

# FIRST PEOPLES FICTION SECONDARY READING LIST



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

## *Introduction*

British Columbia's redesigned curriculum with its focus on Big Ideas gives educators space and flexibility to innovate. An important part of this curriculum transformation is the authentic and respectful inclusion of Aboriginal content, culture, and knowledge. The purpose of this reading list is to contribute to the wide variety of resources offered by the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) to educators in order to help them engage learners on the many aspects related to First Peoples governance.

Recognizing the role of the spoken word and that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations the stories included in the following list explore First Peoples culture, traditional knowledge, values, perspectives related to interconnectedness and continuity, relationships, communities, and families. While several of the books on the accompanying lists do not explicitly address First Peoples governance they do provide a sense of the world view and cultural values upon which First Peoples governance principles are based. The stories listed provide opportunities for educators and students to initiate a discussion of what First Peoples governance looks like and to explore "Big Ideas" related to citizenship, community, identity, service, sharing, social justice, empathy, and respect.

King, Thomas (author). (1999). *Green grass, running water*. Toronto, ON: Harper Perennial. ISBN-13: 978-0006485131.

*Green Grass, Running Water* was a Canada Reads 2004 finalist. It was defended by Glen Murray. CBC Books Tuesday, July 1, 2014.

“Fresh, inventive, funny and intriguing, this latest novel from King (Medicine River) is an imaginative exploration of contemporary Native American culture. The plot revolves around the escape from a mental hospital of four very old Indians called Ishmael, Hawkeye, Robinson Crusoe and the Lone Ranger. These, however, are no ordinary natives. They may be the last survivors of the Indians interned at Fort Marion in Florida in the 19th century. Or perhaps they are the first human beings, as described in tribal creation myths. Their repeated breakouts--37 to date--have coincided with disasters: the 1929 stock market crash, the eruption of Mt. St. Helens, etc. Their mission this time brings them into the lives of an eccentric Canadian Blackfoot family: Lionel Red Dog, who sells TV sets and has no ambition; his sister Latisha, who owns a restaurant that bilks thrill-seeking tourists by purporting to serve them dog meat; Uncle Eli Stands Alone, a former university professor who is determined to prevent the operation of a dam on Indian land; and Charlie Looking Bear, a smarmy lawyer who works for the company opposing Eli's cause. Wavering emotionally between Lionel and Charlie is Alberta Frank, who dates both of them and wants a baby but knows that neither man is husband material. King, a professor of Native American studies at the University of Minnesota, skillfully interweaves Native American and Euro-American literatures, exploring the truths of each. He mixes satire, myth and magic into a complex story line that moves smartly from Canada to Wounded Knee to Hollywood, and to a place beyond time where God and the native trickster, Coyote, converse. With this clever, vastly entertaining novel, he establishes himself firmly as one of the first rank of contemporary Native American writers--and as a gifted storyteller of universal relevance. (*Publishers Weekly*). Reading level 11 up.

Maki, Joel T. (Ed). (1995). *Steal my rage: New native voices*. Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre.  
ISBN: 1-55054-401.2.

“Joel T. Maki has done a marvelous job of editing, selecting, and encouraging each participant to push beyond their own expectations. Yes, there is some rhetoric; however, there are times when we have to plow through the anger, surely a justifiable anger, an anger whose story has never been told or heard in its constructive form.

Throughout *Steal My Rage*, the voice of healing strains to cut through the fabric of oppression. The reader is left with the recognition that one cannot fight back if one cannot name the enemy, be it the colonizer, a lover, a demon, or the crippling hold of shame, fear, anger.

The opening observations in "Traditional Spirituality, Philosophy and Values" by David Redwolf guide the reader into the inheritance of all tribes. Though it's written with some evangelical zeal, the content is meant to help the reader become aware of differences that exist in individual and tribal practices. Redwolf beseeches the reader to pay heed to the traditional values that have sustained cultures throughout the ages. Lack of practice, he laments, leads to the erosion of cultural and personal actualization. Alfred Groulx's moving imagery in "Black Water"--"there is an Island on black water/Where spirits roam and eagles fly/and Native souls dance to silent drums"-leads us to the bones, the marrow of the people's history.

"Fire in the Mountains," a prose piece by Frederick A. Lepine, is a tickler that gently jabs the ribs of his non-Native companion and his audience. He observes, "I've always found it funny that written history is perceived as the truth and oral history as legend. Somehow, somewhere, we've managed to lose respect for the spoken word." He watches his friend jot down a story he has shared with him and notes: "Later, I notice he is writing down the co-ordinates ... in his diary. Maybe in case his son doesn't believe him when he tells the story."

Clint Elliott in "The Visit" takes the reader through a 14-year-old ritual of sharing tobacco with his beloved departed brother, a ritual that has sustained him through a troubled life, where marrow lives and where bone and sinew join. "We prayed/The splintered leg bones were invisible, sharp,/and that was when themagic began." I can think of no better conclusion. *Steal My Rage* is a book that reaches into deep marrow, sharing the vision, the hope, the pain, and laughter of this handful of writers who have dared to share beyond the scope of academic understanding. They gather their medicine, weave trails through their tears of self-recognition. Men and women illuminated in and with life." (*Quill and Quire*, Vol. 61, No. 12, Dec. 1995).

"*Steal My Rage* was originally conceived by Na-Me-Res (Native Men's Residence, Toronto) as a "community based publication, a way of promoting literacy in the Native community and encourage Native people to write." In response to a call for material, 400 works were submitted by unpublished Native writers. After a difficult selection process, the fiction, poetry, and non-fiction of 34 writers from across Canada was selected. The book is divided into four sections, each indicative of the writers' unique ways of seeing the world, each offering an appeal for "unity and community...and the interconnectedness of the cosmos.

"Wind blows throughout this book, be it the "Guardian Spirit Winds" of Rena Patrick's poem from which this collection's title is taken; or the winds on which the eagle flies as in a poem by Lone Eagle Le Maigre; or the gentle wind that blows a read along to a deeper understanding of Native peoples and their culture." (*Canadian Review of Materials*, Vol. III, No. 5, November 1996.) Reading level 10 up.

Maracle, Lee (author). (2002). *Will's garden*. Penticton, BC. Theytus Books. ISBN 978-189477022.

"*Will's Garden* is a coming of age story of a young native boy. The book begins with the busyness of preparing for Will's Becoming a Man Ceremony. While Will, his brothers and male cousins prepare for the ceremony in the living room, down the hall in the kitchen the women are busy too. As his mother, sisters, aunts and cousins do their part in preparing for the ceremony, Will observes the way they do things in comparison to men. In the novel, Will takes the time to re-look at the women in his life. He considers his future as a caretaker of the land in this modern world, while dealing with the problems of face, love, sexuality and illness. As a gifted orator, acclaimed author, poet and public speaker, Lee is recognized as an authority on issues pertaining to Aboriginal people and Aboriginal literature." (From the publisher).

"*Will's Garden*, Lee Maracle's first novel for young adults, also addresses issues of crosscultural misapprehension and stereotyping with compassion and humour, but the story is ultimately optimistic in its implications. Set in an unnamed Sto:lo community near Mount Cheam in the Upper Fraser Valley, the novel follows 15-year-old Will through the days leading up to and following his traditional coming-of-age ceremony. As in Maracle's earlier work, most notably *Ravensong* (1993), the novel develops Will's character partly in terms of his response to the complex ethical codes of Sto:lo society, and partly in terms of his confrontation of the larger world, particularly at school. Some readers will no doubt find the high school's pack of inarticulate racist "jocks" rather crudely drawn caricatures, but Maracle is interested in the roles that people are willing to play in society, and throughout the novel Will is looking for ways to see

people in larger contexts that make their behaviour comprehensible, if not forgivable. A key theme in VWH's *Garden* is the challenge of finding a language in which to comprehend and embrace human difference; Maracle's attention to the difficulty of reconciling different value systems saves the novel's depiction of small moments of reconciliation from sounding simplistic. For example, when Will brings home his friend Wit, who is homosexual, his family's troubled response, while low-key, nevertheless prompts Will to examine the kinds of freedom and choice that his society offers. The family ultimately tolerates Wit (who is part Aboriginal), but Will and the reader are cautioned to think carefully about how homophobia may be constructed differently from community to community.

Like Stacey, the protagonist in *Ravensong*, WiU sometimes seems wise and self-possessed beyond his years. However, the novel also effectively captures Will's teenage longings for love and impatience in a world that often still treats him as a child; the reader's resistance to his insights draws attention to the obstacles that Will must still face in his effort to find the authority to speak in his own voice." (*Library Media Connection* Vol 21, No. 7, April, 2003). Reading level 10 up.

Maracle, Lee (author). (1992). ***Sundogs***. Penticton, BC: Theytus Books.  
ISBN-13: 978-0919441415

"With Elijah Harper's symbolic blockage of the Meech Lake Accord and the high intensity of the Mohawk Warrior Society's defiant stand, 1990 marked a significant change for both First Nations and all the other people living in Canada. *Sundogs* is a novel about the struggle of a young First Nations family for love and solidarity in the context of that turbulent year. From urban Vancouver, to a small town in the Okanagan Valley, and across the country on a desperate bid for peace between the Canadian government and the Mohawk Nation, Marianne, Sundog's heroine, finds a moment of peace from the confusion and dis-unity in her own life. In returning to the beliefs of her ancestry, she comes to chart the course of her life anew.

Through *Sundogs*, Lee Maracle takes the reader on a cultural and spiritual journey into the heart of First Nations country. The agony, the joy and humour of First Nation's people makes the novel a lively and inspirational piece of work. *Sundogs* presents the reader an intimate look at the lives of one family during the momentous events surrounding the downfall of Meech Lake and the Oka crisis from a very personal perspective." (From the publisher.)

“On the first page of Lee Maracle's first novel, the narrator, Marianne, meditates about the run-down state of her Vancouver neighbourhood. But she chides herself: "I shouldn't be thinking about the crowding here in the east end. I have a sociology paper to do." The tension between Marianne's constant meditation on sociological problems and her alienation from an academic sociology that does not adequately address those problems is a central concern of the novel. On the one hand, the novel seems to say that Native people can only become strong by seeking traditional Native knowledge; Marianne learns more by joining a peace run across Canada with young Native people than she ever did at school. "I whizzed through school," she says, "swallowed everything I read, secretly disagreed with most of it, but gave it back in neat little packages for fourteen years and the only people to stump me were my own." On the other hand, sociology has evidently provided Marianne with tools and habits of mind that seem useful to her. Her classes have included the work of Frantz Fanon and Samir Amin, and her insights into the effects of racism and sexism on women of color resonate with the work of scholars such as Audre Lorde and bell hooks. Thus when her lover tells her that "I have never courted a Native woman and I have been with plenty," she observes that "Paragraphs of sociological analytic lay within those lines." She comes to understand her position as a Native woman, in the end, through a combination of experience and outside knowledge.

Perhaps I make *Sundogs* seem like an essay rather than a novel. This would not be a misrepresentation. Despite its vibrant characters, *Sundogs* is essentially a novel of ideas. It is set during Canada's notorious "Indian summer" of 1990, which began with Elijah Harper's heroic filibuster in the Manitoba parliament to block the Meech Lake constitutional accord, and ended with the violent stand-off at Oka, Quebec, where Mohawks defended their land from golf course development and the army moved in. *Sundogs* provides an intimate portrait of Native people sitting in groups glued to the television, talking with each other about what all of this meant for their communities and their children. The complicated events had complicated effects. Thus, Maracle celebrates the hope Elijah Harper gave his people, but she also analyses the ways Native men kept Native women at a remove from their new-found power, and she portrays inter-generational conflict.

Unfortunately, this fascinating and troubling web of ideas is not always presented in a very engaging manner. Long passages are really essay, and the narrator-as might be expected of a second-year university student, I suppose-lapses into purple prose with annoying frequency. (To add to the stylistic problems, the novel has not been properly copyedited. It is no shame to seek editorial assistance, and I hope Maracle gets some for her next novel so readers are not distracted by typos and petty errors.)

Various colourful characters impinge on the narrator's self-absorption and earnestness. Marianne's "Momma," tough and very funny, knows what not to believe from politicians and television and keeps her family together against great odds. If the university is one intellectual center of this novel, Momma is the other, along with Marianne's sister Lacey. As an example from the rest of the large cast of characters, I might choose James, a white student whose "voice is full of did I mess up?" James self-indulgently claims that his ignorance of Native politics is no crime. No, Marianne thinks, her mother wouldn't let him get away with that: "Momma excuses ignorance and stupidity in children and physically retarded people. The rest of us owe consequences for thoughtlessness."

All in all, this novel is better after reading than during reading; the long-winded prose fades and the characters and ideas remain. I find myself more and more fascinated by the novel the more I think about it. I would recommend *Sundogs* because of its intelligent portrayal of the complexity of Native communities and recent Native politics, because of "Momma" and her family-and because even the stylistic problems of *Sundogs* would make for lively discussion. The novel raises questions about the relation between aesthetic effectiveness and political effectiveness. intelligent portrayal of the complexity of Native communities and recent Native politics, because of "Momma" and her family-and because even the stylistic problems of *Sundogs* would make for lively discussion. The novel raises questions about the relation between aesthetic effectiveness and political effectiveness. (*American Indian Quarterly* Vol 18, No. 1, Winter 1994). Reading level 11 up.

Van Camp, Richard (author), Mateus, Krystal, (illustrator). (2015). *Three feathers*. Winnipeg, MB: Highwater Press.  
ISBN-13: 978-1553795360

"This graphic novel (available in selected Indigenous languages, as well as English) weaves together the stories of three young men who have committed crimes within their community. They are sent by its Elders to live nine months on the land as part of the circle sentencing process. Their time there is transformative, and they return home changed. Their experience, and changed relationships with the community members they have harmed, speak to the power and grace of restorative justice in First Nations communities. Themes & topics restorative justice, stewardship, traditional teachings, relationship with the land, spirituality." (*First Nations Education Steering Committee: Authentic First Peoples Resources*.) Reading level 8 – 9.

“Three Feathers, a graphic novel about restorative justice, is just one of six new works from Richard Van Camp anticipated for release in 2015. He worked on Three Feathers with artist Krystal Mateus.

It tells the story of three young men who return from the land after nine months of learning their language and culture.

In the novel, three boys, Rupert, Bryce and Flinch, break into a number of homes to steal valuables and drugs. When they are caught, they feel nothing but contempt for the people they victimized and the Elder they gravely injured.

The story is richly drawn with vivid images of the pain these young men feel, having lost their culture and connection to their community. One of the lines that stand out explains, "Every animal is born with gifts. Bears always know what you are thinking. Frogs are keepers of the rain. Dragonflies are keepers of snakes and can sew the lips shut of any child who tells their first lie."

This graphic novel can be read and re-read for the wonder of learning Native culture and for the simple genius of how the story is told, bringing three misguided boys to a new understanding of who they are in the world around them and bringing them to 'repent' for their crimes and make right what was made wrong.

Richard Van Camp was born in 1971 and grew up in the town of Fort Smith, N.W.T. in the South Slave region. Nearly all of his work has a focus on the northern region and he counts himself lucky to have lived there in the time of ninjas, music videos, Star Wars and He Man, which he says "invaded his life and spirit".

Always a big reader, Van Camp devoured the writings of S.E. Hinton, Stephen King and Pat Conroy, and many comic books. He started writing himself when he was 19 when he realized that no one was writing about the life he and his family and friends were experiencing, living in both the traditional Native and pop culture worlds.

His earliest major work was "The Lesser Blessed," which came out in 1996.

Another new work, released in April is *The Blue Raven*, a graphic novel illustrated by Stephen Keewatin Sanderson. It's a tale of family and loss and friendship.

A young man named Benji has his bike stolen, and a young man in his teens named Trevor offers to help get the bike back. The two boys become close friends as the younger boy teaches the older about the wonders of his culture, though he is still tormented by the loss of his father which the lost bike symbolizes for him.



The story carries a message of hope in how by helping one another through life's difficulties we grow stronger, and it is also about the power of tradition in all of our lives.

A third Van Camp short novel called *Whistle* will also focus on the topic of restorative justice, but this time told through letters written from a young man named Darcy to a boy he bullied and assaulted numerous times.

The letters are written from a youth detention centre where Darcy was taken and shows the transformation of the young man as he learns useful job skills, realizes how important his family is to him and, through writing to his victim, realizes that when he was most angry and violent he was more scared than anything.

These three works are set up to be used as teaching tools. The *Blue Raven* and *Whistle* are featured on the website [www.pearsoncanada.ca](http://www.pearsoncanada.ca) under the heading "Always Learning", and *Three Feathers* is available through Highwater Press, which can be accessed through [www.highwaterpress.com](http://www.highwaterpress.com)

Other works to watch for from Richard Van Camp are *For Our Children: Teachings and Traditions from Fort Smith Elders*, *Night Moves*, and *The Moon of Letting Go*.

Van Camp believes that life in Fort Smith will always influence his work.

"There is a magic there" he said. "There are so many storytellers and so many people I admire."

(*Windspeaker*, May 2015). Reading level 11 up.

Wagamese, Richard (author). (2006). *Keeper'n Me*. Toronto, ON: Anchor. ISBN-13: 978-0385662833.

"When Garnet Raven was three years old, he was taken from his home on an Ojibway Indian reserve and placed in a series of foster homes. Having reached his mid-teens, he escapes at the first available opportunity, only to find himself cast adrift on the streets of the big city.

Having skirted the urban underbelly once too often by age 20, he finds himself thrown in jail. While there, he gets a surprise letter from his long-forgotten native family.

The sudden communication from his past spurs him to return to the reserve following his release from jail. Deciding to stay awhile, his life is changed completely as he comes to discover his sense of place, and of self. While on the reserve, Garnet is initiated into the ways of the Ojibway--both

ancient and modern--by Keeper, a friend of his grandfather, and last fount of history about his people's ways.

By turns funny, poignant and mystical, *Keeper'n Me* reflects a positive view of Native life and philosophy--as well as casting fresh light on the redemptive power of one's community and traditions. (From the publisher). Reading level 11 up .