



Red Wolf

Jennifer Dance

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Life is changing for Canada's Anishnaabek Nation and for the wolf packs that share their territory.

In the late 1800s, both Native people and wolves are being forced from the land. Starving and lonely, an orphaned timber wolf is befriended by a boy named Red Wolf. But under the Indian Act, Red Wolf is forced to attend a residential school far from the life he knows, and the wolf is alone once more. Courage, love and fate reunite the pair, and they embark on a perilous journey home. But with winter closing in, will Red Wolf and Crooked Ear survive? And if they do, what will they find?

Red Wolf Details

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From Reader Review Red Wolf for online ebook

Kristin says

This is a really powerful story about a boy who is ripped from his family and sent to one of Canada's Indian reservation schools at the age of five. It follows his life over several years through an attempted escape to working as a farm laborer as a young adult.

The recommended age group is 9-12, and I'm honestly not sure how I feel about fifth graders reading this. It is unremittingly sad from beginning to end. I don't remember Things Fall Apart well, but I have the sense that this is a similar book. I'm also not sure how well most fifth graders would understand the story.

Educators considering adopting this book for classrooms should be aware that physical abuse of children and animals is pervasive throughout. And there are less explicit undercurrents involving child sexual abuse as well.

I loved the book. There are no literary reasons why nine-year-olds shouldn't read this, but for emotional reasons... I think the targeted age group should probably be 12 and up.

Katarina says

This book is about a 5 year old boy and a red wolf. The boy is taken from his home and family and taken to a residential school to be raised.

The author captures the emotional toll on the family and the child at being ripped apart. The writing is not graphic and is appropriate for young readers, but the heartbreaking reality of residential schools and forced "assimilation" comes through. The book hints at abuse and describes some of the punishments the children had to endure.

As adults we know of many more types of abuse that occurred at these schools, but the book keeps it appropriate for young readers.

I thought this was an excellent book and very well written. I read it with sadness, but feel it should be mandatory reading in schools, so that this chapter of Canadian history is not forgotten.

Maxine says

Set in the 1880s in the province of Ontario, the novel explores the impact of the Indian Act of 1876 on the indigenous peoples of Canada. It opens as a wolf cub, left on his own when his parents are killed by 'uprights', is driven into an Anishnaabe camp by hunger. Happily, it is the camp of the Wolf Clan and the cub becomes the companion of a young boy, five-year-old Mishqua Ma'een'gun or Red Wolf.

The 1880s in Ontario Canada is a time of expansion. As loggers move into the northern parts of the province, the Anishnaabe (the People) are left with the choice of moving further north away from the whites or stay and fight. A government agent offers them a third choice: move to the Reserve where they will, according to him, receive free housing and money for food. What he does not tell them is that, once they move to the Reserve, the government has complete control of their lives including the need for approval to leave the reserve for any reason. It also means that the children can be removed and put into Residential schools in an

effort to 'kill the Indian to save the man'. Taken away from their parents often over long distances, the native pupils are denied their names, their language, their spiritual life, and their cultures and are told that they are 'dirty savages' who must learn to assimilate into the 'superior' white culture.

The cub, Crooked Ear's story parallels Red Wolf's. When Red Wolf is forced to go to the school, he must find a new pack to join. But food is becoming scarce with loss of habitat to logging and farming. As well, wolves are hunted relentlessly for their pelts and because they are seen as pests. But even when Crooked Ear finds a new pack, he misses the boy – they may be seen only as pests and savages to others but they were equals within their own pack.

Eventually, when Red Wolf (or George as he has been renamed) leaves the school, he discovers quickly that, having lost his own culture, he will not be accepted into white society. To the white population, he will always be a 'dirty savage'. There are a couple of exceptions to this, whites who don't share this bigotry, but they are few and can do little to help.

Red Wolf ends up back on the reserve, all hope and ambition driven out of him as it has been from the rest of his clan, spending his days doing nothing and his nights drinking. But there are rumours of another way, of his grandmother who has chosen to move away from the cruel reality the bands have been left with, to maintain the old ways. In the end, Red Wolf must decide which path he will follow. With one of Crooked Ear's offspring, he heads out to find his grandmother and learn if the rumours are true.

The YA novel, *Red Wolf*, by author Jennifer Dance gives a very realistic, very powerful and very disturbing portrait of life for First Nations both on Reserves and especially at the Residential Schools. Because of this, I would suggest it might not be suitable for children under twelve. However, for anyone else, I can't recommend it highly enough.

Wayland Smith says

Unfortunately, if you're familiar with the history of white men and Indians in North America, you probably know how this story is going to go. The Ojibwe nation are suddenly uprooted, told their lands are no longer their own, their children are wards of the state, the people will have to move, and the kids forced to go to a residential school. It's nasty, abusive, and the children are beaten for remembering their own culture, or even speaking their own tongue. Even the Canadians didn't do much better on this front than the Americans, as it turns out.

Red Wolf is a young boy who loses his family, his name, and his identity when he's taken to this school and forced to change everything about him. The cruelty and abuse are hard to read, but sadly historically accurate.

Also in the book is Crooked Ear, a wolf who also loses his family to white men, in this case, men who want the pelts of the parents and the tails of his siblings for bounty. Crooked Ear must find a way to survive without a pack.

It's a moving tale, and actually manages to end on a note of hope. Recommended to anyone who is a student of the American (in this case, Canadian) Indian or the history of the whites "settling" in North America.

Jeffrey says

Thoughtful novel that is both about a young Anishinabwe boy whose world is turned upside up when he is forced to attend Residential school but, more importantly I think, about the connections that Anishnawbe peoples have to the environment and to interacting and inter-relating with animals - there is a parallel story of sorts about a young wolf that mirrors that of the young protagonist that is very moving

Diane says

This book really evoked some strong feelings for me. It is very well written and I really felt pain for this characters and the injustice they suffered. This is based on a real event. This is one of my favorites ever!

Jane Warren says

Not just for young people,Red Wolf by Jennifer Dance, is an adventure for mature readers also. A young Native boy and a wolf pup face challenges in a changing world. The boy is taken from his family and placed in a Residential School and the wolf loses his family to loggers clearing the wilderness.The boy escapes the school and he and the wolf journey through the Canadian wilderness back to his home. Their ways of dealing with their new lives make a compelling and at times heartbreaking story.

MaryAnne Silver says

Jennifer Dance's Red Wolf has opened my eyes to a very sad chapter in Canadian history. It is superbly written and is a story that readers young and old will find enjoyable. I was captivated from the very first page and could not put it down until finished! This is a must read and I believe Dance's book would make a welcome addition to every school's curriculum.

Hilary says

Red Wolf tells the story of two maligned and marginalized characters: a young Indian boy, aged 5 at the beginning, and his red wolf cub.

Reminiscent of Conrad Richter's *A Light in the Forest* (which I now need to re-read), we see the story through their eyes, seeing the cultural barriers, the misunderstandings, the white arrogance that theirs is the only way, as the Indians are given their "choice" of going to the reserve (which seems very much like a monitored outdoor prison) or being pushed away from the land they've inhabited for generations to land with poor hunting and bad weather. The Canadian Indian Act removed parental rights from the Indians, although those who took the children often regarded them as less than human and had little compassion for them. (That may just be an old-fashioned adult attitude though, because even white orphans were often treated as useless until they could be servants.) I find it somewhat ironic that we've historically forced integration on those who didn't want it (specifically Native Americans and Australian aboriginals) while segregating those who did want to be part of our society.

Back to the story: this is the story of the boy Red Wolf and his experiences. (view spoiler) It's also the story of Crooked Ear, the wolf cub who bonds to the boy, waiting for him outside the school in summer and observing the white men from his own perspective. An intriguing combination, and one that does work.

Even adults will find this a refreshing read. Although it's targeted at young adults, there are plenty of nuances that a more mature reader will pick up on, and it's a good book with which to introduce issues of historical significance or social justice. At the same time, younger readers may read it as a child's journey, not unlike those written by Noel Streatfeild.

Disclaimer: I received a free copy from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Janice Forman says

Dealing with a highly sensitive and sometimes, controversial topic, Jennifer Dance has crafted a remarkable fictional account of the Canadian residential schools and one Native boy, Red Wolf. Captured immediately with the Prologue, I could not stop reading. "Red Wolf" has helped me gain a better insight into the lasting effects of the Indian Act and residential schools. As a young man, freed from residential school and with no place to call home and no meaningful way of earning a living, Red Wolf summed up the result: "He had spent his whole life learning how to become part of a society that didn't want him. He had been taught to despise his own people, and now here he was, caught between two cultures, fitting in nowhere." The reader follows Red Wolf on his journey from a young child of five, forced from his family and culture by gun point, through 10 years at residential school and ultimately, his release into a world he does not know. The one constant in Red Wolf's life is his friendship and relationship with an orphaned wolf.

I highly recommend this YA novel -- good read for both young adults and adults, as well. I feel that one of the marks of good literature is a story that leaves the reader thinking and questioning. Dance has definitely succeeded!

Sally906 says

RED WOLF is a heart-rending and enthralling story set in Canada in the 1800s about the impact of the Indian Act of 1876 upon the Indian culture along with the compulsory residential school system for Indian children. Red Wolf is just five years old when he is removed from his parents and everything that was familiar and taken to a boarding school for Indian children only. The main focus of the school is to assimilate the children by forcing them to lose their own culture. Sadly most of the people who ran these schools under the blessings of their church were less than Christian to the children.

"...There was barely enough space for a small boy to turn around, and if he had stood upright he would hit his head on the ceiling. Everything in his body yelled move, run, get away, be free. But he was trapped like an animal in a cage. Even more than the ache in his cramped limbs, Red Wolf ached for his mother. Tears came just at the thought of her. He rocked back and forth, clutching his knees to his chest. He was utterly alone, utterly abandoned..."

From all over Canada children were taken away from their parents and most of them never saw their family again. The children had their traditional names taken from them, were banned from using their native language, told to give up their spiritual beliefs for the one true faith, in fact, they had to give up anything connected to their cultures. The children are told that they are 'dirty savages' who must learn to conform to

the 'superior' white culture. Red Wolf is renamed George, and given a number, which is what he is mostly called at school. As the years pass, Red Wolf slowly 'becomes' George, and learns English, the Christian religion and receives only cruelty from his teachers. For a couple of years, he returns to his parents for two months in summer, but as time goes on, he feels less and less welcome in his old life, which corresponds with feeling less and less like Red Wolf and more like George. When he is told that his father has died, his mother is a drunk and his baby sister taken into care he finally realises that he doesn't fit anywhere, not with his traditional native family nor with the white community. Once he turned 15 he was evicted from the school with no support in the outside community. Red Wolf was despised by the whites and had lost his links to his people.

Red Wolf's story is not the only one being told, there is also the story of Crooked Ear a young wolf who is orphaned when his family is shot. He bonds with Red Wolf as Red Wolf's family is part of the wolf clan. When the boy is put in the school Crooked Ear has to learn to live in the wild but keeps an eye out for the boy. Whenever Red Wolf leaves the school, Crooked Ear is there for him, and the wolf becomes the one link to the old traditional ways, and the key for Red Wolf to come back to his traditional roots when he can.

RED WOLF is a well-told story aimed at young teens upwards, the boy is form of 'Everyman' for the treatment of the Indian children of the day – his anguish when his father leaves him at the school, his confusion and terror as his braids are cut off and his hair is washed in kerosene by strange white people who yell at him in a language he doesn't understand. The agony of punishments, the struggle with his inmates to belong, the pangs of starvation and the complete absence of any love being shown to the children. It is a hard read, and an emotional journey, and I thoroughly recommend it.

With thanks to Dundurn Group and the author via Netgalley for my copy to read and review.

L.S. Redding says

I had the opportunity to get an early preview of Red Wolf by Jennifer Dance. This novel tells a story of one boy's experience in the Indian Residential Schools of the late 1800's. The writing style is accessible and the pacing is just right for a YA novel. The author uses some poignant analogies and illustrates a beautiful companionship between the boy and a stray wolf. I'd recommend this novel for school aged children (12 and up) as it is an important, and somewhat forgotten part of Canadian history that we should all be made aware of.

Cee says

5 year old Red Wolf is Anishinaabe mowen boy who happens to howl back one night to the call of the red wolf Crooked Ear, forging a bond with the orphaned pup. When Red Wolf is sent to residential school, Crooked Ear cannot follow and must find his own way into wolf society. Much like Red Wolf who is immersed in the horrors of being taken away from his family and assimilated into the society of The People, Crooked Ear also has trouble being accepted into the pack. Jennifer Dance does a superb job of showcasing animal and aboriginal culture in beautifully written passages that speak about the circle of life and will leave you howling at the injustices done.

Rachelia (Bookish Comforts) says

Red Wolf is an emotional story of two lives forever changed by Canada's settler-colonial actions and policies of the late 1800s: that of an orphaned wolf and Red Wolf, the boy he befriends. With a focus on the changing environment and the devastating effects to animals and wildlife, in conjunction with the harsh realities of the policies of the Indian Act and the Residential Schools system, Jennifer Dance weaves a complex narrative about the First Peoples and creatures of Turtle Island, Canada.

First off, I just want to say that I really appreciated that Jennifer Dance started the book by introducing some historical context to the story and locating herself: she is a non-indigenous woman who has three mixed-race children, and through her daughter's marriage, has been welcomed into her son-in-law's First Nation family.

I found the intertwined story of the wolf and Red Wolf to be really effective, especially how their stories mirrored each others in many ways. Also, I think it was a smart way to have readers begin to understand and empathize with both characters — often times it is easier for people to empathize with animals, and I think by starting with the wolf's story, and relating to Red Wolf's it could help particularly older readers to set aside the negative portrayals of indigenous peoples that history books, the media, etc. perpetuate.

Read the full review on my blog Bookish Comforts on 03.03.14!

Disclosure: I received a free copy of this book from Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review.

Philippa Dowding says

Red Wolf is only five when he is removed from his father and mother, and taken to the bewildering new place called school. His father is brave and wise, but is tricked into believing that his son will learn to read and write and so will never be outsmarted by the white men. At school, Red Wolf slowly becomes George, learning the language, religion and cruelty of his teachers. Every summer, he returns to his parents for two months, but as time goes on, he feels less and less welcome in his old life, less and less like Red Wolf and more like George. Told with great empathy and careful research, Jennifer Dance has done a good job of making us feel alienated, lost, and in between worlds like Red Wolf/George. I particularly enjoyed the descriptions of school life, I really felt in Dance's writing how difficult it was for young Red Wolf to understand what was happening to him, and the slow realization as he grew, that he didn't fit anywhere, not with his traditional native family nor with the new white culture forced upon him. This is an important book for young readers, about the sad history of Canada's residential school system.

*Please note, I received an advance reading copy from the publisher, in exchange for an honest review.
