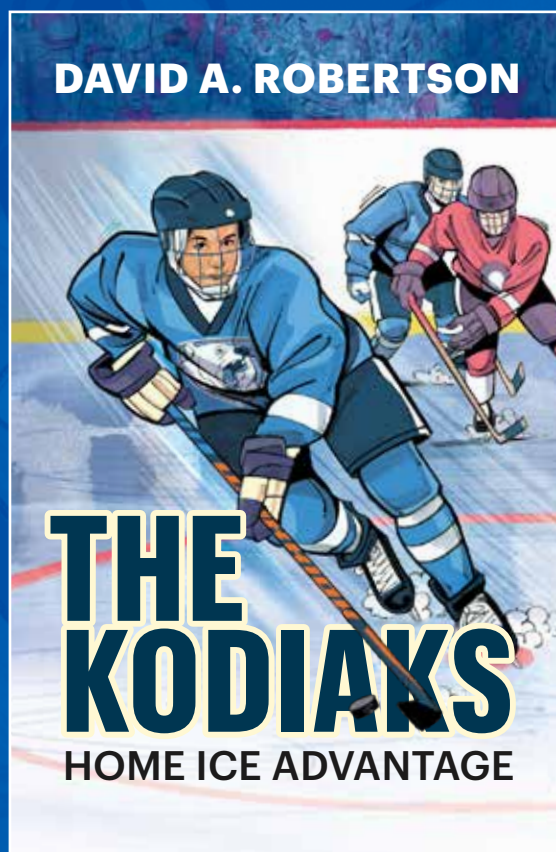


TEACHER GUIDE FOR

THE KODIAKS

HOME ICE ADVANTAGE

Empowering Youth to Change Conversations
On and Off the Ice in Grades 4–6



Jerica Fraser

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Introduction

The Kodiaks: Home Ice Advantage by David A. Robertson is an action-packed middle-grade novel about overcoming adversity and being proud of who you are. As the story begins, everything is changing for 11-year-old Alex Robinson. After his father accepts a new job, Alex and his family move from their community of Norway House Cree Nation to the city of Winnipeg. For the first time in his life, Alex doesn't fit in. His fellow students don't understand Indigenous culture. Even a simple show of respect to his teacher gets Alex in trouble.

Things begin to look up after Alex tries out for a local hockey team. Playing for the Kodiaks, Alex proves himself as one of the best, but he becomes a target because he is Indigenous. Can Alex trust his teammates and stand up to the jerks on other teams? Can he find a way to fit in and still be who he's meant to be? Alex's perseverance will inspire young readers to ask questions, learn about Indigenous Peoples and perspectives, and take action against racism and discrimination.

Key Themes and Connections

- Contemporary Indigenous stories
- Courage and determination
- Family and community
- Friendship
- Identity and belonging
- Impacts of colonization
- Indigenous cultures, protocols, and perspectives
- Leadership
- Prejudice, racism, and stereotypes
- Residential schools and intergenerational impacts
- Self-esteem and self-reliance
- Social emotional learning
- Social justice

Before Reading: Considerations

Contextualizing Colonialism in Communities and Sport

The Kodiaks provides students with an accessible starting point for learning about complex topics such as racism and discrimination and for challenging conversations about the ongoing impacts of colonialism. Historically, many Canadians did not learn about colonialism and its ongoing negative impacts on Indigenous Peoples and communities. Indigenous stories and histories were often missing from school curricula. Those that were included were frequently written by non-Indigenous authors and depicted Indigenous Peoples inaccurately and as generalized and homogeneous stereotypes. These stereotypes linger in the Canadian consciousness today and continue to harm First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

When reading *The Kodiaks*, it will be helpful to contextualize for students the effects of colonialism on Indigenous experiences, including in sport. Today, students have a greater awareness of the residential school system. There are many resources to help them understand that this system was created to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian society. By design, it did not provide Indigenous children with opportunities to find their gifts and follow their dreams. Rather than receiving an education, Indigenous children at residential schools were forced to work long hours in various trades to maintain the schools' operations and offset their chronic underfunding.

However, students and educators alike may not be aware that Indigenous children were sometimes given opportunities to access sport in residential or day schools. Rather than a simple pastime, sport was weaponized as a tool to "civilize" Indigenous children. Only sports that emphasized Western concepts of discipline were offered; this has been described as using recreation as a form of re-creation.¹ Hockey was the primary sport used to move Indigenous children "further toward the goal line of civilization."²

Contextualizing Racism and Exclusion in Sport

Upon returning home from residential school, First Nations individuals faced barriers to participating in sports outside of their own communities. Because of the pass system—a surveillance measure to control the movement of First Nations individuals—those living on reserve had to receive permission from an Indian Agent to leave their community.³ Likewise, under the Indian Act, it was illegal for Status Indians under 19 years of age to leave the country unaccompanied, making it difficult to travel to competitions outside of Canada.⁴

Barriers stemming from colonialism continue to impact Indigenous Peoples' participation in sports. Indigenous athletes may face racism including harmful stereotypes and racial slurs, particularly in sports such as hockey in which participants are predominantly white. While it is crucial to highlight that despite these challenges

1 John Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879–1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), 37.

2 Milloy, *A National Crime*, 97.

3 For more information on the pass system, see "Indian Act and the Pass System," Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., June 23, 2015, <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indian-act-and-the-pass-system>; Rob Nestor, "Pass System in Canada," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, July 16, 2018, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/pass-system-in-canada>; and *The Pass System*, written, produced, and directed by Alex Williams, Tamarack Productions, 2016, <http://thepasssystem.ca/>.

4 For further reading, see Fred Sasakamoose, *Call Me Indian: From the Trauma of Residential School to Becoming the NHL's First Treaty Indigenous Player* (Toronto: Viking, 2021).

Indigenous Peoples have shown incredible resilience and made tremendous contributions to sport, it is also important for students to understand this history and its impacts. In connection with this learning, students can begin to understand the role they can play in making their communities better for everyone, on and off the ice.

For more information and ideas for protocols and approaches for engaging with Indigenous histories, teachings, arts, and stories, refer to the Teacher Guide for Heart Berry Bling: Engaging Respectfully With Indigenous Stories and Their Themes in Grades 1–8, available through Portage & Main Press, at <https://www.portageandmainpress.com/Books/T/Teacher-Guide-for-Heart-Berry-Bling>.

Supporting Student Literacy With Diverse Texts and Choice in Junior Classrooms

Providing students with opportunities to select texts that connect with their lived experiences, diverse identities, and personal interests (such as sport) can increase student engagement and literacy skills. Students can determine for themselves if a text is of interest or could be potentially triggering for them. Allowing students to select texts helps them become more confident in their learning and decision-making. In addition, this creates an opportunity for educators to shift their position from being the expert in the classroom to learning alongside students.

NOTE: Educators should be familiar with *The Kodiaks* and aware of the slurs and stereotypes referenced within to help students navigate these aspects of the text. This includes discussing with students the history of stereotypes, why they persist today, and why they are not appropriate for use and do not need to be repeated to understand the harm they cause. If reading aloud, encourage students to skip over slurs.

For more ideas of how to nurture students' love of learning and reading and how to embed Indigenous ways of knowing in the classroom through inquiry and choice, see the Teacher Guide for Little by Little: Empowering Young Leaders to Build Stronger Communities in Grades 3–6 (available September 2024), from Portage & Main Press, at <http://www.portageandmainpress.com>.

During Reading: Guiding Questions to Empower Students to Build Better Communities

As you read with students, you can support student learning by asking guiding questions that lead to discussion and help deepen their understanding of, and ability to make personal connections with, the text. These questions have been designed to encourage students to learn about Indigenous Peoples and perspectives, think critically about how they might ask questions about racism and discrimination, and take action to improve their schools and communities.

- Preview the front cover. What elements are familiar? What other elements do you notice or wonder about? What questions do you have about the text after exploring both the front and back covers?
- Think about a time that you, or someone you know, had to go through a big change. What happened? How did this event make you, or the person you know, feel? What learning or growth came from this experience?
- Alex must move with his parents from his home community of Norway House Cree Nation to Winnipeg. What emotions, challenges, and/or personal growth do you think Alex might experience with this move?
- In what ways does George show support for Alex? What might this reveal about George and the Norway House Cree Nation community?
- When Alex first moves to Winnipeg, he notices some differences between his home community and the city. What are these differences?
- Alex soon realizes that things are also different on his new hockey team, the Kodiaks, than they were on his old team. What might this foreshadow about his future with the team?
- How do you think colonialism and historical events such as the residential school system connect to the racism Alex experiences?
- Alex worries about revealing to Jenny that he is Cree. Why do you think he feels this way? What impacts might racism have on Alex's sense of identity and self-esteem?
- In what ways do Terrence's and Coach's words affect Alex's health and well-being? What might this indicate about the powerful effects one person's actions and/or words can have on another person?
- What are some ways Alex's family, friends, and community support him through his experiences?
- What are some characteristics of a leader? How does Alex show leadership while playing for the Kodiaks?
- As you near the end of the book, consider how the author has helped readers understand Indigenous perspectives, histories, traditions, and contemporary realities. What have you learned from the text?
- At points throughout the story, Alex is the only one to speak up and educate others about racism. Why is it important for other people to speak up to support Alex?
- Why is it important to learn about diverse and distinct peoples, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, in school? How might this knowledge have helped Alex at school and on the ice? How might it have helped his coaches and teammates?
- How does Alex show courage and bravery throughout the text? What changes could his teammates, parents, coaches, and league make so Alex does not have to be as brave next year? What suggestions can you think of that would help support Alex?

After Reading: Suggestions to Extend Learning and Encourage Students to Take Action

After reading *The Kodiaks*, students can undertake the following activities individually, in groups, or as a class to deepen their learning.

- Indigenous Peoples have a long history of contributing to sport in what is now commonly referred to as Canada. Explore the diverse contributions of Indigenous athletes. What challenges did they face in their sports? How did they overcome these challenges? What can we learn from their experiences?
- In *The Kodiaks*, the reader comes to understand the critical role education plays in creating safer spaces in arenas, schools, and communities. How might you educate your school community on something you learned about Indigenous Peoples from reading *The Kodiaks*? Collaborate on a project to share your learning with others, such as creating a school awareness campaign, forming an allyship group in your school, or compiling your learning in a format that can be shared with other classes. Consider connecting with the Indigenous education department in your school board to invite Indigenous community members into your school.
- How could you work with your peers to make your classroom and school a more inclusive and accepting space? Consider some ways you and your peers might learn about each other's distinct cultures and diverse histories. What actions can you take individually or as a group to extend your learning to the whole school? What commitments can you make to continue your learning in the future?

JERICA FRASER is a Rotinonhsión:ni (Kanien'kehá:ka) educator. Throughout her career, she has focused on anti-racism and anti-oppressive education not only in her classroom, but in the education system as a whole. She writes and collaborates on Indigenous-focused curriculum and workshops as well as courses for educators. She has her Master's in Education with a focus on social justice and Indigenous health studies. Jerica is passionate about learning and reclaiming the languages of her grandparents and recently graduated from the Mohawk Language and Culture program at Tsi Tyónnheht Onkwawén:na and Queen's University. She looks forward to continuing her learning and teaching Kanien'kéha in the future.

TEACHER GUIDE FOR **THE KODIAKS** **HOME ICE ADVANTAGE**

**Empowering Youth to Change Conversations
On and Off the Ice in Grades 4–6**

Use this guide alongside *The Kodiaks: Home Ice Advantage* to explore themes of self-esteem and identity; the ongoing impacts of colonialism, particularly in sport; discrimination and racism; and building better communities through education.

Written by Rotinonhsión:ni (Kanien'kehá:ka) educator Jerica Fraser, the *Teacher Guide for The Kodiaks: Home Ice Advantage* supports educators in:

- engaging learners before, during, and after reading
- using the suggested activities, questions, and ideas for inquiry
- selecting texts that connect with students' lived experiences, diverse identities, and personal interests
- providing context and practising cultural appreciation when introducing Indigenous stories
- confronting stereotypes with sensitivity in the classroom and beyond
- encouraging action-based responses to classroom learning to create inclusive spaces

Activities in this teacher guide are approachable and engaging and are most appropriate for grades 4–6. This guide can be used in a range of subject areas including social studies, history, and language arts.



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