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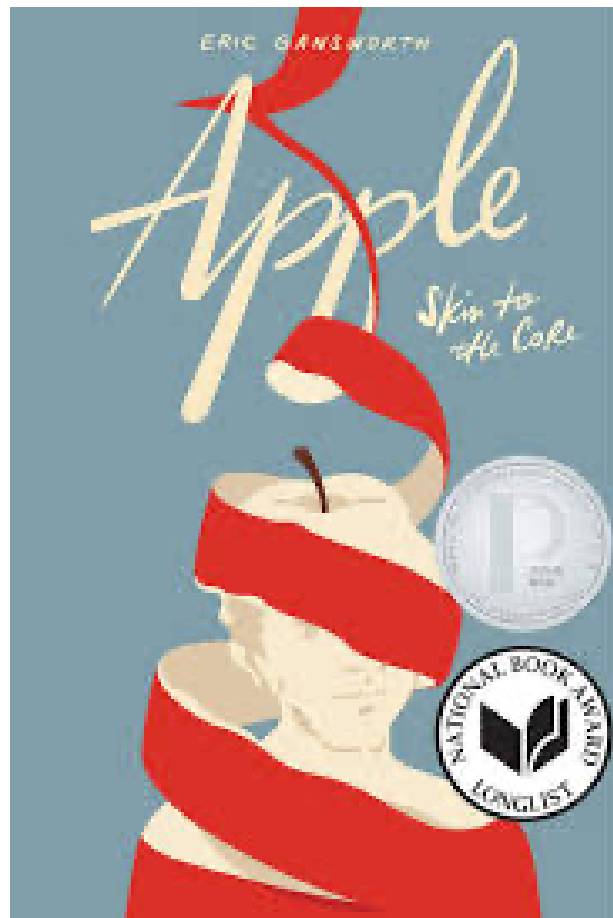
ENGL 122B Sec 01

Dr. Warner

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## *Apple: Skin to the Core*

by Eric Gansworth



*Gansworth, Eric. Apple: Skin to the Core Publisher: Levine Querido (2020)*  
*ISBN: 9781646142033*

## About the Author:

[Eric Gansworth Link to Website](#)



Source: <https://poets.org/poet/eric-gansworth>

Eric Gansworth is a member of the Onondaga Nation but grew up in the Tuscarora Nation. He studied literature and has written/published a dozen novels to date. Including *Apple: Skin to the Core*.

- Eric Gansworth is currently a Professor of English at Canisius College, in Buffalo, New York
- He is a visual artist who has had solo exhibits.
- He has been invited to speak at the National Book Festival in 2013 and at the Library of Congress in 2016.

### Summary:

*Apple: Skin to the Core* is a memoir written in poetry verse. Author Eric Gansworth recalls and retells his childhood memories, experiences, and struggles with self-identity through “verse, prose, and imagery”. The title *Apple: Skin to the Core* is not only essential but indicative of the direction that Eric Gansworth's story takes due to the political and cultural meaning behind the term “Apple”, in regards to indigenous/native people. “Apple” is a slur in Native communities referring to someone supposedly being “red on the outside, white on the inside”.

- I. “After all this time, and all these attempts to wipe us out, some things *are* on the verge of disappearing, some things are gone. Our stories survive in wampum belts, woven rows of purple shell beads and white, in sequence and arrangement, revealing an image in the contrast between the colors that documents our history, cosmology, culture” (23). Eric Gansworth explores way back into the generational trauma, discussing the ones who came before him, the ones who lived near him, and the items left in their wake before introducing himself.

In fact, this quote sets the tone for the entirety of the books' contents: the generational/family trauma, the consequences of that shared but individual experience, and the desperate yet beautiful grasping of identity preservation.

- II. “We’re Indians,’ she added when I grinned. ‘A lifetime of people are going to line up to tell us no. If you love something, you gotta find your own way of turning that No into a Yes, because no one’s going to do it for you” (185).

Here, Eric is speaking to a childhood friend after watching a movie and rather than waiting inside the lobby like every other movie goer, Eric and his friend are profiled and deemed too “rezzy” to remain inside. While this is a passing observation on Eric Gansworth’s behalf, it adds context and meaning to his friends' reiteration of their identity and their constant battle to protect it.

- III. “We are still here, despite everything that has been taken away any moment we aren't looking” (322).

Eric Gansworth concludes to his family and himself how he will always be a little different. But not because he is from both Onondaga and Tuscarora nations or because of his native identity in general to the outside world. But, rather because as it becomes his turn to be the elder, he will still don his batman clothing just like he did all those many years ago. This is the perfect wrap up to Eric Gansworth journey of remembering, sharing, and exploring further into his identity. Despite the historically embedded trauma, pain, and resistance; identity perseveres in Eric Gansworth and through others’ stories.

### **Classroom Use**

I would use this unit as part of self discovery in identity and culture for students. Along with *We Were Here* by Matt de la Pena due to parallels in discrimination, lack or complete blockage of opportunity, and identity crises. I would also have students read and watch *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky to compare and contrast different backgrounds, perspectives, cultures, and livelihoods but connect it in the end to one thing: self identity.

As a writing activity, I would ask students to write a letter to their past, present, and future selves: about who they were, who they are, and who they yet hope to become.

### **Why should you give this book to teens?**

This book should be given to teens due to the digestible diction presented in prose. It also can be a source of community for teens who typically cannot find their culture or identity in the pages of their assigned readings. Not only native/indigenous teens but any teen who finds themselves or their loved ones in bare kitchens and a head full of dreams.

### **More Reasons:**

- Driving home the message that everyone is important regardless of background
- Identity and culture is never truly lost because it IS you
- Kids deserve an opportunity regardless of past mistakes (because they're kids!)
- Allowing others to see that they are not alone

### **How it fits best in Chapters 4-8 in *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning*:**

#### *Chapter 4: Books about Real Life Experiences*

- Writing can be therapeutic; Eric Gansworth shares, retells and relives in a therapeutic manner. It can teach and encourage young people to express themselves through writing.

#### *Chapter 6: Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions*

- Discrimination for culture and self identity. Eric Gansworth is discriminated against by the outside world for his native identity. He is also an “outsider” on the reservation due to being of the Onondaga nation.

*Chapter 7: Books about Courage and Survival*

- Survival looks different for everyone: Eric Gansowrth survived the disrupture of his culture, the shaming of his identity, and the loss of what could have been for his people.
- Surviving the absence of a father and braving the circumstances for his mother
- His determination and courage to remain true to himself regardless of outside or inside labels

*Chapter 8: Books on Allegory, Fantasy, Myth, and Parable*

- Throughout the book, Eric Gansworth shares parables and wisdom from the tongues of others

**Quantitative:**

Lexile: Age: N/A

Readability: 5-6 graders, ages 10-12

I would recommend this book to 10-11th grade students.

**Qualitative:**

1. Structure
  - a. First-person POV
  - b. Timeline is mainly linear with a litter of time skips.
    - i. There are recollections of the farther past

1. I.e., When telling of his grandparents circumstances, the boarding schools, and the experiences of his past relatives

## 2. Language Clarity

- a. Diction is digestible and readable for a vast age range
- b. Eric Gansworth maintains a rather steady vocabulary usage throughout the book
  - i. There is no real difference of language in his “early years” versus the latter half of the book (his later years)
- c. Imagery and personification are the main elements used in the book, perhaps because originally, the book was meant to be a series of paintings versus poetry

## 3. Knowledge Demands

- a. The text requires knowledge of indigenous native history specifically the trauma and cruelty of the enforced boarding schools
  - i. The systematic genocide of native/indigenous people
- b. The reader understands the discrimination of being indigenous/native
  - i. The constant battle to prove you are worthy
  - ii. The preservation *and* the enforced label of identity will always be an obstacle to move in the outside world