

# INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AND RECONCILIATION

## Teacher Resource Guide • Social Studies 5

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## BACKGROUND

*The Commission recommends that provincial and territorial departments of education work in concert with the Commission to develop age-appropriate educational materials about residential schools for use in public schools. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Interim Report)*

### **Rationale**

Why curriculum about Indian Residential Schools? This unit was developed in response to the call by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to develop age-appropriate educational materials about Indian Residential Schools. In its Interim Report (2012) the Commission concluded that “Canadians have been denied a full and proper education as to the nature of Aboriginal societies, and the history of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.”

The colonial foundations of our country resulted in a relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that was always unbalanced and unjust. This relationship manifested itself in many ways, including the treatment of Indigenous people as wards of the government, the loss of land and language, and the banning of cultural practices that had sustained the diverse First Nations for millennia.

A key component in this relationship was the imposition of the residential school system which the dominant culture hoped would bring about its goals of “civilizing and Christianizing.” Only in recent years has mainstream society acknowledged the extreme unjustness of the residential school system and the harm it caused to multiple generations of First Nations families and communities.

These learning resources are also a response to The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996) which, in calling for a new relationship, outlined four principles of a renewed relationship:

Mutual Recognition  
Mutual Respect  
Sharing  
Mutual Responsibility

The time is overdue for a strengthening of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and this can only be accomplished by a full and truthful understanding of the history of the relationship. Stó:ló educator Bill Mussell gives an insightful view of what a positive relationship could be:

Relationship is a key value in Aboriginal cultures; one must at all times recognize the value of the other and demonstrate respect and a willingness to discover and honour uniqueness in a relationship, whether it is with people, land, creatures, or

the Creator. One is called upon to be open to learning and to become changed for the better by the other; everyone and everything is a potential teacher in the ongoing journey to wholeness. In [a] relationship, one must be willing to take responsibility for the impact of one's behaviour toward the others, as well as responsibility for managing and learning from one's responses to the other's behaviour. ... This traditional way of understanding relationships can be a model for revising the imbalanced relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canadians generally.<sup>1</sup>

The educational materials in this curriculum package are designed to help students participate in this renewed relationship.

### ***What is Reconciliation?***

A dictionary definition of “reconciliation” is the reestablishment of a broken relationship, or forging positive accord where there was discord.

In the words of Reconciliation Canada, it is “based on the idea of restoring friendship and harmony – about resolving differences, accepting the past and working together to build a better future.”<sup>2</sup>

There is an important legal context for the concept of reconciliation in Canadian Aboriginal law. Supreme Court judgements for landmark cases such as *Sparrow* (1990), *Van der Peet* (1993), *Gladstone* (1996) and *Haida* (2004) all include discussions of legal and social reconciliation between Canada and First Nations.<sup>3</sup>

The process of reconciliation is complex, and requires full and active commitment of all parties. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission acknowledges, it will take time and commitment to reverse the legacy of residential school system. It affected many generations of students and their families; it will take several generations to bring about reconciliation.

Reconciliation involves more than the Indian Residential Schools. It includes reconciling the gamut of colonial injustices, including a fair settlement of land and treaty issues. Although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was tasked to reveal the truth about the residential school system, it concludes that it was the whole relationship “shaped over time by colonialism and racism” that needs full attention for the reconciliation process to move forward.

### ***What was the Residential School System?***

The residential school system was a collaboration between the Government of Canada and the mainstream churches to educate First Nations children in an environment that removed them from the influences of their families and culture. The explicit goal was to “civilize and Christianize” the children and to teach them basic trades for the boys and domestic skills for the girls. The system was based on a colonial, racist world view that Euro-Canadian society was superior and First Nations culture and people were inferior. In its Final Report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada called the Indian Residential School system “cultural genocide.”<sup>4</sup> Chief Justice Beverly McLachlin is the highest ranking Canadian

1 William Mussell. *Decolonizing Education: A Building Block for Reconciliation. From Truth to Reconciliation – Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*. Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008: 336.

2 Reconciliation Canada Backgrounder, <http://reconciliationcanada.ca/explore/reconciliation-canada-documents/>

3 Tony Knox, *Reconciliation In Canadian Law: The Three Faces Of Reconciliation?* 2009. [http://mccarthy.ca/pubs/Reconciliation\\_Paper\\_July2009.pdf](http://mccarthy.ca/pubs/Reconciliation_Paper_July2009.pdf)

4 *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future. Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, page 1.

official to date who has used the term “cultural genocide” to describe residential schools.<sup>5</sup>

Under the BNA Act, 1867, the federal government assumed all control of the lives of First Nations people, making them “wards of the government.” This includes responsibility for education. The government funded both day schools located on reserves, and Indian Residential Schools. They paid the churches to operate the schools, since there was a historical precedent of missionaries using education as part of their proselytizing.

The Indian Residential Schools were chronically underfunded. Teachers were paid less than in the public schools, and many residential schools operated farms to both feed and subsidize the schools. In these schools, students did much of the work around the school and farm in the guise of “industrial training” and were subjected to the “half-day system” where they attended classes for half the day and worked for the other half.

There were many abuses inherent in the system. The basic premise of removing children from their communities to “kill the Indian in them” was harsh enough. But because of the under-funding and some of the unqualified teachers hired, the schools became a breeding ground for emotional, physical and sexual abuse.

Not only First Nations children attended residential schools. Métis, Non-Status and Inuit children also experienced the system. Métis students were sometimes admitted by church officials, although the governments position was not to fund students without status. In some cases the residential schools were the only option for Métis students to get any kind of education. In the Arctic the schools were run directly by the churches until 1953 when the Department of Northern Affairs and National resources was created and the federal government formally took over the operation of the schools. For more information see chapters 3 and 4 in *They Came for the Children*, and *Métis History and Experience and Residential Schools in Canada* available on the Aboriginal Healing Foundation website.

It should be noted that some students had positive experiences at residential schools. They learned practical skills and self-discipline that helped them in their future lives. Also, there were many committed teachers who endeavoured to nurture students where they could in the system.

For more information about the history of the residential school system, see *They Came for the Children*, published by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and available online at <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=580>. Further resources pertaining to the residential school system can be found in the Resources listing, “Resources” on page 82.

### ***The Way Forward***

In the words of Justice Murray Sinclair, the Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “education brought us here, education will help us get away from this.” On one hand, generations of First Nations children have been damaged by an inferior education system. On the other hand, public schools systems frequently taught that First Nations people and cultures were inferior. “Because that was taught in the public schools,” Sinclair has said, “generation upon generation of non-Aboriginal children in this country have been raised to believe that Aboriginal people have been, were, and are inferior.”<sup>6</sup>

5 Reconciling Unity and Diversity in the Modern Era: Tolerance and Intolerance. Remarks of the Rt. Hon. Beverley McLachlin, P.C. Chief Justice of Canada at the Aga Khan Museum Toronto, Ontario, May 28, 2015. In *Globe and Mail*, May. 29 2015.

6 Report to Senate Committee 2013

There is growing evidence that many members of Canadian society recognize the importance of fully understanding the impact of the Indian Residential School and other injustices experienced by First Nations people. There is a recognition that, as Sinclair suggests, education is the key to understanding and reconciliation.

For example, in December 2012, School District 78 (Fraser-Cascade) passed a motion to authorize the integration of the residential school experience into the social studies curriculum taught in its schools.<sup>7</sup> The City of Vancouver declared the Year of Reconciliation from June 21, 2013 to June 20, 2014.<sup>8</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Committee's BC National Event held in Vancouver in September, 2013, saw 10,000 people participate in a Walk for Reconciliation through heavy rain. At that event, 5000 students participated in the BC National Event Education Day.

Although the Indian Residential Schools happened before today's students were born, as British Columbians and Canadians they share the history, and as future leaders will be actively involved in the reconciliation process. These learning resources will give them a reason for positive action.

## PLANNING FOR INSTRUCTION

These learning resources are designed to help Grade Five students attain an understanding of the history of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people over Canada's history. The primary learning resources are published literature, enabling a cross-curricular approach employing both Language Arts and Social Studies learning standards.

While the instructional activities are presented in a structured format that is an example of how they may be incorporated, they are intended to be flexible in their use. They allow for the application of both a First Peoples Pedagogy and the BC Social Studies Curriculum.

### *First Peoples Pedagogy*

This curriculum is guided by a pedagogy that recognizes certain ways of learning inherent in First Nations world views. This curriculum:

- is learner centred
- employs experiential learning and oral texts
- emphasizes an awareness of self and others in equal measure
- recognizes the value of group processes
- supports a variety of learning styles and representation

This pedagogy is based on the desire to bring an inclusive, holistic organization to learning activities. They reflect the following principles of learning, originally developed for the English First Peoples curriculum:

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<sup>7</sup> SD 78 (Fraser-Cascade) Minutes December 11, 2012, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> <http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/year-of-reconciliation.aspx>

*First People's Principles of Learning*<sup>9</sup>

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge.
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- Learning involves patience and time.
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
- Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

***Dealing Sensitively with the Topic of Indian Residential Schools***

It is important to deal with the topic of Indian Residential Schools with sensitivity. A great deal will depend on the age, maturity and family background of students, and teachers will be the best judge of how to approach the material.

As teachers go through the unit, they should be aware of the student's reactions to the injustices discussed. It is important to convey to them that the purpose for understanding the past is to be part of a more positive future.

For some students the topics discussed will be sensitive, especially if they have personal connections with residential school survivors. For others, the topics may be controversial, particularly if they feel they have no connection with the issues. Also, in some schools with new Canadians, teachers will need to be aware that some topics may echo feelings that are part of the immigrant experience.

Some considerations for making sure the topic is presented fairly and with sensitivity include the following:<sup>10</sup>

- a classroom is not a platform
- these topics are best taught through discussion rather than instruction
- a teacher is responsible for ensuring exploration of the issue so the discussion promotes understanding and is not merely an exchange of intolerance
- allow time to deal with students' concerns and questions
- be aware of issues that may arise for students both in formal discussions and in and around the classroom; close conversations appropriately; play a role in ensuring potential conflict is dealt with in the context of the classroom
- try to give students the tools and skills to discuss these topics rationally in the school and community

<sup>9</sup> English First Peoples Teachers Resource

<sup>10</sup> Adapted from BC First Nations Studies 12

When discussing sensitive and controversial topics such as the residential school system with students, it is important to set ground rules to ensure a safe environment for sharing ideas and opinion.

- always respect and value what others bring to the discussion
- discussion should protect diverging views among participants
- it is okay to feel discomfort

Students can be encouraged to analyze any controversial issue by asking the following questions:

- What is the issue about?
- What are the arguments?
- What is assumed?
- How are the arguments manipulated?

Much of the text and video content will elicit an emotional response from students. Teachers should be prepared to help students deal with the difficult emotions that may arise. Find people who are knowledgeable about the issue or who are trained to counsel students, such as school counsellors or Aboriginal resource people available in the community. In certain circumstances teachers may wish to refer students to a crisis line for confidential support:

- Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line. Their mandate is to support residential school survivors and their families but their policy is not to turn anyone away. 1-866-925-4419
- Kids Help Phone, an anonymous and confidential phone and on-line professional counselling service for youth. 1-800-668-6868

### ***Using These Resources in Grade Five***

The learning activities in this resource are organized in a sequential format that suggest one way of presenting the content about Indian Residential Schools and Reconciliation. However, the activities are designed to be adaptable and flexible. Teachers can follow the sequence of lessons, they can use particular lessons or sections as stand alone activities, or they can adapt the activities to meet their own curriculum planning requirements and the learning needs of their students.

It is important to select activities from all four parts of the unit. Teachers will probably not be able to use all the activities, so planning is essential to choose activities that fit the time frame and also address all the Essential Questions.

It is especially important to include Activity 4.4 to culminate the study on a positive note.

#### **British Columbia Curriculum**

At the same time as this resource is being developed, the BC Ministry of Education is in the process of transforming the provincial curricula. While the Social Studies curriculum is still in draft form, it mandates the study of residential schools and their legacies in Grade 5 Social Studies. The new draft Learning Standards for Grade 5 Social Studies include the components listed on the following page. Revisions may be made to accommodate confirmed changes to the BC Social Studies 5 and English Language Arts 5 Curriculum.

### Suggested Responses

Within some of the suggested learning activities, suggested responses are provided (*in italics*). These are not intended to be definitive answers, but to serve as a guide for teachers.

## ***Teacher Resource Overview***

The Resource Guide is made up of four sections:

Part 1: Learning and the Relationship with the Land

Part 2: Why Indian Residential Schools?

Part 3: Inside the Indian Residential School

Part 4: The Healing Journey

*The suggested activities are based on the following:*

### ***Enduring Understandings***

- Both church and state used Indian Residential Schools to promote their goals to destroy traditional culture and assimilate First Nations people into Western culture.
- The legacy of destruction caused by Indian Residential Schools is inter-generational, as family and societal disruption impacted successive generations.
- First Nations people have endured a long journey to bring the hard truths about Indian Residential Schools to the attention of the Canadian government and society, and to see the start of a road to reconciliation.
- All Canadians can help the reconciliation process by learning about and understanding the truths about the history and legacy of Indian Residential Schools.

Below are some relevant selections from the Draft English Language Arts 5 Curriculum, and the Draft BC Social Studies Curriculum.

### **Grade 5 English Language Arts**

#### **BIG IDEAS:**

- Exploring text and story helps us understand ourselves, and make connections to others and to the world
- Text can be understood from different perspectives

#### **CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES**

- Access and integrate information from a variety of sources and from prior knowledge to build understanding.
- Use personal experience and knowledge to connect to text and develop understanding of self, community, and the world.
- Demonstrate awareness of the oral tradition in First Peoples' cultures and the purposes of First Peoples' texts.
- Identify how story in First Peoples cultures connects people to land
- Exchange ideas and perspectives to build shared understanding.

## Draft Learning Standards for Grade 5 Social Studies

### BIG IDEA:

Economic interdependence and cultural exchange between Aboriginal peoples and Europeans produced conflict and cooperation which shapes Canada's identity today.

### LEARNING STANDARDS

#### Curricular Competencies

Students will develop competencies needed to be active, informed citizens:

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes (ask questions, gather, interpret and analyze ideas, and communicate findings and decisions)
- Construct arguments defending the significance of individuals/groups, places, events, or developments (significance)
- Ask questions and corroborate inferences about the content and origins of different sources (evidence)
- Sequence objects, images, and/or events and recognize the positive and negative aspects of continuities and changes in the past and present (continuity and change)
- Differentiate between intended and unintended consequences of events, decisions, and/or developments and speculate about alternative outcomes (cause and consequence)
- Take stakeholders' perspectives on issues, developments, and/or events by making inferences about their beliefs, values, and motivations (perspective)
- Make ethical judgments about events, decisions, and/or actions that consider the conditions of the time and place, and assess appropriate ways to respond and remember (ethical judgment)

#### Concepts and Content

Students will know and understand the following concepts and content related to Contemporary Canadian Issues:

- discriminatory government policies, including the Head Tax and Komagata Maru; and the responses and reactions over time, including residential schools and internments.
- human rights and responses to discrimination in Canadian society
- levels of government (First Peoples, federal, provincial, and municipal), their main functions, and sources of funding
- participation and representation in Canada's system of government
- First Peoples land ownership and use