

Truth and Reconciliation Week 2021 **EDUCATOR'S GUIDE**



Foreword

We are all learning, all the time.

Across the country, educators are incorporating Indigenous histories, cultures, and perspectives in their teaching. They are calling upon themselves and their students to learn about the land on which they reside. They are answering questions about missing children and unmarked graves. They are empowering students to take meaningful actions towards reconciliation.

Through all of this, teachers are on their own journeys of learning about truth and reconciliation.

The publication *Truth and Reconciliation Week 2021* and this complementary educator's guide are designed to support educators in both their own learning and teaching. The resources in this guide are intended to offer teachers what they need *at the moment* and *in the moment*, whether that be a place to start or a space to reflect.

This compilation begins and ends with a conversation, introducing some of the key questions that educators across the country are thinking about. In this package, you will also find suggested approaches and directions you can take to facilitate learning beyond a single week.

There are many different ways to take active and allied roles in reconciliation. We hope educators feel inspired to connect, converse, and share their own experiences with each other to keep the conversation going.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes to the leaders and learners who have shared their perspectives, experiences, and knowledge for this project.

*Canada's National History Society with the
National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation*

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Opening Reflection

Teaching in an Authentic Way

How can we as educators ensure that sharing culture does not cross the line of cultural appropriation? How can we teach our students and our community about Indigenous culture that stems away from offending or spreading misinformation?

It is first important to acknowledge that not all Indigenous communities, groups, and people are the same, and therefore authentic learning may look different in practice.

Drums, Moccasins, Dreamcatchers, and Indigenous art are stereotypical items that students are eager to replicate. While it is not in any way offensive to learn about Indigenous culture, nor is it appropriation to want to make these items, many non-Indigenous peoples do not know the “layers” of significance that these items have. These items hold teachings that guide Indigenous peoples to further understand the world through the perspective of a shared spirituality and belief system.

In our current society, we are taught through documentation, like writing. However, traditionally Indigenous peoples teach through oral history, using our stories, languages, and songs. Many Indigenous peoples use the items like the Dreamcatcher as a “canvas” to pass on our oral history and spirituality. Spirituality is just one layer to a “canvas;” there are several other “layers.”

The example I often use to explain this is the sweat lodge. In Cree, we say *Matotisan*, which has two translations: one being the crying lodge *Matowin* and/or Creator/God lodge *Manito*. People often refer to a sweat lodge as “just sweating.” However, it is more than sweating. It’s about praying and reflecting while our bodies cry and heal. There are multiple layers to teachings like the sweat lodge, and it becomes appropriation when those layers are taken away and result in an item that holds no meaning. We can appreciate a teaching like this when those layers, such as spirituality, are explained and acknowledged.

Now, how can we incorporate authenticity into these teachings?

The best way to do this is to involve those who can explain the layers of spirituality, symbolism, and worldview associated with the aforementioned items. A prime resource could be members of an Indigenous community.

It is important to note that variety in the teachings does not necessarily equate to something being non-authentic, but rather reflects the uniqueness of teachings and styles between varying communities.

I encourage all to learn about Indigenous culture the way they would in any subject: do not cut corners and use primary sources!

Gavin Bergeron

Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation

Introduction

A Conversation about Truth and Reconciliation in the Classroom

How do you introduce the history of residential schools to students who have never heard about it before? How do you adapt your teaching for learners of different ages and backgrounds? How can you centre Survivors' stories, testimonies, and experiences?

On August 25, 2021, a panel of educators shared their own experiences and unique perspectives on these questions and more during a live video broadcast.



Watch the recording at CanadasHistory.ca/Conversation.

NEW TO TRUTH & RECONCILIATION?

**A LOT OF US ARE.
HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:**

TRUTH

"That which corresponds to reality"

**RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS WERE A CULTURAL ASSIMILATION.
THE EFFECTS STILL IMPACT INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES.**

- Residential schools operated from 1831 until 1996.
- Indigenous children nationwide were compelled to attend.
- While there, they faced abuse, neglect, malnutrition, and disease. Thousands died.
- They were forced to speak only English or French, and forbidden to use their own languages.
- This nearly destroyed Indigenous cultures and languages across Canada.

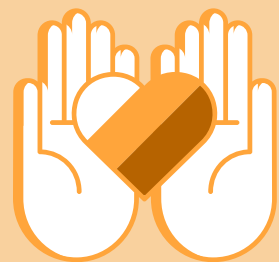
**It is estimated that
150,000 children attended
residential school in
Canada.**

RECONCILIATION

"Restoring positive relationships"

**RECONCILIATION COMES THROUGH COMPASSION FOR AFFECTED
COMMUNITIES AND A WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN.**

- The history of residential schools still burdens many Indigenous communities.
- The first step toward reconciliation is a willingness to listen and learn.
- Listen empathetically and with an open mind.
- Reconciliation requires action.



ACTION

- Participate in **Orange Shirt Day (September 30)** and learn the story behind why we wear orange at orangeshirtday.org.
- Learn about whose land you live on to honour **land acknowledgement** at native-land.ca.
- Read the **94 Calls to Action** and learn about what important steps still need to be taken towards reconciliation.

**"There are no shortcuts.
When it comes to Truth
and Reconciliation, we
are forced to go the
distance."**

– JUSTICE MURRAY SINCLAIR

215 unmarked graves discovered near Kamloops, B.C. on June 1, 2021

Residential schools existed in Canada from 1831-1996.

751 unmarked graves discovered near Cowessess, Saskatchewan on June 24, 2021

182 unmarked graves discovered near Cranbrook, B.C. on July 2, 2021

160 unmarked graves discovered on Penelakut Island, B.C. on July 13, 2021

...Investigations continue and more unmarked burial sites will continue to be found.

Indigenous children at residential schools died at a much higher rate than other school-aged children in the general population.

The TRC confirmed the deaths of thousands of children from accidents or disease. The true numbers are likely much higher, as many records have been destroyed or are missing.

RECENT NEWS

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

HOW DO I TALK ABOUT UNMARKED GRAVES AND MISSING CHILDREN WITH MY STUDENTS?

Remember that this is an emotionally heavy topic. Leave time and space for discussion.

Check out the [NCTR's resources](#) to include Indigenous curriculum connections in your class.

Answer to the best of your ability, but acknowledge when you don't know an answer and suggest places to research.

Unsafe living conditions: poorly built and maintained facilities

Unsanitary conditions and lack of medical care allowing for the spread of tuberculosis

Sexual and emotional abuse: complaints disregarded and dismissed

Government failure to respond to systemic and persistent concerns

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH STUDENTS

Avoid "us" and "them" language.

CAUSES OF STUDENT DEATH

WHAT CAN I DO TO GET STUDENTS INVOLVED AND ENGAGED?

PARTICIPATE IN ORANGE SHIRT DAY

to remember the children taken from their homes.

PARTICIPATE IN TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION WEEK

to learn more and hear Indigenous voices.

PARTICIPATE IN "IMAGINE A CANADA"

to envision current and future reconciliation. Students will create an original work of art of their choosing (painting, song, rap, poem, drawing, etc.) of what they believe reconciliation in Canada looks like. These works of art are submitted to the NCTR for review and various winners across Canada are chosen.

LEAD LESSONS WITH INDIGENOUS CONTENT

and study Indigenous literature/film/art in your class. Discuss Indigenous perspectives in history. Highlight Indigenous perspectives on contemporary issues in science classes, such as oil pipelines, water contamination, loss of biodiversity, and sustainability.

INVITE INDIGENOUS SPEAKERS TO YOUR CLASS

so you and your students can meet Indigenous leaders and community members.

GET INVOLVED IN LOCAL INITIATIVES

throughout the year and support Indigenous community members.

Starter's Guide

Talking about Residential Schools in the Classroom

Promoting Cultural Safety in your Classroom

Here are some points to remember before, during, and after having discussions about residential schools:

- Students come from diverse backgrounds, so be aware that students' pre-existing feelings and knowledge about this topic will vary.
- You may have students that self-identify as Indigenous in your classroom, but do not ask students to do so.
- Preface your lessons with appropriate background and context.
- Send a note home beforehand to keep families included in the discussion.
- Be prepared to respond to students who make hurtful or ignorant comments. Give these students the opportunity to learn and grow, but maintain a safe space.
- Remove yourself as an authority on the subject by being transparent about your own learning journey. "Reconciliation" is not a subject to be covered in a single unit or semester, but rather something to be incorporated into all realms of teaching.
- Try to have an Elder or Knowledge Keeper come into your classroom.
- Discussing residential schools or Indigenous history may be personal or difficult, so be prepared to provide support to your students (i.e., have your school's guidance counsellor nearby, provide the phone number of the crisis line, etc.). **The 24/7 Residential Schools Crisis line can be reached at 1-866-925-4419.**

Historical Background

Residential schools were government- and church-mandated schools for Indigenous children operating from 1831-1996 created for the purpose of cultural assimilation. Children were removed from their homes at young ages, destroying families and cultural ties. Abuse, disease, and death were common. Although they are now closed, the impact and trauma of residential schools continues to affect communities today.

Consult these resources for a more in-depth history of residential schools:

[Residential School History \(NCTR\)](#)

[Residential School Timeline \(NCTR\)](#)

[Residential Schools in Canada \(The Canadian Encyclopedia\)](#)

[Timeline: Residential Schools \(The Canadian Encyclopedia\)](#)

Key Events

2007: The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was signed by the Government of Canada, acknowledging truths about residential schools. This was the largest class action lawsuit in Canadian history.

2008: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established as part of the court-mandated settlement of the Survivors of the residential school system.

2015: The TRC published the 94 Calls to Action, calling for reconciliation in six domains: child welfare, education, language, culture, health, and justice. In the six years since it has been published, 14 Calls to Action have been completed.

2019: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was published.

2021: Mass unmarked graves near decommissioned residential schools are discovered across Canada.

Titles and Names

Indigenous: A widely used, broad umbrella term to refer to the first inhabitants of Canada – peoples of long settlement and connection to specific land – including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

Aboriginal: A general term that is synonymous with “Indigenous” and that is found in the Canadian Constitution. The term is used less frequently due to greater sensitivity around the word’s potential to code as “away from” or “not original.” “Indigenous” is the preferred term in most cases.

Indian: An outdated term referring to the legal identity of a person registered under the *Indian Act*. Although used in many government documents, the term is offensive and should not be used. Individuals may choose to identify this way for personal or legal reasons.

Native: A general term not referring to any specific cultural group. It is largely unused due to its broad definition.

FNMI: This term is a widely used acronym meaning First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

First Nations: Any of the groups of Indigenous peoples in Canada officially recognized as an administrative unit by the federal government or functioning as such without official status. The term is generally understood to exclude Inuit and Métis.

Inuit: Refers to groups and communities of people living in the Arctic regions of what is now Canada, Greenland, and Siberia.

Métis: Refers to cultures and ethnic identities that resulted from the union of First Nations with European settlers. Individuals may self-identify as Métis for different reasons. “Métis” also refers to Indigenous people whose culture grew out of kinship relations with the Plains Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine, and Dene.

Land and Status

Treaty: An arrangement established by settler governments between an independent First Nation and the Crown that usually trades land for certain rights.

Treaty Partner: Refers to both governing bodies and non-Indigenous Canadians.

Indian Act: A Canadian Act of Parliament that concerns registered "Indians," their bands, and the system of "Indian" reserves. The *Indian Act* gave the federal government full control of Indigenous lands and resources, as well as who is a "Status Indian."

Status Indian: A legal term for a person who self-identifies as Indigenous and is regarded as such by the government. As such, they are afforded the rights associated with status under the *Indian Act*. This status designation systematically excludes entire groups such as Métis and Inuit from basic rights.

Non-Status: A person who self-identifies as Indigenous but is not afforded "Indian status" or the rights from the *Indian Act*.

Land Acknowledgement: Recognizing and verbally honouring the traditional ownership of the land in which you are situated on. This is an important step in reconciliation.

Reserve: A tract of land designated for the exclusive use by First Nations by the government in accordance with the *Indian Act*, Treaties, and other agreements.

Tradition and Culture

Elder: An Indigenous person who is highly respected and consulted because of their wisdom, knowledge, insight, experience, and background.

Knowledge Keepers: Indigenous people who preserve the cultures and traditions tied to Indigenous ways of knowing and who share that knowledge and expertise with others.

Language Revitalization: Residential schools and colonization resulted in the severe loss of language in Indigenous communities. As language is tied to identity, community, and culture, bringing back Indigenous languages is a large step in reconciliation.

Colonization and Reconciliation

Colonization: The process of establishing control over an Indigenous community and forcing assimilation of the colonizer's perspectives, culture, histories, and traditions. Decolonizing the education system is an important step in reconciliation.

Decolonization: Restoring the freedoms and ways of knowing attributed to Indigenous peoples by deconstructing dominant colonial influences on cultures, histories, and traditions.

Cultural Genocide: The deliberate and systemic destruction of a people's culture, language, traditions, beliefs, and heritage.

Intergenerational Trauma: Trauma that is transferred from an earlier generation of trauma survivors to subsequent generations.

Sixties Scoop: Refers to the practice in which an estimated 20,000 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in non-Indigenous homes for the purpose of assimilation.

Reconciliation: An ongoing individual and collective process working towards restorative justice for Indigenous peoples. This movement requires commitment and involvement from all Canadians.

Truth: Evidence, including personal accounts, from Survivors, their families, their communities, and anyone else who was personally involved with or affected by the residential school system. Committing to truth-telling means listening and learning with an open mind in order to move forward.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC): Organizational predecessor to the NCTR operating from 2008 to 2015 in Canada and tasked with addressing the truths of Canada's residential school system while promoting healing.

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR): Organization established to carry on the work of the TRC by protecting the testimony, materials, and documents gathered by the TRC, compiling and disseminating the history of Canada's residential school system, honouring Survivors' truths, and engaging the Canadian public in truth and reconciliation.

Learning Paths and Activities

“Education is what got us here and education is what will get us out.”

– Justice Murray Sinclair

Talk to your students about the truth and the significance of the truth when learning about historical events in Canada. Here are some questions to prompt this discussion as it relates to the topic of residential schools:

What is truth?

Why should we always tell the truth?

Why is it important to use factual and primary documents when we are learning about an event in history?

Why is it important to learn about history, even if it might make us upset?

How can we build empathy when learning about truth?

How can we show we are listening respectfully?

When someone makes a hurtful or inappropriate comment, how can we address it in a way that we learn from positively?

This pre-talk with your class is an essential process, as the questions and comments that come up will guide learning, dispel misconceptions about residential schools, and alert you to any students who have personal ties to residential schools.

Path One: What Are Residential Schools?

Introduce students to the purpose of residential schools, who opened them, who attended them, and how they are a significant piece of Canadian history.

- Read aloud an age-appropriate book of your choice about residential schools.
- Create a KW chart and have students fill it out with “What I Know” and “What I Want to Know.”
- Create a Wonder Wall for students to post their wonders about residential schools.
- In a talking circle, review some of their wonders/want to know(s) about residential schools.

Path Two: Timeline

Utilize [NCTR's digital map](#) for students to learn how long residential schools were operating for and give them a visual of the chronology.

- Split students into partners and assign a year (e.g. 1965).
- Have students record information about the number and location of open residential schools that year. Students should be prepared to present their information at the end of the activity and discuss trends they notice.
- Students can work together to assemble a chronological timeline of residential schools and keep it displayed.

Path Three: Before and After

Where were residential schools and what is there now?

Use a student sheet and Google Maps (See also CBC's "[Did you live near a residential school?](#)" and the NCTR's [Memorial Map](#)) to show a "before and after" of the location of residential schools.

Introduce students to using an interactive map and how we can learn about history by using one.

- Compare pictures of residential schools with what that area now looks like. Have students draw or describe what they see there now.
- Encourage them to make note of any buildings that have been taken down and rebuilt or if the original residential school structures are still there. If they are still standing, what are the buildings used for? (e.g. [Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre](#))
- Have students explore their own communities and the residential school(s) that were closest to various locations they know. Have a discussion about how far away this residential school would be by car and other information to make it relatable to students.
- Allow students to independently explore the interactive map and have them put in different addresses.

Additional Activities

Have students read and complete a book report on an age-appropriate text on residential schools such as [*Fatty Legs*](#) or [*Dear Canada: These are my Words: The Residential School Diary of Violet Pesheens*](#).

Complete an “I see, I think, I wonder” by putting up a photo of students inside a residential school. Have students verbally share their thoughts in small groups or write on sticky notes and put them up. If this goes well, have them transition into “I claim, I support, I question” with more photographs to promote historical, reflective, and critical thinking.

Get a toolkit focused on residential schools and reconciliation and complete it with your class. We recommend [100 Years of Loss EDU Kit and Teacher Bundle](#) or the [Assembly of First Nations Education Toolkit](#).

More Resources

This guide is intended to help teachers fulfill the 62nd Call to Action:

“Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.”

It is important to recognize the significant and lasting impact residential schools continue to have on Indigenous and settler communities while accurately representing Indigenous perspectives and culture. Reconciliation demands awareness and action from every Canadian, and that starts in the classroom.

Consult some of the sources used to create this guide:

[Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#), National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

[Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#), National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

[Residential School History](#), National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

[Residential School Timeline](#), National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

[Residential Schools in Canada](#), The Canadian Encyclopedia

[Timeline: Residential Schools](#), The Canadian Encyclopedia

[Moving Toward Reconciliation in Ontario’s Publicly Funded Schools](#), People for Education

[Terminology Guide: Research on Aboriginal Heritage](#), Library and Archives Canada

[Native Land Digital](#)

[An Overview of the Indian Residential School System](#), The Union of Ontario Indians

Discover more suggested resources from our contributors:

[Downie/Wenjack Foundation](#)

[Legacy of Hope Foundation – Where Are the Children](#)

[Project of Heart](#)

[Every Child Matters: Reconciliation Through Education](#), Canada's History Society

[Residential Schools in Canada: Education Guide](#), Historica Canada

[Beyond 94: Truth and Reconciliation in Canada](#), CBC News

[Indian Residential Schools and Reconciliation: Teacher Resource Guide](#), First Nations Education Steering Committee and First Nations Schools Association

[Wapikoni Teaching Guide: An introduction to the diversity of Indigenous cultures in Canada](#), Wapikoni

[Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada](#), Canadian Geographic

[Authentic Resources and Appropriation](#)

[Truth and Reconciliation in YOUR Classroom](#)