

Children's Literature and Canadian National Identity: A Revisionist Perspective

• Jerry Diakiw •

Résumé: L'auteur rappelle le rôle essentiel que joue l'institution scolaire dans l'affirmation de l'identité et de la culture canadiennes; il plaide en faveur de l'abandon de la vision eurocentrique traditionnelle et d'une plus grande ouverture à la diversité et au pluralisme. À cet égard, l'école primaire devrait non seulement sensibiliser les élèves à la variété des productions régionales mais aussi promouvoir l'égalité, la justice et la tolérance grâce à la diffusion d'une littérature de plus en plus multiculturelle.

Summary: Canadian children's literature can play an important role in affirming a Canadian culture and identity. The school has always played and, whether we like it or not, always will play, an important role in promoting a national perspective. This article argues that there are commonplaces of our Canadian culture and identity that are inclusive of Canadians of all racial and ethnocultural origins and from all parts of Canada. The promotion of any national viewpoint is usually directed at the secondary level where Can-Lit and Canadian history become a focus for study. This viewpoint has traditionally been a Eurocentric perspective that has ignored the reality of Canada's current diversity. A focus on the secondary level ignores the fact that most societies have traditionally focussed on inducting their youth into the "tribe" before the age of thirteen. Therefore elementary schools have an important role to play in telling the Canadian story through children's literature, a literature that can not only reveal the splendour of our regional diversity, but one that can promote equity, justice and fairness through the richness of our multicultural literature.

Many Canadians believe that there is such regional, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in this country that we do not in fact have an overriding culture or identity. But even those who express this belief are quick to distance us Canadians from our American neighbours and from our British and French roots. I would like to argue that there are in fact powerful commonplaces in our culture and identity — shared values that most Canadians can identify with — and that the school is an important place to explore, discuss and debate these commonplaces. I especially want to suggest that, because story and literature are important ways to reveal these commonplaces, there can be a powerful connection between Canadian literature and Canadian cultural identity — a connection educators should take advantage of. Nor is it just a matter of including Canadian literature at the secondary school level. Since it is in the

early years before puberty that who we are really comes into focus, I believe it is imperative that we give young children access to the rich body of Canadian children's literature.

Schools in Canada and elsewhere have always conveyed cultural and political views, and they will continue to do so whether we like it or not. In the past, of course, these views were dominated largely by the white male European perspective of the most dominant powers in society; but as the conviction of so many that there is no over-riding Canadian culture suggests, this is no longer true. The culture and identity we all share is multi-faceted, and not dominated by any one group. The difficult task schools now face, therefore, is determining how to convey our culture and identity in a way that is inclusive of *all* Canadians, so that justice and equity are underlying principles of the curriculum.

How Cultures Have Traditionally Transmitted Their Values

In most culturally homogeneous countries, children grow up hearing and learning the stories that define their culture: myths, legends, folklore, historic tidbits, tales of heroes and villains, miraculous tales and tales of courage and achievement. These shared stories lie at the heart of a culture's identity. Literature, arts and crafts, music, dance, film, and poetry blend together over time to crystallize an image that says, "This is who we are." The shared stories provide a culture with its values and beliefs, its goals and traditions. The myths, legends, folk tales, histories, and experiences of any cultural group bind the individuals together to form a cohesive society which allows people to communicate with each other and to work together with a shared purpose. These common stories become the foundation of public discourse, and they are a source of pride in their community.

The education of children is central to this process. According to E.D. Hirsch Jr., "The weight of human tradition across many cultures supports the view that basic acculturation should largely be completed by age thirteen. At that age Catholics are confirmed, Jews bar or bat mitzvahed, and tribal boys and girls undergo the rites of passage into the tribe" (30). Hirsch traces how Korean children traditionally memorize the five Kyung and the four Su. In Tibet, boys from eight to ten read aloud and learn the scriptures, in Chile the Araucanian Indians use songs to learn the customs and traditions of their tribe. The Bushmen children of South Africa listen to hours of discussion until they know the history of every aspect of their culture.

Hirsch also traces how the education system has been used to convey a national culture in modern nations. Traditionally on any particular day in France, for example, each child in each grade would be reading the same page in the same textbook. In the history of American education, the text book has been a constant source of debate over attempts to control the culture transmitted through the schools.

Hirsch cites an example of the influence of one particular document in defining a culture. In 1783, Hugh Blair, a Scot from the University of Edinburgh

published *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres*, intended as a compendium of what every Scot needed to know if he or she were to read and write well in English. This book had enormous impact on curriculum in school systems throughout the English-speaking world. Widely used in Great Britain, US and Canada between 1783 and 1911, the book went through 130 editions! Blair defined English literary culture for use initially by the Scots, later by colonials like Canadians and Americans; and eventually it became the standard for educating Englishmen and women.

In *Nations & Nationalism* (1983), Ernest Gellner argues that, viewed from a historical perspective, it has been the school and not the home that has been the decisive factor in creating national cultures in modern nations. Literate national cultures, he maintains, are school-transmitted cultures. He asserts that the chief creators of the modern nation have been school teachers; they helped create the modern nation state. They perpetuate it and make it thrive.

The history of Europe has shown that the schools play a major role in the creation of a national culture. Even in the United States with its many disparate groups, the schools have done much to create a national culture through such common shared stories, both real and imagined, as George Washington, Daniel Boone, Tom Sawyer, and Casey at the Bat, as well as through the promotion of strong central shared values and symbols of patriotism.

The history of the evolution of nationalism in country after country indicates clearly that a national culture is an artificial, created construct. Discussing how nation builders use a patchwork of folk materials, old songs, legends, dances, and historical tidbits, selected and re-interpreted by intellectuals to create a national culture, Gellner says, "The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary inventions, any old shred or patch would have served as well.... Nationalism is not what it seems and above all, not what it seems to itself. The culture it claims to defend is often its own invention" (56).

While these readings and discussions have illuminated for me how culture has been transmitted during our recent world history of colonialism and nationalism, they have unsettling implications. Hirsch, for instance, laments what he sees as the disintegration of central core values and a shared common knowledge in recent years. He argues for the need to identify what every American needs to know, and works to promote a return to a narrowly Eurocentric curriculum based on the glories of Greek civilization, the British Empire, and the Bible. While the European civilizations, and in particular, British and French traditions, are an integral part of our identity, they are but one significant facet among many facets.

Yes the school is, and always has been a major purveyor of a national viewpoint. But what kind of a viewpoint do we want to promote for the future? Any examination of the curricula of the past reveals a program of indoctrination into the culture and mores of those in power. The old African proverb is still true: "Until lions have their own historians, tales of bravery and courage will be told about the hunter." Or, as Napoleon put it more bluntly, "History is a set of

lies agreed upon" (cited in Wright 2). History is written by winners (Wright). The winners write the school curriculum and decide what stories will be told and what literature will be read.

As the child of immigrant Ukrainian parents in grade seven and eight in Toronto in the late 1940s, I vividly remember spending hours memorizing the Kings and Queens of England in chronological order. Later in high school I read the required stories and novels of Rudyard Kipling, Charles Dickens and Jane Austen, and the poetry of Tennyson and Wordsworth. I do not recall ever reading any Canadian authors. The children's books in the local library reflected this Anglocentric curriculum. I grew up feeling that I was somehow an outsider in Canada despite the fact that I was born in the country. Nor was I alone: My current research into the life histories of racial minority teachers in Canada reveals time and again that as students these young Canadians did not see themselves reflected in the curriculum of their schools. These experiences illustrate how recently in our history educators perceived the transmission of traditional culture as a major function of schools. It was clear who the winners were.

Revising the Traditional Culture

Since Prime Minister Trudeau proclaimed the policy of Multiculturalism in 1971, there has been a remarkable change in our *official* notions about our culture. It is no longer officially English or French-based or Eurocentric. Indeed, Trudeau said, "While we have two official languages we have *no official culture*, no one culture is more official than another" (*italics mine*). I have long celebrated Trudeau's statement; but the longer I ponder it the more I have difficulty with the words, "we have no official culture...." It seems to imply what many have said for decades, that Canada has no cultural identity at all. The insistence on no official culture has resulted in a backlash against multiculturalism, while multiculturalists struggle to stem the tide of racism and disempowerment.

Education, then, is caught between conflicting demands. As Grossberg suggests, on the one hand,

there is the discourse of multiculturalism and liberation which calls for a democratic culture based on social difference and which is usually predicated on a theory of identity and representation. On the other side there is a discourse of conservatism based on canonical notions of general education and a desire to impose what it cannot justify — the existence of an illusory common culture. (10)

Simply, there is a lament over the loss of a culture rooted in Western civilization and values, and *there is also the cry for equity and a multicultural curriculum*. Must there be a dualism? Is there an alternative to these two positions? Amidst the remarkable diversity of this country are there inclusive commonplaces? Can a patchwork quilt of our stories welcome all Canadians?

It is helpful to review some history surrounding some of these issues. We have been inundated the last few years with critical examinations of the

meaning and purpose of multiculturalism and its affects on the curriculum in the school. Popular best selling books like Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*, Bibby's *Mosaic Madness* and Bissoondath's *Selling Illusions* have promoted a return to a traditionalist view. In Henry Giroux's view, they have "argued that multiculturalism posits a serious threat to the school's traditional task of defending and transmitting an authentic national history, a uniform standard of cultural literacy, and a singular national identity for all citizens to embrace" (1).

The heated position of the traditionalists is best demonstrated by Roger Kimbal's provocative statement:

Implicit in the politicizing mandate of multiculturalism is an attack on the idea of common culture, the idea that despite our many differences, we hold in common an intellectual, artistic, and moral legacy, descending largely from the Greeks and the Bible, supplemented and modified over the centuries by innumerable contributions from diverse hands and peoples. It is this legacy that has given us our science, our political institutions, and the monuments of artistic and cultural achievement that define us as a civilization. Indeed it is this legacy, insofar as we live up to it, that *preserves us from chaos and barbarism*. And it is precisely this legacy that the multiculturalists wish to dispense with. (6; italics mine)

This position is widely held in Canada as well. The notion that our cultural mosaic and regional and ethnic differences can promote "chaos and barbarism" is a form of extremism that is not useful in promoting a constructive dialogue.

An alternative is to think of culture as, in Gates's words, "a conversation among different voices." Is it possible, by identifying a set of commonplaces, to balance the traditionalist objective and yet incorporate a multicultural, inclusive and liberating perspective? Is it possible for diversity to be a source of cultural identity? Is the idea of multiple loyalties and identities possible within the framework of a national culture and identity?

I personally identify with my Ukrainian heritage, my Toronto and Ontario regional roots, with immigrant cultures, as well as feeling an overriding identity with Canada and even a pervading global outlook. Survey data indicate strong regional loyalties and identities in many parts of Canada, far stronger than any regional loyalties in the United States; yet the evidence shows that the stronger the regional loyalty, the stronger the identity with Canada (Lipset).

As individuals we hold a complex set of loyalties and cultural identities, particularly in Canada. We have a strong bond to place — neighbourhood or community; often a strong affinity to our bio-region — the Maritimes or the Prairies, for example; often also a bond to our ethnic and/or our linguistic heritage, and to our religious group; and finally, to our country. For many Canadians there is even a strong feeling of loyalty to, and identity with, the planet. We move in and out of our various "tribes" with ease and comfort. The complexity of our "tribal" relations is in fact quite extraordinary. We are a mass of hierarchical, overlapping, shifting, often contradictory and conflicting loyalties and identities.

Given this complexity, one might ask why national identity and culture are so controversial. Among many academics, nationalism is a concept in dispute. At one extreme, David Trend declares, "Nationality is a fiction. It is a story people tell themselves about who they are, where they live and how they got there" (225). And in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson demonstrates how nationalism is only a recent phenomenon in human history. He finds its origins in the late eighteenth century, and points out three paradoxes about it. The first is "the objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eye of nationalists." The second is "the formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept — [the idea] in the modern world that everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she has a gender" The third paradox is "the 'political' power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence." Anderson comments that, as Gertrude Stein referred to Oakland, one can quickly conclude with respect to nationalism that "there is no there there"(2).

But despite his unwavering scorn for the concept of nationalism, Anderson reflects on the continuing process:

And many 'old nations,' once thought fully consolidated, find themselves challenged by 'sub'-nationalism within their borders — nationalisms which, naturally, dream of shedding this sub-ness one happy day. The reality is quite plain: the 'end of the era of nationalism,' so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time. (3)

Why Culture and Identity need to Be Addressed in the Schools

Regardless of how we feel about this debate, nation-ness is with us. Nationalism is clearly not going to go away. It is unlikely we can do much about it. We can, however, make every effort to ensure that the manner in which our nation-ness is promoted in the school is based on democratic principles of justice and equity, concepts which also lie at the core of our Canadian commonplaces.

As a pragmatist educator I am confronted with the problem of observing a gathering of fundamentalist, traditionalist and conservative forces which are erupting across this country and whose views are consistent with those of Roger Kimbal — that the legacy of western civilization and the Bible saves us from "chaos and barbarism." They are fanning a backlash and are profoundly influencing the policy-makers and practitioners to bring back their "common culture," a move which they see as a return to essentially an exclusive Eurocentric Christian society. They view the schools as having a central role in transmitting *their* view of our common culture through a common curriculum.

"Some argue that in an increasingly multicultural society there is a need for a common literacy; others propose that we are moving toward a culture of many literacies" (Trend 227). I propose bridging these two positions — that we work towards a common literacy as long as the common literacy is inclusive of all Canadians.

This sort of bridging of these positions requires a revisioning of our traditional notions of our culture. For example, we have to recognize the temporal character of culture. As Tomlinson points out, "There is no such thing as a single national culture that remains the same year after year. Nations are constantly assimilating, combining and revising their national characters" (as cited in Trend 229). In a speech given by Sheldon Hackney, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1993, he claims, "All ethnic groups have permeable boundaries, and the meaning of any particular identity will change over time ... History has a way of changing who we think we are." Hackney postulates a view of America that I believe is equally true of Canada: "There is an American identity that is different from the identities of any one of the ethnic groups that comprise the American population, that is inclusive of all of them and that is available to everyone who is an American."

Commonplaces of Canadian Culture and Identity

One way in which culture and identity can be addressed from a revisionist stance is by approaching the issue from the perspective of commonplaces of our culture accessible to all. It is important to identify these commonplaces, not because they are finite, correct, or complete enough to end the debate, but simply because they can provide a starting point for further debate and discussion. As Richard Rorty has argued, it is not so important to arrive at the absolute truth as it is to "keep the conversation going" (1982).

While Canadian culture is constantly evolving, I am convinced that it is tied together by a number of commonplaces which most Canadians consciously or unconsciously accept, promote and take pride in, commonplaces which permeate many aspects of our society and reveal some central truths about our country. Elsewhere, I have discussed ten such commonplaces in some detail (Diakiw 1996). Let me list them here:

1. Canada: A wilderness nation, a land of awesome size and grandeur, with savage beauty and incredible obstacles. Despite our largely urban existence our wilderness preoccupies our psyche, our literature, our arts, our mythology.
2. Canada: A country of diverse and distinctive regions with powerful regional identities — Quebec, the Maritimes, the Prairies, for example.
3. Canada: A democratic, multi-faith nation with remarkable freedoms. Equity is enshrined in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but we are nevertheless a nation marked by equity struggles yet unfolding, for First Nations, women, people of colour, and French Canadians.
4. Canada: A nation with a strong sense of social welfare. A social safety net is part of our tradition, a tradition that is the envy of many of our neighbours to the south.
5. Canada: Home of our First Nations. Our Native roots are deeply entwined in our Canadian way.
6. Canada: A nation of immigrants. We cherish our multicultural mo-

- saic, our immigrant culture — this immigrant culture has forever attracted adventurers, inventors and entrepreneurs.
7. Canada: A nation state founded initially on the cultures of France and England. They have profoundly contributed to many of our institutions, laws and principles. Most of us respect and support our bilingual society and our distinct Francophone culture centered in Quebec.
 8. Canada: A nation of enormous resources with a vibrant, inventive economy. Our identity is in part a product of this economy, one that permits one of the highest standards of living of any nation in the world.
 9. Canada: A nation of rich cultural traditions in the arts, sports and popular culture. We have a legacy of distinctive creative and artistic achievement in all the arts, provided by institutions such as the CBC, the NFB, the National Ballet, the Montreal Symphony, the Canadian Opera Company as well as by individuals like Bryan Adams, Alanis Morisset, Celine Dion, and our many comedians.
 10. Canada: Peace-keepers for the world and a partner with all nations. Our long history as peace-keepers and mediators, our participation in international organizations, our long involvement with developing nations, and our comparatively open immigration and refugee policies, confirm our global commitment as global citizens and our family ties to virtually every country in the world.

In struggling to identify these commonplaces, I asked myself a series of questions. Do they provide ample latitude to address critical issues in our society? Do they provide for a new multicultural curriculum that provides opportunities for students to become, in Henry Giroux's words, "border crossers"? As Giroux states, "Teachers must be educated to become border crossers, to explore zones of cultural difference by moving in and out of the resources, histories and narratives that provide different students with a sense of identity, place and possibility" (11). And finally, do the commonplaces reveal that there is a Canadian identity that is different from any one of the ethnic or regional identities that comprise the Canadian population, and are also different, for example, from an American identity?

I believe that the answer to all these questions is yes. Canada is a complex nation with multiple characteristics and identities. Its identity is comprised of layer upon layer of physical, regional, linguistic, ethnic, religious and cultural variations. While any one of the commonplaces I listed may also be characteristic of other nations, the layering of them, one over another, creates a unique Canadian culture. But despite this complexity, there is a Canadian culture and identity that emerges from this layering that is different from any one of the regional, cultural or ethnic cultures and identities that exist within Canada. Nevertheless, this national culture and identity is inclusive of all groups and individuals and is accessible to all Canadians. *All* regions and ethno-cultural groups can relate to these commonplaces.

Most significantly in terms of literature, these commonplaces are rich with stories that are part of our "community of memory." There are gripping

and fascinating stories that emerge from them, whether through narratives of events or through biographies of remarkable women and men who exemplify them. While there is room for considerable debate and discussion here, these commonplaces are the “stuff” that myths are made of. The big stories of Canada are embedded in them.

The Role of Story and Literature

Story is a powerful and traditional way to provide a common bond for members of a society and to familiarize children with a culture. According to Postman, “Human beings require stories to give meaning to the facts of their existence ... nations, as well as people, require stories and may die for a lack of a believable one” (122). And Bellah states:

Communities in the sense that we are using the term, have a history — in an important sense they are constituted by their past — and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a ‘community of memory,’ one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget the past a community is involved in retelling its story These stories of collective history and exemplary individuals are an important part of the tradition that is so central to a community of memory. (153)

It is through stories that our central values and commonplaces are shared. It is through stories that we can preserve and enhance our Native roots, our rich multicultural heritage, while still revealing an understanding of the historic traditions and structures that created the Canadian nation state. Our stories explore and reveal our commonplaces.

In *Survival*, Margaret Atwood argues for the important understanding of how our culture is revealed in our literature:

I’m talking about Canada as a state of mind, as a space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head. It’s that kind of space in which we find ourselves lost.

What a lost person needs is a map of the territory, with his own position marked on it so he can see where he is in relation to everything else. Literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind. Our literature is one such map, if we can learn to read it as our literature, as the product of who and where we have been. We need such a map desperately, we need to know about here. Because here is where we live. For the members of a country or a culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive. (19)

Canadian Children’s Literature: Toward Understanding Our Culture and Identity

Because our identities, our attitude to people of different races, our sense of self and therefore probably our sense of a national identity or lack of it, is largely fixed by the end of elementary school, children’s literature can be a powerful

way of sharing a nation's stories. Fortunately, furthermore, there is now a rich body of Canadian children's literature which can provide our children with knowledge of our culture and identity — "a map, a geography of the mind." Many titles provide rich insight into many of the commonplaces I have identified, and reveal a revised Canadian culture consistent with the heritage of our young Canadians from across Canada of all races, religions, and cultures. A loose collection of such titles, if profiled and shared across Canada, could bind all Canadian school children together in the knowledge that in every school from White Horse to St. John's, whether Black, First Nation, Chinese, French Canadian or fourth generation English Canadian, they would all be reading and discussing many of the same Canadian stories, stories in which they can see a reflection of themselves. Through this process they would be inducted into the Canadian "tribe." These central conceptions and the shared stories, tales, histories, and poems would be the starting point for the beginning of our student's understanding of a Canadian culture.

In a country in which educational curricula are controlled by individual provinces, however, no authority exists to set any such canon. But at the secondary school level, at least, an unwritten canon has evolved amongst teachers across Canada. A central core of titles has emerged through word of mouth, through articles and journals, through courses, and through discussions at conferences and meetings. On the Can-Lit discussion group on the internet, for example, scholars and teachers from across Canada share their views about titles and authors they suggest for serious study. No such process has developed at the elementary level, where perhaps the need is greatest. Our students are more familiar with the wonderful children's authors from England, the United States and Australia than they are with our own Canadian authors and illustrators. In the faith that a loose list of shared Canadian materials would be of great value, I would like to offer some suggestions about what it might contain.

- Pre-primer alphabet books such as R.K. Gordon's *A Canadian Child's ABC*, Ann Blades's *By the Sea* (a BC alphabet book), Erica Rutherford's *An Island Alphabet*, about PEI, Elizabeth Cleaver's *ABC*, Ted Harrison's *A Northern Alphabet*, Stephanie Poulin's *Ah! Belle Cité, A Beautiful City, ABC* and *A Halifax ABC*. Through these alphabet books, young children become familiar with many of our Canadian icons.
- Children's stories by some of our finest writers: Margaret Lawrence's *Olden Days Coat*, Gabrielle Roy's *Clip Tail*, Mordecai Richler's *Jacob Two Two and the Hooded Fang*, W. O. Mitchell's *Jake and the Kid*, Farley Mowat's *Owls in the Family*, Ralph Connor's *Glen Garry School Days*, Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, Marshall Saunders' *Beautiful Joe*.
- Richly-illustrated picture story books that have entered into our canon, such as Robert Service's *Cremation of Sam McGee* and *The Shooting of Dan McGrew* illustrated by Ted Harrison, William Kurelek's *Prairie Boy's Winter*, Roch Carrier's *The Hockey Sweater*, and perhaps even Robert Munsch's *Paper Bag Princess*.

- Stories of our multicultural heritage such as Ian Wallace's *Chin Chiang and the Dragon Dance* and *The Sandwich*, Ann Blades's *Mary of Mile 18*, Paul Yee *Curses of the Third Uncle*, Mary Hamilton's *The Tin-lined Trunk*, Sing Lim's *West Coast Chinese Boy*, Kit Pearson's trilogy about war-time guests from England, Laura Langston's *No Such Thing as Far Away*, a story set in Chinatown, Ann Alma's *Skateway to Freedom*, and Marlene Nourbese Philip's *Harriet's Daughter*.
- Historical novels such as Susanne Martel's *The King's Daughter*, set in New France; Barbara Smucker's *Days of Terror*; Barbara Greenwood's *A Question of Loyalty*, Geoffrey Bilson's *Fire over Montreal*, Marsha Hewitt's *One Proud Summer*, James Reaney's *The Boy With An R in his Hand*, Bernice Thurman Hunter's "Booky" series, and Janet Lunn's *The Root Cellar*, to name just a few.
- We need to provide opportunities to have children appreciate and celebrate our spiritual and religious diversity through such books as Kathleen Cook-Waldren's *A Wilderness Passover*, the Divali story in Rachna Gilmore's *Lights for Gita*, Kim So Goodtrack's *ABC's of Our Spiritual Connection*, as well as Christmas stories such as Bud Davidge's *Mummer's Song*, about Christmas in Newfoundland.
- The readings should also include stories that capture the majesty and savage grandeur of the country in wilderness survival tales such as Jan Truss's *Jasmin*.
- First Nation stories such as Markoosie's *Harpoon of the Hunter*, Jan Andrews's *The Very Last First Time*, Grey Owl's *The Adventures of Sajo and the Beaver People*, James Houston's *Tikta Liktak: An Eskimo Legend*, and Kevin Major's *Blood Red Ochre*.
- Fairy tales and legends from Eva Martin's *Canadian Fairy Tales*, Maurice Barbeau's *The Golden Phoenix and other Tales from Quebec* and Claude Aubry's *The Magic Fiddler and Other Legends of French Canada*, and First Nation myths and legends, such as William Toye and Elizabeth Cleaver's *How Summer came to Canada* or *The Loon's Necklace* as well as children's literature written and illustrated by Native Canadians, for example, Michael Arvaaluk's *Arctic 123*.
- Poetry selections from anthologies such as Mary Alice Downie and Barbara Robertson's *The New Wind has Wings: Poems from Canada* and David Booth's *Till All the Stars Have Fallen*.
- There are many titles that capture the essence of our many distinctive regions. The Prairies, as one region for example, are portrayed evocatively through such visually splendid titles as Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet's *A Prairie Alphabet*, *A Prairie Year* and *Grampa's Alkali*, David Booth's *Dustbowl*, William Kurelek's *A Prairie Boy's Summer*, Jim McGugan's *Joseph: A Prairie Boy's Story*, Marilyn Reynolds's *Belle's Journey*, a story of the Prairies in the twenties, and of course, the works of W.O. Mitchell. These and many other titles can convey a sense of the Prairies to young people from across Canada. Similar collections could be pulled together for each of the regions

of Canada with the exception of Quebec. It is lamentable that the rich body of children's literature that exists in Quebec is not widely available in English nor is much of the literature in English available to children in Quebec.

- Biographies too, have an important role to play in creating a Canadian identity, not just the traditional figures included in the curriculum such as our adventurous explorers, founding fathers and sports figures, but including women, aboriginal and Black heroes in such sources as: Susan Merritt's *Her Story: Women of Canada's Past*, Jo-ann Archibald et al's *Courageous Spirits: Aboriginal Heroes of our Children*, and Rosemary Sadlier's *Leading the Way: Black Women in Canada*.
- A rich body of recent historical works are available with the lively retellings of historic events by Pierre Berton, the "Adventures of Canadian History" series, Marsha Boulton's *Just a Minute: Glimpses of our Great Canadian Heritage*, and Barbara Greenwood's, *A Pioneer Story*, as well as compelling new historical biographies such as Jean Little's *His Banner Over Me*, the story of one of Canada's early female doctors, and new biographies for children including those of Nellie McClung and Roberta Bondar.
- But the Canadian story is not only about successes and heroic deeds. As Bellah says,

A genuine community of memory will also tell painful stories of shared suffering that sometimes creates deeper identities than success.... And if the community is completely honest it will remember stories not only of suffering received but of suffering inflicted — dangerous memories, for they call the community to alter ancient evils. The communities of memory that tie us to the past also turn us toward the future as communities of hope. They carry a context of meaning that can allow us to connect our aspirations of a larger whole and see our own efforts as being contributions to a common good. (153)

Thus, the list should include stories of the Japanese internment, such as Joy Kogawa's *Naomi's Road* and Shizuye Takashima's *A Childhood in Prison Camp*; stories about early slavery and emancipation in Canada, such as Barbara Smucker's *Underground to Canada*; stories about discrimination like Jean Little's *From Anna*, Brian Doyle's *Angel Square*, Paul Yee's *Tales of Gold Mountain* and *Ghost Train*, Ann Walsh's *Shabash* in which a Sikh boy confronts racism, and Michelle Marineau's *Road to Chlifa*, in which Karim emigrates from war-torn Beirut and faces discrimination in Quebec.

While discussion and debate would be necessary to identify a core body of exemplary materials, as it has over time at the secondary level, it is important that they reflect the central commonplaces of Canada's culture. The selection of these stories would be like creating a patchwork quilt. Each patch or story would be an individual creation of merit in its own right, but collectively, they would blend together to create a total image. Together these patches would tell the new emerging Canadian story.

While we do have some outstanding resources to begin, it is not enough. We still need to find new ways to tell tales about our heroes, not textbook biographies but fireside tales — tales about our First Nations, our explorers, our fur traders, our pioneer women, our artists and musicians, our great athletes and scientists; about the settlement of the west, the discovery of our minerals, and the building of our railways, the contributions of our new immigrants; about our international accomplishments, our Nobel Peace Prize winner; and in particular, we need sources about French Canada to bridge the two solitudes.

We need to tell more stories that capture our multicultural heritage — stories about the Jewish fur traders and settlers who were here even before the English; about the Black Canadian men and women who lived in Nova Scotia two hundred years ago in greater numbers than Scots; about the Chinese workers who built the railways; about the English, Scottish, Irish, Ukrainian, Finnish, German, Sikh, and Japanese immigrants, to name just a few who broke ground across this country to make Canada what it is today.

Parekh defines multiculturalism in a way that fits appropriately within the intent of my conception of the commonplaces of our identity:

Multiculturalism doesn't simply mean numerical plurality of different cultures, but rather a community which is creating, guaranteeing, encouraging spaces within which different communities are able to grow at their own pace. At the same time it means creating a public space in which these communities are able to interact and enrich the existing culture and create a new consensual culture in which they recognize reflections of their own identity. (Cited in Giroux 7)

We know that the school is a major purveyor of a political viewpoint. It always has been, and always will be. If we recognize this influence, we can promote a viewpoint that is reflective of all Canadians and that commits us to a continuing search for equity and a society for the new millennium that is free of racism and inequities. The "big" themes or commonplaces of Canadian culture can assist us in suggesting a core of readings for reading aloud, for study or discussion, for every grade from Kindergarten to grade nine in every school in Canada, that contributes to a truly just, equitable and inclusive society. Through this collective patchwork quilt of shared stories we create "a community of memory," and we reveal our Canadian culture and identity in a way that allows Canadians from all regions, French and English speaking, of diverse racial and ethnocultural backgrounds to "recognize reflections of their own identity" — a way that says, "this is who we are."

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