

YOUNG ADULT BOOKS

From

Heartdrum

An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

EDUCATOR GUIDE

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Young Adult Books from Heartdrum

TABLE OF CONTENTS

An Expanse of Blue
by Kauakanilehua Māhoe Adams ..... **Page 4**

A Constellation of Minor Bears
by Jen Ferguson ..... **Page 5**

Like Glass
by Jen Ferguson ..... **Page 6**

The Summer of Bitter and Sweet
by Jen Ferguson ..... **Page 7**

Rez Ball
by Byron Graves ..... **Page 8**

The Unfinished
by Cheryl Isaacs ..... **Page 9**

The Others
by Cheryl Isaacs ..... **Page 10**

Shards of Silence
by Brian Lee Young ..... **Page 11**

Click here for more Young Adult

Those Pink Mountain Nights by Jen Ferguson

Medicine Wheels by Byron Graves

Looking for Smoke by K. A. Cobell

Legendary Frybread Drive-In: Intertribal Stories edited by Cynthia Leitich Smith

Check out our other Heartdrum guides here!

Why is Native literature important?

Heartdrum is a Native-focused imprint of HarperCollins Children's Books and is a leader in the movement of publishing equitable and inclusive titles for young readers. The imprint "evokes the heartbeat of the Native community" by offering books representing today's 1000+ tribal Nations located within the borders of the United States and Canada. Heartdrum is dedicated to shining a spotlight on Native and First Nations characters, topics, and points of view while raising up Indigenous creatives as well as their literary and visual art.

According to current publishing data, most people haven't yet read contemporary books with Indigenous protagonists. Children's and young adult literature that includes a wide variety of cultures, traditions, and beliefs can help both Native and non-Native readers experience life on a larger scale. Stories dedicated to Indigenous, modern-day characters promote empathy by letting readers vicariously experience their struggles, celebrations, and daily lives. Reading these books creates opportunities for teachers and students (Native or non-Native) to better understand one another and to communicate more effectively.

Click here to learn more about the Heartdrum imprint.

Guide prepared by Andrea Page (Lakota—Standing Rock). Andrea Page was an author and educator, copresident of the Rochester Area Children's Writers and Illustrators (RACWI) group, and a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI).



Cover artist: JT Ojerio (Native Hawaiian)

An Expanse of Blue

by Kauakanilehua Māhoe Adams

About the book

Aouli Elizabeth Smith feels like she's disappearing. At home, no one really hears her or seems to care. At church, she feels like she doesn't belong. Her sister is angry with her, her best friend is slipping away, and the only place she can breathe is in her song journal—and at Aunty Ehu's house, surrounded by her Native Hawaiian community in Western Washington. Then, a devastating secret about her father changes everything. Suddenly, Aouli is drowning in feelings she can't put into words. That is, until Nalu arrives. With a gaze that sees straight through her, he might be the person who helps Aouli finally find her voice.

Kauakanilehua Māhoe Adams

(Kanaka Maoli/Native Hawaiian) is the debut YA author of *An Expanse of Blue*. Her writing appears in the Printz Award–winning anthology *Legendary Frybread Drive-In* and other works. Kaua is from Washington State and lives in Carlsbad, California, with her husband and two dogs.

Discussion questions

1. From the beginning, the author tells Aouli's story in an unconventional way, using unique prose, shapes, spacing, and purposeful line breaks. How do these choices affect the way you experience the story? What might they reveal about Aouli's thoughts, emotions, or journey?
2. Aouli has complicated relationships with the people closest to her. Compare her relationships with her mom, dad, sister, and Aunty Ehu. How does each relationship change throughout the story? Which relationship has the greatest impact on who Aouli becomes?
3. When Aouli first meets Nalu, she makes a point of telling him her "real" first name rather than her nickname. Why do you think this matters to her? What might this moment suggest about Aouli's identity and her journey throughout the story?
4. Aouli seems to have a complicated relationship with religion. Consider the Bible verses and prayers throughout the story. What do these moments reveal about Aouli and her connection to faith? Why do you think she struggles to reconcile her feelings about religion with the role it plays in her life?
5. As Aouli becomes more withdrawn and overwhelmed by everything happening in her life, her friendship with Taylor suffers. How does Aouli's internal struggle affect the people around her? What advice would you give to Aouli about repairing or navigating her friendship with Taylor?
6. Wings can symbolize freedom, escape, transformation, protection, or even feeling trapped. How are wings used throughout the story? What do they symbolize for Aouli and the other characters? How does the meaning of wings change as the story progresses?
7. Near the end of the book, Aouli has an important conversation with her dad about ʻuhane. What does this conversation reveal about Aouli's understanding of herself, her father, and their relationship? Why do you think the author chose to include this moment near the end of the story?
8. Aouli has several opportunities to confront her dad, but she struggles to share what she truly wants to say. By the end, however, she seems to have moved forward. Why do you think Aouli was finally able to let go? Do you think she needed to confront her dad directly to heal? Why or why not?

Guide written by Heather Lassley, a consultant who works as a public-school librarian in Texas. Her focus is bringing the right book to the right reader at the right time. She is a member of the Oklahoma Chickasaw tribe.



Cover artist: bailey macabre (Nêhiyaw michif)

A Constellation of Minor Bears

by Jen Ferguson

About the book

Molly, Hank, and Tray are the best kind of friends—the finish-each-others'-sentences type of besties—so when Hank falls at the climbing gym under Tray's watchful eye, everything Molly knows to be true is spinning out of control. Searching for the familiar, Molly decides to move forward with the trio's longtime plan to hike the Pacific Crest Trail after graduation, even if she's obligated to bring Tray along for protection.

The journey is full of surprises! Join Molly, Hank, and Tray as they figure out that the packs they carry on their backs might not be the heaviest burden they'll have to bear along the trail.

Jen Ferguson is Michif/Métis and white, an activist, an intersectional feminist, an auntie, and an accomplice armed with a PhD in English and creative writing. Visit her online at jenfergusonwrites.com.

Discussion questions

2. After Hank's accident, Molly is thrown into a tailspin. Think of a time in your own life when your confidence was shaken. How did you recover? Who or what helped you get your footing back?

2. There are two incidents when Traylor is forced to navigate power and privilege—from the first-class passenger on the flight to San Diego to the encounter with Lieutenant Green, the police officer in Lone Pine. How might these two interactions have gone differently had an observer stepped in to be an ally? Tray thinks on page 296 that it's "toxic" to sit by and watch while someone is behaving poorly. Do you agree? Discuss.

3. Reciprocity is the action of being in relationship, of giving and taking. How are the characters in relationship with the natural world—what do they "get" and what do they offer? How are characters in relationship with one another? How are these relationships nurtured and cared for? Who (or what) are you in relationship with?

4. This novel pushes us to think about labels—fat, gay, disabled, ENBY—while providing readers with a counternarrative about each. How do the characters' experiences in the book broaden your understanding of these terms? When is a time you've been put into a box that doesn't tell your whole story?

5. It can be difficult to be objective about our own stories. As readers, we have the privilege of seeing the main characters' perspectives through their eyes, each others' viewpoints, and our own as we read the book. What advice would you offer the characters as a caring outside observer? What do you wish they knew about themselves?

6. Molly questions her indigeneity, judging herself as less-than for not having the same cultural upbringing that her friend Tray has. How have you needed to reconcile similar feelings of inadequacy? Who/what helped you on your journey?

7. Tray shares the many purposes of stories in Métis culture. How does storytelling show up in your culture? Who are the storytellers in your community? What Indigenous communities are local to you? Is there an opportunity to enjoy a storytelling event nearby?

Guide prepared by Odia Wood-Krueger, a consultant who focuses on community engagement and curriculum writing projects. She is Métis from Saskatchewan, Canada, and currently calls Minneapolis home.



Cover artist: Alanah Jewell (Haudenosaunee)

Like Glass

by Jen Ferguson

About the book

How do you cope with the grief of losing a family member suddenly and unexpectedly? For Tatum Nova, it means traveling to Chamonix, France, to reconnect with her father, who hides in his work instead of being her dad. The French Alps are nothing like Tatum's home in Toronto, and she feels the suffocating shadow of her sister's spirit in the last place she called home. Confronting her dad forces Tatum to face hard truths—that her sister Bronwyn had secrets, that her dad might be struggling with his addiction again, and that light can still shine through, even when you feel broken…like glass.

Jen Ferguson is Michif/Métis and white, an activist, a feminist, an auntie, and an accomplice armed with a PhD. She believes writing, teaching, and beading are political acts. She also has strong opinions about pastries and could essentially live off of pain au chocolat. Jen is a citizen of the Manitoba Métis Federation.

Discussion questions

1. Jen Ferguson writes, "Because what are borders anyway but made-up lines drawn by angry toddlers on the land" (2). How do borders—both physical or self-imposed—show up in your life? How do borders show up for Tatum?

2. On page 16, Tatum is reminded of the World Religions class she took last year. What teachings does your culture or religion hold around grief and death? How can this knowledge help us during our times of loss? How can learning about the teachings of other ways of knowing enrich our understanding of the world?

3. On page 38, Mr. Maloney suggests that if Tatum "can't reconcile [her] culture with [her] art, maybe [she] should ask [herself] why [she's] making art at all?" What responsibility do artists (Native or otherwise) have to meet the expectations of critics? Does art become "Native art" when it is created by Indigenous people, or must it also include Native images and/or iconography? What expectations might we be putting on someone to showcase their culture in ways that aren't appropriate? Discuss.

4. Tatum says, "I'm thinking it's our job to do better than our parents, our ancestors could, while we carry the names they've given us" (62). What names have you been given? What name(s) do you call yourself? When do you choose to use one of your names over another? What power does it give you?

5. Tatum thinks, "Comfort can be dangerous, or at the very least, overrated" (65). How does comfort show up in your life? Who gets to be "comfortable" in your community and how can that be dangerous?

6. Tatum wrestles with her feelings about churches. What history do the buildings hold for her in Canada, whose history may feel familiar to Native people living in the United States? How does being on the other side of the world make her question what she always thought was true? When is a time you've been faced with rethinking something you thought you knew?

7. Discuss the context of the book's title, as described on page 75. In what other instances does "like glass" show up in the text?

Guide prepared by Odia Wood-Krueger, a consultant who focuses on community engagement and curriculum writing projects. She is Métis from Saskatchewan, Canada, and currently calls Minneapolis home.



Cover artist: Reyna Hernandez (Yankton Sioux)
Title beading: Kim Stewart (Métis)

The Summer of Bitter and Sweet

by Jen Ferguson

About the book

In this complex and emotionally resonant novel about a Métis girl living on the Canadian prairies, debut author Jen Ferguson serves up a powerful story about rage, secrets, and all the spectrums that make up a person—and the sweetness that can still live alongside the bitterest truth.

Jen Ferguson is Michif/Métis and white, an activist, an intersectional feminist, an auntie, and an accomplice armed with a PhD in English and creative writing. Her favorite ice-cream flavor is mint chocolate chip. Visit her online at www.jenfergusonwrites.com.

Discussion questions

1. What do you know about realistic fiction? What are some genre expectations you have regarding authentic life, family, and/or world issues?
2. On page 7, Lou's mom says, "My daughter could be the next Waneek Horn-Miller! Lou could go all the way to the—" and then Lou chimes in with, "Olympics." Lou finishes her mother's sentence, indicating she's heard it often. What Olympic sport are they talking about? How does this sentence inform you of their mother/daughter relationship and Lou's goals in life?
3. Use a reliable resource to learn more about the Métis people. Find a map of the Canadian prairies. Discuss what you've learned about the book's setting and Lou's Métis culture. Add examples from the story that strengthen your understanding about Canada, the Métis people, and language.
4. What does Lou lie about? She mentions on page 34 that her classmates "had been burned" by her lies. How do her lies affect others? Are secrets the same as lies? Why or why not?
5. The narrator describes on page 31 how some of her friendships finished: "Our end arrived fast and furious, like a sparkler burning out." Later, she refers to a friend's offer of help as "comforting like campfire" (p. 193). What do these selections mean to you? Discuss how you would describe various types of friendships in your life.
6. How does Lou's relationship with King strengthen? How does King help Lou heal?
7. At what point in the story do you know Lou has accepted her identity? Explain why.

Guide prepared by Andrea Page (Lakota—Standing Rock). Andrea Page was an author and educator, copresident of the Rochester Area Children's Writers and Illustrators (RACWI) group, and a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI).

Curriculum Connections: characterization; inferring character traits; drawing conclusions; word choice and language; symbolism; goal setting and motivation; mental health and well-being; healing strategies; acceptance and forgiveness; discovering identity; justice vs. injustice; making connections and fostering empathy; knowledge of Indigenous cultures; kinship and community; relationship with land; environmental education: Canadian Prairies ecosystem; maps: Canadian provinces; thoughtful/reflective discussion; understanding diverse perspectives; expressing/reflecting new ideas in writing; educational resource for Canada and First Nation/Métis people: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/First-nations-metis-inuit-studies-grades-9-12.pdf



Cover artist: Natasha Donovan (Métis)

Rez Ball

By Byron Graves

About the book

Tre shoots, he scores! Author Byron Graves (Ojibwe) delivers a fast-paced story about grief, friendship, family, and making a place for yourself in high school. For sophomore Tre Brun, who's following in his popular older brother's footsteps, fitting in is a challenge. Tragically, Jaxon died in a car accident, and everyone aches from the loss. Tre feels ignored as his family tries to heal. But he pursues big dreams as a talented basketball player during this extraordinary season. He maneuvers new friendships and high expectations from his coach and his parents. Decision-making becomes difficult when his teammates tempt him with parties and other distractions. Will Tre prove he can balance his life choices, pursue his dreams, and be the winner his community needs?

Byron Graves is Ojibwe and was born and raised on the Red Lake Indian Reservation in Minnesota, where he played high school basketball. When he isn't writing, he can be found playing retro video games, spending time with his family, or cheering on his beloved Minnesota Timberwolves. *Rez Ball* is his debut novel.

Discussion questions

1. How does the author reveal the setting in each chapter?
2. How is Jaxon honored throughout the story? What can you infer about his family and Ojibwe community?
3. Belonging is a human need. Choose a character and locate evidence in the story of their attempt(s) to fill this need. How does "belonging" affect people and their decisions?
4. The author's writing voice is powerful and distinct. On page 52, he writes, "Those nights rip the stitches off my heart." Phrases like this make you have strong emotional connections to the characters. Find and discuss more evidence that shows what kind of person Tre is.
5. Would you be friends with Tre? Why or why not? Which character(s) fits into your friend group? Why?
6. How does the author make you feel when you visualize the fast-paced games? What emotions do you feel as the team approaches play-offs? Who are you rooting for?
7. Read pages 254-256. How does Coach motivate Tre? Do you think Tre will represent his family and community in the way Coach hopes he will? Explain.
8. One theme in *Rez Ball* is living up to your potential. How does Tre struggle to live up to his potential? How does he succeed? Find evidence of this theme and include page numbers.

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Curriculum Connections: Characterization, Setting, Author's Craft, Writing with Emotion, Role Models, Grief and Healing, Belonging, Knowing and Accepting Yourself, Understanding Life Choices, Growing Up in High School, Pursuing Dreams, Family Life, Reservation Community, Race Relations, Making a Plan to Succeed, Determination, Perseverance, Fortitude, Sports Fitness and Basketball, Athletic Strategy.



Cover artist: Brittany Newton (Mvskoke)

The Unfinished

by Cheryl Isaacs

About the book

Mohawk writer Cheryl Isaacs delivers a spine-tingling mystery in which small-town athlete Avery, out on one of her many long runs, stumbles upon a strange pond and unearths a horror that many in Crooks Falls have long forgotten. Or chosen not to remember—the black water. As the black water begins to haunt Avery, making her question her own sanity, folks in town start to go missing. Despite often hearing whispers about monsters among her Kanien'kéha:ka (Mohawk) Elders, Avery has largely remained disconnected from her Native culture. But when her best friend—and longtime crush—Key is the next to go missing, Avery is forced to contend with what it means to be Kanien'kéha:ka and connect with her Elders, who may have the answers she needs to bring Key home and to stop living in limbo.

Cheryl Isaacs can often be found running through the Carolinian forests of Southwestern Ontario, where she has fearlessly enjoyed the trails for years. Her Kanien'kéha culture often appears in her writing. *The Unfinished* is her debut novel, though her work has appeared in numerous Indigenous publications.

Discussion questions

1. What is community? How is that embodied in this story?
2. What role do Elders play in Native communities? In your own community? How is this demonstrated in the novel?
3. As Avery runs trails, those paths become symbols. What do they represent in the novel?
4. The Haudenosaunee story of Sky Woman plays a prominent role in the novel. What role does Sky Woman play in the larger Indigenous universe?
5. Monsters have long been used as symbols for fear and insecurity. What does the Ragged Man represent for Avery?

Guide prepared by Jenna Wolf. Jenna is tribally enrolled in Mvskoke Nation of Oklahoma and the library director at The Cambridge School of Weston. She regularly gives talks on decolonizing practices in libraries and libraries that are curated by students for students.



Cover artist: Brittany Newton (Mvskoke)

The Others

by Cheryl Isaacs

About the book

In this bone-chilling sequel to *The Unfinished*, Cheryl Isaacs (Mohawk) grapples with the lingering effects of trauma related to missing persons. The story picks up a few weeks after Avery pulls her best friend, Key, from the black water, reversing the Kanyen'kehá:ka (Mohawk) family curse of the Ragged Man. The black water is now a harmless lake—or so Avery thinks. But when she begins seeing the same reflection again and again while Key becomes more and more distant, she must decide whether to return to the water or allow her family to be consumed by the darkness for good. Gripping and propulsive, this is an eerie story steeped in Mohawk tradition.

Cheryl Isaacs is a Mohawk writer and educator from southern Ontario. *The Unfinished* was her first novel. Cheryl Isaacs can often be found running through the Carolinian forest of southwestern Ontario, where she has fearlessly enjoyed the trails for years. Her Kanyen'kéha culture often appears in her writing.

Discussion questions

1. Discuss the first-person point of view. Does it impact the way you read this story? How so? How would this novel be different if it were told from a third-person perspective?
2. How does Cheryl Isaacs explore trauma in this story? How is that represented in the relationship between Avery and Key? Avery and her family?
3. What role does Avery's ihstá (great aunt) Lily play in the story? How does the black water affect her? What lessons does she impart to Avery?
4. How does the Ragged Man appear in this story? How are his appearances different from those in the first book, *The Unfinished*?
5. Discuss the choices Avery makes. How do Kanyen'kehá:ka (Mohawk) tradition and family legacy impact her decisions?
6. Think of a time when you needed healing. What does healing look like for Avery? What similarities or differences are there to your own life? Describe how healing is explored in the story.

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Cover artist: Lynnette Haozous (Chiricahua Apache, Navajo, and Taos Pueblo)

Shards of Silence

by Brian Lee Young

About the book

Derrick, a sophomore from the Navajo Nation in New Mexico, has been accepted to attend the prestigious Sagefield Academy in Connecticut. While some things stay the same, like playing sports and endless homework, attending Sagefield Academy means stepping away from his friends, family, and Diné community during the school year. Derrick is forced to tackle the ways silence shows up in his life, from wondering whether to speak up against racism, to researching the secrets held close within his family, to investigating just how deeply these shards of silence cut.

Author and filmmaker **Brian Lee Young** is an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation. He grew up on the Navajo reservation in Arizona. Brian earned his BA in film studies from Yale University and his MFA in creative writing from Columbia University. His debut middle grade novels, *Healer of the Water Monster* and *Heroes of the Water Monster*, were American Indian Youth Literature Award winner and honor books, respectively. Brian currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Discussion questions

1. Readers are introduced to the Diné clans. If you are unfamiliar with Diné clans, what do you pick up from the interactions between the characters? How are community members connected in your culture?

2. Másání Mildred's doctor, Dr. Platero, is Diné. What are the benefits of having medical professionals who come from the communities they serve? How could this doctor's visit have been different if the doctor hadn't been Diné?

3. Derrick knows he's going to be homesick when he is at Sagefield Academy in Connecticut. Have you ever experienced homesickness before? Who or what did you miss the most? What advice would you give Derrick as he begins this next stage of his life?

4. Reread this quote on page 16: "I know that even though I'll be leaving these two, we'll forever be brothers and have each other's backs. Nothing will change between us." What does this foreshadow? In what ways does Derrick change and grow as a friend during his time away?

5. There are several instances where Derrick stands firm about his culture, even though it will draw attention to him. Recall a time when you chose to be true to who you are, even if it made you feel like you were in the spotlight. If you were in Derrick's shoes, would you have made different choices? Discuss.

6. What cultural teachings does Derrick rely on to help him stay grounded and aim for success at Sagefield Academy? What teachings do you draw from to help you when you need guidance?

7. While writing his history paper, Derrick is faced with hard truths about his family and their history. He acknowledges that he is "angry at 'Doo 'ajínída' for all the harm that it is doing to generations of Diné" (284). What does that phrase mean? What philosophies or rules does your culture follow? How do they impact your life?

8. Leaving everything you know to step into an unfamiliar world takes courage. What part of Derrick's journey resonated most with you? If you were given the same opportunity to attend a school like Sagefield Academy, would you go?

Guide prepared by Odia Wood-Krueger, a consultant who focuses on community engagement and curriculum writing projects. She is Métis from Saskatchewan, Canada, and currently calls Minneapolis home.