On July 26, Mary Jeannie May Simon became Canada’s 30th Governor General.

Canadians celebrated her appointment as the Queen’s representative in Canada for many reasons. A big one? She is the first Indigenous person to hold the post. Ms. Simon is an Inuk who was born in Kuujjuaq, a region of northeastern Quebec.

**A GREAT OCCASION**

For Indigenous Peoples, Ms. Simon’s appointment to the government’s highest position was momentous. It was a long overdue acknowledgement of their rightful *stature* in Canada.

It has “lifted Inuit up to a pedestal that I can’t even imagine,” said Nellie Kusugak, a former Nunavut official.

Ms. Simon took the oath of office in Ottawa. The ceremony was scaled down due to COVID-19, but it still had its share of pomp. In recognition of Ms. Simon’s heritage, a qulliq was ignited. A qulliq is an Inuit oil lamp used to light and warm the home.

**WORKING FOR ALL**

Ms. Simon promised to help unite Canadians.

“Every day, inside small community halls, school gyms, Royal Canadian Legions, places of worship…there are ordinary Canadians doing extraordinary things,” she said. “As Governor General I will never lose sight of this. Our selflessness is one of our great strengths as a nation.”

**A STELLAR CAREER**

The new Governor General has a long history of public service. Ms. Simon was the first Inuk to serve as a Canadian *ambassador*. Between 1999 and 2001, she was Canada’s chief diplomat in Denmark. She held the same job for Circumpolar Affairs from 1994 to 2003.

Throughout her career, Ms. Simon has worked tirelessly to safeguard the Arctic’s future in the face of climate change. Another key focus has been advocating for the Inuit. Early on in public life, she negotiated *land claims agreements* on their behalf. What’s more, she actively fought for Indigenous treaty rights when the Canadian Constitution was *patriated* in 1982. And she regularly advises lawmakers on policies and programs to support the Arctic and its residents.

**HEALING OLD SCARS**

However, her appointment comes at a highly troubling time in Canada.

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**DEFINITIONS**

**AMBASSADOR**: the highest-ranking person who represents his or her own government while living in another country

**LAND CLAIMS AGREEMENTS**: modern treaties that define legal, political and economic relationships between Aboriginal parties and federal, provincial, or territorial governments

**PATRIATE**: transfer control over a constitution from a mother country to its former dependency

**STATURE**: importance gained by ability or achievement
In 2015, Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission released a report. It detailed how more than 150,000 Indigenous children were taken from their homes and sent to Residential Schools between 1881 and 1996. The schools were government-funded and run by churches. The goal was to assimilate the children into European settler society.

The schools were like prisons – dirty, crowded and cold. Students were bullied and abused. They were severely punished if they spoke Indigenous languages.

Thousands of children died at these schools, but no one knows for sure how many. However, over the summer, the remains of hundreds of Indigenous children were located in unmarked graves on the grounds of former Residential Schools.

The shocking discovery shines a new light on a dark period. Ms. Simon says we must face the truth about this era in Canada. “We need to stop to recognize, memorialize, and come to terms with the atrocities of our collective past,” she said.

“Reconciliation is a way of life and requires work every day.”

**The French factor**

Traditionally, Governors General speak both French and English, Canada’s two official languages. Ms. Simon speaks English and Inuktitut, but not French. That disappoints some of the seven-million-plus Canadians whose first language is French.

However, Ms. Simon says she plans to study French. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau praised her gift for bringing people together. “We are a country of vast arctic spaces and busy city skylines, of prairies and coasts. Of French and English. And of Indigenous languages,” he said. “We need people like Ms. Simon… who build bridges.” ★

**Definitions**

ASSIMILATE: to cause (a person or group) to become part of a different society, country, etc.

ATROCITY: a cruel and violent act

RECONCILIATION: a reestablishment of a broken relationship

THRONESPEECH: speech outlining the government’s plans for a new parliamentary session

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION: a three-person panel established by the federal government in 2008 to find out what happened at Indian Residential Schools and inform all Canadians
1. Who does the Governor General represent in Canada?

2. List at least three duties or responsibilities of the Governor General.

3. Who is responsible for selecting the Governor General?

4. List at least three important facts about Canada’s new Governor General.

5. Which two languages does the new Governor General speak?

6. List one ambassador post that the new Governor General has held during her career.

7. What other public service experience does Ms. Simon bring to her new role as Governor General?

8. When was the new Governor General sworn in?
QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

1. In her inaugural address, Mary Simon said: “Every day, inside small community halls, school gyms, Royal Canadian Legions, places of worship, and in thousands of community service organizations, there are ordinary Canadians doing extraordinary things. As Governor General I will never lose sight of this – that our selflessness is one of our great strengths as a nation. I pledge to be there for all Canadians.”

   a) As you see it, what does this statement tell us about Mary Simon?

   ____________________________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________________________

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2. The article discusses the significance of Ms. Simon's appointment as Canada's first Indigenous Governor General during a highly troubling time in our nation's history. As you see it, how might Ms. Simon's role impact the reconciliation process? Explain.

   ____________________________________________________________________________

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3. The appointment of Ms. Simon to the role of governor general comes six months after the resignation of Julie Payette, who was accused of bullying her staff. As you see it, what characteristics should political figures demonstrate and why? Give examples to support your ideas.

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A NEW GOVERNOR GENERAL
– CANADA'S FIRST INDIGENOUS GOVERNOR GENERAL MAKES HISTORY

QUESTIONS FOR ONLINE EXPLORATION

Note: The links below are listed at www.lesplan.com/en/links for easy access.

1. View Ms. Simon's inaugural address as Canada's new Governor General:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yI0SjnhO4fU
What stands out to you in Ms. Simon's message? Given the opportunity, what questions might you ask Ms. Simon about her new role? Explain.

2. View Prime Minister Trudeau's introduction of Ms. Simon to Parliament:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=760oVYhI7MA
What qualities does the Prime Minister highlight that make Ms. Simon a good choice for this role? Explain.

3. During her career, Ms. Simon has had important interactions with at least two former prime ministers in Parliament, namely Pierre Trudeau, the father of our current Prime Minister, and Stephen Harper. View these at the links below:
What impressions do you have of Ms. Simon during these interactions? As you see it, will Ms. Simon make an effective governor general? Give examples to support your ideas.
A. Write the letter that corresponds to the best answer on the line beside each question:

1. In which province or territory was Canada’s new Governor General born?
   a) Nunavut       b) Quebec
   c) Ontario       d) Northwest Territories

2. In which country did she serve as a Canadian ambassador?
   a) Denmark       b) Germany
   c) China         d) Texas

3. The overall role of the Governor General in Canada is to:
   a) read the Speech from the Throne
   b) represent Queen Elizabeth II in Canada
   c) dissolve Parliament
   d) symbolically command Canada’s military

B. Mark the statements T (True) or F (False). If a statement is True, write one important fact to support it on the line below. If a statement is False, write the words that make it true on the line below.

4. True or False? The prime minister selects Canada’s Governor General.
   __________  True or False? The Governor General will live at 24 Sussex Drive for ten years.

5. True or False? All Canadians think having a governor general is a good idea.

C. Fill in the blanks to complete each sentence.

7. Ms. Simon has been a lifelong advocate for the rights of the ________________________.

8. The new Governor General does not speak ________________________.

9. Ms. Simon believes that ________________________ is “a way of life and requires work every day.”

D. Respond to the following question in paragraph form. (Use a separate sheet of paper if necessary.)

10. Ms. Simon is an excellent choice for Canada’s 30th Governor General. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain.