

Lucas Omstead

Grand Prize Winner, Grades 9-12

Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary Simon is a Canadian trailblazer. As Canada's first Indigenous Governor General, she is a respected role model for youth, an emblem of hope for Canada, and a demonstration to the world of what reconciliation and unity can look like in a nation committed to moving forward from its colonial past.

Committed to the philosophy of “ajuinnata” – an Inuktitut word reflecting her devotion to tireless, persevering advocacy work – the year 2022 has seen Ms. Simon use her platform to move us toward healing, peace and unity. Notably, Ms. Simon petitioned the Queen for the re-writing of Canadian history texts to accurately reflect the past. She provided important context to Canadians for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations and death, and she used her diplomacy skills, working to validate and encourage those affected by residential schools when the Catholic Church provided an official apology. Given the challenging history of the British Monarchy and Catholic Church with Indigenous peoples, Ms. Simon has worked to advance the Truth and Reconciliation process, acknowledging the impact of the past, while providing a path forward. Her approach is sure to inspire youth, who recognize themselves in leadership that affirms their voice as valuable, acknowledges their lived experiences and models advocacy on various Indigenous issues.

Ms. Simon's experienced, dedicated and passionate leadership on Indigenous interests and her commitment to representing her background in her various roles affirms Canada's commitment to reckoning with the past at this critical juncture in the Truth and Reconciliation process. As a decorated, accomplished member of the Indigenous community, Ms. Simon's life of service is inspiring to all Canadians. Her recent work models the path of restoration, bridging the past and forging a bright new future. Generations to come are sure to be grateful for her ajuinnata.