



*Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams*

# Learning Guide

By Andrea Auger, Emily Williams & Spirit Bear



First Nations Child & Family  
Caring Society of Canada

Written by Andrea Auger, Emily Williams & Spirit Bear  
*Three cheers for Sylvia Smith and Lisa Howell for their guidance and feedback!*

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Design: Leah Gryfe Designs



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## About the Book

*Spirit Bear: Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams* is written by Cindy Blackstock. The book was illustrated and art directed by [Amanda Strong](#),<sup>1</sup> with additional illustration by Dora Cepic, Natty Boonmasiri, Rasheed Banda, Alex Mesa, Bracken Hanuse Corlett, and Edwin Neel. Editors are Jennifer King and Sarah Howden. Design and layout are by [Leah Gryfe](#).<sup>2</sup>

For more information about *Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams*, please visit [Spirit Bear's website](#) or email [info@fncaringsociety.com](mailto:info@fncaringsociety.com).



@SpiritBear

1 <https://www.spottedfawnproductions.com>

2 <http://www.leahgryfedesigns.com>

# Introduction

In *Spirit Bear: Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams*, Spirit Bear continues his work as a *Bearrister*, learning about injustice and helping to make things right. In this adventure, he learns about the history of First Nations children's education and how the government continues to discriminate against First Nations children by underfunding their education and other essential services. From his Uncle Huckleberry, he discovers how First Nations children learned from their Elders on the land, while his new friend Lak'insw teaches him about Residential Schools and their impact on Indigenous communities. Spirit Bear then heads to Algonquin territory where he learns from new friends about a young hero named Shannen Koostachin, and how to take action to help her dream, Shannen's Dream, for safe and comfy schools for all First Nations children come true.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) called on Canada to end its discrimination against First Nations children, and bridge the gaps in funding between First Nations children being educated on reserves and children educated elsewhere in Canada (TRC,<sup>1</sup> 2015). At the time this learning guide was written, this recommendation was among the many [Calls to Action](#)<sup>2</sup> the government had yet to act on (TRC, v2015, p. 2). To learn more about the [TRC's Calls to Action](#),<sup>2</sup> and to keep track of how Canada is doing in making changes to end discrimination against Indigenous peoples, visit CBC's [Beyond 94](#).<sup>3</sup>

Senator Murray Sinclair, former Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission stated that "education is the key to reconciliation" (as cited in CBC News, 2015, n.p.). *Spirit Bear: Fishing for Knowledge*,

It is important to note that First Nations children are uniquely impacted by the underfunding of on-reserve education. While Shannen knew that kids everywhere deserve an equitable education, Shannen's Dream brings attention to the specific underfunding of schooling for First Nations children on reserves. It is important to respect the differences among and between First Nations, Métis and Inuit, including the different ways they experience and respond to human rights violations.

1 [http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2015/trc/IR4-6-2015-eng.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/trc/IR4-6-2015-eng.pdf)

2 [http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

3 <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform-single/beyond-94?cta=8>

*Catching Dreams* is intended to engage children in learning about discrimination and Canada's colonial legacy, equity and social justice, and to affirm the role of young people in the reconciliation movement. Shannen Koostachin is a role model of social justice, love, and fairness because she had the courage and determination to stand up to the Canadian Government and demand action for First Nations children. By learning about her story from Spirit Bear's book, children are offered opportunities to be critically engaged and caring learners who are better equipped to develop informed ethical perspectives, and stand with First Nations children.



# Learning Intentions

After reading Spirit Bear's book children will be able to

- Develop an understanding of:
  - how Indigenous peoples have, and continue to pass on traditional knowledge from generation to generation;
  - the legacies of the Residential School system and their impact on First Nations families and communities;
  - discrimination and inequities affecting First Nations children, which compromises their health, safety, and well-being;
  - discrimination beyond individual prejudice; that is, understanding that discrimination also exists in institutions (like the government), and that laws (rules) and policies (ways of doing things) can treat groups of people unfairly.
- Identify actions they can take to help end discrimination against First Nations children.
- Recognize that their voices and ideas matter and that children have the power to influence the world around them.
- Recognize that true heroes are those who are courageous enough to stand up for what is right and not give up, even when it is hard to be brave.

# Words and Concepts to Think About

- Spirit Bear and his job as a *Barrister*
- Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit)
- Government
- Fair treatment
- Discrimination
- Education
- Ancestors
- Elders
- Passing down knowledge
- Indigenous languages
- Residential Schools
- Reconciliation
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)
- Shannen's Dream
- Spirit Bear and what he represents
- School is a Time for Dreams



# Comprehension Questions

1. Who is Spirit Bear? (What First Nation does he come from? What is his job?)
2. What does the Government of Canada do? Name as many things as you can.
3. What did Spirit Bear learn on his last trip to Ottawa? Who are the other characters in the book? Name as many as you can.
4. What was life like when Uncle Huckleberry was a cub?
5. What did First Nations children learn from Elders and what did Elders teach them? (Hint: Spirit Bear talks to Uncle Huckleberry and Lak'insw).
6. What did Spirit Bear learn from Lak'insw about Residential Schools? What were Residential Schools? How did they hurt First Nations families and kids?
7. Who was Shannen Koostachin and what was her dream?
8. Why is Shannen the hero of the kids in Ottawa?
9. What actions have the kids in the story taken to help make Shannen's Dream come true?





# Reflection and Discussion Questions

## Thinking about character traits

- Pick one of the characters in the story. What do you know about this character (what are they like, what are their values)? Think about the things they say and do and maybe what others say about them.
- How does Spirit Bear's mood change throughout the story? What feelings does he feel and why?

## Thinking about theme and message

- What do you think the big idea or message of this book is?
- What ideas do you think Spirit Bear wants you to think about?

## Making connections to the world

- What did you learn from reading Spirit Bear's book?
- How did reading the book change your thinking?
- Why is learning about traditional Indigenous knowledge, Residential Schools, and Shannen's Dream important?

## Making personal connections

- What feelings did you have while reading the book? What parts of the story made you feel that way?
- What were you thinking about when you read the book?
- Did the story or the characters remind you of someone or something in your life?
- Did the story remind you of something you have learned about already?

## Taking action

- What can you do to help take better care of the land, animals, and water?
- What can you do to help make Shannen's Dream come true?

## School-Based Activities

1. Invite learners to jot down new concepts, vocabulary, and unanswered questions on the learning log graphic organizer (in the appendix). Having some ideas written down can support learners to discuss or write about the topics addressed in the book.
2. Discuss the comprehension and reflection questions in a variety of ways that work best for your learning group (e.g., think/pair/share, circle discussions, jigsaw activities, elbow partners, etc.).
3. Write a persuasive letter to a Member of Parliament or another elected official asking the government to make Shannen’s Dream for safe and comfy schools for all First Nations kids come true. Older learners may wish to talk about the [TRC’s education-related Calls to Action](#),<sup>1</sup> which at the time this guide was written, were not fully implemented.
4. Make and display a class or school timeline with events featured in the book or events related to Residential Schools and Shannen’s Dream. Timelines can offer a visual representation of collective learning that can support students in situating and connecting events. As your class learns more about the history of First Nations education, and Indigenous history more broadly, your timeline will grow!
5. Participate in the Reconciliation *Ambearrister* (ambassadors + barristers) program where groups host a teddy bear. This special *Ambearrister* helps students in a year-long journey learning about reconciliation and how to make a difference for First Nations kids. Working with a local Elder, groups are asked to take care of their bear like one of their own – have a naming ceremony, dress their bear and learn together. For more information, check out the [Reconciliation Ambearrister’s program page](#).<sup>2</sup>
6. Start a Shannen’s Dream Club where students can learn about, talk about, and take action on issues affecting First Nations kids. The club can:
  - a. Start a book club where students read books by Indigenous authors and talk about them.
  - b. Watch documentaries made by Indigenous filmmakers, and host a film festival for the school or community.

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1 <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform-single/beyond-94?&cta=1>

2 <https://fncaringsociety.com/Reconciliation-Ambearristers>

- c. Create a message about Shannen’s Dream or express wishes for equality for First Nations kids through visual art, music, poetry, film, spoken word, a dramatic rendition, or any other medium. This artistic work can be shared with the school, community, or on social media using the hashtag #ShannensDream. Visual art could always be made into postcards to be sent to elected officials (feel free to send your postcards to the Caring Society to hand out!).
  - d. Plan and participate in events related to First Nations education and reconciliation. See a list of events and campaigns started by the Caring Society that students can participate in below.
7. Learn more about your local environment and how to look after it. Consider asking students to research a local tree, plant, animal, river or lake, and make an information sheet, poster, movie, or other project about it. Ask students to include its name in a local Indigenous language, some facts about it (ideally from an Indigenous perspective), and what humans can do to take better care of it. If possible, invite an Elder to share their knowledge of the territory.



# Caring Society Child- and Youth-Led Reconciliation Campaigns, Events and Multimedia Resources

In the book, Spirit Bear explains that many First Nations children still do not have safe and comfy schools.

Here are some fun and meaningful ways to learn more and make a difference!

## Reconciliation Campaigns

[Shannen's Dream](http://fncaringssociety.com/shannens-dream) (fncaringssociety.com/shannens-dream) for safe and comfy schools and quality education.

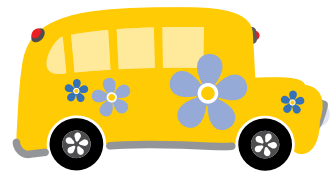
[I am a witness](http://fncaringssociety.com/i-am-witness) (fncaringssociety.com/i-am-witness) for culturally based equity.

[Jordan's Principle](http://fncaringssociety.com/jordans-principle) (fncaringssociety.com/jordans-principle) to make sure First Nations children get the services they need when they need them.

## Reconciliation Events

### *School is a Time for Dreams*

Shannen Koostachin wanted all children to be able to live their dreams. First Nations children do not always get this chance because the federal government underfunds their education. Celebrated during the first few months of the school year, *School is a Time for Dreams* invites people from all over the country to call for equitable education for First Nations kids.



### *Have a Heart Day*



Celebrated on or around Valentine's Day, Have a Heart Day is a child- and youth-led reconciliation campaign (event) to help make sure First Nations children have a fair chance to grow up safely with their families, get a good education, be healthy, and feel proud of who they are. Take part by sending a Valentine's Card or letter supporting Have a Heart Day to the Prime Minister or your Member or Parliament, or by hosting a party to raise awareness in your school or community!

## ***Bear Witness Day***



Show your support and “Bear Witness” to Jordan’s Principle by bringing your bears to daycare, school or work on May 10. Host a Jordan’s Principle “bear birthday party,” parade or other fun event to raise awareness about Jordan’s Principle and to honour Jordan River Anderson!

## ***Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams***

Celebrated in May and June, Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams is an annual commemoration initiative honouring Residential School Survivors, the children who didn’t make it home, their families and the legacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.



## **Multimedia Resources**

### ***All learners***

#### **“Fair and Unfair Education” (2019)**

Available through the *First Peoples Child & Family Review*:

<http://journals.sfu.ca/fpcf/index.php/FPCFR/article/view/358/292>

The Grade 3/4 and Grade 7 classes at Ross Drive Public School worked together to learn about treaties, Shannen Koostachin, and Shannen’s Dream. The students were asked to think about what a “safe and comfy” education might look like and why it is unfair that Shannen Koostachin had to fight for this right. To learn more, visit [shannensdream.ca](http://shannensdream.ca).

#### ***TRC Mini Documentary – Senator Murray Sinclair on Reconciliation (2019)***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjx2zDvyzsU>

This mini documentary by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, features Senator Murray Sinclair as he shares his thoughts on everyone’s role in reconciliation.

**Honouring Memories Planting Dreams Public Service Announcement  
– made by youth! (2017)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uO7KE66Rq1Q>

Young people have a lot to teach the world about reconciliation. Follow their lead and do your part to make this a better Canada: Plant your heart garden today! Celebrated in May and June, Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams is an annual commemoration initiative honouring Residential School Survivors, the children who didn't make it home, their families and the legacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

***The 7<sup>th</sup> Generation Our Ancestors Prayed For (2016)***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuqtXdgKrKY>

A short documentary featuring the voices and perspectives of children and youth on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's top Calls to Action (child welfare, access to services and education).



***Reconciliation Begins with You and Me (2016)***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpYcczGu1Is&t=11s>

Young people need to have an active role in reconciliation. In this compelling (14-minute) film, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth discuss contemporary inequities in relation to what reconciliation means to them and how everyone can play a role.

**Shannen and Serena Koostachin speak at the Ontario Federation of Labour (2012)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQNvOp6sZDg>

In this brief (12-minute) video Shannen and Serena Koostachin address the Ontario Federation of Labour Convention on November 27, 2009. They speak on behalf of the children of Attawapiskat who, at the time, were still going to school in rundown portable classrooms. Shannen and Serena describe their struggle to get a proper school built, and the injustice of First Nations kids being denied their right to education.

## ***Best Suited for Older Learners***

### ***Jordan River Anderson, The Messenger by Alanis Obomsawin (2019)***

Available through the National Film Board of Canada:

<https://tiff.net/events/jordan-river-anderson-the-messenger>

Alanis Obomsawin's remarkable 53<sup>rd</sup> film documents the story of a young boy forced to spend all five years of his short life in hospital while the federal and provincial governments argued over which was responsible for his care, as well as the long struggle of Indigenous activists to force the Canadian government to enforce "Jordan's Principle" – the promise that no First Nations children would experience inequitable access to government-funded services again.

### ***A National Crime by Sandrine Murray, Jordan Gray, Kyleigh Gault, and Astara van der Jagt (2019)***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bz6-TIRBWRy>

Winner of the Underhill award for best documentary at the Carleton University Department of History 2019 juried screening, this student-created documentary tells the story of Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, a whistleblower for the poor treatment of Indigenous children in the Residential School System.

### ***"Rekindling the sacred fire for children and families" by Sun Lodge Village and Peguis Child and Family Services (2019)***

Available through the First Peoples Child & Family Review:

<http://journals.sfu.ca/fpcfr/index.php/FPCFR/article/view/355/291>

This video describes the partnership between the Sun Lodge Village and Peguis Child and Family Services in Peguis First Nation, Manitoba. Together these two groups are providing opportunities for families, youth, and children to find their way back to traditional spiritual ways of healing and knowing who they are through ceremony, traditional teachings, and land-based experiences.

### ***We Can't Make the Same Mistake Twice* by Alanis Obomsawin (2016)**

Available through the National Film Board of Canada:

[http://www.nfb.ca/film/we\\_can\\_t\\_make\\_the\\_same\\_mistake\\_twice](http://www.nfb.ca/film/we_can_t_make_the_same_mistake_twice)

In this documentary, distinguished filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin focuses her lens on the landmark discrimination case filed by the Assembly of First Nations and the Child and Family Caring Society of Canada against Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada in 2007. Obomsawin exposes injustices to the community by showing how the child and welfare services provided to them are vastly inferior to the services available to other Canadian children, while giving voice to the childcare workers at the heart of the battle.

### ***Hi-Ho Mistahey!* by Alanis Obomsawin (2013)**

Available through the National Film Board of Canada:

[http://www.nfb.ca/film/hi-ho\\_mistahey\\_ena](http://www.nfb.ca/film/hi-ho_mistahey_ena)

In this feature-length documentary, Alanis Obomsawin tells the story of Shannen's Dream, a national campaign to provide equitable access to education in safe and suitable schools for First Nations children. Strong participation in this initiative eventually brings Shannen's Dream all the way to the United Nations in Geneva. A 60-minute version of the film suitable for younger audiences is also available.





## Additional Reconciliation Actions

1. Connect with Indigenous peoples in your territory. Find and form relationships with the nearest First Nation, Métis, or Inuit community or reach out to urban Indigenous groups. You might be able to work with your First Nations, Métis, Inuit School Board Liaison to make connections. Students can research and learn about the history of the Indigenous peoples in the territory, including traditional knowledges, contributions, languages, human rights issues, etc.
2. Learn more about colonization and Residential Schools. [Project of Heart](#),<sup>1</sup> [100 Years of Loss \(Legacy of Hope\)](#),<sup>2</sup> [Where Are the Children \(Legacy of Hope\)](#),<sup>3</sup> and [Legacy Schools \(Downie and Wenjack Fund\)](#)<sup>4</sup> are interactive projects in which teachers and students can learn about history that is often not taught.
3. If your school is located near Ottawa, consider participating in a Reconciliation Walking Tour. The Caring Society is developing a free walking tour in downtown Ottawa that showcases the role of non-Indigenous peoples and the federal government in Residential Schools. Students may also visit the graves of Peter Henderson Bryce, Duncan Campbell Scott, and Nicholas Flood Davin at Beechwood Cemetery in Ottawa, to learn about, and compare their very different roles in the Residential School system. For more information, visit the Caring Society's [Reconciliation Walking Tours](#).<sup>5</sup>
4. Participate in [Imagine a Canada](#),<sup>6</sup> a national campaign created by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation that invites students to express their vision of reconciliation through visual art, written, or spoken word.

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1 <http://projectofheart.ca/>

2 <http://100yearsofloss.ca/en/>

3 <http://wherearethechildren.ca/en/exhibition/>

4 <https://downiewenjack.ca/our-work/legacy-schools-programs/>

5 <https://fncaringsociety.com/reconciliation-walking-tours>

6 [http://nctr.ca/education\\_imagine.php](http://nctr.ca/education_imagine.php)

## Assessment and Evaluation

After reading *Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams* and engaging in further learning about reconciliation, learners may be invited to:

- Assess the impact of the Residential School system on First Nations families and communities
- Assess the impact of ongoing discrimination against First Nations children
- Consider and draw connections between the Residential School system and ongoing discrimination against First Nations children
- Make ethical judgements about Canada's Residential School system
- Make ethical judgements about Canada's ongoing discrimination against First Nations children

# Holistic Learning

## Spirit

- Developing ethical perspectives
  - "It's really important that we..."
  - "Everyone has a right to..."
  - "I wish..."

## Body

- Actively engaging
  - Writing letters/postcards
  - Gathering, walking
  - Talking with others

## Mind

- Building and using knowledge
  - Learning about Residential Schools, Shannen's Dream, colonization, etc.

## Heart

- Personal Responses
  - How did it feel when...
  - my heart hurts when...
  - I wish..., etc.



# Appendices

Learning log

Spirit Bear letter writing sheet for students

Colouring sheet



# Spirit Bear: Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams: Learning Log

**New or interesting words**

**What they mean**

Kwe Kwe

Hello, Greetings in Algonquin

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## Questions I had from reading the book

I wonder...

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# Spirit Bear: Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams: Learning Log

## Things I learned from the book

I learned that...

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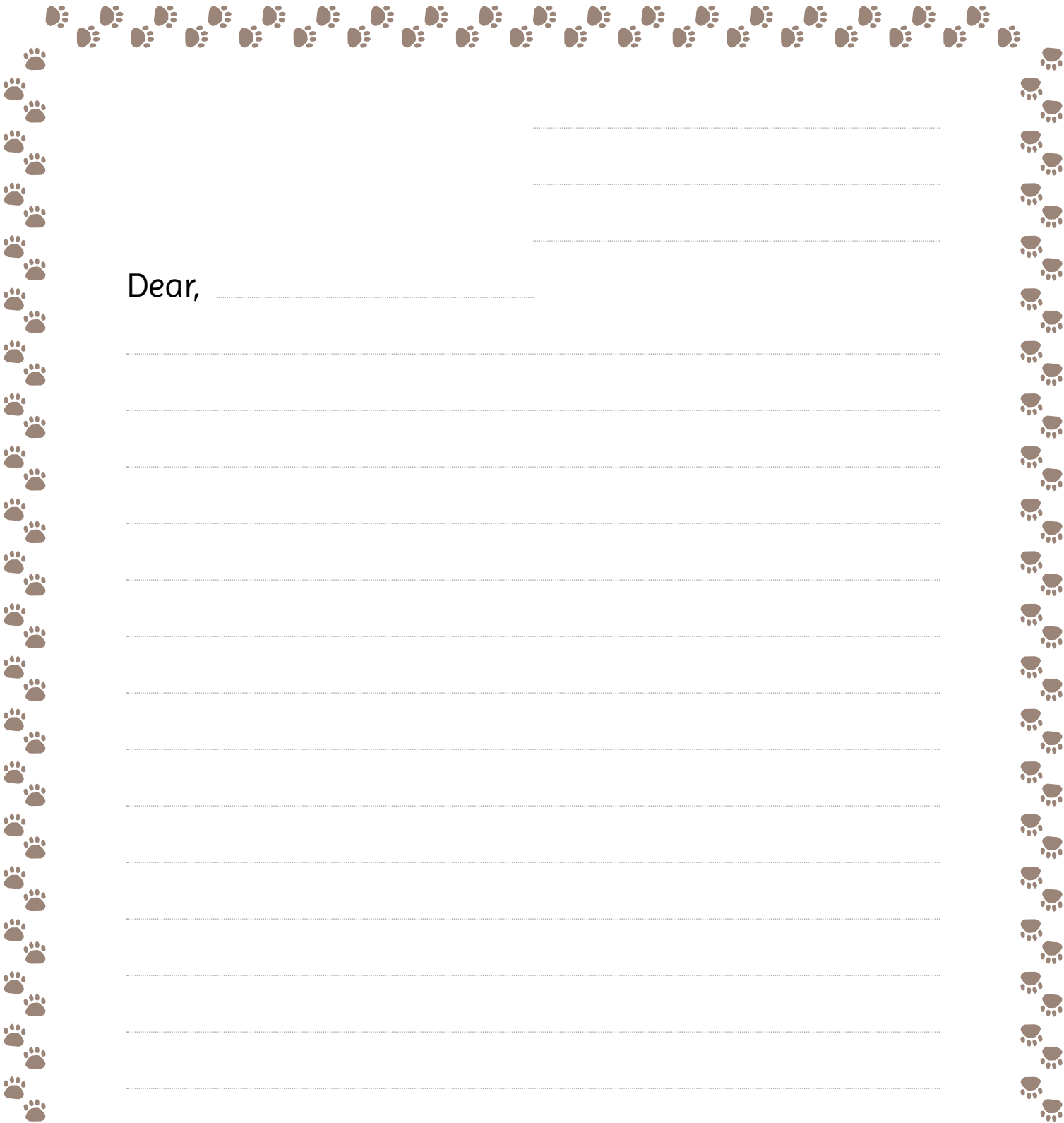
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Your friend,

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# Spirit Bear: Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams

Based on a True Story

