

Education for reconciliation and social justice:

Bringing the Shannen's Dream, Jordan's Principle and I am a witness campaigns into the classroom



The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society (Caring Society) is honoured to work with educators and schools across Canada to engage children and youth in peaceful and respectful processes of reconciliation designed to achieve culturally based equity for First Nations children and young people. This resource guide offers ideas for engaging students in critical learning to better understand the situation of First Nations children and young people and to address the inequalities they experience in education, child welfare, and access to government service through three interrelated campaigns nested in principles of reconciliation and in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): Shannen's Dream, Jordan's Principle and I am a witness.

All three campaigns feature resource rich websites that provide background information, independent reports/research and examples of what children and young people have undertaken to support the campaigns across Canada. We strongly believe in respectfully engaging all peoples and organizations in reconciliation and thus the campaigns are designed so that there is no cost for participation and time commitments are minimal.

In addition to assisting First Nations children and young people, the campaigns are designed to uplift all children by promoting critical reflection on the historical and contemporary relationships between Aboriginal and other peoples in Canada and engaging children and youth in peaceful and respectful restorative actions. Teachers report that participating students have a better understanding of Aboriginal peoples and Canadian history within a human rights context, and show an improved sense of respectful citizenship, social agency and academic success. Students are often inspired, excited and motivated when they are provided with an opportunity to make a difference within existing curriculum. For instance, students take great care in writing a letter that could help another child, offering the dual benefit of enhanced French/English language learning and applied civic engagement. There are many examples where students who have worked with educators on the campaigns during the school year have been motivated to organize learning and engagement opportunities for others outside of the school hours, further enhancing the learning process. Teachers have developed learning activities related to the campaigns at both the elementary and secondary levels consistent with Provincial school curriculums and these are available to assist other educators.

The Reconciliation Based Campaigns:



Shannen's Dream (www.shannensdream.ca) for "safe and comfy schools" and quality education

Shannen Koostachin, youth education advocate from the Attawapiskat First Nation in Ontario, had a dream: safe and comfy schools and culturally based education for First Nations children and youth. First Nations schools receive less funding per student than Provincial and Territorial schools, and zero dollars for things like libraries, computers, languages or extracurricular activities. Many schools are plagued by serious health concerns such as extreme black mould contamination, high carbon dioxide levels, rodent and reptile infestations, sewage fumes in schools and unheated portables.

Shannen worked tirelessly to try to convince the Federal government to give First Nations children a proper education before tragically passing away at the age of 15 years old in 2010. Named in her memory, the campaign engages Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to better understand the education inequities and to take action to ensure all First Nations children and young people attend good schools and receive a proper education that prepares them to achieve their dreams and be proud of their distinct cultures and languages.



Jordan's Principle (www.jordansprinciple.ca) to ensure equitable access to all government services

Jordan River Anderson was a First Nations child from Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba. Born with complex medical needs, Jordan spent more than two years unnecessarily in hospital while the Province of Manitoba and the Federal government argued over who should pay for his at home care. Jordan died in hospital at the age of five years old, never having spent a day in a family home.

Payment disputes within and between Federal and Provincial governments over services for First Nations children are not uncommon. First Nations children are frequently left waiting for services they desperately need, or are denied services that are available to other children. This includes services in education, health, childcare, recreation, and culture and language.

Consistent with the UNCRC, Jordan's Principle, named in memory of Jordan River Anderson, is a child first principle for resolving these disputes and ensuring First Nations children and young people receive government services available to all others. It was unanimously passed in the House of Commons in 2007 but sadly the Canadian Paediatric Society reports that neither the Federal government nor Provinces/Territories have fully implemented Jordan's Principle.



"I am a witness" (www.fnwitness.ca) to help First Nations children grow up safely at home

In 2007, the Caring Society and the Assembly of First Nations filed a human rights complaint against the Federal government, alleging that Canada's failure to provide equitable and culturally based child welfare services to First Nations children on-reserve amounts to discrimination on the basis of race and ethnic origin. After several unsuccessful efforts by the Federal government to have the case dismissed on legal technicalities, it is currently before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and hearings on the merits of the complaint are scheduled to begin on February 25, 2013.

Repeated studies have found funding for First Nations child and family service agencies to be inadequate and inequitable. Research indicates that First Nations children on reserve receive 22% less for child welfare than other children. The I am a witness campaign invites organizations and people of all ages to follow the case in person or online and to decide for themselves if First Nations children are being treated fairly. To facilitate learning, the I am a witness website includes a comprehensive timeline with the legal submissions by all parties in the case along with relevant reports from credible independent sources like the Auditor General of Canada. Over 10,000 people and organizations around the world have registered to follow the case on the I am a witness website making this the most formally watched child rights case in Canadian history. Additionally, students and educators have attended at the Federal Court and Tribunal hearings to experience the legal process as a tool for the implementation of child rights and to inform their own critical reflection about the alleged inequity.



www.fnwitness.ca
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www.jordansprinciple.ca

Bringing Reconciliation into the Classroom

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada have both emphasized the vital importance of actively educating children and young people about Aboriginal peoples and providing them with meaningful tools to engage in reconciliation. Educators and students have applied Shannen's Dream, Jordan's Principle and the I am a witness campaign in multiple subject areas. For example, teachers in Ontario and Quebec have used Shannen's Dream to shape lessons in English/Language Arts. Children have written letters and reports about the inequities and are educating other children. Secondary students have attended the Tribunal hearings as part of their civics and law education.

Possible subject areas include...Arts, Careers, Civics, Communications/Media Studies, Drama, English/Language Arts, Health/Nutrition, History, Law, Math, Music, Native Studies, Parenting, Social Studies.

For younger children, the campaigns may fall under learning expectations such as: Personal and Social Development, Language, Health and Physical Activity, Arts.

Maintain a focus on social justice

Educators engage students as co-creators of knowledge by inviting them to ask critical questions about why things are the way they are and empowering them by teaching respectful and peaceful skills to change things that concern them. The campaigns promote an understanding that child rights is a mechanism to ensure all children have an equitable opportunity to succeed and be proud of who they are. Disadvantaged people are reframed from being people who need to try harder to people who often need an equitable opportunity to achieve their dreams. Through the campaigns, students develop critical thinking skills and the capacity to apply curriculum to real word situations. Students learn that they have a voice, and that people will listen to their feelings and ideas.

Joel Westheimer, university research chair in democracy and education at the University of Ottawa, argues that lessons on fostering democratic citizenship usually have more to do with voluntarism and charity than promoting a critical exploration of fairness, equality of opportunity or democratic engagement. He asks educators to orient their teaching toward social-justice oriented citizenship, as outlined below. Shannen's Dream, Jordan's Principle, and I am a witness, are designed to promote just such an approach.



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Table 1. Kinds of Citizens			
Personally Responsible Citizen		Participatory Citizen	Social-Justice Oriented Citizen
DESCRIPTION	Acts responsibly in their community Works and pays taxes Picks up litter, recycles, and gives blood Helps those in need, lends a hand during times of crisis Obeys laws	Active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or clean up environment Knows how government agencies work Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks	Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures Explores strategies for change that address root causes of problems Knows about social movements and how to effect systemic change Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice
SAMPLE ACTION	Contributes food to a food drive	Helps to organize a food drive	Explores why people are hungry and acts to solve root causes
CORE ASSUMPTIONS	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question and change established systems and structures when they reproduce patterns of injustice over time
<i>From: Westheimer, J. & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. American Educational Research Journal. 41(2), 237-269.</i>			

Westheimer, J. (2008, May). No child left thinking: Democracy at-risk in American schools. *Democratic Dialogue Series* (17), p. 6.

Remember that you may have Aboriginal students in your classroom. Engaging with social justice issues often involves challenging stereotypes and assumptions; while this is vital work, Aboriginal students can be hurt by the discussion, even when stereotypes are expressed with a view to new understanding. While encouraging all students to share in the discussion, it is unfair to ask First Nations students to 'teach' others by sharing their personal stories or answering questions on behalf of all Aboriginal peoples.



Resources

Visit the **campaign websites** for video clips, audio files, Access to Information documents, legal documents, news articles, important links and a timeline of events for each campaign. Many educators find the 'Gallery' sections to be particularly helpful, especially the video clips.

- Shannen's Dream: www.shannensdream.ca
- Jordan's Principle: www.jordansprinciple.ca
- "I am a witness": www.fnwitness.ca

Letters from children inspired by the Shannen's Dream campaign have been published in the book ***Children Have Power: Children Standing in Solidarity with First Nations Children***. The book was titled by the children and is available for purchase through the Caring Society.

In collaboration with Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders across North America, the Caring Society has developed resources on community-based reconciliation called **The Touchstones of Hope**. The Touchstones of Hope set out principles to guide reconciliation within a four-phase process. A **Touchstones Toolkit** is available to help build momentum toward reconciliation in your community.

The Caring Society publishes the **First Peoples Child and Family Review**, a free on-line and peer-reviewed journal released twice a year. We also offer a **free searchable database** of research and other resources related to Aboriginal children and families.

The award-winning **Project of Heart**, created by high school teacher Sylvia Smith, offers educators a social-justice oriented approach to teaching and learning about residential schools. Detailed teacher lesson plans and resource guides on residential schools are also available through **The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada** and **The Legacy of Hope Foundation**.

For additional background on Caring Society campaigns and ideas on how to get involved, visit the Canadian Teachers' Federation website (www.ctf-fce.ca) for a recent article by Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the Caring Society, on "**Reconciliation in Action: Educators and Students Standing in Solidarity with First Nations Children and Canadian values.**"

If you would like further information about any of the above resources please contact Jennifer King, Education and Public Engagement Coordinator:

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Kindergarten to Grade 2

Activities may fall under learning expectations such as: Personal and Social Development, Language, Health, and Physical Activity, the Arts.

Activity: Learn Diamonds in the Snow! *Diamonds in the Snow* was composed by Charlie Angus, Member of Parliament for Timmons-James Bay and long-time supporter of the Shannen's Dream campaign. The song is a tribute to Shannen Koostachin and the children of Attawapiskat First Nation. You can watch a video of the song at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OC4vrdMUaRI>. You can also purchase the song through iTunes! Lyrics are attached.

Teachers can invite discussion by asking: What is this song about? What do you think about it? How does it make you feel? What did you learn? What questions do you have?

Activity: "This is what a safe and comfy school looks like". Use the 'safe and comfy' school sheet (attached) to introduce concepts of child rights, health, and safety. What do children need to be 'safe and comfy' at school? At home? In their community?

Teachers can also adapt the lesson plan on *First Nations Communities and Human Rights Through Shannen's Dream* (attached), developed by teacher candidate Samantha Ierullo, to explore concepts of child rights, health, and safety in an age appropriate way.

Activity: Shannen's Dream and Jordan's Principle colouring sheets. Use the colouring sheets to help introduce the campaigns. The campaigns are about making sure all children have the things they need to be safe and healthy! Colouring sheets are attached.

Activity: Share your reflections. Drawing on resources from the campaign websites, ask students to share reflections about what they have learned, how they feel, any questions they have, etc. Reflections can be shared through pictures, writing, circle discussion, dance, poetry, recipes, songs....!

Activity: Shannen's Dream word search. The word search (attached) can be used as a follow-up to discussions about Shannen's Dream and concepts of rights, health, and safety.

Activity: Write (or send a picture!) to the Prime Minister or your Member of Parliament. Writing to the Prime Minister (or Member of Parliament) introduces children to civic participation, how government works, and also ties in to Language Arts curriculum. This activity can be done at any age level through a variety of formats—anything from short letters, to drawings, comics, poems, or recipes!



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Social Action Projects



On **February 14, Have a Heart** for First Nations children. Have a Heart Day invites people of all ages to support culturally based equity for First Nations children by sending letters and Valentine cards to the Prime Minister, by hosting an awareness raising event in their school or community, or by spreading the word through social media like YouTube, Twitter, or Facebook.



Organize an **Our Dreams Matter Too** walk on **June 11**. Our Dreams Matter Too is an annual walk and letter writing event calling for culturally based equity for First Nations children. Write letters to the Prime Minister or your Member of Parliament and organize a walk to a nearby mail box or around the playground, gym, or classroom! Learn more at: <http://www.fncairingsociety.com/our-dreams-matter-too>



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Diamonds in the Snow

(Charlie Angus and Andrew Cash)

**You threw these diamonds, in the snow
You threw them away, thought no one would
know.**

**So what were you thinking, oh didn't you know
little diamonds, diamonds in the snow.**

A lonely field, on a cold dark night.
There's a light, shining in the sky.
It's just a light, you might never know,
A little light, light your way home.

**You threw these diamonds, in the snow
You threw them away, thought no one would
know.**

**So what were you thinking, oh didn't you know
little diamonds, diamonds in the snow.**

There was a child, she had a dream.
She looked to you, and she looked to me.
It's just a chance to make your world whole,
She gave you diamonds, diamonds in the snow.

You threw these diamonds in the snow,
cause you judge your life, by what you can own.
But they shine so bright, brighter than you know,
Little diamonds, diamonds in the snow.

**You threw these diamonds, in the snow
You threw them away, thought no one would
know.**

**So what were you thinking, oh didn't you know
little diamonds, diamonds in the snow.**

Its just a chance to make your world whole,
touch these diamonds, diamonds in the snow.
Touch these diamonds, diamonds in the snow.

This is what a safe and
comfy school looks like...



Shannen's Dream

Word Search

c	y	z	q	y	g	c	r	d	y
l	a	n	i	g	i	r	o	b	A
h	e	a	l	t	h	y	e	g	s
q	j	m	g	x	u	n	f	f	h
s	c	h	o	o	l	d	a	g	a
d	z	i	e	b	l	h	s	p	n
n	o	i	t	a	c	u	d	e	n
k	d	y	f	m	o	c	d	g	e
w	u	g	z	v	t	c	o	y	n
w	c	h	i	l	d	r	e	n	r

Aboriginal
children
comfy
education
healthy
safe
school
shannen

Lesson on First Nations Communities and Human Rights **Through Shannen's Dream**

Minds On

Chart on board: Rights | Wants

Discussion on what is a right and what is a want?

Explain to students they will be divided into groups and each group will receive a handful of rights and needs. For example, nutritional food, housing, education, iPod, vacation, etc. Students will discuss each image and decide whether it should be classified as a right or a want. Students will then be asked to place their rights/wants on the board under their respective categories. Discuss these selections when everyone is complete.

Introducing Attawapiskat

Discuss: Where do you think children don't have these rights? Why? (This will give students an opportunity to use critical thinking to justify their thinking, to unveil bias, debunk myths, and understand the media's role in how we develop our understanding about other countries and cultures.)

Tell students you are going to describe a community and they have to guess what country you're talking about. (The community will be Attawapiskat in Canada.) Country will be written on a piece of paper and folded in an envelope. At the end of the lesson, one student will be selected to unveil the piece of paper.

When describing the community, talk about which rights the community of Attawapiskat has. For the rights the people of Attawapiskat do not have, physically take away the rights/wants from the board to demonstrate what is lacking. For example, right to housing, right to education.

Select one student to open the envelope and unveil the community is in Canada.

Circle Discussion with talking stick. Were the students surprised that the community was in Canada, their own country? Why or why not?

After discussion, have students write in their journal, or a sheet of paper, how they felt when they learned the community was in Canada, and why they felt that way.

Introduce the UN Declaration of Child Rights

Minds on Discussion: When you learned that the community we were talking about was in Canada, how did that make you feel? Are these rights protected? By who?

Introduce the UN: It was written in 1989 and came into force in 1990. All the countries in the world have agreed to it except the USA and Somalia. All the countries of the world try to make the law work. These rights for children are about what children are allowed to do, and what the people responsible for children have to do to make sure they are happy, healthy and safe.

UN Activity: Students are organized in groups. Each group will receive 3 Rights from the UN Declaration of Child Rights. Students will have time to discuss the rights, and come up with reasons why these rights are important. Students will create a chart to organize their thoughts. Students will then present their rights to the class.

Introduce Shannen's Dream

Show students video on Shannen's Dream. Hand out a Mind Map for students to complete while watching. Ensure the handout helps students organize their thoughts, questions, and the information they receive from the video.

Circle discussion with talking stick: What did you notice about this community? What were the Big Ideas? What questions do you have? Do you think other First Nations communities are similar?

Watch video again. Then take up video organizers. Introduce students to other First Nations reserves. Possible topics include sustainability, mining companies, drinking water, housing, health care, and education.

Compare Attawapiskat with Your School

Chart on board: Students of Attawapiskat vs. Students of your school.

Students will be put into groups and given a list of the UN Declaration of Child Rights. Students will create a chart like the one on the board, and indicate which rights each group of students have, and which they do not have. Students will then present their charts to the class.

Circle discussion on fairness, justice, and introduce idea of call to action. What have the children of Attawapiskat done to fight for their right to education? What have children from outside of Attawapiskat done to help advocate for this cause? Brainstorm ways in which we can help.

Persuasive Letter Writing

Using their first Journal entry, their Shannen's Dream Video organizer, and the charts created by the class so far, have a minds on discussion about what students have learned regarding child rights, Attawapiskat, other First Nations communities, and a call to action. Brainstorm ideas on the board.

Introduce a model letter to the Prime Minister on overhead. Ask individual students to read each section of the letter out loud, so that students are participating in the process of understanding letter templates. Hand out papers for students to write their own letters. Students will record what they have learned, their feelings, and arguments for why children in First Nations reserves deserve all the rights on the UN Declaration of Child Rights. Papers will have a letter template included on them. Students will be divided into three groups.

Group 1: Writes to Prime Minister, Stephen Harper

Group 2: Writes to Health Minister, Leona Aglukkaq

Group 3: Writes to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Minister, John Duncan

Give students enough time to write a rough copy, peer edit, teacher edit, and write a good copy. Send Letters!!

Notes: In 2012 the children of Attawapiskat issued a report entitled "Our Dreams Matter Too" at the UN in Switzerland to challenge Canada's record on First Nation education. More than three decades after contamination of Attawapiskat's first school, the federal government has announced that they will be moving ahead with plans to build a school.

This lesson has been approved by First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada .

Further Action: Have students organize an Our Dreams Matter Too walk on June 11th. See <http://www.fncaringsociety.com/shannensdream/> for further details.