



Edith Wilson <ee.wilson1893@gmail.com>

Alfred Music inquiry

1 message

Customer Service <customerservice@alfred.com>

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To: ee.wilson1893@gmail.com

Hello Edith,

Thank you for contacting Alfred Music.

Thank you so much for reaching out with your concerns! We are sensitive to the issue of diversity and are actively working on updating any outdated and insensitive images & songs. Some of them were used in many different piano books, so we really appreciate it being brought to our attention when another iteration is found! Please continue to reach out when you come across one of these images or songs in a book. There is a lot of stock that has already been purchased by various music stores and cannot be changed, but as we print new batches of these old books, we have updated files ready to be inserted. These will be updated as quickly as possible. Please feel free to cross out and change song titles as necessary.

Best Regards,

Brian Floyd

Customer Service Representative
Alfred Music

P.O. Box 10003 • Van Nuys, CA 91410-0003



Alfred Music
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Dear Alfred's Publishing Company,

I am a Canadian music teacher who has recently stopped using your Alfred's Basic Piano Library in lessons because some of the materials are racist and culturally insensitive. I started using your books very recently because they were more freely available than other brands, and I had never tried them before. I thought perhaps a new perspective would be useful, but I have stopped after selling just a few to my students, and will be switching them over to another brand as soon as possible.

The multiple "Indian Song" iterations are inappropriate, especially in the Canadian context, as the word "Indian" to designate indigenous peoples in Canada is a slur. I am aware that the word "Indian", especially "American Indian" has a different history in the U.S than in Canada, and is considered acceptable by some Native American thinkers and activists. However, I have had to explain to multiple small children that that word is considered racist in Canada as they skim through the book and ask questions. Consequently, I skip over that song. In addition, and regardless of our respective countries' differences in language, the illustrations accompanying that song (usually with teepees and/or

with a person dressed in a caricature of traditional indigenous attire, complete with a few feathers) are insensitive at best. They bear a striking similarity to stigmatizing and disrespectful images of Native Americans that organizations like AIM are currently fighting to have removed from media and sports teams.

Second, the various "Mexican stamping dances", illustrated with pictures of brown people stamping their feet near various sombrero-type hats are impossible to teach to any child without feeling as though some explanation of that imagery is required. It is mind-boggling to think that in a country where there are so many immigrants from Mexico, your company has been unable to respectfully integrate Mexican musical traditions into your beginner-level books. I have also skipped over those pieces for all my student's sake, but especially for the sake of the multiple students I have who are brown or whose families are from Mexico or South America.

Third, the "Christopher Columbus" song is disingenuous. Although it's true that Columbus did sail in 1492 and that the voyage brought him fame, any person with even a passing knowledge of colonial history is aware that Christopher Columbus did very little good for anyone who lived on this continent prior to his arrival. The atrocities he committed against native peoples are well documented, even in the most commonly available and uncontroversial sources. These facts led to a growing movement to rename "Columbus Day" to "Indigenous People's Day", which has been successful in several states (New Mexico, Maine, and Vermont) as well as many individual cities. I refuse to lie to my students and contribute to historically inaccurate conceptions of who Christopher Columbus was and what he did. As such, I skip this one too.

In short, in turning the pages of your piano books, I have become unable to recommend them to the parents of children I teach. As an educator, I am committed to creating a positive space where my students feel that their cultures are respected and their love for music is validated. Although this is always a work in progress, I don't think it's too much to expect culturally sensitive teaching materials that can be used for lessons with students from many different backgrounds.

If you wish to include a broad spectrum of cultural references in your teaching materials, may I suggest speaking with AIM (the American Indian Movement), UnidosUS, or any number of other cultural and political associations in order to ask them how they would like their cultural heritages represented in your repertoire.

Best wishes,

Edith Wilson