

WHERE THE BLOOD MIXES

by Kevin Loring

Study Guide for Teachers

This play would make an excellent addition to any English Language, Arts, History, Drama, or Canadian Studies class.

This study guide was prepared by Rachel Penny at Teesri Duniya Theatre.
It is intended for educational purposes only.

Where the Blood Mixes is available for purchase from Talonbooks

Where the Blood Mixes by Kevin Loring

Cast and Crew:

“Christine”: Alarey Alsip

“Mooch”: Charles Bender

“George”: Eric Hausknost

“Floyd”: Jeremy Proulx

“June”: Emilee Veluz

Director: Lib Spry

Assistant Director: Deanna Dobie

Stage Manager: Luciana Burcheri

Production Manager: Mallorie Casey

Lighting Designer: Jody Burkholder

Set Designer: Diana Uribe

Costume Designer: Laurence Gagnon

Projections Designer: Chris Hicks



About Teesri Duniya Theatre:

Teesri Duniya Theatre is dedicated to producing socially and politically relevant theatre that supports a multicultural vision of society, promoting interculturalism through works of theatre, and creating theatrical styles based on the cultural experiences of visible minorities living in Canada. The company believes that culturally diverse theatre and artists are an integral part of the theatre landscape of the country. The company is committed to multiethnic casting and stories.

Teesri Duniya Theatre is engaged in three distinct areas of activities:

- **production** (of original works and translations into and from English/French/other languages)
- play development through our program **Fireworks**
- **theatre and community collaboration program** designed to develop creative skills among emerging visible minority artists and to enhance intercultural interaction.

About the Playwright: Kevin is Nlaka'pamux from the Lytton First Nation in British Columbia. He is a playwright and a professional Actor of the stage and screen, an award winning documentary producer, and the Artistic Director of The Savage Society a non-profit production company mandated to tell Aboriginal stories using contemporary mediums. His first published play, *Where the Blood Mixes*, won the Governor General's Literary Award for Drama in 2009.

Synopsis: *Where the Blood Mixes* is about the legacy left behind after Aboriginal¹ children were taken from their families, abused and assaulted in Residential Schools. The child of Residential School survivors, Christine is removed from her home at a young age. When she returns, she must rediscover the family and community she left behind. *Where the Blood Mixes* is a story of loss and redemption: Can a person survive a past marred with historical injustice; can a people survive their difficult history and march on?

Setting: *Where the Blood Mixes* takes place in Kumsheen, commonly known as Lytton, British Columbia. Kumsheen is located at the confluence of the Fraser and Thomson River. The literal translation of Kumsheen is "the place inside the heart where the blood mixes". This may refer to several things: the striking image of two rivers, one green and one blue, mixing and flowing together; the way the river turns a bright red as the salmon run passes through; or the legend of Coyote being defeated by a transformer, his body scattered near Kumsheen and his blood flowing into the river. Kumsheen/Lytton is at the heart of the Nlaka'pamux nation.



The confluence of the Thompson and Fraser Rivers in Lytton (Kumsheen), B.C

¹ "Aboriginal" is used as an umbrella term used here to refer to First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Though we are speaking broadly here, it is generally best to be as specific as possible about the name of the nation or band to which you are referring.

Characters:

Floyd: A middle aged Native man, and a Residential Schools survivor. He has lost his wife, and his daughter, Christine, has been taken away from him. When Christine tells him she is planning to return to Lytton, he is forced to confront his complicated past.

Mooch: A middle aged Native man, friend of Floyd's, June's partner. A character who brings a mix of comedy and tragedy to the play. His nickname "Mooch" comes from his habit of "borrowing" from his friends and family. Mooch's humour hides a deep pain related to his time at Residential Schools

Christine: A young Native woman in her 20s. Christine is the daughter of Floyd and his late wife Anna. After Anna's death, she was taken from Floyd and has lived most of her life with a foster family in Vancouver, where she was treated well. She returns to Lytton to learn more about her family and her past.

June: A middle aged Native woman who is Mooch's partner. Like Floyd and Mooch, she is a survivor of Residential schools. June is a strong woman who has become clean and sober after a struggle with alcoholism, but she often finds herself frustrated with Mooch's actions and attitude.

George: George is the bartender in Lytton. Though he is not Native, he grew up around the Native characters in the play, and considers them friends.

Audience advisory: This play contains strong language and mature themes.

Key Topics and Themes for Study:

Topics

- History, Legacy and Impact of Residential Schools in Canada
- Alcohol abuse and mental illness in Native communities
- Young Aboriginals and their connection to Aboriginal communities and traditions
- The role of the Canadian government in Aboriginal education, "then and now"
- The impacts of colonialism in Canada

Themes

- Memory (both individual and collective)
- Legend, truth, and history and the fluidity of the lines between the three
- Identity: Individual and collective Aboriginal identity/how it is discovered and defined
- How individuals and communities deal with a painful past/how to move forward.



Floyd (Billy Merasty) and Mooch (Ben Cardinal) in the original production (Photo: David Cooper)

Brief Overview of Residential Schools

Timeline:

1600s: First boarding schools for Aboriginal children are established in New France

1876: The Indian Act makes all Aboriginal people wards of the Canadian government.

1879: The Davin Report recommends the establishment of “industrial schools” in order to “civilize” the Aboriginal population. Government of Canada officially involved in the operation of Residential Schools.

1889: First allegations of abuse at Residential Schools: The principal of Ruperts Land School in British Columbia is accused of sexually assaulting female students.

1892: The Canadian government officially enters into partnership with various church denominations already operating schools.

1920: Attendance at Residential Schools becomes mandatory for Aboriginal children aged 7-15.

1931: The number of Residential Schools in Canada peaks at eighty.

1940s/1950s: Official government policy concerning Aboriginal people begins to shift away from segregation toward assimilation and integration. Indian Affairs calls for the closure of some schools.

1969: Church involvement in Residential Schools officially ends, and the Canadian government takes sole control of their operation. Control of some residential schools begins to be transferred to local bands.

1980s: Allegations of abuse in Residential Schools begin to emerge.

1986: The United Church becomes the first church to officially apologize for their involvement in Residential Schools and the related abuses. The Catholic Church follows in 1991, the Anglican Church in 1993, and the Presbyterian Church in 1994.

1990: Phil Fontaine, then leader of the Association of Manitoba Chiefs, becomes the first high-profile Aboriginal leader to publicly share the fact that he was abused during his time at Residential Schools.

1996: The last government-controlled Residential School closes. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples is released, calling for a full inquiry into Residential Schools.

1998: \$350 million healing fund announced. Used in part to establish Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

2001: Canadian government begins discussions with various churches to build a compensation plan for Residential School survivors.

2005/2006: Class action suit launched against the Canadian government by Residential School survivors. In 2006, an agreement sets up the Common Experience Payment

2008: Prime Minister Stephen Harper makes formal apology in the House of Commons to survivors of Residential Schools. Truth and Reconciliation Commission launched by the Canadian government.

2009: After some early leadership shifts, Justice Murray Sinclair is appointed as the chief commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and its work begins in earnest. The commission holds public event and conducts private interviews with thousands of Residential School Survivors.

Why were Residential Schools created?

A phrase often quoted when describing the goals of Residential Schools is that they were meant to “kill the Indian in the child”, alienating them from their culture and community, and forcibly integrating them into mainstream society. The mandate to provide education for Aboriginal peoples masked a deeper goal of suppressing and destroying Native culture, and eliminating the need for the Government to concern itself with the affairs of Aboriginal Canadians. Though allegations of abuse and substandard living conditions were frequent throughout the time Residential Schools were operating, schools remained open until the mid 1990s. It is important to remember that the driving ideas behind the schools (racism, assimilation, etc.), were often as damaging as the abuses and poor living conditions.

What was life like at Residential Schools?

Though some students had a positive experience at Residential Schools, the majority had their time marked by loneliness, neglect, illness, hunger, hard labour and abuse. Children arriving at the schools were forced to abandon most elements of their culture, most significantly their language. Students caught speaking to one another in their native language would be punished. Punishments for breaking the rules were extreme: students were often given severe beatings or confined to an isolated room for long periods of time. Students were often underfed and given food with little nutritional value. For many years, a large number of Residential Schools operated on a “half-day” system in which students worked for half the day under the guise of preparing them for professional life. The work they took on was often back-breaking and in many cases more than the mandated half-day was spent working. Often, the work the students did directly benefited the school: for example, crops harvested by children would be sold for a profit. Conditions were often very unhealthy, and sickness was prevalent. Many students died while at Residential School, whether from work-related injury, preventable illness, or from exposure when they attempted to run away and return home. In many cases, these deaths were not reported to their families.

What was the impact of Residential Schools?

The Residential School system had impacts on the individual survivors as well as their families and wider communities. For many individuals who attended Residential Schools, the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse they suffered would stay with them and continue to impact their lives. Many survivors suffered with alcohol abuse, mental illness, and some survivors were driven to commit suicide. Due to the fact that survivors were separated from their families during most of their childhood, they were often poorly equipped to function in a family environment when they had their own children. Like many survivors of abuse, some survivors of residential schools were caught in a cycle, and became abusers themselves. On a wider level, Residential Schools had a negative impact on indigenous culture. Children were disconnected from their language and traditions, and unable to learn the skills and trades their families had practiced for generations. The loss to Aboriginal culture caused by Residential Schools is too immense to be measured. *Where the Blood Mixes* showcases all three of these levels of impact: personal, family, and community-wide.



St. George's Residential School in Lytton, B.C (Courtesy Anglican Church)

Aboriginals in the Quebec and Montreal community:

Though the play is set in British Columbia, its themes resonate all across Canada. Quebec was home to eleven residential schools, scattered all across the province, and has a large Aboriginal population. Quebec is home to 11 different Nations; the area around Montreal and Quebec City is historically associated with the Mohawk, Abenaki, and Huron-Wendat nations. According to the 2006 Census, 17,000 Aboriginal people live in Montreal. There are several important groups and organizations in Montreal that might give students insight into the life of Aboriginal people and communities living in and around Montreal.

Native Friendship Centre of Montreal: <http://nfcsm.org/>

Ondinnok, a francophone Native theatre company:
<http://www.ondinnok.org/fr/index.php?m=accueil&intro=2>

Terres en vues/Land InSights (Organizers of the Présence autochtone festival):
<http://www.nativelynx.qc.ca/>

Femmes autochtones du Québec/Quebec Native Women : <http://www.faq-qnw.org/>

Mohawks of Kahnawake: Kahnawake is the reserve closest to downtown Montreal:
<http://www.kahnawake.com/>



Students attending Residential School

Discussion Questions/Suggested activities:

Before attending the play:

- Choose one of the events/milestones on the timeline above and create an in-depth presentation.
- Research a specific residential school in Canada. Create a presentation about what life would have been like for a student attending that school.
- Watch the video of the official apology Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2008, along with the reactions from Aboriginal leaders and other politicians. Discuss the significance/impact of this official apology.
- Research the idea of “colonialism”. In what ways were the Residential Schools part of colonialism in Canada?
- Research a contemporary political or human-rights issue in a local Quebec Aboriginal community and create a presentation about that issue and its impact. Suggest ways for classmates to get involved.
- Research The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. What are its goals? How is it connecting to Aboriginal communities and to survivors? What are the outcomes so far? Where else in the world have “Truth and Reconciliation” processes occurred?

After attending the play:

- Explore the different ways in which the legacy of Residential Schools affected each character in the play.
- Put together a creative response to the play: a poem, a painting, a piece of music, etc.
- Create a scene involving characters in the play that happens before or after the action of the play. Some suggestions are
 - A scene involving Anna and Floyd, before Anna's death
 - A scene involving the survivor characters during their time in Residential Schools
 - Floyd meeting his grandchild for the first time

Sample Discussion Questions

- How does each character in the play incorporate their past into the way they see their present selves? How do they shape their own identities?
- How does the motif of the river connect to the broader themes of the play? To the characters?
- What did the play teach you about the history of Aboriginal people in Canada?



National Chief Phil Fontaine responds to official government apology (2008)

Bibliography/Further Resources:

“They Came for the Children” is an excellent historical overview of Residential Schools created in 2012 by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. It can be found at http://www.attendancemarketing.com/~attmk/TRC_jd/ResSchoolHistory_2012_02_24_Webposting.pdf

“Where are the Children?” is an online resource for classroom use with interactive maps and timelines: <http://www.wherethechildren.ca/>

The CBC’s digital archives provides a wealth of audio and video content surrounding residential schools: <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/>. You can also find video specific to the Truth and Reconciliation process at <http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/Canada/Stolen+Children/>

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission website: <http://www.trc.ca>. They have a helpful list of further links and resources here: <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=9#>

Project of Heart: An initiative bringing schools into the process of reconciliation: <http://poh.jungle.ca/>

Library and Archives Canada has a comprehensive list of print, online, and video resources for research on Residential Schools: <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/native-residential/index-e.html>

Where the Blood Mixes at Teesri Duniya:

Special rate of \$5.00 per ticket for high school students and teachers for the following matinee shows:

Wednesday, September 19th 2012, 1pm

Thursday, September 20th 2012, 1pm

Friday, September 21st 2012, 1pm

Wednesday, September 26th, 2012, 1pm

Thursday, September 27th, 2012, 1pm

Friday, September 28th, 2012, 1pm

A Q&A with the actors can be arranged for your class following the performance. Please let us know in advance if this is something you wish to arrange.

TO RESERVE A STUDENT MATINEE PERFORMANCE, please email our office at info@teesriduniya.com or call Rachel at 514-848-0238.

If you would like to arrange in-class activities with artists from Teesri Duniya Theatre before or after the show, please contact us directly.

Centre culturelle Calixa Lavalée

3819 rue Calixa-Lavalée (in the heart of Parc Lafontaine) Montreal QC, H2I 3A7

Easily accessible from 24 (Sherbrooke) or 29 (Rachel) bus routes, School bus parking available

Looking forward to seeing you at the show!