Northern Stories: Collecting Knowledge from Fiction

“Fiction seeks out truth. Granted, it seeks a poetic kind of truth, universals are not easily translatable into moral codes. But part of our interest as we read is in learning how the world works; how the conflicts we share with the writer and all other human beings can be resolved, if at all; what values we can affirm and, in general, what the moral risks are. The writer who can’t distinguish truth from a peanut-butter sandwich can never write good fiction.” - John Gardner, The Art of Fiction

Research Curiosities (Work in Progress)

1) Are fiction and scientific study antithetical? Can they operate in congruity with each other?
   a) Contrasting research methodology: is fiction appropriate in scientific research?
   b) What can fictional literature offer to social science research?

2) What can fictional literature offer to social science research?
   a) Storytelling: basic plots are often based on reality or ‘writer’s’ real experience
   b) Imagery and description: landscape, community identity, character behavior, relationships
   c) Alternatives: assistance in the process of imagination

3) How can fiction be explored as a dimension of cognitive anthropology?
   a) Organization of knowledge (role of the writer)
   b) Portrayal of knowledge (role of the reader)
   c) Distribution of knowledge (communication in the form of publication or presentation)
   d) Interpretation of the final document (role of reader)

4) What are the relationships between different dimensions of creative writing?
   a) Writing as structured craft (character, plot, setting, point of view, storyline)
   b) Writing as art (imagination, quality of writing, clarity and precision of imagery, questions and conversation, complexity and continuity of story-line)
   c) Writing as cognition (interpretation of reality, relationship between story, author and reader, energy of possible knowledge: desire to know more about the general subject)

5) What role might other arts and humanities contribute to studies of climate change and northern community impacts?

Bibliography

- Alaska's Digital Archives: http://vilda.alaska.edu
- Steinhilber, W. Northern Stories: Collecting Knowledge from Fiction.” In Northern Studies: Collecting Knowledge from Fiction.” University of Alaska Fairbanks, Department of Anthropology. 2013.
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