

Our smallest warriors, our strongest medicine

Overcoming
COVID-19!



Introduction

“Our Smallest Warriors, Our Strongest Medicine: Overcoming COVID-19” is a book written for Indigenous (American Indian, Alaska Native, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) children affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Our Smallest Warriors, Our Strongest Medicine: Overcoming COVID-19” should be read by a parent, caregiver, or teacher alongside a child or a small group of children. It is not encouraged for children to read this book independently without the support of a parent, caregiver, or teacher. There is a toolkit online at <https://bit.ly/NativeStrongMedicine> that offers support for addressing topics related to COVID-19, helping children manage feelings and emotions, and supplementary activities for children to do based on the book.



The making of “Our Smallest Warriors, Our Strongest Medicine: Overcoming COVID-19”

Background on original story

This book is an adaptation of “My Hero is You,” a children’s book developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (IASC MHPSS RG). The original book was supported by global, regional, and country based experts from Member Agencies of the IASC MHPSS RG, in addition to parents, caregivers, teachers, and children in 104 countries. “My Hero is You” was written and illustrated by Helen Patuck.

Adaptation process for “Our Smallest Warriors, Our Strongest Medicine: Overcoming COVID-19”

The Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health convened a team of Native American experts in child development and communications as well as a young Native illustrator to re-write the story and create illustrations that represent Indigenous peoples, values, and communities. This book elevates Indigenous storytelling, an important tradition that has supported the well-being and resilience of tribes since time immemorial. This adapted story seeks to reach Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island and portray a sense of communal efficacy, strength, and hope in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The people listed below contributed to re-writing the story. Some additional child development, mental health, and health communications experts contributed to this book who are not listed below. They include citizens of the following tribal nations: Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Diné, Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone, Muscogee Creek Nation, and Ohkay Owingeh/Tewa.

Joshua Allison-Burbank, PhD, CCC-SLP Diné and Acoma Pueblo, Northern Navajo Medical Center, Shiprock, New Mexico

Emily E. Haroz, PhD, MA, MHS Center for American Indian Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Allison Ingalls, MPH Center for American Indian Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Crystal Kee, BS Diné Nation, Program Consultant, Center for American Indian Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Lisa Martin, MPH Ojibwe, Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan

Kristin Masten, MPH Center for American Indian Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Tara Maudrie, BS Sault Ste. Marie Ojibwe, Center for American Indian Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Victoria O’Keefe, PhD Cherokee/Seminole Nations of Oklahoma, Center for American Indian Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

The book was **illustrated by Joelle Joyner** (Kauwets’a:ka/Tsalagi/Pikuni). She is an undergraduate student at Wayne State University, free-lance artist, illustrator, and Jingle Dress dancer from Detroit, Michigan. Notably, her art has been featured in the U.S. Capitol Building and at the Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute.

We also want to express gratitude to the JHU Office of the President and Office of the Provost, as well as the Johns Hopkins Alliance for a Healthier World for funding the adaptation and distribution process.

This book is dedicated in loving memory to our Relatives whose lives have been lost to COVID-19 and all the frontline workers whose relentless efforts have saved so many.

[Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health](#)

Founded in 1991 and based in the Department of International Health of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health supports public health interventions designed for and by Native peoples. Learn more at caih.jhu.edu

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This translation/adaptation was not created by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The IASC is not responsible for the content or accuracy of this translation. The original English edition, “Inter-Agency Standing Committee. My Hero is You: How Kids Can Fight COVID-19! Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO,” shall be the binding and authentic edition.



DIRTY
CLOTHES
DO NOT TOUCH

Twins Virgil and Tara are proud of their Mom because she is the best Mom and nurse in all of Turtle Island. But it seems like even she can't stop people from getting sick from the coronavirus.

The Twins' Mom has been working a lot lately. When she comes home from a long day of work, she is careful to change her clothes before coming in the door. The Twins think this is odd and kind of funny.

That evening, after the Twins' Mom showers, they all sit down at the kitchen table. The Twins ate with their Dad and Grandma before their Mom got home, so they eat their dessert – juicy, ripe fruit – while their Mom eats her dinner.

The Twins can't wait to talk to her. "Mom, why can't we give you a hug until you shower and change your clothes?" asks Tara.

"It's to make sure I don't spread the coronavirus to you."

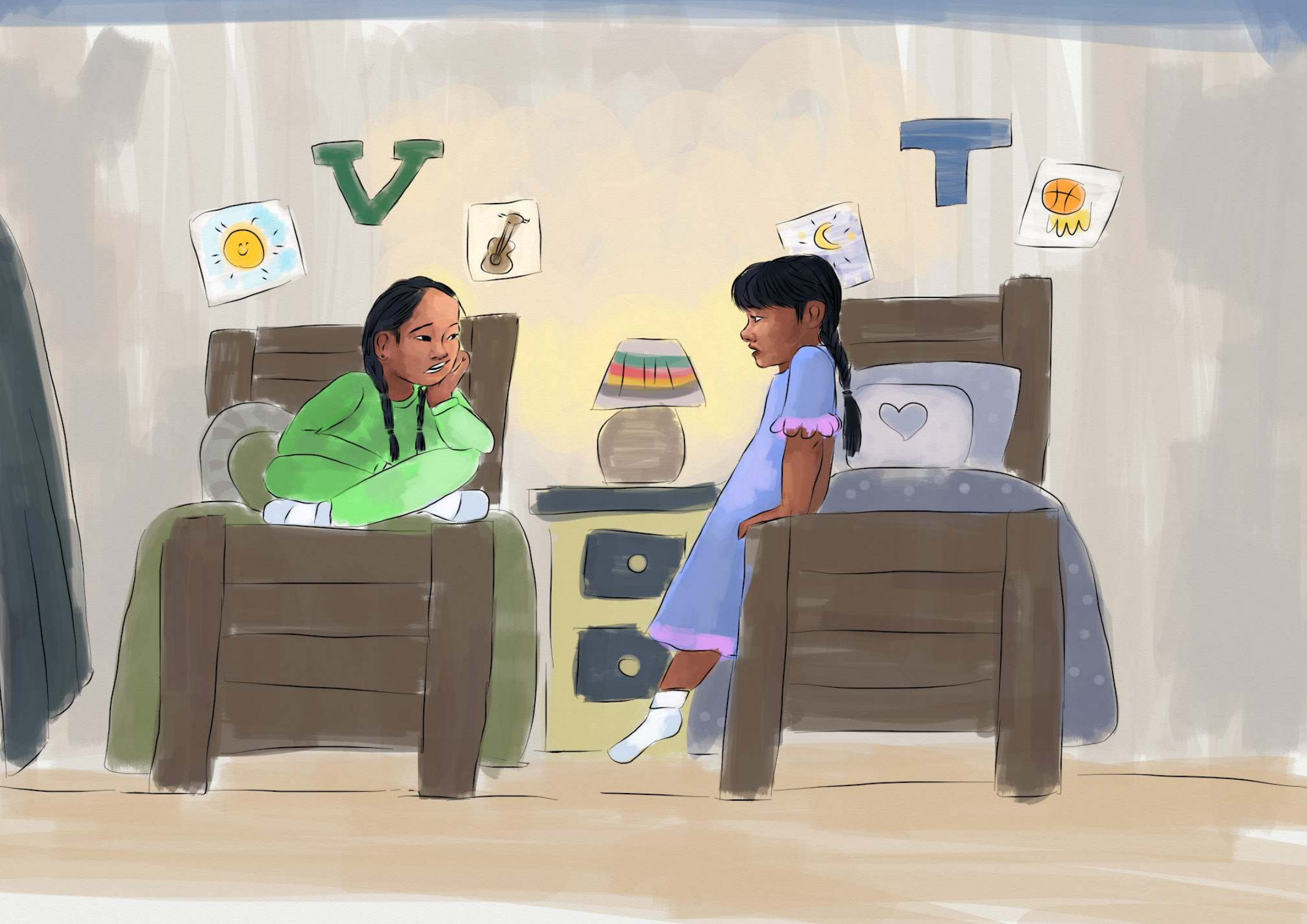
"How does it spread? Can people die from the coronavirus?" Virgil asks.

"We can't see it, but COVID-19, or the coronavirus, spreads through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick and through things they have touched. When people get COVID-19, they might have a cough or a fever or even not feel that sick at all. And yes, it's true that people can die from the coronavirus."

"That makes me feel sad and afraid. How can we stop it if we can't see it?" Tara asks.

"Let me give you a hug, little ones. One way we can help stop it is by staying home. This virus affects everyone. Children are special medicine and you can both help heal our communities by staying safe."





After going to bed that night, the Twins think about the dinner conversation with their Mom. They hadn't seen their relatives, friends, and teachers in a while. They miss them so much. The coronavirus is making them feel scared and unsafe.

"What does Mom mean when she says we are special medicine? How can we stand up to the coronavirus? We're just kids," Tara wonders out loud.

Virgil shrugs. "I don't know. Doesn't Grandma call us good medicine sometimes?"

Overhearing their conversation, Grandma enters the Twins' room.

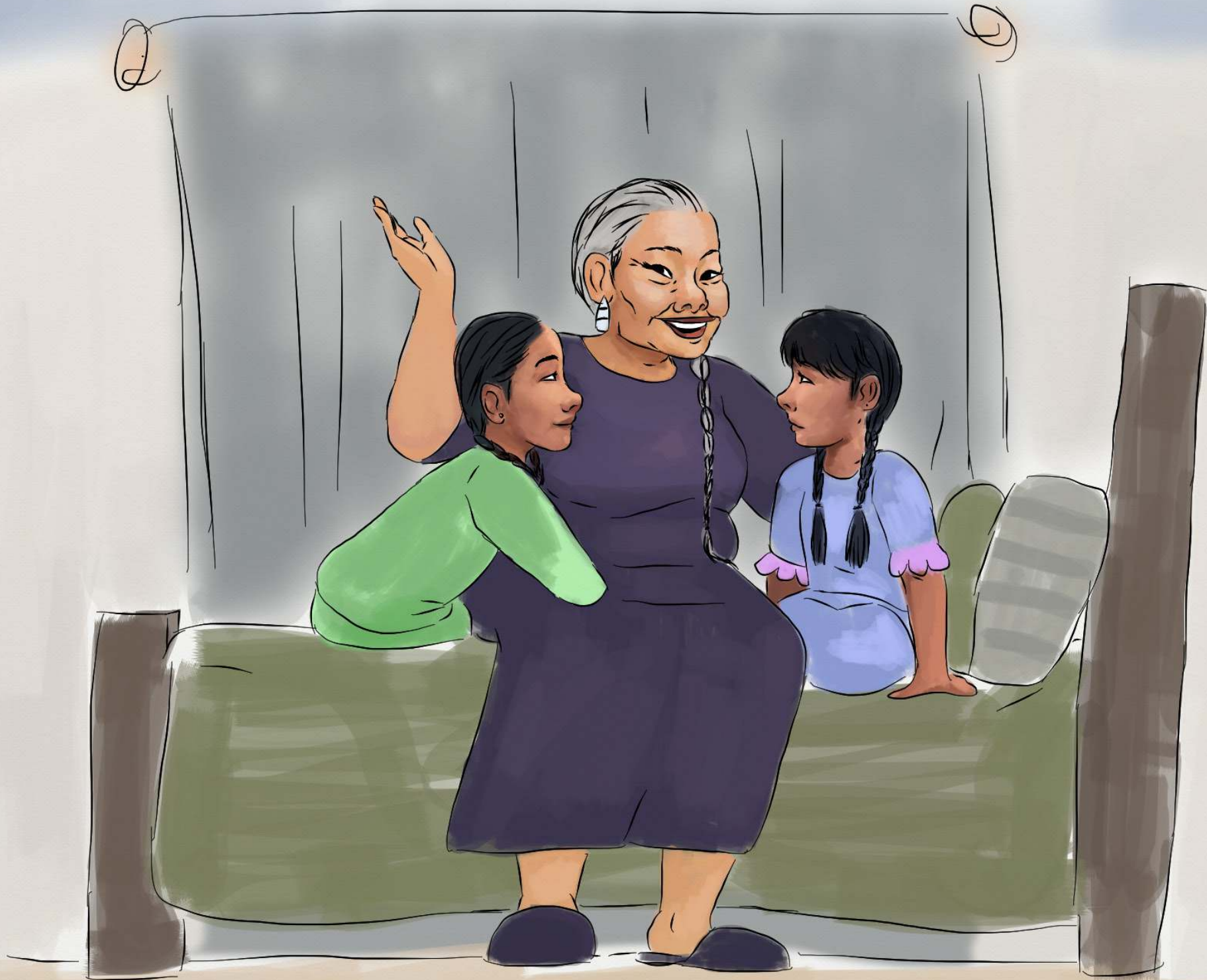
"Yes, little ones, you are the strongest medicine of all. We are all responsible for each other, the land, and the whole universe. We must respect and honor all our relations by taking care of each other.

Your Mom is helping by taking care of people sick with the coronavirus.

Your Dad is our tribal chairperson, doing important work for our community to keep us all safe. He's telling everyone to stay home as much as possible and is also working hard to get food and water to people that need it. That's why he hasn't been at home as much.

I'm sewing masks to help keep us safe when we do need to go out, like when your Dad goes to get groceries.

Taking care of each other is a big part of our culture. We are here because our ancestors took care of each other. We need to continue this tradition."





“Our ancestors taught us that responsibility, respect, and protecting each other are important.

Remember when you both started dancing at powwows? We asked the powwow committee to bring you out into the circle with an honor song.”

“Yes! We danced up front!” Tara responds excitedly. “People shook our hands and then danced behind us!”

“We had a giveaway, too,” Virgil adds.

“You little ones remember so well,” responds Grandma with a smile. “It’s an honor to come out into the circle. We expressed our gratitude to others by giving them gifts. This is one way we all respect one another.

There’s also responsibility involved in powwow dancing. You need to take care of your regalia, treat your mind and body right, and send prayers while you dance.”

Tara, remembering this well, turns to Virgil and says, “We made so many friends at that first powwow, remember Virgil? I hope they’re all staying safe.”

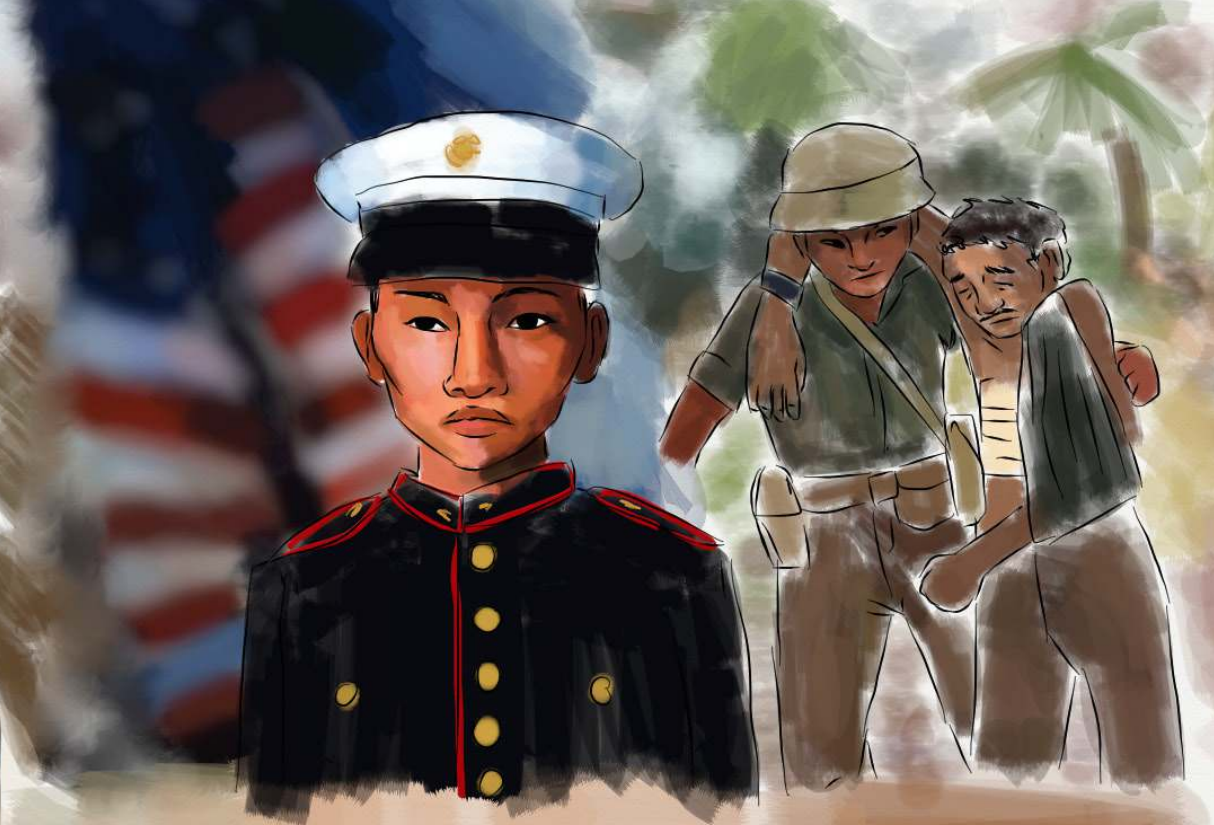
“Yes, being at powwows can connect us all, near and far, all tribes, and all ages – from the smallest babies to our dear Elders,” Grandma replies. “Remember the Elder chiefs that wore the bonnets with all the Eagle feathers?”

The children nod eagerly.

“Wearing that headdress with the Eagle feathers is a right that must be earned through overcoming hard times or showing a lot of responsibility and respect.”

“What did Grandpa do to earn his feathers?” asks Virgil.





CLOTHING DRIVE



“He grew up living a hard life working on the land with his family. As a young boy, he took care of animals and helped raise his younger brothers and sisters. Your Grandpa fought in a war defending our country. When he danced at powwows, he danced for all of us. His sacrifices earned him every feather until he became Grandfather Eagle. He protects us now even though he is not physically here anymore. But now, little ones, it’s time for you to get to sleep.”

“But Grandma, we’re scared of the coronavirus. How can Grandpa protect us from it?” whispered Virgil.

“Grandpa will show us the way. When you feel scared, close your eyes and imagine you are at a safe place with your favorite people.”

“I’m going to imagine I’m at a powwow with all our friends and family,” said Tara.

“Me too,” said Virgil.

As the Twins drifted off to sleep, they thought of their Grandpa, the coronavirus, and their family and friends from all over, including their powwow family.

"Virgil and Tara, come with me," says a voice in the darkness.

"Who's there?" the Twins whisper.

The Twins blink and find themselves outside, under the starry sky, an Eagle standing in front of them.

"It's me, Grandfather Eagle. Creator sent me to show you how you can protect each other from the coronavirus."

"But Grandpa," the Twins respond, "we can't overcome the coronavirus. We're just kids."

"Come with me, and I will show you how you can be strong like our warriors and protect each other."





Grandfather Eagle explains, "Your friends miss you too, and they have been dealing with the coronavirus in their own communities."

"Our friends from the powwow?" the Twins ask.

"Yes, we are going to check on your friends from all over Turtle Island. Come with me young ones. We will fly to all four directions."

Tara, Virgil, and Grandfather Eagle fly East, in the direction of the rising sun. They fly over a big city. They look below where they can see people watching them from their windows.

“Grandpa, isn’t that the medicine wheel?” asks Virgil, pointing to a mural painted on the wall of a building.

“Yes, it’s a health center where they help our people,” Grandpa responds. “They are working hard to heal people from the coronavirus. Your friend Aspen is waiting for us. Let’s go.”

They fly over rows of homes, landing on a quiet street. Aspen appears at the window of a nearby house. The Twins rush over to see her.

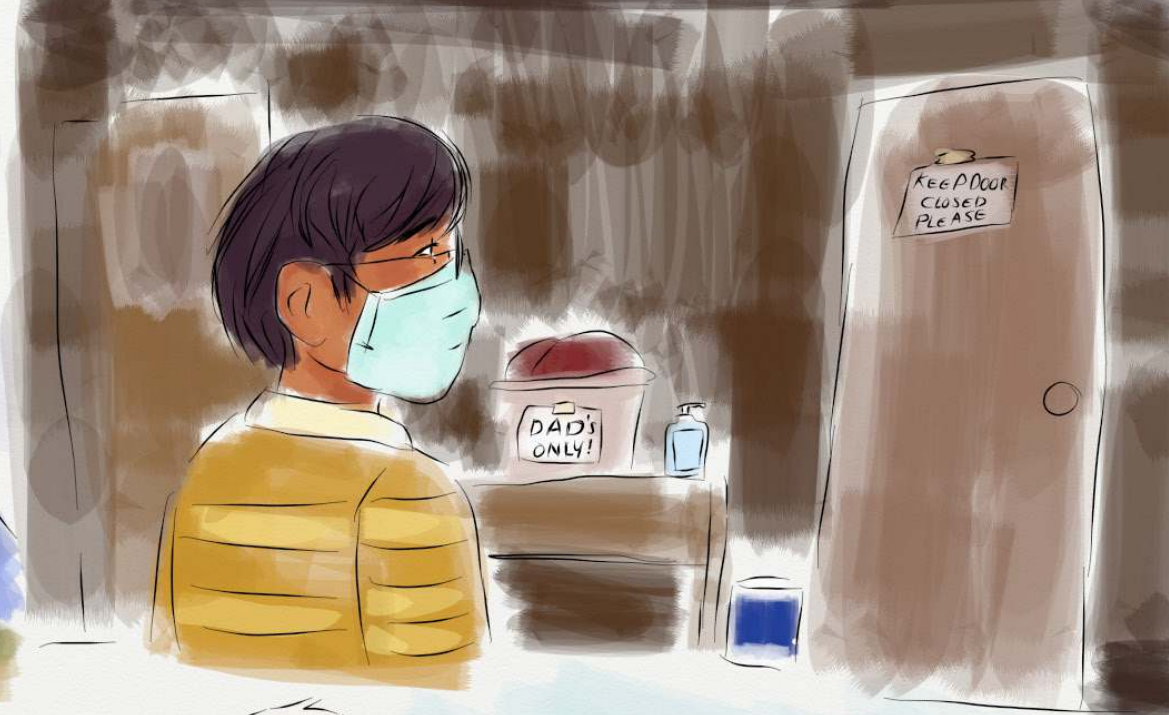
“It’s so good to see you guys,” Aspen says. “I’ll come outside to see you, but we must stay at least six feet away from each other to keep us all safe. I can’t hug you right now even though I really want to.”

She continues, “Living in a city, it’s hard to stay apart from other people. But we wear masks outside and wash our hands a lot. Even though we can’t be near other people we don’t live with, we can wave at each other. I also made some window decorations to make people smile. This is our way of protecting each other from the coronavirus.”

“Come Twins, we have more stops to make tonight,” Grandfather Eagle says gently.

“Thank you, Aspen! We will see you at the next powwow!” call the Twins as they fly away with Grandfather Eagle.





The Twins fly South towards the mountains and the desert.

Tara asks, "Grandfather Eagle, who are we going to visit now?"

"We are almost to your friend Daniel's house. Follow me, little ones."

They land in the red earth, where they see Daniel. They run towards him but stop short to give him space like Aspen taught them.

Daniel waves. "I've missed you! I'm so glad you're here. I was feeling lonely," he says.

"Why are you wearing a mask?" Virgil asks.

"My Dad is sick, so we wear masks inside and outside. I don't leave the yard because even though I don't feel sick, I might be carrying the coronavirus. I don't want to get anyone else sick."

"What's it like having a sick family member?" asks Tara.

"It's hard. I can't play with him. He uses separate blankets and towels. All my Mom does is clean. I help by wiping down the counters and doorknobs. We wash our hands as much as we can, but we don't have running water inside. Our Uncle built this handwashing station outside to help us."

"Thanks, Daniel. We should wear masks whenever we leave the house too," says Tara, and Grandfather Eagle hands each of the Twins a mask.

"Yes! And we can help our family by wiping down the counters and doorknobs," adds Virgil.

"Don't forget to wash your hands every time you use the bathroom, before you eat, after you take off your masks, and when you leave or enter the house," Daniel adds.

The Twins wave goodbye as they say, "We will keep our family safe by doing these things so that we can see you at the next powwow."

They fly West, toward green fields and tall trees. Grandfather Eagle lands near a house nestled among the trees.

Their friend Sophie comes outside and waves from afar.

"Hey, Sophie! I haven't seen you in months. How have you been?" asks Virgil.

"Thanks Virgil. I was sick, but I'm better now."

"Oh, no. What was it like being sick?" asks Tara.

"I felt tired all the time. I had to stay home except to go to the doctor. I slept a lot and drank lots of water. My whole family stayed inside to keep other people from getting sick."

"Now that you're better, what do you do so you aren't bored?" asks Tara.

"I practice dancing for powwows. Also, my Mom and Grandma are teaching me how to weave baskets and grind up corn and acorns to make flour."

"We can't wait to see you dancing at the next powwow, Sophie! When this is all over, can you also teach us about basket weaving?" asks Tara.

"Yes, I can't wait until the coronavirus is gone so I can dance with you! Until then we have to keep our communities safe by staying home."

"Virgil and Tara, we have one more stop to make before the night is over. Wave goodbye to your friend," reminds Grandfather Eagle.

The Twins wave goodbye to Sophie.





They fly North, over many lakes and rivers, until Grandfather Eagle lands on the edge of the water where their friend Jason was waiting for them.

“Jason!” the Twins call, waving to their friend.

“Hi, Virgil and Tara!”

“We have been flying all over visiting our powwow friends and learning how the coronavirus has been affecting them. How have you been?” asks Tara.

“We have been trying to stay safe and healthy. We are being extra careful because of my baby sister. We protect her future by telling our friends to stay home and wash their hands as often as they can. This will help keep our Elders and other people safe. We need our community strong so she can grow up learning our history, language, and culture.

You know, thinking about the coronavirus can be scary, but I’ve learned to take deep breaths and blow them out slowly like I’m trying to make ripples in the water. That helps. Our family also goes on walks near the water to remind us that no matter how bad things get, Mother Earth will take care of us as long as we take care of her.”

“Those are great ideas, Jason. We can try those too!” says Virgil.

“Little ones, it’s time to say goodbye to Jason and go check on what your Mom is doing to help our people with the coronavirus,” says Grandfather Eagle.

Grandfather Eagle takes the Twins to the hospital where their Mom works. "We have to stay outside because all the space in the hospital is being used for the coronavirus patients. We can see your Mom through the window."

"Look, it's Mom!" exclaims Virgil.

The Twins watch as their Mom helps her patients.

"She looks really busy. Everyone is moving around so quickly," observes Tara.

"They're all working hard to help patients get better. They work long days and are extra careful not to bring the coronavirus home to their families. These people are all earning their Eagle feathers by protecting and healing their communities," explains Grandfather Eagle.

"Like how you earned your feathers, Grandpa?" asks Virgil.

"Yes, like how I earned my feathers. Now it's time to get you two home."

The Twins blink and find themselves back in their beds. Exhausted from their night's adventures, they fall asleep with hardly a word.





In the morning, Tara wakes and stretches. She looks over at her sleeping brother. Suddenly, she remembers the journey they had with Grandfather Eagle.

She shakes her brother awake. "Do you remember our trip with Grandfather Eagle last night?"

"Yes! We must have had the same dream. Did you see all of our powwow friends?" asks Virgil.

"I did! I think we need to share the lessons they taught us with our relatives here to help them stay safe from the coronavirus." She adds, "But first, let's talk to Grandma. She always knows what dreams mean."

The Twins run into the living room where their Grandma is already awake, drinking coffee, and sewing masks. "Grandma! Grandma! We have to tell you about our dream!" they both exclaim.

The Twins tell their Grandma all about their journey with Grandfather Eagle – the places they went and the lessons they learned. When they finish, Grandma takes them in her arms and gives them a big hug.

"You two make me so proud. You are meant to tell all your friends and family about the lessons you have learned from your powwow friends and Grandfather Eagle. Come here, I will give you a blessing before you start to teach your friends about the coronavirus."

The Twins stand tall as their Grandma blesses them using an Eagle feather and sage.

"Now go little ones, share what you have learned with your relatives."

The Twins start by calling and texting all their friends and family and telling them what they know about the coronavirus.

They tell them that keeping a safe physical distance from others doesn't mean they can't stay in touch. They can call and talk on social media. They can see each other at a safe distance – at least six feet apart. The Twins even came up with a way to help remember this. They think of things that are about six feet long to imagine between them and other people. "A horse is about 6 feet long! I'm going to picture a horse between me and other people," explains Virgil.

Together, the Twins and their friends and relatives come up with other ideas to help their communities – making drawings and writing letters to each other, Elders, and people working in hospitals; helping their parents put together care packages of food and supplies for others; praying or smudging for those who are sick; and beading, weaving, or making other crafts to learn their traditions.

With help from their parents, the Twins start sharing their message through YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. Their Mom and Dad help them participate in the Social Distance Powwow on Facebook and Pass the Brush Challenge on TikTok.





Several months later...

The coronavirus has passed. Experts and leaders have said that people can gather again. The Twins are at a powwow with their friends. They are finally allowed to dance together again.

A memorial song takes place to remember those who died from coronavirus. Next, an honor song is dedicated to the people that helped overcome the coronavirus. The Twins' Mom is honored along with the other nurses, doctors, police officers, emergency responders, and all volunteers from the community. The Twins are also honored for the work they did to educate others.

After the honor song, their Grandma gives each of them their first Eagle feather. The crowd celebrates by clapping, the men war whoop, and the women lili.

The Twins look up and see an Eagle circling overhead. It cries out, and they know it is Grandfather Eagle watching them with pride. The Twins and their friends showed so much responsibility and respect by helping their communities protect themselves. Children are strong medicine.



Resources

Read on to discover resources related to the story. They include vocabulary words, ways to personalize the story for your family, tips and questions for families about strength and resilience as well as stress and finding ways to deal with strong emotions.

Vocabulary from the story

Coronavirus or COVID-19

A coronavirus is a type of virus (germ) that can cause cold-like symptoms and some serious problems with lungs and breathing. COVID-19 is a novel (new) coronavirus.

Honor song

A special type of song that is used to honor a specific person or group of people. The person or group of people dance in the front, typically with their family following behind them. During a certain point in the song, other dancers and powwow spectators are invited to join in, shake hands, and dance behind the group. Everyone is expected to stand during this song, take off hats, and be quiet to show respect during this song.

Lili or lulu

A sound that women make to show honor at a powwow.

Regalia

Clothing worn during traditional or modern dancing, often at a powwow or ceremony. Each person's regalia is different, and it represents a person's culture and their family. There are many kinds of regalia and each tribe may have their own specific style. Ask an Elder to teach you about regalia.

Relatives

We were all born into a family of relatives. However, we also have special people in our lives who are our relatives – family friends and others who we may call our brother, sister, auntie, uncle, grandma, or grandpa. Some tribes also have clans that come from your mother's or father's family line. When you're part of a certain clan, others who are part of that same clan are your relatives. Together, all these people are your relatives.

Turtle Island

A name for Earth or North America used by many Indigenous people living in the USA and Canada.

Personalize the story

One way to help younger children engage or feel connected to a story is to personalize the story. You can do this by changing the names of the characters when you read it to your children. For example, instead of Tara and Virgil, you could use your children's names or names of children they know. If Grandma is not the word that they use to refer to a grandparent, use something that is more familiar to your child. The friends' names in the book can also be changed to familiar names to your child/children. Finally, if you speak your tribal language and see places to add words or concepts into the book in your language, that also can help the child feel more connected to the story.



Earning Feathers

It has been a practice in many tribal nations to honor the deeds or bravery of the People. Warriors of combat, elders whose long lives has been an achievement in itself and those who have exhumed courage by the nature of their acts, profession or sacrifice earned the honor of wearing the feathers of mature eagles, the mightiest of all our winged Relatives. Eagles exalt an energy that is too great, too powerful, because they are often revered as the carrier of prayers to the Great Mystery.

However, bravery, good deeds, achievements and sacrifice does not go unnoticed. The gifting of a feather often is done to continue to foster growth, learning and protection for one's future, therefore children may be given a plume taken from the undergrowth of an eagle's wing and they are encouraged to use it as they need.

We dedicate this book to the Knowledge Keepers and Life Teachers like Jimmie Austin II, who selflessly shared their wisdom and teachings. Thank you, shi yázh, for contributing to this story. You will be greatly missed.

Feeling strong during COVID-19

There are many things we cannot control during this pandemic, but we are still strong. Our ancestors and tribes overcame many difficult and challenging things. By believing in ourselves and our communities, we can rise up and deal with challenges effectively.

Here are some ways to feel strong during COVID-19:

- Separate things that are within your control versus not. For example, we can't control if people get very sick, but we can control washing hands, wearing a mask, practicing physical distancing.
- View problems as tasks to be mastered that can be broken down into smaller pieces. For example, if you are frustrated with cooking, pick one dish to learn to make well.
- Don't dwell on mistakes. View them as learning opportunities.
- Give verbal encouragement. Tell your children you believe in them and love them. Share messages about strength – you and your family are here because of strong ancestors and relatives. Share family stories.
- Difficulty and challenges do not mean failure or defeat. Recommit yourself to overcoming challenges and support your children doing the same thing.

Use the pages of this book to help you talk about this with your children.

- When Tara and Virgil feel scared and worried about COVID-19, Grandma reminds them of things they can do to help. Ask your child:
 - What are some things that help you feel less scared or worried?
 - What are other ways you can help people in your family or community?
- Grandma describes earning Eagle feathers through hard times or showing a lot of responsibility and respect. Ask your child:
 - Tell me about a time when you felt something was very hard? (examples may include something hard at school, climbing something or riding a bike, something difficult with a friendship or family member)
 - What things helped you overcome that challenge?
 - What are ways that you have shown responsibility?
 - What are ways that you have shown respect towards others?
- Ask your child: What makes you feel strong?
 - Who in your family or community do you think is strong and why?



Managing Stress During COVID-19

There are so many sources of stress right now, including worry about the safety of loved ones, lost jobs, and disrupted routines.

Some signs of stress:

- Low energy
- Quick temper
- Trouble sleeping
- Not hungry OR hungrier than normal
- Feeling depressed, sad, or anxious, worried
- Drinking or using drugs more

Some ways to handle stress:

- Take a break from the news or social media
- Go for a walk
- Take deep breaths or stretch
- Call or video chat with a loved one
- Pray or use traditional medicines



Important numbers to save in your phone, all confidential and free:

- StrongHearts Native Helpline (7am-10pm CDT; domestic/sexual violence): 1-844-762-8483
- National Domestic Violence Hotline (24/7): 1-800-799-7233
- National Sexual Assault Hotline (24/7): 800-656-HOPE (4673)
- SAMHSA Disaster Distress Hotline (24/7): 1-800-985-5990
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (24/7): 1-800-273-8255

Source: <http://caih.jhu.edu/news/covid19>

Indigenous Children & Self-Regulation

What is self-regulation?

Self-regulation is influenced by external factors like the environment and interactions with others.

Self-regulation refers to a child's behavior, emotions, and thoughts, which can be impacted by both happy and scary events.



Young children learn how to express and manage their emotions from caregivers. Caregivers are co-regulators and can help children express their feelings in positive ways. For example, when a baby cries a caregiver can swaddle the baby or put the baby in a cradleboard to soothe the baby. The child will learn that crying will bring a caregiver's comfort. The young child will eventually learn to communicate his or her discomfort verbally when the child gets older.

Young children learn to cope based on how their caregivers cope. A child will learn to take deep breaths and keep working on a difficult task when frustrated if they are encouraged by their caregivers and see caregivers do the same. For example, caregivers can tell stories about overcoming obstacles or tell traditional stories to a child who is worried or anxious. The child will learn that their culture and family can help them cope.

We all have different ways of regulating our emotions and we learn how to do this as young children.

Young children and even teenagers watch how adults express and manage their emotions. Modeling positive ways of coping with stress at home is essential to helping children and teenagers self-regulate.

Self-regulation is important for emotional maturity and overall development in young children.

- Encourage your child to talk about their feelings and validate how they are feeling.
- Spend quality time with children and teenagers.
- Reassure them with familiar home and cultural routines that can be done together – telling stories, cooking, crafting, singing, laughing, and smudging.

Please help us understand how this book is helping your family!

Go to: oursmallestwarriorssurvey.org

Or scan this QR code on your phone:



For more information, including resources for addressing topics related to COVID-19, helping children manage feelings and emotions, as well as activities for children to do based on the book, please visit:

<https://bit.ly/NativeStrongMedicine>

How is this book helping
your family? Tell us at:
oursmallestwarriorssurvey.org

Or scan QR code:



Get a PDF copy of the book, along with
printable activities and more at
<https://bit.ly/NativeStrongMedicine>