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Introduction

This book is a coming together of two authors from very different walks of life to deal with the numerous problems that exist in our educational systems today in the portrayal of American Indian peoples and cultures. Guy Jones, who is Hunkpapa Lakota, is one of the founders and leaders of the Miami Valley Council for Native Americans, an organization whose goal is to foster understanding and respect for Native cultures and to educate the public about Native American issues. Sally Moomaw, who is not Native, is a long-time preschool and kindergarten teacher who also works with future teachers, practicing teachers, and administrators in areas of professional development. Together, the authors examine problems in the coverage of Native American peoples in early childhood and primary programs and suggest appropriate materials and strategies for including Native cultures across the curriculum and throughout the year.

Appropriate terminology is an important issue when discussing groups of people. In the case of people who are indigenous to the Americas, however, there is really no consensus on acceptable group nomenclature. For some time, the term *Native American* replaced *Indian* or *American Indian* in much of the professional literature. Many Native people, though, do not consider *Native American* to be any more acceptable than *American Indian*. In attempting

to discuss issues related to various Indian peoples, some authors use the term *Native people*, while others use *Indigenous* or *Aboriginal*. All of these labels, though, face criticism from those who feel they promote an “uncivilized” image. One point of agreement that seems almost universal among people who are native to the Americas is the desire to be referred to by the traditional name of their people. For example, Lakota people would rather be called by that name than *Sioux*, which is not their name for themselves and is actually a French corruption of an Ojibway word implying that they were as lowly as snakes. They also prefer *Lakota* to *Native American*, which groups them with many Nations with different languages and customs. Whenever possible, we have used the traditional tribal names of groups or individuals we are referring to. In some cases, where an author may choose to use the more typical English name for his or her people, we have used both the English name and the traditional name, such as *Navajo* and *Diné*. When it is necessary to refer to groups of people of more than one tribal affiliation, we have used *American Indian*, *Native American*, and *Native peoples*. We employ the plural *peoples* to remind the reader that the term *Native peoples* refers to many different groups. We are using the term *Native* in the following sense, as taken from *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*: “Belonging to or originating in a certain place; indigenous.”

Readers may not realize that American Indian people belong to more than 500 separate Nations. While many Native groups are not recognized by the United States government, many retain a domestic, dependent Nation status as recorded in more than 200 treaties. In recognition of this, in most cases, when referring to specific tribal groups, we have used the preferred term *Nation* rather than the Anglo term *tribe*.

Throughout this book, we have often relied on outstanding children’s literature, usually by Native authors, to introduce positive, accurate images of Native peoples to children. (Where appropriate, we indicate the Native background of the author.) It is our view that, with the possible exception of classroom visits by American Indian people, excellent children’s literature is the most effective way to counter deeply held stereotypes and help children focus on similarities among peoples as well as cultural differences. The literature serves as a catalyst to extend related activities into other areas of the curriculum.

Unfortunately, children's books periodically go out of print; however, teachers can often find them in libraries or order them from sources that deal with used or out-of-print books, including some of the large Internet booksellers.

Those who work with young children realize that children perceive differences among people much more readily than similarities. For example, a young girl who sees an individual in a wheelchair is much more likely to comment on the wheelchair than the fact that the person is wearing a ball cap similar to the one she may be wearing. Young children also readily notice racial and cultural differences. Skillful parents and teachers help children look beyond differences to the similarities among peoples. The books and materials recommended in this book help non-Native children understand similarities among themselves and Native children while accurately representing Native cultures. Learning about the respectful inclusion of Native American materials in early childhood classrooms helps teachers develop a respect and appreciation for other groups as well. They learn to ask culturally specific questions and not accept curriculum materials blindly. Teachers can apply the recommendations for selecting appropriate Native American books and materials to other cultures and ethnicities as they become sensitized to the issues in diversity education.

Chapter 1 outlines the many problems that currently exist in our schools with regard to Native peoples. Issues involving the omission of Native American materials from the curriculum, inaccurate portrayals or information about Native peoples, stereotyping of American Indian peoples, and cultural insensitivity are discussed at length so that teachers can understand the seriousness and depth of the problems. Chapters 2 through 6 focus on broad topics of similarity among peoples that can serve as unifying themes for curriculum planning: children, homes, family, community, and the environment. Each chapter opens with reflections from both authors on the topic. (Naturally, the names of children involved in school anecdotes have been changed.) Next, issues of cultural similarities and differences are discussed with respect to the chapter topic. Many suggestions of appropriate children's literature and activities follow to help teachers successfully incorporate Native American materials into the overall curriculum. Each literature selection also has recommendations for curriculum extensions.

Each chapter also includes a list of activities or practices that are not recommended, in order to help teachers distinguish between culturally appropriate and inappropriate curriculum ideas. Chapter 7 illustrates the influence of Native American books and artwork on a Family Heritage project undertaken by several preschool and kindergarten classrooms. It shows in action the principles outlined throughout this book and documents their effect on children and families. Chapter 8 is an extensive resource chapter. It includes guidelines for teachers on selecting class guests, children's literature, toys, and materials; an extensive bibliography of recommended children's books; a discussion of problematic children's books; an annotated list of publications to help educators; a discussion of problematic teacher's guides or activity books; a list of recommended recordings by Native musicians; a list of Native American artists whose work is available and affordable to schools or teachers; a selected listing of Native American publications; and a list of Web sites that can provide valuable resources for teachers.

Teachers will note that each literature selection is followed by curriculum extensions, including activities in the areas of literacy, math, science, dramatic play, art, music, social studies, sensory, cooking, and blocks. Many of the activities involve materials teachers can make. For example, in the literacy area, teachers can make charts that relate to the literature selections by carefully printing the words on *sentence strips* (lined paper approximately two feet long and two inches wide) and mounting them on poster board. For writing center activities, they can add *fill-in-the-blank strips*, which are predictable sentences from a book that are preprinted on paper with blank spaces for children to add their own ideas. The fill-in strips can be printed by hand or on a computer. Whatever method is used, the printing should be clear and the letters appropriately formed so that early readers are not confused.

Curriculum extensions in the math area include *grid games* and *path games*. Grid games consist of bingo-type cards used in combination with dice and interesting counters. Path games have movers for each player and dice to roll to determine how many spaces each player may advance. Both are excellent math activities because they focus on quantification and the creation and comparison of sets, using hands-on materials. When assembling materials for these activities, teachers must assess the developmental levels of their students and adapt accordingly. For example, if teachers still have children who

put things into their mouths, they should naturally select materials that are large enough not to pose a choking hazard, and so forth.

It is our hope that this book will empower teachers to reevaluate established curriculum; recognize the difference between appropriate and inappropriate materials and practices; and introduce to their children the wonderful books, artwork, and music of Native authors and artists. As Lakota people say, *mitakuye oyasin*—we are all related.



Chapter 4

Families—The Importance of Relatives

Guy's Perspective

Family structures in many traditional Native American cultures differ from the nuclear family organization in many American homes. Grandparents, aunts, and uncles are all integral parts of the family. In my Lakota upbringing, the main responsibility of parents was to love and provide sustenance for their children. Grandparents, aunts, and uncles took the important roles of teachers and disciplinarians. This does not mean that parents did not also teach and provide discipline, but primarily they gave unconditional love and support while grandparents, aunts, and uncles concerned themselves with teaching and guidance. In the Lakota culture, aunties are also considered to be a child's mothers, and uncles are their fathers.

Sometimes high school students ask me how many wives I have. They have trouble understanding the differences in family structures. In terms of mainstream culture, I am married and have a wife. In Lakota society, on the other hand, I have a partner who completes me and is called my "half-side." We have children together. Her sisters are considered to be my wives because my responsibility is to teach and discipline her sisters' children. I am called "grandfather" by the children of my nieces and nephews. This closely aligned family structure does not mean, though, that Lakota men have more than one partner, or half-side.

When schools call the family of a Native American child to come to school for a conference, they should not be surprised if an uncle, aunt, or grandparent also comes. That is their role. If the school tries to exclude this important family member, it can create a barrier between the school and the family. Schools should let families decide who needs to be at the conference and thus foster cooperation and support between home and school.

Educators should also realize that not all Native American families are part of traditional, extended families. Many have assimilated into mainstream society and have family structures and roles that are similar to the dominant culture. Schools cannot make assumptions about any child's family structure. That is why it is so important for teachers to get to know the families of the children they teach.



Sally's Perspective

The dramatic play area of our classroom had been transformed into a dance area, complete with dance attire and multicultural shoes. Children could watch themselves in a large mirror as they danced to an international selection of music. In order to help children draw the connection between dance and its representation in diverse cultures, pictures of dancers from around the world were also displayed in the area. Donte entered the dance center and looked at all of the pictures. He examined photos of dancers from Africa, Cambodia, and Hawaii without commenting. Then he saw a poster of two Native American dancers, in colorful regalia, leaping into the air. "Those men are bad!" Donte exclaimed. "Indians are bad. They'll kill you. They'll scalp you."

Momentarily at a loss for words, I recovered and reassured Donte that they were dancers. I had met them during a festival, and I remarked that they were very pleasant people, and also quite talented. Donte remained unconvinced, and I realized that he had already formed frightening impressions of American Indian people. In order to counter those ideas, I invited a Diné (Navajo) friend to visit the classroom. I asked him to come and just "hang out" so the children could get to know him.

Joseph arrived with his two-year-old son as the children were engaged in free-choice activities. He wore jeans and a shirt, lizard boots, and a beautiful turquoise necklace. With his long black hair and dark complexion, the children immediately identified him as Native American. As I went to greet Joseph, Donte hid behind my dress, clinging to

it. He seemed very frightened but also curious. Joseph knelt down and began to show the children his necklace. Meanwhile, his son raced around the room looking at the class pets and examining the toys. Gradually Donte emerged from behind my back and also began looking at the necklace.

During the course of the afternoon, the children enjoyed many interchanges with Joseph. With playdough and a wooden hammer, he showed them how he could tap out designs in silver such as those on his necklace. Then several children asked Joseph if he lived in a tipi. Taking paper and markers, he drew a picture of his house in Dayton—definitely not a tipi! Then he asked them to draw pictures of their homes for him. When snacks arrived, several children invited Joseph to join them at the table. As he began sipping his juice, the children asked in amazement, “Do you like apple juice?” “Yes,” he replied. “Do you?”

At first, Donte watched Joseph from a distance. Gradually, he got closer and closer until he joined Joseph’s group at the snack table. When it was time for Joseph to gather up his son and leave, Donte asked him if he could come back. He had now formed a new image of Native American people, an image of kindness, caring, and nurturing.

Building on Similarities

Not every classroom has the opportunity to have a special visitor like Joseph to help dispel fears and myths, but all classrooms can celebrate the similarities among peoples through carefully selected literature and curriculum materials. Unfortunately, in many cases the only images children see of Native peoples are violent ones. The stories they hear are of marauding Indians attacking peaceful pioneers. At an educator’s conference on the Oneida reservation in Wisconsin, conference organizer Brian Doxtater commented, “Why are warrior images the only ones people ever have of us? Why don’t they ever see us as fathers and husbands and teachers and doctors?” This is a question all educators must take to heart, including those of us working with the youngest children.

Talking about families gives us many opportunities to focus on our commonalities as people. As we share multicultural books about families in our classrooms, children quickly perceive that children from other races and cultures also have families that love and nurture them. Reading about Native

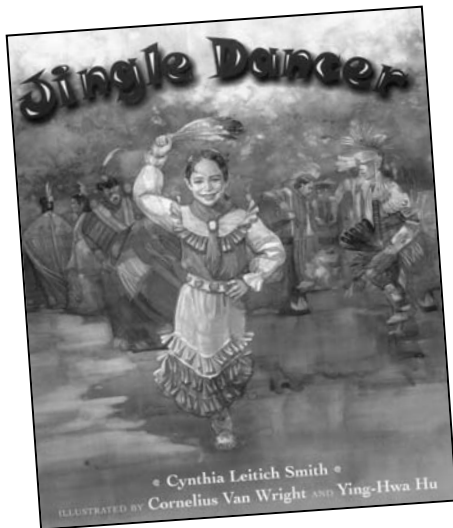
families of today, looking at lovely illustrations or photographs, and participating in curriculum extensions of books by Native American authors help children counter imbedded stereotypes and focus on likenesses instead.

Appreciating Differences

Of course not all families are the same, even within a particular culture or race of people. Helping children understand and appreciate differences in family structures is also part of our responsibility as educators. For example, not all families have a mommy and a daddy. Some children are raised by a single parent, a grandparent, a foster family, an aunt or uncle, or two mommies or daddies. As discussed earlier, traditional Native American families may have aunts, uncles, and grandparents fulfilling important child-rearing roles. Families also have different traditions. Some go to powwows, while others go camping or visit the beach each summer. As children discover the special qualities of families, they can reflect on their own families and their unique experiences.

Incorporating Native American Perspectives into Curriculum

Families and Traditions



***Jingle Dancer*, by Cynthia Leitich Smith, illustrated by Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu**

Jingle Dancer, by Muscogee author Cynthia Leitich Smith, introduces children to a young Muscogee (Creek) girl, Jenna, who longs to carry on the tradition of jingle dancing that has been shared by generations of women in her family. Her problem is how to acquire enough jingles, the cone-shaped tin or aluminum lids that clink together during dancing, for her dress. Jenna hits upon a plan. She begins to ask each of her female relatives for a few of their jingles so that they will retain enough jingles

for their dresses, but she will be able to make a jingle dress of her own. As Jenna talks to her extended family, we meet Great-aunt Sis, who tells traditional stories; Mrs. Scott, who is making fry bread; Cousin Elizabeth, who is an attorney; and Grandma Wolfe, who jingle dances on video. Jenna is a contemporary child who turns to her family and community for help. She is honored by her role in her family and eager to carry on family and cultural traditions. The children we teach understand family values, such as respect and love, from their own experiences. This book gives them a chance to see a nurturing Native American family of today as well as some of the unique aspects of their culture.

Literature—Dance Books

Many cultures have their own special dance traditions. By introducing children to a variety of children's books based on dance, teachers can help them not only recognize dance as a thread that travels through many cultures, but also explore the unique aspects of each culture's dance traditions. The following suggested books could be incorporated into classroom dance centers or reading areas.

Mimi's Tutu, by Tynia Thomassie—African American

Silent Lotus, by Jeanne M. Lee—Cambodian

Lion Dancer, by Kate Waters and Madeline Slovenz-Low—Chinese American

Powwow, by George Ancona—Native American

Color Dance, by Ann Jonas—multiracial

Red Dancing Shoes, by Denise Lewis Patrick—African American

My Ballet Class, by Rachel Isadora—multiracial

Song and Dance Man, by Karen Ackerman—multigenerational

Lili on Stage, by Rachel Isadora—multiracial

Dramatic Play and Movement—Dance Area

Children enjoy experiencing dancing firsthand through their own body movements. A dance area in the classroom gives children the opportunity to express themselves through dance. In order to help children recognize that dance is important in many cultures, teachers can play music from many nationalities. However, when including music from Native American cultures, teachers must be highly selective. Much Native music is intended for sacred

or ceremonial use by people who are aware of its cultural significance; therefore, most powwow music would not be appropriate for a class dance area. One recording we can recommend is *Kids' Pow-Wow Songs*, recorded by the Black Lodge Singers. It includes twelve playful songs for children of all ages to dance to.

Teachers may also wish to add a variety of dance outfits for both boys and girls to the dance area. Dress-ups might include the following:

- lapas—African skirts, made by wrapping a yard of African fabric around the waist and tying
- colorful vests, easily made from felt
- tutus—traditional European ballet attire, which can be made from stretch halters sewed to several layers of netting
- small kimonos—wide-sleeved robes from Japan
- silky shirts
- tap shoes
- moccasins
- fancy sandals or slippers

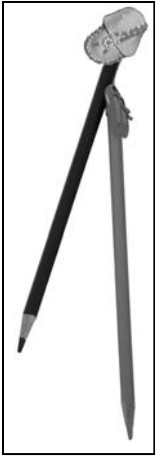
While it is appropriate to display pictures of Native American dancers in the area, along with dancers from a variety of nationalities, teachers should avoid including feathers, which are considered sacred in most Native cultures, and traditional Native American dance regalia. For Native peoples, dance regalia convey sacred and cultural meanings that cannot be equated with a dance costume or dress-up clothes.

Writing Center—Dancers

Children interested in dancing may also be inspired to write about their experiences. Teachers can design a class writing center to coordinate with a dance theme. The area might include word cards with the names of dance items, pencils decorated with stickers of dance shoes, and blank books shaped like dance shoes.

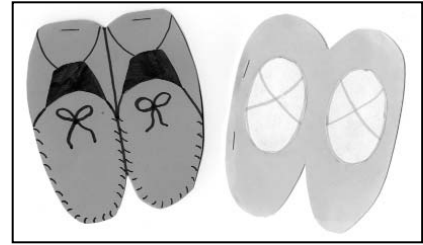


Word Cards—Carefully print the name of each dance item on a separate 3 by 5-inch index card. Illustrate each word card with a sticker or drawing of the item to help children read the words. Laminate the cards for durability. Words to incorporate might include *moccasins*, *jingle dress*, *lapa*, *tutu*, and *vest*.



Fancy Pencils—Fancy pencils often inspire children to write. Dance-theme pencils can be easily made by adhering dance-shoe stickers to sparkly pencils.

Blank Books—Blank books shaped like moccasins or ballet shoes encourage children to copy word cards, experiment with writing, or dictate dance stories. Moccasin books can be made with brown construction paper for the front and back covers and several pieces of inexpensive white paper inside. Ballet-shoe books might have colored paper on the front and back and white paper inside.



Music—Dance Video

It would be wonderful for classes to attend a real powwow, with music, dancing, food, art works, storytelling, and interesting people. Check around your area to see if any are scheduled. If attending a powwow is not possible, teachers may consider showing clips from a powwow videotape recording, such as *Into the Circle*. (Individuals who wish to videotape a powwow should be aware that certain dances or ceremonial portions of powwows may not be photographed or videotaped. The announcer will usually inform the public when cameras are not allowed.) A powwow dancing video segment might be introduced along with other video clips showing various types of dancing from around the world, with perhaps one type viewed briefly and discussed each day. Since young children would typically rather be moving around than watching others dance, viewing time should be limited, perhaps to between five and ten minutes.

Even such a short viewing can have a dramatic effect on children's attitudes. For example, Sally selected one section of the video to show her preschool class. After reviewing the entire tape recording, she chose a portion that highlighted a young fancy dancer because it contained lots of activity, color, and excitement. When the children first saw the dancer on the television screen, several remarked that they didn't like him.

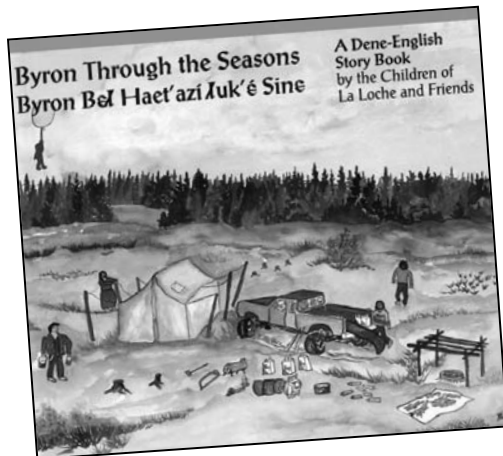
"I think he's bad," declared a young girl.

"Let's listen to what he says," Sally replied.

The dancer was then interviewed on the video. He talked about what dancing meant to him, how hard he had worked to learn the dance traditions and become skilled at moving correctly, and how much he hoped he would win the dance competition at the powwow. When the dancing started, the children all began to root for him. They seemed to have been moved by his quiet voice and sincerity. When he did, in fact, win the competition, the children cheered loudly.

Into the Circle also contains a section on jingle dancing. Teachers who incorporate the book *Jingle Dancer* into their curriculum might wish to show that portion of the video.

Families through the Seasons



***Byron Through the Seasons,* by the Children of La Loche and Friends**

Teachers often highlight the seasons of the year with young children as they unfold. They might introduce books related to seasons and incorporate natural materials related to a particular time of the year into science areas. Families also often have special activities or traditions that are seasonal. *Byron Through the Seasons* describes how Dene families in

Canada enjoy the seasons at their camp on the bay. The book was written and illustrated by children from Ducharme Elementary School in La Loche, Saskatchewan, with assistance from local advisors and elders. It is written in both English and the Dene language. Children learn about many cultural traditions as they listen to the story: catching and preparing fish, making and decorating moccasins, cutting ice blocks to preserve fish in summer, tanning hides, gardening, and picking medicinal plants. They also notice many activities that are similar to things they may do with their families, such as cooking outside, camping out in tents, playing in the snow, and gardening. *Byron Through the Seasons* shows Native children and families of today. Although long-standing traditions are still followed, modern accoutrements, such as pickup trucks, schoolhouses, and snowmobiles, are also present.

Writing—Our Families through the Seasons

After reading *Byron Through the Seasons* and other books about families and their traditions, children may wish to write about their own families and the things they do together at various times of the year. Children can write or dictate their stories and then illustrate them. One class displayed their stories in the hallway outside their classroom. They often stopped to read them on their way to and from class. Other children also stopped to look at the stories and often asked to have them read.

Teachers might wish to reintroduce this activity each time the seasons change. Each child's stories could be compiled into a book to send home at the end of the year. Activities such as this help children bond as a group. They notice the similarities among family activities and also aspects that are unique to their own culture or experiences.

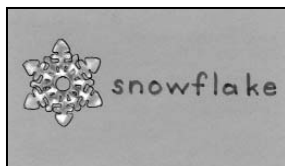
Dramatic Play—Campground

Byron Through the Seasons describes a community's activities throughout the year that revolve around a campground. Many children have had similar camping experiences, whether on an overnight stay in a park, in a friend's backyard, or on an actual camping trip with their family. For this reason, teachers might incorporate a campground into their dramatic play or outside areas. Small tents, perhaps made by draping a bedspread over an A-frame; small grills (not to be lit!); flannel shirts; and outdoor cooking equipment could be included.



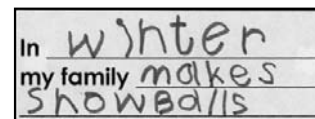
Writing Center—Family Seasonal Traditions

Children may wish to continue writing about camping or seasonal family activities after they have written family stories as a special activity. Relevant materials can be incorporated into a class writing center.



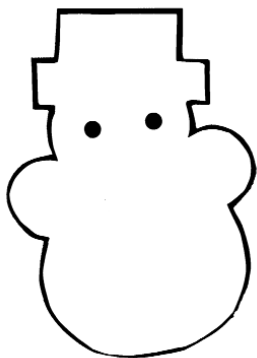
Word Cards—Decide which word cards are important to include for your class. Examples might be camping items, if there is a camp-ground in the classroom, or seasonal words, such as *winter*, *snow*, *autumn*, *leaves*, *summer*, *swim*, *spring*, and *garden*. Carefully print each word on a separate 3 by 5-inch index card. Illustrate each word card with a sticker or drawing to help children read the words. Laminate the cards for durability.

Fill-in Strips—Early writers can be more independent if key phrases are already written for them. For this center, teachers might include the following fill-in strip:



In _____, my family _____.

Children can fill in the first blank space with a season and the second space with what their family likes to do. Teachers can print the fill-in strips by hand or use a word-processing program set to a font that looks like standard print. Include multiple copies of the fill-in strips in the center.



Seasonal Blank Books—Interesting blank books related to seasons are easy to make. Inexpensive notepads with shapes that correlate with the seasons are available in teacher supply stores and catalogs, office supply stores, and stationery stores. One sheet of paper from a notepad can serve as the cover of each blank book, so typically fifty covers can be made from one notepad. Interior paper can be cut in the same shape as the cover from free or inexpensive paper. Shapes available include leaves for autumn, snowpeople for winter, flowers for spring, and seashells for summer. Children can use the blank books for writing stories, copying words, or drawing.

Families and Self-Awareness

***Less Than Half, More Than Whole*, by Kathleen and Michael Lacapa**

Many of the children that we teach today come from families of more than one race or culture. Census figures suggest that this will increasingly be the case. Sometimes children who are biracial or multiracial feel left out or rejected by other children. They may think that they don't fit into either culture. *Less Than Half, More Than Whole*, by authors Kathleen Lacapa (Irish, English, and Mohawk) and Michael Lacapa (Apache, Hopi, and Tewa) deals with this issue in a sensitive way through the loving intervention of a child's grandfather. The story begins with three friends looking at their reflections in a lake. The boys notice that one is blond with light-colored skin, another has brown skin and black hair, and the third, Tony, is somewhere in between. "You're not like me," his friend Will tells him. "I'm all Indian. I think you're only half, or less than half." This comment causes Tony to question who he really is. He is helped by his grandfather, who shows him photographs of all the members of their extended family and points out how different and special each one is. The illustrations in *Less Than Half, More Than Whole* are filled with beautiful colors and Native imagery. Southwestern Native culture is accurately depicted throughout the book. The authors, who represent mixed Native and Anglo heritage themselves, work with children in and around the White Mountain Apache Reservation.



Literature—Books about Families

Less Than Half, More Than Whole explores the emotions of a child who is of mixed Native American and Caucasian descent. Other books show a variety of types of families. A notable example is *Foster Baby*, written and illustrated by Rhian Brynjolson, which sensitively describes a Native American baby in a loving Native foster home. Teachers may wish to introduce books from the selection listed below to help children understand similarities and differences among families.

Black Is Brown Is Tan, by Arnold Adoff—family with a Caucasian father and an African American mother

More, More, More Said the Baby, by Vera B. Williams—Caucasian baby and father; Asian baby and mother; African American baby and Caucasian grandmother

The Mommy Book, by Ann Morris—mothers and children from around the world

The Daddy Book, by Ann Morris—fathers and children from around the world

The Village of Round and Square Houses, by Ann Grifalconi—West African family

Aunt Flossie’s Hats, by Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard—African American extended family

Best Best Colors, by Eric Hoffman—child with two mothers

Mama Zooms, by Jane Cowen-Fletcher—child has a mother in a wheelchair



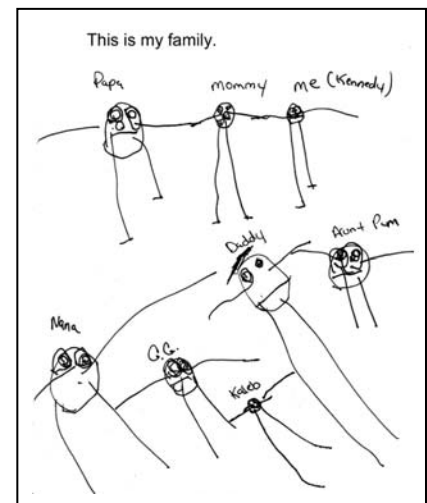
Art—Self-Portraits

Art is a natural vehicle for children to explore skin and hair colors and tones. Children can look into small cosmetic mirrors as they draw their own portraits. Teachers can facilitate by providing markers, crayons, or paint in multicultural skin tones. They can help children mix colors to match their skin or hair color, if desired by the child. Of course, teachers should

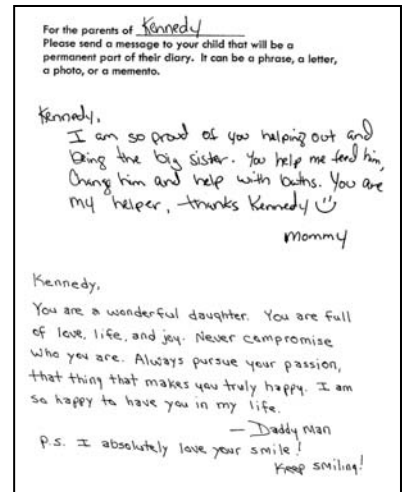
allow children to draw themselves as they choose. Deciding to paint blue hair, perhaps because that is a child’s favorite color, is perfectly acceptable from a creative standpoint. Sally can recall observing in a kindergarten class where children were drawing people. A little girl was reprimanded for drawing a woman with orange hair. “People don’t have orange hair,” the teacher declared. Looking at a strand of her light auburn hair (read “orange”), Sally could only wonder about the comment.

Family Participation—Family Diaries

Family diaries, an activity designed by Monica Battle at the Arlitt Child and Family Research and Education Center,



University of Cincinnati, are a collaborative effort of parents and teachers. They serve as an important link between home and school for children. At the beginning of the year, each family contributes several pages for their child's diary. Examples include a photograph of the child and other family members, a letter to the child describing their special traits and interests, and a description of what the child and family have done over the summer. As the year progresses, teachers add pages to each child's diary that depict special activities in the classroom. Examples of children's art and writing creations can also be included. Children can look at their family diaries and share them with one another whenever they wish.

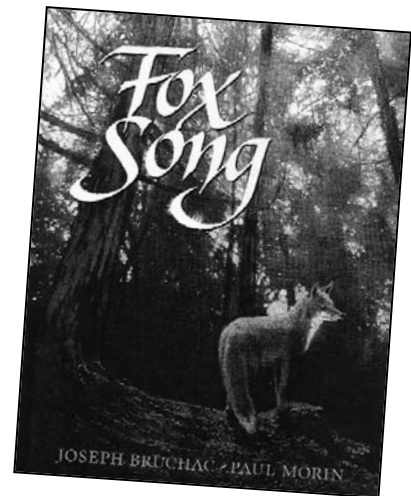


Families and Loss

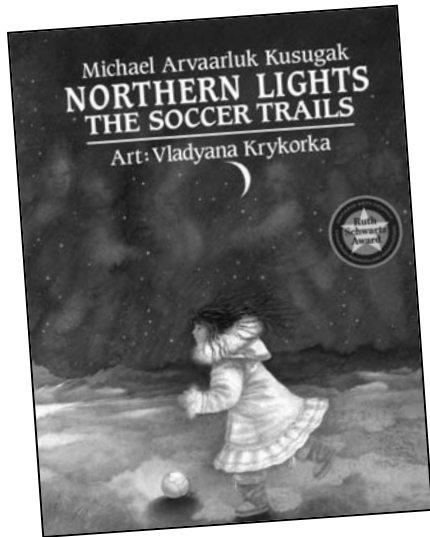
***Fox Song*, by Joseph Bruchac, illustrated by Paul Morin**

Unfortunately, most children have to deal with the loss of a loved one at one time or another. This could involve the death of a parent, sibling, grandparent, or even a pet. *Fox Song*, by the noted Abenaki author Joseph Bruchac, tells the story of a young Abenaki girl, Jamie, whose grandmother has died. Jamie eases her sadness with recollections of the many special times she spent with her grandmother: picking blackberries, harvesting birch bark for baskets, tasting sap from the maple tree, and watching the falling leaves.

Grandmother tells Jamie, “We say that those that have gone are no further away from us than the leaves that have fallen.” She shows Jamie the tracks of Wokwses, the Fox, and tells her, “When you are out here and I am not with you, you keep your eyes open. You might see her, and when you do, you will think of me.” Then she teaches Jamie a special song. Following the death of her grandmother, Jamie walks through the forest and soon sees a fox. She sings the special song taught to her by her grandmother and knows she will never be alone.



Fox Song is beautifully written and illustrated. Cultural traditions are readily apparent in the teachings of the grandmother and the activities she shares with Jamie. The love between grandmother and granddaughter transcends culture and is something all children can understand and identify with.



Literature—Related Books

Other children’s authors also deal sensitively with the topic of death. One notable example is from Inuit author Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak, *Northern Lights: The Soccer Trails*. We meet a young Inuit girl, Kataujaq, and learn of her close relationship with her mother. They travel on sea ice in a canoe pulled by dogs, pick berries, and sing traditional songs together. Kataujaq loves to collect flowers and stones for her mother, who carefully saves and preserves all of them. Then a sickness comes and Kataujaq loses her mother. She is very sad. One night she watches as her village plays soccer under the stars and northern lights. Her grandmother tells her that the lights are the souls of loved ones who have died, and they are playing soccer up in the sky. As Kataujaq watches the aurora borealis, she feels close to her mother and is comforted.

This book won the Ruth Schwartz Award from the Ontario Arts Council and Canadian Booksellers Association. Children are entranced by the breathtaking illustrations and surprised to learn that the Inuit, people they had always called “Eskimos,” also play soccer, a familiar game to all of them.

Not Recommended

1. *Native American dance regalia in dramatic play*

As previously indicated, traditional Native American dance regalia should not be equated with a dance costume. The regalia of Native dancers represent a part of their personal identity and also their affiliation with a particular Indian Nation. Since regalia are considered sacred, it is very inappropriate to include it in a classroom dance area.

2. *Asking children to make up stories about a fictitious Indian family*

Children cannot make up stories about families from cultures they don't know. None of us can. When we urge non-Native children to create fictitious Indian families, we force them to rely on inaccuracies and stereotypes, thereby reinforcing the very misconceptions we hope to counter. In a classroom recently visited by Guy, children were given just such an assignment. They were asked to "describe your Indian and what *it* wears." Needless to say, terminology such as this, coupled with the nature of the assignment, demeans and objectifies American Indian peoples. Instead, teachers can ask children to write about their own families. They can also read stories to the class about Native families written by Native authors.

3. *Asking children to invent "Indian myths"*

In the book *Northern Lights: The Soccer Trails*, author Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak shares a traditional spiritual belief of his people. In school and in the dominant culture, we tend to label the deeply held beliefs and stories of other peoples as myths. While books about more dominant religions, such as Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim, appear under a *religions* category in the school library, the religious beliefs of indigenous people, notably American Indians, are categorized as myths. This denigrates both their religion and them as people. Worse yet is an activity that asks children to make up Indian myths, which Guy and Sally noticed in a literacy activity book, *Art and Writing throughout the Year* (Walrows and Tekerean 1989), for sale at the 2000 NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) national conference. Teachers must remember that a culture's traditional stories have been handed down for timeless generations. They are not made up by contemporary people. In addition, traditional stories often have deep spiritual meaning and are no different from Bible stories to Christian or Jewish children, or stories from the Koran to Muslim children. We would never ask children to make up their own Bible stories, and we should never ask them to make up "myths" from other cultures.

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