Herbert Kohl's "The Politics of Children's Literature: What's Wrong with the Rosa Parks Myth" analyzes the version of the Rosa Parks story that is often taught in classrooms. Kohl exposes how this version supports certain "myths" about conflicts between European Americans and African Americans in the twentieth-century.

While Kohl writes specifically about the Civil Rights Movement, the act of analyzing and exposing popular myths about American history can be productively applied to many aspects of the nation's past. For instance: the confrontation between European Americans and American Indians during 19th century westward expansion, in which thousands of American Indians were forced by the U.S. government to leave their homes and move further west to make room for European American settlers.

Read the excerpts from Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* (1935) and Louise Erdrich's *The Game of Silence* (2005) with Kohl's methods of "correcting the myth" in mind. Below you will find a brief synopsis of each book as well as a few discussion questions to think about as you read the excerpts.

***Little House on the Prairie* (Grades 3-5)**

Laura Ingalls Wilder's famous Little House series tells the story of a white pioneer family who moves to various places in the nineteenth-century American west. The third volume of the series, *Little House on the Prairie*, follows the Ingalls family as they travel into Kansas "Indian Territory" to build their home. Throughout the novel, Laura (around six-years-old) has several encounters with American Indians, including the one described in this excerpt.

Questions:

1. How are the American Indians described as they "ride away"? From these descriptions, how do you think they feel about their departure? How does Laura feel? Who is responsible for their departure, and why? Underline or list specific words and descriptions that indicate the characters' responses to the historical policy of Indian Removal.

2. Examine the descriptions you underlined or listed. What myths about Indian Removal are presented in *Little House on the Prairie*?

***The Game of Silence* (Grades 3-5)**

Wilder's Little House series was a formative influence on Louise Erdrich's Birchbark House series, which tells the story of the nineteenth-century American west from the perspective of a Native American Ojibwe girl, Omakayas. The second volume of the series, *The Game of Silence*, details the daily lives of Omakayas and her Ojibwa community, including their departure from their homes in response to a government order.

(Some helpful vocabulary to understand the excerpt: "Chimookoman" – white people or non-Indians. "The Break-Apart Girl" – a white girl who is Omakayas's friend. Omakayas calls her the Break-Apart Girl because they cannot pronounce each other's names, and the white girl's dress cinches in so much at the waist that Omakayas thinks she will break apart.

Questions:

1. How are Omakayas and her Ojibwa community described as they prepare to leave? From these descriptions, how do you think they feel about their departure? What specific things are they leaving behind? Underline or list specific words and descriptions that indicate the characters' responses to the historical policy of Indian Removal.

2. Look at the descriptions you underlined or listed. Does the shift in perspective presented in *The Game of Silence* help to "correct the myth" presented in *Little House on the Prairie?* How?

3. Can you think of other book pairings that could help students expose and analyze myths about American history?

"Will the government make these Indians go west?"

"Yes," Pa said. "When white settlers come into a country, the Indians have to move on. The government is going to move these Indians farther west, any time now. That's why we're here, Laura. White people are going to settle all this country, and we get the best land because we get here first and take our pick. Now do you understand?"

"Yes, Pa," Laura said. "But, Pa, I thought this was Indian Territory. Won't it make the Indians mad to have to——"

"No more questions, Laura," Pa said, firmly. "Go to sleep."

Chapter 24

INDIANS RIDE AWAY

THERE was another long night of sleep. It was so good to lie down and sleep soundly. Everything was safe and quiet. Only the owls called "Who-oo? Who-oo?" in the woods along the creek, while the great moon sailed slowly over the curve of the sky above the endless prairie.

In the morning the sun shone warmly. Down by the creek the frogs were croaking. "Garrump! Garrump!" they cried by the edge of the pools. "Knee deep! Knee deep! Better go 'round."

Ever since Ma had told them what the frogs

were saying, Mary and Laura could hear the words plainly.

The door was open to let in the warm spring air. After breakfast Pa went out, whistling merrily. He was going to hitch Pet and Patty to the plow again. But his whistling suddenly stopped. He stood on the doorstep, looking toward the east, and he said, "Come here, Caroline. And you, Mary and Laura."

Laura ran out first, and she was surprised. The Indians were coming.

They did not come on the creek road. They came riding up out of the creek bottoms far to the east.

First came the tall Indian who had gone riding by the house in the moonlight. Jack was growling

and Laura's heart beat fast. She was glad to be close to Pa. But she knew this was the good Indian, the Osage chief who had stopped the terrible war-cries.

His black pony came trotting willingly, sniffing the wind that blew its mane and tail like fluttering banners. The pony's nose and head were free; it wore no bridle. Not even one strap was on it anywhere. There was nothing to make it do anything it didn't want to do. Willingly it came trotting along the old Indian trail as if it liked to carry the Indian on its back.

Jack growled savagely, trying to get loose from his chain. He remembered this Indian who had pointed a gun at him. Pa said, "Be still, Jack." Jack growled again, and for the first time in their lives Pa struck him. "Lie down! Be still!" Pa said. Jack cowered down and was still.

The pony was very near now, and Laura's heart beat faster and faster. She looked at the Indian's beaded moccasin, she looked up along the fringed legging that clung to the pony's bare side. A bright-colored blanket was wrapped around

the Indian. One bare brown-red arm carried a rifle lightly across the pony's naked shoulders. Then Laura looked up at the Indian's fierce, still, brown face.

It was a proud, still face. No matter what happened, it would always be like that. Nothing would change it. Only the eyes were alive in that face, and they gazed steadily far away to the west. They did not move. Nothing moved or changed, except the eagle feathers standing straight up from the scalplock on the shaved head. The long feathers swayed and dipped, waving and spinning in the wind as the tall Indian on the black pony passed on into the distance.

"Du Chêne himself," Pa said, under his breath, and he lifted his hand in salute.

But the happy pony and the motionless Indian went by. They went by as if the house and stable and Pa and Ma and Mary and Laura were not there at all.

Pa and Ma and Mary and Laura slowly turned and looked at that Indian's proud straight back. Then other ponies and other blankets and shaved

heads and eagle feathers came between. One by one on the path, more and more savage warriors were riding behind Du Chêne. Brown face after brown face went by. Ponies' manes and tails blew in the wind, beads glittered, fringe flapped, eagle feathers were waving on all the naked heads. Rifles lying on the ponies' shoulders bristled all along the line.

Laura was excited about the ponies. There were black ponies, bay ponies, gray and brown and spotted ponies. Their little feet went trippety-trip-trip, trippety-trip, pat-patter, pat-patter, trippety pat-patter, all along the Indian trail. Their nostrils widened at Jack and their bodies shied away from him, but they came on bravely, looking with their bright eyes at Laura.

"Oh, the pretty ponies! See the pretty ponies!" she cried, clapping her hands. "Look at the spotted one."

She thought she would never be tired of watching those ponies coming by, but after a while she began to look at the women and children on their backs. The women and children came riding be-

hind the Indian men. Little naked brown Indians, no bigger than Mary and Laura, were riding the pretty ponies. The ponies did not have to wear bridles or saddles, and the little Indians did not have to wear clothes. All their skin was out in the fresh air and the sunshine. Their straight black hair blew in the wind and their black eyes sparkled with joy. They sat on their ponies stiff and still like grown-up Indians.

Laura looked and looked at the Indian children, and they looked at her. She had a naughty wish to be a little Indian girl. Of course she did not really mean it. She only wanted to be bare naked in the wind and the sunshine, and riding one of those gay little ponies.

The Indian children's mothers were riding ponies, too. Leather fringe dangled about their legs and blankets were wrapped around their bodies, but the only thing on their heads was their black, smooth hair. Their faces were brown and placid. Some had narrow bundles tied on their backs, and tiny babies' heads stuck out of the top of the bundles. And some babies and

some small children rode in baskets hanging at the ponies' sides, beside their mothers.

More and more and more ponies passed, and more children, and more babies on their mothers' backs, and more babies in baskets on the ponies' sides. Then came a mother riding, with a baby in a basket on each side of her pony.

Laura looked straight into the bright eyes of the little baby nearer her. Only its small head showed above the basket's rim. Its hair was as black as a crow and its eyes were black as a night when no stars shine.

Those black eyes looked deep into Laura's eyes and she looked deep down into the blackness of that little baby's eyes, and she wanted that one little baby.

"Pa," she said, "get me that little Indian baby!"

"Hush, Laura!" Pa told her sternly.

The little baby was going by. Its head turned and its eyes kept looking into Laura's eyes.

"Oh, I want it! I want it!" Laura begged. The baby was going farther and farther away, but it did not stop looking back at Laura. "It wants to

stay with me," Laura begged. "Please, Pa, please!"

"Hush, Laura," Pa said. "The Indian woman wants to keep her baby."

"Oh, Pa!" Laura pleaded, and then she began to cry. It was shameful to cry, but she couldn't help it. The little Indian baby was gone. She knew she would never see it any more.

Ma said she had never heard of such a thing. "For shame, Laura," she said, but Laura could not stop crying. "Why on earth do you want an Indian baby, of all things!" Ma asked her.

"Its eyes are so black," Laura sobbed. She could not say what she meant. We understand because we don't understand our own situations like this.

"Why, Laura," Ma said, "you don't want another baby. We have a baby, our own baby."

"I want the other one, too!" Laura sobbed, loudly.

"Well, I declare!" Ma exclaimed.

"Look at the Indians, Laura," said Pa. "Look west, and then look east, and see what you see."

Laura could hardly see at first. Her eyes were full of tears and sobs kept jerking out of her throat. But she obeyed Pa as best she could, and in a moment she was still. As far as she could see to the west and as far as she could see to the east there were Indians. There was no end to that long, long line.

"That's an awful lot of Indians," Pa said.

More and more and more Indians came riding by. Baby Carrie grew tired of looking at Indians and played by herself on the floor. But Laura sat on the doorstep, Pa stood close beside her, and Ma and Mary stood in the doorway. They looked and looked and looked at Indians riding by.

It was dinner-time, and no one thought of dinner. Indian ponies were still going by, carrying

bundles of skins and tent-poles and dangling baskets and cooking pots. There were a few more women and a few more naked Indian children. Then the very last pony went by. But Pa and Ma and Laura and Mary still stayed in the doorway, looking, till that long line of Indians slowly pulled itself over the western edge of the world. And nothing was left but silence and emptiness. All the world seemed very quiet and lonely.

Ma said she didn't feel like doing anything, she was so let down. Pa told her not to do anything but rest.

"You must eat something, Charles," Ma said.

"No," said Pa. "I don't feel hungry." He went soberly to hitch up Pet and Patty, and he began again to break the tough sod with the plow.

Laura could not eat anything, either. She sat a long time on the doorstep, looking into the empty west where the Indians had gone. She seemed still to see waving feathers and black eyes and to hear the sound of ponies' feet.

All that they possessed and had collected over the years on the island was before them. There were the special hoes—the moose horn, the iron, the one of an antler that Omakayas used. These they had to leave. Omakayas's gun barrel scraper was too heavy to take along, and even though Deydey had given it to her, she left it without a great sense of loss. Too many times she'd used it to scrape those stinking hides! Her rabbit-skin blanket was rolled and stuffed into a pack that she would carry on the difficult portages. Of course, she took her doll, the one Deydey had made for her, and its cradle board. She put it carefully into a skin back that she would wear on her shoulder. Her winter dress and the beautiful shawl that Angeline had made for her came too. She took her mittens and her winter makazinan. She made a rack of their snowshoes. They took makuks of maple sugar, dried fish, what remained of last year's rice. In the end, they left a great deal behind with the few families whose people were too old to travel, or sick, or who preferred to try their luck and remain behind.

They could not take their cabin, their sweet cedar cabin by the pine, and they could not take Makataywazi.

"There's just no room for the dog," said Yellow Kettle, and she spoke as gently as she could, for she knew how Omakayas felt about her dog. "If we take the dog, we'll

have to leave one of us behind. We don't have enough room and besides, we are going into dangerous country. We can't have barking dogs."

"I bet Old Tallow will not leave her dogs behind," Omakayas said in a tiny, stubborn voice.

"Her dogs are older, perfectly trained," said Yellow Kettle. "Her dogs are all that she has."

Omakayas sat for a long time with Makataywazi, down on the shore, on the rock where she'd said her good-bye. Together, they watched the unchanging line of dark green across the bay. Not only would her dog stay here, but her crow, Andeg, had not come back yet. He would find them gone when he returned from his winter hunting grounds. Omakayas forgot all of the strength she gained, the gratitude, and she wanted to sob with fury. She tried a few deep sighs, even tried to make crying sounds, but her sadness and anger was too big. It was a stone. A smooth stone with no chips or cracks.

"Ombay," she said to her dog, and Makataywazi jumped up in such a concerned way the Omakayas knew he understood. The dog wagged his tail and grinned as though to say he'd be all right, and so would Omakayas, and not to worry. Things could be worse. But Omakayas already knew what she would do, and the thought made her more cheerful. She would roll Makataywazi into her rabbit-skin blanket and hide her dog in the canoe. By the

time anybody knew she had taken her dog along, it would be too late. They would be far out on the water.

ANGELINE AND FISHTAIL

When everything was packed down to the shore, and loaded into the canoes, Omakayas noticed that Angeline was loading her things in the canoe that Fishtail came home in, and she was glad. The night before, they had gone somewhere together and that morning they'd talked to Deydey, Yellow Kettle, and Nokomis.

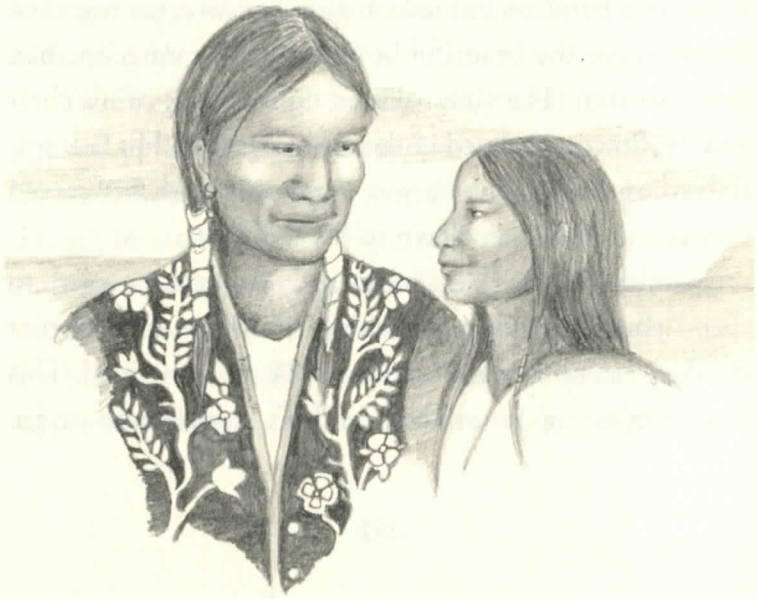
Now, with everyone assembled and ready to leave, there was a pause. Everyone stopped what they were doing and sat down. Miskobines, Deydey, and Fishtail took out their pipes and sat together. The women sat with them while the men smoked and prayed. Then Nokomis brought out a beautiful piece of red cloth and tied Angeline's hand to Fishtail's hand. The two sat together. Fishtail wore the beautiful beaded vest that Angeline had made for him. The vines twisted up each side of his chest and the flowers gleamed in the morning light. His face was starved and thin, but he was handsome with his carved cheeks and thick hair down to his shoulders.

"Children," said Miskobines, "you have decided to spend your life with one another. You have decided that you love each other and want to walk the same road. This is the beginning. From here, we don't know where we go.

Only proceed along this path with love, and you will find the strength."

He put his arms around them both and embraced them. Then Old Tallow came up to the two. She stood before them, scowling, and it was clear that she wanted to speak. Several times she opened her mouth, but every time she did, the wrong words seemed to jump from her lips.

"I was married twice, no, three times . . . I scared away my husbands, but . . . no. You are married, but you have no dogs . . . no." Finally she gave up, threw her head forward in a belligerent way, and then growled at Fishtail. "You be good to her or else!" She thrust a beautifully tanned lynx skin at them and stomped off to see to her own canoe. In turn, everybody went up to Fishtail and Angeline, held their hands, wished blessings upon them, or just hugged them tight.



Then it really was time to go. Around them, a few curious chimookoman people stood watching. One of them was the Break-Apart Girl. She came to Omakayas and in her hand she had a piece of cloth stitched carefully with letters. The Break-Apart Girl pointed at the letters, then at Omakayas, then at herself, and spoke the same words over and over.

"I can't tell what she is saying," Omakayas finally said to Deydey, who spoke the trader's English. Although he frowned to be taken from his task, for he was busy, he stepped near and looked down at the piece of cloth. The two of them worked out the meaning of the letters.

"I think this is your name, how she hears it." Deydey pointed at some of the tracks. "And this is her name. She made this cloth for you and wanted to give it to you. She wants you to remember her."

Omakayas flung her arms around the Break-Apart Girl and hugged her, feeling as though her stone heart would crack. She was surprised that the girl cared for her, and the gift made her happy in spite of the tremendous sorrow of leaving.

"I'll keep it always," she said. The little tan dots on the Break-Apart Girl's face went a rosy red and she smiled. Yellow Kettle gave Bizheens to Omakayas to hold while she prepared the canoe, and the girls tickled him and cooed at him. Omakayas wished the moment wouldn't

end and yet at the same time she was aware of the time pressing down.

Suddenly, there was a commotion in the canoe that Omakayas had packed, and she turned in time to see that the rabbit blanket, bundled carefully around Makataywazi, had flung itself out of the canoe and was bouncing around on the ground and it was barking and growling. One of the village dogs had come too close, and Makataywazi had not been able to contain himself. He was trying to protect her family, even though he was tied up in the blanket!

Omakayas ran for her dog, still carrying Bizheens. When he saw the bundle bouncing comically up and down along the shore, he threw his arms out. He little mouth opened wide, and he made a rusty little sound. The sound got bigger, more definite. Bizheens seemed to concentrate. His whole face crinkled into a laughing expression, and then the actual laugh came out. A big laugh. A baby's belly laugh. His very first laugh! It was a laugh that would have made Omakayas laugh too, except that her dog was going to be discovered.

Quick as a flash, Yellow Kettle untied the blanket and Makataywazi sprang free and bounded proudly to Omakayas. Bizheens was still laughing, delighted. Omakayas wanted to take heart from this good moment, which happened in the midst of sadness, but at the same

time she knew she would be parted from Makataywazi. Shaking her head, Yellow Kettle called to Omakayas.

"You know he can't come along with us."

There was no choice. Omakayas put Bizheens down and knelt with her sweet dog, her cheerful and generous companion. The Break-Apart Girl patted Makataywazi too, and although it hurt her heart, Omakayas knew that there was nothing else that she could do. She pointed to the dog, and then to her friend. To her friend, the Break-Apart Girl, and then to the dog. She brought her hands together. Omakayas rubbed her face in Makataywazi's rough fur, and then she gently took the Break-Apart Girl's hand and put it on her dog.

"Keep him, be good to him," she said in a choked voice.

The Break-Apart Girl nodded. She understood. She nodded and petted Makataywazi as Omakayas left, again holding Bizheens. As they got into the canoe, she heard Makataywazi bark, but she did not turn around. She could not turn around. She tried to remember what the waves told her. What her dream showed. She tried to remember how all things change and to go with gratitude. But she wanted to cry, or shout. Her throat burned. Her eyes stung. A great roar built around her and she was afraid to look at all that she was leaving behind.