

Guidelines for Learning from Residential School Survivors

Strategies for Teachers

Exploring the history of residential schools in Canada by engaging students with the lived experiences of Survivors requires a high level of sensitivity, a keen awareness of the complexity of the subject matter, and well-planned learning activities.

Define the term “Survivor”. Residential School Survivors attended residential schools in Canada. The consequences of the abuse suffered in these schools continues to affect First Nations through an intergenerational effect –the harm caused to students affects families and communities over generations.

Translate statistics into people. Show that individual people—grandparents, parents, communities, and children—are behind the statistics and emphasize the diversity of personal experiences within the larger historical narrative.

Residential Schools were not an inevitability. They were created by the Canadian federal government and were operated by churches for more than 100 years. Multiple laws and numerous organizations and players kept them operational.

Avoid simple answers to complex questions. The history of Residential Schools raises difficult questions about human behaviour, citizen action and inaction, and the context within which governmental and individual decisions are made. Be wary of simplification

Contextualize the history. The Residential School era and particularly how individuals and organizations behaved at that time, should be placed in historical context. Residential Schools should be studied in the context of Canadian history as a whole to give students a perspective on the precedents and circumstances that contributed to them.

Make sound pedagogical choices. Construct well thought out learning activities. Avoid word scrambles, crossword puzzles, ‘tipi Tuesday’, and gimmicky exercises; rather encourage critical analysis and student praxis. Use authentic sources and firsthand narratives.