

Just for Kids!

Complete this activity and bring this page back to the Library to collect a prize. We will hang it up in an art display!

Morgan and Eli enter Ochek's world, Aski, through a portal in one of Eli's drawings. Imagine another world you would like to visit: a fantasy world, a time and place in the past, or a place that exists that you've always wanted to explore. Draw it here.

First Name: _____ Grade: _____

I read *The Barren Grounds* with my _____
(family, classroom, grandmother, parents, dog, etc.)

THE BARREN GROUNDS FAMILY READING KIT

The Barren Grounds

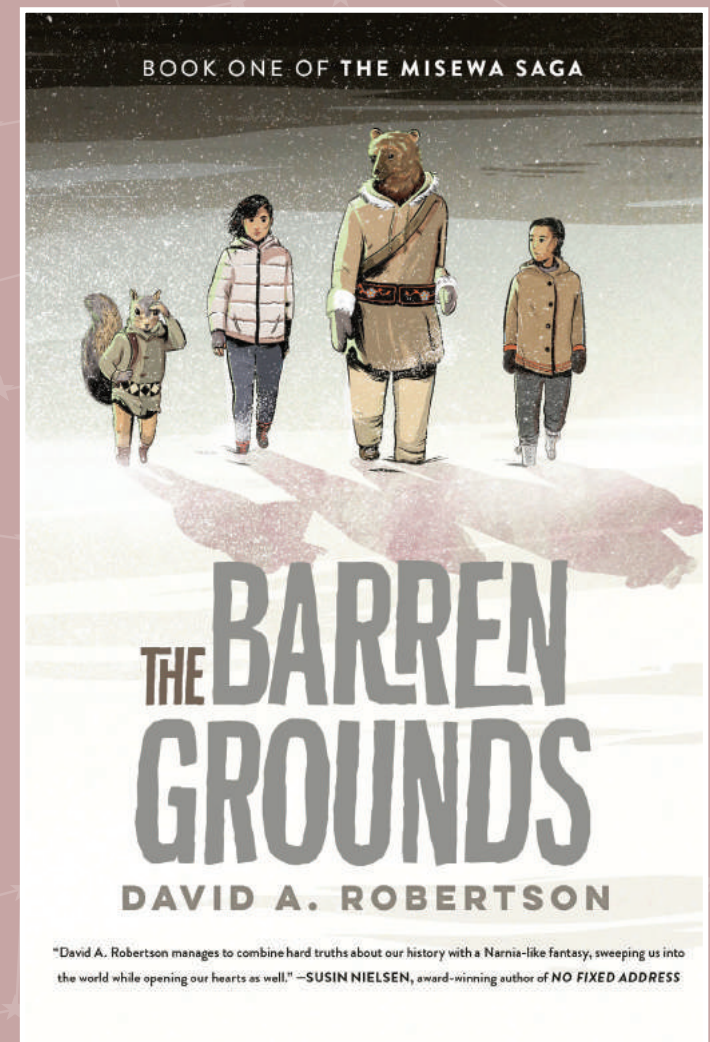
While living together in the same foster home, Morgan and Eli stumble upon a portal to a parallel reality where they meet Ochek, a walking and talking fisher. The trio set out on a quest to save Ochek's community and reconnect with Morgan and Eli's cultures at the same time. *The Barren Grounds* was nominated for the Governor General's Literary Award in 2021.

Author: David A. Robertson

David A. Robertson is an Indigenous author who has written many award-winning books, including picture books, novels, and graphic novels. He lives in Winnipeg and is a member of Norway House Cree Nation.

Historical Context: Narnia meets traditional Cree stories of the sky and constellations in an epic middle-grade fantasy series. Written in 2020, it addresses contemporary issues such as the foster care system and Indigenous land rights.

Recommended for: ages 10 and up.



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Discussion Questions

Read each question aloud and share your answers. Don't worry about staying on topic! See where the conversation leads you and encourage everyone to ask questions of their own.

- Throughout the book, Morgan and Eli try to connect with their Indigenous culture. How do they do this? Why do you think it's important for them to make that connection? Consider yourself and the culture(s) your family belongs to – what are some things that make you feel connected?

- At the start of the book, Morgan feels alone and isolated, but comes to learn that she has unexpected friends. How do some of the book's characters show Morgan that they care about her? How does she show them that she cares about them?

- When Morgan, Eli, and Ochek first meet Arik, Ochek intends to eat her. The group argues about whether this is right or wrong. Because Arik can speak and walks on two legs, Ochek argues that it is right to do anything to save your community. What do you think and who would you agree with?

- Ochek said: "All things are connected. Your world and this one, the sky and the land. All that is." What does this idea of interconnectedness mean to you?

- David A. Robertson has said that *The Barren Grounds* is an **allegory** about climate change and First Nations' land rights. What happens to the environment and nature when things are not in balance? How do Morgan and Eli's stories about being taken from their families, and Ochek's story of loss of land and culture, mirror the stories of Indigenous people in Canada today?

Allegory: a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one.

Sign up for *The Barren Grounds* Family Reading Kit Book Club to receive more activities, resources, and invites to programs and events right in your inbox! Register online at calgarylibrary.ca/family-reading-kits

An Activity for your Family to Do Together

The book tells us the origin story of the Ochekatchakosuk constellation. Learn more about Indigenous sky stories and the constellations we can see in our night sky, including what different people and cultures have called them throughout the ages. Spend an evening with your family finding them in the sky. You can plot their stars, write down as many different names as you can find for them, and read about their origins. Find programs for all ages to learn about space, the night sky, and more at the Library, or visit the University of Calgary's Rothney Astrophysical Observatory.

