**Grade Level**: 12 Canadian History

**Learning Centre Topic/ Theme**: Indigenous Histories, Ignored Histories, Power of Stories, Power of Who Controls the Narrative

**Learning Centre Objectives**: The main objective of this inquiry centre is to demonstrate that the histories we are normally taught are not the only narratives that exist. Much like Casey’s article that details how Chanie Wenjack’s story had tried to be told by others for decades but was ignored, this Johnny Cash album was shunned and ignored, despite his celebrity. Everyone knows Johnny Cash but very few people know about this album and the Indigenous stories that it describes. This inquiry centre details the struggle Cash went through in order to even get these Indigenous songs played on the radio, but it also details what Cash did wrong in his journey, which was to claim he himself had Mohawk and Cherokee blood. I think highlighting this aspect and showing that he still made some bad decisions despite his main goal being a noble one. I think this is important for students, especially grade 12 students who are set to graduate and go off into the adult world, because in a time of so much division, people are quick to label things as good or bad and absolute. Everything is so polarized that there is hardly room for any in between. What I wanted to demonstrate with this inquiry centre is that there is more to stories than just the face value, and there can be elements of “good” and “bad”. This inquiry centre also intends to demonstrate the immense power that rests in the hands of the storyteller and who is controlling the narrative. They say that the victors are the ones who write history, which has been true unfortunately, but we need to be able to see when that is happening and be open minded enough to keep looking, keep investigating, keep questioning.

**Materials:** printed lyrics from the 8 songs on Johnny Cash’s Bitter Tears album. It is important to not include the artist or titles on the printed lyrics, as to keep album anonymous for now. Want them to appear as simply poems for students to analyze initially before later informing of artist.

**Procedure**: As mentioned, initially hand out the eight poems/songs to the students, and have them read the poems. Ask them to pick a line or two from the poem they read that stuck out to them and why, whether it is the imagery, the message, etc. Go around and for each poem have the students share their line or two and reason they picked those lines. This makes for a great discussion on why those lines hit home and the students will relate the Indigenous stories in the poems to the Indigenous issues and stories that they are familiar with. Once every poem is read and lines picked out, ask if anyone recognizes the lyrics or has any guess as to who’s work this is. Then reveal it as Johnny Cash. The majority of the students will know who he is and familiar with his work, but open discussions as to why they think this album was so unheard of. Also give mini lesson on the album itself, detailing Cash’s struggle to promote the album, have his stories told and helping of Indigenous people. Discuss Cash’s false Indigenous lineage and also compare and contrast to story of Secret Path and its struggle to reach the masses until only recently. This inquiry centre opens up great discussions about Indigenous histories, the struggle to have these stories told and heard, the power of storytelling, the power of who controls history’s narratives, and even the polarization of issues (Indigenous or non-Indigenous) in today’s world.