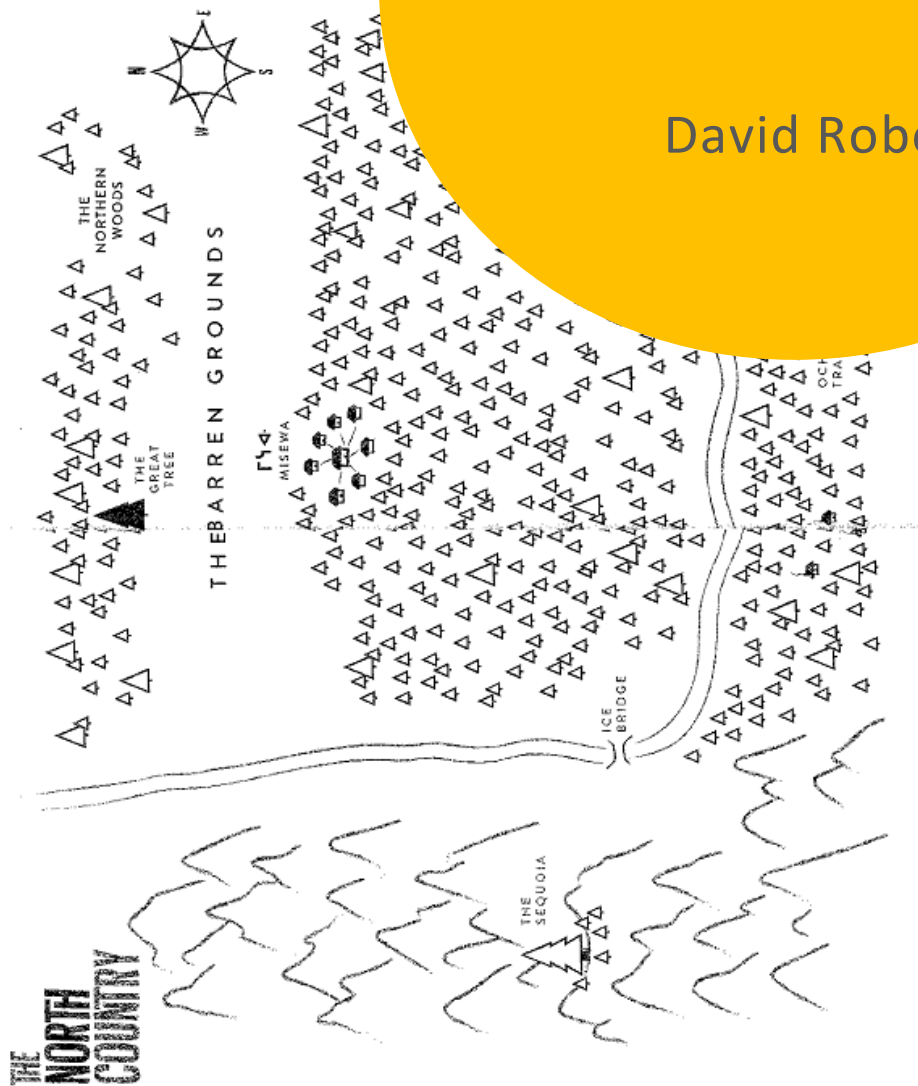


The Barren Grounds

David Robertson



SECTION 5: Community
Pg 184 - 220

Section 5: Community Consciousness

Pg 184- 220

Summary:

Ochek, Arik, Morgan and Eli are continuing their journey, getting closer to both danger and to their ultimate goal. Ochek makes a sacrifice, and the others must continue – with help from an unlikely ally.

Important background knowledge/ context for Teacher consideration:

Note for teachers One of the reasons that the original Legend of the Fisher was recommended to be used at the onset of this text, as it foreshadows/prepares us for Ochek's death. In the legend it describes the moment of Ochek facing the man: 'The man came running...The man chased after Fisher with a bow and arrow and shot many times at him. But Fisher jumped into the sky, and climbed up higher higher and higher, right to the stars... Fisher escaped into the sky.' A focus in this section should therefore be more on the teaching of Ochek than the literal interpretation of it.

FPPL:

Learning ultimately supports a well-being of self the family, the community, the land, the spirits the ancestors.

Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

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?
- How has your understanding of story and place changed since the beginning of the book?
- What are all the ways we can show people we care about them?
- How are some ways that we can honour all are relations?
- How has Morgan changed? How can you tell? What did she learn about herself that has caused her to change? What has caused this change in Morgan? If Morgan had the choice to change, do you think she would choose change, or choose staying as she was before?

Indigenous Worldview and Perspectives

Constellation

Return to the opening activity story: **The Legend of the Fisher, or Ochek.**

- Where do you find meaning in this story - now that your knowledge has grown?
- How does this relate to The Barren Grounds? What do you notice?
- What new questions do you have now?
- How is Ochek's sacrifice in the Barren Grounds better understood alongside this Cree teaching?

All My Relations

Write the phrase "**All My Relations**" Write the phrase All My Relations on the board- Ask students if they have ever heard this phrase and in what context.

- if students have heard it, know it, have them explain what it means
- if students haven't heard it, ask them to predict what it means

Share the following quote from famous Indigenous author Thomas King:

"All my relations" is at first a reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and our relatives. It also reminds us of the extended relationship we share with all human beings. But the relationship that Native people see go further, the web of kinship extending to the animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined. More than that, 'all my relations' is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have within this universal family by living our lives in a harmonious manner (a common admonishment is to say of someone that they act as if they have no relations)."

Thomas King, (Cherokee) All My Relations

Source: Justice, D. H. (2018). *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. Pg 88

Share the following quote from famous Indigenous author Richard Wagamese:

"I have learned that to love this country [Canada] means to love its people. All of them. When we

say “all my relations,” it’s meant in a teaching way, to rekindle community. We are part of the great, grand circle of humanity, and we need each other.

Source: Wagamese, Richard. (2008). *One Native Life*. To Love This Country. Pg 192

- have students identify what All My Relations means by finding key words ideas in the quote
- have students identify what All My Relations isn’t by finding key words ideas in the quote

Note for teachers this would be a great opportunity to invite the ASW into the classroom to speak about this phrase.

Have students apply their understanding of this phrase by:

- creating an image or symbol that represents the meaning of this phrase – and explaining their choices
- finding examples of actions in the text that represent the ideas behind *All My Relations*
- finding examples of actions in the text that go against the ideas behind *All My Relations*

Consensus

In a community, making decisions for everyone can be a big responsibility. Have students engage in a consensus circle to decide. The topic of the consensus circle can be one that will be acted on (a decision for a class activity) or can be one that explores ideas (a topic selected from the text). Consensus circles should be small: 4-5 people, not as a whole class.

When creating a consensus activity, it is important for students to be asked a question that isn’t Yes/No. It must be open ended to allow varied student ideas and have the capacity to blend ideas to form consensus.

See attached [Consensus activity outline](#) and instructions in appendix.

Tradition & Modernity

David Robertson is a contemporary writer, using traditional influences.

Discussion prompt for students:

- How can a person be both traditional and modern at the same time?
- What is a traditional philosophy? How can that philosophy be applied in a modern world?

Indigenous author Chelsea Vowel (Metis) writes about the stereotype of freezing Indigenous people in the past:

“I am not going to belabour the frozen-in-time approach and how flipping bizarre it is to read about people telling us not to haul game home in pick-up trucks, or use kitchen appliances to make frybread, or use gasoline in our motorboats, because once you think about it, the weirdness should be self-evident.... We are just as capable of adapting to new technology and using it according to traditional beliefs and philosophies as you are.”

Literacy Focus

Discussion Questions:

The Barren Grounds contains Cree teachings around sustainability and the land.

- What are some of these beliefs and concepts?
- What does the man represent?
- How does this connect to issues in the world today?

Mistapew is a giant being in Cree stories that, according to Ocheq, “takes your soul and leaves only flesh and bones behind.”

- How does the author use Mistapew in the story?
- Does Mistapew remind you of similar creatures in other stories?

The Legend of the Fisher, or Ochek

As told by Wilfred Buck, Science Specialist, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre

A long time ago, there was no summer in the north country. It was winter all the time. Cold and bitter winds rushed through the lands and the beautiful colours of nature were only a dream. It hadn't always been this way, but there was once a man who captured all the little summer birds. He tied them in a bundle and they were always with him and Herring. This is why there was winter all the time.

The animals in the north country knew that summer existed somewhere, even though it never came to them. They wanted summer. They were tired of the cold. One day, Squirrel discovered where the birds had been taken, and the animals decided that one of them must go and free the summer birds. They chose Fisher, and off he went.

He walked and walked until he had left the north country. He walked and walked until he reached the wigwam where the captor and Herring lived.

When Fisher went inside, he found the man was gone but Herring was there. Quickly, Fisher put some sap around Herring's mouth so that he couldn't call out to the man. Once Herring was captured, Fisher used his teeth and tore open the prison that held the summer birds captive. As the summer birds made their way out of the wigwam, Herring broke free from the sap and called out, "Fisher broke the summer birds out! Fisher used his teeth! The summer birds are free!"

The man came running, but as he arrived at the wigwam, Fisher and the summer birds were already far away. The man chased after Fisher with a bow and arrow, and shot many times at him. But Fisher jumped into the sky and climbed up higher and higher and higher, right to the stars.

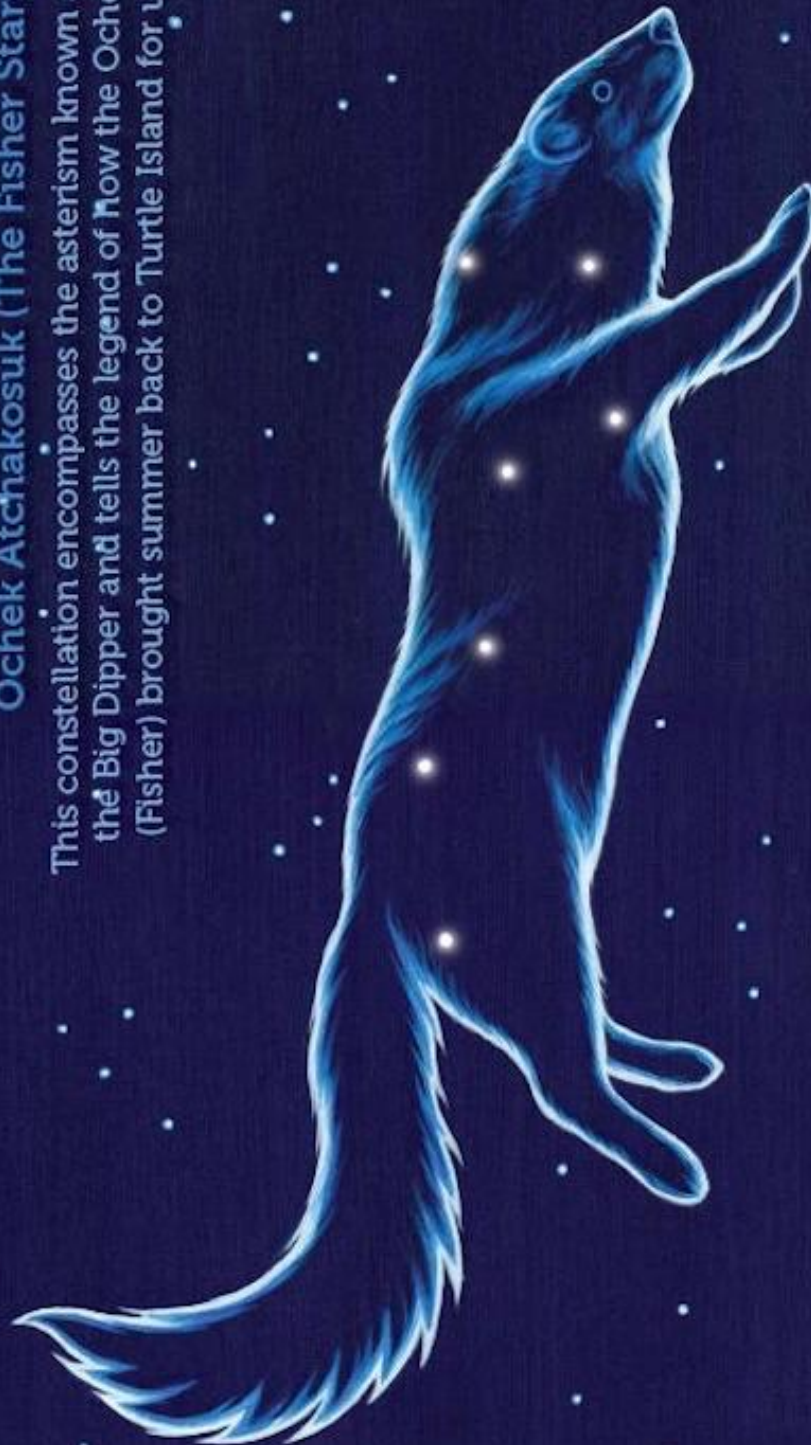
All the man could do was shoot Fisher's tail. Fisher escaped into the sky, and that is where we see him now.

His broken tail can still be seen today as the bent handle of the Big Dipper constellation.

Source: <https://mfnerc.org/newsletter/under-a-blanket-of-stars/>

Ochek Atchakosuk (The Fisher Stars)

This constellation encompasses the asterism known as the Big Dipper and tells the legend of how the Ochek (Fisher) brought summer back to Turtle Island for us.



Blackline Master 30

Consensus Activity

In some traditional government systems, consensus was used to make decisions. That means everyone in the group had to agree on the decision.

In a meeting, Chiefs, Elders and other leaders would share their thinking. People didn't vote. They kept talking until the group could come up with a decision that everyone could agree upon.

You are going to try out the consensus model.

Your group is going to sit in a circle and one student will be asked to be the speaker. The speaker shares the decision that needs to be made and starts the conversation. Only one person speaks at a time. Once you have spoken, you cannot speak again until the circle returns to you. This means there are no rebuttals. There is no cross talk. You cannot speak until it is your turn, which means you have to be actively listening.

All thoughts and ideas that shared are to be respected. You do not name someone in the circle. For example, if a person liked an idea that someone shared, they might say, "An idea was shared that I think would help our community." If an idea is shared that you don't agree with, you could say "an idea was shared and I am wondering if we should think more about what the consequences might be."

Topic:

Your class is studying life cycles in science and your teacher wants the class to go on a field trip. He has a few ideas and wants the classroom to make a decision.

- The first idea is to go to the Salmon Fish Hatchery.
- The second idea is to go on a nature walk and invite an Elder to guide the class.
- The third idea is to go on a virtual field trip. For the virtual field trip, a scientist from Haida Gwaii would talk about sustainable fishing practices. The class would get to connect with her via Skype.

In your group, discuss which field trip would work best for everyone.

After you have all shared ideas, come to a consensus decision. That is, make a decision as a whole group that everyone agrees on.