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Reflection Paper

Abenaki tribe…..never heard of them before. That is what I was first thinking when we began this series of readings. Before I read the first book, I wanted to gain some prior knowledge so I could comprehend the stories to an even great extent. From my research, I learned that the Abenaki are a tribe of Native Americans and First Nations people who lived in northeastern North America. Abenaki stands for “people of the dawn” or “Easterners”. The stories we read encompassed that culture during many different time periods, ranging from the 1920’s to contemporary times.

When I first opened *Dark Pond* and read the first few pages of it, I felt that the story of Armie having birds as friends was very odd. I thought about Armie and felt that there was one stereotype that was portrayed in the book. Armie and the male gardener had animals as friends and Armie also had a fox protecting him, which I felt was a stereotype. I have heard many times that Native Americans got along well with animals and had a special relationship with animals. This book seemed to fit that stereotype of animals becoming best friends with Native Americans. I was beginning to judge the book by its cover and was caught up on this stereotype but I kept reading. As I continued throughout the story, however, it became more interesting and I was caught wanting to keep reading the book.

*Dark Pond* is considered a contemporary realistic fiction book. The story does take place as a current event, not a story from a long time ago. However, I am not agreeing about it being a realistic fiction story. The monster worm that comes out of the pond near the end of the story does not strike me as something that could really happen. Also, the birds jumping on and eating from the two male characters is something that doesn’t happen in real life either.

*Dark Pond* is told by a boy that is half-Armenian and half-Shawnee, which are both cultures I don’t read a lot about, nor know a lot about. I could only find the one stereotype in the story that I talked about earlier and Native Americans were not talked about negatively. Because of this reason, I could see this book as a good introduction to multicultural literature in the classroom and could also begin a good conversation with students. The story is also enjoyable and I feel it would help keep the students engaged and get them excited about multicultural literature.

While reading the articles from the first week of the unit, I began to think a lot about what multicultural literature is and how often these books are being used in the classroom. Harris talks about how there are fewer multicultural books that are being written and published. This genre of books is not in high demand so many people do not write these books anymore because they do not sell well. I could agree with that statement because I know I haven’t read a multitude of books that I consider multicultural. Adults need to get children engaged more in multicultural books so that many more authors are tempted to write books that encompass multiple cultures.

Bishop talks about multicultural literature and the use of this literature in a classroom. Some characters may appear unrealistic and not contemporary – which could begin some research with students on those characters and their similarities and differences. Students could also have a good conversation on those characters and what characteristics seem unrealistic and why. Bishop also says that reading literature by and about people of color can offer varying perspectives – cultures we may not be able to connect to in real life. Some students aren’t subject to many different cultures, so this literature can open a gate to see those different cultures and how their lives in books are different from the students’ own lives. This discussion could lead students to comparing and contrasting their own cultures to multiple other cultures.

Bishop’s article connected itself well to the Cai article, in which multicultural literature was talked about to an even greater extent. I was moved while thinking about how I have been bringing multicultural literature into my classroom but also made me realize that I need to include even more into my classroom library. I have read about different cultures in my classroom and we have talked about how people may look differently but how they are still great people who we treat with respect. There is very little diversity in or around the village I teach in, so students don’t know a lot about other cultures. The Cai article reminded me of a specific time in my classroom when a student reacted negatively to a book that I was reading. After reading the book *Amazing Grace,* which is centered on an African American girl, one of my students talked about how “black people” shouldn’t be treated with respect because that is what his dad taught him. This article made me realize that I need to increase my multicultural literature books in my classroom because these books can offer different perspectives of the world. Multicultural literature can also help give students more knowledge of the diversity from around the world. We need more multicultural literature in the classroom, libraries, and book stores – not less.

Cai talks about the importance of using multicultural literature in the classroom because it helps teach students about diversity, inclusion, power structures and struggles. The goal of multicultural literature is to achieve social equality and justice among cultures. Multicultural literature can teach students many things, including interracial relationships and varying traditions that those cultures may have. This literature can teach students a great deal about the world, without ever having to leave the classroom.

Additionally, Reese points out that most heroes in books and movies are not minority or ethnic characters. If children aren’t seeing diversity as a positive character in media, then I feel that it is important to introduce students to multicultural literature at an even greater number. Teachers and parents need to share these varying cultures with children and have them become more aware of those different cultures and for adults and children to react positively to these cultures. For authors who write multicultural literature, it may be a good idea to have some stories about heroes so children can begin to realize that anyone can be a hero, no matter the person or their culture.

*The Faithful Hunter* has many different tales about how things came to be. These short stories made me laugh because I felt that many of the stories were exaggerated. I personally didn’t enjoy reading these stories – they just didn’t allow me to be entertained. Abenaki and other Native American tribes felt that storytelling is a mode of socialization – so this book supports this fact by telling the reader stories that these tribe members might enjoy sharing with others. I think if I were an Abenaki reading this book, I would appreciate and enjoy the stories much more. It may also be more enjoyable if I was more educated with this culture and their past.

*The Faithful Hunter* gives stories that show relations between plants, trees, and animals. The Abenaki family, responsibilities, and right behaviors were introduced throughout the stories. The book also emphasized how patience, courage, loyalty, humility, and humor are important characteristics for an Abenaki person to possess. These stories showcased how the Abenaki children were taught about their culture and their community. It is interesting to see how one culture learns those values compared to how we learn about our own culture. I think I was told some stories growing up that were considered tall tales, that helped me learn about the world around us, however I don’t remember too many of those stories. This book could be used in the classroom to emphasize to students that no matter what culture one is speaking about, the same morals and characteristics are important for people from all over the world and stories can teach about the world around us.

Once I began reading *Darkness Under the Water,* I was confused as to the time period and what was occurring in the story. The story is in the genre of historical fiction and I was not well educated on the Eugenics Movement and the sterilization issues in the 1920’s – 1930’s. Once I became more comfortable with this time period and the movement by doing some research, I began to enjoy the plot and the events that occurred throughout the book. This story is about a girl whom lived with her mom, dad, and grandma. Her father works on the river and she finds out that her mother is pregnant. The main character, Molly, is aware of the nurses visiting the school and learns that they are sterilizing many Abenaki people of Vermont to get rid of the “weak links”.

However, when I began reading the debates and reviews of the book, I became aware of how there may be inaccuracies and stereotypes in books. The relationships between Molly’s friends and family in this story are at the center of this book. Scale and Dow discuss how the genre for *Darkness Under the Water* is historical fiction and this book is not historically accurate. There are many misrepresentations presented and stereotypes also occur throughout the book. For example, a stereotype in the book is that all Indians have long, braided hair. Some misrepresentations include the culturally inappropriate disrespect for elders and that there weren’t nurses roaming Vermont who would sterilize patients. However, there was some accurate information including a hydroelectric dam that was built across the Connecticut River in 1930.

After looking at the review for Kanell’s book, I began to ask myself a couple of questions. First, does it matter in a fiction story if there are inaccuracies? I feel that if a book is being used to teach about one’s own culture or about another culture, this story could teach students wrong information and increase stereotypes. In this case, it is my opinion that it is important for a fiction book to be accurate if it is being used in the classroom. If it is not being presented in the classroom, then I feel it isn’t as important to be fully accurate.

Reese feels that Kanell’s book, *Darkness Under the Water,* is being disrespectful to the readers because of the stereotypes and inaccuracies. Then I began to think about authors of books and does it matter if one person writes about another’s culture? I feel that it is harder for an author to write a story outside of one’s culture because there is extensive research that needs to be done before writing the story. Although I don’t feel it is impossible for someone to write a multicultural story, those who write a story from their own culture often have much more background knowledge on cultural issues.

When we look at *Hidden Roots* by Bruchac, the story is written from the decade of the 1950’s. Reese states that it is best if someone tells the story that is from that specific culture or time period. I feel that Bruchac’s book is written with less stereotypes and misrepresentations than what we saw in Kanell’s book. Also, Bruchac didn’t overwhelm the reader with a lot of information from the Eugenics movement, but instead chose to go into more detail about the family and their strengths and challenges. Bruchac chose to not go into a lot of detail about the Eugenics Movement because he wasn’t comfortable discussing too much about that time period and wanted his information to be as accurate as possible.

Sonny’s family decided to “hide in plain sight” so people wouldn’t know that they were Native Americans. In the book, Sonny asks, “Is it alright, us praying like Indians that way?” Uncle Louis replies, “Long as no one sees us.” The family doesn’t want everyone to know that they are Abenaki. The book also describes another character, the librarian. She is Jewish and shares with Sonny the story about her parents and how they had to escape during the Holocaust. This book can teach students a great lesson about how many different cultures have had to hide in fear of their lives and many cultures also don’t have the freedoms that we have in the USA.

The approach that Bruchac chose to use in his book *Hidden Roots* is very interesting. In the book, Sonny didn’t understand who his ancestors were or the background of his family. When we compare this idea to Bruchac’s own life, we notice a similarity. In his real life, Bruchac didn’t know of his culture when he was young either, so I think he may have tied his own life into the basis of this book. One thought I had was that he wanted to offer readers the perspective that Native Americans were proud of their heritage but also had to live carefully because of their past.

While viewing Bruchac’s website and reading *Bowman’s Store,* we learn even more about Bruchac. He grew up in the 1950’s with his grandparents, who were of the Abenaki culture. Reading this book last helped me go through the books that he has written and look at what he writes about and to notice patterns. He writes books in different genres, but it is interesting that all the books we have read have the Abenaki culture tied into them. He feels comfortable with his culture and to speak about it as well. This fact leads me to support the idea that it is easier to write a story if you are aware of the time period and culture. I know that when I write, I feel more comfortable if I choose to write a story about events that I have experienced in my own life and feel comfortable writing about.

Bruchac begins each chapter of *Bowman’s Store* in a very interesting way. He begins with a traditional tale and then relates that story to something that has happened in his own life. Bruchac states, in the foreword: "It does begin with my earliest memories of childhood and continues in more or less chronological order.....However, because it draws on memory and on dreams to guide its course, each chapter - like memories and dreams - is linked to that which is long ago and that which is today." His decision to include the tales throughout the book helped make the book more interesting to me and more importantly, I was constantly thinking about the Abenaki culture and how it tied in to Bruchac’s real life.

After reading these novels and learning more about both the Abenaki and the Eugenics Movement, I began looking more into this time in history and wondering how the Abenaki are currently being treated compared to how they were treated in the past. I came across the name Homer St. Francis. He has fought for all Abenaki people to be treated fair and for the people of the world to treat them with respect as well. I learned that the United States government doesn’t officially recognize the Abenaki tribe. They are fighting for rights to be able to hunt, fish, and sell crafts. It would be interesting to read a book from the Abenaki that is written from modern times and see how they may still struggle in current times. *Dark Pond* is written as a contemporary piece, but the book didn’t teach a lot about the Abenaki way of life. It would also be interesting to see how they describe their culture and the traditions they follow into the book as well. Then we would be able to see how life has changed for them from the 1920’s to current times.

In conclusion, this unit of reading has taught me a few important, key ideas. First, stereotypes of Native Americans are often represented through movies and literature. It is important for people to realize what these stereotypes are and be knowledgeable about the culture. Second, the author of a multicultural story either needs to be of that culture so they have personal experience and knowledge in that area, or complete research on that culture beforehand. Third, including multicultural literature in the classroom is very important. Students need to be introduced to a multitude of various cultures and learn more about diversity. Literature can teach a lot about the world and discussing what a person reads only helps create an even better understanding of what you read.