

## A Review of Stella Welcome to Your Doodem

Meghan Young

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**Review of:**

Schalla, M. (2023). *Stella, Welcome to Your Doodem*. (R. Bruce, Illus.). TakingITGlobal, The Samual Connected North Youth Leadership Fund.

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The newly published children's book *Stella, Welcome to Your Doodem* is a beautifully written story that incorporates Métis and Anishinaabe teachings, language, and worldviews. It was written by accomplished educator and new author, Marika Schalla, accompanied by stunning illustrations from Ruby Bruce. Both author and illustrator originate from the Métis community of St. Laurent, Manitoba.

The story follows a young Métis-Anishinaabe girl named Stella through her journey to discover her clan. After receiving her spirit name, Memengwaa Ikwezens (Butterfly Girl), through a naming ceremony, Stella hears an animal calling out to her from the woods. Her Papa explains that the animal was calling out to welcome her to her Doodem (clan). Stella was curious about the clan animals and shared a special moment with her Papa as he introduced the seven animals representing the seven clans in Anishinaabemowin. Her Papa explains that the seven animals are Maang (Loon), Ajijaak (Crane), Giigoonh (Fish), Mikinak (Turtle), Mahkwa (Bear), Waabizheshi (Marten), Bineshiinh (Bird), and Waawaashkeshi (Deer). Stella then ventures off into the woods to discover her clan and the animal who was calling out to her. As Stella walks in the woods, she discovers each of the seven clan animals and asks each of them if they called out to her. The last animal she finds on her path is Waawaashkeshi (deer); this is when she discovers she belongs to the deer clan. The story ends with Stella introducing herself with her spirit name to the deer before excitedly heading back to tell her Papa about her experience.

Throughout the story, readers are introduced to Stella's Métis and Anishinaabe cultures and the interconnected relationship with language, land, and our animal relatives. Schalla beautifully captures the ways in which our identities are shaped by the land and demonstrates Stella actively building relationships with the animals as she meets them along her journey in the woods. As she meets the other clan animals, they guide her along her spiritual journey, demonstrating the importance of reciprocal relationships between us and the animals.

Another impactful theme throughout Schalla's book focuses on the importance of Anishinaabemowin and modelling the use of Indigenous languages within the story. The book weaves Anishinaabemowin throughout the story and creates space for children, families, and classrooms to learn words in an accessible way. The book includes a glossary at the back, which breaks down the Anishinaabemowin words, providing the phonics so first-time language learners can sound out the words. There are many different languages that the Métis have historically spoken, with Anishinaabemowin being one of many, and I applaud Schalla for capturing Stella's story, which highlights the breadth of experiences within Métis cultures across the homeland. This story is an amazing resource to bring language to children and young readers to encourage language learners.

I also must emphasize the stunning artwork throughout the story from illustrator Ruby Bruce. Each page is filled with amazing illustrations that reinforce the connection and influence of the land within Métis and Anishinaabe cultures. With the turn of each page, you uncover a new, colourful masterpiece with familiar Métis symbols and imagery.

The amazing story from author Schalla and the impactful illustrations from Bruce are a perfect combination. This will be a book I forever cherish and share with family, friends, and loved ones. As I reflect on my childhood, I wish I had a book like this to reinforce my identity and instill pride in my culture, spirituality, and connection with the land. This children's book will be a significant resource for classrooms and households to strengthen an Indigenous language and share cultural teachings.

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## Biography

Meghan Young (she/her) is a Red River Métis woman from Winnipeg, Manitoba. She is Métis through her maternal side with ancestral connections to St. Norbert, St. Vital, and St. Boniface, Manitoba. Meghan has an undergraduate degree in Indigenous studies and is currently pursuing her Master of Arts in Indigenous Studies at the University of Manitoba. Her research focuses on urban Métis youth identities and how youth are politically organizing. She currently works for the Community Engaged Learning department at the University of Manitoba, facilitating a land-based education program, and is the co-chair for the Manitoba Métis Federation regional youth advisory council.

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