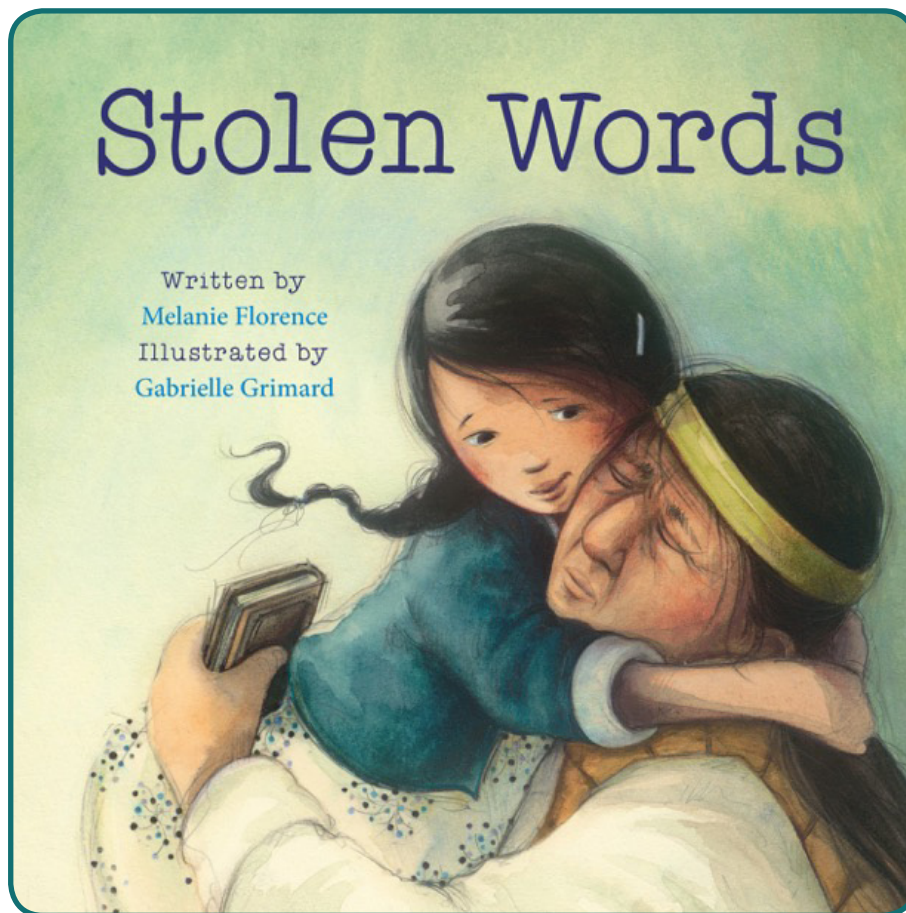


AGES 6-9 / GRADES 1-4

Stolen Words

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Teaching Guide

by

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Summary

When a lively little girl asks her grandfather how to say *grandfather* in their language, his pain is immediate. He shares his story of residential school, separation from family, community, language, and culture. He states, "I lost my words a long time ago."

The granddaughter's life has been very different. She has only good memories, but she listens to her grandfather with ears, heart, and spirit. Then she takes action with a gift that sets the two of them off on a new path of discovery, healing, reconciliation, and Cree language reclamation.

Notes to the Teacher

This guide is specific to the book. We realize it does not provide a full understanding of the complex issues surrounding residential schools and the experiences of Indigenous children and those connected to them.

Stolen Words can be used to help young students begin to understand concerns raised by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Call to Action. Miigwech for listening to and teaching this story.

"She" could be any of the hundreds of thousands of residential school descendants. We are all to move forward in a good way. *Bebomichiwebiik-iban* is a concept that Ojibway Elder, Ann Wilson of Rainy River First Nations, taught us years ago. She also taught us *Biskaabiyon*, that we must look back in our history to see events from many perspectives. We are to try to understand, to release negative energy, and make room for health and new ways of moving forward. We are to learn from mistakes. Many more teachings are held within *Biskaabiyon*, and I hope you and your students get a glimpse into the history of residential schools and the hope of Truth and Reconciliation.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The idea of a truth commission was determined to be necessary, as the majority of the Canadian public did not understand the story of the Indian Residential Schools system or appreciate its impact. There was a need to investigate and document the origin, purposes, and effects of residential schools and to have a national truth telling process in order to address the legacy of our shared history. This process was intended to take the burden of the experiences off of former students, their families, and their communities.

The TRC completed its work on December 15, 2015. The TRC's seven-volume final report detailed accounts of what happened to former students of Indian Residential Schools who were physically and sexually abused, as well as the lasting impacts on First

Nation families and communities. The TRC provided 94 Calls to Action to address the legacy of Indian Residential Schools. Among the Calls to Action is a demand for the repudiation of the “doctrine of discovery” that gave European colonizers the right to claim discovered lands as their own, as well as a request to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Assembly of First Nations website:

www.afn.ca/policy-sector/indian-residential-schools/

Definitions of Residential Schools (note the different “voice” of each site)

- a. Residential schools were government-sponsored religious schools established to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture.
www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca
- b. Indian Residential Schools: Between the 1860s and 1990s more than 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children were required to attend Indian Residential Schools, institutions operated by religious organizations and funded by the federal government.

The Canadian government removed First Nation children from their families and communities and placed them in these institutions. Many children were inadequately fed, clothed, and housed, and many were abused physically, emotionally, and sexually. Their languages and cultural practices were prohibited.

www.afn.ca

Visit the website www.trc.ca. This is the official site of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which dealt with residential schools as part of the action taken by the Canadian government after the formal apology was made to First Nations Peoples in 2008 and as part of the Indian Residential Settlement Agreement.

Learning Opportunities

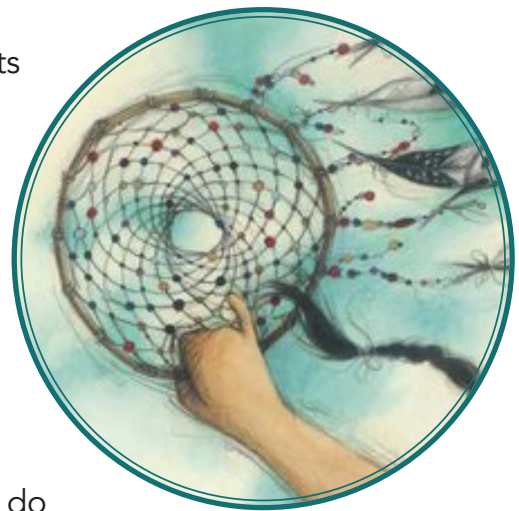
- Character Education
- Empathy, Prejudice, and Difference
- History and Social Studies, Canadian History
- First Nations and Indigenous Peoples
- Government and Citizenship
- Reflecting Diversity
- Social Justice (Residential Schools)
- Cree Language
- Family Relationships
- Social Studies
- Resilience

Preparing to Read *Stolen Words*

- Invite students to share their experiences, or the experiences of someone they know, with having something taken from them. Ask them to describe feelings connected with the loss.
- The characters in this story are Cree. Google “Canadian First Nations Languages map Cree”. There are many to choose from, choose one that will help your students make personal connections. Notice the vast region where Cree people live, where the Cree language was spoken. There are many dialects of Cree spoken in Canada. Which one is closest to you? Where are the nearest-to-you Cree communities? Google “First Nations Profile Interactive Map” and take a look.
- Explain to the children that there was a time when governments and Christian church leaders thought they could do a better job raising Indigenous children in Canada than their parents could. Do they find that hard to believe? Let them know that many sad things happened to the children. Ask them to listen carefully to Grandpa’s story. What did he lose? How did he feel?

Questions for Discussion

- “She was skipping and humming while clutching a dream catcher.” Ask the students about the granddaughter. She is coming home from school. Do you think she likes school? Why? Look at the illustrations to help you imagine. How must the little girl be feeling? How might her day have been? What clues does the illustrator use to help express these feelings?
- What is a dream catcher? What do your students know about dream catchers? Tell them how dream catchers were traditionally placed above a sleeping person to protect him or her from bad dreams. Good dreams were able to slip through the hole in the middle and slide down the feathers to the person below. Bad dreams, however, would get tangled in the dream catcher’s web and remain there until sunrise, disappearing only when the first sunbeams touched them. Ask students if they have something similar from their culture? How do their parents/guardians help them with dreams?
- The author tells us the granddaughter made her dream catcher out of “odds and ends.” What odds and ends did she have? What do you have at your house? Odds and ends reflect the things you do in your home. They can reflect your work, gender, ethnicity, age, and so much more. Archeologists learn about ancient people by sifting through



middens, the mounds of discarded odds and ends they have left behind.

- d. As the girl walks hand in hand with her grandpa, what does the picture tell you about their relationship? When she asks what she thinks is a simple question—"How do you say grandfather in Cree?"—Grandpa's pain and shame are immediate. He tells her that his words were lost. How were Grandpa's words stolen from him? How does he describe his Cree language and the way his mother spoke to him?
- e. Compare how the granddaughter came home from school on pages 1 and 2 with how Grandpa and his classmates looked in their residential school on pages 9 and 10. Note imagery, colour, faces, eyes, the bird, and cage. Why are the pictures so different?
- f. So what was residential school? Grandfather refers to it as "Away." Away from whom and what? How was he taken? Ask: When have you been "away" and what do you remember? What do you think Grandpa's experience was like? Reread his words.
- g. Use the notes provided above to help you guide students' discussion about this deep question.
- h. The granddaughter feels her grandpa's pain. Her experience has been different, how do we know her time at school is good? How does she help her grandpa? Who helped her find the gift to give him?

Responding to Stolen Words

Communication

Language is used to express how people interact and relate to the world in which they live. Language holds keys to worldview, relationships, values, beliefs, and even spirit.

Language may be expressed through words, song, body, emotion, and so much more. Different languages express things differently. It is good to know many languages so that we see the world from diverse viewpoints.

Body language is a physical form of communication in which physical behaviour is used to express or convey information, as opposed to words. Such behaviours include facial expressions, body postures, gestures, eye movements, touch, and the use of space. Body language exists in both animals and humans.



Cree Vocabulary

Words can carry many meanings. Work with these extended translations to appreciate Cree worldview.

- Gender may or may not be identified. *Nimosom* is gender specific but *nosisim* is not. We could ask both English and Cree speakers why gender is/is not specified. In this case, we will note and respect that there are differences. Neither is better than the other. They are just different.
- As you study the word *masinahikan* ponder on why there can be so many uses for the same word: book, report, magazine, and so on.

Cree became a written language just over a hundred years ago. Missionaries developed syllabics to write Cree in efforts to convert the people to Christianity. Missionaries also developed writing systems for other Indigenous languages, which are primarily oral (spoken). Indigenous written systems prior to contact included pictographs, petroglyphs, scrolls, winter counts, and petroforms. These systems continue to be used and evoke memory to tell a story as it was passed down through the generations.

Today, Native Language classes include both oral and written language.

The six Cree words in this story are the same in all three of the major western Cree dialects: Plains Cree (y-dialect, also called *nêhiyawêwin*), Swampy Cree (n-dialect, also called *ininîmowin*), and Woodlands Cree (th-dialect, also called *nîhithowîwin*). There are nine Cree dialects in Canada.

tânisi [TAHN-sih]: hello

tânisi is the word most commonly used in greeting.

We usually translate it as hello.

tânisi is also the question word how.

While we think "Hello," in English, Cree is also asking, "How are you?"

nimosôm [NIHmusement]: my grandfather

nimosôm means my grandfather.

Your grandfather is **kimosôm**.

His or her grandfather is **omosôma**.

Cree families speaking English often shorten the word to **mosôm**.



nôsisim [NOHS-sim]: my grandchild

nôsisim literally means my grandchild.

In this book, nôsisim is translated as my granddaughter.

Without the pictures and context, it could also be translated as my grandson. Cree doesn't have separate words for granddaughter or grandson.

And in Cree culture, nôsisim is an affectionate way for a Cree elder to address a young person, whether they are related or not.

masinahikan [mussih-NUH-eegun]: book

masinahikan can also be translated into English as letter, report, paper, document, drawing, or magazine—all depending on context.

pîkiskwêwin [peeKISS-kwaywin]: language

pîkiskwêwin is used in this book to mean language.

It too, can be translated into several different English words including: expression or phrase; speech, talk, or conversation; lecture; voice.

têniki [TAYN-key]: thank you

têniki is one of several ways people say “thank you” in Cree.

This form seems to have been borrowed from English.

Other informal words used for thanks include hay-hay (mostly in Alberta); or êkosi meaning that's good, that's enough (mostly in Manitoba).

When working on any writing, include Cree words so that all may hear this beautiful language. There are several videos on YouTube. Search: Cree 12-year-old. Listen to the boy speak.

Something Nice to Know

Among the many English words borrowed from the Cree language are: Muskeg, Muskrat, and Pemmican. Can your students find more?

English Vocabulary

Something Nice to Know: English is a hybrid language consisting of words from over 6,800 languages.

Words that evoke emotion and can be expressed through the body:

Skip	Hum	Clutch	Sway
Spin	Breath	Punish	Gnarled
Harsh	Sharp	Lose	Stolen

Act out the Words:

- Write words on paper, place in bowl. Students pull out a word, act it out, others guess.

Art

Cree language is part of the Algonquin language family. Dream catchers are known by many First Nations and Indigenous groups. Have children make their own dream catcher. Loren Spears, Director of the Tomaquag Museum and member of the Narragansette Nation, also of the Algonquin language family, can teach you how. It is important to listen to an Indigenous person who speaks with authenticity.

Google: Indigenous Artways podcast. Watch the four-episode series (each episode is 4–7 minutes long) entitled *Making Dream Catchers*. Use a map to show Rhode Island, where Loren's people are from. The series characters are Cree.

Material List:

- Bendable red willow branch, no thicker than your smallest finger, or a metal ring of the size desired
- Synthetic sinew, string, or hemp
- Pony beads, small feathers, or decorative materials (ensure space for good dreams to pass through)
- Leather or cording for hanging above bed

Watch the videos and follow the instructions.



WRITING: Letters to Grandpa's classmates

Ask your class to write letters to those children illustrated on pages 9 and 10. What might your students tell them? Ask the class what they seek comfort from. Have them include in their letter that they are now learning what happened in residential schools. Have them send good energy to the children to whom they are writing.

Share the letters.

The illustration of the children as their language is being taken from them is difficult and complex imagery. The bird may represent their language as it is stolen from them. Talk more about that.

It is difficult to place ourselves in another person's position, yet we must if we are to feel empathy and learn from the past.

How: Imagine that only the other official Canadian language will be used in their school.

Tell the children that tomorrow, things will be different at school. The government has decided that all Canadians must be fluent in *both* official languages—French and English. So tomorrow, for English students, everything will be done in French. Their English books will be replaced with French books, English-speaking teachers will be replaced by French-speaking teachers. The reverse is happening in French-language schools and classrooms to ensure that all of Canada will be truly bi-lingual. Everyone must speak French *and* English fluently. The children's challenge will be to function in an environment that is different in language only. As hard as this may be, it is much kinder than what children faced in residential schools. Remind them that, unlike residential school students, they will be able to go home after school and speak their own language in their own homes with their own families.

Have a good discussion about what changes they must make as individuals. What will they know? How silent will they be when they can't speak in their own language?

Invite your second-language teacher to take over tomorrow's class for a set period of time. Teach a science or social studies class in that language—something that gets the point across! Process the lesson. How did it feel? What caused anxiety? How did you help one another? How did the teacher help?

Now think about the children in Grandpa's class. They were taken from their homes and placed in an environment totally different from their own. The food was different. Their parents were gone. Their siblings were probably in a different area, if they were there at all. No talking in the language they spoke was allowed anywhere; not at recess, lunch, evening, or bedtime. Speaking their own language was severely punished. How hard that must have been!

Ask students to draw a picture of themselves when the second-language teacher was teaching.

Share the pictures.

DRAMA: Adapt the story into a play

Have the students adapt *Stolen Words* into a play. Create lines for the main characters, Granddaughter and Grandpa, from the story. Students can also add Grandpa's family members to the beginning of the story as he is taken from his home. Once there is an

understanding of the Indian Agent, his role might be included. The residential school teacher, and Grandpa's peers at residential school (remembering they are both younger and older students there), might also be included. You may also add Granddaughter's teacher as she helps find the Cree dictionary.

Using the Cree websites noted earlier, write and speak the final words of the play in Cree.

As the children act out their play, ensure they communicate the unspoken language illustrated in the pages of the book. Body language speaks volumes. Have them practise their best sad, depressed, oppressed body language. Not forgetting that the residential school system had a dreadful impact on First Nations people, always end with a practice of your students' best happy, exuberant, love-for-life selves.

Culminating Event

Present the play to the school, parents, community.

