

CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND RESOURCES REVIEW

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Indigenous Perspectives in Children's Literature

There are 574 federally recognized American Indian tribes and Alaska Native entities in the U.S. Each tribe has a unique and rich culture, yet we are all still connected. Our communities still exist in this contemporary world while maintaining our traditions that have been passed down through the generations. Reading stories written by members of these communities and through our perspectives is important and allows us to share our stories in a culturally appropriate way. Unfortunately, only one percent of stories being published depicted a *Neshabek* character that our children can identify with. Reaching out to tribal communities and building relationships are essential for growth and understanding. Native American communities have a relevant past and future and deserve recognition beyond Native American Heritage Month. Our stories are medicine and sharing our stories from our perspective creates healing and connection with the community.

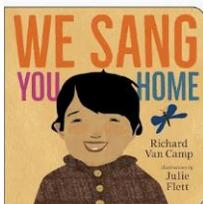
Additionally, when evaluating books, Brent Dunn from the Tribal and Indigenous Early Childhood Network suggests asking the following questions:

Cultural Authenticity: Is the story accurately related to our population(s)? how? if not, what's wrong?

Indigenous sources: Did this indigenous story come from indigenous authors? communities? illustrators? any partnerships to give validity?

Baseline: What can classrooms take from these texts if it is accurate? intertribally? Specific Nations?"

While we offer a few suggestions, continue finding books by indigenous authors, especially by tribes in your area.



We Sang You Home by Richard Van Camp

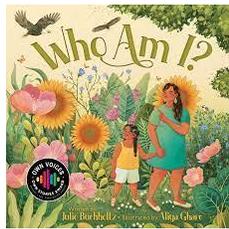
In this sweet board book, the bond between an infant and caregivers is explored through wishes, kisses, song, and more, with pictures of nature, home, and relationships.



We All Play by Julie Flett

This picture book celebrates playtime and the connection between children and the natural world. The animal actions and verbs encourage movement! Easily accessible for our youngest citizens, the animals and recurring concept that we all play works with children through kindergarten. The backmatter includes a list of prominent animals in the book with the names in Cree of one animal and other groupings of animals, along with a Cree pronunciation guide. There is a lovely note from the author that points us toward connection and kinship.

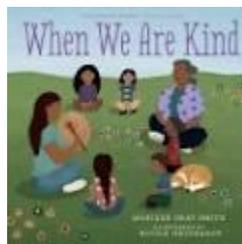
<https://greystonebooks.com/products/we-all-play>



Who Am I? by Julie Buchholtz

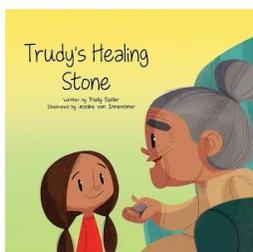
This picture book tells the story of how we are all connected to our ancestors, our past and future, and the Earth. Through beautiful illustrations, you can follow a mother and daughter through their journey of understanding and connection. Be the oak tree strong and mighty, the river that bends, the wild rose, wind that scatters seeds, rain that falls, fire that burns, and so much more! We are nature!

<https://www.juliebuchholtz.com/>



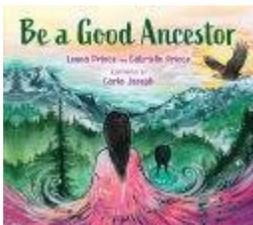
When We Are Kind by Monique Gray Smith

A simple picture book with a powerful message that encourages the gift of kindness and receiving acts of kindness. We can be kind by helping friends, elders, only taking what we need from the earth, taking care of ourselves, and that we are all related. Lots of emotions are simply explored such as respect, gratitude, kindness, joy and more!



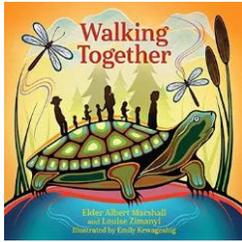
Trudy's Healing Stone by Trudy Spiller

In this simplified version of *Trudy's Rock Story*, children are encouraged to find a special stone for sharing their feelings. The rhyming text suggests putting the stone back where it was found and show it gratitude when our hearts are lighter. The book includes a short glossary of Gitksan words and how to pronounce them.



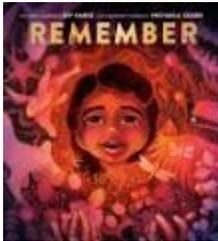
Be a Good Ancestor by Leona Prince and Gabrielle Prince

A picture book that encourages readers to realize the importance of community and the world around them. Starting with water, raindrops, puddles and streams, our connection to the natural world is woven throughout. The author explores seeds, the life cycle of a salmon, being neighbors, our thoughts, ideas, and feelings with an overall theme that we are part of a larger community.



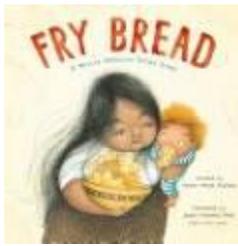
Walking Together by Elder Albert Marshall and Louise Zimanyi

This book urges us to walk together in a good way, including the concept of Etuaptmumk—or Two-Eyed Seeing. The book weaves nature, life cycles, seasonal changes and activities, relationships, and connections into a coherent theme of learning from both indigenous and non-indigenous ways of knowing. We learn from nature by spending time in it as we share, show gratitude, and care for the living things around us. There is even a little bit of loose parts art as part of the illustrations!



Remember by Joy Harjo

A poem with stunning illustrations reminds us of our importance in the world. The poem asks the reader to remember the earth and sky around us while getting to know the individual stars, moon, family members, and all the plant and animal life around us.



Fry Bread by Kevin Noble Maillard

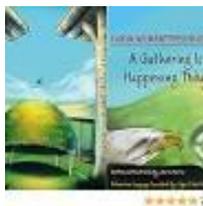
This picture book provides a look at a modern Native American family and their community making fry bread, a dish that became traditional after tribes were pushed west and given rations of flour. This sensory filled book shares how fry bread brings people together, contributes to art, shares history, and has become a collective aspect of native tribes. The simple, yet descriptive text shares the story well. A recipe for fry bread is included at the end, as well as personal stories on how fry bread is food, shape, sound, color, flavor, time, art, history, place, nation, everything, and us!



Keepunumuk: Weeâchumun's Thanksgiving Story by Danielle Greendeer, Anthony Perry, Alexis C. Buntun

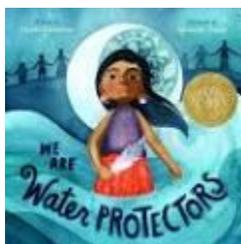
A picture book that retells the Thanksgiving story for a more inclusive America, a story that honors the Native peoples who made it possible. The book includes definitions, a pronunciation key, and recipe.

<https://keepunumuk.com/curriculum/>



A Gathering Is Happening Today by Aaron Martin

This picture book features the Potawatomi language and follows the happenings on the day of a Pow Wow.



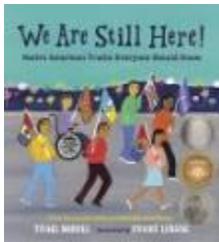
We are Water Protectors by Carole Lindstrom

After establishing a strong connection to our need for water, this picture book issues an urgent rallying cry to safeguard the Earth's water from harm and corruption. People come together in community to protect the sacredness of water. The book includes a pledge to promise to take care of the earth with additional backmatter on being water protectors.



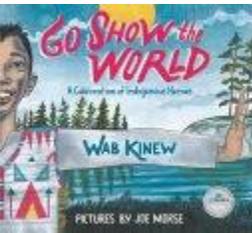
When We Were Alone by David A. Robertson

A young girl learns about her grandmother's time at Native American Boarding school as child, leaving her family, dressing the same as all the other children, having her hair cut, and not being able to use her native language. The girl understands why her grandmother now speaks in Cree, wears beautiful colors, wears a long braid, and spends time with family.



We Are Still Here! Native American Truths Everyone Should Know by Traci Sorell

This book provides a solid understanding of everything you never learned in school about Native American people's past, present, and future from an Indigenous perspective. This text heavy picture book is best for ages 7+, tackling tough topics and policy such as assimilation, allotment, termination, the native new deal, termination of treaties, language revival, etc. Backmatter gives a timeline of events, glossary, sources, and an author's note. The continuing theme is persistence through challenging times and "We are still here!"



Go Show the World: A Celebration of Indigenous Heroes by Wab Kinew

This beautifully illustrated book is a tribute to historic and modern-day Indigenous heroes. Kinew showcases a diverse group of Indigenous people in the US and Canada and their contributions, inspiring all of us to be good people contributing to our communities. Geared toward early elementary children, the author shares, "We are people who matter, yes, it's true; now let's show the world what people who matter can do."

Additional Resources

[Recognize the Land You Live On](https://native-land.ca/) - An interactive map to understand tribes, languages, and treaties pertinent to your area. <https://native-land.ca/>

[Indigenous Owned Bookstores You Need to Visit](https://bookriot.com/indigenous-owned-bookstores/) - Consider supporting indigenous owned bookstores as you shop for books. This list on BookRiot lists a few bookshops across the United States and Canada. <https://bookriot.com/indigenous-owned-bookstores/>

[Indigenous Perspectives in Children's Literature](https://youtu.be/M-qKOKgbj6k), Mkos Mboken and Indiana Children and Nature Network
In this webinar recording, Erin Burggraf shares her insight into showing diverse representations by native authors with the Indiana Children and Nature Network audience. <https://youtu.be/M-qKOKgbj6k>

[American Indians in Children's Literature](https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/), curated by Dr. Debbie Reese (Nambé Pueblo) and Dr Jean Mendoza
A website sharing a critical analysis of indigenous people in children's literature, including yearly book lists, books that are NOT recommended, tips for teachers, resources for research projects, and so much more! <https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/>

Acknowledgements

Migwëthh (thank you!) to Erin Burggraf for collaborating on this article! You can find her book suggestions and social media (Mkos Mboken) on this [linktree](#).

Mkos Mboken was created 3 years ago due to the tribal government shutdown and my program being, Neshnabe Mboken, being cut. It was important to me to continue to share stories with families in my community and that is how Mkos Mboken came to be. This year Neshnabe Mboken was brought back to the community. Neshnabe Mboken is a children's book club that focuses on books written by Neshnabek authors. My goal is for our children to see themselves in a story in hopes it inspires them to someday write their own story. – Erin <https://linktr.ee/Mkosmboken>

An additional thanks to the *Tribal and Indigenous Early Childhood Network* from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and their regular conversations around children's books.