Secret of the Dance by Andrea Spalding and Alfred Scow


Grade levels: 2 to 5

Synopsis:

In 1885, the Canadian Government passed a law forbidding Aboriginal people to hold ceremonials, including the Potlatch. But these ceremonies were the very essence of Aboriginal culture and so were continued in secrecy.

Pre-reading activities:

a) Anticipation questions
   - Have you ever done something that you were forbidden to do? How did you feel?

b) Illustration activity
   - Pair/share—Tell about an important cultural activity that you practise with your family.

Post-reading activities:

a) Understanding the story
   - Why did the family go on a fishing trip?
   - Describe a potlatch.
   - Why were First Nations people not allowed to practise their cultural beliefs?
   - What factors might have contributed to the banning of potlatch ceremonies?
   - How did the government try to police the lives of First Nations people?

b) Transforming your thinking
   - Think back to a situation where you were forbidden to do something. What was the consequence of your choice? Do you think it was fair or unfair?
   - Is it ever okay to break a law? If so, under what circumstances?
   - Can you think of some other times when people of colour have specifically had their rights denied in Canada or abroad?

c) Deepening your thinking
   - If you feel that a law or rule is unjust, what can you do to change it? Who can be your allies?
   - Who in your community can help you to be a change-maker?