

# Bias in American Indian Literature

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# Outcomes

- ▶ Eliminate stereotype threat
- ▶ Promote Identity safety
- ▶ Seek accurate representations of Native Peoples
- ▶ Represent the past, present, and future



## 7. Long-term Effects



### HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Young Native Americans who attended boarding schools lost their sense of who they were. In return, they gained only knowledge of a world that continued to exclude them. Yet a few Native Americans found ways to use their new knowledge. Little by little, they worked for the rights of all Native Americans. They knew enough about the European American world to be able to reason with the government and to inform all Americans about the damage that had been done to Native American culture. It was the first step in bringing to light centuries of injustice and the first step toward healing the wounds.

Zitkala-Sa wrote many stories and articles about her experience at Carlisle Indian Industrial School (see Appendix A for an example). She and others worked hard for Native American rights. Because of these efforts, the U.S. government passed the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.

Evaluate  
verb  
tense





How do you present  
Native American  
people, culture and  
artistry?

K'ómoks and Kwagu'ł artist Karver Everson

Finish the  
statement...



**“You know a  
book about  
American Indians  
is biased  
when...”**

# What do you think?

How confidently  
can you evaluate  
your own  
classroom library?

If you have  
questionable  
titles, what can  
you do?

# Can you tell the difference?

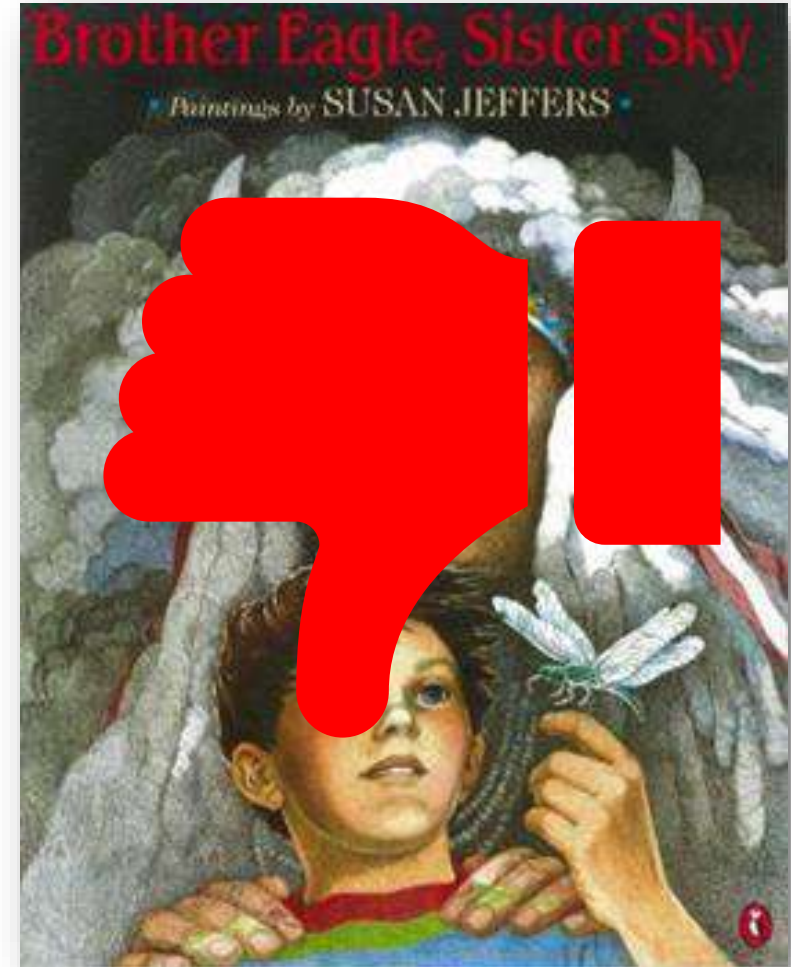
7

Thumbs up if you believe the book is appropriate; thumbs down if you think it is inappropriate. Be prepared to share.

## Selection 1: *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky*

A collection of environmental speeches attributed to Suquamish and Duwamish leader sifaA (Chief Sealh).

If you were perplexed as to why a man in Plains Indian regalia represents a Coast Salish chief, you likely realized that this book, while beautifully illustrated, does not accurately represent sifaA and perpetuates a pan-Indian stereotype.



# Let's practice.

Thumbs up if you believe the book is appropriate; thumbs down if you think it is inappropriate. Be prepared to share.

## Selection 2: *Indian in the Cupboard*

A classic tale of a youth being transported in time by figurines who become animated while in a magical cupboard.

“...these are classic examples of highly acclaimed books riddled with horrendous stereotypes of Native Americans. [Lynne Reid] Banks has created her “Indian” character from the mixed bag of harmful clichés so common...American Indian Library Association

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# Let's practice.

Thumbs up if you believe the book is appropriate; thumbs down if you think it is inappropriate. Be prepared to share.

## Selection 2: *American Indian Festivals*

From the *True Book* series, Delaware author Jay Miller describes Native American festivals, including festivals of a tribe he refers to as "people of the Northwest".

Reviewer Kara Stewart (Sappony) writes, "Mr. Miller belongs to the Delaware Wolf Clan...has attended most of the festivals described in the book [and is a professor]...the first two pages are written in the present tense...However, there are a number of instances in the text where it refers to generalized Indians, resulting in inaccurate information..."



# Let's practice.

10

Thumbs up if you believe the book is appropriate; thumbs down if you think it is inappropriate. Be prepared to share.

## Selection 2: *The Education of Little Tree*

A classic, best-selling autobiography of Forrest Carter and what he learns while living with his Cherokee grandparents in Appalachia

[The book]...was exposed as a work of fiction in 1991. Its author, "Forrest" Carter was not Cherokee. He was Asa Carter, member of the KKK, and the person who wrote George Wallace's "segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" speech. --Dr. Debbie Reese (Nambé Pueblo)



# Let's practice.

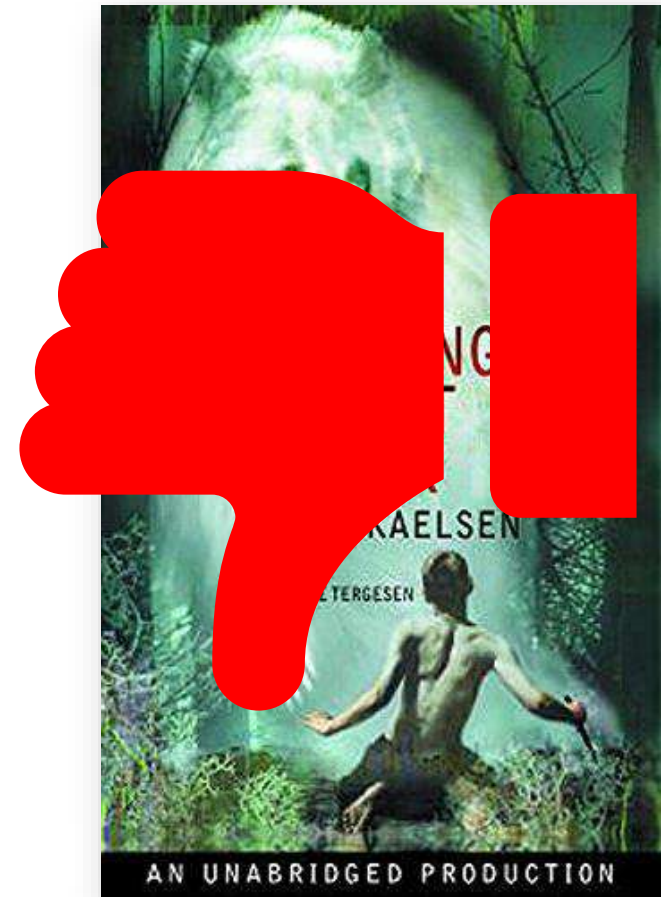
Thumbs up if you believe the book is appropriate; thumbs down if you think it is inappropriate. Be prepared to share.

11

## Selection 2: *Touching Spirit Bear*

A popular novel about a non-Indian banished to a Tlingit island learn the error of his ways

...It is obvious that what he doesn't know, [Mikaelsen] invents. Edwin, the Tlingit elder, instructs Cole to: ...watch for animals and dance around the fire to impersonate the animal ...and finally, carve that animal on his own personal 'totem pole'." --Beverly Slapin



# Let's practice.

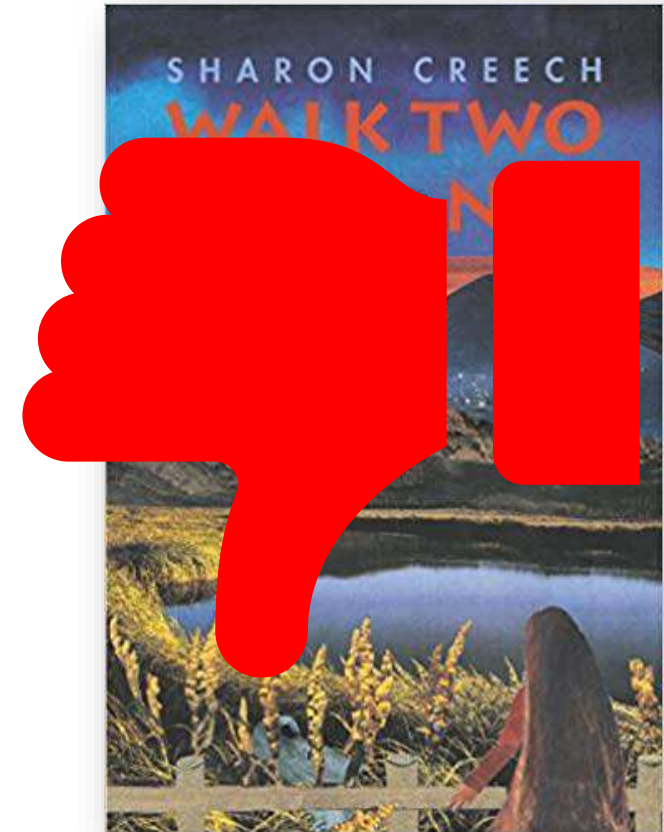
12

Thumbs up if you believe the book is appropriate; thumbs down if you think it is inappropriate. Be prepared to share.

## Selection 2: *Walk Two Moons*

A popular Sharon Creech story about a “part Indian” girl who searches for her mother and adolescent discovery. Creech uses Native American imagery, language, and references to ceremony and traditional ways.

While an entertaining story, the factual errors and implications and assumptions that inevitably arise from them are problematic. Dr. Reese's review is extensive and so is linked [here](#).





## Evaluate the scholarship.

1. If the creator of this resource is not a tribal member, were tribal members, cultural committees, or knowledgeable experts consulted about the American Indian content in this resource?
2. Has this resource been reviewed by a tribal cultural committee, tribal historian, or other well-qualified reviewer?

*“Without a doubt, the most important collaborators in a project like this are Native people themselves. **There is no longer any reason (or excuse) for a scholar to write Indian history without the active participation of tribal people.** The Muckleshoot Indian Tribe in my hometown of Auburn, Washington, granted me access to oral histories...Culture Committee, tribal staff members, archaeologist...other Muckleshoot community members...”*

*--Coll Thrush, Preface to Native Seattle*

## Evaluate the authorship.

- **Tribal affiliation** is essential to Native Identity. If the author or editor claims they are “Native American,” they are likely “Pretendian,” and the literature should be avoided.
- **Non-Indian authors and editors** should have extensive credentials that indicate collaboration with specific tribes or tribal people.
- **“Authentic” or “Native American” resources** are probably neither. (Think about snacks that claim to be “all natural.”)
- Be wary of **“New Age”** type organizations. They are notorious for prevalent cultural appropriation.

A POWERFUL AND VISUALLY STUNNING ANTHOLOGY FROM SOME OF  
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**Home. Identity. Love. Fitting in.** A collection truly universal in its themes, *Dreaming in Indian* shatters commonly held stereotypes about what it's like to grow up Native. Over 50 emerging and established contemporary artists contribute to this astounding collection with poignant pieces that deal with everything from painful memories of first love to the tragic legacy of residential schools.

Lisa Charleyboy

**Lisa Charleyboy** (Tsilhqot'in) is the Editor-in-Chief of *Urban Native Magazine* and has been the host of the CBC radio program, *New Fire*. The *Huffington Post* called her, "an Aboriginal millennial to watch."

— *School Library Journal*, ★starred review

... both an exuberant work of art and a uniquely valuable resource."

— *Kirkus Reviews*, ★starred review

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- ★Kirkus Best Books
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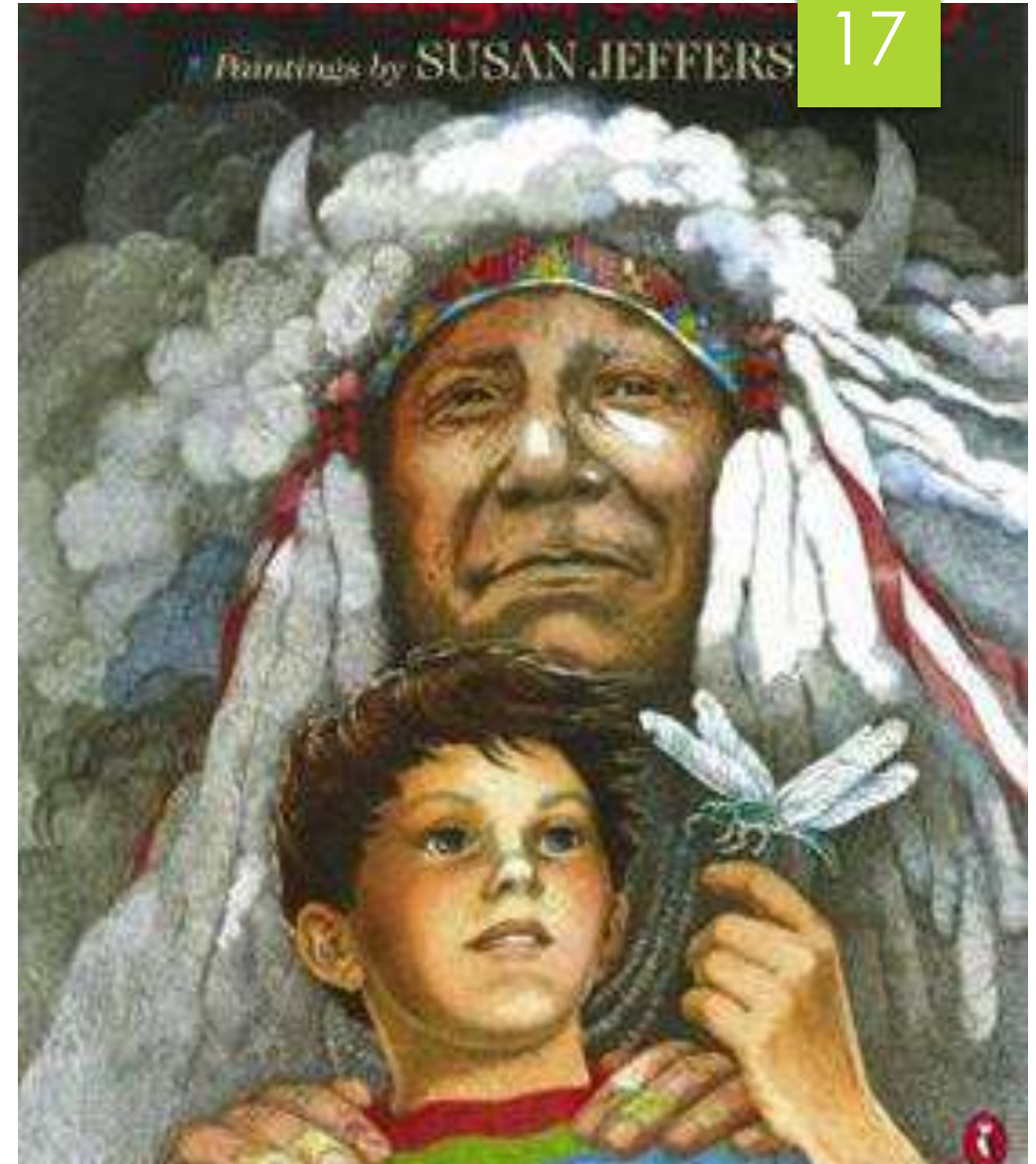
created by Shana Brown, 2020

Tribal Editor with  
a lot of cred



# Evaluate the images.

- ▶ Are they accurate to the tribe or tribal region?
  - ▶ Attire
  - ▶ Geography
  - ▶ Action
  - ▶ Positioned in relation to non-Indians
- ▶ Are there illustrations where there could be photo images?



# The Native American Racial Equity Tool

Seattle Public Schools adapted Montana's *Evaluating American Indian Materials* and *How to Tell the Difference: A Guide for Evaluating Children's Books for Anti-Indian Bias* (Slapin & Seale) to develop its [NARET](#), or Native American Racial Equity Tool.

How might you develop your own tools?

# Perceptions are Subjective

## Defer

Defer to the judgment of your local tribe/s.

## Consult

Consult with your Title VI Indian Education liaison or department

## Seek

Seek wisdom of others

# kw'ałanúusha matash

(Thank you, everyone.)