

Northern Lights: The Soccer Trails

written by Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak • illustrated by Vladyana Krykorka

genre: PICTURE BOOK, FICTION

themes: STORYTELLING
LEGENDS AND FOLKTALES
NATIVE PEOPLE
DEATH/LOSS
SCIENCE AND NATURE
MULTICULTURAL TALES
ARCTIC
COMMUNITY

suitable for: GRADES 1–4

This is a picture book about a little girl growing up in the Arctic. With the help of her grandmother's story about the Northern Lights, she learns how to cope with the death of her mother.

Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak bio: Michael Kusugak grew up in Repulse Bay, a small village in the Northwest Territories. During his childhood, Michael's family traveled by dog team; they lived in igloos in the winter and tents in the summer. He had no access to books as a child, and didn't speak a word of English until he was seven. "Every night, my grandma would tell us a story to put us to sleep," he recalls. "I take things that are native to me, such as the northern lights, and create a story around them."

Vladyana Langer Krykorka bio: Often choosing a medium of watercolor and pencil, Vladyana illustrates with vibrant colors that enliven diverse themes. Rich borders and endpages with elaborate, stunning decorative designs distinguish her work. Her love of animals has also inspired her to sneak a few furry creatures onto each page. She has illustrated all the titles by acclaimed Inuit storyteller Michael Kusugak. In total, Vladyana has illustrated over 20 picture books for children, including several additional titles for Annick Press.

The following activity ideas ...

... are only a start. There are many possibilities for helping students construct meaning from text.

Comprehension activities:

- help readers to extend their general knowledge from prior experience
- develop reading strategies for comprehension
- bring relevance to the act of reading
- foster discussion and reflection through response to the text and illustrations

Before

STARTING THE BOOK

Activities to set the tone or introduce the topic of the book, establish prior knowledge and interest, and develop predictions of what the text will be about.

- A 1. Display a map of Canada and pictures of Baffin Island and other northern areas. Begin a list of children's activities and words describing life in the Far North. Introduce Inuit words: *Kataujaq* (rainbow), *Mamaq* (you smell so nice), *Aqsalijaat* (the trail of those playing soccer), *amaut* (decorative parka).
- A 2. Display other books by Michael Kusugak. Research the author's life growing up as an Inuit and the influences shown in some of the other books he has written. Share this information with the students and read aloud the autobiographical note on the back of *Northern Lights: The Soccer Trails*.

READING THE BOOK

Activities to check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

- B 1. Read to page 8 and then stop to lead a discussion about what the students have heard (teacher reading aloud) and seen (teacher showing the pictures) so far.
Use questions such as the following:
- What do you know about Kataujaq so far?
 - Who is in her family?
 - What does she like to do?
- B 2. Read to page 10 and then stop to explain that the story has suddenly changed. Now we know that Kataujaq is looking back at the happy days when she was younger. At this point in the story she is very sad.
Lead further discussion with questions such as the following:
- What has happened to make Kataujaq feel sad?
 - What could help her feel better?
- B 3. Throughout the book are photographs taken by the illustrator of beading on an *amaut* (decorative parka) belonging to Rhoda Karetak of Rankin Inlet, Canada. Ask questions to help the students describe the pattern work in the beading. On the second-last page, bring the students' attention to the *amaut* and its bead-work in the illustration of Kataujaq's mother looking down on him from the northern lights.
Bring in other examples of beadwork and set up appropriate art activities to have the students create and explain their own patterns.

READING THE BOOK

Activities to inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions.

- C 1. Turn back to show the picture on page 10. Lead a discussion with questions such as the following:
- How do we know from the picture that Kataujaq is feeling sad?
 - Who was it that helped Kataujaq? How?
 - Think about yourself. What do you do when you feel sad?
 - If you had a problem, who could help you?

Hand out, or ask students to make, a large five-pointed star. On each point ask students to write the name of a person they could talk to if they were needing help.

Lead a discussion with questions such as the following:

- How would talking to someone help you with your feelings?
- What would show that that person was a good listener?

- C 2. In this story, the girl believes that her mother's spirit is in the starry night sky as part of the northern lights. This is a fictional explanation for the scientific occurrence called the northern lights or aurora borealis. Lead a discussion with questions such as the following:
- Why are there legends or stories made up to explain natural phenomena?
 - Do you think these legends are not true (fiction)? or true (non-fiction)?
 - Why do legends continue to be passed on from grandparents to grandchildren?

Ask the students to interview their grandparents or parents and describe in class any stories or beliefs from their families that explain things which also have a scientific explanation, for example the noise of thunder or how rabbit got his tail.