

Proceed with Caution: Using Native American Folktales in the Classroom

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To counter flawed representations found throughout popular culture and the media, the author draws on her identity as a woman from the Nambe Pueblo to help teachers select children's books that are realistic in their presentation of Native peoples, as well as factually, historically, and culturally accurate.

Traditional stories include myths, legends, and folktales rooted in the oral storytelling traditions of a given people. Through story, people pass their religious beliefs, customs, history, lifestyle, language, values, and the places they hold sacred from one generation to the next. As such, stories and their telling are more than simple entertainment. They matter—in significant ways—to the well-being of the communities from which they originate. Acclaimed Acoma Pueblo writer Leslie Marmon Silko writes that the oral narrative, or story, was the medium by which the Pueblo people transmitted “an entire culture, a worldview complete with proven strategies for survival” (Silko, 1996, p. 30). In her discussion of hunting stories, she says:

These accounts contained information of critical importance about the behavior and migration patterns of mule deer. Hunting stories carefully described key landmarks and locations of fresh water. Thus, a deer-hunt story might also serve as a map. Lost travelers and lost piñon-nut gatherers have been saved by sighting a rock formation they recognize only because they once heard a hunting story describing this rock formation. (p. 32)

Similarly, children's book author Joseph Bruchac writes,

... rather than being 'mere myths,' with 'myth' being used in the pejorative sense of 'untruth,' those ancient traditional tales were a distillation of the deep knowledge held by the many Native American nations about the workings of the world around them. (1996, p. ix).

Thus, storytelling is a means of passing along information, but it does not mean there is only one

correct version of any given story. During a telling, listeners can speak up if they feel an important fact or detail was omitted, or want to offer a different version of the story. In this way, the people seek or arrive at a communal truth rather than an absolute truth (Silko, 1996). Ruoff (1990) notes that a storyteller may revise a story according to his or her own interpretation, or according to the knowledge of the audience, but in order for it to be acceptable to the group from which the story originated, it should remain true to the spirit and content of the original.

In my years as an elementary school teacher, I was often disappointed in the ways that American Indians are portrayed in children's books. In graduate school, I read the works of American Indian scholars whose research is critical of representations of American Indians in textbooks. For example, Angela Cavendar Wilson, a Wahpetunwan Dakota professor of Indigenous History, asserts that American Indian history books should be called “non-Indian perceptions of American Indian history” (1998, p. 23) because they are filled with “misinterpretations, mistranslations, lack of context, and lack of understanding” (p. 25). Based on my study of children's books about Native Americans, I believe Wilson's statement applies to that genre as well. Broadly speaking, representation of Native Americans in children's literature is dominated by two categories of writing: they tend to be either well-loved classics (like *Little House on the Prairie* [Wilder, 1935] or *Sign of the Beaver* [Speare, 1983]) that portray Native peoples as primitive savages who merely grunt or speak in broken English, or they are best sellers (like *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky* [Jeffers, 1991]) that present Native peoples as romantic but tragic heroes who speak with elaborate, poetic prose about living in harmony with the earth. While

there are better representations of Native people in books such as *Jingle Dancer* (Smith, 2000) or *The Birchbark House* (Erdrich, 1999), books like *Little House on the Prairie* and *Sign of the Beaver* are better known and outsell newer books. In fact, they are among the top 12 all-time best-selling paperback children's books, with sales of 6,172,525 and 6,394,587, respectively (Turvey, 2001).

Traditional stories originate from a specific people, and we expect them to accurately reflect those people, but do they? Does Wilson's statement hold true when looking at retellings of Native American folktales? As a Pueblo Indian woman, I wonder, what do our stories look like when they are retold outside our communities, in picture book format, and marketed as "Native American folktales" for children? Are our religious, cultural, and social values presented accurately? Are children who read these folktales learning anything useful about us? In this article, I discuss my analysis of two Native American folktales, retold, packaged, and marketed as picture books.

Much of what I bring to bear on my research emanates from my cultural lens and identity as a Pueblo Indian woman from Nambe Pueblo. I was born at the Indian hospital in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and raised on our reservation. As a Pueblo Indian child, I was given a Tewa (our language) name and taught to dance. I went to religious ceremonies and gatherings, and I learned how to do a range of things that we do as Pueblo people. This childhood provided me with "cultural intuition" (Delgado-Bernal, 1998). Cultural intuition is that body of knowledge anyone acquires based upon their lived experiences in a specific place. As a scholar in American Indian studies, I know there are great distinctions between and across American Indian tribal nations. For instance, my home pueblo is very different from the other 19 pueblos in New Mexico, among which there are several different language groups. As a teacher and researcher, I approach curriculum materials (e.g., textbooks, children's books) with a critical eye and a desire to see Pueblo Indian and Native American culture presented accurately and authentically (Bishop, 1997).

I draw upon both my cultural intuition and knowledge when reading a book about

Pueblo Indians. For example, when I read Gerald McDermott's *Arrow to the Sun: A Pueblo Indian Tale* (1974), I wondered what Pueblo the book is about. There are 19 different Pueblos in New Mexico, and more in Arizona. In which Pueblo did this story originate? That information is not included anywhere in the book, and there are other problems as well. In the climax of the story, the boy must prove himself by passing through "the Kiva of Lions, the Kiva of Serpents, the Kiva of Bees, and the Kiva of Lightning" where he fights those elements. McDermott's kivas are frightening places of trial and battle, but I know kivas are safe places of worship and instruction. McDermott's protagonist is ostracized because he does not know his father. To me, that does not ring true either. In my experience, children are born into an extended family/community that loves and cares for them. The stain of illegitimacy is Euro-American, not Puebloan. In my view, then, McDermott's story is not accurate in its representation of my Pueblo Indian culture. Other Pueblo Indian people, serving as informants for a case study of *Arrow to the Sun*, express similar and additional concerns with the book (Smolkin and Suina, 2003). A primary concern raised by Smolkin and Suina is with regard to audience.

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Depictions that are culturally acceptable at one Pueblo are not necessarily acceptable at a different Pueblo. As such, elders at one Pueblo would say the book could be

used with their children, while elders at another Pueblo would disagree and forbid their children from reading the book. This is not a question of cultural authenticity; it is one of appropriateness in teaching, given a specific audience. Smolkin and Suina note that the people at any given Pueblo have final say regarding what is taught to children there. This particular concern with *Arrow to the Sun* could have been addressed if McDermott had provided information about which specific Pueblo served as the origin of the story. This seemingly insignificant bit of information could serve as a guide to a teacher of Pueblo children, helping her to be selective in what she uses in her classroom, and informing those less knowledgeable about the need to ask for this type of detail. Making informed choices when selecting books about Native Americans requires a substantive knowledge base.¹ This

raises the question, however, about what Americans know about Native Americans.

Studies show that children and adults in the United States think that American Indians are a vanquished people of the past and that they all looked pretty much the same. Specifically, children and adults say that American Indians lived in the distant past and wore buckskin, feathered headdresses, lived in tipis, and hunted buffalo (Doering, 1998; Brophy, 1999; League of Women Voters, 1982/1999). A March 2006 search of the Children's Literature Database, for example, indicated that 36 of the 42 books about American Indians published in 2000 are works of historical fiction. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that, even in 2006, most children's books represent American Indians as people of the past, not present.

As educators, it is critical that we provide children with literature that expands their knowledge, that portrays the diversity within the 500+ federally recognized tribes in the United States. For that matter, they should learn what it means to be "federally recognized" or "state recognized" or "tribally enrolled." There is much to know about American Indians that is obscured by the ubiquitous and flawed representations found throughout popular culture and the media. To counter these misrepresentations, children need books that are realistic in their presentation of Native peoples, as well as factually, historically, and culturally accurate.

COLLECTING, RECORDING, AND RETELLING NATIVE STORY

The practice of collecting, translating, and writing down Native American traditional stories began with the Jesuits and early explorers in North America, and later, with Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's *Algic Researches* published in 1839 (and republished in 1999 by Dover). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) began to systematically collect the stories. Moving traditional stories from a Native tongue to

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English, from an oral performance to a printed text, and from a visual performance to an illustrated rendering is fraught with difficulty. It means turning a living, dynamic entity into something that is relatively static. Lost in the process are elements such as tone, volume, and pacing of voice. Also gone are the gestures that make a story come alive, and the input of the audience. Equally significant is consideration of the cultural lens and bias of the person who collected the story. Folklorist Stith Thompson (1929) noted that Schoolcraft's work is "marred by the manner in which he has reshaped the stories to suit his own literary taste. Several of his tales, indeed, are distorted beyond recognition" (p. xv). Ethnographer Dennis Tedlock (1971) showed that BAE ethnologist Frank Hamilton Cushing added explanatory material to the stories he collected at Zuni Pueblo in the 1880s for the benefit of those unfamiliar with Zuni culture, and he added didactic, moralistic passages directed to the audience. Specifically, writes Tedlock, Cushing used simile and added oaths such as "Souls of my ancestors!" that are not used by the Zuni people.

Those existing problems are compounded by the biases of children's book authors who use the stories as source material for retellings that are marketed as picture-book folktales. This began as early as 1894. In *The Yellow Fairy Book*, Andrew Lang included several "Red Indian" stories from the BAE, and as I demonstrate in this article, such practices continue today. In the remainder of this article, I discuss the findings of my comparative analysis of two children's picture-book retellings: *Turkey Girl* by Penny Pollock and *Dragonfly's Tale* by Kristina Rodanas.

POLLOCK'S TURKEY GIRL: A ZUNI CINDERELLA STORY

Most people are familiar with the story of Cinderella. With some variation from one telling to the next, the plot is a familiar one, as outlined in the Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales (Goldberg, 2000). In the United States, there are several picture-book folktales categorized as Native American variants of the Cinderella story, including Rafe Martin's *Rough-Face Girl* (1992) and Robert D. San Souci's *Sootface: An Ojibway Cinderella Story* (1994).

1. To see Reese's list of recommended books and resources about American Indians, go to her website "American Indians in Children's Literature" at http://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/2006_05_07_americanindiansinchildrensliterature_archive.html.

Turkey Girl: A Zuni Cinderella Story, retold by Penny Pollock, was published in 1996. Pollock's retelling was favorably reviewed by *Horn Book*, *Kirkus*, and *Booklist*, and it is listed among the 1996 Aesop Accolades by the American Folklore Society. The criterion for their award is that the book accurately reflects the culture and worldview of the people whose folklore is the focus of the book. *Turkey Girl* includes an author's note that cites the source for her retelling as follows:

I am grateful to Frank Hamilton Cushing, who traveled to New Mexico in 1879 to study the Zunis. Cushing came to admire the Zunis so much that he not only moved in with them, he became a member of the tribe. Among his many contributions is his collection of Zuni folktales, which is where I found "The Turkey Girl." (n. p.)

To analyze Pollock's retelling, I compared it to Cushing's "The Poor Turkey Girl" in his *Zuni Folk Tales*, published in 1901, and to "The Turkey Maiden" in *The Zunis: Self-Portrayals*, by the Zuni People, published in 1972. Neither one is a picture book. As noted earlier, Cushing was an ethnologist with the Bureau of Ethnology. In 1879, the Bureau sent him to study the Zuni people. He lived among them from 1879 through 1884, and his study resulted in several publications. *Self-Portrayals* is a collection of stories as told by Zuni storytellers. Speaking in their native tongue, they recorded legends, myths, and history of Zuni Pueblo. Tribal member Alvina Quam translated the stories into English. Some were placed in Zuni High School where they could be used for educational purposes, and some were subsequently published in *The Zunis: Self-Portrayals*, along with photographs of the storytellers and maps of the places mentioned in the stories. In the analysis below, I use "Quam" to refer to the version of the story from *The Zunis*.

Storyteller's Style

In the imagination of white America, Native peoples speak in eloquent, romantic prose, using phrases such as "many moons ago," or they use broken English peppered with grunts and war whoops. It is the former that Pollock and Cushing use in their versions of the Turkey Girl story. This

style has the effect of making the Zuni people seem mystical and exotic. For example, Pollock's opening sentence is: "In the days of the ancients, a young girl lived alone in the shadow of Thunder Mountain." Later, when the dance is announced, the text reads: "Hear me, children of Sun-Father and Earth-Mother. In four days' time, before the harvest moon, the Dance of the Sacred Bird will be held in Hawikuh." On the day of the dance, Turkey Girl, with tears that "streaked the dust on her cheeks" takes her turkeys to the "plains below Thunder Mountain." A large turkey steps forward and says "Maiden Mother, do not water the desert with your tears. You shall go to the dance." After transforming her clothes and appearance, the turkey tells her not to forget to return to feed them. The girl says she will not forget, to which the turkey says: "You will prove that by returning to us before Sun-Father returns to his sacred place" or, he adds, all will be as it was before. At the dance, the girl decides to ignore the turkey's request, and at the last minute, races back to their pen, finding it empty. The turkeys had waited for her until "Sun Father fell asleep behind the

mountain." Then, seeing that she had broken her trust with them, they had left Matsaki and their Maiden Mother, never to return, and then flew away.

This style is evident throughout Pollock's retelling, and stands in stark contrast to the language used by the

Zuni storytellers in *The Zunis*. In their telling of the Turkey Girl story, instead of "in the days of the ancients," the setting is established as "long ago" a maiden lived "in a village called Matsakya." Instead of an elaborate dance announcement, it is stated in a matter of fact way: "One day while tending her flock she heard of a Yah Yah Dance which was to be held at the village plaza." In the transformation, the turkey speaks plainly: "Have no fear, my child," "go wash up, come back, and we will get you ready in time to go see the dance."

Some of Pollock's word choices fit her style well, but these choices reflect popular culture more than reality. She uses the word "braves" to describe male dancers, while Cushing calls them "youths" and Quam does not note them at all. Pollock says the protagonist's dress is made of "doeskin"; Cushing says it is made of cotton and Quam does not specify. Pollock refers to Pueblo

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jewelry as “jewels,” while Cushing describes them as “rich ornaments” and Quam does not specify. Pollock describes the dancers as “pounding” and “stomping” their feet. Neither Cushing nor Quam remark on the footwork of the dancers.

Quam’s straightforward style makes the story more realistic. Artistically, some may deem Pollock’s version more pleasing to the ear. Lost, however, is any suggestion that the Pueblos are a living people who continue to tell the Turkey Girl story in their communities today. In effect, Pollock’s Pueblo Indians are cast among the romantic, vanished Indians of days long past. Children reading her book may love its similarities to Cinderella, but the information they glean about the people of Zuni Pueblo is inaccurate.

Cultural Differences

Much has been written about the ways that cultures differ from each other. Some characteristics of Euro-American society are embedded in the story of Cinderella (i.e., the concept of orphan-hood, higher status based on wealth or beauty, accumulation and appreciation of material goods) and also in Pollock’s and Cushing’s version of the Zuni story, but they do not appear in the Quam retelling. While there are some differences across and within tribes, generally speaking, American Indian societies embrace extended families, a collaborative work ethic, equitable distribution of material goods, and a harmonious community.

Pollock’s protagonist is an “orphaned herder” who lives alone; Cushing’s and Quam’s protagonist lives with her sisters in the village. In Pueblo culture, children are born into extended families. If a child’s parents die, other family members, who may already live in the same home, raise the children. The concept of “orphan” does not exist. By changing the status of the protagonist, Pollock inserts a Euro-American value into Zuni culture.

Pollock’s and Cushing’s protagonist works for wealthy families that “cared little” for her; she is rejected by the other girls in the village. Pollock’s text reads: “They thought her fit company only for turkeys.” In the Quam retelling, there are no references to wealth or status. The protagonist lives in the village and is responsible for taking care of the turkeys.

Pollock’s and Cushing’s turkeys clean and dress the protagonist, transforming her and her clothing. Seeing her reflection in the water, the girl is confident her beauty will assure her acceptance. Pollock’s text reads: “Now everyone would see she was fit company for more than turkeys.” And, upon arriving at the dance, her beauty stuns the people: “The musicians, setting the rhythm with their flutes, drums, and notched sticks, missed a beat when they saw her. Her beauty was so great, everyone stopped to stare.” And she was accepted: “The Turkey Girl danced every dance, her heart beating in time with her stomping feet. At last she was among the proud maidens and handsome braves.” Quam’s protagonist is also transformed into a “beautiful maiden” by the turkeys and goes to the dance, but her beauty is not noticed or marked by anyone at the dance. When she arrives there, she joins her sisters and dances.

Pollock’s protagonist is surprised when the turkeys speak to her: “The young girl sank to the ground and gasped, ‘How is it that you speak my tongue, Old One?’” In the Cushing and Quam versions, the girl expresses no surprise when the turkey speaks to her. In Pueblo and other American Indian communities, many stories are told in which animals speak, so it would not be surprising to a child in such a story if a turkey spoke to her.

Most significant, however, is Pollock’s Disney-like ending. When her protagonist finally returns to the turkeys, they are gone and her finery returns to its previous condition. The final sentence in her book reads: “From that day unto this, turkeys have lived apart from their tall brothers, for the Turkey Girl kept not her word.” In the Cushing and Quam version, the story ends when the turkeys have flown away “and landed to drink in a spring flowing out of the rocks. To this day you see the tracks of the flock where it drank at the spring.” The purpose of the story, as borne out by this closing, is to explain something about the land. As Leslie Marmon Silko writes, stories include such information to provide tribal members with a map, of sorts, that they can use to guide them. With her ending, Pollock fundamentally changes the story’s purpose and meaning to the people of Zuni. As such, I assert that it cannot be called a Zuni story, and should not be used as such in elementary school classrooms.

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What about Pollock's Source?

As noted earlier, Pollock relied upon the Turkey Girl story collected by Frank Hamilton Cushing. His version is longer than the Quam version, with Cushing using over 2200 words on 10 pages to tell the story. In some ways, Pollock's retelling aligns closely with Cushing's: the protagonist lives alone and works for wealthy families, people stare at her when she arrives at the dance, and both use a great deal of romantic phraseology. In other ways, Pollock departs from Cushing: his protagonist is not an orphan; the turkeys transform her dress into one of cotton, not doeskin; she is given "rich ornaments," not "jewels"; his turkeys do not warn the girl that her clothes will change back to rags; he does not use "braves" to refer to men; he does not use "stomping" or "pounding" to describe the dancer's footwork. Most important, however, is that Cushing's version, like Quam's, ends by talking about tracks (fossils) at a mesa located at Zuni. As such, he does make some errors, but he does not fundamentally alter the purpose of the story.

Conclusion: A Romanticized and Disneyfied Story

Pollock's opening sentence sets the tone for the rest of her retelling. Throughout, her prose is effusive. Native speech, as imagined and presented in popular culture, is laden with romantic phraseology. This may make Pollock's story sound more "Indian," but it is far from a realistic portrayal of the way that Zuni (or any) Indians speak. Pollock's retelling of the Turkey Girl story changes the story in ways that make it more familiar to a mainstream audience. That is, she adds elements that correspond directly to plot points in the Disney Cinderella. Pollock's version omits any reference to the land. Leaving out the land, Leslie Marmon Silko might argue, renders the story incomplete, because through story, Pueblo people transmit a worldview and strategies for survival. Central to that worldview is the land (Silko, 1996). Although her title says this is a Zuni Cinderella story, Pollock's retelling is replete with changes that render this book useless in terms of providing credible information about the Zuni people and culture. Pollock is far from alone in changing traditional stories. The most well-known examples are Walt Disney's movies, which depart dramatically from the source stories' original ver-

sions. Indeed, such change is described as the Disneyfication of story (Hearne, 1997).

RODANAS'S DRAGONFLY'S TALE

My analysis of *Turkey Girl* and the problems I identified prompted me to look at another acclaimed picture-book folktale marketed as a Zuni story. Although *Turkey Girl* is a variant of the well-known story of Cinderella and is marked as such by the subject headings in the Library of Congress, that is not the case with *Dragonfly's Tale*. It is simply catalogued as folklore. Published in 1991 by Clarion Books, it received favorable reviews. *Kirkus* described it as an exceptional

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book, and noted that it is "A fine addition to Native American folklore collections." It was cited for recognition by the American Bookseller Association, and the International Reading Association designated it as a "Teacher's Choice." It is part of two national reading programs: the "Reading Is Fundamental" program started in 1966, and the "Accelerated Reader" program established in 1993. Like Pollock, Rodanas includes a source note that indicates she used Cushing as the source for her retelling. Her complete note reads as follows:

Dragonfly's Tale is based on an ancient Zuni story kept alive for centuries by tribal storytellers. It was first translated by anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing and published in *The Millstone* (Volume 9, 1884). In the hope of conveying this tale's important and timely message, I have simplified Cushing's version and added some details of my own. That is the way of storytellers. I think the Ancient Ones will understand. (n. p.)

I located a copy of her source and learned that the complete title of the story she used is, "The Origin of the Dragonfly and of the Corn Priests, or Guardians of the Seed." It is exceedingly long, with nearly 14,000 words over 69 pages of text (no illustrations). As with *Turkey Girl*, I attempted to locate a version of the story as told by Zuni tribal members. I found pieces of it in two different stories. *The Zunis: Self-Portrayals* contains a story called "The Two Orphans and Their Grandmother" about two boys and their grandmother who were left behind when the people in their village abandoned it during a famine. (The use of

“orphan” in the title is odd; it is likely the translator used the word because there was no single English word to convey the status of the two boys in the story. Nowhere in the story itself is the term “orphan” used to describe the characters.)

In the story, the grandmother makes “Shu-ma-gho-lowa” out of cornstalks. She says they are a blessing to the spirits that will aid in bringing corn pollen to the people so they can plant and receive the corn they need for their livelihood. In Tedlock’s *Finding the Center: The Art of the Zuni Storyteller* (1972) is a story called “The Hopis and the Famine” told by Zuni tribal member Andrew Peynetsa, who told Tedlock that the story was borrowed by the Zunis from the Hopi and that “the details of the story fit the Zuni way of life as well as they do the Hopi” (p. 63). The story is about two children and their grandmother who are abandoned in a famine, and how the children (a boy and a girl) become “persons of value” with powerful knowledge who know how to cause and stop floods and famines, and how to care for corn so the people will always have this crucial staple. It is possible that Cushing heard both these stories and combined elements of them in the story he called “The Origin of the Dragonfly and of the Corn Priests, or Guardians of the Seed” that Rodanas cites as her source. As noted in the analysis of *Turkey Girl*, Cushing made some errors in word choice and embellished his retellings, but he did not alter the fundamental purpose of the *Turkey Girl* story. We can make similar assumptions about his retelling of the dragonfly story.

In my analysis of *Dragonfly’s Tale*, the changes Rodanas made are significant, but do not lend themselves to the same categorical analysis I used for *Turkey Girl*. Rodanas does not use romantic phrases to suggest an Indian-like tone, and she does not change the story so that it is more familiar to a mainstream American audience. In this case, the changes are to the story itself. As such, my analysis centers on the plot of the story and how Rodanas’s retelling is different from her source.

Opening

Both Rodanas and Cushing start out with an affluent people whose chief decides to stage a food fight to flaunt their wealth to neighboring villages.

Both introduce the Corn Maidens, who, disappointed in the planned food fight, disguise themselves as poor old women and go to the village during the time when the people are preparing for the food fight. Both introduce a boy and girl who are scolded when they try to offer the disguised Corn Maidens some bread.

An Old Woman and An Elder

It is at that point Rodanas departs from Cushing. His disguised Corn Maidens go through the village past many homes, but nobody offers them any food. At the edge of the village, an ostracized, poor old woman invites them into her home and offers them a bowl of mush, which is the only food she has. Touched by her generosity, the Corn Maidens remove their disguise and give her honey-bread and melons. After feasting with the old woman, the Corn Maidens give her several items for her storerooms that will forever provide for her needs. This old woman is an important figure in the story, because it is she who later comforts the two children when they (and the village) are abandoned because of a famine, and it is she

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who will become a mother figure to the entire village when the villagers return after the famine. That night, young people tell their elders that they saw two beautiful maidens at the edge of the village earlier in the evening. One of the elders

remembers the rain that had fallen earlier in the day, and realizes that the beautiful maidens were the Corn Maidens, and that the two old women who were treated poorly that day were the Corn Maidens in disguise. This elder is an uncle to the two children, and like the old woman, he is a significant figure in the story Cushing tells. He will be the first to return to the village after it is abandoned, and he will be a key advisor to the boy who will become the people’s father figure and leader.

In the Rodanas version, neither the old woman nor the elder are included in the story. This omission is what changes the purpose of the story from one that lays out the political and religious structure of the village to a simple story about kindness to others and respect for nature’s gifts.

The Seed-Eaters and the Famine

In Cushing’s version, later that night, Squirrel and Mouse call all the seed-eating animals

together. They tell them that the Corn Maidens have warned them of a coming famine and that the animals must go to the village the next day and gather corn and other food in preparation. The drought comes, food is scarce, but the old woman has plenty of food. She offers to share it with the villagers, but fearing sorcery is the reason for her food, they reject it and decide to leave the village without telling the old woman. The parents of the two children decide that traveling with children will slow them down, so they leave quietly while the children are asleep.

In the Rodanas version, the Corn Maidens watch the food fight and decide the people must be taught a lesson. They tell the seed-eaters a famine is coming, so the mice, gophers, bugs, and birds work all night gathering crumbs and food. The drought comes, and when, in the depth of winter, the food runs out, the villagers decide they must leave immediately. In their hurry, nobody notices the sleeping children, and they are left behind.

The primary difference at this point in the story is that in Cushing, the children are not alone in the village as they are in the Rodanas version.

The Dragonfly

In Cushing's version, the boy wakes up and knows they must have food. He makes snares to catch chickadees, catches several, cooks them, and then wakes his sister. They survive on the roasted bird meat as days pass, but his sister cries for corn. Trying to comfort her, the boy tells her he saw a strange creature where the cornfields were, and that he will make a cage to catch and bring it to her so she can watch it. He gathers straw and corn stalks and sits by his sister as he makes the cage. She grows tired of watching, falls asleep, and while she sleeps, he begins to make a butterfly out of pith (soft core inside the corn stalk). Pith, however, cannot be fashioned into butterfly wings, so the boy makes four long thin wings instead. He paints eyes on the side of the head, but the paint spreads and the creature has large eyes. He paints the wings and body with dots and stripes, but the paint spreads into bands of color. With a strand of hair, he suspends the creature inside the cage. When his sister wakes, she laughs and talks to the creature, believing it can hear her. One day, she tells it to get her some

corn. One night as his sister sleeps, the boy hears it ask to be let go. Realizing it is alive and must be hungry, the boy frees it from the cage. It tells the boy he has a good heart and that it will help the boy and his sister; then it flies away.

In the Rodanas version, the boy wakes and decides he must make a toy for his sister to comfort her when she wakes up. He decides to make her a butterfly using straw and a cornstalk. He paints it and attaches a long thread to it so it can be twirled round and round. His sister wakes and begins to cry when she learns they are alone, but the creature distracts her, and she plays with it all day long. Before going to sleep that night, she asks it to fly away and find them some food. That night, the boy hears it ask to be let go. He frees it and it flies away.

The primary difference in this portion of the story is the passage of time. In the Cushing, many days pass, while in the Rodanas, only one day passes.

Return of Corn

Where the creature goes marks another significant point at which Rodanas departs from the Cushing version. Rodanas's creature goes right to the Corn Maidens and tells them about the children. The Corn Maidens remember their offer of bread and summon their messengers to deliver food to them. When the children wake up the next day, their home is filled with beans, squash, and corn. When spring arrives, they plant corn. It sprouts overnight, and by the fourth day, the stalks are laden with ears of white and yellow corn. The children roast some, eat, and fall asleep amidst the corn.

Cushing's creature goes to the spirit world, where it tells the gods about the children and asks them to help. The gods fill a storeroom near the children with corn and tell the creature to return to the boy and tell him to make prayer plumes. The next day, the children wake to find the corn. They cook and eat it, and the boy, instructed by the creature, makes prayer plumes and prays over them. Afterwards, the creature takes them to the gods, who declare that the children will become the fathers and mothers of their people, and that they will have corn in abundance when the spring comes. Days pass and the girl mourns for her mother, father, and uncle. In response, the crea-

My analysis did not include illustrations because, in my view, the beauty of illustrations does not counteract unacceptable text.

ture flies off, this time to the Corn Maidens. This sets in motion a lengthy and detailed segment of the story that describes how the children will be prepared to become leaders of their people, the roles the old woman and elder uncle will play, how the religious, political, and economic structure of the village will be set up, the way the gods cause the corn to grow again, and how the villagers will be asked to return. Cushing relates that the creature will henceforth be known as Dragonfly, and it will live amongst the corn. There will, however, be two dragonflies: a black, white, and red one in early summer to symbolize spring rains, and a green and yellow one in late summer to symbolize summer showers. Their likenesses will be painted on sacred things. The creature leaves, and the villagers return.

The passage of time is, again, a significant difference in the two versions. In Rodanas, the story takes place overnight, while in Cushing, many days with significant events take place.

Return of Villagers and Closing

In the Rodanas version, the people decide to return to the village, hoping to replant their fields. They see the ripe corn and think they have been blessed by the Corn Maidens. An elder sees the sleeping children. In the little girl's hand is the toy creature. He declares it is the children who have been blessed. Their chief steps forward and says that the people will honor the Corn Maidens and learn from the children who received their gifts. On the final page of her book, Rodanas says the people were careful not to take the Corn Maidens' gifts for granted. She concludes her story by saying that the cornstalk creature appears in early summer when the corn is beginning to bloom, humming from one corn tassel to the next. Her last sentence is, "He is known as Dragonfly."

In the Cushing version, the villagers, summoned by the elder uncle who is now a warrior priest, return humbly. The boy selects three men to help him lead the people, and another to help the warrior priest. These leaders instruct each man

in the village to harvest seven loads of corn for their own families, and one load for the boy, who stores the corn in case there is another famine or drought. Cushing closes his story with, "Thus was it in the days of the ancients, long, very long, ago; and hence have we today Guardians of the Corn, Ta-a A'-shi-wa-ni, or Corn Priests of Zuni."

Both stories end by explaining something about the world. This is characteristic of folklore.

The difference is Rodanas tells us how dragonflies came to be, while the Cushing tells us what a people have done to ensure their survival.

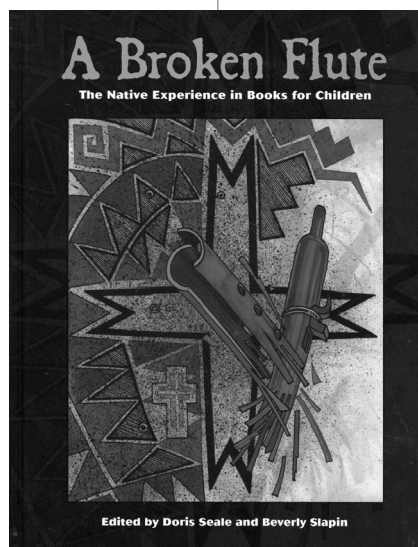
Conclusion: Rodanas Does Not Tell a Zuni Story

Rodanas's *Dragonfly's Tale* is fundamentally different from Cushing's story (and the two stories I identified as probable sources for the Cushing version). In its entirety, the story Cushing tells is about the establishment of secular and spiritual leadership for the people, and how a people ensures its survival. His version is centered on the spiritual world of the Zuni people. In contrast, Rodanas's story is a cautionary tale, urging readers not to

be wasteful, and to be kind to those in need. And, it is about how the dragonfly came to be. In crafting her version, she simplified the story, changed and reordered some events, and left out significant elements. The result is a compelling story, but the changes are such that it no longer retains the same character or meaning as the original. As a result, I do not think it can be called a Zuni story.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Turkey Girl and *Dragonfly's Tale* are picture books. By definition, the illustrations are important, especially since picture books are commonly read aloud during story time in classrooms, and well-executed illustrations enhance that experience. *Turkey Girl's* evocative pastel and oil crayon illustrations, created by acclaimed illustrator Ed Young, may have obscured problems with the text. My analysis did not include illustrations because, in my view, the beauty of illustrations does not counteract unacceptable text. If I had found the text acceptable, I would have moved



A Broken Flute is a good resource of essays and book reviews for teachers (see p. 255).

Guidelines for Evaluating and Selecting Native American Literature for the Classroom

Teachers can use the following guidelines* to evaluate American Indian images and characters and can adapt them to use with children in the classroom. Evaluating takes time, but it is time well spent. Instead of assuming a book is accurate, do some research using print and Web sources cited in the article. Compare what you learn with what is in the book.

Desirable Markers of Authenticity

- Works of fiction are tribally specific. This means that the tribal affiliation of major characters is specified, and content related to history, setting, and material artifacts accurately reflects that tribe. It means characters are Choctaw or Meskwaki or Apache instead of "Indian" or "Native American" or "American Indian."
- Retold folktales, myths, and legends specify the source for the story and details regarding changes the author made in retelling the story. The retold story reflects the tribe from which it originated.
- Illustrations of setting, characters, and tribal artifacts accurately reflect the tribe specified.
- Family stories include grandparents, aunts, and uncles. In American Indian families, they figure prominently in the lives of children.
- In stories set in contemporary settings, Native characters are portrayed as members of contemporary society who engage in the same activities mainstream Americans do, such as riding bikes and playing video games. Aspects of their tribal culture are appropriately woven into the story (i.e., wearing traditional regalia in appropriate contexts, not as everyday attire).

- Native characters are described as men/women/children/baby, instead of chief/warrior/brave/squaw, papoose (example: a Native mother would use the word "baby" or her tribal word for baby to refer to her infant, not "papoose.")
- Significant Native characters have personal names and are portrayed with a range of emotion and human qualities.

Undesirable Elements That Signify Stereotypes and Bias

- Alphabet books with "E" is for "Eskimo" or "I" is for "Indian."
- Counting books in which "Indians" are presented as items to count.
- Non-Native characters who play "Indian" by engaging in stereotypical activities of a savage or overly romanticized nature.
- Native characters portrayed as savage, with no context provided for aggressive behaviors.
- Native characters portrayed as unrealistically heroic, with no flaws.
- Adjectives and verbs used to describe Native characters as animal-like.
- A plot and/or theme that suggests Native Americans accepted defeat passively.
- A plot and/or theme that suggests Native Americans fought settlers and soldiers for no reason.
- Arbitrary references to *chief*, *warrior*, *brave*, *squaw*, or *papoose* to refer to characters. These commonly used words subtly dehumanize American Indians and distance the reader from the human qualities they share with Native American people.

*These guidelines were developed based on the following: Rudine Sims Bishop's chapter "Multicultural Literature for Children: Making Informed Choices" and Donnarae MacCann's chapter "Native Americans in Books for the Young" in *Teaching Multicultural Literature in Grades K–8*, edited by Violet J. Harris, published by Christopher Gordon Publishers, Inc.; Ronald Stedman's *Shadows of the Indian: Stereotypes in American Culture*, published by the University of Oklahoma in 1982; Doris Slapin and Beverly Seale's *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children*, published in 1998 by the University of California American Indian Studies Center; Naomi Caldwell-Wood and Lisa Mitten's "I is Not for Indian," published by American Indian Library Association in 1992; the Council on Interracial Books for Children's *10 Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Racism and Sexism*, published by the Council in 1974, and Barbara Kuipers, *American Indian Reference and Resource Books for Children and Young Adults*, published by Libraries Unlimited in 1995.

—Debbie Reese

on to analyze the illustrations. Given the significant departures from the original stories that my analysis revealed, I don't believe *Turkey Girl* and *Dragonfly's Tale* should be used in classrooms to teach children about the Zuni people. Stories matter to the people who tell them, and they should matter to all of us, whether we are Zuni Indians or not.

We are teachers, charged with educating the students in our classrooms. As such, we must become informed about the books we choose. To begin, look at the picture-book folktales in your classroom or library. Turn to the page(s) that note the sources the author used. Did the authors use BAE sources for their retellings? Do they describe the changes they made to the story? What tribe is the story about? Do you know enough about the tribe to identify errors of representation in the story? With the multiple demands on teachers' time, it is not possible to do in-depth analysis of every single book, but teachers can take advantage of Internet resources to help them determine a book's accuracy.

Each year, more tribal nations develop websites. The most extensive list is available at <http://www.nativeculturelinks.com/nations.html>, a site maintained by Lisa Mitten, a mixed-blood librarian who also maintains the website for the American Indian Library Association. Here, sites maintained by tribes are identified by a drum icon. Two other must-have resources for doing this research are *Native America in the Twentieth Century: An Encyclopedia* (Davis, 1996) and *Encyclopedia of North American Indians* (Hoxie, 1996). Teachers can also learn a great deal, quickly, by reading the essays and book reviews in *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children* (Slapin & Seale, 1998) and *A Broken Flute: The Native Experience in Books for Children*, (Seale and Slapin, 2005). Equally important are these three websites:

- Oyate, (<http://www.oyate.org>), includes critical reviews and is a good source for books;
- Native American Themes in Children's and Young Adult Books, (http://cynthialeitichsmith.com/lit_resources/diversity/native_am/NativeThemes_intro.html), is a website maintained by children's book author Cynthia Leitich Smith, an enrolled member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation;
- American Indians in Children's Books, (<http://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com>), is a blog and resource maintained by me, Debbie Reese, an enrolled member of Nambe Pueblo.

Teachers and their students can turn their evaluation into action by writing to authors and publishers and noting the problems they find in their evaluations. If authors and publishers hear from enough of us, perhaps we will see a positive change in the creation and publication of books about American Indians.

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CEE AWARD ANNOUNCEMENTS

A number of awards were presented by the Conference on English Education at the NCTE Annual Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. **The 2006 James N. Britton Award** for Inquiry within the English Language Arts was presented to Richard E. Miller, *Writing at the End of the World* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), and Alfred Tatum, *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males: Closing the Achievement Gap* (Stenhouse Publishers, 2005). **The 2006 Richard A. Meade Award** for Research in English Education was presented to Thomas M. McCann, Larry R. Johannessen, and Bernard P. Ricca, *Supporting Beginning English Teachers: Research and Implications for Teacher Induction* (NCTE, 2005). **The 2006 Janet Emig Award** for Exemplary Scholarship in *English Education* was presented to Anne Haas Dyson for her article, “Crafting ‘The Humble Prose of Living’: Rethinking Oral/Written Relations in the Echoes of Spoken Word,” (*English Education*, January 2005). **The 2006 Cultural Diversity Grants** went to Sherelle Jones for her proposal, “Tracing Relationships between Art and Literacy: Three Views toward a Compleat English Curriculum,” and Carmen Kynard for her proposal, “‘The Skin I’m In’: Using Voice Scholarship and Young Adult Literature about Youth of Color to Transform Urban Teacher Education Curriculum.” **The 2006 James Moffett Award** for Teacher Research was presented to Joseph M. Shosh (Moravian College, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania), Jennifer Wescoe (Freedom High School, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania), and James Cercone (Cheektowaga Central High School, New York).