

Son of A Trickster Unit Plan

<p>Resources used and possible concerns</p>	<p><i>Son of a Trickster</i> Novel by Eden Robinson</p> <p>Possible concerns: Although the novel follows the story of Jared, a 16 year old Grade 10 student, there are numerous content warnings that may present challenges when teaching this novel.</p> <p>Sensitive elements include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frequent drug and alcohol use ● Sexual content ● Reference to self-harm and cutting ● Violence ● Swearing <p>Students/parents/administration will need to be prepared to cover this sensitive material and alternatives may need to be provided.</p>
<p>Author/creator and/or literature background</p>	<p>Eden Robinson - member of Haisla and Heltsuik nations in Northern BC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Born in Kitimat BC -Her work is often given the label “Northern BC Gothic” due to the dark and macabre content; Robinson often lists Stephen King and Edgar Allan Poe as influences -Her literary work is typically set in Northern BC and tells the stories of contemporary Indigenous youth -She is one of the most prominent living Canadian Indigenous writers and frequently addresses Indigenous issues and perspectives in the press -Other work includes <i>Monkey Beach</i> and <i>Traplines</i> <p><i>Son of A Trickster</i> - book one of the Trickster trilogy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Follows 16 year old Jared Martin, a grade 10 student in Kitimat BC who sells weed brownies to help support his family. Jared tries to just get through high school while taking care of the people around him, but he often drinks too much and smokes too much weed and believes that he is hallucinating magical creatures. -The novel ties Haisla mythology with the daily life experiences of a 16 year old self-described “random town Native” (22) -The book deals with themes of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The role of chosen and biological family

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The responsibility of spiritual gifts ● The tension between Western and Indigenous worldviews ● Addictions and substance use ● Family conflict ● Coming of age <p>-The book was adapted into a CBC television series <i>Trickster</i> and was featured on CBC Canada Reads 2020</p>
<p>UPE course connections (not exhaustive)</p>	<p>EDUC 530 Indigenous Education - This novel presents a unique perspective and could be used to give pre-service teachers insight into contemporary urban Indigenous life as well as the role that residential schools played in creating intergenerational trauma (as students may have people that are close to them that attended residential school). It could also be used to teach pre-service teachers about the trickster character archetype that is present in the stories of many Indigenous cultures. Using the sharing circle lesson plan may also be helpful in decolonizing the classroom and encouraging every person to contribute to a dialogue (rather than just the students that consistently raise their hands)</p> <p>EDUC 450 Diversity in Learning - The novel gives insight into the lives of young people that experience poverty and instability with home/family, so it me be helpful for pre-service teachers who have not experienced poverty to understand what it would be like to be a student like Jared trying to complete high school while also coping with economic hardships.</p> <p>EDUC 460 or 535 Specialization I/II - Secondary English - This novel could be used to create a novel study unit/lesson plan as it would be an attractive text to teach (it is written by a well known Canadian Indigenous author, which fulfills the “Canadian text” requirement, and has many elements Young Adult literature that would appeal to young people, including a TV show based on the novel). As this text contains some mature content, it would not be suitable for Elementary level courses.</p>
<p>K-12 connection</p>	<p>Given the maturity level of the content, this <i>Son of A Trickster</i> would likely only be suitable for high school aged students (grades 10-12).</p> <p>The novel fits the “Long Text” requirement for ELA 10,20, and 30 and is by a Canadian author</p>

Materials	<i>Son of A Trickster</i> novel (class set)
Rationale	<p>Big idea: Students will engage in a novel study of <i>Son of a Trickster</i> building towards a critical response for 20-1 & 30-1 students or a Literary Exploration for 20-2 & 30-2 students.</p> <p>Purpose: This unit plan provides a framework for teaching <i>Son of A Trickster</i> building towards having students write a Critical Response to Text (CRT) for -1 level ELA or a Literary Exploration (-2) on the novel. It outlines lessons that cover key decolonizing concepts that would be essential for understanding this text and includes discussion questions for each cluster of chapters as well as essay questions for CRT and Lit Ex.</p>
Lesson/activities	<p><u>Lesson Plans</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introductory sharing circle - As the importance of family, kinship, and community is a key theme in this text, the novel study can begin with a sharing circle to build community. The teacher will begin by introducing the colonial idea of family (biological, patriarchal, nuclear, etc.) and challenge this by introducing the Indigenous concept of kinship (looking at “all my relations”; biological, non-biological, chosen, ecological, ancestors and descendants, etc.) Proper protocols should be followed (circle moves to the left, one student talking at a time, passing is okay etc.). The guiding question for the circle can be “where do you come from?” and students should be encouraged to explore this question as much as they see fit. Students may have difficulties talking about family, so it would be important to frame this as a decolonizing and community building exercise where students can share as much or as they feel comfortable with. As sharing circles may be new to some students, it is important to clearly outline the rules while in circle and to embed circle time throughout the unit, as students will become more comfortable with the idea of sharing (and circles can be used for formative assessments) 2. Background on trickster stories - The trickster archetype is seen throughout Indigenous narratives, so having students understand the common traits of a trickster

character would be a good place to start. Students could watch a YouTube video on Tricksters here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RW1ChiWyiZQ>. Students could participate in activities such as: a) brainstorming other trickster characters in popular media b) developing and presenting their own brief trickster narratives/skits c) discussing how trickster stories fail to fall into a binary of good vs. evil

3. The political - Given the presence of political groups such as Idle No More in *Son of A Trickster*, it would be prudent to have students understand some of the political issues of contemporary Indigenous people. Students could work in small groups to research Indigenous political events/groups such as Idle No More, Ipperwash, Oka, Wet'suwet'en, MMIW, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, etc. It may be wise to connect and collaborate with the Social Studies curriculum.
4. Kinship - Given the prominence of kinship and family in *Son of A Trickster*, a lesson on the role of kinship in Indigenous cultures would help students understand some of the different ways of being and belonging in *Son of A Trickster*. Numerous videos of Elders explaining kinship can be found on the Walking Together website here: <http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/kinship/#beginning-together>. When introducing this topic, it would be important to highlight the fact that there is a huge diversity between Indigenous cultures, and this notion of kinship is not something that can be collapsed into a single narrative or way of being. This lesson can include another sharing circle where students can choose to talk about or share a story about someone that they consider "kin" even though they may or may not be biologically related to this person. A second round of the sharing circle could discuss what responsibilities that students have to their kin/family.

Discussion Questions

Chapter 1-6

- 1) Discuss the difference in worldviews between Nana Sophia (who thinks Jared is a Trickster) and Jared's Mom, who accuses Nana Sophia of believing in "old school crap" (3)
- 2) How does the author use characterization to develop each of the main characters in the opening chapters?
- 3) Who is the speaker in Chapter 2? What is the significance of the change in font?
- 4) How does Jared respond to his mom's saying, "the world is hard. You have to be harder"? (17)
- 5) How does Jared's description of himself as a "random town Native" contrast with other characters such as his Mother, Father, and Dylan? (22)
- 6) What is the significance of Nana Sophia's introduction at the beginning of Chapter 5? What about the fact that she talks to Jared through Facebook? How is she different from Jared's other Grandmother (Anita Moody)? How do the two grandmothers compare to Mrs. Jaks?
- 7) Why is Jared's best friend a dog when despite the fact that he has many relationships with people?
- 8) What is the significance of Jared's encounter with the Girl with "Smurf-blue hair" who claims that her "mother was a Selkie"?

Chapter 7-11

- 1) Why does Jared want to flatter Richie by getting the same haircut?
- 2) How does Jared's family contrast that of a stereotypical patriarchal family? How have residential schools impacted Jared's family?
- 3) Why does Jared's mom believe that people are going to "use" him because of his big heart? (68)
- 4) What is Jared's motivation to make the weed cookies?
- 5) Why does Jared take care of Dylan when he's drunk?
- 6) Why does Jared shrug off his encounter with Wee'git on the bus by thinking that "Christmas always brings out the crazies" (85)? Does he believe Wee'git?
- 7) What are Jared's obligations to Destiny?
- 8) What is the significance of the "Requiem for the Trilobites" chapter? What is the connection between extinct creatures and Starbucks?

Chapters 12-18

- 1) Why does Jared's mom insist that Jared uses the nail gun to get revenge on David?
- 2) What is the significance of Jared's out of body experience with Mrs. Jaks after he is attacked by David?
- 3) If Jared believed that his Dad used to be "relentlessly honest", why does Jared assume the worst intentions? (115)
- 4) What is the significance of that fact that Jared's "inner voice surprise[s] him"? (125)
- 5) What is the significance of Sarah's outfits? How do they connect to her political activism?
- 6) Why is Jared so ambivalent towards politics?
- 7) Why does Destiny tell Jared's mom that Jared has been helping his Dad financially?

Chapters 19-23

- 1) What does Jared see in the woman who gives him a ride that was "as dark as cedar bark, with large yellowed fangs and knobby, twisted knuckles"? (148) What would you imagine this to look like?
- 2) What does the speaker mean in chapter 20 when they say that they believe the reader would "still trust a human face to be a human"? Who is the speaker? (159)
- 3) What is the significance of Sarah calling Mrs. Jaks and Jared's Mom "colonized" or "bourgeois goons" (171).
- 4) What is Jared's reaction when Sarah accuses him "thinking in Western binaries"? (174) How does Sarah characterize Jared's relationship with Dylan?
- 5) What is the significance of Jared's encounter with the talking ravens and crows?

Chapters 24-28

- 1) What do you make of Maggie's apology to Jared?
- 2) What is the significance of Jared's dream? Are his communications with "Monster Gran" real? (190)
- 3) What is going on with Jared's mother in Chapter 26? How does Jared cope?
- 4) What's the significance of the story of the shaman with two sons?
- 5) Jared "wanted to believe" his parents, but does he?

How does Jared feel about his mom's drug use? What are Jared's responsibilities as a son to deal with his parents' problems?

- 6) What is the effect of both Richie and Jared's mom telling Jared difficult family stories over text? Why does Richie tell Jared his story and want Jared to text his mom? What do these stories reveal about each character?
- 7) What do you make of the family reunion at the end of chapter 28

Chapters 29-32

- 1) How do Sarah's actions when her Uncles come to visit reveal her conception of Family? Is her conception of family decolonized? Who does she feel a sense of belonging to? How does this differ from Jared's?
- 2) What is Jared seeing at the end of chapter 29? How does Jared negotiate what is reality and what is not?
- 3) What is the significance of the reappearance of Baby Killer?
- 4) How does the discussion of the nature of the universe in chapter 31 relate to what is going on in Jared's life? What characteristics are a trickster given in this chapter?
- 5) How does Dylan shape his identity around hockey and how does this change when he quits?
- 6) What is the significance of Jared's house smelling like sweetgrass and cedar? (You may need to look this up) What does this reveal about Jared's mom?

Chapters 33-36

- 1) What is the significance of the fireflies? What are they saying and what do they mean?
- 2) Why does Jared cry when he learns that Mrs. Jaks is moving? What does their conversation about Jared's "sleepwalking" reveal about his conception of family?
- 3) If Jared knows if the versions of Baby Killer and Sarah that he sees aren't real and his inner voice is telling him to run, why doesn't he?
- 4) What does Fake Sarah say to justify her tricks? Does she have a point?
- 5) What does Jared's conversation with his mother about

magic and witches reveal about his mother's personality? How does it change how the reader might view his mother prior to this?

- 6) How does Jared's discussion with the otters about the Anthropocene complicate the otters' role as villains?
- 7) What information is revealed about Jared's powers at the end of chapter 36? Who is Wee'git?

Chapters 37-40

- 1) What is the significance of the Raven imagery from both Wee'git and Nana Sophia? (You might need to look up the significance of Ravens in Haisla and other First Nations' culture)
- 2) How does Nana Sophia's conception of family differ from that of Jared's and Jared's mom?
- 3) Why is Mr. Jaks so afraid of moving? What is his role in the novel?
- 4) Why is magic "like a tree"? Considering the change between italic and standard fonts, who is speaking during this passage? What actually happened with Sarah and Jared when the fireflies appeared like "a strand of DNA" (280)
- 5) What is the significance of the giant grizzly bear and how do its actions connect to what is going on throughout the remainder of the novel?
- 6) Why is Jared so sad when Mr. and Mrs. Jaks leave? Consider the difference between the structure of the Jaks family and Jared's family.
- 7) Compare and contrast the difference between Monster Gran and Nana Sophia. What role does each play in helping Jared recover?
- 8) Why do Jared's friends and family reject his new found sober lifestyle?
- 9) What is the significance of Granny Anita's letter at the end of the novel?

Essay Questions

Literary Exploration Essay questions:

- 1) What is your opinion of the idea that family plays an important role when individuals make life altering decisions?

	<p>2) What is your opinion of the idea that people are unable to truly escape their circumstances?</p> <p>3) What is your opinion of the idea that caring for others is an important quality?</p> <p>CRT Critical Response to Text Essay questions:</p> <p>1) Discuss the interplay between autonomy and the expectations of others when making decisions about the future.</p> <p>2) Discuss the role that guilt plays when individuals pursue their goals in life</p> <p>3) Discuss how individuals cope with the character flaws of another person</p>

Supporting Sources (APA):

Crash Course. (2017, July 21) *Tricksters: An Introduction: Crash Course World Mythology 20* [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RW1ChiWyiZQ>

Learn Alberta (2020) *Walking Together: First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum*. Retrieved August 26, 2020, from <http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/>

Lewis, J. (2017, November 9). *Eden Robinson*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. Retrieved August 26, 2020, from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/eden-robinson>

Robinson, E. (2018) *Son of A Trickster*. Vintage Canada.