

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR SISTERS IN THE WIND

ABOUT THE BOOK

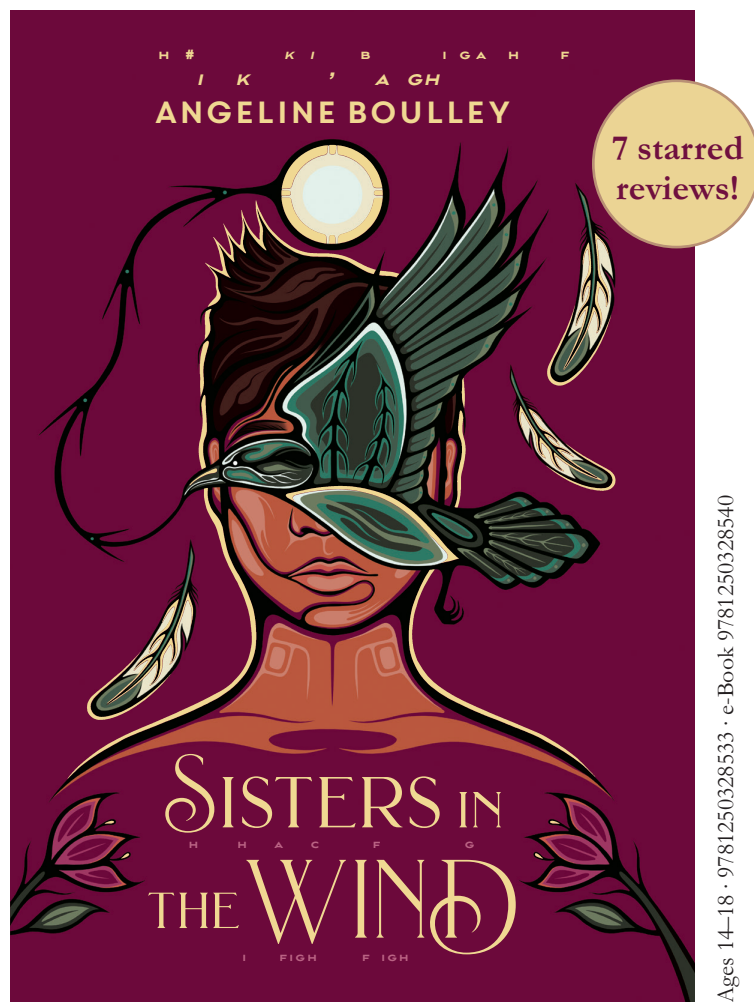
From the instant *New York Times* bestselling author of *Firekeeper's Daughter* and *Warrior Girl Unearthed* comes a daring new mystery about a foster teen claiming her heritage on her own terms.

Ever since Lucy Smith's father died five years ago, "home" has been more of an idea than a place. She knows being on the run is better than anything waiting for her as a "ward of the state." But when the sharp-eyed, kind Mr. Jameson who has an interest in her case comes looking for her, Lucy wonders if hiding from her past will ever truly keep her safe.

Five years in the foster system has taught her to be cautious and smart. But she wants to believe Mr. Jameson and his "friend-not-friend," a fierce-looking tall woman, when they say that they want to look after her. They also tell Lucy the truth her father hid from her: She is Ojibwe, and she has—had—a sister, and more siblings, a grandmother who'd look after her, and a home where she would be loved.

But Lucy is being followed. The past has destroyed any chance she had at safety. Will the secrets she's hiding swallow her whole and take away any hope for the future about which she always dreamed?

When the past comes for revenge, it's fight or flight.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANGELINE BOULLEY, an enrolled member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, is a storyteller who writes about her Ojibwe community in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. She is a former director of the Office of Indian Education at the US Department of Education. Her debut novel, *Firekeeper's Daughter*, was an instant #1 *New York Times* bestseller and the recipient of many international accolades, including the ALA Printz and Morris Awards, the YA Goodreads Choice Award, the Walter Award for Outstanding Children's Literature, and a Carnegie Mellon nomination. Boulley lives in southwest Michigan, but her home will always be on Sugar Island.

This teacher's guide aligns with Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Reading, Writing, and Communication for the Ninth/Tenth Grade-level band. Specifically, these activities emphasize Standard Category 2: Reading for All Purposes; Category 3: Writing and Composition; and Category 4: Inquiry and Research Design. *Sisters in the Wind* looks into the spectrum of experiences common to the foster care system in the United States, including an exploration into those experiences specific to Indigenous and Native American children. This guide will engage students in research opportunities to build background knowledge on the legal and cultural elements present in this novel to better understand, appreciate, and critique the representations and reflections in this work (Sims Bishop, 1990 and 2023).

[\(Multicultural Literacy: “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors”\)](#)

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. To build background knowledge regarding the statute, implementation, representation, and lived experiences that are present throughout the novel, students can conduct small research tasks on the topics of the US foster care system and the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

Suggested topics and designs for scaffolding and differentiation:

- a. Timeline of progression of policies against Indigenous peoples across the Americas. Further analysis and reflection can be conducted on regional responses toward policies, the lasting impacts and influences of this persecution, and the historical genocide of Indigenous and Native peoples and their culture.
- b. Design inquiry and research into the foster care system, considering the variety of perspectives and experiences. Potential topics to help develop inquiry and research questions include legal protections and representation of children in the foster care system (specifically considering the correlations to race, socioeconomic backgrounds, gender, etc.) and long-term effects on individuals placed in foster care. Using the novel title, *Sisters in the Wind*, encourages students to further consider and investigate the relationships and bonds built between and among foster siblings and the various impacts this has on individuals regarding culture and self-identity.
- c. Investigate and analyze the ICWA. Challenge students to delve into their region or local area, considering the history and progression of policies and practices regarding the “welfare” of children of color, specifically American Indian and Alaska Native children and families. Students can extend their learning by continuing to research the role of child removal and family breakup as an assimilation policy. Why is this such a prevalent strategy? What impact does disconnection from their families have on children?

CCSS: W.9-10.7; W.9-10.9

2. *Sisters in the Wind* shares very powerful and thematic statements regarding ideas of home, hope for the future, balance between good and bad or risk and reward, etc. Using the knowledge built via the previous research and inquiry, have students reflect on and infer the depth and impact of these ideas on the characters. Have students consider questions like: What might these statements reveal about the story and characters? How do these ideas make you feel? In what ways do you feel they relate to or resonate with you (or not)? What can you infer about the author's tone toward the ICWA and the foster care system?



The phrases and general themes below are repeated throughout the novel as motifs.

- a. Home and family: “Come Home Where You Are Loved,” “It’s complicated. Loving imperfect people”
- b. Hope: “*Someday*”
- c. Grief and loss: “Good people say goodbye”
- d. Risk and reward assessment
- e. Good balances evil



CCSS: W.9-10.8

DURING READING ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

While reading, have students track, identify text evidence, and reflect, revisit, and build on the following:

1. Text Development: Literary Elements and Structure

- a. The use of flashbacks and foreshadowing between and across chapters. As the narrator and protagonist, Lucy reveals her life in a methodical way distinguished by her path through memories and past lessons interrupted by reflections of her current danger and path for survival.
 - i. As a reader, how does this influence your understanding of the unfolding narrative?
 - ii. What is revealed about the characters’ motivations by seeing Lucy’s past and present concurrently?
 - iii. How are the characters influenced or impacted by their developing relationships?
 - b. Analyze the developing tone and mood on the foster care system, child protective services, and the ICWA.
 - i. Connect the pre-reading research with new insights into how the narrator discusses foster siblings, notions of race and sexism, social discrimination, and mistreatment, etc.
 - ii. Consider how the intent of the ICWA aligns with or diverges from its actual impact. How does this imbalance develop throughout the text, and how does that change, challenge, or extend your previous understandings?
 - c. Extended metaphor and imagery.
 - i. Developing significance of fire. Each section of the novel is introduced by a short excerpt on the respective stages of fire development (pages 1, 61, 169, 259, 333). Before continuing into each section, have students create and develop or alter predictions and inferences on what these introductions might indicate about the progressing story.
 - ii. As students read, have them annotate places in the text that reveal or develop the significance of fire and related elements, such as ash, water, and air. Further students’ critical thinking by having them consider what the significance of fire, wind, ash, and water is relative to each character, how the significance changes and develops, and the importance of the spectrum of meaning and relevance placed on these elements. The following quotes can be used to help support students with this activity.
 - Page 27: Years later I realized we’d used medical information like kindling to stay warm because the logs that might have provided more lasting comfort seemed too heavy to carry.
 - Page 96: Fire speaks to something chaotic inside us. It has the power to destroy, but if we respect and recognize the ways it keeps us warm and safe, we can coexist with the fire.
- More than once, Miss Lonnie described herself as a child of ash and air.
- Page 145: The anticlimactic part when the top of the volcano blows into the sky and



the hot wind carries the ash far away. Instead I'm a pyrotechnic flow of regret.

- Page 162: Children need a safe and stable place when their parents crash and burn in the chaos of their lives. Instead of being swept aside like ash, Native children—through ICWA—are placed with relatives, or people in their community, or even people from other tribal communities.
- Page 322: All fires are sacred? I repeat.

Yes. The smoke is a link to Gichimanidoo. In other religions, you have to confess to a priest or some kind of middleman. Fire lets us communicate directly. Our prayers and messages rise and rise . . .

- Page 335: In the end, it seems like everything comes down to Devery and me.

My sister of ash and air. If she is the gas can . . . does that make me the spark?

- Page 365: And I decide not to fight the sad. I cry for Jamie. If not for him, I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have Luke with me. I might not have made my way back to Maggie. I might still be crawling through the ash, struggling to breathe fresh air.

- iii. The concept of “new normal” is introduced by Daunis and referenced throughout the narrative as Lucy heals physically, mentally, and emotionally on her journey. Have students reflect on personal moments of “new normal,” such as COVID, or economic, social, and natural disasters, etc.

CCSS: RL.9-10.1; RL.9-10.5

2. Character Development

- a. Character Maps: Archetypes and Representations

- i. *The Heroine's Journey*, by Maureen Murdoch, is a critical adaptation of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, by Joseph Campbell. As opposed to the latter which is often used as a plot template, the former can be leveraged to discuss and critique how women and femininity are often represented in literature. Using a diagram or representation similar to the one here, discuss the benefits and downfalls of women and the feminine being represented in this way. As students read, have them track the ways Lucy falls into and out of the stages outlined in *The Heroine's Journey*.



Illustration from *The Heroine's Journey* by Maureen Murdoch

- ii. In literature, archetypes are often used to represent common roles, beliefs, and notions across cultures. Discuss common archetypes, such as the rebel, the hero, the innocent, etc. Along with tracking Lucy's development against *The Heroine's Journey*, have students reflect on the various archetypes present and absent throughout the narrative, and the purpose each role serves in the development of Lucy and her story at large.

- b. After reading part one, have students select a key character other than Lucy. For example, students might choose Jamie or Daunis, Miss Lonnie or Devery, Stacy Sterling, etc. As they read, students will cocreate the narrative from their chosen character's perspective. Students will need to consider how their character is impacted by others, as well as how they influence those around them. Additionally, students will incorporate reflections and opinions on major events throughout the novel from the viewpoint of the character they chose. Once the novel has been read, students will revise and edit their narrative, with the option to share with their peers.

CCSS: RL.9-10.3; RL.9-10.6; W.9-10.3

POST-READING AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **Literary Analysis:** Have students refer back to their responses and inferences to the themes from the pre-reading activity, and then write a reflection on their inferences and personal responses. Encourage them to consider how their thoughts on these themes and inferences have developed with new insight. Then, have students choose one or two themes or motifs (from the pre-reading activity or independently identified while reading) and develop a literary analysis on the development and impact of, and insights gleaned from, the chosen theme(s).
 - a. For example, the notion from page 144 of “life and death braided together,” associated with the allusion to the production *Our Town*, is very revealing of views and beliefs surrounding life, memory, and what exists beyond death. How might these views and beliefs be developed and defined throughout the novel? What deeper revelations can be gleaned about Lucy and her developing understanding of her own life experiences? Connect this with your insight into the ICWA and the foster care system to support your analysis.

CCSS: RL.9-10.1; W.9-10.9



2. **Advocacy Infographic:** After reading, have students revisit their research and inquiry from the pre-reading. Using their built background knowledge and insights from the novel, they should design and create an infographic advocating for a change in statute, administration, implementation, or communication surrounding specific topics related to the ICWA, foster care and child protective services, restorative justice in juvenile prosecution, the role of the legal system as a protector of citizens or defender of property, etc. Students should include visual evidence (for example, graphs, charts, relevant images), incorporate voices and perspectives relevant to their topic issue, and give a clear explanation of the current issue, including preceding events and responses of and effects on impacted groups. Also, students should propose a detailed course of action regarding how to alleviate negative impacts or rectify injustices.

CCSS: W.9-10.1; W.9-10.9

3. **Evidence-Based Argument and Discussion:** This activity is designed as a Socratic seminar or discussion, but can be modified to align with another whole-group discussion practice (for example, round-robin debate, silent gallery walk, etc.). An overarching idea in *Sisters in the Wind* is the distinction between individualist and collectivist cultures. Students will engage in a cycle of questioning, research, and discussion preparation in order to collaborate in a conversation with minimal teacher facilitation and redirection. The basic steps students will follow in this activity cycle are:

- a. Conduct independent research on the social definitions and distinctions of individualism and collectivism.
- b. Using the question matrix below or a similar resource, students will design and formulate critical questions to engage classmates in discussion and discourse.

Question Matrix	IS? or DOES? <i>Present</i>	HAS? DID? WAS? <i>Past</i>	CAN? <i>Possibility</i>	SHOULD? <i>Opinion</i>	WOULD? COULD? <i>Probability</i>	WILL? <i>Prediction</i>	MIGHT? <i>Imagination</i>
WHAT? <i>Event</i>	What is...?						
WHERE? <i>Place</i>			Where can...?				
WHEN? <i>Time</i>						When will...?	
WHICH? <i>Choice</i>							
WHO? <i>Person</i>							
WHY? <i>Reason</i>		Why did...?					
HOW? <i>Meaning</i>							

(NNSTOY, 2025)

- c. Using cocreated expectations and debate procedures, students will analyze and reflect on the ways the novel answers and expands on their questions, or challenges and supports currently held ideals and beliefs.
 - i. Example sections they could consider are the teachings about wolf mothers from pages 112–13, Jamie’s motto of “Let’s do work that matters,” or Jamie’s comparison of peas and onions to non-native and native families from page 163.

The key purpose for this activity is for students to explore and explain their reactions to the novel, express their new learnings and understandings, and expand their appreciation of other perspectives and experiences through practicing discourse and designing deeper critical questioning.

CCSS: W.9-10.1; W.9-10.9

Guide prepared by Kit Robinson, a middle-school teacher in Colorado who identifies with the Cherokee Nation. She earned a bachelor’s and master’s degree in secondary English education from Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado. She has experience teaching Language Arts to multilingual students at Fort Morgan High School, teaching English Language Development at Aurora Central High School, and teaching MYP Language and Literature and MYP Individuals and Societies at Discovery Canyon Middle School. Her research focuses on creating equitable and rigorous Language Arts and Social Studies instruction through accessible texts, primarily young adult literature.