



# finding dawn

A GUIDE FOR TEACHING AND ACTION

A NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA PRODUCTION



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## A GUIDE FOR TEACHING AND ACTION BY FAY BLANEY

### ABOUT THE FILM

Dawn Crey. Ramona Wilson. Daleen Kay Bosse. These are just three of the estimated 500 Aboriginal women who have gone missing or been murdered in Canada over the past thirty years. In *Finding Dawn*, Métis filmmaker Christine Welsh takes us on a journey into the dark heart of Native women's experience.

From Vancouver's Skid Row, where more than 60 women have gone missing, we travel to the "Highway of Tears" in northern British Columbia and onward to Saskatoon, where more murders of Native women remain unresolved. Along the road, Welsh discovers incredible strength and courage in individuals such as Native rights activists Professor Janice Acoose and Fay Blaney, who are bringing their communities together to stem the tide of violence against Native women. (Produced by the National Film Board. 2006, 73 min. This film can be viewed online at [nfb.ca](http://nfb.ca)).

### APPROACHES TO THIS TEACHING AND ACTION GUIDE

This guide is oriented towards three main viewer groups: **Aboriginal groups, professionals** and **students**. Each has specific discussion questions and activities relating to the key learning objectives and key discussion themes below.

Undoubtedly there will be crossover among these groups: Aboriginal participants will be present in classrooms and in professional development workshops, and non-Aboriginal employees, friends and family will attend screenings in indigenous communities.

Organizers, facilitators and educators must be prepared to address cross-cultural, racial, gender discrimination and "poor bashing". They should draw on the expertise of Aboriginal participants, without burdening them with the responsibility of educating others on the issues. For mixed groups, organizers may combine portions of the A Guide for Teaching and Action.

## KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Shift the focus from the numbers of women who have gone missing on the Highway of Tears, to the human dimension behind those statistics.
- Move beyond the intellectual exercise of defining stereotypes to appreciating the humanity of the missing and murdered women, who are mothers, sisters, daughters, lovers, aunts and friends. *Finding Dawn* challenges viewers to reconsider various stereotypes: Many in the film are angered by the lack of police responsiveness, yet an Aboriginal police officer participates in the walk organized by Maddie Wilson. While some express concerns over sexism within Aboriginal communities, Ernie Crey, Dawn Crey's brother and an activist for the Sto:lo Nation, struggles for Aboriginal women's rights.
- Understand the differences that separate those involved and become bridge-builders.
- Appreciate the importance of ceremony in Aboriginal communities to help bring closure to the loved ones of the missing and murdered women. Hopefully, participants will commit to attending such events as the annual Valentine's Day Memorial March or the two occasions commemorating the murdered women on the Highway of Tears.
- Translate knowledge into action.

## KEY DISCUSSION THEMES

### i. What Is It about Numbers?

In contemporary Canada, we use statistics to describe everything from unemployment rates to political preferences to the economy. In such a quantitative world, the significance of missing women is lost.

### ii. Stereotypes that Aboriginal Women Face

Negative attitudes, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination have devastating impacts on Aboriginal women's lives. Why are these women vulnerable? Why are they so frequently the victims of violence? Why are they devalued?

### iii. Bridging the Divide

*Finding Dawn* introduces the concepts of marginal and mainstream in a stratified society. We see the gulfs between the police and Aboriginal Peoples, between Aboriginal women and other residents and staff at non-Native transition houses, between Native families and families considered conventional by society, and between Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men.

### iv. Ceremony and Closure

Ceremonies help the grief-stricken to heal, allow community members to rally round them, promote understanding and bring closure. But for the families of missing women, they bring no answers. At this point, participants can explore how to introduce ceremonies into their communities or participate in existing activities, particularly in relation to missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

### v. Take Action

Viewers need opportunities to respond to *Finding Dawn*. Understanding the gravity of the issues it raises inevitably mobilizes people; they will want to discuss strategies for taking action. Note that while these activities are categorized according to the three main viewer groups, it is suggested that the facilitator review all action points and identify those that would be most useful to their group.



## PREPARING FOR A SCREENING OF *FINDING DAWN*

- Preview the film before screening to a larger audience as the subject matter can be overwhelming.
- Review background materials and demographic data relating to Aboriginal women; become familiar with the resources listed in the “Into Action” section of this guide.
- Invite local Aboriginal communities and resource people to screenings at professional development workshops and educational institutions. The reference section suggests useful resources to prepare for this.
- Research the current impacts of colonization on Aboriginal peoples, notably the rates of incarceration, unemployment, suicide and apprehension of Aboriginal children. The issues surrounding missing and murdered Aboriginal women should be considered against the larger backdrop of the Indian Act, the Indian Reserve system, the legacy of residential schools and the settlement era in Canadian history.

## ABORIGINAL GROUPS

Aboriginal communities and women’s groups have long endeavoured to raise awareness of the missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Many will organize screenings of this film.

To assure safety and support in cases of gender discrimination, read the articles by Emma Larocque, Anne McGillivray, the Aboriginal Women’s Action Network and others noted in the reference section. The subject matter of *Finding Dawn* may give rise to unexpected disclosure of personal experiences or bring back traumatic memories for participants.

### i. What Is It about Numbers?

Ask participants to reflect upon the numbers of women killed on the Highway of Tears, of individuals appearing on the missing women poster on the East Side of downtown Vancouver and of missing and murdered women represented by the Native Women’s Association of Canada and Amnesty International’s Stolen Sisters campaign. Some participants will have first-hand experience of this issue; most will have been touched by it in some way. This group requires less effort to understand the human face of statistics. If helpers and counsellors are present, now may be the time to explore grief, loss, guilt and shame.



## ii. Stereotypes that Aboriginal Women Face

Facilitators can stop the film at strategic points and engage the group in discussions about experiences of discrimination. Yvonne House says “any one of us in this room could have been Daleen; any one of us could go missing.” Can participants identify with such statements? Other pertinent questions include: Does our community treat men and women differently? Do we discriminate against women? Why do women leave their homes, their Reserves and their communities? What can our community do to ensure the safety of our women and girls?

## iii. Bridging the Divide

Most Native people can offer numerous examples of where social divides exist. Record these points to use in the “Into Action” portion of the workshop. Encourage discussions on gendered concerns to explore such topics as Native women’s access to transition houses and other anti-violence services, the different treatment of women and men within indigenous communities, and access to Aboriginal and state governmental programs and services. Participants may wish to envisage systems and structures to address closing the gaps. Strategies may include developing a better relationship with the police, working toward greater Aboriginal representation in the governance of transition houses or forming an action committee. Such ideas can also be addressed during the “Into Action” section of the workshop.



#### iv. Ceremony and Closure

The founders of the Annual Valentine's Day Memorial March were brilliant in recognizing the value of ceremony. Some Aboriginal communities went underground with spiritual ceremonies during the Potlatch Ban (1884–1951), but many were resigned to giving up ceremonies. Some communities embrace the reintroduction of ceremonies but others are resistant. The starting point for facilitators will vary, depending on participants' experiences and attitudes. It could be as simple as holding a candlelit vigil or as involved as organizing a sweat lodge ceremony. Participants in and around the Lower Mainland are encouraged to take part in the Memorial March, but those in other areas, can initiate ceremonies in remembrance of missing and murdered Aboriginal women – it means so much to families and loved ones.

#### v. Take Action

- Visit the Native Women's Association of Canada website <http://www.nwac-hq.org/en/awareness.html> and explore the Sisters in Spirit Community Education Resources that includes a "Raising Awareness Toolkit" and a "Safety Measures for Aboriginal Women Toolkit".
- Develop strategies that can bring groups together in an effort to end violence against indigenous women. This could include joining existing initiatives or creating new ones. This could mean lobbying to get an Aboriginal woman onto the Police Board or the board or collective of a transition house. It could also involve creating an educational committee at your place of work. There are many possibilities.
- Identify and support autonomous Aboriginal women's groups such as the Native Women's Association, Quebec Native Women's Association and Aboriginal Women's Action Network, and urge national Aboriginal organizations to support them too. Support can take the form of donations, volunteer work, creating space for indigenous women to be heard, etc.





## PROFESSIONAL GROUPS

Aboriginal peoples can access an array of programs, services and institutions in the legal, education, social and child welfare fields in Canada and the United States. Professionals delivering services to Aboriginal communities will value *Finding Dawn* as a professional development tool.

Facilitators should familiarize themselves with local Aboriginal communities, resource people or Aboriginal agencies, as a resource for debriefing the film and identifying strategies for improving services to Aboriginal communities.

### i. What Is It about Numbers?

Ask participants how *Finding Dawn* has changed their perceptions of the numbers of missing women in Canada. Resist the impulse to move toward solutions; instead lead discussions toward the human dimension of this issue. This section and the next (Stereotypes that Aboriginal Women Face) can be combined for a fuller appreciation of the experiences of the Native women subjected to violence in its various forms. After the discussion, facilitators may distribute demographic data relating to their own profession and relate what this film conveys to their domain.

### ii. Stereotypes that Aboriginal Women Face

Invite each participant to bring a poem by an author such as Marilyn Dumont, Crystos or Lee Maracle that depicts experiences of discrimination. Alternatively, circulate writings to the group. Sample questions: What does Ernie Crey, brother of Dawn Crey, mean when he describes the differing treatment of Aboriginal women at the hands of the police? What does Janice Acoose mean when she speaks of mainstream media coverage of the John Crawford murders? How do the writings of Native women further elucidate this issue? Do laws and policies make Aboriginal women more vulnerable to violence? What enables attackers to target Aboriginal women? Does our profession contribute to the construction of stereotypes that Aboriginal women are burdened with? Is the burden of stereotypes evident in the lives of the women presented in the film?

### iii. Bridging the Divide

The facilitator will lead a discussion on the divisions that are immediately evident from the film, that come to mind as a result of watching the film and that arise within the profession of workshop participants. Steer discussions away from concepts such as “colour blindness” and from the denial of divisions, as this only exacerbates problems. Are there existing initiatives that attempt to bridge the divisions? What methods or approaches work best? What are some of the fundamental principles that must be honoured in working with Aboriginal communities? Are there attitudes or beliefs that must be parked at the door?



#### iv. Ceremony and Closure

Most Aboriginal peoples will attest that cultural and traditional practices have been essential to their survival. Often these practices are synonymous with spirituality. In secular society, Aboriginal spirituality is difficult for many to accept or understand. Aboriginal spiritual practices are grounded in the world views that equality exists among all living things and that respect, connectedness and interdependence are fundamental. Encouraging professionals to take part in Aboriginal Spiritual Ceremonies inevitably comes with risks. But most importantly, any ceremony should ideally be performed with the active participation and advice of indigenous elders or other resource people, who can ensure that it is conducted with respect and all necessary cultural protocols. While these rituals can be life-affirming for Aboriginal service-recipients, professionals must exercise caution and sensitivity as to their role in such activities. Before attending ceremonies, workshop participants should discuss issues such as cultural appropriation, voyeurism, the suspension of judgment and the appreciation of cultural differences. In the case of the missing and murdered Aboriginal women, there are clearly different ways of understanding and dealing with death. The participation of professionals in such existing events as the annual Valentine's Day Memorial March in Vancouver can have a positive effect for both service providers and service recipients.

#### i. Take Action

- Read the Amnesty International Canada's Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada Report here: <http://www.amnesty.ca/campaigns/resources/amr2000304.pdf>
- Support autonomous Aboriginal women's groups and urge national Aboriginal organizations to support them too. Support can take the form of donations, volunteer work, creating space for indigenous women to be heard, etc.
- Promote education on Aboriginal women's issues – there is room for improvement notably in social work programs, teacher training, police training, law schools and child welfare departments. This could also mean organizing a community classroom and screening *Finding Dawn* or inviting indigenous women to give presentations.
- Write to your local police department calling for professional development workshops on Aboriginal women's issues and child sexual exploitation; urge them to develop proper protocols and policies for when Aboriginal women go missing or report violence. Stress the need for an independent advocate for Native women; make a case for an independent complaints process for when indigenous women have grievances against police officers; recommend that the police develop a new relationship with Aboriginal women's groups.



## STUDENTS

Educators are constantly seeking out materials and resources by and about Aboriginal peoples. This film is well suited to secondary, post-secondary and adult education classrooms, notably in the fields of Women's Studies, Aboriginal, Native or Indigenous Studies, Political Science, Law and Social Work. Books, articles and films are listed in this guide as supplementary resources.

### i. What Is It about Numbers?

Ask the class why the narrator begins and ends the film with the question "What is it about numbers?" Was she successful in moving beyond the numbers? Why do the media, the justice system, and other institutions use statistics? Is statistical information useful in bringing a story to life? Can we fathom the human tragedy behind the numbers? Educators must gauge the level of appreciation for the lives of these women and focus discussion on the human dimension behind the numbers.

### ii. Stereotypes that Aboriginal Women Face

This section can be combined with the "What Is It about Numbers?" section. Students can bring in writings by Aboriginal women that relay messages about discrimination. To deconstruct stereotypes, pose the following questions: What role do systems, laws and institutions play in the construction of stereotypes? How do stereotypes become believable to each member of society? Can these stereotypes convey the vulnerability of Aboriginal women to those who perpetrate the attacks? Do educational institutions participate in the construction of stereotypes? Did Dawn Crey and others in the film fall victim to these stereotypes?

### iii. Bridging the Divide

The task of the educator is to challenge any notions of denial that divisions exist, in particular to expose the fallacy of colour blindness: the notion that we are all the same, regardless of ethnicity. Upon establishing the existence of divisions, the class can move to identifying the areas in which these exist. The following questions may be used to advance discussion: What divisions are presented in the film? Are the divisions based upon stereotypes? Are there models in academic programming or within Student Council that attempt to bridge the divisions? What aspects of these practices are the most effective? Are there distinct separations within the student body between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students? If so, why do they exist? What can our Student Council do to promote bridge-building as it pertains to the missing and murdered Aboriginal women? How can students be more involved in that effort? What activities can students participate in outside of school to remedy this issue? Be clear on Aboriginal protocols and principles of respectful engagement and discuss them thoroughly with students before embarking upon a bridge-building exercise.

### iv. Ceremony and Closure

Participation in the annual Valentine's Day Memorial March or other such ceremonies may be made part of the coursework. Beforehand, students must be prepared for the level of grief that Aboriginal families are experiencing. The emotional aspects of these events are significant. Cross-cultural sensitization exercises and discussions must form part of the groundwork for attendance. These discussions may lead students to become more involved in solidarity work. While Aboriginal communities can use assistance and support, the double-edged sword may be that supervising volunteers becomes an added responsibility for them. Organizers may, however, welcome student participation in organizing events. These ceremonies and the community's support are invaluable for families without answers as to where loved ones are and what has happened to them.

**v. Take Action**

- Visit the Amnesty International Canada Stolen Sisters website [http://www.amnesty.ca/campaigns/sisters\\_overview.php](http://www.amnesty.ca/campaigns/sisters_overview.php) and explore the *Take Action* section where there is a list of 6 specific steps that can be taken to help break the silence.
- Read the Amnesty International Canada's Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada Report here <http://amnesty.ca/campaigns/resources/amr2000304.pdf>
- Read the Native Women's Association of Canada "Aboriginal Women's Rights are Human Rights" Report here: <http://action.web.ca/home/narcc/attach/AboriginalWomensRightsAreHumanRights.pdf>
- Conduct research and scholarly activities on violence against Aboriginal women.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Acoose, Janice (1995). *Iskwewak – Kah' Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaws*. Toronto: Women's Press.

Anderson, Kim (2000). *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Toronto: Second Story Press.

Culhane, Dara (2003). "Their Spirits Live within Us: Aboriginal Women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver Emerging into Visibility" in *American Indian Quarterly*, Volume 27, Numbers 3 & 4, Summer/Fall 2003, (pp. 593-606). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Crosby, M. (1993). "Speak Sm'algyax Grandma, Speak Haida Grandpa" in *Sharing Our Experience*, edited by A Mukherjee (pp. 109–113). Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

De Vries, Maggie (2003). *Missing Sarah: A Vancouver Woman Remembers her Vanished Sister*. Toronto: Penguin Press.

Dumont, Marilyn (1996). *A Really Good Brown Girl*. London: Brick Books.

Fornier, Suzanne & Crey, Ernie (1997). *Stolen from our Embrace*. Vancouver/Toronto: Yukon Books.

Goulding, Warren (2001). *Just Another Indian: A Serial Killer and Canada's Indifference*. Markham: Fifth House Publishers.

Green, Joyce (2007). *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.

LaRocque, Emma (1997). "Re-examining Culturally Appropriate Models in Criminal Justice Applications" in *Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada: Essays on Law, Equity and Respect for Difference*, edited by Michael Asch (pp. 75–96). Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

LaRocque, Emma (1993). "Violence in Aboriginal Communities" in *The Path to Healing* (pp. 72–89). Ottawa: Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Canada Communications Group.

Maracle, Lee (1988). *I am Woman*. North Vancouver: Write-on Press.

McGillivray, Anne & Comaskey, Brenda (1998). "Everybody had black eyes...nobody don't say nothing": Intimate Violence, Aboriginal Women and Justice System Responses in *Unsettling Truths*, edited by K. D. Bonnycastle & G. S. Rigakos (pp. 131–142). Vancouver: Collective Press.

Nahanee, Theresa (1997). "Indian Women, Sex Equality and the Charter" in *Women and the Canadian State*, edited by Caroline Andrew & Sanda Rodgers (pp. 89–103). Montreal: McGill - Queen's University Press.



Razack, Sharene (2000). "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George" in *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, Volume 15, Number 2, (pp. 91 – 130).

Robertson, Leslie A. & Culhane, Dara (Editors) (2005). *In Plain Sight: Reflections on Life in Downtown Eastside Vancouver*. Vancouver: Talon Books.

Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba/Public Inquiry into the Administration of Justice and Aboriginal Peoples (1991). (See section on Helen Betty Osborne.) Manitoba: Queen's Printer.

#### NFB FILMS

Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance. Obomsawin, Alanis. (1993, 119 min).

<http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=29368>

Keepers of the Fire. Herring, Ian & Welsh, Christine. Omni Film Productions in association with (1994, 55 min).

<http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=32012>

Killer's Paradise. Portenier, Giselle. NFB and BBC Productions. (2006, 83 min).

<http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=54178>

The Learning Path. Todd, Loretta. (1991, 56 min).

<http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=26041>

Patrick's Story. Cuthand, Doug. (1999, 24 min).

<http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=33950>

Vendetta Song. Kaftan, Eylem. DLI Productions Inc. and NFB (2005, 52 min).

<http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=51381>

Woman in the Shadows. Bailey, Norma; Johansson, Signe; Welsh, Christine; Snowsill, Tony; Stikeman, Ginny. Co-production with Direction Films (1991, 56)

<http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=26603>

## INTERNET RESOURCES

Aboriginal Women's Action Network. "The Implications of Restorative Justice in Cases of Violence against Aboriginal Women and Children."

<http://casac.ca/english/awan.htm>

Aboriginal Women's Action Network Statement, February 8, 2002.

[http://rapereliefshelter.bc.ca/issues/eastside\\_women02.html](http://rapereliefshelter.bc.ca/issues/eastside_women02.html)

Amnesty International. Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada

<http://amnesty.ca/campaigns/resources/amr2000304.pdf>

Amnesty International. Stolen Sisters Campaign

[http://amnesty.ca/campaigns/sisters\\_overview.php](http://amnesty.ca/campaigns/sisters_overview.php)

Highway of Tears

<http://highwayoftears.ca>

Native Women's Association of Canada "Aboriginal Women's Rights are Human Rights"

<http://action.web.ca/home/narcc/attach/AboriginalWomensRightsAreHumanRights.pdf>

Nipshank, Mabel. "Aboriginal Women: No Rights to Land or Children"

[http://womanabuseprevention.com/html/aboriginal\\_women.html](http://womanabuseprevention.com/html/aboriginal_women.html)

Sayers, Judith F; MacDonald, Kelly A; Fiske, Jo-Anne; Newell, Melonie; George, Evelyn Cornet, Wendy.

"First Nations Women, Governance and the Indian Act: A Collection of Policy Research Reports"

<http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection/SW21-85-2001E.pdf>

Sisyphé. "No legalized brothels for the Olympics 2010 – Aboriginal Women's Action Network statement on prostitution"

[http://sisyphe.org/article.php3?id\\_article=2823](http://sisyphe.org/article.php3?id_article=2823)

Stewart, Wendy; Huntley, Audrey and Blaney, Fay. "The Implications of Restorative Justice for Aboriginal Women and Children Survivors of Violence: A Comparative Overview of Five Communities in British Columbia"

[http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection\\_2008/lcc-cdc/JL2-53-2001E.pdf](http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection_2008/lcc-cdc/JL2-53-2001E.pdf)