

WHAT IN THE WORLD?



LEVELS 1 & 2 (GRADES 5 AND UP)

Gord Downie

1964-2017

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BREAKING NEWS
NOVEMBER 2017



A monthly current events resource for Canadian classrooms

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NATIONAL

FAREWELL, GORD DOWNIE

– AND THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC



The country was united in sorrow on October 17 when singer-songwriter Gord Downie died of **terminal** brain cancer. He was 53. Mr. Downie was the front man of The Tragically Hip, arguably the nation's most beloved rock band.

"Gord knew this day was coming," his family wrote on his website. "His response was to spend this precious time as he always had – making music, making memories and expressing deep gratitude to his family and friends for a life well lived."

Mr. Downie and his high school friends from Kingston, Ontario – guitarist Rob Baker, bassist Gord Sinclair, and drummer Johnny Fay – started the band in 1984. Guitarist Paul Langlois joined later.

The Hip, as fans call the group, produced 14 albums in 33 years and sold millions of records. Many of their hits, such as *Wheat Kings* and *The Lonely End of the Rink*, tell truly Canadian stories. The band was inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame in 2005.

"If you're a musician and you're born in Canada it's in your **DNA** to like the Tragically Hip," said Canadian musician Dallas Green.

HIS LAST GREAT CONCERTS

The band played a series of concerts across Canada last summer. The CBC carried the last show in Kingston. The broadcast aired in pubs, parks, and drive-in movie theatres across the country. Kingston officially proclaimed the date The Tragically Hip Day.

More than 11 million people watched the concert on TVs, laptops, tablets, and phones. The American newspaper *The New York Times* called the concert "an unparalleled moment of national pride laced with sorrow." Fans cried for joy as they heard the songs they loved. They also cried in sadness. They knew it was likely Mr. Downie's last performance.

EMOTIONS RUN HIGH

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, a big fan of Gord Downie and The Tragically Hip, made an emotional statement after he had passed away.

"I thought I was going to make it through this but I'm not," the prime minister said. His voice broke and he cried openly. "We all knew it was coming," Mr. Trudeau said. "But we hoped it wasn't. We are less as a country without Gordon Downie."

Another fan, Melanie Wells, paid her respects to Mr. Downie at a day-long memorial held in Kingston. "It's a band that's been with me my whole life," she said of the Hip. "It's the soundtrack to my life."

MR. DOWNIE THE ACTIVIST

Mr. Downie was not only a famed singer, songwriter, and published poet. He was also a devoted activist who took up many important causes.

As a committed environmentalist, he was a strong **proponent** of clean water rights. He served on the board of Lake Ontario Waterkeeper, a charity working to protect the Great Lakes. As well, he battled a cement company that was experimenting with burning tires as a fuel source near the lakeside village of Bath, Ontario. He helped put a halt to the unsafe practice.

DEFINITIONS

DNA: Deoxyribonucleic acid – the primary chemical component of chromosomes and the material of which genes are made

PROONENT: a person who pleads for a cause

TERMINAL: (of a disease) predicted to lead to death, especially slowly; incurable



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Even the Hip’s final tour produced more than memories and cultural unity. Over one million dollars was raised for brain cancer research.

FRIEND OF FIRST NATIONS

The Hip has also been a long-standing **advocate** of First Nations causes. Early into the Kingston concert, Mr. Downie said that Canadians were “trained our entire lives to ignore” these issues. Days later he announced a solo album that highlights a terrible time in Canadian history.

Called *Secret Path*, the album was part of a multimedia project. It includes a graphic novel and an animated movie that were released last year. Together, they tell the tragic story of Chanie Wenjack, a 12-year-old boy who died 50 years ago after running away from an Ontario residential school in search of his family. Mr. Downie wanted all Canadians to learn about the thousands of indigenous children who suffered like Chanie. Proceeds from the project go to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) at the University of Manitoba.

‘MAY HE DANCE AMONG THE STARS’

First Nations leaders mourned Mr. Downie’s passing and praised him for drawing attention to the **legacy** of residential schools.

“May he forever sing and dance among the stars, reminding us all that love in action is reconciliation,” said First Nations children’s advocate Cindy Blackstock. “And may we, the receivers of his gift, take action every day to make the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action a reality.”

THE TERRIBLE LEGACY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

In the 19th century, the Canadian government wrongly assumed that it would be best if First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples were forced to learn English, accept Christianity, and embrace Canadian customs. The theory was that after a few generations, native traditions would disappear and aboriginal communities would be **assimilated** smoothly into so-called mainstream Canadian society.

To advance this policy, the government funded church-run residential boarding schools to teach aboriginal children Canadian ways. The schools were run by the Anglican, Catholic, United and Presbyterian churches. In all, about 30 percent of aboriginal children, or 150,000, were torn from their families and forced to live at 130 of these schools between the 1870s and 1996.

Many of the children who attended residential schools were abused and severely mistreated by their teachers and caregivers. All were lonely and longed to be with their families. Some, like Chanie Wenjack, tried to escape and return home.

As many as 6000 children died while in the residential school system. Survivors often came home traumatized and felt alienated from their families.

Beginning in the late 1990s, former students sued the federal government and the churches that ran the schools. Their cases led to the 2006 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. Aside from providing compensation to former students, the agreement called for the establishment of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).

In June 2008, then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized on behalf of the Government of Canada to former students, their families, and communities for Canada’s part in the operation of the residential schools. That same year, the TRC was officially established to learn the truth about what happened in residential schools and to inform all Canadians about their findings.

The TRC travelled the country for six years, listening to testimony from nearly 7000 witnesses. The commission’s final report was delivered in December 2015. It included 94 recommendations for changes in policies, programs and the “way we talk to, and about, each other” to repair the relationship between aboriginal people and the rest of Canada.

At the end of the TRC mandate, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation was established as a resource for all Canadians. It is a permanent home for the statements, documents, and other materials gathered by the TRC so that survivors’ families, communities and all of Canada can learn from the hard lessons of this black mark in Canadian history.

Mr. Downie’s music was one reason Canadians loved and respected him. Another was his activism.

“His impact, no question, will live on beyond Gord Downie’s time in this

world,” said Assembly of First Nations Chief Perry Bellegarde. “He is indeed walking amongst the stars now.” ★

DEFINITIONS

ADVOCATE: a person who publicly supports a cause or policy
ASSIMILATE: to become similar to one’s environment

LEGACY: something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past



NATIONAL
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ON THE LINES

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. List the five members of The Tragically Hip.

2. Where and when did this band start? How many albums has the band recorded?

3. What did this band do last summer?

4. Describe the last concert that this band played.

5. Explain why the federal government set up residential schools for aboriginal children in the late 1800s.

6. Which organizations operated these schools?

7. How many aboriginal children were forced to attend these schools? How were many of these children treated?

8. Who was Chanie Wenjack and what did he do?

9. What did Mr. Downie do to help Canadians remember Chanie and many others who suffered in residential schools?



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BETWEEN THE LINES

Making an inference: An inference is a conclusion drawn from evidence. *A plausible inference is supported by evidence in the article and is consistent with known facts outside of the article.*

What inferences can you draw from the fact that the CBC broadcast the Hip’s final concert live and commercial-free – a decision that cost the broadcasting corporation millions in advertising dollars?

BEYOND THE LINES

What does music mean to you? Who is your favourite singer or band? Can you describe a time when a song helped you through a tough time in your life?

JUST TALK ABOUT IT

1. a) What is your understanding of the term ‘icon’?
- b) In what ways could the Hip be considered a Canadian icon?
- c) What other examples of Canadian icons can you suggest? Explain.
2. As you see it, what is the significance of The Tragically Hip? Explain.

ONLINE

1. Watch coverage of the sad news that Tragically Hip singer Gord Downie has terminal cancer on The National at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ZdGSsD99sQ>
2. Watch news coverage on the day Tragically Hip singer Gord Downie passed away at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/gord-downie-obit-1.4359906> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3G2gzyBzAE>
3. Read a Maclean’s article about Gordon Downie at <http://www.macleans.ca/culture/how-we-will-miss-gord-downie-and-the-tragically-hip/>
4. Learn more about Mr. Downie’s type of cancer and the foundation that he raised money for at <http://sunnybrook.ca/foundation/>
5. Hear Gord Downie’s voice in the trailer for Secret Path and learn more about this multimedia project at <http://secretpath.ca/>
6. Explore videos, read findings, and stay connected to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s important work at <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3>
7. Watch news coverage from The National about the TRC’s final report at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKKLgwlosaw> ★

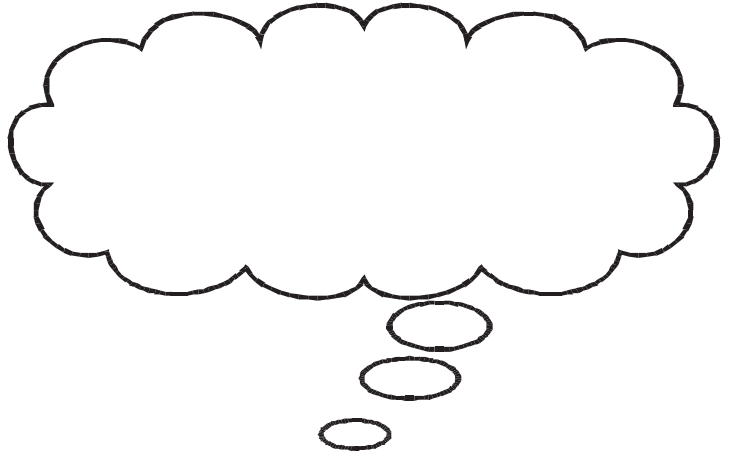
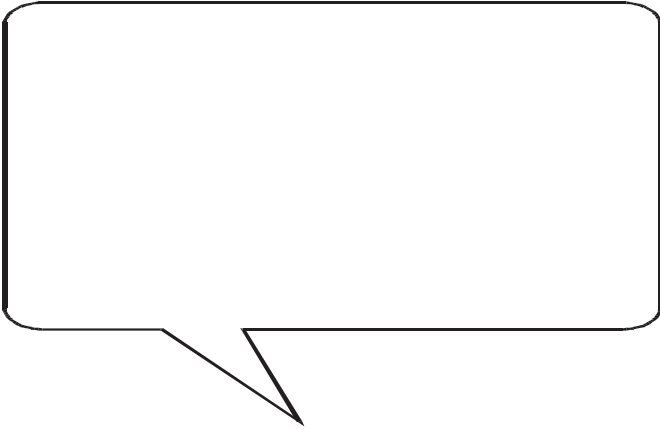


IMAGES IN THE NEWS

FAREWELL, GORD DOWNIE

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Write the inner and outer dialogue for the person in this scene. Show what the person is thinking/feeling (inner voice) and saying (outer voice). *A believable conversation conveys appropriate ideas, thoughts, feelings or reactions; is on topic; extends the details of the scene; and is convincing.*

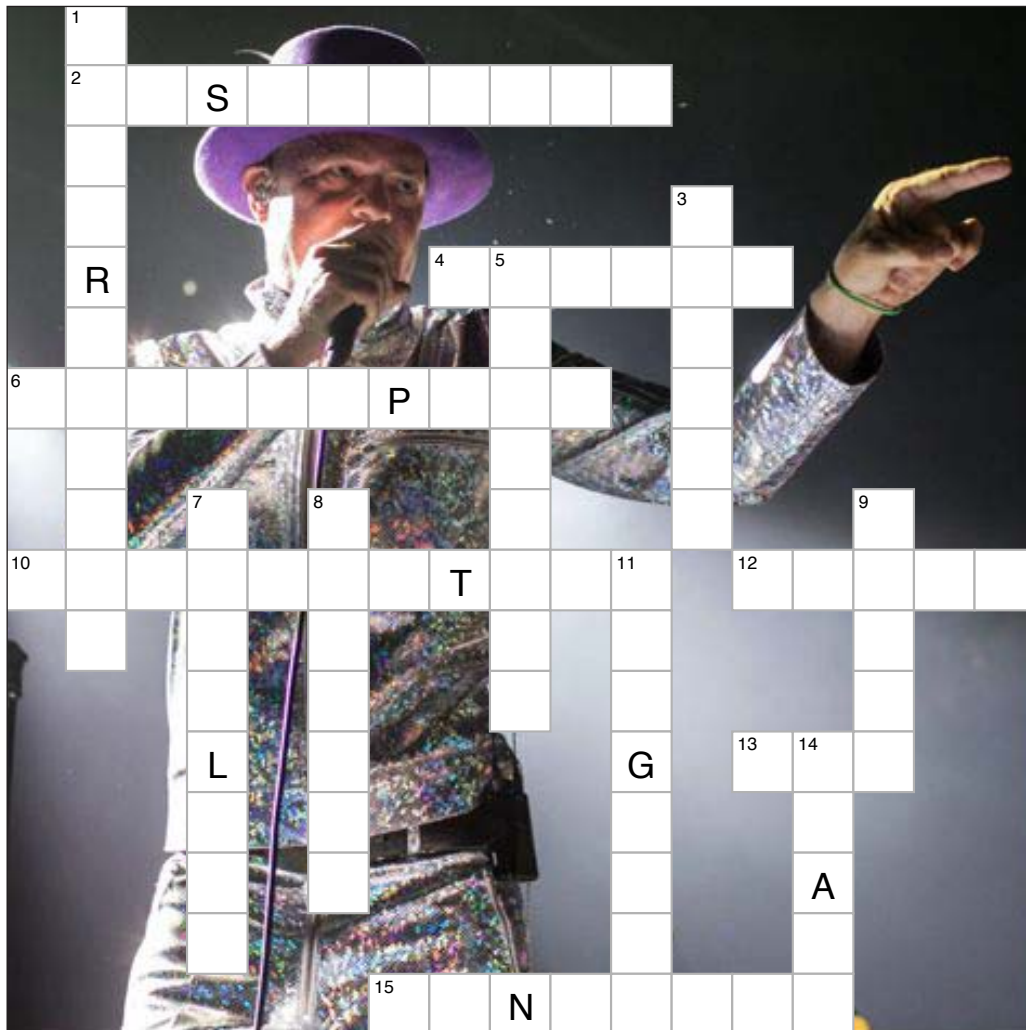


Gord Downie of The Tragically Hip performing at the Air Canada Centre in Toronto as part of the band's Man Machine Poem tour. Marcus Oleniuk/Toronto Star via Getty Images



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ACROSS

- 2. to become similar to one's environment
- 4. prime minister who apologized
- 6. Gord Downie's last album (2)
- 10. some 150,000 indigenous children were forced to attend _____ boarding schools
- 12. The _____ and Reconciliation Commission
- 13. public broadcaster that carried the Hip's last show nationwide
- 15. the Hip's hometown

DOWN

- 1. Gord Downie served on the board of Lake Ontario _____
- 3. something important transmitted by or received from an ancestor
- 5. Gord Downie was a devoted _____
- 7. Hip bassist
- 8. 12-year-old who ran away
- 9. Canadian _____ Hall of Fame
- 11. Hip guitarist
- 14. Gord Downie died of _____ cancer



FAREWELL, GORD DOWNIE

Write the letter that corresponds to the best answer on the line beside each question:

- _____ 1. **Which city was The Tragically Hip's hometown?**
a) Hamilton
b) Toronto
c) Montreal
d) Kingston
e) Winnipeg
- _____ 2. **What disease did Gord Downie succumb to?**
a) brain cancer
b) arthritis
c) hepatitis
d) lung cancer
e) leukemia
- _____ 3. **What was the objective of the government-funded church-run residential schools?**
a) to encourage aboriginals to assimilate
b) to provide First Nations children with a good education
c) to protect aboriginals from hunger and disease
d) to encourage First Nations to travel outside their communities
e) to force aboriginals to go to church
- _____ 4. **True or False?** Over 11 million people watched The Tragically Hip's last concert.
- _____ 5. **True or False?** Gord Downie's newest album was called *Secret Path*.
6. **The Tragically Hip is a Canadian icon.** Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give reasons to support your response.

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