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/](http://www.WE.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/).

**NOTE TO EDUCATORS**

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.

**KEY TERMS**

- **Legacy**—something that is handed down from the past, generation to generation
- **Reconciliation**—to bring people or groups of people back together by fixing the problems that caused the anger or division between them

**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](https://www.trc.ca/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](https://www.trc.ca/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](https://www.cbc.ca/))
- 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](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/))
- 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](https://www.cbc.ca/))
THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

- **Themes:** Indigenous Peoples of Canada, Human Rights, Local Issues, Education
- **Course Connections:** English, Canadian and World Studies, Native 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 more than 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.


Why are they called survivors? What was the experience of living in a residential school? What was the purpose of residential schools?

In pairs, ask students to create a mind map on the reconciliation process using the stories of residential school survivors. Ask students to research the Truth and Reconciliation Commission [www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca) to gain a deeper understanding of reconciliation. Consider, what reconciliation is. What is the path to reconciliation?

Share with students the video “The Stranger,” Gord Downie, Secret Path [www.youtube.com/watch?v=za2VsjkwtF0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=za2VsjkwtF0) (5:46) and “The Path to Reconciliation—Gord Downie and Pearl Wenjack at WE Day” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eyp1G8PZziE&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eyp1G8PZziE&feature=youtu.be) (4:03). Inform students that these videos were created to tell the story of Chanie Wenjack, 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?

The article discusses the opportunity to raise awareness about residential schools and reconciliation through the creation of legacy rooms—a physical space where Canadians are not only reminded of the story of Chanie, but encouraged to think about the process of reconciliation. As a class, discuss how a legacy room can be created in your school to raise awareness about the legacy of Indian Residential Schools. Ask students to think about how they would design and create a legacy room for their school community. Encourage students to think about technological resources, primary sources, photographs and written resources.

In small groups, start the process of designing a legacy room for your school community. Students can use chart paper or design software to start the creative process of design.

RESOURCES

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

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