**The Role of Children’s Books in Native Nation Building**

**Debbie Reese, Culture Keepers, November 2012**

**dreese.nambe@gmail.com**

**American Indians in Children’s Literature**

**http://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.net**

**Evaluating American Indians in Children and Young Adult Books**

There is a cumulative process in which Native youth become detached from school and drop out. During their years in school, they are asked to do assignments that are irrelevant to their experience as Native people. Over time, they detach from school and do not complete assignments.

As we create tribal libraries, we can choose what we will have on our shelves so that our students find stories that reflect who they are. These kinds of stories are empowering. Providing them to our youth helps us to help them build our Native Nations. Some questions to consider are:

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| **Question** | **Why ask the question** |
| 1. Is the book tribally specific? | Tribally specific books add information and push back on stereotypical “Indian” images and ideas. |
| 1. Is the author or illustrator Native? | Introducing books by Native writers and illustrators shows readers ‘what is possible’ and increases knowledge of other tribes. |
| 1. What is the time period for the book? | A library should have a balance of historical and contemporary books |
| 1. Who are the main characters? | Characters should reflect our families, with babies, children, teens, parents, grandparents, and elders. |
| 1. Where is the story set? | A library should have a range of settings, from reservation to urban to rural. |
| 1. Does the story include an author or background note? | Notes tell us a lot (good and bad) about the author’s research and permissions for telling the story. |
| 1. What are the characters like? What are their personal names? | Characters should be realistic, not stereotypical. |
| 1. Does the author use biased, incorrect, or stereotypical words and phrases? | Examples: Massacre/battle; soldier/warrior; woman/squaw; baby/papoose |
| 1. Is a character shown playing Indian? | Like mascots, this activity is generally stereotypical in nature |
| 1. Where are traditional stories shelved? | All peoples/cultures stories should be treated respectfully, and shelved together, perhaps as World Religions |

**Professional Resources to Indigenize Your Library**

Get READ posters from the American Indian Resource Center at the Tulsa City Council Library. On the posters, the word READ is in a Native language.

Contact: Teresa Runnels, Coordinator, email: trunnel@tulsalibrary.org

Website: http://guides.tulsalibrary.org/content.php?pid=337492&sid=2760070

Get a wall clock with the numbers spelled out in your language, from the Indigenous Languages Institute in Santa Fe.

Website: http://www.ilinative.org/merchandise/clockLanguages.html

Order posters and bookmarks of Native writers and their books from the American Library Association.

Website: http://www.alastore.ala.org/detail.aspx?ID=2526

Download, study, and teach tribal members how to evaluate websites. Use a copy of “Techniques for Evaluating American Indian Websites,” by Elaine Cubbins of the American Indian Library Association.

Website: http://www.u.arizona.edu/~ecubbins/webcrit.html

Use Lisa Mitten’s “Native American Nations” to find information on specific tribal nations. Sites maintained by a Native Nation are marked with a drum. Sites without the symbol are **about** the nation, but not by the nation.

Website: http://www.nativeculturelinks.com/nations.html

Add board books to your collection. Specially designed for toddlers, the pages are thick cardboard and sturdy. There is a list of board books at American Indians in Children’s Literature.

Website: http://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/2011/04/top-board-books-for-youngest-readers.html

Order encyclopedias written by people who are scholars, experts, and tribal leaders. Some excellent ones are:

* Davis, Mary B. (1996) *Native America in the Twentieth Century: An Encyclopedia.*New York: Garland Publishing Inc.
* Hoxie, Frederick E. (1996) *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
* Francis, Lee. (1996) *Native Time: A Historical Time Line of Native America*. New York: St. Martin
* Champagne, Duane. (1994) *Chronology of Native North American History*. Detroit: Gale Research
* Champagne, Duane. (1994) *Native America: Portrait of the Peoples.*Detroit: Visible Ink Press
* Keoke, Emory Dean and Porterfield, Kay Marie. (2003) *American Indian Contributions to the World.*