



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL BOOK CLUB

READ

*Who We Are: Four Questions
for a Life and a Nation*

BY THE HONOURABLE
MURRAY SINCLAIR

LEARN

Reconciliation requires truth,
empathy & shared responsibility.

TAKE ACTION

Stand up for Indigenous rights.

*“Reconciliation is not an Indigenous problem —
it is a Canadian one. It involves all of us.”*

— THE HONOURABLE MURRAY SINCLAIR

Senator Sinclair’s story calls on us to recognize the impacts
of colonization and help build respectful, just relationships
between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

DISCUSSION GUIDE **SEPT/OCT 2025**

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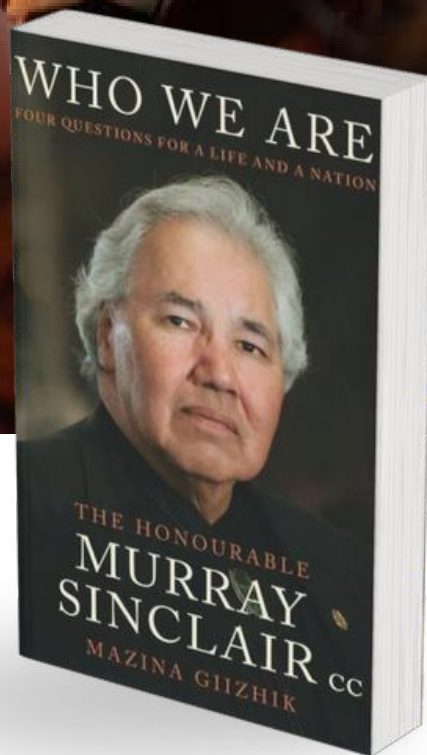


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Anholete via Getty Images

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A COMMUNITY THAT *READS, LEARNS & ACTS* TOGETHER



Pacinthe Mattar

JOURNALIST, WRITER,
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Photo by Enzo Rodriguez

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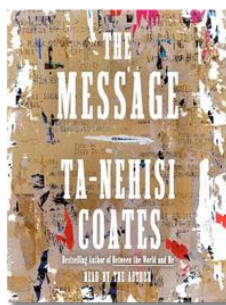
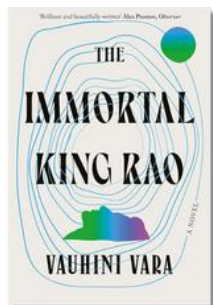
HOST, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL BOOK CLUB

Welcome back to another edition of Amnesty Book Club, where we believe that the first part of working towards a better world is to read about it, understand it, and get the information you need to take action towards improving it. We've designed this guide to help you and our more than 13,000-strong community of readers delve into some of the biggest issues through some of the most memorable and powerful stories of our time. Following Canada's National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, in this edition of Amnesty Book Club, we're examining Canada's history of colonialism through the eyes of one of the most respected Indigenous leaders in this country: the late honourable Murray Sinclair.

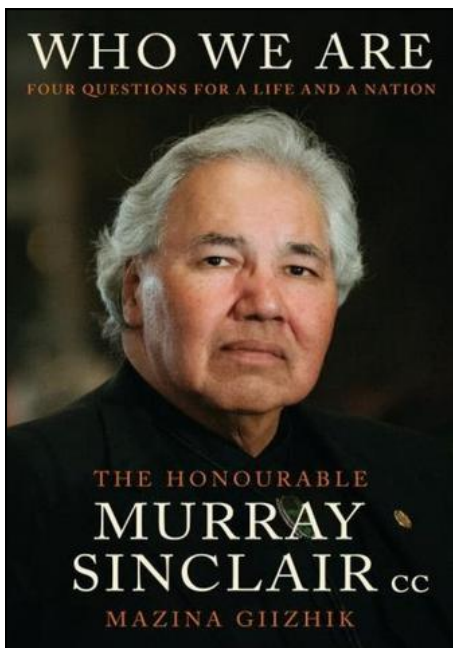
"Reconciliation is not an Indigenous problem — it is a Canadian one. It involves all of us." That's the urgent message that undergirds Sinclair's powerful autobiography and meditation on truth and reconciliation *Who We Are*. In the telling of his life story and the painful and challenging work he did to advance Truth and Reconciliation for Indigenous peoples, Sinclair holds up a mirror to himself, to all Canadians, and to Canada's past and present. As a journalist who believes in the power of stories to confront injustice and reshape narratives, I found this book to be a masterclass in truth-telling: personal, warm and intimate, yet unflinching in chronicling Canada's historic injustices towards Indigenous peoples and its refusal to contend with that past. Sinclair's weaves between the measured clarity of a judge, and the wisdom and deep cultural knowledge as an Elder. He uses his own story to lay bare the legacy of colonialism and the ongoing impact of residential schools.

Bearing witness is at the core of my work as a journalist. I hope you'll join me and our incredible authors as we refuse to look away from the chaos of this time. Instead, let's learn together what's possible when we act in hope and solidarity.

BOOK CLUB
TITLES IN
2025



THE *BOOK*



Who We Are: Four Questions for a Life and a Nation

BY THE HONOURABLE MURRAY SINCLAIR
PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE, MCCLELLAND & STEWART

Drawing on Senator Sinclair's unique experiences, and his perspectives regarding Indigenous identity, human rights, and justice in Canada, *Who We Are* beautifully illustrates how history, resistance, and resilience collide in finding a way forward to heal the damaged relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. It is an intimate excavation of Senator Sinclair's life, exploring how his experiences as an Anishinaabe man, father, and grandfather, Elder, Senator and Commissioner shaped him.

Structured around the four questions that have long shaped Senator Sinclair's thinking and worldview—Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here? Who am I?—*Who We Are* takes readers by the hand into the story of his life, while challenging us not just to bear witness, but to be part of the repair.

Murray Sinclair

AUTHOR

Murray Sinclair was a respected Anishinaabe leader, legal trailblazer, and lifelong advocate for justice and Indigenous rights in Canada. Born and raised on the former St. Peter's Indian Reserve in Manitoba, Sinclair broke ground early in his career as Manitoba's first Indigenous judge. He later became the Chief Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), where he led a landmark national effort to document the experiences of residential school survivors and expose the devastating legacy of that system. Under his leadership, the TRC produced 94 Calls to Action that continue to shape the national conversation around reconciliation today.

Beyond his official titles, Sinclair was also an Elder, a father and grandfather, and a deeply grounded voice within his community. In 2016, he was appointed to the Senate of Canada, where he continued to advocate for Indigenous rights, education, and justice until his retirement in 2021. Throughout his public service, Sinclair has balanced the demands of political life with the responsibilities of culture and family, often drawing on his own experiences as an Indigenous man to inform his work. His legacy is one of truth-telling, bridge-building, and unwavering commitment to a more just and honest Canada.



HEAR FROM THE LATE
HONOURABLE MURRAY
SINCLAIR'S SON

Niigaan Sinclair

Learn more!



**The Honourable Murray
Sinclair on CBC's Unreserved**



And on CBC's The Next Chapter

Sources: Galt Museum and Archives,
Canadian Geographic, Nunatsiaq News, USC
Center for Health and Journalism.



INDIGENOUS



National Indigenous Peoples Day, on June 15, 2024 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Photo by Mert Alper Dervis/Anadolu via Getty Images

Residential Schools in Canada: From Cultural Genocide to Calls for Action

The roots of residential schools in what is now Canada stretch back centuries: In the mid-1800s, religious organizations—Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and others—were educating Indigenous children in mission schools; by the 1880s, with the Indian Act (1876) and other legislation, the federal government took on a stronger role, funding and administering a system aimed at assimilating Indigenous children, erasing their languages, cultures, spiritual practices, and connections to family.

As the system expanded, attendance became compulsory in many places, children were often removed from their homes (sometimes forcibly), and decay in oversight—underfunding, neglect, abuse—became widespread.

Murray Sinclair, as Chair of the TRC, helped bring this history into sharper, more public view. Under his leadership, the TRC gathered thousands of survivor testimonies, reviewed archival records, and ultimately concluded in its 2015 report that Canada's residential school system was not simply misguided policy or tragic mistake—but rather, what he called a period of “cultural genocide.”

Through Sinclair's work, key facts became more widely known: that at least 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were enrolled over more than a century; that thousands never returned home—many buried in unmarked graves; that many survivors continue to experience intergenerational trauma linked to the physical, emotional, sexual abuses and systemic cultural erasure they endured.

RIGHTS IN CANADA

Today the legacy of residential schools is both a memory and a living reality. The harms—loss of language, cultural dislocation, broken familial connections, psychological trauma—are being addressed through the 94 Calls to Action of the TRC, Indigenous-led healing, new memorialization, national apology(s), and legal settlements. Yet many believe much work remains. Sinclair repeatedly has insisted that reconciliation cannot just be about apology—“Canada must move from apology to action.”

Here's how you can help be part of that:

Take action!



Say “NO” to legislation that sidelines Indigenous Peoples' rights



Help End Violence Against Indigenous Women & 2SLGBTQIA+ Land and Water Defenders

Learn more!

Read more about Indigenous Rights in Canada:



Why Amnesty's Ketty Nivyabandi says Doug Ford's Apology To First Nations Falls Short In The Wake Of Bill 5



What You Need To Know about the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples



Here's Why Amnesty International Canada is concerned that passage of Bill C-5 sidelines Indigenous rights



How Red Dress Day Honours and Remembers the lives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirited People (MMIWG2S+)





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Hundreds of women participated in the annual Red Dress Day march in downtown Edmonton, hosted by Project REDress, commemorating the lives of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls across Canada. Photo by Artur Widak/NurPhoto via Getty Images

Questions by Book Club Committee, Carol Ricker-Wilson

The Honourable Murray Sinclair's Introduction offers a structure both for reading *Who We Are* and understanding the lives of Indigenous and other peoples: the four great questions of life used "by Elders from all walks and cultures" in order to raise & educate one's children.

CHAPTER 1: WHERE DO I COME FROM?

1. Identify some of the multiple ways in which young Sinclair's various relatives participated in showing him "where he came from."
2. During his early years in Selkirk, Sinclair recognized that he "lived in a world that wholly and absolutely celebrated whiteness." [p. 43] How this is evident overall in his education and with what effects?
3. What educational opportunities supported him in becoming more immersed in his Indigenous background?
4. What were some of the challenges that he encountered with both secular and religious forces?

CHAPTER 2: WHERE AM I GOING?

1. Sinclair identifies specific and substantial details on Anishinaabe beliefs, faith and hopes (p. 83- 86). How, specifically, are Anishinaabe ritual details of death, burial and the afterlife meant to support both the living and those in the multiple processes of dying? How do these rituals both reflect human struggles and offer comfort?
2. Sinclair notes a desire to broaden his knowledge of Indigenous history and cultural knowledge, with a hope of passing it on to others. He writes: "I started to understand my lack of cultural knowledge more deeply as a progression of the pressures put upon Indigenous people to succeed in white society." (105) How is his understanding of these pressures evident as the chapter progresses?
3. Select one of his roles in the legal system, as lawyer or judge, and describe the significance of one of his cases in supporting Indigenous rights.



"Pushing through a transformative development bill, not to mention mammoth infrastructure projects, without respecting Indigenous rights does not advance national interests — it sabotages them. Respecting human rights, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples, is essential to building a strong, just economy for all."

Ketty Nivyabandi

SECRETARY GENERAL
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CANADA
(ENGLISH SPEAKING)
on [how Bill 5 Harms Indigenous Sovereignty](#)





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CONTINUED...

Hundreds of women participated in the annual Red Dress Day march in downtown Edmonton, hosted by Project REDress, commemorating the lives of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls across Canada. Photo by Artur Widak/NurPhoto via Getty Images

4. What do these two incidents demonstrate about his character:

- In 1988, he is offered a position, by the Manitoba Minister of Justice, to become a judge. How does he react to comments that he got the job because he was a Native guy? (p. 141)
- How does he react when asked, almost immediately after becoming a judge, to act as a Manitoba inquiry commissioner to address the deaths of J.J. Harper & Helen Betty Osborne? (p. 143)

CHAPTER 3: WHY AM I HERE?

- Sinclair begins this chapter by stating that he “wanted to spend more time learning from Elders I knew about how to be Anishinaabe and about how to raise an Anishinaabe child. (p. 174). How did he do this with his own family?
- Discuss the degree to which the traditional Anishinaabe understanding and enactment of gender roles was meant to benefit children. How does Sinclair incorporate these roles into his love and care for family? How have he and his wife balanced tradition with a current feminist understanding of gender roles?
- A significant purpose of Sinclair’s life was the difficult and poignant task of developing a framework. How did this inquiry and commission differ from regular court?
- How did Sinclair and his co-chairs attempt to address both the practical aspects of running the commission and the trauma carried by the survivors? How did they ensure that the information provided by the survivors would have a Canadian wide audience?

CHAPTER 4: WHO AM I?

- Discuss the significance, for Indigenous people, of having a spirit name and clan identity. If not Indigenous, what, in your own culture, is similar and of what value to your own identity?
- Sinclair examines the role of Indigenous Elders and compares their positions to those of Canadian Senators. How so? And who, if any, do you see as the Elders in your own communities?
- What does Sinclair see as the role and purpose of Canadian Senators? (p. 238)
- What were some of the positive outcomes he identified in Senate after the TRC completed its initial task?

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