



GROUNDWOOD STUDY GUIDES

Ancient Thunder

Written and illustrated by
Leo Yerxa



A beautiful and visionary book, *Ancient Thunder* celebrates wild horses and the natural world of the prairies. The art is accompanied by a rich song of praise for the wild horses that came to play such an important role in the lives of the First Peoples.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Ages 4 to 7 / Grades K to 2

JUVENILE FICTION / Animals / Horses; Indigenous studies

Full-color illustrations / 10.75 x 8.25 / 40 pages

Trade paperback / \$12.99 / 978-1-55498-127-4 / ebook / 978-1-55498-211-0



BOOK DESCRIPTION

A beautiful and visionary book, *Ancient Thunder* celebrates wild horses and the natural world of the prairies. Using an extraordinary technique, Leo Yerxa, an artist of Ojibway ancestry, makes paper look like leather, so that his illustrations seem to be painted on leather shirts. The art is accompanied by a rich song of praise for the wild horses that came to play such an important role in the lives of the First Peoples.

Years in the making, the book is truly a work of art — one that reflects Yerxa's sense of nature and the place of the First Peoples within it.

In this book, the author celebrates the relationship between people, animals and nature. Curriculum connections include the Arts, Social Studies, Science, Physical and Health Education.

BEFORE READING

TEXT FORMS

Brainstorm and create a word web of text genres titled “Things We Read.” Record ideas on chart paper or on the Smartboard. Examples: labels, recipes, fiction, ads, magazines, comics, nonfiction (biography, informational text), signs, poetry, graphic novels, chapter books, maps, newspapers and instructions.

ENGAGING THE READER

Pose the following question to students: “If you were an animal, what animal would you be and why?” The students can write or draw their response on a post-it note or a piece of paper. Post their responses on chart paper. Read the story aloud to students without showing the pictures. Afterwards, give students the opportunity to make additions or changes to their original responses.

MAKING PREDICTIONS

Show the front cover of the book to students with the title covered. Ask students to make predictions about what they think the book will be about and share their ideas with a partner. Uncover the title and pose the question again. Ask students to confirm their predictions.



BEFORE READING

ACTIVATING PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Have students work in small groups (three or four students) to illustrate a phrase from the text. Post their illustrations when complete. Do a gallery walk to view each group's illustration. Follow up this activity with a sharing circle.

Curriculum connections: Arts / visual art; Social Studies / communities, roles and responsibilities, celebrations and culture; Science / seasons, space

- Note to Teachers: The strawberry is also known as the heart berry, or Ode'miin in Anishinaabemowin, and has many teachings, including love, forgiveness and peace. Many Indigenous Peoples follow a thirteen-moon calendar based on things happening in the natural world. The Strawberry Moon rises in June and is one of reconciliation, welcoming everyone. It is celebrated by many communities, including the Ojibway (Anishinaabe).

Strawberry Teachings:

<https://wabano.com/product/strawberry-teachings/>

<https://onlc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/13-Moon-curriculum2.pdf>



WHILE READING

These are guiding questions that can be discussed orally, done as a shared response as a class or small group, or completed as individual responses.

VISUALIZING

As the story is read aloud, ask students to create mental images of what the text is about. Have them share their ideas with the class. Reread the text to students, showing the pictures as the text is read aloud.

ILLUSTRATIONS

As you look through the illustrations on each page of the book, what do you notice? Why is this important?

VOCABULARY BUILDING

Think Aloud — What do the following phrases mean? Teachers will model the “Think Aloud” process for students with this activity.

http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/think_alouds

“... first sparkles of new daylight” (sunrise)

“Over a sea of grass” (running on the Great Plains)

“Soaring on eagles’ wings” (running so fast they seem to be flying)

“Beating the earth drum” (galloping)

Curriculum connections: Language arts / poetic devices, metaphors

AFTER READING

MAKING CONNECTIONS

(text to self, text to text, text to world, text to media)

What does this book make you think of/remind you of?

BOOK TITLE

Why do you think that author / illustrator Leo Yerxa chose the title *Ancient Thunder* for this book? Suggest a different title and explain your thinking.

ILLUSTRATIONS

How has the illustrator used color to create interest for the reader? (He used rich, vibrant colors to engage the reader.) What do you notice about the illustrations? (There is a horse in each illustration, as well as the presence of other animals and regalia of the Indigenous Peoples of the Great Plains)

Art Connection: Mixed-media arts, color, patterns

► Note to Teachers: Illustrations in this text depict traditional clothing of the Indigenous Peoples of the Great Plains. The patterns for the shirts and dresses are loosely based on designs that Leo saw in museums and books over the years.

AFTER READING

GENRES OF TEXT

Compare and contrast poetry versus narrative using a graphic organizer (T-chart, Venn diagram), record students' ideas about the similarities and differences between these two genres of texts.

AUTHOR'S MESSAGE

What is the author's message? Think about the relationship between man and nature. Have students create written or illustrated responses, and then share them in small groups or with the whole class.



CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

THE ARTS — MOBILE

Ask students to choose items and create a mobile that reflects their personal connection to the land just as Leo Yerxa used his admiration for horses along with the traditional clothing of the Indigenous peoples of the Great Plains in his book *Ancient Thunder*. Items could include glass beads, porcupine quills, feathers, shells, different kinds of leather, tree bark, cones, dried berries, tall grass, leaves, rocks, etc. Allowing students to pick what to include in their mobile gives them the opportunity to choose the theme that speaks to them.

THE ARTS — CLASS QUILT

Create a class quilt using fabric squares. Each square of the quilt will reflect a student's personal connection to the land. Explore how different colors or patterns can represent different elements of nature and the land.

THE ARTS — 3-D REPRESENTATION

Ask students to collect recyclable materials as well as materials found in nature (i.e. folded paper, fabric, beads, feathers, tree bark, acorns, pine cones, needles, leaves, sticks, twigs, tall grass, flowers, etc.). Students will use the items to create a three-dimensional picture illustrating their relationship to nature and their natural surroundings.

THE ARTS — MURAL

As a class activity, students will work collaboratively to plan and design a mural to be painted on a designated wall in their school. The mural will reflect nature and the relationship between man and his surroundings just as Leo Yerxa has shared his childhood interest in horses and admiration for the Indigenous Peoples of the Great Plains with us.

CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

THE ARTS — NATURE COLLAGE

Have students create a nature collage in groups of four or five students. Students will collect items from their environment (i.e. school playground, community/neighborhood parks, backyard) and work together to create a collage placing collected items on the ground. Before items are collected, teachers should pre-teach vocabulary and talk with students about poisonous and non-poisonous items. Brainstorm with students about items that are safe to collect and unsafe items that they should avoid. Items could include pine needles, seeds, tree bark, pine cones, leaves, tall grass, twigs, sticks, stones, berries, etc. Create a T-chart for Safe and Not Safe items. Safe items can be recorded using a green marker and unsafe items using a red marker.

- **Note to Teachers:** When the collages are complete, teachers can take a photo of each one as a visual reference of students' work. Follow up with a class discussion or ask groups to present their collages in an oral report, explaining their choice of items.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Aboriginal Perspectives: A Guide to The Teacher’s Toolkit — Teaching Resources and Strategies for Elementary and Secondary Classrooms.

Ontario Ministry of Education: 2009.

https://www.tncdsb.on.ca/Programs/Program/IndigenousEd/Documents/Guide_Toolkit2009.pdf

“Creating a Classroom Parking Lot.” Competency Works: 2013.

<https://www.competencyworks.org/how-to/creating-a-classroom-parking-lot/>

Danks, F., & Schofield, J. Nature’s Playground: Activities, Crafts, and Games to Encourage Children to Get Outdoors. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2007.

“Fostering Literacy Success for First Nations, Metis and Inuit Students.”

Student Achievement Division. Ontario Ministry of Education: 2013.

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/WW_Fostering_Literacy.pdf

Harvey, S., & Goudvis, A. Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement. 2nd Edition. Portland ME: Stenhouse, 2007.

Miller, Debbie. Reading With Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades. Portland ME: Stenhouse, 2002.

Reading Rockets (Features a variety of graphic organizers and other literacy resources for teachers.) www.readingrockets.org

CONNECT TO THESE GROUNDWOOD TEXTS

A Salmon for Simon

Written by Betty Waterton and illustrated by Ann Blades

978-0-88899-276-5

Last Leaf First Snowflake to Fall

Written and illustrated by Leo Yerxa

978-1-55498-124-3

Lessons from Mother Earth

Written by Elaine McLeod and illustrated by Colleen Wood

978-0-88899-832-3

P'esk'a and the First Salmon Ceremony

Written and illustrated by Scot Ritchie

978-1-55498-718-4

Salmon Creek

Written by Annette LeBox and illustrated by Karen Reczuch

978-0-88899-644-2

AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR BIOGRAPHY



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.

