HOW TO USE *BRAIDED IDENTITIES* IN TRAINING AND EDUCATION

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Contents

1 | **Why Is This Book Important?** 1

2 | **Genres in *Braided Identities*** 5

3 | **List of Contents, Authors, and Genre(s)** 7

4 | **Discussion Questions, Writing Prompts, and Creative Responses** 11

References 23

1
Why Is This Book Important?

CANADA IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY DIVERSE in meaningful and measurable ways. The proportion of individuals identifying as "visible minorities" continues to rise, reflecting growth not only through immigration but also across generations, as many second-generation Canadians and their descendants now belong to minority ethnocultural or racialized groups. Mixed-origin and multiethnic identities are also becoming more common, shaped by intermarriage and diverse immigration patterns. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples have experienced rapid population growth in recent decades, far outpacing that of non-Indigenous populations.

At the same time, people who are neurodiverse or living with mental illness are becoming more visible owing to higher diagnosis and prevalence rates, increased reporting, demographic shifts, and growing public awareness. Similarly, more people in Canada are identifying with a range of intellectual and physical disabilities, as well as diverse gender and sexual orientations, supported by evolving public attitudes and strengthened legal protections. Together, these trends reflect a nation that is not only growing but is also becoming more richly interconnected in its cultural, social, and human diversity.

In short, to live in Canada in this second quarter of the 21st century means to encounter, particularly in urban centres, people of multiple languages, cultures, religions, worldviews, (dis)abilities, sexualities, and gender identities, each with constitutionally

recognized fundamental freedoms (e.g., speech, religion), voting rights, legal rights (e.g., fair trial, life, liberty), equality rights, mobility rights, and language rights. These sit alongside legally protected inherent rights for Indigenous Peoples, including to self-government, lands and resources, cultures and treaties.

The growing diversity of contemporary Canadian societies, combined with the gradual dismantling of stigma surrounding a range of identities, has created a patient population whose needs extend far beyond the scope of traditional training. Many health and allied professionals now encounter individuals with world-views, embodied experiences, and care expectations that their education has not adequately prepared them to meet. As a result, practitioners often face gaps in cultural humility, communication, and trauma-informed practice, revealing an urgent need for curricula that meaningfully address the realities of today's diverse communities.

Although Western biomedicine is beginning to acknowledge the benefits of engaging with and valuing Indigenous ways of knowing and being, its efforts so far have been partial and uneven. Indigenous knowledge systems offer holistic, relational, and land-based approaches to health and well-being that challenge the reductive tendencies of biomedical practice. Incorporating these perspectives while ensuring that they remain accessible to Indigenous Peoples and that they are implemented with respect, reciprocity, and sovereignty would not only address longstanding inequities but would also broaden the conceptual foundations of healthcare itself. When biomedical systems listen to and learn from Indigenous traditions, they cultivate more comprehensive, culturally grounded models of care.

Alongside growing efforts to recognize Indigenous healing practices in Canada's health systems, the field of health humanities has expanded the health professional's educational horizons. Drawing from multiple disciplines including literature and other arts, history, ethics and philosophy, and so on, the health humanities help learners explore the human dimensions of illness, vulnerability, power, and care. They offer the tools for reflective practice, moral

imagination, and critical inquiry that practitioners need in order to work in increasingly complex social and clinical environments. As a complement to scientific training, the health humanities foster a more empathetic, context-aware healthcare workforce.

Health humanities experts and Indigenous leaders in medical and allied health education share a strong commitment to personal narrative and arts-based approaches as catalysts for transformative learning. Stories, images, and creative expression illuminate aspects of human experience that clinical language too often flattens or overlooks. Integrating these modes of learning into educational environments alongside traditional methods creates space for emotional resonance, ethical reflection, and the disruption of entrenched assumptions. When learners encounter the lived realities of patients and communities in these ways, they are more likely to cultivate the compassion, humility, and courage needed to support individual and collective journeys toward health and well-being.

2
Genres in *Braided Identities*

BRAIDED IDENTITIES is divided into four parts, with the title of each part pointing to the broad themes uniting the contributions in that section: "Experiencing Racism" (Part I); "Connecting with Others" (Part II); "Knowing Oneself" (Part III); and "Living Diversity" (Part IV).

Similarly, the contributions in *Braided Identities* fall into four broad genres. Together, these genres create meaningful learning opportunities by drawing on the strengths of diverse pedagogies to expand knowledge, encourage self-reflection, deepen empathy, and foster culturally safer environments. Although many contributions blend genres, they can be broadly grouped into four categories:

1. creative nonfiction
2. poetry
3. visual art
4. academic essay

Through these forms, contributors explore the intersections of identity and health in distinct yet complementary ways. Individually, the works speak with strong, singular voices; collectively, they create a powerful sense of harmony. We strongly recommend that educators foster learning environments in which participants engage with these genres both independently and in concert with other forms of expression.

There is no single "right way" to explore the contributions in this book. In all cases, we recommend learners read the collection's Introduction, which offers essential background to the intersections of identity and health in Canada and explains why this collection is both unique and powerful. For educators seeking inspiration, we suggest three approaches to ignite meaningful learning experiences:

1. Select contributions comprising three different genres from each of the four parts of *Braided Identities*. For each part, analyze how the selected contributions explore its central theme. Discuss how the nature of that genre shapes learners' reading experience—what they take from the text and how they feel afterward. Which genre(s) feel most impactful, and why?
2. Choose one contribution from the same genre in each of the four parts of the collection. For example, you might select a creative nonfiction piece from Part I ("Experiencing Racism") and another from Part III ("Knowing Oneself"). As learners read each work, ask them to reflect on both their emotional response and the ideas or insights it stimulates, particularly in relation to the central theme of its section.
3. Select any number of contributions for your syllabus or course outline and have readers engage with the questions in Section 4 of this guide. These discussion and reflection questions may be used in class groups or assigned as individual or group homework. Section 4 also includes adaptable arts-based activities—some requiring advance planning and materials—many of which are suitable for term projects. *Although the questions and activities are designed for specific contributions in* Braided Identities*, many can be readily adapted for use with other pieces in the collection.*

Section 3 lists the genre of each contribution, noting entries that span more than one genre. Section 4 provides corresponding discussion questions, writing prompts, and arts-based activities.

3
Contents, Authors, and Genre(s)

Chapter	*Author*	*Genre(s)*
I Experiencing Racism		
A'niaqtuq (Sick)	Norma Dunning	creative nonfiction
An Educated Guess	Miyawata Dion Stout	creative nonfiction
Burden of Truth	Vanessa Mitchell	poetry
Growing Up Jewish	Mark W. Rosenberg	creative nonfiction
Identity	Sarah Yi-Mei Tsiang	poetry
II Connecting with Others		
Me Because of You	Renee Priya Prasad	creative nonfiction
Introducing Myself as Dakelh	Marion Erickson	creative nonfiction
Help I'm Alive: Supporting the Mentally Ill When the System is Broken	Julie Sutherland	creative nonfiction
Hunting Medicine	Thomsen Boniface D'Hont	creative nonfiction
Ancestors	Wahsontí:io	poetry

The Most Incredible Transformation	Corrine Hunt	creative nonfiction
Heart Works	Reneltta Arluk	creative nonfiction
III Knowing Oneself		
Wild Ones	Margaret Robinson	creative nonfiction
The Radical Act of Anti-Oppressive Self Identification	Kimberley Thomas	academic essay; creative nonfiction
The Trouble With Identity	Terri Aldred	creative nonfiction
My Mere Presence	Wala Azimi	creative nonfiction
A Fish Out of Water	Omolara Odulaja	academic essay; creative nonfiction
I Am	Ysabelle Vautour	poetry
Bi-Coastal: The Changing Tide of Identity	Sam Loppie	creative nonfiction
I'm Fine.	Sana Z. Shahram	creative nonfiction
IV Living Diversity		
Different Bodies	Zamina M. Aziz	poetry
A Double Bind	Shane Neilson	creative nonfiction
Walang Hiya (Without Shame)	Christine Añonuevo	creative nonfiction
Reflections on Fox Medicine	Lisa Boivin	visual art; creative nonfiction
From Global to Local: An Overview of Men's Health Policies Around the World	Marc Lafrance, Gilles Tremblay, and Hélène Lahaie	academic essay

Transforming Relations Through Art: A Photo Essay About Multi-Sensory Storytelling	Salima Punjani	visual art
Staying in the Game: Groundwork for a Creative Research Project on Turning From Stigma	thom vernon	academic essay; creative nonfiction
An Exercise in Dissociation	Max Ferguson	creative nonfiction

4
Discussion Questions, Writing Prompts, and Creative Responses

I EXPERIENCING RACISM

A'niaqtuq (Sick)

NORMA DUNNING

1. How does the author's experience at the walk-in clinic reveal the ongoing influence of colonial assumptions and racial stereotyping in healthcare? In what ways can healthcare professionals and institutions actively work to recognize, address, and prevent these systemic inequities?
2. *Role-Play Exercise*: In small groups, create a short scenario illustrating a healthcare interaction where assumptions about identity influence care. After performing, discuss how these biases could be addressed and what alternative approaches could improve equity and empathy. You might consider drawing on a specific time you observed what you felt was inequitable.

An Educated Guess

MIYAWATA DION STOUT

1. In what ways does the author's journey of self-awareness reveal the tension between personal ambition, social acceptance, and cultural identity? What lessons can be drawn about the challenges

Indigenous youth face in navigating predominantly non-Indigenous spaces today?
2. *Identity Timeline*: Construct a visual timeline of key moments when your cultural or personal identity influenced how others perceived you. Highlight turning points of growth or tension, and share reflections on how these moments connect to the author's experiences of navigating majority-non-Indigenous spaces.

Burden of Truth

VANESSA MITCHELL

1. How do the poet's choices in language, structure, and imagery communicate both the personal impact of racism and the emotional work involved in confronting it? How does poetry offer a unique lens for exploring these experiences compared with prose?
2. *Poem or Microstory*: Write a short poem or microstory inspired by the themes in Mitchell's work. Focus on expressing the emotional weight of confronting injustice, using imagery, repetition, or structure in a way that mirrors the author's techniques.

Growing Up Jewish

MARK W. ROSENBERG

1. How does the author employ personal storytelling to reveal the persistence of antisemitism in Canada? What can narrative essays teach us about understanding both overt and subtle systemic discrimination?
2. *Community Storyboard*: Create a storyboard depicting key moments or locations from the essay. Use sketches, symbols, or captions to highlight experiences of inclusion, exclusion, or resilience. Present your storyboard and explain how these visual choices reflect systemic or historical biases.

Identity

SARAH YI-MEI TSIANG

1. How does the poetic form allow the author to explore complex experiences of identity, intergenerational tension, and racism in ways that prose might not? How do shifts in voice, tone, or structure deepen your understanding of these experiences?
2. *Voice Exploration*: Individually or in small groups, assign different "voices" from the poem and produce a short scene that explores their interactions. Afterward, discuss how assigning and performing these voices deepened your understanding of intergenerational tensions, identity fragmentation, and internalized racism.

II CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

Me Because of You

RENEE PRIYA PRASAD

1. How does the narrator use lineage—both biological (mDNA, matrilineage) and emotional (motherhood, grief, resilience)—to make sense of identity, health, and belonging across generations? In what ways do these letters challenge conventional biomedical definitions of well-being?
2. *Lineage Collage*: Create a visual or written collage tracing how traits, memories, or emotions flow through your own family or community across generations. Include images, words, or symbolic objects. Pair this with a short written reflection connecting your collage to themes of identity, health, or resilience highlighted in the text.

Introducing Myself as Dakelh

MARION ERICKSON

1. How does the author's use of a traditional Dakelh introduction and connection to clan and ancestral responsibilities confront settler-colonial ideas of identity and belonging? What insights

does this offer about personal and communal safety in contexts like the Highway of Tears?

2. *Visual Timeline*: On a long piece of newsprint or other paper, create a visual timeline, using images, maps, and symbolic art to represent the Highway of Tears, the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people (MMIWG2S), as well as community responses to MMIWG2S. Add personal reflections, poetry, or drawings along the route, allowing both historical context and emotional engagement to emerge through collective storytelling.

Help I'm Alive: Supporting the Mentally Ill When the System Is Broken

JULIE SUTHERLAND

1. How does the metaphor of "performance" illuminate the invisible labour of living with treatment-resistant mental illness? What does the contribution reveal about societal responses to suffering that is hidden or misunderstood?
2. *Layered Narrative Installation*: Use drawings or magazine clippings, writing, or found objects to create a layered representation of an experience or identity you carry that is often unseen, highlighting the difference between public perception and internal reality. Present your work as an installation that invites viewers to engage with its layers and explore hidden experiences and emotional labour.

Hunting Medicine

THOMSEN BONIFACE D'HONT

1. How does the author's role as a Métis family doctor reveal the intersection of professional identity, culture, and community? What lessons can be drawn for Indigenous health care and reconciliation efforts?
2. *Identity Intersections Map*: Create a visual map showing how your personal, cultural, and professional roles intersect. Use symbols, diagrams, or a timeline to indicate areas of tension,

harmony, or growth. Write a brief commentary linking your experience to D'Hont's reflections on community, medicine, and cultural responsibility.

Ancestors

WAHSONTÍ:IO

1. How does the poem's form influence the way knowledge, culture, and healing are transmitted across generations and landscapes? How might this differ from the experience of reading an academic essay?
2. *Ancestor Story Web*: Construct a web connecting yourself to ancestors, mentors, and cultural influences. Alongside the web, write a short narrative, poem, or set of questions addressed to these figures, experimenting with call-and-response, past-present-future dialogue, or layered voices inspired by the poem's form.

The Most Incredible Transformation

CORRINE HUNT

1. How does the essay demonstrate the interplay between memory, cultural tradition, and artistic expression? How do these elements work together to shape the author's identity and creative work?
2. *Artistic Memory Portfolio*: Build a portfolio of images, short texts, or digital artifacts representing key moments of transformation, creativity, and cultural learning in your life. Include an artist's statement linking these pieces to Hunt's exploration of memory, tradition, and identity.

Heart Works

RENELTTA ARLUK

1. What is the effect on the reader of the author's use of journaling, introspection, and meditative practices to explore self-worth and intergenerational healing? How do these

practices connect personal growth to community and ancestral legacy?
2. *Reflective Journal Project*: Keep a short, focused journal over a few days or a week. Explore a personal question, decision, or experience while considering the influence of family, ancestors, or community on your choices. Include written reflections, sketches, or symbols, and conclude with a summary of what this introspective practice revealed about your identity and relationship.

III KNOWING ONESELF

Wild Ones

MARGARET ROBINSON

1. How does the author balance personal identity, family history, and community belonging? In what ways do systemic factors (e.g., colonial policies, "Indian" status, rural poverty) influence how Mi'kmaw and Two-Spirit identities may be claimed, lived, and expressed?
2. *Identity Layers Collage*: Create a visual or digital collage representing the "layers" of your identity (e.g., family, community, culture, experiences, and social roles). Use colours, symbols, or images to show how these layers intersect, conflict, or support one another. Include a short reflective caption explaining what your collage reveals about your sense of self and belonging.

The Radical Act of Anti-Oppressive Self-Identification

KIMBERLEY THOMAS

1. How does the author's journey of self-reconnection challenge conventional ideas of what it means to be a "good doctor"? How does this critique illuminate broader issues in healthcare, colonialism, and systemic inequity?
2. *Journey Mapping Collage*: Build a mixed-media or digital collage that traces your own journey toward reconnecting

with aspects of your identity or values. Highlight moments of tension, growth, and empowerment, using symbolic imagery or text. Present the collage and explain how it parallels or contrasts with Thomas's critique of systems and anti-oppressive practices.

The Trouble With Identity

TERRI ALDRED

1. What ethical and social responsibilities do individuals and organizations have when confronting questions or disputes about identity?
2. *Identity Role-Play Exercise*: In small groups, role-play scenarios where identity is questioned or misunderstood. Take turns playing different perspectives and explore strategies for affirming oneself while navigating external pressures. Afterward, discuss insights gained about identity, ethics, and communication.

My Mere Presence

WALA AZIMI

1. How do societal expectations, cultural displacement, and personal choices interact to shape identity? In what ways can outward expressions, such as wearing the hijab, simultaneously reflect, resist, or reshape these influences?
2. *Spoken-Word or Performance Piece*: Compose a short spoken-word piece or micro-performance inspired by the essay, highlighting moments of resilience, transformation, and self-reclamation. Incorporate specific lines or themes from the text into your work, and present it either individually or collaboratively to explore embodied expressions of identity.

A Fish Out of Water

OMOLARA ODULAJA

1. What roles and responsibilities do individuals and communities have in creating environments where people can express their identities authentically? How might professional or institutional practices help or hinder this process?
2. *Immersion Reflection Exercise*: Create a visual or written representation of a time you were "out of your element" in a new environment. Include sensory details, emotions, and strategies you used to navigate the experience. Optionally, transform this reflection into a short comic, storyboard, or illustrated timeline.

I Am

YSABELLE VAUTOUR

1. How does beginning each line with "I am" shape the exploration of identity in the poem? How might this structure help readers reflect on the multiplicity and complexity of selfhood?
2. *Identity Collage Figure*: Draw or trace a human figure and "dress" it with cutouts, symbols, or images that reflect your physical, emotional, cultural, or social identity. Include a brief explanation of the choices made and how the visual representation expresses your multifaceted self.

Bi-Coastal: The Changing Tide of Identity

SAM LOPPIE

1. How do family history, community, and life experiences shape the author's identity and resilience? How can these influences simultaneously support and challenge an individual's sense of self?
2. *Environmental Identity Map*: Create a visual map of a place, community, or family environment that shaped your identity. Use symbols, sketches, or colours to show influences that supported or challenged your growth. Accompany the map

with a short narrative connecting your experiences to the lessons or values you carry forward.

I'm Fine.

SANA Z. SHAHRAM

1. How does the concept of "being fine" function as both a protective strategy and a potential source of harm for the author? How might similar strategies appear in your own families or communities, and what do they reveal about resilience and coping?
2. *Kintsugi-Inspired Mixed-Media Art*: Create a visual piece (collage, layered portrait, or sculpture) that represents the "broken pieces" and "gold" of your personal or familial identity. Highlight inherited resilience, coping strategies, and pressures from assimilation or societal expectations. Include a brief reflection connecting your piece to Shahram's themes of survival, tension, and healing.

IV LIVING DIVERSITY

Different Bodies

ZAMINA M. AZIZ

1. How does the poem challenge the idea of patients as collections of medical data? In what ways does it highlight the importance of empathy, narrative, and human context in providing holistic, compassionate care?
2. *Empathy Poem or Collage*: Make a short poem or visual collage that captures a patient's lived experience beyond medical data. Incorporate narrative elements, imagery, or metaphors to convey context, emotion, and human complexity, reflecting on how these insights might influence compassionate care.

A Double Bind

SHANE NEILSON

1. How might medical education and healthcare systems be redesigned to acknowledge and support neurodiverse physicians and students? What changes could foster inclusion, understanding, and equity in professional learning environments?
2. *Neurodiversity Awareness Project*: Design a creative representation (digital poster, storyboard, or short comic) illustrating your personal or observed experiences of being different or misunderstood in a learning or work environment. Highlight strategies for valuing neurodiversity, fostering inclusion, and supporting resilience.

Walang Hiya (Without Shame)

CHRISTINE AÑONUEVO

1. How do language, culture, and family stories shape Filipino diasporic identity in the context of settler colonialism and intergenerational trauma? How can these practices serve both as preservation of heritage and as acts of resistance, and what insights do they provide about identity, belonging, and health?
2. *Cultural Roots Multimedia Map*: Build a visual, interactive, or digital map that explores your cultural heritage and diasporic identity. Include elements such as language, traditions, stories, ceremonies, or food, and annotate with short reflections on how these aspects shape belonging, resilience, and health.

Reflections on Fox Medicine

LISA BOIVIN

1. How does the combination of text and digital collage expand your understanding of healthcare beyond biomedical practice? What new perspectives on healing, culture, or relational care emerge through this form?

2. *Animal or Symbolic Mentor Artwork*: Select an animal, plant, or other being that resonates with your identity or personal journey. Observe or research it, then create a visual piece (drawing, painting, digital work), accompanied by a short written, audio, or video reflection that connects its traits, behaviours, or symbolism to your own experiences or values.

From Global to Local: An Overview of Men's Health Policies Around the World

MARC LAFRANCE, GILLES TREMBLAY, AND HÉLÈNE LAHAIE

1. How does this essay challenge or expand your understanding of men's health? What insights does it offer about the role of policy, culture, and systemic factors in shaping health outcomes?
2. *Policy Themes Reimagined*: Translate key themes from the essay into a new arts-based medium (e.g., poetry, short story, comic, visual artwork). Focus on expressing insights about men's health, disparities, or systemic influences in a way that communicates both information and lived experience.

Transforming Relations Through Art: A Photo Essay About Multi-Sensory Storytelling

SALIMA PUNJANI

1. How might engaging with *Progression* as a health professional expand one's understanding of living with a neurological condition beyond clinical diagnosis? In what ways might this perspective influence how health professionals approach patient care, empathy, and communication?
2. *Multi-Sensory Patient Experience Project*: Create a mixed-media work combining visual elements (e.g., photography, drawing, digital art) with auditory or textual components (e.g., soundscape, recorded narrative, creative writing) to represent the lived experience of a health condition.

Emphasize both clinical and personal dimensions, showing the human side of medical experiences.

Staying in the Game: Groundwork for a Creative Research Project on Turning From Stigma

thom vernon

1. How does the author's concept of "turning attention away from stigma" redefine resilience? What does it reveal about how marginalized individuals can exercise agency and cultivate empowerment despite social oppression?
2. *Resilience Mapping Exercise*: Reflect on a moment you witnessed or experienced stigma or discrimination. Create a visual or textual resilience map: a visual representation of strengths, challenges, and strategies for navigating the situation. Include actions or "turns of attention" that helped (or could have helped). Highlight connections to agency, empowerment, and social response.

An Exercise in Dissociation

MAX FERGUSON

1. How does the essay's shifting, dissociated "you" complicate the narration of generational trauma? What does this fluid narrative form reveal about the challenges of being witnessed, understood, or believed within personal and social contexts?
2. *Fragmentation Art Project*: Using fabric or mixed media, create an abstract collage capturing the sensations of dissociation, emotional overload, or fragmentation described in the essay. Include a brief accompanying reflection on a key emotional or sensory moment from the text that inspired your artistic choices.

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