



Under One Sky Friendship Centre

Talking to Children About Residential Schools

Background

Orange Shirt Day grew out of Phyllis Webstad's account of losing her shiny new orange shirt on her first day at residential school. This year, in recognition of the new National Day of Truth and Reconciliation and Orange Shirt Day, Under One Sky is calling on everyone to wear orange on September 30th to show solidarity with those who survived residential schools across Canada and to remember those who never made it home.

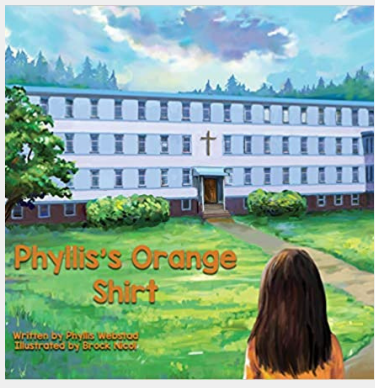
With the recent discoveries of the mass graves throughout Canada, many people are reaching out to Indigenous organizations with the same question; how can I help my children begin to understand the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada?

Under One Sky has created this Resource List in response to requests for resources that can help make it easier to start this discussion and encourage our children and youth to engage in reconciliation. The resources are broken down into age categories, and chosen with the intention that Indigenous and non-Indigenous children will both find the activities meaningful.

By using this resource with young people, you are participating in reconciliation.

Books for Young Children

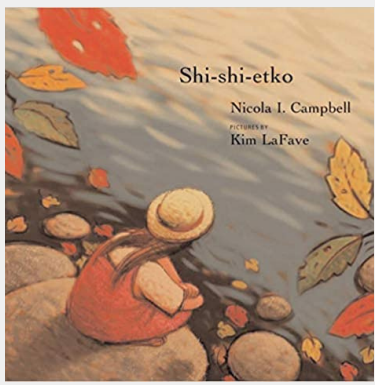
Ages 4-8



Phyllis's Orange Shirt by Phyllis Webstad

Ages
4-6

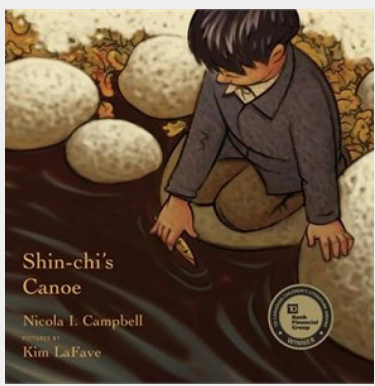
When Phyllis was a little girl she was excited to go to residential school for the first time. Her Granny bought her a bright orange shirt that she loved and she wore it to school for her first day. When she arrived at school her bright orange shirt was taken away. This is both Phyllis Webstad's true story and the story behind Orange Shirt Day, a day for us all to reflect upon the treatment of Indigenous people and the message that 'Every Child Matters'.



Shi-Shi-Etko by Nicola Campbell

Ages
4-7

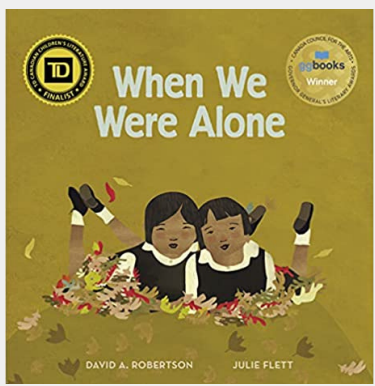
In just four days, young Shi-shi-etko will have to leave her family and all that she knows to attend residential school. She spends her last days at home treasuring the beauty of her world. Her mother, father and grandmother, each in turn, share valuable teachings that they want her to remember. Shi-shi-etko carefully gathers her memories for safekeeping.



Shin- Chi's Canoe by Nicola Campbell

Ages
4-7

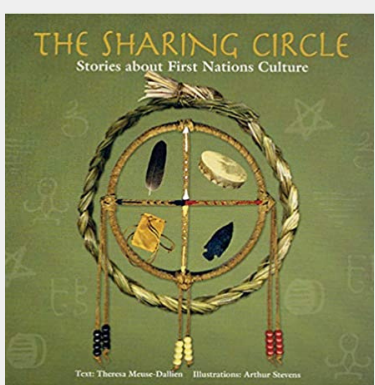
This moving sequel to the award-winning Shi-shi-etko tells the story of two children's experience at residential school. Shi-shi-etko is about to return for her second year, but this time her six-year-old brother, Shin-chi, is going, too. Shi-shi-etko tells her brother all the things he must remember from home. Shin-chi is forever hungry and lonely, but, finally, the salmon swim up the river and the children return home for a joyful family reunion.



When We Were Alone by David Robertson

Ages
6-8

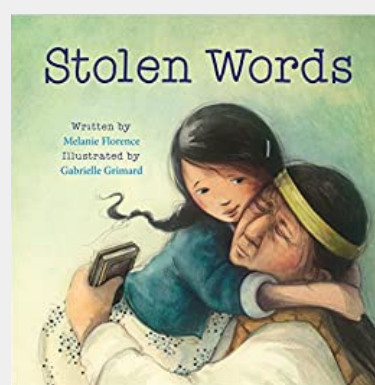
A young girl notices things about her grandmother that make her curious. Why does her grandmother have long, braided hair and beautifully coloured clothing? Why does she speak Cree and spend so much time with her family? As she asks questions, her grandmother shares her experiences in a residential school, when all of these things were taken away.



The Sharing Circle by Theresa Meuse

Ages
6-8

Matthew loves to play games with his friends and share his toys with them. But most of all he loves to share the special treasures that remind him of his First Nations culture. Perhaps his favourite treasure is the medicine pouch that his grandfather made especially for him. This is where he keeps many of his other treasures.



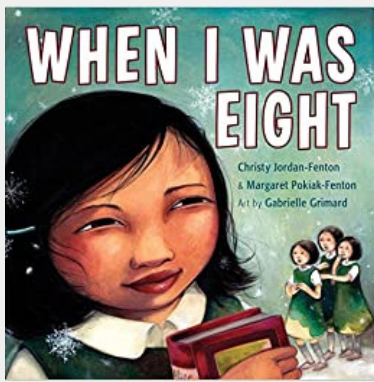
Stolen Words by Melanie Florence

Ages
6-8

The story of the beautiful relationship between a little girl and her grandfather. When she asks her grandfather how to say something in his language - Cree - he admits that his language was stolen from him when he was a boy. The little girl then sets out to help her grandfather find his language again.

Books for Young Children

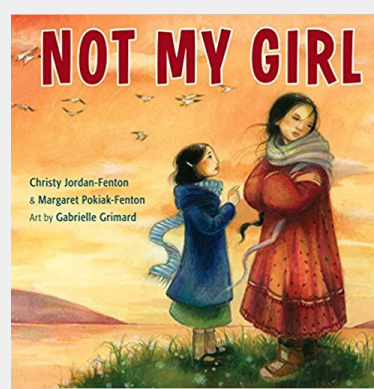
Ages 6-9



When I Was Eight by Christy Jordan-Fenton

Ages
6-9

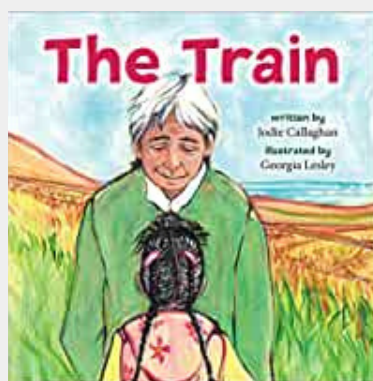
Olemaun is eight and knows a lot of things. But she does not know how to read. Ignoring her father's warnings, she travels far from her Arctic home to the outsiders' school to learn. The nuns at the school call her Margaret. They cut off her long hair and force her to do menial chores, but she remains undaunted. Her tenacity draws the attention of a black-cloaked nun who tries to break her spirit at every turn. But the young girl is more determined than ever to learn how to read.



Not My Girl by Christy Jordan-Fenton

Ages
6-9

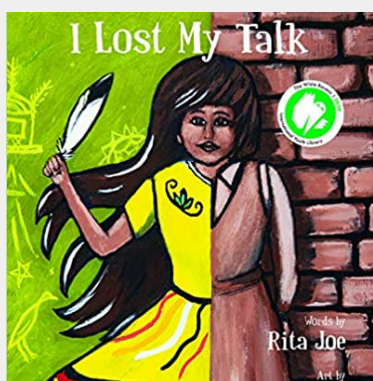
Margaret can't wait to see her family, but her homecoming is not what she expected. Based on the true story of Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, **Not My Girl** makes the original, award-winning memoir, **A Stranger at Home**, accessible to younger children. It is also a sequel to the picture book *When I Was Eight*. A poignant story of a determined young girl's struggle to belong, it will both move and inspire readers everywhere.



The Train by Jodie Callaghan

Ages
6-9

Ashley meets her great-uncle by the old train tracks near their community in Nova Scotia. Ashley sees his sadness, and Uncle tells her of the day when he and the other children from their community were told to board the train before being taken to residential school where their lives were changed forever. They weren't allowed to speak Mi'gmaq and were punished if they did. There was no one to give them love and hugs and comfort. Ashley promises to wait with her uncle by the train tracks, in remembrance of what was lost.

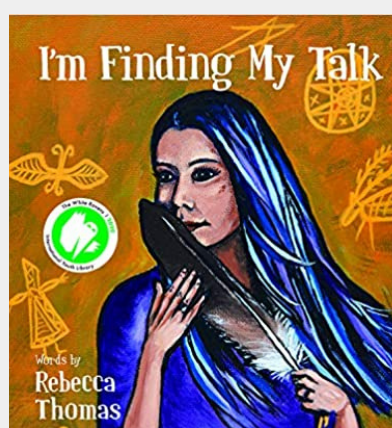


I Lost My Talk by Rita Joe

Ages
4-9

I lost my talk The talk you took away When I was a little girl At Shubenacadie school.

One of Rita Joe's most influential poems, "I Lost My Talk" tells the revered Mi'kmaw Elder's childhood story of losing her language while a resident of the residential school in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. An often quoted piece in this era of truth and reconciliation, Joe's powerful words explore and celebrate the survival of Mi'kmaw culture and language despite its attempted eradication.



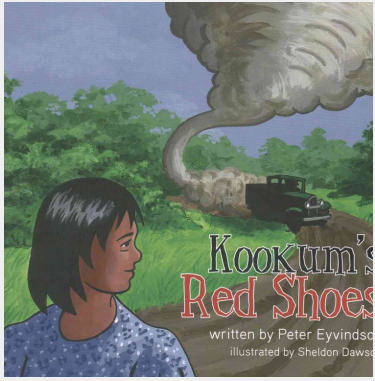
I'm Finding My Talk by Rebecca Thomas

Ages
4-9

A response to Rita Joe's iconic poem **I Lost My Talk**, comes a companion picture book by award-winning spoken-word artist and Mi'kmaw activist Rebecca Thomas. A second-generation residential school survivor, Thomas writes this response poem openly and honestly, reflecting on the process of working through the destructive effects of colonialism. From sewing regalia to dancing at powwow to learning traditional language, *I'm Finding My Talk* is about rediscovering her community, and finding culture. Features stunning, vibrant illustrations by Mi'kmaw artist Pauline Young

Books for Young Children

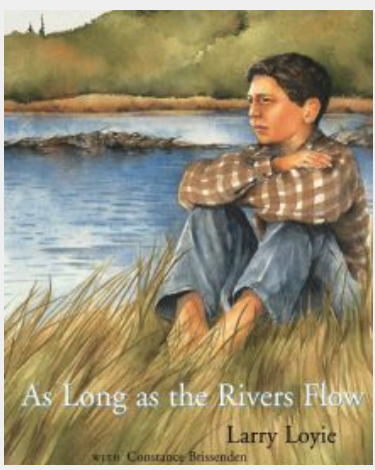
Ages 7-11



Kookum's Red Shoes by Peter Eyvindson

Ages
7-11

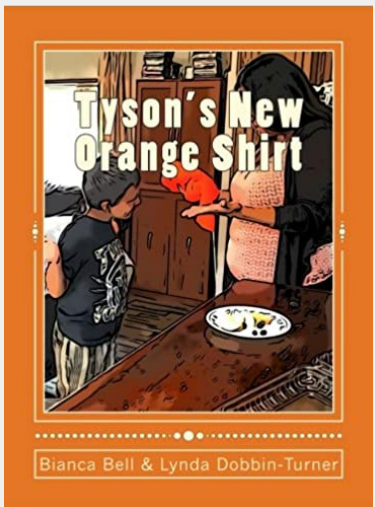
The legacy of the residential schools is conveyed with respect and imagination in this illustrated story for young readers. As the elderly Kookum remembers the experiences in her youth that changed her life forever, we see what was lost in her life, and how goodness persisted.



As Long as the Rivers Flow by Larry Loyie

Ages
7-11

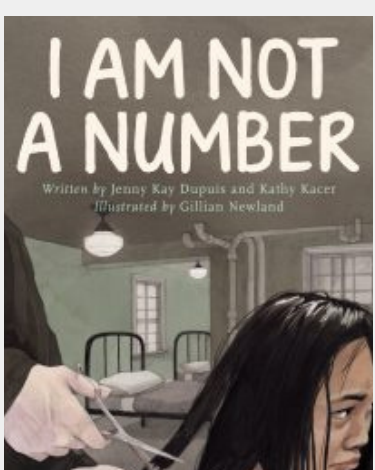
As Long as the Rivers Flow is the story of Larry Loyie's last summer before entering residential school. It is a time of learning and adventure. He cares for an abandoned baby owl and watches his grandmother make winter moccasins. He helps the family prepare for a hunting and gathering trip.



Tyson's New Orange Shirt by Lynda Dobbin Turner

Ages
7-11

The last day of September, Tyson got ready for school, only to find that his Mom wanted him to wear a different shirt. An orange shirt! Tyson wasn't very happy about it, so his Mom had to explain just why it was important that on September 30th he wore orange. In Canada, for over a hundred years, Indigenous children were sent away to be educated in what is now known as the Indian Residential School System. Devised by the government, to 'kill the Indian in the child', these schools were often miles and miles from where they child's family resided. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has uncovered and documented many of the atrocities that took place in those institutions. It has exposed the intergenerational trauma that is the system's legacy. Tyson's New Orange Shirt tells the story of how his Mom explained to him the importance of recognizing the impact on children and how in a different time, Tyson might have been one of those kids!

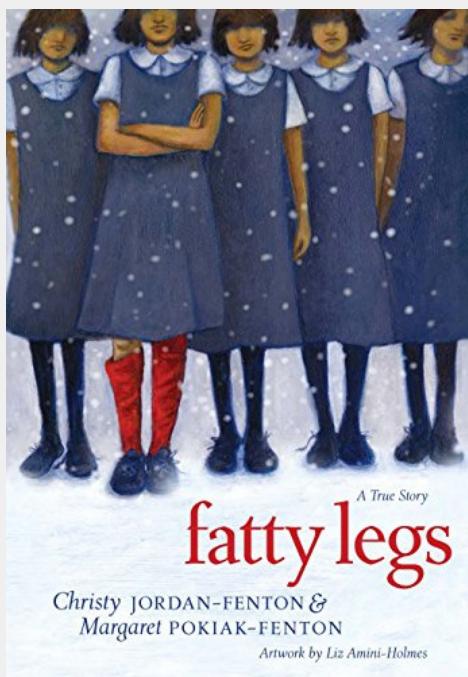


I Am Not a Number by Jenny Kay Dupuis & Kathy Kacer

Ages
7-11

Eight-year-old Irene is removed from her First Nations family to live in a residential school and she is confused, frightened, and terribly homesick. She tries to remember who she is and where she came from, despite the efforts of the nuns who are in charge at the school and who tell her that she is not to use her own name but instead use the number they have assigned to her. When she goes home for summer holidays, Irene's parents decide never to send her and her brothers away again. But where will they hide? And what will happen when her parents disobey the law?

Novels for Young Children



Fatty Legs: A True Story by Christy Jordan-Fenton

Eight-year-old Margaret Pokiak has set her sights on learning to read, even though it means leaving her village in the high Arctic. Faced with unceasing pressure, her father finally agrees to let her make the five-day journey to attend school, but he warns Margaret of the terrors of residential schools.

At school Margaret soon encounters the Raven, a black-cloaked nun with a hooked nose and bony fingers that resemble claws. She immediately dislikes the strong-willed young Margaret. Intending to humiliate her, the heartless Raven gives gray stockings to all the girls – all except Margaret, who gets red ones. In an instant Margaret is the laughingstock of the entire school.

In the face of such cruelty, Margaret refuses to be intimidated and bravely gets rid of the stockings. Although a sympathetic nun stands up for Margaret, in the end it is this brave young girl who gives the Raven a lesson in the power of human dignity.

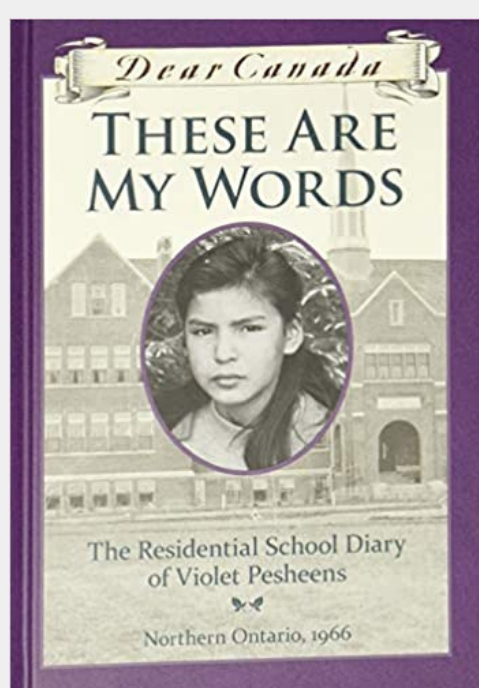


A Stranger At Home by Christy Jordan-Fenton

Traveling to be reunited with her family in the arctic, 10-year-old Margaret Pokiak can hardly contain her excitement. It's been two years since her parents delivered her to the school run by the dark-cloaked nuns and brothers.

Coming ashore, Margaret spots her family, but her mother barely recognizes her, screaming, "Not my girl." Margaret realizes she is now marked as an outsider. And Margaret is an outsider: she has forgotten the language and stories of her people, and she can't even stomach the food her mother prepares. However, Margaret gradually relearns her language and her family's way of living. Along the way, she discovers how important it is to remain true to the ways of her people – and to herself.

Highlighted by archival photos and striking artwork, this first-person account of a young girl's struggle to find her place will inspire young readers to ask what it means to belong.



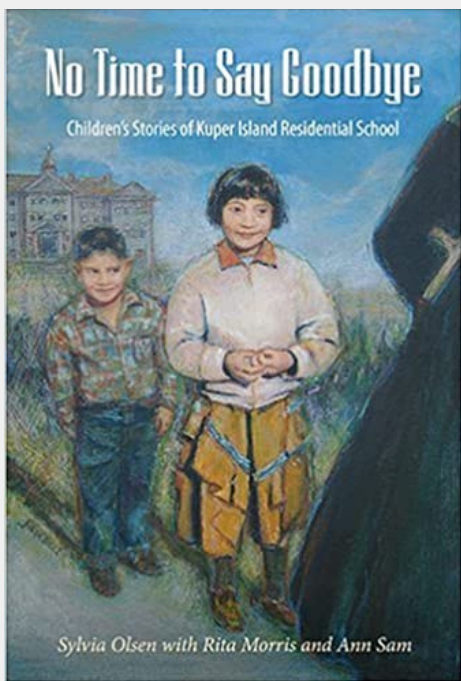
Dear Canada: These Are My Words by Ruby Slipperjack

Violet Pesheens is struggling to adjust to her new life at residential school. She misses her Grandma; she has run-ins with Cree girls; at her "white" school, everyone just stares; and everything she brought has been taken from her, including her name—she is now just a number. But worst of all, she has a fear. A fear of forgetting the things she treasures most: her Anishnabe language; the names of those she knew before; and her traditional customs. A fear of forgetting who she was.

Her notebook is the one place she can record all of her worries, and heartbreaks, and memories. And maybe, just maybe there will be hope at the end of the tunnel. Drawing from her own experiences at residential school, Ruby Slipperjack creates a brave, yet heartbreaking heroine in Violet, and lets young readers glimpse into an all-too important chapter in our nation's history.

Novels for Young Children

Ages 9-12



No Time to Say Goodbye: Children's Stories of Kuper Island Residential School by Sylvia Olsen

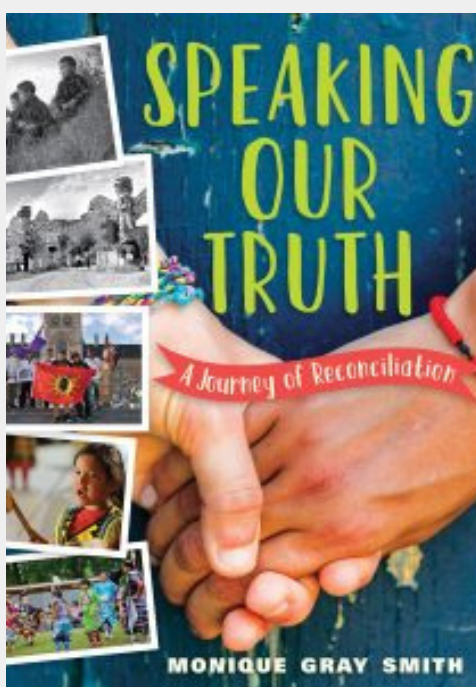
No Time to Say Goodbye is a fictional account of five children sent to aboriginal boarding school, based on the recollections of a number of Tsartlip First Nations people. These unforgettable children are taken by government agents from Tsartlip Day School to live at Kuper Island Residential School. The five are isolated on the small island and life becomes regimented by the strict school routine. They experience the pain of homesickness and confusion while trying to adjust to a world completely different from their own. Their lives are no longer organized by fishing, hunting and family, but by bells, line-ups and chores. In spite of the harsh realities of the residential school, the children find adventure in escape, challenge in competition, and camaraderie with their fellow students. Sometimes sad, sometimes funny, always engrossing, **No Time to Say Goodbye** is a story that readers of all ages won't soon forget.



My Name Is Seepeetza by Shirley Sterling

An honest, inside look at life in an Indian residential school in the 1950s, and how one indomitable young spirit survived it.

At six years old, Seepeetza is taken from her happy family life on Joyaska Ranch to live as a boarder at the Kalamak Indian Residential School. Life at the school is not easy, but Seepeetza still manages to find some bright spots. Always, thoughts of home make her school life bearable.

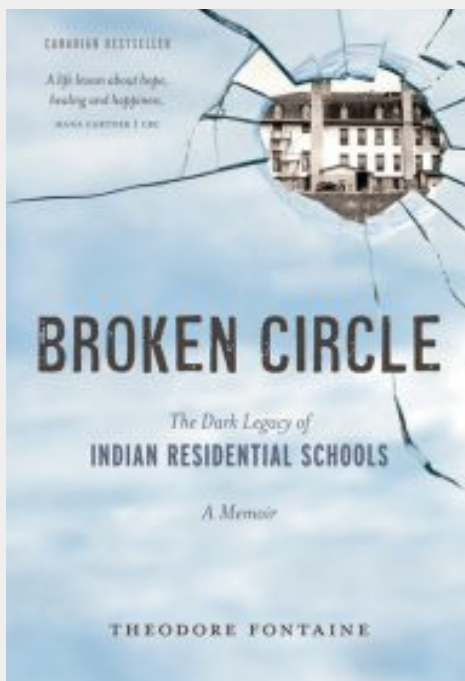


Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation by Monique Gray Smith

In **Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation**, author Monique Gray Smith explores the historic relationship between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people in Canada, the legacy of the Indian Residential School system, and the impact still being felt by survivors and their families. Readers will learn how Canadians can move forward with reconciliation.

Novels for Young Children

Ages 13+



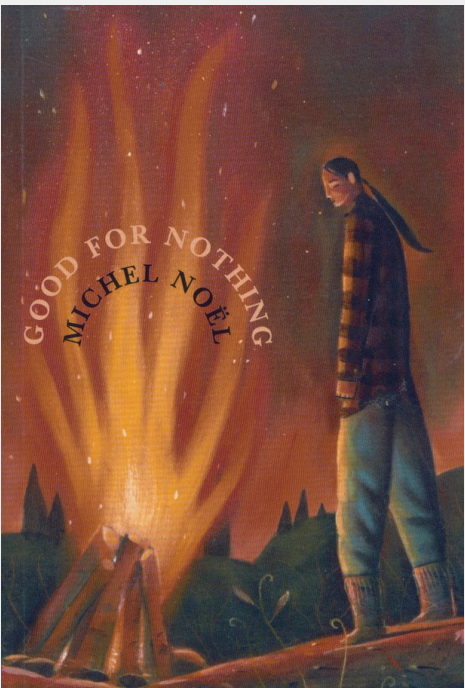
Broken Circle, The Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools: A Memoir

by Theodore Fontaine

Theodore (Ted) Fontaine lost his family and freedom just after his seventh birthday, when his parents were forced to leave him at an Indian residential school by order of the Roman Catholic Church and the Government of Canada. Twelve years later, he left school frozen at the emotional age of seven. He was confused, angry and conflicted, on a path of self-destruction. At age 29, he emerged from this blackness. By age 32, he had graduated from the Civil Engineering Program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and begun a journey of self-exploration and healing.

In this powerful and poignant memoir, Ted examines the impact of his psychological, emotional and sexual abuse, the loss of his language and culture, and, most important, the loss of his family and community. He goes beyond details of the abuses of Native children to relate a unique understanding of why most residential school survivors have post-traumatic stress disorders and why succeeding generations of First Nations children suffer from this dark chapter in history.

Told as remembrances described with insights that have evolved through his healing, his story resonates with his resolve to help himself and other residential school survivors and to share his enduring belief that one can pick up the shattered pieces and use them for good.

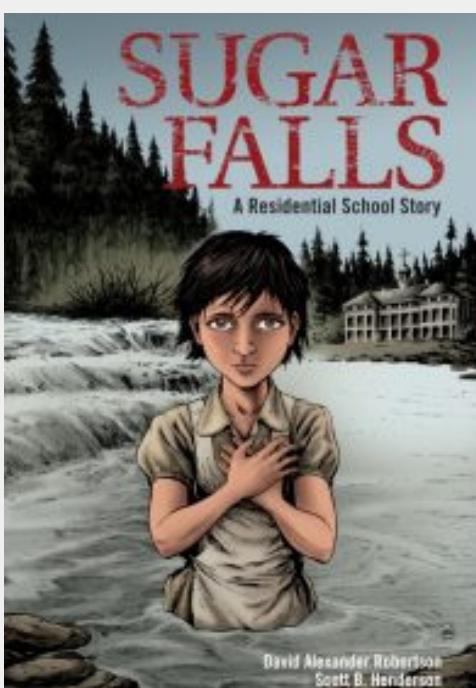


Good for Nothing

by Michel Noel

The year is 1959, and fifteen-year-old Nipishish returns to his reserve in northern Quebec after being kicked out of residential school, where the principal tells him he's a good-for-nothing who, like all Indians, can look forward to a life of drunkenness, prison and despair.

The reserve, however, offers nothing to Nipishish. He remembers little of his late mother and father. In fact, he seems to know less about himself than the people at the band office. He must try to rediscover the old ways, face the officials who find him a threat, and learn the truth about his father's death.



Sugar Falls: A Residential School Story

by David A. Robertson

A school assignment to interview a residential school survivor leads Daniel to Betsy, his friend's grandmother, who tells him her story. Abandoned as a young child, Betsy was soon adopted into a loving family. A few short years later, at the age of 8, everything changed. Betsy was taken away to a residential school. There she was forced to endure abuse and indignity, but Betsy recalled the words her father spoke to her at Sugar Falls - words that gave her the resilience, strength, and determination to survive. Sugar Falls is based on the true story of Betty Ross, Elder from Cross Lake First Nation. We wish to acknowledge, with the utmost gratitude, Betty's generosity in sharing her story. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of Sugar Falls goes to support the bursary program for The Helen Betty Osborne Memorial Foundation.

Other Resources



Indigenous Voices: Children's Books

<https://www.chapters.indigo.ca/en-ca/books/indigenous-voices/kids/>

Spirit Bears Guide to Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action

https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/child_friendly_calls_to_action_web.pdf

Activities

Reconciliation Activities for Children:

https://presbyterian.ca/wp-content/uploads/Reconciliation_Activities_for_Children.pdf

Bring Reconciliation into the Classroom:

<https://fncaringsociety.com/shannens-dream-school-resources>

Colouring Sheets:

https://www.urbaniskwew.com/coloring_pages?fbclid=IwAR1NmnujKpwpR-gZa8ZgLa70jkFLPmtBz6EaW_3splrTLdHofzzeTTjGNnQ

Videos

Namwayut: we are all one. Truth and reconciliation in Canada:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zuRQmwaREY>

The Indian Act:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3__LogQXx_8

Canada's Dark Secret:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peLd_jtMdrc

Residential Schools in Canada: A Timeline:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFgNl1lfe0A>

How Residential Schools in Canada robbed Indigenous Children of their Identity and Lives:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4wExQG9Dyk>

Orange Shirt Day Resources

Resources and Ideas for the Children:

<https://www.orangeshirtday.org/resources--supplies.html>

Orange Shirt Day Activities for Kindergarten to Grade 7:

https://www.orangeshirtday.org/uploads/7/9/8/7/79871818/bctf_orange_shirtdayactivities.pdf

Please note that these resources deal with difficult topics and might evoke strong emotions. We strongly encourage parents, guardians and educators to screen the videos in their entirety prior to showing them to children, teens and/or students and be particularly mindful of emotional resources from children.