The term ‘Native American’, which is used interchangeably with ‘American Indian’ or ‘Indian’ refers to people of indigenous origin in the forty-eight adjoining states, Alaska and Hawaii of the United States of America. Christopher Columbus, convinced that he had sailed from Europe to Asia, used the term Indios (Spanish for Indians) to describe the indigenous Arawaks he encountered on arriving at the Bahamas on 12 October 1492 (Utter 2). ‘Indian’, then, is a perception created by the colonizing Europeans to refer to Native Americans. The term became widespread among European Powers competing for domination of the Americas. The term was also used negatively along with words such as savage, barbarian and redskin to express what colonizing Europeans and later Americans considered essential racial and cultural differences between themselves and Native Americans. Today, however, when a large section of Native Americans in the United States identify themselves as ‘Indians’, the term offers mainly positive propositions and expresses a sense of collective indigenous identity among Native people which transcends tribal boundaries.

Native American Literature is the literature of people of Native American ancestry. The central focus of Native American literature is on issues and subjects connected to Native American culture, ethnicity, identity,
oral tradition, subjugation, dislocation, bi-cultural conflicts, history, religion, mythology, folklore and experiences.

Although native people live in every country of North America and South America, the term Native American literature or American Indian literature, usually refers to works written by the indigenous people of the United States and Canada. But in Canada, Native literature is called First Nations literature. It is said that around 900 nations or tribes of Native Americans live in the United States and Canada.

Indian American literature begins with the orally transmitted myths, legends, tales, and lyrics (always songs) of Indian cultures. There was no written literature among the more than 500 different Indian languages and tribal cultures that existed in North America before the first Europeans arrived. As a result, Native American oral literature is rather diverse. Narratives from quasi-nomadic hunting cultures like the Navajo are different from stories of settled agricultural tribes such as the pueblo-dwelling Acoma; the stories of northern lakeside dwellers such as the Ojibwa often differ radically from stories of desert tribes like the Hopi.

Tribes maintained their own religions-worshipping gods, animals, plants, or sacred persons. Systems of government ranged from democracies to councils of elders to theocracies. These tribal variations enter into the oral literature as well. Still, it is possible to make a few generalizations. Indian stories glow with veneration for nature as a spiritual as well as physical
mother. Nature is alive and endowed with spiritual forces; main characters may be animals or plants, often totems associated with a tribe, group, or individual.

Paradigms of almost every oral genre can be found in American Indian literature: lyrics, chants, myths, fairy tales, humorous anecdotes, incantations, riddles, proverbs, epics, and legendary histories. Accounts of migrations and ancestors abound, as do vision or healing songs and tricksters’ tales.

Native American literature takes in many different social, cultural, historical, legendary and spiritual perspectives. Native American literature initiates in the oral traditions of native people. The spoken words are used to pass on information from generation to generation. Today, the oral tradition remains very important to Native American life and literature, and ceremonies and religious rituals are often known only through the spoken word. At the same time, written works offer the advantage of publishing ideas, stories, experiences and thoughts to a wide audience. Though Native American literature has been published since the eighteenth century but has acquired significant momentum steadily since the 1960s. In addition to using writing systems, Native Americans in earlier times used to pass down tribal knowledge in spoken forms such as speeches, songs, stories, ceremonies, chants, and rituals. The first Native American works written in European languages were transcribed speeches and treaties with European colonists. These speeches and treaties date to the 1600s and 1700s. Today, Native American oral literature
includes many literary forms, and of these forms, songs and stories are among the most important and popular. Songs are composed by individuals and groups. Traditional beliefs hold that songs can create harmony. Each tribe has its own songs, as well as songs that are shared among tribes. The tribal songs can be categorized according to their use, such as for religious ceremonies or for social events. Songs are most often accompanied by dance. Stories play a crucial role in defining what it means to be a member of a given tribe and how a person relates to the tribe’s past, present, and future. Although the details of stories found in different tribes may differ, the tales often have similar themes. One common theme is the creation of the world and another is the theme of a people’s origins and migrations.

Oral literature remained important in Native American life and culture throughout the twentieth century and continues to be more important during this twenty-first century. One of the most influential works of modern Native American oral literature is the narrated autobiography of Black Elk (a Lakota). The book *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (1932) was transcribed and edited by American poet John G. Neihardt (1881-1973). In addition, many modern written works show the influence of oral literature. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969) by N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) and *Storyteller* (1981) by Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna) also express the importance of the spoken word as it has been passed from generation to generation in Native American world.
Before Native Americans came into contact with Europeans, many tribes supplemented the spoken word with pictographs (symbols or pictures that represent words or ideas). Native Americans used pictographs to record important events, incidents and rituals. After Europeans began arriving in great numbers in the beginning of the seventeenth century, many tribes used European writing systems to communicate with the colonizers. After seeing the usefulness and scope of written language, a Cherokee named Sequoyah developed a written form of the Cherokee language. Sequoyah was the first Native American individual to design a written language without using other languages as sources.

In fact, extensive Native American writing began in the nineteenth century as an act of necessity. Native American writings have emerged to save their nations, themselves, and their cultures from destruction by colonizers. Many of the early European colonizers of North America did not recognize Native Americans as human beings with their own cultures and histories, and much bloodshed resulted as Native Americans were displaced from their homelands. By writing about their experiences, Native American writers hoped to educate non-Native Americans about Native American cultures, religions and beliefs and about their rights as sovereign human beings. They believed that their written works such as autobiographies, tribal histories, lyrics, travel accounts, sermons, and protest literature would help faster understanding between Native Americans and non-Native Americans.
Autobiography is one of the primary genres that Native American authors borrowed from the Euro-American literary tradition and adopted to address their own concerns and experiences. Most nineteenth-century Native American autobiographies derive from a Christian practice of testifying to one’s conversion and reflect the fact that the authors were educated in mission schools. Indian autobiographies exhibit the authors’ awareness of themselves as speaking not simply as individuals but as representatives for their tribes and even for their race. The “double consciousness” (to borrow the term coined by W. E. B. Du Bois in 1903), these authors experience is evident in their negotiation of insider and outsider status. Sometimes they adopt the voice of an ‘authentic’ Indian with a complete knowledge of tribal traditions and practices. But just as often they position themselves outside of Indian culture or belief systems, as members of a Christian, educated, and white society. The complex tensions that result from this bifurcated view give rise to some of the most interesting and important moments in the majority of texts.

The first full-length Native American autobiography was written by William Apess (Pequot, 1798–1839), *A Son of the Forest: The Experience of William Apess, a Native of the Forest* (1829). In this work Apess depicts his escape from a dark and abusive childhood through conversion to Christianity and particularly his involvement with the Methodist Church.

Some of the earliest written works by Native Americans were narrated autobiographies, religious sermons and protest works. Many Native Americans
converted to Christianity as a result of contact with non-Native communities, and they argued against the poor treatment of their fellow Native Americans by showing how this treatment contradicted Christian values. Through their works Samson Occom (Mohegan) and William Apess (Pequot) protested discrimination against Native Americans. Occom’s *Sermon Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul, an Indian* (1772), discusses the destruction that the introduction of alcohol had brought to native peoples, while Apess’s *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts, Relative to the Marshpee Tribe* (1835) helped the Marshpee fight legal injustices that other tribes were facing.

Nineteenth-century Native American literature is a literature of transition, the bridge between an oral tradition that flourished for centuries before the arrival of Europeans and the emergence of contemporary fiction in the 1960s. Unlike the preceding oral tradition, nineteenth-century Native American literature was increasingly text-based and composed in English. The result of missionary schools that taught Indians the skills believed necessary to assimilate into white society. Nineteenth-century Native American authors employed Euro-American literary genres like autobiography and the novel, often combining them with traditional narratives like the trickster tale or creation myth to create hybrid forms. Although the early texts exhibit the struggle of Indian authors to find a voice within American culture, they foreshadow elements of later Native American literature such as the refutation
of stereotypical depictions of Indians all too common in American literature. Like their successors, nineteenth-century Indian authors were aware of the power of literature as a tool in changing the political and social status of their people.

The nineteenth century was a troublemaking political era for many Native Americans, defined by the Indian Removal Act of 1830. A federal law authorized by President Andrew Jackson, the Removal Act ruled that Indians living east of the Mississippi River could be displaced to land west of the river. A contentious debate about the limits of federal and state jurisdiction over Indian tribal lands and peoples, coupled with a cultural belief in the essential incompatibility of Indian and white societies, led to a movement to relocate Indians to territory less populated by and less advantageous to white Americans. The Removal Act was met with resistance by many tribes, most significantly by the Cherokee. The Cherokee Nation had adapted to white society more successfully than other tribes, including creating its own written alphabet or syllabary, adopting a constitution similar to the U.S. Constitution, and establishing a bilingual newspaper. But gold was discovered on Cherokee land, precipitated their expulsion. In 1838 the Cherokee were forced by federal troops to depart on foot for the Indian Territory to the west. All Native Americans felt the impact of the new reservation policies, which sought to isolate and contain Indians to make room for an expanding American nation.
At the same time that Native Americans were being excluded from the nation, white Americans began to look to them as the source of a unique national identity and literature, distinct from European traditions. Literature from the period depicting Indian characters was incredibly popular, and many works are still celebrated as classics, including James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* (1827), and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *Song of Hiawatha* (1855), to name only a few. These texts employ the trope of the ‘disappearing Indian,’ which represents the deaths of Indians as natural, similar to the changing of the seasons or the setting of the sun, rather than the result of political exclusion or social discrimination. Thus the disappearance of Indians from the American social landscape was not only depicted within this body of writing but also implicitly approved of.

Early Native American authors wrote within an intimidating political climate and in response to a dominant literary tradition that sentimentalized and condoned the death of Indians. But they found the means to engage with their detractors by authoring their own accounts of Indians that challenged stereotypical beliefs, demanded equal political rights, and proved that Indians were neither disappearing nor silent.

Understandably much early Native American literature was occupied with challenging the political status of Indian people. One of the first authors to engage in protest literature was Elias Boudinot (Cherokee, c. 1802–1839).
Boudinot was born Gallegina (or Buck) Watie but changed his name to honor the president of the American Bible Society. While name change was common within Cherokee culture, Boudinot’s choice reflects his allegiance to both Christianity and white society. At the age of six, Boudinot was sent to a mission school where he was encouraged to leave behind his culture’s ‘savage’ traditions in favor of white ‘civilized’ practices. Boudinot was a prize pupil and subsequently returned to his people as a missionary to share this knowledge. Boudinot became a spokesperson for the Cherokee Nation, delivering a speech titled “An Address to the Whites” throughout the United States in 1826, in an attempt to raise money for a Cherokee newspaper and school. In the speech Boudinot demonstrates the capacity of the Cherokee people to be civilized by lauding them for their achievements and implicitly distancing them from other Native American tribes. He appeals to his audience by claiming that these improvements are only possible with white assistance: “I ask you, shall red men live, or shall they be swept from the earth? With you and this public at large, the decision chiefly rests” (79). Boudinot’s efforts were successful in raising money to purchase a printing press, and he became the editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix*, a biweekly, bilingual newspaper. But the controversy sparked by the Removal Act of 1830 ended Boudinot’s career, when he joined a minority group which advocated that the Cherokee voluntarily relocate to the Indian Territory. For this reason Boudinot was considered a traitor, and after the Trail of Tears, he was assassinated by
members of a rival group. His “An Address to the Whites” advocates acculturation and compliance as key for the survival of the Cherokee, but his life story draws attention to the limitations of this viewpoint.

The Pequot autobiographical writer William Apess also engaged in protest literature, but unlike Boudinot, Apess’s writing is characterized by an angry resistance to white society. In an essay titled “An Indian’s Looking-Glass for the White Man” (1833), Apess makes a scorching challenge to the ideology of white supremacy by arguing that whites are blacker than any other race in terms of their sins: “Now suppose these skins were put together, and each skin had its national crimes written upon it—which skin do you think would have the greatest?” (157). By inverting Euro-American assumptions associated with skin color, Apess rejects the inferiority of indigenous people and casts aspersions upon whites for centuries of discrimination and violence. In a speech titled “Eulogy on King Philip” (1836), Apess celebrates the life of King Philip, the seventeenth-century leader of a war against the New England colonists. Apess suggests that Philip was a superior military and political leader than either Alexander the Great or George Washington. Moreover Apess holds Euro-Americans responsible for the widespread destruction of Indian society: “But let us again review their weapons to civilize the nations of this soil. What were they? Rum and powder and ball, together with all the diseases, such as the smallpox and every other disease imaginable” (286).
Apess’s explosive political rhetoric proves the image of the silent, “disappearing Indian” that dominated American literature to be false.

The first Native American novel written by a woman is *Wynema: A Child of the Forest* by S. Alice Callahan (Muscogee [Creek], 1868–1894), which was published in 1891. But long before Callahan’s *Wynema*, other women authors were entering the literary profession. One of the earliest is Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (Ojibwe, 1800–1841). Schoolcraft was married to Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, a renowned ethnographer, with whom she helped publish the *Literary Voyager or Muzzeniegun*, a journal of poetry, essays, and history. Schoolcraft published numerous poems in this journal and earned a glowing reputation among literary critics. Schoolcraft’s poems reflect her education in classical and European literature. She employs the conventional rhyme structure and meter common at the time. Certain poems, like “Lines Written under Affliction” (1827), echo the style of Felicia Hemans (1793-1835) and Lydia Sigourney (1791-1865), the two most popular women poets of the century. Despite Schoolcraft’s accomplishments, she never published a book of poems, a testament to the difficulties that women writers, especially Indian women, faced in achieving literary legitimacy in the nineteenth century.

Many Native American writers of the nineteenth century wrote histories of their tribes. One tribal historian was David Cusick (Tuscarora, c.1780-c.1831), whose *Sketches of Ancient History of the Six Nations* (1828) was the first published tribal history. This is an early account of Native American
history and myth, written and published in English by an Indian. Tribal histories explained the deep ties that tribes had to their ancestral homelands. Beginning in the 18th century, these ties took on special meaning because the United States government began removing Native Americans from their traditional homelands. These removals forced Native Americans to uproot their families and travel hundreds of miles to unfamiliar lands. Along with losing their possessions and their homelands, Native Americans suffered great casualties during these forced removals. Among the worst removals was the Trail of Tears of 1838 and 1839, when thousands of Cherokee were forced to drive from their homeland in the Southeast out to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). It is said that of the 18,000 Cherokee who traveled the Trail of Tears, about 4,000 died of starvation, exposure, diseases, and despair.

One of the best-known early tribal historians was George Copway (Ojibwa, 1818-1869), whose *Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation* (1850) emphasizes the importance of tribal oral history and explains the migrations, myths, religions, government, languages, hunting, and games of his nation. Other Native Americans who wrote about their cultures and nations include Peter Dooyentate Clarke (Wyandot), with his *Origin and Traditional History of the Wyandotts: And Sketches of Other Indian Tribes of North America* (1870).

The establishment of several Native American newspapers in the nineteenth century made an important contribution to Native American
writing. Among these newspapers were the Cherokee Phoenix, first published in 1828, and the Cherokee Advocate, which began publication in the year 1844 after the Cherokee Nation was removed to Indian Territory.

Among the prominent nineteenth-century Native American writers of fiction were John Rollin Ridge (Cherokee, 1827-67), who wrote at mid-century, and Emily Pauline Johnson (Mohawk, 1861-1913), whose career lasted into the early 20th century. John Rollin Ridge’s *Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* (1854), regarded as the first novel published by a Native American writer. In his depiction of American racial injustice, Ridge not only describes the fate of Mexicans but also of his fellow Native Americans. He recounts the story of a notorious Mexican bandit in California. Murieta was a folk hero whose story was popularized through oral legends and Mexican corridos (narrative folk songs) as well as in dime novels like Ridge’s. Ridge was descended from a prominent Cherokee family; his father and grandfather both advocated the removal of the Cherokee to the Indian Territory and were assassinated shortly thereafter (along with Elias Boudinot, who was a cousin). Ridge subsequently grew up and was educated in white society. Ridge traveled to California during the early years of the gold rush, fleeing a murder charge after he killed a man he believed to have participated in his father’s murder. Ridge began a career in journalism in San Francisco, and it was there he learned the legend of Joaquín Murieta. In his novel Ridge transforms Murieta into a Robin Hood character, driven to be an outlaw by the egregious ill-
treatment he receives from whites. Ridge valorizes Murieta’s actions, even when he seeks violent vengeance, perhaps expressing his own frustrated desire for revenge. Ridge concluded his novel with the lofty sentiment that “there is nothing so dangerous in its consequences as injustice to individuals—whether it arise from prejudice of color or any other source” (158). But in his journalism, Ridge argued that giving up traditional indigenous practices and adopting white ways was the only means for the survival of Indians. And Pauline Johnson was a Canadian Mohawk who spent a great deal of her time touring Canada, England, and the United States as an advocate for Native American people. Well known as a poet and as a performer of her poetry, she also wrote short stories for popular publications such as *Mother’s Magazine* and *Boy’s World*, which had large circulations. Johnson’s books of poetry include *The White Wampum* (1895), *Canadian Born* (1903), and *Flint and Feather* (1912). Her short stories are collected in *Moccasin Maker* (1913) and *The Shagganappi* (1913). Sarah Winnemucca (Paiute, c.1841-91) was also a prominent lecturer, writer, and Native American advocate. She was notable for being the first Native American woman known to secure a copyright and to publish in the English language. Her work *Life Among the Paiutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* (1883) was the first Native American autobiography written by a woman.

Native American writers since beginning of the twentieth century have continued the traditions of their predecessors, but their styles and forms have
evolved to a greater extent. The novel has become a popular Native American literary genre, along with poetry, the short story, and autobiography. At the same time, Native American scholars and writers have begun investigating Native American history, sociology, ethnography, culture, medicine, education, law, and literary criticism, among other fields. In the past, Native American writers and scholars sought primarily to educate non-Native American people about Native Americans, but today many Native Americans write for the benefit of Native American audiences.

Native American writing began to advance new genres in part because of the influence of government-run boarding schools. For generations, many Native Americans learned English in mission schools (schools run by churches). Many Native American children were forced to attend off-reservation schools. While sometimes living hundreds of miles away from their homes, children attending the off-reservation schools were punished for speaking their native languages and were told that their traditional ways of life were inferior to those of non-Native Americans. The result was that many Native Americans were taught conventional American subjects, with special emphasis on reading and writing in traditional European literary genres. They were later able to employ these skills in new and innovative ways for their people’s own ends, but because they were also urged to view their own cultures as inferior, some of the students found themselves alienated from their own people when they returned home. Francis La Flesche (1857-1932) of the
Omaha tribe wrote about his school experiences in *The Middle Five, Indian Boys at School* (1900).

Native American literature of the twentieth century was shaped by and helps shape political questions concerning Native American people. One of the most prominent voices of the early twentieth-century was Zitkala-Sa (Sioux, 1876-1938), also known as Gertrude Simmons Bonnin. Zitkala-Sa became a prominent voice for Native American rights. She wrote two books, *Old Indian Legends* (1901) and *American Indian Stories* (1921).

Other political writers, such as Will Rogers (Cherokee, 1879-1935) and Alexander Posey (Creek, 1873-1908), used satire and humor to express their beliefs. Charles Eastman (Sioux, 1858-1939) continued this tradition of educating through storytelling with the publication of books such as *Wigwam Evenings: Folktales Retold* (1909). In *The Soul of the Indian* (1911), Eastman explains the deeper ethical and moral underpinnings of some Lakota beliefs.

Two popular political writers of the first half of the twentieth century were John Joseph Mathews (Osage, c. 1894-1979) and D’Arcy McNickle (Cree and Salish, 1904-77). Matthews’ *Sundown* (1934) and McNickle’s *The Surrounded* (1936) argue that cultural survival depends upon fighting the assimilation of Native Americans into mainstream American society.

Since the 1940s, anthologies have played an important role in Native American literature, primarily because they expose readers to different writers and styles. *The Winged Serpent* (1946), edited by Margot Astrov (a non-Native
American), was the first anthology of Native American literature to gain mainstream popularity. The anthology form has been especially beneficial to Native American poetry. Some noteworthy anthologies are *Carriers of the Dream Wheel: Contemporary Native American Poetry* (1975), *Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Native American Literature* (1979), and *That’s What She Said: Contemporary Poetry and Fiction by Native American Women* (1984).

In the 1950s and early 1960s, little Native American literature was produced. One of the major reasons was that the political climate in North America was hostile to tribal traditions, making it difficult to publish works dealing with Native American life. But in the mid-1960s Native American writers began again to promote seriously Native American culture. A major reason for this resurgence was the Red Power movement. The Red Power movement emphasized developing pride in one’s self, sustaining traditional Native American cultures, identity and lands, and supporting Native American rights in the struggles of Native American communities with the government.

An important theme in Native American literature today is the issue of Native American identity—what it means to be Native American. *Winter in the Blood* (1974) by James Welch (Blackfoot and Gros Ventre) is an important work that deals with one man’s developing understanding of who he is. Welch’s main character comes to understand himself by piecing together his complex family history. Like many other characters in contemporary Native
American fiction, Welch’s hero suffers problems that have affected many Native American people, such as alcoholism and alienation.

_Cogewea the Half-Blood: A Depiction of Great Montana Cattle Range_ (1927) by Mourning Dove (Colville), also known as Christine Quintasket, was one of the first novels written by a Native American woman. The book has as its theme the alienation experienced by a woman of mixed race. _House Made of Dawn_ (1968) by N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) and _Ceremony_ (1977) by Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna) explore how persons of mixed races may come to terms with their heritage. Louise Erdrich (Ojibwa) also takes on issues of cultural identity in her series of books set in North Dakota. _Love Medicine_ (1984), _The Beet Queen_ (1986), _Tracks_ (1988), and _The Bingo Palace_ (1994).

Other works of Native American literature concentrate on the dynamic aspect of Native American cultures—their ability to grow and change. Some writers who portray modern life in all its complexity are Joy Harjo (Creek), Gerald Vizenor (Ojibwa), and Ray A. Young Bear (Mesquakie).

Modern historical novels explore tribal histories in order to educate readers of today about complex tribal events. _Fools Crow_ (1986) by James Welch (Blackfoot and Gros Ventre), _Mean Spirit_ (1990) by Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), and _Mountain Windsong_ (1992) by Robert J. Conley (Cherokee) seek to remind readers the important events of the past Native American culture.
In the late twentieth-century Native American writers began publishing more works in genres other than fiction. In the 1970s, Native American literary critics and scholars began to write studies from Native American perspectives. They wrote of how Native American people suffered physical and cultural genocide, and how they are still recovering from those atrocities today. They also showed the resiliency of Native American nations, marveling at how Native American people have survived 500 years of conquest.

While there was an extensive amount of Native American writing published in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, Native American literature did not receive much popularity until the second half of the twentieth century. In 1968 N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) published the novel *House Made of Dawn*, which won the Pulitzer Prize. Many modern writers are motivated by a need to educate non-Native Americans about Native American people. They also write specifically for Native American audiences, celebrating their nations and the ability of their peoples to survive hundreds of years of colonization, prejudice, and assaults on their culture.

*Custer Died For Your Sins* (1969) by Vine Deloria, Jr., (Lakota Sioux) is a classic work of Native American intellectualism and political analysis. Other noteworthy scholarly works include *Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986) by Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna and Sioux), *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (1994) by Robert Allen Warrior (Osage), *Why I Can’t Read

Native American poetry is another strong genre. Well-known poets include Lance Henson (Northern Cheyenne), Roberta Hill (Oneida), Maurice Kenny (Mohawk), Simon J. Ortiz (Acoma), Wendy Rose (Hopi and Miwok), Luci Tapahonso (Navajo), Gail Tremblay (Onondaga and Mi’kmaq), and Elizabeth A. Woody (Navajo, Warm Springs, Wasco, and Yakama). Native American poetry often depicts the importance of land and nature in Native American belief systems and myths. A major theme is how a respect and understanding of the earth can work to heal individuals and communities.

New Native American writers are constantly emerging. Two of the most nationally well known are Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d’Alene), who wrote The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven (1993). Among other writers Susan Power (Sioux), author of The Grass Dancer (1994) is also equally popular.

Native American literature continues to evolve and change, but the characteristics that define Native American literature—its vital role in
publicizing the concerns of Native American communities and nations, its contemplation of identity, its portrayal of complex tribal histories prove to be still stronger concerns of Native American identity.

The first Native American literary texts were offered orally, and they link the earth-surface people with the plants and animals, the rivers and rocks, and all things believed significant in the life of America’s first people. The texts tie Indian people to the earth and its life through a spiritual kinship with the living and dead relatives of Native Americans. Coyote, raven, fox, hawk, bear, snake, turtle, rabbit and other animal characters in the stories are considered by many Native Americans to be their relatives. In the same way, the Plant People are related to Indian people. Oak, maple, pine, cedar, fir, corn, squash, berries and roots are viewed as relatives. The Animal People and Plant People participated in a history before and after the arrival of humans, and this history was kept through the spoken word. There was a similar relationship with the geographical features of the earth.

For many Native Americans the turn of the century marked their dispossession of ancestral lands, the nadir of the populations, and confinement to reservations. Fearful that their oral traditions would disappear forever as the tribal communities became more and more fragmented under the demoralizing conditions of reservation life, some Native Americans began to write down the legends and folktales of their tribes, as well as their own personal narratives, in an effort to preserve their history and culture for posterity. Writing became, for
Native Americans, a means to perpetuate tradition in the face of cultural disintegration.

Some scholars believe that Native American literature did not exist before N. Scott Momaday’s publication, *House Made of Dawn* in 1968. The text won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Although authors of American Indian descent had published novels and short fiction before Momaday was even born, they hardly received a substantial critical response to their works.

*House Made of Dawn* triggered off a host of publications by Native American authors. The corpus of texts by Native Americans has since been expanding in two directions. Not only authors are constantly adding new texts, but other, earlier texts are also being republished and published for the first time. The acclaim Momaday received helped Native American literature attain wide public attention. Since the late 1960s hundreds of works by and about Native Americans have been published, and the period from the late 1960s to the present has been referred to as the “Native American Literary Renaissance” as critic Kenneth Lincoln points out.

The Native American Renaissance was a term originally coined by critic Kenneth Lincoln in his book of the same title. Lincoln’s goal was to explore the explosion in production of literary works by Native Americans in the decade and a half since N. Scott Momaday had won the Pulitzer Prize in 1968 for *House Made of Dawn*. Before that time, few Native Americans had published fiction. Writers such as William Apess, Pauline Johnson, John
Rollin Ridge and Simon Pokagon in the nineteenth century, and Mourning Dove, John Milton Oskison, John Joseph Mathews, Zitkala-Sa, Charles Eastman and D’Arcy McNickle in the years before WWII but had not inspired much other Natives to follow in their footprints.

Lincoln pointed out that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a generation of Native Americans were coming of age who were the first of their tribe to receive a substantial English language education, particularly outside of standard Indian boarding schools and in universities. Conditions for Native people, while still very difficult, had moved beyond the survival conditions of the early half of the century. Moreover, the beginnings of a project of historical revisionism, which attempted to document from a Native perspective - the history of invasion and colonization of the North American continent had inspired a great deal of public interest in Native cultures.

During this time of change, a group of Native writers emerged, both poets and novelists, who in only a few years expanded the Native American literary canon hugely. At the same time, the sudden increase in materials, and the setting up of Native American Studies Departments at several universities lead to the foundations of scholarly journals such as *SAIL* (Studies in American Indian Literatures) and *Wicazo Sa Review*, and publishing imprints such as the Native American Publishing Programme, all of which further increased the interest in and chances to be published of new Native American voices.
Popular Writers generally considered within this movement ‘Native American Renaissance’ include: N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Gerald Vizenor, Leslie Mormon Silko, Simon J. Ortiz, nila northSun, Louise Erdrich, Joy Harjo, Duane Niatum and Paula Gunn Allen.


Gerald Robert Vizenor (born 1934) is a Native American (Anishinaabe) writer, and an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, White Earth Reservation. One of the most prolific Native American writers, with over 30 books to his name. Vizenor also taught for many years at the University of California, Berkeley, where he was Director of Native American Studies. Vizenor is currently Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley, and Professor of American Studies at the University of New Mexico.

Leslie Marmon Silko (born on March 5, 1948) is a Native American writer of the Laguna Pueblo tribe, and one of the key figures in the second wave of what Kenneth Lincoln has called the Native American Renaissance. She received the MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Grant in 1981. Major works

Simon J. Ortiz (born on May 27, 1941 in Albuquerque, New Mexico) is another Native American writer of the Acoma Pueblo tribe, and one of the key figures in the second wave of what has been called the Native American Renaissance. He is one of the most respected and widely read Native American poets.

nila northSun is also a Native American poet and tribal historian, one of the best-known figures in the Native American Renaissance. Her gritty, realistic poems about life both on and off the reservation have made her one of the most widely read of all Native American poets.

Karen Louise Erdrich, known as Louise Erdrich, (born June 7, 1954) is an author of novels, poetry, and children’s books with some Native American ancestry. She is widely acclaimed as one of the most significant writers of the second wave of the Native American Renaissance. In April 2009, her novel *The Plague of Doves* was named a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction.

Joy Harjo (born Tulsa, Oklahoma, May 9, 1951) is a poet, musician, and author of Native American Canadian ancestry. Known primarily as a poet, Harjo has also taught at the college level, played alto saxophone with a band called Poetic Justice, edited literary journals, and written screenplays. She is a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma and is of Cherokee descent.
Duane Niatum (born 1938) is a poet, author and playwright. After his parent’s divorce, his Klallam grandfather became his surrogate father. After serving in the Navy, he graduated from the University of Washington, Johns Hopkins University with a M.A., and the University of Michigan with a Ph.D. in 1997. He was editor of the Native American Authors Program, Harper & Row Publishers.

Paula Gunn Allen (October 24, 1939 - May 29, 2008) was a Native American poet, literary critic, lesbian activist and novelist. Born Paula Marie Francis in Albuquerque, Allen grew up in Cubero, New Mexico. Of mixed Laguna, Sioux, Scottish, and Lebanese-American descent, Allen always identified most closely with the people among whom she spent her childhood and upbringing. Having obtained a BA and MFA from the University of Oregon, Allen gained her PhD at the University of New Mexico, where she taught and where she began her research into various tribal religions.

Though, the phrase ‘Native American Renaissance’ has been criticized on number of occasions, it remained important to understand Native American literary history and studies. James Ruppert states, “scholars hesitate to use this phrase because it might imply that native writers were not producing significant work before that time, or that seems writers sprang up without longstanding community and tribal roots. Indeed, if this was rebirth, what was the original birth?” (“Fiction: 1968 to the Present” 173)
Of Kiowa descent, Momaday is widely recognized as one of the most successful contemporary Native American literary figures. Considered a major influence by numerous Native writers, he has garnered critical acclaim for his focus on Kiowa traditions, customs, and beliefs, and the role of ‘Amerindians’ in contemporary society. Although highly regarded for the novel *House Made of Dawn* (1968), winner of the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, Momaday considers himself primarily a poet and notes that his writings are greatly influenced by the oral tradition and are concerned with the nature and origins of Native American myths.

Born in Lawton, Oklahoma, during the Great Depression to Alfred and Natachee Scott, Momaday is of Kiowa, white, and Cherokee ancestry. His father was a Kiowa artist and educator whose work has often been featured in Momaday’s books. Although primarily of white descent, Momaday’s mother, who was also an educator, strongly identified with her Cherokee roots—even dressing in Native clothes and adopting the name “Little Moon.” Her advocacy of self-imagining as a means of achieving Native identity is considered a basic foundation of Momaday’s writings. During his early years, Momaday moved about the American Southwest with his parents, who eventually settled on the Jemez Pueblo reservation in New Mexico. He attended a military school in Virginia, the University of New Mexico, and Stanford University, where he worked under the guidance of American critic and poet Yvor Winters, who strongly influenced his early poetry. Momaday published his first poem,
“Earth and I Give You Turquoise,” in 1959. A member of the Gourd Dance Society and an accomplished artist, Momaday has taught at numerous schools, including Stanford, the University of Arizona-Tucson, and the University of California, Berkeley where he was instrumental in instituting a Native American literature programmes.

N. Scott Momaday almost inevitably became a spokesman for American Indian literary concerns. Repeatedly and emphatically in essays, interviews, and addresses, Momaday has held that what distinguishes American Indian from Euro-American moral and spiritual vision is a deep-rooted identity with, and sense of responsibility to the natural environment.

Momaday’s first major publication, *The Journey of Tai-me* (1967), is a nonfiction account of Kiowa folktales and myths, particularly those concerning the tai-me, a medicine bundle or doll used in the Kiowa sun dance. Thematically, much of the volume is also included in the autobiographical work *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969), which has occasionally been classified as both a novel and a nonfiction work detailing Kiowa history and legends. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* spans several hundred years of Kiowa history, relating and at times reimagining the tribe’s customs, sacred myths, settlement on the Great Plains, and “Golden Age” prior to the encroachment of white settlers onto their lands in the 1800s. However, rather than merely focusing on the past as he did in *The Journey of Tai-me*, Momaday employs several voices and combines ethnography with personal reminiscences to
depict his family’s participation in Kiowa traditions and rituals. The book ends with Momaday visiting his grandmother’s grave at Rainy Mountain, a place sacred to the Kiowa people. The 1976 autobiography, *The Names*, similarly incorporates family and tribal history. Focusing on Momaday’s early years, the volume details the importance of naming and self-identity as well as Momaday’s evolving understanding of language, imagination, and the creative process. Aspects of *The Journey of Tai-me* and *The Way to Rainy Mountain* are additionally present in *House Made of Dawn*. Momaday’s best known work, *House Made of Dawn* concerns Abel, a young Jemez Pueblo searching for a sense of identity in white and tribal society. Following Abel’s return to his reservation after serving in World War II, the novel relates the events leading up to his incarceration in prison for murder. His subsequent release and attempt to become integrated into white society in Los Angeles and his relationship with various whites and Native Americans forms the major part of the novel. Incorporating a circular structure, Native storytelling techniques, and biblical allusions, the novel emphasizes historical attempts to convert Native Americans to Christianity as well as the alienating effects of assimilation. *House Made of Dawn* is also known for its fragmented, stream-of-consciousness narrative style, its inclusion of multiple voices, and its use of flashbacks, all of which have earned Momaday favorable comparison with American novelist William Faulkner. Momaday’s second novel, *The Ancient Child* (1989), on the similar concerns a Kiowa man alienated from his heritage.
Occasionally classified as a post-Symbolist, Momaday is additionally known for the verse collections *Angle of Geese, and Other Poems* (1974) and *The Gourd Dancer* (1976). Oral traditions and Kiowa customs are central to these volumes, which feature prose poems, syllabic verse, and Native chants, and often focus on philosophical issues regarding nature, identity, death, knowledge, and current events. *In the Presence of the Sun: Stories and Poems, 1961-1991* (1992) contains short stories and, among other poems, a sequence concerning the legendary outlaw Billy the Kid, a prominent figure in all most all Momaday’s artworks and in his *The Ancient Child* (1989). Acknowledging his focus on Kiowa history and culture in his writings, Momaday has asserted:

> I think that my work proceeds from the American Indian oral tradition, and I think it sustains that tradition and carries it along. And vice versa. And my writing is also of a piece. I’ve written several books, but to me they are all part of the same story. And I like to repeat myself, if you will, from book to book, in the way that Faulkner did—in an even more obvious way, perhaps. My purpose is to carry on what was begun a long time ago; there’s no end to it that I can see. (Schubnell, *Conversations* 107)

Consistently praised for his exploration of Kiowa concerns and traditions, Momaday is a seminal figure in both mainstream American and Native literatures. His *House Made of Dawn* and *The Way to Rainy Mountain* are frequently taught in literature courses, and critics note that his works are of
relevance and importance to Natives and non-Natives alike. In particular, his early poetry is frequently hailed as among the most significant of the century.

Growing up on Indian reservations in the American Southwest, Momaday attributes many of his childhood and lifetime memories to his parents. Momaday relates it in his work The Names: A Memoir (1976) as follows: “Some of my mother’s memories have become my own. This is the real burden of the blood; this is immortality” (22). His mother’s intense love of books and English literature was a great treasure that she passed on to him. Through their shared experiences, Momaday learned to develop a mental repository for his vast collection of memories. As Momaday recalls in his book The Names: A Memoir, “Memories … qualify the imagination, to give it another formation, one that is peculiar to the self. I remember isolated, yet fragmented and confused, images—and images, shifting, enlarging, is the word, rather than moments or events—which are mine alone and which are especially vivid to me.”(61)

Momaday remembers that the first notable event in his life occurred when he was just six months old and he accompanied his parents on a journey to the Black Hills in Wyoming to see Devil’s Tower. Referred to in Kiowa as Tsoai [“Rock Tree”], Devil’s Tower became the source of Momaday’s Kiowa name, Tsoai-talee, given to him by Pohd-lohk [“Old Wolf”], a Kiowa elder. Pohd-lohk had in his possession a ledger which he had secured from the Supply Office at Fort Sill and which depicted the calendar history of the
Kiowa people from 1833. Momaday would later derive much of his knowledge about the origin of his people from that book.

Being an only child, Momaday learned at an early age to give free reign to his imagination. Momaday’s mother encouraged him to learn English as his native language, and this circumstance sometimes led the boy to experience brief periods of cultural dislocation. When he was twelve, his family moved to the Pueblo village of Jemez and Jemez offered the boy a child’s natural delight full of canyons and mountains. In Momaday’s interpretive mind, Jemez became a landscape full of mystery and life, and many of his descriptive details of those childhood days can be found in his later writings. Once referring to Jemez as having “horses in the plain and angles of geese in the sky,” Momaday later reflected on this image when writing *Angle of Geese and Other Poems* (1974).

Uncertain about his future after graduating from high school, Momaday contemplated attending West Point before deciding to enroll in the University of New Mexico in 1952. He earned a bachelor’s degree in Political Science in 1958, while distinguishing himself as a public speaker and creative writer. Taking a one year break from his studies, Momaday taught school on the Jicarilla Apache reservation before pursuing a graduate studies program in literature. By this time, he had received his first academic recognition as a talented writer when he was awarded the John Hay Whitney Fellowship in creative poetry writing and the Stanford Wilson Dissertation Fellowship at
Stanford University. While at Stanford, Momaday met Yvor Winters, who
later became a close friend and adviser. Momaday obtained his Master’s
degree in 1960 and his Ph.D. three years later. In 1965 he published his first
book, *The Complete Poems of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman*, which was
based on his doctoral dissertation. Momaday credits Winters for his decision to
analyze the writings of Tuckerman, a reclusive New England naturalist.
According to the 1971 edition of the *Penguin Companion to World Literature*,
Momaday’s thesis led to an increased awareness of Tuckerman’s poems on the
part of poets and critics alike.

Momaday joined the faculty of the University of California at Santa
Barbara in 1963 as assistant professor of English. Further literary research led
him to pursue a Guggenheim Fellow at Harvard University during the 1966-67
academic year, after which he returned to Santa Barbara to resume teaching.
Two years later, he was named professor of English at the University of
California, Berkeley, where he taught creative writing and introduced a new
curriculum centered around American Indian literature and mythology. Also
during this period, Momaday published his influential novel *House Made of
Dawn* (1968). In an analysis of *House Made of Dawn* published in the June 9,
mysteries of culture different from our own cannot be explained in a short
novel,” nevertheless Momaday’s book is “as subtly wrought as a piece of
Navajo silverware.”
In subsequent years, Momaday’s reputation has ascended to the international level. In 1979 he was awarded Italy’s highest literary award, the Premio Letterario Internationale “Mondello”. Moreover, in 1990 Momaday was selected to be a keynote speaker in Moscow before the Conference on Environment and Human Survival, the Global Forum and the Supreme Soviet. That same year, he was asked to be a member of the Pulitzer Prize Jury in Fiction. The father of four daughters, Momaday continues to write and teaches classes on oral tradition at the University of Arizona.

In 1992, Momaday published *In the Presence of the Sun: Stories and Poems, 1961-1991*. This book includes 70 poems and 16 new stories about the “great tribal shields of the Kiowas and a strange, arresting section on Billy the Kid,” according to The New York Times Book Review’s Barbara Bode. Bode further says that “the reader will not find here the ‘political’ Indian, the Indian as ‘victim’ or the romanticized Indian. Rather, we hear the voices of people like Otters Going On and the woman Roan Calf, of people raided and killed, worshipped and wept. Yet the images, the voices, the people are shadowy, elusive, burning with invention, like flames against a dark sky.”

The following year saw the publication of *Circle of Wonder* (1994). This is a poetic story that “skillfully blends Christian and Native American traditions,” according to Publishers Weekly. The book also effectively features Momaday’s artwork.
The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, Passages (1997), whether Momaday is discussing language, the oral tradition, or the land, he imbues his subjects with a Native American perspective. His interest in Native American sacred places extends to similar settings in Russia, Bavaria, and Spain. Critics admire not only the range of Momaday’s subject matter but also his candor about his development as a writer. In the Bear’s House (1999), this mixed-media collection combines paintings, a dialogue, poems, and prose pieces on the subject of the bear, an animal of cosmic significance to the Kiowas. The author also publishes Circle of Wonder: A Native American Christmas Story (1994), a recollection of his reservation childhood.


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