The Raven Boy

About the Book
In this retelling of an Inuit traditional story from the Western Arctic, a doll made by a poor old woman who is cast aside by her camp magically comes to life. The boy, with the beak of a raven, is raised as the old woman's son. When he is finally old enough to venture out on his own, he embarks on an epic journey to fight a beast from the depths of the sea to create his own island world. This cautionary tale will leave readers pondering the values of empathy, vanity, and compassion for those less fortunate.

About the Author
Rosemarie Avrana Meyok was born in a small Hudson Bay post on Reid Island, Northwest Territories, and now lives in Kugluktuk, Nunavut. She studied as a teacher in Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, and worked as an Inuinnaqtun teacher and program specialist, developing Inuktut teaching resources for the Nunavut Department of Education. She went on to study linguistics at the University of Western Ontario and the University of New Mexico. She has worked as a language researcher and translator. Rosemarie has four children (two of whom were adopted to her sister through custom adoption), twenty grandchildren, and more than ten great-grandchildren. Rosemarie loves to sew, bead, and design traditional and contemporary clothing. She spends as much time as she can out on the land with her large family.

About the Illustrator
Marcus Cutler is both a children’s illustrator and an occasional climber of rocks. He lives in Windsor, Ontario, with his wife and two daughters.
Pre-Reading Discussion Questions

• Identify the title, author, and illustrator of the book.
• What kind of a story do you think this will be? (E.g., fiction, non-fiction, funny, serious, happy, sad.) What makes you think that?
• Look at the cover illustration. What do you already know about the book through these drawings?
• What characters do you see?
• Do you think the boy was born looking partly like a raven, or does he become a raven at some point during the story?

During and Post-Reading Discussion Questions

The following questions and discussion points can be used during and after reading *The Raven Boy*. 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.

Pages 2-3

• What is tundra?
• What other types of environments/habitats do you know of? Which habitats are near your home?
• Discuss what you see in this illustration. (E.g., clothing, weather, housing, transportation, animals.)

Page 5

• What do you think will happen next?
• Will the raven boy be helpful to the woman?

Pages 6-7

• How do you think the old woman is feeling when she sees that the raven boy has come to life?

Pages 8-9

• What chores do you like to help with at home?
• Which chores do you like the least?

Page 10

• Which animals are they hunting?
Page 13
- Make a guess about what this creature could be.
- Why can’t the hunters catch it?
- Have you heard any similar tales of a large beast living in the water?

Page 16
- Do you think this giant beast will be dangerous?
- What could happen next?

Page 19
- Why do you think this raven boy could catch the rock soil beast when all of the other skilled hunters were unable to?
- What could happen on this new land?
- If you were the raven boy, what would you do next?

Page 21
- Look back to the cover illustration. The same owl is there! Have a vote with your class. Do you think the raven boy will catch the last owl?

Page 23
- Do you think the raven boy will listen to the owl?
- What would you do in this situation?
- How might you feel if you were the owl?
- How might you feel if you were the raven boy?
- Do you think the owl is telling the truth and that if the boy takes his feathers he would not be able to return home?
Page 25

- The raven boy has made a beautiful parka for himself! Consider what you would use to make your own parka. What would it look like?

Page 26

- The owl was right! The raven boy could not make it home. Why do you think that is?

Post-Reading

- What do you think happened to the old lady?
- What is the lesson in this story?
- Did you like this story? Why or why not?
- What was your favourite part of the story?
- Did this book remind you of anything? (E.g., other books, a real-life experience, a tale you have been told.)

Extension Activities

Talking Circles

Sit in a circle on the floor or in chairs and pass around a talking piece so each person has a turn to contribute. Allow students the right to pass if they do not wish to share. Here are some suggestions to guide the discussion:

- Who was your favourite character in this story? Why?
- Did you like this story? Why or why not?
- Give the story a rating from 1-5.
- If you could turn into an animal, what would you be?
- Who is someone in your family that may enjoy this story?

Art: Clay Project

Using playdough or clay, create your own person with one animal characteristic. For example, you may make a girl with an elephant ears, or you may create a man with wings like an eagle. The following are more extension activities that could go along with your clay creations:

- Rewrite the story using your animal instead of the raven boy as the main character. What things may change in the story?
- Write a paragraph using descriptive language about what your character looks like. Write a second paragraph about their personality traits.
- Draw a picture of your character before building.
- Build the other characters in the story and use your clay characters as puppets.
- Have an art show. Invite classmates or other staff to come see all of your clay creations.
- Present your new character to your class. Give them a name and tell a short story about them.
Writing Prompts

- Rewrite *The Raven Boy* using a different location. How would the environment change the story if it did not take place on the tundra/the ocean?
- Use a different point of view to rewrite *The Raven Boy*. You could be the raven boy, the old woman, a hunter in the community, the strange beast, or the owl with the human head.
- Read the short biographies at the end of the story. Imagine you are a writer or illustrator. Write an autobiography for the end of your story. What things would you include that are important for readers to know?
- Write a biography for a partner. First, make a list of a few questions you’d like to ask your partner to get to know them better. Then, turn those answers into a paragraph using descriptive language.

Family Tree

The old woman in this story lived alone, but she created the raven boy and raised him like her son. Family can be any combination of people! Every family is unique and special. Create a family tree of the people in your family. Start with yourself, and draw pictures and label the names of all of the people in your family.

*Note to educators: This can be a great activity to have a class discussion about family structures, reminding children that family does not have to live in the same home, that kids may go back and forth to multiple families, that family does not have to be biological, etc.*
Readers' Theatre

Practice oral reading skills by telling/performing the story. Use any or all of these suggestions to make readers' theatre work best for your group of students.

- Decide if the story will be performed as a whole class or in small groups. If using groups, split students into groups (by random draw, by numbering students, etc.).
- Make a list of the characters involved in the story and assign parts. Depending on the length of class time spent doing readers' theatre for *The Raven Boy*, consider changing parts or allowing students to try multiple roles.
- Use the book as your guide for a script. There is not a lot of dialogue in this story. Depending on student age/abilities, as a class or in groups create a dialogue that goes along with the story. You could keep the narrator's parts as the main story and supplement it with dialogue from each of the characters.
- Students can be assigned to create costumes, props, or backgrounds.
- Choose a time for your performance(s) and invite other classes to watch!

Parka Design

Readers get to see two parkas that the raven boy had in this story. The first parka was made from scraps that the old woman sewed together. The second parka was made of owl feathers that the raven boy made when he was on the new island.

Create your own parka.

- What would it be made with?
- What colours would be on the parka?
- Write a description of your parka, draw a picture, or even sew a mini parka with felt or other available materials.