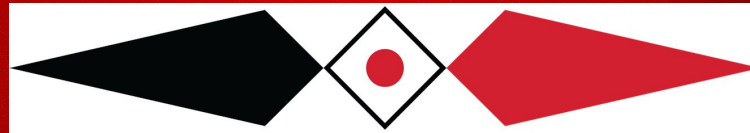


Beyond the Land Acknowledgement: Indigenous Language Revitalization, Student Activism, and Library Research



Ginny Boehme
Science Librarian
King Library

boehmemv@miamioh.edu



Stefanie Hilles
Arts & Humanities Librarian
Wertz Art & Architecture Library
hillesa@miamioh.edu

Miami University Land Acknowledgement

Miami University is located within the traditional homelands of the Myaamia and Shawnee people, who along with other indigenous groups ceded these lands to the United States in the first Treaty of Greenville in 1795. The Miami people, whose name our university carries, were forcibly removed from these homelands in 1846.

In 1972, a relationship between Miami University and the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma began and evolved into a reciprocal partnership, including the creation of the Myaamia Center at Miami University in 2001. The work of the Myaamia Center serves the Miami Tribe community and is dedicated to the revitalization of Miami language and culture and to restoring that knowledge to the Myaamia people.

Miami University and the Miami Tribe are proud of this work and of the more than 140 Myaamia students who have attended Miami since 1991 through the Myaamia Heritage Award Program.

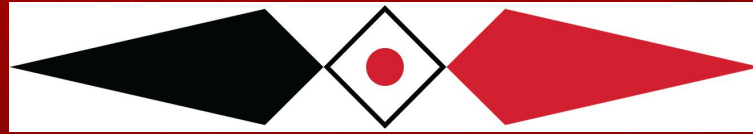
From more information on the Myaamia Center and Miami Tribe Relations, please see <https://www.miamioh.edu/miami-tribe-relations/index.html>

Myaamia Forced Removal in 1846




This material is based upon work assisted by a grant from the Department of Interior, National Park Service.

What is Critical Theory?



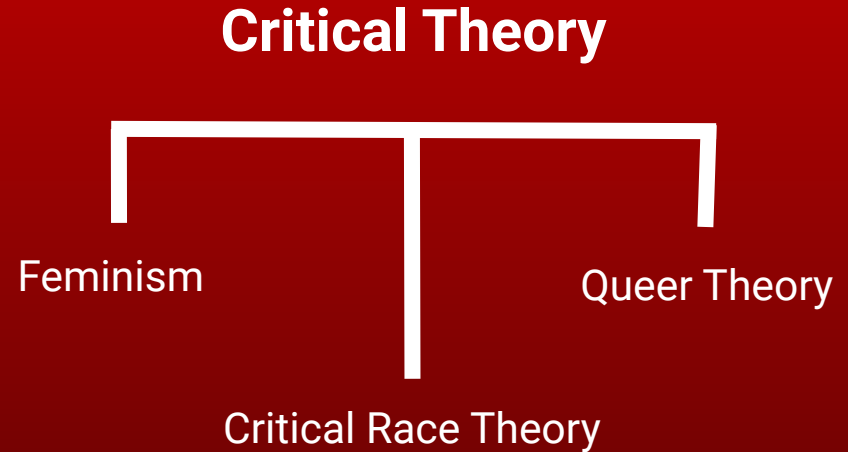
What is Critical Theory?



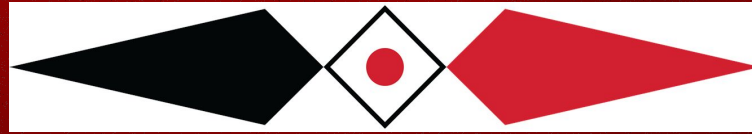
Critical theory, in a lot of ways, is about power. It's about critically analyzing the ways in which structures, whether they be cultural, societal, economic, or political, etc., participate in power narratives and recognizing that these structures are not natural, inevitable, or neutral but rather created to consolidate and maintain traditional power hierarchies. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, critical theory is not just about identifying these power narratives; it goes beyond mere recognition and calls for its practitioners to challenge and overturn these unjust structures.

What is Critical Theory?

Other influential theories fall under the critical theory banner. Examples include, but are not limited to: feminist theory, which investigates how women are oppressed in patriarchal systems; critical race theory, which examines how BIPOC peoples are oppressed by white supremacist systems; and queer theory, which explains how LGBTQ+ folks are oppressed in heteronormative systems.



How Does Critical Theory Relate to Libraries?



Critical Theory and Libraries

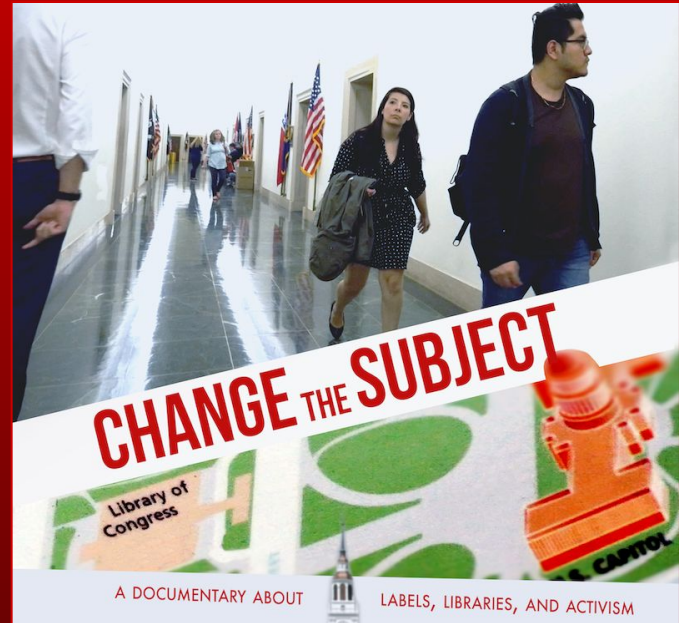
Libraries have participated, and continue to participate, in power structures that harm BIPOC people. For example, southern public libraries were segregated during the Jim Crow era. As separate was never equal, this would have severely inhibited Black people's access to the free information and services that libraries offer.



Woman arrested for trying to read a book in a segregated library. Albany, GA. 1962

Critical Theory and Libraries

While libraries are no longer segregated, there are still significant issues, including the ways we organize and classify collections. One of the more well known instances is the use of the Library of Congress Subject Heading, “illegal aliens.” The Library of Congress attempted to remove the heading in 2016 but the U.S. House of Representatives voted 237 to 170 to overturn the Library of Congress’ decision and keep the derogatory and belittling term.



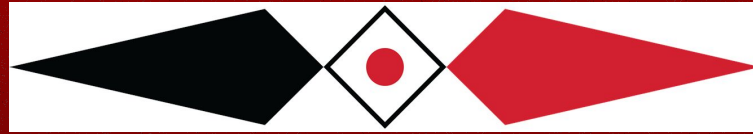
Film poster for *Change the Subject*, a documentary about the attempts to change the LCSH subject term, “illegal aliens.”

Critical Theory and Libraries

In addition to making libraries' culpability in white supremacy apparent, critical theory has changed the way librarians teach and approach information literacy.

- **Critical Pedagogy** - “engaging in the theory and practice (or praxis) of inclusive and reflective teaching in order to broaden students’ understanding of power structures within the education system and in society. This comes with the ultimate goal of action in some capacity to make the world a more socially just place.”
- **Critical Information Literacy** - “takes into consideration the social, political, economic, and corporate systems that have power and influence over information production, dissemination, access, and consumption.”

Indigenous Language Revitalization (ILR)



Indigenous Language Revitalization



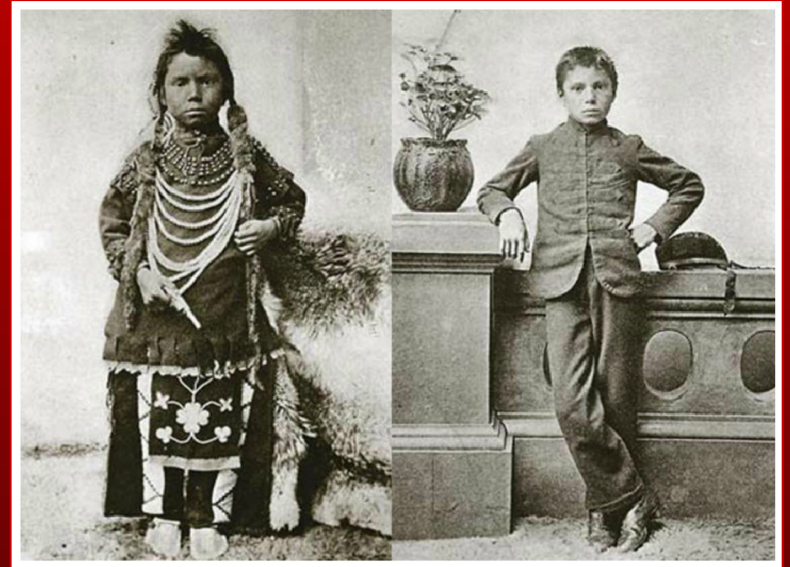
Indigenous Language Revitalization is also related to critical theory. Simply put, ILR works to save indigenous languages from extinction. While not a branch of theory, ILR is one of the concrete actions being taken to address the oppression of BIPOC people examined by critical theory. Indigenous languages didn't just fade away, they were intentionally eradicated to exert power and control by white conquerors.

“One indigenous language dies every two weeks.”

8th United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon

Indigenous Language Revitalization

Through forced assimilation programs in both the U.S. and Canada, white conquerors attempted to eliminate indigenous language, tradition, and culture. And they often succeeded. One example is forcing indigenous children to attend boarding schools where they were taught the ways of their oppressors in English and were punished for speaking their tribal languages. Indigenous children were often horrifically abused at these schools. Furthermore, white supremacy favors the written word over spoken language and many indigenous peoples have strong oral traditions.

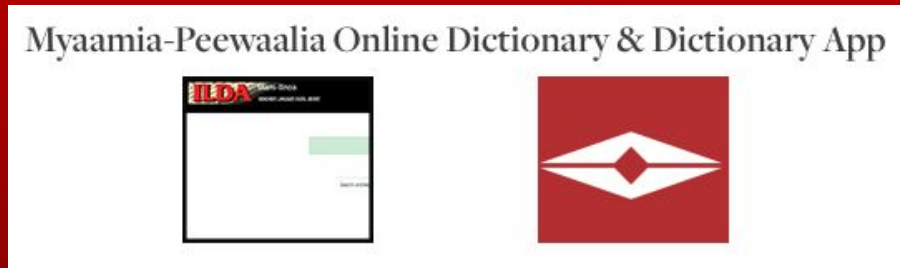


Thomas Moore before and after attending Regina Indian Industrial School, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, c. 1897

<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/4/4/726/htm>

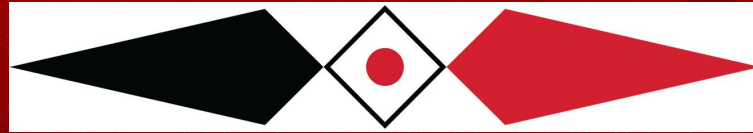
Indigenous Language Revitalization

One ILR practice is the creation of Indigenous Language Dictionaries. The Myaamia-Peewaalia Online Dictionary and Dictionary App, created by the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and the Myaamia Center at Miami University, was originally unveiled in 2005 (minus the app). To date, the dictionary has 1897 entries, a number that will continue to grow as the dictionary is updated regularly. It also provides an audio track of the spoken word for pronunciation purposes.



ahsiimišaahkw- (n.inan) pawpaw tree (Asimina triloba)		
Basic Forms		
Myaamia	English	
ahsiimišaahkwi	pawpaw tree	 -0:02
ahsiimišaahkwa	pawpaw trees	 -0:02

ILR Case Study




ILR Case Study



The Myaamia-Peewalia dictionary and the work of the Myaamia Center are primarily geared toward the Myaamia community, as well as researchers in linguistic and Native American studies, but recently, a class of first-year student researchers saw an opportunity to highlight the language and culture of the Myaamia people for a much wider audience in a more approachable and creative way.

This course was created by Steven Sullivan, the Director of the Hefner Museum of Natural History on Miami's campus, and Ginny Boehme.

Creating Museum Exhibits



“Our team of passionate students will learn how to distill research and write for different audiences, develop prototypes, adapt exhibit components for people of all abilities, and quantitatively test products. Then, we will create graphics, interactives, and other specialty components, and install the exhibit.”

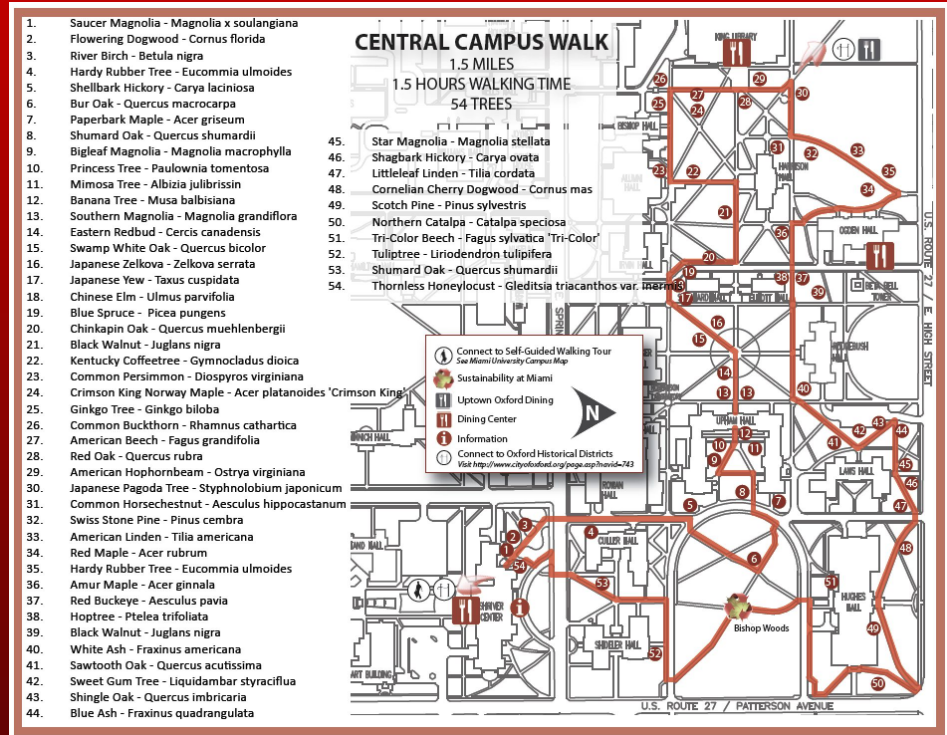
--excerpt from course description

Tree Walk

Our goal with the course was to not only teach our students about the highly interdisciplinary field of museological design, but also use the course as a vehicle for the restoration of Miami's Tree Walk exhibit.

The Tree Walk was originally created around 40 or 50 years ago as a way to showcase the extreme diversity of trees on Miami's campus.

Our collection includes not just trees endemic to southwestern Ohio, but also those from all over North America and other countries across the globe.



Map of Central Campus Tree Walk, last updated ca. 2010
Image courtesy: Miami University

Tree Walk



Original label for tree #9 (Bigleaf Magnolia)

Image courtesy: Steve Sullivan

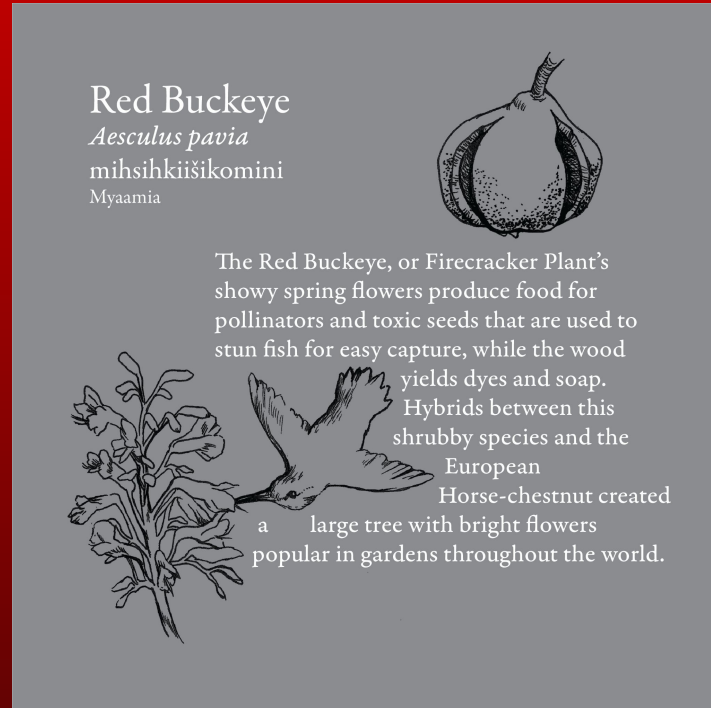
Many trees or signs (or both) are missing, and the original labels and map were not all that informative or accessible. It desperately needs updating.

When designing the course content, we intentionally set out to give the students as much agency as we could over their own learning (within reason), to align with the tenets of feminist pedagogy.

We provided the framework for museological research and design, gave them some practical restraints (particularly funding, which was limited).

Tree Walk

The refreshed exhibit will use the existing structures to hold the new, more informative, labels. Each label will have some meticulously researched and biologically accurate information related to each species, an image associated with the species in question, and the names of each species.



Mock-up of new label design

Native Trees

Many of the trees on Miami's campus are endemic to southwest Ohio. Thanks to the collaboration between the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and the Myaamia Center, we have access to an amazing resource, the Myaamia-Peewaalia Dictionary, mentioned earlier.

Using this dictionary, our students were able to determine the traditional names of many of the trees that were important and useful to the Myaamia people.



Ohio buckeye, *Aesculus glabra*

<https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/trees-and-plants/ohio-buckeye/>

Basic Forms

Myaamia	English
miihshkiišikomiši	Ohio Buckeye tree (<i>Aesculus glabra</i>), Yellow Buckeye tree (<i>Aesculus flava</i>)
miihshkiišikomiša	Ohio Buckeye trees (<i>Aesculus glabra</i>) (pl.), Yellow Buckeye trees (<i>Aesculus flava</i>) (pl.)

Entry for "Ohio buckeye" in Myaamia-Peewaalia Dictionary

<https://mc.miamioh.edu/ilda-myaamia/dictionary/entries/6638>

Non-native Trees



Native range of Blue spruce, *Picea pungens*
https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/misc/ag_654/volume_1/picea/pungens.htm

However, many of the trees on Miami's campus are endemic to other areas of North America, and are thus not represented in the Myaamia language. Our students quickly ran into problems while trying to identify indigenous names for all the trees in the Tree Walk.

The Blue spruce is one example. Sometimes also called a Colorado spruce, it is endemic to the Rocky Mountains and some surrounding areas. Two of the more well-known tribes that called these lands home are the Shoshone and Goshute, whose cultures and languages seem to have been quite similar to one another.



SHOSHONI WORD OF THE DAY

nasuma - a verb meaning 'pretend'

[LISTEN TO WORD OF THE DAY >](#)

[SEE MORE WORDS >](#)

The University of Utah is the home of the Shoshoni Language Project, which has a similar goal as the Myaamia Center.

One of the resources created by this initiative is the Shoshoni Dictionary.

We partner with tribal communities, non-profits, and other like-minded organizations to support Shoshone linguistic and cultural heritage through language preservation, revitalization and materials dissemination.



[Shoshoni Dictionary](#)



[Audio & Video Books](#)



[Great Basin Indian Archive Videos](#)

Non-native Trees

However, this Shoshoni Dictionary currently has no entry for "blue spruce" and makes few distinctions between the many currently recognized species of pine tree.

Why this gap exists, we do not know.

wa'a"-pin, waa"-pin	pine tree	
wa'a"-pin, waa"-pin	fir tree, pine tree	
	pine tree, fir tree	
	Sugar, pine tree	
	Christmas tree, pine tree sapling	
	Christmas tree, fir tree sapling, pine tree sapling	
	stand (of pinon pine)	vi su
	Pine tree	

Shoshoni Dictionary

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N

Search:

Shoshoni: English:

Found 11 results containing english=spruce.

Shoshoni	English	
añ'-go-bi	Douglas Spruce	
onko-pi-tta	spruce (Pseudotsuga douglasii)-OBJ	N

Non-native Trees

It's possible the traditional lands of the Shoshone and Goshute peoples did not actually overlap with the native range of the blue spruce.

It's also possible the blue spruce was not an important species for these tribes.

Another possibility: these pine trees were important to these tribes, but no one pine species was more important and so all were lumped together under one identifier.


It's also entirely possible that the blue spruce has just not yet made it into the dictionary.



Apparent overlap of *P. pungens* range and traditional homelands of indigenous peoples

<https://native-land.ca/>

Non-native Trees



Thanks to the government-sanctioned oppression and genocide of many Native Americans and the forced assimilation of the rest, we may never know why these gaps exist.

This example with the blue spruce is far from the only knowledge gap we found; the vast majority of trees in Miami's collection are native to one area of North America or another, and very few areas of North America are currently inhabited by tribes who traditionally call these lands home.

Not just an American Problem



White mulberry, *Morus alba*
Endemic to East Asia

<https://www.invasive.org/browse/detail.cfm?mgnum=5395979#>

These problems persist even when considering trees in our collection endemic to other countries. Colonialism and genocide were not restricted to North America.

When working to identify names for these non-North American native species, we relied heavily on current geographies and country designations and were not in most cases able to account for historical changes in the languages and cultures of the regions.

Not just an American Problem

Where possible, we did consult with native speakers to ensure accuracy of our spelling and translations, but we did not have the time or cultural expertise to do more than fact-check against current knowledge.

Thus, the labels for these non-native trees are very likely only serving to perpetuate the current power structures in place in those regions



Star magnolia, *Magnolia stellata*
Endemic to Japan

<https://bernheim.org/learn/trees-plants/bernheim-select-urban-trees/star-magnolia/>

Not just an American Problem



European beech, *Fagus sylvatica*
Endemic to Europe

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fagus_sylvatica#/media/File:Fagus-sylvatica-cansiglio-forest-italy.jpg

This is problematic because very few, if any, cultures rose to power peacefully.

Complete domination was often the goal, and the people and cultures who were not eradicated outright were often forced to assimilate.

Over many generations, cultural assimilation eventually leads to cultural eradication, and results in astronomic loss of knowledge.

Native Americans & Language



We need to look no further than our own country. Based on data collected between 2006 & 2010, the US has:

- 574 federally recognized tribes
- 169 Native North American languages
- Less than 20 languages have more than 2,000 at-home speakers
- 1 in 5 at-home speakers are 65+
- 1 in 10 at-home speakers are between 5 and 17

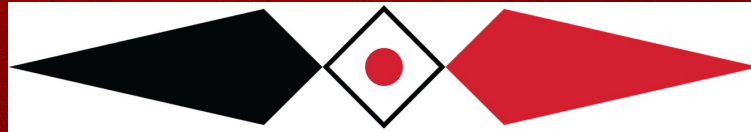
Native Americans & Language



As their native speakers age and pass away, the languages are disappearing, and very few of them have the benefit of a well-funded initiative or program dedicated to helping them preserve and revitalize their cultures and heritage.

The Myaamia language's last fluent speaker passed away in the 1960's, and it has only been since the 90's that there has been a concerted effort to revive the language. The actions and initiatives by community elders and the Myaamia Center have led to considerable progress in saving the language from extinction, but there is still work to be done.

What can we do?



What Can We Do?



After all, the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma is just one tribe, and the Myaamia language, while related to other languages once spoken in this region, is still only one language. There are hundreds of others across our country alone that are on the brink of extinction and many others still that are lying dormant.

Libraries and universities can and should be using their resources and expertise to begin or continue the work of revitalizing the languages and cultures of the peoples whose lands they currently occupy.

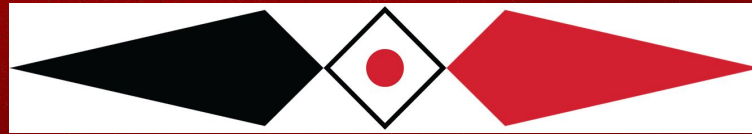
So what actions can we take?

What Can We Do?



- Create LibGuides or other research tools highlighting indigenous languages and cultures
- Incorporate indigenous knowledge into instruction
- Cultivate student researchers
- Make ILR a priority
- Codify ILR-related collections policies
- Secure ILR-related grants and programs
- Forge relationships with tribes

**Remember:
Any Action is Still Action**



Acknowledgements



Miami Tribe of Oklahoma
Myaamia Center

Steve Sullivan

Kevin Messner

Rachel Makarowski

References

McElroy, K. & Pagowsky, N., eds. (2016). *Critical library pedagogy handbook, volume one: Essays and workbook activities*. Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries.

Gregory, L., & Higgins, S., eds. (2013). *Information literacy and social justice: Radical professional praxis*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press.

Malik, A. H., Ziermann, J. M., & Diogo, R. (2018). An untold story in biology: The historical continuity of evolutionary ideas of Muslim scholars from the 8th century to Darwin's time. *Journal of Biological Education*, 52(1), 3–17.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00219266.2016.1268190>

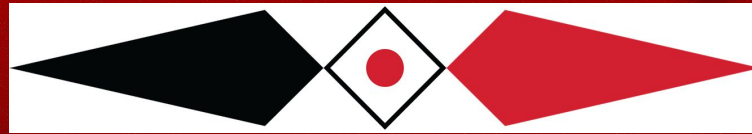
National Conference of State Legislatures. (n.d.). *Federal and state recognized tribes*. Retrieved July 18, 2021.
<https://www.ncsl.org/legislators-staff/legislators/quad-caucus/list-of-federal-and-state-recognized-tribes.aspx>

Siebens, J., & Julian, T. (2011). *Native North American Languages Spoken at Home in the United States and Puerto Rico: 2006-2010* (Report no. ACSBR/10-10). U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2011/acs/acsbr10-10.html>

The University of Utah. (n.d.). *Shoshoni language project*. Retrieved July 18, 2021. <https://shoshoniproject.utah.edu/>

Slides & backgrounds courtesy of SlidesCarnival

Thank you!



Ginny Boehme
Science Librarian
King Library
boehmemv@miamioh.edu

M
MIAMI
UNIVERSITY
OXFORD, OH • EST. 1809

Stefanie Hilles
Arts & Humanities Librarian
Wertz Art & Architecture Library
hillessa@miamioh.edu