

KIDS SHOW THE WAY

When young people like you learn about history and how it affects people today, they come up with some pretty great ideas. Check out how these students are rethinking commemoration.

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

Governor Edward Cornwallis started the British settlement in 1749 that would become Nova Scotia's capital, Halifax. The Mi'kmaq people already living there fought back, killing the British settlers invading their ancestral territory. To clear the land for British settlers, Cornwallis promised cash to anyone who killed a Mi'kmaq. People mostly forgot about him until the premier had a statue of Cornwallis put up in 1931 to attract tourists and celebrate the creation of Halifax. By 2017, many people were saying that Cornwallis did not deserve to be honoured at all. Just over an hour away in Port Williams, N.S., Grade 6, 7 and 8 students at The Booker School decided to come up with their own plan for the statue. They wanted to honour Nova Scotians from many backgrounds while ensuring Cornwallis's place in history wasn't forgotten. So they listened, learned and discussed. They agreed the statue should come down to ground level so Cornwallis had to face the results of his actions. They decided he should be forced into a conversation with three groups of people who were very important to Nova Scotia's history but who had been dismissed (or even killed) by the British: the Mi'kmaq (represented by a statue of Grand Chief John Denny Jr.), French-speaking Acadian families (Noël and Marie Doiron and child) and Black Nova Scotians (Viola Desmond). The students said they would put the four statues facing each other in a circle, as if they were talking to each other. Visitors could stand next to the figures or in the middle and become part of the discussion. The students also recommended there be plaques around the area with information about the things — good and bad — each person had done, and questions to get people thinking about racism, history and more. They even sent their proposal to the city committee studying what to do. In 2018, Halifax took down the Cornwallis statue; it has no plans to put it back.

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Students and teachers from The Booker School hang out where the Cornwallis statue once stood.

"QUICKLY I REALIZED HE HAD TO STAY, BUT WE HAD TO CHANGE HOW PEOPLE LOOKED AT HIM." -GRADE 6 STUDENT

"AT THE START I LOOKED AT CORNWALLIS AS A PERSON WHO ALL HE DID WAS KILL, BUT THEN I LEARNED ABOUT THE FOUNDING OF HALIFAX ... IF WE DIDN'T HAVE HIM HALIFAX WOULDN'T BE THE SAME." -GRADE 7 STUDENT

Temma Frecker

"I FEEL OUR IDEAS ARE BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY MANY PEOPLE WITH MORE POWER THAN US, AND THAT GIVES US THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY WHICH COULD HAVE A GREAT, POTENTIAL, POSITIVE OUTCOME." -GRADE 8 STUDENT

Students at The Booker School and their teacher Temma Frecker discuss what they would do with the statue of Edward Cornwallis.



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DIFFERENT TIMES, DIFFERENT NAME?

WHAT TO CALL A VANCOUVER SCHOOL

Who was Lord Strathcona anyway? In May 2021, three students at the Vancouver elementary school named for him decided they'd rather have it named for someone they felt more of a connection to. (Lord Strathcona was the Scottish-Canadian Donald Smith, a businessman and politician. He ran the Hudson's Bay Company in the 1870s and the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s.) They picked Barbara Howard, who grew up in Vancouver and in 1941 became the first person of colour hired as a teacher there. She taught at Strathcona and other schools until 1984. But before that, she was a record-breaking sprinter — a short-distance runner. At just 17 years old, was chosen for the Canadian team heading to the British Empire Games in Australia, where she won silver and bronze medals. She was the first Black woman to compete for Canada. The students, Chenesayi Kagande, Matt Bogdanovic-Milosevic and Sojchana Swatton were in Grade 7 when they started a petition to change the school's name. "Our school represents community, kindness and just caring about each other — and we feel that Barbara Howard is the best fit to do that for us," Kagande told the CBC.



A BIGGER PICTURE OF HISTORY

WHO GETS TO DECIDE WHO'S A HERO

In 1660, Dollard des Ormeaux was put in charge of a mission to fight the Haudenosaunee who had been attacking settlers in New France. By the 1930s some people had started to question his actions, but Abbé Lionel Groulx, a historian and priest, insisted Dollard was a hero who had saved New France. His ideas went unchallenged for decades. In 2020, a class at Pensionnat du Saint-Nom-de-Marie, a girls' school in Montreal, took a hard look at both men. Their teacher, Dominique Laperle, gave them a fake newspaper article saying a statue to Dollard had been destroyed. They researched Dollard and Groulx, and added important information that had been overlooked for centuries: the rights of First Nations to fight back when Europeans came and took their land. In the end, the students wrote their own newspaper article saying what they thought should happen to the statue of Dollard as a piece of public art.



Alamy, James Weekes, Dominique Laperle, James Weekes



TEACHERS TEMMA FRECKER AND DOMINIQUE LAPERLE RECEIVED GOVERNOR GENERAL'S HISTORY AWARDS FOR THE CREATIVE WAYS THEY HELPED STUDENTS THINK ABOUT WHO GETS TO BE COMMEMORATED AND HOW.

