|  |
| --- |
| **A GUIDE FOR SELECTING OR WEEDING FIRST NATION MATERIALS** |
| **HOW TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE** |
| Beverly Slapin, Doris Seale, and Rosemary Gonzales have compiled this list of criteria in the hope it will make it easier for librarians to choose non-racist and undistorted books about the lives and histories of Native People. As you may notice, some of the choices are blatant; others are subtle. Few books are perfect. When looking at books about Native peoples, then, perhaps the most important questions to ask are: Does this book tell the truth? Does the author respect the People? Is there anything in this book that would embarrass or hurt a Native child? Is there anything in this book that would foster stereotypic thinking in a non-Indian child?” |
| **LOOK AT PICTURE BOOKS** |
| In ABC books, is “E” for “ESKIMO”? | In ABC books, is “I” for “Indian” | In Counting books, are “Indians” counted? |
| Are Children shown “playing Indian”? | Are animals dressed as “Indians” | Do “Indians” have ridiculous names, like “Indian Two Feet” or “Little Chief”? |
| **LOOK FOR STEREOTYPES** |
| **Bad** | **Good** |
| Are Native peoples portrayed as savages, or primitive craftspeople, or simple tribal people, now extinct? | Are Native peoples shown as human beings, members of highly defined and complex societies? |
| Are Native cultures oversimplified and generalized? Are Native people all one color, one style? | Are Native cultures presented as separate from each other, with each culture, language, religion, dress unique? |
| Is the art a mishmash of “generic Indian” designs? | Is attention paid to accurate, appropriate design and color; are clothes, dress, houses drawn with careful attention to detail? |
| Are there insulting overtones to the language in the book? Are racist adjectives used to refer to Indian peoples? | Is the language respectful? |
| Are Native people depicted as stereotypically alike, or do they look just like whites with brown faces? | Are Native people depicted as genuine individuals? |
| **LOOK FOR DISTORTION OF HISTORY** |
| **Bad** | **Good** |
| 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?” | Is the history put in the proper perspective: the native struggle for self-determination and sovereignty against the Euro-American drive for conquest? |
| Does the story encourage children to believe that Native peoples accepted defeats passively? | Does the story show the ways in which Native peoples actively resisted the invaders? |
| 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? | Are Native heroes those who are admired because of what they have done for their own people? |
| Are Native cultures presented in a condescending manner? Are there paternalistic distinctions between ”them” and “us?” | Is the focus on respect for Native peoples and understanding of the sophistication and complexity of their societies? |
| **LOOK AT THE LIFESTYLES** |
| **Bad** | **Good** |
| Are Native peoples discussed in the past tense only, supporting the “vanished Indian” myth? Is the past unconnected to the present? | Is the continuity of cultures represented, with values, religions, morals, an outgrowth of the past, and connected to the present”? |
| Is a culture portrayed in a distorted or limited way? Are religions described as “superstitions” with backward or primitive connotations? | Are Indian religions and traditions described accurately, in the context of their civilizations? |
| Is there an ethnocentric West Focus on material objects, such as baskets, pottery, rugs? | Does the writer show any understanding of the relationship between material and non-materials aspects of life? |
| Are Native peoples shown as “relentlessly ecological”? | Are Native societies described as coexisting with nature in a delicate balance? |
| **LOOK AT THE DIALOGUE** |
| **Bad** | **Good** |
| Do the People speak in either a sort of “early jawbreaker” or in the oratorical style of the “noble savage”? | Do the People use language with the consummate and articulate skill of those who come from an oral tradition? |
| **LOOK FOR STANDARDS OF SUCCESS** |
| **Bad** | **Good** |
| In modern times, are Indian people portrayed as childlike and helpless? Does a white authority figure - pastor, social worker, teacher-know better than Native people themselves what is “good for them?” Are Indian children “better off” away from their families? | Are Native adults seen as mature individuals who work hard and make sacrifices, in order to take care of their families, and for the well-being of the people? |
| Do Native people and their communities contract unfavourably with the “norm” of white middle-class suburbia? | Are Native people and their communities seen as their own cultural norm? |
| Does it take “white” standards for Native people to get ahead? | Are Native values of hard work, sharing, honesty, and courage seen as integral to growth and development? |
| **LOOK AT THE ROLE OF WOMEN** |
| **Bad** | **Good** |
| Are women completely subservient to men? Do they do all the work, while the men loll around, waiting for the next hunt? | Are women portrayed as the integral and respected part of Native societies that they really are? |
| **LOOK AT THE ROLE OF ELDERS** |
| **Bad** | **Good** |
| Are Elders treated as a dispensable burden upon their People to be abandoned in times of trouble or famine; querulous, petulant, demanding, nagging, irritating, and boring? | Are Elders treated as loved and valued custodians of a People’s history, culture, and lifeways? Are they cherished in the words of the writer as they were and are in the reality of the lives of the People? |
| **LOOK FOR THE EFFECTS ON A CHILD’S SELF-IMAGE** |
| **Bad** | **Good** |
| Is there anything in the story that would embarrass or hurt a Native child? | Are there one or more positive role models with which a Native child can identify? |
| **LOOK AT THE AUTHOR’S OR ILLUSTRATOR’S BACKGROUND** |
| **Bad** | **Good** |
| Is the background of the author and illustrator devoid of the qualities that enable them to write about Native peoples in an accurate, respectful manner? Is there an ethnocentric bias which leads to distortions or omissions? | Is there anything in the author’s and illustrator’s background that qualifies them to write about Native peoples? Do their perspectives strengthen the work? |
| If a book has at least one “Bad” characteristic, it is **not recommended** to purchase the item for your library. If you currently have a title in your collection that has at least one “Bad” characteristic, it **is recommended** to weed that item.This chart has been adapted from:Slapin, Seale, and Gonzales (1987). *How to Tell the Difference.* Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children. Edited by Beverly Slapin and Doris Seale. New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, BC.  |