

Resource	7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga by David A. Robertson and Scott B. Henderson
Product	7 Generations Book Backgrounder including background information, plot synopsis, main characters, key themes and critical thinking questions.
Suggested Themes	Family and Community, Health, Indigenous History, Residential Schools and their Legacies, Personal Relationships
UPE Course Connections	
EDUC 435: Literacy, Language and Culture	This book is a good example of how students can learn about and explore Indigenous culture through reading. Also how culture can be passed on through story telling. The books discusses how some Indigenous students lost their language in residential school. The Book Backgrounder also explores why teachers should teach using graphic novels, including the benefits of reading graphic novels in improving student visual literacy.
EDUC 450: Diversity in Learning	The graphic novel explores the cultural importance of Indigenous knowledge. It shows how Indigenous peoples learn from the land and pass down knowledge through generations. The story also demonstrates how a connection to culture and past generations can help provide healing and guidance to modern Indigenous youth.
EDUC 460: Specialization I	This would be an appropriate resource for students in the Social Studies or English Language Arts specialization. Introducing them to a variety of Indigenous literature, including graphic novels, is important as they begin their focus in their teachable subject area.
EDUC 530: Indigenous Education	The novel introduces students to the history, perspectives and practices of the Plains Cree people. It covers important historical events such as the smallpox epidemic and the introduction of residential schools. A strength of this resources is how it shows an Indigenous family's journey across 7 generations, meaning readers learn important historical events, but also see perspectives from modern Indigenous life.
K-12 Connections	Recommended age range: Grades 9-12 Subjects: Social Studies and English Language Arts  Curricular Outcomes: Respond to a variety of texts, Visual literacy, Respect others and strengthen community, Indigenous knowledge, Identity, Diversity and Citizenship

# 7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga

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## an epic 4-part graphic novel.

### Introduction

From HighWater Press, this 4-part graphic novel series tells the story of one Indigenous family over three centuries and seven generations, inspired by the teaching that “what was done to us will touch us for 7 generations” (pg.126). It is written by David A. Robertson and illustrated by Scott B. Henderson. The novel was a national bestseller and was selected for the Canadian Children’s Book Centre’s *Best Books for Kids & Teens* List. It is recommended for grades 9-12 and is available in English and French.

**Note: This document may contain spoilers!**

### Synopsis

#### Stone (Book 1)

While recovering in the hospital from a failed suicide attempt, Edwin learns the story of Stone, his Plains Cree ancestor. Stone is forced to make a difficult decision when his older brother, Bear, is killed during a Blackfoot raid. Stone must overcome his grief in order to avenge his brother's death. He is then able to begin a new life with his family. Edwin realizes that he has people to live and fight for and also that there are those who are fighting for him.

#### Scars (Book 2)

Edwin returns home and, with the help of his mother, continues to learn about and embrace his family’s past. His mother tells him the story of White Cloud, an ancestor survived the smallpox epidemic of 1870. After witnessing the

### WHY GRAPHIC NOVELS?

- **Visual Literacy**– graphic novels help students develop their ability to interpret information in the form of an image. Connecting images and words at the same time engages more of our brains!
- **Visual supports** can aid reading and comprehension for English language learners and students with some learning disabilities.
- **When given the chance to study graphic novels, studies show students are more encouraged to read and engage more than they normally would.**

death of his entire family, White Cloud must find the strength to continue living, move on and start a new life. Edwin finds strength to continue living and confront his past.

### Ends/Begins (Book 3)

Edwin reconnects with his father, James, who opens up about his experiences in residential school. James and his younger brother Thomas leave their home and grandparents to attend school. James is assigned to manual work on the grounds and hardly sees his younger brother. Eventually, James discovers the abuse that Thomas is living under and in a fit of rage, attacks a priest. Thomas runs away and the story ends in tragedy. Pain and guilt from this experience stay with James and have been passed on to Edwin.

### The Pact (Book 4)

James continues his story to Edwin. He becomes lost after Thomas' funeral and leaving residential school. He can't escape the feelings of his past. Lauren leaves to attend university and James stays behind to "live in [his] thoughts" (pg. 116). After reconnecting and the birth of Edwin, Lauren helps James realize he must find a way to heal to be the father he wants to be. After being away 16 years, we are back to the present, watching Edwin and James struggle to connect. Edwin expresses his pain from a fatherless childhood. He forgives James but realizes that he must walk his own path in life to find his own healing.



Figure 2. Cover of *The Pact* (Book 4) by S. Henderson, 2016, Portage & Main Press.

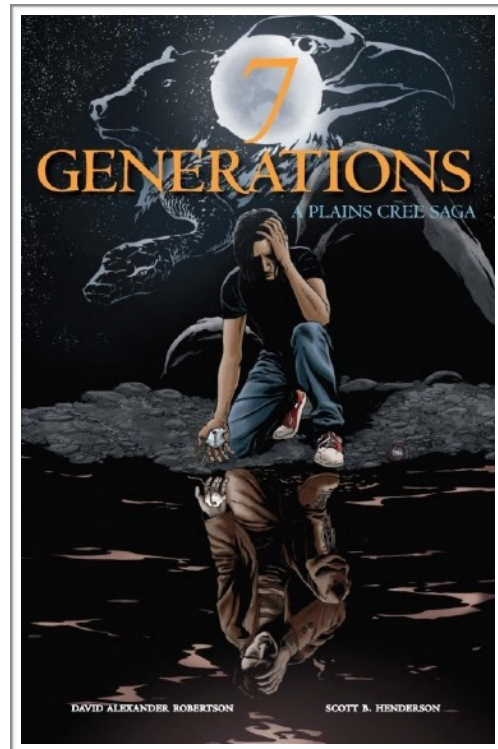


Figure 1. Cover of *7 Generations: Plains Cree Saga* by S. Henderson, 2016, Portage & Main Press.

## Important Characters

### Edwin

A lost young man. Growing up fatherless, Edwin is unsure if life holds any meaning for him and how he fits into the world. He reconnects with his family and ancestors during the story.

### Lauren

Edwin's mother. A childhood friend of James, who leaves him after his return from residential school to attend University. She studies psychology and reconnects with James later in life. Throughout the 4 books, she helps guide and care for Edwin, telling him stories of their ancestors.

### James

Edwin's father. Residential school survivor who is left with pain and guilt. Leaves his family to find his own path of healing.

## Thomas

James' younger brother who is taken with him to attend residential school. Thomas dies tragically while trying to escape the abuse of the school.

## Stone

An ancestor who makes difficult decisions in order to continue living and become a leader in his family.

## White Cloud

An ancestor who survives smallpox and learns an important lesson about holding on to hope in dark times.

## Key Themes

### Family

Much of Edwin's struggle around finding his place in the world stems from feeling disconnected from his family, both those living and those who came before. Edwin opens up emotionally to his mother who helps him reconnect with his ancestors through storytelling. The stories of Stone and White Cloud give Edwin comfort and direction. We also see Edwin reconnecting with his father and see how pain, guilt, and trauma can be passed between family members. We are presented with the idea that what happens to us in our lives can reach out and touch our families for 7 generations (pg. 126).

### Healing

At the beginning of the story, Edwin is physically healing from the effects of a suicide attempt. The rest of the story is how he begins his journey of spiritual and emotional healing. Some of this healing takes place through

reconnecting with family and traditions. James shares his path to healing and including the advice "one of the things that helped me was coming to know our ways again" (pg. 125). The series ends with Edwin's realization that he must find his own journey of healing.

## Indigenous History

This single story stretches across three centuries and seven generations. Because of its epic scope, we see glimpses of different moments and aspects in Indigenous history. In Book 1 we are introduced to the Plains Cree people and their ways of life including warrior society and the formation of kinship and marriages. In Book 2, we learn about the devastating smallpox epidemic of 1870-1871. Later in the series, we are presented with the residential school system and the resulting legacies of trauma. All of these histories are framed by Edwin living in modern times, showing how all of history is connected.

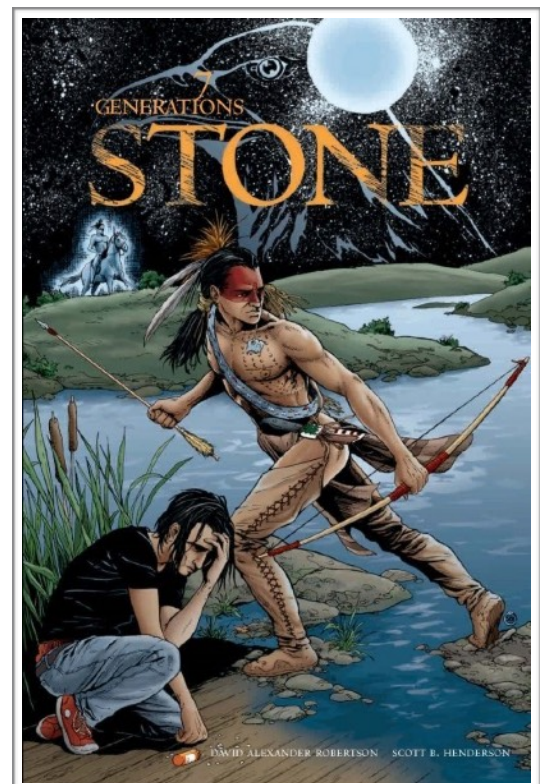


Figure 3. Cover of *Stone (Book 1)* by S. Henderson, 2016, Portage & Main Press.

## Critical Thinking Questions

1. In Book 1, we learn “we all have someone to fight for” (pg. 31). Who are you fighting for in your life? Who are your people?
2. Edwin is connected to his ancestors in the stories his mother tells him. What are some techniques the illustrator uses to make the connections between Edwin and his ancestors visible to readers?
3. Trauma can be passed down between generations. In which ways are pain and guilt from James’ experiences in residential school still affecting Edwin?
4. What is the significance of Edwin returning the amulet to his father at the end of Book 4? Why does he not keep it?

## MEDIA AND OTHER LINKS

Check out these videos, articles and websites to learn more about *7 Generations*.

- 7 Generations Book Trailer: [Click Here](#)
- Interview with David A. Robertson: [Click Here](#)
- Teacher’s Guide for 7 Generations series from HighWater Press. The 49-page guide is available for free download: [Click Here](#)

## About the Author and Illustrator

### David A. Robertson

David A. Robertson is a member of Norway House Cree Nation in Winnipeg. He is a winner of the Governor General’s Literary Award and the Beatrice Mosionier Indigenous Writer of the Year Award. He is the author of several picture books, YA novels and Graphic Novels. He seeks to educate and entertain through his writing about Canada’s Indigenous Peoples. His work focuses on many contemporary Indigenous issues. Learn more at [darobertson.ca](http://darobertson.ca)

### Scott B. Henderson

Scott B. Henderson has always been an artist. He enjoyed drawing pictures and comics as a child. He graduated from the University of Manitoba’s School of Fine Art. He has illustrated a variety of projects and has worked with many Indigenous authors. He has also written and illustrated his own sci-fi/fantasy comic, *The Books of Era*. See his online portfolio at [scotthendersonart.wordpress.com](http://scotthendersonart.wordpress.com)



Figure 4. Cover of *Ends/Begins (Book 3)* by S. Henderson, 2016, Portage & Main Press.



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