

WE BELONG TO THE DRUM



Sandra Lamouche

illustrated by
Azby Whitecalf

BA-BOOM, BA-BOOM.

That is the sound of belonging.

Nikosis grew up going to powwows with his family, happily immersed in music, dance and the sounds of the drum. But when he starts going to daycare, he doesn't feel like he belongs. Nikosis cries every time his mother leaves him in the unfamiliar environment until, one day, she and the teachers use drums to help Nikosis find connection and comfort.

Inspired by her son's experience—and her family's love of powwow music and dance—Indigenous educator and champion hoop dancer Sandra Lamouche shares this uplifting true story of the transformative effects of culturally safe and inclusive early childhood education.

Sandra Lamouche is a nêhiyaw iskwêw (Cree Woman) from the Bigstone Cree Nation in northern Alberta. She is a wife, mother of two boys with braids, champion women's hoop dancer, award-winning educator and two-time TEDx speaker. She has a bachelor of arts in Native American studies and is currently completing a thesis on Indigenous dance as a determinant of well-being. Sandra and her family live in Blackfoot Territory (Treaty 7), the heart of powwow country in southern Alberta.

Azby Whitecalf is a Plains Cree character designer and illustrator based out of North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Treaty 6 Territory. They have a bachelor's degree in visual communication (character design) from the Alberta University of the Arts. An important part of their practice is creating accurate and positive representations of Indigenous Peoples and cultures and exploring what it is to portray Indigenous people in a way that captures their multidimensional identities. They are the illustrator of *Buffalo Wild!* Azby enjoys working with bright colors, strong contrast and fun shapes.



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We Belong to the Drum

Author: Sandra Lamouche

May 16, 2023

Illustrator: Azby Whitecalf

In this illustrated picture book, a child who's away from his family for the first time at daycare finds belonging through the music of the powwow drum.

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8.75 × 10.75"

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KEY SELLING POINTS

- A culturally-specific take on the universal challenge of the separation anxiety that comes with starting daycare or school.
- Showcases the power of cultural connection for the well-being of Indigenous children.
- Author Sandra Lamouche is a multidisciplinary creator and storyteller, champion hoop dancer and award-winning Indigenous educational leader. She was inspired by educator Shelley Moore, who said, "Inclusion is about responding to student need, not forcing students to respond to us."
- Includes a glossary of Plains Cree kinship terms.
- A Plains Cree/English dual-language edition, *We Belong to the Drum / mistikwaskihk kitipêyimikonaw*, is also available.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



DEFINE YOURSELF PHOTOGRAPHY

SANDRA LAMOUCHE is a nêhiyaw iskwêw (Cree Woman) from the Bigstone Cree Nation in northern Alberta. She is a wife, mother of two boys with braids, champion women's hoop dancer, award-winning educator and two-time TEDx speaker. She has a bachelor of arts in Native American studies and is currently completing a thesis on Indigenous dance as a determinant of well-being. Sandra and her family live in Blackfoot Territory (Treaty 7), the heart of powwow country in southern Alberta.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR



YANNICK DUPUIS

AZBY WHITECALF is a Plains Cree character designer and illustrator based out of North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Treaty 6 Territory. They have a bachelor's degree in visual communication (character design) from the Alberta University of the Arts. An important part of their practice is creating accurate and positive representations of Indigenous Peoples and cultures and exploring what it is to portray Indigenous people in a way that captures their multidimensional identities. They are the illustrator of *Buffalo Wild!* Azby enjoys working with bright colors, strong contrast and fun shapes.

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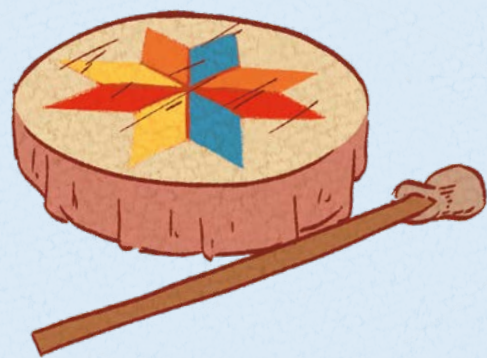
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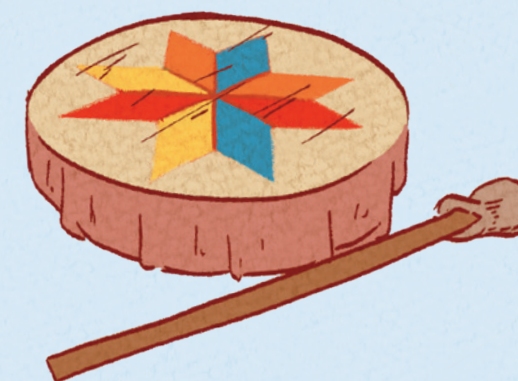
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WE BELONG TO THE DRUM

Sandra Lamouche
illustrated by Azby Whitecalf



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Ohkoma
his grandmother

Okâwiya
his mother

Nikosis

Ohtâwiya
his father



Nikosis had been listening to the drum before he was born.

BA-BOOM,
BA-BOOM,
BA-BOOM,
BA-BOOM!

Ohkoma says this is the first sound we hear—our mother's heartbeat.





Nikosis spent his first summer on Mother Earth traveling to many powwows.

As Nikosis grew he learned to love the movement and music of powwow.

Okâwiya loved to dance. Ohtâwiya loved to sing and drum.
The drum made Nikosis want to dance.



The drum made him want to sing.

WAAY YA

HEY YA

HO!



The drum made him want to have a nap.



After summer was over, Nikosis started daycare. He didn't like it very much. He cried every time Okâwiya left.





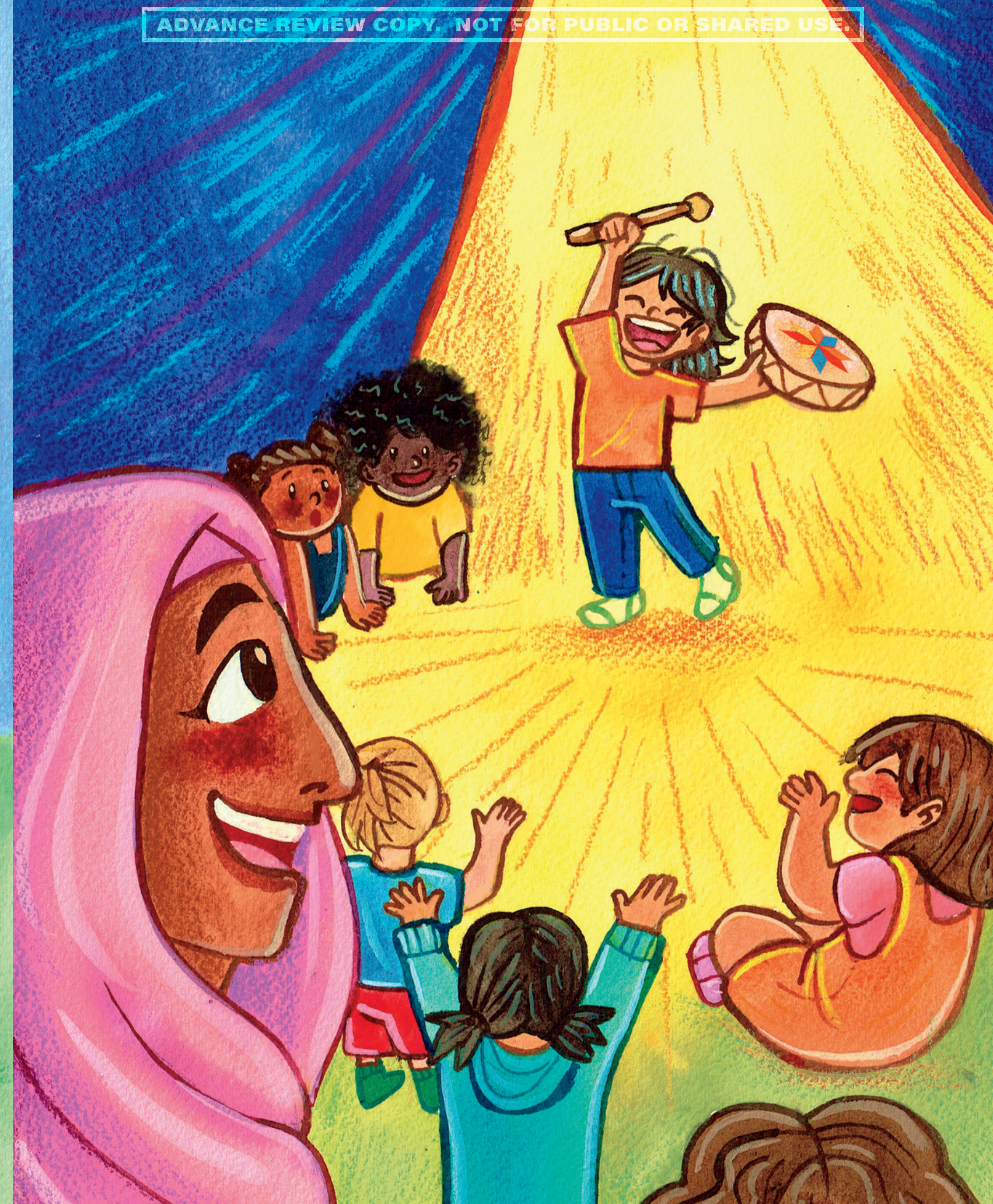
Then Okâwiya had an idea. The next day she brought in a powwow CD for everyone to listen to. The daycare staff were so excited that they started playing drum music from around the world for the children.

When Nikosis heard the powwow music, he looked over.
To him it sounded different from all the other drums.

BA-BOOM,
BA-BOOM,
BA-BOOM,
BA-BOOM!



He went to a toy drum in the room, called his friends over and showed them how to drum.





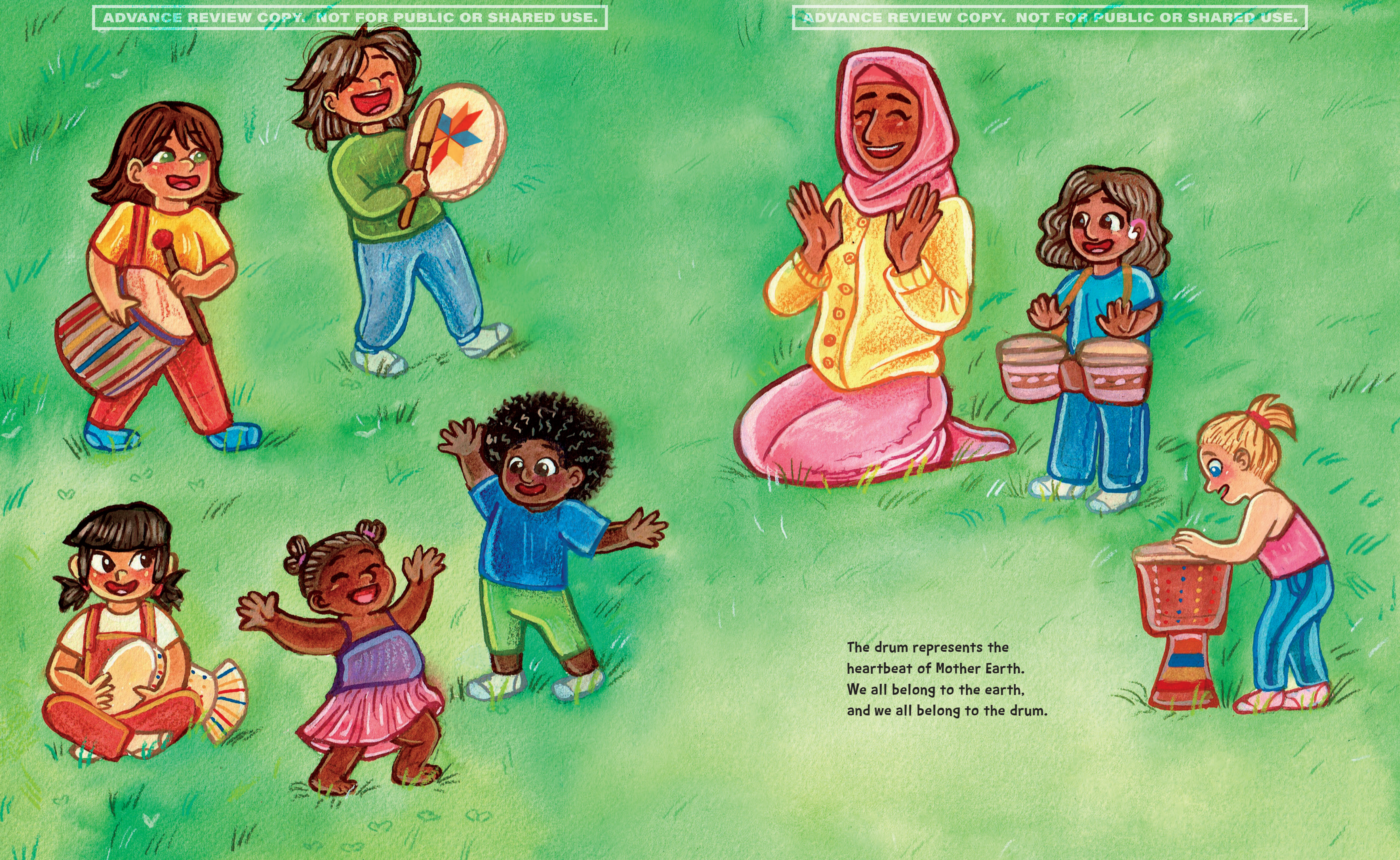
They watched powwow videos, and he told them about his summers with Ohkoma. It was the first time anyone had heard him talk about his family.

The next morning Nikosis grabbed his own shoes and coat and went to the door. Okâwiya didn't have to fight with him to get him dressed.





When Nikosis went to daycare, he no longer cried. He felt safe and happy. He belonged at daycare with his friends.



The drum represents the
heartbeat of Mother Earth.
We all belong to the earth,
and we all belong to the drum.

PLAINS CREE WORDS FOR FAMILY

In English, we use the words *my*, *your*, *his*, *her* or *their* to show how people in a family are related. In Cree, those family words have the “possessive” built right in. In the English version of this story, the Cree words are treated like proper names. When speaking Cree, those same words change their form, depending on who is speaking and how people are related.



niya *me*
kiya *you*
wiya *him/her/their*
kiyânaw *us*



nôhkom *my grandmother*
kôhkom *your grandmother*
ohkoma *his/her/their grandmother*



nimosôm *my grandfather*
kimosôm *your grandfather*
omosôma *his/her/their grandfather*

nikâwiy *my mother*
kikâwiy *your mother*
okâwiya *his/her/their mother*

nôhtâwiy *my father*
kôhtâwiy *your father*
ohtâwiya *his/her/their father*

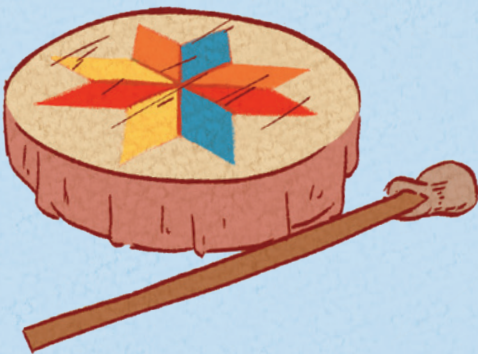


nitânis *my daughter*
kitânis *your daughter*
otânisa *his/her/their daughter*

nikosis *my son*
kikosis *your son*
okosisa *his/her/their son*



Nikosis



It is important to me that my children are raised knowing their culture and identity. My oldest son was born in 2008, and this story is based on his experience at daycare. The drum music was so important to his feeling of belonging, of being accepted for who he was and not changing himself to fit into the group. If he could be so affected at such a young age just by having his culture and identity acknowledged, what could this do for other children—older ones too? This experience became my inspiration in my work in education, where I find myself continually advocating for inclusion of Indigenous students’ culture and identity. It’s important that Nikosis’s daycare providers were interested in and took the time to value his Indigenous culture. It sends the message to caregivers and educators that they can make a huge difference by using inclusive practices and resources. In the encouraging words of Brené Brown, “True belonging doesn’t require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are.”

—Sandra Lamouche

To nikosisak, my sons, and my family for being an inspiration! —S.L.

To all the little dancers, singers, drummers and everyone else on the powwow trail. Thank you for keeping our culture alive. —A.W.

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Summary: A child at daycare—away from his family for the first time—finds belonging through the music of the powwow drum, in this illustrated picture book.

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