

The Children's Workshop on Native American Cultures

Women of Hope posters surround the room with a subdued power of self-confidence. The posters are of contemporary, influential Native-American women; leaders, artists, educators. Yvonne Wakim-Dennis and Arlene Hirshfelder, two confident and graceful women invite all who enter the small room into a world of diversity and harmony. These two women have dedicated their lives to our community promoting intercultural awareness and understanding. Both are educators and authors who wrote the highly acclaimed book *Children of Native America Today*.



Yvonne Wakim-Dennis (standing on right) and Arlene Hirshfelder (standing on left) speak to the children about Native American cultures today

On Sunday January 11 The Children's Workshop on Native American Cultures was held at the Dingman Township branch of the Pike County Public Library. Gathered in the small room, about twenty school kids from first through seventh grade were introduced to our Native American cultures in an entirely new way. To begin the workshop, children and adults alike were handed a questionnaire. Draw or describe a Native American person of today. Where do Indian people live? Name an Indian Nation or group that lives within 300 miles of here. Name one United States senator who is American Indian. Ten questions in all that are not so easy to answer given that our first responses are by and large learned stereotypes or simple textbook descriptions. Yvonne and Arlene make clear to us the diverse talents and skills of the many cultures of our Native American neighbors.

The authors mentioned various historical facts about the, often stormy, relationship between the native-American and the immigrant European cultures. "A lot of what we do is to separate myth from reality" said Arlene, "Not many people know the United States Constitution is based partly on the northeast's Haudenosaunee people's Great Law of Peace." Breaking free from stereotypical thinking is the first step toward an engaging education. Yvonne and Arlene handed out maps of the United States and helped the children locate the homes of the twenty-six groups included in their book. Yvonne told the children why some people were located in two different geographical areas, "In the early 1800's Indian people were forced to walk to Oklahoma from their homes in the east and many died."

The [Tri-State Unity Coalition](#) co-sponsored last Sunday's event with the Dingman Township Branch of the Pike County Public Library. Financially supported by United Way of Pike County, The Tri-state Unity Coalition is the only human relations organization in Pike County and is dedicated to celebrating diversity, promoting human rights and enhancing community harmony.

Yvonne and Arlene provided a copy of their book, *Children of Native America Today*, to the library. They hope those children who could not attend the workshop come to the library to learn more about native-American culture. Proceeds from the sale of the book go to The Global Fund For Children.

For more information about diversity in Pike County contact the Tri-State Unity Coalition at www.tristateunity.org or the United Way of Pike County at 570-296-9980. For information about any of Pike County's human service agencies or to learn about exciting, local volunteer opportunities go to www.PikePaHelp.org.