

Susan D. Dion

Braided Learning: Illuminating Indigenous Presence through Art and Story

Vancouver: UBC Press, Purich Books, 2022. 288 pp.

In her book *Braided Learning: Illuminating Indigenous Presence through Art and Story*, Susan Dion offers readers opportunities to engage in relational learning through traditional Indigenous pedagogies of art and story. Dion writes this book as a response to her understanding that Indigenous children and peoples are acutely aware of the lack of historical and cultural knowledge of Indigenous peoples in the settler Canadian mind. Through her writing, she creates a more relational form of allyship and reconciliation and situates art and story as the method through which current narratives should be disrupted to restore balance to our shared history and relationship. An honest conversation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is a primary theme throughout this work. The writing is abrupt and gentle, being truthful about the ways settlers perpetuate continued settler colonial violence, while simultaneously inviting readers into relationship and providing a starting place to repair the broken relationship.

In her introduction, Dion provides anecdotes of ignorant and racist experiences she and students she has worked with have suffered, enabled by stereotypical, romanticized, and historicized images found in and perpetuated by Canadian educational curricula and teacher practices. At the same time, Dion recognizes how the work of Indigenous peoples has transformed Canadian mindsets towards a desire to revisit these stories and better understand the truth. She notes, “We agree that the stories we hear and do not hear—the stories we tell and do not tell, about ourselves and each other—matter a great deal.”(10). As such, Dion appeals to the reader to be responsible listeners, who, from an Indigenous episteme, do not interrupt the speaker, and instead listen to the whole story, from which they can gain their own insights about themselves. From this, Dion positions settler educators as responsible for learning and teaching the true history of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples for reconciliation to be possible.

In her first chapter she outlines four requisites: implication, investment, shared interest, and impact. The chapters that follow provide opportunities for readers to begin or continue their own learning. The first requisite, implication, establishes the responsibility of recognizing self as implicated in this shared history and, if one is a settler, as a beneficiary of the privileges of colonialism. To aid the reader in understanding this process, Dion offers three settler stories—one from a settler working in the field of education, one from a first-generation immigrant, and another from a settler who works for a Canadian government department directly responsible for relations with Indigenous peoples. The stories demonstrate humility in learning and allow readers to recognize themselves in the stories, while also teaching important lessons. For example, one author writes about how their perspective was shaken and their ignorance noted on several occasions while another notes the need for all Canadians to unlearn the Indian Act.

The following chapters provide opportunities for the readers to engage further with learning from this new understanding of their place within an

Indigenous-non-Indigenous relational space. Dion provides readers with an overview of the history of the land settlers live on. The history is written from an Indigenous perspective and makes corrections on common misperceptions of Canadian history such as conflictive experiences of Indigenous peoples regarding the Indian Act and reserve lands. This historical overview provides readers a way to make an investment into learning historical truths they may not yet be aware of. To pull readers into a shared interest, Dion shares modern Indigenous art projects, which invite communities into a conversation regarding shared relationships and opens dialogues about possibilities of a better relationship. Provocative questions lead the reader through the experience of viewing the images and leave the reader with more curiosity about the projects. Following the section on visual arts, Dion then shares a series of stories co-written with her brother to introduce the reader to the impacts of settler colonialism. Dion offers a lens to the reader including stories of “how people have survived, resisted, and recuperated from policies and practices aimed at eradicating Indigenous people, our knowledge, and our cultural practices” (130).

This book challenges the reader to become invested in the question “How can I take responsibility for the actions of my ancestors and work to establish/re-establish respectful relationships with [Indigenous peoples]?”(29). The book provides a structured outline for opportunities to begin or continue the required learning needed for settler Canadians to enter the Indigenous-non-Indigenous relational space as learners and prepare to be a better educators because of this. The book helps the reader participate in Indigenous story-telling ethics and provides the reader with insights as to what this means.

Braided Learning: Illuminating Indigenous Presence through Art and Story is a thorough beginning for the reader to begin their journey into the requisites for reconciliation and would be well suited for young and experienced educators alike who are open to this learning. If a reader is inclined to learn more, Dion also provides a thorough review of resources for learners to extend their understanding. This book is a strong example of how a dialogue can begin from a place of learning to understand, and how the power of art and story can transform relationships.

In respecting Indigenous story ethic and ethical spaces of engagement,⁴ this review also refuses to comment on weaknesses of the work. I agree with Shawn Wilson’s assertion that “Criticizing or judging would imply that I know more about someone else’s work and the relationships that went into it than they do themselves.”⁵ Instead, I appreciate the Indigenous story practices Dion desires from her story listeners, and hope that all readers come to understand the responsibilities of the Indigenous story-listening ethics that are woven throughout the book.

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⁴ Willie Ermine, “The Ethical Space of Engagement,” *Indigenous Law Journal* 6, no. 1 (2007): 193–203.

⁵ Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. (Blackpoint: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 43.