

rain forests, to mention just a few. Thus, as well as assisting those concerned with the selection of quality literature for children and young people, these two collections of annotations provide a fascinating overview of trends in books and concerns of American society during the nineties. They are welcome additions to the field of literature for children and young adults.

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Film Review

National Film Board of Canada (1993).
FIRST NATIONS: THE CIRCLE UNBROKEN.
Ottawa, ON: National Film Board of Canada
ISBN 0-7722-0490-x.

First Nations: The Circle Unbroken is a video series about First Nations (as used by the producers, this term includes all aboriginal peoples) and about their relationship with Canada.

Lorna Williams, one of the directors of the series, says of the goals of this series:

This collection. . . will introduce students, age 9 to adults, to a variety of contemporary First Nations perspectives on history, culture, spirituality, education, justice, the environment, racism, colonialism, Aboriginal title to land. . . . These programs will provide students with rich and complex images of the contemporary reality of the First Nations, their sense of identity, and their relations with Canada. (p. 2, workshop guide)

According to the supporting documents, the series was produced by *Face to Face Media* and the *National Film Board* in cooperation with First Nations teachers and filmmakers. Three of the four series directors are aboriginal educators from British Columbia. Over the course of a year, the four of them collaborated with over seventy-five educators and filmmakers in reviewing and revising NFB, CBC, and independent documentaries. The result is thirteen video programs about aboriginal peoples and issues of concern to them which run an average of twenty minutes each.

Description of the Series

The thirteen programs are contained on four video tapes and the media kit includes a promotional video, a guide for an implementation workshop for teachers, a teacher's guide, as well as press releases and endorsements from a number of aboriginal people.

The videos are grouped by theme: (a) stories about what is important to a sample of individuals and their families (video 1 - four stories), (b) somewhat more complex stories about aboriginal title, alternative justice (videos 2 and 3 - six stories), and (c) more difficult issues such as the purposes of education, the definition of cultural genocide (video 4 - three stories, one from South America).

The promotional video shows vignettes of each of the thirteen videos without explanation; one gets a visual image of the range of experiences that will be encountered throughout the series.

The workshop guide outlines in detail a one-day schedule with alternate delivery of several one- or two-hour meetings. The guide is designed principally to introduce mainstream teachers with little or no prior knowledge of aboriginal peoples to the video series, and to increase their sense of comfort, competence, and confidence in using the videos in the classroom. The strategies suggested for use in the workshop model the types of behaviours it is suggested that teachers should use in their own classes.

The teacher's guide (56 pages) is quite extensive. The introductory section includes: (1) a summary of each video; (2) a brief explanation of the role of stories in aboriginal cultures, and in this series; (3) a description of the elements of the guide; (4) a section on the principles and pedagogy on which the guide is based, e. g., for people who have little knowledge of aboriginal issues, the format is designed to provide a safe environment in which to question and enlarge knowledge about aboriginal peoples; the teacher's role is to facilitate and manage classroom discussion while encouraging multiple perspectives; and (5) a section on teaching controversial issues.

What follows then is a lesson plan for each video, using the following format: (1) history of the original video; (2) synopsis of the contents; (3) background (with maps and pictures) - depending on the story, there are different elements, e. g., historical, political, environmental, and social; (4) questions and activities, divided into five sections: before viewing (anticipatory set); focus for viewing, after viewing; extension (moving beyond this story to other aboriginal stories that are

similar); integration (making connections between the students' lives and the lives of those in the videos; and (5) resources: text, video, and other aspects.

At the end of the guide there are addresses for organizations that can provide additional information and contacts for NFB offices throughout Canada.

Responses to the Series

What follows is a dialogue between McAlpine and Coté, the two reviewers of these films. McAlpine is a mainstream teacher educator who for the past five years has worked with aboriginal educators in delivering a field-based teacher education program to a number of Algonquin, Cree, Mi'kmaq, and Mohawk communities in Quebec. She also does classroom research in some of these communities. Coté is an Algonquin teacher educator who for the past three years has worked in a similar type of field-based program in Cree, Iroquoian, and Ojibwe communities in Ontario. Each reviewer watched several of the videos and the following is a reconstruction of their two voices describing their responses to what they saw.

McAlpine:

I began by watching videos 1 and 2 without any supporting documentation since, in my experience, videos have a tendency to get separated from the guides that originally accompany them. Thus, I did not know that each of the tapes has differing themes. Each of the video programs began with the same introduction, ending with a map of North America with a zoom to the place where the story takes place.

I will talk only about two of the seven programs I watched. These were the first on each video, and this is likely to be what someone would look at if they found the tapes in a library and wanted to preview them. *Cree Hunters, Quebec Dams* (video 1, story 1) tells the story of the Cree of northern Quebec, people with whom I work. This was the story of a family living on the land (the theme of video 1), but also of political struggles over land (supposedly the theme of videos 2 and 3). It was made clear in the video that what I was seeing was a mixture of tape from an old video (*Cree Hunters of Mistissini*, 1974) and some new additions (*Flooding Job's Garden*, filmed in 1988, released in 1991). However, the changes in time were not made explicit during the viewing, so it was difficult to know which time was being represented. Were we learning about the recent past or two decades ago?

Since I know the political story quite well, I found there were gaps in the telling, and as the story ended in 1988, many events remain untold. It might have been helpful if the video had explicitly stated the time when the story ended, so that a viewer would know that a gap existed between the end of the story and the present.

The images that remain are strong and evoke much of what I know of east coast Cree communities: the strength of the language and traditional ways, the tension between traditional and southern ways, a respect and need for the land, disillusionment about some of the outcomes of the James Bay Northern Quebec Agreement.

After viewing the video, I studied the lesson plan in the teacher's guide. I found the information in *Background* quite extensive and accurate. It provided additional information, both political and cultural, that made the video more meaningful. The *Questions and Activities* provided are interesting, but vary considerably in their difficulty level.

The first program on the second video was *Hunters and Bombers*, a story I know only through the media and from acquaintances who have contact with the Innu. It is clearly a political story (as the second video is described). We hear from both the military, who describe the beauty of flying in an area where "there's not one permanent resident", and from a number of Innu women and men who are using civil disobedience and public relations to try to stop the overflying of their land at 100 feet above ground. These individuals describe the destruction of their traditional hunting patterns. As one man says so eloquently, the white man "has laws against everything. . . our way of life seems to be illegal. . . the only right we have is to be drunk." There were some episodes that were not clear to me: Have these people been arrested? What have they done?

Still, it is a very powerful program with eloquent Innu speakers who leave bitter emotions in my heart, but who also show their belief in their power to change what is happening to their lives.

When I studied the lesson plan in the teacher's guide, I found the background information extensive, the questions well designed to make evident the differing perspectives of the stakeholders in this video, as well as opportunity for students to imagine how they might react if they found themselves in the same situation.

Finally, I read through the introduction in the teacher's guide; it is excellent and, as I said earlier, the lesson plans seem well thought out and provide the teacher with a lot of information and ideas for instructional

use of the materials. I don't believe the videos could be well exploited without the guide.

Coté:

The saying that "a picture speaks a thousand words" applies well to this video series. I used it with a class of preservice teachers that I instruct at Nipissing University. Many of them had come into my course, "The Education of Native Canadians," without any background in aboriginal culture or education. During previous weeks of classroom instruction, we had seminars and guest speakers dealing with a variety of different issues concerning aboriginal peoples. One Saturday had been set aside to hold a "Film Festival" where several students had taken on the assignment of critiquing a selection of film resources dealing with aboriginal peoples. *First Nations: The Circle Unbroken* was one of the resources chosen to be critiqued. Three of the students had selected segments from this series and analyzed them from a teaching point of view while keeping in mind cultural accuracy and biases.

The overall response to the series by all the preservice teachers in attendance was extremely positive. For those who had never had first-hand experience with aboriginal cultures, lights went on. All of the previous classes had served to give them an academic understanding of the issues that were being discussed but the visual impact of these films enhanced their affective as well as cognitive learning. The films stimulated much discussion that had not previously been forthcoming. Aboriginal students in the course participated much more freely, identifying strongly with certain aspects of culture in the films and offering their own stories in support of these.

I have spent some time studying the materials available in this curriculum resource and can appreciate the series-directors' efforts to present a broad view of aboriginal cultures and issues while not generalizing about any of these or creating a sense of *pan-Indianism*, as so often happens when one is developing curricula about aboriginal peoples. I viewed several of the segments and, even with my experiences as a Native and my background in Native education, I learned much from what I saw.

An undercurrent in many of the segments is the recognition of the strength of some aboriginal cultures in being able to take outside influences and adapt them to their own unique needs and in so doing enhance their own culture. An example of this is the clip about Pete Standing Alone as he recounts how his people, the Blackfoot of Alberta, adapted to the acquisition of horses over a century ago and are now reknown for

their horsemanship. Another example is in the segment, "Magic in the Sky," that describes how a group of Inuit keep the CBC from taking over their airwaves and bringing in a flood of "southern" culture by acquiring the skills and technology to launch their own programming, thus keeping their language and culture from being polluted.

The lesson plans and explanation that accompany each segment give an objective approach to the use of each film, stimulating critical thinking and questioning. However, the segments in video 4, "Education As We See It," "Last Days of Oka," and "Commandos for Christ", contain an undercurrent of anti-Christian sentiment created by the strong visual images in the films. The background and the notes for teachers in the guide attempt to bring objectivity to the material being presented but fall short. "Commandos for Christ" appears to place all the blame for cultural genocide on fundamentalist Christianity while ignoring the damage being done by industrialists and others whose materialistic use of the land has destroyed the fragile balance that most aboriginal cultures have enjoyed with the land. This neglect can give impressionable young people a false view of the issue being presented.

Conclusion

The series does what it sets out to do. As we know from watching news coverage of world events, the visual medium is a powerful tool in influencing opinions. When using this tool, educators need to ensure that they have previewed the material themselves so that they can introduce it with some objectivity. *First Nations: The Circle Unbroken* deals with controversial issues that are best discussed with the support of an objective facilitator. We would then recommend the series for use in schools across Canada or in any other setting where people want to learn more about aboriginal peoples and issues of concern to them.

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