



By
Tomson Highway

Illustrated by
Leo Yerxa

ABOUT

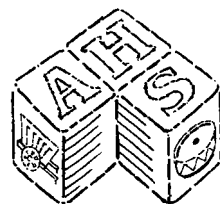
Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities

Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) is a preschool program funded by Health Canada for First Nations, Inuit and Metis children and their families living in urban centres and large Northern communities. AHS projects provide comprehensive experiences that prepare young children for their school years by meeting their spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical needs.

There are 114 AHS sites across the country. Approximately 3,500 children are enrolled each year. Projects are locally designed and controlled and administered by local non-profit Aboriginal organizations. AHS directly involves parents and the community in the management and operation of projects.

Aboriginal Head Start (Urban/Northern) Program
Tunney's Pasture
Jeanne Mance Building, A.L#: 1909C2
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0K9

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**ABORIGINAL
HEAD
START
INITIATIVE**



**JOHNNY
NATIONAL,
Super Hero**

ABOUT

Johnny National, Super Hero

By Tomson Highway
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Johnny National, Super Hero is a fictional story about Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities and the people and communities participating in the program.

The story celebrates and highlights the accomplishments of the program through storytelling, a traditional teaching and communication approach. This innovative project celebrates the success that the Aboriginal Head Start (Urban/Northern) Program is witnessing amongst its participants.



Why Was *Johnny National, Super Hero* Written?

Over the past several years there has been a growth in research approaches that use various forms of the arts to collect and analyse data. Poetry, theatre and fiction, as is used in the case of *Johnny National, Super Hero*, can be used to blend the experiences of many participants into a single character and family. This story is a piece of fiction based on Mr. Highway's experience visiting and hearing stories about AHS sites and participants through which we can examine the lived experience of some participants in the program. *Johnny National, Super Hero* profiles Aboriginal Head Start (Urban/Northern) in a dimension that complements and enhances more quantitative process evaluation reports such as *Children Making A Community Whole: A Review of Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities*.



Aboriginal Head Start program staff may wish to use the story, and the discussion questions below, to discuss the AHS experience with parents of young children. We are sure that this story will generate interesting discussion, and we invite you to consider the following:

Does the story help you to understand the Aboriginal Head Start Program? How?

What do you think and feel about the Aboriginal people in the story?

How would you describe a typical Aboriginal Head Start family? Do Dorothy and Johnny National fit this profile?

Dorothy National and her family struggle with losing their cultural identity while living in the city (for example, by not speaking Cree). How do you feel about the way this is described in the story? Have you or people you know had a similar experience?

Did you identify with any characters in the story? How?

Was reading the story an enjoyable experience for you?

Please feel free to send your comments to the AHS National Office at the address on the back of this Reader's Guide.

ABOUT

THE AUTHOR Tomson Highway

Tomson Highway is a Cree, born on a trapline at Brochet, in Northern Manitoba. He is the celebrated author of the award winning plays *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*. His first novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, published in 1998, was nominated for the Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award and CBA Libris Fiction Book of the Year Award. He has three honorary degrees and is a Member of the Order of Canada. He was the recipient of an Aboriginal Achievement Award in 2001 in recognition of his contributions in Art and Culture. Artistic producer Martin Bragg observes: "Tomson is not only a role model and inspiration for the Native community, he is a Canadian who has inspired us all to challenge ourselves both as artists and human beings." Tomson Highway lives in Toronto.

Tomson Highway's work is celebratory, magical, witty, sad and humorous. In *Johnny National*, he blends his knowledge of the harsh reality of one who has lived both the northern rural and urban experience of Aboriginal people with his experience learning about Aboriginal Head Start projects in urban and northern communities.