

Kunu's Basket: A Story from Indian Island

Lee De Cora Francis

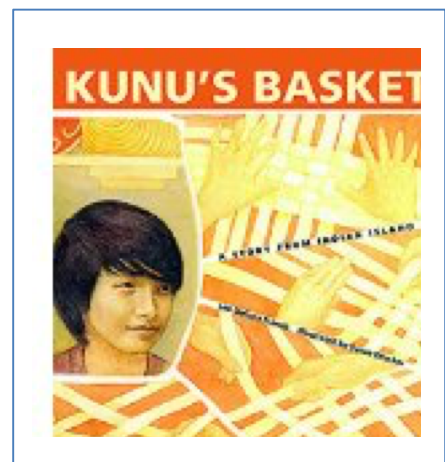
Illustrated by Susan Drucker

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9 x 10, 32 pages, color illustrations

Children / Multicultural / Native American; Grades 2-4



Summary

Not too many nine-year-olds have the determination to accomplish what Kunu does in this story, but then this Penobscot Indian boy is not a quitter. With gentle guidance from his grandfather, Kunu makes a pack basket and discovers the satisfaction that come from participating in the tradition of the men in his family.

Kunu's Basket will lead to discussions about

- Different styles of "pack" and "fancy" baskets: How does the use of an object dictate its design?
- Art and the environment: What natural materials are needed to make baskets?
- Patience and cooperation are valuable skills: Identify other activities that may help promote such personal qualities.
- Name other activities that can promote self-confidence.
- Contemporary Native American families in Maine and beyond: What are the most common stereotypes? Identify some ways believed to help eliminate harmful stereotypes. For further thoughts on this issue visit

<http://anthropology.si.edu/outreach/Indbibl/ErasingStereotypes.pdf>

Before You Read

Background

In a world where instant gratification is increasingly seen as the norm, young readers, Native and non-Native alike, will find much to consider from Kunu as he learns about the rewards of both persistence and patience. Written by Penobscot mother and educator Lee DeCora Francis, *Kunu's Basket* is filled with detailed illustrations that depict contemporary Native family life on Indian Island near Bangor, Maine. Although *Kunu's Basket* is set in "Indian Country," the message is a universal one as it illustrates the importance of hard work.

Access Prior Knowledge

- When have you thought of giving up on something?
- Traditions are meant to be shared: Discuss different traditions in families.

After You Read

Activity

Basketmaking

The website of the Hudson Museum at the University of Maine at Orono has a pattern for a birch bark basket made out of card stock. You might have your students make this basket.

www.umaine.edu/hudsonmuseum/Birchbark.html

Basketmaking, Past and Present

The baskets the Native peoples made were functional; they did their jobs well. They were very beautiful, and some were decorated with traditional designs. In the Victorian Age, tourists showed interest in buying Native American baskets. Basket makers quickly realized that if they adapted their style to the needs of the tourists, they would sell more baskets. So instead of only producing workbaskets, they created sewing and handkerchief boxes, magazine racks, and wood baskets, all highly decorated.

- Why did Maine Native Americans change the kinds of baskets they made?
- Why do you think Native Americans decorated their baskets the way that they did?
- How do you imagine people figured out how to make baskets in the first place?
- See if you can gather the information about how a basket is made, from tree to basket. You can use the Internet, the library, or ask a basket maker.
- Finally, design a new kind of basket that would fit the needs of people today. To see illustrations of different baskets visit this website:

www.umaine.edu/hudsonmuseum/gallery1.htm

Tell a Story with Pictures

Using *Kunu's Basket* as the example, invite your students to tell a family story with pictures. The story might have happened yesterday, four years ago, or a lifetime ago during their grandparents' time. Ask your students to first write the story down. Now, after looking at some of the illustrations, invite your students to tell the story in pictures. Remind your students that stick figures are absolutely okay.

Tell a Penobscot River Story

With the Penobscot River as the setting, write a story with as many accurate nature details as you can find about:

- Flying as an eagle over Penobscot River.
- Swimming with your salmon sibling.
- Being a beaver making a dam in a creek.
- Traveling through the woods with your cubs as a mama bear.

For Further Discussion

- Traditions are meant to be shared: Discuss different traditions in families
- Think of craft ideas that can be made by hand and sold

Further Reading

Muskrat Will Be Swimming by Savageau Cheryl (Tilbury House Publishers, 2006)

Thanks to the Animals by Allen J. Sockabasin (Tilbury House Publishers, 2005)

Remember Me by Donald Soctomah and Jean Flahive (Tilbury House Publishers, 2009)

A Caribou Alphabet by Mary Beth Owens (Tilbury House, 1988)

Internet Resources

You may find the following Internet resources helpful as your students continue to explore the topic of the book.

Native American Rights Fund

Site for the organization that has provided legal assistance to Indian tribes, organizations, and individuals nationwide

<http://www.narf.org>

Native American Baskets

This site gives information on the different types of baskets and materials used by many different tribes

<http://www.native-languages.org/baskets.htm>