



The Water Walker

Joanne Robertson

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The determined story of an Ojibwe grandmother (*nokomis*), Josephine Mandamin, and her great love for *nibi* (water). Nokomis walks to raise awareness of our need to protect *nibi* for future generations and for all life on the planet. She, along with other women, men and youth, has walked around all the Great Lakes from the four salt waters, or oceans, to Lake Superior. The walks are full of challenges, and by her example she challenges us all to take up our responsibility to protect our water, the giver of life, and to protect our planet for all generations.

The Water Walker Details

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From Reader Review The Water Walker for online ebook

Cheriee Weichel says

This is the true story of Nokomis (Grandmother) Josephine Mandamin who began Mother Earth Water Walkers, a movement of women (and men), who walk to raise awareness of how precious water is to us.

Nokomis loved nibi (water) in all its iterations. Then an important elder asked her what she was doing to protect it.

Nokomis gathered her friends around her, and in 2003, they set out walking around the Great Lakes. A movement was begun. She herself has worn out three knees and eleven pairs of sneakers. In 2005 she walked almost 4,500,000 steps for water!

The story is told using Ojibwe vocabulary. At first this was disconcerting but I was mostly able to figure out the story without peeking into the glossary at the end of the book. The illustrations help to make the new vocabulary clear. I still went back and reread it a few times to check my interpretations.

The illustrations are bright and bold with stylized people and lots of colour. I love how Nokomis' love of nibi is captured in the first pages.

Later on the images reveal all the ways water is threatened; from individuals letting water run while brushing their teeth, to corporations spilling oil and dumping toxins into oceans.

My only wish is that the text was formatted differently. It is small and some pages are almost overwhelmed by it.

This is an important book to use during a unit on the hydrosphere with all ages of students. It pushes beyond basic understanding of the water cycle into its importance for our survival. At the same time as it introduces readers to cultural awareness of nibi, it directs students of all ages to think politically about water. Perhaps they can come up with their own powerful ways to answer the Ogimaa's question, What are you going to do about it?

Josephine Mandamin is an indigenous woman from Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island. She now lives in Thunder Bay Ontario, Canada. Click below to find out more about Mother Earth Water Walkers.

<http://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com/>

MK King says

Josephine Mandamin is a hero of mine. Her efforts to protect and pray for the waters of the world will be felt for many generations. I have heard that it won't be scientists that save this planet it will be indigenous people and if the efforts of this woman are any indication then there is truth in that sentiment.

RaiseThemRighteous says

<https://raisethemrighteous.com/2018/0...>

The Water Walker (2017), written and illustrated by Joanne Robertson, a member of Atikameksheng Anishnawbek, brings attention to the work of Mother Earth Water Walkers. The group began walking around large bodies of water, beginning with Lake Superior in 2003, to bring attention to the water crisis. Robertson's book, written with urgency, optimism, and humor, makes this important environmental issue accessible to young children. Even more, the story explores Indigenous traditions and values while depicting the important environmental activism of Indigenous women.

Drawn cartoonishly, Nokomis (Ojibwe for grandmother) is at first depicted enjoying and appreciating water. In one image, she is barefoot on a beach, dressed in a red skirt and blue t-shirt as she splashes in water. In another image she is standing in a puddle joyfully letting rain drip over her body as sad shadows of people struggle with umbrellas. In yet another image, Nokomis rows on a lake. She appreciates Nibi (Ojibwe for water).

For the first several pages water is not politicized; it is simply enjoyed by Nokomis.

Then, over a two-page spread, Nokomis begins to be portrayed as a member of a community, and bearer of traditions. Text and image reflect each other: "Every morning, like the women in her family before her, Nokomis hopped out of bed, and before doing anything else, she sang. 'Gichi miigwech, Nibi, for the life you give to every living thing on Earth. I love you. I respect you.'" Nokomis is participating in a familial and communal tradition. Still joyful, we are given a cultural context that connects her love of Nibi to a shared past.

However, on the same page an ogimaa (Ojibwe for leader or chief) warns Nokomis that water will soon become more expensive than gold and asks what she will do about it. The increasing scarcity of clean and accessible water shatters the unburdened appreciation previously depicted. Even more, Nokomis is roused to action. There is still joy and optimism even as a sense of foreboding and urgency enters the equation.

The next two-page spread depicts abuses to the land and water endemic to our historical moment: fracking, wastefulness, and polluting. Once Nokomis sees these abuses they overwhelm her with their ubiquity. Days pass and she continues to think about the ogimaa's words. One night she has a bawaajgan (Ojibwe for dream).

The next morning her friends join her in a contemporary kitchen. Although the reader is not privy to their conversation, turning the page pushes us forward in time and we witness the action the conversation prompted.

The women are in a neat line, Nokomis at the front, as the text explains: "Four days later, Nokomis and the Mother Earth Water Walkers, as they came to be known, found themselves standing on the side of the road... wearing sneakers. Nokomis carried a copper pail full of Nibi in one hand and a Migizi Staff in the other." For seven years the women spent the spring season walking around large bodies of water to raise awareness and encourage people to protect natural resources. Nokomis's story became quite well-known, but still, the urgency of the project was dismissed.

The women's seven-year pattern was broken when a friend of Nokomis had a dream and shared it with her.

Much like the kitchen table conversation that led to the creation of the Mother Earth Water Walkers, the content of the dream is not revealed, but the action it prompted is. Women from all over gather at Turtle Island. They wear sneakers and bring copper pails and Migizi staves to make a large scale demand for acknowledgment. This is a quiet but firm spectacle steeped in tradition even as it demands a future with clean and accessible water through passionate and well-orchestrated activism in the present.

Effectively introduced in *The Water Walker*, *The Mother Earth Water Walks* continue, and as of 2017 Josephine Mandamin, who Nokomis's character is based on, continues to play a critical role. This is a beautiful little book about a big, complex story, and Robertson tells it wonderfully. An important addition to any library because it engages so many issues, including environmentalism, activism, and First Nation cultural traditions, without feeling overwhelming or didactic. Beautiful book.

Elizabeth says

I had heard good things about *The Water Walker*, but it was one of those few books that truly exceeded expectations for me (although I feel like I've been handing out more five stars than usual this year).

Joanne Robertson uses crisp language and vibrant illustrations to bring a true story to life for a young audience. This is a wonderful way to introduce multiple topics to children. It addresses the importance of water in our everyday lives, as well as the ways we can take care of water. It looks at real-world women as part of a larger activist movement. It looks at indigenous culture and activism in a unique light. There is a lot going on here, but it is presented so subtly as part of the larger picture of the story. I also thought the use of Ojibwe words was well placed, important to the story, important to those the story is about, and important for the audience.

I thought this was an incredibly well-done picture book, and hope to see more books like it in the future. I definitely recommend it to anyone looking for a way to address keeping the water clean to younger readers or to anyone in need of a good picture book.

Linda V says

Thank you Net Galley for the ARC to review.

What would happen if the water on earth became so contaminated that it was scarce and expensive? This is what Josephine Mandamin and the Mother Earth Water Walkers want to bring to everyone's attention. Since 2003 Nokomis, (Grandmother in Ojibwe), has walked around the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence river and other parts of North America to make people aware of the plight of our limited water supply. What incredible commitment to an important cause! The colorful illustrations and beautiful text are a great way to get children thinking- "What are you going to do about it?"

Krystal says

Such a meaningful children's story! Glad to see Indigenous women bringing such a literary gift to readers. This book allows young ones to understand the importance of respecting the earth.

Barbra says

A small picture book that brings to light the importance of water and how it has been abused. With a glossary and pronunciation guide for Ojibwa words this book provides a great topic for saving our environment and a look at Native culture.

Allison M says

4 stars for this account for children of Josephine Mandamin and the Mother Earth Water Walkers.

This lovely children's book tells the story of grandmother/nokomis Josephine Mandamin's decision to draw attention to how precious water (nibi) is and how endangered by pollution. Nokomis began walking around Turtle Island - North America - with a staff in one hand and a pail of nibi in the other. Over time, she and fellow Mother Earth Water Walkers walked around all the Great Lakes and the St Lawrence river, and later to more distant shores. The story has a glossary and pronunciation guide for the Ojibwe words that appear in the text, and there is a page containing facts about Nokomis Josephine Mandamin as well as a photograph of her with the author.

This is an important book about stewarding the earth which asks of us all 'What are you going to do about it?' It is also a necessary story in highlighting the indigenous peoples of Canada and the United States, through an Ojibwe woman's campaign. As well as this, the picture book is an engaging story with appealing illustrations: I am particularly fond of the bunny slippers Nokomis wears when she is at home.

I received this ebook free from NetGalley and Second Story Press.

Sydney Ossege says

A great picture book to be utilized in the classroom to not only show a different ethnicity , but to also show a great meaning! Especially with the age of the main character, this book is filled with conflict and the need to find a solution. The adversity that is used between the character and the men and women going on this journey together to raise awareness for the environment is life changing. This book can lead discussion for the classroom on what steps they can do to improve the environment around them and can even be turned into a project.

Tyler Wansack says

The Water Walker was a great informative, motivative and inspiring story about Nokomis, or grandmother, Josephine Mandamin who began a movement to raise awareness of how precious water is. The movement is called Mother Earth Water Walkers. These women would walk around the great lakes for many years to raise awareness to protect not only just water but other natural resources. I think a lot of people take water for granted, and this can teach children at such a young age how precious water is and how to save water, for

example, shutting off the facet when brushing their teeth. I enjoyed how the story was told using Ojibwe language. I also enjoyed how it tied in the Indigenous culture in a positive way. Not only did I enjoy how it tied in the Indigenous culture, but it also portrayed all of these women by being involved in this activist movement. This can be a big positive for little girls. The pictures are richly filled with detail and I found myself staring at the pictures for long periods of time just examining it all. The only downfall of this book was that the text was slight too small, and I feel that when reading with children, the text should be bigger as I feel it is 'easier' to read

Sally says

The Water Walker by Joanne Robertson was on the American Indians in Children's Literature blog's list of the best books of 2017. It tells the true story of Nokomis Josephine Mandamin, an Ojibwe grandmother who walks to raise awareness of our need to protect our water sources for future generations. Nokomis (the Ojibwe word for grandmother) and the Mother Earth Water Walkers walked every spring for seven years, praying and singing to the water. There are Ojibwe words throughout the book and a glossary at the end of the book. Students can practice their vocabulary in context skills with these words. In addition to learning about Ojibwe culture, the book could be used to teach young elementary students about environmental issues. The book even ends with the question Nokomis continues to wonder: "What are you going to do about it?" This could open up a conversation about our individual responsibility in protecting the environment.

Barbara says

Many of us dream or talk about the actions we'd like to take, but how many of us actually take the first steps that lead to action that might change the world? In this slim volume from Canada, readers meet a Ojibwe grandmother who has walked around various parts of the country, including the Great Lakes and from the Pacific Ocean to the nation's heartland as well as to the Gulf of Mexico with the Mother Earth Walkers in order to bring attention to how humans are treating an important natural resource--water. Not only does this book tell an inspiring story, but it also gives readers a taste of Ojibwe culture through the use of Ojibwe words and practices. The story is inspiring, and the brightly-colored illustrations made me smile and feel as though some of the rest of us need to do some walking on behalf of water.

Courtnie Sepe says

The Water Walker is a beautifully illustrated story that is inspirational and motivating. I enjoyed reading about the Mother Earth Water Walkers. I was amazed at where they walked and how many miles they did. I love reading about helping our earth and how others have made it their life goal to go to the ends of the earth to help it a better place. I learned about the culture and history of her family and how much the main character loved our earth so much she wanted to make a difference. I also loved that this story took place around the great lakes. Students will have knowledge of the location and will be able to connect with the story.

Laura says

Having just gone through five years of drought, in California, I am well aware of how precious water and the lack of it can be.

And yet, I have never heard of Josephine Mandamin and her efforts to make people aware, on Turtle Island (North American), how precious water (Nibi) is. What a great introduction to the importance of water, and to the indigenous Ojibwe people's words.

Hightly recommend this book both for the story, and the introduction to this important water warrior that we should be hearing more about.

Thanks to Netgalley for making this book available for an honest review.

Patricia Tilton says

This is an important tribute to activist Josephine Mandamin and the many Native women and men who have courageously walked around all of the Great Lakes to bring attention to the condition of our water. Her message is not political, but a simple plea to engage people to protect the water, our most important resource. It is an exceptional environmental and conservation story that even young children will understand. The language is lyrical and simply presented. Her detailed illustrations show Josephine's spunk and determination. The book is interactive and perfect for classroom discussions.
