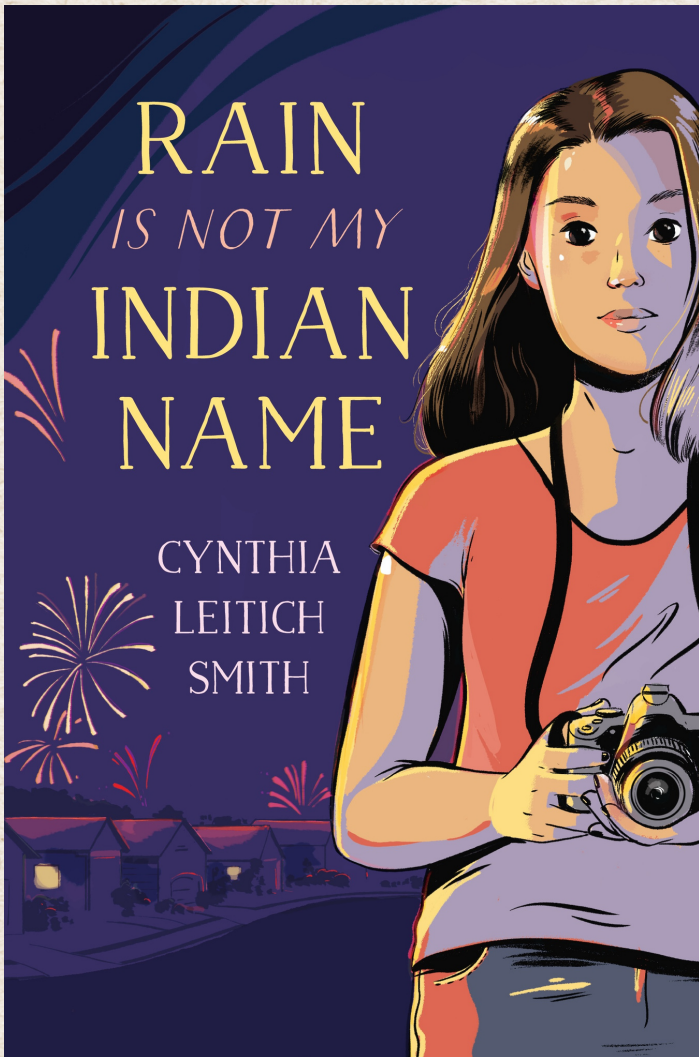


# Educator Guide

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## RAIN IS NOT MY INDIAN NAME

By Cynthia Leitich Smith

Cover art by  
Natasha Donovan

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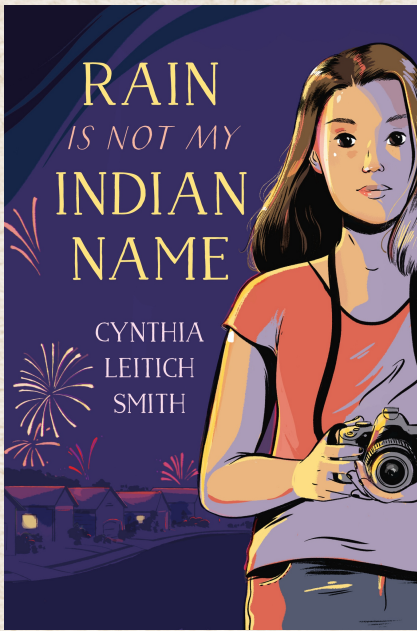




# About the Book

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Tween and teen readers meet Cassidy Rain Berghoff (Muscogee) in *RAIN IS NOT MY INDIAN NAME* as she and her best friend Galen decide to take their relationship in a new direction. Later that evening, Galen loses his life in a road accident. Rain slowly emerges from a six-month mourning period with the help of family, only to be thrust into the middle of a showdown between Galen's mom (Mrs. Owen) and Rain's Aunt Georgia over the local Native Youth Summer Camp. Rain uses her photojournalism skills to cover the story for the local paper, contemplate her Indigenous identity, and honor Galen's life.



## RAIN IS NOT MY INDIAN NAME

By Cynthia Leitich Smith  
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## Cynthia Leitich Smith

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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 Cover Artist

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Natasha Donovan (Métis) is an illustrator with a focus on comics and children's illustration. Her Métis family are the Delarondes and the Morins from Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, but she spent most of her time growing up amongst the moss and ferns of Vancouver, Canada. She holds a BA from the University of British Columbia, and prior to illustration, she worked in academic and magazine publishing. Currently, she makes her home on a tiny farm along with several wonderful creatures in Deming, Washington.







# Discussion Questions

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1. At the beginning of the story, protagonist Cassidy Rain Berghoff is emotional about her time with Galen. The author paints a layered picture of Rain. Re-read page 9, when Grampa gives Rain the sad news: *"That was Mrs. Owen on the phone," he said. Grampa knelt at my bedside, and his cold hands cradled my warm ones. "This is going to be hard, but... I'd best just spit it out. She called to let us know that Galen passed away last night. It was an accident, Rainbow. Nobody's fault." My eyes grew heavy, fuller, like sponges. My lips and fingertips chilled.*

Sensory details enhance the scene's emotions and illuminate Rain's feelings.

Go to page 15 and re-read the scene when Rain ventures out in public for the first time in months. Her family encourages her to take small steps, and one day she does—to the grocery store. *The whoosh of the automatic doors alerted store clerk Lorelei of my arrival. Her eyebrows-high stare almost made me miss my camera. I could imagine her on the phone the minute I left: "Rain Berghoff sighting, aisle six."* This passage reveals how Rain is observant. She has a photographer's eye and slips in a humorous response. How is Rain like you? Maybe you've felt regret about something. Perhaps you've hidden yourself away. Or you have a "photographer's eye" or another special skill. Use character trait words and describe a similar situation you've encountered.

2. Rain was the last person to see Galen before the accident. Should she feel guilt-ridden? Why or why not?

3. Rumors and assumptions can cause hurtful worldviews. Misunderstandings occur based on hair styles and textures, skin color, education, or associations with others. Locate an example in the story of how a misconception affected Rain, her family, and/or her community. Discuss the conflict and whether characters resolved it. What did you learn about the topic? Identify a big idea/theme about rumors, assumptions, and/or misconceptions?

4. Re-read the journal entry on page 20. Why do you think the protagonist's parents named her Rain? Why are her journal entries important to the overall story?

5. Rain's movements in the story allow the reader to witness snippets of Native history. Author Cynthia Leitich Smith does not stop mid-story "to teach" these meaningful words/concepts: traditional tear dress (p21), settlers' cotton (p21), intertribal group (p58), Ojibwe wild-rice harvest (p58), Haskell (p66), Trail of Tears (p76), Native bridge builders (p114), Seminole and Black-Native alliances (p133). Investigate the meanings of these words/phrases. How does this new knowledge add to the story? Why do you think the author skipped explaining these words in the middle of the story?







# Discussion Questions

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**6.** RAIN IS NOT MY INDIAN NAME is considered realistic fiction. On page 34, Rain describes both an external and internal conflict: *Bottom line: Mrs. Owen needed voters for round two of her run for mayor, Aunt Georgia needed money for Indian Camp, and my big mouth had stuck me in the middle. If I did nothing, it would look like I was siding with Mrs. Owen. If I joined Indian Camp, it would look like Aunt Georgia had pressured me – something she'd never do. Besides, the way I saw it, my heritage was not something to be talked about in the weekly news. To think Fynn wondered why I never left the house.*

Do you think Rain's struggles are realistic? Why or why not?

**7.** Describe the setting (present day Hannesburg, Kansas, a fictional town in Douglas County). How does the setting influence the events, characters' actions, and decisions?

**8.** In the chapter "Stop the Presses" (p78 -85), people defended their position with petitions and persuasive essays. Teens brainstormed other actions (making copies of their letter, placing them on windshields, posting online) to convince others of their viewpoint. And, Rain asked, "How about letting it go?" then later, ran away. Which strategy to defend and convince was most effective? Explain why.

**9.** Kinship is an important value in Native cultures. Locate one instance and discuss how Rain shows the importance of "family" in the story.

**10.** How does Rain make sense of her "new" life without Galen at the end? How has she changed for the better?

## Curriculum Connections

Elements of literature (characterization, setting, plot structure), teen social issues (alcohol, pregnancy, death), research Native cultures and/or history (Muscogee, Cherokee, Osage, Ojibwe, Seminole, Trail of Tears, U.S. federal Indian boarding schools,) and Native worldview, writing argumentative essays, active small-group discussions and debates, wild rice ecosystems, Native bridge builders and how they impacted growth and economy of their areas, photography and photojournalism careers.

## 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](http://www.WriterAndreaPage.com).

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Design by Bree Bender

