

21.

Native American Proverbs

Use one of the following proverbs or sayings as an epigraph for today's poem and see where it takes you.

Note: I started this prompt a few years ago, but a friend more attuned to Native American Literature suggested to me that this prompt is not politically correct. The translations are questionable and the collecting intrusive... and yet there is wisdom here. Hilary Clinton got a lot of mileage out of the very first one. Forgive me if this prompt offends.

It takes a whole village to raise a child. (Omaha)

Ask questions from the heart, and you will be answered from the heart. (Omaha)

Even when we lie down, we lie on our own path of life. (Pawnee)

I seek strength, not to be greater than my brother, but to fight my greatest enemy— myself. (Tribe unknown)

Let no one speak ill of the absent. (Hopi)

To gossip is like playing checkers with an evil spirit: you win occasionally but are more often trapped at your own game.
(Hopi)

We will be known forever by the tracks we leave. (Dakota)

Do not wrong or hate your neighbor, for it is not he that you wrong but yourself (Pima)

Many have fallen with the bottle in their hand. (Lakota)

When a man prays one day and steals six, the Great Spirit thunders and the Evil One laughs. (Oklahoma)

If you see no reason for giving thanks, the fault lies in yourself.
(Minquass)

It makes no difference as to the name of the God, since love is the real God of all the world. (Apache)

If I am in harmony with my family, that's success. (Ute)

Remember that your children are not your own, but are lent to you by the Creator. (Mohawk)

Never see an old person going to carry water without getting a bucket and going in their stead. (Twanas)

Don't let yesterday use up too much of today. (Cherokee)

The frog does not drink up the pond in which he lives. (Sioux)

Seek wisdom, not knowledge. Knowledge is of the past, wisdom is of the future. (Lumbee)

What should it matter that one bowl is dark and the other pale, if each is of good design and serves its purpose well? (Hopi)

The smarter a man is the more he needs God to protect him from thinking he knows everything. (Pima)

Even your silence holds a sort of prayer. (Apache)

When man moves away from nature his heart becomes hard.
(Lakota)

God gives us each a song. (Ute)

All who have died are equal. (Comanche)

They are not dead who live in the hearts they leave behind.
(Tuscarora)

The moon is not shamed by the barking of dogs. (Southwest)

In this world the unseen has power. (Apache)

We are all one child, spinning through Mother Sky. (Shawnee)

It is good to tell one's heart. (Chippewa)

To go on a vision quest is to go into the presence of the great mystery. (Lakota)

Life is the flash of the firefly in the night, the breath of the buffalo in winter time. (Blackfoot)

Walk lightly in the spring: Mother Earth is pregnant. (Kiowa)

Work hard, keep the ceremonies, live peacefully, and unite your hearts. (Hopi)

All the above are from *The Soul Would Have No Rainbow If The Eyes Had No Tears: and Other Native American Proverbs*, edited by Guy A. Zona