



Knots on a Counting Rope

Bill Martin Jr. , John Archambault , Ted Rand (Illustrator)

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In this poignant story, the counting rope is a metaphor for the passage of time and for a boy's emerging confidence in facing his blindness.

Knots on a Counting Rope Details

Date : Published September 15th 1997 by Square Fish (first published October 15th 1987)

ISBN : 9780805054798

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Format : Paperback 32 pages

Genre : Childrens, Picture Books, Historical, Historical Fiction, Cultural, Family, Realistic Fiction, Disability, Native Americans, Fiction, Environment, Nature

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From Reader Review Knots on a Counting Rope for online ebook

Trey Kennedy says

This book is a good reminder to us to prepare our young ones for the future and to help train them for what they will have to encounter in the future. It works for organizations too.

This can also be a good way to broach the subject of death with little ones.

Kireja says

I really liked the idea of storytelling, of the connection between grandfather and grandson, of passing wisdom and knowledge from one generation to another, of learning to live with and overcoming a disability, and of the strength of family. However, as an educator I found some aspects of this book problematic. I think that there are benefits in teaching multicultural literature but we need to be careful that we are not teaching and promoting stereotypes and inaccurate and inauthentic stories. Therefore I would like to direct you to this paper on the following site titled: Examining Multicultural Picture Books for the Early Childhood Classroom: Possibilities and Pitfalls.

<http://ecap.crc.illinois.edu/pubs/kat...>

There is a short paragraph regarding this book within this paper as follows:

In Knots on a Counting Rope, Ted Rand's illustrations suggest primarily that the story is set in the Navajo nation, but his work reflects inadequate research into the culture. The book shows a mix of material culture from several different nations. For example, traditional Navajo men in the story are shown with hairstyles typical of the Atsina, Blackfeet, Mandan, and Piegan nations. Also, Pueblo people are shown at a horse race wearing traditional ceremonial clothing inappropriate for everyday wear (Reese & Caldwell-Wood, 1997, p. 177).

Megan Denney says

Knots on a Counting Rope is about a boy and his grandfather as they sit around the fire the boy begs his grandfather to tell the story about how the boy got his name. The grandfather tells the boy this will be his last time and he goes on to tell the story of how he got his name through the storm and rodeo. The knots on the counting rope are a metaphor for the boy's courage and his overall challenge of being blind.

I would definitely use this book in my class. The author does a great job of keeping the reader interested through his emotion and the adventure of why the boy was named Boy-Strength-of-Blue-Horses.

This book would be great to use during a Native American lesson in your classroom to share with how Native Americans told stories to their young. It would also be good for a class speaking on metaphors for the students to pick out at the end of the story.

MK King says

I'm not sure what constitutes as a classic indigenous children's book but this one was wonderful. A beautiful reflection on the passage of our lives. A book that reflect the inter generational love between grandfather and grandson. All done tastefully with gorgeous paintings.

I would have loved the creators biographies to know if any of the three were native and to which nation they belonged but I couldn't find any. Knowing the nation of the story helps to avoid pan- indianism.

Melissa Namba says

A story with a bittersweet ending. All about the life of a little boy who was born blind. He overcomes this and lives up to his given name. But at the end, there is a feeling of sadness because you know that eventually his grandfather must die. The love between the boy and his grandfather is evident so it is sad to know that the boy's heart will be broken one day.

Inge says

Does your library own this book? Time to weed it: <https://web.archive.org/web/200803031...>

Kaye says

A really lovely story but set in a baffling Native American context that seems to be a conglomeration of many Indian cultures. The story is good though, featuring a deep connection between a boy and his grandfather, and how the boy navigates his blindness.

Carolynne says

This is a difficult book to review because on the one hand it is a moving and poetic account of a little boy's (formally named "By-Strength-of-Blue Horses") eagerly asking and prompting his grandfather to tell the story of the boy's own life, a story that, when it is completed, is marked by a knot on a counting rope. As the story is told, the boy's blindness is revealed, which makes more suspenseful the episode of a horse race among this boy and others. That is what makes the counting rope pertinent: when the rope is filled with knots, the boy will be able to his own story by heart. The watercolor paintings by Ted Rand are darkly evocative of families storytelling around a campfire.

On the other hand it cannot be considered an authentic portrayal of Indian storytelling. Archambault and

Martin wrote several books together, and this the only one with a Native American theme. Archambault is from Pasadena and Martin is from Kansas, from a family with a storytelling tradition, but neither is Indian. There is no authors' note to suggest what if anything their research may have been although the publisher at one time claimed that the people pictured in the illustrations were Navajo and Hopi. The People pictured are not specifically identified in the book as part of any nation, and the story needs to be seen just as an emotional encounter between a boy and his grandfather, not between an Indian boy and his Indian grandfather. Viewed in that perspective, the language seems awkward and stilted. According to the review in *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children* by Beverly Slapin and Doris Seale (New Society, 1987), the pictures show representations of many different tribes, with faces like Plains Indians, braids like Mandan, Blackfeet and others, Cheyenne style earrings, and so on. They believe that the grandfather's assertion that the frail newborn would not die was insulting to the spirits, and that the family would name him immediately, not waiting for some spiritual revelation, in this case the mysterious appearance of blue horses. Furthermore, they say that the boy's repeated eager interruptions of the grandfather would simply not happen (pp. 182-184). Slapin and Seale write, "The romantic imagery of this book is no less a white fantasy than the bloody savages of more overtly racist titles. . . . It is a crass, and deliberate, rip-off--an insult to all of us, and most of all to the people of the Navajo Nation(p. 184)." The lack of cultural authenticity in the text and illustrations certainly weaken its value as a multicultural story.

Jennifer (JenIsNotaBookSnob) says

I didn't bother to finish this book. I was reading it to my 6 year old and the cultural inaccuracies were fairly blatant. The unfortunate thing is that this could have been a decent book had they just not tried to make it a Native American book. This is why the most commonly given book advice is, 'write what you know'. Additionally, if you are writing about something you do not know, research the heck out of it. That doesn't feel like it happened here. This book isn't a negative portrayal of Native Americans exactly, but, it is more the myth of the Native American rather than the reality. The illustrations are a mix of multiple groups and not coherent.

It is one thing to write a fantasy, but, if your story is a fantasy your people should be a fantasy too, not real people that you've turned into a myth. Definitely don't recommend for the classroom.

June says

A touching story of a grandfather and his blind grandson.

Brandy says

So looking through the other reviews I see a very valid point about the correct representation of the American Indian culture and other indigenous people of the US. However, the story is beautiful (though the back-and-forth narration takes an extra read).

Nani Yanagi says

This book is about Boy-Strength-of-Blue-Horses, who is told of his life story by his grandfather. When Boy was born, he was very sick and ill. His parents didn't know if he was going to make it or not. His grandfather took him outside where two blue horses were running and stopped by to see this little boy. Boy reached out to touch them and his grandfather could feel the blue horses giving Boy the strength he needs to live. This is where he got his name. Boy had a connection with the blue horses from then on. They taught him how to see in the dark and guided him through certain times. After his grandfather told him the story, he made another knot in the rope. Grandfather claims that when the rope is full of knots, Boy would know the story by heart and be able to tell it to himself. This book explains the storytelling of an Indian family and how their child Boy came to be.

Andrea L'Ecuyer says

I like the story line of the book. I loved how the book talks about passing stories through traditions and down from generation to generation. I also thought it was good that the boy overcame an obstacle and was able to accomplish the tasks. However, this book contains some stereotypical situations that a teacher should avoid in the classroom.

Desi says

Oh, so beautiful. The words and the story. It was also a neat surprise to see the school library bookplate and discover that the book had been given to the school by a woman from our church who is a very special person. (She is in her 90s and moved here from Wales in the 50s and her father fought in the Great War.)

Rachel Replogle says

I found this historical fiction well written and attention-grabbing. It tells the story of a young Native American boy born with blindness, searching for confidence despite his disability. As the well-developed plot unfolds, readers will understand that confidence and how you view yourself is determined by internal qualities and not the physical attributes society so presses. The storyline is action-packed and filled with moments that will both intrigue and surprise young readers. The book is straight-forward about the boy's blindness and honest about the personal, internal struggles people with blindness may face. This story also offers a perspective on Native American beliefs and lifestyle, and teaches young readers that cultures within their own country are vast and plentiful. The illustrations are beautiful, colorful, and large. They do a great job of better developing the context and visually bringing the story to life. My only critique of this book is the text style. The formatting of the conversation between the boy and his grandfather may be mixed up if not closely followed. However, every other aspect of this story I found wonderful.
