

# FORGOTTEN

## The Métis Residential School Experience



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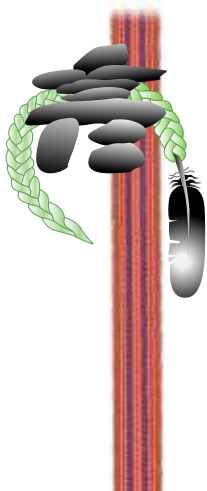
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The Legacy of Hope Foundation (LHF) is a national Aboriginal charitable organization whose purposes are to educate, raise awareness and understanding of the legacy of residential schools, including the effects and intergenerational impacts on First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



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For more information and to download the project's app, please visit [forgottenmetis.ca](http://forgottenmetis.ca)

This resource consists of two activities, each of which examines an aspect of the history or legacy of the Métis experience in Canada’s Residential School System. Each workshop provides an opportunity to develop historical and cultural literacy through experiential learning.

## Rubric of Activities

Activity	Activity Name	Description	Key Competencies	Key Activities	Indigenous Pedagogy	Participatory Experiences
1	Who are the Métis?	Using archival photographs of clothing worn by Métis and where possible, actual modern replicas, participants will engage in a discussion that will allow them to step back into history and imagine how they would incorporate elements of their cultures in a new world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>historical literacy</li> <li>cultural literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>examine, where possible, archival photographs and an artifact</li> <li>learn how identity can be represented by ‘things’</li> <li>provide personal responses to questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>observing</li> <li>manipulating</li> <li>exchanging</li> <li>sharing</li> <li>visual learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>touching</li> <li>looking</li> <li>imagining</li> </ul>
2	Métis Residential School Experiences	Participants will be introduced to Métis Residential School Experiences in Canada through the lens of the federal government’s apology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>historical literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>view video</li> <li>answer questions</li> <li>discuss responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>listening</li> <li>trial and feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>listening</li> <li>watching</li> <li>doing</li> </ul>

Visit [www.legacyofhope.ca](http://www.legacyofhope.ca) to access additional resources such as videos, publications, a recommended reading list, and glossary.

# Activity 1



Métis family in the Auvergne district, ca 1908.  
Saskatchewan Archives Board R-A19719.

# Who are the Métis?

Through the use of both archival photographs and actual replicas of clothing, participants will learn about the ethnogenesis of Métis people.

For the purposes of definition, Métis are neither Indian nor European, but both; the mixed offspring of French fur traders from the North West Company or Scottish and English fur traders from the Hudson's Bay Company and Cree, Ojibway, or Saulteaux women.

Discuss how family names tie the connections to the fur trading companies operating out west; names like McLeod, MacIver, Macdougall, Campbell and Fraser often had ties to the Hudson's Bay Company while family names like Morin, Lavallee, Bouvier, Chartier and Durocher had allegiances to the North West Company.

## Duration

45 minutes

## Age Level

12 and up

## Supplies/equipment needed

- *The Métis* PowerPoint or PDF file;
- equipment to display PDF file or printed copies;
- archival pictures of sash and shawl and/or replicas of sash and shawl
- map of northern Saskatchewan with place names clearly shown

## Facilitator preparation

1. Review *The Métis* file
2. Prepare equipment to display PowerPoint or print copies.
3. Prepare the photographs and/or replicas

## Assess

- What the participants already know about Métis people
- What participants already know about Métis cultural artifacts or objects

## Activate

Present *The Métis* PowerPoint or hand out the printed copies.

## Explore

Ask the question: Who are the Métis? Determine if participants know other names used in the past for the Métis (such as Half-breed, Bois-Brûlés (burnt wood), country-born, Michif, Otipaimsiwauk, and Apeetokosisan).

Place the archival photos and/or replicas of artifacts and the map of Saskatchewan on a table.

Pass around the images or the sash and the shawl to participants. Ask each person to imagine that they are either from France in the case of the sash (ceinture fleché) or from Scotland in the case of the shawl. Then ask each participant the following questions;

1. If you were leaving your homeland, can you think of an element of clothing that you might bring that would perhaps represent your culture in the new place that you and your future ancestors might call home?
2. How might you integrate this element of your culture into your new life so that your family and children will pass it along to future generations?

Suggest that participants think about cultural objects and how they are symbolic reminders of how the past can still influence the present.

<sup>1</sup> Visit [www.legacyofhope.ca](http://www.legacyofhope.ca) or <http://forgottenmetis.ca/> to download the PowerPoint or PDF file.

## Close

Locate places on a map of northern Saskatchewan to show the distinction of community names and how they also tie into cultural backgrounds; names like Stanley Mission, Cumberland House, Île-à-la-Crosse and La Loche.

Today, Métis men still wear sashes with pride. Although historically Métis women did not wear sashes, some do today. It may not be widely known that shawls are as an important part of Métis clothing to women as the sash was and remains to Métis men. Today, more and more Métis women are wearing plaid shawls, and special tartan fabric named Metis Nation can be ordered online at: [www.scotweb.co.uk/tartandesign/details/10317](http://www.scotweb.co.uk/tartandesign/details/10317)

## Activity 2



A group of students from St. Mary's Indian Residential School in Kenora, Ontario. Nishnawbe Aski Nation Collection, St. Mary's IRS series. Photo courtesy of the Shingwauk Archives. 2011-062-001(37).

# Métis Residential School Experiences

Participants will be introduced to the experience of Métis children who attended residential schools. For the most part, when Canadians think of this issue, they think it is primarily a First Nations, or Indian issue. Even the title, the Indian Residential School System, directly references only Indians. Many Métis and Inuit children also attended residential schools – statistics estimate that 10% of the 150,000 children who attended these schools were Métis.

The Métis experiences are unique due to several reasons.

- Many Métis were already familiar with Christianity due to the strong role of the church in many Métis communities.
- Poverty, caused by government policies, meant that many Métis families could not send their children to schools in nearby communities leaving residential schools as the only option.
- Racism, particularly for fairer skinned Métis who could speak English and/or French and an Aboriginal language, often made them feel as outsiders in schools with Indian children.
- Government officials often took Métis children who looked ‘more Indian’ to fill classrooms quotas.

On June 11, 2008, in the House of Commons, Prime Minister Harper apologized on behalf of all Canadians for the Indian residential school experience, which saw 150,000 Aboriginal children taken from their families in an attempt to assimilate them into the dominant culture. Many of these students were physically, psychologically and sexually abused in the Indian Residential School System. This apology failed to acknowledge those who attended Métis residential and day schools.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) – a central part of the 2006 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) that is designed to affect healing and reconciliation – heard heart wrenching testimony from Residential School Survivors across the country. The TRC, as part of the IRSSA, does not have a mandate to deal with residential schools excluded from the settlement agreement, thus precluding a true and just reconciliation for Métis people.

The text of the apology provides the roadmap for examining the history and the impacts of residential schools on Aboriginal peoples, including the Métis.

Participants watch the *Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s apology on behalf of Canadians for the Indian Residential School System* video and discuss how the apology might make a Métis person feel versus how it might make a First Nations person feel.

## Duration

60 minutes

## Age level

12 and up

## Supplies/equipment needed

- equipment to display the *Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s apology on behalf of Canadians for the Indian Residential School System*<sup>2</sup> video;
- masking tape; and
- marker

## Facilitator preparation

1. Watch the first 9 minutes and 30 seconds of the video.
2. Review *A Brief History of the Residential School System in Canada* on page 8, the Apology Text (available at: <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/100100015644/100100015649>) and the *Apology Discussion Guide* (page 12).
3. Prepare equipment for displaying the video.
4. Have available a roll of masking tape and a marker.

<sup>2</sup> Go to <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/100100015657/100100015675> to view or download.



## Assess

What the participants already know about Métis experiences in the Residential School System

Ask participants what they might feel about the church's role and how it affected Métis children who had prior knowledge of Christianity and believed the church to be a source of goodness and kindness and who then suffered abuses at the hands of the clergy and administration.

Do the participants feel that there is a value to apologizing today for wrongs committed decades or even centuries ago?

## Activate

Watch the Prime Minister's Apology. Ask the question: What do you think the Prime Minister was apologizing for? Use the Apology Discussion Guide to assist you.

Ask participants to think about the apology and have a discussion about their reactions to it. Was it enough? Was he sincere? Ask if they have had a change of opinion or feeling about the apology. Ask them what they think should happen now.

## Explore

Place a piece of masking tape on the floor along one length of the room. On one end write, "Totally Agree," in the middle write "Undecided," and on the other end write "Totally Disagree."

Tell the participants that you are going to read a series of statements. They are to place themselves anywhere along the masking tape according to their opinion of each of the statements.

Read the following statements:

- Stephen Harper was sincere when he apologized to Aboriginal peoples in the House of Commons on June 11, 2008.
- Even if he wasn't sincere, the apology had an impact in Canada.
- All Canadians should have to study residential school history.
- There is no racism in our communities today.
- Residential schools have impacted me personally.
- Residential schools have impacted every Canadian, Aboriginal or not.

After participants have "voted" for each statement, encourage them to consider why they placed themselves where they did. If they want to discuss their choices with other students, this should be encouraged. Consider having the people who "Totally Agree" or "Totally Disagree" explain their position to the group. Offer students the opportunity to change their position as a result of the explanation(s).

## Close

Ask participants to share their thoughts about the activity and what they have learned or experienced.



Totally Agree

Undecided

Totally Disagree

# A Brief History of the Indian Residential School System

For over 300 years, European settlers and Aboriginal peoples regarded one another as distinct nations. In war, colonists and First Nations formed alliances, and in trade each enjoyed the economic benefits of co-operation. By the mid-19th century, however, European hunger for land increased dramatically and the economic base of the colonies shifted from fur to agriculture. Alliances of the early colonial era gave way to direct competition for land and resources. Settlers and the government began to view Aboriginal peoples as a “problem.”

The so-called “Indian problem” was the mere fact that Indians existed. They were seen as an obstacle to the spread of “civilization” – that is to say, the spread of European, and later Canadian, economic, social, and political interests. Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, summed up the government’s position when he said in 1920, “I want to get rid of the Indian problem. [...] Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department.”

In 1844, the Bagot Commission produced one of the earliest official documents to recommend education as a means of assimilating the Indian population. The commission proposed implementing a system of farm-based boarding schools situated far from parental influence – the separation of children from their parents being touted as the best means by which to sustain their civilizing effects. The document was followed in successive decades by others of similar intent such as the *Gradual Civilization Act* (1857), *Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians* (1869), and the Nicholas Flood Davin Report of 1879, which noted “the industrial school is the principal feature of the policy known as that of ‘aggressive civilization’.” This policy dictated that the Indians should, as far as practicable, be consolidated on few reservations, and provided with permanent individual homes; that the tribal relation should be abolished; that lands should be allotted in severalty and not in common; that the Indian should speedily become a citizen [...] enjoy the protection of the law, and be

made amenable thereto; that, finally, it was the duty of the Government to afford the Indians all reasonable aid in their preparation for citizenship by educating them in industry and in the arts of civilization.

A product of the times, Davin disclosed in this report the assumptions of his era that “Indian culture” was a contradiction in terms, Indians were uncivilized, and the aim of education must be to destroy the Indian in the child. In 1879 he returned from his tour of the United States’ Industrial Boarding Schools with a recommendation to Canada’s Minister of the Interior, John A. Macdonald, to implement a system of industrial boarding schools in Canada.

Before long, the government began to hear many serious and legitimate complaints from parents and native leaders – the teachers were under-qualified and displayed religious zeal, religious instruction was divisive, and there were allegations of physical and sexual abuse. These concerns, however, were of no legal consequence because under the *Indian Act*, all Aboriginal people were wards of the state. School administrators were assigned guardianship, which meant they had full parental rights over the students. The complaints continued, and school administrators, teachers, Indian agents, and even some government bureaucrats also started to express their concerns – all of them called for major reforms to the system.

## Inuit and Métis Children at Residential Schools

Although policies to manage “Indian Affairs” were being devised in Ottawa as the numbered treaties were signed across the Prairies in the 1870s, it was not until 1924 that Inuit were affected by the *Indian Act*, and not until the mid-1950s that residential schools began to operate in the North. For Inuit, the Residential School System was but one facet of a massive and rapid sweep of cultural change that included the introduction of Christianity; forced relocation and settlement; the slaughter of hundreds of sled dogs eliminating the only means of travel for many Inuit; the spread of tuberculosis and

smallpox and the corresponding mandatory Southward medical transport; the introduction of RCMP throughout the Arctic; and other disruptions to the centuries-old Inuit way of life.

Prior to the 1800s, few opportunities for formal European-based education were available for Métis children. Treaty provisions for education did not include these children who were considered “halfbreeds” and not Indians. It wasn’t until the Northwest Half-breed Claims Royal Commission of 1885 that the federal government addressed the issue of Métis education. The Catholic Church, already a strong presence in Métis society, began instructing Métis children in the Red River area of Manitoba in the 1800s. Despite these efforts, many Métis parents struggled to find schools that would accept their children and would often have to pay tuition for their education.

Attendance at residential school, where the use of Aboriginal languages was prohibited, resulted in the erosion of an integral part of Métis culture. Residential schools profoundly affected Métis communities, a fact often overlooked in the telling of the history of residential schools in Canada.

## Establishment and Eventual Closure

The intent of the Residential School System was to educate, assimilate, and integrate Aboriginal peoples into European-Canadian society. Effectively, it was a system designed to kill the Indian in the child.

The earliest was the Mohawk Indian Residential School, which opened in 1831 at Brantford, Ontario. The schools existed in almost all provinces and territories. In the North, the Residential School System also took the form of hostels and tent camps. At its peak in the early 1930s, 80 residential schools operated across Canada with an enrollment of over 17,000 students.

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 disputed and does not represent Survivors who attended provincially administered schools, as well as hostels and day schools.

In 1920, Duncan Campbell Scott, the bureaucrat in charge of Canada’s Indian Policy, revised the *Indian Act* to make attendance at residential school mandatory for all Indian children from 7 to 15 years of age. Very gradually, the Residential School System was discarded in favour of a policy of integration. Aboriginal students began to attend mainstream schools in the 1940s. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development assumed full management of the Residential School System on April 1, 1969. Throughout the 1970s, at the request of the National Indian Brotherhood, the federal government undertook a process that saw the eventual transfer of education management to Aboriginal peoples. In 1970, Blue Quills Residential School became the first to be managed by Aboriginal peoples. The last federally administered residential school closed in 1996.

## Conditions and Mistreatment

Attendance at residential schools was mandatory for Aboriginal children across Canada, and failure to send children to residential school often resulted in the punishment of parents, including imprisonment. Many Aboriginal children were taken from their homes, often forcibly removed, and separated from their families by long distances. Others who attended residential schools near their communities were often prohibited from seeing their families outside of permitted visits.

Broad occurrences of disease, hunger, and overcrowding were noted by government officials as early as 1897. In 1907, Indian Affairs’ chief medical officer, Dr. P.H. Bryce, reported a death toll among the schools’ children ranging from 15% – 24% and rising to 42% in Aboriginal homes where sick children were sometimes sent to die. In some individual institutions, for example the Old Sun school on the Blackfoot reserve, Bryce found death rates significantly higher.

Though some students have spoken of the positive experiences of residential schools and of receiving an adequate education, the quality of education was low in comparison to non-Aboriginal schools. In 1930, for instance, only 3 of 100 Aboriginal students managed to advance past grade six, and few found themselves prepared for life after school – on the reservation or off. As late as 1950, according to an Indian Affairs study, over 40% of the teaching staff had no professional training.

This is not to say that experiences were all negative, or that the staff was all bad. Such is not the case. Many good and dedicated people worked within the System. Indeed, their willingness to work long hours in an atmosphere of stress and for meager wages was exploited by an administration determined to minimize costs. The staff not only taught, they also supervised the children's work, play, and personal care. Their hours were long, the pay was below that of other educational institutions, and the working conditions were exasperating.

In the early 1990s, beginning with Phil Fontaine (then Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs), Survivors began speaking publicly about abuse experienced in residential schools including:

- sexual abuse;
- beatings;
- punishments for speaking Aboriginal languages;
- forced eating of rotten food;
- widespread hunger and thirst;
- bondage and confinement; and
- forced labour.

Students were forbidden to speak their language or practice their culture and were often punished for doing so. Other experiences reported from Survivors of residential schools include mental abuse, severe punishments, overcrowding, use of students in medical experiments, illness and disease, and, in some cases, death. Generations of Aboriginal peoples today have memories of trauma, neglect, shame, and poverty. Those traumatized by their experiences in the residential schools

suffered pervasive loss: loss of identity, loss of family, loss of language, and loss of culture.

## Intergenerational Impacts

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children were often separated from their parents for long periods of time, which prevented the discovering and learning of valuable parenting skills. The removal of children from their homes also prevented the transmission of language and culture, resulting in many Aboriginal people that do not speak their traditional language and/or are not familiar with their culture.

Adaptation of abusive behaviours learned from residential school has also occurred and caused intergenerational trauma – the cycle of abuse and trauma from one generation to the next. Research on intergenerational transmission of trauma makes it clear that individuals who have suffered the effects of traumatic stress pass it on to those close to them and generate vulnerability in their children. The children in turn experience their own trauma.

The system of forced assimilation had consequences that are with Aboriginal peoples today. The need for healing does not stop with the Survivors – intergenerational effects of trauma are real and pervasive and must also be addressed.

## Healing and Reconciliation

In the early 1990s, Survivors came forward with disclosures about physical and sexual abuse at residential schools. Throughout the 1990s, these reports escalated, and more Aboriginal victims from across the country courageously came forward with their stories. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) confirmed a link between social crisis in Aboriginal communities, residential schools, and the legacy of intergenerational trauma.

Aboriginal peoples have begun to heal the wounds of the past. On January 7, 1998, the Government of Canada issued a Statement of Reconciliation and

unveiled a new initiative called *Gathering Strength – Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan*. A strategy to begin the process of reconciliation, *Gathering Strength* featured the announcement of a healing fund. On March 31, 1998, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) was created and was given a mandate to encourage and support, through research and funding contributions, community-based Aboriginal directed healing initiatives which address the legacy of physical and sexual abuse suffered in Canada’s Indian Residential School System, including intergenerational impacts. The AHF’s vision is one in which those affected by the legacy of physical abuse and sexual abuse experienced in the Indian Residential School System have addressed the effects of unresolved trauma in meaningful terms, have broken the cycle of abuse, and have enhanced their capacity as individuals, families, communities, and nations to sustain their well-being and that of future generations. The AHF will cease operations in September 2014.

In 2000, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation established the Legacy of Hope Foundation, a national charity whose mandate is to educate and raise awareness about residential schools and to continue to support the ongoing healing of Survivors. The Legacy of Hope Foundation is committed to a candid exploration of Canada’s real history. By promoting awareness about the ongoing impacts of residential schools and by working to ensure that all Canadians are made aware of this missing history, the conditions for healing and reconciliation for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are put in place.

Through initiatives by groups such as the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Legacy of Hope Foundation and many others, Canadians are learning this history and understanding the impact that it had and continues to have on their communities.

# Apology Discussion Guide

Below are excerpts from Prime Minister Harper's apology acknowledging the key impacts of the Residential School System.

*"the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes"*

From the early 1830s to 1996, thousands of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children were forced to attend residential schools in an attempt to assimilate them into the dominant culture. Over 150,000 children, some as young as four years old, attended the government-funded and church-run residential schools. It is estimated that there are 80,000 Residential School Survivors alive today.

*"it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions"*

At almost all of the schools, children were not allowed to speak their Native languages. The schools were designed to destroy Aboriginal identity in the children. Sharing circles, healing circles, smudging, Sun dances, the Potlatch, powwows, and many other ceremonies were prohibited and virtually extinguished. They have been revived in the last few decades.

*"it created a void in many lives and communities"*

Many Aboriginal children were taken from their homes, often forcibly removed, and separated from their families by long distances. When many children returned home, their connection to their families and communities was often difficult or impossible to re-establish.

*"separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children"*

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children were often away from their parents for long periods of time and missed the experience of being parented. This prevented them from discovering and learning valuable parenting skills.

*"sowed the seeds for generations to follow"*

Adaptation of abusive behaviours learned from residential schools has also occurred and caused intergenerational trauma – the cycle of abuse and trauma from one generation to the next. Research on intergenerational transmission of trauma makes it clear that individuals who have suffered the effects of traumatic stress pass it on to those close to them and generate vulnerability in their children. The children in turn experience their own trauma.

*"these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you"*

The government neglected their duty of care to provide basic needs for the students. There was little oversight from government and this allowed for abuses to continue unchecked. The children that attended the schools suffered abuses of the mind, body, emotions, and spirit that can be almost unimaginable.

*"as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children"*

Attendance at residential schools was mandatory for Aboriginal children across Canada, and failure to send children to residential school often resulted in the punishment of parents, including imprisonment.