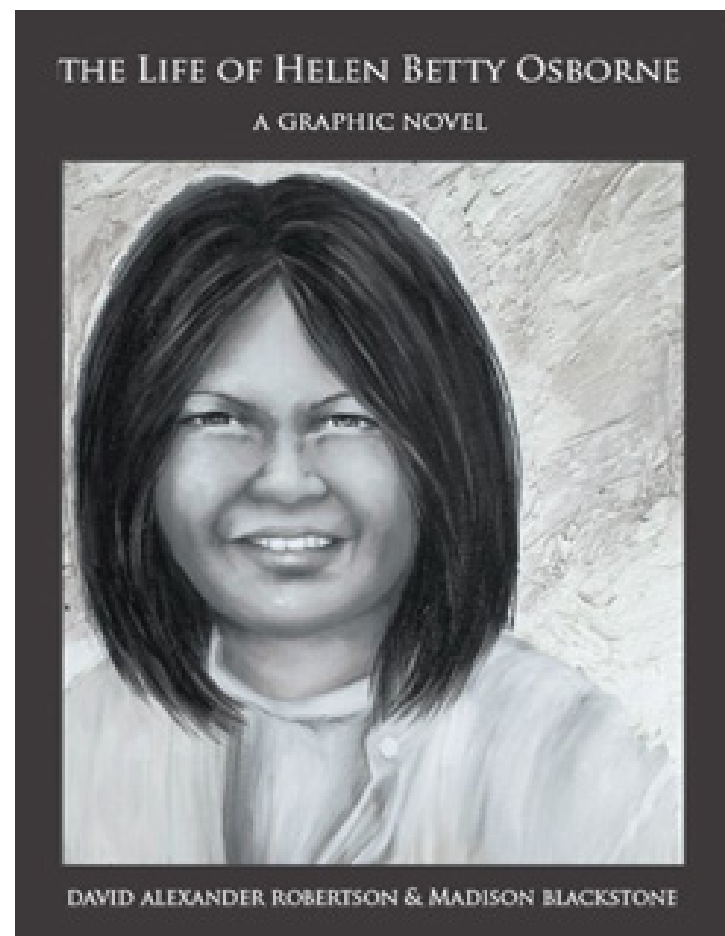


Teacher's Guide

By Pat Adamson and Lauree Kopetsky
for

The Life of Helen Betty Osborne: A Graphic Novel

By David Alexander Robertson/ illustrated by
Madison Blackstone



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Teacher's Guide for:

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INTRODUCTION

The Life of Helen Betty Osborne: A Graphic Novel is based on true events both preceding and following Helen Betty Osborne's death in November of 1971. Betty was born in Norway House, a Cree community in northern Manitoba. In 1969, at the age of 17, she left her community to pursue her education, with the dream of becoming a teacher and helping her people. For two years, Betty attended the Guy Hill Residential School outside The Pas. Then in 1971 she moved into The Pas to attend high school. This book provides a glimpse into the values and perspectives prevalent in the early seventies that inevitably led to Betty's murder and the lack of cooperation in pursuing justice. It wasn't until twenty years after her death that the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry came to the conclusion that "the murder of Helen Betty Osborne had been fuelled by racism and sexism." Today, the Helen Betty Osborne Memorial Foundation, created in her memory as a fitting tribute to her life, provides financial assistance to Aboriginal persons enrolled in post-secondary studies in Manitoba. The Foundation also recognizes deserving students who are making a difference in eliminating these barriers of racism, sexism, and indifference in our society.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

David Robertson is an Aboriginal writer who lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This is David's first graphic novel as a writer and as a publisher. He states "since 2005 Betty has been a constant presence in my life and her undying spirit has driven and changed me." It is his hope that this graphic novel will motivate all of us to contribute to the elimination of racism and indifference.

Madison Blackstone lives in Yorkton, Saskatchewan and has been a professional artist since 1999. This is her first foray into the world of the graphic novel. Madison

appreciates the opportunity to honour the life of Helen Betty Osborne and believes that Betty has guided and touched her life in a spiritual way.

Note: The content may not be suitable for all readers. It is recommended that *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne: A Graphic Novel* should be considered for students in Grade 10 or above.

MANITOBA CURRICULUM CORRELATION

English Language Arts

- General Learning Outcomes 1–5

A Manitoba Residential School Survivors Social Studies Project

- edu.gov.mb.ca/kz12/cur/socstud/far/index.html

Grade 9 Social Studies

- Cluster 1: Diversity and Pluralism in Canada

Grade 11 History of Canada

- First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Peoples
- Identity, Diversity, and Citizenship

Physical Education

- General Learning Outcome for Personal Development

Diversity and Equity

- Belonging, Learning, and Growing: Kindergarten to Grade 12 Action Plan for Ethnocultural Equity

Grade 11 and 12 Family Studies

Note: Check the Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth website for further details. Go to edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/index.html.

USING GRAPHIC NOVELS IN THE CLASSROOM

Graphic novel is a term used by librarians and educators to identify a specific publishing format – a book written and illustrated in the style of a comic book. This is quickly becoming a compelling genre for use in the school system. Graphic novels engage students and motivate them to read. They appear to be particularly popular with boys and struggling readers – students who are traditionally difficult to reach. Graphic novels generally have rich, complex plots and narrative structures that can satisfy all readers. However, the format can help to improve reading comprehension for many students who struggle because the illustrations provide contextual clues that enrich meaning and support understanding. Reading graphic novels can help students develop the critical skills necessary to read more challenging texts.

If students are unfamiliar with graphic novels, explain that a graphic novel is a story with text and pictures. Demonstrate that graphic novels provide several entry points into understanding, and discuss how these features can help them understand the story. Some features to consider include:

- facial expressions
- landscapes
- sound effects
- body language and relationships
- captions
- dialogue
- points of view
- sequences

It would be helpful to provide a variety of graphic novels for students to look through, noting the similarities to and differences from other books they have read. Then ask your students the following questions:

- How are graphic novels the same as other novels?
- How are they the same as comic books?
- Discuss how a graphic novel can be read: from left to right frame, top to bottom frame, and from highest to lowest speech balloon inside a frame.
- Are graphic novels “real books”?

- How many of you have read graphic novels before? If so, how was the experience enjoyable or not so enjoyable? Why, or why not?

INCORPORATING ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE CLASSROOM

Manitoba, Education, Citizenship, and Youth (MECY) support inclusion of Aboriginal cultural concepts in teaching and learning situations and encourage educators to seek the guidance of local community people who are most knowledgeable about the appropriate use of cultural concepts specific and/or unique to the context. It is important that students have the opportunity to develop a respectful and balanced view of Aboriginal people and Canadian culture and a richer understanding of the place of Aboriginal people in the history of Manitoba and Canada.

ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

Providing opportunities for meaningful dialogue and creating an atmosphere of trust in discussions are critical steps to help students deepen their understanding of what they read. The Talking Circle is an excellent teaching strategy that is consistent with Aboriginal values and perspectives. In a Talking Circle, each one is equal and each one belongs. Students in a Talking Circle learn to listen and respect the views of others. A stick, stone or feather (something that symbolizes connectedness to the land) can be used to facilitate the circle. Whoever is holding the object has the right to speak and the others have the responsibility to listen. Douglas Cardinal explains, “When you put your knowledge in a circle, it’s not yours anymore, it’s shared by everyone.” (*Regina Leader Post*, November 28, 1995).

The Talking Circle

- is consistent with Aboriginal values of respecting all views and including all voices
- is a powerful symbol of connectivity and completeness; the circle is the earth, the sky, the sun, the moon, the tipi, the seasons, the cycle of life
- presents a place where everyone is equal, where all can have a say

- represents a place for healing, where the heart can be unburdened and words of consolation can be freely spoken
- supports students in learning how to listen respectfully and to express their ideas without fear of ridicule
- incorporates a talking stick, feather, or stone that can be held by the speaker to signal that she or he now has the right to speak and the others have the responsibility to listen
- helps students to develop confidence in presenting their views, exchanging ideas, examining concepts, raising questions, and exploring ideas
- provides an appropriate framework for learning to respect and appreciate differences between groups

More information on using Talking Circles in the classroom is available at the Saskatchewan Education website link <saskschools.ca/curr_content/aboriginal_res/supplem.htm#talk>

READING AND RESPONDING TO THE TEXT

1. ACTIVATING (before reading)

Many important and complex social issues are addressed in this graphic novel. Before reading *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne*, it is important to provide background information and discuss the following major themes with your students.

Major Themes

The Setting

- Use a map of Manitoba to locate The Pas and Norway House and a map of The Pas to locate the Opaskwayak Cree Nation Reserve.
- Provide a context of times (early seventies). What were the attitudes and values? How did people in small towns such as The Pas interact with one another?

Discrimination

Ask your students the following questions:

- What does the term *discrimination* mean to you?
- What are some examples of discrimination in our world, community, or school?
- How do the terms *racism* and *sexism* relate to discrimination?
- Why do people develop prejudices and stereotypes?
- How are people (both victims and perpetrators) affected by acts of discrimination?
- What actions can we take to prevent others and ourselves from becoming victims or perpetrators of prejudice and discrimination?

Justice

Ask your students the following questions:

- What does that word *justice* mean to you?
- Who gets to determine *justice*?
- What are some examples of justice and injustice in your life, our world, community, or school?
- What is the difference between “legal justice” and “moral justice”?
- What is our social responsibility related to justice?
- Is everyone treated with the same respect? Same justice?

The Aboriginal Education System

- Research and present information about residential schools.
- Discuss the impact these schools have had on Aboriginal culture and identity.

Suggested Activities

Anticipation Guide

An anticipation guide is a list of statements with which the students are asked to agree or disagree. The statements are related to concepts, issues, or attitudes presented in the reading selection. Typically, three to five statements are used in an anticipation guide, and an effort is made to use statements that will result in differences of opinion and thus lead to discussion and debate.

For example: Respond to the following statements (page 7) BEFORE and AFTER reading the graphic novel *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne: A Graphic Novel*. Do your opinions change? Reflect on why or why not your opinions change.

Before Reading	Statement	After Reading	Reflection
	1. Justice is equal for all individuals, regardless of culture, sexual orientation, and so on.		
	2. Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people are always treated equally, now and in the past.		
	3. Stereotyping is an appropriate way of understanding people.		
	4. Society's treatment of Aboriginal people is usually negative.		
	5. We can always learn from the past (including from both positive and negative events).		

Poetry Connection

Select a poem or song of your choice that depicts some aspects of discrimination or prejudice. Read the poem to the class and have students (alone or with a partner or in a small group) respond with an artistic representation of the mood, tone, and/or emotions in the poem or song. Invite students to find and share their own poems and/or song lyrics that help them make connections to the topic of discrimination. *Native Poetry in Canada: A Contemporary Anthology* by Jeannette Armstrong and the website Poem Hunter <poemhunter.com> are possible sources for appropriate poetry.

Guest Speaker

Invite someone who attended a residential school or lived away from his/her own community to attend high school to come and speak to the class. Students can prepare questions and follow an interview format for the presentation.

2. ACQUIRING (during reading)

It is important for students to make personal connections as they read, and to use specific strategies that will help them gain information from the text. Coding the text, double-entry journals and literature circles are tools that can be used to support students' understanding of the text and learning about the important themes in the text.

- *Post-it Notes.* Students use post-it notes to make annotations as they read (code the text) such as:
- √ This sounds familiar ... ! Wow, that's incredible ... ? I'm curious about ...
- *Double-entry journals* encourage students to not only analyze texts but also to make text-to-self connections, text-to-text connections and text-to-world connections. Explain to students that, in the first column, they should choose a quote or situation from the text that they can react to. Then, in the second column, they should record their reaction. Reinforce the fact that these reactions should make a connection between the text and themselves,

another text, or the world. See more information on Connection Prompts below.

- *Four-Quadrant Reading Response* (adapted from: Brownlie and Close 1992) is a comprehension strategy where students read through the novel and make comments, notes, or drawings in each of the quadrant areas:

- *Literature circles* allow students to work in small groups to construct meaning and expand their comprehension of texts.
- *Literature circles* provide a discussion format that encourages both students' personal interaction with the text and consideration of the perspectives of others. The Talking Circle, as described earlier, provides a similar context for exploring diverse perspectives in a respectful and thoughtful manner.

<p>Visual (draw or describe specific character, setting or event)</p>	<p>Language (record important or interesting words or phrases)</p>
<p>Emotional (write about feelings)</p>	<p>Questions (record questions or "I wonder" statements)</p>

Connection Prompts

1. **Text to Self:** connecting with the text through personal experience, thoughts, and feelings.
Ask your students the following questions:
 - What experiences have you had that are similar to any of the characters' experiences?
 - What do you think is the main message of this book/story?
 - What are some connections you may have to the text or the main message of the text?
 - Is this message important? Why? To whom?
 - What are your thoughts or feelings about this message?

2. **Text to Text:** connecting the main message with another text.
Ask your students the following questions:
 - Have you read another story or text with a similar message? How was the message the same? How was it different?
3. **Text to World:** refining thinking through sharing viewpoints, understanding the viewpoints of others, refining perspectives and extending understanding and taking a 'stance' to make the world a better place.

Ask your students the following questions:

- What are some of the viewpoints or perspectives of others to the main message? In what ways are the viewpoints the same? In what ways are the viewpoints different from each other?
- Are you familiar with an event that has happened in another community or another part of the world, in which people share a similar message? Is there an event in the world, or in our community, in which people could benefit from hearing this message?
- What might you do that could make the world a better place because of this message?

Reading and Responding

Ask your students the following questions:

Introduction; back of the book (pp. 30–32); back cover: “Kiskisitan: Let Us Remember”

- What do you think is the author’s purpose for writing this story? (Connect the information in the Introduction, the quote on the back of the book, and the About the Author and Illustrator sections to the initial class discussions).
- What is the main message that the author wants us to consider?
- How might remembering the tragedy of Helen Betty Osborne apply to us in present-day times?

Pages 1–6

Present Day: *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne* is told in graphic format – a weaving of a present-day fictional character, Daniel, and the true facts of a period of time in the life of Helen Betty Osborne.

The story begins in the present day with the fictional character, Daniel, struggling with the issue of not assisting a young Aboriginal woman who had been bullied by white students on the way to school. Racist comments and questions are raised in the classroom as the teacher assigns a research assignment on the life of Helen Betty Osborne.

- What were your thoughts and/or feelings seeing the young girl bullied, and then reading Daniel and Mark’s comments? Does this kind of discrimination happen in our school and com-

munity with Aboriginal and/or non-Aboriginal people? Who else might be affected by similar racist or sexist comments or actions?

- The teacher comments: “...if this girl had been white she wouldn’t have been murdered” (p. 6). Do you think this statement is true?
- “Who was Betty Osborne? She represents the truth of society’s treatment of aboriginal people, but she was also a young woman with real thoughts, emotions and aspirations” (p. 6). What are your thoughts on a 19-year-old woman being the representative of ‘the truth of society’s treatment of Aboriginal people’? Can one person be all of that? What responsibilities go with that role?
- What stereotypes are introduced in this section? What messages are being sent to students throughout the school? As a student, would you feel comfortable in speaking out against these stereotypes?

Pages 7–9

Flashback: We are introduced to Betty as she is abducted as she walked home on November 13, 1971. The story then moves abruptly to Betty’s mother who lives in Norway House as she is informed of her daughter’s death.

- “They thought Betty would be easy because they believed Aboriginal women were easy” (p. 7). How and why do people develop beliefs such as this about individuals?
- What stereotypical beliefs are present in our world today? Are these beliefs helpful? Or harmful?
- How do you think we can alter people’s beliefs about stereotypes?
- If you have read *In Search of April Raintree*, you may recall the rape scene. In what way is April’s story similar or dissimilar to Helen Betty Osborne’s?

Pages 10–14

Over the course of these pages, Betty’s story is further explained as she makes the decision to leave her home in Norway House to attend Guy Hill Residential School. She wanted to work toward her dream of becoming a teacher. The story suggests that Betty was very positive

