

Level 2  
Grade 8 & up

# Building Bridges

By Building Understanding Through Current Events



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# Building Bridges

## Level 2

### PUBLISHER

Eric Wieczorek

### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Janet Radschun Wieczorek

### AUTHOR

Vivien Bowers

### CURRICULUM DEVELOPER

Tasha Henry

### ARTIST/ILLUSTRATOR

Brianna Marie Dick

### LAYOUT AND DESIGN

Jigsaw Design



## LesPlan

LesPlan Educational Services Ltd.  
#1 - 4144 Wilkinson Road  
Victoria BC V8Z 5A7  
[www.lesplan.com](http://www.lesplan.com)  
[info@lesplan.com](mailto:info@lesplan.com)

Phone: (toll free) 888 240-2212  
Fax: (toll free) 888 240-2246  
Twitter: @LesPlan

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We welcome your comments and appreciate your suggestions.

### *Hay'sxw'qa!*

We have been honoured to work with many contributors for this issue including Phyllis Webstad (Stswecem'c Xgat'tem), Eddy Charlie (Cowichan Tribes), Brianna Dick (Songhees), Bear Horne (Tswaout), and Kristin Spray. We are grateful to the Lkwungen Peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, on whose unceded land we now live, and do our work.

## Mission Statement:

LesPlan Educational Services Ltd. aims to help teachers develop students' understanding of and ability to critically assess current issues and events by providing quality up-to-date, affordable, ready-to-use resources.

## Building Bridges:

- **allows for differentiated learning.** **Building Bridges** is available in two levels, and in English and French, to meet your students' varied learning needs.
- **is tech-friendly.** Project each month's pdf on your Promethean or Smart Board to read articles together. Our pdfs also work seamlessly with assistive reading technology, and the Word version of the articles can be uploaded to Google Classroom.
- **is easy to use.** Easily access links referenced in **Building Bridges** by visiting [www.lesplan.com/en/links](http://www.lesplan.com/en/links).

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### *About the cover design:*

*"[This design shows] two hands, Indigenous and Canadian, working together through reconciliation with a ring of cedar surrounding them to represent the medicine to help through this process."* – Coast Salish artist Brianna Marie Dick, August 2018



## An Overview

Many educators across Canada have been responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action through their planning and practices. As a non-indigenous teacher, I know that this work means I will make mistakes. I also know that I can't know everything. Thank goodness! This work isn't about knowing more; this work is about learning and asking questions alongside your students. It's also about learning to ask the right questions in a humble way, and to imagine bridges through our colonial past. But how do we engage in the work of reconciliation alongside curricular learning outcomes in an authentic and meaningful way?

This series of lesson plans is designed to invite you and your students into the complex dialogue that is crucial to any work around reconciliation. By teaching students the tools to ask thoughtful questions, and to think carefully and critically about the questions they ask, we begin the hard work needed to build better relationships with our First Peoples, Nations, and urban Indigenous communities.

In this publication, current events and issues will be presented as opportunities for informed discussions and classroom inquiry that ultimately encourage

students to ask the bigger questions that affect the societies we live in: *Is this right? Is this just for all? What is better?*

### Setting the tone

Setting a positive and empathetic tone in your classroom is essential to the exploration of Indigenous issues. For instance, at the root of exposing Canada's investment in the Indian Act and residential schooling is the discussion of what constitutes racism and discrimination. These topics are, and should be, sensitive for your students to enter into. A classroom environment that invites perspectives, and critically examines inherited belief systems, must first establish a set of rules to live by.

**Action:** Ask your students to come up with a list of body language, words, attitudes, and behaviours that constitute a positive classroom environment. Keep these posted in the classroom as a baseline criteria for entering into the subject of Canada's treatment of Indigenous Peoples. Refer to the criteria often and praise those who spontaneously lead their peers with positive attitudes, words, and actions.

## Creating Learning Environments that reflect the First Peoples Principles of Learning

Aim to nurture a learning environment that embodies the First Peoples Principles of Learning. As the First Nations Education Steering Committee expressed, these principles are not rigid terms or isolated lessons, but more, a way of being with your learners and a way of viewing learning in general. Each Nation may have its own perspectives around learning and teaching, but these principles can be seen as generally agreed-upon starting points that invite all teachers and learners to view learning through an Indigenous lens. I have these posted in my classroom, and I refer to them often.

*Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.*

*Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).*

*Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions. Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.*

*Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge. Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.*

*Learning involves patience and time.*

*Learning requires exploration of one's identity.*

*Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.*

**Action:** Ask your students to describe, in their own words, what the FPPL look like, feel like, and sound like in the classroom setting. Have them list their thoughts, words, and feelings on sticky notes and post their responses under each principle. Leave these up on your wall to set a tone for all learning across the curriculum.

You can learn more about these principles at:

<http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/PUB-LFP-POSTER-Principles-of-Learning-First-Peoples-poster-11x17.pdf>

<https://firstpeoplesprinciplesoflearning.wordpress.com>

## Notes on Assessment: Moving Beyond Empathy

We are trained as teachers to measure learning in students. I feel it is important in this particular endeavour that we don't reduce students' learning to a grade or a percentage. What you can measure is the depth to which your students are able to think critically about an issue, and the degree to which they can communicate their thinking through listening, speaking, and writing. Try using self-assessment tools, or a current events portfolio with an oral interview, as assessment strategies. Focus on speaking and listening as important signifiers of a student's thinking and communication skills. Use dialogue, discussion, and reflection as a way for each student to express his or her own entry point and degree of critical analysis of each current event. Keep the focus on the quality of questions asked, as opposed to coming up with solutions or answers.

Watch each student's learning unfold, at his own pace, in her own words, and encourage ways to stretch individual learning.

**Hay'sxw'qa!** Tasha Henry, Victoria, B.C.

**Action:** Ask students to keep a reflection journal to record their thoughts after each lesson. Make sure they understand that the journal is for your eyes only! Encourage them to make connections to their own life, stories, and experiences. Make sure you don't use evaluative language when responding to their journal. A simple "thank you" for allowing you to witness their journey is sufficient.

# Lesson Sequence: Grades 8–10

## Introduction:

This lesson sequence on Orange Shirt Day and residential schools is meant to be an entry point for you and your class to analyze the deeper issues pertaining to Canada's investment in the Indian Act and the Residential School System. The learning activities are meant to encourage critical, historical thinking and thoughtful reflection. They are also an entry point to the long-term work of understanding the complexities surrounding Canada's relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

## Learning Outcomes:

- I can articulate the purpose of Orange Shirt Day, and how symbols and testimony work to encourage social change.
- I can articulate the history of residential schools in Canada and the ongoing intergenerational impact on Indigenous communities.

## Essential Questions:

- What does Orange Shirt Day symbolize?
- What is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?
- What is the work of reconciliation, and what does it mean to you?

## Lesson sequence snapshot:

- 1. Opening Activity** – Impromptu Memoir Writing
- 2. Pre-Reading Activity** – Listening/Speaking Circle
- 3. Orange Shirt Day**
  - Comprehension and Discussion Questions
  - Post-Reading Activities
  - Research/Inquiry Questions
- 4. The Difficult Truth About Residential Schools**
  - Comprehension and Discussion Questions
  - Post-Reading Activities
  - Research/Inquiry Questions
- 5. Closing Activity** – Sealing the Circle

# 1. Opening Activity: Impromptu Memoir Writing

1. Invite students to close their eyes and think back to a time when they felt worried or nervous about leaving home – perhaps their first day of school or camp. Ask students to remember as much about the event as possible: *How old were you? What did you feel? Where were you? Why did you feel trepidation? What beliefs or messages were swirling in your head?*
2. Have students use the prompts on the **Sensory Grid** organizer (p. 7) to help them touch on all the senses – including their emotional perception – of their memory. Then, ask students to write a **one-page memoir** describing their experience. They don't need to resolve the memory with a 'happy ending' – their goal is to create a sensory description of the event and the feelings, questions, and beliefs they experienced that day.
3. If you wish, have students self-evaluate their memoir using the **Descriptive Writing Comment Boxes** organizer.
4. In groups, have students read their memoirs to each other. As one group member reads, the other group members listen carefully. Do they notice any emotions dominating the memoir as they listen? (For example: *fear, sadness, loneliness, excitement.*) Have one listener record any key repeated emotions on sticky notes. Ask group members to notice: *Were any feelings or experiences common to all – or most – of the group's memoirs?*
5. Invite groups to post their sticky notes on the board. Have them cluster repeating emotions together, with the words repeated most often in the centre, to create a word cloud. Then, as a class, discuss: *Which emotions were most common among all the memoirs? What reasons can students suggest to explain why these emotions might have been most common? Explain.*
6. Finally, discuss with students what a **symbol** is. (*An object or marker representing a process, function, or feeling.*) Invite students to think about what symbol might capture the essence of their personal leaving-home memory, then have them draw or sketch it on the back of their one-page memoir.
7. You may wish to post their sketches around the class and conduct a **Gallery Walk** to prompt further reflection and discussion.

## Sensory Grid

Sense/Perception	Sentence starters
Sight	<p>I looked down and...</p> <p>I could see the colours...</p> <p>I noticed...</p> <p>Out of the corner of my eye...</p> <p>The lights looked...</p> <p>The shapes loomed with...</p>
Sound	<p>I heard the...</p> <p>The sharp sound of...</p> <p>The dull drone of...</p> <p>The silence...</p> <p>The sound of...</p>
Touch/Taste/Smell	<p>Under my fingers, I felt...</p> <p>The soft/hard surface...</p> <p>The ground felt...</p> <p>The texture of the...</p> <p>The air felt...</p> <p>I could taste...</p>
Emotional Perception	<p>I could feel the...</p> <p>I felt deep in my bones that...</p> <p>I couldn't ignore the feeling that...</p> <p>I noticed I...</p>

## Descriptive Writing Comment Boxes

Criteria	I could add more	I could add a little	I've added enough	I've added more than enough
I have included details from all my senses				
I have used a variety of descriptive language				

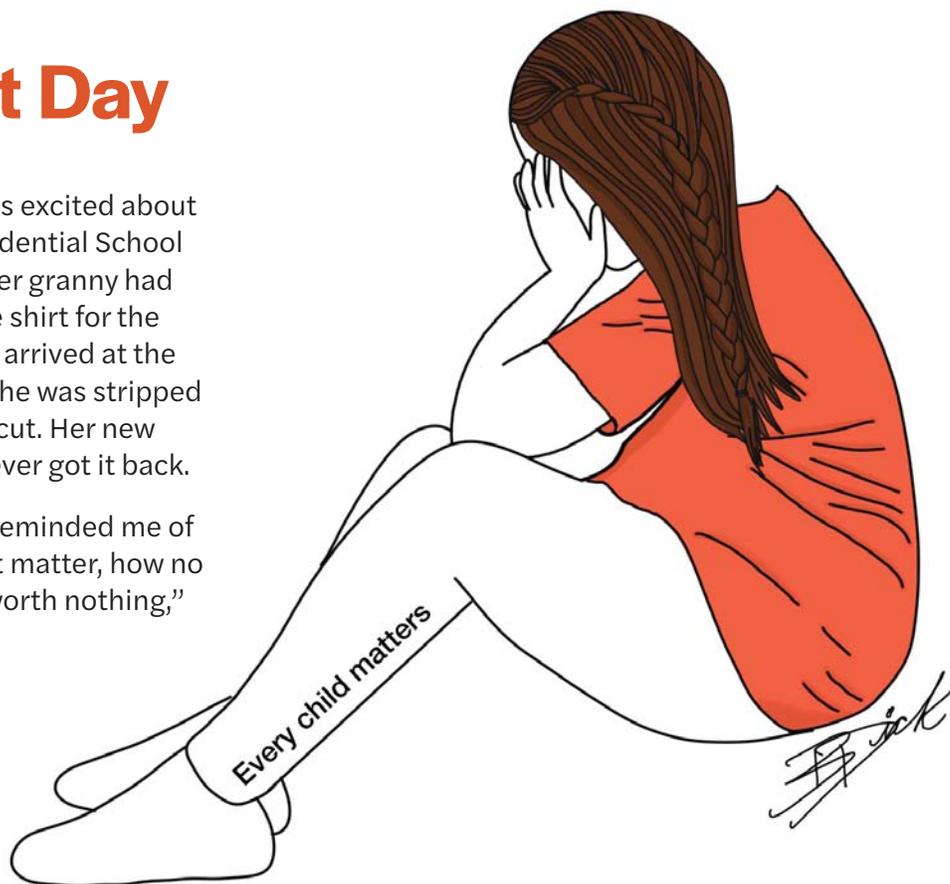
## 2. Pre-Reading Activity: Listening/Speaking Circle

1. Invite students to sit in a circle. Make sure nothing is in anyone's hands. Then, present a **talking piece**, such as a shell, a rock, or a special object. Explain that a talking piece signifies that only one person speaks at a time and that the others are listening. The talking piece is held in the hands of the speaker to give him or her strength to speak his or her truth; the others receive their courage through listening intently and respectfully. "*When one is talking, we are listening...*"
2. Engage students in a class discussion organized around these questions:
  - What is the difference between *listening* and *hearing*?
  - What is the difference between *speaking at*, or *sharing with*, someone?
  - What does listening look like? (*Focus on body language: Square shoulders, hands in lap or on knees, open body, eyes on the speaker.*)
  - What does active listening NOT look like? (You may wish to invite students to role play or dramatize disrespectful listening – crossed arms, eye rolls, groans, clenched fists, etc. Let them overexaggerate and have fun with the role play.)
3. Together with the class, brainstorm a **recipe for listening** on the board. Then, brainstorm a **recipe for sharing one's story**. (For example: *A recipe for listening – shoulders squarely facing the speaker, eyes on the speaker, open body language, nodding, smiling and saying "mmm..."*; *saying "thank you" at the end*; *A recipe for sharing – pick your words carefully, use eye contact, speak truthfully and from the heart, speak as loudly, slowly, and clearly as is possible for you.*)
4. Ask for volunteers to read or share their memoir to the group while holding the talking piece. Then, ask the speakers to reflect on what it was like to read their memoirs in this setting with a talking piece and recipes for listening and speaking (as opposed to standing in front of the class).
5. Ask the students what they already know about residential schools in Canada. Have a scribe record students' sharing on the board.
6. Residential schools left thousands of Indigenous children and their families with painful memories. Ask students to reflect on why it would be important to receive someone's difficult story in an open way. (*So that they feel heard, supported, not judged; to encourage further communication; to help people with their healing journeys.*) Explain to students that their job as listeners is not to offer solutions or to talk about an experience that they had that was similar, it is simply to accept the other's story with a nod, a smile, or a gesture to indicate that they are receiving the story or testimony. Offering a simple "thank you" after someone has shared their story is one way to show the speaker you have listened and received their story without giving your opinion.

# Orange Shirt Day

Six-year-old Phyllis Webstad was excited about her first day at St. Joseph's Residential School in Williams Lake, B.C. in 1973. Her granny had bought her a new, bright orange shirt for the occasion. But when she proudly arrived at the church-run residential school, she was stripped of her clothes, and her hair was cut. Her new shirt was taken away and she never got it back.

"The colour orange has always reminded me of that, and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared, and how I felt I was worth nothing," said Phyllis, forty years later.



## Phyllis' Story

*I went to the Mission for one school year in 1973/1974. I had just turned 6 years old. I lived with my grandmother on the Dog Creek reserve. We never had very much money, but somehow my granny managed to buy me a new outfit to go to the Mission school. I remember going to Robinson's store and picking out a shiny orange shirt. It had string laced up in front, and was so bright and exciting – just like I felt to be going to school!*

*When I got to the Mission, they stripped me, and took away my clothes, including the orange shirt! I never wore it again. I didn't understand why they wouldn't give it back to me, it was mine! The color orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared.*

*I was 13.8 years old and in grade 8 when my son Jeremy was born. Because my grandmother*

*and mother both attended residential school for 10 years each, I never knew what a parent was supposed to be like. With the help of my aunt, Agness Jack, I was able to raise my son and have him know me as his mother.*

*I went to a treatment centre for healing when I was 27 and have been on this healing journey since then. I finally get it, that the feeling of worthlessness and insignificance, ingrained in me from my first day at the mission, affected the way I lived my life for many years. Even now, when I know nothing could be further from the truth, I still sometimes feel that I don't matter. Even with all the work I've done!*

*I am honoured to be able to tell my story so that others may benefit and understand, and maybe other survivors will feel comfortable enough to share their stories.*

## One child's story

Between the late 1800s and 1996, the federal government forced many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children to leave the warmth of their families and attend cold, overcrowded residential schools where abuse was **rampant**. Children and parents often did not see each other for years. This went on for generations.

Every former residential school student had an experience similar to Phyllis'. That's why her story, told at an event in 2013, became the inspiration for a day

to honour the tens of thousands of residential school Survivors and acknowledge the painful **legacy** of the schools.

Observed on the last day of September – the time of year when Aboriginal children were taken from their families – Orange Shirt Day provides an opportunity for meaningful discussion about the impact of residential schools. And a new orange shirt, taken from one child, has become a symbol of the many losses experienced by Indigenous students, families,

and communities because of residential schooling. Among them? The loss of family and parental care, the loss of self-worth and well-being, the loss of language and culture, and the loss of freedom.

From its beginnings in Williams Lake five years ago, the movement has spread, and Orange Shirt Day is now held nationwide. This year, on September 30th, people across the country will wear orange shirts or other orange pieces of clothing to affirm that “every child matters.”

## Shining a light on a dark chapter

For years, this story of the painful past of residential schools was ignored in Canada's history books. Only now is it becoming part of the school curriculum. Calgary middle school principal Lynn Leslie says she was honoured to bring the subject to the school.

“We weren't connected when we were younger and I am proud to be part of Canada. Now we can have these conversations and be honest about how things occurred.”

A statement from Jane Philpott, Canada's Minister of Indigenous Services, and Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, said of last year's event, “On September 30 we urge everyone to not only wear orange but also

to take this opportunity to learn more about the legacy of Indian Residential Schools, to read the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission's** Final Report and Calls to Action.

“All Canadians have a role to play in **reconciliation**.”

Meanwhile, Phyllis Webstad, of the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation, is thrilled that the younger generation is learning about the past.

“That was my dream – for the conversation to happen annually about residential schools,” she said.

“I am blown away and I am humbled and honoured how it has taken off.”

### Did you know?

The Canadian government is creating a new statutory holiday to remember the legacy of residential schools and reflect on a path toward **reconciliation** with Indigenous Peoples. An appropriate date for this holiday is to be determined in consultation with Indigenous groups. One date that has been proposed is September 30th, Orange Shirt Day.

## Definitions

**legacy:** something such as a tradition or problem that exists as a result of something that happened in the past

**rampant:** existing, happening, or spreading in an uncontrolled way

**reconciliation:** the reestablishment of a broken relationship

**Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC):** a three-person panel established by the federal government in 2008 to find out what happened at Indian Residential Schools and inform all Canadians

### 3. Orange Shirt Day: Comprehension and Discussion Questions

1. Start with a traditional territorial acknowledgement to acknowledge the territory or Nation on whose land your school is situated. For example: “We acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the \_\_\_\_\_ (First Nation) peoples.” (You may find the interactive map at <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indigenous-territory/> to be a helpful resource.)
2. Invite students to sit in a circle. Distribute a copy of the “Orange Shirt Day” article (p. 9) to each student, then read the story together with the class.
3. After reading, engage students in a class discussion using these comprehension questions as a starting point:
  - How old was Phyllis when she went to residential school? (*6 years old.*)
  - What does an orange shirt symbolize? (*It symbolizes Phyllis’ experience of residential school, where she was made to feel that she didn’t matter. It symbolizes the many losses experienced by Indigenous students, families, and communities because of residential schooling. It also represents the belief that all children matter regardless of differences.*)
  - Why does Orange Shirt Day take place in September? (*It is the beginning of the school year in North America, and a time to remember that not all children felt – or feel – excited about going to school.*)
  - What Nation is Phyllis from? (*Stswecem’c Xgat’tem First Nation.*)
  - How did Phyllis feel on her first day of school? (*Excited, special, and hopeful.*)
  - What thought imprinted on her after school staff took away her orange shirt? (*That she didn’t matter, that no one there cared about her or the other children.*)
  - In what ways is the moment Phyllis’ orange shirt was taken away emblematic of the Residential School System? (*It’s emblematic of cultural and personal loss, loss of dignity, violence against children, cultural genocide, and institutional child abuse.*)
  - What reasons can you suggest to explain why Phyllis says that she “never knew what a parent was supposed to be like”? (*Her parents weren’t allowed to parent her, therefore she didn’t know how to parent.*)
4. If you wish, read Phyllis’ new picture book, “The Orange Shirt Story,” with students, showing and discussing the illustrations. (This book can be ordered at <https://medicinewheel.education/product/the-orange-shirt-story-shuswhap/>. To find out more about Phyllis’ new book, you can also check out this CBC report: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/orange-shirt-day-residential-school-childrens-book-1.4804657>. The official Orange Shirt Day website is found at <http://www.orangeshirtday.org/> )

## Post-Reading Activities

After reading the article, respond to the following quotes. Reference information in the article and use direct quotes to strengthen your reflection. Self-assess your response using the **Reflection Rubric** and the **KWL chart** (p. 13).

1. Victoria, B.C.-based Indigenous artist and carver Douglas “Bear” Horne (Tswaout) created this design for Orange Shirt Day t-shirts in 2016 as a gift to Victoria Orange Shirt Day event organizers Eddy Charlie and Kristin Spray:



*“Horne’s design features: a bear to help us follow the right path, an eagle to help us have a vision of a bright future, a hummingbird to keep our mind, body, and spirit healthy, and a flower to feed the connection of all these elements.”* (Orange Shirt Day Event Pamphlet) As you see it, what are the teachings of Bear’s design in relation to Orange Shirt Day? Explain.

2. Phyllis Webstad said, *“I am honoured to be able to tell my story so that others may benefit and understand, and maybe other Survivors will feel comfortable enough to share their stories.”* Read between the lines: What is the intention of Phyllis’ sharing? What is the ripple effect of her testimony? How can listening to testimony be seen as a bridge to learning? Draw a bridge and outline your thoughts in words and images, or write a reflection to communicate your thinking.

## Reflection Rubric: Add your comments in the appropriate boxes.

Criteria	I could add more	I could add a little	I've added enough	I've added more than enough
I've analyzed the question				
I have used a variety of sentence structures and word choices				
I have used supporting details from the article or other sources				
I have communicated clearly and concisely				

## KWL Chart: Use this chart to further reflect on your learning.

I used to think	I now think	My hope is...

## Research/Inquiry Questions

Use these thinking points as opportunities for further whole class or small group discussion, or for launching inquiries:

- What are the similarities and differences between *boarding schools* and *residential schools*?
- What are the similarities and differences between a *memoir* and *testimony*?
- Why are some stories too hard to share or speak out loud?
- What happens when we share a difficult story with a good listener?
- Why do you think in Indigenous cultures and traditions, stories carry the power to heal?
- Why do you think you should have permission to tell another person's story?

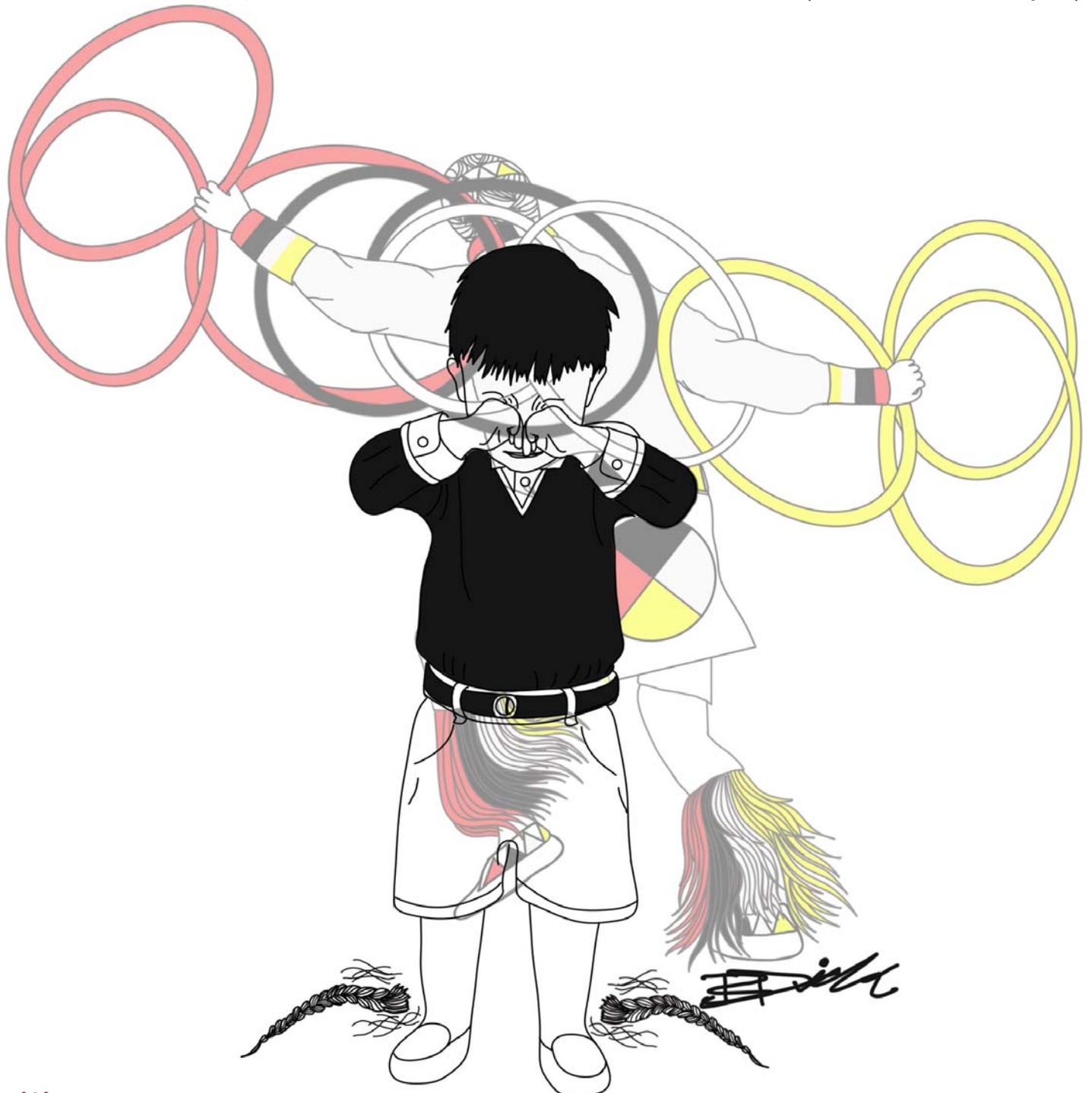
# The Difficult Truth About Residential Schools

For over a century, beginning in the 1880s, more than 150,000 Aboriginal children were taken from their homes and sent to government-funded, church-run “Indian Residential Schools.” The last of these schools, outside

Regina, closed its doors in 1996. In 1931, at the height of the residential school era, there were 80 schools operating in Canada.

The aim of the schools was to “take the Indian out of the child.”

According to the thinking of the day, it would be easier to assimilate First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children into mainstream Canadian society if they were removed from the influence of their parents and community, kept



in schools for most of the year, civilized, “Christianized,” and not allowed to speak their native languages.

This government policy was based on a **colonial** world view that Euro-Canadian society and Christian religions were superior to Aboriginal cultures. Only now, many decades later, has Canada acknowledged that the treatment of Aboriginal children in residential schools was a historical injustice that some call **cultural genocide**.

## Life in a residential school

Canada’s history books have largely ignored the shameful story of residential schools.

“I absolutely think it’s important for kids to learn it in school. It’s been a hidden part of our history,” says one Anishinaabe daughter of a residential school Survivor.

While it’s important to note that some students had positive experiences at residential schools, most did not. The schools were more like violent prisons for inmates than schools for children.

Students were bullied and abused. In addition to physical and emotional abuse, some children report being sexually molested by those who were supposed to care for them.

Students were severely punished if they spoke their Aboriginal languages. Letters home were

## Chanie Wenjack’s Story

“The Secret Path” is the name of an award-winning album of songs, as well as a graphic novel and an animated video adaptation. They tell the story of Chanie Wenjack, a 12-year-old Anishinaabe boy who ran away from a residential school near Kenora, Ontario in October, 1966, hoping to reunite with his family 600 kilometres away. He was found beside the railway tracks a week later, dead from starvation and exposure. The music and artwork were created by Canadian rock musician Gord Downie and artist Jeff LeMire.

written in English, which many parents couldn’t read. When the students returned home, they often found they didn’t belong anymore.

The schools were crowded, unsanitary, and cold. Thousands of children died at the schools, but nobody knows for sure how many. They succumbed to smallpox, measles, flu, and tuberculosis.

The individual stories are heartbreaking.

Michael Cachagee says he was four years old when he was sent to a residential school in northern Ontario. During the 12 years he was there he never celebrated a birthday, and was never hugged or praised. Instead, he was beaten and sexually abused.

It took two failed marriages, years of alcohol and drug abuse, and therapy before he started to come to grips with what happened to him.

His younger brother never did. He was three when he arrived at the school. “He came out when he

was 16 and the rest of his life was just a mess with alcoholism. He never had a chance – all because he was sent off to a residential school,” says Mr. Cachagee.

Ken Young, who was taken from his home at the age of eight in the 1950s, remembers public beatings at the Prince Albert Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan. Children had their heads shaved and their legs shackled in pyjamas because they had tried to go home. The school was more like a prison.

“I thought it was normal because I was just a young guy,” says the Winnipeg lawyer today. “Later, I realized how bad that was that adults would treat children like that.”

It took a long time to get rid of his anger. “I was ashamed to be who I was because that’s what we were taught.”

## Intergenerational fallout

“The closing of residential schools did not bring their story to an

### Definitions

**colonial:** relating to a system or period in which one country rules another

**cultural genocide:** the wiping out of one group’s culture by another group

**legacy:** something such as a tradition or problem that exists as a result of something that happened in the past

end. The **legacy** of the schools continues to this day,” states the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report commissioned by the federal government in 2008.

Many of the problems faced by Indigenous Peoples today are rooted in traumatic residential school experiences. Students were left with feelings of low self-worth, anger, and resentment.

“Traumatized by their school experiences, many succumbed to addictions and found themselves among the **disproportionate** number of Aboriginal people who come in contact with the law,” says the TRC report.

The ripple effect of this trauma has impacted not just the students themselves but also subsequent generations. Aboriginal youth who were not raised in their own homes never learned how to be caring and responsible parents to their children.

“The destructive beliefs and behaviours of many students have been passed on to their children as physical and mental health issues,” says the TRC report.

Canada’s Indigenous population now has high poverty rates and unemployment. It suffers higher levels of poor health, higher mortality rates, higher rates of accidental deaths, and dramatically higher rates of suicide.

Canadians spend billions each year responding to the **intergenerational trauma** of residential schools. That includes money spent on crisis interventions related to child welfare, family violence, ill health, and crime.

Some Indigenous leaders say that when we speak of residential school trauma we should also note the **resilience** of Indigenous Peoples. The people and cultures were badly damaged by years of historical injustice, but they continue to exist. Many Survivors are strong, courageous, and determined to heal and move forward.

“We also need to share stories of strength, resilience, and excellence,” says Rachel Mishenene, an Ojibway who works with the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario.

## Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the reestablishment of a broken relationship. It’s about resolving differences, accepting the past, and working together to build a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples in Canada.

For that to happen, according to the TRC report, “there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour.”

Many church organizations involved with the schools have apologized. “I am sorry, more than I can say, that we were a part of a system which took you and your children from home and family,” said the apology from the Anglican Church. The letter from the Canadian Conference

### The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

The three-person TRC, headed by Justice Murray Sinclair, spent seven years examining one of the darkest chapters in Canada’s history. Its mandate was to inform all Canadians about what happened at Indian Residential Schools. It visited hundreds of communities and heard testimony from 7000 survivors.

The TRC’s final report, released in 2015, contained 94 Calls to Action to address the legacy of the schools and move towards reconciliation.

## Definitions

**disproportionate:** something that is bigger or smaller than it should be in relation to something else

**intergenerational trauma:** trauma that is transferred from the first generation of trauma survivors to the second and further generations of offspring of the survivors

**resilience:** the ability to become healthy, happy, or strong again after an illness, disappointment, or other problem

of Catholic Bishops read, “We face the past and sincerely ask for forgiveness.”

In 2007, the federal government announced a \$1.9 billion compensation package for those who were forced to attend residential schools. Then in June 2008, then-prime minister Stephen Harper made a historic apology to residential school Survivors.

For his part, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has promised to fulfill all of the Calls to Action outlined in the TRC report. In 2018, he announced the government’s plan to overhaul its legal framework with Indigenous Peoples in Canada to give them stronger rights and greater control over their own destiny.

“Reforms are needed to ensure that – among other things - Indigenous Peoples might once again have confidence in a system that has failed them all too often in the past,” he said.

## All Canadians have a role to play

Today, Canadians have the opportunity to learn the difficult truth about what went on in Canada’s residential schools and the harm that was inflicted. But once we know the truth, what do we do about it? The Truth and Reconciliation report recognizes that the path towards reconciliation won’t be easy, or quick.

“It requires an understanding that the most harmful impacts of residential schools have been the loss of pride and self-respect of Aboriginal people, and the lack of respect that non-aboriginal people have been raised to have for their Aboriginal neighbours,” says the final report.

“This is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian problem,” stated Justice Sinclair. “Because at the same time that Aboriginal people were being **demeaned**

in the schools and their culture and language were being taken away from them and they were being told that they were inferior ... and that they were unworthy of being respected – that very same message was being given to the non-aboriginal children in the public schools as well.”

Non-aboriginal Canadians need to explore their own biases, and the stereotypes of Aboriginal people that they were brought up with. As the TRC warns, “the beliefs and attitudes that were used to justify the establishment of residential schools are not things of the past.

“Only a real commitment to reconciliation and change will reverse the trends and lay the foundation for a truly just and equitable nation.”

## The Witness Blanket

The Witness Blanket is a 12-metre-long art installation that recognizes the **atrocities** of the Indian Residential School System. Inspired by the idea of a blanket, which offers warmth and protection, the project resembles a giant “quilt” made out of hundreds of objects from Canada’s residential schools, gathered from across the country. They include old doors

and pieces of stained glass, belts used to punish Aboriginal children, a child’s shoe, braids of hair, a hockey trophy, a doorknob, a photograph of a child, and a letter from parents asking that their children come home. Visitors can use a mobile app to learn more about each item.

The artwork toured the country for four years until the spring

of 2018, when the tour was suspended due to wear and tear on the monument.

The artist was master carver Carey Newman, who is of British, Kwagiulth, and Salish descent. He calls his piece “a testament to the human ability to find something worthwhile, even beautiful, amidst the tragedies, memories and ruins of the Residential School Era.”

### Definitions

**atrocious:** a cruel and violent act

**demean:** to make people have less respect for someone

## 4. The Difficult Truth About Residential Schools: Comprehension and Discussion Questions

1. Start with a traditional territorial acknowledgement to acknowledge the territory or Nation on whose land your school is situated. For example: “We acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the \_\_\_\_\_ (First Nation) peoples.” (You may find the interactive map at <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indigenous-territory/> to be a helpful resource.)
2. Invite students to share what they have already learned, or what they remember, from the previous lesson.
3. Provide students with a copy of the article “The Difficult Truth About Residential Schools” (p. 15). Have students read the article individually, or read the article together as a class.
4. Pause during reading to reflect on the following discussion questions as a class, or use them as prompts for discussion after reading:
  - Re-read the statement that the aim of the Indian Residential School System (IRSS) was to “take the Indian out of the child.” As you see it, what values underlie this statement? Was the Canadian government successful? Why or why not?
  - What is your understanding of the term ‘cultural genocide’? What happens to people who are not permitted to celebrate their culture?
  - Residential school Survivor Ken Young says, “*I was ashamed to be who I was because that’s what we were taught.*” As you see it, in what ways might shame hinder a person’s development and feelings of happiness?
  - Why do you think that some Indigenous leaders, when speaking of residential school trauma, would also like the resiliency of Indigenous Peoples to be noted and celebrated? How is Orange Shirt Day a day that marks the resiliency of residential school Survivors?
  - What is your understanding of the term ‘reconciliation’? What would reconciliation look like, if and when it is achieved? Explain.
  - Why do you suppose reconciliation is a process directed at non-indigenous Canadians? What does reconciliation mean to you? Your class? Your school?
  - How has the Canadian government attempted to reconcile with Indigenous Peoples? Use two concrete examples from the article.
  - Respond to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s announcement that the government will overhaul its legal framework with Canada’s Indigenous Peoples. As you see it, what is the significance of this announcement? Explain.
  - For what reasons do you support a statutory holiday to remember the legacy of residential schools? For what reasons are you opposed to a statutory holiday to remember the legacy of residential schools? What authentic ways of building better relationships with Indigenous Peoples in our communities can you suggest? Explain.

## Post-Reading Activities

After reading the article, respond to the following questions. Where possible, reference information in the article and use direct quotes to strengthen your reflection. Self-assess your response using the **Reflection Rubric** and the **KWL chart** (p. 22).

1. Consider the following quote: *“Non-aboriginal Canadians need to explore their own biases, and the stereotypes of Aboriginal people that they were brought up with. As the TRC warns, ‘the beliefs and attitudes that were used to justify the establishment of residential schools are not things of the past.’”*
  - What is your understanding of the term ‘bias’? As you see it, how do biases affect our relationships with others?
  - What is your understanding of a colonial, settler, or Eurocentric view?
  - According to this quote, what is the work of non-indigenous people in Canada?
  - As you see it, what is our civic responsibility to the past?
2. Create your own response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by visiting the TRC website at <http://www.trc.ca/websites/reconciliation/index.php?p=332> and developing your “personal ribbon” – a personal statement explaining how reconciliation matters to you.
3. Eddy Charlie, a residential school Survivor, together with Kristin Spray, helped organize Victoria, B.C.’s first Orange Shirt Day event. Eddy Charlie asks us to reflect on the following question this Orange Shirt Day: “How does trauma affect the way people act around each other?” Reference the information in the article and use direct quotes to strengthen your reflection. Then consider: How does intergenerational trauma affect individuals, families, and communities?



4. Study Coast Salish artist Brianna Dick's illustration for the 'The Difficult Truth About Residential Schools' article.
  - a. Using a **Think, Pair, Share** structure, discuss these guiding questions about symbolism and the power of art to shape thinking:
    - What feelings does this image evoke?
    - How are the two figures in the image (*the hoop dancer and the little boy*) interacting?
    - What do you suppose the hoop colours (*yellow, red, white, and black*) might represent?
    - What reasons can you suggest to explain why the dancer is transparent?
    - What are the two objects lying at the feet of the boy? What might they symbolize?
    - What is the coloured (*yellow, red, white, and black*) wheel on the back of the dancer? What might it symbolize?
  - b. Brianna says of her illustration: *"I thought I would honour my brothers and sisters in the interior [of B.C.] who use Pow Wow and the Medicine Wheel as their way of connecting with their roots. I did leave the little boy more transparent so the hoop dancer behind him can be seen as our people's strength and resiliency, and especially as a reminder that we have culture still inside us, despite the trauma of residential school."* Respond to Brianna's explanation. As you see it, how does art tell a story?
  - c. Research the significance of the Medicine Wheel and Pow Wow for specific First Nations. Then, consider: Why do you think Brianna chose these images to help you think about the history of residential schools in Canada?

## Reflection Rubric: Add your comments in the appropriate boxes.

Criteria	I could add more	I could add a little	I've added enough	I've added more than enough
I've analyzed the question				
I have used a variety of sentence structure and word choice				
I have used supporting details from the article or other sources				
I have communicated clearly and concisely				

## KWL Chart: Use this chart to further reflect on your learning.

I used to think	I now think	My hope is...

## Research/Inquiry Questions:

1. What is the significance of storytelling according to Indigenous/Aboriginal cultures around the world? <https://firstnationspedagogy.ca/storytelling.html>
2. What does language tell us about values? View the primary documents contained in the following pdf compiled by the First Nations Education Steering Committee: <http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/IRSR11-12-DE-1876.pdf> Identify Euro-centric and colonial language in reference to Indigenous Peoples and culture. Then, consider: How does the Indian Act continue to shape Indigenous and non-indigenous relations and policies today?
3. What role can art play in reconciling painful histories? What is the work of witnessing? Research Carey Newman's work on "The Witness Blanket" and watch the short film found at <http://witnessblanket.ca/#!/project/>. How do artifacts tell a story?
4. What is the work of listening to testimony? How was this an integral piece of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission? Explore the website "Where are the Children?" found at <http://wherearethechildren.ca/en/>. Preview the Survivor testimonies and choose several that would be suitable for your class or age group. Have students listen to the stories of Survivors.
5. What does reconciliation look like? Watch the Murray Sinclair video "What is reconciliation?" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swo9flbACho> and review the Indian Residential Schools Statement of Apology by then-prime minister Stephen Harper at <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015677/1100100015680>. What do you observe in these videos? As you see it, what is the work of reconciliation?
6. What was the role of the church in residential schooling? Was there a residential school near where you live? Check out this interactive map: <http://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/beyond-94-residential-school-map/>
7. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released 94 Calls to Action. Do you know any of these Calls? Can you guess which areas of government, policy, or public service might be called to act? Research the Calls to Action: [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

## 7. Closing Activity: Sealing the Circle

1. Close the learning circle at the end of each day or lesson with a verbal check-in. Use the talking piece to signify the speaker. Ask your students to comment on how they are feeling, or to comment on something that impacted them in the lesson(s). If students are feeling triggered or emotional, always give the option to 'pass' or to hold up fingers (out of five) representing how they are feeling in the moment.
2. End with a territory acknowledgment, and some sincere thanks to the Survivors for sharing their painful stories, and to your students for listening respectfully and entering into this work with a sincere attitude.
3. Ask your students to fill out an 'exit slip' on a sticky note or a slip of paper that they can fold up and put in a jar. On the exit slips they could articulate a 'burning question' or a topic they want to learn more about. You can also use the KWL chart as an exit slip. Use the exit slips as a way to know how to assess your lesson and how proceed in this work.



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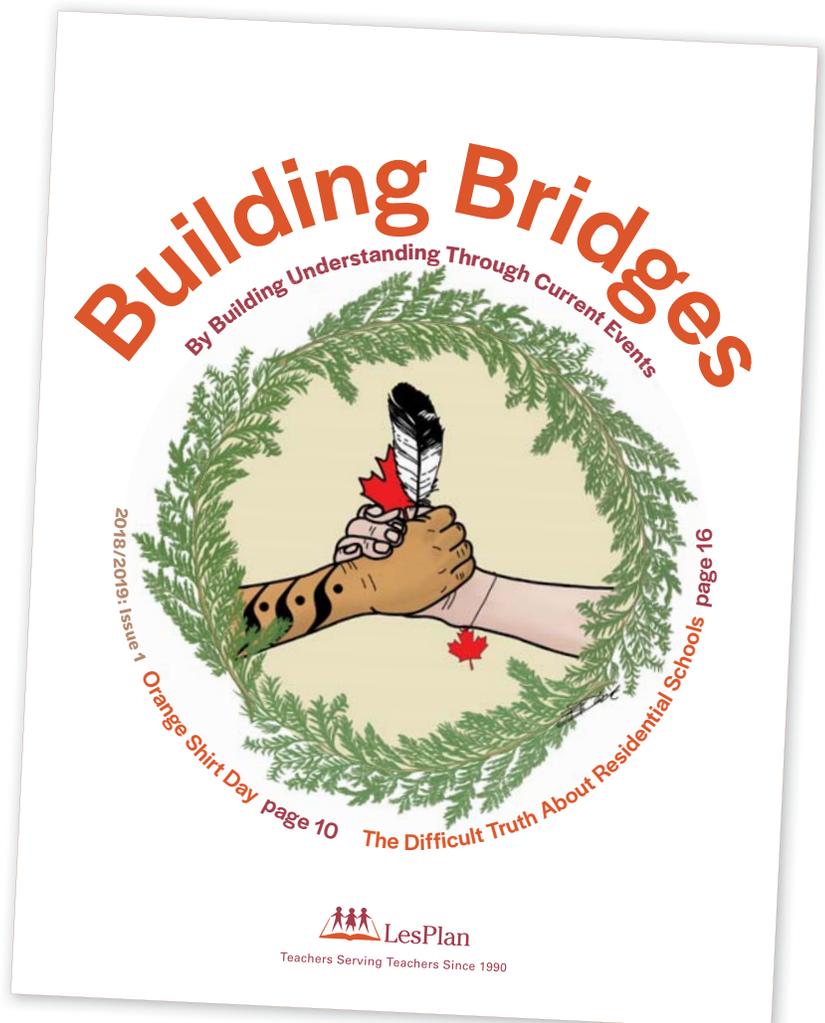
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