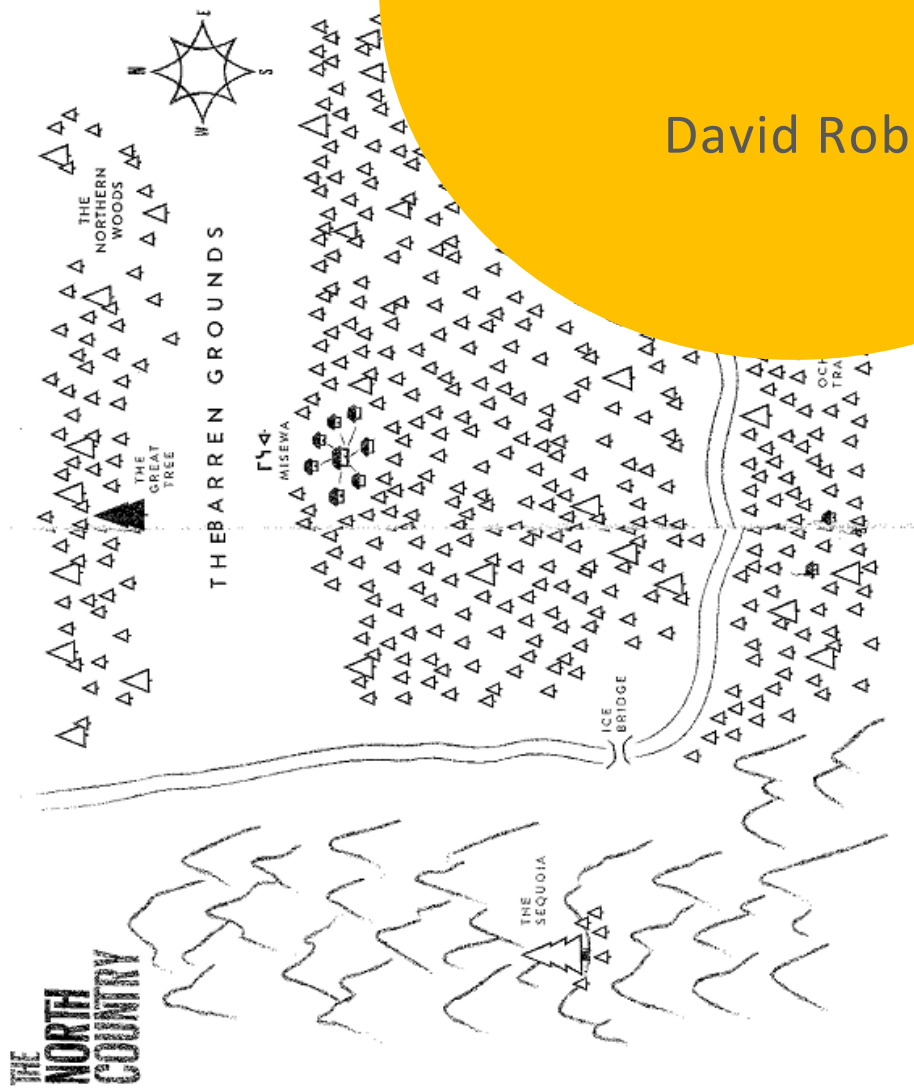


The Barren Grounds

David Robertson



Opening Activity:
Looking at the Stars

Opening Activity: Looking at the Stars

Question: What do you know/not know about the stars? What comes to mind when you think about 'stars in the sky'?

- Have students quietly reflect on this question before sharing out. Think/ Pair / Share
- Emphasize both what is known or not known.

Have students share out their ideas and capture the feedback on the board or on a piece of chart paper.

(Areas that may be shared or can be prompted to show a more complete brainstorm- *what stars are? Star names? Types of stars? Constellations? Sayings that include stars? Stories from childhood? Cliches? Navigation? Space exploration? Songs that include stars?*)

Note for teachers Having diverse ideas and knowledge about the notion of the stars (both literal and figurative) helps to model that we all think differently and have different connections to the world around us. It helps to model that different worldviews exist- it is not about one over the other, but rather, the spectrum of ideas that endure.

Bring in the text: David Robertson, the author of the Barren Grounds, is a member of [Norway House Cree Nation](#). There is a lot of Cree knowledge that is connected to the stars. That knowledge is sometimes shared, with permission, by elders to show Cree worldview and teachings.

Share: Wilfred Buck, a Cree elder, introduces us to important life teachings, concepts and of course how the stars play into all of this. Select a quote or quotes that best supports your classroom context that can be shared with students. This might look like writing a quote on the board, using the quote sheet for them to choose from, putting students into groups and giving them each a quote—whatever supports student engagement with critically reading, thinking and engaging with Wilfred Buck's words.

See attached quote list.

Learning from Elder Wilfred Buck:

Individually or in groups have students identify:

- What are key words?
- What are powerful phrases?
- What are the sentences or phrases that teach you something new?

Share: Have students share out learning from Wilfred Buck

- What can you add to the original star brainstorm that reflects your new understandings about the stars?

Read & View: Project the image of the Fisher Constellation attached below and read aloud the Legend of the Fisher, as told by Wilfred Buck. Let students know that at the end of the story, they will be asked to reflect on:

- **Where did you find meaning?**
- What is unclear or is an area you think you might need to learn more about?
- Where they found meaning MEANS – *what stood out to you? What was meaningful is often based on your worldview, understandings, experiences, perspective? There is not a singular meaning, it is about seeing what resonates with each person.*

Share: Use one of the following strategies to have each student contribute where they found meaning in the legend told by Wilfred Buck: *Talking Circle* or *Say Something strategy*.

Connect: Ask students if any of their learning from Wilfred Bucks quotes, could be connected to the story they just heard. Have students share questions they still have, predictions on what this may have to do with the novel they are about to read.

Wilfred Buck: Cree Elder

“All cultures on Mother Earth have their own understandings of the stars. No matter where one was located on Earth, all one must do was look up into an evening sky and a myriad of stories can be revealed. As human beings made sense of their world and established a sense of belonging, stories were told and connections between people and the environment were established.”

Buck, Wilfred. *Atchakosuk: Ininewuk Stories of the Stars*

“I came across an atayokewina (sacred stories) about the constellation popularly known as the Big Dipper. The storyteller, late Murdo Scribe called this constellation Ochekatchakosuk – the Fisher stars.”

Buck, Wilfred. *Atchakosuk: Ininewuk Stories of the Stars*

“We as individuals tend to view our civilization as “the best” and when our teachings, knowledge, and belief systems are ridiculed, marginalized and then utterly dismissed as “quaint”, we begin to question our world view. This has happened and is still happening to First Nations people as well as all colonized peoples. Until other world views are proposed and considered, there will be a distinct “difference” and “quaintness” about all that is not mainstream. In addition, our children will see these differences and attempt to discard them in order to become more mainstream. These teachings reflect the differences and propose another perspective, broadening and giving voice to them.”

Buck, Wilfred. *Atchakosuk: Ininewuk Stories of the Stars*

“I hope to see a day where Anishinabe, Dene, Oji-Cree, Inuit, Lakota, Ininewuk and all other marginalized peoples hold their stories and relationships to the stars in plain view for their children and all the world to see. First Nations astronomy can be just as relevant as that associated with Roman or Greek mythology and makes people aware of the quality and quantity of knowledge that has been overlooked in Canada.”

Buck, Wilfred. *Atchakosuk: Ininewuk Stories of the Stars*

“We arrive at knowledge from many different paths and the more aware we are of other possibilities, the more sensitive we will be to understanding and difference.”

Buck, Wilfred. *Atchakosuk: Ininewuk Stories of the Stars*

“. we are told by various Elders and Knowledge Keepers, there are untold numbers of stories about the stars and skies and slowly they will reveal themselves.”

Buck, Wilfred. *Atchakosuk: Ininewuk Stories of the Stars*

Ochek Atchakosuk (The Fisher Stars)

This constellation encompasses the asterism known as the Big Dipper and tells the legend of how the Ochek (Fisher) brought summer back to Turtle Island for us.

