

Lesson Plan: Kuei My Friend: A Conversation on Racism and Reconciliation by Deni Ellis Béchard and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine
Grade 10-12

Calls to Action: Number 63

We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- I. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- II. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- III. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- IV. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

First Peoples Principles of Learning: Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place). Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

Connections to Secondary Curriculum:

- Social Studies
- History
- English Language Arts
- English First Peoples
- Film Studies
- French Language Arts (if you purchase the original French edition)

Vocabulary:

- See Appendix 2 for a glossary of Innu words.
- racism
- systemic/institutionalized racism
- reconciliation
- media bias
- Seven Fires Prophecy (Anishinaabe)
- residential schools
- oppression
- intergenerational trauma
- Oka Crisis
- oral traditions
- colonization
- marginalization
- White privilege
- White superiority
- genocide

- reparation

Chronology of significant events for the Canadian Indigenous community from 2014-2016

- See Appendix 1.

Themes in each chapter:

1. Media portrayal of Indigenous culture as deadly and anti-scientific -Deni
2. Seven Fires Prophecy -Natasha
3. Fear and silence -Deni
4. Pride and racism -Natasha
5. Deni's father hating Indigenous people -Deni
6. Residential schools -Natasha
7. Genetics and oppression -Deni
8. Individual and collective heritage, "autochtone", and walking like an Indian -Natasha
9. Intergenerational trauma and numbers for names in residential schools -Deni
10. Dreams and expression through the arts -Natasha
11. The suffering of "unpeople" (George Orwell) and the Oka Crisis -Deni
12. Resistance by Indigenous people -Natasha
13. Traditional names, limits to empathy, and how literature can decrease human aggression -Deni
14. Reclaiming the family name, Innu conjugating is determined by animate (nature) and inanimate (man-made) things, oral traditions, and the role of literature -Natasha
15. Diversity in beliefs, dehumanizing people as "monsters", and acknowledging stolen lands -Deni
16. The wound of colonization, freedom, high school racism, marginalization, and connecting with Innu culture -Natasha
17. Becoming the master of oneself, invisible privilege, White as the norm, institutionalized racism, police targeting minorities because it is tolerated, and trauma -Deni
18. Innu childhood memories, failure and alcoholism, the disparity between poverty and family vs. isolation of city -Natasha
19. Québécois, oppression of marginalized peoples, and racist jokes and caricatures -Deni
20. Facing your own racism, and freedom is the mastery of self -Natasha
21. The importance of written discourse, racism as a feeling of guilt, and the duality of being racist and not racist -Deni
22. Importance of laughter and connecting young people in different cultures -Natasha
23. Racist memories, persistent racism/White privilege, the Congo, White superiority, and the importance of being open -Deni
24. Humanity's survival instinct and genocide -Natasha
25. America's genocide denial, activists, using technology to connect people, passive and silent racism -Deni
26. No reconciliation without reparation and acknowledgement -Natasha

Introduction:

- *Kuei, My Friend* is an engaging book of letters: a literary and political encounter between Innu poet Natasha Kanapé Fontaine and Québécois-American novelist Deni Ellis Béchard. Choosing the epistolary form, they decided to engage together in a frank conversation about racism and reconciliation. This book was originally written in French and translated into English. By sharing honestly even their most painful memories, these two writers offer an accessible, humanist book on social bridge-building and respect for difference. *Kuei, My Friend* is accompanied by a chronology of events, a glossary of relevant terms in the Innu language, and, most importantly, a detailed teacher's guide that includes topics of discussion, questions, and suggested reflections for examination in a classroom setting.

Activities:

- See Appendix 3.
 - Exercise 1: Discussion in the classroom on the topics of racism.
 - Part A: Preparatory research
 - Part B: Personal experiences of racism
 - Part C: How do we fight racism? What are the solutions?
 - Exercise 2: Letter exchange projects between students from different communities and cultures.
 - Exercise 3: Other projects to be done as a group.
 - Organize a lecture by an Indigenous person, an immigrant, and/or a Québécois so that they can share experiences in Canada and their views on racism.
 - Reconstruct the history of Canada or of a Canadian province from the perspective of Indigenous Peoples: analyze colonialism from the perspective of the Indigenous Peoples, taking into account its consequences for their culture, their traditions, their languages, their territories, and their history.
 - Reconstruct the history of cultural genocide based on the 2007 film *The Invisible Nation* by Richard Desjardins and Robert Monderie, which Natasha mentions in one of her letters (on p. 30). After watching the film, give examples of things that were done to Indigenous people that were aimed at destroying their culture. Think about what is being done today. Is it very different?
 - Reconstruct the events of the 1990 Oka Crisis that Natasha talks about on p. 47 and 54-57, and look for solutions that could have brought about a rapprochement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in those circumstances.
 - What do you think of this statement by Deni on p. 98? "I hope that the Quebecois [...] can understand that the cultural oppression they inflict on Indigenous people is worse than that which they themselves have experienced. If we can succeed in seeing how much oppression has

harmed our own people, perhaps it is easier to understand its effect on other groups.”

- Do you believe that the cultural oppression of Indigenous people affects the Québécois today? How?
- As a group, make a list of important themes related to racism and of challenges created by this problem for a given society. Then choose a theme and write a short essay in which you analyze it. For example, you could choose the theme of dispossession, discussed by Natasha on p. 93-94, and discuss in your text the dispossession of Indigenous lands by certain private companies and by governments. Next, read the texts in the classroom. The readings can be followed by discussions focusing on the search for solutions.

Links:

- [Seven Fires Prophecy](#) (Anishinaabe) -Government of Treaty 2 Territory
- Online [Aimun-Masinaikan/Innu Dictionary](#) in French and English
- [Innu-aimun](#) -website teaching grammar, stories and lessons in Innu.
- [Systemic racism... Let's talk about it!](#) by Comité racisme et exclusion sociale - Ligue des droits et libertés (LDL) -questions and information about systemic racism with quotes from Natasha Kanapé Fontaine and novelist Deni Ellis Béchard.

Extensions:

- Watch the movie *Beans* (2020) about the Oka Crisis from a teenager's perspective.
Trailer: <https://youtu.be/MiIC3zT1gw4>

Created during several Professional Development sessions led by Devika Chudy from the MRTA Social Justice Committee, 2022-2023.