

KINIKINIK

A TREATY PLAY BY IAN ROSS



SYNOPSIS:

Kinikunik is a short instructive piece of theatre that seeks to enlighten those who experience it. Commissioned by the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba (TRCM), Governor General Award winning playwright, Ian Ross created the piece which serves to educate and share experiences relative to Treaty and the Treaty relationship. The story and issues are explored through three main characters who act as guides to those who view Kinikunik.

Written for all ages with a focus on a youthful audience; Kinikunik serves as an adaptable tool for exploration of themes surrounding Treaties. Designed to be performed by young actors who may not have considerable experience, as well as professionals, adaptability is one of the strength's of Kinikunik so that it may reach as many people as possible. Ultimately, the message of *Kinikunik* lies in the fact that 'We Are All Treaty People'.



Three characters set the scene, TURTLE, WOLF and BEAVER. They talk directly to the audience and introduce themselves.

TURTLE We're here to share with you today;
BEAVER A bit of the past;
WOLF The present;
TURTLE And the future.
BEAVER We'll talk about history,
WOLF And don't forget the stories.
BEAVER Hey! I was supposed to say that part!
WOLF Just chill; easy, easy.
BEAVER Whatever. You're such a biter.
TURTLE I think we'd better start.

TURTLE tosses a small bag to WOLF and BEAVER. TURTLE then places a small red willow on the ground. They all begin planting seeds. It is all very pleasant. As they plant, WOLF and BEAVER notice a small red willow; they both reach for it at the same time. They look at each other and then begin to tug at the willow. Improvise a fight with words of "That's mine." "No it isn't." etc...

TURTLE Guys. Guys. Stop. Please. Let me have the willow.

WOLF and BEAVER tug at the willow a bit more. TURTLE slowly puts her hand on the willow. They stop tugging. TURTLE tries to take the willow from both of them. At first, it seems as if they will release it, but then they start tugging at it again. All three are pulling at the willow.

TURTLE Guys. Guys.

WOLF Let go.

BEAVER You let go.

With a massive show of strength TURTLE pulls the willow away from both of them.

BEAVER
& WOLF Hey. Give that back. It's mine.

BEAVER and WOLF look at each other.

WOLF No it isn't.

BEAVER Yes.

TURTLE (Yelling) Quiet. That's better. Sit down now. Please.

BEAVER and WOLF sit.

TURTLE Do you know what this is you're fighting over?

WOLF A stick?

BEAVER A stick. Duh. That's a branch.

WOLF Like Indian Affairs?

BEAVER What?

WOLF They're a branch of the government right? Is that what you mean?

BEAVER No. A branch. Like a stick.

TURTLE It's part of a willow. Let me tell you a story about what comes from this willow. Long ago, not far from where we are now, there were millions of buffalo. The buffalo



were very important. They provided food, shelter; even safety. For as long as there were buffalo, the people who depended upon them could survive.

WOLF Hold on. Hold on. What time period are we talking about right now?

TURTLE Why do you need to know what time period we're talking about?

WOLF Well, it was very different then from the time we're in now right?

TURTLE Yes. No one knew what global warming was.

BEAVER Or iPods. iPhones. iTunes. Apple.

WOLF People knew what apples were. Those were invented already.

BEAVER I meant the computer.

TURTLE Yes. Things were very different. Especially for the Ancestors of everyone here right now. There were no phones or cars or anything.

WOLF No cars? How did people get to the store?

TURTLE Well the telephone was about to be invented. But there were light bulbs. Phonographs.

WOLF Phonograph? What's that?

BEAVER It's like a cassette tape.

TURTLE Not exactly. It's a record player.

WOLF Record player? What's a record?

BEAVER It's something you get if you're bad.

- TURTLE No, no. It's what people used to listen to music. DJs still use them. That's where we get (TURTLE does her best to make a scratchy DJ sound).
- WOLF Okay, don't do that again.
- BEAVER Yeah. Please.
- TURTLE On with the story. The people who lived in this time did things differently. Food came from what was hunted, grown or gathered. Medicine came from plants and spiritual ceremonies practiced by the people and their healers. Long, long, long ago, when people and animals walked the earth together in harmony, Manitou took the form of a very big bird and our Creator found a spot that would be very important to Native people. So important that it would be sacred. Do you know what sacred means?
- BEAVER Sure.
- TURTLE What then?
- BEAVER It's like respect.
- TURTLE Yes. The utmost respect. And belief. Well, Manitou came down to the earth and landed upon a huge piece of rock that stuck out from the prairie around it. Not that it was high, but it was not covered in grass and the rock that was there was red. Manitou called his children to him. The Creator broke off a piece of this stone he had landed upon, and formed it, worked it, made it into a pipe and smoked it. He then told the people, whom he loved very much, that this stone which made the pipe was them—they were made from it—and that when they smoked the pipe good things would come to the people. They could find peace and harmony. Good story?
- BEAVER Yes. Very good.

- WOLF Well...
- BEAVER Oh come on. How come you always got to be so down about everything? Geez.
- TURTLE Was there something you didn't like about the story?
- WOLF Okay, so look. Check this out. So this story came from long ago. And the pipe was given to Native people. And the people who lived here from long ago and their kids and kids and kids of kids and so on, those people had a good way of living.
- TURTLE I think so.
- WOLF So then what happened?
- TURTLE Well...things changed.
- WOLF Well of course they changed. Look around you.
- BEAVER Yeah, what happened?
- TURTLE Well...other people came.
- BEAVER Other people?
- TURTLE Yes.
- WOLF From where?
- TURTLE Well at that time, they came from a continent called Europe. But today they come from all over the world.
- WOLF But...what happened to the kids of the kids of the kids of the people who were here before the other people came?
- TURTLE You see them around you. Every day.
- BEAVER I think he means how come they aren't living the same? Like hunting the buffalo and stuff. Right?

- TURTLE That's not easy to answer. There are many reasons and much history. Way more history than we can show or tell in the time we have here.
- WOLF So did things change right away? Or was it more kind of slow and gradual and one day the kids of the kids of the kids woke up and were like, whoa! Dude, where's my buffalo?
- TURTLE It was a bit of both.
- BEAVER What happened when they met?
- TURTLE What do you think happened?

WOLF becomes a EUROPEAN. BEAVER an ABORIGINAL.

- WOLF It was probably all like... "Sup?"
- BEAVER "Yo."
- WOLF "I'm not very good at crackin' the egg. You know what I'm sayin'?"
- BEAVER "For sure. Just flip the scrip and its majestic."
- TURTLE Hold it, hold it. That's not the way it happened.
- WOLF It could've been.
- TURTLE I don't think so.
- BEAVER Well, the intention's the same.
- TURTLE Is it? Do you think they got along like this when they first met?
- WOLF No. It was probably all, like...

WOLF raises his hand.

WOLF "How."

TURTLE No. No. No.

BEAVER Well, they obviously kind of got along because everyone's still here right?

TURTLE Not everyone. There were many that died. Some Nations are gone. Completely.

WOLF What do you mean? Like one day China's there and then the next it's not? That doesn't make any sense.

TURTLE Kind of like that. But imagine if all the people in China disappeared.

BEAVER That's kind of ridiculous. That's like 1,330,044,605 people.

TURTLE Well, when I say some of these Nations that used to be here are gone now, I'm talking about the people. Not the land. The land was always here and will always be here, long after we're gone too. But can you imagine all the people in a country disappearing?

BEAVER Not really. That's a bit too scary.

WOLF I can imagine that; 'cause that's what happened right?

TURTLE Yes.

WOLF And I guess...

TURTLE You guess what?

WOLF I guess there's no way to bring them back. Those Nations that are gone I mean.

TURTLE Not really.

- BEAVER Why couldn't they save them?
- TURTLE Well they did actually. Some of the people you see around us belong to Nations.
- WOLF What kind of Nations?
- TURTLE First Nations.
- BEAVER
& WOLF First Nations.
- BEAVER I like the sound of that.
- WOLF Me too. Like, it means they were first. Kind of like when you post a comment on a website and you're the first one and you type "FIRST". That's so cool.
- BEAVER So how did these First Nations survive? And if they're the First Nations then who are the second and third Nations?
- TURTLE Well, we all live in a larger Nation we call Canada. And Canada was formed as a Nation long after several other Nations had already been in existence for thousands of years. Right here.
- BEAVER Cool.
- WOLF Wait. Wait. All this Nation talk, so then a Nation is just a bunch of people?
- TURTLE Let me put it to you this way; Nations are expressions of a shared culture, language and beliefs that unite people in a common bond. I know a place not too far from where we are now where these people from others Nations and the First Nations met for the first time.
- BEAVER Cool.

- WOLF What was it like?
- TURTLE All we can do is imagine really. No one's alive who was there.
- WOLF It wasn't that long ago.
- TURTLE In the big scheme of things, no, but it was long ago enough that the people who were there aren't here anymore.
- BEAVER So then how do we know this even happened?
- TURTLE Well, the people who were there told others and they told others and so on.
- WOLF Oh yeah, yeah. I've heard of that. That's the oral hygiene.
- BEAVER I think you mean "oral history".
- WOLF No. That's brushing your teeth and stuff. I'm talking about when someone tells a story and keeps telling it.
- TURTLE You're a bit confused, but that's okay. When these groups of people met for the first time they were confused as well.
- BEAVER Why?
- TURTLE Probably because they didn't quite know who the others were, or what they wanted. They also looked different from one another. Different shades of skin and different clothes.
- WOLF Did they shake hands?

WOLF offers his hand to BEAVER. BEAVER looks at it.

TURTLE Maybe that was offered, but what if you don't know

what that means?

WOLF It means we're cool. It's friendly.

TURTLE You know that, but what if the person you're extending your hand to doesn't know that. What if your culture never had that gesture?

WOLF Then how do you say hello?

BEAVER There are many ways of doing something. Right?

TURTLE Absolutely.

WOLF Then how do you ever make a deal?

TURTLE There are many ways of doing that as well.

WOLF Like?

TURTLE You can use words.

BEAVER Like, I promise if you let me have my branch you can play with it later.

WOLF No. I don't believe you. That's my stick.

BEAVER But I'm promising.

WOLF So. You're just saying that, it doesn't mean you're gonna do it.

BEAVER If I say I'm going to do something, I do it.

WOLF Well, how about if I promise the same thing to you.

BEAVER No. You won't do it.

WOLF Sure I will.

BEAVER No you won't. You never keep your promises.

- WOLF This saying words thing doesn't seem to work very well.
- TURTLE Sometimes it depends on your culture. For First Nations people sometimes your word was all that was needed. It was good enough.
- WOLF Okay, but what if you wanted to make extra sure that someone would keep their word.
- TURTLE There were ways of doing that too. Sometimes people got married.
- BEAVER What?
- WOLF That seems a bit extreme. I don't want to have to marry everybody I make an agreement with. People would be getting married all over the place. I do not want to have to marry someone I don't even like. Oh wait. That happens all the time, eh?
- TURTLE You're starting to see how difficult it is to make sure a promise is kept for some people.
- BEAVER People should just do what they agree to.
- WOLF Yeah. Then there'd be no problems in the world at all.
- TURTLE Sadly, people don't always do what they say. Or agree to.
- WOLF Hey, I know.
- TURTLE Yes?
- WOLF What if you write it down? What if, say I agree to let her use the stick for a certain pre-agreed to amount of time, pursuant to certain clauses and sections of said agreement that would enable her fair use of the stick, but only as deemed fit by mutually agreed to terms and only for a said period of time as is deemed

reasonable by the signatories, et cetera, et cetera. I could write it all up; you'd just have to sign it.

BEAVER What? Wait. What did he just say?

TURTLE Writing it down is one way to ensure an agreement, but you see the problem in that too don't you?

WOLF What's wrong with it? It made perfect sense to me.

BEAVER But it didn't make any sense to me.

WOLF gets frustrated and throws up his hands and walks about.

WOLF We're not getting anywhere. I feel like I'm talking to the wall. We just keep going around and around.

BEAVER Well maybe if you used language I understood too.

WOLF Look, this is a real simple thing. Why don't you get it? Maybe if I talked slower.

BEAVER I'm not stupid. What if we agree to share the willow?

WOLF Not good enough.

BEAVER Why not?

WOLF I need some kind of assurance. A guarantee if you will.

BEAVER Fine.

WOLF Sweet. I'll draft the agreement and you can sign it.

BEAVER Wait. What's this "I", we should do it together.

WOLF Okay fine, fine.

TURTLE This is good. You're figuring things out for yourselves.

WOLF Maybe, but it's exhausting.

- BEAVER Yeah. Why is it so hard? Was it this hard for the First Nations and the Europeans?
- WOLF Yeah, what happened between those two anyway? How did they figure this all out?
- BEAVER Yeah. What did they do?
- TURTLE They came to an agreement. A Treaty.
- WOLF What's that?
- BEAVER Duh. It's an agreement.
- WOLF I know that, she just told us, but what kind of agreement?
- TURTLE Good question. A Treaty is an agreement or contract that's been negotiated between sovereign Nations, countries or parties.
- WOLF Explain sovereign again.
- TURTLE Independent.
- BEAVER There's something I don't get here.
- TURTLE What's that?
- BEAVER Shouldn't the Treaty you make be good for both sides?
- TURTLE You would hope so.
- BEAVER But that didn't happen here.
- TURTLE Not exactly.
- BEAVER That's so unfair.
- WOLF Hey, life's not fair, right? That's what I always hear people say. Life's not fair.

- TURTLE Maybe that's not how you should look at it.
- BEAVER Wait a minute. What if we make this agreement and he thinks it means one thing and I think it means something else?
- TURTLE Do you have an example?
- BEAVER Well, say my relatives call me and say, "Can I stay at your place for a little bit?" And I say "Sure". I think okay, they come over and they are going to stay for a couple of days, which is fine. But then they end up staying a couple of months.
- TURTLE When people don't speak the same language or even see the world the same way it can be hard figuring out a way to find what you both need.
- BEAVER This must have been so hard. Who helped these people figure it all out?
- TURTLE The First Nations believed Manitou helped guide them in the Treaties.
- BEAVER Manitou? Like God. Cool.
- WOLF Can I have my stick now please?
- BEAVER That's my branch.
- WOLF Maybe. But life's not fair. And I just figured something out. Even if I make a Treaty with her about the stick, I may not have to live up to what I agree to. Right?
- TURTLE You can do what you like, but is that a good way to behave?

WOLF pauses.

WOLF I guess not.

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- BEAVER No. It isn't.
- WOLF Oh man. This is so frustrating. I really want that stick.
- BEAVER But, so do I.
- WOLF We can't both have it.
- TURTLE You could if you shared.
- BEAVER That's what I said earlier. Share it with me.
- WOLF I don't want to share.
- BEAVER Then we're never going to get anywhere. And nobody gets to have it.
- WOLF Help us out here.
- TURTLE There's only one way you're going to figure this out.
- BEAVER What is it? Tell us.
- TURTLE It's radical.
- WOLF That's okay, I like radical. I've even been called radical.
- TURTLE It might be hard work.
- BEAVER That's okay, we can work hard.
- TURTLE You might even get killed.
- WOLF Really?
- TURTLE No, not really.
- BEAVER What is it already? What do we have to do?
- TURTLE You have to...change the way you see yourselves.
- WOLF Huh?

BEAVER How do we do that?

TURTLE Let's go back in history a little bit.

WOLF makes a snoring sound.

WOLF Not this again.

TURTLE Bear with me. Remember our willow?

WOLF Kind of hard to forget.

TURTLE Why do you want it so badly?

WOLF and BEAVER look at each other.

WOLF You know what?

BEAVER What?

WOLF That's a good question.

BEAVER Yeah.

WOLF I don't know.

BEAVER Me either. Maybe because he wanted it so badly.

TURTLE Sometimes people will do anything to get something and they forget why they wanted it in the first place. Or even how to share. This willow can be used as medicine. Remember the story I told you about the pipe?

BEAVER Yes.

TURTLE How Manitou said that the First Nations people were made of the same stuff as the pipe?

WOLF Yes.

- TURTLE What is a smoking pipe used for?
- WOLF Smoking?
- TURTLE Yes, but not smoking in a way that's abuse, but smoking as a form of prayer. Offering.
- BEAVER Ohhh.
- TURTLE And what was sometimes used along with the tobacco for the pipe, or instead of, if there was no tobacco available was the medicine that came from this willow.
- WOLF Ahhh.
- TURTLE When the First Nations people and the Europeans first came to their agreements and Treaties, pipes were used. The ceremony of the pipe was for communicating with spirits and even each other. We could make known what we wanted and needed.
- BEAVER I like that.
- WOLF Does this stuff have a name? This medicine.
- TURTLE Kinikinik.
- WOLF Kinikinik.
- TURTLE Let me tell you something about that word. When you write it down in the language of English it's what's called a palindrome.
- WOLF A pala whaty?
- BEAVER A palindrome. I heard of that. That's a word that's the same backwards and forwards right?
- TURTLE Yes. If you read it, it's the same both ways.
- WOLF Like ABBA?

- TURTLE Yes.
- BEAVER Or racecar.
- TURTLE It can be phrases too.
- BEAVER Yo, banana boy.
- WOLF No lemon, no melon.
- TURTLE Never even.
- WOLF Okay, that's cool. These words are like circles. They go around. But get back to this Kinikinik.
- TURTLE As I said, it was used in the pipe and it helps us communicate. When the Treaties were made between the First Nations and Europeans the pipe was there and so were the medicines.
- BEAVER Then how come things haven't always worked out with the Treaties?
- TURTLE If all people got along there would be no reason to have Treaties in the first place.
- WOLF I thought you said we had to see ourselves differently for this to work.
- TURTLE I did.
- WOLF Well how am I supposed to see myself differently?
- TURTLE It's not just you. It's everybody who's a part of the Treaties and the people who made them.
- BEAVER The kids of the kids of the kids.
- TURTLE And even those who aren't kids of the kids, but who come to live in the Nation that was created. Kinikinik is now considered a word in English, but it's really a word from the language of one of the First Nations.

- BEAVER What does it mean?
- TURTLE “That which is mixed.”
- WOLF That which is mixed. Because it was mixed with tobacco?
- TURTLE Yes. But it’s a lesson for us today. Everyone who walks on this part of the earth called Canada are mixed together.
- BEAVER From different lands.
- WOLF Different languages.
- TURTLE Different cultures. But we all belong to the Treaties which were made.
- WOLF All of us?
- TURTLE Yes.
- BEAVER We Are All Treaty People!
- WOLF But what if someone doesn’t see themselves that way?
- TURTLE That’s where you have to start seeing yourself differently.
- BEAVER That might be hard for some people.
- TURTLE Perhaps. But anything that’s worth it is hard.
- WOLF So do you think if people see themselves differently things will start to change?
- TURTLE What do you think?
- BEAVER Absolutely.
- WOLF Yes.

TURTLE holds out the willow.

WOLF She can have it.
BEAVER No, that's okay.
WOLF No, no. Really.
BEAVER No, really, it's okay.
WOLF I insist. You take it.
BEAVER No, you take it.
TURTLE Ahem.
BEAVER Let's share.
WOLF Good idea.
TURTLE That's just like Canada.
WOLF What's just like Canada?
TURTLE What he just said.
BEAVER A good idea?
TURTLE Exactly.



STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Who is your favourite character in Kinikinik? Why?
2. Give some specific examples of new facts/ideas you have learned from Kinikinik.
3. What did you learn about the Treaties and the Treaty relationship from Kinikinik? Give some examples.
4. How can we (First Nations and Canadians) enhance the Treaty relationship? Use your own ideas and examples from Kinikinik.
5. What does Treaty mean to you?
6. What does the phrase 'We Are All Treaty People' mean to you?



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