



Soapstone Porcupine

Jeff Pinkney

Illustrated by Darlene Gait

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About the Book

The dog shows up the way that snow does on a winter's day. She just drifts in and stays, becoming the boy's friend. Soon the two set out on an adventure that ends in a quandary of quills involving a porcupine and a big brother who swears to take revenge on the animal. But a Cree elder and master carver reminds the brothers of the importance of the porcupine and works with the younger brother to perfect his carving skills. After a day spent carving for the tourists, the boy learns some truths about human nature and realizes that sometimes, like the porcupine, you must put your quills up to keep from getting pushed around.

Soapstone Porcupine is the sequel to *Soapstone Signs*, although it also stands alone as an independent story.

About the Author

Jeff Pinkney likes to be out in a canoe or on his mountain bike on forest trails. He has met a few porcupines along the way. He is an amateur stone carver, having learned the art from a Cree elder who provided him with his first piece of soapstone. Jeff carved a bear cub. He also writes poetry and is a proud member of the Live Poets of Haliburton County. Jeff is husband to Leslie and father to Maarika, Alexandra and Isabella. He holds an English degree from Trent University. For more information, visit jeffpinkney.com.

About the Writing

Jeff's stories draw on his experiences while living and traveling as a development consultant in Canada's James Bay Frontier, where he acquired a deep appreciation of the people and the landscape and also dreamed of opening a birders' lodge. These wonderful memories provided the setting for *Soapstone Porcupine*. Jeff knows firsthand what it's like to be both a little brother and a big brother. The story shines a light on

the relationship between two brothers from the perspective of the little brother, who narrates the story.

Teaching Ideas—Curriculum Connections

This teachers' guide outlines activities that promote curriculum integration while supporting a holistic view of the world. *Soapstone Porcupine* is more than an engaging story; it can be a tool for environmental, cultural and linguistic investigation. Students will make connections within and between global, social, environmental and cultural contexts, as well as between personal experiences, scientific inquiry and the arts. Through recognition and respect for the signs that personally link each individual to their physical and abstract environments, students will develop tools to commune and communicate with the world around them.

Prereading Ideas

- Has an animal ever wandered into your life, such as a stray cat or a dog? What are the dangers of approaching a stray animal? What is your story?
- The story's main character is out with his dog, pretending to be a great hunter, when the dog has a run-in with a porcupine. With porcupine quills stuck in the dog's muzzle, the pretend world gives way to a real-life emergency. Have your *pretend world* and your *real world* ever been at odds?
- How do you think you would handle a real-life emergency? What types of emergencies have happened to you? Have you ever helped out in an emergency?
- Have you ever seen a porcupine? Have you ever smelled a porcupine? If so, what did it smell like? What other animals do you know that have a strong smell? (E.g.: skunk)
- What would you do if your dog was quilled by a porcupine? What would you do if you had porcupine quills stuck in you?

Classroom Discussion Questions

Chapter 1—*A Miss and a Wish: A New Way to Shoot*

1. What was the miss? (The protagonist, the young boy, had gone hunting with his father, brother and uncle, and had missed his quarry on purpose.)
2. Why do you think he missed his shot?
3. Why do you think he was worried about it?
4. Are you a hunter?
5. In chapter 1, Stan gives the boy the gift of a camera. Stan says, "Great hunters don't just shoot guns." What does Stan mean by this?
6. Can you think of different ways to go hunting?
7. What was the wish? (The young boy wishes that Atim, the stray dog that recently wandered into their lives, will decide to stay.)

Chapter 2—Sidekicks and Signs: A Quandary of Quills

1. Have you ever seen a gray jay?
2. Why are gray jays known as “camp robbers”?
3. What is another name for the gray jay? (Whiskeyjack.)
4. When the joking father says, “Our guests are for the birds,” what does he mean?
5. When Lindy, the master carver, is asked how he knows what to carve, he says that whatever the carving is going to be is already there inside the stone. What does he mean?
6. Lindy teaches that a “sign” is any way that the world around you gives you a message. Signs come to you when your thoughts mix with your senses. What are your senses? Can you think of an example of how a thought can mix with one of your senses to give you a sign? Has your world ever given you a sign?
7. The boy remembers a lesson he learned about hunting. *When there is an emergency, always try to control your own panic first.* What does this mean?
8. What was the emergency?
9. How does the boy control his own panic?
10. How does he handle the emergency?
11. What does the big brother mean when he says, “I’ll find the porcupine who hurt her. And my gun doesn’t shoot pictures”?

Chapter 3—Hunters, Hunger and Hopeful Hearts: A Shot in the Dark?

1. Why does Lindy joke and say to the boy, “I think you could be an auctioneer if you ever have enough of stone carving”? (The boy was so excited to see Lindy that he was talking very fast and asking many questions at once.)
2. After breakfast, when his brother goes out hunting, what is the young boy worried about? (He is worried that his brother will shoot and kill the porcupine. He is also worried that the dog might attack the porcupine again and have quills stuck in her muzzle again.)
3. What advice does Lindy give to the big brother about hunting the porcupine? Does the brother take Lindy’s advice? What decision does the big brother make when hunting the porcupine?
4. Why does the young boy fall asleep with pride in his heart?
5. Why does he decide that his brother does not have to know how he feels?

Chapter 4—Carving Tools and Tourists: You Can’t Push a Porcupine!

1. A tourist wants to buy one of Lindy’s carvings but thinks the price is too high. The tourist offers less money than what Lindy is asking. Why does Lindy say to the tourist, “Okay, but at that price I will take off the back leg and the tail”? What happens next? (The tourist pays the full price that Lindy is asking.)
2. How does Lindy, the master carver, get so many types of carving stone? (Lindy knows many secret places to find carving stone. He also trades pieces of stone with the other soapstone carvers that he knows.)
3. What is the “dance of the tasty newcomer”? (This dance is done by people who have come to visit the area but have forgotten to bring bug spray to prevent mosquito bites.)

4. The fast-talking lady in the neon-red windbreaker who picks up the boy's porcupine carving is compared to a fisher or a marten. What is the significance of this? (Fishers and martens are natural predators of the porcupine.)
5. The woman says, "A kid like you couldn't carve like this." Is she correct?
6. How would you feel if you were the young boy listening to her?
7. What lesson has the young boy learned from the porcupine? (The boy thinks of how the porcupine is confident that it is well protected, so it can be brave. The boy thinks of how the porcupine does not let itself be pushed around.)
8. How does the young boy react to this lady? (He stands up to her. He does not sell his carving to her. He stays calm and demands that she give it back to him.)
9. As the young boy comes home, what birthday wish is coming true? (Atim, the stray dog, has chosen to stay with the family.)

Suggested Activities

1. *Creative skills*

- Have you ever made your own carving? Pretend that you have your very own piece of soapstone—it could be a bar of soap or a piece of modeling clay. Whatever the carving is going to be, it is already there. Take your piece of "soapstone" home with you and be aware of your signs. When you come back to class, tell us what your signs were. Have your signs helped you to see the carving that waits inside?
- Make your own carving. Soap can be carved with a variety of safe (non-pointy) tools found about the house, like table knives and teaspoons, bolts (use the threaded part to carve the soap), keys, or files without points. Non-pointy and non-sharp carving tools designed for modeling clay are available at most art-supply stores.
- Have you ever illustrated a story? The pictures are an important part of this story. Choose a page in the book that is not illustrated and draw a picture for that page. What special signs will you include in your illustration?

2. *Language skills*

Can you speak Cree? This story could have happened in many Canadian places, but it is based on the author's travels in northern Ontario. There are six words in the book from the Cree language. They are in the Moose Cree, or "L," dialect. Practice saying these words. Then choose some animals or plants or things you know in English and look up the Cree words for them.

âštam (ash-tum)—"come here"

atim (a-tim)—dog

kâko (kah-koh, with a very soft *oh*)—porcupine

meegwetch (mee-gwetch)—"thank you"

mahkitonew (mah-kee-tah-nayo)—one with a big mouth

wachay (wah-chay)—"what cheer" or "greetings" or "goodbye." (This word has many spellings, including *wah-chay*, *watchay*, *wachey* and *wâciye*.)

3. *Environmental skills*

Do some research on the porcupine. How many kinds of porcupines can you find? What do porcupines eat? Where do porcupines live?

Other Titles and Websites of Interest

Bats in Trouble by Pamela McDowell, Orca Echoes, 2017

The Dog by Helen Mixer, Greystone Books, 2017

Moose Factory Cree, by Daisy Turner, White Mountain Publications

(see wmpub.ca/1147-MFCree.html)

wikihow.com/Make-a-Soap-Carving

kids.creedictionary.com/

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cree_language

Other Books by the Author from Orca Book Publishers

Soapstone Signs

Reviews and Awards

Winner of the Writers' Union of Canada's eleventh annual Writing for Children Competition for *Soapstone Signs*. This book was also:

- one of 25 Canadian children's titles chosen for a mega-launch at the Ontario Library Association Super Conference
- chosen by Club Amick (founded by former lieutenant-governor James Bartleman) to be circulated for free to children in far northern communities
- named by The Canadian Children's Book Centre as one of its Best Books; out of six books selected in the Early Chapter Books category, *Soapstone Signs* was the only title to receive a Red Star, reserved for titles of exceptional calibre.