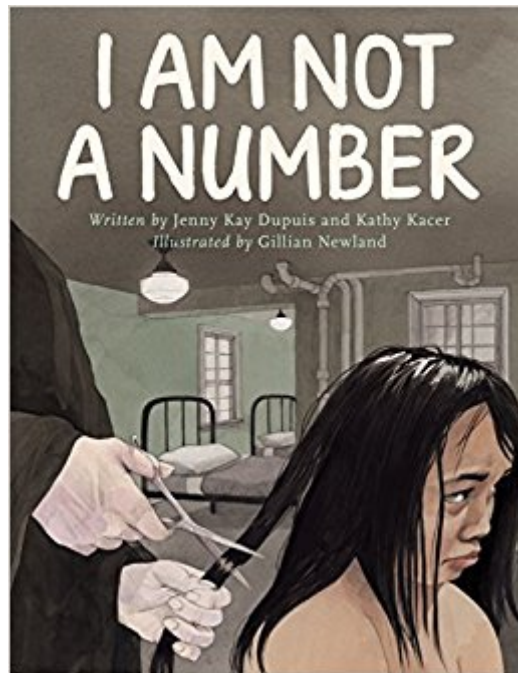




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# I Am Not A Number



## Synopsis

When Irene is removed from her First Nations family to live in a residential school, she is confused, frightened and terribly homesick. She tries to remember who she is and where she came from despite being told to do otherwise. When she goes home for summer holidays, her parents decide never to send her away again, but where will she hide and what will happen when her parents disobey the law?

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #433,889 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #39 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Canada](#) #60 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Dysfunctional Relationships](#) #142 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Abuse](#)

Age Range: 7 - 11 years

Grade Level: 3 - 6

## Customer Reviews

Gr 4-6 • A spotlight on the injustice of Canada's residential school program based on Dupuis's grandmother's childhood experience. The story begins in medias res: the front door is open, and a gruff white man is demanding that Irene Couchie's parents hand over their children—now "wards of the government." Couchie and her two brothers are taken from their home on Nipissing First Nation to attend a residential boarding school many miles away. Couchie learns that names are not allowed at this school; she becomes number 759. Subdued illustrations assist in setting the overall serious tone. The facial expressions of Couchie throughout the year bring the raw hopelessness of the situation to light. Many scenes are alarming; for example, Sister Mary is shown cutting a crying Couchie's hair off. After the kids return home for the summer,

Couchie's parents vow to hide their children from the government and the "Indian Agent" sent to recollect them. Back matter contains material on Canada's residential school system, which "educated" indigenous peoples, and the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission condemning the practice in 2015. Dupuis also provides more information about her grandmother. VERDICT Pair this recommended selection with Nicola I. Campbell's *Shi-shi-etko* for students learning about the boarding school system. —Amy Zembroski, *Indian Community School, Franklin, WI*

Residential and boarding school stories are hard to read, but they're vitally important... books like *I Am Not a Number* should be taught in schools in Canada, and the U.S., too. (Debbie Reese *American Indians in Children's Literature*) A moving glimpse into a not-very-long-past injustice. (Kirkus Reviews) It's important to teach children about true Canadian history, but it's not easy to talk about it in a way that children will understand. *I Am Not a Number* is perfect to get the conversation about residential schools started with your children. It opens the door for them to ask questions about the subject and the story is relatable in a way they can follow. (Residential School Magazine) This well done, empathetic historical book is highly recommended for all collections. (Booklist starred review) To any one looking for a book to teach children about the history of residential schools 'I Am Not A Number' is without hesitation a very powerful and historical teaching tool. (Anishinabek News) The personal relevance of the subject matter to Jenny Kay Dupuis comes through in the strong text she co-wrote with Kathy Kacer.... primary school teachers and librarians will find much here that they can work with. (CM: Canadian Review of Materials) The story never shies from the harsh treatment Irene endured, peaking dramatically when the children hide from the agent coming to collect them for a second school year. They were among the lucky ones whose parents took a stand and refused to return them. Most spreads feature a full page of first-person narrative opposite Newland's somber watercolors. An afterword discusses Canada's history with the residential school program (and recent government apologies for it) and provides additional details about her grandmother's life. (Publishers Weekly) Gillian Newland's sombre illustrations, done with a muted palette of greys, greens and browns, beautifully capture the written words.... This book is a moving look into an injustice that continues to have ramifications for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. (Canadian Children's Book News) Of special note is the author's ability to portray the devastating environment that Irene lived in, in a heartfelt and authentic way that is very much appropriate for the intended age... Few stories exist about the residential school system that are aimed at a younger age group, and this one is an

absolute must for classrooms and libraries. (Resource Links)[A] powerful teaching tool that brings a terrible part of Canada's history to light in a way that children can learn from and relate to. It is written in simple language and told in a way that will stimulate conversations about residential schools and the traumatic effects they have had on generations of First Nation families and communities. ... beautifully illustrated by Gillian Newland. She captures the somber mood of the school, the anguish of the children, the severity of the nuns and the desperation of the family. Students can easily empathize with Irene and her brothers as well as their parents as they try to imagine how they would feel or act in a similar situation. (Alberta Native News 2016-12-06)The story was captivatingly told.... I can't stress the importance of having these books in your library collection enough. They reflect accurately the experiences of many Native families and the history of many Native peoples (not just the ones in Canada). They can start conversations, albeit hard ones for us white teachers and parents, around the deep seated racism in our country and how that has played out over the years. They can also ensure that children are being exposed to this history. (At Home Librarian Blog 2016-11-14)With tenacious resolve and empathetic storytelling, [Jenny Kay Dupuis, Kathy Kacer, and Gillian Newland] reminds us perhaps more urgently than ever that 'there is still much work to be done.' (Book Dragon Blog)Gillian Newland's illustrations are a highly realistic, very evocative accompaniment to [the] text. They set the tone and establish the mood of the story.... [The book] raises such issues as child rights, parental rights, Canadian constitutional rights, and Indigenous rights. I Am Not a Number would be an excellent starting point for anyone pursuing these issues. (Deakin Review of Children's Literature)Endless cross-curricular connections can be made using this story. But the most powerful aspect of this book is that it will open a dialogue, one that Justice Murray Sinclair spoke of as head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a dialogue that needs to take place for reconciliation to happen. (ETFO Voice)

The way Native Americans have been treated in the past is something that needs to be taught to children now. It's not easy to read about. It is, however the facts. I am not a Number offers a valuable lesson in history in a simple and profound way. In I Am Not A Number, Irene's parents, like many Native parents, were coerced into giving up their children. In Canada, in 1928, Dupuis's grandmother, Irene Couchie Dupuis, was taken to a residential school in Canada. These were schools designed to "civilize" and convert Native children. When Irene arrives at the school and tells the nun (it is a mission school run by the Catholic Church) her name, she's told "We don't use names here. All students are known by numbers. You

are 759. Her hair, along with the other girls, is cut short. They are also punished for using their own language. When Irene and her friend speak in, Ojibwe, one of the nuns hits her with a wooden spoon, saying it's the devil's language." The nun then punishes Irene by filling up a bedpan with hot coals to burn Irene's hands and arms. This is indeed how the children at the schools were punished. Irene's story ends on a hopeful note. She and her brothers go home for the summer. When the agent shows up in the fall, the children hide in their dad's workshop. Irene's dad challenges the agent and says, "Call the police. Have me arrested," vowing that his children will never be taken away again. In the Afterword, Dupuis writes that her grandmother was only at the school for that one year because her father's resistance worked. She was able to stay home, with her family. The lesson is, resistance works against injustice. In the back of the book Dupuis and Kacer provide historical facts and information about the residential school system, specifically the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (the TRC) released in 2015. The history of the US and Canada is complex and often painful. However, *I am Not a Number* provides a valuable history lesson with straight forward text and enhanced by beautiful illustrations. I highly recommend this read aloud book for children 6 years and older.

Based on the true story of the author's grandmother, this picture book captures the experience of First Nations people in Canada being sent to boarding schools. Under threat of fines and jail time, First Nation parents were forced to give their children up to the government. When Irene is taken to her new home, she tries to never forget her real home, her parents and their way of life. Irene is called only by a number at the school and told to scrub the brown off of her skin. Her hair is cut off. She is punished when she speaks her native language by a nun burning her hands. Irene is eventually allowed to return home for the summer, where she continues to have nightmares of her time at school. Finally, her parents decide to hide the children rather than sending them back. This is not a picture book for preschoolers, rather it is ideal for elementary-aged children closer in age to 8-year-old Irene in the story. The horrific treatment of First Nation children is shown with real clarity. The use of Irene's own voice to tell the story makes it personal and much more painful. While there is a lot of text on the pages, the book reads well and the text is straightforward and necessary to explain the loss of culture and the darkness of the boarding schools. The illustrations by Newland are almost like painted photographs. They show the family losing their children, the stern nuns, and the punishment scene is carefully captured afterwards in terms of pain and emotion rather than depicting the punishment itself. There is a feeling of

constraint and loss in the images of the boarding school and then freedom when the children return home. A powerful look at Canadian history and First Nation children, this book would work well paired with *When I Was Eight* by Christy Jordan-Fenton. Appropriate for ages 7-10.

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