



Sivulliq: Ancestor
by Lily H. Tuzroyluke

INTRODUCTION

“Sivulliq: Ancestor” is a gripping and heartwarming tale of rescue, survival and inner strength, following the journey of young mother Kayariluk as she braves the Alaskan wilderness to save her child kidnapped by whalers.

After her village is devastated by smallpox one frigid winter, Kayaliruk sets off with her children to find family, her only hope against starvation. Along the way, they cross paths with a whaling crew, who ruthlessly kidnap her daughter and leave her to bleed out in the snow. Kayaliruk must rally all her strength and determination to battle deadly low temperatures, hungry polar bears, starvation, treacherous landscapes, and her own personal demons to save her.

Ibai is an African American whaler aboard the Erysichthon who has high hopes for his career – but has not realized the extent of greed and corruption present in the industry. Facing racial injustice and prejudice from the crew, Ibai undergoes an emotional journey to rival his physical one as he reevaluates what is important in life.

Kayaliruk and Ibai’s journeys come to an unlikely intersection with the kidnapping of the young Native child. Kaya’s unwavering courage in the face of insurmountable odds and Ibai’s unflinching morality in the presence of great evil inspires a true appreciation of the human spirit.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lily H. Tuzroyluke is an Indigenous author of Tlingit, Inupiaq, and Nisga’a First Nation descent. She is from Point Hope, Alaska, currently residing in Anchorage where she uses her writing to tell the stories of Indigenous people groups. With a background in Tribal Government and a passion for preservation, Tuzroyluke provides a voice for unheard Natives through her creative works and extensive traditional knowledge.

<https://rasmuson.org/people/lily-tuzroyluke/>

DISCUSSION GUIDE QUESTIONS

- How does Kaya’s view of the Yankee whalers reflect the Native’s opinions of them at the time? How does this differ from or coincide with the idea that the whaling industry was beneficial for the Indigenous people groups of coastal Alaska?
- What does Nasau’s role in the book say about the role of women in Indigenous cultures? What about Kaya’s? What about her young sons?
- How does this book portray mental health issues? Is it an accurate and/or helpful portrayal? Why or why not?

- How does Ibai's experience aboard the Erysichthon demonstrate racial issues at the time?
- What role does religion play in the book? Is it entirely negative or positive? How does this coincide with or differ from common beliefs about Western religion in Alaska?
- Kayariluk relies heavily on her children for support during her journey. How does this reveal Native attitudes towards children and their capabilities, and how does this differ from Western views of childhood?
- How does the whaling crew's treatment of the whales they kill differ from the Native whalers? Do these inconsistencies appear in any other areas of the book, and how do you think this impacted the Natives' views of the Yankees as a whole?
- What role does family play in Sivulliq: Ancestor - specifically in the form of Kaya's uncle? What does this say about the role of family in Native cultures? What other examples in the book support this idea?

PRAISE FOR SIVULLIQ: ANCESTOR

"This is my favorite book of the year! Lily Tuzroyluke's debut novel Sivulliq is an instant Alaska classic. Gripping and raw, honest, and gut wrenchingly beautiful, this profound and heartbreaking story of resilience and love is as important as any modern tale ever told in the north. Sivulliq is unforgettable and haunting-a bold new work from a gifted writer sharing her talent and vital indigenous knowledge that can help us all become better human beings."

- Don Rearden, author of *The Raven's Gift*

"Indigenous writer Tuzroyluke's stirring debut evokes the beauty of the Arctic and sheds light on a dark corner of U.S. history. In the spring of 1893, a smallpox epidemic devastates Indigenous communities along the north shore of Alaska. After lighting a funeral pyre for the bodies of her husband and immediate family, Kayaliruk heads north in a dog sled with her three children to find other survivors. Along the way, they suffer a violent encounter with Naluagmiut (white men), who kidnap her only daughter. Badly injured and near starvation, Kayaliruk is determined to save her daughter and follows the men's American whaling ship with her two sons, first to Herschel Island, an outpost in the Beaufort Sea, then to Siberia. The story of Kayaliruk's journey alternates with that of Ibai, a Black whaler from Massachusetts, whose fate will eventually merge with Kayaliruk's. Tuzroyluke explores a chapter of American expansion rarely included in history books, illuminating both the rich cultural diversity predating U.S. colonialism in the Arctic and the sordid legacy of whalers who overhunted and spread diseases. The ice is as omnipresent a character as either protagonist: "unpredictable, feared and a living creature" that can shift, crack, and overwhelm. Tuzroyluke's beautiful novel crackles with a fierce love of her people and their land."

- Publishers Weekly