

## Native American Literature

The following authors and titles are recognized as some of the best Native American literature written and known. Although only one book is listed by each author, each offers several more books to read. This list is not meant to be complete nor authoritative so explore on your own and discover your favorite.

Author Momaday, N. Scott, 1934- (Kiowa-Cherokee)  
Title House made of dawn.  
Subject Kiowa Indians -- Fiction  
Indians of North America -- Southwestern States -- Fiction  
Genre Historical fiction  
Western stories  
1969 Pulitzer Prize

*House Made of Dawn* begins with the protagonist, Abel, returning to his reservation in New Mexico after fighting in World War II. The war has left him emotionally devastated and he arrives too drunk to recognize his grandfather, Francisco. Now an old man with a lame leg, Francisco had earlier been a respected hunter and participant in the village's religious ceremonies. He raised Abel after the death of Abel's mother and older brother, Vidal. Francisco instilled in Abel a sense of native traditions and values, but the war and other events severed Abel's connections to that world of spiritual and physical wholeness and connectedness to the land and its people, a world known as a "house made of dawn."

Author Ridge, John Rollin (Yellow Bird), 1827-1867. (Cherokee)  
Title The life and adventures of Joaquín Murieta, the celebrated California bandit.  
Publication 1955 Edition [New ed.]

Although the novel describes the "the trails and revenge of a mixed-blood Mexican" the novel is actually "a picaresque western adventure based on the resistance of California Natives to the incursion of whites brought on by the gold rush." Ridge is Cherokee and was those on the Trail of Tears during the Cherokee Removal.

Author Callahan, S. Alice (Creek)  
Title Wynema: A Child of the Forest  
Publication 1891

"This novel incorporates explanations of Creek customs, it is a fictional account" of the events that led to the murder of Sitting Bull and the massacre at Wounded Knee. *Wynema* is also a plea for women's rights and suffrage. Possible first work by a Native American woman.

Author Mourning Dove, 1888-1936. (Colville/Okanagan)  
Title Cogewea, the half-blood: a depiction of the great Montana cattle range  
Publication 1981  
Subject Okanagan Indians -- Fiction

A tragic/romantic tale of mixed-blood female who is wooed by a mixed blood suitor – the foreman on the ranch where Cogewea lives – and a two-faced, fortune-hunting White man.

Author Mathews, John Joseph, 1895-1979. (Osage)  
Title Sundown  
Publication 1988  
Subject  
Osage Indians -- Fiction.

Chronicles the existential dilemma of Challenge Windser, an Osage youth born of a father who believes in the advantages of allotment and a mother who relies on traditional Osage Beliefs. Chal goes to college, joins the air corps, and is seduced by the White man's world becomes conflicted.

Author McNickle, D'Arcy, 1904-1977. (Salksh)  
Title The surrounded  
Publication [1978] c1936  
Subject  
Salish Indians -- Fiction

Tells the story of Archilde Leon, a mixed-blood who forays into the White world leaves him disassociated and passion.

Author Silko, Leslie, 1948- (Laguna Pueblo)  
Title Ceremony  
Publication 1986, c1977.  
Subject World War, 1939-1945 -- Veterans -- Fiction  
Laguna Indians -- Fiction

The novel tells the story of Tayo, a veteran of mixed ancestry returning from fighting against Japan in World War II. Returning to the poverty-stricken reservation at Laguna, Tayo is recovering from shell-shock and is haunted with memories of his cousin, who died in the conflict. Seeking an escape from his pain, Tayo initially takes refuge in alcoholism. Gradually, helped by the mixed-blood shaman Betonie, he comes to a greater understanding of the world and his own place within it.

Author Welch, James, 1940-2003. (Blackfeet)  
Title Fools crow / James Welch.  
Publication 1987, c1986  
Subject Siksika Indians -- Fiction

Set in Montana shortly after the Civil War, this novel tells of Fools Crow, a young Blackfoot Indian on the verge of manhood, and his tribe, known as the Lone Eaters. The invasion of white society threatens to change their traditional way of life, and they must choose to fight or assimilate. The story is a powerful portrait of a fading way of life. The story culminates with the Marias Massacre of 1870 in which the U.S. Cavalry knowingly slaughtered innocent Blackfeet. While many find this book tragic with depressing implications, Welch's development of the hero offers contemporary readers a sense of hope.

Author Vizenor, Gerald Robert, 1934- (Annishinaabe/Chippewa)  
Title Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart Also titled as Bearheart: the Heirship Chronicles.  
Publication 1978

A novel within a novel. The major portion of the text is a work written by Saint Louis Bearheart, a Native who works for the BIA in Washington. During a raid on his office, Bearheart asks a young female radical to search through the BIA's file cabinets to find and then read a novel he has written called the Heirship Chronicles. Bearheart's novel chronicles the journey of a mangy miscellany of mixed blood pilgrims who travel from Minnesota to New Mexico in search of an escape window into the fourth world at Pueblo Benito.

Author Erdrich, Louise (Ojibwa)  
Title The plague of doves  
Publication 2008  
Subject Indians of North America -- Fiction  
Ojibwa Indians -- Fiction  
North Dakota -- Fiction

The unsolved murder of a farm family haunts the small, white, off-reservation town of Pluto, North Dakota. The vengeance exacted for this crime and the subsequent distortions of truth transform the lives of Ojibwe living on the nearby reservation and shape the passions of both communities for the next generation.

Author Hogan, Linda (Chickasaw)  
Title Mean spirit: a novel  
Publication 1990

A historical novel based on actual occurrences on oil-rich Oklahoma Indian lands, *Mean Spirit* tells a story of exploitation and murder committed against Native American Indians as they struggle against the greed that threatens their lives and the survival of their culture in the 1920s.

Author Owens, Louis. (Choctaw-Cherokee)  
Title The sharpest sight  
Publication 1992  
Subject Choctaw Indians -- Fiction  
Genre Detective and mystery stories

This mystery novel is the first volume of a new series featuring literary works--novels, short stories, criticism, and interpretations of tribal myths. Owens is of Choctaw, Cherokee and Irish descent. Although the plot of *The Sharpest Sight* involves a double murder mystery, the novel is far more than a whodunit, as it concerns several people of mixed ancestry who have to discover and come to terms with their identity, acknowledge their American Indian heritage, its values and meaning, and the position of Indians in a predominantly white society. The novel also deals with the trauma of the Vietnam War on its walking wounded. When Attis McCurtain, a half-Choctaw Native American and Vietnam veteran, is killed, deputy sheriff Mundo Morales investigates while the victim's younger brother begins a spiritual journey that also leads him to the truth.

Author King, Thomas, 1943- (Cherokee)  
Title Medicine River  
Publication 1990

A story of two Blackfoot friends (in Canada) – Will Horse Capture (the narrator) and Harlen Bigbear. Will returns to Medicine River to attend a funeral. While Will is home, Harlen tricks him into staying and becoming involved in the lives of various members of the community.

Author Sarris, Greg. (Pomo)  
Title Grand Avenue  
Publication 1994

Sarris's first work of fiction, a novel in 10 interconnected stories, probes the disenfranchised lives of a Native American community in Santa Rosa California. Sarris weaves history, spiritual belief, and contemporary survival into the stories of an extended family living in a multicultural world.

Author Alexie, Sherman. 1966- (Coeur d'Alene/Spokane)  
Title Indian Killer  
Publication 1996

In *Indian Killer*, Alexie uses a pulp-fiction form, the serial killer mystery, to frame the social issues facing American Indians. He populates the book with stock characters such as a grizzled ex-cop, a left-wing professor, a right-wing talk radio personality, drunken bums, thuggish teenagers and a schizophrenic main character who serves as the most obvious suspect in a mystery that never quite resolves itself.

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### Resources

Lundquist, Suzanne. *Native American Literatures: An Introduction*. New York: Continuum. 2004.

Poter, Joy and Roemer Kenneth M. (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 2005.



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