
Reconciliation Quilt Project

Suzanne Williamson

In keeping with the theme of considering different perspectives and social justice, Lacombe teacher Suzanne Williamson's Grade 9 classes studied Aboriginal rights, Indian residential schools and the legacy of those schools. Students discovered that at one time, 80 of these schools were in operation, and approximately 150,000 Aboriginal children attended them. The students explored the legacy left by these schools, which still affects Aboriginal people and Canadian society today. The fact that many survivors have lost their ancestral language and traditional cultures, and the emotional, physical and sexual abuse that some survivors experienced were just some of the effects students looked at. Students considered the healing process that would be necessary, one that would take time and understanding in addition to the need for Canadians to hear the survivors' stories and acknowledge their experiences.

Near the completion of the unit, the students each chose an image and hand applied those images onto quilt squares. The images related to themes such as love, hope, peace, unity, friendship, strength and courage. Ms Williamson's mother, Sharon Williamson (a local quilter), pieced and quilted the squares into two quilts. For the students, these quilts were a physical demonstration of the learning that took place in the classroom regarding the residential schools, their legacy and Aboriginal rights in Canada. These "Reconciliation Quilts" were a way

for the 55 students to share their dedication to promoting understanding and empathy towards Canada's first peoples. One quilt is hung in École Lacombe Junior High School as a reminder of the importance of compassion and empathy towards all cultures. The second quilt was presented as a gift to Ermineskin Junior/Senior High School in Maskwacis, the site of the residential school closest to ELJHS, as a way to forever provide a link between the two schools and the two communities.

The Grade 9 students from ELJHS travelled to Maskwacis on Monday, February 22, 2016, to present the quilt as a gift to the school. School Elder Marvin Littlechild talked with the students about his experiences in the Indian residential schools, including 12 years at the one in Ermineskin. At a school assembly, there was a drumming and dancing presentation. The drumming group consisted of two adults and a number of male students from the school. The dancers, who came into the gym in a Grand Entry, were a women's traditional dancer, three jingle dancers, a women's fancy dancer, a grass dancer, a chicken dancer and a bustle dancer. The dancers asked a number of the Lacombe students to join them in an Intertribal Dance prior to the formal presentation of the quilt. Once the presentation was done, a Friendship Dance (or Round Dance) was done with all of the students and staff in the gym. The day concluded with a tour of the school.



Above: Teacher Suzanne Williamson presents a Reconciliation Quilt to representatives of Ermineskin Junior/Senior High School in Maskwacis.

