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# INTRODUCTION

The User’s Guide is designed for teachers, facilitators and many others — for example, Elders, administrators and other community stakeholders. Every component in the Kit is described under the following headings:

**WHAT:** title and general description.

**WHY:** purpose, reason for inclusion, application, the advantages of having the information.

**HOW:** using the component— topics for discussion; suggested activities to explore content and engage students.

For some components, there may be additional suggestions for other potential audiences who might benefit or suggestions for incorporation — time of the school year, possible links to curriculum, or community situations or circumstances that might be appropriate.

The content and resources included in the **It’s Our Time First Nations Education Tool Kit** are not a curriculum. However, these resources are relevant to, and can align with curricula across all provinces and territories, especially in the following content areas:

- oral tradition
- stories and legends
- teachings
- art: music, dance, writing, theatre, singing
- traditional values and their importance
- barriers to the preservation of the oral tradition
- history

# Residential Schools

## WHAT

By the mid-1980s, it was widely and publicly recognized that the residential school experience, in the north and in the south, like smallpox and tuberculosis in earlier decades, had devastated and continued to devastate communities. Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 1: Looking Forward, Looking Back

On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized to First Nations, Métis and Inuit people on behalf of Canada for a century of residential schools. The historic apology represented a promise and commitment by Parliament and all of Canada to join First Nations on a journey toward healing and reconciliation. The era of residential schools has been acknowledged to be a regrettable and unfortunate event, a “sad chapter” in our history. See also the map showing the location of residential schools across Canada.

## WHY

It is important that everyone, men and women, people of all ages, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have an understanding of the impacts and consequences of the residential schools. The damage from the residential schools continues to profoundly impact survivors, families and communities. The Apology that was made by the Federal Government to the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada on June 11, 2008 acknowledges that generations of Aboriginal People have been deeply impacted and states that there is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian residential schools system to ever again prevail.

Acknowledging this chapter of Canadian history recognizes some of the unique challenges that First Nations students have faced or are facing. It is a link to the shared history of First Nations and Canadians and as such has the power to promote understanding and respect within the classroom, and recognition of the variety of backgrounds and histories of students.

## HOW

- What did children lose out on once they were removed from their families?
- In what ways did the residential schools make children feel anonymous? Were their traditional and cultural ways respected?
- Many of the children and youth experienced deep-rooted feelings of humiliation, shame and abandonment, leading to low self-esteem. Why do you think they felt this way?
- Why do you think that many residential school survivors have expressed an inability to express affection?
- For survivors, traumatic memories were often triggered by certain sounds and smells. Trauma comes in many forms. Being beaten, humiliated, sexually abused, forced to speak another language, removed at gunpoint from parents, and sent to another place, far from one's nation and land, are all traumatic experiences. Post Traumatic Stress is a result of this kind of treatment.
- Why could children no longer communicate with their Elders upon their return to their own communities?
- The Apology talks about forging a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians...with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us. What does this mean? How can it work? What can you do as an individual, a school, or a community to further these ideas?
- Compare and contrast books and stories (like Shi-Shi-Etko, and Shin-Shin's Canoe) that reference residential schools with other books and stories that gloss over or ignore the residential schools. This type of comparison will help students think critically about the issues.
- Acquire the DVD of the actual apology and ask students to react and respond.
- Discuss how the effects of the residential schools continue impact generations of individuals, families and communities.
- Why do Indigenous peoples feel that an apology, even after so much time, is a necessary step in a path to reconciliation? Do you agree?
- Discuss how the history of colonization, institutional racism and social issues are enmeshed in the era of the residential schools.

- Were the residential schools a bad idea or a good idea gone wrong?
- Invite authors of books about residential schools and/or residential school survivors to speak to the students.
- Following a class discussion on the residential school era and the June 2008 Statement of Apology, have students explore the website: [http://www. wherearethechildren. ca.](http://www.wherearethechildren.ca) • Students can prepare a fictional diary of what they think it was like to be a student in a residential school or how they think they would feel if they were forced to leave their families and live in a residential school.
- Expressions could take the form of diaries, painting or music.
- Have students read and discuss AFN's Statement in response to the Minister's Statement of Apology.