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Oral Storytelling Techniques and Traditions: keys to memorization and preservation of cultural identity.

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In the Beginning

The night's ceremonies have concluded, and most guests have had their fill of frybread and Buffalo stew. Most of the kids are more excited about the smores anyway, as the camping firepit is prepped and lit. The older kids and adolescents direct the younger children to grab skewers and marshmallows from the counter, then graham crackers from the cupboard, and finally, chocolate bars from the freezer. They run outside to find the elders sitting around the campfire, smiling as the stampede of youth comes rushing to cook their marshmallows. The fire crackles as the marshmallows are roasting, and a voice captures everyone's attention and begins to tell a tale that has survived generations.

Oral storytelling techniques play a crucial role in engaging the audience and facilitating memorization. Sensory engagement in oral storytelling is a powerful tool that connects the audience to their heritage, creating a sense of continuity and belonging, while also stimulating the imagination. It provides educators with a means of facilitating learning, with a higher possibility of content reaching long-term memory. Such notions necessitate understanding how the audience receives the information, how the human brain responds to certain stimuli, and how oral storytelling techniques provide scaffolding for committing what is learned to memory. The vocal cues, the human expressions during the live performance, the sights, sounds, and even the smells are not just details; they are at the heart of oral storytelling. These techniques help audiences absorb the story's message, memorize the content, and identify culturally significant themes, including characters, places, and events. The critical advantage of oral storytelling techniques comes from the engagement of multiple senses. The experience of a traditional live oral performance in the same medium as one's ancestors can be life-changing. This thesis will prove that traditional oral storytelling techniques possess psychological and memorization

attributes that are invaluable in preserving cultural heritage and knowledge as well as educating the next generations.

The study of storytelling and its oral nature spans many disciplines and traditions. When discussing traditional oral storytelling techniques, according to graphic novel theorist Will Eisner, who defines a storyteller as the “writer or person in control of the narration” (6), the definition would be in reference to a live person sharing information, musical inspiration, or a story with an audience. Theorist Walter Benjamin offers an explanation, “storytelling is a way to transfer knowledge from the storyteller to others, a way to help people look at reality and formulate ideas and ideals” (159). The storyteller often performs with the accompaniment of musical instruments and a unique backdrop, like a starry night or a painted stage, or in some contemporary setting, pyrotechnics and specialized lighting. These interactions, an elder telling a story or a bard reciting a poem, create a bonding effect within the tribe or nation, fostering a sense of belonging and unity. Even those who cannot read can learn the same information as their counterparts, and the stories often engage the youth, who learn the cultural ways of their ancestors from a young age. When the source of the oration is known to be an accurate account of histories, family lineages, and news, it creates a level of trust within the group, tribe, or nation. In addition to this learning, many evolving oral storytelling transmission techniques, including morality-based stories for entertainment, carry these facts within the plotline.

In order to understand orality, or a fundamental difference between those who think with a literate mind, who have a background in reading texts, and those who come from a culture that features an oral storytelling tradition, I rely on Walter Ong’s article titled “Writing and the Evolution of Consciousness.” Near the top of the article, he writes, “[I]f I ask you to think of the word ‘necessary’ for two minutes, 120 seconds, without ever allowing any letter to enter your

imagination, you cannot do it. A person from a completely oral background, however, will think only of the real word, a sequence of sounds: ‘ne-ces-sa-ry.’ For the real word ‘necessary,’ the sounded word, cannot ever be present all at once, as written words deceptively seem to be. By the time I get to the ‘sa-ry,’ the ‘ne-ces’ is gone. Recalling sounded words is like recalling a bar of music, a melody,” (2). Results from the study show an interesting development in memorization, from cultures that engaged in activities that stimulated the long-term memories of their tribal members to a culture that relies on the ability to find information stored in text or database. George Macpherson, “a contributor to *Mysterious Object* who served as the traditional sennachie¹ for Clan MacPherson,” describes the process of recounting a story thus,

Quite a lot is pretty close to word for word. But I don't tell stories from memory as such. I actually see the story while I'm telling it, and it can be inside my head or it can be round me like a play, and I tell it like that. It's not from the actual words. These kind of pictures. Sometimes the pictures have words. [...] It could be like a film inside your head, and you're seeing the screen and telling what's on the screen. But that's not a very good description of it really because it's not really a screen, you just actually see it (cited in Chambers).

In short, science proves that oral storytelling traditions have a place in our 21st-century societies for their ability to reach minds of every literacy level; the stimulus from these stories promotes memorization and can become critical tools in preserving old-world cultural

¹ A sennachie, or Shennachie, is described in the article “The story of the Scots storytellers – the Shennachie, by Kenny Smith for The Scottish Field Magazine as “who is essentially the genealogist, historian, storyteller, and keeper of the memories, traditions and ceremonies of a clan or family and its Chief... At the coronation of Alexander III on Moot Hill, Scone on 13 July 1249, he was greeted by ‘a man of the Highlands’ - who would have been a Shennachie – who addressed him with the proclamation ‘Beannachd Dè Rìgh Alban’ (God’s blessing on the King of Scotland) and went on to recite the King’s genealogy” (Smith)

knowledge and teaching future generations. Another effect on the brain induced by oral storytelling is the stimulation of the imagination. “There is much meaning in hearing a language spoken and paying close attention to every aspect of it to understand it knowingly and deeply, which takes us back to communicative competence, or the ability to communicate with one’s people appropriately for the occasion. This will, of course, require one not only to hear but also to think and bring much linguistic competency into play when communicating with others, not to mention the imagination” (518). Being submerged in this cultural environment provides a special kind of learning and promotes a longer attention span and better focus. In both traditional Celtic and Lakota cultures, this was the normal everyday education and interaction, something that would be useful for today’s learning spaces.

Over 99% of human history is said to be lost, while a meager 1% has been saved by developing writing systems. According to Ong,

[The] literate world of visually processed sounds has been totally unfamiliar to most human beings, who always belonged, and often still belong to this oral world... Of all the many thousands of languages spoken in the course of human history, only about 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficing to the proper literature, and most have never been written at all. Homo sapiens has been around for at least 30,000 to 50,000 years. Only in recent centuries have human beings generally had the idea that a language could be written (2,3).

The first known writing systems are found in the regions of ancient Mesopotamia and the first kingdoms of Egypt were developed around the 3rd century BCE, in addition to Mayan

Logographic and Syllabic scripts dating as early as the 4th century BCE. The earliest known writing in archeology is a Ugaritic dialect utilizing an Abjad system with a vowel sign appearing in the 13th century BCE in what is now Türkiye (Voogt). Humans of history have been attempting to preserve knowledge by using written language for centuries, possibly to make up for all that has been forgotten and lost over the past few millennia since homo sapiens began cultivating the earth. Even as writing technologies developed, these oral traditions continued to be utilized as a means of double-checking what was being recorded and written down and, more importantly, what is committed to memory.

This case remains true in contemporary societies, as we find in many classrooms the same oral storytelling techniques featured during lectures and presentations. According to Pierce and Spencer, “Oral storytelling is good for all students, but it may be essential for students with code-related disabilities and students with limited proficiency in the mainstream academic language” and “oral storytelling as a versatile classroom-based approach for advancing diverse students' reading and writing skills, as well as facilitating their social-emotional development” (Spencer). Furthermore, “Teachers can give students opportunities to tell stories that originate from their family's culture, as many students are exposed to oral storytelling traditions at home” (Au). This thesis emphasizes the traditional oral features of two cultures, one on each side of the Atlantic Ocean, to demonstrate how powerful these techniques are in educating a nation, preserving distinct cultural identities, and giving humanity the tools to build better memorization techniques going forward. The Celts and Lakota use storytelling to preserve what is unique about their culture and the knowledge accumulated over generations.

Oral storytelling traditions are capable of spanning generations, preserving information that could have been lost as quickly—as when Alexandria's libraries burned during the time of

Ancient Rome 48 BCE (Chesser). Much of human history has been controlled in this fashion; once a conqueror gains hold of a territory, previous cultures are erased from history books. The burning of Alexandria remains a touchstone for unnecessary and terrible cultural knowledge loss. However, the oral traditions of the Griots (also referred to as Jeliw), who were also living in Northern Africa at the time of that burning, have preserved legendary tales that have been passed down for generations (Abdul-Fattah). Each story remains living, changing with each performance; the main storyline and characters remain constant, whether an instrument is added, or details are altered slightly to incorporate a contemporary audience's sensibilities. Parallel to the events happening in the Mediterranean, First Nations tribes have been conducting oral storytelling traditions for generations, spanning hundreds, even thousands of years into the past.

A Glimpse into the Oral Traditions of the Lakota tribe

The age-old traditions and stories of the Lakota tribe are still told as they were by ancestors of old and can be found in the living cultures of Tribal North America (Turtle Island) if you know where to look. This type of longevity proves the strength of oral storytelling techniques and the validity of these traditions. As Ong puts it, “the intelligence trained to expertise in an oral culture cannot be assessed by tests presented in writing or indeed by tests drawn up by literates who are unfamiliar with or even unaware of the ways in which the orally grounded intelligence works—ways which are by no means simple or unsophisticated.” (11). The knowledge and skills learned from the Lakota traditions seemingly transcend typical forms of contemporary education. However, when paired with a literary education, it creates a powerful combination of knowledge—propelling a student into a higher level of understanding that gives them an advantage in the classroom.

We find an alternative classroom where the Rocky Mountains' foothills meet the United States' Great Plains. A summer ceremony called, in English, "Sundance" by the Lakota people provides ample examples of how the Lakota's oral traditions have stood the test of time, as well as the test of genocide and racial oppression. The ceremony is designed to celebrate a new year, but also the renewal of faith and spirituality, just as important events such as this bring tribal nations together through prayer and social bonding. Members are given specific roles: For instance, the drum groups and singers are placed around the ceremonial ring; supporting tribesmen locate themselves into the view of dancers to inspire them to complete the difficult portions of the ceremony. Families have members who focus on feeding the tribe; the older adolescent children look after the younger, and medicine men and women come to share wisdom and pray. Ceremonial participants are given responsibilities, such as keeping the sacred fire going, providing firewood, or participating in the purification ceremonies with the dancers. The master of ceremonies, usually an older medicine man (or woman), reminds the dancers of the reason for their suffering, the significance of each movement, and how the youth will see them in mid-ceremony while also providing colorful and humorous commentary.

In effect, the dances provide teachings via movement and regalia, as each dancer performs a particular function during the ceremony (i.e., the dragging of the buffalo skulls to make up for the unfinished spiritual commitments of certain tribal members). A form of oral tradition can be heard as the dancers ascend to the ceremonial ring and perform the sacred steps through the ceremonial songs sung by the drum groups. In order to participate in the ceremony, the first steps require spiritual individuals to enter what is known in English as a "sweat lodge," where their body, mind, and soul are purified before entering the spirit realm. The various inipi songs sung inside this sacred space reflect generations of knowledge and hold secret information

that a medicine man (or woman), or oral storyteller can unlock for a ceremony participant. Although the majority of this thesis will be focused on the fireside stories, I begin with the ceremony because it demonstrates a relatable aspect of Lakota culture to ancient Greek Epic recitation and Celtic bardic performances.

As the various ceremonial participants, families, musicians, other tribal affiliates, and guests begin arriving, a familiar sight occurs. Tents and Tipis start filling the available campground spaces around the ceremonial circles and the sacred tree. The smell of cooking fires fills the air, along with laughter and an excitable buzz. Older tribal members work on prayer ties, regalia, or other arts and crafts. Children find one another and begin exploring, playing games, and running around, letting their imaginations run free. As night nears, dancers leave the circle to reenter the sweat lodge. At the same time, many other tribal members gather around campfires (or, in modern times, around lanterns and various other light sources) or just outside the chief's tipi. At the center of the crowd is the chief himself and, more often than not, an elder (medicine man/woman) who wields the magic of storytelling that has survived for generations. Parents and adolescent-age children have herded the younger kids to sit and listen, typically with dinner to eat from those who had been cooking all day. Meanwhile, the elders provide the night's entertainment.

On this particular evening, the storyteller selected the folktale of "The Great Race," a traditional Lakota story that has survived for generations of tribal members. In that telling, elements speak about a time when humanity was not at the top of the food chain and had to "race" against the other animal nations to establish themselves as the dominant species. At the beginning of this story, there is a debate between the various animal nations, and a contest is

designed for all attending to prove they have the determination, endurance, and stamina to make it to the finish line of a great race; the story as told by Violet Catches.²

In this section, I will first recount and then examine a particular traditional story to provide insight into the factual information that underlies the narrative of “The Great Race.” This is not a direct quoting of Catches; a recording was not created at the time of the telling. Instead, I will share this story from memory, as a way of offering due respect to the oral traditions of the Lakota nation, as I was raised in these ways, and I will also insert analysis along the way. The beginning of this folktale speaks about a time when many animals lived in a period of predator-less existence. This event allowed mammals to flourish, uninhibited by creatures that would have usually eaten them. This led to the point at which Buffalo, who thought themselves the most dominant life form on the Great Plains, developed a taste for humans. This, of course, was deemed unacceptable by the two-legged race. This brought about a large gathering of animal nations, at which humanity argued for its place as the dominant form of life. After much debate, Buffalo suggested a great race be offered for any and all to compete in to decide once and for all who was atop the food chain. The Oyate (humanity) agreed, but soon, many other animals wanted a chance to prove that they were the most powerful nation. The rules were set: the four-leggeds would be on one team while the two-leggeds would race for humanity. The leaders of the Oyate proposed that the winged ones would race on behalf of the two-leggeds as there were vastly more four-leggeds than they. Buffalo agreed, and the contest was set. Starting at the Gap

² There have been a few times that Violet Catches has told this story. This particular instance was during a ceremony that took place in my youth at the end of the summer season in Colorado. This story was told to me as an older adolescent and a number of other children who had traveled to our mountain home with their parents. I offer a summarization, for the exact version of this telling was not recorded or written down. The key elements are present, but the Lakota words have been removed to give an English transcription for the audience of this paper to read. The academic purpose of this recounted story is to show how information is stored within these traditional oral storylines, to preserve the knowledge, and to provide an entertaining aspect that engages the audience’s imagination for more effective memorization.

near the Black Hills, many animals lined up, ready to prove their dominance. Before the race, many had decided to change their appearances, as all animal life had been of the same color (a possible reference to evolution). Man painted symbols upon their champion's chest, arms, and legs to give them the strength to challenge the legendary endurance of the Buffalo Nation. Quick as a flash, Buffalo took the lead and stayed out in front. In their dust, Elk and Deer soon stopped; their antlers were too much for such an endurance race. Many of the smaller birds quickly tired and dropped out.

Readers of this thesis will note that this early part of the race reveals the advantages and disadvantages of certain evolutionary developments. For instance, Elk bulls have large racks of antlers to defend themselves along with their harem from other bulls and predators looking to make a meal of them. These antlers are heavy, even with the massive muscles in their necks, making running for long distances difficult. Each winter, the large antlers are shed because if they were allowed to grow all year long, those antlers would become a hindrance to the animal. Another example is the small birds; their evolutionary track gave them incredible quickness to avoid danger and little bodies to make them more challenging to hit. However, endurance was not a part of the package, so they left the race with other priorities.

Returning to the tale as told by Violet Catches, Wolf easily kept pace with Buffalo, while Eagle and Hawk soared above them, keeping an eye on the events unveiling below them from the heights they flew. Humanity's champion paced themselves, keeping with a few strides of Buffalo and out of the dust trailing them. Surprisingly, Magpie kept pace, yet the sun was hot. Being the cunning and lazy bird that they are, the dark feathered bird decided to land on Buffalo to rest and get out of the sun before the midway point of the race. Here, listeners learn the endurance of the wolf, whose pack is known to wear out its prey by running it into the ground

and finishing it off when exhausted. Eagles and hawks use air currents to stay in the air, minimizing energy expenditure and keeping altitude to sore high in the air to avoid injury threats from smaller birds' flocks or from being eaten by predators on the ground. Magpie is a teammate of humanity and easily flies under the radar because of its camouflage feathers. Known as camp robbers, these birds are sneaky and opportunistic, always seeking a chance to snag a leisurely meal with little effort.

Halfway through the race, nearly all the competitors had dropped out. Wolf became hungry and decided to go off and hunt, no longer interested in winning the race. To quote the storyteller, "things were as they were." Similarly, Eagle and Hawk decided to go fishing, having reached a point of hunger they could no longer bear, and flew over to the nearest body of water. Only Buffalo and Humanity's champion remained at the last stretch of the race. Buffalo was unphased by the distance they had run, with no sign of slowing. Human's champion was beginning to feel the wear of the race; the heat was beating down on them; they had dodged various predators looking for a quick meal. Having survived this far, there was still that piece of knowledge that drove them forward: knowing that losing would lead to generations of suffering at the hand of being food for the Buffalo; therefore, the champion of the people knew victory was the only option for their nation, the champion summoned all their remaining strength and fought to keep up. Here, the audience is given insight into the nature of animal behavior as they start down the final stretch. Many of the endurance-capable animal life is still in the race, except for some natural hindrances that cause the predators, Eagle, Hawk, and Wolf to drop out. Without sustenance from eating other animals, they lose focus on anything but hunting and pour all their effort and energy into finding their next meal. At the last part of the competition, there are only two competitors left: the massive buffalo, whose physical prowess and sheer numbers

(herds numbered in the millions prior to colonial expansion westward) are unmatched on the Great Plains, and humanity's champion, who has developed language skills to coordinate actions along with powerful cognition abilities that pair nicely with capable upright bodies and hands that feature opposable thumbs.

Nearing the end of the race, the finish line within sight, Buffalo put on a burst of speed. Jeering the Human champion as they ran, knowing full well that the two-legged had run their race and would not have the stamina to overtake them. The sudden movement of Buffalo's massive head shook Magpie awake, who had been resting since the race's midway point. With a sudden quickness, Magpie took to the air and, getting a sense of the situation, dived with all the speed they could muster and crossed the finish line a mere second before Buffalo (Catches). Closing in on the end of the evolutionary race, listeners are given an understanding that sheer physical dominance has gotten the Buffalo nation this far. However, humanity had a trick up its sleeve: the story shows how our brains, which gave us language to speak with one another, minds that can observe and share lessons learned from nature, and the ability to coordinate with other animals through various forms of domestication and partnership make the human species dominant. *Intelligence* is the dominant trait; plain physical prowess is no longer sufficient at this point of evolution; the edge goes to the human omnivore. At this point, the storyteller explains that the two-leggeds were placed at the top of the food chain. Buffalo dedicated themselves to the Oyate, an honorable gesture befitting the mighty Buffalo nation. They begin by offering their bodies as a means of survival: their meat for sustenance, their hides for clothing and shelter, and their bones and organs for tools and weapons. A symbiotic relationship is formed between the two nations, and to this day, many give thanks to Magpie for helping them win the great race.

As readers rather than listeners, we might notice that there are hints of a geologic and biological history of the Turtle Island (North American) continent from this recounting. When the storyteller speaks about the animals all having the same color, and how none of the animals ate each other, this could be interpreted as an evolutionary understanding that we all came from a common ancestor and that after the extinction event that occurred in the Yucatan peninsula, there was a sudden loss of predatory animals. As many scientists suggest, this allowed mammalian life to thrive, and to evolve uninhibited by the massive predatory animals and dinosaurs that had dominated the land for millennia. To continue along with this closer *reading* (as opposed to *listening* to) of the text, we find another instance that refers to an evolutionary race. When the animals begin to change their appearance, one could extrapolate the idea that during this explosive advancement in evolutionary change, which led to a diversification of animal life that began to look different than one another. However, an inevitable element for life on Earth is the requirement to compete for food and space; in this case, the stage was the new dinosaur-free environment. As the character representing physical prowess and dominance, similar traits to the dinosaurs and giant mammals of the ice age, Buffalo is suggested to have begun to develop a taste for the other animals. Yet it was humanity that had something to say about that. As an allegory, the race can be seen as humankind battling to assert dominance over the animal kingdom and ascend to the top of the food chain. Still, the race was won by more than sheer physical ability or intelligence; it was won with the addition of interpersonal cooperation, language development, and teamwork tactics.

The magpie is to be considered a metaphor for cunning, and with that sly ability, the scavenger bird outsmarted Buffalo's physical prowess. In landing on Buffalo, the Magpie used the Buffalo's dominance as a means to win the race; in other words, the crafty bird used that

physical ability to the advantage of the two-leggeds, possibly a reference to cooperation paired with intelligence as being the most dominant traits on planet Earth. Many natural examples include feeder fish following larger marine animals around to feed off scraps uneaten by the physically larger animal or scavenger birds following land predators around to snatch pieces of food from their kills. The information presented in the storyline, and properly analyzed, aligns nicely with a modern scientific understanding of current animal behavior and historical events leading up to the current era.

In his article “Literacy and Orality in Our Times,” Ong states, “I shall treat orality and literacy in two ways, first examining the ubiquitous and persistent problem of moving from oral expression to writing and then briefly considering some special approaches we might take in teaching writing today because of the new, secondary orality that surrounds us on radio, (the internet) and television.” (2). Within specific examples, we can understand that orally transmitted storytelling techniques have evolved to incorporate technology but continue to function similarly to those of ancient cultural traditions. Similar to how oral storytelling traditions continued to be useful as written language developed, these techniques remain a fixture in the same role as a cross-checking source, a teaching tool, and proven practice “(that) it will not end anywhere (or anytime soon) is certain” (Blaeser). The inclusion of this traditional story, “The Great Race,” within this written thesis transforms the story into something different from the oral transmission that unfolds the plotline in time and then disappears, like Ong’s reference to the word ‘necessary’ to a form in which many modern literate cultures can appreciate. In the Indigenous cultures of the United States, including the Lakota, Palmer points out that “in the modern American Indian powwow scene, where the master of ceremonies, in order to rally the lively participatory engagement of spectators, makes not only remarks about the current events

of the day but also direct statements to relatives and friends about their personal behaviors. These antics are not meant to humiliate people but are effective and comical ways to entertain and hold the attention of the listeners” (3). An echo of the oral traditions of the tribe, even as technology advances, many continue to adhere to the storytelling techniques of their ancestors, and the education from these cultural ways is still effective even in the 21st century.

Today, nearing 2025, we see this kind of secondary oral tradition in radio broadcasts via traditional radio stations, satellite, and streamed internet sources. Audiobooks fill our computers, iPods, phones, and tablets. Podcasts speak on the histories of the world, preserving cultural knowledge while also providing commentaries on contemporary subjects. As Ong words it, “The world of secondary orality is a media-conscious world. In fact, this is the world which effectively brought about the discovery of the contrast between... both (orality and literacy) and secondary orality.” (7). Even so, many traditional ancient oral storytelling techniques are still practiced today. Most of these examples can be found in the United States classrooms at all levels, but now, with the updates in technology, some younger and more technologically savvy tribal members have gone ahead and recorded their elder storytellers telling a traditional folktale and posted the video content on social media, incorporating the valuable elements of traditional techniques with today’s developing technology. A characteristic feature in the story of “The Great Race” is humanity's ability to learn and adapt by means of our cognitive capabilities.

First Nations Moral Storytelling

In this section, for the purposes of this thesis, I will retell another story to analyze a more recent Lakota storytelling found in the “Dakota Texts” transcribed by Ella Deloria on page 20. Through this example, I will show how oral storytelling traditions teach real-world lessons

through the storyteller's voice, the personification of animal characters, and the echoes of tribal ancestors who dedicated these stories to memory. In Blaeser's article, "Writing Voices Speaking: Native Authors and an Oral Aesthetic," it is stated that "Oral traditions are the expression of a tribe's sovereignty in matters of culture and beliefs, encapsulating the totality of its understanding of life and living. The expression of our understanding of life is in the conception of our (stories)." Indigenous First Nations storytellers, especially within the Lakota tribal traditions, use folktales and myths to preserve memories. Many of the stories utilize the storytelling element of personifying animals as a means to teach lessons learned through time and events that shaped tribal culture. Great Plains tribes use similar elements, personifying animals with human-like traits, such as the honorable Buffalo Nation, the majestic Eagle, the trickster's Coyote, and Iktomi. All of these characters are found in traditional stories told by the Lakota. According to Violet Catches, these various animal characters were not invented but created by observing the same animal life in its natural habitat. Spiders lure their food to the web, Coyotes steal food from Bears who have lumbered off somewhere, Eagles and Hawks fly overhead surveying the land, and Buffalo stands proud amid a blizzard. The Lakota storytellers apply these natural characteristics to situations that teach morality to children, educate audiences about their fellow earthly animal life, and survival knowledge from generations. In doing so, there is an entertaining aspect in which the audience memorizes the story's content and the science behind animal behavior.

Enter Iktomi, the spider trickster. Many tribal elders and storytellers alike tell the story of this witty trickster who decides to use their cunning and unique abilities to take advantage of the other animals. In this particular story, Iktomi devises a plan to trap a group of pheasants using a fake ceremony. The story begins with Ikto slinging a bundle upon his back, and with it, he

successfully catches the bird's attention by walking by slowly and singing to himself. Curiosity wins, and the pheasants engage Iktomi in conversation; they must know what is in the bundle. To which the crafty spider begins to weave his web of lies and convinces them he has a powerful new ceremony and is practicing his song, but it is a secret. Overwhelmed with a desire to know, the pheasants implore Ikto to allow them to hear the music and participate in the ceremony. He pretends to bend to their will but informs them that it must be done in private, underground, preferably where no unwanted eyes can see. The pheasants agree and find a suitable cave-like structure with enough room to perform the ceremony. They are told to close their eyes; if they open them, the spirits will be displeased, and Iktomi shows them how to dance in a circle just so, to which the spider plays a made-up tune, and as the birds move about, Iktomi strikes them over the head, killing them for his supper. After a few moments, the pheasants become privy to what is happening and flee the cave, taking to the skies. Ikto, satisfied with the success of his wicked plan, takes his prize and finds a place to bury and cook the meat, only to become hampered by a pair of trees that trap him by the wrist. He becomes trapped after attempting to silence the screeching noise produced by the pair of trees rubbing together. Wolf comes by, and Ikto arrogantly tries to tell him off, only to reveal the location of the freshly cooked bird meat and allow Wolf to eat his fill.

This children's story brings up daily situations these young people will face in the real world. For example, when Ikto takes advantage of the Pheasants' curiosity, innocence, and willingness to participate in ceremonies, which could be used today as an allegory for when a swindler takes advantage of an innocent victim or tricks a child. There are many instances in which the pheasants could have used a critical perspective, remembering the fact that they were speaking to the trickster Iktomi, and if they had asked the right questions about the song or why

they needed to have their eyes closed, they might have escaped from the trap set by the cunning spider. The situation within the context of the story offers the chance for the storyteller to teach children to ask questions and about ethos, concepts such as making sure the person being spoken to is who they say they are, and to be knowledgeable about circumstances such as these in order to, either avoid or know how to handle the situation.

Furthermore, the story shows an instance in which the consequences of one's actions can have dramatic results. In the story, Iktomi is punished for his slights against his fellow earthly animals and for abusing the sacred ways of the Lakota for personal gain when Wolf comes and eats the spider's prized pheasant feast. The first mistake is when Ikto gets annoyed at the loud squeaking noise produced by a pair of trees; out of sheer arrogance, he ascends one tree only to get trapped when attempting to hold them apart. The second mistake made by the spider was when pinned up in the trees; if Ikto had said nothing to Wolf, he might have just walked right by and left his cooking pits alone. The fool spider then makes the mistake of telling the wolf about the buried bird's cooking. Thus, the story teaches the children that it is not good to cheat people because, in the end, that kind of energy comes back around (similar to Karma from Buddhist belief systems). It teaches you to be thoughtful, think before speaking, and not be arrogant when interacting with the world around you, along with the pheasant's susceptibility, the wolf's ways of being, and why Spiders use webs to stay up high to avoid their food from being stolen.

In Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota stories, each would have characters, like the trickster Iktomi, doing awful things and seemingly getting away with it. Yet, the tricksters always end up getting into trouble in some way that would teach the young listeners topics such as why one should not steal, lie, or act like the foolish spider. Animal figures are helpful when telling stories about creation, humanity ascending the food chain, or learning about constellations in the night

sky. Many constants contained within Indigenous canon include characters like Coyote (a trickster), the honorable Buffalo, Grandfather Stone, and other animals that represent their wild forms observed in nature (i.e., the hibernating bear, the grumpy badger, or the regal horse). Palmer explains, “Human speech is so dynamic and powerful among human groups that most of the known oral literature produced among speakers in the communities was committed to memory and handed down through the generations by word of mouth... For this reason they share much with ancient Greek epic poetry, also created without the aid of writing” (8). Homeric epics are known for being hymns or sung stories, preserving the cultural knowledge of the ancient Greeks, as the Great Plains tribe's traditions continue to do.

Orality in Mediterranean culture: The Classical period Epic

Up to this point, I have offered an examination of the storytelling tradition taught to me during a first-hand experience as a member of the Lakota Nation. Now, I would like to turn to the oral tradition most readers and scholars will be familiar with in an academic setting. Another form of poem and narrative, epics, which were customarily performed as songs in Ancient Greece, had the added auditory element of musical instrumentation along with singing of the words to help engage young and old audiences, all while depicting scenes that create images of bravery, courage, and many other positive traits in a more fantastic context (Vansina p451). Epics from developing civilizations around the banks of the Mediterranean Sea have become most notably associated in the world of literature with Greece, and a Storyteller (or more likely a group similar to a “bardic circle,” which I will discuss in the next section) named Homer is considered the most well-known. Homer’s epics contain references to fantastic creatures, such as the Cyclops from the *Odyssey* and demi-god heroes like Achilles in the *Iliad*. These

mythological characters fought during the battle of Troy, and those characters who taught morality through their actions, such as that one's choices in life have consequences (i.e., Paris of Troy wooing and taking Helen of Sparta away from Greece and across the Aegean caused a war). Like the Lakota stories I have discussed, the tales engage the audience and teach morals through their musicality; unlike most Native American folktales, however, they have been written. Nevertheless, societal traces of this oral tradition remain. Ong argues:

The mind trained in an oral culture can operate with exquisite skill in this world of sounds, events, evanescent. Basically, it uses formulaic structures and procedures to complement and counteract the evanescence: proverbs and other fixed sayings, epithets, that is, standard, expected qualifiers (the *sturdy* oak, the *brave* warrior, *wise* Nestor, *clever* Odysseus), numerical sets (the three Graces, the seven deadly sins, the five senses, and so on), balance, rhythms of all sorts—anything to give fixity and stability to Homer's 'winged words.' ” (4).

Ong refers to the different sensical stimuli that the words of these classical epics evoke because of the added details, the singing of the verses, and the additional verbiage when depicting characters, places, and other such nouns. These storytelling archetypes are formulated to flow in song, similar to a contemporary opera or musical, which can be felt, heard, and seen. When performed with knowledge and skill, the result is an incredible reaction in the brain, activating many of the centers in the brain that release various brainwaves and then leads to effective memorization of the content being performed.

Homer “wrote” two epics in eighth-century Greece that helped influence the creation of the ancient Greek civilizations, including Athens and Sparta, and what is considered the classical period of literature (Williams). These two epics are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which cover various historical events involving Demi-Gods, Heroes, Kings of old, Gods of Olympus, and different fantastic creatures to preserve what ancient Greece found necessary for outside cultures to understand its unique Mediterranean ideals and morality, but also the distinct ways of living. Ong puts it eloquently when he states in the article, “Literacy and Orality in Our Times,” that “(as) in Homeric epic and to a great extent in classical oratory, particularly of the more orotund variety, this orality operates with the sort of commonplace, formulaic expressions, and clichés ordinarily despised by fully literate folk, for, without writing, and oral culture must maintain its knowledge by repeating it” (3). Before the written forms developed by the classical Greek culture, epics were sung, and performers had to use repetitive means to remember the prose well enough to sing it to an audience. Homer used the rich mythologies of Greece and put them to song to keep these figures alive in the minds of the Greek people. MacKay states, “In such a mentality, epic is traditional because it has to remember, evoke, a past that is different from the audience's present-day world.” Typically, the storyteller or performer was accompanied by a musician who played in tandem, or the singer would play if no such musicians were available. This situation suggests a similarity across all three oral cultures referenced in this paper, in which the situation of the telling is as important to the story as the words used by the storyteller or bard.

However, “the very notion of ‘oral tradition’ is likely to be a literate construct already, and the chances of Homer (or whoever acts under that name) calling himself an ‘oral poet’ are

just as slim as Empedocles³ calling himself a pre-socratic philosopher” (MacKay). Ancient Greeks were aware of this need to memorize cultural history; it was embedded in the mythology. MacKay continues, “this memory, as substitute for writing, ... made the Greeks think that the Muses, the goddesses of poetry, are the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (Memory)? It has been thought that ‘remembering’ is a synonym for singing the oral epic song... (such as) in the recurrent closing formula in the Homeric Hymns: But I shall remember you as well as the rest of the song” (MacKay). Here, I wish to provide an example from the article “Greek Mythology and the Study of the Ancient Greek Oral Story” of how oral stories are embedded in the memories of those who grew up in a culture that utilized this form of storytelling.

It follows a former Harvard professor, Cedric Whitman, who recounts a story about an old sailor for whom he shared a ride on a train to New York; the conversation went thus,

He was reading a comic book and I was reading *Paradise Lost*. Presently, he began to read over my shoulder, then nudged me and asked: ‘Hey, you like dat stuff?’ I said I did, and a conversation began. I asked how long he had been in the Navy, and he said something like twenty-five years. I remarked that he must have liked it to have stayed in it so long. His answer was: ‘Look, when I get out of dis Navy, I’m gonna put an oar on my shoulder and walk inland; and when somebody says, “Where’d’ya find a shovel like dat?” dat’s where I’m gonna build my house.’ He made no mention of a sacrifice to Poseidon... I didn’t ask him if he’d read the *Odyssey*, ... He seemed pretty illiterate-perhaps a bard? (cited in Hansen 101).

³ Empedocles of Acragas (Sicily) from the 5th century BC is best known for formulating ‘a philosophical program in hexameter verse that pioneered the influential for-part theory of roots (air, water, earth, and fire) along with two active principles of Love and Strife,’ (Kingsley).

The professor was thinking about a passage in Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus is told that after he reaches Ithaka, he must walk inland with an oar upon his shoulder until he comes up with a man who mistakes it for a winnowing shovel. It would be there where the hero of the epic would be tasked to plant the oar in the ground and make his peace with Poseidon, that is, with the oceans and sea. Hansen notes, "The conversation of the classics professor and the sailor illustrates the impressive fact that many motifs and stories known from modern oral tradition were already in oral circulation in ancient Greece" (101). This example suggest that the power of oral storytelling traditional techniques are not limited to any one culture and that many of our storytelling motifs are much older than any form of writing systems that we might use to record them.

Each form of oral telling is used to teach different pieces of information deemed necessary enough to preserve and remember for future generations. The precarious nature of remembering and passing on correct versions of these tales led to the formation of written language. The overwhelming issue these traditions were created for was to battle the forgetting of past lessons learned, mistakes, triumphs, and successful survival tactics. Preserving knowledge has been a driving force that has led to cave drawings and written language. However, it is through these oral traditions that many ways of life have survived; even as written accounts burned, oral accounts lived on. This is an invaluable asset of orality; as long as people are willing to dedicate themselves to knowing the word and passing on the morals of their culture, the knowledge will live on. Walls crumble, stone withers, paper burns and degrades, but these traditions offer a means for preservation to be in human hands and memory banks.

Oral storytelling is at the core of Western tradition in the United States, as is the case with the Lakota nation. Many academics often trace the roots of civilization to the ancient

Greeks and through the records of historians from the classical period. This section demonstrates that the epics that tell Greece's founding mythologies and legends are traditionally oral and share features similar to First Nations traditional stories. In the final section, I will discuss one more traditional oral storytelling culture that will provide insight into the value of the memorization techniques developed.

Celtic Oral Storytelling Traditions

Prior to the expansion of the Roman Empire, much of Central, Northern, and Western Europe was inhabited by Celtic Cultures as Germanic tribes occupied the eastern and Slavic regions. Slowly but inexorably, the might of the Romans pushed the Celts north onto what is called the British Isles today. These indigenous tribes of Europe have a rich mythology filled with stories that stretch back to the times of Doggerland.⁴ In those Celtic societies of the northern reaches of Europe, mainly those of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, the Bards were considered the keepers of tradition. The bardic traditions played an important role then, and with the revival in Celtic practices, now. In their article, Dana Driscoll writes a simple definition of the druid tradition and starts by saying,

“(there is) an emphasizes that engaging in the bardic arts as a *process*, that is, the goal of the bardic arts is to cultivate spiritual development with the end product being secondary” (58). The intent is to inspire and effectively educate the children and the attending audience members.

There is a dynamic between storytellers and listeners, one of shared responsibilities in the circle

⁴ Doggerland, according to BJ Coles' published work for the Cambridge University Press, is the name for the land that once connected Britain to mainland Europe. It stretched across the North Sea east as far as Denmark; a mighty snaking river separated it from Norway, Sweden, and Finland. The landmass became submerged as the last Ice Age came to a close, and a massive land shelf off the coast of Norway produced a terrible tsunami that is estimated to have been a minor extinction-level event.

of cultural ethos (Palmer). Also, there is the fundamental element of entertaining the audience, especially the rambunctious children who would gather around to hear another fairytale.

In the Celtic tradition, troupes of storytellers would travel between villages, teaching the youth and bringing current events from surrounding areas to inform leaders about what was happening in neighboring regions. In addition to retaining knowledge, the bards and druids were often called upon to act as advisors to chieftains and kings—an invaluable asset of wisdom for those holding court and ruling over Celtic societies.⁵ Little is known about these mystical ways; only bits and pieces of information survived the Roman Empire occupations, the Anglo-Saxon migration, Norman and Viking invasions, and the relentless advances of the English Kingdom (British Empire), let alone the decay of time. However, from what is known, these Bards were essential to maintaining the culture and the histories of the tribes. Similar to how Shakespeare's plays acted during Elizabethan times, the Bard would help shape public opinion, provide a guiding narrative, maintain social order, entertain, educate the next generation, and provide inspirational tales of bravery for the warriors protecting the people.

In fact, the famous British Bard Shakespeare took this oral storytelling medium to a grander scale in the playhouses during the Elizabethan period, most notably the Globe Theater. In the Article "Playing with a Difference: Revisiting 'Pen' and 'Voice' in Shakespeare's Theater," Robert Weimann writes in his footnote, "Here I adopt and adapt to a wider scenario, a phrase that Leah Marcus has used to trace the difference between 'orality and writing as competing forms of communication within the Renaissance playhouse.'" Literacy rates during the Elizabethan era

⁵ Possibly the most famous Druid (wizard), Ovate (Prophet), goes by the name of Merlin. According to Yale University Press, in the book *The True History of Merlin the Magician*, Merlin was a figure who possessed superhuman power and has fascinated humanity since the Middle Ages. He is most famously known for his role as advisor to King Arthur, a story used by Bards to remember the powerful Mage's prophecies, who by all means was a real being (Lawrence-Mathers 40).

remained low overall, favoring upper-class citizens with access to formal education and limiting those who could not read what was written on paper; having these oral performances take place in the confines of a theater, where actors could put those words into action and perform the complex vocation of literature by storytellers such as Shakespeare, gave the everyday medieval person a chance to learn the story's moral message. This feature of oral storytelling is a familiar archetype throughout the history of the Celtic North and Lakota peoples, where the entire populace had access to critical information. These oral transmissions created the opportunity for learning cultural histories and new discoveries from around the world; hearing the words on a page performed and pronounced appropriately aloud taught the people advanced forms of their language.

When examining oral storyteller literature, like that of the Celtic tribes of northern Europe, they hold little tidbits of information that maintain knowledge from their ancestors. For the various Celtic tribes that existed when Doggerland was above sea level and relied on hunting and gathering, these traditions must be maintained to preserve cultural knowledge and the rare historical data they contain. In doing so, a much-coveted teaching style is preserved as well, one that kept cultural knowledge from ancestors' centuries in the past and could help contemporary educators with techniques to improve memorization in the classroom, at home, and abroad. "Memory is complex and protean, both as a function and as a concept. It is a crucial element in the understanding of many things human... and what it means to remember" (MacKay). As mentioned earlier, many traditional oral storytelling techniques include appropriating a musical instrument. The Greeks used a variety of instruments, such as flutes and drums, to name a few commonly utilized during a performance; the Lakota relied on drums, flutes, rattles, and whistles. Modern science has found a link between music and mental stimulus, which has

yielded fantastic results to help unravel the mystery behind the relationship between an audience and a storyteller. By means of a case study to determine the effect of audio sounds on the human mind, scientists created an experiment that gave them insight into how certain music evokes emotion and how the brain responds to certain stimuli, more specifically, how the neuro-network fires when specific instruments are played.

In a study on brainwave activity described by Lou, a cognitive scientist, multiple experiments sought direct evidence of how brain signals fire when exposed to certain audio stimuli. He writes, “Music is ubiquitous and sophisticated due to it being widely used and multiple structures, which include rhythm, melody, mode, and tonality. “Music can express emotion of mood through these structures, and music has the capacity of communicating emotion or mood between the musician and the listener.” Many talented composers know how to connect to the audience using various musical techniques, such as how a crescendo provides an excitable emotional response, a banjo adds a bluegrass flavor to the audio, or when a bard is in an intimate concert setting at a smaller venue. The artist is within arm’s reach; a bond is formed through proximity, and the enjoyment is similar to the stimuli the music evokes. In this example, the bard’s story’s narrative is similar. Lou goes on to explain the experiment conducted, “Each of the participants needed to accomplish 6 tasks... the first and last tasks were resting, and the other tasks were listening to music... EEG⁶ data was recorded by a pair of devices with 19 channels electrodes that locate in the cerebral cortex according to the international 10/20 standard.” The results show a definite response to the musical stimulus; the brain comes alive when listening to

⁶ EEG refers to an electroencephalogram, which produces a graph (an encephalogram) that monitors specific brainwaves and charts their frequency and amplitude (intensity) over a record amount of time. Five known brainwaves can be monitored in this way: Alpha, Beta, Delta, Gamma, and Theta. (Guy)

music, and the promising results are the beginnings of a large field of study on how certain audio affects the brain.

A certain intimacy forms between the bardic musician, who is sometimes also the storyteller, and the audience; the music acts as a sort of emotional openness from the artist as the listener takes in the story being told, content, and emotion. According to Nakamura, “Musical communication can be classified into two categories: (1) the acoustical properties of a musical sound, and (2) the images and ideas that a performance may evoke” (525). This classification gives perspective on the relationship between storytellers and their audience, especially when the performer incorporates singing and musical instrumentation. Throughout the article, graphics show a relationship between the type of instrument, the performer's intention, and the audience's response. Nakamura concluded that “results show that, in general, the performers' intention could be communicated to the listeners fairly well... the first requisite of good communication between a performer (storyteller) and a listener (audience member) seemed to be that the intensity of a tone sequence executed by the performer varied in accordance with his intention” (532).

Some scholars assert that people from oral-based cultures lack certain cognitive abilities compared to those from literary backgrounds. Palmer asserts, “In his seminal study of orality and literacy, Walter Ong explored profound changes in our thought processes when we developed writing and print. His argument (states)... thinking and analysis are only possible once an oral people learn to write. Put another way, the implication is that primarily oral people because they have no writing, are incapable of abstract or critical thinking” (518). On the contrary, Palmer argues “that unless we know and experience the spoken word in daily doses, we are fundamentally unable to comprehend the thinking world or analytical power of language that

is unwritten and only spoken” (518). Humanity learns best through oral communication, and daily interactions provide more than idle bits of information. There are differing ways of how words are used and manipulated, as well as sentence structures in which one can use language.

Celtic traditions have found a resurgence in contemporary society; an event changed the anglophone literary world in 1760. A man by the name of James MacPherson allegedly translated a poem from the legendary Gaelic bard known as Ossian (Savonius-Wroth). This kickstarted an explosion of interest in the history of the British Isles, and with it, “[t]he Celtic Revival arose in 19th century Ireland and Britain, partly as a result of archaeological discoveries of Iron Age objects, but also due to ... a new consciousness of nation identity” (Celtic Revival).

⁷ According to the records from both the Western Highlands and Ireland, Bards were not only charged with knowing the culture, history, and stories of their tribes (Driscoll). Contemporary storytelling continues this tradition of inspiring the audience, even if not always orally, but in order to develop fully, Bards (and students) can take a step further. The notion of learning-through-oral stimulus pushes a narrative of personal development through education, knowing how to think and use the power of words to influence and inspire those around us. Driscoll, in a discussion of Celtic Bardic teaching notes and strategies, said, “We (must) open ourselves to the artistic, the creative self.” Driscoll explains that a student's education, those seeking to become Master Bard, can then be used to help people learn similar truths that were learned when going through the process of learning the druidic arts. This invaluable exchange of knowledge is reflected in the modern classroom, as both teacher and student have something to learn from one

⁷ In this post-WWII, post-British Empire reality, many sought a more original identity, seeking an ancestry that the conquerors had buried. As the true history of the British Isles began to be uncovered, “the Celtic Revival ... (painted) a Romantic reconstruction of Britain’s ancient past. Based on discoveries of archaeologists and antiquarians, linguists, and social anthropologists, it was, at least initially, an attempt by artists to regain contact with the cultural roots and emulate a bygone age” (Fowle 2).

another. A symbiotic relationship is formed through song, speaking, and listening, and when carefully crafted and allowed to grow, it can be a powerful tool in creating a functioning society. Again, today, Bards are seen as traveling entertainers, mystic wielders of magic, “However the features of the central druid find their source ... in photographs of Native Americans that were widely distributed around the time of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show, ... in 1889” (Fowle 2). Many connections can be made concerning oral storytelling traditions around the globe; this paper selected a trio to balance the First Nations perspectives from the point of view of the colonizers and the colonized.

Oral Storytelling Historical Truths

There are some stories that touch on events that took place thousands of years in the past when Celtic cultures roamed the northwestern regions of Europe, now called France. In a *History Today* article, “Celtic Myths: Celtic History? Simon Young Reveals the Limitations of Oral Legends as Historical Sources,” the author references a pair of scholars: John Carey, an expert in Celtic Culture, and John Koch, who claim to have found evidence of Celtic Oral storytelling preserving details from an ancient times “Celtic Attack on Greece in the third century BC⁸, implying the oral lore preserved history for a more modest fifteen hundred years” (Young). Here, we find evidence of one of the incredible attributes of these storytelling traditions, when Young continues in his articles to say, “the Celts are not alone in having tales about their own prehistory. Oral stories from elsewhere worldwide are also supposed to carry echoes from the past. Some Amerindian legends, for example, are said to include memories of

⁸ “As (Celtic)... tribes began crossing the Alps, they came into conflict with the Romans and Greeks living around the Mediterranean. The death of Alexander the Great (356 BCE – 323 BCE) made Greece appear like an easy target to many opportunistic Celtic Chieftains who led their people into the Balkans, first to Thrace ... before pressing ... towards Macedon.” (King)

the crossing of the Bering Strait, an event usually dated to between 10,000 and 20,000 BC.” This article presents a connection between the cultures mentioned in this paper. The First Nations tribes and Celts met, warred, and exchanged stories, a

In a sense, as Young puts it, “Celtic legends win out over oral traditions like these for two reasons. First, the Celts wrote down their legends in the Middle Ages. As a result, the ability of modern scholars to manipulate the texts is greatly reduced: there is a concrete corpus that we can only alter minutely with textual emendations. The second reason is a geographical and chronological accident. Unlike the Amerindians...the pre-literate Celts had literate neighbors” (Young). This provides an excellent cross-checking interaction between written literature and oral traditions. In fact, it gives credibility to the ability of oral traditions to preserve information over time. To credit further this oral story, Young gives an example, “the narrative of the Celtic attack on Delphi in Greece in the third century BC is said to survive in a Welsh story of the Twelfth century, Branwen Daughter of Llyr. However, the fact that we know about that attack in the first place is due to the Greek and Roman historians, among them Pausanias and Diodorus Siculus, who recorded the event when, or shortly after, it happened.” The facts from both Celtic and Greek accounts correlate in many ways, not very often when two historical references can be cross-examined and back up each other's information. Below is an uncanny example of this back-and-forth with Greek and Celtic historical data. Young explains:

The surprising connection was first suggested by the Celticist John Koch well-known for, among other works, his recent edition of the Welsh epic poem *The Gododdin*. Koch took the Welsh legend and noted a series of parallels between the invasion of Ireland and the invasion of Greece, using for the second Greek and Roman historians.

Among these parallels are the following, i) The name of the leader is Bran in the Welsh story and Brennos in the Greek invasion: Brennos could have become Bran by plausible sound-changes, ii) In both accounts an unfordable river is crossed by Bran/Brennos and his army after the enemy has broken down a bridge, iii) During a climatic battle, Bran/Brennos is mortally wounded by an enemy missile, iv) A treasure used by the Greeks/Irish brings supernatural warriors out against the enemy, v) Bran's/Brennos' warriors return home forlorn. vi) His people use relics of Bran/Brennos as a defence against enemies, vii) These defences break down when a later general takes the relics away and brings disaster on Bran's/Brennos' people... the descendants of the warriors who attacked Greece were among those Celts who slowly moved to the west in subsequent centuries. They eventually arrived in Britain with their legends and these legends survived in the folklore of Wales where Greece became Ireland (Young).

It is worth quoting Young at length because then the reader that there are these parallels between Celtic and Greek storylines are but one example of how effective the scaffolding traditional storytelling techniques offer for memorization in contemporary society's learning minds. These narratives were able to pass over thousands of miles in the distance, through thousands of years in time, with slight changes in names but essentially the same factual information and moral of the story. More evidence supporting the value of these traditions to modern educators comes from a colleague of John Koch, who goes by the name John Carey.

Carey chose for his research medieval Irish stories about the Boyne Necropolis (Newgrange)... According to these stories the prehistoric mound was won by a hero from an old Irish god, the Dagda, using a pun, a pun that plays on time and the sun. As Carey excitedly points out, Newgrange was originally built in the fourth millennium BC so that the sun shone into its innermost recesses on one day every year, though archaeologists only realised this in 1969 and the sun passage had been closed since circa 3000 BC. As a result, Carey suggests that the tales are a medieval Irish reminiscence of the now forgotten Neolithic beliefs that caused the complex to be built in the first place. If he is right then we have an oral memory that has survived almost four thousand years (Young).

Critics might start by asking how these ancient traditions can be taken seriously, and much of the information above has been provided to answer this question. However, within the past fifty years, these oral storytelling techniques have been taken seriously in the academic fields of History and Literature. For reference, “When Koch first published his article in 1990, Celticists were accustomed to looking with heavy scepticism on the idea of oral legends containing historical truths. However, even in this hostile environment, Koch's thesis prospered. Now twelve years later, the question of oral lore as a ‘carrier’ is taken much more seriously and Koch's work is cited with approval” (Young).

Another point of criticism would stem from the chance that some of the stories were without a relationship of cross-referencing, like the Celtic and Greek cultures. In Young’s article, a passage brings up an example of how these stories can be a distorted translation or manipulated circumstance in which the expert, in this case, nineteenth-century researcher Constantine S. Rafinesque, twists the narrative and creates falsifiable evidence.

(the) example (given), the most famous 'oral' evidence for the crossing of the Bering Strait from... a text written out by Constantine S. Rafinesque... based on the combined testimony of a Delaware Indian and some peculiar(ly) painted Indian sticks. The vast majority of modern scholars believe that the paintings were falsified by Rafinesque. And even if we take a more charitable view of the man's integrity, Rafinesque still had to interpret the Delaware's words into his own English. The crossing of the Bering Strait may, for example, have been a vague coupling of words 'over a great water' on the part of the Indian that was then given a more forthright rendering by Rafinesque.

However, another point of view would challenge the legitimacy of the two references, which coincide with ancient Celtic and Greek storylines. There is inevitably a distortion, such as when Branwen becomes Bran, because of a telephone game effect.⁹ Young's text provides an apt point of view from a historian's perspective:

(The) big problem with both Koch and Carey's arguments is that even if real historical data has survived we can do nothing with it. There may, for example, be a connection between the Celtic invasions of Greece in the third century BC and the story of Branwen in the twelfth century AD. But though this is curious in itself and a testimony to continuity in human affairs, it does not actually tell us anything new about the attack. For example, the Welsh story claims that Bran made a treaty with Ireland. So does this

⁹ In reference to how memory is like the childhood game telephone, where a sentence is spoken to one participant and is whispered into the ear of the next player, until it reaches the end of the line. Where more often than not, the sentence has been altered, distorted, or manipulated.

mean that we have genuine historical data being transmitted over the centuries demonstrating that Brennos had first made a treaty with the Greeks? It is not impossible. However, it is far more likely to be some extraneous folkloric material. After all, if oral lore sometimes preserves genuine historical events there are other times when oral lore demonstrably distorts history.

To put it bluntly, these two historical accounts could be similar; not much new information is learned from confirming this Celtic–Greek cross-referencing relationship. How can you be sure that some revolutionary detail in the Celtic oral storyline is accurate when there is no similar reference in the Greek canon?

Conclusion

As humanity continues to evolve, along with the technologies we make, traditional oral storytelling techniques will continue to adapt and be needed for their incredibly effective memorization properties, for the purpose of cultural education, for learning of topics from the past as well as new content, and for the cultural significance, the traditions maintain. From their usefulness in the classroom when teaching younger minds to the practical memorization qualities that can help those same students in upper-level academic circles, or even more intimately, when parents use them as tools to preserve cultural heritage and knowledge when raising their children. The use of these traditional storytelling practices will always have a place in contemporary society. In Northern Celtic and Great Plains Lakota traditions, even in the face of extinction by genocide, there is a sense of adaptability and longevity. Each continues to persevere in the face of developing technology, pivoting societal norms and ideals to maintain

the identity of current and future clan and tribal members. In order to remember the lessons of the past and not repeat them, these traditional techniques will be pivotal as humanity moves forward into the future.

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