Focus Points and Themes in Three Day Road

Storytelling

* Large and important part of Aboriginal culture
* Oral practice rather than written
* Connected to psychological well-being
* Stories inspire and influence individual and group behavior
* They consolidate a group’s identity
* Elijah is a charming storyteller
* Niska and Xavier tell each other stories
* Niska uses her stories to connect Xavier to his heritage and heal him

War and Hunting

* The difference is the victim, whether it is human or animal
* There is brutality in both, but each is carried out in order to survive
* There is a contrast between the aboriginal respect for nature and animals and the war’s disregard for human and animal life

Windigo

* The legend comes from stories that show what happens when there is an imbalance between the spiritual and physical sides of our being
* A person who becomes windigo is a danger to the community and must be sacrificed for the safety of the rest
* Elijah kills in order to “feed” himself, not just for physical survival
* Niska comes from a long line of windigo killers

Visibility/Invisibility

* When Niska goes into town she encounters an “invisible” wall between her and the homeguard Indians
* Invisibility is key in hunting
* During the war, there is an unseen line between life and death
* Xavier often feels invisible next to Elijah because his accomplishments are not recognized next to Elijah’s exaggerated exploits
* Aboriginal Soldiers were denied the pensions and financial assistance given to returning white soldiers. They and their contributions were invisible

Sound/Silence

* Silence and sound are vital in hunting
* Elijah is curious and talkative, his constant conversation masks his insecurity
* Niska and Xavier are quiet and observant
* The absence of the birds singing is the first thing Xavier notices about the war
* Xavier loses his hearing due to the constant gunfire and shelling
* Xavier also has no voice and he sees himself as a ghost

Betrayal

* The betrayal experienced by the native characters reflects the broken faith and legacy of distrust between the natives and the Canadian community
* Niska is betrayed by the Frenchman
* Niska’s father is betrayed by his own people
* Xavier is betrayed by Elijah on numerous occasions
* Native children are betrayed by the residential school system
* War reflects global hatred and betrayal as a larger parallel

Adapted from: Herbert, Marilyn. *Bookclub-in-a-box Presents the Discussion Companion for Joseph Boyden's Novel Three Day Road*. [United States]: Bookclub-in-a-box, 2010. Print.

Questions to consider:

What additional examples from the text can you find for the above focus points and themes?

How might the above focus points and themes be connected to the experience of Aboriginal Canadians?

Can you make any connections between the focus points?

How might these ideas serve a larger purpose?

Which is the most important focus point to acknowledge or consider? Why?