

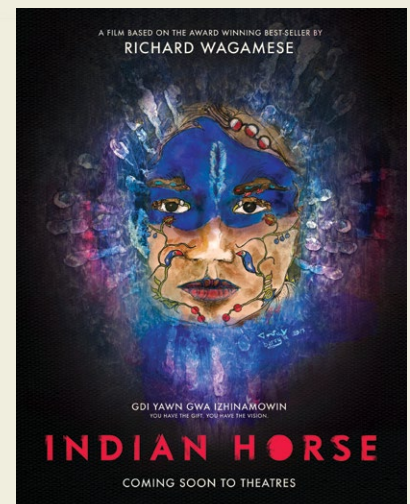
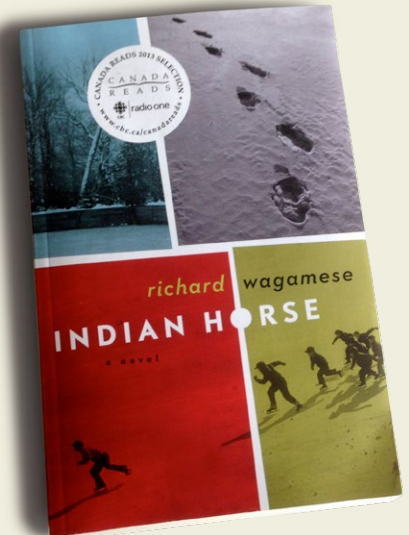
INDIAN HORSE

STUDY GUIDE



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Download a mini-poster at
IndianHorse.ca



INTRODUCTION TO EDUCATORS

Richard Wagamese's award-winning novel *Indian Horse* is being taught in thousands of Canadian classrooms, with over 100,000 copies of the book in circulation.

In late 1950s Ontario, eight-year-old Saul Indian Horse is torn from his Ojibway family and committed to one of Canada's notorious Catholic Residential Schools. Denied the freedom to speak his language or embrace his Indigenous heritage, Saul witnesses all kinds of abuse at the hands of the very people who were entrusted with his care. Despite this, Saul finds comfort and fascination in the unlikeliest of places and favourite Canadian pastimes — hockey. His talent leads him away from the misery of the school to a Northern Ontario native league and eventually the Pros. But the ghosts of Saul's past will always haunt him.

Spoiler alert! Unless your class or group has already read Richard Wagamese's novel *Indian Horse*, this study guide is best used after viewing the film.

This movie is timely. *Indian Horse* tells an important story that Canadians need to hear, and which fits in with curriculum the current government has mandated for educational institutions in this country by adopting the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

For First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in Canada, this story is both deeply familiar and current. The book and the film provide an opportunity for educators to enact the TRC recommendation to engage with students who may be learning this history for the first time. The movie provides an opportunity for educators and students to explore how to be a part of Reconciliation in a meaningful way.

The book and the film taught together will be a powerful tool for transformation. Through this project, our hope is to build understanding in non-Indigenous Canadians about why things look the way they do for Indigenous Peoples today. The educational component will provide much needed resources to discuss this history in a safe and culturally relevant way.

We are calling on Educators to help us create useful and meaningful resources to accompany the film release.

Please sign up on our site www.indianhorse.ca/en/education and fill out our feedback forms.



#Next150 is a series of 21 challenges, each with different challengers, to give everyone ways to take ReconciliACTION! Join the #Next150 Challenge! Assign it to your classes.



DUTY TO REPORT DISCLAIMER

Please note: This movie introduces the discussion of Canadian Residential Schools which in part includes harms against children, sexual abuse of children, secrets, and shame. While this is done gently and not in a graphic nature, it may lead to disclosures by children or youth in your classroom or group. Before viewing the film, please ensure you are familiar with the mandatory and legal steps within your province, organization or school regarding your duty to report, and also that you know about available supports in your community.

**Residential School Survivor Support Line
1-866-925-4419**



TRUTH AND FICTION (English Literature)

The book and the film

One of the natural gifts of author Richard Wagamese is his ability to marry the oral tradition of storytelling tradition and the written word. He does this by carrying the voice of the main character, Saul, and bringing the reader through stages of Saul's life. Reading *Indian Horse* is more than just a book, it is a journey the reader takes with Saul. It feels like you are sitting with Saul and listening to him speak the story of his life. One important way the film stays true to the tone of the novel is by maintaining the narrator's voice throughout.



Richard Wagamese (1955–2017), an Ojibway from the Wabaseemoong First Nation in Northwestern Ontario, was one of Canada's foremost Indigenous authors and an esteemed public speaker and storyteller. A professional writer since 1979, he was a newspaper columnist and reporter, radio and television broadcaster and producer, documentary producer and the author of fourteen titles from various Canadian publishers. Richard was a success in every genre of writing he tried.



The truths in storytelling

Indian Horse is fiction, but the story it tells is true.

Each character in this story is larger than their own role: they are symbols for the experiences of hundreds of thousands of other people.

When the novel and film touch on Child Saul being taken to St. Jerome's Residential School, he represents every child who experienced this part of Canadian history. St. Jerome's is a fictional version but stands in for many, many actual schools. For Saul, like hundreds of thousands of other Indigenous children, the first thing the nuns do is cut off his hair. This removal of hair parallels a common humiliation and dehumanizing tactic, such as the Nazis shaving the heads of prisoners in concentration camps.



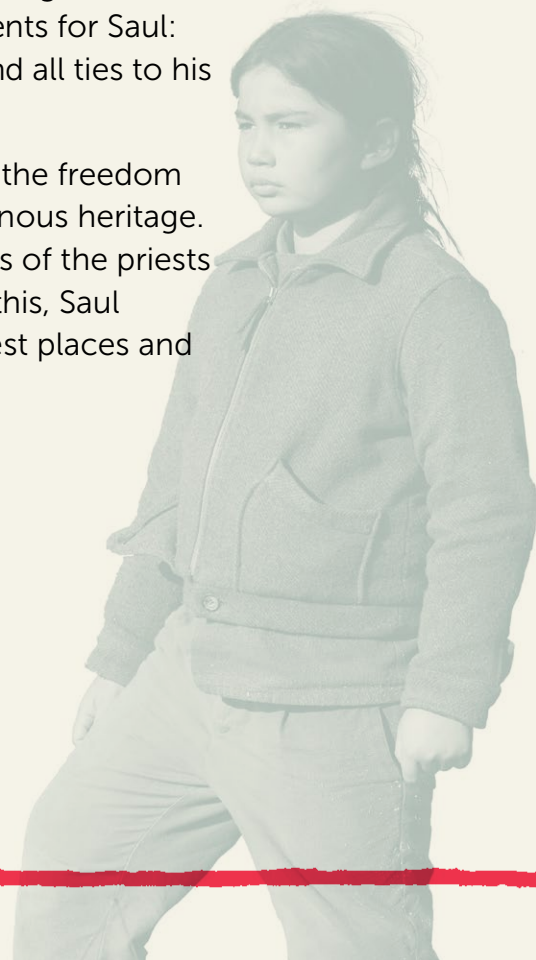
Sladen Peltier's real hair cut off during the filming of Indian Horse



Sladen Peltier plays the Child Saul.

The scene where Saul's long hair is cut off is a real moment for the actor, Sladen Peltier, who plays Saul. Sladen had been growing his hair since age five and his initial feeling about playing Saul was, "I didn't really want to go in this movie if I had to get my hair cut." But based on his own family's experiences (he has several older relatives who went to Residential School) he came to decide this was a bold step he was willing to take when he *"realized it was going to teach lots of people."* Peltier and his family agreed to the sacrifice and single-take of having his braids removed, to highlight the moment it represents for Saul: the forcible removal of culture, of history, and all ties to his Indigenous identity.

From this point forward Child Saul is denied the freedom to speak his language or embrace his Indigenous heritage. Saul witnesses all kinds of abuse at the hands of the priests and nuns at the Residential school. Despite this, Saul finds comfort and fascination in the unlikeliest places and favourite Canadian pastimes – hockey.



INDIAN HORSE

Assignment

HISTORICAL FICTION

Think of a true story of a historical event that you have read or heard about. Imagine you are a character in this story.

Now tell “your story” in the voice of the character you created. Work with a partner and interview each other so that you can learn about each others character.

Present your story as a performance to the class, or hand in as written text.

INDIAN HORSE

Discussion questions

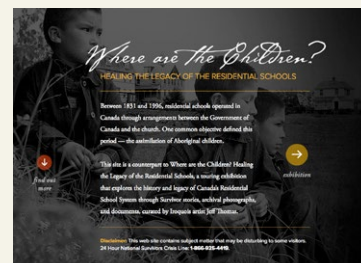
- Why is it so traumatic for Saul to have his hair cut off? What does it represent? Why was this done to Indigenous children in Residential Schools?
- Think of another book that is fiction and is used to teach about history. Why is fiction a powerful tool to talk about important and difficult subject matter?
- What are some of the differences and similarities between the book and the film?

Challenge

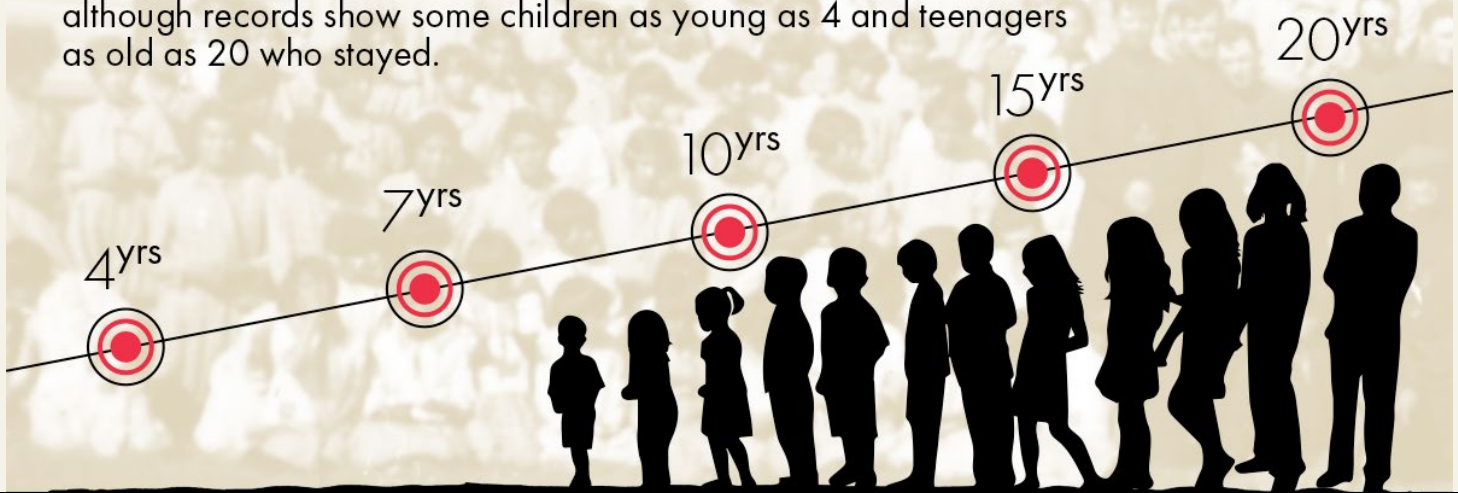
GO DEEPER INTO THE HISTORY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Visit some sites where documentary and testimonial videos are kept. Start with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation website, www.nctr.ca, and go to the archives section. Many mini documentaries were created following the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Also go to the Legacy of Hope “Where are the Children” project to view video testimonials at <http://wherearethechildren.ca/en/stories/>

Watch a few of these documentaries to get a sense of what a non-fiction account of the schools is like.



1920 is the year the *Indian Act* is amended to make it compulsory for status Indian children between 7-15 to attend Residential School although records show some children as young as 4 and teenagers as old as 20 who stayed.



HISTORY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

(Social Studies)

Truth and Reconciliation

From the 1880s, for upwards of 100 years, the Canadian government worked in tandem with the church-run schools to forcibly remove Indigenous children from their families, communities and Nations and put them into notoriously abusive institutions called Indian Residential Schools (IRS). The purpose of the schools was to eliminate parental involvement in the spiritual, cultural and intellectual development of Indigenous children. During this chapter in Canadian history, more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were forced to attend these schools, many of which were hundreds of miles from their home.

In his role as Head of Indian Affairs in 1920 Duncan Campbell Scott set out the forceful and deliberate policies that perpetuated the efficacy of the Residential School system. He stated: *"I want to get rid of the Indian problem. Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed."* (source: National Archives of Canada, Record Group 10, vol. 6810, file 470-2-3, vol. 7, 55 (L-3) and 63 (N-3).)

60% is the mortality rate at some Residential Schools, according to Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Justice Murray Sinclair.



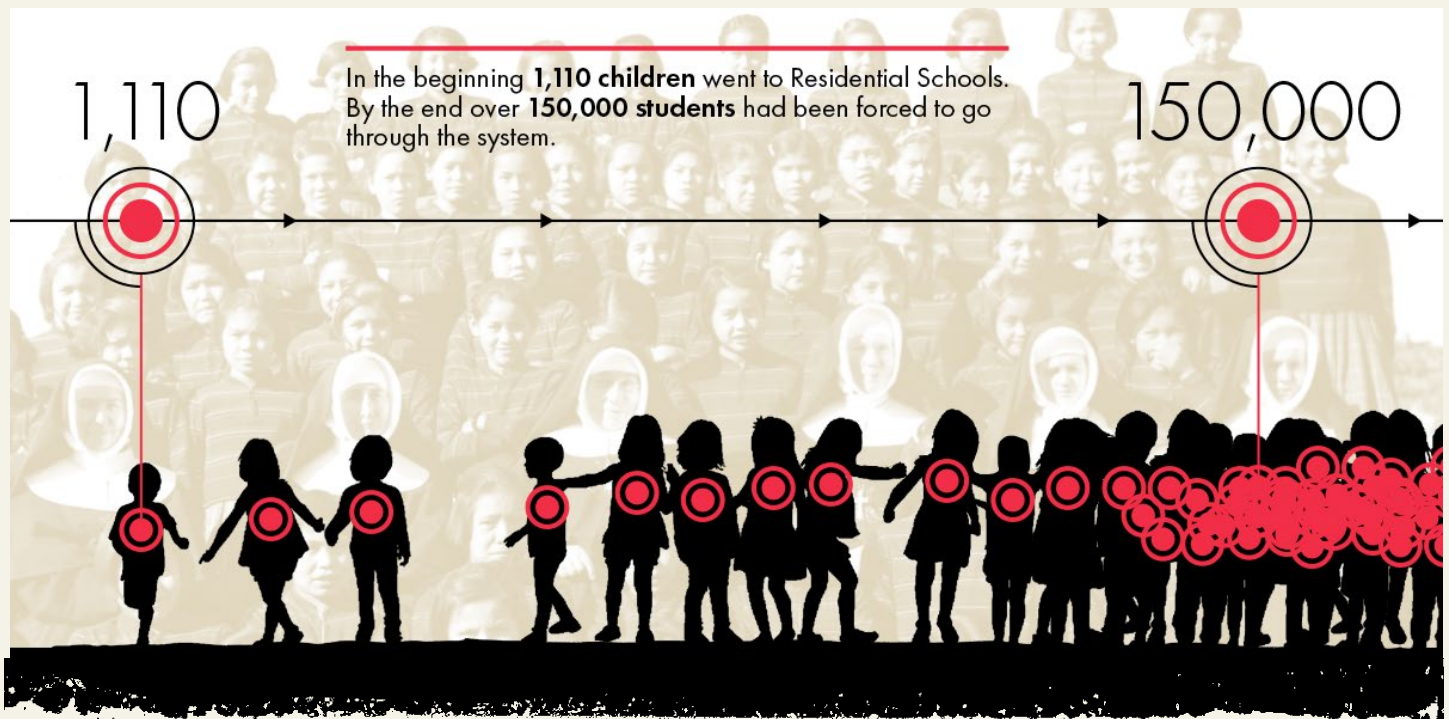
Children as young as five-years-old were taken far away from their families and homes where they were violently punished for speaking their own languages or practicing their traditions. They were indoctrinated into Euro-Canadian and Christian ways of living with the goal of assimilating them into mainstream Canadian society. This systemic racism was meticulously crafted to 'kill the Indian in the child', as has been notoriously quoted in many Residential School accounts (including the 2008 government apology). Children were often physically and sexually abused for the duration of the years they were forced to live in the schools creating an enduring legacy of secrecy, shame and pain for generations of Indigenous people.



"50% of the children who passed through these schools did not live."

Duncan Campbell Scott,
Deputy Superintendent,
Department of Indian
Affairs, 1920.





The cumulative impact of Residential Schools resulted in unresolved trauma passed from generation to generation and has had a profound effect on the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians. To really comprehend the trauma of this legacy, we need to remember that removing the children didn't just happen once, a long time ago. It went on, relentlessly, for over a century. The last Residential School in Canada closed in 1996.

“For those who cannot imagine the impact that Residential Schools had on Aboriginal peoples, picture a small village, a small community. Now picture all of its children, gone.

No more children between 7 and 16 playing in the lanes or the woods, filling the hearts of their elders with their laughter and joy. Imagine the ever-present fear of watching their children disappear when they reached school age.”

~ Gilles Duceppe (Laurier – Sainte-Marie, BQ) June 11, 2008



30% 30% of schools were run by: United Church, Anglican Church and Presbyterian Church.

70% 70% of schools were run by: Roman Catholic Church.

All were contracted under federal and/or provincial governments.

In 2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada called the Indian Residential School system “cultural genocide.” (TRC final report). It summarized the 6 volumes of reports on the findings into 94 Calls to Action.

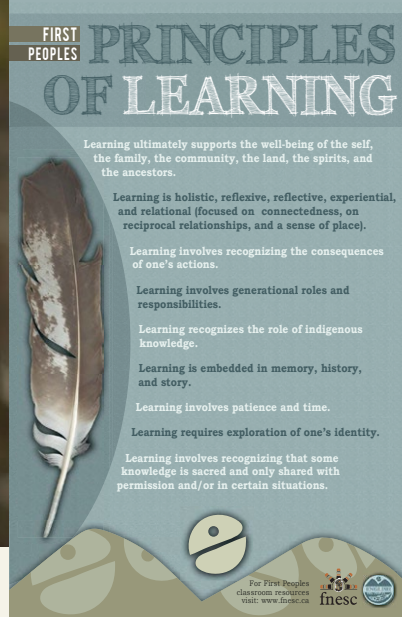
There are a total of 94 calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report.

94



INDIAN HORSE

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVOR SUPPORT LINE: **1-866-925-4419**



Reconciliation in education

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) in BC has created many resources available on their website www.fnescc.ca. One of these resources is a poster of Indigenous principles of learning.

<http://www.fnescc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/PUB-LFP-POSTER-Principles-of-Learning-First-Peoples-poster-11x17.pdf>.

First Peoples Principles of Learning

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.
- Learning is embedded in memory, history and story.
- Learning involves patience and time.
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
- Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

INDIAN HORSE

Assignment

TRC CALLS TO ACTION

Read the Education section of the [TRC's 94 Calls to Action](#). Now consider Call To Action 10 (iii): "Developing culturally appropriate curricula." Reconciliation includes sharing teachings.

In small groups discuss how you would use the book and the film to teach others about Canada's history with First Nations people. Refer to the FNESC "First Peoples Principles of Education." Consider the questions: What is culture? and; What does 'culturally appropriate' mean to you?

When you come back together as a class, present your discussions and reflections back to the larger group.

INDIAN HORSE

Discussion questions

- The book *Indian Horse* is taught in grade 10 across Canada. The film is rated 14A, in most provinces, PG in Alberta. Yet the story of Residential Schools is the story of very young children being taken from their families. Discuss with your students how they might handle introducing these topics when teaching history to younger children.
- In the later scenes in the film, Saul sees a familiar-looking person laying on a mattress in a laneway in the film. Is this Lonnie? The book and the film do not make it clear if it is or not. Discuss with your class. How does seeing this person affect Saul? What are the author and the filmmakers trying to say with this short scene?
- On much of the Residential School material, including on the *Indian Horse* website, contact information is provided for “Residential School Survivor Support Line.” Why do you think this information is needed?
- *“When the present doesn’t recognize the wrongs of the past, the future takes its revenge. For that reason, we must never, never turn away from the opportunity of confronting history together – the opportunity to right a historical wrong.” Governor General Michaëlle Jean, October 15, 2009.*
How does this quote relate to Truth and Reconciliation?

INDIAN HORSE



Challenge

ORANGE SHIRT DAY

September 30 is Orange Shirt Day, an annual event founded by Phyllis Webstad (pictured above) from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation (in Williams Lake, BC). She tells her story of having her shiny new orange shirt taken away on her first day of Residential school at the Mission. The date was chosen because it is the time of year when children were taken from their homes to the Residential Schools, and because it is an opportunity to set the stage for anti-racism and anti-bullying policies for the coming school year.

Visit www.orangeshirtday.org to learn more about how to get involved. What ideas do you have to make this day an opportunity for education and Reconciliation at your school? Form or join a committee to plan an Orange Shirt Day event in your community.



HOCKEY AND SPORTS CULTURE

Saul's gift

Saul falls in love with hockey – for him it is more than a game, it has spiritual qualities. He sees patterns in the game and is able to integrate himself into the action in a way that the other players, even though they are older and stronger, can't compete with. Within both the book and the film, this opens space to talk about how Indigenous spirituality has a place in a contemporary world. As it says on the movie poster in Ojibwe and English: "Gdi yawn qwa izhinamowin – You have the gift, you have the vision." The delicious other-world that hockey provides gives Saul safety from the daily realities of Residential School: "The rink became my escape, the ice my obsession, the game my survival."



*Father Gaston
played by actor
Michiel Huisman.*

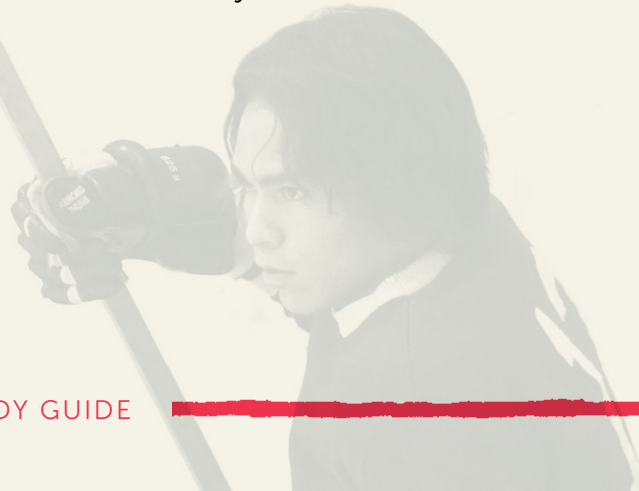
Father Gaston

Father Gaston is a symbol of the church and its conflicted relationship with Indigenous Peoples in Canada. His character provides viewers a way to delve into the complexity that people experience in abusive relationships. That the priest is also the hockey coach is another powerful way to explore the role that coaches and influential adults can have in children's lives.



Father Gaston Leboutillier introduces child Saul to hockey. He is introduced as a likeable character when he comes to the rescue of a young boy being humiliated by a priest. The boy has peed the bed and a priest is forcing his face into the urine-soaked mattress while telling him he's disgusting. Father Gaston stops him: this is the the first of many scenes where we are witness to Father Gaston showing "kindness" to the children in Residential School.

As Narrator Saul says in the novel *Indian Horse*, "Father Gaston Leboutillier came to St. Jerome's the same year I did. He was a young priest with a sense of humor that angered his fellow priests and nuns, and a kindness and sense of adventure that drew the boys to him. He led hikes in the spring and summer. He took us camping for days at a time and when winter came he brought us hockey. He convinced Father Quinney to let him build a rink, outfit the older boys and start a team. Things changed at St. Jerome's after that, for one season of the year at least" (Wagamese p 56).





Brotherhood and betrayal

Teenage Saul's talent at hockey leads him away from the misery of the school to a Northern Ontario native hockey league and eventually to the Pros.

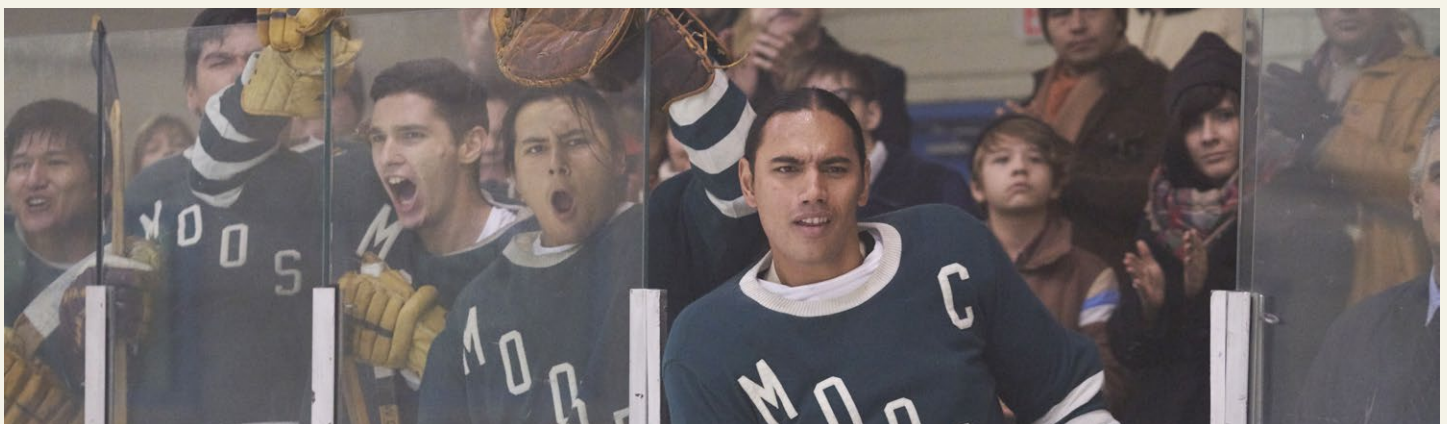
Teenage Saul moves in with the Kelly family. Both Fred and Martha Kelly also attended St. Jerome's Residential School and Fred coaches the local hockey team "the Moose."

The film reveals warm moments of team banter and camaraderie. This is the first time since childhood that Saul has felt safe and been with a family. This shows the viewers the importance of being connected to other Indigenous Peoples in healthy and safe environments.

Despite being happy with the Moose team, Teenage Saul still experiences many examples of overt and violent racism. A particularly charged moment in the film is after a game when the team members of the Moose enter a local restaurant. They are approached by a white man who says, "You win a little hockey tournament and you think you can come in here and eat like white people."



Teenage Saul played by Forest Goodluck.





This particular era of the film coincides with first time Indians could legally leave the reserves unaccompanied by an Indian Agent, and the first time they would have been visible to the dominant public.

In 1974, 22-year-old Saul is recruited to play for The Monarchs, a stepping stone to the NHL. At first reluctant to leave his friends and move to Toronto, Saul is encouraged to give it a shot.

In Toronto while playing for the Monarchs, Saul experiences more racism but this time he doesn't have his teammates to support him. This isolation weighs heavily on Saul.

When Father Gaston's shows up at a game at the end of the movie, it triggers Adult Saul to abandon hockey, and fall into a long and destructive path of alcohol addiction. This strips Saul of the ability to keep at bay the painful repressed memories from his childhood in Residential School.



Adult Saul played by actor Ajuawak Kapashesit.

INDIAN HORSE

Assignment

REDESIGN FOR RECONCILIATION

Research sports team mascots and which ones reflect stereotypes. Choose an example of a current team who you think needs to change their image.

Present an alternative branding plan that is not offensive to any groups of people.

INDIAN HORSE

Discussion questions

- How does the symbol of hockey play a role in this story? Hockey equals Canada. Does the story affect the way you view hockey and the history of this country? Why was hockey not fully a 'way out' for Saul?
- After a more challenging game a visibly unhappy Saul tells the team captain that "They got shocked seeing Indians skate. It's their game. Not ours." The captain responds, "They play for the same reason we do. For the feeling. Nobody owns that." How might this quote be relevant to the idea of Reconciliation?
- How does the image of the little plastic Indian figures being thrown onto the ice and the "war whoops" that erupt when Saul is playing affect him? What are some other examples of racism shown in the movie?

INDIAN HORSE

Challenge

BE GOOD SPORTS

There has been a lot of criticism of sports in the news lately. Many concerns have been raised about safety, bullying and sexism.

Do some research on recent news around this topic. If your school has sports teams, do they have a code of conduct? Find out what this is. If it needs to be revised, suggest what a positive code of conduct could be.



LAND, LANGUAGE AND HOPE

Saul's return

The film opens with Saul as an adult, at the New Dawn recovery group, but it is the memories of his grandmother which guide his healing path. After we hear Saul's voice introduce us to his story, and why he needs to tell it, we find ourselves immersed in the world of young Saul, on the land with his grandmother, his parents and his brother Benjamin.

Significance of language

The opening chapter of the film is almost entirely in Ojibwe. His grandmother, Naomi, is pivotal in this phase of his life and her character does most of the speaking during this chapter. Viewers have a chance to witness the gentleness of the Ojibwe language and how it reflects the land where it is spoken. The film uses subtitles when Ojibwe is being spoken. This is one difference between the novel and the movie: in the book, the Ojibwe language is inferred while in the movie it has a central role. The official website has an Ojibwe version as well.



Grandmother Naomi played by actor Edna Maniwabi.



Naomi carries the stories that connect Saul and his family to the land and their ancestors. She passes on this history to Saul in songs and stories, and by bringing him to the very land that holds the stories.

Saul's mother calls the stories and traditions of the Ojibwe people "blasphemy," a reflection of her own time in Residential School. This conflict that Saul's parents experience of being caught between two worlds (listening to the old stories and having been forced to hear bible stories and told these stories are the truth) shows us some of the disconnect that some Indigenous people still experience in their families and communities today.



INDIAN HORSE

Assignment

FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE LAND

There are lots of different ways to access nature regardless of where you live. Find a place that represents The Land to you and that can help you imagine what it might have been like before colonization. Perhaps sitting quietly on The Land will help you contemplate all The Land gives us, has lived through and continues to live through.

Write a journal entry, in first person, from the point of view of “The Land.” Write about what you’ve witnessed over the years and how you feel about it. What have you seen? What do you miss? What are your hopes?

INDIAN HORSE

Discussion Questions

- Does your family or a family you are close to speak another language at home? How would you feel if the government made a decision to erase this language and created policies to remove the freedom to speak with your family?
- Do you know how many Indigenous languages and dialects are original to the First Nations peoples of the province you live in? Of Canada? How does it make you feel to learn that many of these languages are on the verge of extinction if they are not already gone?
- How is the land connected to the healing of Saul? What are the various ways the government has removed the land from Indigenous people?

INDIAN HORSE

Challenge

LEARN AN OLD LANGUAGE

Learn who the First Peoples are from the area where your school is and where you live.

<http://www.firstvoices.com>

What languages are original to these people? Find out how to learn to say hello and thank you in these languages.





ELEVATION PICTURES PRESENTS

A Screen Siren Pictures/Terminal City Pictures/Devonshire Productions Film

Directed by **Stephen Campanelli** • Screenplay by **Dennis Foon**

INDIAN HORSE

Based On The Award-Winning Novel **Indian Horse** by **RICHARD WAGAMESE**

Produced by **Christine Haebler**, **Trish Dolman**, and **Paula Devonshire**

Starring Sladen Peltier (Ottawa), **Forrest Goodluck** (Albuquerque, New Mexico), **Aj Kapashesit** (Minneapolis, Minnesota)

with **Michael Murphy** (Cape Elizabeth, Maine & Toronto) and **Michiel Huisman** as Father Gaston (New York City)

Martin Donovan (Vancouver), **Edna Maniwabi** (Wiwikong, Ontario), **Michael Lawrenchuk** (Gillam, Manitoba),

Will Strongheart (East Norwich, New York), **Irene Poole** (Stratford, Ontario)

Director of Photography **Yves Belanger** • Editors **Geoff Ashenurst** and **Jamie Alain** • Music by **Jesse Zubot**

Run time: 110 minutes • 14 A in all provinces except Alberta, where it's rated PG.

COMING TO THEATRES APRIL 13, 2018

This film is based on the novel *Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese, currently taught in high schools across the country.

Contact us if to get involved with the Educational launch of this important film.

www.IndianHorse.ca outreach@IndianHorse.ca