

Spirit Bear and Children Make History

Lesson Plans for the Book and Film



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First Nations Child & Family
Caring Society of Canada

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Spirit Bear and Children Make History Lesson Plans for the Book and Film

Introduction to the Story

Spirit Bear and Children Make History tells the true story of a landmark human rights case for First Nations children at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and how Spirit Bear and his friends stood with First Nations children to help make Jordan's Principle a reality.

In January 2016, nine years after the case was filed, the Tribunal ruled that the Government of Canada was racially discriminating against 165,000 First Nations children by underfunding public services, including child welfare, education, and healthcare. While progress has been made, Canada has yet to fully comply with these orders. Highlighting how children and youth across Canada continue to stand with First Nations children by learning about the case, speaking from the heart and taking respectful action for change, the story offers opportunities for learners to see themselves as actors for social justice and meaningful reconciliation.

About the Book

Spirit Bear and Children Make History, published in 2017, was written by Cindy Blackstock and Eddy Robinson, illustrated and art directed by Amanda Strong with additional illustration by Dora Cepic, Erin Banda and Natty Boonmasiri. Editors are Jennifer King and Sarah Howden. Design and layout are by Leah Gryfe.

About the Film

The film *Spirit Bear and Children Make History* is a stop-motion adaptation of the book by the same name. The film was released in 2020, and is a co-production of the First Nations Child and [Family Caring Society](#)¹ and [Spotted Fawn Productions](#)², an Indigenous-led production company. Amanda Strong and Cindy Blackstock collaborated as executive producers. Bracken Hanuse Cortlett and Cindy Blackstock wrote the screenplay.

For more information about *Spirit Bear and Children Make History*, please visit fncaringsociety.com/SpiritBear/children-make-history or email info@fncaringsociety.com.

Link to the book: fncaringsociety.com/SpiritBear/children-make-history

Information about the film: fncaringsociety.com/films

1 <https://fncaringsociety.com/welcome>

2 <https://www.spottedfawnproductions.com>

Overview of Lesson Plans



This mini unit aims to support learners in engaging with the book and short film, *Spirit Bear and Children Make History*. It is made up of three lessons and a flexible culminating task in which students share their learning with their community and take action towards reconciliation. If your time is short, you can adapt Lesson 1 to suit a screening of the film rather than a reading of the book.

In Lesson 1, you and your students will read the book ([free online copy available here³](https://fncaringsociety.com/SpiritBear/children-make-history)) and explore its big ideas or themes. In Lesson 2, you will re-read the book, paying attention to characters and how their actions and feelings relate to the big ideas you worked on in Lesson 1. In Lesson 3, you will watch the film and consider how the film gets the big ideas across differently. After these lessons, you and your students are invited to share your learning with your peers, school, or community, or take another action that supports reconciliation or fairness for First Nations children and youth.

3 <https://fncaringsociety.com/SpiritBear/children-make-history>

Learning Intentions

As learners, we're all working to be able to:

- consider the big idea or author's message of a story and explain how we came to that understanding;
- build an understanding of big ideas expressed in the story, including fairness, discrimination, bearing witness, taking action, responsibility, reconciliation and power;
- notice how different kinds of texts (e.g., books and movies) use different structures and features to get big ideas across;
- make ethical judgements about what is fair and what needs to be done to create fairness for everyone;
- identify actions that we can take to support fairness for First Nations children and youth.



Lesson 1



This lesson was adapted with permission from English Language Arts lessons by Amy Curry, Western Quebec School Board

Note: If you have limited time, you may want to adapt Lesson 1 to suit a screening of the film instead of a reading of the book.

Learning Intentions

Today we will...

- explore the meanings of powerful words and ideas
- look for examples of these words and ideas when we read *Spirit Bear and Children Make History*

so that...

- we can talk about the book meaningfully
- we can consider the story's big ideas

Procedure

- Model how to use a Frayer diagram to build a rich understanding of words and concepts using the word **Fairness** on a large sheet of paper or poster (Frayer model will be referred to as “big idea posters”). Model enough so that students have an idea of how to use the diagram, but leave space for students to continue to make meaning of the idea. Copy and distribute the “big idea” sheet found at the end of this document.
 - Tell students that **Fairness** will be one of the important ideas as we think about *Spirit Bear and Children Make History*.
 - Invite students to fill in the big idea posters in groups for one of the following words or ideas. If students are struggling with these terms, feel free to support them in coming up with working definitions. Students can also generate their own big ideas after the first reading as well:
 - > Fairness
 - > Discrimination
 - > Bearing witness
 - > Taking action
 - > Responsibility
 - > Reconciliation
 - > Power
 - Provide time for each group to share, allowing for peer and teacher feedback to clarify definitions.
 - Frame the read aloud of the book by explaining that authors write stories for a reason. They have something they want us to know, usually a lesson or message that they hope will help us better understand ourselves and the world around us.
- **Read *Spirit Bear and Children Make History*⁴ aloud**, with stops for questions. Be careful not to reveal too much, as students will have a chance to make meaning through discussion later.
- Following the read aloud, invite students to choose a partner.
 - Ask students to identify examples of the big ideas that they noticed in *Spirit Bear and Children Make History* and record them somewhere that works for them (e.g., a journal).
 - Wrap up by inviting students to do a quick write or discuss these questions:
 - > Why do you think the authors, Cindy Blackstock and Eddy Robinson, wrote this book?
 - > What do the authors want us to know?

⁴ <http://fncaringsociety.com/SpiritBear/children-make-history>

Lesson 2



Learning Intentions

Today we will...

- re-read the story, paying attention to characters and how they act and feel

so that we can...

- make connections between how characters act and the big ideas from Lesson 1
- make ethical judgements about how characters act and what is happening in the story

Procedure

- **Think-pair-share:**⁵ Help learners re-orient themselves in the story by asking them to discuss these questions:
 - > What was the case in the story about? Or, what was the problem in the story?
 - > Did the problem get solved? How?
 - > What happened at the end of the story? Did this really happen?

5 <https://teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching-support/active-learning-pedagogies/active-learning-adapting-techniques/think-pair-share/>

- **Re-read *Spirit Bear and Children Make History*.** Tell students that as you are re-reading the book, you would like them to focus their thinking on the different characters, how they act, and how they feel.

- Invite students to get into small groups and assign each group a character or a group of characters from the story: Spirit Bear, the government, Cindy the Sheep, the children that go to watch the hearings, Mary the Bear, Era Bear, the Tribunal, etc.
- With input from your students, model how to infer information about a character based on the character's experience and actions in the story; make connections between these and the big ideas you worked on previously by talking about Jordan River Anderson. For example, you can talk about Jordan being forced to live in the hospital, infer how he and his family may have felt, and make a connection to discrimination as a big idea. Use these questions as a guide for discussion:
 - > What do we know about this character or group of characters? How do we know it?
 - > What is their experience like? How do they feel? What do they do in the story? Why do you think they act that way?
 - > What connections can we make between this character and the big ideas we worked on in Lesson 1?
- Provide time for each group to share, allowing for peer and teacher feedback.
- Facilitate a discussion about ethics and what it means to make an ethical judgement. Explain that ethics are about figuring out if things are right and fair, and making ethical judgements is about deciding for yourself if something is right and fair, explaining why, and describing what you think needs to be done about unfairness.
- Wrap up with a peer discussion. Using [inside/outside circles](#)⁶ or a method that works for your students, invite students to discuss the questions below with at least three peers. Before starting the discussion, model how to take turns speaking and listening. Write the prompts, "I agree with what you said about _____ because..." and "I disagree with what you said about _____ because..." on the board and model how to use these.
 - > Who is acting fairly in the story? Who is acting unfairly?
 - > Who is powerful? Why do you think so?
 - > Who is responsible for creating fairness for First Nations kids?

6 <http://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/inside-outside-circles>

Lesson 3



Learning Intentions

Today we will...

- watch the film *Spirit Bear and Children Make History*⁷ and look for examples of the big ideas from Lesson 1

so that we can...

- talk about the film meaningfully
- consider how the structures and features of film are different than those of books
- consider how the movie represents or expresses big ideas differently than the book
- make ethical judgments about the story and begin to think about what actions we want to take

Did you know?
Michif artist Amanda Strong illustrated the book and created the film with help from her team at Spotted Fawn Productions?

Procedure

- Invite students to discuss or consider these questions in a way that works for them:
 - > How are movies different from books?
 - > Do movies get ideas across in the same way as books?
- Let students share their answers, then facilitate a brief discussion about structures and features, i.e., tools artists use to tell stories and get ideas across, and make a list of examples (e.g., text, motion, music, dialogue, illustration, narration, etc.).

7 <http://fncaringociety.com/films>



- Return to the big idea posters. Let students know that after watching the movie, they are going to identify examples of the big ideas in the movie. Let students know that as they are watching, you would like them to focus their thinking on how the film gets big ideas across and how they feel while watching.

- **Watch the movie!**⁸

- If your space allows for it, allow students a movement break after the film where they can move freely and share their first impressions of the film with their peers. Consider *Milling to Music*,⁹ where students move around freely to music and partner up with a peer to chat when you pause it. Pause three times with these questions:
 - > What did you think of the film?
 - > How did it make you feel?
 - > How was it different from the book?
- Return to the whole group, and organize students into small groups. Allow them to choose a big idea poster and give them sticky notes that they will add to the big idea posters.
- In their groups, ask students to identify examples of our big ideas that they noticed in the movie on their sticky notes and put them on the big idea posters. After some time, groups can swap big idea posters with other groups and add to them as they wish.
- Invite students back to the group and facilitate a discussion about how the big ideas come across in the film. Allow groups to share what they noticed.
- Transition into talking about what you as a group of learners are going to do with what you learned from the story. Explain that some learning changes our point of view and makes us want to take action (like Spirit Bear does). Ask students if this story makes them feel that way.
- Wrap up with a quick write:
 - > Why do you think Cindy Blackstock (the author of the book and executive producer of the movie) and Amanda Strong (the filmmaker and executive producer) made this movie? What do they want us to know? What do they want us to do?
 - > Now that we have heard this story and thought about its big ideas, what are we going to do? What actions should we take?

8 fncaringsociety.com/films

9 <https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/balancedliteracydiet/Recipe/50223/>

Culminating Task



At the end of these lessons, invite students to share their learning with their peers, school, or community and/or take an action that supports reconciliation or fairness for First Nations children and youth. There are many ways to do this. We suggest choosing one of the culminating tasks below or creating your own and coming up with assessment criteria that meet your students' needs and subject area requirements.

Ideas

- Collaboratively or individually make a poster or piece of art that you can display in the school.
- Make a webinar presentation to share what you have learned, and make it available to the school, parents, and community members.
- Make a video or write letters demanding fairness for First Nations kids and youth and send it to your elected officials. If you make a video, consider posting it on the school website or social media. Tag @SpiritBear!
- Host a [Have a Heart Day](http://fncaringsociety.com/have-a-heart)¹⁰ event (in-person or virtually) where you tell others what you learned and brainstorm actions you want to take to support fairness for First Nations kids.




¹⁰ <http://fncaringsociety.com/have-a-heart>

Other Ways for Students to Get Involved

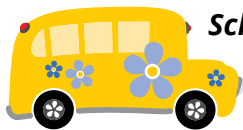
First Nations Child and Family Caring Society's youth-centred reconciliation campaigns and events

The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society has been engaging young people in social justice for First Nations young people for many years through accessible campaigns and events. The reconciliation campaigns listed below present additional learning opportunities to the ones presented in the lesson plans above, and are easy ways that students can participate throughout the year.

Reconciliation Campaigns

-  **Shannen's Dream** (fncaringsociety.com/shannens-dream) for safe and comfy schools and quality education.
-  **I am a witness** (fncaringsociety.com/i-am-witness) for culturally based equity.
-  **Jordan's Principle** (fncaringsociety.com/jordans-principle) to make sure First Nations children get the services they need when they need them.

Reconciliation Events



School is a Time for Dreams

fncaringsociety.com/school-time-dreams

Shannen Koostachin wanted all children to be able to live their dreams. First Nations children do not always get this chance because the Government of Canada underfunds their education. Celebrated during the first few months of the school year, School is a Time for Dreams invites people from all over the country to call for equitable education for First Nations kids.



Have a Heart Day

fncaringsociety.com/have-a-heart

Celebrated on or around Valentine's Day, Have a Heart Day is a child and youth-led reconciliation campaign and event to help make sure First Nations children have a fair chance to grow up safely with their families, get a good education, be healthy, and feel proud of who they are. Take part by sending a Valentine's Card or letter supporting Have a Heart Day to the Prime Minister or your Member or Parliament, or by hosting a party to raise awareness in your school or community!



Bear Witness Day

fncaringsociety.com/BearWitness

Show your support and “Bear Witness” to Jordan’s Principle by bringing your bears to daycare, school or work on May 10. Host a Jordan’s Principle “bear birthday party,” parade or other fun event to raise awareness about Jordan’s Principle and to honour Jordan River Anderson!



Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams

fncaringsociety.com/honouring-memories-planting-dreams

Celebrated in May and June, Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams is an annual commemoration initiative honouring Residential School Survivors, the children who didn’t make it home, their families and the legacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Free Online Resources for Further Learning

- ***Spirit Bear and Children Make History*** – free online book in English, Cree, French, Carrier and Hungarian: fncaringsociety.com/SpiritBear/children-make-history
- ***Spirit Bear and Children Make History Learning Guide*** – fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/learning_guide_web_0_0.pdf
- ***Spirit Bear: Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams*** – free online book and learning guide: fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear-fishing-knowledge-catching-dreams-0
- ***Spirit Bear’s Guide to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action*** – fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/child_friendly_calls_to_action_web.pdf
- ***Spirit Bear Plan*** – fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear-plan

BIG IDEAS

Definition	Characteristics
Examples	Non-examples

WORD

