

TRUTH **BEFORE** RECONCILIATION



COVER ILLUSTRATION: JORDAN STRANGER

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Foreword

Truth and Reconciliation Week is a national week-long program open to all schools throughout Canada, presented by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR). The 2023 theme is “Honouring Survivors.” This week is an opportunity to come together as a country to reflect on the history and legacy of Residential Schools in Canada and our individual and collective commitment to creating a more just and equitable future.

Canada’s National History Society is honoured to collaborate with the NCTR on an annual publication to coincide with Truth and Reconciliation Week, which is distributed free to classrooms throughout Canada. This year’s publication, *Truth Before Reconciliation: Listening to Survivors*, shares stories of Residential School Survivors and explores the theme of language loss and revitalization. The accompanying lesson plans included in this guide are designed to help teachers and students engage their hearts as well as their minds as they explore the publication together. You may also download past publications and educators’ guides:

[Remembering the Children \(2022\)](#)

[Truth and Reconciliation Week \(2021\)](#)

[Every Child Matters \(2020\)](#)

We encourage teachers to bring Indigenous voices and perspectives into the classroom all year long. It is important to centre the stories of Survivors, who have long spoken of the diversity of experiences that Indigenous children faced at Residential Schools: separation and isolation; physical, sexual and emotional abuse; resilience, and resistance. Many Survivors also hold traditional knowledges, teachings, practices, and languages, passed on through generations. Listen to their stories with open hearts and open minds.

Thank you to all teachers who are taking on this important work of advancing reconciliation every day in their classrooms and their communities.

Canada’s National History Society with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

Residential School Survivor Support Line 1-866-925-4419

Contents

Learning through Poetry	4
Building Respect for Indigenous Languages	7
Sharing Knowledge Through Stories	12
Indigenous Place Names in Canada	15

Lesson: Learning through Poetry

By Canada's History

Summary:

This activity guides students through a reading of and reflection on the poem "For My Nieces" by Makayla Webkamigad on page 6 of *Truth Before Reconciliation: Listening to Survivors*.

Background:

Before beginning this activity, teachers should assess the students' knowledge of Residential Schools. Teachers of young learners may introduce the topic using one of the age-appropriate books noted on pages 18 and 19 of the publication. Teachers may also consult the following resources as part of their preparation and as an introductory lesson:

- Video: [Teaching on the Frontlines of Reconciliation](#), presentation by David A. Robertson at the Canada's History Forum (2023).
- Lesson Plan: [Preparing for Difficult Conversations](#), by Jacqueline Cleave (2022).
- Webinar: [A Conversation about Truth and Reconciliation in the Classroom](#), with Gavin Bergeron, Sylvia Smith, Maxine Hildebrandt and Natacha Sirois (2021).

Lesson:

To begin, read the poem "For My Nieces," by Makayla Webkamigad aloud to your students. Then, return to the beginning and read through the poem in small sections, pausing as follows to allow for explanation and conversation:

Read stanzas 1-4 as a class (the teacher may lead the reading, or may divide students into small groups). Pause after the fourth stanza and ask some of the following questions:

- What is happening in this section of the poem? Students may recognize that an Auntie is telling her niece about stories her Grandma told her in the past. Ask students what types of things the Grandma spoke about (childhood memories, language, teaching, and prayers).
- Ask students to recall a time a family member or loved one told them a story that was not from a written book. What sorts of things did they share?
- Ask students how this section makes them feel. What words are used to describe the Grandma and her stories?

Continue with reading stanzas 5-8. Pause to encourage conversation by asking some of the following questions:

- What is happening in this section of the poem? Where was the Grandma taken? How did she feel at the school? How did she feel when she was able to return home? Explain to students that Residential Schools were created to separate Indigenous children from their culture and family as a way to assimilate them into the dominant Euro-Canadian culture.
- Ask students how this section makes them feel. What words does the poet use to describe the Grandma's experience?

Read the final six stanzas together. Ask the following questions:

- What is the Auntie saying in this final section? What does she mean when she says "it's time to heal?"
- Explain that Residential Schools were just one aspect of **colonization** – the process of asserting control over a group of people through policies of assimilation. In Canada, the *Indian Act of 1876* and its subsequent amendments banned, "any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony," which included potlatches, powwows and Sun Dances, and sacred dance forms, such as hoop dancing and jingle dress dancing. There were also many traditional practices and knowledges that were lost as a result of families being separated through such systems and policies as the Residential School System and the Sixties Scoop. These traditions include language, song and music, art forms, land-based skills and more. Some specific examples include throat-singing, building canoes, kajaks or umiaks, kakiniit (traditional Inuit tattoos), or hide tanning.
- Explain the concept of **revitalization** – that many Indigenous people and organizations in Canada are relearning and sharing traditional languages, cultural practices and teachings that were disrupted and lost because of colonization.
- Ask students to describe how this section makes them feel.

Final Reflection:

As a class, brainstorm some of the main themes (ideas) that were included in the poem. Students may note themes such as family, language, stories, loss, or love.

In small groups, have students select a theme and find a phrase in the poem that best represents that theme. Create a poster that includes their selected phrase and images or colours that represent how the theme makes them feel. Have students share their posters with each other or display them in the school.

Extension:

Have students read the article, "Small Pebbles," by Lisa Jane Smith on page 24 of *Truth Before Reconciliation: Listening to Survivors*. Have students take turns recounting one of the stories of revitalization that they have read. As a class, explore the websites, social media feeds or videos made by the individuals profiled on pages 27 and 28:

- Michelle Chubb: [Jingle Dress straight dance](#)
- Mikey Harris (Ivan Flett Memorial Dancers): [Métis jigging](#)
- Isabelle Chapadeau: [Inuit art and jewelry](#)
- James Jones (Notorious Cree): [Hoop dancing](#)
- Shina Novalinga: [Inuit throat singing](#)

Lesson: Building Respect for Indigenous Languages

By Meredith Rusk

Summary:

This lesson can be completed after reading the message from Elder Harry Bone and Elder Florence Paynter (page 4) and “Why our Languages and Traditions Matter More Than Ever” by Richard Van Camp (page 10) in the publication *Truth Before Reconciliation: Listening to Survivors*.

This lesson guides students towards learning a few words or phrases of a local Indigenous language(s) as recommended by the Elders and Van Camp. Students will discuss language revitalization and explore diverse ways that language conveys meaning. Then they will learn to speak a few words in the language of the Indigenous territory where they live, or where their school is located.

In this lesson students will:

- build their understanding of language diversity among Indigenous Peoples in Canada
- develop an appreciation for Indigenous languages
- learn about the importance of revitalizing language

Background information:

When attending Residential Schools, Indigenous children were forbidden to speak their traditional languages. These languages existed for thousands of years and were connected to their local lands. The lands we now call Canada held the languages of the Inuit (who have five dialects), the Métis (Michif), and a large diversity of First Nations languages. People in one First Nation territory can speak the same language but have varying dialects depending on where they live or the group they belong to. Some First Nations groups developed a sign language so they could communicate with other Nations for trading.

Learning to speak a local language (and dialect) can involve some research. It is important to work with the local Indigenous community or communities whenever possible. In some cases, permission may be needed to speak the language or to guide when and where you may speak it, if you are not a member of that community or Nation. As Indigenous cultures tend to be holistic in nature, all things are connected. Language is interconnected with the land and with the People and their culture.

Cultural appropriation is the use of a people's belongings (culture) without permission, so it is important to do things in a good way. If the teaching of the local language is shared online, then it should be all right to speak it within the school setting.

Also, keep in mind the cultural safety of Indigenous students within classes. Do not call on (local) Indigenous students to help with speaking the language. Many are not able to or may feel uncomfortable sharing. Allow them to come forward if they so choose. If there are other students who know how to speak an Indigenous language from outside the local territory and are willing to share, you may encourage them to do so. Remember, the main objective is for Indigenous Peoples to revitalize their languages, so you and your students should lend support to whatever Indigenous languages are within the classroom or school spaces.

It is important to know there are some English and French words that do not have a direct translation into Indigenous languages. For instance, some First Nations languages do not have a word for "sorry," as it was the expectation for the person to demonstrate they were sorry rather than to merely say they were sorry. In some First Nations languages, there can be many words for an English or French word. To say "hello" could be a different word depending on who you are greeting or whether you are greeting more than one person.

Lesson:

1. Discuss with students the importance of language and some of the ways that language conveys meaning. You may explore some of the points below:
 - **Information.** This can include instructions or explanations on how to do something such as build, operate or repair an item; directions for where to go or be, such as to get to a destination or to attend an event; ethical values and cultural protocols (manners, behaviors); other knowledges that are believed to be true (in Western ways of being this is referred to as facts).
 - **Feelings.** Language can communicate an emotional state or reaction, either directly or indirectly. For example, "I don't want to ride the roller coaster" could indicate a feeling of anxiety or fear.
 - **Knowledge.** Ways of knowing, and coming to know, can be shared through written or oral accounts.
 - **Culture.** Identity, beliefs, and worldviews can be expressed through songs, stories and names (including names of places).

- **Relationships.** Language reveals how we relate to and connect with the world around us. We may use different words to describe things based on our perspective. For example, in English or French, there may be a place named after a person such as the city of Vancouver, but in an Indigenous language, the place may be known by a story or an event.
2. Ask students if they, or their families, speak more than one language. Write the names of all the languages spoken on the board. Invite students to reflect on their experience of translating between languages. Ask: *“Why is it difficult to directly translate something from one language to another?”* (Languages often do not have the same words or ideas making it hard to translate. The original meaning of words or sentences can be changed through the act of translation, hence the phrase “lost in translation.” Share some examples like *joie de vivre*, *zeitgeist* and *sobremesa*).
 3. Explain to your class that First Nations, Métis and Inuit children who attended Residential Schools or Day Schools were forbidden from speaking their traditional language. This meant that they often didn’t learn their language, or the knowledge and meaning it contained, from their parents and grandparents. According to the 2016 census, there are more than seventy Indigenous languages spoken in Canada today, although many languages have very few speakers and are in danger of being forgotten. There are many efforts to revitalize Indigenous languages, including courses, policies, and cultural products such as books and music.
 4. Tell students that traditional Indigenous languages in what is now Canada were very different from European languages. For example, some languages had very few nouns, as they tended to place less emphasis on things and more on relationships, thus using more verbs.

Ask students: *“Can you imagine speaking English or French without using any nouns?”* Have them try to speak to a partner without using nouns. You can give them a topic such as describing their favourite subject in school, favourite sport, or a good movie.

Today many Indigenous languages in what is now Canada have changed to suit English or French language construction, as well as contemporary cultural, social, economic, or political ideas. Therefore, these languages may contain more nouns than they did 500 years ago.

5. Ask students:

“Why is language revitalization important for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples?” Some conversation points are noted below and can be scaffolded depending on the age of your students.

- Language revitalization helps Indigenous Peoples heal from the trauma of having their languages taken from them as a result of Residential Schools.
 - Language revitalization is a collective responsibility for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action.
 - Indigenous languages inherently transmit culture, so Indigenous people gain cultural knowledge and connections, and become more deeply rooted in their worldview.
 - Language connects Indigenous people to their Ancestors and their histories; all Canadians can gain a fuller understanding of the past and our interactions and relationships with each other.
 - Traditional Indigenous knowledge passed on through language, particularly with respect to the land and environment, can provide solutions to today's problems.
 - Indigenous Peoples can gain greater autonomy and self-determination.
6. Have students research their local territory and the Indigenous languages that are spoken where they live or go to school. You may use the following resources:
- Native-land.ca <https://native-land.ca/>
 - First Voices <https://www.firstvoices.com/>
 - Honouring Indigenous Languages <http://copahabitat.ca/sites/default/files/language-tool.pdf>
 - Indigenous Languages - Learning and Teaching Resources <https://www.nolangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/ressources-resources/autochtones-aboriginals/apprentissage-learning-eng>

Have students research other resources for learning a local Indigenous language, as well as any preservation and revitalization efforts. They may consult websites, news stories, YouTube, local libraries, universities, and especially the Indigenous Nations' government, friendship centre or other community resources. Compile all the resources and initiatives into a digital or physical scrapbook.

7. If possible, invite an Elder or community member to the classroom to speak about language preservation and revitalization efforts. Have students learn a few words or phrases in the speaker's language that they can share, such as "hello" or "welcome." In addition to a traditional offering in accordance with the local culture, have students create a thank-you card using the local community's word for "thank you."

Extensions:

- Have the class choose seven to thirteen words that are used regularly (examples: goodbye, sorry, yes, no, sit, stand, walk, mom, dad, grandmother, grandfather, children/child, the sun, moon, and stars, numbers to five or ten, common animals). Create posters for the classroom and school illustrating the words and their meanings.
- The class could inquire into learning more about Indigenous languages in Canada: How many Indigenous languages are in Canada? What are language families and where can they be found? Where are the language and Nation connections into the U.S.? (For example, the Dene Peoples live in Northern Canada but also in southern Alberta and the southern United States.)
- Observe National Indigenous Languages Day on March 31 with a special celebration, presentation or film screening.
- The United Nations declared 2022-2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Have students research what this means and how Canada has committed to advance the Decade's objectives. Have students develop and deliver presentations to other classrooms about the history and importance of language revitalization and the ways that students as individuals can support the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Conclusion

This lesson can be expanded for students to explore other words or phrases. Students and staff should be encouraged to use the words on a regular basis so they become natural to them, especially if there are students and staff who are from the local territory. This can help these individuals to begin or continue to revitalize their language, making this process a part of reconciliation.

Lesson: Sharing Knowledge Through Stories

by Meredith Rusk

Summary:

This lesson corresponds with the poem “For My Nieces,” by Makayla Webkamigad, on page 6 of the publication *Truth Before Reconciliation: Listening to Survivors*.

This lesson explores the importance of listening to stories, the issues of appropriation of Indigenous stories, and the protocols around telling a story. Students will have an opportunity to explore and tell some Indigenous stories in a respectful way.

In this lesson students will:

- gain a deeper understanding of the ways Indigenous Peoples share knowledge through stories
- learn about protocols regarding the sharing of Indigenous stories
- better understand the concept of appropriation

Background information:

For Indigenous Peoples, stories have been a way of building relationships with all things since time immemorial. The themes within the stories inform Indigenous people about their cultural ways of being, their values, and how to live in a good way within the world. Stories educate the mind, body, and spirit. Stories are sacred and living processes that are passed from generation to generation. Stories can also be lived experiences with many being closer to the present, like the stories of Residential School Survivors.

It is important to keep cultural and emotional safety in mind when sharing some of the sensitive stories of Indigenous Peoples. Cultural safety is an approach that considers how social, cultural, and historical contexts and interpersonal power imbalances have existed and continue to shape educational experiences. It is important to demonstrate respect and be aware of stereotypes or misconceptions. Indigenous students should not be called upon to speak but rather should choose on their own whether they wish to share their knowledges and experiences. Allow students safe spaces if the stories are too sensitive for them.

Lesson:

1. Ask students: When a person is telling a story, why is it respectful to listen without interrupting? What makes a good story listener?

Explain that respectful story listeners:

- Understand that they have a responsibility to listen and learn, because a story is a gift that a storyteller has chosen to share.
 - Allow the person telling the story to do so without interruptions, which can make the person forget what they were saying and lose their flow.
 - Remain focused on the story without talking to the person beside them or looking around too much.
 - Listen with body language and brain, not just ears.
2. Have students work with a partner or in small groups to share a short personal story. Tell them to be respectful when listening (You may provide a story prompt, such as: a time when they were very scared; a time they saw a wild animal, such as a bear; the best birthday party or gathering they ever attended).
 3. Have a student share a story that their partner or group member told. Before they tell the story have them ask the story "author" if it is all right to share their story with the whole group.
 4. After the sharing of the lived (experience) story, ask the "author" how they would feel if the "teller" started telling everyone their story without getting permission first. Ask them how they would feel if the "teller" wrote a book about this story and published it without permission. (To add to this, they could also make money off this story.)
 5. Explain to the class how this could be seen as **appropriation** (taking something for one's own use, especially without permission) and that this is what has happened, and sometimes continues to happen, with Indigenous Peoples' stories.
 6. Tell students that traditional/ancestral Indigenous stories have been and continue to be the way Indigenous Peoples pass on their knowledge, preserve their history, and keep social order intact. These stories are like the textbooks and computers of today. These stories are connected to the local lands and Peoples, so they are theirs to tell and only for others to tell with permission.

7. What Indigenous stories can non-Indigenous people or Indigenous people outside of the community tell or share?
 - oral stories when the storyteller has given permission
 - published stories
8. Ask students: What is important about the retelling of Indigenous stories? Tell them these are the protocols, or rules/guidelines for sharing an Indigenous story:
 - having permission and acknowledging the source (author or teller)
 - saying what territory or Nation the story came from
 - acknowledging where they got the story from (book, website, etc)
 - not making any main changes to the story (storytellers may add their own small details, but the theme and ideas must stay intact to keep the teachings)
 - respecting protocols for when a story can be told. For example, for some Nations, traditional or ancestral stories are told only in the winter, once the first snow falls.
9. Have students work in small groups to find an Indigenous story that has been published or shared (can be lived experience or traditional). These can be in book form or from an online video. Tell them to make sure they learn the Nation and/or author/teller.
10. Have them share the stories by beginning with "This story is from the _____ Nation and was told by _____."

Extensions

- Each individual person takes their own meaning from an Indigenous story. Read a book or story by an Indigenous author (or orally tell a story) and ask students what their own personal learnings are from that story.
- Invite an Indigenous storyteller into your class or school. Together with your students, research and follow the appropriate protocols for the guest's culture.

Conclusion

There are many books by Indigenous authors that tell the stories of such things as land, people, language, relationship, and respect as well as colonial issues such as the history and effects of Residential Schools. When we speak about Truth and Reconciliation, much of the "truth" can be learned through these storytellers. It is by listening and learning that students can find understanding in their own journeys towards reconciliation.

Lesson: Indigenous Place Names in Canada

by *Canada's History*

Summary:

In this lesson, students will learn about traditional Indigenous place names in Canada. They will learn about efforts to restore traditional place names in their region and participate in a mapping activity. This lesson can be completed after reading the publication *Truth Before Reconciliation: Listening to Survivors*.

Background:

Indigenous place names are embedded with meaning about relationships to the land – narrating historical events, conveying traditional knowledges, and revealing connections to identity and culture.

Throughout centuries of colonialism, many Indigenous place names have been altered or renamed to align with settler language. This process has resulted in a loss of the original meanings tied with many place names in what is now known as Canada.

Reinstating Indigenous place names plays an important role in recognizing, preserving, and strengthening Indigenous languages. The Geographical Names Board of Canada is working with Indigenous organizations and communities to restore the traditional names of geographical features (toponyms) and to create a map that displays Indigenous place names, along with their traditional spelling, meaning, and pronunciation.

Activity:

Have your students use the [Indigenous Place Names in Canada map](#) to explore some of the places and geographical features found near your community. As you scroll through the map you will see different categories of names: place names derived from Indigenous languages, reinstated Indigenous place names, and traditional Indigenous place names that are in the process of being made official. Please note the places indicated on the map represent a small selection of the nearly 30,000 place names that are, or may be, of Indigenous origin and that are recognized as official names by the Geographic Names Board of Canada.

As you explore the map with your students, consider: Which communities are being represented on the map? What type of information does the Indigenous place name reveal? Are there any stories behind the place name? How do you have a better understanding of the land – and the relationship to the land – through the Indigenous place name? How does looking at the map with different names make you feel?

Using a large map of your province, territory, or region, have students label key locations and features with Indigenous place names. You may continue to use the Geographic Names Board of Canada map, or you can broaden the activity to include other types of place names (cities, parks, etc). Here are some additional resources you may consult:

[Indigenous Geographical Names Data](#) (full dataset from the Geographical Names Board of Canada)

[Canada's Original Place Names](#) (Canadian Geographic)

[Indigenous place names](#) (Parks Canada)

[Largest Cities in Canada With an Indigenous Name](#) (Canadian Encyclopedia)

Ask students: What can we learn from viewing our updated map? What did you learn about Indigenous place names? How does language play a role in naming? How can recognizing Indigenous place names contribute to language revitalization and reconciliation?

Extension:

Spend more time learning about the process of renaming in your community. What is the body in charge of renaming? What are its process and criteria for renaming? Is there anything you would change or add to the process or criteria?