



Book Club Set

Seven Fallen Feathers

By Tanya Talaga

About the Author



Tanya Talaga is Ojibwe with roots in Fort William First Nation in Ontario, Canada. She worked as a journalist at the Toronto Star for more than twenty years, and has been nominated five times for the Michener Award in public service journalism. Talaga holds an honorary Doctor of Letters from Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, and shares her expertise on the boards of PEN Canada and The Narwal. Tanya is the President and CEO of Makwa Creative, a production company focussed on Indigenous storytelling.

Tanya is the acclaimed author of *Seven Fallen Feathers*, which was the winner of the RBC Taylor Prize, the Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing, and First Nation Communities Read: Young Adult/Adult. The book was also a finalist for the Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Nonfiction Prize and the BC National Award for Nonfiction, and it was CBC's Nonfiction Book of the Year, a Globe and Mail Top 100 Book, and a national bestseller

Tanya was named the 2017–2018 Atkinson Fellow in Public Policy and this series resulted in her new book, *All Our Relations: Finding A Path Forward*, Tanya shared the messages of this book through the Massey Lectures 2018 across Canada. This book was a finalist for the Hilary Weston Writers Trust Prize for Non-Fiction in 2019. *All Our Relations* has also been published and released in the United Kingdom and Australia under the title, *All Our Relations: Indigenous Trauma in the Shadow of Colonialism*. The book will be released in French in 2020.

She lives in Toronto with her two teenage children, but her heart is in northern Ontario. Her great-grandmother, Liz Gauthier, was a residential school survivor. Her great-grandfather, Russell Bowen, was an Ojibwe trapper and labourer. Her grandmother is a member of Fort William First Nation, and her mother was raised in Raith and Graham, Ontario.

Retrieved from:

https://caledon.library.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/book-club-sets/discussion-guides/Seven-Fallen-Feathers-by-Tanya-Talaga_BCDG.pdf

About the Book



In 1966, 12-year-old Chanie Wenjack froze to death on the railway tracks after running away from residential school. An inquest was called and four recommendations were made to prevent another tragedy. None of those recommendations were applied.

More than a quarter of a century later, from 2000 to 2011, seven Indigenous high school students died in Thunder Bay, Ont. The seven were hundreds of miles away from their families, forced to leave home and live in a foreign and unwelcoming city. Five were found dead in the rivers surrounding Lake Superior, below a sacred Indigenous site. Jordan Wabasse, a gentle boy and star hockey player, disappeared into the cold night. The body of celebrated artist Norval Morrisseau's grandson, Kyle, was pulled from a river, as was Curran Strang's.

Robyn Harper died in her boarding-house hallway and Paul Panacheese inexplicably collapsed on his kitchen floor. Reggie Bush's death finally prompted an inquest, seven years after the discovery of Jethro Anderson, the first boy whose body was found in the water.

Using a sweeping narrative focusing on the lives of the students, award-winning investigative journalist Tanya Talaga delves into the history of this small northern city that has come to manifest Canada's long struggle with human rights violations against Indigenous communities. (*From House of Anansi*)

Retrieved from: <https://www.cbc.ca/books/seven-fallen-feathers-1.4232642>

Discussion Questions



1. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to “get into it”? How did you feel reading it - amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored...?
2. Describe the main characters - personality traits, motivations, and inner qualities
 - Are their actions justified?
 - Describe the dynamics between characters (in a marriage, family, or friendship).
 - How has the past shaped their lives?
 - Do they remind you of people you know?
3. What did you like most about *Seven Fallen Feathers*? What aspects of the book did you find challenging?
4. How did you see the racism embedded in public institutions adding to the problems of Indigenous youth in Northern communities?
5. What role can we play as individuals in promoting justice and equality for Indigenous youth?
6. What do you think Tanya intended to convey by giving readers intimate portraits of the youths' lives?
7. How did this book influence your thoughts on the institutional racism faced by indigenous peoples in Canada as well as the legacy of the terrible harms done by the residential schools?
8. Tanya asks in the epilogue: “Can the settlers and the Indigenous people come together as one and move forward in harmony?” Discuss her question.
9. What passages strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that’s funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character? Maybe there’s a particular comment that states the book's thematic concerns?
10. If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask? Have you read other books by the same author? If so, how does this book compare? If not, does this book inspire you to read others?

Retrieved from: https://www.cplma.ca/media/lacp4b51/bcib_seven_talaga.pdf

Author Interview



How did you get into journalism?

I grew up in Toronto and I went to the University of Toronto... I was the news editor of the *Varsity*. I was part of Victoria College at the University of Toronto. I started at the *Strand* [Victoria College campus newspaper]. I volunteered and I just learned it. I went from there to the *Varsity*. It was a really, really good spot for me because I never went to journalism school.

Have you always been able to focus on Indigenous issues in your reporting?

There wasn't a lot of appetite for Indigenous news in Canada, other than the stories on the chief that embezzled money. It was like that in Canada for a long time. It wasn't until Idle No More and when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came out that people started to have more of an appetite, and news organizations started to have more of an appetite for Indigenous news.

I think that the TRC really opened people's eyes to this country's history and the 94 calls to action really did mean something to people. All of a sudden the newsmakers, people that controlled the papers and the TV stations and radio stations, it was in their face. And part of the reason why... was probably [younger people that were] going up and tweeting, asking questions, creating their own space on Twitter and on Facebook. That helped move it.

In cases where a child has been killed or gone missing, how do you approach the situation as a reporter – what do you call that family?

It's really hard. I've done it a lot. When I first started [with the *Star*] I was a city reporter and that sort of gives you the grounding and the basis to be able to do stuff like that often. So that, sadly [is] not a very good answer, but that kinda helps — but it doesn't

because you know it's hard every time you have to do that. Every time you have to pick up the phone, you just never know.

In the north, I usually call somebody else first. Like a band council member or the chief of a community or somebody at NAN (Nishnawbe Aski Nation). I'm back into it so I'm not cold calling. It's just better that way I think. You can be respectful that way and still get the story.

Do you think it's true that Indigenous journalists bring a shared experience to their work that is unique to their lived history in Canada, accounting for systematic effects of colonization?

That's very true. You have relatives that you never knew you had because they got taken away by Children's Aid and then they're showing up to family reunions. But you feel that weighed history. It's a responsibility. It's like when I was standing in Thunder Bay and realized – you gotta do it. You just have to [start writing about what's happening to Indigenous youth from northern communities in Thunder Bay].

Other Links and Resources



- Q&A: Tanya Talaga on writing All Our Relations and delivering a Massey lecture in Thunder Bay:
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/q-a-tanya-talaga-all-our-relations-massey-lectures-1.4899308>
- Tanya Talaga talks about her Indigenous heritage and why holding the first Massey lecture in Thunder Bay was so important:
https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/tanya-talaga-talks-about-her-indigenous-heritage-and-why-holding-the-first-massey-lecture-in/article_29fc9795-80f7-5e0b-8a0b-8ef486a85970.html
- A Conversation with Tanya Talaga Honorary Degree Recipients 2022:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7UtCCcSuPU>

Share your thoughts with other readers!



DATE: _____

BOOK CLUB: _____

BOOK TITLE: _____

As a group we rated this book:

1	2	3	4	5
Ugh!		It was OK...		Loved it!

Would we recommend this book to other book clubs?

Yes No Undecided

Why/why not?

Our discussion: