

Celeste Dugas, TTS34 (a series of short-answer reflections)

“Three years into High School, I knew my curiosity and need to reflect were not being fulfilled. I applied to The Traveling School and lived its experiential learning program through Southern Africa. As the only international student whose first language was not English, I was challenged by the high academic expectations. My desire to produce perfect work kept me up working late, falling asleep headlight on in my tent.

I realized that pushing through to get more done was not healthy. I refocused on allowing space for my emotions and listened to my body. I adjusted my habits and found an energetic, joyful and centered mood which actually made me more productive.

Upon returning, I faced various reintegration approaches from teachers. Even though I studied hours every day, my grades dropped. My ability to be gentle with myself eased my anxiety and helped me persevere through completing my school year.”

“The return from my semester abroad left me aching to find the best next step. My curiosity had been rekindled as I had found my place in the Traveling School’s community which perceived education as a continuous process of personal growth connecting the environment, the students, and the classroom subject. I started looking on the internet for programs which similarly valued learning through openly engaging with difference, and found UWC.”

“Core History of Quebec and Canada is taught in Quebec’s third year of high school program. This course is meant to ground us in the political story of our country. I found that something essential was missing as the course was taught solely from settlers’ point of view. The few random facts we learned about the Indigenous people of Canada excluded them from the story.

We studied South African history in my semester abroad. The story was presented to us as an evolution leading to today’s systems, structures and issues. We had to engage with modern society in order to unravel its’ past and did so through meeting locals, people who had lived the change and leaders of movements. This led us to reflect on divergent interpretations of same events. I understood how history might be ‘whitewashed’ and how this may apply to Canada.

This September, a 37 years-old Atikamekw woman named Joyce Echaquan filmed herself lying in a hospital bed in Joliette, Quebec, receiving racist comments from a nurse. Mrs. Echaquan is clearly in physical distress as she desperately repeats that she was over drugged. This was a few hours prior to her death in that same hospital.

Repetitive incidents of systemic racism, such as police brutality or unequal access to services, bear witness to Quebec's failure in facing the issue.

This problem is directly linked to teaching History from the perspective of the settler.

Students around me lack the tools to respect and engage with native culture as having barely any knowledge of Indigenous people's worldviews and perspectives. If young Québécois don't understand that colonialism is at the base of our inter-cultural relations and the root of systemic racism, they cannot be equipped to undo it.

Telling Canadian history in a way which develops student's critical thinking skills, more specifically, should start as understanding history as perspectives to investigate and question rather than given facts. History should be taught as a way to contextualize today's issues instead of as a series of facts frozen in time, with no consequences. This will help us consider the evolution of social issues and undertake meaningful reconciliation.

Education is the most powerful tool for change. What can we expect from future generations if we don't empower them to question mistakes of the past?"