

## COMM 390 Business Writing Book Publishing Assignment

*This is a fictitious scenario. Neither Century Publishing nor the business model of buying the second rights to big name book titles from large publishers currently exists. But they could!*

**BACKGROUND:** You work for Century Publishing, a small but distinguished company that seeks the second-rights to books from major publishing houses. Yours is a niche business run by Century Publishing founder, Christine Daley. For the purposes of this assignment, ‘second rights’ means making deals with major publishing houses to print and distribute small runs of the publishing houses’ proven bestsellers. Century is granted this right because it has access to a small but highly literate customer base that wants to read the best newly-written books but does not want to support mega publishing houses that control the book publishing industry, nor Amazon, the sales behemoth that distributes their books. Century’s customers are a dedicated bunch who want to support great writers but disagree with the business model that is currently consolidating the book publishing industry, forcing small booksellers and publishers to close down as the large players either buy them or force them into bankruptcy.

Century Publishing’s members do not buy books on Amazon. They exclusively order titles (in both electronic and paper format) directly from Century. This is a small but lucrative market because its members are voracious readers and passionately devoted to Century remaining an independent publishing house. Century, for its part, is dependent on the major publishers doing deals with it to print small runs of their major titles for a fee. Century’s marketing slogan is: “Book lovers serving book lovers.” The large publishers accept a niche player like Century because it allows them to access a small but eager group of book lovers who would otherwise be lost to them. Century must choose wisely the books it will publish. One mistake and the company could alienate its members, who are the lifeblood of the company.

**SCENARIO:** You are located in Vancouver and work as a book advocate for Century Publishing, Unit #112, 1134A Chesney St, Toronto, ON M5H 1H1. At Century, ‘Book Advocate’ is the title given to researchers across Canada who scour the bestseller lists and choose titles to which they think Century should negotiate the rights.

You must read two books: *Indian Horse* by Ojibway author Richard Wagamese (Douglas & McIntyre, 2012) and a book of your own choosing from the New York Times’ bestseller lists or Oprah Winfrey’s Book Club. Century Publishing only has enough money to buy the second rights to ONE of these books. Your job is to decide which one should be chosen. **Do not choose audio book versions. You must physically READ both books.**

**BOOK #1:** To better understand *Indian Horse* and how residential schools and European settlement have affected Canada’s indigenous population, consider Richard Wagamese’s horrendous upbringing (see his obituary in the appendix). Also view the work of Canada’s Truth & Reconciliation Commission, in particular the *What We Have Learned* section of the TRCs final report, which is on Canvas. **The TRC report is long. This is a chance to get a jump on reading it before the First Nations assignment.**

**BOOK #2:** Choose a book title from one of the links below and read it from cover to cover. There are no limits on which book you may choose, but it should be something that a discerning adult would sit down and read. It’s best to choose one that interests you and for which you can be a strong advocate. The book can’t be something you read back in high school, because one of the goals of this assignment is to introduce you to modern writing.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/19/books/review/100-notable-books.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/books/review/10-best-books-2017.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/books/review/best-books.html>

[http://www.oprah.com/book/oprahs-book-club-becoming?editors\\_pick\\_id=26790](http://www.oprah.com/book/oprahs-book-club-becoming?editors_pick_id=26790)

**SIGN UP SHEET:** Once you have chosen a book, claim it on the sign-up sheet by entering your name and the book's title. **Everyone must choose a different book. When a title has been claimed, it can't be selected by anyone else.**

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fWdAYVyORbLi7ZBxYM\\_f13sXWkYLqEyPX1HskVGoM\\_8/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fWdAYVyORbLi7ZBxYM_f13sXWkYLqEyPX1HskVGoM_8/edit)

**DELIVERABLES:** Make sure you deliver these five components of the assignment:

- **ASSIGNMENT TITLE PAGE:** It should include your name, section number and a paragraph explaining the key message of your briefing note in fewer than 150 words. Also include a short audience analysis by answering these questions:
  1. **Who is my audience? Why should they read this? What's in it for them? (WiiFM)**
  2. **What is my audience expecting to receive from me? (i.e. What do they need from me? What did they request?)**
  3. **How much prior-knowledge does my audience have on my subject? Are they experts or novices?**
  4. **How likely is my audience to agree with my conclusions? Do I need extra facts & evidence to convince them?**
- **A COVER LETTER:** No specific word limit. Cover letters are short documents attached to longer ones. Their only purpose is to let the reader know the longer document is attached and to encourage the audience to read this attachment. A cover letter should briefly state your key finding (i.e. your attachment's key message) and to indicate that the required document (i.e. report/resume/backgrounder/ creative brief, etc.) is attached. Cover letters are separate to the documents they are attached to, so both the letter and the briefing note should clearly state your key message. This may seem repetitive, but repetition of important ideas is a key communications practice. To discover more, do research on what cover letters are and how they should be formatted. NB. Normally letters are only sent to external audiences, but Christine Daley insists on formality when Century's book advocates from around the country send her their recommendations. Use your Vancouver address when writing to her.
- **BRIEFING NOTE:** 1,500 words. Weigh up the merits of both books and make a choice.

**Important:** You will need to provide a brief synopsis of each book for context, but avoid writing a school essay. This is a business document, not a book report. You should form an opinion about each book's value to Century Publishing, choose one as your favourite, and defend this favourite persuasively. Develop a strong, evidence-based argument that supports your viewpoint. Acknowledge any weaknesses your chosen book may have and refute these to strengthen your argument. As you write, keep in mind the briefing note's purpose, which is persuading Christine Daley whether or not Century should bid for the book's second rights so that Century can print and sell copies to its members.
- **READING LIST:** It should contain **at least four credible references**. Possible reading could include business analyses of the book industry, interviews with the authors, news media articles about the authors and critical reviews of both titles.
- **FIRESIDE CHAT:** A three-minute persuasive pitch to Christine Daley and Century's management team about your book from the New York Times bestseller lists. Your purpose is to explain what your book is, why you chose it, and why or why not it would be a good purchase for Century. (This pitch should only be about the book you chose, not Indian Horse.)

**Your speaking style for the fireside chat should be light and conversational. Avoid writing a script. Don't memorize your words. If you need notes, they should only be a brief outline of your main points. Keep it relaxed. You are a book lover talking passionately to other book lovers.**

**Organize your presentation using Monroe’s Motivate Sequence (MMS). For more on MMS, see the help sheet in the assignment instructions folder and Google the phrase “Monroe’s Motivated Sequence”. MMS is a common organizational pattern for persuasive communication. Submit a copy of your outline to Turnitin by 10pm, the night before you speak.**

**HOW TO CREATE A BRIEFING NOTE:** A **briefing note** is a high-level document that summarizes a large project or proposal. It contains all the key information in short-form and places it in context. There is no standard format for a briefing note, so lay it out this way:

**BRIEFING NOTE**

**Document’s Title** *[Provide a compelling heading to catch your readers’ attention]*

**Book recommendation made by** *[Insert your name]*

**Date**

Beyond the header template provided above, you are free to structure your briefing note any way you wish, as long as it is well-organized, professionally laid out, and achieves its stated purpose: to persuade or dissuade (you may vote against the books you have read) Century Publishing from choosing your book for small-run publication. Like all professional documents, your briefing note should use concise, easy-to-read plain English, have a clearly defined key message, and be laid out so that it is visually attractive.

You must clearly state the two books’ titles, authors, publishers, and any other relevant details. Beyond this, there is no required structure or content for this assignment. The questions below are primers to get you started, but are not an exhaustive list, so you should think broadly about what makes a book sell and add anything you think would make your argument more compelling:

- Compare and contrast the two books. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses?
- What kinds of audience would likely want to read these books (i.e. what are their target markets?) and why? If you are clearly advocating against one of the books, why do you think readers would not like it?
- Is there something inexplicably compelling about the topics, the authors’ writing styles, or the stories, that would entice readers to buy these books? Or, is there something about these things that might turn off readers?
- Do the books fit into a current trend of books on this theme, making them more topical and likely to sell? Or are there aspects of the books that clearly miss the mark?
- Are the authors known quantities, or newcomers without a track record? How might this name recognition, or lack of it, affect sales?
- Will these books stay popular for a longer period of time, or are they more likely to be a quick success and then gone?
- Do the books have unique stories, characters, or ideas that will captivate readers?
- Would these books have wide appeal or would they only appeal to a niche audience? And if so, would Century Publishing’s members be the right niche?

**ASSIGNMENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** This two-part assignment has three key learning goals:

- Forming an evidence-backed opinion and persuasively arguing your point of view for a defined audience
- Using plain English to express ideas in a logical, coherent, and highly readable manner
- Reinforcing the importance of reading and the way it stimulates imagination, creativity, and new ideas with an emphasis on indigenous Canadian content.

**GRADING:** The briefing note is worth 85 percent of your grade for this assignment and the fireside chat/pitch is worth 15 percent. Due dates are in the syllabus.

OBITUARY

## Ojibway author Richard Wagamese found salvation in stories

**MARSHA LEDERMAN**

Published March 24, 2017

UPDATED MAY 16 2018

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/ojibway-author-richard-wagamese-found-salvation-in-stories/article34422836/>



Richard Wagamese, of the Ojibway First Nation, had a childhood fraught with troubles, but it did not deter him from eventually becoming a lauded author, broadcaster and journalist.

Richard Wagamese understood the power of words. He made a living from writing – eventually, after terrible struggles – but he also knew what words, put together the right way, could do for a life: They could save it. He knew this as a writer, and also as a reader. Whether his words were on the page or spoken aloud in mesmerizing performances, they were alive with raw honesty, searing insight and a delicate eloquence.

"He got to our cores; he got to where we are most human," says CBC broadcaster Shelagh Rogers, a friend whom Mr. Wagamese called his Chosen Sister. "And his words resonated with us. The fact that they were beautiful was gravy."

The self-taught Ojibway author's works were infused with his excruciating history. The tragedies that shaped him from early childhood gave birth to demons that chased him throughout his too-short life. But through books (and nature and music and animals and baseball and love), he found refuge.

"Stories are meant to heal," he wrote in his 2008 memoir *One Native Life* – one of 14 books he published in his lifetime, which included non-fiction, novels, poetry and children's books. "That's what my people say, and it's what I believe. Culling these stories has taken me a long way down the healing path from the trauma I carried."

Despite an intense shyness, Mr. Wagamese was a spellbinding speaker – leaving adults in tears or inspiring the toughest high school gym crowd. He told traditional stories, anecdotes from his life. He might do some stand-up or a Rocky impression.

"He briefly drummed to call in the ancestors and then he spoke for 45, 50 minutes without notes, with fluidity and eloquence and such grace," says Jane Davidson, recalling his appearance at her festival, the Sunshine Coast Festival of the Written Arts.

"He talked about how important it is to speak to each other, neighbour to neighbour."

Mr. Wagamese died March 10 at his home in Kamloops. He was 61. He died in his sleep of natural causes, according to his fiancée Yvette Lehmann. "In my opinion it was just heartbreak," she says. "From the life that he had to live, the past."

Richard Wagamese was born on Oct. 14, 1955, on the Wabaseemoong First Nation in northwestern Ontario. His first home was a canvas army tent hung from a spruce bough frame, he wrote in his essay *The Path to Healing*. His family fished, hunted and trapped. But his parents and extended family were deeply scarred by residential school.

"Each of the adults had suffered in an institution that tried to scrape the Indian out of their insides, and they came back to the bush raw, sore and aching," he wrote.

Mr. Wagamese inherited their trauma.

His childhood was dreadful. In that same story, he recounted having his left arm and shoulder smashed as a toddler. And how when he was almost three, the adults left him, his two brothers and sister alone in the bush on a bitterly cold winter day. They ran out of food and firewood. His older sister and brother hauled the two younger boys across a frozen bay and they huddled at the railroad depot. A police officer took them to the Children's Aid Society. "I would not see my mother or my extended family again for 21 years," he wrote.

He was fostered out and at the age of nine, adopted by a family he described as staunch white Presbyterians who led a regimented life and tolerated no disorder. "The wounds I suffered went far beyond the scars on my buttocks." He was moved to southern Ontario, separated from his native heritage.

He left home in St. Catharines at 16. For years, he lived on the street or in jail. Even when working, he was often homeless. He sometimes raided gardens and fruit trees. One winter, he spent a month living in a nativity scene. He became an alcoholic and a drug user.

But even in that darkness, there were life-changing events.

In St. Catharines, Mr. Wagamese, looking for shelter, followed people into a building. It was a library – and there he found a quiet, warm haven. And he found books. He would stack them into a mountainous L-shape surrounding him, worried he might be asked to leave.

Mr. Wagamese had a Grade 9 education but what he learned at the library was staggering. He carried a notebook and would jot down things he heard that sounded interesting. Then he would ask the librarians for books on those subjects: astronomy, geometry, music. At a bar one night, he heard people discussing James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. The notoriously difficult book was his next library choice. Unlike many before him, he didn't give up. He bought his own copy. It took him months to finish it.

One day, a brown bag showed up on his desk. Mr. Wagamese didn't touch it for hours, afraid he might be accused of stealing what was inside. Finally, he looked. There was a muffin and a sandwich – a gift from the librarian. She introduced him to the listening room. There he heard Beethoven for the first time. And she took him out, to a performance.

"He actually taped up his shoes with duct tape to look a little more put together," Ms. Lehmann says. "He was so afraid to go in there because he wasn't dressed properly. She said don't worry about that; just close your eyes and don't look at the people; just hear the music."

When Mr. Wagamese told that story at an event at the Victoria Native Friendship Society last year, many in the audience wept. "It hit people in the heart," executive director Bruce Parisian says.

At 23, he reunited with family and found his calling. After he told his long, terrible story, an elder gave him a storyteller's name: *Mushkotay Beezheekee Anakwat* – Buffalo Cloud. Your role is to be a teller of stories, the elder said.

In 1979, Mr. Wagamese was hitchhiking across Canada when a job posting on the board at the employment office in Regina caught his eye. A First Nations publication, *New Breed*, was looking for a native writer. He applied for the job, telling the editor that yes he had training but no transcripts; they had been destroyed in a fire. None of this was true.

He was told to return the following Monday, when he would be tested by rewriting newspaper stories. Mr. Wagamese went to the library, asked for books on journalism, and for five days buried himself in writing exercises. At the test he was presented with three *Globe and Mail* articles and told to shorten them. He got the job.

His dream of becoming a published author also received a boost at the library in Regina. In 1984, he took a book he had been writing to the writer-in-residence, Lorna Crozier.

"I took the novel home and was very moved by it and ... I wrote him a page of encouragement," Ms. Crozier says.

They made an appointment to meet again, but he didn't show up. She eventually received a letter from him: He was in jail and needed books. Ms. Crozier and her husband Patrick Lane, living on her meagre salary, raided their own collection and mailed him some books. He never forgot it.

"You told me to keep on going; I needed someone to say that to me in my life," she recalls him saying.

Mr. Wagamese, who was also a broadcaster, left active journalism in 1993. (He continued to write as a freelancer, for publications including *The Globe and Mail*.) He published his first book, *Keeper'n Me* in 1994.

"We thought this is an extremely powerful voice and one that at that time wasn't really being heard," says John Pearce, who received his manuscript at Doubleday and became his editor and publisher – and later, his agent. His writing demonstrated "a storytelling ability that just grabbed you from the first page."

*Keeper'n Me* won the Writers' Guild of Alberta's Best Novel Award and launched his publishing career.

His breakthrough was *Indian Horse*, a novel about a hockey phenomenon who suffered from the legacy of the residential schools. It was a national bestseller, a Canada Reads 2013 contender and won the Burt Award for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Literature. It's being made into a film.

Another novel was published in 2014 to more raves. "*Medicine Walk* really knocked me out; it was a lovely book. And I'm a real snob about writing," says Thomas King, the award-winning author of *The Inconvenient Indian*. "Richard was the real deal."

*Medicine Walk* was dedicated to his two sons.

Mr. Wagamese's personal life was troubled. He did not raise his sons, Jason and Joshua. *For Joshua: An Ojibway Father Teaches His Son* was published in 2002, a love letter to his estranged son.

Mr. Wagamese married and divorced three times. But he found love again: Ms. Lehmann, a yoga teacher, contacted Mr. Wagamese about a writing workshop. When they finally met, over coffee in July, 2013, they talked for hours – about everything but writing. They moved in together that October. They moved twice since – each time to make room for Mr. Wagamese's ever-expanding music collection, she says. Last July, he proposed in Horseshoe Bay, where Ms. Lehmann was fresh off the ferry.

"It was a beautiful promise: to honour me, to be by my side, to be the best man that he can be for the rest of our lives. He always said to me that I can promise to love you until the end of my days."

Mr. Wagamese had many important mentors in his life and he became a mentor himself.

When Ms. Davidson brought him back to the Sunshine Coast for a schools-based aboriginal storytelling festival, his impact was stunning, according to Kerry Mahlman, district principal, aboriginal education.

Students said: "I didn't expect this, but that man just changed the way I think about everything," she recalls. "For a 16-year-old that struggles to pull his face away from his phone screen, to walk out with this look on their face ... was just one of the most wonderful gifts."

After Waubgeshig Rice published his first book, *Midnight Sweatlodge*, he was shocked and delighted to receive a message from Mr. Wagamese. Mr. Wagamese had read his book and said he was happy to see a

young Anishinaabe author writing fiction, adding that Mr. Rice should drop him a line if he needed any help.

For Mr. Rice, who is also a CBC journalist, this was "totally mind-blowing," he says. "He was a storyteller that I'd looked up to since I was a teenager. ... I would definitely not have become an author or a journalist without his influence."

In 1991, Mr. Wagamese became the first Indigenous writer to win a National Newspaper Award, for his Calgary Herald columns. It's one of two awards that hung over his desk in his book-piled home office in view of where he wrote. The other is the Kouhi Award for outstanding contributions to the literature of Northwestern Ontario.

He received many other honours, including the 2013 Molson Prize from the Canada Council for the Arts, honorary degrees, and the 2015 Writers' Trust Matt Cohen Award – In Celebration of a Writing Life.

In his acceptance speech, he described the early mornings when he would prepare to write, "and hope that the stories that live inside the curl of your knuckles can be coaxed outward one more time," he said. "And you sit there and you breathe and you hope and you dream and you close your eyes and you feel the essence of that gift radiating inside you."

His last book, *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*, came out of Mr. Wagamese's daily Facebook posts. They had a devoted following and Douglas and McIntyre head Howard White proposed publishing them as a collection. On March 7, *Embers* was nominated for a BC Book Award. Two nights later, Mr. Wagamese went to sleep and didn't wake up.

He had two more books in the works: *Starlight*, a nearly finished sequel to *Medicine Walk*; and *One Drum: Stories and Ceremonies for a Planet*, a journey into the spiritual teachings of Indigenous people. Says Mr. White: "He was bursting out in all directions."

In one of Mr. Wagamese's final Facebook meditations, posted in November, he wrote about starting his day with candlelight, tea and meditation, and what the years had taught him. "Actions born of contemplation are wiser than those made in quiet desperation. If all that's true, and I feel it is, then I have grown some in these 61 years. I have learned and become a better person. And from that maybe it's the years ahead that will be the richest of my life. A quiet man moving forward, gladly beyond all expectation."

A celebration of Mr. Wagamese's life will be held Saturday in Kamloops.