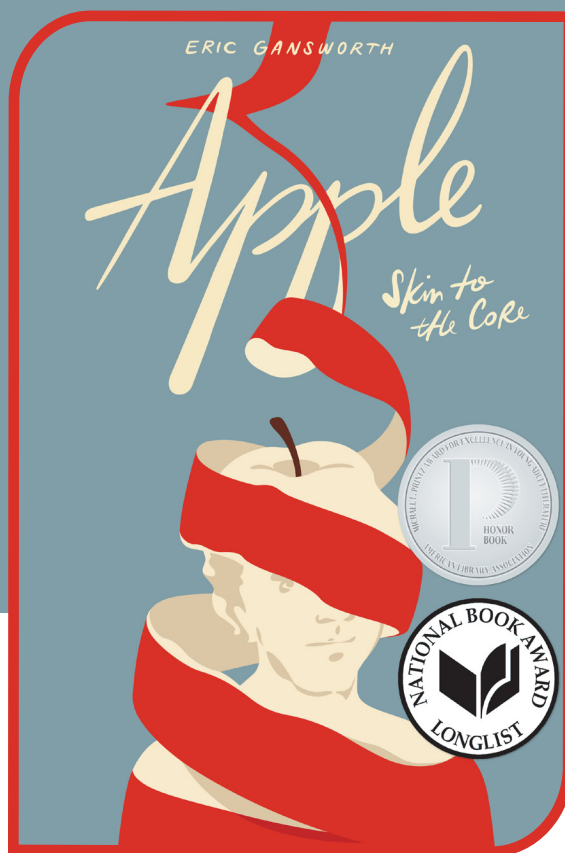


Educator Guide

Eric Gansworth's *Apple (Skin to the Core)*

Guide created by
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Summary

Author Eric Gansworth's love of music has always shaped his work from his award-winning poetry to his paintings to his books for young people. Composed in narrative poetry, *Apple (Skin to the Core)* highlights events in the author's life. His memoir reads like "liner notes," written discussions of production found on record albums.

The first few pages link the complexity of history and identity and reveal the meaning of the book's title. Then, Gansworth introduces his lineage—describing how his grandparents survived boarding school. He explains how forced assimilation affects future generations. This memoir-in-verse continues, detailing Gansworth's formative years, friendships, and losing his mother. Stories circle back to his meager childhood home on Dog Street, where he grew up in poverty. As an Onondaga living on the Tuscarora Reservation near Buffalo, NY, he offers a unique perspective. Native values guided how he approached obstacles and pursued an education. Readers will connect as the author shares deeply personal life experiences, communicated through musical influence, art, and humor.

Through readings and discussion questions we explore themes of generational trauma, forced assimilation, inequality, finding connection through music, kinship and other ideas found in Eric Gansworth's award-winning memoir in verse.

Discussion Questions

- 1. PREVIEW:** Seek out and read real “liner notes” on record albums. Listen to various albums by the musical band, The Beatles. Scan the Table of Contents and skim through *Apple (Skin to the Core)*. What do you notice about the genre and structure of the book? How will this knowledge help guide your reading?
- 2.** After reading pp3-4, what images are forming in your mind of the people? After you’ve viewed pp 5–33, what impressions do you have about the author’s family? Are you an outsider looking in, like the ethnographer on p28? Or did you place yourself inside the Wolf Clan and look outward? What in this section surprised you?
- 3.** Kinship is important in Native American culture—and more specifically for Haudenosaunee people. In “Metamorphoses” (p87-91) and “Masks Unmasked” (p122-124), author Eric Gansworth shows his love and responsibility towards his family. He helps his niece and nephew on pp 123-124 and his amputee uncle on p130. Locate and discuss another passage where he helped someone else. What motivated Eric to care for members of his family the way he did?
- 4.** Eric writes about several women in his life, namely a distant grandmother on p91, Jaboozie on pp 135-138, his sister on pp 255-256, his mother on pp 259-260. How would you describe their roles in these passages? Locate two more text examples that illustrate a woman’s important role in Haudenosaunee culture.
- 5.** Discuss the power of the last line on p171. Writing task: Follow the structure on this page and write a list of comments directed to you in your lifetime. Compare and contrast your *list poem* to Eric Gansworth’s “Lines Spoken to Me Through High School and, Let’s Face It, Beyond.”
- 6.** Skim and scan “Side B: Dog Street” p206 - 229. How do the titles on each page confirm Eric’s enthusiasm for music?
- 7.** Many stories in this memoir reflect the tough circumstances in which the family lived. On pp 264, Little Umma writes, “I have known loneliness of the sort you are feeling now.” She explains the situation further, “It was not exactly the life I had hoped for, myself, but we do

things we have to, keeping ourselves as alive and intact as we can.” Often while growing up, Eric and his family endured a lack of food, money, and jobs. In addition, they encountered misconceptions and prejudice. Eric notes on pp 108, as he watched the Beatles sing “Hello, Goodbye” on the Ed Sullivan Show, he presumed those two words “will frame each of our lives.” What does he mean? Then, discuss how Eric coped with scarcity and discrimination?

8. Read the last paragraph on p110 and section #10 on pp 318. Do you think this book offers hope? Why or why not?
9. Writing Task: Compile significant events in your own life. Follow the *Lost and Found* format Eric used on pp 314-316 and 318-319.
10. What questions are raised in this memoir that aren’t answered?
11. Visual Art Task: Create a collage of drawings and/or photos, similar to the one on pp 176 to support your *Lost and Found* writing sample.
12. Musical Task: Create a musical playlist to accompany your writing and visual art tasks.

Curriculum Connections

Genre study: memoir; Analyze how the text categorizes and presents information; Describe the impact of the author’s choices; Cite text evidence to support what is explicitly and implicitly stated; Make logical inferences; Develop questions; Determine central ideas and themes; Write a narrative/poem in response to the text while readers/writers connect content to their own lives; Leadership roles of women in Native and Haudenosaunee culture; Positive effects of Art and Music on members of society; Compare and contrast the author’s perspective with current educational materials on these topics — U.S. History, Government and Policy; Loss of land due to the Indian Removal Act; Loss of Identity due to forced attendance in Boarding Schools; Loss of Native Language; assimilation; Americanization; sovereignty.