

**AMERICAN INDIAN YOUTH LITERATURE AWARD CRITERIA**  
**American Indian Library Association**

The biennial American Indian Youth Literature Award (AIYLA) identifies and honors the very best writing and illustrations by and about Native Americans and Indigenous peoples of North America. Books selected to receive the award present Indigenous North American peoples in the fullness of their humanity. In odd-numbered years, nominations are encouraged in fiction or nonfiction and may include graphic novels; for picture books, the award is for both author and illustrator. Awards are granted in even-numbered years. Authors/illustrators may win the American Indian Youth Literature Award in the categories Best Picture Book, Best Middle Grade Book, and Best Young Adult Book. In addition, up to five awards may be selected as Honors books in each category.

**CRITERIA FOR NOMINATION**

- Authors (for illustrated books, both author AND illustrator) must be recognized by the Native community of which they claim to be a part and be connected to the people of that community.
- For anthologies, at least  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the authors must be recognized members of the community to which they claim affiliation.
- Books must have been published after October of the year before the last awards were given (i.e., the odd-numbered year preceding the previous award cycle; after October 2017 for the 2020 awards, etc.).
- Indigenous-language text and audio materials are encouraged, and every effort will be made to provide accurate translation for the committee when possible, but the committee's common language is English.
- Books may be nominated for consideration by the AIYLA Jury, publishers, librarians, authors, illustrators, and others.
- The Awards go beyond merely naming the best creator of a particular art form in a certain year to representing the ideals of our multiple communities. Native authors and illustrators are role models for young people. For that reason, AILA does not endorse authors who appropriate other cultures or who behave in ways that dishonor others.

**GENERAL CRITERIA**

- Text and illustrations are infused with, or reflect, the values and worldview of American Indian cultures, such as significance of community (its language, history, ceremony, and place), extended family structures, harmony between material and non-material aspects of life, and respect for the land.
  - Text and illustrations accurately reflect the traditions, symbols, clothing, housing, and lifestyles of the nation(s) of the story's time period.
  - Books show the continuity of cultures, with Indigenous values, religions, and

- morals as an outgrowth of the past and connected to the present.
  - Authentic and balanced characters exhibit a wide range of positive and negative human emotions, behaviors, reactions, and lifestyles.
  - Indigenous characters demonstrate the ability to achieve success on their own terms and in the context of their cultures or communities, as successful problem-solvers independent of non-Native teachers, social workers, and other authority figures.
- Text and illustrations depicting race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, and/or class are free of stereotypes.
  - The role of traditional elders is authentically presented.
  - Portrayals of gender are balanced and accurate.
  - Women are accurately portrayed as essential, integral, and powerful members of their communities.
  - Native American characters are not be portrayed as stereotypical heroic guardians and caretakers of the environment, nor as faultless, flawless, or unrealistically heroic (the “noble savage”).
  - Native religion and spirituality, if included, are shown in a natural, not contrived, manner.
  - No inaccurate and unrealistic “coming of age” scenarios are depicted.
  - Historic fiction/nonfiction portrays Native people as human beings and members of highly defined and complex societies.
  - Books portraying contemporary life accurately depict geographical settings on or near reservations, in villages, or in urban or suburban areas.

## **CRITERIA FOR TEXT**

- Authors must be recognized by the Native community of which they claim to be a part and be connected to the people of that community. Publishers must provide a brief biographical statement about the author’s Native identity along with their submission.
- Retellings or interpretations of traditional literature (myths, legends, folktales) must specify tribal origin and include notes regarding the origin and source for the story. References and expert consultants in Native American cultures are cited when used.
- “Warrior,” “brave,” “chief,” and similar terms must only be used in proper context. Inappropriate, insulting, or stereotypical terms like “squaw,” “papoose,” “redskin,” “paleface,” and “savage” must only be used in context and not as standard vocabulary. Stereotypical portrayals of people as “fierce,” “violent,” “stealthy,” “stoic,” etc., must not be used gratuitously or out of context. Dialogue must be realistic and free of romantic overtones such as “My Son,” or “Tonto-speak” such as “Me go help.”
- Avoid generalizations such as “Indians lived in tipis.” Authors should use specific, authentic terms for Native nations when referring to only one people, such as “Yaqui” or “Wampanoag,” rather than generic terms like “Indian.” Significant Indigenous characters

should have personal names.

- Historical fiction and nonfiction should avoid providing a distorted view that newcomers brought “civilization” to the “New World” and thus improved Native ways of life. Authors should avoid terminology that demeans American Indian cultures or implies the superiority of European ways.
- Books should consistently demonstrate parallel usage of terminology, i.e. “Indian communities” and “White settlers” or “Native people” and “non-Native people.”
- When the tribal language is used, notes should verify/support its accuracy.

### **CRITERIA FOR ILLUSTRATIONS**

- Illustrators must be recognized by the Native community of which they claim to be a part and be connected to the people of that community. Publishers must provide a brief biographical statement about the illustrator’s Native identity along with their submission.
- Illustrations should be high quality, with careful attention to accurate and authentic portrayals of culture as well as artistic elements of design.
- Illustrations should accurately portray the tribe(s)/nation(s) specified. Generic “Indian” designs must not predominate.
- Traditional clothing must only be depicted in appropriate contexts.
- Unless the illustrations are abstract or stylized, characters should be unique and genuine with physical features that distinguish individuals from one another.

### **JURY MEMBERSHIP AND DUTIES**

- The AILA President will appoint the Jury Chair, Co-Chair, and members in February of the odd-numbered year preceding Youth Media Awards (YMA) announcements (i.e., 2019, 2021, etc.). The AILA President has the discretion to remove or add committee members at any time.
- The AIYLA Jury will consist of a minimum of seven, maximum 10, members, with one Chair and one Co-Chair.
- Individual Jurors must
  - be an AILA member in good standing
  - live in the U.S.
  - have experience working in libraries
  - have experience working with children and youth, and/or teaching, reviewing writing, or writing for children or young adults
  - exhibit a working knowledge of criteria used to evaluate books about American Indians for young people
  - ideally, work for a Native-serving institution.
- The Jury membership must
  - include wide geographic representation from on/near U.S. reservations, villages, and rural, suburban, and urban communities, whenever possible

- include majority ( $\frac{2}{3}$ ) representation of recognized members of Indigenous nations/tribes/communities
- commit to a minimum of four, maximum of six, virtual meetings according to the timetable set by the Chair
- make the final decision concerning books accepted for nomination and awards, on time and by consensus, with Chair as tie-breaker if needed.
- Jury members are encouraged to
  - nominate titles in each category
  - attend ALA Midwinter YMA and AILA sessions and ceremonies.
- Terms limits are as follows:
  - Indigenous Jury members may serve an indefinite, unlimited number of years as needed
  - Non-Native Jury members may serve for two award cycles or four years at the discretion of the AILA President.

## **TIMETABLE**

- Titles may be submitted at any time during the two-year award cycle. The deadline for submissions is October of the odd-numbered year preceding the year of the award. For fullest consideration, titles should be submitted by the end of June.
  - Publishers are requested to submit sufficient copies of each title being nominated for each Jury member. The Jury Chair will provide addresses of Jurors to publishers.
  - Submissions received after October may not be eligible for that year's award but may be considered in the next award cycle.
- Winners will be announced at the Midwinter ALA Conference in even-numbered years, at the same time as the other ALA Book Award announcements during the Youth Media Awards.
- In odd-numbered years, the previous year's winners will be invited to an AILA awards ceremony planned by the committee.

## **RESOURCES CONSULTED**

Aase, Lara. "AILA Youth Literature Award & Sherman Alexie," ALA Intersections, March 2018. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intersections-aila-youth-literature-award-sherman-alexie>

Caldwell-Wood, Naomi and Lisa A. Mitten. *I is Not for Indian: The Portrayal of Native Americans in Books for Young People*, Multicultural Review, 1.2 (1992): 26-33, 35.

Hirschfelder, Arlene, Paulette Fairbanks Molin, and Yvonne Wakin. *American Indian Stereotypes in the World of Children: A Reader and Bibliography*, 1999.

Reese, Debbie. "Critical Indigenous Literacies: Selecting and Using Children's Books about Indigenous Peoples." *Language Arts* 95.6 (2018): 389-393.

<https://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/LA/0956-jul2018/LA0956Jul18Language.pdf>

National Council of Teachers of English. “‘We Are Still Here’: An Interview with Debbie Reese.” *English Journal* 106.1 (2016): 51–54.

[http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/EJ/1061\\_sep2016/EJ1061WeAre.pdf](http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/EJ/1061_sep2016/EJ1061WeAre.pdf)

Seale, Doris, and Beverly Slapin. *A Broken Flute: The Native Experience in Books for Children*. Berkeley, CA : AltaMira Press, 2005.

Slapin, Beverly, Doris Seale, and Rosemary Gonzales. *How to Tell the Difference: A Checklist*. Philadelphia, PA : New Society Pub., 1992.

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