

The War Shirt

Bently Spang

Illustrated by Troy Anderson





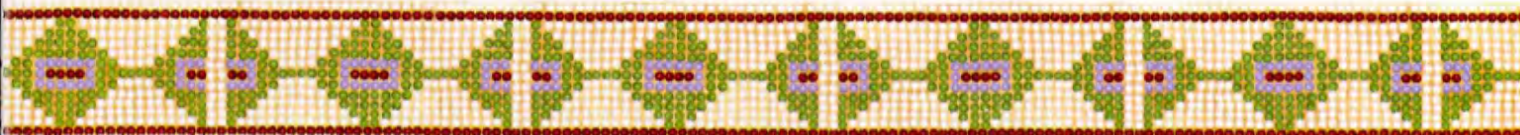
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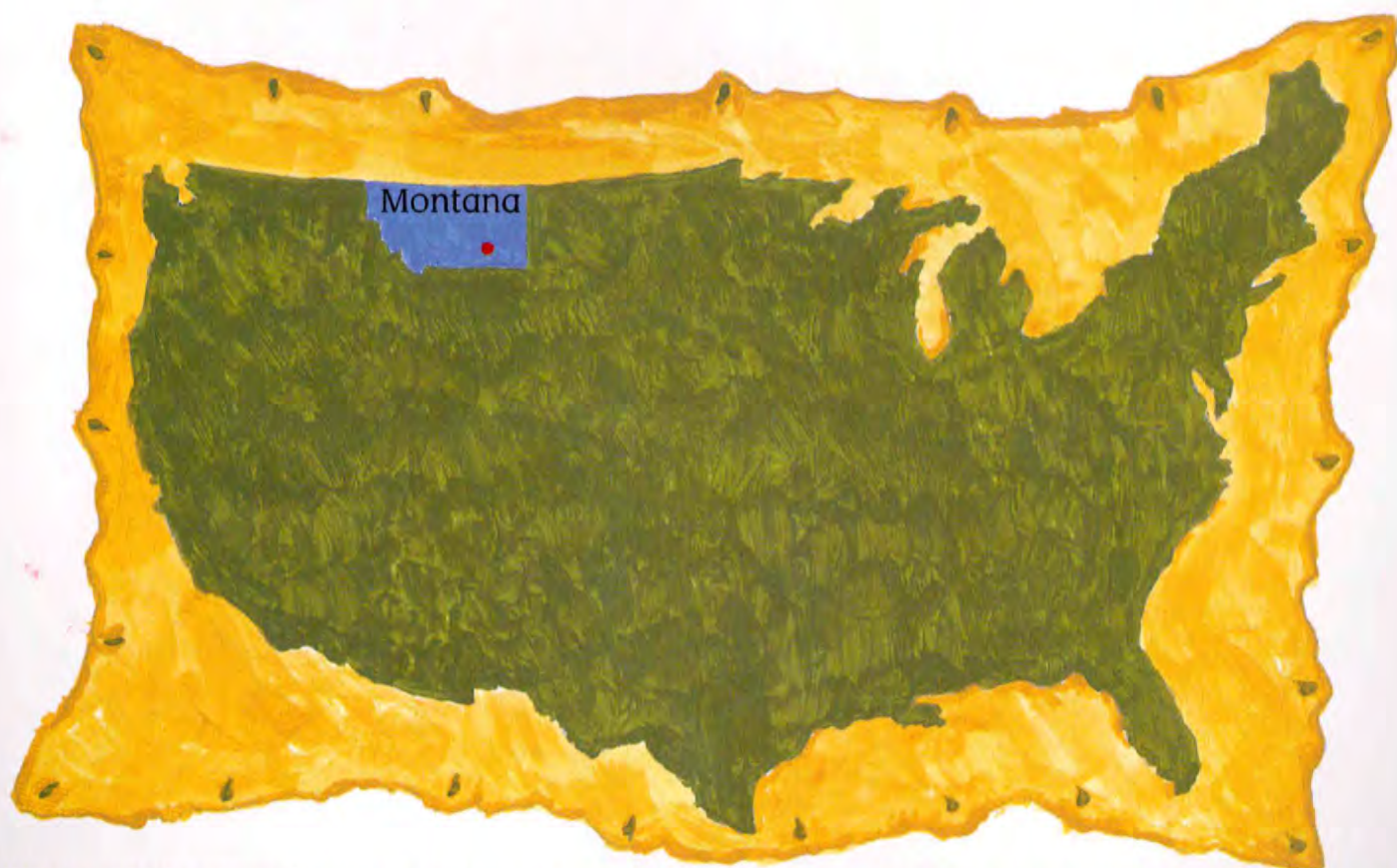
Troy was a smart, young Northern Cheyenne boy. More than almost anything, he loved to make art.

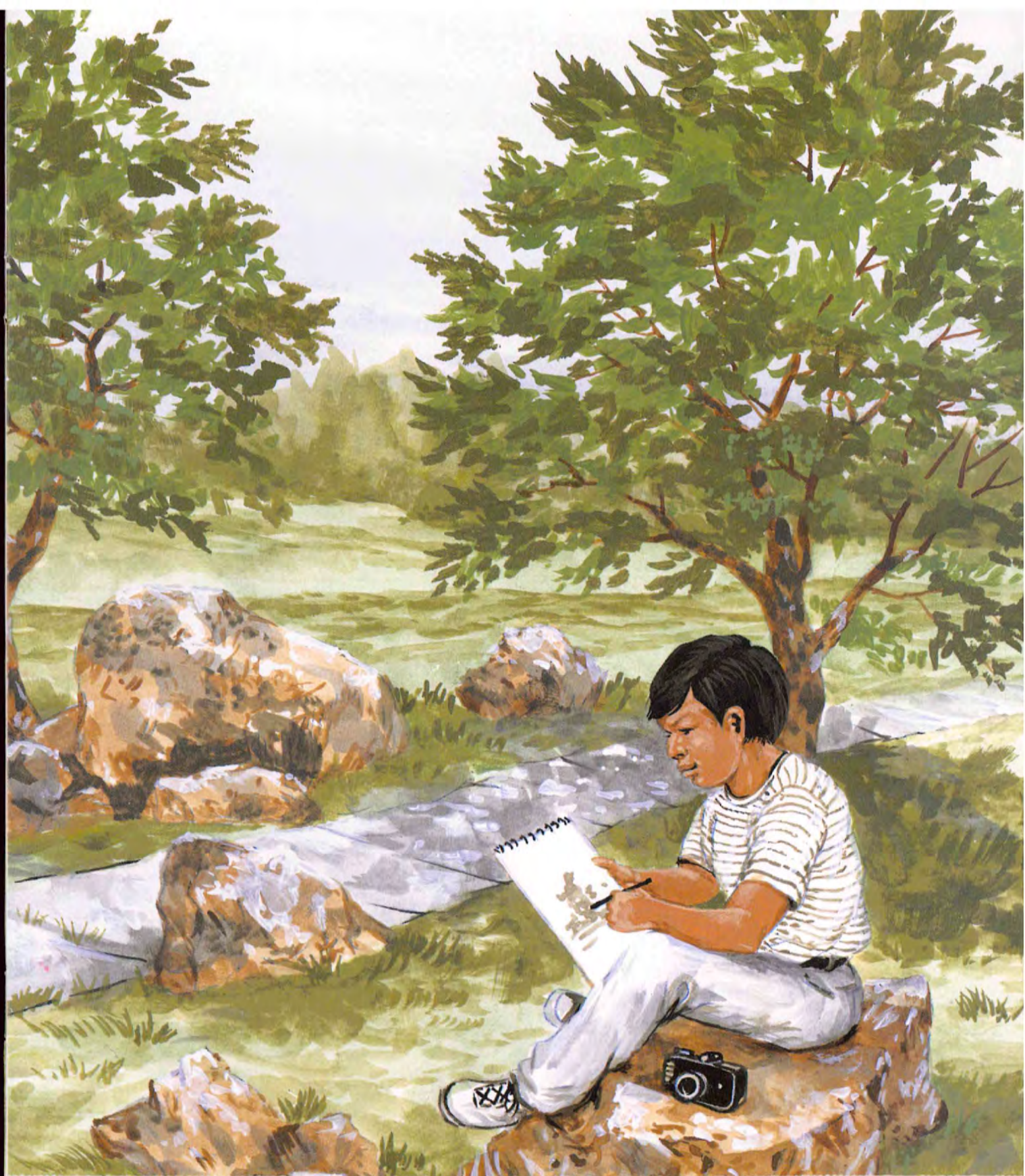
He would spend hours at the park or in his backyard or at the mall, sketching rocks, painting trees, and photographing people.

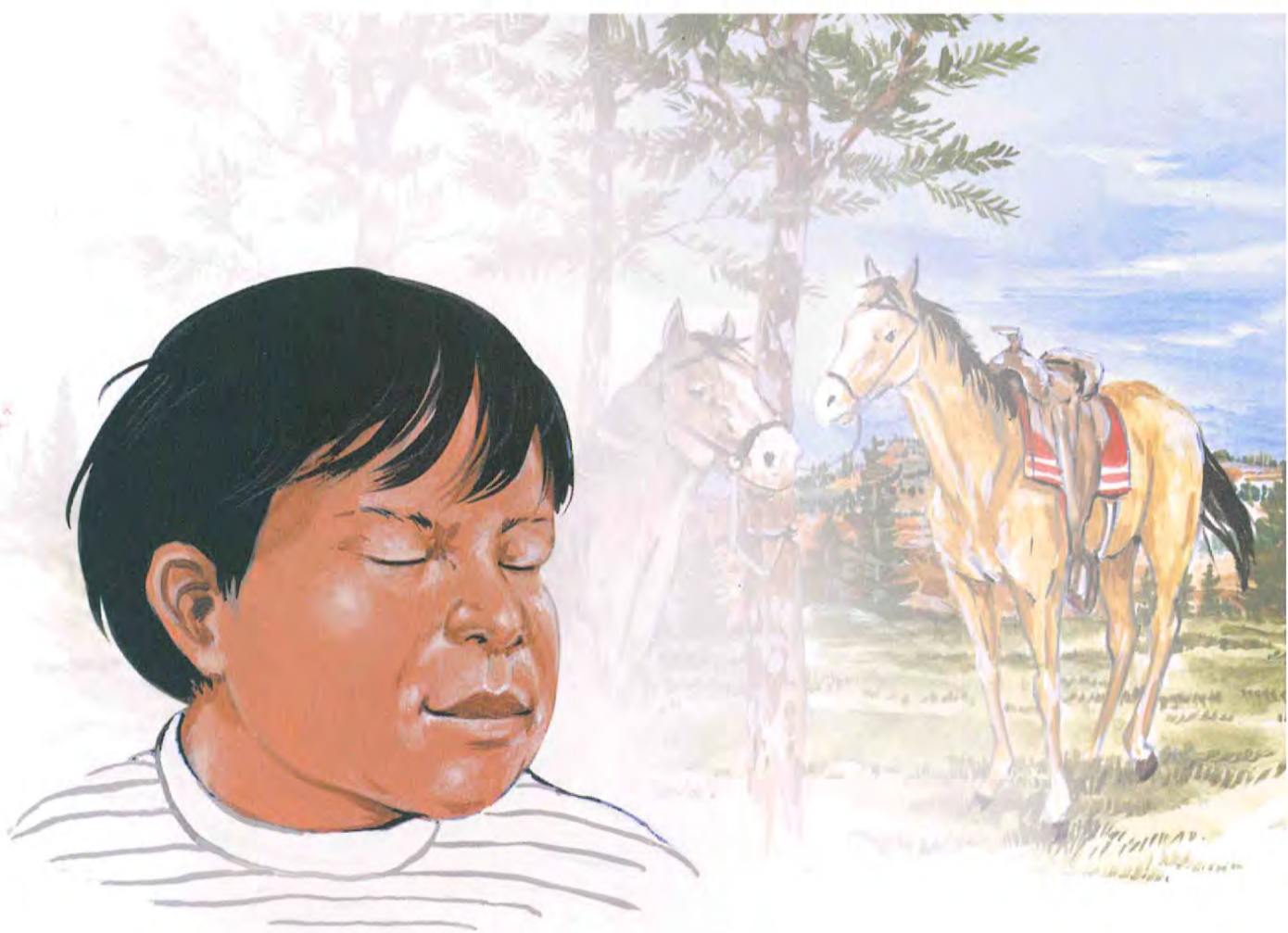
As happy as he was, there was something missing in his life. One day he was sketching rocks at his favorite park when he suddenly realized what was missing.

He was a Cheyenne boy who loved art, yet he knew very little about Cheyenne art. In fact, he knew little about any of the ways of his people.

You see, Troy lived in the city far from the Northern Cheyenne reservation in Montana, where he was born.







He remembered visiting his grandparents on the reservation several times when he was young. His grandparents were artists, just like Troy. Though his visits were short, Troy had many fond memories of them.

Even in the city park, Troy could see the many-colored, painted hills and taste the sweet pure air of the reservation when he closed his eyes.



He remembered riding horseback through those beautiful hills, stopping to pick berries and picnic in the cool creek bottoms with his family.

"Your great-great-great-grandparents rode through these same hills," his grandfather had told him. "Much of the history of our people is in this land."

Troy thought then how much his great-great-great-grandparents must have loved living in this beautiful place.

All at once, Troy was jolted out of his daydream. He had a great idea! He knew how he could fill the missing part of his life!

That night after dinner, Troy asked his parents if he could spend the summer with his grandparents on the reservation. His parents talked it over and agreed to let him go.





Early that summer, Troy and his parents traveled to the reservation. His grandparents welcomed him into their home.

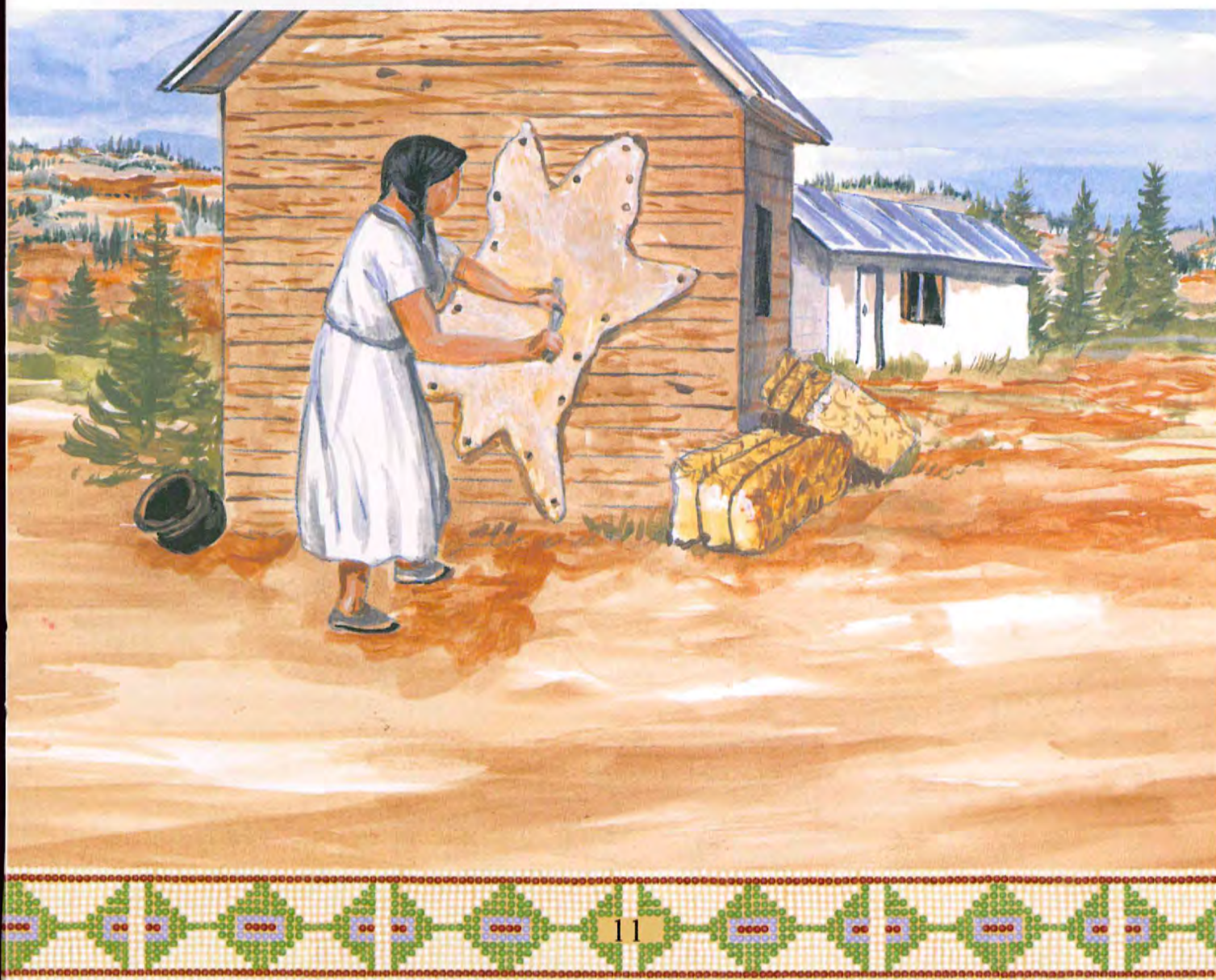
Troy was happy to be back among the painted hills. He hoped he would know a lot more about Cheyenne ways when his parents returned for him at the end of the summer.

Troy's grandparents wasted no time in starting to teach Troy Cheyenne ways. The first day, they began to teach him how to tan a deer hide.

Grandpa hunted a deer on the reservation. Then he showed Troy how to scrape the deer's hide, all the while telling Troy about the importance of the deer to Cheyenne people.



"Cheyenne people have great respect for all animals, including the deer," Grandpa explained. "We try not to waste any part of a deer. We eat most of it and then use its bones, hide, and muscle to make our art. In this way, we honor the deer and thank it for giving its life so that we might live."



Grandpa showed Troy how to hold the hide scraper and explained that it was very old. The scraper was handed down to Grandpa by his grandmother. It had been made by Troy's great-great-great-grandfather for his wife.

"The handle was made from an elk antler, and the metal blade came from an old wagon part," Grandpa said.





Days later, Troy rubbed the hide with handfuls of rich yellow dirt to color it. He liked how the dirt turned his hands yellow.

He and his grandparents had collected the dirt from the painted hills behind their house. They had explained that using the dirt was a way of honoring the earth.



A few weeks later, Troy's grandmother began to teach him how to bead.

She showed him how to shred the dried deer muscle, called sinew, into hair-thin threads to use in sewing on the tiny beads.

"In the old days, a beadworker offered up a prayer for every bead," Grandma told him as she held up a glass bead. "Our ways are old, but the materials we use are sometimes new and different, like these glass beads."



Next his grandmother showed him how to line up a group of the tiny beads between his thumb and forefinger.

"Line them up like this so you can poke the needle through many beads at once," Grandma said. "It makes the beading go faster."

Troy tried it and found that his slender fingers were perfect for the job.

Troy spent most of his summer tanning and coloring deer hides with his grandparents. Finally they began to make clothing out of the hides.

After Grandpa shaped some colored hides into a man's war shirt, Troy sewed pieces of beadwork onto it. He also added a long fringe to a buckskin dress his grandmother had made.

"The war shirt is made to honor a Cheyenne man for what he has done for his people," his grandfather explained.

"And a beaded dress honors a Cheyenne woman for her deeds," Grandma added. "As you can see, grandson, Cheyenne art honors animals, people, and the earth, from which all life comes."



With one week left in Troy's summer, his grandparents pulled him aside.

"We have taught you some of what we know, Troy," Grandma said. "And you have done well. Now we want you to make a piece of art that shows us what you have learned."





For the rest of that week, Troy worked hard on a special piece of art. He was very careful not to let anyone see.

He kept the piece in a burlap sack and took it with him into the hills every day to work on it. He had to be secretive because he wanted to surprise his grandparents.



Finally Troy's piece of art was finished. With his burlap sack in hand, he asked his grandparents to come closer. Proudly he drew something out of the bag and held it up.

His grandparents looked at each other, confused. It seemed to be some sort of war shirt. But there was no buckskin and no beadwork. The shirt was made entirely of photographs, all stitched together like a quilt.

Grandpa frowned and asked, "What is it?"



"It's a war shirt," Troy replied. "I made it out of photographs because you taught me that Cheyenne artists sometimes use new and different things to create our art. That way, people will know that we are still alive today.

"Most of all, I made the shirt because I wanted to honor both of you."



Troy drew the shirt closer to them and pointed at the photographs. "If you look closely, you will see that I used pictures of you and your art. I wanted to thank you for teaching me about our Cheyenne ways.

"I will teach them to my children, just like you taught them to me."



As Troy spoke, tears of joy filled his grandparents' eyes. He understood what they had taught him!

He was doing what they and other Cheyenne before them had always done. Troy was keeping Cheyenne traditions alive.

Greetings!

Read Aloud



The War Shirt

From **Bently Spang**

Like Troy, I grew up on and off the Northern Cheyenne Reservation and learned about Cheyenne art from my family. I wrote about Troy's art because I want children like you to know that Cheyenne people are still alive, making art of all kinds. I actually made a special war shirt like the one in the story. I, too, made it to honor my loved ones.



From **Troy Anderson**

As a Cherokee artist, keeping Native American traditions alive has always been important to me. I really enjoyed illustrating how Troy used his art to convey an old tradition in a new way without losing sight of the past. I hope that reading this book will cause you to become interested in your family's past and to find something worth passing on.



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