

Bringing Métis Children's Literature to Life—The Beavers' Big House

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Overview of Story: *The Beavers' Big House* tells the story of a forest fire and how two beavers—Baptiste and Betsy—rally the other forest animals to fight it. The book teaches children valuable lessons such as the need for cooperation and preparedness.

Themes in this book:

- Ecosystems (water and fire)
- Animals
- Fire safety
- Cooperation
- Leadership

Possible Curriculum connections:

Language Arts

- Listen, comprehend, and respond
- Sequence
- Alliteration (names of animals)

Science:

- Elements of Fire (heat and temperature)
- Ecosystems—interdependence
- Environmental impacts
- Plant growth and development
- Interdependence (human and animal)

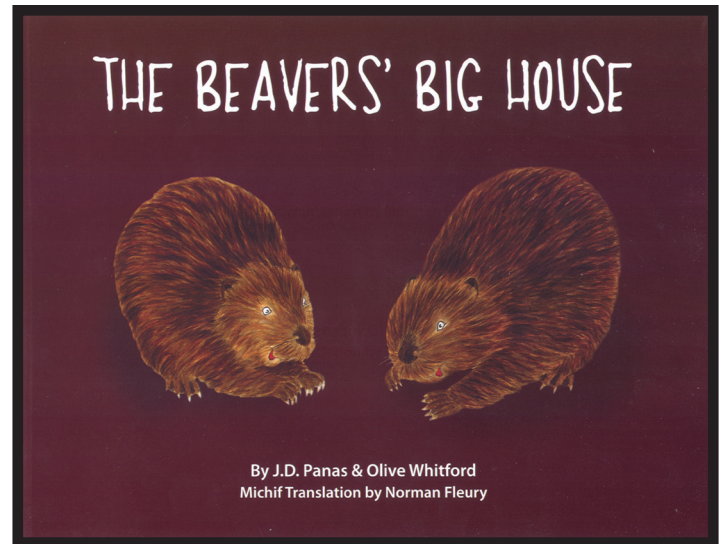
Health/Physical Education

- Fire prevention and safety
- Balance of work and play

Before Reading: Activate students [background knowledge](#) about fire safety by asking the students (in small groups or in the large group) to think about ways in which they could save themselves if there was a fire in the school or at home, both with prevention of a fire, and action during a fire. Then ask them to discuss how animals could save themselves if there was a forest fire.

During Reading: Read the first part of the book without interruption. When you arrive at the page where Betsy smells smoke, stop and ask the students to think about what might happen ([infer](#)) to the animals in a forest fire. What could they do to save themselves?

Continue reading until you get to the page where the animals seem defeated by the immensity of the fire. Have them return to their seats and write or draw the ending ([predict](#)). Share their creations with a small group or a partner. Then return to complete the reading.



After Reading: Fire Prevention and Safety Lesson:

1. Focus the students' attention on fire safety and the positive and negative effects of wildfires. Create a T-chart.

Positive Effects	Negative Effects

2. Ask the students about the fire. What started it? How was it put out? Were any of the animals hurt? What could have happened had it not been extinguished? Lead the questioning to wildfires, prevention and safety.
3. Discuss with students the importance of extinguishing fires while camping. The consequences may reach beyond the forest and animals to areas populated by humans and areas with property. However, the effects of a fire are not permanent and often lead to regrowth and the flourishing of many plants and animals. As the teacher is explaining this cycle, images of forests before, during, and the stages after can be shared to illustrate these cycles.
4. What part do humans play in this cycle? Causing the fires, intentionally or accidentally (explain to students the benefits and reasons for intentional forest fires).
5. Ask the students what it takes to start a fire. What elements are required for a fire to take place (heat, oxygen, and a fuel source). Then ask how we can prevent forest fires. Rules such as: drown the fire with water, ensure all embers, coals and sticks are thoroughly wet, stir the area with a shovel and add more dirt or water should be outlined with visuals. Other safety rules are not to play around the fire or with the fire, avoiding putting flammable materials near a fire, and allowing adults to be in charge of setting, maintaining, and extinguishing the fire. Be sure to emphasize awareness as a large part of this process.
6. Have each student create a poster that illustrates campfire safety rules that may be shared with local campgrounds for fire prevention and awareness.



Additional Post-Reading Lessons for *The Beaver's Big House*: Unique characteristics of Saskatchewan's forest animals

1. In this activity, students will understand about unique animal characteristics and their purpose in the ecosystem.
2. After reading ask students: How did Baptiste and Betsy get around? What did they spend their time doing? How did they collect the wood for the lodge?
3. Explain to students that Baptiste and Betsy would not be able to do these specific activities as well had they not had unique characteristics that helped them. For example, humans could not chew trees down, but beavers have strong teeth that do not stop growing which allow them to chew down trees. We can't live both "in" and "out" of water either.
4. Pick an animal from the book or several, and dress up a student volunteer for a feature-by-feature while explaining the special purpose for it. For example, beaver—cardboard tail: tail stores fat in winter, offers balance and steering while swimming, creates warning noise; thick coat and undercoat: protects from all climates; goggles: clear layer that covers their eyes while swimming; teeth: stick out in front of the lips so they can carry wood while under water without getting water in their mouth, teeth never stop growing, etc.
5. For the additional dress up animals, have the students speculate for what purpose each feature would serve.
6. As closure, students will invent an animal that they feel would have all the characteristics required to live in the forest and create an illustration and short explanation.



Make a Fire Escape Route Plan Lesson:

1. In this lesson, students will understand the importance of fire safety and how to safely exit their school or home. You may have to initiate a practice drill at the school.
2. After a fire drill in the school have the students compare and relate to the actions of the animals in *The Beavers' Big House* when notified of the fire. Ask students what they noticed that was similar or different. How should they have reacted? What is the procedure?
3. As a class discussion, list possible escape routes from the classroom, including alternatives such as windows, as well as confirming a safe meeting place for when the students have exited the school.
4. Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4 and give each group two copies of the school floor plan. Assign each group an area or room of the school; for example, the classroom and alternate classrooms used, library, bathrooms, and gym. Each group is to draw escape plans for each room.
5. Once students have completed their assignments, regroup as a class and discuss escape plans. Make necessary changes if necessary. Post one copy in the classroom and one in the area of the school that was covered. In addition, or on their own, have students create fire escape routes in their home.

