



**Classroom Guide for  
THE VANISHING CULTURE  
SERIES**

Written & photographed by  
**Jan Reynolds**

**Reading Level**

\*Reading Level: Grade 4

Interest Level: Grades K–6

Guided Reading Level: P

Lexile™ Levels: 910L-1050L

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

**Themes**

World Cultures and Traditions, Native Peoples, Family Life, Environments and Habitats, Customs and Traditions, Sustainability, Human Impact, Adaptations, Globalization, World Geography

**Synopsis**

The books in this series take students around the world to visit seven indigenous cultures and the unique landscapes and communities in which they live. Readers “meet” children in each culture and experience their lives through stunning photographs and straightforward, sensitive text. The books focus on each group’s traditions, values, beliefs, and family life. Readers also learn how each cultural group meets its basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter, and how changes in the environment pose challenges to the continuing existence of the culture.

Each book begins with a child asking a family member for a bedtime story. The stories told reflect the traditions and pride of the group; they draw the listener and reader into a world where a way of life rooted in the past is very much a part of the present.

The books contain two stories—a story of a family and the story of the author’s journey into the focus culture. *Amazon Basin* centers on the Yanomama in the heart of the Amazon of South America, with powerful images of rarely photographed tribal rites. *Down Under* concentrates on the aboriginal Tiwi people as they go on a walkabout, dance their Dreamings, and carve spirit poles to honor their dead on Bathurst Island, off the north coast of Australia. *Far North* details the Sami people above the Arctic Circle in

Europe as they follow the reindeer migration from tundra grazing lands in winter to high mountain pastures in summer. *Frozen Land* records an Inuit family surviving on the desolate shores of Quamanituaq in the North American Arctic region of Canada, hunting Caribou, building igloos, and performing traditional music. *Himalaya* documents the Tibetans traversing the highest mountain range on Earth to trade salt, tea, and other goods in Nepal, home of the Sherpa. *Mongolia* tells about a family of Mongolian herders in Asia and provides a glimpse of daily life among these people. *Sahara* captures a nomadic Tuareg family in north Africa as they caravan across the world's largest desert to trade and to attend the celebration of the camel races.

## BACKGROUND

*From the author:* These ancient ways of life are disappearing as new roads and towns change the landscapes, and modern ways of life replace the traditional methods. These cultures and we are all part of the same human family, and the loss of their traditional ways of life is our loss too. Like these groups, we all depend on the natural world to live. We all share this Earth, its lands, and its waters. Perhaps we can learn from the relationship these groups have with their natural surroundings before their ways of life vanish forever.

*Globalization and endangered societies:* In addition to the seven cultures featured in the series, indigenous cultures around the world struggle to practice their traditional ways of life and face cultural extinction due to globalization. Roads, housing developments, deforestation, national governments, and the Internet invade indigenous groups' lands and intrude on traditions. As older generations disappear, so do many practices and minority languages. According to [National Geographic's Enduring Voices Project](#), by 2100, more than 3,500 of the 7,000 languages spoken on Earth may die out. National Geographic's Explorer-in-Residence, Wade Davis, argues, "Indigenous cultures are not failed attempts at modernity, let alone failed attempts to be us. They are unique expressions of the human imagination and heart, unique answers to a fundamental question: What does it mean to be human and alive?" Watch and listen to his [TED talk, "Dreams From Endangered Cultures."](#)

The [World Bank](#) states, "Globalization is an inevitable phenomenon in human history that's been bringing the world closer through the exchange of goods, products, knowledge, and culture. But over the last few decades, the pace of this global integration has become much faster and more dramatic because of unprecedented advancements in technology, communications, science, transport, and industry." In fact, younger generations seek jobs and lives outside their communities in search of greater prosperity. This exposure and interaction with the more globalized world can result in younger generations losing connection to their traditional homes or returning with more modern technology, clothing, food, and habits.

Globalization has brought benefits and detriment to the many cultures, albeit to different degrees. On one hand, many indigenous cultures are gaining access to literacy and education, healthcare, gender rights, and economic opportunities. On the other hand, globalization threatens and weakens the endurance of languages, old customs, and knowledge about the land and environment. The Internet, specifically, offers these indigenous groups access to education, a platform to bring attention to their struggles, and a space to celebrate and share their traditions. Yet the Internet can also expose these cultural groups to excessive or intrusive tourism and lure young people away in

pursuit of a new life. For in-depth reports and analysis of global trends, check out the [Yale Center for the Study of Globalization](#).

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strand 1)

Before introducing a book from the series to students, you may wish to develop background and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following for each book:

1. Take a look at the front and back covers. Take a picture walk. Ask students to make a prediction. Do you think this book will be fiction or nonfiction? What makes you think so? What clues does the author/photographer give to help you know whether this book will be fiction or nonfiction?
2. What do you know about texts that are informational nonfiction? What are the typical features of informational nonfiction texts? What are some things that will not happen in informational nonfiction texts? Why do authors write informational nonfiction texts? How do you think their reasons differ from authors who write fiction?
3. What does the word *culture* mean? What makes a culture? What activities or traditions are observed as part of your culture? What makes your culture unique? Can a person belong to more than one culture?
4. (Adjust for each book being introduced) What do you know about Australia [Mongolia/Nepal/Canada/the Arctic/the Amazon/North Africa]? Where is this place located? What is the climate and environment like? What kinds of animals and plants live there? What are some of the challenges people living there may face? Why might this place a good environment for people to live and thrive?
5. We are going to be reading about a family from a different culture. Think about your own family. What are some things you and your family need to live? What types of activities do you do together? How do you get food and clothing? In what kind of housing do you live? How do you help each other?
6. Why do you think I chose this book for us to read today?

### Exploring the Book(s)

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1 and 2, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

Read and talk about the title of the book. Ask students what they think the word *vanishing* means. Then ask them what they think this book will most likely be about and who the book might be about. What places might be talked about in the text? What do you think might happen? What information do you think you might learn? What makes you think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, inside front cover, title page, dedication, introduction, photographic illustrations, About the Journey section by the author, and map on the inside back cover.

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- the characteristics of the culture
- what makes this featured culture unique
- how this group of people has adapted to survive in its environment

- the challenges the people face
- about the modern human impact (positive and negative) on this traditional cultural and the environment overall

Encourage students to consider why the author would want to share this story with children and create a whole series on the topic of vanishing cultures.

## VOCABULARY

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below. Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### CONTENT SPECIFIC

Sahara	Mongolia	Amazon	Asia	desert	grasslands
plains	rain forest	jungle	swamp	aborigines	Canada
island	Tibetans	Sherpa	Himalaya	lowlands	highlands
valley	Inuit	inlet	tundra	plateau	
Tibet	Nepal	Australia	Finland	bush (wild country)	

### ACADEMIC

vanishing	culture	exchange	ancient	basic needs	disappears
proud(ly)	village	festival	ceremony	celebration	tradition(al)
decorations	hand woven	valuable	continent	nomad	permanent
caravan	tribe	portable	constructed	human spirit	extended
family depend	relatives	liquid	honor	designs	patterns
perform	landscape	harmony	rhythm	ancestors	trade route
barter	homemade	daily chores	survival	migration	annual shelter
thousands	natural cycle	competition			

## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite evidence with their answers.**

<b>Literal Comprehension</b>
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(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

1. What types of food do the people eat? What do they hunt? What do they gather? What strategies do adults teach children for getting and preparing food? What tools do they use to help them get and prepare their food?
2. What is the climate and environment like in the region where the people live? What words or phrases describe the setting?
3. How does the culture honor relatives and loved ones who have passed away?
4. How does the family prepare for a ceremony, celebration, or festival? What types of special things do they wear?

5. In what ways do the family members help each other? What chores does each family member carry out? How do children help their parents? What skills do children learn from their parents?
6. What role does the extended family play in the culture?
7. What kinds of activities do members of this culture have to entertain themselves? What do children (and adults) do for fun?
8. What animal/s is/are important to the culture's survival? How do people use the animal/s to meet their needs?
9. What kind of transportation do the people use? How does this way of getting around help people survive in their environment?
10. What is causing the people's way of life to disappear? What is the impact of new construction, trucks, and roads on the culture?
11. What tools or strategies do people use to get water?
12. What challenges does the culture face in day-to-day life and in the long term?
13. Study one ceremony or celebration of the culture. How is this event different from day-to-day activities? What do children and parents need to prepare in terms of food, clothing, and transportation to get ready for the celebration or ceremony?

<b>Extension/Higher Level Thinking</b>
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(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4–6)

1. What words or phrases does the author use to show the central figures are proud of their culture and traditional way of life?
2. How are adults in this culture teaching children—the next generation—to carry on their traditional way of life? What skills will their children need to learn to survive? What customs do the adults want to pass on to their children?
3. What role does storytelling play in the culture?
4. Why do you think this group of people dresses the way they do? How do their special garments help them survive in their environment? Would this be an example of a physical or behavioral adaptation?
5. Study the animals that appear in the book. Describe several physical and behavioral adaptations of the animals. What do they need to have or be able to do to survive in their environment?
6. What is the author's purpose in choosing the title *Vanishing Cultures* for this series of books? What does her choice reveal about the message or the central idea of the series?
7. What do you think the author, Jan Reynolds, wants you to learn from this book and series about traditional cultures? What is the central idea(s) of the book and of the entire series? What words or phrases confirm the central idea? What words or ideas does she use to show the value of preserving the culture?
8. How does the family demonstrate persistence and creativity?
9. Do you think it is important to protect traditional ways of life? Why do you think so? What might happen if we don't defend and protect these cultures?
10. What does the book teach about sustainability and the impact of humans on their environment?
11. How is the information in this nonfiction book arranged? What evidence do you have that the book is organized by chronology, comparison, description, problem/solution, or cause/effect?
12. Why do you think the family and other members of the culture continue to live a traditional way of life?
13. Read the About the Journey section at the end of the book. It details Jan Reynolds's experiences living among people of the culture. What challenges did she face? What

- are her favorite memories of this family? What surprised her?
14. The author notes that the children feel proud of their culture and parents. What words or phrases does the author use to show the children are proud? Why do you think it is important for the children to be proud of their culture?

### Literature Circles

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 8 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7 and 8)

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Questions section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for passages that show how children of the culture play and have fun.
- The **Illustrator** might create a map of the country or region where the people of the culture live. Be sure to include countries surrounding or bordering the area, physical features such as rivers or mountains, and animals.
- The **Connector** might find another of the Vanishing Cultures books and connect how people of the other culture adapts to their environment.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might research more information about the causes of the "vanishing" culture highlighted in the book.

\*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: GETTING STARTED WITH LITERATURE CIRCLES by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), LITERATURE CIRCLES: VOICE AND CHOICE IN BOOK CLUBS AND READING GROUPS by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and LITERATURE CIRCLES RESOURCE GUIDE by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3, Craft & Structure, Strands 4–6, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. Suppose you are going to change places with the main child profiled in the book. Identify at least three skills you would need to learn, and explain why you would need them.
2. Imagine you are a scientist studying the culture and you need to enlist help from the local government to stop the building roads and houses where this traditional culture is located. Write a letter, from the point of view of a scientist, asking for help. How will you persuade the local government to leave space for this group of people to live?
3. Imagine you are going to be pen pals with one of the children in the book. Write a letter to him or her describing your family and daily life. What do



you do for fun? What are your daily chores? What do you eat and how do you get it? What are your favorite celebrations and how do you prepare for them? How do you help the adults in your life? What do you wear for special occasions? What is a favorite story an adult has told you about a long time ago? What questions do you want to ask your pen pal about his or her culture?

4. If you were offered a plane ticket and the opportunity to move to the region and live with people of this culture, would you take it? Why or why not? What skills would you need to be able to survive there? What challenges would you face? What would be the most exciting part of living someplace else? What things from your current life would be hard to give up?
5. Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not? Describe what makes this an interesting book or what you would do to improve it.

### ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the book with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the text. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the photographs in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the book or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they admire about a central figure in the book.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### Comparing and Contrasting *Vanishing Cultures* Books

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 9)

(Writing Standards, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strand 8)

1. How are the cultures highlighted in the seven books similar and different from one another? What actions do the families take in each book to protect their way of life?
2. Compare how the challenges each culture faces are similar or different.
3. Compare how children in each book demonstrate pride in their culture. Why is it important for the children to feel proud of who they are and their way of life?
4. What is the author's purpose in starting each book with a parent telling her or his child a story from long ago? How does this affect the tone of the books? How does this support the central idea?

5. After reading two or more of the Vanishing Cultures books, discuss the features and characteristics the books have in common. What kinds of things are included in a Vanishing Cultures book? What are some things that are not included in a Vanishing Cultures book? What central ideas and lessons are in each book?
6. Have students create a chart to compare different aspects of life across two or more cultures. Write the names of the groups being compared on the left side of the chart, and list the areas for comparison across the top. Here are some possible topics: *Food, Clothing, Climate, Geography, Important Animals, Homes, How Children Help (Chores), Roles of Men and Women, Family Life, How People Have Fun, Beliefs, Means of Transportation, Challenges Faced Today, Celebrations, Honoring Loved Ones*. Have students record appropriate information as they read and re-read the texts.
7. One elementary class created the "[Around the World with Jan Reynolds](#)" project on [Google Earth](#). Explore where each of the cultures is located. Compare the political map with the satellite map. Reflect on how geography has helped or hurt the survival of these traditional cultures. Students can create their own maps of the different cultures at [National Geographic's MapMaker's 1-Page Maps](#).

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Student who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

### Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 1 and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7 and 9)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Direct students to the map on the inside back cover of the book. Have them identify the country or countries where the people highlighted in the book live. On which continent do they live? How might the location and geography help the people preserve their way of life? Have students compare this map to [National Geographic's Enduring Voices Project](#) to see if the culture's language is at risk of disappearing.
2. If students have read the Vanishing Cultures title *Sahara*, have them also read [Caravan](#), another book about caravans, migrations, and a culture dependent on camels. If students have read the Vanishing Cultures title *Himalaya*, have them also read [Sacred Mountain: Everest](#), another book about the Himalaya mountain range and the Sherpa. If students have read the Vanishing Cultures title *Mongolia*, have them also read [Horse Song](#), another book about Mongolian traditions and celebrations.

As students read and review these books, ask them to compare the text features and structure of the texts. What is the central idea of each book? What do the authors want to teach readers about these traditional cultures? How do traditions bring people together in each book? What does each book demonstrate about the value of community and respect for the environment?

3. Have students read and study *The New York Times* article and photo essay, "[Preserving the Voice of Vanishing Cultures](#)." What challenges did documentary photographer Chris Rainier face in working with indigenous groups, teaching outsiders about these cultures, and living in remote environments? Compare his experiences with those of Jan Reynolds, author of the Vanishing Cultures series.



- What motivates people like Chris and Jan to pursue this kind of work?
4. Have students research what globalization is and what it means for the world in which we live. Explore [National Geographic's Earth Pulse](#) for maps about human population, effects on the environment, migration, and connectedness. What are the positive aspects of globalization? What are the negative aspects? Challenge students to write an argument citing evidence about whether globalization is on the whole good for the world (humans and the environment) or on the whole detrimental for the world. Students may then present their arguments to the class and debate in small or whole group settings.
  5. Have students read the [National Geographic's definition and brief history of globalization](#). Using information from the site, ask students to think about which aspects of globalization might affect the culture they just read about. How might globalization help the traditional culture? How might it hurt the culture?

### Science

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 2 and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strand 7)

1. Have students research the environment and geography of the location where the traditional group lives. What physical features are part of the landscape? What is the climate throughout the changing seasons? Which animals and plants are found there? What makes the region unique from other parts of the world? How might the region's geography make it attractive to humans who want to live there?
2. Encourage students to research one of the animal species important to the traditional culture. What does the species eat? What are its predators? How does the animal species help people of the traditional culture survive? For what do the people use the animal? What physical and behavioral adaptations does the animal have to help it survive in its particular geography and climate?
3. Ask students to investigate the behavioral adaptations of the traditional group of people. What tools do they create or strategies do they invent to help them obtain food and water, build shelters, and make clothes? How do these tools and strategies help them survive?

### Writing

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 1 and 3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4)

1. Ask students to imagine that they are spending a week with the children profiled in the book. Then have students write a postcard to a friend back home or a diary entry describing the visit. Encourage students to capture their feelings about the people they meet and what they experience throughout the week.
2. Have students think about spending an entire year living among people of the traditional culture. What are one to three things students would take with them that they think they could not possibly live without? Why are these items so important to students? How would the items help students in this new place? What might the family in the book think of the things students brought?

### Home-School Connection

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 2 and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strand 7)

1. Have students study the format, text features, and topics covered in the book. Encourage students with their families to write a book about their family's culture and include a few photographs. What does their family eat and how do they gather and prepare the food? What activities do they do together for fun? What stories do adults tell children at bedtime? What do celebrations look like? What kinds of clothes do they wear for special occasions?

2. The parents in the book teach their children how to survive in their environment and continue their traditions. Have students brainstorm with the adults in their lives the kinds of things their parents or guardians have taught them to survive where they live. What did parents or guardians teach them about road safety, eating healthy meals, and/or cleanliness? What have they taught them about taking care of the community and how to celebrate holidays?
3. Ask students to interview their parents, grandparents, or guardians about special celebrations or holidays in their family. What clothing do they wear and why are the items special? What foods do they eat, how do they gather it, and why do they eat it at this time? What tasks does each person have to make the holiday or celebration successful? Why is the event so important to their family? How do adults teach children how to prepare and celebrate?
4. Each of the children in the Vanishing Cultures books has a lot of pride about his or her family and way of life. Have students interview different family members about what they are proud of in their family. What family activity or moment are they most proud of? Why do they feel this way?

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR/PHOTOGRAPHER

**Jan Reynolds** is an award-winning author and photographer. Her first book for Lee & Low, *Celebrate! Connections Among Cultures*, was honored for Outstanding Merit on the Bank Street College Best Children's Books of the Year list. Reynolds's work has also appeared in numerous other publications, including *National Geographic*, *The New York Times*, and *Outside* magazine. She is an avid mountain climber, skier, and adventurer; holds the world record for women's high altitude skiing; and was part of the first expedition to circumnavigate Mount Everest. Reynolds lives with family in Stowe, Vermont. Her website is <http://www.janreynolds.com/>.

### Resources on the Web

Learn more about the **Vanishing Cultures** series at:

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/123/hc/vanishing\\_cultures\\_amazon\\_basin](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/123/hc/vanishing_cultures_amazon_basin)  
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### Book Information

\$8.95, PAPERBACK

*Amazon Basin* 978-1-60060-125-5

*Down Under* 978-1-60060-126-2

*Far North* 978-1-60060-127-9

*Frozen Land* 978-1-60060-128-6

*Himalaya* 978-1-60060-129-3

*Mongolia* 978-1-60060-130-9

*Sahara* 978-1-60060-131-6

\$16.95, HARDCOVER

*Amazon Basin* 978-1-60060-140-8

*Down Under* 978-1-60060-141-5

*Far North* 978-1-60060-142-2

*Frozen Land* 978-1-60060-143-9

*Himalaya* 978-1-60060-144-6

*Mongolia* 978-1-60060-145-3

*Sahara* 978-1-60060-146-0

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