

STUDENT WELL-BEING:

Social Equity and Health

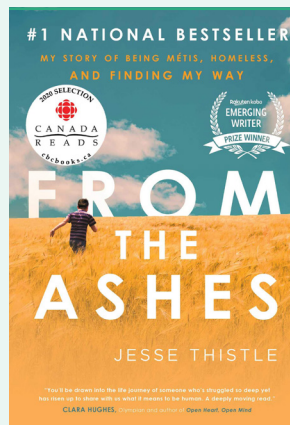
By Rebeca Rubio

GRADE LEVEL:
SECONDARY (11-12)

THEME:
STUDENT WELL-BEING

SUB-THEME:
IDENTITY, SELF-IMAGE, EQUITY

FEATURED BOOK



From the Ashes: My Story of Being Métis, Homeless, and Finding My Way by Jesse Thistle (Simon and Schuster Canada, 2019)

LEARNING FOCUS

Resilience in the Face of Adversity: Systems and Power in Our Communities

LEARNING EXPERIENCE

MINDS ON PROVOCATION

Eric Klinenberg is a sociologist from New York who wrote *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (Crown, 2018). In his book, he argues about the importance of social infrastructure for the health of individuals and the community as a whole.

Have students consider the following questions as they watch Eric Klinenberg's [talk](#) on *Palaces for the People*:

- What is “social infrastructure”?
- How does the social infrastructure of neighbourhoods shape people’s capacity to live well?
- How is city planning linked to healthy communities?

READ, PLAN, AND PRACTICE

From the Ashes follows Jesse Thistle as he grapples with many adversities:

- He has external struggles with addictions, poverty, mental health, and homelessness;
- He has deep internal struggles with his self-image as he learns to embrace his family history and Métis identity;
- He seeks to find belonging in a world that rejects and neglects him at every turn.

This novel study unit will explore these personal elements but will also explore the systems and structures that contribute to the marginalization of groups in the broader community.

Essential Questions

- In the face of adversity what leads some to prevail while others fail?
- What are the factors that create an imbalance of power and equity within a community?
- Who do our communities serve and how do they serve them?

Adversity and Resilience

- How does Jesse show resilience in the face of adversity?
- What prompts him to keep going despite all odds?

Power

- To what extent does power, or the lack of power, affect Jesse's identity / sense of self?

Systems/Equity/Belonging

- Examine the systems that Jesse encounters throughout his journey: educational, policing, social services, health care, correctional, etc. To what extent does each system support or fail him?
- How do these systems shape Jesse's identity / sense of self / sense of belonging?
- Connect back to the interview with Eric Klinenberg. To what extent does the infrastructure in Jesse's world help or hinder his ability to thrive?

MAKE, TINKER, AND MODIFY

Students will be invited to participate in a community action project, exploring how they can impact change in their community.

Check the Critical Thinking Consortium's (TC2) [Social Action Projects handbook](#) for guidance on how to set up an action project inquiry.

- **Brainstorm community issues:** Students explore their interests and make observations about their community.
- **Research:** Students research the issue at the heart of their inquiry. This is where the teacher and teacher-librarian will guide students in research skills, identifying bias, determining reliability of sources, etc. Refer to [MediaSmarts](#) and [Canadian Resources to Support Inquiry Learning](#) for teacher resources. Students start to shape their inquiry question.
- **Explore solutions and make an action plan:** Students explore ways in which they can provide action in relation to the issue they have identified. The action plan can take many forms: a structured event, advocacy, interviews, awareness campaign, fundraising, etc.
- **Take action:** Students enact their plan and document their process and findings.
- **Share:** Students can share with a variety of different audiences (their peers, the school, the community stakeholders, a broader audience on social media, etc.)





REFLECT AND CONNECT

Throughout the study, students will follow the three guiding questions from Kaser and Halbert's *The Spiral Playbook: Leading with an inquiring mindset in school systems and schools*:

- What are you learning and why is it important?
- How is it going with your learning?
- What are your next steps?

After students have completed their action project, they can reflect on how their action contributes to change.



BOOK LISTS

Books about [homelessness](#) (49th Shelf)



ADAPTATIONS FOR THIS LESSON

This novel study could be adapted for online learning environments, through the use of collaborative platforms available across school districts. Students could engage in discussions through video conferencing and could adapt their community action projects to virtual platforms (i.e. advocacy or awareness campaigns on social media platforms). Additionally, students could share their process and products virtually, engaging stakeholders from their community and beyond.

From the Ashes is available in both [e-book](#) and [audiobook](#) format.



MORE RESOURCES

Homelessness and Poverty:

- [The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness](#) is the largest national research institute devoted to homelessness in Canada. The COH is the curator of the [Homeless Hub](#)—a library of over 30,000 resources.
- [Voices of the Street](#), an anthology by *Megaphone* magazine, offers a collection of poems, stories, essays, and creative writing from writers marginalized by poverty and homelessness.
- [Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada](#) explores the 12 dimensions of Indigenous homelessness in Canada.
- “[Homelessness in Canada](#)” is a comprehensive article from *The Canadian Encyclopedia* that examines all aspects of homelessness in Canada.
- [Between the Cracks](#) (Curio 2019) investigates the homelessness crisis in Hamilton, Ontario before looking to Medicine Hat, Alberta for innovative solutions.

Jesse Thistle and Métis Culture:

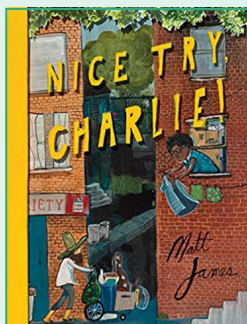
The following articles and videos delve into Jesse Thistle's memoir, exploring his journey, the history of the Métis people, and the barriers that still exist for Canadian Indigenous peoples.

- [Book review](#) of *From the Ashes: My Story of Being Métis, Homeless, and Finding My Way* (Quill & Quire)
- [How Jesse Thistle survived addiction, homelessness and incarceration — and became a Canada Reads finalist](#) (CBC Books)
- [“How Jesse Thistle’s deeply personal memoir ‘happened by accident’”](#) (Unreserved)
- [“Forced to live on roadsides: the dark history of Métis road allowances”](#) (Unreserved)
- [“Métis means much more than ‘mixed blood’”](#) (Unreserved)
- [“What’s Métis scrip? North America’s ‘largest land swindle,’ says Indigenous lawyer”](#) (Unreserved)
- [“From scrip to road allowances: Canada’s complicated history with the Métis”](#) (Unreserved)



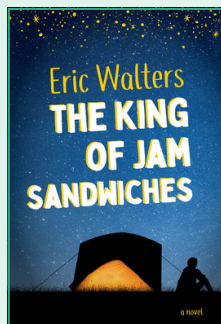
ADDITIONAL CANADIAN BOOKS TO SUPPORT THIS SUB-THEME

Primary (K-3)



Nice Try, Charlie! by Matt James (Groundwood Books, 2020)

Junior (4-6)

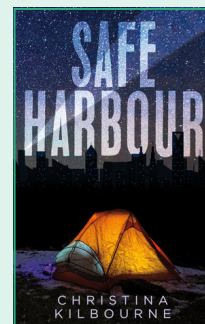


The King of Jam Sandwiches by Eric Walters (Orca Book Publishers, 2020)

Middle (7-10)

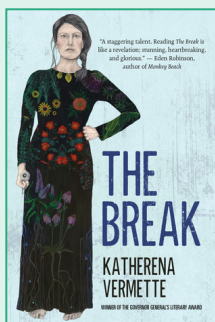


I'll be Home Soon by Luanne Armstrong (Ronsdale Press, 2012)

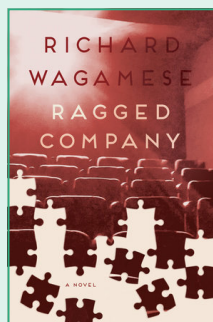


Safe Harbour by Christina Kilbourne (Dundurn Press, 2019)

Secondary (11-12)

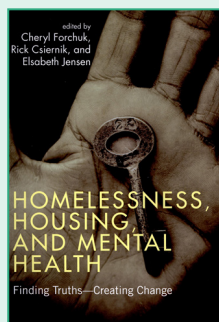


The Break by Katherine Vermette (House of Anansi Press, 2016)

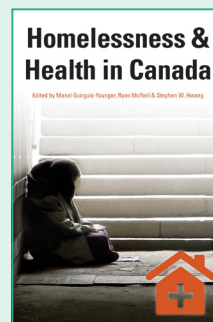


Ragged Company by Richard Wagamese (Doubleday Canada, 2008)

Non-Fiction



Homelessness, Housing, and Mental Health: Finding Truths—Creating Change edited by Cheryl Forchuk, Rick Csiernik, and Elisabeth Jensen (Canadian Scholars' Press, 2011)



Homelessness & Health in Canada by Manal Guirguis-Younger, Ryan McNeil, and Stephen W. Hwang (University of Ottawa Press, 2014)



Beyond Shelters: Solutions to Homelessness in Canada from the Front Lines edited by James Hughes (James Lorimer and Company, 2018)