

Level 1
Grade 5 & up

Building Bridges

By Building Understanding Through Current Events



Teachers Serving Teachers Since 1990

Building Bridges

Level 1

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We welcome your comments and appreciate your suggestions.

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Mission Statement:

LesPlan Educational Services Ltd. aims to help teachers develop students' understanding of and ability to critically assess current issues and events by providing quality up-to-date, affordable, ready-to-use resources.

Building Bridges:

- **allows for differentiated learning.** **Building Bridges** is available in two levels, and in English and French, to meet your students' varied learning needs.
- **is tech-friendly.** Project each month's pdf on your Promethean or Smart Board to read articles together. Our pdfs also work seamlessly with assistive reading technology, and the Word version of the articles can be uploaded to Google Classroom.
- **is easy to use.** Easily access links referenced in **Building Bridges** by visiting www.lesplan.com/en/links.

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About the cover design:

"[This design shows] two hands, Indigenous and Canadian, working together through reconciliation with a ring of cedar surrounding them to represent the medicine to help through this process." – Coast Salish artist Brianna Marie Dick, August 2018

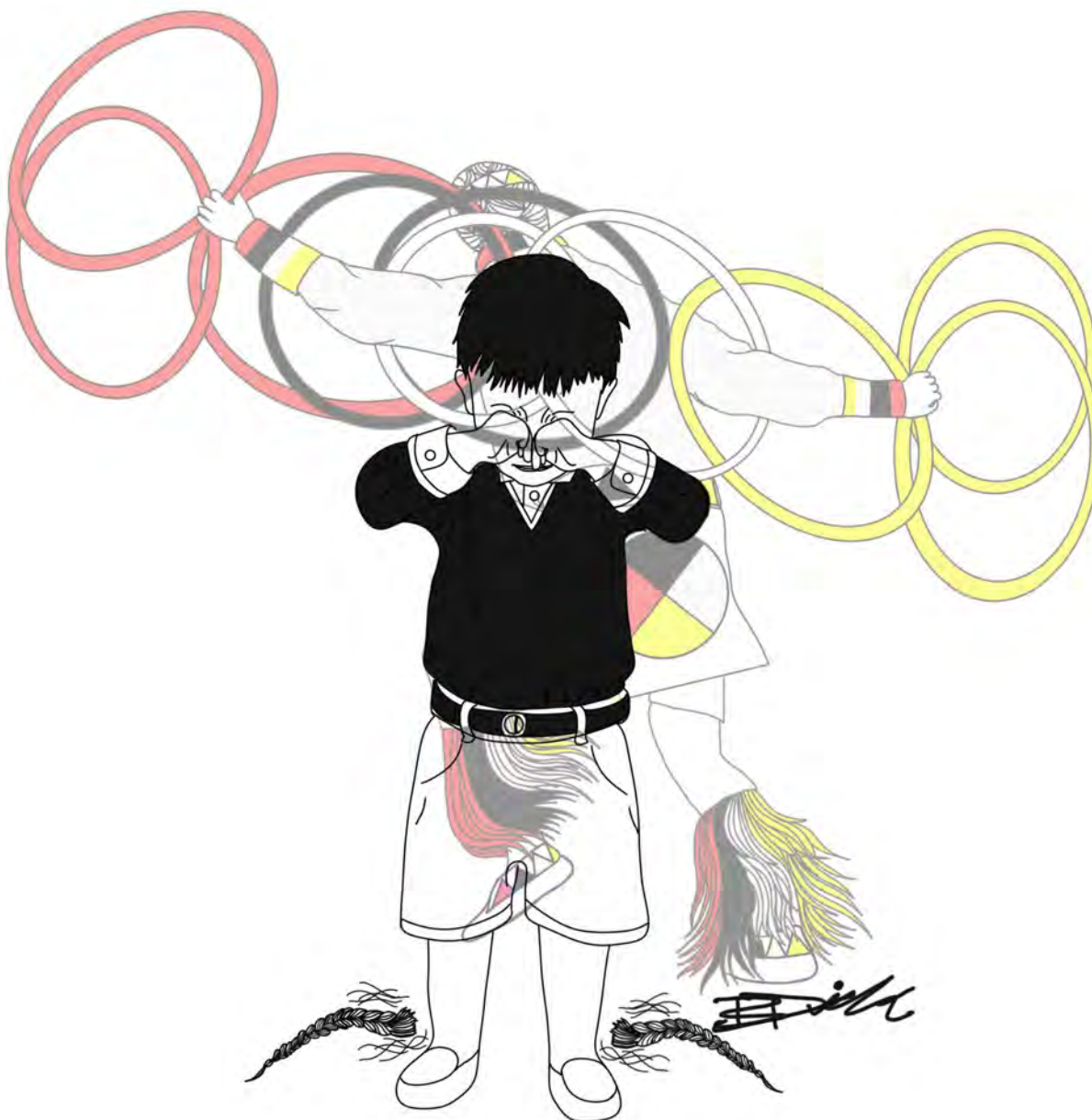
The Difficult Truth About Residential Schools

In the 1880s, the federal government began taking Indigenous children from their homes. The children were sent to “Indian Residential Schools” against their wishes, and against the wishes of their families.

Residential Schools were paid for by the government. They were run by churches.

The last Residential School was located in Regina, Saskatchewan. It closed its doors in 1996.

In all, about 130 Residential Schools operated across the country. They were found in every territory and province except Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick. Some 150,000 children attended these schools over the years.



The aim of Residential Schools was to educate, **convert**, and **integrate** Indigenous children into **mainstream** Canadian society. At the time, the government believed that it would be easiest to **assimilate** First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children if they were taken from their parents and community and kept in school for most of the year.

This government policy was based on a **colonial** world view. According to this way of thinking, Canadian society and Christian religions were superior to Indigenous cultures.

Now, Canada acknowledges that this policy was wrong. Indigenous children should never have been taken from their families. The government should never have tried to wipe out Aboriginal culture.

Life in a Residential School

Residential Schools were more like violent prisons for inmates than schools for children.

Students were bullied and abused. They were harshly punished if they spoke their Indigenous languages. Letters home were written in English, which many parents couldn't read. When the students

returned home, they often found they didn't belong anymore.

The schools were crowded, dirty, and cold. Thousands of children died there. Diseases such as smallpox, measles, flu, and tuberculosis were responsible for many of the deaths.

The individual stories are heartbreaking.

Michael Cachagee was four years old when he was sent to a Residential School in northern Ontario. He spent 12 years there. During that time, he never celebrated a birthday. He was never hugged or praised. Instead, he was beaten and abused.

It took years for him to come to grips with what happened to him. Sadly, his younger brother never did. He was three when he arrived at the school.

"He came out when he was 16 and the rest of his life was just a mess with alcoholism. He never had a chance – all because he was sent off to a Residential School," says Mr. Cachagee.

Ken Young was taken from his home at the age of eight in the 1950s. He remembers public beatings at the Prince Albert Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan. Children who tried to go home had their heads

Chanie Wenjack's Story

Chanie Wenjack was a 12-year-old Anishinaabe boy. He ran away from a Residential School near Kenora, Ontario in October, 1966. He wanted to go home to his family, 600 kilometres away. He was found beside railway tracks a week later. He had died from starvation and **exposure**. Canadian rock musician Gord Downie and artist Jeff LeMire turned Chanie Wenjack's story into an award-winning album of songs, a graphic novel, and an animated video called "The Secret Path."

shaved. They had their legs **shackled** in pyjamas. The school felt like a prison.

"I thought it was normal because I was just a young guy," says the Winnipeg lawyer today. "Later, I realized how bad that was that adults would treat children like that."

It took a long time to get rid of his anger. "I was ashamed to be who I was because that's what we were taught."

Definitions

assimilate: to make similar to

colonial: relating to a system or period in which one country rules another

convert: to persuade someone to change his or her religious beliefs

exposure: the harmful effect of very cold weather on your body

integrate: to make someone become a full member of a group or society and be involved completely in its activities

mainstream: considered ordinary or normal and accepted or used by most people

shackle: to prevent from moving with shackles (restraints)

Intergenerational trauma

Many of the problems faced by Indigenous Peoples today are rooted in their painful experiences at Residential Schools. Students were left with feelings of low self-worth. They were filled with anger. They were resentful.

Some developed addictions to cope with their pain. Some ran into trouble with the law.

Later generations have also been impacted.

“The destructive beliefs and behaviours of many students have been passed on to their children as physical and mental health issues,” explains the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report. As well, Indigenous youth who were not raised in their own homes didn’t have the chance to learn how to be caring and responsible parents to their children.

The result? Canada’s Indigenous population now has high poverty

rates and unemployment. It suffers higher levels of poor health and higher death rates than the population as a whole.

Yet Indigenous Peoples are very **resilient**. The people and cultures were badly damaged by years of injustice. However, they continue to exist. Many Survivors are strong and courageous. They are determined to heal and move forward.

Reconciliation

The word ‘reconciliation’ means the reestablishment of a broken relationship. For that to happen in Canada between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, “there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, **atonement** for the causes, and action to change behaviour,” says the TRC.

In recent years, many church organizations involved with the schools have apologized.

“I am sorry, more than I can say, that we were a part of a system which took you and your children from home and family,” said the Anglican Church.

A letter from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was a three-person panel, headed by Justice Murray Sinclair. It was appointed by the federal government in 2008 to find out what happened in Indian Residential Schools, and inform all Canadians.

Over seven years, the TRC visited hundreds of communities and heard testimony from 7000 survivors. Its final report was released in 2015. This report contained 94 Calls to Action to help Canada move towards reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

read, “We face the past and sincerely ask for forgiveness.”

The federal government is taking steps, too. In 2007, it announced \$1.9 billion in **compensation** for

those who were forced to attend Residential Schools. And in June 2008, then-prime minister Stephen Harper made a historic apology to Residential School Survivors.

Definitions

atonement: something that makes up for an offense or injury

compensation: money given or received as payment for a service or loss or injury

resilient: able to become healthy, happy, or strong again after an illness, disappointment, or other problem

For his part, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has promised to fulfill all of the Calls to Action outlined in the TRC report. In 2018, he announced that the government will change Canada's legal system.

The reason? To strengthen Indigenous Peoples' rights. That will give them greater control over their own **destiny**.

"Reforms are needed to ensure that – among other

things - Indigenous Peoples might once again have confidence in a system that has failed them all too often in the past," the prime minister said.

All Canadians have a role to play

Today, Canadians can learn about what went on in Residential Schools. We can begin to understand the harm that these schools caused. But once we know the truth, what do we do about it?

According to the TRC report, non-Indigenous Canadians need to start by exploring their own **biases**. They need to look at the **stereotypes** of Indigenous

Peoples that they were brought up with.

"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," says the TRC report. "The beliefs and attitudes that were used to justify the establishment of

Residential Schools are not things of the past."

That means that the path to reconciliation won't be easy, or quick. But it is very, very important that Canadians begin to walk down this path.

"Only a real commitment to reconciliation and change will reverse the trends and lay the foundation for a truly just and **equitable** nation," says the TRC.

The Witness Blanket

The Witness Blanket is a 12-metre-long work of art. It was created to recognize the **atrocities** of the Indian Residential School System.

The project was inspired by the idea of a blanket, which offers warmth and protection. It resembles a giant "quilt" made out of hundreds of objects from Canada's Residential Schools.

The objects were gathered from across the country. They

include old doors and pieces of stained glass, belts used to punish Indigenous children, a child's shoe, braids of hair, a hockey trophy, a doorknob, a photograph of a child, and a letter from parents asking that their children come home. Visitors can use a mobile app to learn more about each item.

The artwork toured the country for four years. In the spring of 2018, the tour was suspended. It

was causing too much wear and tear on the exhibit. In May 2019, a new tour was launched using a true-to-scale **reproduction**.

The artist is master carver Carey Newma. He is of British, Kwagiulth, and Salish descent. He calls his piece "a **testament** to the human ability to find something worthwhile, even beautiful, amidst the tragedies, memories, and ruins of the Residential School Era."

Definitions

atrocities: a cruel and violent act

bias: an attitude that makes people treat someone in a way that is unfair or different from the way they treat other people

destiny: a person's overall circumstances or condition in life

equitable: fair and reasonable because everyone is treated in the same way

reproduction: a copy of something, especially a work of art or an antique

stereotype: a very firm and simple idea about what a particular type of person or thing is like

testament: strong evidence for something