



EDUCATOR GUIDE

SARAH PONAKEY, ÂHÂSIW'S FOREST POWWOW

by Sita MacMillan

illustrated by Azby Whitecalf

Educator Guide by Kareena Butler

GENRE: children's fiction

THEMES: crow, dream, early chapter book, new school, regalia, traditional, Cree, Indigenous, culture, making friends, Cree (First Nations), chapter books, bedtime & dreams, friendship, adjusting to a new home, patience, pride in identity, bravery, confidence

SUITABLE FOR: Grades 1–3, Ages 6–9

GUIDED READING LEVEL: Fountas and Pinnell T

LEXILE: 680L

COMMON CORE STANDARDS: RL.5.1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9
W.5.3,3a,3b,3c,3d,4,5,6,9
SL.5.1,1a,1b,1c,1d,2,3,4,5,6
L.5.1,2,2a,2b,2c,2d,2e,3,3a,4,4a,4b,4c,5b,5c,6

SUMMARY:

The first book in a vibrant early chapter book series celebrating Cree culture and being true to yourself.

Sarah Ponakey has moved with her mom to the city from her home community and it's the pits! She misses her Kôhkom (grandmother), her best friend Eden, and the forests around her community. She's having a hard time making new friends at school but at least she keeps in touch with Eden through written letters with very big words. After a particularly tough day where she nearly loses her favorite stuffed animal, Âhâsiw, and is feeling ignored by her mom, Sarah finds herself transported to a magical forest powwow . . .

Sita MacMillan is a registered member of Zagime Anishinabek and is of a mixed Cree and Scottish background.

Azby Whitecalf is a Plains Cree illustrator and character designer.

Kareena Butler is an Algonquin educator and a member of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan. She is passionate about developing authentic learning tasks that are culturally responsive and engage all learners.

Please remember that the suggested questions and activities within this educator guide are meant to serve as a starting point. Educators are encouraged to select items from each part of the guided inquiry process that work best for their style of teaching and will help them meet their goals when covering the topics in this book. Activities and prompts should be tweaked and/or reformatted to best fit your students, context, and community to ensure equity and inclusion.

BEFORE READING THE BOOK

These activities build the context, introduce the topic of the book, and establish prior knowledge and interest.

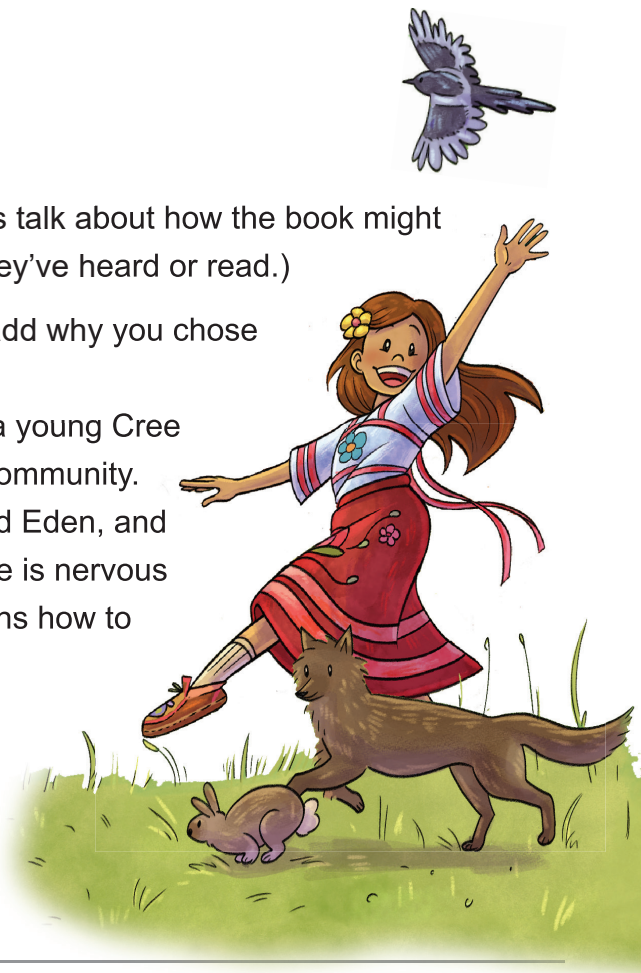
Recommended as a whole class read-aloud, small group shared reading, or guided reading literacy circles.

1. Introduce students to author Sita MacMillan and illustrator Azby Whitecalf.
 - Locate where they are from and where they live now on a map.
 - Identify what First Nations community they are from. Explain that there are many First Nations in this country, with distinct cultures and perspectives.
2. Look at the cover illustration.
 - Ask students to use the images to predict:
 - What do you see?
 - What might this story be about?

3. Activate Prior Knowledge and Make Connections (Students talk about how the book might connect to their own lived experiences or to other books they've heard or read.)

Give a brief explanation about the book. You may wish to add why you chose this story.

"This story shares the experiences of Sarah Ponakey, a young Cree girl who has moved to the city from her First Nations community. She misses her Kôhkom (grandmother), her best friend Eden, and her community. Sarah has had a very bad day, and she is nervous about fitting in at her new school. In this story she learns how to be brave and share about her culture."



Ask students the following questions:

- Sarah is a young Cree girl. Have you heard the word Cree before? Do you know what that means? Do you know any other names of First Nations, Inuit, or Métis across this country?
- The word *nervous* appears several times in the story.
 - What does *nervous* mean? Have you ever been nervous? How did you calm your nerves or what made you feel better?
- The author describes a powwow in the story.
 - Have you been to a powwow? Describe what you hear and see at a powwow.



****Please note that powwow dances are for First Nations; however, during the Intertribal Dances, guests are welcome to dance. Learn the protocols or powwow etiquette from your community/territory. When at a powwow, listen to the MC for guidance.**

4. Pre-learn and Explore Vocabulary

In order to help students be somewhat familiar with the terms before reading, create a list of Cree words that will be seen and heard in the story. Explain that these words may be similar or different from other First Nations.

(Best strategy: use a language app or YouTube page for proper pronunciation)

People: Kôhkom (Grandmother)

Powwow: regalia (traditional clothing for dancers), hand drum, ribbon skirt, moccasins, crow-hop, grand entry, bannock

Animals: Âhâsiw (crow), Maskwa (bear), Maskwachis (little bear), Mistahi-maskwa (Big Bear), Mêtacâkan (coyote), Anikwacâs (squirrel), Ochikomsos (Raccoon), Sikak (Skunk) Amisk (Beaver), Kâkwa (Porcupine), and Wâposos (Rabbit/Bunny)

WHILE READING THE BOOK

These activities check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

Use the following discussion and journal prompts and quotes from the chapter book to engage in discussions, to model reading and thinking strategies, and to develop critical thinking skills (making connections, asking questions, visualizing, inferring, predicting, summarizing).

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What makes you happy? What makes your heart happy?
- What is joy? What sounds bring you joy?
- What makes a person brave? Share some examples from the story? (Kôhkom, Eden, Arya, Sarah) Why are they brave? (p.5, p.64, p.87–89, p.94–97)
- Where do you feel most at home?

QUOTES FROM THE BOOK

Page 20: *I turn the color of a squished Saskatoon berry.*

Page 57: *I feel my cheeks turning squished Saskatoon berry.*



Ask students the following journal or discussion prompts:

- What are Saskatoon berries? (also known as saskatoons, service berries)
- What just happened here? How do you think that character feels? Have you ever felt like that?
- Why did the author use the fruit saskatoon berry instead of strawberry or apple?

*It was an important berry for the Cree. The name Saskatoon originates from the First Nations Cree noun *misâskwatômina*.

Page 62: *My heart feels full watching all of the rainbows of ribbons touching the ground and swinging into the blue sky.*

- When does your heart feel full?

Visualization: Ask students to think about the words rainbow, ribbons, and swinging.

- Make a picture in your head, a mental image. What colors are in the rainbow you visualize? What direction are the ribbons going? (This will help with the Visual Arts extension activity.)

Page 40: *It is better to listen than talk when I am looking for answers.*

- When do you think it is better to listen than to talk?
- What does Sarah learn when she listens?

USING QUOTES TO DRAW ATTENTION TO LETTERS AND WORDS

Students are learning or have learned about capitalization and punctuation. These quotes demonstrate language forms and conventions are always evolving. Most of the sentences in all capitals appear at the beginning of the chapter. Discuss why the authors chose to use all caps (e.g., to express a strong feeling or emotion, yelling, a signal on how to read aloud).

p.30: *I hear laughing. LAUGHING on the phone.*

p.32: *I CAN'T BELIEVE I FELL ASLEEP. I REALLY did put my feet up just like Kôhkom does.*

p.39: *I SQUEEZE MY EYES AS TIGHTLY SHUT as I can.*

p.43: *I WALK BEHIND ÂHÂSIW AND GROW more nervous by the second.*

p.62: *I don't know how to dance, but I really, REALLY, really want to.*

AFTER READING THE BOOK

These activities inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions. The activities will continue to develop reading critical thinking skills, problem solving, and summarizing.

1. Making Connections to the themes

After reading the story, ask students to make connections to their lives or experiences and/or other stories they may have read or listened to.

- Do you know another story where the main character was nervous?
- Kôhkom gave Sarah a special gift, a shawl. How did it make her feel? Describe a special gift you have received or been given. How did it make you feel (giving or receiving)?
- What does this story remind you of? Do you know any other stories about being proud of who you are or being brave?
- Share a story about a time you were brave or shared proudly about who you are.

2. Summarizing the story

Retelling stories (orally and/or in writing) helps to develop an understanding of the story's structure (a beginning, middle, and an end) and the use of sequencing words. Ask students to retell Sarah's story. You may wish to use a story map or appropriate grade level graphic organizer.

3. Writing letters

Sarah and Eden have been writing letters to each other. Take this opportunity to have students co-write (or independently) write letters to the author, illustrator, friend, or family member. Brainstorm questions you might ask Sita MacMillan, Azby Whitecalf, a friend, and/or family member.

- What is your favorite part of the story? Who is your favorite character?
- What adventures do you think Sarah will have next?
- What was your favorite image to draw? Why did you choose the medium? What is your favorite medium to create with?

4. Creative writing

Create a recipe: How to be a good friend.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

These activities are only a start. They are designed to support the goal of helping students explore the story and their own creativity.

LANGUAGE

In addition to the Cree vocabulary list from the story, create a new list that reflects the traditional territory you are on and the Indigenous language(s) that are spoken there. You may also wish to add languages that the students speak in your classroom. (e.g., Greetings: *Tansi'* (Cree). *Boozhoo* (Ojibway), *Kwe'* (Mi'kmaq)).

*Notice if there isn't a word for a certain animal in another language, have students reflect on why (perhaps that animal is not Indigenous to their country).

- Invite students to create a classroom vocabulary book. Each student can draw an image.

INQUIRY LEARNING

1. Âhâsiw is a crow. Learn about crows and ravens. Prompts for learning: What are the differences between them? How can you identify them? Can you see them in your neighborhood?
2. Go for a community walk or walk in your school yard. Listen for other birds. Learn about them. Can you identify a bird by their song?
3. Where do you see them in the sky at a certain time of day? During different seasons?
4. What are Saskatoon berries? Where can you find them? Why are they important to Cree and other Indigenous peoples?

THE ARTS

Using the quote on p. 62: *My heart feels full watching all of the rainbows of ribbons touching the ground and swinging into the blue sky.*

Invite students to explore and create a visual representation of what this might look like. Offer a variety of mediums like watercolor or pastels for their creation. No need for an example as we want students to use their creativity to express what they see in their minds. You may wish to have pictures of rainbows and ribbons for them to handle.

- Create a dance or movement to express the quote.
- Create music or soundscape to accompany that sentence.
- Chose an image from the story and create a soundscape.

