



# Living Cultural Storytelling Values through Research

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# Presentation Overview

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- Introduction
- What is story telling?
- Storytelling and research
  - Being a Connected Storyteller
    - Connectedness [Reflexivity] Statement
  - Staying true to your vision and values
    - Case example: Baltimore Native Food Security Study
  - Telling your story creatively
    - Case example: “Our Smallest Warriors, Our Strongest Medicine” Storybook Series
- Objectives:
  - To explore what it means to be a connected storyteller and researcher
  - Explore a few case examples of how storytelling can take form in research



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Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

# Living Citations

- Maudries (Ojibwe)
- Shiloh Maples (Odawa)
- Rosebud Schneider (Ojibwe)
- Sarah Quint (Mattaponi)
- Valarie Blue Bird Jernigan (Choctaw)
- Melissa Walls (Ojibwe)
- Victoria O'Keefe (Cherokee/Seminole)
- Kerry Hawk Lessard (Shawnee)



A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding several beans. The beans are of different colors: black, yellow, and white. Some beans are whole, while others are cracked open, revealing their inner texture. A white rectangular box with a thin black border is centered over the hand, containing the text "What is storytelling?".

What is storytelling?

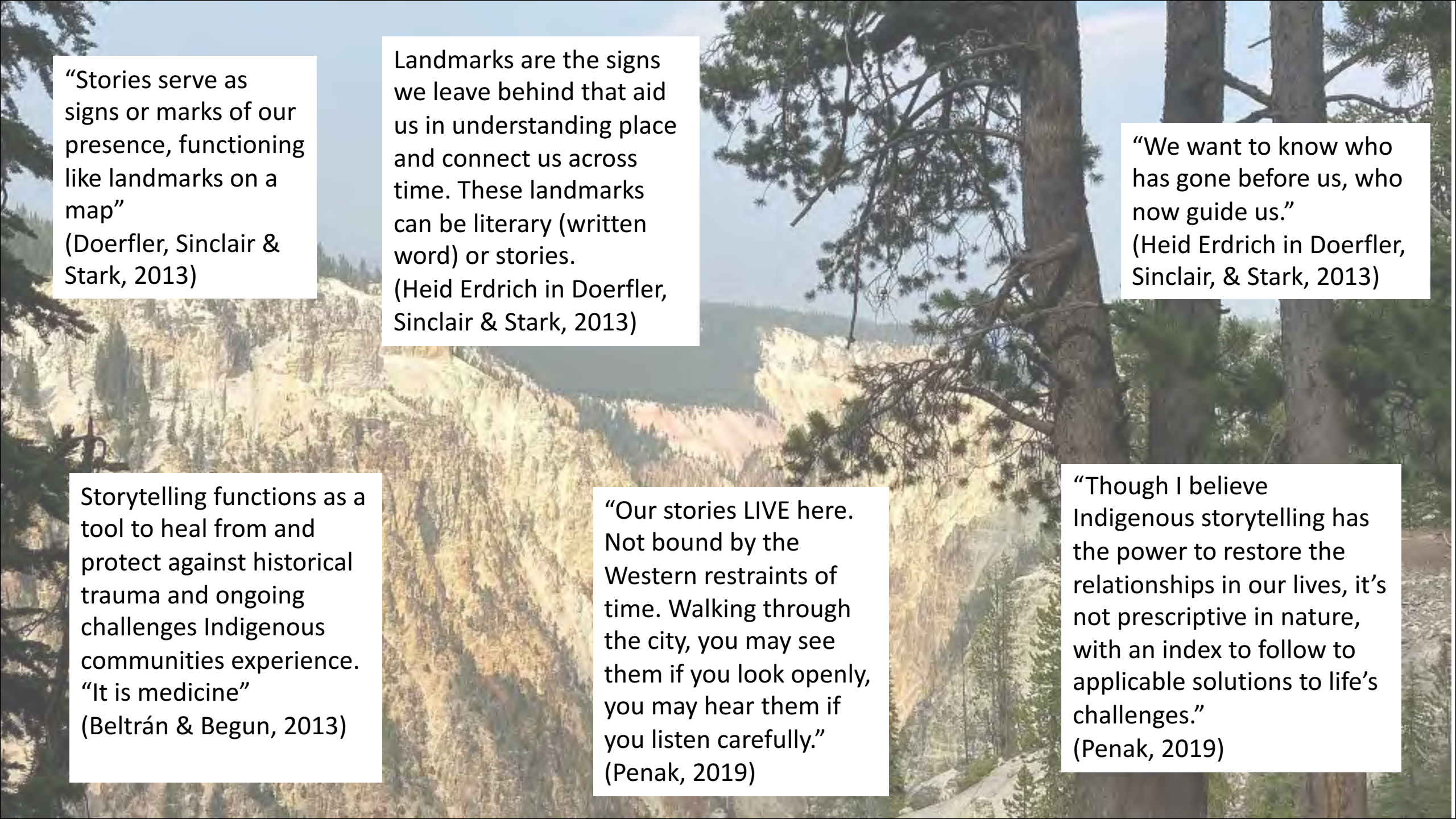
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**What is storytelling?**

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“Stories serve as signs or marks of our presence, functioning like landmarks on a map”

(Doerfler, Sinclair & Stark, 2013)

Landmarks are the signs we leave behind that aid us in understanding place and connect us across time. These landmarks can be literary (written word) or stories.

(Heid Erdrich in Doerfler, Sinclair & Stark, 2013)

“We want to know who has gone before us, who now guide us.”

(Heid Erdrich in Doerfler, Sinclair, & Stark, 2013)

Storytelling functions as a tool to heal from and protect against historical trauma and ongoing challenges Indigenous communities experience.

“It is medicine”

(Beltrán & Begun, 2013)

“Our stories LIVE here. Not bound by the Western restraints of time. Walking through the city, you may see them if you look openly, you may hear them if you listen carefully.”

(Penak, 2019)

“Though I believe Indigenous storytelling has the power to restore the relationships in our lives, it’s not prescriptive in nature, with an index to follow to applicable solutions to life’s challenges.”

(Penak, 2019)

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**What makes a story good (or powerful)?**

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# What makes a story good?

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- A skilled and connected story-teller
- Stays true to the storyteller's vision and values
- Uses creative techniques to convey meaningful (and often place-based) knowledge
  - Our cultural stories help us to make sense of the world and to pass on inter-generational strength

# Living out connections as a storyteller and a researcher

- Positionality and accountability to your relations
- Involves commitment to community
  - In many of our cultures, storytelling comes from trusted knowledge keepers who have listened, learned, and been gifted the right to share stories
- Trust
- Demonstrating and communicating connectedness [Reflexivity]





# What is reflexivity in qualitative research?

- The primary goal of practicing reflexivity is to be aware of a researcher's biases and how those may influence the interpretation and analyses of study data (Jootun, 2009)
- A way to improve rigor in qualitative research
- “Turning of the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation” (Berger, 2015)

How does reflexivity differ from our own structures of accountability and connectedness?

Figure (Call et al, 2018)

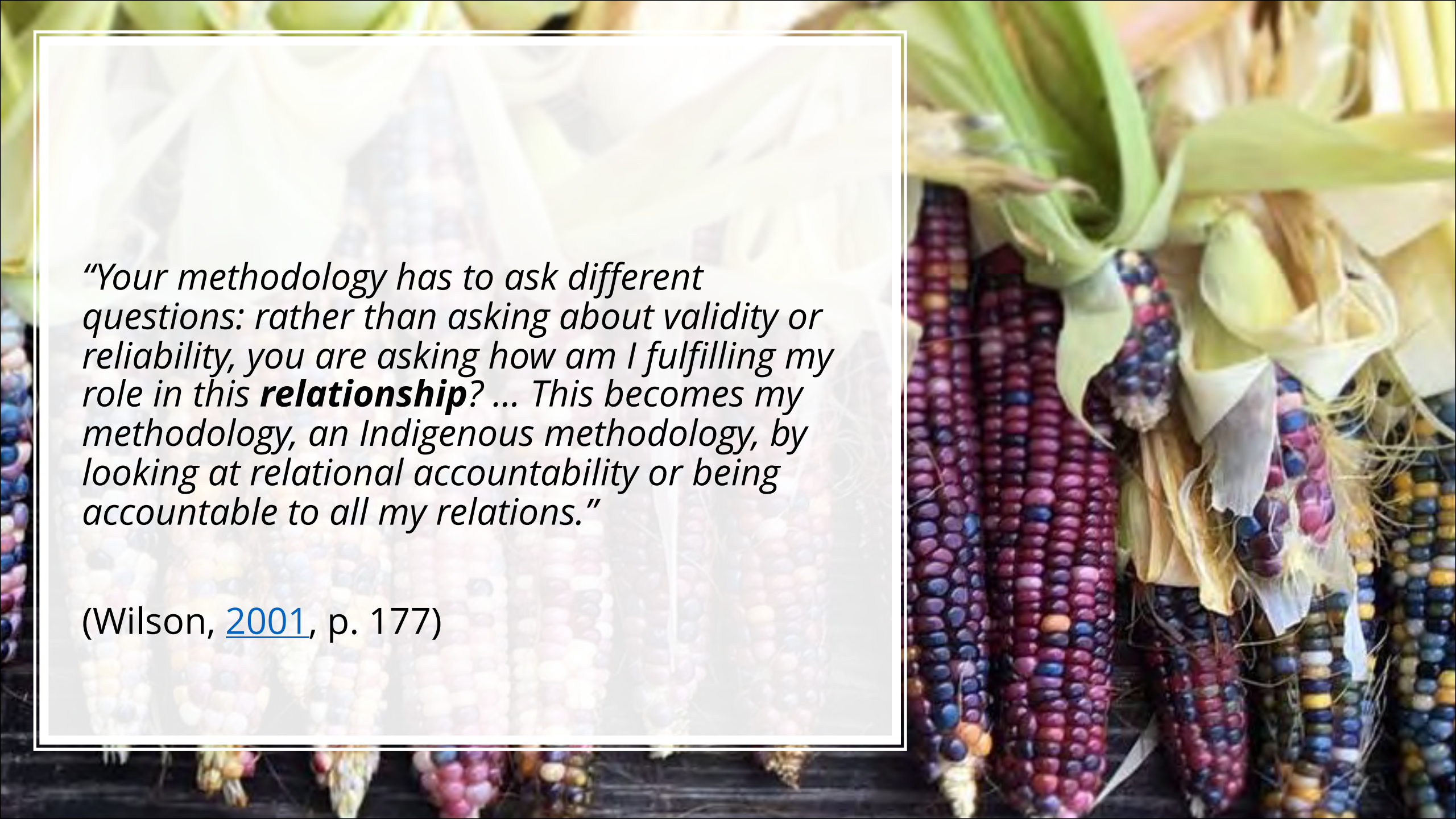


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**How does reflexivity differ from our own structures of accountability and connectedness?**

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*“Your methodology has to ask different questions: rather than asking about validity or reliability, you are asking how am I fulfilling my role in this **relationship**? ... This becomes my methodology, an Indigenous methodology, by looking at relational accountability or being accountable to all my relations.”*

(Wilson, [2001](#), p. 177)



## Tips for developing your connectedness statement

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- Before analyzing data set an intention for your work
- Unpack your greeting structure in your language
- Write down the story of how you came to that work and how you became connected with that community
- Think about how you would explain your role in your research project to an Elder
- Memo regularly along the data collection, data analysis, and data write up processes

# Breakout Activity

- For 2-3 minutes think about what you would put into your connectedness statement
- For 1-2 minutes share with the people around you





# Telling the Story with Your Values

- Analyze data creatively
  - Use creative coding approaches
  - Involve community in interpretation and analysis
  - Present data creatively
- Don't compromise your vision to fit a colonial gaze
  - Your research is for community, forcing it to fit into anyone else's narrative is doing a disservice to your work

"I think that the thing I most want you to remember is that research is a ceremony. And so is life. Everything that we do shares in the ongoing creation of our universe."  
(Wilson, 2008)

"For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."



Audre Lorde



# Case example: Baltimore Native Food Study

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- Presented qualitative data in a narrative form to preserve the context of individual stories and narratives around food security

Our first participant, a mid-thirties self-identified woman, grew up close to her tribal reservation in another state and moved to the Baltimore metro area in adulthood. Although classified as food secure at the time of her interview, she described multiple prolonged experiences with food insecurity throughout her childhood and adolescence. Throughout the interview, she discussed the long-term effects of food insecurity and lack of healthy food availability had on her eating behaviors and long-term food acquisition habits. She described prolonged periods without healthy food access and despite her mother's attempts to access tribal food programs, they often relied on family members or her mother's partners to support them. She describes feeling the need to pay retribution for the unhealthy foods that made up most of her diet through restriction-binge cycles that characterize binge eating disorder.

*"When I was in middle school [and experiencing intense food insecurity], I simply, I was not eating at all. Um, you know, when I got the opportunity to eat, I would, I would do it more probably than I should. . . Like I probably had like some sort of eating disorder, where I just did not eat for a while at a time. So currently, so that used to be the value that I had back then, just don't eat because I'm eating all these unhealthy foods, I need to counteract that by not eating at all."*

She described the lingering effects of food insecurity on her food acquisition habits stating that rationing food and being hyperaware of her financial situation are ways in which she braces herself to weather another bout of food insecurity, even though she describes herself as financially secure now.

*"And I would also say that the effects of that lingered, rationing even until now. . . I do find myself buying food more than anything because I can. So I can finally go out and buy all those things that you know, I never could afford when I was younger, so I buy foods that I want now, so rationing is still something that I do to kind of save money. Um, I am still very money conscious to this day. It has definitely had a lasting effect. . . So it's really about keeping in mind when I get paid next. And you know, how can I make my food last as long as possible without having to go and buy more."*



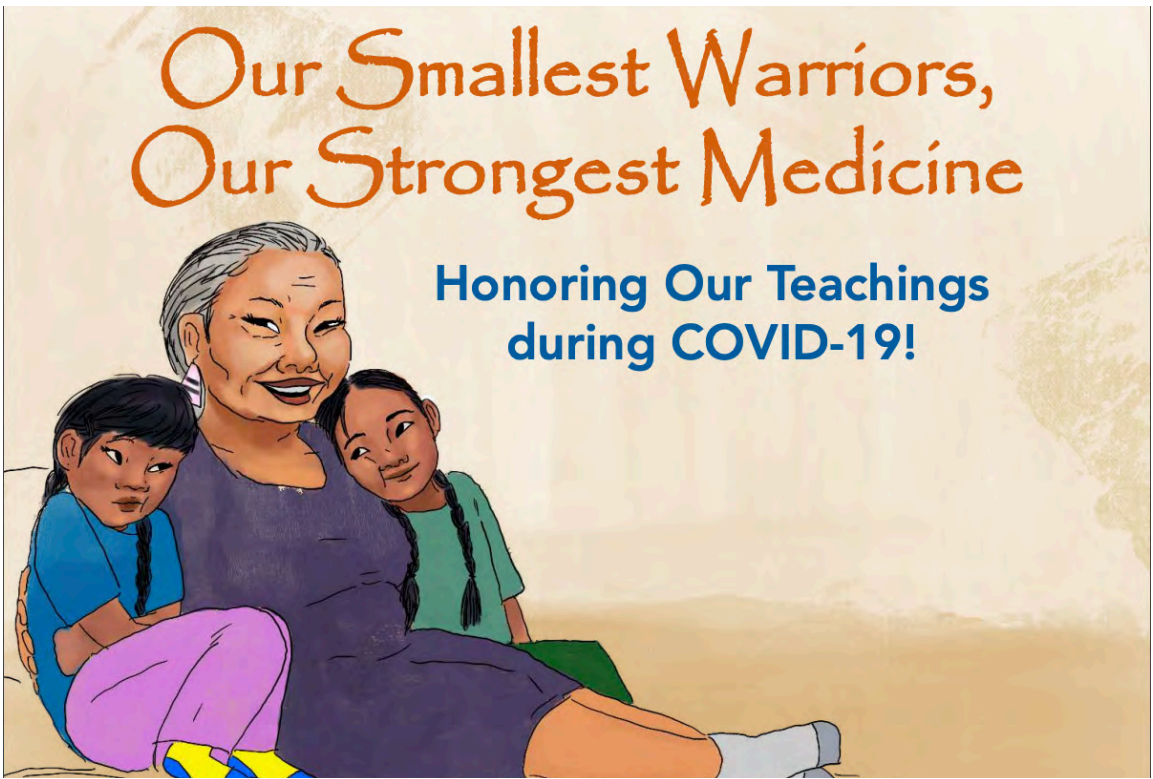
# Telling Your Story Creatively

- Good research should tell a story
- This story might give knowledge to many people but it should also include knowledge to directly benefit communities from which it came from
- Local and place-based learning
  - The story often extends beyond what we share in our academic dissemination

# Storytelling creatively



- Outside of the traditional academic means of dissemination, there are many other opportunities to share your story
- Examples include:
  - Community Research Presentations
  - Podcasts
  - Radio shows
  - Infographics
  - Research Reports
  - Storybooks



Case Example: “Our Smallest Warriors, Our Strongest Medicine” Storybook Series

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# Storybook Working Group and Development Process

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- **Collaborative team** of 14 child development, mental health, and health communications experts
  - Representing 12 tribes, on- and off-reservation, urban Indigenous communities, and non-Indigenous allies
- **Youth artist** Joelle Joyner (Meherrin/Cherokee Nation/Blackfeet)
- **Virtual meetings** via video conference to discuss:
  - Consensus on story themes, character development, major adaptations
  - Feedback on storyboard drafts
  - Input on final story text and illustrations
- **Virtual work via email**
  - Developing parent resources and children's activities to accompany the book
  - Reviewing final content before sending to print

# Key themes

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- **Public health information**
  - Consistent information with public health guidance
  - Wash hands; Wear masks; Watch distance
  - Staying home
- **Strength and self-efficacy**
  - Strengths based approaches - go beyond resilience to focus on intergenerational strengths
  - Self-efficacy – a sense of control over one’s environment and optimistic view of being able to alter a challenging environment or circumstance
- **Mental health coping mechanisms and acknowledging grief**
  - Relaxation and behavioral activation approaches
  - Acknowledging and addressing grief
- **Cultural values and strengths**
  - Relationality, connectedness, passing on language and traditions





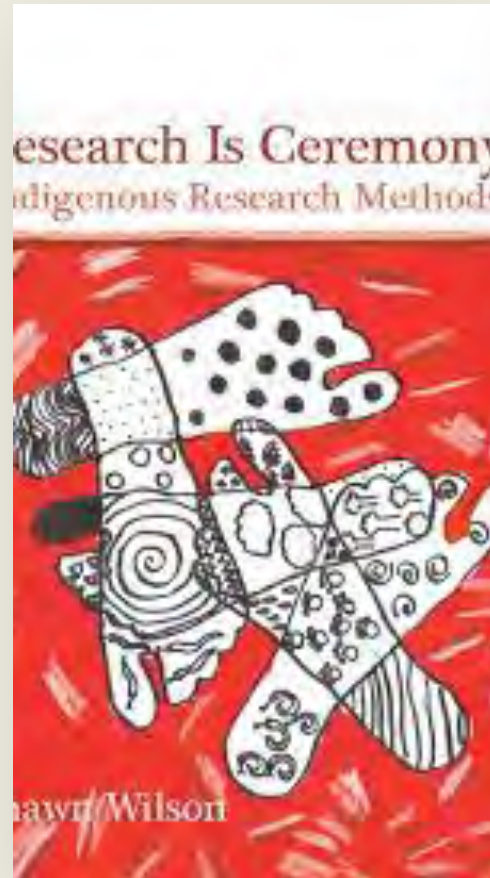
Visit and read the two storybooks:

[bit.ly/SmallestWarriorsBook](http://bit.ly/SmallestWarriorsBook)

[bit.ly/OurSmallestWarriors](http://bit.ly/OurSmallestWarriors)



# Indigenous Scholarship on Storytelling



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