

"I" Is not for Indian

The Portrayal of Native Americans
in Children's Literature

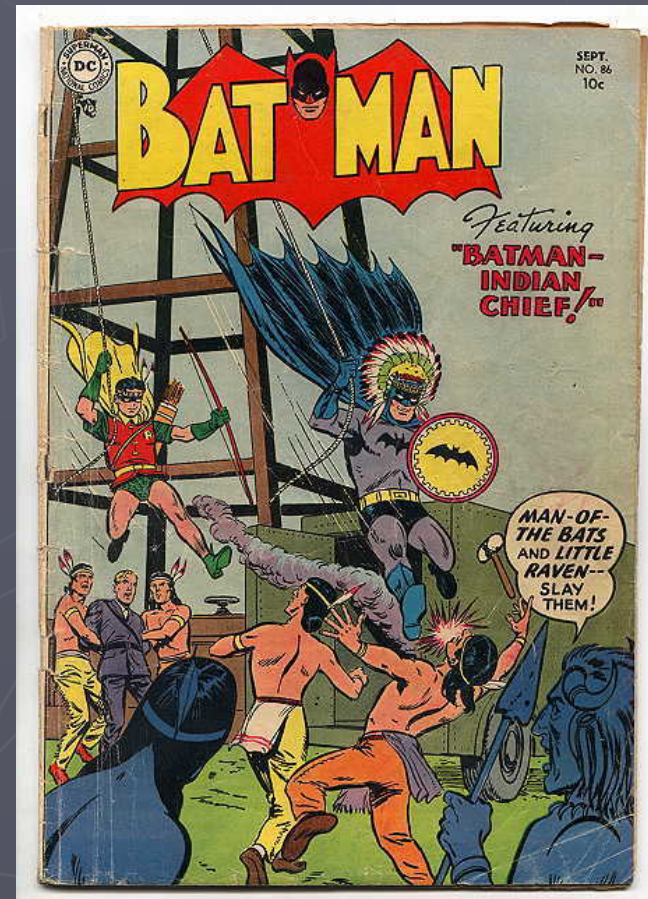
*My name is Raven. When I was in the third grade, our class read **The Courage of Sarah Noble**. In this book they said Indian people were savages and murderers, they chop your head off and eat you alive and that we were not really people. When the class put on the play for the whole school, the kids started taunting me, calling me "stinky" and asking me how many people I've eaten. Nobody would play with me or even sit next to me in class...I felt so ashamed. Finally, I told my mother I didn't want to go back to school.*

--Raven Hoaglen (Maidu/Konkow/Wailaki/Mono)

The media and historians have sometimes marketed negative images of American Indians

These negative images have caused false perceptions and misinformation which have led to harmful stereotypes often in children's books

Stereotypes



Stereotypes cont.



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Native Americans include over 500 different groups with diverse geographic locations, languages and economic conditions

California has the largest Indian population of any state

There are 110 federally recognized tribes in California and 40 tribes who are seeking federal recognition

Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Jose and Oakland have large urban Indian communities

Do's and Don'ts

- ▶ Do present Native peoples as appropriate role models with whom a Native child can identify
- ▶ Do look for books and materials written and illustrated by Native people
- ▶ Don't encourage children to do Indian dances
- ▶ Don't use ABC books that have "I is for Indian" or "E is for Eskimo"

Do's and Dont's

- ▶ Do talk about the lives of Native peoples in the present
- ▶ Don't use picture books by non-Native authors that show animals dressed as Indians
- ▶ Do invite Native community members to the library or storytime
- ▶ Do avoid crafts and activities that trivialize Native dress, dance or ceremony

Where to go

- ▶ Oyate: www.oyate.org
- ▶ Heyday Books: www.heydaybooks.com
- ▶ Multicultural Review: www.mcreview.com
- ▶ 10 quick ways to analyze children's books for racism and sexism:
www.birchlane.davis.ca.us/library/10quick.htm

Books to help you choose

- ▶ *Broken flute*, Beverly Slapin and Doris Seale, eds., 2005
- ▶ *Through Indian eyes*, Beverly Slapin and Doris Seale, eds., 1998
- ▶ *American Indian themes in young adult literature*, Paulette Fairbanks Molin, 2006.

What can you do

- ▶ Educate yourself about today's Native Americans
- ▶ Encourage and support Native authors, storytellers and illustrators
- ▶ Purchase quality children's and YA books from places like Oyate

*By failing to challenge
existing biases we allow
children to adopt attitudes
based on inaccuracies*

Derman-Sparks (1989)

Resources

Reese, Debbie. (1996). *Teaching young children about Native Americans.*

<http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/eecearchive/digests/1996/reese96.html>

Seale, Doris and Beverly Slapin, eds. (1998). *Teaching Respect for Native Peoples*

http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com/lit_resources/diversity/native_am/teaching/TeachingRespect.html

Wood-Campbell, Naomi and Lisa Mitten. (1991). *"I" is not for Indian: The portrayals of Native Americans in books for young people.*

<http://www.nativeculturelinks.com/ailabib.htm>