

## Indigenous Children's Literature

Indigenous Children's Literature in the Canadian context reflects Indigenous knowledge, the history and legacy of colonialism, and the strength and resilience of the movement toward truth and reconciliation.

## Indigenous Knowledge

(Indigenous knowledge comes from an oral tradition and is continually evolving. This is an academic description only.)

- **Traditional Knowledge** (passed down orally through stories): Describes creation, connections to the spirit world, societal formation; memorializes historical events; records genealogies, ancestral rights, territories; reinforces values
- **Empirical Knowledge**  
Gained through observations of the land and ecosystems over time
- **Revealed (Spiritual) Knowledge**  
Dreams, visions, intuition (Brant-Castellano, M., 2000)

**Seven Sacred Teachings** (represented on TRC logo)

Honesty, Humility, Wisdom, Courage, Love, Truth, and Respect  
*Individual nations have their own unique values and principles.*

## Indigenous Education

**TRC Call to Action 63:**

1. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
3. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.

Indigenous Education is an **approach** to teaching. Just as important as the content of the curriculum is the way the curriculum is taught. Through the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, Indigenous children traditionally learned by observation followed by hands-on experience. This learning was broken by the residential school system. Teachers can support traditional practices through offering experiential and strengths-based learning; including families in learning; taking learning outside; emphasizing identity (family, culture, place of origin); focusing on local Indigenous content; recognizing the value of traditional teachings, language, and culture; and using the power of story. FNESC describes Indigenous pedagogy as one that: is learner centered; is inquiry based; is based on experiential learning; emphasizes an awareness of self and others in equal measure; recognizes the value of group processes; and supports a variety of learning styles (<http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/PUB-LFP-IRSR-5-2015-07-WEB.pdf>).

*"All that we are is story ... It is what we arrive with. It is all we leave behind."*

(Richard Wagamese)



The Elders are Watching/illus. Roy Vickers; When We Were Alone and Owls See Clearly at Night/illus. Julie Flett. Used with permission

*"While it is not possible to fully comprehend another way of knowing, what we can do is acknowledge that both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems have equal power."* (Dr. Karen Martin, 2013)

*"The education system itself must be transformed into one that rejects the racism embedded in colonial systems of education and treats Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian knowledge systems with equal respect."* (p. 239)



**You can always ask/include:**

Parents and families  
District Indigenous Education Depts.  
Local Native Friendship Centres  
Libraries, Museums, and Galleries  
(Take note of appropriate protocols when contacting First Nations resource people or guests.)

## First Peoples Curriculum in BC:

Indigenous content is woven through most subjects: English Language Arts (connection to people, communities, and land; oral tradition and texts); Social Studies (local communities, cultural characteristics, oral history, traditions, values, land use, conflict and cooperation); Science (plants and animals, local landscapes, seasonal rounds, life cycles, earth moon and sky, ecosystems, interdependence, sustainability). The impact of colonialism is introduced in Grade 4 SS; residential schools are introduced in Grade 5 SS. The following BIG IDEAS can also be applied to Indigenous content: language and text can be a source of creativity and joy; stories and traditions about ourselves and our families reflect **who we are and where we come from**; stories help us understand ourselves and make connections to others and the world; text can be understood from different perspectives.

## Indigenous Children's Literature

### The Oral Tradition:

... has preserved Indigenous knowledge, culture, and literary expression for thousands of years and is still **very much alive**. Stories are cultural property, some are considered sacred. Some are shared publicly (but this does not give a listener the right to retell the story) and some are reserved for specific audiences or certain occasions. Some stories have never been written down and continue to be memorized and passed down orally. It is always up to the listener to interpret meaning from the story.

### Genres and Examples of Indigenous Children's Books:

#### Non Fiction

- **Go Show the World**, Wab Kinew, 2018
- **We Are All Connected Series**, Strong Nations, 2017
- **Sockeye Mother**, Brett Huson, 2017
- **Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation**, M. Gray Smith, 2017
- **Strong Readers Series (Frog, Bear, Eagle, Raven)**, Strong Nations, 2012

**Traditional Stories** have been retold in book form, often portraying animal and human characters, connections to the spirit world, traditions, values.

- **The Two Sisters**, Pauline Johnson, 2016
- **Strong Stories Series**, Strong Nations, 2016
- **Peace Dancer** (2016), **Orca Chief** (2015), **Cloudwalker** (2014), **Raven Brings the Light** (2013), Roy Vickers and Robert Budd
- **The Raven and the Loon**, Rachel and Sean Qitsualik-Tinsley, 2013
- **Flight of the Hummingbird**, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, 2008
- **How Raven Stole the Sun**, Maria Williams, 2001
- **Salmon Boy: A Legend of the Sechelt People (Series)**, Donna Joe, 1999

## Timeline:

**This timeline, based in part on Snuneymuxw history, represents selected dates from the colonial perspective only and is used in this workshop to demonstrate the impact of policy.**

**7,000 BC** Evidence of human settlement in Coast Salish Territory  
**1,500 BC** Snuneymuxw settlement  
**1534** First contact on east coast  
**1763** Royal Proclamation  
**1791** Malaspina explores area  
**1843** Hudson's Bay Company establishes Fort Victoria  
**1849** Vancouver Island becomes a Crown Colony  
**1852** HBC Post established at new coal mine  
**1850 – 54** Douglas Treaties  
**1854** First settlers arrive  
**1862** Snuneymuxw removed from main village  
**1862** Smallpox Epidemic  
**1867** Confederation  
**1876 onwards** Indian Act  
**1885-1940s** The Pass System  
**1890** Kuper Island Residential School opens  
**1920** Residential Schools mandatory  
**1946-66** Nanaimo Indian Hospital  
**1960** Status Indians allowed to vote  
**1960 onwards** The Sixties Scoop  
**1969** White Paper  
**1973 onwards** – significant court decisions regarding rights and title  
**1970s to 1996** – Residential Schools close (Kuper Island closes mid 1970's)  
**1982** Constitution  
**1996** Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report  
**2007** Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement  
**2007/2016** Jordan's Principle  
**2008** Apology  
**2012** Snuneymuxw Reserve 2 connected to new water system  
**2015** Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report  
**2017** Snuneymuxw receive a \$49M settlement  
**2019** MMIWG Report

**Contemporary Traditional Stories** are newly created stories which retain elements of the stories that have been passed down (animal and human characters, values, connections to the spirit world, humour).

- ***The Girl and the Wolf***, Katherena Vermette, 2019
- ***Awasis and the World Famous Bannock***, Dallas Hunt, 2018
- ***Coyote Tales***, Thomas King, 2017
- ***Taan's Moons***, Alison Gear, 2014
- ***A Man Called Raven***, Richard Van Camp, 1997
- ***Little Bear's Vision Quest***, Diane Silvey, 1995

**Everyday Stories (Past and Present)** portray life as experienced by Indigenous people. These stories can be contemporary, or can be a recounting of the past as a character shares his or her memories. A large number of the most recently published books are everyday stories.

- ***What's My Superpower?*** Aviaq Johnston, 2017
- ***You Hold Me Up***, Monique Gray Smith, 2017
- ***A Day with Yayah***, Nicola Campbell, 2017
- ***Thunderboy Junior***, Sherman Alexie, 2016
- ***Amik Loves School: A Story of Wisdom*** (7 Teachings Series), Katherena Vermette, 2015
- ***Sometimes I Feel Like A Fox***, Danielle Daniel, 2015
- ***P'eska and the First Salmon Ceremony***, Scot Ritchie, 2015
- ***Dipnetting with Dad***, Willie Sellars, 2014
- ***A Walk on the Tundra***, Rebecca Hainnu 2011
- ***B is for Basketball***, School District 50, 2010
- ***The Moccasins***, Earl Einarson, 2008
- ***Yetsa's Sweater***, Sylvia Olsen, 2006
- ***Secret of the Dance***, Andrea Spalding, 2006

**Residential School Stories**, while being Everyday Stories from the past, have their own category because of the number of books being published on this subject.

- ***Phyllis's Orange Shirt***, Phyllis Webstad, 2019
- ***Stolen Words***, Melanie Florence, 2017
- ***When We Were Alone***, David Robertson, 2016
- ***I am Not a Number***, Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer, 2016
- ***Not My Girl***, Christy Jordan Fenton/ Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, 2014
- ***When I was Eight***, C. Jordan Fenton/Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, 2013
- ***Shin-chi's Canoe***, Nicola Campbell, 2008
- ***Shi-shi-etko***, Nicola Campbell, 2005

**Many titles also available in French\***

### **Common Themes:**

Identity  
Importance of the family and community  
Intergenerational transfer of knowledge  
Integral relationship with the land  
Tradition and ceremony  
Nature and place of spirituality  
Courage and resilience  
Humour  
Language revitalization

***"It is precisely because education was the primary tool of oppression of Aboriginal people, and mis-education of all Canadians, that we have concluded that education holds the key to reconciliation."***  
**The Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair**

### **Cultural Humility**

Humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another's experience. We review the history and "connect the dots" to the present day, being aware of personal and systemic power imbalances, structural privilege, and our own assumptions and biases.

**When talking about Residential schools (or any other aspect of colonial history), it is helpful to emphasize:**

- the value of the knowledge that was lost
- the courage and resilience of the survivors
- learning about this is an act of reconciliation

(Starleigh Grass, 2015)

## Resources

**Strong Nations** 102 – 5160 Dublin Way, Nanaimo

<https://www.strongnations.com/>

**Canadian Indigenous Books for Schools**

<https://49thshelf.com/Lists/Members/2018-45/Canadian-Indigenous-Books-for-Schools-2018-19>

**Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom**

[https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/aboriginal-education/awp\\_moving\\_forward.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/aboriginal-education/awp_moving_forward.pdf)

**FNESC**

<http://www.fnesc.ca/>

**Promising Practices in Indigenous Education**

<https://www.themfi.ca/ppw-educational-resources>

**National Centre for Truth & Reconciliation**

<http://nctr.ca/map.php>

**Their Voices will Guide Us (MMIWG)**

<https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NIMMIWG-THEIR-VOICES-WILL-GUIDE-US.pdf>

**Math Catcher: Math Through Aboriginal Storytelling (SFU)**

<http://mathcatcher.irmacs.sfu.ca/>

**First Voices**

<https://www.firstvoices.com/>

**FN Health Authority Food Fact Sheets**

[http://www.fnha.ca/documents/traditional\\_food\\_fact\\_sheets.pdf](http://www.fnha.ca/documents/traditional_food_fact_sheets.pdf)

**Powerful Understanding**, Adrienne Gear, 2018 (Indigenous Connections)

**MOOC Course UBC - Reconciliation Through Indigenous**

**Education** <http://pdce.educ.ubc.ca/reconciliation/>

**Links to Video Clips:**

TRC Education Day, Vancouver <https://vimeo.com/75812900>

Starleigh Grass, West Vancouver <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuoalw1vdiE>

Flight of the Hummingbird <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naj6zZakgEg>

N'we Jinan Artists <http://nwejinan.com/>

## French Resources

**GoodMinds** distributes First Nations, Inuit and Metis books in English and French. Type “French” in the search bar for their French titles.

<https://www.goodminds.com/search?keys=french>

**Strong Nations** also has a good selection of French titles. Again, type “French” in the search bar. <https://www.strongnations.com/search/?s=french>

**Indspire** <http://indspire.ca/> hosts a “a small group of people interested in Indigenous French resources from across the country that formed after the last National Gathering for Indigenous Education.” and suggests this resource from BCTF:

[https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/AboriginalEd/PoH\(1\)/Ressourcesvoleten%C3%A9ducati onautochtone.pdf](https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/AboriginalEd/PoH(1)/Ressourcesvoleten%C3%A9ducati onautochtone.pdf)

## How do I determine authenticity?

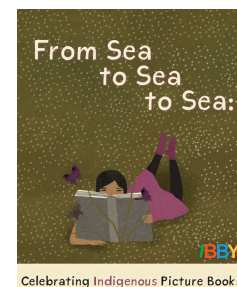
Indigenous Children’s resources:

- are appropriate and relevant for the teaching and learning of Indigenous storytelling traditions
- respectfully represent the diversity, knowledge, and world views of Indigenous peoples
- were developed and validated by a qualified, reputable, Indigenous source
- include appropriate strategies, activities, and visuals that support the teaching and learning in Indigenous storytelling traditions (Reconciliation through Indigenous Education MOOC course, UBC, 2015)

If in doubt, check these online resources. This guide from **FNESC** includes grade levels, summaries, and curricular connections:



and this collection from **IBBY Canada (International Board on Books for Young People)** - lists 100 of the best books by Indigenous authors, many illustrated by Indigenous artists, published in Canada:



**Strong Nations** also screens for Indigenous content.

**ULS** <https://www.uls.com/>

Go to Advanced Search

- On the left, type Indigenous in the "Subject Bar"
- Under "Grade Levels" select the grades you would like.
- On the Right, click "Active Titles Only"
- Click "French Only"
- If you want to see just what is stocked, you can click "Stock Titles Only"

**Alison Gear, MA**

**[gear.alison@gmail.com](mailto:gear.alison@gmail.com)**

**(778) 554-4064**

*Grateful to be living and working on the traditional territory of the  
Okanagan First Nation.*

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