



PICTURE BOOKS

From

Heartdrum

An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

EDUCATOR GUIDE

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Picture Books from Heartdrum

TABLE OF CONTENTS

To Walk the Sky: How Iroquois Steelworkers Helped Build Towering Cities

by Patricia Morris Buckley,
illustrated by E. B. Lewis **Page 4**

Rock Your Mocs

by Laurel Goodluck,
illustrated by Madelyn Goodnight..... **Page 5**

Yáadilá!: Good Grief!

by Laurel Goodluck,
illustrated by Jonathan Nelson **Page 6**

Stitches of Tradition (Gashkigwaaso Tradition)

by Marcie Rendon,
illustrated by Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley..... **Page 7**

When We Gather (Ostadahlisiha):

A Cherokee Tribal Feast

by Andrea L. Rogers,
illustrated by Madelyn Goodnight..... **Page 8**

I Am Osage

by Kim Rogers,
illustrated by Bobby Von Martin..... **Page 9**

Just Like Grandma

by Kim Rogers, illustrated by Julie Flett..... **Page 10**

Firefly Season

by Cynthia Leitich Smith,
illustrated by Kate Gardiner **Page 11**

Circle of Love

by Monique Gray Smith,
illustrated by Nicole Neidhardt **Page 12**

[Click here for more Picture Book educator guides!](#)

A Letter for Bob by Kim Rogers, illustrated by Jonathan Nelson

Check out our other Heartdrum guides here!



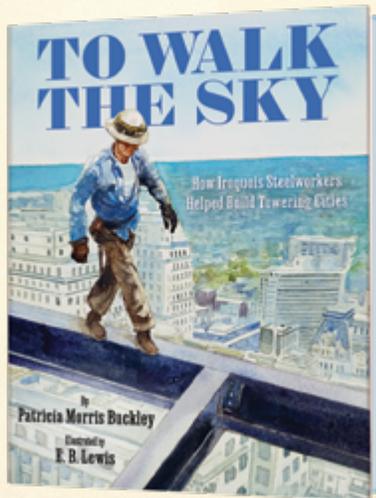
Why is Native literature important?

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 offering 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 Indigenous 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.

Click [here](#) to learn more about the Heartdrum imprint.

Guide prepared by Andrea Page (Lakota—Standing Rock). Andrea Page is an author and retired educator, copresident of the Rochester Area Children's Writers and Illustrators (RACWI) group, and a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Andrea lives with her husband in Rochester, NY.



To Walk The Sky:

How Iroquois Steelworkers Helped Build Towering Cities

by Patricia Morris Buckley,
illustrated by E. B. Lewis

About the book

Native people helped build many important landmarks across North America. With few jobs on the reserve, Mohawks and eventually men from the rest of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy sought well-paying steelwork jobs, where they worked high above ground on beams for bridges and buildings. These steelworkers have “sculpted city skylines” for generations and women ironworkers are now part of the profession, too. Mohawk author Patricia Morris Buckley, descendant of skywalkers, tells their story, noting two major collapses. These brave men and women persevere in their work despite such tragic circumstances. High above, they proudly continue their walks across the steel structures under construction. Compelling back matter enriches the story and celebrates the legacy of these steelworkers. E. B. Lewis’s watercolor illustrations intensify the emotions of the story.

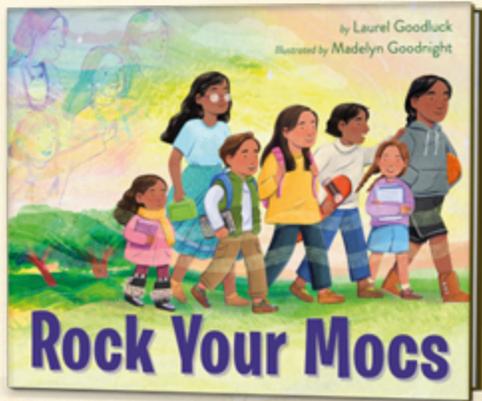
Patricia Morris Buckley (Kahnawà:ke Mohawk) is the regional advisor emeritus for SCBWI California: San Diego and taught writing for children for the University of San Diego Extended Studies. A newspaper reporter and editor for many years, she followed her passion for children’s literature to become an elementary school librarian. She is the author of the Step into Reading book *The First Woman Cherokee Chief: Wilma Pearl Mankiller*.

E. B. Lewis (Lenni Lenape), award-winning illustrator and fine artist, has illustrated more than seventy-five books for children, including the Caldecott Honor winner *Coming on Home Soon*. He won the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award for *Talkin’ About Bessie* and has earned the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor Award five times. After graduating from the Tyler School of Art and Architecture at Temple University, Lewis taught art in public schools for twelve years.

Discussion questions

1. On pages 4 and 5, the story starts with “Look to the sky!” Read the next sentence, too. How does the author hook you as a reader?
2. The text in *To Walk the Sky* provides important context, but take a second to look only at the illustrations. What do you feel and learn from the artwork throughout the story? How can art tell its own story, even without words?
3. Why did some Mohawk workers choose the dangerous profession of skywalking?
4. Describe the significant event that happened to the steelworkers in August 1907. How was the Caughnawaga tribal community affected? How did they try to overcome their grief?
5. Clan mothers made an important decision for the entire tribe. What was the decision and what effect did it have on where men found work?
6. Use context clues in the story and the back matter to define the following words: Iroquois Confederacy, Mohawk, Akwesasne, Caughnawaga, ironworker, and skywalker. Identify two to three other words in the text that you are unfamiliar with. Discuss the words’ meanings with a partner.
7. On pages 32 and 33, the author explains how trees planted in memory of those who perished in construction disasters grew and “stretched their branches to the sky.” Visualize the trees and tall buildings from the illustrations. Explain the comparison and how it connects to the story.

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Rock Your Mocs

by Laurel Goodluck, illustrated by Madelyn Goodnight

About the book

In *Rock Your Mocs*, Laurel Goodluck (Mandan/Hidasta/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.

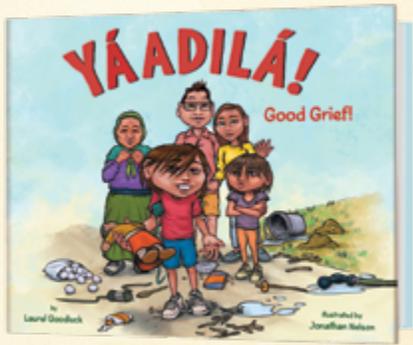
Madelyn Goodnight is a member of the Chickasaw Nation. Her work reflects her love of childhood. She holds a degree from Rhode Island School of Design and lives in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. She is the illustrator of *The Pear Tree; Look, Grandma! Ni, Elisil!*; and *Rock Your Mocs*.

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 week-long event?
2. The author uses repeated phrases then adds a detail. (Example “We Rock Our Mocs with pride!” (pg. 8)) Find and copy four more repeated phrases. How are they all connected? (Tip: Think harder...there’s more than using the same words.)
3. With a partner, choose one of those repeated phrases. Then find and discuss all the ways in the story that Native people prove that statement.
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...

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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.



Yáadilá! Good Grief!

by Laurel Goodluck,
illustrated by Jonathan Nelson

About the book

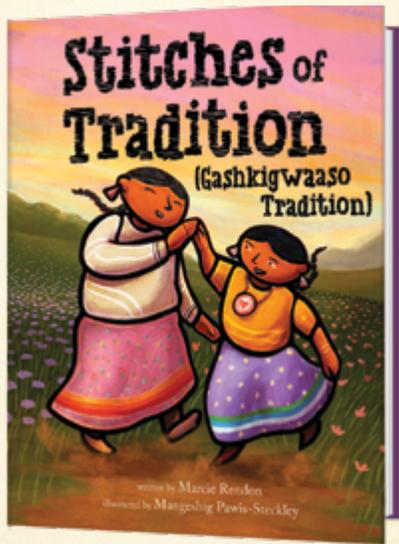
A young boy named Bahe and his family are helping his Diné (Navajo) grandmother, Nali, move from her home to live with them. Bahe's parents pack boxes while his younger sister plays in the yard. Then Bahe walks with Nali as she says goodbye to her home and sheep camp. Starting a new life is difficult, and Nali is homesick. Bahe seems to be getting into mischief, and at every frustration with him, the family throws up their hands and exclaims, "Yáadilá!," which means "Good grief!" in Diné. But they come to find out that he is really trying his best to help. Author Laurel Goodluck (Mandan/Hidatsa/Tsimshian) and illustrator Jonathan Nelson (Diné) introduce readers to this Navajo term while conveying the family's real, relatable emotions.

Laurel Goodluck is the author of many books for young readers, including the award-winning *Forever Cousins*, *Rock Your Mocs*, *She Persisted: Deb Haaland*, and *Too Much: My Great Big Native Family*. She comes from an intertribal background of Mandan and Hidatsa from the prairies of North Dakota and Tsimshian from a rain forest in Alaska. Laurel lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with her Diné (Navajo) husband, where they raised two sons.

Jonathan Nelson is a visual artist. He is Diné (Navajo) and was born into his mother's clan, the Towering House Clan (Kiiyaa'aanii), and born for his father's clan, the Mexican Clan (Naakai Diné'é). Jonathan holds a master's degree in visual communication from the University of Arizona and works as an illustrator, fine artist, and creative consultant. Among the books he has illustrated are *A Letter for Bob* by Kim Rogers, winner of the American Indian Library Association Youth Literature Award.

Discussion questions

1. On pages 2 and 3, the author presents Helpful Narrator. What is the narrator's role in the introduction? Why will learning "how to yáadilá" help you read the story?
2. What is everyone doing all day at Nali's home before Dad says "yáadilá"? Look at the illustrations on the first few pages and describe what Nali, Dad, Dezba, Bahe, and Mom are doing. Why does dad say the word "yáadilá"?
3. On pages 6 and 7, how do you know Bahe cares about how Nali is feeling? Identify more actions that Bahe takes to show respect for Nali throughout the book.
4. Why is it important for people to show empathy toward Elders?
5. In what ways do you show care and respect for others? How do your actions show you care about someone else's feelings?
6. On page 20, Bahe reflects on the word "yáadilá" and says, "I'm beginning to think that's my name." Identify three events in the story that would lead Bahe to say this.
7. Sometimes doing certain things can be challenging, but in the end, the hard work pays off. Do you think Bahe's hard work resulted in a success? Explain your answer.
8. Bahe and Dezba's relationship changes throughout the story. Describe what it's like in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. How is this the same as and different from your relationships with your siblings (or cousins, a close friend, etc.)? Compare Bahe's family to your family.



Stitches of Tradition (Gashkigwaaso Tradition)

by Marcie Rendon, illustrated by Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley

About the book

“Noozhishenh, mino-bimaadiziwin,” 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.

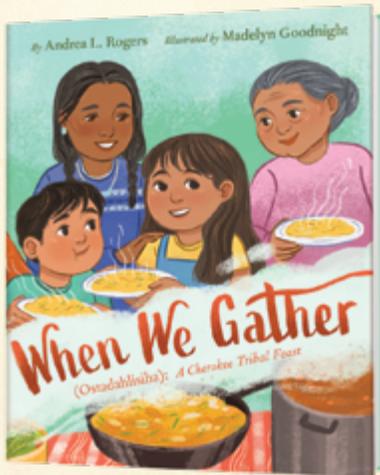
Marcie Rendon is an enrolled member of the White Earth Ojibwe Nation, author, playwright, poet, and freelance writer. A community arts activist, Rendon encourages other Native creators to pursue their art and is a speaker for colleges and community groups on Native issues, leadership, and writing. She 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.

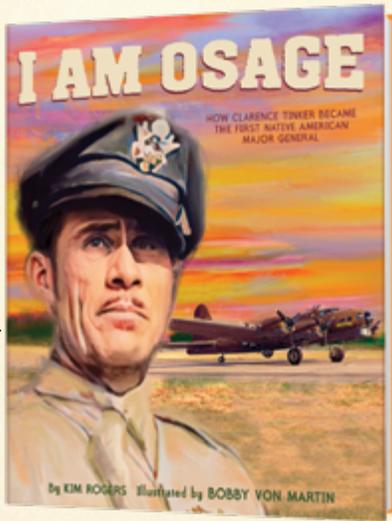
Andrea L. Rogers is from Tulsa, Oklahoma, and is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation. She graduated from the Institute of American Indian Arts with an MFA in creative writing. Andrea lives and writes in the Boston Mountains in Arkansas.

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*; *Look, Grandma! Ni, Elisi!*; and *Rock Your Mocs*.

Discussion questions

1. What does *Idalisdavhvga* 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?

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



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. 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 do 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?

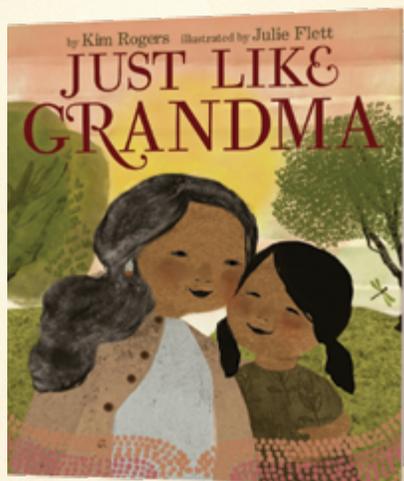
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Just Like Grandma

by Kim Rogers, illustrated by Julie Flett

Cover artist: Julie Flett (Cree-Métis)



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 Honor Book; she also received the Governor General's Award for *When We Were Alone* by David 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?

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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).



Firefly Season

by Cynthia Leitich Smith,
illustrated by Kate Gardiner

About the book

In this tender story of friendship and found family, Cynthia Leitich Smith (Muscogee) shares the story of Piper, who lives in Kansas City but spends every summer with Elders, cousins, and extended family on the Cherokee Nation and Muscogee Nation reservations within Oklahoma. With family, she shares stories, tradition, and language, and chases koleppa—fireflies in the Muscogee language. Piper’s story of living away from family and tradition in cities and suburbs across the country is common for many Indigenous kids. But when a neighbor named Sumi immigrates to Kansas from Mumbai with her family, Piper is excited to share her stories and seasons with a new friend. Through intimate, detailed illustrations, *Firefly Season* tells a deeply heart-opening story of found family and contemporary Indigenous life.

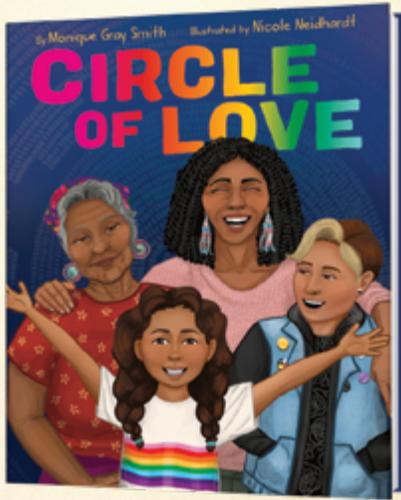
Cynthia Leitich Smith is the bestselling, acclaimed author of books for all ages, including *Firefly Season*, *Jingle Dancer*, *Indian Shoes*, *On a Wing and a Tear*, *Sisters of the Neversea*, the *Blue Stars* series, *Rain Is Not My Indian Name*, *Harvest House*, and *Hearts Unbroken*, which won the American Indian Youth Literature Award. Cynthia is also the anthologist of *Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids* and *Legendary Frybread Drive-In: Intertribal Stories*. She has been honored with the American Library Association’s Children’s Literature Lecture Award and has been 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 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 Denton, Texas.

Kate Gardiner is a New England–based illustrator. She is a member of the Chaubunagungamaug band of Nipmuck Indians and a graduate of Maine College of Art & Design. Kate has illustrated several books, including her debut picture book, *Small Places, Close to Home* by Deborah Hopkinson, and *Sometimes We Fall* by Randall de Sève. She can be found online at kategardinerillustration.com.

Discussion questions

1. What role do fireflies play in the story? What is important about these beetles for Piper and her family?
2. What is found family? Do you have any friends you consider family? What does that relationship look and feel like?
3. How is Piper’s life in the city the same as and different from her life on the reservations?
4. How does the illustrator bring Piper’s communities to life? What kinds of imagery does she use?
5. Piper introduces a friend from the city to her family members on the reservations. Why do you think she does this?
6. Have you ever moved or had a friend move away? How did you navigate your feelings about it? Did you stay in touch? Why or why not?

Guide prepared by Jenna Wolf. Jenna is tribally enrolled in the Mvskoke Nation of Oklahoma and is 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.



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 to 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 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'áanii 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, 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?

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