



Absent Narratives Resource Assessment Tool

As one begins the journey of embracing and including typically absent(ed) narratives into curriculum, public life, and into practice, it can be difficult to discern what resources are appropriate and respectful to the stories that are being brought to light.

At the Humanities Center, we believe that the foundation of this journey should always begin with building relationships to the stories themselves and with the people telling them. We've developed the following tool to help with the process of building this relationship.

The foundational question one should begin is asking: **Who or what isn't here? Who or what isn't being talked about?** The aim of incorporating absent(ed) narratives is to create a "balance of stories" which open up the space for increased engagement.

Guidelines for using the tool

The tool below is not a traditional checklist. Instead, use this as a framework to respectfully interrogate resources that you come across. How you decide to move forward with using the resources (or not) is completely up to you!

- **For anything checked "...adequate and appropriate"**
 - Great!
- **For anything checked "...have some hesitation..."**
 - Do you have other resources that might better address this concern that could be paired with the resource in question?
 - Is a "disclaimer" needed?
 - Might these areas serve as discussion/conversation topics if dealt with sensitively and appropriately? How will you do so?
 - Who can you ask to help you decide how to proceed?
- **For anything checked "Unsure"**
 - What relationships do you have to help give clarity to the concern? Who can you ask or consult?
 - What more information do you need? Where will you get it?
- **For anything checked "I don't think the resource addresses..."**
 - Might you consider using a different or more appropriate resource?
 - Do you think the resource is strong enough in other areas to warrant further consideration? If yes,
 - Is a "disclaimer" needed?

- How will you pair other resources with this to help give light to this area? Is this an appropriate place to have this conversation?

For anything reviewed, consider

- creating a document showing how it was reviewed and why
- going through the tool in a group to help build capacity for interrogating narratives
- how these questions resonate with different communities



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Context – The big questions!	
<p>Who recommended the resource or how did you come across it? Was this resource recommended to you by someone from the community that is being discussed?</p>	<p>Source:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This source was recommended by someone from the community being discussed or a respected scholar in this area. (Or, someone from the Minnesota Humanities Center!)</p>
<p>What is the creator’s background for writing/creating a resource about this particular community? Check the author’s background. Are they from the community being discussed?</p> <p><i>At the Humanities Center, we often say we should learn FROM and not ABOUT. Although this sentiment is not a catch-all, we often will choose to amplify resources which come straight from the communities themselves.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I think that the resource is adequate and appropriate in addressing this question</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have some hesitation about how the resource addresses this but might overlook it if the resource is still strong in other areas</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don’t think the resource addresses this or have significant concerns about how this concern is being addressed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>
<p>What is the context of the resource? Is it specific or general? Resources that deal more with specific communities or with individual experiences are largely better because they do not attempt to generalize experiences.</p> <p><i>Analyzing the context of the resources can help draw attention to ways it may provide a “single story” of the community being discussed. For example, resources which discuss Women Veteran experiences rather than generic Veteran experiences might be prioritized. Resources which discuss a specific subset of Women Veterans (such as Women Veterans of Color or Queer Women Veterans) or, center on one woman’s experience as a Veteran might be more helpful than resources</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I think that the resource is adequate and appropriate in addressing this question</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have some hesitation about how the resource addresses this but might overlook it if the resource is still strong in other areas</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don’t think the resource addresses this or have significant concerns about how this concern is being addressed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>

<p><i>that discuss them more generally. In a similar way, resources which discuss specific American Indian Tribes are usually better than ones that discuss a generic “American Indian.”</i></p> <p><i>At the Humanities Center, we value learning from and with multiple voices. One way this multiplicity can show up is through a collection of many of these more-specific stories rather than one or two resources that are more general in nature.</i></p>	
<p>Form/Presentation</p>	
<p>For contemporary (but secondary) sources, is the resource up-to-date? If a website, was it updated recently? Are all of the links current and not-broken? If another type of resource, was it published recently?</p> <p><i>In the present age, new information is always being surfaced and incorporated. Typically, resources that are up-to-date are going to reflect the most current understandings. If you have a more historical text or resource, it can be helpful to pair this with something contemporary.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I think that the resource is adequate and appropriate in addressing this question</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have some hesitation about how the resource addresses this but might overlook it if the resource is still strong in other areas</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't think the resource addresses this or have significant concerns about how this concern is being addressed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>
<p>Is the resource usable and appropriate for your audience and purpose?</p> <p><i>Knowing what “appropriate” looks like for your audience involves firstly building and strengthening relationships with them in order to know their needs and how certain stories might be received. Something that might come up is the potential for a story to trigger.</i></p> <p><i>Knowing what’s “usable” for your purpose involves thinking about what you’d like to see as a result of using this resource.</i></p> <p><i>Educators who are dealing with a room of second graders might have a goal of simply broadening the student’s worldviews about the community and themselves. Educators who are in a room of high school seniors might be looking to engage in a more critical dialogue.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I think that the resource is adequate and appropriate in addressing this question</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have some hesitation about how the resource addresses this but might overlook it if the resource is still strong in other areas</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't think the resource addresses this or have significant concerns about how this concern is being addressed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>

<p>Consider how the resource in question addresses these needs and goals.</p>	
<p>Does the resource present well? Does the resource present the stories in a visual manner that is respectful of the content?</p> <p><i>While it's important to "not judge a book by its cover" as you begin the work of centering absent(ed) narratives, it's important to make sure that these stories are presented in the best light possible in order to not derail or take away from the story that is being told.</i></p> <p><i>Realize also that what is aesthetically pleasing for you might be culturally-bound. It's ok to ask someone else (preferably from the community being discussed) if the resource is being presented in a sufficiently respectful manner.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I think that the resource is adequate and appropriate in addressing this question</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have some hesitation about how the resource addresses this but might overlook it if the resource is still strong in other areas</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't think the resource addresses this or have significant concerns about how this concern is being addressed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>
<p>Content</p>	
<p>Is the community being discussed presented as "extinct" or otherwise "not present?"</p> <p><i>Does the narrative say in so many words, "These people used to _____?"</i> <i>Ex: Dakota people <u>had</u> a very different relationship to this place than white settlers. Vs. Historically, Dakota people had a very different relationship to this place than white settlers, and this relationship continues today.</i></p> <p><i>Or does it otherwise minimize the existence of these communities by saying "those people" are "not here"?</i> <i>Ex: "As of yet, Asian Americans have not stepped up in areas of social justice." Vs. "There are a few salient examples of Asian Americans working in social justice. They are..."</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I think that the resource is adequate and appropriate in addressing this question</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have some hesitation about how the resource addresses this but might overlook it if the resource is still strong in other areas</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't think the resource addresses this or have significant concerns about how this concern is being addressed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>
<p>Is the resource condescending to or disproportionately in awe of the community's customs or lifestyles?</p> <p><i>Are the customs or mannerisms displayed by the community within the resource looked down upon or disproportionately mystified?</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I think that the resource is adequate and appropriate in addressing this question</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have some hesitation about how the resource addresses this but might overlook</p>

<p>Watch out for loaded words like: “backward,” “quaint,” “underdeveloped,” “exotic,” “simple,” “crazy” or any words or imagery which suggest that the customs and lifestyles discussed otherwise deviate from an arbitrary “norm.”</p>	<p>it if the resource is still strong in other areas</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don’t think the resource addresses this or have significant concerns about how this concern is being addressed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>
<p>Does the resource distort history? <i>Watch for balance of presentation as you would with any history. For example, any resource which attempts to discuss historical issues in a binary manner (bad vs. good) is probably distorted to a certain extent. Historical events are rarely, if ever, that simplistic.</i></p> <p><i>If it seems that an event is being painted in this way, and the resource is strong in other areas, consider adding more perspectives on the same event to address the balance issue.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I think that the resource is adequate and appropriate in addressing this question</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have some hesitation about how the resource addresses this but might overlook it if the resource is still strong in other areas</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don’t think the resource addresses this or have significant concerns about how this concern is being addressed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>
<p>Are norms ethnocentric? <i>Are the characters within the resource being used as foils for describing flaws in American society? For example, does the resource make it obvious that one way of being is prioritized over another?</i></p> <p><i>At the Humanities Center, we attempt to adopt an attitude of epistemological modesty, humility, or dexterity, which asserts there is not a single way of doing things “right.”</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I think that the resource is adequate and appropriate in addressing this question</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have some hesitation about how the resource addresses this but might overlook it if the resource is still strong in other areas</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don’t think the resource addresses this or have significant concerns about how this concern is being addressed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>
<p>Are there stereotypes in the resource? <i>Something we often talk about at the Humanities Center is not that stereotypes aren’t true; it’s that they are incomplete. A dead giveaway is if “all” of a certain group are or behave a certain way.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I think that the resource is adequate and appropriate in addressing this question</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have some hesitation about how the resource addresses this but might overlook it if the resource is still strong in other areas</p>

<p><i>Where these stereotypes might be present, it's important to be critical about where these "single stories" come from and to be skeptical about why they are present within a particular work. Again, if there are stereotypes in a resource, does the resource also present counter-narratives to these stereotypes?</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't think the resource addresses this or have significant concerns about how this concern is being addressed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>
<p>Watch for tokenism!</p> <p><i>Does the resource make a minimal or haphazard attempt at "diversity" without actually taking the time to delve into the complexities?</i></p> <p><i>Particularly within the work of incorporating absent(ed) narratives, it's easy to fall into a trap of using certain stories as tokens for addressing a missing voice. This trap can be avoided by asking oneself "why?"</i></p> <p><i>Are you, for example, attempting to incorporate this narrative and ask it to speak about an entire body of experiences? Or, are you incorporating this narrative to inspire the knowledge that there is much more to be known? At the Humanities Center, we believe that absent(ed) narratives speak for themselves and not on behalf of an entire community.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I think that the resource is adequate and appropriate in addressing this question</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have some hesitation about how the resource addresses this but might overlook it if the resource is still strong in other areas</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't think the resource addresses this or have significant concerns about how this concern is being addressed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>
<p>Are the people of the community presented as objects?</p> <p><i>Looking through the resource, are the people presented as having agency? Autonomy? Strength? Power? Identity? Humanity?</i></p> <p><i>Even in groups that have been historically marginalized, stories which discuss the dynamics of marginalization should acknowledge the humanity of the group. Ultimately, these are stories of people and places and should be presented as such.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I think that the resource is adequate and appropriate in addressing this question</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have some hesitation about how the resource addresses this but might overlook it if the resource is still strong in other areas</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't think the resource addresses this or have significant concerns about how this concern is being addressed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>