

Yabal Raya

Yabal Raya: A First Primer for Miskito Children of Honduras

When I began drawing images of community involvement with rain forest preservation, one of the first issues I had to resolve was depicting the people living in or near the forests, most of whom have dark skin. It mattered because I have white skin and because of the history of prejudice and problems around differences in skin color. I decided to denote the richness of various skin tones rather than to ignore the issue. Partly as a result of that choice, I was invited to help illustrate this first primer for Miskito children's schooling.

It is interesting that the young local artists who collaborated with me in this project depicted their people as lacking skin color, that is, as mestizo or white. This may not have been a conscious choice, or it may have been subtly influenced by art school training in the cities, where there was more prejudice against rural, mostly darker-skinned people.

We were asked to make illustrations in which children would recognize themselves and their lives. With the written Miskito text and stories the teachers would tell to narrate the pictures, children would learn to associate written with spoken language. Before this primer, all Honduran children entering school were taught to read in Spanish. But people of the isolated Miskito coast speak Miskito, not Spanish, and young children there found it very difficult to learn to read in a language new to them. As a result many Miskito children soon fell behind and left school.

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