

Talking Points for Discussion

For Young Man, True Stories of a Cree Childhood

An anthology

The Moon Speaks Cree

When the Spirits Dance

Goodbye Buffalo Bay

By Larry Loyie with Constance Brissenden

Book One: *The Moon Speaks Cree*

In *The Moon Speaks Cree*, author Larry Loyie writes about his traditional Cree childhood in the changing world of the 1940s. The year is 1940, the season is winter, a time of adventure and learning for Indigenous children. Larry Loyie, known as Lawrence, is learning the traditional way of life he loves. As the Christmas season approaches, the family's four dogs bark and howl, eager to pull Papa's toboggan. Lawrence's adventures bring him closer to his family, especially his grandfather and a secret sorrow.

Talking Points for Discussion

1. What is a "traditional" Indigenous lifestyle?
2. What survival traditions are in *The Moon Speaks Cree*?
3. What family traditions are in the book?
4. What traditional knowledge is shared in the book?
5. Does your family have traditions? Do you have your own traditions?
6. What is the importance of dogs in Lawrence's family life?
7. Name some ways that his family is good to their dogs.
8. Do you have a pet in your life? How do you feel about your pet?
9. What are the ways that Lawrence shows his love and respect for his grandmother, Kokom Bella, and his grandfather, Mosoom Albert?
10. What does Lawrence learn from Kokom Bella? She encouraged him to "make do with what you have." Does he take her advice? What does he invent?
11. Robert, Lawrence's older brother, is almost a man. His responsibilities now influence his relationship with his younger brother and sisters. What are the ways that Robert is now different from them? How does Robert show his positive feelings for them?
12. What have you learned from others in your family?
13. Mama tells Lawrence about Mosoom (grandfather) Daniel, his Papa's father, who died in the flu epidemic of 1918. Research more about this worldwide flu epidemic.
14. Lawrence's grandfather, Mosoom Albert, gave up a special skill related to his culture. In your own words, explain what happened. Talk about why you think this happened. Would you make the same choice as Mosoom Alberta?

Talking points provided by Principal Christine Gullion of Oski Pasikoniwew Kamik, a K4-K7 school on Bigstone Cree Nation, Wabasca, Alberta, Canada. This Cree-based school practises cultural traditions along with its regular curriculum.

Book Two: *When the Spirits Dance*

In *When the Spirits Dance*, author Larry Loyie writes about his traditional Cree childhood in the changing world of the 1940s. The year is 1941, the place Northern Alberta, Canada. Larry Loyie, known as Lawrence, is eight years old when his father is caught up in the Second World War that is raging in Europe. After his father leaves to fight overseas, Lawrence struggles to grow up while wrestling with the meaning of war. When army runaways threaten his family, he must call on his skills and the teachings of his Elders to keep them safe.

Talking Points for Discussion

1. How did life change for Lawrence's family during the Second World War?
2. How would you handle these types of changes? Such as food shortages?
3. How would you have felt if you were Lawrence when his father left to go overseas?
4. Members of Lawrence's extended family often dropped by to visit his family, like Uncle Louis and Lawrence's grandfather, Mosoom Alberta. What is the importance of family in your cultural background?
5. Build a family tree. Ask your parents about their parents and grandparents. Illustrate your tree on a large piece of Bristol board. Ask your parents if they have any old photos they can share with you.
6. Did any of your relatives serve in the Canadian Armed Forces? If possible, talk to your Elders about what their life was like when they were growing up. What do we learn from sharing these stories?
7. Write a letter to a Canadian serving in the Armed Forces overseas. What would you like to say to that person?
8. Write a short story about your life at a particular point in time. How did a major event (a new brother or sister, moving, breaking a limb) change your daily life?
9. Kokom (grandmother) Bella told Lawrence his spirit animal was a grizzly bear. What is a spirit animal in Cree culture? Do you feel close to any special animal?
10. A great quote on the authors' website (www.firstnationswriter.com) is: "To honour yourself is to honour your ancestors." How does this quote apply to the authors? How does it apply to you?

Book Three: *Goodbye Buffalo Bay*

With sensitivity and humour, award-winning Cree author Larry Loyie shares his tumultuous last year in residential school, learning the power of friendship and courage. Back home at age thirteen, he is a stranger to his family and the culture he loves until he follows his grandfather Mosoom Edward's gentle guiding voice. By the time he turns sixteen, Lawrence fights a terrifying forest fire, flies for the first time, and fulfills his dream of freedom in the mountains.

Epilogue: A background to residential schools and Larry Loyie's experience

Goodbye Buffalo Bay is the true story of Larry Loyie's experience at St. Bernard Mission residential school in the 1940s, and his return to the world outside. It tells of the emotions that children felt when they were taken from their families and shows how other emotions, such as anger, developed. The author shares his adventures, both dramatic and comical, as he enters the working world.

Larry, known as Lawrence as a child, and an estimated 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children experienced harsh treatment at an estimated total of 144 schools from the late 1800s to the late 1990s.

Poorly funded by the Canadian government, the schools were mainly run by the Roman Catholic, United, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches. Staff had little or no professional training. Time in the classroom was limited. The children faced constant punishments, ate poorly prepared food, and worked hard at daily chores that kept the school running. Many deaths occurred, with unmarked graves first discovered in Kamloops, BC, in 2021. In 2022, unmarked graves were also found at the site of St. Bernard Mission residential school.

Isolated from their families, children lived lives of uncertainty and fear. They were constantly told what to do. Above all, they were forbidden to speak their birth language. If they did, they were severely punished by having their mouths washed with soap, by being beaten, and by being ridiculed. Criticism of their families, cultures, and languages was a belittling, daily occurrence. Friendships like those in *Goodbye Buffalo Bay* helped children get through their days.

An encouraging teacher, such as Sister Theresa, was a one-time experience for the author.

Goodbye Buffalo Bay also explores how a child felt when he or she returned home. Children like Lawrence came home as strangers. Before entering residential school, Lawrence lived a cherished, traditional Cree life. He could already provide food for his family by fishing and hunting. He attended the Slave Lake community school and enjoyed learning. After six years in St. Bernard Mission, he returned home, questioning his role in the family, his culture, and his community.

After attending residential school, most children no longer spoke their Indigenous language. They felt shame about their culture and faced widespread racism. This loss helped to widen the divide between family members. Larry's grandmother, Bella Twin, for example, only spoke Cree. She could no longer talk to most of her grandchildren or teach them traditional ways.

Lawrence refused to forget his Cree language despite punishments at residential school. *Goodbye Buffalo Bay* tells of his struggles and adventures as a teenager as he finds personal freedom and a place for himself in the outside world.

In 1949, a Canadian Senate Report questioned the residential school system and recommended that the children attend mainstream schools. In 1969, the Federal Government of Canada assumed responsibility for the schools and began shutting them down.

On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada, and the Leaders of the Opposition, apologised in the House of Commons to leaders of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit for residential schools.

The apology was an important step in recognizing the sad history of the residential school system and its long-lasting negative effect on children and families. On June 2, 2015, the six-year-long Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its final 94 recommendations for healing and reconciliation.

Goodbye Buffalo Bay honours the children who attended residential schools and helps to ensure their stories will never be forgotten.

