outside and white on the inside. But what we are is what our ancestors did. How they survived” (p. 10). Here, Orange pushes back against the idea of “apples,” and he suggests that the very existence of Native people in the US today is a testament to how Native peoples continue to adapt, survive, and resist the settler colonial project of elimination. Even so, in the wake of 500 years of violence, Orange’s characters grapple with what “Indianness” means for one’s personal, cultural, and political identities.

*There There* does not offer any easy answers or provide any authoritative definition of what Native identity should feel like, look like, or be. Instead, his polyphonic novel places his characters’ questions within a long context of historical traumas and also gives voice to many different ways of “being Native” in the 21st century.

Close-Reading & Discussion Questions:

1. Mirrors are a recurring motif in the novel. For Tony Loneman and Orvil Red Feather, in particular, the act of confronting one’s reflection is intimately connected to grappling with one’s identity.

   - The book begins (and ends) with Tony Loneman, a young man who quite literally embodies intergenerational trauma. He has a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, a condition caused by exposure to alcohol before birth that can result in a range of health problems, neurobehavioral conditions, and facial abnormalities. Tony calls this “The Drome” (a shortened form of its previous name, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome). Because of his facial abnormalities, he is **hyper-visible**—people notice him, and often not in positive ways.
      - Early in the novel (pp. 15-16), Tony describes the first time he really saw himself as others see him. Tony recalls that he saw “a fucking villain” staring back at him from the tv screen (p. 16). What do you think he means by this?
      - He also describes The Drome as “a power and a curse,” and “the way history lands on a face” (p. 16). What is the power The Drome gives him? How does it manifest a cycle of historical pain—notably, his mother’s struggle with alcohol addiction? How do these both affect what he sees when he looks at his reflection?
At the end of the first chapter, Tony agrees to plant bullets in the bushes to help Octavio steal the prize money from the Big Oakland Powwow. He puts on the regalia he promised Octavio he’d wear to blend in at the event and returns to the TV screen to examine his reflection: “I looked at my face. The Drome. I didn’t see it there. I saw an Indian. I saw a dancer” (p. 26). What is significant about this change, do you think? If the Drome made him feel like a hyper-visible “villain,” how does wearing the regalia change how he sees himself? Is this a positive shift? In what ways yes, and in what ways no? Why?

Orvil Red Feather also uses mirrors to confront his identity (pp. 121-122).

Orvil looks at himself in the mirror, dressed in his regalia for the powwow, and feels like “a boy playing dress up” (p. 122). Why does he feel like this?

*It might be useful to remember, here, that he found this regalia in his grandmother/great-aunt Opal’s closet; Opal received this regalia as a young teenager from her childhood friend and fellow foster kid, Lucas, who is also Dene’s uncle. Orvil doesn’t know any of this, and he feels as if he stole this regalia from Opal, who does not tell him much about their heritage.*

As Orvil stares in the mirror, he is “waiting for something true to appear before him—about him.” How does “dressing like an Indian” help him to access something “true” about himself, even though he feels like a fraud? Why?

Orvil seems to think that “the only way to be Indian in this world is to look and act like an Indian.” Do you think that the novel itself agrees with him? Why/why not?

Later, we learn from Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield (p. 159) that Orvil has been both interested in and frightened by mirrors for a long time. As a very young boy, Orvil worried that the person he saw in the mirror was another person entirely (not just a reflection), and wondered who was copying whom. When he jumps around as if he were powwow dancing, Opal thinks that he must be “just trying to act crazy in front of the mirror to prove no one else was in control but him, the Orvil on this side of the mirror” (p. 160).

How does Orvil’s fear—his fear that he might be a copy of the person in the mirror—resonate with the identity confusions he experiences as he gets older (see questions above)?

Do you agree with Opal’s interpretation that Orvil’s childhood dancing is an attempt to prove that he’s the one in control? Why or why not?
And in control of what, exactly? Compare your thinking here to your analysis of Orvil’s “dressing up Indian” in front of the mirror. Is “dressing up Indian” also about trying to exert control over his own sense of identity and belonging? If so, how?

2. Edwin Black (pp. 72-77) and Thomas Frank (p. 216) are white and Native, and this sense of “being both and neither” impacts how they understand their personal identities as well as their places in larger Native communities.
   - Why does Edwin feel he has to defend his Native identity? (Read pp. 71-72)
     - How does constipation work as a metaphor for Edwin’s identity crisis? (Read pp. 66-78) Why does he finally experience relief at the end of the chapter?
   - Thomas’s father is “1000% Indian” (Cheyenne/Arapaho), his mother is white, and he wrestles with what that means for his own sense of self and belonging: “You’re from a people who took and took and took and took. And from a people taken. You were both and neither. When you took baths, you’d stare at your brown arms against your white legs in the water and wonder what they were doing together on the same body, in the same bathtub” (p. 216).
     - What does Thomas feel when he sees his “brown arms against…white legs in the water”? Why do the various parts of himself feel at odds?
     - Thomas’s chapter is written in second person—using “you” rather than “I” (first person) or “he” (third person). Second person is unusual because it does two things simultaneously: it gives readers insight into Thomas’s perspective and it seems to address the reader (the “you”). Does the second person point of view affect how you read and respond to this chapter? In what ways?

Discussion Questions & Personal Reflection:

1. Have you ever felt torn between multiple conflicting identities? At odds with your reflection or your own body? Have you worried that you weren’t performing the identity in the way that others expected you to? In your journal, write about a time when you have experienced your own identity struggles. Do the chapters on Tony, Orvil, Edwin, or Thomas resonate with how you dealt with (or are dealing with) these worries?
Note: It’s important not to flatten important differences or to try to make your experiences seem the same as those the characters are dealing with. Instead, consider a time when you had a similar experience of feeling unsure about yourself, your reflection, your body, and/or at odds with stereotypes about who you think you should be.

**BLOOD QUANTUM**

In the US, we often tend to think about identity through the frameworks of race and ethnicity. To understand what is at stake in the question of who gets to identify as an American Indian/Alaskan Native, as a member of a particular tribe, and/or as Native (regardless of enrollment status), it’s necessary to consider not only structures of racialization and ancestry but also the politics of tribal citizenship. Blood quantum has been a key factor in all of the above.

Blood quantum refers to a controversial method of determining how much Native “blood” a person possesses. Blood quantum is measured in fractions: “full blood,” ½, ¼, etc. It originated as a colonial tool to control both racial hierarchies and the political standing of Native peoples in the US. In the early 18th century, Anglo-European colonists were interested in tracking racial ancestry in order to define legal rights (or lack thereof). The Colony of Virginia, for example, adopted the “Indian Blood Law” (1705) to curtail the civil rights of anyone with a blood quantum ½ or greater. Throughout the 18th and most of the 19th centuries, blood quantum could determine who was and was not legally “white” but the US government did not use it to determine who was considered “Indian” under federal law. Native nations used criteria of their own choosing, granting citizenship not only through lineage but through other forms of kinship like adoption, marriage, and community recognition. Indigenous peoples and Anglo-European colonists had been intermarrying for centuries, and tribes often incorporated Black freedmen and people who had escaped chattel slavery into their communities. The federal government recognized that sovereign tribal nations had the inherent right to regulate their own citizenship requirements. However, in the late 19th century, this began to change.

The Native Governance Center explains: “Starting in 1884, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) used census rolls to assign blood quantum amounts to Native people. These amounts, often incorrect, continue to affect blood quantum determinations...Calculating blood quantum involves dividing an individual’s parents’ combined degree of “Indian blood” in half. For example, if one parent has ¼ “Indian blood” and the other has ½, their children will have ⅜ blood quantum. The BIA issues Native people a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) that identifies an individual’s blood quantum and Native nation affiliation.” Blood quantum was—and remains—an arithmetic based on arbitrary numbers. BIA officers often guessed a person’s ancestry based on physical appearance, which left many tribal citizens who looked Black off the rolls. Other tribal
citizens refused to sign blood quantum-related documents, which meant they too did not appear as enrolled citizens.

During the allotment period (1887 - 1934), the US government carved up reservation land into individual privately-owned parcels called allotments. American Indians were eligible to receive allotments, but only if they could prove at least 1/4 American Indian blood quantum based on those original (and often inaccurate) census rolls. The blood quantum requirement left many Native people ineligible for allotments, and Native control over reservation land was dramatically reduced. This was not an accident of the program but an integral element of its design. The government sold “surplus” land to white settler homesteaders and corporations for purchase, which created patchwork reservations with both American Indian and non-American Indian landholdings. Approximately sixty percent—over 90 million of the 138 million acres—of Indian territory became property of the US, and thousands of American Indians were displaced. Allotment diminished the sovereignty of tribal nations, encouraged assimilation by demanding that American Indians take up the colonial practice of independent small farming, furthered white western expansion—and it used blood quantum to do it. As Dr. Elizabeth Rule, an enrolled citizen of the Chickasaw Nation, puts it: the notion of blood quantum resonates with settler colonial hope that “Indians would literally breed themselves out and rid the federal government of their legal duties to uphold treaty obligations.”

Under the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, the US recognized tribal governments’ right to self-determination and encouraged Native nations to adopt constitutions for self-governance. The US provided boilerplate language for these constitutions, and many tribes adopted the language—including 1/4 blood quantum minimum for citizenship. Today, blood quantum is a matter of intense debate. Many Native nations currently use blood quantum to determine eligibility for tribal citizenship. Others do not. The reasons are complex, and both proponents and opponents of blood quantum cite concerns for the ongoing survival of Native identity in the US. People in favor of blood quantum worry that eliminating the requirement would allow disconnected outsiders—without Native ancestry or ties to the community—to suddenly become members and to take advantage of the tribe’s already scarce resources. Some people who oppose blood quantum argue that this colonial tool rips families apart: siblings who share only one parent can have dramatically different blood quantum percentages, which significantly affects where families can live, where they can send their children to school, and what tribal resources they can (and cannot) access. Others argue that it privileges Western genetics over Indigenous kinship relations and, as Dr. Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate) writes, ultimately diminishes Native sovereignty. After centuries of forced assimilation and genocide, they argue, using flawed settler colonial arithmetic to police Native identity—to decide who is Native enough and who is not—does more to erase Native presence than to preserve it.
Family Matters: The Theft of Native Children, Then & Now

Suggested Opening Activity: Family Map/Web

- As a class, use the board to create a family map (or web). Write the names of every character (in any configuration) and encourage the class to complete the map/web by drawing arrows to visualize how various characters are bound together in family relationships—through marriage, blood, or other kinship forms.

Indian Boarding Schools

The settler colonial project has targeted Indigenous family structures for centuries. Indian boarding schools were an attempt to assimilate Native Americans out of...
existence by removing Native children from their homes and forcefully—often violently—stripping them of their languages, cultures, and histories. War was expensive, education much less so. Indian boarding schools became a cheap and efficient weapon through which the US government could “subdue” the “Indian Problem.”

Between 1819 and 1969, hundreds of thousands of Native American children were placed into Indian boarding schools operated by the federal government and Christian churches. Children were removed from their homes—sometimes by force—and often transported long distances, far from their tribes and families. Once at school, teachers and administrators barred them from speaking their languages, cut their hair and stripped them of their traditional clothing, banned their cultural practices, and converted the children to Christianity. The conditions in these schools were brutal. Children were neglected, physically and sexually abused, and tasked to perform manual labor. Thousands—perhaps tens of thousands—of Native children suffered preventable deaths from disease, maltreatment, and unhygienic conditions. Rather than sending the bodies of the deceased children home to their tribes and families, many schools chose instead to bury them in cemeteries on school grounds. Almost every off-reservation school has its own cemetery, and the bodies of unidentified children are still being discovered today, both in Canada (where a similar system was in place) and here in the US.

Under the direction of Secretary Deb Haaland—a member of the Pueblo of Laguna and a 35th generation New Mexican, whose own family was directly impacted by boarding schools—the US Department of the Interior recently conducted an investigative report that reported at least 500 Native children died at the 19 schools they studied. As the investigation continues and the other 400-some schools are scrutinized, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Bryan Newland (Bay Mills Indian Community) estimates that number will rise to the “tens of thousands.” We still do not know exactly how many children were removed into residential schools, nor do we know exactly how many perished there, as many of the graves remain unmarked. But we do know that an extraordinary number of Native children were subjected to punishing, even torturous, conditions that were tantamount to genocide.

According to The Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report (2022), the Indian boarding school network included 431 school sites, spread across 37 states. Their purpose is perhaps most famously stated in a speech by Captain Richard Henry Pratt, a Civil War military officer who founded the first off-reservation boarding school, Carlisle Indian School (1879): “A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one. In a sense I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: That all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him and save the man.” Before the Civil War, as early as 1819, missionaries had opened on-reservation schools to Christianize (to “civilize”) Native children. Pratt founded The Carlisle Indian School on
the site of old cavalry barracks in Pennsylvania in 1897. As Nick Estes (Lower Brule Sioux Tribe) writes in a *High Country News* report:

The same year the United States celebrated its 100th birthday, at the Battle of Greasy Grass (known in U.S. history as Little Bighorn), a Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho alliance wiped out Col. George Armstrong Custer, Pratt’s former commander, and his 7th Cavalry. A U.S. military victory seemed unlikely. Tactics shifted to starving out the militant Lakotas by killing off the remaining buffalo herds, a primary food source, making reservation life not a choice but a necessity for survival. The next step was to undermine customary authority by weaponizing Native kinship systems against reservation leadership. “Carlisle was established to intern, so to speak, the children of leadership,” says Ben Rhodd, “to hold them as hostage, so that their fathers would not be so warlike and resist.”

. . . the first class [of the Carlisle Indian School] would be drawn from those most responsible for Custer’s crushing defeat, the Lakotas. In 1879, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Ezra Hayt ordered Pratt to recruit first from Pine Ridge and Rosebud, “because the children would be hostages for the good behavior of their people.”

Although 21 children in that initial Carlisle class died in the first two years alone (13 died at the school; 8 ill children were sent home on trains to die shortly after), the school was deemed a success. Between 1879-1900, the Bureau of Indian Affairs opened 24 off-reservation schools modeled on the Carlisle Indian School and its “Kill the Indian, save the man” philosophy. By 1900, at least 75% of all Native children had been enrolled in boarding schools. Seventy years later, the system remained largely unchanged. According to a 1969 report by the Senate Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, “Indian Education: A National Tragedy—A National Challenge,” almost 35,000 children were attending Indian boarding schools in the US at the time. The report found that many teachers still saw their role as “civilizing the native,” and privileged “a quite obsolete form of occupational preparation” over academic learning.

As recently as the late 20th century, Indian schools traumatized children and their entire communities; attempted to erase Native cultures, traditions, and languages; and significantly contributed to mental health and addiction epidemics. Today, residential schools remain a living wound, as languages, traditions, intergenerational wisdom, were stolen from generations of Native peoples. Survivors are still grappling with the effects and charting new paths toward healing. For many, this healing process includes reclaiming traditional ceremonies, learning their Native languages, and telling their stories. Communities are also calling for education that acknowledges the ongoing legacies of harm inflicted on tribal nations. (*See Unit 5 for more on the lasting trauma of these schools and contemporary Indigenous campaigns for recognition of these harms and practices of healing.*)
The following data comes from a recent survey of US Native peoples, conducted by the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition:

- 98.8% said that the U.S. needs to acknowledge the TRUTH: that Indian children were forcibly abducted, sent hundreds of miles away, beaten, starved, or abused.
- 96.9% said that the U.S. needs to share the FACTS about how many children were sent to Boarding Schools, how many died at schools, and why there are graves marked “unknown” at many school cemeteries.
- 91.7% of respondents believe that due to the high incidence of substance abuse and mental health issues resulting from the historical trauma of having attended boarding schools that increased funding of community-oriented healing programs in Indian Country and urban Native populations should be a priority.

Suggested Extension Activity—Wisconsin Connection:

This activity is modeled after an activity in the High School Truth and Healing Curriculum. For more additional curricula (including reflection questions, assignments, and resources), consult the materials developed by The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, which are free to download here. The activity below could be geared toward individual students or toward small groups.

Wisconsin was home to approximately 11 Indian boarding schools, each of which is briefly discussed in this Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article.

1. Choose one of these schools.
2. Conduct additional research as necessary to address the points below.
3. Compose a brief historical narrative report in which you identify:
   a. the location of the school;
   b. the operator/administrator;
   c. the tribes who attended (or are attending);
   d. years of the school’s operation;
   e. and at least three things about the school that are of particular historical interest to you, in light of what you’ve learned in this unit.
Adoption

Like boarding schools, the US government has used adoption as a way to deal with the “Indian Problem.” Despite its seemingly “benevolent” motivations, white adoption of Native children has left deep wounds in the lives of the adoptees and their tribes.

The first recorded Native American adoptee is a woman named Lost Bird. As an infant, Lost Bird was found alive, sheltered by her mother’s frozen body, in the aftermath of the Wounded Knee Massacre (1890). She was adopted by Gen. Leonard Colby, whose wife tried to raise her as white. Lost Bird’s young life was difficult, marked by neglect, ostracization, and unresolved trauma from the slaughter of her Lakota community and the subsequent disconnection from her tribe’s ways of life. Tired of her rebellion and her inability to assimilate, the Colbys returned her to the Lakota when she was a teenager. But she no longer fit in there, either. She briefly toured as a performer in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show (see Unit 5 for more on Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Shows), suffered the loss of three children, and died from influenza when she was 30. “Throughout her life of prejudice, exploitation, poverty, misunderstanding and disease,” Lost Bird’s biographer Renée Sansome Flood writes, “she never gave up hope that one day she would find out where she really belonged.”

While white adoptions of Native children have been happening for centuries, they gained both momentum and federal support through the The Indian Adoption Project, a child welfare program that ran from 1958 to 1967. Administered by the Child Welfare League of America and funded by a federal contract from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the US Children’s Bureau, this project saw itself as a benevolent force intent on “saving” Native American children. In a message to Congress on March 6, 1968, President Lyndon Johnson emphasized the dire conditions from which these children would be rescued: “fifty thousand Indian families [living] in unsanitary dilapidated dwellings: many in huts, shanties, even abandoned automobiles.” He noted that “[t]he unemployment rate among Indian [was] nearly 40 percent, more than ten times the national average…Indian literacy rates [were] among the lowest in the nation; the rates of sickness and poverty among the highest.” Criminalizing poverty and centering white middle-class values, the Indian Adoption Project set out to care for “the forgotten child[ren], left inadequately cared for on the reservation.” A Bureau of Indian Affairs press release described the Project in this way, borrowing the sing-song lyrics of a popular (and distinctly murderous) nursery rhyme: “One little, two little, three little Indians—and 206 more—are brightening the homes and lives of 172 American families, mostly non-Indians, who have taken the Indian waifs as their own.”

Although certainly some of the actors might have imagined themselves as being saviors to the “Indian waifs”—a conception that problematically assumes Native parents are inherently unfit—Claire Palmiste explains it is no coincidence that the Adoption Project overlapped with the Termination Era, during which the US government enacted a series
of assimilation policies (see Unit 2 & 3) in the hopes of ending federal responsibilities to tribal nations. Ultimately, the Project succeeded in placing 395 Native children from 16 States into white homes. But many more Native children were removed by social workers and adopted through organizations and religious institutions not officially associated with the Project.

A 1976 report by the Association on American Indian Affairs found that approximately 25% to 35% of all Native children in the US had been separated from their birth parents. 85% of these children were placed in white foster homes, white adoptive homes, boarding schools, or other institutions outside of their extended families and communities, even if their relatives were willing to care for them. Native advocacy groups, American Indian Movement activists, and tribal nations argued that the disproportionate removal of Native children—and their placement into white care—was not only racially discriminatory but also undermined Native sovereignty; they saw it as another iteration in an unbroken line of genocidal strategies. As Chief Calvin Isaac of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw stated in the congressional hearing of 1977: “culturally the chance of Indian survival are significantly reduced if our children, the only means for the transmission of the tribal heritage are to be raised in non-Indian homes and denied exposure to the ways of their people.” This practice also had devastating consequences for the children whom it targeted. Research has consistently shown that Native adoptees and Native children in foster care who were not given opportunities to stay connected to their cultures are at greater risk for behavioral and mental health problems than those who were.

Thanks to the hard work of tribal nations and Native activists, Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978. This Act stipulates that Native children be placed with Native family members and tribal community members whenever possible:

In any adoptive placement of an Indian child under State law, a preference shall be given, in the absence of good cause to the contrary, to a placement with (1) a member of the child's extended family; (2) other members of the Indian child's tribe; or (3) other Indian families.” ~ 25 U.S. Code § 1915

It seeks to protect the rights of Native children to stay within Native care, to correct the Indian Adoption Project’s infringement on tribal sovereignty, and to reverse generations of policies that wielded child welfare as a weapon of Native elimination. Although the ICWA has been not uniformly enforced and some states (South Dakota, among others) have been found to be non-compliant, its passage marked a significant win for Indigenous sovereignty in the US and has helped to ensure that many Native children remain within Native care for over 4 decades. The ICWA will be challenged in the Supreme Court this fall—in November 2022—and thus has an unknown future.
Suggested In-Class Activity & Discussion Questions:

Invite students to compare these two photographs of Tom Torlino (images courtesy of the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center.) Torlino, a member of the Navajo Nation, entered the Carlisle school on October 21, 1882, and departed on August 28, 1886.

○ How does the second photograph differ from the first?
○ What seems significant to you about these differences? Why, do you think, did the schools enforce these changes?
○ How do you think this young person—and the thousands of other children like him—might have felt when he was forced to abandon the ways he learned to speak, dress, act, and worship? What kind of effects do you think this might have had on his identity?

• Then, screen a short video produced by Vox, “How the US Stole Thousands of Native American Children.”
  ○ What is the relationship between Indian Boarding Schools and disproportionate adoption of Native children by white families?
  ○ What kinds of lasting harms have survivors suffered?
Why do you think that telling their stories is an important part of their healing process?

Connect to the novel. What similarities can you draw between what the people interviewed in the video above describe and the identity struggles depicted in Orange’s book? You might consider the following:
  - Blue was adopted by white parents. How did this affect her? What did she lose? What is she looking for now? How has she worked toward healing?
  - How was Opal’s life affected by the US foster system after the death of her mother? How did she and her friend Lucas survive it?
  - How has the Indian Child Welfare Act impacted Opal’s life? Orvil and his brothers’ lives? Jacquie Red Feather’s?

IDENTITY & BELONGING: SEARCHING FOR HISTORY, FINDING ONESELF

Suggested Reflection Questions:

1. Orvil Red Feather is eager to know about his tribe’s culture and traditions, and he wonders why his caregiver and great-aunt Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield doesn’t teach him and his brother more about “being Indian.” She tells him:

   “Anything you hear from me about your heritage doesn’t make you any more or less Indian. More or less a real Indian. Don’t ever let anyone tell you what being Indian means. Too many of us died to get just a little bit of us here, right now, right in this kitchen. You, me. Every part of our people that made it is precious. You’re Indian because you’re Indian because you’re Indian” (p. 119).

   What do you think that Opal means? What might Opal be suggesting about how she understands Native identity in the 21st century?

   What details from Opal’s own history might influence how she describes what being Native means to her?

   Does this satisfy Orvil? In what ways yes? In what ways no?

2. On page 149, Calvin Johnson tells Dene that he “feel[s] bad sometimes saying [he’s] Native” because he doesn’t know much about the traditions and cultures of his people. Dene asks, “So you think being Native is about knowing something?” “No,” Calvin replies, ‘but it’s about culture, and a history.’ Dene continues:
“My dad wasn’t around either. I don’t even know who he is. My mom’s Native too, though, and taught me what she could when she wasn’t too busy working or just not in the mood. The way she said it, our ancestors all fought to stay alive, so some parts of their blood went together with another Nation’s blood and they made children, so forget them, forget them even as they live on in us?”

“Man, I feel you,” Calvin says. “But then again I just don’t know. I just don’t know about this blood shit.”

- For Calvin, what does it mean “to be a real Indian” (to borrow Orvil’s phrase)? What is at the root of his ambivalence about whether he should—and can—identify as Native?

Many Native teens in the US experience significant stress around questions of identity. Studies have shown that urban Native youth and adolescents, in particular, struggle with navigating mixed racial-ethnic identities (Brown, Dickerson, and D’Amico 2016), decreased knowledge of Native languages, and fewer opportunities to feel connected to their heritage and cultural practices (Dickerson et al. 2015). These struggles can have profound impacts on every aspect of their lives, including increased risk for substance abuse, decreased academic achievement, depression, suicidal ideation, and feelings of isolation. Studies also consistently show that when Native American youth have opportunities to maintain a strong connection to cultural traditions—such as attending intertribal powwows and sweat lodges, or learning practices like beading, weaving, drumming, etc.—they tend to experience improved mental and behavioral health and are more likely to positively adapt to challenging situations (Schweigman et al. 2011; Elizabeth J. D’Amico et. al 2019). For Native adults, connections to tribal traditions and intertribal communities have been shown to be important factors in managing symptoms of PTSD, substance abuse, and other manifestations of trauma and intergenerational trauma (see Unit 5).

Suggested Close-Reading Questions:

1. Read “Thomas Frank” (focusing primarily on pp. 208-212; 224-225). What are some of the reasons why drumming is so important and meaningful to Thomas?
2. In what ways does drumming and singing with Southern Moon help Thomas find a sense of identity and belonging?
3. How does he describe the feelings he gets when he drums with the group as they practice for the Big Oakland Powwow?

While it is important to acknowledge how strong connections to traditional practices can positively impact the wellbeing of Native American peoples, it is also important not to fixate on static “traditionalism.” Survivance—which Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor defines as an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories”—is
also about dynamic adaptation. There There considers the multiple and multifaceted ways that Urban Indians synthesize the traditional with the modern, the historical with the contemporary, and develop entirely new approaches to “being Native.”

Suggested In-Class Activities:

1. Orvil Red Feather wants to learn how to dance so he can compete in the upcoming powwow. Like any other 12-year-old in the 2010s and 2020s, he turns to YouTube.
   - As a class or in small groups, spend time exploring popular powwow videos available on YouTube. According to Powwow.com, here are the most popular videos people watched last year in 2021.
   - Next, develop a list of reasons why Orvil wants to learn powwow dancing. Use textual evidence to support your thinking. Why is it so important to him? Why does he feel he needs to do it in secret? How does dancing make him feel? How does this affect Orvil’s developing identity as a teenager and as a Native teenager?
   - How does Orange use Orvil’s character to show how Native American peoples—and perhaps Urban Indians, in particular—are “present-day people”?

2. Edwin Black points to what he called “the double-bind” of Indigenous art: “If it isn’t pulling from tradition, how is it Indigenous? And if it is stuck in the past, how can it be relevant to other Indigenous people living now, how can it be modern?” (p. 77). For Edwin, the powwow drum-driven dance music created by A Tribe Called Red—a group of First Nations DJs from Ottawa, Canada, that now goes by the name Halluci Nation—manages to be both “traditional and new-sounding” (p. 77).
   - Listen to “Electric Pow Wow Drum.” [Alternatively, other videos of their music can be found here.]
   - Listen to the Ted Talk, “We Are the Halluci Nation.”
   - In small groups or as a class, discuss the following:
     - How does The Halluci Nation (previously, A Tribe Called Red) embody the idea of survivance?
     - How does it fuse the past, present, and future? The traditional and the modern?
Why do you think this music matters so much to Edwin, particularly early in the novel?

UNIT ACTIVITY IDEAS

• Create a playlist of contemporary Indigenous music. Write a blog-style listicle—(e.g., “Five Native Bands to Listen To Right Now”)—in which you introduce the Indigenous musicians to your audiences. Whenever possible, include short quotations that feature the musician’s own voices, excerpted from interviews, reviews, or other sources. (Be sure to cite any sources you use in your research.)

• Choose one character. How do they feel about “being Native”? What does Native identity in the 21st century mean to them? What colonial policies continue to impact their lives? Be sure to collect textual evidence to support your claims. Then, use your artistic abilities to transform your character analysis into another medium. Draw, sculpt, paint, or create a collage that offers your artistic interpretation of how this character’s identity as it emerges (and changes) throughout There There. Write a short artist’s statement (250-500 words) in which you describe the methods you used and the choices you made in your project.

• Create an extended version of the family web/map completed by the class. Your extended version should include succinct (and accurate) notes about relevant histories that help to contextualize the familial relationships. What colonial policies are at work here? How have real-world settler colonial policies disrupted these fictional Native American families in Orange’s novel? How have they worked to heal these relationships?

• Develop an informational pamphlet, zine, or short video that explains the relationship between residential schools and white adoption of Native children and how communities are working to heal these wounds. Include analysis of how Blue’s character embodies both these traumatic histories and forms of healing. Whenever possible, center sources written by Native American survivors and/or organizations (cited) in your research. Note: this assignment is very similar to questions raised in Unit 5. If educators plan to teach Unit 5 as well as Unit 4, it might be best to not offer this option during Unit 4 to avoid repetition.
UNIT 5: BEYOND RESILIENCE

About This Unit

This unit is designed to support class discussions about historical trauma, intergenerational trauma, and practices of healing among Indigenous communities in the US. These are key themes in *There There* and are essential frameworks to help students make sense of disturbing events that occur in the novel, including the mass shooting in the final pages of the book. Unit 5 aims to support educators who want to grapple with themes and plot points that students (both Native and non-Native alike) might find especially triggering—gender and intimate partner violence, substance misuse, suicidal behaviors, and gun violence—in ethical and sensitive ways.

The first two subsections of this unit encourage discussion about the ongoing “wound” of settler colonialism. The first, “Historical Trauma and Intergenerational Trauma,” defines these key concepts, provides opportunities to learn about their causes and ongoing impacts in Native communities, and offers a framework for avoiding a “deficit” approach when discussing Orange’s cast of flawed and complex characters. Please note that while this section includes extensive discussion of gun violence, it encourages teachers to treat gun violence as a metaphoric and symbolic manifestation of colonialism and historical and intergenerational trauma. This is true to the book’s central motifs, and we hope that it might help in a small way to ease anxiety students may feel when being asked to read about a mass shooting at school; this is also a way for teachers to avoid getting mired down in pro- and anti-gun control arguments (as they can always direct attention back to the text).

The second, “Gender Violence,” addresses the crisis of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People as well as intimate partner violence in Native communities, using *There There* as a touchstone and an entry into these important topics. We understand that teachers and students might find conversations around sexual violence and gender violence difficult to navigate. The Indigenous feminist framework offered in this subsection aims to provide educators with the tools to approach these sensitive moments in the novel.

The third subsection, “Medicine and Healing,” takes as its starting place the fact that Native culture *is* medicine. Access to traditional ceremonies, crafts, songs and dances,
and spiritual practices has been shown to be a significant component in improving well-being among Native peoples. Examples of this abound in *There There*. Storytelling—and the refusal to be silenced—also play a central role in how 21st-century Indigenous peoples describe their healing processes. This subsection encourages conversations around healing the wounds of trauma (as well as what gets in the way), focused primarily (though not exclusively) at the urban Native youth in the novel.

The fourth subsection, “The Powwow,” builds upon the third subsection. “The Powwow” aims to introduce students to the modern powwow as a celebration of Indigenous survivance while also explaining how haunting histories of colonial violence—including criminalization of Indigenous practices and brutal military suppression of Lakota Ghost Dancers (as discussed in Tommy Orange’s short film on the subject)—still remain. The goal of this final subsection is to offer a framework for understanding the tragedy at the Big Oakland Powwow.

All four subsections are interspersed with sample close-reading exercises, sample discussion questions, sample in-class assignments, and sample unit activities.

**RECOMMENDED READINGS**


- “Decolonizing Data: Strengthening Community Voices to Take Action for Our Missing Relatives.” Urban Indian Health Institute, 2022.


- Fish, Jill. “Honoring Indigenous cultures and histories,” *TedX Minneapolis*. [Note: Dr. Fish, who is from the Tuscarora Nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy of Western New York, begins this talk with a land acknowledgment. Educators might find it to be a very useful model. See Unit 3.]


• *Wisconsin Public Radio* report (2020) about the creation of a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women task force in Wisconsin state.

**PRIMARY SOURCES**


**HISTORICAL TRAUMA & INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA**

“The wound that was made when white people came and took all that they took has never healed. An unattended wound gets infected. Became a new kind of wound like the history of what actually happened became a new kind of history. All these stories that we haven’t been telling all this time, that we haven’t been listening to, are just part of what we need to heal. Not that we’re broken. And don’t make the mistake of calling us resilient. To not have been destroyed, to not have given up, to have survived, is no badge of honor. Would you call an attempted murder victim resilient?” —*There There*, 139.
Suggested Opening Discussion Questions:

In the Interlude, the second of the two nonfiction essays that appear in *There There*, the narrator describes colonialism as a wound. Read the passage above. Then encourage students to discuss the following questions in preparation to study the novel through the lens of historical and intergenerational trauma:

1. What do you think Orange’s narrator means when he describes colonialism as a wound?

2. Why do you think that telling and listening to stories might help this wound heal?

3. What is the difference between being wounded and being broken? Why do you think this difference is important to Orange?

4. What is Orange’s frustration with describing Indigenous peoples as “resilient”? According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, the words “resilient” means:
   a. capable of withstanding shock without permanent deformation or rupture
   b. tending to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.

   We usually think about resiliency as a good thing, so why do you think he asks readers “not to make the mistake of calling us resilient”?

**Historical trauma** is defined as the accumulative emotional and psychological pain transmitted across generations as the result of massive group trauma (Brave Heart, 60). Traumas inflicted on a community are passed on to individuals within that community; even those people without direct experience of the trauma itself feel the effects generations later. Indigenous peoples are not alone in experiencing historical trauma. In fact, the term first came into widespread use in the wake of World War II and the German Nazi party’s genocide of over 6 million European Jews; scholars began to take notice of how the Holocaust reverberates across generations, shaping people who were born years—even decades-after the end of the war. Historical trauma has also been an important framework for studying how the impacts of race-based chattel slavery continue to echo in the lives of Black and African-American people today. Examples abound throughout many different communities around the globe and in the US. While each group’s trauma unique to the particular horrors inflicted upon it, “historical trauma” is general framework that scholars, therapists, and other practitioners use to explain what might seem at first to be a strange phenomena: that trauma passes at the level of the community, across time and space.

In one of her early articles on the subject, Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart articulates some of the ways in which historical trauma impacts the lives of Native individuals:
American Indians experienced massive losses of lives, land, and culture from European contact and colonization resulting in a long legacy of chronic trauma and unresolved grief across generations. This phenomenon...contributes to the...high rates of suicide, homicide, domestic violence, child abuse, alcoholism and other social problems among American Indians (p. 60).

Indigenous peoples have long argued that 500 years of colonization have left a festering wound in their communities, manifesting in disproportionately high rates of addiction, suicide, mental illness, intimate partner violence, incarceration, sexual violence, and crushing poverty. One important aspect of how Indigenous peoples here in the US have experienced historical trauma has to do with what Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart calls “unresolved grief” under settler colonialism. Native American peoples have survived centuries of genocide (see Unit 1); the theft of their land, resources, and sovereignty through removal, appropriation, broken treaties, and relocation (see Units 2, 3, 4); the theft of their children, languages, cultural and spiritual practices through Indian boarding schools (see Unit 4) and other coerced forms of assimilation; and today, still, they survive ongoing practices of colonial dispossession, racism, and anti-Indigenous violence.

There are spiritual, psychological, cultural, and distinctly economic repercussions to these traumas. And yet, as Brave Heart argues, so often these traumas are unrecognized, ignored, and made invisible. There are few spaces, outside of Native spaces, where the impacts of these harms are acknowledged as historical trauma. Instead, as Dr. Jill Fish (Tuscarora Nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy) argues, Native Americans are seen through a deficiency model, and problems like addiction, poverty, homelessness, and suicide that plague Native communities are understood as a matter of their own weakness, work ethic, or backwardness. Community-level grief and group pain remain, then, unrecognized, disenfranchised, and unresolved.

**Intergenerational trauma** is similar to historical trauma. Whereas historical trauma exists at the level of the community, intergenerational trauma passes through a single family. Many studies on the intergenerational effects of Indian boarding schools, for example, have found that boarding school survivors disproportionately suffer physical health concerns (chronic illness, respiratory disease, headaches, diabetes, etc.) and mental health concerns (depression, anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, addiction, substance misuse, mental stress, and suicidal thoughts and actions) that can in turn impact their children’s physical and psychological health, as the next generation faces subsequent adversities such as separation from their birth families, homelessness, abuse, and poverty. Intergenerational trauma, then, can pass from caregiver to child through behaviors and circumstances that can be directly traced to a network of harms.

Legacies of trauma can also live on the bodies of the next generation. For instance, if a pregnant person suffering from addictive behaviors misuses alcohol or illicit substances
during the course of their pregnancy, their child has an increased risk of developing disorders such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum disorder (as Tony Loneman does). New studies on epigenetics also suggest that trauma might actually transform a person’s DNA, predisposing their descendants to carry the legacies of trauma in their genes. Similar to how a person can pass along an increased risk for heart disease or cancer to their child, a person who has experienced significant stress from trauma might also pass along disrupted stress-regulating genes that increase their child’s susceptibility to dysfunctional stress responses. When intergenerational trauma is not recognized or addressed, its patterns tend to repeat themselves. Healing practices can intervene in these patterns, but it is necessary to first acknowledge how individuals are embedded in complex networks of historical and intergenerational pain. Individual healing and individual struggles should be understood within the context of history, community, and ongoing oppression.

It can be difficult to disentangle historical trauma from intergenerational trauma, as the two are intimately woven together. While it is useful to know the difference, it is also appropriate to consider them in tandem when considering how Tommy Orange deals with these legacies throughout the book.

Suggested In-Class Activities:

*Note to teachers: These activities will be most effective if done in succession (I, II, then III). While Activities I and II could also function as homework, Activity III is meant to be done in class. We encourage teachers to remind students to focus not only on Indigenous trauma but also on healing practices; this will be important for both non-Native students who might unconsciously turn toward a “damage-centered gaze” and Native students who might find it difficult to discuss traumatic histories in a classroom setting.*

1. Screen The Healing Foundation’s animated video, “Intergenerational Trauma.”

Although this video addresses historical traumas inflicted on Indigenous and Aboriginal peoples of Australia, there are clear and important parallels to historical and intergenerational trauma in the US context.

- Discuss:
  - How are traumas passed down through generations?
  - This video focuses on the experiences of Indigenous peoples under a similar structure of white settler colonialism in Australia. What similarities do you see between what the video describes and what Orange describes in the passage from *There There* quoted at the beginning of this unit?
2. The video above visualizes trauma as a broken heart and parched earth. *There There* uses a much different constellation of metaphors: settler bullets from settler guns.

- In small groups, read the following excerpts from the Prologue and the Interlude:

“We are the memories we don’t remember, which live in us, which we feel, which make us sing and dance and pray the way we do, feelings from memories that flare and bloom unexpectedly in our lives like blood through a blanket from a wound made by a bullet fired by a man shooting us in the back from out hair, for our heads, for a bounty, or just to get rid of us” (p. 10).

“When they first came for us with their bullets, we didn’t stop moving even though the bullets moved twice as fast as the sound of our screams…The bullets were premonitions, ghosts from a hard, fast future. The bullets moved on after moving through us, became the promise of what was to come, the speed and the killing…They took everything and ground it down into the dust as fine as gunpowder, they fired their guns into the air in victory and the strays flew out into the nothingness of histories written wrong and meant to be forgotten. Stray bullets and consequences are landing on our unsuspecting bodies even now.” (p. 10)

“We’ve expected the shooter to appear in our lives in the same way we know death is and always has been coming for us, with its decisive scythe, its permanent cut…“Something about it will make sense. The bullets have been coming from miles. Years.” (p. 141).

- Why do you think Orange uses a gun and bullets to describe white settler colonial violence against Indigenous peoples in the US? What about guns makes this a useful metaphor to illustrate his argument about the “wounds” of historical and intergenerational trauma?

- In both the Prologue and the Interlude, Orange prepares readers for the tragic shootout at the Big Oakland Powwow at the end of the novel. What do you think Orange might mean when he writes that “we expected the shooter”…that “the bullets have been coming from miles. Years.”?

- At the end of *There There*, the bullets come from the white plastic 3-D printed guns that Tony, Octavio, Calvin, Charles, and Carlos bring to help them steal the powwow prize money to pay off a debt they owe to a drug dealer. These bullets don’t come from *outside* the
urban Native community in Oakland but from within it. Why? In what ways are the shots fired at the powwow like the “stray bullets” noted in the passage above? In what ways are they metaphors for the “infected wound” Orange describes in the quote at the start of this unit? What other significance(s) do you see in the use of the white plastic guns that bring tragedy at the end?

3. Each of the characters in the novel wrestle, in some way, with the deep wounds of historical and intergenerational trauma. We encourage teachers to emphasize that the goal of this exercise is not simply to visualize harm or damage in There There but to contextualize these flawed and complicated characters within the long trajectory of colonial violence. This is an important point, and we suggest that educators consider briefly reminding students how to avoid a “damage-centered gaze” (see Unit 2 for a discussion of Eve Tuck’s term) before proceeding.

- The Red Feather family illustrates both intergenerational trauma—how it is passed down, unresolved, and transformed into new traumas—and processes of healing.
  - Write Jacquie Red Feather’s name on the board and circle it.
    - With Jacquie at the center, ask students to help you complete a family tree, including her sister, mother, children, and grandchildren.
    - Looking at the board, discuss how each character both grapples with inherited trauma and how they strive to heal from it, both in their own lives and in the lives of their communities (e.g., Jacquie goes to AA and works to help prevent suicide in Native youth communities).
GENDER VIOLENCE

**Content Warning**: This subsection contains sustained discussion of sexual violence.

Indigenous feminists such as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) argue that violence against Native women, girls, and two-spirit people has been a key aspect of settler colonial genocide for centuries. Through acts of sexual violence, assault, abduction, and murder, gender-based violence against Indigenous women is a colonial tool to assert dominion over Native bodies, Native lands, and Native futures. Its wounds are deep and long-lasting. From the earliest days of colonization, Indigenous women have been subjected to colonial gender violence; white settlers, militias, and armies routinely raped Native women and girls and targeted them during massacres. Today, Indigenous women in the US are estimated to suffer sexual assault at a rate almost three times higher than non-Indigenous women. A 2016 study by the National Institute of Justice found that more than four in five American Indian and Alaska Native women (84.3%) have experienced violence in their lifetime, including 56.1% who have experienced sexual violence. In just a single year (2016), 39.8% of American Indian and Alaska Native women reported having experienced violence, including 14.4% who had experienced sexual violence. AI and AN women are also murdered at significantly higher rates than non-Indigenous women, by intimate partners and strangers, and by Indigenous and non-Indigenous men.

These numbers are startling on their own. They are, however, only estimates, and the total numbers are most likely much higher. One of the major obstacles in the fight to protect Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people is the fact their rapes, deaths, and abductions have been largely ignored and treated as negligible, if not entirely invisible, by non-Indigenous government officials, police departments, and news outlets.

An Indigenous-led campaign to address this epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, And Two Spirit People (MMIWG2S) in the US and Canada has recently gained momentum and public visibility. Much of these efforts are focused on and near reservations. The Urban Indian Health Institute began collecting data on missing and murdered women, girls, and two-spirit people in urban centers, hoping to study the “institutional practices that allow them to disappear not once, but three times—in life, in the media, and in the data.” According to their report, in the year 2016, the UIHI identified 506 unique cases of missing and murdered American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls across the 71 selected cities—128 (25%) were missing persons cases, 280 (56%) were murder cases, and 98 (19%) had an unknown status. Well over half of these women and girls have no official tribal affiliation. The youngest victim was one-year old; the oldest, an 83-year-old elder.
Very recently, the US federal government has begun to offer support for addressing this largely ignored crisis. On October 10, 2020, the Not Invisible Act of 2019 was signed into law by four US Congress Representatives: Deb Haaland (Pueblo of Laguna), Tom Cole (Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma), Sharice Davids (Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin), and Markwayne Mullin (Cherokee Nation). This effort was led by Deb Haaland, who is now the Secretary of the Interior, in an effort to correct “the lack of urgency, transparency, and coordination has hampered our country’s efforts to combat violence against American Indian and Alaska Native people.”

Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. Read the passage in which Blue and her friend Geraldine discuss the dangers of the road they’re traveling on the way to the Greyhound station. What are their fears about getting stuck out on the road? Why? (pp. 200-202). What are some reasons that Orange might have included this example of the MMIWG2S crisis?
2. Why is Blue running away from Paul? Why do you think that Geraldine’s brother tries to stop them from running away? What do Geraldine and Blue see as the similarities—and the differences—between Paul and the white men who abduct and kill Native women from the lonely road they drive on (pp. 202-205)?

3. Consider how this chapter ends: with an older Native woman helping Blue to hide from her abusive husband in the bathroom, staying by her side, and escorting her safely to the bus she rides out of town (pp. 206-207). Why do you think Orange includes this detail?

Suggested In-Class Activity—Wisconsin Connection:

Read the Wisconsin Public Radio report (2020) about the creation of a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women task force in Wisconsin state and listen to the short follow-up interview (2022).

Create a TikTok video or design an infographic to share what you’ve learned about MMIWG2S in Wisconsin.

Each central woman character in There There has been impacted by violence in the home—intimate partner violence (Blue), the threat of childhood sexual abuse (Opal), and date rape (Jacquie). And each of their attackers are Native men. This is important to note, but difficult to discuss. Many Native women and girls hesitate to speak out in mainstream circles about the abuse and violence they’ve survived at the hands of Native men because, as Simpson writes, “I don’t want white Canadians [and, we can add, white Americans] to automatically blame Indigenous men for gender violence. I know they will because they’ve invested a lot of energy into the stereotype of ‘Indian men’ as unfeeling, uncaring, violent savages.” Gender violence can be understood, in part, as another manifestation of historical trauma. This does not excuse abuse or violence of any kind—nor does it absolve their attackers from responsibility for the harm they’ve caused. But it does ask readers to approach these women characters as survivors of violence with a framework that does not replicate racist stereotypes.

Settler colonialism brought strict Christian sexual and gender norms to Turtle Island, including Western understandings of patriarchal masculinity, submissive femininity, and monogamous heterosexuality. Tribes had their own existing gender roles, gender identities, and forms of sexuality, which colonialism called “primitive” and corrupt. Matriarchies—or social and political forms in which women held key leadership positions—were particularly foreign to white colonists and seen as especially
dangerous. The imposition of Western Christian norms is inextricable from colonial desire to erase and replace Native peoples and Native ways of life.

As historical and intergenerational trauma, this gender violence manifests today in forms of **colonial patriarchy**—or the colonial imposition of strict Western gender norms based on assumption of masculine domination and feminine submission—that continue to affect tribal communities and the lives and safety of Native women and girls. As Dina Gilio-Whitaker (Colville Confederated Tribes) writes in “Indigenous Roots of Modern Feminism,” colonial patriarchy “translated into sexist, repressive behavior toward women. One of the most profoundly destabilizing aspects of colonization on Native life has been in the relationships between men and women.”

**Suggested Discussion Question:**

1. What place do you think gender violence has in the novel? There are only three main women characters (although other women appear throughout the book), and much of the novel’s energy drives the plot toward the final tragedy—the robbery and the shooting—at the powwow. How does gender violence fit into what you see on some of the novel’s major themes? Why?

**MEDICINE & HEALING**

“...if we oversimplify Indigenous peoples as perpetually wounded, we cannot possibly understand how they formed kinship bonds and constantly recreated and kept intact families, communities, and governance structures while surviving as fugitives and prisoners of a settler state and as conspirators against empire; how they loved, cried, laughed, imagined, dreamed, and defended themselves; or how they remain, to this day, the first sovereigns of this land and the oldest political authority.” — **Nick Estes**

If settler colonialism has torn deep wounds in the lives of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island and if, as Orange writes in the Prologue, silence about these wounds has caused them to fester, then what does healing look like? Since time immemorial, Indigenous healers have used a combination of medicines—herbal remedies, rituals, and spiritual and psychic guidance—to support the wellbeing of their communities. Albeit in very different ways (and from within very distinct traditions), Native tribes have also relied on communal gatherings where song, drumming, and dance have brought people together in shared celebration and prayer.

In yet another attempt to enforce assimilation and replace Native ways of life with white Christian culture, the US government passed the Code of Indian Offenses (1883), which outlawed religious and ceremonial dances, funeral rites, ritual gift-giving, and traditional medicine, among other practices, and criminalized anyone who participated in the now-
illegal practices. Today, healing from the “infected wounds” of historical and intergenerational trauma often focus on refusing silence and invisibility: telling untold stories, publicly acknowledging generations of grief and pain, passing along traditions that were once outlawed (but survived, nonetheless), and demanding public recognition of settler colonialism’s ongoing harms.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. Opal spends her life trying to stifle her history, her stories, and she tries to shield her boys from the pain she’s experienced by keeping silent. Her childhood friend Lucas takes precisely the opposite strategy; as he nears his death, he hopes to collect as many Native stories as he can. Lucas’s nephew, Dene, takes up the project where his uncle Lucas left off, recording the stories of urban Natives—whatever people want to share about being Native in Oakland, however they want to share it. These are two very different strategies for coping with trauma. Why do you think the novel includes both?

2. The day before the powwow, Orvil Red Feather pulls spider legs from a sore on his leg (p. 125). He and his brothers, Loother and Lony, decide it must be “something Indian” (p. 127). When he tells his great-aunt Opal, she thinks back to a time when she was Orvil’s age and she too pulled spider legs from her body. She has spent her entire life trying to push away memories of her traumatic past. But now, “these damn spider legs have her stuck on the problem. They’re making her look back” (p. 165). When Opal was a young adolescent, she found spider legs in her leg the same time her first menstrual cycle started. That same day, the man they were staying with after their mother’s death, Ronald, tried to sexually abuse Jacquie while she slept, and Opal hit him hard on the head to protect her sister—hard enough they thought she killed him (pp. 165-166). They ran away. Jacquie left to have the baby she would give up for adoption (Blue), and Opal went into the foster care system, precariously housed and desperately lonely except for her close friend, Lucas (Dene’s uncle). Interestingly, Tommy Orange also pulled spider legs from his own leg! And he, too, assumed it was “something Indian.” See this interview for more.

In the context of the novel, the spider legs are a complicated symbol. One on hand, they seem to symbolize resurfacing memories; this might suggest that if stories are hidden away, they will get infected, so perhaps the spider legs being pulled out (like stories being told) is a way to heal from all the inherited trauma that lives inside? On the other hand, the spider legs also seem to presage violent, life-altering events: they appear just before Opal hits Ronald and has to run, and just before Orvil is shot at the powwow. How are the spider legs connected to memory? Are they signs of hope and healing? Portents of how
historical trauma will fester, get infected, and re-emerge as new forms of trauma if it is not addressed? Both, somehow?

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Western scientific studies have shown what Indigenous peoples have said all along: that culture is medicine. Native veterans returning from combat with PTSD, incarcerated people, urban Native youth struggling with (or at risk for) addiction—studies show that all of these groups, who often feel disconnected from larger Native communities—report better mental, spiritual, even physical health when they feel grounded in and supported by traditional Native practices and Indian community.

Urban Natives—particularly youth and adolescents—tend to have fewer opportunities to connect to these traditions in sustained ways. When they aren’t enrolled citizens, don’t know their tribal affiliations, or don’t have strong ties to a particular set of practices and beliefs, there exist additional barriers to accessing culture as medicine. In There There, Orange’s characters often try to chart their own paths toward healing, braiding the traditional with the modern along the way. But the path is a difficult one, set with traps both old and new.

**Suggested Close-Reading Activities:**

1. Octavio Gomez has suffered so much loss, including the sudden death of his family in a drunk-driving accident. His uncle Six, a man haunted by his own troubles, was behind the wheel, and Octavio—in grief, in rage, in despair—confronts him. Read pages 180-186.
   - In his own way, Six tries to turn to traditional medicine to cope with the pain he’s inherited. What does he try to do to heal himself? What gets in the way? Why?
   - When Octavio comes home ill after the encounter, his grandmother, Fina, turns to her own understanding of traditional medicine to help break the curse he suffers from. Why does she want to set up a medicine box for her grandson? What does she want to include? Why?
   - At this point, does it seem like Octavio might be headed in a direction that leads not to the tragedy at the powwow but somewhere else, somewhere better? If this moment feels hopeful, why do you think Orange included it?

2. What other characters turn to traditional culture as medicine, adapting it to fit into their modern lives. (For example: Thomas’s alcoholism and drumming; Orvil’s dancing; Harvey’s time at the Native American Church; Jacquie’s storytelling at AA; etc.) Choose a character and select 2 passages to analyze in detail: 1 passage that suggests how this might help them to begin to heal from inherited traumas and 1 passage that points to the traps and obstacles that make the path toward healing difficult to navigate.
THE POWWOW

Suggested Opening Activities:

1. Read the opening pages of the “Interlude” (pp. 134-136).
   • Before you read this, what did the word “powwow” mean to you? Does anything surprise you about the narrator’s description of the event? If so, why?
   • According to the narrator, who attends powwows?
   • The narrator uses long lists to emphasize the diversity of people at this intertribal celebration? Why? What is the tone of these lists?
   • The “Big Oakland Powwow” section ends with the following passage: “We are… Undoable math. Insignificant remainders” (p. 136). How does this final line change the tone of the section?
   • Why do you think that Orange uses the first-person plural point of view (“we”) to narrate this “Interlude”? Who belongs to this “we”?

2. Then, as a class, spend time looking at the website for the Stanford Powwow and the Milwaukee’s Indian Summer Festival. Note: The Stanford Powwow does not take place in Oakland, but it is a long-running powwow in the Bay Area.
   • What strikes you about these websites? What details stand out?
   • How do the events these websites advertise compare with the descriptions you read in There There?

   The modern powwow is a celebration to honor Indigenous survivance: to pray the prayers, sing the songs, drum the drums, and dance the dances that settler colonialism spent centuries trying to silence—to practice the living history of many diverse tribal traditions. It’s also a commercial event, where people buy and sell Native-made goods and some powwows are contests, like the one Orange writes about in There There. The Big Oakland Powwow is arguably the gravitational center of the novel. It is the reason the characters’ lives converge. It is the place where Edwin meets his father, Blue meets her birth mother, and Orvil finally gets to fulfill his dream of dancing; where Opal and Jacquie confront old wounds, Dene collects Native stories, and Thomas gets to drum. It is also the place where Daniel, Calvin, and Tony get caught in the web of Octavio’s doomed robbery plan. Although, as the Interlude says, it is “a place to be together…to see and hear each other,” the wounds of historical and intergenerational trauma appear here, too: “feathered, braided, blessed, and cursed” (p. 135).
How Indian Offenses & Colonial Violence Haunt The Big Oakland Powwow

Long before European contact, most Native societies held communal gatherings marked by dancing, singing, drumming, and feasting to celebrate religious ceremonies, successful war parties, and tribal alliances. The modern powwow recalls these traditions, but it has transformed across the years into the intertribal affair we see in The Big Oakland Powwow. The history of the modern powwow is complex, and it winds through centuries of violent US colonial policies such as Removal, the Code of Indian Offenses, and Relocation. Powwows gained new life in urban centers as thousands of Native Americans from around the US came to cities through the Voluntary Relocation Program. Urban intertribal centers sought to celebrate the diverse array of American Indian cultural traditions in an open and pan-Indian atmosphere. Then (and now) these events offered (and continue to offer) important opportunities to connect through song, dance, socializing, and food in a dynamic mix of the old and the new.

In part, we can trace the modern powwow to Removal and the development of reservations. As many different tribes from across Plains Indian lands and from across the country were suddenly living much closer together in Indian Territory, new intertribal relationships emerged. We can also trace elements of the powwow’s pageantry to another complicated colonial history of that era: Wild West Shows. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a man named William F. Cody (nicknamed “Buffalo Bill” Cody) hired many Native singers and dancers to perform “authentic” tribal dances for his enormously popular and circus-like “Wild West Shows.” Buffalo Bill had been a US soldier and a buffalo hunter (in fact, he participated in the railroad-sponsored campaign to eradicate the buffalo in order to starve out the Indian tribes who would not cede their land). His “Wild West Shows” offered up distorted stereotypes of “real Indians”—based loosely on a mishmash of Plains warrior traditions—to entertain white audiences eager to see a “true” vision of the American frontier. Some aspects of these shows have been reclaimed and incorporated into modern intertribal events. For example, the Grand Entry that begins powwows today resembles the parade that opened those early Buffalo Bill shows. It is important to note, however, that although modern powwows do allow non-Native people to attend, these are not performances where white audiences pay to see “Indians dressed as Indians” reenact stereotypes on stage (people like the white women Tony meets on the train on his way to the convention center).

In a strange way, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West shows put American Indian dances (or a cartoonish version of them) on display at a time when the US government was criminalizing Indigenous dances and songs under the Code of Indian Offenses (1883). To hold Indian feasts or ceremonies, to practice traditional medicine or rituals, to sing traditional songs and perform traditional dances was to face imprisonment or to lose treaty rations for 30 days (in other words, to starve). Perhaps one of the most famous examples of how seriously the US enforced assimilation is the Ghost Dance.
The Ghost Dance is a ceremony rooted in the vision of a Northern Paiute healer named Wovoka. During an eclipse in 1889, Wovoka had a vision in which he visited God. He prophesied that Ghost Dance—based on a traditional round dance—would bring about a new era of peace and prosperity. If properly performed, the Ghost Dance would reunite the spirits of the dead with the world of the living, and together they would usher in a new world; they would end war, conflict, disease, poverty, starvation, and colonial expansion, and God would return the earth to its pre-colonial state. The buffalo, hunted nearly to extinction by white settler extermination campaign, would return. As Nick Estes writes, “Once the land was cleansed, life would be free of disease and colonialism, and correct relations among human and nonhuman worlds would be restored.”

The ceremony spread quickly, and tribes shaped the dance according to their beliefs and rituals. Many Lakota took up the dance in their own way—as an act of hope and anticolonial resistance. At the time, the Lakota were being brutalized by the US government; they’d been pushed onto reservations, stripped of even more land in an allotment policy that broke their previous treaty with the US, and forced into practicing Western-style farming in place of their traditional buffalo hunting practices, relying on federal treaty rations to survive. In 1890, when a terrible drought decimated their crops, the US cut their treaty rations, and the Lakota were on the brink of starvation. The Ghost Dance offered hope. Local settlers were frightened by the Lakota Ghost Dancers, thinking that it meant a war dance, and the federal government saw it as an act of hostility. They were ordered to stop performing the dance—a threat backed by the support of the US Army. The Lakota Ghost Dancers refused, and this set off a chain of events that led to the US Army murdering hundreds of unarmed Lakota men, women, and children at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. Just a few months after this brutal military suppression of the dance, 23 imprisoned Lakota Sioux were released into the custody of “Buffalo Bill” and hired to perform a version of the Ghost Dance in his show. Although the Ghost Dance is not traditionally a powwow dance, it is embedded in the historical traumas that emerge as “stray bullets” in the final chapter of There There.

Suggested In-Class Activities:

1. **Ghost Dance, by Tommy Orange.**
   The short film Ghost Dance by Tommy Orange begins with grainy footage of the Ghost Dance performed in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show. Screen it (link above) and discuss the following:
   - Given its history, and its relationship to the Wounded Knee Massacre, why do you think that white settlers in the 19th century would want to see the Ghost Dance (or, what they thought was an authentic version of it) performed? How is this similar to (or different from) Orange’s claim that even today “they” (white settlers) would rather see Native peoples “dressed up like Indians” than see them at protests in the 21st-century?
• Why do you think the film ends by replaying the footage in reverse?
• Consider the final line of the film. What do you think it means?

2. What connections can you draw between Orange’s film Ghost Dance and the closing chapters of There There (pp. 269-290)? What are some of the ways that colonial violence and historical trauma appear in both? Return to the quoted passage that opened this unit—focusing especially on the metaphor of the white gun and colonial bullets that go on for centuries—and re-read it in light of what you’ve discussed.

3. The book ends with Tony Loneman (whose perspective also opened the book). Read the final chapter closely, with particular emphasis on the ending paragraph. What do you make of the birds in his bullet wounds? Is this a hopeful ending? A tragic one? Both? Neither? Why?
UNIT PROJECT IDEAS

• Choose a character in *There There* and use their story as a jumping off point for your own research project. Find at least three Native-led organizations (near you in Wisconsin, or anywhere in the US) that do work to support an issue that impacts this character’s life. Create a video, a poster presentation, or a pamphlet that explains what this organization does, whom it serves, and why this issue is important to the community.
  
  ○ *For example:* Jacquie Red Feather and suicide prevention for Native youth; Octavio and drug crime; Bill Davis and Native American veterans; Bill Davis and Native incarceration; Blue and intimate partner violence; Octavio Gomez and drug crime.

• What does historical trauma look like in *There There*? What about strategies for healing? Show us! Create a collage, an animation, a painting, or another form of visual representation inspired by an object that metaphorically or symbolically suggests both historical trauma and healing in *There There*. Write an artist statement (~500 words) to explain your choices, including relevant citations from the novel.
  
  ○ Key tips:
    ■ It is very important that this project does not include graphic representations of violence. You are working with metaphor and symbol. Think, for example, about the Healing Foundation’s video, or the UIHI’s use of the ribbon skirt for their infographic. *No images depicting violence against people in any way will be accepted.*

    ■ It is also important to address steps toward healing and hope (even if these steps toward healing are imperfect or incomplete). Although trauma is a central theme to the novel, we want to practice avoiding a “damage-centered” approach to the book. *See Eve Tuck on “damage-centered research” in Unit 4.*
UNIT 6. NARRATIVE STRUCTURE (MINI UNIT)

ABOUT THIS UNIT

This unit on narrative structure aims to provide instructional support without extensive historical, cultural, and political context. Each of the four subsections takes up a different method for approaching the study of narrative in *There There*. Although students will need only the materials below to engage in generative conversation about the novel’s narrative methods, this unit will work best if students are familiar with the topics covered in Unit 1 and Unit 2.

The first subsection considers the novel’s storytelling techniques through the lens of film and film editing. The second focuses on the polyphonic structure of the book and the relationship between multi-voiced storytelling and empathic reading practices. The third subsection offers an opportunity to study the arc of the book across its distinct parts: Remain, Reclaim, Return, Powwow. The fourth approaches the novel through music—including the music mentioned in the novel itself and the author’s own *There There* playlist, which is available on Spotify. This unit encourages students to approach Tommy Orange’s novel as a Native text that plays with narrative form in new and exciting ways to create a distinctly contemporary universe of stories.

All four subsections are interspersed with sample close-reading exercises, discussion questions, and in-class assignments. A list of ideas for possible unit projects is included at the end.

RECOMMENDED SOURCES


- Orange, Tommy. “There There Playlist.”


FILM

Some reviewers have described the narrative of *There There* as filmic. In many ways this makes sense, particularly if we keep in mind that Tommy Orange really did receive a grant from the Oakland Cultural Arts Fund to fund a storytelling project—just like the
one Dene Oxendene wins in the book. Tommy Orange never did make that movie. But he did write this novel.

When studying texts by Native American authors, readers often turn to oral storytelling as the primary touchstone. Oral storytelling is certainly central to traditional Indigenous cultures, ways of knowing, and practices of healing from historical trauma (see Unit 5). Storytelling does appear as a central motif in the book. It appears primarily in reference to how people tell their own histories (or don’t), but it also appears in reference to Cheyenne stories about Veho, a trickster spider figure whose name, in Cheyenne and Arapaho languages, has come to refer to “white man.” Instead of tracking down copies of traditional oral stories online (which are, after all, most likely not published in Indigenous voices but collected and transcribed by white settler anthropologists), let’s think about what it means to consider how Orange’s novel also borrows from the storytelling techniques of a modern technology—film. The following questions and activities support analysis of the novel’s structure through the framework of its filmic qualities.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. Do any scenes in the novel stand out to you as particularly visual, as if they could be easily translated into a movie scene? Which? Why?
2. Dene records others’ stories but he seems resistant to tell his own aloud. He is often in the position of the “lens” (which is the tag he uses in the graffiti he scrawls around Oakland)—as if he himself were the camera. In what ways is this position like the one Orange is in, as the novelist? In what ways is it different?

Suggested In-Class Activities:

1. Cross-cutting: a film editing method that cuts together separate actions taking place at the same time within the narrative structure.
   - For examples of cross-cutting, see “Cross-Cutting—Everything You Need to Know” from the Nashville Film Institute.
   - The final chapters of “Part IV: Powwow” move quickly across many characters’ perspectives from their various locations at the convention center. In small groups or as a class, discuss how these chapters might borrow from cross-cutting techniques to achieve their effects. Compare and contrast the cross-cuts in the visual examples above to the textual cross-cuts (between at least three of the ending scenes).
   - How does this textual cross-cutting work to create momentum, build anxiety, increase tension, and/or invite comparison between the scenes?
Why do you think Orange uses this kind of textual cross-cutting

- Why do you think Orange uses this method as this particular point in the novel? How does this form of the narrative structure affect how you, as a reader, experience the content—the feelings it produces, the tone it creates, and the themes it addresses?

- Does analyzing the novel’s scenes through the language of film change how you understand its formal choices? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

EMPATHY & THE POLYPHONIC NOVEL

In an interview with Powell Books, Kate Laubernds (the interviewer) asks Orange why he chooses to feature so many different voices and perspectives in There There. He replies:

“I’d known for a while that I wanted to write a polyphonic novel. I think one of the first books that made me want to do it was Colum McCann’s Let the Great World Spin, specifically because of the way he braids everyone’s stories together and earns the right for it to be a novel, arc-wise. I really appreciated what that felt like as a reader, so before I knew what novel I wanted to write, I knew I wanted to write one like that.

On top of wanting to do it from a writer’s standpoint, it was also very personal in the sense that we—Native people—don’t see our representation basically anywhere, unless it’s negative or stereotyped. But then Urban Indians have kind of a double invisibility going on. To really represent [the full spectrum of] that community, it felt like the right and smart way to do it.”

Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. **Polyphonic** literally means “many-voiced.” If the point is to include so many voices—and so many different perspectives—why do you think it’s also important to “braid” the characters’ lives together. What does Orange mean when he says when a book brings the many different characters’ stories together, it “earns the right…to be a novel”? In There There, if the characters’ stories didn’t intersect at the powwow, do you think it would be a less satisfying book to read? Why?

2. In that same interview, Orange says that although he is writing mainly for Native audiences (so they can see their own stories told, honestly, and without stereotypes), he also hopes that all audiences (Native and non-Native) might connect to the book through empathy. Empathy is the capacity to understand
what another person is experiencing through their own frame of reference—to put yourself in someone else’s shoes. This doesn’t mean that you’ll be able to feel what another person feels or experience what they’ve experienced; it also doesn’t mean that your own perspective disappears entirely. It means that you’re able to suspend your framework to try to understand where others are coming from—to understand their stories as they tell them.

Which characters do you empathize with most easily? Why? Which characters do you struggle with empathize with? Why?

In-Class Activities:

1. Narrative Technique Study
   - a.) What is the point of view?
   - b.) What is the tense?
   - c.) How is the story told (chronically, through flashbacks, etc.?)
   - d.) How do these techniques affect characterization and development of the chapter’s themes?

   • When we first meet Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shied (p. 45), she is narrating a series of memories from her childhood. We don’t know this, yet, because this is the first time we’ve been introduced to her! This chapter is written in the a.) first-person point of view and in the b.) past tense. c.) It is told mostly chronologically.
     ○ Why do you think we meet the young Opal before we meet Opal as an older woman who has been raising Orvil, Loother, and Lony?
     ○ How does hearing Opal tell her own childhood story (in her own first-person voice) shape how you see her when she interacts with Orvil? You know so much about her that Orvil doesn’t know. Why, do you think, Orange lets you, the reader, hear Opal tell stories she hasn’t said aloud for many years?

   • Opal’s second chapter is written in a.) third person (p. 159). It begins in the b.) present tense, in the present-day, when Opal is at work driving the mail truck. Soon, the narrative switches to past tense in a flashback. c.) The chapter moves back and forth between present day (driving around in the mail truck) and past memories (some memories from long ago in her childhood, some memories from just the day before).
     ○ Why do you think this chapter moves back and forth between flashbacks and present-day? How does this narrative technique reflect Opal’s state of mind or other elements of her character?
Why do you think this chapter is in third person rather than first? Why do you think that Opal doesn’t narrate this chapter herself? How does this narrative technique reflect the major themes of this chapter?

2. Narrative Technique Study Redux
   • Individually or in small groups, ask students to choose a chapter and answer the above questions (a. through d.), using the above in-class exercise as a model.
   
   • Discuss: The chapters rely on many different kinds of narrative technique. In terms of point of view, some use first-person (“I/we”), some use third person (“he/she/they”), one uses second person (“you”). Some chapters tell a chronological story, taking the reader step-by-step through the events on the day. Other chapters include many flashbacks. Did you notice this as you were reading? Does it feel chaotic? Confusing? Why do you think this polyphonic novel uses so many different ways to tell the characters’ various stories?

3. Empathy
   • After the students have analyzed the characters in more detail, return to the question of empathy. If Orange wants readers to empathize with his characters, is he successful? Do you empathize with these characters? Why and/or why not? How do the narrative techniques affect your willingness to empathize with them?

FOLLOWING THE ARC

*There There* is divided into six distinct sections: Prologue; Part I: Remain; Part II: Reclaim; Interlude; Part III: Return; Part IV: Powwow. The questions and activities below aim to guide classroom discussion about the purpose and effects of this organizational structure. How does this structure create both a *formal* arc and a *thematic* arc for the book? Why?

Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. What purpose do the Prologue and the Interlude serve in the novel? As you read them, do they remove your attention from the fictional world of *There There*? In what ways yes, in what ways no?
2. Why do you think Orange places the Prologue at the start of the book. How does it prepare readers for what is to come? What foreshadowing does it offer? How does it use humor? Is that surprising, given its themes?


4. What would the book lose if these essays weren’t included? Or, rather, what would you lose, as a reader, if they weren’t included?

In-Class Activity:

1. Divide the class into 4 (or 8 or 16) groups. Assign each group a major Part of the book—Remain, Reclaim, Return, or Powwow. Ask students to answer the following questions about their Part.
   - What chapters are included?
   - What are the major themes of each chapter?
   - What is the epigraph? Who is it by? Look up the author—who is this person? Why do you think Orange might have quoted them to begin this Part?
   - What do you think the epigraph means? How does it relate to the major themes you noted in the chapters?
   - What is the title of this Part? How does this title reflect the major themes of the epigraph and the chapters included in this Part?

Share these observations with the entire class. Then, in small or large groups, consider how the overall structure of the novel is in conversation with its major themes. Some additional questions for discussion:

   - Remain: Who remains? What remains? Where? Why is this important?
   - Return: Who returns? To where (or to when, or to what)? Why? Why does Return come after Reclaim?
   - Powwow: Why might the novel break this “R” pattern for naming the “Powwow” part?
MUSIC

Before Tommy Orange was a writer, he was a musician who studied sound engineering. Before an album of music is ready for release, a sound engineer edited the recorded tracks, mixed the tracks (making sure sonic levels of the various tracks are what the artists/publisher wants, so the drums aren’t too soft, the guitars not too loud, etc.), and mastered the tracks (prepared it for distribution). Orange briefly discusses his background in music during this interview with Evan Smith as PBS.

Discussion Questions:

1. Does the book feel musical to you at all? In what ways?

2. One way to think about this novel is as an album of different song tracks (each chapter being a different track, with its own themes, melodies, and rhythms). By the end of the novel, in Part IV: Powwow, we might think of all of these different songs coming together in a chaotic chorus. In this way, then, the novelist is both the recording artist and the sound engineer who pieces them all together to make a whole. Is this a helpful way to think about your experience of reading the book? Why or why not?

3. “Prologue” and “Interlude” are both words that can be used to describe moments in a piece of music. A prologue introduces the major musical themes of the song. An interlude is an instrumental passage that is often used to connect different musical themes; it can be used within a single song or be used to transition between different songs. Is this a helpful way to think about these two sections of the book? Why or why not?

In-Class Activities:

1. Tommy Orange published a There There playlist on Spotify. This playlist includes the songs he was listening to while writing as well as songs that appear in the novel, which he wrote between 2012 and 2017. This activity can be done as a full class or in small groups. Share the playlist. Encourage students to listen to short clips of the songs.
   - What do you notice about the genres of music included here?
   - The tone or mood of the songs?
   - The particular artists whose voices are, in some way, part of the book’s creation?
   - Does this playlist help you think about the novel as a musical composition as well as a textual one? If so, in what ways?
UNIT PROJECT IDEAS

- Create a soundtrack that includes every song that appears in *There There*, in order of their appearance. Write liner notes in which you offer a short annotation for each song, including: 1.) a short bio of the artist; 2.) year the song recorded; 3.) which character from *There There* listens to it, and why they like it (including quotations from the novel). End your liner notes with a paragraph in which you reflect on the experience of that character.

- Write a new chapter from the perspective of an auxiliary character. Perhaps you will rewrite an existing scene from that character’s perspective. Perhaps you want to give that character more of a backstory? Be sure that the themes you address in this chapter fit into the themes of the Part in which you would include it. Decide what point of view you’ll use, the kind of narrative “cuts” you’ll make, and why. This project will be most successful if you put your empathetic *reading* into practice as empathic *writing*.

- If you were to film one of the chapters, what kinds of film editing techniques would you use to match the tone, point of view, rhythm, and narrative structure? What kind of camera shots would you use? What kinds of transitions (cutaway, wipe, morph, etc.)? For more information on filmic techniques, see Studio Binder’s quick and accessible guide to popular camera shots and popular transition methods.
UNIT 7. TECHNOLOGY (MINI UNIT)

**Content warning**
In discussing the use of technology in the novel, this unit also references sections of the text that deal explicitly with gun violence, and particularly a mass shooting. Educators teaching this text may want to consult appropriate resources for discussing violence of this kind in a classroom setting.

ABOUT THIS UNIT

Throughout *There There*, the omnipresence of 21st-century technology—including some very cutting-edge devices—is one of the myriad ways that Orange shatters familiar stereotypes of Native peoples in the US. For better and for worse, Orange’s urban Native characters confront familiar questions about the ways modern technologies help us, save us, and harm us.

This unit on technology aims to provide instructional support without extensive historical, cultural, and political context. Each of the four subsections takes up a different technology that plays a key role in *There There*. Although students will need only the materials below to engage in generative conversation about these themes, this unit will work best if students are familiar with the topics covered in Unit 1 and Unit 5.

The first subsection deals with social media and the internet, primarily concerned with supporting classroom discussions about how we use these technologies to connect to one another as well as the dangers or risks they pose. The second subsection focuses on the drone that flies through *There There*, bringing along its multifaceted use as a tool of surveillance, an experience of freedom, and a weapon of war.

The third subsection aims to provide a framework for studying the role of the 3-D printer in the novel. It’s important to note here that many students—and teachers—might find conversations about 3-D printing triggering. While this unit does not encourage direct discussion of the 3-D printed guns or how they’re used in the powwow shooting. Still, it is likely they will remain on everyone’s minds, and we encourage teachers who make use of this subsection to consult resources for managing student anxiety and trauma responses in regard to themes such as gun violence and mass shooting.

All four subsections are interspersed with sample close-reading exercises, discussion questions, and in-class assignments. A list of ideas for possible unit projects is included at the end.
RECOMMENDED SOURCES

- “Word Cloud Generator.” *Word Cloud Online*.

(DIS)CONNECTED: SOCIAL MEDIA & LIFE ONLINE

Suggested Opening Discussion Questions:

1. How much time do you think you spend online a day? *Educators, you might encourage students to keep a journal in which they log their online hours for a day—how often they use TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, email, multiplayer online video games, etc.*

2. List some of the positive ways that the internet impacts your life. When you’re online, how do you connect to other people? Find community with like-minded others? Expand your horizons and learn about new things? Does going online ever make you feel empowered? If so, how?

3. List some of the negative effects that the internet has had on your life. What are some ways in which going online can make you feel lonely or disconnected?

4. A lot of information is available online: use Google or TikTok, and you can find just about anything (legal or otherwise). What are the positive impacts of this? What are some negative impacts of this?
Suggested In-Class Activities:

1. Edwin Black: Discussion and Close-Reading Questions
   - Edwin spends a lot of time online. Why?
     - What are some of the things he does online? Why are they important to him?
     - What effects does his online life have on his physical self? Why?
   - Edwin uses Facebook to find his father—and he does so by catfishing him (and a lot of other men who share his name).
     - In what ways is it positive that Edwin finds his father? What does this say about how social media allows us to create community and foster a sense of belonging?
     - In what ways does it reflect a troubling possibility for how some people might use social media—he is pretending be someone else, after all, to get information.
   - Discuss the following passages:
     - “Sometimes the internet can think with you, or even for you, lead you in mysterious ways to information you need and would never have thought of to research on your own” (p. 65).
       ▪ Have you had this experience? What have you learned that was helpful or fascinating? What has wasted your time? How might this feeling of “being led” create dangerous situations for people who find, for example, conspiracy theories and misinformation?
     - “I depend on the internet for recall now. There’s no reason to remember when it’s always just right there, like the way everyone used to know phone numbers by heart and now can’t even remember their own. Remembering itself is becoming old-fashioned” (p. 67).
       ▪ There is strong scientific evidence to support Edwin’s argument here. Is this your experience, too? What are some exciting possibilities for this new way of thinking/remembering? What are some of the downsides?

2. Daniel Gonzales: Close-Reading & Word Cloud Activity
   - Close-Reading: Daniel uses Gmail as a way to mourn his brother, Manny. When Manny was alive, he didn’t use his Gmail account regularly; but when he did, he wrote to his little brother Daniel—and, as Daniel says, he “said shit he never would have said in real life” (p. 189).
     - Why does email give people a way to say things that would be hard to say face-to-face? What are positive aspects of this? Negative aspects of this?
o Read pages 189-194. What does Daniel write about in his email to Manny? Why do you think he uses Gmail to say so many things he never said to him when he was alive.

o Why do you think Daniel use his Gmail account to talk to his dead brother? Do you think it helps him? Why or why not?

- Word-Cloud Activity: On pages 191-192, Daniel writes that he sees Oakland from online. “That where we’re going to be all eventually. Online. We’re already kinda moving in that direction if you think about it. We’re already like fucking androids, thinking and seeing with our phones all the time.”

- In small groups, discuss the following: Do you agree with Daniel? Why or why not? What do we gain if we “think and see with our phones all the time”? What do we lose? Why? Try to list your answers as single words.

Divide the board into two columns: Loss / Gain. Encourage students to write one-word answers under the appropriate column.

Put these keywords into a word cloud generator (one for Loss; one for Gain) and share these word clouds with the class. What stands out in the answers? Why?

THE DRONE

Daniel Gonzales’s drone appears a number of times in *There There*, revealing important aspects of the characters with whom it interacts and ultimately playing a role in the book’s closing tragedy. What is a drone? It is the common name for an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV)—an aircraft with no human pilot, crew, or passengers on board—that is controlled by someone on the ground. Drones have long been part of military campaigns and film production, but they’ve recently become available for personal purchase and use.

Opening Questions:

1. What do you know about drones? What are they used for today?
2. Have you ever flown a personal drone? If so, what is it like?
3. How are drones helpful (military operations, public safety, filmmaking, fun, etc.)?
4. What are some of the major problems or dangers they pose (privacy violations, collisions with people, ease of targeting individuals, less immediate connection to the “real” world, etc.)?
Close-Reading Activities:

**Daniel Gonzales:**
- Why does Daniel initially buy the drone (see pp. 187-194)? Despite his cousin Octavio’s objections, why does Daniel feel like he needs to “attend” the powwow robbery through the drone’s camera feed (see pp. 251-252)?

- When Daniel starts taking the drone on test flights, how does he feel? Why? How does the drone technology—and its virtual reality capabilities—offer him a different kind of freedom? A new kind of control? Why do you think freedom and control might be important for Daniel at this time in his young life (see pp. 194-196)?

- What role does Daniel, via the drone, play in the events that unfold at the Big Oakland Powwow (see p. 273)? Why do you think Orange includes the drone as part of this scene? Why do you think we see this through Calvin’s point of view, rather than the birds-eye-view of the drone?

**Bill Davis:** The drone first appears in “Bill Davis” (p. 86). The chapter’s titular character is at work in the Oakland Coliseum, cleaning up trash after a baseball game, and he sees a “tiny plane” in the outfield. He attacks it and nearly destroys it. Why?

- One possible interpretation is that Bill attacks the drone because it represents to him a troubling trend in the younger generation. Consider the following passage as you discuss:
  - “There’s something wrong with all of it. Something about the ever-present glow on their faces, or the too-fast way they tap their phones, their gender-fluid fashion choices, their hyper-PC gentle way of being while lacking all social graces and old-world manners and politeness. Edwin’s this way, too. Tech-savvy, sure, but when it come to the real cold hard gritty world outside, beyond the screen, he’s a baby” (p. 82).
    - What does Bill dislike about the way that young people use technology? What do you think of his critiques?
    - How might his reaction to the drone—his desire to “destroy the thing” (87) with his trash-grabber—be related to his distaste for how technology removes young people from the “real cold hard gritty world” (82)?

- Another possible interpretation is that the drone is triggering for Bill. Bill is a veteran of the Vietnam War, a long and deeply unpopular conflict between North Vietnam and South Vietnam/the US. Since WWI, American Indians have been a significant presence in the US military. The Vietnam War was no exception. In fact, Native Americans hold the highest record of service per capita of any
ethnic group serving in this war. During this conflict, Native soldiers were disproportionately exposed to war zone stress on the frontlines and suffered Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder at rates twice that of their white peers. This is staggering, given that the PTSD rates for all returning Vietnam veterans are very high. For more information, see the study on American Indian veterans’ psychological trauma, conducted by US Department of Veterans Affairs. The war against the Viet Cong left some Native veterans, like Bill, feeling conflicted about their role in the US military.

- Consider these two passages:
  - “He’d gotten back from Vietnam after going AWOL in ’71, dishonorably discharged. He hated the country and the country hated him” (p. 84).
  - “…it is a tiny plane. Or hadn’t seen one before? He has, it’s a drone. A drone plane like they’d been flying into terrorist hideouts caves in the Middle East” (p. 86).

  *Note: Here, Bill refers to a later war in Afghanistan, where drones were used to seek out and assassinate particular military targets. Drone aircraft technology was in its infancy during the Vietnam War, but did play a part in that conflict, as well.*

- How might Bill’s intense reaction to the drone be related to his PTSD? To his feelings about the US military’s technologies for war?

- How does this initial encounter between Daniel’s drone and Bill foreshadow the role that the drone will play in the final pages of the book?

**3-D PRINTING**

**Suggested Close-Reading Activity:**

Daniel uses the 3-D printer he got (which was, itself, made by a 3-D printer) to make weapons for his cousin. He’s afraid of what he’s done, and he worries about how these white plastic guns will be used during the robbery at the powwow. Like any technology, it offers both possibility and risk. An interesting aspect of how Daniel sees the 3-D printer is about something else entirely. Read the following passage:

- “When you spend enough time online, if you’re looking, you can find some cool shit. I don’t see it as that much different from what you [Manny] did. Figuring out a way around a big bully system that gives only those that came from money or power the means to make it. … Long story short, though, is
that I got hooked into this community [of coders], and I realized I could get whatever I wanted. Not drugs and shit. I mean I could but that’s not what I want.” (p. 191)

• What do you think Daniel is referring to when he describes “a big bully system”? What is that system? Who benefits from this system? How? Why?

• Daniel says that he doesn’t want drugs or any other thing that might seem like a quick way to make some money—money which he and his mother desperately need. He wants a 3-D printer. But why does he want a 3-D printer? The guns were Octavio’s idea, not Daniel’s. What does Daniel want? To be able to use the “big bully system” against itself? A way out of poverty? Hope? Control? Freedom? What do you think he’s looking for? Why does the 3-D seem to offer a way to get it?

UNIT PROJECT IDEAS

• Choose a technology (3-D printing, chat forums/social media, or drones). How does this technology appear in the novel? What are the pros & cons that Orange illustrates? Interview 2 adults and 2 teens in your life. What do they see as the pros & cons of this technology? Why? Write a short paper, poster, or PowerPoint in which you present your data and compare what people in your life feel about this technology to how some of Orange’s characters feel about it. Ultimately, what conclusions do you draw about the positives and negatives of this technology?

Extension suggestion: add a research element! Find at least 1 reputable scholarly source on the dangers of this technology, and at least 1 reputable source on its positive impacts. Incorporate this research into your presentation to offer context and to support your claims.

• Play Thunderbird Strike, an award-winning video game by Anishinaabe and also Métis creator Elizabeth LaPensée. Read the “Reflect” page of the game’s accompanying educational website and complete at least two of the sections, as well.

Create a poster, a video, or a presentation in which you address the following questions: What did you learn by playing this game? Which of Orange’s characters could you imagine playing this video game? What might they say about it? Why?
PREPARING TO MEET THE WRITER

Objectives

- To prepare students to make the most of the Annual Student Conference through active engagement
- To provide strategies for building student confidence, addressing concerns, and setting expectations for conference participation.

Conference Keynote Speaker: Tommy Orange

This year, the Great World Texts program will welcome Tommy Orange, author of *There There*, to the Annual Student Conference. Students from across the state will have the opportunity to engage him in a conversation about thoughts on concerns that captured them while reading his novel. This interaction is the core component of the Annual Student Conference.

On Meeting a Writer

Meeting the writer will be a thrilling experience for some of your students, but it might also prove a nerve-wracking for others. To prepare students for this event, consider the following in advance of the conference: What are the expectations for students’ behavior? What kinds of questions should they ask and how will they present their work to the keynote speaker? How can they best prepare for this meeting? What should teachers do if students are nervous, disruptive or unprepared? The preparatory materials listed below will help you and your students to develop a deeper sense of Tommy Orange, as well as what to expect at the Annual Student Conference and how to prepare for it.

Points for Lecture

Prepare your students for meeting Tommy Orange

- Emphasize that, like all people, our keynote speaker could be nervous, excited, happy, sad, shy, in a good or bad mood, etc. Show clips of him doing interviews, and show the class his photograph so they can think of him as an individual from the start.

Emphasize being courteous and respectful.

- Those students designated to ask questions during the keynote should always greet and thank Tommy Orange, introduce themselves by name and school affiliation, and then ask a question. Encourage students to make eye contact,
and to be polite and confident!

Help students avoid feelings of anxiety
- Focus on the experience, not the “performance” or act of talking to Tommy Orange. Emphasize that he is coming to the conference precisely because he is interested in and excited about the ideas that students have developed as they’ve read *There There*. Know that he thinks students have something to say that is worth hearing. Emphasize that this is a dialogue, meaning that student voices matter. He wants to hear from students as much as they want to hear from him.

Encourage them to be specific.
- Don’t just say: “I love this book!” or “I hate this book!” Students should be prepared to articulate what they loved most about it. In preparation, ask students to consider what was most inspiring, thought-provoking, or challenging about the text.

Tips for asking questions.
- *Avoid yes or no questions.* Instead, ask questions that allow room for thought and interpretation. Consider, too, the “lead in” to the question. Students should give a little context (think 2-3 sentences) to let the author know where they’re coming from.

For example: “Why did you write [X] this way?” would be a much more interesting question if the student first explained what about [X] is interesting or confusing to him / him / them. A question that shows a student’s passion is wonderful (e.g., “Why don’t we know if Orvil dies?! I need to know!”); but the author will be able to offer a more satisfying answer if the student’s question is specific (e.g., “The ending doesn’t really resolve what happens to some of the characters after the shooting—like, for example, whether Orvil dies! I’m curious why you chose to leave some of these big questions unanswered.”)

Be prepared.
- Ask students to think about how Tommy Orange might react to a given question. Once you’ve chosen which questions to ask the keynote speaker, role-play possible answers as a class. Prepare a list of follow-up questions, too. Students might find it helpful to listen to this Q&A with Orange to give them a sense of what to expect.

On decorum.
- This conference will be a serious academic affair and a lot of planning has gone into this event by teachers, students, UW faculty, and staff, etc. The people in attendance have spent months preparing for this event. Disruptive, discourteous,
or disrespectful behavior is unacceptable. Teachers whose students do not follow the decorum guidelines are expected to remove students immediately.

Discussion Questions:

- How would you like to be treated (or not) if you were the keynote speaker? If you were a student from another school?

- What questions do you most want answered? What do you want to know about *There There*?

- Hold a conference dress rehearsal. If your group of participating students is small, this might consist of each student giving a brief but formal presentation of her project, followed by a question and answer session. If your group of participating students is large, split them into two groups. Have one group present their projects first and the other second. Students will alternate between presenting and viewing, just as they will on the day of the official conference.

- Role-play meeting Tommy Orange. Have students prepared with questions, and practice asking and answering them. What questions got the best (or worst) answers? Why?

- Brainstorm productive questions. In small groups, students should write down as many questions as they can think of to ask the author. Then switch questions with other groups and select those which seem best and those which seem least effective. Use this as the basis for a discussion about how we decide if a question is “good” or “bad”? *Hint: the least effective questions are those that are too easy to answer, produce obvious answers, or could easily be answered by anyone reading the book.* You might have students revise with this discussion in mind, practicing how to construct a clear, direct and interesting question.