

Reader Guide

REMEMBER ME: Tomah Joseph's Gift to Franklin Roosevelt

Donald Soctomah and Jean Flahive

Illustrated by Mary Beth Owens

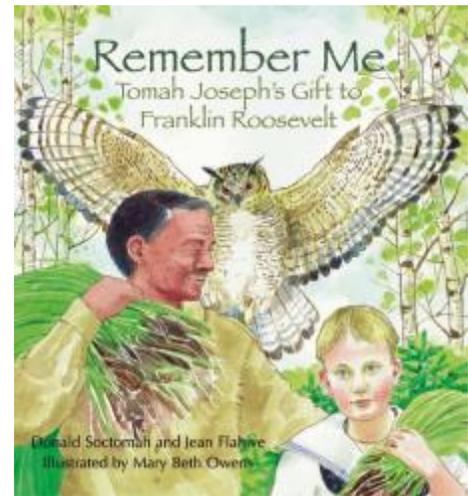
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Children / Biography / Native Americans;

Grades 3-6



Summary

Remember Me is a fictional story based on the real-life friendship of the young Franklin Roosevelt and the distinguished Passamaquoddy guide and artist Tomah Joseph. Franklin expects to learn how to paddle a canoe from Tomah Joseph but learns much more about the guide's love for the natural world and his hope that the stories of his people would be remembered always.

- *Remember Me* will lead to discussions about
- Native Americans in Maine and the Maritimes during the Victorian Age (approximately 1857-1912)
- Native American adaptability
- Storytelling in indigenous cultures
- Birch bark basket making and canoe building
- Seasonal migration of Native peoples
- Modes of transportation in the Victorian Age
- The importance of Franklin Delano Roosevelt
- The importance of Tomah Joseph

BEFORE YOU READ

Background

Inspired by the owl-etched canoe at the Roosevelt summer home on Campobello Island—a canoe built by Tomah Joseph—authors Donald Soctomah and Jean Flahive have created a glimpse into another time, when life as the Passamaquoddy knew it was shifting. Tomah Joseph exemplifies the adaptive qualities of the Native peoples of Maine and the Maritimes. Children will learn about a culture that had a strong history for hundreds of years, as well as, natural habitats of saltwater marshes and birch bark basketry and canoe building.

Access Prior Knowledge

- What does it mean to be an artist vs. a craftsperson?
- What are different ways stories can be told? Orally? Pictorially? Dramatized?

AFTER YOU READ

Activity

Native American Storytelling

Usually storytelling among Native American peoples is reserved for wintertime, when there is less outdoor work and more time to sit together with hand-held projects such as needlework or basketry. Donald Soctomah believes that Tomah Joseph might have purposely overlooked this tradition in his desire to share the values of his people with Franklin, which is why he tells Franklin the story of the *Mother Bear and the Lost Boy* despite it being mid-summer.

Please see bibliography and web resources for legends you could read or tell to your students.

Through his artwork Tomah Joseph recorded the origin stories of his people. He often added the words *Mikwid hamin*—variously translated as "remember me" or "I remember"—to his illustrations of the legends. He also told his stories to folklorist Charles Leland, who published Tomah Joseph's Passamaquoddy tales along with those of other Wabanaki Indians in his book *Algonquin Legends of New England* (1884). Leland listed Tomah Joseph first among his sources. Clearly Tomah Joseph wanted his people's stories to survive.

- Why would Tomah Joseph want his people's stories to survive?
- What happened to the Native American populations throughout the country as more and more European settlers arrive and set up their homes?
- Do you think all of the origin stories have survived? Why or why not?

- Charles Leland was not Native American. Do you think this fact affects how he recorded Native American stories?

Adapting to New Needs

In *Remember Me*, young Franklin wonders if Tomah Joseph missed his old way of living.

- Do you think he did? Why?
- What scenes from the book show that Tomah Joseph might have missed his old way of living?

Tomah Joseph used his skills to forge a new way of making a living when European settlers arrived and changed the socio-economic system. He used his hunting, fishing, and canoeing skills when he hired himself out as a guide. He also adapted his birchbark work to meet the needs of Victorian tourists and summer visitors. Instead of traditional workbaskets, which the tourists were less likely to buy, he could make handkerchief boxes and sewing kits, which they highly valued.

Many people describe the ability Native American people have to function within their own culture, while also adapting to a dominant culture as "walking in two worlds." "Walking in two worlds" is a metaphor for functioning in more than one cultural system. (Many people, in fact, walk in more than two worlds!)

- Are there any ways you walk in two (or more) worlds?
- Do you know anyone else who might walk in two worlds? Maybe a family who has recently immigrated?
- What are the benefits of walking in two worlds?
- What are the costs of walking in two worlds?
- Do you need to be smart to adapt and to survive?

Research a Game

- See if you can find a game that Native American children might have played during the time period of *Remember Me*.
- Now try to find one European American children might have played.
- How are they the same?
- How are they different?
- Play the games.

Tell a Story with Pictures

Using Tomah Joseph's art as an example, invite your students to tell a family story with pictures. The story might have happened yesterday, four years ago, or a lifetime ago during grandparents' time. Ask your students to first write the story down. Now, after looking at some of Tomah Joseph's art, invite your students to tell the story in pictures. Remind your students that stick figures are absolutely OK to use and point to Tomah Joseph's stick figures as an example.

- Objective: Understand a story has a beginning, a middle and an end. Use of consecutive scenes to convey the passage of time.

- Look at the examples of Tomah Joseph's etchings in Remember Me. And look up his work online or in the books listed in the bibliography below. You can go to www.abbemuseum.org/pages/collections/curator-features/handkerchief-box.html for an illustration of Tomah Joseph's handkerchief box.

What Does It Mean to Be an Artist?

Tomah Joseph (1837-1914) distinguished himself as an individual artist by signing his etched birchbark baskets and canoes. Very few Native Americans before had signed their work. Tomah Joseph also stretched beyond the traditional geometric and naturalistic designs of his Passamaquoddy people, to pictorial representations of daily life and Origin Stories. That is, he etched pictures of people and animals and items such as wigwams onto his baskets. The pictures he etched actually tell stories in sequential scenes. Tomah Joseph created a whole new and different art form.

- How would you define "art," "artist," "craft," and "craftsperson."?
- Can a person be both an artist and a craftsperson? How?
- Can an object be both a piece of art and a craft?

Writing in Place

With Passamaquoddy Bay as the setting, write a creative essay with as many accurate nature details as you can find about:

- Flying as an eagle over Passamaquoddy Bay
- Swimming with your porpoise sibling
- Being a fish caught in a fish weir
- Traveling through the woods with your cubs as a Mama bear

Activity: Researching the Tides and Their Potential

Passamaquoddy Bay has a tidal shift of 20 feet.

- Is this unusual?
- How do tides work? Why do we have tides?
- What are the benefits of tides?
- What is a tidepool?
- What would you be likely to find in a tidepool in Passamaquoddy Bay?

Research some of the controversy around harnessing the Passamaquoddy Bay tides for hydroelectricity.

- What is hydroelectricity?
- How does it work? Can you draw a diagram?
- What are the benefits of hydroelectricity?
- How would a hydroelectrical facility affect Passamaquoddy Bay or any flowing water source?
- What kinds of alternative energy sources (renewable resources) can you name

For Further Discussion

- After reading the book, how do you view the uses of trees differently?

What kind of vacation traditions does your family have?

Further Reading

Muskrat Will be Swimming by Cheryl Savageau, illustrated by Robert Hynes (Tilbury House,

A Caribou Alphabet by Mary Beth Owens (Tilbury House, 1988)

Kunu's Basket by Lee DeCora (Tilbury House, 2011)

Unsettled Past, Unsettled Future: The Story of Maine Indians by Neil Rolde (Tilbury House, 2004)

An Upriver Passamaquoddy by Allen Sockagasin (Passamaquoddy) (Tilbury House, 2007)

Thanks to the Animals by Allen Sockabasin, Passamaquoddy Story teller, illustrated by Rebekah Raye (Tilbury House, 2005)

Internet Resources

You may find the following Internet resources helpful as your students continue to explore the topic of the book.

Maine Indian Tribes and Languages

Site lists tribes of Maine with geographical and historical information

<http://www.native-languages.org/maine.htm>

Native American Rights Fund

Site for the organization that has provided legal assistance to Indian tribes, organizations, and individuals nationwide

<http://www.narf.org>

Native American Baskets

This site gives information on the different types of baskets and materials used by many different tribes

<http://www.native-languages.org/baskets.htm>