

REVIEWING AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURE FOR CULTURAL APPROPRIATENESS

Tara Tindall, MMSD Native American Teacher Leader Adapted from *The Broken Flute* by Doris Seale (Editor), Beverly Slapin (Editor), 2002 and *How to Tell the Difference: A Checklist for Evaluating Children's Books for Anti-Indian Bias; 10 Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Racism and Sexism - Adapted from the original brochure, published by the Council on Interracial Books for Children by the California State Department of Education, 1998.*

CHECK ILLUSTRATIONS

Stereotypes	Usually derogatory, oversimplified generalization, can also be contained in labels	Tokenism	Do minorities appear to all look alike or like white people but with different color
Active vs Passive	Are minorities portrayed in subservient, passive roles or active leadership roles?	Past/Present	Are Natives portrayed as existing only in the past or are contemporary images used?

STORY LINE

Standards for Success	Problem Resolution	Roles of Women
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does it take "white behavior" for the minority to succeed? - Does a Native need to exhibit extraordinary qualities to gain approval? - In friendships between white and Native, does the native do the most understanding and forgiving? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How are problems presented—are Natives seen as "the problem or cause" for poverty and oppression? - Is a problem resolved as a result of a white benefactor?" - Are reasons for poverty/oppression explained/accepted as inevitable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are female achievements based on own initiative and intelligence or based on good looks/relationships with boys? - Are sex roles critical or can the same story be told if roles were reversed? - Are contemporary roles of men and women addressed?

NOTES/ACTIONS If the topic is not covered in literature, do not need to apply evaluation tool.

LIFESTYLES

Norms	Accuracy	Diversity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are Native lifestyles portrayed in an unfavorable light as compared to white middle-class suburbia? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are tribal regions, languages, home type, etc. accurately portrayed to distinguish one tribe from another? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is attention paid to a variety of tribal customs practiced, such as the role of grandmothers, elders, etc.

NOTES/ACTIONS

Questions to ask when reviewing books on Native Americans for culturally appropriateness (Beverly Slapin, 2003):

1. If ABC Books, is “E” for Eskimo? Is “I” for Indian?
2. In counting books, are “Indians” counted? Are children shown playing “Indian”? Do “Indians” have ridiculous names like “Indian Two Feet”?
3. Are animals dressed as Indians?
4. Are Natives portrayed as savages, or primitive craftspeople, or simple tribal people, now extinct? OR are Natives shown as human beings, members of highly defined and complex societies?
5. Are there insulting overtones to the language in the book? Are racist adjectives used to refer to Indian peoples?
6. Are Natives depicted as stereotypically alike, or do they look just like whites with brown faces?
7. Is there manipulation of words like “victory”, “conquest” or “massacre” to justify Euro-American conquest of the Native homelands? Are Native Nations presented as being responsible for their own “disappearance”? Is the U.S government only trying to help?
8. Does the story encourage children to believe that Native peoples accepted defeats passively?
9. Are Native heroes only the people who, in some way or another, are believed to have aided Europeans in the conquest of their own people?
10. Are native cultures presented in a condescending manner? Are there paternalistic distinctions between “them” and “us”?
11. Are Native peoples discussed in the past tense only, supporting the “Vanished Indian” myth? Is the past unconnected to the present?
12. Is a society portrayed in a distorted or limited way? Are religions described as “superstitions”, with backward or primitive connotations?
13. Is there an ethnocentric Western focus on material objects such as baskets, pottery, rugs?
14. Are Native people shown as “relentlessly ecological”?
15. Do the people speak in either a sort of “early jawbreaker” or in the oratorical style of the “noble savage”?

16. In modern times, are Indian people portrayed as childlike and helpless? Does a white authority figure---pastor, social worker, and teacher---know better than Native people themselves what is “good” for them?

