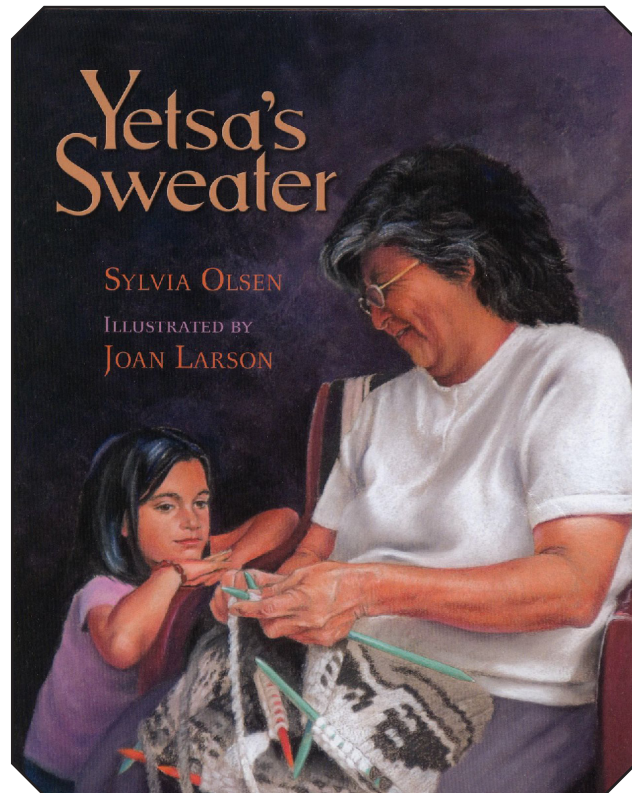


Teachers' Guide



Yetsa's Sweater

Sylvia Olsen

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8" X 10"

40 pages

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide includes a wide range of activities, not all of which are appropriate for all students. Feel free to pick and choose those which best suit your students' needs.

BACKGROUND

Story Synopsis

Yetsa loves her Cowichan sweater, made with love by her grandmother. But Yetsa is growing and her sweater is not! Working with her mother and grandmother, Yetsa learns how to clean, hang, and dry the raw fleece and then tease, card, and spin the wool. When all the wool has been wound into giant balls, Yetsa's grandmother is ready to begin knitting a brand new sweater complete with designs that make Yetsa's sweater extra special.

The Story Behind the Story

Coast Salish women have been knitting Cowichan sweaters for more than a hundred years. In the late 19th century, Scottish settlers came to British Columbia and introduced Coast Salish women to the art of knitting. The women were already skilled and artful woolworkers, having woven Coast Salish blankets for centuries. Children as young as five and six began to learn the craft of sweater-making, just like Yetsa does in the story. And, just like Yetsa, younger children were involved with preparing the wool. At the age of eight or nine, children learned how to knit, often starting with smaller projects like hats and socks. As the children's skills improved, they tackled larger garments. One of the most difficult tasks, spinning, wasn't learned until a knitter's early twenties.

Knitters often have favourite designs they learned from their parents and grandparents. These designs sometimes reflect things found on the West Coast: waves, shells, and animals like eagles and deer.

For many years, Sylvia Olsen has been interested in the origins of the Cowichan sweater tradition as well as how the sweaters are made today. Sylvia married into the Coast Salish and was immediately struck by the ingenuity of the women in their production of Cowichan sweaters. The sweaters became a lifelong passion of Sylvia's, and she learned to make them right from sheep to finished product. She operated a Cowichan sweater shop for 16 years on the reserve. From there she marketed the sweaters locally and abroad until the early 1990s when the markets began to disappear and the once booming industry faded. Sylvia then returned to university, making the Coast Salish knitters the topic of her master's thesis and the theme of a National Film Board documentary, *The Story of the Coast Salish Knitters*. Cowichan sweaters have always been about little girls and their mothers and grandmothers. It was natural for Sylvia Olsen to combine the idea of passing along family traditions with the work of the Coast Salish people.

About the Author



Sylvia Olsen was born and brought up in Victoria, B.C. She married into the Tsartlip First Nation when she was 17, and for more than 30 years she has lived and worked and raised her four children in the Tsartlip community. She returned to school at age 35 and earned a master's degree in history, specializing in Native/white relations in Canada. As a writer, she often finds herself exploring the in-between place where Native and non-Native people meet. Sylvia currently works in the area of First Nations community management, with a focus on reserve housing. Sylvia has four children and Yetsa is her oldest grandchild. Yetsa is in the sixth generation of Coast Salish knitters.

About the Illustrator

Joan Larson has been involved in the arts all of her life. An early interest in art led her to study at the Banff Centre in Banff, Alberta, the University of Victoria, and the prestigious Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. Her career experiences have included graphic design, illustration, and managing her own gallery and framing business in Palm Desert, California. She has worked professionally as an artist since 1986. Joan specializes in equine artwork, often drawing upon her background of landscape and figurative painting to create her work. Although well versed in a variety of art mediums, her preference to work primarily with pastels is due to the exceptional colour effects that can be achieved when working with sticks of pure pigment. Her subjects have been described as “sensitive portrayals, so lifelike that the personalities shine through.”



Although Joan teaches courses and workshops in pastels, she continues to study under other respected professional artists. As a dedicated and disciplined artist, she is continually refining and enhancing her skills. Joan's work has won many awards and been featured in several publications. She is an Associate Member of the prestigious American Academy of Equine Art (AAEA), an Associate Member of the Federation of Canadian Artists (FCA), and has attained the Premier Pastelist designation from the Pastel Society of Canada (PPC). Her work can be found in numerous private and public international collections. Her home and studio are located on a scenic acreage in the Qualicum Beach area of Vancouver Island.

TALKING ABOUT THE STORY

Listen Carefully

Read *Yetsa's Sweater* aloud without showing the pictures or the cover to students. Ask what students imagine the characters, raw wool, cooking pot, carder, spinner, and sweater to look like. Read the story again, this time showing the illustrations. Ask children to compare the images in their minds with the paintings created by Joan Larson.

Making Predictions

Look at the cover of *Yetsa's Sweater*. Before reading the story, ask students for their first impressions. Here are a few questions to get the conversation started:

- What do you think this book is about?
- Who are the characters on the cover?
- Who is the main character?
- How do the two people on the cover know each other?
- Do you think this image comes from the beginning, middle, or end of the story? Why?

STORY ELEMENTS:

Questions and Activities for Basic Comprehension

Have your students consider the following questions. Younger students may discuss these verbally. Older students should write their answers using complete sentences.

Thinking While You Read

- What are some of the things that Yetsa must pick out of the raw fleece?
- How do Yetsa's mother and grandmother lift the heavy, wet wool out of the steaming hot water?
- What type of food does Yetsa enjoy as a special treat?
- What job does Yetsa really want to try?
- What happens when Yetsa tries to spin the wool?
- How old do you think Yetsa will be when she can use the spinner?

Try This:

Is there a job or activity you would really like to do? What do you need to learn before you are able to try it yourself? Write a journal entry about this activity, when you think you might be able to try it, how you will feel when you are ready to do this activity. Illustrate the journal entry.

- Where does Grandma store her big balls of wool?
- Yetsa's grandmother talks about the designs she knitted into Yetsa's sweater. Can you find the salmon? The waves?
- What is your favourite thing in nature?

Try This:

Create a simple design that reminds you of your favourite natural object.

Let's Look at the Plot

1. Every good story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. In *Yetsa's Sweater*, what problem is established at the beginning of the book? Is the problem resolved by the end of the story? How?
2. Create a calendar or journal of the time period covered in *Yetsa's Sweater*. What are the main events? Illustrate each event with a drawing, images cut out of magazines, or pictures printed from the computer.

Let's Look at the Characters

1. In what ways does Yetsa grow up or change over the course of the story?
2. Using both the illustrations and the story as clues, have students discuss what they think Yetsa and Grandma are like.

Let's Look at the Setting

Setting is made up of both place and time.

- Where does this story take place?
- When does this story take place?
- Describe Grandma's house (younger students may draw a picture).
- Describe Grandma's neighbourhood (younger students may draw a picture).

Let's Consider Theme

1. What are the major themes (main ideas behind the story) in *Yetsa's Sweater*? (Answers will vary and may refer to the importance of sharing family traditions, intergenerational bonds and relationships, and origins of everyday items.)

MAKING STUDENT CONNECTIONS:

Questions and Activities to Explore and Encourage Student Connections with the Story

1. We all have a life story that is actually made up of many, many shorter stories. When we read, often something in the book reminds us of something in our own lives. Does a picture, part of the story, character, or feeling in *Yetsa's Sweater* remind you of something from your own life? Write that idea down and illustrate.
2. Does *Yetsa's Sweater* remind you of something that has happened to someone else? Draw a picture or describe in words what happened.

3. Does Yetsa's grandmother remind you of someone you know? Who? Why?
4. Do you like making things? Do you prefer to work alone or do you like doing projects with other people? How are you like Yetsa? How are you different?
5. Draw a picture and then describe in words what you would have done, said, and thought if you realized you were picking sheep poop out of the fleece.
6. Host a special treat day. Ask students to bring in a sample of a type of food they enjoy as a special treat. Compile a cookbook with recipes and student drawings of the different kinds of foods.
7. When Yetsa grows up, how do you think she will feel when she thinks about the sweaters her grandmother made for her? Do you have a favourite piece of clothing, one that is associated with special memories? Bring in a special piece of clothing to class (it could be something you have outgrown). Where and when did you get this piece of clothing? Did someone special give it to you? How do you (did you) feel when you wear (wore) this article. When would you wear this item? What did you say, think, or do the first time you wore the item? If you can't remember exactly, that's okay. Imagine what you might have said. Describe your item of clothing, draw a picture (or take a photograph) and write about a memory associated with the article of clothing. Post the class memories on a bulletin board.

Remember When?

Can you think of a time when someone showed you how to make something? Write down the steps needed to make your item. Draw diagrams or illustrations to help a reader understand the process. (Note: Students might also like to put their ideas into book form.)

Interview a Family Member

Ask a grownup in your family a question about his or her childhood. Can you create a story based on this memory? If your family member can't think of a suitable memory, try asking one of these questions:

- What is the best present you ever received as a kid?
- Were you ever scared as a child? Why? What happened?
- Did you get a scar when you were a child? Describe the scar and how it happened.

Try This:

Ask an adult in your family to describe a piece of clothing he or she wore in the past that was considered fashionable. Ask if you can see a photograph of the person wearing the item. If no photo is available, perhaps your family member can find a similar one on the internet or in a book. Bring a copy of the photo into the class and have a virtual retro fashion show. How do fashions change over time? How are they similar?

Class Project: The Magic of Containers

Yetsa's grandmother keeps her big balls of yarn in cedar-root baskets. Containers can be as beautiful and interesting as the objects they hold.

- Ask each child to bring in a container of some sort and have the other class members try to guess what would be kept in the container. Containers might be bags, jars, boxes, bottles, tins, tanks, drawers, suitcases, folders, wallets, etc. Any object that has the primary function of holding or containing something else qualifies. Have each student create a piece of artwork inspired by the containers students bring into the classroom.
- Help students brainstorm lists of various types of containers.
- Show the class a reproduction of a still life painting and have them identify the containers in the painting.

Imagine This, Imagine That!

Imagine you are following Grandma and Yetsa as they walk to Grandma's house. Try to imagine every detail of what it would be like to make this trip. Then, describe what you, Yetsa, and Grandma see, hear, feel, smell, and taste as you are all walking along. Consider these questions:

- Does each person experience the walk in the same way?
- What are some things Yetsa might notice that Grandma doesn't?
- What do you notice that the others don't?
- What about Grandma? What does she notice?
- Describe the same walk, but this time, imagine what it would be like in winter.

Now imagine you could spend an afternoon with Yetsa. What would you do? What would you talk about? Write about a conversation you might have with Yetsa, or describe something you might do together. Use lots of details. Remember to use all your senses as you describe your afternoon. Include at least one thing that you would say, think, or feel.

Imagine a Ball of Yarn

Authors and artists use their imaginations all the time. They must create clear, detailed pictures in their minds in order to write, draw, or paint images to share with their audience. You can practise this by imagining a ball of yarn.

Consider the following:

- What colour is the yarn?
- Is it thick or thin?
- Coarse, prickly, or soft?
- The ball of yarn is about the same size as
- Imagine you are sniffing the yarn. Describe the smell.
- Name three things your teacher could do with this ball of yarn.
- What might a grandmother do with this ball of yarn?
- What would a cat do with the yarn? What about you? What would you do with this ball of yarn?

Vivid Words

Choose a favourite word from *Yetsa's Sweater*. What colour does this word remind you of? Should it be written large and bold? Tiny and pale? Straight? Crooked? Write the word on an index card. Use coloured pens, pencils, or crayons to write the word. Decorate the word. You may wish to glue your word into your writing journal.

Be Precise

Choose one of the following. Describe the steps needed to complete the task. You may complete the activity as a comic strip, poster, oral presentation, or written description.

Describe the steps needed to

- get milk from the cow's udder to the dinner table
- make a book
- make a quilt
- bake cookies
- build a birdhouse
- fix a flat tire
- make a pair of socks

Study the Artwork

1. Select another picture book from the library. Divide a page of looseleaf in half and write Joan Larson at the top of one side of the page and the other illustrator's name at the top of the other side. Compare the two illustrators' use of colour, texture, shape, perspective, medium, palette, line, space, and general style and approach to their work. (Note: For younger students, complete this exercise as a teacher-led group discussion.)

2. Choose a short selection from the text of *Yetsa's Sweater*. Do an illustration in the style of the other illustrator (i.e., NOT Joan Larson).

Go on a Scavenger Hunt

Find the following in the illustrations in *Yetsa's Sweater*.

- daffodils
- bead bracelet
- cedar basket
- spinner
- snow
- ponytail
- zipper
- carded wool
- washtub handle
- butter knife
- biscuit
- yellow folding chair
- sheer curtain
- cauldron
- washtub table
- two coffee mugs
- two red knitting needles
- two white sheep
- black fleece
- carding machine
- wooden chair

MAKING INFERENCES: Group Discussion— What Happens Beyond the Pages of the Book?

The author suggests information that is not necessarily contained directly in the text. Use these questions to generate discussion about aspects of the story and characters that are not revealed directly.

- How do you think Yetsa feels when she knows her favourite sweater is too small? How does she feel at the end of the story after her grandmother has finished her new sweater? What do you think she does with the old one? What things (items might not be clothing) can one grow out of? Have you ever grown out of something? How did that make you feel? **Try this:** write a paragraph that describes something you said, thought, or did that shows the reader how you felt.

Say What?

Create a conversation between Yetsa and her mother on a day when they go shopping together. Where do they go? What are they buying? What do they talk about?

Pulling It All Together

- What have you learned about the things that Yetsa's grandmother feels are important?
- Interview an adult in your family about a craft or skill he or she learned from an older adult family member.
- As a class, discuss how we are all responsible for preserving and honouring family traditions and keeping family stories alive.
- How are some ways that a culture can be lost or destroyed?
- How does making a sweater relate to preserving Coast Salish cultural traditions?
- Why do you think Sylvia Olsen wrote this book?
- What message do you think Sylvia Olsen hopes to share with readers?

BEYOND THE STORY:

Does *Yetsa's Sweater* remind you of any other books you have read? Why? Does the illustration style remind you of the work of any other artists?

FURTHER RESOURCES

Other Books and Resources About Sheep and Wool

Making Wool and Woolly Things

- *Farmer Brown Shears His Sheep: A Yarn About Wool* by Teri Sloat (DK Children)
- *Red Berry Wool* by Robyn Eversole (Albert Whitman and Co.)
- *Songs from the Loom: A Navajo Girl Learns to Weave* by Monty Roessel (Lerner Publications)
- *Warm as Wool* by Scott Russell Sanders (Aladdin)
- *Weaving the Rainbow* by George Ella Lyon (Atheneum)

Just for Fun

- *Argyle* by Barbara Brooks Wallace (Boyd's Mills Press)
- *Boo and Baa in the Woods* by Olaf Landstrom (R&S Books)
- *Buford the Little Bighorn* by Bill Peet (Houghton Mifflin)
- *Sheep in a Jeep* by Nancy Shaw (Houghton Mifflin)
- *Wool Gathering: A Sheep Family Reunion* by Lisa Wheeler (Atheneum)

Let's Get Crafty

- *Kids Knitting: Projects for Kids of all Ages* by Melanie Falick (Artisan)
- *Kids Weaving: Projects for Kids of All Ages* by Sarah Swett (STC Craft/A Melanie Falick Book)
- *Knitting (Kids Can Do It)* by Judy Sadler (Kids Can Press)
- *Magic Wool: Creative Activities With Natural Sheep's Wool* by Dagmar Schmidt (Floris Books)
- *More Magic Wool: Creating Figures and Pictures With Dyed Wool* by Angelika Wolk-Gerche (Floris Books)

Sheep

- *Hooray for Sheep Farming* by Bobbie Kalman (Crabtree Publishing)
- *My Sheep (My Farm)* by Heather Miller (Children's Press)
- *Sheep (A Complete Pet Owner's Manual)* by Hans Alfred Muller (Barron's)
- *Your Sheep: A Kid's Guide to Raising and Showing* by Paula Simmons (Storey Publishing)

Useful Books for Teachers

- *Reading Power: Teaching Students to Think While They Read* by Adrienne Gear (Pembroke)
- *Literature Is Back! Using the Best Books for Teaching Readers and Writers Across Genres* by Carol J. Fuhler and Maria P. Walther (Scholastic)

OTHER SONO NIS BOOKS BY SYLVIA OLSEN:

Counting on Hope

- juvenile historical fiction, 320pp, ISBN 978-1-55039-173-2, paper, \$14.95, ages 12+

The Girl With a Baby

- teen fiction, 200 pp, ISBN 1-55039-142-9, paper, \$9.95, ages 12+

Just Ask Us

A Conversation with First Nations Teenage Moms

- non-fiction, 160 pp, ISBN 1-55039-152-6, paper, \$19.95

No Time to Say Goodbye

Children's Stories of Kuper Island Residential School

with Rita Morris and Ann Sam

- fictionalized stories for young readers, 175 pp, ISBN 1-55039-121-6, paper, \$9.95

Which Way Should I Go?

with Ron Martin, illustrated by Kasia Charko

- picture book, 32 pp, 8 x 10", ISBN 1-55039-161-5, hardcover, \$19.95, full colour

White Girl

- teen fiction, 200 pp, ISBN 1-55039-147-X, paper, \$9.95, ages 12+

HOST AN AUTHOR VISIT

Sylvia Olsen loves to visit with students to talk about where stories come from and how she creates her books. Visit Sono Nis Press at www.sononis.com and download a copy of her brochure to learn more about inviting Sylvia to speak at your school.