First Steps with First Nations

An Introduction to Engagement with First Nations People

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How can I use this information?

This introductory information is meant to be a first step to aid your learning. Its intent is to help you begin to get an idea of the history of the First Nations people in Canada and the issues affecting them. Most of this information has been adapted from other helpful sites and/or organizations. Our goal is to provide you with helpful information and connections so you don't have to spend time trying to figure out where to find the resources. Let this information be a first step, don't let it be your last one.

We hope you find this information to be useful in your journey of learning more about our First Nations neighbours.

Canada's First Nations: An Introduction

Historical Overview

Canada's First Nations have been in the country we now call Canada for at least 12,000 years, perhaps much longer. For almost all that time, they survived very well in a harsh environment, making everything they needed without polluting the water, or air, and without destroying the land or decimating the animal populations.

Each First Nation had self-government and recognized the sovereignty of other First Nations. They all developed unique systems of government, and complex material cultures (tools, clothing, shelter, transportation, etc.)

Most First Nations of Canada lived mainly from hunting and fishing. They migrated seasonally to get food. They did not wander aimlessly. They moved their camps from season to season to specific places and areas where they knew there would be food. In one season, they would hunt large animals; in another they would fish; in the fall they would gather berries, and so on. The only farming people were the Iroquois and Hurons, and related tribes, in what is now southern Ontario.

The Sacred Circle of Life

Seasonal migration was a continuous pattern, with each group following the same pattern each year, according to to the natural cycles of the plants and animals. Members of each clan usually came together in a big gathering at least once a year. Because the regular seasonal pattern of life and movement of the animals and people was a continuous pattern, like a circle with no beginning and no end, the circle became a sacred symbol for First Nations people, the circle of life and renewal.

Major Migrations

There have been many large scale migrations across North America over time because of climate changes, epidemics, changes in the migration routes of animals, one group expanding into another's territories, victory and defeat in warfare, and many other reasons.

These large scale movements are not the same as the seasonal migrations to follow food sources.

Trade

First Peoples had many well established trading patterns and trade alliances throughout North America. Archaeologists have found plenty of evidence of early trade of items such as pottery, silver, and copper tools.

Complex Cultures

Canada's First Peoples developed complex cultures and lived in harmony with their environment. Everything they had was made from the land around them and its plants and animals - food, clothes, shelter, wood, tools, weapons, dyes, decoration, musical instruments, and ceremonial artifacts.

First Nations people created several distinct cultures, each based on adaptation to a different Canadian environment. Each cultural group was made up of several nations with similarities in language, social structure, and similar ways of making a living from the environment they lived in. Each group of people developed distinctive housing, tools, clothing, transportation, tools, and weapons, and ceremonies, and had their own stories about their origins, and how to interpret the world around them. They used many kinds of medicines from plants. Many of the medicines we use today are based on First Nations knowledge of the healing qualities of certain plants.

Government

Canada's First Nations all had complex social systems, with several levels of government based on the family, the band or clan, and the nation or tribe. Their leaders, or Chiefs, were chosen in different ways, but were always people who had special leadership qualities that brought them respect from their people.

In most First Nations, a council of elders advised the Chief, and decisions were made by consensus, which means that the council would discuss a matter of importance, and

then would make a decision that the majority agreed on. First Nations recognized each other as sovereign nations, and made friendship treaties, or military alliances with each other. Some nations were traditional enemies, and went through periods of war or peace.

Religion

First Nations people were very religious, and respectful of the Great Spirit, and other spirits that they believe inhabited the land and animals all around them.

First Nations people were taught, from the time they were very young, to respect and give thanks to the animals, birds, plants, and the land and water that gave them all the things that they depended on to stay alive.

Oral Tradition

First Nations people did not have a writing system based on an alphabet, but they had a strong oral tradition. That means that knowledge of events or matters of historic importance was preserved by passing information from person to person, and generation to generation.

There were usually specific people in the tribe or band who knew their whole history, and related these events to others at special gatherings. Tales of important events were told and retold around the campfire, as stories are told everywhere.

First Nations also had various ways of recording events, to trigger the memory of those relating the events. For example,

wampum belts had pictures woven into them to tell a story. Drawings on bark or hide preserved the record of events.

In recent years, many First Nations people have been collecting these old stories from elders, and preserving them in recordings, and writing them down.

Legends and Stories

Like every human culture in the world, Canada's First Peoples have stories to explain the origins of the earth and its animals and people. First Peoples' creation stories often contain references to specific landmarks, such as mountains or lakes, that give us good information about the areas that a group of people lived in, and the routes they followed as they migrated over the centuries to the areas they now live in. Canada's First Peoples also have many other wonderful stories and legends about real or imaginary characters and settings, just as every group of people on earth do. These stories were not written down, but were passed on through their oral tradition. Stories were told over and over, and everyone learned them. Children grew up, and passed the stories onto their children.

Stories among First Nations peoples serve the same purpose as stories do for other cultures all over the world. They entertain, they teach listeners how to deal with the world around them, they teach people about good and evil, about bravery and cowardice; they make listeners think about the consequences of their behavior; they scare children with spooky stories so they do not wander away from home, and so on.

Canadian Aboriginal History Timeline*

Year	Event
1612	Sir Thomas Button becomes the first white man known to have set foot in what is now Manitoba, landing on the shores of Hudson Bay.
1659	The Nonsuch sails from Hudson Bay to England with the first shipment of Manitoba furs to reach the Old World. European involvement in Manitoba slowly increases in subsequent decades.
1763	The Proclamation Act (commonly called the Royal Proclamation of 1763) is passed by the British Government. The Act is viewed by some as the Magna Carta of Aboriginal rights. Though the Act assumes the colonial right to take over the continent, it also assumes that the indigenous inhabitants are autonomous political bodies with basic rights. The Act establishes a colonization pattern in which settlers cannot simply take over indigenous lands without first obtaining some form of surrender or cession of the land.
1867	Canadian Confederation
1870	The Manitoba Act creates the province of Manitoba (the northern part of the province was added in 1912).
1871	Treaty #1 is signed at Upper Fort Garry. This treaty covers much of southern Manitoba.
1873	The North West Mounted Police are created. In 1905 they become the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.
1875	Treaty #5 is signed at Norway House. The treaty, and its 1908 adhesion, cover approximately the northern two thirds of Manitoba.
1876	The Indian Act is passed by the Government of Canada.
1880	The Department of Indian Affairs is created by the Government of Canada.
1880s-1996	More than 140 church-run Indian Residential Schools operate across Canada. While most schools were closed in the 1970s, the last one remained open until 1996.
1930	Control of Crown Lands is transferred from Federal to Provincial Governments by means of the Natural Resources Transfer Act.
1960	Aboriginal people finally gain the right to vote.

Canadian Aboriginal History Timeline

Year	Event
1969	Pierre Trudeau's Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chretien, releases a White Paper that proposes to abolish the Department of Indian Affairs, and eliminate special status for Indian peoples and lands. It is vehemently opposed by Aboriginal leaders who say it language of equality masks a sinister assimilation agenda.
1975	The Inter Church Task Force on Northern Flooding holds a public inquiry into hydro development in northern Manitoba.
1977	The Northern Flood Agreement is signed by Canada, Manitoba, Manitoba Hydro and five Cree nations impacted by Manitoba Hydro's Churchill River Diversion and Lake Winnipeg Regulation projects, which began operation the year before.
1980	The First Quebec Referendum on sovereignty is held. The Separatists are defeated (as they were again in 1995).
1982	Patriation of the Canadian Constitution, which includes the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that recognizes Aboriginal and treaty rights.
1990	Prime Minister Mulroney's Meech Lake Accord is defeated, in part by Elijah Harper's famous stand in the Manitoba Legislature.
1990	Plans to create a golf course Aboriginal burial grounds lead to the Oka Crisis in Quebec.
1991	The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry is created by the Government of Manitoba to investigate the deaths of Helen Betty Osborne and J.J. Harper.
1991-1996	The federally created Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples becomes the longest and most expensive royal commission in Canadian history.
1992	Prime Minister Mulroney's national referendum on the Charlottetown Accord is defeated. The Accord promises to recognize the "inherent right to self government" of Aboriginal people.
1992-1997	Four of the five First Nations that signed the 1977 NFA sign subsequent implementation agreements.
1997	20 Manitoba First Nations sign a Treaty Land Entitlement framework agreement with Canada and Manitoba. It sets out a program to fulfill obligations of treaties with respect to land allotment.with Canada and Manitoba. It sets out a program to fulfill obligations of treaties with

Canadian Aboriginal History Timeline

Year	Event
1999	The Manitoba Aboriginal Rights Coalition (MARC)–a successor to the Inter Church Task Force on Northern Flooding–holds a public inquiry to examine whether hydro-affected Aboriginal peoples have been treated fairly.
2004	The Manitoba Government gives Manitoba Hydro the green light to construct the Wuskwatim hydro dam in northern Manitoba. It is the first new dam since in Manitoba since Limestone, which was completed in 1990.
2005	With the Kelowna Accord, the minority Liberal government commits $5 billion over 10 years to improve education, employment and living standards for Aboriginal people. The subsequent Conservative government chooses a different path.
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2006	Aboriginal people and citizens of Caledonia, Ontario enter into a heated and much-publicized land dispute.
2010	The Truth and Reconciliation Commission holds its first public event in Winnipeg.
2011	Construction of the Wuskwatim Dam nears completion. Manitoba Hydro continues to plan for construction of the Keeyask and Conawapa dams.

*Information taken from energyjustice.mcc.org

History of Residential Schools in Canada

Background

For over 300 years, Europeans and Aboriginal peoples regarded one another as distinct nations. In war, colonists and Indians formed alliances, and in trade each enjoyed the economic benefits of co-operation. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, European hunger for land had expanded dramatically, and the economic base of the colonies shifted from fur to agriculture. Alliances of the early colonial era gave way, during the period of settlement expansion and nation-building, to direct competition for land and resources. Settlers began to view Aboriginal people as a "problem."

The so-called "Indian problem" was the mere fact that Indians existed. They were seen as an obstacle to the spread of "civilization" – that is to say, the spread of European, and later Canadian, economic, social, and political interests. Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, summed up the Government's position when he said, in 1920, "I want to get rid of the Indian problem. [...] Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department."

In 1844, the Bagot Commission produced one of the earliest official documents to recommend education as a means of ridding the Dominion of Indians. In this instance, the proposal concerned farm-based boarding schools placed far from parental influence.

The document was followed, in immediate successive decades, by others of similar substance: the Gradual Civilization Act (1857), an Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians (1869), and the Nicholas Flood Davin Report of 1879, which noted that "the industrial school is the principal feature of the policy known as that of 'aggressive civilization'." This policy dictated that: the Indians should, as far as practicable, "be consolidated on few reservations, and provided with 'permanent individual homes'; that the tribal relation should be abolished; that lands should be allotted in severalty and not in common; that the Indian should speedily become a citizen […] enjoy the protection of the law, and be made amenable thereto; that, finally, it was the duty of the Government to afford the Indians all reasonable aid in their preparation for citizenship by educating them in industry and in the arts of civilization."

A product of the times, Davin disclosed in this report the assumptions of his era – that 'Indian culture' was a contradiction in terms, Indians were uncivilized, and the aim of education must be to destroy the Indian. In 1879 he returned from his tour of the United States' Industrial Boarding Schools, or the handling of the 'Indian problem,' with a recommendation to Canada's Minister of the Interior – John A. Macdonald – of industrial boarding schools.

Establishment & Closure

The intent of the residential school system was to educate, assimilate, and integrate Aboriginal people into European-Canadian society. In the words of one government official, it was a system designed 'to kill the Indian in the child.' The earliest was the Mohawk Indian Residential School, opened in 1831 at Brantford, Ontario. The schools existed in almost all provinces and territories. In the North, the residential school system also took the form of hostels and tent camps.

The federal government currently recognizes that 132 federally-supported residential schools existed across Canada. This number does not recognize those residential schools that were administered by provincial/territorial governments and churches. At its peak in the early 1930s, it was a state-sponsored, church-run network of 80 schools with an enrollment of over 17,000.

In 1920, Duncan Campbell Scott, the bureaucrat in charge of Canada's Indian Policy, revised the Indian Act to make attendance at residential school mandatory for all children up to age 15. Very gradually, the Residential School System was discarded in favour of a policy of integration. Aboriginal students began in the 1940s to attend mainstream schools.

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development assumed full management of the residential school system on April 1, 1969. Throughout the 1970s, at the request of the National Indian Brotherhood, federal government undertook a process that saw the eventual transfer of education management to Aboriginal people. In 1970, Blue

Quills Residential School became the first residential school managed by Aboriginal people. The last federally-administered residential school closed in 1996.

Conditions & Mistreatment

Attendance at residential schools was mandatory for Aboriginal children across Canada, and failure to send children to residential school often resulted in the punishment of parents, including imprisonment. Many Aboriginal children were taken from their homes, often forcibly removed, and separated from their families by long distances. Others who attended residential schools near their communities were often prohibited from seeing their families outside of occasional permitted visits.

Broad occurrences of disease, hunger, and overcrowding were noted by Government officials as early as 1897. In 1907 Indian Affairs' chief medical officer, P.H. Bryce, reported a death toll among the schools' children ranging from 15-24% – and rising to 42% in Aboriginal homes, where sick children were sometimes sent to die. In some individual institutions, for example Old Sun's school on the Blackfoot reserve, Bryce found death rates which were significantly higher.

Though some students have spoken of the positive experiences of residential schools and of receiving an adequate education, the quality of education was low in comparison to non-Aboriginal schools. In 1930, for instance, only 3 of 100 Aboriginal students managed to advance past grade 6, and

few found themselves prepared for life after school – on the reservation or off.

As late as 1950, according to an Indian Affairs study, over 40 per cent of the teaching staff had no professional training. This is not to say that past experiences were all negative, or that the staff were all bad. Such is not the case. Many good and dedicated people worked in the system. Indeed, their willingness to work long hours in an atmosphere of stress and for meagre wages was exploited by an administration determined to minimize costs. The staff not only taught, they also supervised the children's work, play, and personal care. Their hours were long, the pay below that of other educational institutions, and the working conditions exasperating.

In the early 1990s, beginning with Phil Fontaine, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Survivors came forward with disclosures that included:

- sexual abuse
- beatings
- punishments for speaking Aboriginal languages
- forced eating of rotten food
- widespread hunger and thirst
- bondage and confinement
- forced labour

Students were forbidden to speak their language or practice their culture, and were often punished for doing so. Other

experiences reported from Survivors of residential schools include mental abuse, severe punishments, overcrowding, use of students in medical experiments, illness and disease, and in some cases death. Generations of Aboriginal people today recall memories of trauma, neglect, shame, and poverty. Those traumatized by their experiences in the residential school have suffered pervasive loss: loss of identity, loss of family, loss of language, loss of culture.

Intergenerational Impacts

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children were often away from their parents for long periods of time and this prevented the discovering and learning of valuable parenting skills. The removal of children from their homes also prevented the transmission of language and culture, resulting in many Aboriginal people who do not speak their traditional language and/or who are not familiar with their culture.

Adaptation of abusive behaviours learned from residential school has also occurred and caused intergenerational trauma – the cycle of abuse and trauma from one generation to the next. Research on intergenerational transmission of trauma makes it clear that individuals who have suffered the effects of traumatic stress pass it on to those close to them and generate vulnerability in their children. The children in turn experience their own trauma.

The system of forced assimilation has had consequences which are with Aboriginal people today. The need for healing

does not stop with the school Survivors - intergenerational effects of trauma are real and pervasive and must also be addressed.

Healing & Reconciliation

In the early 1990s, beginning with Phil Fontaine, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Survivors came forward with disclosures about physical and sexual abuse at residential schools. Throughout the 1990s, these reports escalated and more Aboriginal victims from one end of the country to the other courageously came forward with stories. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) confirmed a link between social crisis in Aboriginal communities, residential schools, and the legacy of intergenerational trauma.

Aboriginal people have begun to heal the wounds of the past. On January 7, 1998, the Federal Government of Canada issued a Statement of Reconciliation and unveiled a new initiative called Gathering Strength—Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan. A strategy to begin the process of reconciliation, Gathering Strength featured the announcement of a $350 million healing fund.

On March 31, 1998, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) was created. It was given ten years to disburse this $350-million fund beginning March 31, 1999 and ending March 31, 2009. In 2007, the AHF received $125M from the federal government extending the life of the Foundation to 2012. Since

June 1999, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has been providing funding support to community-based initiatives that address the intergenerational legacy of physical and sexual abuse in Canada's Indian Residential School System. In 2000, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation established the Legacy of Hope Foundation - a national charity whose mandate is to educate and create awareness about residential schools and to continue to support the ongoing healing of Survivors.

Through initiatives by groups such as the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Legacy of Hope Foundation, Canadians are learning this history and understanding the impact that it has had and continues to have on their communities. The AHF's vision is one in which those affected by the legacy of physical abuse and sexual abuse experienced in the residential school system have addressed the effects of unresolved trauma in meaningful terms, have broken the cycle of abuse, and have enhanced their capacity as individuals, families, communities, and nations to sustain their well-being and that of future generations.

Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement

While the strides that have been made in the healing process for school Survivors are extensive, it must be remembered that healing does not stand as the only action being taken. Compensation for the suffering is also a component of the restitution that is being made to Survivors and their families.

In 2007, the Government of Canada implemented the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. The

settlement agreement included: Common Experience Payment (CEP) to all surviving former students of federally-administered residential schools; the Independent Assessment Process (IAP) to address compensation for physical and sexual abuse; establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; healing initiatives; and a fund for commemoration projects. These were established in order to move ahead in addressing the long-standing and destructive legacy of the Indian Residential School System, which includes lateral violence, suicide, poverty, alcoholism, lack of parenting skills, weakening or destruction of cultures and languages, and lack of capacity to build and sustain healthy families and communities.

The Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established with a mandate to inform all Canadians about what happened in residential schools. The TRC will document the truth of Survivors, their families, communities and anyone personally affected by the residential school experience. The TRC hopes to guide and inspire First Nations, Inuit, Métis peoples, and all Canadians in a process of truth and healing leading toward reconciliation and renewed relationships based on mutual understanding and respect.

Church & Government of Canada Apologies

By the year 2008, most of the church denominations that were responsible for the operation of the residential schools in Canada had publicly apologized for their role in the neglect, abuse, and suffering of the children placed in their care. Most

of these organizations apologized through their national offices, except for the Catholic Church who left it up to individual dioceses to make apologies.

- United Church of Canada (1986)
- Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate (Roman Catholic) (1991)
- Anglican Church (1993)
- Presbyterian Church (1994)
- Government of Canada (2008)
- Roman Catholic Church (2009)

In June of 2008, the Federal Government of Canada also apologized for their historical role in the residential school system. By saying 'we are sorry,' Prime Minister Stephen Harper acknowledged the Canadian government's role in a century of isolating native children from their homes, families, and cultures. Harper called residential schools a sad chapter in Canadian history and indicated that the policies that supported and protected the system were harmful and wrong.

For the thousands of survivors watching from across Canada, the government's apology was an historic occasion, though the response was mixed. The Aboriginal leaders who heard the apology from the floor of the House of Commons called it a 'positive step forward' 'even though the pain and scars are still there.'

Most believe there is still much to be done. "The full story of the residential school system's impact on our people has yet to be told," said Grand Chief Edward John of the First Nations

Summit, an umbrella group of B.C. First Nations.

Abuse Survivor Charlie Thompson watched the apology from the House gallery and said he felt relieved to hear the Prime Minister acknowledge the horrible legacy. "Today I feel relief. I feel good. For me, this is a historical day."

Healing Movement & Cultural Revitalization

Much progress has been made in the healing movement. This progress is the result of the hard work, dedication, and commitment of thousands of individuals in hundreds of communities.

Many Aboriginal people sought out knowledge holders in other communities near and far to revive traditional spirituality, and to re-introduce healing practices like smudging, the sweat lodge, the use of the sacred pipe, fasting, vision quests, and ceremonies for naming, healing, and reconciliation. At times, these practices conflicted with Christian teachings that had become a part of some Native communities, but efforts were made to find common ground.

Mainstream perspectives on health and healing began to change, and this led to a movement that centred on health promotion and healthy communities. In 1978, the World Health Organization defined health as "not only the absence of disease" but also as sharing control over those things which led to health, a view in harmony with traditional Aboriginal concepts of healing. Holistic approaches to health, which emphasize healthy lifestyles, relationships, and communities, together with personal growth programs and traditional

spirituality and healing practices have all contributed to the efforts to heal the intergenerational impacts of residential schools.

Today the schools have all been closed and much has been done to try and repair the damages caused to generations of Aboriginal peoples. Healing agencies and government support have been provided. Both the church groups who ran the schools and the Government of Canada have offered apologies for the damage that they knowingly inflicted on the innocent children in their care. Monies have been made available for compensation to the victims of abuse.

Though it will be many years before the healing is complete, it is important that all Canadians know that this is an era that will never be repeated.

Statistics About First Nations People Living in Canada

The Challenge

- 150,000 Indigenous children, over a period of 100+ years, were a part of the Indian Residential School system. Many of these children and families experienced abuse as a result of the government's assimilation program (Legacy of Hope Foundation 2012).
- Seven generations have been impacted, leaving systemic issues that overwhelm the First Nations and Aboriginal communities all over Canada (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People 1996).
- 1 in 4 aboriginal children live in poverty (Public Service Alliance of Canada 2008).
- 23% live in houses that need "major" repair, as opposed to 7% of the rest of the population. On reserves 26% of people live in homes that are overcrowded (Statistics Canada 2009).
- More than 100 First Nation communities boil water, meaning they have no or little access to clean drinking water for drinking and sanitation (Public Service Alliance of Canada 2008).

- First Nations suffer from third world diseases such as tuberculosis 8 to 10 times the rate of the Canadian population (Public Service Alliance of Canada 2008).
- Over ½ of the First Nations populations living on reserve are not employed (Statistics Canada 2009).
- 1 in 8 aboriginal children is disabled, double the rate of Canada (Public Service Alliance of Canada 2008).
- 43% of First Nations children lack basic dental care (Public Service Alliance of Canada 2008).
- First Nations youth suicide rate is 5 to 8 times the Canadian rate, and in many Inuit communities is it over 30%. Inuit youth suicide rates are among the highest in the world, reaching 11 times the national average (Health Canada 2006).

The Hope

- There is incredible resilience among First Nations. They have survived a deliberate process of cultural genocide (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2003).
- Increase in First Nations people who are completing post secondary education (university or college) and completing trade school, gaining employment (Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs 2006).
- Increase in First Nations entrepreneurs, businesses and First Nations led not-for-profit organizations (Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business 2011).
- Indigenous languages and traditional teachings are being preserved, recorded and taught in schools to children and adults, which is amazing considering that many of the languages have been endangered and some lost entirely through colonization/residential schools (Statistics Canada 2004)
- Aboriginal self-determination and decolonization: there is a growing movement of First Nation communities who are feeling empowered to step toward self-governance models which are increasingly independent from the Federal Government (Indian Affairs). Self-Government allows First Nations to take leadership in the areas of

resources, housing, child welfare, employing/education, justice, etc. Many see self-government as an essential part of the healing journey (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People 1996).

- Today there are 32 communities with self-government agreements, and 393 communities in various stages of negotiation to become self-governed (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in Canada 2012)
- Reclamation/restoration of First Nations culture and traditions: culture becoming accepted practices within important mainstream systems. Ie: Restorative Justice, Education, Social Work, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Health/wellness (Wadden 2008).

A Few More Statistics…

http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2010/06/01/f-aboriginal-population.html

- Statistics Canada's 2006 census found that the number of people identifying themselves as aboriginal topped the million mark for the first time — adding up to 1,172,790 First Nations, Métis and Inuit, or 3.8 per cent of the total population.
- Internationally, Canada's aboriginal population is second only to New Zealand's, where the Maori account for 15 per cent of that country's total population.
- The study, released on Jan. 15, 2008, also found that Canada's aboriginal population is becoming increasingly urban and is younger than the non-aboriginal population.
- From 1996 to 2006, the aboriginal population has grown by 45 per cent. That is nearly six times faster than the non-aboriginal population.
- 73.7 per cent of all Aboriginal Peoples live off-reserve in Canada.
- 72.1 per cent of all non-reserve Aboriginal Peoples live in urban areas.

- Ontario has the largest concentration of Aboriginal Peoples at 242,495, or two per cent of the province's population.
- Almost half, or 46 per cent of the aboriginal population, is aged 24 or under, compared with 31 per cent of the non-aboriginal population.

We Were Children: Film & Discussion Guide

Film	We Were Children
Website	http://aptn.ca/pages/wewerechildren/
Download/ Rent	http://www.nfb.ca/film/we_were_children
Trailer	http://www.aptn.ca/wewerechildren

Synopsis

As young children, Lyna and Glen were taken from their homes and placed in church-run boarding schools. The trauma of this experience was made worse by years of untold physical, sexual and emotional abuse, the effects of which persist in their adult lives. In this emotional film, the profound impact of the Canadian government's residential school system is conveyed unflinchingly through the eyes of two children who were forced to face hardships beyond their years. We Were Children gives voice to a national tragedy and demonstrates the incredible resilience of the human spirit.*

*http://aptn.ca/pages/wewerechildren

Why Watch the Film

This Statement by Murray Sinclair, Chair of Truth and Reconciliation Commission best answers this question:

> *More than anything else, this film will make people believe what they have only heard second hand. It grabs you by the hair and makes you turn your head and look at this country's history and see that the pain and anger and despair that Aboriginal people live with everyday, has a reason, and the blame does not rest with the victims.*
>
> *The theft of the spirit marks the loss of something important. Shed your tears for those who have suffered. Feel your anger at the injustice of what was done. Forgive those who have affected your lives in a sad way because of their trauma. But never forget that we have to do something about the damage this has caused. You and I. You may not have the magic wand that will fix this, but you have a voice. Use it. You have a responsibility, accept it. You have children in your lives, think of them. Do not let them inherit all of this mess. Help them understand. Ensure they are better educated. Denounce the ignorance of today that stems from the racism of the past. Make things better.**

*http://media.knet.ca/node/22367

Film Debrief: Questions For Group Discussion

1. Initial thoughts? What do you think?
2. What was the most surprising thing that stood out to you about the film?
3. What did you find most difficult to watch/hear?
4. After seeing this film, do you think that most Canadians really know about what went on in Residential Schools? Why or why not?
5. Do you see any connection to the issues that First Nations people are facing now (suicide, alcoholism, drugs, etc.) to the history of 100 years of time that children were forced to spend in Residential Schools?
6. How did what was being taught in the Residential Schools affect the student's sense of self-worth?
7. The 100 years of Residential schools have been called "Canada's Holocaust". If this is true, then why are most people ignorant to what really went on? Why do you think people hold so easily to their negative stereotypes (or racist views)?
8. Just from watching this film, how do you think a First Nations person's perception of God could have been shaped and affected through their time in a Residential school?

9. How do you think this could affect a person's choices after they got out of the Residential School?
10. How can the church become a catalyst for positive change after all the harm that it's done in the past?
11. How do you think we can promote reconciliation after all of the harm that has been done?
12. What are you going to do with what you've seen? How can you continue this journey and help to educate others? Is there hope?

Helpful Terminology

(Information used from http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/)

Aboriginal peoples
The descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people — Indians, Métis and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

Aboriginal rights
Rights that some Aboriginal peoples of Canada hold as a result of their ancestors' long-standing use and occupancy of the land. The rights of certain Aboriginal peoples to hunt, trap and fish on ancestral lands are examples of Aboriginal rights. Aboriginal rights vary from group to group depending on the customs, practices and traditions that have formed part of their distinctive cultures.

Aboriginal self-government
Governments designed, established and administered by Aboriginal peoples under the Canadian Constitution through a process of negotiation with Canada and, where applicable, the provincial government.

Aboriginal title
A legal term that recognizes an Aboriginal interest in the land. It is based on the long-standing use and occupancy of the land by today's Aboriginal peoples as the descendants of the original inhabitants of Canada.

Band

A body of Indians for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart or money is held by the Crown, or declared to be a band for the purposes of theIndian Act. Each band has its own governing band council, usually consisting of one chief and several councillors. Community members choose the chief and councillors by election, or sometimes through custom. The members of a band generally share common values, traditions and practices rooted in their ancestral heritage. Today, many bands prefer to be known as First Nations.

Bill C-31

The pre-legislation name of the 1985 Act to Amend the Indian Act. This act eliminated certain discriminatory provisions of the Indian Act, including the section that resulted in Indian women losing their Indian status when they married non-Status men. Bill C-31 enabled people affected by the discriminatory provisions of the old Indian Act to apply to have their Indian status and membership restored.

Custom

A traditional Aboriginal practice. For example, First Nations peoples sometimes marry or adopt children according to custom, rather than under Canadian family law. Band councils chosen "by custom" are elected or selected by traditional means, rather than by the election rules contained in the Indian Act.

First Nation
A term that came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the word "Indian," which some people found offensive. Although the term First Nation is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. Among its uses, the term "First Nations peoples" refers to the Indian peoples in Canada, both Status and non-Status. Some Indian peoples have also adopted the term "First Nation" to replace the word "band" in the name of their community.

Indian
Indian people are one of three cultural groups, along with Inuit and Métis, recognized as Aboriginal people under section 35 of the Constitution Act. There are legal reasons for the continued use of the term "Indian." Such terminology is recognized in the Indian Act and is used by the Government of Canada when making reference to this particular group of Aboriginal people.

Status Indian
A person who is registered as an Indian under the Indian Act. The act sets out the requirements for determining who is an Indian for the purposes of the Indian Act.

Non-Status Indian
An Indian person who is not registered as an Indian under the Indian Act.

Treaty Indian
A Status Indian who belongs to a First Nation that signed a treaty with the Crown.

Indian Act
Canadian federal legislation, first passed in 1876, and amended several times since. It sets out certain federal government obligations and regulates the management of Indian reserve lands, Indian moneys and other resources. Among its many provisions, the Indian Act currently requires the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to manage certain moneys belonging to First Nations and Indian lands and to approve or disallow First Nations by-laws.

Indian status
An individual's legal status as an Indian, as defined by the Indian Act.

Innu
Naskapi and Montagnais First Nations (Indian) peoples who live in Northern Quebec and Labrador.

Inuvialuit
Inuit who live in the Western Arctic.

Inuit
An Aboriginal people in Northern Canada, who live in Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Northern Quebec and Northern Labrador. The word means "people" in the Inuit language — Inuktitut. The singular of Inuit is Inuk.

Land claims

In 1973, the federal government recognized two broad classes of claims — comprehensive and specific. Comprehensive claims are based on the assessment that there may be continuing Aboriginal rights to lands and natural resources. These kinds of claims come up in those parts of Canada where Aboriginal title has not previously been dealt with by treaty and other legal means. The claims are called "comprehensive" because of their wide scope. They include such things as land title, fishing and trapping rights and financial compensation. Specific claims deal with specific grievances that First Nations may have regarding the fulfillment of treaties. Specific claims also cover grievances relating to the administration of First Nations lands and assets under the Indian Act.

Métis

People of mixed First Nation and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis, as distinct from First Nations people, Inuit or non-Aboriginal people. The Métis have a unique culture that draws on their diverse ancestral origins, such as Scottish, French, Ojibway and Cree.

The North

Land in Canada located north of the 60th parallel. AANDC's responsibilities for land and resources in the Canadian North relate only to Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon.

Nunavut
The territory created in the Canadian North on April 1, 1999 when the former Northwest Territories was divided in two. Nunavut means "our land" in Inuktitut. Inuit, whose ancestors inhabited these lands for thousands of years, make up 85 percent of the population of Nunavut. The territory has its own public government.

Off-reserve
A term used to describe people, services or objects that are not part of a reserve, but relate to First Nations.

Oral history
Evidence taken from the spoken words of people who have knowledge of past events and traditions. This oral history is often recorded on tape and then put in writing. It is used in history books and to document claims.

Reserve
Tract of land, the legal title to which is held by the Crown, set apart for the use and benefit of an Indian band.

Surrender
A formal agreement by which a band consents to give up part or all of its rights and interests in a reserve. Reserve lands can be surrendered for sale or for lease, on certain conditions.

Tribal council

A regional group of First Nations members that delivers common services to a group of First Nations.

This general information is provided as a brief overview only. The provisions of theIndian Act, its regulations, other federal statutes and their interpretation by the courts take precedence over the content of this information sheet.

Resources for Further Learning

1. Check out these Projects/Movements

Project of Heart

Who they are and what they do:

"Project of Heart" is an inquiry based, hands-on, collaborative, inter-generational, artistic journey of seeking truth about the history of Aboriginal people in Canada. Its purpose is to:

- Examine the history and legacy of Indian residential schools in Canada and to seek the truth about that history, leading to the acknowledgement of the extent of loss to former students, their families and communities.
- Commemorate the lives of the thousands of indigenous children who died as a result of the residential school experience.
- Call Canadians to action, through social justice endeavors, to change our present and future history collectively.

Project of Heart acknowledges the families and communities to whom those children belonged. It was originally designed to bring awareness both to the settler community and communities of new Canadians. Project of Heart has evolved, through community ownership of the project itself, to educate all Canadians about the history and legacy of this crime and tragedy. In acknowledging the loss suffered by Aboriginal children, families and communities through the Indian Residential School experience, we also gain an understanding

of the strength, wisdom and resilience of the traditional peoples of this land. Project of Heart seeks to:

- Expand the opportunities available for the wisdom of Aboriginal Elders to be heard, recognized and honored
- Change attitudes and behaviors – hearts and minds – as Elders give voice to language, values, traditions and teachings that were suppressed by residential schooling
- Inspire the building of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada based on mutual understanding, respect and collective action to create a different future

Website: http://poh.jungle.ca/

Project 417

Who they are and what they do:

Working with First Nations people across Canada, we aim to develop and enhance native leaders in the Christian community as well as establish networks and community within the First Nations.

Website: http://project417.com/

Where Are The Children

Who they are and what they do:

The Legacy of Hope Foundation was established to address the long-term implications of the damage done to Aboriginal children and their families by many of the residential schools. The psychological wounds run deep and have infected new generations. Healing is a gradual process that will demand time and patience.

A primary objective of our work is to promote awareness among the Canadian public about residential schools and try to help them to understand the ripple effect those schools have had on Aboriginal life. But equally important, we want to bring about reconciliation between generations of Aboriginal people, and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Everyone who belongs to the First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities has been affected by the residential school experience. Only through understanding the issues can we undertake this healing journey together.

Website: http://www.wherearethechildren.ca/

Legacy of Hope

Who they are and what they do:

The Legacy of Hope Foundation (LHF) is a national Aboriginal charitable organization whose purposes are to educate, raise awareness and understanding of the legacy of residential schools, including the effects and intergenerational impacts on First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, and to support the ongoing healing process of Residential School Survivors. Fulfilling this mandate contributes towards reconciliation among generations of Aboriginal peoples, and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada.

The LHF fulfills this mandate by: working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, communities and organizations across Canada; and undertaking communications, research and policy activities that support the development and implementation of our educational programming. All of these activities are informed by the experiences and stories of Residential Schools Survivors, their families and communities.

Our work is guided by ethical guidelines and principles for working with Survivors and Aboriginal communities. These ethical guidelines are based on:

a. A deep concern and compassion for, and honouring of, Survivors, their families and communities
b. A clear understanding of the need for and importance of the oral tradition of Aboriginal peoples.

> We take as our fundamental guiding principle that the work of the LHF must contribute to the health, safety, well-being and healing Survivors, their families and communities, and towards promoting reconciliation in Canada.

Website: http://www.legacyofhope.ca/

Idle No More

Who they are & What they do:

"Idle No More calls on all people to join in a peaceful revolution, to honour Indigenous sovereignty, and to protect the land and water".

INM has and will continue to help build sovereignty & resurgence of nationhood. INM will continue to pressure government and industry to protect the environment. INM will continue to build allies in order to reframe the nation to nation relationship, this will be done by including grassroots perspectives, issues, and concern.

Website: http://www.idlenomore.ca/

2. Take a tour of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights

Visit their website and arrange a visit:
http://museumforhumanrights.ca/

3. Attend a Pow-Wow

What's a Pow-Wow?

Each Pow Wow begins with the Grand Entry, when all the dancers enter the Dance Circle for the first time. The pageantry and drama of the Grand Entry make is one of the most beautiful traditional Aboriginal ceremonies and a must see of anyone interested in native culture and customs. Pow Wows are one of the oldest, most important and colourful Aboriginal ceremonies. Traditionally, they have been dedicated to warriors and a way of giving thanks to the Creator for all that Mother Earth provides for her people (Thanksgiving ceremony). The Pow Wow is the centre piece of the Canadian Aboriginal Festival with visitors from all parts of Canada and around the world gathered to witness this most beautiful traditional ceremony. All people of all races and creeds are invited. In fact, you do the First Nations people honour by attending this great offering to the Creator.

Where do they happen?

They happen all over Canada. Check your local listings to find one near you. Check out this website for the Pow-Wow Trail: http://500nations.com/Ontario_Events.asp.

What should I know about attending one?

You should read this article on "Pow Wow Etiquette": http://www.powwows.com/2011/07/19/pow-wow-etiquette/#.

4. Go on a Learning Tour

What's a Learning Tour?

A learning tour is just that – a tour through a reservation where the goal is to just simply learn. BIC Canada has recently begun creating learning tours to help people better engage with the First Nations culture. It's a time to ask questions, learn about the history and unique factors affecting the people of a certain tribe/band. These tours are done in community so there is time to discuss and reflect amongst others who are learning alongside of you. Contact BIC Canada to learn more about opportunities to be a part of a learning tour or to organize one for your group.

5. Get connected with local organizations that are already involved with the First Nations Community.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Mennonite Central Committee (MCC): http://mcco.ca/aboriginal
- Speroway: http://www.speroway.com/
- Agadasin Initiatives: http://www.agidasin.com/

6.Host a conversation about reconciliation:

http://1000conversations.ca/

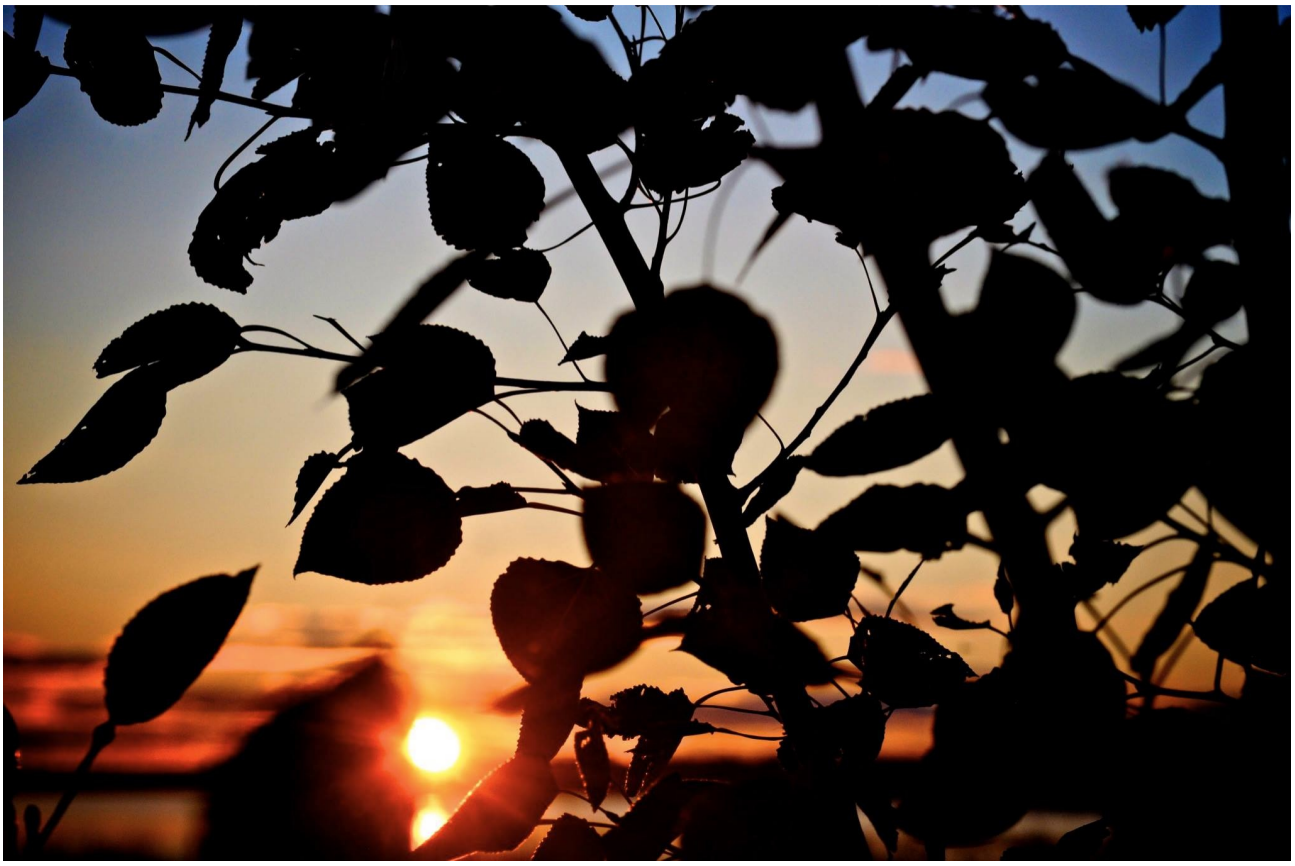
7.Contact BIC Canada for more information about First Nations Initiatives already on the go:

office@canadianbic.ca.

Helpful Websites, Articles and Information

An Online History	http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/exhibitions/archeo/hnpc/npint00e.shtml
Canada in the Making	http://www.canadiana.ca/citm/themes/constitution/constitution2_e.html
An MCC History	http://energyjustice.mcc.org/system/timelineII
Myth Perceptions	http://mythperceptions.ca/english_home.html
Aboriginal History Timeline	http://energyjustice.mcc.org/system/timelineII
"I Admit It: I Hold Racist Views About Native People in Canada"	http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/lou-james/racist-native-canada_b_3795232.html
"10 Key Dates in the Story"	http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/features/first-nations/mapping-the-future/pack-10-key-dates/index-10keydates.html
Aboriginal Women's Issues	http://www.canadiana.ca/citm/specifique/abwomen_e.html http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/too-many-aboriginal-women-have-died-its-time-for-action/article4961973/
Residential Schools in Canada	http://www.nature.com/news/canada-used-hungry-indigenous-children-to-study-malnutrition-1.13425 http://www.edmontonjournal.com/news/edmonton/Truth+Reconciliation+Commission+Woman+describes+spirit/8702698/story.html http://rabble.ca/news/2013/07/using-right-word-genocide-to-describe-canadas-treatment-aboriginal-peoples http://www.tolerance.cz/courses/papers/hutchin.htm http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2008/05/16/f-faqs-residential-schools.html

Christianity Amongst First Nations People	http://www.ottawacitizen.com/life/Religion+Experts+Canada+right+wrongs+done+First+Nation+peoples/8793466/story.html http://c2cjournal.ca/2011/12/the-hidden-faith-battles-on-canada%E2%80%99s-reserves/ http://www.christianweek.org/stories.php?id=815
Idle No More	http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/idle-no-more-native-led-protest-movement-takes-on-canadian-government-20130204
Aboriginal Issues	http://www.socialjustice.org/index.php?page=aboriginal-issues
Video link to the Prime Minister's Apology to the First Nations Community, June 2008	http://www.cbc.ca/mrl3/8752/news/features/harper-apology-080611.wmv
We Were Children Facilitator's Guide	http://ow.ly/q9jrk
We Were Children PowerPoint Presentation	http://ow.ly/q9jaz
Self-Care Guide from the Legacy of Hope Foundation	http://ow.ly/q9jkV



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