

THE 8TH FIRE



"...the Seventh Fire will light the Eighth and final Fire, an eternal fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood."

— Anishinaabe Seven Fires Prophecy

Tomson Highway's Theology of Laughter

Fallen Feathers, Unfinished Stories

Reconciliation is a Two-Way Street

How Clothing Conveys Culture

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Reservation Dogs poster. Courtesy of IMDb

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EDITORS



Alex Jian



Leonette Qian



Bodhi Srivastava



Daniel Cui



Emily Chen



Yvette Wu

A message from the editors

Dear reader,

Over the past year, we read, watched, and discussed Indigenous stories. Some were beautiful, speaking of hope, resilience, and the strength of people holding onto who they are. Others were deeply painful, bearing witness to centuries of land dispossession, residential schools, racism, and violence.

As high school students, we are still learning how to approach these stories with honesty and care. This magazine is our attempt to listen more closely, think more critically, and reflect on what it means to live in a country shaped by these stories. We hope this magazine invites you to question the stories Canada tells about itself, to recognize that reconciliation belongs not only to governments or textbooks, but also to ordinary people and everyday choices, and most of all, to keep listening.

Thank you for reading.

The Editors of The Eighth Fire

OUR MISSION

“In the time of the Seventh Fire New People will emerge. They will retrace their steps to find what was left by the trail...to remember and reclaim the wisdom of those who came before them. If they choose the right road, then the Seventh Fire will light the Eighth and final Fire, an eternal fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood.”

—from the *Anishinaabe Seven Fires Prophecy*, as recorded in Edward Benton Banai's *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway*



Some histories reach us as facts. Others reach us as silences and erasures — in broken treaties, in unmarked graves, in festering scars a country has long chosen to look away from. We inherit them regardless. We inherit them in classrooms and cities, in family stories and public apologies, in what a nation remembers with pride and in what it still struggles to face. *The 8th Fire* begins from that inheritance.

Founded in 2026 at the University of Toronto Schools, *The 8th Fire* is a magazine created by Grade 11 Students Alex, Daniel, Leonette, Bodhi, Emily, and Yvette, inspired by a year of studying contemporary Indigenous literary texts. One of the most important themes in this course is reconciliation. To us, reconciliation demands more than acknowledgement. It demands the courage to confront our nation's past injustices with honesty, and the responsibility to let that truth inform the future we build.

We take our name from the Anishinaabe teaching of the Seven Fires and the idea that the future is shaped by the paths people choose to follow. That choice, the prophecy reminds us, must be rooted in the wisdom of those who came before. For us, the eighth fire is a belief that this generation has both the opportunity and the obligation to carry that wisdom forward, with greater care, humility, and courage than the generations before us.



Therefore, our purpose in creating this magazine is to invite our audience to engage deeply with Canada's history, to reflect on the truths that have shaped our present, and to recognize the responsibility each of us holds in shaping the country's future. We hope our readers will not only gain a greater understanding of Canada's past, but also feel called to imagine and help build a more just, honest, and inclusive future.

This magazine is written primarily for young people in Canada, aged 14-30. We believe this is important because young people are the next generation of leaders, decision-makers, and citizens who will inherit both the challenges and the hopes of this country.

As they step into leadership roles and adopt leadership skills, they also take on the responsibilities that come with shaping the future. The torch they carry is lit by the efforts and progress of the generations before them, through initiatives such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; it is their task to carry this light forward, striving to finally ignite the Eighth Fire. At the same time, this magazine also speaks to

Canadians more broadly: parents, educators, immigrants, and anyone seeking to understand the histories and responsibilities that shape life in this country. Many of our readers, like many of our writers, may be non-Indigenous, but that does not place them outside this history. To live in Canada is to be shaped by what happened here, and that shared condition is precisely what makes reconciliation a collective responsibility.

The 8th Fire publishes evidence-based essays and personal narratives. Our tone is thoughtful and honest, and we hold ourselves to two editorial commitments. The first is transparency about positionality: our writers are open about who they are and what relationship they bring to the subjects they write about. The second is that this magazine does not speak for Indigenous people. We do not claim to. Instead, we seek to learn from and amplify what Indigenous writers, thinkers, and communities have already said, and to complement those voices with our honest reflections.

At its heart, *The 8th Fire* is a magazine about retracing our steps and lighting the fires ahead. If this issue invites even one reader to think more honestly about what they have inherited and what they are helping shape, then it has done what we hoped it might do.

– Editors of *The 8th Fire*

Tomson Highway's Theology of Laughter:

Bodhi Srivastava

A peculiar, grey fatigue has settled over our current reading. To open a contemporary journal is to find oneself trapped in a dreary contract with apocalypse, where solemnity is mistaken for seriousness. A collective assumption has taken hold: to treat the world with seriousness, one must treat it with a flat, unyielding solemnity. We have come to view existential panic and historical grief as our only authentic modes of thought, elevating a grey melancholy into a kind of odd virtue. It is into this airless room that Tomson Highway brings his *Laughing with the Trickster*, a book that acts less like a lecture and more like an open window. Based on his CBC Massey Lectures, this small, unassuming book offers something far more radical than a standard lecture series on comparative mythology. It offers a theology of pure vitality, proposing that a wild laugh is not a flight from reality, but an entry into it. For those of us at *The 8th Fire*, a magazine founded by Grade 11 students at the University of Toronto Schools, this text carries a unique weight. As young, largely non-Indigenous Canadians learning to navigate a national history marked by

erasures, our purpose is never to speak for Indigenous thinkers, but to listen and amplify their voices. Highway offers our generation a vital inheritance. He shows us that retracing our steps toward reconciliation does not require us to wear a heavy shroud of permanent guilt, but rather demands the humility and courage to look forward and embrace life fully.

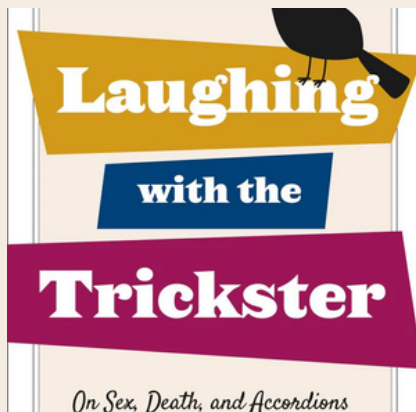
Highway lays this out spatially. He maps out what he terms the "Vertical" hierarchy of Western monotheism, a strict pyramid where a distant and perfect deity looks down upon a creation crippled by guilt, and sets it against the "Horizontal" circle of Indigenous pantheism. With an immense, theatrical warmth, Highway gets rid of the idea of original sin. In place of a judge, he gives us the Trickster, a gender-fluid, shape-shifting prankster who lives not above humanity, but directly with them. This Trickster is greedy, foolish, and unrepentant. He cannot condemn our human clumsiness because he shares it completely. By reminding us that the Cree cosmos does not have a Garden of Eden, Highway quietly eliminates the whole idea of inherited guilt. Without an apple to be forbidden, the universe no longer resembles a courtroom. To banish original sin is, inevitably, to liberate the anatomy. Highway approaches our stubborn biology not with the pinched suspicion of the Western prude, but with a grand, carnivalesque realism. For centuries, Western thought has encouraged a suspicious relationship with our own biology, treating the body as a site of temptation. Highway completely flips this script, reclaiming the physical self as a happy center of sensation. He describes sex as a sacred, fundamental energy, a moment where human biology mimics the creative force of the cosmos itself. There is no squeamishness here. Highway insists that we learn to laugh at our physical absurdities, using humor as a vital tool to ground our cosmic pride. What makes the book extraordinary is how this freedom is traced back to the style of grammar. In a brilliant chapter on the Mind, Highway explores how



Tomson Highway, Courtesy of CBC

language constructs the limits of what we can feel. English, in Highway's view, suffers from a heavy, transactional thicket of nouns, a language obsessed with the ledger and the property line. Cree, by contrast, is pure velocity, a kinetic theater of verbs where the world refuses to sit still long enough to be owned. To switch from English to Cree is to watch unmoving nouns dissolve into motion. With a dry, precise wit, Highway drops a beautifully simple observation: if your language has no word for Hell, the psychological terror of eternal punishment simply ceases to exist. The universe is freed to become "The Great Dreamer," a consciousness dreaming our world into existence for the sheer pleasure of the performance. You can hear Highway's musical training in the very heartbeat of his prose. The text moves with the syncopation of a piano, full of sudden, rhythmic listings and short, percussive sentences that leap off the page. If the book stumbles, it is due to the transition of moving from the microphone to the page. It is because these chapters began as oral broadcasts that the introductory flourishes in a few sections feel slightly repetitive when bound in print, briefly stalling an otherwise high speed pace.

Yet, Highway's central insight remains urgent: giving in to pessimism is a form of failure, a literal insult to the beauty of the world we inhabit. Even death is stripped of its grim shadow, reimagined here as a final, carnivalesque



Courtesy of Goodreads

transformation into a grand party where our ancestors are already drinking, joking, and waiting for our arrival. For a generation over-schooled in dread, and for young readers striving to carry the torch of reconciliation with care and humility, Highway offers a vital corrective. He reminds us that the only dignified response to the terrifyingly messy business of living is not a frown, but a wild, unrepentant laugh.

Murray Sinclair's 3 Injustices

Bodhi Srivastava

In *Who We Are*, Murray Sinclair meticulously documents three interlocking injustices that serve as the foundation of the Canadian-Indigenous relationship: the fraudulent seizure of land, the systemic erasure of identity through Residential Schools, and the failure of the justice system to protect Indigenous lives. The first injustice is the 1907 surrender of the St. Peter's Indian Reserve. Sinclair describes this not as a historical footnote but as a foundational theft. Through illegal voting and state-sanctioned intimidation, his family was displaced from fertile land to less viable territory. This was an economic injustice that created a cycle of poverty and displacement that Sinclair felt personally throughout his youth in Selkirk. The second injustice is the Residential School system, specifically the physical and sexual abuse endured by his father, Henry, at the Ft. Alexander school. Sinclair characterizes this as "Cultural Genocide," a term he defends with legal precision. This was not about education; it was a psychological warfare designed to "kill the Indian in the child," leaving a wake of intergenerational trauma that Sinclair had to navigate in the silence of his father's grief. The third injustice is the systemic apathy of the Canadian legal system, exemplified by the murder of Helen Betty Osborne. Sinclair illustrates how the law was used as a



The Honourable Murray Sinclair, Courtesy of "Roots of Empathy"

tool of exclusion, where the killers were protected by a conspiracy of silence in a town that viewed an Indigenous woman as inherently less valuable. Addressing these harms requires a shift from guilt to responsibility. Sinclair argues that individuals must move from being passive listeners to active "Witnesses." In Indigenous tradition, a witness is not just someone who sees an event; they are someone who holds the truth and is duty-bound to share it.

For individuals—including immigrants and those born long after these events—redress begins with acknowledging that we inhabit a "house" (Canada) built on a faulty foundation. As Sinclair suggests through his homeowner analogy, you may not have built the house, but you own the structural damage now. As I reflect on my own place in Canada, the house analogy helped me understand that we don't just inherit a country's assets, but its liabilities too. Even if my family wasn't here when these

injustices occurred, I've learned that living in the 'house' means I am now a co-owner of its history and its healing.

Communities must address this by integrating the 94 Calls to Action into the fabric of local life, moving beyond symbolic land acknowledgments toward actual shifts in power and resource distribution.

As a country, redress requires the restoration of balance. This involves more than just financial compensation; it requires the return of the self to Indigenous people through the restoration of language, culture, and sovereign governance. True redress is the long-term work of ensuring that the "Swar" (the Indigenous person) no longer has to pretend to be a "Duck" (the colonial standard) to survive in their own homeland.

Behind the Barricade

A Review of *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*

Daniel Cui

In the summer of 1990, sunlight filtered through the tranquil Pines near Oka, Quebec, as a barricade of logs, tires, and wire cut across the forest floor. On one side, soldiers and police in riot gear stood beside armoured vehicles in the shade of the pines. On the other, Mohawk community members gathered—faces tense, voices determined—defending ground hallowed by generations but so often misrepresented in the nation's gaze. In *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin challenges the official narrative by documenting the standoff from within. Through her eyes, we are drawn into the sights, sounds, and emotions of those holding the line behind the barricades.

Obomsawin's documentary focuses on the 1990 Oka Crisis, which began when the municipality of Oka approved the expansion of a private golf course and a luxury housing project onto traditional Mohawk land. In protest, Mohawk community members blocked the road leading to the site. Tensions rose quickly when Quebec police raided the blockade, resulting in violence and the death of Corporal Lemay. Following this escalation, the Canadian Army was brought in to replace the provincial police. Under mounting military pressure, the Mohawk Warriors and other community members withdrew to the Treatment Centre, where they were surrounded and under siege for the rest of the 78-day standoff. With journalists pushed out and food and medical supplies restricted, the people behind the barricades were isolated from the outside world. However, the film's title reminds us that this crisis didn't begin in 1990. It was just the latest in a long history of land dispossession.

Obomsawin, an experienced Abenaki filmmaker, was among the few who remained behind the barricades during the military-enforced media blackout. Her camera was a form of resistance against the military's efforts to control the narrative. One journalist warns, "We're your eyes and they're trying to blind us by getting the press out of here." Another remarks that the army was deciding "what can be published in our newspapers." Obomsawin's footage is raw and unfiltered. Her camera stays close as people are shoved and handcuffed, captures the panic of parents searching for their children, records accounts of bodies beaten, dragged, and bayoneted, and lingers on the aftermath of a Mohawk Warrior being "beaten beyond almost all recognition." Although Obomsawin was powerless to stop the violence, her camera served as a form of accountability, ensuring that what happened behind the barricades could not be overlooked or forgotten.

Obomsawin's filmmaking style is quiet and deliberate. She rarely appears on screen and avoids cluttering the documentary with narration. Instead, her footage lets people's actions speak for themselves. Every exchange between warriors and soldiers at the barricade, every spiritual ceremony in the Treatment Centre, and every tense negotiation for medical care was carefully documented and meticulously pieced together. This minimalist approach is brilliantly executed. By arranging these moments into a cohesive narrative, Obomsawin places the audience alongside those behind the barricades, inviting us to witness their daily struggles and feel the intensity of each moment.

Because Obomsawin gives every moment room to breathe, the people behind the barricades are not simply reduced to symbols of resistance. Her attentive style brings out the complexity of their humanity: principled, frightened, exhausted, angry, and doing



Group of Mohawk People In Kanehsatake. Courtesy of The Canadian Encyclopedia

their best to hold themselves together. One Mohawk warrior declares, “I didn’t come here to kill people... I just came here to protect the land.” Another reflects that the warriors have shown “strong integrity,” holding back even after being fired upon. However, Obomsawin doesn’t shy away from depicting their vulnerability either. Her camera also captures moments of panic, frustration, and uncontrolled outbursts of profanity behind the barricade. It is precisely this honest portrayal of both strength and fragility that brings the people in her documentary to life.

Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance does not strive to emulate the polished, conventional look of many modern documentaries. It is long, often chaotic, and emotionally exhausting. However, the film’s roughness is not a flaw but a deliberate choice. Its pacing allows the audience to experience the tension of being watched, restricted, and surrounded. For young Canadians, this proximity to discomfort matters. We inherit this history whether or not we asked for it, and we are responsible for how honestly we choose to face it now. The documentary refuses to let the Oka Crisis fade into just another headline or chapter in our history books. It insists that land dispossession is not a relic of the past — what began 270 years ago continues to shape the country we live in. This documentary is essential viewing for anyone who wants to understand how history continues to echo in the present. The barricades came down 36 years ago, but the question the film leaves still persists: What must we do to prevent this story from repeating itself?

No More Fallen Feathers

Daniel Cui

In 1966, Chanie Wenjack, a twelve-year-old boy, died alone beside the railway tracks after running away from residential school. An inquest followed, and

recommendations were made to prevent this from happening again. But, as has happened many times in Canada’s history, the real changes never came.

Decades later, in Thunder Bay, seven Indigenous students left their northern homes because the only way to get a high school education was to move hundreds of kilometres away. Jordan Wabasse disappeared into the cold winter night. Jethro Anderson, Reggie Bushie, Kyle Morrisseau, and Curran Strang were found in the rivers. Robyn Harper died in a boarding house, and Paul Panacheese collapsed at home. Each one was a teenager, far from their family and community, lured into the city that promised education but could not guarantee their safety.

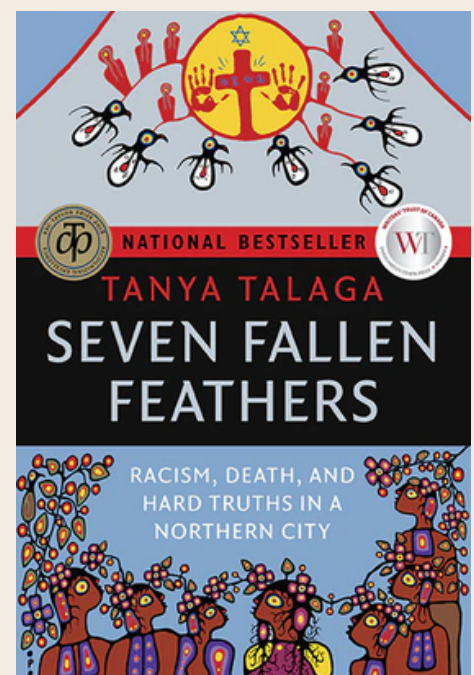
In *Seven Fallen Feathers*, Tanya Talaga makes it clear that these deaths were not isolated tragedies. They are connected by a pattern that runs through Canadian history: the legacy of residential schools, the forced displacement of Indigenous youth for education, and the repeated negligence in police investigations of missing and dead Indigenous children. These injustices are not just in the past; they are issues we still face today.

The root of this issue traces back to the residential school system. Under the Indian Act of 1876, children between seven and fifteen were legally required to attend residential schools. These schools were underfunded and overcrowded. Inspections describe buildings “literally alive with cockroaches,” boys use barns as bathrooms, and students suffer from malnutrition and disease. From 1940 to 1952, starvation experiments were conducted on children without consent, deliberately withholding milk and nutrients. Dr. Peter Bryce’s 1904 report found that death rates were between 24%-42% in some schools, yet the Canadian government ignored his findings and pushed him out of public service.

Furthermore, massive underfunding of education and reserves in recent years

meant that most schools on reserve end at grade 8. This forces indigenous families to make an impossible choice: Abandoning their children’s high school prospects or sending them hundreds of kilometres away to an inadequately supervised urban environment such as Thunder Bay. Even after Jordan’s Principle was unanimously endorsed by Parliament in 2007, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled in 2016 that the federal government had racially discriminated against 163,000 Indigenous children by underfunding child welfare services and failing to implement Jordan’s Principles.

Additionally, the police response to the indigenous students’ death revealed systemic racism within the justice system. In multiple cases, including Jethro Anderson, Reggie Bushie, and Jordan Wabasse, police quickly declared “no foul play suspected.” In Jordan’s case, the Thunder Bay Police waited three days before conducting a ground search. No Amber Alerts were issued. No K9 unit or forensic identification unit was deployed. Justice Frank Iacobucci’s 2013 report later found systemic racism in jury roll formation and the police force that contributed to the neglect of these missing and dead Indigenous children.



Cover of *Seven Fallen Feathers*.
Courtesy of Amazon

Addressing these harms requires more than acknowledgement. It is easy to feel distant from these stories. But we still live in a country shaped by these histories. We did not create them, but once we know about them, we have a responsibility to decide what we do next.

As young Canadians, we must refuse to be indifferent by educating ourselves and challenging dismissive narratives. As communities, we must rally for equitable funding for schools on reserve so Indigenous youth are not forced into unsafe environments. As a country, Canada must implement, not merely acknowledge, the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Jordan's Principle, and the inquest's 145 recommendations. Justice requires structural changes, and if reconciliation is to mean anything, it must prevent the next seven fallen feathers.

Fallen Feathers, Unfinished Stories

Leonette Qian

Seven *Fallen Feathers* by Tanya Talaga reveals a reality that sits just beneath the surface of everyday life in Canada: one where Indigenous youth are not only navigating school, but also distance, displacement, and risk in order to access it at all. What emerges in Talaga's writing is not a series of isolated tragedies of Indigenous youth, but a pattern of colonial policy, structural neglect, and ongoing underfunding that continues to shape the present.

In many First Nations communities, particularly across the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the absence of properly supported local high schools means students are often required to leave home at a young age to continue their education. Cities like Thunder Bay become temporary schooling grounds, but the cost of that educational

"opportunity" is high. It often means stepping away from family, language, and community support systems that are central to identity and well-being. Education becomes not just access, but also separation.

That separation does not end upon arrival. Throughout the book, Talaga traces how the deaths of seven Indigenous students in Thunder Bay were repeatedly and quickly classified as accidental, often without timely or thorough investigation. In the case of Jordan Wabasse, search efforts were delayed for months despite urgent concern from his community, and no immediate amber alert was issued. In other cases, such as Jethro Anderson, families were not directly informed and instead learned of their loss through public announcements, while evidence suggesting deeper investigation was not fully pursued. Across the stories of Reggie Bushie, Robyn Harper, Paul Panacheese, and Kyle Morrisseau, similar patterns appear: delayed responses, incomplete investigations,

and unanswered questions that remain with families long after official reports close. These present-day realities do not exist in isolation. Talaga connects them to longer histories of colonial control, including the Indian Act, residential schools, and forced relocation. While often spoken of as historical, these systems continue to shape how institutions function today: from education access to the handling of cases. Even the 2016 Thunder Bay Coroner's Inquest of the deaths of the seven Indigenous youth, which produced 145 recommendations for reform, saw limited implementation, reinforcing a persistent gap between acknowledgment and meaningful change. What emerges is a relationship between systems and communities that remains deeply uneven. Access to education can require leaving home entirely, while justice is not always delivered with equal urgency. The question that lingers is not only what has been lost, but what continues to be normalized in its absence.



Family of Jordan Wabasse listening to prayers during his memorial service, Courtesy of Getty Images

Accessing Transportation in Indigenous Communities

Yvette Wu

As students who live within the Greater Toronto Area, we often take transportation for granted. Whether it be a bus, a streetcar, the subway, or the comfort of our parents' vehicle, accessible transportation is always near and there for us. This, however, is not the case for many communities, particularly Indigenous communities in British Columbia. What would life be like for us if we were not able to freely travel? We have all heard our parents claim they climbed mountains and crossed rivers to go to school, but what if that was reality for some communities? What if our daily commute to school meant trekking over expansive stretches of highway, cutting through sketchy shortcuts, or putting our safety in the hands of strangers? Many Indigenous communities are forced to survive in this broken system—a system that doesn't serve the people directly—and end up assaulted, missing, or murdered. Public transportation should, by definition, ameliorate mobility accessibly. This essay will talk about the effects of a lack of transportation on vulnerable Indigenous communities including healthcare, ineffective solutions and where they fail, and propose solutions that address the issue.

In her memoir *Unbroken: My Fight for Survival, Hope, and Justice for Indigenous Women and Girls*, journalist and radio host Angela Sterritt covers multiple cases of young Indigenous women and girls who have gone missing or been murdered along a 724-kilometre corridor of Highway 16 between Prince George and Prince Rupert in British Columbia, otherwise known as the Highway of Tears. Most of these cases involved hitchhiking, which the government tried to address through billboards emphasizing the idea that

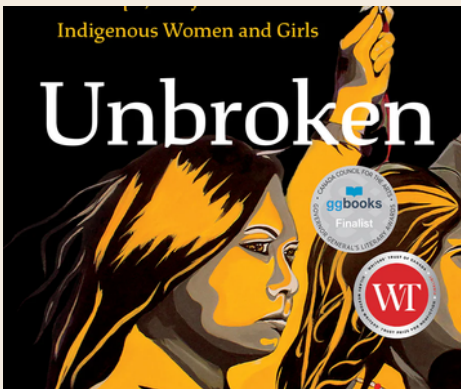
hitchhiking was risky and dangerous. However, a lot of people, specifically vulnerable Indigenous populations, were not hitchhiking out of choice, but rather out of necessity and a lack of other options. Sterritt goes on to point out that the original intention of reserves was to isolate and alienate Indigenous peoples, which is clearly seen in the lack of fertile land and equal funding from municipalities and provinces—leading to a lack of essential services, public transportation, and retail establishments. In a statement on Indian Policy, the Canadian government admits to the intentional lack of services, stating that because Indigenous reserves were exempt from taxes, reserves were not required to participate in the development of their own communities. This led to these communities believing that property taxes were an “unnecessary element in their lives,” and ultimately did not develop services for themselves. Additionally, while Canadian society began to industrialize and more people began moving to the growing economic centres, Indigenous communities remained on their rural reserves in order to maintain their Indigenous identity. Although rural land was developable, many reserves were located in areas where development was difficult or insufficient, leading to what the statement calls “islands of poverty”. Without these essential services, those living on reserves are forced to make the commute on either inconvenient, inaccessible, or unaffordable public transportation in order to get what they need or go where they want. Many women have lost their lives or gone missing because of their risky commutes—a large portion of these cases occur on or near the Highway of Tears. The Highway of Tears

website has listed over 20 missing and murdered Indigenous women, openly stating that there are far more than just those listed. Sterritt also includes a list of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls—her list accounting for 45 women. The government is aware of the problem and has taken action, though ironically prioritizing truckers over locals. Sterritt talks about signs and announcements of new upgrades to the highways, one of which includes a recent plan to construct more cell towers, but no changes to the existing system that forces locals to hitchhike.

Commuters do not have to rely only on public transportation—private transportation is also a viable option. However, these private companies, like Coach USA, parent company to Megabus, often financially struggle with maintaining routes that have lower ridership. A great example of this is Greyhound, a private bus company that used to be the only form of transportation in rural British Columbia, aside from hitchhiking. The company, though it had ultimately shut down in 2021, previously had fully cut service to Western Canada in 2018. This cut was met with a lot of criticism, but the company had stated that it was unsustainable to continue on routes in Western Canada because of the drop in



A now discontinued Greyhound bus - replaced by the European company Flixbus. Courtesy of Northern Ontario Business



The cover of *Unbroken* by Angela Sterritt.

Courtesy of Greystone Books

ridership. For 300 of its 360 routes in Western provinces, Greyhound was the only service. In 2021, Greyhound was purchased by European company FlixBus, which has routes connecting cities all across the continent. However, there is only one stop in British Columbia—Vancouver, at the southern end of the province—meaning someone travelling to anywhere else in British Columbia would need to find other forms of transport. I disagree with the choice made by FlixBus and Greyhound to not continue serving riders in rural British Columbia—Greyhound was aware that it was the only service for a majority of its routes and shut down because of a lack of funding, but even following their acquisition by FlixBus, there is still a lack of service in areas in need. This means larger numbers of hitchhikers and therefore an increase in hitchhiking-related missing and murder cases.

A significant problem Indigenous people face due as a side effect of a lack of transportation and living on reserves or in rural areas is a lack of essential services, including healthcare. Healthcare is extremely important, especially in remote areas where essential services are either lower quality or inaccessible, whether that be due to longer wait times or otherwise. With healthcare spread thin in rural areas on top of a lack of effective transportation, many Indigenous people struggle with their health. An example of this is AUD—alcohol usage disorder. Alcohol use is especially prevalent in Indigenous communities. Put into

perspective, according to a Canadian Student Alcohol and Drugs Survey in 2024, 22% of children in grades 7-12 who live in rural areas have higher rates of past 30-day non-cannabis vape use, 45% have used alcohol in the past year, 8% self-medicate, 9% use drugs illegally, and 24% use polysubstances, which makes screening and proper treatment even more important. Women in particular are a heavily impacted group when it comes to testing and treatment, not only for AUD but all health-related concerns in general, facing barriers such as stigma, location, transportation, and childcare, which contribute to the treatment gap. Another situation where transportation impacts accessibility of quality healthcare is with the elderly. In a study by Wendy Hulko, a professor and researcher on aging, and health care with equity-denied groups and Noeman Mirza, an associate professor and researcher on aging and education, they determined the social factors that impact older adults' ability to age in place, which include income, living situation, living rurally, Indigenous ancestry, ethno-racial minority status, gender and transportation. A study by Statistics Canada in 2025 finds many elderly rely on community support services for transportation. However, these are less available in rural areas, and living in more urban areas, while more convenient and accessible, may not fit their lifestyle, or may not be financially viable. This highlights how a lack of accessible transportation can affect people in more ways than just commuting. Some people may turn to personal vehicles, but even then, those who live rurally are still put at a disadvantage. Under British Columbia's Community Benefits Agreement, workers are to be provided with a travel allowance if they are using their own vehicle, but there are barriers to accessing this benefit. For one, certain areas are exempt from this benefit, and it is only available during the winter months. Additionally, acquiring a driver's license is difficult if a person did not grow up in the city. Living in a rural

Indigenous community means driving into town with a car, parental consent, and payment for the test. In order to be able to get a full license in British Columbia, there are three driving stages, which take a total of 36 months and require a driver who is willing to teach in the community or nearby. This makes obtaining a driver's license much more difficult and makes solo commute a hassle, in both time and money, making commuting via personal vehicles an unrealistic option for many. While the government is working on solutions that could make travelling and hitchhiking through certain areas less



A billboard on the side of the road warning against hitchhiking. Courtesy of Merritt Herald

dangerous, these are still considered bandage solutions; increased cell coverage means nothing to those who do not have access to a mobile device, and rest stops do not change the fact that those who have to commute and travel will still have to be on the road at some point. My perspective on these changes is not that they are unnecessary—increased cell coverage and rest stops are important. I do believe, however, that these changes do not address the underlying issue: that there is a lack of accessible transportation. The solution? Bringing back bus routes and potentially decreasing public transit fares for vulnerable populations or for certain routes. Bussing companies could run fewer buses through more routes, running only a few buses a day at intervals, ensuring that transportation is still available and efficient. Even if there are only a few buses being run daily, keeping the option open for those

who need to commute daily. For example, there could be two or three buses running in the early morning, another one or two at noon, four or five in the evening, and one in the late night. This ensures that people can commute to and from work or school and, if need be, have a safe way home in the late hours of the night. Other transportation companies could decrease their fares for members of certain communities or for stretches that are particularly dangerous, like the Highway of Tears, making the route more accessible to those who may not be able to pay the fare. A potential problem that could arise is funding. The British Columbia provincial government has forecasted \$558 million in transportation—a cut of which could go to constructing infrastructure to support bus routes in rural areas of the province.

The transportation system in British Columbia does not work in favour of vulnerable Indigenous populations, and without further action, there will only continue to be tragic cases of lives lost along the roads of British Columbia—tragedies that could have been prevented. While the decision-makers advise on what to do, there aren't any advancements on moving forward and making transportation more accessible and reliable. This is especially visible in the examples given in *Unbroken*. By encouraging vulnerable Indigenous populations to take transit and bringing buses back, transportation becomes less of an inconvenience.



Images of 18 Indigenous women and girls who went missing or were murdered along the Highway of Tears. Courtesy of CBC

Reconciliation Is a Two-Way Street

Emily Chen

The last copper penny in Canada was made in 1997, only a year after the last residential school was closed. Most people don't think that pennies and Indigenous history are connected in any way, but Katheryn Wabegijig would argue otherwise. In her artwork *Self-Portrait in Reclaimed Copper* (1979), Wabegijig uses flattened copper pennies to create a portrait of herself. The laborious act of hammering away the Queen's face from each copper penny signifies Wabegijig's assertion of her independence as an Indigenous person and Indigenous peoples' reclaiming of history from the confines of colonization. Located at the entrance of the Daphne Cockwell Gallery



Self-Portrait in Reclaimed Copper (1979)
Katheryn Wabegijig

dedicated to First Peoples art & culture, *Self-Portrait in Reclaimed Copper*, introduces the gallery's mission, which is to allow Indigenous peoples to reclaim history by presenting their history through an Indigenous lens and using artifacts to support this retelling. Reconciliation is a long road, and it's a two-way street at that; not only should Indigenous peoples be allowed to share their stories, but their voices must also



A pair of Métis Mukluks (2024)

be listened to. I will explore how effectively the Daphne Cockwell Gallery highlights Indigenous voices and cultures, and arranges this information to be educational and comprehensive for non-Indigenous visitors.

The first section of the gallery, "First Peoples Explorations and encounters," is a long wall lined with large birchbark canoes. These canoes signify the first chapter in the gallery's retelling of Canadian history, when Europeans began stealing Indigenous resources for only the benefit of themselves. The first section always sets the tone for the entire gallery. It gave me the expectation that each section will mark a significant moment in Indigenous history using artifacts to support each depiction. This expectation was immediately broken by the next section. The second section, "Origins & Worldviews," contains several ancestral and cultural artifacts that highlight Indigenous origin beliefs, which are Indigenous views on the creation of the world. These artifacts represent how Indigenous peoples were the original inhabitants of the land and how they have been in Canada for centuries. This section takes a different approach from the last section in describing Indigenous history. Rather than focusing on specific events, it decides to delve into a fact about Indigenous history, which is that "This has always been Indigenous land." This section can be seen as a response to people who do not understand how long Indigenous history truly is compared to Canadian history told by European

settlers.

If the second section did not surprise me in its change in tone, the third section made sure I got whiplash. Being the largest section, "Sovereign Allies | Living Cultures (First Nations of the Great Lakes)" does a complete change in terms of its structure and focus. A blurb shown at the beginning of the section reveals that it is a collection of artifacts once owned by a Mohawk doctor named Dr. Oronhyatekna. This section is huge, featuring cultural artifacts and pieces from Indigenous nations across Canada. Each piece describes a different aspect of Indigenous life before and during colonization. Aside from its complete change in structure and tone compared to the first two sections, the third section presents a deeply comprehensive dive into the diversity of Indigenous cultures across Canada.

Beside the third section is the fourth section, "First Peoples Retelling traditions," which features a collection of images detailing the creation process of traditional beadwork and arctic kayaks as well as a few physical pieces. This

section focuses on the preservation of traditional practices in a modern context, whether that be by using modern materials, or using modern methods of preservation, like photography.

Right around the corner is the fifth and final section, "First Peoples Contemporary expressions." This section contains contemporary art made by Native artists. It demonstrates how

Indigenous people are using art to express their own experiences with colonization and the loss of their cultures.

Overall, the gallery has a strong purpose, which is to emphasize Indigenous tellings of the past and Canadian history, and allowing Indigenous peoples to reclaim their past. The gallery succeeds at highlighting the diversity of Indigenous cultures, however, the sections are scattered, and there is no consistent structure or tone throughout the gallery. The sections in this gallery are strong on their own, but they do not effectively work together to emphasize the main message of the gallery.

The gallery is clearly made by Indigenous peoples with Indigenous peoples and cultures in mind while also being accessible to a non-Indigenous audience. So much of Indigenous history and cultures is hidden behind the pretense that Canadian history has no flaws, which ignores



O'tára nikanatsyò:ten (Pottery Vessel)

the injustices that were experienced by Indigenous peoples, and the fact that these injustices have affected Indigenous peoples for generations. By highlighting Indigenous cultures through art and artifacts, the gallery dismantles the erasure of Indigenous voices, and spotlights Indigenous experiences and knowledge. The gallery also invites non-Indigenous visitors to consider the Indigenous stories it presents, and by doing so, combined with its representation of Indigenous voices, takes

the next steps in the road to reconciliation. I highly recommend everyone visit this gallery because not only is it a free resource to learn about Indigenous history—mostly Indigenous cultures—from Indigenous voices but also because one of the most important parts of reconciliation is awareness and education.

How Can Indigenous Self-government be Perfected?

Emily Chen

For the past few decades, the Canadian government has been attempting to reconcile their relationship with Indigenous peoples and correct their past wrongdoings in order to move forward to create a better future for Indigenous peoples in Canada. The government's commitment to reconciliation appears through more representation for Indigenous people, which allows for the recognition of Indigenous issues and voices in the government. Although the government has made an effort to increase representation, it has not reached its full potential due to the lack of Indigenous self-government.

Indigenous representation inherently involves giving Indigenous peoples the power to make decisions for themselves through self-government—which comes in many forms—due to the complexities of pre-colonial forms of Indigenous sovereignty.

In this essay, I will analyze the government's current solution to the under-representation of Indigenous peoples, then I will look at two solutions to improving Indigenous representation and analyze their merits and disadvantages, using real-world examples of each solution in order to develop



Potato Peeling IOI to Ethnobotany IOI
(2004) Jane Ash Poitras



Courtesy of the Nisga'a Lisims Government

the most ideal form of Indigenous representation. The two solutions are Indigenous ridings and Indigenous sovereignty. Indigenous ridings are unique ridings with Indigenous representatives that focus on integrating Indigenous self-government into the current government system, and Indigenous sovereignty focuses on the separation of Indigenous self-government with the current government and implementing pre-colonial forms of Indigenous self-government. Both solutions tackle the under-representation of Indigenous peoples in the federal government, but they each focus on two different aspects of Indigenous representation: integration vs. decolonization.

Great amounts of progress have been made in representing Indigenous peoples in the government and acknowledging their rights. For example, the Standing

Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples is an Indigenous-only committee in parliament that focuses on issues pertaining to Truth and Reconciliation, the Indian Act, self-government, and more issues related to Indigenous peoples. Additionally, many organizations across Canada have been established, including The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP), that work together to represent First Nations, Inuit, Métis, status and Non-status Indians living on and off-reserve in legal and government-related cases and bills. But, these actions view Indigenous representation as synonymous with the representation of ethnic minorities in the sense that presence is sufficient representation. In reality, Indigenous peoples are very different from ethnic minorities in terms of representation. Indigenous representation requires Indigenous peoples to be able to directly make

decisions for themselves because of Canada's history of stripping Indigenous peoples of their autonomy.

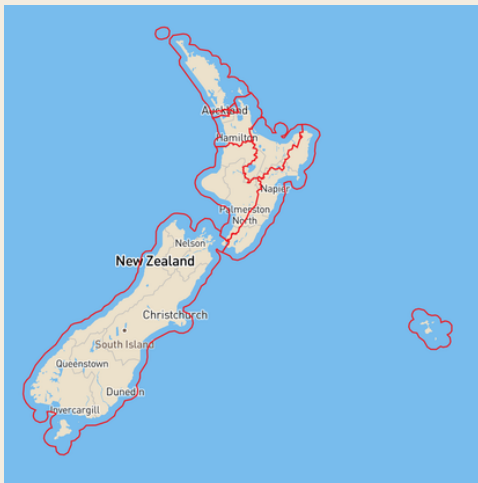
The sources I looked at were divided between two main approaches: one approach being giving Indigenous peoples more power by deeply integrating Indigenous sovereignty into the current political structure and the other approach being focusing on decolonization by establishing Indigenous self-governance through the idea of shared sovereignty.

The first solution that many sources mentioned is the idea of Indigenous ridings, which separates the Indigenous nations into ridings that each have an Indigenous representative who are elected by the Indigenous peoples in their riding. Réal Carrière, a Nehinuw and Métis award-winning researcher and Assistant Professor of Political Science, and Royce Koop, an award-winning author and Professor of Political Science, claim that developing Indigenous ridings allows Indigenous peoples to reclaim power in a colonial system and gain the little autonomy they can have in this government system. On the other hand, Richard Stacey, an author and Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law, argues that fitting into the current Canadian government through ridings is insufficient, and Indigenous sovereignty must involve re-establishing pre-colonial systems of Indigenous self-governance. I agree that Indigenous ridings can provide Indigenous peoples with accessible forms of power while still maintaining current systems of government, but I also acknowledge that, although Indigenous voices are amplified through Indigenous ridings, Indigenous cultures and traditions are continuously ignored. I believe that this is due to the inherent integration of Indigenous peoples into the government systems of the state that Indigenous ridings present and lack of recognition of pre-colonial systems of Indigenous self-government.

Carrière and Koop, counter Stacey's point,

stating that Indigenous ridings succeed because they accommodate “Indigenous political theories and practices while recognizing that a singular Indigenous political entity does not exist.” Essentially, they are saying that the system acknowledges that Indigenous self-government needs vary greatly between different regions, and allows accommodation to region-specific issues. They are also arguing that since one part of Indigenous cultures is a unique view on territorial boundaries, Indigenous ridings accommodate Indigenous cultures through its Indigenous ridings-specific boundaries. Though I agree with their point, I must add that they mention only one part of a diverse range of cultures.

Yet, Indigenous ridings have been implemented before outside of Canada. In New Zealand, there are two electoral rolls (the New Zealand version of ridings): one general roll and one Māori roll. The Māori are the Indigenous people



Courtesy of the Electoral Commission of New Zealand

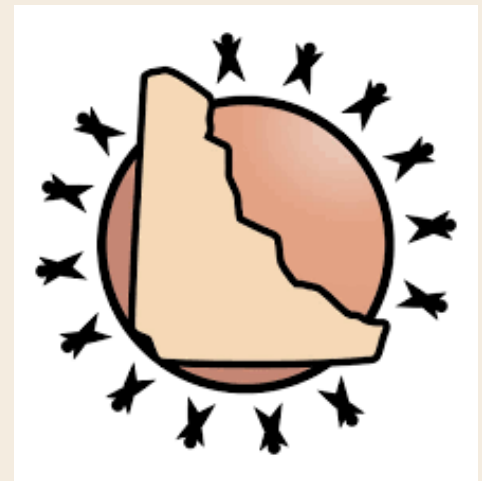
of New Zealand. Each roll has different parliamentary candidates that are split up between different regions. The Māori electoral roll has been extremely effective in increasing Māori representation in the government, allowing the Māori an equal number of seats in parliament as the percentage of the Māori population in New Zealand as well as allowing the Māori a voice in both Māori and general issues. The Māori roll shows that Indigenous ridings can be effective in increasing Indigenous

representation in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous issues.

I think Indigenous ridings triumph most in their integration of Indigenous self-government into the current government system, because, while this feature is very much criticized, it shows how Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples can exist and thrive together. But, I acknowledge that Indigenous ridings do not fully recognize the diversity of Indigenous cultures and traditions. Robert A. Milen,

an Aboriginal Research Co-ordinator at the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, reminds us that “the creation of [Indigenous ridings] is but one component in” the path towards Indigenous self-government. So, what is the next step in building Indigenous self-government?

The second solution, which outlines the next step towards Indigenous self-government, is Indigenous sovereignty, which is a separate government that is ruled by Indigenous peoples. Meaghan Williams, academic researcher in Indigenous-settler relations who worked at the Assembly of First Nations and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resource’s Aboriginal Policy Branch, and Robert Schertzer, a former member of the Government of Canada with a focus on social policy and intergovernmental relations, concede that Indigeneity can not be treated like ethnicity in terms of representation in the sense that presence is insufficient representation. Instead, Indigenous representation must involve Indigenous sovereignty in order to re-establish Indigenous culture and traditions in the government. Carrière and Koop argue that there are many ways to preserve Indigenous culture while an Indigenous person is acting as a member of parliament outside the context of Indigenous self-government. Their unique backgrounds and histories provide different opinions and views on certain issues that only an Indigenous person could provide, which can emphasize Indigenous culture through mere involvement in parliament. I disagree with Carrière



Courtesy of Council of Yukon First Nations

and Koop because they do not acknowledge the inherent colonization of Indigenous practices that Indigenous ridings maintain. Due to the presence of pre-colonial systems of Indigenous sovereignty, decolonization is necessary when considering improving Indigenous representation further. Implementing pre-colonial systems of Indigenous sovereignty can take many forms. I wonder which form is most effective?

One form of Indigenous self-government has, in fact, been implemented in Canada, specifically, in the territory of Yukon.

In Yukon, 11 out of the 14 First Nations are self-governing, which was achieved through the Umbrella Final Agreement. Currently, the eleven self-governing First Nations have a “right to develop their own constitutions, and pass laws for their own settlement land and citizens.” This form of Indigenous sovereignty follows state systems of government and does not adhere to pre-colonial systems of Indigenous sovereignty. I believe that this form of self-government is effective in granting Indigenous sovereignty, while also acknowledging that Indigenous cultures are constantly changing by not fully embracing pre-colonial systems of Indigenous sovereignty. Paul Nadasdy, a researcher with a focus on the people of the Kluane First Nation in the southwest of Yukon and author of *Sovereignty’s Entailments: First Nation State*

Formation in the Yukon, disagrees with me, stating that the self-government agreements in Yukon continue to apply colonial ideas of sovereignty, including “the existence of geographically and socially bounded First Nations” on First Nations peoples and ignore “First Nations’ prior sovereignty.” I agree that the system of Indigenous self-government in Yukon does not fully decolonize colonial systems of government, but I must add that it is also important to acknowledge that although many aspects of the Indigenous self-government in Yukon did not exist prior to colonization, many Indigenous cultures and traditions are changing from their pre-colonial forms, and possibly



Courtesy of
www.understandingtheun.org

could accommodate a blend between pre-colonial practices and modern practices.

Kathryn Reinders, a Graduate Research Assistant in Political Science at the University of Guelph suggests focusing on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), which declares that the right of Indigenous peoples “to freely determine their political status and freely pursue economic, social and cultural development” is a key right. She presents the government of the Nisga’a people in British Columbia’s Nass Valley as an example of the application of UNDRIP’s definition of Indigenous sovereignty. When the Nisga’a Lisims

government was formed, all Nisga’a people were removed from the Indian Act and the government was given all rights to the land they occupied. In the Nisga’a Lisims government, there are representatives not only from the Nass Valley region, but also from people living around the land they own.

The central question is how Indigenous representation in the Canadian government can be improved while preserving pre-colonial Indigenous traditions and recognizing that Indigenous sovereignty must also adapt to post-colonial government systems. Indigenous ridings and Indigenous sovereignty offer two possible answers to this question, each with distinct strengths and limitations. Indigenous ridings are an efficient method of Indigenous self-government that works

within colonial structures of governance. Indigenous sovereignty, by contrast, offers a stronger path toward decolonization because it recognizes Indigenous peoples’ right to govern themselves according to their own laws, cultures, and political traditions.

I believe that the Nisga’a Lisims government is a perfect amalgamation of all the best parts of the different forms of Indigenous self-government that the previous sources presented. It presents Indigenous sovereignty in the context of the current government system while also acknowledging pre-colonial systems of community governance and allowing the Indigenous government to finally rule alongside the state government in co-sovereign collaboration.



Courtesy of the Nisga’a Lisims Government

In most stories we grow up with, parents are the ones holding everything together. In media, they are often portrayed as protectors, guides and the steady figures who rarely appear to fall apart in front of their children. From *The Lion King*, where Mufasa stands as an almost mythic figure of strength and guidance for Simba, to *Finding Nemo*, where Marlin's entire identity becomes defined by protecting Nemo, we are used to seeing parenthood as something constant, reliable, and powerful. But what happens when that structure collapses? When the parent is no longer the protector, but the one who needs protecting?

In *Medicine Walk*, Richard Wagamese quietly challenges that expectation by reversing the parent-child dynamic we have seen and been trained to accept. Instead, Wagamese exposes the fragility of parenthood, reconsidering how strength, responsibility, and care actually look like.

Medicine Walk follows Franklin "Frank" Starlight, a 16-year-old Indigenous boy raised in relative isolation on a rural farm under the care of a tough, but deeply principled guardian known as "the old man". Frank has grown up shaped by discipline, survival, and emotional restraint—learning to keep his emotions tightly controlled. However, that careful balance is disrupted when he is asked to accompany his estranged, dying father, Eldon Starlight, into the wilderness for his traditional burial. Eldon is an alcoholic and absent figure, a man Frank barely knows and has every reason to resent and reject. Yet the story places them side by side in a setting where escape is impossible, making conversation and the process of learning each other inevitable.

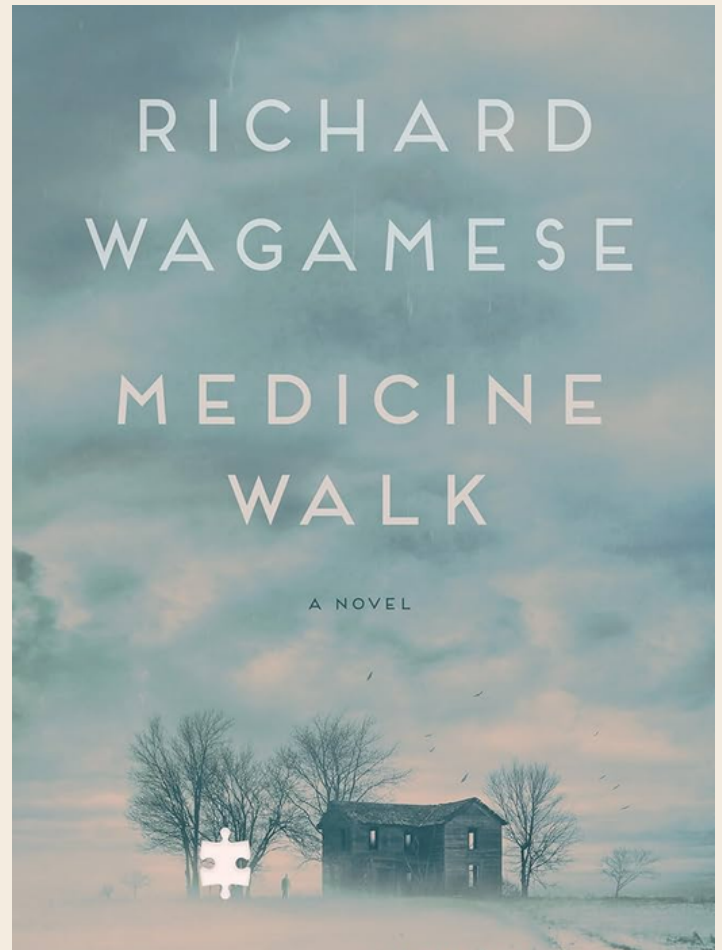
Wagamese writes in a reflective, meditative way that mirrors the long and tiring journey Frank and Eldon are on. Despite conflicting feelings between both characters, *Medicine Walk* does not have dramatic confrontation or emotion, but rather constant, quiet dialogue. The pacing is slow, but intentionally so: there is a sort of silence and a discomfort with what is left unsaid between two people who share blood, but not history.

Moreover, the real conflict exists within each character rather than between them. Frank is caught between duty and resentment, accompanying a father he never truly knew. Eldon is forced to confront a life of absence, addiction, and regret. Their communication is indirect, with emotions only peeking through memory and storytelling rather than direct confession. As a result, the novel feels fragmented without clean answers or neat resolutions, where understanding instead comes in pieces of memories that are shaped by Eldon and Frank's incomplete and biased perspectives.

However, the most intriguing aspect of the novel is that it challenges one of the most familiar relationships in storytelling: the parent as the protector and the child as the one being protected. During their journey, Frank prepares for survival: gathering supplies, setting up camp, and carrying all responsibilities to move forward. Meanwhile, Eldon contributes something different: stories. Immediately, Eldon becomes the one opening up, speaking about his past, his mistakes, his losses, and the life Frank never got to witness. Frank remains quiet, listening and quickly acting as an emotional anchor for his father and assuming the "protector" role. Their relationship is built through an unusual exchange, where Eldon exchanges his

Reversed

Leonette Qian



Cover of *Medicine Walk*, Courtesy of Beaded Dreams

vulnerability for Frank's care.

In a way, Eldon's vulnerability becomes his form of responsibility. Eldon cannot give Frank protection, guidance, or years of fatherhood back, but he can give him honesty. For me, this role reversal is what gives the novel its impact. *Medicine Walk* is not really about repairing a broken relationship or creating a perfect version of family. It is about removing our idealized images of parenthood and replacing them with something more human. Wagamese does not present parents as untouchable figures of strength and reliability, but as people capable of failure, vulnerability, and complexity. That perspective is what makes the novel feel so different from common portrayals of parent-child relationships.

Medicine Walk is not a fast-paced novel, nor is it one that relies on dramatic twists and storytelling to keep us invested. Instead, Wagamese asks us to slow down, sit with discomfort and awkwardness, and recognize the complicated realities beneath familial relationships. Those willing to move at the novel's pace will find a story that is thoughtful, emotionally layered, and different. Wagamese does not ask us to admire his characters; he asks us to understand them—and that's what makes *Medicine Walk* memorable.

Retracing Our Paths

Alex Jian

In January 2007, an eighteen-year-old Indigenous youth named Robyn Harper arrived in Thunder Bay to continue her high school education. Robyn came from Keewaywin First Nation, which only offered education up to grade 8. However, within days, Robyn passed away from acute alcohol poisoning, left to die on the hallway floor of her boarding home. Robyn's death is not an isolated incident; she is one of the seven Indigenous youths whose deaths were documented in *Seven Fallen Feathers*, a book written by award-winning Anishinaabe journalist and author Tanya Talaga. Robyn represents thousands of Indigenous youths who suffer from alcohol and substance abuse across Canada. Indigenous youths are disproportionately affected by substance abuse. A Government of Canada study found that Indigenous youths have five times higher odds of being smokers and significantly higher rates of marijuana use than their non-Indigenous peers. To avoid any more "Fallen Feathers", the Canadian government must move on from using generic, non-specific policies and start implementing interventions specific to Indigenous communities under the guidance of Indigenous partners. I write this as a non-Indigenous student — not to speak for Indigenous communities, but to amplify what Indigenous leaders, scholars, writers have already said about what healing requires.

The substance abuse crisis is a tragic yet predictable outcome of Canada's colonial past. An article written by award-winning Sagamok Anishnawbek author Peter Menzies illustrates how intergenerational trauma resulting from colonial policies such as the residential school system and the mass removal of Indigenous children during the Sixties Scoop render Indigenous youths unable



Courtesy of The Globe and Mail

to develop appropriate coping strategies to deal with life stressors. The story of Owen Pelletier, a member of Cowessess First Nation, serves as an illustration of the modern impacts of intergenerational trauma. As a "little Indian foster kid", he was abandoned by parents who struggled with addiction themselves. Lacking healthy coping mechanisms, youths like Pelletier turned to substances and gangs to find belonging. Jennifer Lavalley, a Métis scholar writing for the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, reinforces the link between colonial trauma and addiction. She states that "Canada's drug overdose crisis disproportionately affects Indigenous peoples differently owing to a legacy of colonialism, racism and intergenerational trauma". It is evident that any government solutions that want to effectively address the substance abuse crisis amongst Indigenous youths must address the intergenerational trauma inflicted by Canada's colonial policies.

To resolve the substance abuse crisis, the provincial government of British Columbia launched a drug-decriminalization program. Edzi'u Loverin, a member of Tahltan First Nation, published an article on CBC News outlining the ambitious three-year pilot project. Launched on Jan. 21, 2023, the initiative allows people aged 18 and over to possess up to 2.5 grams of illicit substances for personal use. This initiative is supported by Lavalley, who states that "drug decriminalization must be central to the Government of

Canada's reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples" and "while drugs remain criminalized, strides toward addressing the overdose epidemic among Indigenous people who use drugs will remain futile." Nadine Yousif, a senior Canada reporter from BBC News, echoes Lavalley, noting that "Decriminalisation is based on the argument that the war on drugs has failed - that arresting people with severe addiction and seizing their drugs could increase their likelihood of overdose by forcing them to find other drugs that may be lethal. A criminal record may also bar them from finding a stable job, reducing the chance of recovery."

The program has seen some successes since its launch: Yousif acknowledges that there has been a 76% decrease in drug possession charges in the first year of the policy, and the number of people seeking support has increased — a sign that demand for help exists, even if the right kind of help does not. However, the shortcomings of the program are also evident. While acknowledging the benefits of the program, Yousif also concedes that the number of deaths related to drug use has increased by 5 percent. The CBC article also illustrates the many concerns experts hold regarding the program, including that of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), which states that "the province failed to support the drug decriminalization project by not investing in other models of care, such as prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery support". This healthcare gap matters the most for the population hit the hardest by the drug-abuse crisis. Although First Nations only make up 3.4% of British Columbia's population, the First Nations Health Authority reports that they accounted for nearly 19% of drug-related deaths in 2024 and died at 6.7 times the rate of other residents. Nearly half of those deaths involve people under 40, yet BC released no



Youths who passed away in Seven Fallen Feathers. Courtesy of CBC

decriminalization data specifically about Indigenous people; therefore, there is no evidence it improved outcomes for the very population it most needed to reach. The central barrier holding the youths back from healing is not the justice system, but rather the lack of support systems and the intergenerational trauma inflicted by an unempathetic colonial government. This is backed up by Dr. Nel Wieman, the First Nations Health Authority's deputy Chief Medical Officer, who states that First Nations lives are saved through connection, culture, and programs that are community led — not through the removal of legal penalties alone. Drug decriminalization fails because it leaves Indigenous youths in a vacuum where support is minimal, and trauma still unresolved, a gap that can only be filled by programs specifically designed for Indigenous recovery.

A more effective alternative for bettering the widespread Indigenous youth drug abuse crisis is the use of Evidence Based Programs (EBPs). Assistant professor Jarreed D. Ivanich from the University of Colorado explains in his research paper that EBPs involve taking interventions with proven success in one demographic and adapting them to meet the needs of another; in this context, Indigenous ones. An article published by the Public Health Agency of Canada states that many EBPs are funded by the Canadian government through the Youth

Substance Use Prevention Program to help build community-driven evidence-based programs. The programs are not without challenges, however.

One concern that Ivanich brings up is how well such programs are adapted to Indigenous communities. Talaga's *Seven Fallen Feathers* illustrates the unique understandings Indigenous people have of the world, meaning that they need very different approaches to healing. Without proper adaptation, an evidence-based program can be easily rejected by an Indigenous community because it does not resonate with their worldviews. This is supported by an article from the Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal, led by Dr. Genevieve Sansone of the University of Toronto's Fraser Mustard Institute, which states: "Some key findings that emerged included the importance of culture as part of a holistic approach to treatment and recovery and the value of integrating Western treatment methods with traditional Indigenous approaches to healing and wellness to better meet the needs of FNMI clients." Another concern outlined in Ivanich's paper is on ensuring that the programs are adapted for Indigenous contexts while maintaining the core components that made the original intervention effective; if the program gets altered too much, it is hard to guarantee that it will produce the results anticipated. Before introducing the potential solutions to the above concerns, it is important to address a case study

introduced by Ivanich. The program "Bii-Zin-Da-De-Dah" (BZDDD), the adapted evidence-based program at the center of this case study, is funded by the IRINAH initiative (Intervention Research to Improve Native American Health); it involved seven small Indigenous communities in the upper Midwest and Canada. BZDDD is adapted from the Iowa State Strengthening Families Program for Parents and Youths 10-14, a substance-use prevention program designed to reduce teen drug and alcohol use by strengthening family connection and parenting skills. The original program utilized group meals, separate youth and adult sessions, and video-based discussions. Games and activities were also used to foster interaction and provide opportunities to practice skills.

BZDDD addresses two central concerns. On the first concern of adaptability, BZDDD consulted many Indigenous community members in their adaptations and took into consideration their wants and needs. Ivanich stated that from the start, "it became abundantly clear that the community did not want a dominant culture prevention program but one that reflected the cultural strengths of their families and culturally specific protective factors." The importance of listening to community feedback is amplified by Talaga's *Seven Fallen Feathers*, as we see most of the progress made towards resolving the education disparities faced by Indigenous youths being made by Indigenous communities; when government interventions failed, the Indigenous communities and leaders



Courtesy of Native Overdose Resource

were the ones who established somewhat-successful educational programs, such as the Wahsa Distance Education Center in 1991, and the boarding program which enabled students from faraway Indigenous communities to study in Thunder Bay. BZDDD and the Wahsa Distance Education Center were imperfect, yet they were far more effective than the federal and provincial interventions that preceded them. Consulting Indigenous voices is crucial for successful EBP adaptations.

On the second concern regarding securing the balance between adapting the programs for Indigenous contexts and maintaining the core components that make EBPs effective, Ivanich suggests that the “best practices to date include cultural relevance, including “top down core components of the original program and bottom up components derived from cultural practice and teachings.” In this approach, the EBP maintains the general elements making the original program effective, while filling it up with specific Indigenous traditions and practices. To exemplify this, BZDDD kept the core themes of the original program (i.e., family and community) while adapting it by re-shooting some of the program videos with Indigenous actors and community-developed scenarios. Seven Fallen Feathers offers a comparable, if informal, illustration of the same principle. To help students cope with the death of Reggie Bushie, Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School took the scientific skeleton of “crisis intervention via counseling” and integrated it with Indigenous practices like holding ceremonies, drumming, and offering prayers and tobacco. BZDDD has shown some great progress: “findings from the first iteration of BZDDD showed positive changes in family communication, child anger management, children’s perception of parental monitoring...”. EBPs efficiently combine scientifically proven methods of healing with Indigenous values

specific to different Indigenous communities, thus being a great tool for resolving the substance-abuse epidemic plaguing Indigenous youths. Ultimately, EBPs offer the active support that decriminalization lacks. While decriminalization removes the very limited legal threats against Indigenous youths, it does not provide tools for recovery. Although Yousif suggests that decriminalization increases the number of people seeking help, it is not enough. As Métis journalist Jacky McKay reports for the CBC, former youth addict Avis O’Brien found that even though mainstream addiction services were available, they were not culturally specific, stating: “There was no access to elders, there was no cultural teachings, no land-based healing”. EBPs fix this lack of effective and culturally-specific treatment. Under the supervision and guidance of Indigenous partners and leaders, communities can take the general elements of models proven to be effective like the Matrix Model — an evidence-based treatment program recognized by the Government of Canada — and reshape them for Indigenous communities. This addresses the problems of intergenerational trauma and the lack of modes of care mentioned by Lavalley and UBCIC: EBPs rebuild the coping strategies disturbed by Canada’s colonial policies by integrating Indigenous traditions, communities, and cultural teachings into established interventions. Together with their

communities, Indigenous youths can restore identity, belonging, and support systems that have been weakened. Skeptics raise a fair concern: EBPs like BZDDD have only been measured through their early iterations, with their long-term effectiveness remaining unproven; altering an already-established intervention also risks damaging the components that made it work in the first place. But that calls for continuous community-led refinements, not a retreat to the blanket policies that have already failed. A program still being corrected is far more promising than one which offers no pathway of recovery at all. Canada can finally follow the paths Indigenous communities have already charted, and move towards the culturally-specific interventions Indigenous youths need. Some histories are inherited without our choosing; but what we do with them is for us to decide. The Seven Fires teaching calls for a new generation to retrace its trail and reclaim its wisdom. You are that generation, the readers who will become the teachers, lawmakers, neighbours, and allies who will decide which kind of country Canada becomes. No matter who you are and where your family’s story begins, to live in Canada is to be shaped by its past; this shared inheritance makes reconciliation a responsibility that we all carry. The eighth fire is not lit, and that work begins with you.

Bü-Zin-Da-De-Dah

Listening to One Another

Courtesy of the Centre for Indigenous Health

How Clothing Conveys Culture

Yvette Wu

How does a show about a small, close-knit community subtly express Indigenous culture by showing and not telling, while keeping the plot and characters still unique and interesting to viewers?

Created by Inuk filmmakers Stacey Aglok MacDonald and Meritorious Service Cross recipient Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, *North of North* (2025) is a comedy television show that follows a young Inuit woman, Siaja (played by Anna Lambe), in the fictional town of Ice Cove, Nunavut. As a self-named “modern Inuk woman” Siaja tries to take her life back and become her own person, breaking free from her old life. Over the course of eight episodes, Siaja meets new people, finds a purpose in her life, and reconciles long-standing personal relationship issues, going out for an adventure alongside us, her viewers.

Throughout the show, there is no direct mention of traditional cultural practices and the characters engage in activities that people in urban cities also engage in—weekly town-wide baseball games (with a twist), community events, parties and celebrations—things that you would expect from a small, tight knit community such as Ice Cove, Nunavut. By using traditional clothing and jewellery, *North of North* is able to fully immerse the viewer in Indigenous culture without outright saying it, making the show that much more visually interesting and unique.

How someone dresses is an important part of how they choose to present themselves to the world, and this is no exception for a fictional world on television. Throughout the show, most of the characters dress in traditional parkas, tattoos, earrings, and boots, which, even to someone who hasn’t been around Indigenous culture, are still

visibly intricately decorated with care. The lead costume designer, Debra Hanson, said the goal was to “get it right culturally, and for it to be beautiful and modern,” something that the team definitely achieved through the bright colours and real fur pelts.

However, the show excels in this department even past just visuals by sourcing clothing with a story. As Inuk artist and consultant on the series Keenan “Nooks” Lindell stated, “a lot of people still sew a lot of their own clothes.” A large portion of their set clothing and accessories were from independent artists and individuals (ordinary people!), as well as consulting furriers to find the perfect cut of fur for some pieces, including Siaja’s wedding atigi (Inuktitut for parka), made by Victoria Kakuktinniq, that she wears in Episode 6. The clothing worn on set was not only created from scratch, but also altered and slightly redesigning existing items in ways that are popular in Inuit culture. One of these techniques involves taking modern heavy-weight parkas from brands such as Carhartt and Arctica and fixing fur trimming onto them. The contributions of these artists and people are monumental in the part they played in making this show so much more effective in representing the culture, definitely achieving Hanson’s goal of beauty and modernity, reflecting the mood and overall theme of the show.

Still, *North of North* remains environmentally conscious, choosing to use sustainable, real fur from ethically

sourced animals to create their clothing pieces. Lambe points out the ethics of real fur versus fake fur as well as the fact that they are biodegradable are so important. She goes on to consider the microplastics that “are shedding into our oceans and into our land and are harming our animals.”

The show uses tattoos on certain characters to inform the viewer about certain parts of their character arc as well. For example, an upside-down triangle on the forehead symbolizes womanhood, a tattoo visibly seen on Neevee (Maika Harper), Siaja’s mother. Another example is on Siaja herself, with her fingers being tattooed with rings to symbolize her connection to Nulijuk (played by Inuk throat singer Tanya Tagaq), as the tattoo directly references the Inuk story of the god Nulijuk’s fingers.

This show isn’t just a comedy with gorgeous clothes, though! *North of North* might be a comedy but it also covers some heavier topics like intergenerational trauma, PTSD, and residential schools, each issue being addressed with genuinity in a way that feels open and vulnerable. Each episode involves Siaja directly connecting with and learning from an elder or family, doing so in a way that makes the overall energy of the show light and homey, really encompassing the vibe of the setting (a close-knit community!), and causes the viewer to feel like they belong in Ice Cove, experiencing this new life right alongside Siaja.

North of North truly is an all-rounder. It combines humor with grief, and is lighthearted while touching on sensitive topics, all while rocking incredible, traditionally handmade outfits in a culture-rich setting. Each aspect of the show only serves to amplify the intensity of the other elements and make them stand out more, bringing colour to the snow of Nunavut.



Siaja running to her crush in a traditional wedding parka. Courtesy of Elle Canada

Reservation Dogs — A Review

Alex Jian

In Indigenous director Sterlin Harjo's new work *Reservation Dogs*, a distressed young girl runs through run-down school buildings. She storms inside an abandoned storage shed, and breaks down in front of her friend as she finds him suspended by a rope from the ceiling. Elora Danan (played by Devery Jacobs) desperately pulls her friend back and forth, but all signs of life have left his body. She collapses knee-first onto the ground crying, unable to comprehend the reality that the boy she had always loved had forever left her on that humid afternoon.

Set in an Indigenous reservation in rural Oklahoma, the show follows four Indigenous youths – Elora Danan, Bear, Willie Jack, and Cheese – as they save money for California. Along the way, the group finds themselves in a hostile confrontation against another band of teens, torn between whether or not they want to leave everything behind, and trapped by the trauma from losing their loved ones. Despite all this, *Reservation Dogs* never flinches from these hardships, and never lets them become its characters' identities. It makes a silent argument: reconciliation is not about pity, but rather about seeing Indigenous lives honestly — their hardships, personalities, and

individualities together, instead of one erasing the other.

The layouts in season 1 are not just well-shot pictures. They symbolize the intrinsic disadvantages Indigenous communities face in North America: As Elora Danan, Bear, Willie Jack and Cheese walk into the junkyard, attempting to broker a good deal for the truck they had just stolen, the audience is presented with several people clearly high on drugs mindlessly strolling the area. A seemingly ordinary event for the teens, with an unsettling sheen, heightens the show's examination of kids inundated with the lack of opportunities and flaky adults. Similarly, when the teens visit their local health clinic, they are confronted with impatience, disregard, and uncustomarily long wait times. Despite being a mostly lighthearted episode, episode 2 is the tragic embodiment of what it looks like when an entire generation is left to navigate a broken system on their own. Harjo captures this theme with balance and intention. Harjo depicts the drug users in the junkyard, and the clinic's long wait times as ordinary, unremarkable background — no dramatic music, no lingering camera. This lack of sensationalism further illustrates the damning nature of the youths' conditions; problems many regard as insurmountable are the reality youths on the reservation face every single day. Harjo's refusal to sensationalize the youths' disadvantages makes a deliberate claim: Indigenous struggles should be viewed honestly, instead of being seen as a tragedy.

"You ever feel like you're just stuck?" Elora Danan's question captures the gravity of life on the reservation; hardships are not incidental, but rather prolonged, ordinarily present. Yet despite all this, *Reservation Dogs* refuses to let hardships define the characters. The youths have their community, loved ones, humour, and futures to fight for. Beyond its depiction of the traditional growing-pains of young adulthood, the first

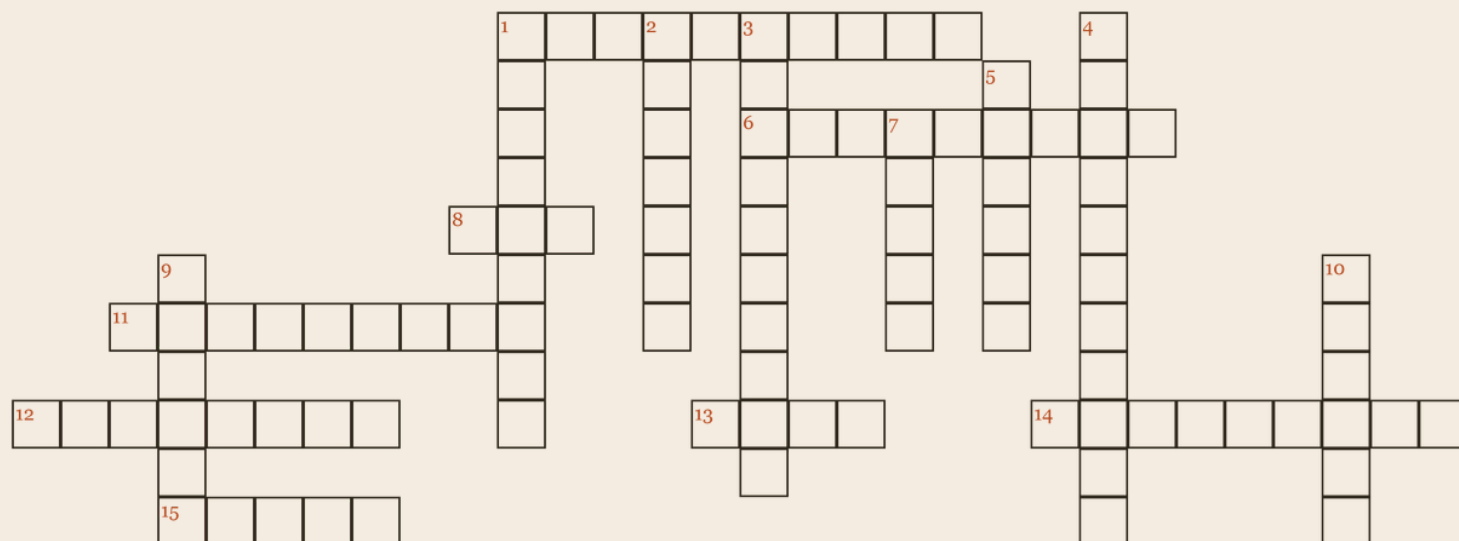
season of *Reservation Dogs* depicts many harrowing and distressing moments – the death of a close friend by suicide, a familial tug-of-war featuring an irresponsible "rapper" father, gang violence. Yet for each heartwrenching moment, the show counterbalances it with warmth — Elora Danan's tearful confession to her driving instructor/ex-basketball coach, Willie Jack and her father's emotional reminiscence of Daniel, an unexpected gathering in a basement during a tornado. *Reservation Dogs* provides hope for the youths' futures. Its ensemble's turbulent experiences in season one are formative to their development. Bear gained a sense of responsibility towards his community, Willie Jack gained a deeper appreciation for his family, while Elora Danan learned the importance of picking the right partners-in-crime in pursuit of life-changing goals. The four youths were hurt, they grieved, and they cried, but they refused to let their circumstances define them. This mix of tone — humour and warmth intertwined with grief — mirrors the way Indigenous people actually live: with individuality and personality instead of as a uniform group defined by their shared disadvantages.

For all its darkness, *Reservation Dogs* never let its characters or audiences fall into despair. In the season finale, we see the teens part their ways in pursuit of what they want in life — Elora Danan driving off to California, Bear getting dinner with his mother. Instead of wielding suffering as a spectacle, Harjo wields it as context. The kids are still broke, and they are still grieving. But they are still there, and still fighting. And in Harjo's telling, that is enough. *Reservation Dogs* is a must watch for Canadian youths grappling with reconciliation, as it teaches them that reconciliation begins not with pity, but with seeing Indigenous lives honestly, and not letting their circumstances erase their personhood.



Courtesy of the Los Angeles Times

Crossword



Across

1. Ontario city the seven students moved to for high school (2 wds.) (10)
6. Bus company whose withdrawal worsened rural transit in Western Canada (9)
8. Quebec town in the 1990 dispute over a golf-course expansion (3)
11. 1876 Canadian law that controlled much of Indigenous life (2 wds.) (9)
12. Angela Sterritt's memoir of survival and justice (8)
13. Language Highway contrasts with English in Laughing with the Trickster (4)
14. Roadblock built by land defenders during the Oka Crisis (9)
15. Cold-weather garment discussed in the North of North review (5)

Down

1. Gender-fluid, shape-shifting figure central to Tomson Highway's worldview (9)
2. Territory where North of North is set (7)
3. This magazine's title, from the Anishinaabe Seven Fires Prophecy (2 wds.) (10)
4. Mohawk community at the centre of the 1990 Oka Crisis (11)
5. Material in Katheryn Wabegijig's Self-Portrait (6)
7. Territory where several First Nations are self-governing (5)
9. UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, for short (6)
10. Nation defending the Pines during the Oka Crisis (6)

Visit eighthfiremagazine.com for the crossword solution