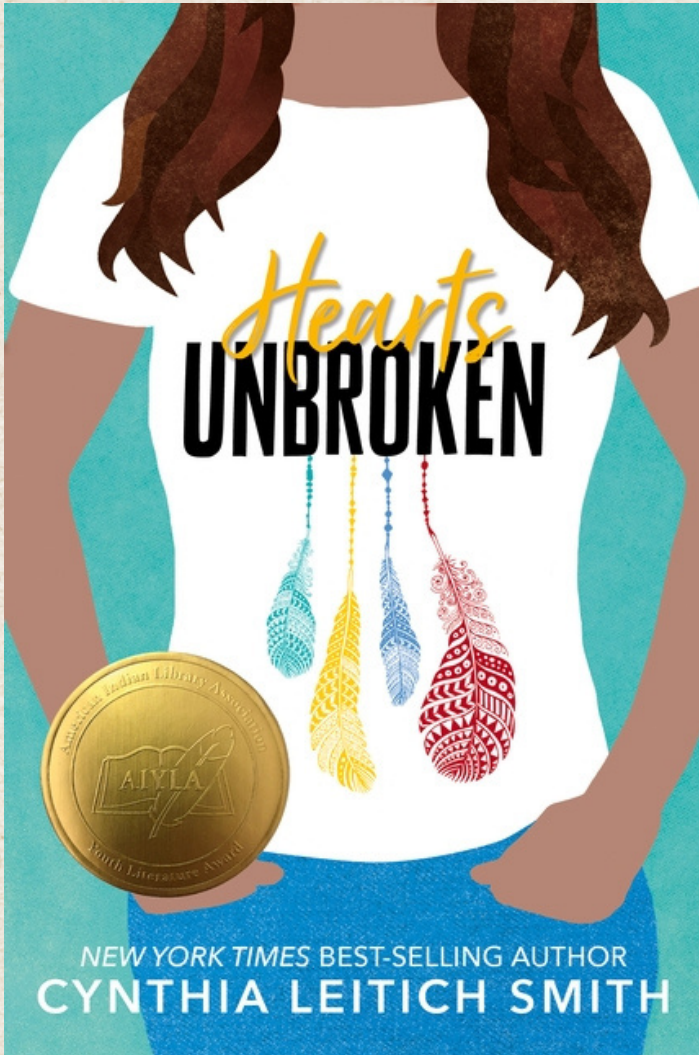


Educator Guide

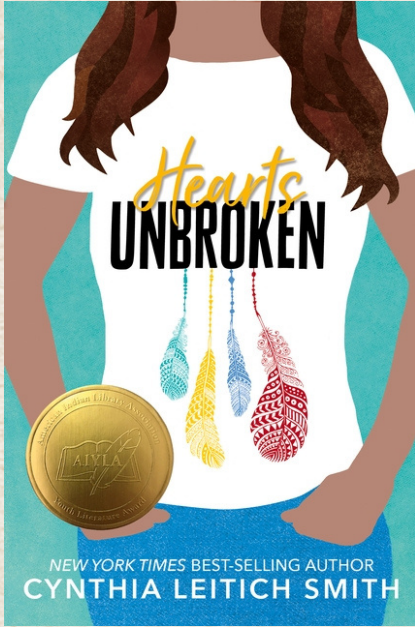


HEARTS UNBROKEN

By Cynthia Leitich Smith



About the Book



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As a Native teenager, Louise “Lou” Wolfe (Muscogee) must navigate not only daily life in her senior year in a middle-class suburban high school, but prejudice and bigotry, too.

In HEARTS UNBROKEN, Lou has an ugly breakup with her popular boyfriend, Cam. Then, she competes for a spot as a features reporter for the school newspaper, *The Hive*. Her editor pairs Lou with Joey, a student photojournalist and videographer, as a reporting team covering the controversy around the color-conscious casting of the school musical.

The new faculty director stands firm on embracing a diverse cast for the school’s latest play, “The Wizard of Oz.” Meanwhile, Lou’s younger brother Hughie auditions and earns the part of the Tin Man, while a Black girl wins the role of Dorothy and a Latinx boy lands the role of the Scarecrow. Some parents object, claiming that this is a departure from tradition and questioning the BIPOC actors’ acting/singing abilities. Cast members also receive anonymous threats.

Ultimately, Lou (and Hughie) must decide how to use their words responsibly for the greater good. Along the way, Lou and Joey spend time together, covering newsworthy school events, and their teen love blooms.

Cynthia Leitich Smith

Cynthia Leitich Smith (Muscogee Citizen) is a NYT bestselling author and was named the 2021 NSK Neustadt Laureate. Her novel HEARTS UNBROKEN won an American Indian Youth Literature Award. Her recent books include ANCESTOR APPROVED: INTERTRIBAL STORIES FOR KIDS, an ALA Notable Book and winner of the Reading of the West Book Award for Young Readers, as well as SISTERS OF THE NEVERSEA, which received six starred reviews and made numerous “best of the year” lists. Her debut tween novel RAIN IS NOT MY INDIAN NAME was named one of the 30 Most Influential Children’s Books of All Time by Book Riot. Her 2023 release is the YA novel, HARVEST HOUSE, an Indigenous ghost mystery. Cynthia is the author-curator of Heartdrum, an imprint of HarperChildren’s and was the inaugural Katherine Paterson Chair at the Vermont College of Fine Arts MFA program.





Discussion Questions

1. The protagonist Louise (Lou) Wolfe knows who she is and dearly loves her family. She and her first boyfriend Cam have conflicting backgrounds, and when he minimizes her heritage, Lou has the courage to walk away. On page 12, she thinks through different ways to break up and decides. What does her decision tell you about her character? What is her weakness? Predict some consequences of her decision.
2. Chapter 3 reveals Lou's family background. What did you learn? What does she mean when she says on page 18, "I'd been home long enough for the rhythm in my speech to down shift... joked more freely..." Discuss a place in your life where you feel the same way.
3. Lou is observant. On page 27-28, she is aware of her mother's feelings while pursuing a higher education. She gauges the strengths and weaknesses of her little brother, an incoming freshman, and intends to protect him. On page 85, Lou shows she is determined when she "botched her last attempt at the feature" story and, as a result, does more prep work before she proposes another idea. What other traits does Lou have that make her a strong journalist? Explain why using text evidence.
4. Reread *The Hive* articles on page 95 and 112-114. Compare and contrast them with *The Hive* articles on pages 126-127 and 255-259. What words and/or phrases have the most impact on you? Why? How does this apply to argumentative writing?
5. The characters in this novel confront bullying, cultural differences, family heritage, and other issues. On page 135, Lou shows compassion when Joey describes his parents' divorce. On page 163, she reassures Julia with a few words, "You're not your parents." Locate other instances in the story where friends are supportive and help each other through rough times. How have friends helped you through life's challenges? How can you be a good friend?
6. While researching a short write-up for the musical, Hughie discovers hateful editorials written by the author of *THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ*, shown on pages 173-176. Then on page 178, Shelby comments, "You're upset that your brother is upset about something that somebody wrote about, something that happened over a hundred years ago in South Dakota?" Should Lou support Hughie? Why or why not?





Discussion Questions

7. Other landmark events mentioned in the novel are September 11, 2001, and the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. Why is knowledge of tragic historical events important to learn about to be a thoughtful citizen in today's society?
8. Lou's emotions build and she speaks up on pages 194–196. How do you think she handled the confrontation? What did Louise learn about herself? Who do you think ripped down the spirit sign on page 196? Explain why.
9. Having the courage to speak up and communicate effectively is a theme throughout the story. Louise learns that words matter, whether she's breaking up with a boyfriend, or listening to her Elders, comforting a friend, or writing feature articles for her school's newspaper. Whose voice is heard in this story? Whose voice is not heard? (Hint: consider gender, race, socio-economic status, etc.) How is the story shaped by these voices?

Curriculum Connections

Identify story elements such as conflict, Cite text evidence, Analyze an argument and valid claims, Develop questions, Determine theme and how it develops, Study how complex characters interact, Explore the impact of the author's choices, Analyze how author employs point of view, perspective and purpose, Evaluate author's point of view of historical events, Role of culture in a society and its influence on literature, art, music, Discuss similarities and differences among cultural groups and across time and place, Explore how the world has changed and how ideas and actions differ from the past, Recognize tensions occur when goals, values, and principles of two groups conflict, Discuss factors that influence decision-making, Initiate collaborative discussions with diverse partners on complex topics, Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, Synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue.

About the Guide

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