

Lesson 1.1: Medicine River**Grades: 10-12****Goals/Objectives:**

The student will learn the importance of developing a strong and healthy self-identity, reconnecting to their traditional culture(s), and the importance of belonging.

Rationale:

There is a reason why adolescence is referred to as the formative years. It is during a person's formative years that s/he will build a strong sense of self, explore what it means to be who s/he is, and make decisions that will influence the direction her/his life will take in the future. The purpose of this lesson is to illustrate to the student, the importance of developing a strong self-identity, reconnecting to one's culture, and the importance of belonging.

Content:

- The Elements of a Story
- Introduce the Novel
- Read & Discuss
- Activities & Assessments

Materials:

- Class Copies of *Medicine River*
- Copy of the "two-worlds" cartoon image from Sherman Alexie's *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* found on page 57 (optional)
- Copies of class handouts and discussion questions
- Student journals
- Poster paper & Art Supplies
- Access to computers and internet

Time:

- Three to Four Weeks

Lesson Activity #1: The Elements of a Story

Introduction: Storytelling is a very important element of First Nations cultures. Prior to contact with the first explorers, the Gitksan recorded their history, traditions, and cultural beliefs orally. This tradition is still carried on today, however, unlike the past, the stories are now recorded using written communication, making the stories accessible to a broader range of people. In this lesson, we will learn about the elements

that make up a story and how authors use those elements to write entertaining and thought provoking works of art.

Please Note: The “Elements of a Story” Teacher and Student notes can be found under Lesson 1.10.

Before the students arrive:

- Familiarize yourself with the novel, the elements of a story notes, and all of the activities.
- Create copies of the assignment booklets included with this lesson. You can give the sheets to the students one at a time as needed, or use all of the worksheets to create an assignment booklet.
- Write “Elements of a Story” on the board.

When the students arrive:

- Lead a brainstorming discussion about the elements of a story. Most students should know the elements already, making this activity a simple review. However, if you find that your students are struggling with the elements, you may decide to spend some extra time working through the elements one at a time, providing a clear example of each element.
- Distribute the “Elements of a Story” handouts to your students for future reference as you work your way through the novel. Encourage your students to study and memorize the “Elements of a Story” in the event that you test their knowledge later on.
- You will notice that the “Student Notes: The Elements of a Story” are much shorter than the teacher version. This is done deliberately to ensure that your students learn and not simply read the notes. In addition to the notes supplied, you should help your students to identify the “elements” throughout the novel study using the space provided on the worksheet.

Journal Activities

- Journaling is an effective way for students to demonstrate their understanding of the “Big Ideas” and to make connections between the content of the book and their lives. Included in the student work book is a list of questions based on the content of book that you can use as writing prompts for your students.

Final Projects

- Included in this unit is a novel study unit project. You may decide to give the

novel study unit project booklets to your students as soon as you begin reading the book, giving them ample time to produce the best projects possible.

Lesson Activity #2: Introduce the Novel

Introduction: *Medicine River* is Thomas King's first novel. The novel was chosen for this curriculum based on its undeniable relevance for First Nations students and its focus on the development of a strong and healthy self-identity.

Before the student arrive:

- Collect artefacts that are relevant to the book's theme and display them on a table. Your artefacts might include: a shoebox of old letters, a cowboy or rodeo image, lahal sticks, bone choker, a basketball, a camera and photo album, an apple, a baby rattle, a status card, etc.

When the students arrive:

- Introduce the novel by directing your student's attention to the display table you prepared before class. Give them a few moments to study the items and to generate theories about the content of the novel.
- Give the students ten to fifteen minutes to record their inferences in their journals.
- Bring the class back together so the students can share their inferences with the class.
- Write the title of the novel on the board and lead another brainstorm session about the content of the book. Ask the students to make connections between the artefacts and the title of the book.
- Distribute the books to the class and direct the students to the author page found at the back of the book. Ask the students if they know who Thomas King is.

Share the biographical information included in the "About the Author" reproducible notes pages included in the student booklet following this lesson. If time permits, you may decide to spend extra time introducing the author, as he is a phenomenal author, a very successful Indigenous person, and a good role model for First Nations youth.

Lesson Activity #3: Read and Discuss the Novel

Introduction: Now that the students have "met" the author of the book, you can begin

by reading the first chapter of *Medicine River*. Begin this lesson by reading the synopsis of the book found on the back cover and lead a discussion focusing on the discussion questions that follow the synopsis below.

***Medicine River* by Thomas King**

When Will returns to *Medicine River*, he thinks he is simply attending his mother's funeral. He doesn't count on Harlen Bigbear and his unique brand of community planning. Harlen tries to sell Will on the idea of returning to *Medicine River* to open shop as the town's only Native photographer. Somehow, that's exactly what happens.

Through Will's gentle and humorous narrative, we come to know *Medicine River*, a small Alberta town bordering a Blackfoot reserve. And we meet its people; the basketball team; Louise Heavyman and her daughter, South Wing; Martha Oldcrow, the marriage doctor; Joe Bigbear, Harlen's world-travelling, storytelling brother; Bertha Morley, who has a short fling with a Calgary dating service; and David Plume, who went to Wounded Knee. At the center of it all is Harlen, advising and pestering, annoying and entertaining, gossiping and benevolently interfering in the lives of his friends and neighbors.

Class Discussion Questions:

1. Consider the information presented on the book jacket. Can you make any inferences about the book's plot?
2. Can you identify any similarities between the description of *Medicine River* and your community?
3. Can you identify any similarities between the description of the character traits mentioned on the book jacket and members of your family or community?

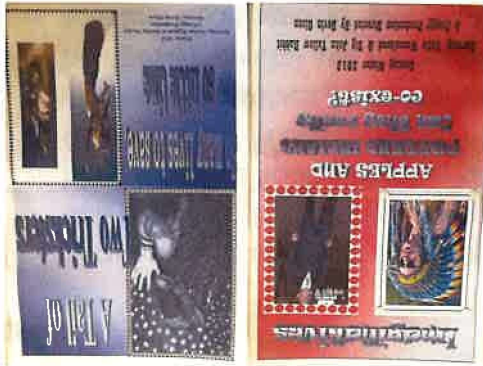
Book Hook Personal Identity Introduction Activity (optional):

- One of the key themes of *Medicine River* is self-identity. Will is half Blackfoot and half European and is searching for where he truly belongs. King addresses Will's confusion in the book and answers a number of questions that most Aboriginal people face today.
- Ask your students to consider the following questions: What does it mean to be an Aboriginal person today? How do we feel if we have to walk in two worlds (Aboriginal Culture and Western Culture)? Where do we fit in the grand scheme of things? Can we walk in the Western world without sacrificing our Aboriginality or another culture if we are not Aboriginal?
- To stimulate ideas, examine one of Ellen Forney's illustrations from *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* with your students, a picture of Arnold/Junior

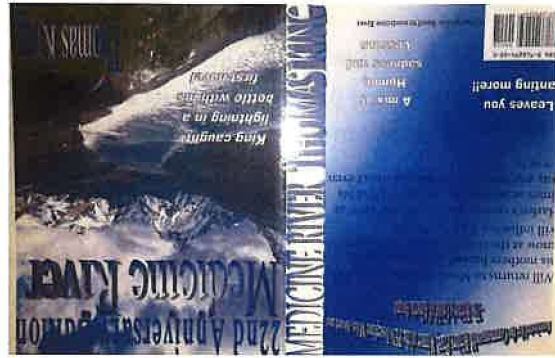
- From this exercise, students can be prompted to free write about what it feels like to “walk in two or more worlds” at once: “How do these identities synchronize, clash, or something else? How do these differences impact decision making, such as deciding what is the right or wrong thing to do?” As a more formal project, students could compose a more formal essay to accompany their drawing. (From the NCTE Publication “Sherman Alexie in the Classroom.”)
- Suggested Activities:**
- You can choose to read the book aloud in class, assign reading for homework and use class time for discussion, or you can do a combination of both. I (Kirsten) have read this book a number of times with my students and have found that reading aloud in class helps to build community and helps shy students to express themselves gradually. Plus, certain parts of the book are hilarious and being from an oral and humor loving culture, reading aloud allows my students to laugh together instead of at each other.
 - In addition, there are some hidden themes presented throughout the book that your students may miss if you do not identify them as you read.
 - The following is a summary of the activities completed throughout this novel study based on the worksheets provided in the student workbook:
 - Begin each day by sharing the student responses to the journal question from the previous day. Encourage all students to share some of their journal entry to generate good discussion about the content of each chapter.
 - Take turns reading one or two chapters aloud and review the assigned journal and discussion questions for the day.
 - Students complete discussion questions in class or for homework.
 - The character trait worksheets included in the student workbook were

- completed gradually as the book progressed. The worksheets were then used again during the creation of the Character "dating profiles" for the final project.
- Upon completion of the book, the students will have a final project to complete based on the book. You can choose to use the project suggested along with this unit or create your own. The important thing is that your students learn how to identify and summarize the main story elements and main messages within the story.
- Host a final project presentation day to celebrate student achievement.

Examples of student work from my classroom:



Movie Posters



Book Jacket



Plot Postcards

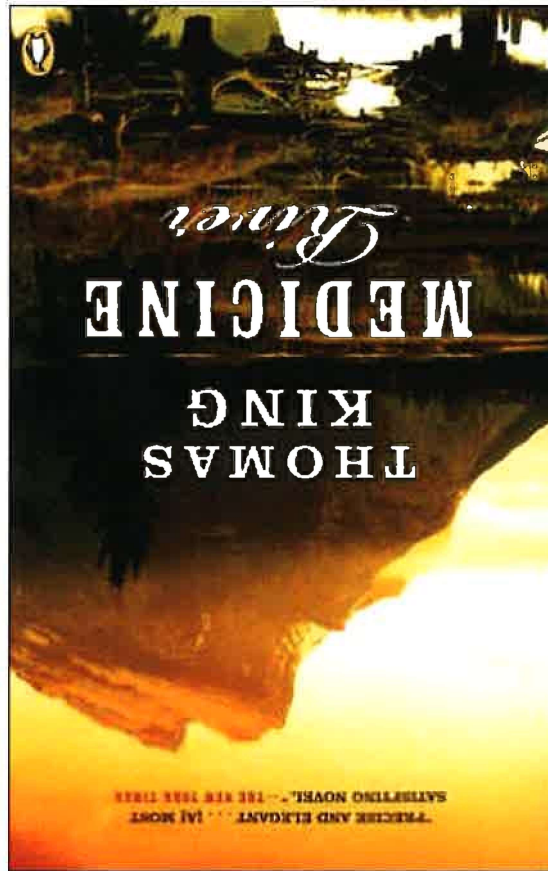


Character Profiles

Student Name: _____

"Not Your Average Book Report"

Novel Study Workbook:



By Thomas King

Medicine River

