

Indigenous Futurisms
English 4771F, Fall 2023
Department of English and Writing Studies
University of Western Ontario

Prerequisite(s): 1.0 from English 3000-3999 or permission of the Department. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description:

What role does Indigenous storytelling in its varied forms play in envisioning—and building—futures beyond colonization? Guided by this question, our course will engage with a range of literature, drama, and film that challenges settler colonialism’s longstanding efforts to relegate Indigeneity to the past. While a growing body of Indigenous speculative storytelling and science fiction has been generated in recent decades, such artistic visions of the future are not a new innovation amongst Indigenous nations of Turtle Island (North America). As Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice asserts, “Indigenous and Black folks understand apocalypse—our peoples have lived it. For populations that faced eighty-percent mortality and higher due to European-inflicted disease, displacement, starvation, military action, and internment policies over just a few centuries—and in some cases mere decades—the ‘end of days’ isn’t just the stuff of ... science fiction, but of historical memory and lived experience” (*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* 166-67).

While Indigenous speculative storytelling is often used as a creative and critical response to colonization, such stories are also rich with Indigenous knowledges and practices that exceed colonialism’s reach. As Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon avers, “incorporating time travel, alternate realities, parallel universes and multiverses, and alternative histories is a hallmark of Native storytelling tradition[s], while viewing time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream is central to Native epistemologies.” In this way, Indigenous futurisms builds upon the longstanding knowledges, stories, and creative brilliance of Indigenous nations to inspire futures of resurgence. Attending carefully to the articulation of these worlds and the knowledges they are built upon, our course will engage with the culturally-specific epistemologies and storytelling traditions represented in each work. At the same time, we will also consider points of connection amongst Indigenous artists who are drawing upon their nations’ philosophies to envision sovereign Indigenous futures.

Land Acknowledgement:

Western University is located on the lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton (Neutral) peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous peoples.

Course Objectives:

- To introduce students to and/or enrich their knowledge of Indigenous literary and cultural production on Turtle Island.
- To consider how the study of Indigenous literary and cultural production is enhanced by an attention to Indigenous ways of knowing and, in particular, Indigenous practices of storytelling and their vital importance to many Indigenous communities.
- To consider the complex relationship between socio-historical contexts and Indigenous literary and cultural production.
- To re-consider conventional literary categories and genres from the perspective of Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous practices of storytelling.
- To hone students' critical thinking skills through substantial in-class discussion and dialogue.
- To strengthen and enrich students' academic writing skills through the provision of ongoing assessment and feedback.
- To foster the development of students' distinctive intellectual voices through the practice of engaged listening, thoughtful class participation, and leadership of seminar presentations.

Course Texts:

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*

Thomas King, *The Back of the Turtle*

Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God*

Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

Custom Course Book available at the University Bookstore

All other readings are available either online at the URLs provided in this syllabus or via the course OWL site.

Statement on ChatGPT and all Artificial Intelligence Technologies:

While ChatGPT may have salient learning purposes in some courses and some real-world applications, in this course, ChatGPT and any and all other AI technologies are not compatible with the learning objectives, which include personal reflection, intellectual independence, and critical thinking and writing skills conducted via each students' own individual skill sets and independent thinking processes. For this reason, any assignment that is found to be created or written with the aid of ChatGPT or any other AI technology for this course will receive a grade of zero.

For all assignments completed outside of class, the professor may require you to attend an in-person interview to discuss your work before the mark is finalized.

Methods of Evaluation:

Assignment	% of Grade	Length	Due Date
Participation	7%	N/A	Ongoing
Discussion Questions	1% each x 3 = 3%	N/A	Students' choice
Seminar Presentation	30%	20 minutes	TBD
Response to Seminar Presentation	5%	5 minutes	TBD
Response Paper	20%	3-4 pages double-spaced, plus Works Cited	Students' choice
Essay Draft and Commentary on Revision Process	12.5%	Essay Draft plus commentary of 2 pages, double-spaced	November 26 th
Final Essay	22.5%	8 pages, double-spaced, plus Works Cited	November 26 th

Final Grades: The Department of English & Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the Office of the Registrar.

Students are fully responsible for being familiar with the information posted on the English Department website at <https://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.

Assignment Descriptions:**a.) Class Participation:**

- The participation grade for the semester will take into account attendance and attentiveness in class meetings, evidence of preparedness for class (i.e. demonstrated detailed engagement with the readings, questions about readings brought to class), as well as the quality of verbal contributions to class discussion.
- Students should have carefully read and thoughtfully engaged with the assigned readings prior to class.

- At the 4000 level, students are encouraged to assume the stance of professional learners—ones who have the critical maturity to be open to broadening their intellectual horizons and to engaging with a diverse range of scholarship.
- Effective participation in a seminar involves being open to asking questions about things one doesn't understand, thoughtfully engaging with the course readings, remaining attentive to the comments of other class participants, and debating ideas with respect and sensitivity to both the subject matter and all participants in the discussion.
- The quality of a student's contributions is more important than sheer quantity, though speaking regularly in class is a goal to work towards. At the same time, effective participation in a seminar course also, in certain cases, means learning when one has contributed enough to a particular discussion and providing opportunities for others to share their thoughts.

b.) Discussion Questions:

- On **three separate weeks** throughout the semester, students are required to submit **one question** about the week's readings designed to be shared in class and to prompt discussion and debate.
- These questions must be emailed to the Professor **at least 30 minutes prior to the class in which the readings will be discussed.**
- Students can choose which weeks they submit their discussion questions. However, students cannot submit such questions on the same weeks that they present a seminar, respond to a seminar, or submit a response paper.

c.) Seminar Presentations:

- Seminar presentations should succinctly and briefly outline the arguments developed in the critical essays and analyze key themes and strategies of the readings assigned for the day. A strong presentation, however, should go much further than merely rehearsing the articles' arguments or the plot and structures of a cultural text. Seminar presentations should engage thoughtfully and critically with the readings, analyzing the connections and points of divergence between the texts as well as reflecting upon the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments.
- In other words, a seminar presentation should have an argument—a nuanced and thoughtful analytic position on the readings/cultural texts assigned for the week. Linking the readings to previous texts studied in the course and/or previous class discussions is also a useful strategy.
- Presentations should also consider how the arguments expounded in the readings could be developed further and, most importantly, how the texts relate to the broader questions under investigation throughout this course. Lastly, presentations should conclude with at least two thoughtful and engaging questions for class discussion.
- Please also note that your presentations will be timed and should not exceed 20 minutes.
- Students will be asked to submit a hard copy version of their seminar presentation notes (whether they be just point-form notes or a scripted paper (if you like to talk without a set script, that is certainly fine and can make for a very engaging seminar) to the Professor on the same day that their presentation is given orally.

- Please note that plagiarism rules apply to oral presentations. Oral presentations should clearly signal when a speaker is quoting someone else's words. The majority of a presentation should be offered in the speaker's own words.

d.) Response to Seminar Presentation:

- On one date during the semester, each student will have the opportunity to formally respond to one of their peer's seminar presentations. The response will be about 5 minutes in duration. The date for each student's formal response will be decided collaboratively at the beginning of the semester.
- The goal of this assignment is to encourage students to develop careful listening skills so as to respond respectfully and thoughtfully to the ideas of others.
- The response to the seminar presentation should clearly summarize the seminar presenter's main points/argument/insights. The response can also include a statement of what the student appreciated about the seminar presentation, what new insights about the readings the seminar generated for them, and what questions they have about the seminar presentation.
- This assignment encourages generous and careful listening as well as thoughtful and collegial engagement with the ideas of others.

e.) Response Papers:

- Over the course of the semester, students are required to write one 4-page response paper for the assigned readings for the week.
- Students can choose which weeks they would like to submit their response paper. Please note, however, that students are not eligible to submit a written response paper on the same weeks in which they present a seminar, respond to a seminar, or submit discussion questions.
- Response papers should be submitted via email (as Microsoft Word or RTF attachments) to the Professor no later than **24 hours** prior to the class in which the texts will be discussed. Response papers for the assigned readings for the week will not be accepted after this deadline.
- The goal for these papers is not to offer a comprehensive summary of all the points expounded in the readings. Instead, the responses should succinctly outline the main argument of **at least two** assigned readings for the week and then proceed to critically analyze the texts and draw connections or reflect on points of divergence between them. In this sense, the goal is to put the assigned readings for the week together in critical conversation. Students may also wish to raise a question or two for further thought or discussion, but this is not a substitute for the submission of three separate discussion questions throughout the semester.
- A proper Works Cited in MLA should be included at the end of the paper.

f.) Essay Draft and Commentary on Essay Revision Process:

- This assignment is designed to encourage students to approach their writing as a process rather than something they do the night before an essay is due.
- The assignment also encourages students to become editors of their own writing—to learn more about their strengths and weaknesses as scholars and how to make the most of their strengths. The assignment also encourages students to plan steps in their

revision process that help address the areas of their writing that could benefit from more attention.

- At minimum, students should submit for this portion of the essay assignment a rough draft as well as a two-page reflection on changes you made during the process of planning and writing the final essay for the course.
- Students' processes for writing may vary and may involve documents like brainstorming notes, thesis statements, and essay outlines. Students are welcome to include in their submission for this assignment any and all documents such as brainstorming and essay outlines in addition to a rough draft of their essay. The more thoughtful steps that you have engaged in on your journey to create your final essay for the course, the higher your grade on this assignment will likely be.
- The "Commentary" portion of this assignment should be a two-page, double-spaced reflection on your writing and revision process for the final essay. It should be written in proper paragraph form. The Commentary should address the following questions: how and why did you choose the topic that you did? How did your thinking about the topic change as you worked on the essay? What changes did you make during the revision process and why? What did you learn through revising your work (about the literary work you were writing about and/or your process/strengths/challenges as a writer)?

g.) Final Essay (8 Pages Double-Spaced, plus Works Cited):

- This assignment involves conceptualizing and writing an analytic scholarly essay that demonstrates strong critical thinking skills, the development of an original argument, and the careful utilization of textual details or "evidence" to support the contentions made in the thesis statement. Essays should include a clear and focused thesis statement followed by the coherent and sustained development of the argument throughout the paper.
- The essay must also incorporate meaningful references to at least **three** of the critical readings/essays we have studied throughout the course.
- Essays should address more than the plot of the literary work when developing an analysis. Please consider the form of the story or text as well. How does the narrative voice (first person? omniscient?) shape the story? Does the narrative proceed in a chronological order or does it move back and forth in time? Does imagery shape the meaning of the story? If so, how? Please provide detailed textual examples to support your discussion.
- Students are not required to consult secondary sources for this paper but they are welcome to do so should they want to. If secondary sources are consulted, however, they must be acknowledged and cited properly.
- A proper Works Cited in MLA should be included at the end of the paper.

Important Information Regarding Assignments:

- Any assignments submitted after the scheduled due date will be assessed a late penalty (2% per day, including weekends). Assignments should be submitted electronically as Word documents via email.
- Extensions will be granted only with medical certification or under other extenuating circumstances and should, when possible, be arranged in advance.

- All assignments should be submitted on 8.5" x 11" paper, with 1" margins, double-spaced, and in a 12-point font (preferably Times New Roman). The title page should include the following information: the title of the essay, your name, the course number, and the date.
- Please retain an electronic version of each essay you submit in this class. As well, please retain all returned, marked assignments until you receive your final grade for the course.
- All bibliographic notation should follow the MLA method of parenthetical citation and essays should be accompanied with a Works Cited page.

Academic Consideration for Missed Work:

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

The full policy is set out here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Religious Accommodation:

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar.

Academic Offences:

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.

Plagiarism:

It is crucial that students create all assignments (both written and oral) using their own ideas and their own words. If you use a concept, idea, or phrasing from another source, it is imperative to signal the direct borrowing of words with quotation marks and to register the borrowing of ideas and concepts via the use of explanatory footnotes and parenthetical citations (or verbal explanation in the case of seminar presentations). When in doubt, please cite your source rather than leaving it out! Please also note that

the same standards of proper crediting of sources apply to oral presentations. Plagiarism is a serious academic offence.

The use of ChatGPT and any other AI technology for assignments in this course will be treated as an instance of plagiarism. **Plagiarism Checking:** All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

For English Department regulations regarding term work, exams, faculty office hours, academic relief (appeals, petitions, complaints), and other matters, please refer to the "Information for Students" on the departmental website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html>.

Intellectual Property/Copyright:

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

Support Services:

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Accessibility Options:

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you.

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Statement On Gender-Based and Sexual Violence:

Western [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, [here](#). To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Schedule of Readings

Please Note: The Professor reserves the right to make minor changes to the schedule throughout the course of the academic term. Any changes will be announced in class with ample prior notice.

UNIT 1: FOUNDATIONS, HISTORIES, CONTEXTS**September 7: Introductions****September 14: Indigenous Literatures: The Ethics and Politics of Engagement**

Warren Cariou, "On Critical Humility"

Daniel Heath Justice, "Chapter 3: How Do We Become Good Ancestors?" (pp. 113-16 and 139-156 only)

Métis in Space Podcast, Season 1, Episode 5, "Montreal ComicCon Special" (available here: <http://www.metisinspace.com/episodes/2016/4/2/mtis-in-space-ep5-montreal-comiccon-special>)

Supplementary: Greg Younging, "Chapter 6: Terminology"

September 21: Indigenous Speculative Storytelling: Decolonizing Genre, Re-Claiming History

Grace Dillon, "Imagining Indigenous Futurisms"

Rebecca Roanhorse et. al., "Decolonizing Science Fiction and Imagining Indigenous Futures: An Indigenous Futurisms Roundtable" (available here:

<http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/decolonizing-science-fiction-and-imagining-futures-an-indigenous-futurisms-roundtable/>)

John Rieder, "Introduction: The Colonial Gaze and the Frame of Science Fiction"

Drew Hayden Taylor, "I Am...Am I"

September 28: Defamiliarizing the Past through Speculative Cinema

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, "The History" (pp. 43-110, available here:

http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf)

Danis Goulet, *Night Raiders* (Please view this film prior to class via online access here:

<https://media3-criterionpic-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/htbin/wwform/006?T=111062E>)

October 5: Beyond Apocalypse: From "Survivance" to "Resurgence"

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*

Renate Eigenbrod, "'For the child taken, for the parent left behind': Residential School Narratives as Acts of 'Survivance'"

Leanne Simpson, "Nishnaabeg Resurgence: Stories from Within"

UNIT 2: IMAGINING ALTERNATIVE FUTURES AND SOLIDARITIES

October 12: Environmental Apocalypse and Restoring Good Relations

Thomas King, *The Back of the Turtle*

Daniel Heath Justice, "How Do We Behave as Good Relatives?"

October 19: Indigenous Women and Futurity: Gender and Genre

Veronica Hollinger, "Feminist Theory and Science Fiction"

Danika Medak-Saltzman, "Coming to You from the Indigenous Future: Native Women, Speculative Film Shorts, and the Art of the Possible"

Nanobah Becker, dir., *The Sixth World* (view here: <https://vimeo.com/256611676>)

Sydney Freeland, dir., *Hoverboard* (view here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAeq-oJXZNw>)

Helen Haig-Brown, *The Cave* (view here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GoLv8a4mQ4>)

October 26: Indigenous Women and Futurity, Part 2

Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God*

November 2: Class Cancelled for Fall Reading Week

November 9: Sexualities and Solidarities: Indigenous LGBTQ2S Speculative Fiction

Niigaan Sinclair, "Returning to Ourselves: Two Spirit Futures and the Now"

Qwo-Li Driskill et. al., from "Introduction" to *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*

Darcie Little Badger, "NÉ ŁE!"

Chelsea Vowel, "Âniskôhîcikan"

November 16: Black and Indigenous Solidarities

Leanne Simpson, "Constellations of Co-Resistance"

Wayde Compton, "The Lost Island" and "The Boom"

November 23: Black and Indigenous Solidarities (cont.)

Isiah Lavender III, "On Defining Afrofuturism"

Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

November 30: Towards Better Worlds

Chelsea Vowel, "Preface" to *Buffalo is the New Buffalo*

Chelsea Vowel, "kitaskînaw 2350" (Please read this story by accessing the EZProxy link for *This Place: 150 Years Retold* on the course OWL site).

Please also listen to the audio version / podcast of "kitaskînaw 2350" available here:

<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/cbc-podcasts/1020-this-place/episode/15862270-kitaskinaw-2350>

Leanne Simpson, "Shi-Kiin: New Worlds"