

Sharing stories, understanding traditions:

The History of Cultures

By recognizing, accepting, and honoring the past, the following books are making strides toward a new future: one that balances, respects, and revives native cultural traditions.



Mexican culture

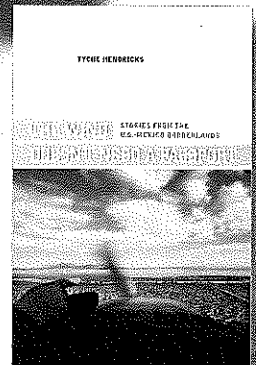
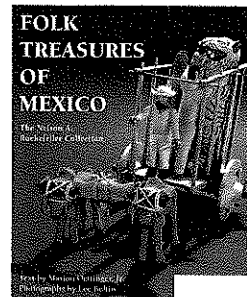
Despite its close proximity, it is easy for Americans to overlook the significance and richness of Mexico's long history and the beauty of its cultural artifacts. The following books reveal some of the aspects of a rich and complex culture.

Few art books convey a collector's passion the way *Folk Treasures of Mexico: The Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection* (Arte Publico Press, 978-1-55885-595-3) depicts the fascination former Vice President Nelson Rockefeller had for Mexican art. This coffee-table book by Marion Oettinger, Jr., not only boasts beautiful photographs of the everyday Mexican objects Rockefeller began collecting in 1933, but also relates the stories of his discoveries and encounters with the Mexican artists themselves. Photographs taken throughout the twentieth century show Rockefeller with such legends as Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, and lesser-known artists living in the Mexican countryside. Any good art book will tie art to the culture in which it is forged, and this book does so not only through storytelling but by explaining the everyday use of these objects. Oettinger, with the help of photographer Lee Boltin, transports readers out of the San Antonio Museum of Art, where

many of the pieces are housed, to the countryside and marketplaces of Mexico.

The United States-Mexico border stretches 1,969 miles, crosses four American states, and is often associated with politically charged issues, such as immigration and drug smuggling. Tyche Hendricks achieves an unusually thorough and diversified view of these issues in her new book, *The Wind Doesn't Need a Passport: Stories from the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (University of California Press, 978-0-520-25250-9).

Hendricks, a lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley, previously reported on immigration and demographics at the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She marries solid academic research to material from hours of on-the-ground interviews. The characters featured include: the O'odham tribe that occupies both sides of the border, medical staff in both countries, and an engineer who is challenging the construction of Mexican power plants for US energy consumers. What emerges from Hendrick's examination is a nuanced picture of the border region written with a journalistic flair. In her words, "in the borderlands, air and water move without heed for political boundaries..." as do many aspects of society. She reminds readers that the border is not just a line in the sand, but a region where families, animals, and ideas move freely. Anyone interested in border issues, from an academic or lay perspective, will appreciate this book. *Gabriela Worrel*

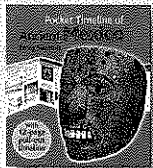


Any good art book will tie art to the culture in which it is forged...

PUBLISHER'S SERIES:

Pocket-Sized Books with an Educational Punch

Interlink Publishing, established in 1987, is on a mission to change the way readers look at the world through its colorful reference series, Pocket Explorers. From the Nile Valley to Moctezuma's empire, Interlink introduces the people and cultures of past civilizations. *Pocket Timeline of Ancient Mexico* by Penny Bateman (Interlink Books, 978-1-56656-790-9) is a must-have for the traveler to Mexico and Central America and the student (either serious or casual) of Latin American history. Bateman's



condensed history of ancient Mexican civilizations is a small, easily navigated reference to have around the house or hotel room.



Specifically, *Pocket Timeline* introduces the reader to the environment, economy, and social structures of civilizations existing in central Mexico and Mesoamerica since 2000 BC. Bateman, an educator and previous curator, examines trade, farming, and urban development patterns. The pull-out timeline is particularly helpful for a quick historical reference, and it contains photos and a summary of the cycles of development over the past 4,000 years.

In addition, the author includes a list of books the reader can explore for more information. Bateman's informative book packs an educational punch in a few pages.

Nicholas Badcott (Interlink Books, 978-1-56656-804-3) seeks to redress the longstanding ignorance about Africa that still afflicts many non-Africans and descendants of the African diaspora in *Pocket Explorer: African Civilizations*. As the "Dark Continent" struggles to overcome the ravages of racism and colonialism, many of its citizens live in conditions comparable to those of Europe's Dark Ages. Political strife, genocide, hunger, and poor health care make Africa's path a treacherous one, but this book tells children that the magnificence of the past may be recreated in the future.

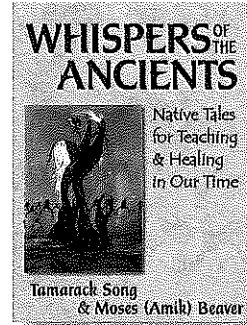
Human life in Africa began more than 100,000 years ago, and ancient civilizations flourished 6,000 years ago. Relics from Africa's rich history include beautifully wrought statuary and other archaeological evidence that enriches our knowledge of humanity's first home. Photographs complement the text and document archaeological finds like Mali's great kingdom of Benin (that dominated what is now southern Nigeria) or Timbuktu's thriving fifteenth-century Muslim community. The book contains a fold-out map that helps make the multiple stories more real, and therefore, more imaginable.

Gabriela Worrel and Elizabeth Breau

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Almost three million Native American people live in the United States today, the survivors of a bloody history, the division of nations and land, and laws that dismantled the Native way of life. Ongoing efforts to educate and share Native stories not only helps to preserve tradition, but also opens a path between contemporary US society and traditional Native identity. Three new books by First Nation and Native American authors share personal and tribal stories with the goal of healing and learning from the past.

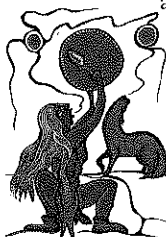


Whispers of the Ancients: Native Tales for Teaching & Healing in Our Time (University of Michigan Press, 978-0-472-05106-9) is beautifully illustrated and designed to appeal to readers "at his or her own level of comprehension and need." It is a lovely collection of stories, organized by themes and lessons, written by Tamarack Song. Moses

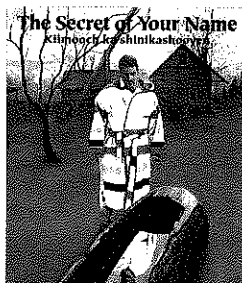
Amik Beaver's lush illustrations brighten the pages—a loon cocks its head in one story, and in another, a warrior peeks over a riverbank at a medicine worker standing on the shore. The images and stories are the result of a collaborative process between the author and illustrator; at the end of each chapter, the inspirations for each illustration and story are described.

"The secret of your name is out /
I finally know my heritage..."

Whispers of the Ancients is highly comprehensive, and accessible as a teaching tool or for readers interested in exploring traditional stories. Each chapter begins with a brief explanation of a theme, and how Native American culture incorporates certain myths and traditions. "In a real sense," Song reminds the reader, "we are all Guardians because we each, in our own way, are called upon to serve our People...I share the next stories as examples of how we can serve our Relations, and of how we can groom and enlist our unique talents for this service." The straightforward, plainly-worded stories are a delight for readers familiar with Native American tales, as well as those new to the genre.

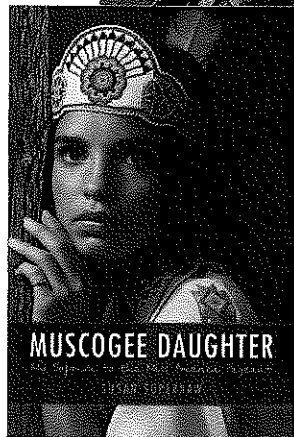


"The secret of your name is out / I finally know my heritage. / It took me almost fifty years / To come to learn of you," writes the award-winning poet David Bouchard in his new work *The*



Secret of Your Name: Kimooch ka shinikashooyen (Red Deer Press, 978-0-88995-439-7). This moving, bilingual volume is a poem dedicated to the people whose ancestors were pressured into denying their mixed-race Metis backgrounds “in favor of their more acceptable European bloodlines.” *The Secret of Your Name* honors Metis history and heritage, and is written in English and Michif—the language of the Metis people. The included bilingual CD features a reading of the poem and music by John Arcand, “Master of the Metis Fiddle,” who plays in the traditional style. Vibrant, political, and stylized paintings are the backdrop to this poignant work. *The Secret of Your Name* is a great addition to any collection of Native or First Nation stories.

Crowned Miss Oklahoma in 1971, Susan Supernaw’s story is an emotional memoir about her search for identity and strength as a Native American woman. Seeking knowledge, balance, and

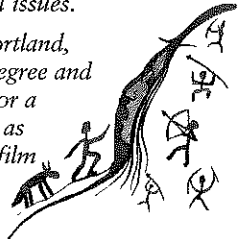


humor in a topsy-turvy world is Supernaw’s forte, and her writing surges forward with a pleasant, congenial grace in *Muscogee Daughter: My Sojourn to the Miss America Pageant* (University of Nebraska Press, 978-0-8032-2971-6). “I learned a long time ago that you can’t really change the stereotypes people have. Sometimes you can help open their eyes, but they have to change by themselves. Too often the people who need to change the most are the ones who never will.”

Muscogee Daughter would be a strong choice for a book group, or for readers interested in contemporary Native American memoirs. Supernaw’s life story is compelling—not only because of her one-of-a-kind experience, but also because of her ability to appeal to a universal readership. *Claire Rudy Foster*

Gabriela Worrel holds a master’s degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of California at Irvine. She lives in Los Angeles, California, and writes on urban and environmental issues.

Claire Rudy Foster has settled in Portland, Oregon, to complete her master’s degree and raise her son. Recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize, she also moonlights as an editor, barista, and independent film actress. Learn more about Claire at <http://clairerudyfoster.blogspot.com>.



CHILDREN’S BOOKS: *Opening New Worlds to Young Readers*

Cultures the world over transmit their values, beliefs, and national narratives to children through folk tales and other short, fanciful stories. And whenever a culture or nation looks at itself anew, the stories its people tell children change as well.

The Barefoot Book of Dance Stories (Barefoot Books, 978-1-84686-219-9) is a joint production of Jane Yolen, Heidi Stemple, and Helen Cann that celebrates dance around the world. Societies as diverse as the Czech Republic, Egypt, and Scotland contribute charming folktales and fanciful illustrations that seem to whirl off the page. Barefoot Books is also releasing *Tales of Mystery and Magic* (978-1-84686-258-8), which will definitely prime youngsters for the magic that awaits them in series such as *Harry Potter*, *Redwall*, and *Inkheart*. Master storyteller Hugh Lupton’s seven mysterious tales span from Russia’s “Who Lives in the Skull?” to the Inuit story of “The Mightiest Mouse that Ever Nibbled Fat.” Agnese Baruzzi’s fantastical illustrations suggest the exact balance of mystery, wonder, and safety that young children require to venture forth on the broomsticks of their dreams.

A Benjamin Franklin Award winner, Icy Smith’s *Half Spoon of Rice: A Survival Story of the Cambodian Genocide* (East West Discovery Press, 978-0-9821675-8-8), makes a significant

contribution to the growing body of literature written to educate about the horrors of genocide. This book will make the task of transmitting the story of the Khmer Rouge’s rule more manageable for those who want their children to understand the suffering of their parents and grandparents. This story about forced labor, suffering, and murder rests on the friendship that forms between the narrator and an orphaned girl. As the two starving children meet at night to devour whatever they can—even a raw frog—they form a bond of friendship that endures beyond the reign of terror. The ultimate message: every night, no matter how dark or long, will eventually end with the dawn of recovery and rebuilding. Sopaul Nhem’s beautifully rendered illustrations add depth to an already moving story; in so doing, he honors his father, an artist who survived the Khmer Rouge regime.

If literature’s function is to first delight and then instruct, all of these books will engage children so that they may learn.

Elizabeth Breau

