



Eagle Drums

DISCUSSION GUIDE



About the Book

Eagle Drums by Nasuġraq Rainey Hopson is part cultural folklore, part origin myth about the Messenger's Feast—which is still celebrated in times of bounty among the Iñupiaq. It's the story of how Iñupiaq people were given the gift of music, song, dance, community, and everlasting tradition.

As his family prepares for winter, a skilled young hunter must travel up the mountain to collect obsidian for knapping—the same mountain where his two older brothers died.

When he reaches the mountaintop, he is immediately confronted by a terrifying eagle god named Savik. Savik gives the boy a choice: Follow me or die like your brothers.

What comes next is a harrowing journey to the home of the eagle gods and unexpected lessons on the natural world, the past that shapes us, and the community that binds us.

About the Author

Born and raised in the rural expanse of the North Slope of Alaska, Nasuġraq Rainey Hopson grew up hearing the fantastic tales from her unique and rich Indigenous Iñupiaq culture. When she is not writing or creating art inspired by these stories, she is studying how to grow food in the arctic and is working at preserving traditional Iñupiaq knowledge. She has a degree in studio art and has taught all levels of art from kindergarten to college. She lives in Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska, with her husband, two daughters, and two dogs. She lives off the land and the amazing bounty it provides like her ancestors did for thousands of years.



Discussion Questions

1. In the opening scene, Piņa kills several caribou while helping his family prepare for the winter. What did you think of this opening scene? Why do you think Nasugraq Rainey Hopson chose to begin the book with such a vivid description of hunting? How do you think it sets the stage for the story that follows?
2. Hopson wrote and illustrated this book. What did you notice about the style of the illustrations? What do they add to the story? Given that this legend has been passed down orally for generations, why do you think Hopson chose to add illustrations?
3. In chapter 6, "Song," Piņa reflects on what it means to be a hunter. "We are the eaters of souls: plant and animal. Living consuming the living." What do you think this means? How does the book depict the relationships between humans and animals, hunters and the hunted, predators and prey? What do you think it's saying about the role of humans in the natural world?
4. During his time with Savik and the other eagles, Piņa goes through many ordeals, but he also learns new skills. Savik and the Eagle Mother introduce him to a rich and complicated world of rituals, ceremonies, spiritual beliefs, and traditions. How did Piņa react to all of these new experiences? Which of them do you think changed him the most?
5. There are many Iñupiaq words scattered throughout the book. Some of them are translated and some of them are not. Why do you think Hopson chose to include so much of the Iñupiaq language? How did it change your experience of the book? What did it feel like to come across a word you didn't know? Sometimes the eagles use words that Piņa doesn't understand. What role do you think language plays in his journey of growth and discovery?
6. Dance, song, and ceremony play a big role in this story. Why do you think these rituals are so important to the Iñupiaq people? Do any of the songs and ceremonies in the book remind you of traditions from your own or other cultures?
7. This book is a retelling of the origin story of the Messenger Feast. It blends folklore, legend, and adventure. Do you think there are elements of magic in it? Why or why not? Are there differences between spiritual beliefs, mythology, and fantasy? What are they? How do you think your own beliefs, religion, and cultural heritage affected your experience of the book?
8. In her Author's Note, Hopson shares that the origin story of the Messenger Feast was told to her by an elder during the feast itself. She also shares a little bit about the history of the story and the feast, ancient Iñupiaq cultural traditions that were banned and ridiculed when colonizers and missionaries came to the Arctic Circle. Given this history, why do you think Hopson decided to turn this particular origin story into a novel? Do you think it's important to write down stories like this? Do you see any parallels between Hopson and Piņa?

