



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 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, inclusion, and resilience; realize the importance of “belonging” and work to include others and help them feel safe.



Why is Native literature important?

Heartdrum is a 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 1000+ 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 yet read contemporary books with Native American/First Nations protagonists. Children's and young adult 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 struggles, celebrations, and daily lives. Reading these books creates opportunities for teachers and students (Native or non-Native) to better understand one another and to communicate more effectively.



Heartdrum

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EDUCATOR GUIDE

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