The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

**Core Skill Sets:**
These icons identify the most relevant core skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE Learning Framework at www.WE.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- In 1883, the federal government of Prime Minister Sir John A. MacDonald passed a law to officially establish a system of residential schools. One of MacDonald’s ministers, Hector Langevin is quoted as saying: “In order to educate the children properly we must separate them from their families. Some people may say that this is hard but if we want to civilize them we must do that.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, They Came for the Children)

- At least 139 different residential schools across Canada have been identified over the history of the residential school system, from the 1800s until the last one was closed in 1996. More than 150,000 Indigenous children—First Nations, Inuit and Métis—attended these schools throughout that history. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, They Came for the Children)

- The estimated number of children who died in residential schools is now more than 6,000. An Indigenous child in a residential school had a higher risk of dying than a Canadian soldier during World War II. (CBC)

- In October 1966, Chanie Wenjack, a 12-year-old boy of the Anishinaabe nation, escaped from a residential school near Kenora, Ontario. Wenjack wanted to return to his father, who he missed, but who lived more than 600 kilometres away. After walking several days, Chanie died of hunger and exposure beside a railway track. (The Canadian Encyclopedia)

- In 2016, Gord Downie—leader of the music group The Tragically Hip—released a multi-media project called The Secret Path about the life of Chanie Wenjack. With the support of Chanie’s sisters, Downie started a charitable fund to raise awareness about the history of residential schools. (CBC)
THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

- **Themes**: Indigenous Peoples of Canada, Human Rights, Local Issues, Education
- **Course Connections**: Language, Social Studies

MATERIALS

- Front board
- Paper and writing utensils
- Computer/tablet with Internet access and video capability

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Understand the realities of life in Indian Residential Schools
- Recognize the need for reconciliation and identify opportunities to work toward reconciliation
- Raise awareness in their local communities about reconciliation

DISCUSS

1. What is the purpose of a legacy room?
2. What does reconciliation look like for a Canadian?
3. What is part of the process of reconciliation in Canada?
4. What is a residential school?
5. How can we raise awareness about the negative effects of residential schools in order to better understand?

MAP IT

Show students a detailed map of Ontario, Canada. Online maps provide satellite imaged maps showing the terrain of the area. Inform students that Chanie tried to travel 600 km from his residential school—Cecelia Jeffrey Indian Residential School in Kenora, Ontario to his home in Ogoki Post. Chanie did not survive this experience. Ask students to map the travel from the residential school to Chanie’s home. Have them map distances they are familiar with to compare the distance.

Ask students, what might the experience be like walking 600 km in bitter fall weather?

DIVE DEEPER

Instruct students to read the Global Voices article and answer the discussion questions from the Discuss section above.


Inform students that these videos were created to tell the story of Chanie Wenjjack, the 12-year-old Anishinaabe boy who died after fleeing his residential school in 1966. Ask students to think about the following questions while watching the videos:

- What was Chanie's experience in the residential school as shown in the video?
- What is the expression on the faces of the children and Chanie while in the residential school? What do these expressions reflect?
- What was Chanie's life like prior to his experience in the residential school?
- Why is it a “secret path”?
- Why is this video important for all Canadians to see?

In small groups, ask students to research and answer the following questions about Indian Residential Schools. Students may use the Canadian Encyclopedia website or other websites [www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools/](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools/).

- When were residential schools first established?
- When was the last residential school closed in Canada?
- What was the purpose of sending children from First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities these schools?
- What was life typically like in the residential school for the students?
- List five negative impacts on children living in residential schools.
- Why were these schools closed?
- Why is there a need for reconciliation?

In the same groups, create a fact sheet that raises awareness about the reality of life in a residential school and discusses the need for reconciliation. Encourage students to use the information they have gained from their research in the previous activity to facilitate the creation of the fact sheet.

As a class, discuss why reconciliation is important for all Canadians to understand and take part in. How can the process of reconciliation help all Canadians?

RESOURCES

Truth and Reconciliation Commission: [www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca)

WE Stand Together [www.WE.org/westandtogether](http://www.WE.org/westandtogether)