

# ***Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese**

## **Book Study**

In response to the publication of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the *Manitou Intentional Learning Community* invites you to engage your hearts and minds with the issues around residential schools by sharing your reflections on reading Richard Wagamese's novel, *Indian Horse*.

If you would like to participate in an on-line forum, please contact Susan at the Manitou Conference Office and she will provide you with all the details about how to join. I will be monitoring the forum from August 2<sup>nd</sup> onwards and it will remain active until September 16<sup>th</sup>. Because Susan is working at General Council and then taking some well deserved holidays, you will either need to register before August 2<sup>nd</sup> or wait until she returns on September 1<sup>st</sup>.

If you prefer not to join the forum, but would like to share your reflections, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact me by email at [gschell@laurentian.ca](mailto:gschell@laurentian.ca).

If you would like to use the study guide with a group of friends or family members, you are welcome to do so. We'd love to hear from you if you decide to do this. Again, please contact me by email at [gschell@laurentian.ca](mailto:gschell@laurentian.ca)

## **Questions to Guide Your Reading:**

What follows are some questions to guide your reading and some information about additional resources you might like to consult. If there are other things you would like to share, please do so.

1. The story is told as a first person narrative. How do you react to Saul? Do your attitudes to him change during the novel, and if so, what brings about these changes?
2. To which character(s) in the novel, other than Saul, do you react most strongly? Reflect on your reactions and the possible reasons for them.
3. "One who loves does not brandish fear or require it" (26)  
What insights into Aboriginal spirituality do you gain from the novel? How do these relate to your own spirituality or Christian faith? What impact do these insights have on your own spiritual journey?
4. "I read once that there are holes in the universe that swallow all light, all bodies. St. Jerome's took all the light from my world"(43)  
"St. Jerome's was hell on earth" (78)  
What aspects of the residential school experience depicted in the novel have the greatest impact on you? Reflect on your responses.
5. "We don't eat with Indians"(133)  
"Thirteen don't talk much."  
"I heard they're like that."  
"Thirteen never smiles."  
"None of them do" (162-163)  
Various characters in the novel view Saul through the lenses of stereotypes or racism. While it is tempting to believe that these attitudes are no longer prevalent, examples can be found in many places. Reflect on examples of stereotyping or racism that you have experienced directly, have heard about from friends, or have witnessed in the media or other sources.

6. Hockey plays an important role in this story. How does it impact Saul's life? In what ways does hockey serve as a metaphor?
7. "Where is God now, then?" I asked (92)  
"Jesus."  
"Don't think he had anything to do with it really" (216)  
Where do you find God in this story?
8. "God has given us the ministry of reconciliation" 2 Corinthians 5.19 (NRSV)  
In the context of the Indian Residential School system, what does reconciliation mean to you on a personal level, in the life of the church, and in the Canadian society? How have your responses to these questions been influenced by your reading of *Indian Horse*?
9. "They say I can't understand where I'm going if I don't understand where I've been . . ." (2)  
How is this true for Saul?  
In the context of the involvement of churches and governments in the running of Indian Residential schools, how is it true for us as members of congregations and as Canadian citizens?
10. "They scooped out our insides, Saul. We are not responsible for that. We are not responsible for what happened to us. None of us are," Fred said. "But our healing – that's up to us." (210)  
How can we as individuals, members of faith communities and as Canadian citizens, be part of the healing?

#### **Additional Resources**

If you would like to learn more, please check out:

- 1) The report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada at <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890>
- 2) A response from churches to the reports at <http://www.united-church.ca/communications/news/general/150603>
- 3) Truth and Reconciliation: Living Out our Commitments at <http://www.united-church.ca/files/aboriginal/relationships/commitments.pdf>