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The cover image is by Harold Fisk, 1944, plate fifteen, sheet one, showing stream courses from *The Alluvial Valley of the Lower Mississippi River*. The map covers sections of Arkansas, Missouri, and Tennessee.

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TEACHING AND PRACTICE

TOWARD A PEDAGOGY OF PLACE: THE *BDO*TE FIELD TRIP AND ABSENT NARRATIVES IN THE CLASSROOM

By Kirk MacKinnon Morrow

The lessons we teach, much like the places we inhabit, are multivalent and layered in the stories they tell. At the Minnesota Humanities Center, we have long sought to empower educators to create lessons that recognize and

amplify *absent narratives*, the stories that have been systematically marginalized or left out in classrooms and curricula for generations. By interrogating their own worldviews and personal experiences, educators recognize absent



*Walking between sites at Oheyawahi/Pilot Knob.
Photo by Michael Murray; courtesy of the Minnesota Humanities Center.*

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narratives in their work and develop strategies to surface these stories in a respectful way. Perhaps unsurprisingly, engaging with questions of equity requires a deep knowledge of oneself and a firm commitment to one's community and relationships. In essence, it is grounded in place—not place in the fickle, cartographic sense, but place as the sum of relationships and physical geography, self and the messy complexity of a shared humanity. A deep knowledge of self is always at once a deep knowledge of place.

That said, if place is the organizing principle through which we can effect the kind of searching personal awareness that, in coalescing among teams of educators, begins to countervail centuries of marginalization and absencing, then there is perhaps no more important place than

the one on which we stand. As Dakota artist and scholar Mona Smith enjoins educators involved in Humanities Center programming, “To know who you are, you have to know where you are.” This, at its core, is the purpose of the professional development offering *Bdote Field Trip: Dakota in the Twin Cities*.^{*} Developed out of the multimedia art and deep mapping project *Bdote Memory Map*, a partnership between Allies: media/art and the Humanities Center, the trip provides an experiential introduction to absent narratives and the human cost of erasure as Dakota scholars and educators tell stories of this land and its first people.

A circle of stones recognizes the seven council fires of Dakota people. Photo by Michael Murray; courtesy of the Minnesota Humanities Center.



*A circle of stones recognizes the seven council fires of Dakota people.
Photo by Michael Murray; courtesy of the Minnesota Humanities Center.*

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A circle of stones recognizes the seven council fires of Dakota people. Photo by Michael Murray; courtesy of the Minnesota Humanities Center. While the confluence, or bdote, of two rivers at the heart of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area might lend itself easily to metaphors of communities coming together, hearing the lived histories of communities and their relationship to this place surfaces more complex truths.

See the seventeen minute video [Know Where You Are - Bdote](#)

Editor's Note : The video above is linked as such for technical reasons. The original is on the website [Bdote Memory Map](#) which is a joint project between [The Minnesota Humanities Center](#) and [Allies: media/art](#).

Throughout the Bdote Field Trip, Mona and colleagues Ethan Neerdaels and Ramona Kitto Stately guide participants on walks at sites of significance to Dakota people and share personal stories that shape an understanding of Minnesota as a Dakota place despite centuries of oppression. Throughout the journey, participants come to see different dimensions of a region they call home and open their minds to honor Indigenous ways of knowing and being in relationship to place.

The trip's crescendo comes at midday when sage is burned and participants gather in circle at the site of Historic Fort Snelling. Situated atop the river bluff surrounded by both a thicket of trees and the incessant din of traffic, the site speaks its rawness. In this circle, Ramona shares of the sacred importance of bdote to Dakota people; of



Throughout the day, participants listen to stories of bdote told by Dakota scholars. Photo by Michael Murray; courtesy of the Minnesota Humanities Center.

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how Wita Tanka (Pike Island) is the site of genesis; of how treaties signed here took hundreds of thousands of acres of Dakota land; of how 1,600 Dakota women, children, and elders were force marched here from Lower Sioux Agency and held in concentration camps after 38 Dakota men were executed by the United States government; of how a military fort, an airport, and multiple freeways were built over these sites of sacredness and wounding; of how this duality of trauma and birth figures in the story of her own family; of how erasure forecloses efforts to engage one another in reciprocal learning to this day.

In this moment, something changes for participants on the trip. The place speaks to them, calls them to action and understanding in a way no training seminar could ever hope to do. Listening to the incontrovertible, human truths of Ramona's story and grounding in the

stirring tranquility of the bdote site, the dangers of absence and erasure are palpable. Planes roar overhead and the fort's outline looms atop the river bluff, offering constant reminders of how a dominant narrative has marginalized and ignored the humanity of this land's first people. Participants leave feeling an overwhelming desire to share what they have learned and do what they can to promote healing for this place. This is a powerful seed of change that, if nourished through practice and collaboration, can create real and meaningful engagement for students of all backgrounds.

*Bdote Field Trips are open to educators and members of the general public. Visit <http://mnhum.org/bdotefieldtrip> to learn more and sign up for upcoming trips.

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About the Author

Kirk MacKinnon Morrow works with the Minnesota Humanities Center on education and public humanities programming that amplifies stories absented from public discourse to promote a more equitable and engaged future. He has a background in comparative literature and is a frequent writer of essays and short fiction.