

# Muskrat Will Be Swimming

Cheryl Savageau

Illustrated by Robert Hynes

Paperback, \$7.95

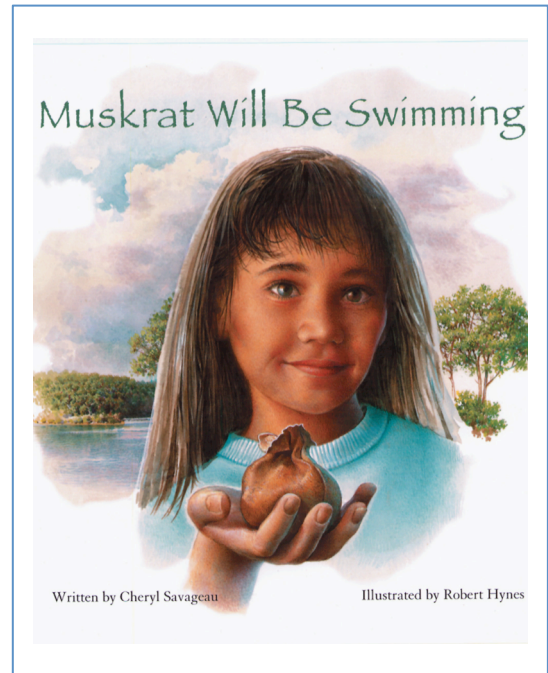
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9 x 10, 32 pages, color illustrations

Children/Native American; Grades 3-6

## Summary

Jeannie loves her lakeside neighborhood, but when her schoolmates who live in fancier homes and call her a Lake Rat hurt her feelings, she confides in Grampa who he tells her about his own childhood experiences with teasing. He shares a traditional Seneca story that helps Jeannie to find strength in her Native American identity and a new appreciation for the different roles that animals play in nature.



*Muskrat Will Be Swimming* will lead to discussions about

- Teasing and bullying
- Storytelling traditions and customs in Native and non-Native families
- The Seneca creation story and creation stories in general
- Traditions of the Sky Woman in Native stories
- Contemporary Native American families and building connections to tribal identity
- Native identity and mixed-blood ancestry
- Significance of dreams in Native culture
- The role of animals as teachers in Abenaki culture
- Animals of the forest
- The Abenaki view towards the natural environment
- The value of experiences in the natural world for children's growth

## Before You Read

### Background

This is a quiet book that will prompt discussions about family and place and the teachings of Native people and is based on a real incident in Cheryl Savageau's life. Although we all might wish otherwise, many of our children have been exposed to biased and inaccurate information about Native Americans. Teachers and parents are sometimes unsure what to say to kids who have or exposed to biased and inaccurate information about Native Americans. *Muskrat Will Be Swimming* will make children aware of the importance of cultural differences.

### Access Prior Knowledge

- Where do you consider your home?
- What are your favorite places to go where you live?
- Have children consider what they know of Native American culture

## After You Read

### Activity

#### My Special Place

Objective: An important element of Native American culture (and many other cultures) is the strong attachment to particular places. The objective of these activities is to help students understand the importance of place within cultures by having them consider a special place in their own lives. (Developed by Judy Sizemore of the Kentucky Council on the Arts, and are here with her permission.)

- Background: Invite students to share some details about a place that is important to them. It might be their home or a special place where they go fishing. It might be a place where they can play games with friends, or it might be a place that they like to go to on their own, like an attic, or a special climbing tree. It should be a place that they see on a repeated basis, not a place that they have seen only once. Ask students to describe how they feel about the place and then ask them to brainstorm descriptive details and words about their special place. Make sure that each child writes down a list of words (including colors) they associate with their favorite place.
- The rough illustration: Explain to the students that they are going to create an "illustration" of their favorite place by doing a rough color interpretation of it. What is needed: To make a rough color impression students need watercolors, oil pastels, or crayons. Markers are not suitable for this type of project.
- How to do it: The idea is for the students to experiment with color and create an emotional impression of their scene. It is better if their impression is done

- quickly. These images should be either abstract or impressionistic. Students should not work to create a realistic replica of their special place.
- Writing variation: Explain to the students that they are going to write a poem about their favorite place. Encourage them to use their illustration as an inspiration. It might be fun for younger children to write a haiku while older children might enjoy the challenge of writing an ode.
  - Display: Children will enjoy learning about each others' special places by creating a gallery of poems and rough illustrations.

### **Animal Tales—Animal Redemption Story Variation**

Objective: To have children think about the stereotypes they hold about animals based on their behaviors. (Developed by Judy Sizemore of the Kentucky Council on the Arts, and are here with her permission.)

- How to do it: Ask students to get into groups and do research about these animals with "bad reputations." Tell the students that their job is to write a new story with their animal as the hero. When all the stories have been written, compile them.

### **For Further Discussion**

- Why is it important to be kind to animals?
- How can you learn about other cultures?
- Why shouldn't we assume something about someone if we don't know the person?

### **Further Reading**

**A Caribou Alphabet by Mary Beth Owens (Tilbury House, 1988)**

**Kunu's Basket by Lee DeCora (Tilbury House, 2011)**

**Remember Me: Tomah Joseph's Gift to Franklin Roosevelt (Tilbury House, 2015)**

**Thanks to the Animals by Allen Sockabasin (Tilbury house, 2005)**

**Unsettled Past, Unsettled Future: The Story of Maine Indians by Neil Rolde (Tilbury House, 2004)**

Allen describes growing up on his reservation in Maine. For young adults / adults.

**An Upriver Passamaquoddy by Allen Sockagasin (Passamaquoddy) (Tilbury House, 2007)**

## Internet Resources

You may find the following Internet resources helpful as your students continue to explore the topic of the book.

### **Discovery Kids**

Learn about different types of animals and what they do

<http://discoverykids.com>

### **Native American Rights Fund**

Site for the organization that has provided legal assistance to Indian tribes, organizations, and individuals nationwide

<http://www.narf.org>