

Gabrielle Giles

TE 849

4.2

The stories and articles viewed this week had race, ethnicity, and cultural themes. There were nonfiction texts, articles, and historical fiction stories that depicted the mistreatment of Native Americans in The United States of America in the early 1900s. Reflecting back on the stories, I am glad to have read them. Growing up in elementary, middle, and high school the stories we read that informed us of the historical mistreatment of groups of people usually were written around those of Jewish, Mexican, and African American descent. Each History class, Literature class, and Social Studies course shared stories, facts, and novels that depicted of people of African, Jewish and Latino descent, however I never viewed Abenaki. We heard about the earliest American times, where the explorers and colonists took the Native people's land and killed many, however I had never read a text that stressed the cruelty they faced in the 1900s. Of course it made sense, and I knew of it, however I had never read children's books based off of those stories. When reflecting on what I learned, I would say that I am now more aware of the cruelty shown to the Natives, the Abenaki cultural ways, and have heard different viewpoints on the types of books to incorporate into my classroom library to share with students. I feel I now have resources that can determine which text is the most accurate and relevant story to share with students. The article written by Bishop, *Selecting Literature for a Multicultural Curriculum*, is an article I will use as a references as it helps to evaluate the correct text for the classrooms. I want to share these stories with my second grade students, however I do question the appropriateness of the stories based off of the young age group I have. I want them to be informed, but the texts we viewed this week may be too advanced for my 7 year olds. For example, I would read *Hidden Roots* instead of *The Darkness under the Water* because I feel it is more age appropriate, however has the same theme and facts that correlate to the mistreatment to the Abenaki people. All of my students are African American and are well informed of their culture historically, as we have read and discussed the challenges and battles overcome by African Americans, so I know they will have an open mind as I shared these stories to them.

The article *Continuing Dilemmas, Debates, and Delights in Multicultural Literature* written by Harris, is one that referenced my above discussion on incorporating more cultural and historical stories of different races and groups of people. The theme of this article shared the connection two women from different cultures had over a story. I foresee this happening in my class if I share a story based off of the Abenaki history, as my students are young, but very well aware of the mistreatment of African Americans years ago, and still occurring today. I think they will feel a connection to the story, and an appreciation to hear about other cultural traditions and

beliefs, as the two women did within the article. Incorporating multicultural literature into my classroom will be important because it will give my young readers an opportunity to self reflect on their own lives, beliefs, and opinions of others, while also comparing their lives and experiences to people from different places. Reading stories from other cultures, and hearing their stories have the reader ask the what if questions. I know they will enjoy reading texts about other people's cultures, lives, way of living, and experiences. The discussion and debate to give children the opportunity to read literature is pointless if children do not have the opportunity to even view these type of texts.

The second article that I will incorporate as I expand my classroom library was also written by Reese, *Native Americans in Children's' Literature*. Once again we viewed the theme of cruelty among the Native Americans in our history. I also learned about the Abenaki ways within this particular article. It was a good idea to read the articles first to get a background on the cultural views and beliefs of these people before reading a story. I will open the unit with my second graders by discussing facts I learned within this article about the hardships of the Abenaki people. In early Literature Native Americans were drawn and created to be characters that were called savages, and were drawn as villains, evil creatures that were killing Europeans, scalping colonists, and a terror to all Europeans. Authors drew stories that made it seem that the land had been uninhabited, making the Europeans look innocent, however the truth is that they were there first, and that is their land. As I discussed that Native Americans in Children's Literature were looked at as savages, the textbook discusses the villain in a classic story written by Mark Twain. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* has a character who is a villain. He is half Native American, and a thief and murderer. The Natives are referenced in the story *Peter Pan and Wendy* as red skins, and finally, even in 1980s, *The Indian in the Cupboard* depicts a character that embodies many stereotypes of Native Americans and uses broken English. Reese's article will help me choose stories for my classroom library with scrutiny, as there is a need to ensure that the books are socially and historically correct, not one that was created early on drawing the Native Americans with incorrect and cruel representations. As the textbook states, "The representation of different races, ethnicities, or cultures in children's literature involves a complex set of issues that demand we read critically, and think carefully." (Hintz and Tribunella) This article helps readers choose books with that in mind. Lastly, this article taught me that it is important to share Abenaki cultural stories with children because native children must learn that being Indian is not mutually exclusive, and non native children must learn that Native Americans are alive and well!

The textbook shares that although there are too many texts that give the wrong depiction a representation of Native Americans, there is a prominent, trustworthy Native American writer named Joseph Bruchac, who writes historically accurate depictions of the Abenaki. He has published multiple folk-tales and novels about the lives of Native Americans. Bruchac's stories

each shared similar themes that I recognized within the numerous texts, the mistreatment of the Abenaki people. Not only was I informed of the cruelty of the Native Americans, but I was also introduced to the ways and beliefs of the Abenaki. I will be implementing both stories into my classroom library to share with my students, as the articles say children should be introduced to multiple types of stories to self reflect and appreciate different cultures. Discussing Bruchac's themes, *Hidden Roots* and *Bowman's Store* each share a similarity as they allow the reader to view the mistreatment of the Native Americans. The main characters were forced to hide their Abenaki roots, and called themselves French Canadians, as the US Canadians were of dark complexion, in order to give themselves and their families a better life. Sonny does not know his Uncle Louis is his Abenaki Grandfather, as his family has chosen to hide their heritage in hopes of a better life for him. This is seen within *Bowman's Store*, as the grandfather tells people he is French Canadian, even though he is proud of his Abenaki ways, he hides it for a better life for him and his family. When townspeople ask why he is so dark, he simply says that US French Canadians are always dark. Times are very different between Joseph's life and Jesse's life, as Jesse had to hide his heritage, and even fight people who called him Indian, Joseph Bruchac is now a proud American Indian storyteller and author. The ways and beliefs of the Abenaki people were represented in each story. Family and Abenaki connections were represented in each. The relationship Uncle Louis had with Sonny and his mother in the story *Hidden Roots* reminded me of the strong connection between Joseph Bruchac and his grandfather in *Bowman's Store*. Each story also elaborated on the connection the Abenaki had with nature. The animals were appreciated, and the characters had a connection since birth with nature. Within *Hidden Roots*, Uncle Louis shares stories and beliefs with Sonny, as Sonny is raised without his Abenaki heritage. Uncle Louis is able to get close to wild animals, like deer, and knows much about nature and the land they live on. The connection to the land they live on was seen in *Bowman's Store*. The grandfather was able to pass on in peace once he knew that Joseph Bruchac, his grandson, was back home safe and on the family's land. *Hidden Roots* really emphasized on the mistreatment of the Abenaki people in the 1900s. Uncle Louis explains to Sonny that not only did he have to move from his home in Virginia because of the discrimination and cruel treatment of his people, but he lost his wife to it. He shares that his wife, Sophie, was tricked into undergoing a procedure that took away her ability to have children. It was done so terribly, that Louis does not know whether or not she died from the procedure, or a broken heart. This was the first text that shared the devastating force of sterilization of the Native Americans.

The final novel which shared the theme of the cruelty and mistreatment the Native Americans underwent is called *The Darkness Under The Water*, written by Beth Kanell which is a story about a girl, Molly, who struggles finding her identity due to the fact that her mother is French Canadian, however her father is Native American, and the time she is living in Virginia is a dangerous place for Abenaki. Similar to *Hidden Roots'* main character Sonny, Molly hides her heritage as an Abenaki person. She "brushes out the braid and looks pretty," which is a phrase

that means hiding the looks of Abenaki and blending in with the people in town. Molly and Sonny's family do this to have better lives and opportunities, as Sonny's father says "The only way the boy (Sonny) is going to do better than we did is if he leaves all of that behind. All of it!"

Sonny and Molly both at one point have hypocritical thoughts, as they are actually afraid of Native Americans for a brief moment in the stories, although they are Abenaki! Molly is attracted to a man named, Henry, but doesn't want to be seen with him by the townspeople because he is obviously Abenaki. Sonny has nightmares, and thinks the Native Americans will creep up on him. Lastly, Sonny blames the Native American people for his grandfather's forced move from his home, when in reality, it was due to the cruelty the townspeople used with the Abenaki.

Both characters have strained relationships with their parents. Sonny's is because of the decision to hide his Abenaki heritage. His father gets angry whenever Sonny makes Abenaki connections, and Molly has a strained relationship with her mother as she lives in the shadow of her dead sister.

The final, most devastating similarity these two texts had would correlate to the theme, the mistreatment and cruelty the Native Americans underwent, the sterilization of the Abenaki people by the government, in hopes to wipe out that particular race. We read about the horrible truth in *Hidden Roots* when Uncle Louis shares he is not Sonny's uncle, he is his grandfather. During their time in Vermont, his family was tricked into going to the clinic. They were desperate for help as Sophie, Louis' wife, had a miscarriage yet still wanted children. The doctors fooled them and operated to make each sterile, solely because the state of Vermont didn't want Native Americans reproducing. Grandpa Louis underwent this procedure, and did state that these individuals didn't treat him and his other Native American citizens as humans. Like the doctors in that story, the government nurses in *The Darkness Under The Water* trick Molly's mother and grandmother into their services. They come and inspect both women, and later return when Molly's mother is extremely sick and losing the baby. They deliver the stillborn baby early, at seven months, and afterwards Molly watches the nurse use a blade on her mother. She tries to fight her off, but the nurse argues that it has to be done, and fools her into thinking it's a procedure you do after the birth of a baby. Like Uncle Louis and his wife, they cut the mother so she no longer has the ability to reproduce. It is also believed that the older nurse smothered the newborn baby, and that it could have possibly lived. The hatred and cruelty given to the Native Americans in these stories was devastating and difficult to read.

All of the stories had a similar theme which gave readers a story in which the Abenaki were forced to interrupt their lives and hide their heritage and identities, even though they were kind, gentle people. There is children's literature out there that still gives off racist and incorrect representations of who the Abenaki were, and you can use the multicultural literature program to

help choose correct stories to share with children. It is important to share the way of life of the Native American culture and other religions and ethnic backgrounds to children so they can learn to appreciate and learn from the differences.