

**A Stranger at Home: Mentor Text Writing Assignment**

Rowena Cuento

English and Literacy Practices: Elementary

Lynda Gellner

October 31, 2024

## Book and Rationale

### **A Stranger at Home by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton.**

This is a perfect book to support the outcomes listed below from the Grade 4 Saskatchewan ELA and Treaty Education Curriculum on identity and community. The book is divided into chapters that would allow for the teacher to discuss smaller sections with the students and zero in on the themes of identity, family, and community. There are illustrations that would support student understanding of the topic on residential schools and its effects on First Nations people. The memoir is 8 chapters long, making it ideal for engaging grade 4 students, especially at the beginning of the school year. According to the National Institute for Health, “a grade 4 student’s attention span ranges from 20-30 minutes,” (National Institute of Health. (n.d.). *Children's Attention Span and Developmental Stages*. 2023), making this book a perfect read for 2 to 3 class periods. In addition, many of our grade 4 students “begin to learn how to think and talk about a text to find deeper meanings and messages” (Scholastic Parents Staff. *The guide to 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading and writing*. 2019). This makes this book a great resource for introducing them to critical analysis of stories and helping them connect to their personal experiences. This book also uses colorful illustrations, which according to Debbie Miller, from her book *Reading with Meaning*, can “aid comprehension, particularly for visual learners, helping them connect with the text on multiple levels” (Miller, D. *Reading with Meaning*, 2012). Overall, this book is an excellent choice for the Grade 4 Saskatchewan Treaty Education and Health Studies Curriculum. It captures students' interest with themes of identity and community, encouraging critical thinking and personal connections through the varying crafts and techniques the author used to keep readers engaged.

**SI4.2:** Examine the intent of treaty in relation to education.

- The "After Story" section on pages 105-109 offers clear and significant information that directly supports this curricular outcome. It presents valuable insights and examples that can enhance our understanding of the key concepts of the intent of treaties in relation to education.

**USC4.5:** Examine how identity (i.e., self-concept, self-esteem, self-determination) is influenced by relationships that are formed with others.

- In examining how identity is influenced by relationships, the Introduction and Chapters 1 through 4 provide valuable insights into the interplay between self-concept, self-esteem, and self-determination. These chapters illustrate how connections with family and friends shape an individual’s perception of themselves, impacting their confidence and ability to make choices. Through various examples, illustrations, and dialogues, these sections emphasize that positive relationships can enhance self-worth and promote a stronger sense of identity.

## Rationale for Using Mentor Texts for Students

Using mentor texts helps students see good writing examples, boosting their skills and confidence in their own writing. As outlined in Hochman and Wexler’s *The Writing Revolution*, students need an “effective template to transfer their vocabulary ideas into a coherent piece of writing” (Hochman & Wexler, 2017, p. 83). When we introduce students to a step-by-step process for writing simple sentences—first as a whole group and then gradually increasing the complexity of sentence structures—they become more confident in tackling the challenges of writing.

As teachers, it is crucial to help students navigate these early stages through scaffolding and equipping them with the tools to organize their ideas logically. In viewing *Gradual Release* (Modeled-Guided-Independent Practice), Marty Fraser demonstrates how this approach effectively helps students understand and retain information, allowing them to write with more confidence. He emphasizes the “I Do, We Do, You Do” model, which fosters a positive classroom culture by setting clear expectations (Citizens Academy Cleveland, 2011).

As students grow more comfortable forming logical sentences, they can explore writing more deeply and analyze the techniques used by authors (Dollins, 2020, *A Critical Inquiry Approach to Mentor Texts*, p. 191). The EASE (Examine, Assess, Suggest, Envision) strategy highlighted by Dollins is an effective way to analyze authors’ techniques. For instance, during a small group activity, we received a prompt and wrote a lead for it. This strategy encourages students to reflect on the author’s craft and helps them EASE into independent writing (Dollins, 2020, p. 197). Overall, teaching with mentor texts and straightforward writing strategies allows students to grow their skills and feel more confident as they improve their writing.

## Differentiated Sentence Activities

<i>Sentence Fragments YES/NO</i>	<b>Teacher writes the following sentence on the board and then work with students to decide if it is a complete sentence (who/do) or a sentence fragment</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. with your family</li><li>2. at least we are home</li><li>3. she had written her own name</li><li>4. we drank tea</li><li>5. said goodbye</li><li>6. near the end of February</li><li>7. soon after that</li><li>8. things were changing</li><li>9. she looked back at the bay</li><li>10. I’m sorry</li></ol>
<i>Sentence Types</i>	<b>The teacher hands out strips of paper to students and let students identify the 4 types of sentences.</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Declarative- a statement</li></ol> <b>Examples:</b>

	<p>Margaret is from Aklavik.  My father was waiting for us at the site of our new home.  Agnes was my best friend in all the world.  Most men in the North worked as trappers.  One of my father’s jobs in the winter was to cut chunks of ice.  The government is telling us to send our children to school.</p> <p><b>2. Interrogative- a question</b>  <b>Examples:</b>  Where is Margaret’s hometown?  How could he not know better?  Can she hear me read?  Don’t you wish we were leaving on those boats, too?  Why did Olemaun and her mom go to the Hudson’s Bay Company store?  How can I relearn my language?</p> <p><b>3. Imperative- a command</b>  <b>Examples:</b>  You cannot talk to your friends in your language!  “Just go!” You’ll manage fine.  Don’t say anything! I do not want to hear it before I eat!  Finish your food or you’ll get a strap!  Take these books back to the clerk.  Wait until you wear our scent again.</p> <p><b>4. Exclamatory- an expression</b>  <b>Examples:</b>  The team practices really hard!  “I can’t,” I cried out. “Help!”  She is getting worse!  She had written her own name!  I am going to ask something very difficult of you. You will need to be brave!  I would keep us together, safe and strong!</p>
<p><i>Sentence Starters</i></p>	<p><b>The teacher will ask students to use each sentence starters to write a complete sentence on their writing journals.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Imagine if....</li> <li>2. One day, Olemaun saw....</li> <li>3. Have you ever wondered....</li> <li>4. If the school was a safe place, Olemaun would be....</li> <li>5. It was a bright and sunny day when....</li> <li>6. Every morning, the children at the school see....</li> <li>7. She never expected to feel....</li> <li>8. The moment she walked into the building, she noticed....</li> </ol>

*Sentence Building  
Blocks*

**The teacher will have students use each sentence building block to write a complete sentence.**

**Sentence starters for students to build on.**

**The boat crunched...**

**My mother and father say...**

1. Simple sentence structures: Subject+ Verb +Object  
Object (adjectives/adverbs)

Ex:

The boat crunched to a stop.

The boat crunched suddenly.

My mother and father say I am an outsider.

My mother and father say I am a brave girl.

2. Adding time and place: Subject + Verb + Object + Time

**Sentence Starters:**

**My father was away...**

**One day in February...**

Subject + Verb + Object + Time

Ex:

My father was away for three weeks.

My father was away between 5am-2pm every day.

One day in February, my mother went to chunk ice the whole day.

One day in February, we went sledding for 2 hours.

Subject + Verb + Place

Ex:

My father was away in our cabin.

My father was away hunting deer in the open prairie fields

One day in February, my family went skiing at Mission Ridge.

One day in February, I went ice fishing with my father out at the lake.

3. Question and Answer Formats

**Prompts:**

**What would you do if...**

**Which option do you prefer...**

*Question + Answer:*

Q- What would you do if you were stuck in an island?

A- I would try to make some fire to keep me warm.

Q- What would you do if you must leave home to go  
to school?

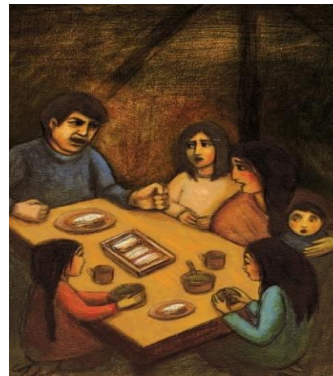
	<p>A- I will be brave and give my best studying.</p> <p><i>Question + Answer:</i>  Q- Which option do you prefer, a Disneyland vacation or a tropical getaway?  A- I would prefer to go to a tropical getaway.  Q- Which option do you prefer, McDonalds fries or DQ fries?  A- I would prefer DQ fries.</p> <p>4. Adding emotion words to sentences: Subject + Verb + Emotion:</p> <p><b>Sentence Starters:</b>  <b>Mabel squealed with... when she caught a huge fish.</b>  <b>We were filled with... as the Immaculata travelled down the river.</b></p> <p>Ex:  Mabel squealed with excitement when she caught a huge fish.  We were filled with sadness as the Immaculata travelled down the river.</p> <p>5. Making Comparisons:  Subject + Comparative Adjective + Another Subject</p> <p><b>Sentence Starters:</b>  <b>Tuktoyaktuk is...Aklavik.</b>  <b>Olemaun is...the other kids outside the store.</b></p> <p>Ex:  Tuktoyaktuk is further north than Aklavik.  Tuktoyaktuk is colder in the winter than Aklavik.  Olemaun is taller than the other kids outside the store.  Olemaun is friendlier than the other kids outside the store.</p> <p>6. Sentence Transformation: Ask students to transform simple sentences into questions, exclamations, or commands  Ex:  Olemaun has forgotten her people’s language.  Question: Why did Olemaun forget her language?  Exclamation: How sad that Olemaun forgot her own language!  Command: Remember your people’s language, Olemaun!</p>
<p><i>Picture Sentences</i></p>	<p><b>The teacher will show the students pictures from the book, and they will write simple but complete sentences describing what they see and with the correct punctuation mark.</b></p> <p>1. Statement: <b>Subject + Verb</b>  <b>This picture can be found on page 38.</b>  Ex: Olemaun is standing.</p>



**2. Subject + Verb + Object**

**This picture can be found on page 42.**

Ex: The family is having supper.



**3. Write a complete sentence describing the location of Aklavik on the map. This picture can be found on page 2.**

Ex: Aklavik is in the Northwest Territories.



**4. Use the picture below to answer the question or to write a question. This picture can be found on page 119.**

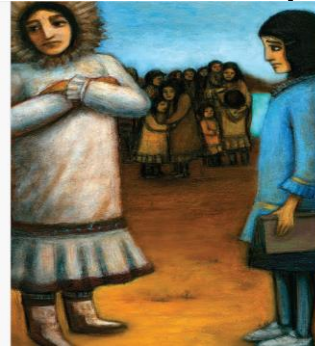
Ex: What did Olemaun and her family do near the end of February?

Answer: Subject + Verb = They travelled.



**5. Write complete sentences using the pictures below. Use descriptive words to make your sentences more interesting. Try have 2 complete sentences for every image**

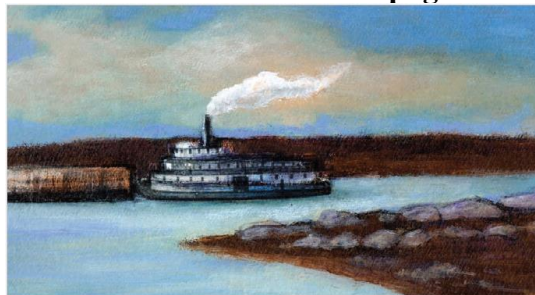
**Picture can be found on page 5**



**Picture can be found on page 27**



**Picture can be found on page 28**





Picture can be found on page 89



*Sentence  
Correction Activity*

**The teacher will write sentences on the board with errors (capitalization, subject-verb agreement) and the students will write the correct sentence on their writing journal**

1. Subject- Verb Agreement:

Olemaun and her friend Agnes boards the boat to Aklavik.

= Change boards to board- plural subject + singular verb

The trees grows tall in the summer.

= Change grows to grow

People loves ice cream.

= Change loves to love (everyone is singular)

The teams plays with integrity every season.

=Change plays to play

2. Subject-Verb Agreement:

My mother give me a strange look as if to question why I were standing in front of her.

=change give to gives- singular subject+ plural verb

The flower bloom in the spring.

=Change bloom to blooms

The movie start at 7pm.

=Change start to starts

Everyone love ice cream.

=change love to loves (everyone is singular)

3. Subject-verb agreement:

Olemaun nor her sisters was treated poorly at the residential school.

=Change was to were- subjects joined by or, nor- If one subject is singular and one is plural, the verb agrees with the subject nearest to it.

Either my mom or my dad pick me up at school

=Change pick to picks

Neither the teacher nor the students knows the answer.

=Change knows to know

Either the cookies or the cake are served at the party.

=Change are to is



	<p>(head at I and hung my supper God for prayed the save of souls to my and sibilings my parents)</p> <p>3. After an hour, my mother sent me out to feed the rest of my meal to the sled dogs. (my mother after an hour sent out to feed the me of my meal to the rest dogs sled)</p> <p><b>Group 2:</b></p> <p>1. I gathered the stones, searched for a feather, and headed back to our tent. My mother was inside, putting my brother down for a nap. (stones, searched for a feather, I gathered and back to our tent headed. Nap down my brother for a putting, inside was my mother.)</p> <p>2. The nun told me that she would let me out if I could remember my name and if my mother could recognize me. (I could my name remember the nun told me and if my mother would let me out she recognize me that she would)</p> <p>3. All of us who had been to the school were regarded as strange creatures, changed by our time away. (changed by our time away, all of us were regarded as strange creatures who had been to the school).</p> <p><b>Group 3:</b></p> <p>1. I did see Agnes on occasion and her mother did allow us to speak to one another, now that I have rediscovered my own tongue. (my own I have rediscovered that now tongue I see Agnes did occasion and her on mother allow did us to speak one to another.)</p> <p>2. My sisters were excited when they heard that they would be going to the school like their big sisters. (like their big sisters when they heard my sisters were excited that they would be going to the school)</p> <p>3. Father knew that I was like him and that hard work eased my loneliness and pain. (hard work eased my loneliness and father knew pain that I was like him and that).</p>
<p><i>Story Sequencing</i></p>	<p><b>The teacher divides the class into groups of three. Each group will have 5 sentence strips from each chapter of the book that they have to put in order from the first event to the last event. (Use clues like -first, initially, next, then, finally, in conclusion) in the sentence strips to make the sequencing a little easier for the students for the first activity.</b></p>

**Group 1:**

- Initially my mother came to find me to go fishing one afternoon.
- Then we she found me, we walked to Felix lake near our home.
- When we arrived at the lake, we found a spot on the shore and my mother and sister dropped their lines into the water.
- It was my turn next, but I did not know what to do and my mother noticed that I was acting strangely.
- Just as my mother was about to help me, Mabel squealed with delight.
- Finally, it was time to pack our things and head back home. It has been a long day.

**Group 2:**

- First, I joined my mother at the table where a cold piece of bannock was waiting for me.
- Then she set the book in front of us and pointed at it. “Read,” she said in Inuvialuktun.
- Next, I swallowed the bannock in my mouth. “Gulliver’s Travels,” I said out loud.
- “No,” she said in English, shaking her head. And then she repeated the word “read.”
- I wasn’t sure what she wanted of me, so I opened the book and began reading aloud.
- Finally, I figured out what my mother was asking me to do. She wanted me to teach her to read in English.

**Group 3:**

- First, I walked to the store with my mother to help her bring home some supplies.
- Then, I saw a group of kids playing a game with a caribou-hide ball outside.  
My mother indicated that I should stay and play with them, but I stood on the step and crossed my arms.
- I didn’t know how to ask to join them, and I was pretty sure they wouldn’t welcome me.
- The next thing I knew, the children were pointing at my shoes laughing.
- I walked towards my mother who was arguing with the clerk about the price of flour.
- When we got home, my mother started arguing with my father. I didn’t know what it was all about until I heard my name and finally realized it was about me.

**Phoneme Segmentation Words:**

2	3	4
off	home	barge
it	feet	early
to	like	froze
me	boat	hunt
up	sad	mind
us	day	stung

**Author’s Craft**

<p><i>Punctuation</i></p>	<p>In <i>A Stranger at Home</i>, the author uses punctuation effectively to enhance the emotional depth and rhythm of the narrative.</p> <p><b>Dashes:</b> The author employs dashes to create pauses that emphasize characters' thoughts and feelings. This technique can convey a sense of urgency or confusion, allowing readers to feel the characters' emotional turmoil.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The supply barge, which came only twice a year-once in the spring and once in late summer- was expected today.</li> <li>• “Mamaqtuq,” I said, pointing to my tea- tastes good.</li> <li>• Only one person had touched me so sweetly- my mother.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ellipses:</b> Ellipses are used to indicate hesitation or unfinished thoughts, reflecting the inner conflict of characters. This invites readers to linger on moments of uncertainty or reflection.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It was easier to avoid on Banks Island, but here...</li> <li>• I promised myself to bring it up as soon as...</li> <li>• A shot cracked through the air...</li> </ul> <p><b>Exclamation Points:</b> The occasional use of exclamation points heightens the intensity of certain moments, capturing the characters' excitement, frustration, or despair, and drawing readers into the emotional landscape of the story.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “No, no... It’s me... I’m still the same!”</li> <li>• Watching him walk in that grizzly-like manner of his reminded me of how strong a person could really be!</li> <li>• Every child aboard that Immaculata wished they had the strength to jump over to that new tugboat and go back to their parents’ arms!</li> </ul>
<p><i>Text Structure</i></p>	<p>The author’s use of text structure plays a crucial role in conveying themes and enhancing the reader’s understanding of the characters' experiences.</p> <p><b>Flashbacks:</b> The use of flashbacks provides insight into Olemaun’s memories and cultural background, contrasting her past experiences</p>

	<p>with her current reality. This structure helps highlight the impact of her experiences and the loss of her language and culture.</p> <p>Ex:          “I remember clearly how the nuns would let us eat porridge every day.”          “I couldn’t help but see the day I first step foot at the school and they chopped my long-black hair”</p> <p><b>Short Chapters:</b> The use of shorter chapters creates a sense of urgency and makes the text more accessible for younger readers. Each chapter often focuses on a specific moment or theme, allowing for focused exploration of different aspects of Olemaun’s life.</p> <p>Ex:          Chapter 1- has 19 pages of text with bigger font size and illustrations. This talks about Olemaun’s return to Aklavik.          Chapter 2- has 15 pages with texts and illustrations about Olemaun’s first day back home and slowly transitions to Olemaun relearning her community’s way of life.          This set-up of shorter chapters and a combination of texts and illustrations are consistent throughout the book that makes it easier for grade 4 students to understand the major events in the story.</p>
<i>Sentence Structure</i>	<p>The author’s use of sentence structure significantly contributes to the emotional impact and clarity of the narrative.</p> <p><b>Repetition:</b> Repeating certain phrases emphasizes important themes and feelings, making them stand out and resonate with readers.</p> <p>Ex: “Not my girl, not my girl!”          “No, no! It’s me          “I cried, and held on to her, held on to her tightly”</p> <p><b>Simple and clear sentences:</b> The author writes clear, short sentences to show tension and quick shifts in feelings, making important events feel more impactful.</p>
<i>Paragraph Structure</i>	<p>The author effectively enhances the storytelling and deepens the reader's connection to Olemaun’s experiences by thoughtfully crafting paragraph structure.</p> <p><b>Focused Paragraphs:</b> Each paragraph often centers on a specific idea or event, helping readers easily follow Olemaun’s journey and understand her experiences.</p> <p><b>Flashbacks and Dialogues:</b> The use of dialogue and flashbacks within paragraphs emphasizes key moments and provides a deeper understanding of characters' thoughts and emotions.</p> <p>Example:  <i>Dialogue:</i>          “I worked the dough for a really long time so it will be well mixed,” I said.          “Ah, that pushes all the air out.” He tilted his head. “What did you put in it? Baking soda?”          “Come, he said, I’ll make you breakfast.”</p>

	<p>This dialogue between Olemaun and her dad shows how Olemaun’s parents are trying their very best to support her as she finds her way back into their culture.</p> <p><i>Flashback:</i>          “I remembered the laughter of my cousins during summer vacations”- Olemaun reflects on a past event that shows the warmth of her past experiences compared to her current state of isolation.</p>
<p><i>Use of Illustrations</i></p>	<p>The author’s craft in the use of illustrations plays a vital role in enhancing the narrative.</p> <p><b>Cultural Representation:</b> The illustrations often reflect Olemaun's cultural background, providing context and enriching the story's themes of identity and belonging.</p> <p>Ex: A picture of Olemaun’s family traveling across land by dogsled. - This image symbolizes the determination and adaptability of Olemaun’s family in navigating their environment and their skills in handling harsh conditions.</p> <p>An image of a canvas tent where Olemaun’s family lived. – This exhibits simplicity and contentment in the lifestyle of Indigenous people before settlers came.</p> <p><b>Symbolism:</b> Some illustrations may include symbolic elements, like the picture of the <i>Immaculata</i> and Olemaun’s parka, that reinforce the memoir’s themes, like the importance of family and the value of one’s identity, encouraging readers to think critically about the connections between text and image.</p>

**Script for Teacher Talk: A Stranger at Home**

Hello grade 4. Today, we're going to revisit an important writing concept using our mentor text, *A Stranger at Home*. We're going to dive deep into an important writing concept to understand the purpose of repetition in writing to emphasize important themes and feelings. Repetition can really make certain ideas stand out and reflect with readers experiences, and I want us to see how it's done effectively in this text.

Let’s start by looking at a specific passage. I’ll read it aloud, and I want you to pay attention to any words or phrases that seem to be repeated.

Passage: My mother gave me a strange look, as if to question why I was standing before her. I smiled, but she crossed her arms and shook her head. “Not my girl, not my girl,” she shouted up to the dark-cloaked brothers in the only English I had ever heard her speak.

I assured my mother that I wasn’t an outsider—that I was still er daughter— “No, no...It’s me, I’m still the same— but my words came out in English, which she could not understand, instead of Inuvialuktun, our native tongue. She cried even harder— “not my girl, not my girl.”

Now, what did you notice about the repeated phrase? Why do you think the author chose to repeat this specific phrase?

Allow for students to respond.

Great observations! The repetition here emphasizes the theme of belonging. It makes the reader wonder why a mom would say this to her daughter and it draws our attention to the importance of family and identity in the text.

Now that we've analyzed how the author uses repetition, let's practice this together. I want you to think about a theme or emotion that's important to you. It could be anything—a personal experience or something you're passionate about.

*Teacher:* Once you have that in mind, let's brainstorm some phrases or words that connect to that emotion or theme. I'll write them on the board. What are some words or phrases that represent your emotion or theme?

*The teacher writes student suggestions on the board.*

Now, let's work together to create a short piece of writing using repetition. I'll model it first. For example, if my theme is 'courage,' I might write: Courage is standing up when it's hard. Courage is speaking out when it matters. Courage is believing in yourself, even when others doubt you.

Now it's your turn! In pairs, take a moment to create a few sentences using repetition based on the theme you brainstormed. Make sure to think about how repetition can enhance the emotional impact of your writing.

Now it's time for you to try this on your own. I want you to write a short paragraph or a few sentences that utilize repetition to convey a theme or emotion of your choice. Remember to think about the structure—what phrases will you repeat, and how will they enhance your message?

Once you finish, I'd like you to share your writing with your classmate sitting beside you. Give each other feedback on how the repetition works in your pieces. After sharing, we'll come back together and discuss how it felt to use this technique.

To wrap up, can anyone share how using repetition affected your writing today? How did it change the way you conveyed your theme or emotion?

Allow students who are willing and comfortable to share their thoughts.

Excellent insights! Remember, repetition is a powerful tool in your writing. Keep practicing it as you write in the future and notice how it can create impact in your work. I can't wait to see how you apply this in your next assignments!

For homework, I'd like you to revise a previous piece of writing from your weekend news journal by adding in some repetition. Think about how it can strengthen your message. Happy writing!



## References:

- Brain Balance. (2021). *Normal Attention Span Expectations By Age*.  
Www.brainbalancecenters.com; Brain Balance.  
<https://www.brainbalancecenters.com/blog/normal-attention-span-expectations-by-age>
- CitizensAcademyCleve. (2011). Gradual Release (Modeled-Guided-Independent Practice) [YouTube Video]. In *YouTube*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uE\\_KTMRwbJs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uE_KTMRwbJs)
- Dollins, C. A. (2020). A Critical Inquiry Approach to Mentor Texts: Learn It With EASE. *The Reading Teacher*, 74(2), 191–199. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1928>
- Health Studies Curriculum, Grade 4, p.18, (2009). Government of Saskatchewan, Ministry of Education  
<https://curriculum.gov.sk.ca/CurriculumHome?id=48>
- Hochman, J. C., & Wexler, N. (2017). *The Writing Revolution: A Guide to Advancing Thinking Through Writing in All Subjects and Grades*. Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Brand.
- Jordan-Fenton, C., & Pokiak-Fenton, M. (2011). *A Stranger At Home*. Annick Press.
- Lindsey, J. (2022). *READING ABOVE THE FRAY: the art and science of teaching foundational skills*. Scholastic Professional.
- Miller, D. (2013). *Reading with meaning: teaching comprehension in the primary grades*. Stenhouse Publishers.
- Treaty Education Curriculum, Grade 4, p.5, (2009). Government of Saskatchewan, Ministry of Education  
<https://curriculum.gov.sk.ca/CurriculumHome?id=169>