

PART TWO : The Assaults and Their Legacy

Summary

Part Two examines the impacts and legacies of the residential school system in more depth. It begins with a consideration of the conclusions given in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Interim Report, which refer to the impact of the Indian Residential Schools as assaults. Students research different meanings and connotations of “assault” to reflect on why the TRC chose to use that word. Next students investigate what life was like in an Indian Residential School for students, using first person accounts of survivors as their main source. They also examine what led the schools to become breeding grounds for abuse. Finally, the lasting impacts of the Indian Residential Schools on families and communities is studied, including the pathways to intergenerational dysfunction.

The sequence of activities given here uses the discussion of the definition of assault as an introduction (Lesson 2.1). It could also be used as the final lesson of Part Two to consolidate the learnings in Lessons 2.2 and 2.3.

Enduring Understandings

- The Residential School system intentionally attacked First Nations children, families and cultures.
- The legacy of destruction caused by Indian Residential Schools is inter-generational; family and societal disruption impacted successive generations.

Essential Questions

Big Question

How have the Indian Residential Schools created cycles of intergenerational dysfunction?

Focus Questions

1. In what ways was the Indian Residential School system an assault on First Nations people and culture?
2. How did students survive the isolation and abuse of the Indian Residential School?
3. What losses contributed to the intergenerational effects of the residential school system?

LESSON 2.1

Defining
Assault**Key Concepts**

- An assault is an intentional attack on a person or group.
- The Residential School system was an assault on First Nations people, families and culture through its culture of denial of personal and cultural identities.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Give multiple definitions for “assault”
- Explain ways in which Indian Residential Schools were an assault on First Nations children, families and culture

Vocabulary

assault, connotation

Resources

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Interim Report conclusions (page 25 of Interim Report, or pages 85-87 of *They Came for the Children*.)
- Blackline Master 8, Interim Report Conclusion headings, page 43.

Suggested Activities**1. TRC Interim Report Conclusions**

Introduce the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Interim Report conclusions, using Blackline Master 8. Ask students to discuss or record historic truths that support these conclusions, from their knowledge and research.

- You may want to discuss these conclusions as a whole class, in small groups, or use as an individual written activity.

2. What is Assault?

Ask students to research meanings for “assault.” They may use dictionaries or online sources. (This could be a homework activity). Note: This is a sensitive issue, and students will likely encounter references to sexual assault and rape.

- What are some synonyms for assault? (*The most common synonym is “attack.”*)
- What are some different connotations of the word?
- Discuss the emotional impact of the word.

3. Identifying Historic Truths

- Discuss with the class why they think the Commission chose to use the word “assault.”
- Ask students to review the full text of the conclusions. Have them identify historic truths that they identified in Activity 1, and highlight or underline new points that were not considered earlier.

LESSON 2.2

Life in the Residential School

Key Concepts

- Indian Residential Schools actively repressed First Nations culture and language, causing shame and loss of self-worth.
- Students were forced to spend at least half their day working to help sustain the institutions, resulting in an inadequate level of education achievement.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Research survivor accounts of experiences in the Indian Residential School system
- List characteristics of the residential school system that created the conditions for abuses to occur

Resources

- *They Came for the Children* chapter 2 (pages 21-53)
- TRC Interim Report, pages 4-6
- *The Survivors Speak*. Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015. Download at www.trc.ca - go to TRC Findings. On the next page, click on Survivors Speak.
- Additional resources as suggested in the Resources section, Survivor Accounts, page 101.

Suggested Activities**1. How Did the TRC Arrive at its Conclusions?**

Explain to students that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission arrived at their conclusions after hearing the testimony of hundreds of Indian Residential School survivors who bravely shared their experiences with the commissioners.

2. Jigsaw Activity: Residential School Experience

Using Chapter 2 (School Days: The Residential School Experience) from *They Came for the Children*, have students complete a jigsaw activity to research what daily life was like for students in Indian Residential Schools.

- Divide the class into 9 groups and photocopy and distribute the relevant pages from Chapter 2 of *They Came for the Children* for background information about their particular topic:

– Arrival (p. 21-25)	– Discipline (37-41)
– Education (p. 25-28)	– Abuse (p. 41-45)
– Health (p. 28-31)	– Accomplishment (p. 45-49)
– Hunger (p. 31-35)	– Resistance (p. 49-53)
– Work (p. 35-37)	
- Ask students to consider the following question as they read their section: What does your section of text reveal about what life was like for those who attended residential schools?
- For further research, students may use *The Survivors Speak*. This 260 page document provides excerpts from many witness statements, gathered by topic. Student can browse by topic or use keyword searches to find relevant material.
- Ask each group to share or present findings about their aspect of school life with the

rest of the class, and ask students to record at least two ideas about what life was like from each group. You might want to create a chart or sheet of paper with the nine headings on them so students have a place to record the information about school life.

3. Personal Impacts

Extend the investigation of life in the residential school by researching personal accounts of experiences in the school. Ask students to collect evidence from a variety of sources to document aspects of life in the schools, and their lasting impacts. Students may use the following topics to organize their evidence:

- Personal Identity and Self-Worth
- Language Loss
- Cultural Loss
- Separation and Loneliness
- Education and Work
- Living Conditions
- Health and Death
- Punishment and Abuse
- Positive Experiences

Possible resources:

- *Survivors Speak*.
- Survivor testimony, as recorded in books or available on line. See the Resource List, page 101 for a list of suitable resources.
- Fiction and poetry. You may want to use a fictional source in connection with a literature study, or you may read an excerpt from a novel to the class that dramatically describes a character's experiences with different aspects of the school.

You may want students to focus on a particular school, or have groups research survivor testimony from different schools and compare them.

4. Breeding Ground for Abuse

How did the Indian Residential Schools become environments where abuses occurred? This is a sensitive topic that will need to be dealt with carefully. You will have the best understanding of your students' abilities to deal with it.

- Discuss with students different types of abuses that occurred: physical, emotional, sexual.
- Discuss the factors inherent in the system permitted the abuses. Refer back to chapter 2, *They Came for the Children*. (Some factors were: chronic underfunding, unqualified teachers, lack of supervision of staff, protection of the abusers by church officials; students' fear of reporting.)
- Discuss what lasting effects experiencing abuses would be.
 - How do students think the children coped when at school? (*Many shut down their emotions; some rebelled or acted out; some copied the learned behaviour and bullied other children.*)
 - How might they deal with the trauma caused by memories of abuse in later years. (*Students will have diverse responses; of course, survivors also had diverse ways they dealt with the trauma. Many tried to bury the memories, never speaking about it. Some turned to substance abuse to deal with the pain.*)
 - How might students who witnessed abuse feel afterwards? (*Some responses could include, guilt, emotional trauma, anger.*)

LESSON 2.3

Impacts on Family and Community

Key Concepts

- Most parents felt they had no choice but to send their children to Indian Residential School. Some did so under fear of imprisonment, while others hoped education would help them in Canadian mainstream culture.
- When students returned home from Indian Residential Schools, they often felt estranged from their families and communities.
- In many cases parenting skills were lost or not learned because children had no role models to follow; the effects accumulated over generations.
- While some students had positive experiences at Indian Residential Schools, the very nature of the institution's form and function meant an overriding negative effect on Aboriginal societies.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Give examples of ways in which the residential school system impacted First Nations families and communities
- Explain how the impacts affected successive generations

Vocabulary:

dysfunction, historic trauma, intergenerational impact, intergenerational survivor, lateral violence

Resources:

- *They Came for the Children*, pages 77-80
- Blackline Master 9, Trauma Terms, page 44
- For additional background and student activities, see Lesson Plan 5 of 100 Years of Loss (Legacy of Hope Foundation)
- *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* (Executive Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission). Download at www.trc.ca – go to TRC Findings. On the next page, click on Executive Summary.

Suggested Activities**1. Communities Without Children**

Ask students to imagine what it would have been like for people in First Nations communities where there were no children or youth.

- Discuss how community members would have felt when students were removed.
- Ask how their absence might have affected daily life in the community. What roles did children usually play in community life?
- Have students summarize the impacts on the community with few children.

2. Ongoing Legacy

Use the material in *They Came for the Children* pages 77-80 (stop at top of second column) to begin the discussion of the ongoing legacy of the residential school system.

- Ask student to use the double entry journal strategy to reflect on the text. Have them select 4 or 5 quotes from the text and write them in the first column, then write their thoughts or reactions in the second column.

3. Discussing Intergenerational Impact

In this activity students will discuss some aspects of the intergenerational impact of residential schools, and the broader colonial experience, using three relevant terms. These terms are frequently used when discussing the impact of colonialism on First Nations communities:

- historic trauma
- intergenerational impact
- lateral violence

A related term is intergenerational survivor. Intergenerational survivors are the children and grandchildren of Indian Residential School survivors. They may not have attended Residential School themselves, but may have suffered abuse from their parents, grandparents or guardians who were passing on abuses they suffered in the system.

- Begin by discussing with students what they think the terms mean. You may want to ask them to research the meanings of the terms using the internet, or provide the meanings with Blackline Master 9.
- Use Blackline Master 9 to discuss some of the outcomes of the intergenerational impacts of Indian Residential Schools.
 - You may want to use the listed topic as springboards to discussion.
 - Students might select 4 or 5 topics to explain the connections.
 - The topics could be divided amongst groups of students to discuss and research.
- Additional student resource in *100 years of Loss*. See “An Unacknowledged Legacy” handout on pages 134-135 of that resource. It is a time line that illustrates how abuses that began in the schools were transferred to communities.

4. Legacies of Historic Trauma

Discuss with students the point that historic traumas are not just the result of the residential school experience. It is only one of the causes of historic trauma for First Nations. Recall activity 5 in Lesson 1.3 (Only Part of What was Lost).

5. The Question of Genocide

Ask students to consider the question: Was Canada’s policy to send children to Indian Residential School system an act of genocide?

- Provide students with the United Nations definition of genocide:

Genocide is defined in Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

- Ask students to decide whether or not they believe the use of the Indian Residential School system was an act of genocide, based on their understanding of the schools and the impact on families. Students should provide evidence for their conclusions. You may have students work in small groups or work individually after a class discussion.
- In its final report the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada concluded that Indian Residential Schools were examples of “cultural genocide.” Discuss with students how this may differ from the United Nations definition of genocide. See *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, page 1 for the TRC discussion of cultural genocide.

Part Two Assessment Activities

1. What did you really learn at school?

Ask students to list some of the ideas, attitudes and skills that children learned while at Indian Residential School. Identify those which were intended, and those which were unintended.

Suggested criteria for assessment:

- at least ten ideas, attitudes or skills are listed;
- responses include both negative and positive ideas, attitudes and skills;
- responses indicate an understanding of different aspects of a student's life in the Indian Residential School.

2. Illustrating intergenerational impacts

Ask students to demonstrate their understanding of how the Indian Residential School system has led to an intergenerational breakdown of families and communities. A variety of formats could be used to illustrate this understanding, such as

- poster or time line
- graphic novel
- script for a short play
- short story
- essay
- video