

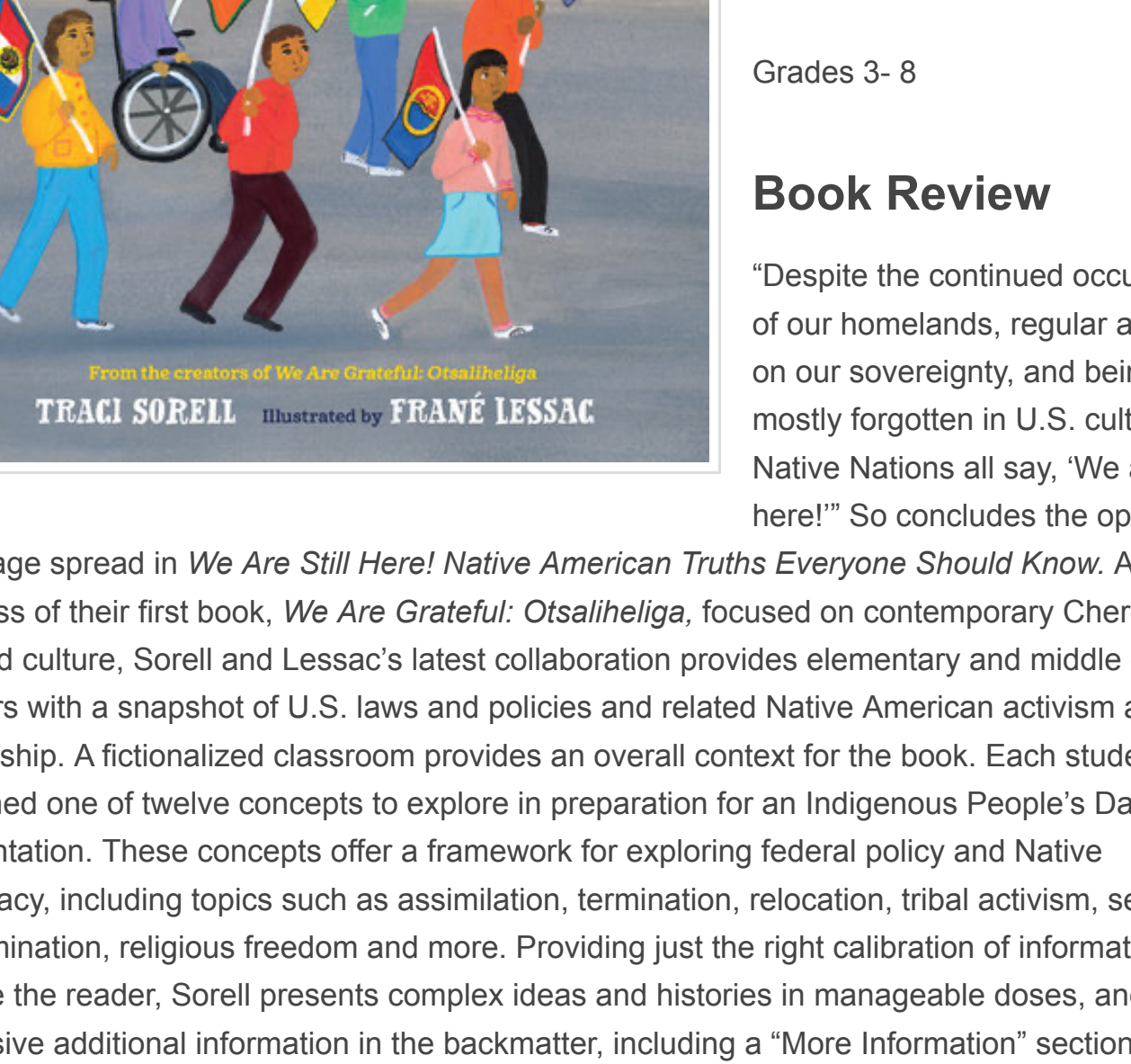
Teaching with Children's
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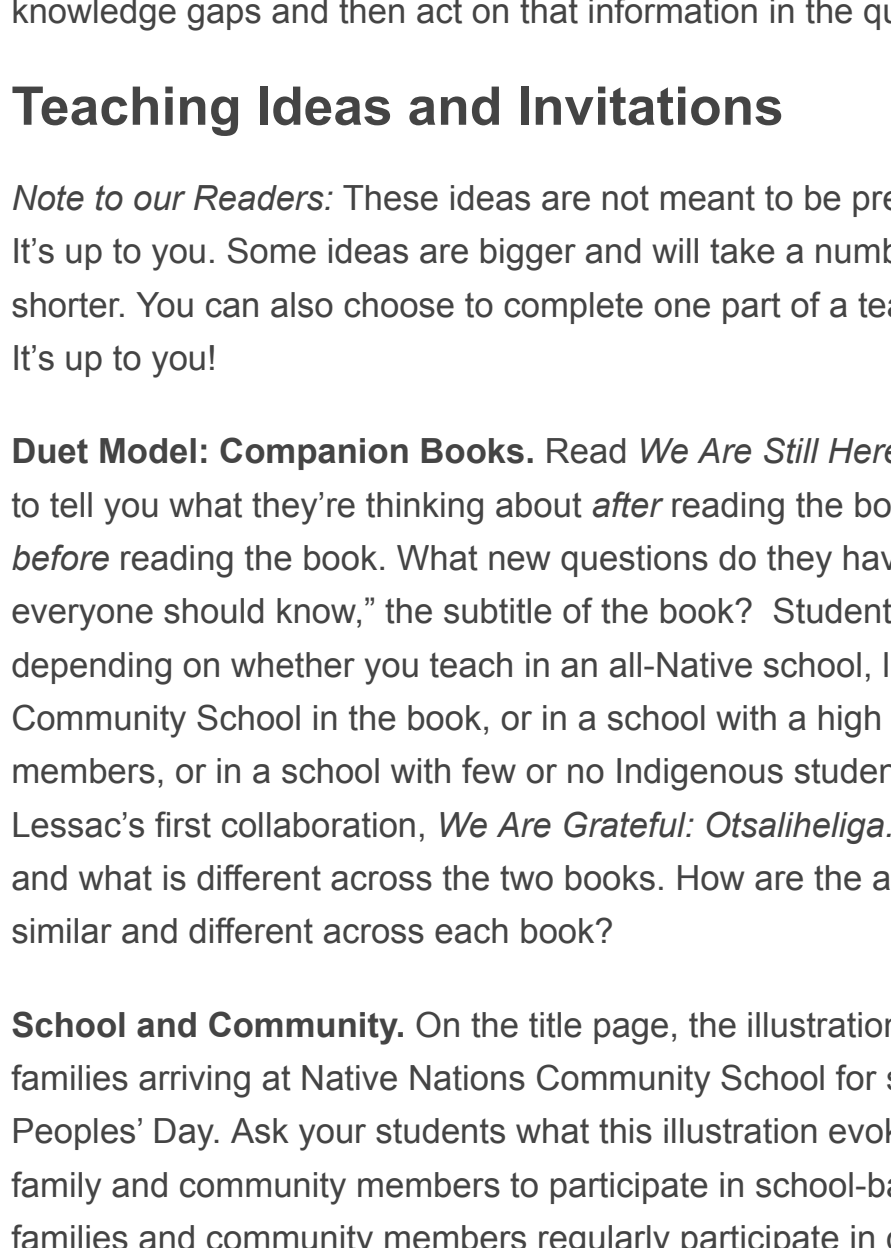
Exploring Native American Activism: Teaching Ideas for We Are Still Here!

APRIL 26, 2021 BY MARY ANN CAPPIELLO

Announcement: Classroom Bookshelf blog readers, please join Mary Ann in conversation with author Traci Sorell this Friday, April 30th at 7 pm EST courtesy of Porter Square Books in Cambridge, MA. To register for this free virtual event, you can follow this [link](#). Traci will also be delivering the closing keynote at SLJ's Day of Dialog, another free virtual event, on Thursday, May 20th. Click [here](#) to register and learn about the on-demand viewing options after the 20th. Finally, [Traci](#) will be joining [Monica Brown](#) and [Jason Chin](#) as part of Lesley University's Informational Literacy Institute in June. Find out more [here](#).



We Are Still Here! Native American Truths Everyone Should Know



Written by Traci Sorell, illustrated by Frané Lessac

Published by Charlesbridge Publishers, 2021

ISBN: 978-1-62354-192-7

EBook ISBN: 978-1-63289-973-6

Grades 3-8

Book Review

"Despite the continued occupation of our homelands, regular attacks on our sovereignty, and being mostly forgotten in U.S. culture, Native Nations all say, 'We are still here!'" So concludes the opening

two-page spread in *We Are Still Here! Native American Truths Everyone Should Know*. After the success of their first book, *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga*, focused on contemporary Cherokee life and culture, Sorell and Lessac's latest collaboration provides elementary and middle grade readers with a snapshot of U.S. laws and policies and related Native American activism and leadership. A fictionalized classroom provides an overall context for the book. Each student is assigned one of twelve concepts to explore in preparation for an Indigenous People's Day presentation. These concepts offer a framework for exploring federal policy and Native advocacy, including topics such as assimilation, termination, relocation, tribal activism, self-determination, religious freedom and more. Providing just the right calibration of information to situate the reader, Sorell presents complex ideas and histories in manageable doses, and offers extensive additional information in the backmatter, including a "More Information" section, timeline, glossary, and author's note. Lessac's gouache illustrations bring past and present to life, from the painful to the poignant to the celebratory. Ideal for explorations of Native American history, U.S. history, and current events, *We Are Still Here! Native American Truths Everyone Should Know* offers teachers, librarians, parents, and young people the opportunity to fill in knowledge gaps and then act on that information in the quest towards justice.

Teaching Ideas and Invitations

Note to our Readers: These ideas are not meant to be prescriptive. Choose one. Choose more. It's up to you. Some ideas are bigger and will take a number of days to complete. Some are shorter. You can also choose to complete one part of a teaching idea, but not the whole thing. It's up to you!

Duet Model: Companion Books. Read *We Are Still Here!* aloud with your students. Ask them to tell you what they're thinking about *after* reading the book that they weren't thinking about *before* reading the book. What new questions do they have about "Native American truths everyone should know," the subtitle of the book? Students' thoughts and questions will differ depending on whether you teach in an all-Native school, like the fictional Native Nations Community School in the book, or in a school with a high number of Indigenous community members, or in a school with few or no Indigenous students. Next, read aloud Sorell and Lessac's first collaboration, *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga*. Have students identify what is similar and what is different across the two books. How are the author's and illustrator's purposes similar and different across each book?

School and Community. On the title page, the illustration across the spread shows diverse families arriving at Native Nations Community School for student presentations for Indigenous Peoples' Day. Ask your students what this illustration evokes for them. Why is it valuable for family and community members to participate in school-based events? What are ways in which families and community members regularly participate in ongoing school activities? If you're reading this book in spring of 2021, your school is likely not hosting family and community events. Brainstorm with your students what community events they would like the school to host next fall, when it is safer for people to gather.

Duet Model: Indigenous Activism. Have students read the Caldecott Award-winning fictional picture book *We Are Water Protectors* written by Carole Lindstrom and illustrated by Michaela Goade. Next, have them read *We Are Still Here!* How does the nonfiction book help them to understand the fiction book in new ways? What questions do students have about the Dakota Access Pipeline and other current environmental issues impacting Native lands and peoples? Use some of the resources included below as well as in our original entry on teaching with [We Are Water Protectors](#) to support your students' exploration.

Grades 4 and Up

Interrogating the Concepts. In the book, author Sorell outlines a history of U.S. policies since 1871 and Native Nation's responses. Like the teacher at the fictional Native Nations Community School, divide up your class into small groups. Have each small group explore one of the twelve concepts discussed in *We Are Still Here!* more deeply. Have each group go back to the spread that presents the initial information on their concept. What do they notice about the illustrations? What do they convey? What questions do they have about the concept? Next, have students read the additional material in the backmatter: More Information, Timeline, and the Author's Note. What new questions do they have? Support students in researching their questions, using information included in Further Explorations below and more. Ideally, partner with your school or public librarian for additional resources.

Duet Model: Exploring Termination & Relocation Up Close. Read *We Are Still Here* with your students in order for them to get the broad context of U.S. policies towards Native Nations since 1871. Next, have students explore *Indian No More*, a historical novel written by Charlene Willing McManus with Traci Sorell set in 1957. Have students make connections between what they learn in the nonfiction picture book about termination and relocation, and what they learn about both in the historical novel. For more teaching ideas for using *Indian No More* in the classroom, you can read our entry [here](#).

Considering the Concepts Locally. In the book, author Sorell outlines a history of U.S. policies since 1871 and Native Nation's responses. What does that history look like where you live? If you teach in a Native school or community with a significant Native population, arrange for students to interview elders in the community to learn more about what these policies have meant locally. If you teach in a school that does not have a significant Native population, reach out to a statewide or regional Indigenous council or a specific Native Nation in your state or region to organize a video conference interview with one or more members. In all contexts, support your students as they brainstorm, organize, and sequence their interview questions.

Deepening the Timeline. In the backmatter, Sorell offers a decade-by-decade timeline of specific events, policies, and laws that impacted Native Nations from 1871 to the present. Allow students to select a single event within the timeline to research further. Work with your librarian to support students' efforts to find age-appropriate information on their topic. The resources in the Further Explorations section below can be a starting point. Students can choose the best methods and modalities for sharing their findings with one another.

Grades 6 and Up

Duet Model: Exploring U.S. History with an Indigenous Lens. Pair *We Are Still Here* with the nonfiction middle grade chapter book *An Indigenous People's History of the United States Young People's Edition*. Read the picture book to introduce an overview of U.S. policies since 1871. Next, have students use Sorell's framework (the twelve concepts) as a lens for reading the middle grade chapter book. What similarities and differences do students see in U.S. policy when it appeared in the form of a treaty with Native Nations prior to 1871 and when it became simply policy after 1871? How are previous treaties being upheld? One method of exploring this is assigning small groups to particular chapters of *An Indigenous People's History*, so that groups students can focus more deeply on one period of time. For more information on using *An Indigenous People's History* in the classroom, you can find our entry [here](#).

Critical Literacy

Grades 4 and Up

Auditing Your Social Studies Materials. In the backmatter, author Sorell states that Indigenous people often disappear from the curriculum after 1871. Does this happen in your classroom and/or your school? Have students complete an audit of the materials available in your room – your curriculum materials for social studies, your classroom library. Ask permission for your students to do an audit of the materials at other grade levels as well. Allow time for students to talk about the implications of this absence.

Grades 6 and Up

Native American Agency and Resilience During the COVID-19 Crisis. After reading *We Are Still Here!*, provide your students with an opportunity to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the Native Nations in spring 2020, the leadership Native nations have displayed in expanded vaccine access in 2021, and the ongoing challenges faced by tribes that do not have federal recognition. A year ago, in our entry on *We Are Water Protectors* written by Carole Lindstrom and illustrated by Michaela Goade, we crafted a critical literacy teaching idea focused on the impact of COVID-19 on Native Americans. The teaching idea read as follows:

Do Native American tribes and nations have access to the same resources as states and municipalities across the country? What unique challenges have emerged for Native American tribes and nations? In what ways does the strength of specific tribal/national organizational structures, collective community, and ancestral knowledge help fight the virus? In what ways are environmental injustices, like the specific example depicted in *We Are Water Protectors*, impacting the ability of Native Americans to fight the virus? Have students explore this [Indian Country Today article from Sunday, April 19, 2020](#), this Associated Press [story from April 18, 2020](#), this [April 13, 2020 New York Times article](#), and this [Indian Country Today opinion story from April 13, 2020](#). Next, have students read this [April 4, 2020 Washington Post story](#) on the impact of the virus on Native American communities. Ask students to compare and contrast information and language across the different stories and sources. Offer students the opportunity to write something in response. Use the various resources shared in our [Pursuing Meaningful, Authentic, Student-Centered Writing During Precarious Times](#) entry to present a range of options.

A year later, Native American tribes and nations have been a model of leadership in effectively vaccinating populations. Have your students explore the impact COVID-19 had on Native Americans included in the above paragraph from last spring. Next, have them explore recent news stories and resources, such as the [Indian Health Services COVID-19 vaccine planning](#), this [February 2021 NPR story on tribal vaccinations](#), this [February 2021 CNN story on tribal vaccinations](#), this [April 2021 Roll Call story](#), and this [March 2021 Indian Country Today story](#) about tribal efforts to expand vaccination to non-tribal members in order to help the United States reach herd immunity. Contrast these stories with this [April 2021 NPR story](#) about the challenges faced by tribes that are not federally recognized by the U.S. government. What are the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 reveal the resilience of Native Nations? What are the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 has revealed the realities of the twelve concepts around which *We Are Still Here!* is written?

Further Explorations

Digital Resources

[Traci Sorell's Official Website](#)

[Frané Lessac's Official Website](#)

[Hear Traci Sorell read from the first spread of We Are Still Here!](#)

Resources from the Backmatter of the Book:

[Indian Country Today](#)

[National Museum of the American Indian](#), The Smithsonian Institute

["Native Voices Timeline," National Library of Medicine](#)

["Frequently Asked Questions," Indian Affairs, U.S. Department of the Interior](#)

Other Resources:

[National Congress of American Indians](#)

[National Indian Youth Council](#)

[Native American Rights Fund](#)

[National Indian Children Welfare Association](#)

[National Indian Education Association](#)

[Indian Affairs, U.S. Department of the Interior](#)

[National Knowledge 360](#), [National Museum of the American Indian](#), [The Smithsonian Institute](#)

[Essential Understandings and Social Studies Curriculum](#), [National Museum of the American Indian](#)

[Indigenous Environmental Network](#)

[Native Organizers Alliance](#)

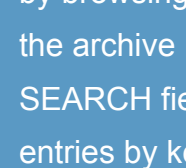
Books

Dunbar-Ortiz, R., Mendoza, J., Reese, D. (2019). *An Indigenous People's history of the United States*. Beacon Press.

Lindstrom, C. (2020). *We are water protectors*. Ill. by M. Goade. Roaring Brook Press.

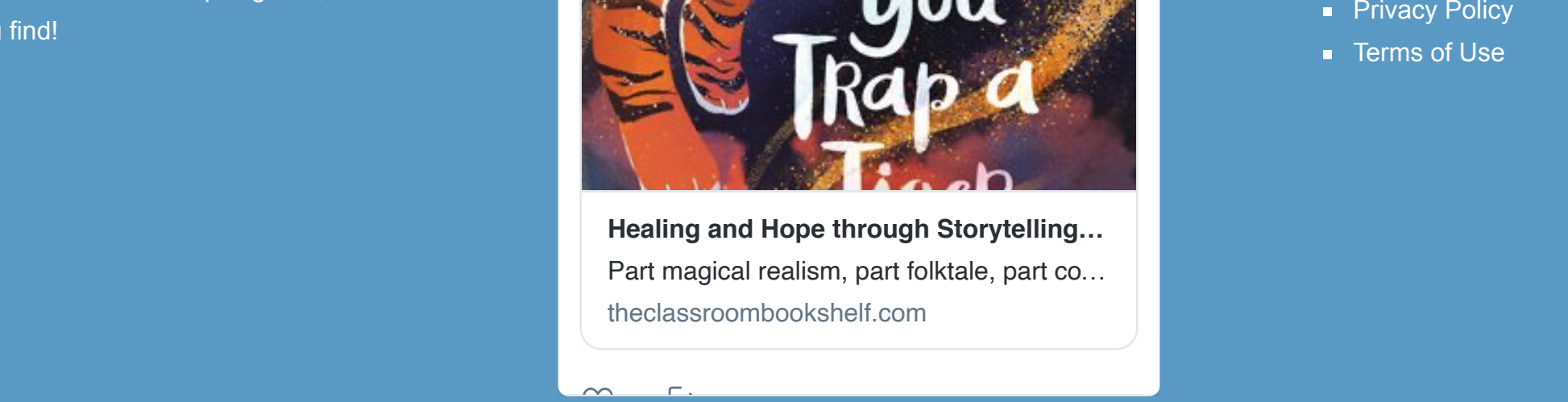
McManus, C.W. (2019). *Indian no more*. Lee and Low Books.

Sorell, T. (2018). *We are grateful: Otsaliheliga*. Illus. F. Lessac. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing.



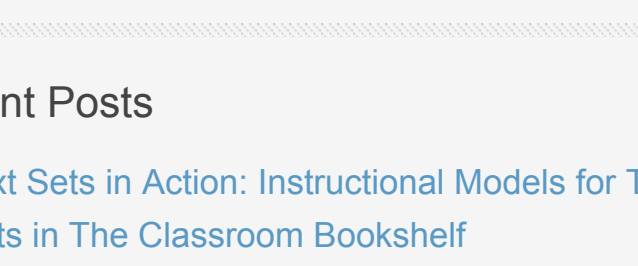
About Mary Ann Cappiello

Mary Ann is a professor of language and literacy at Lesley University. A former public school language arts and humanities teacher, she is a passionate advocate for and commentator on children's books. Mary Ann is the co-author of *Teaching with Text Sets* (2013) and *Teaching to Complexity* (2015) and *Text Sets in Action: Pathways Through Content Area Literacy* (Stenhouse, 2021). She has been a guest on public radio and a consultant to public television. From 2015-2018, Mary Ann was a member of the National Council of Teachers of English's Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction (K-8) Committee, serving two years as chair.



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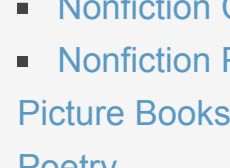
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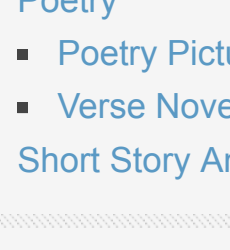
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