

## **First Unitarian Reconciliation Working Group**

Indigenous resources for allies, as compiled by *Myseum* of Toronto, 2021  
<http://www.myseumoftoronto.com/programming/indigenous-resources-for-allies/>

### **Indigenous reading list**

*All titles are available from the Toronto Public Library  
(with thanks to Nancy Lee for preparing this list)*

### **Part I: Indigenous Voices**

#### **Maria Campbell. Halfbreed (1973)**

A classic account of a young Metis woman's struggle to come to terms with her northern Saskatchewan childhood. Maria was a strong and sensitive child who lived in a community robbed of its pride and dignity by the dominant culture. At 15 she tried to escape by marrying a white man, only to find herself trapped in the slums of Vancouver -- addicted to drugs and tempted by suicide. But the inspiration of her Cree great-grandmother, Cheechum, gave her confidence in herself.

#### **Robin Wall Kimmerer. Braiding Sweetgrass (2013)**

As a botanist, Robin Wall Kimmerer has been trained to ask questions of nature with the tools of science. As a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, she embraces the notion that plants and animals are our oldest teachers. Kimmerer shows how other living beings—asters and goldenrod, strawberries and squash, salamanders, algae, and sweetgrass—offer us gifts and lessons, building toward a central argument: that the awakening of ecological consciousness requires the acknowledgment and celebration of our reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world.

#### **Theodore Fontaine.**

### **Broken Circle; the Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools (2010)**

The author recounts his own experience in a residential school with psychological, emotional and sexual abuse, the loss of his language and culture, his family and community. He explains why most residential school survivors have post-traumatic stress disorders and why later generations of First Nations children still suffer the effects.

### **Lynn Gehl.**

#### **Claiming Anishinaabe: Decolonizing the Human Spirit (2017)**

Denied her Indigenous status, Lynn Gehl has been fighting her entire life to reclaim mino-pimadiziwin-the good life. Exploring Anishinaabeg philosophy and Anishinaabeg conceptions of truth, Gehl shows how she came to locate her spirit and decolonize her identity, thereby becoming, in her words, "fully human." She provides a harsh critique of Canada and takes on important anti-colonial battles, including the land claims process and sex discrimination in the Indian Act.

### **Drew Hayden Taylor.**

#### **Me Artsy (2015)**

While First Nations cultural practice still honours traditional forms, contemporary Indigenous artists have diversified. The fourteen contributors pursue such varied disciplines as filmmaking, gourmet cuisine, blues piano, fashion design, acting, writing and painting as well as traditional drumming and storytelling -- always overlaid with an awareness of First Nations identity. The essays explore the importance of art for creating social change, the role of art in representing Native culture, and personal stories touched with humour and humility.

### **Wab Kinew.**

#### **The Reason You Walk: a Memoir (2015)**

This story of Kinew's quest to reconcile with a father who was damaged by abuse in a residential school is also a vision of hope for cross-cultural reconciliation. Kinew, the recently elected leader of the Manitoba NDP, reflects on what it means to be an educated aboriginal in Canada.

### **Thomas King.**

#### **The Inconvenient Indian: a Curious Account of Native People in North America (2012)**

A critical history of centuries of Native and European contact. King offers his critical and personal meditation on what it means to be “Indian” in North America. He helps us understand the past and offers hope for the future.

**Arthur Manuel, with Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson.  
Unsettling Canada: a National Wake-up Call (2015)**

A chronicle of 50 years of struggle for Indigenous rights in Canada and internationally, and an important call to action for Canadians.

**Arthur Manuel, with Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson.  
The Reconciliation Manifesto: Recovering the Land, Rebuilding the Economy. (2017)**

Manuel and Derrickson show how governments are attempting to reconcile with Indigenous Peoples without touching the basic colonial structures that dominate and distort the relationship. They review the current state of land claims. They tackle the persistence of racism among non-Indigenous people and institutions. They celebrate Indigenous Rights Movements while decrying the role of government-funded organizations like the Assembly of First Nations. They document the federal government's disregard for the substance of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples while claiming to implement it. These circumstances amount to what they see as a false reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. Instead, Manuel and Derrickson offer an illuminating vision of what Canada and Canadians need for true reconciliation.

**Lee Maracle  
My Conversations with Canadians (2017)**

Maracle has long lived with the difficult questions of citizenship, segregation, law, prejudice, and reconciliation. In essays that are conversational and direct, she thinks through each one, drawing on her experience as a First Nations leader, a woman, a mother, and a grandmother.

**Danielle Metcalfe-Chenal, ed.  
In This Together: Fifteen Stories of Truth and Reconciliation (2016)**

Some of the authors tell it like it is for them on a personal level. Others examine the systemic prejudice that permeates our society and challenge us to face up to it. One essay, *To kill an Indian*, by Steven Cooper, is a searing description of what the residential school system did and why it took so long for the rest of us to understand.

**Pam Palmater.**

**Indigenous Nationhood: Empowering Grassroots Citizens (2015)**

Palmater is a [Mi'kmaq](#) lawyer, activist, and academic who offers analysis on topics relating to legislation, Aboriginal rights, and social issues such as murdered and missing Indigenous women, poverty, economics, identity and culture.

**Shiri Pasternack.**

**Grounded Authority: The Algonquins of Barriere Lake Against the State (2017)**

From the perspective of Indigenous law and jurisdiction, Pasternak tells the story of the Algonquins of Barriere Lake in Western Quebec and their tireless resistance to federal land claims policy.

**Leanne Simpson.**

**Dancing on our Turtle's Back (2011)**

Simpson, a well-regarded scholar, writer, musician and activist, argues that reconciliation must support indigenous languages, culture and governance traditions. Challenging and original, she provides a valuable new perspective on the struggles of Indigenous Peoples.

**Blair Stonechild.**

**The Knowledge Seeker: Embracing Indigenous Spirituality (2016)**

Stonechild shares his sixty-year journey of learning-from residential school to PhD, while trying to find a place for Indigenous spirituality in the classroom. Encouraged by an Elder who insisted sacred information be written down, Stonechild explores the underlying philosophy of his people's teachings to demonstrate that Indigenous spirituality can speak to our urgent, contemporary concerns.

**Tanya Talaga.**

## **Seven Fallen Feathers: Racism, death, and Hard Truths in a Northern City (2017)**

Over the span of ten years, seven high school students died in Thunder Bay, Ontario. The seven were hundreds of miles away from their families, forced to leave their reserve because there was no high school there for them to attend.

## **Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Final Report. Summary. (2015)**

The TRC focused on the legacy of the residential schools and how to bring about reconciliation. The full report is in several volumes, covering child welfare, education, language and culture, health, and justice. The Summary report gives the background of the residential schools, the work of the commission, and 94 Calls to Action.

## **United Nations.**

### **Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)**

A charter to protect the rights of 370 million people around the world, this document affirms the inherent or pre-existing collective human rights of all Indigenous peoples – men, women, and children. It provides a framework for justice and reconciliation. While 144 nations ratified this international agreement immediately, Canada took almost a decade to do so.

## **Richard Wagamese.**

### **One Native Life (2008)**

Short personal essays of his life journey from adoption, abuse and alcoholism to a reconciliation with his Ojibway roots and hope for the future.

## **Richard Wagamese.**

### **For Joshua: an Ojibway Father Teaches his Son (2002)**

Due to alcoholism, Wagamese was not a present father to his son. Now estranged, he atones by passing on the traditions and teachings of his people, along with his own life-long search for wholeness and connection with his people.

## **Richard Wagamese.**

**Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations (2016)**

A moving selection of short musings on life's lessons, from the ordinary to the sublime.

**Watt-Cloutier, Sheila.**

**The Right to be Cold: One Woman's Story of Protecting her Culture, the Arctic, and the Whole Planet. (2015)**

A story of resilience, commitment, and survival told from the vantage point of an Inuk woman who rose from humble beginnings in the Arctic community of Kuujuaq, Quebec--where she was raised by a single parent and grandmother and travelled by dog team in a traditional, ice-based Inuit hunting culture--to become one of the most influential and decorated environmental, cultural, and human rights advocates in the world.

**Part II: Critical settlers**

**Charlie Angus.**

**Children of the Broken Treaty (2015)**

Children of the Broken Treaty exposes how Canada failed Indigenous children in education. A youth-driven protest movement was inspired by Shannen Koostachin, a young Cree woman, who had to leave home to get a decent education. She found an ally in Charlie Angus, M.P. for Timmins-James Bay. Based on extensive documentation assembled from Freedom of Information requests, Angus establishes a dark, unbroken line that extends from the policies of John A. Macdonald to the government of today. He provides chilling insight into how Canada--through breaches of treaties, broken promises, and callous neglect--deliberately denied First Nations children their basic human rights.

**Ken McGoogan.**

**Dead Reckoning: the Untold Story of the Northwest Passage. (2017)**

A brilliant recasting of Arctic exploration history that puts the Indigenous people and their knowledge at the heart of the story.

**John Ralston Saul.**

**A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada (2008)**

In this startlingly original vision of Canada, renowned thinker John Ralston Saul argues that Canada is a Métis nation, heavily influenced and shaped by Aboriginal ideas: Egalitarianism, a proper balance between individual and group, and a penchant for negotiation over violence are all Aboriginal values that Canada absorbed. An obstacle to our progress, Saul argues, is that Canada has an increasingly ineffective elite, a colonial non-intellectual business elite that doesn't believe in Canada. It's critical we recognize these aspects of the country in order to rethink its future.

**John Ralston Saul.  
The Comeback (2014)**

Once again, John Ralston Saul presents the story of Canada's past so that we may better understand its present - and imagine a better future. Saul calls on us to embrace and support the comeback of Aboriginal peoples. This is the great issue of our time. What is happening today between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals is not about guilt or sympathy or failure or romanticization of the past. It is about citizens' rights. It is about rebuilding relationships that were central to the creation of Canada. The centrality of Aboriginal issues and peoples has the potential to open up a more creative way of imagining ourselves and a more honest narrative for Canada. Saul illustrates his arguments by compiling a remarkable selection of letters, speeches and writings by Aboriginal leaders and thinkers, showcasing the extraordinarily rich, moving and stable indigenous point of view across the centuries.

**Paulette Regan.  
Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada (2010)**

Regan argues that non-Aboriginal Canadians must undergo their own process of decolonization in order to truly participate in the transformative possibilities of reconciliation. Settlers must relinquish the persistent myth of themselves as peacemakers and acknowledge the destructive legacy of a society that has stubbornly ignored and devalued Indigenous experience. A passionate call to action, this powerful book offers a new and hopeful path toward healing the wounds of the past.

**Peter Russell.**

### **Canada's Odyssey: a Country Based on Incomplete Conquests (2017)**

150 years after Confederation, Canada is known around the world for its social diversity and its commitment to principles of multiculturalism. But the road to contemporary Canada is a story of division and conflict as well as union and accommodation.

By focusing on what he calls the "three pillars" of English Canada, French Canada, and Aboriginal Canada, Russell advances an important view of our country as one founded on and informed by "incomplete conquests". It is the very incompleteness of these conquests that have made Canada what it is today, not just a multicultural society but a multinational one.

### **Ronald Wright.**

#### **Stolen Continents: the "New World" Through Indian Eyes (1992)**

In many Eurocentric histories, Europe's discovery and conquest of the Americas is described as a great saga of achievement. In this seminal book, Wright tells the story of the people who already lived in the Americas at the time of the European conquest. It's a story of plague and invasion that crippled great civilizations and killed one fifth of the human race. Weaving together contemporary accounts of native peoples with his own compelling historical narrative, Wright has assembled a powerful account of what he terms "a holocaust that began five centuries ago."

## **Part III: Fiction**

### **Joseph Boyden.**

#### **The Orenda (2013)**

The Orenda opens with a brutal massacre and the kidnapping of the young Iroquois Snow Falls, a spirited girl with a special gift. Her captor, Bird, is an elder and one of the Huron Nation's great warriors and statesmen. In Snow Falls, Bird recognizes the ghost of his dead daughter and sees that the girl possesses powerful magic. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Huron and Iroquois tribes faced a new threat from a Jesuit Mission. Christophe, a charismatic missionary devotes himself



to understanding their customs and language in order to lead them to Christ.

**Joseph Boyden.**

**Through Black Spruce (2008)**

A powerful novel of contemporary aboriginal life, full of the dangers and harsh beauty of both forest and city. When beautiful Suzanne Bird disappears, her sister Annie, a loner and hunter, leaves behind their uncle Will to search for her. While Annie travels from Toronto to New York, from modelling studios to A-list parties, Will encounters dire troubles at home. Both eventually come to painful discoveries about the inescapable ties of family.

**Joseph Boyden.**

**Three Day Road (2005)**

It is 1919, and Niska, the last Oji-Cree woman to live off the land, has received word that one of the two boys she saw off to the Great War has returned. Xavier Bird, her sole living relation, is gravely wounded and addicted to morphine. As Niska slowly paddles her canoe on the three-day journey to bring Xavier home, travelling through the stark but stunning landscape of Northern Ontario, their respective stories emerge--stories of Niska's life among her kin and of Xavier's horrifying experiences in the killing fields of Ypres and the Somme.

**Gord Downie and Jeff Lennie.**

**Secret Path.**

A graphic novel about 12-year-old Charlie Wenjack, who died 50 years ago trying to run away from an abusive residential school.

**Thomas King.**

**Green Grass, Running Water (1993)**

Welcome to the town of Blossom--part myth, part hilariously off-kilter reality. Green Grass, Running Water is the story of five Blackfoot Indians whose existences connect in ways that are at once coincidental, comical and cosmic. This is a rich tale, weaving magical humour, revisionist history, nostalgia and myth into one bright whole.

**Tracey Lindberg.**

**Birdie (2015)**

*Birdie* is a darkly comic first novel about the universal experience of recovering from wounds of the past, informed by the lore and knowledge of Cree traditions. Bernice Meetoos, a Cree woman, leaves her home in Northern Alberta following tragedy and travels to Gibsons, BC. She is on something of a vision quest, seeking to find answers, but they are not the ones she expected. With the arrival of her Auntie Val and her cousin Skinny Freda, Bernice finds the strength to face the past and draw the lessons from her dreams that she was never fully taught in life. Part road trip, dream quest and travelogue, the novel touches on the universality of women's experience, regardless of culture or race.

**Brian Moore.**

**Black Robe (1985)**

Moore has written an astonishing fictional account of the 17th-century encounter between the Huron and Iroquois the French called "Les Sauvages" and the French Jesuit missionaries the native people called "Blackrobes." He captures both the intense--and disastrous--strangeness of each culture to one another, and their equal strangeness to our own much later understanding.

**Eden Robinson. Son of a Trickster. (2017)**

Sixteen-year-old Jared smokes and drinks too much and sells weed cookies. His mom is unreliable and he can't rely on anyone for consistent love and support. He has weird experiences when he's stoned and hears ravens talking to him. But he has an immense capacity for compassion, an impulse to look out for people, and he tries his best to stabilize his family and keep everything afloat. His maternal grandmother has never liked him, says he's the son of a trickster, that he isn't human. By the end of the book, he has turned the corner and figured things out.

**Katherena Vermette.**

**The Break (2016)**

When a young Metis mother looks out her window one evening and spots someone in trouble in a barren field, she calls the police to alert them to a possible crime. In a series of narratives, people who are connected with the victim -- police, social workers, family, and friends -- tell their personal stories leading up to that fateful night. Through their various perspectives a larger story about the residents in Winnipeg's North End is exposed. A powerful intergenerational family saga.

**Richard Wagamese.**  
**Medicine Walk (2014)**

Franklin Starlight, age 16, is called to visit his father, Eldon, a man he hardly knows. Though troubled, Frank answers the call, a son's duty to a father. He finds Eldon decimated after years of drinking, dying of liver failure. Eldon asks him to take him into the mountains, to be buried in the traditional Ojibway manner. What ensues is a journey through the rugged and beautiful backcountry, and a journey into the past, as Eldon reveals the desolate moments of his life, redemption, and love -- and in doing so offers Frank a history he has never known, the father he has never had, and a connection to himself he never expected.

**Richard Wagamese.**  
**Indian Horse (2012)**

Saul Indian Horse is dying. Tucked away in a hospice high above the clash and clang of a big city, he embarks on a marvellous journey of imagination back through the life he led as a northern Ojibway, with all its sorrows and joys. With compassion and insight, author Richard Wagamese traces through his fictional characters the decline of a culture and a cultural way. For Saul, taken forcibly from the land and his family when he's sent to residential school, salvation comes for a while through his incredible gifts as a hockey player. But in the harsh realities of 1960s Canada, he battles obdurate racism and the spirit-destroying effects of cultural alienation and displacement.

**Richard Wagamese.**  
**Ragged Company (2008)**

Four chronically homeless people seek refuge in a warm movie theatre when a severe Arctic Front descends on the city. They fall in love with this new world, and once the weather clears, continue their trips to the cinema. On one of these outings, they meet a jaded and lonely journalist and an unlikely friendship is struck. A found cigarette package changes the fortune of this struggling set. The ragged company discovers they have won \$13.5 million, but none of them can claim the money for lack proper identification. Wagamese deftly explores the nature of the comforts these friends find in their ideas of home, as he reconnects them to their histories.