

# Choosing Life: Bobby's Story

## **Teacher's Guide**

This guide accompanies “Student Activities: Choosing Life: Bobby’s Story.”

“In the tradition of our culture, this teaching about choosing life  
will be told through a story.”

- *Dr. Gilles Pinette, Métis, author “Choosing Life: Bobby’s Story”*

“Suicide is not chosen;  
it happens when pain exceeds resources for coping with pain.”

Choosing Life: Bobby’s Story Teacher’s Guide © Ningwakwe Learning Press, 2010.

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ISBN 978-1-897541-13-5

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## introduction

The subject of suicide is a difficult one and it is unfortunately too familiar in First Nation communities across Canada. Suicide also touches and affects the wider community in all socioeconomic levels. “Choosing Life: Bobby’s Story” is one of five books in Ningwakwe Learning Press’ ‘Healthy Life Series.’ It is the hope of Ningwakwe Learning Press that along with the general upgrading associated with the books and supplementary material, there will also come a deeper understanding of the often-complex health issues that are presented within this series. Group discussions and further study with the individual subject matter will be highlighted at the end in the Go Further section of the guide.

## plot summary

“Choosing Life: Bobby’s Story” is a fictional story about a 17-year-old boy who loses a good friend to suicide. Bobby’s anger and frustration build to such a point that Bobby begins to contemplate suicide himself. Through the shared teachings of his great-grandfather, Leo, Bobby manages to work through his painful feelings and become stronger. Eventually, Bobby becomes a counselor and passes on some of the traditional teachings to others that need help.

## rubrics

The Rubrics (except Part 9 rubric) are designed for student self-assessment. After the student has finished the first Rubric in Part 1, check their work and their assessment of their work. This will give you a chance to see if the student understands and is comfortable with the level of the material being presented. This will also present a chance to decide how you would like to have the student proceed with the written sections.

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## BEFORE READING

Review the ‘Go Further’ section to familiarize yourself with the activities that are suggested. Before beginning this lesson, make sure you are comfortable with the content and that you have thought about how you may handle any emotional crises that may arise. Do not feel that you have to do this by yourself. Familiarize yourself with your local community mental health resources, to refer students if necessary. Status First Nation individuals can have their crisis counseling costs covered by the FNIHB. Call your local First Nation health branch to access these services.

You may want to give the heads up to an Elder, counselor or other community worker. Ask them if they would be willing to talk to a student, if necessary. Make sure you pass the contact information on to the students before you start the lesson. By passing out the contact information before you begin, you remove the stigma of singling anyone out if a student needs to talk to someone after the lesson.

### Suicide Help Resources

- Honouring Life Network – Your source for Aboriginal youth suicide prevention resources <http://www.honouringlife.ca/en/youthCorner/main>
- Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-686 <http://www.kidshelpphone.ca/>
- Youth Suicide Prevention Website <http://www.youthsuicide.ca/>
- Acting On What We Know: Preventing Youth Suicide in First Nations [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/pubs/promotion/\\_suicide/prev\\_youth-jeunes/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/pubs/promotion/_suicide/prev_youth-jeunes/index-eng.php)
- “Dialogue for Life” - First Nations & Inuit Suicide Prevention Association of Quebec and Labrador <http://www.dialogue-pour-la-vie.com/index.php?lang=en>

- Aboriginal Youth: A Manual of Promising Suicide Prevention Strategies <http://www.suicideinfo.ca/csp/go.aspx?tabid=144>
- Healing of Nations: Suicide Prevention & Crisis Intervention Among Native American Youth <http://www.healingofnations.org/>
- Za-geh-do-win Information Clearinghouse - They provide information about Health Healing and Family Violence to Aboriginal communities in Ontario. <http://www.za-geh-do-win.com/>

Make sure you warn the students about the content of this lesson at least a day before you plan to go over it. A brief discussion with the class (student) about the upcoming subject matter is encouraged. The material may be used within a wider context and as a starting point for further discussion.

## REVISITING THE STORY AND SELF REFLECTION

These sections are to be completed in full sentence format by the student, marked and corrected for grammar as indicated in the Rubrics. They will be used as an introduction to the five-paragraph essay format.

*Note:* If the student is having a lot of trouble with the grammar and sentence structure but has no trouble with the comprehension, feel free to create separate lessons for the student and not worry so much about the grammar and structure aspect of their writing as they work through the book.

## AFTER READING

### ANSWERS

#### Part 1

A. 1) 4   2) 3   3) 2   4) 3

#### B. Revisit the Story

Why do you think the author made a point of showing us that Bobby was a happy kid before James' suicide?  
*Possible answers could include the fact that the author is demonstrating that suicidal thoughts can strike anyone or that sudden changes of behaviour is an indication of suicidal thoughts.*

#### C. Self-Reflection

Some of Bobby's personality traits could be: confident, friendly, daredevil. Come up with a list of three of your personality traits and an example for each one. Write and discuss these questions.

Some of the big five personality traits along with their constituent traits that could be used:

Openness - appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, curiosity and variety of experience.

Conscientiousness - a tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, and aim for achievement; planned rather than spontaneous behavior.

Extroversion - energy, positive emotions, urgency and the tendency to seek stimulation in the company of others.

Agreeableness - a tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others.

Neuroticism - a tendency to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anger, anxiety, depression or vulnerability.

## First Rubric

Use the first Rubric as a quick assessment of the student's comfort level with the material.

### Part 2

A. 1) 3 2) 2 3) 3 4) 4

#### B. Revisit the Story

In the story, it states that Bobby was feeling angry. What are some other emotions Bobby probably had at the time?

*Sadness, fear, frustration, rejection, loneliness, guilt, shame, remorse, shock, anxiety are some of the emotions that could be used.*

#### C. Self-Reflection

Bobby's personality changed after James' death. Write down three life-changing events that might cause someone to have a change in personality. Choose one and come up with a way in which someone could deal with that situation.

*These could be happy events such as a marriage, birth or even meeting a new friend, as well as, loss of job, loved one or illness, divorce, moving to a new community, bullying, etc.*

### Part 3

A. 1) 1 2) 4 3) 2 4) 2

#### B. Revisit the Story

Judging from Bobby's reaction to his mother's request to talk, how do you think Bobby was feeling? Do you think he understood why he was feeling that way?

*Confused, unhappy, angry are all valid responses. He probably did not understand why he felt this way.*

#### C. Self-Reflection

It is difficult to cope when we have stress in our lives. Coping strategies can help us deal with the stress. Think about what some of your coping strategies are and write down two of them and describe how they helped you. Denial, repression, isolation, rationalization are all coping strategies we use to deal with difficult situations. The student does not necessarily need to identify these but rather provide concrete examples.

### Part 4

A. 1) 1 2) 2 3) 3 4) 3

#### B. Revisit the Story

Anne said that she put a note underneath her father's door. What do you think she said in her note? Why do you think she wanted to kill herself?

*The fact that she could not go on and thought that Bobby would be better off without her - guilt, shame, not being able to cope with these emotions.*

#### C. Self-Reflection

Anne saw no way out of her situation. Who would you most likely talk to about a problem that you were having? What is it that makes that person special? Use a mind map. A sample is found at the back of this guide (or a list if more comfortable for student) to answer this question. Your instructor will show you how to do this.

*Info on how to write a five paragraph essay:*

*<http://www.studygs.net/fiveparag.htm>*

*<http://abeged.com/essayPW&A.html>*

## Part 5

### A. Comprehension Check

1. What did Anne pack for Bobby to take when he went to visit his great-grandfather?  
*couple of boxes full of canned food /tobacco / supplies for Bobby*
2. What did Bobby expect his great-grandfather Leo to look like?  
*someone in animal skins and feathers holding rattles and drums*
3. How long is Bobby told he will be staying with his great-grandfather?  
*two weeks*
4. What does Anne tell Bobby about his great-grandfather?  
*That he is a very gifted and if he opens his mind he will learn and receive wisdom.*

### B. Revisit the Story

What do you think Bobby thought about his great-grandfather when he first saw him? What are some of the details the author uses to get this across?

*Bobby didn't have respect for Leo or his position. The physical description provide by the author of Leo are indications of this / long grey hair, faded jeans, and the fact that Bobby calls him a 'geezer.'*

### C. Self-Reflection

Have you ever been wrong about a first impression of someone? Describe what happened.

Use this to have the student write a paragraph, which contains: An introductory topic sentence, a few supporting sentences and a concluding sentence.

## Part 6

A. 1) 1 2) 4 3) 3

4. What did Leo do when Bobby set the plate of food in front of him?  
*Took plate to counter, wrapped with a plastic bag and set it in the fridge.*
5. What did Leo tell Bobby he had learned?  
*He learned that he needs others / he needs conversation, love and acceptance / doesn't like being with himself*

### B. Revisit the Story

What do you think Bobby was thinking when he realized Leo was not going to speak? Why do you think Bobby did not want to be the first one to speak?

*Possible answers could include the fact that Bobby thought he was kind of crazy and that he was testing his will out against the older man.*

### C. Self-Reflection

Has someone ever tried to teach you something you did not want to learn, maybe a relative or close friend? What happened?

Try to get them to write about a specific task or a life lesson from his or her own life

## Part 7

A. 1) 2 2) 1 3) 3

4. Why did Leo turn to the East and begin singing?

*He was singing a greeting to the sun and the Creator, thanking him for the gifts of life. The medicine wheel begins in the East.*

5. What did Leo say would happen if Bobby did not use his gifts to do the Creator's work?

*He told him that he may not feel well and his spirit will be angry.*

6. How did Bobby feel after he had shared a sweat in the sweat lodge?

*He felt exhausted but strangely filled with energy.*

### B. Revisit the Story

Summarize Leo's explanation of the medicine wheel.

Make sure the student understands how to write a summary and does not just copy down from the book.

### C. Self-Reflection

Leo states that good health means paying attention to your medicine wheel. Can you remember an instance when something in your life was being affected by something unrelated to the problem? What did you do to resolve the problem?

Check to see that the student uses an example that is unrelated to the problem. For example, if you have a headache or are sick, this will affect your performance, which could lead to disciplinary action.

## Part 8

A. 1) 2 2) 3

3. How did a boy become a man in the old days?

*He would become a man after getting his vision.*

4. What was Leo's reaction as Bobby and his mother drove away?

*Leo had no reaction at all. He just watched them drive away.*

5. In what way did Bobby see the world differently after the teaching from Leo?

*He felt he had a purpose in life and wanted to share the experience with others.*

### B. Revisit the Story

What did Bobby discover about himself after his experience on the hill with Leo?

*He discovered he was mad at his father and he was still mad and sad about his friends death. He was also angry and guilty about his feelings towards his mother.*

### C. Self-Reflection

Of the ten myths about suicide, which one surprised you the most? Which two myths do you think most people believe to be true? Why?

*Any of the ten myths are acceptable as long as the student's reasons make sense.*

## Part 9

A. 1) 4 2) 3 3) 1

4. If someone is suicidal, who are some of the people they can talk to?

*Counselor, parent or guardian, health care provider*

5. What happens to other teens that are considering killing themselves if one of their friends commits suicide?

*They may also try killing themselves.*

6. What are three things you can do if someone you think may be suicidal?

Pick 3 things to do from the list of 14 recommendations.

### **B. Revisit the Story**

Bobby decides to choose life. Which of the suggestions that Uncle Levi mentions are also listed in the ‘What to do if you know someone who is suicidal?’

*Some answers could include: the fact that many times a person only feels suicidal for a short while, suicide can be prevented but you need to involve caring and trained people, you should talk to a counselor, parent or health care provider.*

### **Culminating Activity**

The final essay can be a 1, 3, or 5 paragraph essay.

Use the final essay Rubric for this essay.

### **C. Self-Reflection**

Bobby works as a crisis counselor and is ‘living his vision.’ What are some things that you would like to achieve? This can be a work related goal, or a skill you would like to attain. What are some things you can do to achieve your goal?

### **Final Discussion**

What did you learn? how has your thinking about suicide changed now that you know the facts?

## **GO FURTHER**

### **Group Activities:**

Here are a few ideas for activities that can be used as a group.

Medicine Wheel:

- Have an Elder come in and discuss a subject with the group (medicine wheel, sweat lodge, stories, suicide/community issues etc...) or have students research the topic online
  - students take notes and ask questions, some that they have come up with beforehand
  - break up into small groups (2-3) have students prepare a 3-5 minute presentation on what they learned
  - If individual, have the student write a five paragraph essay on the presentation, such as ‘The relevance of traditional teachings in the student’s life,’ or ‘The importance of Aboriginal culture in the community.’

Hollywood:

- Film a trailer for the pretend movie, “Bobby’s Story”
  - Have students develop a short plot and script (depending on how much technology is available this can be simple or complex)
  - Film short trailer and upload it as a YouTube video

Shakespeare:

- Put on a short play based on 'Bobby's Story'
  - this can be improvised directly from the book, or a scene written as a deleted scene or an alternate ending
  - have students write their own scene about suicide and have the student direct

## **Self-Directed Activities:**

Hemingway

- Have a student type a news report about the good work that a counselor in the community is doing by using traditional methods to teach in the community.
  - use the idea map to outline ideas
  - student should use the 'Five W's' (who, what, when, where, why, and also how)
  - have different students use different points of view on the subject matter / compare and contrast the different styles

Journal Time

- Have the students create a week/two week journal entry  
Journal starter questions:
  - I really admire...
  - I would like to be friends with...
  - I would like to know more about...
  - I really related to....
  - This reminds me of the time I...

Picasso

- Design a poster to bring awareness to the warning signs of suicide
  - design and draw a book cover for a book about suicide
  - design and draw a mural in a community space

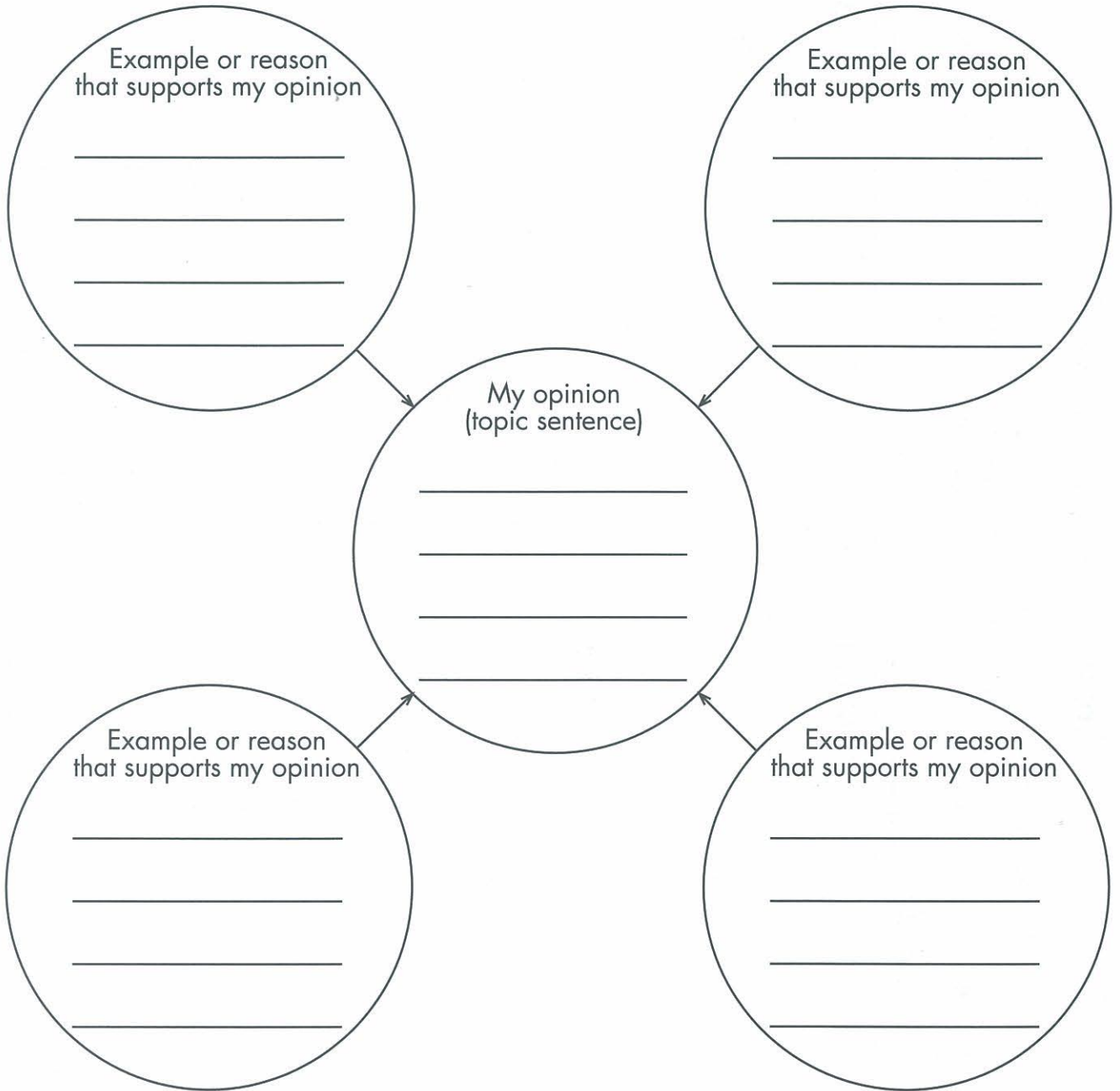
Rock and Roll

- Write (and sing) a song
  - can be their own or they can write new lyrics to the melody of a popular song
  - if there are instruments, have the student write and perform

# Idea Map

Write your topic on the line below. In the center circle, write a topic sentence summarizing your opinion about the topic. In the surrounding circles, list examples or reasons that support your topic sentence. You can add more circles if you'd like.

**My Topic** \_\_\_\_\_



Persuasive Essay : Three/Five paragraph Essay

Teacher Name:

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

CATEGORY	4 - Excellent	3 - Good	2 - Needs Work	1 - Review	Score
Thesis Statement	The thesis statement names the topic of the essay and outlines the main points to be discussed.	The thesis statement names the topic of the essay.	The thesis statement outlines some or all of the main points to be discussed but does not name the topic.	The thesis statement does not name the topic AND does not preview what will be discussed.	
Organization	Arguments and support are provided in a logical order that makes it easy and interesting to follow the student's train of thought.	Arguments and support are provided in a fairly logical order that makes it reasonably easy to follow the student's train of thought.	A few of the support details or arguments are not in an expected or logical order, distracting the reader and making the essay seem a little confusing.	Many of the support details or arguments are not in an expected or logical order, distracting the reader and making the essay seem very confusing.	
Development and details	Achieves coherent development with specific details and examples.	Has focused but sometimes uneven development. Uses some specific detail.	Has some development but lacks specific detail; may be limited to listing, repetitions; or generalizations.	Demonstrates little or no development; usually lacks details or examples or presents irrelevant information.	
Closing paragraph	The conclusion is strong and leaves the reader solidly understanding the student's position. Effective restatement of the position statement begins the closing paragraph.	The conclusion is recognizable. The student's position is restated within the first two sentences of the closing paragraph.	The student's position is restated within the closing paragraph, but not near the beginning.	There is no conclusion - the paper just ends.	
Sentence Structure	All sentences are well-constructed with varied structure.	Most sentences are well-constructed and there is some varied sentence structure in the essay.	Most sentences are well constructed, but there is no variation in structure.	Most sentences are not well-constructed or varied.	
Grammar & Spelling	Student makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Student makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Student makes 3-4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Student makes more than 4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	