

redSky

Sandra Laronde, Artistic Director

Mistatim

Study Guide



ABOUT RED SKY

Internationally renowned for its artistry and innovation, Red Sky is Canada’s leading company of world Indigenous performance in dance, theatre, and music.

Established in 2000 by Sandra Laronde, this multi-award winning company creates, produces, and tours original work for audiences on stages across Canada and around the world.

Red Sky has garnered an international reputation for collaborating on landmark projects with some of the most prestigious artists and companies from around the globe. Since its inception, Red Sky has captured and ignited the imagination of close to 550,000 people from nine countries on four continents.

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 Borkowski, Graphic Designer of Young People’s Theatre (YPT). For more information on YPT please go to: youngpeoplestheatre.ca. This guide is copyright protected.

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

- **Language Arts:** Storytelling, Native-American Language, Oral Communication
- **Literature:** Mythology, Folk Tales, Reading
- **Science:** Animals and Habitats, Care for the Environment
- **Social Studies:** Native-American Studies, First Nations, Traditions and Celebrations

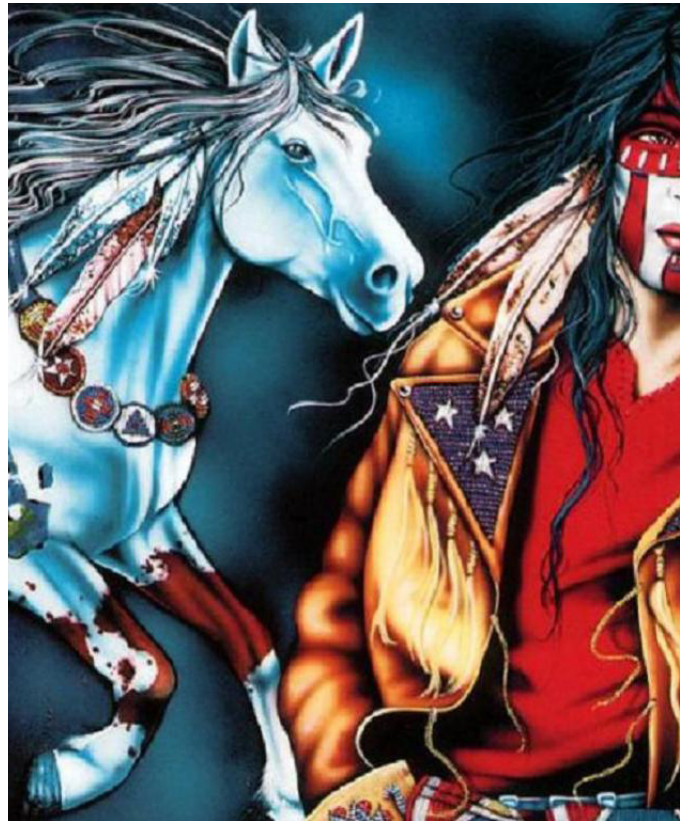
A Note from the Artistic Director

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the world of *Mistatim*, a coming of age story about the truest of friendships. In this play, a wooden fence is all that separates Calvin's ranch and Speck's reservation, but in many ways they are worlds apart. Working together to rein in a wild horse named "Mistatim", Calvin and Speck must learn to communicate with one another across the divide of their own cultures.

I have always been intrigued by children with special gifts, and I am fascinated by horse whisperers who have the ability to lead through firm gentleness, deep knowledge and compassion. It is a leadership style that many of us can learn from. With these ideas in mind, I was introduced to playwright Erin Shields who was able to bring this play into being with such finesse.

We have had an amazing creative team that made a huge contribution to bringing this idea to fruition. A huge thank you to Erin Shields, Andrea Donaldson, Tyrone Tootosis, Carlos Rivera, Andy Moro, Rick Sacks, Sera-Lys McArthur, Brendan McMurtry-Howlett, Sonia Norris, Daniel Levinson, Young People's Theatre, and to the many horse whisperers that have inspired this story.

- Sandra Laronde



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 fence was the first image that came to me when I started to create the characters and story for *Mistatim*. Fences are built to separate land, to control access to that land and, in the case of animals, to prevent escape. Fences are intended to separate people and things.

In this story, the fence becomes the place where two very different children and one horse meet. Speck and Calvin begin the play on their own sides of the fence looking across at one another. At their backs are their land, their families, their cultures and their inherited worldviews. And yet they both stare, quite boldly, across the fence at one another.

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.

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. When we see Calvin's side of the fence, he reveals his fear of his father and desire to impress him by training *Mistatim*. Speck's empathy and determination embolden Calvin to be brave enough to train the horse and, in the end, confront his father. Eventually Speck and Calvin destroy the fence to liberate *Mistatim* for whom the fence is a type of prison.

I hope the image of the fence will resonate with young audience members. Fences exist everywhere in the world. Sometimes those fences are literal, as they are in this play. Most of the time, however, those fences exist only in our minds. While there is no way to remove every barrier between people, the process of negotiating those fences can bring us closer together.

- Erin Shields

Canada's Residential School System

BY SUZANNE KEEPTWO 2015

Mistatim may be students' first exposure to Canada's dark legacy of the Residential School system. Others may have some knowledge of it or it may be part of some students' own family history. In any case, this is sensitive and complex material to learn about and discuss.

European policy assumed the education of indigenous children as early as the 1600s. The appropriation of new lands had to be morally and legally justified; it was a Christian duty to rule over non-Christian "primitives". However, First Nation peoples did not willingly embrace the colonizers' alleged superior way of life and became an obstacle to land acquisition, eventually documented as the "Indian problem".

In 1847, church and state entered into partnership to Christianize and "civilize" indigenous peoples. By 1857, the Gradual Civilization Act became law. Government officials determined how to assimilate First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples by segregating children from their families and immerse them into the colonizers' language, religion and culture by way of the educational institution. The first catholic residential school opened in Mission, British Columbia in 1863. Indigenous communities were childless and, children were parentless for 150 years.

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. Although the federal government withdrew in 1969, many schools continued operating with the last residential school closing in 1996.

The residential school system was set to eradicate cultural identity, language, spirituality, and the connection to the land. The goal was for the children "to have the Indian educated out of them". In 1920, Duncan Campbell Scott, Minister of Indian Affairs, states: *"Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department."*

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 simplest 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. Some estimate that up to 50,000 children died during this era of systemic ethnocide.

The intergenerational trauma of learned shame, abuse and neglect resulting from this dark chapter of Canadian history is inevitably apparent to this day.

Suzanne Keptwo is a freelance writer, editor, and educator of Metis (Algonkin) descent.

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 ways in which heritage is passed on through various community celebrations and events.
- 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

THE CAST

Mistatim **Carlos Rivera**
 Speck **Sera-Lys McArthur**
 Calvin **Jesse LaVercombe**

CREATIVE TEAM

Playwright **Erin Shields**
 Concept/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**
 Cree Translator & Coach **Tyrone Tootoosis**
 Mask Maker **Karen Rodd**
 Mask Coach **Sonia Norris**
 Fight Director **Daniel Levinson**

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 guide 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 sculptures 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.

tableau. A group of silent, motionless figures used to represent a scene, theme, or abstract idea (e.g., peace, joy), or an important moment in a narrative. Tableaux may be presented as stand-alone images to communicate one specific message or may be used to achieve particular effects in a longer drama work. Important features of a tableau include character, space, gesture, facial expressions, and levels.

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?



Mistatim (Red Sky Performance) Photo credit: Cylla von Tiedemann

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?
- Calvin and Speck have different views on how to “train” Mistatim? How did they arrive at their viewpoints? How do their viewpoints change over the course of the play?
- What does Mistatim represent? Is the horse a symbol for something?
- Have students conduct some research on Red Sky Performance. Why do students think Red Sky wanted to tell this story?

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 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.

Statements:

People can learn to trust.	Children should do what adults tell them to do.
People are in charge of the natural world.	Everyone is worthy of forgiveness.
Trust can be demanded.	Create your own
Create your own	Create your own
Create your own	Create your own
Create your own	Create your own

Quotes from the Play

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.

EXERCISE: CHARACTER SKETCHES

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

Website Resources

Wherearethechildren.ca
<http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3>

Aboriginal Healing Foundation
<http://www.ahf.ca/>

Anishinabek Nation: Indian Residential School Commemoration Project
<http://www.anishinabek.ca/irscp/>

Legacy of Hope Foundation
<http://www.legacyofhope.ca/about-residential-schools>

Project Heart
<http://projectofheart.ca/what-is-project-of-heart/>

Speaking My Truth
<http://speakingmytruth.ca/>

Children's Fiction

Fatty Legs: A True Story
<http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/search.jsp?Ntt=Fatty+Legs%3A+A+True+Story>

Shi-shi-etko
<http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/detail.jsp?Entt=RDM254832&R=254832>

Shin-chi's Canoe
<http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/search.jsp?Ntt=Shin-chi%27s+Canoe>

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