

Race as Seen in Children's Books

Lisa Cellucci

<http://muweb.millersville.edu/~columbus/data/cwk/CELLUCCI.CWK>

Section 1: Some of the more common stereotypes regarding Native Americans are savage, depraved, and cruel. Noble, proud, silent, and close to nature; or inferior, childlike, and helpless. White authors dehumanize Native Americans by comparing them to animals. Native American is described as grunting, yelping, or snarling...

There are three stereotypical ways in which Indian culture has been portrayed in children's books. First, culture may be shown as inferior to the white people. The author treats the absence of the Indian way of life as an improvement. Indians can progress by going to white schools or by taking on the values of the white people. A common theme in children's literature is that white people should be responsible for changing Indians.

Second, the culture may be shown as valueless, and not worthy of respect. The diversity of ceremonies, beliefs, moral values, and the life-styles in Native American cultures may be overlooked in order to depict violence as the normal Indian life-style. *Growing Up in Indian Times* by Brenda Ralph Lewis is a book that demonstrates a lack of appreciation for the culture and uses stereotypical phrases, such as behaved like barbarians, and ferocious nature.

Third, the culture may be demonstrated as superficial, without depth. White people in children's literature usually put down customs that have spiritual ties to Native Americans. They look down upon ceremonies, ancient artifacts, and legends of the Indians. All of these stereotypes of a culture are continually offensive. To develop positive attitudes for all cultures, children need opportunities to listen, and read literature that demonstrates correct images of everyone.

Section 2: There are many stories that describe positive images of the whites and the Indians such as *The Sign of the Beaver*, by Elizabeth George Speare. This book describes Native Americans and white people working together. The book has themes of friendship, faith, moral obligation, working together, and love for land. Indians are represented as friendly and also proud of their race. Children's literature is now exposing personal and social values of the black and Indian cultures that are depicted as natural and accepted. Literature also reflects sensitivity to the needs and rights of minorities without preference, or negative stereotypes. Indians and blacks are increasingly allowed to demonstrate courage and ambition. They are also not denied access to certain occupations because of their sex. When violence is presented the author tries to give the necessary facts of both the white people and the other cultures. They try to portray both sides of the conflict fairly and honestly...