

A TEACHERS' GUIDE TO MY NAME IS SEEPEETZA

Written by Shirley Sterling

INTRODUCTION

At six years old, Seepeetza is taken from her happy family life on Joyaska Ranch to live as a boarder at the Kalamak Indian Residential School. Life at the school is not easy, but Seepeetza still manages to find some bright spots. Always, thoughts of home make her school life bearable.

An honest, inside look at life in an Indian residential school in the 1950s, and how one indomitable young spirit survived it.

This text is a strong example of a journal and allows students the opportunity to connect through literacy, history, connection to the arts, science and mathematics.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Merritt, B.C., Shirley Sterling (1948–2005) was a member of the Interior Salish Nation of British Columbia. She earned a Bachelor of Education and a doctorate on oral traditions and the transmission of culture. She wrote *My Name Is Seepeetza*, which is based on her own childhood experiences at an Indian residential school. Acclaimed in both Canada and the United States, the book has won the Sheila A. Egoff Children's Literature Prize. She also won the Laura Steiman Award for Children's Literature.



MY NAME IS SEEPEETZA

Written by Shirley Sterling

JUVENILE NON-FICTION

Reading ages 9 to 12

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Paperback

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BEFORE READING

Activate Prior Knowledge

Students may have a wider variety of understanding of the Indian Residential School systems that were instituted by the federal government. Working with a KWL chart (What do I Know? What do I Want to know? and What did I Learn?), have students generate a list of things they know about residential schools and questions they might have about the residential school systems. Post these questions so the students can think about them as they work through the book and related activities. At the end, go back to the chart and see which questions can be answered. Also, have a look at the list of items that the students think they know and confirm whether this is accurate thinking or if new thinking/understanding has taken place.

Residential schools began in Canada in the 19th century and the last school closed in 1996.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/a-history-of-residential-schools-in-canada-1.702280>

Where in the World?

Locate the region of the Interior Salish people in British Columbia. You may wish to use the website <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/interior-salish-first-nations> to assist with gathering information. While the town of Firefly and the Kalamak Indian Residential School are fictional, they are based on the author's personal experience in residential school. Map out the area of the Interior Salish Nation and locate the Indian residential schools in the Syilx/Okanagan Nation region. <https://www.syilx.org/wellness/indian-residential-school/>

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BEFORE READING

The Interior Salish

Generate questions with the students that they are interested in learning about the four First Nation Groups of the Lillooet, Secwepemc, Nlaka'pamux and Okanagan of the Salish Nation. Using strategies such as idea webs or charts, have the students choose one area or question they are most curious about, and then work with them to locate and gather information that pertains to their question. Discuss some strategies with your students to critically examine the information authenticity of the texts as they research.

Text Form: Journal

Explore the students' understanding of the journal text form. What do they know about the journal genre? Record these characteristics for students to view. If you have worked with this genre before, connect to other texts that have been explored.

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WHILE READING

Dedication

Read the dedication and poem “Coyote Laughs,” found at the beginning of the book, to the class. Ask the students what they think the author’s message is for readers. Discuss the responses as a class.

Figures of Speech

Further examine the text, keeping in mind figures of speech (<http://examples.yourdictionary.com/figure-of-speech-examples.html>). Post the poem “Coyote Laughs” so the students can see it. Read the first two lines of the poem and discuss the meaning that the author is trying to convey. Examine some Figures of Speech and identify some that the author is using here (i.e. alliteration, sibilance, personification, enjambment, tone shift).

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Suggested Pause Points

Ask the students questions to deepen their understanding of the story

Journal Writing (September 11, 1958)

Seepeetza tells her friend Cookie that she wants to keep a secret journal for a year.

Why do you think the nuns won't approve of this?

Why do you think Seepeetza feels it is important to keep a journal for a year?

Home Is Where the Heart Is (September 18, 1958)

Home holds a special place in Seepeetza's heart. She describes cooking at the school and how everyone felt while working together. She then goes on to describe her home and the evening activities. After reading this passage, discuss with the children the feelings that Seepeetza evokes as she describes her memories with her family. Record these using a T-chart with the headings "Feeling" and "Evidence."

Conflict (October 2, 1958)

Seepeetza describes a conflict at school with her schoolmates. Discuss ways that you address conflict and in this case name calling within your school community.

Loss of Culture (October 30, 1958)

In the final two sentences of the journal entry, Seepeetza's grandmother is quoted as saying "Quaslametko didn't want her and her brothers and sisters to go to school, because school would turn them into white people. They wouldn't be able to hunt or fish or make baskets or anything useful anymore." Given what you have learned about residential schools, why do you think Quaslametko believes this to be true?

T-Chart

Using a large piece of Chart Paper create two columns. Label one "Feeling" and the second "Evidence." Record student ideas and thoughts in the appropriate columns.

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WHILE READING

Suggested Pause Points Continued

Loss of Language (November 13, 1958)

Seepeetza expresses a desire to learn Indigenous languages and be an interpreter like her father, but her father and mother do not wish to teach them their language. Seepeetza wonders why it is bad. Why do you think the nuns and priests strap the children for speaking their own language?

Conflicting Emotions (November 13, 1958)

Seepeetza comments on a photo taken of the Irish dancing group she was part of. She says, "I look happy. How can I look happy when I'm scared all the time?" Why do you think she is asking this?

New Year's Eve (December 31, 1958)

Seepeetza describes a family gathering on New Year's Eve. How were her celebrations similar and different to those you and/or others in your community have?

Irish Dancing (Throughout the story)

Irish dancing plays a major role in the spare time that Seepeetza has at school. Although she is a leader in the dance group and is good at it, she does not enjoy the activity. Discuss why you think the students at the school are only allowed to do Irish dance and not engage in traditional Indigenous dances during their time at school

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WHILE READING

The Hollywood Version (Thursday, May 14, 1959)

Seepeetza writes “We can see them from the dorm and hear them whooping like Indians in the movies. The Indians in the movies are not like anyone else I know. Real Indians are just people like anyone else except they love the mountains.” Discuss this passage and elicit from the student what they think she means by this statement. Why do they think that the movies may portray people differently than they actually are?

Media Literacy Connection: This raises an opportunity to discuss stereotypes/concepts perpetuated by the media. How does the media shape our perceptions and beliefs.

Importance of Place (Thursday, May 14, 1959)

Read this passage: “There is something really special about being mountain people. It’s a feeling like you know who you are, and you know each other. You belong to the mountains.” Using the Think-Pair-Share strategy (see sidebar), ask the students the following question: “Why do you think having a place you go where you know who you are and who you belong to is important?” Following this, the student can write a paragraph to respond to this question. Offer students an opportunity to reflect on if they have a place such as this. They can also create a drawing/ image of this place for an Art connection.

Think-Pair-Share

Students think independently and may write down their thoughts, then they pair with a partner, share with and listen to their partner, and finally share with the larger group.

Loss of a Friend (June 4, 1959)

Seepeetza learns of the deaths of two children with whom she attended school. One of them was her friend Charlie. How did learning about his death impact her? What are some things that a person can do to help them with the loss of a friend or a situation that is difficult?

View “Heritage Minute: Chanie Wenjack” to watch a short documentary on Chanie “Charlie” Wenjack whose death sparked the first inquest into the treatment of Indigenous children in Canadian residential schools:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_tcCpKtoU0

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WHILE READING

Potlatch Ceremony (August 20, 1959)

Seepeetza describes the potlatch that was held in honor of her aunt Alice's passing. Explore the importance of having a ceremony to honor the life of someone and specifically, the potlatch ceremony of the Salish people. Ask the students to describe the ceremonies their families participate in, if they know of them.

SFU: Potlatch

https://www.sfu.ca/brc/online_exhibits/masks-2-0/the-potlatch-ban.html

Canada's First Peoples

http://firstpeoplesofcanada.com/fp_groups/fp_nwc5.html

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AFTER READING

Prime Minister's Apology

Discuss with the students their understanding of an apology, its importance and what must be present (criteria) in order for an apology to be effective.

Watch a short video on the Prime Minister's apology for the Government of Canada's role in the Indian Residential School system. Discuss with students the significance of this apology. Explore different viewpoints about its impact.

Canadian Federal Government Apology to First Nations, June 11, 2008

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCpn1erz1y8>

Written: <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649>

Commentary: Why silence greeted Stephen Harper's residential-school apology

<https://www.straight.com/article-150021/unyas-lynda-gray-responds-prime-ministers-apology>

Guest Speaker

If you have access to a local community member who is a residential school survivor, you may work with your community, school support, administrator, etc. to invite them in to speak to the class about some of their experiences in the schooling system. If you do not have access to a speaker, you may view an online video of a survivor's personal experiences. Be sure to preview these before you share with your class and ensure that you have supports in the class for your students in the event that any students are triggered by listening to a survivor's personal story.

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AFTER READING

Reconciliation

Examine the resources available at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation: <https://nctr.ca/map.php> (Education) and the TRC of Canada: Calls to Action <http://bit.ly/2U3nyrP>. Be aware of the Calls to Action and have them available. Select ideas that you can share with the students.

You can share the commitments in a variety of ways, i.e. Twitter (www.twitter.com/NCTR_UM), newsletters, blogs, written and share with members of your local Indigenous communities.

View Senator Murray Sinclair: How can Canadians work towards reconciliation, CBC News <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2Lv21Ktz84>

Following conversation with the students, discuss what each of them can commit to doing to work toward reconciliation. Have students write the action they are committing to and why it is important to them.

Post students' commitments on the classroom wall, to remind them of the importance of their commitment and to inspire them to action. Don't forget, as a teacher you should make a commitment, as well. If possible, engage the school administration in this activity as well.

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CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Reconciliation through Art:

Following a discussion with the students on reconciliation, design and create a unified art piece with the students to express their views of reconciliation and what it means to them. You may choose to use 6-inch by 8-inch paper tiles to create a wall display. You may also choose to create through a variety of other media such as: video, sculpture, painting, collage, etc. Have students write a statement about their piece of art, including what it means to them and why it is important in their message of reconciliation.

Science Connections

In the journal entry from Saturday, May 6, 1959, Seepeetza describes her mother's collection of plants or medicines and her use of these to help keep her family healthy. Explore through several resources the many ways that Indigenous traditional knowledge has helped society heal as well. Please be sure to let the students know that there are traditional healers who are as skilled as medically trained physicians. Tell students that they should never try to collect plants to try on their own. If possible, invite a local traditional healer into the class to talk about their profession.

Cancer Society

<http://www.cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/diagnosis-and-treatment/complementary-therapies/aboriginal-traditional-healing/?region=on>

First Nation Health Authority

<http://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/traditional-healing>

Historica Canada: Indigenous Medicines

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/native-medicines>

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Non-Fiction Writing for the Junior Student, Capacity Building Series #5, 2008,
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/non_fiction_writing.pdf

100 Years of Loss (Information and teacher resources)
<http://100yearsofloss.ca/en/>

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

Project of Heart
<http://projectofheart.ca>

Connections to Other Greenwood Books

As Long as the Rivers Flow
Written by Larry Loyie with Heather Holmlund
Illustrated by Constance Brissenden

Shi-shi-etko
Written by Nicola I. Campbell
Illustrated by Kim LaFave

Shin-chi's Canoe
Written by Nicola I. Campbell
Illustrated by Kim LaFave