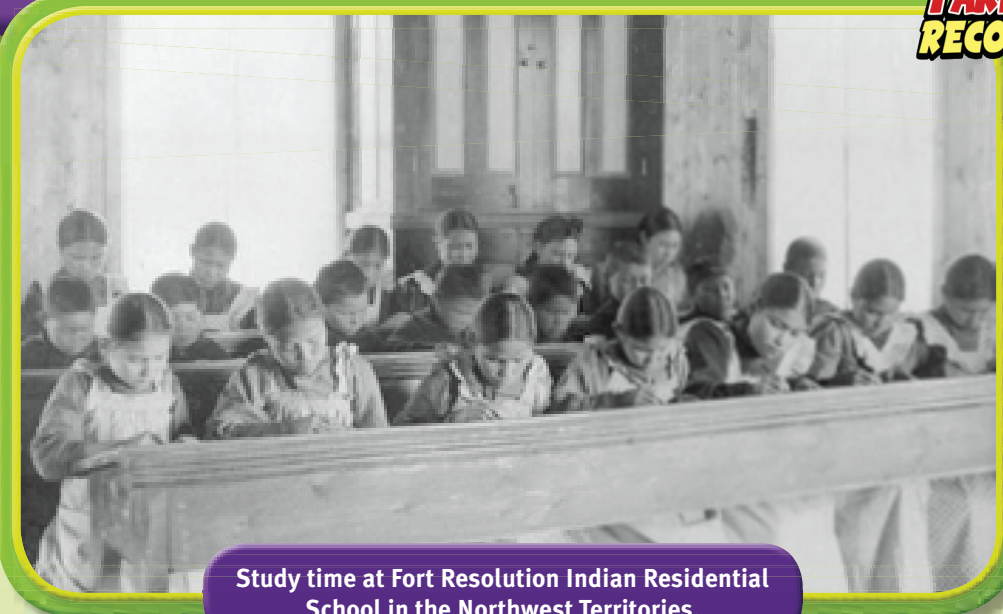
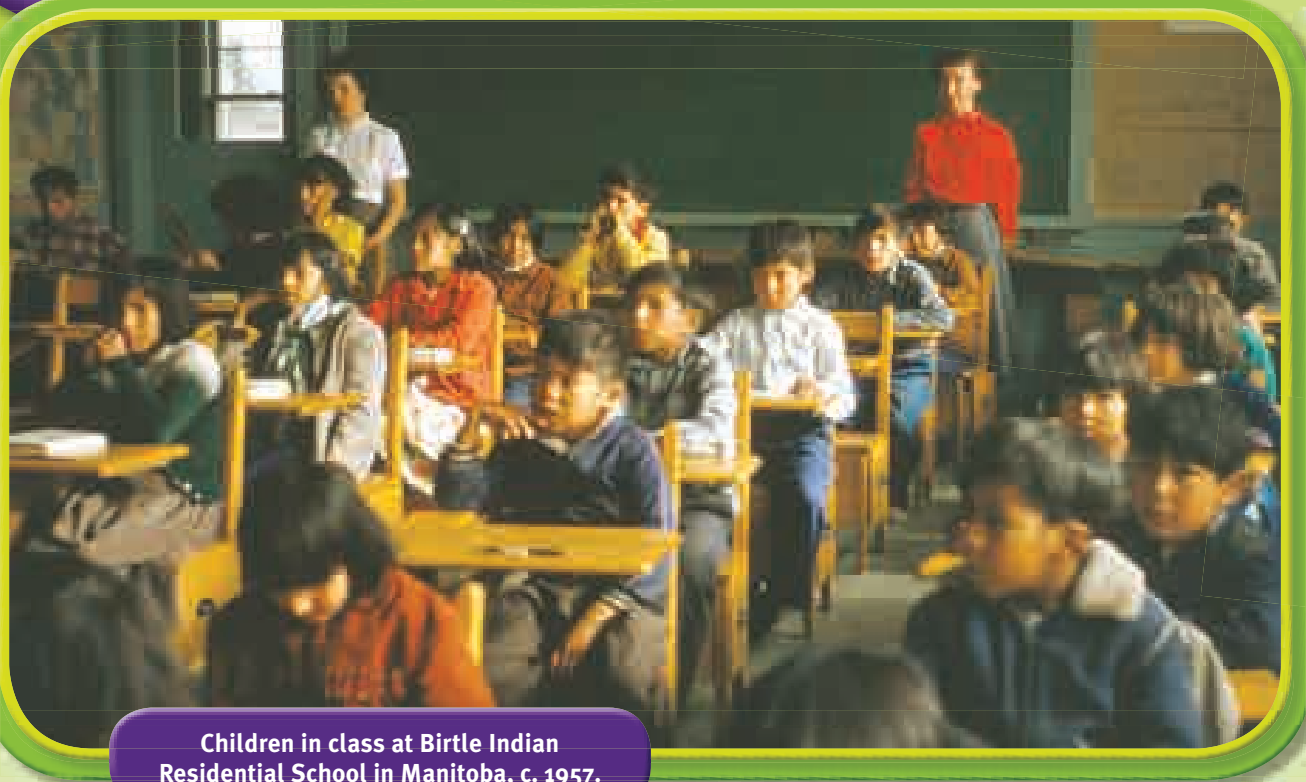


Changing the Legacy of Residential Schools



Study time at Fort Resolution Indian Residential School in the Northwest Territories.



Children in class at Birtle Indian Residential School in Manitoba, c. 1957.

When the federal government apologized to residential school Survivors in 2008, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper admitted that the government wanted to assimilate

Indigenous children into colonial society in an attempt to “civilize” them. Today, Survivors of residential schools are trying to heal from the experience.

Taking Action

Orange Shirt Day

When Phyllis arrived at her residential school at the age of six, all of her clothes were taken, including the orange shirt her grandmother had bought her for the first day of school. Phyllis has spoken publicly about how the colour orange reminded her throughout her life of how the school taught her that she and the other kids didn't matter. She started a national movement, Orange Shirt Day, to acknowledge residential school Survivors and to show that every child matters. Orange Shirt Day is recognized all across Canada every year, on September 30th. What will you, your class, or your school do to honour Survivors next September 30th?



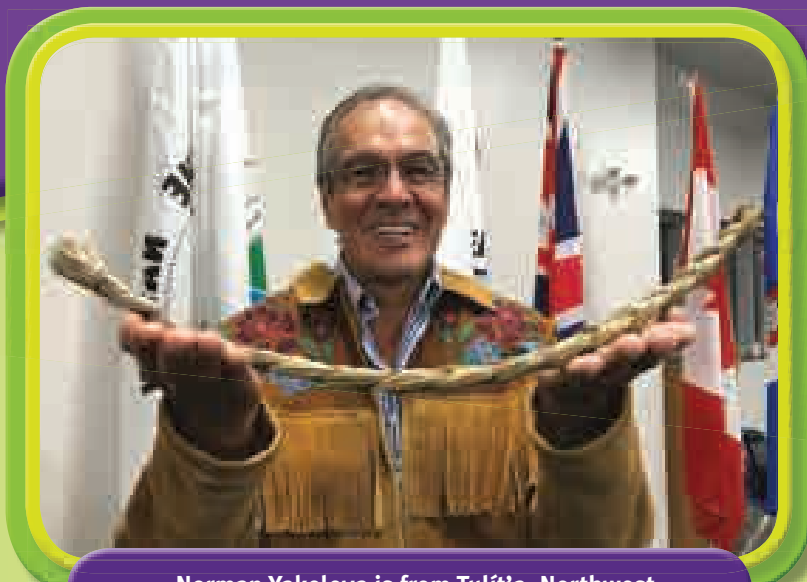
“We need to speak about it; we need to learn about it.”

—Phyllis Webstad, founder of the Orange Shirt Day movement

For over 100 years, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children were removed from their homes and communities by the Canadian government and forced to attend residential schools. They were forbidden to speak their languages, or practise traditional customs and spirituality. They lived in substandard conditions and experienced abuse. They did not see examples of normal family life.

When Indigenous children left the schools, they often felt that they did not belong in their own communities. They didn't have the traditional skills to help their parents, and they had been taught to feel ashamed of their Indigenous identity. Racism and stereotypes meant they also did not feel welcome in Canadian society. Many residential schools did not provide good quality education, so those who attended the schools were often unable to succeed in higher education or the workplace.

Norman Yakeleya's Story



Norman Yakeleya is from Tulít'a, Northwest Territories, and now lives in Yellowknife. He was a councillor, chief, and former Member of the Legislative Assembly for the Sahtu in the Northwest Territories Legislature. In 2018, he was elected national chief of the Dene Nation. At the age of six, Norman entered Grollier Hall residential school, run by the Roman Catholic Church in Inuvik, Northwest Territories.

angry. When I went into the sweat lodge, the Elder said I had to pray for the courage to forgive. Part of the healing process is letting go. If you don't allow yourself to forgive, you stay stuck in the past, instead of living your life with the path in front of you. When you walk through life with the path in front of you, you can see where you walk, because the path is there.

Q: What are some things that your community is doing to address the legacy of residential schools?

NY: The education system right now does not reflect the Traditional Knowledge of the Elders. There are one- or two-week programs on the land, but that's different from sustaining yourself on the land.

An Elder called me from one of the small communities. He wanted to get the young people together with the Elders and start mapping out our trails—where to go, where not to go, and which areas are forbidden because of our traditional stories. These young people have academic knowledge and a strong desire to know who they are and what they are—but they don't have the Traditional Knowledge. We want to ensure that this knowledge continues on. We are planning a week-long conference that brings together Elders, students, anthropologists, and archaeologists. We want to record the stories and presentations so that we can preserve our history, knowledge, heritage, culture, and spirituality for future generations.

Q: What do you want people in Canada to know about your time in residential school?

NY: They taught me to listen to a teacher, do geometry and chemistry, how to write proper English. I learned a little bit of piano, hockey. I studied, but I didn't learn about drumming or where our songs come from, how our language is structured, the importance of the Elders' teachings, the importance of being one mind. So when I went back home at age 15, I was locked out by my own people because I didn't know how to set a fishnet, how to set a snare. There was a price to pay.

When I came out of residential school, I was in a pattern of blaming, manipulating, and living my life as a victim. I wasn't a very nice guy. But all those behaviours, it just covered up my denial about who I was and what residential school did in my life. I was so

Q: Do you think that Canada is working differently with Indigenous Peoples now?

NY: [Prime Minister] Trudeau said he wanted to create a new relationship with Indigenous Peoples. Part of that is recognizing Indigenous rights. We need to look at our nation-to-nation relationship. This is an opportunity to sit down and have a discussion about residential schools

in Canada, and the impact it had on communities, people, our cultures. We have to talk about what's continuing the intergenerational impacts. We have the inherent right to our language, our culture, our own systems. We can work nation to nation.

Taking Action

A Path Forward to a New Relationship

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has said that Canada must change the way it works with Indigenous Peoples and communities. Part of that is understanding the rights that Indigenous Peoples have. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was created by the United Nations. It's a document that explains the rights of Indigenous Peoples around the world. UNDRIP contains 46 articles that describe specific rights and the actions governments must take to protect them. All Canadians can take action to respect these rights. We can learn about what these rights are and ask our government to fully implement them.



▲ On August 9, 2017, Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild from the Ermineskin Cree community in Maskwacis, Alberta, opened an event about UNDRIP for the 10th anniversary of the Declaration.

UNDRIP has four important themes:

- The right to **self-determination**. That's the right of Indigenous Peoples to decide what is best for them and their communities.
- The right to be **recognized as distinct peoples**.
- The right to **free, prior, and informed consent**. This means the right to be consulted and to make decisions about anything that may affect their rights—freely, without pressure, with all the facts, and before any decisions are made.
- The right to be **free of discrimination**.

Think About It!

Why is it important for the education system to include Indigenous histories, experiences, and perspectives?