

# Evaluating Texts for Indigenous Voice

Greg Younging defines Indigenous Voice as, “the creation and expression of culture by Indigenous Peoples – through any traditional medium, or any contemporary medium, or any combination of these” (Younging, Elements of Indigenous Style, 11).

**One of the three points below must be true to be Indigenous Voice and go to the next step.**

Is the author:

- an Indigenous community or person who communicates about their own lived experiences or about the Indigenous culture/community they live in?
- an Indigenous community or person who creates using experiences and information about their own culture/community?
- a person who writes in partnership with a particular Indigenous community or person about the experiences, culture or community in question?

The Indigenous community/ancestry of the person included in this text is:

## Illustrations

If the illustrations are Indigenous themed, is the illustrator an Indigenous person using their own Indigenous culture/community knowledge? If the answer is yes, move to the Ownership section. If the answer is no, please check for the following points:

- If the illustrations are Indigenous themed and the illustrator is not using their own Indigenous culture/community knowledge, is there training or permission given to illustrate using this art form? Key point we are considering is cultural appropriation.
- If the images are of Indigenous people, activities and/or cultural material, does the text note permission, additional information about the image contents and people’s names?
- If the images are of Indigenous people, activities and/or cultural material, does the text note if there are protocols around use of these images?

**Note:** If the illustrator or photographer is not Indigenous, this does not mean the text isn’t Indigenous Voice. Many Indigenous Voice texts have illustrators who are not Indigenous. The key is the content of the images and whether they exhibit Indigenous cultural knowledge.

## Ownership

If the author is not writing about their own culture or community, who have they partnered with to ensure the content is accurate and appropriate? Choose one of the three options below:

- an Indigenous community/Nation/band/Métis Chartered Community
- an Indigenous person whose story or experiences are being written about
- an Indigenous consultant/review panel made of people from the Indigenous culture/community being written about

Also consider:

- If the story was told to the author by another person, do they have permission to retell the story?
- If the text is recommended by an Indigenous community/group/person, have they been a part of the entire process of the text? An Indigenous person writing an introduction or preface in a text does not make the text Indigenous Voice.

## **Stereotypes and racism**

- Does the text avoid use of stereotyping? This means characters created that are one dimensional, only exhibit negative or offensive characteristics. This do not include characters depicting real issues or concerns happening within Indigenous communities.
- Does the text use derogatory language and racial slurs? If so, are they used to move the story rather that describe a character or used as a trope. Indigenous people are reclaiming use of specific terminology, such as Indian, so context is very important.
- Is the story free from colonialism? Colonial views uphold the idea that normal is white, Western societal values only. It also devalues Indigenous traditions and knowledge.
- Does the text distinguish between different Indigenous nations and avoid blending? E.g., “The Salish” described as one nation. Recognition of specific and correct Indigenous community names is important in modern texts.
- Does the text use appropriation in the story or characters? E.g., using a Raven trickster character without proper cultural context or knowledge.

## **Other factors in addition to Indigenous Voice to consider**

- Is the text inclusive of all genders and sexual orientations?
- Does the text contain any racism, stereotypes, discrimination or derogatory terminology?
- Is the content appropriate for the reader in terms of sexual activity, violence, etc.
- Is the text inclusive of different belief systems?

## **Locations in text to consider when looking for Indigenous Voice information**

- Author and illustrator biographies
- On the page inside the book that contains the copyright date and acknowledgments
- Front and back covers
- Author’s preface or introduction
- Appendices, notes and acknowledgements in the back of the book

## **Locations besides the text to consider when looking for Indigenous Voice information**

- Publisher’s website. You can always contact the publishers if you have specific questions.
- Author’s website
- ABPBC’s website - [www.booksforschools.ca](http://www.booksforschools.ca)
- Book review magazines and associations, such as 49th Shelf or Quill & Quire
- FNESC’s Authentic First Peoples Resources - <http://www.fnesc.ca/authenticresources/>

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