

Global Voices is a weekly column written by Craig and Marc Kielburger examining current events, topics and issues affecting local and global communities. Each month, engaging classroom resources are created to accompany one column to help educators bring world issues into the classroom in a digestible manner. For more information on how to sign up please visit WE.org/global-voices-signup.

A Visit to the Dark Parts of Canada's Past: Taking Steps Towards a Brighter Future

Fact Sheet

- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has identified 139 residential schools funded by the Canadian government and acknowledges the existence of many others that were funded and operated by religious bodies ([Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#))
- Religious bodies established residential schools before Confederation in 1867, but the Canadian government only adopted the model in the 1880s; the Federal government began to close them in the 1970s but the last school was open until 1996. ([Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#))
- These schools impacted First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in every province and territory. ([Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#))
- Estimates say over 150,000 children passed through residential schools, where they were robbed of their culture, restricted from seeing their parents and often physically abused. ([University of Manitoba](#))
- More than 6,000 children died in residential schools. ([CBC](#))
- One in five students suffered sexual abuse at residential schools. ([Globe and Mail](#))
- Residential school survivors and their descendants report poorer health and wellbeing than those not impacted; specifically, poorer mental health, lower employment and income levels, elevated risk of suicide and alcohol abuse. ([CBC](#))
- 80,000 residential school survivors are still alive today. ([CBC](#))
- In 2008, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper offered an historic apology for residential schools in the House of Commons. ([Toronto Star](#))
- The grounds of former residential schools and the buildings themselves are in various states of repair across the country; some have been turned into spaces for Indigenous communities (band halls or cultural centres), others have been destroyed in ceremonies, while some are in private hands. ([CBC](#))

Key Terms

- ▶ **Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)**—As part of a settlement agreement in light of the history of residential schools, a commission was established to take testimony of survivors and document the impact on communities. The commission ran from 2008 until 2015 and offered 94 calls to action for the federal and provincial governments, as well as all Canadians, to pursue reconciliation between Canadians and Indigenous peoples.
- ▶ **Residential school**—Starting in the 1880s and running until 1996, residential schools refer to a network of boarding schools and institutions established and run by the government or religious bodies with the express purpose of educating and assimilating Indigenous youth by removing them from their families and culture. This act was tantamount to cultural genocide, according to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- ▶ **Reconciliation**—Reconciliation is difficult to define or categorize, meaning different things to different people and communities. Broadly speaking, it refers to a hope for the future founded on achieving justice for the past.
- ▶ **Intergenerational trauma**—The result of untreated trauma-related stress among one generation of survivors when it is passed down to subsequent generations; in this context, the trauma of abuse, neglect and forced assimilation in residential schools impacted several generations.

WE Learning Framework Skills



Critical Thinking



Action Planning



Reflection

These icons identify the most relevant skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE Learning Framework at WE.org/we-schools/program/learning-framework/.

Subject

- ▶ English Language Arts
- ▶ Media Literacy
- ▶ Social Studies

Materials

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



Classroom Activity - Grades 9 to 12

Essential Question:

- ▶ How do our experiences shape our understanding of history?
- ▶ What role do we play in building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada?

Learning Goals:

Students will:

- ▶ Learn about residential schools through oral stories
- ▶ Explore how their experiences shape their understanding of history
- ▶ Investigate the concept of cultural genocide and the impact it has had on Indigenous communities in Canada
- ▶ Understand their place in the history and legacy of residential schools and the role they can play in creating positive change for the future

Discussion:

1. What were residential schools? Why were they created?
2. Are there any residential school sites in your local area?
3. Why is it important to visit residential school sites and learn about the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada?
4. The author states that "seeing history is often more powerful than learning about it in textbooks." Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why?
5. Why are residential schools referred to as Canada's "dark past"?
6. Why are many non-Indigenous Canadians unaware of the history of residential schools? How is this lack of understanding harmful to Indigenous communities?
7. Why do the authors refer to residential schools as an act of cultural genocide?

Warm up: (20 minutes)

Educator's Note: The following activities discuss the trauma children experienced in residential schools and the effect of this policy on Indigenous communities. It is important to be mindful that the content of these activities may be challenging for your students to discuss and that it is important to create a safe space for all students to share their thoughts and feelings.

Show students the video "Heritage Minutes:

Chanie Wenjack," www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_tcCpKtoU0&list=PL1848FF9428CA9A4A&index=5 (1:00).

Place the following questions on the front board. Ask students to create pairs and assign each pair one question to discuss and respond to. After students have discussed their question, invite them to share their response with the class.

Discussion Questions:

- What was the purpose of establishing residential schools in Canada?
- Why were Indigenous children forced to attend residential schools?
- Why does Pearl Wenjack use the term "cultural genocide" to refer to residential schools?

Investigate and Learn: (60 minutes)

Place the map of Residential Schools of Canada on the front board: www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/pdfs/2039_T&R_map_nov2011_final.pdf. As a class, locate the city or town closest to you on the map. Ask students, which residential schools were close to your city or town? Write the names of these residential schools on the front board.

Using an online mapping tool, search for one of the residential schools near your hometown or city. Ask students:

- How far is the residential school from your school?
- Can you find an image of the school or area? What does it look like? Can you identify any specific features?
- Do you know what the purpose of this site was? Are you familiar with the history surrounding this site?
- What other information do you need to find out about this residential school site?

Educator's Note: In the following activity, students will hear the stories of residential school survivors across Canada. To make this activity more relevant to students' local context, consider contacting an Indigenous liaison in your school or district to find out if there are residential school survivors in your community who could share their story with your class. For this activity, collect a class set of laptops or tablets for students to listen to the oral stories of the survivors of the residential school. This will provide students with the experience of listening to a primary source of evidence and to connecting with it in an authentic manner. However, if laptops or tablets are unavailable, provide students with a transcript of the story. As an alternative, listen to one story as a class and provide students with the questions to discuss in small groups.

Show students the website www.wherearethechildren.ca/en/stories. Explain that between 1831 and 1996 residential schools operated in Canada through arrangements between the Government of Canada and churches across the country. Thousands of Indigenous children experienced the trauma of being removed from homes and families and placed into residential schools.

(Source: www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools)

Ask students to create small groups and provide each group with a tablet. Distribute **Blackline Master 1: Oral Story Guiding Questions** and explain to students that they will listen to the stories of residential school survivors to understand the trauma and impact residential schools had on their lives and the lives of their families, and respond to the questions in their small groups.

Invite each group to select one story to listen and respond to and, if time permits, encourage students to listen and respond to additional stories as well.

Bring students back together and invite them to share their learning. As a class, reflect on the following questions:

- What did you learn about the experiences of Indigenous people in residential schools?
- Did you discover any similarities or differences between the experiences of the survivors?
- Why is it important for all Canadians to understand and reflect on the experience of the survivors of residential schools?
- How can learning about the history of residential schools help you to understand your place in history and the role you can play in shaping the future?

Dive Deeper: (3 x 40 minutes)

Educator's Note: The following activities are a series of actions students can consider taking to learn more about the history and legacy of residential schools and discover the role they can play in moving toward a positive future.

Option 1

Ask students to create small groups. In the groups, ask student to use the map of residential schools in Canada from the Warm Up activity to choose a residential school site in the local area. Invite students to create a field trip proposal to present to the school principal, explaining why their class should visit the residential school site. In the proposal, invite students to consider the following questions:

- What is the name of the residential school site? Where is it located? How far is the school from the site?
- Why is it important to visit the residential school site? What is the purpose of the visit?
- What do you hope to learn about residential schools from this visit?

- How will your visit to the residential school site help you to understand your place in the conversation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people?
- How will this experience help you to work together with Indigenous people to create positive change for the future?
- How will students travel to the site? What are the travel and/or accommodation costs?

Option 2

Challenge students to write a letter or record a video explaining why it is important to remember, designate and commemorate residential school sites, and send it to their local Member of Parliament. In the letter or video, encourage students to reflect on why these sites serve as opportunities to learn about the trauma experienced by those in residential schools, and how understanding the impact of residential schools on Indigenous communities can help Indigenous and non-Indigenous students work together toward positive change.

Option 3

Pose the following question to students: Should the act of removing Indigenous children from their homes and sending them to residential schools be considered cultural genocide?

Challenge students to investigate examples of cultural genocide around the world and use their findings to explain whether or not this part of Canadian history should be considered cultural genocide.

Provide the following guiding questions to help students in their research:

- What is the definition of cultural genocide?
- Do these events align with the accepted definition of cultural genocide?
- Which communities or peoples were targeted? Why?
- What has the impact of these events been?
- Why was this notion of assimilation important?

After students have had sufficient time to research, discuss each group's findings with the class.

Additional Resources:

Truth and Reconciliation Commission: www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3

Where Are the Children: www.wherearethechildren.ca/en/resources

Legacy of Hope Foundation: www.legacyofhope.ca/education

United Nations: www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.html

Facing History: www.facinghistory.org/stolen-lives-indigenous-peoples-canada-and-indian-residential-schools

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada: www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-northern-affairs.html

Canadian Encyclopedia: www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools

Blackline Master 1: Oral Story Guiding Questions

How old were they when they were taken to residential school?

What was the residential school experience like for them and their fellow peers?

Why were they taken away from their families to attend residential school?

What was the impact of residential schools on them and their communities?

What was the impact on their families after they were taken away to residential school?

Why was the policy of assimilation focused on by the Government of Canada and the church?

What were the consequences for their community and their culture?