

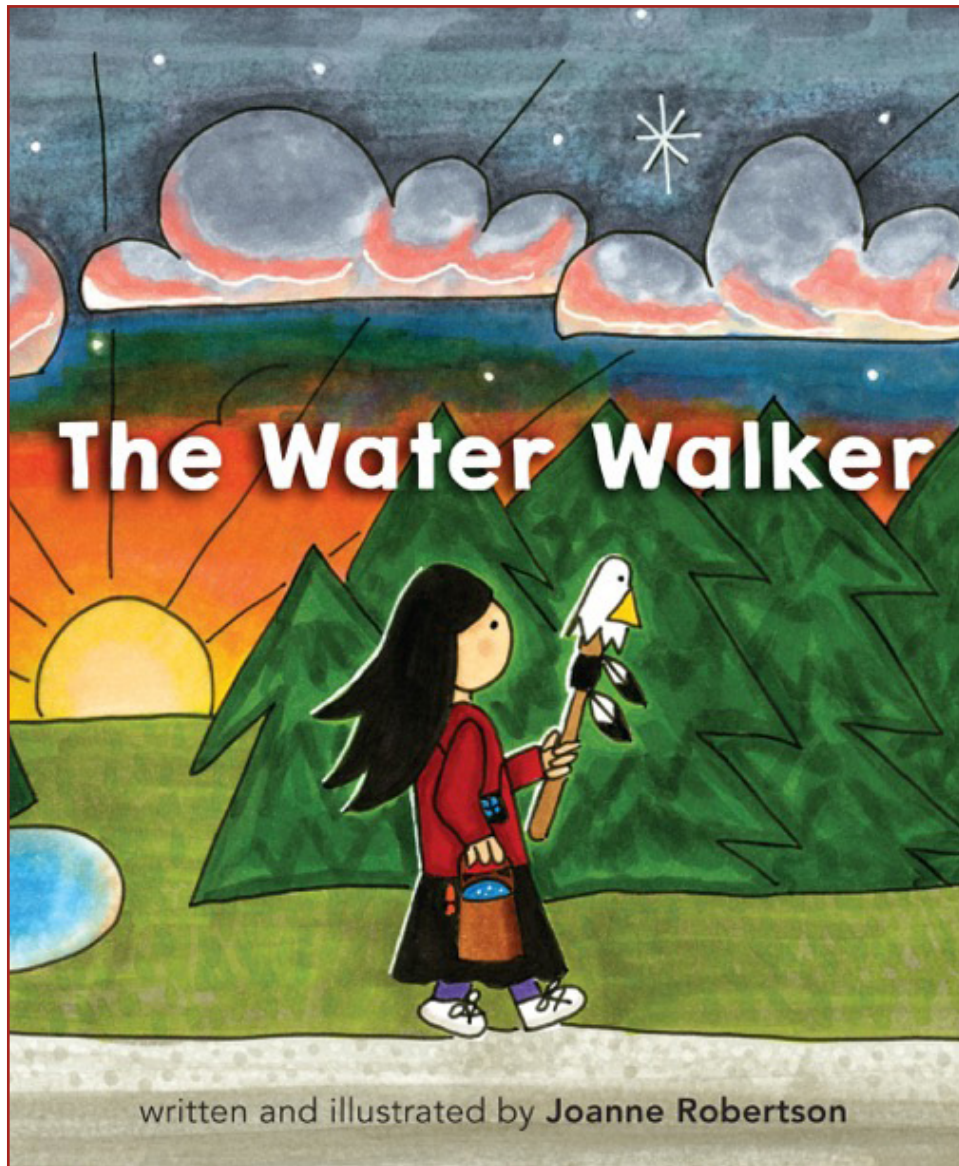
# The Water Walker

Written and Illustrated by Joanne Robertson

•••● **TEACHER GUIDE** ●•••

Written by Laura Horton

With editing by Colinda Clyne



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## SUMMARY ●●●●

Nokomis Josephine Mandamin responds to a call to action and a dream requesting help for Nibi (water). Water is in danger from pollution, wastage, and humans forgetting that we cannot survive without it. In response, Nokomis and her kwewok niichiis (women friends) decide to bring attention to this danger to the water and become Water Walkers. They lift a copper pail of water, walk thousands of kilometers, and sing and pray for every stream, river, and lake they pass. Nokomis hopes her actions will get people to act in a good way for the Water. She asks everyone, “What will you do for the water?”

## LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ●●●●

- ✱ Ojibway Language—Also known as Nishnaabemwin or Anishnaabemwin. Learn and use the Ojibway words given in the book. Pronunciations are given. They will soon become as familiar to you as “moccasin, moose, tipi, and Canada”.
- ✱ Social Activism—Our society faces many challenges. If we all choose an issue and act in a positive, respectful manner that leads to solutions, we can bring about change.
- ✱ Character Education: Integrity—is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. Taking action with a strong mind, heart, and spirit will help us effect positive change and build character. Another building block of character is perseverance. It is worth sticking to a task in order to get it done: to work through the many problems along the way, to work collaboratively, to ask for help when needed, to draw attention to issues that can be solved.
- ✱ Social Studies—Study North American water systems and direction of flow.

## ENGLISH VOCABULARY ●●●●

Respect	Disrespect
Waste	Responsibility
Protect	Urgency
Devastating	Petroglyphs
Gratitude	Turtle Island (North America)



# NISHNAABEMWIN VOCABULARY ●●●●

## Notes To the Teacher

Anishinaabe is a generic Ojibway word translated as The People/Indigenous People. When you see the word Anishinaabe used, you are given a hint into the worldview and ways of knowing of the author. The author, Joanne Robertson is Ojibway Anishinaabe of Atikameksheng First Nation, 19 km west of Sudbury, Ontario. The author could use the word Indigenous, but it is a sign of respect to call people what they call themselves. When you meet an Indigenous person, ask what they call themselves. It is good to add First Nation languages to our daily vocabulary and to learn of the origin meaning.

People may self-identify as Ojibway Anishinaabe, Dene Anishinaabe, Métis Anishinaabe, or simply Anishinaabe. You may also hear or read the word Haudenosaunee, which has Six Nations within that family. Haudenosaunee means People of the Long House. We have so much to learn and it is all good. Mino Bimaadiziwin, good life!

Humans are complex. Every culture has a word that speaks collectively of their larger group and of outsiders or “others.” Many words specify specific groups within the larger group. There are also many words, terms, and expressions used to identify and describe “others,” those outside the group that is speaking. Did you know there are twelve Indigenous language families in Canada with sixty distinct languages?

The author has used the double vowel system with the Eastern dialect of Ojibway, reflective of Nokomis Josephine Mandamin’s first language. Nokomis is Ojibway-Odawa Anishinaabe of Wikwemikong First Nation, Manitoulin Island, Ontario.

Many places, including the Great Lakes, were named by Indigenous peoples prior to the arrival of Europeans. They were named in the language of whoever was in that place: Ojibway, Cree, Mohawk, and Oneida to mention a few. Ojibway names have been identified in this book. English names of the Great Lakes are reflective of how early settlers named them. The English names are not a translation of Ojibway. Look at the map Coming Home to Indigenous Place Names. <https://umaine.edu/canam/publications/coming-home-map/coming-home-indigenous-place-names-canada-pdf-download/>

Go to <https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu> to further explore Ojibway vocabulary. The Ojibway Peoples Dictionary has many words, voice bites and extended cultural teachings. The Ojibway spelling may differ so for greatest success, translate from English to Ojibway.

## OJIBWE WORDS AND THEIR PRONUNCIATIONS FOUND IN THE WATER WALKER

bawaajgan	(buh-wawj-gun)	dream
biindigen	(been-dih-gen)	come in, enter



gichi miigwech	(gih-chih mee-gwetch)	thank you very much
jiimaan	(jee-mawn)	canoe, boat
kwe	(quay)	woman
kwewok	(quay-wuk)	women
migizi (staff)	(mih-gih-zee)	bald eagle
Nibi	(nih-bih)	water
niichii	(knee-chee)	friend
niichii-kwe	(knee-chee quay)	women friend
nokomis	(no-kuh-miss)	grandmother
Nokomis Giizis	(no-kuh-miss ghee-ziss)	moon
ogimaa	(oh-gih-maw)	leader, chief
semaa	(say-maw)	sacred tobacco
Turtle Island		North America
Ziibi-gichigami		St. Lawrence River
Nga-zhichige Nibi onji		I will do it for the water
S.S. Gichigami Jiimaan		Great Lake Canoe/Boat

**Anishinaabe name for the Great Lakes****English name for the Great Lakes**

Anishinaabe wi-gichigami

Lake Superior

Ininwewi-gichigami

Lake Huron

Naadowewi-gichigami

Lake Michigan

Waabishkiigoo-gichigami

Lake Erie

Niigaani-gichigami

Lake Ontario

**PREPARING TO READ *THE WATER WALKER*** ● ● ● ●

1. Start with an inquiry of the cover of the book. Students could generate their own questions and the teacher can categorize. Or, the teacher could direct, using some of the questions below, to guide students' attention when reading to answer.

\* *Factual: Who is on the cover? What is she doing? Where is she? When is it?*



- \* *Predictive: If they can't answer the questions above, who might it be? What might she be doing? Where/when might this be taking place?*
  - \* *Analytical: How did she get the pail and the staff? Why is she carrying them?*
  - \* *Application/Synthesis: What might it mean to be a water walker? How might being a water walker have an impact on people and the water?*
2. Explore students' experiences with water. How do they, and all of creation, consume, play with, and use Nibi?
  3. Identify students' best and scariest memories with Nibi—as snow, lakes, rivers, rain, hail, ice, and as hot and cold water.
  4. Using a map of the world, compare land and water masses; salt and freshwater bodies. Then zoom in on North America, Turtle Island, and do the same. Finally, use local maps to identify nearby bodies of water. Use a map of North America that shows the outline like a turtle.
  5. Ask students to consider what one thing they really care about and would put all their efforts into helping and protecting it.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS ●●●●

1. What does Nokomis love about Nibi?
2. Nokomis rises each morning and gives thanks for Nibi. Why does she do this? Is there something that you are thankful for each morning? Why is important to be thankful for things we have?
3. What did a wise ogimaa tell Nokomis that caused her to think very hard?
4. The graphics tell stories about how water is being mistreated. Have students speak about graphics. What do they see, know, feel about the images? How do they relate to the graphics?
5. How is Nokomis called to action? We all need help, who does Nokomis go to for help, and what do they do?

- \* *(Note: A bawaajgan can come to all of us. It can bring fun, scary, or confusing messages. Each of us must learn to understand our own bawaajgan. Anishinaabe understand that bawaajgan can carry messages from the spirit realm to help us in this physical realm.)*





6. Sneakers, skirts, copper pail, and migizi staff. How do they fit into the story? What did Nokomis hope to accomplish?
  - \* *(Nokomis and her friends came to be known as Mother Earth Water Walkers and their many stories can be found at [www.motherearthwaterwalkers.com](http://www.motherearthwaterwalkers.com))*
7. Say the names of each Great Lake, trace the Water Walkers' route on virtual maps, and realize they passed through long stretches where there was little habitation as well as huge industrial cities.
  - \* *How might people have responded to the Walkers when they saw them? If you had not read this book, what you think about seeing women, carrying a pail and an eagle staff, walking along the highway? Think of positive and negative reactions people may have had.*
8. Nokomis spoke to many people, yet they did not hear the message. Who received the next bawaajgan, and how did Nokomis and the Water Walkers respond?
  - \* *(Note: Anishinaabe nini, men, began to recognize they were not beside the women, walking in balance, supporting their cause. By and by, nini joined the walk and would carry the migizi staff but not the water pail.)*
9. Four sets of Water Walkers set off from the four salt waters surrounding Turtle Island. How were their walks different? Use topographical maps to identify the salt water bodies and highlight different landforms, terrain, and challenges that could arise. [www.motherearthwaterwalkers.com](http://www.motherearthwaterwalkers.com) could be searched for maps and stories of the 2011 walk.
  - \* *Note: There is no road to Churchill, where the Arctic Ocean waters were collected so that group took a train from Winnipeg to Churchill. The return train went through Saskatchewan.*
  - \* *Something further to know: The train rails to Churchill sank in muskeg during summer of 2017. The only way in or out now is by air. Imagine how life has changed for the people there.*
10. "Nga-zichige Nibi onji" means I will do it for the water. Look closely at the graphic page illustrating the many adventures had by the four groups of Water Walkers in 2011. Have children choose a specific graphic tell what might have been happening. Remember, the illustrations depict events that are real, e.g. the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico 2010, tornadoes 2011 were the worst to date.



11. The four salt waters were combined and poured into a freshwater lake. What must that have been like? Why were the Mother Earth Water Walkers crying?
12. Once the waters have done their work, how will they get home? Chart the water flow from Lake Superior then back to the various oceans.
  - ✱ *Note: Anishinaabe know that all life has a purpose and work to be done. Nibi is life.*
13. When Nokomis was finished her work, how many knees and sneakers had she gone through? How is that possible?
14. Nokomis reminds us that without Nibi there is no life. How is that true?
15. At the end of the book, Nokomis asks “What are you going to do about it?” Any ideas?

## RESPONDING TO *THE WATER WALKER* ●●●●

Ask students to choose their favourite page in the book. With a partner or small group, do Reader’s Theatre for the page, or a group artistic response, or an explanation about what you think the most important messages are on that page, and why it is your favourite.

## ARTS ●●●●

### VOCAL MUSIC

Nokomis sings for the water every morning. There are water songs from many Indigenous nations. Learn the “Water Song” by Doreen Day at: [http://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com/?attachment\\_id=2244](http://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com/?attachment_id=2244)

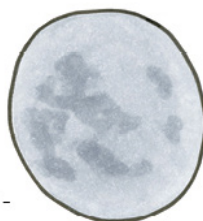
Doreen, an Ojibway Anishinaabe kwe and Mother Earth Water Walker, was with Nokomis when she started the first walk. Read her story of how this song came to be as she and her son crossed the waters between Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario and Wisconsin to attend school. (Note: they are Native Americans and lived on the U.S. side, and Doreen attended Shingwauk Kinoomaagegamig/Algoma University.) We can all do something for the water. Sing for the water.

Another water song that people have permission to sing is with Mary Lou Smoke found on youtube here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIHxDXx5st8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIHxDXx5st8).



**migizi** (mih-gih-zee) -  
bald eagle

**Nokomis Giizis**  
(no-kuh-miss ghee-ziss) -  
moon



**ART***Nga-zhichige nibi onji*

Near the end of the book is a two-page spread with images that show what Nokimis and the Water Walkers did for water. Create an art piece that shows what you will do for the water. It could be an individual piece in any media, a mural, a play, a rant, etc. If several classes read the book, it could be a larger mural project.

**SCIENCES ● ● ● ●****UNDERSTANDING LIFE SYSTEMS****DEVELOPING INVESTIGATION AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

Investigate and compare the basic needs of humans and other living things, including the need for air, water, food, warmth, and space using a variety of methods and resources.

**RELATING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY TO SOCIETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT****THE IMPACT ON SOCIETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

Students are to look at graphics on pages 10,11. What are they depicting? Have them tell story of what they see happening, how that action impacts plants, animals, air, fish, etc.

Nokomis says, “One day the four salt Nibi will be reborn as clouds and be carried home on the wind.” Her words speak from an Anishinaabe perspective, as Nibi is alive and has travelled and will return. What is the scientific process for this called?

**SOCIAL STUDIES ● ● ● ●****HERITAGE AND IDENTITY: OUR CHANGING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES****UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT: ROLES, RELATIONSHIPS, AND RESPECT**

Ask students to identify some of the significant people, places, and things in their lives, including their connection in the community (e.g., an Elder, a teacher, a coach), and describe their purpose or the role they play.

- ✱ Sample questions: “What role does an Elder play in your community?” “How does this person help you?”

Identify some elements of respectful behaviour that students can practice in their everyday lives (e.g., sharing, cooperating, being courteous, protecting their natural or home environment). Or, identify respectful behaviour that other people practice (e.g., how one offers tobacco, a sacred medicine for symbolic purposes when meeting an Elder).





## PEOPLE AND ENVIRONMENTS: THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

### APPLICATION: INTERRELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Outline the process Nokomis used to build the community of Water Walkers, foster interrelationships and boost their impact. To deepen their understanding, explore the website developed to build the Water Walker community.

[www.motherearthwaterwalkers.com](http://www.motherearthwaterwalkers.com)

Gather and organize information on the interrelationship between people and the natural world (e.g., water) and manufactured features (e.g. water treatment facilities) of their community, and comment on the effects of this interrelationship. Use sources that students have located themselves or that have been provided to them. (E.g., use a tally sheet to monitor the use of water fountains, plastic water bottles, and recycling containers around the school; use a digital camera to record the amount of garbage on the ground in a nearby park; organize satellite images that show changes in natural or man-made features in their community; interview a person who works in the park.)

Do a class, or division walk for the water in your own school community.

## WRITING ●●●●

### CONNECTING ENGLISH VOCABULARY WORDS TO “NGA-ZHICHIGE NIBI ONJI”

There are eleven words in the English vocabulary list above. Define them. Reread, study the graphics of the story, and write sentences using the words in relation to “Nga-zhichige Nibi Onji—I will do it for the Water.”

## PERSONAL NARRATIVE ●●●●

### ORAL

Ask students to read their sentences aloud and comment on three of them. What impressed me/caused me to think/makes me want to change my ways was. . .

## MEDIA CONNECTIONS ●●●●

### EXPLORING REAL EVENTS OF THE STORY

We are told that Nokomis spoke to many groups about the health of Nibi and our need to protect the water and not to pollute. Google Josephine Mandamin. Watch a few of the videos capturing the story at [www.motherearthwaterwalkers.com](http://www.motherearthwaterwalkers.com)

How is she recognized? Where is she from? What is her motivation?

In 2015, Nokomis received the Lieutenant Governor’s Ontario Heritage Award for Excellence in Conservation.



## ACTION RESEARCH ●●●●

### LEADING TO “NGA-ZHICHIGE NIBI ONJI”

Nokomis’ final words ask us, “What are you going to do about it?”

Listen to Nokomis on YouTube—“Water Journey – Trailer”. This 3:38 clip highlights the 2011 water walk featured in *The Water Walker*. Why has and will Nokomis do anything for the water? What do her teachings tell us?

Watch the YouTube video, “Great Lakes Water Walk- Sun., Sept. 24, 2017”. Water Walkers have activated an interracial water walk along the shores of Lake Ontario in the Greater Toronto Area with a call to action for other Ontarians as part of Canada and Ontario 150.

Brainstorm possibilities for students to stand up for the water. Everyone needs water to live. Water is life. Have students choose something that is respectful, responsible, timely, and doable. This could be a supervised few-hours-long walk beside a local body of water; a survey of water consumption in their classroom, followed by an analysis of waste and healthy usage, followed by recommendations to implement for better water usage; whatever gets them committed to take action for positive change.

We can all be agents of change. What will your class agree to do under your leadership?

Or simply ask students to commit to one thing they can do for the water (turn off faucet when brushing teeth, give stale water to plants instead of putting it down the drain, etc.). Write the commitments on a poster board and revisit regularly. Ask those who have kept the commitment to make another one, and then track that.

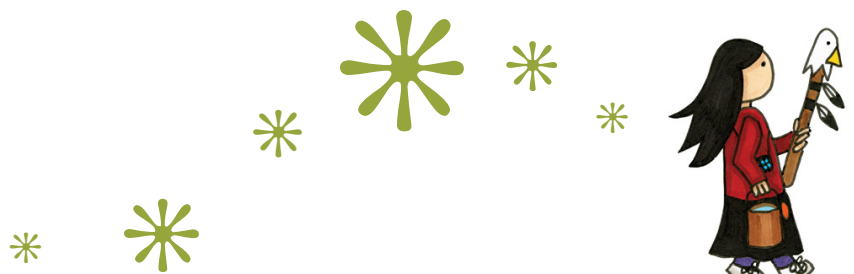
## DRAMA ●●●●

### STORYTELLING AND INTERVIEWING IN ROLE

Interview one another throughout the Action Research project approved by your students.

## WRITING ●●●●

Nokomis invites you to write her. Document your Action Research and tell her about your journey.



## CONNECTIONS ● ● ● ●

Are any students in your class connected to any of the many Water Walks? If so, how are they connected? Our world is shrinking as we connect through family, friends, social media, and beyond.

This picture is an example of how small our world is. I, the author of this Teacher's Guide, am carrying the copper pail in the photo below. What an honour it has been to write this guide and help you open the children's world to the power of standing up. I am Dene Anishinaabe married to Ojibway Anishinaabe-nini and a community member of Rainy River First Nations.



### WATER WALK 2011

*Hilda Atkinson, Laura Horton (with water),  
Jeremy Johnston, Delbert Horton, and Wayne  
Anderson*

I am carrying water along the Rainy River with my Mide Lodge sister, son, husband and brother. David Anderson, another brother cut the hole in the ice in Churchill so that the women could get to the flowing water, carried here in this photo.

