

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

*** WARNING ***

This activity deals with sensitive topics. Please review the following activity and accommodate accordingly.

PRE-TEACH/PRE-ACTIVITY

The residential school system, which lasted from the 1830s to 1996, is a dark chapter in Canadian history. These government-funded, church-run schools aimed to assimilate Indigenous children by taking them away from their families and forcibly eradicating their cultural identity. Residential schools have left a legacy that survivors, communities and families are still struggling to overcome and heal from to this day. Before starting with the Giant Floor Map, review Canadian Geographic Education's Google Earth Voyager Story, found here: g.co/earth/residentialschools. To begin deeper research, you can access the archives of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and view/read hundreds of primary resources and personal accounts about residential schools in Canada.

When discussing residential schools with your students, many emotions will be brought up that may be painful and difficult to process. Take some time to discuss self-care with your students, and encourage them to journal, draw or discuss the feelings they are having throughout with trusted peers or adults. Encourage your students to participate in the Imagine a Canada contest as part of their self-care. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has many resources to support teachers and students.

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LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- By studying the distribution of residential schools on the Giant Floor Map, students will gain an understanding of the federal government's agenda in removing children far from their families and communities so they could destroy Indigenous cultures throughout Canada.
- Students will use the Giant Floor Map and timeline to gain an understanding of the various names and labels for residential schools.
- Students will explore historical relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the local context of the Nlaka'pamux Nation in British Columbia.
- Students will learn about the story of one Nlaka'pamux child (Gladys) in the context of her local environment and traditional culture.
- Through Gladys's true story, students will understand the devastating impact residential schools had on Indigenous children, families and communities.
- Students will use the inquiry process to ask questions, gather information, interpret and analyze ideas, and communicate findings and decisions.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Foundational knowledge and perspectives

FIRST NATIONS

“Residential schools operated in Canada for more than 160 years, with upwards of 150,000 children passing through their doors. Every province and territory, with the exception of Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and New Brunswick, was home to the federally funded, church-run schools. The last school closed in Saskatchewan in 1996. First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were removed, often against their will, from their families and communities and put into schools, where they were forced to abandon their traditions, cultural practices and languages. The residential school system was just one tool in a broader plan of “aggressive assimilation” and colonization of Indigenous Peoples and territories in Canada.”

— from the “History of Residential Schools” in the *Truth and Reconciliation volume of the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*

“Through the course of its mandate, the TRC documented more than 3,100 student deaths, though that number could be closer to 6,000 or even higher. It was standard practice to construct a cemetery directly attached to the schools in many locations. Many cemeteries remain unmarked and undocumented at locations attached to former sites of residential schools and close to some of the schools that remain standing. There is a great deal of work still to be done to properly honour and remember the children who remain missing. Estimates suggest there may be as many as 400 unmarked gravesites near the sites of former residential schools.

One of the darkest elements of the residential school system was how many children disappeared while attending residential schools. They would die from disease, abuse, neglect and occasionally, trying to run away. Often, it would take weeks or months for parents of students at residential schools to receive word their child had died. Many families still wait for answers.”

— from the “Still Standing” in the *Truth and Reconciliation volume of the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*

“So many little lives were destroyed here,’ my mother speaks into the silence. One of those little lives belonged to her father, my grandfather. He died before I was born. He died of demons born in this school. He died without ever telling his story. Instead, he swallowed it, and it is this absence that troubles me as I try to find my own relationship to the process of truth and reconciliation.

How to tell truths when the truth is not known? How to reconcile with the absent, with the dead? Peter LeBarge and the untold others who did not survive leave an aching space. Not a wound that can be healed but a phantom limb that is gone but still tingles with feeling.

Calling attention to this absence is a disruption.

It disrupts the narrative that calls upon survivors to catalyze national healing by drawing attention to those who did not survive. The margins — the unknown segments of history that escape the narrative of testimony — contain the Indigenous victims of residential school who did not survive to testify for themselves. These people’s experience reverberates through generations, but their lives and choices are not honoured by the language of intergenerational trauma. My grandfather’s absence triggers a painful imagination, but this is not the same as trauma. I wonder what happened in the school. Imagine if he hadn’t gone. I wonder if he’d have taught me how to hunt moose. Imagine if he’d learned Tlingit from my great-grandmother, and then taught it to me. I wonder if he’d be standing up against these pipelines, too.”

— from “Residential Schools” by Anne Spice, in the *First Nations volume of the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*



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Foundational knowledge and perspectives

MÉTIS

There was a government driven classification system of the Métis based on their appearance, lifestyle and proximity to local Indigenous nations that determined their eligibility to attend residential school. Sometimes students would attend only if there were enough seats. For more information, go to: ahf.ca/downloads/metisweb.pdf

— *Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre – Lesson Plans*

“Many Métis had their faith shaken by the abusive church-run residential school system. Despite these devastating events and ongoing colonization, many Métis remain spiritual people. At present, many Métis youth and urban Métis are embracing First Nations spirituality and attending sweats and other First Nations purification ceremonies.”

— *from “Worldview” in the Métis volume of the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*

Students can take an more interactive approach to learning about Métis history in residential schools by downloading the app *Forgotten Métis* on iPhone or Android and exploring the website that goes with it (forgottenmetis.ca/en/) that is linked with the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg.



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Proceeds from the sale of *The Secret Path* are going to the Gord Downie Secret Path Fund for Truth and Reconciliation through the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba, which was created to ensure the dark legacy of the residential school system is never forgotten.

The Métis Experience, volume 3 of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, has many pictures that could be used for a photo essay or similar project or simply to help students visually: nctr.ca/assets/reports/Final%20Reports/Volume_3_M%C3%A9tis_English_Web.pdf.



RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Foundational knowledge and perspectives

INUIT

“Prior to the Second World War, the majority of Inuit lived in seasonal camps on the Land in smaller family units. The skills Inuit needed to survive and thrive in this reality were passed down from generation to generation; once they became old enough to contribute, each member had a role to play in the survival and well-being of their family unit. Canadian schooling, which followed the western system of education and included residential and day schools, was imposed on Inuit families who moved into settlements and was used as a way to separate children from families who still lived on the Land.

One of the first government-regulated schools specifically for Inuit opened in 1951 in Chesterfield Inlet, Nunavut. Residential schools were often located far away from the new Inuit settlements, and students who attended them often faced loneliness and estrangement from their language and culture. This rapid transition from the traditional methods of teaching and education had wide-ranging effects on the livelihoods of Inuit. These schools separated Inuit from their culture and language and disrupted the family unit, leaving many unable to understand parenting as they had never experienced parenting themselves. The

reverberations of generations suffering rampant physical, psychological and sexual abuse at these schools are still being felt by Inuit today. Although many Inuit have thrived in the Canadian education system, the transition has been difficult.”



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“Our education systems are only just emerging from the long shadow of residential schools, which had a profound impact on our families and communities. It shook our belief in ourselves. And if we are to restore the trust of parents who have been deeply hurt by their own educational experiences, we must build an education system ground-

ed in the Inuit culture, history and worldview, and with respect for the role of parents. The modern history of Inuit land claims has proven that we can be successful in reclaiming those aspects of our lives that were once the foundation of healthy communities. We must now apply that same determination to building our own successful education system.”

— from “Education” in the Inuit volume of the *Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*



RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Points of inquiry and activation related to the Giant Floor Map



NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE LESSON:

- **Have students identify the symbol for residential schools on the Giant Floor Map legend, and then work in small groups to locate these schools.** For younger grades, use the Residential Schools Map card included in the kit to help them locate the symbols. Give each group a part of Canada to examine, and have them record the number and names of the schools in their area. Gather students back together and discuss their findings. How many schools did they find? What were their names? In which part of the country were there a lot of schools, and where were there not as many? Inquiry question: Why were residential schools given their respective names? Discuss patterns and trends that your students see with the location of residential schools across the country. In particular, discuss the areas where there are few or no residential schools on the map, such as Newfoundland and Labrador and the Arctic. Do more research to find out when schools were recognized as having been residential schools, how they are currently (and have been historically) classified, and the impact this has had on the reconciliation process to date.
- **Have individuals or small groups choose one residential school and measure the distance students from surrounding communities had to travel, using the information on the Residential Schools Map card as a guide.** Have students report their findings and then discuss how difficult it must have been for children and their families to see each other. Note that these schools were often run by different religious denominations. Students had no choice in which school they would attend. Parents were threatened with jail if they tried to prevent a child from going. Sending children to schools further from home was another way to keep families separated. Have students locate the school closest to their community and discuss how far children from their community would have been sent.
- **Remind students that transportation long ago was nothing like today (e.g., commercial flying didn't exist).** Most Indigenous people did not have cars or the ability to travel on the train. This would mean walking or finding a ride somehow. Vehicles that were available travelled slowly on unsophisticated roadways. Have older students measure distances between a community and various schools, and then calculate how long it might take to get to a particular residential school on foot or by a car travelling 30 km/h on rough roads versus today when we can travel up to 100 km/h on well-maintained highways.

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RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Points of inquiry and activation related to the Giant Floor Map

PROVINCIAL PERSPECTIVE LESSON:

- **There are hundreds of different First Nations across Canada (more than 200 in British Columbia alone).** Nations studied in this section of the unit will vary depending on your area or province of study. The example provided here is for British Columbia. The Gladys Module (which can be found in the resource section of the teacher's guide) is being used to examine what a child's life was like in a B.C. residential school.
- **We suggest you research examples in your area to help students make personal connections to residential schools.** Begin your research in the archives of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.
- **Once students have explored the location of residential schools on a national level, have them sit around the border of the Giant Floor Map and lead a discussion.** Ask students to recall their first day of school. What do they remember about it? Who took them? How close did they live to the school? Was it what they expected? What did they look forward to when they went home after school? What did they enjoy at school? What did they not enjoy? Was it better or worse than they expected? Ask students to share their memories while they sit in a sharing circle around the map.
- **Have students place a pylon on their school's location on the Giant Floor Map, and ask them if they can use their hands and feet to measure the distance between their house and their school.** In many cases, this will not be possible because the pylon will cover a space much greater than the school property. Discuss how close students live to the school.
- **Next, have students locate the community of Spuzzum, B.C., (49.6 latitude, -121.4 longitude) on the Giant Floor Map.** Ask students to calculate how far away their home is from Spuzzum using the scale provided on the map. Discuss whether your students are familiar with that region of British Columbia. If not, take a moment to explore the map and describe the physical and human geography of the area. For example, Spuzzum is on the Fraser River, in the Fraser Canyon, a mountainous region near Hope. Have students trace or "find" their way from where they live to Spuzzum. What other landforms, physical features do they notice on the map? What other communities, towns, or cities do they see? Take a few minutes to share findings.
- **Ask all the students to sit around Spuzzum, and explain that an Indigenous girl named Gladys was born here on June 15, 1918.** When she was seven, Gladys was forced to leave her home and go to the Kamloops Residential School. Explain that students from the same family and same community were not always sent to just one school. Other children from Spuzzum were sent to Sechelt, Lytton and Mission. Have four students identify these locations on the map and point them out to the rest of the class. Have students calculate the distance from Spuzzum to each of the four residential schools using the coloured ropes. Remind them to follow roads as much as possible, not to measure "as the crow flies." Students could then calculate the actual distance, using the scale on the map. To help students understand just how far these children travelled, have small groups locate communities or towns that are about the same distance away from your school.
- **Next, divide the class into small groups and give each group a blank card and markers.** Ask students to reflect on the common experiences of their community and families — they should touch on things such as language, spirituality, sports teams, friendships, traditions, values, etc. Have each group cross off the experiences they think would be negatively affected, or even disappear, if their community no longer had any children in it. Discuss as a class. Looking back to the students' community and the distances measured out by the ropes, have students reflect on how they would feel if they were forced to attend a school as far away as the one Gladys went to.

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Age appropriate application and experiential learning

ELEMENTARY

K-6

- **Introduce the idea of residential schools** to your students by reading any of the books found on the educational resources section of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's website: education.nctr.ca/link-to-page-2/
- **Ask students to illustrate** all the parts of their life that make them who they are (e.g., language, family, friends, hobbies) and describe how they would feel if these things were taken away. Help to develop empathy in your students by discussing how Indigenous students must have felt.
- **Create your own Project of Heart:** projectofheart.ca/
- **Plant a Heart Garden:** fncaringsociety.com/honouring-memories-planting-dreams

INTERMEDIATE

7-9

- **Invite a residential school survivor** to be a guest speaker. Refer to Project of Heart's guidelines (projectofheart.ca/step-4-survivor-visit/) for inviting an IRS Survivor to visit your class.
- **Show students the Traditional Ways of Knowing and Being** card, and discuss the meaning of each section. Do a jigsaw activity where small groups are responsible for explaining one section to the class. Have a sharing circle discussion about how removing Indigenous children from their communities would have affected Indigenous Peoples in the long term.
- **Have students read the residential school timeline** included with the Giant Floor Map. Ask them to walk around the Giant Floor Map and using sticky notes, mark the important events related to residential schools on the timeline that goes around the border. Discuss how these events fit into the history shown on the bigger timeline.

SECONDARY

10-12

- **Ask older students** what they think the long-term consequences of government policies such as residential schools and the Indian Act have been for Indigenous Peoples across Canada. Have students reflect on the multi-generational consequences of destroying families and traditional cultures. Talk about the things students have learned from their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. What would their life be like if they had not been loved and taught these things?
- **Discuss the 94 Truth and Reconciliation calls to action** and decide as a class what they can do to work towards them.

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RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Age appropriate application and experiential learning

- **Have students read the residential school timeline** included with the Giant Floor Map. Ask them to walk around the Giant Floor Map and using sticky notes, mark the important events related to residential schools on the timeline that goes around the border. Discuss how these events fit into the history shown on the bigger timeline.
- **Explore Chanie Wenjack's story** through *The Secret Path* graphic novel and the music video/short film by Gord Downie (youtube.com/watch?v=za2VzjkwTfc), Gord Downie's *The Secret Path* and a post-show CBC Arts live panel on the road to reconciliation (youtube.com/watch?v=yGd764YU9yc) and associated resources (this Maclean's article discusses Chanie's experiences in his last few days: macleans.ca/society/the-lonely-death-of-chanie-wenjack/). Discuss the role of allyship in reconciliation and how non-Indigenous people can help make a significant impact, similar to the effect that Gord Downie had.
- **Explore these Indigenous-authored books** and discuss them with your students:
 - ▶ *Sugar Falls: A Residential School Story* by David Alexander Robertson, illustrated by Scott B. Henderson
 - ▶ *I Am Not a Number* by Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer
- **Watch the movie *Indian Horse*** and engage students with activities from the accompanying study guide: indianhorse.editmy.website/downloads/study-guide.pdf

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DEMONSTRATION OF LEARNING

- **Ask students to work together** to plan a path that your class can take towards reconciliation.
- **Ask students to review the government's actions towards reconciliation** and the response of Indigenous Peoples so far — is the government making headway? Do Indigenous communities feel like their healing process is being improved by government efforts?
- **Have students consider people today** who are applying for Métis status — why is this important? How will this change Canadian demographics? Is it fair that an application for status is necessary? Do your students agree with the rights that come with status? Should there be more rights?



LEARNING TO ACTION

- **Participate in the Imagine a Canada contest** to share your students' vision for reconciliation in Canada.
- **Have students implement at your school** Orange Shirt Day, Project of Heart, or any of the other reconciliation initiatives that are available.
- **Incorporate lessons about residential schools** into your curriculum. Resources are available through the First Nations Education Steering Committee (fnesc.ca/irsr/), government of the Northwest Territories (ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/northern_studies_10_teaching_guide.pdf) and the government of Saskatchewan (edonline.sk.ca/webapps/blackboard/content/listContentEditable.jsp?content_id=_126354_1&course_id=_3514_1&mode=reset).