

Activity #3

Memories

Stories about residential schools

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 reading a story together and then making a craft. The children will:

1. Hear a story about an Indigenous child and family's experience of residential school.
2. Learn some of the ways Canadians are expressing that they are sorry about residential schools.

Overview for Leaders

The Government of Canada funded a church-operated Indian Residential Schools system beginning in 1876 for Indigenous children. There were as many as 130 schools at one point. The last one closed in 1996. About 150,000 children attended residential schools. Communities and families were left without their children. Children were raised in a foreign environment without the benefit of close connections with families and communities. At least 4,000 children died at these schools. School conditions varied, but were generally poor. Students were often underfed and did not receive adequate health care.

If and when children went home, family dynamics changed. Children, siblings and parents were often strangers to each other. Their place in the community may have been unclear. They may not have spoken the same language. Many ongoing health and social problems in Indigenous communities are a result of residential school experiences.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada ran 11 residential schools. After 1925, The Presbyterian Church in Canada ran two schools, Cecilia Jeffrey in Kenora, Ontario and Birtle in western Manitoba. Our Confession regarding this legacy was made in 1994.

The 2006 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was the largest class-action suit in Canadian history, involving about 80,000 survivors. In 2008 the Government of Canada issued a Statement of Apology. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada was established and completed six years of work. The TRC released 94 Calls to Action in June 2015.

The two books suggested in this activity are by award-winning Indigenous author Nicola I. Campbell and introduce age-appropriate information about residential schools. They each take about 10 minutes to read.

For more information visit The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation <http://umanitoba.ca/nctr/>

You can watch this [video from the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#) for reflections from children about residential schools. Also watch this [video from the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada](#) for children's reflections on reconciliation.

See also "Additional Background Resource for Leaders" on page 8 in the Introduction.

"As early as 1907 the Government of Canada received reports depicting the gross neglect of basic sanitation, medical care, nutrition and protection which was running rampant in the schools, even in relation to the standards of the day. This extreme neglect was largely the product of government under-funding."

– From John Milloy,

A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879-1986
(Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999)

Teaching tip:

The six-minute movie [Shi-shi-etko](#) is based on the book. It is suitable for leaders and older children (because of language subtitling).

Preparation

Get a copy of one or both of the suggested books: *Shi-shi-etko*, Greenwood Books/House of Anansi Press, Toronto, 2005; or *Shin-chi's Canoe*, Greenwood Books/House of Anansi Press, Toronto, 2008. They are available in many public libraries and also through online book sellers.

Read one or both of these books. Decide which you will use in your activity. Plan how you will read the story. Note: If you use both books, begin with *Shi-shi-etko*.

After the story, guide children through a small group discussion and then a craft.

The crafts that accompany the stories were conceived by the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada. The first heart garden event took place at the Governor General's residence in Ottawa as one part of the Closing Event of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in June 2015.

Thousands of hearts were planted in gardens across Canada. Creating heart gardens honours residential school survivors and their families. Heart gardens can be outdoors or indoors. Review this online gallery for ideas. <https://www.pinterest.com/KAIROSCanada/heart-gardens-honouring-memories-planting-dreams/>. More information can be found here. Craft preparation details are below.



Ottawa children plant a heart garden at the Governor General's residence on June 3, 2015

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.

Memories – Reading a story book

Invite the children to sit in a circle and think about their home. Ask questions to encourage sharing:

Who are the people that you live with, that you see most days, like friends and family?

What are some of the things you do together?

What are the favourite places you go to together to play or have fun?

Tell the children:

- ◆ I am going to read a book that tells the story of an Indigenous child's first time going to school and being away from their family, their home and their familiar surroundings. They had to go and stay at school, sleep at school, because it was the law.
- ◆ Life was very different for children at these schools because they were never ever away from their families. Before, the children were with their families all day and every day until they began school. So this was a big change in their lives.
- ◆ The children and family in the book are true, based on the author's experiences.

Invite the children to get comfortable and/or move to a different space. Option: Have children who are the oldest in their families sit together, only children in another group, and children who have older siblings in another group. Tell them:

In this story there is a lot about trying to remember everything to do with home. Listen to what the child in the story is trying to remember about her/his home.

- ◆ *Read Shi-shi-etko and/or Shin-chi's Canoe. Afterward ask:*

What did you like about the story? What didn't you like? *Listen for reactions and questions. Answer any questions honestly but as simply as possible. It's OK to say you're not sure and can't answer or comment on everything they say.*

- ◆ *Encourage the children to think about Shi-shi-etko/Shin-chi's memories of home*

What were the things they tried to remember (e.g. people, surroundings)?

What were the things they used to do with their family that they missed (e.g. canoeing, fishing)?

- ◆ *Explain that many children went to residential schools like Shi-shi-etko/Shin-chi did*

Today more and more Indigenous people are telling their stories and saying how hard it was to be away from home. They are talking about what it was like to lose their language and their way of life, and how hard it was to be away from families and communities.

Do you know what it means to apologize? (*Encourage all to respond and talk about what it means to say "I'm sorry." Then talk about the Government of Canada's Apology.*) Almost 10 years ago the Government of Canada apologized for forcing Indigenous children into residential schools. They said words like "We hurt you and your families. We were wrong. We are very sorry." And now more and more Canadians want to say, "We know those schools hurt you and your families.

We know those schools were wrong, and we are very sorry." Many young people decided to remember those children and to show they care by making hearts. Making a heart can show that we remember the children who went to residential school. These hearts can say what we are thinking and feeling in words and in pictures. What are some things that we say and do to show we're sorry? *(Encourage all to respond.)*

Response

Choose one or both of the following craft responses.

Making Hearts

You will need:

- ◆ A variety of craft supplies like heart templates, card stock or construction paper (red, pink, white); scissors, crayons and markers, safety pins, ribbon or lacing, beads, feathers, hole punch.
- ◆ Plan what options you will give the children for sharing their heart messages – e.g. take them home, or create a display in the church or church garden. If you display the hearts in a public place, be sure to include information to explain the purpose of the heart garden.



Instructions:

Prepare large hearts ahead of time. Talk to children about what words or pictures they want to create. Help them print a few words or phrases on their hearts such as "I remember" or "I care" or "Reconciliation matters." Ask the children to think of words that describe what they are feeling. Assist them as they make their hearts. Use markers, glitter glue, and prepared shapes cut out of construction paper (small hearts, peace doves, hands, etc.).



A Heart Garden

Invite the children to make a heart garden to remember children and families whose lives have been affected by residential schools. Each heart can be in memory of one child. Talk about making and planting a heart to remind ourselves that we can

“plant” ourselves in a place that wants change and to make sure nothing like this happens again. Making the hearts takes about 10-15 minutes.

You will need:

- ◆ Craft supplies like heart templates, card stock or construction paper (red, pink, white), scissors, planting sticks (at least one per child), laminate for outside heart gardens, clay pots and planting soil for indoor gardens. Option: flower seeds (or a small plant) to be planted around sticks in an outdoor garden.
- ◆ A plan of how you will plant the heart garden.

Instructions:

1. Invite each child to take a heart (or two) to decorate and mount on a stick. Hearts can be decorated with a mixture of images, colours and words. Each heart will be unique. Children may want to take their heart home with them. If you plan a display, invite children to make two hearts: one to take home, and one for the display. Have one heart ready as an example.
2. Hearts that are 12-18 inches or 30-45 cm are large enough to display.
3. Do not decorate both sides of the heart; you'll have to affix one side to a stick.
4. Popsicle sticks are usually too small: use a larger mount for the heart such as a planting stick. If you plant hearts outside, insert the stick into the earth deep enough to stand straight.
5. As you make the hearts and mount them, help the children talk about the importance of remembering the children who went to residential school. This is part of reconciliation.
6. Prepare a sign to explain the significance of the garden. If you plant the hearts outdoors, weather-proof them with plastic wrap. If you will be creating an indoor garden, fill one or more pots with stones or soil to support the sticks.

Closing

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

Bible Story (Mark 12:28-31).

Explain that Jesus was teaching about what is most important. He said it was to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” It is also important to love others. Remembering children who went to residential schools shows we care.

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!

Pray

Dear God,
Thank you that we can learn about
the past.
Teach us to how show love to our
neighbours, just as you love us.
Amen!

Handout for Home: Memories

Dear parent or guardian,

Today we read one or two stories that described a young Indigenous child's experience leaving home and going to residential school. They are called:

Shi-shi-etko. Groundwood Books/House of Anansi Press, Toronto, 2005

Shin-chi's Canoe. Groundwood Books/House of Anansi Press, Toronto, 2008

Nicola I. Campbell is the award-winning author of these stories. She is of Interior Salish and Métis ancestry. The stories are based on experiences from her family and community. In these stories, we learned about the love between parents and children, the day-to-day experiences at residential school, and memories of things at home that children missed while at residential school.

Through the story, your child may have become aware of some facts about residential schools such as

- ◆ Parents did not have a choice about sending their kids to residential school.
- ◆ Men (i.e. school agents) came in trucks and took children from their homes. Some children were as young as five or six years old.
- ◆ At school the children were forbidden to speak their own language or to speak with their siblings. They had to cut their hair and wear unfamiliar clothes.
- ◆ The children could not go home or see their families until the end of the school year.

Your child(ren) had a chance to talk about what home means to them, and what they liked and didn't like about the story. They were told that there are no more residential schools and that the Government of Canada has said it is sorry for running residential schools. They also heard that we can participate in reconciliation by remembering the children who went to residential school. We made hearts for a heart garden as a way of showing we remember and care.

To help your child

- ◆ Ask about the story about Indigenous children going to residential school and what they liked and didn't like about the story.

Here is a video prepared by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation that includes reflections from children about the heart garden activity: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1NQ_tgR_oA

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.