In Anishinaabe tradition, an offering is a gift. It’s a gesture of relationship between people, animals, spirits, and other entities in the universe, given in the interests of creating ties, honoring them, or asking for assistance and direction. Offerings are acts of responsibility. Making one includes acknowledging value, promising respect, and affirming the presence of another being. They carry duties matched only by the acceptance of the offer, forming what is hoped to be a mutually beneficial partnership, not only for participants, but for the universe around them.

For most Anishinaabeg, offerings are the currency of life; they constitute ties that form a network of Creation. They can take many forms, from asemaa (tobacco) to nagamowin (songs) to zhooniya (money). Food is an offering. A story can be an offering. Knowledge can be an offering. One can witness hundreds of examples of offerings in ceremony—ceremonies are indeed offerings unto themselves—but there are many other places these can be given too. Offerings can be made a single time, over a set amount of time, or consist of multiple components over a long period of time, even in perpetuity. Offerings can be given by individuals, a family, a clan, or an entire community—depending on the demands and constant changes in any relationship. In Anishinabemowin, the word for an offering is bagijigan (plural: bagijiganan), and the act of making an offering is bagijige. This collection, and the many words and ideas that constitute it, is an offering. It is a gift that hopes to engage, affirm, and inspire relationships with all who read it. It is also a gesture towards future offerings.
The idea to create *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World through Stories* came about at the American Indian and Indigenous Studies conference in 2008 at the University of Georgia (the organization is now known as the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, or NAISA). This should come as little surprise as what are conferences if not a collection of people coming together to share stories? NAISA embodies the notion of offerings: bringing scholars together to explore our relationships to one another and to share our stories. In Georgia, the three of us discussed how we often felt that many conferences we’d attended had primarily focused on history, anthropology, literature, or another epistemological divide—with not a lot of engagement across the disciplines. NAISA broke down this barrier and allowed us the opportunity to become aware that there were many scholars working on related issues, using similar methodological approaches. Both during formal presentations and in informal conversations, we observed that many of our colleagues were using stories as a kind of methodology or center point. We noticed that stories—in their broadest sense—were being used as theoretical frameworks guiding questions in law, history, anthropology, environmental studies, and other fields. This was particularly evident among scholars working in Anishinaabeg Studies, many of whom were exploring issues and interests of their own communities. Then, when we reflected upon the traditional and contemporary practices of our home communities and cultures, and those of our relations, it occurred to us that stories were operating as different entryways, foundations, beginning points—as centers—to Anishinaabeg Studies. We explored the notion further and came up with the idea for this collection.

We were also inspired by how vast our storied community of Anishinaabeg scholars had grown, from our critical and creative ancestors from ancient times to the vast body of new work produced over the past few decades. Much scholarship produced by Anishinaabeg (and cited within this collection) could be argued as different embodiments of the idea that Anishinaabeg Studies resides in and through Anishinaabeg stories—past, present, and future. As before, Anishinaabeg are examining our community’s offerings, adding perspectives and ideas, and making new stories in the interests of carrying forward an intellectual and collective future. While a tribally centered field—but not altogether different and separate from studies privileging theories of pan-Indianism, hybridity, and transnationalism—Anishinaabeg-centered scholarship emerging from an examination of Anishinaabeg stories represents some of the most innovative and exciting work being produced today. Most often locally focused and interested in specific issues surrounding Anishinaabeg expressions, lands,
resources, cultures, and communities, Anishinaabeg scholars offer a different way of viewing the world that does not narrow intellectual approaches but open them up, constituting a sort of global studies. It is in these interests that we hope this collection offers a perspective of what Anishinaabeg Studies has been, what it is, what it can be, while at the same time encouraging others in their own conclusions about its possibilities. In the end, that’s the power of the Anishinaabeg stories—and we and our colleagues hope that this book is an inspiration for others. As our colleague Gerald Vizenor once remarked in an interview: “You can’t understand the world without telling a story. There isn’t any center to the world but story.”

The Anishinaabe span a vast geographic region from the Great Lakes to the Plains and also reside in other urban and rural communities throughout North America. Historically and today, the Anishinaabe are a people who share many beliefs and practices, yet individual bands are influenced by their particular histories, geographic locations, political relationships, and internal conflicts. There are therefore many ways Anishinaabeg speakers and thinkers use the term “Anishinaabe.” For example, it’s a word that also exists as Anishnawbe, Anishinape, Anicinape, Neshnabé, Nishnaabe, Nishnawbe, Anishinaubae, and Nishnabe—just to name a few. Each lives in a locality, history, and context that can open up entire discourses. What brings these terms together, however, are the similarities, connections, and overwhelming number of ties that emerge when they are considered in relationship. Like strands and points of an interconnected web, these specific and shared names are what communities known now as Ojibwa, Ojibwe, Chippewa, Ojibway, Saulteaux, Mississauga, Nipissing, Potawatomi, and Odawa (and others) use to describe themselves. Each different incarnation of Anishinaabe shapes a connection, defines a relationship, and is an offering to a multiply defined whole. There are, of course, lots of definitions and interpretations of these names, but we like Basil Johnston’s description in “Is That All There Is? Tribal Literature,” when he describes “Anishinaubae” as both a noun and a verb—something that we are and we do at the same time. Complexity is the tenet perhaps most evident and unifying in Anishinaabeg life, culture, and nationhood. Just as there are many distinct definitions of Anishinaabeg, we are still connected. What connects us, as we see it, are stories.

In Anishinaabemowin, two words are predominantly used to describe, and sometimes classify, narrative. While there are many ways these terms are explained and defined, Aadizookaanag are generally considered “traditional” or “sacred” narratives that embody values, philosophies, and laws important to life. They are also manidoog (manitous), living beings who work with Anishinaabeg in the interests of demonstrating principles necessary for
mino-bimaadiziwin, that good and beautiful life. These stories are most often classified as animate in Anishinaabemowin. Dibaajimowinan, another word used to describe narratives, is generally translated to mean “histories” and “news.” They range in time from long ago to today, and often tell of family genealogies, geographies, and historical experiences. They are often classified as inanimate in Anishinaabemowin. There are, of course, exceptions in both cases and many blurry lines in these groupings. In this collection, Leanne Simpson refers to these two types of stories as interrelated forces, echoes, and parts of a greater whole—a wonderful way to conceive of both.

To illustrate this for a moment, take the Anishinaabeg Creation story, which tells of our creation, time on Turtle Island, migration from the east, and path into the future. It is made up of a vast collection of stories that embody history, law, and many experiences and perspectives. These live, change, and grow through continuous retellings, constituting a dynamic narrative practice and process by a people. It is often said that there are as many versions of the Creation Story as there are storytellers—all contribute to understandings of who we are. The Creation Story therefore is both aadizookaanag and dibaajimowinan. Both concepts are necessary parts of Anishinaabeg narrative tradition. Together they are like maps, or perhaps instructions, that teach us how to navigate the past, present, and future. They tell about the past, but at the same time inform our present and guide our future. Aadizookaanag and dibaajimowinan are ultimately about creation and re-creation. We believe that all of our stories include and encompass senses of aadizookaanag and dibaajimowinan and together form a great Anishinaabeg storytelling tradition.

INITIATING A DIALOGUE

Centering Anishinaabeg Studies is a collection of offerings. We seek to engage in an open dialogue about the multifarious and vast opportunities that stories afford us in the ongoing development of the field of Anishinaabeg Studies. In this spirit, the next segment of our introduction emerges out of a conversation we recorded on Friday, November 10, 2010, in Duluth, Minnesota. Edited for conciseness and focus, it best expresses the inspiration, influences, and goals for the collection.

Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark (HKS): This book emerges out of interests to honor and contribute to our diverse and complex collectivity. We want this
book to be thought of not as an authoritative guide defining Anishinaabeg Studies, but a vision, a community of voices, about our field. This collection not only comes out of a long Anishinaabe tradition of storytelling, but it is also part of a larger conversation across Anishinaabeg geographies, histories, and communities. Centering Anishinaabeg Studies is one step along a long, intellectual, and storied path of our people. We look forward to, and want to encourage, the development of more voices, more ideas, more discussion.

Jill Doerfler (JD): Indeed. So many Anishinaabeg have thought deeply about stories, and we have lots of different perspectives. For example, Basil Johnston argues in *Ojibway Heritage* that “It’s through story, fable, legend, and myth that fundamental understandings, insights, and attitudes toward life and human conduct and quality and their diverse life forms are embodied and passed on.” Gordon Henry Jr., on the other hand, writes in the introduction to *Stories through Theories, Theories through Stories* that “Stories seem to transcend jurisdictions of nation, culture, time, and text irrespective of whether they are spoken, written, heard, smelled, filmed, or performed.” I envision an Anishinaabeg understanding of story that includes diverse points of view.

Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair (NJS): So do I. I think of the contrast between David Treuer, who in *Native American Fiction: A User’s Guide* argues that looking for culture within stories ossifies that culture, and Patronella Johnston, who in *Tales of Nokomis* documents stories she heard in her community because she wanted to maintain culturally specific teachings and values that she saw threatened by colonialism. Stories imagine, construct, and unify communities, but they can also deconstruct, destroy, and divide them. Stories have abilities to do all sorts of things, sometimes all at the same time. Thinking of all of these as part of a whole was the challenge set before us as we created our call for papers.

JD: I’d also like to acknowledge that this book emerges out of a long intellectual history. Anishinaabe writers produced and published one of the largest bodies of American Indian narratives during the first half of the nineteenth century. I am so proud of the work done by George Copway, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, and William Warren. Learning about these early writers helped me to understand that writing is very much a part of Anishinaabe tradition.

NJS: Contemporary collections like Gerald Vizenor’s *Touchwood* and Kimberly Blaeser’s *Stories Migrating Home* remind us that our work emerges from some pretty significant footprints. We have a lot of intellectual ancestors, predecessors, and contemporaries.

HKS: We’ve already mentioned a few, and there are too many for us to list, but I have to mention the important work that has been done by Maude Kegg, Michael Witgen, Jim Northrup, Dale Turner, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm,
Brenda Child, Rebecca Kugel, and Anton Treuer. I also want to acknowledge our ancestors who told our stories to anthropologists and others to record, which led to a large collection of published work. For example, *Ojibwa Texts*, recorded by William Jones at the beginning of the nineteenth century. I believe that our ancestors shared these stories in the hope that future generations would look to these rich sources for guidance and direction.

**NJS**: Anishinaabeg Studies has really been operating since time immemorial. Our communities have always been intellectual and philosophical, with stories and storytelling practices at the center of this endeavor. It doesn’t seem to matter what activity—whether ceremonies, hunting trips, history sharing, medicine gathering, constitution writing, or cooking—there is a body of Anishinaabeg knowledge involving stories about it. If you look at anthropological and ethnographic studies, even from people whose conclusions are certainly debatable, stories come up time and time again as primary vessels of knowledge. For millennia our storytellers have assured our existences as speaking, thinking, creating, and struggling beings in this landscape. They’ve done this so we could be here now, doing this work.

**HKS**: Many theories have emerged from Anishinaabeg stories.

**JD**: And we could argue that stories are theories, to reference Gordon Henry Jr.’s title. Gerald Vizenor has been a real leader in this direction. There’s a vast body of important work by Jace Weaver, A. LaVonne Ruoff, Deborah Madsen, and others that expound on Vizenor’s stories/theories. So much of Vizenor’s work has focused on challenging the idea of the *Indian* and asserts that Natives are *postindians* who hold the power to create a new world. What I love most about Vizenor’s writing is the way in which it creates openings and allows for imagination—it also has a focus on action, which is very empowering. It upsets and challenges in positive and productive ways; it’s never fixed or static. Words carry the power of creation—we create ourselves with stories.

**NJS**: I’ve always been inspired by Louise Erdrich’s work, which we all know also has wide popular appeal. She has been able to introduce many readers to the diversity and complexity of Anishinaabe life while embodying interesting themes and struggles, and doing it with a rich sense of humor. I really like the intricate connections and relationships between characters, families, and history in her texts. Her work reminds me of the multiple layering and changes many Anishinaabeg experience in our own families and lives.

**HKS**: John Borrows is another great Anishinaabe scholar; he believes in the ongoing process of story. In *Drawing Out Law*, he shows how stories emerge from everyday experiences, and how stories can be used to guide the contemporary creation of Indigenous law. He continually shows that Anishinaabeg
storytelling is a theoretical process that hasn’t ended for Anishinaabeg; it’s an ongoing process. It makes me think of a quote by Amanda Cobb that I really love: “Sovereignty is both the story or journey itself and what we journey towards.” Borrows’s work reminds us that what it means to be Anishinaabeg is still being defined; it is still a journey, an ongoing process. We’re not only telling the stories that we’ve carried for generations, but we’re also being gifted with and creating new stories all the time.

**NJS:** We certainly are scholars in the early part of our careers, and following a trail set forth by a very rich intellectual Anishinaabeg ancestry. At the same time, we come from three different Anishinaabeg communities with very different historical experiences and knowledge keepers. Many of our contributors also come from radically different spaces and places from our own too. I wonder if we could say briefly what, in terms of our personal experience and community contexts—how the idea of *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies* was guided by our understandings of story.

**HKS:** Good point. A lot of my academic work has really been provoked, sustained, or answered by stories. Oftentimes I hear a story and I end up applying that story to certain questions I am thinking about in other contexts. When I was first interested in issues of treaty rights and questioned what Ojibwa concepts of nationhood and land rights were in the nineteenth century, it was only after I returned to stories that I came to understand the complexity of some of these questions. When studying Anishinaabemowin in college, I was struck by the relationship between language and stories. It is in the etymology and rich meanings in specific words that stories are embedded, and this helped me appreciate the multiple ways in which stories function, as well as their power to provoke. It’s in the transmission of stories, from one person to another, that the *aadizookaan* or “spirit” of the story is recognized and uncovered—even if sometimes only partially. Stories, I believe, give us so much insight into how Anishinaabe people understand the world; they teach us how to see and understand and listen and learn, and then, finally, express ourselves.

**JD:** When I was doing my graduate work, I was looking at Anishinaabe identity within the legal context and how tribal citizenship came to be created and regulated. I was interested in how Anishinaabe people defined and asserted identity in other ways than those imposed upon them. So, I started looking to stories locally, to people from my home at White Earth—like Gerald Vizenor, Ignatia Broker, and Kim Blaeser—and I was amazed by the rich heritage of written literature we have, and how it shapes and informs identity. Of course, identity and citizenship are complex and controversial issues with a wide range of very diverse opinions, but what I’ve found is that
stories do some of the hard work in finding fundamental values that can
guide us. For instance, Gerald Vizenor’s concept of survivance has been very
useful for my work because it both embraces change and envisions continu-
ance. Stories encourage listeners and readers to look inward to find plausible
solutions. That’s what I hope for the collection: that stories are understood
as something continually applicable, not something stuck in the past. Also,
contemporary stories are just as applicable and useful as “traditional” ones.

NJS: I grew up on the former St. Peter’s Indian Settlement, sometimes called
“Little Peguis.” It is a community that was illegally and unjustly removed by
the Canadian government in 1907 to benefit settlers in southern Manitoba.
Over three-quarters of our community was forced to move several hundred
miles north, to what is now known as Peguis Indian Reserve. Some of us
stayed and squatted on land once our own, including members of my family.
Growing up, I lived in a community enveloped by legacies of erasure. St.
Peter’s is a community with no “official” name, representation, and certainly
without recognition by anyone outside of ourselves. We even struggle with
our northern relations to recognize that we are a part of them. I learned
about the history of St. Peter’s not through books, classrooms, or in schools
I attended, but in the stories I heard at the friendship center, bingo hall, and
at family picnics. These were transformative; they were tales filled with anger,
irony, and beauty. And, despite such violence in our history, lots of laugh-
ter. These, to me, embodied the ongoing spirit of my community: a place
that continues because people simply refuse to stop telling stories. I’ve used
this to guide my work and research. Anishinaabeg stories, to me, are about
generation and regeneration.

HKS: I also see Anishinaabeg stories as methods that teach us how to survive in
an ever-changing environment. There is so much change and adaption going
on in many of these stories. The power of them reside in these abilities; they
are the greatest tools our people have to survive and live.

NJS: We see in our contributions in this book many suggestions that Anishinaa-
beg stories are vessels of intellectual life. They are methods, to use Heidi’s
word. What are some that assisted in our editing and selection process in
Centering Anishinaabeg Studies?

JD: The intellectual possibilities in Anishinaabeg stories, the methods, are endless.
I find LeAnne Howe’s concept of tribalography useful in encapsulating what
I understand these to be. Tribalography is the idea that Native stories take
all different forms and often combine aspects of history, memoir, law, and
other things. Tribalography unseats history as this unbiased authority and
allows us more control over our stories. It relates back to the idea of us creat-
ing our own past and our own future, and this idea that it isn’t necessarily
predetermined. Our lives aren’t tragic victimization narratives. Stories provide us with infinite possibilities because we acknowledge that they have a creative aspect; they aren’t lists of “facts.”

**HKS:** Like Howe, Jean O’Brien disrupts previous understandings of history in her recent book *Firsting and Lasting.* She beautifully shows how history is collection of stories, both real and imagined, demonstrating how local historians were recording narratives that essentially wrote Indian people out of existence. They convinced themselves that authentic Indians no longer existed. These were the stories they told, that they wrote, that became history. I think in the same way we see so many scholars trying to get us to think broadly about the power and function of stories, we see scholars like O’Brien talking about how history is story. We can’t take history at face value, as a kind of empirical, objective form of knowledge. Just like our examination of stories, these histories also convey certain kinds of values and ideas.

**JD:** Yes, regardless of the type of narrative, regardless of how we want to categorize it, there are always these embedded values. Jace Weaver has argued: “I do not believe that there is any scholarship that is value-neutral. All scholarship, every academically attested to ‘fact,’ serves some political agenda.”

**NJS:** I think that the creation, maintenance, and continuation of relationships are the centers of Anishinaabeg Studies. Stories actualize the infinite connections that make up Anishinaabeg culture and community, not only individually and amongst our varied communities, but with non-Anishinaabeg, with animals and plants and manitous and *zhaaganashag* and all of creation. Stories are strands that connect Anishinaabeg with everything around us, across space, time, and geography. They are gifts. The act of storytelling is also imaginative: it’s what our ancestors did not only to create relationships with the world around them, but because they envisioned us here and now and wished to have a relationship with us. In a similar vein, we tell stories now for people who are coming, Anishinaabe youth like my daughter, and her children and grandchildren. That’s why this work, for me, is so important, because it has an opportunity to have a life, a role to play in continuing the lives of future Anishinaabeg. Storytelling is an intellectual act that is both an inheritance and a responsibility.

**HKS:** There is some recent debate amongst Anishinaabeg scholars about the ways in which knowledge embedded within Anishinaabeg stories can be applied to contemporary and critical issues facing Anishinaabeg communities. We should speak about the ways in which Anishinaabeg stories not only are things but *do things,* like provoke action, embody sovereignty, or structure social and political institutions. We’ve spoken about the definitions of Anishinaabe, but what do we think about this? Can Anishinaabeg
stories address challenges facing Anishinaabeg communities like poverty and unemployment?

NJS: I got an example, but I warn you, I’m starting with a discussion I had on Facebook.

HKS: I’m really glad Facebook made it into these discussions. In the future, there will be a story called “When Nenaboozhoo Discovers Facebook.”

JD: Wow, just imagine what a great story that will be.

NJS: So, one day, I posted as my status: “How do we create strong and healthy Anishinaabeg communities?” I got several interesting responses, but the most striking was from my Anishinaabemowin teacher who said: “Start with the Creation Story.” I thought about what she meant—about all of the versions I have read, heard, and known. All of the answers, I realized, are in that story. There is this amazing version of the Creation Story by the painter Daphne Odjig in a mural standing in the Manitoba Museum in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. It’s called The Creation of the World. In that mural are teachings that educate about the history of the geography of Manitoba, of that territory being at the bottom of this great melting iceberg that created the Great Lake Agassiz (which encompassed much of North America). There are also stories in that mural about our responsibilities as Anishinaabeg and non-Anishinaabeg signatories to Treaty One. There are also stories about Anishinaabeg aesthetics, European surrealism and cubism, and intercultural negotiation. There are stories about Odjig’s historical witnessing of the removal of the Chemawiwin Cree from their homelands when their lands were flooded for a governmental damming project, and what they did to re-create their lives. There are stories about our relationships with Naanaboozhoo and Aki, with muskrats and turtles, with spirits and humanity. There are prophecies in that mural. Every single real-life struggle encountered by Anishinaabeg in Manitoba (and elsewhere) is talked about in that version of the Creation Story—from colonization to poverty, to environmental degradation, to language revitalization. It’s a remarkable work. Now, whenever I think about issues facing Anishinaabeg Studies, I go back to thinking about our Creation Story. And it all started from Facebook. [laughing]

HKS: These stories are about what it means to be Anishinaabe. In my own work looking at Anishinaabe conceptions of sovereignty, I argue that the word for sovereignty in Anishinaabemowin is Anishinaabe. Our stories tell us who we are as a people, as nations. They outline the relationships that we have, to one another, to our place, to people, to our experiences and our ancestors’ experiences too. Stories can guide us, serve as a lens for us to understand our social and political structures. When we look to stories, we begin to not only have a richer understanding of the contemporary kind of social and legal traditions in operation today in Anishinaabe country, but also those that we’re
able to enact. I think it’s in these rich stories then that we can also come to understand how we can build mutually beneficial and healthy relationships today. We have high suicide rates among our youth, high rates of domestic violence, and other issues because there is a real divide between the kinds of values and ideals conveyed in our stories and the kinds of actions playing out in Anishinaabe country today. By looking to these stories, we can understand not only how to survive, but also how to thrive.

NJS: There are many studies that conclude that youth who are exposed to Anishinaabeg language and literature—and gain pride in their cultural inheritances—also gain values of resilience and self-worth. These possibilities are available through Anishinaabeg stories.

HKS: I think so. It is said that the goal or function of Anishinaabe life is to understand our purpose in this world: ando-bawaajigeyan, seek your dream or purpose. I think a way for us to get at that, a way for us to leave our own footprints for others to step in and then extend their own, is through stories. And that’s what I think is so rich about many of the stories cited by our contributors in this collection: that they recognize the relationships we have to one another and our own self. It’s not about creating a kind of singular identity, a singular Anishinaabe.

There’s a reason why storytellers will often not tell you what these stories mean, because the idea is that we’ll bring our own interpretations and ideas and language, and that can lend insight into addressing the contemporary challenges facing our communities.

JD: Thinking about how stories can be used to address contemporary issues draws me back to the idea of nationhood and relationships. What I want to talk a little bit about is the writing of the White Earth Constitution in 2009. At one of the Constitutional Conventions I gave a presentation on the story of Shingebiss and how we might apply the principles of perseverance and autonomy in that story to constitutional reform. I argued that we could use Shingebiss as a model for our actions. So that story of Shingebiss is embedded in our story of constitutional reform. The political document we developed is, in some ways, a creation story. We discussed how we could make the document reflect our values, our rights, and our responsibilities. We had to figure out how to articulate a vision of family, identity, and citizenship in the rigid structure of a constitution, which by nature is a relatively short document. Gerald Vizenor was a Constitutional Delegate and the Principal Writer of the Constitution. [He discusses this in an interview with James MacKay in this collection.] Many compromises were made along the way, but the Constitution is one example of a new story that we’re telling now—one that envisions the future and asserts our sovereignty, and one that includes some of our older stories like Shingebiss. It’s an act of survivance. It’s an ongoing process.
NJS: And a story that will be told for years to come. So, as we conclude, what are some of the themes you see emerging from this collection? We now have a community formed from this book, thinking about story and its impacts and influences on Anishinaabeg Studies. What future relationships and trends do you see coming from our future readers, scholars, kin?

HKS: I think what comes out of this anthology is that stories are essential to understanding what it means to be Anishinaabe. Stories suggest the ideals we want to work towards. As we’ve all stated, this embodies and actualizes sovereignty and processes of self-determination. Vine Deloria Jr. has argued that “[Sovereignty] is a useful word to describe the process of growth and awareness that characterizes a group of people working toward and achieving maturity. Sovereignty, in the final instance, can be said to consist more of continued cultural integrity than of political powers and to the degree that a nation loses its sense of cultural identity, to that degree it suffers a loss of sovereignty.” I think stories provide us a sense of cultural identity and direction toward achieving maturity.

NJS: I see new directions being provoked in the interests of continuing a great path our people have been following for generations. I see this book as participating in the continuation of our traditions, our ceremonies, our lives. I see it supporting the work of communities continuing to heal and, as Heidi has said, to survive and thrive. We’re not perfect people by any means . . . and this is not a perfect book. But this collection of voices is part of a continuing conversation. All of our contributors may not agree, but they are all still invited to come and sit around the fire and have an opportunity to offer their words and ideas.

JD: I look forward to this collection contributing to the developing field of Anishinaabe Studies, but also engaging with American Indian Studies and Indigenous Studies. Tribal-centric views are not formed in isolation; in fact, I would argue that nothing exists in isolation. I don’t agree with the idea that some things and ideas are “hybrid” and others are “pure.” Purity is nonexistent, but that does not mean that distinct tribal perspectives are. I hope that we see the continued development of Anishinaabeg Studies, Choctaw Studies, Navajo Studies, and so on—in conversation with each other as well as with American Indian Studies and disciplines like history, English, and political science.

We hope Centering Anishinaabeg Studies offers new pathways for Anishinaabeg Studies. When editing the essays in Centering Anishinaabeg Studies, we encouraged conversation and a critical awareness of the contexts that resulted in divergent and interesting points of view. We wanted story-centered theories of Anishinaabeg Studies that imagined, constructed, and unified Anishinaabeg expressions, but weren’t afraid of how stories also
deconstructed, destroyed, and divided. Anishinaabeg stories, we believe, can create and transcend, affirm and deny—they have abilities to do all sorts of things, sometimes all at the same time. Thinking of all of these as part of the whole is the challenge set before us as inheritors of a great Anishinaabeg narrative tradition. We invited contributors to engage with the idea of story in multifaceted meanings. We didn’t want to limit story just to the idea of traditional stories, or really even just to literature. We asked contributors to conceptualize story broadly and then think of the various ways in which they might use story within their work. We wanted them to then consider how story may serve as a center for Anishinaabeg Studies. In the end, we got a diverse body of essays that used “story” in the conventional and classical sense, as well as paintings, poetry, essay, song, and legal documents. If you think about all of the senses of narrative available in Anishinaabeg communities, all belong to a dynamic and complex sense of Anishinaabeg story.

What emerged are themes based in history, expression, earth, and values that span the beauty of Anishinaabeg life. We have grouped them into offerings that we believe encapsulate much of what we know as Anishinaabeg stories, which conveniently fell into what we affectionately referred to as “The 7 R’s”: Roots, Relationships, Revelations, Resiliency, Resistance, Reclamation, and Reflection. These R’s do not, of course, include everything Anishinaabeg stories hold. In addition, the chapters and sections overlap and interact with each other, creating connections and dialogue.

It takes a village, and in that spirit, we say chi-miigwech to Gordon Henry Jr., the reviewers, and all of the contributors for seeing this process through, and for their ideas, perspectives, and engagement in this ongoing dialogue about the meaning, function, and application of stories. We also give tremendous thanks to our many elders, teachers, colleagues, relations, and friends who made Centering Anishinaabeg Studies possible. We continue to gain inspiration from all of you in this work and others. And, last but not least, we acknowledge our families—for without you none of this would be possible, or purposeful.

So, for now, we offer these words—and look forward to more. Miigwech.

NOTE
