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Book Review: Approaches to Teaching Louise Erdrich

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Approaches to Teaching Louise Erdrich. Edited by Greg Sarris, Connie A. Jacobs, and James R. Giles. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2004. ix + 261 pp. Maps, notes, appendixes, works cited, index. \$37.50 cloth, \$19.75 paper.

That a critical vocabulary has been established for addressing Louise Erdrich's body of work is quite evident in *Approaches to Teaching Louise Erdrich*. Key words in the Erdrich lexicon—syncretic, hybridize, amalgamate, mediate, integrate, dialogic, accretive, connective, merging, blurring, webbed, multivoiced, transformative—echo throughout the collection and stamp the text's theoretical approach to her oeuvre. There are two common pedagogical themes that dominate the essays. Teachers elaborate on ways to help students understand the challenges to hegemonic views of culture, history, gender, and religion that Erdrich, drawing upon an imagination nourished by her ethnic and cultural identity as a contemporary American woman of Native and German descent, weaves through her poetry, autobiography, and fiction. Many of the essays also discuss ways to foreground Erdrich's innovative approach to narration in the classroom.

Part 1 of the book, "Materials," provides readers with short summaries of Erdrich's work and recommended supplemental reading lists. Part 2, "Approaches," is divided into four sections. In "History and Culture," contributors provide background about the Chippewas and the Turtle Mountain Reservation. "Erdrich's Fictional World" focuses on the family relationships that bind Erdrich's novels together. In "Pedagogical Strategies" teachers share their ideas for addressing the challenges Erdrich presents to readers unfamiliar with Native American and postmodern literature. "Critical and Theoretical Perspectives" provides provocative interpretive insights. The work concludes with a set of appendices comprised of genealogical charts, maps, important dates in Chippewa history, and study guides for the novels.

The contributors read and interpret Erdrich from a variety of personal and critical perspec-

tives—they write about teaching the works as indigenous people, explore Erdrich's role as a postmodern/Native storyteller, place the novels in the tradition of canonical American literature. There are postcolonial, feminist, and Bakhtinian readings of the early novels: *Love Medicine*, *Tracks*, *The Beet Queen*, and *The Bingo Palace*. The only drawback of the text is one caused by the time lapse between gathering, organizing, and editing a work and its release to the public. Erdrich's later novels—*Tales of Burning Love*, *The Antelope Wife*, *The Master Butchers Singing Club*, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, *Four Souls*, and her newest release, *The Painted Drum*—could not receive the attention they deserve.

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