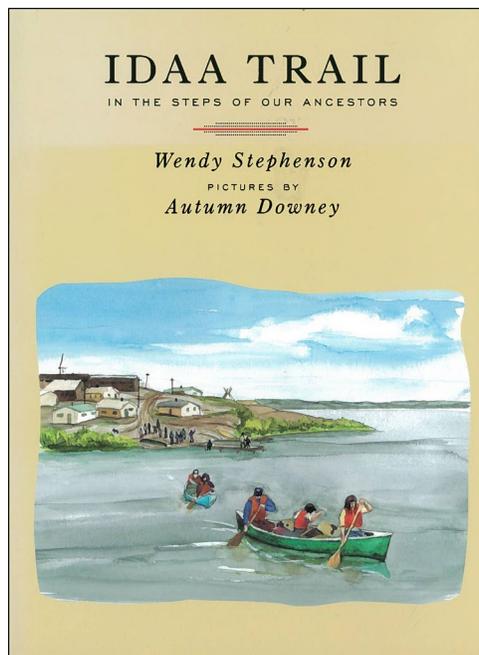




# GROUNDWOOD STUDY GUIDES

## Idaa Trail IN THE STEPS OF OUR ANCESTORS

*Written by Wendy Stephenson  
Illustrated by Autumn Downey*



Etseh, Etsi and their three grandchildren have just embarked on a month-long canoe trip. They are following the Idaa Trail, a trade route that the Dogrib people have traveled for hundreds of years.

### **CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

Ages 7 to 10 / Grades 2 to 5

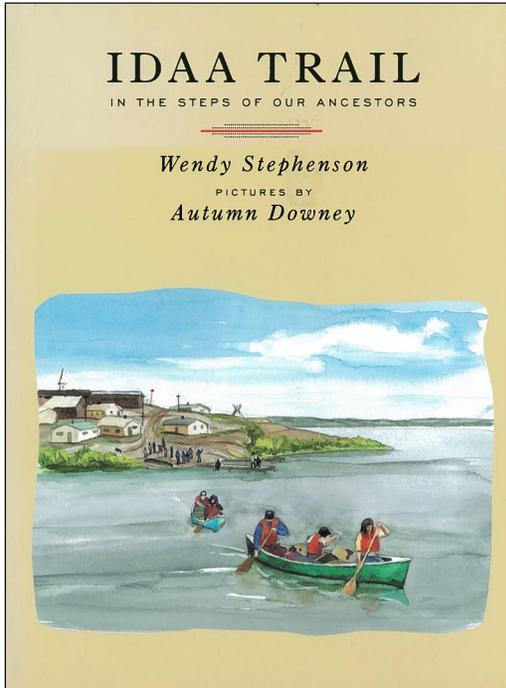
JUVENILE FICTION / People & Places / Canada / Indigenous

7 x 9.5 / 64 pages

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Ebook / \$16.95 / 978-1-55498-467-1

[groundwoodbooks.com](http://groundwoodbooks.com)



## BOOK DESCRIPTION

Etseh, Etsi and their three grandchildren have just embarked on a month-long canoe trip in the Northwest Territories — from the town of Rae to Hottah Lake. They are following the Idaa Trail, a trade route that the Dogrib people have traveled for hundreds of years.

Etseh and Etsi traveled the Idaa Trail when they were children, and as they paddle north with their grandchildren they pass along their knowledge of special sites along the way and explain how their people survived in the old days — building birchbark canoes, fishing with willow lines and muskrat-tooth hooks, and ambushing herds of caribou.

This remarkable work, based on ten years of archeological research, documents the past and present of one of the most intact Indigenous cultures of North America. The reading of this book could span a week or two; each chapter explores a different theme and provides new vocabulary and learning. Discussion prompts and questions are provided for each chapter.

## BEFORE READING

### WHO ARE THE DOGRIB PEOPLE?

Have students take some time to learn about the Dogrib people, and ask them: Where do they live? How do they live?

“Dogrib” entry in the Encyclopaedia Britannica:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dogrib>

#### ► Tlicho (Dogrib)

The Tlicho, also known as the Dogrib, fall within the broader designation of the Dene, Aboriginal peoples of the widespread Athapaskan language family. Their name for themselves is Doné, meaning “the People.”

—The Canadian Encyclopedia article “Dene Nation (organization)”:

<http://bit.ly/2DIOaVB>

### VOCABULARY

Have students use the glossary at the back of the book to familiarize themselves with the words they will see in the text. Create a word wall of Dogrib words. Encourage students to use these words in their day-to-day interactions in class.

Transliteration	Pronunciation	Definition
Asanile	(eh-sun-nee-lay)	It's okay
Dawhidi	(dow-hee-dee)	Nothing
Dzonchleh	(dzone-clay)	Come here

## BEFORE READING

### WHERE IN THE WORLD?

With students, explore the route of the Idaa Trail. Calculate the distance between Rae and Hottah Lake, which the family will travel in this book. Look at this on a map and/or Google Earth.

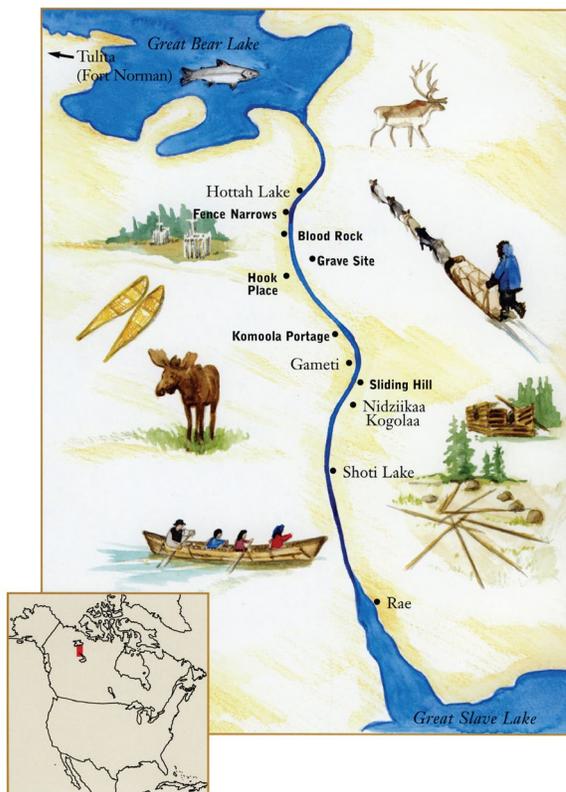
Lessons from the Land: A Cultural Journey through the Northwest Territories — Idaa Trail virtual tour:

<http://bit.ly/2XXWybt>

Idaa Trail Teacher's Guide (pair with the virtual tour above):

<http://bit.ly/2VDyHAn>

- ▶ The Idaa Trail is a traditional water route that has been used for centuries by the Dogrib people. It runs between Great Slave Lake near Hay River and Great Bear Lake near Yellowknife. Canoes were used to traverse the trail in the summer, and dog teams were used in the winter. Various Indigenous Peoples' artifacts have been found along the route.



## DURING READING

### VOCABULARY

Continue to build and add to the word wall that has been created and integrate these words into day-to-day activities.

### THE EXPERT

Included in the afterword is a description of each of the places the family visits along their journey. You could provide students with these short descriptions before reading. As the family makes it to each stop, students can share what they know (based on the information in these descriptions) about the location.

### LEARNING SKILLS

While reading, ask students to pay attention to the kinds of skills the characters learn from their grandparents. Create a chart to record the different skills. After reading, go back to this list to sort the skills — e.g., survival skills, personal skills, etc.



## DURING READING

### CHAPTER 1: GETTING READY FOR THE TRIP

In this chapter, we see the first of many offerings of tobacco that are made throughout the story. Discuss this Indigenous protocol with students. If possible, invite an Elder or knowledge holder to share teachings about tobacco.

On pages 12–13, it says, “John lay on the couch ... But he kept imagining what lay ahead ...” How is John feeling?

On page 12, it lists the ingredients and equipment the characters are packing. What do you think they will eat on their trip?

- Sacred Tobacco can be used as a daily offering when saying prayers and giving thanks for all the gifts the Creator has provided. Whenever there is a request for guidance or advice, a ceremony or when taking from the animal or spirit world, Sacred Tobacco is always offered in advance as a way of giving thanks.



## DURING READING

### CHAPTER 2: SHOTI LAKE

With students, learn more about traditional ways of making birchbark canoes. View a few videos and explore why birchbark was used, what tools were needed, etc.

Native Art in Canada — “Building Birchbark Canoes: Step by Step Guide to Birchbark Canoes”: <http://www.native-art-in-canada.com/birchbarkcanoes.html>

“Building a birch-bark canoe”:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnPCJ5bamBE>

“Birchbark Canoe: Creating a replica of an 1860’s Ojibwe canoe.” Produced by Lakeland PBS, 2012: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPvbKgxN1c4>

### CHAPTER 3: VILLAGE BESIDE NIDZII

On page 20, Etseh tells the children, “To us the land is like a book,” and that they “must see each place before we tell you the stories.” Discuss with students what Etseh means by this and why it is important to see a place before you hear the stories.

Etseh tells the story of the flu epidemic that spread through Nidziikaa Kogolaa. Have students complete research to find other diseases that resulted in loss of Indigenous life in Canadian history.

- ▣▶ European settlers had immunities built up over time by their ancestors. Indigenous peoples never dealt with the vast number of infectious diseases that had existed in Europe for centuries. Scholars estimate that as much as 90 percent of the Indigenous population died as a result of disease.

## DURING READING

### CHAPTER 4: SLIDING HILL

Etseh tells the legend of Yamozhah. Try to find other legends that tell the story of spruce trees or birchbark, then share them with the class or have students retell these stories.

During bad weather, the Dene people play hand games. View this CBC News video to learn more about hand games:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/dene-hand-games-1.3586982>

Additional information can be found in the Canadian Encyclopedia “Dene Games” article: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/dene-games>

### CHAPTER 5: KOMOOLA PORTAGE

Ask students: What lessons do the grandchildren learn in this chapter? What in the story or illustrations lets us know about the lessons? What types of lessons have you experienced when learning or working with your grandparents or other family? How are these lessons different from those we learn in school? How do you let people know you are coming to visit? How is this different than the family in the story?

### CHAPTER 6: HOOK PLACE

Have students research how traditional fishing differs from present-day fishing. Record the differences and similarities on a contrast-and-compare chart.

Ask students: What do the characters in the story believe about Madelaine?

## DURING READING

### CHAPTER 7: BLOOD ROCK

With students, discuss the significance of Blood Rock. Sharing stories about the land is important throughout this book. Find stories of the land near you, visit those places as a class if you can and/or have an Elder or knowledge keeper come into your class to share the stories of the land in your community.

### CHAPTER 8: FENCE NARROWS

The caribou hunt is explained in this chapter. As a class, explore what the uses were for caribou (including those that are discussed in the chapter) and consider what else the Dogrib people used caribou for.

Have students look into the current caribou population in this territory.

Investigate how the Dogrib Caribou Skin Lodge was made and the meaning behind its construction. Share the information with your students or research the information together.

“The Dogrib Caribou Skin Lodge: An Exhibit” booklet:

<https://www.pwnhc.ca/item/the-dogrib-caribou-skin-lodge>

More information on caribou can be found here:

Kuhnlein, H. V., and M. M. Humphries. Traditional Animal Foods of Indigenous Peoples of North America. Montreal: Centre for Indigenous Peoples’ Nutrition and Environment, McGill University, 2017.

<http://traditionalanimalfoods.org/mammals/hoofed/page.aspx>

## DURING READING

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What themes come out of this journey?

Early in the book, Etseh tells John, “You’ll be a lot stronger.” In what ways does John become stronger throughout the story? Have students support their answers with examples from the book.

What is the role of stories throughout their journey?

### RECREATE THE JOURNEY

In small groups or as a class, recreate the characters’ journey as a visual representation. This could be through a mural, a painting or a 3-D representation of the Idaa Trail route. Students can retell the stories that happened at each stop along the trail.

**Cross-curricular Connections: Visual Arts, Language Arts**

### HAND GAMES

Try playing some of the Dene games described in this article:

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/dene-games/>

**Cross-curricular Connections: Health and Physical Education**



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### CONNECT TO THESE GROUNDWOOD TEXTS

*Last Leaf First Snowflake to Fall*

by Leo Yerxa

ISBN 978-1-55498-124-3

*nipêhon / I Wait*

written and illustrated by Caitlin Dale Nicholson,

translated by Leona Morin-Neilson

ISBN 978-1-55498-914-0

*niwîcihâw / I Help*

written and illustrated by Caitlin Dale Nicholson,

translated by Leona Morin-Neilson

ISBN 978-1-77306-116-0

*Alego*

by Ningeokuluk Teevee

ISBN 978-0-88899-943-6

*Lessons from Mother Earth*

written by Elaine McLeod, illustrated by Colleen Wood

ISBN 978-0-88899-832-3

## AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Wendy Stephenson** was the Curator of Education at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. The archeological research on the Idaa Trail inspired her to write this book, and she has canoed many parts of the trail described in the story. She lives in Yellowknife.

**Autumn Downey's** illustrations appear in *Shield Country* by Jamie Bastedo (The Arctic Institute of North America) and the Arctic Ecozone Poster series. She lives in southeastern Saskatchewan.