BACKGROUND
INFORMATION
Preface

This manual contains activities which should help teachers of Indian students feel more comfortable in the classroom. Teachers using The Indian Reading Series: Stories and Legends of the Northwest, are urged not to rely entirely upon these teacher’s aids but to diverge and create strategies and activities which are best suited to their own particular class at any given time.

Although The Indian Reading Series: Stories and Legends of the Northwest is designed to help meet some of those particular problems which Indian students face, the Series is good for everyone since it gives some insight into parts of the Indian cultures which are represented in creating the Series.

As is commonly known, there are several Indian cultural groups within the northwest area. We have had to generalize some of the concepts across the region with the definite danger of creating stereotypes.

Teachers are urged to find out about the particular tribe with which they work. If there is an Indian program associated with your school, this is the best place to start.

There is another valuable resource in the community, the Indian people themselves. Invite them to the classroom to help teach children. Plan a lesson with them prior to having them come into the classroom so they can cover as much as possible in the limited time available.

We, the program staff, can never express enough the gratitude we feel to the Indian people who wrote and illustrated the books, the teachers and administrators who were invaluable in the testing phases, as well as providing many of the ideas incorporated into the manual, the Program Policy Board for its guidance, the National Institute of Education for the funding and moral support and the Laboratory administrators who were instrumental in making the project possible.

Joseph Coburn
Program Director
Rationale

In spite of some encouraging indicators in recent years, Indians continue to lag behind the general population in formal educational attainment. Four major problem areas have been defined:

- The reading and language arts curriculum materials currently in use in schools do not contain content that is culturally relevant or within the experiential background of most Indian children.

- When Indian children's reading and language skills are measured using typical norm-referenced standardized tests, their scores tend to be lower than scores for other comparison groups (especially middle-class Anglo children). Although the children learn decoding skills, they seem to lag behind in developing comprehension and language fluency.

- Indian children seem to become less interested in school and school activities as they progress through the grades. Drop-out rates in high school and junior high are extremely high. Many elementary school Indian students become quiet and withdrawn and do not participate actively in classroom activities.

- Due to cultural conflicts in the classroom and the resultant lack of academic success, many Indian children lack a positive self-image.

Upon examination of these problem areas, one can readily determine the special needs of Indian children:

- Indian children need to develop an increased interest in school, especially interest and involvement in language arts activities and communication processes. They need the opportunity to use the language they bring to school. Only after they are aware of the potential of their own language, and feel free to use it, can they develop new and more effective patterns of communication.

- Indian children, like all children, need relevance and high interest potential in the content to which they react while speaking, reading, writing or listening. They need instructional strategies and activities which more closely match their past experiences and interactions with adults.

- Indian children need support from parents and other community members involved in the school program. They need experiences with school materials which emphasize the dignity and importance of people and places within the Indian community.

- All children need to know and understand important similarities and differences among the varied cultural backgrounds of their classmates.
Program Objectives

The Indian Reading Series is a supplementary reading and language arts development program for elementary grade Indian and non-Indian children. The objectives of the program are to:

- expand student interest in language arts experiences.
- increase student skills in language arts activities.
- improve student feelings of competence and success in communication skills.
- reinforce for Indian students a positive self-image and pride in being Indian.
- provide students and teachers with greater understanding of Indian culture.
Indians Were Always Good Readers

SIGNS OF NATURE

BOOKS

HAND SIGNALS

SMOKE SIGNALS
Language Experience

and

Native American Oral Tradition

I hope to indicate something about the nature of the relationship between language and experience. It seems to me that in a certain sense we are all made of words; that our most essential being consists in language. It is the element in which we think and dream and act, in which we live our daily lives. There is no way in which we can exist apart from the morality of verbal dimension.

N. Scott Momaday

If one accepts the premise of Momaday’s quote then it is essential that educators create an environment which gives students maximum opportunities to experience language. The more adept an individual becomes at utilizing language, the more fully that individual may realize his or her potential.

The language experience approach to reading was promoted throughout the first five levels of The Indian Reading Series. With Level VI it still provides a bridge by which Indian and non-Indian students may better understand the relationship between spoken and written language. The language experience approach employed in Level VI encourages students to draw upon their individual experiences, as well as their experiences as members of a collective tribal group rich in cultural contributions to be shared. The program gives students ample opportunities to practice language skills such as reading, listening, speaking and writing within a cultural context.

Similar to the previous levels of The Indian Reading Series, Level VI provides increased opportunities for student oral expression. As Indian students move from elementary schools to middle schools and beyond, the demand to express one’s self orally in front of a large group is increased. Level VI provides more opportunities for Indian students to practice oral skills in this context by providing story related scripts that may be adapted to such theatrical productions as readers theater, puppet plays, role plays, participation drama and full scale plays with costumes, staging and props.

The stories themselves reflect the power inherent in oral tradition (that process by which the stories of a people are formulated, communicated and preserved in language by word of mouth rather than in writing). Oral tradition requires the active participation of both the storyteller and the listener for each must internalize the thoughts, words and spirit of the story since no reference can be made to written words.

The stories of The Indian Reading Series originated in oral tradition and, undoubtedly, have lost something in the written translation. However, the response from students indicates that these stories can stand on their own even in written form and, if conscientiously presented, can provide students with stories to recreate the benefits of the oral experience. By role playing, pantomiming, reading aloud, retelling old stories and creating new stories, students can be immersed in the thought and spirit of oral tradition; a truly rewarding experience with language.
All such activities will require additional time and commitment on the part of the teacher. Only a committed and sensitive teacher can provide the enthusiasm which will help shy inhibited students get out of themselves and get into the stories. The creative potential of all students cannot be appreciated unless it is given a chance to be expressed.

Robin A. Butterfield
A Historical Perspective

In order to help students and teachers better understand not only the stories but Indian culture as it exists today, a good deal of time should be taken to explore the changes and adaptations Indian people have made in recent history. Following is a brief description of three historical periods.

**Historical Periods** (As described by Deward Walker)

There are various ways of looking at the evolution of the Indian cultures reflected in *The Indian Reading Series*. The most practical way, however, of dividing up that history is as follows:

- **Pre-contact or Aboriginal Culture Period (pre 1860)**
  This is the period prior to the treaties; values are those that are significantly intact and unaltered, or those portions of the present culture that might be said to derive from that period.

- **Reservation Culture Period (1860 to 1930)**
  This period follows the treaties and the establishment of the reservations; it includes the early experiences with the missionaries, traders and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

- **Modern Culture Period (1930 to Present)**
  This period begins with the Indian Reconstruction Act when the tribes underwent formal organization; it is the period of formal institutionalization of effective tribal government.

These three periods are roughly the same for each of the culture areas, (Plains, Plateau and Coast) represented in *The Indian Reading Series*.

Most of the Level VI stories originated in the pre-contact period with the exceptions of *A Cultural Change, Willie’s Tribe* and parts of *Tsapah Talks of Pheasant* which are all contemporary or from the modern culture period. The reservation period is represented by *Nina Saves Roan, Adventures on an Island* and *The Story of Wild Horse Island*.

In order to better eliminate stereotypes for Indian and non-Indian students alike, **opportunities should be taken to note than Indian people encompass a diverse group of people who range from being very traditional in some cases to very modern in others**. They live on and off reservations and still maintain their ties with their culture. There is a need to point out real life examples of Indian people who are successfully bicultural. We all need to understand that practicing traditional culture and living in the modern world are not necessarily contradictory. Indian people have developed a clear, rich, multicultural kind of existence in which they can express their “Indianness” in certain contexts and yet be quite competent with non-Indian behavior in other contexts. Culture is an ever changing phenomena, a process rather than an end result.
Pre-Contact Period

Before interacting with non-Indians, Pre-Contact, the tribes in the northwestern part of the United States maintained unique cultures, which for sake of discussion may be grouped according to three geographical areas (Plains, Coast, Plateau).

This general discussion of the three culture areas and the values that make them distinctive concentrates on the differences, not the similarities, of the three cultures. People tend to talk as if Indians were all the same, which they are not. Nor are these culture areas the same even now. Normally, the Northern Plains, the Northwest Coast and the Plateau are thought to have been quite distinctive in terms of the pre-treaty or aboriginal Indian cultural period (prior to the advent of the whites).

The Northern Plains is historically characterized by horse nomadism, a lifestyle of following a seasonal round of economic activities by way of the horse. It is also characterized by the warrior ethic, in which one’s ability as a man, at least, was measured by how successful he was in war. Some anthropologists would also describe this culture in terms of religion that was a search for visions or religious ecstasy. The Northern Plains inhabitants have traditionally had large confederated tribal council groups — much larger political units than those of the Plateau or the Northwest Coast Indians.

The Northwest Coast is thought of in terms of relatively rich fisherpeople with a host of patterns surrounding status consciousness based on property holdings and property distinctions. The Northwest coast people can be characterized by a very rigid class distinction and a close connection between material success in life and religious virtue.

In looking at the Plateau, which lies between the Northern Plains and the Northwest Coast, one finds an area that is not so well known or so well characterized in the literature. Some anthropologists have seen the Plateau as transitional between the Plains and the Coast, but this has been shown recently to be a bit too simplistic. More recent research sees the Plateau as being only indirectly involved with either the Northern Plains or the Northwest Coast, and has shown that it formed a rather distinct set of cultures with separate values. For example, the Plateau is characterized by an economic system that is more diverse in its nature. It involved some horse nomadism, some fishing and much reliance on roots and game, all of which suggests a more generalized adaptive kind of cultural pattern. It was a diverse economic scheme, in other words, compared to the more concentrated focus on buffalo out in the Plains and on salmon on the Coast. The social organization of the Plateau is distinct from either the Plains or Northwest Coast in that it emphasized very small sized groupings, like small villages. A very strong emphasis was placed on the individual and a kind of equality of each individual, more so than in either the Plains or the Northwest Coast areas. In the Plateau, the religion was not strongly concerned with materialistic success, nor was it as oriented to religious ecstasy and vision as was the case in the Plains area.

There are, then, important differences between these three culture areas, not just harking from the traditional cultures and the differences that existed, for example, one hundred and fifty years ago. Even now, certain differences exist due to the different kinds of exposures and involvement with non-Indians in the three culture areas.
Core Values of the Three Cultural Areas

While the three culture areas have distinct differences, the culture areas are the same in terms of a common set of core values, at least during the pre-contact period. A common set of core values that apply fairly equally in all three areas would include the following:

- **primacy of kinship/family obligations**
  Family is the ultimate security; sharing among family members is not even questioned, it is assumed.

- **religion as maintaining harmony between man and nature**
  Nature, society and man have to be brought into an equitable balanced relationship.

- **economy as dependence on what nature has to offer**
  Dependence is on nature itself for food; a passive, non-agricultural approach in which people exercise and exploit that which nature has to offer.

- **political organization based on the consent of the governed**
  There is respect for the aged in general; a leader has no automatic power outside of the consent of the governed.

- **art, music and recreation as reflections of man's relationship to nature**
  There are naturalistic, highly stylized representations that deal primarily with phenomena of nature.

- **common rituals or ceremonies of thanksgiving**
  Some of these are the first salmon ceremony on the Coast, the first buffalo ceremony on the Plains, and the first root ceremony on the Plateau.

*The Indian Reading Series* contains a good set of core values for the three culture areas. Those values represented in the stories include emphasis on the harmony principle with nature, the heavy emphasis on the importance of relatives and kin and the dependence on nature itself for food (inhabitants followed their distinctive but still similar economic activity patterns by being dependent upon nature for what it gave rather than on what people could raise).

Reservation Period

For Indian culture, the **Reservation Period** can be likened to a visit from outer space by people who refuse to leave and who get stronger and ever more involved with changing the planet earth. If one thinks of the Reservation Period for Indian people as being like a visitation from outer space, then one gets some idea of how tremendous the impact must have been.

The establishment of reservations was not just a restriction on the movement of Indian people to certain physical areas, which of course was very much a part of it, but it also involved exposing them systematically, as well as somewhat less systematically, to European influences in the form of missionaries, teachers and government agents. This might be called the period when Indian life became bureaucratized; when Indian life was turned over to different kinds of bureaucrats; where certain bureaucrats had control of one's head, certain others had control of one's heart and
certain others had control of the food, horses, etc. Life began to be split up and put under the control of alien people, individuals that Indians had no reason to understand or no real sympathy with from the beginning. The Reservation Period is really a revolution in Indian life, a major transformation. It involved administration by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and intensive efforts by missionaries, educators and other individuals to change Indian people.

It also involved a slow erosion of reservation resources. Many reservations lacked resources to begin with, but underwent a slow erosion (or sometimes not so slow) as land, minerals and timber, not to mention cultural autonomy of Indian people, were eroded. During this time, there was a very rapid increase in non-Indian control over practically all institutions of Indian life, from the family to religion to economic and political activities. Practically no area of life escaped during this early Reservation Period in which the Europeans were trying to either eliminate or to change them somehow to resemble European patterns. In the case of the family, for example, it involved doing away with multiple marriages, trying to develop the nuclear family and isolate it on a piece of ground, as opposed to the older extended family pattern in which there was much more economic cooperation. It involved trying to stamp out the old religion in favor of basic Christianity that Europeans tried to implant everywhere. In terms of politics, it involved giving leaders a lot more power, whether they were non-Indians or ones appointed by non-Indians. It involved increasing a leader's power unlike that exercised by any of their political leaders during the Pre-Contact time.

Of course Indian people had to develop values in order to deal with this. Most anthropologists think that core values are those values from the traditional (Pre-Contact) period that were learned earliest in life — those that a child took in during its first years of life and tended to be perpetuated by virtue of the fact that individuals in the Reservation Period were still being raised by their elders, and still learning their culture from the parents and grandparents. Many of the core values therefore continued.

These values continued, but on top of them, as soon as school started (and sometimes before) the individual began to be taught contrary values, basically Anglo-European values relating to family, religion and so on. Out of this came a need to deal with the two cultures and consequently, the values which fit into the general area of biculturalism began to emerge.

**Biculturalism is a coping mechanism**, a way of keeping certain things that are Indian with Indians and exercising them with Indians only, and of keeping the things that are from white culture with the white and using them with white only. Out of the experiences of the early Reservation Period, people began to be not only bilingual in the sense that they would use their Indian language in certain settings and English in certain other settings, but they also even began to practice two religions. They would do the old religion when they were out at the first salmon ceremony down on the coast, and then would go listen to a Presbyterian minister on Sunday and talk about life in the Holy Land somewhere. In areas of kinship and family, (on paper) Indians would look like Europeans in terms of each house supposedly being owned by a father and mother with their children, but in practice maybe several cousins and brothers also lived there; even some multiple marriages were still being contracted but not acknowledged publicly in the white man's way.
In almost all institutions of life, the early Reservation Period was producing a bicultural response. People were learning to practice traditional Indian ways in certain areas of life. What they had to practice in non-Indian settings was being practiced primarily there.

The Reservation Period, then, brought about biculturalism, in itself a response to the fact that Indian people would not change or could not change many elements of their makeup and their culture, in spite of European pressure. The Indian learned rather reflectively, like people learn to use two languages reflectively. These may appear on the surface to be contradictory modes of behavior. They are not; what they are is situationally specific forms of behavior that one might obviously label "white man's behavior" or "Indian behavior." But for Indian people, it is like shifting gears. It is shifting from one context to another depending on the situation's calling.

Originally, there were theories that two cultures could flow together like milk and water. They start out being quite distinct and then flow together and become so mixed that no one could ever extricate them. In other words, they form a solution. What anthropologists have found, however, and what is a better theoretical approach to this problem, is that really much that was Indian still exists and is derived from the traditional (Pre-Contact) period.

In the later Reservation period, with the emergence of tribal governments that began to be relatively effective, there was an increase in the degree of political sophistication; as was evidenced in the use of the courts, the use of intertribal communication and lobbying and the use of organizational development, like the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, and for that matter, the National Congress of American Indians. It is also marked by intertribal blossoming and consequently, a kind of pan-Indian political alliance against efforts that were originally successful because they could be applied piecemeal and divide Indian people one from another.

**Modern Period**

The **Modern Period** (1930 to present) is the last historical period in which values and changes in values need to be discussed. Changes in values have become obvious in the "urban/reservation split" that has been made so much of by some people. Today, something like half to a majority of American Indian people live off reservations at any given time. Many of them, even though they start out life in a reservation community, will move to urban centers at some point in their lives.

There are many examples of Indian people who are successfully bicultural. The individual lives of Indian people may show them participating in the first salmon ceremony one day of the week, and going to the university on the next day. Maybe on a special weekend, if they are deeply religious people like many on the Plains, they may take part in the sundance. This is an area where Indian children need much assistance, since many children think they are only Indian if, for example, they are like Sitting Bull. To the degree that they are not like Sitting Bull, they feel they are not Indian. There is a need to take real life examples in which the Indian child can see that these things are not necessarily contradictory, that people put them together in a clear, rich multicultural kind of existence in which they can play the white man's game and the Indian game without any kind of trouble at all, without contradiction and quite successfully. There are many ways of being Indian and successfully living
in the bicultural mode where Indian people can be Indian in certain contexts and quite competent with non-Indian behavior in others.

To summarize, the Pre-Contact period is that period from which the core (or common) values of the three culture groups have derived. The Reservation period is the period when biculturalism was developed by Indians as a way of dealing with European demands to change and assimilate into the white culture. The Modern period has brought a shift from reservations to urban centers for many Indian people, though without the loss of access to reservation culture.

*The Indian Reading Series* reflects many of the core values which have derived from the Pre-Contact period. *There is a need, however, to reflect more contemporary issues, such as Indian life in an urban setting and successful biculturalism, in order to assist Indian students to deal with the complexities of modern culture.*