



MAGGIE'S ADVENTURES UNIVERSE

The MAU Family Promise

The promise that defines what Maggie's Adventures Universe stands for, what it means to belong to the MAU family, and the standard everything carrying the MAU Seal is held to.

Status: Canonical / Constitutional. This document is the foundation of MAU's entire company culture — it governs both what MAU makes and represents to the world, and how MAU operates internally. It sits at the top of the document hierarchy defined in Part V — every Domain Charter and reference study built beneath it implements this Promise and may never contradict it.

Version 2.2 · IP-protected company doctrine



Preamble — Why this document exists

Maggie's Adventures Universe was built on a conviction: that children who grow up feeling no life on this planet is foreign to them — only beautifully, fascinatingly different — help bring the world closer together. That conviction is not a marketing line. It is a discipline, and it demands real care to honour.

Describing another way of life accurately and respectfully is harder than it looks. Getting it wrong does real harm: it can flatten living people into curiosities, freeze them in an imagined past, or quietly rank them beneath the describer. The standard MAU holds itself to is simple to say and hard to keep: see through the eyes of the people who live a place, not through the eyes of the visitor passing through.

This Promise exists so that MAU gets it right, everywhere, by default. It is written to be *constitutional* rather than *configurable*: a prompt can be edited by anyone in an afternoon, but the principles here are the settled character of the company. They change only deliberately, with intention, at the level of doctrine — not casually, in the course of shipping a feature.

This is how MAU thinks, acts, and breathes — in what it makes, in who it works with, and in how it runs itself. This document makes that legible, teachable, and enforceable. Wherever the MAU Seal is used, it is the standard the Seal represents; wherever MAU itself is acting — hiring, deciding, partnering — it is the standard MAU holds itself to.

Part I — The Five Foundational Principles

These five principles govern every representation of a people, place, or living thing anywhere in MAU. Each is stated plainly, explained for why it matters to children specifically, and paired with what its violation looks like — because a principle you can't recognise being broken is a principle you can't uphold.

Principle 1 — Understand each culture on its own terms

*This draws on the idea of **cultural relativism**, associated with Franz Boas and his students, who established that a practice can only be understood within the web of meaning of the people who hold it — not by measuring it against the observer's own culture (see Appendix, Boas).*

Every custom, belief, food, or way of living exists for reasons that make sense inside the life of the people who hold it. MAU describes those reasons. We explain *why* something matters to the people who do it, in terms they would recognise as fair.

Why it matters for children: A child who learns to ask "why does this make sense to them?" instead of "why is this weird?" has learned the single most important habit this whole platform exists to teach. This is the difference between a child who finds the world foreign and one who finds it fascinating.

Violation looks like: framing a practice as strange, backward, primitive, exotic, or surprising; comparing it unfavourably to whatever the describer happens to be used to, as if their own norm were the neutral default and everything else a deviation from it; inviting the child to gawk rather than understand. This bias is not particular to any one culture — every culture tends to treat its own "normal" as the baseline and everything



else as the exception. MAU holds itself to a different standard: no culture's normal is the default against which others are measured.

Principle 2 — Prefer the insider's understanding

*This draws on the distinction between the **emic** (the insider's own understanding of their life) and the **etic** (the outside observer's description), terms introduced by the linguist Kenneth Pike and later developed by Marvin Harris (see Appendix, Pike; Harris).*

Wherever possible, MAU represents a culture as its own people understand it, not only as an outsider would describe it from the outside. "What does this festival mean to the people who celebrate it?" is a better question than "what does this festival look like to a visitor?"

Why it matters for children: it teaches that the people being learned about are the authorities on their own lives — subjects with their own voice, not objects being catalogued. It models respect at the level of whose knowledge counts.

Violation looks like: describing a people only from the tourist's-eye view; explaining what a practice "really" is in a way its own people would not recognise or accept; treating the outside describer as the authority over the people described.

Principle 3 — Cultures are living and plural, never frozen or singular

Real cultures contain internal variety, disagreement, and constant change. There is no single "authentic" version of a people, and no culture is a museum exhibit stopped in time. A teenager in Nairobi with a smartphone is as genuinely Maasai as one herding cattle; both are real, both are now.

Why it matters for children: it inoculates against the most common and most damaging misconception — that other cultures are simpler, older, or more uniform than one's own. It teaches that every society is as internally rich, modern, and varied as the child's own.

Violation looks like: "The [people] believe..." as if millions of individuals share one identical mind; presenting only the most traditional, rural, or picturesque version of a people as the "real" one; implying a culture is a relic rather than a living present-day society.

Principle 4 — Describe living peoples in the living present

This names an error worth naming directly — describing living peoples only in a timeless, traditional tense, as though they exist outside of modern history (a critique developed notably by Johannes Fabian; see Appendix, Fabian).

MAU describes living peoples as contemporaries who share our present moment — not as though they exist only in a preserved past. Traditions are real and worth teaching, but the people who hold them also live in the same world, and same year, as the child learning about them.

Why it matters for children: it prevents the quiet condescension of imagining other peoples as living "long ago" or "still" doing things, as if they hadn't caught up. It places every people the child meets firmly in the shared now.



Violation looks like: describing a contemporary people only in traditional terms; the word "still" ("they still hunt..."); any framing that implies a living culture belongs to the past.

Principle 5 — Respect the living world as carefully as we respect living people

The natural world MAU explores — animals, habitats, oceans, forests, ecosystems — is treated with the same non-judgemental respect and care as the cultures within it. Wildlife is never a backdrop, a prop, or entertainment; it is a living, independent thing whose life continues whether or not anyone is there to watch it.

Why it matters for children: environmental respect learned early becomes instinct rather than a rule to remember. A child who learns to observe rather than intrude, to admire without needing to touch or possess, carries that instinct into every part of life — not just travel.

Violation looks like: presenting feeding, touching, chasing, or handling wild animals as fun, cute, or something to try; treating a habitat as scenery for a story rather than somewhere living things actually live; describing conservation as someone else's responsibility rather than everyone's.

Part II — Hard Prohibitions

These are never permitted anywhere in MAU, in any medium, regardless of framing, brevity, or intent. Where the Five Principles guide toward good representation, these forbid specific harms outright.

1. **No exoticising.** A people, place, or practice is never presented as strange, bizarre, or a curiosity to be marvelled at. Fascination is welcome; othering is forbidden. The line: fascination invites the child *in*; exoticising holds the subject *at arm's length as spectacle*.
2. **No ranking of cultures.** No people, belief, language, or way of life is ever presented as more advanced, civilised, developed, primitive, simple, or backward than another. Difference is never hierarchy.
3. **No frozen-in-time framing.** No living people is presented as a relic, as living "in the past," or as untouched by the modern world.
4. **No religious or belief evaluation.** MAU never presents any belief, religion, or spiritual practice as true or false, right or wrong, real or superstition. We describe what people believe and what it means to them — never whether they are correct to believe it. This applies equally to majority and minority, familiar and unfamiliar beliefs.
5. **No living people as museum artifacts.** Living cultures are represented as living — through how people actually live now — not primarily through objects in collections. (See Part IV on the specific handling of museum-sourced material.)
6. **No single-story representation.** No people is reduced to one trait, one image, or one narrative — the "danger of a single story" (see Appendix, Adichie). Every people is shown with enough breadth that no child could mistake the part for the whole.
7. **No colonial or dominant-only narrative.** Where a place's history includes colonisation, conflict, or marginalised peoples, MAU does not tell only the coloniser's or the dominant group's version. (See Part IV on contested history.)



8. **No relativism as cover for harm.** Understanding a practice on its own terms (Principle 1) is never used to justify, normalise, or present as a model any practice that endangers a person's safety, bodily autonomy, or basic dignity — particularly where children are concerned. Where MAU's content touches on such a practice, it may explain the human, historical, and social circumstances that gave rise to it, and must treat the people who live within it with real empathy — they did not choose the conditions they were born into, and are never attacked, shamed, or held up for judgement. What is never in question is that the practice itself is described, not endorsed, and is never presented to a child as something to aspire to or copy.
9. **No ranking of sacred belief against empirical fact.** Where a culture's sacred or cosmological account of something intersects with scientific or historical fact — the origin of a mountain, the age of the world — MAU presents both without letting either diminish the other. A sacred account is never dismissed as myth or superstition; a scientific account is never treated as an attack on belief. Each is offered as a real, meaningful answer to a real question — different kinds of truth, held side by side.
10. **No encouraging harmful contact with wildlife or the environment.** MAU never presents feeding, touching, disturbing, cornering, or collecting wild animals as playful, admirable, or something to try. Natural spaces are never treated as disposable scenery. Where real-world travel guidance is given, MAU favours low-impact, respectful observation over close contact or souvenir-taking.

Part III — Application Across the MAU Dimensions

How the principles translate concretely into each part of the experience. These are directives, not suggestions.

Story (Maggie's narrative voice)

Maggie is a *guest and a learner*, never a tourist or a judge. Her wonder is curiosity turned toward understanding ("Maggie wanted to know why this mattered so much to them"), never surprise at strangeness ("Maggie couldn't believe they did it this way"). She defers to the people whose home she is visiting as the authorities on their own lives. She never speaks *for* a people; she listens and learns *from* them.

Wherever the format allows it, the people Maggie visits speak for themselves — a line of dialogue, a quoted answer, a name attached to what was said — rather than being summarised entirely through Maggie's own telling. Maggie's role is to ask, to listen, and to pass the moment on faithfully; she is a conduit for another person's voice, not a re-interpreter of it.

Explore

- **Geography** — place is described as lived-in and meaningful to its people, not merely as physical features on a map. Land carries names, histories, and relationships.



- **History** — the standard is sharpest here: whose history is told? MAU includes the perspectives of colonised, marginalised, and Indigenous peoples, not only the dominant national or colonial narrative. Contested histories are presented as contested, honestly.
- **Food & Flavours** — foodways are treated as windows into culture: trade, migration, religion, climate, and identity all live in a cuisine. Food is never presented as strange or gross; it is presented as meaningful.
- **Eco-travel & Conservation** — the human relationship to land and species is foregrounded: how local and Indigenous communities know, name, and steward their environment. Indigenous ecological knowledge is treated as knowledge, not folklore. Practical guidance for travelling respectfully — leaving no trace, minimising impact, supporting conservation rather than disrupting it — is given the same weight and care as cultural guidance.

Language

The already-established practice — teach the language a place's own families actually speak, not merely the colonial or administrative default — is exactly what Principle 2 calls for in practice. This Promise ratifies that practice as doctrine. Where official and local languages differ, the local, lived language is taught, and the relationship between the two is explained honestly and warmly.

Culture (and its sub-dimensions: religion, folklore, beliefs, customs)

This is the highest-stakes dimension and the one where all Five Principles and all Prohibitions apply most forcefully.

- **Religion & beliefs** — described, never evaluated (Prohibition 4). MAU explains what people believe, how they practise, and why it is meaningful to them — never whether it is true. Equal descriptive respect is given to every tradition regardless of size or familiarity.
- **Folklore & stories** — treated as living cultural expression carrying real meaning and value, never as quaint "myths" implicitly contrasted with modern "fact."
- **Customs & daily life** — the emphasis falls on the living present (Principle 4): how people actually live now, alongside the traditions they carry.

Wildlife

Wildlife is connected back to people wherever relevant: the relationships between local and Indigenous communities and the species around them — how animals are named, understood, valued, and protected within a culture. Nature is not treated as separate from human meaning.

Wherever MAU shows a child how to engage with wildlife directly — a destination's do's and don'ts, a conservation tip, or Maggie's own behaviour inside a story — the guidance is concrete and consistent: observe, don't feed; watch, don't touch; keep a respectful distance rather than chasing a closer look or a better photo. Maggie models this herself in every story she appears in, not only when the story is explicitly about conservation.



Part IV — Special-Care Domains

Domains that carry particular risk and require explicit handling beyond the general principles.

Museum-sourced material (the collections caveat)

MAU draws on museum collections (including major institutional open-access collections) for material and historical culture. This carries specific risk that this Promise addresses directly:

Many ethnographic objects in Western museum collections were acquired during periods of colonialism, sometimes through coercion, theft, or unequal power. Presenting such objects as straightforwardly representative of "a culture" can reproduce exactly the harms this Promise forbids — treating living peoples as collections of artifacts, and privileging the outsider-collector's framing over the insider's.

Therefore: museum objects may illustrate **history and material culture** — what was made, when, and how. They may **not** stand in for a living culture's present-day identity, nor be presented as "what this people is." Where a collection's colonial provenance is relevant and known, honesty is preferred over silence. A living culture is always represented primarily through how its people live now, not through objects held elsewhere.

Contested and colonial history

Where a place's history includes colonisation, slavery, conflict, displacement, or the marginalisation of peoples, MAU tells that history honestly and from more than one perspective — never only the version told by the victors or colonisers. Contested history is presented *as* contested, at a depth appropriate to a child audience, without erasing the peoples who were harmed.

Indigenous peoples and knowledge

Indigenous peoples are represented as contemporary, sovereign, and diverse — never as vanished, vanishing, or purely historical. Indigenous ecological, cultural, and linguistic knowledge is treated as genuine knowledge. Where an Indigenous people has expressed how they wish to be represented, that wish takes priority over an outsider's convenience.

Religion and belief (reiterated as special-care)

Because belief is where the temptation to evaluate is strongest, it is named again here: MAU is descriptive and never evaluative on all matters of faith, spirituality, and worldview — for every tradition, majority or minority, familiar or unfamiliar, without exception.



Part V — The MAU Seal

The MAU Seal is how this Promise becomes visible. Where Parts I–IV describe how MAU represents the world, this Part governs what it takes to earn the mark that tells a child, a parent, or a partner: *this has been checked against that standard, and it held up*.

What the Seal means

The Seal is **binary and specific**. A thing either carries the Seal or it doesn't — there are no partial marks, star ratings, or tiers of certification. And the Seal always certifies a *specific, named thing* (a destination's Language section, a partner, a curriculum) — never MAU as a whole, and never by association. Holding the Seal on one thing says nothing about another thing that doesn't yet carry it.

The absence of the Seal is not a verdict. Most things start unreviewed, not failed. Being unreviewed and being found wanting are different states, and MAU's public language about the Seal must always keep that distinction clear (as already established in the Language section's References & Sources copy).

The Universal Standard

Whatever the domain — content, a partner, a future category not yet defined — earning the Seal requires all of the following, with no exceptions:

1. **Measured against this Promise.** Every domain's specific criteria (Part V, Domain Tracks, below) must be a direct application of Parts I–IV — never a substitute standard invented separately from them.
2. **Independently reviewed.** The Seal is never self-certified. A partner cannot award it to themselves; a piece of content cannot pass itself. Review is done by someone other than the creator or the party being assessed.
3. **Re-reviewable.** Nothing holds the Seal permanently by default. Each domain track defines its own review cadence and what triggers an out-of-cycle re-check (a complaint, a change of ownership, new information).
4. **Revocable.** If something no longer meets the standard, the Seal is removed. Removal reverts the thing to unreviewed status — it is corrected language, not a public shaming mechanic (see Revocation, below).

Reviewers

Today, Nicolas is the sole reviewer across every domain. This is acknowledged as a bottleneck, not a permanent design: as MAU grows, each domain will bring in **specialised reviewers** suited to what that domain actually requires — a content domain needs people with real local/native knowledge (as already practiced in Language, cross-referenced against Glottolog and confirmed by native speakers); a partner domain will need people equipped to vet a business, not just a piece of writing. Each domain track, when built, defines who is qualified to review it and what qualifies them.



Revocation & Re-Review

- The Seal can be revoked at any time a reviewer determines the standard is no longer met.
- Revocation reverts the item to **unreviewed**, not to a flagged or penalised state — the public-facing language never distinguishes "lost the Seal" from "hasn't earned it yet."
- Each domain track sets its own re-review cadence and its own triggers for an out-of-cycle review.

Document Hierarchy

This Promise sits at the top of a three-tier hierarchy. Everything beneath it exists to implement it, never to contradict it.

1. **The MAU Family Promise** (this document) — doctrine. Amended only deliberately, at the level of intention and record, never in the course of ordinary work.
2. **Domain Charters** — one per domain named under Domain Tracks below (for example, the MAU Language Dimension Charter, the MAU Destination Charter). Each is the fully worked-out version of a Domain Track: the concrete criteria, process, and reviewer qualifications a certifier actually applies when deciding whether that domain earns the Seal. A Domain Charter may go into far more operational detail than this document ever will — but it must implement Parts I–IV, and where the two ever appear to conflict, this Promise governs and the Domain Charter is corrected.
3. **Evidence & reference studies** — documents that feed a Domain Charter's review process with documented reasoning (for example, the MAU Language Genealogy Study, which underlies the Language Dimension Charter's plausibility checks). These carry no independent authority of their own — they exist to make a reviewer's judgement traceable and defensible, not to set the standard themselves.

Domain Tracks

Each domain the Seal applies to gets its own track below: what specifically must be true for that domain to earn the Seal, who reviews it, and how often. A track starts here, as a short description — and graduates into its own full Domain Charter (see Document Hierarchy above) once the domain is mature enough to warrant one. Tracks are built one at a time, as each domain is actually ready to be certified — not designed in the abstract ahead of need.

Destinations — Geographic Register

Status: proven in production, fully specified in the MAU Destination Charter.

Before a place can carry the Seal in any other domain, it must first exist correctly in MAU's own register: correctly classified, uniquely keyed, and honestly located. This track is the foundation the Content track (and every future track) is built on top of, and it is the first track to graduate into a full Domain Charter alongside Language.



A destination's own Seal is distinct from the Seal on any single dimension of its content. Most of what a place needs — existing in the register at all, and being open to search — is structural and automatic, requiring no reviewer: a place becomes eligible the moment it resolves correctly against the register's own rules, exactly as Part V intends for any question that is factual and checkable rather than a matter of judgement. Certification is the one part of this track that is human-gated, held to four criteria the Destination Charter defines: mission relevance, safety, authenticity, and readiness.

A destination may be Certified while none of its content dimensions are yet Certified, and a content dimension (such as Language) may be Certified at a destination that is not itself Certified. The two are independent applications of the same Seal to two different, specifically named things, per this Part's own rule that the Seal always certifies a specific, named thing and never by association.

Content — Discover the World dimensions & sub-dimensions

Status: proven in production (Language), pattern to be confirmed for other DtW dimensions.

The Language section is the first live example of a domain track and the model the others will be measured against for rigor: 1. Every generated destination is checked for plausibility against real country-level reference data (currently the CIA World Factbook) before the Seal is even eligible. 2. Items that pass sit in an admin review queue; a human reviewer approves as-is or corrects and approves. 3. Where possible, the reviewer's judgment is cross-checked against an academic/linguistic reference (currently Glottolog) and, ideally, confirmed by someone with real local/native knowledge of the language in question. 4. Only once independently reviewed does the Seal display.

Other DtW dimensions and sub-dimensions (Explore, Culture, Wildlife, Story) do not yet have their own confirmed track — each will need its own definition of what "checked" means for that specific kind of content, built when that dimension is ready.

Partners — Smart Travel

Status: not yet designed.

To be built when this track is taken up: what MAU actually requires of an external partner or vendor beyond the representation standard in Parts I–IV (for example: local involvement or ownership in what they represent, fair treatment of the communities they work with, honesty in claims made to travellers) — and how a business, rather than a piece of content, gets vetted.

Future Domains — educational curriculums, standards of living, others not yet named

Status: not yet designed.

Reserved for domains identified later. Each will get its own track defined here when it's actually being built, following the same Universal Standard above.

Part VI — Company Conduct

Status: not yet designed.



This Promise's scope extends beyond representation to how MAU itself operates — hiring, internal decision-making, and how the company treats the people and communities it works with directly. Unlike Parts I–V, this is not about the Seal; it is about MAU holding itself to its own standard even where nothing is being certified.

To be built when this Part is taken up: what the principles in Parts I–IV mean applied inward rather than outward — for example, how MAU sources local knowledge and pays the people who provide it, how hiring and team culture reflect the same non-hierarchical respect for difference, and how decisions affecting a community MAU works with are made with that community rather than for it.

Part VII — Governing Clause

This Promise is the settled standard of Maggie's Adventures Universe — what MAU stands for and the bar the MAU Seal represents. All present and future MAU output, and everything the Seal is stamped onto, implements it and may not contradict it. Where a feature, prompt, source, partner, or piece of copy conflicts with this Promise, the Promise governs and the conflicting element is changed.

Amendments are made deliberately, at the level of doctrine, with intention and record — not casually in the course of ordinary work.

Appendix — Sources and Intellectual Lineage

The ideas in this Promise are stated in MAU's own words and applied to MAU's own purpose, but a number of them rest on real, citable scholarship. The ideas below are attributed to their originators; none of their work is reproduced here, and the framing, application, and wording throughout this Promise are MAU's own.

- **Cultural relativism** — foundational to the work of **Franz Boas** (1858–1942) and his students in establishing that cultures must be understood on their own terms rather than ranked on a single scale. (Principle 1)
- **The emic / etic distinction** — the terms originate with linguist **Kenneth L. Pike** and were further developed by **Marvin Harris**, distinguishing the insider's understanding from the outside observer's description. (Principle 2)
- **Critique of the "ethnographic present"** — the problem of describing living peoples in a timeless traditional tense was articulated notably by **Johannes Fabian**, particularly in *Time and the Other* (1983). (Principle 4)
- **"The danger of a single story"** — the phrase and its argument are owed to the novelist **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**. (Prohibition 6)
- **Decolonising methodologies** — the imperative to centre the perspectives and self-representation of colonised and Indigenous peoples draws on a body of scholarship including **Linda Tuhiwai Smith's** *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999). (Part IV)



- **UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage framework** — MAU's treatment of living cultural practices as heritage to be represented as their communities wish reflects the principles of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. (Culture dimension; Part IV)
- **Leave No Trace outdoor ethics** — MAU's low-impact, observe-don't-disturb approach to wildlife and natural spaces reflects the widely adopted Leave No Trace principles for outdoor recreation. (Principle 5; Wildlife dimension)

Full bibliographic references to be completed at document finalisation.

RATIFIED ON BEHALF OF

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