

# Joe and the Thunderbird: Teachings of Fire

Activity Book



Featuring Joe Gilchrist and the Thunderbird

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Joe was young when he first felt the land calling to him.

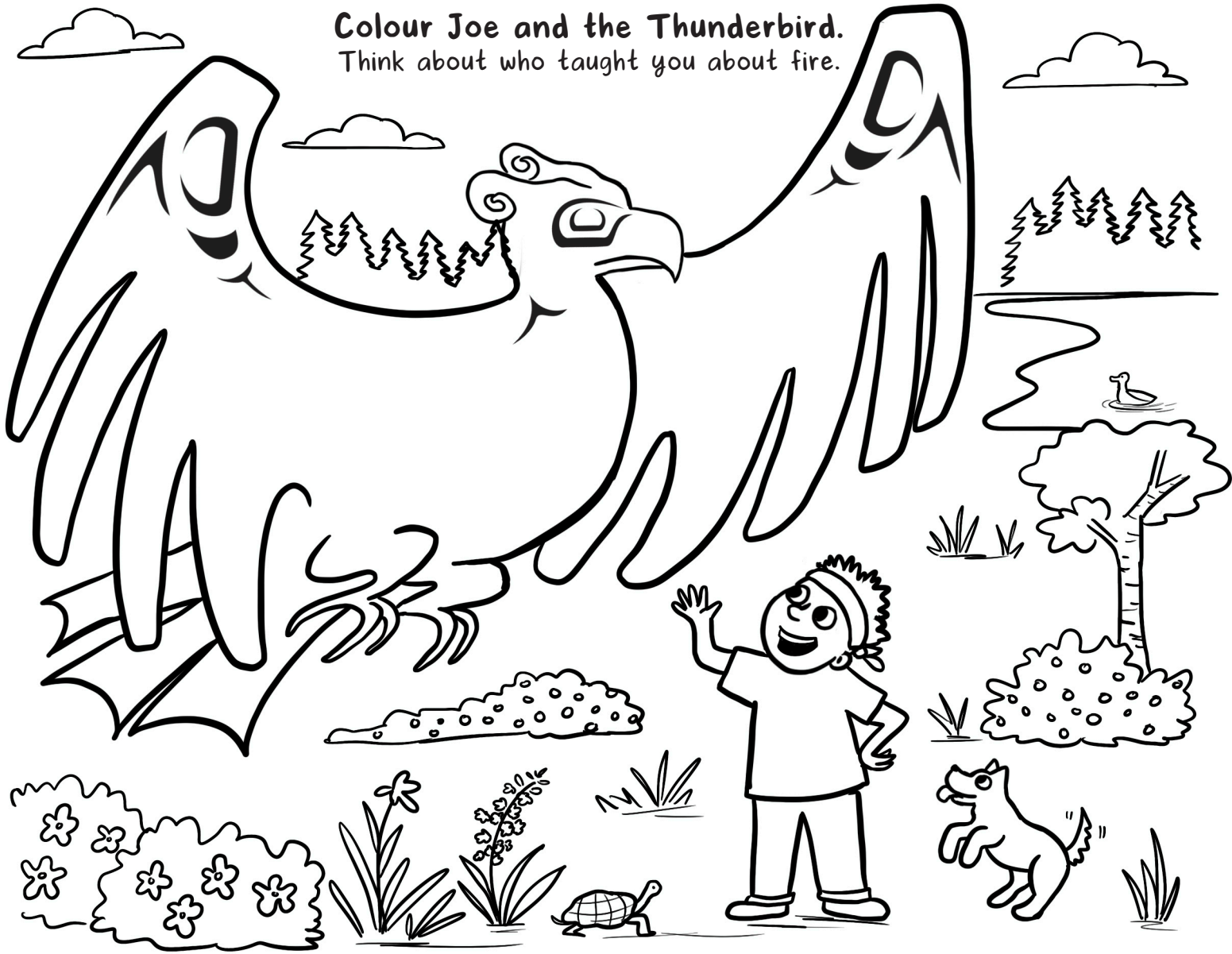
One evening as he collected sticks, the sky darkened.  
A large shadow swept overhead. A Thunderbird.

It circled once, then landed near him. A warm,  
steady message rose inside Joe. Not spoken,  
but understood.

I have much to teach you.

Joe listened without fear. He knew this was the beginning  
of something important.

Colour Joe and the Thunderbird.  
Think about who taught you about fire.




What does fire mean to you?  
Draw or write in the space.

As Joe grew up, the Thunderbird guided him. Joe was curious, always ready to listen.

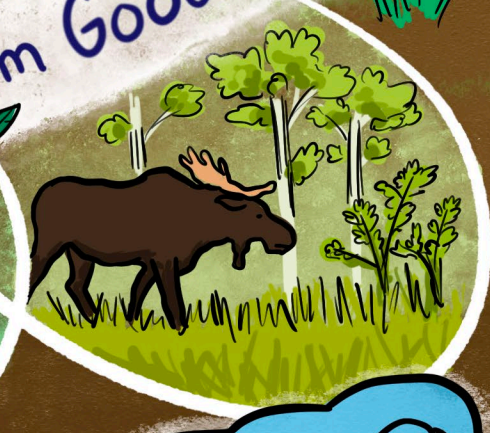
One day, the Thunderbird led him to a berry patch full of young spring shoots. Joe knelt and touched the warm soil.



This is renewal. This comes from Good Fire.



"Good Fire helps the land heal" he said softly.  
"But bad fire can hurt the land and its people."



The Thunderbird nodded once. Joe was learning well.

# Number the steps of a cultural burn.

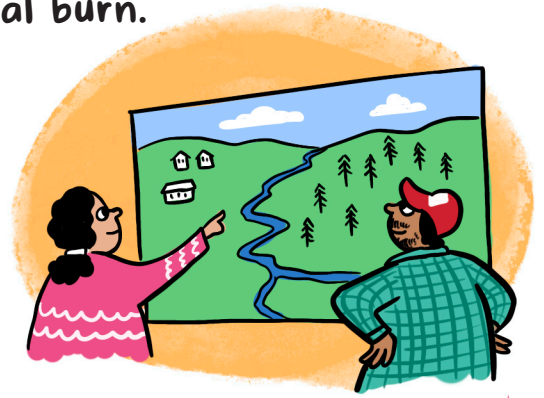


— A small Good Fire is lit and watched

— The land is cleared of dry brush



— New plants and berries start to grow



— Fire Keepers make a plan

Draw the same place in spring, summer, fall and winter.

SPRING

SUMMER

FALL

WINTER

## Word Search

Find these words in the puzzle:

- BALANCE
- BERRY
- RENEW
- ELDER
- FIRE
- LAND
- CARE
- BURN



M	Y	F	I	R	E	J	B	R	Y
M	S	F	N	V	J	Q	U	E	W
R	I	O	S	J	D	P	R	H	K
D	E	E	B	A	L	A	N	C	E
X	I	N	L	N	E	V	J	I	F
B	Z	Q	E	D	I	O	M	O	L
E	M	S	E	W	E	S	X	W	A
R	E	A	D	O	H	R	B	I	N
R	L	L	M	Z	C	A	R	E	D
Y	N	D	Z	V	H	E	X	C	C

As Joe grew into a young man, the Thunderbird taught him that fire is important but it can also be dangerous. To keep his people safe, Joe and the Thunderbird walked through the community finding items that could easily catch fire around homes.

Joe brushed dry needles and leaves away from the side of a house. "These can catch fire," he said.

Care for your home. Care for your people.

He looked at branches hanging low over a roof.

"This tree needs trimming."

They moved past a small tended sage patch near a door. Joe paused, remembering that medicines need protection too.

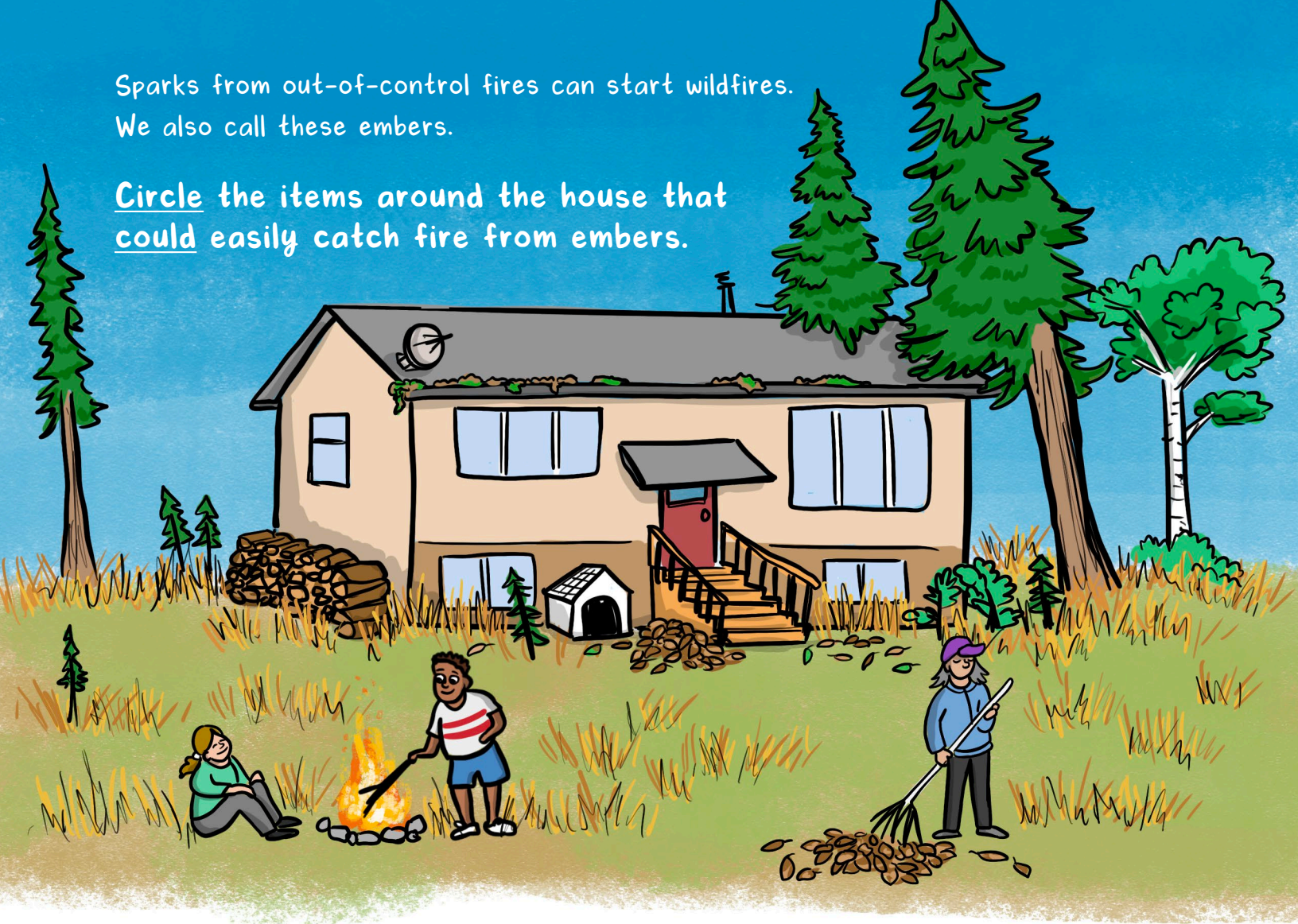
He noticed firewood stacked too close to a wall and felt the Thunderbird's quiet warning.

"This firewood should be stored farther away."

House by house, Joe practiced and explained the teachings he had learned. "You don't need to be older to help," he told the young people. "Small steps matter."

Sparks from out-of-control fires can start wildfires.  
We also call these embers.

Circle the items around the house that  
could easily catch fire from embers.



Draw your own safe version of the house above.

ANSWERS: tree branches on house, leaves around house, grass and shrubs around house, firewood against house, fire pit with no water nearby, grass around the fire pit, leaves in gutter

Years passed. Joe stood with confidence now, grounded, experienced, and trusted. The Thunderbird still guided him as they walked side by side.

The Thunderbird led him to a ridge overlooking a wide valley.

Four teachings filled Joe's chest:



"Nothing stands alone," he said. "The land, the water, the air, the fire all take care of each other, just like we do."

The Thunderbird folded its wings around him, proud of how far he had come.

Match the elements.

Cleansing

Movement

Growing

Renewal



Help this hungry deer find its food patch!



Find and circle the elements hidden in the cultural burn below.



Joe's hair had silver in it now. His hands were strong from years of tending the land. The Thunderbird still visited him — its feathers glowing as brightly as the night they met.

Joe lit a small fire. The Thunderbird stood behind him.

Share this



Joe understood his role now. He thought of everything he learned: Good Fire, balance, caring for homes, protecting families, respecting the land.

"When I was young, the Thunderbird taught me," Elder Joe said. "Now I pass those teachings to you."

"One day," Joe said softly, "you'll pass these teachings on too."



# The Gift of Fire: A Story of the Thunderbird

As told by Fire Keeper and Knowledge Holder Joe Gilchrist,  
of the Secwépemc Nation and Nlaka'pamux Nation

Our people came from the South and the Southwest. Our land was given to us by the Creator, long before our arrival. It was the time of giants. Giant bears, giant cats. All the animals were bigger, stronger, and faster than us. They could hear, see, and avoid, or attack us. The Creator gave us many gifts, like sharpened tools, spears, bows, to help us hunt and survive. The gift of the horse, so we can move faster, and the dog, so we can be warned of danger sooner.



Colour the story as you read along!

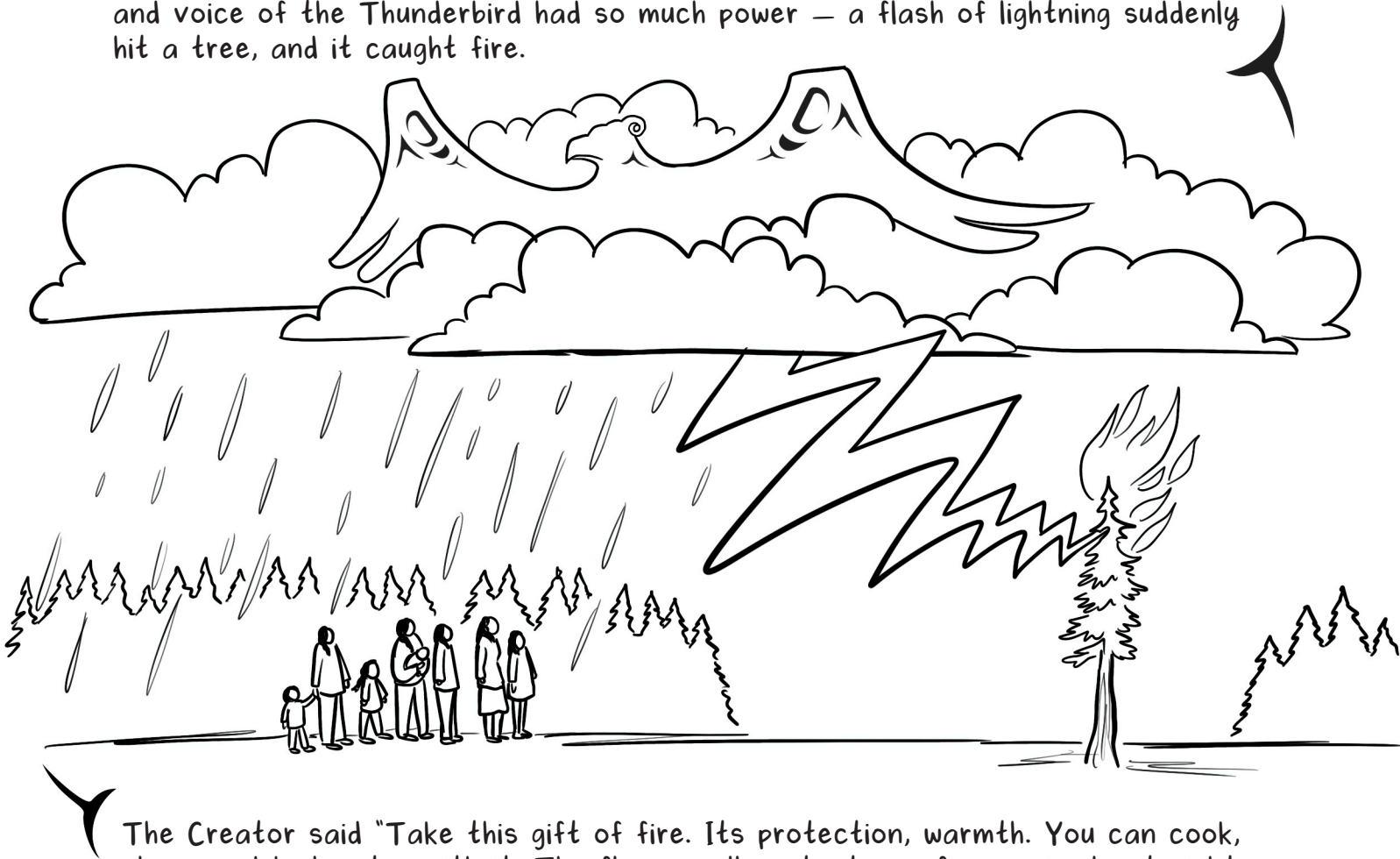
But the winters were long and cold, and the people suffered. Cold and hungry, the people asked the Creator if they could sleep all winter like the Bear.

Instead, the Creator called upon the Eagle, from the top of a volcano. As the Eagle flew closer, it grew and grew, and the Eagle turned into the Thunderbird. With great power from its wings and its screams, it picked up a Whale and gave it to the people as a gift.



It was springtime, and the Creator sent the Thunderbird into the clouds. The white clouds soon gathered, and turned black. As the Thunderbird appeared to play in the clouds, going back and forth through the clouds, soon the great wind became strong and cold. It became very rainy.

The Thunderbird worked hard as it played in the clouds. Just as the people, cold and wet, were going to leave into their shelters, thunder came from the clouds. The people stopped and looked up: the clouds were lighting up. The great wings and voice of the Thunderbird had so much power – a flash of lightning suddenly hit a tree, and it caught fire.



The Creator said "Take this gift of fire. Its protection, warmth. You can cook, clean, and boil water with it. The flames will protect you from animals at night, and light will help you see. The fire will cleanse Mother Earth so you can have food and medicine for all time."

**After that, every day was a celebration.**



## FIRESMART RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

To learn more about Indigenous Fire Stewardship, you can explore knowledge and insights that support living with fire in "Blazing the Trail: Celebrating Indigenous Fire Stewardship". Find this book and other wildfire resilience resources on [FireSmartCanada.ca](https://www.fire-smart.ca)!



## GIVING OF THANKS

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The depiction of the Thunderbird in this story is inspired by Coast Salish peoples. We respect that this characterization may not be representative for every community, and honour the unique stories and teachings of the Thunderbird held by Indigenous peoples across Canada.

Thank you to our partners:

