

This Land is My Land

written and illustrated by George Littlechild

About the Book

Genre: Historical Fiction

Format: Paperback, \$11.95
32 pages

ISBN: 9780892391844

Reading Level: Grades 4-5

Interest Level: Grades 2-8

Guided Reading Level: Q

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
4.7/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: 790L

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Nature/Science, United States History, Identity/Self Esteem/Confidence, Responsibility, Overcoming Obstacles, Native American Interest, Home, Holidays/Traditions, History, Grandparents, Friendship, Forgiveness, Families, Environment/Nature, Dreams & Aspirations, Discrimination, Childhood Experiences and Memories, Biography/Memoir, Art, Empathy/Compassion, Gratitude, Human Impact On Environment/Environmental Sustainability, Persistence/Grit, Respect/Citizenship, Self Control/Self Regulation

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/this-land-is-my-land

SYNOPSIS

Through his own words and paintings, acclaimed Native artist George Littlechild takes us back in time to the first meeting between his Plains Cree ancestors and the first European settlers in North America. In *This Land is My Land*, George intimately and honestly shares with readers how he discovered his Native heritage and what it means to him. He recounts the history of his people and expresses his wish to use his art to portray the wonders of his heritage, and to heal the pain of his people's history.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

BACKGROUND

Note About Terminology

When using this guide, teachers are encouraged to incorporate local Indigenous histories into the discussions. We acknowledge that terms may vary by region when discussing Indigenous communities. For example, discussions may include a specific tribe name and/or may use more general terms such as Native American, American Indian, Indigenous, First Nations, or First Peoples that are neither intended to minimize nor elevate any one tribe. Furthermore, the term Native is used to identify Indigenous people, as this is a commonly used term in some Indigenous communities. Teachers are encouraged to speak about Native Americans in present tense and acknowledge that all Native Americans carry rich cultures and traditions. A Native American's identity is not tied to the United State of America or Canada's recognition as people. *This Land is My Land* states a preference to be called First Nations or First Peoples. The following website includes additional information about First Nations in Canada: <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1307460755710/1536862806124>.

Cree Nation

It is important to note that a tribe may have multiple bands, each with potentially distinct cultures and traditions. *This Land is My Land* is specific to the Plains Cree Nation. The author is also the illustrator of the book. An important cultural element of the book is the role of pictorial storytelling to the Plains Cree Nation people. Pictorial storytelling is deeply rooted in the tribe. Visit <https://insidersi.edu/2016/04/drawings-images-plains-native-americans-tell-stories/> to learn more about pictorial storytelling as a way tribes may document accomplishments. When reading the book, keep in mind that the illustrations serve as historical markers of events as much, if not more, than they serve as telling a story.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- Based on the cover of the book, ask the class what they know and what they want to know about the story they are about to hear. A prompt may include the Jane Addams Children's Book Award symbol. The title of the book may remind students of a song they know. Students may recognize a headdress on the person. Students may question the colors on the front page (e.g., What do you think the colors represent? Is there one color that sticks out to you more?)
- Encourage students to share a family story where they learned a lesson.
- How does storytelling help you learn about the world?
- What is colonization?
- How does colonization impact Native American cultures and traditions?

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- Talk about the title of the book. Then ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?
- Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, author's dedication page, title page, and author's biography.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- how art has a way of telling a story. Think of the relationship between the visual imagery in the book and how it helps tell the story. Do specific colors or color combinations set a particular image, tone, or message to the reader?
- how colonization impacts our understanding of the world in which we live.
- how symbolism helps an individual understand their world.
- how understanding history requires listening to multiple perspectives.

Encourage students to consider why the author, George Littlechild, would want to share this story with young people.

VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below. Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word. (Many of the Spanish words can be found in the book glossary, but there are also some that are not included. Students could be encouraged to create a log of these words—they will not be listed here.)

In *This Land is My Land*, teachers are advised to review the vocabulary words in advance and to specifically note to students that vowels and consonants may make different sounds in languages outside of English. In *This Land is My Land*, the author/illustrator is a member of the Plains Cree Nation and uses the word Wahkomkanak (ancestors) from his tribe's language. It is important to be respectful of the language by becoming familiar with correct pronunciation. A good starting point for understanding the language, particularly the vowels and consonants, can be found at the following website: http://www.native-languages.org/cree_guide.htm. It is equally important to note that Indigenous languages were more commonly learned through oral traditions and not through written text. Therefore, there may be a variety in the spelling of a word, but the pronunciation of the word is crucial. Below are some content specific words teachers may want to explore through an Indigenous lens (i.e., words like Indian, reserves, and traditional may mean something different based on perspective and culture).

Content Specific

boarding schools, buffalo, chicken dancers, Chief (leader of the Plains Cree), Creator, First Nations, First Peoples, fancy dancers, four elements (earth, air, water, and fire, grass dancers, headdress, Indian, Indian Country, Indian Princess Pageant, Indigenous, jingle-dress dancers, Mother Earth, Plains Cree, pow wow, reserves, sacred, sneak-up dance, spirit, traditional, Wahkomkanak (ancestors), warrior

Academic

adorn, ancestors, belonged, canvas, continent, cruelty, destination, dignity, discovered, elegance, extermination, extinct, generation, intention, magnificent, management, permission, photograph, pride, prisoners, respected, restaurants, restore, smack, stereotypes, suffered, survivors, tampered, territory, towers, tremendous, Western Hemisphere

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. According to the family tree shared in the book, how many Chiefs are directly related to the author?
2. Who inspires the author?
3. What is the highest symbol in the Plains Cree Nation?
4. In the past, in what seasons did the Plains Cree Nation citizens follow the buffalo?
5. What is the significance of the arrow in the night sky?
6. What was it that white men wanted to own, but Indians never owned it?
7. Four is a sacred number. What are some of the examples that use the number four in the book?
8. According to the story, who guides you like the Creator?
9. The author's brother overcame hardships to become successful. What does the author do to help heal "the pain of the past" and to help "the next generation of Indian people"?
10. What hemisphere does the author claim "...that all this land was once Indian land"?
11. How does the author describe boarding schools?
12. What are some stereotypes that the author breaks down about Plains Cree Nation citizens in the book?
13. What does the author mean when he states, "It's good medicine to laugh"?
14. According to the author, what does the circle represent to all Indians?
15. In Indian Country, how do we heal ourselves?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Red is noted throughout the book. Name at least three ways that red is used to symbolize or emphasize a certain characteristic in the book. The three ways can use red to symbolize or emphasize the same characteristic three ways or can highlight three different characteristics.

2. How does the story compare to students' understanding of historical events?
3. Have students identify one event or experience in the book. How does the one event of experience help them better understand the author's perspective on life?
4. Pick one illustration that indicates the impact colonization has on cultures and traditions. Why did you pick the illustration? Does the use of negative and positive space influence your selection of the image? If so, please explain.
5. How does "A Dancing Bird Seeks Freedom" relate to the author's, George Littlechild, story about Plains Cree Nation experiences?
6. In *This Land is My Land*, the author draws connections to respect for land. Why is respect to land important?
7. Why does the author use animals to illustrate points in the book?
8. In what ways does the "Winner of the Miss Hobbema Indian Princess Pageant" painting "help restore a sense of dignity, pride, and elegance to the women of the Plains Cree"?
9. Why does the author/illustrator use stars throughout the book? Do the stars represent multiple ideas?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. Select an illustration from *This Land is My Land*. Pretend you are the artist and create a backstory to the selected illustration. Make sure to include the intent of your illustration in your backstory.
2. Identify two complementary colors see (<https://color-wheel-artist.com/complementary-colors-defined/>) and recreate an illustration from the book using only two complementary colors. Note: You can use different shades of the complementary colors, but your illustration must only use two colors (e.g., red and green). Tell a story using your recreated illustration.
3. Using the pages "Indian Artist Visits New York, New York" as your example, think of your first visit to a new place. Illustrate your first visit to a new place and include your likeness in the illustration. Write a reaction piece about what it was like to draw your visit and how it made you feel in your response.
4. Identify two different symbolic ideas in the book. Using the two symbolic ideas, write a reaction about how those symbols were meaningful in the book and how they are important to the author.
5. *This Land is My Land* is dedicated to the author/illustrator's ancestors. Create your family tree and recall one lesson that you learned from as many ancestors on your family tree.
6. Find evidence in your own life where colonization played a role. Discuss your finding with a partner.

ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about their favorite illustration in the book.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
6. In pairs, have one student read the text while the other student points to items in the illustration that are read aloud from the text.

Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. Identify a color that you see used throughout the book. What emotion(s) does the color represent to you in the story?
2. Look at the eyes illustrated throughout the book *This Land is My Land*. Select one illustration that includes eyes to examine closer. What do the eyes tell you about how the person or animal in the illustration feels? What story do the eyes tell you? Do the eyes tell you the same story as the rest of the illustration?
3. Reread "Columbus First Saw" and "Mountie and Indian Chief". Describe the emotions of each person in the illustrations. How might their cultural beliefs conflict with opposing views?

4. Create a final page for the book that portrays your understanding of colonization and how it has impacted your life. How has colonization impacted society and the country as a whole? Have students reflect on colonization through art and how the story made them think of colonization differently, or not.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Consult the “Selective Bibliography and Guide for ‘I’ is not for Indian: Portrayal of Native Americans in Books for Young People” to read more about recommended titles, titles to avoid, and additional guidelines in choosing culturally responsive Native texts for students.** (<http://www.nativeculturelinks.com/ailabib.htm>)
 - Read books that meet these criteria in the following categories:
 - Find books that feature Native People in the present. LEE & LOW titles include *Kiki’s Journey* by Kristy Orona-Ramirez (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/kiki-s-journey>).
 - Find books that present Native People accurately such as *Buffalo Song* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/buffalo-song>), *Crazy Horse’s Vision* by Joseph Bruchac (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/crazy-horse-s-vision>), *Stone River Crossing* by Tim Tingle (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/stone-river-crossing>), and *Indian No More* by Charlene Willing McManus with Traci Sorrell.
 - Find biographies of Native People, such as *Quiet Hero: The Ira Hayes Story* by S.D. Nelson (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/quiet-hero>) and *Jim Thorpe’s Bright Path* by Joseph Bruchac (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/jim-thorpe-s-bright-path>).
- **George Littlechild documents colonization and genocide of First Nations or First Peoples throughout his book *This Land is My Land*.** Write a haiku from George Littlechild’s perspective that highlights your understanding of either colonization or genocide.
- ***This Land is My Land* includes mention of dancing. Dancing, it is shared, “...is to celebrate life.** With each beat of the drum we celebrate the heartbeat of Mother Earth”. After doing research on jingle-dress dancers, fancy dancers, grass dancers, or chicken dancers, write a poem that describes what you hear and feel as someone witnessing the dancing. Consider <https://www.powwows.com/main/pow-wow-dance-styles/> as a resource when researching the

different dance styles.

- **In the book, it is suggested that ancestors guide us just like the Creator.** Write out the names of some of your ancestors and what lessons they have taught you. Try to connect the ancestor with the lesson learned, if possible.
- **One theme in the book *This Land is My Land* is the role and importance of generations before and after your time.** The "Give Thanks to the Grandmothers", "Urban Indian Pain Dance", and "This Warrior Goes Dancing" reminds the reader about the role and importance of generations before and after your time. Write out goals as to how you plan to honor generations before you while planning to support generations after you.

Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Boarding schools is a topic discussed in the book *This Land is My Land*. Have students continue to conduct research on Indian boarding schools and how they affected Native children and continue to do so today.** Consider reading another Lee & Low title, *Home to Medicine Mountain* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/home-to-medicine-mountain>). If possible, show a documentary on Native American Boarding Schools, such as (<https://www.pbs.org/video/unspoken-americas-native-american-boarding-schools-oob-t1r/>). What are students' reactions? What did they learn from watching the documentary and reading *Home to Medicine Mountain*? What have they learned about Indian boarding schools that they had not known prior to reading and engaging with additional information, and what does it make them think about the experiences that Native people have had to endure overall?
- **George Littlechild stated that the eagle headdress is "...the highest symbol in our culture."** Think of your own cultures and traditions. What, if any, symbol(s) does your culture(s) acknowledge? How is the symbol similar and/or different from your understanding of the eagle headdress?
- **Land is a theme discussed and illustrated throughout the book *This Land is My Land*.** For example, Columbus and his entering of occupied land in present-day Americas and giving thanks to the grandmothers highlight the importance of place and land. Study the ecosystem of your community. What connections can you draw from how the author/illustrator, George Littlechild, discusses land to your community?
- **The author/illustrator of *This Land is My Land* discussed his visit to New York, New York (He tells readers that he observed tall buildings, huge stores, crowds of people, and fancy restaurants in his visit to New York, New York).** Construct a free-standing model of your interpretation of what the author/illustrator described using objects available to you. Use the author/illustrator's work on page as inspiration for your model.
- **The author/illustrator includes interpretations of housing and general buildings in *This Land is My Land*.** Use <http://www.native-languages.org/houses.htm> to create

miniature models of different types of housing, noting that Native Americans today also live in generally idealized apartments, condominiums, and other more widely known homes.

Art, Media & Music

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Check the Lee & Low Books website for close reading with book art ideas with *This Land is My Land*** (<https://blog.leeandlow.com/2014/11/09/first-look-second-look-third-look-close-reading-with-book-art/>). Select specific questions for students to focus on and what it was like reflect on what it was like to do the first, second, and third looks with the art. What did they learn from this close reading process of reflecting about the art in *This Land is My Land*?
- **Identify similarities and differences between George Littlechild's illustrations from the book *This Land is My Land* with other Indigenous artists.** Examples of other prominent Indigenous artists include: Woody Crumbo (<https://americanart.si.edu/artist/woodrow-crumbo-1059>), Oscar Howe (<https://www.usdartgalleries.com/oscar-howe-reproductions>), and Virginia Stroud (<https://www.pinterest.com/boots402/virginia-stroud/>).
- **The use of mixed media to tell a story is used in *This Land is My Land*.** Create a mixed media piece that tells a story of a life lesson you experienced.
- **The author, George Littlechild, alludes to his perspective on trust or forgiveness in the book.** Create an illustration of your own that provides your perspective on trust or forgiveness. How does your perspective differ from your interpretation of George Littlechild's perspective?

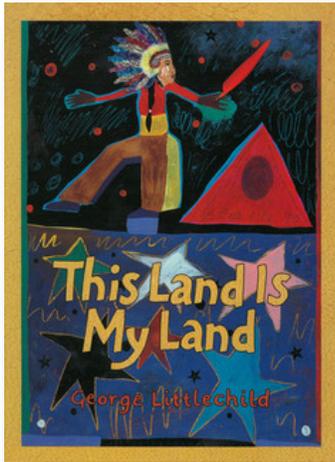
School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Interview two different people in your family about their lessons learned from their ancestors.** Try to find people from different age groups to interview (e.g., parent, grandparent, great grandparent).
- **Walk around your neighborhood and create a list of things that you see as need versus want.** In *This Land is My Land*, the author specifically mentions how “The white men wanted to own the land they lived on, which meant that we could not share it. Indians never owned land. Nothing belonged to us. Everything we had, we shared. So when the white men came we found their ways very unusual.” Do you observe more needs or wants in your neighborhood? What do your results suggest to you? How does this connect back to what George Littlechild writes in *This Land is My Land*?
- **Create a time capsule with your family that documents your identity, interests, and story.** Encourage all family members to contribute to the time capsule. Plan a future date to open up your time capsule (maybe in 5 or 10 years).



Ordering Information

General Order Information:

leeandlow.com/contact/ordering

Secure Online Ordering:

leeandlow.com/books/this-land-is-my-land

By Phone: 212-779-4400 ext. 25

By Fax: 212-683-1894

By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,
New York, NY 10016

ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

George Littlechild is an internationally renowned artist from the Plains Cree Nation. He is a member of the Plains Cree Nation, which is part of the Cree Nation, the largest Indian nation in Canada. His work is celebrated for its exciting use of color, its themes from his Plains Cree background, and its spirit of playfulness. His paintings have been shown in galleries across Canada, in the United States, and in Europe and Japan. They can be found in many public and private collections. *This Land is My Land* was the winner of both the prestigious Jane Addams Picture Book Award and the National Parenting Publications Gold Medal.

Littlechild was born in Edmonton, Alberta in 1958, and spent his first four years living on and off the reserve at Hobbema, Alberta. He grew up in Edmonton and received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Nova Scotia College of Arts and Design in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He currently lives in Vancouver, British Columbia. Visit him online at <http://georgelittlechild.com/>.

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