

WINTER 2023 | VOLUME 101 NUMBER 2

# MBTEACHER

NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY



**RESISTANCE ON  
THE GIIMOOCH:  
THE LIFE OF  
MARY COURCHENE**

**D&D CLUBS BRING  
ADVENTURE TO SCHOOLS**

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**QAUMAJUQ INDIGENOUS  
FOCUSED LEARNING**

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**MTS MEMBERSHIP  
POLL RESULTS**



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## COVER STORY RESISTANCE ON THE GIIMOCH: THE LIFE OF MARY COURCHENE

*Resistance on the Giimooch: The Life of Mary Courchene* is a comprehensive learning resource including lesson plans and a teacher's guide. With the Medicine Wheel Four Directions as its foundation and storytelling at its heart, the lessons reveal truth, unshakably rooted in culture, family, language and ways of knowing. With *Resistance on the Giimooch*, Mary and her family share their intergenerational strength—strength to be, to heal, and through education, to share a path towards resurgence.

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## D&D CLUBS BRING EDUCATIONAL ADVENTURES TO SCHOOLS

Dungeons and Dragons—or D&D—is exploding in popularity. The oldest and most popular role-playing game has expanded into the digital space, and two Manitoba teachers say the collaborative, storytelling game's problem-solving and relationship building potential pays big dividends in the classroom.

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## WAG-QAUMAJUQ: SHINING A LIGHT ON INDIGENOUS-FOCUS LEARNING

This winter, WAG-Qaumajuq offers an immersive exploration of climate change, identity, intergenerational relations and traditional knowledge. Robert Houle: Red is Beautiful features 90 large-scale installations showcasing the Manitoba-born, Anishinaabe Saulteaux artist and educator's Residential School experience and the healing power of art.

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## MTS MEMBERSHIP POLL: ISSUES FACING MANITOBA'S PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATORS

We asked and you answered! Check out what MTS members have to say about job satisfaction, mental health, class composition and workload, as well as the increasing need for better, more timely resources for students (spoiler: nine in 10 teachers say their students need more support). And what do Manitoba's teachers think about the current provincial government?



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## Stephanie Emberly PAGE 32

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## Leslie Dickson PAGE 34

Leslie Dickson is past president of the Reading Council of Greater Winnipeg. After 13 years teaching English Language Arts (ELA) and History at Elmwood High School, she became a professional support service teacher. Leslie is currently in her 25<sup>th</sup> year as a member of the Winnipeg Teachers' Association.

FROM THE  
PRESIDENT



# FULL OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

## James Bedford

I leave office proud of all we've accomplished together.

This will be my last column for the MB Teacher magazine, as I retire in February. It's not been the journey that I expected it to be, due largely to an unscheduled global pandemic. Had I known in advance what challenges lay in wait for me as president, I might not have taken the opportunity to serve. And that would have been unfortunate; I'd have missed out on some of the hardest—and best—learning and growth experiences of my life.

When elected vice president I was clear that I was a teacher first, and my values were rooted in the classroom. I still believe that teachers need to be represented by teachers, united in their commitment to equitable public education for all. That foundational commitment bonds our membership and cements the mission of The Manitoba Teachers' Society.

### PRESIDENCY SAW SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

My time as president saw significant change in both operational and political leadership. The restructuring vision that began with General Secretary Roly Stankevicius came to fruition under the brilliant leadership of Executive Director Danielle Fullan Kolton. Today, the Society is more responsive to the needs of its members than ever before. Our communications have improved vastly. And we are far more transparent in our decision-making. Politically, your Provincial Executive is an exceptional team dedicated to working together on behalf of members.

The Society has accomplished much over the past four years: ground-breaking arbitration decisions in Louis Riel and Pembina Trails and joining forces with the labour community to defeat Bill 28, which sought to negate the right to free and fair collective bargaining. We witnessed Manitobans from

every corner of the province join teachers to Slam the Door on 64, forcing the government to withdraw legislation that would fundamentally erode the democratic process. And I am excited to see the Society begin historic negotiations for the first collective agreement to cover each and every MTS member in the province.

Leaving prior to the end of my term is about my health and wellness. Because Vice President Nathan Martindale and I have worked so well and so collaboratively, I have every confidence that he is prepared to serve you as president for the interim until annual elections are held at the Provincial Council meeting in May.

There remain many challenges on the horizon for public education. Some are anticipated; others, like the pandemic, cannot be. We must shy away from neither, and we will not, knowing that together we champion a profession integral to the development of our children, our future, and a just society.

### PLANNING AND PREPAREDNESS

Teachers prepare for challenges—even unanticipated ones—through planning and preparedness, just as your Society has done. To meet those challenges, we must come together with one voice and one purpose. Our victories in the midst of the pandemic speak to the strength of our collective agency, and we must never doubt its power.

To all those who have supported me over the years, my sincere thanks. I leave office proud of all we've accomplished together, and full of hope for the future. <sup>1</sup>

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FROM THE  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR

## RECONCILIATION WORK IN THE CLASSROOM

**Danielle Fullan Kolton, Ph.D.**

MTS is committed to meaningful  
non-performative reconciliation.

I've always been struck by one particular statement made by Senator Murray Sinclair as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: "Education is what got us here, and education is what will get us out." It crystalizes the role of education in undoing the harms of the past and present by teaching truth—that which must precede reconciliation.

Perhaps this is why the words of Elder Mary Courchene were so impactful as I devoured this issue of *The Manitoba Teacher*: "Today's teachers have a powerful opportunity to champion the truth. They are positioned, perhaps better than anyone else, to create fundamental and enduring change".

### ADVANCING RECONCILIATION LEARNING

This responsibility is not lost on educators. Yet many teachers feel paralyzed by the task, having themselves been taught in an era characterized by misinformation, disinformation, and destructive and traumatizing narratives of Indigenous Peoples. Settler teachers are hungry to do this work in meaningful and non-performative ways.

This may be why our *Indigenous Education Series: Teachers Talking to Teachers* captured the attention of over 90 teachers and teacher candidates who logged into the first session in January. This professional learning, coordinated by the Indigenous Voice and Action Standing Committee and MTS staff, gets to the heart of three key topics that may hold teachers back from advancing Reconciliation work within their classrooms. Follow the link or check out [mbteach.org](https://mbteach.org) for more information.


In this issue, we are thrilled to introduce *Resistance on the Giimooch: The Life of Mary Courchene*, a Residential School curriculum and comprehensive resource including a teacher's

guide and sixteen lesson plans (pgs 14-23). This impactful work was a collaboration between MTS and Seven Oaks School Division. It is powerful, not only because of Elder Mary's voice, but also because her story channels truth, resistance, healing, and hope to reclaim the story and identity of her family.

For more learning and support with reconciliation, check out WTA member Leslie Dickson's book review of *Five Little Indians* (p. 34).

As a teacher and MTS member, remember that you receive free admission to WAG-Qaumajuq. With online resources, education modules linked to Manitoba curriculum and customized PD opportunities, it opens a world of Indigenous Knowledge through connection to art, artists, and traditional storytelling (p. 28). Be sure to check it out.

MTS is committed to the work of reconciliation both at the micro level in supporting members with learning resources, and at the macro level, advocating for change within the public education system and our own settler organization governed by colonial practices and ways of knowing. Through ongoing resolutions advanced at our Annual General Meeting of Provincial Council, advocacy work at the over 50 consultation tables MTS members and staff contribute to, and our own internal work and learning through an organizational Equity Scan, the work of reconciliation remains a priority.

As Maya Angelou said, "When we know better, we must do better." And so it follows that our commitment to the truth is our responsibility to the future. For meaningful reconciliation to occur, that truth must irrevocably reside in our classrooms, our relationships, and our learning. 



# D&D CLUBS BRING EDUCATIONAL ADVENTURES TO SCHOOLS

By Matea Tuhtar, MTS Staff

Dungeons and Dragons—or D&D—is exploding in popularity. The oldest and most popular role-playing game has expanded into the digital space, and two Manitoba teachers say the collaborative storytelling game’s problem-solving and relationship building potential pays big dividends in the classroom.

*“Your party arrives at a dungeon at the same time, to answer the same advertisement asking for help retrieving an artifact. When you start to argue about whether or not you should work together and split the reward, you get ambushed by a small group of goblins. What’s your next move?”*

When teacher Curtis Bilewitch proposes a Dungeons and Dragons storyline to his students, he’s never sure how the adventure will go or where the characters will end up. All he knows is his students will have a ton of fun and do a lot of learning along the way - often without even realizing it.

“It’s really a choose your own adventure type of game, with different plots and arcs. I give the kids problems to solve and puzzles to work out and they just run with

it,” says Bilewitch, who teaches English and social studies at Sisler High School in Winnipeg. “It gets my creative juices going and they love it so much—I feed off that enthusiasm.”

Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) is a collaborative storytelling and role-playing game in which players can create their own characters and form adventuring parties that explore a fantasy world and complete various quests. The game is led by a Dungeon Master who guides and narrates the story and reminds the players of the game rules. The Player’s Handbook is the essential reference for the game, alongside numerous other supplement books such as the popular Monster Manual.

D&D is the oldest and most popular role-playing game, originating in the ‘70s as a

tabletop game, and in more recent times expanding to the digital space. Played by over 20 million people worldwide, D&D can be found everywhere—from friend leagues played in basements, to pop culture references (it has recently gained even more attention due to the Netflix show *Stranger Things*).

And D&D is also becoming popular in schools—much to the delight of teacher Jonah Simmonds.

Simmonds is a substitute teacher in Winnipeg who has presented about D&D at MTS PD Day and has recently established the Manitoba Educators D&D Council—a group of teachers who run D&D and other role-playing game clubs. As a Dungeon Master and long-time enthusiast of the game, Simmonds says he was pleasantly

surprised to find so many clubs in schools, such as the three groups that Bilewitch runs at Sisler.

“Every school that I go to, I will try to find out if they have a D&D or role-playing club. And I will get the teacher to join our Discord group so we have a way to communicate with each other,” says Simmonds.

“We have the Manitoba Esports Association, but nothing specifically for D&D or role-playing games and I really wanted to change that.”

For Simmonds, what sets D&D apart from video games is its versatility and usefulness for education and teaching. At its core D&D is tied to literacy and reinforces problem solving, language arts, drama and interpersonal skills. Mental math is often involved to figure out game

modifiers, and teachers can use problems in the game to incorporate other parts of the curriculum such as science and history.

“One of the teachers I know is getting his students to try and get their characters to achieve the power of flight without magic,” explains Simmonds. “So the kids are trying to figure out how to basically create combustion engines and make gunpowder in a medieval setting. The potential for curriculum tie-ins is huge.”

The social aspects of the game is something that Bilewitch often sees resonate with his students. “They really make friends in the club. All the players have to work together cooperatively - they rely on each other. It can be great for kids who are maybe a little shy or scared to come out of their shell in real life.”

Today his students have the option of playing in person or joining in from home, but during the height of the pandemic the groups moved to playing fully online. “I had a parent during COVID contact me and say, ‘Please keep this club going, it does wonders for my daughter’s mental health and she looks forward to it every week.’ The kids love it. We even keep the clubs going during the summer when they’re out of school.”

Bilewitch says that when he began playing the game as a kid, every boy he knew was into the role-playing games and there wasn’t a single girl. “Today it’s at least 50/50.”

“Having a character to play can be very freeing for a student. A character that you create could be very brave, while you may







not feel as brave in real life. You can be transgendered, female characters playing male characters—whatever. In D&D you can be whoever you want to be.”

Simmonds agrees. “Ideals, bonds and flaws are the main topics that I use when I get my students to craft their character stories. The life lessons they can learn through the game are huge. I had one student who realized his character had been awful and he chose to do a self-sacrifice in order to save some others. That was a really great growth moment.”

The learning curve for D&D can seem

daunting at first but there are a lot of resources available to help, both online and in books. And Simmonds and Bilewitch say they would be happy to help any teachers looking to start a club of their own.

“This is what I’m looking to create with the D&D Council,” says Simmonds. “I want to have a place where teachers can talk and get ideas and also create a way for all these kids to get together and socialize.” Simmonds envisions a role-playing conference in the future where students and teachers from across the province can get together and build community.

“Students are always surprised to hear there are a lot of others playing the game. I want these kids to connect with each other over these shared passions, because there are so many of these clubs around and people don’t realize it.”

And as for student feedback? “Well, they’re always showing up. That tells you right there,” says Bilewitch. “I’ve had kids going through rough times who have told me they only came to school because it’s D&D day. Even when they’re going through stuff, the club inspires them to show up and make the effort.” <sup>T</sup>

# D&D CURRICULUM GUIDE & TEACHING KIT

## D&D CURRICULUM GUIDE

For a great D&D curriculum guide and free teaching kit visit <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/educators> or scan the QR code.



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# MTS MEMBERSHIP POLL:

## ISSUES FACING MANITOBA’S PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATORS

By Samantha Turenne, MTS Staff

After holding the top spot for two years, COVID-19 has fallen off the radar as a concern for Manitoba’s teachers (3%). According to the latest MTS membership poll, funding cuts (35%), inadequate resources (33%) and class sizes (19%) are the most pressing issues facing Manitoba’s 16,600 public school educators.

The annual poll, commissioned by MTS and conducted by Viewpoints Research, contacted 806 MTS members randomly selected from across the province to find out their views on issues ranging from their level of job satisfaction, and reasons for job dissatisfaction to feelings about their own mental health and perceptions of the supports and services available to them and their students, and much more.

Overall job satisfaction is in line with 2021 results with 85 per cent of members reporting being satisfied with their jobs, however those who are very satisfied continue to slide to a new historic low (29%).

### JOB SATISFACTION

The highest level of overall job satisfaction recorded was in 2006 (94%). 2006 also saw the highest number of members who were very satisfied with their jobs (55%). Overall job satisfaction and the percentage of members who are very satisfied with their jobs has gradually decreased since 2006.

Respondents indicated that class composition (61%) and workload (41%) were the two main reasons they were less satisfied with their jobs. Behavioural concerns saw the biggest increase, rising to 19 per cent from 11 per cent in 2021, as a factor in job dissatisfaction.

Members continue to lean on their



colleagues for support, with 86 per cent agreeing that they feel the most supported by their peers. This statistic remains unchanged since 2019.

Most educators think MTS (94%), local school boards (78%) and trustees (65%) are reliable sources of information about education issues. However, only half of respondents perceive the news media as a reliable source of information.

### PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Looking at the provincial government, even with a change in leadership, trust in government remains at an all-time low. A

little more than three in 10 respondents (34%) consider Education Minister Wayne Ewasko to be a reliable source of information. By comparison, in 2017, 45 per cent of respondents agreed that Education Minister Ian Wishart was reliable. Wishart holds the highest reliability rating of all education ministers since 2016.

When it comes to Premier Heather Stefanson, 18 per cent of respondents consider her to be reliable. This is the lowest rating of a premier in recent history. Premier Brian Pallister had a 27 per cent reliability rating in 2020, while Premier Goertzen in 2021 during his short stint as

head of the province polled at 28 per cent among MTS respondents.

The provincial government has been touting its investments in mental health supports for students and school staff and based on respondent feedback there are some improvements. Close to nine in 10 respondents agreed there is high awareness around mental health at their school (87%) and a majority agreed that mental health is promoted among students (79%) and staff (76%). Furthermore, three in four members agreed their students currently benefit from mental health supports and seven in 10 agreed when a need is identified, supports are accessible.

While this is a step in the right direction, a great need still exists. Nine in 10 respondents agreed that more students in their classroom could benefit from supports.

### MENTAL HEALTH

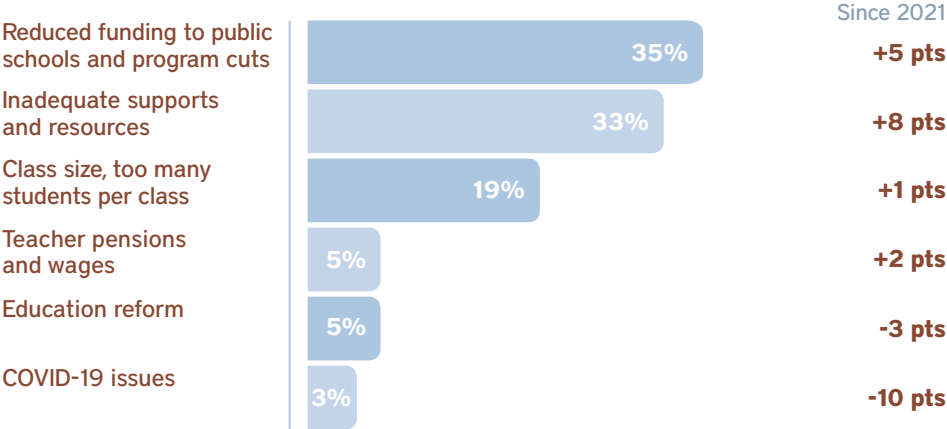
The story is similar when it comes to teachers’ mental health – some improvement, but still a long way to go. More than half of respondents rate their mental health as somewhat good to very good (51%) and, compared to last year, a similar number said their mental health is somewhat better to much better (50%). However, respondents are much less likely to be very stressed (36%) compared to 2020 (56%).

Most members (83%) are aware of the MTS Member and Family Assistance Program (HumanaCare) which was launched on Jan. 1, 2022. The service has been accessed by 30 per cent of respondents, totaling just under 5,000 members. Two out of three members were satisfied with the counseling services offered through HumanaCare.

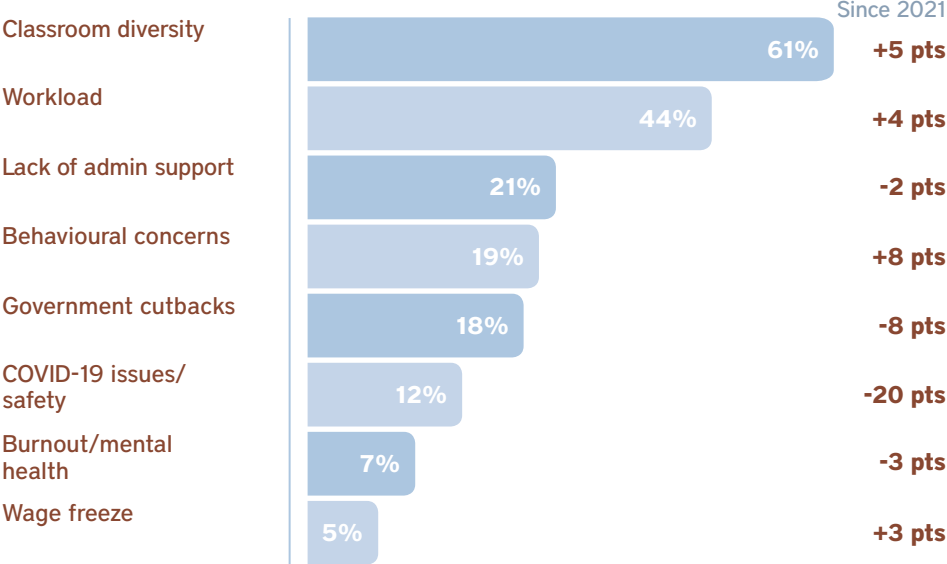
Overall confidence in the ability of MTS to advocate for public education remains high at 82 per cent. Members who feel they are better off as part of MTS is similar to past results (80%). The main benefits of MTS membership are support/protection/job security, strength in numbers and representation (69%), unchanged from previous years.

The margin of error for this poll is  $\pm 3.3\%$ , with the data considered accurate 19 times out of 20.

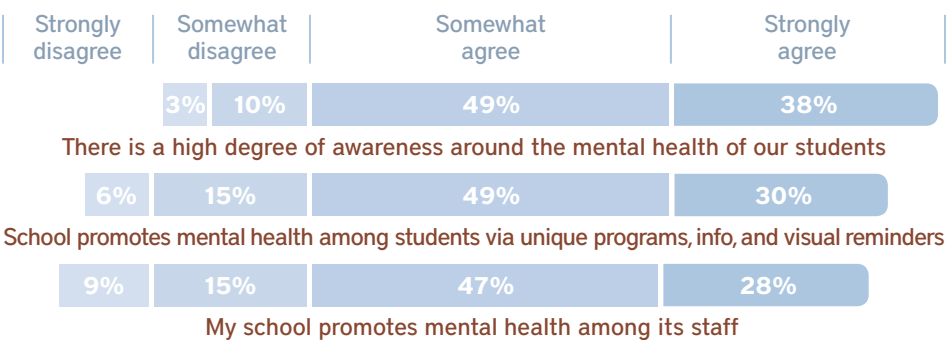
COVID-19 retreated as the single biggest concern of teachers, replaced by funding cuts, inadequate supports/resources and class size.



Behavioural concerns increased the most as a reason they are less satisfied with their job (+8 points), while COVID-19 issues/safety was down 20 points.



Close to nine in 10 (87%) agree there is high awareness around mental health at their school and a majority agrees mental health is promoted among students (79%) and staff (76%).







# RESISTANCE ON THE GIIMOOCH:

## THE LIFE OF MARY COURCHENE

By Anne Bennett, MTS Staff

*Resistance on the Giimooch: The Life of Mary Courchene*, a comprehensive learning resource that includes sixteen lesson plans and a teacher’s guide, launches this month on The Manitoba Teachers’ Society website [mbteach.org](http://mbteach.org). Through storytelling both written and oral, Mary Courchene, Elder in Residence in Seven Oaks School Division, shares her life and how her history, family, culture, language, and ways of knowing preserved her spirit, sharpened her focus, fuelled her determination and led her to the place – and person – she is today.

When asked about the title of the project, Mary says, “It means on the down-low, in secret,” with a little laugh, she adds, “We had to hold onto our identity quietly, unseen. It was very risky, but there was power in it.”

### GIFT OF TRUTH AND THE POWER OF STORIES

It was only near the completion of the project that its title, *Resistance on the Giimooch*, came to Mary.

*“When I was about 12, a nun locked me and my best friend in the bathroom so we couldn’t go to supper. We were being punished because we didn’t pick up the things in the playroom that we were told to. I got my friend to stand on my shoulders and squeeze out the window. She came around and unlocked the door so we could go to supper. When we were eating, the nun saw us and took us back to the playroom. When we got*



there, she told us to get back into the bathroom and I said no. She picked up a bat and aimed it at my friend. I thought she was going to kill her, so I ran and grabbed the bat. The nun fell and I unintentionally stepped on her veil, and it came off. I said, “don’t do that again”, in the language. I didn’t think about it, I just knew I had to protect my friend. The nun just sat there on the floor; she was so stunned by it. We went back and ate supper and she never came to punish us again. We sure got away with that one.”

### STEPPING INTO ROLE OF TEACHER

Throughout her time at Residential School and the years since, Mary has routinely reflected on the intentional acts of genocide against her being and spirit. As an adult, undefeated by the loneliness and devastation of her past and an education system determined to destroy her, Mary would step into the role of a teacher. She recognized that one of the ways she could change a school system that attempted to erase who she was as an Indigenous person was to disrupt it from within.

*“In the early 70s, I found out there was a new program starting at Brandon University. And I thought, wow, there’s an opportunity for me. I lived on the reserve, but I wasn’t going to leave my kids. So I wrote a letter to the university about my life in the Residential School and why I wanted to leave the reserve to take this program. I felt it was an opportunity to do something for me and for my children. I basically wrote an autobiography. And based on that, they wrote me back and said I was accepted. The only problem was they wanted me for an orientation the very next weekend. I had very little money, with seven kids from ages three months to 13 years old, and I thought “What am I going to do, how can I get to Brandon with my kids?” Then I thought of a plan, once again on the Giimooch. I decided to borrow my husband’s car, and I say my husband’s car because back then you were subservient to your husband. I couldn’t just ask him if*

“

**I CAN SEE THE CHANGES OVER THE YEARS, OVER THE GENERATIONS. I CAN’T HELP BUT NOTICE THAT THE THIRD GENERATION, MY GRANDCHILDREN, THEY’RE ANGRY. THEY’RE MAD AT THE WORLD FOR THE WAY THEIR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS WERE TREATED, AND THEY ARE STRONG IN CLAIMING BACK WHAT WAS DENIED THEM. AND I UNDERSTAND THAT. BUT WITH THE FOURTH GENERATION, MY GREAT GRANDCHILDREN, IT IS ALREADY DIFFERENT AND THAT FILLS MY SOUL. THEY ARE JOYFUL AND HAPPY BEING WHO THEY ARE, AND THEY EMBRACE THE LANGUAGE, THEY EMBRACE THE CULTURE. I AM A HOPEFUL PERSON, AND MY HOPE IS WITH THE LITTLE ONES. THEY ARE THE HEALERS.**

*I could go because he would have said no, and I would’ve listened as he was the authority. So, I told him I wanted to go to bingo, and he gave me a bit of money for it, which I used for gas. I didn’t even have a driver’s license, but that was beside the point. I drove my husband to work, went back to the*

*house and packed up the kids. We put our stuff in garbage bags and took off. I wrote my husband a note and told him “I’m going to School in Brandon, I’ll talk to you later, love Mary”. That’s all I said. We went to Brandon and showed up at my brother’s place because I had nowhere else to go, and he let us stay. When my husband found the note, he got someone to drive him to Brandon to find us. He had quit his job on the reserve and followed us out there. He understood. He knew it was so we could have a better life, so our children could have a better life.”*

### “WE ARE SORRY”

Fast forward to June 11, 2008. Mary sat in Ottawa in the gallery of the House of Commons as then Prime Minister Stephen Harper read a statement of apology to survivors of Indian Residential Schools in Canada.

“The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly,” he said. “Nous le regrettons. We are sorry. Nimitataynan. Niminchinowesamin. Mamiattugut.”

As the apology was read, Courchene began to sob. “My first instinct was to feel shame that I was showing emotion. But when I looked around, I saw other survivors openly crying, too. It was a moment of finally hearing the government say yes, you’re right, this happened, you were wronged. And we did this to you.”

Events such as the apologies by the Canadian prime minister and more recently the pope were particularly searing for Mary, as she felt her childhood experiences were being unpacked on varying levels—the impact on herself, and in the broader Canadian context.

Mary’s goal in sharing her story far and wide has always been in the name of a better future for Indigenous children and youth. Despite the genocide of Indigenous people, their culture, rights, language, and ways of knowing and being, despite the pain and suffering that have spanned generations, with *Resistance on the Giimooch*, Mary and



Elder Mary Courchene and her fourth generation grandchildren Sacha, Niko, James and Ava (L to R)

her family have both re-claimed and shared their power. The power to be, to heal, and through education, to change the course of history.


### THE HEALERS WILL PREVAIL

“I can see the changes over the years, over the generations,” she says. “There is my generation, my children’s generation, the third generation of my grandchildren and now their children, the fourth generation, my great grandchildren, who are the young people now. I can’t help but notice that the third generation, my grandchildren, they’re angry. They’re mad at the world for the way their

parents and grandparents were treated, and they are strong in claiming back what was denied them. And I understand that. But with the fourth generation, my great grandchildren, it is already different and that fills my soul. They are joyful and happy being who they are, and they embrace the language, they embrace the culture. I am a hopeful person, and my hope is with the little ones. They are the healers.”

Mary concludes that it is the healers who will prevail, the healers who have heard the voices that cannot speak and will pass along hope to future generations.

### DEDICATED TO THE YOUNG ONES

*“Resistance on the Giimooch: The Life of Mary Courchene,”* is dedicated to both the young ones who endured Canada’s Residential Schools through quiet, unseen, courageous moments of resistance and to the young ones today who will resist in plain sight. In their joyful defiance, they will help create a better life for themselves and generations to come. 



# MARY:

## A SURVIVOR’S STORY

At the age of five, Mary Courchene was forced to attend Fort Alexander Residential School in what is now Sagkeeng First Nation. Despite the School being within walking distance from her family home, Mary had to observe her parents and younger siblings’ day-to-day lives from a short distance. Like looking through a keyhole at a family life that she longed to be a part of, Mary watched from a third-floor windowsill of the Residential School ten months of the year, for ten long years.

Mary was one of over 150,000 children forced into the Residential Schools in Canada. From the time she arrived until she was 16 years old, Mary’s life revolved around the ways of the Residential School system. She was compelled to abandon all that she knew, all that made her who she was. And while Residential Schools may have been known in settler communities as places of learning, the lessons taught “were riddled with shame, devastation, and unimaginable trauma,” she says. “These are lessons I have spent my whole life trying to make sense of.”

In 2018/19, Elder Mary, her daughter Sherri Denysuik, director, Adult Education Centre and Indigenous Inclusion, and Sarah Gazan, a staff officer in the MTS Professional and French Language Services department, began a collaboration between The Manitoba Teachers’ Society and Seven Oaks School Division.

The intent: Come together to create an Indian Residential School curriculum centered around Mary’s story—how her time at Fort Alexander had shaped her life and family. The result: *Resistance on the Giimooch*, a comprehensive, multi-platform project that captures Elder Mary’s early years, her time at Residential School and the impact of that experience not only on her own life, but the lives of her children and grandchildren as well.

### IT TAKES A TEAM

The process included collaboration with an extensive team of educators. Taking on various roles within curriculum development, the team of educators listened to Mary’s stories, briefly and methodically stepping into her lived experiences in an effort to distill her learning into teaching tools with the power to change the course of history. Five years after that work began, *Resistance on the Giimooch* was born.

“This project has been a long journey that’s been challenging, emotional, so very personal and fulfilling,” says Denysuik. “We began by recording Elder Mary’s stories and the recorded interviews with two of her children and two of her grandchildren to share their stories as 2nd and 3rd generation Residential School survivors.”

As both Elder Mary’s daughter and an educator, Denysuik’s investment was multi-layered and intensely personal. For her, the power and potential of both perspectives gave *Resistance on the Giimooch* a weight and significance unlike anything else.

“I had a dual role with the project,” she says. “The first as daughter of Elder Mary, and the second as project lead. This meant I was deeply connected on both a personal and professional level. It’s been a huge honour and a gift to be working so closely with my mom on this project and especially in all her years as Elder in

Residence for Seven Oaks. I can remember as a child thinking my mom is the greatest storyteller in the world, and as an adult this perspective has not changed.”

“I am so grateful to every single person who was part of this journey and were dedicated to this special project,” Denysuik continues. “And I am especially grateful to them for honouring and holding Elder Mary’s story close to their hearts.”

### POWERFUL OPPORTUNITY TO CHAMPION TRUTH

Today’s teachers have a powerful opportunity to champion the truth. They are positioned, perhaps better than anyone else, to create fundamental and enduring change.

Both Mary and her daughter recognize that this is one story of thousands that is being shared. Collectively as we unpack the truths of Residential Schools, we must remember the stories that were never given voice, and those that have yet to be heard.

In Mary’s words: “Those deceased who were never given the voice they so deserved—for them, for myself, for my grandchildren, great grandchildren, and for our collective whole, I share these stories. In an act of both truth and reconciliation, I bring voice to the stories that have been woven into the person I am today. A person who I have been working to reclaim for as far back as I can remember.”<sup>1</sup>



Elder Mary Courchene and her daughter Sherri Denysuik



# NANA: THE GRANDCHILDREN’S STORY

The best and brightest reflection of Mary’s legacy is without a doubt her grandchildren. Growing up, the young people learned much as they observed her way of being. And while each has their own perspective on her life, their stories of Nana contain similar threads, woven together in a portrait glowing with admiration and the resolve to continue her work.

Here, three of Mary’s grandchildren reflect on her life and the impact it has had on their family.

### JONATHAN

Jonathan Courchene is Mary’s grandson. As a child, he spent almost every weekend at his Nana and Grandpa’s home, watching in awe as his grandmother cared for her family and community and still found time to sit at the kitchen table, late into the night, focused on her reading and studies. Today Jonathan works as a student support facilitator at the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre and recognizes now that her discipline was and is rooted in her belief in lifelong learning.

“Learning is her passion; she loves it. And when you love something, you give it all of yourself through your presence, just like she has done her whole life.”

Young people owe Mary a debt of thanks, he says, for the priority she placed on learning and the sacrifices she made to continue doing it. “Her life’s work means brighter tomorrows for so many First Nations children and youth across our province and country. Her hardships and struggles have turned into their comforts and securities.”

### JAIMIE

Jaimie Isaac, Mary’s granddaughter, is an interdisciplinary artist and chief curator at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Jaimie’s vision of her

grandmother’s life and work is shaped by storytelling and Mary’s deep connection to those who have come before.

“**NANA HAS INSTILLED IN ME A STRONG SENSE OF PRIDE IN MY IDENTITY AS AN ANISHINAABE KWE AND HAS GIVEN ME THE LOVE AND PASSION OF ANISHINAABEMOWIN. IT IS WITH HER IN MIND THAT I AM LEARNING OUR LANGUAGE TO TAKE BACK WHAT WE WERE DENIED. HER LIFE’S WORK, THAT SHE IS GRACIOUSLY SHARING WITH US, IS AN IMPORTANT TRUTH WE ALL MUST LISTEN TO AND LEARN FROM.**

“Nana’s work as an educator, as a knowledge keeper and storyteller exist because of her courage, resilience and survival,” says Jaimie. “Her personal perseverance, power and will were

developed through necessity. She shares with us the collective power and beautiful resistance of our ancestors.”

It is this power, combined with the support of Mary’s children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, that fuels the hope of generational healing gifted to us through the stories of survivors like Mary.

“She has worked for a cultural resurgence that we as her family must carry forward,” says Jaimie. “I learn from Nana every day and aspire to follow in her footsteps. She empowers all of us to be the best we can be.”

### ALYSSA

Granddaughter Alyssa Denysuik is also following a path towards a career in education. She is enrolled in the Community Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP) at the University of Winnipeg and will begin teaching in 2024. Alyssa credits Mary, her family’s “brave, sharp-minded matriarch”, for the connection she feels to her culture and history.

“She has instilled in me a strong sense of pride in my identity as an Anishinaabe kwe and has given me the love and passion of Anishinaabemowin. It is with her in mind that I am learning our language to take back what we were denied. Her life’s work, that she is graciously sharing with us, is an important truth we all must listen to and learn from.”



Elder Mary Courchene has 7 children, 18 grandchildren, 22 great-grandchildren (Here she is with 2 of her daughters and their families)

Each of Mary’s grandchildren speak to their hope that *Resistance on the Giimooch* leads teachers and students alike towards the truth and a deeper understanding of the legacy and ongoing impact of Residential Schools.

Teachers have a unique opportunity to share the truth with students, says Jaimie, so that “they carry forth these teachings and stories with care. Educational reform will redress a history of harmful education, so that generations of the future aren't bereft of important cultural knowledge that Elders like Nana have fought to

protect, revive and share. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action should be the guiding principles and values that instill change and nourish ways of being and learning.”

“My hope is that the judgement and criticism against our people, harboured in the minds of yesterday, slowly fades away,” says Jonathan. “The students who grow up in times of truth and reconciliation can nurture kinder and more understanding hearts so the relationships with our relatives can heal. Healing cannot take place until the truth is told and accepted.”

Alyssa agrees.

“I hope that educators and students will see the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and learning in both historical and contemporary contexts. We all have a responsibility to one another through the teachings of mino pimatisiwin—living the good life. Through my grandmother’s gift of these truths, we are better equipped to live in harmony with the teachings of the good life that she has generously shared with us.”<sup>1</sup>



# TEACHERS AS LEARNERS: A TEAM’S STORY

Imagine you are approached with an opportunity: Take the life story of Residential School survivor Mary Courchene, and create a learning resource reflective of truth, founded in resistance and connected to a hope for Canada rooted in meaningful reconciliation. No small task.

Unfazed by the overwhelming responsibility, a team of Manitoba teachers took up the challenge, aware of the incredible opportunity to create positive, lasting change. From 2018/19 till today the following educators were part of a team who created the educational resource, *Resistance on the Giimooch*: Alyssa Denysuik, Amy Carpenter, Christine M’Lot, Hayden LaRiviere, Janelle Prairie, Jenna Firth, Jonathan Traverse, Melissa Neapew, Niki Simard, Sarah Gazan, Sheri Ingram, Sherri Denysuik, Sopear Chhin, Stephanie Luna, Tanya Muswagon, Teri McKay, and Wendy Coveney.

“They recognized that in creating this curriculum they would pave the way for settler teachers to invite students into the story of Canada’s history and the impact of colonization on the peoples of Turtle Island,” Sherri Denysuik says. “Their contributions rose from their hearts and minds, evidence of a strong commitment to honouring the voices of Residential School survivors and providing authentic resources for teachers to guide students in a kind and good way.”

Working collaboratively, guided by traditional teachings and inspired by Mary’s life and example, the educators wove her experiences and message into 16 lesson plans and a teacher’s guide that:

- honour the truth of those who attended Residential Schools;
- prompt thoughtful examination of those experiences and their ongoing impact, and;
- motivate teachers and students alike to make fundamental changes necessary for real, enduring reconciliation to occur.



Sopear Chhin, Janelle Prairie, Elder Mary Courchene, Sherri Denysuik, Sarah Gazan and Amy Carpenter (L to R)

## AN MTS AND SEVEN OAKS COLLABORATION

This project was inspired by a model originally conceived by Gail Stromquists at the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation. Sarah Gazan, a staff officer in the MTS Professional and French Language Services department, approached Courchene’s daughter, Sherri Denysuik, director, Adult Education Centre and Indigenous Inclusion, with a proposal; a collaboration between MTS and Seven Oaks School Division to create an Indian Residential School curriculum around her mother’s story. Gazan was inspired by the work begun with BCTF and saw the opportunity to develop the project further. Together, they built the team that would create *Resistance on the Giimooch*. “Gail’s work at BCTF taught about generosity, about story, about commitment

and about the love that carries us through even the darkest times,” says Gazan. “Mary’s story is one of trauma but also of resistance, healing, and love. She has carried her Residential School story and has also continued to carry the Anishinaabe language and her teachings. That is her strength and the strength of our people.” Each of the teachers who shared reflections on the experience, pointed out the personal growth they felt bringing *Resistance on the Giimooch* to life. For Amy Carpenter, a teacher of 19 years currently pursuing her Ph.D, the process drew on her history with the Courchene family, permitting an even richer relationship with Mary’s story. “To be part of this project helped me see the power of healing, remembering and resurgence through the power of story. It helped me to be a better listener and to ponder stories on a deeper level.”

Amy Carpenter adds, “I want to see educators and students delve into the oppressive, violent and intentional actions on the part of the colonial Canadian government. I hope this project will help students better understand the intricate and collective impact Residential Schools have had on this place we call home. I hope it will help students not only understand Mary’s story, but also their own.” Mary Courchene’s story resonated deeply with Sopear Chhin, a teacher at Seven Oaks Middle School and the only member of the teacher team who is not Indigenous. “Whether you’re Indigenous or not,” says Chhin, “the lessons are approachable and helpful in allowing classes to make connections with the histories of our past in order to make sense of our current world. It has reminded me to listen with an open, courageous heart and not shy away from using my own voice.” The intention of the curricular resource is to provide educators with the opportunity to delve deeply into the stories of truth that surround the impacts of residential schools. The hope is classrooms will engage in multiple lessons over a period of time, versus a one-day event to honour Orange Shirt Day.

**EAST**

Lesson 1: Mino Pimatisiwin (The Good Life)  
Lesson 2: Land, Language, and Identity  
Lesson 3: “The Best Years of my Life”  
Lesson 4: Stages of Life

**SOUTH**

Lesson 5: Displacement  
Lesson 6: Fear  
Lesson 7: Residential Schools, Thousands of Stories  
Lesson 8: History of Education and Schools

**WEST**

Lesson 9: Who am I?  
Lesson 10: Finding Her Way  
Lesson 11: Life as an Educator  
Lesson 12: The Four Essential Questions

**CANADA’S TRUE HISTORY**

“This is a part of Canada’s history that many of us did not learn about in school,” says Janelle Prairie, a graduate of the Community Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP) and vice principal at École Belmont. “Through the stories and voices of Elder Mary and her family, my hope is that school communities meaningfully engage in truth and reconciliation while they learn about Canada’s true history. This is an opportunity for students to share what they learn and inform other generations, building on our collective healing.” Curriculum editor Christine M’Lot, a teacher at the University of Winnipeg Collegiate shared that, “As educators we need to understand that truth has to come before reconciliation. That means listening to the stories and learning the truth about what happened at Residential Schools, the intergenerational trauma that followed and the historical and ongoing effects of settler colonialism.” Tanya Muswagon, a teacher at Elwick Community School, says that while Mary’s life was uniquely hers, her story illustrates the commonalities fundamental to a just and caring society. “This is a way for students to learn about forgiveness, kindness and empathy.

**NORTH**

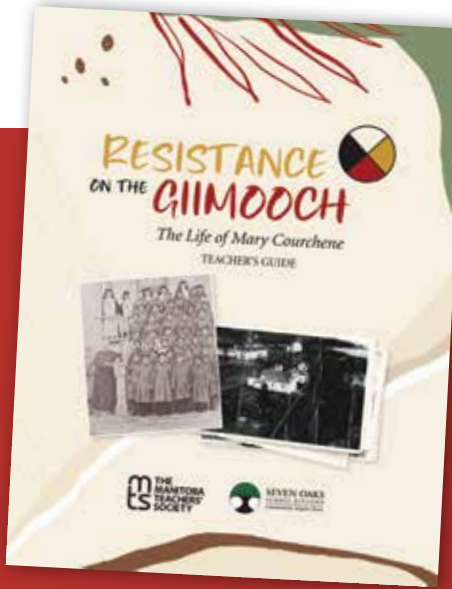
Lesson 13: Blood Memory  
Lesson 14: Unmarked Graves  
Lesson 15: The Apology and Reconciliation  
Lesson 16: Mino Pimatisiwin (The Good Life)

**HOLDING SPACE**

Some topics in this resource will be difficult to learn about. It is important to create a safe learning environment that holds space for all experiences and emotions. Teachers are encouraged to engage with students from a Trauma-Informed perspective. For more information on Trauma-Informed practice visit the Manitoba Trauma Information and Education Centre at [trauma-informed.ca](http://trauma-informed.ca)

We are here to teach our kids to be good to themselves and one another.” M’Lot adds that the teacher’s guide is a key facet of *Resistance on the Giimooch*. Following the Anishinaabe teachings of the Four Directions, the guide is informed by learnings from Knowledge Keeper Sherry Copenace and a summary by Elder Dan Thomas. “It assists teachers to understand the importance of the directions and how Mary’s life journey has taken her through the stages of life—childhood, adolescence, adulthood and now Elderhood.” This project has been a work of heart for everyone involved. At times the work was heavy, at other times it was joyous and at all times there was a sense of responsibility to honour survivors who fought with their lives to resist acts of genocide against all aspects of their being. “The lives of survivors are complicated,” says Gazan. “The injustices of the Residential Schools, the dark history and the legacy of this country are perpetuated through our child welfare and education systems. I hope students will fight for justice, for truth and for equity and against oppression and racism, and I am forever thankful to Mary, her family and the teachers involved for all they have shared and given of themselves to make this project a reality.”

# LESSON PLANS: THE FOUR DIRECTIONS



For *Resistance on the Giimooch* lesson plans visit [mbteach.org](http://mbteach.org) or scan the QR code.





TABLE TOPICS: MTS BARGAINING UPDATE

NEGOTIATIONS ON BEHALF OF MANITOBA’S MORE THAN 16,000 MTS MEMBERS ARE TAKING PLACE CENTRALLY AND AT TABLES ACROSS THE PROVINCE. HERE’S THE LATEST NEWS.

PROVINCIAL BARGAINING

Historic negotiations for a single provincial collective agreement began on September 20, 2022, when the MTS Table Team met with provincial representatives for the first time. Proposals have been tabled by both sides and negotiations are well underway, with meetings taking place on September 20, 2022, October 20, 2022, December 14 & 15, 2022 and January 24 & 25, 2023.

AÉFM (FRANCOPHONE PROVINCIAL TABLE)

Opening proposals were prepared and the Table Team’s initial meeting with the DSFM representatives took place December

14, 2022. Dates are set for February and March, 2023.

NELSON HOUSE TEACHERS’ ASSOCIATION

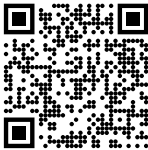
Nelson House teachers are MTS members under federal jurisdiction. For the past year and a half, the NHTA has bargained for the period 2018-2022, without reaching a collective agreement. NHTA has applied for conciliation under federal labour legislation. This is in process and can take up to 60 days.

SANDY BAY TEACHERS’ ASSOCIATION

Sandy Bay teachers are MTS members under federal jurisdiction. They settled 2018-

2022 last spring, for the same salary increases won by all Manitoba teachers. In the fall of 2022, the SBTA reached a one-year agreement for 2022/2023 with a COLA based on Manitoba’s annual inflation rate in 2022, which is 7.9%. This sets a precedent in the province as we expect teacher salaries to keep pace with inflation.

Bargaining updates are available through your MTS MyProfile account. If you haven’t registered yet, please do at [mbteach.org](http://mbteach.org) or scan the QR code to stay up to date on all things MTS.



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# MTS PD DAY RECAP

## OCTOBER 21, 2022

MTS Professional Development Day featured over 1,000 workshops in Manitoba

MTS Professional Development Day featured over 1,000 workshops hosted by 32 SAGEs including ÉFM, COSL and LIFT in Winnipeg, Brandon and numerous satellite sites around the province. Thousands of participants

attended their self-selected professional learning opportunities on October 21 in-person or electronically and shared their experiences with colleagues on social media through the #MTSPDDAY hashtag.

Many heart-filled thanks to all of the conference organizers and the hundreds of volunteers who contributed their time and expertise to offer high quality professional development opportunities on this day. <sup>T</sup>

## SPOTLIGHT ON SAGEs

*Spotlight on SAGEs* is a regular feature designed to highlight opportunities for enrichment and inspiration offered by the MTS Special Area Groups of Educators.



### THE COUNCIL FOR INDIGENOUS EDUCATION IN MANITOBA

The Council for Indigenous Education in Manitoba is committed to supporting educators through holistic approaches, professional development and advocacy to advance Indigenous knowledge for the success of future generations. We are committed to promoting innovative activities which provide for improved professional development and promote high standards of professional practice. Our SAGE Day Conference brings in Elders, knowledge keepers, teachers, social workers, psychologists and university students. We have a membership of 300 people and our conference sells out every year! Our 2023 conference will focus on wellness, and we hope you can join us!

To learn more visit [ciem.ca](http://ciem.ca) or scan the QR code.



### THE MANITOBA SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

The Manitoba School Library Association serves to advance and advocate for school libraries and collaborate with teachers to support the learning of all students. The MSLA provides a place to network at our annual fall SAGE conference, our spring LIT Forum, and our yearly AGM in May. Members also get access to a bi-yearly journal to keep up to date on current issues, materials and best practices. Because of the library's holistic view of the school and understanding of inquiry, technology and literacies—including digital, media, information, critical and cultural literacies—MSLA events and membership are useful not just for library staff, but for any teacher who would like to embed the 4Cs into their classroom.

To learn more visit [manitobaschoollibraries.ca](http://manitobaschoollibraries.ca) or scan the QR code.





# SHINING A LIGHT ON LEARNING AT WAG-QAUMAJUQ

By Rachel Baerg, Head of Learning & Programs WAG-Qaumajuq



The new Inuit art centre was given the name Qaumajuq—meaning “it is bright, it is lit” in Inuktitut—and all spaces within were named in Indigenous languages, including Inuktitut, Anishnaabemowin (Ojibway), Nêhiyawêwin (Cree), Dakota, and Michif (Métis).

Over the past years, WAG-Qaumajuq has undergone a transformation—both inside and out! As we prepared to open the new building, a group of Indigenous language keepers and elders gifted the Winnipeg Art Gallery with the Ojibway name Biindigin Biwaasaeyaah, meaning, “Come on in, the dawn of light is here”. The new Inuit art centre was given the name Qaumajuq—meaning “it is bright, it is lit” in Inuktitut—and all spaces within were named in Indigenous languages, including Inuktitut, Anishnaabemowin (Ojibway), Nêhiyawêwin (Cree), Dakota, and Michif (Métis).

## HONOURED TO WORK DIRECTLY WITH LOCAL INUIT COMMUNITY

This renaming initiative was just the start. We’re honoured to be working directly with the local Inuit community, the Manitoba Métis Federation, and the Treaty One Nation, to name but a few; as an art gallery, we are on a collaborative learning trajectory, committed to doing our part to respond to Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action and addressing the diverse needs of the larger community in Manitoba and beyond.

Our learning and school programs reflect this transformation and have been designed with care to create opportunities for students and teachers to encounter the importance of reconciliation and the value of Indigenous Knowledge

through connection to art, artists, and traditional storytelling. During their visit, students also have the chance to respond individually and creatively through artmaking.

## INDIGENOUS-FOCUS EXHIBITION TOURS AND WORKSHOPS

This winter, Robert Houle: Red is Beautiful brings to Winnipeg over 90 large installations, paintings, and drawings created by the internationally renowned, Manitoba-born Anishinaabe Saulteaux contemporary artist and educator. A tour of this powerful collection will prompt reflection on various narratives, including the artist’s personal experience in the Residential School system and how his art has served as healing in his life and the life of others.

Qaumajuq’s inaugural exhibition, INUA (running ‘til Feb 26, 2023), offers a spectacular look at over 100 artworks by contemporary circumpolar Inuk artists including newly commissioned pieces, wearable art, and immersive digital media. On April 1, 2023, the exhibition Sanaugangit, “art by Inuit”—will present a survey of Inuit artistic expression from prehistoric periods of creativity (500 BCE to 1200 CE) until the present. Both exhibitions will serve as a catalyst for meaningful discussions around themes of identity, climate change, intergenerational relations, and the sharing of cultural knowledge.



## INUIT ART AND THE VISIBLE VAULT

The stunning new three-story glass vault at the entrance of Qaumajuq houses a permanent display of over 5,000 Inuit stone sculptures, introducing students and teachers to an impressive scope of artwork and artists from across Inuit Nunangut, the Inuit homeland in Canada.

The accompanying Visible Vault platform (available on site and virtually) was developed in collaboration with Inuit artists, curators, and storytellers, and offers a series of digital maps alongside educational audio and video

clips connecting to key artworks in the vault. Coming soon: a series of educational modules directly linked to Manitoba curriculum and learning outcomes, including lessons and resources that teachers can access for free.

## COLLABORATING WITH EDUCATORS

As WAG-Qaumajuq continues to transform, learn, and grow as an organization, we are always thinking of how we can best support and collaborate with educators. We are thrilled to offer free admission to teachers throughout

the year, and to develop online educational resources and customized PD opportunities for you.

And if you have not yet come for a visit, please consider this your personal invitation.

We look forward to continuing to learn with you and your students as we look towards a bright future!

To learn more about our student and teacher programs visit [www.wag.ca/learn/schools-teachers/](http://www.wag.ca/learn/schools-teachers/) or scan the QR code.





# INTRODUCING MTS MEDIATION SERVICES

By Sylvie Ringuette, MTS Staff

COVID-19 has had a huge impact on our lives, including our work. Studies show that one of the pandemic’s nasty after-effects is an increase in work-related conflict, and MTS has reflected on how to help educators resolve peer to peer friction. One option: guide our members through a process to sort through issues of conflict and arrive at solutions that work best for them.

That process is called mediation, and MTS formally launched the new service on September, 1, 2022.

Through mediation, conflicts can become opportunities for positive transformation where members feel safe, prepared, and empowered.

## WHAT MEDIATION IS, AND WHAT IT ISN’T

Mediation is a process whereby participants can explore their intent and actions. The hope is to help members increase empathy, reduce hostilities, address misunderstandings, identify underlying interests and concerns, find common ground, and help members arrive at their own solutions. MTS mediation services are trauma informed, gender inclusive, and culturally sensitive.

The mediator will:

- be impartial,
- deal respectfully with all participants,
- contact each participant and initiate the proceedings, explain the mediation process and its voluntary aspect,
- explain the roles of all parties,
- ask questions in order to discover the issues and interests underlying the respective positions,
- ensure that the consent to mediate has been signed by all participants,
- establish the rules of procedures to be followed during the mediation,
- help members listen to each other and encourage open and respectful communication,

- help members focus on the future rather than dwell on the past, and encourage discussions on interests rather than positions,
- help members understand each other’s perspectives,
- support members in exploring viable options,
- support members in developing their own solutions,
- review the plan agreed upon and ensure all terms respect the MTS Professional Code of Practice,
- protect the confidentiality of the mediation process.

The mediator will not:

- take sides,
- act as a representative or an advocate for either member,
- tell members what the issues are between them,
- take responsibility for the issues,
- solve the problems,
- make decisions for members,
- provide his/her own opinions,
- give suggestions,
- give advice,
- provide counselling/psychotherapy,
- divulge the content of the Terms of Agreement to anyone without permission of parties.

## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM MEDIATION

If mediation is deemed a good fit, the mediator gathers information, helps the participants unpack the issues and establish goals for the process. Preparation is conducted with both participants before the initial joint session.

At the joint session, the mediator helps members explore their issues and concerns. Afterwards, the mediator follows up to prepare participants for a final joint session—



MTS mediators Angela Haig and Sylvie Ringuette

two joint sessions may be needed.

The mediator guides members to find resolutions and to develop a plan that works for both. Mediation is not an arbitration, therefore it is not meant to determine who is right or who is wrong.

Once the process is concluded, the mediator provides a summary of the results to both participants. A Memorandum of Understanding is then sent to both parties.

## HOW TO ACCESS MEDIATION SERVICES

You must be referred for mediation services by a Teacher Welfare staff officer or a Disability Benefits case manager. Contact Teacher Welfare at 204-831-3055 or Disability Benefits at 204-957-5330 to explore whether mediation is an option for you. Or call MTS toll-free at 1-800-262-8803.

The MTS executive director may refer members to the service if they believe that resolution is attainable through the Code of Professional Practice complaint process.



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# THE PRINCIPAL OF THE THING:

## MIXING IT UP AT BOISSEVAIN COLLEGIATE

By **Stephanie Emberly**, Principal

At Boissevain School, a core belief is that building connections is the key to success. Principal Stephanie Emberly is proud of her team’s work to create a school space that students are excited to be a part of. Over the last two years, they’ve developed an advisory class in which all grade 9-12 students are mixed and relationships develop across grades.

It can be overwhelming at times to think of the demands on the teaching profession, particularly now, in a pandemic-recovering world. If nothing else, the impact of COVID-19 has underscored the vital role that supportive relationships play in all our lives. Our students, like many adults, have experienced and internalized the mental health impact of a prolonged period of isolation and fear, along with the inevitable strain on relationships.

At Boissevain Collegiate, we saw a unique opportunity to rebuild connection in our school community. For the last two school years, our teachers have tackled many of the issues highlighted through the pandemic by collaborating as part of a very special endeavor—teaching an advisory group of mixed grades 9-12 every day for 40 minutes. The process has been fascinating and worthwhile.

“We came to this plan by identifying our ‘why,’” says Al Hicks, vice-principal and history teacher at Boissevain. “Once we were clear regarding the students’ needs it was just a matter of looking at what was in our control to do.”

Deep learning and connection occur when teachers connect curricular goals to life skills, community building and service to others. This helps students gain a better understanding of themselves and their peers while developing skills that will benefit them both in school and life.

Through this collaborative effort, the teacher advisors infuse mental health strategies, executive functioning skills, community outreach, school leadership and building school culture and community into their daily meetings. In the post-pandemic era, this team of teachers has stepped up to the challenge of meeting the unique needs of our students in a holistic way.

### DEEP LEARNING BUILT ON THE 6C’S

Physical education teacher and student advisor Corey Billaney says that at Boissevain, deep learning is built on the 6C’s: character, creativity, communication, citizenship, collaboration and critical thinking.

“I think it’s one of the best parts of our advisory program,” he says, “and we

incorporate it every day. All of our students have benefitted from working with their peers and building a great high school culture.”

Our teachers have been vigilant in identifying students who may be struggling, connecting them with the support they need. Teaching coping strategies, modelling them consistently, and normalizing the importance of mental health care as a need that we all have has been an important part of the work.

As a collective, there has been an increased focus on connecting students with nature and encouraging movement and physical fitness. Situated in the beauty of the Turtle Mountain area, the whole high school spends days at Lake Adam hiking trails, canoeing, zip lining, cooking outdoors, and creating a sense of community between students and their teachers.

### BUILDING EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS

In addition to addressing mental health, the team has also focused on building our students’ executive functioning skills. These are the cognitive abilities that help us plan,

organize, and manage our time, and it’s more important than ever to explicitly teach them. Students are taught to evaluate strategies for improving academic skills and knowledge and adopt those that contribute best to their lifelong learning process.

### ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Recognizing the importance of rebuilding a sense of community within the school and reconnecting the school to the community itself was another identified priority. The pandemic forced us to be physically distant from one another, and our teachers noticed how disconnected students felt when returning to school in person. Fostering a sense of belonging by connecting daily with their advisory groups has increased engagement among our students.

One of the methods for accomplishing this has been active citizenship. Together we’ve developed ways of encouraging students to get involved in community service, civic engagement and leadership projects. These activities have helped students foster important skills such as teamwork and

communication, while also giving them a sense of purpose and connection to something bigger than themselves.

The advisory groups have performed random acts of kindness in town: washing windows for businesses, shoveling snow, and helping to set up town events. Within the school community, the groups paired with classrooms in the primary school for reading buddies and even taking turns wiping down the lunch tables. Celebrating the accomplishments of their peers in and outside of school, be it in athletics, arts, rodeo, music, or martial arts has nurtured a sense of camaraderie. They even create a monthly slideshow celebrating each other and what it means to be a Boissevain Bronco!

Graduate Jaz Barwick says advisory groups made a fundamental difference to her high school experience, socially and academically.

“In advisory I was able to connect with students that I might never have known because they weren’t in my grade. In the class we learned things about everyday

life that wouldn’t normally be taught in a regular class setting, and I’ve already found use for many of those lessons. And there were lots of fun advisory activities that created excitement throughout the entire high school and made it a more positive place to be.”

“One important thing to note is that it is working because we are meeting the students where they are, and building them up,” says resource teacher Terryl Stone. “How we created the structure isn’t what’s important. It’s the risk-taking, trying something new. Adults and students working collaboratively has made the real impact.”

Overall, the effect of this innovative approach has helped teachers and students rise to the challenge of creating a learning environment that has students excited to come to school—a place where they find community and acceptance, and a family-like environment that positively supports everyone.

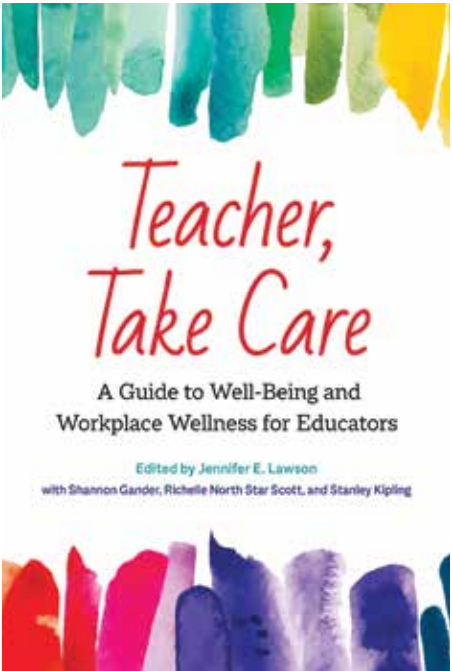
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# BOOK REVIEWS

By Leslie Dickson



## TEACHER, TAKE CARE

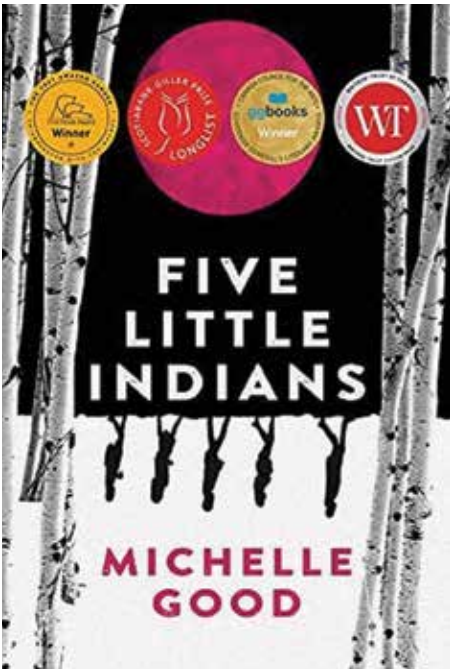
Edited by: Jennifer E. Lawson  
Publisher: Portage & Main Press (2022)

Teaching can be a highly rewarding, satisfying profession. It can also be stressful and overwhelming. In their new book, *Teacher, Take Care*, editors Lawson, et al. present a practical, easy-to-read resource written by teachers for teachers. In an accessible way, this resource allows educators to explore strategies for self-awareness and self-care that ultimately contributes to a work climate that encourages the positive mental health of everyone.

The framework of this book is based on the Sacred Hoop – the idea that wellness involves the whole person—their Physical, Emotional, Mental, and Spiritual selves—in recognition of Indigenous Knowledge

and perspectives. Each chapter connects to Indigenous perspectives of wellness through stories told by Elder Stanley Kipling and Knowledge Keeper Richelle North Star Scott. They suggest ways in which teachers can make deeper connections for Mino Pimatisiwin, or “living the good life”.

At the start of this new school year, whether you are already feeling burnt out, or you are managing personal self-care, *Teacher, Take Care* is an excellent read to explore a variety of perspectives and consider what it means to “be well”.



## FIVE LITTLE INDIANS

Author: Michelle Good  
Publisher: HarperCollins (2020)

*Five Little Indians* depicts how five young Indigenous adults cope with life after being ‘released’ with little warning or supports for survival, from their Residential/Mission School in the 1960s in the city of Vancouver. Author Michelle Good, a lawyer, writer of Cree ancestry and a member of the Red Pheasant Cree Nation in Saskatchewan, pens a powerful, emotional narrative of the painful experience of these survivors after they leave school with no social support, money, life skills, or family connections. Good, a daughter and granddaughter of Residential School survivors, relates how the characters try to manage with the emotional and physical scars of years of neglect and trauma in a world that has no place for them, or understanding of how

their experiences in the schools affected their spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental well-being. What I enjoyed most about this story is that it is multi-voiced. The novel highlights that although each character came from the same “school”, each child manages their trauma and abuse very differently through their adult years. Good demonstrates that coping with trauma is an individual experience; that people heal, or do not heal, differently. Upper Senior Years teachers (grades 10-12) should consider utilizing this text for study in either English language arts or social studies; middle years teachers (grade 8-9) should consider using excerpts as mentor texts to spur class discussions or writing prompts. *Five Little Indians* is a must-read for all Canadians.

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