

Pedagogical Considerations for Teaching About Residential Schools



September 30th has been marked nationally as Orange Shirt Day. This day is an opportunity for schools and communities to come together in the spirit of reconciliation to commemorate and recognize Residential School Survivors. Please note that Orange Shirt Day can be done at any time throughout the year and not just on September 30th. We encourage you to create learning opportunities that go beyond the scope of just a one day event.

We recognize that this year will involve a significant amount of learning online. This document is to provide guidelines and suggestions on how to have important and necessary conversations within a safe and caring environment.

Educator As Learner

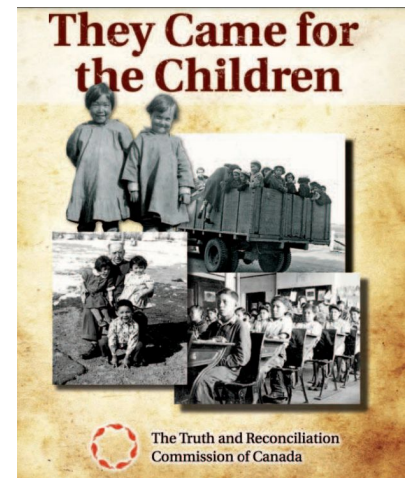
Prior to engaging in this learning with your class, it is imperative that you inform your own personal and professional practice by building an understanding of the history and lasting impacts of Canada's residential school system.

The following links provide a historical context and impact of residential schools to help inform your own professional practice:

[They Came For the Children](#)

[Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action](#)

[21 things you may not know about the Indian Act](#)



Know the Learner

Before diving into this topic it is critical that you know your students and their level of readiness to determine what information can be shared to ensure that the learning is meaningful as well as safe. Consider:

- You may or may not be aware that there are students in your classroom that have been impacted by residential schools. We cannot make assumptions as educators that this topic has been discussed at home. This may be an experience that Indigenous families have not yet chosen to share with their children.
- If you have families who self-identify as Indigenous in your classroom, building a relationship with them is essential before approaching the topic.
- How will you use a trauma-informed and culturally safe approach to learning?
- Have you considered how the topic may be triggering for your students? What supports are in place to support the learner if the topic is triggering?



Center Indigenous Voices



It is essential to have those who have been directly impacted by Residential Schools to be the ones to share their experiences.

- Connect with your Indigenous Education Lead to inquire about having a speaker in your classroom (if appropriate virtually).
 - Avoid activities that require students to take on the role/voice/perspective of an Indigenous person (e.g. no debates, plays, reenactments, etc.).
- Look for opportunities to support local individuals or communities directly impacted by residential schools.

Examples:

[Save The Evidence Campaign](#)

[Geronimo's Dream](#)

Make Connections to Colonialism

For over a century, *"The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as "cultural genocide."...Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next."*

http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf

It is important to connect the learning to colonialism. Consider:

- The goals of past and ongoing Canadian government Indigenous policy are to eliminate Indigenous governance, deny Inherent/Indigenous rights and termination of the Treaties.
- How this process of assimilation, causes Indigenous Peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, spiritual and racial entities in their homelands, now called Canada.
- Impacts of loss of identity? Language?
- How might the impacts of residential schools continue to contribute to the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health and well being of Indigenous families?
- Discuss the inequities of the settlement (apology, compensation) and make connections to other unjust settlements (60s scoop, day school)

Example Resources:

[In Our Words FNMIEAO Video](#)

[Colonization Road](#)

[How to Change Systemic Racism in Canada](#)

[Is it really genocide? In Canada?](#)



Balance the Narrative: Resistance and Resilience

While it is important to bring to light the realities of colonialism, it is critical that educators spend an equal amount of time on the resistance and resilience of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous People have ALWAYS resisted! Families hid from the Indian Agents. Survivors kept their languages, knowledge of Indigenous sciences, technologies and governance structures. Survivors continue to share their story in order to lead action where Indigenous Human Rights are fully recognized.

Consider:

- How can you include stories of resistance and reliance?
- How will you ensure that Indigenous students feel empowered and supported in their expressions of identity?
- Making connections to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
- How are Indigenous languages being revitalized? How can you contribute to ensuring languages survive and thrive?
- Revitalization of food sovereignty (access to traditional foods and medicine)
- How Indigenous peoples are actively defending their lands and ways of life

Examples:

[Facing History Stories of Resistance](#)

[Resistance and Residential Schools](#)

[An Untold History of Resistance to Residential Schools](#)

[Resistance and Change Lesson Plan](#)

[UNDRIP Activity](#)

Moving to Action

Equally important to the learning, is involving students in reconciliation projects. Consider how to actively involve those directly impacted. For example, have a residential school survivor or their children share their story and co-create a reconciliation project based on reciprocity to raise awareness (social media campaign, letter writing to government) and provide support (fundraisers).

Other ideas to consider:

- How can you involve your treaty partner(s)?
- What reconciliation projects can you be part of as an individual? Class? School?
- How can connections be made with our responsibilities to the land and to each other?

Examples of Projects:

[Youth Reconciliation Initiative \(YRI\)](#)

[Project of Heart](#)

[Onaman Collective](#)

[Save The Evidence Campaign](#)

[Geronimo's Dream](#)

