

***Rez Dog Blues & The Haiku: A Savage Life in Bits and Pieces***  
**A Creative Writing Lesson Plan**

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INTRODUCTION:

Creative writing as expressed in journal writing, combined with haiku poetry writing, can be a cathartic daily exercise. Finding 15-30 minutes daily to record ones' thoughts, plans, hopes, dreams, and strategies to obtain these, are a fantastic way to monitor thoughts, moods, challenges, and progress in the pursuit of the worthwhile. Especially for the young, as they can use the written word and simple haiku poetry to gain daily perspectives, chart the ups-and-downs of life, and identify patterns in behavior, the good and the bad. Positive change and gaining control over emotions in the midst of tumultuous personal times, no matter the age, are thus possible through the use of page-and-pen. For ideas expressed and written out can lead to life-changing action.

William George Lindsay (Cree-Stoney) uses his award-winning, Indigenous-focused novel *Rez Dog Blues & The Haiku: A Savage Life in Bits and Pieces* (2021) as a platform to espouse the benefits of the above. At regular daily intervals, the book's protagonist Liam jots down his thoughts, feelings, plans, and lessons learned along his way. As this main character notes in Chapter Two, the written word and poetry help him to, "make sense of [his] crazy f\*\*\*ing world," a world initially defined by a wayward, criminal, runaway life on the reservation and the street. Books, journal writing, haiku poetry, as well as, music, movies, sports, and the better parts of Indigenous life and culture, enables the protagonist to not only survive but eventually thrive, this in the midst of the toughest trials one can possibly imagine a young person facing. Yet, as the young protagonist acknowledges in Chapter Two: "I find solace in script, peace in poetry, with hope overflowing around all the edges."

Music is important to this story, as well. A dominant 1970s soundtrack — punk, rock, and folk — is thus skillfully woven in throughout this book, providing insights into the lives of the characters within. Their thoughts, feelings, and emotions are expressed in their music choices, with the melodies and lyrics of important songs and albums from the era expressing exactly how they feel and why. As Chapter Three notes, "regarding punk, when you're joyful you hear the melody, when you're angry you hear the lyrics." Evoking such emotion, music becomes a character unto itself in this story. Especially for young Indigenous people, knocked about by life and history, looking for something better through the joys and lessons of music.

## OBJECTIVES:

In the midst of a tough life on rez and street, the book's young protagonist (Liam) relies on reading, journal writing, haiku poetry ("rez haiku"), movies, music, sports, and Indigenous cultural and life practices to survive, figure out his world, and prepare him for a better life. The positive power of these artistic and cultural endeavors shines through brilliantly. Use of the acclaimed Indigenous novel *Rez Dog Blues & The Haiku: A Savage Life in Bits and Pieces* along with the formal lessons provided below, can thus assist readers in cultivating their own joys regarding creative writing, poetry, films, sports, and music. Such practices and endeavors have created new artistic worlds. They can also create positive personal worlds for the individuals who take the time to learn and explore them. The protagonist's ability to survive and even thrive as a young Indigenous person in the wake of the horrors and challenges of the Indian residential school system, is a lesson for life unto itself, no matter the readers' background. If Liam and his family can make it, so can you. Potential roadmaps to this goal (survival) are highlighted below and throughout the book.

## LESSONS:

1. Have it as a goal to write one to two pages in a journal format daily. This is largely free-form writing that provides clarity. For the purposes of this lesson, begin by summarizing the read chapters in *Rez Dog Blues & The Haiku: A Savage Life in Bits and Pieces*. For example, what is the dominant theme in each chapter? What characters do you relate to and why? What will be remembered as lessons for life going forward? What new vocabulary (three examples from each chapter) is learned herein? Remember that building up a vocabulary will add spice to your writing and speech. Journal entries can then turn personal, with the writer expressing feelings, schedules, planning, daily and long-term goals, strategies to reach these goals, and how the journey is going. Write a little bit every day, at different times. Re-read what was written previously. Re-learn the lessons. Don't over-think, just keep writing. Share if you feel comfortable, to show others how honest and cathartic writing is done. For you are now recording your life's journey.
2. Haiku poems are found throughout *Rez Dog Blues & The Haiku: A Savage Life in Bits and Pieces*. They are meant to summarize what is happening in the respective chapters. Haiku poetry as an art form is from Japan. They are short, meant to be read in one breath, in a reflective spirit. They follow a simple three-line format, with the first and third line containing five syllables, with the middle second line containing seven syllables. Have a look within the book for numerous examples of this poetic style. Thereafter, practice haiku poetry, writing about anything you want. The book's protagonist uses this form of poetry to figure things out, to summarize an event, and to learn from his life's experiences.

Anyone can do the same. Share your haiku poems with others, if you're comfortable. Show others the power of personal expression, in a few simple words.

3. Regarding music, check out the listed soundtrack of albums and songs in *Rez Dog Blues & The Haiku: A Savage Life in Bits and Pieces*. Get familiar with the songs of a generation and their motivating power. Ask yourself the following: What does each song or album you come across say about the moment? What are your favorite two albums in the book and why? What are your three favorite songs in the book and why? What's the soundtrack of your own life i.e. what are your own two favorite albums and three favorite songs and why? What motivations and feelings are expressed and aroused because of music, in the book and in your own life?
4. Regarding movies, a few specific landmark films are mentioned or alluded to in *Rez Dog Blues & The Haiku: A Savage Life in Bits and Pieces*. These include *The Warriors* (1979), *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), *Little Big Man* (1970), *Easy Rider* (1969), and *The Seventh Seal* (1957). What are these movies mainly about (themes)? What lessons for life are learned from each of these films? Why are these films important to the main character, Liam? What three special movies have worked for you, in your own life, and why?
5. Sports and exercise are important to the protagonist, Liam, throughout the book. These include hockey, running, weight training, boxing, and martial arts. What lessons for life does Liam learn from each of these healthy endeavors? What specific sports/exercises have provided the same results for you and why?
6. Indigenous qualities and specific cultural practices are found throughout *Rez Dog Blues & The Haiku: A Savage Life in Bits and Pieces*. For example, the use of humour as a survival tool (Chapter Twelve), the influence of the game of bingo (Chapter Twenty-Eight), and the power of the First Nations' drum (Chapter Nineteen). These practices enable the book's characters to survive (for a time) and even thrive. Please list another five of these cultural practices/habits and how they help the characters. Also, what cultural practices and activities from your own background help you to remain grounded in a good way in your own life? List five and explain why they're important to you.

## CONCLUSION:

Although an adult-oriented book in terms of language and experiences, *Rez Dog Blues & The Haiku: A Savage Life in Bits and Pieces* tells honestly of life *as it was* for a generation of 1970s Indigenous people, *not* as we wished it to be. Most importantly, it tells of how a colonized, dystopian Indigenous generation, personified by the main character Liam, navigated its way through the rocky shoals of life to find a better way. Life's journey goes on for us all, in all its glory and challenges. Honest lessons galore thus await readers who wish for something better in their own lives, as a way to figure things out and create a daily life's plan. This is the main purpose of

these exercises. Hence, please feel free to use the above lesson plan suggestions for creative writing as you see fit. Adjust the lessons as needed. Apply these to other works and books.

Oh, what positive endeavors to help others to aspire to: regular reading, daily journal writing, haiku poetry, and music! Along with movies, sports, and Indigenous culture, these changed the life of the novel's main character, Liam. They can change the world. They can change your life, too. Experience the arts. Pick up a book and pen. Record your life's sojourn. Experience clarity, goal setting, joy, and healing. Above all, enjoy the journey of life.

For further information on the award-winning novel *Rez Dog Blues & The Haiku: A Savage Life in Bits and Pieces* please see: <https://williamglindsay.com/>