

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?