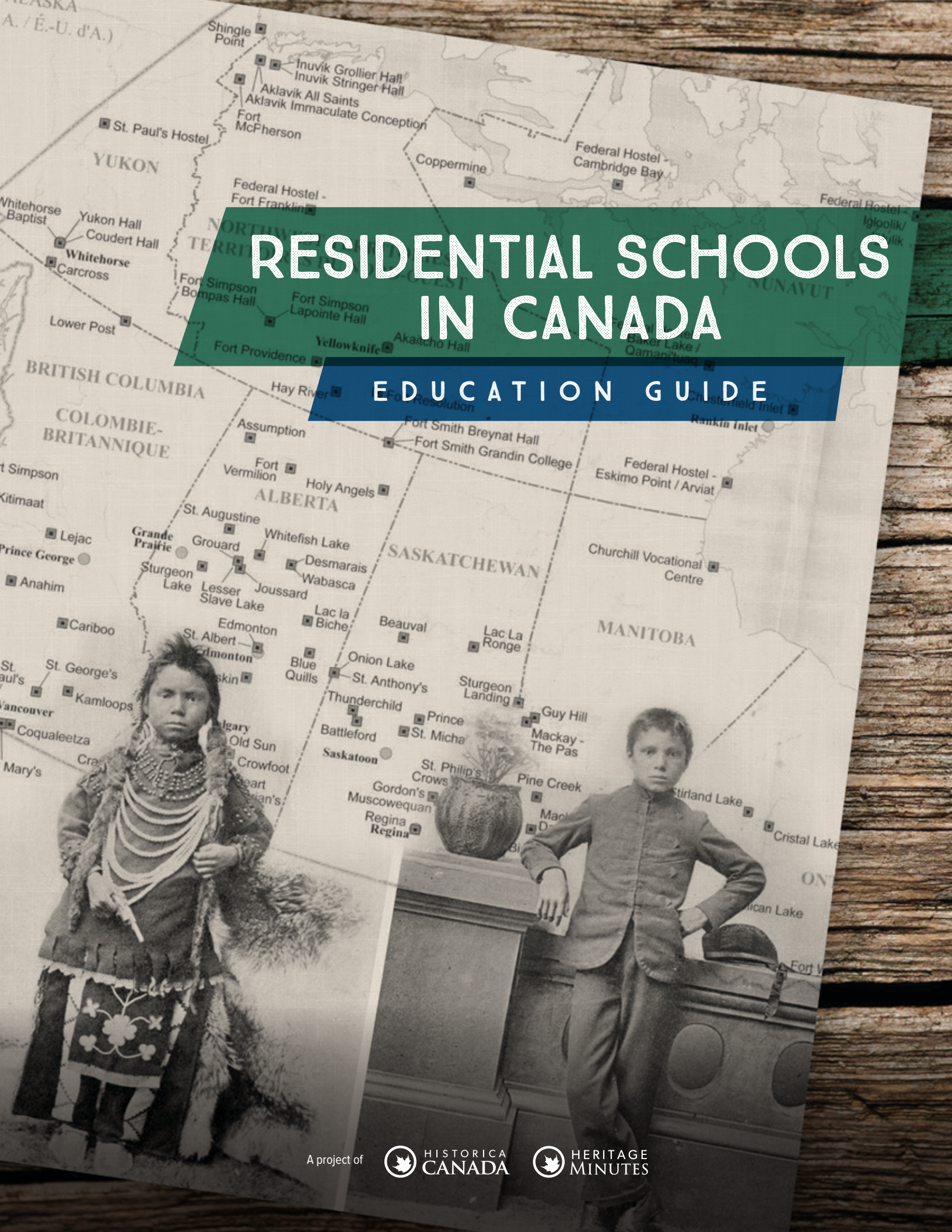


RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS IN CANADA

EDUCATION GUIDE



A project of



“When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that the Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.”

— Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, Official report of the debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada, 9 May 1883, 1107–1108

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Residential Schools	2
Message to Teachers	3
The Legacy of Indian Residential Schools	4
Timeline	5
Historical Significance: Timeline Activity	8
Analyzing Historical Photographs	9
Understanding Residential Schools	9
The Oral Tradition	10
Understanding the Term 'Cultural Genocide'	10
A Timeline for Reconciliation	10
What Happened to Residential Schools?	11
Ethical Dimensions: Creating a Museum Exhibit	12

INTRODUCTION: RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Residential schools were government-sponsored religious schools established to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian society. Successive Canadian governments used legislation to strip Indigenous peoples of basic human and legal rights, dignity and integrity, and to gain control over the peoples, their lands and natural rights and resources. The *Indian Act*, first introduced in 1876, gave the Canadian government license to control almost every aspect of Indigenous peoples' lives. The Act required children to attend residential schools, the majority of which operated after 1880.

Residential schools were originally created by Christian churches and the Canadian government. The goals of these schools were to 'civilize' Indigenous peoples by forcibly converting them to Christianity, and to integrate them into Canadian society through a process of cultural, social, educational, economic and political assimilation.

Residential schools were underfunded and overcrowded; they were rife with starvation, neglect, and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, often including isolation from normal human contact and nurturing. Students were forcibly removed from their communities, homes and parents, and frequently forbidden to speak their Indigenous language and perform traditional music and dance. However, the experience of Survivors varied dramatically from school to school.

Residential schools caused immeasurable damage, disrupting lives, disturbing healthy communities and causing long-term problems.

The legacy of the schools has been to alienate generations of Indigenous peoples from their beliefs, traditions and lifestyles. The damages inflicted by these schools created intergenerational trauma that continues to affect Indigenous peoples across Canada today.

An estimated 6,000 children died while in the residential school system, and many more remain unaccounted for. Often, officials refused to send the bodies of dead children back to their parents, claiming the cost was too high. Many children were buried in graves with multiple bodies. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, approximately 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children attended residential schools.

This Education Guide aims to raise awareness of this chapter in Canada's history and increase understanding of the important role education plays in the reconciliation process. As the Executive Summary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada notes, "Schools must teach history in ways that foster mutual respect, empathy, and engagement. All Canadian children and youth deserve to know Canada's honest history, including what happened in the residential schools, and to appreciate the rich history and knowledge of Indigenous nations who continue to make such a strong contribution to Canada, including our very name and collective identity as a country. For Canadians from all walks of life, reconciliation offers a new way of living together." — *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 21.



First Nations peoples in Canada were initially called ‘Indians’ by colonial Europeans. We no longer use this term to describe First Nations, though it is still in use as a legal definition. ‘Indian residential schools’ is similarly a historic term, used by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, as well as by this Guide. ‘Aboriginal,’ conversely, is an umbrella term that includes status and non-status First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Indigenous’ are used interchangeably, and since the preferred term is Indigenous, we have primarily used that throughout this Education Guide.



▼ Residential school students at Fort George cemetery, Québec, November 3, 1946 (public domain/Handout/Truth and Reconciliation Commission).



“There is a world of difference between being an Indian and being Anishinabe. An Indian is a creation of the European imagination and is legally inscribed on us by the federal government. There were no Indians in our territories prior to European arrival. In fact, there are only Indians in contemporary terms if the federal government is allowed to take control of Indigenous identities.”

— John Borrows, *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution*, 415

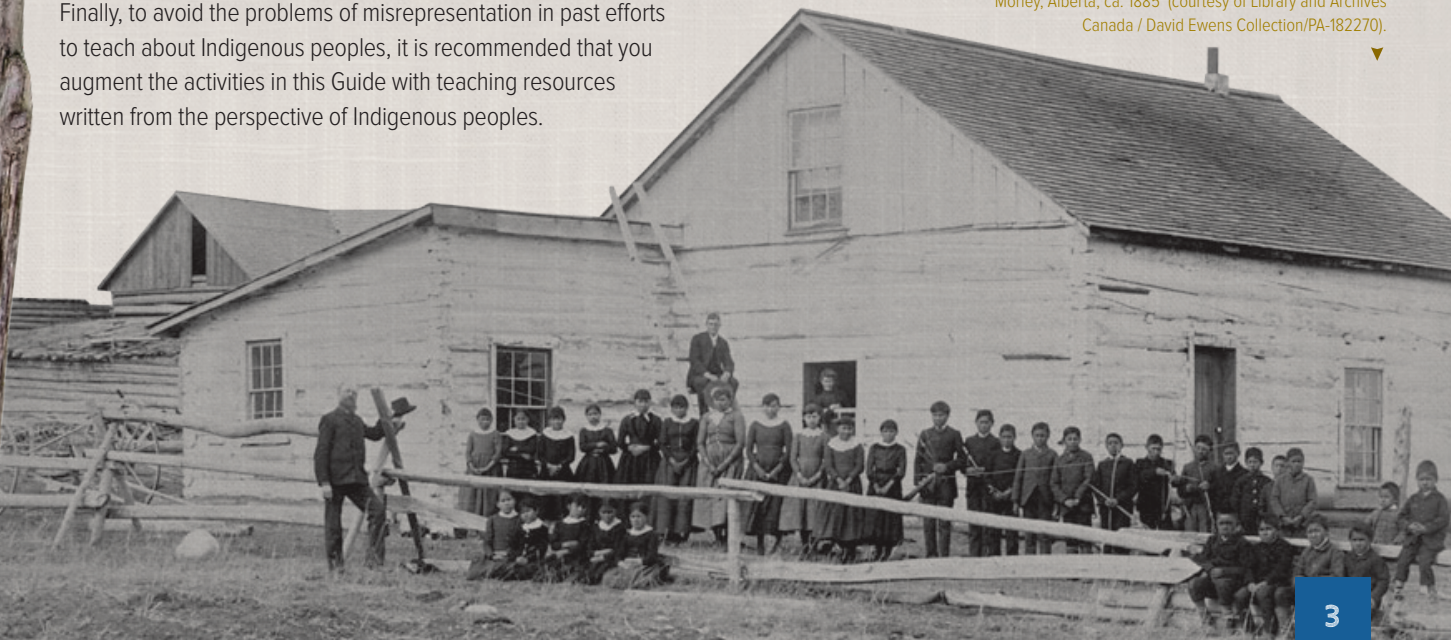
MESSAGE TO TEACHERS

For this set of learning tools, you will need to conduct some research and lead discussions around the history and legacy of Canada’s Indian residential schools. This is an opportunity for students to develop their inquiry skills to help them understand the reasons for the actions, beliefs and decisions that motivated the creation and maintenance of this system for more than a century. It is very important to understand the difficult nature of the topic, and the emotional impact it might have on some students. The topic should be broached with compassion, and it must be examined with attention to students’ responses. The classroom climate should encourage students to relate to one another in positive, respectful and supportive ways. Establish ground rules for class discussions that demonstrate respect for privacy, diversity, and the expression of differing viewpoints. Should any concerns arise, inform an administrator or counsellor and ensure that students know where to go for help and support. We strongly advise that you watch the [Chanie Wenjack Heritage Minute](#) and check links provided before sharing with students, as content may be upsetting.

We are in the unique position of being able to hear from Survivors and **Intergenerational Survivors**. The history of Indian residential schools is contemporary; this is a living history. The legacy continues to affect Survivors, their families, and generations of Indigenous peoples who are dealing with the consequences of previous government policies.

Finally, to avoid the problems of misrepresentation in past efforts to teach about Indigenous peoples, it is recommended that you augment the activities in this Guide with teaching resources written from the perspective of Indigenous peoples.

Students at Morley Indian Residential School - McDougall Orphanage, Morley, Alberta, ca. 1885 (courtesy of Library and Archives Canada / David Ewens Collection/PA-182270). ▼



KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Intergenerational Survivors: people who have been affected by the cross-generational dysfunction created by the experience of attending residential school, including people who have been abused by Survivors or victims of Survivors and, more generally, people who live in dysfunctional communities that are rooted in the fracturing of family and community caused by the generations of children who were separated from their families. In the early 1990s, an estimated 287,350 Intergenerational Survivors were living across Canada, on- and off-reserve.

From <http://wherearethechildren.ca/watc/blackboard/intergenerational-survivors/>

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The activities included in this Guide have been developed in line with the Historical Thinking Concepts developed by Dr. Peter Seixas. Students and historians are often required to make judgments when studying history, but it is important to consider historical context. This involves considering what society and attitudes were like in the past. When trying to understand people's motivations or beliefs, historians and students of history must balance this awareness of past beliefs while working to avoid excusing their actions as resulting solely from their historical context.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS

Accommodations for Special Education, ELL and ESL students are included under the appropriate sections, and identified as "modifications."

Students practising penmanship, Red Deer Industrial Institute, Alberta, c. 1914 (courtesy of the United Church of Canada Archives / #93.049P/850). ▼

Further educational activities and resources are available on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. We hope this Guide will assist you in teaching this important subject in Canadian history.

THE LEGACY OF INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

The legacy of Indian residential schools remains a controversial subject in Canadian history. You will do some research to better understand the intentions of and motivations for the schools. Working in groups, research one of the following questions. Use the resources listed below to begin your research.

- What were the goals of the residential schools? How did the residential schools seek to meet these goals? Was attendance at residential schools mandatory? How was it enforced?
- Describe life at residential schools. Look at circumstances and policies. How were students at the residential schools affected by the neglect, abuse, and lack of affection?
- Were officials aware of problems such as hunger and overcrowding at residential schools during the time they were in operation? How did teachers and operators react to these issues?
- How did Survivors' relationships with their families and communities change as a result of attending residential schools? How have the policies that traumatized students affected later generations?

Share your findings as a class, and discuss what you have learned from your research.



▲ Shingwauk Indian Residential School, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, May 1966 (courtesy of Archives of Ontario/10012275/Mildred Young Hubbard Fonds/F4369-1-0-7RG 1-653).

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation: nctr.ca/map.php

Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports: nctr.ca/reports.php

Truth and Reconciliation Commission: thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/truth-and-reconciliation-commission

Residential Schools: thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools

Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement: thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indian-residential-schools-settlement-agreement

TIMELINE

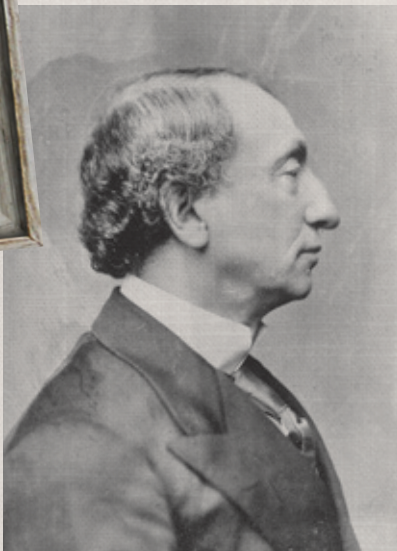


▲ Mohawk Institute, Brantford, Ontario, c. 1884 (courtesy of Library and Archives Canada/PA-051882).

1857

The Gradual Civilization Act requires male 'Indians' and Métis over the age of 21 to read, write and speak either English or French, and to choose a government-approved surname. The Act awards 50 acres of land to any "sufficiently advanced" Indigenous male, and in return removes any tribal affiliation or treaty rights.

◀ Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald (courtesy of Library and Archives Canada/W.J. Moore/C-021595).



1883

Sir John A. Macdonald authorizes the creation of residential schools in the West based on the recommendations of the 1879 Davin Report.

1896

45 residential schools are in operation across Canada. Each school is provided with an allowance per student, which leads to overcrowding and an increase in diseases within the institutions.

Students at Alert Bay Mission School, British Columbia, c. 1885 (courtesy of Library and Archives Canada/George M. Dawson/PA-037934).

1831

The Mohawk Institute becomes Canada's first residential school in Brantford, Ontario. At first, the school only admits boys. In 1834, girls are admitted.

1800

1844

The Bagot Commission proposes that separating Indigenous children from their parents is the best way to achieve assimilation. It also recommends that the Mohawk Institute be considered a model for other industrial schools.



1867

CONFEDERATION OF CANADA

Under the *Constitution Act (British North America Act)*, 'Indians' and land reserved for 'Indians' are made a federal responsibility, as is education.

▲ "The Fathers of Confederation" by Rex Woods. The original painting by Robert Harris was installed in the Parliament Buildings in 1883 and was destroyed during the 1916 fire. This image is a reproduction by Woods, commissioned to mark Canada's centennial (courtesy of Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1967-49-11).

1884

Amendments to the *Indian Act* of 1876 provide for the creation of Indian residential schools, funded and operated by the Government of Canada and Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and United churches. The Canadian government also bans traditional Indigenous ceremonies.

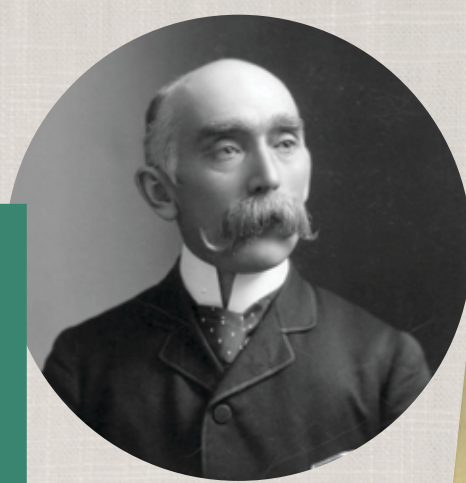


TIMELINE (CONTINUED)

1907

After visiting 35 residential schools, Dr. P.H. Bryce, chief medical officer for Canada's Department of the Interior and Indian Affairs (1904–1921), reveals that Indigenous children are dying at alarming rates. Bryce suggests the mortality rate could be as high as 42%.

1900



◀ Dr. P. H. Bryce, c. 1920 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Topley Studio/PA-042966).

▼ Dr. P. H. Bryce's 1922 report on the conditions in residential schools (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/James Hope and Sons Ltd).



1920

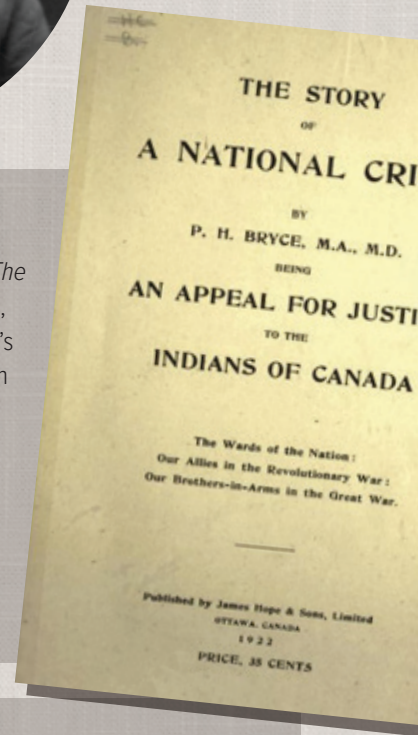
Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, makes attendance at residential school mandatory for every 'Indian' child between 7 and 16 years of age.

◀ Duncan Campbell Scott, c. 1915 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Dupras & Colas/C-003187).

Boys planting in the fields outside the school, Portage la Prairie Indian Residential School, Manitoba, c. 1930 (courtesy of the United Church of Canada Archives / #93.049P/1752).

1922

Dr. P.H. Bryce publishes *The Story of a National Crime*, exposing the government's suppression of information on the health of Indigenous peoples. Bryce argues that Scott neglects Indigenous health needs, and notes a "criminal disregard for the treaty pledges."



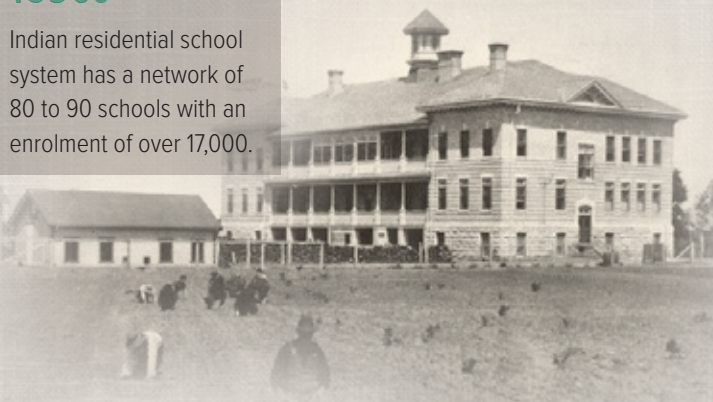
1955

The federal government expands the system of residential schools and hostels to the Inuit in the far north.

Personal family photo of Chanie "Charlie" Wenjack (courtesy Pearl Achneepineskum). ▼

1930s

Indian residential school system has a network of 80 to 90 schools with an enrolment of over 17,000.



NOVEMBER 17, 1966

Coroner's jury delivers its verdict for the inquest into the death of Chanie "Charlie" Wenjack (see page 9). Among the recommendations is that "[a] study be made of the present Indian education and philosophy. Is it right?"



Boys watching television at Portage la Prairie Indian Residential School, c. 1960 (courtesy of the United Church of Canada Archives / #86.158P/53).



1960-1980 THE SIXTIES SCOOP

As residential schools close, thousands of Indigenous children are taken from their families by provincial and federal social workers and placed in foster or adoption homes. Often these homes are non-Indigenous. Some children are even placed outside of Canada.

1969

The agreement between the churches and the Canadian government comes to an end, with the Department of Indian Affairs assuming responsibility for the remaining schools. The transfer of a few schools to local bands begins.

1991

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney initiates the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, with seven commissioners. The report is completed in 1996.

1996

The Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommends a public inquiry into the effects residential schools have had on subsequent generations. The 4,000-page document makes 440 recommendations calling for changes in the relationship between Indigenous peoples, non-Indigenous peoples, and governments in Canada.

2000

JUNE 1, 2008

The Canadian government authorizes the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) to document the truth and inform all Canadians about what happened in residential schools.

JUNE 11, 2008

Prime Minister Stephen Harper issues a statement of apology on behalf of the Government of Canada to former students of Indian residential schools.

Assembly of First Nations Chief Phil Fontaine (right) watches as Prime Minister Stephen Harper officially apologizes for more than a century of abuse and cultural loss involving Indian residential schools at a ceremony in the House of Commons on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, June 11, 2008 (courtesy of The Canadian Press/ Tom Hanson).

2015

The TRC issues its final report, *Honoring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, documenting the tragic experiences of approximately 150,000 residential school students. The report also includes 94 Calls to Action.

1900

1979

12 residential schools are still operating in Canada, with 1,200 children attending. The Department of Indian Affairs evaluates the schools and creates a series of initiatives. Among them is a plan to make the school administration more culturally aware of the needs of Indigenous students.

1991

Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Phil Fontaine, speaks of the abuse he suffered at residential school.

Gordon Indian Residential School, Punnichy, Saskatchewan, c. 1930 (Anglican Church of Canada Archives / P75-103-S7-151).



1996

The last federally-run facility, Gordon Residential School, closes in Punnichy, Saskatchewan.

2007-2012

The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement provides compensation to Survivors of residential schools. All Survivors receive the Common Experience payment, based on the number of years they attended residential school. Claims of sexual and physical abuse are assessed on a case-by-case basis.



KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Intended Consequences:
expected or anticipated results of an action; intentional outcomes

Unintended Consequences:
results that were not specifically planned as an outcome; they may be anticipated or unanticipated, but are not the aim of the original plan. Note: unintended consequences are not necessarily negative.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS

In helping students determine the historical significance of a given event, refer to the criteria provided by [The Historical Thinking Project](#).

How do we make choices about what is worth remembering? Events that resulted in great change over long periods of time, or affected large numbers of people, are often considered significant. But a historical person or a smaller event can acquire significance if historians can make links to larger trends and stories that reveal something important for us today.

Read more about historical significance [here](#).

Read about cause and consequence [here](#).

“The residential schools were designed to eradicate any sense of Indian-ness. They denied us the opportunity to learn about ourselves.”

— Phil Fontaine, former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: TIMELINE ACTIVITY

1. From the timeline, select 3–5 events you feel are significant in the history of the residential school system in Canada. Consider historical significance when making your selections. Explain why you think they are significant. Use a chart like the one below to help you organize your thoughts.
2. In pairs, pick 1 of the events you listed and visit [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#) for further research. Determine the causes and consequences of this event. Choose 3 **intended consequences** and 3 **unintended consequences**. Consider the historical significance of those causes and consequences: Which have had the longest legacy? Which affected the most people? Why?
3. Looking back at the timeline, choose 2–3 events which reflect the point Phil Fontaine makes in the quote above, and explain your choices.

◀ Laundry day at Mount Elgin Industrial Institute, c. 1909 (courtesy of the United Church of Canada Archives / #90.162P/1173N).

EVENT	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PEOPLE AFFECTED	DEPTH OF IMPACT How significant was this event? How deeply has it affected the people involved?	DURATION OF IMPACT How long has the impact of this event lasted?
-------	-------------------------------------	--	---



// MODIFICATIONS

Ask students to select 2–3 events from the timeline that they feel are significant. Have students work in pairs to choose one of the events they listed, research it on [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#), and fill in the [5Ws chart](#) for the article.

You can also have students choose 5 events and rewrite them in their own words, and identify 5 new words and create their own definitions.

▲ Classroom at St. Mary's Residential School, Blood Reserve, Alberta, July 1946 (courtesy of Glenbow / Archives NC-7-746).

Chanie wanted to go home. Stills from 'Chanie Wenjack' [Heritage Minute](#). ▶

ANALYZING HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS

The photograph to the right, entitled “Quewich and his children,” was taken around 1900 at the Qu’Appelle Industrial School in Saskatchewan. Not much is known about its subjects, but this photo was frequently used by the Department of Indian Affairs to display their confidence in the residential school system. Study the photograph closely, then answer the questions below.



1. What does this photograph tell you about the policy of assimilation? What can you infer from the differences between the parent and children? What does this say about separation from traditional environments and ways of life?
2. What message do you think the Department of Indian Affairs thought was being communicated through displaying this photograph?
3. What impression does the photograph leave with you?

// MODIFICATIONS

The questions can be answered in a variety of manners, depending on class ability level. Students can answer in point form, and more advanced writers can answer in paragraph form.

▲ “Quewich and his children”, Qu’Appelle Industrial School, c. 1900 (courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board photograph collection, Brock Silversides Fonds / R-A 22202 #23965).

UNDERSTANDING RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

“[C]hildren ... have rebelled against the harsh discipline by running away. Caught and brought back, they are locked in a room with just a mattress on the floor, left only their under-clothes, and put on a bread-and-milk diet.”

— Ian Adams, “The Indians: An Abandoned and Dispossessed People,” *Weekend Magazine*, no. 31, 1965, 4

According to his family, Chanie Wenjack’s name was changed to ‘Charlie’ by the people who ran the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School. What does this tell you about cultural repression and assimilation? How does this contribute to feelings of disconnection and isolation? What do you think were the goals and the impacts of name changing?

As a class, watch the “[Chanie Wenjack](#)” *Heritage Minute*. After, respond to the following questions together in groups. Read more about Chanie at [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#).

- A. Why do you think Chanie chose to run away from residential school? What does this say about the conditions students faced in the school?
- B. The quote in the *Minute*, “Kill the Indian in the child,” was frequently used to describe the aim of the residential schools. What does this tell you about the intentions of the policies that led to the formation of the Indian residential school system in Canada? Do you think the quote accurately reflects the intentions of the residential schools?
- C. Why do you think this *Minute* is told from the perspective of Chanie’s sister, Pearl? How does this connect to the tradition of oral history? See “The Oral Tradition” note on page 10.
- D. What kind of impression of the residential schools does this *Minute* leave? Compare this to what you have learned about residential schools from other sources. Why is it important to explore different perspectives and use multiple sources?
- E. How do you think this story might be different if it were told from the perspective of the school’s principal or a teacher? What does this teach you about historical perspective and how we remember the past?

// MODIFICATIONS Ask students to identify and define five new words from the *Minute*.

Students can write a point-form timeline of the events in the *Minute*. Going scene by scene, have students make a list of words describing Chanie’s emotions, and a list of their own emotional responses to what they are viewing.

THE ORAL TRADITION

Indigenous societies in North America have long trusted the oral transmission of stories, histories, lessons, and other knowledge to maintain a historical record, chronicle agreements, and sustain cultures and identities. Western discourse values the written word over the oral, and until recently, societies with oral traditions were characterized as peoples without history. There are many forms of oral recordkeeping, from storytelling and myths to performance-based narratives such as dancing and drumming. Most oral societies have adopted the written word as a tool for documentation, expression and communication, though many still depend on oral traditions and place great value on the oral transmission of knowledge as a key element of their cultures and societies.

(Adapted from <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/culture/oral-traditions.html> and from *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.)

UNDERSTANDING THE TERM 'CULTURAL GENOCIDE'

Thomas Moore, Regina Indian Industrial School, c. 1874 (courtesy of Library and Archives Canada/NL-022474).

"It is the absolute destruction of our ways, our languages, our families and identities. From my perspective it is a stepping stone in the right direction to call it cultural genocide. It is the starting point to a much larger process of awareness, recognition and reconciliation."

— Kahente Horn-Miller (Kanien:keha'ka/Mohawk; Assistant Professor in the School of Canadian Studies, Carleton University)



"Cultural genocide" is a new and controversial term used to refer to the intentional eradication and destruction of cultural artifacts and structures, the banning of cultural activities, and the obliteration of social structures rooted in unique cultures.

Two primary objectives of the residential schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into European colonial culture, causing Indigenous peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. These objectives were based on the assumption that Indigenous cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior to white European culture. Further, many believed that unless Indigenous peoples were assimilated into the dominant Canadian culture, they were destined to die out as civilization inevitably and naturally advanced. In June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission designated the residential school system a "policy of cultural genocide." (*Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 134.)

A TIMELINE FOR RECONCILIATION

"From the outset, this Commission has emphasized that reconciliation is not a one-time event; it is a multi-generational journey that involves all Canadians."

— *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*,
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 209

In the 1980s and 1990s, Survivors began to speak out about the abuses they had experienced in the residential schools. They took the Government of Canada and the churches involved to court for damages and compensation. By 2001, an estimated 78,500 people had gone to court or were preparing to do so. Most of these people were working together in a number of class action lawsuits.

Faced with a deluge of lengthy court battles, the Government of Canada and the churches entered into a negotiated settlement with the Indian residential school Survivors. The result was the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, reached in 2005. It was ratified in provincial courts in 2006, and implemented in 2007.

You can read more about the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement [here](#).



An image of a black-robed boy stares out from the wall of the now-demolished St. Michael's Indian Residential School in Alert Bay, British Columbia (courtesy of UC Observer, June 2015, Pieta Woolley, used with permission).

One of the legacies of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) in 2008. The TRC delivered its final report in December 2015. More than 6,750 people gave statements to the Commission.

The TRC identified 94 recommendations, or Calls to Action, which are specific ways that Canadian society can help make amends for the injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples, particularly the legacies of the Indian residential school system. Many of the Calls to Action call for the Government of Canada to take action, while others include provincial, territorial and municipal governments. Many of the Calls to Action appeal to the Canadian people to honour the legacy of the residential schools and to help right injustices through concrete actions.

You can read more about the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) at *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

You can also read the full TRC reports [here](#).

Participants in the Reconciliation Walk march towards Queen's Park in Toronto, Ontario, May 31, 2015 (courtesy of Newzulu/Lars Paronen)

In pairs or small groups, think about the following questions.

1. Read the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement article at *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. What were the main outcomes of the Agreement? Summarize the five components that were agreed on.
2. How are you involved in the reconciliation journey? Have you participated in any activities that have commemorated residential school students and their families? Have you engaged in projects or events that have honoured Indigenous cultures? (Think about the fact that right now you are learning about Indian residential schools.)
3. How is your increased understanding of this part of Canada's history important to you and to the reconciliation journey?
4. What can you do to help make reconciliation a reality? One place to look for suggestions is the [TRC website](#).

FURTHER READING:

It Matters to Me - trc.ca/websites/reconciliation/index.php?p=328

I Couldn't Forget: Reflection on Truth and Reconciliation by author

Lee Maracle - thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/i-couldnt-forget-reflections-on-truth-and-reconciliation



// MODIFICATIONS

Students can read the *The Canadian Encyclopedia* article on residential schools and create a [5Ws chart](#). Have them work in pairs to discuss their responses and check understanding. If you would like students to answer the above questions, have students reply in the form they are most comfortable with.

WHAT HAPPENED TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS?

What remains of the 139 residential school buildings across Canada? The physical relics of the residential school system are being treated differently across the country. Communities are grappling with which approach to take, asking questions about whether it is better to leave the building or to wipe the school off the face of the earth, leaving nothing as a marker of the dark past. The buildings serve as a presence that reminds Survivors of their stolen culture, language and identity, broken familial bonds and, in some cases, the physical or sexual abuse they endured. But they can also serve as a memorial to Survivors and to those who died, and as a lasting physical reminder for outsiders who did not experience the trauma. Some communities are embracing the structures, creating cultural centres, office spaces, or memorials to the atrocities committed. Others are tearing the buildings down to spare Survivors the painful memories that come with seeing the site of their trauma. Some examples of renovated spaces include the [Woodland Cultural Centre](#) (in the former Mohawk Institute) in Brantford, Ontario; the [Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre](#) at Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario; and [Nechi Institute: Centre of Indigenous Learning](#), in St. Albert, Alberta. However, some communities have not consulted with Survivors of the schools, and have torn the buildings down with little regard for the painful history attached to them. Today, only nine residential school buildings remain standing in Canada.

ETHICAL DIMENSIONS: CREATING A MUSEUM EXHIBIT

How should we remember the injustices of the past? As we study residential schools, we must consider the ethics of how we remember the past and its legacy in the present. How can we present history from an unbiased perspective? Can we show different perspectives without stigmatizing? What do we owe to the people of the past? How should we respond to past wrongs?

With that in mind, in groups of four, you will research and plan a virtual museum exhibit on the legacy of residential schools.

1. Begin by brainstorming with your group. Take notes on your planning. Think about what makes a powerful exhibit. How can a museum exhibit move us, make us think, or successfully preserve a memory? What understanding do you want visitors to walk away with? Is there an overall message? How can memorials work to prevent injustices from occurring in the future? How does understanding the past create a way forward?
2. Now begin your research. Discuss with your group members what features you would like your exhibit to have. As part of your research, look online for exhibits that museums or memorials have created for similar events of repression or genocide that have taken place (e.g., Australia, South Africa, Germany). Use your research to help you answer the following question: **What story do you want your exhibit to tell?** Visit *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and do some research on the history and the legacy of residential schools. You can also visit the website of the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#), and read the [94 Calls to Action](#) from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.



“Giniigaaniimenaaning (Looking Ahead)”
(courtesy of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada).

The Witness Blanket at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights stands as a national monument to recognise the atrocities of the Indian Residential School era, honour the children, and symbolize ongoing reconciliation. December 14, 2015 (courtesy of The Canadian Press/ John Woods).

Think about the following questions:

- A. Who are the main historical figures to be included? Which events will be featured? Why are these people and places significant to the story you are telling?
 - B. Will you choose one specific school to examine, or one specific story? Or will you address the legacy of residential schools as a larger topic?
 - C. Who would you consult in the creation of this exhibit (e.g., academics, Survivors, community members, teachers, etc.)? Which voices and perspectives would you include in your exhibit? How would you include them?
3. What key images or written pieces would you use and why? What visual representations of artifacts (e.g., photos, clothing, books, letters, etc.) would you want to include in your exhibit?
 4. Create a plan for your virtual exhibit. How will you present the stories? Will you organize the exhibit thematically or chronologically? How will you organize images and text to communicate the overall story of your exhibit? How will this affect understandings of your exhibit?
 5. Based on your research, develop a written proposal for your exhibit. Each group member will also write a one-paragraph personal reflection on why you feel your exhibit is an important step in telling the story of Indian residential schools. Is it a step toward reconciliation? Is it a memorial to the past, or does it create ways of moving forward? How do you feel about telling this story?



One of the recommendations in the TRC Final Report calls on governments to install public monuments “to honour Survivors and all the children who were lost to their families and communities.” In 2012, a stained glass window was placed in a prominent window in the Centre Block of Canada’s Parliament Buildings. The work of art, by Métis artist Christi Belcourt, is called “Giniigaaniimenaaning (Looking Ahead).” It commemorates the legacy of students of the Indian residential schools, and also Canada’s apology in 2008.

// MODIFICATIONS

Have students focus their museum exhibit on images rather than on words.

What will students use to help tell this story? Allow students to present the museum exhibit as a visual story.

Students can concentrate closely on one story, focusing on one school or individual. What images or artifacts can tell a story?

TEACHER TIP

If possible, plan a class trip to a local museum to explore how Indigenous histories and cultures are depicted. You can also visit wherethechildren.ca to see an example of how to present this sensitive subject matter.

You may want to consider alternative ways students can present their research. Examples include a Prezi or PowerPoint presentation, a WordPress site, an online Flipbook, a Word document, or even a bristol board presentation.