Grandmother Drum

By: Wallace James Awasis of the Thundercloud First Nation in Saskatchewan

One day a young man was following a path in his dreams. He walked for many seasons knowing the Creator was guiding him. The Creator showed the young man all that he had created. The young man was fascinated with all that he had seen, but yet he felt alone inside his heart. The yearning within he could not understand. That evening when he had fallen asleep a vision came to him. In his dream he was running. He was running towards a sound that was beckoning him. It was a familiar sound. One that he had heard before. The sound turned into pulse, and he noticed he was no longer a young man. He had transformed into a baby, and was totally immersed in darkness. Yet, he was not afraid. He was in a quiet, safe and nurturing environment surrounded by the warmth of his mother’s blood. A pulse turned into a steady beat that sent shivers running up and down his spine. He began to dance, twist and turn. Songs flooded his mind, and his spirit suddenly came alive. He no longer felt alone. The yearning within subsided, and there in front of him stood the Creator. The Creator saw the young man’s happiness and decided to make him a special gift. It would be a gift of great significance. Something that the young man could carry with him at all times. The Creator asked the buffalo, eagle, wolf, and tree for help. The tree offered to give up his life so that the man could have the wood that he needed to make a frame.

The buffalo offered to give up his life so man could have a skin that he could stretch over the wooden frame. The wolf offered to make songs for the man to sing, and the eagle said he would fly in the sky to remind man of his spirituality and freedom. All they asked in return from the man were his prayers, tobacco, and respect. They agreed that if the young man took care of his mother’s heartbeat, his mother’s heart beat would in turn take care of him. In the morning the young man woke from his dream to find that he was clutching a round shaped object. It was a gift from the Creator. It was a drum. In his other hand was a stick. He began to hit the drum softly, and a song emerged from within. He howled like a wolf. An eagled screeched in the sky. The beat turned to thunder as rain fell from the sky. The young man drummed, and he danced and he sang. He knew he would never be alone again, for he carried his mother’s heartbeat with him wherever he went.

**The Red Sash**

**By: Jean E. Pendziwol**

**Illustrated by: Nicolas Debon**

**Part 1**

The sun is rising over Nanabijou who lies sleeping on the great sea Gitchee Gumee. My sister Isabelle and I wake up. I can see Mother though entrance of the wigwam. She and Grandmother are cooking breakfast over the fire, and the smell is making my stomach rumble with hunger. Isabelle and I dress quickly, careful not to wake the baby who is still sleeping on a warm bear hide.

Across the river, at Fort William I see smoke from many small fires rising above the canvas tents of the voyageurs. It is the time of the rendezvous, when winter traders paddle to Fort William with their pack of furs to meet the North West Company canoes coming from Montreal bringing supplies. Around the campfires, the voyageurs trade stories about the storms and fog on the big lakes, about portages and bears and racing across Lake Winnipeg.

Mother and I push our canoe into the water to cross the Kaministiquia River. I am not strong enough to carry two packs over a portage, but I am strong enough to help my mother paddle our canoe. Someday, I will carry three packs over the Mountain Portage at Kakabeka Falls, and I will have many stories to tell when I come to rendezvous.

But today we will work at Fort William.

I greet two voyageurs who stand on the wharf smoking their pipes, their bright red sashes blowing in the breeze. My father is a guide in a canoe du nord, just like the ones they paddle. Last fall, he left to follow the river highways beyond Lac La Pluie to Fort Gibraltar on the Red River. Maybe he will go as far as Athabasca. It is a hard life. Some do not come back for rendezvous. The winters are long and cold, food is difficult to find, and some of the rivers are wild.

But someday, I will go. I will paddle on the lake with many islands and see the Great Plains where the buffalo live. Then, I, too, will be a voyageur.

All around us, the fort is waking up. In the bakery, bread is rising and the oven is hot. Mother helps in the kitchen, and she sets the baby’s tikinnaagan down where she can see it. Isabelle works in the dairy. I go to look for eggs on the farm.

The rooster struts about on the fate to the pig pen, boasting in a loud voice. Inside the barn, the hens scratch for cracked corn on the ground. I fill a large makuk with eggs and carry it into the kitchen. Isabelle there too, with fresh butter and fresh buttermilk for the busy cook and his helpers. There will be a feast tonight in the Great Hall as more and more gentlemen arrive for rendezvous. Maybe my father will arrive today, too.

The blacksmith’s hammer bangs against the anvil, and I can smell the sweet scent of freshly cut wood as the carpenter cuts a log for the palisade wall. Some of the voyageurs are helping him.

“Would you like to go to the islands?” asks John as Isabelle and I stop for as drink at the well. John is the doctor’s son and he is older than I am. He is looking at me, but I think he is asking Isabelle.

There are hare on the Traverse Islands. It has been a long time since Grandmother has cooked hare.

We push our canoe into the river and paddle out onto the great sea. It is not far. I pretend that I am a voyageur and paddle hard to a little bay on the largest island. We lift our canoe out of the water and gently place it on the rocky beach. I go to set my snares on the furthest side of the island.

The scent of the warm earth and pine fills the air as I explore the woods and climb to the great cliffs. From here, I can see across the big bay. A brigade of canoes from Montreal is nearing the feet of Nanabijou. I wait and watch. The canoes are coming closer – the voyageurs are paddling hard.

Behind me, the sky has grown dark. Black clouds boil up over the eerie green beneath them. I can feel the storm coming long before it touches the waters of the lake.

I quickly check my snares and find a fat brown hare! Scrambling down the cliff to the beach, I look for Isabelle and John. I cannot see them.

Just then, the storm hits. The trees behind, me moan and groan in loud, angry voices.

The wind pushes them until their trunks bend and snap. I find shelter among the boulders along the shore. Out on the lake the waters are turning to foam.

The icy green waves hurry and tumble over each other not knowing which way to go. I can see them crashing against the rocks of the point with a surge of white spray. Rain is falling but I can hardly feel it, for the wind has caught the waves, picking them up and dropping them over me until my clothes are soaked.

**Part 2**

I stumble over the boulders around the island. From here, I can see the voyageurs’ canoes. They are much closer now. These men are not singing. They are paddling hard to get to the shelter of the island. In the middle of one canoe sits a gentleman, holding onto his beaver felt hat.

I scramble along the slippery shore and wade out to the water, hoping to catch the bow of the first canoe. But I lose my footing and fall. The water is so cold! When I get back to my feet, the gentleman’s canoe is nearly on top of me, so I grab the bow and steady it. It is almost full of water. The voyageurs jump out and lift the gentleman ashore. I can see now that the birch bark bottom is torn.

The other canoes are waiting off shore. They are piled with packs holding blankets, beads, trinkets, pots, and tobacco to trade with the Indians for furs. It is too rocky for the canoes to come ashore here, and the squall is already easing. They will continue on to Fort William. But the gentleman’s canoe cannot go any further today.

“Well, you are a fine young voyageur,” says the gentleman. He has a strong Scottish accent. “I would sign on, but it seems I am without a canoe!” I almost smile. Just then, I Isabelle and John arrive. They have been looking for me. I stand up straight and tall, ignoring the wind and wet. “We have a canoe,” I say. “It is across the island in the shelter of the bay. We can paddle you to Fort William.

**Part 3**

The wind is calmer and the rain has stopped. It has been a long journey for the gentleman and Fort William is so close.

I sit in the bow of the canoe with the hare lying at my feet. My paddle is flashing as it dips in and out of the sparkling blue water. The gentleman sits in the middle, and the Northwest Company flag is flying.

John and Isabelle paddle, too. The waves are still large, and we have to work hard to reach the mouth of the river. As we approach, we begin to sing. “En roulant ma boule roulant!” Cannon fire announces our arrival and bagpipes play in greeting.

But before we reach the wharf, I hear an echo of our song. “Roulis-roulant ma boule roulant! En roulant ma boule roulant! En roulant ma boule!”

And then the voyageurs whoop and cheer as the bend of the river, red paddles flashing as they dip in and out of the sparkling blue water. There are six canoes from the North and I see my father sitting in one of them!

A crowd is gathered to meet the canoes. Mother is there. Father smiles at her, and then looks at me and Isabelle sitting in the canoe with the gentleman. I will have a good story to tell around the campfire tonight. But first I help them to unload the

packs of furs that have travelled from deep in the wilds of the Indian territories – wolf, muskrat, deer, fox, buffalo, mink ...but most important, beaver. I can only carry one pack at a time.

Father has gifts for us all. There is a ribbon for the baby’s tikinaaganm, an ivory comb for Mother, and beads for Isabelle, a fabric pouch filled with colourful beads. Father turns to me, and I wait eagerly.

“You have grown, my little voyageur,” he says. “It looks like you will be needing this sooner than expected.”

My father hands me a bright red sash, the sash of the voyageur.

It is dark, but no one in the fort is sleeping. Inside the Great Hall, the women have joined the men. The fiddler is playing a reel, and the elegantly dressed gentleman dance with the girls of the fort. Mother and Father are dancing, too.

Isabelle and John are dancing in the square. The voyageurs dance along with them. They are telling stories about cold winters and wild animals, long portages and turbulent rapids. They are wrestling and playing games. They are happy to be here after such a long winter, after paddling many hard days. They are happy to celebrate rendezvous. My bright red sash blows in the breeze. I begin to dance too.

C**hallenging Words to Focus On**

**beaver birch blacksmith mink rendezvous\_ snare wharf sash anvil squall trinkets buttermilk palisade portage nord muskrat boule voyageur Athabasca bagpipes campfire Gibraltar gitchee kakabeka kaministiquia montreal nanabijou pluie roulant roulis Scottish someday tikinnaagan Winnipeg wigwam**

**Linear and Circular Story Mapping Procedure**

1. Read, and listen to both the Red Sash and The Grandmother’s Drum.

2. As a class decide upon the story’s events.

3. Put events into chronological order.

4. Teacher demonstrates circular story mapping.

Questions to Ask Students

* 1. What would you do first?
  2. Name the events you would use.
  3. What possible pictures could you use?
  4. Where does your last picture go?
  5. Do your pictures tell the whole story?

5. Students do their own circular story mapping using the graphic organizers below.

**Grandmother’s Drum Circular Story Mapping**

**The Red Sash: Linear Story Mapping**

**Setting/s**

**Main Characters**

1. **Beginning**

**2. Middle**

**3. End**