

Barren Grounds, The: The Misewa Saga, Book 1

The first book of a series, “The Barren Grounds,” is an authentic Indigenous story about a fantasy world discovered by two foster children, Morgan and Eli, who find themselves living in the same foster home. They traverse a hidden portal and embark on a magical but dangerous journey in the frozen, barren land of Misewa, guided by Ochek and their animal companions. Suitable in a Grade 4–9 classroom, this resource lends itself well as a whole-class read-aloud or as a literature circle choice. It may be used to explore the fantasy genre or as part of a unit about Indigenous stories.

CURRICULUM FIT

Does the resource support BC curriculum?

Extensively

THIS PRODUCT SUPPORTS THE CORE COMPETENCIES OF THE BC CURRICULUM:

- Communication
- Creative Thinking
- Critical thinking
- Positive Personal and Cultural Identity
- Personal Awareness and Responsibility
- Social Responsibility

This story supports the Grade 4–9 English Language Arts Big Ideas of “exploring stories, exploring multiple perspectives and making connections to our world.” It also supports the Grade 5 and 6 Science Big Ideas related to the solar system and the “First Peoples concept of interconnectedness in the environment.”

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM USAGE

This resource could be used as a whole-class read-aloud or as a part of a unit on fantasy or Indigenous stories. It can also be used as a literature circle book or as a supplement to a unit on space and the constellations. This story retells the Cree legend of how Ochek (The Big Dipper) came to be in the sky.

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Indigenous Peoples:

The book talks about “white saviours” who foster Indigenous children to “save” them.

Belief System:

They talk a lot about the “Creator,” who is seen as the creator of life in some Indigenous cultures.

Socio Economic:

The children in this story are part of the foster care system, which is a definite reality for many Indigenous students.

Violence:

Some of the animals in the story are killed or maimed. The wolf tries to take Eli, and Ochek cuts his throat. The man in the story shoots arrows at the group and hits Ochek.

Safety:

The children venture into an unknown frozen land and are taken in by an animal stranger. They choose to start a journey that will be dangerous.

Do the social considerations support, rather than detract from, student learning?

Extensively

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS COMMENTS:

The story falls into the fantasy genre, and the situations the children find themselves in have a magical quality. The violence is situational and between talking animals. It is not gratuitous nor overly gory.

GENERAL CONTENT

CONTENT

Should this product be identified as Canadian?

Yes

Is the resource engaging?

Extensively

Is the content current for the intended curriculum and grade?

Extensively

Is the content accurate for the intended curriculum and grade?

Extensively

Is the content timely and important for student broad understandings?

Extensively

Is the resource an Authentic First Peoples Text?

Yes

AUDIENCE:

Is the content appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

Extensively

Does the resource provide opportunities for creative and critical thinking?

Extensively

Is the level of detail appropriate?

Extensively

Is the language use appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

Extensively

This book is engaging and draws students into the story with the familiar fantasy genre while being an authentic Indigenous text. It also speaks to children who are in foster care. The children both have very different journeys in the foster care system. At the beginning of the story, a map shows the land travelled in the fantasy portal.

TECHNICAL DESIGN

Does the resource make effective use of the medium?

Extensively

Is the resource easy to use?

Extensively

Is the use of font, text size and presentation uniform?

Extensively

This book has 247 pages, divided into twenty-seven chapters, including an epilogue. The font and text presentations are uniform, and the layout is clear and consistent.

PRINT NOVEL

Does the text show insight into the complexity of the human condition?

Extensively

Does the text broaden students' experiences and understanding?

Extensively

To what degree is this text stylistically rich?

Extensively

PLOT DESCRIPTION:

Morgan and Eli are foster children placed in a home together. Morgan decides to share her secret hideaway with Eli. They discover a portal in this hideaway that transports them to another land where animals talk and walk on two legs and are stuck in a place where all seasons have become winter. Through interactions with the animal characters, they embark on a journey to recover the summer birds stolen by a man. The journey to "the green place" is fraught with danger, and their survival is not guaranteed. They successfully free the summer birds, but their guide, Ochek, is killed by the man and his spirit now lives in the sky as the Big Dipper. The children vow to return soon.

RELATED COMMENTS:

This story shows the inner struggle of the children, especially Morgan, as she works to connect to her Indigenous heritage. She often hears whispers of her mother, who she did not previously remember. She thought her mom abandoned her, but through dreams, she realizes this wasn't the case. Both

children grow through their experiences in Misewa, despite not initially being accepted by the residents.

GENRE:

- Adventure
- Fantasy

LITERARY HIGHLIGHTS:

- Complex conflict
- Rich Characterization

TYPE:

Novel

CURRICULUM FIT

Does the resource support BC curriculum?

Extensively

THIS PRODUCT SUPPORTS THE CORE COMPETENCIES OF THE BC CURRICULUM:

- Communication
- Creative Thinking
- Critical thinking
- Positive Personal and Cultural Identity
- Personal Awareness and Responsibility
- Social Responsibility

This story supports the Grade 4–9 English Language Arts Big Ideas of “exploring stories, exploring multiple perspectives and making connections to our world.” It also supports the Grade 5 and 6 Science Big Ideas related to the solar system and the “First Peoples concept of interconnectedness in the environment.”

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM USAGE

This resource could be used as a whole-class read-aloud or as a part of a unit on fantasy or Indigenous stories. It can also be used as a literature circle book or as a supplement to a unit on space and the constellations. This story retells the Cree legend of how Ochek (The Big Dipper) came to be in the sky.

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Indigenous Peoples:

The book talks about “white saviours” who foster Indigenous children to “save” them.

Belief System:

They talk a lot about the “Creator,” who is seen as the creator of life in some Indigenous cultures.

Socio Economic:

The children in this story are part of the foster care system, which is a definite reality for many Indigenous students.

Violence:

Some of the animals in the story are killed or maimed. The wolf tries to take Eli, and Ochek cuts his throat. The man in the story shoots arrows at the group and hits Ochek.

Safety:

The children venture into an unknown frozen land and are taken in by an animal stranger. They choose to start a journey that will be dangerous.

Do the social considerations support, rather than detract from, student learning?

Extensively

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS COMMENTS:

The story falls into the fantasy genre, and the situations the children find themselves in have a magical quality. The violence is situational and between talking animals. It is not gratuitous nor overly gory.

GENERAL CONTENT

CONTENT

Should this product be identified as Canadian?

Yes

Is the resource engaging?

Extensively

Is the content current for the intended curriculum and grade?

Extensively

Is the content accurate for the intended curriculum and grade?

Extensively

Is the content timely and important for student broad understandings?

Extensively

Is the resource an Authentic First Peoples Text?

Yes

AUDIENCE:

Is the content appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

Extensively

Does the resource provide opportunities for creative and critical thinking?

Extensively

Is the level of detail appropriate?

Extensively

Is the language use appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

Extensively

This book is engaging and draws students into the story with the familiar fantasy genre while being an authentic Indigenous text. It also speaks to children who are in foster care. The children both have very different journeys in the foster care system. At the beginning of the story, a map shows the land travelled in the fantasy portal.

TECHNICAL DESIGN

Does the resource make effective use of the medium?

Extensively

Is the resource easy to use?

Extensively

Is the use of font, text size and presentation uniform?

Extensively

This book has 247 pages, divided into twenty-seven chapters, including an epilogue. The font and text presentations are uniform, and the layout is clear and consistent.

PRINT NOVEL

Does the text show insight into the complexity of the human condition?

Extensively

Does the text broaden students' experiences and understanding?

Extensively

To what degree is this text stylistically rich?

Extensively

PLOT DESCRIPTION:

Morgan and Eli are foster children placed in a home together. Morgan decides to share her secret hideaway with Eli. They discover a portal in this hideaway that transports them to another land where animals talk and walk on two legs and are stuck in a place where all seasons have become winter. Through interactions with the animal characters, they embark on a journey to recover the summer birds stolen by a man. The journey to “the green place” is fraught with danger, and their survival is not guaranteed. They successfully free the summer birds, but their guide, Ochek, is killed by the man and his spirit now lives in the sky as the Big Dipper. The children vow to return soon.

RELATED COMMENTS:

This story shows the inner struggle of the children, especially Morgan, as she works to connect to her Indigenous heritage. She often hears whispers of her mother, who she did not previously remember. She thought her mom abandoned her, but through dreams, she realizes this wasn't the case. Both children grow through their experiences in Misewa, despite not initially being accepted by the residents.

GENRE:

- Adventure
- Fantasy

LITERARY HIGHLIGHTS:

- Complex conflict
- Rich Characterization

TYPE:

Novel

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

READABILITY:

- At intended grade level(s)

A teacher's guide is available on the publisher's website (https://tundrabooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-Barren-Grounds_Educators-Guide.pdf), as is a pronunciation guide for the Cree words in the book. This book was a finalist for the 2020 Governor General's Literary Prize for young people's literature.

BOOK ONE OF THE MISEWA SAGA



THE BARREN GROUNDS

DAVID A. ROBERTSON

Author/Publisher/Website

Robertson, D. A.

Copyright

2020

Primary Identifier

9780735266100

Recommended Grades & Subjects/Courses

4-9

Evaluation/Record Entry Date

Aug/2021

Subject

English Language Arts

ID

[View recommended grades and subjects](#)