

I am a Pueblo Indian Girl: Native American Child Authorship and Cross-Cultural Empathy in the 1930s

The ALSC's decision this past June to change the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award to the Children's Literature Legacy Award has, among other things, drawn the attention of educators and general readers to questions of empathy, representation, and activism in relation to *Little House on the Prairie* in particular and to early 20th-century children's literature in general. With this context in mind, I propose to focus my paper on a 13-year-old Native American child author, E-Yeh-Shure (or Louise Abeita), whose nonfiction account of her life in Isleta Pueblo was published in 1939, during the same decade that Wilder's first books appeared. Largely ignored within literary children's studies, *I am a Pueblo Indian Girl* is regarded as one of the first Native American books written by an indigenous author with a general (white) audience in mind. The story is an invitation to readerly empathy across cultures: the narrator recounts elements of her daily routine, from baking bread to washing her hair. Intriguing moments in the text anticipate that white readers or outsiders may make mistakes about Native culture; these are confidently corrected. In addition, the book is distinctive as an example of child-adult collaboration, as the illustrators are Native American adults, including one WPA muralist whose work is currently in the Smithsonian. A complex work of subtle activism in its time -- the introduction identifies it as part of a "living literature" which is all too often "pirated" by "white people"-- E-Yeh-Shure's story makes an important contribution to current discussions regarding the inclusion of Native American voices and perspectives in children's literature.