

Lesson Plan: Tilly: A Story of Hope and Resilience by Monique Gray Smith

Grade 9-12

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 is embedded in memory, history, and story. Learning involves patience and time. Learning requires exploration of one's identity.

Connections to Secondary Curriculum:

- English Language Arts
- English First Peoples
- Science
- Foods
- Physical Education

Vocabulary:

- See glossary at the end of the book.

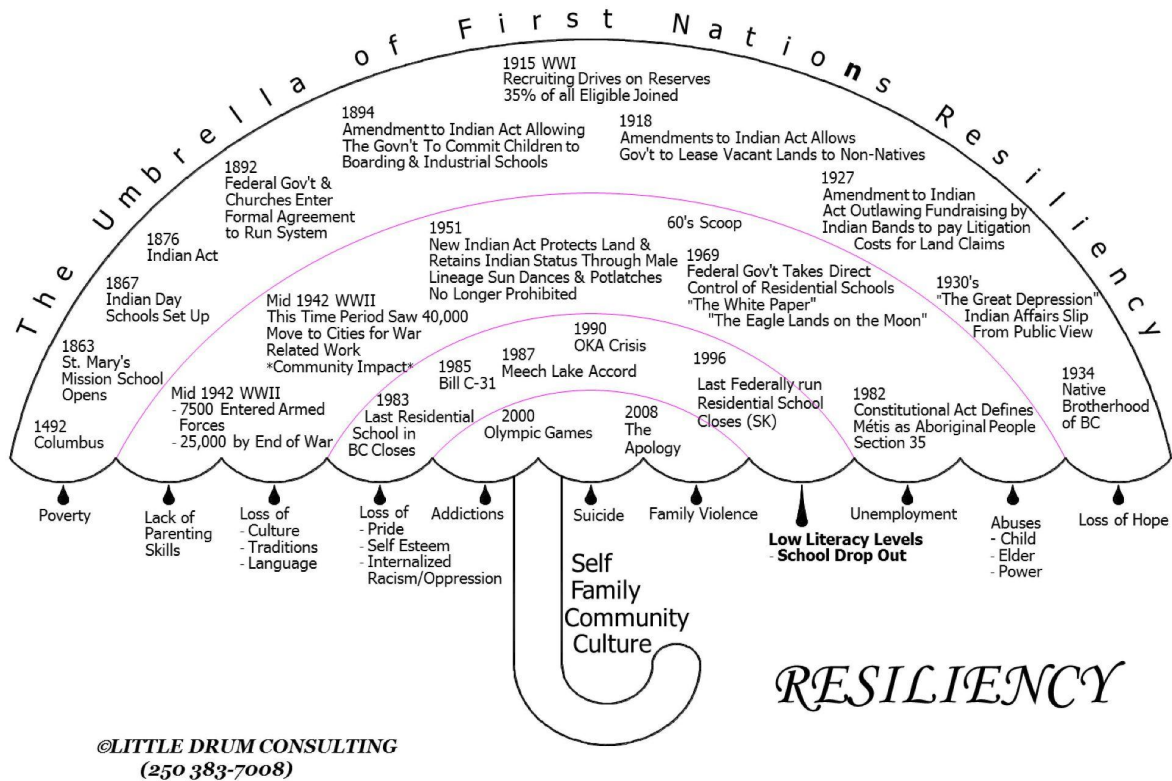
Big Ideas:

- This story captures the resilience of the main character, Tilly (and of Indigenous Peoples) through acknowledging the historical events of Canada and the impacts from the Government that continue to influence Indigenous affairs. It follows Tilly's story from a girl to an adult, as she finds both negative and positive ways to cope with her intergenerational trauma.

Introduction:

- Possible concerns may include triggers for students who are grappling with: intergenerational trauma, sensitivity towards subjects of (domestic) violence as well as substance use and abuse, sexual abuse, and controversial discussions about race, society, and historical events between student-teacher, student-student, and student-teacher-parent/guardian.
- Review The Umbrella of First Nations Resiliency on p. 205.

- Examine listed government policies -determining if they had a positive or negative effect on indigenous communities
- What are some of the long-term issues indigenous communities face due to these policies?



Activities:

- Read the novel. The following discussion questions are available at the back of the book:
 - *Tilly: A Story of Hope and Resilience* is published as a work of creative non-fiction. Why do you think the author chose to fictionalize her own story? How far from the truth can a memoir stray before it becomes a work of fiction?
 - Why does the author choose to begin Tilly's story with the scene she does? How does this opening relate to the final scene in the book in which Dan first meets his great-grandchild?
 - What is the significance of the dragonfly in the story?
 - How would you describe Tilly's relationships with her family members?
 - Which characters do you identify with the most? The least? How come?

- Throughout, the author integrates information about the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. What did you learn about this history over the course of the story?
- In what ways is Tilly similar to Grandma Tilly?
- What is the significance of Tilly's fishing trip with Grandma Tilly? How do you think her influence shapes Tilly?
- When Auntie Pauline tells Tilly that she is moving away, she recalls words from Grandma Tilly: "Wherever you go, there you are." In what ways is this true?
- What are some of your reactions to Chapter 31, Tears Are Medicine?
- Dreams play an important role in the book (p. 42). Discuss the idea that dreams experienced during different parts of the night relate to the dreamer's past, present, and future.
- Though Aboriginal peoples in Canada have faced many challenges, the author says, "[The fact] we are thriving in the multitude of ways we are is pure inspiration." What aspects of Aboriginal communities and culture contribute to their resilience?
- Tilly is of Cree, Lakota and Scottish ancestry, but the message of pursuing one's "dreams, ambitions and heart's desires" is universal. How does this message resonate in your own life?
- Think about special knowledge your family has passed on to you. It could be how to prepare a family recipe, how to do watercolour painting, how to make pottery, a family trade, or a helpful life skill like knitting, crocheting, sewing, mechanical repair, woodworking, fishing, hunting, etc. Write an information brochure or create a How-To video sharing this information.
- Have you had a teacher like Mrs. Murphy (p. 53, Chapter 10)? It doesn't have to necessarily be a teacher. It could be a coach, a religious leader, a family friend, or a family member. Think of and share an important life lesson that this person taught you.
- Reflect and write about who your "cookie person" is (p. 131, Chapter 27). "Who is someone you looked up to as a kid? [...] someone who believed in you? Maybe they didn't always like what you did or how you were living your life, but you felt better about yourself when you were with them." Write them a letter or poem to express your appreciation.
- What do you think about the practice of bringing a problem to "the fire"? "One of the teachings I had was about bringing a problem or hurt to the fire. A person has the right to bring the problem to the fire four times and have it listened to by those sitting round the fire. In return, you must take their guidance or direction and continue to move forward with your healing. If you don't, you no longer have the right to bring your problem to the fire or to seek guidance."(p. 160, Chapter 32). Does this seem fair? How do you help someone that is stuck on the same problem but doesn't follow any advice?

Extension Activities:

- Invite a guest speaker or go on a field trip to learn about the medicine wheel (p. 100, Chapter 22), experience a sunrise ceremony (p. 119 Chapter 25), or other indigenous medicine practices.

- [In the Footsteps of Tilly \(A novel study\): A Proposal to the Government addressing Indigenous Issues](#) by Gloria Tse
 - Blanket Exercise
 - see Appendix A
 - An interactive exercise/role-play activity that provides students with an insight into the hardships and inequities faced by Indigenous peoples of Canada through a timeline from colonization to the present. This activity creates empathy, understanding, and inspires students to use their voice as advocates and allies to Indigenous affairs in this country.

Links:

- [In the Footsteps of Tilly \(A novel study\): A Proposal to the Government addressing Indigenous Issues](#) by Gloria Tse -weeks of lessons based on the book.
- [Tilly: A story of hope and resilience](#) -lessons by Teaching Books.

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