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New PBS Kids Series Aims to Change the Representation of Native Americans on TV: Meet *Molly of Denali!*

The series, focused on a 10-year-old girl and her Alaskan adventures, premieres July 15

By [Kate Hogan](#) | July 12, 2019 04:41 PM



If your children are PBS Kids fans, you probably already have the theme song stuck in your head: “Mollllyyyy of Denali!”

And good thing you do: the network’s newest show, the first-ever national children’s series to feature Native American leads, premieres this Monday, July 15, giving First Peoples a chance to see themselves properly represented on TV.

“Throughout history, Native Americans have long been misrepresented in Western media through film and cartoons like *Peter Pan* and *Pocahontas* that are shown to kids at a young age,” says Sovereign Bill, the 14-year-old Alaska native who voices Molly, a Gwich’in/Koyukon/Dena’ina Athabascan girl. “These shows can leave doubts about cultural identity for native kids and, for every other kid, provide wrong information on the legacy of Native Americans.



“That’s why it’s so important that *Molly of Denali* is giving a good representation on Native Peoples,” she continues. “It’s breaking the stereotypes and sharing important Indigenous knowledge. That has been absent from the media long enough.”

This is Sovereign’s first acting gig, one she couldn’t be more proud of.

“It’s really amazing just seeing it all come to life,” she tells PEOPLE. “Sometimes I get caught up and I’m not sure where it’s going, then I watch a clip and think it’s so amazing — and seeing the differences and similarities between Molly and me is really amazing.”



The series — which was also created with an Alaska Native working group of Indigenous screenwriters, producers, production teams, advisers and Alaska Native child actors — centers on 10-year-old Molly Mabray, her dog Suki and her friends Tooley and Trini, who find themselves in endless adventures in their Alaskan hometown of Qyah. Molly shares her adventures via her vlog, giving kids in the “lower 48” a look at life in Alaska.

According to PBS Kids, the show also aims to teach children family values and the importance of intergenerational relationships, based on the Alaska Native values of honoring elders. Additionally, it teaches literacy through informational texts — the series has a heavy emphasis on Molly’s use of books, online resources, field guides, historical documents and more.



“The values that Molly holds and her culture are similar to mine,” says Sovereign, a member of the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and T’ak Dein Taan clan of the Tlingit Tribe. “She is so energetic and bright, too, and has a lot of perseverance, which are great qualities for kids to see.”

Sovereign has a lot of energy, too: now based near Seattle, she’s a lead dancer and singer with Kuteeyaa, the Muckleshoot Canoe Family, and her school district’s Native Education program’s Coast Salish Song and Dance group. Sovereign has also participated in a Tlingit dance group, The Alaskan Kuteeyaa Dancers and the Coast Salish Canoe Journeys as well as Red Eagle Soaring, the Seattle-based Native Youth Theater group. She recently completed a voiceover recording of a traditional story for an upcoming exhibit at the White River Valley Museum in Auburn, Washington, and for the past several years, she has been the speaker for the Muckleshoot Canoe Family during formal protocol at Tribal Canoe Journeys. She’s also the lead puller with the Muckleshoot Canoe Family (did we mention she’s 14?).

When asked how she balances this all with middle school — where she’s an honor student, plays saxophone in band and participates in volleyball and soccer — she makes it sound easy.



“Sometimes you just have to deal with it,” she tells PEOPLE. “I am very busy it’s a lot of time, I just try to do my homework in the car rides, and sometimes have late nights, but it’s all worth it.”

Especially now that Molly is about to appear on screen.

“My friends know,” she says. “They think it’s really cool and they’re very excited for the premiere to come out!”

Molly of Denali, aimed at kids ages 4 to 8, premieres the evening of Monday, July 15, on PBS Kids (check local listings for times). For families who can’t wait, check out the *Molly of Denali* podcast, which introduces young fans to Molly and her home.

<https://people.com/parents/molly-of-denali-cast-preview/>