

Engaging with the
**National Day for Truth
and Reconciliation**
Toolkit



Indigenous
Initiatives

Western
UNIVERSITY • CANADA



Engaging with the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR) at Western

Observing the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR) across campus is a foundational step in advancing Theme 2: *People, Community, and Culture* in Western's strategic plan, [Towards Western at 150](#) (2021). While NDTR is formally recognized each year on September 30, the work of Truth and Reconciliation must be ongoing and embraced daily to foster meaningful and lasting change.

To support this commitment, NDTR-related learning and engagement opportunities at Western often span the month of September and extend into October. In previous years, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII) has highlighted over 40 events annually, hosted by faculties, departments and support units across campus - showcasing discipline-specific efforts to engage students, staff and faculty in this important work.

This toolkit supports educators, staff, and leaders at Western University by offering guidance and context for observing NDTR and advancing Reconciliation throughout the year. Western has designated September 30 as a non-instructional day. No formal classes, labs, or tutorials will take place, allowing the Western community to fully engage in the wide range of NDTR activities planned across campus.

Campus leaders are encouraged to coordinate NDTR events that:

- Honour Survivors and the children who never returned home.
- Engage in truth-telling and confront Residential School denialism.
- Reflect the unique contexts of their disciplines, faculties, or units (interdisciplinary collaboration is encouraged).
- Amplify Western's institutional commitments to Reconciliation.
- Deepen personal and collective understanding of the actions required by all members of the Western community.

As we gather in reflection and action this year, we also honour the legacies of the Honourable Murray Sinclair and Elder Dan Smoke, who both passed away in November 2024. Their lifelong dedication to truth, justice, education and Indigenous people continues to guide our collective journey. Let us remember their teachings and carry forward the work they championed with courage and compassion.

As part of this year's observance:

- OII will host a flag-raising ceremony for the Orange Shirt Flag on Monday, September 29, 2025.
- A full listing of NDTR events will be available on the OII website under the "National Day for Truth and Reconciliation" webpage.

- In partnership with the Dellelce Family Bookstore, OII has coordinated Orange Shirts and other merchandise by Indigenous artists to be available in the bookstore. Proceeds will support the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation's Save the Barn campaign.
- Follow the Wampum Learning Lodge on Facebook and Instagram for updates and programming.

We invite you to join us in this ongoing journey of learning, unlearning and meaningful action.

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What is the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation?

“Residential schools are a tragic part of Canada’s history. But they cannot simply be consigned to history. The legacy from the schools and the political and legal policies and mechanisms surrounding their history continue to this day. This is reflected in the significant educational, income, health, and social disparities between Aboriginal people and other Canadians. It is reflected in the intense racism some people harbour against Aboriginal people and in the systemic and other forms of discrimination Aboriginal people regularly experience in this country. It is reflected too in the critically endangered status of most Aboriginal languages.”

- *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Final Report, p. 135*

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR) is officially observed each year on September 30. This day coincides with - and originated from - the grassroots observance known as Orange Shirt Day, initiated in Indigenous communities to honour Indian Residential School (IRS) Survivors, intergenerational Survivors, and the children who never came home. Many also include recognition of Indian Day School Survivors as part of their observances.

Between the 1870s and 1996, more than 150,000 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families to attend Residential Schools across Canada. These institutions were funded by the Canadian government and operated by various Christian denominations (Union of Ontario Indians, 2013). The establishment of NDTR in 2021 reflects decades of advocacy by Survivors, families, and communities.



T-SHIRT DESIGN BY SHANA ELIJAH OF
ONEIDA NATION OF THE THAMES

Historical Background

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was launched in 1991 in response to the 1990 Oka Crisis. Following extensive public hearings and submissions, the Commission released its final report in 1996. It included wide-ranging recommendations to promote justice and equity for Indigenous Peoples - among them, a call for a public inquiry into the Indian Residential School system.

In 2006, the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement laid the foundation for the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which operated from 2008 to 2015. The TRC's mandate was to document and share the experiences of Survivors and their families, ensuring that no one in Canada could claim ignorance of this history. Over 6,500 Survivor testimonies were collected, along with government and church records—including materials from Huron University College at Western.

The TRC's work culminated in the release of 94 Calls to Action, aimed at redressing the legacy of Residential Schools and advancing the process of Canadian Reconciliation.

“The impacts of the legacy of residential schools have not ended with those who attended the schools. They affected the Survivors’ partners, their children, their grandchildren, their extended families, and their communities.”

- *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Final Report, pp. 135-136*

TRC Call to Action #80: Origin of NDTR

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation was formally established in 2021 in direct response to the TRC Call to Action #80:

“We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.”

Who is this Day for?

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR) and Orange Shirt Day are for everyone living in Canada. All are encouraged to participate in ways that centre and honour Survivors, intergenerational Survivors, their families and communities.

While the TRC's Calls to Action focus significantly on the legacy of Indian Residential Schools, they also address broader colonial systems and structures—such as the Indian Act, the concept of *terra nullius*, and the Doctrine of Discovery. The TRC's report is therefore not only a reflection on the past, but a call to action to confront the ongoing realities of colonialism in Canada.

It is important to recognize that “reconciliation” is a contested and critiqued term. Many Indigenous scholars and communities question its scope, intent and ways it has been institutionalized.

In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes:

“As reconciliation becomes institutionalized, I worry our participation will benefit the state in an asymmetrical fashion, by attempting to neutralize the legitimacy of Indigenous resistance. If reconciliation is focused only on residential schools rather than the broader set of relationships aimed at assimilation and political genocide, legislation, and practices, then there is a risk that reconciliation will “level the playing field” in the eyes of Canadians. In the eyes of liberalism the historical “wrong” has now been “righted” and further transformation is not needed, since the historic situation has been remedied.”

- Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, pp. 21–22

In Call to Action #80, all levels of government as well as organizations and institutions are asked to “ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.”

It is important to consider how the work we do around Reconciliation honours and centres Survivors, as well as their families and communities. Many families live with the impacts of the schools and will continue to do so for generations; however, the schools were and are not the only violence inflicted upon Indigenous Peoples and lands in Canada. Simpson (2011) writes:

"I also worry that institutionalization of a narrowly defined "reconciliation" subjugates treaty and nation-based participation by locking out Elders - the ones that suffered the most directly at the hands of residential schools - in a position of victimhood. Of course, they are anything but victims. They are our strongest visionaries, and they inspire us to envision alternative futures. Are we participating in a process that allows the state to co-op the individual and collective pain and suffering of our people, while also criminalizing the inter-generational impacts of residential schools and ignoring the larger neo-assimilation project to which our children are now subjected?"

- Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, p. 22

Addressing the legacy of the Indian Residential School System, and the broader framework of Indian policies, requires nuanced, ongoing discussions. It also demands recognition that the systemic discrimination continues today. For example, Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately represented in Canada's justice system. [Indigenous youth make up almost half of Canada's incarcerated youth population](#) and [make up over half of the children currently in the child welfare system](#). Advocates point to these statistics as [direct outcomes of the intergenerational trauma caused by Indian Residential Schools](#) and related colonial policies.

What is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada?

The [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#) (TRC) was created in 2008 as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.* Survivors advocated for the Commission to ensure that the legacy of Indian Residential Schools could not be ignored or forgotten. You can find the official mandate [here](#).

From 2008 to 2015, the TRC collected over 6,500 Survivor testimonies, held national educational events, and created an official historical record of the Indian Residential School system. This included gathering documents from the Canadian government, and various churches and organizations – including Huron University College at Western.



JUSTICE MURRAY SINCLAIR, CHAIR OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION, SAYS IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT AN EXTENSION OF THE COMMISSIONS WORK WAS NECESSARY.

PHOTO: MARITES N. SISON ([SOURCE](#))

The TRC's work culminated in the release of 94 Calls to Action, directed at all levels of government, institutions and individuals to redress the legacy of Indian Residential Schools and advance Reconciliation.

The work of the TRC continues today through the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#) (NCTR), which preserves the archives and promotes ongoing education about the legacy of Indian Residential Schools to Canadians and newcomers alike.

*Note: Not all Residential Schools or Day Schools were included in the TRC process or the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.

Why does the TRC use the Term 'Aboriginal' and not 'Indigenous'?

The TRC report uses the word "Aboriginal" because it is the legal term defined in Canada's Constitution and legislation, such as the *Indian Act*. "Indian" is also a legal term (as in "Indian Status"), though widely considered outdated and racist in most contexts.

While "Indigenous" is now the preferred term for many individuals and communities, it currently has no formal definition in Canadian law. "Aboriginal" was the appropriate term for the legal and political context in which the TRC was created.

For more information on terminology, see [The Elements of Indigenous Style](#) by Gregory Younging or Chelsea Vowel's blog post, "[What to Call Us.](#)"

TRC Calls to Action

The 94 Calls to Action serve as a roadmap for truth, justice, and reconciliation. They are grounded on the stories and testimonies shared by Survivors and families between 2008 and 2015. You can read the full list [here](#).

In 2023, no Calls to Action were completed or initiated by the federal government.

IMAGE: FROM THE YELLOWHEAD INSTITUTE'S [CALLS TO ACTION ACCOUNTABILITY: A 2023 STATUS UPDATE ON RECONCILIATION](#)

What does Reconciliation Mean?

The term “reconciliation” came into broader use after World War II to describe post-conflict healing processes in the aftermath of human rights violations. In the Canadian context, Reconciliation refers to addressing the ongoing impacts of colonialism and working to improve relationships between Indigenous Peoples and the state.

According to the TRC:

“Reconciliation is an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships... repairing damaged trust by making apologies, providing individual and collective reparations, and following through with concrete actions that demonstrate real societal change” (Honouring the Truth, 2015, p. 16).

Critiques and Debates:

The term “reconciliation” is used differently across contexts. Critics argue it can act as a “politics of distraction”, allowing governments to claim progress while leaving colonial structures intact (Corntassel & Holder, 2008, p. 472).

Other concerns include:

- The prefix “re” implies a return to good relations that never existed (Chrisjohn & Wasacase, 2009, p. 222).
- The word’s roots in Catholic doctrine (as a sacrament) may be inappropriate, given the role of churches in the IRS system (Garneau, 2012, p. 35).
- Some advocate for the use of “conciliation” instead, which acknowledges the existence of conflict and the need to rebuild trust (Amagoalik, 2008, p. 93).

(For additional definitions and citations, see the [Office of Indigenous Initiatives Key Terms](#) resource.)



What is Orange Shirt Day?

Orange Shirt Day originated from a 2013 commemoration project in Williams Lake, British Columbia, led by Esketemc (Alkali Lake) Chief Fred Robbins, a former Residential School student. The project brought together Survivors and families from the Secwepemc, Tsilhqot'in, Southern Dakelh, and St'at'imc Nations, along with local governments, school districts, and civic organizations in the Cariboo Region.

The events were designed to:

- Commemorate the Residential School experience
- Honour the healing journeys of Survivors and their families
- Commit to the ongoing process of Reconciliation

A key moment in the project was the sharing of Phyllis (Jack) Webstad's story. On her first day at Residential School in 1973, her new orange shirt—gifted by her grandmother—was taken from her. Her story became the symbol of Orange Shirt Day.

Phyllis attended Residential School in 1973/74. You can find her story [here](#).

Where to Buy Orange Shirts in London, Ontario:

It is recommended to purchase orange shirts from Indigenous creators or organizations that directly support Indigenous communities. Here are some options:

- [The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#) and [Orange Shirt Day](#) offer shirts with proceeds supporting Survivor-led initiatives.
- [Dellelce Family Bookstore](#) at Western has Orange Shirts, with profits supporting the *Save the Barn Campaign* (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation).
- [Rezonance Printing](#) in London also offers Orange Shirts (including kids sizes) created in collaboration with local Indigenous artists.

What are Indian Residential Schools?



(Image credit: *The Scream*, Kent Monkman/Collection of the Denver Art Museum)

The Indian Residential School system operated formally in Canada from the 1870s until 1996, though some schools existed prior to Confederation—such as the Mohawk Institute (“The Mushhole”) in Brantford and the Mount Elgin Residential School near Muncey. Over 150,000 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and placed in these institutions, which were funded by the Canadian government and administered by Christian denominations, including Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist churches.

In many cases, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) [removed children from their homes to bring them to the schools](#). You can find more information in the [TRC Reports](#) or on [UBC’s Indigenous Foundations page](#). Kent Monkman, a Cree two-spirit artist, painted *The Scream* (2017) as a visual depiction of the chaos caused by the RCMP forcibly removing Indigenous children from their communities to attend the schools as part of the aggressive assimilation tactics employed by churches and the Government of Canada.

The [Mount Elgin Residential School](#), also known as the Muncey Institute, operated near Muncey, Ontario, on the territory of Chippewas of the Thames First Nation (COTTFN).

- Founded in 1847
- Operated from 1851–1862 by the Wesleyan Methodist Society
- Reopened from 1867–1946, later run by the United Church of Canada (from 1925)

Though the building no longer stands, a monument at COTTFN commemorates the students who attended. Visitors are encouraged to contact the Heritage Centre before visiting.

The Mohawk Institute Residential School, known as “The Mushhole,” operated in Brantford, Ontario, from 1831 to 1970. Run by the Anglican Church, it is notorious for the abuse faced by students. In 1972, the building was transformed into the [Woodland Cultural Centre](#), which now preserves the school’s history and supports the revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures.

Read more about the Mohawk Institute [here](#).

In 2008, [the Canadian government issued an apology to Indian Residential School Survivors on behalf of all Canadians](#). You can watch the video [here](#). The Anglican, Presbyterian and United Churches have also publicly apologized. In 2022, Pope Francis formally apologized to survivors and families, but [there is controversy and criticism surrounding this apology](#). The Roman Catholic Church [has yet to pay the \\$25 million ordered in the 2007 Residential School Settlement Agreement](#).

Western University is historically connected to the Indian Residential School system through its roots in settler-colonial institutions, including Huron University College and King’s University College. Clergy trained at Huron were involved in operating Residential Schools, and Anglican Bishop Isaac Hellmuth had ties to the Shingwauk Indian Residential School.

For more on this history, see:

[*“My Own Old English Friends”: Networking Anglican Settler Colonialism at the Shingwauk Home, Huron College and Western University*](#) by Thomas Peace and Natalie Cross (2021).

What are Indian Day Schools?

[Indian Day Schools](#) operated on First Nations reserves across Canada from the mid-1800s until 2000, with an estimated 200,000 children attending. Like Indian Residential Schools, they were funded by the Canadian government and operated by various Christian or Catholic denominations.

Students at Day Schools experienced similar abuses, including cultural suppression and physical punishment. In 2019, a [class action lawsuit](#) was launched to seek justice for Survivors. However, nearly [700 schools were excluded from the Federal Indian Day School settlement](#). [Many survivors have spoken out about the process as re-traumatizing](#), and are still awaiting outstanding payment.

Learn more and view a map of the schools at www.IndianDaySchools.org.

Local Legacy: Save the Barn Campaign and the Mount Elgin Monument



MOUNT ELGIN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL MEMORIAL LOCATED IN CHIPPEWA OF THE THAMES. ([JAMES CHAARANI/CBC](#))

Near the former site of Mount Elgin Residential School stands an old barn with beams etched by children who attended the school.

In 2021, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation launched a petition and fundraising campaign to preserve the structure.

“We know there are beams on this barn that have been engraved on by former students. We want to capture that and to be able to turn it into an interpretive centre, which would house Mount Elgin’s residential school history, as well as reclaim and revitalize our culture and language”

– Gina McGahey, COTTFN ([London Free Press 2021](#)).

Watch a short video that features some of the etchings [here](#).

What is the Significance of Unmarked Graves?

In May 2021, the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation announced [the discovery of 200 potential unmarked graves at the Kamloops Indian Residential School](#). Since then, thousands more anomalies have been detected at former school sites across Canada using ground-penetrating radar.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) estimated that at least 3,213 children died in Residential Schools—a number believed to be significantly underreported. A 2015 report titled [“Where are the Children Buried?” offers further recommendations on how to address this issue](#).

Finding the graves is Call #75 in the TRC Calls to Action:

We call upon the federal government to work with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, churches, Aboriginal communities, former residential school students, and current

landowners to develop and implement strategies and procedures for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries or other sites at which residential school children were buried. This is to include the provision of appropriate memorial ceremonies and commemorative markers to honour the deceased children.

Since 2021, the findings of potential graves have received widespread media attention. However, this visibility has also led to scrutiny and denialism from some academics, commentators, and media outlets—some of whom have falsely claimed the findings are exaggerated or fabricated. (*See the appendix on denialism for more.*)

It's important to understand that many First Nations have been conducting this work for decades. Since 1974, at least 20 First Nations—primarily in Western Canada—have identified thousands of anomalies. However, not all communities choose to publicly share their findings, and the number of confirmed graves may never be fully known.

Each First Nation approaches this work according to its own customs, protocols, and healing journeys. Some communities may choose to leave potential graves undisturbed, while others may proceed with excavation.

Regardless of the method, Canadians should not require further “proof” of the atrocities committed at Residential Schools. These are well-documented in the TRC’s six-volume report and other investigations. It’s also important to remember that many children died after leaving the schools due to the trauma and abuse they endured—deaths that are not always included in official counts.

“A total count for the number of children who died or went missing will likely never be known. Many Indigenous Nations have asked for people not to focus on tallies—treating relatives as mere numbers, as was done in many residential schools—but instead to remember that every child matters. One child in an unmarked grave is one too many.”

- [Kisha Supernant & Sean Carleton, CBC Opinion, June 2022:](#)

More Information:

- [Sacred Responsibility: Searching for Missing Children and Unmarked Burials Interim Report](#) (June 2023)

Are Indigenous Communities near London Searching for Graves?

[Deshkaan Ziibing Anishinaabeg](#) (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation) is leading an investigation into possible unmarked graves at the [former Mount Elgin Industrial Residential School](#), located just outside of London.

At the request of Deshkaan Ziibing leadership, Western University is supporting the investigation by offering expertise and coordination through the Office of Indigenous Initiatives. All communications about the search will be led by the First Nation.

Several Western scholars are also involved in national and provincial efforts to investigate Residential School sites. For example, Dr. Rebekah Jacques serves on the National Advisory Committee on Missing Children and Unmarked Burials. Read news coverage here:

Related News Articles:

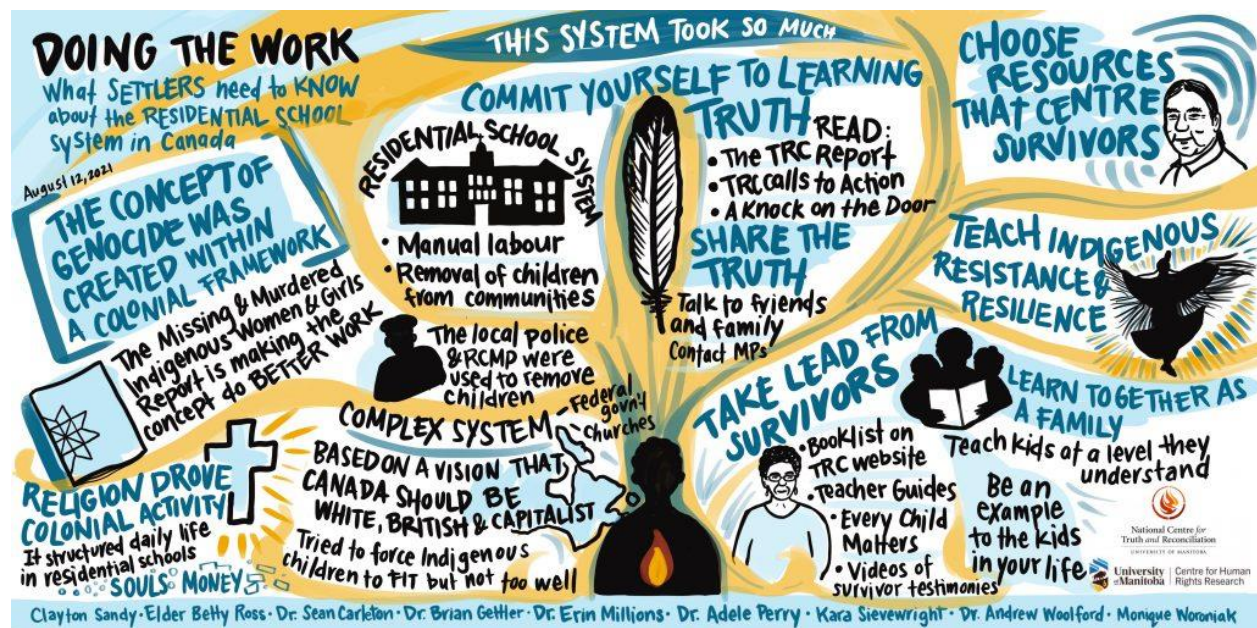
- [First Nation getting clearer picture of who attended Mt. Elgin residential school](#) (*Simcoe Reformer*, 2022)
- [Search at Ontario's Mount Elgin residential school seen as step toward healing](#) (*CTV News*, 2021)
- [Search for unmarked graves at former Mount Elgin Residential School to start in fall](#) (*Global News*, 2021)
- [Western professor offers forensic expertise to investigate missing Indigenous children](#) (*Western News*, 2022)

Engaging Students, Staff and Faculty in NDTR and Reconciliation at Western

The Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII) invites units, departments, programs, and institutes to create internal and/or external learning opportunities for staff, faculty, and students to observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR) in meaningful ways.

We also encourage you to support staff participation in Indigenous community-led and OII-hosted events. Feel free to share your events with the OII to increase your audience, too.

Why is it Important to Participate in Reconciliation and Observe this Day in your Classroom, Office or Unit?



[SOURCE: RESOURCES FOR NON-INDIGENOUS CANADIANS ON RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AND COLONIALISM IN CANADA](#)

Treaties with Indigenous Peoples are foundational to the creation of Canada. While Indian Residential Schools were not the direct wish of every Canadian, they were part of a systemic policy of assimilation that persisted until the last school closed in 1996.

These schools were designed to “kill the Indian in the child,” a phrase attributed to government policies under Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald. Duncan Campbell Scott, who oversaw Residential School policy from 1913 to 1932, stated:

“I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously

protect a class of people who are able to stand alone...Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill.”

- *Duncan Campbell Scott, 1920* ([Canadian Encyclopedia](#))

Under the Indian Act, the Canadian government defines who is and is not considered an “Indian” through Indian Status. The goal of assimilation was to eliminate Indigenous nationhood and render Treaties void by absorbing Indigenous Peoples into the Canadian body politic.

Upon the release of the TRC’s final report in 2015, Justice Murray Sinclair [stated](#):

“The Survivors have entrusted us, and by extension, all the people in Canada, with two priorities: First, the Survivors need to know before they leave this earth that people understand what happened and what the schools did to them. Second, the Survivors need to know that, having been heard and understood, we will act to ensure the repair of damages done.”

- *Murray Sinclair, June 2, 2015*

In this spirit, every Canadian is invited to reflect on the legacy of Residential Schools and take meaningful action to ensure this history is never forgotten—and that the harms are repaired.

For practical suggestions on how to engage in Reconciliation, see the University of Manitoba’s Centre for Human Rights guide: [“Doing the Work: Truth Before Reconciliation,”](#) developed in collaboration with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

What Can Faculties, Departments and Support Units do for NDTR?

- Amplify NDTR messaging from OII, Western Communications and discipline-specific organizations or Leaders
- Host discipline-specific or collaborative/interdisciplinary events that support the intentions of Truth and Reconciliation, to benefit your own staff, students, and faculty using existing resources and budgets
- Ensure all staff, faculty, and students are aware of NDTR and related events, and support their meaningful engagement.

- Provide time for staff and students to attend events or learn about NDTR as part of their work or coursework.
- Encourage attendance at community-led events, even outside regular work hours, and consider this time as part of work responsibilities.
- Share details about your NDTR event(s) on Western's Event Site
- Cross-promote community and OII-led NDTR events.
- Invite your team to complete the 4 Seasons of Reconciliation module (updated Brightspace version coming soon!).
- Sponsor exhibits on Indigenous histories, cultures, traditions, leadership, art, etc.
- Support students with meaningful classroom opportunities to engage with Truth and Reconciliation.
- Review [Western's Indigenous Strategic Plan](#) (2016) and reflect on how its goals apply to your unit.
- Explore the TRC's Calls to Action (especially Volume 6, p. 16) and Universities Canada's Principles on Indigenous Education to identify relevant actions for your unit.

Engaging Indigenous Speakers and Presenters:

Indigenous speakers and presenters are in high demand around NDTR. Please invite them as far in advance as possible.

Be sure to review the [Guidelines for Working with Indigenous Community Members](#) to ensure respectful and reciprocal engagement.

Sharing your NDTR Events:

OII is happy to highlight NDTR-related events across campus on our NDTR page for others to find details. To do this, please email indigenousinitiatives@uwo.ca and let us know the following details:

- Date
- Time
- Name of the Event
- Location
- Units/departments hosting the event
- 2-4 point form details to describe the event
- Weblink to direct people to for more details

Encouraging Participation in NDTR Events:

Some individuals may feel uncertain or hesitant about participating in NDTR events. That's okay—everyone is at a different point in their learning journey.

You can support their engagement by:

- Giving staff and students time during work or class hours to attend events.
- Offering background information to help them understand protocols and respectful participation.
- Framing participation as part of professional development or academic learning.

Common barriers and how to address them:

- “I don’t have time” or “It’s not in my contract.”
 - Consider how your unit can make space for participation, in alignment with the *Western Towards 150 Strategic Plan* for “Building Relationships with Indigenous Peoples and Communities.”
- “It’s not professional development.”
 - Indigenous learning often happens in community settings. These opportunities should be considered professional development.
- “Students don’t know about NDTR or don’t prioritize it.”
 - Faculty can build participation into syllabi or offer reflection assignments to encourage engagement.

A Trauma-Informed Approach

Conversations around Indian Residential Schools and their legacy will impact Indigenous people with lived experiences in your classroom, office and on campus.

While educators have a responsibility to foster learning through discussion and critical thinking, conversations about the severity or intent of the Residential School system—such as whether it constitutes genocide—must be approached with care. These discussions extend beyond the classroom and should aim to foster belonging, promote Reconciliation, and avoid retraumatization.

The impacts of Residential Schools are ongoing and deeply felt in Indigenous communities today—affecting education, child welfare, incarceration rates, health, culture, and spirituality. Educators and facilitators must approach this topic with sensitivity and a trauma-informed mindset.

Tips for Teaching This Topic with Care:

- **Provide content warnings** before lectures, materials, or discussions. These help prepare individuals for potentially triggering content and give them the option to opt out or prepare emotionally.
 - **Example of a content warning:**
Content Warning: Indian Residential Schools, genocide, suicide, sexual abuse, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, violence against Indigenous Peoples.
- **Respect avoidance as a valid response.** Indigenous students may choose not to engage with certain content. This is a compassionate and trauma-informed choice.
- **Allow time and space for reflection.** Offer opportunities for students to process what they've learned—through discussion, journaling, or quiet time.

Recommended Resources on Trauma-Informed Practice:

- [Trauma-Informed Schools](#) (Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres)
- [Trauma-Informed Practice for Indigenous Peoples](#) (Halsey & Boodhai, 2022)
- [Trauma-Informed Practice: Working with Indigenous Individuals](#) (Southwest Aboriginal Health Access Centre)
- [Trauma-Informed and Culturally Appropriate Approaches in the Workplace](#) (Native Women's Association of Canada)

Support Resources

Please provide the following support resources alongside any content related to Indian Residential Schools to your students, staff and faculty:

- Students may access elders and Cultural Supports from the Indigenous Student Centre via virtual and in-person appointment; contact the Centre by phone (519 661 4095), [email](#) or by connecting with Mandy Bragg at the ISC
 - Faculty and staff can also invite an Elder to their classroom or event to facilitate debrief circles and offer support. Consider how to meaningfully engage Elders beyond providing openings and ad hoc support.
Review the [Guidelines for Working with Indigenous Community Members](#).
Please contact OII (inidgenousinitiatives@uwo.ca) with your course, or event, reason for seeking to invite an Elder, and applicable dates with at least four weeks of notice to make arrangements on your behalf.

▪ Wellness Supports is available via [Western's Student Crisis Contact Information](#)
Off-Campus Supports:

- [Atlohsa's Family Healing Services](#) and the 24-hour Crisis Line at [1-800-605-7477](tel:1-800-605-7477).
- [Zhaawanong Women's Shelter](#) provides emergency shelter and support for Indigenous women and their children who are at risk of violence, abuse and/or homelessness.
Crisis Line: Toll free 1-800-605-7477
- National Indian Residential School Crisis Line – 24/7 support Survivors and those affected: 1-866-925-4419
- Hope for Wellness Helpline – 24/7 support for all Indigenous people in Canada.
 - Online chat function is available ([Home - Hope for Wellness Helpline](#))
 - Phone: 1-855-242-3310.

Learning Opportunities

Online Learning Resources

Western Libraries and the Office of Indigenous Initiatives have collaborated to license two online learning modules created by external organizations. These resources provide foundational knowledge on Reconciliation and Indigenous Peoples in Canada and are available to all Western staff, faculty, students and leadership.

In the link below, you will find a description and learning outcomes for each resource; a chart for determining which resource is best suited to your needs, and instructions on how to access the modules. [Access them here.](#)

Additionally Atlohsa has created an online primer “[Truth Comes Before Reconciliation](#)”

Check out these additional free and paid online learning opportunities below:

Online Resource	Summary	Link to Access	Cost
Indigenous Canada MOOC	<p>“Indigenous Canada is a 12-lesson Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) from the Faculty of Native Studies [at University of Alberta] that explores the different histories and contemporary perspectives of Indigenous peoples living in Canada.</p> <p>From an Indigenous perspective, this course explores complex experiences Indigenous peoples face today from a historical and critical perspective highlighting national and local Indigenous-settler relations.”</p>	https://www.ualberta.ca/admissions-programs/online-courses/indigenous-canada/index.html	Free
Indigenous Corporate Training Inc – variety of modules	Provides foundational and advanced training in person; live virtually or asynchronously.	https://www.ictinc.ca/training?hsCtaTracking=bd994c2e-af66-498c-b5c9-df5df9f4e781%7Ca454473c-d31d-477c-a53d-7bde706fd2b7	See site for pricing
What is Reconciliation? (OISE)	“The mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has come to an end, bringing a historic opportunity to build a shared future together.	https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/abed101/what-is-reconciliation/	Free

	<p>Mutual understanding is fundamental to achieving genuine reconciliation between Indigenous people and all Canadians. Envision what reconciliation means and how education can be an important site for renewing the relationship.</p> <p>Learn what it means to be an ally and think through concrete ways of contributing to social justice and positive change.”</p>		
Virtual National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Programming for TRC Week 2024	<p>“Truth and Reconciliation Week 2024 is a transformative five-day journey for students (grades 1-12), educators, and the broader community to engage with the poignant history and enduring spirit of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.</p> <p>Explore interactive workshops, witness the profound “Mino-pimatisiwin – The Good Life” youth empowerment gathering, engage in meaningful dialogues, and contribute to our collective path toward reconciliation.”</p>	https://trw-svr.nctr.ca/	Free
4 Seasons of Reconciliation	<p>Created by the First Nations University of Manitoba, this nine-part module takes participants approximately 3.5 hours to complete and provides a basic, foundational knowledge on Truth and Reconciliation. Intended for Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners, the course and its bonus video library shine a bright light on the contributions of Indigenous Peoples, debunk myths, stereotypes and racism while meeting the Calls to Action in the workplace from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).</p> <p>4 Seasons of Reconciliation follows Indigenous principles and is guided and overseen by the First Nations University of Canada to offer bilingual courses for</p>	<p>Access to 4 Seasons in Brightspace coming soon!</p> <p>Find updates on this page.</p>	Free

	secondary, post-secondary, and the workplace.		
The Path by NVision	<p>Created by NVision, The Path is designed to offer Indigenous cultural awareness, the five-part online module gives general background and context about First Nations, Metis and Inuit in Canada.</p> <p>Topics: First Nations, Inuit and Metis History and distinctions; Indigenous worldviews; Treaties; Indigenous Rights; Terminology</p>	The Path is migrating to Brightspace! Find updates on this page.	

Suggested In-Class or Group Activities:

These activities are designed to support meaningful engagement with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action and broader themes of Reconciliation.

Explore the TRC Calls to Action

- Review the TRC Report and Calls to Action.
 - Ask participants to identify Calls relevant to their discipline or field.
 - Discuss: Have these Calls been implemented? If not, what actions could be taken to address them?
- Reflect on individual and collective responsibility.
 - In small groups, reflect on how individuals can contribute to Reconciliation and what personal learning or capacity-building is needed.

Use Interactive Resources

- Use CBC's [Beyond94](#)
 - Track progress on the TRC Calls to Action across different levels of government.
 - Discuss: What factors are delaying action? How might these barriers be addressed?
- Investigate Western's and Affiliate institutions' contributions
 - Explore how Western and its affiliates have responded to relevant Calls to Action. What more could be done? Pitch your ideas!

Read and Discuss the Yellowhead Institute's Accountability Reports

- Review the 2023 [Calls to Action Accountability Report](#)
 - Discuss key questions from the 2023 report:
 - a. What kind of "value" do Canadians place on Reconciliation?
 - b. Why is progress on implementation so slow?

- c. What does the pace and prioritization of certain Calls say about Reconciliation in Canada?

Course-Based Assignments

- Assign NDTR event reflections
 - Encourage students to attend NDTR events and submit reflection as part of their coursework.

Create a Community of Practice

- Departments and units can form communities of practice around:
 - Online learning modules
 - Indigenous-authored novels, podcasts, Yellowhead Briefs, or academic articles
 - a. Use these to foster ongoing learning, reflection, and debriefing.
 - Helpful Resource:
 - a. [Creating and Sustaining a Community of Practice for Instructional Leaders: Acquiring and Applying Indigenous Foundational Knowledge](#)

Creating Accountable Spaces

Learning and unlearning challenging topics such as genocide, oppression, abuse, and state violence can be deeply uncomfortable – and that discomfort is part of the process. A holistic approach to these conversations allows us to hold space for emotions while also engaging critically with facts and differing perspectives.

Rather than striving for “safe” or “brave” spaces – which can unintentionally place the burden of vulnerability on those most impacted – consider creating “Accountable Spaces.”

“Accountability means being responsible for yourself, your intentions, words, and actions. It means entering a space with good intentions, but understanding that aligning your intent with action is the true test of commitment.”

- Elise Ahenkorah, 2020

Read more from Elise Ahenkorah discussing the differences [here](#).

Why Accountable Spaces Matter

- Safe spaces can be difficult to guarantee, especially when harmful ideas or language may arise.
- Brave spaces often place the burden on marginalized individuals to speak up or educate others, which can lead to retraumatization.

- Accountable spaces shift the focus to shared responsibility – where all participants are expected to reflect on their biases, intentions, and impacts.

Considerations for Educators and Facilitators

- Acknowledge that complex identities shape how people experience these conversations. Those directly impacted by the topics discussed may need additional care and support.
- Practice humility by recognizing your own positionality and limitations. If you haven't experienced what's being discussed, name that openly and respectfully.
- Create space for reflection and repair when harm occurs. Accountability includes responding thoughtfully and taking steps to rebuild trust.

Building Accountable Space Guidelines

([adapted from Elisa Ahenkorah adapting UCLA](#))

Creating accountable spaces means fostering environments where participants are responsible for their words, actions, and impacts—while centering care, humility, and mutual respect.

For Facilitators and Event Leaders:

- Establish the expectations of the learning environment at the beginning of the session. Explain these guidelines you'll be using and invite participants to co-create or add to them.
- Acknowledge the discomfort that may arise when discussing topics like genocide, oppression and colonial violence.
- Invite input from participants: What guidelines would help them feel supported? To not create further trauma, what does accountability look like in this space? What will help people walk away grounded in mutual respect and understanding?
- Ensure everyone leaves the space in a good headspace or that they have tools and supports available to them to navigate lingering feelings and emotions.
- Include guidelines in event registration so attendees are aware before participating.
- Offer content warnings for sensitive topics (e.g., Residential Schools, sexual abuse, MMIWG2S+).
- Have support people present, such as an Elder or counsellor, to assist with emotional processing and debriefing.

For Participants:

- Come with a learning mindset. Listen with an open heart and mind.
- Please do not interrupt others. Let others speak without interruption.
- Listen actively. Don't just wait to speak, take notes if needed.
- Be mindful of your talk time. Share space and allow others to contribute, without unnecessary pressure.

- Apologize for impact, not intent. If you say something harmful, take responsibility for the effect, not just your intention.
- Embrace friction. Disagreement can be a sign of growth and diverse perspectives, not conflict.
- Give credit. Acknowledge when you're building on someone else's idea or story.
- Ask for clarification. Avoid assumptions or projections. Reflect on where they are coming from.
- Speak for yourself. Use "I" statements and avoid sharing others' lived experiences.
- Positionality is relevant. Your social class, culture, gender, sexuality, all impact how you experience the world and contribute to conversation.
- Words and tone matter. Be mindful of the impact of what you say, and not just your intent. If you're hurt or if you've hurt someone, seek accountability with kindness.
- If you are an ally, hold space. Make room for marginalized voices to be heard without dominating the conversation.

Beyond NDTR

Reconciliation is not a one-day event. It is an ongoing commitment to Survivors, families, communities, those who did not make it home and to dismantling the systemic structures and barriers Indigenous Peoples continue to face as part of the legacy of Indian Residential Schools and colonization.

Wearing orange and creating opportunities for commemoration are important acts of solidarity. But healing the legacy of Indian Residential Schools requires more than just symbolic gestures, like putting on a T-shirt. The Yellowhead Institute Report on Calls to Action Accountability (2022) points to four fundamental barriers to doing Reconciliation work:

1. “The absence of political will to tackle the hardest Indigenous issues, specifically issues of land and self-government.
2. Structural, legislative and institutional barriers embedded in the federal, provincial and territory colonial governance systems.
3. Systemic racism and discrimination entrenched within multiple sectors of society.
4. Failure to collect and disseminate quality data makes accurate reporting on various statistical measures difficult”

- Yellowhead Institute, Calls to Action Accountability, 2022, p. 42

Consider: How do those barriers reproduce themselves within our own institutions?



Considerations in the ongoing work of ReconciliACTION:

- How can faculty embed Calls to Action and Reconciliation in course content throughout the curriculum? Are there learning outcomes tied to Reconciliation?
- Are there opportunities for staff and faculty to continue their learning and unlearning as part of their expected workloads?
- How is Western University responding to the Education Calls to Action?
- How is Western University measuring its progress towards Reconciliation? Is this assessment within an Indigenous framework?
- As a university, how are we meaningfully engaging with Treaty responsibilities around education, and the local Nations that are party to them?
- How can Western publicly acknowledge its relationship to Residential Schools and teach this as part of such days as Founders Day?
- How are Western and the Affiliates making documents, files and data in their archives on Indian Residential Schools accessible to Indigenous community members?

Additionally, Reconciliation is not just about Indian Residential Schools. Treaties remain unhonoured, and other issues connected to the Residential School legacy require attention. It is important to keep conversations and action continuing.

Here are some resources to continue work beyond NDTR:

- [Maamwi Gizekewag: Indigenous Curriculum and Learning Subcommittee Report](#) (Western University, 2021)
- Yellowhead Institute [Cash Back](#) and [Land Back](#) Reports
- [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit People Report](#) and [Calls for Justice](#)
- [Indigenous Peoples Atlas: The Road to Reconciliation](#)

Appendices

Principles for Reconciliation

Excerpt from Volume 6 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report (2015):

"A reconciliation framework is one in which Canada's political and legal systems, educational and religious institutions, corporate sector, and civil society function in ways that are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Canada has endorsed. The Commission believes that the following guiding principles of truth and reconciliation will assist Canadians moving forward:

1. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society.
2. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, as the original peoples of this country and as self-determining peoples, have Treaty, constitutional, and human rights that must be recognized and respected.
3. Reconciliation is a process of healing of relationships that requires public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms.
4. Reconciliation requires constructive action on addressing the ongoing legacies of colonialism that have had destructive impacts on Aboriginal peoples' education, cultures and languages, health, child welfare, the administration of justice, and economic opportunities and prosperity.
5. Reconciliation must create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.
6. All Canadians, as Treaty peoples, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.
7. The perspectives and understandings of Aboriginal Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers of the ethics, concepts, and practices of reconciliation are vital to long-term reconciliation.
8. Supporting Aboriginal peoples' cultural revitalization and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, protocols, and connections to the land into the reconciliation process are essential.
9. Reconciliation requires political will, joint leadership, trust building, accountability, and transparency, as well as a substantial investment of resources.
10. Reconciliation requires sustained public education and dialogue, including youth engagement, about the history and legacy of residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal rights, as well as the historical and contemporary contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canadian society" (16-17)

Quick Facts on Residential Schools

From the [Canadian Encyclopedia](#):

What were residential schools?	Residential schools were government-sponsored schools run by churches.
What was the purpose of residential schools?	The purpose of residential schools was to educate and convert Indigenous youth [to Christianity] and to assimilate them into Canadian society.
How many students attended residential schools?	An estimated 150,000 children attended residential schools.
How many children died at residential schools?	An estimated 6,000 children died at residential schools (records are incomplete).
How many residential schools were there in Canada?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- In total, over 130 residential schools operated in Canada between 1831 and 1996.- In 1931, there were 80 residential schools operating in Canada. This was the most at any one time.
When did the first residential school in Canada open?	The Mohawk Institute in Brantford, Ontario, accepted its first boarding students in 1831.
When did the last residential school in Canada close?	The Gordon Residential School in Punnichy, Saskatchewan, closed in 1996. It was the last federally-funded residential school in Canada.

Indian Residential School Denialism

"Fighting for the truth thus requires us to take residential school denialism more seriously. Denialism is, as TRC chair Murray Sinclair argues, the "biggest barrier" to reconciliation. It needs to be confronted at every opportunity. Taking comfort in delusions and disinformation will not advance healing and justice in this country. There is no shortcut. We need truth before reconciliation."

([Supernant, K. Carleton, S. CBC News, 2022](#))

The current public discourse surrounding topics of Reconciliation, alongside Anti-Racism and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, is often contentious, or controversial. Since the announcements of unmarked grave searches beginning in 2021, articles questioning the validity of these claims and searches have evoked what is being termed "Residential School Denialism."

Learning about violence and oppression in your own country, as a citizen who did not grow up learning about, or experiencing those things, can be devastating, frustrating, and sometimes elicit feelings of guilt. This is totally normal, and space must be made to work through those feelings. However, we must also make space to listen to Survivors, and families and learn about the legacy of these schools, in good faith. Everyone in Canada is impacted by these shared histories, through the legacy of Indian Residential Schools that remains. By refusing to acknowledge what happened, Canadians can unintentionally perpetuate the ongoing project of colonialism and risk reinforcement of harmful stereotypes about Indigenous Peoples, as well as further marginalizing and harming them.

At Western, part of our Indigenous Strategic Plan asks that we “Nurture an inclusive campus culture that values Indigenous peoples, perspectives and ways of knowing.” This includes acknowledging, naming and examining Indian Residential School Denialism, and ensuring the safety of Indigenous students is prioritized in these instances.

It is not easy to uncover and sit with truths, especially when they do not correspond to how and what you know, and your own experiences. As well, we are currently in an era of disinformation and misinformation, making it difficult to discern what “truth” even means. By coming together with patience and kindness, and a willingness to listen, we can build bridges across divides, identify shared oppression, and create solidarity. For many Indigenous people, these conversations can feel—and be—violent, taking an immense emotional toll, and it is important to acknowledge this. The more informed people are, and the greater capacity they build to hold space for each other to have difficult conversations, the greater will be the pathways that allow truth to emerge.

Resources on Residential School Denialism:

- [Truth before Reconciliation: 8 ways to identify and confront Residential School denialism](#) (Justice, Daniel H. Carleton, S 2021)
- [Residential School Denialism Is on the Rise. What to Know](#) (The Tyee 2023)
- [Residential-school denialism doesn't stand up to reality](#) (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation 2023)
- [The Dangerous Allure of Residential School Denialism](#) (The Walrus, 2023)
- [Lawyer says residential school denialism should be added to Criminal Code](#) (CBC News 2023)
- [Canada should consider legal solution to fight residential school denialism: report](#) (CTV News 2023)
- [What is residential school 'denialism' and should it be banned?](#) (CBC News 2023)
- ['I don't need any more education': Senator Lynn Beyak, residential school denialism, and attacks on truth and reconciliation in Canada' by Sean Carleton](#)

Further Resources

Local Residential School Context:

- <https://www.niindahlohke.ca/>
 - “This book takes its title from the phrase for “I work” in Lunaape, the traditional language of Munsee Delaware people, and was inspired by the work of the Munsee Delaware Language and History Group. Written for the descendants and communities of children who attended Mount Elgin and intended as a resource for all Canadians, Nii Ndahlohke tells the story of student life at Mount Elgin Industrial School between 1890 and 1915. Like the school itself, Nii Ndahlohke is structured in two sections. The first focuses on boys’ work, including maintenance and farm labour, the second on girls’ work, such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry.
In Nii Ndahlohke readers will find a valuable piece of local, Indigenous, and Canadian history that depicts the nature of “education” provided at Canada’s Indian residential schools and the exploitation of children’s labour in order to keep school operating costs down. This history honours the students of Mount Elgin even as it reveals the injustice of Indian policy, segregated schooling, and racism in Canada.”
- [Woodland Cultural Centre](#)
- [Our Healing Journey](#)
(Two parts – YouTube; Chippewas of the Thames First Nation)
- [Mount Elgin Residential School – YouTube Documentary](#) by User: Jaguar Bird
- [“My Own Old English Friends:” Networking Anglican Settler Colonialism at the Shingwauk Home, Huron College and Western University](#); Natalie Cross & Thomas Peace

National Contexts:

- [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#)
 - [Reports](#)
 - [NCTR Archives](#)
- [Orange Shirt Day official website](#)
- [Indian Residential School Survivors’ Society](#)
- [Office of the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites associated with Indian Residential Schools](#)
- [The Path, Module 3](#)
- Yellowhead Institute’s [Calls to Action Accountability: A 2023 Status Update on Reconciliation](#)
- CBC’s [Beyond 94](#) - looking at Calls to Action that have been achieved or are ongoing
- [The Children Remembered](#)
- [Historica Canada: Education Guide](#)

- [Legacy of Hope: Where are the Children](#) (Survivors Stories)
- [apihtawikosisan: Indigenous Issues 101](#)

Podcasts & Episodes:

- [Historica Canada Residential Schools Podcast](#)
- [Canadaland: Residential Schools](#) (Ryan McMahon & Chelsea Vowel)
- [All of it: Connie Walker on Residential Schools](#)
- [Porcupine Podcast: Finding Healing after Surviving Residential Schools with George Tuccaro](#)

Documentary Films/Videos:

- [We Were Children](#) (NFB)
- [Our People Will be Healed](#) (NFB)
- [Namwayut: We are all One, Truth and Reconciliation in Canada](#) (CBC Animation, Chief Robert Joseph)
- [Gord Downie's The Secret Path + Panel](#) (CBC Arts)
- [Canada's Dark Secret](#) (Al Jazeera English)
- [My Auntie Survived Residential School](#) (Sarain Fox, CBC Docs)
- [Murray Sinclair's Statement on Kamloops discoveries](#) (CBC)

Fictional Films:

- [Indian Horse](#)
- [Rhymes for Young Ghouls](#)

Indian Day Schools:

- [Canadian Encyclopedia: Indian Day Schools in Canada](#)
- [UBC: Indian Day Schools](#)

Non-Profits:

- [The Indian Residential School Survivor Society](#)
- [Atlohsa Family Healing Centre](#)

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