

# Gibaajimominaan: Our Stories\*

**Author:** Connie Wyatt Anderson

**Grade Level:** 7-9

**Themes:**

- Decolonization
- First Nations, Inuit & Métis
- Social Justice
- Residential Schools

**Subject Areas:**

- Social Studies
- History
- Indigenous Studies

**Overview:** In this lesson students listen to a residential school Survivor\*\* tell their story, respond with a personal comment or question, link the Survivor's experiences with the Seven Sacred Teachings, and consider what they can do to support the Survivors and their families.

**Time Required:** One to three periods.

**Historical Thinking Concepts:**

- Identify continuity and change
- Analyze cause and consequence
- Take historical perspectives
- Understand the ethical dimension of historical interpretations.

**Learning Outcomes: Students will...**

- Explore the history of residential schools in Canada.
- Identify historical sources used to study residential schools.
- Engage with a residential school Survivor testimony.
- Value the importance of Survivor testimony/lived experience.
- Appreciate Indigenous knowledge systems, using the Seven Sacred Teachings as a lens.

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\* Gibaajimominaan means 'our stories' in Anishinaabe

\*\* Students may opt to personally interview a Survivor.

## Lesson Activities

### Activating: How will students be prepared for learning?

- Familiarize yourself with *Guidelines for Learning from Residential School Survivors: Strategies for Teachers* at the end of this lesson before beginning the learning activity.
- Provide an overview of residential schools in Canada. Incorporate maps, images, etc.
- Encourage questions, invite dialogue.

### Acquiring: What strategies facilitate learning for groups and individuals?

- Divide the class into table groups. Distribute *Kitayánán: We are Still Here*.
- Facilitate a small group reading activity.
- Check for understanding. Ask: what types of sources can we use to learn about student experiences in residential schools? Capture responses on whiteboard/flipchart.
- Encourage questions; invite dialogue.
- Pay special attention to Survivor lived experiences and personal testimonials.
- Distribute *Learning and Listening with Respect*. Read over with the class.
- Engage students with a Survivor's personal story. You may access stories at <http://legacyofhope.ca/wherearethechildren/stories/>, invite a Survivor to class, have students interview a Survivor; or listen to a Survivor speak during the Every Child Matters virtual event.
- Encourage questions; invite dialogue.
- Make time for student introspection.

### Applying: How will students demonstrate their understanding?

- Introduce the concept of Indigenous knowledge by sharing the definition provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):  
"Local and indigenous knowledge refers to the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. For rural and indigenous peoples, local knowledge informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life. This knowledge is integral to a cultural complex that also encompasses language, systems of classification, resource use practices, social interactions, ritual and spirituality. These unique ways of knowing are important facets of the world's cultural diversity, and provide a foundation for locally-appropriate sustainable development."
- Explain that different Indigenous nations throughout Canada and the world will have different knowledge systems. Provide an overview of the Seven Sacred Teachings, which is a set of teachings that are common to many Indigenous groups in Canada. (There are many versions of these seven teachings which are sometimes referred to as the Seven Grandmother Teachings or the Seven Sacred Teachings. Nations and communities may

use differing stories to impart these teachings, but the same guiding principles and morals can be found in all.)

- Distribute *Gibaajimominaan: Our Stories*. Instruct the students to complete.
- Guide and assist as necessary.

#### **Materials/Resources:**

- Access to Internet, including video and audio capabilities (optional)
- *Guidelines for Learning from Residential School Survivors: Strategies for Teachers*
- *Learning and Listening with Respect Student Resource* - copies as needed
- *Kitayánán: We are Still Here Student Resource* - copies as needed
- *Gibaajimominaan: Our Stories Student Resource* - one copy per student

#### **References/Further Resources:**

- [Residential School Survivor Stories](#)
- [Residential Schools in Canada](#)
- [Seven Grandfather Teachings](#)
- [National Student Memorial Register Book](#)

#### **Extension Activity: Using Objects to Tell the Story of Residential Schools (grades 4-9)**

- Introduce 'The Witness Blanket' to students by exploring the [website](#)
- Click on the objects
- Facilitate a class discussion
- Explain how a curator pieces carefully selected objects together to represent a story.
- Introduce the steps of curator:
  1. The curator selects objects that represent the topic they are sharing.
  2. The objects together must represent a story.
  3. All of those stories together must represent an overall coherent narrative.
  4. The objects must fit within a defined space
- Have students design an exhibit dedicated to the history and legacy of residential schools in your class. Encourage students to bring items from home, items from school, etc.

# 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

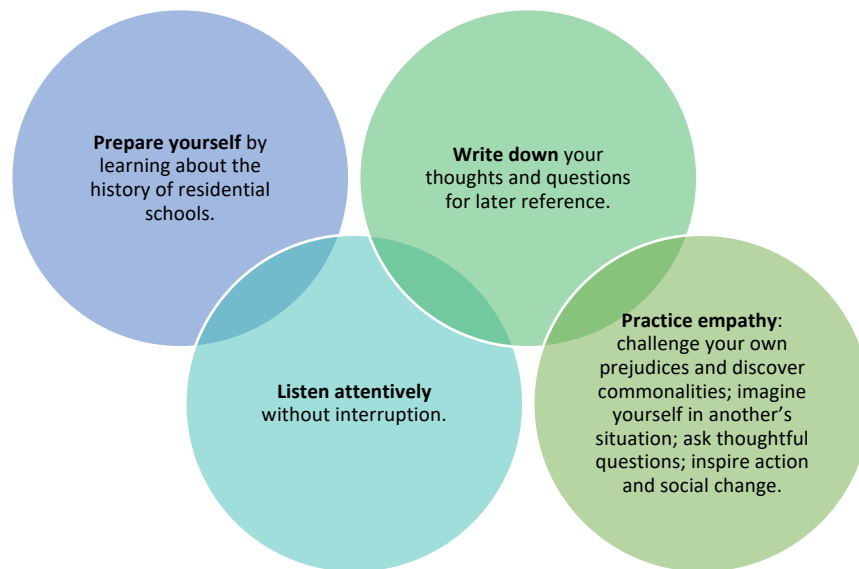
**Contextualize the history.** The Residential School era and particularly how individuals and organizations behaved at that time, should be placed in historical context. Residential Schools should be studied in the context of Canadian history as a whole to give students a perspective on the precedents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

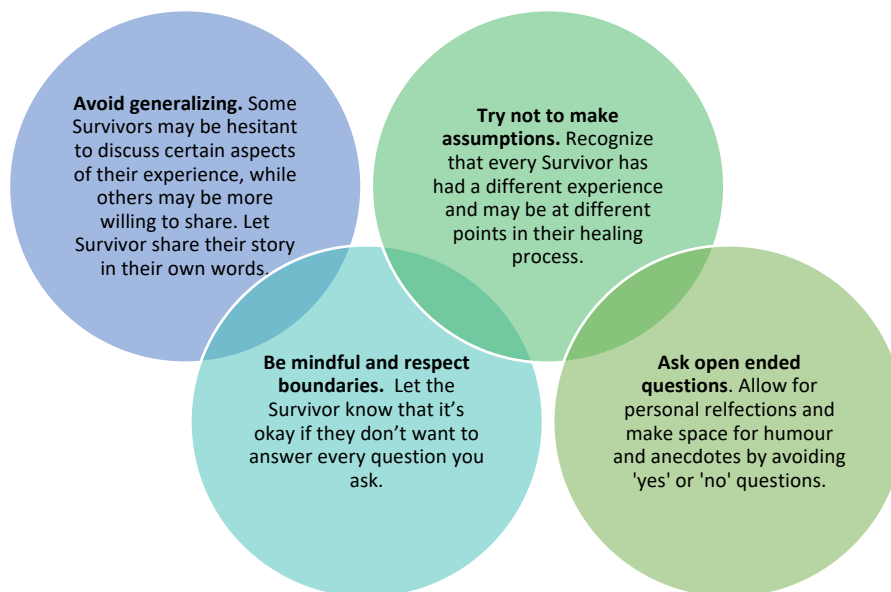
# Learning and Listening with Respect

As a student you have been given a gift - you have listened to (or interviewed) the personal story of a residential school Survivor. This gift comes with responsibilities on your part: to be respectful, appreciative, and to practice self-care. Below are some guidelines for you.

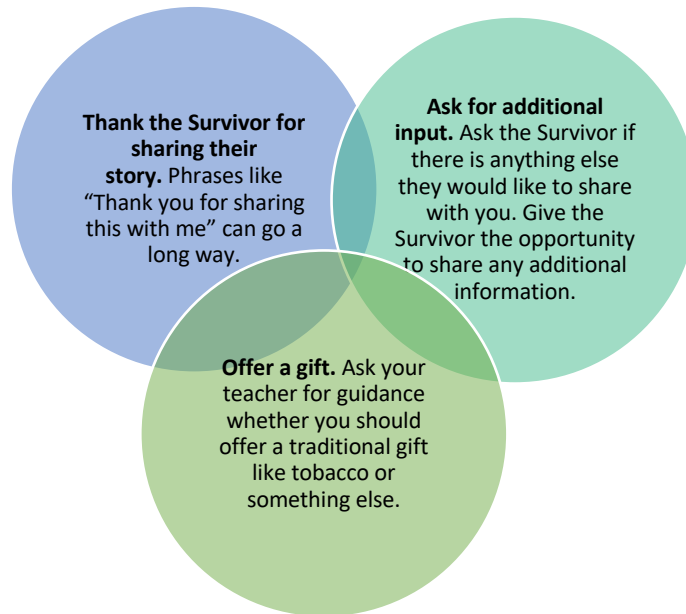
Residential schools are a complicated topic. Each Survivor has their own story and own lived experience. When **listening to an interview** and/or discussing it with your classmates:



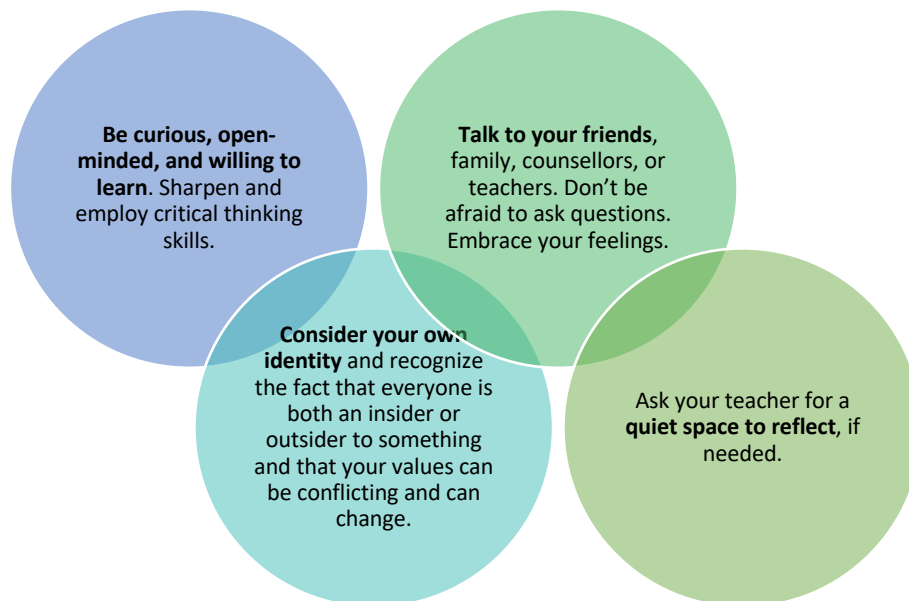
When **interviewing a Residential School Survivor:**



**At the end of interviewing a Survivor**, show appreciation:



Finally, don't push your feelings aside. Hearing the firsthand experiences of residential school Survivors may trigger your own emotions (teachers call this *emotive history*) and **taking care of yourself is paramount.** What can you do?

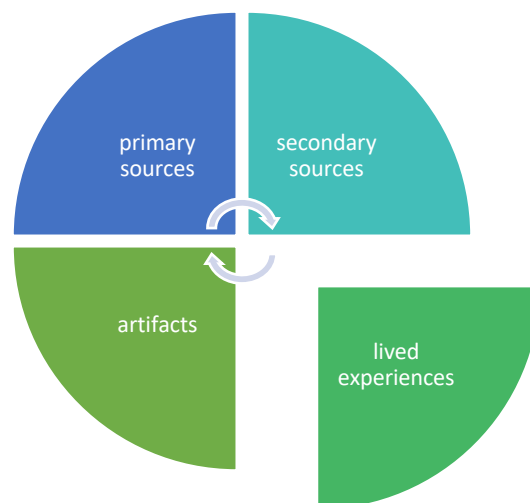


# Kitayánán: We are Still Here

Between 1831 and 1996, residential schools operated in Canada through arrangements between the Government of Canada and various Christian church organizations. Over 130 residential schools existed nationwide, the apex being in 1931, with 80 institutions running. An estimated 150,000 children were forced to attend.

One common objective defined this era– the assimilation of Indigenous children and the resultant eradication of Indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions.

Today, we can learn about the experiences of the students in these institutions using a variety of sources. Primary sources include the school documents such as attendance registries, photographs, and Survivor diaries; secondary sources like books and films about residential schools; and artifacts like farming tools and children’s uniforms. These sources speak on behalf of both living and dead students.



While residential schools are very much part of Canada’s past, they are not relegated solely to the annals of history. Residential schools form a very real part of our present. By several estimates, there are currently 80,000 Survivors alive in Canada today. The chances are high that you know a Survivor, have sat next to one in a public space, shared a work or school environment, or know someone whose family has been affected by intergenerational trauma as a result of residential schools. Their lived experiences and personal testimonials provide us with the fourth type of source for learning about residential schools. They speak for those Survivors who are no longer with us and provide us with a direct account of their experiences. Their stories are a breathing connection between the past and the present and a tangible gift to the future.

# Gibaajimominaan: Our Stories

## Part 1: Record

Survivor's Name:

Home community:

Summary:

- Residential school:
- Years attended:
- Age:

## Part 2: Tell

What Survivor statement or recollection resonated with you? Why?

## Part 3: Wonder

Imagine you were the interviewer. Write a comment or question for the Survivor. (If you were the interviewer, write a comment or post an additional question)

## Part 4: Connect

Write the Survivor's name in the middle of the circle. Use the circle segments and connect his/her residential school experiences with the Seven Sacred Teachings. Are there blank segments? How can we support Survivors and their families to fill in those gaps? Write your ideas on the perimeter of the circle.

