

## Part Three

# The Indian Residential School Experience

### Summary

In Part Three students examine what daily life was like for students in the Indian Residential Schools. To keep it age appropriate, the activities focus on the physical aspects of the school: the building and the various rooms where the children lived. Students use some primary source material to understand the problems with poor food experienced in the schools. Another story from *No Time to Say Goodbye* tells about two boys running away, which was a common response of students in surviving the schools. Throughout this section students compare the experiences of residential school students with their own lives.

### Essential Questions

- What was daily life like for students in Indian Residential Schools?
- How did students learn to survive in the schools?

### Key Concepts

- Indian Residential Schools intentionally isolated children from their families, their communities, and their culture.
- Indian Residential Schools instilled the belief that First Nations culture and language were inferior, and children were taught to be ashamed.

### Resources

- *No Time to Say Goodbye: Children's Stories of Kuper Island Residential School.* Sylvia Olsen with Rita Morris and Ann Sam. Sono Nis 2001
- Blackline Master 6 British Columbia Indian Residential Schools, page 47
- Blackline Master 7 Plan of Indian Residential School, page 48
- Blackline Master 8 Residential School Daily Schedule, page 52
- Blackline Master 9 Memories of St. George's Residential School, page 53
- Blackline Master 10, 11, and 12, School Food, page 58
- Pictures of residential school building facilities including exteriors, dormitories, dining rooms. Some sources of images are:
  - Indian Residential Schools Resources gallery. This site has pictures from all the BC residential schools. Link: <http://irsr.ca/photogallery/>
  - United Church of Canada has images from some of its schools. Link: <http://thechildrenremembered.ca/school-images/>
  - Fallen Feathers productions has some downloadable images. Link: [http://www.fallenfeatherproductions.com/photo\\_gallery.html](http://www.fallenfeatherproductions.com/photo_gallery.html)

## Activity 3.1

### The School Building

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#### Resources

- Pictures of exterior and interior of residential schools
- Pictures of public schools in the past
- Blackline Master 6, Map of BC Indian Residential Schools, page 47.

#### Vocabulary

dorm  
dormitory  
ominous

#### Summary

This activity focus on the physical aspects of Indian Residential Schools, including the imposing buildings and the interior features, which included both learning, living and working spaces. Most of the institutions also included a large area of farmland and associated outbuildings.

#### Key Concepts

- The physical aspects of the Indian Residential Schools emphasized the isolation from family.
- The Indian Residential School buildings created self-contained communities intended to assimilate First Nations children into Canadian society.

#### Key Questions

- How were Indian Residential School buildings different from school buildings today?

#### Suggested Activities

##### 1. Comparing School Buildings

Ask students to think about the question: *How were Indian Residential School buildings different from our school building?*

- Here are some strategies to investigate the question:
  - Discuss with class words on the Word Wall that describe features of the residential schools. Which describe the physical aspects?
  - Ask students to list things they already know about the physical aspects of the schools from the books and other work done in the unit. Students may want to review *Shin-Chi's Canoe* and Thomas' story to find descriptions of the schools in the text and illustrations.
  - Examine photographs of the Indian Residential School buildings. Many are available on line:
    - Indian Residential Schools Resources gallery. This site has pictures from all the BC residential schools. Link: <http://irsr.ca/photogallery/>
    - United Church of Canada has images from some of its schools. Link: <http://thechildrenremembered.ca/school-images/>
    - Fallen Feathers productions has some downloadable images. Link: [http://www.fallenfeatherproductions.com/photo\\_gallery.html](http://www.fallenfeatherproductions.com/photo_gallery.html)
- Work with students to develop categories with which to compare schools (e.g exterior, grounds, types of rooms).
- Have students develop a comparison chart for the two types of schools. You may want students to work individually or in small groups.

- Extend the comparison activity by asking students to illustrate some of the major features of the schools.

## 2. Sensory Imagination

Ask students to imagine the schools of the past. Have them write one or two descriptive phrases or sentences for each of the five senses.

## 3. Other Schools in the Past

Students may be interested to investigate what other schools looked like in the past, especially local schools.

- Find pictures of early day schools and public schools in the region.
- Ask students the question: How are schools of the past similar to our schools today, and how are they similar to Indian Residential Schools?

## 4. Where Were Indian Residential Schools in BC?

Use the map of Indian Residential Schools in BC, Blackline Master 6, to locate the school or schools closest to your community.

- Find out to which school most First Nations people from your area were sent.

## Activity 3.2

### Mapping a Day in the Life of a Student

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#### Resources

- Blackline Master 7  
Plan of Residential  
School, page 48
- Blackline Master 8  
Residential School  
Daily Schedule, page  
52
- Materials for creating  
maps

#### Summary

This activity asks students to compare their daily routine with that of students who attended Indian Residential Schools. It uses spatial skills to compare maps of the past and the present.

#### Key Concepts

- The daily life for students at Indian Residential Schools was highly regimented.
- Many students spent half of their day working to maintain the institution.

#### Key Questions

- How was daily life for student at an Indian Residential School different from daily life of students today?

#### Suggested Activities

##### 1. Mapping a Day in Your Life

Ask students to map the places they go during a normal school day, and show the route they travel from place to place.

- Lead a class discussion about the divisions in their day (e.g. morning routine, school, after school, dinner, bedtime).
- Ask students to make a schedule of their main activities on a typical day.
- Discuss how these might be represented on a map.
- Have student create their own maps.

##### 2. Mapping a Day in the Life of an Indian Residential School Student

Use the plans of St. George's Residential School, Lytton, (Blackline Master 7) and the schedule of a typical daily routine (Blackline Master 8) to track a day in the life of a student visually.

- Have students select a bed in the appropriate dorm and mark it with a "1." (To make it more realistic you could assign beds.)
- Following the schedule, students label the location of each activity with its number.

##### 3. Comparing Daily Routines

Lead a discussion with students about how their present day maps are different from the residential school student's map.

- Compare the other people that the students – present day and in Residential School – would be doing these activities with.
- Ask students to write a summary of the main ways that the two days are different.

## Activity 3.3

### Life at an Indian Residential School

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#### Resources

- Blackline Master 9  
Memories of St. George's  
Residential School,  
page 53

#### Summary

This activity continues to investigate what life was like for students at Indian Residential Schools using textual materials. It explores the memories of one student who attended St. George's, the same school that was used for the example in Activity 3.2

#### Key Concepts

- The operations of Indian Residential Schools were dictated by the goals of assimilation.

#### Key Questions

- How did the authorities of the school maintain control?
- Was the treatment of students at Indian Residential Schools fair?

#### Background

- This memoir is adapted from a sociology essay written by a university student in 1953. It describes an unnamed friend's experiences at St George's Residential School. As the student explained, "He consented to assist me in the 'own story technique' for my assignment. The 'own story' as he told it to me is an endeavour to describe an Indian Residential School education system." The essay eventually found its way into the BC Archives in Victoria. (Clarence Walkem, "Life of an Indian Lad in a Residential School," MS 2327.)

#### Suggested Activities

##### 1. Reading About St. George's Residential School

Use the text on Blackline Master 9, Memories of St. George's Residential School in the 1940s, as a reading activity to learn about one boy's experiences.

- Ask students to find places mentioned in the text on their maps of St. George's Residential School.
- Discuss how school life changed for the children as they grew older.

##### 2. Gender Differences

- Point out that this is a boy's story. Ask students what might be the same and what might be different for girls.
- Present some stories of school experiences from a girl's point of view: *My Name is Seepeetza* by Shirley Sterling, pages 24-26. (Note that Seepeetza

goes to school all day; her story takes place in 1958, after the half day system had been abolished.)

*They Called Me Number One* by Bev Sellars. Read aloud sections from Chapter three, particularly pages 29-36.

### 3. Additional Resource

See the “School Life” section of the video *Fallen Feather*, which includes a tour of Kamloops residential school and interviews with survivors.

## Activity 3.4

### School Food

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#### Resources

- Blackline Master 10 School Food, page 58

#### Summary

In this activity students use primary source documents to find evidence about the topic of food in Indian Residential Schools. These include two examples of official correspondence between Department of Indian Affairs officials, and a unique letter from a student.

#### Key Concepts

- The operations of Indian Residential Schools were dictated by the goals of assimilation.

#### Key Questions

- What does the quality of food served at Indian Residential Schools tell us about attitudes towards the children?

#### Background

- The food was notoriously bad in Indian Residential Schools. This was in part due to economics. Schools were always short of funds; however, staff were always fed adequately. This would tend to support the notion that the perception of First Nations being inferior seems to have permitted a lack of empathy on the part of the staff.
- Document 1 is an excerpt from a School Inspector's report about food at Kuper Island School, where the book *No Time to Say Goodbye* takes place. The Inspector's report was not unique. Schools often scrimped on food because of the shortage of funds to operate the school. In this case the school was selling the butter they made from the milk to raise extra money, leaving the students to drink less nutritious skim milk. You may want to explain what a separator is, and discuss the process of making butter from milk.
- Document 2 is a letter written home by a student at Sechelt Residential School. Unlike Kuper Island and the other schools discussed so far, the Sechelt Residential School was close to the Sechelt community. This is unique because letters home were usually censored by the staff, and students were made to re-write them until the staff was satisfied with the way they reflected on the school. The letter is transcribed on Blackline Master 10, and the original handwritten letter is also included as Blackline Master 11 if you want to show students the original.
- Document 3 is a longer piece of correspondence from Indian Agent Halliday to the Department of Indian Affairs regarding food and nutrition at Alert Bay Industrial School. Transportation to isolated coastal communities in that period depended on the coastal steamships that delivered groceries from stores in Vancouver.

## ***Suggested Activities***

### 1. Reading Primary Source Documents

Use the primary source materials on Blackline Masters 10, 11 and 12 to investigate one of the problems of the Indian Residential Schools: providing proper food and nutrition. Ask students to use the following questions to examine the evidence in the documents:

- Who created the document?
- What type of primary source is this? (letter, photograph, legal document, diary entry, etc...)
- When and where was the primary source created?
- Who was the intended audience of the document?
- Why was the source created?
- What does this document tell us about food in Indian Residential Schools?

### 2. Student Letter

Ask students to summarize the boy's main complaints about Sechelt Residential School. (*Not allowed to speak with family or people in community; school like a prison; food only fit for pigs; other complaints that he doesn't want to talk about.*)

### 3. Perspectives on Food and Nutrition

Discuss the changing perspectives people have on nutrition from the 1920s to today. Would we consider butter more nutritious than peanut butter? Why do you think butter was believed to be nutritionally superior?

Read the Inspector's Report about Kuper Island food.

- Talk about the irony of students having to take care and milk the cows, but the butter was sold to make money for the school.
- Recall from *Shin-chi's Canoe* the differences in food eaten by the children and by the staff.

### 4. Questioning Poor Food

Ask students to answer this question: "Why did the children in residential schools so often have poor food?"



## Activity 3.5

### *No Time to Say Goodbye: Joey's Story*



#### Resources

- Copies of *No Time to Say Goodbye*

#### Summary

This activity uses another section of *No Time to Say Goodbye* to illustrate some further aspects of life in a residential school. It deals with running away, a common way for students to resist authority. It also includes a section comparing life in the schools in different time periods.

#### Key Concepts

- Students coped with the Indian Residential School experience in different ways.

#### Key Questions

- Why did students run away from Indian Residential Schools?
- What positive experiences did students have at Indian Residential Schools?

#### Background

- NOTE: *No Time to Say Goodbye* is made up of a number of different stories. Not all of them are appropriate for Grade 5. Caution should be taken when using the book outside of the classroom.
- In Joey's story (pages 63-107) Joey runs away with a friend. They end up at Joey's aunt and uncle's home. There is a great deal of content about life in the Indian Residential School woven in. In Chapter 6, his aunt and uncle recall what the school was like for them, an earlier generation.
- His aunt lived at Kuper Island full time as her mother had died. She had a doll which she kept under her pillow until a nun decided she was too old for dolls. Things she learned were how to make the bed, how to pray and how to work.
- His uncle thought that things were pretty good for him. When he first went, he only spoke his own language, no English. Kids like Joey spoke English at home. He made his own toys: paper airplanes. They were taught to "pray for forgiveness for being Indian." He did many jobs around the school farm.

#### Suggested Activities

##### 1. Reading Joey's Story

- The first part of Joey's story is an exciting adventure. Use reading strategies such as Listen-Sketch-Predict and Mood Swing.

##### 2. Different Experiences

- Compare and contrast the school experiences of Joey and of his aunt and uncle.
- Talk about how Stumpy found out that his grandfather was dead, and how this shows the attitudes of the authorities to the feelings of their students.

##### 3. Character Study

You may want to delve into character studies of Joey and his friend Stumpy. Use the Character Web strategy.

## Part Three Assessment Activities

### *1. Comparing School Experiences*

Ask students to compare their school experience with children attending Indian Residential School. This could be in written form, as a chart or a poster.

### *2. Coping and Survival*

Ask students to reflect on the strength of students at Indian Residential Schools. How did they cope and survive? What evidence from the books and documents help to reach conclusions?

A variety of formats could be used, such as:

- a letter to Thomas or Johnny
- a poem
- a visual representation
- a written response

### *3. Memory Bag*

Ask students to identify four important ideas they remember or learned from Part Three. Create objects that represent these ideas to them. They may be pictures of an object, or an actual item.

- Students should be able to explain the significance of their objects.
- Ask students to put these items in their memory bag.