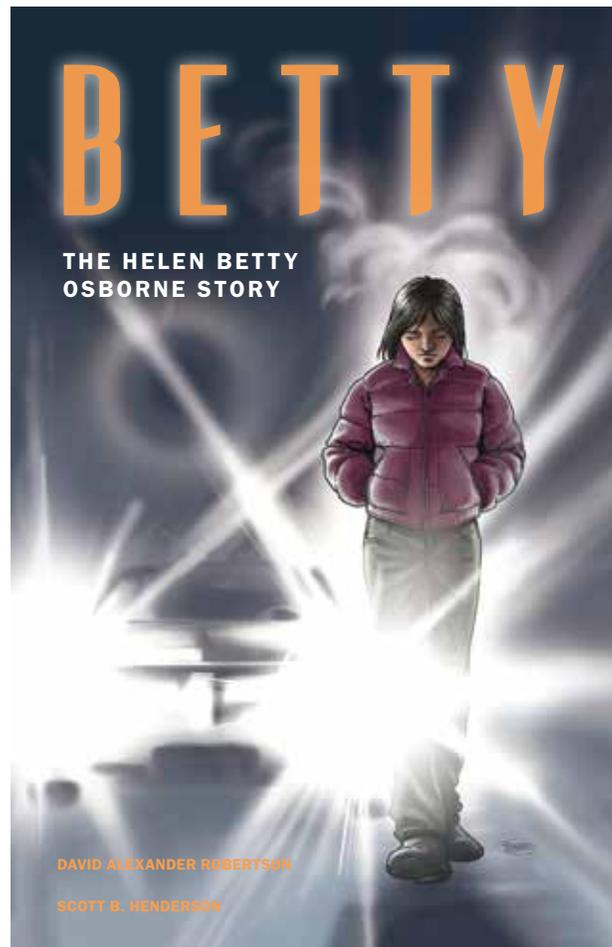


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO STUDENT INQUIRY

BY CONNIE WYATT ANDERSON



FOR THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

BETTY: THE HELEN BETTY OSBORNE STORY

BY DAVID ALEXANDER ROBERTSON & SCOTT B. HENDERSON

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CONTENTS

Using Graphic Novels in the History Classroom as a Teaching Tool	3
Teaching Sensitive Issues.....	3
The Helen Betty Osborne Case.....	4
<i>Betty: The Helen Betty Osborne Story</i> in the Classroom	5
The Story	5
Using this Teacher’s Guide	6
Using the Guiding Questions	6
Guiding Questions	7
Questions for Further Student Inquiry	9
Appendix: Suggested Reading	12

USING GRAPHIC NOVELS IN THE HISTORY CLASSROOM AS A TEACHING TOOL

Students in high school classrooms are exposed to history in a multitude of ways: primary source documents, textbooks, film, music, prose, manipulatives, artifacts, and through traditional knowledge, oral histories, and stories from Elders and knowledge keepers. Graphic novels, like *Betty: The Helen Betty Osborne Story* are a valuable part of that pedagogical suite. They deliver a cognitive and affective experience that allows students to access historical content and sensitive topics in a manner that complements the use of more conventional textbooks.

Why use graphic novels to teach history?

Graphic novels can offer textbook coverage of historical events, at the same time humanizing them and making them more tangible to readers. They can enrich history by offering different personal narratives which help students better understand the many perspectives of history. This unique framing also nudges learners to go beyond names, places, and dates and interweave larger societal trends in history thus helping them to contextualize events.

Graphic novels are able to combine sophisticated historical content with visual scaffolding and diverse perspectives making them an important tool for teaching sensitive issues. In the case of the graphic novel *Betty*, issues like racism, misogyny, sexism, and indifference can be explored. As well, graphic novels offer dialogue between characters and convey characters' emotion through body language; they bring depth and pause to unsettling scenes by offering non-sequential timelines; and their narrative approach helps frame actions and elusive concepts.

TEACHING SENSITIVE ISSUES

Many of the topics addressed in high-school social studies and history classes are controversial. That's because much of our Canadian past is, unfortunately, unpleasant and controversial. Planning is therefore integral. Teaching sensitive issues should not be a pedagogical minefield; rather it should be viewed by teachers as a portal to critical thinking. Research indicates that exploring controversial issues in high school helps students become better informed and more active democratic citizens, have confidence in their ability to influence government policy, do charitable work, and take an interest in the well-being of their community.

How, then, can you have a thoughtful, productive, respectful discussions in class centred on sensitive issues? Here are some pointers.

Before class begins.

Identify potentially sensitive and controversial topics before the start of the course, unit, or lesson. Make note in the course outline/unit outline that discussions around difficult topics will be handled sensitively – an asterisk or endnote in the course outline stating that sensitive issues like racism, sexism, etc. will be explored. Anticipate and plan for any difficulties that may occur and devise a range of strategies to address them. Examine your own assumptions and views on the topic. Talk to colleagues who have experience of teaching sensitive and controversial issues; ask them about their experiences and strategies that have worked for them and their students.

Establish ground rules at the beginning of the year.

Set the tenor from the beginning – build a sense of community in your classroom by helping students get to know each other, as well as agree on ground rules for discussions. Consider guidelines around inflammatory language, stereotyping, name-calling, personal attacks, and sarcasm. Clearly state what discussion is for – analysis,

understanding, and thoughtful evaluation. Preface discussions of sensitive and controversial topics by reminding everyone that some members of the group may have had personal experience related to the topic or issue (even though this may not be obvious).

Facilitate discussions.

Explain the process and define roles – refer students to class rules. Model the behaviours you expect: sit with the class when discussions are taking place, not at your desk; listen attentively; show respect; be cognizant of your body language. Interrupt when necessary – stop the discussion if it becomes emotional or meanders too far off topic. If appropriate, steer conversations in a more positive direction. Encourage students to take a class break and write out their thoughts or feelings about the conversation. Informal writing or journaling provides learners with an opportunity to sort through their feelings and organize their thoughts before jumping into a discussion.

Encourage attentive listening.

Attentive listening isn't reflexive; it doesn't come easily. Consider sharing these tips with students: if you must speak, ask questions; be aware of your nonverbal messages (gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice); let speakers speak; do not interrupt when a counterpart is speaking; don't trust your memory, write it down. Tell students: it is impossible to listen and speak at the same time.

Consider potential student triggers.

Consider in advance the possible triggers for your students. Give forethought to how sensitive issues like the Helen Betty Osborne murder and MMIW may affect your students personally. Approach the topics carefully, keeping in mind students who may be affected and with plans in place for what to do if a student is triggered. On the day of the sensitive topic, it may be a good idea to reiterate the ground rules for the discussion. Consider giving a “trigger warning” for things that may be upsetting to certain students (you may want to invite a counsellor in as a precursor and have one on campus who is on-call and ready to speak with students). Focus on ending the learning experience with positive steps that students can take if similar issues arise in their own lives or how they can take action and bring awareness to such issues.

Use primary and secondary sources to guide discussions.

Using other people's words to guide or initiate discussions of sensitive issues allows students to see how others have talked about, or continue to talk about, these topics. Works by historians, scholars, authors and playwrights, and newspaper and magazine articles – even a single quoted sentence or excerpt – to which students can respond may help get discussions started when students are hesitant to voice an opinion.

THE HELEN BETTY OSBORNE CASE

Helen Betty Osborne was an Ininiw (Cree) high school student from Norway House Cree Nation. She was abducted and brutally murdered near The Pas, Manitoba, on November 13, 1971. Osborne dreamed of becoming a teacher when she left her home to go to high school in The Pas and was only there for two months before her death. Her murder drew national attention, sparking a conversation around violence towards Indigenous women across Canada. Since the Osborne case (and likely before), hundreds of Indigenous women have gone missing or been murdered across the country.

It took 16 years before Osborne’s killers were charged, despite the fact that a local lawyer, a local provincial sheriff, and hundreds of residents of the predominantly non-indigenous town of The Pas had already heard or knew exactly who had been involved in the killing. Some months after Osborne’s death, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police established that Dwayne Archie Johnston, James Houghton, Lee Colgan, and Norman Manger were involved in the murder. Despite this knowledge, it was not until December 1987 that one of them, Dwayne Johnston, was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder. James Houghton was acquitted. Lee Colgan, having received immunity from prosecution in return for his testimony, went free. Norman Manger was never charged. The case was one of the primary events to illuminate the problem of the systemic racism, and there were widespread calls for a public inquiry.

In the spring of 1988 the Manitoba government established the Public Inquiry into the Administration of Justice and Aboriginal People. The subsequent Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission conducted an investigation into concerns surrounding the investigation into the Osborne case, including the length of time involved in resolving it. The Commission concluded that the most significant factors prolonging the case were racism, sexism, and indifference.

The Manitoba government issued a formal apology on July 14, 2000. The apology addressed the failure of the province’s justice system in Osborne’s case. The province created a scholarship in Osborne’s name for Indigenous women.

Norway House Cree Nation opened the Helen Betty Osborne Ininiw Education Resource Centre in 2004 named in the teenager’s honour. In the foyer of the nursery to grade 12 school is a portrait of the young woman, surrounded by symbols of the Ininiw Seven Sacred Teachings: love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility, and truth.

In 2016, on the anniversary of Osborne’s murder, Eric Robinson, a former NDP member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly for Keewatinook told CBC, “Forty-five years from now I hope that Indigenous people have a sense of belonging in Canada, a country that we are supposed to be a part of”.

On December 6, 2016, the government of Canada launched an independent inquiry into the issue of murdered and missing Indigenous women, which remains a major societal issue more than 45 years after the Osborne case. The issues brought to light by the Helen Betty Osborne case are not relegated to the past; they remain part of contemporary Canada.

BETTY: THE HELEN BETTY OSBORNE STORY IN THE CLASSROOM

THE STORY

Betty: The Helen Betty Osborne Story is a graphic novel based on true events surrounding the murder of the Ininiw teenager in November of 1971. Betty was born in Norway House Cree Nation and in 1969, at the age of 17, she left her community to pursue her education, with the dream of becoming a teacher and helping her people. For two years, Betty attended the Guy Hill Residential School outside The Pas. Then in 1971 she moved into The Pas to attend high school.

Betty’s story is bookended by the larger, ongoing issue of murdered and missing indigenous women in Canada. Inside this framing, the graphic novel provides a glimpse into the values and perspectives prevalent in the early seventies that inevitably led to Betty’s murder: sexism, racism, and indifference.

Betty: The Helen Betty Osborne Story concludes with a call to action for ordinary citizens to make a difference, challenging and empowering readers to become upstanders by posing the question “what can we do?”

USING THIS TEACHER’S GUIDE

NOTE: Given the sensitive nature of the content in *Betty*, it may not be suitable for all readers. It is recommended that *Betty: The Helen Betty Osborne Story* should be considered for students in Grade 9 or above.

This guide is a teaching support to the implementation of *Betty* in high school social studies courses. It is meant to complement curricular outcomes pertaining to historical and contemporary indigenous issues in Canada; indigenous history; social justice and equality; and active citizenship.

A Teacher’s Guide to Student Inquiry for *Betty: The Helen Betty Osborne Story* engages students in the graphic novel by having them explore a set of guiding questions based on *Betty*’s story and offers five theme-based options for further research-based student inquiry.

USING THE GUIDING QUESTIONS

Set the context for the graphic novel by locating and indicating Norway House Cree Nation and The Pas/Opaskwayak Cree Nation on a map. Contextualize *Betty* by providing a backgrounder to Osborne’s life, her move to The Pas, and her murder. Study the resultant Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, focussing on the findings in its report.¹ Inform the students about the scholarship and school named in her honour. Since *Betty* is set within the larger issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada, provide students with an overview. Consider highlighting current news articles and events centred on MMIW. Encourage and guide discussion.

Have the students read the novel individually. Explore the Guiding Questions, pp. 7 and 8. You may assign this as an individual exercise, or arrange students into reading pairs, triads, or small groups. Be sure to go over the questions as a class before they are assigned, and pay special note to Questions 11 and 12 which explore Osborne’s murder. Be sure you have read and taken steps for the study of sensitive issues.

Consider sharing the student responses to the Guiding Questions to the whole group. Devise a method of sharing that is supportive, respectful, provides an opportunity to learn and explore, and represents a place for healing, where the heart can be unburdened and words of consolation and reconciliation can be freely spoken.²

¹ *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba*, November 1999. It can be accessed at ajic.mb.ca/volume.html. Volume 2 relates to the Osborne case.

² Adapted from https://www.portageandmainpress.com/lesson_plans/plan_260_1.pdf

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pages 3 – 4

1. Where does the graphic novel open? What is the setting? Describe the theme of the protest and the calls to action by those involved.

Page 5

2. Betty is leaving her home to attend school. What is her long-term goal?

Pages 6 – 9

3. Describe the scenes on pages 5 and 6. How do you think Betty and her peers feel leaving their community to attend residential school at Guy Hill?
4. Page 9. Why is Betty leaving Guy Hill Residential School and attending school in The Pas?

Pages 10 – 17

5. Betty is living in The Pas, billeted at the Benson household. Does Betty like living there? How do you know?
6. Page 13. Bud Colgan is having dinner with his family. He meets up with Jim (James Houghton). What are their plans for the evening?
7. Page 14, 17. By 11:00 p.m. Colgan's car has three passengers. At 11:55 they arrive at the Royal Canadian Legion. Describe what they have been doing for the past 60 minutes.

Pages 18 – 21

8. Page 18. Betty is with her friends. Describe the scene. How is Betty feeling? Has she made the right choice coming to The Pas?
9. Page 19. Betty finds herself alone at 12:30 a.m. in downtown The Pas. How did she come to be alone? Where is she planning on going?
10. Page 21. At 2:00 a.m. Bud Colgan, James Houghton, and Norman Manger pick up Dwayne Johnson. Describe the scene.

Pages 22 – 28

Betty connects with many of her friends throughout the evening until just after midnight. Little is known about her whereabouts after that; she was last seen at 2:15 a.m. walking alone down Edwards Avenue. A little later, she was abducted by four non-Indigenous young men and taken to a cabin north of The Pas where she was beaten and stabbed to death.

**Pages 22 to 28 are difficult, illustrating the murder of Helen Betty Osborne.*

11. The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission conducted an investigation into concerns surrounding the length of time involved in resolving the Osborne case. The Commission concluded that the most significant factors prolonging the case were racism, sexism, and indifference.



- a) Define
- Sexism:
 - Racism:
 - Indifference:
- b) Using the scenes depicting the murder of Helen Betty Osborne, explain how David Alexander Robertson and Scott B. Henderson illustrate how these beliefs/actions were contributing factors in her death.

Page 30

12. The story ends as it began, at a protest highlighting the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. The lead activist asks "...but, what can we do?" What can you do?

Reflection

13. What questions do you have about the Helen Betty Osborne case? List them.
14. Research answers to your question/s. What did you learn?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDENT INQUIRY

Theme: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women	Questions for Inquiry
<p>Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) in Canada is a social issue that has received a great deal of attention by the media and government in the past several years.</p> <p>The Native Women’s Association of Canada has gathered information about 582 cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. The exact number remains disputed, with some estimating that 1,200 women and girls have gone missing or been murdered over the past 40+ years.</p> <p>Statistics show that the Indigenous women are six times more likely to be murdered than non-Indigenous women. The Helen Betty Osborne story illustrates the issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada matter? In what ways is it an issue for all Canadians? • Who is affected by the issue of MMIW? In what ways? • Why is the murder of Helen Betty Osborne often considered a significant point in the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada?
Theme: How is the Helen Betty Osborne Case Connected to Larger Trends?	Questions for Inquiry
<p>The United Nations, Amnesty International, and other international human rights bodies and non-governmental organizations have all issued reports on the nearly 1,200 indigenous women and girls who have gone missing or been murdered in Canada.</p> <p>In 2015, a UN human rights committee stated, “indigenous women and girls are disproportionately affected by life-threatening forms of violence, homicides and disappearances.” It recommended a national inquiry.</p> <p>In late 2016, the government of Canada announced they were launching an independent national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helen Betty Osborne was abducted and murdered in 1971. How has the issue of MMIW changed since then? What might future concerns be? • How is the issue of MMIW connected to other social and/or economic issues? What are these issues? • Is this issue a part of a larger trend or problem? • Why does the issue of MMIW continue to be a problem and for whom?



Theme: Looking Inward	Questions for Inquiry
<p>Reflecting on what we have learned has many facets. For example, reflecting on newly acquired knowledge enhances its meaning. Reflecting on experiences encourages insight and complex learning. Some reflection is best done alone; some reflection is enhanced when we ponder and share our learning with others. Reflection – looking inward – is often recursive. As our students return to something they knew or thought they knew, they may have more questions.</p> <p>Reflection involves linking a current experience to previous learnings. Reflection also involves drawing forth cognitive and emotional information from several sources: in this case, using a graphic novel to explore history.</p> <p>In the end, reflecting also means giving our students the opportunity to apply what they have learned about Helen Betty Osborne to contexts beyond the classroom.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you feel about the Helen Betty Osborne case now that you know more about it? • How do you feel about the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada now that you know more about it? • What questions do you still have?

Theme: Raising Awareness	Questions for Inquiry
<p>Democratic citizenship is the crux of many Canadian Social Studies curriculums, kindergarten to grade 12; the overarching goal is for students to become responsible, informed citizens. Learners should be exposed to the skills, tools, and strategies to be active agents of change.</p> <p>Knowledge about issues like the murder of Helen Betty Osborne and MMIW helps students respond respectfully. It offers them the opportunity to apply critical thinking skills, explore ideas regarding activism and advocacy, and utilize the tools to effect social or political change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What impacts did the Helen Betty Osborne case have at the local, national, and international level? • What actions were taken by citizens and other groups to bring awareness and closure to the case? • In what ways did citizens bring their concerns to the forefront? • What were the short-term and long-term consequences of these actions?



Theme: Praxis: What Can I Do?	Questions for Inquiry
<p>According to Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, it is not enough to gain new knowledge, to dialogue, and share. Learners must take further steps centred on concrete reflection and action.</p> <p>Praxis – experiential learning – engages students in work with their peers to apply their learning and contribute to a more equitable future in which quality of life is improved for all.</p> <p>There are a wide range of approaches to citizen action and engagement. Students should be encouraged to determine their own level of social action by challenging themselves to explore areas where they can be most effective in making personal, community, and societal change.</p>	<p>In regard to MMIW in Canada:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who needs to do what? What can and should we do? • What are the challenges, barriers, and risks to taking action? • What do I have to offer? How can I take action? • How can I make others aware? How can I get others involved?

APPENDIX: SUGGESTED READING

- Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission. *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba*. November 1999; <http://www.ajic.mb.ca/volume.html>.

Volume 2 relates to the Osborne case.

- Ham, Jennifer. “Hope, Healing, and the Legacy of Helen Betty Osborne: A Case Study Exploring Cross-Cultural Peacebuilding in Northern Manitoba.” Masters Thesis, 2014; https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1993/23927/Ham_Jennifer.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Provides much context, historical and contemporary, for the HBO case by exploring issues in The Pas and Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

- Manitoba Historical Society. “Memorable Manitobans: Helen Betty Osborne (1952–1971)” http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/osborne_hb.shtml.

Photograph link to Helen Betty Osborne Memorial Monument at the site of the former Guy Hill Residential School.

- Stackhouse, John. “The healing power of hockey.” *Globe and Mail* (6 part series), November 7, 2001. <http://v1.theglobeandmail.com/series/apartheid/stories/20011107-1.html>

“Only one generation later, [after the murder of Helen Betty Osborne] the native-owned Blizzard has used a mixed-race team and integrated home crowd to start a new chapter for both the town and reserve.”

- Turner, Randy. “On the front lines of the missing and murdered women tragedy, pain never fades.” *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 17, 2012; <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/fyi/the-hurting-179777201.html>
- Wilson, Jamie. “Smashing stereotypes with double-doubles.” *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 26, 2012; <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/analysis/smashing-stereotypes-with-double-doubles-149015155.html>

In 2014 the student councils from the two high schools in OCN and The Pas – one being on the reserve and one being in the town – met on the bridge which links (and divides) the two communities. They closed the bridge and signed a friendship treaty. “Now when people ask me where I am from, I tell them The Pas and OCN – communities focused on a positive future for us all.”

