

Apology Dice: collaboration in progress

Snow and rain. Escaping the slushy, wet darkness, seven people gather in a circle around a generic grey blanket. In the centre are several oversized cedar dice incised with words. The first reads ‘I am’, ‘you are’, ‘we are’, and ‘they are’. The second reads ‘fairly’, ‘deeply’, ‘very’, ‘so’, ‘not’, and ‘somewhat’. The final die has five sides reading ‘sorry’, and one with ‘tired of this’ carved into it. The possibilities and combinations disassemble and reassemble as everyone reaches for the dice to smell and feel their heft, their smooth, rounded sides. Clement Yeh begins to speak about their genesis at a residency in Kamloops, BC. These dice, he explains, are a proposition, a provisional answer to the question: given Canada’s horrific legacy of Indian Residential Schools, is reconciliation at all possible? What form could it take? He rolls. I am / not / sorry.

Discussion quickly ensues, fueled by questions from participants. Basic information on Aboriginal history and contemporary realities is missing; misconceptions abound. Haven’t reparations been made? Does an apology even matter? Still, the participants roll. Speak. Listen. Learn. They are / deeply / tired of this.

Description courtesy Rhonda L. Meier (Dec. 10, 2014. Montreal)

Apology Dice

In 2008, on behalf of Canada, Prime Minister Harper apologized to former students of Indian Residential Schools for the government policy of aggressive assimilation that separated children from their families, cultures and languages in an attempt to “kill the Indian in the child.” The reactions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people were various. Many were pleased by the recognition of these facts but did not think the Apology and reparations went far enough. Non-Aboriginal Canadian reaction was similarly mixed when not apathetic or confused. The meanings of the Apology are endless and this complexity may lead people to feel in suspense or indifferent. Apology Dice is an artistic effort to stir emotional response, to help participants discover and express their feelings about this important issue. For ambivalent participants, rolling the dice may prompt more certainty. To those feeling more decided, play may reinforce their beliefs or perhaps unsettle them a little. Apology Dice is a conversation starter.

Apology Dice consists of participants, three large dice, and a blanket.

Each die is cast one at a time, and in order, to form a sentence. The letters of the first die begin with a capital letter. The second die has no punctuation. The word or words of the third die end in a period. ‘I am / so / sorry,’ ‘We are / not / sorry,’ ‘They are / very tired / of this,’

The participant reads the sentence aloud and responds. Is this how they feel? Is this the opposite of what they feel?

The Indian Residential Schools are a living tragedy for Aboriginal people. This work is not intended to make light of this dark legacy but to be a disarming vehicle to prompt discussion. Apology Dice are only to be rolled in an environment of contemplation and conversation. Participants must be willing to share and discuss their thoughts and feelings.

David Garneau