

Being Able to Listen - Stephanie Charging Eagle - OSEU #5

Oceti Sakowin is very much a dynamic group, and although we did not gather in the summertime for our annual gatherings, we still do, especially now with transportation, everything. We are able to gather in other places with families, but I would want my students to know that they are very much alive. The people on the Pine Ridge Reservation, the people on the Rosebud, Cheyenne River, they are all part of this Oceti Sakowin.

That would be the first objective of that understanding, is to know that Oceti Sakowin is not dead, that it's very much alive, just now in a different way. And so historically, the idea that Oceti Sakowin is this, it's not just a group, it's a whole sociological, cultural, political, economic group. And that we have ties to not just the land, but with each other. And that establishes a group of people who are very much alive.

And so that as a teacher, as an educator, that's what I hope, is that my students understand that these people over here from the Pine Ridge, the Oglalas, are related to these people from Minnesota, from Flandreau, Yankton. That they are all still related, even though they may not know each other, or know each other's language, they are still part of this group. Oath-telling was very important because you had to be able to... know cognitively what was important in that story, in what was being said.

So you had to listen.

And fortunately, we grew up in a time when we were told that if you're going to come to this gathering, you have to sit and listen. Next time, if you don't, next time you're staying home. That was it.

No argument.

There was no time out, nothing.

You stayed home. So if you were able to go to a gathering and you listened, you never talked while somebody was talking, but you listened. And what I was taught was that you always listen to a person when they're speaking, particularly if they're older than you, and they're in a position where they have respect, authority, whatever. If they're speaking, there is no way you should be talking or doing anything else. Your whole attention should be, the focus of your attention should be on what that person is saying.

The value of oral tradition, storytelling, language, whatever, is that you learn to listen, and you learn critically.

You listen critically, then later you ask questions, you research, or you Google it. But you know, oral tradition, I used to teach little kids language, taught them Lakota language, and I used stories a lot, the Iktomi stories, and I got really good.

The one thing I always had to remember is I could not change the story. I could pantomime along with it, or make all these weird sounds, sing if I have to, but with young children, I had the freedom to do that.

Nobody, they didn't say, they didn't get embarrassed for me or anything, and so I was able to do that. But as time went on, when they got into high school, the same story was told, they should be able to listen and say, hey, this storyteller changed some things. They should be able to listen again critically to the story. Maybe it's more, it's entertaining still, but you still have to keep the important parts of the story in there. So there were some storytellers, just for that, they had that role.

Not everybody was a storyteller, but you still had to be able to listen, and if you're going to tell that story another time, make sure you get the story, the concept, everything of it, so that when you do tell it, it's accurate. And that's all part of that oral language, that oral tradition, is always listening and listening critically, and know what to do with the information that you receive.