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## Abuse in Residential Schools as Depicted in the Novel Indian Horse

Residential schools were government sponsored religious schools established to incorporate indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture from 1915 to 1996. The negative effects were caused by four main things, the robbery of indigenous children's culture and the massive change in lifestyle, inhumane living conditions, and the abuse they were forced to suffer through. All that you knew and loved was gone. The kids' long hair was cut short, and they were dressed in uniforms. This was the reality for an estimated 150,000 First Nations children.

The novel, *Indian Horse* by Ojibway writer Richard Wagamese, goes into the life of Saul Indian Horse, an Ojibway boy who is telling his own story to reform it, in other words, heal his broken spirit.

The novel is told in first person, causing the reader to experience the horror through Saul's eyes. Saul's story begins in the Northern Ontario Bush where he lives a traditional life of hunting with his parents, his older brother, Ben and his grandmother. Saul's family hoped living outside of their town would protect the boys from residential schools but government men hunted them down and took Ben. Saul's devastated parents turned to alcohol as a source of comfort. Richard Wagamese shows Saul's journey from a young boy living with his family to pre-adulthood in the residential school system, moving forward to adulthood where Saul establishes a relentless drinking problem very precisely and in-depth.

Children had a daily timetable that they had to follow. The girls and boys were separated. Friends and even family members were not allowed to see each other. Children were forbidden to speak their native language. If they did, it would result in harsh physical consequences. The education was even worse, children did not learn about their people, instead they learned to be ashamed of being First Nation. The staff purposely cut out any reminder of traditional indigenous beliefs and culture and Euro-Canadian culture was forced upon them.

Children didn't even learn regular school subjects. They were taught courses like shoe making, farming, knitting and cooking. There were courses called "Evils of Indian Isolation". The isolation of these students resulted in a loss of communication, loss of traditions and culture, and forgotten language. It doesn't end there, the living conditions in these schools were even worse causing many consequences.

The schools were underfunded with unqualified staff, there was little to no sanitation, and the buildings were not heated and built poorly. The schools were extremely overcrowded and there was very little food. These two factors led to countless deaths, due to quickly spreading malnutrition, tuberculosis, influenza and the Spanish flu.

The abuse in these schools would make anybody suffer. To start off, there was forced unpaid labor, students were forced to cook, clean and fix up the school. Students felt threatened by the staff, and they had a good reason to. They had to go through physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, medical experiments and even torture such as electrocution. There was even some reported murders. There was emotional and psychological abuse as well. These kids had

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nobody to go to for help and as a result, many of these children either tried to escape and died or killed themselves. Some specific short-term consequences of this abuse included alienation, shame and anger towards the school and parents, self-hatred, and low self-esteem. An example of abuse that children faced were to kneel down on their knees in a dark room from 7am to 10pm without any food or water. Children who were not afraid of the dark prior to this abuse are now terrified of the dark because it always brings them back to that time in the school.

General consequences of residential schools, many of these kids grew up without a loving family, so as adults, they don't have good parenting skills and some even abuse their children and family because that is what they know. Some long-term effects include harmful coping habits such as alcoholism, drug abuse and eating disorders. Many former students suffer from dysfunctional personal relationships, depression, internalized racism, and chronic rage. Another consequence is that they don't fit into either society, indigenous or western. So, while residential schools have been left in the past, their consequences may last many generations.

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