

DAVID A. ROBERTSON

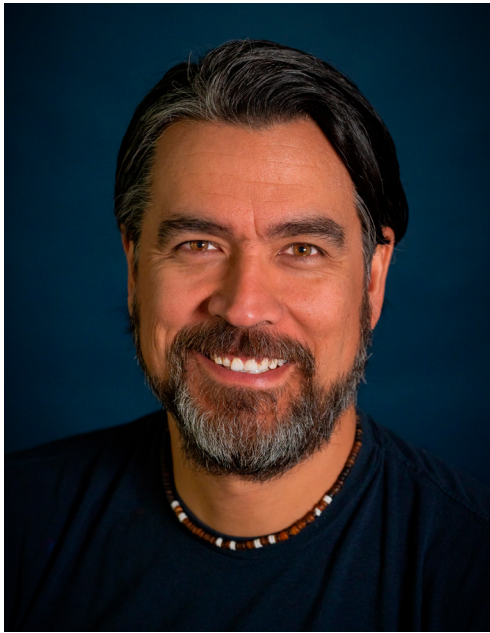
THE MISEWA SAGA



THE PORTAL KEEPER

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EDUCATORS' GUIDE



DAVID A. ROBERTSON

is the author of numerous books for young readers including Governor General's Literary Award winners *On the Trapline* and *When We Were Alone*. *The Barren Grounds*, Book 1 of The Misewa Saga series, was a *Kirkus*, NPR, and *Quill & Quire* best middle-grade book of 2020, as well as a USBBY and Texas Lone Star selection. Winner of the Writers' Union of Canada's Freedom to Read Award, as well as the 2021 *Globe and Mail* Children's Storyteller of the Year recipient, Dave is a member of Norway House Cree Nation and currently lives in Winnipeg, Canada.

For more information, visit his website: www.darobertson.ca

and follow him on

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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. She is currently an administrator of Indigenous Education and provides instructional support and professional development for educators in bringing authentic Indigenous perspectives, culture and history into their classrooms.

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THE MISEWA SAGA

Eli and Morgan experience life-changing revelations in this new adventure in the award-winning, Narnia-inspired Indigenous middle-grade fantasy series.

While exploring World's End, an area in Askí they've just discovered, Morgan and Emily delight in their developing relationship, while Eli struggles to understand his newfound power: the ability to locate a portal. A shocking turn of events leads them to a new village, Ministik, where the animal beings who live there are going missing. Horrified to discover who is responsible, the children vow to help and turn to friends old and new. But it's getting harder and harder to keep the two worlds separate, especially when details of a traditional legend change everything. Forever.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the beginning of the book, the idea of “blood memory” is reintroduced. Where does Eli feel the “pull”? Is there a place where you feel the pull?
2. As the children are out on the land traveling to Misewa, they discuss traditional roles and responsibilities of men and women. What do we learn about the work that needs to be done to run a camp successfully?
3. The children reconnect with Pip, Chaos and Pick, the Bird Warriors. How are they treated by the birds? How do their plans change?
4. The children are forced to travel to the village of Ministik. What is Ministik like in comparison to Misewa? How are the children treated there once they arrive?
5. Once again the children discover paintings within the village that tell a story or history of the community. Describe the paintings that Eli observes in Ministik. How would you interpret them?
6. How does Ace the lynx describe his relationship with Ashék the wolverine? On page 73, Eli and Ace talk about “traditional adoption.” Explain the concept and how it might happen. Do you have people in your life who you consider family, even though they might not be blood-related?
7. Eli has flashbacks to a variety of different memories with his family, before he was taken into the Child and Family Services system. What was his life like in Cross Lake? How does Morgan compare it with other things that have happened to Indigenous families in history?
8. The children and their new friends finally meet the other humans who have been returning to Askí. What happens when they meet?
9. On page 136, Eli begins to have a panic attack. What happens to him? How do Morgan and Emily help him? Why do they think it is happening to him?
10. The children make it back safely through the portal to Norway House. They then go for breakfast at Morgan’s kókom’s home. What is it like there? How does Morgan react to her kókom?
11. The children see their animal relatives on television in the Assiniboine Zoo in Winnipeg. What do they do next? How do Morgan’s kókom and Katie react? How do you think you would react if someone was explaining the same situation to you?
12. The children make their way back to Misewa to get some help from Mahihkan and Arik. What happens when they finally make it to Ministik?
13. What does Eli discover at the end of the book? How would you react to a discovery like this? How do you think this connection will impact him in the next book?

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. On page 222, Mahihkan states that “stories run through our veins like blood.” The story of Star Woman is significant in Ininew (Cree) culture and communities. It explains how the people came to be on earth. Explore different ways of learning about the story of Star Woman. There are Indigenous Elders or Knowledge Keepers within your own local community who carry similar stories. Following the proper protocols, invite them into your class to share their nation’s stories.
2. David Robertson introduces other beings, such as Wíshkécáhk, Coyote, and Raven into the novel. Research these beings further, as well as other similar ones in other Indigenous nations. How are they similar and how are they different? Using what you have learned about them, choose one that interests you the most and create an illustration of what you think they might look like. You can choose to use traditional art supplies or use a digital/ graphic art program.
3. The children and their animal relatives have the goal of making their way towards World’s End and the Sleeping Giant. What is it like when they finally make it there on page 126? How is it different from the rest of Askí? Is there a real place on Turtle Island (North America) that is referred to as “The Sleeping Giant”? Using the information that David Robertson gives you, create a model of what you think it looks like. Your model can be a drawing or painting, or a three-dimensional work such as a diorama.
4. After the battle at Ministik, the animal relatives who have passed away are honored with star blankets. What does a star blanket look like? What is their significance? Learn about star blankets through the book that is in Eleanor’s living room mfnerc.org/product/the-making-of-a-star-blanket-book/ or by inviting in an Elder or Knowledge Keeper. Try to replicate patterns with either fabric or paper.
5. The animal relatives that are kidnapped by the humans are taken to a zoo in Winnipeg. The children are devastated to learn this on the news on TV. Many people have varying opinions about zoos and the ethics around keeping animals in captivity. How do you feel about zoos in general? Break the class into two groups – those in favor of zoos, and those against. Have the groups research the topic and use their facts to formulate their arguments. Organize a class debate by breaking the class into two groups. At the end of the debate, ask the students where they stand. Have them share what they learned with the school community.