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### Reading as Resistance: Representations of Indigeneity in Twentieth Century American Children's Literature

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Isabel Evans

Library Undergraduate Research Award

### Reflective Essay

Conducted during Summer 2021 through the Arthur Vining Davis Library Internship, my research project used the Juvenilia Collection and the Children's Collection at Denison Library to investigate representations of Indigeneity in twentieth century American children's literature. In my research, I employed a strategy called "resistant reading," which involves interpreting a literary canon through the lens of a community who has largely been denied the ability to generate and analyze canonical texts. According to Judith Fetterly, who coined the term in *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (1978), resistant reading offers a mechanism for reclaiming "power" while "creat[ing] a new understanding of our literature" (Fetterley xix). To figure out how to implement resistant reading in my work, I also took inspiration from the methodologies of several secondary sources I consulted during my research, including *Racial Innocence* (2011) by Robin Bernstein and "Native American and White Camp Fire Girls Enact Modern Girlhood, 1910-39" (2014) by Jennifer Helgren.

To begin my resistant reading practice, I examined mainstream twentieth century children's books that include Indigenous characters or iconography, like feather headdresses or moccasins, coded as "Indian" in the dominant American imagination. By browsing the shelves at Denison and by conducting pointed searches using the Claremont Colleges Library website, I was able to identify and access popular children's books in the collections that meet these criteria, such as *Two Little Savages* (1903), *Little House in the Big Woods* (1932), *The Book of Indians* (1935), and *Little Leo* (1951). These titles enabled me to interrogate hegemonic understandings of the "Indian" among non-Native people in the United States and, subsequently, to situate children's books by Native creators in the broader cultural landscape in which they were published.

After gaining a deeper understanding of representations of Indigeneity in books published for a wide audience, I turned to books written specifically for Native children, with an emphasis on books published by the Education Division of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for use in Federal Indian Schools. As I describe in the first three sections of my paper, I had the opportunity to work with a collection of previously uncatalogued materials in Denison's Archives that were once owned by a woman named Dorothy Walter Baruch. Studying the thirty-one children's books in the Baruch Collections that were published by the BIA allowed me to investigate the ways in which the children's book form was used by the United States government as part of their colonial project. During this phase of my research, Dorran Boyle, the Library Associate at Denison, taught me how to copy catalogue and to process archival materials, so I could help make the Baruch Collection available to future researchers using the Claremont Colleges Library website.

In opposition to this dominant history, my research ultimately uses resistant reading strategies to centralize children's books by Native creators that celebrate Indigenous cultures and

continue oral storytelling traditions in written form, like *Old Father, the Storyteller* (1960), *Lucy Learns to Weave* (1969), and *Coyote & the Winnowing Birds* (1994). To identify children's books by and about Native people, I carefully sifted through Denison's physical copies of *The Horn Book Magazine*, a prominent journal about children's literature, which has been published continuously since 1924, and searched through WorldCat, a digital archive of the collections at libraries across the world. Since few of the titles I identified were held by the Claremont Colleges Libraries, I created a list of children's books to add to the Denison collections. By the end of August 2021, when my internship officially concluded, Denison acquired eighteen of the twenty-eight books I recommended, including all three of the titles I mentioned earlier in this paragraph. Because I have continued to work at Denison this academic year as a student employee, I have also been able to give advice on new additions, and in January, Denison just added five more recently published children's books.

Completing this research project has enabled me to blossom into a more confident thinker, equipped with a newfound belief that I can contribute to the scholarly conversation. So far, I have had the privilege of sharing my work at two academic conferences. I presented at the Southern California Conference on Undergraduate Research in November 2021, and I will be presenting at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research in April 2022. My research also provided me with the opportunity to collaborate with Jennifer Martinez Wormser, the Director and Librarian at Denison, at the beginning of the Spring 2022 semester in curating an exhibit on children's books. Called "Agents for Change: Realizing a Better World Through Children's Books," the exhibit draws heavily on the findings of my research and highlights several of the new additions that were purchased upon the recommendations of my project. Working in the library for my research, I realized that I feel the most inspired buried in the treasure trove of archives and special collection libraries. Now, I am eagerly planning to pursue an MA in Library Sciences after I graduate from Scripps.

Isabel Evans

Arthur Vining Davis Foundation Internship, Summer 2021

Ella Strong Denison Library, Scripps College

## Reading as Resistance: Representations of Indigeneity in Twentieth Century American Children's Literature

### Part One

#### A Beanstalk Sprouts

When I first learned to read, I struggled to differentiate between “make-believe” and “true” stories. Sea witches, wolves in grandmothers’ clothes, and giants in the sky were not impossibilities, but plausible encounters, and the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Anderson provided me with model pathways for my own, surely imminent adventures. Gentle reminders from my parents and teachers eventually helped me to understand the concepts of “fiction” and “nonfiction,” but my opportunity for a fairy tale adventure arrived anyways.

Through the Arthur Vining Davis Internship, I traversed the realm of dusty shelves and quested between the pages of hidden books, finding my own gingerbread house in the woods, my own magic beanstalk. Until this summer, when I began my research, the archives at Denison Library sequestered a previously uncatalogued trove of seventy-five books, five manuscripts, and a box stuffed with papers, photographs, letters, diplomas, and other documents. These materials were once owned by a woman named Dorothy Walter Baruch (1899-1962), a teacher, child psychologist, and author of books for young people and parents (Hurwitz). In 1937, Baruch earned the first PhD granted by Claremont Graduate University (CGU), then known as Claremont University College (Doctoral Degree, 1937). Hyman Miller, Baruch’s second husband, donated the materials in 1965 to create the Dorothy Walter Baruch Collection, which preserves Baruch’s work and her significant role in the history of the Claremont Colleges (Butala, 1965).

The Baruch Collection, at least as Miller imagined it, never came to fruition. Instead, its contents were squirreled away in Denison’s Archives, forgotten for fifty years. Sibyl Fielder, Assistant Librarian at Denison, is the last recorded person to have interacted with the materials (Fielder, 1970). According to her notes, filed with the Baruch’s papers, Fielder began the intake process in the summer of 1970, during a period of turmoil and change for Denison (Typed List of Books, 1970). Dorothy Drake, who had been Denison’s Librarian since 1938, retired in 1970, and Fielder temporarily assumed Drake’s responsibilities until 1976, when Judy Harvey Sahak became Librarian. Denison’s holdings were in as much flux as its staff; in 1971, Denison joined Honnold Library to together become the Libraries of the Claremont Colleges, beginning an exchange of materials between the two locations (“History of Denison”). This period of upheaval could also have been the moment when the Baruch Collection was stashed on a double-sided

bookcase in Archives. When another shelf was moved in front of this side of the bookcase, the Baruch Collection became obscured.

Jennifer Martinez Wormser, the current Director and Librarian at Denison, found the Baruch Collection in the spring of 2021, when she was shifting furniture to prepare for students' return to campus after the COVID-19 pandemic. Jennifer pointed out the materials to me when I began my on-site research in the summer of 2021, since she thought there might be children's books among them. Her hunch was right. The Baruch Collection contains fifty-nine distinct works of children's literature, including three published books by Baruch. I also unearthed five manuscripts written by Baruch for stories likely designed for children and teen readers. Even more importantly for my project, thirty-one of the children's books, nearly half of the total volumes Miller donated for the Baruch Collection, center on Indigenous experiences. As I will elaborate on in Part Three, these books served as an entryway into developing the core focus of my research: representations of Indigeneity by Native and non-Native creators in twentieth century American children's literature.

After a long, complicated journey, the Baruch Collection materials are now available at Denison for scholars and young readers alike to learn from and to enjoy. Both the budding archivist and bookish little girl in me are proud and grateful that I was able to contribute to making them accessible and planting a magic bean for future readers to climb.

## **Part Two**

### **Dorothy Walter Baruch**

In addition to the thrill of its mystery-shrouded history, the Baruch Collection offers a Claremont-specific avenue into patterns of representing race in twentieth-century American children's literature, the topic that guided my research. In her professional career, Dorothy Baruch strove to actively disrupt the overwhelming whiteness of the genres she worked in: non-fiction books for parents, where she shared her findings as a child psychologist, and picture books for children, where she put these theories into practice. In both forms, Baruch originally focused on "play therapy, discipline, and sex education" (Hurwitz). During World War II, however, Baruch also began investigating and writing on sources of childhood trauma, especially racial prejudice and discrimination. Baruch publicly explored this nascent interest in race through her 1946 book *Glass House of Prejudice* and through her tenure as a Special Lecturer on Interracial Relations at the Claremont Colleges from 1944 to 1945 (Hurwitz).

Likely, the anti-Japanese attitudes that pervaded the West Coast of California, where Baruch lived and worked at the time, informed this turn in her career. The Baruch Collection documents Baruch's growing interest in Japanese and Japanese American identities, from World War II until her death in 1962. Most notably, it contains three manuscripts Baruch wrote in 1960 for two children's books with a Japanese subject. One manuscript, dated May 20, 1960, is handwritten dummy called "Kappa and Farmer Shiba" (Baruch, Handwritten Manuscript for "Kappa"). In 1961, Charles E. Tuttle, Co. published "Kappa" as *Kappa's Tug-of-War with Big*

*Brown Horse*. The other two manuscripts are a handwritten dummy, dated May 16, 1960, (Baruch, Handwritten Manuscript for “Kobo’s”) and typed dummy, dated October 15, 1960, both titled “Kobo’s Wish” (Baruch, Typed Manuscript for “Kobo’s”). “Kobo’s Wish” was published posthumously in 1964, also by Charles E. Tuttle, Co. as *Kobo and the Wishing Pictures*. After I identified these manuscripts, Denison Library purchased the published versions of *Kobo* and *Kappa*, which supplement the Baruch Collections (see Part Eight).



**Figure A:** In addition to Baruch’s manuscripts, the Baruch Collection contains other documents and material from Baruch’s process for *Kobo and the Wishing Pictures*. These include Baruch’s handwritten and typed notes on the project; seven original photographs and twelve photocopies of photographs of Japanese ema paintings; one film strip and one box of slides; and an ema painting on wood by an unknown artist of “Kobo’s beautiful horse” (left). Evidently, illustrator Yoshi Noguchi used these images as inspiration for the art in the published book. Noguchi’s final painting of “Kobo’s beautiful horse” (right), for instance, bear strong similarities to the ema painting in the Baruch’s collections.

Both *Kappa* and *Kobo* reflect a growing desire among Japanese American writers and their allies to produce children’s books that actively counter anti-Japanese hate in the post-World War II period. In a 1966 article in *Elementary Education*, Miriam Burris published a survey of fiction books for children “concerning Japan” released between 1953 and 1964. Burris identified fifty-eight books that met her criterion, with the number of children’s books focusing on Japanese themes gradually increasing over the decade, from one book published in 1953 to nine books in 1964. In part, the commercial and critical success of books by Pearl S. Buck activated this trend, with Burris regarding Buck’s novel *The Big Wave* (1948) as an “unequaled” predecessor to the works she surveyed (Burris 30). Buck’s bestselling novels *The Good Earth* (1931) and *Dragon Seed* (1942), read by children and adults alike (Scoggin 396), illuminated consumer interest in more empathetic portrayals of Asian subjects and demonstrated the lucrative potential market for publishers willing to supply such books (Burris 29).



**Figure B:** However influential Buck's works were in establishing a market for Asian and Asian American voices, her work also peddled in racist stereotypes. For instance, the first American edition of Buck's 1942 picture book *The Chinese Children Next Door*, illustrated by William Arthur Smith, represents the sisters in a Chinese family as physically identical, cloned versions of the same figure, which perpetuates Orientalist assumptions that all Asian people are essentially interchangeable.

In the introduction to *Kobo*, Baruch explicitly states her goal for the book: to “bridge customs and culture through our children seeing that the children of Japan have the same human feelings of affection, of rivalry, of sadness and joy” (Baruch, *Kobo* 8). Like many other twentieth-century thinkers, Baruch's argument for racial equality hinged on a belief that people with different races were fundamentally the same, and this sameness could be readily performed. While critical race scholarship problematizes Baruch's aspiration to “colorblindness,” as twenty-first century readers might label her perspective (Choi), *Kobo* and *Kappa* offer portals into the way diversity and race were frequently presented by progressive white authors in early-and-mid-twentieth century children's books bold enough to address non-white experiences of race. To borrow children's book author Florence Crannell Means's metaphor in her 1940 essay for *The Horn Book Magazine*, racial difference, for these white progressives, was a superficial category, capable of being rendered by any well-meaning and empathetic writer who sought to amalgamate people of different races into one, multi-colored “mosaic” (Means 35).

## Part Three

### An Overview of the *Indian Life Readers* and their Impacts

Although Baruch's contribution to the shifting racial consciousness of twentieth century children's literature demands deeper critical inquiry, I located the most influential books for my research among the titles Baruch did not author. The Baruch Collection contains thirty-one books published in the 1940s by the Education Division of the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Fifteen of these books are *Indian Life Readers*, a series of twenty-two bilingual children's books in English and one of four languages spoken by Indigenous peoples: Diné Bizaad (spoken



by the Navajo), Hopi, Lakota, and Spanish (spoken by many Pueblo peoples).<sup>1</sup> Most of the remaining sixteen books are educational, semi-ethnographic pamphlets for students on the “Life and Customs” or “Handcrafts” of more than ten distinct Nations.



**Figure C:** Pictured are the covers of one book from each of the subseries that make up the Indian Life Readers. Moving in a clockwise direction, *Little Herder in Autumn* (1940) is from the Navajo Series; *Young Hunter of Picuris* (1943) is from the Pueblo Series; *There Still Are Buffalo* (1943) is from the Sioux Series; and *Field Mouse Goes to War* (1944) is from the Hopi Series. Each of the books pictured is from the Dorothy Baruch Collection, except for *Young Hunter of Picuris*, which was added to the Denison Collections as part of my project (see Part Eight).

The *Indian Life Readers* and the other BIA-published books in the Baruch Collection are products of a highly unusual, short-lived period in the history of United States relations with Indigenous peoples. Through the early twentieth century, the United States worked to irradicate Indigenous peoples, cultures, and languages through aggressive military, political, and social campaigns (Deloria, Trachtenberg). Beginning in the 1880s, the Federal Government sought to achieve this goal through forced assimilation strategies, ranging from legislation, like the Dawes

<sup>1</sup> It is essential to note that Spanish, like English, is the language of a colonizer. Although many Pueblo people spoke Spanish as a second language at the time the *Indian Life Readers* were written, Spanish is not technically an “Indigenous language.” As such, BIA encouragement of bilingual education in English and Spanish does not promote, preserve, or value Indigenous languages at all, even if this choice of language would make the books accessible to more Pueblo children speaking a wide variety of distinct Pueblo languages, including Tiwa, Tewa, Towa, Keres, Zuni, and Hopi (Benes 46).



Act,<sup>2</sup> to educational programs, like BIA Boarding Schools (Trachtenberg 22). When it was founded in 1879, the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania became “the first government-run boarding school for Native Americans.” A frequent “refrain” of the school’s founder Richard H. Pratt typifies the project of BIA Boarding Schools: “kill the Indian to save the man.” Pratt’s claim identifies Indigenous peoples as fundamentally less than human. To transform the non-human “Indian” into the human “man,” BIA Boarding Schools deliberately estranged Indigenous children from their families, languages, and cultures (*Carlisle Indian*). Organizations like the *Carlisle Indian School Project* document the ongoing intergenerational trauma and systematic loss of culture that BIA Boarding Schools continue to produce.

In the mid-1930s, after a document called the Meriam Report issued a scathing condemnation of BIA Boarding Schools, the BIA underwent a series of radical changes (Benes 24). Under BIA Commissioner John Collier and Director of Education Willard Beatty, the Federal education program pivoted to community-based schools that encouraged bilingual instruction in English and Indigenous languages (Benes 24). The *Indian Life Readers* were written and published during this transitional moment as part of the BIA’s new approach. According to the inside back cover of the softcover editions, each work was designed “primarily for use in Federal Indian Schools,” although the BIA clarified that they were nonetheless “Suitable for use in any school” (Clark, *There Still Are Buffalo*). As books about Indigenous subjects intended for Indigenous children, the *Indian Life Readers* are exceptional among twentieth century American children’s literature. Most “Indian” books by non-Indigenous authors were written for white children, especially boys, a discrepancy I analyze in more depth in Part Five.

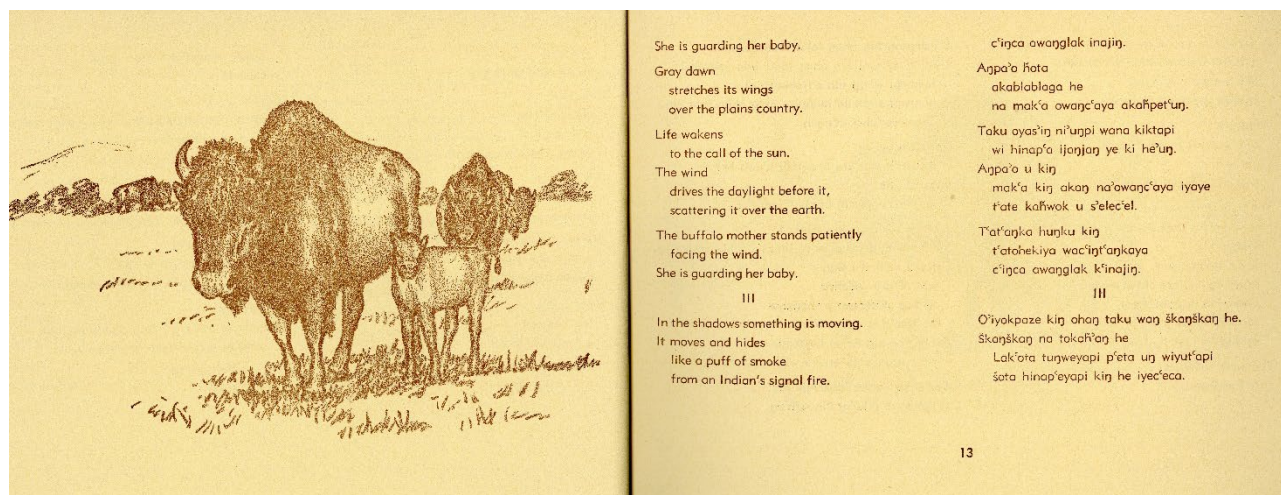
The *Indian Life Readers* sought to assimilate young Indigenous peoples into mainstream (white) American society, even if the BIA was less explicit about this intention. Ultimately, promoting English literacy was the goal behind bilingual reading instruction. Principal writer Ann Nolan Clark, who authored seventeen of the twenty-two *Indian Life Readers*, insisted “language difficulty” was the “only handicap” for Indigenous students, relative to white students. Clark’s experience as a BIA teacher at Zuni Pueblo, Tesuque Pueblo, and Santa Fe Indian School instilled her with the belief that young people learned more enthusiastically and thoroughly if the curriculum interested them (qtd. in Benes 36). By hiring Clark to produce reading materials in Indigenous languages with Indigenous themes, Beatty hoped students would learn to read and speak English more readily and, afterwards, confer this skill to their family members. Of the four Nations the BIA targeted with the *Indian Life Readers*, Beatty considered competency in English

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<sup>2</sup> Passed in 1887, the Dawes Act, also known as the General Allotment Act, sought to “civilize” Indigenous people by offering citizenship to Native peoples who “voluntarily” revoked common Indigenous practices like communal landownership and matriarchal systems of leadership. The Dawes Act authorized individual Native men to receive an “allotment” of land for themselves and their family to own “separate and apart from any tribe” as “private property” (qtd. in Trachtenberg 38). In addition to working to assimilate Native peoples into “American” life, the Dawes Act strove to redistribute Indigenous peoples’ land to white settlers by claiming the land of Native peoples who did accept the government’s exchange. Because of this policy, 90 million acres of land were wrenched from Native Nations, already confined to 138 million acres in 1887, before the Dawes Act was repealed in 1934 (Trachtenberg 39).

most pressing for the Navajo people, since the Navajo are the largest Indigenous community in the United States and Beatty mourned that “nine out of ten [Navajos] cannot speak the English language” (qtd. in Clark, *Who Wants to be a Prairie Dog?* 66).

Yet, simultaneously, the *Indian Life Readers* represented a powerful tool for young people to continue embracing their Indigenous identities as they were exposed to bicultural modes of thinking. The BIA prioritized the English language-sections, but the *Indian Life Readers* themselves present both languages equally. Each book is organized into two side-by-side columns of text: one in English and one in Diné Bizaad, Hopi, Lakota, or Spanish (see Figure D). Because the two languages take up roughly the same amount of space on the page, the *Indian Life Readers* encourage children to read the text in Diné Bizaad, Hopi, Lakota, or Spanish as much as in English. For Indigenous young people who encountered the *Indian Life Readers* in government schools, whose education largely centered whiteness, seeing Navajo, Lakota, Pueblo, or Hopi children as protagonists would have been powerful.



**Figure D:** This spread from *There Still Are Buffalo* (1942) written by Ann Nolan Clark and illustrated by Andrew Standing Soldier typifies the organization of the *Indian Life Readers*. On one page, there is a black and white illustration, and on the other side there are two columns of the same text: in English and in Lakota.

Slashes to the BIA's budget because of World War II prevented Beatty and Collier from continuing bilingual education programs. After they left the Bureau in 1952 and 1945, respectively, the BIA reverted to a more openly assimilationist approach, with little of the respect for Indigenous language and culture that its former leaders shared (Benes 107). Bilingual books that celebrated Indigenous identities wouldn't reemerge in schools for Indigenous children until late 1960s and 1970s, when the Navajo Curriculum Center began publishing books like *Lucy Learns to Read* (1969) and *Navajo Biographies* (1970) (see Part Seven). Although fewer Native children had the opportunity to read them in their classrooms than Beatty and Collier hoped (Benes 107), the *Indian Life Readers* created a precedent for later books written in Indigenous languages, by Indigenous peoples.

The *Indian Life Readers* also propelled multiple contributors to greater prominence in children's publishing. Clark's service to the BIA helped her earn a job with the U.S. Department

of Education in Central America (Benes 95), an experience that inspired her to write the Newbery Medal winning children's book called *Secret of the Andes* (1952) about an Inca child.<sup>3</sup> Because Clark wrote "commercially published books for a general audience" after the *Indian Life Readers*, her work, usually illustrated by an Indigenous artist, provided readily accessible, thoughtful, and empathetic portrayals of Indigenous peoples for Native and non-Native readers alike (Benes 96). Most of the illustrators for the *Indian Life Readers* were young Indigenous artists who recently graduated from the BIA schools Beatty and Collier hoped the books would service. Hoke Denetsosie (*Little Herder* quartet) and Andrew Tsinnijinnie (*Who Wants to be a Prairie Dog?*), for instance, continued illustrating books about Indigenous peoples, eventually working together on Navajo Curriculum Center publications (Hoffman, *Navajo Biographies*).

## Part Four:

### Close Readings of *There Still are Buffalo* and the *Little Herder* Books

The *Indian Life Readers* embody the ability of children's books to grapple with knotty, challenging topics, from race to environmental change to gender. In *Racial Innocence*, author Robin Bernstein outlines the frequency with which discussions of race permeated American children's culture in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Bernstein argues that children's books, toys, and games are far from "racially innocent fun" (Bernstein 21) because of their perpetuation of structures of anti-Blackness, including violence against Black bodies (Bernstein 7). Although Bernstein focuses on Blackness in children's literature, the *Indian Life Readers* reveal that Bernstein's argument is also applicable to the way non-Black communities of color were depicted at the same time. The *Indian Life Readers* simultaneously deconstruct and participate in the racialization of Indigenous peoples, and, as a result, the books provide a complex lens through which representation of Indigeneity can be observed.

The "vanishing Indian" trope dominated nineteenth and twentieth century perceptions of Indigenous peoples. Popular works of literature, like Henry Wordsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*, forwarded an ideology called "vanishing race theory," which insisted "indigenes of the continent would disappear as a matter of natural course" (Trachtenberg 4). Beginning with its title, *There Still Are Buffalo* (1942), part of the *Indian Life Readers: Sioux Series*,<sup>4</sup> asserts the

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<sup>3</sup> Denison Library has a signed first edition of *Secret of the Andes*. This book is one of three titles by Clark held by Denison that did not come from the Baruch Collection. *Blue Canyon Horse* (1954) illustrated by celebrated Apache artist Allan Houser was also on the shelves at Denison before the Baruch Collection resurfaced. My project also made possible Denison's acquisition of *In My Mother's House* (1941), a Caldecott Honor book illustrated by Velino Herrera, which earned Clark the job as the principal writer for the *Indian Life Readers*. *In My Mother's House* was born out of Clark's frustration with the insufficient government-issued reading material in her classroom at Tesuque Pueblo. It began as collaboration with her students, which she saw as a tool for encouraging them to write and read with passion (Benes 36-37).

<sup>4</sup> When the *Indian Life Readers* were published in the 1940s, the word "Sioux" was commonly used by the Lakota people, whom the term described, and non-Native people alike. Today, however, Lakota activists emphasize "Sioux" is a pejorative term. Rebecca C. Benes, another twenty-first century researcher on the *Indian Life Readers* and author of the book *Native American Picture Books of Change*, opted to use the term "Sioux" in her analysis to maintain consistency with the historical period she writes about (Benes 81). In this paper, I will use the phrase

ongoing presence of the buffalo and, relatedly, the Lakota peoples in clear opposition to these popular fixtures in the American imagination. Author Ann Nolan Clark poses the title like an answer to a question. The adverb “still” and present tense verb “are” both respond directly to an historical uncertainty: will the buffalo continue to roam the plains, after being hunted to near extinction by white settlers in the second half of the nineteenth century (Krech)? Yes, the book insists, *There Still Are Buffalo*. Although *There Still Are Buffalo* only explicitly addresses the “vanishing” buffalo, not the allegedly “vanishing Indian,” Clark also immediately affirms the continued presence of the Lakota peoples. In the first stanza, Clark credits “the Sioux People [who] have set aside / a tract of their precious range land” as the agents in enabling the buffalo to “live again / in splendid right” (Clark, *There Still Are Buffalo* 5). For the buffalo to “still” exist, the Lakota people must “still” live alongside them, must have access to their own “splendid right[s].”

This mode of using the buffalo to resist the “vanishing Indian” trope activates a reading of the buffalo as a metaphor for the Lakota people themselves. Clark writes:

there still are buffalo  
living and dying  
and perhaps never knowing  
that they are fenced. (Clark, *There Still Are Buffalo* 6).

When Clark refers to the “fence” surrounding the buffalo, she implicitly gestures to the invisible, but still tangible borders around the reservations, to which the Lakota people were confined by the U.S. government. Like the buffalo, the Lakota people were herded together, denied the right to traverse the land they once lived on, supposedly for their own safety and good. This comparison points to the dehumanizing treatment the Lakota people suffered and endured. However, by conflating the Lakota people with the buffalo, a kind of animal, *There Still Are Buffalo* also perpetuates the very act of dehumanization it critiques. In contrast to the buffalo, the Lakota, as humans, are keenly aware “that they are fenced,” though the U.S. government might like them to forget who “fenced” them. Though language barriers and racial animosity might prevent some communication between the Lakota peoples and the U.S. government – the very challenge the *Indian Life Readers* sought to address – the thoughts, beliefs, and values of the Lakota are certainly not as impenetrable as the buffalos’ woolly heads.

Clark subtly addresses these tensions when she qualifies her initial claim:

But the Indians  
who keep [the buffalo]

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*Indian Life Readers: Sioux Series* when referring to the books, but I call the Lakota people by the name they autonomously chose. To me, thinking critically about historical publications, like the *Indian Life Readers*, and how they fit in structures of colonization and decolonization necessitates centering Indigenous peoples, their sovereignty, and their rights.

know  
 that the world changes  
 and the wild things  
 that know not how to change  
 must be fenced (Clark *There Still Are Buffalo* 6).

Yet, this clarification only further complicates *There Still Are Buffalo*. Even while it distinguishes between the “Indians” and the buffalo, this passage also urges the Lakota to accept the “changes” of the “world” – assimilation and urbanization – or else, because they refuse change, they remain “wild things” who “must be fenced.” This suggestion participates in the false “civilized” and “savage” binary that dominated the American imagination about Indigenous peoples by continuing to present Indigenous peoples who cling to their culture and languages as unintelligent, uncivilized savages.

While *There Still Are Buffalo* insists that the Lakota peoples protect the buffalo from extinction, the *Little Herder* books address an opposite fear that the Navajo people were exacerbating environmental change. In late 1930s and early 1940s, the Federal Government believed the Navajo peoples’ herding practices was a primary cause of the Dust Bowl (Benes 62). Beatty and Collier hoped the *Little Herder* book would intervene in ecological deterioration by subtly encouraging young Navajo people and their families to accept new practices that adhered to BIA policies dissuading herding (Clark, *Little Herder in Spring* 107). In an essay called “Bilingual Readers,” edited and republished in most of the *Indian Life Readers*, Beatty alludes to the Federal Government’s perspective when he writes, “Conservation of natural resources is a vital issue in many areas, where over-grazing and water and wind erosion are rapidly destroying the fertility of the soils” (Clark, *Little Herder in Spring* 107). The Navajo people adamantly disagreed, and they refuted that their herding practices were the cause of ecological harm (Benes 62).<sup>5</sup>

Clark most explicitly addresses this contentious debate in *Little Herder in Spring*, in which the protagonist watches her father attend a “meeting” where he will learn “if it is best / to have many sheep / or few sheep” (Clark, *Little Herder in Spring* 93). Although Clark was writing a book commissioned by the BIA, published and paid for by the Federal Government, she does not obviously forward the Federal Government’s position and, in fact, never resolves the issue of “many sheep” or “few sheep” Little Herder’s father introduces. By titling the books *Little Herder*, Clark links herding practices to the very identity of her protagonist, which suggests that wrenching herding from her and her people is an attack on her existence. Little Herder’s name, which reveals her deeply personal connection to herding, also emphasizes the fact that “herding

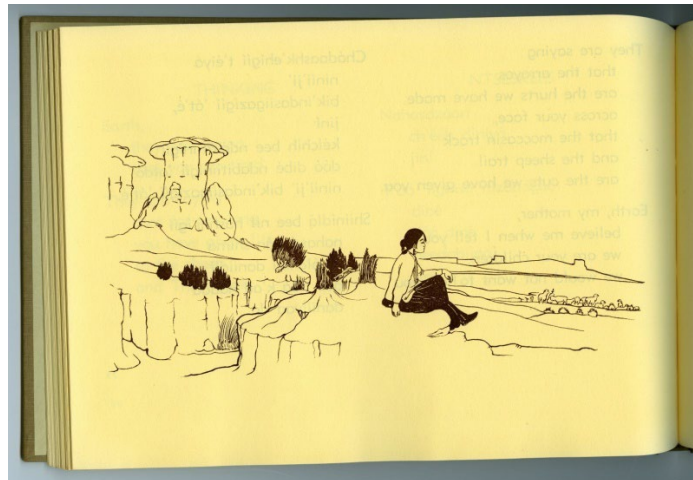
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<sup>5</sup> Careful investigation into the origins of the Dust Bowl reveal that widespread agriculture, not herding, was the primary cause of ecological deterioration (“Dust Bowl”). Ironically, the main contributing factor was improper agricultural practices of white settlers, who began farming on the Great Plains because of Federal policies that offered land for farming like the Homestead Act of 1862, the Kinkaid Act of 1904, and the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 (“Dust Bowl”).

sheep was children's work" in Navajo communities (Benes 62). By emphasizing the centrality of children in herding, and, implicitly in the disagreement between the Navajo peoples and the federal government, Clark reveals young people have, necessarily, been integrated into dialogues of resistance and change historically. When Little Herder reflects "Earth, / they are saying / that you are tired" (Clark, *Little Herder in Spring* 70), Clark continues to imbue her young readers with agency through her protagonists' bold response:

I am only little.  
 I cannot do big things,  
 but I can do this for you.  
 I can take my sheep to new pastures [...]  
 this way their little feet [...]  
 will not make the cuts  
 across your face  
 grow deeper" (Clark, *Little Herder in Spring* 73-74).

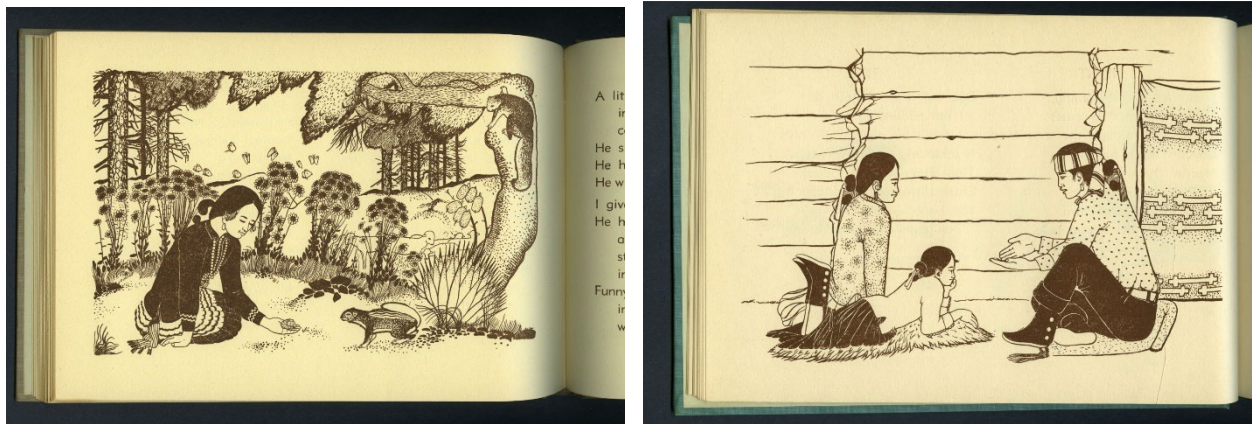
Notably Clark does not have Little Herder vow to give up her herding practices, as the BIA ultimately urged Navajo people to do. Instead, Little Herder seeks to "heal" the wounds of the Earth through a decidedly Navajo strategy: continuing herding but relocating her sheep to "new pastures." Little Herder's repeated use of singular first-person pronouns emphasizes her individual importance in creating change, through even the "little[st]" of her action, compelling young Navajo readers to recognize that their essential role in looking after "Earth, my mother" (Clark, *Little Herder in Spring* 75).



**Figure E:** In this illustration from *Little Herder in Spring* (1940), protagonist Little Herder delivers a mournful, yet emboldened apostrophe to "Earth, my mother" and vows to do what she can "to heal your cuts, / to make you / not so tired." This subtle and introspective moment signifies one of the most explicit allusions to the new herding policies the BIA attempted to enforce among the Navajo people in late 1930s and early 1940s.



Written by a woman about the matriarchal Navajo people, *Little Herder* boldly embraces its female heritage. Beyond Little Herder's occasional invocations to "Earth, my mother" Clark centralizes a young girl, Little Herder, as the protagonist and writes in a first-person perspective, ensuring the interiority of Little Herder drives the text, even as she keenly describes the world around her. Denetsosie's illustrations constantly reaffirm Little Herder's centrality. Human figures are not present in all of Denetsosie's drawings for the series, but, in the images with people, Denetsosie repeatedly situates Little Herder in the middle of the page, the focal point, where she demands to be seen (see Figure F). The covers of the series immediately establish this visual pattern. Little Herder is the only image on the covers of each book. With beige or teal cloth cover as the only background, Little Herder floats, deity-like, between the title and Clark's name, commanding the viewer's attention through her singularity (see Figure C).



**Figure F:** In his illustrations for the *Little Herder* series, Hoke Denetsosie regularly places the protagonist, the titular Little Herder, at the center and focal point of his compositions. These images from page 74 of *Little Herder* in Summer (left) and from page 29 of *Little Herder* in Winter (right) typify Little Herder's visual prominence.

In the few illustrations where Denetsosie deviates from this visual pattern, he does not desist from female strength. When Little Herder does not sit in the center of a composition, Little Herder's role model, her mother, occupies the focus of Denetsosie's drawings. In the final image of *Little Herder in Spring* (see Figure G), for example, Little Herder's mother looms over her daughter as she tucks her child into bed, her shadow cast dark behind her, a monumental female presence, simultaneously nurturing and unyielding (Clark, *Little Herder in Spring* 104). Relative to the protagonist and her mother, Little Herder's father only occasionally dominates an image, such as in the first illustration in *Little Herder in Summer*, in which Little Herder helps her father "pack the horses," "big enough" to carry the family's belongings to him, even if she is "too little" to secure them (Clark, *Little Herder in Summer* 8). Yet, female authority remains omnipotent, as Clark's prose poetically insists that Little Herder's father packs "My mother's possessions" (Clark, *Little Herder in Summer* 7, 9) so they can leave "My mother's hogan" (Clark, *Little Herder in Summer* 5, 10, 12).



**Figure G:** When Denetsosie does not position Little Herder at the focal point of his illustrations, he often centralizes her mother instead, such as in the final image from *Little Herder in Spring* (above).

Through a different avenue than Clark would later travel in *There Still Are Buffalo*, Denetsosie's careful compositions also resist the racist trope of the "vanishing Indian." Although some illustrations are absent human figures, Denetsosie's landscapes are always populated with evidence of Navajo presence. At the beginning of *Little Herder in Fall*, for instance, Clark focuses the reader's attention on "The land / around my mother's hogan," which Denetsosie draws speckled with the corn plants Little Herder and her family planted and the sheep's night corral nestled in the valley (Clark, *Little Herder in Spring* 5). Through such careful visual and linguistic insertions, Clark and Denetsosie powerfully refuse the reader the opportunity to imagine the landscape of the Southwest absent its Indigenous inhabitants; there are no "virgin lands" or "frontiers" for colonization by white settlers, only "my mother's" lived-in spaces.

## Part Five

### Children's Literature and the Intersectionality of Indigeneity and Gender, in Perspective

The unabashedly female-driven perspective of the *Little Herder* books proves especially remarkable in the context of early twentieth century children's culture and children's literature, which often link "Indianness" to masculinity. Situating the *Little Herder* books in their literary, cultural, and political context illuminates the profoundly exceptional nature of Clark and Denetsosie's accomplishment. It also provides an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the few other early twentieth century books that centered the voices of Indigenous women and girls, including, most notably, *Old Indian Legends* (1901) written by Zitkala-Sa and illustrated by Angel De Cora and *I am a Pueblo Indian Girl* (1939) by E-Yeh Shure.

In *Playing Indian*, author Philip Deloria traces a long and complicated history of non-Indigenous Americans performing "Indianness" to explore other American identities (Deloria 2). This phenomenon stretches from early European colonization into the present and includes

seemingly disparate historical moments, from the rebellious anti-British protestors who initiated the Boston Tea Party disguised in “Indian” garb (Deloria 5) to New Buffalo Commune, founded in 1968, whose members ate what they called “a Navajo diet” (Deloria 159). Although many communities<sup>6</sup> experimented with Indian-play, white men have been the most prominent and frequent perpetrators, often using “Indianness” to insist upon their rugged American masculinity (Deloria 8). From the turn of the twentieth century to mid-century, boys were central in this widespread phenomenon. Summer camps like Camp Chocorua – “America’s first boys’ camp” – and scouting programs like the Boy Scouts of America touted Indian-play as mechanism through which young, often white boys could simultaneously perform their masculinity and ward off the “effeminacy of the modern city” (Deloria 101-102).

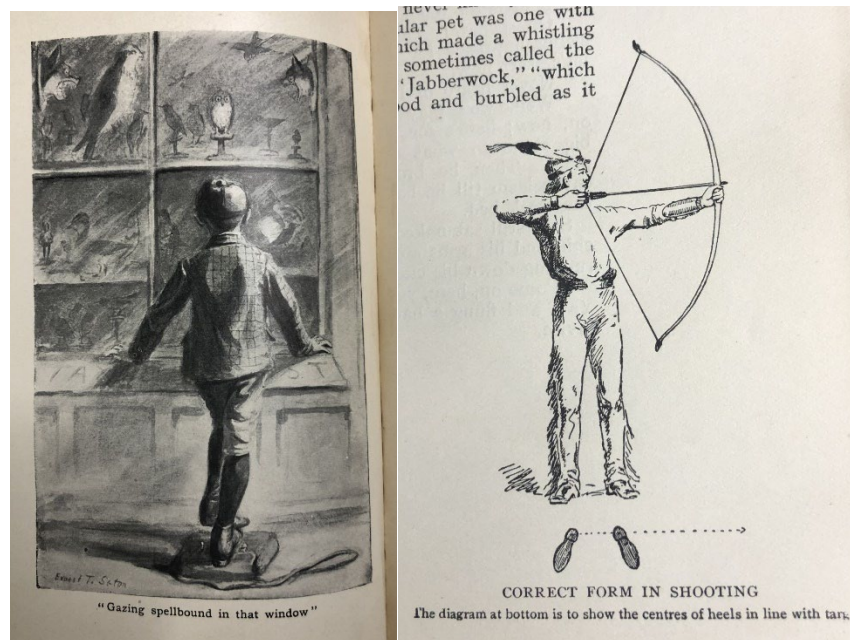
The rising popularity of camps and scouting in children’s culture directly informed the types of books published for young people and the way their authors portrayed Indigeneity, which stand in stark contrast to the *Indian Life Readers*. Ernest Thompson Seton, who founded the Woodcraft Indians in 1901 (Deloria 96) and co-founded the Boy Scouts of America in 1910 (Ellis and Knight 8), wrote prominent books with wildlife and “Indian” themes, which were beloved by early twentieth century boys (Ellis and Knight 8). Although it was itself a highly unusual book, crossing genres of autobiography, manual, novel, ethnography, and wildlife study, Seton’s *Two Little Savages: Being the Adventures of Two Boys Who Lived as Indians and What They Learned* (1903) exemplifies the intentions and impact of early twentieth century literature for boys. Quite aware of its form, *Two Little Savages* celebrates books as gateways to discovery, of both the self and the surrounding world. When Yan, one of the titular “little savages,” purchases “a work on the Birds of Canada” (Seton 32), his new book presents him with “the key to all the wonders and mystery of Nature” (Seton 34). This scene affirms the importance of the subgenre of books for boys Seton in which writes, positioning each work as a mechanism for empowering its readers by inducting them into the agential world of American manhood.

Yet, Seton’s narrator in *Two Little Savages* ultimately positions Yan’s new book as “the most worthless trash ever foisted on a torpid public” (Seton 34). Yan comes to this revelation after “five years,” during which he embarked into the natural world (Seton 34). Powerful as the imagination is to Seton, it is a hollow shadow of lived experience. A cynical reading interprets this as profiteering, an attempt by Seton to financially benefit from both book royalties and participation fees for the camps and scouting organizations he began to provide boys with an avenue into the outdoor experience Seton necessitates. More likely, Seton’s position is rooted in profound anxieties about gender, which Seton and his fellow authors, camp counselors, and scouting leaders attempted to alleviate through Indian-play and other outdoor activity. *Two Little Savages* expresses an uneasiness towards docile, urban boys, who read quietly indoors, occupying a sphere of domesticity and femininity, even as they consume books like Seton’s (see

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<sup>6</sup> Rachel Rubenstein and Alan Trachtenberg, for instance, explore the Jewish American’s appropriation of “Indianness” in *Members of the Tribe: Native America in the Jewish Imagination* and “Yiddish Hiawatha,” from *Shades of Hiawatha*. As Deloria briefly notes, participants in New Orleans Mardi Gras in New Orleans have, too, coopted Indian-play to investigate and celebrate both Americanness and “Afro-Caribbean cultural hybridity” (Deloria 8).

Figure G). Publicly, Seton argued that living like “the Red Man,” not just reading about him, instructs boys in a more desirable form of masculinity: bold, confident, adventurous, active (qtd. in Deloria 96). After being led into this rugged “Indian” life through the book, boys like Yan evolve, through performing “Indianness,” into models of a pre-modern, pre-industrial masculinity, forged through physical and intellectual prowess in the wilderness.<sup>7</sup>



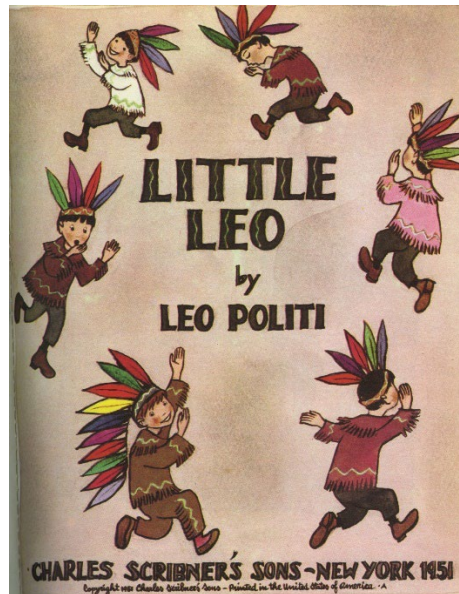
**Figure H:** When Yan’s only access to “Indians and wildlife” are the window of the game store and the book on Canadian birds, he squirms in his neat suit, confined (left). As he gains experience, Yan shifts away from the passive voyeur, towards activity and autonomy. In a diagram about “correct form in shooting” (right), which accompanies a scene where Yan and his companions toil to master archery, Yan’s maturation into manhood is physically obvious. With his feet confidently placed, shoulders back and spin tall, and an “Indian” feather standing erect on his head, Yan achieves the “correct form” for manhood, itself, while performing the manly act of “shooting” a bow and arrow.

Seton’s vision informed mid-twentieth century works of children’s literature, as some boys who grew up “playing Indian” incorporated this gendered practice into children’s books they wrote as adults. In the autobiographical *Little Leo* (1951), for example, author and illustrator Leo Politi presents “play[ing] Indian” as appealing to a universal childhood desire. The teacher in *Little Leo*’s village in Italy bemoans that “the children can think of nothing else” but *Little Leo*’s “Indian costume.” Although *Little Leo* is surrounded by a group of children – both boys

<sup>7</sup> Ironically, Seton’s hyper-masculine text, *Two Little Savages*, was adapted from a regular column that he wrote throughout 1902 for *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, a periodical decidedly oriented towards femininity (Deloria 96-97). Even in their titles, Seton’s articles refused the intended female readership of *The Ladies’ Home Journal* by centering the “boy” identity; Seton called his column “Ernest Thompson Seton’s Boys” (*The Ladies* 212, 557) and, in his editorial position for the magazine, Seton was referred to as “Head of a Regular Department for Boys” (*The Ladies* 28). Yet, as much as Seton attempts to center masculinity, Seton’s audience of boys could only navigate to his articles in *The Ladies’ Home Journal* through close contact with femininity. To be exposed to Seton’s writings, a boy would have to be first presented with the magazine by a female authority, his mother, after she encountered it in her own reading, or a boy would need to choose, of his own volition, to look through a women’s magazine.



and girls – in the illustration of Leo walking through the village and Leo explaining “his exciting stories about cowboys and Indians,” only the boys are shown acting on their fascination. When Little Leo shows the other children how to make their own “Indian” costumes, Politi only depicts the male children donning costumes and “play[ing] Indian.” In the image on the title page (see Figure I), for example, only boys run giddily in their “Indian” costumes. The gendered experience of “play[ing] Indian” also infiltrates Little Leo’s own acquisition of his “Indian costume.” While Leo’s sister and mother, respectively, get “a lovely blue bonnet” and “a big hat trimmed with roses,” feminine-coded objects, Leo’s father gives Leo “the thing he wanted most of all – an Indian Chief Suit” (Politi).



**Figure I:** The title page of *Little Leo* (1951) by Leo Politi exemplifies the practice of “Indian play” as a gender-segregated pursuit.

Politi also figures “Play[ing] Indian” as a decidedly democratic pursuit. By encouraging other children to participate in the game and to assume the “Indian” identity, *Little Leo* confers both American democratic ideals (the self-made man and access to an American Dream) and American identity (that of the American “Indian”) on the Italian children. Notably, this overlaps with Politi’s presentation of “playing Indian” as a universal, but still gendered pursuit. Because only the boys “play Indian,” they are the only children with access to the American ideals and democratic pursuit the experience enacts.

The erasure and misrepresentation of Indigenous women and girls persists in mainstream Native American children’s literature, which illuminates continually exceptional nature of female-driven stories like the *Little Herder* books. Arguably, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) and *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1960) represent the most well-known and well-read children’s books about Indigenous characters and experiences since the mid-twentieth century, when books like *Little Leo* and *Two Little Savages* gradually began to wane in popularity. Both *True Diary* and *Island*, however, continue to privilege male voices and peddle in stereotypes about Native American women.

With 318 appearances on *The New York Times* best sellers list, the fifteenth most of any book between 2008 and 2020, Sherman Alexie's National Book Award winning novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* remains the most widely read and celebrated children's book about an Indigenous protagonist written by an Indigenous author (Jensen). Yet, female characters (both white and Indigenous) remain auxiliary in *True Diary*, defined by their relationships to men and perceived only through the male gaze. Rather than regularly being referred to by name, female characters are often tethered by possessive pronouns to the novel's protagonist, a fourteen-year-old boy named Junior. The most important female characters are almost exclusively called "my big sister" (Alexie 26, 37, 89, 177, 201) or "my grandmother" (Alexie 68, 154, 177). Mary, Junior's sister, even signs the messages she writes to him as "your Big Sis" (Alexie 134) or "Your sis, Mary," relinquishing her autonomy and designating herself as an extension of Junior (Alexie 100). The only exception to this pattern, Penelope, Junior's love interest, is regularly objectified. Junior's descriptions of Penelope frequently linger on her body – "totally, absolutely gorgeous" (Alexie 59) and "sexy" (Alexie 111). Penelope fulfills Junior's fantasies of "the curves of imaginary women," quite literally becoming those "curves" in the flesh (Alexie 26).

Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins* is perhaps the only book with an Indigenous subject to rival the *True Diary* in popularity and acclaim in the second half of the twentieth century and in the twenty-first century. *Island* reached a broad readership since winning the 1961 Newbery Medal and was listed as among "the ten best American children's books of the past 200 years" by the Children's Literature Association in 1976 (Reese). I first encountered *Island* as required reading in my fourth-grade class, a testament to its well-documented popularity among educators (Reese). Recent scholarship from Debbie Reese, Diann Baecker, and Kristen Gregory contests the popular embrace of *Island* both as a work of "female empowerment" and positive representation of Indigenous experiences (Tarr). Although Karana, the novel's protagonist, embodies resilience, courage, and independence in her solitary life on the titular island, O'Dell tames both the woman and the "Indian" in Karana through a trajectory towards docile maternity and Christianization (Tarr), a twist on Captain Richard H. Pratt's famous call to "kill the Indian to save the man" (qtd. in Trachtenberg 39). Karana also exemplifies the "positive stereotype of a Native American – stoic and strong, poetic in language," a female embodiment of the "noble savage" stereotype, which earlier writers like Seton, Henry Wordsworth Longfellow, and James Fenimore Cooper branded into American imaginings as the "Indian" (Tarr). In the "Author's Note," O'Dell explicitly defines Karana as a female version of another established male archetype – not a fresh, decidedly individual heroine – when he refers to her as "The girl Robinson Crusoe" (O'Dell 182).



## Part Six

### The Better to Assimilate you with, my Dear: Converting Oral Traditions into Written Forms

Oral storytelling represents an essential mode of expression for many Indigenous peoples (Sium and Ritskes v). In the foreword to Rebeca Benes' *Native American Picture Books of Change*, Gloria Emerson underscores the significance of oral storytelling to Indigenous identity when she writes, "Tampering with indigenous oral story forms tampers with the authenticity of the indigenous voice" (Benes x). According to Emerson, the written form amputates narrative from other culturally crucial elements of Native storytelling. Among these aspects, Emerson cites the social contexts in which stories are shared and the dynamism and nuance permitted by each teller's individual style (Benes x).

Books like *Taytay's Tales* (1922) by Elizabeth DeHuff and *Old Father, the Storyteller* (1960) by Pablita Velarde forge a subgenre of Native American children's books that pay homage to the importance of Native peoples' oral traditions, passed down generationally. By centering "Taytay"<sup>8</sup> and "Old Father" in their titles, DeHuff and Velarde credit elders as repositories for knowledge and invite young people to access the wisdom of their ancestors in a new form: books. In the foreword to *Old Father, the Storyteller*, Velarde describes herself as "one of the fortunate children," able "to hear stories firsthand from Great-grandfather or Grandfather." Mourning that she and her generation "were probably the last" young Pueblo people to have this opportunity, Velarde presents *Old Father, the Storyteller* as a mechanism to "preserve" Old Father's stories by continuing to communicate them, even if in a different medium. Yet, Velarde insists that a book, ink and paint on paper, provide an insufficient "glimpse" into the reciprocal relationship between young people and elders that "used to be" central to the storytelling process (Velarde 17). Velarde's book may be "beautifully illustrated" and "charmingly written," according to biography of Velarde laid into the edition Denison purchased as part of my project ("The Story of Pablita"). However, *Old Father, the Storyteller* cannot compare to the cosmic abilities of "Old Father" himself, speaking his stories into the fabric of the universe (see Figure V).

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<sup>8</sup> "Taytay" is a Pueblo word for "grandfather" (Benes 7).



**Figure J:** Velarde repeatedly emphasizes the chasm between her achievement in *Old Father*, the Storyteller and the power of the stories conveyed orally. To do this, she presents “Old Father” as a superhuman, a deific figure. In the first full-page illustration (above), Velarde paints “Old Father” as physically larger-than-life, towering over his audience. His body swells, growing larger to mirror his important social position in the community. As he reaches his hand to point to a constellation, “Old Father” appears to touch the sky itself, suggesting that, through his stories, he can manipulate the very cosmos.

The production of the *Indian Life Readers: Navajo Series* directly corresponds with the creation of an early written form of Diné Bizaad, the Navajo language, and a movement away from the oral modes of storytelling (Benes 58). In the nineteenth century, prior to the conception of the *Indian Life Readers*, the Judeo-Christian Bible was translated orally into Diné Bizaad and transcribed phonetically by Protestant missionaries using a system known as the International Phonetic Alphabet. Yet, these translations were anomalies, and Diné Bizaad persisted as a purely oral language, with no common written form, until the late 1930s (Benes 57). Willard Beatty realized a written version of Diné Bizaad would be necessary to achieve his goal of creating bilingual books for Navajo children. Consequently, Robert W. Young and William Morgan developed practical alphabet – called an orthography by linguists – for Diné Bizaad (Benes 58).

Significantly, the *Indian Life Readers: Navajo Series* recognize John P. Harrington and Robert W. Young as the source of each book’s “Linguistics”<sup>9</sup> (see Figure K). The *Indian Life Readers* likely emphasize Harrington’s name for several reasons. Firstly, Beatty originally selected Harrington to complete the project; Young and Morgan only became involved after Harrington hired Young as his assistant. As a leading voice for the Bureau of Ethnography at the Smithsonian Museum, Harrington was a significantly more recognizable figure in linguistics of Indigenous languages, so attaching his name to the *Indian Life Readers* imbued the project with greater authority. The omission of Morgan, however, is notable in a text that presumes to center

<sup>9</sup> In “Bilingual Readers,” Beatty clarifies that he uses “Linguistics” to credit the labor of transforming Diné Bizaad into a written language and the “re-expression” of Clark’s English text “in Navaho style and idiom” (qtd. in Clark, *Who Wants to be a Prairie Dog?* 66).

Indigenous experiences. Morgan was the only main contributor to the Diné Bizaad orthography who himself identified as either Navajo or Indigenous (Benes 58). This glaring exclusion likely stems from the intersection of Morgan's Indigeneity and his relative youth during his involvement in the orthography project. Morgan was just twenty when he began working on the Diné Bizaad alphabet in 1937 ("Timeline"). Young, at twenty-five, was not much older than Morgan, but he was earning his graduate degree in anthropology at the University of New Mexico when he started working with Harrington, a credential that Morgan, who just graduated high school, lacked (Benes 58). The *Indian Life Reader's* erasure of Morgan represents a form of the infantilization and tokenism experienced by Indigenous artists and thinkers working in the first half of the twentieth century. Fortunately, Morgan has been widely recognized for his contributions outside of the *Indian Life Readers*, including by the Navajo Nation Council, who honored Morgan and Young in a 1996 public ceremony ("Timeline").



**Figure K:** Although he and Robert W. Young were the primary creators of the Diné Bizaad orthography, William Morgan was not credited alongside his co-collaborator for his contributions to the “Linguistics” of the *Indian Life Readers: Navajo Series*. This omission can be seen in the title page from Denison Library’s copy of the first printing (September 1940) of *Who Wants to be a Prairie Dog?* written by Ann Nolan Clark and illustrated by Andrew “Van” Tsinnijinnie.

In addition to the Diné Bizaad orthography, Young and Morgan also contributed a lesser-known book, called *Coyote Tales*, to the *Indian Life Readers: Navajo Series* (Benes 77). *Coyote Tales* began as a passion project for Young, who was inspired by the “old men [who told me Coyote stories]” when he visited the Navajo Nation (qtd. in Benes 77). After Young collected the tales in 1942 into a “mimeographed booklet” written in Diné Bizaad, Morgan became involved, providing illustrations and assisting Young in translating the book into English. The U.S. Office of Indian Affairs published *Coyote Tales* in 1946, making it one of the few *Indian Life Readers* released after World War II. Willard Beatty’s successor as Director of Education, Hildegard Thompson, collaborated with *Who Wants to be a Prairie Dog?* illustrator Andrew

Tsinajinnie on an adaptation of Young and Morgan's book, published in 1949 (Benes 77). Although neither Young and Morgan's *Coyote Tales* nor Thompson and Tsinajinnie's *Coyote Tales* was donated with the Baruch Collection, I helped the library locate copies them, and they can now be found in the Denison Collection beside the other *Indian Life Readers*.

Its point of origin – in the stories told by Navajo elders – differentiates *Coyote Tales* from the other *Indian Life Readers*. Clark's contributions were fictional stories, born of her imagination (Benes 83) and based in her experiences teaching Pueblo and Navajo students (Benes 36) and in field research among the Lakota peoples (Benes 81, 83). *Field Mouse Goes to War* (1944) and *Little Hopi* (1948), the two books that make up the *Indian Life Readers: Hopi Series*, are the only other *Indian Life Readers* to find a source in Native peoples' oral traditions (Benes 97). This detail clarifies an important aspect of Young and Morgan's orthography. In addition to paying careful attention to the mechanics of the Diné Bizaad language, Young and Morgan's work also notices and respects an essential way Navajo people use that language in practice: communicating wisdom across generations through oral storytelling. *Coyote Tales* attempts to translate this culturally invaluable practice into a new written form, creating a precedent for later books like *Old Father, the Storyteller*; *Gullible Coyote* (1985); and *Coyote and the Winnowing Birds* (1994) that would embark on similar projects in the second half of the twentieth century.

The influence of Young and Morgan's work cannot be understated, as their orthography remains "the only Navajo alphabet in common use today" (Benes 58). The bilingual *Little Herder* books (1940) and *Who Wants to be a Prairie Dog?* (1940) were among the earliest published texts that used Young and Morgan's alphabet, appearing in BIA day schools for Navajo children even before Young and Morgan's first major lexicon, *The Navaho Language* (1943; 1980), was released (Kari and Leer 124). As a catalyst for the creation of a written version of Diné Bizaad, the *Indian Life Readers: Navajo Series* point to Native American children's books as ripe territory for both unpacking the legacy of the printed word as a complex mechanism of colonialism and exploring possibilities for Indigenous authors and their allies to reclaim the written form as a part of decolonization efforts.

The BIA's *Indian Life Readers* participate in a centuries-long effort among colonizing forces to use books printed in Indigenous languages as an avenue for disseminating European and Protestant values. This process can be traced to the Eliot Indian Bible (1663), a version of the Judeo-Christian Bible translated into "a local Algonkian language"<sup>10</sup> by British-born pastor John Eliot (Blumenthal 3). The language of *conversion* helpfully illustrates the impact of texts like the *Indian Life Readers* and the Eliot Indian Bible that transcribed Native people's oral languages into written forms. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the verb "convert" means "To turn or change *into* something of different form or properties; to transform" ("convert," def. 11). When Young and Morgan *converted* Diné Bizaad from an oral to a written language, they "transform[ed]" it through an act of inversion, replacing the "properties" of oral

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<sup>10</sup> The Algonquian languages are a family of more thirty languages spoken by the geographically and culturally diverse Indigenous peoples of North America, including the Ojibwe, Blackfoot, and Mohican peoples, who are sometimes collectively known as the Algonquian ("Algonquian Language Family").

storytelling, as enumerated by Emerson, with the different “properties” of the written form. A fundamentally changed language emerges.

This process of *conversion* connotes a change in the moral value of the transformed object. “Convert” is often used in religious contexts to describe the rejection of old belief system in adopting a new faith, especially Christianity. For instance, the Eliot Indian Bible ultimately aimed to establish Indigenous peoples as “the Lord’s people, ruled by Him alone in all things” (Blumenthal 3). Through the phrase “alone in all things,” Eliot insists that the Christian religion cannot coexist with Indigenous belief systems. For a Native person to subscribe to Christianity, they must replace “all” other objects of worship with God “alone.” In this framework, the experience of *conversion* signifies a linear progression from one state to another, implicitly “from error or ignorance” and towards “truth” (“convert,” def. 9). Regardless of the intentions of Beatty and his linguists, the very process of *conversion* itself represents a corrective act that facilitates a transition from perceived deficiency to wholeness. Consequently, the *converted* written form of Diné Bizaad recalls racist tropes, in which the white colonizer intervenes in the ways of a “primitive” or “savage” people to “civilize” and “save” them.

Beatty desired the Diné Bizaad orthography to be composed primarily of the letters used in the English alphabet (Benes 58). This was a practical choice; English-language typewriters and printing presses could print Diné Bizaad without alteration, decreasing the financial burden of the *Indian Life Readers* on the Department of the Interior. Even more, Navajo children at BIA schools learning to read and write in both languages would only have to master one character system, making it easier for students to become biliterate (Benes 58). However, as Navajo educator Wayne Holm points out, Beatty’s vision *converted* Diné Bizaad into a language that “looked more like English” (qtd. in Benes 58). An English-like orthography denied Navajo people the right to distinct linguistic identity, instead positioning Diné Bizaad as an appendage of the English alphabet. Written and oral languages are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as Christian and Indigenous belief systems are in Eliot’s model. However, when colonization introduces a written language, especially one that “looked more like English,” this European mode of expression competes for epistemological space with oral language. Through an English-like alphabet that acculturated Diné Bizaad readers to English literacy, the BIA gradually *converted* Navajo readers into increasingly “Americanized” individuals, defined by bicultural identities, not Indigeneity. Although they would still, fundamentally, be Navajo, Navajo readers would experience and practice their Navajo culture in increasingly more American ways, by using a written language, or by raising crops, instead of livestock.

## Part Seven

### Shoving the Witch into the Oven: Decolonizing Children’s Literature

The ethical paradoxes that underpin the written form of Diné Bizaad raise essential questions about the future of books for and about Indigenous children: What, if any, is the role of removing the written form in the process of validating Indigenous oral traditions of storytelling?



Can the written forms of oral languages be reclaimed by Indigenous authors? In theory and practice, is the decolonization of children's literature possible?

The idea of epistemic injustice of colonialism provides one avenue for tackling these knotty questions. Miranda Fricker coined the term "epistemic injustice" in 2007 in a book of the same name. There, she defines epistemic injustice as "a wrong done to someone," especially women and people of color, "specifically in their capacity as a knower" (Fricker 1). Later scholars, including Rajeev Bhargava, author of "Overcoming the Epistemic Injustice of Colonialism," situate Fricker's term in a postcolonial studies framework (Bhargava 413). According to Bhargava, epistemic injustice is a form of oppression that colonizers enact on colonized people alongside more recognizable, tangible forms of colonization, such as physical displacement (Bhargava 413). It is a kind of colonization of the mind, or colonization of the imagination, in which "the concepts and categories by which a people understand themselves and their world is replaced or adversely affected by the concepts and categories of the colonizers" (Bhargava 413). The written forms of Indigenous languages, like the Diné Bizaad orthography and the bilingual *Indian Life Readers*, exemplify the epistemic injustice of colonization. As Velarde describes in her foreword to *Old Father, the Storyteller*, Indigenous peoples' oral processes of sharing information, necessarily, are supplanted by written records, a more "American" mode of communicating knowledge.

Bhargava identifies a root of this ethical dilemma when he interrogates an often-overlooked consequence of the epistemic injustice of colonialism: the knowledge systems introduced by the colonizer can fuse with those practiced by the colonized peoples (Bhargava 416). This "deep imprint of western domination and hegemony" produces culturally hybrid thinkers, to whom "western thought is both recognizably their own *and* alien" (Bhargava 416). Without negating the ongoing importance of oral culture to Indigenous communities or misconstruing a written language as inevitable or necessary for a complex society, a reader may view twentieth century children's books created by and for Indigenous peoples as an actualization of Bhargava's framework. Although the book form has long served as a mechanism for colonization, Indigenous stories that are printed on paper, rather than conveyed orally, do not inherently represent an embrace of the colonizer and a revocation of Indigenous culture. Instead, these works boldly reappropriate the colonizer's tool into an avenue for widely communicating Indigenous knowledge.

Thus, although they assume a form introduced by colonizers, books by Indigenous people, in Native languages or in English, do not exert the same colonizing influence as books written by non-Native authors. In "Bilingual Readers," Beatty writes that the written form of Diné Bizaad and books like the *Indian Life Readers* that propagate it will, hopefully, "facilitate the spread of information which will help the Navaho" (Clark, *Little Herder in Autumn* pp. 89). The *Indian Life Readers* were made possible by the Indigenous illustrators, linguists, translators, and storytellers who supported Beatty's vision. However, the *Indian Life Readers* do not "facilitate" an equal exchange of "information" between white creators and their Indigenous co-collaborators, much less between the predominantly white creative team and the books' Indigenous readers. As Beatty's language reveals, *Indian Life Readers* position white creators as



possessors of knowledge, which they generously share to “help” the implicitly innocent and ignorant Indigenous reader. Books written by Indigenous authors inherently refuse and renegotiate this script and, with it, the racist narrative of the white savior, who educates the “ignorant savage.”

Pablita Velarde said her book *Old Father, the Storyteller* arose from her belief that “it would be a good thing if an Indian wrote an Indian book” (qtd. in Velarde 13). Velarde’s project, making “an Indian book,” subverts the framework of ethnographic objectivity that policed nineteenth and early twentieth century books about Indigenous peoples. This system assumes that white writers who observed Indigenous subjects scientifically could convey “Indianness” with less bias than a person who was emotionally entangled with Indigenous peoples (Deloria 93). In direct opposition, Velarde locates herself as an expert because she is an “Indian,” because there are no gaps between her identity and her subject. By claiming this position – author, authority – which has been historically denied to Indigenous peoples, Velarde assumes the place Beatty implicitly denied Native peoples in “Bilingual Readers.” Though “Old Father” cannot tell his stories orally to new generations of Pueblo children, Velarde intervenes in the loss. She shares his wisdom, and, in doing so, she “facilitates the spread of” decidedly Indigenous “knowledge,” providing the means for her people to continue “help[ing]” themselves.

Upon being founded in 1967, the Navajo Curriculum Center expanded upon Velarde’s dream when it provided a space where many “Indian[s]” could write, illustrate, and publish multiple “Indian book[s].” The Navajo Curriculum Center was formed and run by an all-Navajo team to provide books for Navajo students at Rough Rock Demonstration School, which was founded 1966 with a goal of supplying Navajo young people with an education that celebrated their culture and language (Benes 132). Robert A. Roessel, Jr., one of the founders of the Rough Rock Demonstration School and the Navajo Curriculum Center, described these publishing efforts as an active resistance to mainstream children’s literature. According to Roessel, Navajo Curriculum Center publications like *Lucy Learns to Read* (1969) and *Navajo Biographies* (1970) offered an alternative to mainstream children’s literature, which centered on the “average American child,” who was “blond-haired” and “blue eyed” (qtd. in Benes 131-132). Notably, the Navajo Curriculum Center’s project refused patriarchy, as it did white supremacy. Roessel rejected the model of the child “running to meet their father when he comes home from work” as an expectation of the “average American child” (qtd. in Benes 131-132).

Navajo Curriculum Center publications have much in common with the *Indian Life Readers*. Like the *Indian Life Readers*, they sought to provide Indigenous young people with reading material that accurately and empathetically reflected their experiences and celebrated their Indigeneity. Often, the Navajo Curriculum Center used bilingual books to achieve this goal (Benes 132). However, despite the similarities between the two bodies of works, the Navajo Curriculum Center publications contain power that their predecessors, the *Indian Life Readers* lack because they operate through an unabashedly Indigenous perspective. By embracing the written form, the Navajo Curriculum Center books provide children with the practical skills of “a modern education” that enables them to negotiate a world outside the Navajo Nation. Yet, this decision does not compromise the Navajo Curriculum Center’s fierce loyalty to Navajo tradition

(qtd. in Benes 131). Books like the Navajo Curriculum Center publications that are written by and for Indigenous peoples represent a radical act of resistance, an inherent challenge to the colonial structures that desires a total irradiation of Indigenous peoples and culture.

## Part Eight

### Expanding the Denison Library Collections

My project also aspired to continually enrich Denison's holdings, rather than passively interact with pre-existing collections. To accomplish this goal, I created a suggested list (see below) of children's books to add to the Denison collections.<sup>11</sup> By the end of August 2021, when my internship officially concluded, Denison had already acquired eighteen of the twenty-eight books I recommended. To show this, I updated the list by dividing it into two categories: books from the list that Denison purchased and books that will hopefully join the collections in the future.

When identifying the most important titles to add to the Denison collections, I decided to focus on historically and culturally important, yet underrecognized texts. Many of the books on the list were originally published by small and independent presses, especially those owned and run by communities of color, like *Lucy Learns to Weave* (1969). *Lucy Learns to Read* was written and illustrated by an all-Navajo creative team and published the Navajo Curriculum Center. Others were not widely recognized, even if they were distributed by mainstream publishers. *I am a Pueblo Indian Girl* (1939), "one of the earliest children's books to be both written and illustrated by Native Americans" (Benes 27), was published by William Morrow, with sponsorship by the National Gallery of the American Indian (Benes 26). Although *The Horn Book Magazine* lauded it as a "lovely book" (Jordan 51) and published an excerpt (Shure, "Beauty" 94), it predicted the book's unenthusiastic reception (Benes 26, 33) by mainstream (white) American readers when the reviewer wrote "Probably the book's appeal will be more to adults than to children" (Jordan 51). In their new home at Denison, I hope books like *Lucy Learns to Weave* and *I am a Pueblo Indian Girl* begin to receive the attention they deserve, from young readers and scholars alike.

In my selection process, I also chose titles that complement the already existing collections at Denison and fill gaps and oversights in the library's holdings. For instance, my list prioritizes books that center female voices, especially the voices of women and girls of color. Most of the books added through this project will be catalogued and shelved in Juvenilia, Denison's collection of rare children's books. However, many books on my list thematically

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<sup>11</sup> Officially, this list represents a final product of the Arthur Vining Davis Library Internship. However, my work identifying and selecting titles also overlaps with the research I did for the Mellon IHI Fellowship, a second source of funding I received this summer. Although some titles are more relevant to one of the two projects, all the books relate to the broader goal that unite both: increasing awareness of and access to twentieth-century American children's books that center people with identities historically erased and misrepresented in children's literature.

overlap with the Ida Rust Macpherson Collection, “the earliest major collection by and about women at any women’s college in the United States” (“Ida Rust Macpherson”).

**Books Added to the Denison Collections During Summer 2021 (in alphabetical order):**

- *Coyote and the Winnowing Birds* (1994) based on a story told by Eugene Sekaquaptewa, translated and edited by Emory Sekaquaptewa & Barbara Potter, illustrated by Hopi children from the Hotevilla-Bacavi Community School
- *Gullible Coyote* (1985) based on stories narrated by Michael Lomatuway’ma, translated by Ekkehard Malotki, illustrated by Anne-Marie Malotki
- *The Higher Power of Lucky* (2006) written by Susan Patron and illustrated by Matt Phelan
- *In My Mother’s House* (1941) written by Ann Nolan Clark, illustrated by Velino Herrera
- *Indian Life Readers*
  - *Coyote Tales* (1946) written by Robert W. Young and illustrated by William Morgan
  - *Coyote Tales* (1949) written by Hildegard Thompson and illustrated by Andrew Tsinajinnie
  - *Singing Sioux Cowboy* (1947) written by Ann Nolan Clark and illustrated by Andrew Standing Soldier
  - *Young Hunter of Picuris* (1943) written by Ann Nolan Clark and illustrated by Percy Sandy
- *Kappa’s Tug-of-War with Big Brown Horse: The Story of a Japanese Water Imp* (1962) written by Dorothy Walter Baruch and illustrated by Sanryo Sakai
- *Kobo and the Wishing Pictures* (1964) written by Dorothy Walter Baruch and illustrated by Yoshie Noguchi.
- *Little Brown Baby* (1895) written by Paul Laurence Dunbar
- *Lucy Learns to Weave: Gathering Plants* (1969) written by Virginia Hoffman and illustrated by Hoke Denetsosie
- *M.C. Higgins, the Great* (1974) written by Virginia Hamilton
- *Old Father, the Storyteller* (1960) written and illustrated by Pablita Velarde
- *Stevie* (1969) written and illustrated by John Steptoe
- *The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit* (1987) written by Julius Lester and illustrated by Jerry Pinkney
- *Umbrella* (1949) written and illustrated by Taro Yashima
- *Uncle Remus: The Complete Tales* (1999) written by Julius Lester and illustrated by Jerry Pinkney

**Books to Acquire (in alphabetical order):**

- *Clarence and Corinne; or, God’s Way* (1890) written by Amelia E. Johnson
- *I am a Pueblo Indian Girl* (1939) written by E-Yeh Shure (Blue Corn) and illustrated by Allan Houser, Gerald Nailor, and Quincy Tahoma
- *Indians Life Readers*

- *Little Boy with Three Names (Taos)* (1940) written by Ann Nolan Clark and illustrated by Tonita Lujan
- *Little Hopi* (1948) written by Edward A. Kennard and illustrated by Charles Loloma
- *Little Man's Family* (1940) written by J.B. Enoch and illustrated by Gerald Nailor
- *Little Navajo Bluebird* (1942) written by Ann Nolan Clark and illustrated by Paul Lantz
- *Old Indian Legends* (1901) written by Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin) and illustrated by Angel de Cora
- *Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti* (1932) written by Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes, illustrated by E. Simms Campbell
- *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry* (1976) written by Mildred D. Taylor
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