

I Am Kwakkoli

by Bisco Hill (p. 108)



Teacher's Page

Plot Summary

In this short essay, the narrator, a Native American of the Oneida tribe, tells how he received his Indian name, “Kwakkoli,” or “Whippoorwill,” in a tribal Naming Ceremony. The young man and his family fly from Colorado to the Oneida reservation near Green Bay, Wisconsin. The boy describes his tour of the reservation and learns something of its history and his ancestors. On the morning of the ceremony, he excitedly puts on his special “ribbon shirt” and goes to a special site, where the Faithkeeper gives him his Oneida name, the same used by the boy’s grandfather. The visit, the ceremony, and the name remind the young man of the importance of his heritage.

Interpreting the Story

Have students research an aspect of the Oneida tribe that interests them. They could work in groups to find one or two facts about Oneida history, traditions, beliefs, or contemporary issues of which they were not aware before. Ask each group to report back to the whole class on what they discovered. Answers to the **Reader Response Log** assignment on the **Student's Page** may also become the basis for class discussion.

Responding Creatively to the Story



1. Using the author’s outline of the Naming Ceremony on page 111, have students **write a short play** in which they expand on the actual words and actions of the ceremony.
2. The author gives few visual clues as to the appearance of the characters in the story. Ask students to **write descriptions** of Kwakkoli and the Faithkeeper.
3. Since the narrator’s mother cannot attend the ceremony, she asks him to “remember the details and tell her about it later.” Starting with the bare facts the narrator provides on page 111, ask students to **write a letter from Kwakkoli to his mother**, telling of the ceremony and his feelings about it. Although the students will need to use their imagination and expand on the sketch, encourage them to stay true to the facts revealed about the Oneida tribe, the meaning of the ceremony, and Kwakkoli’s seriousness about this event in his life.

Connecting with Cultural Values and Students’ Lives

These questions may guide your students to a deeper understanding of how the story relates to their own lives. The discussion may also be used to foster the positive values of cultural traditions and family ties.

1. One of the most important elements in “I Am Kwakkoli” is the narrator’s yearning to connect with his family’s heritage. He does this by anticipating the ceremony, touring the reservation, participating in the Naming Ceremony, and musing on the importance of his heritage. Is the need to connect with one’s older family members a universal value? Do you have any pictures, mementos, traditional heirlooms, stories that you treasure as links to your own ancestry and heritage?
2. Because Kwakkoli talks of how he wants to take his grandfather’s name and of how his little sister received her name, there’s a sense that Kwakkoli himself will make sure that future family members participate in the Naming Ceremony. Does your family have traditions, large or small, that you will make sure are perpetuated?

Name _____ Date _____

Before You Read



Before you read "I Am Kwakkoli," **write about one of the following topics** for a few minutes:

1. Are there any first or middle names in your family that get passed from generation to generation? What are the names? What is the importance of these recurring names?
2. Have you ever been part of a ceremony or activity that helped you know that your family now thought of you as grown up? (These may be formal ceremonies, such as church activities, or may be something as informal as the passing of a family holiday tradition—the making of a special food, for example—from a parent to you.) What was the event? How did you feel?
3. Imagine yourself sixty years from now. Your great-grandchildren are sitting on the floor in front of you, waiting for one of your wonderful stories. What tales will you tell about your own parents or grandparents (very ancient ancestors to the kids in front of you)? What in the stories will be important? Why will they bear repeating?

After You Read: Reader Response Log



When you finish reading, **try writing about aspects of the story that are important to you or raise questions for you.** If you need a prompt, you may write about one or two of the questions below:

1. What intrigued you the most about the Naming Ceremony, and why? Were you interested in the history, the preparations, the ritual itself, the connection with family and nature, etc.?
2. How might Kwakkoli be changed by his experience? How might his life and his perception of himself differ upon his return to Colorado?
3. If you had the opportunity to take another name styled in Native American fashion, what would it be? Why?

Connecting with Other Stories

In *Short Takes* other stories present **characters who have coming-of-age experiences** in which they leave childhood and face adulthood. Some embrace their new "grown-up" status—the narrator in "No More 'Dirty Look Special'" and the brother in "Blank Disks." But most reach their new status and mourn the loss of their younger, more carefree, less cynical selves—"Through My Picture Window," "Always a Memory," "Without the Imagination," "My Brother, My Heart," and "Anonomatos."

Name _____ Date _____

Reading Check for "I Am Kwakkoli"

Circle the letters of all correct answers. Some questions may have more than one correct answer.

1. "Kwakkoli" means
a. Mockingbird c. Whippoorwill
b. Woodpecker d. Windowsill
2. The Oneida Reservation is near
a. Grants Pass, Oregon
b. Green Bay, Wisconsin
c. Grants Tomb, New York
d. Greenville, South Carolina
3. For the ceremony, the narrator will wear
a. buckskin pants c. moccasins
b. a feathered hat d. a ribboned shirt
4. Kwakkoli belongs to the
a. Dove Clan c. Wolf Clan
b. Turtle Clan d. Eagle Clan
5. Kwakkoli is given his name by the
a. Torchbearer c. Namesender
b. Creator d. Faithkeeper

Language Study in Context: Sentence Combining

Directions: Rewrite the passages below by combining sentences to make them more effective, more interesting, less stiff. You will have to leave some words out, and you may make small changes in the wording. You may use conjunctions (and, or, as, but) to join sentences, but you may also want to use words like "who," "with," "whose," and "which" to join ideas. Each group can be shortened into one sentence. When you are finished, compare your work to the original passages.

Example: My older sister, Megan, had received her Indian name. Her Indian name was Maquequay. It means Woman of the Woods. She received it when she was only three.

Combination: My older sister, Megan, had received her Indian name, Maquequay (Woman of the Woods), when she was only three. (p. 108)

In my case, I was named after my grandfather. I was named after him through my Anglo name. I also wanted to take his Indian name. It was available. It had been waiting for me for seven years. (p. 109)

They knew who was married to whom. They knew who everyone's grandparents were. They knew who everyone's parents were. (p. 110)

It was time to go. We thanked the Faithkeeper. We thanked the Chief. We gave them gifts. (p. 111)

Name _____ Date _____

Vocabulary: Words to Watch

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Oneida

a North American Indian tribe. The name by which the tribe is known is derived from a native word meaning "standing rock," referring to a boulder sacred to the tribe situated near the site of their ancient village on Lake Oneida, New York. The Oneida number about 3500 at present.

reservation

a tract of public land set apart for a special purpose, as for the use of an American Indian tribe

meditated

engaged in thought or contemplation; reflected

sacred

holy; regarded with reverence

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solstice

a time when the sun is at its greatest declination. North of the equator, this occurs on June 22.

Anglo

a reference to Americans and American culture

whippoorwill

a nocturnal American wild bird named for its distinctive call, which sounds like the bird is calling its own name (*whip-poor-will*)

turquoise

a sky-blue or greenish blue mineral

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convent

a building or complex occupied by nuns

heritage

something that comes or belongs to one by reason of birth

butterflies

nervousness

flying

in formation

when planes or birds fly in a set pattern and order, such as a >

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clans

groups of people of common descent; families

Creator

a commonly used term for *God*

Brain teasers for Critical Thinking

1. Is Kwakkoli a boy or a girl? How do you know?
2. What is the significance of the statue of Dr. Rosa Minoka Hill? What does her "presence" add to the reservation?
3. What are some of the preparations necessary to planning the Naming Ceremony?
4. Notice the number of people involved in the preparations. Make a list of all the people who help with the Ceremony and their responsibilities. Why do so many people take part? What significance does this support carry in light of the Ceremony and the beliefs it represents?
5. How has the Naming Ceremony been influenced by modern times? What parts have remained very traditional?
6. Why is his grandfather's name so important to Kwakkoli?