

A TEACHERS' GUIDE TO SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A FOX

Written and illustrated by Danielle Daniel

ABOUT THE BOOK

In this introduction to the Anishinaabe tradition of totem animals, young children explain why they identify with different creatures such as a deer, beaver or moose. Delightful illustrations show the children wearing masks representing their chosen animal, while the few lines of text on each page work as a series of simple poems throughout the book.

In a brief author's note, Danielle Daniel explains the importance of totem animals in Anishinaabe culture and how they can also act as animal guides for young children seeking to understand themselves and others.



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Sometimes I Feel Like a Fox

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JUVENILE FICTION

Reading Ages 4 to 7

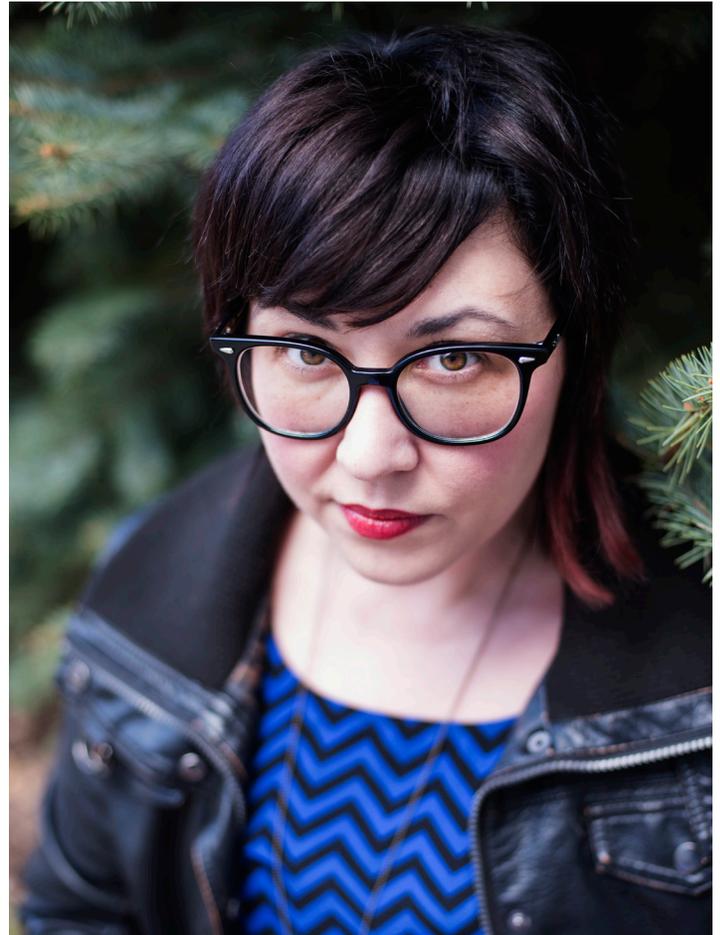
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ABOUT THE CREATOR

Danielle Daniel, writer, artist and illustrator, is Métis. She was inspired to write *Sometimes I Feel Like a Fox* to encourage her young son to connect with his Aboriginal roots. It won the Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award and has been selected as one of the New York Public Library's Best 100 Books for Reading and Sharing. A schoolteacher for many years, Danielle now paints and writes, and she is completing an MFA in creative writing through the University of British Columbia. She has published a memoir, *The Dependent*, her second picture book, *Once in a Blue Moon*, and *You Hold Me Up* written by Monique Gray Smith. Danielle lives in Northern Ontario.



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BEFORE READING

To increase students' oral language and written language skills, have students respond to any of the questions during discussions as a whole class, in small groups or in partners and then record their responses in a journal, report or other written format.

Judging a Book by Its Cover (Prediction)

Look at the front cover depicting a young person with a fox mask. Ask students: Why do you think the title of the book is *Sometimes I Feel Like a Fox*? Do you think animals have feelings? If so, how do you think a fox feels?

Picture Walk

With the class, look at each illustration in the book and ask students to describe the animal that they see in each mask. Ask them what characteristics they think each of the animals has. Write these on a chart under the headings "Animal" and "Characteristics."

Dedication

The author makes a dedication "to the thousands of Métis and Aboriginal children who grew up never knowing their totem animal." Ask students: Why do you think the author made this dedication to those children? (Note: Think about age-appropriate explanations for the negative influences of residential schools, cultural loss, the Sixties Scoop, moving away from their communities, etc.)

Clans are a form of governance for many Indigenous cultures. "The word totem, or doodem in Anishinaabe, means clan. In the Anishinaabe tradition, everyone belongs to an animal clan, which is decided at birth and is usually the same as their father's. This totem animal symbolizes the skills that each member of the clan must learn to serve their tribe."

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DURING READING

Totem Traits

As you read through the book, document the description of each of the animals. With students, create a chart to capture each animal's characteristics. (Chart headings can be "Animal," "Feeling" and "Character Trait.")

The Role of a Guide

Discuss with students the meaning of a guide. Why do you think that having a guide is important to someone? How might a guide help you? Brainstorm some situations in which having a guide might be useful. How does understanding the characteristic of an animal help you understand yourself?

Feelings

Generate a list of different feelings with students. Have them choose one to discuss with a partner, telling about a time when they have experienced this feeling.

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AFTER READING

After reading the Author's Note, discuss with students the statements "The word totem means clan. ... Everyone belongs to an animal clan ... usually the same as their father's. This totem animal symbolizes the skills that each member of the clan must learn to serve their tribe." Ask students the following question: Why do you think it is important to learn skills to serve your community?

Use the following writing prompts:

Now, I can serve the community by ...

When I grow up, I will serve the community by ...

Community Connection

Invite a local Indigenous knowledge keeper, Elder or Métis senator to be a guest in your classroom to discuss with students the importance of totems. You may connect with a local Indigenous Friendship Centre to locate someone to speak with your class.

Totem Animals and Their Meanings

Using the list at the end of the story, explore each of the animals and the trait that the author associates with the animal. Have students choose one animal and write a connection they may have to the meaning of the totem.

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CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Literacy and the Arts Connections: Daily Journal

Ask students to journal their feelings and create pictures of how they feel each day as you explore the story.

The Arts Connection: Mask Making

Invite an Elder, senator or knowledge keeper to speak with your class to share information about the concepts of clans, totems and doodems. If you have an Indigenous lead within your school system, they may be able to help with this. Understanding that clans are systems within Indigenous cultures will help students understand the concepts that the author was exploring.

Have students create masks of animals of their choice. They can accompany their masks with a written statement about their choice of animal and how they connected to the characteristic traits of that animal.

Please note to the class that these are not ceremonial masks as some Indigenous cultures create and wear, but masks specifically related to the story. It should be kept in the realm of feelings and character values, and please do not tell the students that these are their spirit animals or totems.

While it is important to learn about the cultural concepts of spirit animals and totems, the actual assignment of a spirit animal or totem is a deeply spiritual and cultural process. It should never be done in a classroom as this would be considered cultural appropriation.

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CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Science and Literacy Connections: Animal Investigation

Have students do some early investigation on one of the animals in the book. They can write in a research frame:

Name of animal:

Drawing of animal:

My animal lives in:

My animal eats:

Two interesting facts about my animal:

Learn About the Indigenous Peoples in Your Area

Locate within your area the nearest First Nations community and Métis community. Using the internet, do some research on the community. Invite a guest speaker to share some information about the community with your class. When you invite them, you may ask them to talk about their totem/doodem and how this helps to guide their life. In many Indigenous cultures, it is appropriate to offer a tie of tobacco when inviting the Indigenous person to speak to the group.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Connect to This Groundwood Text

Grandpa's Girls — written by Nicola I. Campbell, illustrated by Kim LaFave
ISBN 978-1-55498-084-0

Web Resources

The Anishinaabe Clan System of Governance:

Gehl, Lynn. "The Anishinaabe Clan System of Governance." Abstract (Fourth Annual Trent-Carleton Graduate Student Conference), Trent University, 2007. <http://www.trentu.ca/academic/can-adawhowhyhow/documents/LynnGehl.pdf>

Anishnawbe Health Toronto — Traditional Teaching and Other Brochures (for information on clans and the four sacred medicines): <http://www.aht.ca/circle-of-life/teachings>