

The Drum Calls Softly

David Bouchard

Shelley Willier

Red Deer Press (Nov 8, 2008)

\$24.95 (120pp)

978-0-88995-421-2

The blurb on the front cover of *The Drum Calls Softly* asserts that this illustrated book is of equal importance to children and adults—a blurb has never been so right. From the beautifully painted illustrations to the world-class musicianship of Northern Cree on the accompanying audio CD, *The Drum* is a powerfully narrated tale of spiritual belonging that transcends cultural barriers, whether you page through the book listening to the narration in Cree, or you follow the story on its own.

David Bouchard, an award-winning author who is best known for *Nokum Is My Teacher*, and Shelley Willier, a first time author, poetically weave fragments of oral history into a story that chronicles the power of the drum, rhythm, and movement in Cree cul-ture—and in most every culture around the world. The storyline pulls the reader into the rhythm of the Round Dance, and the cyclical nature of life, from nature's cycles to the bonds of human friendship. "Dance in circles around the drum / Seek the magic and it will come. / Shut your eyes so you might hear / That song is sung to draw you near."

Jim Poitras, a self-taught and internationally renowned painter, contributes illustrations that add another dimension to the story. Fluctuating between literal interpretations of the scenes described by Bouchard and Willier and more abstract cultural representations that compliment the musical selection and extend the narrative to a truly multi-media project, Poitras's skillful brushstrokes accentuate the cyclical nature of the story and the graceful movements of the Round Dance. Northern Cree, a Grammy-nominated pow-wow group, perform the singing and drumming that is interspersed within the spoken narrative, as well as additional stand-alone tracks. All in all, *The Drum* is an artistically crafted bilingual book that has the potential to educate children and adults alike about Cree culture and the nature of the world we live in.

A Native American Thought of It is similarly an educational book, and although slightly more straight-forward, it is no less important. Written by Rocky Landon, an Ojibway band member and Native Studies consultant from Ontario, with children's book author David MacDonald, *A Native American Thought of It* chronicles inventions and accomplishments of Native Americans across the Americas.

Both of these books bring a diverse spectrum of Native American cultures to the forefront. *A Native American Thought of It* offers a broad overview of cultural, scientific, and artistic contributions in the past and present. *The Drum Calls Softly* showcases the artistic talents of contemporary Native American artists, while sharing the cultural practices of the Cree and their connection to the rest of the world. Each of these books shows us the importance of Native American cultures and histories in our lives, and both deserve a permanent spot on any reader's bookshelf; whether they are a child or an intellectually curious adult. (November/October)

ELIZABETH SHRAMKO (December 15, 2008)

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