

Classroom Guide for
BOWMAN'S STORE
A Journey to Myself
by **Joseph Bruchac**

Reading Level

Interest Level: Grades 4-12

Reading Level: Grades 4 and up

(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

Themes

Family Roots, Belonging and Connections, Self-discovery, Love, Prejudice, Memoir, Native American History and Myth

Synopsis

In this autobiography, writer and storyteller Joseph Bruchac paints a compelling and haunting word picture of his childhood. Bruchac was brought up by his grandparents in Greenfield Center, a small town not far from Saratoga Springs, New York. Although his family never spoke about Grampa's Abenaki blood, Bruchac intuited from childhood the strength and beauty of his Indian heritage. As an adult he became a respected storyteller and author of Native American history and lore.

In *Bowman's Store*, Bruchac uses Native American myths and legends to shed light on the events that shaped his boyhood. Little "Sonny" Bruchac's childhood was full of secrets, yet as he grew he found himself drawn to all things Indian long before he knew of his grandfather's Abenaki roots. Readers learn about his love for his grandparents and their fierce devotion to him, his difficult and distant relationship with his parents and sisters, his unhappy experiences in elementary and middle school, his inborn attraction to plants, animals, and the world of nature. Bruchac explains that because the book "draws on memory and on dreams to guide its course, each chapter—like memories and dreams—is linked to that which is long ago and that which is today."

Background

When Europeans arrived in North America, the Abenaki were part of interrelating Algonquian communities that lived along the Atlantic coast of the United States from the Chesapeake Bay to the Gulf of the St. Lawrence River. There were 13 Abenaki Nations:

Arosaguntacook, Cowasuck, Kennebec, Maliseet, Micmac, Missisquoi, Nipmuck, Passamaquoddy, Penacook, Penobscot, Pigwacket, Pocumtuck, and Sokoki. It was an Abenaki—Samoset—who was the first Native American to meet the English at Plymouth Colony in 1621. Some Abenaki intermarried with French immigrants and later called themselves French Canadians, often giving up their Native American customs.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

Before having students read *BOWMAN'S STORE*, you may wish to have them explore these questions.

1. What is an autobiography? How is an autobiography different from a biography?
2. Why do you think people write autobiographies? Why do you think people read them? Do you think autobiographies should be told in chronological order? Why or why not?
3. Some people say that each life is a story. What are the things that make up a life story? What kind of life story would be more interesting to read—one that evolves around a struggle or one that is a series of happy events? Why?
4. Do you think people are always in control of their life stories? Give an example to support your answer.
5. How do traditions and customs and beliefs of a people or family get passed on to the next generation? How are they passed on in your family?
6. Who are the people in your life who have been important role models? Why?

Exploring the Book

Draw students' attention to the cover of the book. Ask them to comment on the title. What is *Bowman's Store*? Why would that be the title of an autobiography? What is "a journey to myself"? Who are the people in the photograph? Ask students if they are familiar with the work of Joseph Bruchac. Have they read any of his books?

Have students find these parts of the book: dedication, foreword, afterword. Discuss what each of these is and why the author might have included it. In scanning through the book, what other things do students find? How is this book illustrated? Why is there a genealogical chart in the front?

Setting a Purpose for Reading

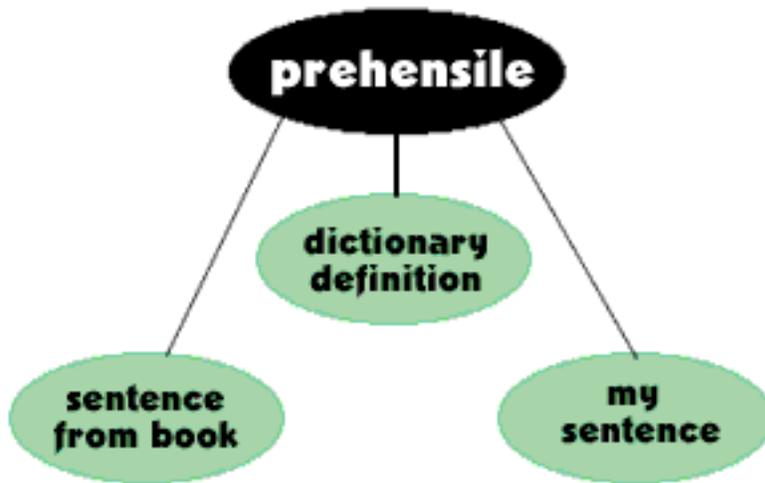
Suggest that students think about the kinds of things they might learn from this book and have them write down their ideas. Tell students to keep these ideas in mind as they read.

Encourage students to listen to the stories woven through this book and to the language the author uses.

Vocabulary

If students come across words that they do not know, suggest that they mark the place on the page with a sticky note. Later, students can go back and make webs like the one shown

here for these words. Students should include the sentence from the book in which the word is used, a dictionary definition, and an original sentence that they make up using the word. Display the webs so that other students in the class can benefit from them.



READING & RESPONDING

Because the book is 315 pages long, you will want to chunk the pages students are assigned to read. Many of the following questions are general enough that you can apply them to more than one section of the book. This will help students build more thoughtful answers as the characters and stories in the book develop.

Discussion Questions

After reading the book, use these questions to generate discussion and help students explore BOWMAN'S STORE.

1. How is Joseph Bruchac's grandfather connected to the land? Why does this mean so much to Bruchac?
2. Why is Bruchac's relationship to his grandfather so important to him?
3. In what ways is Bruchac's Indian heritage present in his childhood even though no one in the family speaks of it directly?
4. What is Bruchac like as a small child? How would you describe him? What do you think caused him to be this way?
5. What words would you use to describe Grampa? In what ways is he a hero?
6. How does Grampa "communicate with his silence"?
7. What are some of the customs Bruchac recalls? Why does he think they're important?
8. How would you describe the tone of much of this book?

9. Why do you think Bruchac includes stories at the beginning of each chapter? How do these stories help you understand the rest of the chapter? What kinds of power do stories hold?
10. How does Bruchac learn to understand his father? How does understanding lead to forgiveness?
11. What does Grama mean when she says that the teacher Mrs. Jay has “stopped looking”?
12. What is a “black sheep”? Why do people call some family members that?
13. How do things change when Grampa gets sick? How do they change when Grama dies?
14. As he grows older, how does Bruchac's success at wrestling affect him? Why is he able to succeed?
15. What is this book's overall message about Native Americans?

Reader's Response Journal

An excellent way to promote active reading is to have students keep reader's response journals. These journals help students personalize what they are reading. Here are some questions students might respond to in their journals.

1. Bruchac writes that “Our memories, our dreams, and what truth we do know, may better be seen as a great circle.” He explains that this circle is filled with “lines of connection which move between circles within circles.” In other words, the future is always linked with the past. What are some of the circles or connections that you can trace in your life? Which connections are important to you now? Will these change in time? Do you think there are connections that you've not yet discovered? What might they be?
2. In BOWMAN'S STORE Bruchac tells about losing his dog Lady. Have you ever lost a pet? What happened? How did you feel? Who helped you overcome this event?
3. Would you have wanted to have Sonny Bruchac as a friend when he was a young child? when he was a teenager? Why or why not? Would you want him to be your friend now? Explain why.
4. Bruchac worked very hard at wrestling and finally became good at it. What are some things you have succeeded at? How did you accomplish this? What things do you hope to succeed at in the future? How will you do this?
5. How was Joseph Bruchac's life as a child like yours? How was it different?
6. What are some questions you might like to ask Joseph Bruchac? What would you like to tell him?

Other Writing Activities

Ask students to respond to one or more of the following writing activities:

1. In many of the incidents relating to his parents that Bruchac recounts, he is with his sister Mary Ann. Choose one of these incidents and write about how Mary Ann might have felt about it. What might she have been thinking?
2. As a boy, Bruchac had trouble making friends. What do you think is the basis for friendship? What advice would you give someone about how to make friends?
3. In a review of *Bowman's Store*, one journal said, "This is not just a story of one life but the story of a nation." Explain what you think this statement means.
4. In *Bowman's Store* Bruchac writes about some of the nicknames he and others had. How can nicknames be hurtful? How can they confer status or power? Write a letter to your school paper explaining why students should or should not have nicknames.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

To help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas, introduce some of the following activities.

Social Studies

Bruchac mentions numerous places in the book, many in New York State. Have students research the geography of upstate New York and make maps to portray the book's setting. Some places they might include are: Saratoga Springs, Ballston Spa, Old Forge, Greenfield Center, Corinth, Hudson River, Cedar River, Lake George, Lake Champlain, Adirondack Mountains.

Language Arts

1. Students might work in groups to compile Native American words from the book to list in a glossary.
2. Draw students' attention to Bruchac's use of language. Point out his use of imagery in similes such as:

"seeds . . . whirring though the air like detached airplane propellers"

grandfather "went through the fence as quick as a weasel into a henhouse"

"the windows had a blank look, like eyes empty of dreaming"

Encourage students to find other examples of similes in the book. Have students write their examples on a specified section of the chalkboard or on sentence strips to post on a bulletin board. Have a discussion about what each simile means.

Literature

Draw students' attention to the wonderful Native American tales that Bruchac uses throughout his autobiography. Have students choose one story and learn it by heart. Point

out that students needn't memorize each word, but should be able to retell the story in their own words. Some students might also learn other Native American tales.

Once students know some stories, hold a storytelling session. Invite students to tell the stories they learned to the class. You might also consider having students rehearse their storytelling and then inviting guests (other classes and/or family and caregivers) to attend a storytelling event.

Science

Remind students that as a boy Joseph Bruchac kept copious notes in which he wrote down his careful observations about plants and animals. Students interested in nature might begin their own notebooks. Suggest that students might want to focus on just one aspect of nature, such as the weather or insects or even one tree, or they might want to keep general notebooks in which they jot down any information of interest.

Art

Suggest that students choose one of the Native American stories in BOWMAN'S STORE and make illustrations for it. Students might input the story on a computer and then create picture books containing both the stories and their pictures.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph Bruchac—storyteller, author, and poet - is of Abenaki Indian and Slovak descent. He is the author of several award-winning books for children and young adults, including Lee & Low's *Crazy Horse's Vision*, an ALA Notable Book and winner of the Parents' Choice Gold Award, and the *Keepers Of The Earth* series.

Bruchac earned his B.A. from Cornell University, his M.A. from Syracuse University, and a Ph. D. from Union Institute of Ohio. He is a Rockefeller Fellow, the recipient of the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas Lifetime Achievement Award, and an NEA Poetry Writing Fellow.

Bruchac has spent much of his career exploring his Native American roots and using his talent as a writer to create materials for young readers. He is also a popular speaker at schools, libraries, conferences, and other events nationwide. Bruchac and his wife Carol still spend part of their time in Bruchac's childhood home in Greenfield Center, New York.

Resources on the Web

Learn more about ***Bowman's Store***

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/24/pb/bowman_s_store_a_journey_to_myself

Also by Joseph Bruchac

Crazy Horse's Vision

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/38/hc/crazy_horse_s_vision

Jim Thorpe's Bright Path

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/69/hc/jim_thorpe_s_bright_path

Buffalo Song

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/171/hc/buffalo_song

BookTalk with Joseph Bruchac on Bowman's Store

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/bruchac.mhtml>

BookTalk with Joseph Bruchac on Buffalo Song

http://www.leeandlow.com/p/buffalo_song_talk.mhtml

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