



# Publishing Experiences for Indigenous Authors and Authors of Colour in Canada: A Visual Story Featuring Cats!

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## Abstract

The Canadian publishing industry presents certain challenges for Indigenous authors and Authors of colour. This visual story along with some commentary aims to touch upon some of the struggles such as having their work edited to fit mainstream ideals which robs a part of their identity, being rejected for telling their own stories because of their identity, and feeling out of place in a white dominated industry. While there are Indigenous authors and Authors of colour getting published, the mentioned issues still remain and more, and is seen amongst other minority groups as well. However, it is important to remember that while they all face struggles within and outside the publishing industry, communities and individuals of minority communities have their unique stories and would require more learning, researching, and listening to understand their unique perspective and experiences of their struggles.

The first set of images focuses on setting the background for the main cat, Lydia, representing an Indigenous author. Her

experiences are shaped by her experience growing up (culture, history, family, etc.) and of course also her unfortunate experiences of leaving her family and attending a residential school. To show part the of history, Lydia is seen saying “32” as her designated number. Besides having their birth names replaced by “Euro-Canadian names” (Quan 2015), they were also “...routinely addressed by their assigned numbers” (Quan 2015).

*“Lydia Ross, who was given several numbers in Cross Lake, Man. — 51, 44, 32, 16, 11 and 1 — said even students’ clothes and shoes were marked with their assigned numbers.”* (Quan, 2015)



In Akiwenzie-Damm's article, she discusses the struggles that Indigenous authors may have, including having their stories "...appropriated, expurgated, and distorted in colonial culture" (Akiwenzie-Damm, p.31). The linguistic accuracy of Indigenous languages are also threatened during the editing process, "Linguistic accuracy is also essential when working with material in Indigenous forms of English or Anglicized forms of Indigenous languages. In the past, these forms of language have not been accepted, edited to conform to conventional English, altered in ways that did not recognize their cultural and linguistic underpinnings, or caused the manuscript to be rejected altogether. Editing out these forms of language is offensive." (Akiwenzie-Damm, p.38)







Authors of colour sometimes struggle being boxed inside their own minority identity. An example is tokenism where publishers may feel like that they have published enough stories by authors of colour and do not see the point of publishing more. Another issue is “struggling within their own struggles”, where authors are encouraged to only write and represent more about their experiences as a minority, boxing the author’s expression to a certain type of story.

These sets of images for the visual story “The Only Voice” was inspired by issues mentioned above and specifically by these below quotes from authors of colour.

*“The blow that hurt the most? When I was told by one of my former editors that the novel I was writing didn’t “build on my existing audience”, I asked if it was because that particular novel wasn’t centered on the Chinese Canadian experience. She paused and had to admit that was what she meant. I abandoned that novel, too demoralized to look at it again. I still haven’t reread it, 10 years later.” –Jen Sookfong Lee*

*“One of the most prominent editors in Canada, one who is continually and publicly lauded for her career, told us that she just couldn’t justify taking on “one more Asian woman writing about her dead grandfather.” This was 2004, when the number of Asian women publishing fiction in Canada could be counted on one hand.” –Jen Sookfong Lee*

*“DB: I am trying really hard not to get sort of boxed into certain ways. Just because I am black and just because I live in the world as it is, as it’s constructed now, then I’m supposed to do these major things like represent, you know?” – Dionne Brand (Walcott & Sanders, 2000)*



In Akiwenzie' article, there is encouragement for more Indigenous editors to help Indigenous authors along the process of publishing. There are many things an editor can do to help the process like learning more about Indigenous culture, understanding their history, being mindful of not editing their language, ensuring there is not a hierarchy between editor and author, and more. However, an Indigenous editor can provide comfort and a feeling of solidarity to an Indigenous author where there is someone similar to them and probably already have a deep understanding of their shared struggles already. When putting art for another to see, there is the fear that as an author they will be painfully criticized, those feelings may be exacerbated by their horrific past with colonialism where the editorial process may feel like having their own voice and identity edited out once again. Having an Indigenous editor who is "...comfortable with their own Indigeneity within the editorial process..." (Akiwenzie-Damm, p.33) can help ease those feelings.





Even after being published the struggles are not all over. The book industry is still vastly dominated by white authors, the feeling of being different still remains. The final piece of this visual novel is inspired by this quote in an article by Jen Sookfong Lee.

*“As the years went on, I was constantly placed in white-dominated literary spaces (readings, writers’ festivals, etc.), which made me feel both visible and invisible, as well as profoundly uncomfortable.” – Jen Sookfong Lee*

On an ending note, this visual story was created to give a general overview of some issues found in the publishing industry and only touches upon some of the issues that people of colour and Indigenous people face in the book industry. There are still many things to cover, from a deeper look into the issues mentioned earlier to looking at each struggling group individually including communities such as the queer community or disabled people trying to fit in an established industry of well-connected and similar people. These communities all share the fact that they have struggles, but their struggles are unique and have their

own history. I would recommend further research to paint a more broad and detailed picture of the experiences in the publishing industry for minorities.

## References

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## Special Thanks

MysticEmma for some patterns and brushes (that were free for personal and commercial use) used in the making my project's art.

<https://mysticemma.deviantart.com/>

## Links to specific Brushes/Patterns used

<https://mysticemma.deviantart.com/art/Distressed-Marker-Brushes-570394390>

<https://mysticemma.deviantart.com/art/Triangle-Delight-Patterns-389185362>



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