

Curriculum Alignment

for

Feathers of Wisdom

Feathers of Wisdom addresses the following widely used learning frameworks:

Common Core State Standards (ELA, Grades 9–12)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information in different media

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1: Initiate and participate effectively in collaborative discussions

National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) Themes

College Board AP English Literature

Culture: The meaning and importance of culture; cultural change and continuity

Individual Development and Identity: Personal identity and cultural heritage

Power, Authority, and Governance: Historical and contemporary relationships between Indigenous nations and settler governments

Global Connections: Shared themes across cultures worldwide

Literary Analysis: Close reading of myth, archetype, and symbol

Cultural Context: Literature as a product of and response to historical conditions

How to Use This Book: A Teacher's Guide

Before You Begin

Read the Dedication and Prologue before assigning any chapters. Kait Matthews' prologue — the story of her birth mother Bette, the residential school system, the Sixties Scoop, and her decades-long search for her roots — is not introductory matter. It is the moral and emotional center of the book, and it reframes every story that follows. Students who understand Kait's story will read the legends differently.

Consider beginning with a brief historical framing of the residential school system in Canada and the United States, and the Indian Child Welfare Act. The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (boardingschoolhealing.org) is an excellent classroom resource.

Suggested Pacing

- Unit
- Suggested Timeframe

Unit 1: The Prologue & Historical Context
1–2 class sessions

Unit 2: North American Legends (selections)
2–3 weeks

Unit 3: Mesoamerican & South American Legends (selections)
1–2 weeks

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Unit 4: Pacific & Oceanian Legends (selections)
1 week

Unit 5: Visual Art Analysis (Kait's illustrations)
1–2 sessions, integrated throughout

Unit 6: Final Reflection / Project
1 week

Selecting Chapters

At 44 legends, instructors should select a thematic subset rather than assign the full book. Below are three suggested thematic clusters:

CLUSTER A: Women as Keepers of Life and Land

Changing Woman (Apache) · Hutash, Earth Goddess (Chumash) · Iyatiku, Corn Mother (Acoma Pueblo) · Pachamama (Inca) · Spider Woman (Navajo) · White Buffalo Calf Woman (Lakota) · Sky Woman (Iroquois/Huron) Themes: Creation, land stewardship, feminine generative power

CLUSTER B: Warriors, Survivors, and Resisters

Aliquipiso, The Warrior Maiden (Oneida) · Buffalo Calf Road Woman (Cheyenne) · Princess Erendira of Purepecha · Strikes Two Warrior / The Other Magpie (Crow) · Yohl Ik'nal, The Visionary Mayan Queen Themes: Resistance to colonial violence, feminine courage, Indigenous sovereignty

CLUSTER C: Memory, Language, and Cultural Survival

Nokomis, Spider, and the First Dream Catcher (Ojibwe) · Sedna, Goddess of the Sea (Inuit) · Girl Who Climbed to the Sky (Caddo) · Legend of the First Strawberry (Cherokee) · Ko-Kwal-Alwoot, The Maiden of Deception Pass (Samish) Themes: Oral tradition, intergenerational knowledge, cultural memory and loss

Key Themes and Discussion Questions

1. *Cultural Memory and Oral Tradition*

Leigh Podgorski's Note on Language explains that many of these stories were transmitted orally for generations before being written down. The act of writing them — and the choices made in translating, adapting, and presenting them — raises important questions about cultural ownership and representation.

These stories survived colonization, forced assimilation, and the suppression of Indigenous languages. What does their survival tell us about the role of oral tradition in cultural resistance?

How does the writing-down of an oral story change it? What might be gained or lost in that transition?

Kait Matthews' prologue describes the specific loss her birth mother Bette experienced when removed from her community — including the loss of language. After reading several stories, return to that prologue. How does Bette's story echo through the legends you've read?

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2. Archetypes of Feminine Power

The women in these legends embody a wide range of archetypal roles: creator, warrior, healer, earth mother, trickster, ghost, and more. Across different nations and regions, certain patterns emerge.

Choose three women from different nations — for example, Sedna (Inuit), Buffalo Calf Road Woman (Cheyenne), and Changing Woman (Apache). What themes does each figure represent? Where do their stories converge, and where do they diverge?

The "Speaks" section at the end of each chapter gives voice to the featured figure directly. How does this device change your relationship to the legend you just read?

Several legends feature women who die, are sacrificed, or are transformed. What do these narratives reveal about how different cultures have understood the relationship between women's bodies and the natural world?

3. Connection to the Land

In nearly every story, the natural world is not backdrop — it is participant. Mountains, oceans, stars, animals, and plants are animate, relational, and morally significant.

Hutash, the Chumash Earth Goddess, is the land itself. Sedna becomes the sea. Ko-Kwal-Alwoot merges with the ocean. What different relationships between women and nature do these transformations represent?

The book's dedication states: "The land is sacred. These words are at the core of your being." How do the stories in this collection build an argument for what that sacredness means in practice?

How might these stories speak to contemporary debates about environmental protection, land sovereignty, and Indigenous land rights?

4. Exploring Kait Matthews' Artwork

Before reading each legend, spend several minutes with the illustration. Then return to the image after you've read the text.

What does the illustration tell you before you know anything about the story?

What emotions does it evoke?

After reading, how does the artwork extend, interpret, or complicate what the text describes?

Kait Matthews is Ojibwe/Potawatomi. How might her own heritage and personal history (described in the prologue) shape the way she visualizes stories from nations other than her own?

Choose one illustration and write a 300-word analysis of the visual choices — color, composition, figure, symbol — and what they add to the story.

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Suggested Pairings

Feathers of Wisdom works well alongside the following:

Nonfiction

- Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi botanist on Indigenous science and land relationship)
- An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
- The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee by David Treuer (history of Native America from 1890 to present)
- All Our Relations by Winona LaDuke (Indigenous environmental activism)

Fiction & Poetry

- Ceremony by Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo)
- The Round House by Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe)
- There There by Tommy Orange (Urban Native experience)
- Whereas by Layli Long Soldier (Oglala Lakota poet)

Film & Media

- Dawnland (2018) — documentary on the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- Warrior Women (2018) — PBS documentary on Indigenous activism
- We Are Still Here (directed by Leigh Podgorski) — companion documentary

Final Project Options

- Research and Expand: Choose one figure from the book and research her more deeply using primary and academic sources. Write a 4–6 page paper that places her legend in deeper historical and cultural context.
- Creative Response: Write an original "Speaks" section for a figure of your choosing, imagining what she might say to the world today. Include a 1-page reflection on your creative choices.
- Visual Analysis: Select three of Kait Matthews' illustrations and write a comparative visual essay (1,000–1,500 words) analyzing how her artistic choices serve the stories.
- Community Connections: Research a living Indigenous community connected to one of the nations represented in the book. Create a 10-minute presentation on that community's current work to preserve language, culture, and land.
- Oral Tradition Project: Record yourself telling one of the legends as an oral story — without the book in front of you. Afterward, write a 500-word reflection on what you noticed about the story when you had to hold it in memory.

Recommended Resources for Educators

- National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition — boardingschoolhealing.org
- Native Knowledge 360° (National Museum of the American Indian) — americanindian.si.edu/nk360
- Oyate (evaluating books by and about Native peoples) — oyate.org
- Rethinking Schools — Indigenous education resources at rethinkingschools.org
- We Are Still Here (film) — direct inquiry to Leigh Podgorski for school licensing