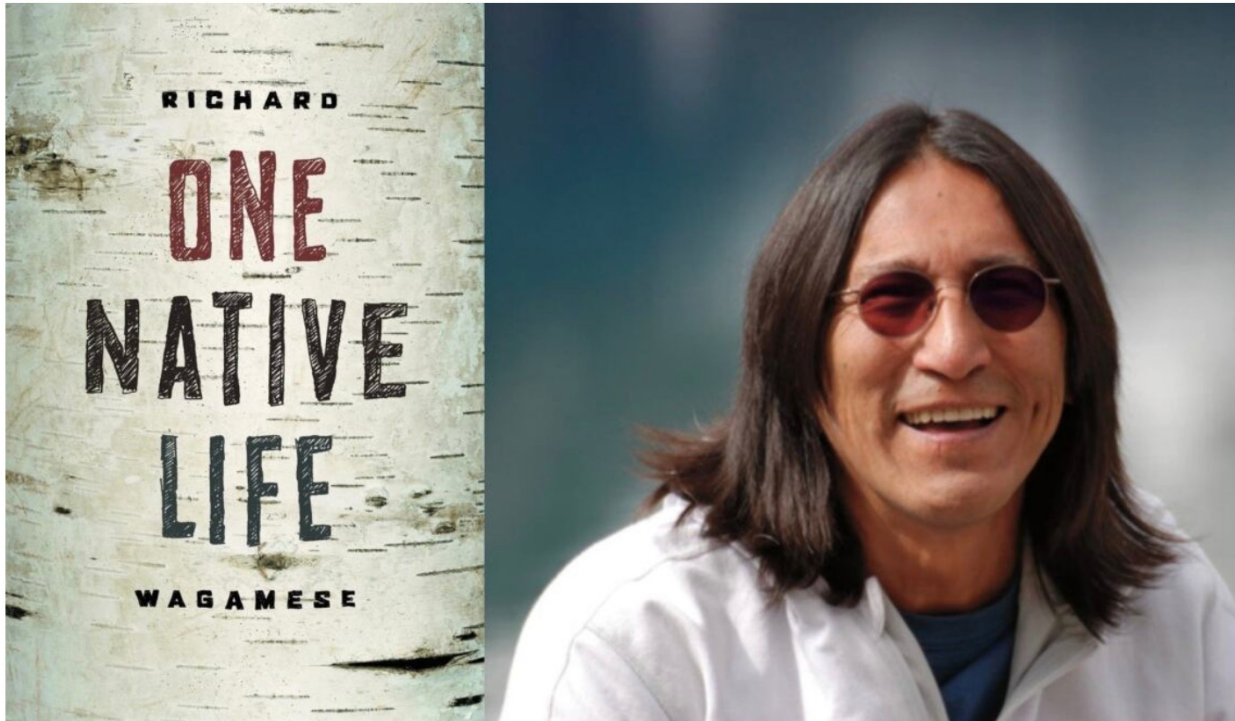


August 5, 2025

**Notes to  
One Native Life Companion**

Trevor Bearance

***One Native Life* by Richard Wagamese**



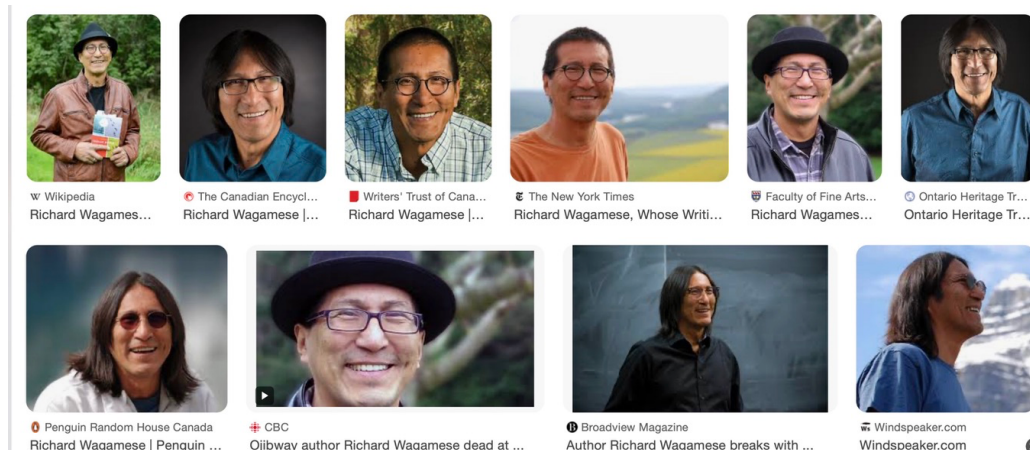
Richard Wagamese was an Ojibwe author and journalist from the Wabaseemoong Independent Nations in Northwestern Ontario. (Douglas & McIntyre, Yvette Lehmann)

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thenextchapter/bookseller-and-psychotherapist-max-arambulo-recommends-three-books-about-healing-to-read-in-2024-1.7070481>

**A Companion Resource**

**For Teaching and Studying**

***One Native Life***



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## Notes to One Native Life Companion

Trevor Bearance

### One Native Life


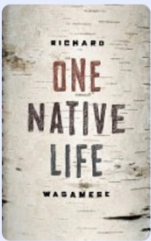
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Originally published

2008

Author

Richard Wagamese

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Jul 22, 2008

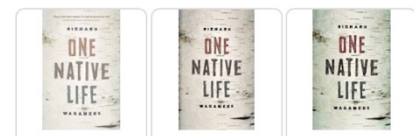
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#### One Native Life

In *One Native Life*, Wagamese looks back down the road he has travelled in reclaiming his identity and talks about the things he has learned as a human being.

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## Notes to One Native Life Companion

► *One Native Life* was chosen because it seemed, and is, a great fit with Indigenous students in Alternative programs. As well, it should appeal to adults in Adult Basic Education Programs (ABE). Enabling youth to read a novel or autobiography when they can scarcely read is a big obstacle to overcome. As well, after years of failure and frustration in schooling, they have a reflexive aversion to such things.

► Every page of the novel was scanned and put in Power Point, with a soundtrack laid down from the audiobook. This way, students could read along and have words pronounced for them.

► Worksheets were developed for each chapter to support interest and comprehension, as well requiring that the student actually read through the text and note pertinent points.

► The worksheets began in bold “14” font because I had students with poor vision and no glasses. Later, things were scaled back to “12” (or less) with bold retained only for the questions to be answered.

► No marks were assigned in this case. The Alternative Education class operated on a basic “Pass/Fail” basis—“You come, you do something, you let me help you, and you will pass. (In Saskatchewan, one Alt Ed course on a high

school transcript automatically disqualifies the student from postsecondary studies. So what really is the point of marks, even curriculum?) The better you are at all three things, the better your grade will be.” But marks could be assigned to each question if required or appropriate. I found these kids had had nothing but unpleasant experiences with grading, and after getting adjusted to something different—they still felt they wanted to “succeed” in “real” schooling and marks seemed the measure of that—they came to like not being graded on everything they did. I found, they found, they could still just like learning things and accomplishing tasks.

► In Alt Ed, curriculum is scarcely relevant. How are kids to meet any ELA 12 expectations when they can’t read or write beyond sketchy Elementary School abilities? I was given a boy with scarcely any Math abilities and told to teach him Math 38.

► I found all subjects could be “integrated” into study of *One Native Life*. Native Studies of course was continually relevant. Broader Canadian history, even world history, was evident, including as Cultural Studies. But basic Math things could be pulled out too. Science regularly could be focused on. Topics in Psychology and Health Studies could be highlighted. ELA things were constant.

► I found that with appropriate back-up on the worksheets—there is so much available on the Net now—students could also appreciate the formative times of their parents, uncles and aunts, and grandparents.

► What I most want such kids to gain from *One Native Life* is hope. Richard Wagamese had a first half of life about as bad as a Native person could have. Abandonment and abuse by his own family, foster care, Sixties Scoop, adoption into an unsympathetic White family far removed from his Northern Ontario roots, Grade 10 dropout, homeless on the streets as a teenage runaway, alcoholism, drug dealing, incarceration—Richard endured it all. But thanks to his own resiliency and help from many others, it is hard to find a photo of Richard from the second half of his life where he is not smiling, grinning even. Disadvantaged Indigenous kids need to know this is possible.

► Little, if any, “higher order” analytic tasks were incorporated into the worksheets. “Fill in the blanks” with material pulled verbatim from the text is used most often. If any writing is required, a sentence or two sufficed. With more able students, higher order comprehension and analysis-reflection questions could be added.

► I have included the original WORD files because, first, there no doubt are still errors and misprints in the text, and second, any teaching with them should be adapted to the needs and ability levels of the students. There will always be more that can be added, perhaps at the expense of material that can be jettisoned. It took a lot of creative imagination and time to put this together, and there was only so much of each to work with at the time.

► As Richard worked his way through assembling the book—most of it was collected from his writing in other arenas—his vocabulary and abstract thinking ramped up. Hence, the later chapters are the most challenging for struggling readers to navigate through. The worksheets try to help with this, but students might well need help with not just the text but the worksheets too. It is to be hoped that students will have enjoyed the book enough to be determined to finish it.

► *One Native Life* is, I think, a great resource to be used with a wide-range of students, but Indigenous ones in particular. I hope we can keep finding ways to make it possible for more of them to access such sources of hope.