

## Book Club Suggestions for the 7 Sacred Teachings

### 1. Humility

Bob Joseph (2018) *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act: Helping Canadians Make Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples a Reality*

#1 National Bestseller. Based on a viral article, *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act* is the essential guide to understanding the legal document and its repercussion on generations of Indigenous Peoples, written by a leading cultural sensitivity trainer. Since its creation in 1876, the Indian Act has shaped, controlled, and constrained the lives and opportunities of Indigenous Peoples, and is at the root of many enduring stereotypes. Bob Joseph's book comes at a key time in the reconciliation process, when awareness from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities is at a crescendo. Joseph explains how Indigenous Peoples can step out from under the Indian Act and return to self-government, self-determination, and self-reliance - and why doing so would result in a better country for every Canadian. He dissects the complex issues around truth and reconciliation, and clearly demonstrates why learning about the Indian Act's cruel, enduring legacy is essential for the country to move toward true reconciliation.

**Possible Book Club Questions:** Were you surprised by anything you learned from this book? How did you feel when you learned this new information? How have you been able to incorporate this new information into your understanding of Canada?

### 2. Wisdom

Robin Wall Kimmerer (2015) *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*.

A *New York Times* Bestseller, A *Washington Post* Bestseller and Named a "Best Essay Collection of the Decade" by Literary Hub.

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. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer brings these two lenses of knowledge together to take us on "a journey that is every bit as mythic as it is scientific, as sacred as it is historical, as clever as it is wise" (Elizabeth Gilbert).

**Possible Book Club Questions:** What parts of the worldview that the author describes do you resonate with? How do you understand reciprocity and gratitude in relation to the natural world?

### 3. Respect

Thomas King (2013) *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*

NATIONAL BESTSELLER. Rich with dark and light, pain and magic, *The Inconvenient Indian* distills the insights gleaned from Thomas King's critical and personal meditation on what it means to be "Indian" in North America, weaving the curiously circular tale of the relationship between non-Natives and Natives in the centuries since the two first encountered each other. In the process, King refashions old stories about historical events and figures, takes a sideways look at film and pop culture, relates his own complex experiences with activism, and articulates a deep and revolutionary understanding of the cumulative effects of ever-shifting laws and treaties on Native peoples and lands.

This is a book both timeless and timely, burnished with anger but tempered by wit, and ultimately a hard-won offering of hope--a sometimes inconvenient but nonetheless indispensable account for all of us, Indian and non-Indian alike, seeking to understand how we might tell a new story for the future.

Thomas King (2003) *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*

Winner of the 2003 Trillium Book Award. "Stories are wondrous things," award-winning author and scholar Thomas King declares in his 2003 CBC Massey Lectures. "And they are dangerous." Beginning with a traditional Native oral story, King weaves his way through literature and history, religion and politics, popular culture and social protest, gracefully elucidating North America's relationship with Native peoples. Native culture has deep ties to storytelling, and yet no other North American culture has been the subject of more erroneous stories. The Indian of fact, as King says, bears little resemblance to the literary Indian, the dying Indian, the construct so powerfully and often destructively projected by White North America. With keen perception and wit, King illustrates that stories are the key to, and only hope for, human understanding. He compels us to listen well.

**Possible Book Club Questions:** How have the stories that Thomas King tells changed your thinking? How have they changed how you feel? Can you think of any ways that they may lead to actions?

#### **4. Honesty**

Richard Wagamese (2012) *Indian Horse*

Saul Indian Horse has hit bottom. His last binge almost killed him, and now he's a reluctant resident in a treatment centre for alcoholics, surrounded by people he's sure will never understand him. But Saul wants peace, and he grudgingly comes to see

that he'll find it only through telling his story. With him, readers embark on a journey back through the life he's led as a northern Ojibway, with all its joys and sorrows. 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. Indian Horse unfolds against the bleak loveliness of northern Ontario, all rock, marsh, bog and cedar. Wagamese writes with a spare beauty, penetrating the heart of a remarkable Ojibway man.

**Possible Book Club Questions:** Did you find yourself connecting with the main character Saul? How has this story changed your understanding of Indian Residential Schools? How did you feel when Saul is subjected to racism as a hockey player?

## 5. Bravery

Lee Maracle (2017) *My Conversations with Canadians*

Shortlisted for the 2018 Toronto Book Award and Shortlisted for the First Nation Communities READ 2018-2019 Award. On her first book tour at the age of 26, Lee Maracle was asked a question from the audience, one she couldn't possibly answer at that moment. But she has been thinking about it ever since. As time has passed, she has been asked countless similar questions, all of them too big to answer, but not too large to contemplate. These questions, which touch upon subjects such as citizenship, segregation, labour, law, prejudice and reconciliation, to name a few, are the heart of *My Conversations with Canadians*.

In essays that are both conversational and direct, Maracle seeks not to provide any answers to these questions she has lived with for so long. Rather, she thinks through each one using a multitude of experiences she has had as a First Nations leader, a woman, a mother, and grandmother over the course of her life. Lee Maracle's *My Conversations with Canadians* presents a tour de force exploration into the writer's own history and a reimagining of the future of our nation.

**Possible Book Club Questions:** Were you surprised by Maracle's reaction to questions you yourself may have asked? Are you able to hear her point of view even if it feels uncomfortable to do so? Has this changed how you might speak in a future dialogue?

## 6. Kindness

Charlie Angus (2017) *Children of the Broken Treaty: Canada's Lost Promise and One Girl's Dream*

*Children of the Broken Treaty* exposes a system of apartheid in Canada that led to the largest youth-driven human rights movement in the country's history. The movement was inspired by Shannen Koostachin, a young Cree woman whom George Stroumboulopoulos named as one of "five teenage girls who kicked ass in history."

All Shannen wanted was a decent education. She found an ally in Charlie Angus, who had no idea she was going to change his life and inspire others to change the country.

Based on extensive documentation assembled from Freedom of Information requests, Angus establishes a dark, unbroken line that extends from Sir John A. Macdonald's time to today. He provides chilling insight into how Canada through breaches of treaties, broken promises, and callous neglect deliberately denied Indigenous children their basic human rights.

In this new edition of Charlie Angus's award-winning and bestselling book, he brings us up-to-date on the unrelenting epidemic of youth suicides in Indigenous communities, the Thunder Bay inquiry into the shocking deaths of young people there, the powerful impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, and how the Trudeau government's commitment to Indigenous communities continues to be stymied by decades-old policy roadblocks.

**Possible Book Club Questions:** Were you surprised to learn how the government responds to people on reserves? Did you have any strong feelings come up while reading this book? Can you think of ways that you can help to change the governmental policies that are harmful?

## 7. Truth

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Volume One: Summary*

This is the Final Report of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its six-year investigation of the residential school system for Aboriginal youth and the legacy of these schools. This report, the summary volume, includes the history of residential

schools, the legacy of that school system, and the full text of the Commission's 94 Calls to Action to address that legacy.

This report lays bare a part of Canada's history that until recently was little-known to most non-Aboriginal Canadians. The Commission discusses the logic of the colonization of Canada's territories, and why and how policy and practice developed to end the existence of distinct societies of Aboriginal peoples.

Using brief excerpts from the powerful testimony heard from Survivors, this report documents the residential school system which forced children into institutions where they were forbidden to speak their language, required to discard their clothing in favour of institutional wear, given inadequate food, housed in inferior and fire-prone buildings, required to work when they should have been studying, and subjected to emotional, psychological and often physical abuse. In this setting, cruel punishments were all too common, as was sexual abuse.

More than 30,000 Survivors have been compensated financially by the Government of Canada for their experiences in residential schools, but the legacy of this experience is ongoing today. This report explains the links to high rates of Aboriginal children being taken from their families, abuse of drugs and alcohol, and high rates of suicide. The report documents the drastic decline in the presence of Aboriginal languages, even as Survivors and others work to maintain their distinctive cultures, traditions, and governance.

The report offers 94 Calls to Action on the part of governments, churches, public institutions and non-Aboriginal Canadians as a path to meaningful reconciliation of Canada today with Aboriginal citizens. Even though the historical experience of residential schools constituted an act of cultural genocide by Canadian government authorities, the United Nation's Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the specific recommendations of the Commission offer a path to move from apology for these events to true reconciliation that can be embraced by all Canadians.

**Possible Book Club Questions:** Were you surprised to learn about the truth of Indian Residential Schools? Did you feel any strong emotions while reading this book? Are there any of the 94 Calls to Action that you can connect with and act on?