

SUGARCANE

HELENA COMMUNITY SCREENING

DISCUSSION GUIDE & RESOURCES

As part of our Helena community screening of *Sugarcane*, we offer the following from the *Sugarcane* Film Faith Community Conversation Guide for those willing to keep the conversation going among their congregations or their own community groups. We hope these shared opportunities deepen our understanding and courage as we work toward repair and healing.



Reflecting on the Story

- How are you feeling? (Try to be specific in naming feelings and where you might be feeling them in your body.)
- Which people in the story did you find yourself resonating with and why?
- What moments of the film are “sticking out” powerfully to you and why?
- Were there any moments where you experienced tension, disengagement, or skepticism?
- Were there any moments that challenged your previous understanding about boarding schools? What were they? What new understanding is taking its place?
- Were there any moments that challenged your previous notions about the Church and its role in boarding schools? What were those moments and what new understanding is taking its place?
- Were there any moments that challenged your previous notions about Indigenous communities? What were those moments and what new understanding is taking its place?



Connecting the Dots

- Many Indigenous activists and scholars refer to boarding schools as kidnapping and cultural genocide sanctioned by the U.S. Government and carried out by Christian institutions. What does that description bring up for you?
- What examples of immoral and unjust laws or policies were present in the story? What are other times when you've seen people or institutions perpetuating or complying with structural racism and violence? How have you stood up against such things in the past?
- How do you think displacement from land and family impacts a culture's survival? The land's wellbeing? How does intergenerational trauma carried within families impact a community's ability to fight back against further land loss, predatory economic actors, domestic violence or other "social ills"?

Taking Action

- How can your religious community take part in repairing the wrongs of boarding schools, land theft, and the attempted genocide and erasure of Indigenous peoples?
- What Indigenous liberation struggles are happening in the region where you live? (If your answer is "there aren't any Indigenous people where I live", you probably need to check other sources! This website is a good place to start: native-land.ca)
- Does your community have influence in schools and education systems? How can you fight for Indigenous representation and authorship in the educational curriculum tied to land, place and history?
- Does your community have resources that could be directed towards local Indigenous initiatives, land recovery, or a voluntary Native land tax?
- If you own land, might there be burial sites that Indigenous communities on the property should know about? Has your community ever checked?
- If your community was involved in any boarding schools, might your community have information that's important to boarding school survivors or their descendants located somewhere in your archives? Has your community reached out to the Tribal Historic Preservation Officers for those tribal nations to let them know?

RESOURCES

Indigenous communities across Montana, nationwide, and throughout western colonized countries have been impacted by the intergenerational harm of policies that forcibly separated children from their families and communities. The Indian boarding school system is one colonial policy that has been used by the US government to undermine tribal sovereignty and erode traditional governance and family structures. It's important to understand how this legacy relates to contemporary issues like Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (aka MMIP/MMIWG) and policies like the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). It's also important to learn from and support Indigenous-led efforts dedicated to healing, culturally safe/relevant practices, and strengthening Native communities.

Maps and reports

- Visit boardingschoolhealing.org/interactive-digital-map for an interactive Digital Map of Indian Boarding Schools in North America created by the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) in partnership with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Canada.
- Visit boardingschoolhealing.org/vol2-release to see key findings from the 2024 report published by the US Bureau of Indian Affairs about the historical and current day impacts of federal Indian boarding school policies in the US and find a link to the full report.



Learn more and take action in your community

- Visit hmhb-mt.org/native-american-initiatives to learn more about Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies-MT's Native American Initiatives. You can also request a Cultural Safety Toolkit created by Dr. Amy Stiffarm (Aaniiih, Chippewa Cree, Blackfeet) to help those who provide care or work with families during the perinatal period.
- **Support Native-owned businesses in your community, like Sage & Oats in Downtown Helena!** Sage & Oats is an intercultural gift shop carrying lots of handmade items from Indigenous makers, a variety of Native-authored books for all ages, smudge kit supplies, and more.
- **Visit lastchancepowwow.com to sign up for updates about our annual powwow here in Helena!** Powwows are an excellent time for communities to come together and celebrate Indigenous traditions of dance, music, and storytelling.

Suggested books and podcasts

 ***A Council of Dolls* (2023) by Mona Susan Power (Standing Rock Sioux)**
This novel shines a light on the damage wrought by Indian boarding schools, and the historical massacres of Indigenous people—told through the stories of three generations of Yanktonai Dakota women and the dolls they carried.

 ***The Seed Keeper* (2021) by Diane Wilson (Dakota)**
A haunting novel spanning several generations, *The Seed Keeper* follows a Dakota family's struggle to preserve their way of life, and their sacrifices to protect what matters most.

Young adult fiction by **award-winning author Angeline Boulley (Ojibwe)** highlights issues like MMIP/MMIWG and government policies like NAGPRA and ICWA.

 ***The Cheyenne Story* (2019) by Gerry Robinson (Northern Cheyenne)**
What should a man do when the army sends him to help kill his wife's family? Robinson reaches back through time to unravel the emotional and complex story in a historical fiction account of his great-great grandfather, and the events that led to the beginning of the Northern Cheyenne's exile from their homelands in southeastern Montana and northern Wyoming. (Available at Sage & Oats in Helena!)

Suggested books and podcasts continued

We Survived the Night (2025) by Julian Brave NoiseCat (Canim Lake Band Tsq'escen)

The Sugarcane co-director uses the style of Interior Salish Coyote tales to interweave oral history, hard-hitting journalism, and a deeply personal father-son journey into a searing portrait of Indigenous survival, love, and resurgence in his debut book.

Stolen Season 2: Surviving St. Michael's (2022)

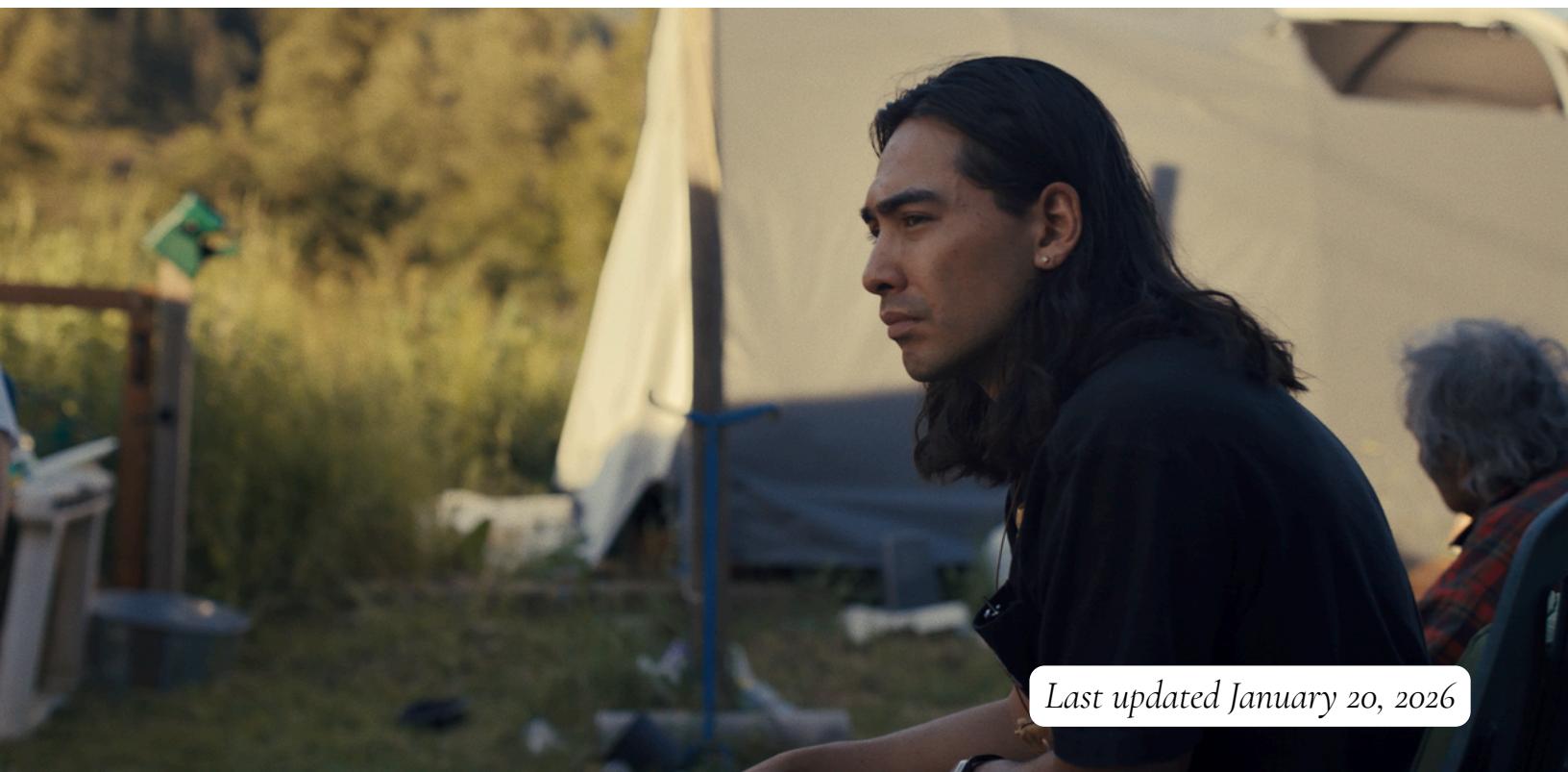
In the second season of the Pulitzer Award-winning podcast, Connie Walker (Okanese Cree) investigates her own family's experience of sexual violence while attending St. Michael's, a residential school operated until 1982 by the Roman Catholic Church in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan.

“Biden Apologized and the Women That Made It Happen” (2024)

All My Relations podcast co-hosts Matika Wilbur (Swinomish, Tulalip) and Temryss Lane (Lummi) highlight the incredible Native women at the forefront of the efforts to bring about President Biden's 2024 apology for the harm caused by the federal Indian boarding school system.

“Indian Boarding Schools with Marsha Small” (2021)

Marsha Small (Northern Cheyenne) joins the Extreme History Project's *The Dirt on the Past* podcast to discuss her work locating unmarked graves in boarding school cemeteries using ground penetrating radar, GPS, and GIS, along with the work she has been doing to establish protocols to document boarding school cemeteries.





Suggested film and television

Powwow Highway (1989) directed by Jonathan Wacks

The road-movie genre gets a lyrical twist shot through with Native American spirituality in this bittersweet portrait of two Cheyenne men on a journey through the American West and their own identities.

Smoke Signals (1998) directed by Chris Eyre (Cheyenne, Arapahoe)

Victor and Thomas take a journey to collect the ashes of Victor's estranged, alcoholic father in this coming-of-age story about identity, family forgiveness, and challenging stereotypes, told through a humorous road trip.

Reservation Dogs (2021-2023) created by Sterlin Harjo (Seminole, Muscogee) and Taika Waititi (Te Whānau-ā-Apanui Māori)

This critically-acclaimed comedy series follows the exploits of four Indigenous teens (known mononymously to their aunties and uncles as “shitasses”) in rural Oklahoma.

Fancy Dance (2023) directed by Erica Tremblay (Seneca-Cayuga)

Since her sister's disappearance, Jax has cared for her niece, Roki, by scraping by on their reservation in Oklahoma. Every spare minute goes into finding her missing sister while also helping Roki prepare for an upcoming powwow.

Daughter of a Lost Bird (2020) directed by Brooke Pepion Swaney (Blackfeet, Salish)

This documentary follows Kendra, an adult Native adoptee, as she reconnects with her birth family, discovers her Lummi heritage, and confronts issues of her own identity. Her story echoes many affected by ICWA and the Indian Adoption Project.