Open Educational Resource for Moon of the Crusted Snow

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This educational resource has been created for educators who are interested in adopting the novel Moon of the Crusted Snow as a course reading. Below is an introduction to the book. A short biography and an interview with Waubgeshig Rice, the book’s author, can be found after the introduction. Below that you will find some of the novel’s themes, descriptions of characters and links to a variety of online resources to help you in the classroom.

Introduction

With winter looming, a small northern Anishinaabe community goes dark. Cut off, people become passive and confused. Panic builds as the food supply dwindles. While the band council and a pocket of community members struggle to maintain order, an unexpected visitor arrives, escaping the crumbling society to the south. Soon after, others follow.

The community leadership loses its grip on power as the visitors manipulate the tired and hungry to take control of the reserve. Tensions rise and, as the months pass, so does the death toll due to sickness and despair. Frustrated by the building chaos, a group of young friends and their families turn to the land and Anishinaabe tradition in hopes of helping their community thrive again. Guided through the chaos by an unlikely leader named Evan Whitesky, they endeavor to restore order while grappling with a grave decision.

Blending action and allegory, Moon of the Crusted Snow upends our expectations. Out of catastrophe comes resilience. And as one society collapses, another is reborn.
Author’s Bio


Waub got his first taste of journalism in 1996 as an exchange student in Germany, writing articles about being an Anishinaabe teen in a foreign country for newspapers back in Canada. He graduated from Ryerson University’s journalism program in 2002. He’s worked in a variety of news media since, reporting for CBC News for the bulk of his career. In 2014, he received the Anishinabek Nation’s Debwewin Citation for excellence in First Nation Storytelling. He currently hosts *Up North, CBC Radio’s afternoon show for northern Ontario*.

His proudest roles are as dad to Jiikwis and husband to Sarah. The family splits its time between Sudbury and Wasauksing.

Waubgeshig Rice is interviewed by Shelagh Rogers, The Next Chapter

Waubgeshig Rice’s website

Primary Characters

The primary characters in *Moon of the Crusted Snow* are introduced here.

**Evan Whitesky**
An Anishinaabe man in his mid-20s who lives with his partner Nicole and two children in a northern Ontario First Nation.

**Nicole McCloud**
An Anishinaabe woman in her mid-20s who is Evan’s partner and mother to two children: Mailingan, a five-year-old boy and Nangohns, who is a three-year-old girl.

**Isaiah “Izzy” North**
An Anishinaabe man who is Evan’s friend.

**Terry Meegis**
The chief of the First Nation where the novel takes place.

**Aileen**
An elder who speaks fluent Ojibwe and knows the traditional ways of living on the land.

**Justin Scott**
A white settler from the south who is allowed to stay on the reserve.
Resources

Waubgeshig Rice wrote two articles on the process of developing the characters for his book that can be found at these two links:
[I know my characters very intimately](#)
[Characters like family](#)

Theme: Land

Curriculum connections
Environmental Studies, Indigenous Studies, Equity Studies, Law Studies and Literature Studies

Introduction
In the novel, *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, a First Nation in northern Ontario deals with the sudden disappearance of power which leads to loss of communication with other First Nations and towns in the south. As winter approaches, many in the community realize they aren’t as prepared as they should be due to their over-reliance on technology and modern conveniences. As people struggle through the winter months, it becomes clear that the key to survival may be found in reconnecting, as a community, with the land.

Relevant quotes from the author
From the interview: [When things start to fall apart: Andrew Wilmot in Conversation with Waubgeshig Rice](#)

But in just a couple of generations, a lot of people have moved away from winter preparations like hunting and gathering wood, and have become more reliant on the amenities that bring them closer to the world to the south. So when they lose many of these conveniences, it’s a sobering wake-up call to re-examine their roles and responsibilities to the land and their community as Anishinaabeg.

Part of it goes back to what I mentioned earlier about putting a different lens on post-apocalyptic experiences and why an Indigenous perspective is crucial to consider. Nations and cultures have survived since time immemorial on this land without the fragile luxuries we’re so dependent on today. If and when those things disappear, the answer to survival will be in the land, as it has always been. Also, a personal reason for driving this message home was to remind myself to reconnect with the land. I grew up on the rez with lots of land-based knowledge, but I’ve lost a lot of that since I’ve lived in cities for two decades now.

From the novel
*Evan ate southern meats when he had to, but he felt detached from that food. He’d learn to hunt when he was a boy out of tradition, but also necessity. It was harder than buying store-bought meat but it was more economical and rewarding. Most importantly, hunting, fishing, and living on the land was Anishinaabe custom, and Evan was trying to live in harmony with the traditional ways. (page 6)*
Aileen was the last of the generation raised speaking Anishinaabemowin, with little English at all. She was one of only a few dozen left who could speak their language fluently. She remembered the old ways and a lot of the important ceremonies. She had more knowledge than everyone else about the traditional lives of the Anishinaabeg. (pages 146-147)

And when it became clear to them that they were never supposed to last in this situation on this land in the first place, they decided to take control of their own destiny. Their ancestors were displaced from their original homeland in the south and the white people who forced them here had never intended them to survive. The collapse of the white man’s modern systems further withered the Anishinaabeg here. But they refused to wither completely, and a core of dedicated people had worked tirelessly to create their own settlement away from this town. (page 212)

Discussion Questions
1. The novel begins with Evan hunting a moose. In what ways is Evan connecting with his Anishinaabeg identity when harvesting the moose?
2. Have students reflect on what land-based knowledge means to them before reading the novel and after reading it.
3. On page 107, Justin Scott says that he knows how to live on the land. On page 124, Justin goes hunting with Evan, Dan, Isaiah and Jeff. Compare and contrast Justin’s way of living on the land with Evan’s.
4. Ask students if they know that all those living in Canada are treaty people. Have students reflect on how Indigenous land-based knowledge has been impacted by treaties.

Resources

**Harvesting moose**
On page 6 Evan remarks how hunting for meat is harder than buying it but it is more economical and rewarding and on page 21, Dan and Evan tan a moose hide. This video shows the traditional way of harvesting deer by a member of the Lac Du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.

**Treaties in Canada**
*We are All Treaty People* is an excellent resource to teach students about treaties from pre-contact to contemporary times. This resource contains reflective questions and activities as well.

**Traditional Medicines**
On page 147 Aileen urges Evan to learn about the medicines found on the land. In this video Joseph Pitawanakwat discusses traditional medicines.
Theme: Colonialism

Curriculum Connections
History Studies, Literature Studies, Indigenous Studies, Law Studies, Sociology and Anthropology

Introduction
Colonialism is a prevalent theme throughout the novel. The lasting impacts of colonial practices, such as land theft, displacement, loss of language and residential schools, are felt by every member of the community where this story takes place.

Relevant quotes from the author

From the following interview:
When Things Start to Fall Apart: Andrew Wilmot in Conversation with Waubgeshig Rice

I wanted to portray Evan as a rez “everyman” who embodies the paradox of modern Indigenous life, like many of us who grew up in a First Nation do. Within just a couple of generations, culture and language are scrubbed from his community due to the brutal impacts of colonialism. Even though he didn’t endure the violence of residential schools himself, because his grandparents did, very little of his Anishinaabe identity was passed down to him. It’s the common intergenerational trauma of these terrible assimilative measures. Fortunately, he still has links to the old ways, and they become clearer and more important during this crisis. But basically, I wanted to convey that there are a lot of people like Evan, wanting to learn about being Anishinaabe but finding it hard to connect with those old ways even though they live immersed in an Indigenous community.

From the following interview: Sharing Stories is the foundation of culture and community – Waubgeshig Rice

It was important for me from the beginning to imagine a so-called “post-apocalyptic” story through an Anishinaabe lens in order to convey that distinct perspective of a world ending. Indigenous nations in North America have already experienced apocalypse, and the world many communities inhabit now is a dystopia. They’ve been removed from their homelands and their languages and cultures have been severely damaged or outright destroyed. Still, Indigenous communities have survived these crises and remain resilient, which perhaps leaves them better suited to deal with a catastrophe like a blackout that we would read about in contemporary post-apocalyptic stories. And the key to survival – as always – is in the land and culture.

From the interview: Author Q & A: Waubgeshig Rice

Reconciliation is such a big buzzword and the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous is framed that way… people may have the misconception that colonialism is in the past and all these wrongs happened in the past and that reconciliation is about just
recognizing them and working towards creating a good relationship between community but in reality it is ongoing. There are things that communities continue to deal with as a result of being settled and being colonized and attempts at assimilation.

**From the novel**

*It had become protocol to open any community event or council meeting with a smudge. This protocol had once been forbidden, outlawed by the government and shunned by the church. When the ancestors of these Anishinaabe people were forced to settle in this unfamiliar land, distant from their traditional home near the Great Lakes, their culture withered under the pressure of the incomers' Christianity. The white authorities displaced them far to the north to make way for towns and cities.*

*But people like Aileen, her parents, and a few others had kept the old ways alive in secret. They whispered the stories and the language in each other’s ears, even when they were stolen from their families to endure forced and often violent assimilation at the church-run residential schools far away from their homes. They had held out hope that one day their beautiful ways would be able to re-emerge and flourish once again.* (page 53)

*Often, Aileen shared a teaching or an old story with the young men when they came to visit. Once in a while, someone would bring a group of children or teens to hear some old Nanabush stories or her memories of the old days. There had been no electricity in this community when she was a child and parents sometimes brought the young ones to her to remind them that life was possible without the comforts of modern technology. Now it was critical that they learn how the old ones lived on the land.* (page 148)

*Our world isn’t ending. It already ended. It ended when the Zhaagnaash came into our original home down south on that bay and took it from us. That was our world. When the Zhaagnaash cut down all the trees and fished all the fish and forced us out of there, that’s when our world ended. They made us come all the way up here. This is not our homeland! But we had to adapt and luckily we already knew how to hunt and live on the land. We learned to live here.* (pg. 149)

**Discussion Questions**

1. In what ways does Justin Scott’s actions in the book seem to be characteristic of practices associated with colonization?

2. Explain how Evan’s Anishinaabe identity is impacted by the residential school system.

3. Do you agree with Aileen when she says to Evan that their community has already experienced the apocalypse (page 149)? Justify your answer.

4. In what ways does the community in the book reveal its resiliency after the blackout? Do you feel people who are living in an urban setting are being just as resourceful when dealing with the power and communications outage?

5. Ask students if they know the name of the traditional territory that they live on. This website can help students find that information, along with the traditional languages spoken in the area: Native-Land.ca
Resources

To learn about the history of residential schools:
National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation
Where are the Children?

Four Faces of the Moon is a stop-motion animation documentary by Amanda Strong. The documentary focuses on the impact colonization had on her family.

Information on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
TRC Findings and Final Report

Indian Horse is the award-winning novel by Richard Wagamese, who passed away in 2017. The book focuses on how playing hockey helps a young Indigenous boy survive the horrors of the residential school system. The book was adapted for the big screen in 2017 and community screening requests can be made at this website. The website also provides various educational resources that can be downloaded.

Theme: Community

Curriculum Connections

Introduction
The Anishinaabe First Nation in the novel is strong and resilient although most of the members of this community are still dealing with the past and present effects of colonialism. Community in this story is also about the strength of family and cultural ties in a time of crisis.

Relevant quotes from the author

From the following interview: When Things Start to Fall Apart: Andrew Wilmot in Conversation with Waubgeshig Rice

I only ever wanted to tell this story from the perspective of the people in the community. It was really important to me to give the Anishinaabe characters the primary voice because I wanted to highlight their sense of community and relationship with the land as a means to survive.

From the following interview:
The Next Chapter with Shelagh Rogers– Audio Interview
Waubgeshig Rice on Moon of the Crusted Snow
A lot of communities like the one in this story are overcoming the negative, brutal impacts of being colonized, being displaced from their homelands and having children taken away and really being shamed out of their culture and being legislated out of their culture in many ways.

There’s a healing process that is ongoing and I think that is prevalent in a lot of First Nations in Canada today. They are at some point in that healing journey. Some people are reclaiming the language, the culture, the traditions, hunting, fishing and aspects like that but they aren’t quite there.

From the following article: **Dystopian novel pays ‘homage to the everyday people on reserves across Canada’**

It’s an homage to the everyday people on reserves across Canada. Those are the people that I don’t think get as much attention as they should because they’re laying the foundation or upholding the foundation of community just by being themselves and trying to live on the land in a good way and trying to bring culture back.

**From the novel**

_In the coming weeks, the temperature would drop and the snow would come. Soon after, the lake would freeze over and the snow and ice would be with them for six months. Like people in many other northern reserves, they would be isolated by the long, unforgiving season, confined to a small radius around the village that extended only as far as a snowmobile’s half tank of gas._ (page 11)

It was supposed to be a dry community. Alcohol had been banished by the band council nearly two decades ago after a snarl of tragedies. Young people had been committing suicide at horrifying rates in the years leading up to the ban, most abetted by alcohol or drugs or gas or other solvents. And for decades despairing men had gotten drunk and beaten their partners and children, feeding a cycle of abuse that continued when those kids grew up. It became so normal that everyone forgot about the root of this turmoil: their forced displacement from their homelands and the violent erasure of their culture, language and ceremonies. (page 44)

Despite the hardship and tragedy that made up a significant part of this First Nation’s legacy, the Anishnaabe spirit of community generally prevailed. There was no panic on the night of this first blizzard, although there had been confusion in the days leading up to it. Survival had always been an integral part of their culture. It was their history. The skills they needed to persevere in this northern terrain, far from their original homeland farther south, were proud knowledge held close through the decades of imposed adversity. They were handed down to those in the next generation willing to learn. Each winter marked another milestone. (page 48)
Discussion Questions

1. Contrast and compare the community depicted in the novel with what you have seen or heard about First Nations in Canada.

2. Do you feel that the members of this community are better equipped to deal with the aftermath of the blackout due to having been subjected to colonialism? If yes, explain why.

3. Members of this First Nation use computers, have Internet and cell phone service. Some families though, such as Evan’s, hunt and fish to put food on the table. Were you surprised that contemporary cultural practices were blended with more traditional ones in this novel?

4. In the book, the band council is shown to be caring, competent and interested in doing the best for the community. In what ways does the depiction of the chief and councillors in this community contrast with the ways band councils are typically portrayed in popular culture?

Resources

The words Band Council are used in the book. This link provides information on what a Band is and how they came to be. The following links with information on the Indian Act will provide context to the terms Band Council.

What is a Band?
The Indian Act

The Indian Act explained

I am Indigenous – videos of seven Indigenous community builders in Ontario.
How to talk about Indigenous People – Guide for proper terms when referring to Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Theme: Language

Curriculum Connections
Languages and Linguistics, Education, Indigenous Studies, Anthropology, History and Sociology

Introduction
Anishinaabemowin is the language of the Anishinaabe nation and it is spoken by the characters in the book Moon of the Crusted Snow. Anishinaabemowin is one of the oldest Indigenous languages in North America.
Relevant quotes from the author

From the radio interview with Unreserved – Waubgeshig Rice balances historical accuracy with dystopian future in new novel

(2:16) It was important to me as an Anishnaabe person to try to reflect some of the language to the best of my own ability. It was just about reflecting the day-to-day parlance that thrives in a lot of our communities…there is some decent knowledge still in a lot of places of Anishinaabemowin …it exists. It’s part of council meetings and family gatherings but just to have it live on the page, especially in a book, that is somewhat widely distributed, that a lot of non-Indigenous people will read, I just wanted them to know what the language looks like.

From the interview When Things Start to Fall Apart: Andrew Wilmot in Conversation with Waubgeshig Rice

Within just a couple of generations, culture and language are scrubbed from his community due to the brutal impacts of colonialism. Even though he didn’t endure the violence of residential schools himself, because his grandparents did, very little of his Anishinaabe identity was passed down to him. It’s the common intergenerational trauma of these terrible assimilative measures. Fortunately, he still has links to the old ways, and they become clearer and more important during this crisis. But basically, I wanted to convey that there are a lot of people like Evan, wanting to learn about being Anishinaabe but finding it hard to connect with those old ways even though they live immersed in an Indigenous community.

From the interview “Sharing Stories is the Foundation of Culture and Community” – Waubgeshig Rice

It was important for me from the beginning to imagine a so-called “post-apocalyptic” story through an Anishinaabe lens in order to convey that distinct perspective of a world ending. Indigenous nations in North America have already experienced apocalypse, and the world many communities inhabit now is a dystopia. They’ve been removed from their homelands and their languages and cultures have been severely damaged or outright destroyed. Still, Indigenous communities have survived these crises and remain resilient, which perhaps leaves them better suited to deal with a catastrophe like a blackout that we would read about in contemporary post-apocalyptic stories. And the key to survival – as always – is in the land and culture.

From the audio interview Get Lit – E96 with Waubgeshig Rice

(24:43) The Ojibwe that is in the book is sort of reflective of my own skills, like the things that I’m able to say, in my circles. My younger brother is a fluent speaker and he’s a teacher. so I consulted with him on a lot of those things. Grammar means a lot in Ojibwe, it is very technical and complicated.

From the novel

He still felt a little awkward, saying this prayer of thanks mostly in English, with only a few Ojibwe words peppered here and there. But it still made him feel good to believe that he was giving back in some way. Evan expressed thanks for the good life he was trying to lead. He apologized for not being able to pray fluently in his native language and asked for a bountiful fall hunting season for everyone. (pages 4 and 5)
But people like Aileen, her parents, and a few others had kept the old ways alive in secret. They whispered the stories and the language in each other’s ears, even when they were stolen from their families to endure forced and often violent assimilation at the church-run residential schools far away from their homes. They had held out hope that one day their beautiful ways would be able to re-emerge and flourish once again. (Page 53)

Nicole closed the children’s book, Jidmoo Miinwaa Goongwaas, and kissed the top of Nangohns’s head. “There you go, my little star,” she said, switching from the Anishinaabemowin in the book to English. “Now you know about the squirrel and the chipmunk. You two stay put, I’ll be right back up.” (Page 48)

The children were learning their language earlier and better than their parents had. Evan and Nicole has grown up in an era when Ojibwe wasn’t spoken much with the younger generation at home. It was only two generations before Nicole and Evan that speaking Ojibwe was punished at the church-run schools that imprisoned stolen children, and the shame attached to it lingered. Evan and Nicole had vowed to make things different for their kids. They had given them Anishinaabemowin names with pride – Maiingan meant “wolf” and Nangohns “little star”. (Page 128)

Discussion questions

1. In your opinion, what are the connections between the language that you speak and your identity?

2. How would you feel if you were told that speaking English (or French) was forbidden and that you were to now speak in another language that is unfamiliar to you?

3. Many Indigenous languages are on the verge of extinction in Canada. Do you think it’s important to make sure these languages don’t disappear? If yes, how do you propose ensuring these languages are preserved and learned by future generations?

Resources

Language Warriors Needed: Miskwaanakwad on Anishinaabemowin Revitalization
Learn how to speak Anishinaabemowin through this online resource.

The Ojibwe People’s Dictionary is a searchable, talking Ojibwe-English dictionary that features the voices of Ojibwe speakers.

First Voices is a suite of web-based tools and services designed to support Indigenous people engaged in language archiving, language teaching and culture revitalization.

Article: Where do Indigenous Languages fit into Canada’s National Identity?
Introduction
The impacts of colonialism on gender and Indigenous gender roles are explored in the novel.

Relevant quotes from the author
From the radio interview – The Next Chapter
Waubgeshig Rice on Moon of the Crusted Snow
(11:03) I think it’s important to really highlight the elder women in our communities who have really held things together despite all these other things that have happened.

From the interview (podcast) – Can’t Lit – Waubgeshig Rice
(35:27) … Justin Scott, he embodies that toxic masculinity that is inherent in settler colonialism to begin with because he is very much an allegory for settling the land, overtaking it and exploiting it. At the core of that is the spirit of trying to conquer things and take things over, manipulate them…that’s the essence of toxic masculinity.

(36:02) On the other hand Evan, I think what I was trying to get at with him and his family is that there are healthy, functional families on reserves and these are the stories that we aren’t hearing enough of in the mainstream…and by and large, modeled after my own family. I grew up in a healthy and safe environment. That was also an antidote to toxic masculinity at the same time. The women in both my families, my father’s and mother’s, were by and large the leaders….that was normal and I don’t think we see it enough in art, in culture and the mainstream media.

(38:38) He’s young (referring to Evan), he’s in his early to mid-twenties, so he still has a lot to learn and I think I didn’t want to portray him as the hero because even though he does have an instrumental role in keeping order and keeping everyone fed, there’s this whole network of people behind him who are doing a lot of the heavy lifting too. He’s just a product of that, a product of a good sense of community and of people who are trying to do the right thing, look out for each other in the face of catastrophe.

From the novel
The boy was eager to join his father on his first hunt but that was still a few years away. Evan first went on an actual hunt with his own father when he was nine, after spending years learning about the land. He had shot his first buck that fall. They didn’t offer tobacco when they killed animals to eat back then – Evan only learned about that ceremony years earlier, when an elder took it upon herself to teach him and some of the other young people the old ways. (page 14)

Evan thought of Nicole at home, trying to prepare herself for the skills they would need if the power was gone for good while struggling to keep the children occupied. (page 147)
Conversation between Aileen and Evan
“What about your bazgim?”
“Oh, she’s tired, but she’s getting by. She really appreciates all the things you are teaching her about the old medicine ways, but she still gets stuck at home a lot with the kids while I’m out here doing stuff.”
“Well, you should make sure you spend more time with her. Go for a walk in the bush. When the spring comes, ask her to show you some of the medicines. She’ll know a lot now, if she remembers all the stuff from when I used to take her and all the young girls out there. It will be important if we don’t get any new supplies in from the hospital down south.” (page 147)

Discussion questions
1. Evan Whitesky and Justin Scott represent two very different models of masculinity. Explain what you think these two different models are by using examples from the book.
2. Did the families portrayed in the novel seem different from what you expected a First Nation family might be like? If yes, what were those differences?

Resources
Zaasaakwe – a documentary showcasing the strong familial and social ties found within a community are portrayed in this short.
Indigenous Concepts of Gender – University of Alberta
Reference:

Traditional Teachings & Culture
Tuesday Teachings are short videos that share the wisdom and knowledge of Indigenous elders and knowledge keepers.

Bannock is a food that is mentioned in the novel. The following links provide information on bannock.
History of Bannock
Bannock, wild meat and indigenous food sovereignty

Unreserved is a radio program for Indigenous community, culture and conversation.
Smudging is described in the novel. To learn about this purification ceremony, watch this video.

Additional Resources

Waubgeshig Rice wrote several posts reflecting on writing his novel when he served as Writer-in-Residence for Open Book. Those posts can be found at this link, along with several interviews and reviews of his book.

Deepening Knowledge
Resources for and about Aboriginal Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Infusing Indigenous Perspectives in K-12 Teaching
A guide to help Initial Teacher Education students find materials that centre on Indigenous worldviews, experiences and knowledges for teaching in the K-12 classroom.
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Our Voices, Our Stories
First Nations, Métis and Inuit Stories Library and Archives Canada

Indigenous Publishers, Distributors and News Media
A guide created by the University of British Columbia

Understanding Indigenous Perspectives
Learning Modules on Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and worldviews
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Aanii.org
A website dedicated to Anishinaabe history, language, culture and education.

Indigenous Studies Portal Research Tool
This is a database of electronic resources such as articles, e-books, theses, government publications, videos, oral histories, and digitized archival documents and photographs.
University of Saskatchewan

Short Documentaries on Indigenous Topics
Two-minute walk through 500 years of Indigenous history