

***My Heart Fills With Happiness***  
***sâkaskinêw nitêh miywêyih tamowin ohci***

Written by Monique Gray Smith

Illustrated by Julie Flett

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***Discussion Questions***

1. *My Heart Fills With Happiness* is about finding joy in life's simplicity. Can you name some things that make you feel happy? What are some activities that you and your family enjoy doing together?
2. What is culture? Culture is the language, religion, food, clothing, music and art of a particular group of people. In *My Heart Fills With Happiness* we are learning about Indigenous (Cree) culture. What is Indigenous culture? Talk to the children about Indigenous culture and then ask them if they can give any examples of Cree culture from the book (e.g., making bannock, storytelling, drumming, dancing).
3. Point out to the children that *My Heart Fills With Happiness* is written in two different languages (English and Plains Cree) and then discuss some words that are used in the book with them. Ask the children if they and their family speak another language at home.
4. Point out to the children that bannock is a food enjoyed in Indigenous culture and explain to the children what it is. Talk about foods that come from different cultures: sushi from Japan, masala dosa from India, quesadillas from Mexico. Then ask them what foods they enjoy at home.
5. Talk about the instruments presented in the book. Explain that drumming is very important for Indigenous ceremonies and then ask the children if they have a favourite musical instrument or if they are learning to play an instrument.

## **Suggested Activities:**

### **Cooking activity**

A great way to get the children engaged in learning about Indigenous culture is to engage them in cooking a traditional Canadian recipe — Bannock! This dish was mentioned in the story. In order to do so, the children could help mix the dry ingredients together, and the teacher can cook the recipe either in an oven or frying pan! The following is a link to a simple bannock recipe: <https://www.bettertogetherbc.ca/recipes/single/easy-bannock> (Suvi, N.d.)

### **Art activity**

Inspired by Julie Flett’s illustrations (techniques, colours, etc.) let students create a picture of what makes them happy. Teachers can provide art tools such as paper, markers, pencil crayons, etc. required to complete the project.

### **Creating drums**

Have students make drums using plastic or metal containers of different sizes and shapes. Once the drums have been decorated using a variety of different materials (e.g., paper, wool, tissue paper, etc.) have students experiment with different types of drum sticks (e.g., corks, crayons, erasers, etc.). Now they’re ready to explore different sounds and rhythms.

### **Positive thinking activity/discussion**

Teachers can read the book with students when weather conditions are poor and children need to stay indoors. Teachers can remind students that even though it is unpleasant outside, there are still many things in our lives that make us happy! Teachers can lead discussions that will help children think about things that make them feel very happy. For example, even though the children cannot go outside and the weather is not very nice, what are some things they *do* feel happy about? What are some fun activities they can still do in the classroom? What was something that made them feel happy at school that day, or before they came to school?

*(activity inspired by an interview with Monique Gray Smith, Canadian Children’s Book News, Fall 2019)*

### **Art activity**

Teachers can create hearts for students to write or draw on to show what makes them feel very happy. When children are finished this activity, the artwork can be used as beautiful displays in the classroom!

*(activity inspired by an interview with Monique Gray Smith, Canadian Children’s Book News, Fall 2019)*

### **Valentine’s Day Activity**

Each child in the classroom can give every other child a cut-out heart attached to a popsicle stick. Students can write why the other student makes them feel happy inside the cut-out heart.

*(activity inspired by an interview with Monique Gray Smith, Canadian Children’s Book News, Fall 2019)*

**Expressing emotions activity**

Teachers can place cut-out hearts of different sizes on the walls of the classroom. When students first arrive at school, teachers can instruct students to stand by the heart that best describes their level of happiness. For example, a small heart can say “Not Very Happy,” a slightly bigger heart can say “Somewhat Happy,” a medium-sized heart can say “Happy,” and a large heart can say “Very Happy.” If the children want to, have them explain why they are feeling this way.

*(activity inspired by an interview with Monique Gray Smith, Canadian Children’s Book News, Fall 2019)*

**Deep, positive thinking activity**

Teachers can read the book with students as soon as they get to school. When the reading is finished, teachers can instruct students to think deeply about what makes them feel happy, and to close their eyes while doing so. This is a wonderful, positive way for both students and teachers to start their day!

*(activity inspired by an interview with Monique Gray Smith, Canadian Children’s Book News, Fall 2019)*

**Incorporating families’ home languages**

Explain to the children where the Cree language is spoken and by whom. Then ask the children what languages they speak at home. Create a poster or graph of all the languages spoken in the classroom. Invite a parent(s) into the class to read the book to the children in another language (other than English, French or Cree) to show that we should all be proud of the language(s) we speak. If there is an Indigenous community near your school, invite a member of the community to your school and ask them if they can teach the children some words from their language that are in the book.