

The background of the cover features a stylized illustration. On the left, a large profile of a woman with dark hair and a gentle smile is shown. In the lower right, two smaller children, a girl with pigtails and a boy, are looking up at her with interest. The woman is holding a yellow pencil. The overall style is soft and illustrative, with a light blue and green color palette.

# The Pencil

by Susan Avingaq and Maren Vsetula  
Illustrated by Charlene Chua

EDUCATOR'S  
RESOURCE



# The Pencil

## About the Book

Susan and her sister, Rebecca, love watching their mother write letters to people in other camps. Their mother has one precious pencil, and she keeps it safe in her box for special things. One afternoon, Mom leaves the iglu to help a neighbour, and Susan, Rebecca, and their brother Peter are left with their father. They play all their regular games but are soon out of things to do—until Dad brings out the pencil! As Susan draws and draws, the pencil grows shorter and shorter. What will Mom think when she comes home? Based on author Susan Avingaq's childhood memories of growing up in an iglu, this charming story introduces young readers to the idea of using things wisely.

## About the Authors

Susan Avingaq was born on the land and moved to the community of Igloodik, Nunavut, in 1967. She loves to go camping and fishing whenever she can and often brings new people along to teach them these land skills. She enjoys sewing and teaching younger people important cultural practices. She is an extremely resourceful person and thinks that this is an important quality to pass on to the younger generation. She has many grandchildren, with whom she likes to share her stories. Her previous picture book, *Fishing with Grandma*, was published in 2016.

Maren Vsetula is a teacher. She loves to spend as much time on the land as she can, camping, hiking, paddling, and dogsledding. She has lived and worked in Nunavut for over a decade. She is the co-author of *Fishing with Grandma*.

## About the Illustrator

Charlene Chua picked up her first pencil when she was around three years old and never really put it down. She now creates illustrations, using her trusty pencil, as well as brushes, paints, inks, and computers. She also has way, way too many erasers. Charlene lives in Hamilton, Ontario, with her husband and two cats.

## Note to Educators

This educator's resource is written for Kindergarten to Grade 3 students.



## Pre-Reading Discussion Questions and Activities

Before introducing the book, hold a short discussion about pencils with the class. Use the following steps to engage the students:

- Start by holding up a pencil.
  - o Ask the students what you are holding.
  - o Have the students think about all the different things they can do with a pencil and record their answers on the board or chart paper.
  - o Next, have the students think about what the world would be like if they didn't have any pencils or other writing utensils, such as pens, pencil crayons, markers, or paintbrushes.
    - What would be different?
    - What would be the same?
- Again, record their answers on the board or chart paper.

Next, introduce the book to the students. Hold the book up and read the title, *The Pencil*. View the illustrations on the front cover and use the following prompts to begin a class discussion.

- Who do you see on the front cover?
- What are they doing?
- Where are they? How do you know?

Continue the discussion. Choose a few illustrations from the book and use the following suggested questions to engage students in predictive thinking.

- Who are the characters in the story?
- What do you think the characters are like in the story? How do you know?
- Where does the story take place? Why do you think this might be important?
- What do you think the characters might learn throughout the story?
- Why do you think this book is called *The Pencil*?

## Vocabulary

Tell the students that as they read this book, they will encounter some new Inuktitut words. Explain that Inuktitut is the traditional Inuit language. If you are in the south, you may want to do a short lesson on Inuit culture and where Inuit live. Before you read the book, go through each word in the glossary. Have the students repeat the words after you. Ask if anyone is familiar with any of the terms.

- Have the students practise reading the words and their meaning with a partner.
- As you read the story, the first few times you encounter a word, ask for a volunteer to remind the class what that word means.

## During and Post-Reading Discussion Questions

The following questions and discussion points can be used during and after reading *The Pencil*. Provide students with the chance to voice their own opinions, share their experiences, ask questions, or point out anything else they may notice about the book.

- At the beginning of the story, where did the children's *anaana* go?
- What games did the children play while they were with their *ataata*?
- Why do you think their *ataata* eventually let them play with the pencil?
- At first, how did Susan feel about using the pencil? Why?
- What are some words you would use to describe Susan's personality? With a partner, find examples from the story to support your chosen characteristics.
- How did the children's *anaana* feel when she came home and saw that they had all been drawing with the pencil?
- How did the children feel about showing her their drawings?
- The phrases "using things wisely" and "taking care of what we have" appear more than once throughout the story. Why is it important for this family to use things wisely and take care of what they have?
- Did you learn anything from this family? Share your thoughts.
- What was your favourite part of the story and why?

## Extension Activities

The following activities could be used to help strengthen students' understanding of the story. Adapt these suggestions to the ability level of your students as necessary.

### Perspective

After reading the story and answering the discussion questions, ask the students:

- Who is telling the story?
- How can you tell?
- Why do you think the author chose to write the story this way?

Next, read the About the Author section of the book out loud to the students. Ask:

- What is the author's first name?
- Susan is also the name of the little girl telling the story. Do you think the author Susan is writing about one of her own childhood experiences? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Susan wrote this book?



## Story Recount

Ask the students to create a recount of the story. Students can choose to draw pictures, use a combination of words and pictures, or use just words. Include the following in the recount:

- Setting (when and where the story takes place)
- Characters (what characters are present in the story)
- Three events that take place throughout the story
- The lesson that is being shared/communicated to the audience

Have the students use their recount to rewrite the story in their own words. Younger students can choose to create a wordless picture book.

## Pencil Drawings

Have the students create their own pencil drawing. For this activity, have students imagine what it would be like to use a pencil for the first time.

- What would they draw?
- What would they write?

Give each student a blank piece of white paper and ask them draw and/or write anything they like, imagining it is their first time holding a pencil.

When they are finished, ask for volunteers to share their drawing with the class and explain why they chose to draw what they did.

## Journal Response

Have the students write a short reflection beginning with the statement, “My favourite page in the book *The Pencil* is \_\_\_\_\_ because it taught me \_\_\_\_\_.” When they are finished, have them draw a picture of what they have learned. When reflections are complete, encourage the students to share their thoughts with the class.

