

## TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR

# PRAIRIE FIRE!

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*Prairie Fire!* is set in Manitoba in 1876. This was a time of great changes in the new Canadian province. Surveyors drew lines across the prairie dividing the land into farms, and settlers from Ontario began homesteading this rich farm land, turning it into some of the most productive farms in the country. But farming in Manitoba displaced the Métis people who had lived on this land for decades. Métis society was based on hunting and trading. They had been great buffalo hunters and now that the buffalo had disappeared, and homesteaders occupied their land, the Métis way of life was threatened. This is the basis of the conflict described in *Prairie Fire!*

These are some ideas for stimulating classroom discussion and student projects based on the novel.

### THE NOVEL

- Why is Peggy Bains determined to plough the land as quickly as possible after the family arrives at their homestead?
- The Bains family finds themselves caught between the Métis and the other settlers from Ontario. Why?
- In *Prairie Fire!* all of the members of the family are required to work and do their chores. Why was it so important that all of the children contribute their labour to the family's farming efforts?
- How did the crisis of the prairie fire bring the Métis and the settlers together?

### CANADIAN HISTORY

- The Bains family travel from Ontario to Manitoba via the United States. Why did they take that route and not travel through Canada?
- Why did the Métis feel they were a unique people, different than other Canadians?
- There were two Métis rebellions, one in 1870 and the second in 1885. Who was the leader of the Métis and what were the Métis objectives?
- The early settlers on the prairies were mainly from Ontario, but later people from all over North America and Europe homesteaded in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Describe this settlement.

### GEOGRAPHY

- Research prairie fires explaining why they started, how they burned everything in their path and what could bring them to a halt. Why do we not have fires like this today?
- Much of the prairie land is deep, rich soil, perfect for farming. How was that soil formed?
- On the prairies trees only grow along the waterways and the vegetation on the rest of the land grass. What are the climatic conditions that create prairies like this in Western Canada?
- The buffalo were native to the prairie grasslands. Why are these types of lands a perfect environment for the buffalo?

### SPECIAL PROJECTS

- In *Prairie Fire!* the Bains family build a sod house for themselves. Describe how this was done and the advantages and disadvantages of a sod house.

- The Métis spoke a language that was a mixture of French and Cree. What does the language tell about the history and culture of the Métis people?
- In the novel some of the English speaking settlers are described as Orangemen. Who were the Orangemen, what is their history and why were they intolerant of the Métis?
- Research the life of Louis Riel. Do you think he was a great leader of his people or a traitor to Canada?