

Indigenous Identity, Advocacy, and Legacy in Children's Historical Fiction

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Carole Lindstrom is the author of the New York Times bestselling and Caldecott Medal-winning *We Are Water Protectors*; *My Powerful Hair*; *Autumn Peltier, Water Warrior*; and *The Gift of the Great Buffalo*. She is Anishinaabe/Métis and is a proud member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe Indians. She was born and raised in Nebraska and currently makes her home in New York.

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Growing up in Nebraska in the 1970s, I spent a lot of time in my bedroom reading books and visiting the library down the street from my house. Coming from an abusive household, my home life was very stressful and filled with anxiety. Books were my escape, and my place of comfort and safety.

As a young Ojibwe, I was profoundly affected by the *Little House on the Prairie* books, which left me conflicted and confused about myself and my identity. I loved so much about these books, like the family dynamic between Laura and Pa. At the same time, I saw how they felt about Native Americans. Ma said that even their dog Jack "hated Indians." I loved dogs; it hurt so much to read that even their dog would hate me. It hurt to see that the family I loved didn't love me back. I knew that someday, if I became an author, I'd want to write a historical fiction novel in the same vein, but featuring a Native family and their lives on the prairie during the late 1880s.

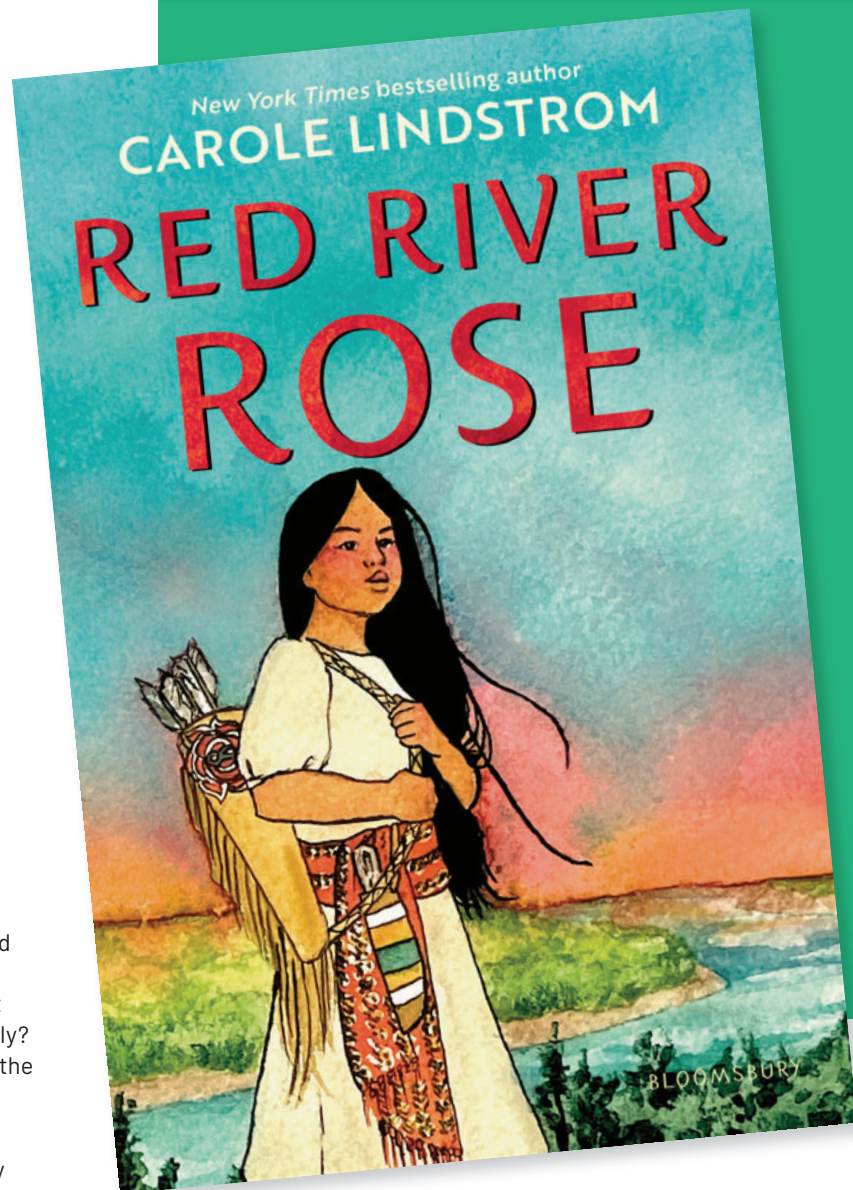
I first introduce readers to Rose and her family in my historical picture book, *The Gift of the Great Buffalo*. I felt she was the perfect plucky character to feature in my debut novel which would become *Red River Rose*. In many ways, she is like the child

I was: always outside playing in the dirt, climbing trees, and playing in sandboxes. I loved doing everything and anything that my brother did, but was often told I couldn't do certain things because I was a girl. That always frustrated me—and sparked a fire in me to prove them wrong.

Red River Rose is set during the Northwest Resistance of 1885, when the Canadian government forcibly removed the Métis people from their land. After the Red River Rebellion in the late 1860s, Rose's family migrates from their home in Red River area in Manitoba to present-day Saskatchewan to avoid the Canadian government, but that only lasts so long. The government wants more land further west of Manitoba for their settlers. Land is everything to Rose and her family, just as it was, and is, to all Indigenous people. We come from and are connected to the land. We need the land to survive; we need the water and food the earth provides for us. Rose doesn't want to see all of that taken away. What will become of her family? Where would they go? This is their home; the only home they've ever known.

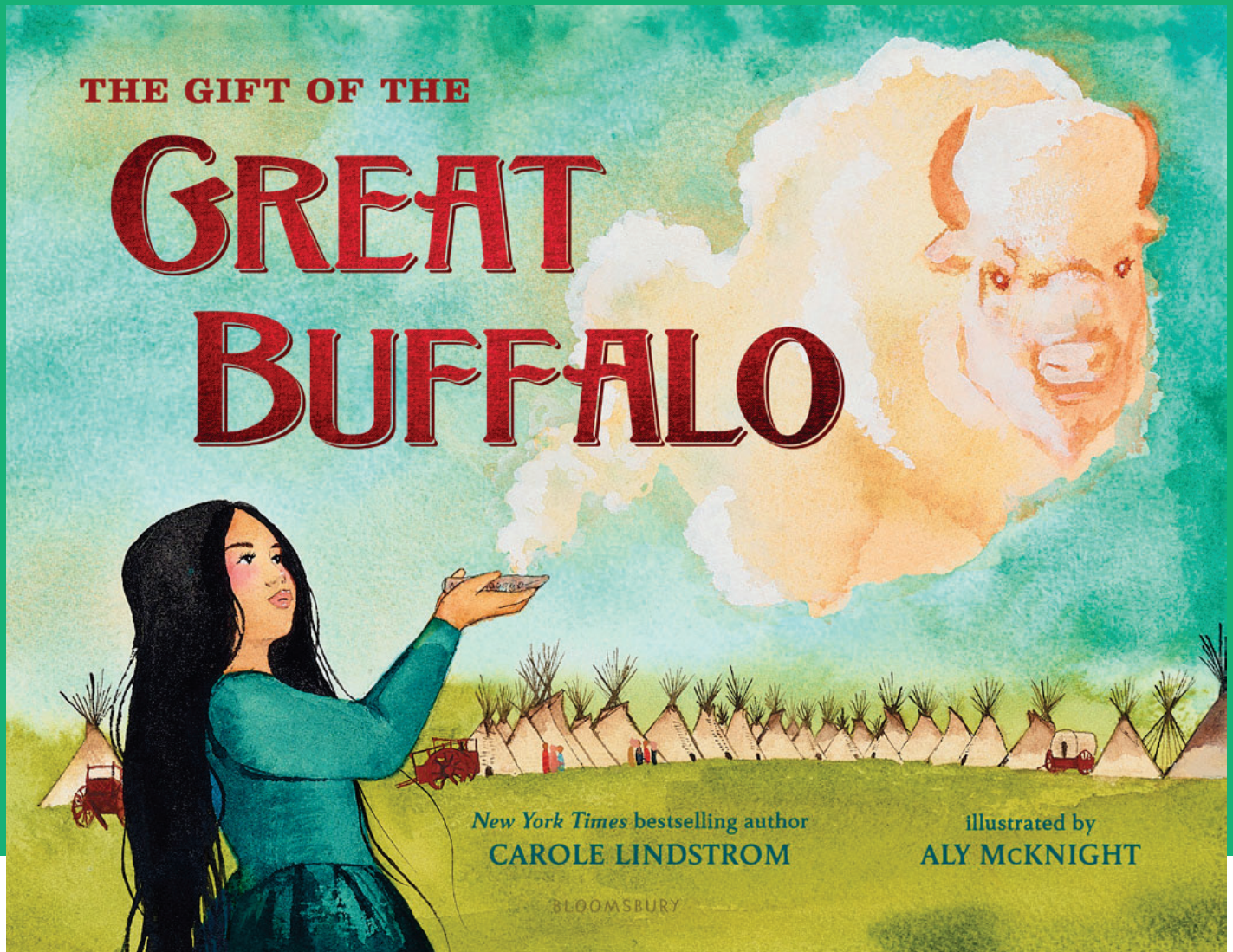
When the railroad comes through with Canadian troops, it decimates the already dwindling buffalo population and cuts off Rose and her community's main supply of food and shelter, as they rely heavily on entire buffalo to survive. Rose watches her home and culture disappear before her eyes, and her parents—who were part of the earlier rebellion and migration—grieve this loss twice. Though Rose doesn't change the outcome of what happened to her people, she has a role in her family's struggle. So, twenty years down the road when her family is gathered around the dinner table discussing the resistance, Rose can say she was there and share what she did to help.

Writing *Red River Rose* took me much longer than I would have liked. I didn't know much about my Anishinaabe/Ojibwe/Métis heritage. Indian Boarding Schools weren't abolished until the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978, and practicing my culture and spirituality were forbidden for me until I was fourteen. My mother endured intense racism growing up in the 1940s, and I inherited her internalized shame of being Native American. Many of my own ancestors fought against the Canadian



government during the Northwest Resistance, and when I was researching *Red River Rose*, I read their names in books and saw photos of them in shackles and chains. It was a difficult book emotionally for me to write, and took a toll on me mentally. I needed to take many breaks to continue.

Yet, writing was also tremendously healing. I wanted to take this historical moment in Métis history and give Rose agency in protecting her community. I like to think that Rose was me if I was living at that time. And in publishing *Red River Rose*, I am preserving my ancestors' story. As difficult as it is to know the more painful parts of my past, reading about my people coming together to fight for their livelihood is inspiring and powerful for me, as their descendant. I feel immense pride in how they defended their land and way of life, even though the odds were stacked against them. And as an Ojibwe/Métis author of literature for young people, it is an honor and privilege to



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bring stories based on real events to readers who may not necessarily know this part of history. A fictionalized story like Rose's is accessible, and it makes for a truly authentic and immersive read when the author writes from a lived perspective.

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