The Study Guide

STUDY GUIDE NOTE FROM KAREN GILODO

Speck: Some people just get stuck in one feeling.

Speck’s Grandmother is sad, Calvin’s father is mad. And no one knows what to do about it. Mistatim is a story of two young people searching for ways to connect with the adults in their lives while developing a friendship with one another. At the heart of the story is Mistatim, Calvin’s horse that he is trying (unsuccessfully) to “break”. Speck has a gentle way of communicating with Mistatim. Working together to understand Mistatim, Speck and Calvin find respect for each other and the tools they need to cope with their family lives. Most of all they learn about trust - how to find it and how to nurture it.

This study guide and the exercises are intended to encourage students to think critically and emotionally about trust. They will be asked to put their trust in each other and to creatively represent images of healing as they consider how to move from a state of mistrust to one of trust. They will also be asked to think about the pressures facing Speck and Calvin and to find ways to visually represent those pressures. Overall, we hope this guide will be a jumping off point for discussion and reflection.

Curriculum Connections, Grades 1-8

- The Arts: Reflecting, Responding, and Analyzing, Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts
- Native Languages: Knowledge and Understanding of Culture, Communication
- Social Studies (Grades 1-6): Heritage and Identity, Canadian History
- History, Grade 7: Canada, 1800-1850: Conflicts and Challenges
- History: Grade 8: 1890-1914: A Changing Society
- Science and Technology Studies: Habitats and Communities, Interactions in the Environment, Growth and Changes in Animals
- Language Arts: Oral Communication, Interpreting Texts, Elements of Style, Perspectives & Points of View

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ABOUT RED SKY PERFORMANCE

Red Sky Performance is a leading company of contemporary Indigenous performance in Canada and worldwide.

Led by Artistic Director Sandra Laronde of the Teme-Augama-Anishinaabe (People of the Deep Water), Red Sky’s mission is to create inspiring experiences of contemporary Indigenous arts and culture that transform society.

Touring since 2003, Red Sky has delivered over 2,250 performances across Canada and around the world.

Red Sky’s work highlights the originality and potential of what is possible within contemporary Indigenous performance.

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This study guide was written by Karen Gilodo, Associate Artistic Director, Education of Young People’s Theatre (YPT). It was designed by Jan Borowski, Graphic Designer of Young People’s Theatre (YPT).

The 2018 edition was edited by Jason Aviss, Red Sky Performance with contributions from Franco Saccucci.

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A Note from the Artistic Director

Mistatim has galloped into the hearts of over a quarter of million children since we premiered four years ago at Toronto’s Young People’s Theatre. This energetic story of reconciliation is more relevant than ever before as it illuminates new possibilities and deals with trust in two worlds that are seemingly far apart. Mistatim is about power relationships that are reinforced by boundaries and borders, and how children instinctively find ways to cross, navigate and transform them. This timely story offers an exceptional vehicle for understanding the relationships between Indigenous/non-Indigenous, adult/child, boy/girl, human/animal and reserve/ranch. It also serves as a catalyst for new dialogue on reconciliation, intercultural connections, and intergenerational impact and legacy.

The concept of Mistatim is about the taming of a wild horse, and the two different worldviews as revealed in their approaches to taming a horse. It was a story waiting to be told in hindsight as I have always marveled at a horse whisperer’s remarkable gift for understanding, compassion and gentleness. And, I am equally fascinated by children who are born with special gifts, and who must learn to discover and then share their gift. I was fortunate to bring the idea and story elements of Mistatim to the right team of collaborators, and I would like to dedicate Mistatim to Okiysikaw Tyrone Tootoosis and to the many horse whisperers throughout the world. Chi-miigwetch for showing us that another way is possible in a world that seems to be driven by fear, greed and domination.

At Red Sky Performance, we are pleased to offer new ways of thinking about the future that starts with the current generation of children. As storytellers, we are the truth-tellers, bridge-builders and galvanizers. We stand in awe of the transformational power of where art meets nature.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the world of Mistatim.

Sandra Laronde
Teme-Augama Anishinaabe

Falciony Patino Cruz, photo by David Hou
**Director’s Note**

When I was asked to direct *Mistatim* by Red Sky’s Artistic Director Sandra Laronde, I was sure I wanted to even before I read it. The playwright, Erin Shields, and I have worked on many plays together. She is one of my favorite writers and one of my best friends. I was excited by all of the collaborators that Red Sky Performance had already assembled. It was an unusual treat to walk into a fully assembled team. The first step was auditioning the actors to play the characters of Speck and Calvin and then we were off.

*Mistatim* is a beautiful story of friendship, bravery and leaps of faith. In it, two young people and a horse learn to listen and trust themselves and each other. When they first meet they are guarded, lonely and misunderstood. Each, in turn, go out on a limb to share their true selves and ultimately learn a lot about who they are and who they have the potential to be.

**Playwright’s Note**

The world of the play is brought to life through gorgeous costumes, mask, music, dance, a single fence and projections of a rural world. Although Mistatim is played by a man, Carlos Rivera, he takes on the character of a horse - you see it in his eyes, his lips, his torso, his arms and legs. He is wild, loving, curious and brave. Speck, a girl, who lives on a reservation, lives on one side of the fence and Calvin, a farm boy, lives on the other. It is Mistatim, the horse, who brings them together - first in argument, then in song, dance and friendship.

**Andrea Donaldson**

**When Speck’s side of the fence is closest to the audience, we see the names of remembrance Speck has carved into the wood. Calvin’s curiosity and compassion compel Speck to share the meaning of those names.**

**In this story, the fence becomes the place where two very different children and one horse meet.**

As I moved through the play writing each scene, the fence was always very present for me. My vision was that the fence would move and offer the audience different perspectives on one meeting place. As the action of the play progresses, each character reveals greater insight into life on his/her side of the fence and in doing so, the fence becomes less and less of a barrier between them.

**Erin Shields**

**The residential school system was the Canadian government’s deliberate attempt to rupture indigenous families to resolve. The system was officially in effect from 1892 until 1969, administered by the Catholic, Anglican, United, and Presbyterian Churches.**

Priests, ministers, Indian Affairs agents, and the police were legally allowed to forcibly remove children as young as 3 yrs old - from their communities. They were isolated from their families for ten months of the year until they reached the age of sixteen. Some were located too far to return home at all.

Nothing of indigenous culture and tradition was tolerated at the institutions. Speaking one’s mother tongue was prohibited. Punishments for the slightest of “errors” were cruel, debilitating and immoral. Survivors report that needles were pushed through their tongues as punishment. Immersion into scalding bathwater with snakes has also been reported. Students were taught to be submissive, to never question authority, or react to any corporal punishment of siblings or classmates; much of their day was filled with manual labour. Children were also used for medical experimentation. In 1907, a Montreal newspaper reported that 42% of children attending residential school died due to disease, abuse, neglect, hunger, or suicide.

The implementation of these institutions resulted in the cultural genocide of thousands of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples over the course of 150 years. Indigenous communities were childless and children were parentless for 150 years.

**Suzanne Keeptwo is a freelance writer, editor, and educator of Metis (Algonkin) descent.**
For over 100 years, residential schools were the institutions tasked by the Canadian government and administered by churches to, in the words of Sir John A. Macdonald, “kill the Indian out of the child.” More than 163,000 children were taken from their families, and sent to one of the 130 residential school across the country, tearing apart families, communities, and traditions. In the words of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this was cultural genocide of Canada’s Indigenous peoples, “the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group.”

In the government’s official apology of June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper acknowledged that “two primary objectives of the residential school system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal... Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.”

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, specifically the Calls to Action for education (#62-65), seeks to establish new relationships between educators and Indigenous communities by honouring Indigenous history, culture, and language within educational curricula. Because of the role education has played in the erasure of Indigenous culture, educators must be proactive in centering Indigenous experience in classrooms in order to overcome a historical trust deficit accumulated over multiple generations.

A story of reconciliation for children, Mistatim offers important lessons for educators in this regard – it is a story that asks its audience, why tame and punish when we can learn to listen and seek to understand? As Calvin attempts to “train” Mistatim, he mirrors the historical actions of residential schools, where colonizers sought to suppress Indigenous knowledge, culture, and tradition. Just as Speck opens Calvin’s eyes to view Mistatim with respect, empathy, and compassion, teachers must also commit to building trust with Indigenous students and their families, and to help redefine the classroom as a space where Indigeneity is celebrated and affirmed.

Shifting perspectives is central to Mistatim – Speck and Calvin each begin to see truth through each other’s eyes, and together they set forth to free Mistatim from injustice. The same principle is at the core of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s work. In our roles as educators, truth involves explicit curricular attention to the legacy of the residential school system and its attendant intergenerational trauma. Reconciliation requires centering Indigenous voices in curricula, consulting with families and communities to engage with students’ cultural needs, and, as educators, we must recognize the role that schools have had in the past, and the role that they can have in building a better future for all Canadian students.

Despite the efforts of the state, and through relentless resistance, Indigenous people are now one of the fastest growing demographics in Canada. With a resurgence in Indigenous cultures afoot, Mistatim imparts upon young learners an introduction to the diversity of arts and culture in Canada. So too does it provide teachers with a resource that enhances students’ comprehension of history, enriches their pedagogical experience, and develops a vocabulary with which to continue these critical conversations about reconciliation and diversity as students advance into upper years.

Franco Saccucci is a queer settler, activist-educator, and graduate student at OISE/University of Toronto.
Curriculum Expectations

By seeing a performance of Mistatim and participating in the exercises in this guide and responding to discussion questions, students will:

Language
• Demonstrate an understanding of appropriate speaking behaviour in a variety of situations, including paired sharing and small- and large-group discussions (e.g., acknowledge and extend other group members’ contributions; make relevant and constructive comments on the contributions of other group members);
• Identify the point of view presented in oral texts and ask questions about possible bias.
• Identify who produces various media and determine the commercial, ideological, political, cultural, and/or artistic interests or perspectives that the texts may involve.

Social Studies
• Compare and contrast the perspectives of some different groups.
• Identify some present-day issues concerning First Nation peoples that relate to results of early contact.
• Demonstrate an appreciation and understanding of aspects of the First Nations culture under study.

Science
• Investigate the ways in which a variety of animals adapt to their environment and/or to changes in their environment, using various methods.
• Identify ways in which animals are helpful to, and ways in which they meet the needs of, living things, including humans, to explain why humans should protect animals and the places where they live.

Synopsis

Mistatim is a coming of age story about the truest of friendships. A wooden fence is all that separates Calvin’s ranch and Speck’s reservation, but in many ways they are worlds apart. An unlikely friendship is struck between the two 11-year olds when Calvin attempts to “break” a horse that no one else can tame in order to prove himself to his father. Speck, who is struggling to find her place in her family, discovers her incredible gift to communicate with horses. She finds she can empathize with Mistatim. Working together to rein in the wild horse, Calvin and Speck learn to communicate with one another across the divide of their own cultures.

The Company

CREATIVE TEAM

Playwright
Erin Shields

Concept/Dramaturgy, Co-Choreography
Sandra Laronde

Direction
Andrea Donaldson

Co-Choreography
Carlos Rivera

Composer
Rick Sacks

Associate Sound Designer
Marc Merilianen

Production Designer
Andy Moro

Costume Designer
Elaine Redding and Charlene Senuik

Cree Translator & Coach/Advisor
Okiysikaw Tyrone Tootoosis

Mask Maker
Karen Rodd

Mask Coach
Sonia Norris

Fight Director
Daniel Levinson

ORIGINAL CAST

Mistatim
Carlos Rivera

Speck
Sera-Lys McArthur

Calvin
Brendan McMurtry-Howlett

Pre-Show Questions

- Who is in charge of the natural world?
- What does it mean to “break” a horse? Why do people “break” animals?
- What do students already know about Residential Schools?
- What do students already know about Reservations?
- What do students know about the First People of Canada?
- Can people heal from oppression? How? What if the oppression is systemic and enduring?

Pre-Show Questions

WARM-UP: DEVELOPING TRUST

Objective:
In this exercise students will have to trust one another and allow themselves to be vulnerable.

Materials:
• A space in which to move
• Scarves to be used as blindfolds

Directions:
1. Divide students into pairs and ask them to decide who will be player “A” and who will be player “B”.
2. Have all of the “A’s” leave the room. Ask the “A’s” to put on a blindfold
3. Instruct the “B’s” to create an obstacle course with items found in the classroom. The “B’s” will be guiding their partners safely through the obstacle course.
4. When the obstacle course is set and the “A’s” are blindfolded, have the “B’s” meet their partners and let them know they will be guided through the room.
5. Have the “B’s” lead their partners around the room (by the arm) taking extra care to communicate with their partners where the obstacles are and how to safely avoid them.
6. Once the “A’s” have been led around the room, have players switch roles so that “A” will be leading “B” through an obstacle course.
7. Have the “B’s” leave the room and put on blindfolds. This time, let the “A’s” know that the goal will be the same – to safely lead their partners around the room. However, this time, they will not be able to use words to communicate with their partners. They must speak in gibberish. Encourage “A’s” to experiment with tone. How will their partners react if the tone is calm and reassuring? What if their tone is loud and alarming?

Debrief:
After the exercise, ask students the following questions:
• How did it feel to be led around the obstacle course blindfolded? What was it like to be the guide?
• How did it feel to communicate with someone using only gibberish? What was it like to be guided by someone whose words you could not understand?
• Did you prefer being the guide or being guided through the course?
• What was the reaction from the person being led with gibberish as the only means of communication?
EXERCISE: MOVING FROM MISTRUST TO TRUST

Objective: This exercise asks students to creatively explore the concepts of trust and mistrust.

Directions:
1. As a class, spend a few minutes brainstorming words that come to mind when discussing “mistrust”.
2. Next, spend a few minutes brainstorming words that come to mind when discussing “trust”.
3. Keep a record of student responses and make it available for the next exercise.
4. Divide students into groups of 5-6.
5. Ask one student in each group to volunteer to be the “sculptor”. The rest of the group will be “clay”.
6. Direct the “clay” students to create a tableau that represents “mistrust”.
7. Next ask the “sculptor” to sculpt the image of “mistrust” into “trust”. Ask students to remember both images.
8. When the groups have created their two tableaux ask each group to present their sculptures to the rest of the class. Be sure to include in the presentations, the sculptor actively working to change the sculpture from “mistrust” to “trust”.
9. Next, ask students to name their sculptures.

Debriefing Questions:
• What are some other ways that we can use tableaux to help tell a story?
• How did you think of your poses in each tableau?

Extension:
Creating an Exhibit
As a class, have students think about the images they created. If they were to show their sculptures at a gallery, what would the exhibit be called? Have them curate an exhibit of their sculptures and invite another class to the opening. Give them time and resources to research what a gallery exhibit looks like, what extra information might be included in wall text and in which order they would present the sculptures.

Debriefing Questions:
• What did it feel like to be a part of the tableau?
• How did you think of your poses in each tableau?
• What are some other ways that we can use tableaux to help tell a story?

CAST OF MISTATIM ON TOUR IN CANADIAN SCHOOLS, APRIL 2017: FALCIONY PATINO C. (MISTATIM), DUSTIN LUCK (CALVIN), AND SAMANTHA BROWN (SPECK). PHOTO CREDIT: KELSEY RAE

Post-Show Questions
• Calvin and Speck live in the same small town near one another and yet have never met. Why?
• Speck says “some people just get stuck in one feeling” Why is Speck’s grandmother sad?
• Why does Speck keep a record of “everyone who needs to be remembered”?
• Why is Calvin’s Dad mad all the time? How does Calvin cope with his Dad’s anger?
• Speck says “you know how your mind holds on to things you’ve heard before…”. What does she mean? How is Speck able to communicate with Mistatim?

Post-Show Unit

WARM-UP: STAND THE LINE

Objective:
This activity provides an opportunity for students to explore and share their opinions on some of the themes in the play in a structured and non-judgmental setting. By using general statements and quotes from the play, students will examine their beliefs, hear alternate points of view, and have an opportunity to re-think their position on some of the major themes of the play.

Materials:
• A space in which to move

Directions:
1. Ask students to imagine a line running along the length of the floor.
2. Explain that a series of statements and quotes from the play will be read out loud and it is the students’ job to agree or disagree with the statements by choosing their position on the line on the floor. (Use the template on page 9 with example statements and quotes. Cut these out and put them in a hat so that there is no particular order)
3. Define with the class the end of the line which represents “strongly agree” and then indicate that the opposite end represents “strongly disagree”. The midpoint of the room is a neutral position where students can stand if they neither agree nor disagree with the statement.
4. When each statement is read aloud, students decide which place on the line represents their own opinion. They can stand anywhere on the line, near either end, or somewhere in the middle.
5. After each statement is read, pick a few students to explain their choice of position. This is not a debate. The students’ viewpoints should not be judged, just shared.
6. After a number of viewpoints have been shared on each statement or quote, offer students the chance to move to a new position on the line if they have changed their mind, or feel differently about the statement.
Speck and Calvin are unlikely friends. They go to different schools, have learned different things and have different relationships to their caregivers. Despite their differences however, they come to learn about and from one another and become friends.

Objective:
In this character sketch exercise, students will visually represent Speck and Calvin’s differences and similarities.

Materials:
• Large pieces of craft paper
• Crayons/Pencil Crayons

Directions:
1. Divide students into groups of four.
2. Have students choose between Speck and Calvin for their character sketch.
3. Ask one student to volunteer to lie down on the craft paper and be loosely traced to create an outline of a person on the paper.
4. Outside of the lines of the body, have students write down all the words that reflect the pressure Speck/Calvin are under in their personal lives. Inside the lines have them draw images that represent how they feel about the pressures they are facing.
5. Have groups present their character sketches to the class.

Extension:
Mistatim is a witness to the burgeoning friendship between Speck and Calvin. What are the needs Mistatim has that he communicates to Speck? What would he want to say to Calvin/Speck? Create a character sketch of Mistatim.

Resources

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EXERCISE: CHARACTER SKETCHES

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You should trust me like I want you to.
Tell him we don’t want to hurt him. We just want to train him.
Once people shut themselves up in their ways, they don’t change, they can’t change.
Everyone gets scared.
Red Sky gratefully acknowledges:

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Conseil des arts du Canada

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