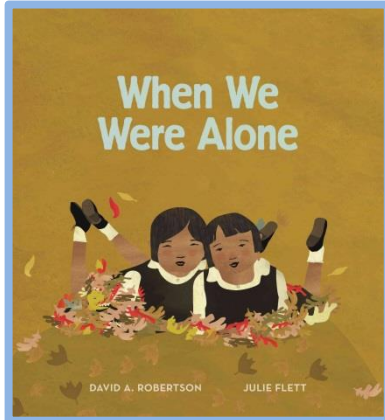


Spotlight

March 10, 2017



One of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to Canada's Calls to Action is to "Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples', historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students."

For those teaching younger grades who might struggle to put the horrors of residential schools into language their students would understand while also being sensitive to their emotional development, David A. Robertson's *When We Were Alone* is a perfect resource.

The text is simple and uses a predictable pattern sure to be of help to those with emerging literacy skills. The story revolves around a grandmother (Nókum) and her inquisitive granddaughter (her Nósisim).

"Nókum, why do you wear so many colours?" I asked.

Nókum said, "Well, Nósisim..."

The why/well pattern is repeated throughout as the grandmother gently describes how residential school has shaped her into the woman she is today.

More importantly, it is a story of resilience. She wears so many colours today because she was not allowed to wear them in residential school, and so on. The fact that the story involves a family united across generations makes the message all the more powerful.

Aiding Robertson's text are beautiful watercolour collages by Julie Flett. With earth-tones and a vintage style that reflect the story, the oppressiveness of residential school flashbacks are cut with occasional pops of colour and smiles that are at once engaging and subversively strong.

When We Are Alone should be a required text in all elementary schools.

- Reviewed by John Mutford, Library Manager