



RICK RIORDAN  
PRESENTS

# RACE TO THE SUN



BY REBECCA ROANHORSE

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE • Disney • HYPERION

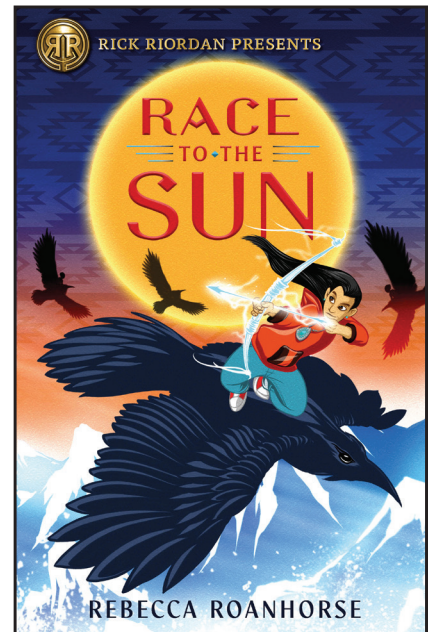


## About the Book

Lately, seventh grader Nizhoni Begay has been able to detect monsters, like the man in the fancy suit who was in the bleachers at her basketball game. Turns out he's Mr. Charles, her dad's new boss at the oil and gas company, and he's alarmingly interested in Nizhoni and her brother, Mac, their Navajo heritage, and the legend of the Hero Twins. Nizhoni knows he's a threat, but her father won't believe her.

When Dad disappears the next day, leaving behind a message that says "Run!" the siblings and Nizhoni's best friend, Davery, are thrust into a rescue mission that can only be accomplished with the help of Diné Holy People, all disguised as quirky characters. Their aid will come at a price: the kids must pass a series of trials in which it seems like nature itself is out to kill them.

If Nizhoni, Mac, and Davery can reach the House of the Sun, they will be outfitted with what they need to defeat the ancient monsters Mr. Charles has unleashed. But it will take more than weapons for Nizhoni to become the hero she was destined to be . . . Timeless themes such as the importance of family and respect for the land resonate in this funny, fast-paced, and exciting quest adventure set in the American Southwest.



## Pre-Reading Activities

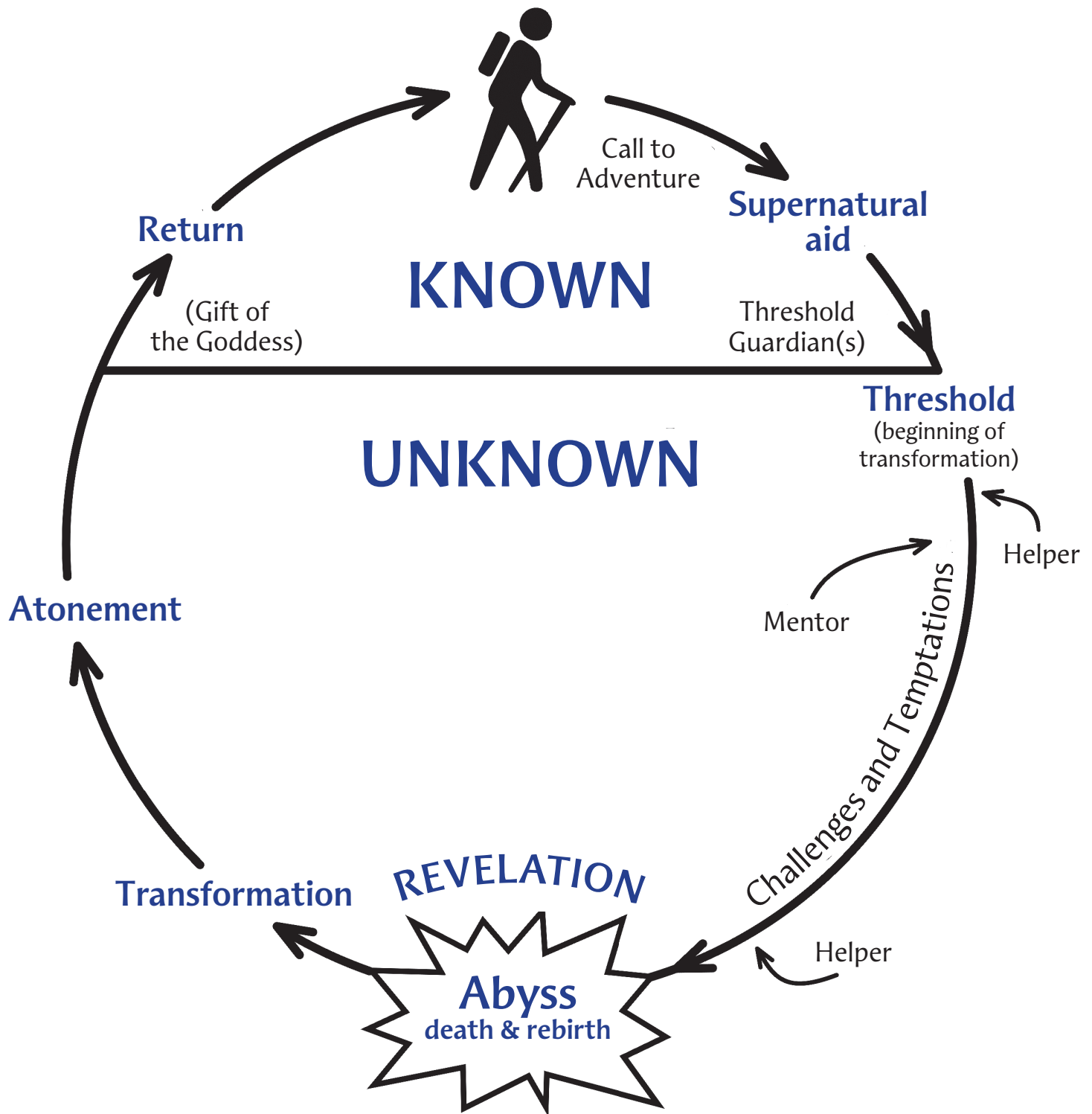
Reflect on stories you have heard or read that are about a hero or hero figure.

- A. What do they look like? How do they act? What personality traits do they typically have? What is their gender? Where are they from?
- B. Draw or describe the hero in detail. Compare and contrast descriptions of heroes with your classmates.
  - Were there more similarities or differences among the ideas/images of your heroes?
  - Why do we have these specific ideas/images of heroes? Where do they come from? What trends do you notice in the ideas/images of heroes?

In *Race to the Sun*, the narrator Nizhoni must deal with the magnificence and struggle of becoming a hero. A hero does not just pop into existence, as she quickly finds out, and she must go through a series of difficult challenges and series in order to succeed. As with most heroes, Nizhoni will go through a process known as the hero's journey.

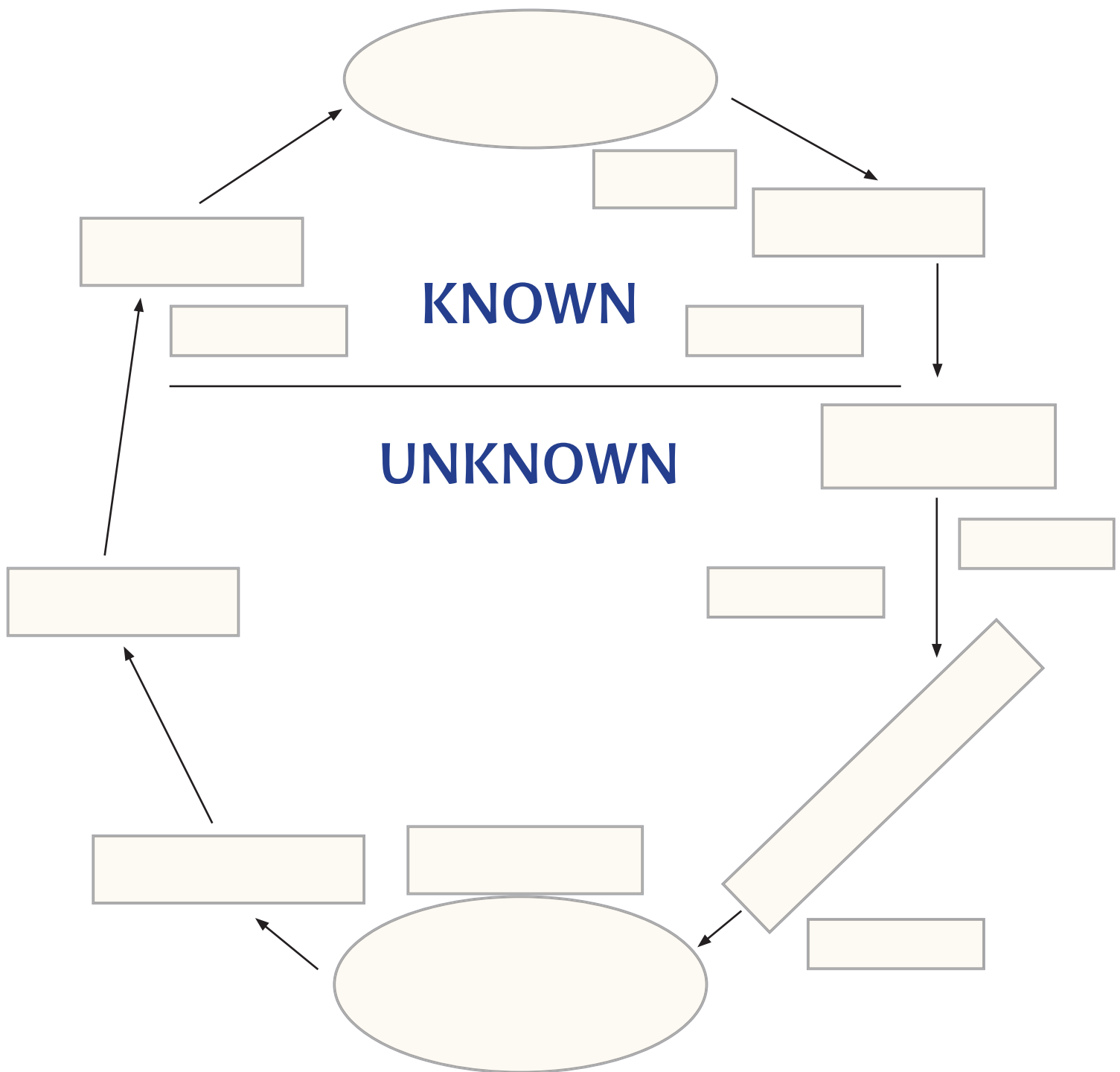
- A. Using the hero you described in the first pre-reading activity, fill in each step as best you can. If needed, work with a partner who had the same or a similar hero as you to better understand the journey a hero goes through.

# The Hero's Journey



# The Hero's Journey

## Graphic Organizer



## Discussion Questions

1. What is the importance of giving exposure and representation to marginalized groups through fiction? *(Introduction)*
2. How does Laurie Wilder's disbelief and misunderstanding of Davery's parents being different ethnicities reflect U.S. society as a whole? *(Ch. 2)*
3. When thinking about the hero's journey, what role or roles would Mr. Charles's and his bodyguards fulfill? What role or roles would Nizhoni's dad fulfill? *(Ch. 3)*
4. Nizhoni is shocked when Mr. Charles tells her about Changing Woman's twin sons, reflecting on the fact that her shimásání did not tell her that part of the story. What is the importance of perspective when looking at historical and cultural events? *(Ch. 5)*
  - A. Does it matter whose perspective history is seen from?
  - B. What reasons do people have for revising historical events and cultural stories?
  - C. What purpose do stories have in history and culture?
5. How important is the desire for approval and acceptance among young adults? *(Ch. 6)*
  - A. Does this impact Nizhoni's ability to fulfill the hero's journey?
6. When thinking about the hero's journey, what role or roles does Mr. Yazzie fulfill? *(Ch. 7)*
7. Mr. Yazzie briefly mentions the origin story of the Navajo tribe, mentioning the Four Worlds and the First Man and the First Woman. How is this similar to other cultures' origin stories? *(Ch. 7)*
  - A. What cross-cultural connections can be made from origin stories?
8. Mr. Yazzie explains to Nizhoni that being a monsterslayer is her destiny. Do all heroes need to be destined for greatness in order to be a hero? *(Ch. 7)*
9. Nizhoni thinks that if she were to call the police about her dad being kidnapped, they would never believe her because Mr. Charles is wealthy. What does this say about societal values? *(Ch. 10)*
  - A. Is this an accurate depiction of society?
10. Where can foreshadowing be seen in the song from the Diyin Dineé disguised as the cart lady? *(Ch. 16)*
11. Historically, myths and legends have been used within different cultures to explain natural phenomena. What phenomena might this modern telling of the Hero Twins be explaining? *(Ch. 16)*
  - A. What could this modern take on a traditional Navajo story be saying about the modern world and/or society?



12. Many of the holy people in this novel are portrayed as having modern behaviors and mannerisms. How does this impact the perception and significance of these cultural figures? (*Ch. 18*)
- A. Where should the distinction be made between making cultural beliefs and figures more relatable and appropriating traditional stories?
13. After meeting the first guardian, Rock Crystal Boy, Nizhoni makes a mental note to speak more Navajo when she knows the proper words. Why does she want to do this? (*Ch. 18*)
- A. What power does language have?
- B. How is language used to maintain and promote culture?
14. What role or roles do the heralds and guardians fulfill within the hero's journey? (*Ch. 21*)
15. Black Jet Girl tells Nizhoni, "The things that mean the most to us often have the most power." How much personal sacrifice should be expected from an individual in order to preserve or protect their culture? (*Ch. 24*)
16. Davery reminds Nizhoni of a very particular line in the song from the Diyin Dineé that reads, *Four days to find you are not alone*. What is the significance of this line? (*Ch. 27*)
- A. What is the importance of having strong connections with family and friends when thinking about culture?
- B. What is the cultural importance of having a strong connection with ancestors?
17. When Mr. Yazzie airs his frustration over the modern weapons Nizhoni, Mac, and Davery receive from Jóhonaa'í, Jóhonaa'í responds by saying, "We all must change with the times." What else could Jóhonaa'í be talking about with this comment? (*Ch. 38*)
- A. What could this response mean when applied to the past monsterslayers who become freed from the Lost and Found? (*Ch. 39*)

## Post-Reading Activity

Using the hero's journey graphic organizer, fill in the steps of Nizhoni's journey throughout the novel. How does Nizhoni's journey compare or contrast to the typical ideas/images of heroes (such as Harry Potter, Luke Skywalker, Oedipus, etc.)?

Extension: Try to fill in the hero's journey template for Nizhoni's father. In what specific ways do they differ?

### Consider this:

- Do the "helpers" have to be positive figures in the story?
- Is Nizhoni's father a hero? Why or why not?

## Writing Prompts

1. Marginalization means to treat a person, group, or identity as inferior or insignificant. Did anyone in this story experience marginalization? How? Representation is the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone. Why is representation important? How does this novel represent groups or individuals?
  - A. What are the causes of the minimal representation of marginalized groups in fiction?
  - B. What are the possible consequences of only using one story/novel to represent a marginalized group?
2. Throughout the novel, Rebecca Roanhorse weaves traditional Navajo stories with contemporary characters and settings. For example, portraying Nizhoni and Marcus as the most recent generation in a long line of the legendary Hero Twins. Roanhorse also depicts Navajo holy people, such as Spider Woman and Jóhonaa'íí, as having distinctly modern behavior and mannerisms.
  - A. Should authors maintain all aspects of traditional stories, including characters, setting, etc.? How does an author's decision to change elements of the story to be more relatable impact the cultural significance?



## About the Author

**Rebecca Roanhorse** ([www.RebeccaRoanhorse.com](http://www.RebeccaRoanhorse.com)) is a Black Indigenous (Ohkay Owingeh) writer of speculative fiction, including two adult books in the Sixth World series, *Trail of Lightning* and *Storm of Locusts*, and a Nebula- and Hugo-winning short story, “Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience™.” *Race to the Sun* is her middle grade debut. Rebecca, a graduate of Yale, is a lawyer by day who specializes in federal Indian and tribal law. She lives in Northern New Mexico with her Navajo husband and their daughter. Follow her on Twitter @RoanhorseBex.



## Glossary

**Ahéhee'** (ah-HYEH-eh) thank you

**Bináá' yee aghání** (bih-NAAH yee agh-HAH-NEH) the monsters that kill with their eyes

**cheii** (CHAY) grandfather (slang)

**Dibé Nitsaa** (dih-BEH nih-saah) the northernmost Diné sacred mountain

**Diné** (dih-NEH) the People, the name the Navajo call themselves in their language

**Dinétah** (dih-NEH-tah) the traditional homelands of the Diné

**Diyin Dine'é** (dih-yin deh-neh-EH) the Diné Holy People

**Dólii** (DOH-lee) bluebird

**Dook'o'osłiíd** (dook-KOH-oos-CLEED) the westernmost Diné sacred mountain

**hatałii** (hat-tah-CLEE) medicine person

**hogan** (HO-ghan) traditional Diné house

**Jóhonaa'éí** (JOE-ho-nah-AI) the Sun

**k'é** (k-EH) kinship, relatives, family

**łigai** (CLEH-gay) the color white

**łizhin** (CLEH-zhin) the color black

**na'ashjéii** (nah-ush-JEH-ee) spider

**Na'ashjéii Asdzáá** (Nah-ush-JEH-ee as-ZUH) Spider Woman

**na'ashó'ii dich'izhii** (nah-ush-OH-ee dih-CHIH-zhee) horned toad

**Nayéé Neizghani** (Nah-YEEH nez-ghan-nih) Monsterslayer

**Nítch'i** (Ni-CLEH-CHIH-ee) the wind, who provided life to First Man and First Woman and helped the Hero Twins

**Nizhóní** (Nih-JHOH-NIH) beauty

**shicheii** (shih-CHAY) my grandfather

**shimá** (shih-MAH) my mother

**shimásání** (shih-MAH-SAH-NEH) my grandmother

**Sisnaajiní** (Sis-nah-ghin-NEH) the easternmost Diné sacred mountain

**Tsé Bit'a'í** (SAY bih-TAH-ee) Shiprock, the volcanic pillar where the original Monsterslayer imprisoned the bináá' yee aghání

**tsídii** (SIH-dee) bird

**tsiyyéél** (see-YEH) a traditional Diné hair bun

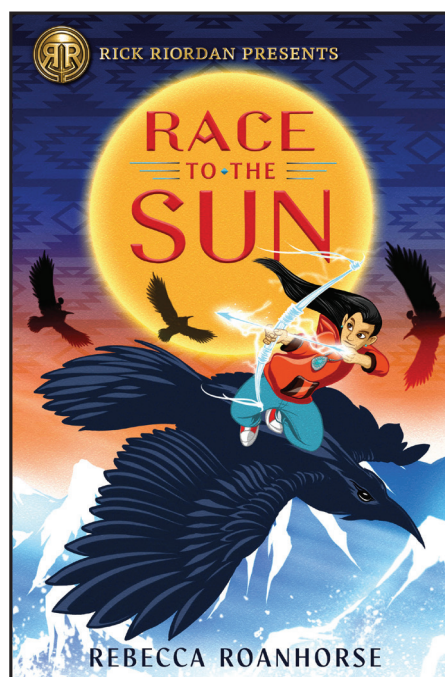
**Tsoodzil** (so-ZEH) the southernmost Diné sacred mountain

**yá'át'ééh** (YAH-AH-TEH) hello



About the guide writer: **Kit Magee** has a bachelor's degree in English education from Colorado State University. She currently teaches freshman English at Fort Morgan High School, working to redesign curriculum to make education representative of diverse students.

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