



Reviews and Activities by Anna Stewart

Sees Behind Trees by Michael Dorris

Age range: 8 and up

Challenge: Visual impairment

Tip: Set in 16th-century America, making it ideal to include a history lesson

Dorris' compelling story is about a blind boy named Walnut who learns to listen deeply to the forest and to "see" what can't be seen. His other senses are highly developed along with a mind that can understand the sensory information by forming pictures in his head. Walnut "sees" best when he slows down and pays very careful attention to his environment.

In his tribe, a boy becomes a man when he can accurately shoot an arrow. But Walnut cannot see the target. He cannot see the tops of trees or clouds or his people around a fire. The tribal elders understand his differences and see the gift he does have and so he becomes Sees Behind Trees- his new name as a man.

See Behind Trees goes on a quest with a village elder who continues to teach him to see without his eyes, "Your body will remember where it has been if you let it. It recalls what's familiar –but not as your mind does. With your mind you stand outside the world and look in. With your body you are inside already."

Dorris has a profound ability to enter an individual's body, mind, and soul and show him as a real person with both challenges and gifts. He also accurately portrays life for Native American in the 1600's.

Write: Close your eyes, put on some Native American flute or drum music. Let the images it evokes swirl into you. Imagine if you were a child living in an Indian village. Imagine that you wanted to become a man or a woman but something is holding you back. What is it? How does it affect you? How does it affect the way the other children and villagers see you? How will you overcome it?