

ENRICHMENT GUIDE

The Secret to Good Tea

By
Rosanna
Deerchild



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The Secret to Good Tea

Enrichment Guide

Created & Compiled by Seraph-Eden Boroditsky
Editing and resource compilation by Ksenia Broda-Milian for Royal MTC

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The Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre is proud to call Manitoba home. Royal MTC is located in Winnipeg on Treaty 1 territory, the lands of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples, and the National Homeland of the Red River Métis. We are thankful for the benefits sharing this land has afforded us, acknowledge the responsibilities of the Treaties, and embrace the opportunity to partner with Indigenous communities in the spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

The Role of the Audience

Theatre needs its audience! We are happy to have you here. Every staff person, actor, and crew member backstage plays an important part in your experience, and you also have a role in the experience of cast, crew and the people around you.

Arrive Early: Please make sure you give yourself enough time to find your seat before the performance starts. Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. We ask schools and other groups to arrive at least 20-30 minutes before the show.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Please **turn off** your cell phone/mp3 player /gaming system/camera/smart watch. 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 performers and people around you. Unless it is 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 MTC, but we respectfully ask you not to wear hats in the theatre. We strive to be a scent-free environment and thank all patrons for their cooperation.

Leaving During the Performance: If you leave the theatre during a performance, you will be readmitted at the discretion of Front of House staff. If readmitted, you may be placed in an empty seat at the back of the auditorium instead of your original seat.

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 inappropriate or disruptive including (but not limited to): talking, using devices that produce light or sound, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.).

Talkbacks: A short question and answer period with the actors takes place after student matinees, first Tuesday evening shows, and some public matinees. While watching the show, make a mental note of questions to ask the actors about the production or life in the theatre. Our artists deserve to be treated with respect! It's okay to have a negative opinion, but this is your chance to ask questions and understand the performance or process, not to criticize. If you have a concern, see the house manager after the show and they will make sure your feedback gets to the appropriate Royal MTC staff.

Enjoy the show: Laugh, cry, gasp – responding to the performance is part of the nature of theatre! As you get involved in the story, try to balance your reactions with respecting the people around you. The curtain call is part of the performance too – it gives you a chance to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause, and for them to thank you for your attention. We all appreciate when you stay at your seat and join in the applause!

Playwright Biography



Rosanna Deerchild (She/Her) is a Cree storyteller, journalist, broadcaster, activist, and award-winning poet. She is from the northern community of O-Pipon-Na-Piwan Cree Nation, Manitoba (formerly known as South Indian Lake) in what is now Treaty 5 territory.

When she was two years old, she moved with her mother and 5 siblings to Thompson Manitoba. While growing up, Deerchild faced alcoholism and an abusive stepfather at home and dealt with racism-fueled bullying in school. Salvation for her was found at the library, where she discovered Mohawk writer E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake) through her

book of poetry, *Flint and Feather: Collected Verse*. Drawing on the inspiration she found in this writing and writer, Deerchild wondered if she could write like that and started filling journals with poetry. Deerchild says her "... heart belongs to poetry. It is my ceremony, my prayer, my drum song. It is how I told my mother's residential school survivor story and how I shared my story of growing up Indigenous in Canada."

Deerchild's mother Edna Ferguson is a Residential School survivor who lost both of her parents by the age of five. Until then Ferguson lived on the Land with her family. After losing her parents, she was sent to residential school, and attended three of them from the ages of five to fourteen. The mistreatment she suffered throughout her life, and the confusion and sadness it caused her, informed the early life her children were to live. It was only in her late teens that Deerchild learned her mother had attended residential school. At the time, Deerchild did not even know what residential school was despite it having a huge impact on her childhood and community. Eventually she came to consider her home life "unbearable" and left while still a teen. She slept on friend's couches and developed an alcohol dependency. She found herself kicked out of school and struggled with finding her way in life. While in a cleaning job Deerchild asked herself "do you really want to clean toilets for the rest of your life?" She answered herself by going back to finish school, then taking Communications in college, and carved out a space for herself in journalism and broadcasting. While working in the industry early on, she was told she would not be allowed to cover stories about Indigenous peoples and so helped start the APTN (Aboriginal Peoples Television Network) National News. It was the first news broadcast by, for, and about Indigenous peoples in the world.

As a writer Deerchild's work is heartfelt, deep, and well-received. Her literary debut, a full-length collection of poetry called *this is a small northern town*, is about a Cree girl

finding comfort and escape from a racially divided town, a family dealing with it's past, and what it means to be from the north. It won the 2009 Aqua Books Lansdowne Prize for Poetry. Her second book *calling down the sky* is a collaborative work with her mother to tell her survivor's story of Indian Residential School. It was shortlisted for the League of Canadian Poets' Pat Lowther Memorial Award, the Manitoba Book Award, and the McNally Robinson Book of the Year Award. Her poetry has appeared in literary magazines and her work has been anthologized in *Post-prairie: An Anthology of New Poetry* (Talonbooks, 2005), *Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival* (Sumach Press, 2003), and *#NotYourPrincess* (Annick Press, 2017), as well as numerous other publications.

Deerchild is a veteran broadcaster having worked at APTN, CBC, Global and NCI-FM, where she hosted *All My Relations*. She has hosted *The (204)* and the *Weekend Morning Show* on CBC Radio One and appeared on CBC Radio's *DNTO*. Currently, and for 7 seasons past, she has hosted CBC Radio's popular show *Unreserved*, a radio space for Indigenous community, culture, and conversation, and is the creator and host of CBC Books podcast *This Place*. It is based on a ground-breaking graphic novel anthology entitled *This Place: 150 Years Retold*. The podcast, like the book, explores 150 years of Indigenous resistance and resilience which live outside of and beyond the national story that has been taught.

Deerchild is a co-founder and member of the Indigenous Writers Collective of Manitoba, founded in 1999, and has also contributed to numerous Indigenous newspapers. *The Secret to Good Tea*, created in her time with Royal MTC's Pimootayowin Creators Circle, is her first play, and she is writing her third collection of poetry. Rosanna, a mother of two, now lives and works in her found home of Winnipeg.

Related Resource Links: Hear more from Rosanna on [CBC's Unreserved](#), the radio space for Indigenous voices. [Read about E. Pauline Johnson](#) who inspired Rosanna, and [see a video of Rosanna and a fellow poet visiting Johnson's home](#).

Journey to the Stage

By Kim Wheeler, MTC Community Coordinator and Rosanna Deerchild's "bestie"

When Rosanna Deerchild first sat down with her mom, Edna Ferguson, to talk about her residential school experience, Rosanna didn't think these conversations would turn into a poetry book, and eventually become a play called *The Secret to Good Tea*.

Her play began as a book of poetry called "calling down the sky." Rosanna says it came from about five years of listening to her mother's painful memories and then turning that pain into poetry.

"*The Secret to Good Tea* honours that journey and her strength as a survivor. But it's also a larger conversation about intergenerational trauma and healing while asking the question 'who is responsible for reconciliation?'" said Rosanna.

Residential schools have not always been at the top of conversation amongst families. In fact, for many years and decades, they were kept quiet – secret even. The pain of the experience the survivors went through was not dealt with and we have all seen the outcome of the trauma Indigenous communities have faced.

A journalist and broadcaster by trade, Rosanna is the host of CBC Radio's *Unreserved*, now in its ninth season. She was asked to take part in the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre's first-ever Pimootayowin (an Anishinaabemowin word meaning 'journey') Creators Circle. It brought together six artists already established in their own artistic practice but new to playwriting.

"I was outside my comfort zone and was really unsure if I was going to be able to do it. But as happens in Indigenous community, it wasn't long before everyone was laughing and fear was replaced with connection. All the participants were so supportive and constructive and had at least a thousand and one stories to tell about our communities, peoples and histories," said Rosanna.

Participants of the first incarnation included: Lynette Bonin, Jim Compton, Dave McLeod Kathleen MacLean, and Tracey Nepinak – the latter two who are in *The Secret to Good Tea* as Gwynn and Maggie.

"I want people to see Maggie Mooswa and Gwynn Starr [main character], to recognize them and understand them," said Rosanna.

While she has never written for the stage before, Rosanna does know one thing – the power of story. "Story comes in many forms, and we should never limit how we tell our stories" she said.

Having said that though, Rosanna admits at first, she was slightly terrified to be writing a play. When she agreed to be a part of Pimootayowin, she didn't think she had to write a full play. She thought they would be writing scenes, learning about the playwriting process, and creating together.

“Ian Ross guided us with the patience of a Jedi Knight, the humour of a favourite uncle and the wisdom of a true-hearted storyteller.”

Like most storytellers, Rosanna was inspired by real life people. Maggie is obviously based on her mother, who she lovingly refers to as Mommy in real life. Gwynn is based on herself, and the role of the best friend is a composite of a few people – who shall remain nameless to protect the guilty.

But what does Mommy think of the play?

“Being a 77-year-old Cree woman, she doesn't quite understand what a big deal a stage play means, so, I look forward to seeing it on the Royal MTC mainstage with her.”

It is without a doubt that Rosanna is a gifted storyteller, whether that is through poetry, spoken word, or her radio show. Even though her very first play is just gearing up, Rosanna is already thinking about what's next for the stage.

“Recently, I was visited by Coyote who was telling me about a plane trip he took up north. Seems the government wanted to dig around on some Indian land up that way. Crow, being very busy these days, asked Coyote instead, who really had no business flying anywhere. Anyways, he ends up on this plane with two Crown bureaucrats, a hungover pilot, a feuding couple, and a single mom with her nine-year-old son who won't stop playing the damn flute. Hop a ride on Coyote Air.”

Related Resource Links: [Read or listen to Rosanna speak about *calling down the sky*](#) and [hear Rosanna and her mother tell their story](#) from CBC radio; [watch her open up about telling her writing process on *The Exhibitionists*](#); and read her [address about the importance of storytelling](#). Read an [overview and excerpts of *calling down the sky*](#) from Prairie Fire magazine.

Content Overview

This section may contain spoilers.

Some strong language. Mature content includes alcohol use, and unflinching though not graphic discussion of the horrors of the residential school system including separating children from parents, death of children, and sexual assault.

Setting

Off-reserve in an urban setting, Manitoba, circa 2008/2009. At this time the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was traveling across Canada to facilitate gatherings where Indian Residential School survivors could tell and have documented their stories (2008-2014).

Characters

Maggie (Margaret) Mooswa: Mid to late 60's; Residential School survivor; mother of Gwynn Starr and John Joseph (JJ); widow; uses humour to veil emotions and secrets; loves classic country; avid bingo player; religious.

Gwynn Starr: Mid to late 30's, Maggie's daughter; loving mother to 9-year-old Ruby and 7-year-old Lucy; recently separated from husband Michael; well put together appearance; radio broadcaster; serious and responsible; uses sarcasm as a defense.

Michael: Mid to late 30's; recently separated from Gwynn; father to Ruby and Lucy; lawyer; self-centred and ambitious; former musician who still plays guitar when no one is watching.

Nicki: Mid to late 30's; Two-Spirit; Gwynn's best friend of over 12 years; straight talker; national newspaper reporter.

Mr. BigChief: 45 - 50 years old; station manager of MAD-NDN FM and Gwynn's boss; loud and overbearing, but cares.

Plot Summary

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hosted sharing circles nation-wide for Indian Residential School (IRS) survivors to share and record their experiences, it generated a national interest and recognition of the residential school experience for the first time in Canadian history. Prompted by this new phenomenon, radio host Gwynn wants to capture her mother's topical story of her time at Guy Hill Residential School in Northern Manitoba for her radio program. After many attempts over tea to get her reluctant mother Maggie to share her story, Maggie and Gwynn embark on what is to become their family's much-needed healing journey.

The Secret to Good Tea is a beautiful and simple story that shows the complicated family relationships born from parents' surviving the atrocities of residential school, and their children that are formed by the aftermath (intergenerational trauma). Through concise language, lyrical dialogue, bits of humour, and poignant pieces of poetry in both English and Cree, the story of a daughter seeking to uncover and understand her mother's life-kept-secret is lovingly and realistically told. This hushed history has affected their family for decades and as Maggie suffers nightmares and the fear of confronting what has happened to her and all she's lost, Gwynn confronts what has kept her mother a near stranger her entire life.

With an ever-present resilience, mutual love, and a want to do better than they've done before, harsh colonial realities are faced, nightmares turn to new dreams and possibilities, and a family is reborn. None of them will be lonely again, and subsequent generations will know peace while the words "I love you" flow freely and frequently.

Synopsis

This section contains spoilers.

This production is a world premiere, which means that changes to the script happen throughout the season and rehearsal process. At the time of posting, this synopsis is accurate to the current version of the script, but there may be minor changes between what is written here and what is depicted onstage. We will do our best to update the synopsis and re-post new versions of the Guide as needed. Thank you for your understanding!

Act I

In a small, simple, neat apartment kitchen we meet the matriarch of the Mooswa (Starr) family, Maggie. She has bannock and the fixings for tea out. A lover of classic country, she is listening to George Jones on the radio and softly sings along while pouring boiling water from her kettle into the teapot.

As Maggie sings the hurting song's line "He stopped loving her today...", she stops to address her own deceased husband, also named George, saying "You're a geepootz for leaving me like that!". She relates to the old music with her own sorrows and "tells" George Jones that he sings "the sadness in our hearts." While lamenting to both Georges, there is a knock, and her daughter Gwynn Starr enters. Over tea, Maggie tells Gwynn that her hearing aid is broken, and that her arthritis is bad. Gwynn shows obvious care for her mother and offers to help in various ways. When she suggests Maggie try CBD oil for pain, they squabble a bit. Maggie considers that taking drugs. The conversation then turns to the recent separation with Gwynn's lawyer husband, Michael, due to his infidelity. Here the audience also learns they have two young

daughters, Ruby, and Lucy. Mother and daughter disagree over Gwynn's course of action at the betrayal. Tensions rise more when talking about Gwynn's own father, George. She refers to him only as "father", resenting that he was abusive towards Maggie. Maggie doesn't understand the resentment since George never hit Gwynn and provided the necessities of life to their family. Gwynn states "I refuse to accept that as a baseline for a successful relationship." There is more than a hint of understandable bitterness in Gwynn's side of the conversation.

Gwynn changes the subject, and Maggie reports experiencing nightmares about her time at school: "the past won't let me go, eh." Gwynn reminds her about an upcoming healing gathering for the survivors of Guy Hill School at Clearwater, the residential school Maggie attended. Gwynn wants to do a documentary about the gathering and is going to attend with her daughters. She asks Maggie to join them to tell her story, but Maggie wants no part of it. It's not something people talked about before, and she doesn't want to start now after 50 years.

Later, Gwynn is texting with her best friend Nicki, a newspaper reporter. She is working on a story for her paper about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action. They agree that it's understandably hard for Maggie. No one cared about survivors for such a long time, and now everyone wants to know about the trauma. Gwynn is not sure where she herself is situated in this moment-in-time.

Back at Maggie's apartment she is saying her prayers before bed. She expresses her love for her family, living and deceased, wanting God to watch over the ones still here and struggling, and to say hello to her parents, sisters, and George for her on the other side. She asks for forgiveness for her shortcomings, relief from her arthritic pain, to finally win at bingo, and begs that Gwynn gets off the issue of attending the gathering. Throughout this conversation with God, she braids and re braids her long hair. After going to sleep she is menaced by a big, black crow that has been visiting her dreams for 50 years. She yells at the crow that it has taken everything from her, "... My hair. My home. Even my mother and father. What more do you want?" To her this crow is school, nuns, priests, loneliness, pain, and suffering. She wakes from her nightmare breathing hard.

Back at Gwynn's house, Michael has shown up 2 hours late to pick up their daughters. Stood up, the girls have gone out visiting with Auntie Nicki. With the parents alone, the audience gets to see that Michael's cheating is not the only issue between them. Although seemingly apologetic, Michael tells Gwynn that he feels like she treated him as an enemy during their marriage and that she wanted to prove that he would hurt her like her dad did. He insists he is not her dad, and she is not her mother. Gwynn points out that Michael's ambition makes him self-involved and not a good partner. Michael

wants back into their lives. Gwynn is not interested, stating that he is right: "I'm not my mother. I'm not nearly as forgiving."

Later we see Gwynn at work at the radio station MAD-NDN FM. Her show, Achimowina (Cree for "stories"), has been doing a series sharing residential school survivor stories. She announces to her audience that the following week on air she will be interviewing the head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Justice Murray Sinclair about their 94 Calls to Action. As she signs off, her boss Mr. BigChief appears and excitedly, rather insensitively, tells her that the audience is loving the series. He tells her that the next episode which will feature her mother should have an accompanying picture for their website. She finds his suggestion of a dreamcatcher background for the picture obnoxious and here she breaks it to him that her mother has not yet agreed and may never agree to share her story. Mr. BigChief insists that they need her mother and Gwynn needs to secure that interview or it's a "no go". "You got a lot of potential kid, don't blow it!" Gwynn is insulted.

Back at Maggie's apartment, she shares with Gwynn her thoughts about the Red Rose tea they always drink. It is not her favourite tea, but she loves it because of what it represents. The old days. The good days. It represents the ceremony in visiting, community, togetherness, sharing, and storytelling. "That's why it's sacred. This tea. It's medicine." This sweet anecdote sparks a memory in Gwynn that her mother used to collect the little figurines that came with the tea. Her mother, who never showed much affection or told her children she loved them, would let Gwynn carefully play with them while braiding her hair. When Gwynn reminds her mother that "father" destroyed them while drinking, Gwynn feels again the unhappiness in her childhood. Though her mother mentions she quit drinking while Gwynn was a child and her father eventually did too, the damage to Gwynn as the audience sees it, had been done. Will Maggie come to the gathering with them? Gwynn asks. Maggie angrily refuses. That night after asking God for forgiveness again, Maggie dreams of the crow. This time Gwynn is with the crow which upsets Maggie tremendously.

Act II

In Maggie's kitchen while she talks to herself about her life before residential school, the gathering, Gwynn, and the bannock she's making, Michael shows up at her door. He wants advice from his mother-in-law about how to repair his family. She talks to him about her family and Gwynn's childhood and that even though they quit drinking when Gwynn was a child, the hurt her father caused her never left her. Michael is afraid the same thing will happen with him. Maggie's advice is to do something before Gwynn's heart shuts him out for good. He doesn't know how. Maggie tells him he must earn it. Sometime later Nicki and Gwynn are hanging out at Gwynn's after putting the children to bed. They talk about what is going on in Gwynn's life and how residential school has affected everyone around them. Nicki shares that her homophobic uncles would make

dark jokes about priests while playing hockey behind the house, and that a particular priest at their school was inappropriate with the hockey boys. When they would drink, they would hurl homophobic insults at Nicki, and act the next day like nothing happened. She says that she could see the hurt little boys in their eyes. Gwynn shares that she always wondered why her parents would get drunk and fight on Friday nights, but go to church every Sunday, or why their house had to be spotless, or why they never said I love you or gave encouragement. Nicki offers "I'm not saying it's right. How they dealt with it. But we got to start somewhere. We have to stop hurting - to stop hurting."

Michael then shows up at Gwynn's and Nicki leaves. They argue for a bit, but Michael reminds her that his parents were products of residential schools too and didn't live long enough for any apologies. He wants to go with them to the gathering at Clearwater Lake be there for his daughters as they hear the stories, and to be there for Gwynn because he still loves her. They hope if Maggie knows the whole family unit is going, she will want to go with them.

Again we see Maggie in bed, this time dreaming of herself at school, her long hair cut off, alone, crying for her mama and papa. The crow appears in Maggie's bedroom and calls for her with the name her parents used for her: Apasisis, meaning little one. Maggie recognizes the crow is her mother and tells her she is lost. Mama has been trying to find her and tells her that she has to stop running and must go back in order to finally come home. Maggie wakes and calls Gwynn on the phone.

On a day soon after the last dream, Gwynn and Maggie are driving out to the gathering. Maggie decided she could go on that journey. Michael has taken the little girls in his car to give the mother and daughter time to talk. Maggie finally shares her story with Gwynn, and ends it with telling her that the old people said they could hear all the mothers crying at night after their children were stolen, and that's when the drinking started. Every year fewer and fewer children would come home to visit and the ones who made it back were empty skins with broken bones, broken English, and broken spirits. Gwynn has deep empathy for this and says if she knew her mother's story she would have understood better. She was confused and lonely growing up, because while her and her brother always had clean clothes, and a clean house and food to eat, and birthday cakes, they were never told "I love you" or hugged, or kissed, or encouraged. She felt her mother was a stranger to her. Maggie tells her that she was a stranger to herself too. Little Gwynn wanted to know why her mother didn't love her, and what she did wrong. At this Maggie tells her that of course she was loved, but she couldn't say it, because she had never heard it herself. Maggie tells her daughter "I guess I hoped you saw it in all the things I did. Fold up in your clothes. Taste in your food. Feel in your braids. Guinevere. You're my light, my baby girl. My north star, guiding me home."

At the gathering, Michael tries to build a fire while the girls are off playing with other kids. Gwynn walks up, takes over fire making, and they banter, but there is no anger in it this time. Michael thanks Gwynn for allowing him to accompany them. Just then Mr. BigChief shows up on site. Nicki had caught him poking around Gwynn's house and so she drove him up to the gathering to see Gwynn. Before leaving town, Gwynn quit her job with the station after being told that she had better get the interview with her mother. Mr. BigChief insists he fired her but needs her to come back. At this point Maggie recognizes Mr. BigChief as the son of a schoolmate of hers and calls him "Littlechief" since his father is "BigChief". This cheek cuts him down to size a bit and Maggie and Nicki suggest that Gwynn may want to come back for a "big-ass raise". "The biggest ass!" Maggie says.

Finally, it's time for Maggie to share her story publicly. She sits in a tipi, a smudge bowl burning beside her, and speaks. "My name is Margaret Mooswa." And she tells her whole story. When she finishes, she asks with suggestion "What will you do with my story?" As she walks out, the crow – her mother – wearing braids and regalia dances behind her beautiful, brave daughter.

Gwynn sits with her mother amongst the remaining rubble of the school. Maggie holds a brick from the school in her hand and tells her girl more. There is a lot to tell. She thanks Gwynn for bringing her back so she could tell her stories and reconnect with a classmate she intends to take to bingo. She apologizes to Gwynn for not being the mother she needed. She assures Gwynn, "But I'm here now." Maggie remembers the colour of the bricks, and remembers the pain, and puts that brick down like many of the stories she told that day. "They" - this place, the school, those people - can keep it. Gwynn and her dear mother walk arm in arm, away from that place and towards each other.

Context and Related Resources

The Secret to Good Tea centers on an Indigenous family living in an urban (off-reserve) setting in the late 2000's who have been deeply affected by their matriarch's forced attendance at the Guy Hill Indian Residential School. That past is faced when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's journey across Canada to give survivors a chance to tell their stories and expose the truth comes to Guy Hill School. These public events gave survivors and their families the space to speak and be heard. At the same time, it was to compel non-Indigenous Canadians to shift the colonial narrative of (Euro-)Canadian superiority and confront their role and complacency in Indian Residential School history and ongoing colonialism.

Related Resource Links: The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation has a [brief entry on Guy Hill](#) and in the third part of a series of articles for Media Indigena, Jane Glennon writes about [her time at Guy Hill](#). In 2015, CTV news reported on [Manitoban survivors' reactions to the TRC report](#).

Indian Residential Schools

*Residential schools*¹ or *Indian Residential Schools* (IRS) refers to the long-running and extensive school system specifically set up by the Canadian government, overseen and operated by various denominations² of churches. More than 150 000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were removed from their homes and families to attend these boarding schools that were often very far away from their communities. The first church-run residential school for Indigenous children was opened in 1831. By the 1880's the Canadian government had begun to establish residential schools across the country as part of their assimilation³ policies. In 1920, as outlined in the *Indian Act*⁴, attendance at Indian Residential Schools was mandatory for Treaty-status children between the ages of seven to fifteen years old, although children as young as four years old attended. Many Métis and Inuit children were also forced to attend these schools for various reasons. While the vast majority of schools were boarding schools, some were day schools (meaning all children only attended by day) or had some students that only attended by day. Regardless of a child's individual situation, most students did not have a positive experience at these schools.

¹ "Boarding" school like "residential" school means students are living in dorm accommodations at the school they attend.

² A recognized independent branch of the Christian Church i.e. Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, etc.

³ Refers to cultural assimilation, the process in which a minority or oppressed group or culture comes to resemble the majority or oppressing group's culture through values, beliefs, and behaviors.

⁴ A section of Canada's Constitution Act added in 1867 which gives the federal government exclusive authority over "Indians and Lands Reserved for Indians."

To the Canadian public who were or became aware of residential schools it seemed that they were required institutions set up to educate Indigenous children, but many former students reported not having obtained an adequate education. Many spent a decade or more at residential school and left without basic and necessary skills like how to read and write. From many quotes of politicians of the day (1800s-1900s), and the evident lack of education obtained, it is evident these schools existed to further the Canadian colonial agenda of land and resource theft and accumulation. Things like forced attendance at residential school broke family and community bonds; robbed children of being raised by their parents and parents of the experience raising their children; immersed children and communities in foreign religious and racist ideologies, exerted fear and control; and increased the likelihood that people would leave their reserves and not fight to keep their land. These and many other tactics as outlined in Canadian legislation controlled and excluded Indigenous peoples from participation in the Canadian economy and society, and historically made it almost impossible to negotiate their human rights.

Related Resource Links: for history and background: learn about the purpose and establishment of Residential Schools in [this introductory article](#), in-depth [exploration in the Indigenous Peoples Atlas](#), and this [detailed overview document](#), follow [a timeline of their presence](#) in Canada, and discover [videos about their legacy](#) embedded in this article from the Canadian Museum of Human Rights.

For artifact-based learning, [interact with the Witness Blanket](#), a large-scale art piece that is presented online where you can find items and stories accompanied by voices of survivors, and watch [a documentary about its creation](#) (86 minutes); and see another [art piece focused on the Métis experience](#) at the Mural Mosaic. These websites also include educational guides and resources specific to the art pieces.

CBC has compiled a [list of songs](#) in which Indigenous artists have documented the history of residential schools.

Truth and Reconciliation (and the TRC's 94 Calls to Action)

The word "Reconciliation" means to restore relationships to compatible and friendly. When Europeans first came to what is now called Canada, they generally enjoyed a friendly relationship with Indigenous peoples. (Not always, but for the most part). Long before European contact, Indigenous nations had autonomous⁵ control over their territories, resources, political leadership and social organizations, traditions, culture, and self-expression and could not foresee that with these visitors to their Lands that that would change. Fast-forward to 1869 when the new Canadian government imposed a foreign, European-style election system on First Nations people. When the Indian Act was passed in 1876, the Canadian government took complete control of Indigenous

⁵ Is independent with the freedom to govern one's own affairs.

lands and life and Indigenous autonomy within Canada was systematically destroyed under the threat of force. Over many decades up to that point and since, that once friendly relationship was also destroyed. One of the major ways that happened was through the kidnapping of children to force attendance at Indian Residential Schools.

In 2006 the Supreme Court of Canada issued the *Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement*, which was an agreement that ended years of litigation⁶ between 86 000 Indigenous people who had attended residential schools. In response to survivors' calls for justice and healing, Canada launched the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* headed by Justice Murray Sinclair. The commission brought to light, via first-hand accounts, the legacy of multigenerational colonial violence inflicted on Residential School Survivors (and by extension, highlighted systemic injustice and racism towards all Indigenous peoples), and brought the truth to Canadians so they could start making change. For over half a decade the TRC did this by:

- Hearing testimony from residential schools Survivors within the Indigenous, Métis, and Inuit communities
- Compiling a detailed and accurate report on the atrocities committed and the intergenerational effects of the system
- Recommending far-reaching policy changes and fostering comprehensive educational programs to prevent such atrocities from ever happening again

From this work the [TRC released its Final Report](#) in 2015, outlining actionable policy recommendations meant to redress the legacy of residential schools and foster reconciliation and national healing in 2 ways.

- Teaching Canadians the reality of Indigenous Peoples' treatment
- Creating educational and economic opportunities for Indigenous Peoples so they can participate at the same level as other Canadians

In addition, this allows Canadians and Indigenous Peoples to benefit from Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in all spaces.

Of the 94 Calls to Action recommended, and a commitment from the federal government to implement them, only 13 have been achieved over the past 8 years. If continued at this rate, it will take until 2065 (42 years) to complete them.

Related Resource Links: Learn more about Truth and Reconciliation from the [Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada](#), and the [website of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#); explore each Call to Action and follow the progress on their implementation at [Beyond 94](#) and [read an article about the reconciliation project](#) from CBC; discover artefacts with significance [by reading about the Canadian Museum for Human Rights reconciliation exhibit](#).

⁶ Legal action.

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 that 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 racism⁷, medical racism⁸, 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 Scoop⁹, the child welfare system (also known as the 80’s, 90’s and 2000’s Scoop), gendered forms of violence including the imposition of heteronormativity¹⁰ and patriarchy¹¹, general encouragement and enforcement of hegemony¹², 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 if 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

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Assumes there are only 2 opposite genders and it is natural and normal mode of sexual orientation and behaviour.

¹¹ 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.

¹² Sameness.

- mental and emotional suffering, personal and intergenerational affects 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)

The play reflects the issues that affect many Indigenous communities and people. Maggie and Gwynn mention several times how alcohol has affected their family and connections to each other. Maggie, Gwynn, and her brother JJ are the victims of domestic violence in different forms. Due to that violence, and mentioned in one sentence of dialogue, it's said that JJ was taken away. Whether that meant taken into the child welfare system or simply "taken away" by running away from a troubled home life due to the legacy of colonial imposition, their family is fractured and missing a member.

Related Resource Links: Explore a [map of treaties in Manitoba](#). 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](#), and learn about real-world repercussions in this [article about Joyce Echaquan and her death due to medical racism](#) and background about the [conflicted relocation of a community due in South Indian Lake](#).

Language

Language is used to transmit culture, knowledge, worldview, history, identity, ways of knowing, political structures, values, love 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 reaffirmed with the Indigenous Languages Act receiving royal assent¹³ in 2019 in response to the 94 Calls to Action, the revitalization of languages has almost solely been due to 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 residential school survivors were able to retain any of their languages. In the play Maggie states "The words, eh, they get stuck here in my throat. Where the nuns would choke us when we spoke our language. You learn not to talk after that." And we can feel her loss and pain. We must remember that while some details and storylines are altered

¹³ Royal assent is the method by which a monarch formally approves an act of the legislature.

or fictitious, Maggie's story mirrors tens of thousands of others. What a gift to the world and Cree Peoples that knowledge keepers and Elders remember and can pass language on to their communities. What a gift to audiences to get to experience the world through the Cree language even in a small way.

So, while the poetic 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 relatives¹⁴. 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 Through shared language, geographic location, shared Indigenous experience, and/or shared understanding of kinship many Indigenous Peoples consider and refer to each other as relatives.

The Crow as Messenger in Indigenous Spirituality

The crow is a well-known figure in many Indigenous cultures across Turtle Island¹⁵ and many times represents a spiritual being known as “Trickster”¹⁶. In the foreword of his play *The Rez Sisters*, Cree-Ojibway playwright Thompson Highway offers that Trickster is “as pivotal and important a figure in the Native world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology.”

Trickster creates life, protects life, and ushers life into the spirit world. Their role is to transmit cultural teachings, traditional knowledge, messages, and lessons, and to help human beings live their lives in a good way¹⁷. To do that they can take any form and shapeshift (like from the black crow to Maggie’s mother). Trickster lives and behaves outside of convention and the generally accepted. Trickster can appear as friend, or a terrifying foe. In perfect harmony with all these traits and responsibilities, the trickster figure has a fundamental core of humour, love, care, joy, and helps bring healing. In this story the Crow figure inevitably helps bring healing by bringing Maggie’s mother to her. In *The Secret to Good Tea* Maggie is terrified of this crow who visits her in her sleep and causes her nightmares. She relives her trauma everyday inside her being but can only see it when her eyes are closed at night. The crow represents her hurt and terror but is there to bring her a message and help her work out her path forward with her family. As Maggie allows herself to share her stories, in part because Mother Crow finally reveals herself and encourages her long-lost baby, Maggie and Gwynn are able to lay some of the hurt down that was a wedge between them.

It is interesting to note that because of colonization and the implementation of Church-run residential schools, many Indigenous Peoples practice Christian religions. Although these religions were at the centre of the residential school experience and abuses, many Peoples continued to hold fast to them. Maggie is one of them. There are 2 things to note with this. One is that there are many Indigenous Peoples that remained severely disconnected from their traditional cultures and spiritualities after leaving those schools and they continued to shun the Old Ways. But there are also many Peoples who fused their traditional cultures and spiritual practices with organized religion. Maggie is also part of this group of people. It is a testament to the persistence and resilience of Indigenous Peoples and their cultures.

¹⁵ A widely used name by Indigenous Peoples to describe the North American continent.

¹⁶ 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

¹⁷ 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.

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)

Glossary

Some Cree words used in the play:

Tansi: Hello

Chisk: Ass

Achimowina: Stories

Keemoch: On the down-low, on the sneak, sneaky.

Tapwe: Truth, it's the truth, (more closely) I believe you.

Nitânis: Daughter.

Kinaskomin: Thanks, I'm grateful.

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.

Buffy Sainte-Marie: (b. February 20, 1941) A well-known and beloved Indigenous Canadian-American singer-songwriter, composer, musician, visual artist, and social activist from the Piapot Cree Nation, Treaty 4, in Saskatchewan. She has won recognition, honours, and awards for her music and social contributions. She was the first Indigenous American person to win an Oscar award.

Colonialism: Absorbing a nation by erasing its identity and enforcing policies that destroy the economics of the societies already living in a place. Economic class creation, classism, racism and sexism are caused by and perpetuated by colonialism. They all work together and work to uphold colonialism. Colonialism continues through established and powerful legal, educational, social systems and institutions and knowledge production (ex. propaganda).

Cree: The Cree (also known by numerous names specific to different

groups and communities of Cree peoples), 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).

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 styles of communication.

George Jones: (September 12, 1931 – April 26, 2013) An internationally known classic country music artist. His best-known song is “He Stopped Loving Her Today” and he was often called the greatest living country singer before his passing.

Hank Williams (Sr.): (September 17, 1923 – January 1, 1953) An American singer, songwriter and musician regarded as one of the most significant and influential American singer-songwriters of the 20th century.

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).

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 Nations, 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.

Indian Affairs: Refers to what was first called Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), renamed Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, then The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) which was then dissolved and replaced in 2017 by 2 new departments: [Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada](#) and [Indigenous Services Canada \(ISC\)](#). It is the department of the Government of Canada responsible for northern lands and territories, and with ISC is responsible for policies relating to Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

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

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.

Shamattawa: Shamattawa First Nation, a remote northern community in Manitoba on God’s River. It is accessible by air or winter road.

Teaching: Ideas, principles, 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.

Trauma Porn: A medium (movies, books, visual art, performance art) that glorifies trauma and exaggerates aspects of it to increase angst, usually for entertainment value.

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

Treaty Status: “Treaty” or “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.

Discussion Questions

Pre-Show

- What are Indian Residential Schools, and who was responsible for the schools and students?
- How were students and their families affected by residential schools? How do you think the experience impacted the families they had when they grew up?
- What affect do you think residential schools have on the communities whose children were sent to attend them?
- What affect do you think residential schools had on Canadian society?
- What is assimilation?
- How did residential schools assimilate students, OR how did they not work?
- What is colonialism and what are it's impacts on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada?
- What is spirituality? What is the difference between religion and spirituality? How has religion impacted Indigenous peoples in Canada?
- What is justice? What is healing? What is reconciliation? Are they important? How are they achieved?
- 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?
- How do you define family and community? What keeps a family and community strong? Why are they important?
- Is it important to have empathy for our friends and relatives?

Post-Show

- How is the legacy of colonialism and Indian Residential School represented in the play?
- What function does Maggie's dreams have in this play? Do you think Maggie's dreams are an important part of the story? What function does the Crow serve in the story?
- How has Gwynn's childhood experiences shaped her adult ones?
- How does the conversations she has with Michael move Gwynn's character development forward? What do we learn about Gwynn?
- 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 is based on real-life experiences. What impact does that have on you? If it was completely fictitious, would that change the impact of the story?
- What images, words, or feelings are you left with after seeing this play? How do you think it will impact audiences, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous?
- Nicki says, "We have to stop hurting - to stop hurting." How do we help others stop hurting?

Suggested Classroom Activities

For discussion or as a writing prompt:

- 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?
- Storytelling, community, and spirituality 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 are doing. 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 using her personal experiences and fictionalizing a story that commemorates her mother’s life. She made Gwynn a broadcaster and journalist on radio like she is. In addition, she named a real school, Guy Hill, that is one of the schools children from her community were sent to.) For now, only reveal parts of your life or characters based on real people that you and those people would be comfortable with if it’s obvious they are real people and situations.

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 family, 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!

- Dreams, ideas, and passions: we all have them. Think of one of yours and write about it. Write about what was and what you would like to do or become, or what you would like to accomplish to make the world a better place.

- Imagine and discuss a reconciled Canada. What does that look like to you?

Artistic expression:

- Everyone has hurt, and a lot of people use artmaking to process their emotions and create to feel better. Artists also use art to express joy. Create a piece of art for yourself or someone else that is guided by emotion.
- Every ethnic culture creates beautiful things unique to their culture. In the play *Mother Crow* is last seen dancing in regalia. Regalia are garments that powwow dancers wear when they are dancing. They are sacred works of art that makers put a lot of time and effort into. Does your own culture have unique material objects? Put some research into them and if your culture allows it, make one! Share your piece and its cultural significance with your classmates to help foster cross cultural awareness and intercultural understanding. Ensure that whatever you make is specific to your own culture, that you adhere to cultural protocols, and that you are respectful of your classmates' effort and contributions.

For fun and team building:

- There were very heavy elements and themes in this play. But also humour and loving family bonds with relatives as well as friends. These things brought the family closer together, and the audience closer to them. Sharing safe and fun things about yourself can have a similar affect. 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 crows (or ravens, as some cultures recognize ravens in this role) in Indigenous cultures and compare their depiction in various myths to the crow's appearance in *The Secret to Good Tea*.
- Tea is almost its own character in this play and represents togetherness and community. Research the role of visiting and community in Indigenous and other cultures around the world. You'll probably find many are centred around tea!
- Find accounts of the Indigenous experience in Canada by people who lived/live it from different time periods or watch some of the National Film Board of Canada films linked in this guide, discuss the similarities and differences from *The Secret to Good Tea*.

- The playwright and the protagonist in this play are intelligent and thoughtful Cree women who have a desire to do good things in the world. Seek out stories and contributions to the world from Cree and other Indigenous women throughout time. You can look at groups or individuals, and contributions to communities or the world at large. You'll find more than you think, and some of the stories will surprise and inspire you!

- Here are some places to start or sources for inspiration – what else can you find?

<https://tinyurl.com/IndigenousHistoryMakers>

<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1414152378639/1607908713791>

<https://iucn.org/blog/202208/celebrating-and-upholding-indigenous-women-keepers-indigenous-scientific-knowledge>

<https://canadianwomen.org/blog/indigenous-womens-firsts/>

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.

The [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#) also lists educational resources.

You and your class can explore [The Witness Blanket](#) artefact collage for stories from survivors. [The online exhibit includes a teacher guide](#) for teaching about residential schools, building empathy, community, and more.

[Historica Canada has teaching resources about residential schools](#) as well as a [3-episode podcast](#) (also available on Apple and Spotify).

[CBC Kids](#) hosts articles about many subjects under the topic of “Indigenous.”

The [new book Resurgence](#) guides K–12 educators in bridging existing curricula with Indigenous voices and pedagogies. Edited by Anicinaabe educator Christine M’Lot and settler educator Katya Adamov Ferguson, it features work from Indigenous artists from Manitoba and across Canada.

[Warrior Kids Podcast](#) is an interactive podcast that celebrates everything Indigenous. It aims to share Indigenous cultures and values so that kids can learn about what it means to be strong, healthy, and compassionate warriors for themselves, their families, communities and Nations.

Canadian schools are invited to sign up for the Downie Wenjack Foundation’s [Legacy Schools Program](#) to receive toolkits, support in events, and more.

The [Manitoba Teacher’s Society has published lesson plans](#) relating to Gord Downie’s *The Secret Path* project and Edmonton Public Schools also have [lesson plans at the junior high level](#).

For teachers, parents, or others introducing the topic, Monique Gray Smith shares tips for [talking to kids about residential schools in this video](#).

More resources for audience members

[United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People](#)

[Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada from the Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Native Land Digital](#) is a website and app that is constantly being updated to reflect Indigenous lands, languages, and treaties.

[Circles for Reconciliation](#) suggests actions that individuals and businesses can take.

Gord Downie's *The Secret Path* tells the story of student Chanie Wenjack's death as an album, graphic novel, and animated film. [Watch the film and panel discussion](#) and explore the Downie Wenjack Foundation's work including [ideas for reconciliation actions](#) and [more resources](#).

[Indigenous Canada](#) is a well-endorsed Massive Open Online Course from the University of Alberta that you can start any time and take for free.

Podcasts:

[Kuper Island](#) – an 8-part series about a notorious residential school focusing on 3 students who survived and one who didn't.

[Stolen: Surviving St. Michael's](#) – an investigative journalist uncovers family secrets while exploring the past of her late RCMP officer father, a residential school survivor.

[Love, Land & Spirit](#) – a series about connection, community, culture, and Indigeneity written and hosted by a team of four Indigenous youth to create discussion between youth and knowledge holders about interconnected topics in their lives.

[Media Indigena](#) – weekly current-affairs roundup with guests from activism, arts, and academia for conversation that goes beyond the headlines.

[Still Here, Still Healing](#) – bringing awareness to lasting impacts of residential schools and colonization. [More background here.](#)

[Teachings in the Air](#) – an Indigenous health and wellness podcast hosted by Elder Gary Oldman.

Enrichment Guide creator Seraph-Eden Boroditsky recommends the following books:

21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act by Bob Joseph

The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America by Thomas King

Peace and Good Order by Harold R. Johnson

A Short History of Indians in Canada by Thomas King

All Our Relations: Finding the Path Forward by Tanya Talaga

Explore More: Recommended Library Reading List

Explore More Rosanna Deerchild

This is a Small Northern Town Deerchild's first full-length collection of poems explores her childhood as a Cree girl growing up in a divided northern town and her places of comfort and escape. 819.16 DEE 2008

Calling Down the Sky A deeply personal poetry collection examining the post generational effects of the horrors of the residential school system. 819.16 DEE 2015

Explore More about Mothers/daughters/sisters/aunties

The Break, Katherena Vermette. The interconnected personal stories of several women lead up to a heartbreaking event witnessed by a young Métis mother. Set in Winnipeg's North End, this novel dives deep into women's lives and community. FICTION VERMETTE

Bad Cree, Jessica Johns. A haunting psychological thriller following a young woman who is terrified when her vivid nightmares begin to cross over into reality. She seeks out her mother, sister, cousin and aunties in her small Alberta hometown for help. FICTION JOHNS

Nedí neẏ / Good medicine: Poems, Tenille K. Campbell. An honest and cheeky take on sex and romance, these poems celebrate the experience of an Indigenous woman falling in and out of love and lust. 819.16 CAMPBELL 2021

Miskwagoode, Marie Annharte Baker. Laced with humour and wisdom, Annharte's fifth poetry collection incorporates her experiences as an Anishinaabe Elder and riffs on life at the margins of settler society. 819.154 BAKER 2022

Explore More Residential School Stories

215, Duncan Mercredi. Poetry written in response to the news of unmarked graves at residential school sites across the country. 819.154 MERCREDI 2021

Genocidal Love: A Life After Residential School, Bevann Fox. A survivor's path towards healing seen through the eyes of 'Myrtle' who survives horrific abuse at the hand of residential school and the colonial powers. 813.6 FOX 2020

Broken Circle: The Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools, Theodore Fontaine. The late Theodore Fontaine's story of his experience in residential school details his healing from psychological, emotional and sexual abuse, as well as the loss of language and community that he suffered. B FONTAINE 2022



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 there's 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.

Curriculum Connections

Attending Royal MTC's production of *The Secret to Good Tea* 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)

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.

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.

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

Worlds Colliding 1.3

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

Legislated Discrimination: The Indian Act 2.3

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

Mental Health Resources

The Secret to Good Tea deals with some heavy subject matter. If feelings become overwhelming for you, please access some of the following resources.

Get immediate help in a mental health crisis:

For Indigenous Community members specifically:

Indian Residential School Survivors Society 24/7 Crisis line: 1-800-721-0066 for anyone experiencing pain or distress as a result of their Residential school experience.

Hope for Wellness Indigenous Peoples Helpline: 1-855-242-3310 24/7 or chat online at <http://www.hopeforwellness.ca>

For everyone:

KLINIC Crisis Line: Winnipeg 204-786-8686; toll-free Manitoba 1-888-322-3019 24/7

Manitoba Suicide Prevention and Support Line: 1-877-435-7170

Manitoba Farm, Rural, and Northern Support Services: 1-866-367-3276 24/7

Winnipeg Crisis Stabilization Unit: 204-940-3633 24/7

Winnipeg Mobile Crisis Service: 204-940-1781 24/7

Winnipeg Youth Mobile Crisis Team: 204-949-4777, 1-888-383-2776

Seneca Warm Line: 204-942-9276 (24/7)

Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868 or text 686868 24/7

The Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program provides former Indian Residential School students and their families--regardless of status or place of residence within Canada--with access to counselling, cultural, and emotional support services. The Program also provides assistance with the cost of transportation when counselling and cultural support services are not locally available. irsss.ca and **1-877-477-0775**

Hope for Wellness Helpline is available to all Indigenous people across Canada. Experienced and culturally competent counsellors are reachable by telephone and online chat 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Both telephone and online chat services are available in English and French. Telephone support is also available upon request in Cree; Ojibway (Anishinaabemowin) and Inuktitut. <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/>

Manitoba regional contacts and mental health services by region -
<https://www.gov.mb.ca/mh/mh/crisis.html> Crisis and non-crisis services

KLINIC Community Health - <http://klinik.mb.ca>

Provides health care, counselling, and education as well as a crisis line for people of every age, background, ethnicity, gender identity, and socio-economic circumstance. Klinik's crisis line (number above) is open to people of all ages, genders and backgrounds. You do not have to be in crisis or suicidal to call Klinik. Calling the Crisis Lines can be a good place to start when trying to sort out a problem. Klinik can also refer you to other services or programs.

Manitoba Suicide Prevention and Support - www.reasonstolive.ca

A project of Klinik Community Health, this website has resources for getting help, helping someone else, and dealing with loss as well as running a crisis and support line.

MB Farm, Rural and Northern Support Services besides the 24/7 number above, offers free, confidential, non-judgmental counselling and resources for anyone living on a Manitoba farm or in a rural or northern community. Live chat and resources online at <https://supportline.ca>

Suicide Prevention, Education, Awareness, Knowledge - <http://www.speak-out.ca>

Material about depression and suicide for survivors and their loved ones. Not for those in immediate danger.

Wellness Together Canada - <https://www.wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA> offers free and virtual support related to mental health and substance use for anyone in Canada, 24/7.

BIPOC Mental Health Worker List is an open source and free use resource for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour identifying individuals seeking BIPOC mental health workers in Manitoba. [Find the list here.](#)

Enrichment Guide Contributor Biography

Seraph-Eden Boroditsky is a multidisciplinary artist, activist, educator, and 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 is the most recent storyteller in a long maternal line of ancestral storytellers.

Seraph 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 are Tomson Highway's *Songs in the Key of Cree* and *The Rez Sisters* (Royal MTC); Darla Contois' *The War Being Waged* (Prairie Theatre Exchange), and Ron Pederson's *The Player King* (Shakespeare in the Ruins).

While reading the *The Secret to Good Tea*, before creating this enrichment guide, Seraph visited over tea, (well, coffee), with long-time friends of her mother's, Jessie Howell and Norma Watt-McDougal. Both women have intergenerational experience with the residential school system as students, and daughters. Norma, Jessie, with love, a heartfelt maarsii, miigwetch, kinanaskomitin.

Seraph, the mother of two teens, lives in Winnipeg with her partner and children, works to help people build intercultural understanding and relationships, and hopes to see a day when the effects of colonization can be corrected and healed in radical and tangible ways.

Further Sources

<https://carleton.ca/fpa/2019/sharing-the-wounds-of-a-broken-community-rosanna-deerchild-delivers-keynote-address/>

[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre-In conversation with Rosanna Deerchild \(royalmtc.ca\)](https://royalmtc.ca/in-conversation-with-rosanna-deerchild)

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thenextchapter/rosanna-deerchild-todd-babiak-and-great-science-fiction-novels-1.3624443/rosanna-deerchild-shares-her-mother-s-residential-school-story-through-poetry-1.3624457>

https://www.scholastic.ca/reconciliation-resources/pdfs/FarfromHome_TruthandReconciliation_Student_Sample2.pdf