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Wokini Initiative: The New Beginnings Newsletter

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The New Beginnings Newsletter, April 2022

Wokini Initiative

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Wokini Knowledge Circle Debuting at Briggs Library

Collaborative and Student-Led Initiative to Open April 26

The Briggs Library is soon to be the home of the Wokini Knowledge Circle, a space that promotes understanding of Oceti Sakowin culture and history through exhibits, books, and other materials. This project was made possible through a Wokini Challenge Grant. The Wokini Knowledge Circle will open with a reception on April 26 at 3:30 pm in the Main Level Reading Room in Briggs.

We sat down with Emmeline Weber, Briggs Library Operations Manager and the project director for this grant, and Emirra Returns (Standing Rock/Oglala, Rapid City), the Knowledge Circle Student Assistant and Project Manager. Emirra is majoring in Political Science with minors in American Indian Studies and Legal Studies.

What is the Wokini Knowledge Circle?

Emmeline: It is a dedicated space at Briggs Library to promote understanding and education about Oceti Sakowin culture and history. We're doing that through exhibits that student assistants are developing, and Emirra is our first Student Assistant for this project. We're hoping it's a project that will continue to go on in the future. The space is made up of five bookshelves arranged in a circular pattern and on those bookshelves will be rotating exhibits and books. We have some artwork going to be placed there as well and other materials.

Where did the inspiration for this project and the design come from?

Emmeline: When the Wokini grant application was announced we'd already had a couple of grant projects here through the archives. So I was just walking around the building trying to think of other ideas where the needs of the library and the needs of the grant could mesh and I was walking in the space where the Knowledge Circle is going to be located now. We're using the same bookcases that were there prior to the Knowledge Circle, and back then a lot of them were empty. So it felt like a very underutilized area. And so I just was thinking about the Wokini Initiative, and the desire to have educational materials for students and faculty to learn more about the culture. And it just felt like it could be a location where that could happen.



A couple of years ago, I had been on a traveling workshop with CAIRNS (Center for American Indian Research and Native Studies) and in their materials they had information about the camp circles, and how they faced East. I know the symbol of a circle is a sacred symbol and the culture, so I thought about talking circles and so I felt like the circle could be a nice way to springboard that educational element.

With the exhibits it started off with just an idea of having basic exhibits, and Emirra has brought the exhibit topics to the project, so she chooses the exhibits to develop. And she's brought new ideas as well as how to present those exhibits, like the audio portion. So since the original proposed idea, it's developed in bringing in new materials that we hadn't considered before.

Emirra, as a student, how did you become involved with this project?

Emirra: I worked in archives last year, and Michelle (Watkins) recommended me for this job.

Emmeline: And we're so happy that she joined it.

What has it been like working in archives and then collaborating on the Knowledge Circle?

Emirra: [In archives] I think it's cool to learn and see all the stuff that we've had on campus. I liked it. I mean, it led me to this job and I really, really like this job.

This job has actually also helped with what I want to do with my future career, because I turned out to really like the research in indigenous culture and everything. So yeah, it's impacted me a lot, I would say. It's great.

The work I've done at the library with the Wokini Grants have allowed me to really dig deeper and learn about my culture. My first exhibit is about the Lakota language. I take Lakota classes here and it's really important to me that we revitalize the language. So I'm pretty grateful that I get the chance to have an exhibit solely on it so that I can like bring more awareness to the situation.

Emmeline: The success of [the Wokini Knowledge Circle] is in large part due to Emirra's work, because the grant purpose was to have a student heavily involved with developing the circle. And we want to give those students free rein as to what kind of topics they want to research or collections they want to recommend to include or to purchase for the circle. Emirra is an excellent student assistant, and we would not have as successful of a launch if it wasn't for her really good work.

What are the plans for the reception on April 26?

We'll have Dr. George Eagleman here to start us off with the blessing. Dr. Eagleman is the grant consultant who I reached out to after meeting at a library event. He reviews the exhibits for cultural appropriateness prior to display and he has provided really good guidance.

The [American Indian Student Association](#) will be serving frybread. To celebrate we'll have some of the grant project personnel just give a few words. And then really just welcome everyone into the circle to you check out the materials that we have up now.

[Learn about the Wokini Initiative](#)

[Learn about the Wokini Challenge Grant](#)

Upcoming Events

- AISES Meetings: Every Tuesday, 7:00 PM, AISC Lounge
 - AISA Meetings: Every Tuesday, 5:00 PM, AISC Lounge
 - AISC Popcorn Fridays: Every Friday, All Day, AISC Lounge
 - Wokini Scholars Meeting, April 19, 7:00 PM, AISC Classroom
 - Topic: Personal Finance and Internships
 - *The Gift* Reception and Curator Talk with Dr. Craig Howe, 4:30-7:00 PM, April 21, South Dakota Art Museum
 - *The Gift*, an educational art exhibit from the Center for American Indian Research & Native Studies, April 1 - July 31, 2022, South Dakota Art Museum
 - Meet the Author - David Heska Wanbli Weiden, *Winter Counts*, April 21 6:30-8:30 pm, Orpheum Theater, Sioux Falls. (Event hosted by [Siouxland Libraries](#), registration required.)
 - Joseph Marshall Keynote & Workshop Presentation, April 21, Woster Celebration Hall
 - Wahanpi Wednesday: April 27, May 4, AISC
 - Film Screening: Women of the White Buffalo, April 27, AISC, panel to follow
 - Native Graduate Honoring Ceremony, May 6, AISC
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Women of the White Buffalo

Filmmaker and Panelists from Pine Ridge and Rosebud Coming to AISC

On April 27 the Wokini Initiative and the AISC will host documentary filmmaker Deborah Anderson and a screening of her work, "Women of the White Buffalo". The film offers glimpses into the lives of nine Oglala and Sicangu Lakota women, ranging in ages from 10 to 98, and seeks to center our Native sisters' voices in this current global wave of women's empowerment.

The Wokini Initiative is delighted to host Anderson and a panel of some of the women featured in the documentary on April 27 in the AISC. Look out for more details in your inbox later this month.

[View Trailer](#)

[Learn About the AISC](#)

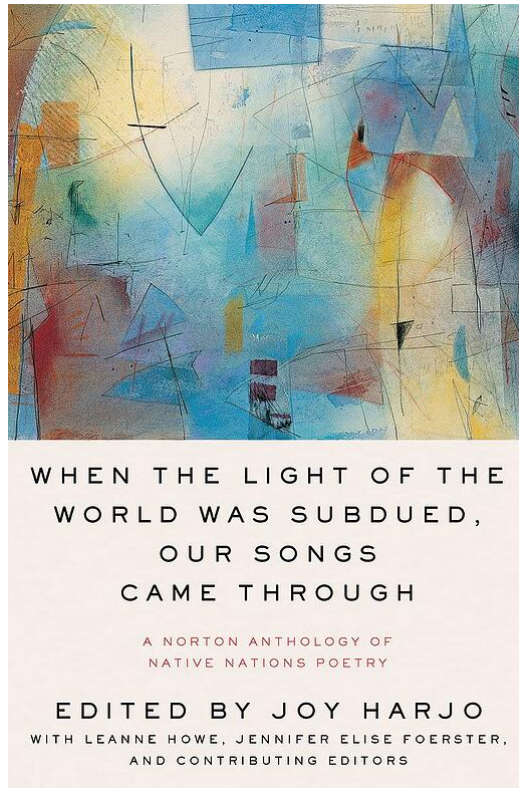
Dakota Word of the Month

káǵA | to make

Lakota Word of the Month

ptehínčala | buffalo-calf

Book of the Month



Since April is National Poetry Month, we recommend you immerse yourselves in the verses contained in the Norton Anthology of Native Nations Poetry, *When the Light of the World Was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*, edited by National Poet Laureate Joy Harjo (Muscogee). Harjo's introduction elevates Native oral tradition as literature, and the selections open with the transliteration of an Anishinaabeg dream song. The anthology includes selections from time immemorial and from contemporary writers representing a myriad of indigenous nations across Turtle Island.

Oceti Sakowin poets in this anthology include Zitkala-Sa (Yankton Dakota), Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Crow Creek), Lois Red Elk (Isanti/Hunkpapa/Ihanktonwa), John Trudell (Santee Dakota), Tiffany Midge (Standing Rock), and Layli Long Soldier (Oglala Lakota). The beauty of a Norton Anthology is you can start

anywhere, read as little or as much as you want, and engage with profound and thought-provoking poetry. This collection is a great way to get familiar with indigenous literary traditions and contemporary poetic expressions.



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