Book Club Questions

The following questions are intended to begin discussion on the historical topics and themes developed in *The Education of Augie Merasty*. Topics that should be addressed include the history of residential schools, the meaning of assimilation, intergenerational trauma, and the idea of reconciliation.

It is important to deal with the history of residential schools with sensitivity. For Indigenous people, the following discussion topics may be sensitive—especially if they have family members who are survivors of the residential school system. Others may find the topics that emerge in the book to be controversial, incomprehensible, or unsettling. This story recounts memories of physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual abuse.

Sensitive subject matter in the guide is indicated by an asterisk (*), providing discussion facilitators with an opportunity to prepare participants for disquieting content.

Background Preparation

Those who are unfamiliar with the history of Indian residential schools in Canada may wish to prepare for the background questions portion of their book club by consulting the following resources:

CBC – A History of Residential Schools in Canada:

The Canadian Encyclopedia:

Where are the Children? Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools:
http://wherearethechildren.ca/en

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Background Questions

1. What were Indian residential schools and what do you know about their history in Canada?
2. How and why were these schools created?
3. What does the term “assimilation” mean to you?
4. What do you think the impact of the assimilation was on Indigenous peoples, both in a historical and contemporary sense?
5. What is your understanding of the term “intergenerational trauma”? Can you provide an example?
6. In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in Canada. What was its role?
7. Reconciliation can have numerous meanings for different people and in varying contexts. What is your understanding of reconciliation?

Questions on the Story

8. What do you think of the image on the front cover? What might it symbolise?

9. Think about the title of this book: The Education of Augie Merasty. Could it have more than one meaning?

10. Page 13. Merasty recalls Sister Mercy’s favourite phrase: “Indians from the bush, what can you expect?” What does the phrase say about her perception of the children in the school? What is the impact on young Augie’s self-image?

11. *Pages 18-21. Merasty recounts his memories as a victim of sexual abuse. Many other residential school survivors have shared similar experiences. Some people may be uncomfortable with such depictions, while others feel it is necessary for us to acknowledge that these things happened to many children. Why would some people object to these stories? Why would others feel they are necessary to tell? What is your opinion?
12. Pages 45-49. Merasty speaks of the physical and sexual abuse that he and other students experienced at the hands of Brother Lepeigne. Lepeigne beat and threatened young Augie, telling him to keep his “mouth shut about that sexual abuse,” and Augie states, “He did a good job, because I have never told anyone about those assaults, until now.” Both as a young child and later as an adult, Augie Merasty did not talk about his experiences with Brother Lepeigne. Why do you think it took him such a long time to share his experience?

13. Pages 57-58. When he was in his late teens, Merasty and another former student of St. Therese ran into Brother (Brer) Lepeigne in The Pas and took him to an abandoned building. What is your reaction to what they did to Lepeigne?

14. Pages 60-62. Augie Merasty says, “All I have stated about incidents regarding our keepers at St. Therese are absolutely true...” Why do you think Merasty felt the need to write his stories down? Can you think of more than one reason?

15. Page 73. At the end of the book, David Carpenter meets Augie Merasty in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, for the first time in a decade. Of the end of the meeting Carpenter wrote, “At that moment, Augie Merasty was no longer a fleeting vision, a character that vanishes in a dream. He was right there in front of me, as big as life. Bigger than life. More than just a man. More like a hero.” Carpenter also called Merasty a hero in the introduction on page xxxvi. Why do you think Carpenter came to see Augie Merasty as a hero? Does he fit your own idea of a hero? Why?

Questions for After Reading the Book

16. Augie Merasty briefly describes his early life before attending residential school, and then describes building a cabin and hunting and fishing with his family at the end of his school days. How do you think these settings shaped an understanding of his culture? What were the differences between life at home and life at St. Therese?
17. What was life like for a student attending residential schools during this time? What parts of the memoir support your answers?

18. *Many children who attended residential schools have borne witness to stories of physical and sexual abuse at the hands of people who worked in the schools, many of whom represented a specific religious domination? What belief systems were in place when residential schools operated? And how did these beliefs affect the curriculum in residential schools?

19. Of all the people teaching or caring for the children at St. Therese Residential School, who do you think is the most admirable, and why? Who was the most reprehensible, and why?

20. Think about the relationship between David Carpenter and Augie Merasty. Why do you think David Carpenter agreed to help Augie Merasty write his memoir? What relationship existed between these two men in the beginning? How did this relationship change?

21. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada heard hundreds of stories from people who attended residential schools as children. Part of the Commission’s work was to listen to the stories of survivors, such as Augie Merasty. Do you find his story credible? If not, explain your reasons. If so, what things make it credible for you?

22. List the characteristics of the residential school system that created conditions for the abuses to occur.

23. What do you think are some of the lasting effects of residential schooling on Indigenous people?

24. What do you think are the lasting effects on non-Indigenous people?