

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## I Heard the Owl Call My Name

by  
Margaret Craven

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### Book Information

Margaret Craven, I Heard the Owl Call My Name

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Dell, 1980

ISBN 0-440-34369-0; LCCN

159 Pages

Book Level: 6.0

Interest Level: UG

This heartwarming novel is about a young priest who participates in the life of an Indian village, where he learns the meaning of life and death.

**Topics:** Adventure, Life Changes; Canadian Content, Canadian Content (All); Careers, Religious; People, Native American

### Main Characters

Calamity Bill the hand-logger who wears two sets of long-legged underwear

Caleb the highly respected old canon who teaches Mark how to handle the diesel launch

Chief Eddy the leader of the villagers

Ellie Sam's daughter

Gordon T.P. Wallace's grandson who leaves the village to go to the university and decides not to return to the village

Jim Wallace an Indian about Mark's age who helps Mark learn about the village's customs and becomes a friend to Mark as they travel together on the launch

Keetah Mrs. Hudson's granddaughter who is promised to marry Gordon

Mark Brian the young vicar who is sent to Kingcome to patrol the Indian villages

Marta Stephens one of the grandmothers of the tribe who cooks for and watches over Mark

Mrs. Hudson the matriarch of the tribe to whom everyone looks when there is a feast to prepare

Peter the old wood carver who lives next to the ancient burial ground

Sam the unlucky one of the tribe who drinks heavily and beats his wife and daughter

T.P. Wallace the elder and orator of the tribe

the Bishop the church leader who assigns Mark to Kingcome and advises Mark through letters

the teacher the only other white person in the village who chooses to keep to himself

### Vocabulary

**efficacious** characteristic of removing from the mind

**float** a floating platform anchored near a shoreline

**potlatch** a ceremonial feast of the Northwest Indians at which the host gives out many gifts

**vicar** an Anglican minister having charge of a mission

### Synopsis

When the Bishop is told by the doctor that Mark Brian, a young ordinand, is terminally ill, the Bishop assigns Mark to Kingcome on patrol of the Indian villages. Prior to leaving for the village, he is coached on what to expect and how to handle the diesel launch by the old canon, Caleb.

Jim Wallace, the first villager Mark meets, comes to take him to the village and transport the organ to the church. On arriving at the vicarage, Mark has his first lesson in the culture into which he has stepped. He helps with the burial of a little boy in the ancient burial grounds. The people watch to see how Mark will handle different situations, and they judge him by the respect he shows for their ways. Mark, with guidance from the Bishop's letters, learns to know the people and how to help them accept him.

As time goes on, he becomes more and more involved in their lives, trying to help them. He tries to locate Keetah's sister when she leaves the village to marry a white man. He is called on when Gordon's mother has difficulties with childbirth. There is a sense of acceptance when Chief Eddy tells Mark that the men are ready to build a new vicarage and when the gill-netters call to him as they would only speak to a friend.

At Christmas, when the school-age children come back for the holiday, there is unease in the village.

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The old ones are concerned that the old ways will die out and be completely forgotten. Another major concern is the effect liquor has when it is legally sold to the villagers.

The extent to which Mark has become a part of the village is brought out when he takes four boys to Vancouver. Visiting with his sister and former classmates, he discovers he no longer belongs in their world.

After facing death in the village many times, Mark realizes he does not have much longer to live. He is happy when Keetah asks him to stay in the village rather than return to the world from which he came. Knowing the village will die out, Mark tries to educate Jim in the ways of the outside world before he dies. The tribe's response to his death demonstrates the impact he has had on them.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

#### Initial Understanding

When Gordon's mother nears death in childbirth, she asks Mark to help Gordon get an education. What do you know about her to argue that this request is in keeping with her character?

*This request seems to go against the traditions of the tribe. She herself has broken tradition by being the first woman of the tribe to choose her own husband, and again, she breaks tradition by requesting that there be no professional mourners after her death.*

#### Literary Analysis

Mark receives letters from the Bishop with advice and information on the villagers. Why did the author choose to present this advice and information through letters rather than face to face or with a phone call?

*The letters serve several purposes. The use of letters rather than a phone call or a visit from the Bishop reinforce the remoteness of the village from the outside world. It also is a sign of the age when long distance calling was very expensive and not as common as it is today. With a letter, the reader is left alone to decide what the significance is of the Bishop's message. Mark has no chance to question the Bishop on the meaning of what he has been told.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

Chief Eddy eventually tells Mark the men are ready to build a new vicarage. What do you think contributed to the men being ready to build the vicarage?

*They have been able to observe Mark and how he deals with the tribe. He has proven that he will respect their customs; he has tried to fix the old vicarage without demanding supplies from them; he has shown that he cares about them and what happens to them. They are beginning to accept him as one of them.*

#### Constructing Meaning

Toward the end of the book, the Bishop tells Mark that he will start looking for a replacement for him. What qualities do you think the Bishop should look for in Mark's replacement?

*It seems that, to be accepted in the village, a person needs to be patient, respectful of other's traditions, willing to learn new things, caring and selfless, and resourceful.*

### Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** The story takes place some time in the sixties. One of the major problems

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from the old ones' point of view is that the young have not learned the traditions of the tribe and that traditions will be forgotten and die when the old ones are gone. This is a time period in which the existence of the remote village and the generational conflicts are very believable. Have the students find out about life in the sixties through major events and influences.

**Understanding Characterization** In the book, we learn that Jim has returned to the village after being away for awhile. We are not specifically told where he had been or what events led to his return. Imagine what caused Jim to decide to return to the village. Write a flashback that describes the events and feelings that made him decide to return.

**Responding to Literature** Gordon is faced with a difficult decision when he visits after attending the university in Vancouver for awhile. His uncle and grandfather plan to give him a potlatch in the summer at which they will give him the ceremonial rites of the family. They plan to build a house for him and put him in charge of the gill-netting. Eventually Gordon decides to stay at the university. Think about what he considered in making the final decision. Write a journal telling of his thoughts and struggles in coming to that decision.

**Understanding Literary Features** Death is a presence throughout the book. Mark encounters death many times in the book: the dead weesa-bedo on his arrival, observing the salmon in the pool, the death of the traditions of the tribe, the death of Keetah's sister, the death of Gordon's mother, the death of Calamity Bill, and in the end, his imminent death. People deal with death in a variety of ways and respond differently depending on who or what has died. Have students write a story or a poem about personal experiences with death and how they reacted and dealt with the feelings.