

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



BOOK CLUB
DISCUSSION
GUIDE

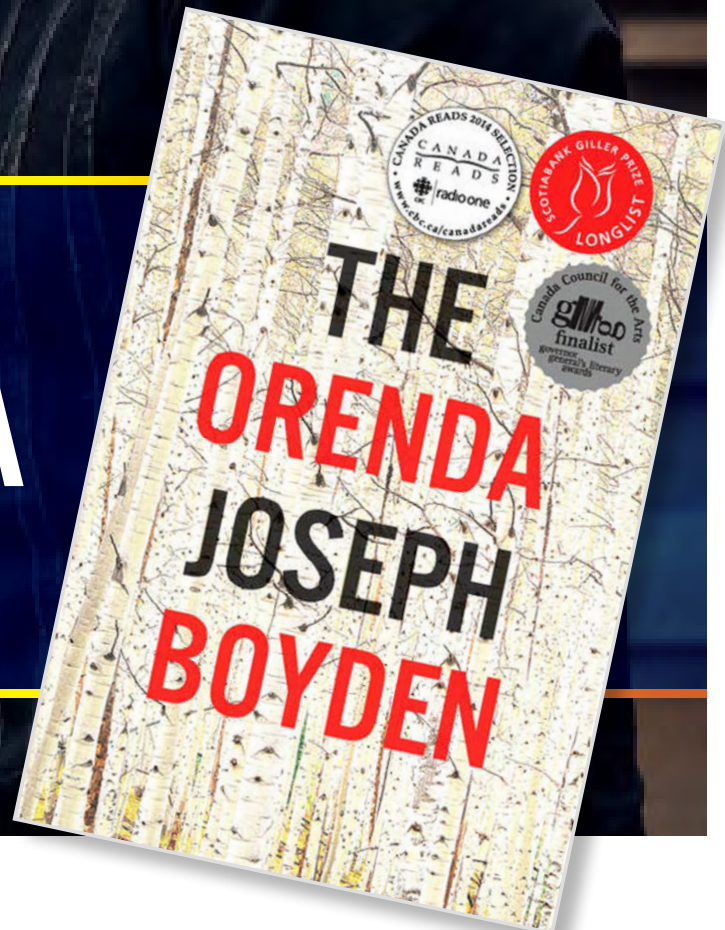
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READERS'
CHOICE
2016

DECEMBER 2016

THE ORENDA

BY JOSEPH BOYDEN



WELCOME AMNESTY BOOK CLUB MEMBERS!

The Amnesty International Book Club is pleased to announce our Readers' Choice winner for 2016, *The Orenda* by Joseph Boyden. This novel brings its readers to the traditions, tensions and battles of mid-17th century Canada. Boyden alternates between three key perspectives: that of Bird, a respected elder warrior in the Huron nation who is haunted by the loss of his family and a desire for revenge; Snow Falls, a gifted Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) girl who is kidnapped and made to become the daughter of Bird after her family is slaughtered; and Jesuit missionary, Christophe, who has found himself trapped in a war during his mission to lead the Huron to Christ.

Beyond the powerful storytelling, *The Orenda* links the mismanagement of resources, reckless ambition, and the disregard for Indigenous rights in Canada today. This guide will examine current initiatives to help address rights violations experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada, and how the novel illustrates these themes.

Thank you for being part of the Amnesty International Book Club. We appreciate your interest and would love to hear from you with any questions, suggestions or comments you may have. Just send us an email at **Bookclub@amnesty.ca**.

About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than seven million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person's voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

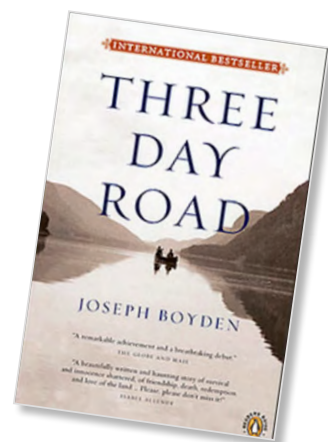
Together, we make a difference.

For more information about Amnesty International visit **www.amnesty.ca** or write to us at: Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.



About this month's author, **Joseph Boyden**

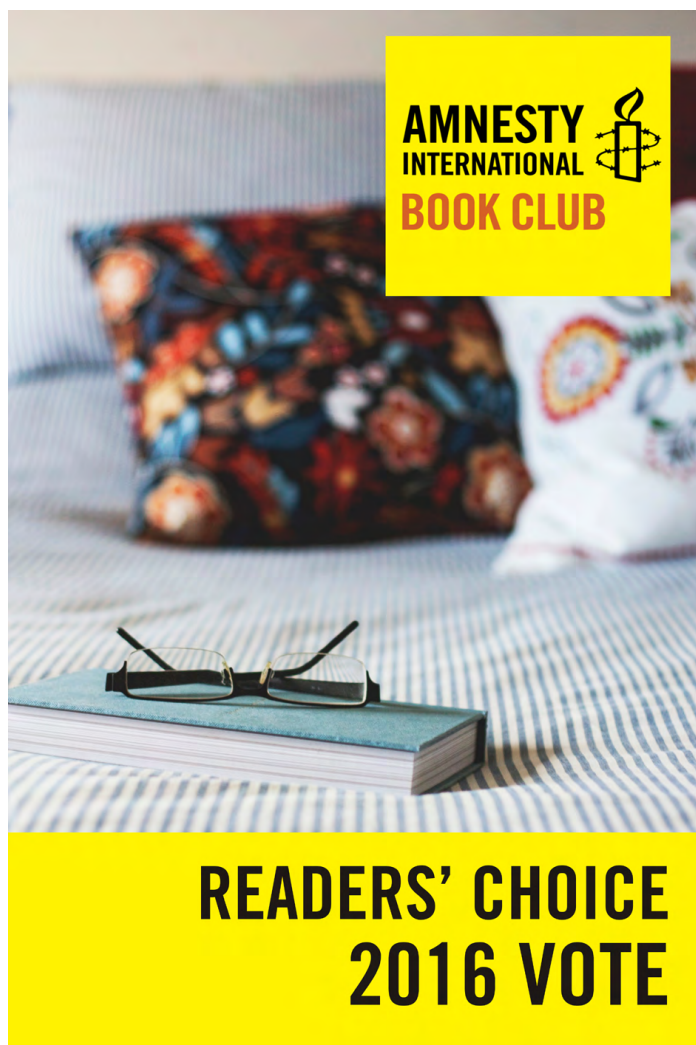
Joseph Boyden's first novel, *Three Day Road*, won numerous awards including the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and the McNally Robinson Aboriginal Book of the Year. His second novel, *Through Black Spruce*, was awarded the Scotiabank Giller Prize and named the Canadian Booksellers Association Book of the Year; it also earned him the CBA's Author of the Year Award. *The Orenda* was a finalist for the Governor General's English Language Prize and the Scotiabank Giller Award, and won the Libris Book of the Year Award. In 2012, Boyden received the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for his contributions to Canadian art and culture. Boyden divides his time between Northern Ontario and Louisiana.



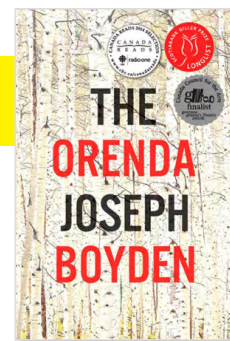
ABOUT READERS CHOICE 2016

This month's Reader's Choice selection was made possible by you, our book club members. With over 400 votes from our Amnesty International Book Club members for Readers' Choice 2016, *The Orenda* was the favourite pick from our readers, with novels such as *Medicine Hat* and *Birdie* not far behind. Clearly this is a book club that is passionate to hear more from Indigenous authors! Read on to learn more about your Amnesty International Book Club.

Since the book club launch in January 2014, we have featured 28 books by Canadian authors (how many are on your bookshelf now?), and shared many stories and actions around human rights injustices. We are partnered with over 62 libraries and bookstores across Canada. In 2016 and 2017 we are partnering with the International Festival of Authors to capture more conversation around good books and human rights, as well as other great initiatives such as *The New Quarterly*, the Festival of Literary Diversity and Word on the Street. Book club membership has now reached 5000 individuals – our book club is a growing voice in the Canadian literary scene!



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON *THE ORENDA*



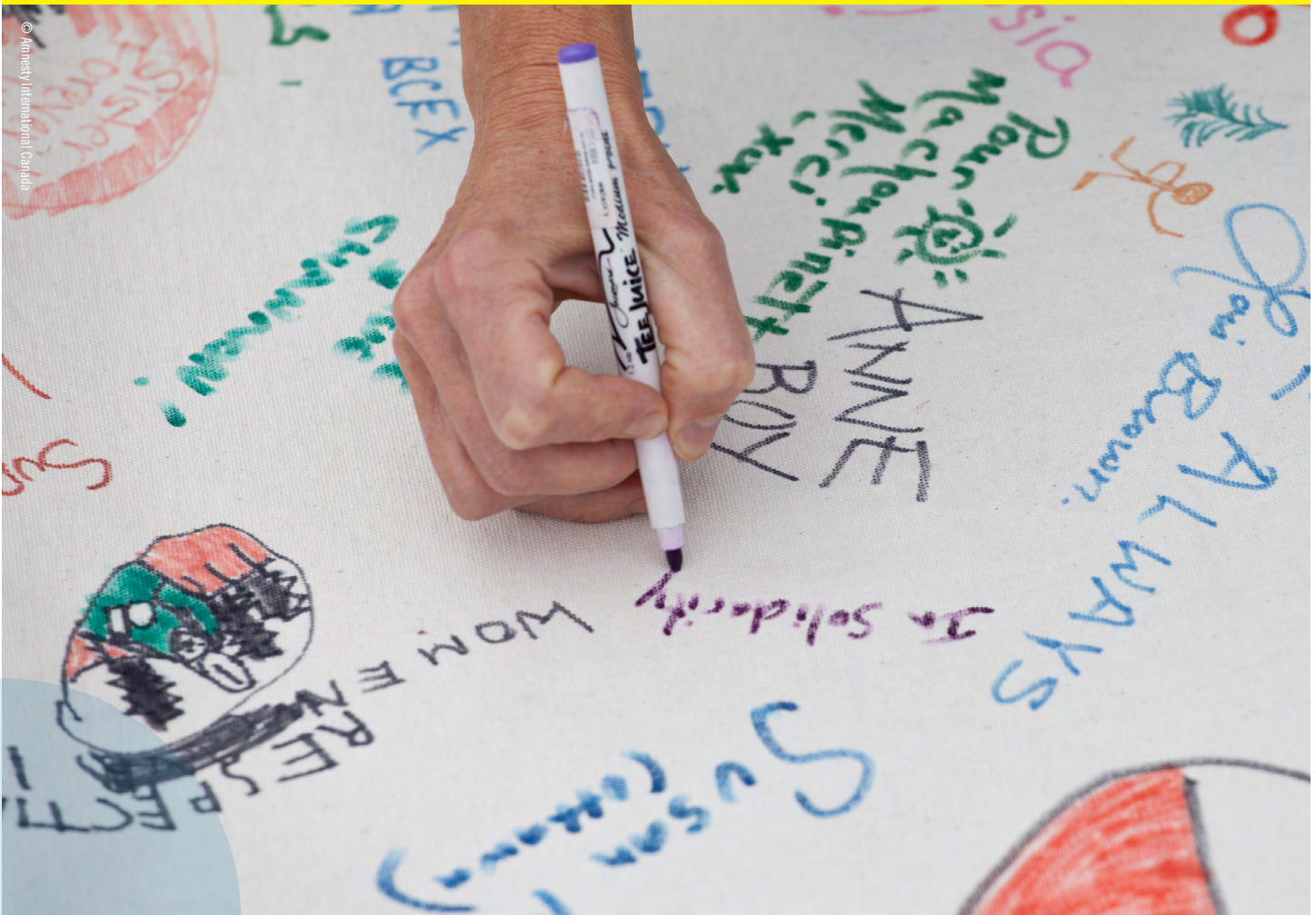
Questions from the Amnesty International Book Club

1. What did you think of *The Orenda*? Which aspects did you appreciate, and which aspects were most challenging?
2. What do you think about the concept of an orenda, life forces believed to be within every element of our environment, including us? Why do you think Boyden named this novel after that idea?
3. As featured in *The Orenda* and the kidnapping of Snow Falls, how has this concept of possession and dis-possessing of Indigenous women and girls led to contemporary marginalization?
4. How did you react to the violence in the novel? Why do you feel Boyden choose to include such graphic descriptions?
5. Boyden raises the question of responsibility with his short vignettes between each section of the novel. "It's unfair, though, to blame only the crows [Europeans], yes? It's our obligation to accept our responsibility in the whole affair." Who holds responsibility in our present day realities around Indigenous peoples and their rights? How has this novel impacted your understanding of the current-day situations?

Further discussion questions

1. This is the second year in a row that an Indigenous theme won the Amnesty International Book Club's Readers' Choice vote, with the runners up also being from Indigenous writers as well. In addition to the quality of these individual works, do you think there is something about Indigenous perspectives that particularly resonate with our readers?
2. Considering the previous book club titles from 2016, which has been your favourite and why? Which book did you least enjoy, and why? Which book challenged you most to think differently?
3. How has reading along with the book club changed your perspective or approach to human rights? And how has it impacted your view of Canadian Literature?
4. If you could meet any author the Book Club has featured, who would you want to meet and what would you want to discuss with them?
5. Reading can be such a personal choice and private activity. Why, then, is it important to discuss literature with others? Which novels have you appreciated more deeply for having spoken with others about their stories?
6. Think about your favourite novels of all time. Even if they are not novels about human rights, consider what you have learned from the stories you have read. How have your favourite books contributed to the values you hold today?

BACKGROUND



The Orenda is a novel that explores ambition, pride, and power through the characters Bird, Snow Falls, and Christophe. Through alternating perspectives, Boyden reveals how each perception mingles and conflicts with the other. In doing so, the novel does not place blame directly upon one group or another. What it does do is shock us, the readers, with its many moments of violence, pain, sickness and the resulting devastation. In a story where no one person or group quite understands the other, and everyone is out to service their own best interests, the physical horrors of this story foreshadow the developing dynamics of the country we know today as Canada.

Issues such as land rights, the treatment of women and girls, the taking of resources, the breaking of

promises are all relevant today when discussing Canada's responsibilities towards Indigenous peoples.

**In a story where
no one person or group
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other, and everyone is
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In Canada, the rights of Indigenous peoples are enshrined in the Constitution and set out in nation to nation treaties. The Supreme Court has clearly said that Parliament cannot ignore these rights. There must be “reconciliation” between the power of the state and the prior sovereignty of Indigenous peoples.

Laws passed by Parliament must be balanced against the laws, customs and perspectives of Indigenous peoples and “equal weight” must be given to each. Any infringement on Indigenous rights must be strictly justified. The government must deal “honourably” with both the established and the asserted rights of Indigenous

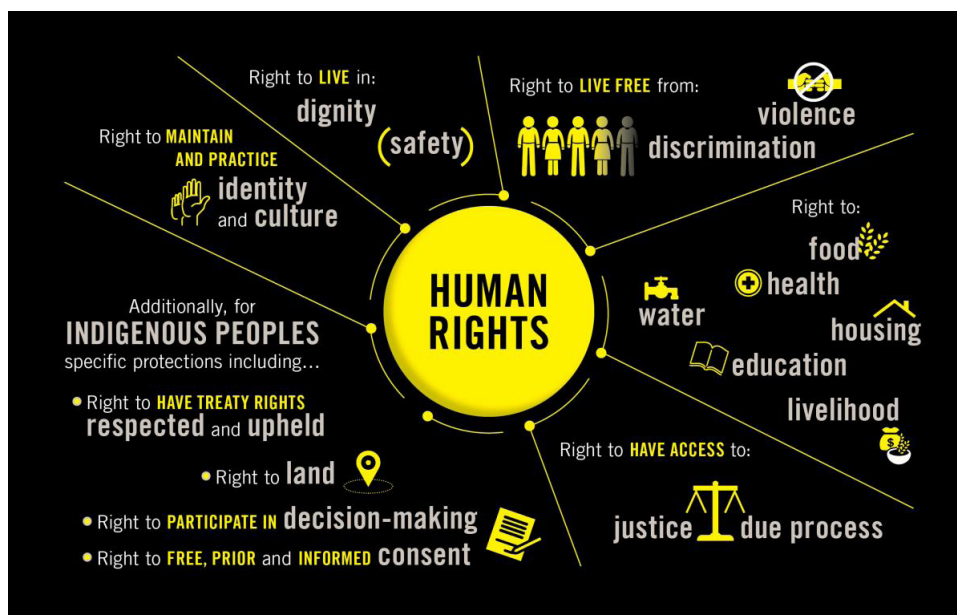
peoples. And in every case, in order to uphold the “honour of the Crown”, there must be good faith consultations to ensure that Indigenous peoples’ concerns are at least “substantially addressed.”

These legal standards of justice and reconciliation must be in turn, informed by Canada’s international human rights obligations. Over the last three decades, there has been tremendous advancement in recognition of Indigenous rights within the international human rights system, including the 2007 adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Unfortunately, the recognition of Indigenous rights in law and principle has not been matched with consistent protection of these rights in practice. It has been far too easy for obligations to be pushed aside or taken too lightly. The results have their own kind of horrific consequences.

In this background section, we will recount some initiatives led by the Indigenous human rights defenders in Canada, and share the work being done by Amnesty International Canada.

PRESSING HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES



people in terms of income, health and overall quality of life – can be traced to a long history of grave human rights violations at the hands of governments and to contemporary forms of discrimination. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada issued its landmark report on Canada’s notorious Residential School system. The TRC concluded that the residential school programme’s explicit purpose of breaking children’s ties to their families, communities and cultures was part of a broader, systemic assault on Indigenous cultures in Canada – an attack so severe and so

By any account, the situation of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples is simultaneously the most pressing and neglected human rights issue in Canada. In 2013, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, James Anaya, concluded that “the human rights problems faced by indigenous peoples in Canada...have reached crisis proportions in many respects” with “the most jarring manifestation of these human rights problems” being “the distressing socio-economic conditions of indigenous peoples in a highly developed country.”

Critical human rights concerns facing Indigenous individuals, families and communities – including the wide gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous

pervasive that the TRC called it “cultural genocide.”

Perhaps the most striking thing about the TRC’s Calls to Action, however, is the extent to which they focused not only on the need to address the injustices of the past, but also to deal with contemporary forms of discrimination that continue to undermine Indigenous societies and deny far too many Indigenous individuals the opportunity for a full and healthy life. Two of these contemporary issues highlighted in the TRC report have been the subject of more than a decade of research and campaigning by Amnesty International: the continued rates of First Nations children being put into state care and the shockingly high rates of violence faced by Indigenous women and girls.

KEEPING FIRST NATIONS FAMILIES TOGETHER



The result: cash strapped social service agencies are taking more children away from their families than at the height of the residential school era simply because it's cheaper to break up families and communities than to provide them the supports they need to stay together.

8-year-long process (the Assembly of First Nations and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society) and ultimately for the Canadian human rights system itself.

Unfortunately, a year later, the federal government has not complied with this January 2016 ruling. The federal government didn't dispute the ruling and did increase funds for First Nations children's services in its subsequent budget. However, the funds that were allocated were not sufficient to meet the Tribunal's order to immediately eliminate the discriminatory gap in funding for family services on reserves. As a result, the matter is still before the Tribunal – and the needs of First Nations children and families are still not being met.

Dr. Cindy Blackstock, who has led the campaign on behalf of the Child and Family Caring Society, has said, "We should all be accountable for what's actually happening to these children on the ground level."

What is the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal?

The CHRT was created in 1977 in Parliament, and has a statutory mandate to "apply the Canadian Human Rights Act based on the evidence presented and case law ... the Tribunal legally decides whether a person or organization has engaged in a discriminatory practice under the Act. The purpose of the CHRA is to protect individuals from discrimination. It states that all Canadians have the right to equality, equal opportunity, fair treatment, and an environment free of discrimination."

The federal government's failure to comply with the Tribunal ruling undermines human rights protection in Canada by calling into question the power of a key institution to address discrimination in government policy.

One of the well-documented legacies of the residential school era is the loss of parenting skills in the families and descendants of many of the survivors. Along with the stresses of poverty and marginalization, many First Nations families require extra support to make sure the needs of their children are met.

Far from meeting this need, however, government provides significantly less money per child for family services on reserves than to similar agencies serving other communities. The result: cash strapped social service agencies are taking more children away from their families than at the height of the residential school era simply because it's cheaper to break up families and communities than to provide them the supports they need to stay together.

In January, 2016 the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) concluded that the federal government's persistent underfunding of child and family services on reserves – compared to what was made available to other families and compared to real needs of First Nations children – is a form of racial discrimination and contrary to the Canadian human rights act. The Tribunal's decision was a crucial victory for First Nations children, for the organizations that had led this struggle in an almost

TAKE ACTION

Urge Canada's Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Carolyn Bennett and Minister of Justice Jody Wilson-Raybould to work with First Nations organizations to close the gap in family services in First Nations communities across Canada.

Send a short, polite letter urging the federal government to work with First Nations organizations to uphold the Tribunal's ruling and ensure that the real needs of First Nations children and families are finally met.

To Ministers Bennett and Wilson-Raybould,

I welcome the fact that, in responding to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling, your government has acknowledged its responsibility to ensure equality in both funding and outcomes for First Nations children.

Racial discrimination in government services to First Nations children is absolutely unacceptable.

The Tribunal decision provides an important opportunity to set things right.

I urge your government to work in good faith with First Nations to ensure that all First Nations children and families have full and equitable access to the quality of services they need and deserve, including through full implementation of Jordan's Principle.

Sincerely,

Or visit the online petition at **bit.ly/2hrZxod** and sign!



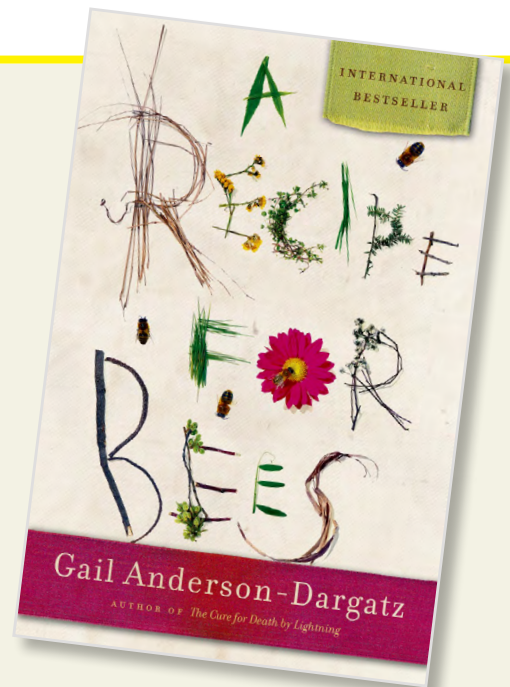
FURTHER READING

The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society website www.fncaringsociety.com

Amnesty International *Canada's Out of Sight, Out of Mind Report* www.amnesty.ca/outofsight

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COMING UP IN JANUARY 2016

A Recipe for Bees by Gail Anderson-Dargatz

Recommended by guest reader Alan Bradley

In *A Recipe for Bees*, Gail Anderson-Dargatz gives readers a remarkable woman to stand beside Hagar Shipley and Daisy Goodwin — but Augusta Olsen also has attitude, a wicked funny bone, and the dubious gift of second sight. Just as *The Cure for Death by Lightning* offers recipes and remedies, *A Recipe for Bees* is saturated with bee lore, and is full of rich domestic detail, wondrous imagery culled from rural kitchens and gardens, shining insights into ageing, family and friendship. And at its heart, are the life, death and resurrection of an extraordinary marriage.

The discussion guide will be sent out mid-January 2017.

In the meanwhile, if you have any questions or comments, please contact us at bookclub@amnesty.ca.