

# 100 Years of Loss

The Residential School System in Canada



**First Edition  
August 2017**

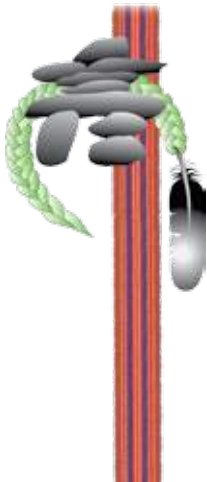
ISBN: 978-1-77198-012-8

© 2017 Legacy of Hope Foundation

Reproduction in whole or in part of this document for personal use, and in particular for educational purposes, is authorized, provided the following conditions are respected: non-commercial distribution; respect of the document's integrity (no modification or alteration of any kind); and a clear acknowledgement of its source as follows:

Source: Legacy of Hope Foundation, 100 Years of Loss: The Residential School System in Canada Activity Guide, 2017

Reproduction in whole or in part of this document for the purpose of adding it to data banks, encyclopedias, websites, or other reference sites will be granted provided the Legacy of Hope Foundation (LHF) is informed in advance.



Legacy of Hope Foundation  
1427 Ogilvie Road, Suite B4  
Ottawa, ON K1J 8M7  
T: 613-237-4806 or 877-553-7177

[legacyofhope.ca](http://legacyofhope.ca)

The Legacy of Hope Foundation is a national Indigenous charitable organization whose purposes are to educate, to raise awareness and understanding of the legacy of residential schools, including the effects and intergenerational impacts on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, and to support the ongoing healing process of Residential School Survivors. Fulfilling this mandate contributes towards Reconciliation among generations of Indigenous Peoples and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

**Acknowledgements**

The LHF gratefully acknowledges and thanks all the contributors to this project, particularly the students in Kim Bruton and Tessa Foster's Aboriginal Voices class (NBE3U/C) at Sir Robert Borden High School, Ottawa, Ontario, who conceived and produced the Reconciliation video used in this Guide.

Funding for this Guide was provided by the Museums Assistance Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

**Canada**

Please visit [legacyofhope.ca](http://legacyofhope.ca) for more information.



# Background

For over a century, beginning in the mid-1800s and continuing into the late 1990s, Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, Métis) children in Canada were taken from their homes and communities and were placed in institutions called Residential Schools. These schools were run by religious orders in collaboration with the federal government and were attended by children as young as four years of age. The children were separated from their families, often for years at a time. They were prohibited from speaking their mother tongue or language and practicing their culture and traditions. The vast majority of the over 150,000 children who attended these schools experienced neglect and suffering. The impacts of the sexual, mental and physical abuse, shame, and deprivation endured at these institutions continue to affect generations of Survivors, their families, and communities. Many died and were never to return home. Remarkably, in the face of this tremendous adversity, many Survivors and their descendants have retained their languages and cultures, and continue to work toward their personal healing and Reconciliation.

## Why It Matters

Why is this issue important to all Canadians? Why should it matter to those who didn't attend residential school?

**IT MATTERS** because it continues to affect First Nations, Inuit, and Métis families – people from vibrant cultures who are vital contributors to Canadian society.

**IT MATTERS** because it happened here, in a country we call our own – a land considered by many to be a world leader in democracy and human rights.

**IT MATTERS** because the Residential School System is one of the major causes of the disproportionate levels of poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, and violence experienced by Indigenous Peoples – devastating conditions that are felt and experienced by our neighbours, friends, and community members.

**IT MATTERS** because Indigenous communities suffer levels of poverty, illness, and illiteracy comparable to those in developing nations in a country that is prosperous.

**IT MATTERS** because we share this land. We may not be responsible for what happened in the past, but all non-Indigenous Peoples benefit from what First Nations, Inuit, and Métis have had to relinquish. We are responsible for our actions today and for addressing racism that continues today.

The Residential School System, as defined by the federal government, is limited to 139 schools that operated across Canada between 1831 and 1996. This definition is controversial and excludes provincially administered schools, as well as hostels and day schools. Residential schools existed in almost all provinces and territories, and in the North also took the form of hostels and tent camps. The earliest recognized and longest-running Indian Residential School was the Mohawk Indian Residential School in Brantford, Ontario, which operated from 1831 to 1962. The last federally-run Indian Residential School, Gordon Indian Residential School in Punnichy, Saskatchewan, closed in 1996, and was subsequently demolished, marking the end of the residential school era.



# About this Workshop Activity Guide<sup>1</sup>

Thank you for choosing to use this Guide with your group. It is our hope that the information and activities contained herein will give both facilitators and participants the resources they need to examine aspects of the Residential School System and to recognize the impact it has had, and continues to have, on generations of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Awareness that the legacies of the residential schools also impact non-Indigenous Peoples is also intended.

## Things to Consider

The histories, memories, and impacts of the Residential School System are complex. There are many details, policies, different perspectives, and unique features that are challenging to grasp fully even after years of study. These activities represent a first step for many of us in exploring these stories and legacies.

Here are some important things to think about as you prepare to deliver these activities.

1. **No one can know everything that happened at the residential schools.** Try not to position yourself as an “expert.” Even if you have a connection to the content, try to remain open to the possibility that participants may have more or different knowledge or experiences than you do.
2. **There are few generalizations that can automatically apply to all residential schools.** Each school, in its particular location, under its particular administration, and at a particular time, had unique features. It is important to listen for, recognize, and discuss differences. This should be made clear to participants.
3. **Residential schools in some parts of the North were not in operation for as long as schools in other regions of Canada.** This means that in some places, fewer generations of children attended residential schools. This does not diminish or simplify the experience of students and their families from the North. Because fewer generations attended the schools, a greater number of Inuit students were able to retain their traditional language and cultural knowledge despite attendance at residential schools, however, there were high rates of sexual abuse because they were so far away and it went unaddressed.
4. **Individual stories and experiences are so diverse that we cannot label one group of people “victims” and others “perpetrators.”** It is easy to emphasize the negative experiences of former students of residential schools and not give due attention to the difficult realities that teachers and parents encountered. Also, it is important to note that some students had positive experiences. Another layer of complexity is that, in some instances, student-on-student abuse occurred.
5. **Some of the content in these activities deals with difficult subjects and emotional responses may be triggered in participants as a result.** It is vital to create a supportive environment when presenting these materials – one in which participants can express their feelings and thoughts openly.

---

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from *The Residential School System in Canada: Understanding the Past – Seeking Reconciliation – Building Hope for Tomorrow*. Second Edition © 2013. Government of the Northwest Territories, Government of Nunavut, and the Legacy of Hope Foundation.



## Dealing with Tough Stuff

Discussing the history of residential schools frequently involves being confronted with stories of traumatic experiences such as separation from family, mistreatment and neglect, abuse of many kinds, and children who did not survive. This kind of content can be referred to as “difficult knowledge” or “tough stuff.” While these experiences may seem to be from the past, they may provoke strong emotions and feel close to home today. Strong feelings may well up unexpectedly or seemingly without explanation and may connect to experiences individuals have had themselves, or manifest as “vicarious trauma” (the transfer of trauma from the victim/survivor onto the “witness,” or person who is hearing their story).

The impacts of the Residential Schools continue into the present and can be seen in some Indigenous families and communities. These can manifest in a variety of ways including a lack of parenting skills, domestic abuse, substance abuse/addictions, disconnection with family, lack of language and/or cultural skills, and suicide, among others. It may be difficult to raise these issues when there are participants who are, or may be, directly affected by these situations. However, naming and talking about these issues openly is part of breaking the cycle of trauma.

Many former students have shown courage in speaking out, resiliency while on their healing journeys, and willingness to participate in the Reconciliation process. They have given us – all Canadians – their memories and stories as gifts so that we can be better informed in the present and contribute to constructing a better future. While it is sometimes difficult to make sense of what happened, listening is an important act of respect and support.

## Self Care

It is important that facilitators practice self care for their own well-being and because they are responsible for teaching this material and supporting participants through it.

Facilitators may find this role to be emotionally difficult or burdensome. Please keep in mind that these activities can be an important part of a learning, Reconciliation, and healing process. With support and assistance from colleagues and other community members, this learning experience can be a safe and powerful one for everybody.

Although a number of positive actions have been taken to address the racism and inequality Indigenous Peoples experience, every Canadian must stand up and take responsibility to personally address the continuing socio-economic injustices that are ongoing and take action to build a brighter future for all generations.

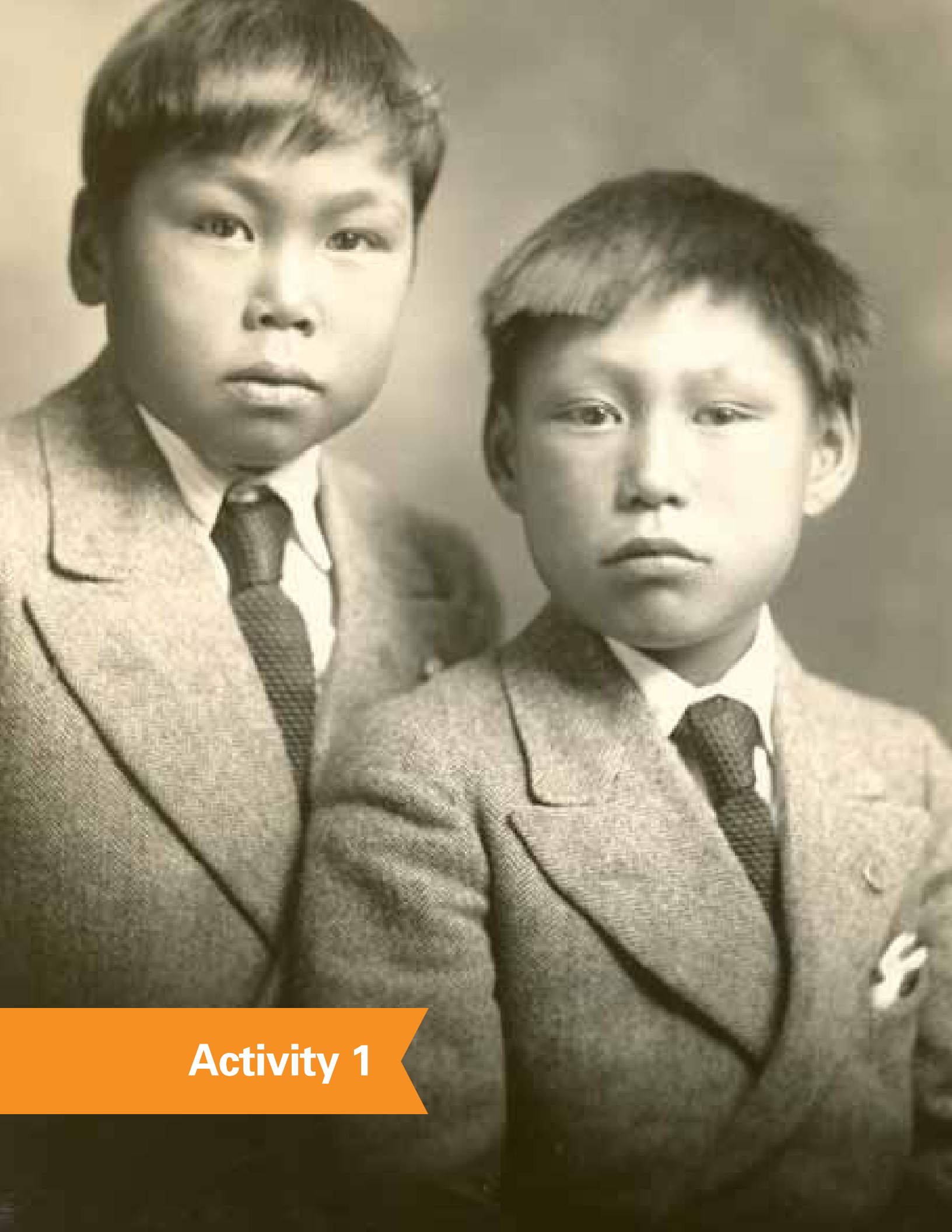
While it may seem as though we are stating the obvious, self-care is vital when you are dealing with difficult subject matter. Take care of yourself, emotionally and spiritually, and talk about these ways of coping with your students.

- Each day, write down three positive things that you accomplished
- Engage in reflective practice, like meditation
- Do yoga or a sport
- Go out into nature
- Talk with a friend
- Make time for relaxation

Contact local crisis/counselling line if needed, and encourage others to do the same.

# Rubric of Activities

Activity	Activity Name	Description	Key Competencies	Key Activities	Indigenous Pedagogy	Participatory Experiences
1	A Sharing Circle	Participants explore the various meanings of Reconciliation.	Historical literacy Cultural literacy Creative expression	Viewing a video Listening to ideas and sharing thoughts	Sharing Learning Listening Awareness of self and others	Listening Empathizing
2	A Series of Catastrophic Events	Participants experience a fictional situation in which a community is invaded, changed, and the children taken away.	Creative expression Ask questions, gather ideas, listen, analyze and communicate decisions	Imagining responses to a series of events Recording reactions, responses, decisions	Sharing Learning Listening Experiencing Oral History Storytelling Group work	Listening Empathizing Imagining
3	Return to the Circle	Participants review the meanings of Reconciliation and add action steps to make Reconciliation happen.	Thoughts to action Learning consequences	Sharing impressions and feelings Creating an Action Plan	Sharing Learning Listening	Listening Empathizing Sharing Initiating Action



## Activity 1



# Activity 1

## A Sharing Circle

### Reconciliation: What It Means and Why It Matters

The word “Reconciliation” is used regularly these days in describing what is needed as part of the healing process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. However, the various meanings of “Reconciliation” can be unclear, and the ways in which we can make it real are often vague. In this first activity, participants will watch a short video that explores ideas about the meanings of Reconciliation, and will then start defining it for themselves.

### Duration

30 minutes

### Age level

12 and up

### Supplies needed

- Video monitor
- Internet connection
- Large paper
- A marker for each participant
- Masking tape
- Two different colours of sticky notes
- A stone, stick, or another object that will identify who has the floor to speak during the sharing circle.

### Facilitator preparation

1. Review the Residential School System timeline that can be found at [legacyofhope.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/100-years-print\\_web.pdf](http://legacyofhope.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/100-years-print_web.pdf)
2. Visit [wherearethechildren.ca](http://wherearethechildren.ca) to learn more about the history and legacy of the Residential School System.
3. Consider various definitions of what Reconciliation means.
  - Senator Murray Sinclair, former Chief Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: [trc.ca/websites/reconciliation/index.php?p=469](http://trc.ca/websites/reconciliation/index.php?p=469)
  - Oxford English Dictionary: the restoration of friendly relations.
  - Merriam-Webster Dictionary: the act of causing two people or groups to become friendly again after an argument or disagreement, the process of finding a way to make two different ideas, facts, etc., exist or be true at the same time.
4. Watch the short video prepared by the students in Kim Bruton and Tessa Foster’s Aboriginal Voices class (NBE3U/C) at Sir Robert Borden High School, Ottawa, Ontario, at the following address: [vimeo.com/227070280](http://vimeo.com/227070280)

### Assess

- Participants’ knowledge about the Residential School System in general.

Refer to the online timeline or to [wherearethechildren.ca](http://wherearethechildren.ca) if additional information is considered necessary.





### **Activate**

- Attach several large sheets of paper to the wall.
- Divide the large sheets into two columns and add these titles: “Define” on the left and “Act” on the right.
- Distribute the markers.
- Choose one of the sticky note colours and distribute 4-5 sticky notes per person.
- Have the Talking Stone or Stick ready.

### **Explore**

- Present the video to the participants.
- Once the video is complete, and using the Talking Stick or Stone, give participants an opportunity to speak and share their thoughts about the Residential School System and how they define Reconciliation. The person who is holding the Talking Stick or Stone has the floor and should not be interrupted.
- Once the verbal sharing is complete, give the participants a few minutes to consider what word or words best symbolize their understanding of Reconciliation.
- Ask participants to write their word(s) on the sticky notes and attach them on the large sheets of paper under the “Define” column.

### **Conclusion**

- Review the various words and identify common ideas and the outliers, as well.
- Participants will return to these words in Activity 3.

---

## THE INUIT EXPERIENCE

The Inuit Residential School experience duplicated many of the experiences of students in the South – prohibitions on language and traditional cultural practices, assimilation, punishment, deprivation, and separation from family and community. Added to this were the extraordinary distances many young Inuit had to travel to attend the schools – distances that would further separate them from their families and make visits home even less likely. Compounding the isolation was the extremely poor communications system in the North – telephone lines were rare, and mail delivery infrequent.



School boys. These children live too far away to go home in the summer. [Students at the Anglican mission's residential school]. Aklavik. 1940-42.

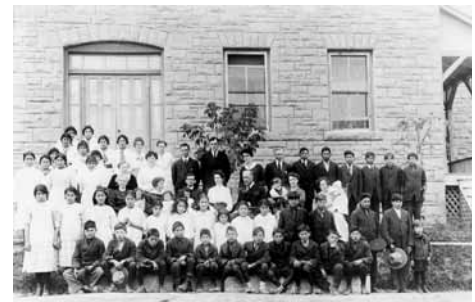


Two Métis children standing next to an Inuit child (centre) at the Anglican-run All Saints Residential School, Shingle Point, Yukon, ca. 1930. Photographer: J.F. Moran. Library and Archives Canada, PA-102086

---

## THE MÉTIS EXPERIENCE

Métis children, initially turned away by the Canadian government, were later encouraged to fill school spaces left by Indian children. Métis students also encountered racism from all sides – they were often outsiders within the student body, and were treated as second-class citizens. They were not wanted in non-Indigenous schools, but the Department of Indian Affairs would not recognize them as Indians. With limited options, Métis parents often had to pay for children's education, or the children themselves would be made to "earn" their keep at the schools through manual labour.



(Detail) Staff and students outside the Red Deer Indian Industrial School, Red Deer, Alberta, c. 1910. United Church of Canada Archives, 93.049P/846N



## Activity 2



# Activity 2

## A Series of Catastrophic Events How Would You Respond?

In this activity, participants divide into groups and imagine their reactions to a series of catastrophic events that impact their daily lives, and the life of their community. At the end of the activity, participants will make connections between the events described and the experience of Indigenous Peoples in the Residential Schools. It is important to go through the exercise and reveal the connections to the Residential Schools only at the end.

**Duration**  
60 minutes

**Age level**  
12 and up

### Supplies needed

- Paper and pens/pencils for participants

### Facilitator preparation

1. Review and print the “Series of Catastrophic Events” (below). These events draw parallels between a fictionalized series of catastrophic events and the actual Residential School System.
2. Visit [wherearethechildren.ca](http://wherearethechildren.ca) to learn more about the history and legacy of the Residential School System.

### Assess

- Participants’ knowledge about the Residential School System in general.

Refer to [wherearethechildren.ca](http://wherearethechildren.ca) if additional information is considered necessary.

---

## RESCUES AND RUNAWAYS

There are many examples of children attempting to run away from the schools and back to their families. They would often conspire together, stealing and storing food for the journey home. Other children, so desperate to get home, would leave alone during the night, only to die of exposure.

A 12 year-old Ojibwa boy, Chanie Wendjack, is perhaps the best-known of the runaways from the schools. In October of 1966, he fled from Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School near Kenora, Ontario trying to get home to his family in Ogoki Post nearly 600 kilometres away. A few days later, Chanie’s lifeless body was found next to the railway tracks. He had died of exposure and starvation. With the permission of Chanie’s family, his story is being told through A Secret Path - a project that includes a graphic novel and music written by Gord Downie accompanied by an animated film and website ([secretpath.ca/](http://secretpath.ca/)).

Outside of the schools, some parents travelled many days on foot, by boat, on dogsled, and later by car to see their children. Some tried to help their children escape, while others confronted school administrators with knowledge of the abuses their children were suffering. Other parents attempted to thwart Indian Agents by taking their children into the bush with them to live off the land, or concealed births so that their children would not be registered and later sent to school.

**Activate**

- Distribute the pencils and paper.
- Gather participants into groups of four or five, depending on the number of participants. This activity will also work well with smaller numbers in each group.

**Explore**

- Read the text from each event, one at a time. Give participants several minutes to respond to the event. They can respond individually or as a group. They can write a narrative response or simply list key words.

**Conclusion**

- Gather the participants together into one large group and ask them to share their thoughts and feelings about the activity, using the talking stick or stone, if useful.
- Did it make the Residential School System more real for them?
- How did the events described make them feel?
- Are there examples of Reconciliation in their own lives that symbolize its importance?

## **100 Years of Loss: Activity Guide**

### **A Series of Catastrophic Events: Script**

---

#### **Event 1: A Happy Life**

You live in a small community with your family and friends. It is a close-knit community and you know pretty much everyone in it.

- Describe what your daily life looks like – what do you enjoy doing, who matters to you, what elements of your community make you feel like you are “at home.”

---

#### **Event 2: Change is Coming**

Something is changing. You and your community are aware that there is a new invading force coming into your territory. The invaders’ ways of life are different and unfamiliar, but attempts are made to cooperate, to share resources, to help the invaders adapt to life in your territory.

- What is your reaction to the arrival of this new force? Are you more likely to interact with them, or resist them?

---

#### **Event 3: The Invaders Arrive**

The invading force realizes how rich your land is in resources and sees immense opportunity to make money and create new industries. The invaders begin to take over your territory through force. Your neighbourhoods and communities are attacked.

- Do you flee, fight, or wait to see what happens. Is there something else you can do? If you flee, what do you bring with you?

---

#### **Event 4: The Children Vanish**

The invading force begins to gather up the children of your community and separate them from their parents. The children are taken away to special schools where they will have little contact with their families. They are forced to learn the invaders’ language, customs, and histories. They are punished if they speak their own language or practice their own ways. The children are given new names and are dressed to look like the invaders.

- How do you react to this – as the child, and as the parent?
- What feelings do you have as the child being taken away?
- What emotions are the parents in the your community feeling?

---

### **Event 5: A Community Changes**

Within a few days, there are no children left in your village. Some families have fled into the countryside to hide their children but your community now consists only of adults. The invaders have banned your culture – your food, ceremonies, language, clothing, spirituality – all are considered to be illegal.

- How does daily life in your community change?
- What happens to the ceremonies and traditions of your culture?

---

### **Event 6: The Children Return**

It is now ten years later... the children, who are now in their teens and twenties, are released from the schools. The invaders are established in your territory. Their culture has taken over, and there are more invaders than original inhabitants on your land.

- What is it like for the children to return home? Do they fit in?
- What difficulties do they encounter as they meet their parents and community again after ten years away?
- How do they communicate with each other?
- How do the parents and community react?
- How do the invaders react to the returning children who are now young adults?

---

### **Event 7: Fifty Years On...**

It is now fifty years later... Those who were adults when the invaders arrived are now either very old or they have already died. The children who were sent to the schools are now senior citizens.

- Thinking about the description of a happy life that you created in Event 1, is this happy life still possible? Describe what the community is like now for the original inhabitants.

---

### **Event 8: This is a True Story**

These events that we have just imagined are reflections of what Indigenous Peoples experienced first with colonization and second with the Residential School System. While these events may only be imaginary for some of us, for Indigenous Peoples, it was and is a reality.

- Does this give you a different perspective on the experiences of Indigenous Peoples in Canada?
- Do you see any connections between what happened during colonization and the Residential School period, and issues affecting Indigenous Peoples today?



Hanako Hubbard-Radulovich

---

## CULTURE IS GOOD MEDICINE

As prohibitions against Indigenous cultural practices were lifted in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, First Peoples sought to restore traditions and languages that had been all but lost in the Residential School Era.

For many Indigenous Peoples, healing is rooted in culture and language. What began in the 1950s has become a growing movement to revive and preserve diverse Indigenous languages, cultural and spiritual values, and ways of being. Connectedness is being restored at the individual, family, and community level. A resurgence of traditional healing and medicine is helping many Survivors and their families to recover but we are generations away from healing.

We all must honour, acknowledge, respect and empathize so that we can learn from past mistakes, correct current and ongoing injustices and racism and take action to build a brighter future for all Canadians.





## Activity 3



# Activity 3

## Return to the Circle

In this closing activity, participants reflect upon what they experienced in the previous two activities, and look for active ways in which they can contribute to creating Reconciliation in Canada.

### Duration

20-30 minutes

### Age level

12 and up

### Supplies needed

- Pen/pencils for participants
- A different colour of sticky note from that used in Activity 1.

### Activate

- Distribute the pens/pencils and sticky notes, giving four or five notes to each person.



## Explore

- Returning to the large sheets of paper used in Activity 1, review the words in the “Define” column and ask participants if they want to make any additions or changes.
- For each word in the “Define” column, ask participants to come up with an action that would make the word real. Participants can either write their ideas on sticky notes or the facilitator can write them under the “Act” column.
- Examples of actions include:
  - Write letters to MPs.
  - Choose one of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action and work to ensure that it is enacted.
  - Volunteer at a Friendship Centre or other Indigenous organization.
  - Create conversations with friends, family, and neighbours.
  - Invite Indigenous community leaders, Elders, artists, and other representatives into your school to speak about Reconciliation and what it means to them.
  - Show a film which deals with the topic of Reconciliation. The National Film Board has many titles from which to choose.
  - Attend a local Pow Wow or cultural event at a Friendship Centre or Community Centre.
  - Visit the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society website and explore “7 Free Ways to Make a Difference.” [fncaringsociety.com/7-free-ways-make-difference](http://fncaringsociety.com/7-free-ways-make-difference)
  - The KAIROS Blanket Exercise is an interactive teaching tool which explores the historical and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Host a KAIROS Blanket Exercise activity at your school or Community Centre. [www.kairosblanketexercise.org](http://www.kairosblanketexercise.org)
  - Contact the Legacy of Hope Foundation to order an exhibition to be on display in your area or buy or download many of the education resources or ask for free research reports from [legacyofhope.ca](http://legacyofhope.ca).

## Conclusion

- Once the participants have completed the list, encourage them to take photographs of it (if they have smartphones) and to keep the image with them as a reminder not only of what they can do but also of their responsibility to do something to make positive change.
- Ask them to talk about what they have learned with their family, friends, colleagues.
- Speak up against racism and challenge remarks based on ignorance whenever you hear them and share your knowledge.

“[C]ulturally speaking, [First Nations] are a very kind People. I want people to understand that, to know that, who we really are, you know, not the way they perceive us to be. Because for too long we’ve been told what to do, how to act, when to say things, when to speak up, who you should be, you know. The time is here now to tell the truth, to really tell the truth and to tell society who we really are...”

Percy Ballantyne, attended Birtle Indian Residential School

Below: The Alexie Family, Ulkatcho First Nation, Mud Bay, about 34 miles up the Bella Coola River, July 28, 1922, Canadian Museum of History, Harlan I. Smith, image 56918.

