

Activity #2

Blanket Exercise

Indigenous & non-Indigenous relationships

What the TRC says about reconciliation

It requires that the paternalistic and racist foundations of the residential school system be rejected as the basis for an ongoing relationship. Reconciliation requires that a new vision, based on a commitment to mutual respect, be developed. It also requires an understanding that the most harmful impacts of residential schools have been the loss of pride and self-respect of Aboriginal people, and the lack of respect that non-Aboriginal people have been raised to have for their Aboriginal neighbours. Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one.

Inviting an Indigenous speaker

The best way to learn about Indigenous people is from an Indigenous Elder. Contact a [Friendship Centre](#). For protocols for inviting Elders, see page 6 in the Introduction to this resource.

Who are Indigenous people?

The Indigenous (or Aboriginal) people in Canada are First Nations, Inuit and Métis. See page 4 in the introduction for definitions.

Communicating with Parents

These activities and the conversations may affect children (and adults) differently. Read the section about communicating with parents in the Introduction on page 6. Each activity includes a sample letter for parents and includes suggestions for what you may say to parents about the activities. Adapt them to suit your group's needs.

Self-Care for Leaders

The facts about colonization, residential schools and other discriminatory practices in Canada can be difficult for people of any age to learn. To help yourself and others, read "Pastoral Care" on page 5 in the Introduction to Reconciliation Activities.

Objectives

This activity includes the Blanket Exercise with imaginary time travel and a craft response. The children will:

1. Imagine time traveling to different points in the history of Indigenous people in Canada (20 minutes).
2. Learn about Indigenous people's experiences.
3. Make a craft to help remember and talk about the need for changes and for reconciliation (20 minutes).

*KAIROS is an ecumenical organization working with its member churches, including The Presbyterian Church in Canada, to fulfill the justice imperatives of the Bible. Kairoscanada.org

Overview for Leaders

The KAIROS* Blanket Exercise (KBE) was developed in partnership between Indigenous people and churches working together so that the findings of the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples would not be forgotten. The result was an experiential activity that simulates the loss of land experienced by Indigenous people since contact with European settlers. This version has been adapted for children ages five to eight years old.

Adult leaders will have differing levels of knowledge about Indigenous people and their relationship with non-Indigenous people in Canada. Here is a summary. Prior to the arrival of European explorers in 16th century, millions of Indigenous people lived on the lands we now call Canada. They had diverse cultures, spiritual beliefs, governments, and economic and social systems. Today there are 634 distinct First Nations governments in Canada.

The early relationships between Indigenous people and European settlers were generally marked with respect and peace. Indigenous people offered hospitality to settlers who were dependent on their knowledge of how to navigate and survive the environmental conditions. Agreements of peace and friendship were formed out of these early relationships. Even during these years of relatively peaceful co-existence, Indigenous people suffered disproportionately from diseases for which they had no immunity, such as smallpox, measles and tuberculosis. By Confederation in 1867, Indigenous populations had dramatically decreased.

In the years that followed, colonial attitudes that reflected a sense of superiority of European cultures and values over Indigenous cultures and values were entrenched in government policies and societal attitudes. This manifested in many ways, including policies of assimilation which led to a further loss of Indigenous land as well as language, culture, spiritual practices, government and social systems. It led to the creation of the residential school system, the impact of which has been condemned as cultural genocide by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Preparation

The activity presented here is based on the adult version of the KAIROS Blanket Exercise. For a three minute video explanation on the KBE visit <http://www.kairosblanketexercise.org/lessons/1>

This version is adapted for young children. If you have time, acquaint yourself with the KAIROS Blanket Exercise process (adult version) by going to kairosblanketexercise.org. For further information about the KAIROS Blanket Exercise or to inquire about hosting a Blanket Exercise workshop, you may contact Justice Ministries at healing@presbyterian.ca. You may also wish to consult other [resources for teachers](#) from the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (nctr.ca).

Read the adapted KAIROS Blanket Exercise script in this activity. Read it more than once. Adults who participate in the Blanket Exercise bring different life experiences and perspectives that will inform their feelings. It is important for leaders to share these before leading children through the activity. It is especially important to remember that this activity, and the facts it provides, stir up strong emotions. This is an opportunity to provide a safe place for children to talk about their feelings. Begin and end the activity in prayer.

Prayer

Loving and caring God of all creation, give us:
the willingness to learn about difficult and new things;
the sensitivity to help these children hear and respond with hope; and
the ability to discern your voice calling us to work for reconciliation.
In Jesus name we pray, amen.

You will need:

- ◆ Several blankets or sheets. The number of blankets will depend on the size of the group. One blanket is needed for every three to four children, and a minimum of six blankets is suggested.
- ◆ A large room that can comfortably hold all your participants, with room to walk around.
- ◆ A copy of the script for the leader who will be the Narrator.
- ◆ Bring a Happy Face sign and a Sad Face sign for each child (the children can make these in advance with popsicle sticks, pieces of paper, markers or stickers and glue).
- ◆ A sign with the word "Reconciliation." Option: Make a sign for each time period.
- ◆ Supplies for the Response option you choose and for the Closing.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory

Find out whose traditional territory you are on. See page 8 for resources on how to do this. Say:

We gather today and stand on the traditional territory of *[name the Indigenous people who lived here before you]*. We understand

- ◆ that this land was very important for Indigenous people who lived on it before us;
- ◆ that this land is still important for Indigenous people today;
- ◆ and that Indigenous ways of living with each other, and their ways of relating to the Creator, have always been connected to this land and its creatures.


KAIROS Blanket Exercise script

(Adapted for children ages five to eight years old)

Narrator: *(Before you begin, spread out the blankets on the floor so that they are touching each other creating a huge blanketed area that will accommodate all the children with space to walk around. Fold one blanket and set it aside. Give each child a "Happy Face" and a "Sad Face" sign.)*

In this activity, we will be using our imaginations to time travel. At each point in time we will learn something about Indigenous people and their lives during that time. In Canada, there are three different groups who are recognized as Indigenous people: First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Today, we will call them Indigenous people which includes all three.

Sometimes you might feel happy and sometimes you might feel sad about the things you hear. Not everyone will feel the same way at the same time. And that's OK. To tell us how you are feeling, you can hold up your signs. During the time travel we will have a chance to talk about our feelings.



Narrator: *(Invite the children to bring their signs and to come with the other leaders to the edges of the blankets, remove their shoes and stand up tall. Ask them to close their eyes, take three deep breaths and imagine themselves travelling thousands of years back in time. Invite them to open their eyes and walk onto the blankets and to walk around on them slowly, telling them to imagine that the blankets are the land that Indigenous people are living on. As they walk about, begin speaking.)*

10,000 Years Ago

Imagine that it's 10,000 years ago. These blankets make up the land we call Canada. But before it was called Canada it had another name - Turtle Island. There are no cities or highways or buildings like we have today. Look at the rivers and lakes, the ocean shore, the forests and fields, hills and valleys. Imagine what Turtle Island is like.

What a long, long time ago! It's long before anyone arrived from Europe. Turtle Island was home to millions of Indigenous people who lived in hundreds of different nations and communities. They had their own languages, cultures, traditions, laws and governments. Depending on where they lived, they did a lot of fishing, or hunting. They made their own clothing. They made their own buildings. Many lived in large family groups with their parents and brothers and sisters, and their grandparents and aunts, uncles and cousins. When the nations disagreed with each other they ended fights by making promises called treaties.

We believe the Creator will take care of us if we take care of this land, and each other!

Pause for Children's Reflection

Narrator: We have travelled back in time 10,000 years! What did you see? What did you do? *(Encourage the children to use their imaginations and share. Accept their ideas with phrases like "maybe" or "imagine that!" or asking for more ideas with phrases like "and would that have been OK for you" or "how do you think that worked.")* How do you feel about living on Turtle Island 10,000 years ago? *(e.g. Sad? Happy? Encourage them to show their signs and, if they wish, to talk about their feelings.)*

Narrator: *(Invite everyone to walk around some more on Turtle Island.)*

500 years ago

Now we are going to time travel to 500 years ago. The people on Turtle Island have found new people on their lands. The kings and queens in Europe were looking for new places to live and rule over. Their sailors explored the ocean. There were no airplanes. They came to Turtle Island. Walk around the edge of the blankets. Imagine new people called explorers visiting your home and land. Pretend to greet them.

The newcomers looked, and sounded and behaved very differently than Indigenous people. They needed help to find their way around, and to survive the cold winters. Indigenous people taught them how to live here, so that they would know too. Sometimes Indigenous people and the European newcomers made promises to each other (treaties) as to how they will peacefully share the land,

plants, water and animals. Indigenous people taught them how to have enough to eat, how to hunt and fish, what plants are safe to eat, and medicines that can be used when you are sick. Indigenous people taught them how to form a circle and talk about important things. Imagine what it's like to share all this important knowledge! How would you share all this with someone else?

Pause for Children's Reflection

Narrator: *(Invite everyone to sit in a circle on the blanketed area.)*

What did you feel when the new people came? Were you excited? Happy? Scared? *(Accept the children's input with phrases like "maybe" or "imagine that!" or asking for more ideas with phrases like "and would that have been OK for you" or "how do you think that worked?") Encourage them to show their signs and, if they wish, to talk about their feelings.)*

Narrator: *(Invite everyone to stand up and walk around some more on the blanketed areas. Before you begin talking turn up some of the edges so that the area becomes smaller and smaller and walking becomes more like "walking on the spot.")*

220 years ago

Now we are going to time travel to the beginning of the 1800s. That was 220 years ago. Life on Turtle Island is changing! There are more new people from Europe than there are Indigenous people. And more people keep coming.

One of the reasons that there are fewer Indigenous people is because the new people had sicknesses that Indigenous people never had, and so their bodies could not fight them! Some of these diseases were called smallpox, measles and tuberculosis. Many, many Indigenous people got very sick.

Pause for Children's Reflection

Narrator: *(Invite everyone to sit in a circle on the blanketed area.)* Imagine having many people in our families and communities getting sick. This might have been your family members and friends. To help us imagine, I am going to go around and touch some of you on the shoulder. If I touch you on the shoulder, you must lie down because you are one of the Indigenous people who got sick. *(Go around and touch every third child on the shoulder and then return to your place. Do this until half the children are laying down. Ask everyone to stay in their position, either sitting or lying down, and to look around.)* What a difference this has made to our circle!

We will now remember those who got sick and died. Remember the families and communities who loved and missed those people. *(Have a moment of silence.)* What did you feel when you saw some people lying down because they were sick? How do you feel when you're sick? *(Encourage the children to show their signs if they haven't been holding them up, and to explain their feelings.)*

Sometimes, it is sad to hear about and imagine this part of history. Remember that there are many strong Indigenous people today. Remember that this part of history is just as important as remembering the parts that make us happy.

150 years ago

Now let's travel to when Canada was formed. Does anyone know how old Canada is? We've travelled back 150 years. In 1867, non-Indigenous people gave part of Turtle Island a new name. They called it Canada. And they made a government and made up rules for people to live by.

This new Parliament of Canada was very different than Indigenous governments. The Canadian government decided on rules differently than Indigenous people, and the government thought their laws were more important than the laws and rules of Indigenous people. Do you remember when the new people first arrived, and we made promises to each other? What were those called? Treaties! Indigenous people believe treaties are important agreements. But the new laws didn't follow the rules Indigenous people agreed to in the treaties!

What were some of the things we talked about in the treaties?

Treaties talked about sharing land. Non-Indigenous people wanted more land so they made new laws that said that Indigenous people could only live on small pieces of land called reserves. And they couldn't leave the reserves! Come and stand over here. *(Fold up some of the blankets on one side.)* Now stand over here. *(Fold up some of the blankets on the other side so that the blanket space is smaller but still enough for all the children to stand on with a little space between each other, but no longer any space for walking.)* Careful, we all want to stay standing on some "land." But we have so little room to move!

Pause for Children's Reflection

Narrator: What do you think about going from lots of blankets to small blankets? Is it easier or harder to move around? Is it easier or harder to see other people?

Narrator: For Indigenous people this change was really hard. They couldn't fish or hunt in the same places. All the things that were familiar in the trees, in the water, in the plants and animals changed. And for many this meant that they couldn't get enough food. Some became very hungry and sick. To help us imagine, I am going to touch some of you on the shoulder and you must sit down near the edge of the blanket, because you are one of the Indigenous people who is hungry and weak. *(Touch every fourth child on the shoulder and then return to your place. Ask everyone to stay in their position, either standing or sitting and look around.)* What a difference this has made to our circle!


This was a difficult time. How do you feel hearing about this? *(Encourage the children to show their signs and to talk about their feelings.)*

It is sad to learn about and to imagine this time in history. Today Indigenous people are strong people and they teach us about Turtle Island and the people who were here first.

100 years ago

Narrator: Okay, let's time travel again! *(Invite everyone to "walk on the spot" on the blanketed area.)*

We are travelling back in time to 100 years ago. The parts of Turtle Island that Indigenous people can walk on has become much smaller. Many people got sick from diseases and some got hungry because Indigenous people couldn't hunt and fish like they used to.



About 100 years ago, many Indigenous children were sent to school. Who goes to school here? What do you do at school? (*Invite children to talk about what they do at school*). *Invite children to use their faces to show whether school makes them happy or sad.*

Indigenous children went to a different kind of school. They went to a residential school, which means that they had to leave their homes and live at the schools. For a lot of kids, this meant that they didn't get to see their parents and grandparents while they were at school. Do you think you'd miss your parents? Would school be easier or harder if you were missing your family so much?

The Government of Canada wanted Indigenous children to become like other Canadians. They wanted them to speak the same languages, to live in the same places, and to forget that our families do things differently.

Because of these schools, Indigenous people forgot many of the things their parents and grandparents taught them about where they came from, how they lived, and even their language! Because students at these schools lost their Indigenous languages, many couldn't talk with their parents when they went home!

Imagine what residential schools mean for parents and grandparents. From September to June, families and communities don't hear the voices and laughter and singing of children. And at the schools, the children miss their families and their home and the places where they played, the water they canoed on, and the forest paths they walked on.

To help us imagine, I am going to touch some of you on the shoulder indicating you must sit down on this other blanket, because you are an Indigenous child who went away to residential school. If I don't touch you, then you are a grown-up whose child goes away. (*Touch every fourth child on the shoulder and then return to your place. Ask everyone to stay in their position and to look around.*) What a difference this has made to our circle!

10 years ago

Let's time travel again! We have traveled back to 2008. This was when the Prime Minister of Canada apologized to Indigenous people. The Prime Minister said it was wrong to send children to schools away from their parents, and said sorry that the Government of Canada did this.

Pause for Children's Reflection

Narrator: What do you think about this? How are you feeling? (e.g. *Sad? Happy?*) *Encourage them to show their signs and, if they wish, to talk about their feelings.*

Now we are back in the present time and we have finished time travelling. We have learned about some of the things that happened in the past that have hurt Indigenous people from Turtle Island. There is a lot of sadness that still exists because of our past. But because there are Indigenous people who share about the past and remind us of our promises in the treaties, we are learning how to make a better future through reconciliation.

Reconciliation means learning how to be friends. What are some things you think you can do to be a good friend?

Now we are going to make a craft that can help us remember what we learned and think about the future!

Craft

You will need: Large safety pins (size 3), pinking shears, coloured fabric pens and permanent markers, an old white sheet or pillow cases that can be cut up and written on, card stock templates for shapes. The children will cut out circles or other shapes from the blanket that are large enough for up to five or six words – about 5 in. or 12 cm across. (Option: cut out shapes in advance.)

Instructions:

Invite children to make a “blanket button” or badge. As they create, encourage them to talk about what they have learned and how they feel about it. Ask the children about what they want to say in a word or two after this KAIROS Blanket Exercise – something that will prompt them to talk about the experience when somebody reads the button and asks what it means. Encourage them to think of one or two words or a short phrase like: “I did the Blanket Exercise”, “Turtle Island”, “reconciliation”, “let’s be friends.” Help them to write on their badge. When finished pin the “blanket button” on the child’s shirt.



Closing

You will need: A Bible and the Book of Praise.

Remind the children that Jesus taught us how to live in peace with respect and love for one another. Ask an older child or a leader to read aloud what Jesus said in Matthew 7:12: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you...”

Sing to the tune of hymn #328

It's the Creator's world
O happy day to see
the rocks and trees, the skies and seas
God loves us, you and me!

Prayer

Dear God,
Thank you that we can learn about
the past. Help us to talk to our
families and friends.
Thank you for your love!
Amen.

Handout for Home: Blanket Exercise

Dear parent or guardian,

Today we did the KAIROS Blanket Exercise to help us understand the history of relationships between the first people of Canada, the Indigenous people (First Nations, Métis and Inuit), and the European settlers. We spread out blankets to make the land of Canada and imagined ourselves travelling back in time. We began 10,000 years ago before Europeans arrived and then travelled to the 16th, 19th, and 20th century, and then to the present. The children learned how disease, colonization and the residential school system hurt Indigenous people and all aspects of their way of life. Throughout and after the Exercise, the children gathered in a circle to share their feelings and ideas.

The children also learned that

- ◆ People find hope through sharing these true stories
- ◆ In reconciliation new, fair relationships form between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people
- ◆ Reconciliation is possible if non-Indigenous people take action.

Afterward there was a craft. The children made a “blanket button” to help them remember and talk about today’s experience and the need for changes to make reconciliation happen.

Your child might like to create something bigger like a poster to express their feelings in words or images that could be shown to other family members, friends and neighbours. It could express what they want others to know about Indigenous people and the importance for all of us to participate in reconciliation. It could be displayed somewhere in your home or taken to school or to another program where the leader might help your child share their experience and ideas.

To help your child

- ◆ Ask about the experience today in time travelling and the Blanket Exercise. What parts did they like the most? What parts did they find were the saddest? Wonder together about what your family might do to change relationships, to make conditions more fair for Indigenous people (e.g. learn more, tell others).
- ◆ Acquaint yourself with the KAIROS Blanket Exercise process (adult version) by going to kairosblanketexercise.org. The version we used was adapted to have less content and more movement for young children with the idea of time travel added. For further information about the KAIROS Blanket Exercise or to inquire about hosting a Blanket Exercise workshop, you may contact Justice Ministries at healing@presbyterian.ca.

If you have any questions about this activity, please don’t hesitate to contact

Name: _____ Organization: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

We believe that reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada requires us to learn and to take action. Through this activity we are trying to encourage this process.

For information about reconciliation in Canada, see www.trc.ca.