

## Approved for use in Essentials English I

### Summary of the Work:

Fifteen-year-old Cole Matthews is a young man with a troubled past. He has been in and out of the juvenile justice system and his parents—as well as the entire community—are sick of his criminal behavior. After a particularly horrendous bout of violence against a boy named Peter, Cole has to decide between the Native American tradition of Circle Justice or prison. Cole reluctantly chooses Circle Justice and is sent to a remote island in Alaska where he learns about the balance of nature, how to control his anger, and how to reach out to others. Most importantly, Cole learns to forgive and heal himself by healing those he has wronged, and he learns that he is part of the great circle of life.

### Rationale:

Students are drawn to this book because of its connection with nature and the outdoors, and for the evolution of the main character, Cole Matthews. Cole's experiences throughout the story call into question the responsibility of one's choices and the impact these choices have on not only them, but other members of their community. The main character's experience of adapting from an irresponsible, angry adolescent to a compassionate, accountable young man allows students to connect to their own questions of responsibility and identity.

*Touching Spirit Bear* also lends itself to the teachings of the importance of the circle in the native Tlingit culture of Alaska, as well as tribes of Montana. Students learn about the symbolism of the circle and how it can relate to aspects of their own life.

The novel also follows certain patterns of the hero cycle and can help illuminate stages in the cycle. It allows students to understand that a person can make terrible mistakes in his/her life, but in the end, he/she can still be a hero by being accountable for their behavior and mistakes.

### Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

- Book Report (September/October 2001)
- Booklist (January 1, 2001 (Vol. 97, No. 9))
- Horn Book (Fall, 2001)
- Kirkus Review (January 1, 2001)
- School Library Journal (February 2001)

\* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

\* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

### Noted Distinction:

- Book Sense 76 Pick
- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- Flicker Tale Children's Book Award (North Dakota)
- Nevada Young Readers' Award
- California Young Reader Medal
- Beehive Award (Utah)

### Readability:

- Lexile Score: 670
- Readability Level: 6.7

### Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

### Standard Alignment: *(link)*

### Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption: 2005

### Notes on the Text:

*(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)*

The novel does contain some violence, physical abuse, and some gruesome descriptions about when Cole is attacked by a bear. Hence, it is important to prepare students for the content with open discussion before reading.

### Connection to the Curriculum:

The novel connects to the curriculum by supporting the concept of the hero journey, and demonstrating the essential understandings related to the American Indian as designated by Montana OPI.

### Additional Connections:

*(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)*

Connections reviews how the book fulfills a curricular objective or how it provides insight for the students related to curriculum.