THE HILL
Karen Bass

THE STORY

"Karen Bass draws on the Cree legend of the Wihtiko for her latest YA novel, which blends adventure, horror, and some good old-fashioned coming-of-age wisdom....The dynamic between the boys is the best part of the narrative, and will open many readers’ eyes to the issues of race, class, and privilege."
—Quill & Quire Editor’s Choice

BOOK SUMMARY

Jared’s plane has crashed in the Alberta wilderness, and Kyle is first on the scene. When Jared insists on hiking up the highest hill in search of cell phone reception, Kyle hesitates; his Cree grandmother has always forbidden him to go near it.

AUTHOR PROFILE

KAREN BASS is a multi-award-winning author of novels for young adult readers. Graffiti Knight won the CLA Young Adult Book Award, the Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People, the R. Ross Annett Award for Children’s Literature, and the CAA Exporting Alberta Award. Uncertain Soldier is nominated for the OLA Forest of Reading Red Maple Award. Her most recent book is The Hill, an eerie thriller that draws on the Cree Wihtiko legend. A former library manager, Karen now dedicates herself full-time to writing—and to reading.

WEB RESOURCES

• Author Website: http://www.karenbass.ca/
• Publisher Website - Book: http://pajamapress.ca/book/the_hill/
• Publisher Website - author: http://pajamapress.ca/author/karen_bass/

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

• Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre’s “Oral Tradition: The Beginning of The Cree World” http://www.sicc.sk.ca/archive/heritage/ethnography/cree/orign/oral.html
• The Canadian Encyclopedia’s “Cree” http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/cree/
• Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada’s “The Learning Circle: Classroom Activities on First Nations in Canada – A Learning Resource for Ages 12 to 14” https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1331134511189/1331134588218
READING COMPREHENSION

- The narrative of *The Hill* follows a particular plot structure. Identify the following stages of the plot within the novel: Exposition, Rising Action, Conflict, Falling Action and Resolution. Please make reference to specific parts of the novel when outlining these stages.

- *The Hill* can be categorized as a suspense or mystery novel. What devices or elements does Karen Bass incorporate in her writing to build suspense?

- Kyle and Jared first encounter a Whiskey Jack on page 24 of *The Hill*; however birds, and the Whiskey Jack in particular, appear frequently throughout the book. Explain the symbolism of birds, and specifically the meaning of the Whiskey Jack, within *The Hill*.

- The character of Jared changed greatly over the course of *The Hill*. Explain how Jared changed throughout the book and identify what the key turning points were for Jared's character. Please provide specific examples from the book to outline Jared’s change in perspective.

DISCUSS

- In *The Hill*, Karen Bass tackles the current issues of racism and social stigma surrounding Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Kyle raises this issue on page 118 when he states:

  “Don’t talk to me about my people. You have no idea, not one single clue in that insect mind of yours, what it’s like to be treated like scum because of your skin colour.”

  Jared frequently makes assumptions about Kyle, which Kyle explains are false and racist blanket statements regarding Aboriginal peoples. Do you think these misperceptions are prevalent in today’s society? How do you think peoples’ perspectives can be changed to better reflect the reality of the situation and eliminate racist misperceptions? Additionally, discuss the importance of differentiating between Canada’s diverse Aboriginal groups and embracing the contributions and history of Canada’s Aboriginal groups.

- Jared and Kyle have two very different worldviews. Explain their respective worldviews and how their upbringings and experiences have developed their worldviews.

- Refer to page 109 where Kyle states, “Maskwa is our brother and means many things to the Cree. It’s one thing to hunt a bear but we’d never harm a bear unless we have no choice.” Explain what this means about the Cree’s values. Discuss how the environment and setting of the novel plays a role in the character development and plot of the novel.

SUGGESTED READINGS

FROM THE SAME AUTHOR

- (For Gr. 7 & up) *Uncertain Soldier* (2015) http://pajamapress.ca/book/uncertain_soldier/
- (For Gr. 7 & up) *Graffiti Knight* (2014) http://pajamapress.ca/book/graffiti_knight/
- (For Gr. 9 & up) *Drummer Girl* (2011) http://coteaubooks.com/index.php?id=675

BY OTHER ARTISTS FROM WORDFEST 2016

- (For Gr. 5 to 8) *Lightfinder* (2016) by Aaron Paquette http://kegedonce.com/bookstore/item/60-lightfinder.html
- (For Gr. 7 & up) *Urban Tribe: Native Americans in the City* (2015) by Lisa Charleyboy http://www.annickpress.com/Urban-Tribes
- (For Gr. 7 & up) *Jillian Christmas’ Black Feminist and Anti-Oppression Spoken Word Poetry* http://wordfest.com/speaker/jillian-christmas/
- (For Gr. 6 & up) *The Swan Riders* (2016) by Erin Bow http://books.simonandschuster.ca/The-Swan-Riders/Erin-Bow/9781481442749

OTHER BOOKS AND MOVIES ON RELATED SUBJECT

ACTIVITIES

A WRITING ACTIVITY - IN YOUR OWN WORDS...

Throughout *The Hill*, Karen Bass uses various literary devices to build suspense in her writing. For example, she continually uses sentence fragments in her writing to break up the text and hold the reader’s interest. Do you think this is an effective technique? Using your knowledge of proper sentence structure reconstruct one of the passages in *The Hill* so that it does not include sentence fragments. Does this excerpt still have the same effect?

A DRAWING ACTIVITY - ENVISIONING THE HILL

Karen Bass puts the setting of *The Hill* at the forefront of the novel. She frequently uses imagery to bring the setting alive to the reader. Find an excerpt in the novel that especially evoked an image of the setting for you while you were reading. Draw out how you envision the setting in your mind.

A WRITING ACTIVITY - BRINGING A LEGEND TO LIFE

In *The Hill*, Karen Bass effectively brings a Cree legend to life in her story. In this activity, you will create your own story that is based off of a traditional Aboriginal legend.

Research Aboriginal groups in Canada. Pick a group of interest and find a legend that is important in their culture. Once you have selected your legend, draft out a brief outline of a story that incorporates this legend. To format your research and set up your plot structure, please use the provided organizer.

“...a chilling tale of endurance in northern Alberta, blending a survival story with the supernatural of Cree legends. It’s hauntingly gripping YA and I think it’s her best story yet.”

—Helen Kudiw, CanLit for LittleCanadians

CURRICULUM CONNECTION

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

GRADE 7

• Identify and explain how narrative hooks, foreshadowing, flashback, suspense and surprise endings contribute to the effectiveness of plot development (2.3)
• Use suspense, exaggeration, foreshadowing, dialogue and description to show rising action and develop conflict (2.4)

GRADE 8

• Discuss various ways characters are developed and the reasons for and plausibility of character change (2.2)
• Identify and discuss how word choice and order, figurative language, plot, setting and character work together to create mood and tone (2.2)

GRADE 9

• Describe how theme, dominant impression and mood are developed and sustained through choices in language use and the interrelationship of plot, setting and character (2.2)

SOCIAL STUDIES

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

• Honour and value the traditions, concepts and symbols that are the expression of Canadian identity

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

• Understand the diversity of Aboriginal traditions, values and attitudes
• Understand contemporary challenges and contributions of Aboriginal peoples in urban, rural, cultural and linguistic settings

SOCIAL STUDIES AND ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES

PLURALISM: DIVERSITY AND COHESION

ISSUES-FOCUSED APPROACH TO TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES:

• Current Affairs
• Controversial Issues
• The Land: Places and People
• Culture and Community
WRITING – In your own words…

ACTIVITY SHEET

Throughout The Hill, Karen Bass uses various literary devices to build suspense in her writing. For example, she continually uses sentence fragments in her writing to break up the text and hold the reader’s interest. Do you think this is an effective technique? Using your knowledge of proper sentence structure reconstruct one of the passages in The Hill so that it does not include sentence fragments. Does this excerpt still have the same effect?

Excerpt from The Hill:

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Is this an effective technique? Why or why not?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Please re-write the excerpt in your own words.

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Does the excerpt still have the same effect?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
Karen Bass puts the setting of The Hill at the forefront of the novel. She frequently uses imagery to bring the setting alive to the reader. Find an excerpt in the novel that especially evoked an image of the setting for you while you were reading. Draw out how you envision the setting in your mind.
WRITING – Bringing a Legend to Life

ACTIVITY SHEET

In *The Hill*, Karen Bass effectively brings a Cree legend to life in her story. In this activity, you will create your own story that is based off of a traditional Aboriginal legend.

Research Aboriginal groups in Canada. Pick a group of interest and find a legend that is important in their culture. Once you have selected your legend, draft out a brief outline of a story that incorporates this legend. To format your research and set up your plot structure, please use the following the organizer provided below.

The following resources may help you in your research:

- The National Film Board of Canada’s Catalogue of First Nations Legends: [https://www.nfb.ca/subjects/literature-and-language---canada/first-nations-legends/](https://www.nfb.ca/subjects/literature-and-language---canada/first-nations-legends/)
- "Aboriginal Perspectives: The Oral Tradition" an excerpt from Aboriginal Studies 10 accessed from Learn Alberta: [http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ssbi/pdf/aboriginalperspectivestheoraltradition_bi.pdf](http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ssbi/pdf/aboriginalperspectivestheoraltradition_bi.pdf)

Please write out brief plot points for your re-telling of the story using the organizer below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposition</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exposition

Please write which Aboriginal legend you have selected as the topic for your story and explain the moral of the story.

__________________________________________________

(Title)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rising Action</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falling Action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>