

Juvenile Fiction: Recommendations Featuring Native American/Indigenous Characters

Authors of Note:

Joseph Bruchac Cynthia L. Smith Louise Erdrich Christine Day

Realistic/Contemporary Fiction

***Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids* edited by Cynthia L. Smith (Gr 3-6)**

Each story focuses on a different character and their experience of an intertribal powwow in Michigan. The stories range from solemn to silly, but each emphasizes the power of the tribal community to support and heal its members.

***Rez Dogs* Bruchac, Joseph (Gr 4-6)**

Malian, a Wabanaki girl, can't go home to her parents because she must shelter in place with her grandparents on the rez, thanks to being caught there by the COVID--19 pandemic during a weekend visit. She loves her grandparents but is often bored. That changes one morning when she wakes up and sees the rez dog outside, just as she had dreamed he would be.

***I Can Make This Promise* Day, Christine (Gr 4-6)**

When twelve-year-old Edie finds letters and photographs in her attic that change everything she thought she knew about her Native American mother's adoption, she realizes she has a lot to learn about her family's history and her own identity.

Realistic/Contemporary Fiction continued

***The Sea in Winter* Day, Christine (Gr 4-6)**

Maisie loves ballet. Now that she's torn her ACL, a key ligament, she experiences depression. At times, she feels disconnected from her family, and her grades suffer. During an annual midwinter vacation to her stepdad's native home, she realizes that her dreams of being a dancer may not come true. With the help of her family, Maisie must learn that even though life may not work out the way she wants, she can still move forward.

***The Reluctant Storyteller* Coulson, Art (Gr 4-6)**

Chooch is reluctant about many things. He is reluctant to be a storyteller like the rest of his Cherokee family, and he is reluctant to spend spring break in the small town of Greasy, Oklahoma, with Uncle Dynamite. But Chooch will find out there's more than one way to tell a story.

***The Used-To-Be Best Friend* (Jo Jo Makoons series: book 1) Quigley, Dawn (Gr 2-5)**

Jo Jo Makoons Azure is a spirited seven-year-old who moves through the world a little differently than anyone else on her Ojibwe reservation. Even though Jo Jo loves her #1 best friend Mimi (who is a cat), she needs to figure out how to make more friends. Because Fern, her best friend at school, may not want to be friends anymore...

Historical Fiction

***The Star That Always Stays* Johnson, Anna Rose**

Growing up on Beaver Island, Grand-pre told Norvia stories about her ancestor Migizi, about Biboonke-o-nini the Wintermaker, about the Crane Clan and the Reindeer Clan. On the island, Norvia was proud of her Ojibwe heritage. Things are different in the city. Here - during the new year 1914 - Norvia's mother forces her to pretend she's not Native at all...

***Peacemaker* Bruchac, Joseph (Gr 4-7)**

A twelve-year-old Iroquois boy rethinks his calling after witnessing the arrival of a mystical figure with a message of peace in this historical novel based on the creation of the Iroquois Confederacy.

***Runs With Courage* Wolf, Joan M. (Gr 4-6)**

Ten-year-old Four Winds, a young Lakota girl living in the Dakota Territory in 1880, has been taken from her family and brought to a boarding school. She's taught English and learns how to assimilate into white culture, but soon discovers that the teachers at this school are not interested in assimilation but rather in erasing her culture. Now Four Winds must fight to hold on to who she is.

***Indian No More* McManis, Charlene Willing (Gr 4-7)**

It's 1957, and when Regina's Umpqua tribe is legally terminated and her family must relocate from Oregon to Los Angeles, she goes on a quest to understand her identity as an Indian despite being so far from home.

Historical Fiction continued

Mary and the Trail of Tears: A Cherokee Removal Survival Story (Girls Survive series)

Rogers, Andrea L. (Gr 4-7)

Twelve-year-old Mary and her Cherokee family are forced out of their home in Georgia by U.S. soldiers in May 1838. Facing horrors such as internment, violence, disease, and harsh weather, Mary perseveres and helps keep her family and friends together until they can reach the new Cherokee nation in Indian Territory.

***Code Talker: A Novel about the Navajo Marines of World War Two* Bruchac, Joseph (Gr 5+)**

After being taught in a boarding school run by whites that Navajo is a useless language, Ned Begay and other Navajo men are recruited by the Marines to become Code Talkers, sending messages during World War II in their native tongue.

***The Birchback House (series: book 1)* Erdrich, Louise (Gr 4-6)**

Omakayas, a seven-year-old Native American girl of the Ojibwa tribe, lives through the joys of summer and the perils of winter on an island in Lake Superior in 1847.

Fantasy/Science Fiction/Horror

***Night Wings* Bruchac, Joseph (Gr 5+)**

After being taken captive by a band of treasure seekers, thirteen-year-old Paul and his Abenaki grandfather must face a legendary Native American monster at the top of Mount Washington.

***The Ghost Collector* Mills, Allison (Gr 5+)**

In the tradition of their Cree ancestors, Shelly and her grandmother help lost souls transition to the next world by catching them in their hair. But when Shelly's mom dies, her relationship to ghosts--and death--changes.

Fantasy/Science Fiction/Horror continued

***Race to the Sun* Roanhorse, Rebecca (Gr 4-7)**

Guided by her Navajo ancestors, seventh-grader Nizhoni Begay discovers she is descended from a holy woman and destined to become a monsterslayer, starting with the evil businessman who kidnapped her father.

***Healer of the Water Monster* Young, Brian (Gr 4-6)**

When Nathan goes to visit his grandma, Nali, at her mobile summer home on the Navajo reservation, he knows he's in for a pretty uneventful summer. Then one night, while lost in the nearby desert, Nathan finds someone extraordinary: a Holy Being from the Navajo Creation Story--a Water Monster--in need of help...

***The Barren Grounds* (Misewa Saga series: book 1) Robertson, David A. (Gr 4-7)**

Morgan and Eli, two Indigenous children forced away from their families and communities, are brought together in a foster home in Winnipeg, Manitoba. They each feel disconnected, and struggle to fit in at school and at their new home until they find a secret portal to another reality.

***Sisters of the Neversea* Smith, Cynthia L. (Gr 4-7)**

Lily Roberts, a member of the Muscogee Creek Nation, and white Wendy Darling are step sisters who share many things (including a younger brother, Michael), but they find themselves at odds over their parents' impending separation. As Wendy reads to Michael the night before she leaves, they are interrupted by a braggart boy, Peter, and his fairy friend, Belle. Peter wants a storyteller, and Wendy, always in love with fantasy, agrees to go (with Michael) by fairy dust to Neverland...

Mystery

***The Case of Windy Lake* (Mighty Muskrats series: book 1) Hutchinson, Michael (Gr 4-6)**

Sam, Otter, Atim, and Chickadee are four inseparable cousins growing up on the Windy Lake First Nation. Nicknamed the Mighty Muskrats for their habit of laughing, fighting, and exploring together, the cousins find that each new adventure adds to their reputation. When a visiting archeologist goes missing, the cousins decide to solve the mystery of his disappearance

Graphic Novels

***Borders* King, Thomas (Gr 4-6)**

Laetitia, a young Blackfoot woman living north of the Canadian border, moves to Salt Lake City after growing bored with her life, which is filled with tension between her and her mother. After some time has passed, Laetitia's mother and her little brother, who narrates the story, decide to take a road trip to visit, and so must pass through two border checkpoints: one for the United States and one for Canada. At each checkpoint, Laetitia's mother is asked her citizenship, and at each, she claims her Blackfoot nationality. Barred from entering the United States, Laetitia's mother is sent back to the Canadian border and isn't allowed to pass; she and her son find themselves stuck in the space in between, recognized as citizens of nowhere.

For more suggestions for excellent children's books featuring Native and/or indigenous characters...

Check out book lists on the AICL (American Indians in Children's Literature) blog:
<https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com>