



CLB

7

The Indian Residential School System

Customarily, Aboriginal histories, traditions, beliefs and values are passed on from one generation to the next through experiential learning and oral storytelling. So what happens when there are no more children to pass this knowledge on to? What happens when the children no longer understand the language of their Elders or the landscape of their people?

Summary

In this unit, you will learn about the history of the Indian Residential School System and its impact on Aboriginal children, their families and their communities. You will discover the ways that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada are remembering and acknowledging this tragic part of Canada's history and finding ways to move forward.

Imagine



Photo: Onion Lake Catholic Indian Residential School, residential school girls (c. 1950).
Source: Canada. Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development/Library and Archives Canada. PA-202480.

“Four more sleeps before I go to school. All of the older children in our village, including my brother, have already gone. My brother went to school 2 years ago when he was 6 like me. He doesn’t talk about school much when he is home for summer, so I still don’t know what it is like. Grandma tells me that I am going to learn many things, many useful things. But she says that I must try hard to remember what she has taught me. Mom has been sad lately. I don’t think she wants me to go to school. I told her I would stay with her, but she says I have to go. She told me I must not forget the songs and dances I have learned. I promised her I will remember. Four more sleeps.”

Talk about it

The little girl in the above story is about to go to an Indian residential school run by the Catholic Church. She will not see her family again until the spring. With your partner, discuss the following questions.

1. How does this little girl seem to feel about going to school?
2. How do you think this little girl might feel about school after she arrives there?
3. What are some things she might learn at school?
4. What do you think the biggest challenges will be for her?
5. Did you go to a residential school as a child? If so, tell your partner about your experience. How did you feel about it? What were some of the challenges?

4. Who ran Indian Residential Schools?

5. Why were Indian Residential Schools created?

6. What year did Indian Residential Schools first begin? What year did the last one close?

7. What did children learn at Indian Residential Schools?

Keywords

Use the context of the sentence to match the word to its meaning. Write the correct letter on the line. Then underline the clue in the sentence that helped you understand the meaning of the word. Compare your answers with a partner.

Word	Clue from Reading
b appreciation	If people learn about the history and legacy of the Indian Residential School System, they will have a better understanding and appreciation of some of the challenges that Aboriginal people in Canada have faced and that they continue to deal with today .
_____ assimilation	Instead of wanting to learn about and maintain the various Aboriginal cultures and languages that were found throughout Canada, the Canadian government decided that assimilation of Aboriginal people into Euro-Canadian society would be the best thing for Canada.
_____ complexity	When European settlers arrived in what is now Canada, they did not understand or appreciate the complexity of Aboriginal languages, cultures, and spiritual belief systems.
_____ conditions	Unfortunately, the conditions of these schools and the quality of education that these children received were very poor. Many of the school buildings were old, or built quickly with cheap materials, so they had poor heating and ventilation, or air flow.
_____ convert	Their hope was that through education, they would be able to convert , or change, Aboriginal people into Christianity.

Meaning

- the many details, elements or parts of something that that make it hard to understand
- an understanding of the importance or meaning of something
- to encourage or persuade someone to change to a different religion
- the process of becoming an accepted member of a country or group by learning and using that country or group's language and cultural practices
- the situation or environment in which people live or work, specifically the physical things that affect the quality of their lives

Keywords

Use the context of the sentence to match the word to its meaning. Write the correct letter on the line. Then underline the clue in the sentence that helped you understand the meaning of the word. Compare your answers with a partner.

Word	Clue from Reading
_____ deal with	If people learn about the history and legacy of the Indian Residential School System, they will have a better understanding and appreciation of some of the challenges that Aboriginal people in Canada have faced and that they continue to deal with today.
_____ establish	The first missionary school opened in 1620 near Quebec City, and after that many other missionary schools for Aboriginal children were established throughout Canada.
_____ inadequate	However, the amount of money given for each student was very small, so the students' food and clothing were often inadequate .
_____ inferior	Many settlers thought that Aboriginal people were savages and they believed that Aboriginal societies were inferior or much less advanced than their own.
_____ legacy	If people learn about the history and legacy of the Indian Residential School System, they will have a better understanding and appreciation of some of the challenges that Aboriginal people in Canada have faced and that they continue to deal with today.

Meaning

- to handle a problem or difficult situation, to do something to solve a problem
- something that happens or exists today because of things that happened in the past
- not good, or not as good as someone or something else
- to start a company, organization or school that is intended to exist for a long time
- not good enough for a particular purpose

Keywords

Use the context of the sentence to match the word to its meaning. Write the correct letter on the line. Then underline the clue in the sentence that helped you understand the meaning of the word. Compare your answers with a partner.

Word	Clue from Reading
_____ mandatory	Furthermore, in 1920 the government of Canada made it mandatory for Aboriginal children between the ages of 7 – 15 to attend an Indian residential school. Therefore, Aboriginal parents could no longer choose whether or not to send their children to these schools.
_____ punish	Although many of the children did not speak English or French, they were punished if they used their Aboriginal language.
_____ reconcile	And through this awareness, all people living in Canada will be able to reconcile the past and begin to move forward into the future in a more positive and united way.
_____ spiritual	They believed that the spiritual practices of Aboriginal people were strange and primitive. Therefore, in order to teach Aboriginal people about the Christian faith, many churches began to build missionary schools near Aboriginal villages.
_____ vocational	They attended class for only half a day, and often spent afternoons doing vocational training. This training included learning how to sew, cook and clean for girls, and learning how to farm and do trades, such as woodworking and shoemaking, for boys.

Meaning

- to make someone suffer because they have done something wrong or broken a rule
- relating to religion or belief systems
- relating to skills a person needs in order to do a particular job
- to find a way to accept a difficult or unpleasant situation; to build a positive, trusting relationship between people after a misunderstanding, a fight or mistreatment
- relating to something that must be done

Jigsaw (A)

Read the article. In the space provided, write down the main ideas and important details. Then use these notes to tell your partner about this information.

THE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

For more than one hundred years, Aboriginal children in Canada were educated through the Indian Residential School System. This system consisted of 140 Indian Residential Schools, which were located in all provinces and territories across Canada, except New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. These schools were funded by the federal government and run by Christian churches. More than 150,000 Aboriginal children attended these schools. With so many children attending so many schools over such a long period of time, it might be surprising to learn that very few people living in Canada know about this part of Canadian history. Only recently have schools begun teaching Canadian children about the history and legacy of Indian Residential Schools. It is part of Canada's history that some people would rather not talk about. It is part of Canada's history that some people would rather forget. However, it is also part of Canada's history that all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people living in this country should know about.



Photo: Aboriginal students attending the Metlakatla Indian Residential School.
Credit: William James Topley (1845-1930)/Library and Archives Canada. C-015037.

If people learn about the history and legacy of the Indian Residential School System, they will have a better understanding and appreciation of some of the challenges that Aboriginal people in Canada have faced and that they continue to deal with today. And, through this awareness, all people living in Canada will be able to reconcile the past and begin to move forward into the future in a more positive and united way.

Partner A - What was the Indian Residential School System?

When European settlers arrived in what is now Canada, they did not understand or appreciate the complexity of Aboriginal languages, cultures and spiritual belief systems. Many settlers thought that Aboriginal people were savages and they believed that Aboriginal societies were much less advanced than their own. Also, the churches that had been set up in Canada at that time did not recognize that Aboriginal communities had their own complex form of spirituality. Instead, they believed that the spiritual practices of Aboriginal people were strange and primitive. Therefore, in order to teach Aboriginal people about the Christian faith, many churches began to build missionary schools near Aboriginal villages. Their hope was that through education, they would be able to convert, or change, Aboriginal people to Christianity. The first missionary school opened in 1620 near Quebec City and, after that, many other missionary schools for Aboriginal children were established throughout Canada.

As more and more settlers came to Canada, Aboriginal people recognized that their way of life was going to change. Many Aboriginal Chiefs and Elders knew that if their communities were going to survive and flourish in this new society, community members would need to learn the skills and languages of the settlers. In fact, in the early and mid-1800s in what is now Ontario, some Aboriginal leaders worked with the churches and government officials to create schools for the children in their communities. At these schools, Aboriginal children learned reading, writing and math as well as farming and

trade skills. The Chiefs wanted these children to know both their own Aboriginal language and culture and the language and culture of the colonialists. They felt that this knowledge would ensure that their people would continue to prosper even though the society was changing so quickly.

However, the same curiosity and respect for another people's culture was not shown by the Canadian government at that time. Instead of wanting to learn about and maintain the various Aboriginal cultures and languages that were found throughout Canada, the Canadian government decided that assimilation of Aboriginal people into Euro-Canadian society would be the best thing for Canada. This meant that Aboriginal people would need to give up their languages, spiritual beliefs and cultural practices. The Federal government understood that adult Aboriginal people would be unable or unwilling to assimilate into the mainstream Euro-Canadian culture. Therefore, they focused on the children. They decided that Aboriginal children should be segregated, or completely removed, from their villages and separated from their parents, communities and all Aboriginal influence. This was the beginning of the Indian Residential School System.

The first government-funded Indian Residential Schools were opened in the early 1830s. The schools were paid for by the Federal government, but run by churches because the churches had already set up many schools. One of the differences between Indian Residential Schools and the earlier missionary schools was that they were very far away from the children's villages. Therefore, Aboriginal children lived at residential schools for months or years at a time rather than going home every day after class. This meant that many of these children did not see their families for very long periods of time. Furthermore, in 1920 the government of Canada made it mandatory for Aboriginal children between the ages of 7–15 to attend Indian Residential School. Therefore, Aboriginal parents could no longer choose whether or not to send their children to these schools. In fact, parents who tried to keep their children with them at home could be fined or even sent to prison. The last federally-funded Indian Residential School didn't close until 1996.

Partner A - What Was the Indian Residential School System?

Use this T-chart to make notes on the article. Write key words and phrases instead of copying full sentences from the article. When you are finished, use these notes to tell your partner the information.

Main Ideas	Details

Comprehension

After you have shared your information with your partner, look at the pre-reading questions again and check your answers. Add any missing information.

Jigsaw (B)

Read the article. In the space provided, write down the main ideas and important details. Then use these notes to tell your partner about this information.



Photo: Indian children holding letters that spell “Goodbye” at Fort Simpson Indian Residential School (1922). Credit: J.F. Moran/Library and Archives Canada PA-102575.

The Indian Residential School System

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Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people living in this country should know about. If people learn about the history and legacy of the Indian Residential School System, they will have a better understanding and appreciation of some of the challenges that Aboriginal people in Canada have faced and that they continue to deal with today. And, through this awareness, all people living in Canada will be able to reconcile the past and begin to move forward into the future in a more positive and united way.

Partner B - What was Indian Residential School like?

The purpose of Indian Residential Schools was to “civilize” Aboriginal children, so that they could assimilate into Euro-Canadian society. The hope was that by attending Indian residential school these children would forget their language and their culture, and would not be able to pass them on to the next generation. Therefore, anything to do with Aboriginal culture was forbidden. When the children arrived at the schools, their clothes and belongings were taken away, their hair was cut short and they were dressed in identical uniforms. Children were not allowed to speak their Aboriginal languages or adhere to the practice of their spiritual beliefs. Many of the children did not speak English or French; however, if they used their Aboriginal language they were punished. Boys and girls were often separated, and brothers and sisters were not allowed to see or speak to each other. Children slept in large rooms that had rows and rows of beds. They attended class for only half a day, and often spent afternoons doing vocational training. This training included learning how to sew, cook and clean for girls, and learning how to farm and do trades, such as woodworking, for boys. Some of these children were taken out of class altogether and had to spend all day working for no pay. The idea was that when these children finished their schooling they would work as labourers for Euro-Canadian families.

Unfortunately, the conditions of these schools and the quality of education that these children received were very poor. This is because there was not enough funding from the Federal government to support the large number of Indian Residential Schools that were being established by the churches. Many of the school buildings were old, or built quickly and with cheap materials, so they had poor heating and ventilation. This meant that the insides of the schools were very hot in the summer and extremely cold in the winter. The schools were also overcrowded because

the government paid the church a certain amount of money for each student it had. The more students at the school, the more money the church would receive. However, the amount of money was still very little, so the food and clothing that the students were given were often inadequate. Cold temperatures, lack of food and clothing and overcrowding often led to the spread of disease in these schools. In fact, thousands of children who attended these schools died due to these poor conditions.

The quality of education that the students received at Indian Residential Schools was also poor. Many students left with only a grade 5 education. This is because the churches could not afford to hire qualified teachers. Many of the teachers who worked in these schools did not have any professional training, and some did not even have high school diplomas. Also, children were often taken out of class to do chores such as cleaning, cooking and maintenance because the churches did not have enough money to hire proper staff for these schools.

But perhaps the worst part of Indian Residential Schools was the physical, psychological and sexual abuse that some Aboriginal children experienced. There are some Aboriginal people who have fond memories of their time at Indian Residential School. They remember kind, loving teachers, nuns and priests. They remember good times with their friends. However, for the majority of people who attended these schools, the memories are not pleasant. Instead, they remember feeling lonely, hungry and scared. They remember being told that Aboriginal culture is strange and inferior, and that Aboriginal beliefs and practices are wrong. Many of the people who attended Indian Residential Schools left with very little education, no ability to speak their Aboriginal language and a belief that it is shameful to be an “Indian”.

Partner B - What Was the Indian Residential School System?

Use this T-chart to make notes on the article. Write key words and phrases instead of copying full sentences from the article. When you are finished, use these notes to tell your partner the information.

Main Ideas	Details

Comprehension

After you have shared your information with your partner, look at the pre-reading questions again and check your answers. Add any missing information.

True/False

Answer the following questions on your own. Circle T for true and F for false.

1. **T • F** Not all provinces had Indian Residential Schools.
2. **T • F** Most Canadians know about the Indian Residential School System and its impact on Aboriginal people.
3. **T • F** Generally, European settlers did not understand how developed Aboriginal cultures were when they arrived in what is now Canada.
4. **T • F** Churches wanted all Aboriginal people to become Christians.
5. **T • F** Indian Residential Schools were the first schools that Aboriginal children went to.
6. **T • F** Aboriginal people wanted their children to assimilate into Euro-Canadian society.
7. **T • F** Indian Residential Schools were operated by the Federal government.
8. **T • F** Many Indian Residential Schools were poorly built and had too many students.
9. **T • F** All Aboriginal children received a good education at Indian Residential Schools.
10. **T • F** When Aboriginal people left Indian Residential Schools and returned to their homes and villages, they faced many challenges.



THE FIRST DAY

I'll never forget the first day of school. The school was the biggest building I had ever seen. The nuns and priest looked so scary in their long black clothes. When they spoke to me I couldn't understand anything they were saying. They made me take a bath. Then they cut my hair short. I didn't want short hair, but they didn't understand me when I tried to tell them this. They didn't understand me when I asked if I could see my brother. I didn't understand what was happening. I just wanted to go home.

Thinking Critically: Impacts of Indian Residential Schools

Write answers to the following questions. Then share your answers with your group.

1. How do you think attending an Indian residential school might have affected individual students?
2. How do you think attending an Indian residential school might have affected a person's relationship with his or her family?
3. In what ways do you think Indian Residential Schools have impacted Aboriginal communities?



RETURNING HOME

I returned to my village when I was 14. Things seemed so different, so strange. I felt embarrassed when I saw my father cutting up salmon behind the house and laying it out to dry on all those racks. I felt embarrassed when I saw my grandmother weaving her baskets. I was frustrated when she tried to talk to me because she wouldn't use English. I didn't want to speak Indian. I couldn't. I was angry at my family for sending me to school, but I was even angrier that they hadn't learned English or how to live in the Canadian way. They were just so "Indian".

Stories

Listen

Listen to this short speech about the effects of Indian Residential Schools and add notes to the table. Then use your notes to retell the information to your partner.



Effects of Indian Residential Schools : <http://youtu.be/eWndmJPFR24>

People	Effects of Indian Residential Schools
Individual Students	
Families	
Communities	
Non-Aboriginal People	

Healing the Past

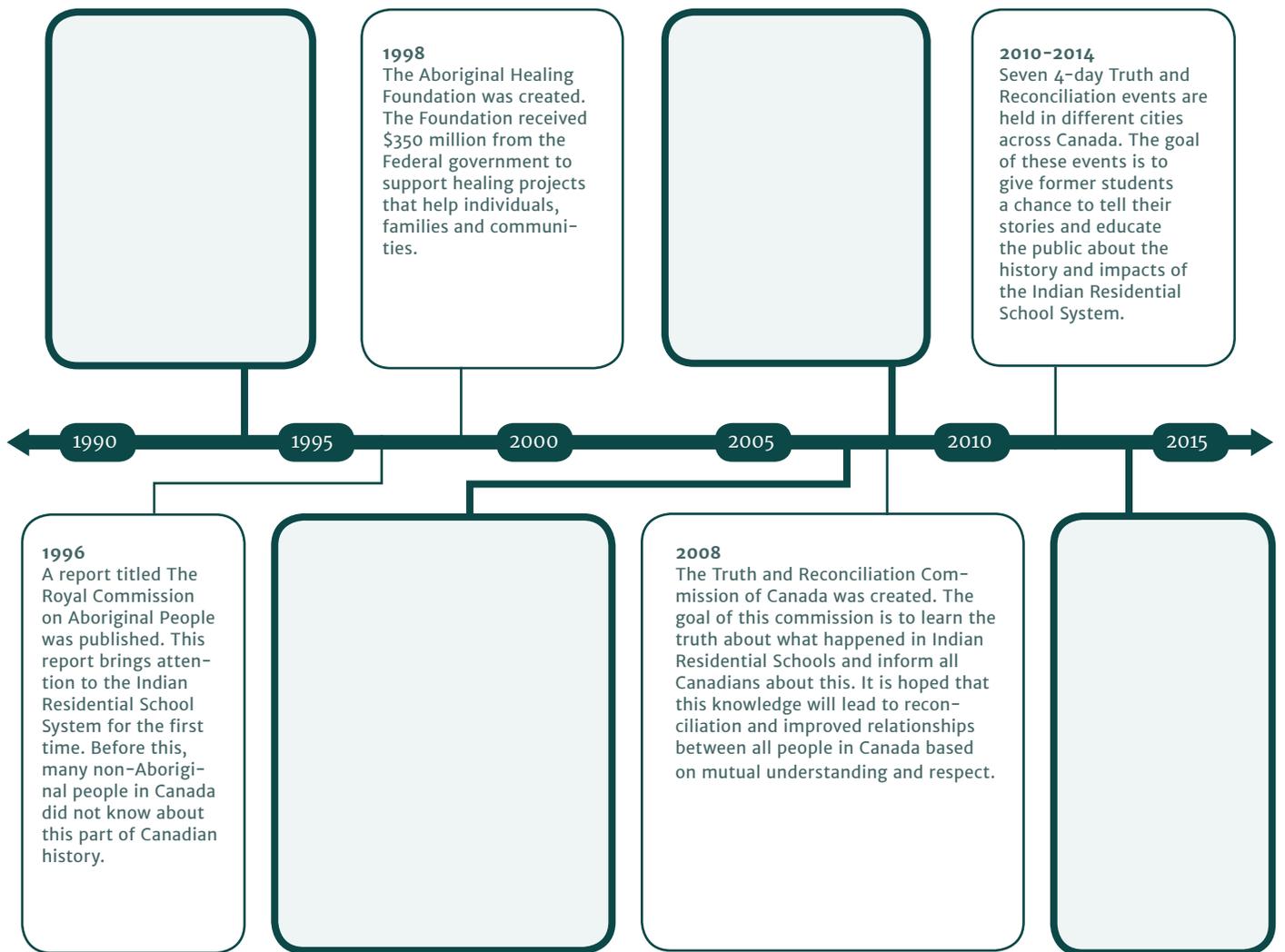
Recently, more and more Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have been learning about the history and legacy of the Indian Residential School System. This awareness has prompted the Federal government and the churches to take responsibility for their roles in this part of Canadian history.

The government, churches and Aboriginal organizations are taking steps to help former students of Indian Residential Schools and their families recover from the negative impacts of these schools. The following timeline outlines some of these actions.

Timeline of Reconciliation (Partner A)

Work with a partner. You and your partner have different information on your timelines. Ask your partner about the dates that are blank on your timeline and fill in the information using note form.

Partner A



Healing the Past

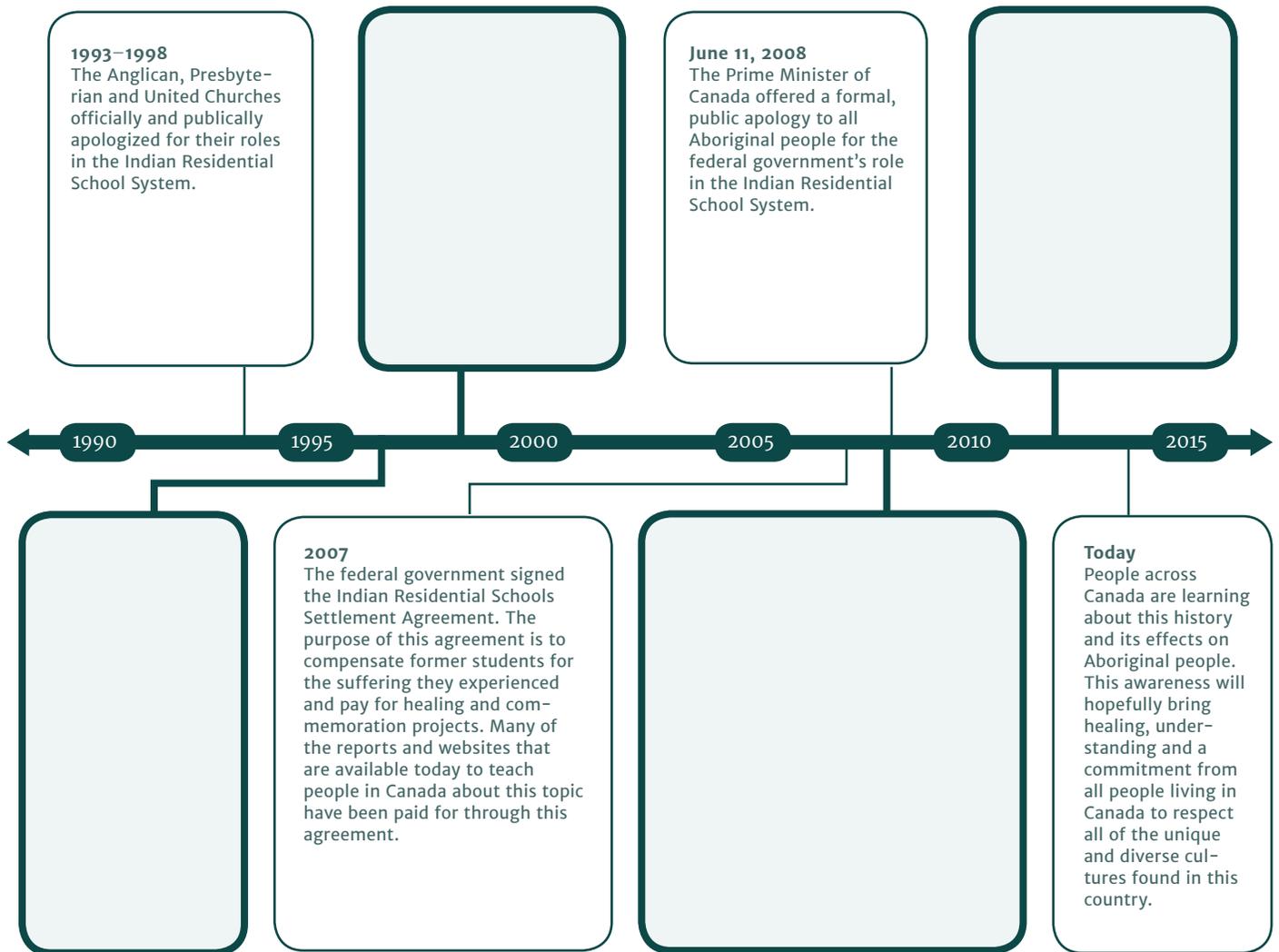
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The government, churches and Aboriginal organizations are taking steps to help former students of Indian Residential Schools and their families recover from the negative impacts of these schools. The following timeline outlines some of these actions.

Timeline of Reconciliation (Partner B)

Work with a partner. You and your partner have different information on your timelines. Ask your partner about the dates that are blank on your timeline and fill in the information using note form.

Partner B





Photos (Above & Right) Prime Minister Harper offers full apology on behalf of Canadians for the Indian Residential School System (2008). Courtesy of the Office of the Prime Minister of Canada.

Photo (Below) Phil Fontaine, National Chief of Assembly of First Nations. Courtesy of the Office of the Prime Minister of Canada



Moving Forward

“Two primary objectives of the Residential School system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, “to kill the Indian in the child.” Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.”

— Prime Minister Stephen Harper, official apology, June 11, 2008



“To know this history requires the courage of survivors to speak to understand it requires the courage of others to listen: a better future requires that we all join together and act.”

— Indigenous Foundations UBC



AN APOLOGY

Today the Prime Minister officially apologized to the Aboriginal people of Canada for the government’s role in creating and implementing the Indian Residential School System. I watched his apology on TV with my children and grandchildren. And today I finally told my family that I went to a residential school.

Before you Listen

In September 2013, a Truth and Reconciliation event was held in Vancouver. You are going to listen to a short description of this event. Before you listen, read the questions and make predictions about the answers. Share your predictions with a partner.

Listen

Listen and write short answers to the following questions.



Moving Forward: Truth and Reconciliation: <http://youtu.be/DiPhkXSSlyg>

Truth and Reconciliation

1. What is the purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)?
2. What was the “Learning Place” at the PNE?
3. Who attended the TRC event in Vancouver?
4. What did the survivors of Indian Residential Schools do at this event? Why was this important?

Did you know?

Vancouver’s mayor Gregor Robertson officially declared June 21, 2013 – June 20, 2014 as a Year of Reconciliation in Vancouver.

“We are embracing reconciliation through a year-long initiative as a way to mend the past, build shared understanding, and create a legacy for meaningful change in society.”



Photo: Mayor Robertson (Right) with Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, before the Walk for Reconciliation. Courtesy of the Vancouver Mayor’s Office.

5. What happened on “Education Day”?

6. What happened on September 17th? Why was this event important?



7. How did the TRC event in Vancouver end?



Photos: Walk for Reconciliation, September 22, 2013. Courtesy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

8. What other types of events do you think could be organized in the future to continue to acknowledge and support Indian Residential School survivors and educate the public about this part of Canada’s history?



WALK FOR RECONCILIATION

Today, I participated in a walk for reconciliation. It was organized by Reconciliation Canada. I couldn't believe how many people came out on such a cold, rainy Sunday morning. My children and my grandchildren walked with me. It was an amazing day.

My Perspective

projects & assignments

These projects and assignments give you a chance to share your ideas and perspective on this topic.

Journal/Blog

- Compare what you knew about Indian Residential Schools before this unit to what you know now.
- Describe how the information in this unit has changed your understanding of Aboriginal peoples' lives.
- Write a 2–3 paragraph narrative that outlines a different history for Canada's Aboriginal people that does not include Indian Residential Schools. How would the lives of Aboriginal people be different today?
- Many children around the world attend residential schools and, unlike Indian Residential Schools in Canada, many of these schools are excellent. Are there residential schools in your country? If so, describe them.
 - What do these schools look like?
 - Who attends these schools?
 - Why do these children attend residential school?
 - What kinds of programs are offered at these schools?
 - What types of jobs/post-secondary education do the children who attend these schools get after they graduate?

Sharing & Connecting

Projects & Assignments

These projects and assignments give you a chance to learn more about this topic and/or share what you have learned with others.

Indian Residential School - Presentation

In small groups, prepare a presentation on the history and legacy of Indian Residential Schools for other classes in your school.

Learning About Aboriginal Peoples - Research Project

Today, many Aboriginal people are working hard to save and relearn the languages and cultural practices that were almost lost through the Indian Residential School System. Although in the past education was used to try to eliminate Aboriginal languages and cultures, today more and more schools are offering Aboriginal language classes, and all school districts in BC have signed Aboriginal Enhancement agreements with the provincial government. These agreements ensure that education about Aboriginal culture and languages is offered to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students throughout BC. Today, education is playing a big role in the preservation and celebration of these rich cultures. This research project will also allow you to learn more about some of these unique cultures.

Learn more about Aboriginal people in BC, their languages and their cultures. In small groups, research one of BC's First Nations. Then present your information to your class. Include some of the following things in your presentation:

- the name of this First Nation
- the territory of this nation: look for a map of BC that outlines the traditional territory of this Nation <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/map.htm>
- the language of this nation: with 3–4 words you could to your classmates!
 - The First Voices website lists many First Nations languages, has recordings of many words and phrases in each language, and even has games to help people learn and remember the language. <http://www.firstvoices.com/en/index-canada-west>
 - The First Peoples Language Map of BC website shows the First Nations languages in BC. Click on different parts of the map to learn about the language and nation of each area. <http://maps.fphlcc.ca>
- traditional and contemporary styles of art of this nation
- the location of a cultural centre where you and your classmates can go and learn more (Note: not all areas in BC have Aboriginal cultural centres.)
 - Aboriginal Tourism BC <http://www.aboriginalbc.com>
 - Hello BC <http://www.hellobc.com/british-columbia/things-to-do/arts-culture-history/aboriginal-experiences.aspx>