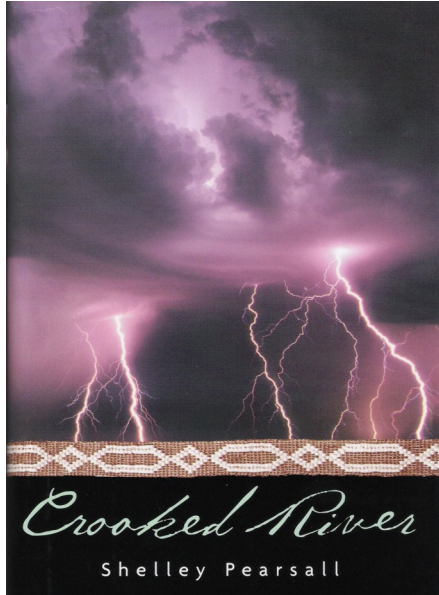


CROOKED RIVER Reading Guide



The year is 1812. A white trapper is found murdered. And a young Chippewa Indian stands accused of the crime.

Held captive in the cabin of the Carver family, the Chippewa man awaits his trial by the white settlement. In a world of crude frontier justice where evidence is often overlooked in favor of vengeance, the young Indian faces the wrath of a community eager to see him executed for his crime. And 13-year-old Rebecca Carver is caught in the middle.

With the captive cruelly chained in the loft of her cabin and her own father serving as a witness in the trial, Rebecca is caught between her family's beliefs and her growing suspicion that the Chippewa man is innocent. Ultimately, she must decide for herself who -- and what -- is right. At stake is a life.

Told through the dramatic, alternating voices of 13 year old Rebecca Carver and the Chippewa man known as John Amik, CROOKED RIVER takes a powerful look at prejudice, justice, and the clash of two cultures on the Ohio frontier. Inspired by a true story. Suggested for 6th grade and up.

Published by Alfred A. Knopf, 2005 ISBN: 0-440-41811-9

Curriculum Connections: Native American Cultures, Early Settlements, Poetry, Point of View

Praise for CROOKED RIVER

2006 Notable Social Studies Trade Book

New York Public Library Top 100

Great Lakes Book Award finalist

State Reading Award nominee in Oklahoma, Maryland, Illinois, Maine and New Hampshire

Starred Review

"This vivid look into the reality of crude frontier life and justice is outstanding historical fiction." -- *Kirkus Reviews*

Starred Review

"Captivating tale of fear, ignorance and bravery on the Ohio frontier...Packed with believable characters wrapped in a thoroughly researched plot, Crooked River is a must-read for fans of historical fiction and would aptly serve as a discussion-rich tool for American studies." -- *School Library Journal*

Pre-reading Activities

Find: Locate Ohio and the Cuyahoga River in northern Ohio on a map. Notice the unusual U-shaped route of the river which gives it the nickname “Crooked” River.

Investigate: Provide students with an outline map of the United States. Have students research and shade in the states that were part of the U.S. in 1812. Discuss: Who lives in the territories (non-shaded parts)? Where would conflicts be most likely to occur?

Vocabulary and Discussion Questions

The following questions are divided by chapters. They can be used for discussions or written responses.

Poem and Chapter 1 (pages 3 – 10)

Vocabulary: gichi-mookomaanag (white men), vexed, ailing, savage

- Who are the two speakers on these pages? Describe the differences between their voices.
- On page 3, it says, “It is the time when the leaves are small on the trees.” What time of year would this be? (early spring) Discuss what descriptive phrases could be used for other seasons.

Chapters 2 to 5 (pages 11 – 34)

Vocabulary: razor strop (leather strap), parched, pallet, catamounts, kindling, slop jar (chamber pot)

- Describe each of the Carver family members. What are their similarities and differences?
- What does the derogatory word “savage” show about the settlers’ views of Native Americans?
- What does Indian John mean by the phrase “I walk through the darkness with my ears” (p. 25)? If you could walk somewhere with your ears, describe where you would go.

Poem and Chapters 6 to 10 (pages 35 – 61)

Vocabulary: mournful, nashke (look), paltry, shillings, quill, trinkets, clabbered (spoiled), trifling, learned

- Why does Indian John give beads to the girls on page 41?
- What words and phrases demonstrate Indian John's negative opinion of the trapper on pages 56 – 57?
- What is a Learned Pig Show? (p.58) In what ways is Indian John being treated more like an animal than a human being by the settlers?

Chapters 11 to 14 and Poem (pages 62 – 88)

Vocabulary: acquaintance, neejee (my male friend), vermilion, eya (yes), beau, widower, grindstone, cache, snowshoe, bowstring, moons (months)

- What are some of the experiences shared by Peter Kelley and John Amik when they were growing up?
- How does Peter Kelley's upbringing affect the way he views John Amik?
- On page 77, Rebecca finds an arrowhead in her family's fields. How does this discovery change her views of Native Americans?
- What is the meaning of the "Fox, Snake, and Man" story?

Chapters 15 to 17 and Poem (pages 89 – 107)

Vocabulary: Kitche Manitou (Great Spirit), dread, ague, haversack, blasphemous

- How did Amik's family save Peter Kelley's mother?
- How does the earlier story of "Fox, Snake, and Man" relate to Peter Kelley's story about the rattlesnake in Chapter 15?
- On page 101, Amos says, "If he (John Amik) wasn't guilty, there wouldn't be a trial...." What is wrong with his view of justice? Discuss what makes a fair trial.

Chapters 18 to 21 and Poem (pages 108 – 129)

Vocabulary: portmanteau, camphor, breeches, objection

- Why do you think Pa requires his daughters to attend the trial?
- How is the jury described on page 116 different than a jury of today? What groups are missing? Why are they missing do you think?
- What joke did Amik play on the white men who tried to capture him and his son?
- Why is the death of Ten Claws suspicious? Do you think he killed himself or was he killed by the settlers?

Chapters 22 to 27 (pages 130 -- 160)

Vocabulary: tomahawk, anvil, beka (stop), pox, recollect, didibin (roll), will o' the wisp, blasphemy

- What pieces of evidence are introduced in these chapters?
- Why is the testimony of Blacksmith Nichols important to the trial? Whose side does he seem to be on?
- On page 146, John Amik says that witness Ezra Phelps "speaks from three sides of his mouth at once." What does this mean?
- Should Rebecca have spoken up and told what she knew? Why or why not?

Chapters 28 to 33 (pages 161 – 190)

Vocabulary: exhibition, pertinent, interpreter, snares, ancestors, trespassed, defendant, testified, deliberated

- According to John Amik's passages, who started the conflict? What did the trappers do?
- On page 173, Amik says the Old River of Many Fish was left to his people by their ancestors "many strings of lives ago" – yet, the settlers believe they own the land because they purchased it. How would you resolve this conflict?
- Predict: Will John Amik be found guilty or innocent by the jury? Give reasons to support your prediction.
- Describe your reaction to the verdict and sentence in Chapter 22.

Chapters 34 to 39 (pages 191 – 217)

Vocabulary: mide drums (ceremonial drums), defy, springhouse, gallows, millstones, palsy, scriptures, muskets, militia

- Retell Amik's dream on pages 191 – 192 in your own words
- Peter Kelley says "all the lawyers, all the courts, all the judges...will never change the hearts of men" (p. 194). Do you agree or disagree with him? Explain.
- What is Rebecca's plan for saving Amik? What goes wrong with it?
- On page 214, John Amik makes a prediction about what may happen to the Native American people in the future. Do you think his prediction comes true?

Chapters 40 to 43 and Final Poem (pages 218 – 236)

Vocabulary: raving, bedraggled, expired

- What is the purpose of the chant recited by Amik on page 218?
- Who are the "Thunder Beings"?
- Who do you think was responsible for saving Amik? Rebecca? The Thunder Beings? Or someone else? Give reasons to support your answer.
- What important message does Reverend Doan bring about Amik and his family?
- In the final poem, Amik is an old man looking back on his life – what do we learn from the poem about his family? His later life? His homeland?

Classroom Activities

Visual Activity: Settlement Map

Draw a map of the Crooked River settlement from the descriptions found on pages 5 – 6

Visual Activity: Moon Calendar

In Chippewa culture, “moons” are months and each moon has a special name. The “moon of crust on snow” is March. January is the “moon of the Big Spirit.” Create a visual calendar naming twelve new “moons” based on your life and world today. (example: September is the “moon of starting school”)

Figurative Language Activity: Re-Naming the World

Instead of using object names, the Chippewa often describe what they see instead. Examples from the story: 1.) loft = room that floats above the ground 2.) spring = time when leaves are small on the trees. See how many other examples you can find in the poems. Then, try creating a few of your own phrases for common objects found in the classroom. *Example: pencil = black-tipped arrow for writing words*

Research: Corn Soup and Other Meals

On page 45, Indian John describes some of the foods eaten by the Chippewa people. Research foods common to other Native American groups found in North America.

Creative Writing: Add a New Poem to CROOKED RIVER

Write a poem in John Amik’s voice that could appear after Chapter 10, giving John Amik’s reaction to the visitors and their cruel treatment of him. Or add a new poem to the end of CROOKED RIVER having one of the other characters (Rebecca, Laura, Peter Kelley, etc.) look back at their own lives.

Play a Game: Chippewa Moccasin Game

On page 179, John Amik describes the Chippewa game called “Moccasin.” Try the game in the classroom using 3 plastic cups instead of moccasins and 3 small pebbles (one marked with an X). Place the pebbles under the cups and play music as one student (the leader) quickly moves the cups, When the music stops, take a guess about which cup hides the marked pebble. Discuss why John Amik might make the connection between watching the jury and watching this game.

Reader’s Theater

Reader’s Theater script of CROOKED RIVER trial scenes included in paperback editions.



Request a School Visit or Skype Chat with the Author

A former teacher, Shelley Pearsall, M.Ed., has worked with more than 150,000 students across the U.S. as a visiting author. Contact shelleyvisits@yahoo.com if you are interested in one of her popular school visits or Skype chats. More details can also be found on her website: www.shelleypearsall.com