

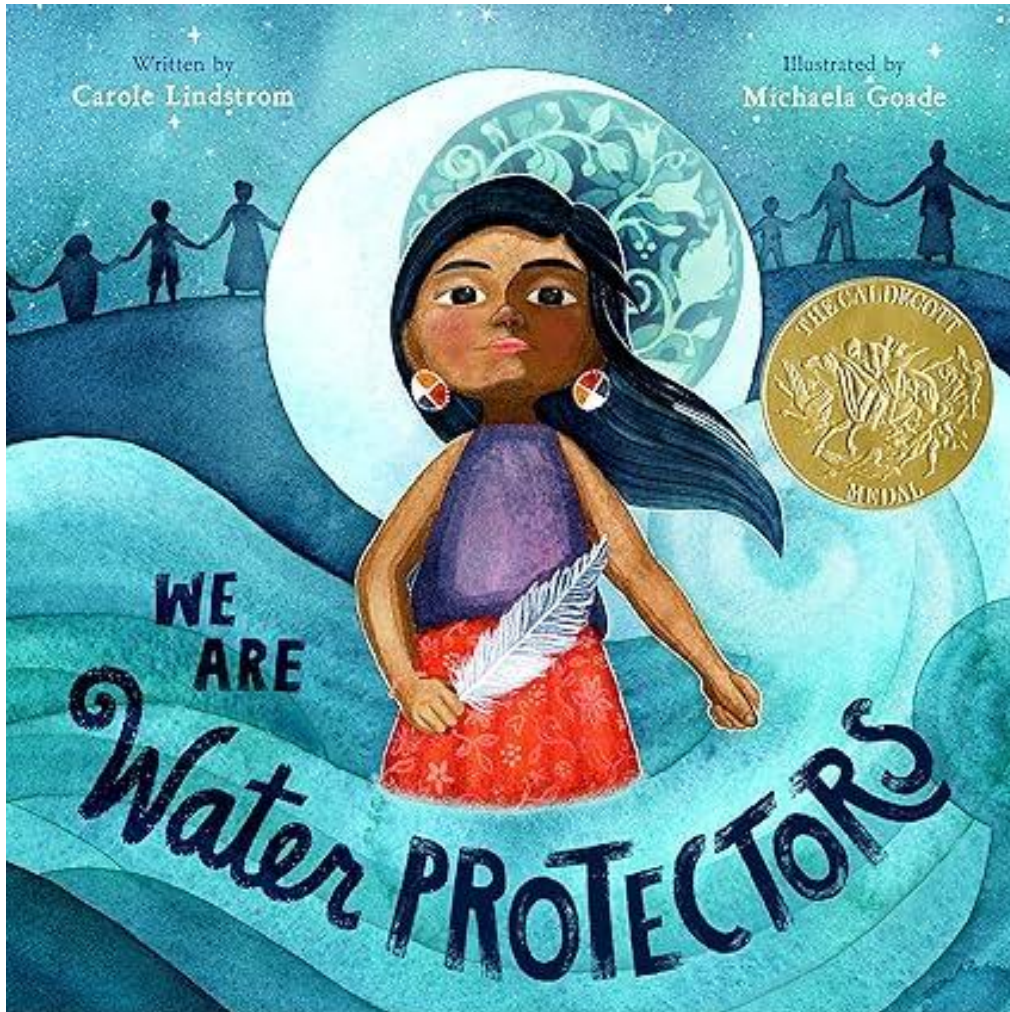
We Are Water Protectors

by Carole Lindstrom

(2020)

Illustrated by
Michaela Goade
(Tlingit)

This Caldecott Medal-winning picture book centers on a young Ojibwe girl who takes a stand against an oil pipeline threatening her community's water and land. Inspired by the real-life resistance at Standing Rock, the lyrical text and luminous



watercolor illustrations create a powerful call to environmental stewardship, Indigenous sovereignty, and ancestral wisdom.

The poetic narrative draws from Indigenous teachings, portraying water as sacred and alive. The book offers students an entry into themes of environmental justice, Native resilience, and collective action without being heavy-handed.

Lesson plans by Aliah Selah Clar Rheinstein for 2nd-12th grade.
Inspired by a non-story poetic book for the whole family of humanity.

Why it's great for teaching diversity & multiculturalism

- **Centers Indigenous voices and values**, often underrepresented in classrooms.
- **Elevates environmental justice** as a shared human responsibility rooted in ancestral teachings.
- **Encourages respect for Earth and each other**, promoting empathy and stewardship.
- **Visually rich** watercolor art invites emotional and symbolic exploration.
- **Inspires action** and shows young people as powerful change-makers.

Art Project: “Water Is Life: Story Shields of Protection”

Big Idea: We can express our values, stories, and responsibilities through visual symbols inspired by Indigenous storytelling and design.

Grade Bands: Grades 2–5 and adaptable for Grades 6–8

Learning Objectives

- Understand how art and story can honor Indigenous cultures and Earth's resources.
- Explore symbolism, circular composition, and color to convey values and protect what matters.
- Connect personal values with environmental or cultural symbols through mixed-media.

Materials

- Watercolor paper or thick drawing paper
- Pencil, eraser, fine-tip black marker
- Watercolors or colored pencils
- Circle templates or paper plates
- Optional: natural textures for rubbings (leaves, bark), collage scraps

Mini-lesson (10–15 min)

Look & Discuss: Show several spreads from *We Are Water Protectors*. Ask:

- “How does the artist show that water is sacred?”
- “What symbols and patterns do you notice?”
- “What feeling does the art give you?”

Demo:

- Draw a circle to represent a “story shield.”
- In the center, place a personal or environmental symbol (water drop, tree, animal, etc.).
- Around it, add 3–5 motifs representing values (protection, courage, family, healing).
- Show how to use pattern and color to create a unified design.

Vocabulary:

Symbol vs. Motif - A symbol is an object that represents a deeper meaning and can appear just once in a story, while a motif is a recurring element or idea that supports the main theme throughout the text. Both help to enhance the understanding of the story's overall message.

Circular Composition - Circular composition is a design technique that uses circular shapes to create a harmonious and unified visual experience. This format can enhance movement and flow within a piece, making it distinct from traditional rectangular compositions.

Harmony & Sacred - how they are related:

Harmony and the sacred are interconnected as harmony reflects the order and beauty of creation, which is often seen as a manifestation of the divine. In many religious traditions, music is sacred and the harmony of the music is what moves us and is viewed as essential to spiritual well-being and is considered a reflection of God's/Spirit's nature and presence in the world.

Stewardship - Stewardship is a practice committed to ethical value that embodies the responsible planning and management of resources. The concepts of stewardship can be applied to the environment and nature, economics, health, places, property, information, theology, and cultural resources.

Studio Process (30–45 min; 1–2 sessions)

Brainstorm: Quick write or sketch ideas:

- What do you love or want to protect (river, animal, plant, person)?
- What gives you courage? What connects you to Earth or ancestors?

Design & Create:

- Lightly sketch your story shield using symbolic shapes and colors.
- Paint or color your shield, layering soft washes or bold lines as needed.
- Add detail with fine lines or patterns inspired by nature.

Optional Extensions:

- Add textures with leaf rubbings, natural materials, or collaged paper.
- Write a one-sentence pledge or story to accompany the artwork.

Reflection & Share (Critique Circle, 10–15 min)

- “What do you protect and why?”
- “What does your central symbol mean to you?”
- “How did this project help you see the Earth differently?”

Differentiation & Inclusion

- **Cultural sensitivity:** Invite reflection on shared values (protection, water, respect) rather than direct appropriation of tribal designs.
- **Multiple entry points:** Students can draw from family traditions, nature, or personal values.
- **Visual supports:** Provide symbol banks and nature motif references.
- **Sensory needs:** Offer dry media-only versions or tactile options like textured rubbings.
- **ELLs:** Provide sentence starters for artist statements: “My symbol is ___ because ___.”

Adaptations for 2nd-12th grade

Grades 2–3: Focus on a single water symbol with surrounding patterns.

Grades 4–5: Encourage layered storytelling with shield + pledge.

Middle School: Add research about real-life water protectors or Indigenous leaders. Option to include light calligraphy or heritage language words.

High School: Write a short Children's book about something they really care about that they want to pass down to younger students. It is an end of the semester project that they work on all semester starting in the fall so that they could give this book to children in their family or friends as a holiday gift.

Encourages **voice and agency**: Students choose something meaningful to them, which makes the writing more genuine.

- Builds empathy and leadership: High schoolers create something to teach younger students, so they think about how to communicate ideas clearly and kindly.
- Integrates cross-curricular skills: Writing, art, storytelling, research, and sometimes even editorial skills.
- Reinforces values and beliefs: Helps students clarify what they believe in, why it matters, and how to express those beliefs.



A Lesson Plan Framework For High School Students

Writing a belief-based children's book using *We Are Water Protectors* as inspiration and a guide for a poetic non-story piece of work. If they want they can also make it into a video presentation or live presentation of their idea. It is their choice how they want to present it.

Phase	What Happens
Introduction / Inspiration	Read <i>We Are Water Protectors</i> and show the YouTube read-aloud video together. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yLtBjVG0No Discuss what makes it so powerful: imagery, message, voice, audience.
Brainstorming	Students reflect on what they believe deeply (justice, kindness, environment, truth, inclusion, etc.). Generate a list of possible topics.
Story Planning	They outline their story: main character(s), setting, conflict or message, how the message will be communicated to younger children. Decide art style and format (pictures, text length, etc.).
Writing & Drafting	Write text (simple, clear language appropriate for children). Meanwhile, they sketch illustrations or select images/visual style.
Peer Review / Workshops	Students share their drafts, give feedback on clarity, illustration/story alignment, appropriateness for younger audience.
Finalization & Sharing	Create final version (digital or hand-made). Share with younger students (elementary class, library event, virtual share). Reflect on what they learned about writing for younger audiences.

For High School Students - Why its message is important for our world:

Unlike some children's books, it is more of a thought poem, than a story - and it speaks volumes of the message of how our world has revolved around "petro dollars" and how it harms the earth to keep extracting all this oil - yet more so - it has made some very powerful, and they are not necessarily in the best interest of the Earth or the people on it. The oil spills in the water have been devastating, and the elite want us to pay for water - that is essential for all life. And as the world shifts from American Dollars to pay for oil... world power is shifting. And it seems our data is the new oil with Ai... and we will see how that shifts the world in so many ways - data center use water to cool them, and we pay for their electricity on our utility bills, so it is using up our water, and we are paying for its power cost too. They are collecting data about each of us - so they are charging us to gather information on each of us for surveillance and possible control. So that is why I made my lessons for 9th to 12th grade - because with the implications something that high school student should understand and discuss. The fact that this is true and yet the book is filled with a unity messages that is inspiring - and the message is to know what is happening so we can see what can be done about it. This powerful book is for the whole family with a message for the whole world from the blessed Hopi tribe who are a very peaceful tribe with a lot of wisdom. They foretold of this "Black Snake" before they ever made one pipeline. There is a Hopi saying that started the Rainbow Gathering since the 70s that celebrates the 4th of July as "Interdependence day" where people of all walks of life come together to pray for peace by making a global village in National Forests around the US and is run on love and all volunteer. **"When the earth is ravaged and the animals are dying, a new tribe of people shall come unto the earth from many colors, classes, creeds and who by their actions and deeds shall make the earth green again. They will be known as the Warriors of the Rainbow."** The Hopi maintain a complex religious and mythological tradition stretching back over centuries. For more information: <https://foreveraz.com/hopi-prophecy/>

www.welcomehome.org