

# RAHYNE Toolkit

**SUGGESTED GRADE RANGE**

GRADE 1-10



## ABOUT RAHYNE

**Prepared by:**

Queen Kukoyi  
Nicole "Nico" Taylor  
Kahsto'serakwathe Paulette Moore

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DATE FINALIZED: FEBRUARY 1ST, 2022



# CHARACTER BACKSTORIES

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## Rahyne

A 12-year-old Afro-Indigenous (Bajan and Mohawk), non-binary youth that lives in the neighbourhood of The Esplanade in the City of Toronto. Rahyne has been experiencing a lot of bullying lately at their school because they are non-binary. They have also been feeling overwhelmed because of everything that has been happening with the Covid-19 pandemic. They are upset about the violence they've seen happening in their community and the anti-Black and anti-racism protests that they saw happening across the world, as well as the discovery of the unmarked graves with the residential schools across Canada.

## Onkwehón:we Spirit

Onkwehón:we (Indigenous) Spirit is inspired by Indigenous understanding that water and land carry original spirit and wisdom. This is not mythology - we are assured that all of the instructions needed to navigate our lives emanate from the natural world. In the key Rotinonhsyón:ni ceremony - called the Ohénton Karihwatéhkwén (the Words that Come Before All Others/The Thanksgiving Address) - gratitude is expressed to (not for) our water, land, plant, bird, wind, sky relatives that protect us, heal us and guide us.



## African Spirit (Olamina)

Based on a [public art piece](#) that is part of the BSAM Canada Earthseeds: Space of the Living Waterfront Artist Residency supported by Waterfront Toronto and Waterfront BIA. It is an installation greatly inspired by Octavia E. Butler's *Parable* series, taking its namesake from the main character of Butler's novels, Lauren Oya Olamina. Olamina's skin, which appears as vitiligo, is meant to represent the vastness of bodies of water. In this film, Olamina is the embodiment of Mami Wata, an Afro-Caribbean water spirit who appears in many forms, like a mermaid, a woman, or sometimes even a man. Mami Wata overlooks the bodies of water scattered across the globe and helps those who have experienced great hardship.



# CHARACTER BACKSTORIES



## Rahyne's Mom

Originally born in Barbados, Rahyne's mom came to Canada as a teenager and settled in Toronto. She ended up meeting Rahyne's father when she moved to The Esplanade neighbourhood, who sadly passed away before Rahyne was born. As a proud Bajan woman, she passed on the stories and traditions of her Caribbean culture to Rahyne. She thought it was important for Rahyne to learn about their Indigenous ancestors, but didn't know where to start. She has always encouraged Rahyne to be their truest self, especially in the face of adversity, and reached out to the ancestors to guide Rahyne.

## Lionelle

Also goes by Leo - is named after a lion cub and means bravery or strength. He is a young boy of about 10 with Afro-Caribbean heritage (Trinidadian parents). He has had a head of long curly hair all his life. Sometimes he wears it in cornrows that go down his back, sometimes in braids that rest at his shoulders, or sometimes he just likes to have it out so that the wind can play with it. Long hair is something he's seen many of the people in his family have and he takes pride in his hair, but the kids at his school don't seem to understand and he has been teased about it. This has caused him to doubt himself sometimes and wonder if he should cut his hair short to fit in.



## Bullies

Youth who were likely once bullied themselves and are repeating the behaviour to feel powerful. They bully to deflect attention away from themselves. They torment Leo and Rahyne because they have never learned that there is no one way to perform gender. The bullies also act as a physical representation of the negative self-talk that we have sometimes. The not-so-nice things that we may think about ourselves and cause us to feel sad or like we're not good enough.





## KEY THEMES

### Civil Rights

Rahyne is both Afro-Caribbean (Bajan) and Mohawk, they exist at the intersection of two cultural identities that have been historically oppressed. They are also a part of the LGBTQ+ community. They are in a position where they have had to fight for their rights to be accepted in today's society. During the time period that the film takes place, Rahyne has been exposed to worldwide protests against anti-Black racism and police violence, and the reveal of unmarked graves across Canada where residential schools resided, which historically displaced Indigenous children from their families.

### Ancestry and Legacy

*Rahyne* is a film that focuses on the rich cultural histories that help mould us into the people that we are today. It looks at ways we can discover who our ancestors are, and how that knowledge can give us the confidence and strength to be the person we want to be.

### Taking Care of Our Environment

The pandemic has shown us that we need to pay more attention to how we take care of the earth, water, and air. This sometimes means listening to the earth around us i.e: paying attention to what is better for our waterways; learning how we can better tend to the land; being more respectful of animal habitats and biodiversity; and trying to lessen our carbon footprint to take better care of our ozone.

### Making Room for Difference

Diversity enriches us. Having different voices and different points of view contributes to a more vibrant society and it is important that we make room for the diverse populations that have previously been silenced. *Rahyne* is exemplary of that, and this is shown through the main character's backstory, their interactions with the water spirits, and how they interact with Leo.

### Gender Identity

The main character of *Rahyne* is a non-binary youth, meaning they do not see themselves as male or female. The film also looks at the different ways that we present our gender, for instance, Leo is a little boy with long hair that identifies as male.

### Living in a Pandemic

There are many things that the pandemic took away from us, but also made us pay attention to. It is important to examine what the pandemic revealed about mental health, economic disparities and medical gaps, and how we can work together to construct the communities we want to thrive in.

# RESOURCES

## EXPERT RECOMMENDATIONS

### Afro-Indigenous People

**Andrea Williams** RECE and AntiRacism + Indigenous Community Educator



<https://www.instagram.com/maingankwe/>



andreawilliams3@hotmail.com

**Shanesse Anne** Diversity, Equity and Inclusion



<https://shaneseanne.ca/>



shanesea.info@gmail.com

**Mahlikah Aweri** Arts Educator, Public Speaker, Curator and Writer



[https://www.instagram.com/mahlikah\\_aweri/](https://www.instagram.com/mahlikah_aweri/)

### Afro-Diasporic People

**Ian Kamau** Black mental health, race, arts & culture, cultural production



[linkedin.com/in/iankamau](https://www.linkedin.com/in/iankamau)

**Kim Katrin** Anti- Racism, intersectionality



<http://kimkatrin.com/>

**David Lewis-Peart** Arts Educator, Public Speaker, Curator and Writer



<http://linkedin.com/in/davidlewispeart/>



david.davidlewis@gmail.com

### Kanien'kehà:ka Mohawk People

**Tehahenteh Frank Miller** Expert Kanyen'kehà:ka (Mohawk) language speaker and educator



tehahenteh2@gmail.com

**Kahehtoktha Janic Brant** Seed steward, farmer, artist, historian



<https://kenhtekeseedsanctuary.com/our-roots/>

**Susan Hill** Author and Educator



susan.hill@utoronto.ca

# RESOURCES

## About these Resources

This toolkit includes resources that provide an additional understanding of the themes present in Rahyne. The books listed below are meant to inspire continued learning and discovery. The experts that are listed are knowledgeable community members, creators, and activists who have been engaged in work pertaining to the themes present in Rahyne. Though some are not directly involved in Rahyne's creation, they are suggested members to contact if you want to expand on the conversation that has been started through the viewing of the short film.

Title	Purchase Link	Age Group
<i>The Clay We Are Made Of</i> by Susan B. Hill	<a href="#">University of Manitoba</a>	Adults
<i>Sacred Instructions</i> by Sherri Mitchell	<a href="#">Sacred Instructions</a>	Adults
<i>Indigenizing Philosophy</i> by Brian Burkhart	<a href="#">Birchbark Books</a>	Adults
<i>Black Looks: Race and Representation</i> by bell hooks	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Adults
<i>Policing Black Lives</i> by Robyn Maynard	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Adults
<i>Afrikan Wisdom</i> by Valerie Mason-John	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Adults
<i>In Search of Mami Wata: Narratives and Images of African Water Spirits</i> by Michelle Yaa Asantewa	<a href="#">New Beacon Books</a>	Adults
<i>Parable of the Sower</i> by Octavia Butler	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Young adults <b>TW:</b> (mention of sensitive topics i.e. sexual assault & violence)
<i>Parable of the Talents</i> by Octavia Butler	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Young adults <b>TW:</b> (mention of sensitive topics i.e. sexual assault & violence)
<i>Children of Blood and Bone</i> by Tomi Adeyemi	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Young adults <b>TW:</b> (mention of sensitive topics i.e. sexual assault & violence)

# RESOURCES

## About these Resources

Title	Purchase Link	Age Group
<i>Turtle Island: The Story of North America's First People</i> by Eldon Yellowhorn and Kathy Lowinger	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Youth (11+)
<i>Young Water Protectors: A Story About Standing Rock</i> by Aslan Tudor, Jason EagleSpeaker, and Kelly Tudor	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Youth (11+)
<i>We Are Water Protectors</i> by Carole Lindstrom	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Youth
<i>The Kids Book of Black Canadian History</i> by Rosemary Sadlier	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Children
<i>The Colors of Us</i> by Karen Katz	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Children
<i>47,000 Beads</i> by Koja Adeyoha and Angel Adeyoha	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Children
<i>IntersectionAllies: We Make Room for All</i> by Chelsea Johnson, LaToya Council, and Carolyn	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Children
<i>Your Name is a Song</i> by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow	<a href="#">A Different Booklist</a>	Children
<i>Callaloo: A Jazz Folktale</i> by Marjuan Canady	<a href="#">Amazon</a>	Children



**Afro-Indigenous** - a term used to describe peoples who have both African and Indigenous heritage (Black Indigenous, Black Native, etc.) The term is not synonymous with people of African and Indigenous heritage and is also used by folks of African descent.

**Bajan** - people who are citizens or a descendant of the country of Barbados located within the eastern most islands in the Lesser Antilles of the West Indies.

**Cis-Gender** - a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their gender assignment at birth.

**Gender** - assigned to newborns as either male or female based on the baby's genitals. Once a sex is assigned, we presume the child's gender. The term was first used in 1955, by John Money, to describe characteristics assigned to femininity and masculinity and differentiating between them.

**Gender Attraction** - is a peer's attraction or feelings toward another peer, and is a factor in mate choice. The attraction can be to the physical or other qualities or traits of a peer, or to such qualities in the context where they appear. It refers to the degree to which a peer prefers to love or like a peer.

**Gender Binary** - is the classification of gender into two distinct, opposing and sometimes harmful characteristics (women=weakness/men=strength), whether by social system or cultural belief. Most cultures use a gender binary, having two genders (boys/men and girls/women).

**Gender Expression/Presentation** - separate and independent from gender identity and can be expressed through behaviour, clothing, hair, makeup and other aspects of one's external appearance. Gender expression does not always fall in line with a person's gender identity.



**Gender Identity** - is each person's internal and individual experience of gender. It is a person's sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither, or anywhere along the gender spectrum. A person's gender identity may be the same as or different from their birth-assigned sex.

**Gender Spectrum**- refers to there being more than two gender identities (female, male, transgender, two-spirit, etc.).

**Nanny Falls** - is a historical site with a waterfall in Jamaica that Nanny believed to have healing powers. It is believed that warriors would go to waters to find out if they could prepare for battle.

**Nanny of the Maroons** - was an 18th-century leader of the Jamaican Maroons. She led a community of formerly enslaved Africans called the Windward Maroons. In the early 18th century, under the leadership of Nanny, the Windward Maroons fought a guerrilla war over many years against British authorities in the Colony of Jamaica in what became known as the First Maroon War.

**Non-binary or genderqueer** - is an umbrella term for gender identities that are neither male nor female identities that are outside the gender binary. Non-binary identities fall under the transgender umbrella, since non-binary people typically identify with a gender that is different from their assigned sex, though some non-binary individuals do not consider themselves transgender.

**Onkwehón:we** - is a Kanyen'kehà:ka (Mohawk) word that literally translates as the combination of ónkwe = people and ón:we = original. We use this term "original people" to describe either Indigenous people in general or Kanyen'kehà:ka people specifically.

**Political Unrest**- protest and riots that are a lawful or unlawful collective action against political authority that can be enacted through non-violent or violent actions.

# KEY VOCABULARY

**Pronouns** - are used in place of a proper noun (like someone's name). We use pronouns most often when referring to someone without using their name. A recent study showed that in transgender youth, using correct pronouns and names reduces depression and suicide risks.

**Trauma** - is the lasting emotional response that often results from living through a harmful event. Experiencing a traumatic event can harm a person's sense of safety, sense of self, and ability to regulate emotions and navigate relationships.

**Trinidadian** - a person/people who come from the region of Trinidad from the island of Trinidad and Tobago. They may also be called Trinis.

**Turmoil** - a state of great disturbance, confusion, or uncertainty happening due to an experience.

**Two-spirit** - refers to a Indigenous person who identifies as having both a masculine and a feminine spirit, and is used to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity. As an umbrella term it may encompass a wide variety of gender variance, including people who might be described in Western culture as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, gender queer, those who have multiple gender identities. (Please do not use this term if you are not a Indigenous person)

**Vitiligo** - a condition that causes loss of pigment cells resulting in differing coloured patches on the skin.

**Water Protectors** - a term that gained popularity in recent years for those who advocate for the water; whether they interrupt the construction of a pipeline through their physical presence on building sites, work politically for the protection of the water, conduct ceremony around the water or educate others around how and why the water needs to be protected. The term was used widely during the 2016/17 Standing Rock protection actions where the largest gathering of Indigenous people in modern history united to protect the water on Lakota land in North Dakota.

**Water Spirits** - in African and Afro-Caribbean folklore and tradition(s) often touch on the idea of change and moving forward.