

First Prize Winner Grades 5-8:

Student: Marlon Breakhouse – Grade 7, age 11

Prize: \$2,000 for student and \$1,000 for Department/Classroom of Teacher

Gord Downie – A True Canadian Hero

Quintessentially Canadian. One of the leading figures in the fight for Aboriginal residential school trust and reconciliation. An amazing musician who has touched the hearts of many. What first comes to mind when you hear these words? If you said Gord Downie, you're probably not alone.

Gord Downie, lead singer of the Canadian rock band The Tragically Hip. Has and always will be a true Canadian icon. His lyrics, packed with Canadian ideology, values and issues has made him someone to look up to, a hero of music and Canada.

Not only is he an extraordinary musician, but also a passionate and heartfelt advocate of Aboriginal rights.

His solo album *Secret Path* tells the heartbreaking true story of Chanie Wenjack, an indigenous child subjected to the horrors of the residential school system. Wenjack escaped from his school but died of cold and exhaustion trying to reach his home 600 km away. The album provides an extremely sad but true window to the troubles of many indigenous people.

In 2016, Downie was diagnosed with brain cancer, making his performing, writing and struggle for Aboriginal rights increasingly more difficult. In the face of the challenges, Downie persevered, refusing to give in, and inspired millions in the process to do the same and never give up.

At his final performance of his band's *Man Machine Poem* tour, he directly spoke to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and applauded his support and recognition of indigenous issues. He invited him to continue his work to solve major problems with 12 million Canadians watching.

Gord Downie is someone who has truly made a difference for the better in Canadian society. His achievements will leave a lasting impact on our country, and Downie's name will go down in Canadian history.