Kiss of The Fur Queen and the Lasting Effects of Residential Schools

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http://www.ronlevyphoto.com/about/tearsheets/photos/KissofFurQueen_RonLevy.jpg
In Tomson Higway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, one of the most significant messages highlights the effect of Residential schools on childhood experience, and also how it later influences adulthood. My presentation will examine this idea of the impact of Residential schools on children that carry into their adult lives, and how this is represented in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* through Tomson’s characters Jeremiah (Champion) and Gabriel (Ooneemeetoo) Okimasis.
Topics

1. Childhood and Adulthood: Effects of Sexual Violence
2. Loss of Spirituality and Traditional Knowledge
3. Loss of Language and Culture
4. Barriers to Healing

Detailed explanations on topics and their connection to *Kiss of the Fur Queen* can be found within the presentation outline.
1. Sexual Violence and Emotional Trauma

- Most significant form of violence in this novel is Sexual Abuse
  - Jeremiah and Gabriel’s experiences of sexual exploitation
- Father Lafleur, using position of authority to take advantage of Indigenous Children
- Interview with Sam McKegney and Basil Johnston
  - McKegney’s and Johnston’s discussion of Similar real-life experiences of sexual violation
- Keavy Martin’s discussion on similar characters and the causation of emotional trauma from sexual violence in residential schools
- Gabriel’s sexuality
2. Loss of Spirituality

• Assimilation by the Canadian government and Christian church
• Jeremiah is forced to learn about the Christian God
• Feeling of unease towards this form of spirituality
• Recognizes “the Lord” as someone to thank later on in life
• Influence of the Christian church pushes away previous teachings of culture and spirit
3. Loss of Language and Culture

- Effects of residential school: Alienation of cultural practices
  - Referring back to McKegney and Johnston’s interview
- Losing traditional indigenous languages
  - Forbidden to speak Cree, immesified in the English Language
  - Jeremiah is reprimanded by Father Lafleur for speaking Cree
- Taken away from culture at young age leads to loss of language and culture
- Language loss over a generational spread
  - Indigenous youth lose this connection to their cultural roots and language
  - McKegney and Johnston discuss youth and language
  - Indigenous youth in the novel unfamiliar with Cree language
4. Barriers to Healing

- Truth and Reconciliation
  - Martin’s discussion on Stephen Harper and Indigenous healing (see next slide for video)
- Inability to connect to culture
  - Displacement as a result of traumatic experience
- Abusive experiences (as referred to with sexual violence
- Distancing of memories required for healing
- Too Difficult to distance traumatic memories

http://www.thehealingjourney.ca/siteadmin/assets/images/medicine-wheel-02-500.gif
Stephen Harper’s Apology for Residential Schools

Canadian Federal Government Apology to the First Nations
June 11 2008

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCpn1erz1y8
Conclusion

Using Tomson Highway’s novel Kiss of the Fur Queen to identify the lasting effects of Residential Schools on childhood experience, and later influence on adulthood, creates meaningful representations for many of the different effects that these institutions had. The unforgettable experiences that children from Residential Schools lived through, that are discussed in this presentation, acknowledge how these individuals are later troubled by the past lived trauma. The emotional trauma of sexual violence, loss of spirituality, loss of language and culture, and barriers to healing, are only some of the effects that the Residential School system left on the children who attended. These effects, discussed in the presentation, are identifiable in Kiss of the Fur Queen due to the extent that they influenced the lives of the Okimasis brothers Jeremiah and Gabriel.
Discussion Question

Do you believe that with Jeremiah and Gabriel, Tomson Highway creates an accurate representation of the way that traumatic childhood experiences, caused by the effects of residential schools, reflect later in adulthood? Why or why not?
