

Cherokee Earth Dwellers: Stories and Teachings of the Natural World. By Christopher B. Teuton and Hastings Shade with Loretta Shade and Larry Shade. Illustrated by MaryBeth Timothy. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2023. 296 pages. \$99 hardcover; \$34.95 paperback.

Hastings Shade carried notebooks with him for decades, writing down Cherokee words and stories of Cherokee language and culture. Understanding that “if the language should die, so will Cherokee peoplehood” (6), Shade became a word collector; he made a deliberate effort to gather information about the Cherokee natural world he knew was disappearing. Upon Shade’s death, his wife Loretta and his son Larry approached Christopher B. Teuton, professor and scholar of Cherokee studies, to complete the work Shade began. From this collaboration, *Cherokee Earth Dwellers* was created.

As a unique archive of information and a published collection unprecedented in its scope, *Cherokee Earth Dwellers* interweaves personal interactions, stories, and Cherokee traditions to communicate the origins of the Cherokee language and culture. Unconventionally structured, Teuton masterfully incorporates the knowledge contained within Shade’s notebooks with additional wisdom from a core group of collaborators consisting largely of “invited friends” of Shade and Loretta who are all “well-known knowledge keepers” within the Cherokee community (2). Teuton weaves their stories together in *Cherokee Earth Dwellers* as he shares information about the Cherokee natural world with readers. Throughout the text, Teuton highlights Cherokee words rather than English to immerse readers in a Cherokee worldview. Illustrations by Cherokee artist MaryBeth Timothy, who also illustrated Cynthia L. Smith’s children’s book *Indian Shoes* (2021), appear alongside these Cherokee words and stories. Timothy’s black-and-white work beautifully depicts elements of the Cherokee natural world to further immerse readers in the stories.

Teuton has organized the text based on the Cherokee model of storytelling (14). He begins the text with an explanation of Shade’s work and the various collaborators who aided in the publication of *Cherokee Earth Dwellers* before moving into why “standing in the middle,” or “maintaining balance in the modern world through living in *tobi* [wellness, peace] of body, mind, and spirit” is so important to Cherokee culture (21). Teuton’s discussion of *tobi* is integrated seamlessly with explanations of foundational Cherokee worldviews, setting the stage for the rest of the book.

In the remaining chapters, Teuton discusses the Cherokee cosmos because “before a person stands in a place, [he] reason[s], you need to know where you are” (34). Beginning with Elohi, the Middle World, Teuton takes readers on a journey of where we, as creatures of Elohi, live. Teuton tells the story of Elohi’s creation, incorporating foundations of *tobi*. For example, readers learn how the creatures of Elohi were forever changed through gifting fire to humans (39). It is in Teuton’s discussion of Elohi that the meanings of

Cherokee words are made clear for the reader. Rather than presenting Cherokee words in simple vocabulary lists without context or meaning, these words from the Cherokee natural world are provided first in Cherokee syllabary, then in Cherokee in Roman alphabet with phonetic pronunciation. Along with each of these words is the story of the word's origin and meaning, always in keeping with Cherokee storytelling aesthetics.

Building upon this understanding of Elohi and definitions, Teuton next tells the story of Galvladi, the sky world. Teuton, Shade, and other elders explain various facets of Galvladi, including its relationship with and importance to other worlds or concepts such as *tohi*, and how the relationship between Galvladi and Elohi Hawinadidla, the underworld, plays out through the weather on Elohi. Teuton gives readers stories such as how the beings of the sun and the moon relate to creatures on Elohi, "the Seven Levels of Heaven," or how specific birds and trees received their names. Teuton effortlessly connects these stories and relationships with other stories and tradition from previous chapters.

Teuton concludes the study of the Cherokee natural world by telling of Elohi Hawinadidla and its "embracing of paradoxes" (198). Perhaps most powerful within this chapter is Teuton's explanation of Elohi Hawinadidla's importance to *tohi* as well as Elohi and Galvladi, manifesting itself through emotions and feelings. To ensure a balance between the Cherokee's three worlds, Elohi Hawinadidla must be acknowledged and understood to cultivate *tohi* and ensure Elohi is not "lost to the waters" (198). Not only including stories about the creatures inhabiting Elohi Hawinadidla, Teuton also incorporates stories of "world-crossers" (220), creatures able to inhabit more than one of the three Cherokee worlds. Teuton brings the Cherokee cosmos full circle with his explanation of the overlap and interconnectedness of the three Cherokee worlds.

Overall, *Cherokee Earth Dwellers* is a powerful and foundational text of the Cherokee language and culture. Complementing Teuton's other works, *Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Island Liars' Club* (2016) and *Deep Waters: The Textual Continuum in American Indian Literature* (2010), this text is a natural progression of Teuton's storytelling abilities. Rather than overloading the reader with a long list of definitions or explanations, Teuton masterfully includes various elements to model "deeply collaborative, community-driven and community-centered focus of decolonial Indigenous research methodologies" (14) in relation with the Cherokee natural world, creating an engaging and user-friendly text. With refreshing honesty, Teuton takes the reader through his own struggles of understanding the Cherokee natural world and peoples' place in relation to the Cherokee cosmos. As a text presenting "stories and knowledge of the Cherokee natural world of both ancient origin and recent occurrence" (10), *Cherokee Earth Dwellers* is a beneficial read for anyone looking to reconnect to, or build a relationship with, the Cherokee language and culture. Teuton and Shade's text is a valuable resource for students, scholars, or teachers hoping to find an accessible example of Cherokee culture to incorporate into their studies or classrooms. The beauty and power of *Cherokee Earth Dwellers*, however, is that no expertise in the Cherokee language or natural world is needed, only a passion for the storytelling tradition.

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