

NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY, CULTURE
AND SPIRITUALITY IN MARY POPE
OSBORNE'S CHILDREN'S BOOK,
BUFFALO BEFORE BREAKFAST

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ABSTRACT

Mary Pope Osborne is a prominent contemporary children's book author, best-known for her *Magic tree house* series. She creates an imaginary world in which the books in the magic tree house literally transport her child protagonists, Jack and Annie, to other times and places. Osborne's books are written simply so that young readers can follow a story that engages them, as they learn about diverse cultures, history and science. In *Buffalo before breakfast* (1999), the eighteenth book in the *Magic tree house* series, Jack and Annie travel to a Lakota camp on the Great Plains of North America in the 1800s, before the arrival of white prospectors, settlers and soldiers. By recreating the life of a traditional Lakota camp, Osborne gives readers a version of Native American history that has been silenced and marginalised. This article will examine her representation of Lakota history, culture and spirituality in Osborne's *Buffalo before breakfast*, and cite research to support the story she tells.

Keywords: Mary Pope Osborne, *Buffalo before breakfast*, Lakota, White Buffalo Woman

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is an essential part of any child's education. Books for children not only instil knowledge, they create the entryway to other worlds, stretching a child's imagination as they entertain. In the *Magic tree house* series, Mary Pope Osborne presents this entryway to another world literally. Her two protagonists, Jack and Annie, can travel to any place and time pictured in the books in the magic tree house simply by pointing to the picture and wishing themselves there. In the eighteenth book in the *Magic tree house* series, *Buffalo before breakfast* (1999), Osborne presents a day in the life of a Lakota tribe on the Great Plains of North America in the early 1800s, before white immigration. In the preface the author admits the difficulty of the undertaking, since traditional Native American culture was preserved and passed down via the oral tradition, and much has been lost. She also was hampered by being of white European descent, without the kind of cultural awareness that traditionally has been passed on by Native American elders. To make up for this lack Osborne conducted research on Native American history and culture to deepen her knowledge, but she admits that what she has to share is only 'the most basic information' about Lakota life.

For anyone whose voice has been silenced, or whose history has been overwritten, African American social critic and writer, bell hooks, advocates a writing-back strategy in her *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black* (1989). Bradford (2007, 47) notes that many indigenous writers have used such a strategy, '[writing] back to those dominant versions of the past that occlude the appropriation of land, the violence, and the marginalization'. Bradford illustrates the continuing need for Native Americans to 'write back' by citing a book she found in an Australian airport bookstore called *America: A patriotic primer* (hereafter *America*). With such a title it is unsurprising that the 'primer' has a political agenda; it was written in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 to 'reassure young readers and the adults who mediate texts to them' that the United States (US) had a 'glorious history and a commanding future' (ibid., 1). Although *America* does mention that Native Americans were the first Americans on the continent, predating the whites by centuries, the book presents them as 'an assimilated, docile presence within the nation' (ibid., 2). In *America*, the true history of Native Americans, who lost their lands and livelihood through violence and deception, is veiled and even fabricated to accord with a Eurocentric master narrative. With such a 'history' book, it is impossible for Native American children, or indeed any children, to learn what is true and what is false.

In her essay, 'Can the subaltern speak?' Spivak (1994) pushes writers to speak for those whose voices have been lost. 'Speaking' in this case means presenting a more nuanced, and more truthful, account of Native American history and culture, one that is from the traditional Native American point of view, or at least includes it. Speaking this truth is a priority for many Native American writers, since if their children only learn a fabricated version of their history they will remain ignorant of their own cultural heritage and traditions. At the same time, as Bradford (2007, 11) notes: 'It is not the case that texts by Indigenous writers always produce "better" representations of Indigenous peoples and cultures than those by non-Indigenous writers.' She goes on to say that since 'Indigenous people have frequently internalized colonial ideologies . . . texts by Indigenous people are not necessarily free of stereotypes and colonial mythologies' (ibid.).

What the above implies is that colonial ideologies may have moved in to replace the Native American cultures they destroyed. In his coming of age novel, *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian* (2007), contemporary Native American author Alexie directly addresses how irrevocably his culture has been lost. He writes about the reservation Indians who are as intolerant of differences as the most bigoted white people, instead of adhering to their own traditional cultural acceptance of those who fall outside the conventional norm.

In the twenty-first century, more non-indigenous writers are trying to speak for those who have been silenced, giving an accurate account of traditional Native American history and beliefs. In *Buffalo before breakfast*, Osborne (1999) makes her own attempt to retrieve a lost culture, conducting research on Native Americans. Even so, she adds the disclaimer that, since most of their beliefs were not written down, 'no one can say for sure what their way of life was actually like over a century ago' (ibid., Preface).

Buffalo before breakfast is the eighteenth book in Osborne's popular and acclaimed *Magic tree house* series.¹ Noted for their ability to engage and instruct young readers, the books in the series portray the history, culture and traditions of various ethnic groups, and provide information about their geography and natural history as well. The series ranges in time from the Cretaceous period to a future virtual era, and in space around the world. Young readers can journey vicariously with the protagonists, Jack and Annie, as the two children experience fantastic adventures. In *Buffalo before breakfast*, readers gain an understanding of Native American history and culture from an account that, although written by a white author, makes the effort to present a true history. For non-Native American children, the book is also a good introduction to a marginalised culture and its values.

This article aims to examine the history and culture of the Lakota as shown in Osborne's *Buffalo before breakfast*. The article will cite research on and accounts from the Lakota and other Native Americans to provide some criteria for evaluating Osborne's accuracy.

2. *BUFFALO BEFORE BREAKFAST*

At the beginning of the *Magic tree house* series, eight-year-old Jack and his seven-year-old sister Annie discover the magic tree house, which is filled with books that can transport them to any time and place pictured within their pages. The books belong to Morgan Le Fay, the legendary sorceress and queen whom Osborne (1999, 2) recasts as ‘a magical librarian from the time of King Arthur’. Jack, who wears glasses and takes notes, is the scholarly child; he consults the magic books to learn what he and Annie need to know to achieve their quests; while Annie is curious and friendly, with a kind of sixth sense about animals and people. Earlier in the series, Jack and Annie freed Morgan Le Fay from a spell, solved four ancient riddles to become Master Librarians, and saved four ancient stories from being lost forever. In *Buffalo before breakfast*, they are journeying for the second of four gifts, the ‘gift from the prairie blue’, to break the spell on a mysteriously appearing and disappearing dog named Teddy (ibid., 7). In the magic tree house, Jack finds a book called *The Great Plains*, points to the picture on its cover, and wishes them there. When they arrive, Jack refers to the book as a research tool, to help them understand the place and the people they meet. Osborne uses this book-within-a-book structure to tell a story based on learning the history and cultural traditions of the Lakota, while underlining the practical importance of learning to read.

Osborne employs a very basic formula, using simple words and pages to narrate the story. She also uses metatext in the form of the ‘To the readers’ and ‘More facts for you and Jack’ (hereafter End matter) at the back of the book to purvey detailed information about the Lakota to the young readers so that they can know more about Native Americans’ history, culture and spirituality. The function of the metatext is not only for the young readers who can read it themselves because the words within the metatext are simple, but also for the parents who can read it for their children if they are not familiar with Native Americans’ history, culture and spirituality. In addition, Osborne stimulates the young readers to experience the fictional world with Jack and Annie’s journey by means of Jack’s reading quotations from the book to display the knowledge and information about Lakota. Osborne’s book-within-a-book story successfully guides young readers to pass through another time and space as the time-slip novel or portal novel.

3. *LAKOTA HISTORY IN BUFFALO BEFORE BREAKFAST*

When they arrive in the ‘ocean of grass’ that is the Great Plains, Jack and Annie find ‘a circle of tepees’ inhabited by Native Americans wearing buckskins, in which they too are magically clothed (Osborne 1999, 15). Consulting their magical book they discover that they have arrived on the plains in the early 1800s, when various tribes lived there, and that ‘The Lakota were the largest tribe’ (ibid.).

Here, Osborne gives a more accurate picture of Lakota history than used to be the case simply by using the correct name for the tribe.² The Lakota have been known as the Sioux since the seventeenth century, when the Ojibwa tribes, who were their enemies, used the term to describe them to French trappers and explorers. The word 'Sioux', from the Ojibwa word 'na-towe-ssiwa', simply means 'people of an alien tribe' (Gibbon 2003, 2). The people who came to be known as the Sioux were a nomadic group of the upper Great Plains who spoke the Dakota language; there were 'three main divisions, the Dakota to the east, the Yankton–Yanktonai in the middle, and the Lakota to the west' (ibid.). Under a picture of a Lakota warrior in his magic book, Jack finds that:

Everything changed for the Native Americans of the Great Plains after white settlers arrived in the mid-1800s. Fighting broke out between Lakota warriors and white soldiers. By the end of the 1800s, the Lakota were defeated. They lost both their land and their old way of life. (Osborne 1999, 18)

In the above, instead of portraying a 1950s Hollywood-movie version of the Lakota as savages attacking innocent settlers (who will be saved by the timely intervention of a cavalry of white soldiers), Osborne presents white settlement in terms of its catastrophic consequences to Native Americans, and she manages to do so in a few short sentences.

Other authors, writing for adults and older children, give a more comprehensive version. The website for the National Museum of American History relates how people displaced by the Civil War became migrants who 'encroached on Indian lands and threatened native game and ways of life' (<http://amhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/printable/section.asp?id=6>). To keep the peace, in 1868 a US treaty with the Lakota gave them permanent land rights to their sacred Black Hills. But in 1874, Lieutenant Colonel George Custer took troops to the Black Hills, ostensibly to find a site for a fort 'to protect this Indian land' (ibid.), but actually to verify rumours that gold had been found in the hills. White prospectors began staking illegal claims; to protect the prospectors, the army sent troops in 1876 to 'trap a large group of roaming Lakota Indians and force them onto a reservation' (ibid.). Custer ignored the army's plan to surround the Lakota, attacking even though he was badly outnumbered. He and all of his men were killed in the fighting, which 'so outraged the government that it mounted a new offensive' to overcome all resistance (ibid.). By 1890, most of the Lakota had been forced onto government-controlled reservations, 'reduced to a subsistence life' (ibid.).

The military defeat and subsequent restriction of the Lakota to reservations would not have been possible without the loss of the buffalo. As the historian Gibbon (2003, 6) notes: 'With the disappearance of the bison herds in the northern Plains by 1885, the foundation of the Lakota's nomadic lifeway was destroyed and decades of dependence on reservation annuities began for all Sioux.'

Osborne makes this connection in her story, equating the loss of Lakota livelihood with the decimation of the buffalo, and making it clear that this was the direct result of white hunting tactics. The magic book tells Jack and Annie that within 100 years of white settlement the number of buffalo had decreased from 40 million to fewer than 300, and: ‘Almost all had been killed by white hunters and soldiers’ (Osborne 1999, 39). When Jack and Annie come upon a herd of buffalo that stretches for ‘as far as the eye can see’ (ibid.), Jack ‘knew for certain they’d come to a time *before* the white settlers and soldiers had arrived, *before* the end of the great buffalo herds’ (ibid., 40).

Osborne makes the point with italics that the buffalo were nearly wiped out by white hunters and soldiers. In the notes at the end of the book, she even adds that this near-extinction was deliberate, stating baldly that the US Army ‘knew the Native American way of life could not survive without the bison. So they decided to kill all the herds’ (ibid., End matter). In a well-researched book for older children, Patent (2006) writes that the buffalo were in the way of white expansion in more ways than one; the bison tore up or blocked the new railroad tracks that were bringing ‘civilization’ west, and competed for grazing range with the domesticated cattle that ranchers were bringing west.

Patent (ibid.) also writes that the bison herds were crucial to the Native Americans and their way of life on the plains, a life they were fighting to preserve, and that the US Army was losing. Initially, the whites hunted the bison for their hides and tongues, but by the 1870s General Sheridan, who commanded the US Army in the plains, counselled that:

[F]or the sake of lasting peace, let them [the army and white hunters] kill, skin, and sell until the buffaloes are exterminated. Then your prairies can be covered with speckled cattle and the festive cowboy, who follows the hunter as a second forerunner of an advanced civilization. (Ibid., 57)

Buffalo Bill Cody alone bragged of killing 4 280 buffalo in less than 18 months, although later both he and General Sheridan would try to protect the few bison that remained. According to Patent (ibid., 61):

Although enough whites had protested the slaughter of buffaloes that a bill to save them passed Congress in 1874, former Army commander President Grant refused to sign it. Not until the early 1900s did Congress create refuges for the remaining buffalo in the US, most of which came from privately-owned herds. Today over 200 000 buffalo live in US parks, wildlife refuges, reservations, and private ranches, but their genetic diversity has been lost.

Gibbon (2003, 6) notes that ‘[b]y the mid-1870s, bison were nearly extinct in the central Plains, and by the mid-1880s, they had disappeared in the northern Plains’.

Once the bison were gone and the tribes moved onto the reservations, another phase in the 'Indian wars' began. To speed their assimilation and 'destroy Indian cultures', the US government took Native American children away from their families and sent them to government boarding schools, where their hair was cut, their clothing exchanged for the kind of clothing whites wore, and their own indigenous languages forbidden (Patent 2006, 59).

Osborne's (1999, End matter) story takes place before the time of the reservations; she only refers to them briefly, stating that: 'Today most Lakota live on reservations in North and South Dakota.' But she defines reservations as 'areas of land reserved for Native Americans by the U.S. government' (ibid.). Such a definition seems a bit disingenuous, first because it implies that the government gave land to Native Americans instead of stealing land from them; second since it suggests that the Lakota wanted to live in such places, where conditions were substandard at best. Although Native American children are no longer sent off to government schools to force their assimilation, circumstances on many reservations are so appalling that Alexie (2007) calls them 'death camps' and saw moving away from his home reservation in eastern Washington as his only option for survival. As for the Lakota, conditions on their reservations are dire. In 2007 on the Pine Ridge Reservation near the Black Hills in South Dakota, the unemployment rate was 85 per cent; the per capita income \$4 000 a year; the rates for death and disease many times higher than elsewhere in the country; and life expectancy lower than anywhere in the Western hemisphere except for Haiti (around 45 years old for men, and 52 years old for women).³

Osborne's delineation on reservation seems to be like Tallbear's (2000) critique on Krech's *The ecological Indian* (1999). Tallbear (2000, 1), as an Indian, claims that their Indian ancestors taught them 'frugal use of a natural resources' as 'part of [their] undeniable spiritual understanding of resource use', but not the 'non-conservationist' by Krech's view. This is 'why much of the positive commentary about Krech's book is offensive to Indian people and does the book itself little justice' (ibid.). Osborne's description on reservation is from a white person's perspective. Tallbear declaims against Krech because of his discourse on Indian people from a white person's viewpoint. Notwithstanding, Osborne makes a voice for the silenced history about Lakota. It seems that Osborne also gives prominence to cultural appropriation by the strategy of making Jack depict Lakota, but not having the Indian boy Black Hawk narrate his own history. By so doing, Osborne maybe accentuate the silence problem of Lakota history and culture.

It may be that in a short book for young children Osborne did not have the space or the heart to tackle such dark subject matter; also, the reservations did not exist until years after Jack and Annie's magical visit, so the reservations, like the lives of contemporary Lakota, were outside the scope of her book. Perhaps, too, Osborne was simply considering how to present traditional Lakota culture to young children.

4. LAKOTA CULTURE AND SPIRITUALITY IN *BUFFALO BEFORE BREAKFAST*

In *Buffalo before breakfast*, the Lakota culture is explored through Jack and Annie's interactions with the Lakota people they encounter, most importantly Black Hawk and his grandmother (simply called Grandmother), and the information in their magic book. Jack and Annie meet Black Hawk, a Lakota boy about their age, soon after their arrival on the Great Plains. As Annie chatters away to Black Hawk, Jack learns from the magic book that 'Good manners to the Lakota mean speaking as few words as possible' (Osborne 1999, 21–22). As soon as they have a moment of privacy, Jack lets Annie know, so she can act in accordance with people from another culture. The book also tells Jack that sharing gifts and not showing fear are important; worried about whether or not they have arrived at a time when whites and Indians were at war, Jack attempts to act more like Annie, who is relaxed and interested.

At the camp they see what first appears as a gender-divided society: 'Men and boys carved bows. Women and girls pounded meat and sewed clothes' (ibid., 26). Then they meet Black Hawk's grandmother, who explains that the bear claws one girl is sewing onto a shirt 'will give her the strength of the bear' and that 'She will sew on hawk feathers, elk teeth, and porcupine quills, too. All will give her the power of the animals' (ibid., 27). This implies that girls need strength and power as much as boys do. It also suggests one role of animals in Lakota culture, which the scholar Hassrick (1964, 266) describes as a belief in the power of animals as a supernatural force 'with which man might be endowed'. This belief is borne out when Black Hawk, disguised under a wolf skin, explains to the startled Jack and Annie that he wears the skin to hunt buffalo, because the wolf is 'the most powerful hunter of buffalo' and wearing the skin he can 'feel his strength' as he hunts (Osborne 1999, 32). Osborne describes that not only Lakota boys but also girls need the power of the animals. Osborne's gender strategy is more or less accessible to the readers of both genders. To the male young readers, as Jack, and the female young readers, as Annie, they experience Jack and Annie's journey together. The gender identity will help boys and girls co-experience the special adventure of going through time and space.

As the mainstay of the Lakota lifestyle, the buffalo or bison was itself the most important of all the animals. Black Elk, the famous Oglala Lakota medicine man and visionary, said, 'The bison is the chief of all animals and represents the earth, the totality of all that is' (in Patent 2006, 34).

Grandmother explains the buffalo's importance to Jack and Annie in terms of all the gifts the buffalo gives them: 'Food from his body. Tepees from his skin, tools from his bones ... Cups from his horns ... Ropes from his hair. Even winter sleds from his ribs' (Osborne 1999, 29). Patent (2006, 27–29) mentions that the Lakota used the buffalo's tail as a fly swatter, the buffalo's dried and cleaned stomach as a water carrier, and even the dried buffalo dung as fuel for their campfires, since there

were so few trees on the Great Plains. The Lakota also reused what the buffalo gave them; when the hides that made their teepees fell apart, they made moccasins out of what they could salvage (Yacowitz 2003, 15).

That the Lakota regarded what they received as a gift, instead of as theirs to take without respect or thought, is underscored by Grandmother's admonition to Black Hawk to refrain from hunting that day because they already have enough to eat, and the 'Lakota never take more buffalo than [they] need' (Osborne 1999, 32). In other words, the Lakota have a relationship with the buffalo, and it is based on necessity and thanksgiving, not greed.

Perhaps it was this cultural precept that made it so difficult for the Lakota to understand the US government's strategy of wiping out the buffalo to be rid of the Native Americans as well. Black Elk, who lived from 1863 to 1950, remembered that when the white men hunted buffalo, they killed thousands of them, sometimes only for the hides and tongues: 'You can see that the men who did this were crazy. Sometimes they did not even take the tongues. They just killed and killed and killed' (in Yacowitz 2003, 24). Black Elk could see no explicable motive behind such wanton destruction; he could only regard it as a form of insanity.

Contemporary Native American author Hogan (1999, 17) has a different perception of the loss of life that resulted from European colonialism, and she does not hesitate to assign culpability when she writes that:

At the time of first contact on this continent, Europe was a devastated place. The animals, land, and people of that continent were plundered and destroyed. Both humans and animals were tortured and killed for the amusement of a bloodthirsty people. The voyagers to other continents robbed those 'new worlds' of their lives, taking back animals and indigenous people. There are accounts of four hundred tigers killed in a single day. In other accounts, five thousand animals and humans were tortured and killed in one day. These included not only lions, hippos, elephants, bison, crocodiles, bears, and giraffes, but humans as well.

Unlike Black Elk, Hogan may well see the wholesale slaughter of the bison herds as congruent with the other brutalities perpetrated by 'a bloodthirsty people'.

In *Buffalo before breakfast*, Osborne introduces the Lakota idea of reverence towards the buffalo instead, through the Lakota deity White Buffalo Woman, who appears to Annie as a 'lady in white' and intervenes to save the children and stop the buffalo from stampeding when Black Hawk is showing Annie and Jack the herd.

When the three children return to camp, telling Grandmother what happened, they are invited to a 'sacred circle', where the men smoke the pipe White Buffalo Woman gave them long ago. White Buffalo Woman, also known as White Buffalo Calf Pipe Woman, is an important deity for many of the Plains tribes, so there are many retellings of her legend. Contemporary Native American author Brooke Medicine Eagle gives a synopsis based on versions by Vera Louise Drysdale and by Black Elk (see Brown 1953). The story begins with two young men scouting on the Great Plains, in some versions during a time of famine. In the distance they see

something moving towards them that turns out to be a mysterious, radiant woman with long flowing hair, dressed in white buckskin. One of the young men sees that the woman is beautiful and alone; he approaches her lustfully. A mist covers him and the woman in white; when the mist clears, there is nothing left of him but a pile of bones, which turn to dust and are blown away. 'Thus was his selfish intention broken apart and dispelled' (Medicine Eagle 1991, 5).

The other young man, who had perceived that the radiant woman was holy, prays to her to teach his people. The people build her a huge lodge; she visits the camp and shows them the sacred pipe with its long stem, and teaches them how to smoke it '*in sacred rites to bring about a reunion with all things in the Circle of Life*' (ibid.).

At the end of her visit, White Buffalo Woman walks away from the Lakota and turns into a white buffalo calf, 'one of the rarest animals of all' (Osborne 1999, 74). In most versions of the story White Buffalo Woman tells the people that in the future, 'the birth of a white buffalo calf would signal her return, which would help bring harmony and balance back to the Indian people and to the world' (Patent 2006, 64). Then the deity in her buffalo form rolls on the ground and changes colour, from white to yellow to red to brown, as a symbol of unity among all the variously coloured people of earth.

Although Osborne (1999, End matter) leaves out the lust and subsequent death of the first scout, along with whatever lesson can be taken from that event, her description of the significance of the sacred pipe matches Black Elk's:

The pipe bowl represented the earth. The buffalo carved upon it represented all four-legged animals that live upon the earth. The pipe's wooden stem represented all that grows on the earth. The twelve eagle feathers hanging from it represented all the winged creatures.

According to Black Elk, 'All these peoples, all the things of the universe, are joined to you who smoke the pipe. All send their voices to *Wakan Tanka*, the Great Spirit. When you pray with this pipe, you pray with and for everything' (in Medicine Eagle 1991, 6).⁴ This concurs with Osborne's (1999, 55–56) retelling, where Grandmother says: 'The smoke from the sacred pipe joins all things to the Great Spirit' who is 'the source of all things in the sacred circle of life'. Grandmother includes the spirits of trees, birds and the wind in this sacred circle (ibid.). She tells the children that White Buffalo Woman brought the sacred pipe to the Lakota so their 'prayers could rise to the Great Spirit' (ibid., 56).

Osborne is also in accord with Hassrick (1964, 266), who notes that, for the Lakota, the Great Spirit is 'all-pervasive and Omnipotent', and that:

His energy ... was disseminated to a myriad of lesser supernaturals who found embodiment in many living things, especially birds and animals. The eagle, the hawk, the swallow, the elk, the deer, and the buffalo – each was a possessor of a specified power; each was representative of some particular deity.

This idea is carried through when Grandmother tells the children that White Buffalo Woman is 'a messenger of the Great Spirit' (Osborne 1999, 56) who can appear as a woman or a buffalo, and again when Grandmother gives the children an eagle feather, both to reward and to represent their courage when they saved Black Hawk from a charging buffalo.

Osborne writes about other aspects of Lakota life that are intertwined with their spirituality. As the Lakota break camp the next morning, Jack asks Black Hawk some of the 'many questions' he still has about their life. When he wonders if it is all right for the Lakota to camp on land they do not own, Black Hawk laughs and replies that 'people cannot own land' since land belongs to the Great Spirit (ibid., 61).

As contemporary Native American poet Simon Ortiz said in the interview with Manley and Rea (1989, 365), 'land is a material reality as well as a philosophical, metaphysical idea or concept; land is who we are, land is our identity, land is home place, land is sacred'. Or, as Lakota Chief Arvol Looking Horse said at the World Peace and Prayer Day held in Australia on 21 June 2003, 'Mother Earth is not a resource but rather the source of life itself' (Patent 2006, 68).

When Jack asks Black Hawk about school, defining it as the place children go to learn things, Black Hawk laughs at the paucity of such a definition. He tells Jack that Lakota children learn everywhere: 'In the camp we learn to make clothes, tools, and teepees. On the plains we learn to ride and hunt. We look at the sky and learn courage from the eagle' (Osborne 1999, 62). In this brief description, Osborne presents a flexible, fluid, open approach to schooling, one that even includes learning from an animal (the eagle). Jack is sufficiently impressed that he makes a note of it, writing down that: 'Lakota school is everywhere' (ibid.). As a reader, one cannot help but compare Black Hawk's schooling to the contemporary mainstream idea of how children should learn.

Although, as previously noted, the problems and issues of contemporary Native Americans are not within the scope of this book, Osborne does include the loss of their culture, sometimes simply by presenting aspects of it that are gone: for instance, in comparison to Black Hawk's idea of learning, contemporary schooling seems regimented, narrow, and dull. At the end of Jack and Annie's stay, Osborne expresses their feeling of loss directly. As the children say goodbye to the tribe, Jack is overcome with sorrow, realising that: 'Soon everything will change ... The buffalo will vanish. The old way of life for the Lakota will vanish, too' (ibid., 66).

Annie's response, which is that the Great Spirit will watch over the Lakota always, seems a little too determinedly upbeat in light of current conditions on the Lakota reservations. More successful as a note of hope is Jack's changed perception of the world on their return to their own time and place. He notices the wind in the trees, and the birds in the sky, and finally understands what Grandmother told them, that all things are related. He has begun to accept an important Lakota cultural belief, in place of his own. The other note of hope occurs on the last page of the book, where

Osborne writes that the US government was finally persuaded, in the early 1900s, to save the bison; today 2 500 of them live in Yellowstone National Park.

5. FROM DETERRITORIALIZATION TO RETERRITORIALIZATION

Kaplan (1990, 358) defines ‘deterritorialization’ as ‘the displacement of identities, persons, and meanings that is endemic to the postmodern world system’. In this sense, the Lakota have been deterritorialized through loss of land and livelihood, as well as through the loss of their cultural heritage. But writers have the ability to reconstruct and restore the silenced or marginalized history and culture of a people. This reconstruction is a kind of ‘reterritorialization’ which occurs when ‘we inhabit a world of our making’ (ibid., 365). In other words, writing can be a form of reterritorialization when it creates, or recreates, a lost world for readers to experience, metaphorically at least.

In *Buffalo before breakfast*, Osborne writes of a time in Native American history before white and other settlers displaced the Lakota. The reterritorialized space she describes appears in the imaginations of her young readers as Jack and Annie discover and explore it for themselves. In this way Osborne not only retrieves part of a culture that has been lost; she also transmits the beginnings of historical and cultural literacy to young readers.

The Native American oral tradition is another method of reterritorialization. As Drees (2002, 8) writes, the oral tradition maintains ‘a tribe’s cultural identity’ by passing on a historical record that includes stories ‘with particular symbolic or spiritual significance’, such as the story of White Buffalo Woman. Osborne notes that this story has been handed down from generation to generation. According to Patent (2006, 64), the sacred pipe that White Buffalo Woman gave the Lakota has also been handed down; Lakota Chief Arvol Looking Horse is the nineteenth-generation keeper of the sacred pipe.

Because the story has been handed down in many tribes and shared with non-Native Americans as well, the female white buffalo calf born in Wisconsin in 1994 received tens of thousands of visitors from all over the world, who saw in her the ‘hope for a return of harmony among the world’s people and harmony in the natural world’ (ibid., 68). The female white buffalo changed in colour throughout her life, from white to yellow, red and brown. Since her birth in 1994, eight other white buffalo have been born.

6. CONCLUSION

Through her research on Native Americans, in *Buffalo before breakfast*, Osborne (1999) has combined oral and written traditions to provide a slice of Native American

history, culture and spirituality for Native and non-Native American children alike. Osborne elaborately puts the Lakota historical and cultural references at the back of the novel for young children to know more about the detailed information though some of the parts are from a white person's perspective. As young readers vicariously experience traditional Lakota life through a journey with Jack and Annie, they learn something about cultural diversity as well as cultural particularity. Simultaneously, Native American children can discover that their history was silenced by the white people because of Osborne's writing strategy of making Jack narrate Lakota history and culture, but not having the Lakota warrior Black Hawk speak up his own ethnic story. Osborne's writing strategy also seems to reveal the phenomena of cultural appropriation.

Osborne employs very simple words and pages to represent the past Lakota historical background, cultural significance and tradition via writing *Buffalo before breakfast*. The pictures also support the writing and stimulate the young readers' thinking and interests. Children's books can broaden a child's vision or limit a child's view of the world to the mainstream of cultural knowledge. Osborne successfully reterritorializes the deterritorialized Native American identities. By reterritorializing Native American traditional life in *Buffalo before breakfast*, Osborne expands her young readers' cultural literacy.

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Special thanks go to the two reviewers for their insightful feedback on an earlier version of this article. Their suggestions on Osborne's narrative strategies, such as basic formula writing, metatext, time-slip novel, gender strategy, and so on, discourse on cultural appropriation and Kimberly Tallbear's review on Shepard Krech's book as a good reference, made the article much richer. In addition, I want to thank Pam for her ongoing encouragement and advice.

NOTES

1. The *Magic tree house* series won honours from the National Council of Teachers of English and the American Booksellers Association; Osborne received the Ludington Memorial Award from the Educational Paperback Association, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Random House Sales Force. As well, part of the *Magic tree house* series was adapted for an animated film by the Media Factory in Japan in 2011.
2. In this Osborne is not alone. Of the works cited in this article, most of the twentieth century publications call this tribe the Sioux, even the interviews with the medicine man and visionary Black Elk (who is called an Oglala Sioux). Osborne's book, published in 1999, accords with most of the material cited here from the twenty-first century (including the National Museum of American History website), in naming the tribe Lakota.

3. The incidence of diabetes, heart disease, tuberculosis, infant mortality, alcoholism and suicide in Pine Ridge continues to be many times more than in the rest of the US. Some homes are without running water and indoor plumbing; some people freeze to death in the cold winters because they cannot afford to heat their homes (see the Pine Ridge website <http://www.re-member.org/pine-ridge-reservation.aspx>).
4. Medicine Eagle employs Brown's words from the book *Animals of the soul: Sacred animals of the Oglala Sioux* (1853) to interpret Black Elk's idea on the pipe.

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