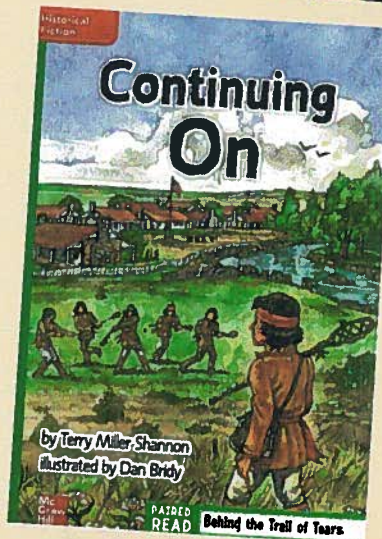
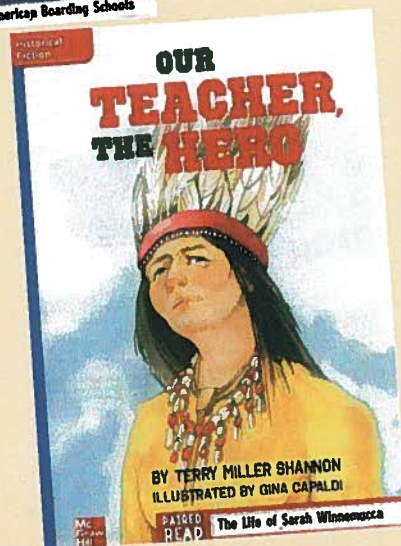
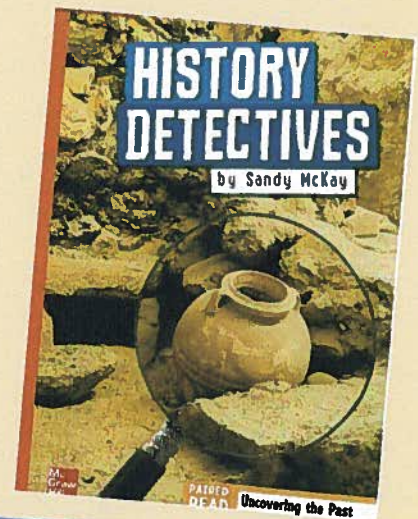
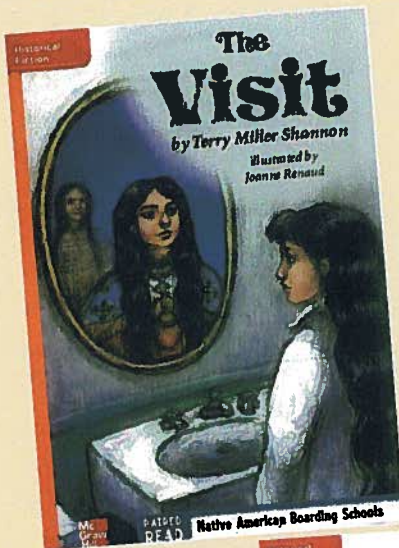


Assessment of Reading Wonders Publications

By: Paul Berg | Cross-Cultural Specialist



September 3rd, 2014
Juneau, Alaska



Assessment of Four Publications in the Fourth Grade Reading Program

which are part of the 4th grade reading program in the Juneau School District.

In August 2014, JSD administration was informed that members of the Juneau Native community were offended by the content of several publications included in the newly purchased Reading Wonders curricula. The Juneau School District requested Cross-Cultural Specialist Paul Berg to provide an assessment with regard to four publications of this curriculum, fourth grade level (*The Visit; Our Teacher, The Hero; Continuing On; and History Detectives*). As part of the critique, Mr. Berg was also asked to submit recommendations regarding the educational utilization of the publications. In doing this analysis, Mr. Berg references the following 4th grade Alaska Content Standards, Alaska Cultural Standards and Juneau School District Equity Standards. An introduction of Mr. Paul Berg and his analysis follow:

Paul Berg began examining cross-cultural phenomenon 48 years ago as a military intelligence analyst with a combat unit in the Vietnam War. On returning home, Paul attended Pacific Lutheran University to become an educator. He began his teaching career on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota in 1971. Within months in this capacity, based on Mr. Berg's training and experience in situational analysis, he informed his superiors in the Bureau of Indian Affairs that an uprising in the reservation was eminent. When the uprising and subsequent siege of Wounded Knee began in 1972, Paul was re-assigned from his classroom to instead serve as a liaison officer with the FBI in efforts to provide ongoing analysis and open communication among the entities involved in this crisis. After the ending of the 72-day siege, Paul was hired by the South Dakota Department of Education to organize and run the 3-year long program to stabilize the children in the Wounded Knee District, many of who were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. In the early 1990's Paul was designated by federal Department of Education as a national expert in cross-cultural education and was part of the 1991-92 Federal Indian Nations at Risk task force. In Alaska, Paul, along with Bill Demmert and Richard Dauenhauer, developed and taught the original cross-cultural education course which is now required for teacher certification in Alaska. Paul also runs training camps during the summer for new teachers and administrators in the Yukon/Kuskokwim Delta. Paul recently completed his 43rd year in education, working as the part time math instructor in the high school program at the Johnson Youth Center and as a Curriculum Developer for Goldbelt Heritage Foundation.

Alaska Content Standards

Reading Grade 4 Standard 2.2.4

The student comprehends literal or inferred meaning from the text by drawing conclusions based on information in the text (e.g. cause and effect, character motivation)

Reading Grade 4 Standard 2.5.1, 2.5.2 and 2.5.3

The student demonstrates an understanding of the main idea by identifying the main idea or central concepts in various types of texts, locating information in narrative and informational text to answer questions related to main ideas or key details and identifying or describing related experiences to support understanding of the main idea.

Alaska Cultural Standards

Cultural Standards for Students: E. 7.

Culturally-knowledgeable students are able to determine how cultural values and beliefs influence the interaction of people from different cultural backgrounds.

Juneau School District Equity Standards

VI. Curriculum, B. Materials and Content, 4 Expected

All curricula provide opportunities for each student to learn or to share ways his or her culture interacts with the dominant culture and the world at large.

All certified staff are trained on embedding local culture, history and place and regularly access and utilize locally created resources.

There are two additional cultural considerations, which I have used in the assessment.

The first of these is Dysconscious Racism:

- the state of mind which justifies inequality by accepting the current order of things as a given;
- a form of racism which tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges;
- a limited understanding about cultural inequality and cultural diversity;
- an unconscious assumption of racial, cultural and linguistic superiority

- Joyce E. King (1991)

The second consideration is Cultural Appropriation. This refers to the actions of members of the dominant culture appropriating the symbols, cultural practices, literature, or identity of a minority culture for purposes of caricaturization, exploitation, or control. As applied to Native American history, cultural appropriation frequently involves reframing the historical experience to:

- minimize the negative impact of the historical event on the Native American participants
- cast the dominant culture participants in a sympathetic role
- present the traumatic event as a positive growth experience

◆ Assessment ◆

The Visit by Terry Miller Shannon

This publication is a fictional account of the experience of a young Native American girl in boarding school. The story centers on a visit by her parents and her struggle to retain her Native identity. The time frame appears to be late 19th or early 20th century. The author accurately portrays several of the excesses of the boarding school programs, including the important detail that her parents do not speak English and the teachers do not allow her and her parents to communicate with each other during the visit. Despite what appears to be a sympathetic account of the boarding school experience, there are major misconceptions in this publication.

1. "Yet I am still the same inside." (pg. 4) "Yes, I have changed and learned new ways, but I am still the person I was when I was born. No one can ever take my heritage away from me." (pg. 15) The author strives to create the impression that the boarding school experience did not affect the child's internal reality. This is inaccurate. The boarding school program both in the lower 48 and in Alaska had a profound impact on the children and for many this was a tragic experience. The Alaska Native community lives with the fallout from three generations of forced acculturation through the boarding school program.
2. "During the 1800's, the government wanted Native Americans to learn the ways of white people. They wanted all citizens in the United States to look and act the same." (pg. 17) The reality—boarding schools existed to remove the indigenous culture and language from the Native American child, not just to teach new skills. Also, the referral to citizenship is inaccurate. Citizenship was not granted to Native Americans until the Snyder act of 1924. The children attended the boarding schools as wards of the state. The children were forcibly removed from their families without parent consent.
3. The author describes the boarding school experience as "proper education and training." (pg. 17) Girls learned how to cook, sew and do laundry. Boys learned skills such as carpentry and shoe making."

(pg.18) "Proper education" was preparing Alaska Native children for lives of servitude and obsequious behavior as expressed in the words of Sheldon Jackson, " . . . to make the Native useful to the White man."

4. "The boarding schools were crowded, the food wasn't very healthy and the students often got sick." (pg. 18) This is accurate, but understated. Student health deteriorated with inappropriate living conditions and the introduction of new diseases, such as polio and tuberculosis. Many families were never notified of their child's death while attending boarding schools. Many Alaska Native students did not have the enzyme to digest the lactose in milk and became chronically ill, but were forced to drink milk as part of regular meals.
5. On page 19 the author writes that the government ended the policy of boarding schools in the 1920's. This does not reflect reality in Alaska. Forced acculturation through boarding schools was the policy in Alaska for another fifty years until the mid-1970's.
6. "Today the descendants of people who attended the Native American boarding schools teach their children to be proud of their traditions." (pg. 19) The author gives the impression that all is just well and good with the succeeding generations--no permanent harm done. In reality, the boarding schools in Alaska have had a profound and lasting effect on the Native community. The forced removal of children from their families during key development stages has had a profoundly negative affect on the Alaska Native community. Loss of language, disrupted cultural transmission between generations and loss of parenting skills are but a few of the long lasting effects. Today Alaska has the highest male indigenous incarceration rate in the world. And the list goes on.

***Our Teacher, The Hero* by Terry Miller Shannon**

This fictional account of 19th century Northern Paiute educator and activist Sarah Winnemucca attempts to portray a sympathetic portrayal of an important historical figure from a child's point of view. However, the story centers the around disapproval of her by the Native community and her winning approval by preventing a government agent from taking children away to a boarding school.

1. The author identifies the conflict in Chapter 1 as follows: "People despise Sarah for trying to help our people get along in the white world and adopting some of the white people's ways." The initial problem in the story is defined as being within the Native American community. The author states that Sarah Winnemucca tried all her life to help her people "get along" with white people.

The reality was quite different. Dominant culture history has failed to adequately document the Native American extermination which took place in the Southwest and West Coast of America. Bounties of fifty cents per scalp and five dollars per Native American head were paid in central California in 1865. In the same year, the Nevada Volunteers murdered Sarah Winnemucca's mother, brother and 29 of the 30 people in her band (mostly old men, women and children) while she and her father were away in

Dayton, Nevada. Ishi, the last of Yahi who was found by a rancher near Oroville, California in 1911, witnessed 17 White men murder 50 members of his band. The problem was not that the Northern Paiute did not know how to "get along" with white people, but rather that they were being hunted and exterminated by armed white gangs.

2. In Chapter 3 the author portrays Sarah Winnemucca as overcoming the attempts of an Indian Agent to forcibly take children to boarding school and implies that the law protected Native American rights. The booklet leaves the impression that Sarah Winnemucca overcomes the government's attempts to remove the children and that government regulations protected the children from being forcibly removed from their families. The actual reality of the situation was quite different. Sarah Winnemucca opened her school in Lovelock, Nevada in 1884. In 1887 the Dawes Severalty Act required that Native American children attend English-language only boarding schools and her school was closed down.

***Continuing On* by Terry Miller Shannon**

This is a classic example of the cultural phenomenon of Appropriation. While the author has included accurate factual information about the Cherokee removal, her handlings of the fictional details of this historical event are distorted. The author portrays the members of the dominant culture as sympathetic and helpful actors in the drama. She leaves the impression that the impact of the death march on the young boy is minimal and transitory and that the move is a positive growth experience.

1. Historical facts contrast sharply with this fictionalized account. The Trail of Tears as experienced by the Cherokee was a death march. Approximately one in four (25%) of the Cherokee died during the journey. Those who reached Oklahoma were in ill health. What we now diagnose as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) affected many of the young Cherokee for the remainder of their lives. The author's attempt to minimize the emotional trauma and frame the Trail of Tears as a growth experience betrays a lack of historical and psychological understanding.
2. The two soldiers: The author presents the soldiers, especially Smith, as being very worried and concerned about the Cherokee. (pg. 8) On the next page the author includes a paragraph describing the soldiers generously sharing extra food with the Cherokee. The impression created is that the soldiers are nice men who were very concerned about their charges. The reality was quite different. As the march continued, as the food shortages materialized, as the suffering increased, as the number of dead mounted daily, the soldiers underwent a psychological shift to protect themselves from feelings of responsibility or remorse. They dehumanized the Cherokee. As the suffering increased, the level of cruelty increased. Years later, an American soldier who participated in the Trail of Tears wrote of the experience, "I fought through the War Between the States and have seen many men shot, but the Cherokee Removal was the cruelest work I ever knew."
3. On page 11 the author briefly mentions the difficulty of crossing a river with floating chunks of ice. On page 12 she states that many white people gave the Cherokee food along the way. This again is an attempt to portray the dominant culture in a sympathetic way and misrepresents the historical reality.

When the Cherokee arrived at Berry's crossing on the Ohio River, the ferry operator, who normally charged 12 cents for the crossing, charged the starving Cherokee \$1.00 per person. Those unable to pay took refuge near Mantle Rock where many died from exposure and starvation. A number of the Cherokee at Mantle Rock were murdered by local toughs who later sued the federal government for \$35 per head to bury the bodies. (Illinois General Assembly – HJRO142)

***History Detectives* by Sandy McKay**

At first glance, this document appears to be a rather straightforward presentation of archaeology as a scientific exploration of the past. The publication makes reference to investigating Native American burial sites (pg. 6), excavating Native American villages in North Carolina (pg. 9), Thomas Jefferson digging up Native American burial sites (pg. 11) and an oddly worded reference to archaeology helping us to "learn when dead people began to be buried," on pg. 12. The author appears to be unaware of the controversies related to the desecration of Native American burial sites, a topic which is both timely and significant in Juneau. A history of disrespect for Native Alaskan cemeteries on Douglas Island and the recent discovery of burials on the Gastineau School grounds have recently brought this issue to the public's attention.

1. In the recent past, a double standard regarding burial sites has dominated the field of archaeology. Institutional racism and the unquestioned cultural superiority of Western culture ensured that European and Native American burial sites and remains were treated in two very different ways. For example, 17th and 18th century European burials on the east coast of the United States are not subject to archaeological disturbance. However, Native American grave sites from the same time period have been the objects of archaeological digs and widespread looting. Native American artifacts and body parts have been regularly displayed in museums and sold across the world on the Internet by looters.
2. Desecration of Native American graves and the disrespectful treatment of the remains were, until relatively recently, established practices in American archaeology. In 1966 Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act which gave limited protection to Native American burials. In 1990 Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) to ensure the respectful treatment of Native American burial sites.
3. Construction of Gastineau School in the 1950's on the location of a known Tlingit cemetery remains a sensitive issue in Juneau. In the racially charged post World War II atmosphere, Native burial sites were not treated with respect. As a result of the discovery of the remains of five individuals buried around 1900 on the school grounds and the identification of additional graves by ground penetrating radar, public awareness of this controversy has increased. As has been observed by several members of the Juneau community—the construction of Gastineau School over a Native cemetery is a social justice issue. Including History Detectives in the fourth grade reading curriculum inevitably focuses attention on the subject. But this also presents the District with an educational opportunity to acknowledge history and an opportunity to ensure that "it never happens again." (Professor Dan Monteith, UAS)

Initial Reaction to these Documents

Having read through each of these documents several times, I was certainly not impressed with the quality of the writing, the historical accuracy and the cultural insensitivity. In my opinion, three of the publications are clearly classic examples of Historical Appropriation. (The rewriting and reinterpretation of an indigenous historical personages or events to satisfy the cultural and historical biases of members of the dominant culture.) Nevertheless, I was prepared to recommend a conciliatory approach to these publications. "Let's use them as bad examples—examples of Historical Appropriation. Let's write a more accurate account to accompany each of these publications and use them together."

After the August 27 Native Education Advisory Council meeting, I now realize that my initial reaction was unrealistic. During the meeting, the offensiveness of these publications was made very clear to me by members of the committee. Several people expressed concern about the effects of the distorted contents on all 4th grade Juneau students. "What the children read, they tend to accept as truth."

Additional Considerations

The reading booklet, "Continuing On" by Terry Miller Shannon, exemplifies the level of Historical Appropriation of these publications. The central problem, which the writer identifies, is the sadness experienced by a young Cherokee boy. John is sad from having been on a forced march across the continent during winter, a march in which 25% of his people perish. However, his father and his friends are happy and filled with optimism. As the story ends, John realizes that he will always be Cherokee and "lets go" of his sadness. To someone who has little knowledge of the Trail of Tears or who is not familiar with the effects of sustained trauma, starvation and brutality on a young mind, this story may seem plausible.

Let us apply this same plot structure to an historical event, which is closer to the consciousness of the dominant culture. Consider the following example:

The year is 1946. Ben, a young German Jew, is sad. After a long march, Ben has arrived with his family in Germany. In 1945, as the Soviet Army approaches a concentration camp, the guards march the survivors, including Ben and his family, westward on a death march. The nice concentration camp guards are very concerned about Ben and his family and share their rations with them. The German people along the way are sympathetic and give food to Ben. After the march, Ben's father and his friends are happy and filled with optimism. Only Ben seems sad. Finally Benjamin realizes that all is not so bad and "lets go" of his sadness.

Such blatant revisionism misrepresents the reality of an historical event and marginalizes the experiences of the victims. Literature of this type does a disservice to all students by unwittingly perpetuating stereotypes and dismissing responsibility. The fact that publications such as "Moving On" are included in the current 4th grade reading program prompts me to ask:

1. Why weren't these materials subjected to a closer scrutiny prior to purchase?
- &
2. Are there similar publications for other grade levels in the Reading Wonders program?

Final Recommendations

1. Discard the four publications from the 4th grade reading program.
2. Replace the publications with locally developed materials from the Alaska Native/Native American cultural perspective. These materials should include how-to-use instructions, lesson plans, and additional teaching activities.
3. Carefully assess the Reading Wonders program for content, which appropriates, distorts, and marginalizes Native American history and issues.
4. Reference: Juneau School District Equity Standard VI.A.4 (Curriculum, Review and Implemented with Institutional Fidelity) *"Curriculum review, development and adoption are regular, transparent processes that occur via inclusive committees which generally reflect district student demographics; committee participants report back to the constituency they represent."*

Implement the above standard VI.A.4 by involving a broader representation of the community when examining potential curriculum purchases. Inform the school board of this assessment.

5. Inform McGraw Hill of the inaccuracies and cultural insensitivities in the four publications from the 4th grade reading booklets in the Reading Wonders program.

Additional Note

One often hears the argument that it is improper to replace the materials in a reading program as such an intervention will compromise the integrity of the program. The implication is that commercial reading programs are scientifically designed to teach reading to students. Such an assertion is misleading. Commercial producers of educational materials develop reading programs according to their understanding of how children learn to read. The actual processes by which children learn to read is not completely understood, is not dependent on one methodology and certainly not dependent on the materials developed by one commercial publishing company. We are quite capable of locally supplementing and replacing content which is unsuitable for our children, especially when that content marginalizes and distorts the historical heritage of a significant segment of our community.

Paul K. Berg
Goldbelt Heritage Foundation
Sept. 3, 2014
Juneau, Alaska