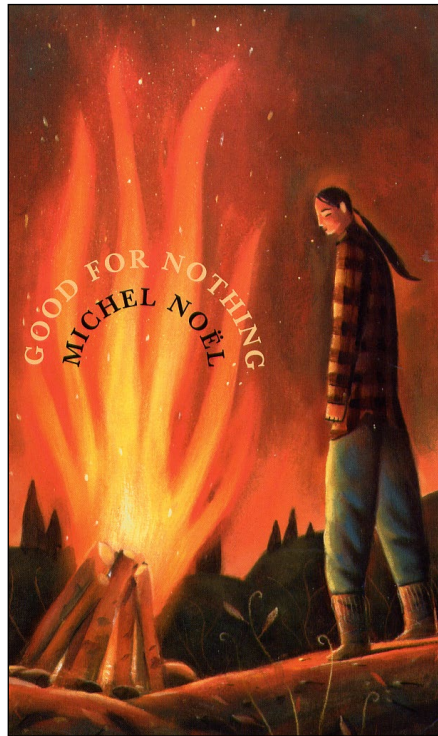




GROUNDWOOD STUDY GUIDES

Good For Nothing

Written by Michel Noël



The year is 1959, and fifteen-year-old Nipishish returns to his reserve in northern Quebec after being kicked out of residential school. The reserve, however, offers nothing to Nipishish. He must try to rediscover the old ways, face the officials who find him a threat, and learn the truth about his father's death.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Ages 12 to 15 / Grades 7 to 10

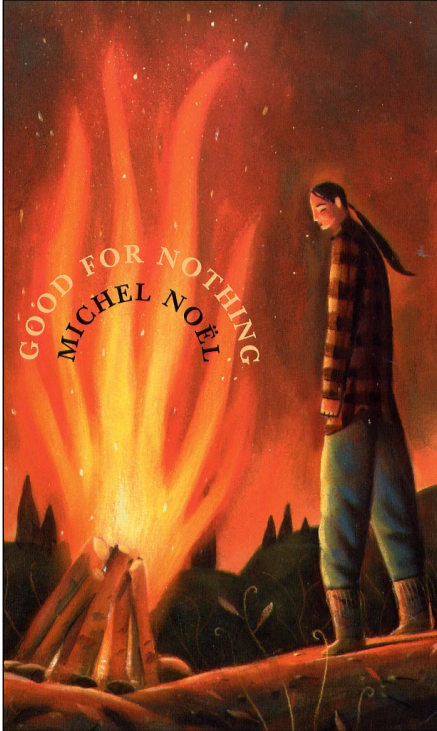
YOUNG ADULT FICTION / People & Places / Canada / Indigenous Studies / History / Geography

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BOOK DESCRIPTION

The year is 1959, and fifteen-year-old Nipishish returns to his reserve in northern Quebec after being kicked out of residential school, where the principal tells him he's a good-for-nothing who, like all Indians, can look forward to a life of drunkenness, prison and despair.

The reserve, however, offers nothing to Nipishish. He remembers little of his late mother and father. In fact, he seems to know less about himself than the people at the band office. He must try to rediscover the old ways, face the officials who find him a threat and learn the truth about his father's death.

This story highlights the differences and similarities of both Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous peoples during the time of residential schools, as well as the many hardships of Indigenous communities as they struggled to maintain their rights. It also tells the story of how people, although faced with racism and discrimination, can overcome these in order to help those in need. Curriculum connections include History, English, Social Sciences, Indigenous Studies, Geography and the Arts.

BEFORE READING

KWL

Before reading, introduce students to the KWL chart to activate prior knowledge of the Indian Act and residential schools, e.g., terra nullius; the Gradual Civilization Act; the Gradual Enfranchisement Act; loss of rights; rights of First Nations, Métis and Inuit as separate Indigenous groups; and effects of residential schools.

Curriculum Connections: Indigenous Studies, History, Geography

Next, brainstorm questions with students in order to develop an inquiry about why Indigenous Peoples of Canada were forced to attend residential schools, what happened at residential schools and how Indigenous rights changed with the Indian Act. Following this, explore what students would like to know about Indigenous rights and residential schools under the W section of the chart. For example: Why did children have to attend residential schools? What happened during residential schools? What did children learn? How old were the children who went there? Why were residential schools a destructive place for thousands of Indigenous people? What happened to Indigenous communities when their children were taken away?

Curriculum Connections: Indigenous Studies

This activity can be completed using a Think/Pair/Share strategy or in small groups, so students can come up with questions together and then record these as a whole class to encourage discussion.

The Indian Act, the impact of residential schools and vocabulary can be researched using videos, movies and websites to help students understand how relationships with the newcomers to Canada changed with the Gradual Civilization Act and the Indian Act, how the Indian Act changed the rights of Indigenous Peoples and how these changes still affect Indigenous Peoples today.

ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Have students answer true or false to the following statements. They should be able to give details to support their answers.

- Terra nullius allowed people to take lands used by Indigenous Peoples.
- The Gradual Civilization Act allowed the First Nations to keep their Indigenous rights.
- The Métis had the same rights as the First Nations during the 1900s.
- The language of the Métis is the same as the language of all the other First Nations.
- Residential schools allowed Indigenous children to become professionals.
- Under the Indian Act, all First Nations children were forced to attend residential schools.
- Residential schools were located in the First Nations communities.
- Children were allowed to speak their Indigenous languages at the residential schools.
- The community you reside in had a residential school. Or, Indigenous children were taken from the area of your community.
- Indigenous Peoples have the same rights as other Canadian citizens.
- Indigenous Peoples were treated well in non-Indigenous communities.
- Indigenous communities had full control over what happened in and around their communities. Has this changed over time?
- Kwe means hello.
- The principals of residential schools had hundreds of Indigenous children.

USING THE TEXT

Good for Nothing begins by examining the years 1959–1960. Have students explore this time period and make connections to the Indigenous history and rights of this time.

Next, complete a text walk to build literacy with students. Have students explore each section of the book and pull out significant text in order to build a glossary together. This will help students make connections and prepare to read the associated text and improve their understanding.

Students can activate their prior knowledge by discussing the text and what they already know about some of the features that come up. Students can make predictions together about what the story is about and help each other form mental images about the setting, characters and storyline by exploring maps of the area, pictures of Métis people and historical data. Students can complete a Think/Pair/Share with an elbow partner before beginning a Read Aloud with the class. Students will then share ideas with the class to confirm predictions made.

Curriculum Connection: Geography

DURING READING

INQUIRY

Model a Think Aloud using the focus inquiry question: “How are Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada treated differently?” Make predictions and confirm as the story is read aloud. Record new words on the Smartboard or on chart paper (e.g., Kwe, residential school, Canada goose, Indians, Lac Cabonga, clear-cut, Hudson’s Bay Company, Kitchimanitou, makoucham, band office, Indian Affairs, Indian Territory, RCMP, North American Indian Government, Assembly of First Nations).

Students can research new words using trips to the library, books, videos (www.youtube.com) and websites (www.metisnation.org to learn more about the Métis, and wherearethechildren.ca/en to learn more about residential schools). Words can be posted on a class word wall as a visual reference for students or recorded in students’ individual word lists.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How did the Indian Act change the rights of Indigenous Peoples?
- Why were residential schools mandatory for all First Nations children?
- Why do the Métis not have rights on their lands?
- Why is it important for Indigenous Peoples to continue to tell their stories?

STORY FRAME

The story frame may be completed during reading or after reading.

The problem in the story is _____

This is a problem because _____

The problem is solved when _____

In the end _____

Visit the following website for the story frame and additional graphic organizers: www.readingrockets.org

SHARING CIRCLE

“Could it be that Indians are in trouble? That they are getting in the white people’s way? Could there be someone somewhere — this all-powerful government, for example — who wants to exterminate the Indians?” (page 31)

Have students sit together in a circle and explain to them the importance of the circle to many Indigenous Peoples. In a circle, everyone is equal and of equal importance. Each person has a gift to share and is important and valued. Explain to students that they are going to examine something that may be uncomfortable but that things that make them uncomfortable can also help them grow to understand one another. Students will each take a turn to share their own experiences and discuss a time when they felt happy and then a time when they felt like they were in the way. This can be done all at once or in two rounds depending on how comfortable students are working together and exploring their truths.

Curriculum Connections: Social Sciences, Indigenous Studies

Students can use the statement “One time, I felt in the way when ... then one day, I was very happy when ...” as needed to help them begin their sharing. Teachers should model how to do this first, and students can use the Right to Pass as well.

AFTER READING

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In the book *Good for Nothing*, Nipishish and his community are concerned about the development that is taking place in their community without their consultation. Ask students: Can you think of something that has happened in your community where you have been in a similar position (e.g., privatization of beaches, clear-cutting, park removals, etc.)? What kinds of changes to your town would you like to see and what would you like to remain the same? Are there changes happening now that you do not agree with?

In the story, Nipishish is made to attend residential school and is told and made to feel that he is good for nothing. Ask students: Have you heard of any other residential school survivor stories that relate to this experience? Explain.

Have students give examples from the text that highlight the loss of Indigenous rights in connection to the Indian Act. e.g., Residential schools — all Indigenous children in Canada had to attend residential school. Nipishish and Pinamen had to attend residential school in this story.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: INDIGENOUS STUDIES

Ask students: What do you think the author wants you to learn from this story (author's message)?

Good for Nothing is set in southwestern Quebec, in what is now La Vérendrye Wildlife Reserve. Have students research their area and explore what the historical connection is to Indigenous history. Next, they should research and locate where the closest First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit community is to their town and if this has changed over time. Invite students to map this and share with others in their class.

Curriculum Connections: Geography

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

WEB RESOURCES

KWL charts:

“K-W-L Charts.” Facing History and Ourselves, accessed September 30, 2018.
<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/k-w-l-charts>

Indian Act:

Indian Act, R.S.C., 1985, c. I-5.

<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5>

Gradual Civilization Act:

Robinson, Amanda. “Gradual Civilization Act.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, March 3, 2016.

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/gradual-civilization-act>

Sharing Circles:

“Talking Circles.” First Nations Pedagogy, accessed September 30, 2018.

<https://firstnationspedagogy.ca/circletalks.html>

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Michel Noël is the author of several award-winning books for young people, including *Pien*, which won the Governor General's Award. Because his father worked for an international paper company, Michel grew up in the logging camps of northern Quebec, living alongside the Algonquins of Lac Rapide, Lac Victoria and Maniwaki. He now lives in Quebec City.