2002 CURRICULUM UPDATE

### **SECTION 1: IN THE BEGINNING**

(2002)

### LANGUAGE ARTS, HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES

### **MAIN IDEA**

The residential school system had devastating effects upon many First Nations children. Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities are still healing from the abuse many of their members suffered at the residential schools.

### **LEARNING OJECTIVES:**

- Students will be introduced to the history of the residential school system.
- Students will explore how residential schools have affected Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities and all First Nations communities across Canada.

#### **ACTIVITIES**

- 1. Divide students into groups of five. Rotate groups each day to a different center. Five centers total.
- 2. As a group have students complete the work that is assigned to them on their *Task Cards*.
- 3. On the sixth day have students present their skits to the class. (Give extra time to practice if needed).

#### **ASSESSMENT**

**Formative:** Group work, participation and final day presentation of their group skit.

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### TEACHER INFORMATION SHARE WITH THE CLASS

### RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS BACKGROUND

Residential schools started operating in Canada prior to Confederation. The churches established the first schools as part of their missionary work. The Government of Canada played a role in the administration of the residential school system as early as 1874. The reason was mainly to meet its obligations, under the **Indian Act**, to provide an education to Aboriginal people, and to assist with their integration into the broader Canadian society. The last of the federally run schools closed in 1996. It is now widely understood that this system has contributed to weakening the identity of First Nations. It did this by separating children from their families and communities, and preventing them from speaking their own languages, and from learning about their heritage and cultures.

Residential schools had a tragic effect upon many First Nations families. They disrupted the smooth transmission of beliefs, skills and knowledge from one generation to the next. The schools separated the children of First Nations from their culture and prevented them from speaking their language and learning about their cultures and traditions. This system reflected mainstream attitudes of racial and cultural superiority. The experience of these schools has left a legacy of personal pain for former residents that continues to reverberate in communities today.

Many of those First Nations children who attended residential schools underwent a devastating process of enforced assimilation. For some of the children in certain schools, the normal and healthy process of change and growth slowed, because conditions were physically, psychologically and spiritually unhealthy. By the 1950s, the federal government began to realize that the residential school system could not be maintained. Many of the children leaving the schools did not have the proper education or skills to fit into mainstream Canadian society and they found it difficult to readjust to their own communities.

The effects of the residential schools did not stop when the children finally left the school. The physical, sexual and spiritual abuse suffered by many children at the schools spilled back into some First Nations communities. At residential schools, many children learned that adults wielded power and control through abuse. As a result of these childhood lessons, many former students have inflicted abuse upon their own children. The incidents of physical and sexual abuse are often higher in certain First Nations communities than the rest of Canada. Many former students also find themselves struggling with their identities, after being taught for so long that their own culture was worthless. Finally, many former students found it difficult to raise their own children, because they had been deprived of any parental role models.

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# TEACHER INFORMATION SHARE WITH THE CLASS continued...

The federal government and churches have acknowledged the damage done to Aboriginal communities as a result of the residential school system. First Nations have demanded, and received, apologies from the federal government and a number of churches. Some former students are also seeking redress through the criminal justice system.

In its report released in 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended that the government and churches offer apologies to residential school survivors, that people be compensated for the abuse they suffered and that a public inquiry be struck to examine the treatment of First Nations students at residential schools. In response to the Report, the federal government issueda statement of reconciliation in which it apologized to those individuals who suffered abuse while at residential school. The government also granted \$350 million to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation to support healing initiatives that address the legacy of abuse left by the residential school system. The government has also been investigating the merits of various dispute resolution approaches for resolving the civil claims being brought against the Crown and the churches involved.

Today, most First Nations run their own schools. They are reclaiming the education of their children and attempting to put the residential school experience in the past.

Source: http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ks/pdf/e\_guide3.pdf

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### **CENTRE 1**

### TRYING TO ADJUST

- **Individual Assignment:** Try to recall an experience in which you had to make a major adjustment, like the children had to make when they went to residential school.
- · Record your thoughts on paper.
- Write a short essay or story (2-3 pages), comparing your experience to those of First Nations children at residential school.

First Nations children were forced to make serious adjustments when they arrived at residential school.

Often children were sent far away to a residential school, and siblings were separated according to age level. Children were often punished for speaking their First Nations languages. Those who did not speak English or French were therefore often unable to communicate verbally to anyone in authority. They were forced to deal with loneliness, sickness, confusion and abuse on their own.

Many former students have reported that they had to cope with the suffocating heat or fierce cold of the buildings. They missed their parents and other adult members of their families. Some also suffered because of inadequate food, rigid discipline, mental and physical abuse and the loss of personal freedoms and individual will. They were often punished for engaging in any cultural and spiritual ceremonies and practices.

Source: http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ks/pdf/e\_guide3.pdf



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#### CENTRE 2

# HATED STRUCTURE: INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL POEM SHUBENACADIA, N.S.

- Choose someone to be the recorder.
- **Group:** In the poem, the poet returns to the residential school in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. As a group discuss and answer each question on the 'Poem Question Sheet'.

Hated Structure: Indian Residential School Schubenacadie, Nova Scotia



I lost my talk
I lost my talk
The talk you took away.
When I was a little girl
At Shubenacadie School

You snatched it away:

I speak like you

I think like you

I create like you

The scrambled ballad, about my world.

Two ways I Talk Both ways I say, Your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask, Let me find my talk So I can teach you about me.



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CENTRE 2

Name:
POEM QUESTIONS
After reading the Hated Structure: Indian Residential School Poem take some time to answer the following questions.
What do you think the poem means?
What is the poet's opinion of the residential school?
What memories does the school stir in the poet?
What type of emotions is she expressing when she remembers the school.
What does the school represent to the poet?

Source: http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ks/pdf/e\_guide3.pdf

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### **CENTRE 3**

### THE ROLE OF THE ELDERS

First Nations had well-developed systems of education before the arrival of Europeans. The bases of traditional education were the lessons and teachings of First Nations Elders and parents. They educated their children in the skills necessary to survive on the land; their family and tribal history; language, fine arts such as music and storytelling; the appropriate social and political behaviour; and moral and religious values.

Residential school disrupted the transmission of beliefs, skills, and knowledge from one generation to the next. Despite residential schools, Elders continue to be respected in First Nations communities for their wisdom and experience.

Source: <a href="http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ks/pdf/e\_guide3.pdf">http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ks/pdf/e\_guide3.pdf</a>



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#### **CENTRE 4**

### **NEW SCHOOL**

- **Group:** Choose a recorder.
- Have a group discussion about the following:
  - Read aloud: Imagine you were seven years old and you were separated from your parents for most of the year and placed in a school where no one spoke your language. In this situation, language spoken to you is written very differently from your native tongue.
- Read aloud: Imagine your teachers don't understand many of the things that are very
  important to you, such as hockey, snowboarding and skateboarding, music videos and
  computer games.
  - As a group make a list of things that are important to you. Recorder write the list on paper.
- If you were a student at residential school and you had a difficult time there, would it mean that you are a failure?



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#### **CENTRE 5**

#### **GOING HOME**

- In your group create a short skit in which a family is adjusting to having their children return home from residential school after a three-year absence.
- Put yourself into the shoes of the character that you are portraying.
- What are some of the problems experienced by the children and their parents when the students arrived home?
- What effect did the residential school have on the way First Nations felt about themselves, as students and parents?
- Present play to class on the last day of centre's, therefore, make sure you record your skit and lines on paper.
- Some Characters could be:
  - Residential school student
  - Parent(s)
  - o Mother, father, brother, sister
  - Grandparent, Elder

### **READ**

When children returned to their communities after several years at residential schools, they often found it hard to fit back into family life, and parents found that the children had changed. Some parents also found that the children argued with them frequently, and with other children and family members. Also, some children seemed unconcerned about hurting others and often appeared unwilling to respect Elders.

Also difficult for many parents was their children's loss of their language. At residential school, many students were often punished for speaking their own language. After several years away at school, children generally found it difficult to speak their mother tongue.

From a First Nations perspective, the most damaging part of residential schools was that children were taught their culture was unimportant. They were told that the values with which they had been raised were primitive, and that non-Aboriginal people in Canada were part of a more "advanced" society. The schools' organization and the curriculum content gave First Nations children the impression that the beliefs, political institutions, religious practices and the economic system of non-Aboriginal people in Canada were superior to the traditional ways of First Nations.