

CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE
Faculty of Education
Department of English Language and Literature

Bachelor's Thesis

**Stereotypical Portrayals of Native Americans
in Lynne Reid Banks's *The Indian in the Cupboard***

Stereotypní zobrazování původních obyvatel Ameriky v knize
Indián a kouzelná skříňka autorky Lynne Reid Banks

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this bachelor's thesis, titled *Stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans in Lynne Reid Banks's The Indian in the Cupboard*, is the result of my own work and that I used only the cited sources. Furthermore, I declare that this thesis was not used in order to obtain any other academical degree.

Prague, 3rd December 2015

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Abstract

This bachelor's thesis, titled *Stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans in Lynne Reid Banks's The Indian in the Cupboard*, focuses on the phenomenon of stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans in Lynne Reid Banks's book *The Indian in the Cupboard*. The theoretical part of the thesis is devoted to the topics of stereotype and ethnocentrism with a focus on Native Americans. It also includes a brief outline of the historical development of literary works concerning Native Americans and discusses the importance of accuracy in children's literature. The practical part focuses on an analysis of particular stereotypes present in the book and criticism concerning the book.

Keywords

The Indian in the Cupboard, Lynne Reid Banks, Native Americans, Indians, Western (genre), Racism, Stereotyping, Children's literature, Accuracy

Abstrakt

Tato bakalářská práce s názvem *Stereotypní zobrazování původních obyvatel Ameriky v knize Indián a kouzelná skříňka autorky Lynne Reid Banks* se zaměřuje na fenomén stereotypního zobrazování původních obyvatel Ameriky v knize *Indián a kouzelná skříňka* autorky Lynne Reid Banks. Teoretická část se věnuje tématu stereotypu a etnocentrismu se zaměřením na původní obyvatele Ameriky. Obsahuje též stručný přehled historického vývoje literárních děl vztahujících se na původní obyvatele Ameriky a pojednává o důležitosti akurátnosti v dětské literatuře. Praktická část je zaměřena na analýzu konkrétních stereotypů v knize a její kritice.

Klíčová slova

Indián a kouzelná skříňka, Lynne Reid Banks, původní obyvatelé Ameriky, Indiáni, western, Rasismus, Stereotyp, dětská literatura, akurátnost

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1. Introduction

This bachelor's thesis focuses on the phenomenon of stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans in Lynne Reid Banks's book *The Indian in the Cupboard*, the first book in a series of the same title. It discusses the influence of literature upon children, considering especially the importance of accuracy in children's books. The aim of the thesis is to compare diverse approaches to these topics, using the example of Lynne Reid Banks's book which has been criticized for an insensitive treatment and depiction of Native Americans, but praised by its readers. The thesis consists of a theoretical part and a practical part.

The theoretical part of the thesis includes a concise biography of Lynne Reid Banks, trying to take the background of the book into account. A significant part of this thesis is devoted to the topics of stereotype and ethnocentrism with a focus on Native Americans. Also, a brief outline of the historical development of literary works concerning Native Americans is provided, focusing on children's literature. The last chapter deals with the accuracy in children's books and the criteria of a high-quality book.

The practical part works with the primary source and focuses on the analysis of the book. The plot of the book is briefly described in order to provide a basis for further analysis which clarifies why the book has been criticized, using specific examples from the book regarding the character of Little Bull. In order to explicate different views on the role of nonfiction in children's literature, various reviews and critiques of this book are examined.

The conclusion summarizes the gained findings and provides a final reflection on the chosen topic.

2. Theoretical part

2.1 Lynne Reid Banks

Lynne Reid Banks was born on 31 July 1929 in London, England. Together with her mother, she moved to Canada during World War II, but returned to Britain after the war was over and later studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. She became an actress afterwards, then worked as a freelance journalist and later joined Independent Television News and became one of the first women TV news reporters in Britain. In 1959, she wrote her first novel for adults, *The L-Shaped Room*, whose success provided finances for her move to a kibbutz in Israel in 1962. She got married soon after and has three sons. She stayed in Israel for nine years and taught English as a second language. Afterwards, she returned to England and continued writing both for adults and children and established herself as a successful author. Some of her books reflect her experience in Israel, such as her first book for children, *One More River*, novel *An End to Running* or *Children at the Gate*. As for her children's books, Banks has become known predominantly for *The Indian in the Cupboard* (1980), which has been followed by four sequels and made into a motion picture in 1995. *The Indian in the Cupboard* has sold over 10 million copies. The basis of the novel came from bedtime stories that Banks told to her son Omri after he received an old wooden cupboard as a birthday present. To teach him to appreciate old things, she made up a story about a magic cupboard which can bring toys to life. One of the reasons she chose an 'Indian' as the main character was to introduce the American West to her children who had spent most of their childhood in Israel and England and share her fascination with Westerns, cowboys, 'Indians' and her childhood memories of the Canadian prairie. Despite the criticism regarding racism and stereotypes in *The Indian in the Cupboard* series, the books remain popular among young readers. In October 2013, Banks won the J. M. Barrie Award for outstanding contribution to children's arts.

2.2 Stereotypes and ethnocentrism present in the portrayals of Native Americans

Even though there is a strong tendency towards an unbiased approach to other nations, communities and individuals, a certain notion of ethnocentrism is still present in the common discourse. The representation of Indigenous cultures is often depicted from the European point of view and thus in contrast to European way of thinking and living. While Indigenous peoples are portrayed as barbaric, inferior or childlike, European people define themselves as civilized, morally superior and scientifically advanced.

With reference to Native Americans, such approach emerged with European imperialism and colonialism in the 15th century and resulted in a collective knowledge which was represented in various ways through the eyes of the West, often based on false assumptions. In his book *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*, Devon Abbott Mihesuah suggests that works on Native American culture should include Native Americans' versions of historical events and other matters and emphasizes that in the past it is non-native academics that have monopolized the study of Native Americans. Much of what we know about Native Americans has indeed been largely informed by the work of non-native historians and anthropologists and thus shaped by Western paradigms of research and knowledge. As a result, Native Americans have little to no control of how they are depicted not only in popular culture, but also in scholarly writings.

Beginning with Christopher Columbus, whose name is often used to identify with the start of imperialism, there are several significant figures who are referred to as adventurers and discoverers, the 'fathers' of colonialism. However, they are not considered heroes in the indigenous world.

One of the supposed characteristics of Native Americans is that they cannot fully use their mind and intellect, and thus the resources from the natural world. Considering them only half human or savage created a kind of an empathetic distance which resulted in, and perhaps also justified, policies leading to either extermination or domestication. Treated as commodities, a considerable number of Native inhabitants were forced to live in reservations. The view of the world suggested that White people were superior to other

races and this encouraged Europeans to "free first peoples from their heathen state, culture, language, and, most importantly, lands and resources" (Flood 332).

Presumptively, the racism did not develop from hatred for alien cultures but is rather based on what was later referred to as the White Man's Burden. This term, originally coming from the title of a Rudyard Kipling poem, became a euphemism for imperialism and describes the presumed responsibility of White people to civilize Indigenous peoples and their land. The policies encouraged the assimilation and adaptation of "European customary, moral and commercial practices" (Flood 332). While Europe is by many still considered an epitome of civilisation, there are subtle as well as more obvious tendencies to portray Indigenous peoples as more primitive. It is even suggested by many that nonliterate people such as Native Americans do not have a coherent view of the world because they lack the capability of sequential and critical thought.

Thus, when the world is described, it is done within the framework of Eurocentric contexts and Indigenous perspectives and understandings are ignored. The worldviews and cultures of Indigenous people continue to be subverted by the nations that dominate the territories.

There are several common stereotypes about Native Americans. Walter C. Fleming, a professor and head of the Department of Native American Studies at Montana State University, addresses some of them in his article *Myths and Stereotypes About Native Americans* at whose beginning he states that "there are two types of people – those who know nothing about Natives and those who know less than that".

Native Americans are arguably among the most misunderstood and isolated ethnic groups in the United States. Since much of the information about their nation which is available is derived from popular culture, tensions between Native and non-Native people arise.

One problem that quite often arises is how should Native Americans be referred to. The term *Indian* stems from the erroneous geography of Christopher Columbus who called the peoples he met *los Indios*. It is nonetheless questionable whether he did so because he thought he landed in the East Indies, since the term *India* stood as a synonym for "all of Asia east of the river Indus" at the time and Indies was "the broadest designation available for all of the area he claimed under royal patent" (Berkhofer 5). Nevertheless, the term

continued to be used by the Spanish for all peoples of the New World and from the Spanish term came eventually the English *Indian*, the French *Indien*, the German *Indianer* and similar words in other European languages. The sixteenth-century English generally employed the term *savage*, originally meaning 'wild man', but switched to *Indian* as the general term for Native Americans in the 17th century. The French, however, continued to use the term *sauvage* as the preferred word until the 19th century. Other used terms, derived from the religious distinction between Christians and other people, included *infidel*, *heathen* and *barbarian*. Also, the label *nation* in reference to Native Americans was replaced by *tribe* in the 19th century. At the time of the colonization, the word *nation* still referred to 'heathen' as well as modern community and was used for instance in the term *Five Nations*.

Fleming, a member of the Kickapoo tribe, is rather tolerant regarding this issue – he suggests the term Native American to be used in academic circles, but finds the other names, 'American Indian', 'Indian' or 'Native', mostly freely interchangeable. Nonetheless, he suggests calling everyone by their nation and compares this phenomena to the terms European or Asian. One would seldom call oneself a European, but would rather use the nationality. Fleming emphasizes that the history, traditions and culture are often highly diverse within a particular area and the tribal names are therefore proper.

Berkhofer notes as well that the original inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere do not call themselves by a single term, because they do not consider themselves a collectivity. Despite recognizing many differences among Native Americans, White people persist in using the general designations. Therefore, it appears rather ludicrous that the 'Indian' stereotype has persisted for such a long period of time.

Among the most common stereotypes about Native Americans are: they are drunks, they get special privileges such as free money from the government and tax relief, they are deeply religious and united with nature, they are a dying race, one can recognize them by the physical appearance, they live on a reserve, etc.

According to Fleming, many of these assertions are based on half-truths. They tend to be products of oversimplification, exaggeration, or generalization. The idea and the image of the 'Indian' is therefore a White conception.

2.3 The History of Native Americans in Literature

Historically speaking, Native Americans and their culture was always a popular motif in numerous literary genres. The tradition of Native Americans in White literature arrived with the rise of Romanticism. The image of a noble and mysterious race which roams the wild prairies and slowly heads to extinction made an irresistible theme. Not that there were no mentions of their cultural life and moral standards before. Benjamin Franklin commented on the issue of Noble Savages already in the second half of the 18th century. However, at that time Americans were preoccupied by politics and religious writings. Therefore, the time in which Native Americans became a centerpiece for popular authors was the early 19th century.

One of the first noticeable authors who devoted a major role in his work to Native Americans was James Fenimore Cooper. His treatment of this ethnic group is far too complex to be described precisely within the scope of this bachelor's thesis. However, overall, we mostly see him highlighting the fragile relationship between the frontier settlers and the Natives. Cooper gave Native Americans sharply contrasting personalities which ranged from the noble, self-sacrificing chief of the Mohicans to the ignoble, violent and merciless "bloody-minded hellhound" Magua of the Huron tribe. As the Romanticists are not quite interested in the characters' personalities or development, it is difficult to discern to what extent Cooper believed these black and white descriptions. Furthermore, he seems to be interested more in the individuals rather than the Natives as a group. The bad 'Indians', Mingos, are much more common in his books than their noble 'good' counterparts. Still, Cooper does see a certain level of heroism in Mingos and their quite futile attempts to oppose the invaders. That being said, it is undeniably true, that Cooper's opinions on Native Americans and their culture carry obvious signs of superficiality and shallowness. The Leatherstocking Tales do, however, retain more than just a modicum of respect for the Natives.

In the 20th century, Native Americans became almost indispensable to the new Western genre. One of the most prominent writers of Westerns in America was perhaps Zane Grey. In Europe, Karl May became enormously popular thanks to his stories about the Apache Winnetou and his friendship with Old Shatterhand. Although Grey's and May's

work differs in many aspects, their treatment of Native Americans was rather similar. They both perceived them as innocent victims of white-lawbreakers. Grey put even higher emphasis on their struggle to retain their cultural values as depicted on the Navajo tribe in *The Vanishing American*. Other acclaimed writers who should be mentioned in reference to Westerns include Larry McMurtry, Louis L'Amour or Cormac McCarthy.

2.4 Native Americans in Children's Literature

The way Native Americans are portrayed in children's books varies markedly. Children's literature has undoubtedly become more diversified during the last fifty years, but the dispute over ethnic characters endures and there is "a widespread agreement that Native American literature for children has lacked authenticity and accuracy" (Stewart 181). The analyses of 600 books about Native Americans done by Mary Gloyne Byler have shown that "depersonalization, ridicule, derision, inauthenticity, and stereotyping" (More and Hirschfelder 58) were present in the vast majority. Native Americans were "treated in patronizing ways, portrayed as fantasy, set in an unidentified past, or juxtaposed with animals" (Moore and Hirschfelder 58). Stereotypical images were also spotted in the books in which the theme was totally unrelated to Native people, much like in *The Indian in the Cupboard*.

There are writers who completely ignore the factual aspects and there are writers who conduct extensive research regarding the particular images of Native Americans in their books. As mentioned above, numerous stereotypes can be found in various books, both with the theme of Native Americans and books with the character of a Native American only. Apart from storybooks, there is a great discussion on children's picture books and Alphabet books, in which the letter 'I' is often assigned to the image of an 'Indian'.

Mary Gloyne Byler remarks that there are "too many books featuring painted, whooping, befeathered Indians closing in on too many forts, maliciously attacking 'peaceful' settlers or simply leering menacingly from the background; too many books in which white benevolence is the only thing that saves the day for the incompetent, childlike Indian; too many stories setting forth what is 'best' for American Indians" (47).

Sadly, it resorts to mixing traditions and cultures in some cases. Some authors continue to depict Native American culture as foreign and strange. Michael Dorris notes that Native Americans continued to be treated as if they were the property of children (according to Stewart undoubtedly a reference to Lynne Reid Banks's *The Indian in the Cupboard*). Also, Native American characters are "often not allowed to change, contrary to the growth of characters in most children's literature" (Stewart 181).

Allegedly, a simple portrayal of a Native American as something that existed in the past can imply that they are no longer a part of the reality. A percentage of how many of books are set in the past is however hard to create, but the number of stories that show Native Americans in a contemporary light is negligible.

It can be rather complicated to discern the accuracy of a given work. The exactness of the story may have been compromised for a variety of reasons. Not having accurate factual information leads to frequent misconceptions of Native Americans. However, it is not only the accurate information that are vital. There are differences between the approaches to literature and narrative techniques as well. Therefore, books written by Native American authors and books by non-Native authors have to be distinguished.

Native Americans perceive life as cyclical rather than linear. Their literary narrative has roots in oral tradition and the significance of storytelling is therefore obvious, affecting also the literary techniques. But since many authors underestimate young readers' abilities, even if there are Native American situations and characters present, youngsters are not exposed to Native American narrative strategies and the European style prevails.

White authors are occasionally criticized for creating Native stories and characters, possibly because there are many books that present false portrayals of Natives and thus contribute to the common stereotypes. Because the culture is considered to be radically different by many Native scholars, it is even said that almost nothing written by White academics can be trusted. By contrast, few children's books have been written by Natives.

Michelle Pagni Stewart notes that rather than categorizing ethnic literature by the colour of the author's skin, we should instead "consider the authenticity and viewpoint of the text, no matter what the author's origins" (179). Consideration of the quality of the created characters is undeniably crucial. African-American critic Henry Louis Gates notes, too that being a Native does not guarantee writing authentic literature the same as being a

non-Native writer guarantees writing a book based on misinterpretation and stereotypes. On the other hand, member of diverse tribes and some scholars have often rather extremist approach towards this issue and they believe that the White authors do not have the right to write about their culture and only they can share the stories that originated in their traditions. The issue regarding authority remains unclear and it appears there is no general agreement on this matter.

One of the most known example of racist children's books is Disney's Pocahontas, based on the Walt Disney Pictures movie. As mentioned above, the stories about the Wild West in Europe came to a great extent from authors such as Karl May. Despite the inaccurate information that May used in his work, he is still praised for his great narrative style and highlighting values of friendship, bravery and justice. This is, however, still no excuse that could exculpate him from involving racism and discrimination in his works.

After the sharp criticism of Banks's first book in *The Indian in the Cupboard* series, she claimed she paid extra attention to the factual information about Native Americans and took extraordinary care to describe the Iroquois of the late 18th century as accurately and unsterotypically as possible when writing the last sequel, *The Key to the Indian*. Still, the motive of a child having power over a grown-up Native American man and even carelessly bringing him back several times after being returned to plastic, raises doubts.

2.5 The importance of accuracy and authenticity in children's literature

Children's literature can often seem treated as inferior and inadequate. When referring to literary studies or literature as such, children's books are often not taken into consideration. There is still lack of academic research regarding children's literature and numerous questions concerning its objectives.

Children's literature can be extremely influential in molding the worldviews of children and plays an essential role in forming a child's moral values. It is commonly believed that it is important and beneficial to read. Research has shown that children, who are exposed to literature prior to their first school experience, are better prepared to embark on literacy learning. But it is not only the cognitive skills that are indispensable for the

future life of the children. Other valuable qualities which are improved by reading include extensively enriched vocabulary, emotional intelligence or vivid imagination.

Another significant aspect of literature is the transmission of essential values and cultural heritage to the next generations. Cultural elements are always, more or less deliberately, a part of a piece of writing, be it conspicuous or subliminal. If we are not exposed to the texts that originated in different cultures from ours, it may be difficult to attain awareness of this fact. However, the Western style of writing differs immensely from the Eastern style, for instance, and the African or Asian fairy-tales are rather different from the Euro-American. Therefore, accuracy is not the only relevant issue in children's literature. Cultural authenticity should be evaluated and reflected as well.

The issue of authenticity in children's literature is undoubtedly more complex than the issue of accuracy. Authenticity is not only connected to culture, of course. We can also evaluate the credibility of the characters and the general logic of the story. So even if the information in the book is reasonably accurate, the book still does not have to be authentic. There are some cases when even the outsiders have written honorable books, one of the more known examples is Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. In his novel, Crane depicted the Civil War in such a realistic manner that he was assumed to be a veteran soldier. In reality, however, he never experienced any battles of the Civil War and had to rely almost entirely on his imagination, and, perhaps, interviews. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that provided the author has enough information about the topic and has a fresh idea, no first-hand experience is necessary to create an authentic and successful literary piece.

Since there was a remarkable turn towards realism in literature during the 20th century, the topic of accuracy and honesty in children's literature became increasingly discussed. There was a greater pressure on authors, especially when important historical events and periods such as Ancient Egypt, the Victorian Era or the Holocaust were being depicted. It is, however, not only because the information sources became so easily accessible that the value of precise data is larger than ever before. One can also sense the natural tendency towards more inclusive behaviour in society and a greater interest in human rights and tolerance. However, the responsibility of providing factually accurate information more often than not ends up being rather excessively honest in areas such as

violence, drug abuse or sexuality in young adult literature, by which the majority is rather alarmed.

Accuracy can be quite easily measured by checking the correct information. This issue is especially discussed when analyzing historical fiction. However, a problem arises of how to evaluate a book's accuracy if it crosses genre lines such as Banks's *The Indian in the Cupboard*. The issue itself can therefore appear rather insignificant, if the book does not necessarily focus on providing accurate information about a certain topic. *The Indian in the Cupboard* is based on a story which takes place in the real world, but the ordinary setting is combined with fictional devices. The fantasy elements are employed into the everyday world, so it can be difficult to recognize which things are made up and which elements are based on truth. The 'Indians' can easily be considered fictional if not entirely extinct, for instance.

It could be regarded as irrelevant, of course, what kind of clothes the actual Native tribe wore or if the feather came from a turkey or an eagle. Especially when the book focuses on an alluring story, not on accurate details. The aspect that made *The Indian in the Cupboard* so beloved is indeed the concept of children's toys coming to life, not the brilliant language or ingenious plotline.

Moreover, one could be led to think that the authenticity of the characters is not of high importance since the book is meant for younger children as mentioned above. Still, it is essential that the literature maintains a certain level of respect towards all types of people. In the early age especially, children tend to form basic views of the world. In doing so, they are prone to stereotyping and creating limited amount of abstract 'boxes' to classify activities, items and people. In their view, world can still be divided in a black-and-white fashion. Therefore, if there are prevailing depictions of a certain group of people behaving in a dishonorable way, the child then perceives the group with contempt. Same goes for patronizing or hateful depictions, especially of minorities as the link between the behaviour of the character is much more likely to be identified by the child as a feature typical of the given minority.

An important question is whether the child can actually recognize and appreciate quality literature. Many scholars have questioned children's recognition of fictionality and

factuality. Adults are expected to recognize quality literature and supply children with the book that encourage their development.

Furthermore, the authenticity is suggested to be perhaps a rather complicated issue. "Typically child readers judge less well for themselves than most adults these issues of authenticity and fairness since they have not been exposed to life, history, literature and people of other cultures." (Stewart 180) In order to ensure that young readers recognize the stereotypes, such texts or books "may lean toward didactic content" (Stewart 180).

Colin Mills notes that "the history of books for young is a fascinating and intricate narrative about the tension between entertainment and didacticism; the need to socialize the young into dominant values" (374). Already in 1980s and 1990s, there have been debates about the suitability of books and the inculcation of the right attitudes in children, especially when forming their attitude towards discrimination. The tendencies to sanitize children's literature resulted in banning books. Banks's book was also attacked. There was a move in Kamloops, British Columbia, initiated by the Native inhabitants who had petitioned the public schools to ban *The Indian in the Cupboard*. Although there were numerous teachers and children protesting against it, it was decided that a sticker would be put on all the copies, saying that the book may contain material that might be regarded as offensive. Eventually, the move to sticker Banks's book was dropped, but the criticism from Native Americans appears every now and then in different places in the United States and Canada. Banks herself declares that her 'Indian' is a role model any community could be proud of, namely strong, proud of his nation, sober, intelligent, and above all, brave.

Another interesting aspect of evaluating a children's book is the authorial freedom, which should provide "the freedom of authors to use their creative imaginations and literary skills to tell a powerful story" (Fox and Short 12). How does it correlate with the social responsibility that the author should have, because he or she writes for certain group of readers? The authenticity may as well stand in opposition to authorial freedom.

Joel Taxel accentuates the social responsibility and notes that "authors have both a social and artistic responsibility to be thoughtful and cautious when they write about characters, plots, and themes related to specific cultural groups, whether they are insiders or outsiders to that culture" (Short and Fox 23).

Last but not least, the opinion of the children should be taken into consideration. One can only speculate about the child's criteria of a good book. Many children enjoy familiarity and predictability, rather than originality and sudden plot twists. Children generally enjoy when they can identify themselves with the characters. For example, Omri in *The Indian in the Cupboard* is an ordinary boy who goes to school, argues with his brothers and plays with plastic toys. This character is likely to be identified with by a majority of children.

In her book, Barbara Stoodt suggests three criteria to evaluate a children's book. The first category is focused on the quality of the work. The other one focuses on children's response to the work and the third category is focused on the appropriate presentation of various social issues in the work. According to Stoodt, all three components are important when choosing an appropriate book, because "a book may present social issues accurately while failing to achieve excellence in storytelling; a book of excellent literary quality may not appeal to children's interests" (60). Allegedly, some of the qualities of a good book include memorable and well-drawn characters, well developed plot, a setting which accurately reflect time and space, significant theme and readability. Among other important features is the fact that the book avoids stereotyping on the basis of race, sex, age, and other discriminatory factors.

There are also different requirements placed on nonfiction and fiction. While nonfiction is defined as "facts about the real world, informational books that explain a subject or concept", the genre of fantasy corresponds to "stories set in places that do not exist, about people and creatures that could not exist" (Galda et al. 14). The major characteristics of a good book in the genre of nonfiction are "clarity, accuracy, stimulating writing and artful design", however, the characteristics of a good fantasy book contain "consistent, logical fantasy world, clearly defined conflict and strong characterization" (Galda et al. 28).

The purpose of fantasy stories should remain as it was — to entertain, expand imagination and impart basic moral values. But when using a real character and claiming it to come from the past, one should be obliged to check the background information regarding the characters employed so as to maintain the basic principles of moral and ethical integrity.

3. Practical part

3.1 Plot

The book tells a story about a boy called Omri who gets an old cupboard for his birthday. Apart from other presents, he also gets a plastic 'Indian' from his friend Patrick, but does not find it very exciting. However, when he puts the 'Indian' into a cupboard and locks it with his great grandmother's key, the 'Indian' comes to life. The name of the Iroquois is Little Bull and Omri has the opportunity to learn important life lessons through taking care of him. Later in the book, his friend Patrick gives life to his plastic cowboy. Despite the conflicts the boys and the toys encounter throughout the book, everything ends happily. Little Bull gets married, becomes a blood-brother with the cowboy and Omri sends the toys back to their world.

Eventually, Banks wrote four more sequels: *Return of the Indian* (1986), *The Secret of the Indian* (1989), and *The Key to the Indian* (1999).

3.2 Book Analysis

At first sight, *The Indian in the Cupboard* may appear as an innocent fantasy book about the adventure concerning toys which came to life. Amplified by the common passion for the Wild West, the contents of the book can surely capture a child's attention. Little plastic toys are something that everyone has played with in their childhood, be it 'Indians', soldiers, animals or various characters from movies. Although an 'Indian' is one of the characters in the story, Native culture or the conflict between Natives and cowboys is certainly not the central theme. However, these motives appear in the book as the book is centred around the characters of an 'Indian' and a cowboy. In the following analysis of the book, there is an attempt to show the subtle as well as more obvious racism.

3.2.1 Commodification and depiction as an object

On the very first page of the story, Omri gets a plastic 'Indian' from his friend Patrick. He is rather disappointed by this present, but gets excited, when it comes to life after being locked in a magic cupboard.

Firstly, the character of a Native American is depicted as a toy, being described as "a secondhand plastic Red Indian" (Banks 9) and presented as something unattractive. The depiction of a Native American as something unwanted and evidently insignificant may, of course, appear offensive. This might, however, also seem like an exaggerated and oversensitive response, since there is no implication of a direct connection to living Native Americans. Still, there has been a use of the image of a Native American for different purposes, from toys to advertisements and mascots. And it is justifiable to consider it offensive or even racist.

From the beginning of the story, we have to take into account that the character of Little Bull is originally a toy, which was presumably designed according to a character from western movies. Therefore, it also displays numerous attributes of a stereotypical image of a Native American. If we want to further examine this image, the initial point of creation of the character is crucial and in this case, it comes from already stereotyped image. Thus, the production of such toys has to be questioned. This is the root of the problem and the reason why this whole depiction is considered insulting and disrespectful.

Secondly, it is naturally a common thing for a child to stop liking their toys. After all, it is plastic figures in general that bore Omri, not only the 'Indian'.

Additionally, Native Americans were allegedly not called red because of the colour of their skin, but for the red war paint.

Also, Omri's mother uses the pronouns 'this' and 'it' to define the 'Indian'.

Why don't you pop this in?" his mother suggested, and opened her hand. In it was Patrick's Red Indian. "I found it when I was putting your trousers in the washing-machine. (Banks 13)

According to Banks's words, she never meant to offend Native Americans. On top of that, it was before Little Bull even came to life that he was referred to as 'it'. Later in the book, there are explicit distinctions between the plastic toy and the 'Indian' when he is alive.

Omri picked it up. It was an 'it', not a 'he', any more. (25)

who was no longer his plaything but a person who had to be respected (35)

Another frustration may arise when Omri is accentuating his ownership of Little Bull several times in the book. It begins with the desire to get the 'Indian' in his hand.

His next thought was that he must somehow get the Indian in his hand. (16)

And continues with quite a few remarks about the Indian's insignificance.

a tiny creature scarcely bigger than his middle finger (18)

such a very small creature (25)

"After all, you are my Indian," he finished in a very reasonable tone. (18)

This Indian – his Indian – was behaving in every way like a real live Red Indian brave (...). (18)

a real, live miniature Indian of his very own (24)

his Indian (26)

This might, of course, associate the British colonists' aim to take hold of the land belonging to Native Americans and, eventually, gain power over Native inhabitants. Such approach may indicate the superiority of White people over Native Americans.

3.2.2 Association with a cowboy

Even if the first arguments are based rather on assumptions, the real dispute may begin when the 'Indian' is automatically associated with a cowboy, which naturally belongs to the common stereotypical image.

"Yes, he's fantastic," said Omri in only a slightly flattish voice. "I haven't got an Indian.

"I know."

"I haven't got any cowboys either."

"Nor have I. That's why I couldn't play anything with him."

Omri opened his mouth to say, "I won't be able to either," but, thinking that might hurt Patrick's feelings, he said nothing, put the Indian in his pocket, and forgot about it. (10)

The children consider it a sure thing, that an 'Indian' needs a cowboy, so that they can play properly.

"Now you can play a proper game with the Indian." (82)

The overall tendency of the western culture is quite rigid in its depictions of Native Americans. Naturally, there are works which give justice to the history and culture of different nations of Native Americans. However, the popular fiction is often prone to the extremely stereotypical scenarios of them in their conflict with the White settlers.

A slightly disturbing fact is that while White people assume various roles and professions (salesmen, banker, engineer, architect), Native Americans tend to be of just one simple group who embrace a nomadic lifestyle and are completely set apart from modern development. In best case scenario, they are valued for their love of nature, honesty and loyalty. They are, however, also rather often depicted as violent savages who despise the 'invaders' and seek to cause them harm whenever they meet.

The cowboys are presented more or less in the same light, therefore, the argument that these narratives are promoting negative stereotypes is arguably groundless. Notwithstanding, Natives still come out of these books as those who are in some way alien to western culture. Historically, that may be true, but the general tendency to label 'Indians' as inarticulate and primitive does leave a mark, especially when any sort of diverse opinion on the matter is not presented to children.

And last but not least, in the classical children's game where 'Indians' and cowboys are considered enemies and fight with weapons typical to their cultural background, the differences are accentuated yet again. Not to mention the sole fact that children are capable of identifying themselves with the group they find closer to their own lifestyle and appearance to a much larger extent.

3.2.3 Appearance and clothing

Little Bull is truly a stereotype of a Native American, as coming from a Western movie. He is depicted with a feather on his head, black hair, shining white teeth and dark skin. Also, he is supposed to be an Iroquois warrior, but is clothed like a Plains Indian Chief.

His bare, bronze shoulders rose and fell, and were shiny with sweat. The single feather sticking out of the back of his headband quivered, as if the Indian were trembling. And as Omri peered closer, and his breath fell on the tiny huddled figure, he saw it jump to its feet; its minute hand made a sudden, darting movement towards its belt and came to rest clutching the handle of a knife smaller than the shaft of a drawing-pin. (...) His lower lip was drawn down from shining white teeth. (...) He stood pressed against the inside wall of the cupboard, clutching his knife, rigid with terror, but defiant. (15-16)

Also, the clothes appear rather stereotypical.

The Indian gave a fantastic leap into the air. His black pigtail flew and the air ballooned out his loose-fitting leggings. His knife, raised above his head, flashed. He gave a shout which, even though it was a tiny shout to match his body, was nevertheless loud enough to make Omri jump. But not so much as he jumped when the little knife pierced his finger deeply enough to draw a drop of blood. (16-17)

The Indian stood there, his feet, in moccasins, planted apart on the white-painted metal floor, his chest heaving, his knife held ready and his black eyes wild. (17)

He was about seven centimetres tall. His blue-black hair, done in a plait and pressed to his head by a coloured headband, gleamed in the sun. So did the minuscule muscles of his tiny naked torso, and the reddish skin of his arms. His legs were covered with buckskin trousers which had some decoration on them too small to see properly, and his belt was a thick hide thong twisted into a knot in front. Best of all, somehow, were his moccasins. (...) It was the only way he would ever be able to see and appreciate the intricate embroidery, or beadwork, or whatever it was which encrusted the Indian's shoes and clothes. (19-20)

He expected to see paint on it, war-paint, but there was none. The turkey-feather which had been stuck in the headband had come out (...) . (20)

Then he had been standing on one leg, as if doing a war-dance – knees bent, one moccasined foot raised, both elbows bent too and with one fist (with the knife in it) in the air. (26)

There is obviously no reason for the author to further specify the foot, since both feet were moccasined and presumably, a foot of a Native American is not any different from a foot of a British, Asian or African man. The use of the expression 'moccasined foot' only accentuates the approach to Native Americans as to something different and foreign.

3.2.4 Illiteracy and language

There is a clear demonstration that Little Bull cannot speak English very well. Also the cowboy speaks slang. This may be in order to create an authentic impression since the characters are said to come from the past, and, to a certain extent, to make these characters more fun. It has, however, a rather satirical effect, especially in the case of Little Bull.

But he noticed that the Indian's strange grimace never changed – he could speak without closing his lips.

"Don't you speak English?" asked Omri. All the Indians in films spoke a sort of English. (...) "I speak," he grunted. Omri breathed in relief. (17)

Then, as the Indian looked baffled, he (Omri) said, in what he supposed was Indian-English, "Me – no – hurt – you." (18-19)

Unwarily, Omri replied, "Oh, I don't think he can write English, he can only just speak—" (23)

"Happen? Good sleep happen. Cold ground. Need blanket. Food. Fire." (28)

The readers might ask themselves if Little Bull is illiterate. He seems to have quite a broad vocabulary yet he uses the infinitive and present tense only. Also, he does not know the word 'thirty', or should this indicate that Natives are so simple that they can not count or did not have words for numbers in their language? It appears slightly embarrassing that he is not able to count even the number of people he killed.

Little Bull proudly held up all ten fingers. Then he closed his fists, opening them again with another lot of ten, and another. (44)

3.2.5 Depiction of Little Bull as a savage

Not only does Little Bull use a primitive language, Banks also uses verbs such as crouch, grunt, growl, snarl or snort, when referring to him. This might by all means suggest that 'Indians' are close to behaving like animals.

"You touch – I kill!" the Indian growled ferociously. (18)

The dangling Indian twisted, writhed, kicked, made a number of ferocious and hideous faces (...) (34)

3.2.6 Characteristics of Little Bull

Despite a few comments about Omri's respect and admiration for Little Bull, the 'Indian' is described as a rather childish person. Characteristics which are directly or indirectly mentioned in the book include: greedy, quick-tempered, bossy, ungrateful, contemptuous, simple, violent.

"I no small! You, big!" the Indian shouted angrily. (20)

Omri gaped. Was the little man giving him orders? Undoubtedly he was! (28)

"Hm!" snorted Little Bull with a superior look. (36)

"I have," he said promptly.

"You mean all of them?"

Little Bull nodded hungrily.

"No, that's too much. I can't have herds of horses galloping all over my room. You can choose one."

"One?" said Little Bull sadly. (49)

Omri was getting used to his Indian's ungrateful ways and was not offended. (75)

He says he's a Chief now. It's made him even more bossy and – difficult than before," said Omri, using a word his mother often used when he was insisting on having his own way. (91)

While Scalping was not extremely widespread, and although there was scalping during some wars, Little Bear's thirst for violence seems disproportionate.

"Look! Him no use for fight. Little Bull soon kill, take scalp, finish. Very good scalp," he added generously. "Fine colour, look good on belt." (Banks 118)

"Let me kill and I do dance round campfire," he coaxed. (Banks 119)

Also, he obviously does not need a friend. When Omri asks him if he feels lonely, he replies that the little pony, which Omri turned to life from plastic as well, is his friend.

"Little Bull, are you lonely?"

"Huh?"

"Would you like a friend?"

"Got friend," said the Indian, jerking his head towards the pony.

"I meant, another Indian." (76)

This might as well indicate that 'Indians' are friends with animals, which suggests they are on the same level. One might think that Little Bull does not need a human companion. Since a regular person cannot live without human relationships, this might signify that Little Bull is different from normal people.

3.2.7 Common life

What did Indians eat? Meat, chiefly, he supposed – buffalo meat, rabbits, the sort of animals they could shoot on their prairies. (29)

Typically, Little Bull is associated with drinking alcohol, namely 'fire-water'. The term itself implies that Native Americans are, firstly, not able to even use the proper term for this particular alcoholic beverage, and secondly, they are practically alcoholics. In the book, a joke is made about this issue, but what rather stands out is Omri's innocence in contrast with the horrid habit.

And what about a drink? Milk? Surely, Indian braves did not drink milk? They usually drank something called 'fire-water' in films, which was presumably a hot drink, and Omri dared not heat anything. (29)

One of the stereotypes that is actually recognized and explained in the book is the 'Indian's' place of living. Although it is not explained that different tribes live differently, it is made clear that Little Bull, supposedly a member of the Iroquois, does not live in a teepee, but in a longhouse.

"Tepee!" the Indian shouted. "I not live tepee! I live longhouse!" (33)

"Surely you sleep in tepees sometimes?"

"Never," said Little Bull firmly.

"I've never heard of an Indian who didn't," said Omri with equal firmness. (33)

"Horse!" Little Bull seemed surprised.

"Don't you ride? I thought all Indians rode."

Little Bull shook his head.

"English ride. Indians walk." (49)

"Little Bull, can you dance?"

"Yes. War dance, wedding dance, many kind."

"Would you do one now so I can see?"

He hesitated, then shook his head once.

"Why not, though?"

"No make war, no make wedding. No reason dance." (113)

3.2.8 Depiction as a spiritual and superstitious person

Little Bull regards magic as something completely normal. Therefore, he is not excessively surprised when he meets Omri, a giant to him, who is able to make the light disappear and plastic toys come to life.

"So? Magic. The spirits work much magic." (41)

He talks with the spirits of his ancestors, is in fact called 'superstitious' which is a pejorative term in and of itself.

"Make strong pictures – Iroquois signs. Please spirits of ancestors." (42)

He had shown that he was very superstitious, believing in magic and good and evil spirits. Perhaps he thought of Omri as – well, some kind of genie, or whatever Indians believed in instead. The wonder was that he wasn't more frightened of him then, for genies, or giants, or Great Spirits, or whatever, were always supposed to be very powerful and often wicked. (46)

Then he went back to his room and laid all these offerings beside Little Bull, who was seated cross-legged outside his tepee, arms folded, eyes closed, apparently saying his prayers. (65)

But he was still in a trance – communicating with his ancestors, Omri supposed.
(66)

Little Bull also possesses a strange ability to manipulate animals.

He stood quite still for a long time, just looking back at the pony. Then, so slowly you could scarcely notice, he edged towards him, making strange hissing sounds between his clenched teeth which almost seemed to hypnotize the pony. (51)

3.2.9 Real person coming from the past

All the stereotypical depictions might not be entirely bad, had it not been for the fact that Little Bull is said to come from the past. As far as Little Bull is only depicted as a stereotyped toy that came to life, there is in fact no direct reference to the real Native Americans and it is only another stereotypical portrayal that appears in the books and is based on the image coming from Western movies. It is naturally disrespectful, but as long as it does not refer to the actual Native inhabitants, but clearly to a modified image, it is not offensive per se. The trouble appears, when Banks starts to set the character of Little Bull into the past.

The Indian's face lit up. "English good! Iroquois fight with English against French!" (44)

Not only was his Indian no mere toy come to life; he was a real person, somehow magicked out of the past of over two hundred years ago. (45)

Eventually, it turns out that Little Bull is a real person coming from history. This is the turning point, when the character gets confusing. Banks uses numerous stereotypes, yet she decides to claim her character comes from the real world. Since the fact that Little Bull comes from the past is irrelevant for the plot, it remains unclear, why Banks decided to portray him as a real person. The character could as well come from a movie, a book, a

story or simply from the author's imagination. What Banks does, makes no sense and does not contribute to the story in any possible way. The question, where does Little Bull actually come from, is also rather complicated. Did he disappear from the world back then and travelled into the future? Who made him into a plastic toy? The only answer to that question that Banks gives the reader is that he was "somehow magicked out of the past". Moreover, Little Bull is called a savage.

Not only was his Indian no mere toy come to life; he was a real person, somehow magicked out of the past of over two hundred years ago. He was also a savage. It occurred to Omri for the first time that his idea of Red Indians, taken entirely from Western films, had been somehow false. (45)

Omri realizes that his ideas were false, yet the rest of the stereotypes in the book is not put right. On top of all that, the mentioning of Westerns and taking scalps is followed by a paragraph, where Omri contemplates terrorism and wars in the world.

Thirty scalps... phew! Of course things were different in those days. Those tribes were always making war on each other, and come to that the English and French (whatever they thought they were doing, fighting in America) were probably no better, killing each other like mad as often as they could... Come to that, weren't soldiers of today doing the same thing? Weren't there wars and battles and terrorism going on all over the place? You couldn't switch on television without seeing news about people killing and being killed... (45)

Omri, or Banks, finishes with a rather controversial question.

Was thirty scalps, even including some French ones, taken hundreds of years ago, so very bad after all? (45)

Not only are these thoughts quite too grown up for Omri, it does not really fit into the tone of the book, which does not focus on serious topics. The whole time, Omri is acting rather

childishly, and now he philosophizes on serious matters such as violence in the world. It sounds rather like a grandmother or some elderly parent talking, not a boy. Also, it looks like he is trying to make excuses for Little Bull's violent behaviour on the principle of 'others are even worse, so it is not that bad'. This paragraph is without a doubt a didactic interlude coming most likely from an adult mind. Omri does not know anything about 'Indians' and hardly watches news on TV, yet he swiftly reflects on violence in the world. This suggestive didacticism, along with clichés, stereotypes and predictability of the plot, clearly represents little to no challenge and development for a young reader.

3.3 Reviews and criticism

As mentioned above, *The Indian in the Cupboard* was criticized for its depiction of Native Americans, namely through the character of Little Bull. The criticism of the book comes mainly from Native Americans. On the other hand, White people love the book in the majority of cases. It could be because of the fact that they do not mind stereotyping in other contexts, such as on TV or in the movies. However, it seems more likely that the majority of White people have still not developed the ability to recognize the more subtle manifestations of stereotyping and by extension racism. All the more, stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans does not seem to be such an issue in Europe. In America, this matter naturally appears to be much more controversial.

The reviews of *The Indian in the Cupboard* are very contradictory, but the excitement and positive response prevail. In *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, it is noted that "in her fantasy writing, Banks skillfully draws the reader into the fantasy world with lively detail and description" (Cullinan and Person 62). This could of course be easily disproved by actually reading the book. Banks's literary language could simply not be considered overly distinguished, neither is there any extensively detailed description.

In Sherri Liberman's biography of Banks, a critical review of the book is mentioned. Lisa Mitten and Naomi Caldwell-Wood from the American Indian Library Association (AILA) stated that *The Indian in the Cupboard* contains stereotypes, however acclaimed a book it is. They suggested that librarians are perpetuating Native American

stereotypes by promoting Banks's books. They also mentioned Little Bull's dress and other inaccuracies.

Some reviewers pointed out that Omri, as a representative of the 'White Nation', is manipulating and controlling Little Bull and that it subtly implies that White people are supposed to control Native Americans.

Furthermore, Liberman claims that Banks has "a great talent for depicting characters who on the outside portray a stereotype, but eventually transcend that stereotype through their thoughts and actions" (51). She goes on, stating that "the metaphor of a toy coming to life is much like the transformation of someone who goes from viewing people in terms of static, immovable stereotypes to considering their individual thoughts and actions" (51). Sadly, that might be wishful thinking of the author of this biography rather than the reality of Banks's book. To a certain extent, there is a change through Omri's acknowledgement that playing with plastic toys is different from having living toys who are no more silent puppets. However, it is rather too confident to use the word 'transformation' in reference to Banks's book, since Little Bull does not only embody a large number of stereotypes, but there is also a considerable amount of subtle racism in presenting and treating this character.

Even though Banks claims to have tried to pay extra attention when writing the last sequel *The Key to the Indian*, the critics say otherwise. According to Kirkus Reviews, "summaries of past events and elaborately laid groundwork slow the pace". Also, it is noted that "the stereotyping and cultural parochialism some critics have found in this series is particularly evident". The review closes with the remark that "along with piecemeal plotting and broadly brushed characters, Banks leaves gaps in logic to puzzle even inveterate fans".

One of the means through which the racism is present in *The Indian in the Cupboard* is the language. The language in Banks's book as such is very simple. As mentioned previously, she uses offensive words such as 'savage' and also decides to use the term 'Indian' to designate a Native American. As for the writing style, I would definitely not recommend this book due to its rather poor language and simple, sporadically fragmentary plot. It is possible that the source of this inadequacy is the origin of the story — bedtime stories. When a story is spontaneously made up, one does naturally not focus

on the language. Furthermore, some aspects like Little Bull's mutilated language become irritating after fewer than three pages.

The fundamental problem in Banks's book, however, is in mixing true information with false claims. Banks uses a toy which was produced on the basis of a stereotype, and even explicitly uses some of the stereotypes in the book. On the other hand, she claims that Little Bull is a real person, supporting that with some basic historical events. A small modification would solve the problem, such as claiming Little Bull comes from a movie or a book. But Banks is being extremely inconsistent in the development of this character and moreover, not authentic.

There are several logical inaccuracies and contradictions in the book. One example could be the fact that Little Bull claims that Native Americans do not ride horses. This would commonly mean they also do not have any other deeper contact with these animals, since there is obviously no other reason to keep them then riding them. Yet after he says he walks, he expertly examines the horse and eventually rides it.

Little Bull then made a very thorough examination of every horse, feeling their legs, running his hands over their rumps, looking straight into their plastic faces.
(49)

Step by step he moved, softly, cautiously, until he and the pony stood almost nose to nose. Then, quite calmly, Little Bull reached up and laid his hand on the pony's neck. That was all. He did not hold the reins. The pony could have jumped away, but he didn't. (51)

Furthermore, Little Bear would hardly assume the title from an unknown chief who by no means came from his own nation, not to mention that the title of a chief was not necessarily inherited.

Another logical questions arise when Little Bull comes to life and does not ask how did it happen or where he is, as normal person would probably want to know. He is concerned with a plastic tepee but fails to wonder how can he get home, etc. If we consider the situation, the way the characters act is not very believable.

But perhaps the most illogical aspect is that after realizing that real people should not be manipulated, Omri repetitiously brings Little Bull and other plastic figures to life throughout the four sequels of *The Indian in the Cupboard* series.

In conclusion, the positive reviews usually come from the readers, while Native Americans and experts on racism and discrimination find this book rather alarming and biased. Since there is not much literary critique regarding *The Indian in the Cupboard* which could be taken seriously, the book could be considered rather mediocre.

Conclusion

To sum up such delicate issue is quite complicated. Native Americans have constantly been offended throughout the entire modern history, therefore all such impertinences should be paid close attention to.

Banks's book undoubtedly contains a brilliant idea, but the numerous deficiencies listed above make it somewhat controversial. Since Lynne Reid Banks is without a doubt a kind-hearted person and she devoted a noticeable part of her life to children and voluntary teaching, this topic is rather unfortunate and difficult to discuss. The very fact that the book originated in bedtime stories, makes it questionable whether Banks was planning for it to be so popular and, moreover, profusely criticized.

Furthermore, the character of a Native American in *The Indian in the Cupboard* is rather arbitrary. Had it been later that Banks wrote these books, probably different toys would have appeared in the story.

Undeniably, numerous readers have enjoyed the adventures in diverse Western books. If Banks was more consistent and made clear that the toy is based on an image from Westerns, which it is, it would at least have helped to show that the representation is not based on reality. Nonetheless, it would still expand the common stereotypical portrayals.

The theme of cowboys and 'Indians' would naturally not be so popular if it did not have roots in reality. But even though this topic represents exciting material for writers, the consequences of creating the world of the Wild West are unfortunate. This issue, sadly, has nothing to do with literary imagination and humiliates a particular nation.

Thus, as great as the storytelling of such books might be, it still does not excuse the racism and stereotypical portrayals and despite its popularity, *The Indian in the Cupboard* contains subtle as well as more obvious racism concerning Native Americans.

People frequently underestimate the art of being a good writer and the responsibility that is brought along with this job. Obviously, it takes a nice idea to write a successful book. But it takes more than a nice idea to write a high-quality book. Sadly, far too many children's books of poor quality are being published. Apparently, a large number of readers are not able to discern good-quality books.

As for children's literature, it is surely the task of teachers, parents and other educators, to take the responsibility of choosing proper books. Sanitizing literature is definitely not an appropriate solution to this affair and the resolution to ban certain types of books is far too complex and does not resolve the cause of the issue at hand. Promoting critical thinking and discussion as a part of literature class or even family reading could, however, improve the situation and help to build an open-minded and tolerant society.

As far as the racial stereotyping as such is concerned, society as a whole needs to develop a less selective empathy. White people are, very gradually, becoming more and more aware of their mistreatment of other ethnic groups. Still, there are cases of treating members of these groups with ignorance and condescension. Objectifying these people and approaching them as a spectacle is harmful, mainly because of the subtlety of such actions. As a result, nations and groups such as Native Americans inherently carry a burden that puts up a barrier between them and White people.

The type of literature which continuously promotes the same image of Native Americans as people with poor language skills, living the life not nearly as different as the one of cave people, is most certainly not alleviating the situation. The superficial attempts to grasp the basis of a different culture, sadly, accomplish the complete opposite — they promote ignorance and an unwillingness to acknowledge different characteristics which cannot be applied to all members of a given minority at large.

Today's world is, despite a certain level of globalization, immensely diversified. Even though the general idea of equality is promoted, there is often, possibly unintentional, subtle racism and ethnocentrism present in the common discourse and the general stereotypes of Native Americans originating in Colonial history unfortunately still prevail.

Children's literature containing protagonists who are members of various minorities is most definitely desirable. However, stereotyping differences and approaching a rich and civilized culture in a condescending way does not lead to respect for diversity.

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