



# These Are My Words: The Residential School Diary of Violet Pesheens

**Slipperjack, R.**

When Violet, a member of the Anishnabe nation, is fourteen she must leave her home and attend a residential school, where she struggles with being separated from her family, loneliness, bullying, and a cold, unfriendly environment. She is determined not to be assimilated nor lose the memories and knowledge of her language and culture. This engaging resource introduces students to the reality of life at residential schools and includes eight photos depicting life in the residential school and a Dominion of Canada Map from 1966 that indicates the locations of Residential Schools in Canada. Suitable as a class read-aloud, independent, or literature novel for grades 4-8.

**Collections:** ARC-BC, Indigenous

**Subjects:** English Language Arts, Social Studies  
Grades 4-8

**Evaluation Date:** May 2019

	Social Considerations
	Indigenous Content

# Resource Evaluation

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## CURRICULUM FIT

### Does the resource support BC curriculum?



Extensively

The novel supports the Big Idea that exploring stories helps understand ourselves & make connections to others & the world. It connects to the Core Competencies: communication: provides information on the Canadian Residential Schools which allows students to explore & empathize with the experiences of First Nations children & their world & how they can relate it to their own; thinking: students gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of First Nations in the Residential Schools & compare the historical perspective of then & now; personal and social: prompts students to understand the identity of the First Nation as individuals & the historical influences affecting them at that time.

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## SUGGESTED CLASSROOM USAGE

The biography, in a diary format, of Violet Pesheens may be read independently, to a class or in literature circles and then may be discussed and analyzed for students' reflection of her experiences in a Residential School compared to themselves in their school setting or as a setting of considering what could have been done differently looking through a historical lens. Students may reflect through journal and essay writing, presenting a research project, role-playing, or doing an interview with a classmate about Violet's education, daily living, identity, and culture in the Residential School.

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## SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Indigenous Peoples

In her diary, Violet Pesheens wrote about her education and life experiences while at a Residential School. Some of the experiences may be difficult for young students to understand, (speaking of graveyard where students are buried, several references to distinctions between white and FN society, Violet's mother unable to nurture and love as a Mother due to her time in a Residential School (the book mentions Violet has never been hugged by her Mom and her Mother signs off her letters with; Your Mother Emily). There are many references to white people (girls/boy/schools/houses) in a way of them being different. Violet often refers to the "Cree" First Nations in a negative tone.

### Multiculturalism

When Violet arrives at the Residential School her First Nations identity and culture are taken away from her when she is given clothing to wear with a particular number, her hair is cut short like the other girls, and she has to sleep in a dorm that is empty, with three rows of beds and night tables that were similar. There are several references of distinctions between First Nations and "white" people, white girls/boys/house/school.

### Violence

Violet talks of girls who attempt to bully & beat her up, as well to girls with black eyes, bleeding lips, & scratches on their faces. Also, Violet is chased by a group of teenage white boys who don't catch her, but she wonders what would happen if she is caught. There is also reference to the consequences of parents who did not want their children to the Residential Schools. For example, the parents were under threat of being "thrown in prison & never seeing their child again if they didn't let her go". At one point Violet has an encounter with another girl & a broom. The encounter turns violent & she holds the broom to the girl's throat until she turns red & can't breathe.

### Safety

The resource has references to the personal safety of Violet and other students. One example is when an older man in a car approaches Violet and offers her a ride in his car. Another example is of a candy vendor in the park on her way home from school offering her a free chocolate bar if she returns to the park later. Another reference is to a doctor inappropriately touching female students.

### Language

Violet is physically maturing with developing breasts and she refers to them as 'tits'. Violet also mentions her first period and the blood and cramps associated with it.

### **Do the social considerations support, rather than detract from, student learning?**



Extensively

The author, Ruby Slipperjack, carefully incorporates social considerations into the diary of Violet Pesheens to provide the reader with a realistic view of Violet's experiences at the Residential School.

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## GENERAL CONTENT

### Content

**Is the resource engaging?**



Extensively

**Is the content current for the intended curriculum and grade?**



Extensively

**Is the content accurate for the intended curriculum and grade?**



Extensively

**Is the content relevant and important for student broad understandings?**



Extensively

**Is the resource an Authentic First Peoples Text?**

- Yes

### Audience

**Is the content appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?**



Extensively

**Does the resource provide opportunities for creative and critical thinking?**



Extensively

**Is the level of detail appropriate?**



Extensively

**Is the language use appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?**



Extensively

This resource would work well as a read alone, but could also be a read-aloud and discussed with more detail to provide better understanding for students who are English Language Learners or working on a differentiated program. While the reading level cannot be adjusted, by reading aloud and discussing it may be better understood by those who require the extra clarity of information and support. The content and reading level can only be differentiated and adjusted by reading aloud with students and discussing unfamiliar words and inferences within the book. This would provide students with the additional information to better understand the context.

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## TECHNICAL DESIGN

### **Is the resource easy to use?**



Extensively

### **Is the use of font, text size and presentation suitable?**



Extensively

### **Are extraneous elements/illustrations kept to a minimum?**



Extensively

The text is laid out in a diary format with date headings for Violet's schooling from September 1966"July 1967. The font size changes from a normal font for the diary portions to an italicized font for the letters received from Violet's Grandma and Mother. The white space is consistent throughout this resource. There are no illustrations within the text, however, 8 photos with captions depicting everyday life in the residence follow the diary. Also included is a Dominion of Canada Map (from 1966) indicating the locations of Residential Schools, photo credits, and notes about the author.

**Does the text show insight into the complexity of the human condition?**

Extensively

**Does the text broaden students' experiences and understanding?**

Extensively

**To what degree is this text stylistically rich?**

Moderately

**Plot description**

This book, written in diary format, is of a young girl's experiences and struggles with life at a Residential School. Through the words of her diary the reader learns of her efforts to deal with separation from family, loneliness, peer bullying, and the harshness of a sometime cold and unfriendly environment.

**Genre**

- Auto/Biography

**Literary Highlights**

- Point of view

**Type**

- Other (specify)
- Diary

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS****Reading Level**

- At intended grade level(s)

The resource includes a brief history of residential schools in Canada. There are eight photos (& credits with photo explanations) so the reader can garner some idea of life at a Residential School. Also included is a map of Canada (1966) showing Residential School locations. The resource concludes with an overview of the author's background. This book is available on Amazon as hardcover & Kindle editions.

Scholastic Canada provides an on-line PDF version of discussion guide/questions for Grades 3-8 as well as sample lesson plans, websites with connections to provincial curricula & related books/resources to connect with & further understand this difficult time in Canada's history.

**GRADES AND SUBJECTS****Subjects**

- English Language Arts: 4-8
- Socials Studies: 4-8

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**ADDITIONAL INFO****Copyright**

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