

STUDY GUIDE

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THE REZ SISTERS

By Tomson Highway



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The Rez Sisters

Study Guide

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The Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre is proud to call Manitoba home. Royal MTC is located in Winnipeg on Treaty 1 land, the traditional territory of the Ininew, Anishinaabe and Dakota peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. We are thankful for the benefits sharing this land has afforded us, and we are committed to the responsibilities of the Treaty. Hiy Hiy, Miigwetch, Wopida and Maarsii.

Playwright Biography

Tomson Highway is a Cree (also called Nehiyaw, Ininew, or other names) musician, author and playwright from Northern Manitoba. He was born on December 6th 1951 on his father's trapline, in a tent on a tiny island in Maria Lake, close to where the borders of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Nunavut meet. His mother was a quiltmaker and his father a champion dogsled racer, trapper, and fisher. They had 12 children; Highway is 11th in the birth order. Highway's early upbringing has been described in idyllic terms: "for the first 6 years of his life he lived an exquisitely beautiful nomadic lifestyle among the lakes and forests of remote northwestern Manitoba, trapping in winter, fishing in summer." Nehiyawewin (the Cree language) was his first language, and he knew only Cree and Dene until he went to school. Highway says he was not comfortably fluent in English until his late teens.



At age 6 he was taken to Guy Hill Indian Residential School near The Pas, Manitoba, 451 kilometers from his home in Barren Lands First Nation at Brochet. He was only allowed to visit his family once a year for the summer. For high school, he was moved to Winnipeg to attend Churchill High School while living in the homes of several different white families for the duration of his city stay.

After graduating in 1970 he studied in Manitoba, England, and Ontario, earning a Bachelor of Music Honours and Bachelor of Arts English degrees from the University of Western Ontario. After graduation he dedicated the better part of a decade to working for Indigenous community-based organizations and traveled all over Canada connecting with all kinds of Indigenous People, "just generally familiarizing himself intimately with the organizational network of Native lives and politics in this country." 7 years into this work he started writing plays, including all their music, and collaborating extensively with his dancer/choreographer brother Rene Highway (1954-1990). His works mix Cree and Ojibway, the worldview illustrated by these related languages, and Indigenous spirituality with real-world issues and relationships from life on the "rez".

Though Highway had written several plays before, *Rez Sisters* and its follow-up *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* are his most well-known and critically acclaimed. Both won the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play. *Rez Sisters* was a major hit across Canada in 1988, and even performed at the Edinburgh International Festival and on Broadway in New York City. Highway has received numerous other awards as well, including the Floy S. Chalmers Canadian Play Award, the Governor General's Award for English-Language Drama, and a Herbert Whittaker-CTCA Award for his contribution to Canadian theatre. He was made a Member, then an Officer of the Order of Canada (first Indigenous playwright), and was on Maclean's Magazine's 1998 list of 100 most important people in Canadian history. Highway has

been writer-in-residence at the Universities of Toronto, Concordia, British Columbia, and Simon Fraser (Kamloops) and has 6 honorary doctorates.

Throughout his career, Highway has been a proponent of Indigenous and LGBTQ2S+ rights, has lectured and traveled extensively, for many years acted as Artistic Director for Native Earth Performing Arts and continues to stage his works and create new ones. He is a best-selling novelist with *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, a fictional account of his life with Rene at residential school and beyond and has written several popular children's books. His work has been translated into 11 languages, and Highway has traveled to 50 different countries. He is a grandfather, and partner for 38 years to Raymond Lalonde. They live in Gatineau, Quebec.

Of his work, Highway says: "I like to convey joy. I want to convey that our primary responsibility on planet Earth is to be joyful: to laugh, and to laugh, and to laugh. ... [T]he way that my native culture works is that it teaches that we're here to laugh, that heaven and hell are both here on Earth and it's our choice to make it one or the other."

A Note on *The Rez Sisters* from Tomson Highway

The number seven has always woven a world of wonders for me, my other magic numbers being three and eleven. I don't know anything about numerology but that's the way it has always worked for me. My mother, for instance, was born on the 11th of January, 1911, making for a perfect series of five ones – 11.1.11. And I am her 11th born of 12, which makes for an even more perfect series of seven one's – 11.1.11.11. And that's just for starters, making for a life – my life – that has been filled with magic from one end to the other. So in a sense, the number chose itself; I didn't – this play is about seven women and their madcap adventure with a game of chance called bingo.

Next, I wanted to write about my mother and her sisters, of whom she had three who survived to adulthood, and half-sisters, of whom she had another three who survived to adulthood (she had brothers as well, of course, but we're talking women here). Her mother having died when she, my mother, was a new bride and mother of eighteen years, her father, my maternal grandfather, Louison Cook, re-married, which is where the three half-sisters come from, the total number of sisters adding up to the magic number – bingo – seven. I wanted to write about my mother – her full name was Pelagie Philomene Highway – because, a) I loved her dearly, may she rest in peace and, b) she was funny; she had a great sense of humour, a colourful, a vibrant character from age one day. She was also the very best mother a man could have, wise and kind and with a taste for the ridiculous which I like to think I have inherited – people find it hard to get anything serious out of me, may I never change.

So then I wanted to write about a completely fictional event called "the biggest bingo in the world" and it had to be placed – or at least I thought so – in the biggest, and wealthiest, city in Canada. Which was Toronto. I lived in Toronto for twenty years with a bout of ten months on an island called Manitoulin which is located a six- hour drive north of Toronto on one of the Great

Lakes, the one called Lake Huron. Brochet, Manitoba in the farthest corner of northwestern Manitoba, the First Nation I come from, is way too far away from Toronto to make a trip to that city realizable – between dogsleds, bush planes, trains, and automobiles, it would take a month to make the trajectory so that didn't work for my storyteller's needs. So I wove a web of fiction where I placed my mother and her sisters on this one First Nation on Manitoulin Island which dazzled me with its great sense of humour, its spiritual energy, and its beauty. Which is how the seven completely fictional sisters that you see in this play come from. And, once started, the fictionalizing process just continued. I love all seven women's stories but the one that most gripped me was the one about Emily and her adventures with a Native women's motorcycle gang based in San Francisco, California who call themselves, "Rose and the Rez Sisters." That's a completely made-up story but it worked for the subject that I wanted to write about which was life on this Earth and a certain magic number that, I believe, we are all born with. And someday, when you least expect it, it will be called...by the Master of the Game. So play it well, my dear friends and colleagues, play it well.

I thank all the kind and fabulously talented people who, all these years since I wrote it (fall 1985) – and there have been many in several countries in several languages – have helped make this play a reality, right down to its original director, the late Larry Lewis, its original Nanabush and choreographer, my late younger brother, Rene Highway, the cast and crew in this production and, of course, the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre for having selected it for its current run.

Plot Summary

Nehiyaw and Anishinaabe sensibilities, language, spirituality, and sacred matriarchy collide with Western theatre story-telling style to explore the frustrations, cooperation, and dreams of 7 Rez Sisters on a remote reserve. Through their experiences as observed by Nanabush, the play sees the women reveal dark parts of themselves as they embark on a spiritual and emotional journey to pursue their dreams, healing, and self-actualization; from their small community, to the big city bingo game, and back.

Full of grit and shadowed by harsh colonial legacies, great humour and love shine through to portray Tomson Highway's Rez Sisters as realistic and distinct personalities, illustrating the lasting persistence of culture, spirituality, and the resilience of kin who pursue making a better world for themselves and others.

Content Overview

This section may contain spoilers!

This production contains strong and crude language, including stigmatizing language against mental illness, as well as mature content: descriptions of domestic violence, sexual assault, and vehicle accident. Alcohol use and addiction are discussed and drinking occurs onstage. Drug use is discussed but not in detail. Some people may be triggered by the depiction of a character with late-stage cancer. Other sexual content is not depicted, but mentioned.

Characters

Pelajia Patchnose: 53 years old; sister of Philomena and half sister of Marie-Adele, Annie Cook, and Emily Dictionary; natural leader; handy and self-sufficient; has sons in Toronto and a husband who works away from home in Espanola; is aware of the problems around her.

Philomena Moosetail: 49 years old; sister to Pelajia and half sister to Marie-Adele, Annie Cook, and Emily Dictionary; used to work in Toronto; cheerful; pragmatic.

Marie-Adele Starblanket: 39 years old; sister of Annie Cook and Emily Dictionary, half sister of Pelajia and Philomena; has 14 children with husband Eugene; has seen Nanabush; undergoing cancer treatments; joins the spirit world.

Annie Cook: 36 years old; sister of Marie-Adele and Emily Dictionary, half sister of Pelajia and Philomena; has a daughter named Ellen; singer; catalyst for the bingo trip; lost Eugene to Marie-Adele.

Emily Dictionary: 32 years old; sister of Marie-Adele and Annie, half sister to Pelajia and Philomena; is hardened; left her abusive marriage; former biker; bi; currently in a quasi relationship with Big Joey.

Veronique St. Pierre: 45 years old; sister-in-law to all the sisters; is a busybody; shows concern for others especially children; is often disliked; has an alcoholic husband.

Zhaboonigan Peterson: 24 years old; adopted daughter of Veronique; developmentally disabled; survived a violent assault; can see and interact with Nanabush.

Nanabush: Omnipresent spiritual figure also known as Trickster; no fixed gender or form (Seagull, Nighthawk, Bingo Master); knows and tries to teach the meaning of life to the women; indicates the revival/persistence of Indigenous spirituality.

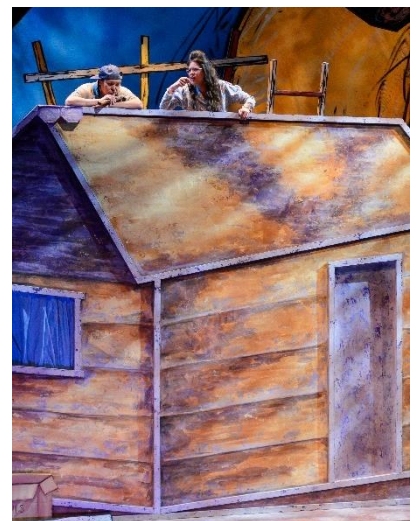
Synopsis

This section contains spoilers.

Setting: Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve (“Wasy”), Manitoulin Island, Ontario, Canada. Late summer, 1986.

Act I

One late August day, up on Pelajia Patchnose’s roof, we meet the first of the seven Rez Sisters. Pelajia is up nailing shingles to her roof, talking with her sister, Philomena Moosetail, who’s over to help. Pelajia’s opening “Philomena. I want to go to Toronto,” reveals her want to escape what feels like a dull life in “plain, dusty, boring old Wasy.” Pelajia laments the loss of Nanabush and Windigo and all the People speaking their own language. “Everyone here’s crazy,” she complains, and goes on about the lack of jobs, the ample drama, and the absence of Nanabush because the people forgot. Especially dissatisfying to Pelajia is the fact there are no paved roads in Wasy. Philomena tells her that Wasy is too much inside her blood and one cannot be rid of the other. Philomena falls off the roof. Pelajia asks her to pass up some nails, since she’s down there.



Patsy Tuba and Stacy Da Silva as Pelajia and Philomena. Set and lighting by Andy Moro, costumes by Jeff Chief. Photo: Dylan Hewlett.

Annie Cook, their half-sister, arrives and the three talk about bingo. They love to play but agree that the pots are too small. Annie leaves to fetch her sister – Philomena and Pelajia’s half-sister – and pick up a package from the post office in the general store. The two remaining sisters commiserate how the bingo games in Wasy “are getting smaller and smaller all the time.”

At Marie-Adele Starblanket’s house, Marie-Adele is throwing stones at Nanabush disguised as a seagull. He’s being a real nuisance to her. When Nanabush tells her “As-tum [Come],” she tells him she can’t fly away: “I have no wings. Yet.” Her conversation is interrupted when her sister-in-law, Veronique St. Pierre, enters. Along with her is Zhaboonigan Peterson, her developmentally disabled adopted daughter. Veronique and Marie-Adele discuss a used car purchased by an acquaintance before moving onto the more serious topic of who will take care Marie-Adele’s fourteen children after she “goes to the hospital” due to her progressing cancer. Eugene (Marie-Adele’s husband and father of the kids) will. The real motive of Veronique’s visit is then revealed - she heard a rumor that “THE BIGGEST BINGO IN THE WORLD” is coming to Toronto and asks Marie-Adele if she wants to play. They scheme about how to get there. Annie arrives, learns of the upcoming bingo game, and all four walk to the post office talking about how they would spend their winnings. Marie-Adele wants to buy an island, idyllic and full of sweet grass, where she can live with her family. Annie hopes to buy a complete country-music record library and record player after winning with her lucky number B14. Veronique imagines herself cooking for everyone over a brand-new stove.

Arriving at the post office in the general store, the women meet Emily Dictionary (Annie and Marie-Adele’s sister, and sister-in-law to Veronique). Emily is an ex-biker and “one tough lady,” who lived in California for years. A few remarks about Emily’s fresh black eye and personal business (like a fight at her boyfriend Big Joey’s house), instigates a violent war of insults revealing their suspicions and jealousies. Emily has become a fighter through an abusive marriage she has left behind, without her children. Zhaboonigan tells Nanabush about a horrible sexual assault perpetrated on her by 2 white boys. Nanabush writhes and contorts as she recounts the harrowing tale she miraculously survived. Inside the store, the fight takes a lot out of Marie-Adele and she collapses. The fight over, Annie opens her parcel and finds a Patsy Cline record. It’s a gift from her daughter Ellen, who is living in Sudbury with a Frenchman named Raymond. Ellen’s letter confirms “THE BIGGEST BINGO IN THE WORLD,” set to take place in Toronto on September 8. Marie-Adele reads a letter from a hospital in Toronto, confirming her appointment for tests on September 10. The women decide to travel to Toronto, play bingo, take Marie-Adele to her tests, and return home. They realize it will take considerable funds they to pull it off. They march to their local Band office to ask the chief for a loan. Nanabush, ever-present and watching, follows, playing tricks all the way. To their disappointment, they are refused.



Company of *The Rez Sisters*. Set and lighting by Andy Moro, costumes by Jeff Chief. Photo: Dylan Hewlett.

Act II

In Pelajia's basement the 7 sisters hold a meeting to discuss how they will fund a trip to Toronto. They decide to use Eugene's van but need \$1,400 to pay for food and expenses. To raise this money, the women undertake a variety of odd jobs. Their endeavours include a bake sale, laundry, babysitting, roof repair, and bottle drive, presented in a long and humorous pantomime sequence. The last few hundred dollars is raised by Annie and Emily singing at the Inn. Finally funded, the women enter the van that they hope will take them to the \$500,000 bingo jackpot.



Waawaate Fobister as Veronique. Set and lighting by Andy Moro, costumes by Jeff Chief. Photo: Dylan Hewlett.

Enroute to Toronto, the women have conversations while others sleep. Philomena reveals that September 8th holds significance for her, since it is the birthday of the baby she had to give up without learning if it was a boy or a girl. She wants to use her winnings to find her grown baby. Pelajia tells her sister that she hopes she wins. Annie tells of dating Fritz, a Jewish country singer whom she hopes will marry her. Suddenly a tire blows out. As the women change the tire, Nanabush, in the form of a nighthawk, attacks Marie-Adele. She has an emotional breakdown at this terrifying omen of her approaching death and begs him for mercy: "Oh no! Me? Not yet. Give me time. Please." Zhaboonigan also sees Nanabush and reacts emotionally. As Philomena calms Marie-Adele and gets her into the van, Marie-Adele confides Eugene's distress over her condition, and the frustration and sadness that leaves her in. Philomena's tender and wise leadership is shown as she kindly explains to her sister "There's only so much Eugene can understand . . . He's only human." Through telling Marie-Adele a story about another ailing couple, Philomena reminds her sister to have faith.

The other sisters complete the tire change and get back into the van. Emily then reveals why she returned to Wasy: the woman she loved, a member of her all-female biker gang, was killed on a San Francisco highway. Suicide by 18-wheeler. Emily begins to cry and is comforted by Marie-Adele. As Marie-Adele drifts to sleep, Emily talks with Zhaboonigan and insults her. Zhaboonigan hits her in the stomach and Emily apologizes for being rude, assures her they are sisters, and gives her a high-five. The stage transforms into the long-awaited bingo game.

The Bingo Master, the "most beautiful man in the world," greets the women and the audience, who also play that first round of bingo. Once the actual big-money game begins, most of the women have terrible luck. Finally, from frustration they rush the grandstand and begin destroying the bingo machine. The stage directions state "[o]ut of this chaos emerges the calm, silent image of Marie-Adele waltzing romantically in the arms of the Bingo Master." The Bingo Master whispers "Bingo" in her ear and changes into the nighthawk. Marie-Adele meets Nanabush and he guides her to the spirit world. Zhaboonigan tries to go with them, but Emily grabs her and keeps her in this world.

The scene returns to Wasy, where the 6 remaining sisters sing a funeral song for Marie-Adele and then talk at the store. Pelajia says her goodbyes, acknowledging that despite their lot in life, Marie-Adele lived hers to the fullest. With a raised hammer, Pelajia promises from now on she'll do the same. Back at the store, Zha is learning to help Emily. Annie and Emily talk about the bum luck they had at the bingo game, except that Philomena won \$600 and built herself the nice bathroom she wanted. Annie has been offered a gig as Fritz the Katz's back up singer for \$25 a week. She asks Emily to come with her that week, Emily agrees and Annie leaves. As a kind of renewal in the face of Marie-Adele's death, Emily announces to Zhaboonigan that she is pregnant, and it's Big Joey's. The audience last sees them here, with Zha excited about Emily's baby, a chance for something good and new for both of them.

Over at Eugene Starblanket's house, Veronique is sitting on the stairs glowing with happiness. She assumes the role of mother to Marie-Adele's children and is seen cooking for them on the departed sister's stove. She is happy to have many people to care for and a working stove to feed them with. Annie comes by and they argue about Annie's new direction in life, because despite her new-found happiness, Veronique just can't help but concern herself with other people's business. Annie moves the play to its final scene, the same place it began: Pelajia's roof. She is still nailing shingles, joking, gossiping, and talking about bingo with Philomena. As Pelajia now considers all of the changes she will work to make on her reserve, ("Pelajia for chief!"), she thinks less of a move to Toronto. Maybe she wouldn't get along too well with her son Tom were she to go live with him there. She also notices there are not so many seagulls flying over the Starblanket house. But Nanabush is there, out of her sight, dancing "merrily and triumphantly" to the new purposeful beat of her hammer.

Context and Related Resources

The Rez Sisters is set on the fictional reserve of Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve, on the real Manitoulin Island, in Ontario, Canada. All 7 female protagonists are First Nations and from this place.

Reserves (and Bingo)

The first reserves in what was to become Canada were established as a means of imposing a sedentary lifestyle on previously semi-nomadic Indigenous peoples to convert them to Catholicism. This early form of care and control snowballed into the total subjugation of hundreds of Nations who previously (for the most part) thrived independently and through complex societal, political, and kinship ties.

An "Indian Reserve¹" is a tract of land set aside by Treaty² agreement, under the Indian Act³, for the exclusive use of an "Indian Band". As Canada's expansion pushed west, Treaties were

¹ The currently correct term for reserves and bands is "First Nation(s)", and for "Indian", "First Nation" and "Indigenous". (Although, "Indian" and "Indigenous" are not exclusive to First Nations People.)

² A written agreement between 2 or more parties and signed by their leaders

³ The Indian Act is the primary law the federal government uses to administer Indian status, local First Nations governments and the management of reserve land.

signed, and more reserves were created. Some reserves were created without bands having signed a treaty. This non-treaty land is called unceded, like part of the actual Manitoulin Island. Regardless of treaty or the absence thereof, the increased rapid settlement of Canada and land theft⁴ began, and policies of assimilation and segregation dominated.

By the 1860's reserves had become an effective and profitable tool for the newly forming Canadian State. By displacing Indigenous families, clans, and communities, community groupings were reconfigured, disrupting the ever-important kinship ties and systems that dictated people's way of life. By forcing First Nations onto reserves it opened up vast areas of land for occupation by European settlers (known as settler colonialism). Canada's reserve system and loss of land use to settler development undermined/s Indigenous Peoples' relationship with their traditional territories. Traditional territory may overlap a reserve, but it's not confined to the reserve. This is largely due to reserves being established far from Peoples' homes on their traditional territory. First Peoples (including Inuit and the Métis) have suffered far reaching consequences to their socio-economic, spiritual, emotional, physical, and cultural health as a result of not having any control over how the Land⁵ is used (or protected) and being prohibited from accessing it.

Tomson Highway has remarked about his play that (due to the effects of colonization), "Reservation life has been marked by this tremendous sense of ... boredom, and certainly economic powerlessness, poverty, unemployment. ... About the only exciting thing that happens with any degree of regularity ... is the weekly or monthly bingo."

From the time this play was staged in 1986 up to today, both reserve and urban Indigenous communities have been working hard to reclaim and hand down cultural practices, spirituality, language and pride and many more young people than before are connected to and openly practicing their culture. Indigenous persistence has seen an increasing force in Canadian politics and society, working towards anti-racism and Indigenous rights. Change has been slow, but it would not be fair to characterize reserve life in only those terms. However, bingo is still a popular and familiar event and pastime for Indigenous peoples both on and off reserve.



Company of *The Rez Sisters* in the bingo scene. Set and lighting by Andy Moro, costumes by Jeff Chief. Photo by Dylan Hewlett.

Related Resource Links: Explore a [global map of treaties](#), read [more about treaties](#) and about [Manitoulin Island](#), and learn more [information about reserves](#). The [full Indian Act](#) is also available online.

⁴ See Bob Joseph's *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act*.

⁵ Land with a capital "L" refers to the Indigenous worldview that Land is a name for a living being, not an object.

Colonization (A Legacy of Violence)

Colonization is the act or process of establishing control over an Indigenous population and the land they occupy. In Canada, establishing political control over the land and people, occupying the land, and exploiting it economically created a system of resource-driven and exploitative settler colonialism. It has shaped the mentality and behaviour of Canadian (Western) culture and society for centuries. It has created our economy and influenced religion, ways of thinking, ways of doing, what we think is “normal”, “beautiful”, “worthy”, “right” and “fair”. It creates biases most people are not aware they have or act on. Everyone’s life is affected by colonialism, but it has inarguably impacted the lives, health, and way of life of Indigenous Peoples to detrimental effect.

Components of settler colonialism in Canada include systemic and institutionalized racism⁶, medical racism⁷, the establishment of the Residential School system that operated for over 160 years, everything in the Indian Act, forced adoption, the 60’s and 70’s Scoop⁸, the child welfare system (also known as the 80’s, 90’s and 2000’s Scoop), gendered forms of violence including the imposition of heteronormativity⁹ and patriarchy¹⁰, general encouragement and enforcement of hegemony (“sameness”), forced assimilation, segregation, and genocide.

The colonial legacy on Indigenous Peoples in Canada includes:

- broken treaties (where they exist);
- loss of ways of life due to forced removal and relocation;
- disengagement from political involvement (due to imposed foreign systems of governance on reserve);
- fractured and lost connections to community, family, spirituality and ceremony (ban on ceremonies);
- loss of language due to residential school, “Scoops”, and the child welfare system (removing children from their families, sometimes from remote communities and placing them in non-Indigenous homes);
- barriers to accessing healthcare, employment, education, housing, transportation, land, and other resources;
- mental and emotional suffering, personal and intergenerational effects of racism, violence, abuse, neglect, and starvation at the hands of church and state (and arguably society-at-large)
- poverty, despair, interpersonal, domestic and gendered violence (MMIGW)

⁶ Refers to how ideas of white superiority are engrained at a systems level and are often expressed through policy that blocks non-white people from accessing goods, services, equal treatment, and opportunities.

⁷ Institutionalized racism in healthcare that affects the quality and quantity of health services. E.g., being ignored to death due to lack of care fueled by racism or abuse of policy.

⁸ Large-scale removal or “scooping” of Indigenous children from their homes and families resulting in further long-term upheaval and disconnection from Land and family.

⁹ Assumes there are only 2 opposite genders and it is natural and normal mode of sexual orientation and behaviour.

¹⁰ Male domination in both public and private spheres, society and government organized around men to the exclusion of everyone else. The dominant ideology of colonial societies.

The play reflects the issues that affect many Indigenous communities and people. Within the individual stories of the sisters, or as part of their dialogue with each other, the mark of colonial reality permeates. Veronique complains of her drunken husband. Emily experienced ten years of domestic violence at the hands of her husband, then escaped only to experience death-by-suicide in a new relationship. Philomena, the most jovial of the group, harbours the deep pain of being used by an older white man with power (her boss), and had to give their baby up when he left her. Although many people have the curse of cancer, such as Marie-Adele, Indigenous health outcomes and lifespan is far lower than the national average. And Pelajia opens the play by voicing her desire to leave: "I want to go to Toronto."

Many people past and present leave their reserves to escape lack of infrastructure and housing, lack of opportunity, and to access healthcare and education. The children of some of the sisters have left the reserve seeking opportunity in cities, and Marie-Adele can only access the care she needs in Toronto, far from her home.

The most poignant nod to colonization in the play, as well as one of its many ground-breaking aspects, is that it talked to the audience about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls before that was a conversation (with a title) as we know it now. The disturbing story Zhaboonigan shares with the audience and Nanabush of her violent sexual assault at the hands of 2 white boys is a direct reference to and symbol of the rape and colonization of this Land and its People. More personally, it uses details from the true story of Helen Betty Osborne of Norway House Cree Nation, a former student of Guy Hill Indian residential School which the playwright attended. Known as "Betty" to her closest friends and family, she was boarding away from home in The Pas to attend high school. She had aspirations of becoming a teacher. In November 1971 she was abducted by 4 young white men who brutally assaulted and murdered her with a screwdriver. It was a horrific and sickening display of colonization manifested as interpersonal violence against Indigenous women. The event and cruel loss of life was met by the RCMP and the Canadian public with disinterest and indifference. Finally in 1987, two of the four originally accused were convicted of her murder. They were arrested just one month before the show opened. Zhaboonigan is the Betty that survived. She is the symbol of survival and resilience of the Land, Indigenous Peoples, Spirituality (through her constant awareness of Nanabush), innocence, and joy.

Related Resource Links: Watch a 25-minute [video from Al-Jazeera about how colonialism has influenced our lives](#), use this [list to examine your biases](#), read about [colonization and its impacts](#), learn about the [purpose and establishment of Residential Schools](#), read an [article about Joyce Echaquan and her death due to medical racism](#), and read a [poem about Helen Betty Osborne](#) by Marilyn Dumont and the [words of Betty's family and friends](#).

Nanabush and Indigenous Spirituality

Nanabush, Nanabozo, Nanabozho, Weesageechak, Trickster: different names for the same genderless spiritual being, shared¹¹ by various Indigenous oral traditions. The Trickster is a central figure in many traditions and is the central figure in yet others. In the foreword of the play Highway offers that Nanabush is “as pivotal and important a figure in the Native world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology.”

Nanabush creates life, protects life, and ushers life into the spirit world. Nanabush’s role is to transmit cultural teachings and traditional knowledge to help human beings live their lives in a good way¹². In order to do that, and as part of the Trickster personality, they can take any form and shapeshift (like from Seagull, to Nighthawk, to Bingo Master), and make mischief and destroy things in order to rebuild them (or get human beings to). Trickster lives and behaves outside of convention and the generally accepted. Trickster can appear as friend, or be terrifying, and in perfect harmony with all these traits and responsibilities, has a fundamental core of humour, care, and joy. As Highway puts it, “The way of Nanabush is the way of joy and laughter.”



Jera Wolfe as Nanabush in seagull form. Set and lighting by Andy Moro; costumes by Jeff Chief. Photo: Dylan Hewlett.

The foreword of the play also states the belief of some that Nanabush left the continent when the colonizers (“whiteman”) came. But in the play, we see Nanabush is there observing all the action, only noticed by Marie-Adele and Zhaboonigan. These 2 can see the physical spirit because their suffering has brought them closer to the spirit world, and the audience sees that Nanabush can feel the People’s suffering as Seagull contorts painfully to the metaphor of colonization in Zhaboonigan’s assault. Although the others do not recognize Nanabush, they still allude to their spirituality with mentions of Windigo¹³, a giant and Bingo Betty who haunts their rez bingo games.

Highway has said that he gave up becoming a concert pianist to bring Nanabush back, and in the Rez Sisters audiences are offered a look at the spirituality of seven women and how this spirituality plays a role in their daily lives.

¹¹ Trickster figures appear in other belief systems around the world like Anansi who originated in West Africa, the Greek Hermes and the Norse Loki, but for this guide the Trickster is as they appear in some Indigenous traditions of Turtle Island (North America).

¹² In a “good way” refers to accomplishing or striving to live by the 7 Teachings, behave in a healthy way, and doing no harm to others.

¹³ A horrifying entity that eats people from Anishinaabe and other various Indigenous cultures.

Language

Language is used to transmit culture, knowledge, worldview, history, identity, ways of knowing, political structures, values, and more. Through the residential School experience tens of thousands of Indigenous children lost the ability to speak their language. With the absence of Indigenous languages goes story as was originally conceived or gifted and intended to be heard and told. Although Indigenous language rights in Canada have been recognized by the government since the Constitution Act of 1982 and were reaffirmed with the Indigenous Languages Act¹⁴ receiving royal assent¹⁵ in 2019, the revitalization of languages has almost solely been at the persistence, and effort of Indigenous communities, language speakers, and youth.

With the colonial effects on Indigenous cultures and languages in mind, it is miraculous that Tomson Highway was able to retain his language and learn new ones. What a gift to audiences to get to experience the Cree and Ojibway¹⁶ worlds in a play that is mostly in English. Highway calls his language the Trickster language, and describes Cree as: “hilarious. When you talk Cree, you laugh constantly. Second, it is visceral, in the sense that bodily functions are discussed openly and casually. Finally, words in Cree have no gender.” This is why it is advantageous to have cross-cultural understanding, and the experience of this play teaches that in different ways. Not only does the audience have a window (the English translation of “Wasaychigan”) into a slice of theatrical rez life, the way the characters express their Cree/Ojibway selves in English is also something worth understanding; both for the play and for real life.

When Rez Sisters came before a prairie audience (most notably Winnipeg at the Manitoba Theatre Centre), the actors were taken aback at the response to their lines in Cree and Ojibway. Many Indigenous people in the audience understood! So, while the fantastical, physical, and the raw provokes understanding from an English only crowd, sounds that had no meaning to them have exceptional significance when in front of Cree speaking relatives¹⁷. Play-goers can enjoy the differences between languages and difference in self-expression and worldview.

Related Resource Links: Watch TED Talks about how [Canada needs thriving Indigenous languages](#) (8 minutes) and [how language shapes the way we think](#) (14 minutes), read this [article about why Indigenous languages matter](#), and explore a [map of Indigenous languages in Canada](#).

¹⁴ In response to Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action numbers 13 to 15.

¹⁵ Royal assent is the method by which a monarch formally approves an act of the legislature.

¹⁶ Cree (Nehiyawewin) and Ojibway (Anishinaabemowin) are from the Algonquin language family.

¹⁷ Through teachings and kinship ties many Indigenous Peoples consider and refer to each other as relatives.

Some Helpful Definitions

These words don't appear in the script, but as you explore related topics further, you might encounter them.

Assimilation: The absorption and integration of people, ideas, or culture into a wider society or culture. Assimilation also means the process of becoming like something. Canada had a policy of forced assimilation on Indigenous societies and the ideology of assimilation is still upheld in Canadian society.

Colonialism: Absorbing a nation by erasing its identity and enforcing policies that destroy the economics of the societies already living in a place. This is how the class system was created. Class creation, classism, racism and sexism are part and parcel of colonialism. They all work together and work to uphold colonialism. Colonialism is also knowledge production (ex. propaganda).

First Nation(s): First Nations is a term used to describe Indigenous Peoples in Canada who are not Métis or Inuit. There are 634 First Nations in Canada, speaking more than 50 distinct languages. First Nations people are original inhabitants of the land that is now Canada, and were the first to encounter sustained European contact, settlement and trade.

Status: "Indian Status" refers to a specific legal identity of an Indigenous person in Canada. "Status Indians" are wards of the Canadian federal government, a paternalistic legal relationship that illustrates the historical imperial notion that Indigenous people are "children" requiring control and direction to bring them into more "civilized" colonial ways of life.

Indigenous: All First Nations, Métis, mixed Indigenous heritage, and Inuit people. Formerly referred to as Indian, Amerindian, Native, and Aboriginal people.

Treaties: An agreement or arrangement made by negotiation. It is also a contract between 2 or more political authorities (such as states or sovereigns) formally signed by representatives duly authorized and usually ratified by the lawmaking authority of the state.

Indian Act: The Indian Act is the principal statute through which the federal government administers Indian Status, local First Nations governments and the management of reserve land and communal monies. It was first introduced in 1876 as a consolidation of previous colonial ordinances that aimed to eradicate First Nation, and by exclusion, other Indigenous cultures in favour of assimilation into Euro-Canadian society. The Indian Act pertains only to First Nations People, not to the Métis or Inuit.

Teaching: Ideas, principals, protocols and knowledge taught by Elders, knowledge keepers, or others who may carry a particular teaching. Teachings can also be learned from the natural and spirit world.

Culture: A social system of meaning and custom that is developed by a group of people to assure its adaptation and survival. These groups are distinguished by a set of unspoken rules that shape values, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviours and communication styles.

Indigenize: To make Indigenous, to come under Indigenous influence

Glossary: Some Vocabulary from the Play

Apple: A derogatory term meaning “Red (Indian) on the outside, white on the inside”.

Awus: Cree for “go away!” Marie-Adele often says this to Nanabush in bird form.

Band Office: The band system was imposed by the *Indian Act* on Indigenous Peoples. A band is governed by an elected chief and council. In this play, the sisters go to the Band Office to ask for money for their trip and are refused.

Cree: The Cree or Nehiyawak (neh-HEE-oh-wuk) in the Cree language, are an Algonquin language group and are the most populous and widely distributed Indigenous peoples in Canada. Cree First Nations occupy territory in the Subarctic region from Alberta to Québec, as well as portions of the Plains region in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. There are groups in Manitoba and Ontario that have a mixed Cree and Ojibway culture and language (known as Oji-Cree). There are also other names different Cree groups call themselves. Nehiyaw/Nehiyawak is commonly used throughout the prairies.

Espanola: a town in northern Ontario that was founded in the 1900s around a pulp and paper mill.

Hex: A magic spell that brings bad luck or trouble; a curse.

Indian: An outdated social term, but still legal term for Indigenous Peoples. Many Indigenous Peoples continue to refer to

themselves as “Indian” (mostly amongst other Indigenous people).

Kapuskasing: A Northern Ontario town, larger than Espanola. It originated in 1914 as a railway station and also has a large paper plant.

Kewpie Doll: Cartoonish dolls based on a “baby cupid.”

Manitoulin Island: An island on Lake Huron in Ontario, the largest freshwater island in the world.

Nanabush: Also called Trickster. A spiritual being, shared by various Indigenous oral traditions. “[A]s pivotal and important a figure in the Native world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology.”

Nishnawbs: A playful name used by some Anishinaabe peoples to refer to themselves.

Ojibway: The Ojibway or Anishinaabeg in the language, are a people of the Algonquin language family in Canada and the United States. they share many traditions with neighbouring Cree people, especially in the north and west of Ontario, and east of Manitoba. Throughout the Anishinaabeg’s vast traditional territory, the People go by many different names.

Patsy Cline: an American singer. She is considered one of the most influential vocalists of the 20th century and was one of the first country music artists to successfully cross over into pop music.

Pot: A large cash prize that can be won in a bingo game.

Reserve: A tract of land set aside by the federal government for the use and occupancy of a First Nations group, created as part of the treaty making process, and governed by the Indian Act. Those groups without treaty were also relocated to reserves. Reserves are meant for the exclusive use of First Nations; however, the Indian Act outlines that First Nations peoples cannot own title to land on reserve, and the Crown can use reserve land for any reason. Only a registered status First Nation person who is an accepted member of that community can live on reserve.

Ricky Skaggs: An American bluegrass and country music singer, and multi-instrumentalist.

Tussle: A vigorous struggle or scuffle; a fight.

Windigo: A supernatural being from oral tradition of Anishinaabe and other Algonquian-speaking Indigenous cultures. Its powers and spelling of the name vary, but it is a horrifying cannibalistic entity.

Wasaychigan: Name of the fictional reserve where the play takes place; Ojibway for “window.”



Patsy Tuba as Pelajia Patchnose on the stained glass window-inspired set. Set and lighting by Andy Moro, costumes by Jeff Chief. Photo: Dylan Hewlett)

Curriculum Connections

Attending Royal MTC's production of *The Rez Sisters* and discussing it, or participating in some of the suggested or similar activities, could fit into the Manitoba Senior Year curricula in several subjects.

Drama/Theatre (Senior Years)

Creating: The learner generates, develops, and communicates ideas for creating drama/theatre.

- DR-CR1: The learner generates ideas from a variety of sources for creating drama/theatre.
- DR-CR2: The learner experiments with, develops, and uses ideas for creating drama/theatre.

Connecting: The learner develops understandings about the significance of the dramatic arts by making connections to various times, places, social groups, and cultures.

- DR-C1: The learner develops understandings about people and practices in the dramatic arts.
- DR-C2: The learner develops understanding about the influence and impact of the dramatic arts.

Responding: The learner uses critical reflection to inform drama/theatre learning and to develop agency and identity.

- DR-R1: The learner generates initial reactions to drama/ theatre experiences.
- DR-R2: The learner critically observes and describes drama/ theatre experiences.
- DR-R3: The learner analyzes and interprets drama/ theatre experiences.
- DR-R4: The learner applies new understandings about drama/ theatre to construct identity and to act in transformative ways.

Dance (Senior Years)

Connecting: The learner develops understandings about the significance of dance by making connections to various times, places, social groups, and cultures.

- DA-C1 The learner develops understandings about people and practices in dance.
- DA-C2 The learner develops understandings about the influence and impact of dance.
- DA-C3 The learner develops understandings about the roles, purposes, and meanings of dance.

Visual Arts (Senior Years)

Creating: The learner generates, develops, and communicates ideas for creating visual art.

- VA-CR1: The learner generates and uses ideas from a variety of sources for creating visual art.
- VA-CR2: The learner develops original artworks, integrating ideas and art elements, principles, and media.

English Language Arts (Senior 1 through 4)

General Learning Outcome 1: Explore thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences.

Express ideas 1.1.1

Consider others' ideas 1.1.2

Experiment with language and forms 1.1.3

Develop understanding 1.2.1

Explain opinions 1.2.2

Combine ideas 1.2.3

General Learning Outcome 2: Comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print, and other media texts.

Experience various texts 2.2.1

Connect self, texts, and culture 2.2.2

Appreciate the artistry of texts 2.2.3

Forms and genres 2.3.1

Experiment with language 2.3.4

General Learning Outcome 3: Manage ideas and information.

Make sense of information 3.2.5

General Learning Outcome 5: Celebrate and build community.

Share and compare responses 5.2.1

Appreciate diversity 5.2.3

Senior 1 Social Studies

Cluster 1: Diversity and Pluralism in Canada

9.1.1 A Profile of Canada

9.1.2 Human Rights

9.1.4 Pluralism and Integration

Senior 2 Social Studies

Cluster 1: Geographic Literacy

S2.1.3 Place and Identity

Grade 11 History of Canada

1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 3.2, 3.3, 5.3

Grade 12 Global Issues

Areas of Inquiry: Poverty, Wealth, & Power; Indigenous Peoples, Global Issues, & Sustainability

Grade 12 Current Topics in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies

Cluster 1: Image and Identity

The Ghosts of History 1.1

From Time Immemorial 1.2

Cluster 2: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Relations with Government

Legislated Discrimination: The Indian Act 2.3

Discussion Questions

(Some inspired by the Stratford Festival Study Guide for *The Rez Sisters*)

Pre-Show

- What is colonialism, and what are its impacts on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada?
- How do you define family and community? What keeps a family and community strong? Why are they important?
- What is spirituality? What is the difference between religion and spirituality? How has religion impacted Indigenous peoples in Canada?
- Who is Nanabush, and what is a trickster? What function do you think the Trickster performs in the world within this play?
- What role does language play in your culture? Why is it important for people to be able to express themselves in their own language? How does language affect how we view the world?
- In the play, each character has a dream. (*Spoilers: Pelajia's dream is to get a paved road on the rez. Philomena's dream is to have a nice porcelain toilet. Marie-Adele's dream is a comfortable, private island home for large family. Annie's dream is an extensive record collection and a record player. Emily's unspoken dream is a new start. Veronique's dream is good stove to cook for people who need it.*) Why are dreams important? Do you think it is better to dream big, or have dreams you know for sure can be attained?

Post-Show

- How is the legacy of colonialism represented in the play and on the Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve?
- What function did comedy have in this play? Would you consider it a comedy, a tragedy, or both? Do you think comedy and humour is a significant part of Indigenous life? How did Tomson Highway show that in his play? Why do you think humour and comedy are important, especially in the context of this play?
- How were spirituality and the character of Nanabush used to propel the story?
- How was the road trip used to further the women's character development and stories?
- What is resilience? What makes someone resilient? How did the women in the play show their resilience? Did they do it in different ways? How?
- This play was written in 1986. How does the play represent gender identity, sexual orientation, diversity and expression? Is it different from how it would be represented today? It is now a different time: does presenting the play now make it a different play than what it was intended to be?
- What impact does this play have on you? What images, words, or feelings are you left with after seeing it? How do you think it impacted Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences when it premiered, and today?

Activities

For discussion or as a writing prompt:

- The 1965 play by Michel Tremblay *Les Belles-soeurs* was an inspiration for Highway's breakthrough play, *The Rez Sisters*, which was first performed in 1986. Read about Tremblay's play here and compare it to *Rez Sisters*.
<https://www.canadiantheatre.com/dict.pl?term=Les%20Belles-soeurs>
- Put yourself in the shoes of one of the characters and write a journal entry as if some time has passed. How are “you” and everyone doing? What has changed? What has stayed the same? What’s going on?
- Spirituality and story-telling are important parts of all Indigenous cultures. Try crafting your own story remembering the 4 P’s: **People, Place, Plot, and Purpose**.
 - People: Figure out who or what you want the subjects of your story to be. Tell your audience or readers more than just what the characters did. We want to know who they are! Human beings find other people very interesting, so try drawing on your own life experiences and incorporate them into your story, or use them to get your story started. (The playwright did this by naming Pelajia after his mother, putting himself in the play as one of her sons in Toronto, and commemorating his lost classmate through Zhaboonigan.)
 - Place: Where are the characters in your story? Where does it take place? Give as much detail about the place as you can. You want to make your audience feel as if they are right there in the story. We connect to stories when we can visualize them, so giving details of the setting will help them do that.
 - Plot: A plot is the main events of your story. There is a saying “show, don’t tell”, that means giving as much detail in your story plot, (and place as was mentioned above), as possible. Keeping things short is *telling* your audience, but when you give lots of rich detail, you are *showing* your audience and weaving a heartier story. You can always take stuff out if you want to when the whole story is done.
 - Purpose: Is your story about a trickster, or a monster, or a person who does incredible things or goes on an incredible journey? Why are they doing what they are doing? What should it be teaching your characters and your audience, or, what feelings do you want your audience to walk away from your story with? Keep that in mind as you create!
- Dream and ambitions – we all have them. Think of one of yours and write about them. Plan possible ways you can achieve your dream or goal.

Artistic license:

- Create a map of the Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve including the major places mentioned in the play like the houses of the characters. Include some spots not mentioned like the rez radio station, and island doc.
- Sketch one of the characters as they are represented in your imagination. Include elements discussed in the play.
- Draw Nanabush as he would have appeared, disguised either as the seagull or the nighthawk.

Act it out:

- Think about the important moments of one of the scenes in the play and act it out. Of course, you do not need to know the lines – write or improvise your own to get the gist, and add your own comedic elements.

Play it out:

- Create a bingo game based on the play. Instead of using numbers and letters, use names and places in the play.

For fun and team building:

- There were some very heavy elements to the play, most of them coming from the women's monologues about their lives and fears. This brought the sisters closer together, and the audience closer to them. Sharing **safe and fun** things about yourself can have a similar effect. Think of something funny, positive, or interesting about yourself that your classmates may not know and share one thing about yourself. Educators go first AND last!

Research for knowledge:

- Research the appearance of the Trickster/Nanabush in Indigenous cultures and compare their depiction in various myths to their appearance in *The Rez Sisters*.
- Find accounts of life on reserves written or as told by the people who live/lived the experience. Compare and contrast these accounts with the depiction of Wasy in *The Rez Sisters*.
- Research the ways death is depicted in various cultures. Compare and contrast these depictions with the Cree perception of death that is presented in *The Rez Sisters*.

Explore More: Recommended Library Reading List

Explore More Nanabush

Nēnapohš āhtahsōkēwinan (Nēnapohš legends), narrated by Saulteaux elders, ed. Margaret Cote. This collection of tales are told first in Saulteaux, the westernmost dialect of the Ojibwe language, and then English. Stories of Nēnapohš recreating the world after being flooded, becoming a wolf, and creating the red willow show both the Trickster and the spirit. 398.208997 NEN 2011

Nanabush series, retold and illustrated by Daphne Odjig. A favourite childhood character of the author, Nanabush uses his powers for both good and evil in these ten short teaching tales. J 398.2 ODJ 2009

Explore More Tomson Highway

Permanent Astonishment. Highway's award-winning memoir begins with his birth in a snowbank as the eleventh of twelve children in a nomadic, caribou-hunting family. Both hilarious and profound, it offers insights into the Cree experience of culture, conquest, and survival. B HIGHWAY 2021.

Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing. The women of a Northern Ontario reservation create an all-female hockey team, much to the annoyance of the men who find it an infringement of their identity. As in *The Rez Sisters*, Nanabush observes and interacts with the characters and the action. 819.254 HIG

Un renard sur glace = Maageesees maskwameek kaapit. Les deux frères cris Joe et Cody racontent des histoires à propos du territoire, les peuples et les coutumes du nord du Manitoba. Pendant que les deux frères pêchent avec maman et papa quand ces chiens aperçoivent un beau renard. ELB M HIGHWAY CRI

Explore More Stories Featuring Indigenous Women

Empire of Wild, Cherie Dimaline. Joan has been searching for her missing husband Victor for over a year when she finally finds him preaching in a revival tent—only he insists he's not Victor, but the Reverend Eugene Wolff. His life, and the life of everyone Joan loves, depends upon her success in reminding the Reverend Wolff who he truly is. FICTION DIMALINE

Monkey Beach, Eden Robinson. After Lisamarie's brother Jimmy mysteriously vanishes at sea, she sets off alone down the Douglas Channel to Monkey Beach, a place known for its Sasquatch sightings, hoping to find any sign of her brother there. A moving story about family infused with humour and darkness. FICTION ROBINSON



There are 1.4 million books, movies, audiobooks, eBooks and more at the Winnipeg Public Library, and all you need to borrow them is your library card. There are 20 locations throughout the city and an online catalogue for requesting items for pick-up at your library of convenience. An e-Library has thousands of eBooks, eAudiobooks and more! All free with your library card. Visit us at Winnipeg.ca/library

Films Exploring Anti-Indigenous Racism in Canada

The following videos unpack events in recent years that exemplify anti-indigenous racism and hope for the future. These all come from the National Film Board playlist “Anti-Racism Films Ages 10+.” Each title is a link to watch the film online.

For Angela This short film portrays the experiences of Rhonda Gordon and her daughter, Angela, when a simple bus ride changes their lives in an unforeseeable way. When they are harassed by three boys, Rhonda finds the courage to take a unique and powerful stance against ignorance and prejudice. What ensues is a dramatic story of racism and empowerment. (24 minutes)

nîpawistamâsowin: We Will Stand Up On August 9, 2016, a young Cree man named Colten Boushie died from a gunshot to the back of his head after entering Gerald Stanley’s rural property with his friends. The jury’s subsequent acquittal of Stanley captured international attention, raising questions about racism embedded within Canada’s legal system and propelling Colten’s family to national and international stages in their pursuit of justice. Sensitively directed by Tasha Hubbard, nîpawistamâsowin: We Will Stand Up weaves a profound narrative encompassing the filmmaker’s own adoption, the stark history of colonialism on the Prairies, and a vision of a future where Indigenous children can live safely on their homelands. (52 minutes)

Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance In July 1990, a dispute over a proposed golf course to be built on Kanien’kéhaka (Mohawk) lands in Oka, Quebec, set the stage for a historic confrontation that would grab international headlines and sear itself into the Canadian consciousness. Director Alanis Obomsawin—at times with a small crew, at times alone—spent 78 days behind Kanien’kéhaka lines filming the armed standoff between protestors, the Quebec police and the Canadian army. Released in 1993, this landmark documentary has been seen around the world, winning over a dozen international awards and making history at the Toronto International Film Festival, where it became the first documentary ever to win the Best Canadian Feature award. Jesse Wente, Director of Canada’s Indigenous Screen Office, has called it a “watershed film in the history of First Peoples cinema.” (2 hours)

Resource Links for Teachers

Manitoba Education and Training has released documents on [Creating Racism-Free Schools through Critical/Courageous Conversations on Race](#) as well as [Residential Schools Resources for Educators](#) which includes books, videos, and more. [Native Land Digital](#) is a website and app that is constantly being updated to reflect Indigenous lands, languages, and treaties. Explore it on your own, or access the [Native Land Education Guide](#) for information about using the site and classroom exercises.

Study Guide Creator Biography

Seraph-Eden Boroditsky is an Indigenous multidisciplinary artist, grassroots organizer, educator, consultant and workshop facilitator of Red River Métis and Ashkenazi descent. In addition to her visual arts practice she is a professional traditional Métis dancer and dance instructor, and the most recent storyteller in a long line of ancestral storytellers. One of her favorite stories to share, passed down by her 4x great grandmother, is almost 250 years old and features Trickster in the form of a raven!

Seraph-Eden studied Native Studies and Sociology at the University of Manitoba, is the creator and workshop facilitator of Guided Conversations Canada (which got its start at Royal MTC) and is the Assistant General Manager of Shakespeare in the Ruins. A few of the most memorable plays she's seen in recent years were *Sense and Sensibility* (a childhood favorite) and Thomson Highway's *Songs in the Key of Cree* at Royal MTC; Darla Contois' *The War Being Waged* at Prairie Theatre Exchange, and Ken Ludwig's *Dear Jack, Dear Louise* at Winnipeg Jewish Theatre.

Seraph, the mother of 2 talented teens, lives in Winnipeg with her partner and children, works hard for her community and the Arts, and hopes to see a day when the effects of colonialism can be corrected and healed in radical and tangible ways.



Renata Meconse as Marie-Adele Starblanket, Ashley Cook as Zhaboonigan Peterson, and Kelsey Kanatan Wavey as Emily Dictionary. Set and lighting by Andy Moro, costumes by Jeff Chief. Photo: Dylan Hewlett.

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Theatre Etiquette

Arrive Early: Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. Please make sure you give yourself enough time to find your seat before the performance starts.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Please **turn off** your cell phones/iPods/gaming systems/cameras/smart watches. Texting, surfing, and gaming during performances is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. Using cameras and recording devices during a performance is never allowed.

Talking During the Performance: Even when you whisper, you can be heard by the actors onstage and the audience around you. Unless you are at a relaxed performance, disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait until after the performance to share your words with others.

Food/Drinks: Food and outside drinks are not allowed in the theatre. When there is an intermission, snacks and drinks may be available for purchase. There is complimentary water in the lobby.

Dress: There is no dress code at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, but we respectfully ask you not to wear hats in the theatre. We also strive to be a scent-free environment and thank all patrons for their cooperation.

Leaving During the Performance: If an audience member leaves the theatre during a performance, they will be readmitted at the discretion of Front of House staff. If they are readmitted, they will not be ushered back to their original seat, but placed in an empty seat at the back of the auditorium.

Being Asked to Leave: The theatre staff has, and will exercise, the right to ask any member of the audience to leave if that person is being disruptive. Inappropriate and disruptive behaviour includes, but is not limited to: talking, using electronic devices, cameras, laser pointers, or other devices that produce light or sound, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.).

Enjoy the show: Laugh, applaud, cheer and respond to the performance appropriately. Make sure to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause during the curtain call.