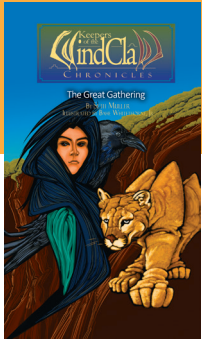


Teacher's Keepers of the Windclaw Chronicles The Great Gathering

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About the Book

For Navajo teachers this text offers an opportunity to connect reading and storytelling with traditional teachings about nature, respect, and balance. The book's imaginative world reflects both Western and Navajo ways of understanding the environment, helping students see that science and cultural knowledge can work together to explain the same truths.

At its heart, *The Great Gathering* begins with the land. The opening scenes on Defiance Plateau introduce the story through a biologist who observes strange animal behavior. This scientific observer represents Western ways of learning—recording, measuring, and analyzing—but his experience shifts into something more spiritual when the animals begin to communicate. In Navajo thought, this is not surprising: the natural world has spirit, and everything that moves or breathes has its own language. Teachers can help students recognize that when the animals speak in the story, they are acting as messengers, just as they do in Navajo oral traditions. Coyotes, cougars, and bluebirds are not only characters—they are teachers. They remind the reader to listen to the land and to walk carefully upon it.

The second chapter, "The Bluebird," introduces Ellie, a young girl who begins to hear the messages of nature. The bluebird, or *dólii*, carries a message of renewal and patience. In Navajo tradition, the bluebird is connected to happiness, the dawn, and new beginnings. When Ellie learns to listen to the bluebird, she begins to hear the song of the Earth itself—a metaphor for understanding balance and harmony. Teachers can encourage children to think about what it means to "listen" to nature, not only with ears but with respect, attention, and a peaceful heart. The bluebird's lesson mirrors the Navajo teaching of *Hózhó*, living in beauty and balance.

As the story continues, both Ellie and Alvin learn that they have gifts that connect them to the animal world. Alvin becomes a "Caller," someone who can hear and respond to the voices of animals. This power represents responsibility rather than control. In Navajo worldview, gifts from nature come with duties—to protect, to listen, and to maintain balance. Teachers can use this idea to help students reflect on their own strengths and responsibilities within their families and communities. Even young children can understand that to have a gift, such as kindness or patience, means to use it for good.

Throughout the story, the theme of K'é, or relationship, runs strongly. Alvin and Ellie's friendship, the bond between animals, and the connection between humans and land all reflect K'é. Betrayal, misunderstanding, and fear—like in the chapters "A Betrayal" and "Fear and Courage"—show what happens when K'é is broken. These moments offer important lessons for children about honesty and respect. Teachers can connect these scenes to classroom relationships, emphasizing cooperation, responsibility, and the restoration of peace after conflict. When the characters in the story regain trust and harmony, it mirrors the Navajo way of returning to balance through forgiveness and understanding.

Many scenes in *The Great Gathering* take place in landscapes familiar to Navajo students—Defiance Plateau, the canyons, the mesas, and Spider Rock. These are real places with sacred meaning. When Ellie reaches Spider Rock, she gains wisdom from the land itself. Spider Rock is tied to the story of Na'ashjé'ii Asdzáá, Spider Woman, who taught the people how to weave and how to create beauty in all actions. Ellie's courage at Spider Rock shows that true learning happens when one listens to both the Earth and one's own heart. Teachers can help students make connections between the settings in the story and their own surroundings—pointing out that the same land their ancestors walked continues to teach today.

Another major lesson of the story is courage. For young readers, courage often appears as facing fear, but in Navajo teachings, courage also means maintaining harmony even when things are uncertain. When Alvin and Ellie encounter chaos, they must remember who they are and what they value. The story reminds children that courage is not loud or forceful—it is quiet, patient, and balanced. It comes from understanding one's relationship to all beings.

The ending of *The Great Gathering* brings unity. Humans and animals come together in a great circle to restore balance to the world. This closing image connects perfectly to the Navajo understanding of the world as a circle—day following night, seasons following each other, and life continuing in harmony. Teachers can use this moment to help students reflect on the cycles in their own lives: daily routines, seasonal changes, or the ongoing work of caring for animals and family. The circle also represents cooperation and community, essential lessons for classroom culture.

For young Navajo learners, *The Great Gathering* bridges imagination and identity. Its fantasy elements—talking animals, dreams, and transformation—are familiar in traditional storytelling, where animals, winds, and stars all have voices. The story invites children to see that their cultural knowledge is not separate from reading and writing; it enriches it. Teachers can connect each chapter to both literacy skills and cultural reflection, encouraging students to draw, write, and share what they learn from animals, stories, and the land.

Ultimately, *The Great Gathering* is a story about returning to balance. It teaches that listening is powerful, that every being has a purpose, and that courage means living with respect for all. For Navajo teachers, it provides a bridge between literacy instruction and the living lessons of Hózhó and K'é—helping young readers grow as learners, storytellers, and caretakers of the natural world.

Readability

- Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level: 2.3
- Flesch Reading Ease Score: 86.5 (Easy to read; typical of early elementary narratives)

Grade 3 ELA Unit Plan: The Great Gathering — Learning from Land, Birds, and Animals

Day 1: On Defiance Plateau & The Bluebird (pp. 3–29)

Essential Question:

What can we learn from the animals around us—like the cougar, coyote, and bluebird—about balance and communication between humans and nature?

Big Idea:

Animals are teachers. The opening chapters introduce how humans, animals, and land are connected, showing that the Earth communicates through signs, sounds, and dreams.

AZ ELA Standards:

3.RL.1, 3.RL.2, 3.RL.4, 3.RL.7, 3.W.3, 3.W.8, 3.SL.1, 3.SL.2, 3.L.4

Objectives (SWBAT):

1. Describe the setting of Defiance Plateau and identify sensory details.
2. Explain the biologist’s encounter with the cougars and its lesson about respect for nature.
3. Interpret the symbolism of the bluebird’s message to “listen.”
4. Compare this idea to Navajo teachings about Hózhó.
5. Write and illustrate a short scene from nature.

Key Vocabulary:

English	Navajo	Sentence from Text	Page
Cougar	Ma'itsoh	"Two dozen cougars formed a circle."	10
Coyote	Ma'ii	"A coyote stood and admired the woman with a calm expression." 12	
Bluebird	Dólii	"The bluebird fluttered and flew toward the ground."	22
Mist	Díílid	"The smell of rain hung in the rare mist that hovered in the forest."	3
Song	Hane'	"Listen, the planet itself sings."	23

Lesson Flow:

1. Warm-Up: Play forest sounds and discuss what the land is saying.
2. Read-Aloud: "On Defiance Plateau" and "The Bluebird." Discuss animal messages.
3. Vocabulary: Fill in bilingual table.
4. Writing/Art: Write and draw a nature message.
5. Reflection: Share: "What the bluebird taught me."

Day 2: The Caller & A Betrayal (pp. 30–67)

Essential Question:

How do animals and humans communicate, and what can this teach us about trust?

Big Idea:

Alvin discovers his power to hear animals, while Ellie learns the pain of betrayal and truth.

AZ ELA Standards:

3.RL.1, 3.RL.3, 3.RL.4, 3.RL.7, 3.W.3, 3.W.8, 3.SL.1, 3.SL.4, 3.L.4

Objectives:

1. Identify Alvin’s “calling” and Ellie’s conflict.
2. Compare scientific and spiritual ways of animal communication.
3. Write from an animal’s perspective.

Vocabulary:

English	Navajo	Sentence from Text	Page
Coyote	Ma’ii	“The coyotes looked up. Human! they called out in his head.”	41
Cougar	Mą’iitsoh	“The cougars formed a circle.”	10
Caller	—	“A human bonded to the animals of claw and fur.”	43
Betrayal	—	“Kingwind has been spying for a coyote named Blacktail.”	63
Balance	Hózhó	“To hear the song is to know your path.”	24

Lesson Flow:

1. Warm-Up: Have you ever felt an animal trying to tell you something?
2. Read-Aloud: Alvin and Ellie’s chapters.
3. Discussion: Loyalty, honesty, and responsibility.
4. Writing: “If I could hear an animal’s voice...”
5. Reflection: Circle share.

Day 3: The Calling & To the Canyon (pp. 68–105)

Essential Question:

How do dreams and family stories guide us toward understanding our responsibilities to the Earth and each other?

Big Idea:

Both Alvin and Ellie are called toward their destinies through dreams and ancestral knowledge.

Standards:

3.RL.2, 3.RL.3, 3.RL.7, 3.W.3, 3.SL.1, 3.SL.4, 3.L.4

Objectives:

1. Summarize how dreams influence choices.
2. Describe symbols of water and mountains.
3. Write a paragraph about a place that teaches.

Vocabulary:

English	Navajo	Sentence from Text	Page
Water	Tó	"He became a Water Reader."	94
Mountain	Dook'ó'osłííd	"The Navajo called the mountain Dook'ó'osłííd."	72
Family	K'é	"Family stories help guide your path."	93
Dream	Náhóóhai	"The dream came to her on her first night back."	27

Lesson Flow:

1. Warm-up: Discuss dream messages.
2. Read: Family stories from Ellie's grandmother.
3. Discussion: How family guides us.
4. Writing: A place that teaches me something.
5. Share aloud.

Day 4: In the Fire & Taking Flight (pp. 107–130)

Essential Question:

What does it mean to be brave when facing fear or change?

Big Idea:

Fire and flight symbolize courage and transformation.

Standards:

3.RL.2, 3.RL.3, 3.RL.7, 3.W.3, 3.SL.1, 3.L.4

Objectives:

1. Identify courage in characters.
2. Explain symbols of fire and wings.
3. Write a story about facing fear.

Vocabulary:

English	Navajo	Sentence	Page
Fire	Kó	"In the firelight, Alvin saw the shadows dance."	107
Courage	Azee'tsoh	"He breathed deeply and faced the darkness."	115
Wings	Bits'óóz	"Taking flight into the unknown."	120

Lesson Flow:

1. Warm-up: Define bravery.
2. Read: Firelight and flight scenes.
3. Discuss: Fear and transformation.
4. Write: A time I was brave.
5. Reflect: How courage feels.

Day 5: Fear and Courage & Spider Rock (pp. 131–175)

Essential Question:

How do sacred places help us find courage and wisdom?

Big Idea:

Spider Rock teaches Ellie about spiritual strength and moral responsibility.

Standards:

3.RL.1, 3.RL.2, 3.RL.4, 3.W.2, 3.SL.1, 3.L.5

Objectives:

1. Identify Spider Rock's role in the story.
2. Describe transformation through sacred geography.
3. Write about a personal sacred place.

Vocabulary:

English	Navajo	Sentence	Page
Spider Rock	Tsé Na'ashjéii	"She looked toward Spider Rock and felt power rising."	160
Fear	Nááłts'óóz	"Fear turned into courage."	150
Sacred	Diyin	"The land itself was sacred."	162

Lesson Flow:

1. Warm-up: Locate Spider Rock on a map.
2. Read: Ellie's journey to Spider Rock.
3. Discuss: Sacred land as teacher.
4. Write: My sacred or special place.
5. Art: Map Spider Rock with labels.

Day 6: Campfire and Nightfall (pp. 177–215)

Essential Question:

Why do we tell stories at night?

Big Idea:

Stories by fire pass down wisdom and keep community connected.

Standards:

3.RL.2, 3.RL.5, 3.SL.1, 3.W.3, 3.L.5

Objectives:

1. Explain storytelling's purpose.
2. Retell a story in students' own words.
3. Create a nighttime story scene.

Vocabulary:

English	Navajo	Sentence	Page
Campfire	Kó	"They sat by the campfire and shared stories."	180
Story	Hane'	"The story connected them all."	190
Night	Táá'tsoh	"Under the night sky they learned."	204

Lesson Flow:

1. Warm-up: Share a short Navajo story.
2. Read: Campfire chapters.
3. Discuss: Why storytelling matters.
4. Retell: Students act out a scene.
5. Draw: Symbols of storytelling.

Day 7: Into the Chaos & Two Fell Off (pp. 216–283)

Essential Question:

What happens when people or animals lose balance?

Big Idea:

Conflict and chaos test courage, cooperation, and Hózhó.

Standards:

3.RL.2, 3.RL.3, 3.RL.7, 3.W.1, 3.SL.1

Objectives:

1. Identify conflicts in nature and story.
2. Explain how balance is restored.
3. Compare storms and emotions through writing.

Vocabulary:

English	Navajo	Sentence	Page
Chaos	Náhoots'óóz	"They entered the chaos of wind and sound."	220
Cooperation	K'é	"Working together brought peace."	260
Balance	Hózhó	"The world must return to balance."	270

Lesson Flow:

1. Warm-up: What is chaos?
2. Read: Conflict scenes.
3. Discuss: Restoring balance.
4. Write: Compare a storm to an argument.
5. Reflect: Peace-building actions.

Day 8: Into the Circle, Beneath the Sunset, Epilogue (pp. 284–318)

Essential Question:

How do humans and animals come together to restore harmony?

Big Idea:

The story ends in unity; balance and healing come full circle.

Standards:

3.RL.2, 3.RL.3, 3.W.3, 3.SL.4, 3.L.5

Objectives:

1. Summarize the conclusion and its message.
2. Discuss how characters change.
3. Write about harmony in nature.

Vocabulary:

English	Navajo	Sentence	Page
Circle	Náshdóitsoh	"They entered the circle of all beings."	290
Harmony	Hózhó	"Beneath the sunset, balance returned."	300
Healing	Ats'idi	"The world began to heal."	310

Lesson Flow:

1. Warm-up: Thankfulness circle.
2. Read: Final chapters.
3. Discuss: Unity and cooperation.
4. Write: What harmony means to me.
5. Art: Class mural of unity.

Days 9–10: Final Book Project — Animals, Birds, and Insects of The Great Gathering

Objectives:

1. Identify key species in the story.
2. Research habitats and roles in Navajo worldview.
3. Explain each animal's lesson about Hózhó.
4. Create an illustrated bilingual booklet or poster.

Activities:

Day 9: Draft notes and sketches with Navajo/English labels.

Day 10: Present projects to class and share reflections.

Assessment Rubric:

Category	4 - Exemplary	3 - Proficient	2 - Developing	1 - Emerging
Content	Accurate and complete	Mostly accurate	Limited detail	Incomplete
Bilingual Vocabulary	All labeled in Navajo & English	Most labeled	Some missing	Few or none
Visual Design	Neat, colorful, detailed	Clear and legible	Minimal effort	Disorganized
Presentation	Confident and clear	Understandable	Hesitant	Unclear

Culminating Reflection:

Write one paragraph: What I learned from the animals about balance and Hózhó.

Resources for Teachers

Annotated Bibliography: Fiction for Grades 2–3 — Balance of Nature and Respect for Animals and Insects

- Arkhurst, J. F. (1992). *The adventures of Spider: West African folktales*. Little, Brown.
This collection of short trickster tales features Spider, a clever and mischievous character who learns lessons about humility, fairness, and respect for other creatures. Each story illustrates the interdependence of all living beings, making it a strong complement to *The Day of Storms* for classroom discussions on moral balance in nature. (Lexile: ~700L)
- Begay, S. (1995). *Ma'ii and Cousin Horned Toad*. Northland Publishing.
In this Navajo trickster tale, Ma'ii (Coyote) learns about humility and intelligence from his smaller relative, Horned Toad. The story highlights traditional teachings about harmony, cooperation, and the dangers of pride—core ideas about maintaining balance within the natural world. (Lexile: ~600L)
- Bruchac, J. (1994). *The great ball game: A Muskogee story*. Dial Books.
This animal fable tells of a great ball game between the birds and the animals, showing how even small creatures like Bat play vital roles in the natural order. Students learn about fairness, teamwork, and the equality of all beings in creation. (Lexile: ~680L)
- Bruchac, J., & Ross, G. (2008). *The girl who helped Thunder and other Native American folktales*. Sterling Publishing.
A diverse collection of short traditional stories that explore the connections between humans, animals, and the environment. These tales emphasize harmony with the earth and illustrate how balance in nature is achieved through respect and responsibility. (Lexile: ~700L)
- Oughton, J., & Desimini, L. (1996). *How the stars fell into the sky: A Navajo legend*. Houghton Mifflin.
In this Navajo creation story, First Woman's effort to bring order to the world through the placement of stars demonstrates the importance of responsibility, intention, and balance in nature. The poetic language and luminous illustrations make it ideal for read-alouds and independent reading. (Lexile: ~650L)
- Powell, P. H. (2006). *Frog brings rain*. Salina Bookshelf.
This retelling of a traditional Navajo story portrays Frog as a bringer of rain who restores life to the desert. It teaches young readers about the sacredness of water, gratitude, and the harmony between weather, animals, and humans. (Lexile: ~600L)

Wade, M., & Pinkney, P. (2016). *The water princess*. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Based on the true story of model and activist Georgie Badiel, this picture book follows a young girl who dreams of bringing clean water to her village. The narrative nurtures empathy, stewardship, and respect for natural resources—values that echo the water and storm imagery in *The Day of Storms*. (Lexile: ~600L)

Yazzie, S. G. (1998). *The three little sheep*. Salina Bookshelf.

This Navajo adaptation of *The Three Little Pigs* replaces pigs with sheep and introduces Coyote as the trickster antagonist. Through humor and cultural imagery, it reinforces lessons of perseverance, homebuilding, and respect for traditional lifeways and animals. (Lexile: ~550L)