

Ojibway Heritage: Basil Johnston, Anishnaabe Author and Historian

Basil Johnston (1929-2015) was a renowned Ojibway author, historian, and educator who made significant contributions to the preservation and dissemination of Anishnaabe culture and history. Through his prolific writings, research, and teachings, he played a pivotal role in promoting understanding and appreciation for Indigenous perspectives and experiences in Canada.



Ojibway Heritage by Basil Johnston

★★★★☆ 4.8 out of 5

Language	: English
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Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 178 pages
Lending	: Enabled



Early Life and Education

Johnston was born in 1929 in the Ojibway community of Wikwemikong, located on Manitoulin Island in Ontario, Canada. From a young age, he was immersed in the rich traditions and stories of his people. His father, William Johnston, was a respected elder and storyteller, and his mother, Mary Jane King, was a devout Catholic. Johnston's early experiences

instilled in him a deep love for his culture and a desire to share its wisdom with the world.

After completing his elementary education in Wikwemikong, Johnston attended the Jesuit-run St. Peter Claver High School in Sudbury, Ontario. There, he excelled in his studies and developed a passion for writing. In 1951, he enrolled in the University of Toronto, where he pursued a degree in English and philosophy. During his time at university, Johnston actively participated in Indigenous student organizations and began publishing articles and essays on Ojibway history and culture.

Literary Career

In 1958, Johnston published his first major work, *Ojibway Heritage*, a collection of essays on various aspects of Ojibway culture. The book was a groundbreaking publication that presented a comprehensive and insider's perspective on Ojibway history, spirituality, and language. It was widely praised by scholars and Indigenous readers alike for its depth, accuracy, and eloquence.

Johnston's literary career spanned over five decades, and he produced a prolific body of work that included novels, short stories, poems, and non-fiction books. His writing is characterized by its lyrical prose, vivid storytelling, and insightful exploration of Indigenous themes. In his works, Johnston sought to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about Indigenous peoples and to bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Some of Johnston's most notable works include:

- *Indian School Days* (1972): A semi-autobiographical novel that follows the experiences of a young Anishnaabe boy attending a residential school.
- *The Manitous: An Illustrated Guide to Great Lakes Indian Spirits* (1995): A comprehensive guide to the sacred spirits and beings of the Anishnaabe people, featuring stunning artwork by Ojibway artist Carl Ray.
- *Moose Meat and Marmalade: Essays in Cultural Identity* (2013): A collection of essays that explore the complex and evolving relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures in Canada.

Historical Research and Activism

In addition to his literary work, Johnston was also a dedicated historian and activist. He conducted extensive research on Ojibway history and treaty rights, and he played a key role in advocating for Indigenous rights and self-determination. In 1970, he co-founded the Union of Ontario Indians (now called the Anishinabek Nation), and he served as its first Executive Director. Johnston's historical research and activism contributed significantly to the growing awareness and recognition of Indigenous rights in Canada.

Teaching and Mentorship

Johnston was also a passionate educator and mentor. He taught Indigenous studies at several universities in Canada, including the University of Toronto and Trent University. Through his teaching, he inspired countless students to pursue careers in Indigenous research, writing, and advocacy. Johnston also provided guidance and support to

emerging Indigenous writers, helping to nurture a new generation of Indigenous voices in Canadian literature.

Legacy and Recognition

Basil Johnston's legacy as an author, historian, and educator is immeasurable. His work has had a profound impact on the understanding and appreciation of Anishnaabe culture and history, both within Indigenous communities and beyond. Through his writings, research, and activism, Johnston helped to break down stereotypes, promote reconciliation, and inspire a new generation of Indigenous leaders and scholars.

Johnston's work has been recognized with numerous awards and honors, including:

- Order of Canada (1992)
- Molson Prize for the Arts (2001)
- Governor General's Literary Award for Non-Fiction (2013)
- Indspire Award (2014)

Basil Johnston passed away in 2015 at the age of 85. His legacy continues to live on through his writings, the institutions he helped to establish, and the countless lives he touched through his teaching and mentorship. He will always be remembered as a trailblazing author, a dedicated historian, and a passionate advocate for Indigenous rights and self-determination.

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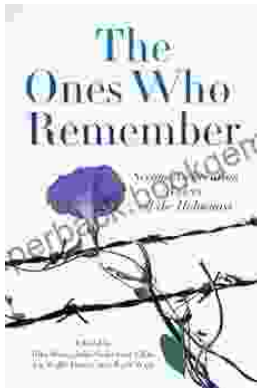
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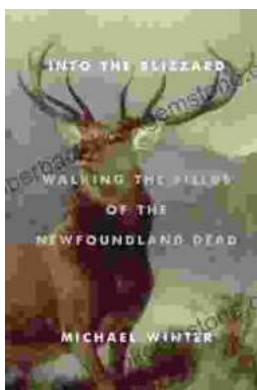
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