

Breaking the Silence

Breaking the Silence is an activity that creates an opportunity to literally 'break the silence' and begin the difficult discussion about the truths of Indian Residential School history and ongoing impacts.

In preparation for the activity teachers will print the pages from the link below and cut the dotted lines to separate the statements of fact about Indian Residential Schools.

Fold each statement into a small bundle and insert one statement into each uninflated balloon. Blow up the balloon to have a full set of balloons ready for the activity.

To begin the activity, have each participant who is willing to read the information that is contained in the balloon pick up on balloon and sit in a circle with all of the students in the class. Invite participants to volunteer to take turns, one at a time, breaking their balloons and reading the statement from inside the balloon. Remind the students that the sound of the balloons breaking, as well as the sound of their voices reading, represents the breaking of the silence about the hidden history of Canada's Indian Residential School system.

Once all balloons have been broken and all statements have been read ask each participant to add some information, a statement or a thought to expand what has been shared in the circle about Indian Residential Schools.

Note: You will need 9 balloons for the 9 statements to be printed. If you would like to add more statements, ensure that you have enough balloons to accommodate the number of statements.

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There are currently 80,000 residential school survivors alive in Canada. There may be someone walking or sitting right beside you in your daily life who went to residential school.

You can be in your 20's right now, in Canada and be a residential school survivor. That means you actually went to residential school. This is not something that happened way back in the past.

The Canadian government took children as young as three-years-old away from their families and put them in institutions called Indian Residential Schools. The government's goal was to "kill the Indian in the child." That means the government wanted to take everything that made an Aboriginal person who they are, out of that person so that they would look, act, and live like the European government people that made these laws.

In 1879 the government official Nicholas Flood-Davin visited the Carlisle Industrial School in Pennsylvania to study how the government of the USA had been so "successful" at assimilating Native Americans in their boarding schools. (To assimilate means to make a person exactly like the people who are making the laws.)

Project of Heart is an education program that students across Canada are using to learn more about the truth of the history and legacy (that means how it affects us even today) of Indian Residential Schools in Canada

Adapted from Breaking the Silence activity by M. Missyabit and G. Whitford (Winnipeg School Division)

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The government of the USA got their model (idea) for their boarding school system (which is called Indian Residential Schools in Canada) from the St. Augustine's Prison for Men in Augusta, Florida!

In 1907 Dr. Peter Bryce visited Indian Residential Schools in the prairies. He wrote a report called "Canada's National Crime" that told the government that between 25% to 75% of the children who went to residential schools died while they were there. The government took away his position and hid the facts from Canadians!

For over 160 years First Nations families and communities had to suffer the devastation of having the government take their children away. The communities were very damaged because they were grieving all of the time. It is impossible to imagine what it would be like to live in a community where there were NO CHILDREN, only babies and adults. This has caused unbelievable harm to First Nations families. The government covered up this truth so that other Canadians would not know it was happening.

Today First Nations and Aboriginal people across Canada are working hard to regain their language, cultural practices, and traditional ways of living and learning. Many Canadians look to Aboriginal people for the wisdom and knowledge that is needed to live in this country and to protect our environment. Learning about the truth helps us to understand how it has been possible to have Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people live side by side in this country for so many years and not really know one another. The learning that we do today will help us to understand each other because now we know the truth.