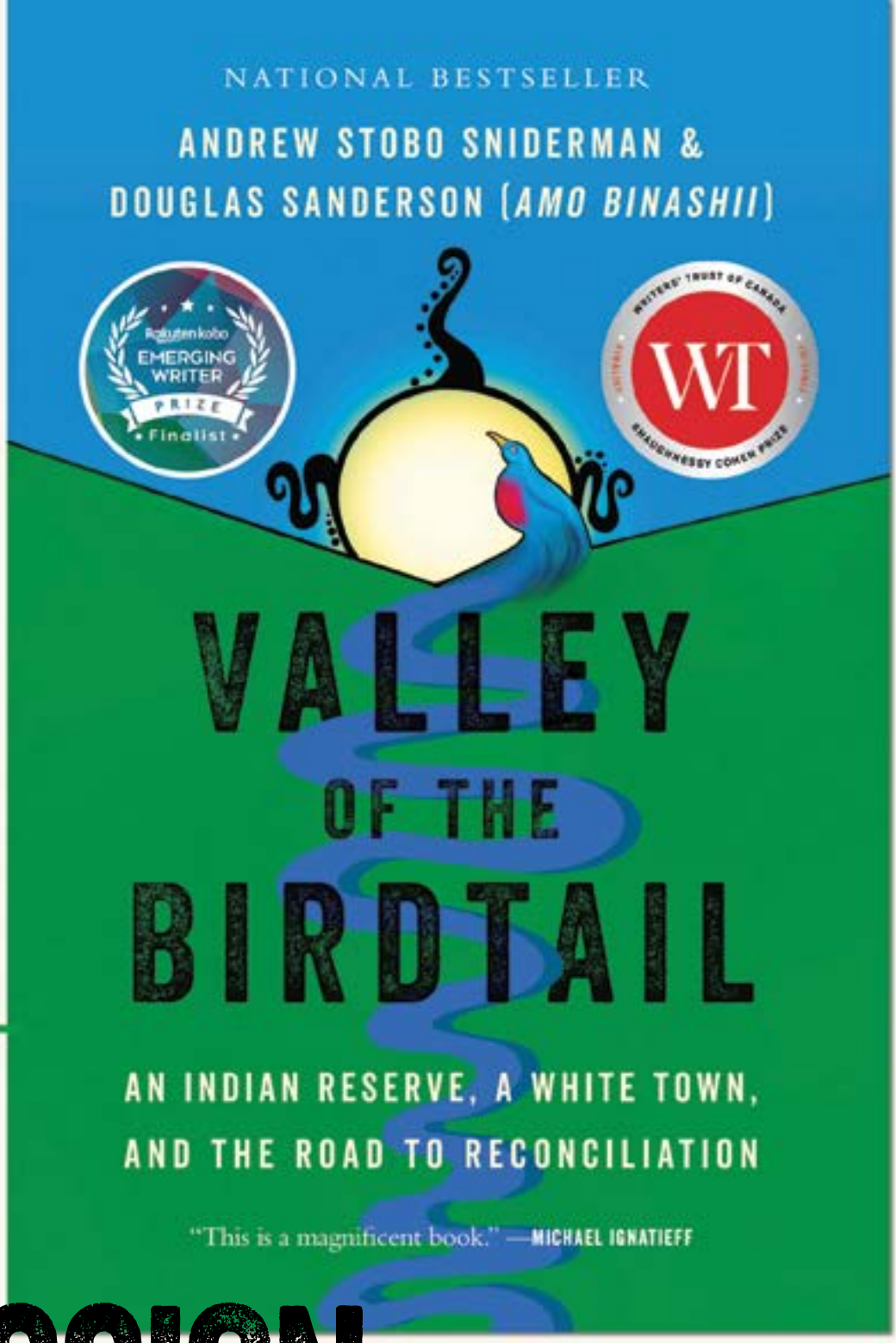
Aniibiishaaboo niwii-minikwen Dibaajimowin
(Drink tea and tell a story)



TEACHER DISCUSSION GUIDE

Book of the Year: CBC Books, Apple Books, Winnipeg Free Press, History Today

Winner, John W. Dafoe Prize for "Best Book About Canada"

PLEASE NOTE
Conversations in this guide may surface strong emotions, personal memories, and experiences of trauma, particularly as you engage with difficult histories and their ongoing impact. As you move through this material, please be mindful of your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of those around you. Support is available through trusted organizations and helplines that provide confidential emotional, cultural and crisis care. Facilitators are encouraged to create space of care, pause when needed, and ensure participants know where to turn if they require additional support.

Mental health support: Get help—Canada.ca
Hope for Wellness Help Line (English and French 24/7):
Hope for Wellness Helpline Online chat or call 1-855-242-3310
First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Chat: www.hopeforwellness.ca
Kids Help Phone Text CONNECT to 686868
Canadian National Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line: 1-866-925-4419

A Few Notes of Gratitude:
We would like to take the opportunity to express our heartfelt appreciation to Lisa Schellenberger for her discerning editorial insight and ability to bring focus to our ideas, and to Becky Avram for her creativity and exceptional skill in graphic design. To Dr. Vanessa Andreotti, we thank you for sharing your powerful poem "wanna be an ally?" with our community. Your words invite deep reflection and courage, reminding us that authentic allyship requires humility, accountability, and an openness to transformation. We are deeply grateful for the insight and candor you bring to this ongoing journey of learning and reconciliation.

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Social Studies Educators Network of Canada
Réseau pour l'enseignement des sciences sociales du Canada

The mission of the Social Studies Educators Network of Canada (SSENC) is to advocate and build capacity for high-quality social studies education by facilitating networking between educators and engaging with partners across Canada.

Funded by the Government of Canada
Financé par le gouvernement du Canada
Canada

Department of Canadian Heritage
SSENC is funded in part through a contribution agreement with the Department of Canadian Heritage. Our network supports the goals of the Canada History Fund to support formal and informal history, civics and public policy networks, to assist educators to use new knowledge to promote learning opportunities about Canada's history, civics and public policy, and ultimately to enhance the knowledge of Canada's history, civics and public policy amongst Canadians.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY

the Authors of Valley of the Birdtail

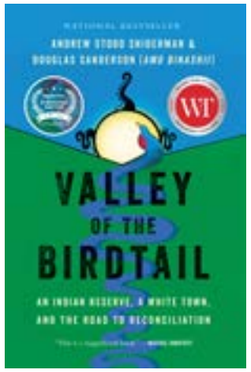
Valley of the Birdtail tells a true story about neighbouring communities–one Indigenous, one white–written by two co-authors–one of us Indigenous, the other white.

We wrote this book for teachers, and for students.

We wrote with the hope that this story would start conversations between people with totally different perspectives. So that more of us could find common ground, or at least mutual understanding.

As you know, it is difficult to learn and teach about grand themes like racism and inequality, residential schools and intergenerational trauma, reconciliation and hope. That is why this book tells an intimate, honest story about Canadian history through the lives of two families.

Half the story follows an Ojibway family living on reserve, and half follows a family of Ukrainian immigrants in a neighbouring small town. This story happens to take place in Manitoba but could just as easily be told about many other parts of Canada. We've heard from readers across the country who recognize themselves and their own neighbours.



Stobo Sniderman

Douglas Sanderson (Amo Binashii)

We, the authors, are very different people. One of us (Douglas) is a Cree man born in West Germany and raised across the Prairies and British Columbia. The other (Stobo) grew up in Montreal with ancestors from Wales, Poland, and Russia. Because we are so different, and because we take our differences seriously, we spent years writing and re-writing sentences so that they felt true and fair to us both.

It is therefore no accident that the tone of this book is not righteous. We don't want readers to feel yelled at. We try to share each character's perspective with empathy, even when we disagree with what they say or do. The story unfolds, imperfect people live their lives, and the reader has to do the work of figuring out what they make of it all.

We hope this guide helps you continue the conversation far beyond the words we wrote, which we only ever intended as a starting point.

Onwards, gently, together.

PREFACE

Shelley Kirkvold and Kevin Lopuck

Welcome to our guide to using *Valley of the Birdtail* as a book study or in a book club.[1] Engaging dialogically with *Valley of the Birdtail* is a unique opportunity for us, as educators, to explore the intertwined histories of Rossburn and Waywayseecappo–two neighbouring communities whose stories reveal the far-reaching effects of racism, colonial policy, resilience, and hope in Canada. By using a book club to facilitate shared inquiry, we are challenged to examine not only historical injustices but also our own beliefs and the roles we play in the ongoing work of reconciliation in education.

Meaningful understanding takes time and commitment, a lesson that resonates deeply with the journey we encounter in *Valley of the Birdtail*. The narrative journey offered by Stobo Sniderman and Douglas Sanderson (Amo Binashii) invites us to listen deeply, think critically, and reflect honestly. Through stories of struggle, courage, and transformation, the authors prompt readers to confront uncomfortable truths and seek understanding across cultural divides. Discussions provoked by the study of this book will centre on hard questions about justice, inequality, and community–while also carrying a spirit of compassion and hope for shared healing.

We encourage everyone to embrace this book club as one for open dialogue, respectful listening, and collaborative learning. The themes we explore are complex and, at times, painful. Let us meet them with empathy and humility, honoring both the living and ancestral voices whose stories shape this valley–and our country.

Ultimately, this experience of engaging in a book study for Valley of a Birdtail is about growth–not only deepening our knowledge of history and reconciliation, but also strengthening our capacity to be better teachers–educators who respond to our students with greater understanding, cultural awareness, and compassion. By reflecting on these stories, we can nurture classrooms that are more inclusive, affirming, and driven by a shared sense of justice and belonging.

Though this guide is mostly intended for teacher professional development, many of the themes and learning strategies could also be used with students in high school classrooms. Later on in the document we suggest curriculum connections across the country.

Thank you for your willingness to be vulnerable and your dedication to learning and moving forward in the spirit of truth and reconciliation. To support this work, we have created a resource page, which you will find at the end of the guide. We look forward to the meaningful conversations and insights that will help us learn, grow, and better support every student in our care.

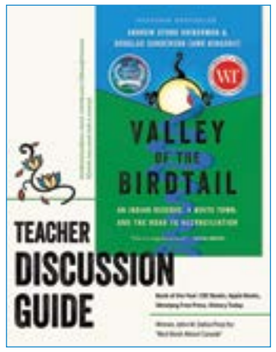
Shelley & Kevin

[1] In this guide, we use "book club" and "book study" somewhat interchangeably. Both refer to educators coming together around a shared text for dialogue and reflection, though book club highlights conversation and community, while "book study" emphasizes structured learning and professional development goals.

HOW TO
Use This Guide

Our hope is that this guide supports teachers not only in their understanding of *Valley of the Birdtail*, but also in their ongoing journeys toward reconciliation through relationship, reflection, and dialogue.

Valley of the Birdtail is an essential resource for teachers ready to engage deeply in the work of truth and reconciliation. The book helps guide teachers through their own personal reflections and can inspire them to foster meaningful change in their classrooms, schools, and communities. Additionally, beyond responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, *Valley of the Birdtail* offers an opportunity for deep personal and professional learning and invites honest and potentially transformative engagement with the legacies of our shared history in the land that is now Canada.



The themes within the book include: racism and inequality, residential schools and intergenerational trauma, hearing each other, and reconciliation and hope. These are not easy to confront; they ask teachers to be open, reflective, and courageous in doing the difficult emotional and intellectual work that reconciliation requires.

We offer this guide to help teachers engage with *Valley of the Birdtail* in a good way: with care, humility, and a commitment to learning. Though there are a variety of ways to engage with *Valley of the Birdtail*, our experience suggests that teacher book clubs can be especially powerful spaces for professional growth and transformation.

Given our experience, we hope to help teachers by:

1. Exploring how teacher book clubs can serve as meaningful professional learning experiences, and providing practical guidance for facilitating them using *Valley of the Birdtail* as a shared text.

2. Acknowledging the challenges that come with engaging in difficult dialogue, and offering strategies and examples rooted in classroom practice but applicable more broadly to help teachers navigate these conversations with care and confidence.

3. Highlighting curricular connections across Canada to support teachers who wish to bring the book and/or its key themes into their classrooms.

Our hope is that this guide supports teachers not only in their understanding of *Valley of the Birdtail*, but also in their ongoing journeys towards reconciliation through relationship, reflection, and dialogue.

INTRODUCTION
to Using Teacher Book Clubs

Rethinking Professional Development Through Non-Formal Learning

As teachers with decades of experience, we have both spent plenty of time in traditional professional development (PD) that feels very top-down. Think back to PD days where a big-name speaker is brought in to address a large audience. Many of us have sat in those rooms, listening politely and wondering how much of what is being said actually applies to our classrooms, while having little say in the content or direction of the learning itself.

Some of the most meaningful professional learning can happen in smaller, collaborative groups where, guided by inquiry, participants can shape the discussion, ask questions that matter to them, and explore topics at their own pace. What makes these experiences stand out is not just the smaller scale, but also the tone. They are less formal, more conversational, and co-directed. Teachers are not passive recipients of knowledge, but active participants, learning from one another and leaving the experience richer for having listened, questioned, and contributed. Teacher book clubs can capture this approach.

Conversational Pedagogy

Book clubs do more than provide space for conversation. They allow teachers to practice engaging in dialogue thoughtfully. We explore topics where opinions differ, where discussions might be challenging or contentious, and where multiple perspectives exist. Teachers learn to speak and listen with curiosity and care, building respect for diversity while navigating complex conversations. These experiences help us grow as educators and better prepare us to guide students through discussions that are difficult, nuanced, or emotionally charged.

Critical and Transformative Potential

Teacher book clubs also encourage us to challenge dominant narratives, consider diverse perspectives, and imagine more just and relational approaches to education. Reading and discussing texts collectively creates a form of public pedagogy where learning is about personal growth and about thinking and acting in ways that influence our communities and classrooms. Engaging with challenging material alongside colleagues develops courage, insight, and the ability to address social issues thoughtfully with our students.

INTRODUCTION
to Using Teacher Book Clubs

Connecting to Valley of the Birdtail and Storytelling

A teacher book club is more than a literacy activity; when done well, it reflects several key Indigenous ways of knowing, especially when conversations centre Indigenous voices, stories, or histories. Teacher book clubs offer a space to develop all these skills while engaging with stories that challenge and expand our understanding. *Valley of the Birdtail* in particular invites readers to listen deeply, reflect critically, and grapple with experiences shaped by history, culture, and community. Discussing it together allows teachers to practice the relational, story-centred learning that is central to many Indigenous pedagogies. These approaches emphasize learning through listening, sharing, and making meaning collectively. In this way, book clubs show us that professional development can be relational, reflective, and transformative, helping us grow as educators while supporting students in navigating complex and diverse worlds.

Teacher Book Clubs = Public Pedagogy
Personal Growth Leads to Community Action

FACILITATING
Meaningful Teacher Book Clubs

Purpose and Framing

Before launching a book club, it's important to clarify why you are doing it and what you hope to achieve. In the case of *Valley of the Birdtail*, it should be clear that you intend to engage in serious and potentially difficult but transformative conversations about truth and reconciliation in Canada.

Connection to Professional Goals and Intended Outcomes

Reflect on how the book club can nurture your teaching practice, curiosity, and sense of professional community. When the purpose is shared and clear, the group can come together with intention and openness. Be explicit about what you want participants to understand or take away from the experience, whether that involves developing new classroom strategies, deepening their understanding of social issues, or strengthening their dialogue skills. This clarity also creates space for movement towards more respectful, informed, and relational educational practices, supporting participants as they examine their own assumptions and contribute responsibly to meaningful change. With *Valley of the Birdtail*, the hope is that teachers not only deepen their understanding of the complex history of Indigenous–settler relations, but also feel encouraged to envision a future in which both truth and reconciliation are fundamental to a Canadian identity.

> *"Reflect on how the book club can nurture your teaching practice, curiosity, and sense of professional community. When the purpose is shared and clear, the group can come together with intention and openness."*

Structure and Logistics

Decide whether the group will be peer-led or facilitator-led. Some clubs rotate roles, such as discussion leader, connector, or summarizer, which helps everyone stay engaged and share responsibility. Also, consider different formats: book clubs can meet in person, virtually, asynchronously (like an online forum), or in a hybrid model. Consider what works best for your group's schedules, comfort levels, and access. Don't forget how busy teachers are! Be sure to think about how much reading is realistic per week or per meeting, and how long the overall cycle should run. Quality is always best over quantity. Later in this guide we will suggest how to engage with themes in *Valley of the Birdtail* and structure your book club so that each meeting can be focused.

FACILITATING
Meaningful Teacher Book Clubs

Group Composition

Remember that small groups often allow for deeper discussion. If you are considering doing a large-scale book study, try dividing up the larger group into smaller ones. In all groups, consider that a diversity of roles, experience levels, or perspectives can enrich the conversation and ensure multiple voices are heard. As much as one group of people might want to stick together (e.g., friend groups, subject area groups), try to mix up the groups as much as possible. It can be helpful to distribute participants who have more knowledge or experience of specific themes throughout the groups, as this can support richer discussion. Social studies teachers, for example, may already understand the topics in *Valley of the Birdtail*, which allows them to offer helpful context or perspectives. However, this knowledge should be shared voluntarily and never create an expectation that they take on leadership roles. While it's true that members of marginalized communities should never be expected to represent or speak for an entire group, there are times when individuals may choose to take on that role. Some people feel comfortable sharing their experiences or offering perspective on broader community issues, and their contributions can be incredibly valuable when offered voluntarily. The key is ensuring that this responsibility is never assumed, assigned, or placed unfairly on them, but rather that space is created for anyone—marginalized or not—who wishes to contribute meaningfully to the conversation.

Implementation Guidance

Always choose your book carefully, recruit participants thoughtfully, and co-create norms and expectations to set the tone for respectful, engaging dialogue. Be ready to guide discussions, especially when topics are sensitive or potentially contentious. Encourage equity of voice so all participants feel comfortable contributing. Try using various forms of reflection like journals, exit tickets, or check-ins after each meeting. Reflection helps participants connect what they read to their own experiences.

Sustaining Impact

Be sure to provide opportunities for participants to translate insights from the book into their classrooms, workplaces, or broader professional practice. Encourage participants to consider how the club can have a lasting effect. Co-plan follow-up activities, action plans, implementation projects, or future book cycles that can keep the learning alive long after the last page is read. *Valley of the Birdtail* proposes some very thoughtful ways forward for Canadians and, though participation in a book club about it is a step forward, asking participants to consider how we move forward can be extremely powerful and help create agency.

NAVIGATING
Contentious Conversations[2]

Building Trust and Purpose

When used as professional development, a book club or book study gives teachers space to live out the reflective, collaborative learning we hope to foster in our classrooms. This is especially true for humanities teachers, who often engage in contentious conversations. While book clubs can be enjoyable (always include yummy snacks!), they also call for purpose and intentionality. Choosing to participate means committing to personal and professional growth while building community.

Practicing Democracy Through Dialogue

At their best, professional book clubs reflect a commitment to democratic ideals. Difficult conversations are not about reaching consensus, but about practicing democracy by listening with curiosity, speaking with care, and holding space for complexity. Our intention should be guided by ethical commitments such as respect, humility, and a shared pursuit of understanding. Participation requires openness to being changed by what we hear.

Creating Space for Safety and Respect

Just as we do in our own classrooms, it's important to begin any book club or study by co-creating group norms with participants that emphasize safety and respect. These shared agreements help set the tone and invite open conversation about how we communicate and engage with one another. For example, the group might agree that conversation is not a competition but a shared search for understanding. This means listening and speaking to understand rather than to win an argument, and giving others the benefit of the doubt rather than assuming bad intent. When difficult moments arise, participants can aim to educate rather than admonish, approaching one another with patience and care. Just as importantly, what is shared in the room should remain in

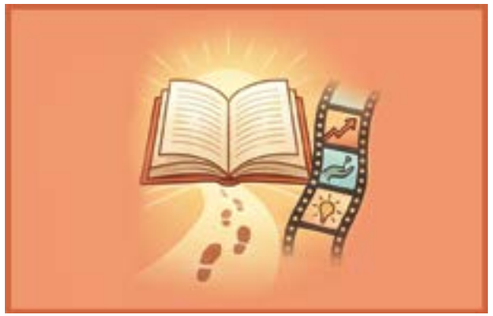
NAVIGATING
Contentious Conversations

confidence, as the conversations are for collective growth, not for social media.

Keeping Dialogue Alive When It Gets Tough

While part of the appeal of a book club lies in the spontaneity of genuine conversation, there may be times when dialogue stalls or feels difficult to sustain. In these moments, structured strategies can help re-energize engagement. Approaches such as Think-Pair-Share (or Turn and Talk), Fishbowl discussions, Chart Paper Gallery Walks, or Paper Blogging (a rotating written discussion) can provide multiple entry points for participants to share ideas and perspectives. Whatever format you choose, the key is preparation: the host or facilitator should come ready with thoughtful guiding questions that provoke reflection and invite dialogue, with or without these engagement structures.

Stories That Move Us Forward



During periods of major change in society and the world around us, when our very ideas of citizenship and democracy are being challenged, dialogue is essential. Book clubs can spark rich dialogue, but it requires thoughtful planning and guidance to succeed. We must intentionally dedicate time to practicing dialogue, establish clear guidelines for respectful discussion, and reflect on why and how we foster these conversations. *Valley of the Birdtail* is an excellent example of a book that can engage participants in a professional development book club, even as it explores themes that may be difficult for some. Using it effectively requires care and intentionality. By coming together in dialogue, we are committing not only to personal and professional growth, but also to confronting challenging ideas courageously, nurturing the insight, empathy, and collective understanding that help shape a more thoughtful and just society.

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[2] This section was inspired and adapted with permissions from Moore, S.D.M., Lopuck, K., & Elgar, K. (2025) Dialogue & democracy: Rationale, guidelines & strategies for encouraging dialogic classrooms. *MB Speaks: The Journal of the Manitoba Social Sciences Teachers' Association*, 50(1), 47-52.

Strategies for Generating
Conversation in the Classroom

Socratic Seminar

What: A structured, student-led discussion exploring ideas from a shared text, video, or related sources.

How: Students prepare by annotating material, then engage each other in dialogue by sharing observations, insights, questions, connections, confusions, etc. with each other while the teacher observes and only intervenes when needed.

Why: Helps deepen understanding and encourages evidence-based reasoning, fosters student agency, and promotes active and respectful listening.

Whip Around

What: A rapid response activity where each student briefly answers a question or reacts to a prompt.

How: Teacher poses a question or asks for a reaction to a shared text, video, or related source. Students respond in turn around the room; passing is allowed, but the quick pace promotes participation.

Why: Engages all students quickly, reveals diverse ideas, and energizes discussion.

Think/Pair/Share (Turn and Talk)

What: A strategy where students think individually, discuss with a partner, and then share with the class.

How: After annotating text, jotting ideas, freewriting, or brain-storming, students respond to guided questions, talk with a neighbour, and then contribute to a whole-class discussion.

Why: Supports individual reflection before sharing thus building confidence and increasing willingness to engage in larger discussions.

Strategies for Generating Conversation in the Classroom

Fishbowl 1

What: A paired discussion format using concentric circles.

How: Students form an inner and outer circle, paired face-to-face. They respond to a question or prompt for a set time, then rotate to new partners; prompts may remain the same or change.

Why: Encourages focused conversations, allows students to practice articulating ideas multiple times, and exposes students to diverse perspectives.

Fishbowl 2

What: A discussion format where a small group speaks while others listen.

How: Students in the inner circle discuss a topic while the outer circle listens and takes notes. The teacher may "empty the fishbowl" to swap groups or allow outer circle members to tap in.

Why: Promotes focused listening, reflective thinking, and active participation.

Chart Paper Gallery Walk

What: A rotating group activity to generate and build on others' ideas.

How: Place chart papers with prompts around the room. Individuals or groups write responses, then rotate, adding new ideas or building on existing ones.

Why: Encourages movement, allows students to see and respond to diverse perspectives while encouraging collaboration and collective idea-building.

Strategies for Generating Conversation in the Classroom

Paper Blogging/Rotating Discussion (Similar to Chart Paper Gallery Walk)

What: A written conversation activity across multiple prompts.

How: Prompts are placed on desks. Students write responses, then move to a new prompt, read previous responses, and reply.

Why: Encourages movement, allows students to see and respond to diverse perspectives while encouraging collaboration and collective idea-building.

Agree/Disagree

What: A position-taking activity on controversial or open-ended questions.

How: Activity can be run by having students hold up a paper with 'A' for agree or 'D' for disagree. Alternatively, agree and disagree can be posted around the room and students physically move to the space they choose. Students discuss reasoning in small groups before sharing with the class.

Why: Encourages students to take a clear stance and justify reasoning, can spark lively debate, and challenges students to consider different perspectives.

T-Chart with Sticky Notes

What: A visual organizer for sorting opinions or responses.

How: A T-chart is displayed with two categories (e.g., Agree/Disagree). Students place their named sticky note in the column matching their view, then can be called upon to explain or discuss their reasoning.

Why: Makes viewpoints visible, prompts discussion, and allows targeted questioning.

Strategies for Generating Conversation in the Classroom

Popcorn/Snowball Discussion

What: A dynamic sharing activity using written responses.

How: Students write for one minute, crumple the paper, toss it to the center, then pick up a new crumpled paper and respond. The cycle can continue multiple times.

Why: Adds novelty, anonymity, and promotes quick exchange of diverse thoughts in a dynamic way.

Line Up According To

What: A continuum-based opinion movement activity.

How: Students respond to a prompt, then position themselves along a line representing a spectrum of views. They share reasoning and try to persuade others to move.

Why: Makes opinion diversity visible, encourages persuasion skills, and helps students recognize and respect diverse viewpoints.

Diamond Deliberation

What: A group decision-making activity ranking statements by priority.

How: Groups are given nine statements and must arrange them in a diamond shape from most to least important, justifying placement through discussion.

Why: Develops reasoning by evaluating complex factors in relation to each other, encourages negotiation and consensus-building skills.

Continued on Page 32

HOW TO

Use Valley of the Birdtail in a Book Club

To use *Valley of the Birdtail* in a book club, build your meetings and discussions around thoughtful engagement, collective learning, and respect for both the content and each other. Start by gathering a committed group of participants—whether in-person or online—and set out clear agreements about how often you'll meet, where, and for how long, so that everyone feels invested and prepared for meaningful conversation.

Welcoming Space and Agreements

Begin each session with a regional land acknowledgment. This practice not only honours the land you are meeting on, but invites participants to consider the broader meaning of your discussions within the context of Indigenous history and presence. Encourage all members to bring their full selves to the conversation and make space for every voice. Use a sharing circle format when meeting in person, sitting together with a talking piece to foster equal opportunities to speak and attentive listening.

The book's honest portrayal of these painful histories may be triggering for some readers, particularly those affected by intergenerational trauma related to colonialism and residential schools.

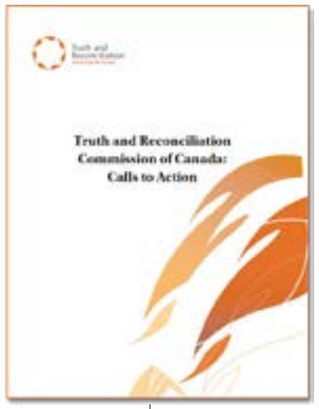
Support is available through the following resources, which offer confidential emotional support to anyone in need: "Resources," p. 36, #1.

HOW TO

Use Valley of the Birdtail in a Book Club

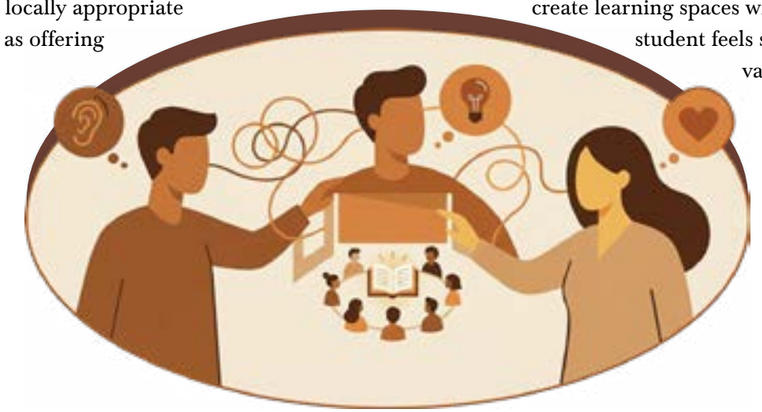
Connecting to Truth and Reconciliation

Use the book study as an opportunity to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action and to deepen understanding of Indigenous history and contemporary realities ("Resources," p. 36, #2).



Infusing Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing

Incorporate Indigenous values throughout your meetings, drawing from teachings such as Wisdom, Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, and Truth. See link for resources. Seven Grandfather Teachings First Nations Métis Inuit Student Education Resources Alberta Educators. Create respectful relationships with your Indigenous community. Whenever possible, invite Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or local cultural advisors to join or speak. Honour their contributions with culturally and locally appropriate gestures, such as offering tobacco, sage, or sweetgrass. Present the Elder or Knowledge Keeper with a heartfelt gift, an honorarium, and thoughtful hospitality. Always ask permission and provide proper credit when sharing others' stories, following local protocols for acknowledgment and thanks. Indigenous Oral Histories and Primary Sources | The Canadian Encyclopedia.



Learn about seeing through an Indigenous lens, asking whose stories are being told and whose are left out. Continue to discuss how these actions can build justice, healing, and hope? Ultimately, the guide aims to support teachers not only in understanding *Valley of the Birdtail*, but also in deepening their ongoing journeys toward truth and reconciliation.

Encouraging Reflection and Growth

Approach each discussion with openness, empathy, and a willingness to learn from one another. Through shared listening and reflection, participants can grow together as educators and create learning spaces where every student feels seen and valued.

CULTIVATING

the Conversation: Themes

To facilitate critical engagement with *Valley of the Birdtail*, this study guide organizes the text into four overarching themes: Racism, Language, and Inequality; Residential Schools and Intergenerational Trauma; Living History and Perspective; and Reconciliation and Hope. Each theme provides a contextual and thematic overview that connects the book's narrative to broader historical and socio-cultural frameworks, guiding readers through complex issues faced by Indigenous and settler communities.

Racism and Inequality

Racism against Indigenous peoples has played a crucial role in shaping and deepening racial divides over more than 150 years. Federal policies enforced exclusion and dehumanization, marking Indigenous people as outsiders unworthy of belonging. Legal restrictions worsened mistrust and hostility between Indigenous and settler communities.

Federal policies, such as the Indian Act, further institutionalized inequality. Officials exercised control that trapped Indigenous communities in economic stagnation while settler towns prospered. Persistent misconceptions continue to entrench racial inequalities and harden public attitudes. This legacy of institutional racism has shaped a society that marginalizes Indigenous peoples economically, socially, and politically, underscoring the critical need to understand these historical roots to address ongoing injustices and promote equitable relationships moving forward.

"Legal restrictions worsened mistrust and hostility between Indigenous and settler communities."

REFLECTION PROMPTS

How do the experiences of the two communities in *Valley of the Birdtail* reveal the ways systemic racism is embedded in language, policies, and everyday interactions? In what ways can understanding this history reshape our approaches to equity and inclusion today?

What is one thing I will do differently in my teaching practice after this discussion?

CULTIVATING the Conversation: Themes

Residential Schools and Intergenerational Trauma

Residential schools-such as the Brandon Indian Residential School, operating from 1895 to 1972 —are central to the intergenerational trauma experienced in Waywayseecappo and many Indigenous communities. These schools, managed by religious organizations under government policies, forcibly removed Indigenous children from their families, aiming to assimilate them by erasing their language, culture, and identity. Despite the government's treaty promises to provide culturally appropriate education, these schools were sites of deprivation, abuse, and cultural genocide, with many children suffering severe physical and psychological harm, and even death. The effects of this trauma did not end with the schools' closure; rather, they have passed down through generations, manifesting in ongoing social and mental health challenges for Indigenous peoples. Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair's reflection that "it's going to take generations to fix things" underscores the need for lasting institutional and governmental changes.

"Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair's reflection that "it's going to take generations to fix things" underscores the need for lasting institutional and governmental changes."

REFLECTION PROMPTS

In what ways does the legacy of residential schools continue to affect generations of Indigenous families, and how can acknowledging this trauma foster healing in our classrooms and communities?

What is one thing I will do differently in my teaching practice after this discussion?

CULTIVATING the Conversation: Themes

Hearing Each Other

Personal stories from families in both Rossburn and Waywayseecappo put a human face on history. These narratives were steeped in stereotypes equating "Indianness" with laziness and lack of ambition—contrasted to the ideal of the self-made settler. These perspectives were rooted in a profound misunderstanding of historical barriers and deliberate policy choices that undermined Indigenous success.

The journeys of these two families prove that immersive experiences in living in different communities often challenges old beliefs. The lived reality of partnerships and friendship demonstrates that "the way it works" for one community isn't universal; sometimes, meaningful change requires breaking old narratives and embracing uncomfortable histories.

"These narratives were steeped in stereotypes equating "Indianness" with laziness and lack of ambition– contrasted to the ideal of the self-made settler."

REFLECTION PROMPTS

How does hearing multiple perspectives from both Indigenous and settler families challenge dominant narratives about Canadian history? What does this teach us about whose stories we prioritize and how history is recorded?

What is one thing I will do differently in my teaching practice after this discussion?

CULTIVATING
the Conversation: Themes

Reconciliation and Hope

While the book never shies from the pain or injustice of the past, it insists on hope. That hope, the authors argue, can only be genuine if it is grounded in truth—an honest accounting of history that makes reconciliation in Canada possible Real partnership requires bridging divides and treating First Nations as equals in Confederation. In Rossburn and Waywayseecappo—divided by a river since 1879—reconciliation emerged via dialogue, shared education agreements, and mutual learning.

"We are all Treaty People" underscores shared responsibility for justice, demanding continuous advocacy, allyship, and power redistribution for equitable futures. This ongoing process, rooted in respect and inclusion, invites all to reflect, learn, and act.

"Real partnership requires bridging divides and treating First Nations as equals in Confederation."

REFLECTION PROMPTS

Reflect on your own experiences. How have the ideas explored in the book shaped your perspectives on racism, privilege, and reconciliation? Considering the ongoing efforts of the communities featured, how can reconciliation be envisioned as an active, collective process? What role can education play in building bridges for justice, healing, and shared futures?

What is one thing I will do differently in my teaching practice after this discussion?

CULTIVATING
the Conversation: Guiding Questions

There are many meaningful ways to engage with *Valley of the Birdtail*. The themes outlined above offer broad entry points for exploring the book's historical, social, and human complexities. If you prefer a more direct, chapter-by-chapter approach, the following is a list of specific questions designed to offer clear direction and encourage deeper engagement and critical thinking. References to relevant passages in the book are included to support evidence-based discussion and help guide students' understanding.

CHAPTER ONE

1. What are the primary themes introduced in Chapter One of *Valley of the Birdtail*, particularly around the 2006 encounter between Maureen Twovoice from the Waywayseecappo Cree Nation and Troy Luhowy from Rossburn?

2. How do these themes reflect the historical tensions between the Indigenous reserve and the white town?

3. How does the physical landscape of the valley highlight the division between Waywayseecappo and Rossburn, and what does this suggest about the broader relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada?

CHAPTER TWO

1. On page 35 Reverend J. Semmens captures the deep skepticism and fear that many Indigenous parents feel towards residential schools. These concerns reveal the profound distrust and apprehension Indigenous families experience in response to government policies that threaten their culture, autonomy, and children's well-being. Reverend J. Semmens documented parents' skepticism about residential schools. How do these questions and concerns reflect broader fears in Waywayseecappo about the legacy of colonialism? Provide specific examples to support.

2. The Brandon Indian Residential School appears grand from the outside. What is the reality within?

CULTIVATING
the Conversation: Guiding Questions

CHAPTER TWO cont'd.

3 "When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with its parents, who are savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read or write." – Prime Minister John A. Macdonald. How did the location of residential schools go against Treaty agreements about education and cultural preservation?

4 Duncan Campbell Scott in 1913 wrote, "It is quite within the mark to say that fifty per cent of the children who passed through these schools did not live to benefit from the education which they had received therein." Scott added a few years later: "It is readily acknowledged that Indian children lose their natural resistance to illness by habituating so closely in the residential schools and that they die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this does not justify a change in the policy of this Department, which is geared toward a final solution of an Indian problem." What do Scott's words reveal about the lengths authorities will go to force assimilation?

5 In 1907, Medical Inspector for Indian Affairs Dr. P. H. Bryce reported that health conditions in residential schools were a "national crime" ("Resources," p. 36, #3). What does this mean, and what were the implications for students?

6 Review the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's Residential School Timeline ("Resources," p. 36, #4). Did anything surprise you in terms of dates, practices, or scope?

7 Use the Canadian Encyclopedia interactive map to locate residential schools throughout Canada ("Resources," p. 36, #5). Where was the closest location to where you live? When did it open and close?

8 Watch the video Historica Canada Intergenerational Trauma: Residential Schools and reflect on its message and connections to the following concepts ("Resources," p. 36, #6).

- Historical trauma: The cumulative effects of trauma experienced by a group of people over generations. For Aboriginal peoples of Canada, it results from historical experiences of colonial control that disrupted language, culture, and identity.
- Intergenerational impact: Trauma experienced by survivors that is passed on to subsequent generations, rooted in unresolved trauma from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse suffered at Indian residential schools.
- Lateral violence: Humiliating or violent behavior directed at members of the same group due to internalized trauma; in

CULTIVATING
the Conversation: Guiding Questions

CHAPTER TWO cont'd.

8 • Indigenous communities, it means abusing one's own people in ways they themselves have been abused. How do these link to the legacy of residential schools in First Nations communities?

9 The Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair states, "Seven generations of children went to residential schools. It's going to take generations to fix things" ("Resources," p. 36, #7).

CHAPTER THREE

1 How does Chapter 3 explore the historical and social divisions between the white town of Rossburn and the Waywayseecappo Cree Nation reserve, and what are the implications for community relationships?

2 How do the authors use the histories of the two communities to show how inequality was created over time rather than in a single moment?

3 Which government policies or decisions seem most significant in deepening the divide between the reserve and the town in this chapter, and why?

CHAPTER FOUR

1 How are education and schooling beginning to emerge as key forces shaping the futures of children in Waywayseecappo and Rossburn in this chapter?

2 What evidence do you see of systemic racism rather than just individual prejudice, and how does the chapter help you tell the difference?

3 How does the use of dehumanizing and derogatory language (e.g., "Barbarians, pampered paupers, ignorant and vicious foreign scum...Wagon burner, Dirty Indian, savage, squaw") illuminate the way language constructs and reinforces racist attitudes and social hierarchies?

CHAPTER FIVE

1 How did the British North America Act of 1867 create separation? What examples show its effects on geography, politics, and Indigenous rights today ("Resources," p. 36, #8).

2 How do the personal stories in this chapter illustrate the impact of residential schools or other institutions on families across generations?

CULTIVATING
the Conversation: Guiding Questions

CHAPTER FIVE cont'd.

3 In this chapter, what tensions do you notice between community resilience and ongoing harm, and how do the authors present both without simplifying either?

CHAPTER SIX

1 Hayter Reed's illegal "pass system" sought to keep "rebel Indians" on reserves. What are its negative consequences, and how did this shape relationships with neighbouring communities ("Resources," p. 37, #9).

2 What is meant by the "Spirit and Intent of Treaties," and why is this significant to current discussions of reconciliation ("Resources," p. 37, #10)?

3 Can you find and share a quote in the book that speaks to the experience of the Métis? How do policies treat the Métis differently from other Indigenous groups (Also refers to Chapter 8.) ("Resources," p. 37, #11)?

CHAPTER SEVEN

1 Why was there resentment and labelling of Ukrainian immigrants as "enemy aliens"? How did these attitudes contribute to racism ("Resources," p. 37, #12)?

2 How does this chapter show the different expectations placed on Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and what consequences do those expectations have?

3 What moments in the chapter best reveal how underfunding and unequal resources are experienced in everyday school life?

CHAPTER EIGHT

1 "A federal inspector described Waywayseecappo's inhabitants as unprogressive, morose, and unwilling to be guided by officials. Their inordinate pride appears to be the greatest obstacle to their advancement." Settlers in Rossburn looked on and drew the same conclusions. What does the inspector's description reveal about colonial attitudes and in what ways might these biased characterizations have affected the treatment, opportunities, or autonomy of Waywayseecappo's residents?

CULTIVATING
the Conversation: Guiding Questions

CHAPTER EIGHT

2 How did federal inspectors' judgments and policies—like the permit system (1882) and restricted access to farming equipment—create and maintain inequality? How many years did it take to repeal the Indian Act provision barring Indians from selling to non-Indians? What government policies were strategically used to create failure on the reserves ("Resources," p. 37, #13)?

3 Research Indigenous War Heroes ("Resources," p. 37, #14).

4 "Like many thousands of other Native veterans, McKay had to confront the painful dissonance between Canada's wartime rhetoric about freedom and the harsh reality of his racist neighbours in a racist nation."

5 Research other racist policies that affected Indigenous veterans. What were the consequences of "freedom denied" upon return from service?

CHAPTER NINE

1 In Chapter 9 the authors describe Clifford Sifton as "the Young Napoleon of the West" and the greatest hypocrite. What do they mean, and how did Sifton's views embody the dissonance between welcoming immigrants and oppressing Indigenous peoples?

2 How are the long-term effects of earlier policies (such as residential schools or funding decisions) becoming more visible in people's lives by this point in the book?

3 Which character's experience in this chapter most clearly illustrates the idea that "separate and unequal" was created by design, and how?

CHAPTER TEN

1 "On occasions when Nelson neglected his clothing or didn't do a chore, his parents would say 'You're just like an Indian.' Because Indians, he was made to understand, were careless, lazy, and reliant on constant handouts—in short, the opposite of hardened, industrious pioneers." How did Nelson Luhowy's ideas about Indigenous people shift as he experienced new realities and relationships? What catalyzed his change in perspective? Reflect on your lived experience. How have these ideas shaped your perspective?

CULTIVATING
the Conversation: Guiding Questions

CHAPTER TEN

2 "...people in Rossburn largely saw their neighbours as authors of their own misfortune. We might call this racism. We might also call it intimate familiarity with only one side of a long and tragic story" (*Valley of the Birdtail,* p. 200). Why is the perception among some Ukrainian immigrants that "we succeeded, they failed" so problematic? What are the errors in this reasoning?

3 In Chapter 10, the authors discuss Ukrainian immigrant perceptions of Indigenous peoples. Ukrainians were "... raised to see themselves as part of a heroic story who arrived in Canada without English, without education, without wealth. But they strived and endured and, over time, prospered." "We are doing something right, and the Indians must be doing something wrong" (*Valley of the Birdtail* pp. 198-199). How have Indigenous peoples been collateral damage of misunderstandings between settlers and Indigenous Canadians?

4 "...it was nearly impossible for anyone in Waywayseecappo to get a bank loan, whether to purchase a home or start a business. This was because banks were not allowed to seize property on reserves, as a consequence of the unique legal status of reserve land and, therefore, Indians living on reserve had no access to the collateral necessary to obtain loans." As far as Nelson was concerned,

CHAPTER TEN cont'd.

4 "[t]he Ukrainians got 160 acres and that was it." "In reality, this land also gave them access to capital, which made all the difference between economic progress and stagnation" (*Valley of the Birdtail,* p. 198). How does the legal status of reserve land prevent Waywayseecappo members from accessing capital and loans? Why does this matter for economic progress?

5 What are some of the devastating consequences for students living on reserves in Canada? (See also *Valley of the Birdtail,* Chapter 14)

6 How do immersive experiences change Troy and Nelson Luhowy's perspectives? In what ways do "the way it works" get challenged by lived reality?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1 In Chapter 11, how are the lasting effects of the residential school system depicted, and what role do these experiences play in shaping contemporary reconciliation efforts in the Birdtail Valley?

CULTIVATING
the Conversation: Guiding Questions

CHAPTER ELEVEN

2 How do efforts at partnership or change begin to emerge in this chapter, and what obstacles do they face from history, policy, or community attitudes?

3 In what ways do individuals in this chapter try to challenge or work within the system, and what does this show about the limits of personal action in a systemic problem?

CHAPTER TWELVE

1 What pathways to reconciliation and healing are presented in Chapter 12, and how do they suggest a way forward for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in the Birdtail Valley?

2 How does this chapter deepen your understanding of reconciliation as more than just an idea or word, but as a set of difficult, concrete choices for people and institutions?

3 Where do you see hopeful signs in this chapter, and where do you see reasons to be cautious about how much change is really happening?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1 Community Elder Bryan Cloud states, "Apartheid is alive and well in Canada" (*Valley of the Birdtail,* p. 230). Do you agree? Why or why not?

2 Because on-reserve education has been chronically underfunded, Indigenous students have experienced unequal educational conditions. How should this history inform current conversations about equity of education ("Resources," p. 37, #15)?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1 In Chapter 14, the former Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs stated: "It is only reasonable to conclude that the deliberate, but unstated, policy of the Canadian government is to maintain the vast majority of First Nations in poverty." This former Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs suggests that government policy deliberately maintained First Nations in poverty. What evidence supports this claim? What are the consequences for reserve students ("Resources," p. 37, #15)?

2 What are the key parallels or differences between Linda and Maureen's education journeys? How do their experiences reflect systemic inequalities?

CULTIVATING
the Conversation: Guiding Questions

CHAPTER FOURTEEN cont'd.

3 The authors ask: "Why did Canada underfund education on reserves for so long? If Canada is to meaningfully address the long-standing problem, we need a clear diagnosis of its causes" (*Valley of the Birdtail,* p. 244). Why is the seeking of truth—the full, honest accounting of history—the foundational step in reconciliation?

4 On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper shared a formal apology on behalf of Canadians in the House of Commons. How might this action be considered a first step in reconciliation ("Resources," p. 37, #16)?

5 An important part of reconciliation is action. Beyond the information from the book, what actions have been taken to reconcile the damage caused by residential schools?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1 Looking back from this chapter, what do you think are the most important lessons for future relationships between Indigenous and settler communities, and why?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN cont'd.

2 How does this chapter connect the story of Waywayseecappo and Rossburn to the larger story of Canada's past and present, and what message do you think the authors want readers to take away?

3 The authors highlight the misconception that "Indigenous peoples in Canada pay no taxes." What are some common misconceptions? How do these shape attitudes?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1 How does "the partnership" change funding for reserve schools? What drives the shift to provincial schools, and what were its outcomes?

2 What causes the growing recognition that there are things to learn on both sides of the Birdtail? How did dialogue help bridge divides?

3 How does Maureen Twovoice's story exemplify reconciliation? What lessons can be taken from her journey?

CULTIVATING
the Conversation: Guiding Questions

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

1 The Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair said, "Education got us into this mess, and education will get us out of it." What do you think he means by this?

2 What specific actions have governments and communities taken to reconcile the harms caused by residential schools? What more remains to be done?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

1 How did the federal settlement system (2006) for survivors of residential schools work, especially the points system for compensation?

2 In discussing the troubled relationship that still exists between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians, the authors write on page 280: "...but it is never long before the news cycle turns and saves us the trouble of having to look away. Outrage blurs once more into indifference." How can we help to avoid the consistent return to indifference?

3 What contributed to the changes in Rossburn and Waywayseecappo to see a move from strangers to reconciliation? How does dignity play a role in reconciliation?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN cont'd.

4 How do perspectives on equality of outcomes differ between communities? Why does this matter for policy and social change?

5 The authors write, "Reconciliation...will require a redistribution of access to wealth and to the mechanisms of governance." Do you agree or disagree, and why?

6 Why is a proper understanding of taxation important for reconciliation? How could empowering First Nations to tax their land and resources change their futures?

7 What does it mean to bring "First Nations into Canadian confederation as partners, not subjects," and how might it be realized?

8 What does the statement "Hope is not just a start—it is a necessary first step" mean for moving towards reconciliation and justice?

CULTIVATING
the Conversation: Guiding Questions

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN cont'd.

9 What does it mean to say, "We are all Treaty People"? Do you believe modern treaties can be rewritten to undo historical inequities ("Resources," p. 37, #10)?

10 How can we shift from apathy to sustained advocacy and allyship?

11 How do these histories affect our students today? How can we, as teachers, help build more just and inclusive classrooms?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN cont'd.

12 The book explores how geography and history contribute to separations, but also how positive change is possible when communities work together. What are some of your takeaways?

13 Can you draw similarities between the story of Rossburn/Waywayseecapo and First Nations communities near you today?

Continued from Page 16

Strategies for Generating Conversation in the Classroom

U-Shaped Discussion / ++/+/?/-/--

What: A visual positioning and dialogue activity.

How: Students indicate their stance on a topic using physical position in a U-shape or by wearing/handing in a symbol (++ to --). They then engage with someone holding a different position.

Why: Visually reveals a range of opinions, fosters respectful dialogue between students with differing views, and promotes active engagement.

Curricular Connections
for Valley of the Birdtail

The lessons of *Valley of the Birdtail* resonate throughout Canadian society. While this guide focuses on using the book in teacher book clubs as professional development, secondary and high school students can also benefit from its study.

Below, we highlight curricular connections across the country where the themes of *Valley of the Birdtail* align with specific provincial and territorial curricula as of December 2025. This list is not exhaustive and should not suggest that the book's value is limited to these connections. Its true significance transcends any single curriculum, speaking to the broader story of Canadian history and our collective responsibility toward Truth and Reconciliation. The book's richness allows it to be used in multiple ways, for many purposes, and across a variety of learning contexts.

National

TRC Calls to Action

10. We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following Principles:

iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

i. 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.

ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

Curricular Connections
for Valley of the Birdtail

Provincial Curricular Connections

PROVINCE/TERRITORY	COURSES/GRADE LEVEL
Alberta	Grade 10: Social Studies 10-1: Perspectives on Globalization Grade 7: Canada: Origins, Histories and Movement of Peoples
British Columbia	Grade 12: Contemporary Indigenous Studies 12; Social Justice 12 Grade 11: Explorations in Social Studies 11 Grade 10: Canada and the World: 1914 to the Present Grade 9: 1750–1919
Manitoba	Grade 12: Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability; Current Topics in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies Grade 11: History of Canada Grade 9: Canada and the Contemporary World
New Brunswick	Grade 12: Indigenous Studies 120; Canadian History 121/122/123 Grade 9: Social Studies 9
Newfoundland and Labrador	Grade 12: Social Studies 3201 / 3202 – Quality of Life, Globalization, and Sustainability Grade 10: Social Studies 1201 / 1202 – Canadian Civics and Economics
Nova Scotia	Grade 11: Mi'kmaw Studies 11; Contemporary Canadian Studies 11; Canadian History 11 Grade 8: Social Studies 8 – A Changing Canadian Society
Northwest Territories	Grade 10: Canada and the World: 1914 to the Present Grade 9: 1750–1919
Nunavut	Grade 10: Inuuqatigiitsiarniq: Seeking Harmony; Grade 9: The Growth of Canada Grade 10-12: Aulajaaqtut
Ontario	Grade 12: Equity and Social Justice: From Theory to Practice Grade 11: Contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Issues and Perspectives Grade 11: Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice Grade 10: Canadian History Since World War I Grade 10: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Canada Grade 8: Creating Canada, 1850 to 1890 & Canada and 1890 to 1914: A Changing Society
Prince Edward Island	Grade 10-12: Canadian History HIS621A Grade 10-12: Canadian Studies: Canada in the 20th Century Grade 9: Social Studies 9
Quebec	Cycle Two
Saskatchewan	Grade 10: History 10 Grade 10: Native Studies
Yukon	Grade 12: Contemporary Indigenous Studies 12; Social Justice 12 Grade 11: Explorations in Social Studies 11 Grade 10: Canada and the World: 1914 to the Present Grade 9: 1750–1919

Bridging the Valley:
Reflecting on the Path Forward

When we were invited to collaborate with Stobo and Douglas on a teacher's guide for *Valley of the Birdtail*, we immediately said yes. Each of us had already seen how powerful this book could be when explored with colleagues, and how it can open up conversations about our histories and the possibilities for our future.

As teachers sit with the painful histories and living realities at the heart of this guide, the work naturally turns towards what it means to move forward responsibly with this new understanding. In moments like this, Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair reminds us that "the road we travel is equal in importance to the destination we seek. There are no shortcuts. When it comes to truth and reconciliation, we are all forced to go the distance." His words name an essential truth: learning about these histories is only the beginning. How we carry that learning forward is the real work.

From this stance of reconciliation, we turn toward the work of bridging the valley. This is not a single act but an ongoing practice of reaching across histories, perspectives, and lived experiences with humility and intention. Bridging the valley means listening deeply, learning openly, and creating spaces where difficult truths can be engaged with care and respect. In the context of teacher book clubs, it invites us to approach discussions thoughtfully, to honour the voices most impacted, and to reflect on our own positions and responsibilities. Each conversation becomes an opportunity to narrow the distance shaped by colonial histories and to build relationships grounded in understanding and trust.

Valley of the Birdtail offers a meaningful opportunity to continue our reconciliation journeys as educators across this country. We hope this guide supports you in engaging with the book's themes in ways that foster thoughtful dialogue, reflection, and shared learning. By approaching these histories with openness and care, we take steady steps toward bridging the valley together, while recognizing that similar divides exist in many communities across Canada.

RESOURCES

Teaching Resources

Facing History and Ourselves
Facing History "Contracting" page
Classroom contract strategy that helps students co-create norms for dialogue, identity safety, and accountability before engaging with difficult histories.
Facing History and Ourselves
Facing History Resource Library (Canada filter)
Searchable collection of lessons, strategies, texts, and videos on genocide, racism, human rights, and Indigenous histories in Canada.
Indigenous Oral Histories and Primary Sources | The Canadian Encyclopedia
Indigenous Oral Histories and Primary Sources—The Canadian Encyclopedia
Explains the role of oral histories as valid and vital primary sources, including protocols, relational accountability, and tensions with colonial archival practices.

1. Mental health support: Get help—Canada.ca
   Hope for Wellness Help Line
   (English & French 24/7)
   Hope for Wellness Helpline Online chat or call 1-855-242-3310
   First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Chat: www.hopeforwellness.ca (online chat)
   Kids Help Phone Text CONNECT to 686868
   Canadian National Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line at 1-866-925-4419

2. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada—NCTR
   Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada – NCTR "About" page
   Overview of the TRC's legal origins, mandate, processes (e.g., survivor statements, national events), and the creation of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. TRC Calls to Action – NCTR
   Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action—NCTR
   Full list of the 94 Calls to Action organized by theme (education, justice, health, commemoration, etc.).
3. Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce: A Story of Courage
   Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce: A Story of Courage (PDF)
   Brief biography and documentation of Bryce's role as a federal medical officer who documented abuses and high mortality rates in residential schools and spoke out against the government's inaction.
4. Residential School Timeline—NCTR
   Residential School Timeline – NCTR
   Chronological overview of the establishment, expansion, and closure of residential schools across Canada.
5. Residential Schools in Canada Interactive Map | The Canadian Encyclopedia
   Residential Schools in Canada Interactive Map – The Canadian Encyclopedia
   Digital map locating residential schools across Canada with historical notes.
6. Historica Canada Intergenerational Trauma: Residential Schools
   Historica Canada "Intergenerational Trauma: Residential Schools" (video)
   Short explainer of how harms from residential schools extend across generations, affecting families, mental health, language, and community.
7. For seven generations... Murray Sinclair's heartfelt words
8. The Words that Shaped Canada: The British North America Act
   The Words that Shaped Canada: The British North America Act (video)
   Explores the BNA Act and how it structured federal–provincial powers and Indigenous–Crown relations.
9. Pass System in Canada | The Canadian Encyclopedia
   Pass System in Canada—The Canadian Encyclopedia Describes the informal but enforced "pass system" that restricted the movement of First Nations people living on reserves after the North-West Resistance.
10. The Spirit and Intent of Treaty
    The Spirit and Intent of Treaty – Education Alliance
    Focuses on treaties from Indigenous perspectives, emphasizing spirit, intent, and relational obligations rather than just legalistic wording.
11. Professional Development—Rupertsland Institute
    Professional Development—Rupertsland Institute PD offerings for educators on Métis history, identity, and pedagogy, often grounded in Métis community knowledge.
    Métis Foundational Knowledge Themes—Rupertsland Institute
    Métis Foundational Knowledge Themes—Rupertsland Institute
    Articulates core themes such as identity, kinship, homeland, governance, and resistance from a distinctly Métis lens.
12. Ukrainian Canadian History and Settlement
    Ukrainian Canadian History and Settlement—Timeline (The Canadian Encyclopedia)
    Highlights key moments of Ukrainian migration, settlement, discrimination (including internment), and community building in Canada.
13. 21 Things™ You May Not Have Known About the Indian Act
14. Honoring Indigenous War Heroes
15. An update on the socio-economic gaps between Indigenous Peoples and the non-Indigenous population in Canada: Highlights from the 2021 Census
    "An update on the socio-economic gaps between Indigenous Peoples and the non-Indigenous population in Canada" (2021 Census highlights)
    Statistical snapshot of ongoing disparities in income, employment, education, housing, and other indicators.
16. 2008 Federal Apology to Residential School Survivors
    This video records Prime Minister Stephen Harper's June 11, 2008 apology in the House of Commons for Canada's role in the Indian Residential School system.

Deepening the Dialogue: A Teacher's Discussion Guide for *Valley of the Birdtail*

RESOURCES

wanna be an ally?

Poem by Dr. Vanessa Andreotti: "wanna Be an ally?"—Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures

A poetic, critical reflection on "allyship" that warns against performative or self-centred engagement and invites more honest, uncomfortable, and accountable relationships. Ideal for staff discussions or senior students exploring decolonization, unsettling complicity, and moving beyond feel-good reconciliation.

Poem by Dr. Vanessa Andreotti emerged from the experiences of many bodies who have been systemically impacted by the violences of colonialism and the difficulties of decolonization.

don't do it for charity, for feeling good, for looking good, or for showing others that you are doing good

don't do it in exchange for redemption from guilt, for increasing your virtue, for appeasing your shame, for a vanity award

don't put it on your CV, or on facebook, or in your thesis, don't make it part of your brand, don't use it for self-promotion

don't do it as an excuse to keep your privileges, to justify your position, to do everything except what would be actually needed to change the terms of our relationship

do it only if you feel that our pasts, presents and futures are intertwined, and our bodies and spirits entangled

do it only if you sense that we are one metabolism that is sick, and what happens to me also happens to you

do it recognizing that you have the luxury of choice to participate or not, to stand or not, to give up your weekend or not, whereas others don't get to decide

don't try to "mould" me, or to "help" me, or to make me say and do what is convenient for you

don't weaponize me
('I couldn't possibly be racist')
don't instrumentalize me
('my marginalized friend says')
don't speak for me
('I know what you really mean')
don't infantilize me
('I am doing this for you')

don't make your actions contingent on me confiding in you, telling you my traumas, recounting my traditions, practicing your idea of 'right' politics, or performing the role of a victim to be saved by you or a revolutionary that can save you

and expect it to be, at times, incoherent, messy, uncomfortable, difficult, deceptive, contradictory, paradoxical, repetitive, frustrating, incomprehensible, infuriating, dull and painful – and prepare for your heart to break and be stretched

wanna be an ally? cont'd.

do you still want to do it?

then share the burdens placed on my back, the unique medicines you bring, and the benefits you have earned from this violent and lethal disease

co-create the space where I am able to do the work that only I can and need to do for all of us

take a step back from the center, the frontline from visibility relinquish the authority of your interpretations, your choice, your entitlements, surrender that which you are most praised and rewarded for

don't try to teach, to lead, to organize, to mentor, to control, to theorize, or to determine where we should go, how to get there and why

offer your energy to peel potatoes, to wash the dishes, to scrub the toilets, to drive the truck, to care for the babies, to entertain the kids, to separate the trash, to do the laundry, to feed the elders, to clean the mess, to buy the food, to fill the tank, to write the grant proposal, to pay the tab and the bail

to do and support
things you can't and
won't understand,
and do what is
needed, instead
of what you
want to do,

without judgment, or sense of martyrdom or expectation for gratitude, or for any kind of recognition

then you will be ready to sit with me through
the storm
with the anger
the pain
the frustration
the losses
the fears
and the longing for better times
with each other

and you will be able
to cry with me
to mourn with me
to laugh with me
to "heart" with me
as we face our shadows
and find other joys
in earthing, breathing, braiding,
growing, cooking and eating,
sharing, healing, and thriving

side by side
so that we might
learn to be ourselves
but also something else
something that is also
you and me
and you in me
and neither you
nor me

Glossary of Terms

Allyship
- An active, ongoing practice in which people who benefit from social privilege work in solidarity with marginalized groups to challenge oppression.
- Genuine allyship involves listening, being guided by the communities affected, taking responsibility for one's own learning, and using one's position to support justice-oriented change.

Apartheid
- A term (from Afrikaans meaning "separateness") for a system of legally enforced racial segregation and domination, most famously in South Africa from 1948 to the early 1990s.
- Apartheid involved separate residential areas, education, political rights, and public facilities based on race, and is now recognized as a crime under international law; the term is sometimes used to describe similar systems of racial or colonial separation elsewhere.

Assimilation
- A process or policy that pressures or forces one cultural group to abandon its language, beliefs, and practices to adopt those of a dominant group.
- In Canada and other settler states, assimilation has often been imposed through law, schooling, and child removal, and is widely recognized as a tool of cultural genocide.

British North America Act 1867
- The foundational constitutional statute that created the Dominion of Canada and divided powers between federal and provincial governments.
- It gave the federal government authority over "Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians," enabling centralized colonial control over Indigenous peoples and territories.

Colonial Policies
- Laws, programs, and administrative practices created by colonial governments to control Indigenous lands, resources, and peoples.
- These policies often combined land dispossession, forced assimilation, and racial segregation to entrench colonial power.

Indian Act
- A federal Canadian law first passed in 1876 that defines who is legally considered a "Status Indian" and regulates many aspects of First Nations life, including governance, land (reserves), and band membership.
- The Act has been a key tool of colonial control and assimilation, restricting rights and imposing external authority on First Nations, and its effects are still felt today despite amendments.

Inequality
- Systematic yet socially constructed differences in access to power, resources, opportunities, and rights between groups, produced through structures such as race, class, gender, and colonial status.
- In settler-colonial contexts, inequality is built into laws, land policies, and institutions that privilege settlers and marginalize Indigenous peoples.

Intergenerational Trauma
- The transfer of the impacts of severe trauma (such as abuse, dispossession, or genocide) from one generation to the next through parenting, family dynamics, community conditions, and social structures.
- For Indigenous peoples, the harms of residential schools, forced removals, and other colonial violence can show up in later generations as grief, health challenges, and disrupted relationships, even when those individuals did not experience the original events directly.

Pass System
- An unofficial but widely enforced system under which many First Nations people on reserves in Canada were required to obtain written permission from an Indian Agent to leave the reserve.
- The system restricted freedom of movement, limited participation in political and economic life, and functioned as a form of racialized social control.

Residential Schools
- Government- and church-run institutions that removed Indigenous children from their families and communities and placed them in boarding schools.
- Children were punished for speaking their languages or practicing their cultures and many suffered physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual abuse, leaving deep individual and intergenerational harms.

Resilience
- The capacity of individuals, families, or communities to withstand hardship, adapt to adversity, and continue or renew cultural, social, and emotional life.
- In Indigenous contexts, resilience often includes drawing on relationships, cultural teachings, land-based practices, and collective resistance to ongoing colonial harm.

Sovereignty
- The inherent right and authority of a people or nation to govern themselves, make laws, and manage their lands, resources, and institutions.
- Indigenous sovereignty emphasizes that these rights predate and persist despite colonization and are grounded in long-standing relationships to land, law, and community.

Treaty
- A formal agreement between nations that outlines shared understandings, rights, and obligations, often regarding land, resources, and relationships.
- In what is now Canada, treaties between Indigenous nations and the Crown are nation-to-nation agreements; many Indigenous peoples understand them as commitments to coexistence and mutual responsibilities, not as surrender of sovereignty.

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Glossary of Terms