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ABSTRACT

A booklet of poems written by Indian children in Ontario and Northern Quebec, Canada, is printed for sharing with everyone. The educational background of the contributors ranges from children attending large schools in or near urban areas to children attending 1-room schools in the northern bush. For some of these children, English is the only language; for others, English is a second language. The booklet is divided into four sections covering the following concepts: Who Am I? Where Am I?, What Am I?, and Why Am I? (DB)

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# WHO AM I ?

## The Poetry of Indian Children

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Education Division  
Indian Affairs  
1849 Yonge St.  
Toronto 7, Canada

## FOREWORD

The poems in this book were written by Indian children in Ontario and Northern Quebec. Some are from large schools, so close to cities as to be almost urban; some come from tiny one-room schools deep in the northern bush. Some were produced by children whose only language is English; some come from children whose mother tongue is Cree or Ojibway, and who have only recently learned English as a second language.

We regret that we do not have a complete list of all the teachers in whose classrooms these poems were developed. We commend them, however, for their sensitivity in collecting the work, and thank them for being willing to share it with us all.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
SAUL WILLIAMS & DANIEL CHIKANE  
ROUND LAKE

Miss M. Young  
Indian Affairs  
Toronto

**WHO**

**AM**

**I**

**The Poetry of Indian Children**

## O GREAT SPIRIT

O Great Spirit! if only you took me back  
Back to the time of our ancestors,  
Back, it's the time when our forefathers  
learned medicines of magic,  
When they lived in teepees,  
Grew up and became expert hunters  
and men of bravery.  
O Great Spirit, if only I knew all the  
ways of our forefathers;  
If only you could teach me,  
Then I too would teach my people  
of their ways long forgotten.  
O Great Spirit! it is sad to think  
of how we dulled our lives  
With our forgotten skills.  
If only I was to know the ways of our gods  
then I would help my people in all ways.  
It is sad to think of all these things.  
O Great Spirit!

Kenneth Pitawanakwat – Age 15  
Wikwemikong

## THE OLD HOUSE

There is that old shaggy house,  
Without a standing door,  
Not even has it a proper floor  
For a little brown mouse  
To scurry about on.

Valerie Elaine Dokis - Age 11  
Dokis

## SKELETON

The skeleton is standing there,  
So straight and tall;  
Against the purple wall,  
And bones is all he wears.

## HOME

When I get home after school  
It is always noisy and loud;  
But when I stay home or baby sit  
Everything is all quiet and nice;  
All the children are sitting  
Because I am there.  
But when Mother gets home,  
Everything is all the same  
As in the beginning –  
Noisy!

Wendy Kitchikeg – Age 14  
Wiwemikong

## **THE SCARECROW**

**I just hate this!  
Every day standing in the sun  
All day long –  
And why do these crows stand on me?  
Why don't they stand somewhere else  
For a change?  
All they do  
Is just picking straws  
That are sticking out of me;  
I wonder what is so good  
About that straw?**

**Janet Dokis – Age 13  
Dokis**



## OUR ATTIC WINDOW

Of all the windows in our house  
I like the attic window best,  
Because it's high and round and small  
And it's so different from the rest.  
From every single way you look  
It seems you look at a picture book;  
From it you can see a stream of water  
Running down the walk way,  
And you can see the clear, blue sky,  
And the birds flying high.  
At night you can see millions of stars,  
And listen to the honking noise  
Of passing cars;  
In the morning, a bird sings  
On your window pane;  
So much you can see  
Out of the attic window,  
And that's why I think it's the best.

Betty Lou Rankin – Age 14  
Goulais Bay

## **SKIPPING IS FUN**

**Here we come,  
Skipping along,  
All the way  
On the sidewalk,  
Then we skip home!**

**We went dancing,  
We went prancing,  
All the way on,  
That is what fun is!**

**Verna M. Lewis – Age 9  
Kaboni**

**WHERE**

**AM**

**I**

### I DREAM OF THE WILDERNESS

Oh how I would love to see  
The wilderness beyond;  
Maybe I will some day.  
I will see a bird so sweet,  
The deer with a leap in every move,  
The squirrel with a nut in its mouth,  
Perhaps a racoon or two,  
But certainly not a grizzly bear, nor wolf.  
I would love to smell the flower  
And the forest green.  
I would love to go a-wondering  
Through the forests and the fields,  
But now I just have a dream.

James Recollet – Age 13  
Wikwemikong

### **I SEE AND I HEAR**

**I see a cloud in the clear, blue sky;  
It seems so alone, so small, and so far,  
And as I watch, it gets smaller and smaller;  
I guess that's because the winds blow it further.**

**I see a man on a lonely road;  
He walks all alone for a little way,  
Then meets another, alone like he,  
And walks with him, for a littler way.**

**I see the trees of a distant land;  
They're mostly green, with specks of white.  
The land is so big, and yet it is so quiet,  
Except for the winds  
That blow through the trees,  
In a distant land.**

**Margaret Pitawanakwat – Age 15  
Wiwemikong**

## AUTUMN WOODS

I like to walk in the Autumn woods;  
I hear the birds,  
I see the squirrels and the deer  
Run about the fields  
All day.

It's fun to watch the chipmunk  
Run around the trees,  
And pounce upon  
The great puff ball,  
Here and there.

But when the sun goes down,  
There is stillness in the air;  
Then all of a sudden  
The jaybird screams  
Aloud.

That fills the air  
For miles around;  
Then I know  
It is surely Autumn  
Once Again.

Mike Isaacs – Gr. 7  
Six Nations

## **SOMETHING ON A COLD, DARK NIGHT**

**The sun was coming down  
And it is cold  
The black bird flies  
It is getting dark  
The tree flew  
The man is cold  
The deer ran away  
The blackbird has wing  
The cold flew and flew  
The man is scared  
The wind flew all the time.**

**Aylmer Rae – Age 7  
Deer Lake**

## **AUTUMN FEELINGS**

**What is Autumn?  
Autumn to me is –  
A happy, colourful, gay feeling;  
It is like walking through a forest  
Smelling the autumn freshness  
Go right down inside you  
And touch the softness  
In your heart.**

**The chill of autumn drops  
In a mist of white silk;  
Leaves drop in clusters  
Of coloured pictures,  
Birds sing, cry and honk  
As they make their way  
Through the clouds;  
Maybe this little taste of autumn  
Will bring happiness to you  
As it did to me.**

**Robert Burnham – Gr. 8  
Six Nations**



### **THE SNOWSTORM**

**The snowstorm is a cloud  
of strong, hard snow  
like needles  
Hitting me on the face.**

**Grade Three  
Eastmain, P.Q.**

### **A WINTER DAY**

**The sun is shining  
In the blue sky;  
White snow falls gracefully  
On the green trees,  
Where it lies.**

**Valerie Elaine Dokis – 11  
Dokis**

## AUTUMN LEAVES

A lonely sound of dead, crisp leaves rustling,  
Accents the sight of topless, unbearing trees;  
Perhaps if I shut my eyes, it will go away.

But no!

The barren sight has made its way to my mind.

The ploughing of the fields has taken away much of the green  
Behind their long, willowy arms, the forests look dark,  
Holding only gloom and dismay;  
Plants with their undying attempt to live  
Wither under dark skies and cold winds;  
Beautiful flowers no longer linger along garden walls.

May it all end

Then beauty shall take its place again.

Verna Montour – Gr. 8  
Six Nations

## **NIGHT**

**Night is such a pretty sight,  
When the lights go off and on,  
And the stars bright with light  
Shine until the coming dawn.**

**Cheryl Taylor – Gr. 4  
Curve Lake**

## **RAIN**

**I like the rain  
It makes things grow;  
It will help the grain,  
It will, I know.**

**Wanita Taylor – Gr. 4  
Curve Lake**

## **SOUNDS**

**Do you ever wonder  
About the sounds you hear?  
Some of them are nice ...  
Like the sound of  
Happy children playing,  
Someone singing,  
And a crack of a hunter's gun,  
And sound of geese flying high  
In the sky,  
Longing for a place to rest, and eat;  
And the splashing sound of water,  
And the birds singing a merry tune.**

**Sammy Achneepineskum  
Fort Albany**

## ANONYMOUS CITY

I walk the streets –  
Busy, noisy, crowded.

I walk;  
People pass by  
I've never seen before,  
And will never see again.

Like you look in the sky,  
Look at the clouds pass by,  
You only see the shape  
Of the clouds  
Once  
And never shall you see it again.

You feel alone  
With so many strangers.  
You don't care who they are  
And neither do they.

Sammy Achneepineskum  
Fort Albany

## **SUMMER AND WINTER**

**People sliding and skipping,  
The rivers are frozen;  
When the birds are hiding  
Good-bye for the winter!  
Here comes spring!**

**Janice Oakes – Gr. 4  
St. Regis**

## **HOME**

**It's cold,  
It's frosty,  
But in the ho  
It's cosy.**

**Tommy Maracle – Ag  
Tyendingaga**

## THE LITTLE STARS

As darkness falls, the birds and the flowers shut their eyes,  
But the wonder of the stars brights up the darkness;  
They seem like diamonds twinkling up above,  
Filling the wide open spaces as you gaze at the stars.

It seems to greet you and tell you  
That it will watch over you while you sleep;  
As daylight breaks I'll still be here,  
But you can't see me for the sun shines bright and near.

Linda Marie Montour – Gr. 4  
St. Regis

**WHAT**

**AM**

**I**



## **SPEED**

**The birds can sing and the birds can fly,  
Over the treetops, into the sky;  
They like to fly like the powered planes,  
And in the sky they both look the same.**

**The only thing wrong is the plane is fast,  
And that is why birds come last;  
But the bird can sing, and the plane can't sing,  
And that is why speed isn't everything.**

**Lloyd William Noganosh – Age 11  
Lower French**

### **SNAKES**

**When I think of snakes, I think about them  
twisting,  
curling,  
going round my legs,  
getting tighter and tighter  
and never letting go.**

**Grade Three  
Eastmain, P.Q.**

### **THE LITTLE BEAR**

**The little bear lives in the woods,  
He hides in the woods;  
And the bear was dark,  
He was fat and big,  
And he saw a little rabbit  
Running away,  
And the bear saved a!!**

**Bonnie Mekis – Age 8  
Deer Lake**

**WEASEL**

There ran a weasel under the snow,  
There were trees all around,  
Then the weasel acted clumsy,  
Like a clown;  
Then he went.  
Where?  
I do not know.

Robert Dokis – Age 14  
Dokis

**DEER**

One day the deer is drinking  
At the lake.  
The sun go down,  
The day is dark.  
Some one talk to the deer,  
She said, "Good night deer."  
The deer ran to the woods,  
It was a cold night,  
The deer is very cold.  
Next day in the morning  
The snow was falling down.

Amos Rae – Age 8  
Deer Lake

## MY BEAUTIFUL HORSES

My beautiful horses were still on the hill,  
Looking toward the mountain side,  
There where the cowboys usually ride,  
They stood so quiet – so very still.

Sharon Restoule – Age 13  
Dokis

**WHY**

**AM**

**I**

### MY SWING

When on my swing I can go high into the air,  
And the world jumps with joy;  
Everything seems to bounce and laugh with delight,  
And everything seems to be kind  
And whistles and sings.  
Love seems to be everywhere.

But when the swing slows down,  
Life seems to die away;  
Love turns to hate;  
Boys throw stones at birds and squirrels.  
I wonder,  
"Is it ever like that in heaven?"

– Tony Roote  
Scotch Settlement

## **WAR**

**War is for dauntless people,  
For whom fighting is a dare,  
Who wish it would never end.  
But peoples' lives are at stake,  
Because of this, innocent human beings die.  
War changes their lives completely.  
If I had my way,  
I would want them safer,  
Instead of thinking only of myself.**

**Patrick Recollet – Age 17  
Wikwemikong**

## **SOMEWHERE**

**Beyond reality  
And into a world so divinely unique  
No man can imagine,  
I have been.**

**A place where the sun  
Constantly casts coloured rays,  
Bringing warmth and happiness  
To all the beautiful people.**

**Rather than hopes, tears, worries,  
Misunderstanding and misery,  
Complete happiness exists;  
It is yours now.  
Come with me,  
For I am the Angel of Death.**

**Brenda Fisher – Age 18  
Wikwemikong**



### **A PRAYER**

**O God, why do you let this destruction happen?  
Why do you let innocent people die?  
Why can't you stop all of this,  
And make this world a happy place to live?**

**Sometimes I never think you exist,  
But other times I do;  
People are born and die in streets,  
Why don't you stop it? eah! eah!**

**Lester Manitowabi – Age 15  
Wikwemikong**

**BRAVE, STRONG, WEAK OR SHY**

**I have a friend  
Who's shy and timid;  
I have an enemy  
Who's brave and strong.**

**But for me,  
I'm in between,  
Neither shy nor timid,  
Brave nor strong.**

**I'm satisfied with what I am.**

**Zoe Enosse – Age 14  
Wkwemikong**

### LITTLE SNAKE

Once there was a boy named Little Snake.  
He was born in the village  
Where there are not much people.  
He got no parents  
He didn't know what to do,  
But he got a friend  
But this friend was bad  
So Little Snake became bad.

Oh Little Snake don't you be bad  
Be my friend  
So I'll take care of you  
And I'll give you anything you want,  
And be my baby.

Little Snake, Little Snake  
Went to steal some bananas  
They didn't know what to do,  
They call the police,  
And they tell him who did it.  
He went to take Little Snake  
He put him in jail for a week.  
Little Snake got out of jail  
And became good.  
His friend will be in jail  
For ten years.

John Moonias – Age 12  
Lansdowne House

### **SOMEBODY IS TEASING ME**

**My eyes are very hot,  
They have tears in them;  
My face feels red like it does  
when I wash it  
and the water is too hot;  
I am breathing fast and I feel  
tight inside.**

**Grade Three  
Eastmain, P.Q.**

### **CHRISTMAS MORNING**

**I am shaking inside  
like a tree when the wind blows  
just a little bit hard;  
I am breathing hard like I do  
after I run fast;  
My heart is bumping like train wheels  
I am happy!**

## **SECRET CAVES**

**When I go in secret caves  
I like to look for things;  
I found a rock I want to save,  
And I saw a bird with funny wings.**

**Peter Restoule – Age 11  
Dokis**