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Narrative of “The Stranger”

Poetry plays an important role as it allows people to understand the world and society around them. It can highlight events in history some may have forgotten. The poem, “The Stranger,” by Gord Downie was written to bring attention to the damaging effects residential schools in Canada had on Aboriginals. The piece was inspired by a twelve-year-old First Nations boy, Chanie Wenjack, who was forced to experience the wounding environment. He ran away from the school he attended and was found dead near train tracks only one week later. The theme of the poem revolved around fear, challenges and lack of hope. Chanie feared the residential school and decided to run away. As he was walking, he started to lose confidence that he would make it home. Chanie felt alone and unnoticed as he continued to walk for miles with little sense of direction. At the residential schools, the teachers would do everything possible to disconnect the children from their background and culture. One’s loss of identity can lead to struggles later in life which is what happened to Chanie. He felt detached from his home and out of place at the school. These feelings resulted with him fleeing and he ended up in his unfortunate situation. “The Stranger,” is significant because dark times are often covered up, but the poem helped bring awareness to the terrible situations residential schools put the children in. Poetry inspired by similar stories insures the conversation will be continued. Poetic devices are tools used by poets to enhance or intensify a poem. There were many poetic devices in, “The Stranger,” that assisted in making the piece more powerful. The first poetic device used in the poem was a metaphor. The path is a metaphor resembling his path of life, through the residential school and going home, “I navigate the mud/I walk a-bove the path/ Jumpin' to the right/ Then I jump to the left” (5-8). The second device was imagery, “On a secret path / The one that nobody knows / And I am moving fast” (9-11). The diction in the lines used visual imagery to help the reader picture the scene, as well as described Chanie walking fast on a path by himself. The third poetic device used was personification, “Please just let me catch my breath” (20). Personification is apparent in the line because one cannot physically catch and hold a breath. The last poetic device used by the poet was repetition, “I am the Stranger/I am the Stranger/I am the Stranger” (33-35). Repetition is a strong device and was used to make the lines have a great effect on the reader. Chanie Wenjack’s tragic story is just one of many. Other similar stories have been lost in history. Fortunately, there are poets like Gord Downie that are dedicated to bringing the stories to the world and not letting the memories fade.