

# Storytelling and *Secret Path*

## Learning Bird Educator Guide

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### Target Course and Grade

**Ontario Curriculum:**  
Language, Grade 7

The resources in this kit will also support other English Language Arts courses that include components of listening, reading, writing, media literacy, and stories that feature Indigenous voices.

### Big Idea

The elements of the *Secret Path* project show us that there are many different ways (oral communication, reading, writing, mixed media) that we can use to express ourselves and share, honour, and learn from stories like Chanie Wenjack's.

### Introduction to the Resource Kit

This resource kit positions Gord Downie's *Secret Path* multimedia project as an opportunity to explore how different forms of storytelling can be used to express ourselves and honour stories like those of Chanie Wenjack.

The resource kit starts by activating students' attention and prior knowledge with a brainstorming activity hook about the multifaceted and flexible definitions of stories. Then, by focusing each learning activity on a different aspect of *Secret Path*, these resources prompt students to use listening, reading, writing, and media literacy skills to analyze how Chanie's story is being told in each medium. Finally, students will demonstrate their learning by creating their own multimedia storytelling project and articulating their intent, choices, and connections with *Secret Path*.

This resource kit supports and develops literacy skills by revolving around a multimedia storytelling project and one experience of the Canadian residential school system. As such, it can be easily situated in Language Arts units about storytelling, media literacy, and novels that integrate Indigenous content.

**NOTE:** Because this resource kit focuses primarily on storytelling, it should be noted that the resources are **not** designed to offer a comprehensive education about the Canadian residential school system. The material in these resources can serve as an introduction or entry point to learning about this history, but the educator should evaluate whether any additional learning is needed for their classroom context.

Where appropriate, the instructional plan in this Educator Guide will indicate opportunities for developing themes that transcend the scope of this resource kit.

### Resources

#### #1 - Hook (Presentation)

Brainstorming Activity: What Are Stories?

#### #2 Learning Activity (Video)

The Ways to the *Secret Path*: Storytelling and Form

#### #3 - Learning Activity (Video)

Listening to the *Secret Path*: Song Analysis

#### #4 - Learning Activity (Presentation)

Reading the *Secret Path*: Graphic Novels

#### #5 - Learning Activity (Handout)

Writing About the *Secret Path*: Movie Review

#### #6 - Learning Activity (Handout)

*Secret Path* Language Activity: "The Stranger"

#### #7 Demonstration of Learning (Handout)

Finding Your Own *Secret Path*: Storytelling and Self-Expression

# #1: Hook (Presentation)

## Brainstorming Activity: What Are Stories?

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### Materials Needed:

Projector or interactive whiteboard

Pens or pencils

Paper or notebook

Sticky notes or index cards with tape

### Classroom Set-Up:

Arrange student desks in a circular pattern. Students can also sit in a circle on the classroom floor.

Designate and prepare classroom wall(s) for sticky note activity.

### Students will be able to:

- Activate prior knowledge and reflect on different definitions and vocabulary pertaining to stories
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### Instructional Plan:

#### 1. Before:

The activities in this presentation will serve as a hook to the rest of the resource kit by getting students to activate prior knowledge and reflect about the definition and purpose of “stories”. If you are situating this resource kit within a larger unit of instruction (media literacy, experiences in residential schools, etc.), consider transitioning to this material by highlighting the relevance of stories and storytelling to this unit.

#### 2. During:

Start by opening up the presentation with your class, or have Thomas King’s quote already displayed on the screen when they enter. Invite students to think about what the quote means.

Move through the slides to the Talking Circle Activity. Hold a talking circle around the starter question: What does Thomas King mean when he says **“the truth about stories is that that’s all we are”**?

- Establish class protocol, if not already present, for a talking circle (eg. taking turns, respectful listening, safe space rules).
- Guide students to follow talking circle protocol and to think about emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions as they share answers and feelings.
- If the discussion dies down or gets off-track, consider providing guiding questions, such as:
  - What can stories tell us about people?
  - How can a story be part of a person?
  - How kinds of stories are part of you?
  - We know that people change over time. Do stories change over time? How?

### Modification/Accommodation:

If your students are too shy or uncomfortable with oral language to fully express themselves in a talking circle, you can have them write down their thoughts in a sentence or two and then read them to the class anonymously.

# #1: Hook (Presentation)

## Brainstorming Activity: What Are Stories?

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### Instructional Plan: (cont'd)

Move through the slides to the Brainstorm Activity.

- Distribute a set of sticky notes or index cards (with tape) to each student in the class.
- Give students 3-5 minutes to fill in each note of theirs with a different keyword about stories.
- If students need inspiration, consider providing guiding questions, such as:
  - Where can we find stories?
  - Who tells stories?
  - What can we use to tell stories?
  - What can we learn from stories?
- After enough time has elapsed, stop the students from writing and ask them to stick their notes onto the wall.

### Modification/Accommodation:

If you don't have the necessary materials for the sticky note activity, students can write their brainstorm keywords directly on the board.

### 3. After:

Facilitate a debrief discussion with your class. Pose the following questions:

- Which words showed up most often in your class's brainstorm?
- What's your favourite way to tell a story? Why?
- How can stories help us learn about people?

# #2: Learning Activity (Video)

## The Ways to the *Secret Path*: Storytelling and Form

### Materials Needed:

Projector or interactive whiteboard

Pens or pencils

Paper or notebook

Teacher's selection of songs from the *Secret Path* album

Teacher's selection of pages from the *Secret Path* graphic novel

Video from the *Secret Path* animated movie (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGd764YU9yc>)

### Classroom Set-Up:

Arrange student desks in desired pattern for teacher presentation and classroom discussion.

### Students will be able to:

- Situate Chanie Wenjack and Gord Downie in the *Secret Path* project
- Identify the broad audience and purpose of the *Secret Path* project
- Recognize the different storytelling components of the *Secret Path* project

**Key Terms:** *Secret Path*, Gord Downie, Chanie Wenjack, storytelling, audience, purpose, form

### Instructional Plan:

#### 1. Before:

Ask basic questions to assess students' prior knowledge about the Canadian residential school system and to find out if they will need more context than what is provided within the video.

### Modification/Accommodation:

If you find that your students require a more developed preamble to the history of the residential school system, you can incorporate this introductory activity:

Take your students through a visualization exercise by asking them to close their eyes and imagine the place that you are speaking about.

Read the following: "Imagine a school where parents and students have no choice in whether or not they attend. Imagine a school

where they teach you that the things you already believe or know are wrong. Would you want to live at a school like this?"

Facilitate a short debrief from the visualization to ask these questions:

- What kinds of emotions are you feeling right now?
- What would you do in this situation?
- Does this situation remind you of anything?

Introduce (or reintroduce) the topic of residential schools by asking students to write three things that they know about residential schools. Ask them to share these with the class.

After students offer answers, consolidate and provide a starting definition for "residential school" (eg, "a school where students live").

# #2: Learning Activity (Video)

## The Ways to the *Secret Path*: Storytelling and Form

### Modification/Accommodation: (cont'd)

Explain that, for a long time, this kind of school was a reality for many Indigenous children and families across Canada. It might be useful to set up the unit by explaining that this kind of school created painful experiences and lasting impacts for people across Canada, and that our responsibility today is to explore these impacts and how to heal from them.

Consult organizations like <http://legacyofhope.ca/> for further advice and resources to support teaching students about residential school history and healing.

### 2. During:

Play video.

When prompted, pause the video to facilitate a discussion around the question “How can stories help us learn about people who are no longer here?” Elaborate on this question by providing examples (ancestors, people from history, people who have left the community).

Resume the video.

Play video in its entirety, but pause video when final discussion question (“**Which part would be best suited for sharing with a relative or friend in Grade 3? Why?**”) appears on-screen.

### 3. After:

Using examples from the album, graphic novel, and animated movie, introduce your students to the different components of the *Secret Path* project.

After showing these examples, ask students to write out their answer to the video’s question on a sheet of paper and to submit it as an exit card response. Collect these exit cards when the class period is over.

### Modification/Accommodation:

If you do not have access to the *Secret Path* album or graphic novel, you can use the animated movie (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGd764YU9yc>) to walk your class through the different components.

Introduce students to the songs by asking them to close their eyes and to focus on listening to the music from the movie.

Introduce students to the graphic novel by pausing the movie on an image and explaining how the graphic novel pairs images like this with the words from the song.

Finally, let a segment of the movie play uninterrupted to students can see how it all comes together.

# #3: Learning Activity (Video)

## Listening to the *Secret Path*: Song Analysis

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### Materials Needed:

Projector or interactive whiteboard

Pens or pencils

Paper or notebook

Teacher's selection of songs from the *Secret Path* album

### Classroom Set-Up:

Arrange student desks in desired pattern for teacher presentation and classroom discussion. Desks can also be arranged into small groups to facilitate group activity.

### Students will be able to:

- Recognize the potential of songs for telling stories
  - Demonstrate active listening behaviours for comprehension
  - Analyze and interpret music, lyrics, and purpose in songs from *Secret Path*
  - Articulate and explain song analysis and interpretation to one another and to the class
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**Key Terms:** Song, music, lyrics, melodies, instruments, rhythm, narrative, imagery, mood

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### Instructional Plan:

#### 1. Before:

Assess students' prior knowledge about music by asking if anyone in the class plays a musical instrument or listens to a lot of music in their spare time.

#### 2. During:

Play video.

When prompted, pause the video to facilitate a brainstorm activity around this question: **“What are the different pieces that make up a song?”** Students can write their ideas on a personal sheet of paper or on the board.

Resume the video.

When prompted, pause the video to facilitate a brainstorm activity around this question: **“How many musical instruments can you think of?”**

Resume the video.

Play video in its entirety, but pause video when the three analysis questions come on-screen.

#### 3. After:

Split the class up into groups. Assign each group a different song from the *Secret Path* album to analyze.

# #3: Learning Activity (Video)

## Listening to the *Secret Path*: Song Analysis

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### Instructional Plan: (cont'd)

To do this, you can share the audio file with them digitally, let them take turns borrowing the CD, or give them the corresponding timecodes from the *Secret Path* animated movie.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGd764YU9yc>

Together with their groups, students must answer these questions on a sheet of paper:

- What is happening to Chanie in this song?
- How do the different elements of this song help tell this story? Give three examples.
- What information can we learn about Chanie from this song? How does this connect to what you already know about Chanie's story?

When the class next gets together, each group will present their song to the rest of the class and share their answers to the question.

# #4: Learning Activity (Presentation)

## Reading the *Secret Path*: Graphic Novels

### Materials Needed:

Projector or interactive whiteboard

Pens or pencils

Paper or notebook

Additional art supplies (crayons, coloured pencils, etc.)

*Secret Path* graphic novel

A booklet with titles and lyrics for each of the songs in *Secret Path* (one booklet for each group; you can photocopy the lyrics from the *Secret Path* graphic novel or write them using the lyrics: <http://www.gorddownie.com/albums/Secret+Path/>)

Printed sequences of images from the *Secret Path* graphic novel (each group should get a unique sequence of images that correspondings to a different song in the book)

Optional: preferred template for graphic novel essay, with pre-prepared comic strip panels

### Classroom Set-Up:

Arrange student desks desired pattern for teacher presentation and classroom discussion. Desks can also be arranged into small groups to facilitate group activity.

### Students will be able to:

- Recognize how graphic novels can use a combination of words and pictures to tell a story
- Identify the elements of style that Jeff Lemire uses to illustrate Gord Downie's words
- Evaluate the effectiveness of Jeff Lemire's illustrations for telling the story of Chanie Wenjack and *Secret Path*

**Key Terms:** Jeff Lemire, graphic novel, words, illustrations

### Instructional Plan:

#### 1. Before:

Prepare the required materials for the learning activity (see Materials Needed section).

#### 2. During:

This presentation will periodically prompt students with a discussion question. Give students some time to look at the slide, think about the question, and offer suggestions. When ready, you can move ahead to the slides that follow, which usually provide some potential answers to consider.

When prompted with the question **“Can you think of any examples of graphic novels?”**, ask the class for suggestions of graphic novel titles. Compile this list to keep as a class reading list for graphic novels.

On the slide with the “Matching Words and Pictures” activity, follow the instructions on-screen to walk your students through the activity. Distribute the lyrics booklets and image sequences that you prepared before using this resource.

### Modification/Accommodation:

If you do not have access to images from the *Secret Path* graphic novel, you can modify this activity by assigning a different set of lyrics to each group and asking them to illustrate the story being told with their own imagery.

# #4: Learning Activity (Presentation)

## Reading the *Secret Path*: Graphic Novels

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### **Instructional Plan:** (cont'd)

On the slide with the “Create Your Own Graphic Novel Essay” activity, follow the instructions on-screen to walk your students through the activity. If you have a preferred template or structure that you would like students to follow in preparing their graphic novel essay (many examples of blank graphic novel pages and comic book strips are available online), then make sure your students understand your expectations.

### **3. After:**

After collecting your students’ graphic novel essays, consider focusing your assessment on their identification of audience and purpose, the strength of their explanation/evaluation of the graphic novel, the quality of the examples that they use, and their ability to confidently discuss conventions of the storytelling medium.

# #5: Learning Activity (Handout)

## Writing About the *Secret Path*: Movie Review

### Materials Needed:

Projector or interactive whiteboard

Pens or pencils

Paper or notebook

Video from the *Secret Path* animated movie (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGd764YU9yc>)

Printed copies of activity handout

Optional: examples of movie reviews from newspapers and websites

### Classroom Set-Up:

Arrange student desks in desired pattern for teacher presentation and classroom discussion. Desks can also be arranged into small groups to facilitate group activity.

### Students will be able to:

- Write a response and critique to the *Secret Path* movie
- Recognize how words, pictures, music, and animation come together to bring Chanie's story to life in a different way

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**Key Terms:** Animation, movie review, critique, response

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### Instructional Plan:

#### 1. Before:

Introduce the concept of a movie review to your students. You can show them some examples of movie reviews from newspapers or websites, and ask them to try identifying the kind of text, its purpose, and its audience.

#### 2. During:

Distribute copies of the handout to your students. As a class, read through the instructions together.

With your class, determine a schedule and due dates for each part of the assignment. Allocate one class session for peer evaluation.

#### 3. After:

Collect final drafts on the set due date. When assessing their work, consider focusing on the clarity of their thesis, their evaluation of the movie's strengths and weaknesses, the appropriateness of their examples, the insight of their personal response, and the overall structure of their article.

### Modification/Accommodation:

If you are looking for a way to let students share their work with one another, you can facilitate a debate and discussion extension activity. Organize the class into pairs that have contrasting reviews of the film, and ask them to prepare a debate to hold in front of the class. These debates should include the most important points from their review, and the class can vote on which review was most convincing.

Alternatively, instead of holding the debate in-class, students can film their discussion as a YouTube-style movie review show. They can then screen this video to the class or share it on a communal class page.

# #6: Learning Activity (Handout)

## Secret Path Language Activity: “The Stranger”

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### Materials Needed:

Projector or interactive whiteboard

Pens or pencils

Paper or notebook

Printed copies of activity handout

### Classroom Set-Up:

Arrange student desks in desired pattern for teacher presentation and classroom discussion. Desks can also be arranged into small groups to facilitate group activity

For talking circle, arrange student desks in a circular pattern. Students can also sit in a circle on the classroom floor.

### Students will be able to:

- Role-play and reflect about the experience of language loss and reclamation
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**Key Terms:** Language, loss, reclaiming

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### Instructional Plan:

#### 1. Before:

Unlike the other activities in this resource kit, this activity does not engage directly with student literacy of *Secret Path*. Instead, this empathy exercise is designed to serve as a conversation starter for reflecting on the broader importance of language and how this was impacted by the history of the residential school system.

Students may experience a variety of emotions like anger, anxiety, and frustration during the activity and during the class debrief. Make sure that you have established safe space protocols and have prepared your students for what to expect during the activity.

Another way to support students is to let them know about any mental health or counselling services that are available in your school and/or community.

#### 2. During:

Distribute copies of the handout to your students. As a class, read through the instructions together.

Determine a time schedule for completing each step of the activity during classroom time.

#### 3. After:

Facilitate the talking circle as a discussion and as a debrief for the activity. Create rules for discussion, or remind students about appropriate discussion protocol for the classroom.

Where possible, draw connections between the feelings that are expressed in the classroom to the experiences of Chanie Wenjack and other residential school survivors. Share stories and testimonials from other survivors. Remind students that they share these feelings with real people.

Additionally, you could take the opportunity to highlight the importance of reclaiming language. This can be especially effective if the conversation starts to slow down or focus too heavily on negative feelings. Draw connections to any locally-relevant organizations and programs that protect and reinvigorate Indigenous language learning. Invite speculation and ideas for further efforts.

# #7: Demonstration of Learning (Handout)

## Finding Your Own *Secret Path*: Storytelling and Self-Expression

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### Materials Needed:

Printed copies of activity handout

Students will determine materials needed for their projects

### Classroom Set-Up:

Arrange the classroom or use a larger room (eg. cafeteria) to allow for an exhibition of art projects and performance pieces. Remove desks/tables or push against the wall to create “stations” for each student. Leave uncluttered spaces for performance pieces.

### Students will be able to:

- Generate their own story that is thematically-linked to *Secret Path*
  - Create a variety of media texts to tell a story
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### Instructional Plan:

#### 1. Before:

Re-state the big idea of this resource kit with your class, recap the different learning activities that the students completed, and review how each one connects to this idea.

Reiterate how the *Secret Path* project is a project that tells Chanie Wenjack’s story by using three different forms of storytelling. Introduce this Demonstration of Learning activity as an opportunity for students to do the same with a story that is important to them.

#### 2. During:

Distribute copies of the handout to your students. As a class, read through the instructions together.

Let your students know whether or not you want to remove or add any art forms to the list of permissible storytelling media.

Determine a time schedule (including class time and homework) for completing each step of the activity.

Before students begin working on their projects in earnest, meet with them individually to discuss their plan, to verify that they have a realistic scope, and to specify the deliverables that you expect to be submitted.

When students begin working on their projects, check in periodically to make sure that they are following the activity expectations and that they have the necessary support/materials/resources to fulfill their vision.

#### 3. After:

Collect the project deliverables and Artist’s Explanations on your set due date. When assessing their work, consider focusing on the effort of their projects, the strength of their Artist’s Explanation (including statement of purpose and audience), their understanding of the conventions of the chosen media forms, and the overall coherence of their storytelling.

Based on the form and feasibility of the projects that were submitted, organize a “Science Fair”-style exhibition for students to share their work with the school or community. Choose an appropriate space for the event (classroom, cafeteria, etc.).

# #7: Demonstration of Learning (Handout)

## Finding Your Own *Secret Path*: Storytelling and Self-Expression

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### **Instructional Plan:** (cont'd)

Work with your students to plan the resources (eg. poster boards, display stands, computer screens) needed to display their projects and their Artist's Explanation at their station. If some projects are difficult to display in the chosen setting (eg. performance pieces), consider having students show their work through a video or a poster with photographs and captions. Additionally, to reduce the scope of the event, you can work with your students to select a single component of their project to exhibit.

During or after the exhibition, remind students to write a final reflection piece that answers the questions on the activity handout. Collect these reflections on your set due date.

# Extension Activities:

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Build a relationship with another classroom in your school or in a different school (eg. in a different community, region, province, or country). Using a communication method of your choice (eg. postal service, email, Skype), have the two classrooms exchange stories about their lives and the things that they are learning.

Invite a guest speaker (eg. Elder, school alumni, motivational speaker) into your classroom to share stories about their lives. Have students ask questions and analyze the way these speakers tell stories.

Share more books and stories about residential school experiences with your students, such as:

- *Fatty Legs*, by Christy Jordan-Fenton, Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, and Liz Amini-Holmes
- *Sammy Goes to Residential School*, by Mary Lingman
- *They Called Me Number One*, by Beth Stellers
- *When We Were Alone*, by David A. Robertson and Julie Flett

Invite students to compare and contrast a variety of accounts and stories about residential school survivors.

Encourage a cross-curricular Social Studies learning project by asking students to write a research paper or prepare an oral presentation about the historical context of the residential school system.

# Additional Online Resources:

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<http://legacyofhope.ca/>

“The Legacy of Hope Foundation (LHF) is an Indigenous-led, charitable organization founded in 2000 with the goal of educating and raising awareness about the history and ongoing impacts of the Residential School System on generations of First Nations, Inuit and Metis Survivors and their families.”

<https://www.downiewenjack.ca/learning/secret-path-learning-resources>

The Downie-Wenjack Fund has made available a series of learning resources that have been used by educators to teach their classrooms about *Secret Path* and Chanie Wenjack’s story.

<http://nindibaajimomin.com/>

“Between 2010 and 2014, four digital storytelling processes took place in Winnipeg, Manitoba on the intergenerational effects of residential schools. Working with thirty-two First Nations and Métis women and men, each of these digital story processes looked at deepening the conversation and understanding of how the legacy of residential schools has affected the descendants of survivors.”

<http://projectofheart.ca/>

“Project of Heart is an inquiry based, hands-on, collaborative, inter-generational, artistic journey of seeking truth about the history of Aboriginal people in Canada.”

# About this Resource Kit

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This resource kit was created by Learning Bird, and is free for all teachers in Canada to use in their classrooms. Learning Bird is a Montreal-based organization that is transforming education in Canada by partnering with schools and First Nations to create digital classroom resources that include Indigenous languages, cultures, histories, and perspectives. If you are interested in other resources we've created in collaboration with our partner Nations, please visit our website at <http://learningbird.com>.

*Secret Path* resources are used with permission from The Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund.