

Books about Native Americans for Children and Teens

This list of books and descriptions was prepared by
Reading to End Racism

Key to Abbreviations

EE: Suitable for Early Elementary School

E: Grades 2-5

M: Grades 6-8

A: Adult/Young Adult

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian. Sherman Alexie; Ellen Forney, il. 2009. M, A, Grades 7-10.

Arnold, whose name on the reservation ('rez') is 'Junior' is encouraged by a teacher to go to an all-white school in a neighboring town, where the only other Indian is the cartoonish High School mascot. He endures prejudice and criticism both from people on the 'rez' and at the school. He gains new friends at school but carries the hatred of his former best friend on the 'rez.' In spite of hardship and loss, the story is filled with laugh-out-loud humor, and the illustrations are delightful. The content is similar to that of Tomando Partito. Both books are well written, but this one is tops for liveliness and humor.

Bird Talk. Lenore Keeshig-Tobias; Polly Keeshig-Tobias, il. 1993. EE, E

This is a warmly told story of an Ojibway child who hears at school, "If you're Indian why don't you come from India?" or "Where's your feathers then?" She is strengthened by her mother's support. This is a sweet book, showing a strong present-day family.

A Broken Flute: The Native Experience in Books for Children.

Contemporary Native American Communities Book 13. Doris Seale and Beverly Slapin, eds. 2006. A

Evaluates hundreds of books for children and teenagers published from the early 1900s to 2004. [Reviews] take on Newbery and Caldecott medalists and reading list perennials for their simplistic, stereotype-filled, condescending, and outright false portrayals of American Indians." (From the listing in Oyate). Edited by the same two women as Through Indian Eyes.

Cheyenne Again. Eve Bunting; Irving Toddy, il. 2002. EE, E

A Cheyenne Indian boy is taken from his family and placed in the repressive atmosphere of an Indian School, which attempts to take away his culture, his language, and his pride. One sympathetic teacher encourages him to believe that he can remain Cheyenne inside, no matter what happens.

Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship and Freedom (Jane Addams Honor NA Book and ALA Notable Children's Books). Tim Tingle; Jeanne Rorex Bridges, il. 2008. Grade 2+, E, M

A beautiful story, poetically told by its Choctaw author, tells about how a little Choctaw girl helped a slave family escape from the plantation where the mother was going to be sold away. The illustrations contribute to the magical quality of the story. Although the story is in English, it uses many Choctaw words. One afterward tells about present-day Choctaws, and another is a note on Choctaw storytelling.

Dancing on the Rim of the World: An Anthology of Contemporary Northwest Native American Writing (Sun Tracks). Andrea Lerner, ed. 1996. Anth, A

This collection of contemporary Native American Writers from the Pacific northwest includes the prose and poems of 34 writers. This collection is unique and could be used as a reference book for those teaching about Northwest Native American culture.

Eagle Song (Puffin Chapters). Joseph Bruchac; Dan Andreasen, il. 1999. Grade 3+ E,M

“Danny Bigtree’s family has moved to a new city, and no matter how hard he tries, Danny can’t seem to fit in.....The kids in his class call him ‘chief’ and tease him about being an Indian, the thing that makes Danny most proud....This appealing portrayal of a strong family offers an unromantic portrayal of Native American culture...and gives a subtle lesson in the meaning of daily courage.” (From the book jacket).

The story is set in contemporary times.

El Sol robado. Una leyenda inuit del Ártico. Amanda Hall. Vistas Del Mundo Series. 2005. Grades 3-6, EE, E

Vista del mundo, the Spanish-language companion to the WorldScape series, transports students beyond their everyday experiences to gain a broader view of the world, specifically the world of the Inuit and the arctic. The text curls around fantastic descriptions of Inuit culture in beautiful artistic fashion.

Encounter. Jane Yolen. 1996. Grade 1+ E,M

A Taino Indian boy on the island of San Salvador recounts the landing of Columbus and his men in 1492, and then, as an old man tells of the disastrous results for his people.

Guests. Michael Dorris. 1999. Grades 3-6.

Moss is upset because his father has invited peculiar strangers to share the harvest meal and because he accidentally broke an old string of wampum beads. He runs off into the forest, and has a life-changing adventure. It is understood that Moss's people are Wampanoag and the uncouth strangers are Pilgrims.

Although the intent of the story is story is to tell about Moss's self-discovery and traditions that affect him, it gives insight into how the Pilgrims were perceived by the people who were already there.

The Indian School. (Trophy Chapter Books). Gloria Whelan. 1997. NA Grade 3-6

This story is told from the point of view of an orphaned white girl sent to live at an Indian Mission School run by her stern aunt and her uncle. She becomes friends with an Indian girl, Raven, who refuses to be made over or to answer to an English name. Raven sets an example of pride, independence, and courage.

Indian Shoes. Cynthia Leitich Smith; Jim Madsen, il. 2002. Ages 4-8.

“What would Indian shoes look like anyway? Like beautiful beaded moccasins...or high-tops with bright orange shoelaces?” This chapter book has several stories about Ray Half-moon, a Seminole-Cherokee boy who lives in Chicago but has relatives in Oklahoma. Most of the book is about multicultural awareness, but the title story is a charming and humorous tale about stereotyping.

The Ledger Book of Thomas Blue Eagle. Jewel H. Grutman. 1994. Ages

9-12.

A beautifully illustrated book, drawn and told as if by a child forced to attend the first Indian School. (Reader preparation is necessary).

The Long March (A Smithsonian Notable Book for Children & A Children's Book of NA Ireland BISTO Book of the Year Merit Award). Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick; forward by Gary White Deer, 1998 E,M

It is 1847. Choona is a young Choctaw. Word has reached his tribe that there is a famine in Ireland.

From what little they have, the Choctaw collect \$170 to help the starving Irish. As Choona learns the terrible truth about his own tribe's Long March, he must decide for himself to answer other people's cry for help." (From the book jacket.)

Malian's Song (Vermont Folklife Center Children's Book Series). Margaret M. Bruchac. NA 2006. Grade 2-4.

"Malian's Song is based on the true story of Major Robert Rogers raid on the St. Francis Abenaki community in 1759 [during the French and Indian Wars]...Malian's account was passed down through generations of oral tradition". Jeanne Brink, an Abenaki descendant living in Vermont told this version of the brutal attack to the Vermont Folklife Center to Marge Bruchac. Beautifully illustrated.

Morning Girl. Michael Dorris. Ages 9-12.

"In alternating chapters, Morning Girl, a twelve-year-old Taíno, and her brother Star Boy vividly recreate life on a Bahamian Island, a life that is richly complex, and soon to be threatened." (From the book jacket). Leaving off where Encounter begins, only the epilogue shows racism, a direct quotation from Christopher Columbus, dated October 11, 1492.

My Name is Seepeetza. Shirley Sterling. 1998. Ages 10-12.

This story is based on the author's own experiences, but told as a novel about a Salish girl going to a Catholic school in Canada. This is an excellent example of institutional racism in a less-distant past than **Cheyenne Again**.

Navajo Long Walk: The Tragic Story of a People's Forced March from their Homeland. Joseph Bruchac; Shonto Begay, il. 2002. Ages 9-12.

Navajo history is presented, from the Navajo creation story through their tragic long march and internment, to their eventual return to their homeland and the survival of their culture to the present. Vividly written and illustrated. The Reader will need to flag sections to read aloud since the book is too long to read in one session.

Northwest Indigenous Gold Rush History. The Indian Teacher and Educational NA Personnel Program at Humboldt State University. M,A

“From an Indian perspective this time [of the California Gold Rush] was one of invasion, famine, murder, and even massacre. This book, put together by a group of Indian students at Humboldt State University, deals with the era honestly, and from a fully Indian perspective.” (From the Oyate review.)

The People Shall Continue. Simon Ortiz; Sharrol Graves, il. 1994. E,M

“The best overview of Native history for younger children that I have ever seen. Ortiz, the author, is Acoma, and a poet, and it shows. This is an epic story of Native American People from the creation to the present day, and it speaks in the rhythms of traditional oral narration.” (From Books Without Bias.”)

Pipestone: My Life in an Indian Boarding School. (American Indian Youth Services NA Literary Award). Adam Fortunate Eagle. NF. 2010. M,A

Published by University of Oklahoma Press, this story is the unforgettable memoir of Adam Fortunate Eagle, best known as the leader of the Indian takeover of Alcatraz Island in 1969. He is also an Ojibwe artist, writer, and frequent guest lecturer. The author attended Pipestone between 1935 and 1945 before changes were made in the federal boarding school system. In his description of boarding school life, he describes pranks, special memories, the loneliness of separation, and the absence of his culture. This book is well suited for high school readers.

A Really Good Brown Girl. Marilyn Dupont. 1996. Young Adult.

The poems in this collection are probably too sophisticated for RER unless the Reader is really tuned in to them and can use them with other material.

However, the title memoir about a Metis (mixed heritage) girl in a Canadian public school is quite touching and useful.

Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years. Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson, eds. 1998. Anth A

“The original edition made education history by introducing a startling new view of Columbus.....In the revised edition we get even richer material, a marvelous compendium of history, literature, original sources, commentary.....an exciting treasure for teachers, students, and the general public.” (From the book cover).

The Rights of American Indians and their Tribes. Stephen L. Pevar. 1991. NA Young Adult

One of a series of handbooks for young Americans, published by the American Civil Liberties Union. Fifteen chapters address different aspects of Indian rights.

Rising Voices: Writings of Young Native Americans. Arlene B.Hirschfelder and Beverly NA Singer, eds. 1993. Young Adult

This book is an anthology of poems and essays written by young American Indians.

A River Lost: Children’s Young Adult Fiction. Lynn Bragg. 1955 Young Adult

This is the story of an American Indian village before and after the damming of the river on which the people based their existence

Saltpie: A Choctaw Journey from Darkness into Light. (American Indian Youth NA Services Literary Award, 2011 Skipping Stones Honor Book, WordCraft Circle 2012 Children’s Literature Award Winner, and Winner of the Patterson Prize for Books for Young People.) . Tim Tingle. 2012. Nonfiction. Grades 4-6.

This author of **Walking the Choctaw Road** and **Crossing Bok Chitto** provides a powerful family story about his family’s move from Oklahoma Choctaw country to Pasadena, Texas. “Panning 50 years, Saltpie describes the problems encountered by his Choctaw grandmother—from her orphan days at an Indian boarding school to hardships encountered in her new home

on the Gulf Coast.” (Amazon description)

1621: A New Look at Thanksgiving. (National Geographic). Catherine O’Neill Grace NA/U and Margaret M Bruchac; Sisse Brimberg, & Cotton Coulson, Photographs. 2004. Grade 3+

“Taking a new look at Thanksgiving means putting aside the myth. It means questioning what we think we know. It means recovering lost voices, the voices of the Wampanoag people.” Illustrated with large color photographs of reenactments.

This Land is My Land. George Littlechild. 2003. Grade 3-6..

A beautifully illustrated book by the artist, George Littlechild, who honors his Plains Cree ancestors and tells their stories. Each double page is complete in itself, so the Reader can make a selection based on his or her experience or the age level of the class. Paintings/collages include photographs of his ancestors. This is an excellent book for teachers seeking art projects to accompany RER events.

A Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children Contemporary NA American Issues No. 7. Beverly Slapin and Doris Seale, eds.1998. A

An excellent background book for RER Readers, youth training, and teachers. Articles include “Why I’m Not Thankful for Thanksgiving,” and “I is Not for Indian,” (by the late Michael A. Dorris), “Notes from an Indian Teacher,” (by Rosemary Gonzales Ten Fingers), as well as chapters by Joseph Bruchac, Doris Seale, Beverly Slapin, and others. There are also book reviews and a section on how to judge books for children.

The Trail of Tears (Step-Into-Reading, Step 5). Joseph Bruchac; Diana Magnusen, il. NA 1999. Grade 3+

The story of the Cherokee People, how they tried to live in peace with the white settlers and adopt many of the white ways, how eventually they lost most of their land and were removed to crowded camps in Oklahoma, and what the Cherokee Nation is like today. Written in simple language.

Illustrations may be too small to unless students are close up.

Two Pairs of Shoes. Esther Sanderson; David Beyer, il. 1980 EE,E

Maggie lives on the Pas Reserve in Canada. For her eighth birthday, she gets two pairs of shoes; patent leather from her mother, and a pair of beaded moccasins from her grandmother. She must remember when and how to wear each pair. The pictures and language are good for early elementary, but children will need help in understanding the message of a child learning to live in two cultures.

The Unbreakable Code. Sara Hoagland Hunter; Julia Miner, il. 2007.
Grades 2-4.

John is scared to leave the Navajo Reservation to go to school in Minnesota, where his mother and new stepfather are moving. His grandfather tells John the story of when he was a code talker in WWII and tells him he will be OK, because he will always have the unbreakable code; his language. Beautiful illustrations.

Who Will Tell my Brother? (International Reading Association Children's Book Award NA Winner). Marline Carwell. 2004. Grade 7+

A novel, told in a series of short poems, about Evan, a high school student of mixed heritage, and how he tries to get the high-school's offensive fake Indian changed. His struggle "exposes him to a barrage of bullying, taunting, and escalating violence." (From the book jacket).

Many of the poems could stand by themselves, like the ones in "My Name is Jorge". The author bases her story on the experiences of her two sons during high school.

Additional recommendations

Absolute True Diary of a Part-time Indian. Sherman Alexis. Teen age and older

Sherman Alexie tells the story of Junior, a budding cartoonist growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation. Determined to take his future into his own hands, Junior leaves his troubled school on the rez to attend an all-white farm town high school where the only other Indian is the school mascot. Heartbreaking, funny, and beautifully written, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, which is based on the author's own experiences, coupled with poignant drawings that reflect the character's art, chronicles the

contemporary adolescence of one Native American boy as he attempts to break away from the life he thought he was destined to live. (Amazon description)

This book won the 2007 National Book Award for Young People's Literature.

The Birchbark House. Louise Erdrich. Age 9+

"[In this] story of a young Ojibwa girl, Omakayas, living on an island in Lake Superior around 1847, Louise Erdrich is reversing the narrative perspective used in most children's stories about nineteenth-century Native Americans. Instead of looking out at 'them' as dangers or curiosities, Erdrich, drawing on her family's history, wants to tell about 'us', from the inside. The Birchbark House establishes its own ground, in the vicinity of Laura Ingalls Wilder's 'Little House' books." --The New York Times Book Review

In Search of April Raintree. Beatrice Culleton

Two young sisters are taken from their home and family. Powerless to change their fortunes, they are separated, and each put into different foster homes. Yet over the years, the bond between them grows. As they each make their way in a society that is, at times, indifferent, hostile, and violent, one embraces her Métis identity, while the other tries to leave it behind. In the end, out of tragedy, comes an unexpected legacy of triumph and reclamation. (Amazon description)

Yellow Raft in Blue Water. Michael Dorris School Library Journal recommends Grade 7+

Michael Dorris has crafted a fierce saga of three generations of Indian women, beset by hardships and torn by angry secrets, yet inextricably joined by the bonds of kinship. Starting in the present day and moving backward, the novel is told in the voices of the three women: fifteen-year-old part-black Rayona; her American Indian mother, Christine, consumed by tenderness and resentment toward those she loves; and the fierce and mysterious Ida, mother and grandmother whose haunting secrets, betrayals, and dreams echo through the years, braiding together the strands of the shared past. (Amazon description)

Louise Erdrich's series Birchbark House is excellent for grade school and older. You can see these and all her books on her website: birchbarkbooks.com. Another book not on the RER list that I like is "In search of April Raintree" by Beatrice Culleton, about two métis sisters in the foster care system in Canada. It comes in two versions, one with a teaching guide. Another is Michael Dorris' Yellow Raft in Blue Water, cultural conflict told from the viewpoints of a mixed race granddaughter, her mother and grandmother. Better for older students, as is the Sherman Alexis book - Absolute True Diary.... Both are excellent for teens and older.

I have some favorites from the list but I have not read them all. They have all been carefully vetted by RER and any would likely be a good investment. It is so wonderful that you are doing this.

Thank you for the opportunity to add my thoughts, hasty as they are.