



# TURTLE ISLAND READS

TEACHER GUIDE - Introduction & Pre-reading activity



This guide was created by **Curran Katsi'sorókwas Jacobs**. Curran is an educator in all facets of her life and is a firm believer that it is possible to walk in both Indigenous and Western worlds confidently. She is currently an Indigenous Resource Teacher in the adult sector and is focusing on providing equal parts academic support and cultural teaching with the pursuit of student success and reconciliation.

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## INTRODUCTION

**Turtle Island Reads** puts a spotlight on Indigenous writing by connecting authors and their writing with high school students. The project's goal is to spark conversation about Indigenous storytelling and Indigenous-settler relationships in classrooms.

When exploring the literature of a country, it is essential to include all stories of the land and the realities of all its people. Each unique story expands the canon of Canadian literature.

To accomplish this, **Turtle Island Reads** has selected three young adult novels — two full-length novels and one graphic novel.

In addition, we have created a curriculum guide, so teachers can bring the themes to light in their classrooms. Throughout Turtle Island Reads, we hope to see students and their teachers endorse a novel (or all three), acting as role models to begin implementing more Indigenous literature into their classrooms and curriculum.

The following notes and activities are meant to be used as a way of introducing students to Indigenous literature and preparing them for reading any or all of the 2019 Turtle Island Reads titles.

On **December 3**, we will be releasing a second teacher guide on [curio.ca](https://www.curio.ca) that will include specific reading activities and extensions for each of the three **Turtle Island Reads** books.



## The importance of Incorporating/Introducing Indigenous authors into the classroom



***“The truth about stories is that that’s all we are....But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now.”***

– Thomas King in *The Truth About Stories* (Massey Lectures 2003)

One of the first things we ask our students when they are approaching something new is for them to dig deep into themselves, and to tell us what they already know about new concepts, and where in their lives they have seen this before. In essence, we ask them to tell us their stories. Thomas King said it succinctly in his Massey Lectures, “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are.”

Stories define us, they encompass all our life experiences and they inform others about who we are and how we got there.

Indigenous literature can appeal to us as readers both by telling powerful personal stories and by offering new perspectives and insight into bigger issues. On a smaller scale, these stories can teach us about the author's direct



experiences, their surroundings, culture and knowledge. On a grander scale, these stories reflect the history of different nations, both before and after colonialism began; they reflect the Canadian (and American, and even borderless) contexts that coexist with mainstream narratives. Most importantly, engaging with contemporary Indigenous authors offers the opportunity to shift the way we think and talk about Indigenous people. Whereas in the past we primarily encountered stories about Indigenous people; we now have access to stories by

Indigenous people.

Beyond simply listening to stories, however, it is essential to reflect upon what you do with this new story or new knowledge that you have acquired. Introducing Indigenous authors into the classroom is as much about developing social consciousness, as it is about developing literacy. We want students to read and to engage in critical thinking with what they have read. Traditional literacy skills are developed through the engagement with Indigenous literature.

Simultaneously, when we read a novel from a different culture, we are working on developing our cultural literacy. It comes down to engaging students with stories about others and about themselves, and asking them why does this matter? Allowing the space to prioritize Indigenous voices alongside other voices in literature is part of the civic engagement that is necessary for reconciliation.

Reading Indigenous literature is about privileging marginalized voices — Indigenous voices.



It is about sharing stories of the land from the original peoples and exploring the cultures that have survived and flourished despite colonization. More importantly, it is about understanding parts of the world that are often overlooked, and spending time discussing real

Indigenous issues that surface in the stories. Engaging with Indigenous literature means engaging with people, history and legacy. Thomas King told us that stories are what we are — as a collective and as individuals. What we do with those stories, however,

that is where change happens. He reminds us: “Don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now.”



## A NOTE ON COLONIALISM, COLONIZATION AND SETTLERS

**Colonialism** and **colonization** are terms that are largely used interchangeably.

Most definitions focus on **colonialism** as the "practice or policy" of exerting control over another country or territory and its people. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy provides this definition: "colonialism is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another...The term colony comes from the Latin word *colonus*, meaning farmer. This root reminds us that the practice of colonialism usually involved the transfer of population to a new territory, where the arrivals lived as permanent settlers while maintaining political allegiance to their country of origin."<sup>1</sup>

By comparison, most definitions of **colonization** characterize it as the "action" of exerting control over people in another country.

What is perhaps the most important distinction to make is that there has been no real end to colonization in Canada.

This is why some historians and academics suggest that it may be useful for non-Indigenous Canadians to consider themselves as **settlers**, as a way of acknowledging that Canada is still “deeply entangled” in the project of colonialism<sup>2</sup>. It is one way to begin grappling with our post-contact reality and the fact that colonizing acts continue to occur regularly in our Canadian context.

Sources:

1. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism/>
2. Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada.  
Fernwood Publishing:  
<https://fernwoodpublishing.ca/book/settler>



## Special Considerations

There are two important considerations when taking on Indigenous literature for the first time.

The first one, although not specific to the books themselves, is a good rule to follow in any context. Language is very powerful in that a single word can carry so much meaning. While engaging with a story by an Indigenous author, take note of which nation or community the story is about. This can change the context of a story greatly as there are major cultural

differences between the contexts of an Urban Ojibwe person living in Toronto and a Cree person from Nunavik. This is part of what makes each narrative unique and valuable; acknowledging these differences is essential.

A further note on terminology: currently the most common catchall term is Indigenous, which encompasses First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Moving away from terms like Native or Indian is wise as they connote different meanings depending on context and might not always seem appropriate. Perhaps characters in the story use

the term Indian to refer to themselves or to other Indigenous people. Why might they do this? There is a question that requires some critical thinking and discussion!

The second consideration when approaching stories by Indigenous authors is something that takes a little bit of practice. The way literature and all of its devices and concepts are taught generally comes from a Eurocentric foundation.



Contemporary Indigenous authors are decolonizing the medium of novel writing by infusing their worldviews and ways of being in this traditionally Western genre. It can seem challenging at first because the ways we have been taught to read and search for

meaning may not always apply to every written piece. There are contextual and cultural differences that surface in some of the writing: white light in some instances might symbolize heaven and God, but consider if the use of the colour white necessarily connotes that in

a different cultural context. Ask questions and you might see something in a way you've never imagined before.



## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

### POSTER CREATION

Provide students with a blank piece of paper, and guide them through creating a poster of their own community.

Students will draw all of the important elements of their surroundings on their poster. They should draw their town, waterways, families, churches and other spaces of worship, and/or community centres — any spaces and/or people that are essential in their lives.

Once they have completed this task, in the blank spaces of their page, they should complete the following written task.

### WRITTEN REFLECTION

Choose three colours for the three types of written reflections outlined on the following page. Create a legend for each colour on your sheet, so that readers can differentiate.

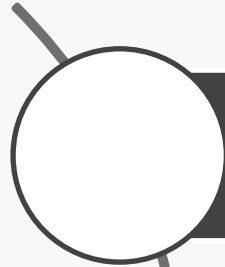


### POWERPOINT

The instructions for students, legends, examples and guiding questions in this pre-reading activity are available for download in PowerPoint at:

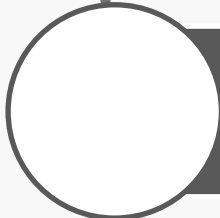
[www.curio.ca/turtleislandreads](http://www.curio.ca/turtleislandreads)





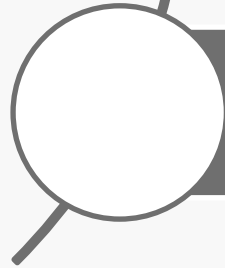
### **Colour 1: PRESENCES –**

Across the page, in the different parts of your life, write down, label and brainstorm any and all of the spaces where Indigenous people, culture, knowledge and/or history are present.



### **Colour 2: ABSENCES –**

Across the page, in the different parts of your life, write down, label and brainstorm any and all of the spaces where Indigenous people, culture, knowledge and/or history are absent.



### **Colour 3: DESIRES –**

Across the page, in the different parts of your life, write down, label and brainstorm any and all of the spaces where you desire to see the cultures, knowledge, history and Indigenous people present.



EXAMPLES:

**Presence:** There are Indigenous students who go to my school.

**Absence:** There are many statues in my community, but none of them are Indigenous related.

**Desire:** I'd like to see more Indigenous presence in school — more cultural activities or something.



## PRESENTATION AND DEBRIEF

This is where the options are plenty. Here are several ways that you can explore students' reflections. Engaging in a class discussion is highly recommended following the poster creation/written reflection above. This can be done immediately following the written reflection or after the gallery walk extension activity (outlined on following page).

### CLASS DISCUSSION

Together as a group, have students work through the following guiding questions as well as any additional questions you deem appropriate. Ask students to take stock of their own experiences of engaging with Indigenous peoples, communities, cultures and knowledge.



### Guiding Questions:

- Where have you learned about Indigenous Peoples of Canada?
- Why are Indigenous culture and people missing from different parts of your life?
- What are some questions you have about Indigenous people?
- What do you know about the history of your community and the land?
- What do you know about the term “settler”? What does it mean to be a settler? What does it mean to be Indigenous?



### Extension: Gallery Walk (optional)

Have students post the posters/reflections they created earlier on the wall, and invite students to look over each other's experiences. Allow students the opportunity to share any initial reactions or questions following the gallery walk. If you did not engage in class discussion before the gallery walk, this may be a good time to consider the guiding questions offered above.

### Extension: Mural Activity (optional)

Have students work together to create a larger scale community on the wall. This can be done with poster boards, on a bulletin board, or across any available space that you have in your classroom. Encourage students to collaborate by compiling their reflections from the initial activity and representing this in a mural. As the class reads a novel, and develops their knowledge, they may add, change or take away any elements from their mural, thus representing their changing positions as they learn more.

Citation for activity:

Taylor, L. K. (2014). *Inheritance as intimate, implicated publics: Building practices of remembrance with future teachers in response to residential school survivor testimonial media and literature. R.I. Simon: A pedagogy of public possibility; Special Journal issue of Canadian Social Studies, 47, 2: 110-126. Available at <https://canadian-social-studies-journal.educ.ualberta.ca/content/articles>.*

