



Sharing the Message of Truth and Reconciliation

A Guide for Parents, Kids, and Educators

Introduction

Reconciliation and the lasting impacts of residential schools have sparked conversations between parents and children, educators and students, around Indigenous issues, histories, and perspectives in homes and classrooms across Canada. This guide provides background information, two articles, and sample notes to help parents and educators have conversations with children about the need for reconciliation.

In response to the **Calls to Action** from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's report in 2015, Scholastic Canada partnered with Indigenous educators including 10 key advisors to create Take Action for Reconciliation for grades 3–8.

“**‘Truth Before Reconciliation’** The importance of understanding the true history of Canada regarding Indigenous Peoples must occur before reconciliation. Each Canadian needs to know that the impacts of government policy, including residential schools, were designed to be hurtful to Indigenous Peoples.”
—Brad Baker, educator from the Squamish Nation



Take Action for Reconciliation
Advisory Team

(Left to right): **Cornelia Laliberte**, Métis (Saskatchewan); **Brad Baker**, Squamish Nation (British Columbia); **Lowa Beebe**, Piikani Nation of Treaty 7 Nations (Alberta); **Jaime Battiste**, former treaty education lead at Mi'kmaw Ki'natnewey (Nova Scotia); **Marilyn Maychak**, Inuk (Ontario); **Diane Jubinville**, Pasqua Nation (Saskatchewan); **April Waters**, Métis (Manitoba); **Fibbie Tatti**, Sahtúot'įnę tribe (Northwest Territories); **Pamala Agawa**, Anishinaabe-kwe from Batchewana First Nation (Ontario); **Colinda Clyne**, Anishinaabe-kwe from Kitigan Zibi First Nation (Ontario)

Background for Parents & Educators

Reconciliation is described as working together to repair a relationship. The relationship between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people has not been equal for a long time. In 2008, the federal government began the Truth and Reconciliation process with a formal apology to the Survivors of residential schools. As part of the process, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was set up to go across Canada to interview and gather statements from Indigenous people relating to residential schools. Residential schools began in the 1800s, and the last one was closed in 1996.

About 150 000 Indigenous children were taken from their parents to live in these schools. The purpose of the schools was to “eliminate parental involvement in the intellectual, cultural and spiritual development of Aboriginal children” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada). Indigenous children were placed in the schools and were forbidden to speak their languages, and forbidden to believe in their own culture and identity. As a result, the intergenerational impact of residential schools is still being felt today in Indigenous communities throughout Canada.

The Commission's focus on finding out the truth about residential schools was meant to lay the foundation for the reconciliation process. Repairing damaged trust, making reparations, following through with concrete actions, and establishing respectful relationships were some of the recommendations the TRC also described as part of this reconciliation process.

The TRC made 94 *Calls to Action* on how Canadians can make amends for the oppression of Indigenous Peoples and move forward with reconciliation. The Commission singled out education as a key tool in reconciliation, and that children and youth should play a strong part in developing reconciliation policy, programs, and practices.

It is important for students to take note that reconciliation is an ongoing participatory process that ideally includes everyone in Canada. This process includes the learning journey of understanding the historical context that has set the stage for contemporary Indigenous lives in Canada.

Restoring the Relationship

Two key understandings about the reconciliation process are that it is reciprocal, and that it looks different to each individual. The experience of colonization has been ongoing since the moment settlers arrived on Turtle Island (North America). As such, the process of reconciliation is expected to be lengthy but certainly achievable. Education plays a special role in reconciliation, given that over the course of at least a century Indigenous children were forcibly pushed into residential schools, and most Canadians did not learn about this truth in their own experiences of education. As the Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair stated in his role as Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, **“Education is what got us here, and education is what will get us out.”** A key consideration in any action taken is that decisions that are made are guided by Indigenous communities and made with these communities.

Source: *Community Ties TG* page 30, 70.

Learning About Reconciliation and Residential Schools

Many of us are just coming to know the history of treaties and residential schools in Canada because of the way the education system functioned for so long. As such, it is important to come to terms with the fact that learning will take time, and there may be some bumps along the way. This is okay. It is important to act, learn, teach, reflect, and make things better as you come to know better. As writer Thomas King stated, “Don’t say you would have lived your life differently had you heard this story. You’ve heard it now.” The same applies here. Reconciliation is about action, and there is a moral imperative to teaching this content in a good way. There are many excellent resources, and many more are being developed on a regular basis. If there is something you don’t know, don’t be afraid to learn about it and find out!

Terminology

First Nations, Inuit, or Métis peoples are often assumed to be culturally homogenous. This could not be further from the truth. One of the challenges is the terminology used to describe Indigenous Peoples. For example, one of the historical terms used is *Indian*. This term is outdated and often felt to be offensive. In the 1970s, the term *Indian* was replaced with *First Nations*, and it is meant to honour the nationhood that the government sought to erase through the treaty-making process and residential schools. The term *Indian*, however, still has legal relevance because of the *Indian Act*. The *Indian Act* impacts many aspects of people’s lives, but one of the biggest ways is through Indian Status. Indian Status is legal recognition of an individual’s First Nations ancestry and all associated rights, including any treaty rights and the rights to live on a First Nations reserve, apply for funding for post-secondary education, and limited health benefits provided through NIHB (non-insured health benefits). There is a growing movement to change the *Indian Act* so that it is less restrictive and oppressive.

The word *Aboriginal* is also considered to be offensive to some people, but it is accepted by many. It is an umbrella term that can refer to First Nations, Inuit, or Métis. It is not a term that captures distinctions, which is one of the reasons some dislike

it. The term *First Nations*, as well, functions in the same way. It implies many nations, but unless one seeks out more knowledge, the distinction is not clear. There are over 600 distinct nations across Canada that could fall under the category of First Nations. Across central Canada there are diverse Métis communities that have many similarities, but also many distinctions. Across the Arctic there are at least four distinct Inuit land claim regions with peoples speaking different dialects and expressing culture in distinct ways relating to the land that they are connected to. When delving into the learning of historical and contemporary experiences of Indigenous Peoples, it is important to be as specific as possible about the group or groups you are exploring.

The term *Indigenous* has gained popularity over the last several years, but it is important to define what is meant by the term *Indigenous*. It is often used in a global context to refer to the original peoples of a particular land or territory. For the purposes of this guide, the term *Indigenous* is synonymous with the term *Aboriginal* and refers to the three distinct groups within Canada that are recognized under Section 35 of the *Constitution Act*: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

In an attempt to push back against terms that were imposed upon Indigenous Peoples, there is a significant push in communities to reclaim traditional names for nations. Some examples would include using the word *Anishinaabe* to refer to people historically known as Ojibwe, or the use of the word *Kanien’kehá:ka* for the peoples historically known as Mohawk. The term *Inuit* is a word in Inuktitut that means “the people,” *Dene* means “the people” in the Dene language, and many Métis people from western regions refer to themselves as *Otipemisiwak*, which means “the people who rule themselves” in the Nēhiyaw (Cree) language. The reclamation of language is significant as communities seek to reconnect and re-establish traditional languages that were diminished through the Indian Residential School System over the course of a century.

One of the unique stereotypes that Indigenous Peoples face is that it is assumed that they live in rural areas, on reserves, or in northern communities. It is true that

many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples do live in these places. However, urban Indigenous populations are growing very fast, and in fast-growing diverse Canadian cities urban Indigenous people often feel hidden in plain view. This urban reality is quite distinct from the rural or reserve reality, and it is important that the content that is learned in schools reflects a diversity of perspectives and experiences to avoid singular narratives being taught to children that are then replicated in their day-to-day lives.

Residential Schools

Indian Residential Schools operated for more than a hundred years in Canada. With children being taken as young as four years old, every aspect of Indigenous families was impacted. Conditions at many of the schools were deplorable, and many children were physically, sexually, emotionally, and spiritually abused. The impacts of all of this, weighing on one generation

after the next, continue to be felt intensely by communities across Canada. Communities are working hard to heal themselves from the deep harm that came from these intergenerational experiences. Residential schools are still new to the learning of many Canadians, which is why it continues to be important to expand the learning of children from their entry into the school system until they leave it.

In 2008, the federal government of Canada formally apologized for its role in the Indian Residential School system. One of the outcomes of this apology was the launching of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The intent of this commission was to gather truth through the testimony of Survivors of Indian Residential Schools, and research into the impact of these schools. The process of reconciliation relied on the gathering and educational outcomes of the truth gathering and was seen to be ongoing and involving both individuals in Canada as well as the collective.

Teaching and Learning with Indigenous Peoples

- Connect with your school board’s Indigenous education liaison or department.
- Build relationships with local communities. Expect it to take time to build trust and for the relationships to grow.
- Prioritize the voices of Indigenous Peoples and listen.
- Centre Indigenous content, knowledge, ways of knowing and being in your practice (Traditional Knowledge, books, film, music, philosophy, art).
- Follow traditional protocols in your local area (e.g., gifting, blankets, and tobacco), and don’t be afraid to ask if you are unsure of the protocols.
- Work with Elders and Knowledge Keepers trusted in your local communities. Often Indigenous education departments and local agencies that serve Indigenous groups are great resources for advice.
- Reciprocate—Value the time and knowledge of any guests in your learning space, or community members you work with. Think about how you can reciprocate the relationship. Remember that a gift or an honorarium is also given.
- Go beyond arts, crafts, and displays of music and dance. Talk about the issues, even the most difficult ones, and make sure to include Indigenous voices, values, stories, and perspectives.

These sample articles and lessons may help teachers, parents, and children start their journey of learning about Canada's history with Indigenous Peoples and take their first steps towards reconciliation.

What Is Reconciliation?

Excerpt from *Community Ties* Student Book



A Path to Healing

"Reconciliation." It's a big word, but what does it mean? It is when people work to repair a relationship. It is an ongoing process. In this case, it is repairing the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and other Canadians. It has been unequal for a long, long time.

In 2008, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a formal apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools on behalf of the Canadian government. That same year, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was set up. Their job was to go across the country to interview people who had attended residential school to get their stories and statements. This was stressful for many students because they didn't want to remember those hard times, but it was also healing for some Survivors.

The TRC completed its report in 2015. It came up with 94 Calls to Action—ways that Canadians can move forward. There is a lot of healing and work still to be done, but the TRC report is a good start for finding a way to honour the past, while looking towards a bright future for all Canadians.

"It took 125 years to create the problem—seven generations—so it may take generations to fix."

—Senator Murray Sinclair,
former Chair of the TRC



▲ Cree Elder Lorna Standingready (left) shared the story of what happened to her as a little girl in residential school. Here, she attends the closing ceremony of the TRC on June 3, 2015.

People have lots of ideas from **learning** to **caring** to **acting**.



"I expect folks to understand that reconciliation is a two-way street. And that we can't get to reconciliation until we have the truth part."

—Rebecca Benson,
Egale Canada Human Rights Trust



"We all go to school and we each have the power to decide how we will use our learning for good. As a young person, your voice is powerful. How will you use your voice to make your community more fair and respectful?"

—Charlene Bearhead,
Pathways to Education Canada Indigenous Education Advisory Circle Member



"We know we made mistakes in the past, but now it is time to right our wrongs. Time to learn from them and teach the next generation this important history. No matter our race or background, we stand together, all of us as one, and we are united as a country because we are all different, but we are all Canadian."

—Nevaeh Murray,
Grade 6, Charlottetown, PEI

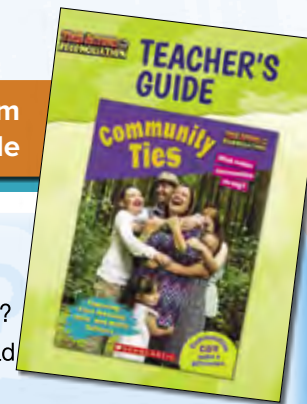


"Reconciliation means... you have to recognize and listen to the survivors of events and hear their stories. You need to spread awareness and make sure that everyone knows about it. Then you need to fix the problem and make sure it doesn't happen again."

—11-year-old Zachary Mullin,
2014

Think About It!

How do you reconcile with your friends and family when you break a promise?



Summary: This selection explains the meaning of reconciliation and looks at the different ideas people have about it.

Reading Level:

Vocabulary: generations, reconciliation, relationship, process, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), residential schools, Survivors, truth, awareness

Minds on Reflection (Before Reading): When you have a disagreement with your friends, what do you do to fix the problem? Do you apologize? What else would you do?

Understanding the Page:

- 1 On page 34, Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the TRC, states that “It took 125 years to create the problem—seven generations—so it may take generations to fix.” What does “generations” mean? What problem is Justice Sinclair talking about? What does he mean when he says it took 125 years to create the problem?
- 2 In 2008, the Canadian government apologized to former

students of residential schools. Why did they apologize? What do you think of this apology? When a relationship needs fixing, do you think an apology is all that is needed to mend the relationship? Explain your thinking.

- 3 Also in 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established to hear the stories of Survivors of residential schools. How do you

think telling their stories helped the Survivors?

- 4 On page 35, Rebecca Benson suggests that reconciliation is a two-way street. What is meant by “a two-way street”? Benson also says that “... we can’t get to reconciliation until we have the truth part.” What does she mean by the truth part? What truth is Benson referring to? Why is

- 5 On page 35, Charlene Bearhead says that “... we each have the power to decide how we will use our learning for good. As a young person, your voice is powerful.” In what ways can you make your voice heard? At home? At school? In your community? How can you make your community more fair and respectful?



History — In the selection, Nevaeh Murray expresses that it is time to right our wrongs. What does Murray mean when she goes further to say, “Time to learn from them and teach the next generation this important history”? Why is it important to learn from history? What lessons do you think all Canadians can learn from knowing about the history of residential schools in Canada?



Social Studies — Zachary Mullen says that “Reconciliation means... you have to recognize and listen to the survivors of events and hear their stories. You need to spread awareness and make sure that everyone knows about it. Then you need to fix the problem and make sure it doesn’t happen again.” Discuss Mullen’s statement with a partner. What does he mean by “spread awareness”? When you recognize and listen to the survivors of events and hear their stories, what does that help to do? Why is making sure that everyone knows about what has happened an important step in reconciliation?



Health — Revisit the picture of Cree Elder Lorna Standingready on page 34. At the Truth and Reconciliation Commission meetings, Elder Standingready shared her story of her time at residential school. Why do you think she was crying at the closing ceremony of the TRC? Do you think that sharing their stories may have been both traumatic and healing for Elder Standingready and other Survivors? Discuss your thinking with a partner.

What Is Reconciliation?

People have lots of ideas from **learning** to **caring** to **acting**.

A Path to Healing

“It took 125 years to create the problem—seven generations—so it may take generations to fix.”
—Senator Murray Sinclair, former Chair of the TRC

“Reconciliation.” It’s a big word, but what does it mean? It is when people work to repair a relationship. It is an ongoing process. In this case, it is repairing the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and other Canadians. It has been unequal for a long, long time.

In 2008, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a formal apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools on behalf of the Canadian government. That same year, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was set up. Their job was to go across the country to interview people who had attended residential school to get their stories and statements. This was stressful for many students because they didn’t want to remember those hard times, but it was also healing for some Survivors.

The TRC completed its report in 2015. It came up with 94 Calls to Action—ways that Canadians can move forward. There is a lot of healing and work still to be done, but the TRC report is a good start for finding a way to honour the past, while looking towards a bright future for all Canadians.

“I expect folks to understand that reconciliation is a two-way street. And that we can’t get to reconciliation until we have the truth part.”
—Rebecca Benson, Equi-Canada Human Rights Trust

“We all go to school and we each have the power to decide how we will use our learning for good. As a young person, your voice is powerful. How will you use your voice to make your community more fair and respectful?”
—Charlene Bearhead, Pathways to Education Canada Indigenous Education Advisory Circle Member

“Reconciliation means... you have to recognize and listen to the survivors of events and hear their stories. You need to spread awareness and make sure that everyone knows about it. Then you need to fix the problem and make sure it doesn’t happen again.”
—11-year-old Zachary Mullen, 2014

“We know we made mistakes in the past, but now it is time to right our wrongs. Time to learn from them and teach the next generation the important history. No matter our race or background, we stand together, all of us as one, and we are united as a country because we are all different, but we are all Canadian.”
—Nevaeh Murray, Grade 8, Charlottetown, PEI

Think About It!
How do you reconcile with your friends and family when you break a promise?



Social Studies — Historically, Canada’s oppression of Indigenous Peoples led to the loss of their traditional territories, ways of life, and languages, the banning of cultural practices, and the Residential School System. We learn on page 34 that reconciliation means repairing a relationship. What do you think repairing the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people involves? Discuss your ideas as a class. In your discussion, consider the idea that reconciliation is an ongoing process.



Global Citizenship — Write a letter to your local government to ask if they are working towards reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. How is the government working towards reconciliation? Write why you think it is important for the government to achieve reconciliation. Share your letter with your school to show that you want changes.



Further Inquiry

Conduct further research on the Residential School System. What were the attitudes of the Canadian government towards Indigenous Peoples at that time period in Canadian history? What were the roles of churches and the Canadian government? What was the Canadian government’s goal? How did residential schools impact the lives of Indigenous children and their families and communities? How are the effects of residential schools still having an impact on Indigenous communities today?



Think About It!

How do you reconcile with your friends and family when you have done something to damage your relationship, such as break a promise or hurt them in some way? What are the keys to a good relationship? Brainstorm what is considered a good relationship, for example, having respect, having trust, and sharing. What happens when a relationship is broken? How can you repair that relationship?

This second sample lesson offers a look into life in residential schools and what was lost for Indigenous families and communities.

Far From Home

Excerpt from *Community Ties* Student Book



Boys lined up in rows at the Brandon Indian Residential School in Brandon, Manitoba, in 1960.

by Lisa Charleyboy

Not many kids can imagine living apart from their parents for a month, let alone an entire school year. Well, that's exactly what happened to more than 150 000 Indigenous kids who had to go to residential schools far from their homes.

Across the country, children aged 4 to 16 were taken from their families by the Canadian government. They were forced to attend residential schools for the whole school year, and sometimes even longer.

In school, children had to cut their hair, wear a uniform, and be called by an English name, or worse yet, just a number.

They also had to follow very strict rules, or they could be punished harshly. Many

Indigenous children spoke their own languages at home, but they were forbidden to do so at school.

The Mohawk Institute Residential School in Brantford, Ontario, was the first recognized residential school. Founded in 1828 as the Mechanics' Institute, it became a full residential school for boys and girls in 1834.

The first residential schools were run by churches. Many students had to take part in church activities that were strange to them.

Later, the schools were turned into boarding schools under the Canadian government's control. More than 130 schools operated across Canada between 1831 and 1996.

Life for Families and Communities

When children were taken from their homes, it had a huge impact on communities. Parents and grandparents were sad and lonely without any children around, and the whole circle of life was broken.



Girls in sewing class at the Fort Resolution Indian Residential School in the Northwest Territories.

Without any children around, some people lost the ability to parent. They had no model of what family life looked like before residential schools. Some of the children who were taken away to school never learned how to show love to their own children—never hugging them or kissing them good night.

Culture is another thing that was taken away by residential schools. Children didn't learn about their culture, and many didn't have any opportunities to learn even after they grew up. There are generations of Indigenous people who have lost their culture because of this. Thankfully, many people are working hard to regain this knowledge.



This scene is from *We Were Children*, a 2012 film by Tim Wolochatiuk. The film recounts the story of Lyna Hart and Glen Anaquod, who were both taken from their homes at a very young age and sent to residential school.

Loss of Language and Culture

Many Indigenous languages are disappearing because kids were forbidden to speak their language at residential school. Being forced to speak English or French for most of the year meant that many simply forgot how to speak the language of their ancestors. And when they became adults, they couldn't teach their children how to speak the language either. As Elders and Knowledge Keepers get older, there are fewer chances to regain these language skills. Young people learning their language become even more important because of this.

Although residential schools seem as though they happened long ago, the last one only closed down in 1996. What happened in these schools is still affecting people's lives today.

Jacob Pratt's Story

Jacob Pratt is from both the Dakota and Saulteaux Nations. He went to the Gordon Indian Residential School as a day school student from grades 3 to 7. The school was on the George Gordon First Nations in Saskatchewan.



▲ Jacob has been dancing powwow since he was a child, and is a men's traditional dancer and a hoop dancer. Jacob also works with young people, helping them to become leaders in their communities.

"I had no other options for school than to go to this residential school on my reserve. The school was run very military-like. For instance, when we had to eat, we would run as fast as we could to the lunch area and we would have to line up facing the wall. We weren't allowed to talk, move, or do anything. And if you did, you'd have to go to the back of the line, and you didn't want to do that because there's only so much good food, and then you'd have to eat the food that was leftover—if there was any food by the time you got your turn."

The conditions at the school Jacob went to were not as harsh as the conditions that some students of residential schools faced. Many students consider themselves "Survivors," because the treatment they faced at school was so difficult.

"I don't consider myself a Survivor. I consider myself a former residential school student, but not a Survivor," Jacob says.

At only 33 years old, Jacob is one of the youngest former residential school attendees in Canada.

Think About It!

What do you learn from your family that you can't learn from other people? How would residential schools affect that learning?

My Mother's Story

By Rosanna Deerchild

For most of my life, my mother was a stranger to me.

When I was a wee Deerchild, she showed little physical affection, was quick to anger, and suffered from depression. She also struggled with alcohol and a difficult marriage.

She showed her love in other ways; she kept the house clean, kept us clean, sheltered and fed us. Every day, my mother brushed and braided my hair while she hummed and sent me off to school with soup and sandwiches.

I know she cared, but I never understood her. To me, she was a mystery and it wasn't until I was in high school that I learned her dark secret. It took another 20 years before she shared her story with me.

My mother, Edna Ferguson, is a residential school Survivor. Born in 1945 in South Indian Lake, Manitoba, she was raised in the North—on the land with her parents and two older sisters.

But that would all be taken away from her. After her dad died on the trapline and her mom died after getting sick with tuberculosis, she was sent away. She arrived at her first school when she was just five years old.

"You didn't go to school to learn. All you learned was to be mean. I didn't learn nothing. I didn't know how to read, and when I talked Cree they grabbed your hair and bang bang on the floor. I was too young to fight for myself."

She went to three residential schools between the ages of 5 and 14. After returning to South Indian Lake, she tried to put the past behind her.



▲ Rosanna Deerchild and her mother Edna Ferguson

"I kept everything to myself. I didn't want to talk about it. I thought people would laugh at me or say, 'Don't make up a story.' That's what they used to say when we went home after school. They didn't believe what we were talking about. What happened at school. What the nuns were doing. What the priests were doing."

In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission began travelling across Canada collecting the stories of Survivors. When they set up in Winnipeg in 2010, I took a chance and asked my mom if she would come with me, just to listen, to know that she was not alone.

What started out as a way for Rosanna's mother to tell her residential school story turned into a six-year healing journey and a book of poetry, *Calling Down the Sky*.



Far From Home Discussion Prompts

Summary: This selection explains how residential schools impacted First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in the past, and continues to impact Indigenous families across Canada today.

Reading Level:

Vocabulary: residential schools, Canadian government, forced, uniform, strict, culture, Survivor, Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Minds on Reflection (Before Reading): What purpose should schooling and education serve? Should it be good for all children?

Understanding the Page:

1 On page 30, we learn that in some residential schools children were forced to cut their hair, were called a strange name, or worse yet, just a number. How do you think these actions made the children feel? What do you think was the purpose of these actions?

2 On page 31, we learn that when children were taken from their homes to go to residential schools, the whole circle of life was broken. What do you think the author, Lisa Charleyboy, means by “circle of life”? What circle is broken? Consider how children grow up and learn from their families and communities in your answer.

3 Because children were removed from their families and communities for long periods of time, these children also went without learning what it was like to have a loving parent because they never had that opportunity at school. What effect do you think this had when they raised their own children?

4 On page 31, we learn that many Indigenous languages are threatened as a result of residential schools. Why are some Indigenous languages disappearing today? Why are Elders and Knowledge Keepers important to the survival of Indigenous languages?

Health — What is required for a child to be healthy? Based on what you have learned about residential schools, do you think that residential schools allowed Indigenous children to be healthy? Provide specific examples for why or why not to explain your thinking.

Social Studies — What role do families have in a community? Revisit the quote on page 2 by Elder Vital Daniels, when thinking about your answer: “Family is what keeps us happy! Being together, helping one another out is what family is all about.” What are the different parts that can make up a family? How do the various parts of a family work to transmit culture? How did residential schools disrupt Indigenous families? What impact do you think this had on Indigenous communities?

Social Studies — On page 30, we learn that the first residential schools were run by churches where Indigenous children had to take part in church activities that were strange to them. What is the purpose of spiritual practices? Who should teach spiritual practices to children? What impact do you think learning spiritual practices that were so different from their own spiritual practices had on Indigenous children?

Further Inquiry
How are different communities working to heal from the legacy of residential schools? What actions could you take to participate in this healing process?

Language — Revisit the quote on the Contents page by Freda Ahenakew: “Knowing your language gives you an inner strength and pride in your heritage.” What does this quote mean to you? Think about the importance of knowing your language in learning about your culture and heritage. What effect would being cut off from learning your language have on you? What has been the experience of Indigenous children? What are Indigenous Peoples doing today to revitalize their languages?

Connecting to the Final Project

Remember that an important part of reconciliation is learning about the history and culture of Indigenous Peoples. Think about the impact that residential schools had on Indigenous communities over more than 150 years, and the impact they continue to have today.



Far From Home Discussion Prompts

Understanding the Page:

1 On page 32, former residential school student Jacob Pratt is quoted as saying, “We weren’t allowed to talk, move, or do anything. And if you did, you’d have to go to the back of the line, and you didn’t want to do that because there’s only so much good food, and then you’d have to eat the food that was leftover—if there was any food

by the time you got your turn.” When you read this quote, how do you feel? Does Jacob’s school experience sound anything like yours? Explain your answer.

2 On page 33, Rosanna Deerchild shares that when she was a child, her mother, Edna Ferguson, showed little physical affection. What ways did Rosanna’s mother show her love despite being

unable to hug her children? What does Edna’s story tell you about the effects that residential schools continue to have on families today?

3 We learn on page 33 that in 2008 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission began travelling across Canada collecting the stories of Survivors of residential schools. Why was it important for Survivors to tell their stories?

Why was it important for Edna Ferguson to hear the stories of other residential school Survivors?

4 Why is it important to learn about the experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in residential schools? What can we learn from their experiences in these schools? Should we share what we learn? Explain your thinking.



Social Studies — Often residential schools are talked about as if they existed in the deep past. However, based on Jacob Pratt’s story on page 32, we learn that he is only 33 years old and is a former residential school student. Do you find it surprising that these schools existed up until 1996? Explain why you are, or are not, surprised.



Social Studies — In Jacob Pratt’s short piece about his experience, he described what is called a “day school.” Rosanna Deerchild on page 33 describes her mother’s experience in a residential school. Read both of these stories and describe what the difference is between a day school and a residential school. Why are both types of schools sometimes described as residential schools? What is the common message that people are trying to get across when they describe them as the same thing?



Think About It!

What do you learn from your family that you can't learn from other people? How would residential schools affect that learning?



Further Inquiry

The discovery of unmarked graves on the grounds of former residential schools over the summer in 2021 made the horror of residential schools real for many Canadians. It also confirmed what Survivors of residential schools told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. What else can we learn from the Survivors’ stories? What can we do to ensure that their stories are no longer ignored? For example, on Orange Shirt Day on September 30 wear an orange shirt to support Indigenous children and learn about residential schools, encourage others to take part in reconciliation, take a pledge of reconciliation yourself, learn about the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, or take action on any of the Calls to Action in the TRC.



Global Connections — Residential schools happened in places other than Canada, including the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Learn about how these schools worked in other countries by doing some research. Why do you think Indigenous people were treated in similar ways in countries around the world? What can we learn from these experiences?



Links to Inquiry Question

Now that you have read many of the selections in this book, think about the inquiry question: “What makes communities strong?” Write down your opinions. Have your opinions changed? How have they changed? How have your opinions been challenged? Discuss the opinions and think about the question as a group.

Learn more about *Take Action for Reconciliation*:
www.scholastic.ca/education/take-action-for-reconciliation

