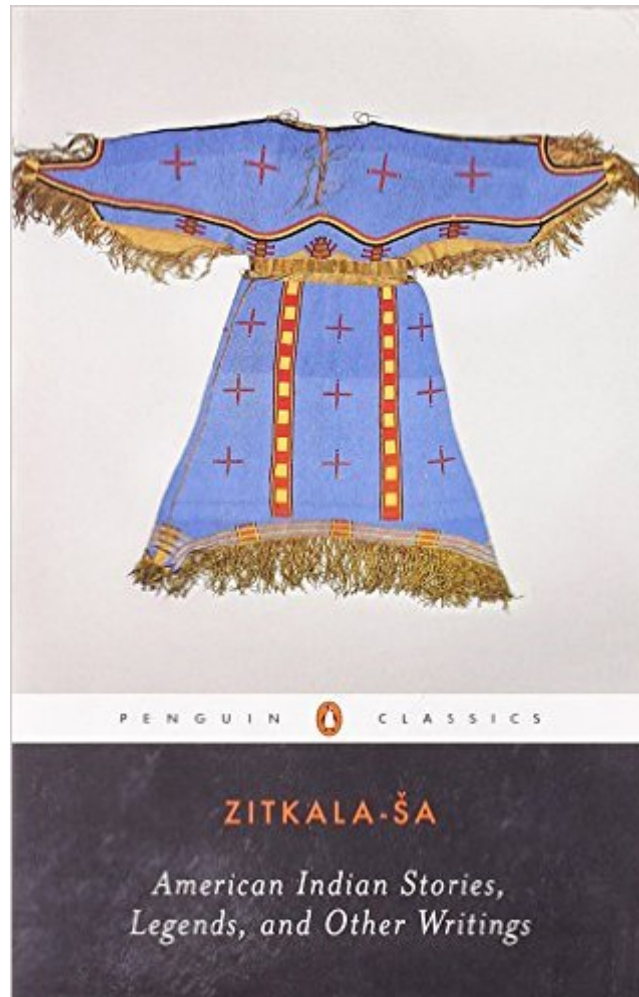


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American Indian Stories, Legends, And Other Writings (Penguin Classics)



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Customer Reviews

Zitkala-Sa: American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings edited with an introduction and notes by Cathy N. Davidson and Ada Norris. Highly recommended. Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), a South Dakota Sioux (through her mother; her father was white) born in 1876, the year of the Battle of the Little Big Horn, was an educator, musician, writer, and activist. She served as the secretary and treasurer of the Society of American Indians (SAI) and as editor of SAI's American Indian Magazine. This collection of Zitkala-Sa's work includes background information about the author; a chronology of contemporary events; selections from "Old Indian Legends" (retellings of oral story traditions); "American Indian Stories"; selections from American Indian Magazine; and some of her poetry, pamphlets, essays, and speeches. "Old Indian Legends" introduces Sioux traditions, including Iktomi (a trickster who often takes the form of a spider), Iya the glutton (able to consume whole villages), and the characters of the Sioux world-coyotes, ducks, the terrifying Red Eagle and the stranger who slays it, turtles, toads, mice, bears, badgers, and more. While at first these traditions and stories may strike the outsider as different and alien, to some extent they can evoke some European fairy tale traditions (which also may seem alien to modern sensibilities). Some of the most charming, like "Dance in a Buffalo Skull," are written in human terms but have no human characters. "Dance," with its "two balls of fire" growing "larger and brighter" and building of suspense, is an excellent short horror story as well.

"American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings" is a collection of pieces by Zitkala-Sa (also known as Gertrude Simmons Bonnin). The book is edited, with an introduction and notes by, Cathy N. Davidson and Ada Norris. Born on the Yankton Sioux reservation in South Dakota in 1876, Zitkala-Sa worked as a writer and activist for Native American causes, and died in 1938. The editors divide Zitkala-Sa's writings into 4 main sections: "Old Indian Legends," "American Indian Stories," "Selections from American Indian Magazine," and "Poetry, Pamphlets, Essays, and Speeches." I really loved the legends, which are Zitkala-Sa's versions of tales that had been passed down orally. These stories are full of magic, transformations, fantastic beings, and amazing feats. Many tales feature Iktomi, a "spider fairy" who is a mischievous trickster. The section on stories features realistic narratives of Indian lives. All together these stories create a vivid and fascinating portrait, with details about Indian crafts, food preparation, and social customs. The many nonfiction pieces in the book cover a number of topics, such as Native American soldiers in World War I, Native American religion, and Indian political issues. Many of these pieces show the author to be a really forward thinking woman with a global perspective; her acknowledgement of the "universal cry for freedom from injustice" really seems to foreshadow the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other great activist-writers of the later 20th century. The book is full of great supplemental materials: a comprehensive introduction; a lengthy bibliographic list of suggestions for further reading; an informative note on the texts; and endnotes.

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