



Educator Guide

INDIAN SHOES

By Cynthia Leitich Smith
Cover art by Sharon Irla
Interior illustrations by
MaryBeth Timothy



About the Book



CYNTHIA LEITCH SMITH
INDIAN SHOES

Ray Halfmoon and his Cherokee-Seminole grampa have a special bond. They live in a “steel and stone city” (Chicago) while longing for the familiar and peaceful surroundings of their family’s tribal town home in Oklahoma. Read INDIAN SHOES to watch their relationship grow through special events in their lives, like attending baseball games, caring for pets, entering an art contest, and fishing at night. Author Cynthia Leitich Smith arranged this collection of six interrelated short stories to capture the loving, respectful relationship between grandson and grandparent. Ray resolves each story conflict with the help of Grampa and his wisdom. Often, the results are comical and endearing.

Cynthia Leitich Smith

Cynthia Leitich Smith is a bestselling, acclaimed author of books for young readers, 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 in YA fiction. She also was named the 2021 NSK Neustadt Laureate and is the anthology editor of ANCESTOR APPROVED: INTERTRIBAL STORIES FOR KIDS. Cynthia is the author-curator of Heartdrum, a Native-focused imprint of HarperChildren's. She is a citizen of the Muscogee Nation and lives in Austin, Texas.

About the Illustrators

Sharon Irla (Cherokee) is a contemporary Cherokee artist whose collective body of works span the fields of painting, murals, graphics and photography. Her studio is located in Cherokee Nation, Oklahoma.

MaryBeth Timothy (Cherokee) often shares her affinity for Oklahoma wild birds, animals and wildflowers through her art. With her husband John (Muscogee), she has traveled and participated in art shows and other venues around the country, winning many awards along the way. They incorporate elements of their tribal cultures into their work. They are based in Muscogee Nation, Oklahoma.





Discussion Questions

- 1.** Previewing and looking for patterns is a good way to make predictions. As a reader, you can also organize knowledge to help you better understand what you read. The author provides clues about the characters (Ray and Grampa Halfmoon) and their relationship. To preview: study the front and back covers, read page 1, then read each chapter title in the Table of Contents. Look at the illustrations inside. What did you find out about Ray? His grampa? Where do you think they live? Predict what troubles they may encounter together.
- 2.** Read the first paragraph of each of the chapters. What did you notice the author doing to help the reader enter the story? Which of the five senses did she use to begin each story?
- 3.** In Native cultures, landscape plays an active role in people's lives. It's clear there is a close — even spiritual — relationship with nature. Read pages 9-10 and identify the phrases where the wind evokes certain feelings and affects a character's reaction or decision. Make a chart to record these phrases and its effect on the characters.
- 4.** Authors use foreshadowing to drop hints about what is going to happen in the future. Go to page 14 and read this passage: "*That's how it goes with weddings,*" *Grampa said, slipping the ring into his jacket pocket.* "*This or that always goes wrong.*" What do you think the author is trying to tell the reader? Why would an author use foreshadowing?
- 5.** In "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" the setting and action are used to transition from one place to the next. Find and copy your favorite examples of transitions in this story. How does the author use sensory details, similes, and strong verbs to move the action forward?
- 6.** No matter what Ray's obstacle is in each story, Grampa is available to help. Sometimes his attempts cause more chaos, but Ray perseveres. Identify a situation where Ray hides his hurt feelings from Grampa. Why does he do that? Even though Ray wants to give up, he continues. How does Grampa encourage Ray to carry on? Identify a "big idea or theme" about perseverance.
- 7.** Find objects in the story that symbolize a "feeling of home" and "safety." Discuss in small groups. Include an object that symbolizes home and safe feelings for you.
- 8.** Perseverance, hard work, caring for others, and respecting your Elders are common Native values. Locate a scene that shows these values. Discuss with a small group.





Discussion Questions

9. Values Spotlight: Examine value lessons learned by Ray. Identify a value for each statement [see the first 3 examples and complete the rest]. Rank the lessons by putting them in an order you think are most important to learn. (1- most importance to 5 least importance). Be prepared to explain why. *Hint: There is no right or wrong answer.

- a. Ray listens to Grampa's stories about his earlier life. [respect for Elders]
- b. Ray trades his high-top sneakers for a pair of worn moccasins. [caring for others]
- c. Ray puts a smile on his face and remains positive, despite disappointment. [perseverance or respecting Elders]
- d. Ray and Grampa trudge through terrible weather to care for the neighbors' pets. []
- e. Grampa arrives at the game with neon orange and purple hair. []
- f. Ray finishes his homework before painting artwork to enter a contest. []
- g. Ray gets up early in the morning (even though he doesn't want to) to go fishing. []

10. In INDIAN SHOES, each chapter can be a short story on its own. The author connects the chapters in a different ways. She uses the same characters, places them in different situations, and uses statements like, "Ray and Grampa traipsed down the cracked sidewalk of the stone and steel city" several times to blend the stories. How is INDIAN SHOES the same and different from chapter books you've read before?

11. In the Author's Note, Cynthia Leitich Smith explains how she got the idea to write this book. What does she hope you will take away from reading stories about grandparents?

Curriculum Connections

Literacy (Genre—Contemporary Fiction, previewing, foreshadowing, making predictions, character motivation and goals, conflicts, symbolism, main character solves his own problems, secondary characters), Native cultures (Cherokee, Seminole, urban Native people, perseverance, respecting Elders and the Earth, education is important, caring for individuals, community, and tribe), historical actions like trading and bartering respectfully, writing (sensory details, similes, metaphors, using personal experiences for ideas, determining importance within storytelling).

About the Guide

Written by author-educator Andrea Page (Lakota - Standing Rock). Andrea is Co-President of the Rochester Area Children's Writers and Illustrators (RACWI) group and a member of SCBWI. Andrea lives with her husband in Rochester, NY. Visit www.WriterAndreaPage.com.

Edited by Gayleen Rabakukk

Design by Bree Bender

