



Belle of Batoche

Jacqueline Guest

Interest level: ages 8–11

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144 pages

AR Quiz # 83341

Consider the following question as you read *Belle of Batoche*:

Can a friendship thrive when one person has behaved dishonestly?

Story

Belle, an eleven-year-old Métis girl, and Sarah, a newcomer to Batoche, both want the coveted job of church bell ringer. An embroidery contest is held to award the position and Sarah cheats. Before Belle can expose her, the two are caught up in the advancing forces of General Middleton and his troops as they surround Batoche in the 1885 Riel Rebellion. The church bell disappeared that day and remains missing to this day.

Author

Jacqueline Guest is a Métis writer who lives in a log cabin nestled in the pinewoods of the Rocky Mountain foothills of Alberta. *Belle of Batoche* is close to Jacqueline's heart as several of her ancestors died in the Rebellion and she drew on family history for parts of the story. Jacqueline is also the author of *Secret Signs*.

Author Website

www.jacquelineguest.com

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

- Have students imagine they are Sarah and keep a journal for one of the following:
 - ◆ an early part of the story
 - ◆ in the root cellar
 - ◆ after the end of the story

Ask children to compare what they have written with one another, looking for a variety of interpretations of the story and of Sarah's character.

- Have students think about a time when somebody they know behaved dishonestly or acted unfairly. Then ask them to write a short story about it from the other person's point of view. (Make sure that they do not write about or identify people who may be hurt by their story.)
- In chapter 2, Belle's class reads William Wordsworth's poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." Lead students in a choral reading of the poem. Have them connect their thoughts about it to the comments made by Belle and Sarah. As a class, analyze the content of the poem. Use this as an opportunity to discuss form and poetic conventions. Ask students: what is the significance of this poem to the story?
- Discuss the difference between autobiography and biography. Use the discussion as a starting point for writing about some of the famous people of Belle's time, such as Louis Riel, Chief Poundmaker, Gabriel Dumont, George Simpson, General Middleton and Victoria Belcourt. Assign students to research these people and describe how they were connected to the Battle of Batoche.
- Discuss one of the following:
 - ◆ honesty versus cheating (in the story, Belle has to deal with Sarah's cheating and subsequent admission of guilt)
 - ◆ riot versus rebellion (what is the difference between these? What are some historical examples of each?)

Plan a debate or group discussion that challenges students to explore such issues from a variety of perspectives.

Art

- In *Belle of Batoche*, Sarah and Belle are asked to make embroidered cloths in a contest to see who will be the new bell ringer. Embroidery is one technique for creating designs on cloth using thread. Using 8 1/2 x 11 graph paper and pencil crayons for the Xs, have students create cross stitch patterns to represent an idea, event or issue from the book. If time permits, have students create their own cross stitch textiles.
- Sketch a design onto cotton material or construction paper. Use embroidery thread or wool and needles to trace the design.
- Explore the work of Métis artist Christi Belcourt, who creates art with beads and paint. Her work represents a visual history of some of the events in Métis history. Through this the students will get a fresh look at events of the time. You might have students create artwork using her style.

Drama

- Have students take one of the chapters of the book and rewrite it as a short play or Readers Theatre (for examples, see the Readers Theatre series by Win and Carl Braun (372.4)). Performances can be given in a very basic way, with no props or costumes, relying on the language and student voice to create the work. A more elaborate version can be undertaken with props and costumes for a structured drama presentation.
- Read about some of the famous people of the time such as Louis Riel, Gabriel Dumont, Sir John A. MacDonald, Dr. Maude Abbott, Alexander Graham Bell, Emily Carr, Emily Stowe and William McDougall. Get students to take on the persona of one of these people and talk about his or her life.
- Sarah's parents are unable to get back to Batoche during the Rebellion. They were probably frantic with worry. Ask students to write a dramatic scene from that time in the story, using Sarah's parents as characters. Perform this for the class.

Social Studies

- Pose a series of questions to students such as: Who were/are the Métis? Why was there a Rebellion in 1885? What was the impact of the Battle of Batoche on Canada? Who was involved in this battle? How was the Hudson's Bay Company involved? Divide students into groups to research the questions and then connect their findings to what they know about the Canada of today.

- A Who's Who (or What's What) of Objects: Have students make a dictionary that lists items or words that relate to life around 1885. Some suggestions are: Gatling gun, steamer, Red River Wagon, pemmican, Michif, settler, bannock, pioneer and trading post. Additional vocabulary could be gathered and researched by the students.
- Steamships and the Hudson's Bay Company: The Hudson's Bay Company steamer *Northcote* played a role in the Battle of Batoche. Have students research steamships and how they work. Using books such as *The Way Things Work* by David Macaulay (600) and *Inventions: Inventors and Ingenious Ideas* by David Salariya (609), students can locate information and draw a cross section of a steamship. Accompanying the drawing, students could write an account of being on the *Northcote* at the time of the Battle of Batoche. (Refer to Chapter Eleven as a starting point.)
- On a blackline master map of Old Canada or Saskatchewan (then called Regina, NWT), or one drawn by students, label the historical places talked about in the book. Examples: Rupert's Land, Red River, Fish Creek, Batoche, Regina (now the capital city), Duck Lake, North Battleford and Prince Albert. Compare this rendering to a current map to see how things have changed.
- Engage students in a discussion of how meeting our basic needs (food, shelter, etc.) has changed over the past 150 years. For example, when Belle returned to her house during the battle, she had to fill skins with water from a pump in her kitchen. What else is different in the way we meet our needs nowadays? Can students find other examples from the story that show the difference between then and now?
- Ask students to imagine that their world has been turned upside down the way Belle's is after the battle at Batoche. The Métis lost the battle against the government forces, and their way of life changed forever as a result. What kinds of feelings would they struggle with as they looked ahead to a life that was suddenly very different than the one they're used to? What if they had to give up some of the freedoms and rights they were used to?

Connecting to the Text

- Jacqueline Guest helps the reader imagine Madame Coteau's cabin with the following description: *The weathered cabin looked run-down and uninviting. An owl flew overhead, its powerful wings beating the air; whoosh, whoosh, whoosh.* Have students think about a place that gives them the shivers. It could be a house, an area in their neighborhood, or even a place they've only dreamed of. Have them imagine how this place would appear to someone who's never been there before. Ask students to describe what the imaginary visitor sees, feels, hears and smells in this spooky locale.

- Authors sometimes use figurative language to communicate meaning. A simile is a comparison using the words *like* or *as*. Similes can be an effective way to show action or mood in a story, or simply to enrich a description. For example, “When Parveen bends over to pull out her books, I watch her long shiny braid swing down her back like a thick rope.” Have students find five more examples of similes in the story.
- *Belle of Batoche* is written in the third person. Choose a passage of about a half-page in length and ask students to rewrite it from Belle’s perspective.
- Most good stories involve conflict of some sort—either between the characters and their environment or between the characters themselves. In pairs, have students discuss and record what they believe to be significant conflicts within *Belle of Batoche*. How is each conflict resolved? How does its presence in the book make the story more interesting to read? What do they see as the major conflict within the story?
- Fiction has to be *believable* to work. If anything in the text suddenly reminds readers that the story or the characters aren’t real, the story loses its credibility and its ability to affect us emotionally. For example, characters who don’t act appropriately for their age, or sudden coincidences that wrap up the plot in a “too tidy” manner can make the story feel really fake. *Belle of Batoche* is a believable book. Break students into small groups and have them discuss why the story works. They should support their findings with examples from the book. Have each group share their reasoning with the class. Can students think of a book they’ve read where the events, characters or actions do not feel believable?
- Have students create a mixed-media timeline of the events in *Belle of Batoche*. They should be sure to include all significant events in the story. Display the timelines around the classroom.
- In pairs, have students determine the message (the “Big Idea”) of *Belle of Batoche*. Have students share their thoughts with the class.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Belle has a clear idea of what she wants to be when she grows up. She would like to sing in the Montreal opera—and she sings all the time! What about you? What would you like to be when you grow up? What kinds of things do you do now that support your goals?
2. Belle and Sarah must embroider altar cloths as a way for the church to decide who should have the honor of ringing the church bell every Sunday. Do you think this is a fair task for Father Moulin to set them? How else do you think the decision could have been made?

3. When Belle learns she must embroider an altar cloth, her mother gives her the pure white linen that was a wedding gift from Belle's grandmother. What is the significance of this gesture?
4. Belle sees rifle pits dug into the cemetery one day on her way home. Imagine if the town you lived in was preparing for war. How would that make you feel?
5. Belle gets scolded for daydreaming. It keeps her from doing her chores. Is there something *you* do that drives the adults around you crazy? Explain.
6. How much courage would it take to confront someone you suspected of cheating?
7. Like the other children of Batoche, Belle has a certain image of Madame Coteau. But how does this image change when Belle goes to visit the old woman at her cabin across the river?
8. How does Belle's character grow throughout the book? Provide evidence of this growth.

Author's Note

Dear Readers,

For me, Belle of Batoche is a magical time machine. Canada has some of the most exciting history in the world, and I want students to know about it. Batoche and the Métis people who fought and died for their rights during the North West Resistance are part of that history.

When I started to do the research for this book, I made some amazing discoveries, such as the fact that my ancestors took part in the battle of Batoche. Not only was the Tourond family good friends with Louis Riel, but they fought alongside him! My great-uncle was on Riel's council and my great-grandfather and other great-uncles fought—and some died—in the events described in this book.

Many of the historical figures, including my great-grandfather Patrice Tourond, are real, but Belle is a fictional character modelled after one of my great-aunts, Elise. I'm sure she did needlework—most pioneer women did—but whether she ever entered a contest to be the church bell ringer, I couldn't say!

Monsieur Letendre, Miss Dorval, Father Moulin, Caron and many others are real people out of Canada's history, but I have taken a little literary license with them so that they could be in my story. The three men who stole the bell from the church tower are also real, and the mystery of what happened to Marie Antoinette remains unsolved today.

When I go into schools to give presentations, I ask the students whom they would choose to meet if they could go back in time. I tell them I have two people I would love to talk to. Samuel Clemens, known as Mark Twain, who is my favorite author, and my great-great-grandmother Josephte Tourond. Josephte was a remarkable woman. Over the span of her one-hundred-year life, she had three different husbands, ten children

and many jobs: wife and mother, homemaker, farmer, cattle rancher, dry goods store-owner and teacher!

I shall never forget the day I visited the historical site at Batoche, Saskatchewan. While walking through the graveyard, I found my great-great-grandmother Josephite's headstone. In a flash, history came alive for me. Suddenly, that exciting period out of the past became real. A thrill ran through me and I knew I wanted to write a book about this piece of Canadian history.

I hope that all of you will ask your grandparents for their stories about life in "the old days." You will be amazed at how your very own special history will come alive for you!

Happy reading!
Sincerely,
Jacqueline Guest

Resources

Books

Fiction

- Carter, Anne Laurel. *Under a Prairie Sky*
- Citra, Becky. *Ellie's New Home*
- Lunn, Janet. *The Root Cellar*
- Reynolds, Marilyn. *Prairie Fire*
- Trottier, Maxine. *Blood Upon Our Land: the Northwest Resistance Diary of Josephine Bouvier*

Nonfiction

- Bouchard, David. *Qu'Appelle* (811.54)
- Braun, Win and Carl. Readers Theatre series (372.4)
- The Canadian Encyclopedia* (971)
- Francis, Daniel. *Discovering First Peoples and First Contact* (971.01)
- Greater Victoria School District. *Growth of the First Métis Nation: A Social Studies Resource Guide for Teachers* (971.05)
- Hancock, Pat. *The Penguin Book of Canadian Biography for Young Readers: Early Canada* (971)
- Logie, Patricia Richardson. *Chronicles of Pride* (971.004)
- Lusser, A.S. (ed.). *Louis Riel and The Métis* (971.05)
- Macaulay, David. *The Way Things Work* (600)
- Salariya, David. *Inventions: Inventors and Ingenious Ideas* (609)

Online

The Canadian Encyclopedia

www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCESubjects&Params=A1

Confederation for Kids

www.lac-bac.gc.ca/confederation/kids/h2-1500-e.html

Heroes of Lore and Yore

http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/nlc-bnc/heroes_lore_yore_can_hero-ef/2001/h6-209-e.html

Louis Riel Backgrounder

<http://library2.usask.ca/northwest/background/riel.htm>

Gatling Gun

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gatling_gun

Storytelling: The Art of Knowledge

www.civilization.ca/cmc/exhibitions/aborig/storytel/indexeng.shtml

Christi Belcourt, Métis artist

www.belcourt.net

Basic Embroidery Stitches

www.needlework-tips-and-techniques.com/basic-embroidery-stitches.html