

FIRE SONG

by Adam Garnet Jones

Genre: Fiction

Themes: Indigenous, Native; suicide; LGBTQ; family relationships; friendship; multigenerational; acceptance; sexuality; secrets; siblings; stereotyping; teens; diversity

Suitable for: Grades 9–12

Guided Reading Level: Z+

Common Core standards : RL.9-12.1,2,3,4,5,6,7
L.9-12.4,5, 5a, 6
SL.9-12.1,1b,1c,1d, 2,3,4,5,6
W.9-12.1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9,9b,10

STORY ELEMENTS

- Analyze the impact of Adam Garnet Jones’s choices in developing different story elements.
- Discuss:
 - Where the story is set
 - How the characters are introduced and developed (Shane, Jackie, Evie, Davis, Uncle Pete, Tara, Destiny, Debbie, Kyle).

STRUCTURE

- Analyze how Adam Garnet Jones structures *Fire Song*.
 - Where does he begin and end the story?
 - What is the climax of the story and where does it occur?
 - How do the different strands in the story come together at the end?
 - How does the structure contribute (or detract from) the story?

POINT OF VIEW

- Analyze how the author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in the book.
- Why do you think Tara’s first-person point of view is important to the story?
 - How do her poems contribute to the story?
 - How would the story change if it were told from the point of view of another character?
 - From whose point of view is the following quote? “Indians have hard lives, Indians die young. It’s sad but it’s the way of the world.” Is this actually true? What information from the story supports this statement?

CHARACTERIZATION

- The characters in *Fire Song* are Indigenous people of the Anishinaabe tribe living on a reserve (the rez) in Canada. The characters struggle with frustration that is deep-rooted in history. Explain.
- Why is it ironic that Shane's nickname was "College"?
- What are some traditions of the Anishinaabe people? Which characters follow tradition?
 - What are the different characters' beliefs, hopes, dreams, values, morals, fears, strengths, weaknesses, vices, and talents? What do they do and say to reveal themselves?
 - How do they conduct themselves?
 - How do other characters react to them?
- Discuss the coping skills of the characters including "drifting" and writing.
- How does Shane talk himself out of joining Destiny in the "spirit world"?
- How would you describe the culture, society, and mood of the reserve?
- Choose one of the characters from the story. Write an essay on how they change and grow from the beginning to the end of the story. What events contribute to this transformation?
- If you were a friend of Shane's, what advice would you give him if he asked?

CONFLICT

- Discuss conflict in *Fire Song*.
- What people, forces, ideas, values, and institutions oppose each other?
- What decisions must the characters make?
 - Between what two things are they deciding?
 - What do these "things" represent?
- Find examples of the following conflicts from the book:
 - man vs man
 - man vs fate
 - man vs society
 - man vs nature
 - man vs self

THEMES

- There are many themes running through this book: sexuality, coming of age, death/loss, survival, and abuse. Discuss two or more of these themes and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account.
- In the end, how does the theme of balance prevail?

LITERARY DEVICES

- Discuss the literary device of foreshadowing. What indications does Jones give to warn about future events in the story?
- What does the “Toronto brochure” symbolize?
- Find examples of metaphor, simile, and hyperbole from the story.
- Why do you think Jones uses repetition of words and phrases throughout the book? Find examples and explain.
- What is the definition of irony? Identify the ways Jones uses verbal and dramatic irony in the story.

REFLECTIONS

- Is literature always an accurate reflection of life?
- How does “realistic fiction” connect with readers in a believable way?
- In what ways has literature brought you to a greater understanding of yourself, your family, your friendships, or your world?
- How are your reading choices and genre preferences related to your personality or life experiences?
- How does reading literature give opportunities to explore life and experiences through different perspectives?
- Are conflicts faced by fictional characters often magnified beyond what is reasonable, or at their core do they reflect common experiences faced by many readers?
- Did you learn anything valuable from *Fire Song*?

DISCUSS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FOLLOWING QUOTES FROM THE STORY

- “He can name the pieces of his mother that left with Destiny—the piece that loves the sun, the piece that laughs and teases, the piece that keeps watch over him—all of that’s gone, and it may never come back.”
- “It makes him sick to be so close to her and so far away at the same time.”
- “I tried to do it once. A couple of years ago. I had a knife in my hand and I was ready to do it and everything.”
- “When he opened the cover, he saw page after page of names, pictures, and obituaries. All suicides, disappearances and accidental deaths in the community over the past thirty years.”
- “Think people here are going to let you be who you want to be?”
- “They were able to maintain the old ways through the decades when it was illegal to sweat or drum or speak the language. Their rebellion is the only reason they weren’t lost forever.”
- “It’s a comfort and a cage.”
- “It’s not about right and wrong. It’s about making that money and getting your ass to school.”
- “You’d be more good to us if you stayed here. Bad things happen when people go down south.”
- “It’s good to have other young men as friends. Not too close though. Too much male energy is no good. There has to be balance.”
- “Seems like the only way out is to live, no matter how much it hurts.”
- “If our ancestors were brave enough to leave the place they came from in order to find something that feeds them, I can give it a shot.”
- “He was walking taller and his back is broader, as if coming out to his family has given his body permission to grow.”

MAKE REAL WORLD CONNECTIONS

- Read the facts!
 - First Nations (status and non-status peoples), the Inuit, and Métis are collectively referred to as Indigenous people.
 - Suicide and self-inflicted injuries are the leading causes of death for Indigenous youth and adults up to 44 years of age.
 - Historically, suicide was a very rare occurrence amongst Indigenous peoples (Kirmayer, 2007). It was only after contact with Europeans and the subsequent effects of colonialism that suicide became prevalent.

- Read the following risk factors provided by The Center of Suicide Prevention, which can place an individual at risk for suicide. Relate these risk factors to the characters in the book. Work in small groups to devise a solution or program that will decrease the risk factors for future generations.
 - Depression and other mental illnesses
 - Alcohol and drug dependency
 - Hopelessness
 - Low self-esteem
 - Sexual abuse and violence
 - Parental loss
 - Homelessness

- Create a PowerPoint presentation explaining how things changed for First Nations people after contact with the Europeans and how colonialism affected this society.

Watch the movie *Fire Song*

- Analyze, compare, and contrast the different representations of the story. Evaluate how the film version interprets the story.