GRADeS 7-8: LANGUAGE

EXAMINING THE THEME OF RESILIENCE THROUGH POETRY

Purpose: Students will explore metaphors, the theme of resilience and the importance of nature and animals in Indigenous culture through a poem by Vera Wabegijig.

Estimated time: 60 minutes

Activity:
1. Start the lesson by asking a few questions to get students thinking about the theme of resilience and what it means to be resilient. What does it mean to be resilient? When might someone need to be resilient (hint: think about personal experiences, what you have read, heard or seen in the news, fictional stories you have read or heard, etc.)? How does someone become resilient? Is it a natural or learned trait? How might someone learn to be resilient?

2. Project Vera Wbegijig’s poem “Hunting” on the board and/or distribute copies to students. Have a student(s) read the poem out loud for the class. Ask the rest of the class to close their eyes or mentally visualize what they hear. After finishing the poem, ask students to describe what they were imagining as they listened to the poem.

3. Discuss the poem using the following questions. Record key points on the board.
   a. What animals are described in the poem? What is each animal doing in the poem?
   b. What adjectives and action words are used to describe each of the animals? (E.g., Raven: blue-black feathers, dives; Salmon: leaps, ascending, etc.)
   c. How is the salmon described differently from the other animals? Why is the salmon described differently? Do you think the author did this intentionally? Why?

4. Tell students they will now watch a video about Vera Wabegijig, the author of the poem. She will also read her poem “Hunting.” https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1401127921687/1401128030270#transcript

5. Arrange students into pairs or small groups and have them answer the following questions recording their answers in their notebooks or on a piece of paper. Encourage students to use the dictionary for any words they don’t understand. The questions may also be answered as a class.
   a. What is “resilience” and “resistance?” What would resilience or resistance be for humans? What other words are similar to “resilience” and “resistance” that you see in the poem? (E.g., build a momentum, ascending, move, push, endure.) Other similar words in general? (E.g., power, strength.)
   b. Why does the author call the salmon “a teacher”? Describe the tempo, rhythm, dynamic and pitch.
   c. How is this poem about animals a metaphor for something else?
   d. Why do you think Wabegijig’s poem is important? Why do you think the theme of resilience is important to think about when we are learning about First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities in Canada?

6. Instruct students to write a reflection on the poem and the discussions. Possible reflection topics include, but are not limited to:
   a. What animal represents resilience and resistance to you? Remember to use adjectives to describe this animal as a symbol of strength.
   b. Describe a time in your life that you’ve had to be resilient or seen someone else show resilience.
   c. What have you learned from overcoming obstacles in your life?
“HUNTING” BY VERA WABEGIJIG

Hunting

A raven flies, wings with long blue-black feathers drifting on the wind
Currents under body and hovers in the air
Raven dives into the creek below that brims with sockeye.
A salmon leaps out of the water, with reds and silver arcs
Back fins wag and build a momentum, ascending further upstream
Bears with pigeon-pawed trot over with a swaying, heavy head, climb on top of rocks
Where the water flows and falls with mouth wide open
They bite the springing salmon, canine teeth pierce into the silver belly
Eagles swoop, massive wings slow the body down with talons wide open
Preying in the creek, rising with salmon in its golden grip
Yet the salmon move, push, and endure, through broken skin and hanging entrails
This gathering place is encoded in memory, bringing salmon home
This long journey that nothing can stop, not even eagles, ravens or bears

Source: Aboriginal Poets: Vera Wabegijig  https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1401127921687/1401128030270#transcript
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In addition to the lesson plans, share these resources with your students:

- Canadian Encyclopedia