

My Ataatsiaq Was a Special Constable



This book is part of the Sapujjijit Reading Series, developed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in Nunavut. The Sapujjijit Reading Series is a unique, Nunavut-developed literacy initiative that infuses the current and historical role of RCMP officers into a culturally appropriate reading program.

The Sapujjijit Reading Series was developed to support the reading level guidelines outlined in Uqalimaariuqsaniq, the Department of Education's reading program. Uqalimaariuqsaniq is a sequential and progressive Inuktitut reading program that supports students in their development as readers.

The Sapujjijit Reading Series informs readers about the role of police officers in their community. It also provides opportunities for readers to consider their own interest in policing as a future career.

Please see the end of this book for more information about the Sapujjijit Reading Series.

Book details

Level:	12
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Subjects/themes:	Special Constables, safety, land skills

My Ataatsiaq Was a Special Constable



Based on the Memories of

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On Saturday mornings, Hailey usually likes to sleep in. But today she can hardly wait to get out of bed. Today she is going caribou hunting with her *ataatatsiaq*! She loves being out on the land with him and hearing his stories from the past.

When she arrives at her grandparents' house, her *anaanatsiaq* opens the door and *kuniks* Hailey. "Hello, little auntie! Come in. *Ataatatsiaq* has been waiting for you," says *Anaanatsiaq*.

Hailey's *ataatatsiaq* is sitting in the kitchen. "*Irngutaq*, I'm happy to see you. Let's eat something before we go," he says. He smiles and gestures at the tea, bannock, and bacon on the table.





“What have you been up to, granddaughter?” Ataatsiaq asks Hailey as she sits down.

While they eat, Hailey tells Ataatsiaq how she has just joined Arviat’s Junior Rangers with her best friend. They are learning all kinds of skills that are important for staying safe out on the land. *But the best way to learn is by going out on the land with Ataatsiaq. He knows everything about land skills,* Hailey thinks.

Hailey's ataatatsiaq is retired now, but he was a Special Constable and translator for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for 20 years. He has told Hailey many stories about this, but she still has lots of questions for him. She knows how important it is to listen to and learn from her Elders.

Hailey tells Ataatsiaq all about the Junior Rangers. Ataatsiaq says, "If you keep working hard, you will learn everything you need to know to survive on the land."





Hailey and her ataatsiaq finish eating and head outside. There, the ATV is ready to go. Ataatsiaq has loaded a tarp on the back with everything they will need for the day, plus an extra jerry can filled with gas.

“You know, Hailey, whenever I go out on my noisy ATV, I think of when I used to travel by dog team for the RCMP. I never had to worry about running out of gas!” says Ataatsiaq.

Hailey smiles. “Where did you go, Ataatsiaq?” she asks.

“All over, irngutaq, up and down Hudson Bay! In those days, people still lived on the land. Special Constables would travel by dog team to check on them. I would see if anyone was sick or hungry. I would see if any babies had been born or if anyone had died,” says Ataatsiaq.

Hailey knows that Inuit who did this job, like her ataatsiaq, were very important. Most of the RCMP in those days spoke only English, and most Inuit spoke only Inuktitut. Special Constables made it possible for them to communicate with each other.





Ataatatsiaq says, “In the summer, we travelled all over by Peterhead boat to go walrus hunting. We used the meat to feed the dogs all winter. When we got back to Arviat, a lot of people would come down to the beach to greet us and help unload the boat. The people were always happy to work together.”

“Can we go walrus hunting this summer?” asks Hailey. She has never been walrus hunting before.

“We’ll see, irngutaq!” says Ataatsiaq. “For now, let’s focus on our caribou.” He looks toward the ATV. “Ready to go?”

Hailey puts on her helmet and climbs onto the ATV behind her ataatsiaq. This has been her spot for a long time! Ataatsiaq started taking her hunting when she was five years old. With his help, she shot her first caribou when she was seven.





Ataatatsiaq drives away from town and out across the tundra. As they get farther away from town, they stop every so often to scan the landscape with their binoculars. Hailey hopes they'll find caribou, but if they don't, that's okay. Just being out on the land with her ataatsiaq is nice too.

She thinks about what her ataatsiaq said about travelling all over the land helping people. She hopes she will be able to travel like he did someday, visiting communities all across Nunavut.

After a couple of hours, Ataatsiaq slows the ATV to a stop. “Let’s take a break and have some tea,” he says.

He sets up the kettle on the camp stove, and Hailey fills it with water from the big thermos. “You know, when I was a Special Constable, one of my jobs was to cut ice from the lakes for drinking water for our family and for the RCMP. We would thaw ice over the qulliit, and that would be our water,” says Ataatsiaq.

Hailey imagines what it would be like to use a long saw to cut the ice instead of filling up the thermos from the tap.





“What other jobs did you have, Ataatsiaq?” Hailey asks. Her ataatsiaq has told her this many times before, but she never gets tired of hearing it.

Ataatsiaq says, “I cared for the dog teams and drove the sleds. I hunted for food and shared the catch. I took the garbage out, got ice, emptied toilets, shovelled, and painted. But it was not just me. Your anaanatsiaq worked very hard to help, too.”

“What did she do?” Hailey asks.

Ataatatsiaq replies, “In the winter, the RCMP officers needed warm clothing to wear, especially when they were travelling by dog team. Sometimes she would sew all night to make caribou parkas, kamiit, socks, and mittens for the officers.”

Hailey imagines how cold she would be without the warm parka her anaanatsiaq had sewn for her.





In between sips of tea, Ataatsiaq scans the horizon with the binoculars. Suddenly, he spots a small herd! “Look, irngutaq!” he says. “Get your rifle, and let’s get closer.”

They walk quickly but quietly toward the herd, making sure to stay downwind. Once they are close enough, Hailey cocks her rifle, aims carefully, and fires. A caribou is down! She and Ataatsiaq run toward it.

As they stand over the caribou, Hailey says, “I can’t wait to share the meat with everyone! That is my favourite thing about hunting.”

Ataatatsiaq looks at Hailey and says, “It makes me proud to hear that, granddaughter. It’s our duty to help whenever we can. When the non-Inuit RCMP officers came to the North, it was our duty to help, as this was not their land. They would not have survived without help.”





Together, Hailey and her ataatsiaq gut, skin, and butcher the caribou. It is hard work, but Hailey knows she should not complain. No matter how hard it is, her ataatsiaq never says that anything is too difficult, and he always does everything with care. Finally, they wrap the meat in the skin and tie it onto the back of the ATV.

When the caribou is loaded and tied down, Ataatsiaq says, “Now we go home. That is the best part of any trip, short or long. As much as I liked travelling from place to place with the RCMP, I always loved being with family again. Your anaatsiaq always cooked something up for my arrival. I would tell stories about my journeys, like how many walruses we caught, if we had faced storms, or who we had seen. Your father always had so many questions about my travels, just like you.”





Hailey and her ataatsiaq travel back toward Arviat. Hailey imagines that they are on a dogsled, heading to another community to check on the people there. She wonders if she could do what her ataatsiaq did and travel across the territory, helping people and working to keep them safe.

Once they arrive home, Hailey helps Ataatsiaq unload the caribou. Hailey turns to her ataatsiaq and says, “Do you think I could be like you, Ataatsiaq? Do you think I could work for the RCMP?”

Ataatatsiaq replies very seriously, “Hailey, you must try your best at everything you do. If you work hard, like you did today, and ask questions and learn as much as you can, you can do anything.”

Hailey knows that she wants to make a real difference. She looks at Ataatatsiaq. She will work hard to help others, just like he has always done.



Sapujjijit Reading Series

The Sapujjijit Reading Series was developed by Inuit RCMP officers in consultation with family members of the Inuit special constables who worked throughout the North in the early to mid-20th century.

“As a young Inuk growing up, I was fortunate enough to have been provided guidance and role models that I learned from. This included Inuit police officers who were respected as hunters and leaders. I saw their capabilities first hand as they helped people despite the challenges they faced. This inspired me to work hard and strive to live like they had.”

—Corporal David Aglukark

The Sapujjijit Reading Series focuses on the following Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principles:

- **Inuuqatigiitsiarniq:** Respecting others, relationships and caring for people
- **Pijitsirniq:** Serving and providing for family and/or community
- **Piliriqatigiinni/ikajuqatigiinni:** Working together for a common cause

It is the belief of the RCMP that these principles will equip readers with the foundation to be successful in any career they pursue, including serving as a police officer in their community.

The RCMP acknowledges the harm caused by the enactment of residential schools and forced relocations, as well as the dog slaughter. The RCMP recognizes the impact of these actions on the Inuit culture, language, and way of life. These books represent the RCMP’s investment in building trust and healthy relationships with Inuit.

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