

## Grade 6 English Language Arts

Week of March 8 – March 12

### Lesson 1: I Lost My Talk



In this workshop, you will apply your "Critical Thinking Competencies" to analyze evidence, gather information, and make choices for your essay based on Rita Joe's poem, *I Lost my Talk*, and the related *Rita Joe National Song Project*.

This poem by Rita Joe has inspired young Canadians to find their voices. Based on the words in the poem, who do you think Rita Joe might be? What is the gist? Who is the "you" in the poem?

#### **I Lost My Talk by Rita Joe**

*I lost my talk  
The talk you took away.  
When I was a little girl  
At Shubenacadie school.*

*You snatched it away:  
I speak like you  
I think like you  
I create like you  
The scrambled ballad, about my word.*

*Two ways I talk  
Both ways I say,  
Your way is more powerful.*

*So gently I offer my hand and ask,  
Let me find my talk  
So I can teach you about me.*

(Source: <https://nac-cna.ca/en/ritajoesong>)

Can you predict anything about the author and what the message may really be?

**Rita Joe**, (March 15, 1932 – March 20, 2007) was a **Mi'kmaw poet and songwriter** from Nova Scotia. Over her lifetime she published seven books, including *I Lost My Talk*. The poem, *I Lost My Talk*, reflects on her experiences at the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School that tried to rid her of her language and culture.

### What is a residential school?

Rita Joe, like many Indigenous children, attended a residential school; she was taken away from her community and forced to adopt European culture. She was one of few that chose to attend – most young Indigenous children were taken away from their families and forced to attend.

The treatment of many children in “Indian Residential Schools” was humiliating and taught them to feel unequal and ashamed. They were not allowed to speak their languages or practice their own cultures and beliefs. They were treated poorly.



These residential schools operated in Canada for over 100 years, and this has had a HUGE negative impact on Indigenous peoples and culture. Indigenous peoples are still trying to recover from this abuse and to regain their culture.

### Order of Canada



Through her writing and influence, Rita Joe did not give up hope that treatment of Indigenous people in Canada could improve and she wrote her poems of protest and hope. Her wish is beginning to come true. Canada is beginning to recognize and educate people about our negative legacies and historical discrimination.

In 1989, in recognition of her efforts, Rita Joe was made a Member of the Order of Canada, an award for Canadians who make a major difference to Canada through lifelong contributions. Rita Joe's poems of protest and hope contributed to our developing understanding of historical wrongs done to Indigenous people in Canada.

**Read the poem again and annotate it by writing a sentence beside each stanza that explains what you think Rita Joe is trying to say about what happened to Indigenous peoples. How does the message change in the last stanza?**

## **Rita Joe and Residential Schools**

Read the poem again and annotate it by writing a sentence beside each stanza that explains what you think Rita Joe is trying to say about what happened to Indigenous peoples. How does the message change in the last stanza?

### "I Lost My Talk" by Rita Joe

I lost my talk

The talk you took away. When I was a little girl At Shubenacadie school.

You snatched it away: I speak like you

I think like you

I create like you

The scrambled ballad, about my word.

Two ways I talk

Both ways I say,

Your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask,

Let me find my talk.