

Using
Little Voice
in the classroom

It's 1978, and eleven-year-old Ray, unhappy both at school and at home in her northern Ontario town, has been growing more silent and withdrawn since her father's death in a logging accident. Then Ray gets the chance to spend summers with her Ojibway grandmother, who helps Ray find her own identity and speak in her own strong voice.

- Invite discussion about why Ray feels unhappy at the beginning of the story. What makes her unhappy at school? What problems does she have at home?
- Invite discussion about what Ray's grandma means when she says that Ray must come forward with her own voice? Why is it important to find your own voice?
- Ask your students what wild foods do Grandma and Ray eat in the book? What is bannock and how is it made? Students could demonstrate making bannock in class.
- Have students write a paragraph describing Ray's grandma. What are the different kinds of work Ray's grandma does? What characteristics make her a good healer? How does she help Ray? Similarly, what does the old man, Hitz, mean to Ray? How does he help her? How about Joshua?
- Ray learns things at school and she also learns things from Grandma. There are two different ways of teaching. Ask your students what Ray learns from her Grandma. What are the ways Grandma teaches her? Why does Grandma tear up Ray's drawing of a plant?
- All cultures have good manners that people learn to live by. Invite discussion describing some of the good manners Ray learned about living among Ojibway people in Grandma's village. How would the class behave to show respect to an elder, such as Grandma or Joshua?
- Grandma and Kate (Ray's mother) have very different relationships with Ray. Invite discussion on how are they different. In what ways does Grandma act as Ray's mentor? Do grandmothers always have a different relationship with kids than mothers do? Have students describe differences in the relationships they have with parents and grandparents.
- Have students write about the animals appear in the story. What does Ray learn from them? For example, what does Ray learn from her contact with the bear cub, Fur Ball? What gift or talent does Ray discover through the seagull, False Teeth?
- Ray's grandma begins to train her as a healer. Invite discussion about what qualities Ray has by the end of the story that suggests she might make a good healer. Have them write about how Ray has changed by the end of the story. What has she learned? Discuss how the story itself illustrates a Native way of teaching.