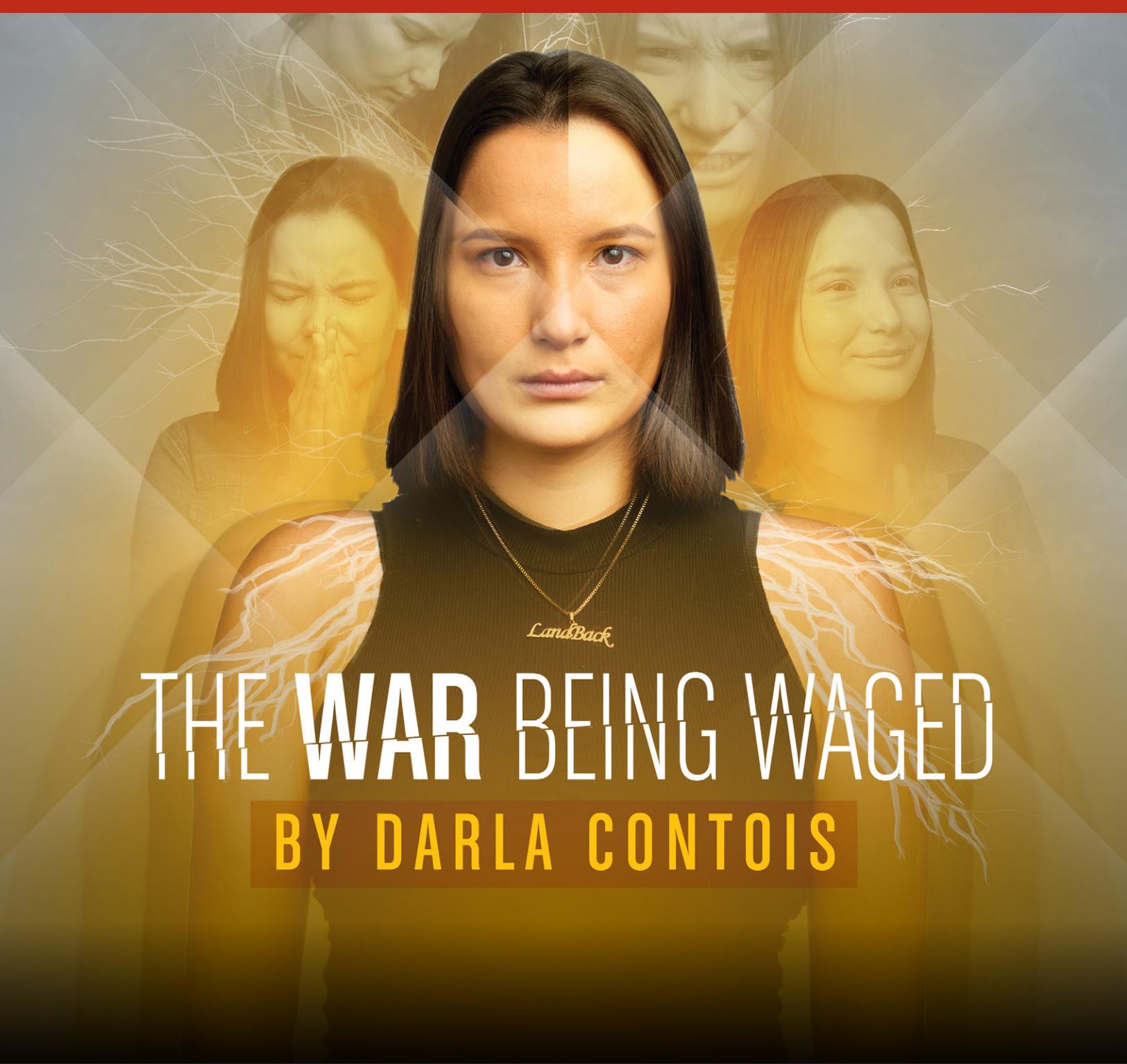


# STUDY GUIDE



## THE WAR BEING WAGED

BY DARLA CONTOIS

**Grade Recommendation:** Grades 9 and up

**Play Content Advisory:**

Descriptions of physical violence, suicidal ideation, description of attempted suicide, anti-Indigenous racism, inter-generational trauma, MMIWG2S, alcohol consumption, incarceration, gun violence

PRAIRIE **THEATRE** EXCHANGE

PRAIRIE THEATRE EXCHANGE IS PROUD TO PRESENT

# THE WAR BEING WAGED

## BY DARLA CONTOIS

### One family, three stories

An Indigenous mother becomes an activist while her brother becomes a soldier. A grandmother raises a child with love, in community. A granddaughter, full of turmoil, finds her voice. Three generations of Indigenous women are woven into this new work by Winnipeg-based theatre artist Darla Contois. And three performance genres tell their story - monologue, poetry with video and movement, and contemporary dance - all tied together by the playwright's story and an all-encompassing set design that has built a world for all three to live inside.

A WORLD PREMIERE

### THEMES / MOTIFS:

- Residential schools and generational trauma
- Loss of Indigenous identity
- Indigenous self-determination
- Protests for land and water protection
- Media bias
- Indigenous incarceration
- Stereotyping & racism

### FEATURING:

Tracey Nepinak  
Emily Solstice Tait  
and the voice of Tantoo Cardinal

Director - Thomas Morgan Jones

Associate Director - Darla Contois

Set/Lights/Projection Design - Andy Moro

Costume Design - Andy Moro with Brenda McLean

Composer/Sound Design - MJ Dandeneau

Choreographer - Jera Wolfe

Stage Manager - Karen Kumhyr

Assistant Stage Manager - Michael Duggan

Make-up Artist - Aileen Audette

Film Director - Sam Vint

Film Company - Ice River Films

**RUN TIME:** 70 minutes, no intermission

Prairie Theatre Exchange is a not-for-profit theatre and an active member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT), and engages, under the terms of the Canadian Theatre Agreement, professional artists who are members of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association.



## A MESSAGE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT Darla Contois

Tansi, Nitooteemuk? Niwihowin Wasakahaw Mikisu Iskeww, otherwise known as Darla Contois. I am a proud Cree/Salteaux theatre artist from this beautiful territory we share.

The story you are about to experience is incredibly personal to me. It is based on one of my deepest fears, my experiences and is a response to one of the most important questions we ask ourselves as Indigenous people: What are you fighting for?

In it you will find remnants of real people, real conflicts and real relationships. I hope you're ready to listen with an open heart.

Ekosani

**Darla Contois, Playwright**

**Darla Contois is an award-winning Cree-Salteaux performer and playwright based in Winnipeg, who has been living and working professionally in her home territory, Treaty 1, facilitating arts/storytelling workshops, mentoring Indigenous youth, acting, and writing.**



## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The journey of this play has been astonishing.

It began as a poem. Then came a short story. Then came the idea of dance.

Then came all of the collaborators and artists who, for months on end, have been meeting to dream, to discuss, and to feel our way through the material. At these meetings, performers would give design insight and ideas. The playwright wrote design prompts. The choreographer would express through music or sound. The sound designer would play with sound and the recorded voice.

All of us together, dancing through our individual craft, but more importantly through our humanity.

Everything you will see in this film has come about as a result of deep conversation, a supported and lengthy process, and a level of vulnerability that is almost impossible to describe. It is an act of community and an act of love.

It is a story of three generations that is told in three performance genres. Together, it becomes theatre. It is a story narrative, it is an emotional narrative, and it invites us all to think about the past, the present, and the future, colliding all at once in this moment.

And it is all for you. Welcome to *The War Being Waged*.

**Thomas Morgan Jones, Director**

This play was originally commissioned in 2018. For over a year prior to production, the core team of Darla, Andy, Jera, MJ, Tracey, Emily, and Thom have been working and meeting regularly to develop the play. This has included commissions for designers and the choreographer, supporting their processes in a way similar to that of a playwright.

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Compiled by Darla Contois, Playwright

## INDIGENOUS INCARCERATION

Indigenous Incarceration rates are at an all-time high, according to reports made in December 2021 by Canada's correctional investigator. In particular, Indigenous women make up 48% of the total population of women in correctional facilities within Canada. And yet, Indigenous women make up less than 5% of the total population of people in Canada.

Numbers like this beg the question about how fair it is to come face-to-face with a judge depending on your background. In Canada, the racism that follows Indigenous people seems to stem from the history of Indian agents, Residential schools, and the pass system, among many others which are the base policies and logic that the criminal justice system this century is based upon.

### References:

- <https://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/comm/press/press20211217-eng.aspx>
- <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/justice-canada-study-finds-courts-stacked-against-indigenous-accused/>

## INDIGENOUS SELF-DETERMINATION

In the play, we talk about self-determination and our main character protecting the land from harm. We talk about being able to start a protest/demonstration on our own treaty territory and what that means when our relationship with Canada comes into question. Self-determination refers to the right of a people to freely determine their own political status, economic social and cultural development, whilst benefit and dispose of their inherent natural resources.

Given the isolation of Canada from its Indigenous population through the signing of treaties, this would mean that any one Indigenous person could take leadership in their own communities and develop their own way to fight for their rights within the legal standpoint of law. However, this gets complicated when legislation intended to hold Indigenous nations back holds up such processes in court - such as the Indian Act and The Doctrine of Discovery. In addition, there is a lack of respect that comes from the Canadian government in recognizing its own laws within disputes between Indigenous Nations and the State.

### References:

- <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/11/29/rcmp-raids-on-indigenous-land-defenders-risk-causing-irreparable-damage-to-our-constitutional-order.html>
- [https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/foundation\\_gr6/blms/6-4-3d.pdf](https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/foundation_gr6/blms/6-4-3d.pdf)

## THE INDIAN ACT

The Indian Act is a piece of legislation that exists within Canada that was created in 1876. The main purpose of this legislation was to control who has the ability to receive rights and benefits from the Canadian government. The terms were agreed to in the treaties.

The Indian Act gave the government control on Indigenous elections in our reserves, it forced our children to attend residential schools, it gave the ownership of our land to our treaty bands and effectively meant that the land itself belonged to Canada. It also prevented us from practicing our culture, dictated who we were allowed to marry as women if we wanted to keep our status, and whether or not we can possess and enact a last will and testament. The document was designed and created to force assimilation into Canadian society. Otherwise, there would consequences applied.

### References:

- [https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the\\_indian\\_act/](https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_indian_act/)
- *There is a podcast included in this article for listening, 45 minutes long:*  
<https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indian-act-plain-language-summary>

## THE LEGACY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

In the play, our main character mentions residential schools and how they affected her life.

They were schools that Indigenous children were forced to attend and live in. They were created into legislation from the Department of Indian Affairs (Canada) and enacted by the Christian Church, with the purpose of isolating Indigenous children from their families, culture, language, and communities and instead teaching them religion, Canadian culture, and the English language. They existed from 1870 - 1996, far more recent than most Canadians realize.

The emotional, mental, and physical abuse suffered at these schools still effects every single Indigenous family today. Over 150,000 children attended these schools during that time. The system itself is considered wildly successful in its ability to disrupt Indigenous practices, culture and language from being taught to younger generations.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION (CONTINUED)

COMPILED BY DARLA CONTOIS, PLAYWRIGHT

### THE LEGACY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS *(Continued)*

The reality of residential schools is that the Canadian government didn't properly document or care how these children were being treated in these schools. Often, priests and nuns had complete power over how the children were treated; beatings, starvation, isolation, medical experimentation, and many other horrific things were common for Indigenous children while under the care of these people.

Today across the country, in the cities, towns and reserves where the facilities existed, the unmarked graves of children who attended those schools are being discovered and brought to light. They never returned home to their families and no explanation was given as to how or why these children died. Today it has fallen to Indigenous people to recover their children and give them the peace and recognition they deserve.

#### References:

- <https://globalnews.ca/news/8458351/canada-residential-schools-unmarked-graves-indigenous-impact/>
- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools>

### MEDIA BIAS

Speaking as an Indigenous woman, there are many stereotypes we come up against when it comes to being portrayed in the media -- often as drunken, sickly, or even a neglectful mother -- and more commonly as having an "at-risk" lifestyle that can lead to death or disappearance.

The general public's opinion is informed by the news, the gossip, and the ways we are portrayed in entertainment. Indigenous people are often seen as resistant to progress, unintelligent, destructive and stuck in the past.

It's important to think objectively about the information you digest. Where does it come from? Who funded this piece to be created? What is the context?

Too often in Canadian media, we are given the consequence but not the context from where it originated. As has been done with the history of this country, the media mirrors the same effect far too often.

#### References:

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Influence\\_of\\_mass\\_media](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Influence_of_mass_media)
- <https://www.tvo.org/article/rewriting-journalism-how-canadian-media-reinforces-indigenous-stereotypes>

### INDIGENOUS PROTESTS

A protest is defined as a public expression of objection, the disapproval towards an idea or action that is typically political. A group of people come together to stand against what they feel is wrong and often ready to face the consequences that follow.

For Indigenous people, more recently that has been over land disputes: oil pipelines, mines, golf courses, burial grounds, etc. The goal is always to protect the land and keep the natural law that the earth deserves the same autonomy as any one individual. This resistance is often seen as anti-progress and anti-economy and is constantly at odds with Canadians who seek to pay lower taxes at any cost to the environment.

Protests by Indigenous people, no matter how peaceful, have always been met with police force, fines, jail time, and further disenfranchisement from our inherent rights in the treaties.

However, with the recent "freedom convoy" protests, it does beg the question why such an aggressive gathering had been allowed to continue for so long without the same brutality that Black and Indigenous protests have faced in the past from the Canadian government.

#### References:

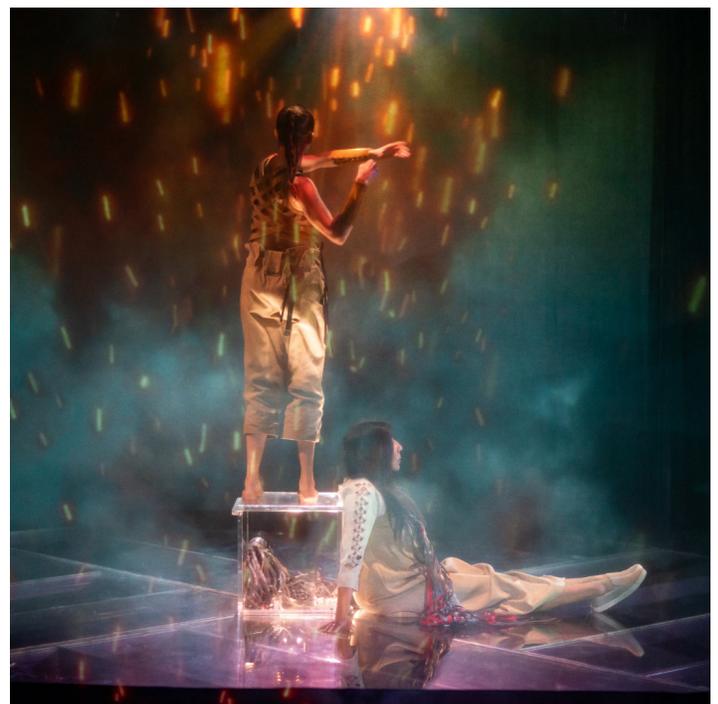
- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/gustafsen-lake-standoff>
- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/oka-crisis>
- <https://newsroom.carleton.ca/story/indigenous-black-protesters-treated-differently/>

# PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you imagine the play is about after hearing the title?
2. What is your knowledge of Indigenous peoples in Canada?
3. How do you think this play relates to real life? Do you think it does at all?
4. What do you think the role of the arts plays in our lives?
5. How important is an open mind when you begin to listen to a story? How does that effect your experience?

# POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Did you learn or hear anything new from watching this production?
2. What responsibility do you carry as an audience member afterwards, if at all?
3. In the play, our main character discusses being painted as a villain in the media. What is the role of media in how we develop a personal opinion on someone's story? How does this effect Indigenous people?
4. How did the law play a role in the outcome of this story?
5. After listening to her story, do you think she did the right thing? What would you have done?
6. How do you think culture and tradition effects Indigenous people after dealing with trauma?
7. Did your opinion or understanding of the Canadian/ Indigenous peoples relationship change after seeing this production?
8. What do you think was the significance of the shawl and how it was used throughout the play?
9. How did the set and projections affect your appreciation of what was happening in the second and third scenes?
10. What is the emotional journey that the granddaughter took from her first appearance to the end of the play?



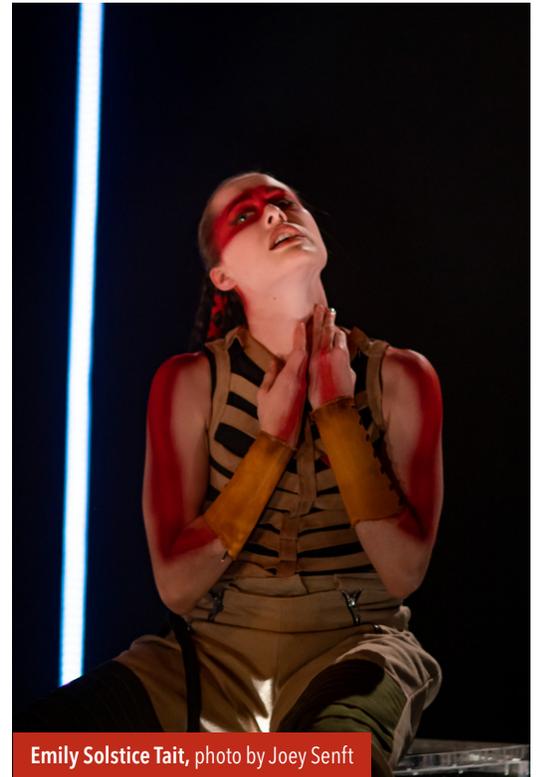
# POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

## Fortunately/Unfortunately

This exercise helps students to engage in seeing two sides of an argument, inhabiting each of them.

### Instructions:

- Students in pairs or groups of three.
- One student begins with a “FORTUNATELY” statement.  
*Example: “Fortunately, I live in Canada”.*
- The next partner responds “UNFORTUNATELY”, in direct response to the “Fortunately”.  
*Example: “Unfortunately, Canada does not treat all its citizens equally”.*
- The students can choose how to begin, or the teacher can provide them with the first “Fortunately” statement that relates to the themes of the play.



Emily Solstice Tait, photo by Joey Senft

## A Life in Three Parts

This is a writing exercise.

### Instructions:

- Ask students to choose a character (one they create, someone they know, or someone from history). Then ask them to tell their story in three parts.  
**Part One:** their childhood  
**Part Two:** a moment of crisis in their lives when everything changed  
**Part Three:** where they are now
- The length of these sections is optional, but giving restrictions is always helpful.  
*Example: one page for each section; or one sentence for each section.*
- Students can choose to write/speak from a first- or third-person perspective.



Tracey Nepinak, photo by Joey Senft

# POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

## Writing Movement

This exercise is designed to help students embody movement.

### Instructions:

- Ask students to choose a theme on which to base their work or provide them with one.  
*Examples: "Love" or "Conflict"*
- Ask them to choose one of six limbs to explore:
  1. Head
  2. Left arm
  3. Right arm
  4. Left leg
  5. Right leg
  6. Hips
- They should create one movement/gesture using that limb in relationship to the theme.
- Prompts can include:
  - *Do you move slowly or quickly?*
  - *Do you move in straight lines or curves?*
  - *Does the movement stay close to your body or does it move far away?*
  - *Do you explore the space above or below you with the movement?*
- Once they have their first movement, create two more movements, using two new limbs.
- Students can then put the three movements together to create a movement phrase.
- Variations include moving two, three, or four limbs at the same time.
- Students may also teach their movement phrase to a group of peers to perform as shared choreography.

## Write a Review

We would love to hear how students responded to the production.

The review could be a sentence, a paragraph, a full story, or it could be in the style of movie poster reviews: a few words or a phrase. The reactions can touch on the performers, the story told, the staging or the student's emotional response to what they've witnessed.

Reviews would be gratefully accepted by Haanita at [marketdev@pte.mb.ca](mailto:marketdev@pte.mb.ca).