



An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

EDUCATOR GUIDE

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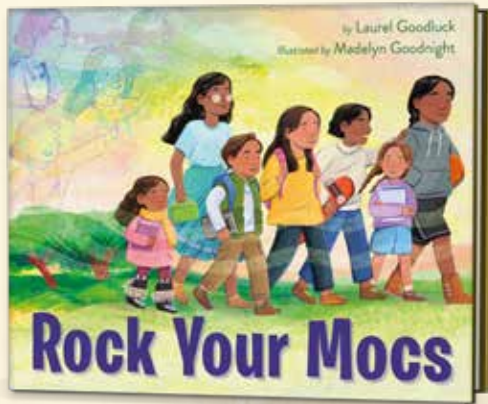
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Why is Native literature important?

Heartdrum is a Native-focused imprint of HarperCollins Children's Books and is a leader in the movement of publishing equitable and inclusive titles for young readers. The imprint “evokes the heartbeat of the Native community” by publishing books representing today's 1000+ tribal Nations located within the borders of the United States and Canada. Heartdrum is dedicated to shining a spotlight on Native and First Nations characters, topics, and points of view while raising up Indigenous creatives as well as their literary and visual art.

According to current publishing data, most people haven't yet read contemporary books with Native American/First Nations protagonists. Children's and young adult literature that includes a wide variety of cultures, traditions, and beliefs can help both Native and non-Native readers experience life on a larger scale. Stories dedicated to Indigenous, modern-day characters promote empathy by letting readers vicariously experience their struggles, celebrations, and daily lives. Reading these books creates opportunities for teachers and students (Native or non-Native) to better understand one another and to communicate more effectively.



Rock Your Mocs

by Laurel Goodluck, illustrated by Madelyn Goodnight

About the book

In *Rock Your Mocs*, Laurel Goodluck (Mandan/Hidatsa/Tsimshian) showcases a celebration by the same name while shining a light on various tribal communities. As characters don their moccasins, the reader is invited to gain a better understanding of contemporary Native cultures and traditions.

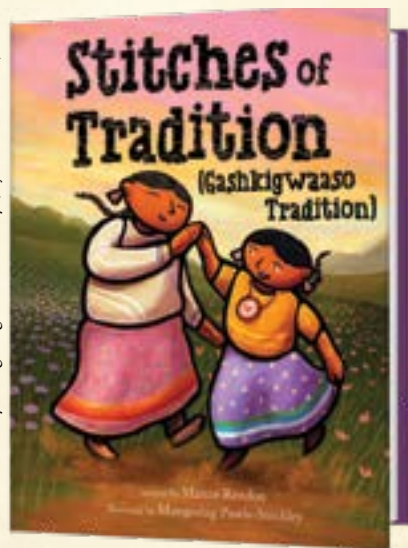
Laurel Goodluck comes from an intertribal background of Mandan and Hidatsa from the prairies of North Dakota and Tsimshian from a rainforest in Alaska. She is the author of *Forever Cousins*, a picture book illustrated by Jonathan Nelson. She received both a BA in psychology and an MA in community counseling and family studies from the University of New Mexico. Laurel lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with her Navajo husband, where they raised two children.

Madelyn Goodnight is a member of the Chickasaw Nation. Her work reflects her love of childhood. She holds a degree from Rhode Island School of Design and lives in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. She is the illustrator of *The Pear Tree* and *Look, Grandma! Ni, Elisi!*

Discussion questions

1. Read the section “Rock Your Mocs Day” on page 30 in the back of the book. Why did the young activist Jessica “Jaylyn” Atsye (Laguna Pueblo) start the event? After reading: Why do you think Rock Your Mocs Day has turned into a weeklong event?
2. The author uses repeated phrases then adds a detail (Example: “We Rock Our Mocs with pride!” [p. 8]. Find and copy four more repeated phrases. How are they all connected? (Tip: Think harder . . . more than using the same words.)
3. With a partner, choose one of those repeated phrases. Then find and discuss all the ways that Native people prove that statement in the story.
4. Turn to a page that connects to your own life. How do you feel when you read the words and study the illustrations? What is your connection to the page?
5. How does wearing moccasins connect a person to the past and the future? (Hint: See pages 16–23.)
6. Finish the sentence: When Native people wear their moccasins, they show pride in themselves because . . .

Curriculum Connections: characterization, identifying feelings, showing how characters respond to events, theme, informational text, facts and details, making connections, text to self, taking action, understanding a variety of Indigenous Nations and Native cultures, creating community, intertribal connections, building friendships, embracing identity, celebrating individuality, honoring traditions, connecting past to present to future, empathy.



Stitches of Tradition (Gashigwaaso Tradition)

by Marcie Rendon, illustrated by Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley

About the book

"Noozhishenh, bimadiziwin," Nookomis says.

"My granddaughter, live a good life."

An Ojibwe grandmother carefully measures and selects just the right colors of fabric, and her sewing machine hums *whirr, whirr, whirr* late into the night.

In the morning, her growing granddaughter has a beautiful new ribbon skirt to wear, a reminder of her nookomis and the cultural traditions that stitch together her family with love.

This heartwarming story by Marcie Rendon (Ojibwe), with stunning illustrations by Joshua Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley (Ojibwe), celebrates the power of Indigenous craft and community and weaves together the spirit of resilience, female empowerment, and gratitude for the generations that came before us.

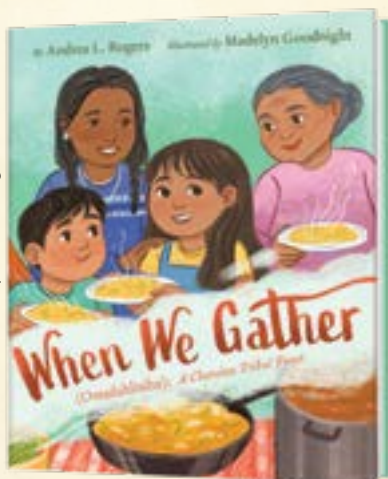
Marcie Rendon is an enrolled member of the White Earth Ojibwe Nation, author, playwright, poet, and freelance writer. A community arts activist, Rendon encourages other Native creators to pursue their art and is a speaker for colleges and community groups on Native issues, leadership, and writing. She is an award-winning author of a murder mystery series for adults and has an extensive body of fiction and nonfiction works. She lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley is an Ojibwe Woodland artist from Barrie, Ontario, Canada, and a member of Wasauksing First Nation. His fine art focuses on promoting and reclaiming Ojibwe stories and teachings in a modern interpretation of the Woodland tradition.

Discussion questions

1. What does the word *tradition* mean to you? In this book, a Native American family's tradition is for Nookomis, the grandmother, to make special ribbon skirts for her granddaughter. Do you and your family have any traditions? What are they? Listen while your classmates share their own traditions.
2. In this story, the phrase "Traditions stitch together generations with love" is repeated. How can a tradition stitch, or connect, generations with love? Why do you think the author repeated this phrase throughout the story?
3. Many times, in this story Nookomis tells her granddaughter to "live a good life." What do you think that means? How can you live a good life, too? Can you share other stories about living a good life?
4. On pages 18-19 and 30-31 we see many people in beautiful Native American ribbon skirts. Yet, the people are all so different! Can you share both the differences and similarities you see? Are there other times in school, or your community, where being unique is celebrated?
5. As the story continues, the granddaughter is growing and needs a new ribbon skirt over the seasons. Talk with a classmate about how you, or another young family member, are growing up. What things have you outgrown, and what things have stayed the same?
6. In the glossary on page 36 are many Ojibwe words and phrases. How do you say these in your own language? Or, how might you draw what these mean to you?

Copy written by Dawn Quigley. Dawn is a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe. She is an author, a PhD education university faculty member and a former K-12 reading and English teacher, as well as an Indian Education program codirector.



When We Gather (Ostadahlisiha): A Cherokee Tribal Feast

by Andrea L. Rogers, illustrated by Madelyn Goodnight

About the book

Brimming with lyricism, Andrea L. Rogers' story tells of the traditional Cherokee spring harvest of wild green onions and the feast that follows. With gentle, warm artwork from Madelyn Goodnight, this book shows readers the roles we all play in a community and that young people are to learn from Elders and help them in order to protect the future. Sharing the rich tradition and role of wild onions on the feasting table, Rogers includes important notes for young readers about not taking more than you need to support a larger ecosystem and the importance of Indigenous food pathways. At its center is a story of family and community with a shared pride and love for carrying on important cultural traditions.

Andrea L. Rogers is from Tulsa, Oklahoma, and is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation. She graduated from the Institute of American Indian Arts with an MFA in creative writing. Andrea lives and writes in the Boston Mountains in Arkansas.

Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley is a member of the Chickasaw Nation. Her work reflects her love of childhood. She holds a degree from Rhode Island School of Design and lives in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. She is the illustrator of *The Pear Tree*; *Look, Grandma!* *Ni, Elisil!*; and *Rock Your Mocs*.

Discussion questions

1. What does *Idalisdayvhga* mean? (use the glossary in the back of the book) Are there important meals you share with your own family? What food or traditions do you share with your community?
2. How do you know it's springtime in the story? What are the clues?
3. When the family gathers wild onions, they pick only a few but leave most. Why do you think that is?
4. In the illustrations, what do you notice about the characters? Are they working together? Do they have roles to play?
5. How are Elders honored in this story? How do you honor them in your own community?

CopyGuide prepared by Jenna Wolf. Jenna is tribally enrolled in Mvskoke Nation of Oklahoma and the library director at The Cambridge School of Weston. She regularly gives talks on decolonizing practices in libraries and libraries that are curated by students for students



I Am Osage

by Kim Rogers, illustrated by Bobby Von Martin

About the book

Clarence Tinker was born in 1887 and wanted to make a difference in the world. He believed in himself and his Osage culture. Eventually, he joined the United States Air Force during World War II and moved up the ranks, eventually becoming the first Native American Major General. He pursued dreams that seemed impossible. Through his perseverance, he became a role model and a hero to his community. Osage people celebrate his life each year at a community gathering and sing a song to honor him.

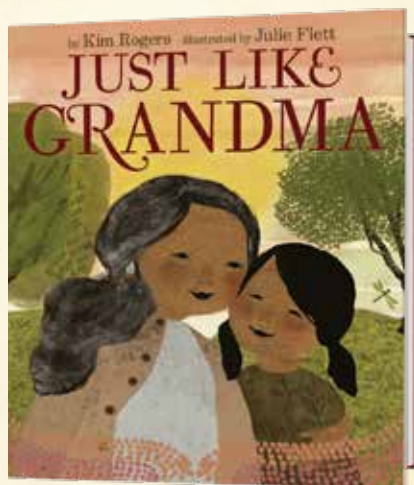
Kim Rogers is the award-winning author of *Just Like Grandma*, illustrated by Julie Flett and *A Letter for Bob*, illustrated by Jonathan Nelson. She is an enrolled member of Wichita and Affiliated Tribes and is a member of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. Much of her writing highlights her Wichita heritage. Kim lives with her family on her tribe's ancestral homelands in Oklahoma.

Bobby Von Martin is an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Born into a family of professional artists, he fell in love with art from a very young age. He is passionate about including cultural influences and historical subject matter in his paintings to inspire children and adults in Native American communities, and he volunteers as an art teacher for Native youth. He lives in Fresno, California.

Discussion questions

1. Listen to the story on the first two pages and study the text. How does the type and the arrangement of the words guide you in reading the story aloud? How do the words and the vibrant illustrations connect?
2. Listen for a drumbeat rhythm as you hear the rest of the story. Search for other repeated patterns in the story. Notice how some of the text stands out in a certain way. Why do you think the author included these patterns?
3. The illustration style is unique. How do the color and style of the illustrations make you feel on the first spread? On the third spread? On the fifth spread?
4. How are the characters different on the second spread? On the right side of the sixth spread?
5. What do you learn about Clarence Tinker? About Osage culture and traditions? (Hint: read the Author's Note too)
6. On the eighth and ninth spreads, we learn that Clarence wanted to become an officer, but he wasn't sure the official would let him. How did Clarence continue to work hard and pursue his dreams? How do the text and illustrations inform you?
7. Some text is brief and not in full sentence form on page 23. What does this text reveal? How does the abrupt text make you feel? Why?
8. Open the book so you can see the front and back covers together. Study this, the title page, the thirteenth page, and pages 19 and 20. Which portrait of Tinker shows he reached his dreams? How does the illustration show that? Explain.
9. Double-page spreads cause a reader to pause and linger. As you study the last spread, what do you see? Hear? Feel? How do you know Tinker is a real-life hero?

Curriculum Connections: Osage Culture; kinship; boarding school education; identity; World War II; leadership; Military Service (Army, ROTC, Air Force); determination; perseverance; timelines?



Just Like Grandma

by Kim Rogers, illustrated by Julie Flett

About the book

Savor this heartfelt story as Becca admires and appreciates her grandmother's talents, such as beading, painting, and dancing. Becca wants to be like her, following along as Grandma inspires her curiosity. Grandfather is nearby, providing encouragement and nourishment. He serves them delicious meals of corn soup, beans and fry bread, and pepperoni pizza. This kinship story celebrates Native children and how they thrive in a loving family with positive role models who share respect, creativity, and perseverance.

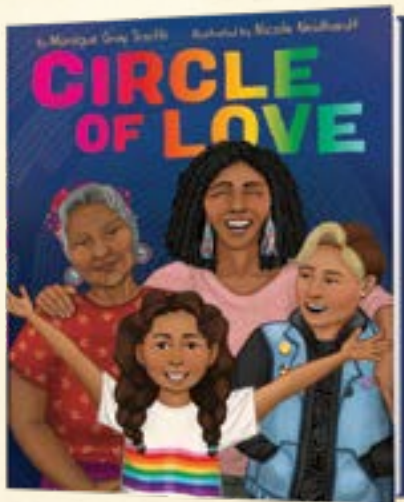
Kim Rogers writes books, short stories, and poems across all children's age groups. She is an enrolled member of Wichita and Affiliated Tribes and is a member of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. Much of her writing highlights her Wichita heritage. Kim lives with her family on her tribe's ancestral homelands in Oklahoma. Kim has three upcoming picture books signed with Heartdrum.

Julie Flett is a Swampy Cree and Red River Métis author and artist. Her picture book *Birdsong* is a *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Honor Book; she also received the Governor General's Award for *When We Were Alone* by David A. Robertson and the American Indian Library Association Award for Best Picture Book for *Little You* by Richard Van Camp.

Discussion questions

1. What do you notice in the art on the front and back cover? Why do you think Grandma and Becca hug each other, but face different ways? What emotions do you have when you look at the illustrations? Why?
2. What does Becca want in the story? How is she going to succeed in achieving her goal? Why do you think the author repeats the same phrases?
3. There are three important characters in the story: Becca, Grandma, and Grandpa. Describe each one using trait words. How do they work together in their family?
4. How does Grandpa support and encourage Becca and Grandma? Who supports you in your life? How do they encourage you?
5. The author uses words that show a close relationship with nature. Identify four strong verbs and/or four sensory words that help you feel a connection with the environment.
6. Explain what the word *to:kic* means, using the glossary at the end of the book. Does your family make a similar dish? If so, please describe the dish and share when you eat it together.
7. The setting helps move the story along. After the powwow, when they return to the "house at the end of the street," Grandma is looking out the window at Becca playing outside. How does the story change?
8. Native families respect and prioritize Elders. Grandparents pass down wisdom to younger generations. What messages do Grandma and Grandpa pass down to Becca? What did you learn about the author's Native culture from reading the story?

Curriculum Connections: kinship; importance of Elders; wisdom and Native values like perseverance, resiliency, fortitude, and reciprocity; powwow event details; regalia; previewing strategy; visualizing; making connections; author's style, like using repetition, sensory details, and strong verbs; how to use a glossary; building community; appreciation for nature (sunrise, sunset, butterflies, gardens).



Circle of Love

by Monique Gray Smith,
illustrated by Nicole Neidhardt

About the book

Join Molly as she spends a day filled with love at her Intertribal Center. Urban intertribal centers provide a place to bring community together, to attend dances and ceremonies, and feast on traditional foods together. Readers meet Molly's diverse family, friends, and neighbors, who are all welcomed as they dance, sing, pray, and eat together. This warm-hearted and tender story celebrates family, community, and the basic human need of belonging and being loved. Monique Gray Smith's simple, lyrical, and inclusive text ensures everyone has a place in the circle.

Monique Gray Smith is Smith is the award-winning and bestselling author of nine books for readers of all ages. She is Cree, Lakota, and Scottish and the mother of twins. An inspirational, sought-after speaker and consultant, she lives in Victoria, British Columbia.

Nicole Neidhardt is Diné (Navajo) of Kiiyaa'anii clan. She grew up in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on Tewa territory, and now lives in Toronto. She has a Master of Fine Arts and works in a variety of media, including book illustration, mylar stenciling, installation, and mural painting and design.

Discussion questions

1. A circle is an important symbol in Native/Indigenous/First Nations culture. Study the cover and the illustrations to find examples of circles. Why do you think so many are included?
2. Read the foreword and the back matter. How does the illustration on the title page invite you into the story?
3. The first illustration goes across a two-page spread, causing you to linger. Who is the main character? What else do you notice?
4. What are all the things Molly does at the Intertribal Community Center? What do you learn about her and her life?
5. Find another two-page spread and study the illustration. Why did you choose this full page? What messages are being conveyed?
6. Urban intertribal community centers include everyone. How did each family/person share their time and gifts? Which is your favorite page? Explain why you selected it?
7. Each character's introduction includes an action followed by the statement of a feeling. Pick one example you connect with and and, if comfortable, share why you chose it.
8. How does the author's lyrical language and the use of repetition express the message of love and belonging?



Jo Jo Makoons: Fancy Pants

by Dawn Quigley, illustrated by Tara Audibert

About the book

Filled with lots of glitter, raised pinkies, and humorous misunderstandings, this second book in the Jo Jo Makoons series is filled with the joy of a young Ojibwe girl discovering her very own special shine from the inside out.

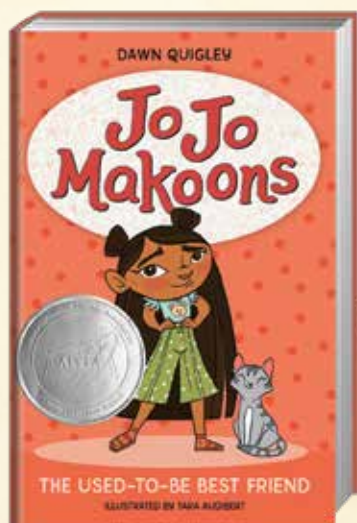
Dawn Quigley is a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe, North Dakota. The first book in her Jo Jo Makoons chapter book series was selected as a best book of the year by *Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, and *American Indians in Children's Literature*, and received five starred reviews; it was also chosen as a Charlotte Huck Award Honor Book and an AILA Honor Book. Her debut YA novel, *Apple in the Middle*, was awarded an American Indian Youth Literature Honor. She has a PhD and is an education, university faculty member, and a former K–12 reading and English teacher, as well as an Indian Education program codirector.

Tara Audibert is a multidisciplinary artist, filmmaker, cartoonist, animator, and podcaster. She owns and runs Moxy Fox Studio where she creates her award-winning works, including the animated short film *The Importance of Dreaming*, comics *This Place: 150 Years Retold* and *Lost Innocence*, and “Nitap: Legends of the First Nations,” an animated storytelling app. She is of Wolastoqey/French heritage and resides in Sunny Corner, New Brunswick, Canada.

Discussion questions

1. Reread pages 4–6. What do you learn about Jo Jo's name, her grandparents, and her Ojibwe and Michif languages?
2. What event makes Jo Jo Makoons wonder about the meaning of the word *fancy*?
3. Jo Jo misunderstands what people say sometimes. When Kokum says she has a “rainy-day fund,” what does Jo Jo think? What does a rainy-day fund mean? Do you have one? What special thing are you saving for?
4. Choose your favorite illustration. Why did you choose it? How did it help you understand that part of the story? How does your life connect to what's happening in the scene?
5. Jo Jo helps Kokum dust and teaches her new dance moves. How does doing her chores help Jo Jo at the wedding reception?
6. While getting ready for the wedding, Jo Jo observes the details of Mama's and Kokum's dresses. What is missing from Jo Jo's dress that both Mama and Kokum have on theirs?
7. In the end, what does Jo Jo realize about being fancy? What does she tell her auntie?

Curriculum Connections: characterization; problem-solution; vocabulary; responsibility; contributing to community; kindness; empathy; humor; discovering identity; making a plan; researching answers; determination; education is important; reading a glossary; Ojibwe culture and values; kinship; ancestral connection; language preservation.



Jo Jo Makoons: The Used-to-Be Best Friend

by Dawn Quigley, illustrated by Tara Audibert

About the book

The first book in a chapter book series about a spunky young Ojibwe girl who loves who she is, written by American Indian Youth Literature Honor-winning author Dawn Quigley (Ojibwe), and illustrated by artist Tara Audibert (Wolastoqey).

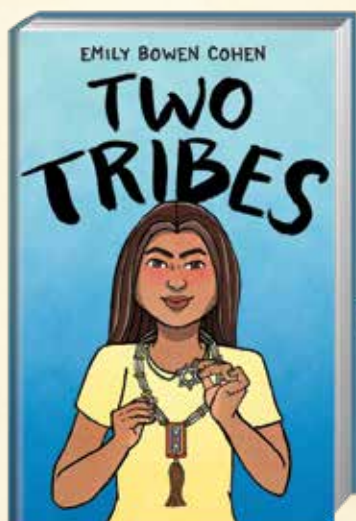
Dawn Quigley is a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe, North Dakota. Her debut YA novel, *Apple in the Middle*, was awarded an American Indian Youth Literature Honor. She has a PhD and is an education university faculty member, and a former K–12 reading and English teacher, as well as an Indian Education program codirector. She lives in Minnesota.

Tara Audibert is a multidisciplinary artist, filmmaker, cartoonist, animator, and podcaster. She owns and runs Moxy Fox Studio where she creates her award-winning works, including the animated short film *The Importance of Dreaming*, comics *This Place: 150 Years Retold* and *Lost Innocence*, and “Nitap: Legends of the First Nations,” an animated storytelling app. She is of Wolastoqey/French heritage and resides in Sunny Corner, New Brunswick, Canada.

Discussion questions

1. Before you read, study the cover art, read “About This Story,” and look at the character wall. What kind of person do you think Jo Jo Makoons is? What do you think will happen in this story?
2. Next, look at the cat illustration at the beginning of chapter 1. What does her expression mean? Make a guess: What is the cat telling you about chapter 1?
3. Mama calls out, “Josephine Makoons Azure” to ask a question. What do you think that means? When did your caregiver call you by your full name? Tell a friend what happened.
4. Jo Jo Makoons says that she doesn’t understand her kokum’s way of thinking a few times throughout the story. What does she mean about understanding her Elder?
5. Kokum’s advice is to be friendly to everyone by saying please and thank you, by smiling, and by holding back and not saying something that’s not nice. What is your advice for finding new friends?
6. (Bonus) During the class lesson, Chuck writes, “Dog jogged on the log.” And Jo Jo writes, “Please do not touch the couch.” Who understands how to rhyme words? Explain how.

Curriculum Connections: learning new vocabulary; identifying what fiction means; previewing a story and making predictions; understanding character traits; making inferences; building meaning from illustrations; learning about diabetes (Classroom Toolkit at www2.jdrf.org; Native/First Nations values: community sharing, respect for Elders, caring for the environment by reusing materials and enjoying humor.



Two Tribes

by Emily Bowen Cohen

About the book

In a moving story of identity, Mia is struggling to navigate life with her mother, new stepfather, and her Jewish day school community. On the cusp of her bat mitzvah, she begins to question the nature of belonging and why she is largely estranged from her father and Muscogee family in Oklahoma. When her mother refuses to talk about it, she takes a clandestine solo trip to visit her father, to foster a connection with her Muscogee heritage. She learns where she belongs: as a member of two tribes with similarities and differences that make her wholly who she is: Jewish and Muscogee.

Emily Bowen Cohen is a member of the Muscogee Nation. She spent her childhood in Okemah, Oklahoma, and her teen years in Montclair, New Jersey, before graduating from Harvard University. She and her husband live in Los Angeles.

Discussion questions

1. The title of the book is *Two Tribes*. Kinship and tradition are important to both Jewish people and Native American communities. How are these exemplified in the story? Can you provide examples of where they share similarities?
2. At the beginning of the book, we see Mia reading a story called *Little Indian Girl*. She hopes it will provide her insights on what it means to be Native American. How does the imagery depict Native Americans? What is the purpose of this imagery in the larger story?
3. How does the author demonstrate the impacts of colonization on the Muscogee people? What are some examples?
4. In the story, Mia is unsure where she belongs. This is often a refrain people of mixed heritage express. How does Mia reconcile where she belongs? What are some examples of the balance she finds between her two cultures?
5. It is easy to feel out of place when you belong to several different cultures. Are there places in your own life where you feel you have to be one way or another? How do you navigate those spaces?
6. This story deals candidly with microaggressions (common, everyday slights and comments that relate to various aspects of one's appearance or identity). Can you think of a time where you have experienced or witnessed a microaggression? How does the author deal with microaggressions in this story?
7. Mia's parents play significant roles in the story arc. Why is that important? How do they ultimately support Mia in understanding her full self?
8. Each character displays some measure of growth. Pick a character and describe an example of their growth. How do they demonstrate a better understanding or new perspective?



The Sea in Winter

by Christine Day

About the book

In this evocative and heartwarming novel, the author of *I Can Make This Promise* tells the story of a Makah/Piscataway girl struggling to find her joy again, and the family who will protect her no matter what.

Christine Day's (Upper Skagit) debut novel, *I Can Make This Promise*, was a best book of the year from *Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, NPR, and the Chicago Public Library, as well as a Charlotte Huck Award Honor Book. She holds a master's degree from the University of Washington, where she created a thesis on Coast Salish weaving traditions. Christine lives in the Pacific Northwest with her family.

Discussion questions

1. Maisie's teacher begins class with a writing activity. Students must journal using the word *sanctuary* and/or its meaning. Reread Maisie's entry on page 3. What would you describe as your *sanctuary*? Why? Write your own journal entry.
2. Maisie reacts to the loss of her dream by isolating herself from her friends and family. Her mood changes, and she is quick-tempered with people she loves. Have you ever had a similar reaction in your
3. The author weaves history about conflict between the U.S. government and Native American Nations throughout this story. Resilience and moving forward with the strength of your ancestors is a recurring theme, something Maisie must learn. Choose one conflict in history mentioned in the book and discuss how hearing that story helps Maisie move forward and grow. What did you learn about being resilient? How can you apply this value to your life?
4. Nature provides many gifts, including "a little heart medicine," as Mom describes it on page 61. What do you think she means? Find one section in the book where Maisie uses her observation skills to describe the places on their trip. How does this description make you feel when you read it? Locate two to three lines that help you visualize the setting. Read them out loud to a partner or small group and explain why the lines intrigue you.
5. On page 150, Mom tells Maisie, "Dreams change. Realities change. People change. We all go through it in different ways." How does this statement apply to Maisie's situation? Explain how this remark applies to your life.
6. Chapter titles provide a hint about what is coming. Choose one chapter title and summarize that chapter in five sentences. Then, explain the connection between the title and the summary. (Hint: The Author's Note explains more details about two chapter titles.)

Curriculum Connections: Makah Nation history; Indigenous Treaties and land loss; Indian Citizenship Act of 1924; prejudice and stereotyping; ecological effects of river dams; the environmental importance of salmon (clams, gray whales, "nursery stumps," or oceans); narrative arc and other elements of story, such as setting; writing description and authentic dialogue; physical therapists and/or mental health therapists; finding "your sanctuary"; values, such as respect for Elders, reciprocity, perseverance, forgiveness, and courage; North American archaeology; geology of the Pacific Northwest, including earthquakes.



We Still Belong

by Christine Day

About the book

Spend Indigenous Peoples' Day with Wesley, a twelve-year-old whose ancestors—including her mom—are Upper Skagit. Despite Wesley's careful planning, nothing seems to go her way on this special day. Learn how her connection to family and friends, along with her cultural teachings, help her make the celebration even better than she'd imagined it could ever be.

Christine Day (Upper Skagit) grew up in Seattle, nestled between the sea, the mountains, and the pages of her favorite books. Her two previous novels, *I Can Make This Promise* and *The Sea in Winter*, were both selected as American Indian Youth Literature Award Honor Books and named best books of the year by numerous media outlets. Christine lives in the Pacific Northwest with her family.

Discussion questions

1. At the beginning of the book, Wesley looks around her living room. What do the items she sees tell us about what Wesley and her family value? Are they similar or different from what we would find in your living room at home?
2. Ryan makes some assumptions about Wesley when he learns she's an only child. We see this later in the book again when Wesley learns about the Tolo prediction involving Ella and Ryan. When is a time you've jumped to conclusions about someone? How did you make it right?
3. How do gemmakitty01 and Skye use their social media networks to teach others about Native culture? In what ways can you offer support to and inform others about issues and topics that are important to you?
4. Identify a situation in the book where Wesley and her Native culture are overlooked by fellow classmates, teachers, or school policies. When was a time you felt like you were invisible? What did you do to feel seen?
5. Wesley recalls on page 101 some advice that her grandfather gave her: "The things that scare us the most in this world are usually the most worthwhile things in our lives." Discuss why you agree or disagree with Grandpa's advice.
6. In chapter 38, Grandpa refers to languages as a "gift." Why doesn't he speak Lushootseed like his ancestors before him?
7. Discuss the differences in feedback Wesley received from Mr. Holt versus the attendees at the intertribal powwow at Coastline High School. What lessons could Wesley take from these two experiences?

Guide prepared by Odia Wood-Krueger, a consultant who focuses on community engagement and curriculum writing projects. She is Métis from Saskatchewan, Canada, and currently calls Minneapolis home.

Curriculum Connections: Indigenous Peoples' Day; U.S. federal boarding schools and their role in loss of culture and language; language revitalization efforts; powwow event details; regalia; jingle dress teachings and history; making connections; building community; tribal citizenship; tribal sovereignty.



Red Bird Danced

by Dawn Quigley

About the book

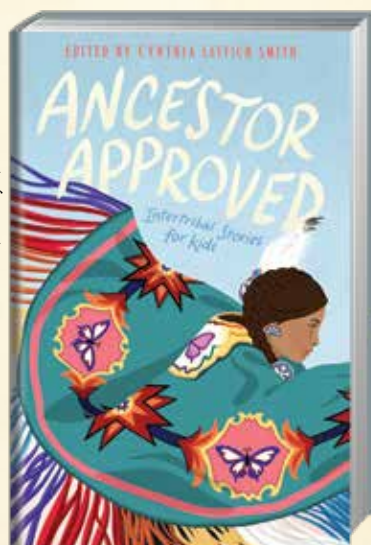
Two characters work through their emotions and grief after a beloved auntie goes missing. Eleven-year-old Ariel loves ballet and the way her feet feel as they hover while she dances. But she has not been dancing since her Auntie Bineshiinh disappeared. Her neighbor, twelve-year-old Tomah, feels the only person in their urban Native community who sees him is Ariel. Tomah sits on the bench outside his door and watches the birds, as well as everyone else as they come and go. He likes to make people laugh to hide his inability to read. The words dance too fast on the page for him to understand. Together, Ariel and Tomah find strength in their intertribal community neighborhood and stories about their cherished auntie to cope and survive throughout the seasons.

Dawn Quigley is a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe, North Dakota. Both her first book in the Jo Jo Makoons series, *Jo Jo Makoons: The Used-to-Be Best Friend*, and her debut YA novel, *Apple in the Middle*, were awarded American Indian Youth Literature Honors. She is a PhD education university faculty member and a former K–12 reading and English teacher, as well as an Indian Education program codirector. You can find her online at dawnquigley.com.

Discussion questions

1. What image did author Dawn Quigley use throughout the book? One example is on page 12 and another on page 34. Select three other examples to share and discuss.
2. Read the poem titled “Hiding Hearts” on pages 37-40. Why did the author choose this title? What do you learn about Ariel and Tomah?
3. Read the poem titled “Snow Kissed the Ground” on pages 47-52. How does this poem contribute to the story? What do you learn about each character (Tomah, Ariel, and Auntie)?
4. Read “The Knock,” pages 76-78. What happened? What is the most important line/ line break that emphasizes the situation? Why did you choose it?
5. Read “Danced Alone” on pages 83-88 and “Red, Red Is Calling” on page 88. What did Tomah do? How does the text and white space support the image of his actions?
6. In “Jingle Dress Healing,” on pages 93-95, you learn about a Native way of healing. Connect your life, culture, or something else to this passage. Explain and discuss.
7. The author uses poetic techniques to make meaning and craft a story that sings.. Choose two examples (repetition, figurative language, rhyme, line breaks, etc.) that stood out while reading. Share and discuss.
8. Read pages 110-128. How do these poems support the theme(s)? How do these poems help you live a productive life?

Curriculum Connections: Urban Intertribal Housing; Community; Native Cultures; Identity; Jingle Dress Dancing; Health and Healing; Novel in Verse structure; Poetic Devices (figurative language, repetition, word choice and white space, line breaks, etc.); Nature and Birds; Struggling Readers; Empathy; Determination; Loss and Grief; Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women (#MMIW) Movement; Red Dress Art Installation Project.



Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids

edited by Cynthia Leitich Smith

About the book

Featuring the voices of new and veteran Native writers, and edited by bestselling author Cynthia Leitich Smith, this collection of intersecting stories set at the same powwow bursts with hope, joy, resilience, the strength of community, and Native pride. Each story can be read individually, but read as a whole, the stories play off one another and intersect, providing a cohesive reading experience.

Cynthia Leitich Smith is the bestselling, acclaimed author of books for all ages, including *Sisters of the Neversea*, *Rain Is Not My Indian Name*, *Indian Shoes*, *Jingle Dancer*, and *Hearts Unbroken*, which won the American Indian Library Association's Youth Literature Award. Most recently, she was named the 2021 NSK Neustadt Laureate. Cynthia is the author-curator of *Heartdrum*. She is a citizen of the Muscogee Nation and lives in Austin, Texas.

Discussion questions

1. The first lines of a book hook the reader. In this book, the first section is a poem. How does this poem intrigue you and make you want to read on?
2. You'll notice the stories have a common thread—relationships. Choose one short story and describe the relationship between the characters. Why do you think building relationships with others is important? Why should people respect their Elders?
3. Which one of the short stories lingered most in your mind? Why did the story appeal to you? Name a memorable character and explain why you chose them.
4. According to the foreword to the book, the contributors coordinated their efforts to create this anthology. How do you think the team of authors organized the book *Ancestor Approved*? What are two overall themes of this collection of poems and stories?
5. Read the last poem in the book. Why do you think the book begins and ends with a poem? How are the poems connected to a theme about sharing cultures and traditions?
6. Reflect on what you learned while reading these stories. How can you connect new knowledge to your own life, family, and/or community?

Curriculum Connections: land acknowledgement and map skills (investigate where each character starts their journey and acknowledge the tribes that once lived there with this resource <https://native-land.ca>; understand that there are more than one thousand contemporary Indigenous Nations within the borders of the United States and Canada (who they are, where they live, how they survive, resources used from the land, culture, and language); discuss stereotypes, racism, and mascot names respectfully; understand why people are connected to the land; identify regalia for various dances; learn Native values like community spirit, inclusion, and resilience; realize the importance of “belonging” and work to include others and help them feel safe.



On a Wing and a Tear

by Cynthia Leitich Smith

About the book

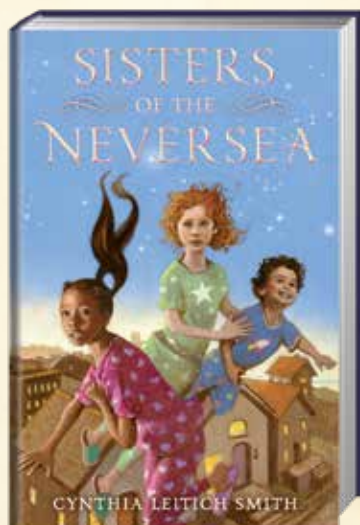
In this blending of traditional Indigenous folklore and contemporary middle grade adventure, Cynthia Leitich Smith delivers a heartfelt story of friendship and the interconnected nature of human and non-human relatives. Nodding to the traditional Muscogee story of the renowned stickball game waged between animals and birds, we are introduced to Ray Halfmoon and Melanie “Mel” Roberts, whose friendship deepens after Mel and her mother move into the attic in Ray and his grandfather’s bungalow. When grandfather Charlie Halfmoon discovers an injured bat taking refuge in his old oak tree, he soon learns there is about to be a rematch of the legendary ball game, and Great-Grandfather Bat needs to travel there in time to play. What ensues is a bumpy road trip south to Macon, Georgia, with Ray and Mel and a neighborhood squirrel in tow, as they attempt to transport Great-Grandfather Bat to the historic game. Along the way, our heroes visit family and make friends on high-stakes, healing, and humorous adventures, complicated by bumbling adversaries and heightened by a mysterious creature. Mel and Ray come to appreciate and embrace the connections that bind us all to each other, to our animal kin, and to ancestral lands.

Cynthia Leitich Smith is the bestselling, acclaimed author of books for all ages, including *Rain Is Not My Indian Name*, *Indian Shoes*, *Jingle Dancer*, *On a Wing and a Tear*, *Sisters of the Neversea*, the Blue Stars series, *Harvest House*, and *Hearts Unbroken*, which won the American Indian Youth Literature Award. Cynthia is also the anthologist of *Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids* and was named the NSK Neustadt Laureate. She is the author-curator of Heartdrum, a Native-focused imprint at HarperCollins Children’s Books, and served as the Katherine Paterson Inaugural Endowed Chair on the faculty of the MFA program in writing for children and young adults at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Cynthia is a citizen of the Muscogee Nation and lives in Austin, Texas, and Denton, Texas.

Discussion questions

1. Does your family share stories that impart particular lessons? What are they?
2. What can traditional stories tell us about a community?
3. The legendary stickball game is a popular story told in a number of Native Nations whose ancestral lands are located in the southeastern United States. How does the author use this traditional story to share a particular worldview?
4. What do Ray and Mel learn about the interconnectedness of the Earth through the legendary game? Who matters? Why?
5. What is reciprocity? How is this demonstrated throughout the story? Give specific examples.

Guide prepared by Jenna Wolf. Jenna is tribally enrolled in Mvskoke Nation of Oklahoma and the library director at The Cambridge School of Weston. She regularly gives talks on decolonizing practices in libraries and libraries that are curated by students for students.



Sisters of the Neversea

by Cynthia Leitich Smith

About the book

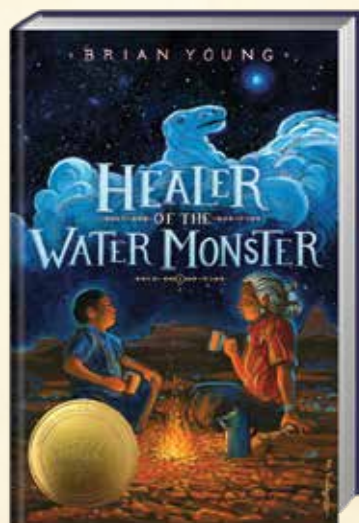
In this modern take on the classic *Peter Pan*, award-winning author Cynthia Leitich Smith (Muscogee) brilliantly shifts the focus from the boy who won't grow up to Muscogee Lily and English Wendy—stepsisters who must face dangers and embrace wonders to find their way home to the family they love.

Cynthia Leitich Smith is the bestselling, acclaimed author of books for all ages, including *Rain Is Not My Indian Name*, *Indian Shoes*, *Jingle Dancer*, and *Hearts Unbroken*, which won the American Indian Library Association's Youth Literature Award. Most recently, she was named the 2021 NSK Neustadt Laureate. Cynthia is the author-curator of Heartdrum. She is a citizen of the Muscogee Nation and lives in Austin, Texas.

Discussion questions

1. The idea of kinship, or a family connection, is central to Native cultures. Relatives respect, care for, and support one another. How can you connect this to the Roberts-Darling family?
2. Wendy and Lily travel through different environments on Neverland, an island surrounded by Neversea. Why is the forest important in this story? Are all species important for keeping nature in balance? What do you think will happen to the baby tiger cub in the future?
3. Many stories include obstacles and opposing forces. In the beginning, Wendy and Lily seem at odds, but once they reunite on the island, they resolve their differences. How do they accomplish this? How can people resolve conflicts peacefully?
4. Elders have an important role in our lives, as stated in this excerpt from page 170: "Michael heard stories of generations past and present from Auntie Lillian and other elders around kitchen tables, and sometimes they all went together to community events with storytellers, too." Choose an Elder from the story (Auntie Lillian; Clifford, the last Native Elder on the island; etc.) and explain why they are significant to the story.
5. Which character do you think achieved the most growth in a positive way? Explain why.
6. Why do you think the author chose third person omniscient point of view to write this story? How does this point of view help tell an engaging tale?

Curriculum Connections: Muscogee Creek Nation history; Mound Builders; migration of five tribes into present day Oklahoma; Indian Removal Act of 1830; acculturation/assimilation; treaties and land loss; Freytag's plot pyramid and narrative arc; fantasy fiction genre; point of view; analyzing text (compare/contrast); author study—Cynthia Leitich Smith; ecosystems and the environment; biodiversity and balance in nature.



Healer of the Water Monster

by Brian Young

About the book

Brian Young's (Navajo) debut novel, a contemporary Navajo hero's journey, features a seemingly ordinary boy who must save the life of a water monster—and help his uncle suffering from addiction—by discovering his own bravery and boundless love. An outstanding debut!

Brian Young is an author and filmmaker and an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation. He grew up on the Navajo reservation in Arizona. Brian earned his BA in Film Studies at Yale University and his MFA in Creative Writing at Columbia University. Brian currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Discussion questions

1. Family dynamics are always changing. What strengthened Nathan's relationship with his grandmother, Nali? What challenged Nathan's relationship with his father? His mother? Uncle Jet?
2. Recurring topics include the environment, family, and friendship. What do you discover about the water monster's sickness? How do you know Nathan perceives the water monster as a genuine friend?
3. Being selfless takes courage. When did you know Nathan was fully invested in helping Nali, Uncle Jet, and Pond? Explain Nathan's actions that helped you determine your answers.
4. How does Nathan change from the beginning of the story to the end of the story? In your opinion, did Nathan fulfill his promise to heal the water monster? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think the author created two parallel journeys for Nathan? Explain how both paths relate to today's society.

Curriculum Connections: Navajo culture; sacrifice and family relationships; using Earth's gifts with respect; the importance of clean water and the Water Is Life Movement; traditional planting techniques vs. conventional planting techniques; human choices and consequences to the environment; uranium mining on the Navajo Nation in the 1950s and its effects; Native American veterans; overcoming struggles such as bullying, divorce, alcoholism, and depression; problem-solving with fortitude.



Heroes of the Water Monster

by Brian Young

About the book

In this dramatic companion to *Healer of the Water Monster*, Nathan and Edward must adjust to a blended family. Nathan is growing up and losing his ability to see Holy Beings, but Edward still has a lot to learn still about being a guardian for Nathan's young water monster, Dew. When Dew's big sister, Yitoo, enters the Fourth World, she suspects a monstrous Modern Enemy is to blame for the dried-up rivers near the Navajo Nation. To defeat the enemy, Nathan and Edward must work together with Holy Beings, and overcome inner doubts to decide whether to feel empathy or seek revenge.

Discussion questions

1. Describe Nathan and Edward's family. On pages 67–69, what do Edward's inner thoughts reveal about himself and his feelings toward Nathan? What do Nathan's actions on pages 75–78 reveal about the boys' relationship?
2. What motivates Nathan? Identify his goal. What motivates Edward to continue the adventure? What is his goal? Explain using textual evidence.
3. On page 29, Edward teaches Dew how to wrestle. How does wrestling play a part in the journey and move the story forward? Explain with textual evidence. (Hint: Read chapters 4, 24, and 26.)
4. Describe Yitoo and Dew's relationship with each other, in the beginning and at the end. How does their sibling relationship change? Explain using textual evidence.
5. Who is Modern Enemy? How are human beings affecting the natural world? Are all species important to keeping a balance in nature? Explain your position.
6. On page 19, Nathan's mother, Janet, and Edward's father, Ted, discuss a situation relating to the boys and they discuss another situation on pages 248–249. Debate when and how grownups should intervene in their children's lives. Give one example of how a grownup (like a family member or guardian) in your life intervened in a positive way. What was the outcome?
7. On pages 245–248, what does the author want you to know about his Navajo ancestors? After hearing about tragedies their ancestors endured, what lessons do Nathan and Edward learn? How can people move forward together?
8. Defend Nathan and Edward's decision to show empathy at the end. Explain using textual evidence.
9. Did Edward's blessing request on pages 341–342 surprise you? Why or why not?

Curriculum Connections: story elements; characterization; setting; world-building; plot structure (The Hero's Journey and/or Overcoming the Monster) point of view; debate; arguments; environment; biodiversity; water; water issues; conservation of water; river dams; caring for the earth; era of relocation; Hwéeldi; the Navajo Long Walk; colonization; manifest destiny; identity; multi-heritage people; place names and other point of interest names; tribal citizenship; tribal sovereignty; perseverance; fortitude; hope; kinship; sibling relationships; empathy for others; overcoming self-doubt; teamwork; speculative fiction; ecological anxiety and grief.



A Constellation of Minor Bears

by Jen Ferguson

About the book

Molly, Hank, and Tray are the best kind of friends – the finish-each-others’-sentences type of besties – so when Hank falls at the climbing gym under Tray’s watchful eye, everything Molly knows to be true is spinning out of control. Searching for the familiar, Molly decides to move forward with the trio’s longtime plan to hike the Pacific Crest Trail after graduation, even if she’s obligated to bring Tray along for protection.

The journey is full of surprises! Join Molly, Hank, and Tray as they figure out that the packs they carry on their backs might not be the heaviest burden they’ll have to bear along the trail.

Jen Ferguson is Michif/Métis and white, an activist, an intersectional feminist, an auntie, and an accomplice armed with a PhD in English and creative writing. Visit her online at jenfergusonwrites.com.

Discussion questions

1. After Hank’s accident, Molly is thrown into a tailspin. On page 17 she thinks, “Before Hank’s accident, I was sure of everything. And now, well, now I’m not.” Think of a time in your own life when your confidence was shaken. How did you recover? Who or what helped you get your footing back?
2. There are two incidents when Traylor is forced to navigate power and privilege – from the first-class passenger on the flight to San Diego to the encounter with Lieutenant Green, the police officer in Lone

Pine. How might these two interactions have gone differently had an observer stepped in to be an ally? Tray thinks on page 296 that it’s “toxic” to sit by and watch while someone is behaving poorly. Do you agree? Discuss.

3. Reciprocity is the action of being in relationship, of giving and taking. How are the characters in relationship with the natural world – what do they “get” and what do they offer? How are characters in relationship with one another? How are these relationships nurtured and cared for? Who (or what) are you in relationship with?
4. This novel pushes us to think about labels – fat, gay, disabled, ENBY – while providing readers with a counternarrative about each. How do the characters’ experiences in the book broaden your understanding
5. It can be difficult to be objective about our own stories. As readers, we have the privilege of seeing the main characters’ perspectives through their eyes, each others’ viewpoints, and our own as we read the book. What advice would you offer the characters as a caring outside observer? What do you wish they knew about themselves?
6. Molly believes that science is facts and observations whereas Tray believes that stories can also be science. Who do you agree most with? Can both opinions be true? Discuss.
7. Tray’s life has been shaped by an internal soundtrack of fiddle music, living up North on the land, and traditional stories. Meanwhile, Molly questions her indigeneity, judging herself as less-than for not having the same cultural upbringing that her friend has. How have you needed to reconcile similar feelings of inadequacy? Who/what helped you on your journey?



The Summer of Bitter and Sweet

by Jen Ferguson

About the book

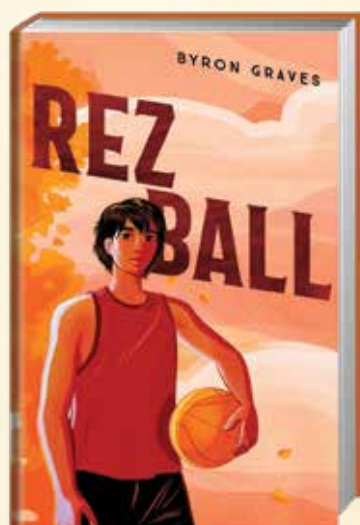
In this complex and emotionally resonant novel about a Métis girl living on the Canadian prairies, debut author Jen Ferguson serves up a powerful story about rage, secrets, and all the spectrums that make up a person—and the sweetness that can still live alongside the bitterest truth.

Jen Ferguson is Michif/Métis and white, an activist, an intersectional feminist, an auntie, and an accomplice armed with a PhD in English and creative writing. Her favorite ice-cream flavor is mint chocolate chip.

Discussion questions

1. What do you know about realistic fiction? What are some genre expectations you have regarding authentic life, family, and/or world issues?
2. On page 7, Lou's mom says, "My daughter could be the next Waneek Horn-Miller! Lou could go all the way to the—" and then Lou chimes in with, "Olympics." Lou finishes her mother's sentence, indicating she's heard it often. What Olympic sport are they talking about? How does this sentence inform you of their mother/daughter relationship and Lou's goals in life?
3. Use a reliable resource to learn more about the Métis people. Find a map of the Canadian prairies. Discuss what you've learned about the book's setting and Lou's Métis culture. Add examples from the story that strengthen your understanding about Canada, the Métis people, and language.
4. What does Lou lie about? She mentions on page 34 that her classmates "had been burned" by her lies. How do her lies affect others? Are secrets the same as lies? Why or why not?
5. The narrator describes on page 31 how some of her friendships finished: "Our end arrived fast and furious, like a sparkler burning out." Later, she refers to a friend's offer of help as "comforting like campfire" (p. 193). What do these selections mean to you? Discuss how you would describe various types of friendships in your life.
6. How does Lou's relationship with King strengthen? How does King help Lou heal?
7. At what point in the story do you know Lou has accepted her identity? Explain why.

Curriculum Connections: characterization; inferring character traits; drawing conclusions; word choice and language; symbolism; goal setting and motivation; mental health and well-being; healing strategies; acceptance and forgiveness; discovering identity; justice vs. injustice; making connections and fostering empathy; knowledge of Indigenous cultures; kinship and community; relationship with land; environmental education: Canadian Prairies ecosystem; maps: Canadian provinces; thoughtful/reflective discussion; understanding diverse perspectives; expressing/reflecting new ideas in writing; educational resource for Canada and First Nation/Métis people:
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/First-nations-metis-inuit-studies-grades-9-12.pdf>



Rez Ball

By Byron Graves

About the book

Tre shoots, he scores! Author Byron Graves (Ojibwe) delivers a fast-paced story about grief, friendship, family, and making a place for yourself in high school. For sophomore Tre Brun, who's following in his popular older brother's footsteps, fitting in is a challenge.

Tragically, Jaxon died in a car accident, and everyone aches from the loss. Tre feels ignored as his family tries to heal. But he pursues big dreams as a talented basketball player during this extraordinary season. He maneuvers new friendships and high expectations from his coach and his parents. Decision-making becomes difficult when his teammates tempt him with parties and other distractions. Will Tre prove he can balance his life choices, pursue his dreams, and be the winner his community needs?

Byron Graves is Ojibwe and was born and raised on the Red Lake Indian Reservation in Minnesota, where he played high school basketball. When he isn't writing, he can be found playing retro video games, spending time with his family, or cheering on his beloved Minnesota Timberwolves. *Rez Ball* is his debut novel.

Discussion questions

1. How does the author reveal the setting in each chapter?
2. How is Jaxon honored throughout the story? What can you infer about his family and Ojibwe community?
3. Belonging is a human need. Choose a character and locate evidence in the story of their attempt(s) to fill this need. How does "belonging" affect people and their decisions?
4. The author's writing voice is powerful and distinct. On page 52, he writes, "Those nights rip the stitches off my heart." Phrases like this make you have strong emotional connections to the characters. Find and discuss more evidence that shows what kind of person Tre is.
5. Would you be friends with Tre? Why or why not? Which character(s) fits into your friend group? Why?
6. How does the author make you feel when you visualize the fast-paced games? What emotions do you feel as the team approaches play-offs? Who are you rooting for?
7. Read pages 254–256. How does Coach motivate Tre? Do you think Tre will represent his family and community in the way Coach hopes he will? Explain.
8. One theme in *Rez Ball* is living up to your potential. How does Tre struggle to live up to his potential? How does he succeed? Find evidence of this theme and include page numbers.

Curriculum Connections: Characterization, Setting, Author's Craft, Writing with Emotion, Role Models, Grief and Healing, Belonging, Knowing and Accepting Yourself, Understanding Life Choices, Growing Up in High School, Pursuing Dreams, Family Life, Reservation Community, Race Relations, Making a Plan to Succeed, Determination, Perseverance, Fortitude, Sports Fitness and Basketball, Athletic Strategy.



The Unfinished

by Cheryl Isaacs

About the book

Mohawk writer Cheryl Isaacs delivers a spine-tingling mystery in which small-town athlete Avery, out on one of her many long runs, stumbles upon a strange pond and unearths a horror that many in Crooks Falls have long forgotten. Or chosen not to remember--the black water. As the black water begins to haunt Avery, making her question her own sanity, folks in town start to go missing. Despite often hearing whispers about monsters among her Kanien'kéha:ka (Mohawk) Elders, Avery has largely remained disconnected from her Native culture. But when her best friend--and longtime crush--Key is the next to go missing, Avery is forced to contend with what it means to be Kanien'kéha:ka and connect with her Elders, who may have the answers she needs to bring Key home and to stop living in limbo.

Cheryl Isaacs is can often be found running through the Carolinian forests of Southwestern Ontario, where she has fearlessly enjoyed the trails for years. Her Kanien'kéha culture often appears in her writing. *The Unfinished* is her debut novel, though her work has appeared in numerous Indigenous publications.

Discussion questions

1. What is community? How is that embodied in this story?
2. What role do Elders play in Native communities? In your own community? How is this demonstrated in the novel?
3. As Avery runs trails, those paths become symbols. What do they represent in the novel?
4. The Haudenosaunee story of Sky Woman plays a prominent role in the novel. What role does Sky Woman play in the larger Indigenous universe?
5. Monsters have long been used as symbols for fear and insecurity. What does the Ragged Man represent for Avery?

Guide prepared by Jenna Wolf. Jenna is tribally enrolled in Mvskoke Nation of Oklahoma and the library director at The Cambridge School of Weston. She regularly gives talks on decolonizing practices in libraries and libraries that are curated by students for students.