



**Informing the Head and the Heart: A (very) short list of Indigenous writing
by Monique Woroniak
January 2017**

We are fortunate to be living in a time when the writing and stories of Indigenous peoples are being published, or otherwise shared, in great numbers. I want to share a (very) short list of writing that has been important in my own learning journey as a White settler woman, community member and librarian.

There are obviously many, many titles and writers not on this list. I encourage everyone to seek out the ones I mention but also all the others. Indigenous peoples are – and will always be – the experts about their pasts, their realities and their futures. Read widely what they, in particular, have to share.

groundworkforchange.org, the website I work on, shares a number of other suggestions [here](#) and [here](#).

April Raintree by Beatrice Mosionier

I first read this in grade ten as part of assigned reading. Set in Winnipeg and telling the story of two sisters' encounters with the child welfare system and their journeys into adulthood, April Raintree was my first glimpse into how people different than me experienced our city. It is a legendary book – particularly on the Prairies. In both my work and personal life, it is rare for me to meet with community members who haven't read and been moved by the story – non-Indigenous and Indigenous folks alike.

The Break by Katherena Vermette

Richly layered, truly devastating but still ringing through with hope, Katherena Vermette has, in a way, written an "April Raintree" for this time. Set in the North End of Winnipeg, The Break contributes a lot that is important, but one aspect of it that stands out is the varied portrayals of urban Indigenous peoples. Vermette's characters aren't only ones who struggle economically – there are also those who are solidly working class, some with professional designations, some who are nearly "passing" in White society and others who do not. Vermette beautifully reveals the inner lives of many intertwined characters, reminding us how important it is to cherish and support the human connections that make up a community.

Calling Down the Sky by Rosanna Deerchild

You could read any number of reports about the intergenerational effects of residential schools (and you should!) but if you only ever read this book of poetry you will learn a lot. Deerchild's mother is a residential school survivor and this book shares her story, including the relationship with her daughter. The poems are accessible, will weigh on you heavily and will leave you with an even deeper respect for the survivors – and their family members – who walk among us.

Anything by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Chelsea Vowel

Through edited anthologies, social and political analysis, traditional stories, blog posts and, most recently, music lyrics, Simpson has been one of my best, most challenging teachers. She gets straight to the root of whatever issue or reality she writes about. Her analysis is grounded by both her significant academic talent and her community and land-based knowledge. I always need to re-read Simpson's work; she is clear but it inevitably takes me some time to re-orient my head and my heart based on the knowledge she shares.

Want truth on any number of Indigenous-related topics distilled into 1000 words or less? Keep tuned in to Chelsea Vowel's blog [âpihtawikosisân](#) or pick up her recent book, *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Issues in Canada*. You will feel more informed almost instantly.

Manitowapow: Stories from the Land of Water edited by Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair and Warren Cariou

Doing Indigenous solidarity work necessitates that we keep learning the histories and stories of the places where we live. In this sense, *Manitowapow* has been a true gift to me. It is an anthology of Indigenous writing from what many refer to as Manitoba. Spanning thousands of years and covering genres from speeches to poetry, short stories to graphic novels, and also ancient petroglyphs, I carry a copy of *Manitowapow* with me whenever I travel to share what I have learned. When you start knowing some of the stories of your home you don't want to let them go.