



# Heartdrum

An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

## EDUCATOR GUIDE

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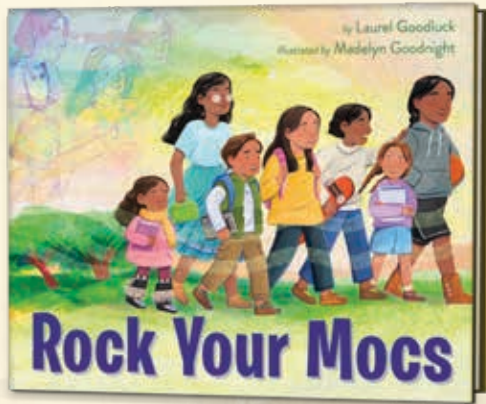
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# Why is Native literature important?

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.





# 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).



# 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](http://www2.jdrf.org)); Native/First Nations values: community sharing, respect for Elders, caring for the environment by reusing materials and enjoying humor.





# 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.

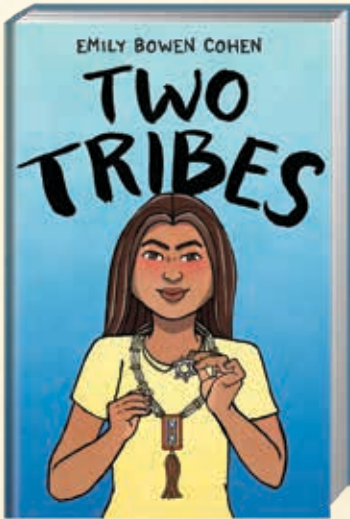
**Dawn Quigley** is a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe, North Dakota. The first book in her Jo Jo Makoons chapter book series was selected as a best book of the year by *Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, and *American Indians in Children's Literature*, and received five starred 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.



# 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?





# 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.





# 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 life? What advice would you give Maisie to help her through tough times?
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.



# 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.





# 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.



# Heroes of the Water Monster

by Brian Young

## About the book

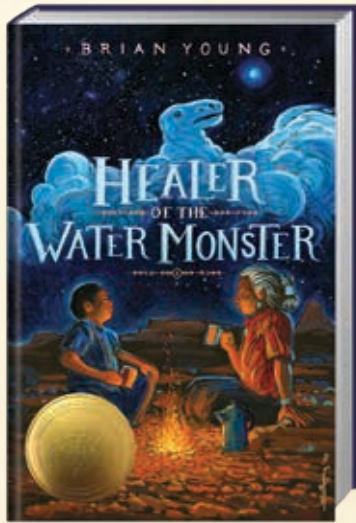
In this dramatic companion to *Healer of the Water Monster*, Nathan and Edward must adjust to a blended family. Nathan is growing up and losing his ability to see Holy Beings, but Edward still has a lot to learn still about being a guardian for Nathan's young water monster, Dew. When Dew's big sister, 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.





# 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.



# 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.



Cover artist: Reyna Hernandez (Yankton Sioux)

Title beading: Kim Stewart (Métis)



# 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 Waneeck 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>