FINDING OUR WAY

DISCUSSION GUIDE
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1. SYNOPSIS

This is a story of a people dispossessed, deep historic wounds and still unresolved conflict between Indigenous people, governments in Canada and industry. It’s a story of the struggles of two First Nations in the Carrier territory of north central British Columbia, on Canada’s northwest coast—a struggle for land and sovereignty, for healing and revitalization.

The Ts’il Kaz Koh First Nation (Burns Lake Band) has been in conflict with the Village of Burns Lake over appropriated lands for almost a hundred years. The conflict culminated in the municipality shutting off water and sewerage services to their Reserve in the year 2000 and the Band taking the Village to the Supreme Court of BC. The Cheslatta Carrier Nation were evicted from their homeland in 1952 by Alcan’s hydroelectric project, and are still struggling to keep their heads above water.

This is 21st century Canada, and this is a story with a question mark. After almost a century of apartheid in this region, the film asks: Is there a way forward?
2. ABOUT THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

This guide is a tool for use in classrooms and in community workshops to help viewers engage in constructive dialogue about some of the difficult issues raised in the film.

Users should be aware that the film is not easy to watch. In recounting the history of colonization through Native and non-Native voices and experiences, it may arouse a range of emotions, from anger to sadness, pain, shame and guilt.

Depending on the community or context in which you are watching this, we recommend that there is a counsellor available as well as trained facilitators to create a safe space for and help to work through these emotions, towards greater understanding of the ongoing legacies of colonization.

This Guide was shaped by four years of conversations with the Ts'il Kaz Koh and Cheslatta First Nations, with the people of the Village of Burns Lake, and with the Elder, Gerry Oleman, of the St’át’imc Nation. It also benefited from the contributions of both Native and non-Native participants in the dialogues following two community screenings in Burns Lake in June 2010.

We thank you all. Mussi.
3. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This guide was developed for a range of audiences who are interested in cross-cultural work involving Native and non-Native peoples, including: High school students, college and university students, government employees, corporate sector leaders, and representatives of civil society organizations.

It is designed to help groups use *Finding Our Way* as a tool for learning and community-based action planning activities. Specifically, it will help you:

- Understand some basic differences between Indigenous and Western European worldviews, and empathize with the response of First Nations to Canada’s colonialism;

- Develop knowledge of the history and ongoing impact of Canadian colonialism on Native people’s rights and culture - with a particular focus on the struggles and successes of two sub-tribes of the Carrier Nation;

- Strengthen critical and creative thinking skills for identifying local pathways of truth and reconciliation between Native and non-Native peoples.
4. PRE-SCREENING INFORMATION AND QUESTIONS

This section is divided into several parts. First, a general description of Western European and Indigenous worldviews is presented. Second, a brief overview of some key concepts and laws relating to settler and Indigenous relations in Canada is provided. Third, the history and location of the stories told in this film and the key groups involved are discussed. Discussion questions follow each section. For well-rounded discussions, it is a good idea to retrieve and review in more detail the material noted in each discussion.

4.1. Comparing Indigenous and Western European Worldviews

A worldview is like a lens through which we see our world and make sense of how it is structured, how it functions and what our role in the world is. There are two general worldviews represented in the film: Indigenous and Western European worldviews. In exploring some of the general elements of both worldviews, the conflicts, co-existence and collaborations that have and continue to define both groups can be more deeply understood.
The following list of general differences between Western European and Indigenous worldviews was adapted from the work of Knudtson and Suzuki (1992) and Kawagley and Barnhardt (2005).

**General Elements of Indigenous Worldview**

- Spirituality is embedded in all elements of the cosmos;

- Humans have responsibility for maintaining a harmonious relationship with the natural world;

- Resources are viewed as gifts from the earth to be cared for with a view to future generations;

- Nature is honoured routinely through daily spiritual practices;

- Wisdom and ethics are derived from direct experience with the natural world;

- The universe is viewed as a holistic, integrative system with a unifying life force;

- Time is circular with natural cycles that sustain all life;

- Nature will always possess unfathomable mysteries;

- Human thought, feelings and words are inextricably bound to all other aspects of the universe;

- The role of humans is to participate in the orderly designs of nature;
• Respect for Elders is based on their compassion and reconciliation of outer and inner-directed knowledge;

• Sense of empathy and kinship with plant and animal life;

• View proper human relationship with nature as a continuous, two-way transactional dialogue;

• Communication of metaphor and story are connected to life, land, values and proper behaviour;

• Oral records hold together complex ancient knowledge systems;

• Trust characterizes how wisdom is passed on and received across generations.

**General Elements of Western European Worldview**

• Spirituality is centred in a single Supreme Being;

• Humans exercise dominion over nature to use it for personal and economic gain;

• Natural resources are available for unilateral human exploitation;

• Spiritual practices are intermittent and set apart from daily life;

• The Universe is made up of an array of physical objects that are often studied in isolated ways;
• The universe is compartmentalized in dualistic forms and reduced to progressively smaller conceptual parts;

• Time is a linear chronology of “human progress”;

• Nature is decipherable to the rational human mind;

• Human thought, feeling and words are formed apart from the surrounding world;

• The role of humans is to dissect, analyze and manipulate nature for own ends;

• Respect for others is based on material achievement and chronological old age;

• Sense of separateness from and superiority over other forms of life;

• View relationship of humans to nature as one way;

• Quantitative and qualitative written records hold together complex ancient knowledge systems;

• Skepticism is an underlying value of inquiry and wisdom is often achieved through personal efforts and not through intergenerational knowledge exchange.

Discussion questions

1. Do you agree with the description of these two different worldviews? Why or why not?
2. From your perspective, what are the top three major differences between Indigenous and Western European worldviews?

3. Do you see any overlap between the two worldviews?

4. Have you ever seen Indigenous and Western European worldviews used together to address a community-based problem? How did these different worldviews come together and for what purpose? What were the challenges and benefits of combining different worldviews for community development?

4.2. Settler and Indigenous Relations in Canada and B.C.: Law and Concepts

This section provides a discussion of key legal developments and related concepts that have shaped the relationships between government and First Nations in Canada over the past several hundred years.

Empty Land

One of the central organizing concepts in early colonial planning was terra nullius, which translates roughly into “empty land.” The term refers to a 17th century legal concept that European colonial powers routinely used to assume control of and establish settlements on Indigenous people’s lands.
The current day province of British Columbia was founded on the myth of empty land. James Douglas, first governor of the colony of British Columbia, once referred to the region as “wild and unoccupied” when proclaiming at Fort Langley the creation of the Government of British Columbia in 1858 (Miller, 2003). However, the most deplorable use of the concept in British Columbia’s history can be attributed to Joseph Trutch, who was Lieutenant-Governor at the time when British Columbia joined the federation of Canada in 1871. He said:

*The Indians have really no rights to the lands they claim, nor are they of any actual value or utility to them; and I cannot see why they should retain these lands to the prejudice of the general interests of the Colony, or be allowed to make a market of them either to Government or to individuals.*

According to Miller (2003), it was Trutch’s version of terra nullius that insured that B.C. policy at the time of the province’s entry into Confederation was not in conformity with the Royal Proclamation of 1763.

**Discussion questions**

1. Why do you think James Douglas and Joseph Trutch bought into the idea of the land that is now B.C. as an empty land?

2. If you were a senior civil servant working for the British Crown at the same time as James Trutch, how you would have responded to his comments about Native peoples?
3. Do you think this concept is still active in government and industry planning for resource extraction in Canada and in other parts of the world? Are you aware of any other instances when the concept of terra nullius was or is used to appropriate lands of Indigenous peoples?

**Royal Proclamation of 1763**

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 was intended to organize the governance of Britain’s newly stolen territories on the mainland of North America. The Proclamation defines the Crown’s special relationship with Aboriginal peoples by setting out the basis in law for Aboriginal land ownership.

It has legal importance to First Nations because it was among the first laws that recognized:

- Aboriginal peoples lived on traditional lands;
- Interest in those lands belonged to groups and nations, not individuals;
- Only the Crown could buy or accept Aboriginal lands;
- The Crown generally required an agreement (loosely defined) to obtain lands from Aboriginal peoples;
- Aboriginal peoples were under the Crown’s protection.

**Discussion questions**

1. Why is legal recognition of Aboriginal rights to land important to First Nations people?
2. In what way is the Proclamation restrictive to the rights of First Nations?

Indian Act

For thousands of years there was no such thing as an Indian Act. As First Nations we lived free from its constraints. We observed laws that encouraged us to be wise, humble, respectful, truthful, brave, loving, and honest in our dealings with others. Other people did not define our citizenship. We held our land in accordance with our own traditions. Children and grandchildren lived with parents and greatgrandparents throughout the generations without being removed through other's rules. If people from other nations wanted to share with us we worked something out through mutual customs or agreement...

When it came time to choose political leaders we did so on our terms. We controlled our own laws. Most other areas of our lives were more firmly within our control. Consistent with our own aspirations and ideas we exercised power over commerce, punishment, enforcement, dispute resolution, education and numerous other matters. The past six generations of my family have not been so fortunate. They have lived under the Indian Act. (Burrows, 2008).

Prior to European settlement, Aboriginal Peoples were living in communities as distinct and selfsufficient nations. The subsequent imposition of the Indian Act, the creation of reserves and the adoption of assimilation policies undermined these traditional governments and led to growing social dislocation, poverty and dependence.
The Indian Act is a Canadian statute that was enacted in 1876. It provides Canada’s federal government authority to legislate in relation to “Indian and Lands Reserved for Indians.” There have been over 20 major changes made to the original Act. The original Act sets out two central dictates affecting all Aboriginal peoples in Canada:
1. The Act defines who is and who is not recognized as an “Indian.” The Act defined a number of types of Indian people who were denied recognition as “registered” or “status” Indians, and who were therefore denied membership in Bands.

2. The Act sets out rules for governing Indian reserves, defines how Bands can be created and spells out the powers of “Band Councils,” which are the federally recognized governance bodies for Indian Bands. (Department of Justice of Canada)

The Indian Act generally angers First Nations because it imposes colonial style governance upon First Nations, prohibiting the emergence of Indigenous governance in First Nations communities.

**Discussion questions**

1. Many Native and non-Native people want to see the Indian Act abolished. What are some of the reasons for abolishing the Indian Act that you have heard? Do you agree with the abolition of the Indian Act? Why or why not?

2. The Indian Act is often referred to as a tool of state oppression. What are examples of how Indigenous peoples in Canada and elsewhere have and continue to creatively resist the imposition of colonial systems of control such as the Indian Act?
Racism and white privilege

Underpinning the law and policy making of the British Crown, and later Canada, was the belief in the racial superiority of European ways of organizing human life and understanding the world. This racism continues to characterize Native and non-Native relations in Canada and connects to practices that privilege people who are of white European descent.

In Wellman’s Portraits of White Racism (1993), he defines racism as culturally sanctioned beliefs that defend the advantages white folks have because of the subordinated social and economic position of racial minorities. As a belief, racism often informs the design of institutional practices and therefore presupposes the everyday routines of human life, especially the verbal and physical actions (interpersonal and systemic) that discriminate against particular other racialized groups.

McIntosh (1988), a U.S. feminist scholar, helps us understand how white privilege and racism are connected. She describes how she tackles the problem in her own life by:

Work[ing] on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life... I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege... I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious.