

Uswitusqaq's Dream is a Kodiak Dream

By Jennifer Simeonoff

Finally! A fictional book centered on Alutiiq culture and the Kodiak region for young readers! Teachers and librarians have long known that the key to sparking a life-long passion for reading starts when a person makes a meaningful, personal connection to text--to see themselves in a story. *Uswitusqaq's Dream* will help fill the literary void for our Alutiiq youngsters. Kodiak bookshelves, make space for this book!

Despite being authored by an Australian, Leighton's story contains a surprising plethora of details about authentic traditional Alutiiq culture and the abundant landscape of Kodiak Island. Kodiak Islanders will recognize their shining home in the pages of this book. Off-islanders will be transported to our Alaskan island in a dream of their own. Educators will find it a delicious fictional treat to complement any study of sea otters or Alutiiq education.

In the story, devoted brothers, Tanqiq and Kuuku, fight with and look after each other on their quest to find sea otters after the animals were believed to have been long eradicated from their island. The boys' satisfyingly different personalities make an interesting character study for comparing and contrasting. Readers, however, may be confused about their age. They are written as young boys, but have girlfriends back home. This may be culturally and historically accurate, but may unnecessarily confuse young readers. Additionally, the beginning of the story, while rich in setting and character development, has an underdeveloped sense of why the mission is important, even with the explanation offered in the introduction. The resulting slow beginning may discourage reluctant readers. Things pick up, however, when Tanqiq and Kuuku must navigate through some sticky situations that will thrill adventure fans to the end. Animal lovers, meanwhile, will absolutely fall in love with the vulnerable baby otter, Mik'i. Mik'i and his mother irresistibly appear on the front cover; Squartsoff's eye-catching art will have readers snatching the book off the shelves. Petroglyph graphics peppered throughout the book also lend the story Alutiiq flavor and adds a whimsical touch that children are sure to respond to.

Alutiiq language learners and teachers will rejoice in having this book in their hands as an entertaining platform to expose learners to Alutiiq vocabulary. Alutiiq terms are sprinkled throughout the story in a natural manner, not forced or over-done. While there is a comprehensive glossary of Alutiiq terms in the back of the book, the first page of each chapter also has a glossary of that chapter's words. This feature reduces the amount of page-flipping for definitions, and it should be noted that many of the Alutiiq words contain sufficient context clues that readers can guess the meanings without interruption. Educators will appreciate the opportunity the chapter glossaries provide for previewing chapters, predicting, and vocabulary review. Non-Alutiiq speakers will want to visit the referenced Alutiiq Museum website for pronunciation assistance. Alutiiq children will also recognize popular traditional songs woven into the story. They will delight in singing along with Tanqiq and Kuuku. Readers will appreciate the provided English translations.

Uswitusqaq's Dream was thoroughly enjoyed by every member of my family. This book has a place in my home, my classroom, and my library.