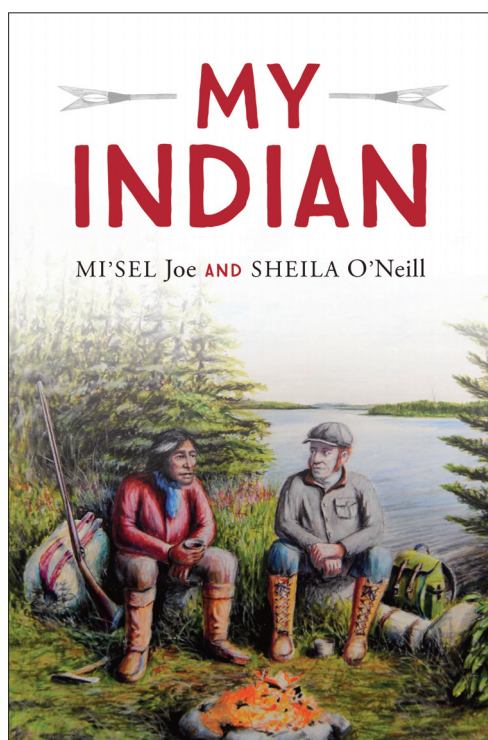




BREAKWATER STUDY GUIDES



MY INDIAN

Written by **MI'SEL JOE** and **SHEILA O'NEILL**

Cover Art by **JERRY EVANS**

My Indian tells the story of Sylvester Joe, the Mi'kmaq guide who was engaged by William Epps Cormack in 1822 to walk across Newfoundland to find the last remaining Beothuk camps on the island.

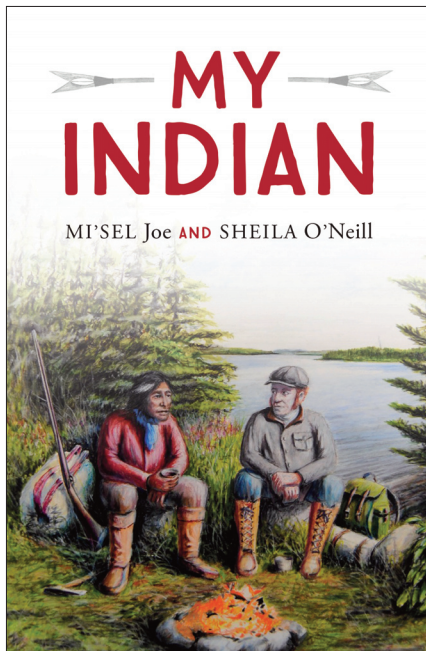
CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Ages 12 to 18 | Grades 7 to 12

YOUNG ADULT FICTION | Social Emotional Learning; Indigenous Studies; History; Geography; Environmental Studies; Art; Restorative Practices

5.25 × 8 | 172 pages

Paperback 978-1-55081-878-9 | \$16.95 | ebook 978-1-55081-879-6 | \$14.99



BOOK DESCRIPTION

My Indian tells the story of Sylvester Joe, the Mi'kmaw guide who was engaged by William Epps Cormack in 1822 to walk across Newfoundland to find the last remaining Beothuk camps on the island.

This book is written as historical fiction, and endeavours to describe the man that Cormack referred to as "My Indian." While very little is known about Sylvester Joe beyond Cormack's journal, *A Journey Across the Island in 1822*, the authors incorporate his character into an established historical and geographical timeline. The book follows Sylvester Joe from the time he was born in 1787 in what is now known as Miawpukek First Nation, his early life in the community, how he grew up travelling the land with family, his grandfather, his uncles, and how he learned about all aspects of Mi'kmaw life. The book describes how he snuck aboard a schooner to Cape Breton, travelled to the French island of Miquelon, and finally journeyed across the island of Newfoundland with Cormack to seek out the last remaining Beothuk camps.

The reader shares in the character's emotional and spiritual connections to the land and appreciates how the customs, values, and ways of knowing and being are the essence of his identity. The author's description of traditional ceremonies and sacred medicines, use of Mi'kmaw language and references to historical documents add context to the rich culture that thrives today.

In keeping with the strong oral history of kinship between the Mi'kmaq and Beothuk Nations, the book supports the authors' premise that Sylvester Joe worked against Cormack while on the journey, and in fact guided Cormack away from the Beothuk.

In rewriting the narrative of Cormack's journey from the perspective of his Mi'kmaw guide, *My Indian* reclaims Sylvester's identity.

Bringing the story full circle, *My Indian* culminates in Mi'sel Joe's successful efforts in 2020 to repatriate two Beothuk skulls from the National Museum of Scotland. In 1828, the remains of Nonosabasut and Demasduit, who had been murdered by John Peyton in 1820, were removed from their gravesite on Red Indian Lake by Cormack and brought to Scotland for study.

BEFORE READING

Before reading, introduce students to the concept of colonization – a country or a nation taking control of other lands, regions, or territories outside its country and turning them into a colony. In other words, an invading culture establishing control over an indigenous population – the people living there before the arrival of the settlers.

To activate prior knowledge, brainstorm with students some of the ways colonization had an impact on Indigenous Peoples, their culture, and the land itself, and why this still matters today. Some questions for discussion:

- How do you feel/think it felt for Indigenous populations to be colonized by settlers?
- What was the early relationship like between Indigenous populations and settlers? Were Indigenous peoples treated fairly/humanely by settlers?
- What impact has colonization/colonialism had on the lives of Indigenous peoples today? Think about the impacts on family relationships, the justice system, treaty rights, and identity.

Curriculum Connections: Social Awareness | Relationship Skills | Indigenous Studies | History | Geography | Environmental Studies

Introduce the Indigenous Peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador: the Innu, the Inuit of Nunatsiavut, the Inuit of NunatuKavut, the Mi'kmaq, and the Beothuk. Some questions for discussion:

- What do you know about the Beothuk Peoples? What happened to the Beothuk?
- Who was William Epps Cormack?
- Who was Sylvester Joe?
- What is an Elder?

Curriculum Connections: Indigenous Studies | History | Geography

ANALYZE THE COVER

Jerry Evans is a Mi'kmaw artist born and raised in central Newfoundland and has been creating and working as a professional visual artist for over 30 years. In addition to his training in fine arts, Jerry has been dedicated to the cultural preservation, reclamation, and continued growth of Indigenous communities across Ktaqamkuk (Newfoundland) and the Big Land (Labrador). (See **Web Resources 1** on page 10.)

Jerry produced the cover artwork using Prismacolor pencils on rag. In designing the cover, he researched the historical clothing and equipment of the time – the skin boots, Cormack's pack, and Sylvester's bundle with the traditional tumpline (strap). He also researched old photographs of white settler men of that period for hair and facial hair styles. The black spruce and other foliage are common here in Newfoundland: (See **Web Resources 2** on page 10.)

- Why is it important to have an Indigenous (Mi'kmaw) artist design the cover artwork?
- Why is it important that the cover artwork be historically accurate?
- Why do you think the authors chose *My Indian* as the title of the book? (See **Print Resources 1** on page 12.)
- Why was the eel spear used as part of the cover design? (See **Web Resources 2** on page 10.)
- On the far right, smoke can be seen off in the distance. Where do you think this is coming from?
- Although only a young man in his early 30s, notice that Sylvester has a silver streak in his hair. How do you think this might be important in the story? (See **Print Resources 1** on page 12.)

Curriculum Connections: Art | Indigenous Studies | History | Geography | Restorative Practices

DURING READING

The authors used Mi'kmaw words throughout the text and included a glossary at the end. Record new words on the smartboard or chart paper. Use online Mi'kmaw language resources or apps to hear the words spoken. (See **Print Resources 2** on page 12.)

Sylvester and Cormack's journey began on September 5, 1822, from Smith Sound, Trinity Bay, and ended two months later in St. George's Bay on November 4. Create a map of the island of Newfoundland and recreate the path they walked as you read the story. (See **Map** on page 9.)

Throughout the journey, Sylvester and Cormack travelled over land, and over water. At times they travelled by traditional Mi'kmaw birch bark canoe. Students can learn more about traditional Mi'kmaw canoe by researching the Conne River canoe project – bringing back the tradition of building traditional birch bark canoes, and by watching the documentary *Spirit Wind*. Spirit Wind is the name of a 26-foot birch bark canoe that was built by a crew of Mi'kmaw people from Miawpukek First Nation to cross the Cabot Strait from Newfoundland to Nova Scotia in 1999. (See Web Resources 3 on page 10.)

Curriculum Connections: Social Awareness | Indigenous Studies | History | Geography | Restorative Practices

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Storytelling holds an important place within Indigenous cultures. The story of Sylvester Joe has been passed down orally within Miawpukek for many years. In rewriting the story of William Epps Cormack's journey across the island in 1822 from the point of view of his Mi'kmaw guide, Sylvester Joe, the authors offer another perspective on the story.

- Why is it important for Indigenous Peoples to tell their own stories?
- Could it be that the history and stories written about Indigenous Peoples were written in a way to honour the colonizers and discredit and/or diminish the Indigenous Peoples?

Curriculum Connections: Social Awareness | Relationship Skills | Responsible Decision-Making | Indigenous Studies | Restorative Practices

The Coming Together Ceremony described in the first chapter of the book is one of many cultural teachings that are written into the story. Prior to reading, did you have any knowledge of wedding ceremonies from other cultures? How might you have pictured a traditional Mi'kmaw wedding? Some questions for discussion:

- How is the traditional coming together ceremony similar to and different from today's wedding ceremonies?
- What did you learn about the roles of the families? Of the Elders?
- What was the significance of the kitpu feathers worn by the warrior and his new bride? Is there a modern-day equivalent?

Curriculum Connections: Social Awareness | Relationship Skills | Responsible Decision-Making | Indigenous Studies | Restorative Practices

Students can learn more about the traditional Mi'kmaw wedding ceremony by viewing a CBC News story: Flat Bay powwow kicks off with traditional Mi'kmaq wedding. (See Web Resources 4 on page 10.)

Curriculum Connections: Social Awareness | Indigenous Studies | Restorative Practices

AFTER READING

➤ *My Indian* is divided into two sections: Suliewey's Tale and Sylvester's Tale. What is the significance of telling the story in this way?

Curriculum Connections: Social Awareness | Indigenous Studies | History | Geography | Restorative Practices

➤ Speculation, Separation, Repatriation: Why was it important to include these sections at the end of the book? How do they fit into the story? (See Web Resources 5 on pages 10-11.)

Curriculum Connections: Social Awareness | Restorative Practices

➤ What is the role of the Elders throughout the story? What role do Elders play today?

Curriculum Connections: Social Awareness | Restorative Practices

➤ In Chapter 21, *Gifts of the Land*, Sylvester talks about what is considered rich in his society versus what Cormack considers to be riches. How do they differ? Is there a right answer? And if so, who do you think is right, and why?

Curriculum Connections: Social Awareness | Indigenous Studies

➤ Ask the students to give examples from the book that highlight

- ▶ environmental stewardship
- ▶ trust
- ▶ honour
- ▶ attachment to the land
- ▶ cultural teachings

Curriculum Connections: Social Awareness | Geography | Indigenous Studies | Restorative Practices

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

A claim that the Mi'kmaq are not Indigenous to Newfoundland but were brought to the island by the French to kill off the Beothuk was taught in the Grade 5 History book in the 1950s and 1960s. This colonial textbook placed the blame on the Mi'kmaq for killing off the Beothuk. This is now known as the “mercenary myth,” and decades of research show no evidence that it is true. Despite this, many people still believe this myth today. After reading the book, what do you think about the relationship between the Beothuk and the Mi'kmaq in Newfoundland? How has the colonial mercenary myth impacted the Mi'kmaq of Newfoundland with respect to culture, sense of place, and well-being? (See Web Resources 6 on page 11.)

Curriculum Connections: Social Awareness | Relationship Skills | Ethical Development and Citizenship | Indigenous Studies | History | Restorative Practices

Re-naming of places is evident throughout the story. Cormack decided to rename the sacred mountain Mount Sylvester. Cormack also named places after Jameson, his teacher in Edinburgh, to whom he brought the Beothuk skulls in 1828, and after King George, the king of his country. These names still exist today. Why would Cormack re-name places that Mi'kmaq people had already named? How does the province's Indigenous history continue to be shaped by this colonial practice today? (See Web Resources 7 on page 12; See Print Resources 3 on page 12.)

Curriculum Connections: Self-Management | Social Awareness | Relationship Skills | Ethical Development and Citizenship | Indigenous Studies | Restorative Practices

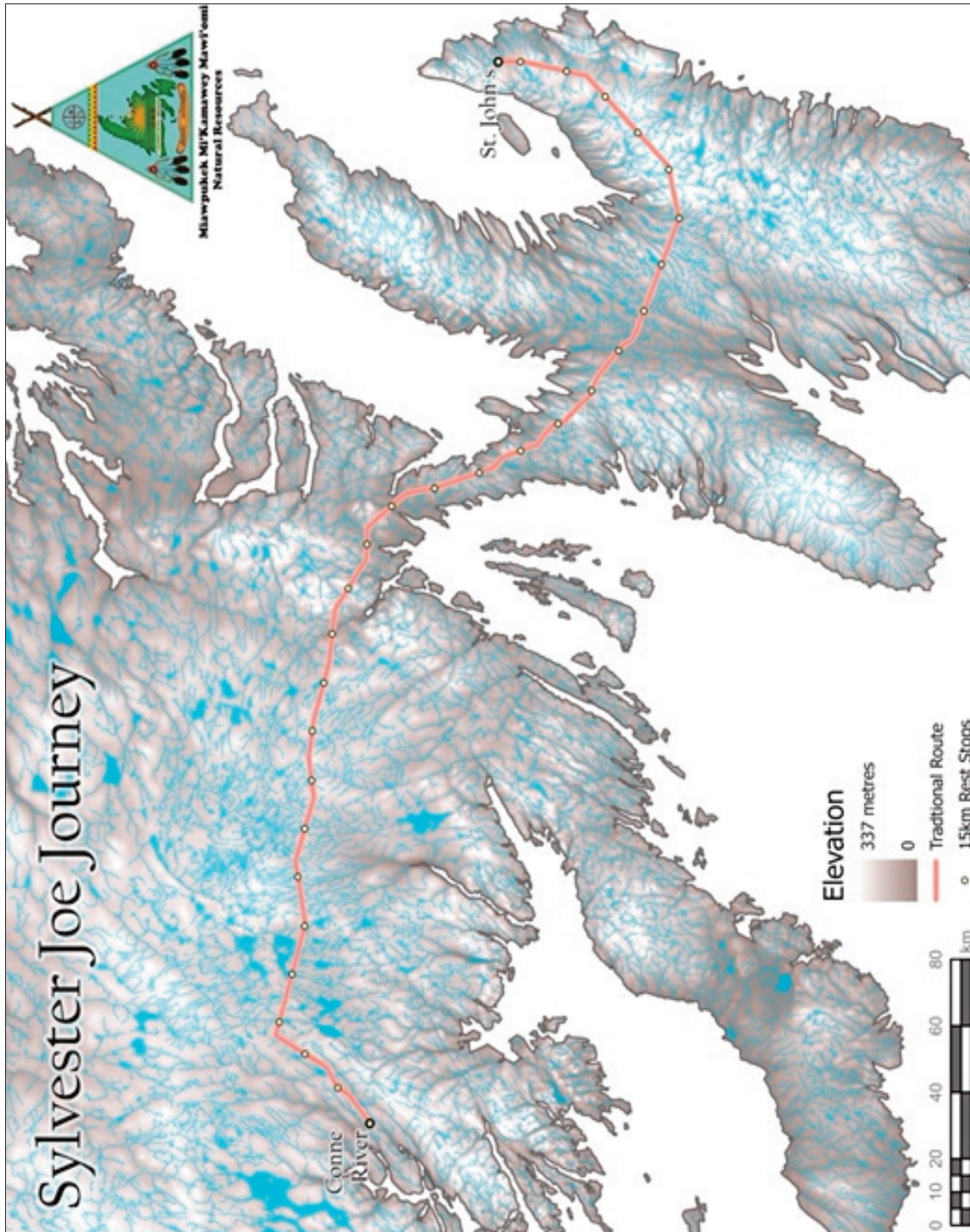
Sylvester Joe has been recognized as a Person of National Historic Significance for his traditional knowledge that made it possible for William Cormack to traverse and record the interior of the island of Newfoundland in 1822. However, before beginning their trek, Cormack required that Sylvester take him on a 150-mile walk from St. John's to Placentia and back by way of Trinity and Conception Bays to test his fidelity. What was the relationship between Sylvester and Cormack, and how differently did each perceive it? (See Web Resources 8 on page 12)

Curriculum Connections: Self-Management | Relationship Skills | Indigenous Studies | Restorative Practices

The book ends with the line: “With a little sadness in my heart, I left this strange white man behind.” Why do you think Sylvester feels sad?

Curriculum Connections: Self Awareness | Self-Management | Social Awareness

MAPS



This map shows the traditional route used by Mi'kmaq people to travel across the eastern part of Newfoundland. This is likely the route Sylvester Joe used in 1822 to travel from Miawpukek to St. John's to meet Cormack. (Map created by and courtesy of Greg Jeddore.)



Guided by Sylvester Joe, Cormack's journey from Smith Sound, Trinity Bay, on September 5, 1822, to St. George's Bay on November 4, 1822. (Image from original edition of Cormack's journal.)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

WEB RESOURCES

1. **Artist Jerry Evans:** <https://www.jerryevans.ca/>
2. **Photo Resources:**
https://www.dropbox.com/s/8qnm1k4xf13y8y0/BBLStudyGuide_MyIndian_PhotoResources.pdf?dl=0
3. **Canoe Building:**
Spirit Wind is the name of a 26-foot birch bark canoe that was built by a crew of Mi'kmaw people from Miawpukek First Nation to cross the Cabot Strait from Newfoundland to Nova Scotia:
https://movingimages.ca/store/products.php?spirit_wind

How Conne River's Miawpukek First Nation brought back birchbark canoe building:
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/conne-river-birch-bark-canoe-1.4828408>

Gwitna'q – Go by Canoe – Miawpukek First Nation: Miawpukek First Nation of Newfoundland constructed a traditional 22-foot birch bark canoe as a gift to The Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough. Video by Miawpukek First Nation:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xscID-b-l6l>
4. **Mi'kmaw Wedding Ceremony:**
Bride Cindy Hepditch and groom Perry Young were married in a traditional ceremony, presided over by Chief Mi'sel Joe, at the 10th Annual Flat Bay powwow, in 2016.
CBC News: Flat Bay powwow kicks off with traditional Mi'kmaw wedding:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pl8QJULS03E>
5. **Repatriation News Links:**
'Stolen' Beothuk remains need to come home from Scotland, Mi'sel Joe says
CBC News. Posted: May 25, 2015 3:37 PM NT
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/stolen-beothuk-remains-need-to-come-home-from-scotland-mi-sel-joe-says-1.3086453>

Ottawa backs request for return of Beothuk remains from Scotland. Government 'considers this matter to be of considerable importance,' heritage minister writes
Dean Beeby. CBC News. Posted: Aug 25, 2016 5:00 AM ET
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/beothuk-repatriation-mi-kmaq-newfoundland-1.3734419>

Indigenous leaders unite for return of Beothuk remains, inclusion in MMIWG inquiry. Scottish museum said prior requests did not meet criteria, as there are no Beothuk descendants

Peter Cowan . CBC News . Posted: May 26, 2017 11:37 AM NT

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/indigenous-leadersroundtable-1.4132582>

Miawpukek chief leads effort to have Beothuk skulls returned from Scottish museum
July 13, 2017 Maureen Googoo

<http://kukukwes.com/2017/07/13/miawpukek-chief-leads-effort-to-have-beothuk-skulls-returned-from-scottish-museum/>

Remains of 2 Beothuk people to be transferred from Scotland to Canada. Authorities want move made 'as quickly as possible,' premier says

CBC News . Posted: Jan 21, 2019 12:04 PM NT

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/beothuk-remainstransfer-1.4986453>

Beothuk remains returned to Newfoundland after 191 years in Scotland

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/beothuk-remains-returned-nl-1.5494373>

Central Newfoundland Leaders want Beothuk Remains Returned to Red Indian Lake

<https://www.thetelegram.com/news/local/central-newfoundland-leaders-want-beothuk-remains-returned-to-red-indian-lake-296144/>

Remains of two of the last known Beothuk people returned to Newfoundland
APTN News Interview with Chief Joe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVDW9M-AjZs> (Video)

Ministerial Statement Premier Dwight Ball Repatriation

March 11, 2020

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=716340765790461> (Video)

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2020/exec/0609n03/>

6. Mercenary Myth:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/mi-kmaw-mercenary-%20myth-colonial-history-school-textbooks-1.6073752>

The Story of Newfoundland and Labrador, Frances B. Briffett, 1949

(see pp. 48-49):

https://archive.org/stream/storyofnewfoundl00brif/storyofnewfoundl00brif_djvu.txt

7. **Newfoundland Place Names:**
<https://qalipu.ca/qalipu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Ktaqmuk%20Handbook.pdf>
8. **Sylvester Joe Recognized by Government of Canada as a Person of National Historic Significance:**
<https://nationtalk.ca/story/government-of-canada-recognizes-sylvester-joe-as-a-person-of-national-historic-significance>
9. **Audio of Chief Mi'sel Joe saying *Aqalasié'w*:**
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/idgnpcxe90hef0w/Chief%20Joe%20says%20Aqalasié%27w%20AUDIO.m4a?dl=0>
10. **Video of Chief Mi'sel Joe pouring water out of pitcher plant:**
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/8zt7a0hkr34ob4u/Chief%20pours%20water%20from%20pitcher%20plant%20VIDEO.MOV?dl=0>
11. ***Narrative of a Journey across the Island in 1822*, W.E. Cormack:**
<https://collections.mun.ca/digital/collection/cns/id/110548>

***Narrative of a Journey across the Island in 1822*, W.E. Cormack as a downloadable PDF:**
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/3t16qyjz9jr9osc/NarrativeOfAJourneyAcrossTheIslandOfNewfoundland.pdf?dl=0>
12. **Ochre Fest 2021 interview with authors Mi'sel Joe and Sheila O'Neill:**
 Reclaiming Indigenous History: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udNSbKQysls>

PRINT RESOURCES

1. **Book Club Questions and Answers:** Pages 165–170 of *My Indian*
2. **Glossary (Mi'kmaq to English):** Pages 148–152 of *My Indian*
3. **Place Names:** Pages 151–153 of *My Indian*
4. **Numbers in Mi'kmaq:** Pages 153–154 of *My Indian*
5. **Additional Print Resources:** Page 171 of *My Indian*

AUTHORS AND ARTIST BIOS

MI'SEL JOE

Saqamaw (Chief) Mi'sel Joe, LLD, CM, is the author of *Muinji'j Becomes a Man* and *An Aboriginal Chief's Journey*. He has been the District Traditional Chief of Miawpukek First Nation since 1983, appointed by the late Grand Chief, Donald Marshall.

In May 2004, Chief Joe was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, by Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador in recognition of his contribution to the economic, social, and political development of the Mi'kmaq of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In 2014, Chief Joe began working on repatriation of the Beothuk remains of Nonosabasut and Demasduit, from the National Museum of Scotland, which had been taken from their graves in Red Indian Lake in 1828 by William Cormack. These sacred remains were successfully repatriated back to Canada in March 2020 and are currently housed in The Rooms in St. John's until they can be moved to their final resting place.

In January 2018 Chief Joe was awarded the Order of Canada for his outstanding leadership in developing and enhancing the well-being and financial vitality of Miawpukek First Nation. He is considered the Spiritual Chief of the Mi'kmaq of Newfoundland and Labrador.



SHEILA O'NEILL

Sheila O'Neill is from Kippens, NL, and is a member of Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation. Sheila is a mother and grandmother and has a solid background in Indigenous issues and post-secondary education. Sheila is a Drum Carrier and carries many teachings passed down by respected Elders. As a founding member and past President of the Newfoundland Aboriginal Women's Network (NAWN), she has been part of a grassroots movement of empowerment of Indigenous women within the island portion of Newfoundland and Labrador.



Throughout her extensive career as an educator, Sheila has worked as a Communications Instructor with College of the North Atlantic (CNA) both in Newfoundland and Labrador and at CNA's campus in Doha, Qatar, in the Middle East.

Sheila holds a Bachelor of Arts (English) and Bachelor of Education, both from Memorial University. She currently lives in St. John's.

JERRY EVANS

Of this land, Jerry Evans is a Mi'kmaq artist born and raised in central Newfoundland. Graduating from NSCAD with a Bachelor of Fine Art in 1986, he has been creating and working as a professional visual artist for over 30 years. In addition to his training in fine arts, Jerry has been dedicated to the cultural preservation, reclamation, and continued growth of Indigenous communities across Ktaqamkuk Newfoundland) and the Big Land (Labrador).

Jerry works primarily as a painter and printmaker but also brings together his experience in film, design, and traditional hand poke tattooing to reach beyond Western ideologies as a means of expression and gift exchange.



Jerry coordinated and was principal researcher for the 1996 exhibition FIRST: Aboriginal Artists of Newfoundland and Labrador, which presented works by Mi'kmaq, Innu, and Inuit artists across Newfoundland and Labrador. Ever since, he has worked rigorously to bring these artistic practices to the forefront and build the research around the traditional and contemporary art of Indigenous Peoples from this land. Jerry's many years of work in St. John's at St. Michael's Printshop as Master Printmaker and technician led him to work alongside renowned Newfoundland artists such as Gerald Squires and Anne Meredith Barry. His prolific lithographic work has been exhibited across Canada and is held in both private and public collections around the world. Receiving grants from the Canada Council and the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council, Jerry is working to develop and deepen his collaborative creative practice and research creation in rural communities.