English Language Arts A30

In Search for April Raintree

By Beatrice Cullen



Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Beatrice Mosionier, also known as Beatrice Culleton was born in St. Boniface, Manitoba on August 27, 1949. When she was three years old, she became a ward of the Children's Aid Society. She grew up in foster homes, mostly away from her real parents and people. There were several years however, when Beatrice lived with her older sisters, two of which committed suicide later in life. Beatrice has written novels such as *April Raintree*, *In Search of April Raintree*, and a children's book called *Spirit of the White Bison*. Ms. Culleton has made great strides in promoting awareness of some of the struggles that the Métis peoples have faced.

**Review by Lillian Turner** (1985)

This revision of *In Search of April Raintree* was requested by the native education branch of Manitoba Education along with a teacher's guide, not seen by this reviewer. Culleton, herself a Métis who suffered the trauma of family separation, foster homes, and the suicides of two older sisters, has written an honest, poignant account of the toll exacted by poverty, alcoholism, prostitution, suicide, prejudice, and discrimination on the human spirit, and perhaps more importantly, the craving for self-identity of the native person lost in an urban environment.

Culleton has made April Raintree the spokesperson for the Métis. April and her younger sister Cheryl, when only six and four years old, were taken from their parents by the Children's Aid Society, first to a convent orphanage, and then to various foster homes. Even though often separated, they always thought about and wrote to each other. April was the white Métis, while Cheryl was totally Indian in appearance. Both children excelled in school, but while April dreamed of integrating into the white society, Cheryl dreamed of becoming a social worker finding her parents, rebuilding the family, and eventually helping children like herself.

Perhaps because of the immediacy of the first-person narrative, the reader is inevitably drawn into the controversy regarding attitudinal ethics and the question of foster homes and adoption of native children. *April Raintree* is an important addition to the supplementary reading list for native studies, Canadian family, and people in society courses, as well as thematic units in Canadian literature.

Introduction to April Raintree

1. Who are the Metis?
2. What biases and stereotypes about First Nations and Metis have been reflected in Canada’s history? (Think about Louis Riel, treaties, reserves, residential schools, child welfare system)
3. What impact have these prejudices had on Canadian Aboriginal peoples?
4. What forms of prejudice and discrimination of the First Nations and Metis are still evident today?

**Part One: Chapters 1-7 /20 Due: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

1. Who were the members of April’s family, and where did they live? (2)
2. Why do you think that people were rude to April’s mother? (2)
3. The narrator introduces many stereotypes regarding First Nations peoples. These biases and assumptions seem to be already internalized by April even though she is only six years old. Discuss how April’s feelings might impact on her future choices and identity. (4)
4. Compare April’s upbringing at the Dions with that of the DeRosiers. (4)
5. How does April feel about her Indian ancestry? (2)
6. Why was grade nine the worst school year April ever had? (2)
7. These chapters focus on the diverse experiences and developing identities of both April and Cheryl as they grow up in foster homes. The question of parents’ rights to their child’s health and well-being foreman important sub-theme in the novel. Compare Cheryl and April’s foster-home situations, and consider how the experiences of each shape her own views about her personal and cultural identity. (4)

**Part Two: Chapters 8-10 /10 Due: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

1. What offensive remarks was Cheryl saying to April? What did April say to defend herself? (2)
2. What were some of the patronizing remarks the women at the party made? Do you think that they meant to be racists? Were they? (2)
3. These chapters focus on life after foster care. April chooses a marriage that promises economic and social security. Cheryl becomes actively involved with the Friendship Centre to reach out to other Aboriginal youth who need help to find their way. Cheryl’s activism in support of First Nations and Métis peoples is often regarded as a positive outcome of her early introduction to Aboriginal issues through her education. From your experience and knowledge, would you say that her education has been adequate? (2)
4. How has the representation of Aboriginal issues in school changed? (2)
5. What do you think is still needed to provide an unbiased portrayal of Aboriginal history and culture? (2)

**Midterm Test on April Raintree: 20 marks Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

 If you have read up to this point, you will do fine. (Paragraph Responses)

**Midterm Report:** Please choose one of the following “projects” to research. This report should be 2 pages and contain a minimum of 4 resources. You need to give a minimum of 5 facts either cited or paraphrased. You must discuss how it connects to the novel. (30) Please see the rubric.

1. **Policy of assimilation:** Policies adopted by governments are enforced by legislation and programs to assimilate ethnic minorities into the dominant culture of a country. This effectively eliminates the culture of that ethnic minority. Consider the ways that this takes place. An example would be the residential schools that Aboriginal Peoples were forced to attend.
2. **Isolation:** Aboriginal youth have a much higher dropout rate than non-aboriginal youth, and “[s]uicide rates are five to seven times higher for First Nations youth than for non-aboriginal youth” (Health Canada). People need to feel that they belong and that they are valued. Otherwise, they experience depression, hopelessness, or a loss of cultural identity. Why are First Nations people having their access to government services limited or denied? Why might this form of isolation lead them to consider dropping out or committing suicide as options?
3. **Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women:** For decades, indigenous women in Canada have been disappearing and dying violently at alarming rates. An unprecedented RCMP report, released in 2014, found there were 1,181 police-reported cases of homicides and long-term disappearances involving indigenous women and girls between 1980 and 2012. Shortly after the RCMP report was published, 15-year-old Tina Fontaine’s body was pulled from a Winnipeg river – a high-profile homicide case that reignited calls for a national inquiry into the violence. What are some of the underlying issues? What about missing and murdered Indigenous men? What are some concerns about this Inquiry?

**Part Three: Chapters 11-14 /35 Due: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

1. Describe the conversation April had with her sister at the hospital. What has her sister revealed?
2. Why do you think the rapists referred to April as a squaw?
3. How will this tragic event affect her life?(2)
4. Find out a minimum of 7 facts for each of the following court cases. Remember that you want FACTS, so please do not use Wikipedia or sites “dedicated” to the victims unless you are sure your information is right. There are a lot of opinions surrounding these cases, so read a variety of texts. Be sure you discuss the outcome of the trial within your facts. **/21**
5. Helen Betty Osborne
6. Pamela George Murder Trial
7. Tisdale Rape Case
8. The sexual assault scene is a graphic portrayal of violence against women. Violence against Aboriginal women, in particular, continues to be a pervasive issue. *Stolen Sisters: Discrimination and Violence Against* *Indigenous Women* tells the stories of nine Aboriginal women who have been raped and murdered. The website states “…young Indigenous women are five times more likely than other women of the same age to die as the result of violence… Indigenous women have long struggled to draw attention to violence within their own families and communities. Canadian police and public officials have also long been aware of a pattern of racist violence against Indigenous women in Canadian cities – but have done little to prevent it.” Here is an important question to guide thinking through this chapter in the story: Some people argue that the sexual assault scene should be cut from the novel, especially for young readers. Others argue that the scene is necessary to the overall vision of the text. What position do you agree with and why? /5
9. In this portion, Cheryl and April attend a powwow in Roseau River. Cheryl recites a piece that she wrote in university that was never published, because it was thought to be too controversial. Would this be considered controversial today and why or why not? (2)
10. Reflect on Cheryl’s message and its importance in relation to our present-day environmental issues. What connections do you see between how Aboriginal peoples have been treated, both past and present, and the detrimental factors affecting our current environmental situation? (3)

Just a side note: *The Elders Are Watching,* by David Bouchard and Roy Henry Vickers, is a message of concern from Aboriginal leaders of the past and a plea to respect the natural treasures of the environment. If you ever have the opportunity, take a look at this picture book and perhaps compare Cheryl’s message to the message of this picture book and/or other texts that address environmental issues and responsibility.

**Part Four: Chapters 15- 17 /5 Due: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

1. Despite having a few flaws, how does Roger help April realize that she is not solving her internal conflict?
2. Cheryl is drinking because she is trying to mask the pain. What has hurt her the most and how/why?
3. What do we learn about Cheryl? Why do you think she does this?

1. In Chapter 8, Cheryl makes a prediction that seems to come true in this chapter. What is it?
2. Who is Henry Lee, and who will raise him?