FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Picture Books

Qu'Appelle
David Bouchard
Michael Lonechild, illustrator
Raincoast Books
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As haunting as a campfire ghost story, the legend of two Cree Indians is told in poetry evocative of oral tradition. Readers (or listeners) are cautioned that if they are out on the prairie as the sun is falling, and they hear a voice cry, “Qui appelle?” (“Who is calling?”) they should not answer.

The narrator leaves it to the imagination why an answer is ill advised, and having set the scene, he relates the legendary tale known to the Cree and others living in the Qu’Appelle region of Saskatchewan.

The handsome illustrations by a Cree artist follow the story of two small children, Witonia and Ikciv, who “Fell in love before they learned to walk. / They say they learned to think as one / Before they learned to walk or talk.” Their friendship was the pride of tribal members. As Witonia and Ikciv matured, their love deepened and they married. Soon, however, the couple would be tragically separated.

Ikciv was prepared through the Sun Dance for his tribal responsibilities and war with the Blackfoot. The raid was not to last long, but shortly after he departed with the war party, Witonia died in childbirth and, presumably, of a broken heart. After the battle was over and as the young brave headed back to his village he heard a voice calling “Qui appelle?” “His soul felt cold” as he came home and learned the fate of his wife. Unable to live without his beloved, Ikciv set off in his canoe to join her.

The author, a speaker and writer of twenty children’s books, provides information about the legend and the Northern Plains where he grew up. American children less familiar with the Cree Tribe and some of the poet’s terminology might also have benefited from a glossary to explain the Sun Dance and the English meaning of qui appelle.

The illustrator’s paintingsÃ’from his memoriesÃ’are filled with the rich colors of sunsets, deep shadows of cold winters, and verdant plains, where the Cree, appropriately, seem

to be part of the landscape.

Although published in picture book format, the poignant story of love, heartbreak, and death will likely appeal to eight- to ten-year-olds more than younger readers. It should inspire them to learn more about the Cree Indians … and to remember not to answer when they hear the ghostly voice call, “Qui appelle?”

Linda Salisbury