

My Name Is Not Easy Study Guide

My Name Is Not Easy by Debby Dahl Edwardson

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Plot Summary

My Name Is Not Easy is the story of Eskimo, Indian and White children who are sent to attend a Catholic boarding school in the early 1960s because there are no schools in their villages. The main character, an 11-year-old boy knows that his name will be changed to Luke because the priests and nuns at the school won't be able to pronounce his Inupiaq Eskimo name. Luke and his younger brothers, Bunna and Isaac, are punished for speaking their native language and soon Isaac is sent away with no warning or parental permission to live with a good Catholic family. The school is attended by white and Indian children too and there is much animosity between the groups of students. Eventually, as the students learn more about each other and bond in their distaste for the way they are treated by the priests and nuns, they begin to form a family of sorts. The death of one of the brothers along with other rites of passage for the kids forces them to grow up early and they learn quickly what is really important in life.



Part I: The Day the Earth Turned Over (1960-1961); My Name Is Not Easy/Luke; Looking for a Tree/Chickie; Never Cry/Luke; Indian Country/Sonny and Chickie

Summary

It is September 5, 1960, and a 12-year-old boy thinks that he will be called Luke when he goes away to Sacred Heart boarding school because his native Inupiaq name is too hard for white people to pronounce. Luke waits with his younger brothers, Bunna who is ten and Issaac who is six, at home to hear the plane that will take them to the Catholic school. Their Uncle Joe is cleaning his gun and their Aaka (grandma) eats maktak (whale blubber). Their mother is making tea for their Aapa (grandpa). The family lives on the Alaskan tundra far from civilization and Luke is apprehensive about going away to school in a place he's never seen. The boys' mother's boyfriend, Jack, fill them with stories about Catholics and Luke is worried about those encounters.

The plane finally arrives and the boys' mother does not cry as they board because they are Eskimos and Eskimos know how to survive. Most of the other kids on the plane are teenagers also going to school because there are no local schools. These older kids will be going to Bureau of Indian Affairs schools while the younger ones are destined for the Catholic school. On the plane, the boys befriend a boy named Amiq who has attended Sacred Heart before.

In Looking for a Tree/Chickie, it is September 6, 1960, and the story is told from the perspective of another student named Chickie. Chickie is Scandinavian but lives like an Eskimo with her Swedish father. Chickie never knew her mother and her father never had any photos of her around. Chickie is amazed at all the trees around the Sacred Heart school because there are no trees in her village. She would like to find a tree tall enough to reach heaven so she could see her mother. One day Chickie gets lost while exploring trees and starts to panic. She yells and then spots a big oil drum which she bangs on to make noise. Suddenly one of the nuns from Sacred Heart emerges from the woods and rescues Chickie. The nun is Sister Mary Kate and she comforts Chickie and takes her back to the school in time for supper.

In Never Cry/Luke, it is still September 6 and the chapter is told from Luke's perspective. Luke is also amazed by all the trees around the school and they seem as if they could choke a person. Luke and his brothers don't like the severe look of Sacred Heart but Luke is reminded of his mother urging him to take care of them but he wishes they could run away. Suddenly the boys see a gnarly old priest emerge from the woods



and he directs them into the school, telling them to wait as he enters an office. Soon an old woman emerges and tells the boys that Isaac is too young to attend the school and that he can stay with a family in town until things get sorted out. The priest drives Isaac away and Luke and Bunna are helpless to go after him. Luke and Bunna are taken to the cafeteria to eat and Luke wonders what he will say to his mother about what happened to Issac.

The cafeteria has Indian children on one side and Eskimo children on the other. Luke and Bunna refuse to eat the meat and the boy named Amiq steps in to tell the nun that they are of the Whale Clan and can't eat that kind of meat. Amiq shares other tips of managing the nuns and they sit down to eat. Before long, the same priest who took Issac away demands that Luke place his hands flat on the table and the priest hits them with a ruler because Luke had been speaking in his native language instead of English.

In Indian Country/Sonny and Chickie, it is still September 6 and the chapter is told from the perspective of Chickie and a boy named Sonny who attended Sacred Heart last year. Sonny is the leader of the Indian kids at the school whereas Amiq leads the Eskimo kids. Sonny notes that the new girl named Chickie is sitting with a girl, Donna, who had been here last year. Donna is always nervous and skittish. Sonny watches how Chickie is so animated in comparison to Donna and also notes that Donna blushes when Amiq winks at her.

As Chickie and Donna talk over their supper, Chickie learns that Donna never knew her mother either. Before long, Chickie, Donna and several other students witnessed the old priest stride across the cafeteria to the table where Luke and Bunna were seated. All the kids except Sonny and Amiq were shocked to see the priest whack Luke's hand with a ruler. Sonny thinks that Amiq should have warned the Eskimo kids about the priest.

Analysis

The author establishes the time and setting of the book as September, 1960, in Alaska. The children from remote areas of the state are being sent to a boarding school because there are no local schools in these places. Luke and his brothers are apprehensive because they have never been away from their home on the tundra and they will be gone for the entire school year. They are also scared of going to the school which is run by Catholic priests and nuns. They have never known any Catholics and they have been told outlandish stories like the Catholics will force them to eat horse meat. When the kids reach the school, some of their fears are realized as the priest is gruff and their youngest brother, Isaac, is taken away to live with a foster family because he is too young to attend the school. The scenery is completely foreign to them too and they are almost scared to be outside in the dense forest area. But the most frightening part is that they are forced to give up their Inupiaq identities. They will be given English names such as Luke and are punished for speaking in their native Eskimo tongue.

The author also presents the events from the perspective of several students as told in the different chapters. Most of the book will be told from Luke and Chickie's



perspectives and it is interesting to see how the same events are seen differently by different people.

The cruelty and insensitivity of the priest and nuns begins to exhibit immediately when Isaac is taken away by the priest because he is too young to attend the school. There is no phone call to the boys' mother, no explanation to Luke and Bunna about what is happening and certainly nothing done to calm Isaac's terror at being separated from his brothers. The priest also exhibits cruelty when he whacks Luke's hand with a ruler for speaking in his native Eskimo language. This is a theme that will exhibit throughout the book.

Discussion Question 1

What do Luke and his brothers believe about Catholics before they arrive at the Sacred Heart school?

Discussion Question 2

Why are the children forced to take English names and prohibited from speaking their Eskimo language at the school?

Discussion Question 3

How are the natural and school environments different for the children arriving at Sacred Heart school this year?

Vocabulary

Inupiaq, tundra, maktak, scuttle, aaka, lemming, aapa, prickly, scabby, bristly, emerge, intimidating, grasping, raven, swoops, scrawny, affidavit, notarized, perched, infirmary, caribou, pawns, trespassers, sauntered, barge, slimy, tendency, prickle, instinct



How Hunters Survive/Luke; Snowbird/Chickie; Kickball/Sonny; The Size of Things Back Home/Luke, Sonny and Chickie

Summary

It is September 7, 1960, and Luke awakens very early and thinks about Isaac and wishes all the brothers could be back home again. Luke also wonders what is so bad about his Inupiaq language that the priest had hit him for saying it. Then Luke gently wakes Bunna and tells him that they are going to run away and go home. Luke thinks that if they can find Isaac, they can hit the highway that runs past the school and then get rides up north to Fairbanks, they can then get a message to their Uncle Joe to come get them. As Luke and Bunna leave the school grounds, they come upon an old cabin with an old Indian sitting inside. The boys take off through the woods, realizing that they'll need Uncle Joe to help them find Issac.

Luke and Bunna get lost in the woods and they come upon that old Indian man and he's angry because the boys are making too much noise and scaring the animals. The Indian has a gun so Luke and Bunna make a run for it, stopping at an opening in the woods to collect themselves. They eventually reach the highway but they are discovered by a young priest from the school who has been driving the road trying to find them.

In Snowbird/Chickie, it is now October of 1960, and Chickie takes stock of her dorm room which she shares with girls named Donna, Evelyn and Rose. Donna is always very withdrawn and wears a necklace with a big gold coin on the end which she rubs when she is nervous or upset. Donna reveals that her mother left when Donna was only five-years-old. Donna was raised at a mission by a nun named Sister Ann and Donna thought she was her mother when she was little. Sister Ann had given Donna the St. Christopher's medal she wears around her neck on the day that Sister Ann left the mission.

In Kickball/Sonny, it is the Spring of 1961, and the chapter is told from Sonny's perspective. Amiq taunts Sonny in the cafeteria by asking Luke and Bunna if they have run into the old Indian man again. Amiq wants to pick a fight with Sonny by making fun of all Indians and then Sonny and the other Indian kids start to make fun of the Eskimos. Eventually Sonny hits Amiq and Father Flanagan has to break them apart and takes them to Father Mullen's office. Father whacks Amiq with a 2X4 board as Amiq smiles and Sonny watches.



In *The Size of Things Back Home/Luke, Sonny and Chickie*, it is the summer of 1961 and the kids are all home for break. Luke's mother is heartbroken that Isaac has not come home. Luke wants to go find Isaac but his mother just sighs and cries. Sonny stays at Sacred Heart for the summer and he reminisces about the moccasins his mother makes to pay for Sonny's tuition. Chickie returns home and learns that her grandma is gone. Swede tells her that they had to put her in a home. Uncle Joe gives Luke a gun to shoot caribou to pay for his and Bunna's tuition. He thinks his mother looks sad and her boyfriend is gone so there's no one to take care of her. When Chickie returns to school, she thinks about her grandma who is in a home in Fairbanks and imagines that even she and all the Sacred Heart students will one day be in the same situation.

Analysis

The theme of discrimination is important in this section. Luke and Bunna are startled when they come across the old Indian in the woods because they have never really seen anyone like him before. They automatically think that he is out to harm them when they don't know anything about him as a person. They base their opinion on stereotypes. The same cultural stereotypes come into play with Sonny and Amiq and their fight in the cafeteria. There is an invisible separation between the Eskimo kids and the Indian kids at the school and Sonny and Amiq are the leaders for their respective groups. In this case Sonny initiates a fight with Amiq for no real reason other than they are different. All the kids get worked up about the fight and it keeps the animosity between the two groups fueled.

It is ironic that Father Mullen whacks the boys for fighting. He is just validating physical aggression in a situation where he could help defuse the animosity. It would be more fitting for a priest to talk to the students about dropping their prejudices and trying to understand people who are different from them but the priest chooses to act out his anger with more anger.

Chickie's maturity begins to reveal itself as she muses about her grandmother's life in a nursing home and how she and her friends will one day be in the same situation. Chickie befriends Donna who also did not know her mother, giving them an important factor in common.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Luke and Bunna run away from Sacred Heart school?

Discussion Question 2

Why is there so much animosity between Sonny and Amiq?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Luke feel better about returning to Sacred Heart school after the summer break?

Vocabulary

flickering, convince, relax, ptarmigan, volunteer, boney, professional, curious, abide, darn, challenges, strand, squint, eradicate, rampant, ignorance, poverty, animosity, savage, scowled, mimicked, muttering, fidgeting, billowing, dim, musty, squirm, twitch, ruffian, deliverance, reverberating, brittle, swat



Part II: The Day the Soldiers Came (1961-1962); Rose Hips and Chamomile/Donna; Burnt Offerings/Luke; Military Trash/Chickie; The Day the Soldiers Came/Luke; The Meanest Heathens/Sonny and Amiq

Summary

Donna helps Sister Sarah work in the garden and recalls being raised by a nun named Sister Ann at a mission. Donna was traumatized when Sister Ann left but instinctively knew that she was to keep her emotions to herself. Sister Ann gave Donna a St. Christopher's medal which she wears around her neck and rubs for comfort. Sister Mary Kate interrupts Sister Sarah and Donna with the news that a dead moose has been found on the highway. Father Mullen has put Sister Mary Kate in charge of butchering the moose for food and she is frantic because she doesn't have any idea on how to accomplish that. Sister Sarah calmly tells her to get Luke and some of the other children involved as a learning experience.

In *Burnt Offerings/Luke*, it is September of 1961 and the chapter is told from Luke's perspective. Luke notes that Father Flanagan brings the mail at suppertime but that he and Bunna rarely get any. A boy named Junior gets reel-to-reel tapes from his family and the other kids like to listen to them too. Father Mullen has put Luke in charge of skinning the dead moose and Luke is apprehensive because he's never even seen a moose before. Father Flanagan drives Luke, Bunna and some of the other kids on the Sacred Heart bus to find the moose on the highway. While they ride, Luke finds Father Mullen's mailbag under the seat and discovers a letter addressed to him but it has already been opened. As the bus screeches to a halt, Luke shoves the letter into his pocket.

The moose has been spotted and Luke steels himself for the task of skinning it. Luke recalls watching Uncle Joe skin a caribou and he does the same thing with the moose. Luke eventually completes the task and the students dine on fried moose and gravy that night. Luke and Bunna finally get to read the letter Luke took from the mailbag earlier and learn that it is from Isaac. Isaac states that he knows how to climb a tree and that his Dad is going to build a treehouse. He also wants to know why Luke never answers any of his letters. Luke studies the postmark on the envelope which indicates that it has come from Texas.



In *Military Trash/Chickie*, it is March of 1962 and the chapter is told from Chickie's perspective. Chickie writes in her diary while riding in the Sacred Heart school bus coming home from Fairbanks where the school team won a basketball game. Suddenly the bus makes a big noise and sputters to a stop. Father Flanagan jumps out to take a look at the engine and the kids laugh, calling the bus military trash because the army had disposed of it and it went to the Sacred Heart school. When Sister Mary Kate gets out to help Father, the boys grab Chickie's diary and toss it to one another. Father tries to start the bus but it won't turn over so he releases the brakes and it starts to roll down the hill and he's able to get it started and they continue on their way to Sacred Heart.

In *The Day the Soldiers Came/Luke*, it is April 5, 1962, and the chapter is told from Luke's perspective. Bunna alerts Luke that soldiers are at the school. A few of the kids including Luke, Bunna, Donna and Amiq have been selected for a type of testing. They line up in the school hallway and Luke is chosen to go first so he enters a small room where two military doctors hook Luke to a machine via wires and make him drink a solution called iodine-131 which is a radioactive tracer. They say they want to study why people who live in the far north are not as susceptible to the cold so that maybe they can get their soldiers to adapt easier. The doctors put on heavy lead aprons and gloves and Luke drinks the green fluorescent liquid. When Luke is finished, Bunna goes in next and Amiq wants to know exactly what awaits him in that room.

In *The Meanest Heathens/Sonny and Amiq*, it is still April 5, 1962, and the chapter is told from the perspective of Sonny and Amiq. Sonny and another boy are chosen by Father Mullen to give one of the military officers a tour of the school. After the tour, Sonny walks toward his room for a brief break before lunch and he sees Amiq cowering in the hall with the general walking briskly in his direction. It's clear that Amiq wants to disappear but there's nowhere to go. Suddenly the general stops and asks Amiq why he isn't with the other students for the testing. Sonny interrupts, saying that Amiq is his brother and is not an Eskimo. The general buys Sonny's lie and moves on. Relieved, Amiq takes Sonny to his quiet spot in the woods. Amiq expresses his gratitude that Sonny saved him from having to drink the iodine and they spend the afternoon talking and becoming friends. Father Mullen is waiting in the dark dorm room when they return to school and he whacks them with his two-by-four and all they can do is swallow their anger.

Analysis

The theme of survival is important in this section. Each of the children has stories of surviving the emotional and physical wounds they have endured. For example, Donna talks about surviving the loss of her beloved Sister Ann, the only mother figure she had ever known, and how she never said a word when the sister was forced out of her life. She instinctively knew that she had to be strong to survive the pain. Luke's mother had always told her sons that Eskimos know how to survive so Luke take a practical approach to butchering the moose even though he has never done it before. He knows it is expected of him and he performs under pressure because it is something he just has to do. He knows how to survive. Amiq has strong survival instincts, too, as he runs



and hides during the iodine-131 testing. He knows it is wrong but has no voice so all he can do is hide. He is ultimately punished for it, but it is a risk he had to take to save himself from the testing.

The situation in which Luke and some other students are forced to drink iodine-131 in a government test was something that actually happened in Alaska at that time. In an experiment in the 1960s, over 100 Alaskan citizens were continually exposed to radioactive iodine. The U.S. government conducted a study of the role of the thyroid gland in acclimatizing humans to cold, using iodine-131. This is now considered to be legally unethical. As in the case of Luke, Bunna and the others, their parents were not contacted to give their permission and the children had no say in whether or not they were interested in participating in such a study. These children were essentially treated like lab animals and it is unthinkable that this could have occurred and no adults objected to their treatment. This plays into the theme of discrimination because the Eskimo children were assumed to be inferior and open to such atrocities because of their status.

It is interesting to note that Sonny and Amiq have now become friends. Sonny saves Amiq from the iodine testing by declaring him to be his brother and not an Eskimo. Sonny is able to override his contentious relationship with Amiq when he sees Amiq's fear. They then are able to bond when they learn that they have more things in common than they do keeping them apart.

There's also an interesting occurrence regarding what happened to Isaac when Luke finds the opened letter from Isaac to him in the school mailbag. From what Luke can tell, Isaac is fine and probably living in Texas. What is particularly upsetting is that Isaac wants to know why Luke hasn't answered any of his letters. Clearly Isaac has been sending letters to Luke but someone at the school has opened them and they have not been given to Luke. This is not right and just serves to further Luke's anger toward the priests and nuns at Sacred Heart.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Luke feel good about himself after he butchers the moose?

Discussion Question 2

What does Luke learn about Isaac from the letter he finds in the mailbag?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Sonny decide to rescue Amiq from the general questioning Amiq about the iodine testing?



Vocabulary

clutching, crouched, sternness, squawking, chamomile, salvaging, sustain, gruff, slain, rose hips, harpoon, lurches, sheath, gunnysack, flecks, cawing, clench, opponent, smudged, yapping, spacey, sputters, fret, pious, loons, annoyed, lobbing, banshee, bashing, groping, glare, clenched, psalm, interrupt, suspicious, radiation, heathens, battalion, scrutinize, prominent, trapline, iodine, tinder, shaft, perch, wary



Part III: When the time Comes (1962-1963); Coupons and Bomb Shelters/Chickie; Our Uncle's Gun/Luke; Eskimo Kiss/Chickie; Forever/Luke

Summary

Chickie talks about practicing for bombs being dropped in the classroom. Father Flanagan talks to them about the atomic bomb and President Kennedy and his desire to get a man on the moon in this decade. Bunna says that there is already an Inupiaq shaman who lives on the moon. Later Chickie, Donna and some other girls are in the library to work on a project and Bunna sits nearby to eavesdrop and flirt with Chickie. The girls see an ad in a magazine that states you can get a car with Betty Crocker coupons which are found on the top of cake boxes. They enlist Father Flanagan's help and they mail about 5,000 letters to people in the area asking for their coupons so that the school can get a new bus.

In Our Uncle's Gun/Luke, it is June 6, 1963, and the chapter is told from Luke's perspective. Luke and Bunna are supposed to be going home for the summer today but Luke has had a bad dream and doesn't feel like they should go. Bunna refuses to listen to Luke's pleas and is adamant about going home. Luke is angry that Bunna also insists on taking Uncle Joe's gun with him. Luke tries to get Bunna to change his mind by saying that they could make some money by staying with a family in Fairbanks and go hunting like Amiq does but Bunna is fixed about returning home. Luke even tries to fight Bunna but nothing works. Bunna says that he just has to go home. Bunna shoves the gun at Luke and there's nothing else that can be said; Bunna is going home.

In Eskimo Kiss/Chickie, it is June 7, 1963, and the chapter is told from Chickie's perspective. Chickie doesn't understand why Bunna is going home for the summer but Luke isn't because they are never separated. Bunna sits in the seat in front of Chickie on the bus headed to Fairbanks where they will catch their planes home. Luke emerges from the school and walks to the bus where he stows Uncle Joe's gun for Bunna to take home. Bunna and Chickie both turn at the same time to see Luke and they bump heads. Some of the kids call it an Eskimo kiss. When Father Flanagan stops for gas later on, Bunna approaches Chickie to see if she likes one of the other boys at school. As they talked about the star formations, Bunna leans in to kiss Chickie before they climb back onto the bus and hold they hands the rest of the way.

In Forever/Luke, it is June 15, 1963, and the chapter is told from Luke's perspective. Luke eats dinner with Sonny and Donna who are also staying at Sacred Heart for the summer and he thinks about summers spent with his brothers at home. Luke gets a sinking feeling as he sees Father Flanagan and Sister Mary Kate watching him. He can



feel that they have news that he doesn't want to hear. Luke has had another dream and he knows before he is even told that Bunna is dead. Luke is told that the plane Bunna was in crashed in the mountains. He rushes outside to the woods because he doesn't want to talk about it and because no one could understand his devastation.

Analysis

The author includes events that were very much a part of life in the early 1960s. The Cold War was prevalent and people lived in fear that the Russians would bomb the U.S. Bomb shelters became very popular and students practiced survival tactics in school in the event of a bomb drop. The space race was also very popular at the time and the United States was in competition with Russia to get a man sent to the moon. One other element that was popular at the time was the saving of box tops and stamps in exchange for products. This is shown by the students who write to people in the area so that they will donate their Betty Crocker box tops so the school can get a new bus.

The theme of intuition and dreams becomes very important in this section. Luke always seems to have a second sense about things that he can't really explain. In this case, he has a dream that is unsettling to him and he knows that he and Bunna should not go home for the summer. He tries everything he can to keep Bunna from leaving school, but nothing works. It's hard for Luke to explain what he is feeling because they are based on intuition, but it is strong for him, just not strong enough to keep Bunna with him and Bunna is killed in a plane crash on his way home. After Bunna leaves, Luke has another dream and he can tell from Bunna's behavior that Bunna is dead. Luke can also intuit what the priests and nuns are going to tell him before they even do. He knows instinctively by the way they look at him and how they're holding their bodies that they will deliver the news that Bunna is dead. No doubt, Luke has the instincts of the hunters of his heritage and he is tuned into things that other people simply aren't aware of.

Bunna's death is especially poignant because the author had just begun revealing more of his personality. He was becoming more sure of himself and had even entered into a flirtation with Chickie, kissing her near the school bus on their way to Fairbanks. Chickie will probably dream of that kiss all summer and be haunted all her life when she learns that Bunna was killed shortly after in the plane crash on his way home.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Luke so adamant that he and Bunna shouldn't go home for the summer?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Bunna's kissing Chickie especially poignant?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Luke run away into the woods when he hears about Bunna's death?

Vocabulary

atomic, Noxzema, cellars, chariot, Hiroshima, Betty Crocker, sophisticated, penmanship, generous, desperate, region, competition, yapping, significant, birch, duffle, lunging, wolverine, ignite, embarrassment, vaguely, rickety, broncos, scowling, amputated, compassion, numerous, kin



Part IV: The Earth Can't Shake Us (1963-1964); He's My Brother/Chickie; Eskimo Rodeo/Luke; Unchained Melody/Donna; A Weak Spot or A Secret Strength/Luke

Summary

When Father Flanagan picks up the kids at the beginning of the new school year, he is driving the new school bus. Chickie is painfully aware that Bunna is missing. When Chickie arrives at school, she rushes into Luke's arms and they both cry. Later, Luke takes Chickie to his and Bunna's secret place in the woods and he tells her that the Inupiaq way is to name a baby after someone who has died and that will be that person's spirit coming back. Luke and Chickie spend time talking and she feels like he is her brother now. Luke states that he has to find Isaac.

In Eskimo Rodeo/Luke, it is November 22, 1963, and the chapter is told from Luke's perspective. It is a Friday and Luke normally likes Fridays but today he has a bad feeling about it. Then he learns that President Kennedy has been shot and died in Dallas, Texas. Bunna's death comes rushing back at Luke and he has to leave the cafeteria to be by himself. Father Flanagan finds Luke in his dorm room and tries to console him but all Luke wants is to call home. As he places the call, Luke remembers calling home after Bunna died too. His mother had screamed when she heard his voice because she thought he had also been in the plane crash that killed Bunna. On this call, Uncle Joe answers the phone and Luke is overwhelmed to hear his voice. Uncle Joe tells Luke that he has a rodeo now and they laugh but they're saddened when Uncle Joe talks about his gun and Luke has to tell him that it had been in the plane with Bunna. Later that night, Luke reads Isaac's letter again and is reassured that one day Isaac will find his way home to them.

In Unchained Melody/Donna, it is March 7, 1964, and the chapter is told from Donna's perspective. Evelyn is cutting Donna's hair to match the style worn by Jackie Kennedy on the cover of Life magazine. Donna is all dreamy thinking about the spring dance. Donna dances with Amiq at the dance and feels like everything is right with the world. They leave the dance to walk into the woods where Amiq lays Donna on the ground and kisses her. They drink from a bottle of vodka and Amiq's kisses intensify which scares Donna. Suddenly Luke appears, having been sent to find them to tell Amiq that someone has called the school to say that Amiq's father took off ten days ago and no one can find him. Amiq defiantly states that his father can survive anything.

In A Weak Spot or A Secret Strength/Luke, it is March 12, 1964, and the chapter is told from Luke's perspective. Luke is lying on the ground in the woods trying to escape his painful thoughts and feelings. He thinks about boxing with Sonny that morning and tries



to block out his emotions like a boxer has to do. Luke also recalls talking to Sonny and Father Mullen after boxing and how Luke's ears shut out their conversation and he senses an experience of his forefathers trying to survive in the brutal cold. Somehow Luke knows that he had also been there and that he was a leader of the people.

Analysis

The theme of grief is important in this section. Both Chickie and Luke are still devastated by Bunna's death and the beginning of the new school year just emphasizes that he is no longer here. They talk about Bunna a little bit and Luke shares the Inupiaq view on what happens when someone dies; that a new baby is supposed to be named after the person who has died and their spirit will live on. Luke has been told that he walks exactly like the person for whom he was named. There is also more death and grief when President Kennedy is assassinated. The teachers and students at the school struggle to understand why this tragedy has happened and it is doubly devastating for Luke because the death simply reminds him of Bunna's death. Luke tries to function now with no brothers in his life but he somehow knows that Isaac will one day find his way home again and that lessens his grief just a little bit. There is the possibility of more grief with the realization that Amiq's father has been missing for ten days. Luke has become accustomed to news of death and he instinctively knows what has happened but Amiq goes into immediate denial, stating that his father can survive anything. So many of the students are getting painful lessons about death and grief and they are forced to grow up fast as a result.

The theme of intuition and dreams rises again when Luke has a sense about his forefathers struggling to survive in the brutal cold. They are forced to live underground and the leader sticks his wrist out in the cold to test whether it is safe to emerge or not. Luke also senses that he was the leader of these people and that gives him a sense of comfort knowing that he has survived brutal circumstances before and he can survive whatever life brings to him now.

Discussion Question 1

What is the Inupiaq belief about someone after they die?

Discussion Question 2

Why is President Kennedy's death especially difficult for Luke?

Discussion Question 3

What does Luke seem to understand from the sensation he had of being a leader of people generations ago who were trying to survive the brutal Arctic cold?



Vocabulary

numb, outlive, hoard, scowled, mush, tentative, ammunition, blubber, whaling, globs, thud, stooped, huddled, static, iceberg, croak, muttered, concentrates, alongside, squinting, spine, billowing, meanders, instinct, parochial, intensity, medallion, slurred, generic, inland, flexed, receding, mastodon, frostbite



Our Story; Civil Disobedience; Good Friday

Summary

Junior shows Father Flanagan a newspaper article stating that Project Chariot is still proceeding but Father doesn't understand the impact of the news. Junior wants him to know that the government plans to set off a nuclear blast up north to blow up an area where some of the kids used to hunt. They wanted to create a harbor out of a region of land and blowing it up was the only option. All the kids are outraged and Junior wants to know if he can do a story about it for the school newspaper and Father Flanagan gives his approval. Unfortunately, Father has misunderstood and thinks Junior wants to do an article about the new school newspaper, not Project Chariot, which had been Junior's intent.

Later, Luke spots an article about Eskimos being warned about duck killing and his Uncle Joe is pictured with the article. The Eskimos had been warned about not hunting ducks in the spring and fall but that's the only time ducks appear in Alaska. Junior decides that he doesn't want to write a story about the new school newspaper so he writes a story about Uncle Joe and the other men warned about killing ducks. Father Flanagan is not pleased because the topic is not appropriate for the students and asks Junior to change the story to one about the school paper. Amiq taunts Junior about disposing of the duck story but Junior has decided to write an even bigger piece entitled "From the Ice Cellar to the Bomb Shelter" to address all the issues threatening his people. Again, Father Flanagan is not pleased because the article only covers Junior's opinions and is not objective. Amiq is angry that Father invalidates their concerns so he sends the article to a Dallas newspaper where it appears in the Letters to the Editor section. Father Mullen and Father Flanagan are angry, and even though Junior states that Amiq didn't write it, Father Mullen orders Amiq to follow him out of the room.

In Civil Disobedience, it is Spring of 1964. Amiq has been expelled and he is packing his things and the other boys question him about why he sent the article to the Dallas newspaper. More information has been revealed and it turns out that Amiq had sent a note to the Dallas newspaper stating that Isaac had been kidnapped, while it was Luke who had sent the article about bomb shelters. Luke is worried that if Amiq leaves all alone, he will become lost and possibly even die. Father Flanagan later tells the boys that the Lord will watch out for Amiq. This is not acceptable to Luke and the other boys and they leave the school during the night to try and find Amiq. Amiq is in his hiding place in the woods when the boys find him and he is holding Donna's St. Christopher medal. Amiq is both shocked and relieved to see his friends.

Luke, Junior, Amiq, Chickie and some of the other kids are at Johnson's Bait Shop to have Mr. Johnson notarize some papers stating that Junior takes full responsibility for



the newspaper article and ad sent to the Dallas paper. After all the students sign the affidavit, they present it to Father Mullen who has no real response.

In Good Friday, Father is in Seward, Alaska, because he's taking a much needed break. He is weary of trying to form good little Christians out of the native boys who seem to want to do nothing but revolt. The others at Sacred Heart school are going about their day when an earthquake hits, cracking pipes and sending things crashing to the floor. Father Flanagan, the nuns and the students all run outside and try to hold on to the thrashing earth. Sister Mary Kate and Father Flanagan try to revive Sister Sarah who is lying motionless on the ground and a thousand miles away, Father Mullen is swallowed up by a huge wave of sea water. Sister Sarah has died from a heart attack and the children gather at the cemetery to say goodbye. They get word that Father Mullen had gone to the beach in Seward just before the tsunami swallowed him.

Analysis

The author continues to weave real events into the story. Project Chariot was an initiative of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission to build an artificial harbor on the north slope of Alaska. The plan included the burial and detonation of several nuclear devices. It started as a part of a project started to uncover peaceful uses for nuclear devices. Although the plan was never fully carried out, the site was radioactively contaminate by related experiments.

The Good Friday earthquake on March 27, 1964, was also a real event that occurred in Alaska. The earthquake lasted four minutes and 38 seconds and devastated the south central Alaska region. The port cities including Seward also experienced tsunamis. Overall, 139 people died as a result.

The theme of fear is important in this section. Amiq is angry and afraid when he is expelled from school and his friends are afraid of what will happen to him on his own out in the world. They overcome their fears, though, and rally to support Amiq and get him back to school. There is clearly fear related to the earthquake experience as well as the aftermath. The deaths of Father Mullen and Sister Sarah extend the theme of grief as the students manage their emotions about what has happened.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Father Flanagan hesitant about letting Junior write an article about Project Chariot for the school newspaper?

Discussion Question 2

Why do the kids go after Amiq when he is expelled from school?



Discussion Question 3

How do the kids show their solidarity with Amiq after he is sent away from Sacred Heart school?

Vocabulary

inescapable, emphasizing, demonstrate, croaked, warden, permission, disobedience, curious, phrase, varnish, indignant, propelled, authority, exposed, economic, altogether, illegal, explanation, deliberately, deflated, curiosity, betrayed, exist, sidewise, muttered, pathetic, trespassers, tentative, certification, communal, affidavit, expel, admonishment, snuffing, ominously, staccato



Epilogue: A New Gun/Luke

Summary

Issac has returned home due to the ad placed in the Dallas newspaper. Father Flanagan found the money and Michael O'Shay's dad did the legal work in securing Isaac's return. Uncle Joe has bought a new snowmobile and Luke and his mother delight in watching Isaac maneuver it around the yard. Uncle Joe also has a bright, shiny new gun to replace the one lost when Bunna died. Uncle Joe laughs at the way Luke's Inupiaq language has been altered by his time spent speaking only English at Sacred Heart. Luke and Uncle Joe use the new snowmobile to hunt caribou and Luke is happy to be back on the tundra.

Analysis

At last there is joy in Luke's life again. Not only is he back at home, but Isaac has been returned to the family. Uncle Joe is including them in the Eskimo ways of life once more and Luke is happy to be back where he belongs.

Discussion Question 1

In the end, was the trouble the boys had about the Dallas newspaper submissions worth it?

Discussion Question 2

What does Father Flanagan's finding the money to bring Isaac home say about what he thought about the situation all along?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Uncle Joe laugh at the way Luke speaks now?

Vocabulary

howling, blizzard, violence, lunge, mimicking, revving, resignation, flared



Characters

Luke Aaluk

Luke is an 11-year-old Eskimo boy who lives on the Alaskan tundra. When he and his brothers are sent away to a Catholic boarding school, he knows they are going to change his name because it is from the Inupiaq language which white people have difficulty pronouncing. Luke is the eldest of three brothers and feels responsible for the other two when they are away from home for the school year. Luke is a sensitive person and has strong intuitive powers which exhibit in dreams and strong connections to his forefathers. Luke's premonitions keep him from harm but his brother, Bunna, dies when his plane crashes on the way home one summer.

At the school, Luke learns discrimination and even cruelty from the priests and nuns who strip him and the other children of their Inupiaq language and sense of their own homes. Luke's Eskimo culture has made him strong, though, and he knows he can survive anything. Luke is able to adapt to life at the school but he is much more comfortable with himself when he is finally allowed to return home to hunt, eat familiar foods and just be with his family.

Chickie Snow

Chickie Snow is a girl with snow blonde hair and lots of freckles. She lives like an Eskimo with her Scandinavian father named Swede even though she doesn't look like an Eskimo at all. Chickie and her father live in Kotzebue, Alaska, where he runs a general store. Swede never had any mirrors in their house so Chickie grew up never realizing how different she was from others in the town. Chickie never knew her mother and Swede never had any pictures of her around so she has no sense about who her mother was. Chickie befriends a girl named Donna whose mother was also missing from her life because they have this in common.

Chickie is mature for her age and she is able to look at situations a little differently from the other children. For example, when Chickie's grandma is moved to a nursing home, Chickie is sad and projects that this will probably happen to her schoolmates at some time in the future. Chickie also learns about loss when Bunna dies. She and Bunna liked each other and he was the first boy she ever kissed. When Bunna dies, Chickie has to grow up quickly emotionally and learn to live without him.

Bunna Aaluk

Bunna Aaluk is Luke's 10-year-old brother. Bunna follows in Luke's footsteps and looks up to him when they're away at Sacred Heart school. Bunna is quieter than Luke and doesn't draw much attention to himself. He is also afraid of the priests and nuns and just tries to not get in trouble. Bunna is a gentle soul with big brown eyes and an easy smile.



He is fascinated by Chickie and shows his infatuation with her by protecting her from the other boys. By the end of the second year at Sacred Heart, Bunna has developed more of his own personality and is able to stand up to Luke's insistence that they not go home for the summer because Luke has had a bad premonition about their going. Bunna dies in a plane crash on the way home that summer.

Sonny George

Sonny George is one of the boys who attends the Sacred Heart boarding school. He is an Indian and has become the leader of the Indian kids at school. He and Amiq have a long-standing rivalry as Amiq is the leader of the Eskimo kids at the school. Sonny comes from a poor family and his mother makes and sells Indian moccasins in order to make money to pay his tuition. Sonny does not go home for the summers and stays year round at the school. Sonny ultimately befriends Amiq when he realizes that Amiq is hiding because he doesn't want to take the iodine-131 test. Sonny reaches out to Amiq in his fear and the two find they have more in common than they ever thought before.

Donna

Donna is one of the girls at the Sacred Heart school. She was raised by a nun at a mission because her mother had left her when she was a baby. For a long time, she thought the nun was her mother. When the nun had to leave the mission, she gave Donna a St. Christopher medal and Donna wears it on a chain around her neck.

Amiq Amundson

Amiq is a student at the Sacred Heart school. Amiq is an Eskimo and the leader of the Eskimo kids at the school. Amiq has a very daring, outgoing personality and can be obnoxious at times. As the leader of the Eskimo kids, Amiq is always battling with Sonny who is the leader of the Indian kids. Amiq is very bold and sends the ad looking for Isaac to the Dallas newspaper. Amiq is alone in the world after his father has gone missing. When Amiq is expelled for the newspaper submission, the kids go after him and he feels more secure in the world with their support.

Father Mullen

Father Mullen heads the Sacred Heart school. He is a strict disciplinarian who has a disdain for the children whom he considers to be little heathens. Father Mullen used to be a boxer and has a sense of anger about him all the time. He wants to totally rid the kids of their natural heritage and punishes them when he hears them speaking their native language. Father also whacks the kids with a board when he finds them uncontrollable. Father Mullen dies in a tsunami as a result of the Good Friday earthquake in 1964.



Sister Mary Kate

Sister Mary Kate is a nun who teaches at the Sacred Heart school. She is a pleasant person who lives in fear of the opinions of her superiors. Sister Mary Kate is younger than the head nun, Sister Sarah, so the children tend to like her better. Sister Mary Kate is a sensitive person and tries to be kind to the kids and help them in difficult situations from a practical perspective.

Sister Sarah

Sister Sarah is an elderly nun who teaches at Sacred Heart school. She is very strict and cannot engage with the kids on their level. She thinks that all things, good and bad, are the design of providence and tries to get the kids to see that everything they have is a gift from God. She is a very practical persona and views butchering a moose the same as working in the garden because they are both ways to sustain people. Sister Sarah dies during the Good Friday earthquake in 1964.

Father Flanagan

Father Flanagan is a teacher at the Sacred Heart school. He is a young priest and seems to be able to relate to the kids on an individual basis. He is open to new ideas and helps the kids with the Betty Crocker box tops project so the school can get a new bus. Father Flanagan tends to reject the rigidity inflicted by Father Mullen and even finds the money to pay the legal fees to have Isaac returned to his family.



Symbols and Symbolism

Plane

The plane is a symbol of transition in the story. The plane transports the students to and from the boarding school each year where their lives are dramatically changed. Bunna is also killed in a plane crash, altering the lives of the Aaluk family but also shattering the innocence of the other students as well.

Forest

The forest is a symbol of the fear and confusion the students feel when they first arrive at the school. They have never experienced such dense trees and dark spaces just as the school is foreign and frightening to them. As the time passes, though, and the kids grow to be more comfortable at the school, they embrace the forest and even use it as a haven for when they are upset or troubled.

Luke's name

Luke's Inupiaq name is not easily pronounced by white people so they change it without his consent. This symbolizes a lack of respect for Luke's heritage and who Luke is as a person.

Uncle Joe's gun

Uncle Joe's gun symbolizes a rite of passage for the Aaluk brothers. When Uncle Joe gives it to Luke to take back to school to hunt, it means that they can provide like men now and pay their own way in the world.

Dead moose

The dead moose on the highway symbolizes the loss of innocence for the kids. The moose was a baby but is killed and then butchered so the kids can have food for dinner. This is a startling event for those who witness it and the kids are learning to adjust to life's stark new realities.

Iodine-131

The iodine-131 tests symbolize the disregard for the native people who are subjected to it. The possible effects of the radiation are dangerous and the army doctors take precautions for themselves but the selected students are forced to ingest the substance



so the effects may be observed. The Eskimo and Indian students are chosen because they are considered to be more expendable than the white children.

Betty Crocker Box Tops

The Betty Crocker box tops symbolize possibility for the kids. They come from poor families who don't have much in the way of material things but when they learn that they can get a new bus for the school by saving enough box tops, they rally together in the cause. Maybe for the first time in their lives, the kids feel empowered to create change and make something positive happen in their lives.

Bottle of Vodka

Amiq keeps a bottle of vodka at the hiding place in the woods. When Amiq is expelled, Luke feels that Amiq will have nothing else to do and nowhere else to go and he will begin drinking. Luke doesn't want to see Amiq's life ruined should he become an alcoholic so he and the other kids rally to save Amiq from a sad fate.

School Newspaper

The school newspaper symbolizes the kids' independence and maturity. Up until this point, they have been very controlled, but the experience of starting the newspaper lets them exhibit their voices and their need to communicate with the world. They also learn the power of the media and infringement during this time.

Uncle Joe's snowmobile

Uncle Joe's snowmobile represents the future. Not only is it new technology that will allow for easier hunting, it represents Luke's joy at being home and looking forward to a future among the Inupiaq people.



Settings

Kotzebue, Alaska

Kotzebue, Alaska, is the largest city in the northwest arctic borough. It is the town where Chickie comes from and where her father, Swede, runs a general store.

Sacred Heart School

Sacred Heart School is the Catholic boarding school attended by the Alaskan children. It is located in a remote area about 100 miles from Fairbanks, Alaska.

The cafeteria

Much of the activity in the book happens in the cafeteria. It is where the students first begin to learn about themselves and their new lives but also the place where division of the students is most apparent.

The dorm rooms

The dorm rooms at the school for both the girls and boys are the setting for much of the story's activity. It is where the students go for some private time and when they are bonding with friends.

Luke's home

Luke's home is located on the Alaskan tundra. It is a simple place but filled with the love of his mother, brothers and grandparents. He notes how it seems smaller when he returns home from school for the summer and he is overjoyed to return there when he is released from school.



Themes and Motifs

Discrimination

The theme of discrimination is an important one in *My Name Is Not Easy*. The Eskimo and Indian children are discriminated against because their heritage and cultural elements are different from the white people with whom they come in contact. Even before he arrives at the boarding school, Luke knows that his name will be changed because Inupiaq names are too difficult for white people to say. They are even punished for saying Inupiaq words at the school. Instead of the white people embracing these children and their differences, they invalidate them and try to make them fit into a white mold. What a difference it would have made to the education of those Eskimo and Indian children if the teachers and administrators had embraced their cultural and language differences and tried to learn about them. The children would have blossomed instead of spent so much time hating the school experience.

The Eskimo and Indian children are also discriminated against in the situation involving the iodine-131 testing. The testing was clearly dangerous because the military doctors covered themselves in lead aprons and long gloves to avoid any radiation, yet they made these selected students swallow the iodine. The administrators never even secured permission from the children's parents before their children were subjected to the dangerous testing. The white children were not chosen to participate, further reinforcing the idea that the Eskimo and Indian children were more expendable and suitable for medical testing.

Grief

Grief is an important theme in *My Name Is Not Easy*. The children suffer and mourn the loss of their families and homes when they are whisked away to boarding school, not returning until the end of the school year. They are removed from comfortable environments and everything that is familiar to them is taken away at the school. Their names are even changed and they aren't allowed to use their native language.

Luke and Bunna experience grief when Isaac is suddenly taken away from them. Luke's mother had charged him with taking care of his brothers and he has failed in that through no fault of his own. Their mother was not consulted and there was no warning; Isaac was declared too young to attend the school and he was gone. This was like a death to his brothers and the rest of the family who don't know where he is or why he is gone. The family is powerless against the white Catholic administrators.

There is obvious grief when Bunna dies in the plane crash. In spite of Luke's protests about not going home for the summer due to a premonition he had, Bunna persists and is killed on the way home. Luke and Bunna had never spent a day apart and now Luke is bereft and doesn't know what to do without his brother. Chickie also suffers the loss of



Bunna because they had begun a mild flirtation prior to his death and he is the first boy she ever kissed.

Fear

Fear is an important theme in *My Name Is Not Easy*. Even before they arrive at the boarding school, the children are told about what Catholics do to children such as making them eat horse meat and getting a hold on them forever. The children live in fear of repercussions of doing the wrong thing at the school. Their Inupiaq names are changed and they are beaten for speaking their native language. They never know when the wrath of one of the priests or nuns will be directed at them for reasons they don't understand. For example, Isaac is suddenly taken away from the school and his terror and that of his brothers is completely ignored by the school administrators.

Fear is huge when certain kids are selected for the medical testing. There is no reason given, they are just subjected to wires placed on their bodies and made to drink a fluorescent liquid.

When Amiq challenges the administration by sending the information to the Dallas newspaper, he is expelled from school. This may not have been an unacceptable punishment for the offense, but expulsion meant leaving the school entirely. The school was located in a remote area and there was nowhere for Amiq to go for food or shelter. His father is missing, presumably dead, and he has no other family. He acts brave but is understandably terrified. Fortunately, the other kids intuit Amiq's fear and rally to find him and bring him back.

Survival

The theme of survival is an important one in *My Name Is Not Easy*. Luke and his brothers are sent away to a boarding school far away from home with no idea of what they will find there. Their mother tells Luke to take care of his brothers and that Eskimos always survive. Luke takes these thoughts with him but that's a lot to put on an 11-year-old boy. Their home life seems very stark and just finding food and shelter is probably a new exercise in survival every day.

Because of his background, it is assumed that Luke knows how to hunt and butcher animals so he is chosen to butcher the dead moose. Even though Luke has never even seen a moose before, he knows he will find a way because he is a survivor and can always figure out a solution.

The kids also survive emotional upsets and indignities inflicted on them by the priests and nuns. Father Mullen, in particular, is violent and beats the boys with boards when they misbehave but they behave with stoicism because they know they have survived more than what this angry man is inflicting on them.



And Luke's family eventually learns to survive without Bunna. His death was shocking and devastated the family but eventually they accept it and learn to live with his memory.

Intuition/Dreams

The theme of intuition and dreams is an important one in *My Name Is Not Easy*. Luke, especially has the gift of being able to intuit things that had happened with his ancestors as well as sense what might happen in the future. Luke is really in tune with nature and his Inupiaq heritage and he has a sense that he was a leader of people at some point and brought them through a terrible freeze in order to survive.

Luke recalls, "We lived in the dark that time, underground. We lived underground because it was too cold on the surface, too cold to even go outside, some days. The leader had to test the cold first, licking a spot on his wrist and sticking it up and out the door, past the thick layer of mastodon skins, sticking it out for just a second to see how fast the spot turned white with frostbite. Testing to see if it's too cold to search for meat that day. That's how we lived.

He continues, "I know this because I was there. I was the leader, testing the safety of the frozen world with my own skin. I was there."

Luke also has the capability to have premonitions about things to come. Although he had nothing to really base it on, Luke did not want to go home for the summer because he had a bad feeling about it. This was not good enough for Bunna who persisted in leaving school and was killed in a plane crash on the way home. Most people would have done the same thing Bunna did because they need facts on which they base their decisions but Luke's dreams and intuition are strong indicators for him and he will always live by them.

Styles

Point of View

The story is told from the first person narrative point of view. This means that the story is told from the perspective of one person. The book is different, however, in that each chapter is told from the points of view of different students. Luke is the main character, so the book begins with his narrative and he has more chapters throughout than any of the other characters. Regardless of the character providing the perspective, he or she always uses the pronoun of "I" throughout because the story is being told just as he or she sees it or experienced it. With the first person narrative point of view, the reader has access to the thoughts and feelings of the narrator only. What is going on in the heads of any other people in the story is only speculative as the reader does not have the privilege of seeing them.

An example of first person point of view is when Luke says, "When I go off to Sacred Heart School, they're gonna call me Luke because my Inupiaq name is too hard. Nobody has to tell me this. I already know. The author not only provides information from Luke's perspective about what he is doing but what he is thinking as well.

Language and Meaning

My Name Is Not Easy is set in the early 1960s and the language is current for the times. The author uses mid 20th century terminology and euphemisms in narration and dialogue to show authenticity. The author uses things like current movies and pop culture icons so that the audience can relate to them.

Because the story is set in Alaska, the author uses terms that are native to the area. When Luke prepares to go away to boarding school he thinks, "Some things are good to know, like knowing what lies on the other side of that smooth line the tundra makes at the edge of the sky. When you don't know, you feel uneasy about what you might find out there, which is how I'm feeling about Catholic school right now. Uneasy. Wondering if it's gonna be good or bad or both messed up together."

The author also keeps the language authentic to the characters. And since the Inupiaq language is such an important element of contention in the story, the author uses some words to showcase it. For example, I know that pretty soon Aapa's (grandpa) gonna belch and say taiku. But he isn't thanking Mom or Aaka (grandma) or anyone, he's just saying it. Taiku. Thank you.

Structure

The structure of a novel usually takes one of four forms: character, milieu, event or idea. And while a story can contain all four forms, one usually predominates. *My Name Is Not*



Easy takes the structure of a character form. These types of novels tend to show a character's personal growth as the story extends. A character structure shows transformation as being important as opposed to an event story which is more concerned with what a character does. It is easy to identify a character structure novel because there comes a point in the story when the main character reaches a point of frustration with life or a set of circumstances that are no longer acceptable for personal growth. The character then decides on changes, both small and dramatic, that will move the character's life in a different direction. The story concludes then when the character has resolved his or her issues and feels satisfied with the transformation or decides to stay in the current situation.



Quotes

When I go off to Sacred Heart school, they're gonna call me Luke because my Inupiaq name is too hard. Nobody has to tell me this. I already know. I already know because when teachers try to say our real names, the sounds always get caught in their throats, sometimes, like crackers.

-- Luke (My Name Is Not Easy, September 5, 1960 paragraph 1)

Importance: Luke already understands that the people at the school will not acknowledge his Eskimo heritage and name and will give him an English name. Their Eskimo language may be difficult for other people to pronounce but by denying it, they are denying the children and invalidating them. This makes Luke and the others feel insignificant and unimportant.

Aaka is still eating maktak, and even though no one ever said it, I know them horse-eating, kid-stealing Catholics aren't ever going to feed me what I like--whale meat and maktak. And I'm all of a sudden so hungry, it seems like I could never get enough to fill me up.

-- Luke (My Name Is Not Easy, September 5, 1960 paragraph 7)

Importance: Luke has been told that Catholics will keep any kid if they get him by the age of seven, and that they will make the kids eat horse meat. And if these thoughts were not appalling enough, Luke knows that he will not get the foods that he enjoys and that his spirit will never be full living their lifestyle.

What am I ever going to tell Mom? What the heck am I ever going to tell our mom? I was supposed to take care of my brothers.

-- Luke (Never Cry paragraph 3)

Importance: Luke's mother had made him promise that he would take care of his two younger brothers at school and now the priest is taking Isaac away with no warning. Luke is still a child himself and needs someone to guide him yet he has been entrusted with this huge responsibility. Luke feels completely helpless and responsible for a huge problem that was not of his making. He feels like he has let his mother down and there was nothing he could do about it.

I have never in my whole life been spanked, and I'm wondering what's so bad about Inupiaq that they have to make your hand sting for speaking it.

-- Luke (How Hunters Survive paragraph 5)

Importance: Father Mullen has whacked Luke's hand with a ruler because he heard Luke speaking his native language. That night, Luke tries to understand what is so bad about speaking Inupiaq that a person gets hit for speaking it. Luke knows that he doesn't really belong in this place and decides that he and Bunna will run away.



I sit here nodding at the memory: Yes, we learned. We learned how not to talk in Inupiaq and how to eat strange food and watch, helpless, while they took our brother away.
-- Luke (The Size of Things Back Home paragraph 6)

Importance: When the boys go home for the summer they find that many things have changed. When the topic of what they have learned comes up, Luke thinks to himself about all the things that they have learned that have taken away who they are as individuals and as Eskimos.

See, everyone has a touch of radiation in their bodies, Luke. That's why we have to wear these aprons--to keep our natural radiation from interfering with the results of this test. We want to measure your radiation level, not ours.
-- A military doctor (The Day the Soldiers Came paragraph 10)

Importance: The doctors who administer the iodine test put on heavy lead aprons and long gloves to avoid being contaminated by the radiation. They lie to Luke about not wanting to compromise the medical tests and this is just another example of how the Eskimo children are devalued.

Look," he says, letting up, "it just don't feel right, us going home this time. Okay? Something's not right. It's just a feeling I have.
-- Luke (Our Uncle's Gun paragraph 5)

Importance: Luke has had a dream that gives him a bad feeling about him and Bunna going home for the summer. He tries to get Bunna to understand but there's no proof he can share, it's just a feeling he has based on a dream and his intuition.

All of a sudden, anger washes over me in icy waves, making me clench my fists again and again, my worthless fists. I wanna beat the shit out of Bunna once and for all, but he's not there. I wanna box him up so bad, he's gonna refuse to ever leave me. Then I'm crying, remembering how the last night we were together, that's just exactly what I did do. Beat the shit out of him until he stopped me with those words, those stupid words: 'I gotta go home,' he said. What in the hell does home mean to him now? To me without a brother? To anybody?
-- Luke (Forever paragraph 5)

Importance: Luke erupts in anger after he learns of Bunna's death. He tried to stop Bunna from leaving school, but his words were powerless. His intuition simply wasn't enough to stop Bunna from leaving. He is also haunted by Bunna's statement that he had to go home and he wonders if Bunna had some intuition about dying and what home really meant to him at that time.

The snowbirds come in the spring, right before whaling, so when you see the first snowbird, you know right away the whales are coming. That's why they call them God's messengers," he said.
-- Luke (He's My Brother paragraph 7)



Importance: Luke and Chickie talk about his being away from home during whaling season for three years. Snowbirds always precede the arrival of the whales and that is a good sign. Bunna had always called Chickie by the name Snowbird, so Luke now takes her on as a special friend because of her close association and special feelings for Bunna.

I know this because I was there," Luke thought suddenly. I was the leader, testing the safety of the frozen world with my own skin. I was there.
-- Luke (A Weak Spot or a Secret Strength paragraph 5)

Importance: Luke has an intuitive experience that he was the leader of his people generations ago who tried to survive the bitter Arctic cold. And because he exists today, having clearly survived, Luke knows that he has the strength inside him to survive whatever life can bring him.

If Amiq leaves here right now, that's exactly what's going to happen to him. If Amiq leaves alone, it would be like sending him off to disappear--or die.
-- Luke (Civil Disobedience paragraph 2)

Importance: After Amiq is expelled from school, Luke is distressed because he knows how vulnerable Amiq really is in spite of his bravado. Luke knows that Father Flanagan's stance that the Lord will watch over Amiq is not satisfactory. Amiq is in danger for several reasons and Luke and the other kids are brave enough to explore options to help him.

But not right now. Right now, as we sit down to eat, all that matters is us, sitting here at our own table eating frozen fish quaq until our stomachs grow warm and our eyes grow sleepy and the world gets slow. All that matters right now is that I'm home and Isaac is finally home, too. And being home is good because I can lean back in my chair and say, 'Where's the seal oil?' saying it in Eskimo like I never even left, never even went to Sacred Heart School where they don't know nothing about seal oil, not in any language.
-- Luke (Epilogue paragraph 4)

Importance: Luke has come full circle. He started out as an Eskimo boy, had his identity altered at the boarding school and now he is home again. His world is right again and he is finally at ease after his experiences away.