

Thunderous

by M.L Smoker & Natalie Peeterse

In this magical graphic novel, a dangerous journey through the Spirit World forces a young girl to embrace her Lakota heritage.

“If Aiyana hears one more traditional Lakota story, she’ll scream! More interested in her social media presence than her Native American heritage, Aiyana is shocked when she suddenly finds herself in a magical world-with no cell coverage!

Pursued by the trickster Raven, Aiyana struggles to get back home, but is helped by friends and allies she meets along the way. Her dangerous journey through the Spirit World tests her fortitude and challenges her to embrace her Lakota heritage. But will it be enough to defeat the cruel and powerful Raven?”

Anchor Text: Thunderous

Time Frame: Two – Three days (30 – 40 minutes per day as time permits for classroom schedule and student grade level)

Lesson Summary: Students will read a graphic novel about a young Lakota girl who experiences and overcomes challenges during a mystic journey to the Spirit World. This fictional story is set in the Black Hills, which are sacred to the Lakota. Lakota cultural traditions and language are weaved throughout the story. The following lesson plans support the standards for English Language Arts and Essential Understanding 3.



Learning Objectives

While reading and discussing the aspects of the book, students will:

- work effectively and respectfully in a small group, listening to everyone’s responses.
- understand and analyze literary elements such as character and plot.
- ask questions, check inferences, and summarize information from reading and viewing background sources related to Lakota cultural traditions.
- determine mood and tone of artwork of the story.
- retell the important details of the story.
- connect the details of the story to the traditional land base of the Lakota.
- develop an increased awareness regarding Essential Understanding 3 and understand how powerful cultural and spiritual connections impacted the outcome of the story.

Essential Understandings Regarding Montana American Indians (EU)

EU3 – Beliefs, Spirituality, Oral Histories Persist

The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its



own oral histories, which are as valid as written histories. These histories predate the “discovery” of North America.

Themes from the Story

- Storytelling
- Heritage/Traditions
- Imagery
- Fitting in
- Listening
- Two worlds metaphor
- “We are always Lakota no matter where we are.”
- Black Elk Peak (history)
- Humor
- Bullying
- Peer pressure
- Kinship/Family
- Being a good relative

Content and Instructional Strategies

Day 1

Begin the class by posing these questions. Who likes to read graphic novels or comic books? What good stories have you read? What did you like about the story? Today we will read a new graphic novel called, “Thunderous” by Montana author M.L. Smoker who is a member of the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux tribes.

Has anyone ever heard of the Lakota tribe? Transition to providing some basic background information about the Lakota and their connections to the Black Hills and in particular Black Elk Peak. See the resource section for on-line materials for teaching about the Lakota.

Display a map and show the location of the Black Hills. If your school has access to Google Earth, you can zoom in to show the location of Black Elk Peak. This is the setting of the story.

Read the story and if your school has multiple copies of the book students could do this independently or in small groups. This could also be done as whole class read aloud.

Allow ample class time for reading the book. Utilize a 3-2-1 prompt for student reaction – Three things you liked about the story. Two things you liked about the graphics/imagery. One thing you learned about Lakota traditions.

Ask students to share their 3-2-1 prompts.

Day 2

Recap the discussion from the previous day and tell students they will now have an opportunity to listen to and learn the Lakota words that are in the book. Students watch the on-line [Lakota language pronunciation guide video clip](#) and have them go through the video several times so they can repeat the words exactly like they heard them. This is a great example of the oral tradition – hearing something over and over and then repeating it the same way it was told to you.

Now have them reread the story and ask them to pay attention to the following:

- How characters in the story respond to challenges.
- Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.
- Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
- Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.
- Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths or traditional stories.

Another fun activity for examining graphic novels is to have your students examine the pictures from the novel. A Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) provides a good framework for this activity.

Consider using these three questions for analyzing the images:

- What is going on in this image?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find?

Facilitate a class discussion regarding their responses. A VTS activity fits well with this Reading Standards for Literature 6 – 8: Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot). (RL.7.3)

For information regarding tricksters in American Indian cultural traditions check out these resources about Iktomi and Raven. Trickster stories are common in many cultures across the world and these often-humorous stories teach lessons about traditional values.

[The Raven – A Tlingit story – video from PBS Learning Media](#)

[Information about Raven from the Akta Lakota Museum](#)

[Iktomi and the Animal Warrior Society](#)

Day 3

Recap previous days' activities and discussions. Today the focus of the lesson is on learning about the author and developing an understanding of Lakota connections to the Black Hills and Black Elk Peak (the peak featured in the story).

First share the [video interview with author – M.L. Smoker](#). Listen and takes notes about key ideas she shares regarding her experience writing the book. Pay attention to the following:

- Why did she write it?
- What does she want readers to take away from her story?
- What was her main challenge and how did she work through it?
- What aspects of Dakota/Lakota culture did she share?

Display the [2023 OPI Making Montana Proud Poster that features Mandy](#). What advice does she share?

Facilitate a class discussion and ask each student to read their responses and to elaborate on at least two of them.

Next, learning about Lakota cultural connections to the Black Hills. Essential Understanding 3 refers to spiritual beliefs, traditions, and oral histories. The cultural context and setting for the story provide students with an opportunity to learn about Lakota cultural connections with the

Black Hills. Display these Key Concepts from EU 3 and ask students to paraphrase what these statements mean to them and have them explain how these concepts are reflected in the story.

- Native people have retained their spiritual beliefs and traditions – tribal languages are still spoken, sacred songs are still sung, and rituals and ceremonies are still performed.
- Tribal oral traditions, ideologies, worldviews, and the principles and values associated with them, are as valid as other such traditions from around the world and should be accorded the same respect and standing.

Now watch this short video from the National Park Service [The Lakota Emergence Story](#)

“In Lakota culture, history is passed down to new generations through the spoken word. There are many different versions of the Emergence Story, varying from band to band and family to family. This version comes from the Cheyenne Creek community on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation of the Oglala Lakota tribe. The story was told by Wilmer Mesteth -- a tribal historian and spiritual leader -- to Sina Bear Eagle, who retells it in the following passage.”

Ask students to share how the Lakota Emergence Story relates to Essential Understanding 3.

Have copies of the [article from Black Hills Magazine entitled From Harney to Black Elk Peak: Evolution of a Name](#) printed out in advance and have students individually or in pairs read the article and take notes. Utilize a 3-2-1 prompt for student reaction – three things you learned regarding the name of Black Elk Peak; two things you learned about Lakota traditions; one thing you would like to learn more about.

Ask each student or student pair to share their 3-2-1 statements and facilitate a class discussion.

Final activity – have students analyze and read the poem “Thunderous.” Allow students time to read the poem and/or do a class read aloud. Facilitate a brief class discussion and ask them to share their reactions. As an extended learning activity students could write their own poems about what they learned from the story.

Assessment

Ask each student to write a one – two-page summary of the book and include how the story impacted them. Assign it as homework and/or allow class time for them to complete the assignment. Consider having students share what they wrote with the rest of the class.

Extended Learning Activities

Have students create their own mini graphic novel and have them share it with the class.

Compare/contrast another American Indian graphic novel.

Listen to examples of other Iktomi stories from the Lakota and ask for student oral and written responses.

Resources

- Background information for Lakota connections to the Black Hills and Black Elk Peak
 - [Needles, Black Elk Peak, Sylvan Lake, Crazy Horse Monument & Mount Rushmore | Over South Dakota](#) – video from SD PBS
 - [Sacred Hills: Preserving Lakota Sioux Culture in South Dakota](#), Great Big Story

- ['In Sacred Motion': Five Years Ago, A Lakota Elder Beat The Establishment And Renamed Harney Peak](#), South Dakota Public Broadcasting
- [Take A Hike: Black Elk Peak](#), Black Hills Visitor Magazine
- [From Harney to Black Elk Peak: Evolution of a Name](#), Black Hills Visitor Magazine
- Iktomi stories from the Lakota
 - [Inkdomi and the Buffalo](#), Level 3, Indian Reading Series, Education Northwest
 - [Iktomi and the Animal Warrior Society](#), Wo Lakota
- [Lakota language pronunciation guide](#), Montana Office of Public Instruction
- [Mandy Smoker Broaddus author interview clip](#), Montana Office of Public Instruction
- Essential Understandings and Content Standards
 - [Essential Understandings Key Concepts](#)
- Reading Standards for Literature 3-5
 - Key Ideas and Details
Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text; and include texts by and about American Indians. (RL.5.2)
 - Craft and Structure
Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described; include perspectives of American Indians. (RL.5.6)
 - Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g., mysteries and adventure stories, including traditional and contemporary stories by and about American Indians) on their approaches to similar themes and topics. (RL.5.9)
- Reading Standards for Literature 6-8
 - Key Ideas and Details
Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution. (RL.6.3)
Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot). (RL.7.3)
Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision. (RL.8.3)
 - Craft and Structure
Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text. (RL.6.6)

Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text. (RL.7.6)
Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor. (RL.8.6)
 - Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories; traditional and contemporary stories by and about American Indians) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics. (RL.6.9)

Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character with a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history; include texts that contain portrayals and/or accounts by and about American Indians. (RL.7.9)

Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new and include texts by and about American Indians. (RL.8.9)

Glossary of Lakota Words and Phrases

Iktomi	spider, who is often referred to as a trickster figure
Ina	mom
Kola	friend
Nituwe he	Who are you, where do you come from?
Osni	very cold
Pa-Hin	porcupine
Pilamaya	thank you
Pispiza	prairie dog
Sungmanitu Tanka	wolf
Tatanka	buffalo
Unci	grandmother
Wakinyan	Lakota Thunder Beings
Wanbli	eagle

Thunderous (poem)

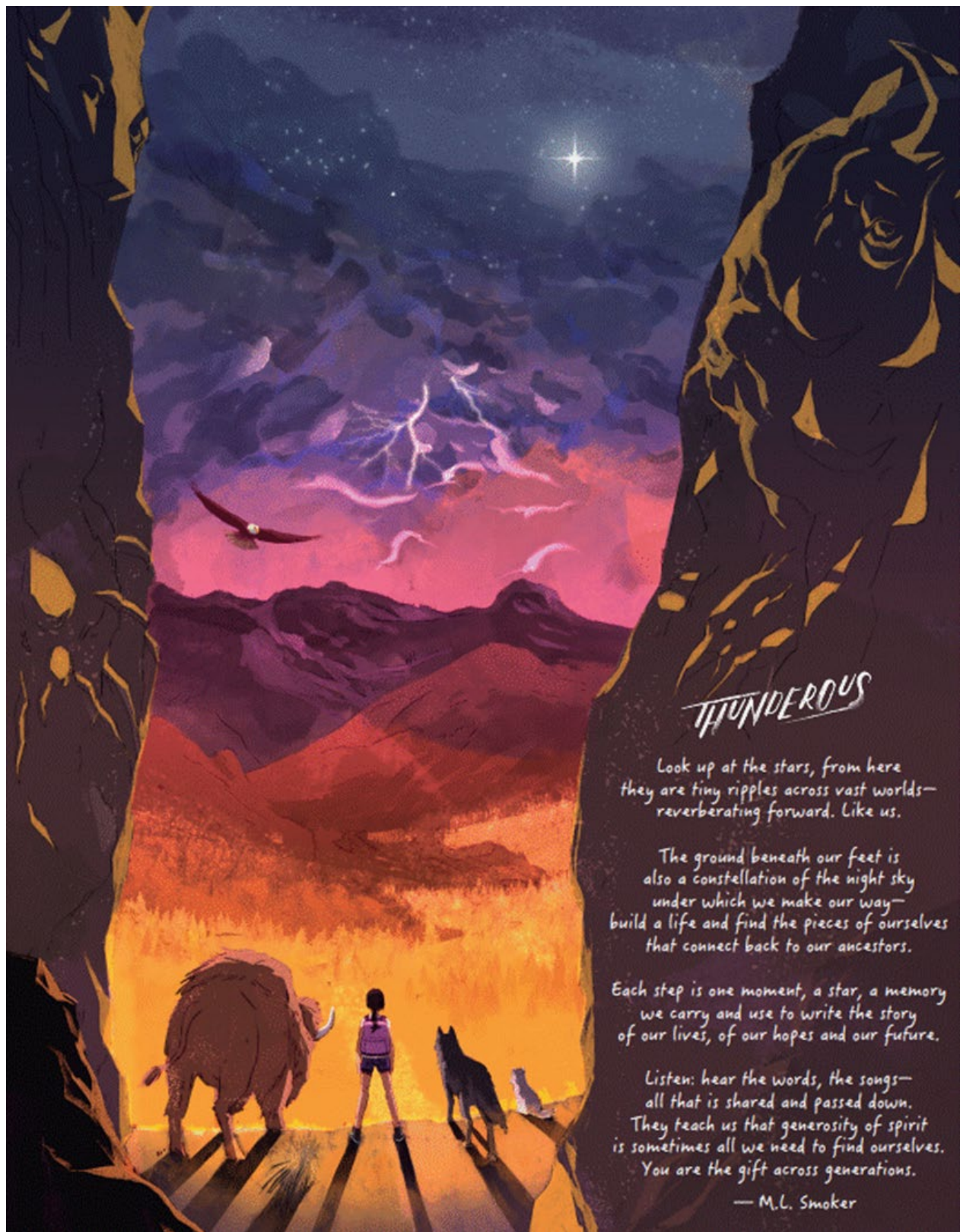
Look up at the stars, from here they are tine ripples across vast worlds – reverberating forward. Like us.

The ground beneath our feet is also a constellation of the night sky under which we make our way – build a life and find the pieces of ourselves that connect back to our ancestors.

Each step is one moment, a star, a memory we carry and use to write the story of our lives, of our hopes and our future.

Listen: hear the words, the songs – all that is shared and passed down. They teach us that generosity of spirit is sometimes all we need to find ourselves. You are the gift across generations.

-M.L. Smoker



THUNDEROUS

Look up at the stars, from here they are tiny ripples across vast worlds—reverberating forward. Like us.

The ground beneath our feet is also a constellation of the night sky under which we make our way—build a life and find the pieces of ourselves that connect back to our ancestors.

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