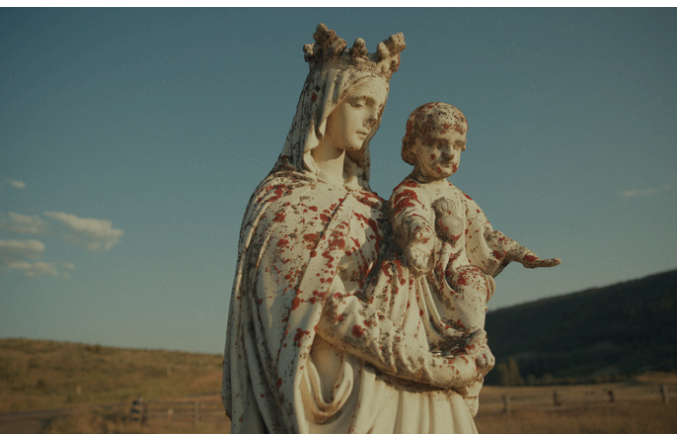


SUGARCANE

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?

Last updated January 23, 2026

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.



Last updated January 23, 2026



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.
- **Visit the new Montana Heritage Center** in Helena and notice how Indigenous stories are incorporated throughout the new museum, with features like a smudge room and a circular exhibit representing an intertribal round dance welcoming visitors from the east entrance.
- Scroll to the end of this PDF (if you're reading digitally) or flip to the last pages (if you're reading a printed copy) for a list of eight ways non-Indigenous people can engage with the process of reconciliation from one of our fantastic screening panelists, Louise Ogemahgeshig Fischer (Anishinaabe). *Thank you, Louise, for permission to include scans of your original notes!*

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 traditional 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.



***Becoming Little Shell* (2024) by Chris La Tray (Little Shell)**

Chris La Tray embarks on a journey into his family's past, along the way uncovering the larger and more complicated history of the diaspora of Métis people—many of whom are now members of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians. After a 158-year-long struggle to obtain official recognition from the federal government, the Little Shell Tribe became the 574th federally recognized tribe in the US in 2019. If you heard Helena's own Dan Pocha (Little Shell) speak at our screening, and are now curious to learn more about how the Little Shell experience is both similar to that of tribes moved to reservations under 19th century treaty negotiations, while also being very unique as a people who were historically considered "landless," this award-winning book is a great starting place.



***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, television, and media

***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.

Suggested film, television, and media continued

***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.

***Playing for the World: 1904 Fort Shaw Indian Girls' Basketball Team* (2010) produced by Montana PBS, narrated by Tantoo Cardinal (Cree, Métis)**

The Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School, located in the Sun River Valley north of Helena, was one of the first schools in Montana to feature basketball as a recreational sport for girls. This documentary, first aired in 2009, shines light on the earliest organized game of women's basketball played in the state. The 1904 team from Fort Shaw was invited to play exhibition games at the St. Louis World's Fair, where they defeated all their opponents. If you attended our screening of *Sugarcane*, you learned that both Major Robinson (Northern Cheyenne) and Dan Pocha (Little Shell) had ancestors who were members of that world champion girls' basketball team! But, as both were quick to point out, the sobering reality of the story is that when the Fort Shaw girls weren't playing, they were on display as part of the World Fair's Indian School Exhibit Hall.

***Sounds of Survivance* | Airs Saturdays, 8-10 AM MST at kexp.org with episodes available to stream up to two weeks after each broadcast at kexp.org/indigenous**

Last but not least, consider getting to know the work of Indigenous artists through their incredible music! Cohosted by DJs Kevin Sur (Kānaka Maoli) and Tory J (Quinault), *Sounds of Survivance* features the languages and music of Indigenous people from across the globe, amplifying collective sovereignty over the way Native people sound with everything from the classics like Redbone and Link Wray alongside today's innovators like Dead Pioneers (Pyramid Lake Paiute), Black Belt Eagle Scout (Swinomish, Iñupiaq), Samantha Crain (Choctaw), and Montana's very own Supaman (Apsáalooke/Crow). As Major said following our screening, Indigenous people have always been capable of telling their own stories—music is one exciting place where they're doing exactly that.

SUPPORT TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND HEALING



**The National Native American
Boarding School Healing Coalition**

The National Native American Boarding School Coalition (NABS) was created to develop and implement a national strategy that increases public awareness and cultivates healing for the profound trauma experienced by individuals, families, communities, and American Indian and Alaska Native Nations resulting from the US adoption and implementation of the Boarding School Policy of 1869.

Scan the QR code or visit boardingschoolhealing.org/donate to learn more and make a gift to NABS.



Berry Medicine

Supporting Indigenous-led birthwork is a powerful way to promote healing from colonial policies that separated children from their communities and prevented Native Peoples from transmitting essential cultural knowledge and practicing traditional forms of healing. Berry Medicine is Montana's first Indigenous-led birthwork nonprofit, working to reclaim traditional knowledge, build Indigenous leadership, and advance birth justice in Tribal and urban Native communities across Montana. Their work supports Indigenous BirthWorkers and community leaders in addressing maternal health disparities through culturally grounded care, organizing, and policy change.

Berry Medicine is fiscally sponsored by *Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies*. Scan the QR code or visit hmhb-mt.org/donate to learn more and make a gift. **Note "Berry Medicine" in the comment field when you make your gift.**



EIGHT WAYS TO ENGAGE IN RECONCILIATION

Provided by Louise Ogemahgeshig Fischer

Here are 8 ways non-indigenous people can engage with the process of reconciliation:

- ① Recognize the word Indigenous refers to diverse and distinct nations.
 - Indigenous is a collective name for first nations which includes hundreds of distinct and independent nations across the country and even the world each with unique histories, traditions and languages.
 - Ask those you interact with how they identify. What tribe they are, rather than, are they Native American. Learn what tribes live and work in your area. It is important when engaging with the process of reconciliation to remember the diversity among first nations.
- ② Learn the history between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples.
 - Before we act, we must learn. The stories and voices of the Indigenous peoples must be and continue to be highlighted in our educational systems. The relationship history of both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous has been one of imbalance and injustice.
 - It is important to be mindful of the history when engaging in reconciliation.
- ③ Understanding the history and legacy of residential schools.
 - Indian residential schools sought to destroy Indigenous cultures and languages and to assimilate Indigenous people so they no longer existed. For over 150 years Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and sent to these schools, with the last schools closing in 1996. It is both a long and recent history.
 - To engage with the process of reconciliation, we must acknowledge residential school experiences, impacts and consequences, including intergenerational trauma.

Eight Ways to Engage in Reconciliation continued

④ Explore the unique intersections we have between Treaty, Constitutional and Indigenous human rights.

- Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples have different relationships with the government. The legal rights of Indigenous peoples are changing all the time.
- To fully engage with the process of reconciliation, time and attention must be given to the power and agency that Indigenous peoples are reclaiming and what that looks like and why it is important.

⑤ Recognize the rich contributions that Indigenous peoples have made.

- The countries are indebted to the diverse cultures and nations of Indigenous peoples and the rich history and knowledge they have contributed to Turtle Island.
- Cultural revitalization and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, protocols, and connections to the land are essential to the process of reconciliation.

⑥ Take action to address historical injustices and present day wrongs.

- Before taking action, learn how to address unconscious biases about Indigenous peoples and unlearn harmful stereotypes. This provides the necessary tools to act in a culturally sensitive and well informed way.
- It is important to reflect on why you are taking action, the affects you hope to achieve with these actions and how you will include Indigenous peoples in your actions.

⑦ Teach Others what we have learned. This is a crucial step while engaging with reconciliation, as it deepens our own learning and understandings and helps create a community of culturally safe people.

- It is important to refer and guide people to Indigenous sources and information while we begin to teach people about the importance of reconciliation and all we have learned, we must make sure that it is grounded in the voices and knowledge of Indigenous peoples.

Eight Ways to Engage in Reconciliation continued

⑧ Create a culturally safe environment

— Creating a culturally safe environment is an important step in creating a culturally safe world, wherein Indigenous Peoples are included in all spaces, without barriers and without access to traditional knowledge and practices.

