

FNST 462: Indigenous Oral Testimony: Theory, Practice, Purpose, Community

Mondays, 5:30-9:20, SWH 9095

Dr. Madeline Knickerbocker

contact via Canvas | office hours M 2:30-4:30, SWH 9083

Indigenous oral narratives are among the most compelling sources of information about Indigenous peoples' lives and outlooks, and yet even today there is a common misconception about their significance. A major lie of settler colonialism is that since Indigenous peoples didn't write things down, their histories aren't valid – this course will disprove and dispel this pernicious notion. As the class readings and discussions will show, Indigenous oral narratives are equally legitimate, and often more relevant, sources of knowledge when compared to textual accounts.

The course takes up this theme of the relationship between orality and literacy – the spoken and the written – and puts it under the microscope. What counts as a “text” and what is “speech”? How are the two connected? In what ways do oral narratives change when they are written down, or do they become fixed at that point? What is the relationship between the transcript and the interview?

While focusing on these central questions, the course will introduce students to ongoing scholarly conversations about Indigenous oral narratives. We will begin by discussing theory and method before proceeding to consider specific themes within the literature on Indigenous oral histories. Readings focus on Indigenous oral histories in what is now called Canada.

Course assignments will also relate to the themes of orality and literacy. Students will have the opportunity to contribute to The People and the Text (TPatT), an ambitious online, open-source project aiming to promote understanding of Indigenous literatures in Canada. Assignments center on transcribing and analyzing existing interviews with Indigenous authors, and final versions may be published on TPatT's website.

Evaluation:

Prep and Participation (20%)

Seminar Facilitation (10%)

Interview transcript (10%) and reflection (10%)

Draft Essay (25%) and peer review (5%)

Final Essay (20%)

Books:

- *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*, by Keith Basso (required)
- *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples*, by Gregory Younging (required)
- all other readings will be available on Canvas and through the SFU Library