

DAVID A. ROBERTSON

THE MISEWA SAGA



THE SLEEPING GIANT

5

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.

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This guide was created by

APRIL WATERS,

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THE MISEWA SAGA

Eli and Morgan embark on a dangerous mission to rescue kidnapped animal beings in this new adventure in the award-winning, Narnia-inspired Indigenous middle-grade fantasy series.

Eli, Morgan and Emily embark on their most dangerous mission yet, to save the kidnapped animal beings of Ministik. But before they can reach the heavily guarded Land of the Sleeping Giant, Eli must rally more help, not just from old friends, but from surprising new allies. And he must rely on a new way to travel: on the back of the leader of the Bird Warriors himself, Pip. Together they will journey across the North Country, on a mission to reconnect the Bird Warriors, as well as confront old enemies. But even as he must fight for his life — and the lives of his friends and new family — Eli must also come to terms with his newfound knowledge: What does it mean that he is only part human?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. On page 17, *The Sleeping Giant* further explores the idea of blood memory. “It was his home. That’s what blood memory meant. The lives and experiences of those who came before you, whether an ancestor or a mother, lived within you. The lives and experiences and, maybe, the power.” Have you ever experienced a feeling like that before? What situation were you in and where were you?
2. Eli begins to develop his abilities to open portals and opens a portal to a memory of being at the pool. Who is he able to have a conversation with? Do they recognize him? What does this person say about Ministik? What important piece of advice does he pass on to Eli?
3. On page 52, Eli shares the quote, “I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better.” Who was he talking about? What do you think he means by that quote? Do you have any examples where you have made mistakes that you had to learn from?
4. During Pip and Eli’s journey to find Tack, they stop on the top of a mountain that is called “The Gate.” What does Pip teach him about The Gate? Why do you think Eli feels The Pull up there?
5. Eli learns about Mihko’s death while on The Gate. What does Pip tell him about what happened? Does Eli learn anything from Mihko’s experience?
6. Eli and Pip are finally able to find Tack, the sandhill crane. Describe what Tack looks like now. How do you think he is feeling about the whole situation when he left? Have you ever been in a situation like Tack, where you’ve made a mistake that needs to be fixed?
7. We learn about the story of Pip and the deaths of his family and village. What attacked and killed the Village of the Robins? Why was the village attacked? What does Eli do to honor Pip’s partner and children?
8. Pip, Eli, and Tack are attacked by lizards in the Village of the Robins. Describe the lizards. Why do the lizards want to hurt them so badly? Explain how Eli ends up saving them from death.
9. On page 127, Choch says, “It is good medicine, to let go of such hate.” Who is Choch referring to? What do you think he means by “good medicine”? What are some other things that you feel are “good medicine”?
10. In this book we see a different side of the Mistapew, as one has been captured by the humans. What is the Mistapew doing at the Sleeping Giant? How does Eli feel about the Mistapew, even after one took his soul?
11. We learn that the humans are after something called the “Green Stars”, and are forcing some of the Pisiskowak to mine them. What is protecting the Green Stars from being taken? What is the story told about Wíshkécáhk and the Green Stars? What is the connection of the Green Stars to the village of Wapan?
12. Eli gets to communicate with his Mother, the Star Woman, when he is shot. Explain their interaction. How does he feel about it?
13. Mahihkan talks about how humans act towards the land on page 175. The humans are not “all that good on the land, lucky for us. They’ve no consideration for it, and so it has little to offer them in return.” What do you think he means by that? How is the human relationship with the land different from the Pisiskowak relationship with the land? Do you agree with what Mahihkan says?

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. As Eli continues to explore who he is in this book, Arik shares some wisdom, “Who you are—human or of the stars or both—is something you have a long time to figure out,” she said, “That’s part of what life is. It’s a journey to find identity.” (page 6) As a class, try to think of all the things that could make up a person’s identity. What do we have control over and what do we not have control over? What could possibly impact how we come to know who we are? Have students think about their own identities and what they know about themselves so far on their own journeys. They can organize what they know into a web to illustrate. Have students share with the class if they feel comfortable.
2. On page 131, Eli thinks about everything that his friend Pip has gone through and how it has made him into the Warrior that he is. “In spite of what he had been through, and the hard life he had lived, he was a good and kind being. To have lost so much, and still give more, was the mark of greatness. That was what Eli found awe-inspiring about Pip now. Not the notches on his anklet, but rather the character in his heart.” Do you know of someone, either in your own life or fictional, who is similar to Pip in character? If you don’t, research someone who has remained a good human despite the challenges and adversity that they have faced. Present who you have chosen to the rest of the class and explain how they are similar to Pip.
3. David A. Robertson describes the impact on Askí by the humans and compares it to the colonization of Canada on page 146. “It felt like the history of Canada in one image: a colonized village that had been taken by settlers, a group of armed people who’d come to stay in a new place, with the villagers likely either kidnapped or murdered. Forced from their village, which they had occupied since the beginning of time, the animal beings were now suffering in a way that Eli did not want to think about or imagine.” Why do you think he used the comparison in the story? Research the impacts of the colonization of Canada, specifically on the land. In what ways is it similar to the book?
4. In this book, we learn more about the Bird Warriors. There is Pip the robin, Cee Cee the duck, Tack the sandhill crane, Mickey the eagle, Choch the blackbird, and Chaos and Pick. Go through the Cree glossary at the beginning of the book to find some words about birds. How do you think David A. Robertson named the Bird Warriors? Pick one of the Warriors and learn about that species of bird. Does that species live in your territory? Using traditional art supplies or digital tools, create an image of one of the Bird Warriors, ensuring they have the right characteristics of their species.
5. On page 27, Eli falls from the tree and opens a portal to save himself, falling into a body of water. It makes him think about the water from his home community of Cross Lake. “The lake water was so cool and fresh and earthy that he always wanted to drink it, even though the adults told him that the water near their community, and in their community, needed to be boiled first for safety. They’d been boiling water in the community for years.” Clean drinking water has been a serious issue for decades in many Indigenous communities across Canada. Go to the site *The Water Crisis in Canada’s First Nations Communities*.
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/52a5610cca604175b8fb35bccf165f96>
Research the territory you live in to see which communities cannot use their water at all or have to boil it before they can use it. Pay attention to how long some of the advisories have been in place. Choose a community with an advisory to highlight and create a poster to educate your school community about it.