

“A Light in the Shadows” - A Teacher’s Guide

This lesson plan was developed in response to a call by the girls of Stardale Women’s Group in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Specifically the 7th call to action stating:

“We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.”

We aimed to develop age-appropriate educational materials that provide Canadians a deeper understanding as to the nature of Indigenous societies, and the history of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

The colonial foundations of our country resulted in a relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that was always unbalanced and unjust. The example highlighted here is that of the intersection of racism and sexism with regards to indigenous women and girls. The time is overdue for a strengthening of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and this can only be accomplished by a full and truthful understanding of the history of the relationship as well as its permeation into today’s current events.

Before Viewing

Dealing Sensitively with Marginalization and Indigenous Women

It is important to deal with this topic with sensitivity. A great deal will depend on the age, maturity and family background of students, and teachers will be the best judge of how to approach the material.

In presenting these issues, teachers are not expected to be experts on the history and legacies of Indigenous peoples, rather their role is as guides and facilitators.

When discussing sensitive and controversial topics it is important to set ground rules to ensure a safe environment for sharing ideas and opinion:

- Always respect and value what others bring to the discussion
- Discussion should protect diverging views among participants
- It is okay to feel discomfort

For some students the topics discussed will be sensitive, especially if they themselves come from a minority community or have experienced marginalization. For others, the topics may be controversial, particularly if they feel they have no connection with the issues. Also, in some schools with new

Canadians, teachers will need to be aware that some topics may echo feelings that are part of the immigrant experience.

Some considerations for making sure the topic is presented fairly and with sensitivity include the following:

- These topics are best taught through discussion rather than instruction
- A teacher is responsible for ensuring exploration of the issue so the discussion promotes understanding and is not merely an exchange of intolerance
- Allow time to deal with students' concerns and questions
- Be aware of issues that may arise for students both in formal discussions and informal conversations in and around the classroom; close conversations appropriately; play a role in ensuring potential conflict is dealt with in the context of the classroom
- Try to give students the tools and skills to discuss these topics rationally in the school and community

Campbell, K. (2003). Overview: Dealing with Controversial and Sensitive Topics . In *B.C. First Nations Studies teacher's guide*. preface, B.C. Ministry of Education.

Question 1: “What is colonialism?” Is colonialism still affecting us today? If so, how?

The dictionary definition: The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.

Question 2: What are some causes of the marginalization of indigenous Canadian women and girls ? Why is this topic important?

Depending on the grade-level, the discussion can move towards the perception of indigenous women in films and movies (For example, sexualizing Pocahontas and fictionalizing the story to make it presentable to audiences.), stories in the news, and what they have learned from their family about indigenous people. For high school students, they may explore the Indian Act and the ramifications of this today for indigenous women.

Introducing the Video

To reveal deep-rooted biases about marginalization, the young women and girls of Stardale Women’s Group shared painful stories about their life experiences to create an ultimate story of hope. With mentors from the first two films (*The Road* and *Shadows in Time*), they wrote, directed, produced, and edited this film of hope for their futures.

Watch “A Light in the Shadow”

After viewing

Question 3: Thoughts and feelings on the video?

Offer time for students to reflect before answering, perhaps they can write their initial thoughts/feelings down before sharing verbally with the class.

Question 4: What are examples of mistreatment of indigenous people, especially women, have they seen or know about?

They may not have experienced or know about these issues if they have no contact with indigenous people, so it may be necessary to use some local and national examples. Students may have more general knowledge due to Residential School unmarked graves findings that have been in the news. Some students may feel comfortable enough to share from their own experience and while that should be welcome and respected, it shouldn't be expected or mandatory.

Historical Causes

While it is important to acknowledge the past and present oppression and subsequent marginalization of Indigenous communities in our society, it is also important to focus on taking action. The following two articles provide information about the historical causes and the ramifications:

https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/marginalization_of_aboriginal_women/

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/fafia-report-rcmp-violence-women-1.6446756#:~:text=Indigenous-,Indigenous%20women%20face%20higher%20rates%20of%20systemic%20discrimination%2C%20violence%20by,by%20the%20national%20police%20force.>

Teachers may want to read these and use their discretion with these issues, depending upon the grade level of their students. Grade 9 and high school students may read these in groups to discuss these issues as a separate or extension exercise.

Teachers know their class best and will know what works best for them. It is important that the activity ends on a note of hope and working towards a better future.

Question 5: What assumptions does North American society generally make about indigenous women? Based on the information you have now, what can be done to change these negative perceptions?

