

I Am Osage

by Kim Rogers, illustrated by Bobby Von Martin

About the book


Clarence Tinker was born in 1887 and wanted to make a difference in the world. He believed in himself and his Osage culture. He joined the United States Air Force during World War II and moved up the ranks, eventually becoming the first Native American Major General. He pursued dreams that seemed impossible. Through his perseverance, he became a role model and a hero to his community. Osage people celebrate his life each year at a community gathering and sing a song to honor him.

Kim Rogers is the award-winning author of *Just Like Grandma*, illustrated by Julie Flett, and *A Letter for Bob*, illustrated by Jonathan Nelson. She is an enrolled member of Wichita and Affiliated Tribes and is a member of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. Much of her writing highlights her Wichita heritage. Kim lives with her family on her tribe's ancestral homelands in Oklahoma.

Bobby Von Martin is an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Born into a family of professional artists, he fell in love with art from a very young age. He is passionate about including cultural influences and historical subject matter in his paintings to inspire children and adults in Native American communities, and he volunteers as an art teacher for Native youth. He lives in Fresno, California.

Discussion questions

1. Listen to the story on the first two pages and study the text. How do the type and the arrangement of the words guide you in reading the story aloud? How do the words and the vibrant illustrations connect?
2. Listen for a drumbeat rhythm as you hear the rest of the story. Search for other repeated patterns in the story. Notice how some of the text stands out in a certain way. Why do you think the author included these patterns?
3. The illustration style is unique. How do the color and style of the illustrations make you feel on the first spread? On the third spread? On the fifth spread?
4. How are the characters different on the second spread? On the right side of the sixth spread?
5. What do you learn about Clarence Tinker? About Osage culture and traditions? (Hint: read the Author's Note, too.)
6. On the eighth and ninth spreads, we learn that Clarence wanted to become an officer, but he wasn't sure the official would let him. How did Clarence continue to work hard and pursue his dreams? How do the text and illustrations inform you?
7. Some text is brief and not in full sentence form on page 23. What does this text reveal? How does the abrupt text make you feel? Why?
8. Open the book so you can see the front and back covers together. Study this, the title page, the thirteenth page, and pages 19 and 20. Which portrait of Tinker shows he reached his dreams? How does the illustration show that? Explain.
9. Double-page spreads cause a reader to pause and linger. As you study the last spread, what do you see? Hear? Feel? How do you know Tinker is a real-life hero?



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.



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