

# A TEACHERS' GUIDE TO AS LONG AS THE RIVERS FLOW

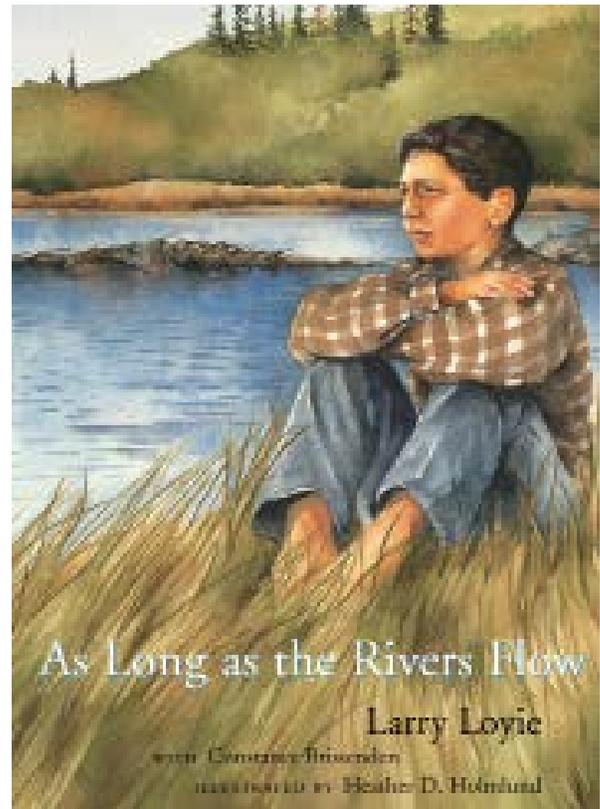
Written by Larry Loyie with Constance Brissenden

Illustrated by Heather D. Holmlund

## ABOUT THE BOOK

In 1892, the education of Indigenous children was taken on by various Canadian churches in government-sponsored residential schools. Children were taken from their families in order to erase their traditional languages and cultures. Families faced the threat of jail if they refused to let their children go.

*As Long as the Rivers Flow* is the true story of Larry Loyie's last traditional summer before entering residential school. It is a time of learning and adventure. He cares for an abandoned baby owl and watches his grandmother make winter moccasins. He helps the family prepare for a hunting and gathering trip.



### **AS LONG AS THE RIVERS FLOW**

Written by Larry Loyie  
with Constance Brissenden  
Illustrated by Heather D. Holmlund

### **JUVENILE FICTION**

Reading Ages up to 8  
978-0-88899-696-1

Paperback

You may wish to read this book over a week, as there are 4 chapters and an epilogue. Each chapter has guiding questions and a variety of activities assigned. All activities can be discussed as a whole group, in a small group, in partners or completed individually. Educators can decide how they wish to best have their students engage with the text.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### Larry Loyie

Residential school survivor Larry Loyie was born in Slave Lake, Alberta, where he spent his early years living a beloved traditional Cree life. At the age of ten, he was placed in St. Bernard's Mission residential school in Grouard, Alberta. He is the author of nine books, four plays, and numerous articles dealing with Indigenous traditions and the history of residential schools. Larry received the Canada Post Literacy Award for Individual Achievement, the Norma Fleck Award for Canadian Children's Non-Fiction, and the First Nation Communities Read Award.



### Constance Brissenden

Constance Brissenden (BA, MA), Larry Loyie's long-time partner and collaborator, is a freelance writer, editor and educator. She is the author, co-author or editor of more than twenty-five books. Constance continues to share Larry Loyie's legacy and research at [www.firstnationswriter.com](http://www.firstnationswriter.com).

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

### Heather D. Holmlund

Heather D. Holmlund is a graduate of the Fine Arts program at York University, specializing in Visual Art. Her art practice centers around social and environmental issues relevant to Canadian identity in the 21st century while reexamining the traditional creative processes of painting and sculpture.



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## BEFORE READING

Prompt a discussion about living off the land and what it means to live a traditional Indigenous lifestyle. If possible, you may wish to invite an Elder or Traditional Knowledge Keeper to share the teachings that they have been taught (berry drying, making tea from Labrador leaves, how to make bannock, the uses of the four sacred medicines, etc.)

The phrase “as long as the sun shines, grasses grow and rivers flow” refers to a significant phrase that was used during the signing of treaties to express how long the promises and contracts would be valid. “[This phrase] can be found in many treaties after the 1613 treaty. It set a relationship of equity and peace.” — Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation’s Turtle Clan

From the Assembly of Nations: Honoring Earth: “Indigenous peoples are caretakers of Mother Earth that respect her gifts of water, air, and fire. First Nations peoples’ have a special relationship with the earth and all living things in it. This relationship is based on a profound spiritual connection to Mother Earth that guides Indigenous peoples to practice reverence, humility and reciprocity. It is also based on the subsistence needs and values extending back thousands of years. Hunting, gathering, and fishing to secure food includes harvesting food for self, family, the elderly, widows, the community, and for ceremonial purposes. Everything is taken and used with the understanding that we take only what we need, and we must use great care and be aware of how we take and how much of it so that future generations will not be put in peril.” [www.afn.ca/honoring-earth/](http://www.afn.ca/honoring-earth/)

## Analyze the Cover

Open the book and show the students the illustrations on the front and back covers. Have students make connections to a time when they were able sit next to a river or lake and draw on their five senses. (What did they hear, smell, touch, see, and taste, and how did they feel?) Discuss the title of the book. Ask if anyone has ever heard of the phrase “as long as the rivers flow.” Ask the students if they can guess how long this is and what they think the author might be suggesting with the title.

## Picture Walk

Conduct a “picture walk” through the story, but end before the epilogue. After the walk-through, turn back to the illustrations on pages 2 and 3 (depictions of happiness and value of family) and show how it contrasts to the last page illustration of the children in the back of the truck (loneliness, fear, sadness, etc.). Ask the students what they think the book will be about.

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## WHILE READING

### Vocabulary

Introduce new vocabulary, including both English and Cree words. You may wish to create individual booklets so that students can add new terms and meanings, or co-construct a class word wall. Introduce new terms before reading each chapter.

#### English Words

#### Cree Words

### Chapter 1

Clacked	Ooh-Hoo - Owl
Trapline	Minos - Cat
Roost	Mosoom - Grandfather
Lean-to	Kokom - Grandmother

### Chapter 2

Canopy	
Saskatoonberries	
Boughs	

### Chapter 3

Partidge	Wapoose - Rabbit
Muskeg	
Bannock	
Bronco Buster	

### Chapter 4

Swiveled	Oskiniko - Young Man
Clenched	
Gravelly	

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## CHAPTER 1

Read the dedication on the first page and ask the students what they think the author means by a way of life that is disappearing.

What does it mean when Lawrence's papa thinks, "Lawrence was small for a ten-year-old boy, but he was already wise in the ways of their people"?

Read to the part where Lawrence wonders what his mother means when she compares school to a prison. Have a brainstorming session with students to collect their thoughts towards this idea. Some students might make a connection to their previous knowledge of residential schools. Use this as a gauge of where the students are in their understanding of residential schools.

At the end of the chapter, have a class discussion about who Lawrence's teachers are and where he goes to school. As you read through the book, keep coming back to the idea that Lawrence and his siblings learn from their family members and the environment.



### Art

Using a variety of media, have students create a piece of art depicting a time when they were with their family outside learning or connecting with the land (walking, fishing, hiking, hunting, camping, etc). If students do not have direct experiences with outdoor family learning, ask them to create a piece of art that depicts an activity they would like to do with their family, or one from the book.

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## CHAPTER 2

If possible, bring in objects like spruce, cedar and pine boughs, maple leaves, birch bark, wild rice and dogwood, as these will provide students an opportunity to interact with natural items.

Ask the students what they think was the purpose of placing the spruce boughs under the beds of the lean-to?

Why are the hunting and gathering skills of Lawrence and his family something that should be respected by all? What skills does Lawrence exhibit while hunting?

Hunting and fishing require many transferrable skills that can help people/children be successful at other tasks.

These include:

Patience, observation skills, attention to detail, focus, mastery, thankfulness, respect, reciprocity, relationship building, land/environmental stewardship

### Visualization

Have students draw what they think the summer campsite would look like. Older students could write a descriptive paragraph, as well.

### Connections

Have students make connections between their own lives and Chapter 2.

In the story, when ...

It reminded me of when ...



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## CHAPTER 3

Bring in examples or pictures of the following: sage, Labrador leaves, rat root, tobacco and wild mint.

What were some of the traditional medicines that Lawrence's Kokom (Grandma) gathered and what are their uses? Students will need to research their uses, and depending on student level of independence, teachers may wish to have students research one of the traditional medicines and present their findings to the class. This activity can be extended to include plants that are native to your region. Connecting with an Elder or Traditional Knowledge keeper to share information about traditional medicines and the harvesting process would enrich this activity.

The tobacco plant takes a considerable amount of time, patience, love and care to grow. It takes over 100 hours of care for a tobacco plant to produce, that is why the gift of tobacco is offered when giving thanks to Mother Earth or asking for guidance or help from an Elder or Knowledge Keeper.

Have the students reflect on why Kokom was an important member of the family. What do you observe in the book?

Many tribes were egalitarian and held complex clan systems where gender roles were unique to each tribe. Indigenous women held spiritual, political and economic power equal to men. Women's and men's roles were different but equal in their importance. Women held a high degree of political power when it came to management of land and nomination of chief and tribal governance. [www.courser.org/learn/indigenous-canada/lecture/ckZ0u/indigenous-concepts-of-gender](http://www.courser.org/learn/indigenous-canada/lecture/ckZ0u/indigenous-concepts-of-gender)

### Art Connection

Students can create an illustration and an accompanying piece of writing to commemorate something they have learned from their own grandparents or another family member.

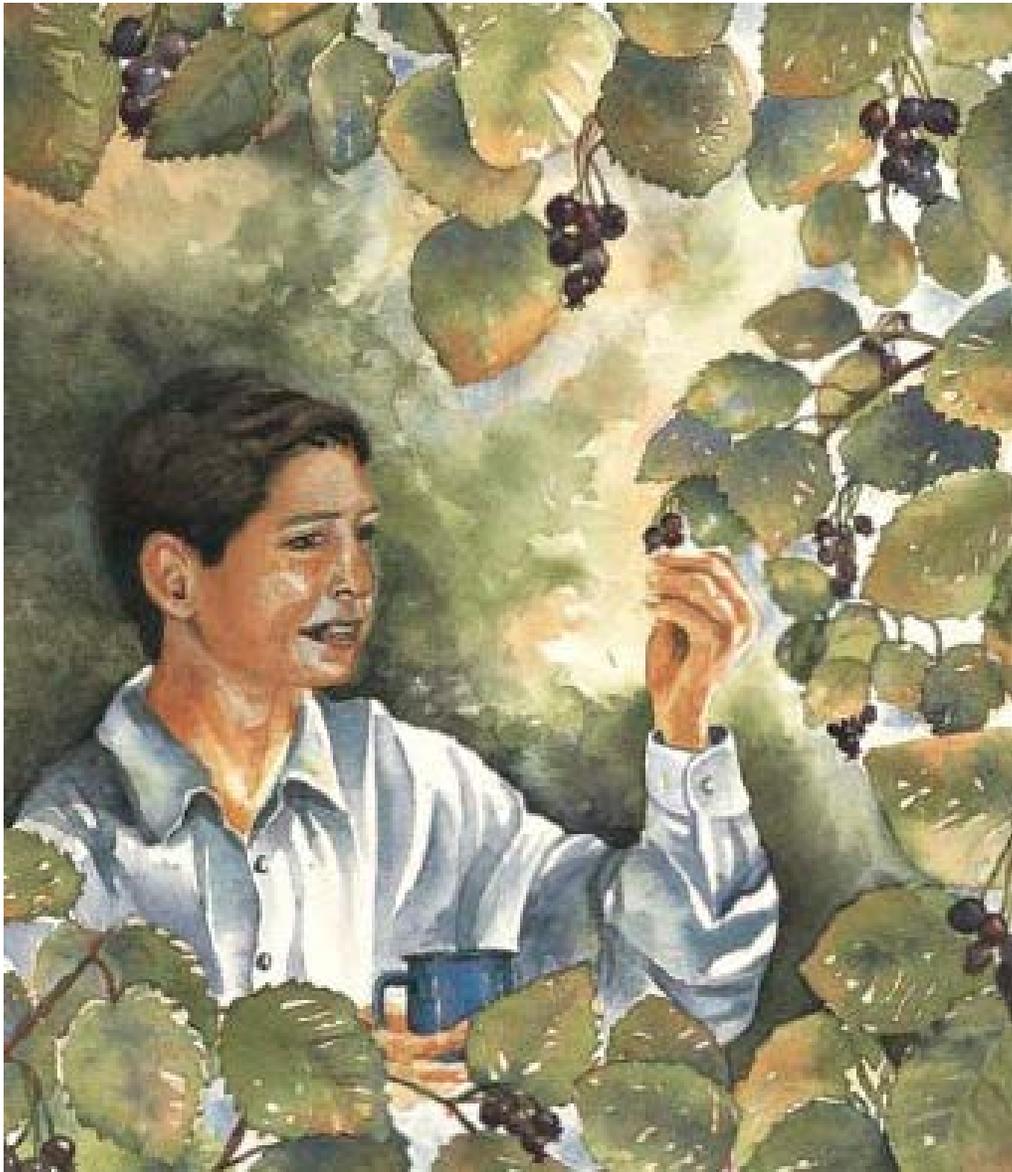


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## CHAPTER 4

What name did Mosoom (Grandpa) give Lawrence? Why is this significant? What was the message of Grandpa's story?

How did Lawrence and the other children feel on the day that they had to leave their family? How do you know?



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## EPILOGUE

Read the epilogue together, and let students know that the author does not finish his story, but he shares personal family photos while blending his experience with that of other children who attended residential school.

### Help students explore these questions:

In your opinion, do you think it was better for the children to attend residential school or should they have been able to continue learning both in a traditional way and in a regular school as Larry did until grade three? Discuss in a group, reflecting on what you have just read.

Why did the government decide Indigenous children had to attend residential schools? What was the goal of these schools?

Residential schools in Canada began in 1884 with changes to the Indian Act. The last school closed in 1996. An estimated 150,000 Indigenous children attended the church-run schools during this time. The goal of residential schools was to get rid of the “Indian” in the child, and remove them from all cultural influences of their own community.

## AFTER READING

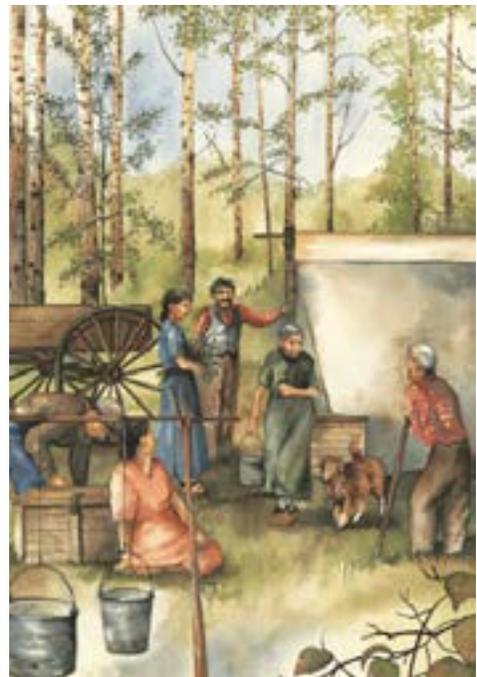
Why do you think the author wanted to write this book?

What do you think the author’s message is?

Do you think he achieved his goal? Why or why not?

If you are reading this book with older students, have them research a local residential school (or one in your region) and write a report on their findings. They can present their report to other classes or even staff members.

Encourage students to write down questions they have after reading the book. These questions will help lead to an inquiry that can prompt cross-curricular connections.



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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Books

*My Name Is Seepeetza*

by Shirley Sterling

978-1-8899-165-2

*Shi-shi-etko*

Written by Nicola I. Campbell

Illustrated by Kim LaFave

978-0-88899-659-6

*Shin-chi's Canoe*

Written by Nicola I. Campbell

Illustrated by Kim LaFave

978-0-88899-857-6



### Internet

**100 Years of Loss: Healing the Legacy of Residential Schools:** <http://100yearsofloss.ca/en/>

**Statement of apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools — Prime Minister Harper, June 11, 2008:** <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649>

**Project of Heart:** <http://projectofheart.ca/teacher-guideslesson-plans/>

**National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation:** <https://nctr.ca/map.php>

**Truth and Reconciliation Commission:**

<https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/truth-and-reconciliation-commission/>

**Residential Schools:** <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools/>