

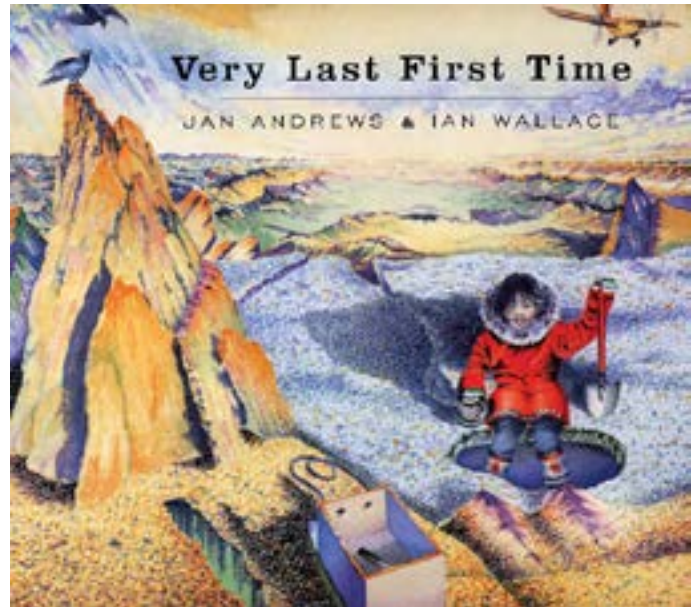
A TEACHERS GUIDE TO VERY LAST FIRST TIME

Written by Jan Andrews and illustrated by Ian Wallace

ABOUT THE BOOK

Every winter in Eva's Inuit village on Ungava Bay in northern Canada, the people walk on the bottom of the frozen sea to gather mussels. Eva has done this with her mother ever since she was a little girl. But today is a special day. Today, for the very first time, Eva is going to walk on the bottom of the sea all alone.

This classic picture book captures the eerie, fantastic world that lies between the bottom of the sea and the ice above and lets the reader share a very special experience with a small Inuit girl.



Very Last First Time

Written by Jan Andrews

Illustrated by Ian Wallace

JUVENILE FICTION

Reading Ages 5 to 9

978-0-88899-043-3

Hardcover with Jacket

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jan Andrews (1942–2017) was nominated for the Governor General's Award three times. Her books, including *Very Last First Time* (illustrated by Ian Wallace), *The Auction* (illustrated by Karen Reczuch) and *Out of the Everywhere: Tales for a New World* (illustrated by Simon Ng) have become Canadian classics.

Jan was also a storyteller with a special love for ancient stories. She performed across Canada, in the US, in Europe and Australia. She was a founding member of Storytellers of Canada / Conteurs du Canada and co-founder of MASC, an organization dedicated to bringing artists to schools and communities. In the last year of her life, she was appointed to the Order of Canada in recognition of her contribution to Canadian culture. As well she was a passionate paddler and a rock climber who loved to sing silly songs.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR



Ian Wallace is one of Canada's best known children's book creators. He has published many classics, including *Boy of the Deeps* and *Chin Chiang* and the *Dragon's Dance*. His illustrations for *Canadian Railroad Trilogy* and *Just So Stories* have each received three starred reviews. His most recent book is *The Curiosity Cabinet. An Owl at Sea*, written by Susan Vande Griek, is forthcoming.

Ian has won the Elizabeth Mrazik-Cleaver Award, the Mr. Christie's Book Award and the Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Award, among others. He has been nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award, the Governor General's Award and the TD Canadian Children's Literature Award. Ian lives in Brookline, Massachusetts, with his wife, Deb.

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BEFORE READING

Cover Analysis

Show students the cover (you may want to display the cover on the Smartboard so that students can get a good look at it). Together as a class, make predictions about what this story may be about.

Note to Teachers: The experience in this story is very unique to the people of Ungava Bay, Canada. Many children will not have any prior knowledge about what Eva, the main character, is doing. You will most likely have to spend some time giving the students background knowledge about mussel hunting in Ungava Bay.



Ungava Bay: This community in northern Quebec, as well as its neighboring community of Wakeham Bay, are believed to be the only two places where people can lower themselves below the ice when the tide goes out to hunt for mussels. The sea ice drops by about 12 m (40 ft.), allowing the locals to go under the ice and walk on the seabed. The locals do this when the moon is full or new, as that is when the tide stays out the longest. This is extremely dangerous, but the locals of these areas have been doing this for generations to add variety to their diets.

Title — *Very Last First Time*

Ask students to share what they think the title might mean. Have students remember a time when they were really excited to do something by themselves for the first time and share their memories with the class.

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DURING READING

These are guiding questions that can be discussed orally — as a shared response as a class or in small groups — or completed as individual reading responses, or a combination of all. This book should be read over a couple of days for students to gain the most insight out of the discussions.

Map Skills

Look up Ungava Bay on a map. What do you notice about its location? Based on where it is located, what resources might the people who live there utilize?

Ways of Living: Traditional Mixed with Modern

On page 3, look at the picture of Eva and her mom walking and pulling their sleds. What evidence do you see of the traditional way of Inuit life? (E.g., hides tanning, wearing parkas and mukluks, woman carrying a baby on her back in her hood.) What evidence do you see of modern life? (E.g., hydro wires, airplane, snowmobile tracks.)

Ungava Bay is in northern Quebec, Canada. The bay opens into the Hudson Strait. The bay is 260 km (160 mi.) at its widest point and is 320 km (200 mi.) long. Small communities of Inuit live along the bay and many continue to partake in traditional hunting activities. See encyclopedia entry for information on what resources Inuit access in the Arctic and how.

www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/inuit

Curriculum Connections: Geography

Tide

Does anyone know what is meant by the sentence “The tide was out, pulling the sea water away”? You can provide background knowledge to the students about why/how tides go out and come back in in oceans. Explain that the incoming tide can come back quickly. To extend this activity, have the class (in pairs or individually) research tides. They can illustrate their findings in a diagram or picture.

Curriculum Connection: Science (Tides, Ocean Currents, Seasons, Habitats and Communities)

Emotions

On page 5, Eva and her mom are peering down the hole. How might Eva be feeling? Why do you think this? When have you tried something new and felt the way Eva is feeling now?

Dropping Down

As Eva drops down the hole, she feels excited. Do you think Eva is ready for this adventure? What have Eva and her mother done to prepare for this experience?

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DURING READING

“Alone — for the first time”

How was Eva feeling when she spoke these words, on page 19? How would you be feeling if you were finally trusted to do something that you never could before?

Throat Singing

“She hummed far back in her throat” (page 19). Perhaps Eva is a throat singer, which is common for Inuit women and girls. Watch some videos that show women and girls throat singing. The songs end when one of the throat singers begins to laugh.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnPh3GGykaI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBg1vfe8P1g>

How is Eva feeling if she is humming and singing?

Predictions

Eva quickly fills her mussel pan and then begins to explore. Predict what might happen next in the story. What problems could arise? How do you think Eva might resolve those problems should they occur?

“The Tide!”

The tide is coming back in. Did anyone predict that this would happen? What should Eva do now? How have Eva's feelings changed?

Panic

Eva's candles have gone out. She is calling for help. When she closes her eyes and buries her face in her hands, what do you think she is thinking? How do you know? What would you do if you were in Eva's situation? Have you ever been so scared that you panicked and forgot what to do, like Eva?

Vote

Do you think that Eva should look for her mussel pan on her way out, or do you think that she should just get out through the hole as fast as possible?

Take a vote. The teacher should record the reasons for each side as the students share them.

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DURING READING

Moment of Time

On page 27, it says, “For a long, forever moment she could not strike the match to light the candle.” How long is a “moment”? What is a “forever moment”? Do you think that it took Eva a long time to find and light the candle, or did it just feel like it took a long time? Think of a time when you felt like Eva, when something you were doing felt like it took a long time, but it really didn't.

Relief

When Eva got back to the hole safely, why didn't she immediately start to dance, skip and leap? Instead, she “slowly began to smile.” Why did it take her so long to become excited?

Perspective

Studying the illustrations, discuss why the perspectives shift. How does it make you feel? How do you experience the protagonist's exploration under the ice? What information are the illustrations giving us that has been omitted from the text? How do the images support the text and propel the narrative of the story?

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AFTER READING

Short-response questions can be used for discussion and to engage in writing short paragraphs. Teachers can co-construct a rubric or success criteria with the students to indicate the essential elements of a written short response.

Prediction

How do you think Eva will feel when she goes mussel harvesting again? Do you think she might do anything differently the next time? Explain your thinking.

Title

Is *Very Last First Time* a good title for the book? What is another title that the author could have used? Explain why you chose this title.

Opinion Writing

Is hunting mussels worth risking one's life? Is hunting other animals any less risky? Explain your opinion using details from this book as well as your own ideas.

Author's Message

What do you think that Jan Andrews, the author, is trying to teach us by writing this book? What do you believe is one of the major themes from the story? Use proof from the story to support your response.

Teachings

Do you think that Eva's mom passed this tradition down to Eva too soon, or do you think Eva was mature enough to handle the responsibilities of this activity? Give reasons from the story to support your view.

Research Inuit Culture

In pairs or small groups, research the Inuit way of life. How do the Inuit traditionally live their lives? What did/do they eat? Has much changed for them in today's society?

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AFTER READING

Modern Conveniences

Could Eva and her mom have gotten the mussels from the store? Eva made memories that day going to collect mussels. Would the same quality of memories have been made had they gone to a store to buy the mussels?

Importance of Keeping Traditions Alive

Why is it important that Eva's mom pass down the tradition to Eva? Why are traditions important in a family? What traditions do you have in your family? Have any "jobs" been passed down to your parents from your grandparents that may one day be your responsibility?

CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Taste Testing

If appropriate for your class/school, bring in some mussels for students to try.
Curriculum Connections: Foods (Secondary)

Research Blue-Black Mussels

What is Eva collecting? Why is she collecting these mussels? In the book, on page 18, it says, "There were strings of blue-black mussel shells whichever way she turned." What does this quote mean? Why are all the mussels attached? Spend some time researching as a class to gain some knowledge about mussels.
Curriculum Connections: Science (Biodiversity, Habitats and Communities)

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Web Resources:

Watch as Inuit go under the ice in Ungava Bay to collect mussels:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sW_Y7S1BuPA

Video of real mussel hunters going beneath the ice surface to walk on the seabed:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgVJNiO6lZI>

Information about mussel harvesting in Ungava Bay:

Lane, Megan. "Inuit's risky mussel harvest under sea ice." BBC News, January 25, 2011. <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-12241053>

Throat singing resource:

"Inuit Throat Singing Introduction — Inuit Cultural Online Resource." Produced by the Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre. Video, 3:59, March 25, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbG6BlTCr-g>

Nunavik Tourism Association:

<http://www.nunavik-tourism.com/default.aspx>

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