

# A TEACHERS' GUIDE TO LAST LEAF FIRST SNOWFLAKE TO FALL

Written and illustrated by Leo Yerxa

## ABOUT THE BOOK

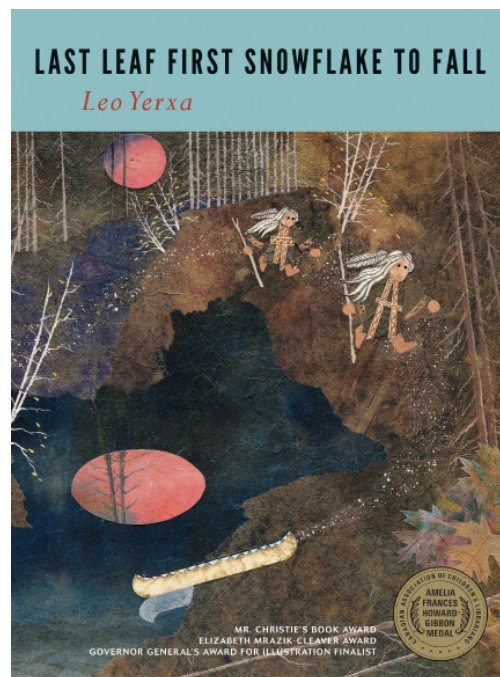
*Last Leaf First Snowflake to Fall* takes us on a dreamlike voyage into nature at that secret moment when fall turns into winter. We find ourselves in a kind of paradise, which humans may be part of but which they have not despoiled.

A father and son lead us through forests, down rivers, over lakes and ponds. Along the way we experience the primordial beauty of the physical world. This is nature as we all feel in our hearts it must once have been.

Through lyrical words and a masterful collage technique, Leo Yerxa has created an exquisite and poetic evocation of this moment.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR / ILLUSTRATOR

Leo Yerxa (1947–2017) was born on the Little Eagle Reserve in northern Ontario. His first book, *Last Leaf First Snowflake to Fall*, was nominated for a Governor General's Literary Award and won the Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator's Award, the Mr. Christie's Book Award and the Elizabeth Mrazik-Cleaver Canadian Picture Book Award. *Ancient Thunder* won the Governor General's Literary Award for Illustration.



**Last Leaf First Snowflake to Fall**  
Written and illustrated by Leo Yerxa

**JUVENILE FICTION**

Reading Ages 4 to 8

9781554981243

Paperback



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## BEFORE READING

### **Activate your thinking about the seasons:**

What do you know about fall?

What do you like about fall?

What do you know about winter?

What do you like about winter?

Create a two-column chart on chart paper (fall / winter). Record students' answers to the above questions and use this as an anchor chart while reading.

Or

**Parking Lot:** Post two pieces of chart paper on the board labeled "fall" and "winter." Have students pair up. Provide each pair with a set of post-it notes. Have students write their ideas on their post-it notes and put them on the appropriate piece of chart paper

### **Changing Seasons**

How do we prepare for the seasons to change?

How does the earth prepare?

How do humans prepare?

**Jigsaw Activity:** Divide students into groups of 3, 4 or 5. Provide each group with a half piece of chart paper. Have students draw and label their answers to the Changing Seasons questions.

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## DURING READING

### Creation Stories

The text begins before creation:

“Long ago, before time  
Before sunlight burst across the universe  
to give light to the heart of a dark green forest...”

Learn and share some of the creation stories of the Ojibway.

Some Ojibway creation story resources:

<http://www.native-art-in-canada.com/creationstory.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cX4GJTtSigY>

[http://www.ottawaalgonquins.com/index\\_files/Creation%20Story.pdf](http://www.ottawaalgonquins.com/index_files/Creation%20Story.pdf)

How are these stories different or similar? Discuss as a class, in small groups or pairs. Have students share their comparisons with the whole group.

As you read this story, ask students to think about how they see elements of the creation story throughout. Use pause points during the story to share and discuss.



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## DURING READING

### Cycles in Nature

On the second page, the author writes “Before rain fell and became mud puddles and seas and rose again to become clouds to fall back to the earth as rain again and again.” This is a demonstration of the water cycle. Discuss/consider other cycles in nature (i.e. photosynthesis, the carbon cycle).

**Science Connection:** Water Cycle: Create a KWL chart with Students about the Water Cycle. Show the following video on the water cycle:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncORPosDrjl>

Prior to class, draw the water cycle on a piece of chart paper. After watching the video, label the water cycle poster as a group and use as an anchor chart.

Consider the following experiment to demonstrate the water cycle:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rwFK5\\_Viqo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rwFK5_Viqo)

### Picture This

Throughout the story there are a lot of literary devices:

“the night wind howled”

“the swamp speaks”

Discuss the meaning and have students create pictures that go with some of them.

**Art Connection:** Discuss with students how in art, things like the wind and water can take on human features. Show some examples. Have students paint the wind or a swamp, etc. and then draw in human features.



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## ABOUT THE BOOK

### How Do You See the World?

Look for examples of the author giving human characteristics to nature. Record these as you read. When the book is done, consider what this tells us about how Ojibway people view the world. How is this different or the same as how you see the world?

### Indigenous Worldview

From Dragonfly Consulting Services Canada:  
“Although Indigenous peoples are diverse in their cultural practices and perspectives, their worldviews are similar in many basic respects, including a belief in the interconnectedness of all living things.”

<http://dragonflycanada.ca/resources/aboriginal-worldviews/>



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## DURING READING

### Eight differences between Indigenous and Western Worldviews

(Adapted from: <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>)

Indigenous Worldview	Western Worldview
Spiritually orientated society. System based on belief and spiritual world.	Scientific, skeptical. Requiring proof as a basis of belief.
There can be many truths; truths are dependent upon individual experiences.	There is only one truth, based on science or Western-style law.
Society operates in a state of relatedness. Everything and everyone is related. There is real belief that people, objects and the environment are all connected. Law, kinship and spirituality reinforce this connectedness. Identity comes from connections.	Society is compartmentalized and becoming more so.
The land is sacred and usually given by a creator or supreme being.	The land and its resources should be available for development and extraction for the benefit of humans.
Time is non-linear, cyclical in nature. Time is measured in cyclical events. The seasons are central to this cyclical concept.	Time is usually linearly structured and future orientated. The framework of months, years, days, etc., reinforces the linear structure.
Feeling comfortable is measured by the quality of your relationships with people.	Feeling comfortable is often dependent on your definition of success and how well you have achieved it.
Human beings are not the most important in the world.	Human beings are often held as the highest being in the hierarchy of living things.
Amassing wealth is important for the good of the community Amassing wealth is important for individuals.	Amassing wealth is important for individuals.

Can you find examples of some of these differences in the text?

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## DURING READING

### You Be the Author

There are some pages without text. After discussing the author's style, have students write a piece of text that the author may have included to go with that picture.

## AFTER READING

### Descriptive Writing

The author uses the senses to describe many moments in this story. Have students experience something together — a walk around the block, for example. In a written response, have them use as many senses as they can to describe that experience.

### Science Connection: The Five Senses

Create a chart that is broken into 5 spaces. Ask students to brainstorm what the five senses are. Create titles in each section. Watch the following video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qh5XsltAhuA>

After watching the video, have the students add ideas to the chart on each of the five senses. Use as an anchor chart while reading/exploring.

### Speak for the Animals

Pick one of the animals and describe its point of view as it prepares for the changes in the season. Write about the sounds/sights/smells it hears as the seasons shift.



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## AFTER READING

### Science Connection: The Five Senses

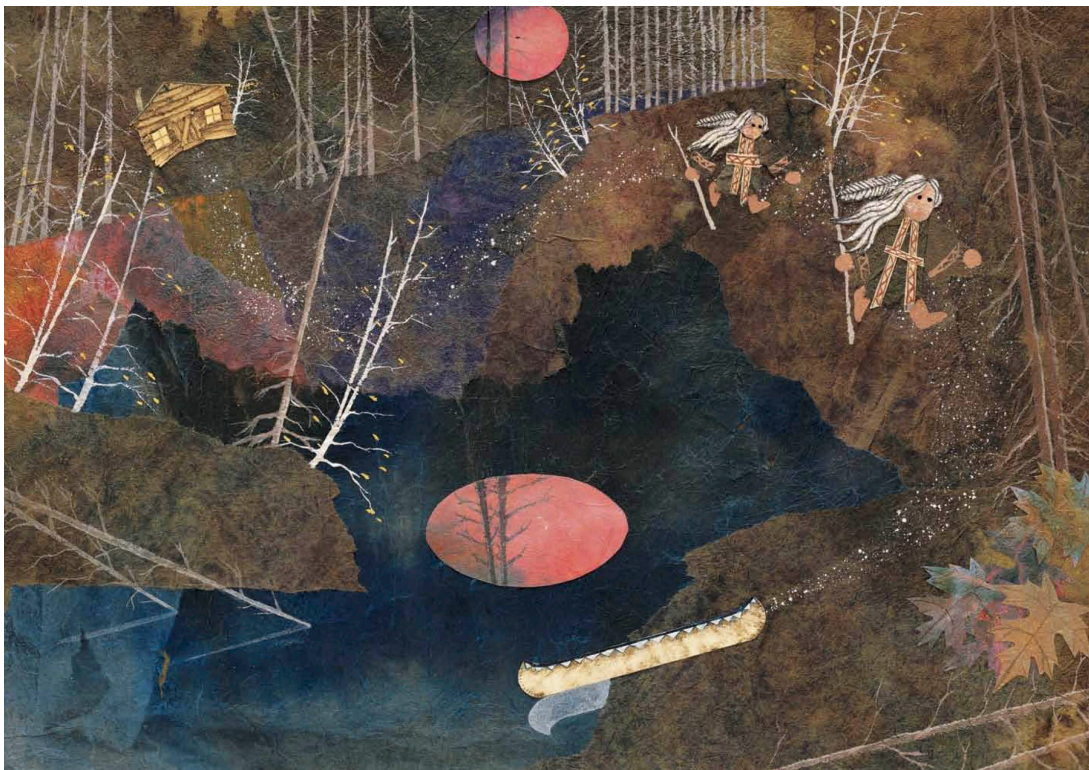
Go back to the anchor chart created with students on the five senses. Have students work in pairs to create a poster entitled "The Changing Seasons." Each pair of students should brainstorm the smells, sights and sounds of the changing seasons.

### Different Seasons

Write a companion to this text about the firsts of Spring.

Science Connection: Seasons

Discuss the four seasons, including identifying features of each, and why they are important.





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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Connections to other Groundwood Titles:

*Ancient Thunder*

By Leo Yerxa

978-1-55498127-4

*Lessons from Mother Earth*

Written by Elaine McLeod

Illustrated by Colleen Wood

978-0-88899-832-3

### Additional web resources:

Circle of Life: What Is the Aboriginal Worldview: <https://youtu.be/zc-Enykb028>

### Native Language connection:

Video of Last Leaf First Snowflake to Fall read and subtitled in Anishnaabemowin (Ojibway Language) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKCN7ohiL8Y>

