

HOLY ANGELS REVIEW

Lena Wandering Spirit.

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The short film, *Holy Angels* directed by Jay Cardinal Villeneuve, is profoundly important for students, teachers, and researchers, as it effectively manages to teach viewers of Indigenous/Canadian Literature.

Holy Angels eloquently conveys Canada's colonialist history through impressionistic images, and is extremely important for students, teachers, and researchers as it teaches the significance of residential schools and how poorly the Indigenous peoples were treated by the churches and Canadian government.

The short film explores residential school victim Lena Wandering Spirit and explores, through her personal experience, how Indigenous children were treated at the Holy Angels Residential School in North-East Alberta, Fort Chipewyan. The institution began as a mission school in 1874 and became a residential school in 1900. In 1942, the federal government built a new residential school facility named Fort Chipewyan Day School. As a significant part of colonialism, the residential school was primarily conducted by churches and religious groups and was administered and subsidised by the federal

government. Lena Wandering Spirit was one of many individuals who were forcefully taken to a residential school away from home by the Canadian government, in hopes of making Indigenous people more 'civilized' and Westernized.

The short film's discussion of language loss may be of particular interest to those studying Indigenous and Canadian Literatures.

Lena Wandering Spirit mentions that anytime someone spoke the Indigenous language the nuns would 'hit them in the mouth' (NFB 4:21). The film's portrayal of language loss is important as it discusses how the church wanted only English spoken at all times in hopes to 'civilize [the] savages' (National Film Board of Canada). Essentially, the native language was not 'civilized' and so the church wanted only English-speaking people.

Furthermore, *Holy Angels* is extremely important for students, teachers, and researchers as it teaches them the significance of residential schools and how poorly Indigenous peoples were treated by the churches and Canadian government. The film manages to shed some light on the fact that

Indigenous children were often treated like prisoners. Lena Wandering Spirit states, ‘they called [us] by numbers, [and I] was number thirty-four’ (NFB).

Lena Wandering Spirit, and more than 150,000 Indigenous children, were taken from their families and were forcefully transferred to residential schools in 1963. The *Holy Angels* film provides great insight and large amounts of profound information on what went down in residential schools and how Indigenous peoples were treated, especially young children. Wandering Spirit says that they would scrub us with water and lighter fluid, which would cause a lot of bleeding, but no amount of scrubbing and cleaning was going to get rid of their brown skin color (NFB). They were given food with worms in it and were forced to eat it, and if they did not the consequence was being locked up in a cupboard, states Wandering Spirit (NFB).

Moreover, *Holy Angels* eloquently conveys Canada’s colonialist history through impressionistic images and a child’s fragmented speech. The short film not only excavates but also moves beyond history. It effectively speaks of the tenacity of a people

who have discovered means of healing and of returning home after the trauma of residential schools. *Holy Angels* explores key themes such as how the church forcefully took Indigenous children from their homes and families and put them in residential schools. It examines how Indigenous children were treated and punished in those schools. The film highlights Wandering Spirit’s journey, and through her personal experience, narrates how other children were treated and victimized.

In conclusion, *Holy Angels*, Jay Cardinal Villeneuve’s short documentary is an excellent video to learn about Canada’s colonial history. This short video review looked at Lena Wandering Spirit, a survivor of a residential school, and her personal perspective of how Indigenous children were treated. The video *Holy Angels* is extremely essential for students, instructors, and scholars since it successfully teaches audiences about Indigenous/Canadian literature. Through impressionistic imagery, the video effectively exposes Canada's history of colonialism. It teaches people about the significance of residential schools and how the Church and government exploited Indigenous people.

REFERENCES

Cardinal Villeneuve, J. (2017). *Holy Angels*. National Film Board of Canada.