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Teaching Guide

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Shannen and the Dream for a School by Janet Wilson

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SUMMARY

All children have the right to a school

This book is based on the true story of Shannen Koostachin and the Mushkegoowuk (Swampy Cree) of Attawapiskat First Nation on the James Bay coast. After thousands of gallons of diesel fuel leaked from a pipe under their 1974 school contaminating the soil, people in the building experienced serious health issues. Short-term solutions with portables only provided long-term problems. Over six hundred children attended classes held in deteriorating portables, not built for the harsh northern climate. Shannen, while in grade 8, continued her older sister's fight for a new school. Learn how Canada was shamed into finally doing the right thing about this school.

Follow the efforts and determination required to gain action from Canada's government in meeting a fundamental expectation of all Canadians; to be educated in a safe environment. Shannen's Dream has been shared globally as she stood up for the rights of children in her community and Indigenous rights in general as declared by the United Nations.

All things are not equal in Canada. Through social activism we learn to see things through the reality that others face and then work towards equality for all. Shannen's Dream for a School teaches us there is no age restriction on doing the right thing and bringing about positive change.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Social Activism	Promotion, and guidance are used to influence social change in government. The duties of a social activist include communicating with policy makers, researching for the cause, and organizing activities and responses for the media.		
	Integrity—The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. Taking action with a strong mind, heart, and spirit will help us affect positive change.		
Character Education	Perseverance—It is worth sticking to a task in order to get it done: to work through the many problems along the way, to work collaboratively, to ask for help when needed, to draw attention to issues that can be solved.		
Social Studies/Native Studies	Discuss how historical events lead to contemporary challenges.		

Some

ONTARIO CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

that are met with Shannen and the Dream for a School

Social Studies, Grades 5 and 6

Strand A. Heritage and Identity Strand B. People and Environments

The topics treated in the two strands for grades 5 and 6 are:

- Interactions of Indigenous Peoples and Europeans prior to 1713, in What Would **Eventually Become Canada**
- Communities in Canada, Past and Present
- The Role of Government and Responsible Citizenship
- Canada's Interactions with the Global Community

History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8

The history taught in these two grades examines Canada's story from the early 1700s up to 1914. The challenges and experiences faced by different groups, including First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and colonists are discussed, as are the lasting effects of colonization and how its impact continues to this day.

Stolen Words provides an excellent example and spark for discussion about the lasting legacy of colonial policies during this period.

STORY ELEMENTS Pieces that Make Up the Story

Characters	Identify the ones who are important to the story.	
Setting	Find the timeframe and location of the story.	
Problem	Identify the main issue, struggle, or conflict that the main character is up against.	
Key Events	What main actions take place in the story and in what order do they happen?	
Solution	How do the characters solve the problem?	

IDEAS TO SET THE STAGE FOR THE STORY

- Title: Discuss who might dream for a school, and why?
- Skim the Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication page. Note the life span of Shannen Koostachin; the author Janet Wilson.
- Look over the Contents Page and names of chapters.
- Read the Author's Note, pages 1–2 and the Prologue, pages 3–6.
- Genre: Creative nonfiction. This story is based on facts (nonfiction), enhanced with probable dialogue and actions supplied by the author (fiction).

- Setting: Ensure students appreciate the location of Attawapiskat First Nation. Location impacts how we experience life, travel, and interactions with land and water.
- Protagonist: Shannen Koostachin
- **Antagonist: Canadian Government**
- Photos: Flip through the novel, look at pictures, read captions, predict the storyline, recognize similarities and differences, and become excited to learn about the power of positive activism.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- What is the issue?
- Trace how to get to Attawapiskat from where your students live.
- Pull lines and phrases from the book that indicate differences from the lives of students in Attawapiskat and the lives your students experience.
- Respond to "If children in other communities have decent schools, why don't we?"

Highlight the "resource gifts" the Author provides (pages 186-207) in the Historical Notes, Timeline, and Glossary with both English and Cree vocabulary.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Many excellent resources on the Internet can add rich background for the setting of this novel. All of these links were operational at the time of this writing, but you can insert the title of an article, for example, in a search engine if a particular link is not operating when you attempt to access it.

https://fncaringsociety.com/shannens-dream-timeline-and-documents

Website with many resources.

https://www.nfb.ca/film/hi-ho_mistahev_en/

Watch the trailer of the feature length movie. Children are still fighting for their right to a school even after Shannen's untimely death.

http://www.afterthelastrivermovie.com/the-film/

Watch the 1:39 minute trailer of the documentary telling the story of Attawapiskat and DeBeers Diamond mine for the purpose of catching glimpses of the community and conditions in which Shannen lived.

https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Attawapiskat+school+crisis+you+tube&view=detail&mid=EE7AEDBAFA18B64EEF2BEE7AEDBAFA18B64EEF2B&FORM=VIRE

YouTube videos made by people of Attawapiskat telling of their living conditions, which are at crisis levels: housing, suicide, toxic air from diesel fumes, water pollution when school was standing and when it was torn down.

https://www.reimaginingattawapiskat.com/

• A true picture of how students view their community now.

READING THE STORY Shannen and the Dream for a School

Chapter One: The Forgotten Children

- Read aloud to students to create voices in their minds that will help them later during their silent reading.
- Listen to story. Find out how the classrooms, students, school, and classroom chatter or Table Talk are the same/different from yours.
- Culturally responsive teachings are provided in Cree class. Explain.

Vocabulary

Use the Glossary pages 193–200 to understand English and Cree terms.

Ideas to Elicit Response

- Complete three Venn Diagrams to compare and contrast:
 - similarities between Shannen's and her classmates' situation/that of your students;
 - Shannen's school and classroom environment/the reader's school and classroom environment;
 - Shannen's Table Talk (what kids talk about)/the reader's Table Talk.
- Shannen is the main character, what do we know about her so far?
- What did Shannen's sister tell the Canadian government about students of J.R. Nakogee School? What do Serena's classmates think is the holdup?

Vocabulary Words, Terms, and Contents

• Expand the chart below or create your own to build a glossary. Add words as you encounter them, both English and Cree. Give their meaning and use them in a sentence.

CHAPTER	ENGLISH	CREE
1	portable classroom, inspired, convince, J.R. Nakogee School, Vezina High School, Indian Affairs minister	Ki-Kinaskin, Jaban, mooshoom,
2		Mahkah geegeesh
3		danis
4		Esh kah ken-oygoh, moonah
5	"Students helping Student's campaign", broken promise, Christmas feast, "fumes causing asthma, eczema, and heart problems", teachings of the Medicine Wheel,	
6	picket line, Aboriginal peoples, National Chief, Parliament, Member of Parliament, apartheid	Wacheyeh,
7	letter-writing campaign, Question Period	
8	verdict, Fancy Shawl dance/dress, Winter road,	
9	Peetabeck Academy, sacred fire, Fire Keeper	
10		
11		
12		
13	grassroots, atrium, press conference, Indian and Northern Affairs	
14		
15		
16	Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child	

Chapter Two: The Old Ways

· Independent reading.

Ideas to Elicit Response

- Add words to Running Glossary.
- Page 22, Jaban told the girls,
 - "...People should know better than to contaminate the land. It is the land that gives us life."

Compare "the old ways" with Shannen's life and student's lives that proves Jaban's statement to be true.

• Respond to the *Wawatay News* article dated Feb 7, 2008.

Chapter Three: Keep Walking in your Moccasins

- Read to determine how your response compares to Serena and Shannen's response.
- Respond to Andrew Koostachin's (Shannen's dad's) gentle response (pg. 28) to a difficult situation. What are comparable teachings you receive at home?

Chapters 4-7: Building the Momentum in the Community and Sharing the Dream with Many

The chapter titles are:

We Won't Give Up; The Circle Is Strong; We Are Important Too; Stand By Me.

These titles give an overview of the challenge Shannen and her community face as they seek an equitable school and try to educate others. Learn how momentum is built in order to take action and gain support from outside the community of Attawapiskat.

Create a JR Nakogee School Timeline

- As you read, jot down dates related to the struggle. Go back as well and find the dates when the school was first built, when people got sick, etc.
- Review the timeline given on page 190, read the sentences by each date. Write sentences by your dates to explain their significance.

Respond to Father when he says,

"There's no point in worrying about 'what ifs.' You might waste time worrying about an 'if' that never happens. You must have faith, daughter!" (pg. 39).

Discuss the inequitable dealings First Nations people endure as shared by the people of Attawapiskat.

Why do they feel this?

Who is showing that they care in Canada?

Explain who supports the dream for a new school and how action is taken by many.

Search YouTube for the videos made by students and politicians.

Getting others to "buy in to your idea" is critical to move social justice issues forward.

What was "the Right Thing to Do" that moved Serena and Shannon's idea forward. Respond by answering Who, What, When, Where and Why questions.

Watch the YouTube video, "Attawapiskat School Fight", Feb. 25, 2008. See many visuals of the community and some print to tell about the dream for a new school. https://www. voutube.com/watch?v=QzLMuW1N50I

Chapter 8-11: There is no age barrier to taking good action

The chapter titles are:

Eight Long Years; Sacred Fire; The Right Thing to Do; Any Volunteers?

After eight long years in portables, and still with no new school, the grade 8 class trip is on everyone's mind; fund raising, planning, imagining. . .

List the places Shannen and her friends want to visit.

How are they similar to places you have been or plan to go?

Write, discuss, and explore:

Peetabeck Academy and their Sacred Fire.

Where is Fort Albany?

Why are the students there organizing a rally?

How will Attawapiskat students be chosen to speak?

How will Attawapiskat people get there?

Give evidence of culturally appropriate programming at Peetabeck and speak about its effect on Shannen.

How does the visit help Shannen understand Serena's plan?

What and why is it "The Right thing to Do?"

Respond to this in relation to Serena's decision, the grade 8 trip, or Charlie Angus.

The traditional Spring Goose Hunt is important because elders teach about Cree culture and rituals, adults teach hunting and camping skills, and everyone participates.

- Watch the YouTube video, "Fall Family Hunt-The Northern Cree Way" (6:48). Learn how they hunt and prepare a moose that will feed them during the winter. The bush is their grocery store. This gives students an insight into different ways to spend time with the family. Note, the camp is a Device Free Zone. https://voutube/kyKM-ewJKEY
- List first experiences and impressions that the students encountered on their school trip. Camp Wenonah, Ottawa, panhandlers, University, city. . .

Watch YouTube video, "Shannen and Serena Koostachin Nov. 2009". Charlie Angus talks about reserve injustice. Shannen speaks of school and her reality. https:// youtube/NQNvOp6sZDg

Chapters 12-15: Remain true to your teachings and culture, wherever you are

The chapter titles are:

A Great Place for a Powwow; The Children Have a Voice; We are Not Going Away; Seeds of Hope.

Travel south begins. The students are presented with new experiences, new knowledge, crushing news, and strength to move forward. What was their original plan, how did it change?

"Oh Canada! Your home's on Native land." (pg. 93). Explain.

Shannen began an impromptu speech on Parliament Hill, on the National Day of Action, 2008.

"Today I feel down because the [INAC] minister said he didn't have the money to build our new school." Pg. 113.

Retell what happened in the minister's office, what Shannen said, and how the minister responded.

What is your reaction to the minister's decision?

Chapters 16-19: Repeat, repeat, hold your ground

The chapter titles are:

Three Little Words; Stepping Stones; Spreading Her Wings; The Back of the Bus.

Who is Cindy Blackstock?

What are the Convention on the Rights of the Child, The United Nation's, and First Nation **Treaty Rights?**

Things are not always what they seem. On June 11, 2008, the Prime Minister offered an historic apology for the mistreatment of First Nations children in residential schools. What three little words meant so much to Residential School Survivors yet caused Shannen's stomach to lurch, and made her furious, depressed, and even more determined that taking action was the right thing to do?

Shannen is nominated for the United Nations International Children's Peace Prize.

What is it?

How is this causing her to think about herself?

Her cause? Others?

How do her emotions factor into her changes?

Shannen is so happy to be in Timiskaming S.S., so happy to go home, so happy to return to school.

How can one person be so happy when there is so much change and disappointment in one's life?

What are some of the teachings her father and elders have given her to keep her centered and strong in the face of difficulty?

Retell the story of the Butterfly and the Fancy Shawl regalia.

Use a search engine to find a video of "Fancy Shawl Dance."

Watch a video and listen to the music, look at the dress, yoke, shawl, watch the dance and imagine Shannen dancing.

What do you do in your culture that helps you relate to Shannen and the story of the Butterfly and Fancy Shawl Dance?

Create a Running Record.

Read the news article on page 149, "Reserve teens want school building." Many facts are given.

Create a Running Record with a comparison chart.

List the facts given for Attawapiskat.

List facts about your situation. Assess the results.

What is your opinion in regards to Equity in Education?

Add more facts as you continue reading the book.

PG #	ATTAWAPISKAT ISSUE/DISASTER	YOUR SITUATION	RESPONSE

Chapters 20-24: The truth must be heard and responded to

The chapter titles are:

The Old Gray Ghost; Forget Me Not; The Journey of Hope; The Butterfly Dance.

J.R. Nakogee School wasn't very old when the diesel spill underground contaminated everything.

What were some of the good stories people remembered about the school?

Think of other positive aspects about the community and beauty of Attawapiskat: resilience, humour, close family bonds, lifelong friendships.

Track the demolition of the school and the effects on the community air quality.

Describe health issues.

The government said there was no danger to the people, yet independent reports identified chemicals that cause leukemia and other health problems.

Why might the government lie or disregard evident truths?

Deaths at early ages are known by the youth of Attawapiskat and many First Nations.

Explain and respond with fact, emotional response, dreams for change.

Again we hear about Attawapiskat being evacuated.

What does that mean? Why?

What would the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual impacts be on the people?

What would the financial impacts be?

Where does a whole community go? Sleep? Eat?

Everyone has a breaking point.

What is Shannen's breaking point?

How does Serena bring Shannen back?

What teachings and words give her strength?

The story ends with two powerful words. Discuss.

Epilogue: Shannen's Dream

Read this as a class. Discuss the emotional impacts of:

Shannen—Overcoming obstacles with the Canadian government, continuing life as an Indigenous teen, nearing graduation.

Shannen's parents—Their joy of raising a strong daughter who applied the Seven Grandfather teachings they gave her: honesty, truth, respect, wisdom, love, humility, and bravery; their ability to gift their daughter with a trip; the guilt, which is not theirs, but brings "what if" questions to the fore; their challenge to do as they taught their daughter.

Classmates—In New Liskeard and Attawapiskat.

Chelsea Edwards became the new ambassador for the Shannen's Dream Campaign. What is the campaign about?

In 2012, Chelsea Edwards was one of a small delegation of First Nation students who travelled to Geneva to meet with and read Shannen's letter to members of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Describe what her experience and emotions may have been like.

Historic Note (Pages 186-189)

We must understand the source of an issue to unravel the problems.

How was Aboriginal life pre-contact?

What was the early relationship between the Cree and the newcomers like?

How did change happen and why?

What was The James Bay Treaty No. 9 about?

Were the actions that followed the signing equitable?

How can Attawapiskat support the large population?

How was residential schooling part of the problem?

What was the purpose of residential schools?

Timeline (Pages 190-192)

This is a glimpse in time. The Royal Ontario Museum displays evidence of habitation in North America dating back 100,000 years. Most Aboriginal creation stories tell of how the people arrived on Turtle Island, which is different from the theory of the land bridge between Asia and North America. Questions abound. Be open-minded and respect not only creation stories, but the belief systems of others. They are all valid.

Teachers, add interesting facts to help build our historic understanding. E.g., Treaty No. 9 was signed in 1905. Canadian women gained the right to vote in 1918. First Nations men and women gained the right to vote in 1960. Connection—lands, resources, laws, boundaries and so forth are all done through government: federal, provincial, and municipal. First Nations lands were developed and harvested without any input from the First Nations peoples with whom the treaty was signed. This was and is unjust, yet even as people try to understand and make amends, it continues today in important matters such as forestry, mining, fishing and other resource management.

Make the timeline current. E.g., INAC was changed to the Ministry of the Crown with two streams: Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs and Ministry of Indigenous Services and is now changing to Indigenous Service Canada and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

Add information gleaned from the novel. Add when the school was built, opened, flooded, and reopened.

Research Attawapiskat today. The school has been built, flooded, closed, and reopened since this book was written. The DeBeer's diamond mine has been built, operational, productive, and closed as well. A state of emergency was called due to a suicide epidemic. There is so much more happening in Attawapiskat. The history is harsh and the solutions are difficult to find.

What can your class do to support Shannen's dream and the community of Attawapiskat today?

Or, what are the issues you face?

How can you address an issue, one step at a time, in your own moccasins? Brainstorm, take action, and never give up.

CULMINATING ACTIVITY IDEAS

Shannen and the Dream for a New School Game Board (Monopoly or Chutes and Ladders may be the template.)

In groups, have students brainstorm the key elements of their game board and how they can insert the story line of *Shannen and the Dream for a School* into the game elements. Include imaging of locations, problems faced, events that happened, supports that grew, disappointments, and so forth. Groups write rules, directions, questions/answers, and so on. Have them practise their own game to work out kinks, then exchange the boards with other students.

Round Robin Book Summary

Each chapter begins with a quotation. Have each student choose a quotation, and speak to it. What does it mean? How does it relate to the chapter? What insight does it give you? Get students to prepare jot notes after rereading their chapter. In a round robin format, have students read their quotation and state their response.

I Want My Education!

Shannen and her friends recognize the need for education. Write an essay about why you want an education, what your hopes and dreams are, how you plan to make things happen. Include connections to Shannen and her dream. Is your school similar? Different? How? Do people in your school get depressed/oppressed/determined? Are some without hope? Are forward thinking?

Third World Living Conditions in Canada

The novel focuses on the education disparities of Attawapiskat First Nation and the efforts of children to make things right. Research other standards of living that vary greatly between on-reserve First Nation peoples and mainstream Canadians. Housing, income, employment, health, and cost of living are issues to compare. There are 613 First Nations in Canada. They vary greatly. Which community is near you? Learn about it.

Choose One of the Following Quotations.

What does it mean to you? How can these words keep you moving forward when things get difficult?

"Never doubt that a small, thoughtful group of committee citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

-Margret Mead (pg. 98)

"An Aboriginal elder once told me that leaders accomplish great things when they have knowledge, passion, and spirit."

-Cindy Blackstock (pg. 124)

"I really thought that something would happen. I was just a naïve kid." -Shannen Koostachin (pg. 165)

Explain how Shannen had lost some of her innocence.

Research one of the following Indigenous people. Who are they and what have they been able to accomplish?

- Phil Fontaine
- Cindy Blackstock
- Murray Sinclair
- · Ta'Kaiya Blaney
- Autumn Peltier

Introduce students to the Second Story Press the First Nation Series for Young Readers with books highlighting First Nations environmentalists, athletes, musicians, and women.