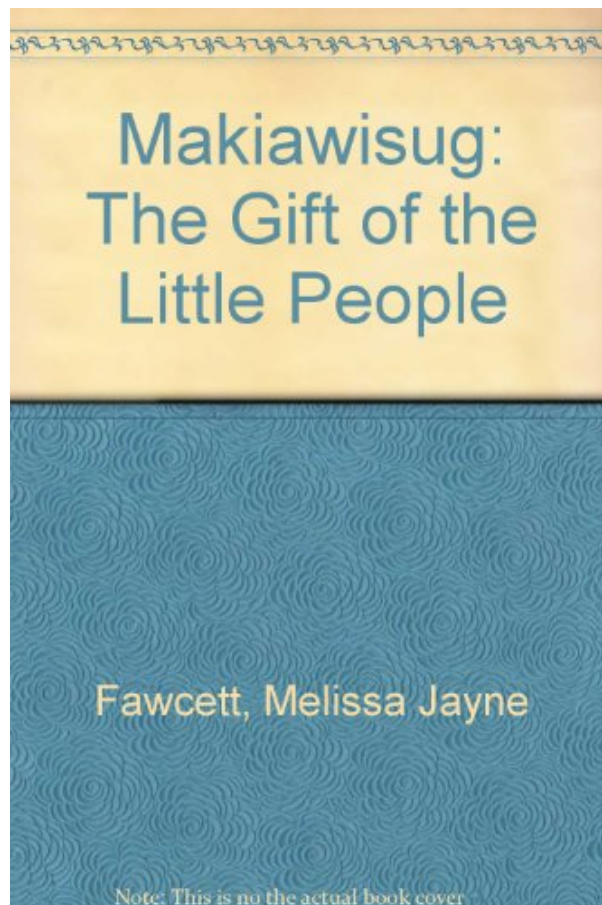
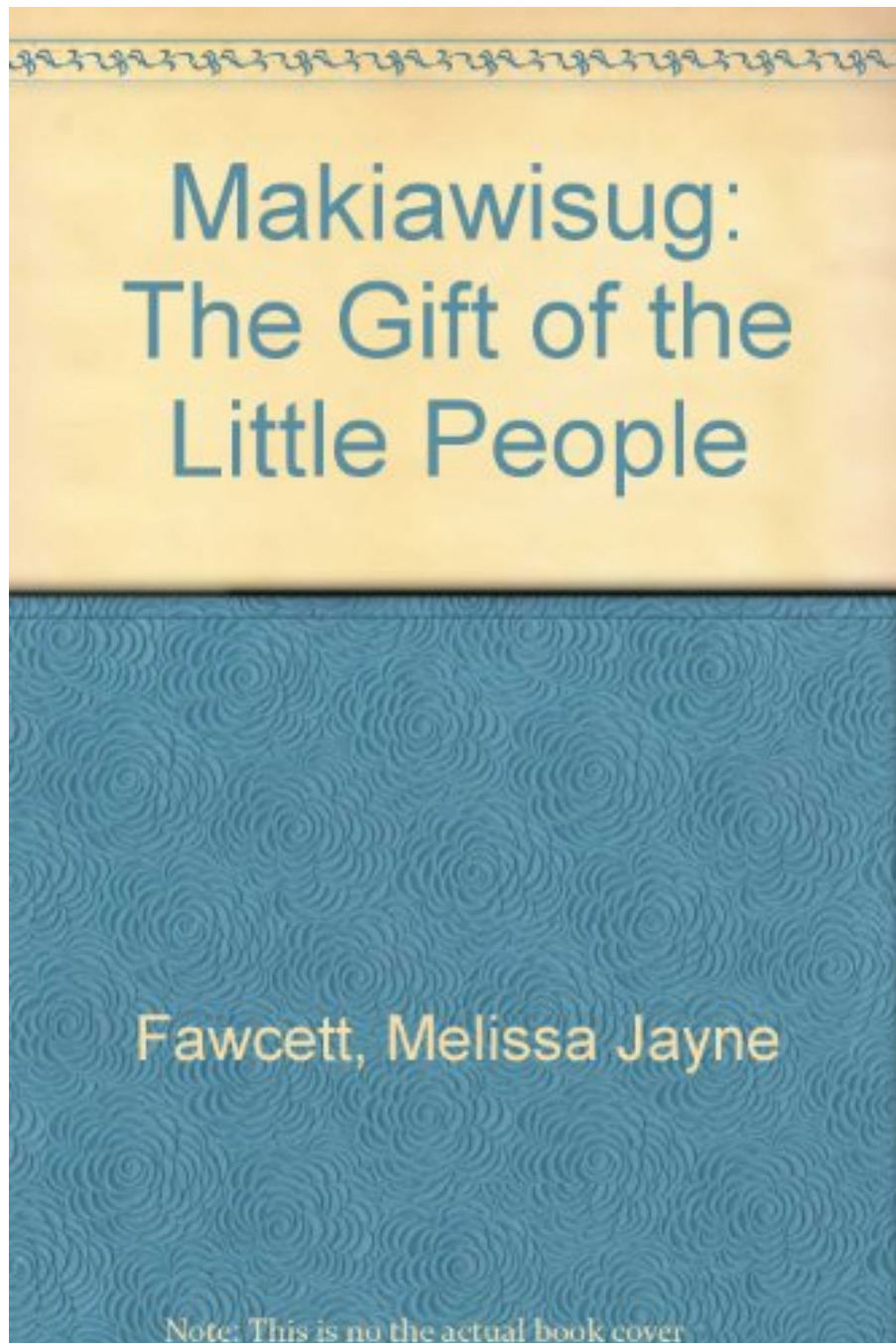


**MAKIAWISUG: THE GIFT OF THE LITTLE
PEOPLE BY MELISSA JAYNE FAWCETT,
JOSEPH BRUCHAC**



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Most helpful customer reviews

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Stories about the Little People in Native American culture

By Robert A. Buck

This is a well written and enthralling tale of the mythology of our local Native people here in Connecticut. I remember hearing these same stories in person from Gladys Tantaquidgeon, an elder of the Mohegan tribe, over twenty years ago while visiting her in Eastern Connecticut. She had heard these same stories in her youth from her great aunt, Fidelia Fielding. I love the idea of this passing of knowledge from generation to generation; even though I am not Native American, I appreciate the sense of history of this great people, and the need to pass it on.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A Gem of a Story From Native Storytellers

By Marisa

What a wonderful little book! I'm so happy to see that it's written and illustrated by people of the tribes the story comes from, and even appears to be published by a Native American press...so happy my library system has it! The tone is just right, evocative of the lyricism of traditional storytelling without going too far and seeming gimmicky, telling the tale with obvious love and respect and never being condescending to it's audience.

I picked this up because I have an interest in folk and fairy tales and really want to shore up my familiarity with various Native American traditions of storytelling...and this was just the right book! I had discovered, browsing my library's catalog, a YA novel called *Killer of Enemies* by Mr. Bruchac and immediately checked it out. Reading the back cover flap about the author, I thought he sounded very cool and looked for what else my library system might have by him. I put this book on hold because it looked similar to stories told in European folklore about "little people", that is to say, spirits or creatures resembling humans but not, and diminutive in size. I wanted to know if this idea of Mikiawisug was similar or different than other traditions that have similar concepts--would they be more like the Little Folk of the British Isles (lephrechauns or elves), or more like forest spirits I've seen portrayed in Miyazaki animated films?

The answer is sort of both, and I'm delighted by the parallels the creators draw between what audiences might already be familiar with and the new ideas they introduce to us to let us know more about northeastern North American native cultures--and by the way, I like that this book takes the useful track of spanning the story across time both before and after the arrival of Europeans--there was life on the continent before we came, after all, we aren't the end-all-be-all of the history of North America like we are used to hearing it told! And the coming of the White Man is handled in a way that I think is generously palatable to those of us who are descended from those White Men (because let's be frank, it was a violent invasion on an apocalyptic scale) while still keeping the tone from being accusing or angry. Rather, instead of focusing outward toward the White Man's descendants, it looks inward at the sadness of the earlier inhabitants of this continent who saw their world destroyed. It doesn't let us off the hook, but it never accuses, and the reaction of the book is just that: sadness. The audience can feel it and share in it, which is, I think, masterful storytelling. The book treats that element very briefly though: I only talk about it here to commend the handling of it.

To answer my question of whether the little characters on the cover of the book were more like leprechauns or avenging Japanese forest sprites, I saw some of both and some elements that were neither, and it fascinated me. The Makiawisug in this story can be strict authorities of the forest who remind humans of their place in the natural world, or pranksters who play embarrassing tricks to scold humans into doing better, but seem never to be cruel, like the arbitrary or excessive punishments meted out by figures of the Mediterranean cultures (although I did see some elements of the fae of older English tradition--the Makiawisug are proud and do not like to be mocked and will root a human who stares at them to the ground like a tree!). They mostly reminded me of something like "forest brownies"--you know the house elves in Harry Potter? They're based off of brownies, little household elves you would leave a little bit of milk and bread in the corner of the house for so they would bless and protect your home and help keep it clean and safe. The Makiawisug are left baskets of offerings in the forest so that they will take care of it and help the natural world flourish as it should and bring prosperity to the humans who live in it..."forest brownies"! When the Makiawisug require help, they gamely set aside their pride and find a renown medicine woman to help them, bringing her back to their world to heal one of their own.

At this point in the story, my guard instantly went up for our human heroine: in a European story of the fae, going to the realm of fairies means you're likely never coming back, at least not without a fight, or that the protagonist of the story will not obey the rules and cause some misfortune to happen. But our medicine

woman remembers not to stare until the Makiawisug urge her to disregard the formality to help them...can you imagine a European fae or fairy waiving their own hubris like that? She helps them, follows the rules, saves the day and is rewarded with gratitude and some handsome gifts--which are supposedly passed down through her family to the storyteller to shared the tale with Mr. Bruchac, only adding to the magic by grounding it in reality!

I thought it was a lovely message of two different worlds of people joining together in respect and with a willingness to be taught and listen to solve a shared problem...hmm, interesting! And the Makiawisug sound like other stories of Little People or "ones who came before us" that are shared throughout the British Isles and Celtic cultures, the Scandinavian and Germanic ones, and I believe even Maori and Aborigine groups of Australia and New Zealand. Folklorists have suggested that perhaps these tales all derive from early humans encountering--or displacing, or conflicting with--other species of hominids or groups of shorter-statured humans from whom stories were exaggerated and passed into legend over time. That fascinates me, and I'm interested to see it among the indigenous groups of North America, where I hadn't heard of it before. Again...fascinating!

This would make a great story for teaching kids about North American native groups and their history or folklore. I'd also recommend it for adults interested in folklore and Native American storytelling, as well as storytelling in a broader sense. I was really pleased with this gem of a picturebook. I had already planned on looking for more books with Mr. Bruchac's hand in them but I think I'll expand that search to include more picturebooks as well!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A great book for little ones

By LilyNickNate's Mommy

This story of the Makiawisug or the "Little People of the Woodlands" is a great book for young children. While the story is geared for kids ages 6-10 a younger audience appreciates the story better. My three and two year old are in love with the Little People and Granny Squannit who is ill in the story. This is more an historical story about the Medicine Women of the tribe and a magical belt. Essentially, this story is a story that was passed down for many generations to the Medicine Women of the Mohegan tribe of Connecticut.

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