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After Centuries of Colonial Violence, a Resurgence of Indigenous Language Learning

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Navajo Update

60-day public comment period on the NRC staff's draft

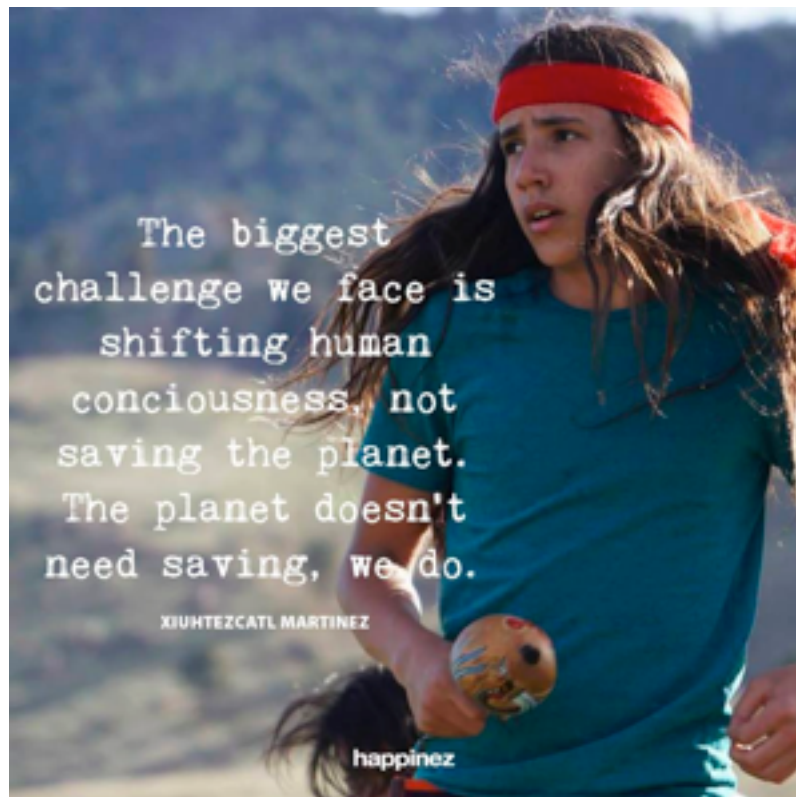
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After Centuries of Colonial Violence, a Resurgence of Indigenous Language Learning

Friday, 21 August

By [Jason Coppola](#), [Truthout](#) | Report

A Maori warrior chants at a Haka during a Waitangi Day celebration, February 6, 2009, in Waitangi, New Zealand. The Maori are one of many groups that have struggled against the violent effects of colonization on their languages. (Photo: [Patricia Hofmeester](#) / [Shutterstock.com](#))

It's a crisis point in history for Native American languages. Without a concerted effort to revitalize them, many will soon

go extinct, succumbing to the generations-long effort to destroy them.

"You could reasonably say every single Native American language, including the large ones, are endangered," said linguist K. David Harrison, a National Geographic fellow teaching at Swarthmore College. "There's no room for complacency whatsoever."

Praying to Ruaumoko

The Maori people of New Zealand are one of many groups that have struggled against the violent effects of colonization on their languages. In 1840, the Maori came under the rule of the British Crown as more and more European settlers arrived and more land was needed to accommodate them. Land conflicts eventually broke out into all-out war, ending with huge tracts of Maori land being confiscated by the government. Displacement, poverty and racism became commonplace.

Their struggle now reflects that of other Indigenous peoples and nations across the globe fighting to preserve their knowledge, culture and traditional way of life.

Hana O'Regan is Ngāi Tahu, Maori. She is the director of Maori and Pasifika and director of student services at the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology in New Zealand.

A Maori warrior chants at a Haka during a Waitangi Day celebration, February 6, 2009, in Waitangi, New Zealand. The Maori are one of many groups that have struggled against the violent effects of colonization on their languages. (Photo: [Patricia Hofmeester](#) / [Shutterstock.com](#))

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Hana O'Regan is Ngāi Tahu, Maori. She is the director of Maori and Pasifika and director of student services at the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology in New Zealand. Her great grandparents were fluent Maori speakers. They never passed it down to her grandmother.

Determined to reverse that trend, O'Regan began learning Maori at the age of 13 as a second language. She then taught her children Maori as a first language.

"Language is a fundamental element in terms of having a positive cultural identity," O'Regan told Truthout. "The first tool to demoralize a people was the destruction of their language. They knew that it had a direct relationship with the way those people then felt about themselves. It's a tool that was used throughout Africa, America, Canada, Europe, and was even used with the Welsh and the Irish."

The Maori language gives O'Regan's children a profound sense of belonging, she said. "They've had to go through a lot of hard times," she said. "Even when things are really bad, they've always gone back to that sense of identity. That's the thing that can always locate them and make them feel like they have a place and make sense of everything. That's the gift of your heritage language."

Nothing illustrates the difference between learning Maori as a first or second language more than a story that O'Regan told Truthout about a powerful earthquake striking her hometown of Christchurch in late 2010.

"What's at stake is not just the preservation of a language but a way of thinking and seeing the world around us."



"I learned about the traditions and the way we connect to the natural world but it was almost academic. It wasn't in me. The way the Maori see the world is through our Gods," she said. "I learned about them, but I still thought that when there's a tsunami, or an earthquake for instance, there were reasons for it like shifting tectonic plates. That's how I'm seeing the world. My children saw those earthquakes as being something completely different. It really hit me probably for the first time that the way they saw the world was different because Maori was their first language. There was no questioning it."

As the powerful earthquake struck the beach where O'Regan and her family live, her son surprised her by grabbing onto her shirt as the ground shook under their feet. He shouted, "Mom, please pray to Ruaumoko!" In Maori mythology, Ruaumoko is the god of earthquakes and volcanoes.

Concerned only for her family's safety, O'Regan confessed, "The last thing on my mind was a prayer to the god of the earthquakes. I'm thinking there may be a tsunami, we have to get to higher ground. But in his world that was absolutely what we needed to do. And I thought well if there is a tsunami I have to do something to settle my son down so we prayed to Ruaumoko, and he settled down."

"It was just incredible," said O'Regan. "My children, who were like 6 and 7 years old at the time, weren't just theorizing it. They were connected. They understood their place in this world and their relationship to it. And that was mind blowing to me as a second language learner. It was their cultural self really taking over."

"A child who doesn't have access to that will learn about the god of earthquakes as a legend. They will learn about it as a legend, as a fairy tale," she told Truthout. "They won't feel it. It won't help them understand how they are placed in the world. It won't help them understand how they are connected to it. Through the language, my children have windows into that world, to their world, in a way that I struggle with sometimes."

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Efforts to Preserve the Lakota Language

The [Lakota Language Nest Immersion School](#) (Lakǰól'iyapi Wahóǰpi) represents another instance of resistance to the colonial legacy that threatens many Indigenous languages. The school is a growing Lakota language program for children beginning at age 3. The school, located on the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Reservation in North Dakota, is struggling to find ways of staying open as initial grants are set to run out.

As Truthout [has reported](#), Tipiziwin Tolman is a Lakota language activities instructor at the school. Tolman's family has a long history with the Lakota language. She recently learned that her great grandfather, Joseph Pretends Eagle Sr., was a Lakota code talker and Silver Medal recipient during World War I, transmitting coded messages in his native tongue about troop movements or positions that were virtually impossible to break. While they had always known that Pretends Eagle Sr. was a veteran of the war, his role in using his traditional Lakota language to fool enemy troops was a secret he kept only to himself until his death. Recently released government documents revealed that Pretends Eagle Sr., along with many other Lakota warriors, played that role during the war.

Despite the contributions to the United States from many native families such as Tolman's, keeping traditional Lakota knowledge and identity alive is a constant battle against US government policies created to oppose it.

This is a linguistic heritage that needs the support of the American people in order to survive over the long term."

"Our people's struggles and our people's social ills are really tied to this lack of identity which comes from all of those past wrongs," Tolman told Truthout. "All of those federal mandates and policies that strictly forbid us from speaking our language and practicing our spirituality and our traditions did something to our peoples' spirits."

For example, Christian boarding schools received mandates to take thousands of Native children as young as 5 years old from their homes and families, tortured and abused them, and forced them to worship as Christians, all in the name of "saving" them. Other policies that Tolman mentioned included the banning of spiritual ceremonies in the past and the blood quantum law, which was designed by European colonists to determine who was to be considered Native American and who was not. If your blood did not measure sufficient generations of native bloodline, a certificate would not be granted. Today, the amount of blood quantum needed to be enrolled in a tribe varies from nation to nation.

"We didn't impose any of the rules on ourselves as to who is and who isn't Lakota. Our people didn't think like that," said Tolman, suggesting the policy was at odds with a more traditional, uncolonized way of Lakota thought. "That was a government policy, and our people have bought into it. We fight all the time over who is full blood and who is not, who does or doesn't look like an Indian. We have such huge identity issues. It comes from language loss but it also comes from embracing policies like that. We didn't do that to ourselves. We are holding onto that idea of who

is more Indian because it says it on my certification of Indian blood."

Tolman said that more important than blood certification are answers to questions like these: "Do you conduct yourself as a citizen of our nation? Do you adhere to our traditional values of generosity and hospitality and speak our language? Do you help others in need? Do you put yourself last?"

"All of these Lakota social protocols can't be measured in blood percentage," she added. "That doesn't speak to how I conduct myself as a Lakota woman or a Lakota mother."



"Having access to the language strengthens our identity and is a healing process for our people", Tolman tells Truthout. "It's not the cure all, it's a proven path. We can heal ourselves. We don't need outsiders to do that for us. We have what it takes. Our language has been through so much. It's like our elder. And this elder is very sick, very close to dying. It hadn't been nourished. It had been silent. These children now are able to visit that elder. They are able to feed that elder's spirit, to offer nourishment. That elder survived many atrocities and survived for a reason, so that this healing process could be provided to the children and people who need it the most. Learning the language is a healing process for yourself personally, for your family and for the people as a whole."

The Language Nest has turned for now to [online fundraising](#) to survive. Despite the economic challenges, Tolman remains clear. "We are doing creators work. We believe in the vision and the future for the children. They already are in a sense our future leaders."

Rising Voices

Tolman can be seen in the upcoming documentary, *Rising Voices/Hóthą́ŋiŋpi*, due out in November. The film addresses the worldwide assault on Indigenous languages while telling "the story of a passionate, dedicated and diverse group of people, including members of the Lakota community and linguists from outside of the community who are working together to save the language and restore it to its rightful place in Lakota - and American - culture."

Executive director of the film, Wil Meya, is the cofounder of the [Lakota Summer Institute](#) and executive director and cofounder of the Language Conservancy and the [Lakota Language Consortium](#). He has been working with Indian communities for the last 25 years.

The purpose of the film, according to Meya, is "to inspire current Lakota nonspeakers and tribal members to learn the language, We need people to become shepherds and stewards of the language."

Rising Voices also intends to reach out to non-Indian audiences to explain how, "out of the 5 or 6 hundred Indigenous languages that once existed here, only about a dozen left have a strong chance of making it, and Lakota is one of them," according to Meya. "And by losing these languages, all of the culture and all of these traditions, and basically the social and community memory of these important Indigenous cultures have gone. We wanted to let people know that there is this important movement happening by young Lakota people who want to recapture their language."

The film's screenings have already served as an inspiration to many other Native nations and language learners throughout the country.

"As Americans," Meya told Truthout, "we need to support these efforts because it's part of the linguistic heritage of this country. It's a linguistic heritage that's not been recognized and essentially this is a linguistic heritage that needs the support of the American people in order to survive over the long term."

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Jason Coppola

Jason Coppola is a writer and producer of the upcoming documentary film *Operation: Manifest Destiny*. Coppola has worked unembedded in occupied Iraq and on the Pine Ridge and Cheyenne River Indian Reservations. His stories for Truthout and Al Jazeera English have won awards from the Native American Journalism Association.

Related Stories

Native American Tribes Seek Help from UN, World Court

By Bethania Palma Markus, Truthout | News

Native Americans Confront History of Dispossession

By Bill Moyers, Moyers & Company | Video Interview

Indigenous Storytelling in the Limelight

By Francesca Dziadek, Inter Press Service | Report

CBS Sunday Morning - digdeep.org.

In the five days since "Sunday Morning" broadcast Lee Cowan's report about the hundreds of

families on the Navajo Nation who live without running water, the nonprofit DigDeep - which has been trying to raise a half-million dollars to dig a well for the Navajo in the New Mexico desert - reports that they have received \$528,000 in donations from our viewers, as well as inquiries from corporations interested in helping.



DigDeep's executive director George McGraw says the money raised from "Sunday Morning" viewers will entirely pay for the well. Donations on top of that

will allow them to fuel the water truck, hire new drivers, and build basic plumbing in local homes.

"Smith Lake is just one community among many facing similar conditions," McGraw said. "Almost 90,000 people on the Navajo Reservation don't have safe, running water at home... and there's more work to be done. The generosity of CBS 'Sunday Morning' viewers will allow us to expand our work to other communities in need, until there's no American family left there without water."

Thank you, everyone! And for more information visit digdeep.org.

Navajo Update

In the wake of the recent 300 million gallon waste spill that flowed into the San Juan River, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency arranged for tanker trucks filled with water for crops and livestock to be sent to the Navajo Nation as an interim supply. The Navajo President, however, is now reporting that he personally inspected the water and found it to be [contaminated with an oily black substance](#). *Guardian*

The **Navajo Nation** has received water of questionable quality from the EPA.

"I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I couldn't believe the EPA's higher-ups basically told me a lie." — Russell Begaye, president of the Navajo Nation, on how he felt at seeing a [black oily substance in water delivered by the EPA](#) after assurances that others' reports about the contamination had been false. The water was delivered as an interim measure to sustain livestock and crops in the wake of a mine waste spill that contaminated natural water supplies earlier this month. (*Guardian*)

Seven Texts to Teach Instead of "Ceremony"

Submitted by [Dr. Amanda Morris](#) on August 19, 2015

If high school students are introduced to Native writers at all, it is usually through Leslie Marmon Silko's (Laguna Pueblo) *Ceremony* (1986), a now-classic story about a troubled Native American man who returns from serving in a war to rediscover his identity and to heal his body and spirit. Of course, Silko's lyrical prose and spiritual narrative deserve to be taught; *Ceremony* became canonical over time for good reason. But it was written in 1986, and other authors have written equally powerful stories in the last 29 years.

Teaching indigenous texts is one tiny step toward correcting the historical inaccuracies about Native peoples that are built into the standard American K-12 curriculum. It also shows students that Native peoples still exist, and it infuses much-needed cultural diversity into often Euro-American-centric book lists. Indigenous peoples were here before the founding of the United States, and we have a responsibility to include their voices and stories in our classrooms.

For teachers who have the willingness and ability to either change the primary indigenous text or add a second one, might I suggest including one of the following seven books for readers in the upper grades.

Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe), *The Round House* (2012). Winner of the National Book Award for fiction, this novel tackles the difficult subjects of rape and white-on-Native crime with lyrical

language that is simultaneously enchanting and direct. It is a heartbreaking story that features a young male narrator who works hard to achieve justice for his mom and learns difficult and poignant lessons along the way. It's one of the best novels I've read in years and worthy of attention in the classroom where a skilled teacher can lead and guide discussion. Students will enjoy this coming-of-age mystery and connect with the story's focus on family and culture.

Sherman Alexie (Coeur d'Alene), *Reservation Blues* (1995). Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) is an oft-taught—and oft-banned—text because of its young protagonist, humor and dramatic story. However, high school students might enjoy digging into *Reservation Blues* because music is central to the story, as well as risk-taking, leaving home and negotiating the complexities of family relationships. Alexie takes the main characters from his 1993 short story collection, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and builds a novel around them with humor, magical realism and the blues. A good companion film would be [*Smoke Signals*](#) (1998), which is based on one of the stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto* collection.

Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), *Solar Storms* (1997). This is a coming-of-age story about a troubled 17-year-old girl who reconnects with her older female relatives upon returning to her family's traditional home on the islands between Minnesota and Canada. From ecofeminism, loss and abuse, healing, to myth, *Solar Storms* will capture students' imaginations and entice them to think differently about Native peoples.

Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), *People of the Whale* (2010). For a more recent novel by Hogan, try *People of the Whale*, set in a fictional Pacific Northwest tribe. The story features strong women and a young man who fights in Vietnam and then returns to find his place between his Native and American worlds. A good companion film would be [*Whale Rider*](#) (2002), the fictional story of a young Maori girl in New Zealand who wants to become chief but is prohibited by tribal tradition. The integral role of whales to tribal culture and the roles of men and women provide several discussion bridges between Hogan's story and the film.

LeAnne Howe (Choctaw), *Shell Shaker* (2001). Winner of a 2002 American Book Award, this story shifts between two different fights across time (1700s and 1990s) for one Choctaw family. The courage and resourcefulness of women, the connection of past to present, politics, humor and flawed characters will engage even the most resistant student reader.

Thomas King (Cherokee), *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* (2008). Filled with personal anecdotes and experiences, wit and serious attention to the nature of storytelling, this nonfiction narrative introduces students to positive and negative aspects of contemporary Native experience. It also provides terrific discussion points for writing nonfiction stories.

Joy Harjo (Mvskoke), *Crazy Brave* (2012). A moving memoir written with poetic power and fearless honesty, *Crazy Brave* is an incredible story that models memoir writing in effective ways. Grounded in Mvskoke myth, ancestry and stories, this memoir introduces students to a woman's journey to become a poet.

By breaking away from familiar texts, high school teachers have an opportunity to introduce students to a wider range of Native experiences and cultures through stories that maintain the high quality and standards set by Silko's *Ceremony*. A terrific starting point on your journey to

select appropriate indigenous texts for younger students is scholar Debbie Reese's blog, [American Indians in Children's Literature](#).

Morris teaches writing and Native American/Indigenous Rhetorics at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania.

To: YMEIS_Supplement Resource <YMEIS_Supplement.Resource@nrc.gov>

Today begins the **60-day public comment period on the NRC staff's draft** "Supplement to the U.S. Department of Energy's Environmental Impact Statement for a Geologic Repository for the Disposal of Spent Nuclear Fuel and High Level Radioactive Waste at Yucca Mountain, Nye County, Nevada," NUREG-2184 (<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/nuregs/staff/sr2184/>). The Federal Register notice announcing the availability of the supplement for comment can be now accessed at <https://federalregister.gov/a/2015-20638>. The notice describes the ways you may submit comments on the supplement.

The Environmental Protection Agency's Notice of Availability for the draft supplement will be published on Monday, August 24, 2015.

The comment period will close on Tuesday, October 20, 2015. Comments received after October 20, 2015 will be considered as practicable. However, the NRC can only guarantee consideration of comments received on or before October 20, 2015.

Information about each of the planned public meetings is provided below. At these meetings, the NRC staff will provide an overview of the draft supplement and an opportunity for attendees to present their comments.

- Meeting, September 3, 2015: NRC Headquarters, One White Flint North, First Floor Commission Hearing Room, 11555 Rockville Pike, Maryland 20852, from 3:00 p.m. Eastern (local) Time until 5:00 p.m. The meeting will be webcast and a telephone line will be available. The number to dial for this call is (880) 790-2936 and the passcode is 9708500.
- Meeting, September 15, 2015: Embassy Suites Convention Center, 3600 Paradise Road, Las Vegas, Nevada 89169, from 7:00 p.m. Pacific (local) Time until 9:00 p.m. The NRC staff will also host an open house from 6:00 p.m. Pacific Time until 7:00 p.m.
- Meeting, September 17, 2015: Amargosa Community Center, 821 E. Amargosa Farm Road, Amargosa Valley, Nevada 89020, from 7:00 p.m. Pacific (local) Time until 9:00 p.m. The NRC staff will host an open house from 6:00 p.m. Pacific Time until 7:00 p.m.
- Teleconference, October 15, 2015: Public meeting via conference call, from 2:00 p.m. Eastern (local) Time until 4:00 p.m.

If you are interested in attending or presenting oral comments at any of the public meetings, we encourage you to pre-register. You may pre-register to attend or present oral comments by

calling [\(301\) 415-6789](tel:(301)415-6789) or by emailing YMEIS_Supplement@nrc.gov no later than 3 days before the meeting. To present oral comments, you may also register in person at each meeting.

We also want to remind you about our public conference call on August 26, 2015. During that call, we will describe how to submit comments and we'll take questions on this topic. The number to dial for this call is [\(888\) 790-2936](tel:(888)790-2936) and the passcode is 9708500.

Information about each of the meetings is posted on the NRC's public meetings web page at <http://meetings.nrc.gov/pmns/mtg> no later than 10 calendar days before the meeting date.

If you have any questions about the information in this email, please contact Christine Pineda at [\(301\) 415-6789](tel:(301)415-6789) or email us at YMEIS_supplement@nrc.gov.

Thank you, The staff of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. *Yucca Mountain Directorate*

Water Deal Reached in Management of Truckee River Associated Press

Water officials have finalized a deal regarding the Truckee River after decadeslong disputes over how the waters should be [managed](#).

IMLS News

IMLS Focus Conference November 16-17, New Orleans

Save the date for the new IMLS annual conference on November 16 and 17 in New Orleans. The *IMLS Focus Conference: Inspiration and Innovation in Libraries and Museums* will replace the agency's former annual gathering which ran as *WebWise* from 2000 through 2014. The Conference program has been updated to reflect current state-of-play in libraries, museums and archives as it relates to agency priorities, and will feature presentations, project showcases, and cross-disciplinary sessions in three parallel tracks of focus on community engagement, engaging learners, and collections and digital access. Space will be limited for this no-cost conference; watch for registration information in the coming weeks.

Call for Nominations: 2016 National Medal for Museum and Library Service

Know a museum or library that is making a significant difference in your community with exceptional programs and services? Nominate them for a National Medal. [Read More](#)

Notice of Funding Opportunity: National Conservation Assessment Program

IMLS seeks a cooperator for national program to help small and midsize museums care for their collections. [Read More](#)

Grant Awards Announcement: IMLS Provides \$240,000 in Grants for the Pacific Territories, Freely Associated States and U.S. Virgin Islands

IMLS announced grants that will help expand digital services and connectivity, digital literacy, professional development, and support summer reading, bookmobiles, collections, and more. [Read More](#)

USCIS and IMLS Seek Your Input

We invite public librarians to suggest a topic for the next joint USCIS-IMLS webinar presentation. The webinar series helps libraries provide accurate information about immigration and citizenship benefits and promotes an awareness and understanding of citizenship within

their communities. Submit your idea on [Idea Community](#) by **Aug. 26** and [sign up for free email alerts from USCIS](#) and [press releases from IMLS](#) for information about the next webinar.

UpNext Blog Posts

Learning Labs Put 3D Printing Skills to the Test to Improve Lives for Veterans in Virginia

Virginia teens teamed up with the Science Museum of Virginia's the YOUmedia Learning Lab for a Make-a-thon hosted by the Department of Veteran Affairs. Their award-winning prototype, a 3D printed socket, will make it possible for veterans to easily switch and wear different prostheses. [Read More](#)

Bringing Together Public Libraries and STEM

STEM professionals and librarians come together for the first Public Libraries and STEM Conference. [Read More](#).

Digital Archival Research and Education

IMLS highlighted agency priorities and funding opportunities at the Archival Education and Research Institute. [Read More](#)

Why Host a High School Apprentice Program?

The New Bedford Whaling Museum hosts an afterschool apprenticeship program to inspire high school students to enroll in college. [Read More](#)

Reach Out and Read has a Prescription for Success

Reach Out and Read has launched the Prescription for Success Toolkit, aimed at helping families benefit from museum and library services that foster literacy development in young children. [Read More](#)

Convening Communities for Good: On the Frontier of 3D Printing for Accessible Education

With the help of an IMLS Grant, Benetech convened a national forum to discuss how 3D printing technology and services can be used for accessible education materials. [Read More](#)

*****Hydraulic

Fracturing Analysis

The deadline to comment on the EPA's [draft assessment of hydraulic fracturing and drinking water resources](#) is August 28. Comments can be emailed to Docket_OEI@epa.gov with the subject line EPA-HQ-OA-2015-0245.

Hilman Tobey Walks On

[Nevada Stories: Pipemakers of the Great Basin | NativeFlix](#)

Hilman Tobey, a Northern Paiute living at Reno Sparks Indian Colony, makes stone-bowled pipes for use in traditional ceremonies. This short film captures master artist Tobey teaching pipe-making skills to apprentice Norman Zuniga under the auspices of ... nativeflix.com