



Heartdrum

An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

EDUCATOR GUIDE

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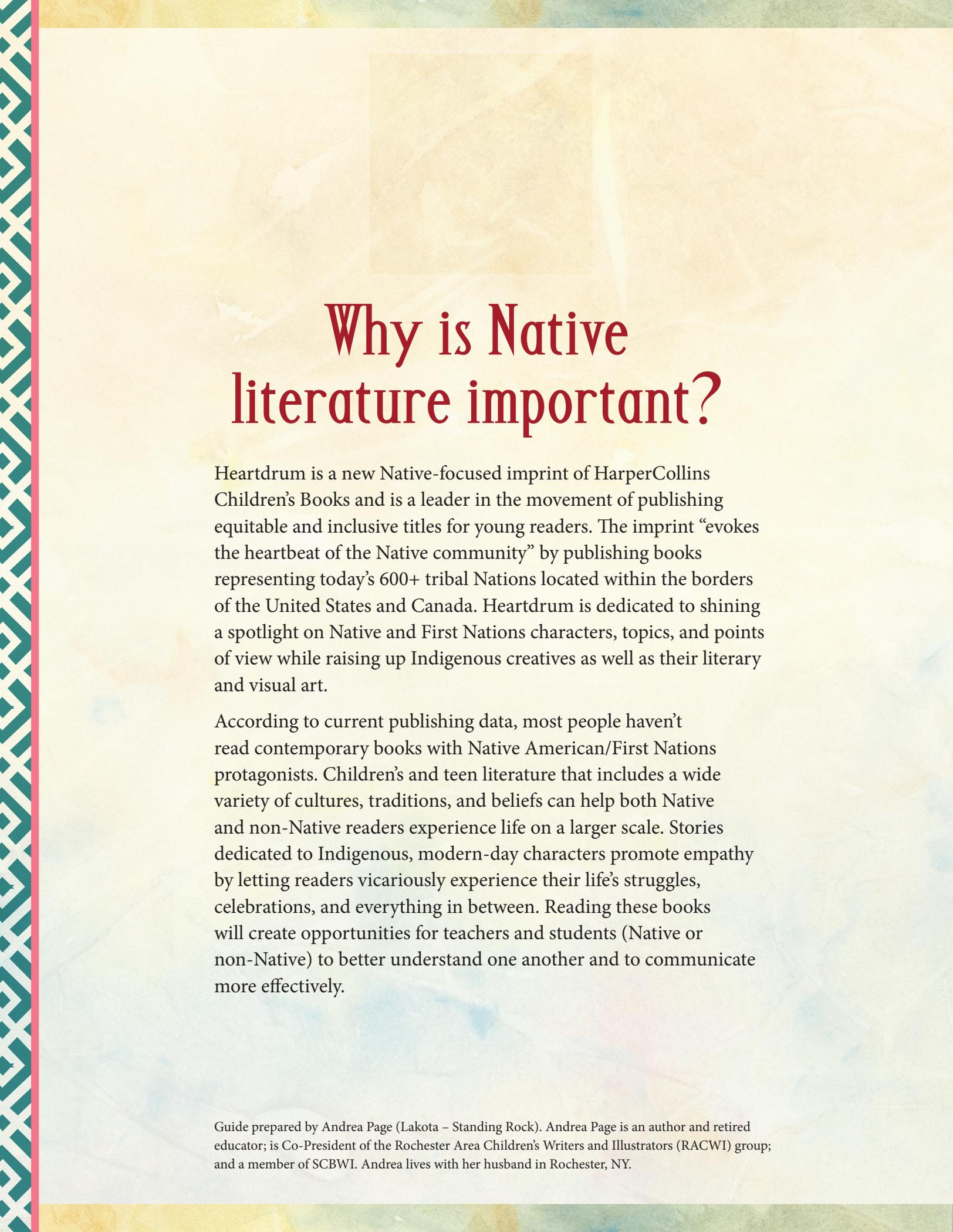
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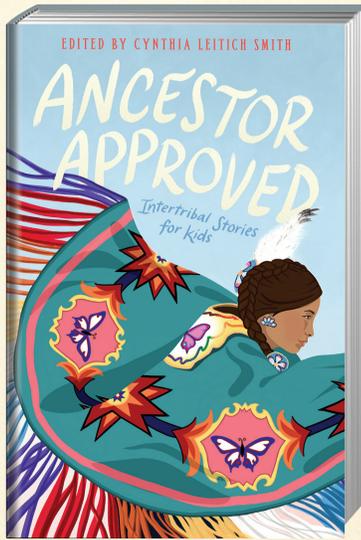
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Why is Native literature important?

Heartdrum is a new Native-focused imprint of HarperCollins Children's Books and is a leader in the movement of publishing equitable and inclusive titles for young readers. The imprint “evokes the heartbeat of the Native community” by publishing books representing today's 600+ tribal Nations located within the borders of the United States and Canada. Heartdrum is dedicated to shining a spotlight on Native and First Nations characters, topics, and points of view while raising up Indigenous creatives as well as their literary and visual art.

According to current publishing data, most people haven't read contemporary books with Native American/First Nations protagonists. Children's and teen literature that includes a wide variety of cultures, traditions, and beliefs can help both Native and non-Native readers experience life on a larger scale. Stories dedicated to Indigenous, modern-day characters promote empathy by letting readers vicariously experience their life's struggles, celebrations, and everything in between. Reading these books will create opportunities for teachers and students (Native or non-Native) to better understand one another and to communicate more effectively.



Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids

edited by Cynthia Leitich Smith

About the book

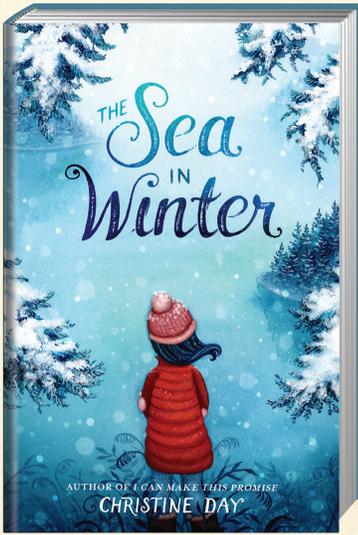
Featuring the voices of new and veteran Native writers, and edited by bestselling author Cynthia Leitich Smith, this collection of intersecting stories set at the same powwow bursts with hope, joy, resilience, the strength of community, and Native pride. Each story can be read individually, but read as a whole, the stories play off one another and intersect, providing a cohesive reading experience.

Cynthia Leitich Smith is the bestselling, acclaimed author of books for all ages, including *Sisters of the Neversea*, *Rain Is Not My Indian Name*, *Indian Shoes*, *Jingle Dancer*, and *Hearts Unbroken*, which won the American Indian Library Association's Youth Literature Award. Most recently, she was named the 2021 NSK Neustadt Laureate. Cynthia is the author-curator of Heartdrum. She is a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and lives in Austin, Texas.

Discussion questions

1. The first lines of a book hook the reader. In this book, the first section is a poem. How does this poem intrigue you and make you want to read on?
2. You'll notice the stories have a common thread—relationships. Choose one short story and describe the relationship between the characters. Why do you think building relationships with others is important? Why should people respect their Elders?
3. Which one of the short stories lingered most in your mind? Why did the story appeal to you? Name a memorable character and explain why you chose them.
4. According to the foreword to the book, the contributors coordinated their efforts to create this anthology. How do you think the team of authors organized the book *Ancestor Approved*? What are two overall themes of this collection of poems and stories?
5. Read the last poem in the book. Why do you think the book begins and ends with a poem? How are the poems connected to a theme about sharing cultures and traditions?
6. Reflect on what you learned while reading these stories. How can you connect new knowledge to your own life, family, and/or community?

Curriculum Connections: Land acknowledgement and map skills (investigate where each character starts their journey and acknowledge the tribes that once lived there with this resource <https://native-land.ca/>); Understand that there are more than one thousand contemporary Indigenous Nations within the borders of the United States and Canada (who they are, where they live, how they survive, resources used from the land, culture, and language); discuss stereotypes, racism, and mascot names respectfully; understand why people are connected to the land; identify regalia for various dances; learn Native values like community spirit and inclusion and resilience; realize the importance of “belonging” and work to include others and help them feel safe.



The Sea in Winter

by Christine Day

About the book

In this evocative and heartwarming novel, the author of *I Can Make This Promise* tells the story of a Makah/Piscataway girl struggling to find her joy again, and the family who will protect her no matter what.

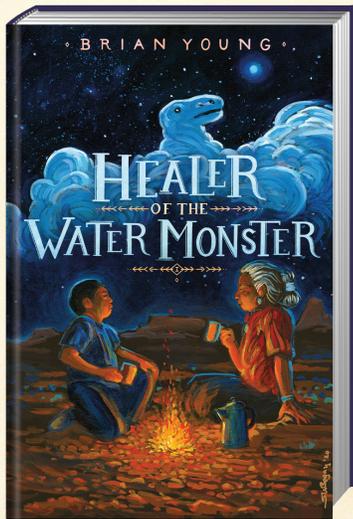
Christine Day's (Upper Skagit) debut novel, *I Can Make This Promise*, was a best book of the year from *Kirkus*, *School Library Journal*, NPR, and the Chicago Public Library, as well as a Charlotte Huck Award Honor Book. She holds a Master's degree from the University of Washington, where she created a thesis on Coast Salish weaving traditions. Christine lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband.

Discussion questions

1. Maisie's teacher begins class with a writing activity. Students must journal using the word *sanctuary* and/or its meaning. Reread Maisie's entry on page 3. What would you describe as your *sanctuary*? Why? Write your own journal entry.
2. Maisie reacts to loss of her dream by isolating herself from her friends and family. Her mood changes and she is quick-tempered with people she loves. Have you ever had a similar reaction in your life? What advice would you give Maisie to help her through tough times?
3. The author weaves history about conflict between the U.S. government and Native American Nations throughout this story. Resilience and moving forward "with the strength of your ancestors" is a recurring theme, something Maisie must learn. Choose one conflict in history mentioned in the book and discuss how hearing that story helps Maisie move forward and grow. What did you learn about being resilient? How can you apply this value to your life?
4. Nature provides many gifts, including "a little heart medicine," as Mom describes it on page 61. What do you think she means? Find one section in the book where Maisie uses her observation skills to describe the places on their trip. How does this description make you feel when you read it? Locate 2-3 lines that help you visualize the setting. Read them out loud to a partner or small group and explain why the lines intrigue you.
5. On page 150, Mom tells Maisie, "Dreams change. Realities change. People change. We all go through it in different ways." How does this statement apply to Maisie's situation? Explain how this remark applies to your life.
6. Chapter titles provide a hint about what is coming. Choose one chapter title and summarize that chapter in five sentences. Then, explain the connection between the title and the summary. (Hint: The Author's Note explains more details about two chapter titles.)

Curriculum Connections: Makah Nation history; Indigenous Treaties and land loss; Indian Citizenship Act of 1924; prejudice and stereotyping; ecological effects of river dams; the environmental importance of salmon (clams, gray whales, "nursery stumps," or oceans); narrative arc and other elements of story, such as setting; writing description and authentic dialogue; physical therapists and/or mental health therapists; finding "your sanctuary"; values, such as respect for elders, reciprocity, perseverance, forgiveness, courage; North American archaeology; Geology of the Pacific Northwest, including earthquakes.

Cover artist: Shonto Begay (Navajo)



Healer of the Water Monster

by Brian Young

About the book

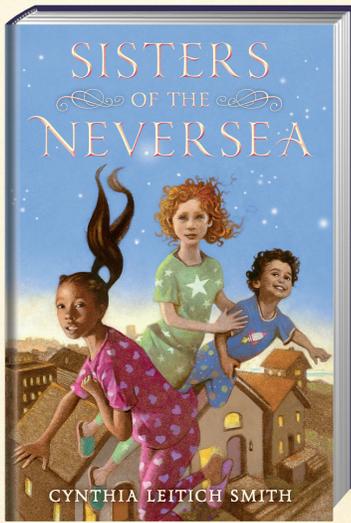
Brian Young's (Navajo) debut novel, a contemporary Navajo hero's journey, features a seemingly ordinary boy who must save the life of a Water Monster—and help his uncle suffering from addiction—by discovering his own bravery and boundless love. An outstanding debut!

Brian Young is an author and filmmaker and an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation. He grew up on the Navajo reservation in Arizona. Brian earned his BA in Film Studies at Yale University and his MFA in Creative Writing at Columbia University. Brian currently lives in Brooklyn, NY.

Discussion questions

1. Family dynamics are always changing. What strengthened Nathan's relationship with his grandmother, Nali? What challenged Nathan's relationship with his father? His mother? Uncle Jet?
2. Recurring topics include the environment, family, and friendship. What do you discover about Water Monster's sickness? How do you know Nathan perceives Water Monster as a genuine friend?
3. Being selfless takes courage. When did you know Nathan was fully invested in helping Nali, Uncle Jet, and Pond? Explain Nathan's actions that helped you determine your answers.
4. How does Nathan change from the beginning of the story to the end of the story? In your opinion, did Nathan fulfill his promise to heal Water Monster? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think the author created two parallel journeys for Nathan? Explain how both paths relate to today's society.

Curriculum Connections: Navajo culture; sacrifice and family relationships; using Earth's gifts with respect; the importance of clean water and the Water is Life movement; traditional planting techniques vs. conventional planting techniques; human choices and consequences to the environment; uranium mining on the Navajo Nation in the 1950s and its effects; Native American veterans; overcoming struggles such as bullying, divorce, alcoholism, and depression; problem-solving with fortitude.



Sisters of the Neversea

by Cynthia Leitich Smith

About the book

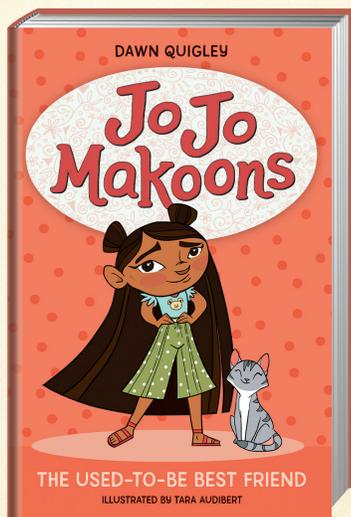
In this modern take on the classic *Peter Pan*, award-winning author Cynthia Leitich Smith (Muscogee Creek) brilliantly shifts the focus from the boy who won't grow up, to Muscogee Creek Lily and English Wendy—stepsisters who must face dangers and embrace wonders to find their way home to the family they love.

Cynthia Leitich Smith is the bestselling, acclaimed author of books for all ages, including *Rain Is Not My Indian Name*, *Indian Shoes*, *Jingle Dancer*, and *Hearts Unbroken*, which won the American Indian Library Association's Youth Literature Award. Most recently, she was named the 2021 NSK Neustadt Laureate. Cynthia is the author-curator of Heartdrum. She is a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and lives in Austin, Texas.

Discussion questions

1. The idea of kinship, or a family connection, is central to Native cultures. Relatives respect, care for, and support one another. How can you connect this to the Roberts-Darling family?
2. Wendy and Lily travel through different environments on Neverland, an island surrounded by Neversea. Why is the forest important in this story? Are all species important for keeping nature in balance? What do you think will happen to the baby tiger cub in the future?
3. Many stories include obstacles and opposing forces. In the beginning, Wendy and Lily seem at odds, but once they reunite on the island, they resolve their differences. How do they accomplish this? How can people resolve conflicts peacefully?
4. Elders have an important role in our lives, as stated in an excerpt from page 170: "Michael heard stories of generations past and present from Aunt Lillian and other leaders around kitchen tables, and sometimes they all went together to community events with storytellers, too." Choose an elder from the story (Aunt Lillian; Clifford, the last Native elder on the island, etc.) and explain why they are significant to the story.
5. Which character do you think achieved the most growth in a positive way? Explain why.
6. Why do you think the author chose third person omniscient point of view to write this story? How does this point of view help tell an engaging tale?

Curriculum Connections: Muscogee Creek Nation History; Mound builders; Migration of Five Tribes into present day Oklahoma; Indian Removal Act of 1830; acculturation/assimilation; Treaties and land loss; Freytag's plot pyramid and narrative arc; Fantasy Fiction genre; point of view; analyzing text (compare/contrast); Author study-Cynthia Leitich Smith; Ecosystems and the environment; Biodiversity and balance in nature.



Jo Jo Makoons: The Used-to-Be Best Friend

by Dawn Quigley and illustrated by Tara Audibert

About the book

The first book in a chapter book series about a spunky young Ojibwe girl who loves who she is, written by American Indian Youth Literature Honor-winning author Dawn Quigley (Ojibwe), and illustrated by artist Tara Audibert (Wolastoqey).

Dawn Quigley is a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe, North Dakota. Her debut YA novel, *Apple in the Middle*, was awarded an American Indian Youth Literature Honor. She is a PhD, education university faculty member, and a former K–12 reading and English teacher, as well as Indian Education program codirector. She lives in Minnesota.

Tara Audibert is a multidisciplinary artist, filmmaker, cartoonist, animator, and podcaster. She owns and runs Moxy Fox Studio where she creates her award-winning works, including the animated short film *The Importance of Dreaming*, comics *This Place: 150 Years Retold* and *Lost Innocence*, and “Nitap: Legends of the First Nations” an animated storytelling app. She is of Wolastoqey/French heritage and resides in Sunny Corner, New Brunswick, Canada.

Discussion questions

1. Before you read, study the cover art, read “About This Story,” and look at the character wall. What kind of person do you think Jo Jo Makoons is? What do you think will happen in this story?
2. Next, look at the cat illustration at the beginning of chapter 1. What does her expression mean? Make a guess: What is the cat telling you about chapter 1?
3. Mama calls out, “Josephine Makoons Azure” to ask a question. What do you think that means? When did your caregiver call you by your full name? Tell a friend what happened.
4. Jo Jo Makoons says, “I don’t understand Kokum’s way of thinking,” a few times throughout the story. What does she mean about understanding her Elder?
5. Kokum’s advice is to be friendly to everyone by saying “please” and “thank you,” by smiling, and by holding back and not saying something that’s not nice. What is your advice for finding new friends?
6. (Bonus) During the class lesson, Chuck writes, “Dog jogged on the log.” And Jo Jo writes, “Please do not touch the couch.” Who understands how to rhyme words? Explain why.

Curriculum Connections: Learning new vocabulary; identifying what fiction means; previewing a story and making predictions; understanding character traits; making inferences; building meaning from illustrations; learning about diabetes (Classroom Toolkit at www2.jdrf.org); Native/First Nations values: community sharing, respect for Elders, caring for the environment by reusing materials, enjoying humor.