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# When We Were Alone



## Synopsis

When a young girl helps tend to her grandmother's garden, she begins to notice things that make her curious. Why does her grandmother have long braided hair and beautifully colored clothing? Why does she speak another language and spend so much time with her family? As she asks her grandmother about these things, she is told about life in a residential school a long time ago, where all of these things were taken away. *When We Were Alone* is a story about a difficult time in history and, ultimately, one of empowerment and strength.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 24 pages

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Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

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Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 3

## Customer Reviews

"*When We Were Alone* is rare. It is exquisite and stunning, for the power conveyed by the words Robertson wrote, and for the illustrations that Flett created. I highly recommend it." - Debbie Reese, *American Indians in Children's Literature*. "Robertson handles a delicate task here admirably well: explaining residential schools, that shameful legacy, and making them understandable to small children. It's a dark history, and the author doesn't disguise that, but he wisely focuses the grandmother's tale on how, season by season, the students use creativity, imagination, and patience to retain their sense of identity. A beautifully quiet, bold strength arises from the continued refrain "When we were alone" and in how the children insisted on being themselves. Flett's gorgeous, skillful illustrations have a flattened, faux

naÃ ve feel to them, like construction paper collage, a style that works perfectlyÂ with the story. She nicely contrasts the schoolâ™s dull browns and grays with the riotous colors surrounding NÃ kom andÂ gets much expression from her simple silhouettes. Spare, poetic, and moving, this Cree heritage story makes a powerful impression." - Kirkus Reviews "Beautiful, painful, and shining with truth and dignity." - Richard Van Camp "Julieâ™s Flettâ™s illustrations are impeccable. The contrast between the colourful and bleak illustrations perfectly match the narrative. The relatively small size of the book makes it perfect for sharing with younger children. When We Were Alone addresses the topic of residential schools and, just as importantly, aspects of Cree culture and language. There is such gentleness about When We Were Alone that makes it an appropriate book for the even youngest of readers. Simply put, this is a much-needed book. Highly Recommended." - Dr. Kristen Ferguson, CM Magazine "A quiet storyâ | of love and resistance.â | Flettâ™s collage illustrations, with their simplicity and earthy colors, are soulful and gentleâ |.Â All readers will connect with how NÃ kom lives in celebration of colors, her long hair, her language, and, most of all, her family. - The Horn Book Magazine, a starred review "Flett's spring palette of warm blues and browns punctuated with splashes of red contrasts the loving moments between grandmother and granddaughter with stark winter whites and grays depicting boarding school life. The repetitive structure creates a predictable narrative; together the illustrations and Robertson's child-centred text make the boarding school experience accessible to a young audience without glossing over its harshness. Verdict: a poignant family story covering a part of history too often missing from library collections. - Chelsea Couillard-Smith, Hennepin County Library, MN "Robertson's text moves between the present and the past, the girl's questions and NÃ kom's memories, which deepen and intensify the quiet, powerful way she lives out her own culture, day by day, in the present. A beautifully rendered story of resistance and love, this is made all the more luminous by Flett's art - not just by flashes of fuchsia or scarlet among ochre grasses, but by her precisely observed images of the compact bodies of the uniformed children, bowed beneath the weight of the scissors, or lovingly tending each other's hair. Highly recommended. - Deirdre Baker, Toronto Star "Done simply, but with devastating clearness this is the story of a womanÂ telling her granddaughter of her timeÂ inÂ one of the boarding schools to which Canadian First Nation children were taken. She tells of the brutal methods usedÂ to strip them of their own cultures and how they managed to quietly, but firmly resist this. The lovely illustrations further the powerful emotional clout of this important book." - Monica Edinger, Educating Alice

A picture book about the strength of family.

Sensitively written book that doesn't soften the upsetting ways that children were treated, but chooses to center their ingenuity and survival skills. It's always tricky to write about traumatic experiences -- you don't want to pretend that they have no effect on children and therefore weren't that bad, but at the same time you want to honor the resilience that people do have. You know your own child best but this could be suitable for children as young as 6. Beautiful illustrations, poetic writing.

Absolutely a must buy in any picture book collection for any age.

If you are looking for a book that can show aspects of the dark history of residential schools in a way that really young kids can read, understand and relate to, this is it. As I read that first sentence, I realize what an impossible sounding task this is, but David Alexander Robertson pulls it off. Every school in Canada should have this book, and perhaps every school in the US as well.

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