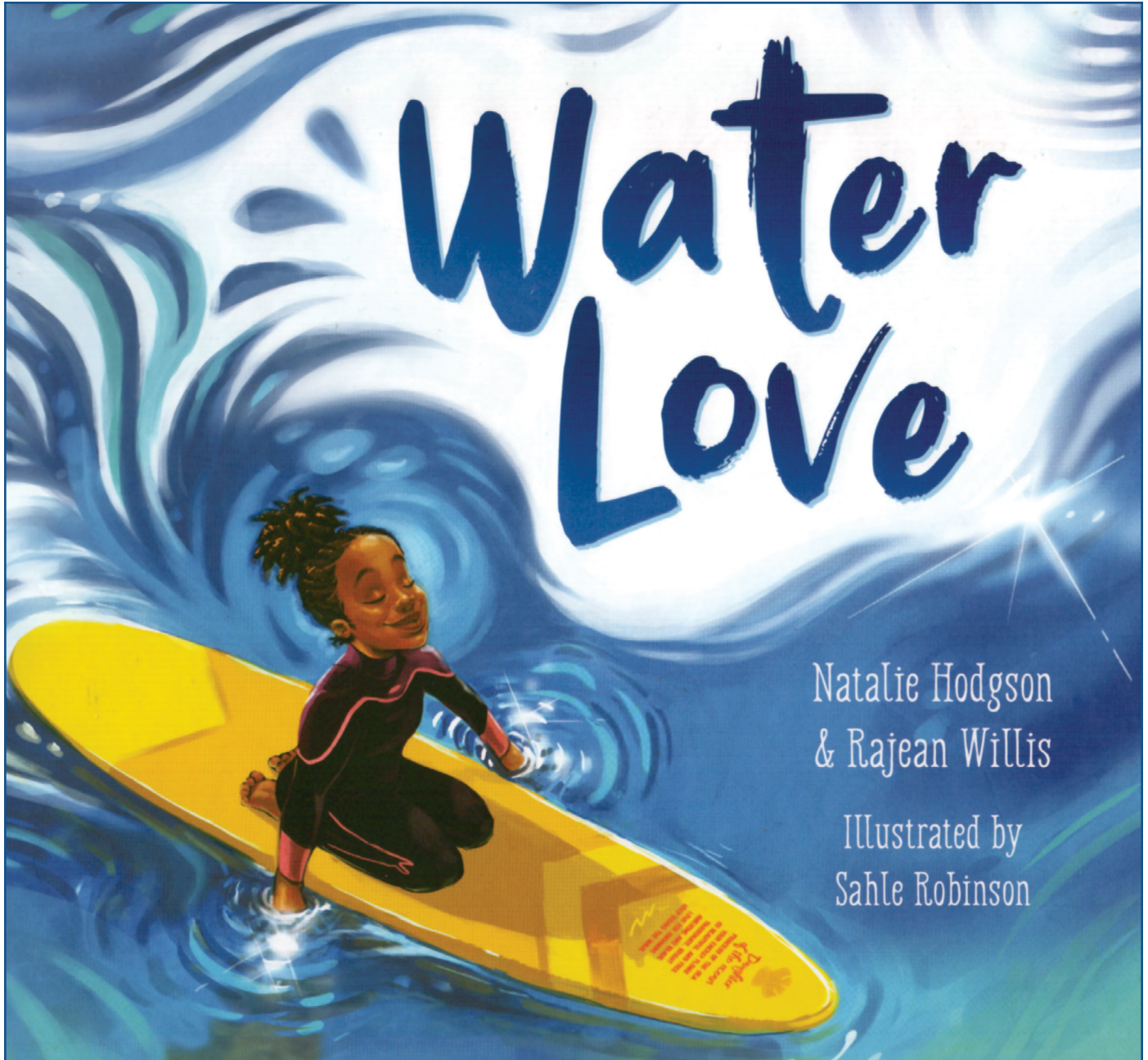


Learning and Growing Together

Using Texts to Navigate Conversations in Our Classrooms



Natalie Hodgson
& Rajean Willis

Illustrated by
Sahle Robinson

A young Black girl with a love of water is told that swimming is not a “Black sport.” She has to overcome discrimination, stereotyping, and peer pressure to finally catch a wave. Told in spoken word, *Water Love* is a story that will inspire children to follow their passion and make their dreams come true.



SANKOFA



**Learning and Growing Together: Using Texts to Navigate
Conversations in Our Classrooms**

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This teacher's guide accompanies *Water Love* written by Natalie Hodgson and Rajean Willis and illustrated by Sahle Robinson. *Water Love* presents a text with rich connections across subject areas. It is designed to engage students in meaningful conversations with a supportive approach.

Social and cultural diversity is a resource for expanding and enriching the learning experiences of all students. Students can learn so much from the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of their classmates in a community of learners where participants discuss and explore their own and others' customs, histories, traditions, beliefs, and ways of making sense of the world. In reading, viewing, and discussing a variety of texts, students from different backgrounds can come to understand each others' perspectives, to realize that their ways of seeing and knowing are not the only ones possible, and to probe the complexity of the idea and issues they are examining.

— Valuing Social and Cultural Diversity,
Atlantic Canada English Language Arts
(Nova Scotia 1998, p. 5)

The guide is divided into three sections. The first section begins with broader themes and guiding questions aligned with outcomes in English Language Arts, Social Studies, and Health Education. Followed by suggested book discussion questions and a section on learning experiences.

Integrating Outcomes

In each curriculum area, there are outcomes with related concepts and skills that require discrete allotment of instructional time. However, there are many outcomes that may be integrated effectively with those from multiple subject areas. It is recognized that grade 6 may exist in different school configurations and therefore may require some flexibility in planning for instruction. (Nova Scotia 2016)

For example, in combined classrooms you will find outcomes that are aligned. In grades 5 and 6, the concept of stereotypes could be explored:

Kaya has a passion for an activity typically ascribed to white culture. She abandons her interest in swimming due to peer influences but regains her love for water when Ms. Meia introduces the North Preston Surf Program. This story also confronts gender norms and promotes the acceptance of females engaging in sports.

Grade 5	Grade 6
Concept: Gender and Health	Concept: Diversity
“How can stereotypes about gender lead to bias and inequality?”	“Why is it important to understand the impacts of stereotyping?”

Section 1: Themes

There are many themes to explore in *Water Love*. Teachers can initiate discussion by asking **who, what, why, when, where**, and **how** to gain a deeper understanding of the text that extends beyond the words on the page. *Water Love* inspires discussion about:

- stereotypes
- representation
- identity and belonging
- conquering fears
- environment and community engagement

Stereotypes/Stereotyping

Guiding Questions (*English Language Arts P-6: At-a-Glance*, p. 67)

- What is stereotyping, bias, and prejudice?
- How are stereotyping, bias, and prejudice different?
- How can I identify stereotyping, bias, and prejudice in texts?

Guiding Questions (*Social Studies P-6: At-a-Glance*, p. 28)

- Why is it important to understand the impacts of stereotyping?
- How can I understand the impact of stereotyping on cross-cultural understandings?

stereotype: a fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality and may cause hurt and offence (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*)

OUTCOMES

English Language Arts: Learners will **respond** personally and critically to a range of culturally diverse texts.

Social Studies: Learners will **analyse** the impact of cross-cultural understanding, inclusive of Acadians, African Nova Scotians, Gaels, Mi'kmaq, and additional cultures.

OUTCOME

English Language Arts:

Learners will **respond** personally and critically to a range of culturally diverse texts.

Representation

The importance of representation is illustrated nicely in this story. The North Preston Surf Program, an Africentric program, allowed characters in the story to feel a sense of belonging.

Guiding Question (*English Language Arts P-6: At-a-Glance*, p. 67)

- Why is it important to read books that represent the perspective of a variety of cultures and peoples?

Additional guiding questions:

- How does the author's word choice affirm representation?
- How does diverse representation in books build someone's identity and sense of belonging?
- What does it do to the spirit when you cannot express who you really are?

representation: the act of presenting somebody/ something in a particular way; something that shows or describes something

(Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

OUTCOME

Health Education:

Learners will **analyse** how relationships impact physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health.

Identity/Belonging

Kaya struggled with where she felt she truly belonged. She recognized that basketball wasn't for her, and that being in the water was where she wanted to be. In doing so, she was able to be her authentic self.

Guiding Question (*Health Education 6: At-a-Glance*, p. 8)

- What are some challenges that can occur in changing relationships with family, friends, and peers as we grow?

Guiding Question (*Health Education 6: At-a-Glance*, p. 8)

- How is language used for stereotyping gender, culture, and race?

Additional guiding question:

- What is the difference between fitting in and belonging?

belonging: the feeling of being comfortable and happy in a particular situation or with a particular group of people, and being treated as a full member of the group (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*)

Conquering Fears

Black people developing a different type of relationship with water is demonstrated in this story. The North Preston Surf Program allows community members to feel comfortable in and around the water.

Additional Guiding Questions

- How do I identify a difficult emotion, like fear, and why am I experiencing it?
- Why would a community have generational fear around water?
- How do you honour it and let it go?

fear: the bad feeling that you have when you are in danger or when a particular thing frightens you
(*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*)

OUTCOME

Health Education: Learners will **investigate** the components of mental health literacy.

OUTCOME

Health Education: Learners will analyse how health behaviours enhance physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health.

Environment and Community Engagement

This story illuminates the importance of communities connecting with nature-based learning. Ms. Meia brought together members of her African Nova Scotian community, of all ages, which allowed a space for generational engagement. The book also highlights the collaborative approaches that can be fostered through allyship, such as working with volunteers from the surfing community.

Guiding Questions (*Health Education 6: At-a-Glance*, p. 2)

- How can the media make everyone feel included in physically active environments?
- How can communities engage individuals and families in physical activity?

Additional guiding question:

- How do positive actions impact a community

environment: the conditions in which a person, animal or plant lives or operates or in which an activity takes place

(*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*)

Section 2: Read Aloud and Book Discussion

Read Aloud—What Is It?

A time when the teacher reads aloud to students, either in whole or small groups

A deliberate instructional context

An interactive learning opportunity

—*Teaching In Action: Grades 4–6*, p. 28

Students should have opportunities to use talk to communicate effectively and clearly, respecting cultural contexts, and to respond personally and critically.

As you begin to discuss issues of mental health, remember students continue to learn along a pathway in the development of mental health literacy.

Holding space for conversations around peer pressure, belonging, and social justice are important concepts for students at this developmental stage because they want to talk and think critically about how these concepts impact them and people around them. Therefore, it is essential to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for these kinds of conversations.

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Mental Health Literacy

1. How do these feelings that Kaya is having and thinking about let her know that something needs to change?
2. What feelings is Kaya experiencing and what can she do to move these feelings?
3. How could Kaya's mental health be impacted if she does not move these feelings?
4. Who could be a part of her support circle?

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Peer Support

1. How can non-verbal cues tell us how a friend or peer is feeling?
2. In what ways can we support our friends and peers in being their true selves?
3. How can changes in our friendships and peer groups be positive as we grow?
4. What benefits are there to friendships when we have different strengths, gifts, and interests?

Teaching Strategy

Inferring means using evidence—the things we observe or that may be implied but not written in the text to construct meaning.

Inferring is often referred to as “reading between the lines.”

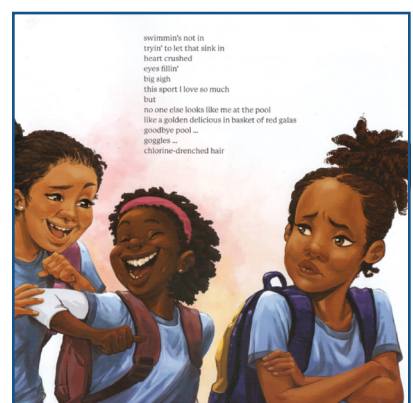
Show students page 15.

Kaya is experiencing an obvious emotion. Talk about what is Kaya experiencing? How do you know?

Video:

[Integrated Learning: Opportunities to Promote Learning in Content Areas](#)

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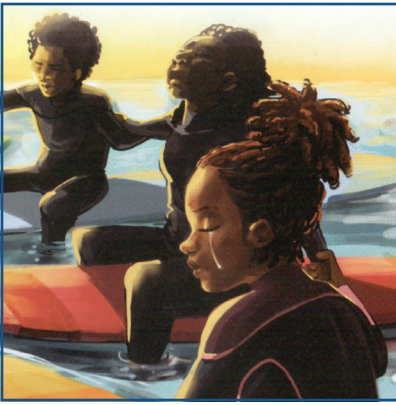




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Belonging

1. What does belonging mean?
2. How can community programs contribute to a sense of belonging for children and youth?
3. Do we have to be the same to belong? How do you support others in being who they are?
4. What are places in your community that help children feel a sense of belonging?



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Social Justice

1. Why do you think Kaya is crying?
2. What do you think is the significance of this remembrance being included in the story?
3. Can you think of something you have read or have seen that challenges or confronts injustice?
4. How have you seen people stand up for injustice in their community and the world?

Section 3: Additional Learning Experiences

LISTEN to the spoken word performance of “Water Love” performed by Natalie Hodgson and Rajean Willis.

- How does the performance help convey the message?
- What do you notice about the use of voice (volume, tone, pacing, etc.)? How do these paralinguistic elements convey meaning beyond words?

WRITE about a time that you conquered your fears. What details might you include to help the reader understand your experience?

Kaya is a fictional character. As a young person, she is learning to overcome stereotypes. Miss Meia is committed to creating opportunities for youth in the community of North Preston.

RESEARCH someone who has positively impacted your community.

When using texts to navigate classroom conversations, celebrate the diverse cultures of Nova Scotia, including promoting African Nova Scotian heritage and the “interconnection of all things.”



Teaching Strategy

Making connections

means recognizing relationships that exist between the text and other experiences.

These connections support the reading linking the reader's prior knowledge and experience to a situation. Connections include:

- text to self: connections between the text and the reader's own life
- text to text: connections between the text and other texts that have been previously read or viewed
- text to world: connections between the text and larger world issues

(Teaching In Action: Grades 4–6, p. 37)

Read text aloud. Model your thinking.

A Note from the Authors

We are delighted to share this powerful story with students, educators, and the larger community. We were inspired to write *Water Love* from our personal involvement in the North Preston Surf Program, and our desire to create literature for children in which Black excellence is highlighted. Storytelling has been an oral tradition among people of African descent. Spoken word, a popular form of oral, poetic art that has cultural connections to our language and phrases was the perfect fit to enhance our story. This gave us the creative outlet to write as we speak. *Water Love's* illustrations beautifully compliment and capture the narrative. This story is very dear to our hearts and needs to be shared.

Background Context

Access to water has deep rooted history in African Nova Scotian communities. There are fears that have been instilled in Black communities from a history of slavery (i.e., enslaved Black people were thrown off slave ships). The North Preston Surf Program is a unique opportunity that promotes and encourages Black people to engage in water activities. North Preston, being the largest Indigenous Black community in Canada, is situated close to the ocean but access to water has been limited. A community that prides themselves by “we’ve come this far from faith.”

There is also a legacy of racism in Nova Scotia which contributed to segregation. Lawrencetown and other areas alongside the ocean are not spaces and places where African Nova Scotians historically reside. African Nova Scotians to this day are still experiencing racial discrimination. The surf program has addressed a gap and created a new normal of Black people surfing.

— LaMeia Reddick,
North Preston Surf Program, Coordinator (2020)

Although African Nova Scotians have a history of enslavement, segregation, and discrimination, this does not define our existence. Our Black history in Nova Scotia is also celebrated through community pride, close-knit families, faith, and resilience.

SPECIAL THANKS

The Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development gratefully acknowledge Natalie Hodgson and Rajean Willis for their inspiration and support for use of *Water Love* in the development of this Teaching Guide.

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