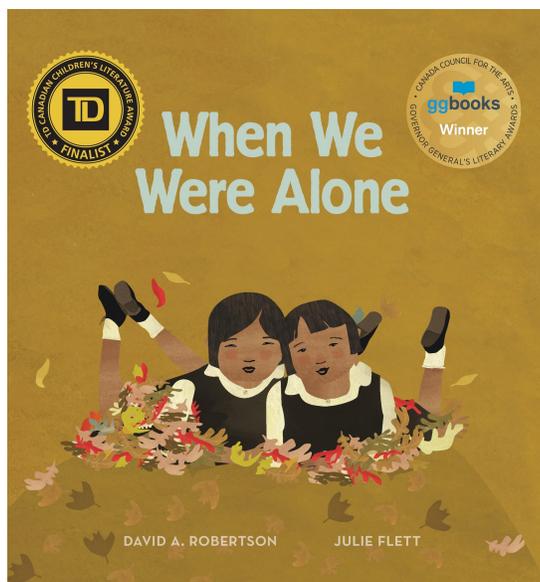


Kókom's Memories

By: Carla, Jason, and Kerry



When We Were Alone by David A Roberston and Julie Flett

Date of Publication: 2016

Published by: High Water Press

This book tells the story of an Elder and their experience of residential schools through discussion with their grandchild.

Grade Level: 4/5

PLO (Provincial Learning Objectives)

A1 - express a variety of ideas and perspectives through drama

B2 - participate in a variety of drama forms

C1 - assess how drama can affect personal and societal beliefs and attitudes

Why did we choose this story?

When We Were Alone is a great story to build a story drama around for a wide range of ages and time allotments. It subtly brings to light the events that an elderly woman went through in a residential school as a child.

- It is full of imagery and illustrations
- This is still a modern issue, intergenerational trauma still exists
- It discusses colonization and assimilation
- It is about resilience among the Indigenous Culture
- Repetition structure puts emphasis on the trauma indirectly

- Engage with the topic at a level that the students can handle
- Switching perspective between past and present
- Depictions to describe Indigenous culture

Key understandings and questions

- Intergenerational trauma
- Importance of family and culture
- How do the events in our life affect who we are?
- How can we learn from injustices of the past to build a better future?

1. Conform

10 minutes

Grouping:	Individual
Strategy:	Discussion; listing
Administration:	White board; pen
Focus:	Talk about the issues in the story

Teacher: Today we will read a book which focuses on an Indigenous persons life experience. Who knows what Indigenous means? [Student offer]

Clarify what Indigenous means so students have an understanding of the character.

Has anyone in class lost something special to them? [Students offer]

Has anyone had something special taken from them? [Students offer]

Have you ever had to act a certain way, even though it wasn't who you really are? [Students offer]

What are some of the feelings a person might have when this happens, call them out one at a time. [Teacher records]. The story we are reading today can bring out some of these emotions.

It can be confusing when people try and get us to change the way we are or take something from us. Do people ever have good reasons for taking something from someone else? [Students suggest]

Is it hard when you don't have a choice? What are some feelings that can cause? [Students suggest]

Summarize students' contributions.

Teacher: I think now is a good time to start our story [Teacher reads the story]

Teacher Reads: *Today I helped my kókom in her flower garden ... to ... “I alway wear my hair very long”*

2. Looking in the Mirror

8 minutes

Grouping: Pairs

Strategy: Mirroring Movements

Administration: Large open space; Music

Focus: To explore movement and mimicking others

Teacher: We have uncovered a pattern here, the school that Nókom went to wanted everyone to act the same. For the next activity everyone find a partner.

[They do]

Partner A is going to be the “mirror” and do the same movements of partner B. We will start by sitting on the ground facing each other, and mirror the movements of our partners arms and hands. To help with the flow of the movements I have some music to play. [Play music to start the game]

After a few minutes, switch so partner B is the “mirror” and partner A leads.

When all students have had a chance to lead and mirror,

Teacher: I think we are ready to stand up and incorporate the whole body in our mirror game. [Students stand]
 We will start again with partner A as the “mirror” and partner B leading. I will play a different song and remember to use your whole body this time.
 [Play music to start the game]

While students are moving suggest parts of the body to move and different levels (ground, crouch, full height) to try out. After a few minutes, switch so partner B is the “mirror” and partner A leads. When all students have had a chance to lead and mirror,

Teacher: Thank you, what did you like about that activity? [Students offer]
 Do you think it would be hard to act like someone else for a whole day?
 What about a whole week? [They offer]

Let's continue our story

Teacher Reads: *After my kókom had fixed the latch* ... to the end of the story

3. Nókóm's Reflection **5 minutes**

Grouping: Whole Group
Strategy: Write in Role
Administration: Paper and Pencil
Focus: Explore Kókom's reflection on her time in the residential school

Teacher: Today we are going to be writing in the role of Nókóm. You can choose to write when she was a young girl in the residential school or as a grandmother. Does everyone know what a residential school is? [Students Suggest] [*Teacher clarifies*] These will be reflective pieces. I am going to

revisit where she talks about speaking in Cree. While listening to this passage please think about her thoughts and feelings.

Teacher Reads: _____ *“Nókom, why do you speak in Cree?” ... to ... “They wanted us to talk like everybody else.”*

Teacher: As you write, dig into the emotions that Nókom would be feeling either as a young girl or grandmother.

Everyone pick up your paper and pencil, you will be allotted five minutes to write in role.

Note: As students are writing continue to give them prompting questions to think about. This will allow any student that feels finished or stuck to continue to write. Questions like, if you spent your whole life growing your hair, and someone cut it off ... how would that make you feel?

Teacher: _____ We are about to finish up this activity, please complete your last thought or sentence. Take a moment to reread what you have written, what sentence stands out to you? Please circle or underline it. [They do]

Can I have a few volunteers to share what they have written? [They Share]

4. Picture Freeze

10 minutes

Grouping: Groups of four or five
Strategy: Tableau
Administration: Different scenes from *When We Were Alone*
Focus: To understand the meaning behind the illustrations

Teacher: Now we are going to stand up and form groups of four or five to create tableaux. [They do] I am going to give each group a different scene from

the book to use. [*Teacher will hand out scenes to each group, the scenes are: dress the same, cutting their hair, language being taken away, family being seperated.*] Now, a tableau is not just a recreation of the images in the book, but what your group thinks the scene means, feels like, and conveys. These scenes are conveying what happened at the residential school, how they had their culture and identity stolen away from them. This is something to think about while you are creating your tableaux. Each group will have five minutes to work on their tableaux.

Teacher circulates the room, checking in with each group and ensuring that they are utilizing different planes and space for their tableaux. As well, answering any questions.

Teacher: _____ Five minutes is up, everyone please take a seat because we will be showing our tableaux to the rest of the class.

Teacher will call each group one by one to show the tableau to the class

Teacher: _____ Now I want everyone to reflect on these tableaux, how did it make you feel? How does Nókóm feel about her culture and identity, and how they were trying to take it away? [Students Suggest]

Now that we have had the chance to tableau these scenes, let's take a closer look at Nókóm and her feelings.

5. Describing Nókóm

10 minutes

Grouping: Whole Class
Strategy: Role on the Wall
Administration: Lifesize cut-out of Nókóm laid out on the floor; coloured felt pens
Focus: Challenges Nókóm has gone through and how they have shaped her.

Teacher: _____ *Pulls out cut-out and felt pens and puts them on the floor*

Having read the story we are starting to understand about Nókóm's life, start thinking about any words that you would use to describe her. Think about whether her experience as a child affects her later in life.

Teacher places a life-size outline of Nókóm, approximately five feet tall, on the floor.

If any of you students have any words to describe Nókóm, please write them somewhere on the outline. All ideas are welcome here. Please, if you have something to contribute come grab a pen. [They do]

Encourage students to come and write what they are thinking about Nókóm. After some words are written on the outline proceed to questions

Teacher: Does anyone feel inclined to volunteer to read some of the words that are written down? If any other ideas come to mind while we are all listening to the words, or you feel that anything is missing, please add them. [They do]

We will now tape this onto the wall as a reminder of Nókóm, so where should we put it? [Decide on place in classroom to tape up the paper]

While I tape this image up, please start thinking about how you think Nókóm felt as a young girl, separated from family and forced to speak a different language.

6. Nókóm's Outlook

5 minutes

Grouping: Whole class separated into two lines. A volunteer will be Nókóm
Strategy: Conscience Alley
Administration: A bland sweater or shirt for 'Nókóm' to wear.
Focus: Reflect on how Nókóm felt at the residential school

Teacher:

When we were alone talks about how the freedom of Indigenous people (Nókom in this case) was taken away from them. Through uprooting Indigenous children and separating them from their family and culture, the Canadian Government tried to make Indigenous peoples act “like everyone else”, we call this assimilation. Throughout the book, Nókom explains the attempt to destroy Indigenous culture by controlling the way they dressed, looked, spoke and who they associated with.

This exercise is called conscience alley because we will all be saying something that is on the conscience of Nókom while she was forced to be at the residential school.

Teacher Shows:

The scene where Nókom is having her hair cut without a choice.

Can I have someone volunteer to be a young Nókom for this next exercise. The rest of us will line up in two lines facing each other about four feet apart. [They do]

‘Nókom’ will walk in between the lines slowly while we all take turns saying something that we think Nókom is thinking. The scene we will be focusing on is when Nókom is forced to have her long hair cut off. We will make sure everyone has a chance to speak, so ‘Nókom’ will be walking slowly enough for everyone to say their part.

Check for understanding of the exercise before you begin. The students should be clear what they are doing, so they can better emote what they think Nókom would be feeling. The student playing Nókom will put on a plain shirt. Students run through the exercise. Nókom walks down the alley, while the students say what they think is on her conscience as she walks by.

Great, now we understand how this works, can I have another student volunteer to be ‘Nókom’ as we run through this one more time. [Student offers] This second scene we will use for a conscience alley is a time when Nókom is caught speaking her language. She would have likely been disciplined for this. Think of how you would feel if you couldn’t do something that you grew up with. Now we are ready, ‘Nókom’ can start walking. [They do]

Again, students run through the exercise. Nókom walks down the alley, while the students say what they think is on her conscience as she walks by.

Teacher: I want to complete this activity with a quick reflection. Turn to your neighbour and discuss what thoughts you heard that stood out to you.
[They do]

Teacher allots one to two minutes for reflection

Teacher: Thank you for sharing, now please come together as a group and sit in a circle for further discussion about the story.

7. Reflection/Assessment

As long as needed

Grouping: Whole class
Strategy: Discussion
Administration: *When We Were Alone* book; Dry Erase Marker, Dry Erase Board
Focus: How actions can impact the people experiencing them

Write discussion questions on the dry erase board.

Teacher: As we finish our lesson, I have a few questions I’d like to discuss with everyone. Do you think a Residential school would be a good or a bad

place to learn? Why or why not? [They offer]

What if you heard about a friend going to a school like this, would you do anything? If yes, what would you do? [They Offer]

To end I want to discuss the importance of family, culture, and identity. For myself, I know that being near to my family and freely expressing who I am is a big part of my identity. Would anyone like to share a part of their identity? [They Offer]

Why do you think it's important to express your personality? [They Offer]

I want to take the time to thank each and everyone of you for participating and diving into the emotions of the story and Nókóm's life. I know this is a heavy topic, but if anyone wants to talk more about this please know I am available.

Resources

Miller, C. and Saxton, J. (2016). *Into the story 2: More stories! More drama!*. Intellect Ltd.

Robertson, D.A. (2016). *When we were alone*. Highwater press.

Swartz, L. (2014). *Drama themes: Classroom literacy that will excite, surprise, and stimulate learning* (4th ed.). Pembroke Publishers.