



10 books about residential schools to read with your kids

Stories open up 'space for conversation' with children, says educator

Chantelle Bellrichard · CBC News · Posted: Sep 26, 2015 8:00 AM ET | Last Updated: September 27, 2015



An excerpt from *Shin-chi's Canoe* by Nicola Campbell. Illustrated by Kim LaFave.

More and more children will be read stories about the legacy of residential schools in the classroom this year.

Provinces are changing curriculums and educators across the country are developing resource guides in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations.

- [Vancouver daycare teaches toddlers about Indian residential schools](#)
- [Canada's residential school story to be taught in classrooms this fall](#)
- [Charlene Bearhead galvanizes educators to move from 'apology to action'](#)

"One of the first criteria for choosing anything is that it's a good story," said Jo-Anne Chrona. She has been developing age-appropriate curriculum materials in B.C. through the [First Nations Education Steering Committee](#) (FNESC).

It opens up that space for conversation.

- *Jo-Anne Chrona, educator*

For parents reading these books at home to their children, Chrona says it's important to be mindful of what's appropriate, emotionally and developmentally.

"Talk with your children about what it is that they're reading, what it is that they understand," she said.

"It opens up that space for conversation."

The following ten books reflect on the residential school experience in different ways. They have all been identified as age-appropriate for children under 12 by reputable organizations, like FNESC and [Project of Heart](#).

***Shi-shi-etko*, by Nicola Campbell (Ages 4-8)**



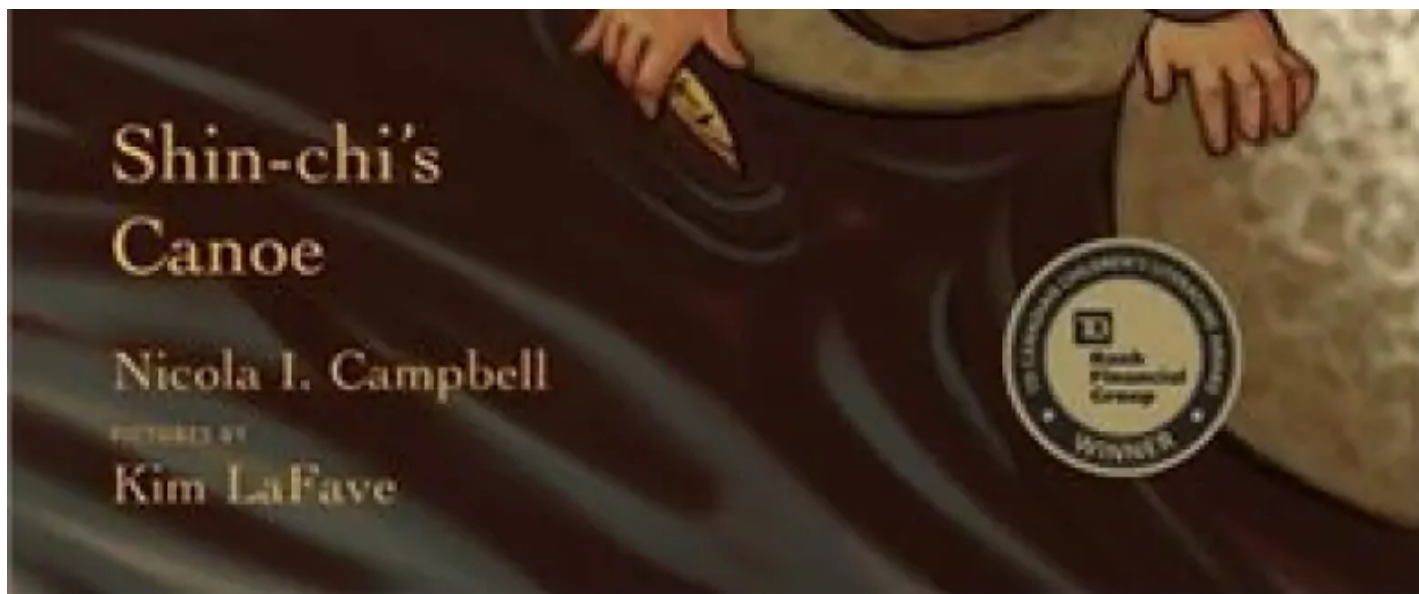


Shi-shi-etko by Nicola I. Campbell (Groundwood Books)

Shi-shi-etko is a young girl who has four days before she leaves home for residential school. Her family has many teachings to share with her, about her culture and the land. Campbell's story — and illustrations by Kim LaFave — follow Shi-shi-etko as she absorbs the world around her and collects a 'bag of memories' at the instruction of her grandmother. But she doesn't take the memories with her. Instead she buries them under a tree, for safekeeping while she is gone.

***Shin-chi's Canoe*, by Nicola Campbell (Ages 4-8)**



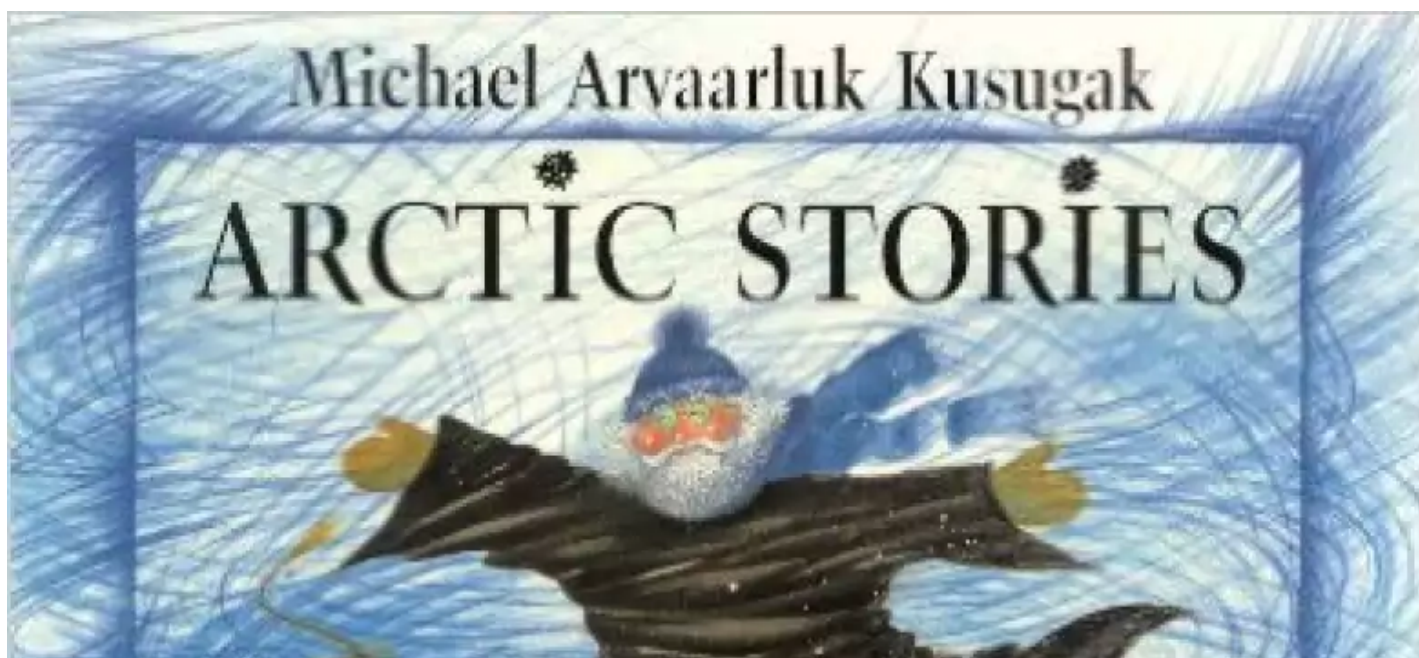


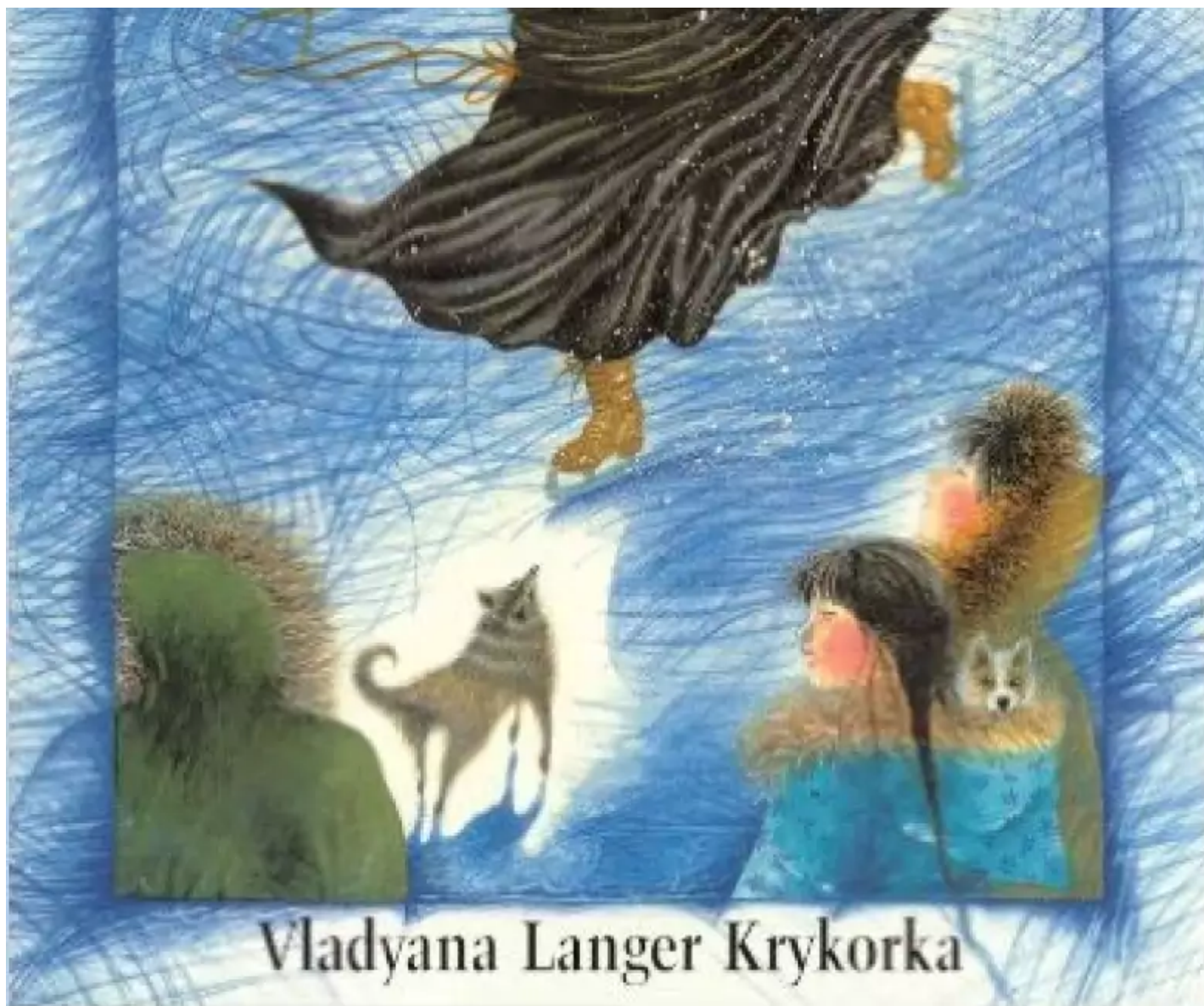
Shin-chi's Canoe by Nicola Campbell (Groundwood Books)

This award-winning book tells the story of six-year-old Shin-chi as he heads to residential school for the first time with his older sister. It is the sequel to Campbell's *Shi-shi-etko*. As the children are driven away in the back of a cattle truck, Shin-chi's sister tells him all the things they must remember about home. Shin-chi knows it will be a long time before he sees his family, not until the sockeye salmon return.

Shin-chi endures a long year of hard work, hunger and loneliness before returning home to his family with his sister.

***Arctic Stories*, by Michael Kusugak (Ages 4-8)**



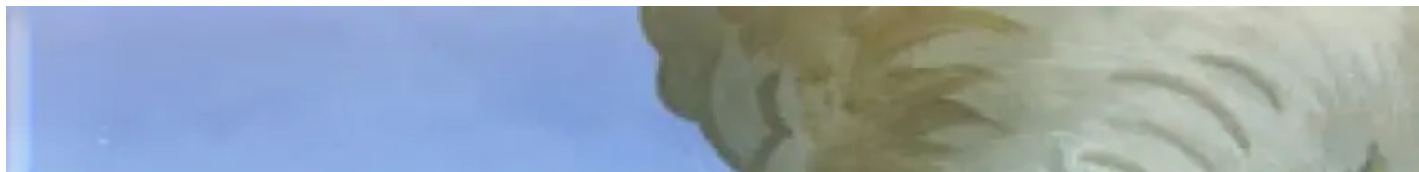


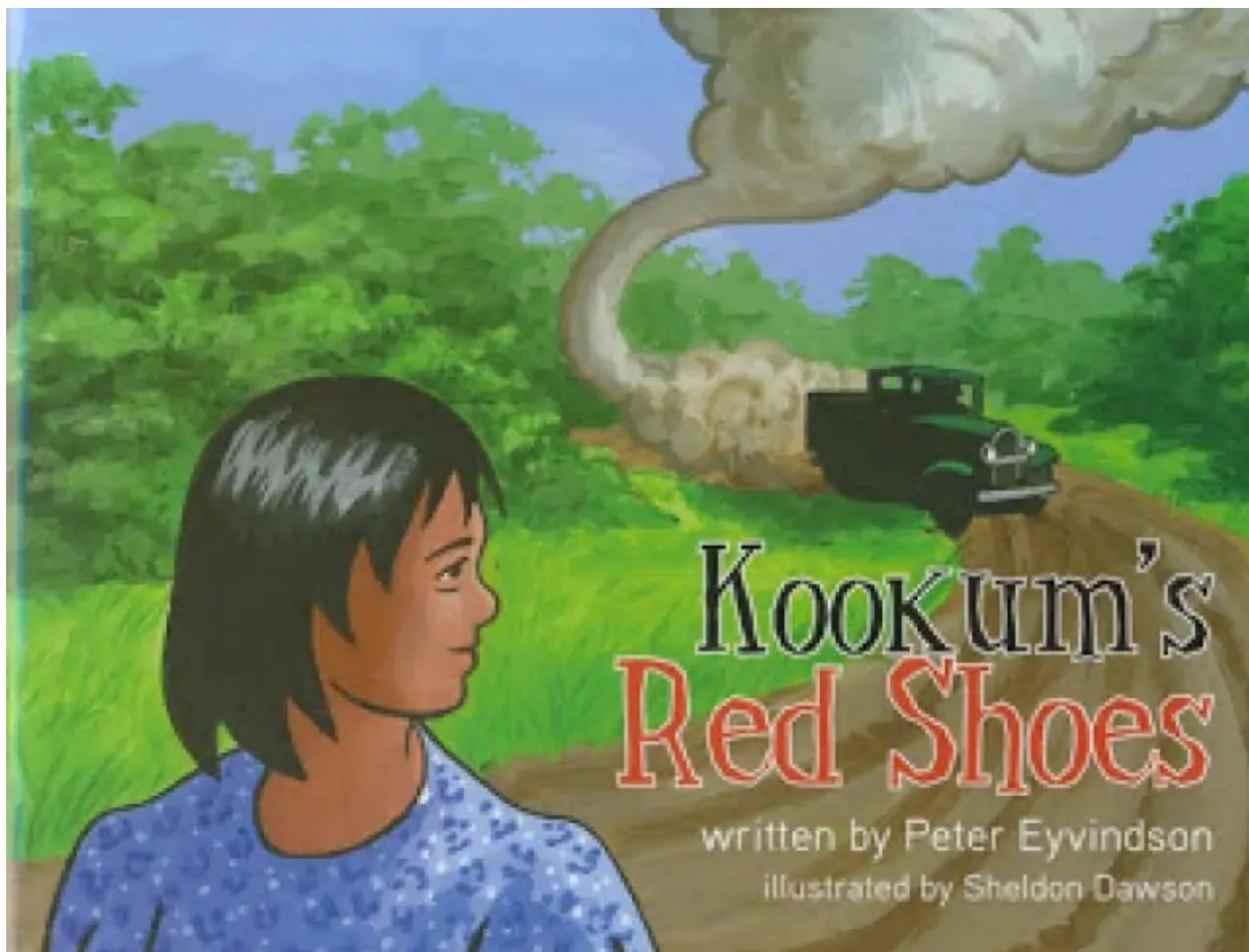
Arctic Stories by Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak (Annick Press)

This trio of stories about a 10-year-old girl named Agatha is based on the childhood experiences of beloved Inuit author Michael Kusugak. The book begins with a tale of Agatha 'saving' her community from a monstrous flying object.

The book also includes the story of Agatha being sent away for school, "The nuns did not make very good mothers and the priests, who were called fathers, did not make very good fathers," Kusugak writes.

***Kookum's Red Shoes*, by Peter Eyvindson (Ages 4-8)**



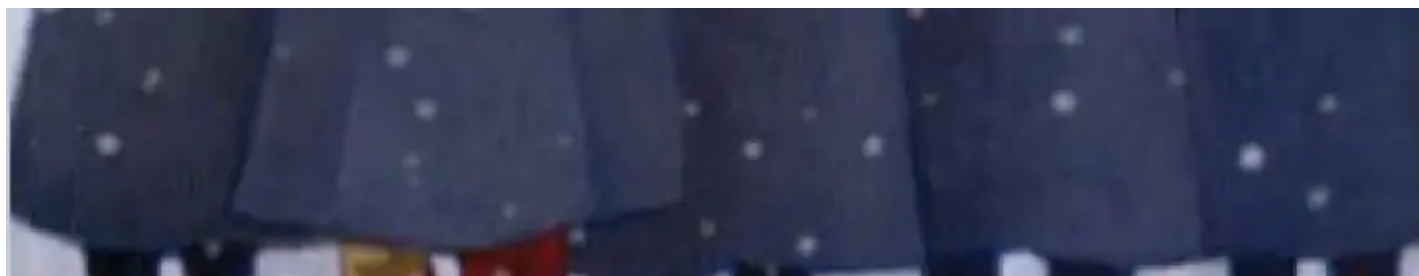


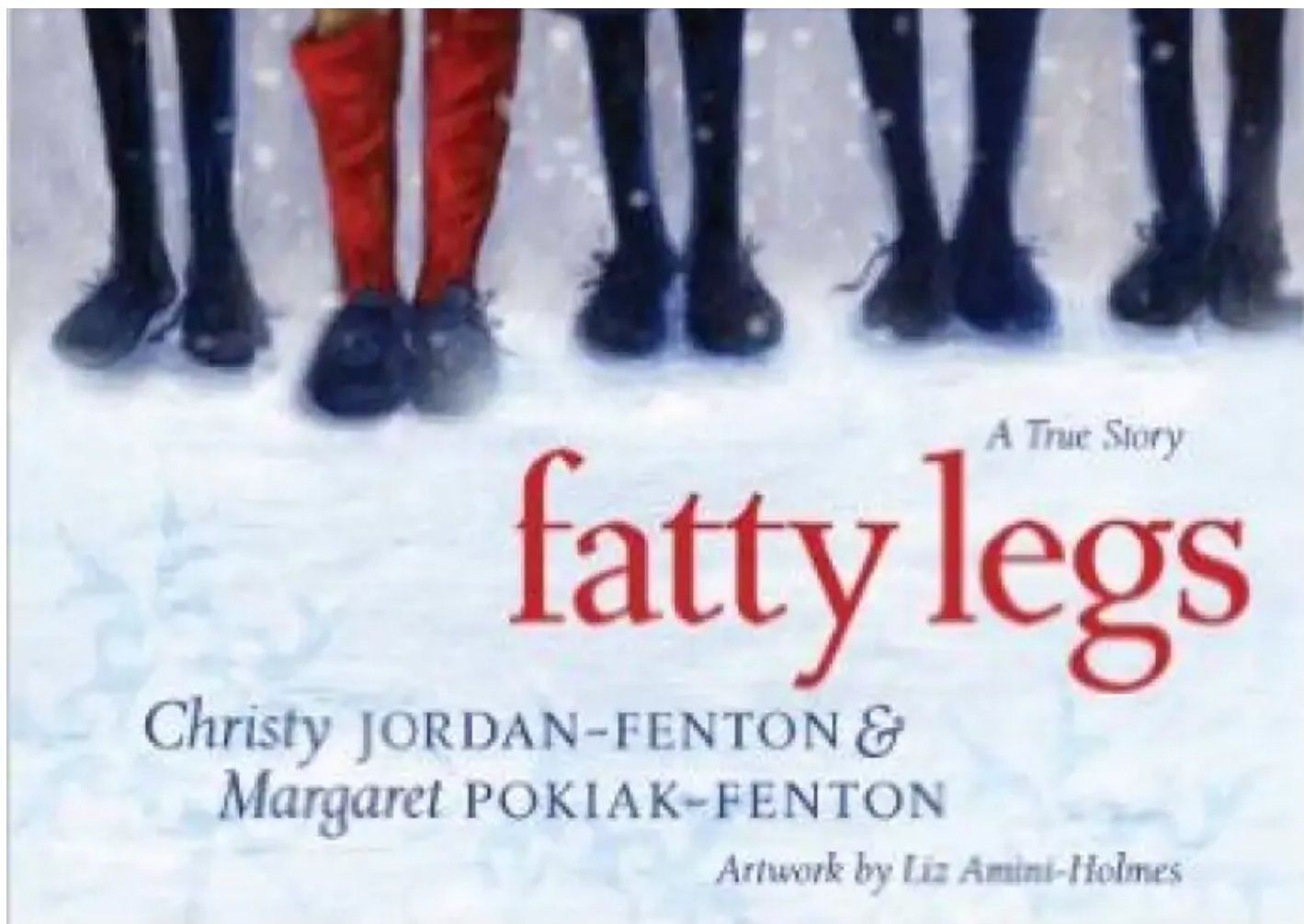
Kookum's Red Shoes by Peter Eyvindson (Pemmican Publications)

An elderly Kookum (grandmother) recounts her experiences at residential school - a time that changed her forever. The book has been described as running parallel to the story of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. "Her tornado had arrived. It rushed up and slammed to a halt just past the wonder world she had created," writes Eyvindson.

Throughout the story Kookum reveals what was lost in her life, and how goodness persisted.

***Fatty Legs: A True Story*, by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton (Ages 9-12)**





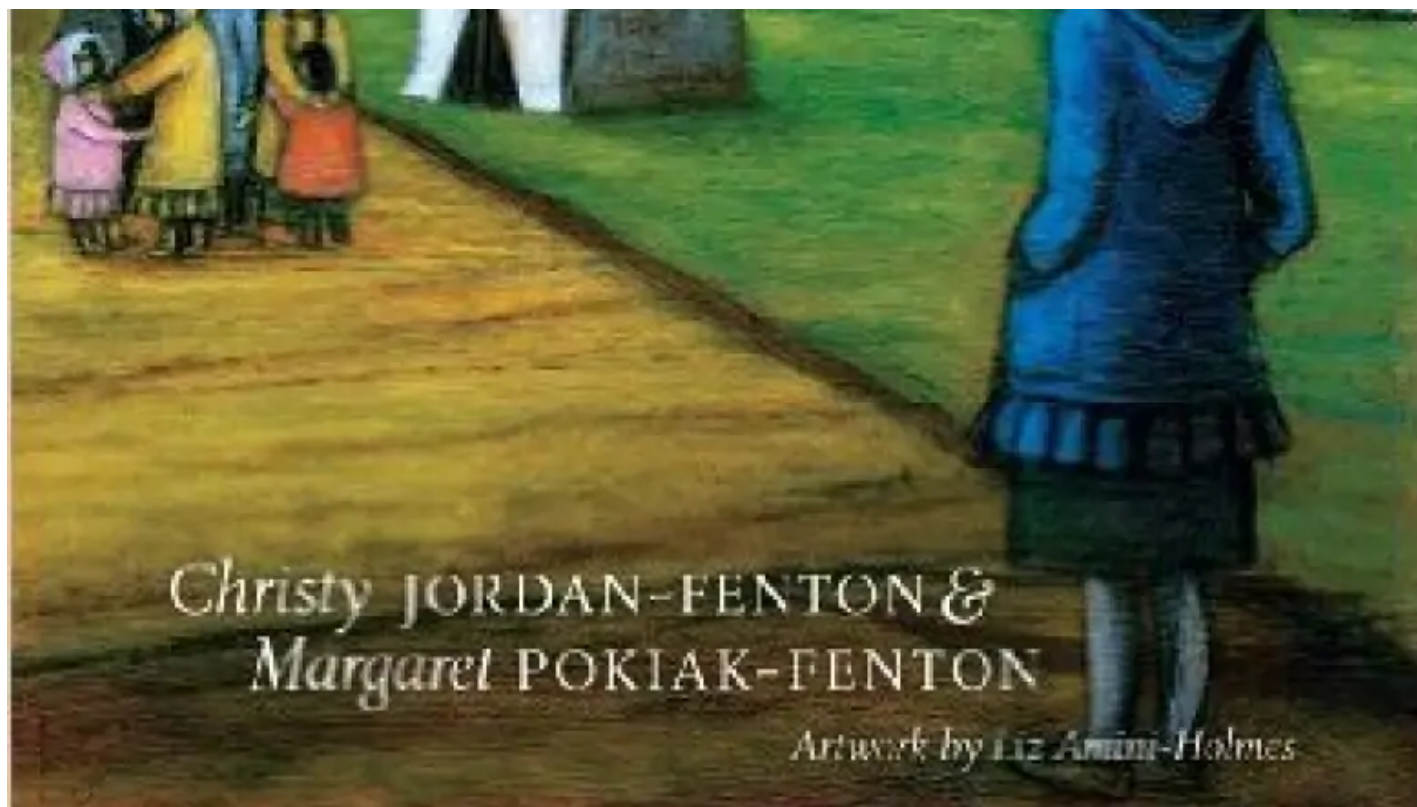
Fatty Legs: A True Story by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton (Annick Press)

Margaret, an 8-year-old Inuvialuit girl, wants to learn how to read so badly that she's willing to leave home for residential school to make it happen.

When she gets there a mean-spirited nun known as the Raven is intent on making Margaret's time at school difficult. But Margaret refuses to be defeated.

***A Stranger at Home: A True Story*, by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton (Ages 9-12)**



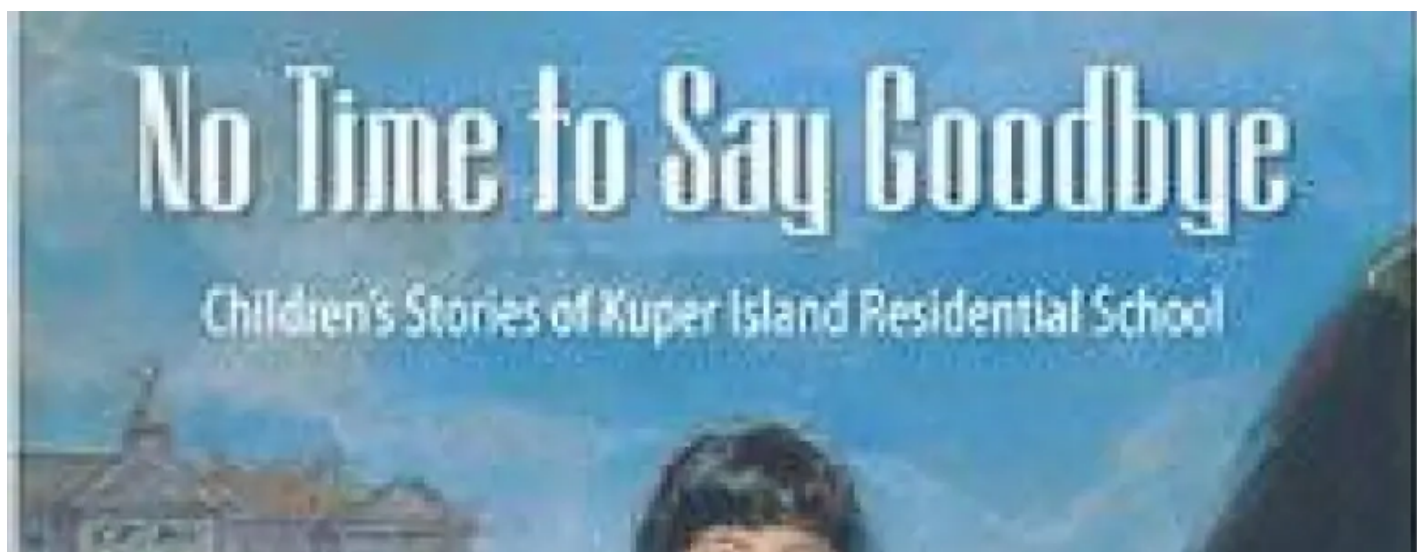


A Stranger At Home: A True Story by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton (Annick Press)

In this sequel to *Fatty Legs*, Margaret Pokiak is now 10 years old and can hardly wait to return home from residential school. But her homecoming is not what she hopes for. "Not my girl," is what her mother says when she arrives.

The story follows Margaret as she moves through feelings of rejection and tries to reconnect with her family, language and culture.

***No Time to Say Goodbye: Children's Stories of Kuper Island Residential School*, by Sylvia Olsen (Ages 9-12)**





No Time To Say Goodbye by Sylvia Olsen (Sono Nis Press)

This collection of fictional stories of five children sent to residential school is based on real life experiences recounted by members of the Tsartlip First Nation in B.C.

The children cope as best they can at Kuper Island Residential School but it's a far cry from the life they're used to.

The book is described as sometimes funny, sometimes sad.

***As long as the Rivers Flow*, by Larry Loyie (Ages 9-12)**





As Long as the Rivers Flow by Larry Loyie (Groundwood Books)

Cree author Larry Loyie writes about his last summer with his family before going to residential school, in Northern Alberta in 1944.

Lawrence learns things like how to care for a baby owl, and how to gather medicinal plants with his Kokom. Loyie's story highlights how his education at home was disrupted by the residential school system.

My Name is Seepeetza, by Shirley Sterling (Ages 9-12)





My Name Is Seepetza by Shirley Sterling (Groundwood Books)

Written in the form of a diary, *My Name is Seepetza* recounts the story of a young girl taken from home to attend the Kamloops Indian Residential School in the 1950s.

Sterling's award-winning book has been described as an honest, inside look at the residential school experience - one that highlights the resilience of a child in a place governed by strict nuns, and arbitrary rules.

***We feel good out here = Zhik gwaa'an, nakhwatthaitat qwiinzii* (The Land is Our Storybook) by Julie-Ann André and Mindy Willett (Ages 9-12)**





We feel good out here = Zhik gwaa'an, nakhwatthajjitat qwiinzii. (*The Land is Our Storybook*) by Julie-Ann André and Mindy Willett (Fifth House Publishers)

We Feel Good Out Here offers a personal account of Julie-Ann André's family story that includes a discussion about her residential school experience.

She also shares the story of her land, *Khailuk*, the place of winter fish. She writes in the book, "The land has a story to tell, if you know how to listen. When I travel, the land tells me where my ancestors have been. It tells me where the animals have come and gone, and it tells me what the weather may be like tomorrow."

André is Gwichya Gwich'in from Tsiigehtchic, NWT.

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