

Used with permission from Samantha Beynon

How to prepare yourself for reading Indigenous books about difficult topics with students.

- 1. Read the book yourself first, alone.** Not to plan the lesson. Just to feel it. If you haven't let yourself be moved by it, you can't hold space for children who are.
- 2. Always assume there is an Indigenous child in the room.** Even if you don't know it, even in an urban classroom, even if no one has identified themselves. 60-70% of Indigenous people in Canada live in urban centres. Teach accordingly, every time.
- 3. Build the relationship before the lesson.** Children learn from people they trust. If a child doesn't feel safe with you yet, a hard book will land as threat, not invitation. Safety comes first.
- 4. Start with connection, not content.** Before you open the book, ask children about their own people. Who are the important women in your life? What have they taught you? This question belongs to every child in the room, regardless of background.
- 5. Name what the book is about before you read it.** Don't surprise children with grief or loss. Say simply: this book is about love and family, and it also has some sadness in it. Predictability reduces the stress response, especially for children already carrying hard things.
- 6. Read slowly and stop.** Let silence happen. When a child gets quiet, that's not disengagement. That's processing. Don't rush past the moments that land.
- 7. Never make an Indigenous child the example, the expert, or the representative.** Don't look at them when you read a hard line. Don't ask them to speak for their community. If a child volunteers something personal, receive it with care and move gently. They are a child first.
- 8. Hold the sad and the beautiful at the same time.** Don't rush to comfort or resolve. It's okay to say "yes, that is really sad" and leave it there. For Indigenous children, false comfort can feel like erasure. For all children, complexity handled honestly builds emotional strength.
- 9. Teach the brilliance, not just the grief.** After the book, return to the matriarchs. The knowledge holders. The language keepers. The decision-makers. Make sure every child leaves the lesson knowing what Indigenous women carry, not only what has been taken from them.
- 10. Let children make something.** Draw it, write it, build the wool connections from Carolyn's lesson plan. The hands process what the mind can't yet hold in words. Making something is how children finish the emotional loop and carry the learning home.