

BOOK TWO OF THE MISEWA SAGA

THE GREAT BEAR



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



DAVID A. ROBERTSON

is the author of numerous books for young readers, including *On the Trapline*, which won the 2021 Governor General's Literary Award. *The Barren Grounds*, the first book in the middle-grade The Misewa Saga series, received a starred review from *Kirkus* and was a *Kirkus* and *Quill & Quire* best middle-grade book of 2020, as well as a USBBY and Texas Lone Star selection, and was shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award, the TD Canadian Children's Literature Award and the Ontario Library Association's Silver Birch Award, among many others. A sought-after speaker and educator, Dave is a member of the Norway House Cree Nation and currently lives in Winnipeg. For more information, visit his website: www.darobertson.ca and follow him on Twitter: @DaveAlexRoberts

This guide was created by **APRIL WATERS**, a Métis educator from Treaty One territory in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. She has been a classroom teacher and Indigenous Education teacher for over a decade, and provides instructional support and professional development for educators in bringing authentic Indigenous perspectives, culture and history into their classrooms.

THE GREAT BEAR

In this second book in the Narnia-inspired Indigenous middle-grade fantasy series, *Eli and Morgan* journey once more to Misewa, traveling back in time.

Back at home after their first adventure in the Barren Grounds, Eli and Morgan each struggle with personal issues: Eli is being bullied at school and tries to hide it from Morgan, while Morgan has to make an important decision about her birth mother. They turn to the place where they know they can learn the most, and make the journey to Misewa to visit their animal friends. This time they travel to the past, meeting a young fisher who might just be their lost mentor. Discovering the village is once again in peril, Morgan and Eli must dig deep within themselves to find the strength to protect it from destruction. But can they carry this strength back home to face their own challenges?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Eli's braid is something that has always been important to him. What do you learn about the braid in this novel? Why do you think Eli cuts it off? How do you think he feels after?
2. Katie and James have tracked down Morgan's birth mother, and give her name and phone number to Morgan. Throughout the story Morgan struggles with the decision to connect with her. Why do you think Morgan hesitates to call her? If you were in Morgan's shoes, would you call her?
3. Morgan and Eli have to deal with racist attitudes and actions from students at their school. Eli says, "If I could stop being brown, I'd do that too." What advice do Morgan and Emily give to Eli? Have you or someone you know ever been discriminated against for who you are? How did you handle that situation?
4. Morgan and Eli learn from Ocheq's family about how the Pisiskowak (animals of Misewa) receive their names. How are names given to them in Aski? How is it different from how names are given on Earth? How is it similar?
5. Mihko talks about something called "blood memory" on page 102: "'This place,' he said deliberately, 'is woven into the fabric of your beings. It's part of you, and it always has been. Kayas, long ago. Before time was. It called you here for whatever reason, and you heard its call.'" What do you think Mihko means by blood memory? Do you have a strong connection to a place where you feel you belong?
6. "And it was hard to feel worry or nervousness or sadness or any negative emotion where they were. Morgan and Eli were living the good life in Misewa, and all of those bad feelings were forgotten." (page 112) In Cree, mino pimatisiwin means the good life. What do you think it means to live the good life? Do you think it's possible for Morgan and Eli to live the good life in Winnipeg? Would the good life in Misewa look different from the good life in Winnipeg?
7. Compare Morgan and Eli's reactions to their bullies with how the villagers in Misewa and Otakosik have reacted to Muskwa.
8. Morgan's feelings towards Katie and James begin to change in the novel. Nikamon, Ocheq's mother, says to Morgan on page 105, "Niwakomakanak, my relatives, are all the beings in this village, whether they are blood or not. It's the same for you." What do you think she means by this? Do you think this helps Morgan?
9. Courage is an ongoing theme throughout *The Great Bear*, with different characters having to show courage in different parts of the story. Is there a time when you had to be courageous? How did you feel before/after?
10. Morgan and Eli are concerned that Muskwa destroys the history of Otakosik, as he attacks the village, but Mihko introduces the idea of Knowledge Keepers to them. What do the children learn about Knowledge Keepers? What does this tell you about the importance of storytelling and oral traditions in Indigenous communities?
11. Muskwa is very different in this novel from how he behaves in *The Barren Grounds*. Morgan is convinced that she can reach him, and he will change into the good bear that they know. Why do you think Muskwa is so angry and destructive? Do you think it is possible for people to change who they are?
12. The stories that Indigenous nations carry throughout the generations often explain why something is or how something came to be. Within *The Great Bear*, are there stories told to Morgan and Eli that do that? Why do you think these kinds of stories are told?
13. Morgan and Eli discover how Mason arrived in Aski. How do you think this knowledge will possibly impact the next book?

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. Morgan and Eli experience different situations where they are victims of racism and hate. Unfortunately, incidents like these are not uncommon. Education and allyship are essential to creating safe spaces for all. Invite community members into the school to share their experiences and lessons. Explore other texts where racism is a theme. As a class, come up with an anti-racism campaign where you can educate others in your school community. Hold discussions to identify possible issues and work together as a community to find solutions.
2. Courage is an important teaching within Indigenous communities. Invite an Indigenous Elder or Knowledge Keeper from a local Indigenous community into your classroom. Ask them if they would be willing to share their teachings and knowledge about courage. Be sure to follow proper protocols when inviting them in. Share stories within your learning community around courage and create a classroom anthology of stories.
3. Throughout *The Great Bear*, traditional medicines are used to heal injured or sick characters. There are Indigenous Elders or Knowledge Keepers within your local community who carry sophisticated knowledges of local plants and medicines that are used to heal. (Cont.)

Following the proper protocols, make a request to go on the land with them to learn. What plants were used in your area? What were they used for? How were they used? Do Indigenous people still use them?

4. Indigenous people have always told stories as a way to share and pass down their community's histories and teachings. Passing down these traditions is complex and requires a lot of memorization. How is storytelling used in Indigenous communities? How do Indigenous stories differ from the stories we typically read in and out of school? How are they similar? Research some different Indigenous stories that would have been told in your local area. Invite an Indigenous storyteller into your classroom.
5. Eli's braid is a source of pride for him, and its cultural significance is something that is discussed frequently throughout the story. There are many cultural and spiritual items, practices and ceremonies that are important to different Indigenous nations. Colonial legislation such as the Indian Act in Canada made it illegal for Indigenous peoples to practice their culture and spirituality. Research policies like the Indian Act and share your findings within your school community. How did Indigenous nations resist these policies? How can learning about this history help in the reconciliation process?

