

Spiritual Worldview and Values of the Indigenous Peoples of North America

ANTH 329 North American Indians

(with correspondence to Frey *Landscape Traveled by Coyote and Crane* 2001 and *Stories That Make the World* 1995, as well as with other religious traditions)

A. The Creation

An example of an **Oral Story Text**: [Salmon Always Goes Up River](#) (PDF)

A.1. The place to begin is with the Creator and the Animal Peoples such as **Akbaatatdia** “the maker of all things first (Apsáalooke - Crow) or **Amotqn** “the one who sits at the head mountain” (Schitsu’umsh-Coeur d’Alene) – referred to as the “Creator,” and the **Titwa-tityáá-ya** “animal peoples” (Nimípuu - Nez Perce) – referred to as the Animal or First Peoples. The world was brought forth and prepared by the Creator and the Animal/First Peoples, such as Changing Woman, Sedan, Coyote, Crane, Salmon, Raven, etc., for “the coming of the human peoples.” They rid the world of most of its “monsters” and embedded within it the “gifts” the human peoples would need to prosper. The “gifts” include the water of the rivers and foods of the earth that nourish bodies, such as camas, huckleberries, salmon, deer, buffalo; the teachings and values that properly guide behavior, the *mi’yep*; and the transformative power to ensure vitality and life itself, the *súumesh*. As a result the landscape is given its contours and form. From the Creator and Animal Peoples are thus established the ontological principles, structures and processes upon which the world is made.

And it was Coyote or Changing Women who created the **human peoples**, either from the soil of the earth (as with the Crow and Diné), or the body and blood of one of the “monsters” (as with the Coeur d’Alene and Nez Perce). Along with the other created beings, such as deer and salmon, as well as camas and trees, human peoples are thus considered a part of the landscape, and not separate from it. Nevertheless, human peoples are distinguished from the other beings by their incompleteness and vulnerability; they are in need of guidance and spiritual vitality.

While the *Amotqn* is omnipotent and omnipresent, it is nevertheless illusive and mysterious. It is through the specific actions of the Animal Peoples that the will of the Creator and the creation itself were brought forth. The Creator may not be encountered directly, but its intentions continue to be expressed today through the Animal Peoples.

The world created is not a world without “**monsters**”; not all were slain at the time of creation by the First Peoples. Among the “monsters” that continue to roam the landscape and challenge the human peoples are certain malevolent beings and spirits, as well as such antagonists as “illness” and “suffering,” and “ignorance,” “greed,” “anger,” “jealously” and “laziness.” It is with the “gifts,” when properly applied, that these “monsters” can be abated.

The accounts of the creation, and the deeds and misdeeds of the First Peoples continue to be conveyed in the **oral traditions**. In the act of re-telling the sacred stories, the “teachings” conveyed within them are disseminated and taught and the world itself and all its entities and beings are revitalized and perpetuated. (See D.6. esp. Orality) In turn, the oral traditions are linked with the

features and forms of the landscape, e.g., a rock outcropping, a river's bend, a hill, etc., the landscape becoming a "textbook" of the oral traditions. As you travel the landscape you engage the oral traditions.

Though the creation is acknowledged as derived from and credited to the Creator and the actions of the Animal/First Peoples, "the creation" can never be fully comprehensible, or knowable, by humans. There is always an element of "mystery" to the creation, and humans approach the creation, the Creator, and the Animals Peoples with great humility, deference, and respect.

Theme: acknowledge the supremacy of the Creator, and the power and role of Animal/First Peoples, though humble and self-deferent toward them. They created the world, preparing it for the human peoples, embedding it with "gifts," yet a landscape upon which "monsters" roam. [Frey 1995: 13 and 2001:9, 184, 262; akin to Hindu Brahman and multiple expressions of Divinity]

Contrast: acknowledge only a secular world of no god, or a polytheistic world of many gods; full knowledge of the origin and workings of the universe is obtainable by humans

A.2. *Snq-hepi-wes* - "where the spirit lives, from horizon to horizon" (Coeur d'Alene). What was brought forth by the Creator and Animal/First Peoples is a spiritual world, which pervades and unifies all entities and beings, in their souls as well as their bodies, in their transcendent, as well as material essences. It is out of this transcendent world of the Creator and Animal Peoples that they embed "gifts" in the overt, material landscape. These are "gifts" of certain spiritual meanings and guidance, known as the *mi'yep* or "teachings", as well as spiritual vitality and power, known as the *baaxpée* or *súumesh* or "medicine". The spiritual world of significance and vitality is thus a part of and not separate from the entire creation, though not readily apparent and revealed to the human peoples.

The primacy of the spiritual world is exemplified in the Diné (Navajo) prayer phrase, *Saah Naghai Bikeh Hoozhoo*, "continual re-occurring long-life in an environment of beauty and harmony," and its associated notion of first "thinking" (*Saah Naghai*) and then "speaking" (*Bikeh Hoozhoo*) the world into existence. It is from the internal, spiritual world (*Saah Naghai*) of archetypal meanings and spiritual force that all behavioral actions and material forms (*Bikeh Hoozhoo*) are derived and manifested, and that is thus ultimately more "real" than the overt, material world. Nevertheless, this understanding is not a denial of the importance of the material world, and of the pragmatic need to work within its circumstances to obtain access to what is needed for life and to the higher, transcendent meanings in life.

Theme: seek to access and travel the spiritual world [Frey 1995: 42-43 and 2001:9, 183, 262. The world of Indigenous peoples is a Platonic world, as represented in the "allegory of the Cave," and akin to Hindu world of *Brahman - Trimurti* and *Jivas - Atman*, as well as *maya* and Buddhist notion of *anicca*, and to the Taoist world of the *Tao*]

Contrast: acknowledge and travel only the material, secular world, akin to only traveling the Hindu world of *maya* or the Buddhist world of *anicca*

A.3. **Ashammaléaxia** - “as driftwood lodges” (Crow), and primacy of the “**family**,” one of the *mi’yep*. The world is characterized by an inherent spatial and temporal connectivity, integration and kinship of all entities and beings - human, Animal, Fish, Plant, Water, Rock and Landscape, as well as Spiritual “Peoples,” such as the Ancestors, and Spirit Guardians, as well as Animal Peoples and Creator itself. All “Peoples” are unequivocal “participants” in the world, living as a part of and not apart from the world. This notion of “kinship” is expressed in the idea of the “**family**,” which is defined in terms and **inclusive** of not only its human “relatives,” but also its animal, fish and plant, and spirit “relatives.” (Story Text: [Sedna, Inua and Seals](#) (PDF))

As the kinship is spatially inclusive of the Animal Peoples and Landscape, so too is it temporarily inclusive of the First Peoples of the Creation. Time itself is not lineally defined in terms of a past, present and future, i.e., a past separated from the present and “dead,” but time is cyclical, with a “past” within which you can participate. You can continue to travel with the First Peoples at the moment of Creation.

Theme: acknowledge the kinship and interrelationship with all beings, and seek to participate in the world of the “family” [Frey 1995:40, 43 and 2001:10, 183, 264.]. Akin to Taoist notion of the *Tao*.

Contrast: the human is an autonomous agent, and the world is based upon the Cartesian Duality of a “mind-body and “I-it” separation and objectification

A.4. **Unshat-qn** - “eye to eye” (Coeur d’Alene), one of the *mi’yep*. **Equality** characterizes the structural relations among all the members of the “family,” be they human, Animal, Plant or Spirit. For the Coeur d’Alene the “deer is a brother,” as Animals have souls, volition and intelligence. In the example of a hunter, he or she does not “take” a deer, as if conquering and dominating it. But in the hunter offering respect to the deer as a “brother” and in demonstrating the need of others for its nourishment, the deer voluntarily offers its body, its meat, to its “relative.” In so doing, the soul of the deer is not violated and desecrated, but continues, to be refurbished by a new material body. The notion of equality is often expressed in the term *pute-nts* (Coeur d’Alene), “**respect**” for all things and beings. (Story Text: Elk and the Young Man and The Muskrat Man)

Theme: respect all the members of the “family” as equals [Frey 1995: 41-42 and 2001:12, 264, 265; akin to Taoist notions of “moderation” and “humility,” two of the Three Jewels].

Contrast: the human has supremacy over all other life forms, with an hierarchical ranking of dominant-subordinate relationships with other entities

B. The Gifts

B.1. **Baaxpée** (Crow) - **Súumesh** (Coeur d'Alene) - **Wéyekin** (Nez Perce) - "medicine" - spiritual power and vitality, one of the "gifts" embedded in the landscape. The landscape, and all its forms, entities and beings are endowed with spiritual power and a life force. From the Wolf and Eagle, to the Tree and Root, to the River and Water, to the Mountain and Rock, each are endowed with *súumesh*. It was with *wéyekin* that the Animal/First Peoples were able to bring forth and transform an entire world at the time of creation. And it is *súumesh* that continues to bring life to a salmon, a bird, a human being, even a rock. But as *wéyekin* can nurture life, it can also withhold it. (**Story Texts:** The Bar Fight and Two Bullets" and "John's Snake")

B.1.a. **The Source:** The Creator - **Akbaatatdia** (The One Who Makes Everything - Crow), **Amotqn** (The One Who Sits at the Head of the Mountain - Coeur d'Alene). Medicine is ultimately derived from the **Creator**; the Creator is the recipient of one's prayers and vows; the Creator is the ultimate source of vision and cure, of transformative power of life. As in the instance of the Crow, there are varied images of the Creator: *Akbaatatdia* "The One Who Makes Everything," *lichihkbaaleeish* "First Doer," *Baakukule* "One Above," *Isaahka* "Old Man," *Isaahkawuattée* "Old Man Coyote." The Creator is not an anthropomorphic nor monotheistic per se, and does not project a morality, does not seek supremacy over nor retribution for transgression. It is diffused and pervasive throughout all the landscape, omnipresent, within all phenomena – land forms, animal, bird, plant, human, and rock.

B.1.b. **The Link and Character: The Animal People - lilapxe** (medicine father). While derived from the Creator, medicine is mediated through a "Medicine Father," the **Animal People**. They are not so much distinct from the Creator, as extensions of it – the arms, legs, ears, voice and eyes – the linkage and channel to the Creator. One prays to and through Medicine Fathers, (story e.g., "young man's visit from Eagle, Meadowlark, Elk"). The Medicine Fathers can be expressed as an Eagle, Elk, Buffalo, Snake, Meadowlark, Otter, Mole, etc. The quality associated with the natural phenomena is expressed in parallel fashion with the particular character/abilities of the medicine – (**Story Texts:** The Mole's Earth, Squirrel Medicine, Eagle Medicine). Medicine Fathers can also be the *Awakkule* "Little People," (**Story Text:** Visit to John's Home). It will be the Medicine Fathers that instruct a one in the proper care of and for medicine, and sets "taboos of respect," (**Story Text:** Stick-game and Right to Guess). One is always cautioned never to use *aannutche*, "to take by the arm," "bad medicine," "to curse someone," (**Story Texts:** The Fancy Dancer). "It will come back to you." (NOTE: consider the parallelism between the creation time and the present time regarding the roles of the Creator and the Animal People.)

B.1.c. **The Nature: Baaxpée** (spiritual power). While medicine can involve a physical agent or property, it always entails a transcendent, **spiritual power**, the life force. (**Story Texts,** e.g., "the brew and diabetes" and "gift of the eagle feathers"). The efficacy of medicine resides in its spiritual power, and not its physical attributes.

B.1.d. **The Effect: *Baalía*** (to doctor). Medicine alters peoples' lives, **bringing health and well-being** (**Story Text:** Nurse's Guilt and Sun Dance, Vietnam Medicine Bundle). It is understood as a very real and true power, and not imaginary, nor psychologically based, and not based in belief (**Story Text:** The White Woman at Sun Dance).

Theme: acknowledge the spiritual forces embedded within the landscape. Akin to Taoist notion of *ch'i* and *wu wei* [Frey 1995:42]

Contrast: the world is devoid of spiritual power and forces

B.2. ***Mi'yep*** - "teachings from all things" (Coeur d'Alene), also one of the "gifts" embedded in the landscape. These teachings, (equivalent to "perennial archetypes," moral and ethical codes and values, and significant meanings) permeate all entities and beings, such as rock formations, rivers, mountains, animals, endowed within them by the Animal/First Peoples at the time of creation. The "teachings" were already in the landscape prior to the arrival of the human peoples. If one "listens attentively," the "teachings" are accessible. The landscape is not void and meaningless. As well as being embedded in the contours of the landscape, the *mi'yep* are also transmitted and conveyed through the oral traditions, and the *súumesh* songs and dances of the Sun Dance (Crow) and Jump Dance (Coeur d'Alene), all of which are understood as "textbooks." As the world is not human-created, neither are the "teachings" and values that guide human behavior socially constructed and derived.

Theme: acknowledge the teachings and meanings embedded in the landscape, [Frey 1995:42 and 2001:9, 264; akin to Taoist notion of *wu wei*]

Contrast: the world is devoid of spiritual and archetypal meanings

B.2.a. ***Ammaakée*** - "give away" (Crow), ***Té-k'e*** - "to give and share [with others]" (Nez Perce), one of the *mi'yep*. Compassion for all others in need of assistance, an **ethic of sharing**, characterizes the dynamics of all "family" relationships. It is the "glue" that holds the kinship together. One gives unselfishly, without anticipation of reciprocity, to help others in need. This notion is exemplified in the act of the Creator and Animal Peoples preparing the world for the coming of human peoples, in the animal, fish and plant peoples offering themselves to the human hunters, fishermen and gatherers, in the humans in whatever capacity they can giving to others in need of help, and in the deceased preparing a camp for those yet to come. A "wealthy" person maybe "poor" in "possessions," having given them to those in need, but "rich" in the number of "relatives." (**Story Texts:** Couple Befriended by the Moon, Rabbit and Jack Rabbit, Crane, at Graduation, the Deer and the Hunter)

Theme: seek to give to and help the others within the "family" who are in need [Frey 2001:10, 184, 264-65, akin to Hindu "renounce the fruits of one's actions" and Taoist notion of "compassion," the third of the Three Jewels].

Contrast: is selfish and greedy, expressing the self-serving trickster Coyote, and seeks to accumulate material possessions

B.2.b. Other *mi'yep* include **tuk'uki** - "honesty" (Nez Perce) and integrity toward others, **diakaashik** "doing it with determination" (Crow) and sincerity in all interactions with others, and **ciká-w** "bravery" (Nez Perce) and courageous in the defense of others and in the face of adversity. (**Story Text:** Four Smokes)

Theme: adhere to honesty and courage in support of the "family"

Contrast: deception, dishonesty, cowardliness

B.3.c. **Isáahkawattee** "old man coyote" (Crow) - **Smiyaw** "coyote" (Coeur d'Alene) - **'Iceyéeye** "coyote" (Nez Perce) - the way of the "Coyote," also one of the *mi'yep*. Nevertheless, there are those considered outside the "family," and who may in turn seek to harm it's members, such as an adversarial grizzly bear, a Blackfoot warrior, a U S military general, or a corrupt government agent. One must be aware of and prepared for encounters with competitive and adversarial individuals outside the "family."

In relations with defined "**adversaries**," members of the "family" apply the example and skills of the trickster Coyote, including intelligence and strategic foresight, physical prowess and agility, deception, wit and cunning, an **ethic of competition**. Coyote's schemes typically fail when his intentions are directed at self gain and at members of the family, while he often succeeds when his desires are to help others in the face of an adversary. Hence Coyote's trickster and deceptive behavior becomes inappropriate when applied to members of the "family," by extension, to spiritual kinsmen, but the very same behavior can be appropriate when applied outside the "family" against an opponent. Being "coyote" is thus appropriate when it is self-effacing and serves the needs of other family members, and is not self-serving. As a result, we see a clear demarcation of that is "family" and "spiritual," all associated with an ethic of sharing defining these relationships, distinguished from "adversary" and non-spiritual which are associated with an ethic of competition defining these relationships. (**Story Texts:** Coyote and the Rock Monster, Coyote and the Green Spot, and re-visit Salmon Always Goes Up River)

Theme: act as "Coyote" only toward one's "adversary" [Frey 1995:63-66]

Contrast: act as "Coyote" toward one's "family" members, as well as toward strangers

C. Primary Spiritual Goal

So that the **primary goal** in one's life is that of protecting and preserving the health and well-being of the "**family**," of maintaining the harmony and vitality of the whole, inclusive of all its human, Animal, Plant and Spirit People members. It is a goal extended to all "family" members. The health and harmony of the human individual, of the human family, and of the ecological landscape of

the Animal and Plant Peoples, of the entire “family,” are all in correspondence and synonymous with each other. When one “relative” is threatened or ill all others in the “family” are potentially threatened or ill.

Theme: the primary goal in life is that of enhancing the well-being of the “family,” comparable to *Bodhisattvas* in Mahayana Buddhism

Contrast: the primary goal in life is self-reliance, autonomy, or ego enhancement; or the primary goal is personal redemption and salvation (as in Judaism, Christianity or Islam), or Oneness, Self-realization, moksha, or nirvana (as in Hinduism or Theravada Buddhism)

D. The Means to the Goal

The **means** to the goal of preserving the “family” is to, 1. fully adhere to the values of the “teachings,” the *mi’yep*, and especially that of the ethic of sharing (to unselfishly help others in need), and 2. obtain and apply spiritual power (*súumesh*, *baaxpée*, *wéyekin* - “medicine”) for the well-being of others. The responsibility of the entire “family’s” health is on the shoulders of those who have the ability to give.

In this sense, Indigenous “religion” is not so much concerned about prescribing the nature of the “sacred” (as there are no “priests” interpreting the sacred for others, nor “doctrinal edicts” followers must adhere to), as it is a vehicle facilitating the movement of individuals to the threshold of the sacred. Upon traveling this spiritual territory, each individual is then offered a rather personal, idiosyncratic relationship with the divine, all within the spiritual worldview framework just outlined.

Theme: seek to espouse the *mi’yup* teachings, and acquire and apply the *súumesh* life forces all for the benefit of others in the “family”

Contrast: espousing “Coyote” toward “family” members, or use “medicine” for selfish, self-serving purposes, to make “bad medicine”

D.1. Medicine: Acquired. Along with espousing the lessons of the *mi’yep*, the transformative power of *súumesh* is sought and applied to welfare of the “family.” When successfully traveling the spiritual world, and through the help and agency of the Animal Peoples, an individual will seek to acquire and apply its life-giving power and guidance, “**medicine.**”

Unlike other beings (such as Animal Peoples), humans must **quest** for spiritual guidance and power. Humans must demonstrate their willingness, as well as worthiness to give of themselves in order to receive “medicine.” In the quest, a faster may journey to a sacred mountain and **offers** his or her “sincerity,” as well as gives up food and water, what is necessary for life. If judged worthy by the Creator and an Animal Person, such as a Buffalo or Eagle, he or she may **receive** a vision and *súumesh* song. The quester has been “adopted” by a Animal Person, and has received a guardian

spirit. It is important to be noted that the First Peoples of the creation time are one and the same as the Animal Peoples that adopt and guide a quester of today. Hence the process and structure of **rites of passage** are essential to the quest. (**Story Texts:** Sundance and Quester examples) [Frey1995:66-71]

See "[Rites of Passage](#)" (PDF). Story Texts: Crow Sundance and Fasting examples

D.1.a. Orphan Status

D.1.b. Separation, Journey and Sacrifice, two active agents

Why symbolism of Death?

- to "die" is to validate the process

- to "die" is to be brought to the threshold of the scared

- to "die" is to sacrifice and give up something of extreme value

- to "die" is to be rendered a neophyte, emptied and thus receptive

- to "die" is to get down to your "bones"

D.1.c. Acquisition of Power and Knowledge, the void is filled and oneness achieved (two active agents dissolved)

D.1.d. Affirmation and Rebirth

It is during the vision experience that what is the unique and distinctive in the human individual is dissolved, merged and rendered a part of the spiritual world, a transitory state of **Oneness** with the sacred, of what can be called Self-realization, Enlightenment, Awakening. But the human does not remain in this state of bliss, returning to the world of his or her family in order to apply any insights, guidance and "medicine" gained for the benefit of the those in need.

Theme: the seeking and acquisition (a state of Oneness) of "medicine" is a means to the higher goal of helping preserve the health of others

Contrast: the seeking and becoming a state of Oneness or Self-realization is the goal of life (as in Hinduism or Theravada Buddhism)

D.2. Your Responsibility. The task of protecting and preserving the health of the "family" is attempted only during **the course of one's lifetime**. Each human gets only one shot, during his or her own lifetime in this world, at fully adhering to the *mi'yep* teachings, and seeking and acquiring "medicine," and thus of helping maintain the health of the "family."

Correspondingly, the "**after world**" is understood as simply "a camp across the waters," where all the deceased, the ancestors, go to prepare the way to those yet to come (reiterating an ethic of sharing), a camp surrounded by green pastures for the horses, great berry patches and camas fields, and good hunting and fishing areas.

Adherence to the *mi'yep* values is **socially invoked** through a number of mechanisms, including the advice and guidance rendered from an elder, the application of public joking and ridicule, and

ultimately, through the enforcement of social ostracism and banishment. Hence the motivation for embracing the *mi'yep* and for seeking to preserve the health of the "family" is not the result of personal spiritual reward, nor the threat of spiritual punishment. Hence there is little meaning and relevance within Indigenous religions for a "black and white view" of the world, dichotomizing it into either "good" or "evil," and "saved" or "sinful."

Theme: in pursuit of preserving the health of the "family," you have only during the course of your lifetime in this world to adhere to the values of *mi'yep*, and seek and apply the power of *súumesh*; the values are enforced through social persuasion.

Contrast: you get many opportunities to get it right, via accumulated "karma" and "reincarnation" into a higher or lower state of being (as in Hinduism and Buddhism); there is "sin" and "evil" in the world; given the condition of "original sin," either eternal salvation in "heaven," or damnation in "hell" await you on "judgment day" (as in Christianity); you are a member of a "chosen people," adhering to God's will, with "sin" an issue of committing "mistakes" (as in Judaism); you seek submission to God's will, with "sin" an issue of "forgetting," awaiting a "judgment day" (as in Islam); "proselytizing," enforce adherence to one's religious orientation via "witnessing," education, or even threat of actual corporal punishment, imprisonment, or killing. (All these orientations are alien to Indigenous peoples)

D.3. Many Paths to the Creator. Yet it is a **very personal quest** into the spiritual world of *súumesh*, a path individualized to each person's needs and disposition. As suggested previously, Indigenous religion is less concerned about prescribing the nature of the sacred, as it is in facilitating the movement of individuals to the threshold of the spiritual. There are thus multiple paths to the Creator and Animal Peoples, all equally valid and potentially effective. As exemplified in the Crow "wagon wheel" metaphor (representative of the ancient rock medicine wheels which dot the northern plains and the structure of the Sun Dance lodge), the paths to the Creator are like the spokes of a "wagon wheel." As there are many separate spokes in the wheel, there are many "religions" in the world, each distinct, with its own unique path. Yet as all spokes are of the same length, all religions are equal. If some spokes were shortened and others lengthened, or if some spokes were eliminated all together, the wheel would no longer turn, but fall flat. Nevertheless, as all spokes are anchored to the hub of the wheel, so too are all religions linked to the common Creator, each religion simply calling it by a different name. (Story Text: The Wagon Wheel and Sundance Lodge)

Theme: acknowledge multiple paths to the spiritual world (akin to Hinduism)

Contrast: there is but a singular, exclusive path to the spiritual, denying the validity of all others spiritual paths to the Creator (as is typically the case in the monotheistic religions of Judaism and Christianity)

D.4. Way of Life. The quest for spiritual guidance and power, and all its associated rituals and ceremonies, the “religion” of the Indigenous peoples, is thus understood as a “path” or “**way of life,**” **comprehensive** of all one’s actions and thoughts, and not a compartmentalized segment of one’s life. As an **experiential** “way of life,” it is not predicated on a testament of faith to a specific doctrine, creed, or set of theological beliefs. The spiritual is directly **encountered** and engaged, not philosophically discussed and talked about. Such ceremonies as the Sweat House, Sun Dance and Jump Dance, medicine bundle opening, naming ceremony, wake and funeral ritual, first fruits ceremonies associated with the roots, fish and game animals, healing ritual, pipe ceremony, and vision quest and fasting address the needs and concerns of virtually every aspect of life, from birth to death. And it is a “path” that necessitates accessing and knowing the world through one’s heart, one’s intuition, one’s spirit, though “**heart knowledge.**” While “heart knowledge” is primary, “head knowledge,” accessing and knowing the world through the intellect and mind, is not to be neglected and is supplemental to “heart knowing.”

Theme: the spiritual quest is an experiential “way of life,” dependent on “heart knowledge”

Contrast: religion is based upon a doctrinal set of beliefs and articles of faith; it is compartmentalized to certain activities; and approach the world relying only on “head knowledge”

D.5. Medicine Applied. Once acquired, “medicine” is directed at benefitting and instilling health in other Peoples, be they human (healing sickness and providing defense) or animal, fish or plant (helping insure prosperity, health and well-being). Medicine can bring forth life and confer health, as well as can relinquish it, bringing illness and death.

Medicine is applied **pervasively throughout** the Indian way of life. Among the **applications** of *súumesh* are the good blessing that comes from the confirming of an “Indian name,” the protection in the face of an enemy the comes from “medicine pouch” worn about the neck, the cure from an illness that comes from a healing ceremony, or the bountiful harvest of camas or huckleberries that comes from the prayers of those in the Jump Dancers. Medicine is used to safeguard and promote the health of all Human/Plant/Animal members of the “family. Medicine is also used to help control of the weather, in locating lost articles as well as lost people, i.e., clairvoyance, in love medicine, in various contests and gambling, but most importantly, for healing ceremonies. (**Story Texts:** The Lost Girl, The Stick Game, Basketball and Love Medicine, Navajo Chantways, Crow Bundle Opening)

But in this world animated with medicine, with *súumesh*, this does not suggest a fatalistic, deterministic world. Humans have **agency and choice**; they can elect to seek and travel the spiritual world or not. (**Story Text:** John, the Little People and Two Caves)

D.6. Efficacy. How does it work? *Baaechichiwaau* - “re-telling one’s own” (Crow, referring to the act of telling a story). The continuation of the Indian way of life and of heart knowledge for the future generations is through the sharing of the oral traditions, “re-telling one’s own.” As the place to

begin is with the Creator and the Animal Peoples, so too is the place of continuance (see A.). The oral traditions are inclusive of the stories of the Animal Peoples, along with their songs, dances, and other aesthetic and spiritual expressions.

In giving voice to the First Peoples and running with the Coyote, consider the example of the following three processes in the act of storytelling – techniques of telling, orality and the power of words – contrasting them with writing and literacy.

Orality and Literacy¹

As we are endeavoring to appreciate an *oral* tradition of the Indigenous Peoples of the Plains and Plateau, we need to clarify many of the salient qualities and differing significances of *orality* in contrast with *literacy*.² The oral traditions of the Plains and Plateau Peoples emanate out of the prominent mode of communications found in speech, in the biological capacity to articulate and hear the spoken word. It is a tradition akin to that in which Homer in the 8th century BCE produced his great *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. It is the tradition whose languages are among the over 3,000 other viable oral-based languages spoken throughout the world today. Of all the languages spoken, less than eighty are grounded in their own derived literacy.

It must be pointed out that orality is not synonymous with illiteracy. Illiteracy refers to the lack of literacy skills within a literacy-based tradition, and not to the presence of orality skills in such a tradition. In addition, the speech patterns found in literacy-based cultures, such as in our own, are significantly grounded in literacy structures and forms, and are not equivalent per se to the speech patterns found in oral-based cultures. These two important observations became most apparent to me after having lived for several years in a community in which *Apsaalooke* (Crow) was the primary language of everyday conversation, and then after acquiring a level of competency in *Apsaalooke* to begin conversing with Crows and to satisfy my "foreign language" requirement in graduate school (though I am far from fluent).

In distinguishing orality from literacy, however, we should not render them dichotomized, each expression exclusive of the other. The particular language configuration of any given culture can, in fact, exemplify qualities of both orality and literacy. Indeed, the pictorial arts of oral-based cultures as represented in pictographs, ritual costumes and masks, sacred fetishes and objects, or architectural structures and adornments, can embrace many of the qualities I will suggest as indicative of literacy. In turn, the significance of orality in a literacy-based culture cannot be underestimated. Any given culture must be assessed as to its own unique linguistic configuration. It is much more appropriate to approach orality and literacy in terms of a heuristic continuum. The following comments are, in fact, heuristic in nature and are meant to stimulate your thinking about the issues brought up here. They should certainly *not be* construed as being somehow the *definitive word* on the subject.

1 Modified from Frey 1995.

2 For additional discussion on the issues of orality and literacy, see Frey 1995, Goody 1977, 1986, 1987, Ong 1982 and Thomas 1992.

Orality

Storytelling Techniques. The orality of the Plains and Plateau Peoples is characterized by its particular techniques of storytelling. The *Schitsu'umsh* (Coeur d'Alene) term for storytelling is, *me-y-mi-ym*, meaning, "he/she is going to tell stories." In the various techniques, the storyteller endeavors to transform the "listeners" of the story into "participants" within the story. During the telling of a Coyote story, for instance, it is difficult to be an "onlooker," passive and non-engaged. In fact, participation within the story must be overtly acknowledged throughout the telling, if the telling is to continue. During the telling of a story, Coyote or otherwise, individuals periodically respond by saying aloud *ee* (in *Apsaalooke*) or *i'!* (in Salish), meaning "yes." Among the Pend d'Oreille, participation is acknowledged by making the hand-sign for "I got it," hooking the index finger and drawing it in toward the body. As long as the responses are given, the telling continues. But should they cease, so too would the story. There is no one in the story any longer!

Everyone has the potential to be a storyteller. Indeed, modes of storytelling pervade even everyday language and conversation. Setting down for an evening meal can mean much more than the consumption of good food, as the stories would continue into the late evening hours. When trying to describe the behavior of someone else, it is not uncommon for an abbreviated account of Old Man Coyote to slip into the conversation. It is as if the behavior of the individual in question is modeled after the example set by Coyote. Mari Watters, a *Nimíipuu* (Nez Perce) storyteller, remembers that "everyone told stories, everyone was a storyteller."

Nevertheless, certain qualities greatly enhance a storyteller's ability to bring a narrative to "life" and transform the "listeners" into "participants" within it. The language of the storyteller is often colored with a **dramatic** use of **intonation**, **pauses** and even the **speech mannerisms** of the animal people. Grizzly Bear's warning is heard in a voiced "growl." *Bear comes up, "Gra-ah, r-a-a-ah!"* Silence can be as meaningful as the spoken word. Pauses are used to highlight and add drama. *I'll catch up to you..., and...chew out your wind pipe!* Words are often spoken slowly, with deliberation. The volume of the voice may rise and lower, and the pitch may change, accenting this action or that character in the story. *And Coyote stood up, and said "It's me, Coyote!",* in a clear loud voice. Augmenting the voice is the language of **hand** and **body gestures**--visual images. The storyteller may look off to the distance with surprise in his eyes as he says, *And so...Coyote is going along,* and the listeners look off as well! Each repeated instance when Tom Yellowtail makes reference to "here" and "there" within his stories, a hand, an arm, or perhaps a finger will motion in that direction. Among some of the elders, as they spoke the story into being, they would also motion in traditional sign-language.

While the length of the narratives can be extensive, the actual language used in the stories is generally rather **terse**. Coyote's actions are stated simply. *It's Old Man Coyote. He is going around, very hungry.* And not only are his actions, but his emotional temperament and motivational disposition, as well as his very physical imagery are seldom given elaborate and detailed descriptions. They are only hinted at. As Archie Phinney stated, "no clear image is offered or needed." Similarly, while the mythic geography and each of its rivers are named, seldom are they painted with the color of

flowers, the texture of trees or the song of birds. *Coyote...was going upstream. Coyote is a-a-lways going upstream. And..he's going upstream, and he's going along the Clearwater...* As a consequence, by only loosely defining the image, action and disposition of narrative characters and scenes, the terse language of the story invites each listener to contribute his or her own particular images to the story. The story's landscape and characters are given added color and textural detail through the active imagination of those participating within that story.

The stories are **linked to the seasons** as well as to the common and daily events people experience. Typically, the long winter evenings are the season for storytelling. In the Plateau area, storytelling often corresponds to the sacred Winter Dances. Among the *Apsaalooke*, stories of Old Man Coyote should not be told during the summer--"bad things just happen!" His season is from the first frost in the fall until the first thunder is heard the following spring. This is the season when "the snakes and the bears are asleep and won't pay you a visit; they really like joining in!" As you feel the cold winter's wind you know the voice of Coyote is not far away. Similarly, when the tipis are being set up at Crow Fair each August or the first winter's sweat bath is taken, there is always a particular story told. As you drive down the highway, that coulee, this bend in the river or that rock outcropping is pointed to and its story told. As you undergo a season, a locale, or an event you experience its story.

Coyote's stories are often interwoven into a singular narrative cycle accounting for his entire journey up the Columbia and its various tributaries, culminating in the "coming of the people." Such a cycle cannot be completed in a single sitting, however. Clarence Woodcock, a Pend d'Oreille, remembers how it would take his father three consecutive winter nights, from sunset to sunrise, to tell the story of Coyote. And no one would think of deleting this section or shortening that segment of the cycle. The "point" of the telling is as much the *plot*--enjoying the character of Coyote or questing with Burnt Face--as it is the *process* of just participating in the grand adventures.

The length of the narrative is also the consequence of stylistic phrase and sequence **repetition**. The storyteller can choose to emphasize a particular action by repeating key phrases or ideas. Perhaps to highlight the challenge as well as the distance to be traveled in Plenty Hawk's account of Burnt Face's quest, Burnt Face is seen setting up *four* camps and carried on the backs of *four* groups of Ducks, each of a different color. The number of repetitions in a story often depends on the dominant number pattern of that tradition. Among the Crow, as with many other Plains area peoples, this number pattern is likely four. Old Man Coyote should not use the bell "four times." Burnt Face heats four sweat stones and waits through four fogs in confrontation with the Long Otter. Throughout most of the Plateau area, three and five are the dominant numbers. It takes Fox three jumps over Coyote to revive him from the "dead." Coyote and Swallowing Monster try to "draw each other in" three times and Coyote makes five flint knives to cut the heart. Coyote is told by his younger Sisters to sweat for five days, using five bunches of rocks. It takes Coyote five digging-sticks and five attempts to break the Swallow Sisters' dam. It is then in the last attempt, be it the third, the fourth or the fifth, that the myth person succeeds in his endeavor or is foiled in his deception.

As Dell Hymes (1981) has pointed out, patterned numbers also shape the groupings of verses within traditional spoken narratives. A storyteller would indicate through the use of intonation, extended pauses or quotative suffixes ("he said") individual verses (as indicated by separate lines in the

narrative texts). The clusterings of verses would be organized based on the dominant pattern number of the tradition. Among the Nez Perce, Klamath and Klikitat, for instance, three- and five-verse groupings are typically found. Each set of verse-groupings, in turn, may represent a scene. Scenes designate grouping of action related to a given locale and characters in the story, and are suggested by the narrative's plot and line-grouping structures. The entire structure of the narrative text would be organized in this way.

Seventy years ago, Tom Yellowtail, along with his wife, Susie, and several other Crows, participated in a traditional dance troop traveling the capitals of Europe for six months. Going from rural Montana, visiting the historic sites of Europe and performing before royalty and dignitaries, offered quite the story. Upon his return, the family gathered around to hear the "story." As a seasoned raconteur, Tom told the story with all the techniques and nuances, with all the repetitions appropriate for the telling. An hour went by, midnight passed and by the early morning hours, all were silent. No one could stay in any longer. And Tom had only told of going from Wyola, Montana to New York City! He hadn't even gotten on the boat to Europe.

While the various storytelling techniques just outlined might be expressed in any given raconteur, they are not necessarily to be found equally in all storytellers. There is, in fact, a tremendous range in the style of storytelling techniques used by individual storytellers. In the stories of Lawrence and Tom, for instance, this is particularly evident. Tom relies extensively on hand gestures, phrase repetition and always anchors his stories in a geographic location. In contrast, Lawrence adds drama to his stories by more frequent placement of emphasis on certain key morphemes, as reflected in his use of intonation and by extending the vowel sounds. *A-a-a-h, I slept a lo-o-ng time!*

But there is one vital ability I find associated with all storytellers, that is the technique and quality of **remembering**. Mari Watters demonstrated to me an amazing capacity for "remembering" a story just told her. We were seated around a camp fire and one among us had just completed his telling of a Lakota story. He was an accomplished teller himself, and told the narrative with detail and twists, lasting some twenty minutes. Mari said, "Let's see if I got it." She immediately re-told the entire story, complete with the same characters and plot. But it was not a rote memorization that we heard. She had added her imprint, and told it with what she called "heart."

In the context of storytelling, stories are always remembered, and never memorized. Memorization results in a rigidity that can inhibit participation in the story. Remembering encourages spontaneity and thus greater immediacy with the listener. Remembering has an important additional significance. To *remember* is to *return to*, and to *re-unite with* the reality within the story, to *re-establish membership* with the characters of the story. The storyteller seeks *membership* of the listeners as well as him or herself within the story he or she is telling.

In light of this discussion, it is instructive to note the Crow term for storytelling, *baaechichiwaau*, literally meaning, "re-telling one's own." Traditionally, to tell a story was to own that story. The right to tell a story was obtained either through direct purchase of the story or as the result of the story having been received as a gift from another. We also saw of the importance of "re-telling one's own" in the "Four Smokes" and "Burnt Face" (Yellowtail version) narratives. In both

cases, upon being re-united with the entire "camp," the story told was a re-telling by Four Smokes and Burnt Face of their own experiences. In all instances, the story told had become part of the teller, an extension of his or her very being. Storytelling thus involved the re-telling, the re-membering if you will, of one's own story.

It is perhaps this quality of *re-membering* that above all else best distinguishes an oral literature. If a story is to come to life, it must be vitalized with the participation of the listeners as well as the teller, all dancing along side the characters of the story. When I would hear Lawrence Aripa or Tom Yellowtail tell his stories in the company of a host of others, the stories always have a certain spark and dynamic. I see, reflected in the eyes of those participating, the image of Coyote. But when those same stories are shared with me, alone, without *membership*, the stories by comparison seem flat, without life.

This special quality of *re-membering* first became apparent to me several years ago while living with the Yellowtail family at their home in Wyola. Tom and Susie were most generous and each wonderful storytellers. In fact, Susie had an important story to tell, as did Tom. Susie was the first American Indian "registered nurse" in this country. She received her nurse's education "back East," in Boston. But there she had to change her name--"Susie Walking Bear frightened the patients!" Married to an *akbaalia*, "one who doctors," and a man who "ran" Sun Dances, Susie was herself very active in traditional healing and religious practices. Susie was one of those who traveled with Tom to Europe, and the "sights they saw!" She served on "Presidential Commissions," chaperoned "Miss American Indian" winners as they toured the country, and was always "in demand on College campuses" as a speaker. Susie had a story to tell! And tell it she did. Each weekend, especially during the summer months, Susie would be visited by "friends and strangers" seeking to learn her story. And each weekend I might be on hand to listen as well. Though most interesting to be sure, after a few sittings, I grew tired of the stories and turned away. And then I noticed. While I turned away, Tom, her husband of fifty-plus years, a man who sat there each weekend of each year hearing the stories, a man who probably shared in the original experience from which the stories sprang, he did not turn away. Tom in fact would laugh, and cry, and act like he had never heard the story before! Susie told her stories with such skill that Tom was *re-membered* within them. The stories were alive. And then I too began participating.

Physiological Experience. Let us consider the most elemental and basic dimension of orality and literacy – the physiological experience of orality and literacy. Orality is fundamentally an auditory experience comprised of morphemes, i.e., meaningful clusters of sound. There is a flow of sound, but no visual presence. As a physiological phenomenon, orality is an event, existing only when it is going out of existence. It is evanescent and transitory. Further, orality is an experience in which the sound envelops and surrounds the listener. It can unify the listener with the source of the sound. Once it is emitted, the sound is heard. The ears are not easily "closed." Orality is thus a transitory **event** that **unifies** the listener **involuntarily** with the sound and its source.

To the extent that the character of the media (the experience of speech as an event) influences that to which it refers (the images of the world), orality tends to reveal a world in terms of **action**, **process** and **becoming**. As we have already glimpsed, *transformation* is an underlying theme within

the stories. It may be expressed in a creation account as Coyote frees the Salmon, gives Rattlesnake his particular character, or creates the various peoples from the parts of the Monster. In the Burnt Face and Seal Boy stories, each protagonist is transformed, a face made "as good as when he was first born" and a boy at "home down in the water" among the Seals. The world is revealed and conceptualized as an **event**

It should be noted, however, that these physiological qualities should not be equated with the residual and retentive abilities of orality and literacy. Despite the transitory character of sound, peoples in oral-based cultures have a tremendous capacity to "remember," in detail, elaborate and lengthy oral narratives, passing them down virtually unchanged, generation after generation. In addition, while the spoken word possess an evanescent quality, it can certainly elicit vivid and lasting images in the mind of the listener. And by contrast, as a librarian or a teacher will attest, to affix words to "permanent" objects, e.g., published books, does not insure their continued usage, nor even their very existence.

The capacity to "remember a story" was impressively demonstrated to me several years ago while teaching on the Crow Reservation. I was the instructor for a group of graduate students home for the summer, enrolled in an off-campus course in "Native American Religion." A "honky" teaching "Indians" about Indian religion is a story unto itself! But the students were "kind" to me, we shared much, and all were eager to explore traditions not so familiar. While each student was well accomplished in literacy and fluent in English, all were nevertheless grounded in the oral tradition. Each spoke Apsaalooke as his or her primary language. Priding myself in the materials I had prepared for the course, I soon became concerned and then annoyed when none of my students took diligent notes on my "wonderful" lectures. Few took any notes at all. I would have my day--the midterm exam would be based extensively on my lectures! But the day belonged to my students. They had "remembered" in detail that which I had spoken in lecture and, in turn, conveyed it with elegance in their Blue Books! They did not need to rely upon the written word, note taking, to retain what was an elaborate and relatively large body of new knowledge.

Meaning Contextualized – Knowledge Experienced. In addition, the ways in which orality and literacy elicit, organize, store and communicate meaning and knowledge also significantly differ. In orality, meaning is inexorably interwoven in the immediacy of human experience; it is **contextualized**. Meaningful morphemes emanate out of an integrated social context involving interpersonal dynamics, gesturing and intonation by the speaker, and listener responses as well as a shared syntax and semantics. There can be no meaning without it being spoken within a social context. Among the Crow, there are subtle variances in the intonation patterns in certain words, all dependent upon the age and gender differences of the speaker. The meaning of a particular word can be significantly altered depending on the intonation voiced by an older woman or by a younger man. Personal pronoun distinctions (he, she, it) are not made in the Crow language. Only in the larger context of its usage can gender distinctions be determined in a speech utterance. As you may have noticed, Crow storytelling minimizes the use of function words such as conjunctions (about, for, of, with) or prepositions (and, but, or, both). In fact, the character of the language found in all our story texts is rather *terse*. Separate

morphemes, and the meaningful ideas they represent, are tied together given the particular gesturing and intonation used by the storyteller, and not necessarily by the actual words uttered. A teller may glance in a certain direction and point his finger, and *all* the eyes look off, but there are no words spoken. The meaning embedded in the narratives is not reducible to the words alone, but is rendered out of an entire context of social interactions.

Similarly, knowledge itself is organized, stored and communicated in **narrative-based structures of human experiential action**. Knowledge is embedded within stories and their telling, in ritual dance and song, in various art and architectural forms, in dress and regalia worn, in the cradleboard comforting a baby, and throughout the landscape as a mythic geography. The rock outcropping and river beds, the fall of snow and the coming of the salmon tell a story, are like a text conveying knowledge. In turn, their stories are repeated each winter, told aloud by the elders. And most importantly, all these "stories" are experienced directly and personally. The song is sung, the dress worn, the lodge lived in, the path along the river travelled, the story felt. Each time the rocks are heated and the sweat lodge entered, its story and meaning are reiterated. Thus, you directly participate in what you know, in knowledge. "When the story ended, . . . you look and see, see the story; we are linked."

Power of Words. The summer of 1974 when I interviewed Alan Old Horn, I was participating in an ethnographic project designed to "improve" understanding and relations between the Indian Health Service physicians and their Crow patients. Tensions had been growing for some time, in part predicated on the physicians' unawareness of their patients' cultural values relating to health and healing. I was to gather information on the Crow perspective of health and healing, and, in turn, write up a paper so physicians could gain an introduction to the health perspectives of their patients. While everyone I worked with was excited about the project and most cooperative, there was one slight problem. For many of the most traditional families, when it got down to discussing actual afflictions a member of the family once had, few would verbally talk about them. And then I was introduced to the Crow word, *dasshussua*, literally meaning, "breaking with the mouth." That which comes through the mouth, words, has the power to affect the world. People were reluctant to discuss an illness for fear of bringing forth that affliction.

And then I began appreciating *dasshussua*. One does not say "good bye" upon departing from a good evening's visit, but rather "I'll see you later," *diiawakaawik*. "Good bye is too final--you may not see them again!" One should always fulfill that which he has publicly stated he intends to do, or "accidents seem to happen!" When you need to convey something publicly before the tribal council, at a giveaway or during a ceremony such as a Sun Dance, it is best to convey it through "an announcer," someone older, more "experienced in the use of words" and who would not inadvertently abuse them, someone like Alan Old Horn. An announcer may even have a medicine bundle pertaining to the "proper use of words."

When it is time for a child to receive its "Indian name," a clan uncle or aunt will be consulted. Having "dreamt" the name, and in a ceremony involving an opened medicine bundle and prayer, the name will be bestowed upon the child. And you might hear a voiced concern--"I hope the name agrees

with the child!" If the words of the name agree with the disposition of the child, the child grows to become the words of his name. But should the name disagree, the child will become sickly and a new name must be sought. The "Indian name" is that name used in prayer and at sacred ceremonies. It is not one's public name. It is most cherished and revered. One's name will guide and protect. More than one veteran of a foreign war has come back "unscratched," "protected because of my name!"

The spoken word has a power, *baaxpee*, a creative force to affect the world. In the context of storytelling, this has particular significance. As the fibers of the words are woven into the exquisite tapestry of a story and the deeds of a hero are portrayed in those words, the words bring forth those portrayed deeds. The animation of a story literally occurs in voicing the words of that story. The words of the narrative do not just describe the events referred to in the story; they help bring them about. The stories are to be entered with great respect and responsibility. They should never be taken lightly. For the **words** of the stories **make the world**.

This understanding is consistently expressed in the oral literature. In the Sanpoil story of the "Sweat Lodge" that follows, *naming* the various animals and birds is an integral part of creating and bringing forth those beings. In a Nez Perce story, when Coyote *said* he wanted to look like his son and then like a Flathead man shooting grouse, Coyote became them. In the Wasco story of Coyote freeing the fish, Coyote *said* to the two Sisters that they would become swallows, and they did. When Coyote *spoke* the words, "Shush ta-ways-s ta-lee-e," the logs he was on went apart. In a Kootenai narrative, when a man named "Wolf" *said* and sang his name, he became a wolf. As reflected in the Kootenai story of the "Star Husband," when a girl *said*, "That is a nice little star there. I'll marry him," the next morning she found herself married. When a story comes to an end or an entire cycle is completed for the season, Clackamas storytellers would tell the myth people spoken of in the narratives to go to the mountains, to the rivers, into the air, becoming the animals of the forests, the fishes of the waters and the birds of the sky (Jacobs 1959:73). That which had been *spoken* and witnessed in the storytelling was indeed alive and now free to return to a world mythically endowed.

Orality In Conclusion. With reference to some of the implications for the oral literature of the Plains and Plateau Peoples, orality tends to direct attention toward action, process and **becoming** (the world viewed is expressed through an event--speech), toward **involvement** (the experience of orality is involuntary), toward **social interaction** and **integration** (requiring a social context to elicit meaning), and toward renewal and **return** (as expressed in the cyclic organization of time and space). In orality, meaning and knowledge are **contextualized** within a network of interpersonal and experiential

relations. Orality is necessarily a **social** event, minimally involving at least a speaker and a listener. Orality tends to be **participatory**.

Literacy

Technological Development. Literacy is derived from and dependent upon a cultural invention and technological application. It involves the use of some sort of medium surface to record upon, e.g.,

wood, clay, or stone tablet/surface, hide, parchment, paper, computer screen, and some sort of notation device, e.g., itching or imprinting device, ink and pen, press, keyboard, organized around a shared, standardized symbolic code, e.g., alphabet with consonants and vowels. In the old world, literacy was first developed by the Sumerians, involving cuneiform on clay tokens, some 3,500 BCE. It was fundamentally a series of pictographs, used for recording ideas and numbers associated with economic transactions. With the Semitic languages, such as Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew and Phoenician, literacy developed a consonant system as early as 1,050 BCE. And with the Greeks, vowels were added as early as 400 BCE. As an early example of the new literacy we have the Dead Sea Scrolls, some 900 documents on papyrus and animal skin, including the entire Hebrew Bible, with carbon 14 dating placing them around 335 BCE - 107 BCE. In the new world, literacy focused around calendarical, cosmic and religious notations, as exemplified by the Omec and Maya, dating back to around 900 BCE.

Physiological Experience. In contrast to orality, the physiological experience of literacy is comprised of visual images, i.e., written words affixed to a page. Literacy is as an object, with a more or less permanent presence. It has a "thingness" quality. Writing is, after all, housed in the *ink* that appears on the *paper* found in a *book*. The viewer can voluntarily select that which he chooses to view or he can ignore it altogether, i.e., he can "close" his eyes. In this sense, it is directional and focused, allowing the viewer to select and dissect from the field of visual experience. It isolates and creates "words." There are no isolated "words," per se, in orality. In fact, it may be difficult to identify a term for "word" in an American Indian language. Thus, literacy as a physiological experience has a **permanence** and is an **object** that allows the viewer to **voluntarily** select and focus on isolated "words."

To the extent that the character of the media (the experience of literacy as an object) influences that to which it refers (the images of the world), the world tends to be revealed as an object, in terms of concreteness and **permanence**. The world is conceptualized as an object, **objectified**.

Meaning Decontextualized – Knowledge Formalized. In contrast to orality, meaning in literacy is divorced from and independent of the immediate human context and texture, having a **formalized** and **autonomous** syntax and semantics. "Words" are governed more by a formalized and autonomous set of shared rules. A written sentence can have meaning without the gesturing of a speaker or the responses of listeners. For instance, the inclusion of prepositions allow better linkage of separate words. A sentence can stand on its own. Thus, meaning is much more decontextualized.

In turn, in literacy knowledge is organized, stored and communicated in an elaborate set of **standardized, formalized and abstract categories and literary forms**. Knowledge is embedded within histories, biographies and various literary and technical genres, and within "lists," "indexes," "tables," "data," "calendars," "textbooks," "dictionaries," "essays," "novels" and "archival records." "History" is made possible. In fact, all these media and expressions come into their very existence through literacy. Words can be isolated, and are given comprehensive and definitive meanings. There are "correct" ways of writing and using words, "proper grammar." Words, and the knowledge conveyed within, are not sung, worn, danced or traveled. Knowledge is thus much more formalized and abstracted from a direct experience of it.

With literacy there is also the possibility of "backward scanning" and the analysis of "lined" texts

of words. Words can be scrutinized and dissected. Symbolic logic and calculus, and the assumptions and methodology of the scientific method, i.e., empiricism and rationalism, are facilitated. However, this is not to suggest that peoples in oral-based traditions lack the mental abilities to think abstractly, rationally or empirically. Literacy does not determine modes of thinking, but rather channels and provides alternative and additional parameters for revealing, processing, storing and communicating knowledge.

Literacy In Conclusion. Literacy tends to direct attention toward the **appearance** of **objects** (the world viewed is expressed through ink on paper in books--objects), toward **selection** and the possibility of **disengagement** (the experience of literacy is voluntary), toward **lineality** (as expressed in spatial and temporal organization), and toward **"history"** (reliance on "archival records" based in lineal time--years, decades, centuries, millennia). In literacy, meaning and knowledge are **formalized** into autonomous, self-contained "words." In contrast with orality, words are **decontextualized** and are seldom "worn," but are estranged from direct human experience. Participation is not needed to complete the meaning of a word. Literacy is fundamentally a **solitary** experience; both the writer and the reader communicate in privacy, alone from the other. Literacy can **objectify** and **distance** the events of the world from the immediate experiences of the individual.

In the oral tradition, all three dimensions (storytelling, orality and the power of words) coalesce to transform the listener into a participant in the Creation Time and Place (Smith's "Dreaming" and "Eternal Time") - **"to run with the Coyote,"** as Cliff SiJohn would say, to travel the world of the First Peoples/Animal Peoples in the **"canoe"** of the unfolding story.

The oral traditions are thus at once **didactic**, passing on pragmatic skills, teaching values, and disseminating identities, as well as **entertaining**, bringing a smile or a tear and rendering the difficult times less so, as Vic Charlo said, "helping lighten the load and make things more accessible." But in addition, the oral traditions also **perpetuate the world. Run with the Coyote, renewing the creation of the world.**

As all phenomena is spatially and temporarily interconnected (see B.2.a., in kinship – *ashammaléaxia*) and potentially endowed with "medicine" (see B.1., *súumesh/wéyekin*), when the expressions (symbols/words in a story or a ceremony) of the Creator and Animal Peoples are properly brought forth, so too is their inherent transformative power. Hence, in the act of telling Coyote's story, as in donning dance regalia or singing a *súumesh* song, the oral traditions also perpetuate the world, reinvigorating life and meaning into the landscape and all of its varied beings. The Creation time is traveled, a camas field nurtured, and an illness healed. Reality and the oral traditions are one and the same. "Stories make the world."

The oral traditions, however, are **not fundamentally explanatory** in nature. Because Coyote did such and such, that is why ! 1. Such would presuppose that the stories were inventions of human curiosity, created by man to explain what he could not understand, and thus not be creations of the First Peoples, i.e., accounts of their actions. 2. Such would presuppose that the stories are earnest but feeble attempts by pre-scientific minds to understand the world, but are inevitably fantasies

and false, and certainly not what is most real and true. And 3. such would presuppose a separate world out there (Cartesian dualism) that needed explaining, and certainly not an interconnected phenomenal world within which one is a part.

Theme: what is most meaningful and real exists in the act of participating in the oral traditions [Frey 1995:141-158]

Contrast: stories are fantasy, suspending disbelief in what is real

E. Conclusion

Run with the Coyote and Crane, and Sharing the Gifts. In the act of re-telling an oral tradition of the Coyote or Crane, in the act of singing the *súumesh* song, in the act of dancing in a Jump Dance, or even a powwow, in the act of gathering camas roots or huckleberries and sharing them with those in need, in the act of hunting the deer or fishing the salmon and sharing the meat with those in need, the world is re-created, re-newed and perpetuated, and all its “family” members are nourished and healed. “You run with the Coyote and Crane” (and the other Animal/First Peoples), and in so doing their Gifts of *mi’yep* and *súumesh* are re-invested and re-distributed back into the landscape, for the benefit of all the Peoples, all the “relatives.” The Gifts continue to be shared. The world traveled in the act of storytelling, in act of singing, in act of dancing is the very world traveled by the Creator, Coyote and Crane, and of the archetypal teachings (*mi’yep*) and transformative power (*súumesh*) of the creation time. It is the world traveled by the vision quester under the guidance of the Elk or Eagle. It is the world traveled by the ancestors as they prepare the camp for those yet to come. All are indistinguishable, one and the same.

Hence, the implicit, **perennial desire** is to “run with the Coyote and Crane.” In so doing, the health, harmony and well-being of the “family” are preserved.

[Frey 1995:169-173, 214-216 and 2001:183, 260-62, 265-66. The worldview of the Indigenous peoples of North America corresponds to the Australian Aboriginal idea of the “Dreamtime” and to the notions of “each (human) becomes the First Hunter,” and of the “participation in, and the acting out, of archetypal paradigms,” along with the idea of “eternal time.”]

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Revised last 6 January 2011