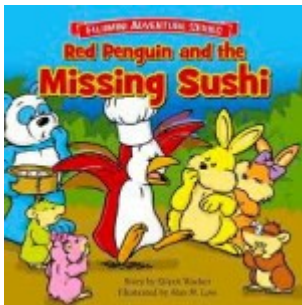


# Asian-themed children's books cross cultural lines

By Kathryn Reed

When I read the promotional material about Eileen Wacker's children's books, I expected the books to have a heavy Asian feel that might not cross all cultural borders. I expected these to be geared toward Asian kids. Though, at the same time, I have no idea what an Asian-centric book looks or reads like.



After all, Wacker wrote, "Asian cultures take immense pride in their customs and traditions. The characters in the books represent this in a way that strives to honor those traditions and share the wonder of Asian culture with children everywhere."

Reading the four books (story lines for eight more have been created) led me at first to wonder what was so "Asian" about these books. Then I had to take a step back and laugh. I realized if I had read these books as a kid (they are geared toward preschool through first grade), that I might not have connected with them. But in today's more ethnically diverse world, at least reading them as an adult, I wasn't thrown by sushi eating penguins to Taekwondo practicing bunnies.

And, really, with pandas in the storyline, I probably would have been all over these books as a kid because to this day I have a thing for pandas.

I'm sure as a Caucasian I don't see the "white" storyline through so much of literature – whether it's children's stories or adult books. I'm sure it also helps that growing up in the Bay Area and going to a university where I was a minority helped make me a bit more colorblind.

I can only see good coming from books like Wacker's that go beyond the stereotypical Caucasian influence to deliver messages. And as with any good children's book, there are messages for youngsters – like lying is bad – even if kids can't articulate the underlying theme.

"Fujimini Island is home to a cast of fun and silly animal groups, each of which reflects a different Asian inspiration," is how the promotional material describes the books.

I would recommend all four – "Green Hamster and the Quest for Fun", "Red Penguin and the Missing Sushi", "Silent Samurai and the Magnificent Rescue", and "Pink Hamster and the Big Birthday Sunrise".