



High School Program

Educator Resource Guide

Returning Home

DIRECTOR: Sean Stiller

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: Canada

RUNNING TIME: 72 min.

LANGUAGE: English, Secwépemc

**Website
& Trailer**



Returning Home shows students how the legacy of Canada's residential school system and the decimation of wild Pacific salmon stem from a common story. Skilfully intertwining narratives concerning residential school Survivors and Indigenous peoples' relationship with imperiled wild Pacific salmon, Sean Stiller's stirring documentary is a revelatory testament to strength and resilience.

At the heart of the film is Phyllis Jack-Webstad, the Survivor who founded the Orange Shirt Day movement. While Phyllis recounts her childhood trials to youth across the country, her relations in the Secwépemc territory near Williams Lake are contending with another outcome of colonialism: the upper Fraser River's lowest salmon runs in Canadian history. In observing the interconnection between the Secwépemc and salmon, Stiller lays bare the impacts of intergenerational trauma, overfishing, and the process of healing in these communities.

The first production by Canadian Geographic, *Returning Home* balances Stiller's stunning cinematography with clear-eyed testimonies to the unforgivable transgressions endured by Phyllis and other Survivors within the walls of residential schools. Likewise, it effectively illustrates what it means to truly be in good relationship with the land and shares how, for the Secwépemc, healing people and healing the natural world are one and the same.

Primary Curriculum Interest

Social Justice 12, Genocide Studies 12, BC First Peoples 12, Contemporary Indigenous Studies 12, Social Studies 9/10/11, Political Studies 12

Other Curriculum Interests

Environmental Science 12, Human Geography 12, Film and Television 11

Read more about these curriculums at

curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum

Content consideration for teachers

In some of the Survivors' stories, some especially difficult moments include:

27:00-28:37: mention of aborted fetuses being cremated or being played with like a doll by students at a residential school, and a priest in bed with a woman from their community.

53:08: brief reference to sexual assault of a 7-year-old

54:40 visiting the suspected unmarked mass graves of children at St Joseph's school.

If you have any questions about this film and its content, please contact VIFF at education@viff.org.

About VIFF

VIFF is the leading presenter of international cinema in Western Canada. Operating both the annual Vancouver International Film Festival and the VIFF Centre, VIFF brings hundreds of films from dozens of countries to British Columbia screens every year.

Why are film festivals important?

- Film festivals such as VIFF generally include screenings, talks, and events that serve as a catalyst for a diverse community to discover, discuss and share the creativity and craft of storytelling on screen.

- For filmmakers, showcasing their film at an international festival such as VIFF allows them to build an audience, meet other filmmakers and even win awards to help fund future films.
- It is in VIFF's mandate to encourage understanding of the world's cultures through the art of cinema.



Before Viewing

What do students already know about Orange Shirt Day, and how it began?

Why do we talk about residential school Survivors and their stories every September?

What is a documentary film and how is it different than a fictional/narrative film?

After Viewing

1. What could the title *Returning Home* mean?
2. How was this story told and what strategies did filmmaker Sean Stiller use? (Interviewing many people like chiefs, professors, and family members. Showing us candid moments of family life, or clips of her telling her story to school children – we listen along with the students)
3. Identify the main stories and themes in this film. Do you see any connections? Why tell these stories together?
4. Food sustains us, but it can also mean so much more. What does salmon mean for Phyllis's community? In contrast, what does it mean for the fishing industry?
5. Family past and present is explored throughout the film – discuss examples you recall.
6. How did residential school experiences impact Survivors as children, and now as adults?
7. How does the experience of past generations at the schools continue to impact Indigenous families now?
8. From the feeling and content of the film, can you guess if the filmmaker was from the community or an outsider? Why? (answer: the filmmaker Sean Stiller is from the community) Discuss together the impact that relationships between filmmakers and their subjects can have on the footage or tone of a film. How might the film have been different if it was made by an outsider or someone who was not Indigenous?
9. What is the value or impact for people to tell their own stories and histories in films like this?
10. Multiple world views and interests collide, making the issues of the salmon run complex in BC. Discuss the multiple economic and world views about salmon and natural resources, impacting the 2020 salmon crisis in this film (specifically Indigenous and monetary/industrial capitalist world views and ideologies). Where do you see these world views shaping other parts of Canadian society and resources?
11. What social and political issues are depicted in the film? What sources of information does the filmmaker consult? What sources do the researchers use? Who is interviewed for context?
12. At the end of the film, Phyllis Jack-Webstad says she tells her story to schools across Canada so they may “learn the true history of Canadian, and planting seed of reconciliation in schools across Canada” What do you think she meant? How is this sharing of her story part of reconciliation?

Activity: Moving Forward

To be an active and engaged citizen in Canada means more than listening and watching. There are many ways we can respond or act after seeing films like this. Have students think beyond the ending of the film:

Research news about what is happening now with the 2021 salmon run. What is the industry and Indigenous communities doing this year?

What does reconciliation mean to you? After listening to stories from Survivors and learning about the residential school history, what can we do in the present? Have students list out ideas.

Together, students can create a class collection of Indigenous news and voices they can continue to learn from. Many Indigenous people across Canada, including Survivors like Phyllis Jack-Webstad, are sharing important stories; writing books; making films, raising cultural awareness and advocating for water, food scarcity and housing issues; they are reviving traditional languages in schools and communities and advocating for environmental protection and sustainable relationships between humans and natural resources and more. Have students research and share 3 examples that interest them of any media, including Indigenous or decolonizing Instagram accounts, websites, news stories or resources they feel are noteworthy and present them to the class.



Director Profile

Sean Stiller is an award-winning filmmaker specializing in documentary, Indigenous and commissioned productions. During the past seven years, he has worked on a variety of productions, from TV series to feature-length films and branded documentary series, as well as his own original productions. Sean's films have screened domestically and internationally at ImagineNative, Planet In Focus

Environmental Film Festival, Maoriland and Maryland International Film Festival, among others. Sean's first short film, *Kékwu* (2017), won awards for best short and for cinematography at several international festivals and its rights were acquired by CBC. He received a HotDocs CrossCurrents fund in 2020. Sean is a member of the William's Lake First Nation (T'exelc), part of the Secwépemc Nation.