

Student Name

Instructor

Date

A Discussion and Activity Guide

Tilly: A Story of Hope and Resilience

Discussion and Activity Guide

About This Guide

Tilly has always known she's part Lakota on her dad's side. She's grown up with the traditional teachings of her grandma, relishing the life lessons of her beloved mentor. But it isn't until an angry man shouts something on the street that Tilly realizes her mom is Indigenous, too—a Cree woman taken from her own parents as a baby.

Loosely based on author Monique Gray Smith's own life, this revealing, important work of creative non-fiction tells the story of a young Indigenous woman coming of age in Canada in the 1980s.

With compassion, insight, and humour, Gray Smith illuminates the 20th-century history of Canada's First Peoples—forced displacement, residential schools, tuberculosis hospitals, the Sixties Scoop.

In a spirit of hope, this unique story captures the irrepressible resilience of Tilly, and of Indigenous peoples everywhere.

This guide is meant to supplement the classroom activities of students engaged with Gray Smith's work. Geared toward high school, college, and university-level classes, the prompts and activities encourage students to think about both the text and the wider contexts within which it is situated.

This guide contains resources for both teachers and students. Instructors are encouraged to copy relevant handouts for their students.

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Cover Art

One of the ways a publisher encourages readers to pick up a book is by taking time to design an engaging cover. While the adage “don’t judge a book by its cover” is a lovely one, sometimes we don’t have more than a few moments to look over a shelf full of books before making a selection. The cover art and design, along with jacket copy and review quotes, can be very important when deciding whether or not to read a book. Cover design is a very important part of the publishing process.

Before you read: Look at the cover of *Tilly*. What do you think this book is about? Can you imagine what might happen in the novel?

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The cover features art by First Nations artist Simone Diamond. In some Canadian First Nations cultures, including Monique’s, dragonflies are known as the gatekeepers to the dreamworld. They both symbolize the magical door to dreamland at night and, during the day, allow us to sit quietly and dream the future for ourselves. Though they vary regionally, almost all First Nations in Canada have their own understanding of, and teachings relating to, these beautiful animals

Although dragonflies are traditionally represented by golds and reds, Gray Smith was drawn to Diamond’s unique use of chocolate brown and robin’s egg blue as soon as she saw it—seeing it as representative of the transformative spirits present within the novel.

Consider it: Some books have descriptions of the contents on the back cover, while others have mini reviews by other authors or people important to the book’s intended audience. When you are looking at books, which cover style do you prefer? Why? Are there any types of book you think are better suited for one style over the other?

Blurb it: A review quote on the back of a book is often called a blurb. A blurb should be concise and should explain to readers why this should be the next book they read. After you’ve read *Tilly*, write your own blurb to the right.

A.J. Jacobs is one of the funniest and most successful non-fiction writers of our time. He also has a blurbing problem. Read his very funny essay about blurbing on the *New York Times* website: <http://tinyurl.com/Ingzsfb>

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Create a Timeline

Choose 10 to 15 events from the novel. Make a mark for each on the timeline below. Decide how important each event is in relation to the others. Make the most important events stand out by highlighting or underlining. Next, draw looping lines to connect related events,

and jot down notes on how you see one event influencing the other.

Note: This could also be done as a class activity on the board.



Time to Reflect—Group Discussion:

Discuss what you had previously learned as part of your formal education about the history of your country's Indigenous Peoples. How may this prior knowledge have coloured the lens through which you read *Tilly*? Did reading *Tilly* alter your understanding of some aspect of Canadian First Nations history? How? After reading *Tilly*, are there areas of study you'd be interested in exploring more deeply?

Analyzing Quotes

"Out, damned spot!"

*"What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet."*

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

Some quotes are iconic and have a reach far beyond the pages of their original work.

Other quotes never gain that level of fame but still provide key insights into the work in which they occur.

Find three quotes you feel are pivotal to *Tilly* and copy them below. Then, choose one and write two to three paragraphs about its importance to the book. Remember to consider style, character, plot, and symbolism.

Quote 1—Chapter: Page:

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Quote 2—Chapter: Page:

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Quote 3—Chapter: Page:

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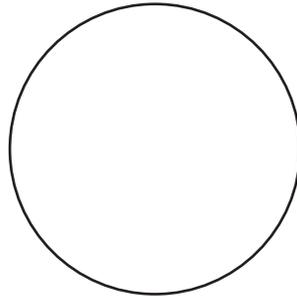
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Mind Map It

A mind map is a technique for exploring topics without thinking too much about the details. It allows you to jot down quick notes and make linkages between characters and subjects. Choose a character from the novel, write the

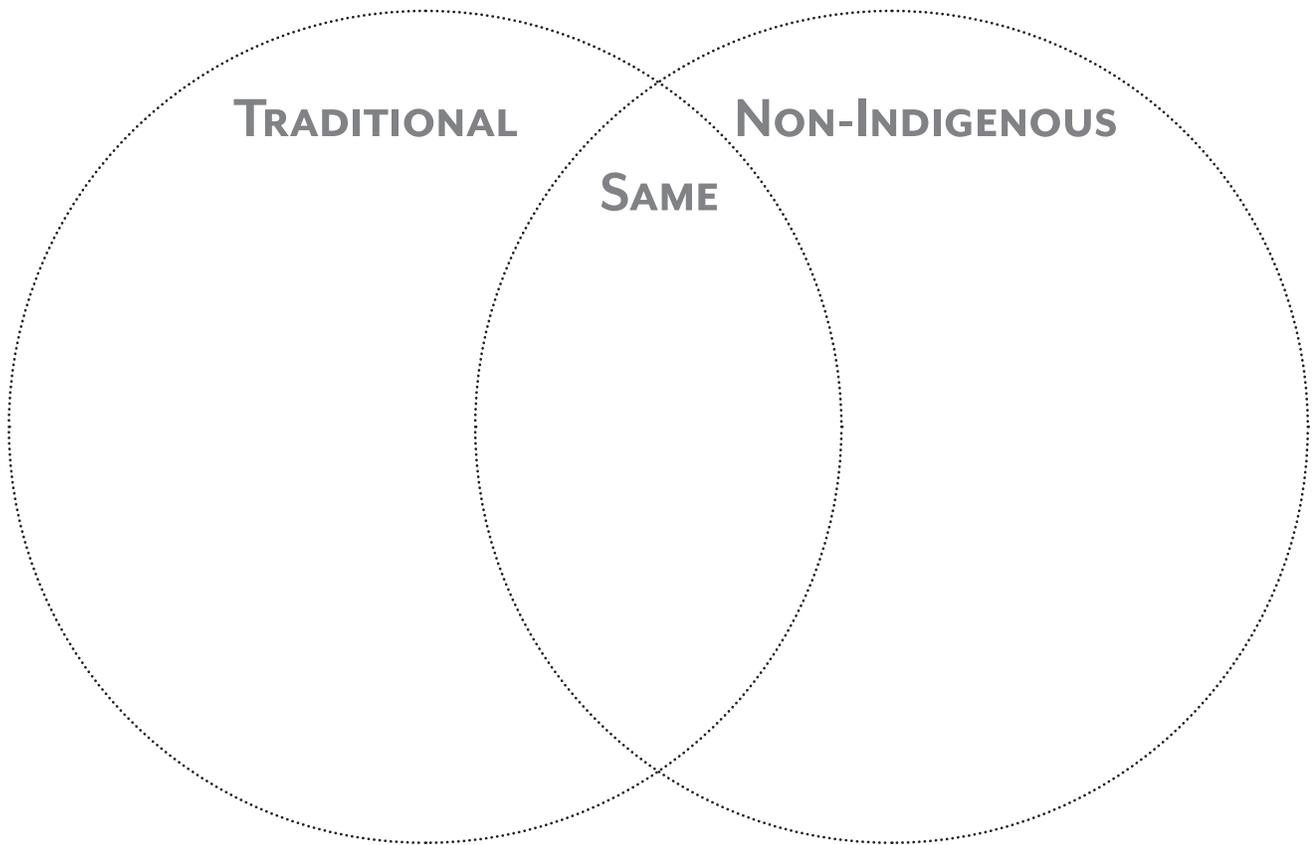
name in the circle, and then mind map as much as you can about the character's development, motivation, connection to other characters, and role in the plot. Try to spot key connections as you go.



Treatment Types: An Analysis

In the novel, Tilly attends a traditional treatment centre where First Nations stories and traditions are integrated into her healing process. Using what you learned in the book, along with

additional research if needed, fill in the following Venn diagram looking at the differences and similarities between traditional and non-Indigenous treatment centres.



If you ever needed to attend a treatment centre, which format do you think would be most effective for you? Why?

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Cause and Consensus

Group Project

Coming to consensus means coming to an agreement everyone in a group can be comfortable with. Consensus building is part of collective governance, a process that ensures each member of a community has a say. It can be a challenging and time-consuming process, but it leads to greater inclusion and buy-in amongst all stakeholders. While it is important to make sure that you listen to other members of the group,

it's also important that you do not throw your ideas away without consideration of why you are changing your mind. Growth through a change of opinions is great, but not when it is done simply to appease a louder group member or hurry the process along. As you complete this activity, remember that it is as much about negotiating between your beliefs and the beliefs of others as it is about the final decision your group comes to.

Look at the table below, which lists several possible risk factors for addiction. On your own, order them by level of importance from 1 to 11, with 1 being essential and 11 being unimportant. Then, gather in groups of three to five and order the factors as a group, coming to consensus as you do.

Possible Risk Factors for Addiction	Your Rank	Group Rank
Genetics		
Gender		
Peer pressure		
Difficult home life, currently and/or growing up		
Age of first contact with the substance		
Type of substance used		
Stress		
Individual's ability to metabolize substance		
Previously existing mental health challenges		
Poverty		
Un- or under-employment		

What factor(s) found you differing the most from your group's opinion? Why do you think that was?

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Take a Stand

Classroom Activity

In this interactive activity, students are encouraged to make a quick, physical judgment call about a statement read by the instructor. Have students clear an open space in the classroom and stand in the middle. Designate one side of the room for those who agree with a given statement and the other for those who disagree.

Read some of the value statements below (or your own). Students should be given just 5–10 seconds to make their choice and move to the relevant side of the room. Pause for a moment to allow the group to notice the overall choice made, and then read the next statement. It is important for all students to make a choice about each issue—this exercise helps demonstrate the challenges of snap, black-and-white decisions, while forcing students to make their own.

For some of the statements, you may choose to ask a couple of volunteers to briefly explain why they are on a particular side of the room. Make sure to keep statements brief and avoid conflict.

- Being an alcoholic is a choice.
- It was the school's fault Tilly became an alcoholic at such a young age.
- It was a conflict of interest for Tilly to be an alcoholic and a mental health nurse.
- More traditional healing methods should be integrated into First Nations physical and mental health-care practices.
- I wish I could try First Nations traditions as a form of therapy or healing.
- Ultimately, family members have the biggest influence on your life.

Write It Around

One of the most useful skills students can take into higher education or the workplace is the ability to see the other side of an argument. Creating a persuasive speech in favour of a point they may not agree with encourages students to think critically, empathize with other viewpoints, and recognize where biases might come from. While a student's opinions may not change, the ability to argue in favour of an opposing viewpoint, no matter how absurd it may seem, is a valuable skill.

Have students choose one of the statements below that they do not agree with, then write and perform a short (1–3 minute) speech arguing in support of the statement.

After the speeches, ask students to discuss how they felt during the exercise. What did they learn?

- Bea is the most positive influence in Tilly's adult life.
- If sports were mandatory for youth, many social challenges would be mitigated or eradicated.
- The government should compensate several generations of future First Nations band members for the cultural and social challenges caused by the residential school system.
- Cross-cultural adoption causes as many problems as it solves.

Article Analysis

Racist health care putting Aboriginals at risk: Study

By Sam Cooper, *The Province*, October 15, 2013

www.theprovince.com/health/Racist+health+care+putting+Aboriginals+risk+Study/9036331/story.html

Racism is resulting in poor and sometimes egregious medical care for urban Aboriginals.

That's the view of John G. Abbott, CEO of the Health Council of Canada, which studied care for Aboriginals in major Canadian cities. When the council interviewed health providers in B.C., "they were easily able to relate stories about racism," Abbott told *The Province*.

Abbott said it's believed that stereotyping of Aboriginals and bad care from front-line health workers in clinics and emergency rooms is under-reported. The council found serious injustices, not just examples of rude comments and hurt feelings.

One case in a Winnipeg hospital involved an Indigenous man who died after being ignored in an emergency room.

"They probably assumed he was drunk and he was left to die," Abbott said. "There is ample evidence of those very difficult stories right across the system."

In other cases, researchers reported that Aboriginals were refused painkiller medication when suffering extreme pain, because of the stereotyped concern that they would abuse or were already addicted to the drugs. Specifically in B.C., some Indigenous women reported feeling

degraded after being stereotyped as sexually promiscuous by care providers.

But whether the racism was direct or subtle, "research shows Indigenous citizens become reluctant to go to the clinic, because they are not being treated fairly," Abbott said.

Evidence the council reviewed suggests the blame for bad care rests with negative perceptions of Aboriginals by Canadians of different ethnicities, as well as systemic problems that must be addressed. When the council's 74-page report was issued in 2012, racist anonymous comments linked to the report online underscored the underlying problems.

"It's funny that they will take our free health care, not pay taxes and still complain about racism," one commenter said. "Pay taxes, get a job like other Canadians then you can complain about where and how your tax dollars are being used."

"Enough trying to perpetuate white guilt," another commenter said. "Not sure whom they are going to snivel to in 50 years when white folks in Canada are such a wee minority that we may need equity programs, too?" But a self-identified Aboriginal commenter responded to a number of similar statements, slamming the "explicit racism."

“The stereotype of the drunken alcoholic Indian eating themselves into diabetic oblivion at the tax payers’ expense is deeply rooted in the Canadian psyche,” the commenter said.

“As evidenced here Canadians are as racist as any other society. It is a good thing actually to see it openly expressed so average Canadians can get over the smug and sanctimonious belief in the lie of the Canadian ‘caring and just society.’” Abbott said that if racism toward Aboriginals isn’t rooted out of Canadian health care, the relatively poor health outcomes now seen within First Nations will only get worse.

“It all compounds, and it is not because of lack of tax dollars,” he said. “It is lack of appropriate care. I think it has to be zero tolerance where there is evidence of racism, whether it’s a doctor or a front-line nurse.”

B.C. is moving toward solutions, Abbott said, with a pending transfer of responsibility for Aboriginal health care from Health Canada.

“Native leadership in B.C. has been more activist, and with the new First Nations Health Authority, there is a recognition of taking ownership of the issue.”

After reading the above article, what was your initial reaction?

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Did anything surprise you about this article?

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Compare this article to Tilly’s experiences with the health-care and treatment system in Canada. What similarities and differences did you note?

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What would you say to the person who said, “It’s funny that they will take our free health care, not pay taxes and still complain about racism...”

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Panel Discussion

Class Activity

As a class, split into four groups. One group should represent a local politician, one should represent an Indigenous working group, one should be a First Nations community member, and one should be a member of the community who may hold outdated or racist views.

Spend class time discussing, as a group, what kind of views your assigned person or group might hold, and what kind of knowledge they might have or misinformation they might believe. Remember to consider the bias they will have as well.

Next, elect one representative from each group to answer questions, and set up the class like a town hall meeting. Consider the topic of First Nations addiction and have the audience pose questions to each of the four assigned students, who should try to answer the questions as they imagine their assigned person would.

It is important to keep in mind that the answers given are formulated from the point of view of an assigned character and don't necessarily reflect the personal views of students.

Cultural Connection

Group Activity

Over the course of the novel, Tilly becomes increasingly connected to her culture and the ways in which traditional culture can provide healing, both to herself and to others she encounters in the story.

Think about a tradition or practice from your culture that has a similar effect or purpose and share it with your group. Look for similarities and differences between your culture's practices and those described in *Tilly*.

Don't feel you have a cultural practice to share? Think about why that might be. Did such

practices never exist, or have they been lost, or are you unaware of them?

Where do traditions come from? As a group, discuss potential theories of how your cultural traditions came to be—what social, cultural, and historical forces could have been at work?

If you were going to introduce a new cultural tradition, how would you do it? Can you think of a tradition you have seen being introduced in your lifetime? What is it? How and why do you think it was introduced? Discuss with your group and then briefly present your thoughts to the class.

Make a Trailer

Like a good movie trailer, a back-cover synopsis should be exciting enough to draw the reader in, but should avoid giving away too much. In the boxes below, create a storyboard for a 1–2 minute book trailer about *Tilly*. Sketch in each scene and, underneath, write in what types of dialogue or music you might include. Remember to let readers know how to access the book upon publication.

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