

EDCI 305: Drama Education as a Medium for Learning

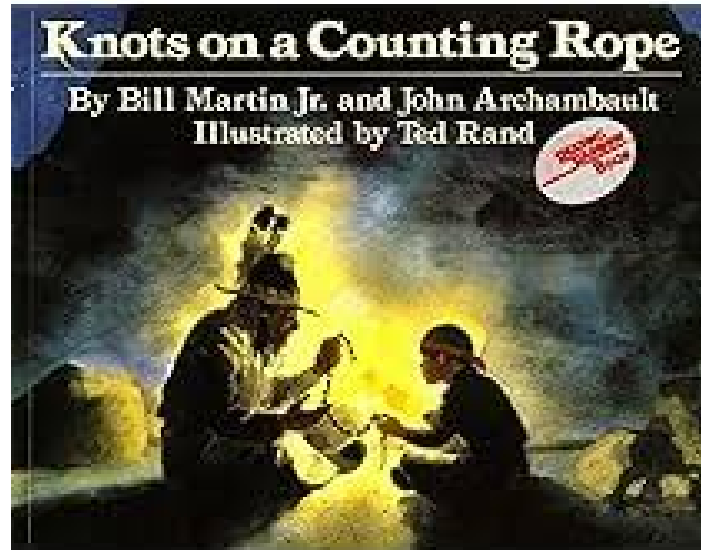
Story Drama

“Knots on a Counting Rope” - By Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault

Published in 1966 by Henry Holt and Co.

Phil Duchene

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Created By Ella, Lindsay and Makayla

Why did we choose this book?

We choose this book because it demonstrates the concept of key intergenerational relationships and how they help guide us in our lives. This story highlights the relationship between a grandfather and grandson, showing wisdom that is passed down, represented by a “knot” that is tied for the story that is shared. The knots of the rope are a symbol of a significant memory or lesson that was shared with his grandfather that we will carry with him throughout his life. This book has themes of overcoming challenges and finding strength, which are important concepts students should learn at a young age. We also chose this book for its powerful themes of Indigenous knowledge that can be learned, valued and shared. We were especially drawn to it because of its beautiful and meaningful illustrations.

Abstract/ summary/ cover depiction:

The story is about a young blind boy who asks his grandfather to tell him the story of the day he was born. As the grandfather tells the story again and again, describing the boy’s inner strength and the challenges he has faced, he ties another knot on a rope. Each knot represents another time the story has been told. Over time, the boy learns the story by heart and will one day be able to tell his own story.

When the boy was born, he was very frail and his family feared he would not survive. The next morning, his grandfather took him outside and two galloping horses stopped beside them. The baby reached out to touch them and his grandfather believed the boy shared the horses’ strength. As he grew stronger and healthy, he was given the name Boy-Strength-of-Blue-Horses. Although he is blind and cannot see the colour blue, his grandfather explains that blue is like the morning sky. Morning is something the boy understands through the feeling of the warmth of the sun and hearing the sound of birds.

The book is about passing down intergenerational knowledge and stories. It highlights the relationship between the boy and his grandfather, who is preparing his grandson for the day when he will no longer be there. The grandfather wants the boy to know that he has strength, which will help him overcome hardships in life and that the story of the day he was born will remind him of that. The struggles the boy will face are referred to by the grandfather as the “dark mountains” he will have to climb. Although the boy is blind and lives in a world of darkness, his grandfather reminds him that he has a strong spirit and has great inner strength.

Key understandings and questions

- It helps students understand how to overcome their fears and life's challenges.
- Teaches students to have courage and find their inner strength through difficult situations.
- Helps children understand the importance of intergenerational relationships.
- Illustrates the importance of seeking love, guidance and support during times of need, reminding us that strength often comes from the connections we cherish most.

Learning outcomes:

- Students will be able to connect to a variety of dramatic forms (Grade 3 art BC curriculum- content section)
- Students will be able to use symbolism as a way of creating and representing meaning (Grade 3 art BC curriculum- content section)
- Students will be able to use built megacognitive strategies (Grade 3 ELA BC curriculum- content section)
- Students will be able to know and understand functions and genres of stories and other texts (Grade 3 ELA BC curriculum- content section)

Connecting the Book to *First People's Principles of Learning*.

Our Story Drama lesson strongly connects to the second *First Peoples Principle of Learning*: Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational. Students actively engage with the story through embodied and meaningful experiences. During the *Frozen Tableau* and *Step Up to the Line* activities, students physically participate in the learning process, moving beyond passive listening. In the Frozen Tableau, students step into the roles of the characters and practice empathy, perspective-taking and emotional awareness as they represent the scene with their bodies.

The lesson also encourages deep personal reflection. Through the *Knots of Courage* activity and guided imagery exercise, students connect the story to their own lived experiences. When creating their Knots of Courage, students reflect on significant memories, accomplishments and moments of bravery, recognizing how these experiences have shaped their

identity. By engaging students intellectually, physically, emotionally and relationally, the lesson demonstrates how learning can be holistic and rooted in meaningful personal connection.

The symbolism of the “blue horses”:

We found a study on the colour symbolism in the cultures of the North American Indigenous Peoples. Research says tribes associate the colour blue with the sky, water, spirituality and calmness depending on geography of tribes and tribal language (Derzhavina, 2020). Horses hold deep spiritual significance in many Plains and Great Basin cultures, horses are sacred relatives, symbols of strength and freedom and part of spiritual life and ceremony (Brence, 2025).

Intro

Teacher: Gather students on the carpet in the classroom. “It’s important that we remember that this book was written a long time ago, in 1966. Back then, people didn’t always understand or respect that Indigenous stories belong to families and communities. Today, we know it’s important to listen carefully and honor who the story comes from.”

Teacher: Introduce the book by doing a cover analysis. “What do you think this book could be about based on the cover and back illustrations?” “Let’s take a look at the illustrations and the title. Talk with your partner about what you think the book might be about. Share your ideas and listen to each other. There are no wrong answers!”

Students: Pair and share, in groups of 2-3 students (2 mins)

Activity - Step Up to the Line (3 mins)

Materials: No materials needed, story book only.

Focus: This activity helps students connect the story to their own lives. Stepping forward shows what relates to them, and the discussion uses these ideas to think about what the book is really about.

Teacher: “Now we’re going to play a game called *Step Up to the Line*! First, make two lines facing each other. I’ve put a line of tape in the middle. This is the ‘step-up line.’ I will read a statement, and if it’s true for you, step onto the line for just a moment. Then step back into your line. We’ll do this for several statements, and not everyone will step up for every one and that’s ok! Just be honest and have fun!”

- Step up if someone in your family tells you special stories.
- Step up if you can remember a story someone told you about when you were little.
- Step up if nature helps you feel calm.
- Step up if you have been somewhere that felt peaceful.
- Step up if you kept trying even when something was hard.
- Step up if you enjoy telling stories to others.
- Step up if someone encouraged you when you felt unsure.
- Step up if you have a special memory with a grandparent.
- Step up if a story has ever made you feel better when you were scared.
- Step up if you enjoy riding horses or learning about animals.

Teacher: After activity is finished, gather students back at the carpet. Prompt the students to discuss what they think the book is about through pair and share. “Okay, now that we are finished playing *Step Up to the Line*, I’d like you to find a partner and discuss what you think the book may be about based on some of the statements in the game.”

Students: Pair and share, in groups of 2-3 students (2 mins)

Story begins

Teacher: Read pages 1-5.

Activity - Frozen Tableau (7 mins)

Materials: No materials needed, story book only.

Focus: This activity lets students act out an important part of the story, showing feelings, relationships and themes like courage and love, while working together and having fun.

Teacher: “Now that we have read a bit of the story, I want you to get into groups of 4 and depict the scene of the sleeping boy in his grandfather's arms petting the two horses by creating a *Frozen Tableau*. Frozen tableaus are portraying a character's emotions and facial expressions without any movement and no talking. Your bodies and facial expressions should retell the scene in the story. One person will be the baby. How can your body show that you are a small, sleeping baby? Maybe curl up, close your eyes and stay very still. Two people will be the horses. Think about how horses stand. Can you make your body tall and strong? Maybe bend forward slightly, hold your hands like a horse's head, or show your legs ready to gallop. The last person will be the grandfather. How could you show that he is protecting the baby? Try holding the baby tight in your arm and raising your other arm toward the horses. Think about the feelings in the scene. Are the horses calm and curious? Is the grandfather surprised or peaceful?”

Students: Students will break into groups of 4 and will have 3 minutes to think of their frozen tableau and which characters they will be portraying. After, the teacher will prompt each group to show their frozen tableau to the rest of the class.

Teacher: “Okay everyone, time is up. We will now go around to each group and each group will have the opportunity to show the class their tableau. We will all have a chance to observe each tableau and see which character is being portrayed.”

Story Continues - Teacher prompts students to come back to carpet

Teacher: Read pages 6-9 pages (including illustration pages)

Activity - Art Poster (Individual) (20 mins)

Materials:

- Regular size paper for each student
- Pencils
- Coloured pencil crayons or markers

Focus: This activity helps students connect the story to their own happy memories, showing how memories can bring comfort and strength, just like for the boy in the story.

Teacher: Introduce key concepts learned so far. “I want you to think about what blue means to you. How does blue make you feel? Once you have an idea, I’d like you to take time to create a visual of a memory or something that makes you feel happy.” Show your own example. Prompt students to create individual posters with visuals that answer these questions.

Students: Work independently on posters.

Story Continues - Teacher prompts students to come back to carpet

Teacher: Read the remaining pages of the book.

Activity - Knots of Courage - Personal Reflection (20 mins)

Materials:

- Yarn or string (18–24 inches per student)
- Beads
- Masking Tape (for labeling knots)
- Markers
- Pencils
- Paper (for brainstorm)
- Scissors

Focus: This activity helps students reflect on their brave moments and personal growth, while building confidence and sharing with classmates.

Teacher: Discuss the importance of constant self check-ins and reflection. Introduce the “Knots of Courage” activity. Students will receive all the materials they need to create their own personal “courage rope” with knots representing important memories, accomplishments, or moments of courage.

Teacher: “Today, you will create your own counting rope. Each knot will stand for an important memory, moment of bravery, or special event in your life. I’d like you to brainstorm 3-5

important memories, accomplishments, or moments of courage that you've endured. You can use words, pictures or short phrases." Show your own example.

Students: Brainstorm (5 mins)

Students: After brainstorming 3-5 ideas, it's time for students to create their individual knot rope. Students will tie a colourful bead at the knot as well as a piece of tape with their special moment on it (short phrase, word or visual). (15 mins)

Teacher: "Now that you've made your memory ropes, find a new partner to share with. Remember, these are your own memories, so let's listen carefully and make sure our friends feel heard and understood." (Groups of 2-3 / 2mins)

Conclusion Activity - Guided Imagery (Final Class Reflection) (5 mins)

Materials: No materials needed, story book only.

Focus: This activity helps students imagine how the boy feels, building empathy and understanding themes like love, courage, and reassurance.

Teacher: Direct students to come back to the carpet. Prompt students to shut their eyes and put themselves in the boy's shoes (students in role - being blind). "Okay, everyone, close your eyes for a moment. I want you to imagine that you are the boy in the story. Try to think about what it would feel like if you couldn't see. What would you notice with your other senses? How would the world feel different?"

Students: Close their eyes and envision what life would look like for the boy in the story.

Teacher: "Think about how the boy might feel after hearing his grandfather's story. Now, think about how he feels when his grandfather says his love will always be with him. Finally, think about how the boy and his grandfather are connected to the story."

This activity is all done individually.

Students: Thinking quietly about how these questions relate to the boy, themselves, and their own families.

End Scene

Reflective closure to lesson:

In order to bring reflective closure to this lesson, the teacher will gather the students back together into a circle, to complete a full class discussion. Teacher will ask questions such as:

- “What gives us strength?”
- “How do stories and relationships help guide us through challenges?”

After this, the teacher will reconnect with the counting rope by asking the group:

- “Why do you think the grandfather tied knots in the rope every time he told the story?”
- “What do you think the rope means now that we have read the book?”

The teacher will then have the students silently- individually reflect on their own counting ropes. The purpose of this is to help support students in integrating the key questions from this lesson; what can we learn from intergenerational relationships? Through reflection, emotional engagement, and personal connection, it also aligns with the First Peoples Principles of Learning through reflection, relational understanding, and self-awareness through shared storytelling.

Peer Assessment:

2 stars and a wish

Star 1: ★ What did you like about these activities?

Star 2: ★ What's another thing you liked about the activities?

Wish: 🗨️ What is something they could add next time or improve on?

Teacher Assessment:

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Beginning (1)
Engagement & Participation	Actively participates in all activities; contributes ideas and effort consistently.	Participates in most activities; contributes ideas and effort.	Participates sometimes; contributes minimally or inconsistently.	Rarely participates; does not contribute ideas or effort.
Personal Connection & Reflection	Thoughtfully connects personal experiences to the story; provides deep reflection on feelings, memories, or courage.	Connects personal experiences to the story; provides adequate reflection.	Shows limited connection to personal experiences; reflections are basic or general.	Little or no connection to personal experiences; reflections are minimal or absent.
Creativity & Expression	Uses creative ideas and artistic/dramatic expression to clearly represent thoughts, feelings, or story concepts.	Demonstrates some creativity and expression in representing ideas.	Uses limited creativity; expression is minimal or unclear.	Rarely demonstrates creativity; ideas are not expressed clearly.
Collaboration & Communication	Works effectively with others; listens, shares, and communicates clearly in group discussions or activities.	Works cooperatively with others most of the time; communicates adequately.	Works with others sometimes; communication is limited.	Struggles to work with others; does not communicate effectively.
Understanding of Story Themes & Concepts	Demonstrates a strong understanding of story themes (courage, love, memory, reassurance) through discussion, artwork, or drama.	Shows understanding of most story themes and concepts.	Shows partial understanding; some themes or concepts are unclear.	Shows little or no understanding of story themes or concepts.
Use of Materials / Tools (Art & Drama)	Uses all materials and tools thoughtfully and effectively to enhance work.	Uses most materials and tools appropriately.	Uses materials and tools with limited effectiveness.	Rarely uses materials or tools appropriately.
Effort & Reflection	Completes tasks with care and effort; demonstrates thoughtful reflection on learning.	Completes tasks with adequate effort; shows some reflection.	Completes tasks with minimal effort; reflection is limited.	Tasks are incomplete or show little effort; reflection is absent.

Student Self-Assessment:

Name: _____

Date: _____

I can...

 **Yes, I
did this!**

 **I did this
a little**

 **I need to
work on this**

Join in all parts of the activity and try my best

Think about my own memories, feelings, or experiences

Show my ideas using words, pictures, or actions

Work well with my group, listen, and share ideas

Understand the story and its ideas about courage, love, and memories

Use materials (art supplies, yarn, beads, etc.) carefully and creatively

Reflect on what I learned from the activity

Feel proud of my work and my effort

References

- Brence, E. (2025, August 11). *The Spiritual and Cultural Legacy of Horses in Native American History*. Buffalo Bill Center of the West.
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- Derzhavina, O. A., Smirnov, A. V., Ivanova, E. Y., Gribkova, G. I., & Korshunova, N. N. (2020). Color Symbolism in the Cultures of the North American Indians. *Journal of Advanced Research in Dynamical and Control Systems*, 12(5), 1339–1345.
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