



# To Walk in Chanie Wenjack's Shoes:

A Reflective Look at Inquiry in the Classroom  
through An Empathetic Lense

by Andrea Eby with the help of the Sensational Sixes



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## Introduction

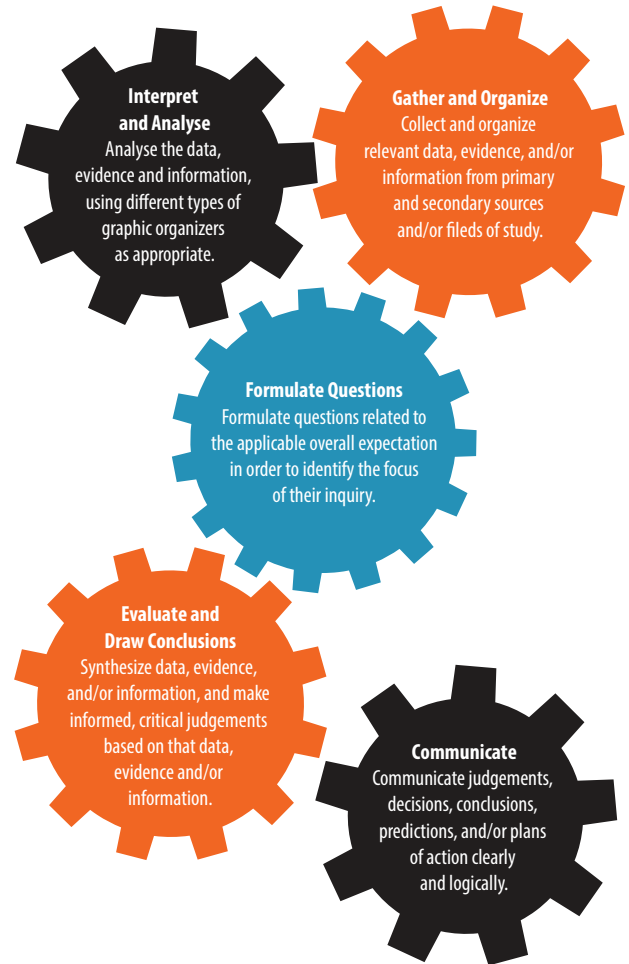
In the ensuing pages is our class inquiry into residential schools from the viewpoint of Gord Downie's *Secret Path* (2016). The Sensational Sixes, a group of 25 dynamic, committed and engaging students, were the inspiration for the reflective resource for educators. It is my most sincere hope that teachers and administrators find their own provocation in these pages to try Inquiry as a learning and teaching process in their own classroom and/or school. Our continued success and growth as a classroom community comes from our never-ending questions and wonderings; the less we know and the more we are willing to try, the greater our collective learning can be.



# Natural Curiosity: A Resource for Teachers

As part of our preparation for Full Day Kindergarten six years ago, the teacher resource, *Natural Curiosity*, was unpacked. Within it, an Inquiry process was presented which promoted the teacher as a co-learner, an advocate for student-voice and as a consummate recorder of student documentation and next steps. It is the most significant piece of teacher learning that has followed me through Kindergarten to Primary to then to Junior in the last five years. A similar inquiry cycle is shown to the right, from the *Ontario Social Studies' Curriculum* (2013) document, page 23.

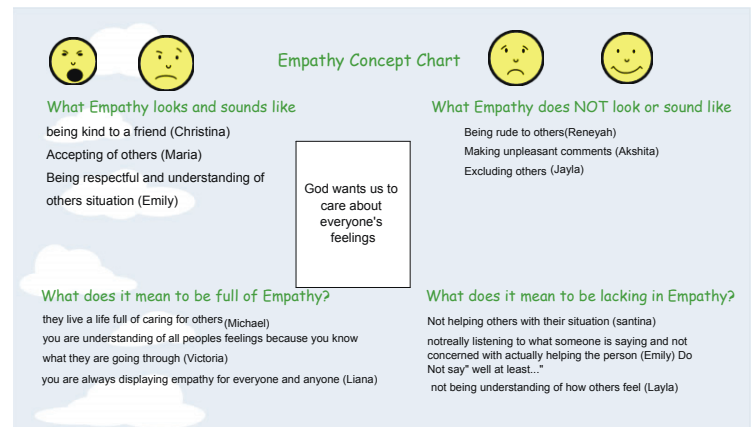
The five main components, Formulate Questions, Gather and Organize, Interpret and Analyse, Evaluate and Draw Conclusions and Communicate, Discuss and Reflect are inter-related and occur at various times throughout the entire inquiry



## Formulate Questions

When we first started our inquiry, we were looking for examples of Empathy, our Board-based virtue of the month. In trying to answer the question “who best demonstrates Empathy and why?”, we filled our ideas in on a Concept Chart, *Beyond Retelling*, (2011), like the one below:

At the time, we were reading aloud the novel *Wonder*, (2012), by R.J. Palacio. As such, many of the students’ suggestions about empathy stemmed from the story’s characters and plot development. We struggled with identifying real-life examples exemplifying Empathy, however, this changed when Gord Downie passed after Thanksgiving. Shortly after, the CBC aired the initial viewing of Downie’s *Secret Path* (2016) album. It is with this show that I first began to learn about Residential Schools, and so when I presented my own new learning at school, the perfect provocation into current models of Empathy began.







## Evaluate and Draw Conclusions

While I often felt pressure to come up with a provocation that would fuel classroom inquiry, listening to and allowing for student voice was really what set this inquiry up for success. After listening to that student shout out “Why can’t we do that too?”, I intuitively recognized what the students wanted to do, and had to consider what the class could do to achieve their goals. I asked myself “What kind of timeline would we need?”, “How would I organize the students, since they all seem to have different ideas about how to contribute?”, “How would I structure the classroom to enable the flow of information, to ensure that learning and sharing could take place for all?”, “Where in the day would I be able to find the time for all students to indulge in their Wonderings?”. There were always multiple questions to evaluate as the facilitator and educator.

Throughout the Inquiry, I sought out a variety of provocations to keep the enthusiasm going and interest high. Amazingly, the more I talked about our Inquiry at home, in the staffroom and to others, the more people offered me resources: books, Indigenous artefacts, their own professional knowledge and connections, news articles and Twitter feeds they had read or heard. I truly was a co-learner in this Inquiry and advocating for my own learning meant that I was in turn, advocating for my students as well.

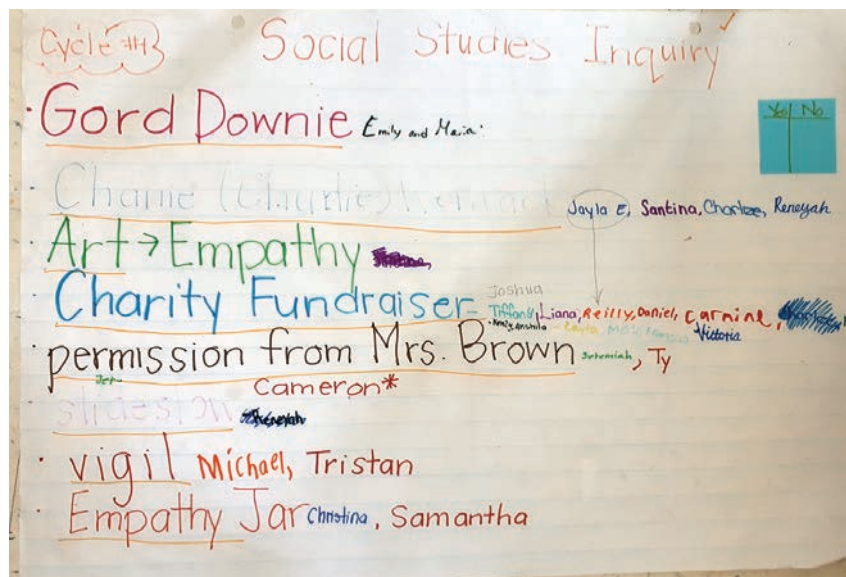
## Communicate

Student questions, concerns and queries are a vital part of the inquiry process. While the children are talking, it is just as important that we listen in order to discover where our students are in their learning. More importantly, it helps to guide us as to what should come next. When I speak to other colleagues about Inquiry, they often want to know what to DO with student learning. “How is it possible to evaluate it?”, “How do we make sense of up to

twenty-five different student generated ideas?”, “How do we make sure that we are being true to what we have to teach curriculum-wise?”.

The information gathered by allowing accountable talk and listening to take place enables a lot of documentation to be collected. Individual and group RAN (*Reading and Analyzing Non-fiction*, Ogle (1986)) charts exist, as do the collection of conversation from KBCs. When I review curriculum Big Ideas and Overall Expectations, it ensures the flow of the Inquiry is embedded in best teaching practices. I highlight, sort and record commonalities between student ideas and interests helps to keep the learning authentic. This helps learning from becoming just a checklist alongside the curriculum document. Some of the time, the data collected leant itself to another subject area; through our Inquiry, all subjects were introduced. The link to our Gym and Drama units came much later into the process when I thought “Hey, Empathy can be expressed in physical movement, not just in thoughts and feelings”. Off we went as a class, taking our knowledge about Empathy and applying it to our Balance and Movement unit. Allowing the students to find comfort in exploring student feeling through Drama was a compliment to this part of our Inquiry; evaluation templates can be found in *Natural Curiosity*, page 34.

To honour the diverse range of interests based within my class, I offered the students a chance to record what they most wanted to research. Here is the original recording sheet, including student names and each of their interests:



“I think the bake sale was great because we made a bit of money and I heard a lot of the student loved the baked goods and we got lots of compliments. The walk was pretty good. It was a little cold but still great. I loved the assembly. I was scared but when I did it I wanted to do it again. It was such a good experience to meet Kevin (Lamoureux).”

Santina

I put a lot of effort into making sure everyone's ideas were recognized, considered and explored. We began meeting as mini-inquiry groups to maximize our time during the day. I formulated guided sessions based on the groups' chosen activity from the list on the previous page. Over the next several months, we met, recorded, discussed, explored and formulated a presentation piece based on the learning about those specific topics. In these small groups, we researched topics such as: Gord Downie, Chanie Wenjack, residential schools, the Bible's viewpoint on Empathy and the suppression of faith's outside of Catholicism, the Terry Fox Walk, and how to engage the school in demonstrating and recognizing Empathy. All of these pieces were then documented in a Book Creator presentation that was presented to the school at the end of January. Opportunities for all strands of Language Arts were easily applied to this part of our Inquiry. In class, I extended our learning through the Social Studies 'block' into my schedules' Language Arts, Gym and Drama 'time'. Over time, students came to expect not a restricted daily schedule where only one subject was taught at a time, but a continuous movement of learning, discussing, acting and reflecting throughout the school day. We never felt that we

ran out of time to something in the day, nor did we feel that we had to put a piece of learning to the side because it wasn't 'time' to do it. Students immersed themselves in their learning and eagerly looked forward to sitting and talking in the next KBC. I knew that all students would eventually learn the same information as all new learning was discussed, posted and shared. The children became the experts and would hear me say "Well, I don't know the answer, but why don't you check with \_\_\_\_\_, who is working on the Gord Downie piece. They will know for certain." Finally, I was able to digest and process my students' learning and to say inquisitively "Where does this need to go next?". In consulting with the Ontario curriculum, I would find a gap and would direct our next steps towards including that piece into our learning. Other times, I pulled new resources for the class: the internet would suffice at times, especially avenues within social media. We were able to watch in Live Time Justin Trudeau's apology to Newfoundland and Labrador Residential School Survivors on November 24th, 2017. It was a great current event to bring up in discussion. Asking fellow staff members with more expertise than myself in certain Indigenous Peoples' issues and contexts allowed our Inquiry to be open to the entire





school community.

## Knowledge Building Circles

To share student learning and to collect data for next steps, Knowledge Building Circles (KBC) *Natural Curiosity*, pages 9-12 were employed. We conducted eight KBCs during our Inquiry, with all twenty-five students participating in oral and written documentation. Based on the structure introduced in *Natural Curiosity* (page 126), students and I sit together in a large circle on the floor.

Students are eager to share their learning in this type of setting. In general, a student is prepped beforehand with a specific piece that relates to a Big Idea from the curriculum. I conduct a KBC to direct whole class learning.

During a KBC, students speak aloud, taking turns one by one. They may link ideas from a previous KBC, from their guided group's learning or from their own independent research. Students are given the option of sharing one informational piece based on the following ideas: "New Learning", "Misconceptions", "New Wonderings", "What They Thought They Knew", or "Something That They Confirmed". In this way, documentation is accountable and intentional. Using a RAN (*Reading and Analyzing Nonfiction*, Ogle, 1986) chart, information is transparent and easily classified. As the educator, I evaluate students for *Assessment as Learning* (*Growing Success*, 2010).

While students are sharing, I record in shorthand the speaker, the type of sharing and the information being shared. I document the flow of ideas and the collaborative efforts of participating students. It is unlikely for all students to

speak during the 50 minute block; therefore, I track who has not yet shared, ensuring that participation comes in alternative forms (*Natural Curiosity*, pages 24-25).

Another option for students during a KBC is to ask questions. Sometimes these arise from independent student work; other times it comes spontaneously from listening attentively during the KBC.

While a student is talking and I am recording, the rest of the class is recording their own questions and learning in an individual Lab Book (*Natural Curiosity*, page 24 ). In my experience, the best questions are the ones that are left at the end of a KBC because we don't have the answers to them yet. These questions often become home 'work'. The quality of homework is elevated because students are engaged in a question that they are invested in answering. Learners are willing to do the work at home because it is one question; families are supportive because it means they know exactly what their child is doing at school. Consequently, at report card and interview time, parents are very receptive to the child's engagement at school. They tell of the dinner conversations that occur and of the enthusiasm of each Sensational Six in family discussions. By the time of our school-wide assembly at the end of January, many of the younger (and older!) siblings of the Sixes knew the story of Chanie Wenjack and of the activities our class had planned. Students engaged in Inquiry talk. And talk. And talk. And they ask questions and engage their families at home.

KBC #8 1/15/18  
Monday, January 24th - AM only in the Bake Sale Library 9:30-11:30am  
Wednesday, January 24th - 1:30pm Assembly with Kevin Lamoureux, Educational Advisor for the National Truth and Reconciliation Committee  
Wednesday, January 31st - after 9:30 - Virtue Assembly - walk/run-Permission form

Jan 11/2018  
Bake Sale  
Success Criteria:  
Use a bubbly/cheerful voice  
Gather the info from our knowledge class  
Write a paragraph form (as in your saying it)  
Use words like

Jan 2018  
KBC #17  
Dates:  
Guidance - 21-22  
Bakery - 23-24  
Bake Sale - 24  
Week - 21-24 days  
Topic: Chanie Wenjack/Spirituality  
Unit: Opening Prayer, Feasting, Beliefs  
Our Father's 70 Days, Physical  
Where to put in Transferring Spirit  
Signify our "Chanie" relationship

Wednesday, January 17, 2018  
Bake Sale  
After the presentation I can see the kids are  
the class took a break to have a bit of a  
going to be. They were really into it and  
Katie H. says to be like, "I'm going to be  
like a monk" saying "Oh, yes, yes, yes"  
to "I'm not like you, I'm not like you"  
and "I'm not like you, I'm not like you"



## Extra Factors that Led to our Success

We are so grateful to many people, resources and community partners that led to the success of our Inquiry. When engaging in your own Indigenous Peoples' Inquiry, consider including the following:

### Books We Read

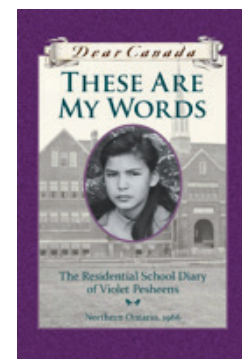
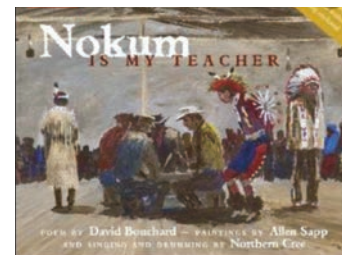
Through our Language Arts initiatives, we worked with the narrative, *Nokum is My Teacher* by David Bouchard (2006). In the story, a young Indigenous boy asks his grandmother questions, with the intention of discovering why the White community is trying to take away his culture. His grandmother, to his surprise, answers him in an empathetic voice and yet directs him to be more accepting of his teacher, peers and White community. We used this resource as a shared reading piece. Allen Sapp's illustrations helped us to consolidate our thinking about Indigenous culture and the White community during the time of residential schools.

Scholastic's synthesizing unit *Moving Up with Literacy Place* (2009) introduced us to a selection of synthesizing activities. Students read in pairs, sharing the parts of *Nokum* and her grandson. They practiced fluency and voice but also used the text to answer guiding questions which were later presented to the class. All students developed a deeper understanding of the family relationship and of the lessons that *Nokum* passed onto her grandson.

Finally, as a cross-curricular link, students reflected in Family Life on their own family culture. They chose an artefact and a tradition that they would pass onto their own future children. They reflected on the consequences of having these pieces removed from their life forever. A very heartfelt conversation ensued with the class as they realized that for Indigenous families, assimilation with Canada had a negative impact on them and their families.

"I was surprised when I found out how much money we raised from the bake sale and walk. I think the bake sale was really fun and the school loved our treats! The walk was really cold but I had lots of fun because me and Charlize were walking together. When Kevin (Lamoureux) came and talked to use and the school we all learned something. When Kevin came over to our class I was really surprised because his grandparents went to a residential school and we got to talk to him and ask him lots of questions. We raised a lot of money for the Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack fund. So far we raised \$970. That's a lot of money! We only need \$30 to reach our goal."

Layla



## Classroom Visit by Residential School Survivor

When field trip plans to visit with a residential school survivor fell through, Jodie Williams, the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Consultant, organized a visit by Issac Murdoch, Ojibway artist and activist, to St. Bonaventure.

Students presented their Inquiry to date and learned about Issac's background as a residential school survivor. He presented the Indian Act and he answered many student questions. Issac was very surprised at the depth of questions; student learning in an inquiry setting is evident even to the community at large!

Issac invited the students to partake in a customary practice in order to prepare ourselves for the day and to take in the new learning we were about to embark on. The class was reverent and respectful as sage burned and we stood in a circle. When we returned to the class, students were engaged immediately.

Later on, Issac provoked the class with his own artistic work, *Water Is Life*. He invited the students to ask questions and to discover an image or saying that spoke to them personally. The children then used art materials for the rest of the day to produce their own art piece, inspired by Issac's work. They stopped only to listen to him share an Anishinaabe story: The Fisher Story.

*"The walk went really well same with the bake sale and we will reach our goal of 1000\$ to donate to the Chanie and Gord Downie Fund"*

Reilly

The children sat mesmerized while he spoke for over 40 minutes; with eyes closed and ears open, they visualized the story and were able to relate to the story's important message.

Issac left a lasting impression in the signed artwork we have in our class but also in the display we have for our school's tenth anniversary celebration. Involving influential people into classroom inquiries elevates the learning cycle and confirms new knowledge for all learners.

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## National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

In late October, I received an email from my sister, a Social Worker for the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board. She informed me of an evening presentation from Kevin Lamoureux, from the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and from Pheasant Williams, a Residential school survivor, at a high school. Both my sister and I attended, participating in a Smudging ceremony, and watching the documentary film *Silent Thunder*.

Towards the end of the presentation, I was able to ask Ms. Williams what she felt would be

most important for my students to advocate for during their inquiry. After the presentation, I also introduced myself to Kevin and so began a working relationship with the Educational Lead for the NCTC in Manitoba.

*"When I met Kevin I was happy and I was happier because I got picked for the interview and I was nervous but when we started I wasn't nervous because I like filming. I enjoyed the bake sale it was successful but I thought people would've forgot because I forgot but unfortunately I couldn't make it to the walk but another time."*

Renayah

While emailing Kevin throughout the Fall, he returned to present to Dufferin Peel staff in December. I attended this presentation, where I was able to take more extensive notes to bring back and share with the class. At both presentations, children were intrigued by the opportunities that were out there to forward



their Inquiry. Both Pheasant and Kevin were very excited about the prospect of Canadian children advocating for an issue that was so close to them and yet so unknown for so many of us. Their interest in the Sensational Sixes was both heartfelt and reciprocal; both wanted to help the class to achieve its goals.

After the December presentation at the Board office, Kevin and I spoke again about the class inquiry. The class had decided on their selection of activities for the school, mainly a technology-based presentation of their learning, a community walk and bake sale. Kevin was very supportive of these initiatives, and he said that he would attend our presentation. The When I returned to school the children were beside themselves with excitement, as was I! This was a completely unexpected opportunity.

Kevin and I arranged a presentation date at the end of January. The children compromised as half of them voted for a date in December; it was a difficult learning experience, as disappointment can be hard to bear. The opportunity to collaborate with professionals also taught the children to see a bigger picture outside of themselves and their own ideas. Unfortunately, on the day of our presentation, Kevin's plane from Manitoba experienced enough problems that he was unable to leave.

**"When I met Kevin I was extremely grateful for our ability to meet him. I thought that our time with him was special. We got to talk to him and I even got to meet him and shake his hand. I also got to do an interview with him and understand our project. Overall, I am proud of our time."**

Emily

With an amazing turn of events, Kevin and his staff advocated to try again, and two days later, he joined the Sensational Sixes for a pizza party and question and answer period, before conducting a whole school talk. Jodie Williams,

our Board Consultant for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education, came to both presentations. She videotaped our presentation with Kevin, and even suggested she tape individual interviews between Kevin and students. We also had a long conversation about our Inquiry, student learning

and next steps. His only concern was that our learning would stay with the Sensational Sixes; he challenged us to create pathways to educate the St. Bonaventure community and to involve them in as much of the potential success as possible.

Finally, our own Inquiry provided a platform for Kevin and the NTRC to provoke the student community with the national contest "Imagine a Canada". Over the following few months, the Sensational Sixes and other students took it upon themselves to write and produce artwork for submission to the committee's campaign for a reconciled Canada. Students shared their empathy artwork and wrote persuasive reflections to personalize the journey they believe Canada can embark on to rectify it's past. What a profound impact these grade 6 child activists continue to explore through their inquiry.





## New Inquiries Within the School

One of the other unexpected ventures that came of our inquiry was the interest of other students at St. Bonaventure. We were so thankful to the school community for their attention and financial support. With them, we were able to surpass our goal of \$1000 for the Chanie Wenjack and Gord Downie Fund. It was a pleasant surprise when teachers approached us to come and speak to their classes; students in a variety of grades had questions that extended beyond our presentation. In the days that followed we met with a full-day kindergarten class, two primary classes and a junior class. During these sessions, the Sensational Sixes introduced the concept of a KBC, and welcomed other students to share their own questions and wonderings. The Sixes did a wonderful job consolidating their learning to both younger and older students. They were also willing to take on other students' questions and to say "I don't know" when questions extended beyond their own knowledge.

*"I think meeting Kevin was fun and intriguing because we met the (leader) of a national organization. It's not likely for people to meet the head of something big. I was happy because he acknowledged that we were the only class in Canada doing this."*

Victoria

At each visit we left behind our copy of *A Secret Path* for the classroom teacher and students to look at on their own time. On more than one occasion, teachers came back and said that their students were continuing to explore and ask questions, but that conversations were becoming deeper and more meaningful.

Parents also approached me after our initial round of activities to share with me the conversations they were having at home with their children, some of whom were only four years old. They spoke of allowances being donated, of talks around their own families and traditions, of websites searches about Chanie Wenjack and YouTube videos about Gord Downie. The spirit of Inquiry can take over an entire school, just as Kevin Lamoureux had challenged us to do.

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## The Role of Experts in Our Inquiry

Teachers were also a great resource for our Inquiry. The more I spoke about the learning that was happening in my classroom, the more my colleagues used their own expertise to elevate our activities. Our primary planning time teacher, who also happens to teach Social Studies, provided me with books to read aloud to the class and to share at our bookcase. *We Are All Treaty People* (2011) was a great one for explaining the idea of treaties and how it is that the current political and geographic relationships exist within Canada.

I continued to explore resources for our classroom library by investigating with Scholastic Canada; they had a variety of titles, all of which I ordered, including *I Like Who I Am* (2010) by Tara White and *Dear Canada: The Residential School Diary of Violet Pesheens* (2016) by Ruby Slipperjack.

An intermediate teacher, whom also grew up in Eastern Canada, provided me with Indigenous Peoples' artefacts from his parents' farm, along with books about culture, games and entertainment and information about the Indigenous Peoples' public speaker, Eddy Robinson.



Another junior division teacher already had in his class a copy of the official government apology to residential school survivors and their families from 2008; he was happy to house this in our classroom.

Outside of the school, Jodie Williams, Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board's First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education consultant was an amazing addition to our panel of experts. I first met her at the second of Kevin Lamoureux's presentation I attended; it was hosted by the Board and directed by Jodie and her department. She was a Board representative at our St. Bonaventure presentation at the end of January, and she took our learning a step further by returning for Kevin's visit and videotaping our luncheon with him. We also documented our learning with the

use of Jodie's video-recorder and she initiated some student-led interviews with Kevin upon his visit. She and I continued to discuss next steps for the Sensational Sixes, which resulted in Issac Murdoch's visit in our class and plans to visit an Indigenous Lodge in late June. Jodie has brought initiatives to our learning that were outside of my limitations as a classroom teacher.

Our KBCs were always open to visitors, and as the momentum for our Inquiry grew, we had our principal, Andrea Brown, attend a session to help us decide when to host our school events. Later, our superintendent, Les Storey, also observed a KBC, where the children were happy to share not only their thinking, but also where limitations were keeping them from progressing in their learning.



## Cross Curricular Links

At first glance our Inquiry is embedded in Social Studies, in particular Strand A of the Ontario Grade 6 Curriculum for Social Studies, *Heritage and Identity: Communities in Canada, Past and Present* (2013), pages 120 to 123. One of the most influential factors in exploring Inquiry within the classroom for me is the connection between other curricular areas. In the process of this particular inquiry, we explored every other mandated grade 6 subject area, outside of courses taught by planning time (i.e. French and Health).

**Language Arts:** This is the subject most teachers would give as a natural link to Social Studies curriculum. With such a large period to work with (an hour and a half each day), joining Language Arts up with Social Studies make it possible for me to take advantage of both time slots within the schedule to focus on inquiry.

**Reading:** The fictional account of a conversation between a young Indigenous boy and his grandmother, *Nokum is my Teacher* was a wonderful book to engage student interest

and to introduce both the reading strategies of viewpoint and synthesizing. An evaluative piece, students reflect on their own family culture in a journal entry. The teacher guide, *Moving Up with Literacy Place 4-6 Synthesizing*, published

by Scholastic (2009) was integral in making this learning come alive.

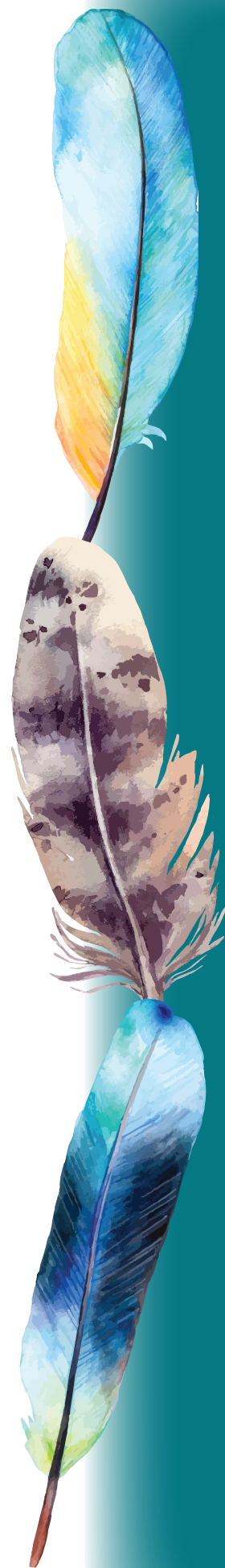
**Writing:** Students stayed busy recording their wonderings, ideas, new learnings and misconceptions for our


KBCs in their Lab Books. In the future, I would keep this documentation in a separate notebook just for Inquiry. At the time, the students had made a strong connection to our studies of Biodiversity, and so this was a natural place to make written connections. In retrospect, because the Inquiry went in so many different directions and not just in Science, being able to pull just a notebook for Inquiry would make more sense.

**Media:** One of the highlights for the students was creating, displaying and advocating for our school wide presentation, bake sale and charity walk. Students produced different media forms for each event: a Book Creator slideshow,

*"I had lots of fun on the walk/run and bake sale and I am really happy because all the money that we raised will be going to a good cause to help others in need."*

Layla





flyers and announcements for each of the corresponding events. Through our attention to Media, student voice was heard, and this went from a classroom inquiry to a St. Bonaventure community inquiry.

**Oral:** Our Media projects themselves nicely to the student's advocating verbally for their Inquiry. Most of the students had speaking parts during our assembly in front of the student body; all had an opportunity to speak to one of the events over the P.A. system.

One of the most notable announcements was to initiate an Indigenous Acknowledgement each day for the entire school:

*We would like to acknowledge that we are on sacred Indigenous ground and would like to thank the Mississaugas of the North Credit for being stewards of this land.* (<http://peelregion.ca/council/indigenous.htm>)

We continue this practice to this day.

**Math:** It was a pleasant surprise when Math came up in our Social Studies activities; the students really did not predict a mathematical connection. When it came time in January to think about the Bake Sale, I casually told the students that they would be in charge of the entire event. They all murmured "Okay" but once we started brainstorming the multitude of tasks they would have to do before the event, they were all taken aback.

When I first asked the class "How much money do you think you can make for the Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack Fund?" I was stunned when they said "\$1000!". In my mind, it would be extremely difficult for 25, grade 6 students to raise this much money for one charity. In the previous school year, one third of our almost 550 student population had transferred to a new school. Working with just over 400 students now, it meant every student bringing in more than \$2. I knew that our biggest charity fundraiser was always the Terry Fox Run. Held at the end of each September, it is a much-loved tradition at St. Bonaventure, raising varying amounts each year, although the goal is always \$2 a student. Although I was doubtful, I did not let this on to the children; they now know they have proved me wrong and love it!!!

In the weeks leading up to our bake sale at the end of January, students worked on rate, ratio and percentages as they came up with a targeted amount to reach with the bake sale proceeds (\$200). Based on that prediction, they then explored costs for baked goods; although they had received approval for the sale, they were gently directed by our administration to purchase all goods peanut-free. Although this increased our event costs, students were not swayed by this.

*"So many people enjoyed the walk. I got to walk with kindergarteners. Now so many people know Chanie's story and want to help. It was kinda slippery."*

Jayla

They continued to work out calculations based on different product and price lists and debated as a community which items were mostly likely to sell. In the end, one of the success criteria for the media flyers

was including prices and products to be sold.

On the day of students quickly adapted to working quickly with money amounts, calculating total price and change, without calculators. They all enjoyed counting the coins the next day, many never having rolled coins before, and assisting each other with mental math calculations. The excitement festered as we all collected each day from classes for the Community Walk, suggesting \$2 to each student, based on expectations from the Terry Fox Run. In the end, the Sensational Sixes raised over \$600 from their bake sale, selling more than 600 items. With the proceeds of the Walk and general donations, in total \$1165 was raised by 25, grade 6 students. AMAZING.

**The Arts:** Inquiry provides so many rich and beautiful opportunities for students to work through the various emotions they experience while working on classroom activities that can sometimes be dense, overwhelming and emotional. Such was the case in our experience. Visual Arts: Our first activity once we decided to explore residential schools was to paint. Students were eager to commit to this new venture and were looking for a way to both watch 'The Secret Path' and to respond to it. I quickly went out and bought canvas for each student; it was up to them to describe Empathy, our virtue of the month, through their painting. At the conclusion, students also named their artwork and wrote a paragraph connecting it to the virtue. These were showcased in our front display at school for October, children's mental health month.



**Drama:** At the same time that we started Social Studies in the Fall, I also introduced Drama. As it was the beginning of October, I chose the House of the Dancing Shadows' unit from the teacher resource *Pretending to Learn, Helping Children to Learn through Drama* (2002), by John O'Toole and Julie Dunn, which focused on student interest around spirits and alternate life forms, as Halloween was quickly approaching. We were just consolidating our inquiry into Biodiversity, and the drama provocation was a great way for the students to showcase the interrelatedness between all living things. The activities were fun, entertaining and amusing, but in the minds on the children, completely unrelated to Social Studies until the concluding activity. I cheered when someone said "Mrs. Eby, this is what it would be like if all the children had been like Chanie Wenjack"; they surmised on their own the gravity of the intentions of residential schools and its impact on Canada's past, present and future.

**Dance:** This was an unlikely strand of Art for me to connect to Social Studies; in the end, it was a great way for the students to express their ideas about what the world would have been like if the government had been successful in eradicating Indigenous Peoples through residential schools. What started as a study in Drama, consolidated in Dance, as the students used their bodies to demonstrate the loss, terror and heartbreak that all Canadians would have experienced had one entire culture been wiped eliminated and lost within history. It was a very emotional and poignant activity, to see the students in the gym, with lights dimmed and tea lights on, using Obon lanterns they had created, to light the way back to inclusion, connection and love.

**Music:** The power with which Gord Downie relates Chanie's story is what influenced the Sensational Sixes to take on such a monumental task. Without recognizing the importance of his music, this inquiry would have never happened. We are so indebted to this genius, not just in terms of music, but for his insight, empathy and drive to advocate for Indigenous Peoples. We came back to his songs again and again, heard them in the video *Secret Path in the Classroom*,

introduced it to St. Bonaventure during our presentation, painted our feelings while we watched the album, and reflected on Mr. Downie's music again and again. Music was the strongest connection to our Social Studies' Inquiry.

**Religion and Family Life:** Teaching in the Catholic school setting provided many wonderful and insightful teaching and learning opportunities for all of us co-learners. In trying to understand how such atrocities happened in our beautiful country, we turned to the Bible and its teachings. In fact, one of the main components of our presentation was a vigil on forgiveness, hosted by two Sensational Sixes. It was their intention to find a reason behind the Church's previous thinking. They used their own expertise with the bible and their experiences; it was a huge aha moment in class when they brought a reading from Deuteronomy 7:2-7 and their interpretation to a KBC.

*"The bake sale was pretty good. We managed to raise a lot of money for the fund. I enjoyed my job as a runner. The classes/staff managed to help raise our goal and go beyond. The bake sale was a success!"*

Emily

In Family Life, we had many conversations about family, commitments and responsibilities. There were debates, role plays and conversations around how difficult it would have been for all family members in an

Indigenous family to lose a child to residential schools. Viewpoints were shared and students made strong connections to their own families and relationships. These were very somber and emotional times.

**The Virtue of Empathy:** It is always my intention to highlight our Board's virtue of the month. In my experience, focusing on the virtue allows for current teaching and learning from the Bible, connecting to the present-day world, books, movies and music and highlights individual students and their God-given gifts. We were so honoured to be able to explore Empathy in October; like the Music connection, the Big Idea of Empathy enriched our class-led inquiry and directed student learning towards making heartfelt connections to Chanie Wenjack and his plight. The students were able to do this in such a strong manner that it led to them wanting to advocate for Chanie. Finally, by listening to student voice, the one that shouted out "Why



can't we do that too?"; the class was able to direct their efforts to a cause that was close to them and one for which they were all committed to inspiring change.

**Physical Education:** Our twice-weekly gym classes lent themselves nicely to the unit in Movement and Balance. With my intention to cover also cover Drama, Phys Ed and Drama were joined up and we took advantage of both subject area blocks to work on curriculum expectations. Although the students learned lesson by lesson different core movements and yogic postures, when it came time to evaluate, because of the time spent in Drama, they were all eager to demonstrate their learning through the two subjects together.

**Science:** As stated earlier, at the outset of this Inquiry, we were finishing Biodiversity. As we spent more and more time immersing ourselves in Social Studies, the students spoke strongly about acceptance and inclusion. They recognized that removing Indigenous Peoples from our Canadian culture was similar to taking away something that belonged. They had just consolidated their learning in Science and had also reflected there in what life would be like with certain living components in the eco-system. Although challenging not to just tell them to see the connection, the students did eventually see the pattern as we continually re-visited the two sets of material. I was very strategic in my open-ended questions and allowed for lots of surmising and conversations in our KBCs.

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## Conclusion

In conclusion, Inquiry, as best demonstrated in the teacher resource, Natural Curiosity, generated the best possible learning experience for the Sensational Sixes and me. It encourages best practice as educators and instills confidence, advocacy and empathy in students. It is my wish that other educators learn about Inquiry, try it in their classrooms and believe in themselves. This process allows us all to be co-learners and collaborators with our children in this incredible journey of education.





# Bibliography

## Useful Inquiry-based Education Books for our Inquiry:

Bouchard, D. (2006) *Nokum is My Teacher*, Calgary, Red Deer Press.

*A great book to explore viewpoint by being invited into a conversation between an Indigenous school-age boy and his grandmother; the boy questions the choices of the “white man” and its effects on the Indigenous culture.*

CBC (2017) *Secret Path Concert* [Video File]. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Au5yWyJ-GU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Au5yWyJ-GU).

*Our very first provocation came from the viewing of the entire concert of Gord Downie’s Secret Path \concert in October of 2017. It includes Gord singing all songs from his album along with the graphic novel/cartoon by Jeff Lemire.*

CBC (2017) *Secret Path in the Classroom* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hz5J0uy9YVE>.

*While students were talking amongst themselves after watching The Secret Path, I pulled this video to watch in class. It was from this viewing that students really felt that there was something more they could do with their learning from Gord Downie’s Secret Path concert, as listed above.*

Chiarotto, L. (2011) *Natural Curiosity: Building Children’s Understanding of the World Through Environmental Inquiry/A Resource for Teachers*, Toronto, Maracle Press Ltd.

*My personal inspirational resource for beginning and committing to Inquiry. A brand new second edition is now out!*

Cunningham, P.M. and Debra Renner Smith (2007). *Beyond Retelling: Toward Higher Level Thinking and Big Ideas*, New York, Pearson.

Downie, G. and Lemire, J. (2016) *The Secret Path*. Toronto, Simon and Schuster.

*Our provocation into this Inquiry began with this poignant and very intentional message about the Residential School system in Canada. The late musician and the illustrator have visualized Chanie Wenjack’s attempt to journey home through song a graphic-novel viewpoint.*

O’Toole, J. and Dunn, J. (2002) *Pretending to Learn: Helping Children Learn Through Drama*, New South Wales, Pearson Education Australia.

*A wonderful resource for educators looking to extend Drama into their Inquiry, I was able to take one of its many exemplars and apply it across Science, Social Studies, Dance, Visual Arts and Religion and Family Life.*

Palacio, R.J. (2012) *Wonder*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf.

*We had many inspiring and thought-provoking conversations in class as we read this book as a read- aloud. Ironically, the film was also produced during our reading time, and we made a special trip as an extended class community with our families by going to watch it together! This is a wonderful story that encompasses many virtues, including empathy, acceptance and respect for all.*





Scholastic Canada Ltd. (2009) *Moving Up with Literacy Place: Grade 6 Synthesizing Strategy Unit Guide*, Markham, Scholastic Canada Ltd.

*The teacher resource and companion guide for Nokum in My Teacher, it also has great ideas for questioning, assessment and student self-reflections.*

Slipperjack, Ruby. (2016) *Dear Canada: These Are My Words. The Residential School Diary of Violet Pesheens*, Markham, Scholastic Canada Ltd.

*A fictional account of a young residential school student. It is written as a diary from her perspective of attending a school meant to assimilate young Indigenous people to White Canadian culture. The last residential school closed in Canada in 1996.*

Switzer, Maurice. (2011) *We Are All Treaty People*, Alderville First Nation, the Union of Ontario Indians.

*An informational text describing the role of treaties in Canada's history. It is a good resource for answering student questions about the early beginnings of our great country.*

White, Tara and Lee Claremont. (2010). *I Like Who I Am*, Penticton Indian Reserve, Theytus Books.

*A fictional story about a young girl looking for acceptance when she doesn't fit the traditional model of an Indigenous child. It is one of many resources out there that can be linked back to the Virtues' program.*

Cairo, Mary and Luci Soncin. (2015). *Many Gifts* Grade 6, Toronto, Nelson.

*Our new Social Studies' textbook is alive with current issues, connections to our Catholic Faith and easy-to-engage discussions points. It is a great resource for confirming student thinking and is in student-friendly language.*

### **Other Educational Resources:**

Ontario Grade 6 Curriculum: [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/grade6.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/grade6.html)

*An important part of my journey was having curriculum documents available and ready to use. The connections between subject areas and their strands becomes so much more apparent when I see it in black and white!*

Growing Success: <http://www.ed.gov.on.ca>

*So much of this document directs us to be accountable, flexible and reliable evaluators for a range of diverse learners and in every subject area.*





