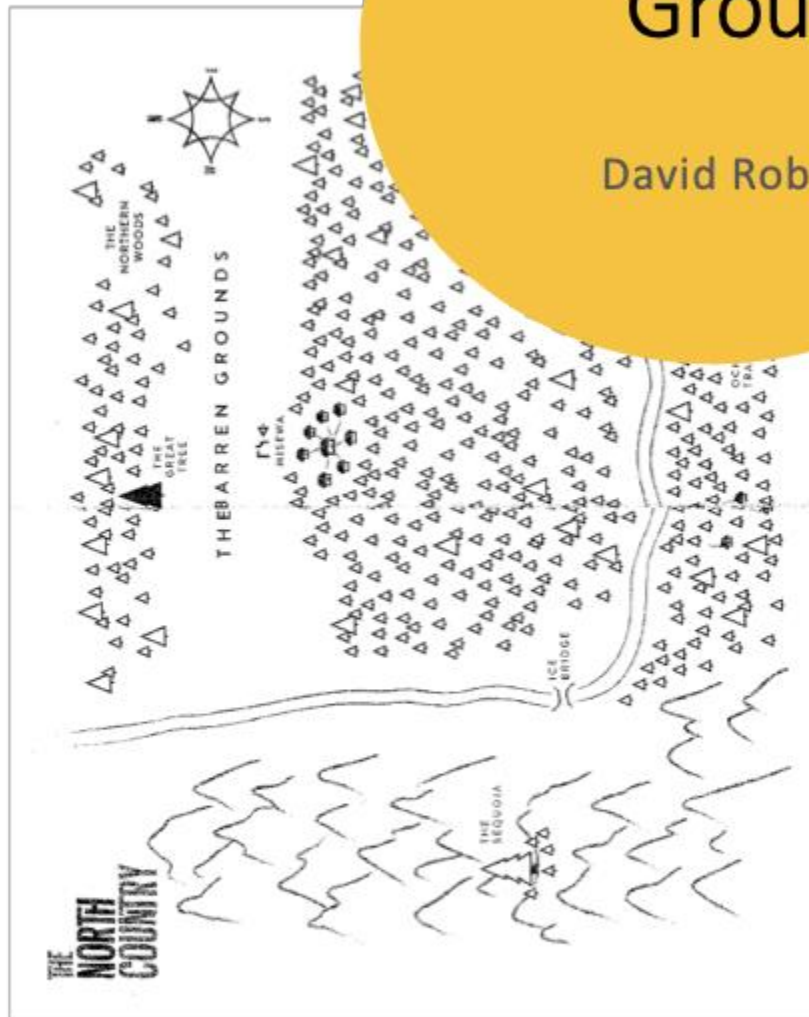


# The Barren Grounds

David Robertson



**SECTION 3: Responsibility**

pgs 97-142

## Section 3: Responsibility

pg 97-142

### Summary:

Morgan and Eli learn more about the Barren Grounds, and the reason why the land is sick. They learn from Ocheq and encounter Arik, all while trying to figure out their role as guests to this land. A meeting with the Elders at council launches these four beings on a new journey.

### Important background knowledge/ context for Teacher consideration:

**Note for teachers** As teachers you need to be conscious that there are particularly important sacred teachings for Indigenous people that are embedded in this text. Robertson has included Cree language and stories throughout the text. Although it is in a fantasy world – these are real teaching and real beliefs.

### FPPL:

## Learning is... relational.

### Big Ideas:

Language and text can be a source of creativity and joy.

Exploring stories and texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world.

### Curricular Competency:

Recognize and appreciate the role of story, narrative, and oral tradition in expressing First Peoples perspectives, values, beliefs, and point of view.

## Talking Circle

### Prompts:

- Where did you find meaning?
- What is unclear or is an area you think you might need to learn more about?
- How is this story a guide?
- In what ways is the land sick today, in Langley, in Canada? In the world?
- How can we help the land? What is one thing I could practise today to help the land?
- What are 5 things I think I should know?
- How would we feel if the animals that we eat could talk? Would we feel different and why?

## Indigenous Worldview and Perspectives Focus

### Indigenous Language:

- **Muskwa**- bear
- **Kiskisitotaso**-do not forget yourself, do not forget who you are
- Learn how to identify animals in our local region in **hə́nqə́mihə́m** with Fern Gabriel:  
[Beaver](#), [Raven](#), [Goose](#)

### Animal Exploration:

- What is a fisher?
- Share the appendix item of the collage of images of what a fisher looks like.
- Why do you think of all the animals that could have been chosen as the leader, why is the leader a fisher?

**Note for teachers** The document and book also reveal that Ocheq, in Cree, means fisher. This also connects back to the **Open Activity: Looking at the Stars**.

Explore other Indigenous languages below for the animal: Fisher:

Listen to 'fisher' in three different Indigenous languages: (double click the speaker to hear the pronunciation).



*Fisher in Tsilhqot'in (Xeni Gwet'in) language*



*Fisher in Uikala language*



*Fisher in Secwepemc language*

Source: First Voices [here](#)

### On the Trapline:

This is one of David Robertson's most recent published works. Great partner story for this section of the book and connecting with Orange shirt week and/or themes of resilience, reconciliation.

Morgan, Eli and Oshek are headed to Oshek's trapline. Important for students to understand what a trapline is and the importance to the Cree people. In his book ["On the Trapline"](#), A boy and his moshom take a trip to the trapline where his grandpa and family used to live off the land. This is a terrific book that explores the connection between the boy, his grandfather, and the land. There is a brief mention of moshom going to school. There is a brief, yet powerful mentioning of residential schools, When the boy asks him "what it was like going to school after living on the trapline." He was quiet for a long time. 'I learned in both places,' he says. 'I just learned different things.'"

Cree words are woven throughout the story. The book does a wonderful job of showing the reconnection to culture and land. In his note from the author, David Robertson says the following "Reconciliation is more than just healing from trauma. It's connecting, or reconnecting with people, culture, language, community."

### Medicine Wheel Thinking:

Have students fill out the Medicine Wheel graphic for the community of Misewa. Have them think about the Mental, Emotional, Spiritual and Physical aspects of the community. This could be done in pairs or small groups, then collaboratively built together on the board. Have students debrief how using the lens of the medicine wheel, helps us to learn, understand what Misewa is going through.

- Have students share what they notice?
- What does this imbalance mean?
- What needs to be more balanced? What would balance look like? Feel like?
- Whose responsibility is it to find balance? In Misewa? In our communities?

### Constellations:

Relate back to the opening activity of this guide- **The Legend of the Fisher.**

- Explore more stories of Cree Elder through text, video and or images. For context on these stories and Elder Wilfred Buck, see article in **Annotated Resource List**.
- Wilfred Buck- *Atima Atchakosuk The Dog Stars* [here](#) (5 min)
- Wilfred Buck- *Sisikwun: The Rattle* [here](#) (2 min)
- Wilfred Buck- *Makinak: The Turtle* [here](#) (3 min)

\*See images of constellations in appendix.

**Note for teachers** Prolonged listening is a skill that has to be built. Having conversations with students about the responsibility of the listener to the storyteller – is an important part of Indigenous pedagogy. Additionally, giving students something to do with their hands is a wonderful way to encourage listening, and avoiding students getting distracted. Colouring is one accessible way to encourage a task that allows for open ears.

By chunking the listening and sharing out after each story- this can allow students to show the reciprocity of the listener to the storyteller.

- Where did you find meaning?
- What is unclear or is an area you think you might need to learn more about?
- How do these teachings relate to The Barren Grounds?
- What can we learn about how Indigenous people see and experience the world? What does “worldview” mean? What Indigenous worldviews can we learn from these teachings?
- What benefits do we get from listening that we do not get from reading?
- What is hard about being a good listener?
- What do you do when you feel your mind wandering when you are meant to be listening? Is it ok for our minds to wander? Where does your mind wander to? Does it wander to the same place? Try sketch doodling or drawing where your mind wanders to. It may not be a place but a thought... doodle the thought, add detail.

## The Calendar

How does time track time on Calendars – Have students create Winter calendars or Seasonal Calendars.

Use this publicly shared resource from Stellat'en First Nation to see how one Indigenous community marks time on a calendar.

**January-** Big moon. Cold. Cold weather.

**February-** We can fall tress on top of the snow.

**March-** ling Cod Moon

**April-** Pea Mouth First Moon.

**May-** Sucker Moon.

**June-** Trout Moon

**July-** Middle of the Summer.

**August-** Salmon Moon.

Kokanee Moon.

**October-** Char moon.

**November-** White Fish Moon.

**December-** Short Days Moon



Access from Stellat'en First Nation Website, for both the descriptions and graphic. Credit to Emma Baker. [Access here](#)

Have students think about activities/ aspects of their lives they could record by the seasons or by the month, to show how they know what time of the year it is.

- How do the seasons affect your life? Does the calendar affect your life? How? Does the calendar affect the structure of time/ how time is divided or used in our own lives? What affects your life more...the seasons, or the calendar, in other words, the way time is organized for us in our day to day lives? Can you imagine a world where the seasons are more important than “time”? What would that look like? What would be important in a life where seasons are more important than the calendar, or time on a clock?
- What was happening at the time you were born on the land and in the sky?

Other resources for calendars, moons, marking time in Indigenous knowledge systems:

[Thirteen Moons Curriculum](#)- Ojibway, Cree, Mohawk

[Indigenous Calendars Mark Much more than the Spring Equinox](#)- Muskrat Magazine

[Thirteen Moons Calendars](#)- Wsanec

[The Grizzly Mother](#)- Gitsxan Moon information

[Days and Months in Hul'qumi'num'](#) (Printable cards with QR codes with sound) -Nanaimo

Ladysmith Schools

- Learn to count in hə́ŋqəmiṇəm with Fern Gabriel in- [Count to Thirteen with Let's Count the Moons](#)

### **Governance:**

David Robertson has talked a lot about how he wanted to create a fantasy world, where the values, traditions and culture were rooted in Indigenous ways. One example of this is through The Council. To support building student context and understanding of the complex and diverse practices of Indigenous governance you may choose to share the attached:

- [First Nations Laws](#) or [Land & Traditional Government](#) (**gr 6, 7 level**)
- [First Nations Government](#) (**gr 8, 9 level**)

Have students identify ways that Robertson included these Indigenous values of governance in the text? Impact?

## **Literacy Focus**

### **Kiskisitotaso:**

This book introduces us to the Cree word Kiskisitotaso. The meaning being ‘[don't forget yourself, don't forget who you are](#)’.

Provide students with the graphic organizer from the appendix. In this week of Orange Shirt Day and/or Truth & Reconciliation (if engaging with the text in other months, outside of September) How does this Indigenous word help us to reflect on the past, present and future?

- *Past:* How do we think/relate this word for those who attended Residential Schools? Survived? Never returned?
- *Present:* How do we think about this word in our present, as we remember, learn work to honour Residential School survivors, Indigenous knowledge?
- *Future:* What is our hope around this word for future generations?

**Note for teachers** this task is keeping in mind Orange Shirt Day, and connecting to the language, culture and family impacts of this colonial policy. This connection is meant to both highlight the resilience and strength of Indigenous people, also the immense trauma that was imposed due to Residential Schools. If you are teaching at time outside of Orange Shirt Day – this is a very integral notion to the Truth aspect of Reconciliation.

### **Gr.8: Speculative Fiction:**

*'The definition of speculative fiction works that are not set in the real world, but instead create a supernatural, futuristic, or other imagined world. Indigenous speculative fiction is unique in this world of speculation, especially when it comes to post-apocalyptic narratives. The reality is that for Indigenous peoples who have been colonized and engaged in assimilation, the apocalypse – the destruction of a reality – has already occurred.'* This excerpt from [Turtle Island Reads Teacher Guide](#) explains why dystopian & sci-fi are becoming more popular in Indigenous literature. The theme of resilience and navigating a harsh reality relates to the real-world experiences of Indigenous people. Support students unpacking, reflecting, and discussing the theme of resilience.

- What is resilience?
- What are examples of resilience in the text?
- When have you been resilient? How does reading about resilience in a fictional world, help us to understand resilience in the real world?
- Have students write, orally share or perform an alternate scene starring a character from the text where the purpose is to show an example of resilience.



# Fisher

**fisher** A carnivorous mammal of the weasel family

ᐃᑦᑦᑦ **ocek** [NA]

**Source:** Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary English-Cree

**Language:** Cree



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## Anatomy

### Fisher

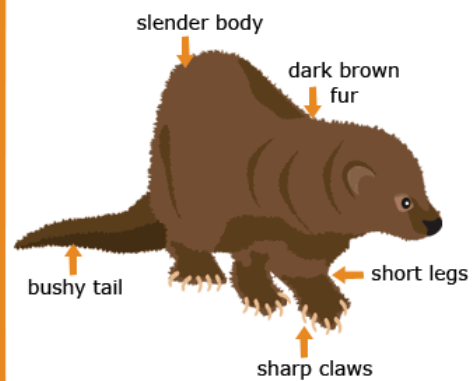
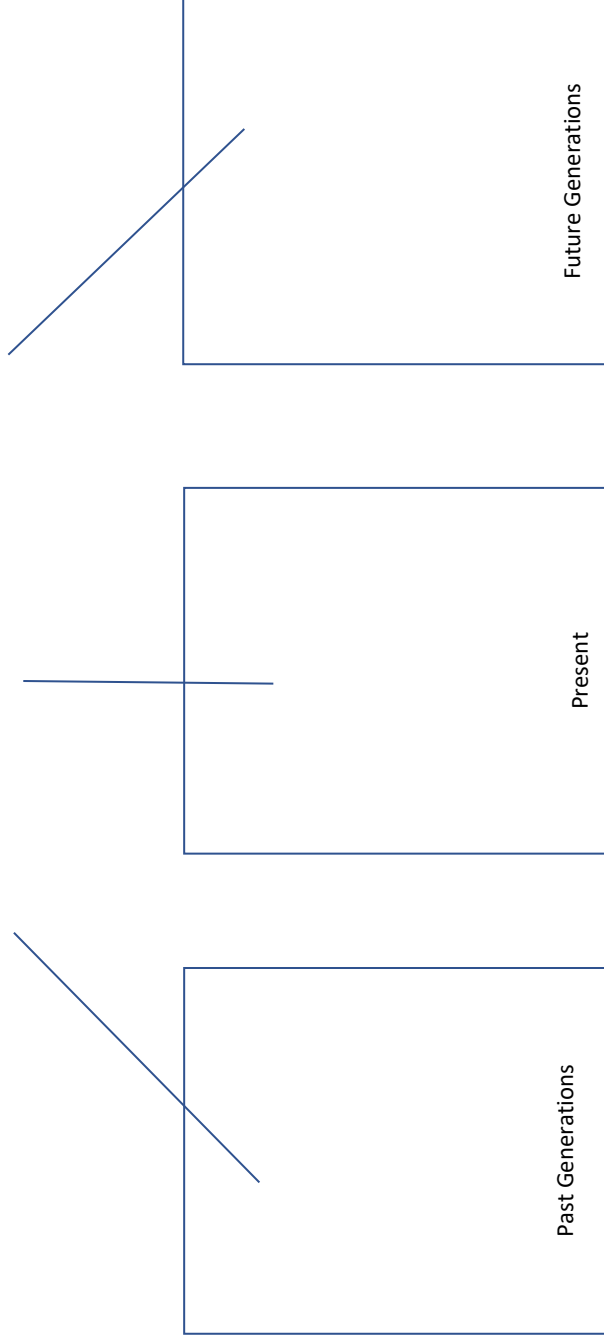


ILLUSTRATION BY ANNA SERRAO

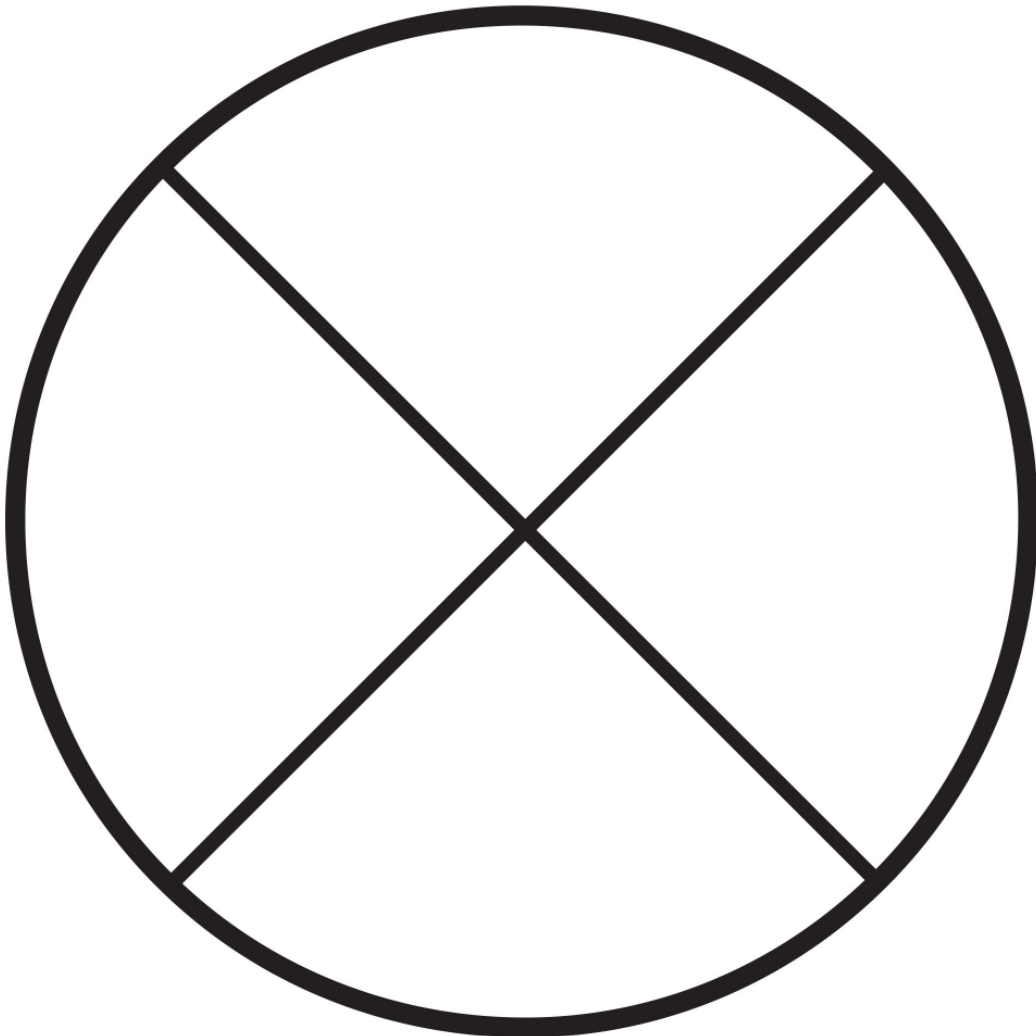


# Kiskisito0tas0

Cree Translation: *don't forget yourself, don't forget who you are*



## Medicine Wheel



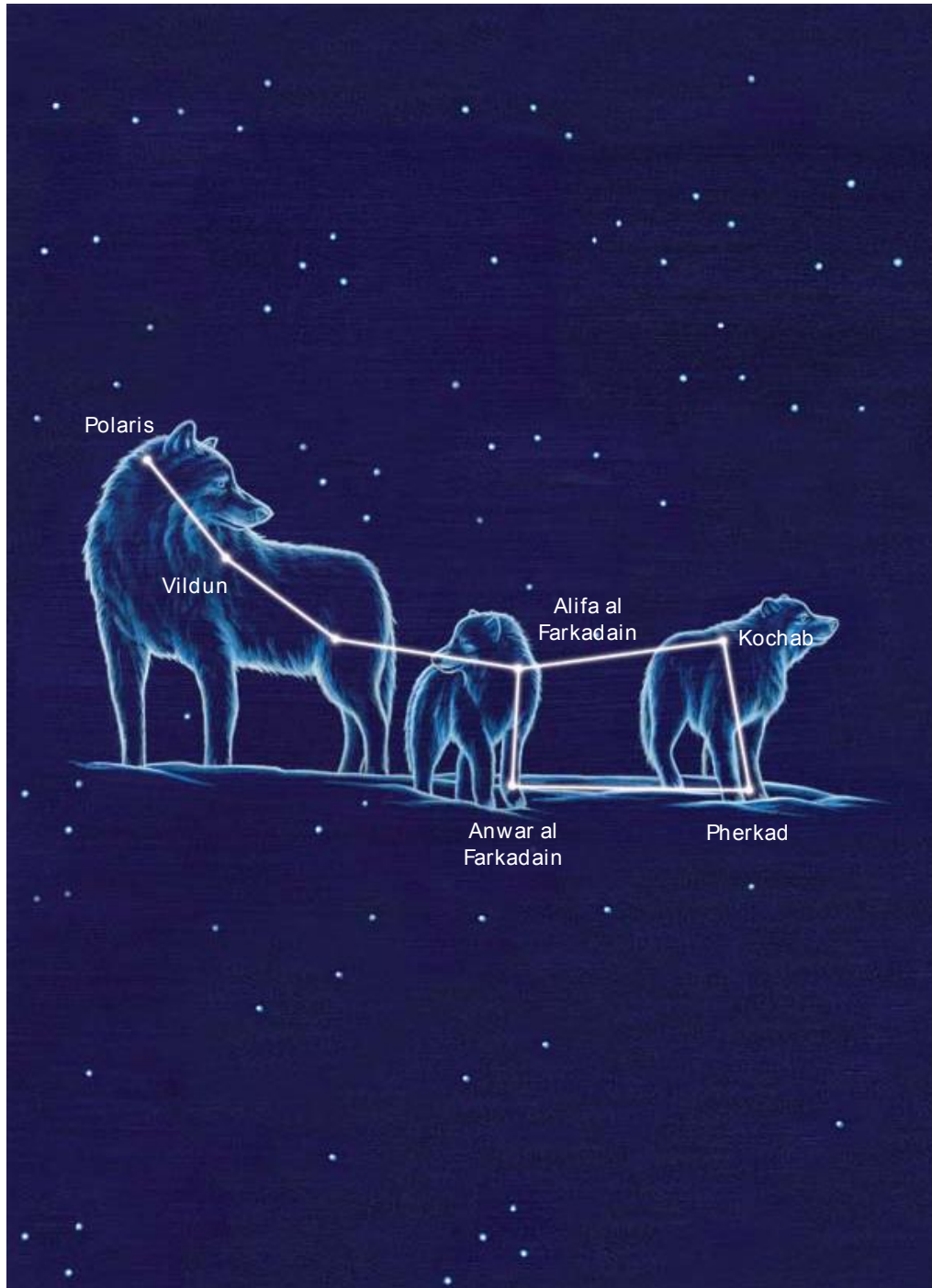
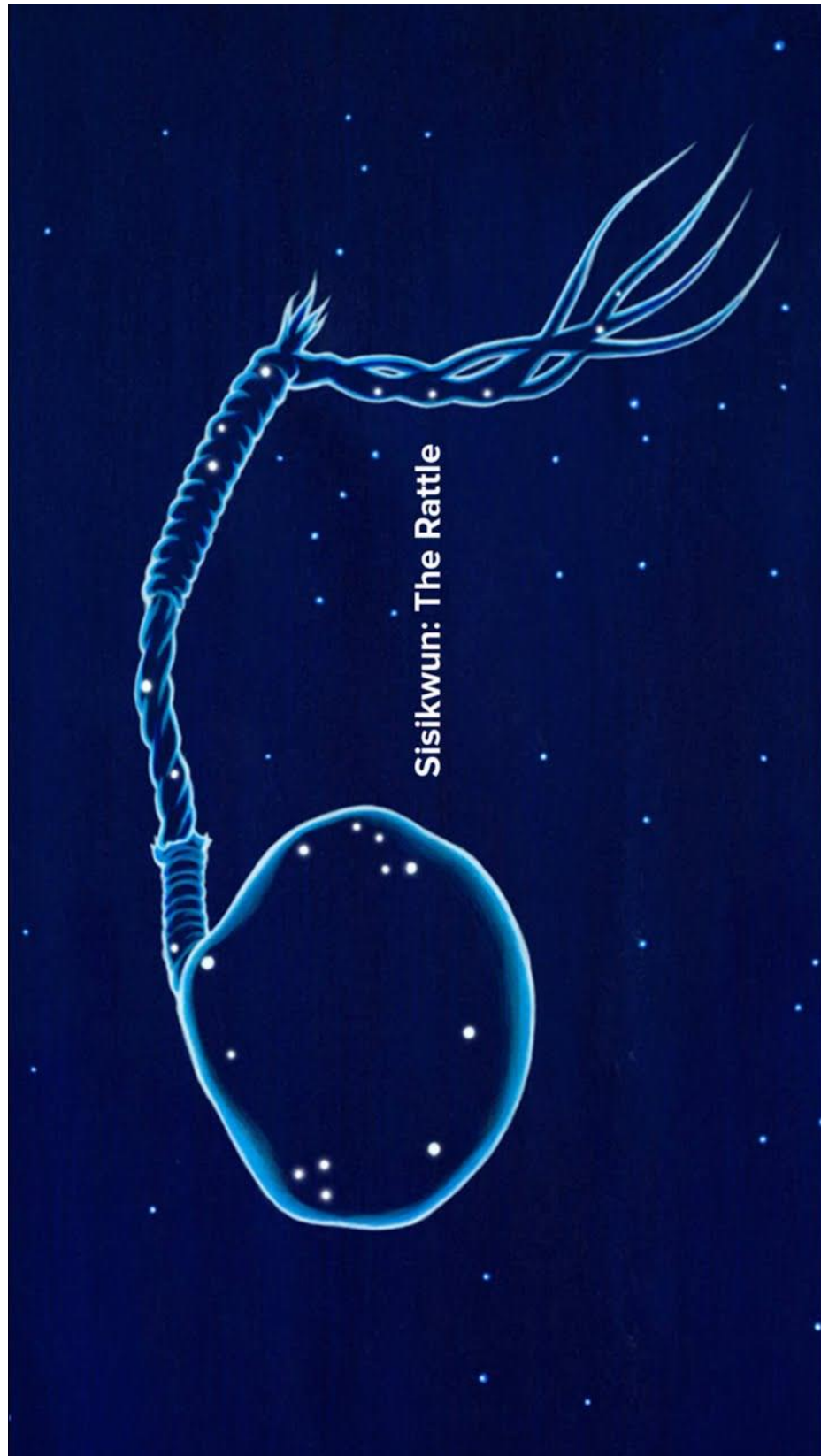
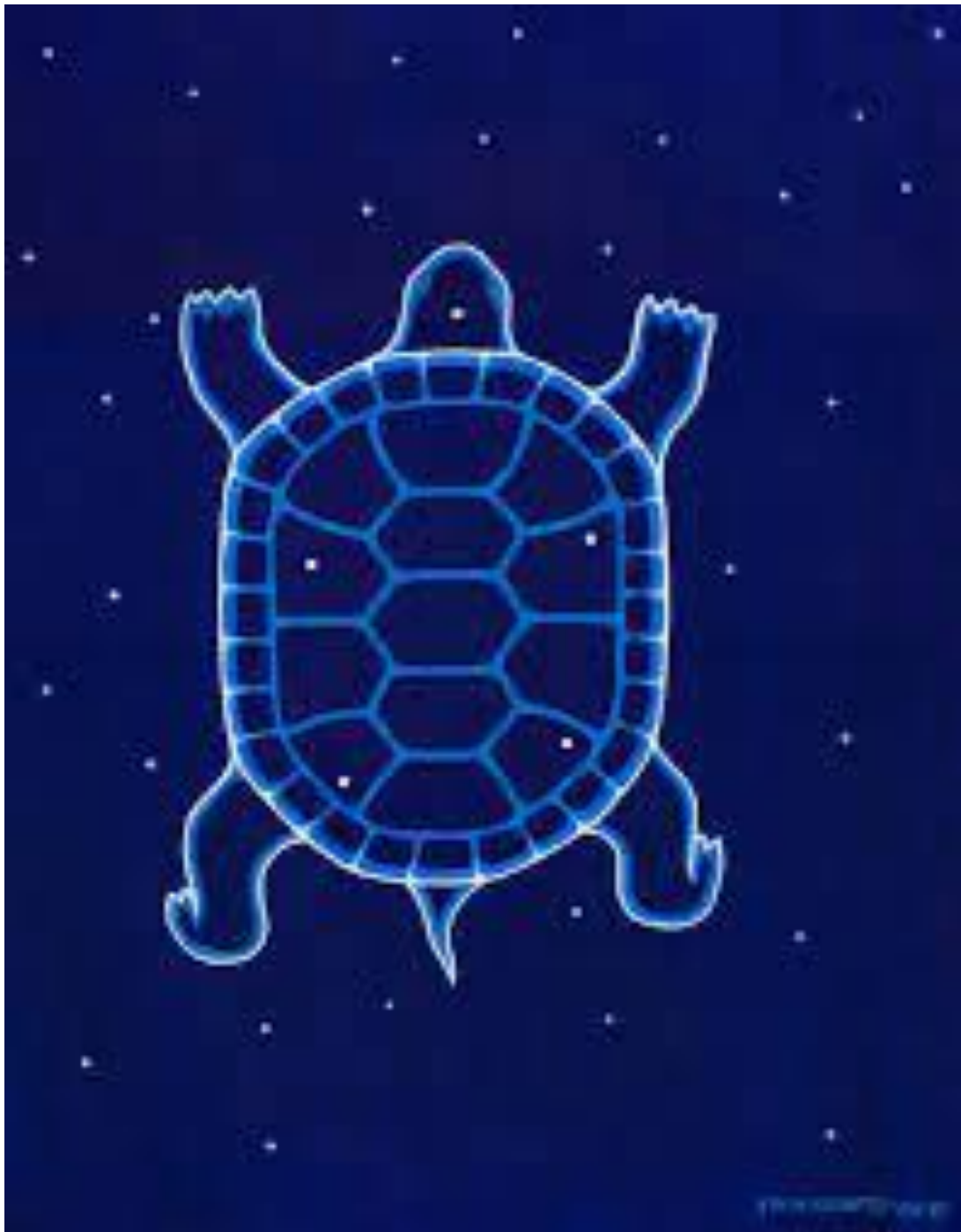


Figure 1: *Atima Atchakosuk* (The Dog Stars), popularly known as *Ursa Minor*, reminds us how the domestic dog came into being.



Sisikwun: The Rattle



## Blackline Master 10

# First Nations Laws and the Land

First Nations had governments in the past.  
They have governments today.  
First Nations have always had governments.

They follow traditional laws.  
The laws were followed in the past.  
They are still followed today.  
The laws are unwritten.  
They are passed down orally.

The laws tell how to take care of the land.  
They tell how to treat animals.  
They tell how to treat each other.

Here are some laws about the land:

- Thank the plants and animals when you take them.
- Only take what you need.
- Share your food with others.
- Only take food from your own land.

## Traditional Governments

First Nations people have always governed themselves. Each First Nation has its own way of organizing.

Leaders are often called Chiefs in English. There are special words for leaders in every First Nations language. What is the name for “Chief” or “leader” where you live?

How are leaders picked?

Sometimes the new Chief is born into the role. This is called a **hereditary** leader. Some First Nations follow the mother’s side of the family. Other First Nations follow the father’s side of the family.

Sometimes everyone in the community picks the new Chief. They all agree on who is best to be the leader. This is called **consensus**.

Chiefs have people who help them make decisions. These people make a council. The council has Elders, family leaders, and Clan leaders.

Often First Nations had feasts and potlatches. They were very important for First Nations government. Everyone could see, hear and remember the business that took place in the feast hall.



## Blackline Master 13

# First Nations Governments

Today many First Nations have more than one system of government. There are traditional governments and there are elected governments. They are two different ways of looking after the community.

### **Traditional Governments**

Traditional governments are the governments of First Nations' ancestors. These governments took care of First Nations people for thousands of years.

The traditional leaders are often called Chiefs in English. Each community has a name for leaders in their own language.

In some First Nations leaders are hereditary. That means a new Chief is related to the old Chief's family. In the past, chiefs were often men.

Some First Nations hereditary systems follow the mother's side of the family. This is called matrilineal.

Other First Nations follow the father's side of the family. This is called patrilineal.

Some First Nations have other ways of choosing their traditional leaders. In these First Nations the people pick their leaders. They all agree on who is best to be the leader. This is called consensus.

Some traditional governments have councils who help make decisions. The council is made up of leaders and Elders from families and Clans in the community.

Important acts of First Nations government take place at public ceremonies where guests witness and approve the business that takes place. These are sometimes called feasts or potlatches. However, every First Nation has words in its language for these public ceremonies.

### **Elected Government**

Elected First Nations governments started after Canada became a country. The Indian Act forced First Nations to make a new type of government. All First Nations had to have the same form of government, called a Band Council. Today many First Nations still operate under Band Councils.

Band members vote on who will be their Chief and Council. The Chief Councillor is the leader of the Band Council. Chief and Council make decisions for the community.

Some First Nations have a newer kind of government. These are Nations who have signed a treaty or a self-government agreement with Canada and British Columbia governments.

In treaty governments, the leaders are elected.

### **Working Together**

The traditional leaders and the elected leaders often work together to govern their community. Together they look after the people. They look after the land in their traditional territory.

They keep their cultures and languages alive. They bring jobs to the community. They fix the roads. They look after the water that people drink.

They make sure their people stay healthy.