

IF I GO MISSING

Dismantling Stereotypes within Canada.

Emily Hardy

English 2300, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

If I Go Missing is an illustrated book following a letter written by 14-year-old Brianna Jonnie to the Winnipeg, Manitoba Police Department. This book includes beautiful and rich illustrations to compliment the intensity of the words being written. The attention to detail within the story and knowing that this comes from such a young Indigenous person, provokes many emotions as the book progresses. Jonnie touches on many pressing issues faced by Indigenous women and youth such as violence, prejudice, and systemic racism within her letter.

Jonnie begins by exploring who she is, her talents and strengths, emphasizing the honor she holds being an Indigenous woman in Canada. Jonnie displays the beauty of her culture and her deep connection to her family. The beginning of the letter introduces Jonnie, though not exposing her name till later in the book. This aspect of Jonnie's letter allows the reader to know more about who she is as an

individual Indigenous teen, aside from the stereotypes forced upon her and her fellow Indigenous peers. Thus, pointing out the systemic racism held within our police departments and highlighting the tendency police have to put aside Indigenous cases more than others.

Jonnie aims to breakdown stereotypes fenced around Indigenous teens pertaining to their tendency to be involved in "drugs, underage drinking, prostitution, or other illegal activity" to minimize the ignorance Canadian police held towards their legal cases.¹ While loving her culture and the people included in it, she acknowledges that Indigenous folks are "more likely to go missing than [others]",² and less likely to have societal support surrounding it. Her letter stresses that the focus of the police department lies on the cases of Caucasian people, and that this pattern of systemic racism needs to come to a halt. She takes her position in a very mature way, thanking the police for

¹ Jonnie, B. and Shingoose, N. *If I Go Missing*. (James Lorimer & Company Ltd, 2019), p. 16.

² Jonnie and Shingoose, *If I Go Missing*. p.21.

returning people home, even though they have disregarded people of her culture. Her letter was written with purpose of persuading the police force to act as promptly on Indigenous missing persons' cases as they would on Caucasian cases.

The illustrations of this book were lightly detailed, allowing the readers to focus more deeply on the message at hand. The illustrator focused on using mild colouring — greys, blacks, and white — to make the accent colour of red appear bolder. The colour red is used to symbolise and recognize the many “missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls” within Canada.³ May 5th has been titled as the day to bring awareness to this cause, and this movement has hung red dresses to symbolize and represent these women. Furthermore, within Jonnie's letter, she uses it throughout to symbolize mistreatment towards Indigenous peoples. This addition of colour to the letter correlates with the message within the book, as the pages with the most emphasis contain the most red. This connection towards the brutality of Indigenous women and youth, may spark some anger, alongside curiosity within potential readers as they continue to learn more. With Jonnie's focus on the systemic mistreatment of indigenous women and youth,

this connection to an existing movement brings further perspective to the matter.

The manner in which the text weaves together with the illustration is cohesive and appealing to the eye. The illustrator, N Shannacappo, set up the illustrations almost like a comic strip. The informality of the letter allows the message to be more versatile in who it reaches, as the message is intended to meet a broad range of readers. Since ideas and messages are typically more easily conveyed to younger folk through informal, eye-appealing literature, this set up is a resourceful way to allow more than one age category to appreciate the letter.

While most short stories have satisfying endings, a satisfying end to this book would be inappropriate. The information being transmitted through Jonnie's letter is an ongoing matter, and if the story were to have a resolution that would tell the reader that this matter has been resolved, and she is speaking from the past. Without revealing the ending of her letter, it is worth noting the author does not allow this to come full circle to please the reader. Jonnie's emphasis on the importance of containing more than just appearance and ethnicity in a missing persons' case allows for a more in-depth perspective on the prejudice Indigenous teens within Canada face. Her fight

³ Uguen-Csenge, Eva. 'Red Dresses Hang across B.C. in a Call for Justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women', CBC News, CBC/Radio Canada (2021)
<[https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/red-dresses-hang-across-b-c-in-a-call-for-justice-for-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-1.601546)

[columbia/red-dresses-hang-across-b-c-in-a-call-for-justice-for-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-1.601546](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/red-dresses-hang-across-b-c-in-a-call-for-justice-for-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-1.601546)> [accessed on: 1 November 2021].

towards racism in Canada, allows the reader to feel her frustration and pain with each page.

The message being conveyed within Jonnie's letter, allows us as readers to recognize the pain and despair felt as she poured her heart into this letter. This letter grants readers from outside of Canada with the ability to identify the many ways in which racism in Canada has affected the lives of Indigenous peoples.

Jonnie's pain and anxiety seeped through each page, making her words speak even louder.

The ways in which *If I Go Missing* works towards dismantling stereotypes and prompting importance on Indigenous missing persons' cases, shows itself as a valuable resource for those to learn from.

REFERENCES

Jonnie, B. and Shingoose, N. *If I Go Missing*. (James Lorimer & Company Ltd, 2019)

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