

Kiss of the Fur Queen Unit Plan

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| <p>Resources used and possible concerns</p> | <p><i>Kiss of the Fur Queen</i> Novel by Tomson Highway</p> <p>Possible concerns: Although this is a wonderful novel to teach, there are numerous content warnings that may present challenges when teaching this novel.</p> <p>Sensitive elements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sexual abuse ● Violence ● Sexuality ● Foul Language <p>Students/parents/administration will need to be prepared to cover this sensitive material and alternatives may need to be provided. The novel also contains critical discussions about Catholicism, which may be problematic for some students/parents/schools.</p> |
| <p>Author/creator and/or literature background</p> | <p>Tomson Highway</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Born in Brochet, Manitoba, in 1951, Highway is Cree and a member of the Barren Lands First Nation -Highway’s parents were caribou hunters (his father was a legendary caribou hunter and world championship dogsled racer and his mother was an artist) -Highway was taken from his family and placed in Guy Hill Residential School from age 6 to 15 -Highway is an accomplished concert pianist and studied music at the University of Manitoba and University of Western Ontario after residential school -He worked for 7 years as a social worker in Ontario before becoming a writer -Highway is best known as a playwright for his plays <i>Rez Sisters</i> and <i>Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing</i>, was a key figure in the establishment of the Native theatre company Native Earth Performing Arts, which was key in supporting the careers of many talented Indigenous actors, writers, and artists -Highway’s brother, Rene Highway, was an accomplished dancer and choreographer and frequently collaborated with Tomson until Rene died in 1990 of AIDS -Highway is a member of the Order of Canada |

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| | <p><i>Kiss of the Fur Queen</i> - published in 1998</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -A semi-autobiographical novel that reflects many aspects of Highway's own life -Tells the story of two Cree brothers that are taken from their family in Northern Manitoba to a residential school -The brothers experience abuse at the residential school while also becoming alienated from their home in the north and move to Winnipeg to attend high school -Both brothers become talented artists but experience conflict between their Cree upbringing and the Catholic teachings of the residential school <p>Themes include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -the conflict between Cree and Catholic/colonial belief systems -Alienation and isolation -Urban vs. Rural Indigenous life -Redemption through arts -Coming to terms with and embracing sexuality -Coping with trauma and abuse |
| <p>UPE course connections (not exhaustive)</p> | <p>EDUC 530 Indigenous Education - This novel presents a unique perspective and could be used to give pre-service teachers insight into contemporary urban Indigenous life as well as the experiences of individuals who attended residential schools (as students may have people that are close to them that attended residential school). It could also be used to teach pre-service teachers about the trickster character archetype that is present in the stories of many Indigenous cultures and offer insights into the Cree language, which conveys elements of the worldview of the Cree people. Using the sharing circle lesson plan may also be helpful in decolonizing the classroom and encouraging every person to contribute to a dialogue (rather than just the students that consistently raise their hands)</p> <p>EDUC 450 Diversity in Learning - The novel gives insight into what it would be like for someone to attend a school system that was designed for them to fail, which may help pre-service teachers identify shortcomings in the contemporary education system to support students from diverse backgrounds.</p> <p>EDUC 460 or 535 Specialization I/II - Secondary English - This novel could be used to create a novel study unit/lesson plan as it would be an attractive text to teach (it is written by a well</p> |

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| | <p>known Canadian Indigenous author, which fulfills the “Canadian text” requirement) As this text contains some mature content, it would not be suitable for Elementary level courses.</p> <p>EDUC 435 - As this novel contains many Cree words and passages, <i>Kiss of the Fur Queen</i> is a text that would especially appeal to English/Cree bilingual speakers, and is a wonderful example of a text that crosses between languages to create new layers of understanding by offering insight into Cree culture through language</p> |
| <p>K-12 connection</p> | <p>Given the maturity level of the content, <i>Kiss of the Fur Queen</i> would likely only be suitable for high school aged students (grades 10-12). The novel fits the “Long Text” requirement for ELA 10,20, and 30 and is by a Canadian author</p> |
| <p>Materials</p> | <p><i>Kiss of the Fur Queen</i> novel (class set)</p> |
| <p>Rationale</p> | <p>Big idea: Students will engage in a novel study of <i>Kiss of the Fur Queen</i> building towards a critical response for 20-1 & 30-1 students or a Literary Exploration for 20-2 & 30-2 students.</p> <p>Purpose: This unit plan provides a framework for teaching <i>Kiss of the Fur Queen</i> building towards having students write a Critical Response to Text (CRT) for -1 level ELA or a Literary Exploration (-2) on the novel. It outlines lessons that cover key decolonizing concepts that would be essential for understanding this text and includes discussion questions for each cluster of chapters as well as essay questions for a CRT or Lit Ex response.</p> |
| <p>Lesson/activities</p> | <p><u>Lesson Plans</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introductory sharing circle - As the importance of family, kinship, and community is a key theme in this text, the novel study can begin with a sharing circle to build community. The teacher will begin by introducing the colonial idea of family (biological, patriarchal, nuclear, etc.) and challenge this by introducing the Indigenous concept of kinship (looking at “all my relations”; biological, non-biological, chosen, ecological, ancestors and descendants, etc.) Proper protocols should be |

followed (circle moves to the left, one student talking at a time, passing is okay etc.). The guiding question for the circle can be “where do you come from?” and students should be encouraged to explore this question as much as they see fit. Students may have difficulties talking about family, so it would be important to frame this as a decolonizing and community building exercise where students can share as much or as little as they feel comfortable with. As sharing circles may be new to some students, it is important to clearly outline the rules while in circle and to embed circle time throughout the unit, as students will become more comfortable with the idea of sharing (and circles can be used for formative assessments)

2. Background on trickster stories - The trickster archetype is seen throughout Indigenous narratives, so having students understand the common traits of a trickster character would be a good place to start. Students could start by reading the “A Note on the Trickster” section in the preface of the book and could watch a YouTube video on Tricksters here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RW1ChiWyiZQ>. Students could participate in activities such as: a) brainstorming other trickster characters in popular media b) developing and presenting their own brief trickster narratives/skits or creating an artistic representation of the Fur Queen c) discussing how trickster stories fail to fall into a binary of good vs. evil
3. Cree Language and Binaries - As Highway writes, the biggest difference between Cree and English is that in Cree, “there is no gender.” Given the fact that there is plenty of Cree used throughout the text, it would be a good idea to discuss the importance of Cree, and of the importance of language in general to understanding culture. Students could be shown the Indigenous language map of Canada found on <https://native-land.ca/> and reflect on how this map is different from ones they are used to viewing. Students could also view this video from a Cree elder telling an oral story.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=93&v=K8beBEQQR0&feature=emb_title. Students could

brainstorm words from other languages that do not translate into English and why these words are important. Using the frame of gender, students could discuss: what would be the consequences of not being brought up with the idea of a binary gender?

4. Residential Schools & the Catholic Church - Given the role that residential schools play in the novel, it may be prudent to address/review the history and legacy of residential schools in Canada. It may also be helpful to review some of the elements of the Catholic religion that present in the text (eg. sacraments, role of the priest, biblical names, etc.). Teachers will want to use diagnostic assessments to see where students have gaps in their knowledge on these two topics
5. Kinship - Given the prominence of kinship and family in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, a lesson on the role of kinship in Indigenous cultures would help students understand some of the different ways of being and belonging in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Numerous videos of Elders explaining kinship can be found on the Walking Together website here: <http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/kinship/#beginning-together>. When introducing this topic, it would be important to highlight the fact that there is a huge diversity between Indigenous cultures, and this notion of kinship is not something that can be collapsed into a single narrative or way of being. This lesson can include another sharing circle where students can choose to talk about or share a story about someone that they consider “kin” even though they may or may not be biologically related to this person. A second round of the sharing circle could discuss what responsibilities that students have to their kin/family.

Discussion Questions

Part 1

- 1) What is the significance of the epigraphs? Why was it important to the department of Indian affairs to stop “excessive indulgence in the practice of dancing”? How

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| | <p>does the author connect the idea of dancing to the northern lights?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">2) Who is the Fur Queen? What properties does she have that make her human and what properties make her celestial or other-worldly?3) What are the significance of the names of the characters? Abraham? Champion? Mariesis? Ooneemeto (Dancer)? Gabriel? Jeremiah? (You may have to look up some of the religious connotations associated with these names)4) How does the Cree cosmological understanding of childbirth and conception in <i>Kiss of the Fur Queen</i> differ from a western conception of child birth?5) How do the Cree characters react to being inside the church?6) Why does Gabriel claim to remember his baptism despite the fact that he was a newborn baby?7) How does Champion save Gabriel from the caribou stampede? How can this be compared to stories from the bible?8) How is Champion's plane ride characterized? Why does Gabriel believe that Champion would be "home by sunset" (48) <p>Part 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) How does Champion become Jeremiah? What does he lose in the process?2) How is Father Lafleur introduced and how is he portrayed? What is the significance of the fact that he is always called "father"? How is Father Lafleur connected to Weetigo? (You may need to look Weetigo up)3) How is Champion-Jeremiah introduced to the concept of heaven, god, hell, the devil, and evil? How does he react?4) How does the working of the residential school create a sense of shame within Gabriel and Jeremiah?5) How is Gabriel's role within the school pageant at Jesus connected to his treatment by the priests? Can Gabriel be viewed as a Jesus like figure?6) Why does Jeremiah tell his brother that his parents would "side with Father Lafleur"? (92)7) How do Jeremiah's and Gabriel's experiences of abuse differ? How do they cope with their abuse? |
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- 8) How is Jeremiah treated differently at the residential school because of his musical talent?

Part 3

- 1) How does Jeremiah experience and deal with isolation during his time at high school? How does Gabriel deal with isolation? How does this urban isolation contrast with the isolation of Northern Manitoba?
- 2) Why does Gabriel suddenly realize that there “is no place for him” in Eemanapiteepitpat? Why does he want to join Jeremiah?
- 3) How do Jeremiah and Gabriel experience the mall? How would their experiences visiting a mall for the first time differ from your own?
- 4) How does the girl confront Jeremiah “with his own Indianness”? How is he used to seeing Indigenous people in Winnipeg? How does he view himself?
- 5) How does Gabriel characterize the changes in Eemanapiteepitpat due to the airport opening up?
- 6) What is the significance of Amanda Clear Sky bringing up the violence of colonization during Jeremiah’s presentation on the French Revolution? How does Jeremiah react? What is the significance of Amanda’s invitation to the Pow Wow?
- 7) How do Jeremiah and Gabriel develop their artistic talents despite their experiences in residential school? How do their artistic talents inform their respective identities?

Part 4

- 1) How does Jeremiah respond to attending the Pow Wow and what does this reveal about his attitudes toward being Indigenous (and more specifically, Cree)?
- 2) What does Jeremiah’s argument with Gabriel about the conflicts between Christianity and “North American Indian Religion” reveal about each of them? (183)
- 3) How have the residents of Eemanapiteepitpat (such as Annie Moostoos and Kookoos Cook) changed when Gabriel and Jeremiah return in Chapter 27? How has the setting changed?
- 4) How does the fact that Jeremiah does not know how to “say ‘concert pianist’ in Cree” demonstrate the change

in his character? (189) Why are there no Cree words available for 'University'?

- 5) Why do Jeremiah's parents want him to become a priest? How would this job contrast the roles that Jeremiah's parents had?
- 6) What is the cause of the fight in chapter 31?
- 7) How does Jeremiah's "northern Manitoba shorn" parallel his father's dog sled racing championship? (213)
- 8) Up until this point in the novel, what role has the Fur Queen played? How does the Fur Queen's description at the beginning of the novel contrast her transformation into Evelyn Rose and Madeline Jeanette?

Part 5

- 1) How is the trickster character (Maggie) introduced? What is the significance of the fact that Maggie's name "used to be Fred but it bored the hell out of me so I changed it"? (231) (Consider the information found in "a note on the trickster" section in the preface of the novel.)
- 2) Why does Jeremiah ask Gabriel for help? Why did he never ask for help from Gabriel before?
- 3) Why does the thought of participating in the round dance still make Jeremiah's "blood run cold" (243)? How can this be connected back to his experience in residential school?
- 4) How do Gabriel and Jeremiah deal with the information that their parents' generation had been "lied to and lied to and lied to"? (247)
- 5) How do the party guests receive Jeremiah's music in Chapter 40? How does the reception make Jeremiah question his identity?

Part 6

- 1) What is the significance of the title of each of the sections? What language are they? (you may have to Google the words)
- 2) How is Gabriel's relationship with Gregory Newman characterized?
- 3) How and why does Jeremiah become a writer?
- 4) How do Gabriel and Amanda characterize "magic"?

(280)

- 5) What is the significance of Jeremiah's dream in chapter 45?
- 6) How does Gabriel's belief that his dad met a trickster "on the other side" contrast his encounter with Weetigo who appears as Father Lafleur? (298)
- 7) Why does Gabriel's mother insist on giving Gabriel his last rites and why does Jeremiah resist? How does this show a change in Jeremiah? What is the significance of Jeremiah locking the priest outside of the hospital room?
- 8) Can Gabriel be viewed as a Jesus like figure?
- 9) How does the ending of the novel with the Fur Queen returning connect to the opening events of the novel?
- 10) What is the significance of the presence of so many Cree words throughout this text? What effect does this have on a non-Cree speaker? What about a Cree speaker?

Essay Questions

Literary Exploration Essay questions:

- 1) What is your opinion of the idea that family plays an important role when individuals make life altering decisions?
- 2) What is your opinion of the idea that individuals born with gifts and talents are able to rise above their circumstances?
- 3) What is your opinion of the idea that resilience is an important quality?

CRT Critical Response to Text Essay questions:

- 1) Discuss the interplay between autonomy and the expectations of others when making decisions about the future.
- 2) Discuss the role that isolation plays when individuals attempt to overcome adverse situations
- 3) Discuss how individuals find or develop resilience within

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| | themselves or from external sources when they pursue their goals in life |
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Supporting Sources (APA):

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