

# Native Authors Meet to Discuss Future of Children's Literature

by STACY WELLS

In September of this year, a group of Native American Young Adult and children's authors converged in Minnesota's north woods.

Writers from the north slope of Alaska, Muskogee-Creek Nation, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewas, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and other Native nations were eager participants.

We shared a common purpose: to build a community passionate about changing the landscape of Native representation.

We were joined by Arthur Levine of Scholastic Press, Cheryl Klein of Lee & Low and Yolanda Scott of Charlesbridge—influential representatives of the industry.

Currently, Native written books are almost non-existent, especially in the young readers market (ages 0-18).

Last year, the top five publishers in the U.S. published over 215,000 books for young readers and from that vast number, only one book featured a Native author (Choctaw

author Tim Tingle's short story was included in the anthology, "Flying Lessons & Other Stories").

Turtle Mountain Ojibwe author Dawn Quigley stated, "In schools and libraries our American Indian identities are still being taken today, although perhaps unwittingly, through the use of biased and misrepresented Indigenous characters portrayed in literature, thereby taking away our right to a true and respectful representation of Native American people."

We Native authors, by writing about the beauty, humor, and depth of our culture allow Native children a reflection of the pride of our past, along with a hope of a bright and promising future.

Tingle observed, "With the rising number of Native students, we must encourage them to share what they know: to write their own stories, their tribal and family stories of tragedy and triumph, of overcoming.

"We must share the truth of our country's history, which begins with us," Tingle said.

"Powerful things hap-



A group of Native American authors recently met in Minnesota to discuss the future of Native American literature. Their goal was to create a community of author's passionate about increasing Native American representation in literature.

pen when Native people gather," said retreat founder and organizer Debby Dahl Edwardson.

That power was evident with the eight writers' who attended.

We were intent on improving craft while addressing issues specific to Native writers—lack of representations, identity and the right to tell our own stories.

Most importantly building a network of authors devoted to making Native voices more prominent was a priority.

Leading advocate for

authentic Native voices in children's literature, Debbie Reese (Nambe Pueblo) said, "We learned, laughed and got to know each other.

"The coalitions we form, formally and informally, have sustained indigenous people for hundreds of years.

"It is why we are still here, fighting—with our words—for our Nations and our children."

Together we are carving a path for change, for our tribes and our Nation's youth—one word, one story at a time.