



CULTURAL APPROPRIATION POLICY FOR OTTAWA STORYTELLERS

There are differing views regarding the telling of traditional stories. Some people feel that all stories are the heritage of all humanity, that hearing them enriches everyone, and the more widely the stories are shared, the better. Others feel that stories are a unique part of their people's cultural heritage. To ensure that the stories are treated with the respect they deserve, they believe that only members of that community have the right to tell the stories.

While acknowledging that both of these points of view have merit, Ottawa StoryTellers recognizes that cultural appropriation - defined as the unauthorized use of a minority, oppressed group's traditional knowledge and cultural artefacts, including stories, by cultural outsiders - must be an area of concern for storytellers, as it is seen by some groups to be cultural theft.

Ottawa StoryTellers believes that tellers should consider and explore the history of the stories they tell and identify their sources. Tellers can feel free to present stories from their own traditions. In our society, where individuals may have a mixed ancestry, and it may be hard to say exactly what one's cultural background is, tellers should consider the cultures and traditions by which they normally identify themselves. If tellers choose to tell a story from a culture outside their own heritage, they should ensure that their decision to use others' traditional stories would not cause harm or offence, and that the story and the tradition it represents are treated with respect. At minimum, if telling others' stories, a teller should have engaged with the culture as a respectful and humble guest. Ideally, the teller would have been invited to tell that culture's stories. If tellers make significant changes to a traditional story, they should inform the audience that what they are presenting is an adaptation.

While individual tellers will decide for themselves whether or not they will tell stories from a particular culture, when Ottawa StoryTellers is staging a public presentation, it will be sensitive to issues of cultural appropriation and make every effort to ensure that cultures are respected.

The telling of Indigenous Peoples' stories is a special case. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and other international agreements acknowledge the "ownership, control and protection by the First Nations of their knowledge, practices and traditional cultural expressions." Within Canada, the Assembly of First Nations' (AFN) Resolution #15-2011 on the Protection of Intellectual Property Rights has declared that: "...unauthorized use, misappropriation, reproduction and theft of First Nations' cultural expressions, traditional knowledge and genetic resources are prohibited and unlawful." (Within Canada, Indigenous people are defined as First Nations (Status and Non-Status), Métis, and Inuit people.)

It is Ottawa StoryTellers' position that tellers should honour the tenet that Indigenous Peoples are the owners of their cultural heritage and their traditional stories. Since, at this time, it is not clear who would have the right to give permission that would allow non-Indigenous people to tell these stories, OST does not support the telling of Indigenous stories by non-Indigenous tellers.