

Engaging with the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation at Western



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Indigenous
Initiatives

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This document is intended to provide educators, staff, and leaders at Western University with information and context relevant to the observation the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR). This year, the Western University has designated Friday, September 29 as a non-instructional day to observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on campus.

Additionally, to keep the conversation going beyond NDTR, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives has partnered with Atlohsa Family Healing Services for Orange Shirt Day and NDTR programming on “ReconciliACTION: An (Un)Learning Series.” Comprised of several different events taking place from September 2023 to May 2024, the series kicks off September 29 at the Wampum Learning Lodge and focuses on themes that ask audiences to reflect on the impact of the Indian Residential School legacy and their roles in building meaningful Reconciliation in their own lives and sectors.

At Western, we are asking leaders across campus to coordinate and plan events that make NDTR relevant to their faculties, units, and students. We will raise the Orange Flag on Monday, September 25, and have compiled NDTR and partner and campus-related events on our website under the “[Truth and Reconciliation](#)” tab. You can also find more information about our Learning Series leading up to the NDTR, and other events, on our social media.

Follow @WesternuOII on Twitter and @WampumLearningLodge on Facebook and Instagram.

Note: Ontario has not declared September 30 a provincial holiday, however Western University has designated September 29 a non-instructional day. We hope you will join us in learning and unlearning.

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

What is the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation?

The official observance of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation takes place on September 30. This date was previously (and still is) observed in Indigenous communities as *Orange Shirt Day* in what is now known as Canada. This day seeks to honour survivors of Indian Residential Schools, and those who did not make it home.

Indian Residential Schools predate Confederation and were funded by the Canadian government and operated by various churches from the 1870s until 1996.

In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created as part of the Indian Residential School settlement, to document Residential School Survivors' accounts so that no one in Canada could claim they did not know about this legacy. The Commission completed its work and released a report with [94 Calls to Action](#) in 2015, asking for all Canadians and levels of government to participate. The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation was established in 2021 in response to Call #80:

*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?

All people living in Canada are encouraged to commemorate NDTR and Orange Shirt Day in ways that centre and honour survivors, their families, and communities.

While the TRC Calls to Action focus on the IRS legacy, there are many Calls that seek to address other systemic inequities such as the Indian Act, or concepts of *terra nullius* and the Doctrine of Discovery. Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson writes a critique of “reconciliation” in her book *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*, published in 2011.

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.
(Simpson 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? (Simpson 22)*

We must consider the complicated nature of addressing the legacy of the schools. Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately represented in Canada’s justice system, and [Indigenous youth make up almost half of Canada’s incarcerated youth population](#). Indigenous youth [make up over half of the children currently in the child welfare system](#) as well, with advocates pointing to this statistic as a [direct correlation to the dysfunction created in families whose members attended Indian Residential Schools](#).

What is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada?



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 [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#) was struck after the Indian Residential Schools Settlement* in 2007. The survivors who participated requested the Commission be created to ensure that no one in Canada could claim ignorance of what happened and to facilitate reconciliation. You can find the official mandate [here](#). The TRC travelled across Canada from 2008-2015, gathering over 6500 stories from survivors and their families that were included in the report, as well as families of those who did not make it home. It is from those stories that the 94

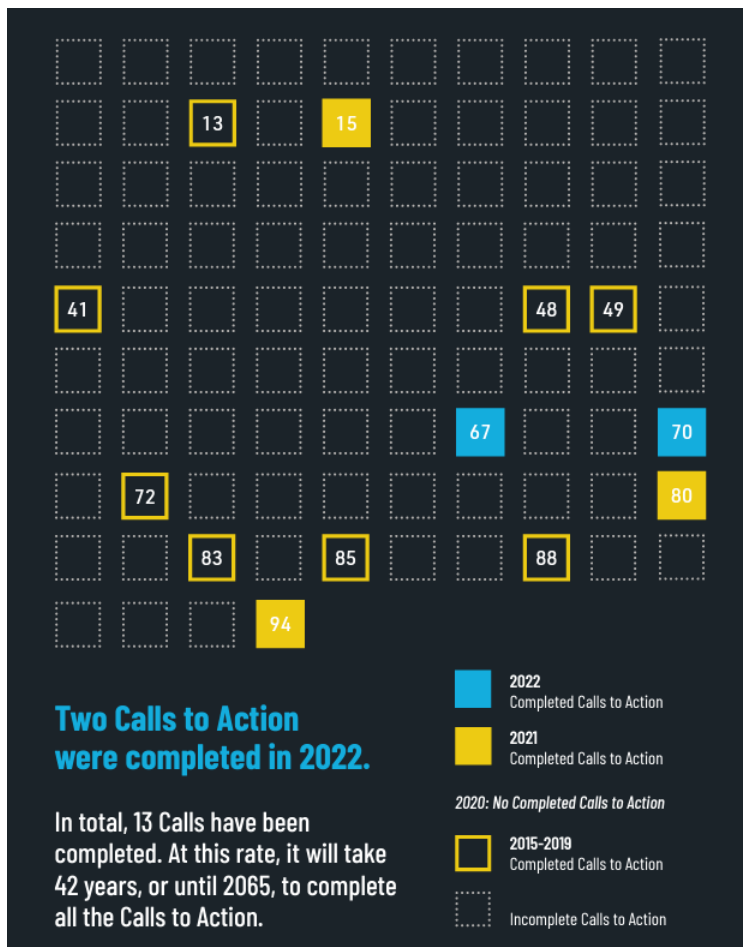
Calls to Action were created. The TRC also held national educational events and created a historical record of the Indian Residential School system, gathering documents from the Canadian government and some churches and organizations, including Huron College here at Western. Today, the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#) continues to educate Canadians and newcomers on the legacy of Residential Schools.

*The settlement, as well as the TRC, did not account for every IRS, nor the Day Schools that operated in the same timelines.

Why is the word 'Aboriginal' used in the Truth and Reconciliation report and not 'Indigenous?'

'Aboriginal' is the legal term used in the Constitution and laws of Canada, as is the term "Indian" (e.g., "Indian Status" and the *Indian Act*). There is no legal definition of the term "Indigenous" in Canada and therefore the word Aboriginal is the most appropriate in this context. For more information on terminology see [The Elements of Indigenous Style](#) or Chelsea Vowel's blog post "[What to Call Us.](#)"

TRC Calls to Action



The 94 Calls to Action were created by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in response to the evidence and stories they gathered from 2008-2015. These Calls are intended as a roadmap to facilitate Reconciliation in Canada. You can read them [here](#).

IMAGE: FROM THE YELLOWHEAD INSTITUTE'S CALLS TO ACTION ACCOUNTABILITY: A 2022 STATUS UPDATE ON RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation Definition

Definition: This term came into use in the post-WWII period to mark socio-political processes of healing and transformation in the wake of gross human rights violations and major political conflicts. In Canada, reconciliation has come to signify a process of grappling with colonialism

and forging better relationships between the Government of Canada (as well as society more broadly) and Indigenous peoples. The TRC “defines reconciliation as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. A critical part of this process involves 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).

Debates: Unfortunately, “reconciliation” is used in very different ways by different constituencies. The Government of Canada often uses the term to suggest that colonialism is over and that the government’s relationship with Indigenous peoples has now changed for the better. However, others contend that reconciliation operates as a “politics of distraction,” obscuring the fact that colonialism has not ended (Corntassel & Holder, 2008, p. 472).

For many Indigenous peoples, righting colonial wrongs involves much more than symbolic gestures; it necessitates fiscal compensation, the return of significant portions of land, and meaningful recognition of Indigenous rights to self-determination. The etymology of the word “reconciliation” also makes its application to the Government of Canada’s relations with

Indigenous peoples problematic. First, the “re” in “reconciliation” suggests a return to a previously amicable state of relations that, many scholars assert, never existed in the context of colonization (Chrisjohn & Wasacase, 2009, p. 222). Additionally, the word “reconciliation” is steeped in Catholicism, where it signifies a sacrament through which sinners are “reconciled with the Church” (Garneau, 2012, p. 35). Some Indigenous peoples contend that the term “conciliation” is more appropriate because it “acknowledge[s]” that conflict has occurred and that “distrust” must be “overcome” (Amagoalik, 2008, p. 93).

[\(Office of Indigenous Initiatives Key Terms\)](#)

What is Orange Shirt Day?

“Orange Shirt Day is a legacy of the St. Joseph Mission (SJM) Residential School (1891-1981) Commemoration Project and Reunion events that took place in Williams Lake, BC, Canada, in May 2013. This project was the vision of Esketemc (Alkali Lake) Chief Fred Robbins, who is a former student himself. It brought together former students and their families from the Secwepemc, Tsilhqot’in, Southern Dakelh and St’at’imc Nations, along with the Cariboo Regional District, and the mayors and municipalities, school districts, and civic organizations in the Cariboo Region.

The events were designed to commemorate the residential school experience, to witness and honour the healing journey of the survivors and their families, and to commit to the ongoing process of reconciliation. Chief Justice Murray Sinclair challenged all participants to keep the reconciliation process alive, because of the realization that every former student had similar stories.

Orange Shirt Day is a legacy of this project. As spokesperson for the Reunion group leading up to the events, former student Phyllis (Jack) Webstad told her story of her first day at residential school when her shiny new orange shirt, bought by her grandmother, was taken from her as a six-year old girl.” (OrangeShirtDay.org)

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

Where to buy Orange Shirts:

It is recommended that people buy orange shirts from Indigenous creators and organizations that directly support and/or provide services for Indigenous people. The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and the Indian Residential School Survivor Society are great places to start. The Western Bookstore also has Orange Shirts and profits go to the Save the Barn Campaign (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation). You can also purchase shirts from Atlohsa Gifts and Rezonance Printing in London.

What are Indian Residential Schools?

The Indian Residential School system was formally in operation from the 1870s until 1996 in Canada, with many schools operating before Confederation, such as the Mushhole. Over 150,000 Indigenous children attended the schools, which were funded by the Canadian government and administered by Christian churches.

In many cases, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) [collected 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.



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

Locally, the [Mount Elgin Residential School](#), also known as the Muncey Institute, operated near Muncey, ON, where Chippewas of the Thames First Nation (COTTfN) is located. The school was founded in 1847 and was run from 1851 to 1862 by the Wesleyan Methodist Society, and again from 1867 to 1946, with the United Church of Canada taking over in 1925. The building is no longer standing, but there is a monument in COTTfN featuring the names of all the students who attended.

Another school that ran locally in Brantford, ON was the Mohawk Institute Residential School, known colloquially as “The Mushhole.” The school was converted into The Woodland Cultural Centre in 1972, dedicated to preserving the school’s history and revitalizing the languages and cultures the school sought to destroy. In operation from 1831 to 1970, the Mushhole was run by the Anglican Church and is notorious for the abuses students faced there.

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

Virtual tours of the Mohawk Institute are available [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, and in 2022, the Pope formally apologized to survivors and families of those who did not make it home, but [there is controversy and criticism surrounding this apology](#). The Roman Catholic Church [also has yet to pay the \\$25 million ordered in the 2007 Residential School settlement](#).

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](#))

Located near the Mount Elgin Residential School site, in Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, is an old barn whose beams contain etchings made by children who attended the school. The First Nation launched a petition and fundraising campaign to preserve the structure in 2021.

“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](#).

COTTFN [created a monument dedicated to the students who attended Mount Elgin in 2012](#). It is accessible to the public, with visitors asked to contact the Heritage Centre first.

What is the significance of unmarked graves?

Since the [discovery of 200 potential unmarked graves at the Kamloops Indian Residential School grounds in May of 2021](#), thousands more anomalies have been detected at old school grounds across Canada using ground-penetrating radar. The TRC reports and accounts estimated 3213 children died at Residential Schools, and even then it was believed the number was higher. A

report published in 2015 (in addition to the TRC's six volumes of reports) entitled "[Where are the Children Buried?](#)" has more detailed recommendations on how to address the issue.

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

75. 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.

Many First Nations have already begun this work, or are continuing it, and since 2021, the findings of potential graves have been highly publicized. This has invoked a high level of scrutiny from a variety of media organizations, academics, and historians, who claim that the work being done to uncover the graves is not only blown out of proportion, but some go as far as to claim it is a hoax. (See the appendix on denialism later in this document.) Since 1974, 20 First Nations, mostly in Western provinces, have identified thousands of anomalies near a variety of Residential School sites, but quantifying the number is difficult, as some communities might choose to never release publicly what they've found.

This is a difficult topic to unpack for many reasons, primarily due to the direct impact on families of Survivors and those who did not make it home that are met with disbelief and denial. Each community and First Nation is addressing the anomalies at Residential School sites according to its own customs, traditions, and healing journeys. For some, that may mean the potential graves remain untouched, and for others that they are dug up. However, Canadians should need no further proof of the atrocities committed at the Schools, as they are detailed explicitly in the TRC reports and subsequent special reports. It is also important to remember that many more students died after attending Residential Schools or Day Schools, due to the abuses and trauma they experienced, who are not included in these counts.

In a [June 2022 CBC Opinion article, Kisha Supernant and Sean Carleton write](#): "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."

More Information:

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

Are communities near London searching for graves?

[*Deshkaan Ziibing Anishinaabeg*](#) (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation) is leading an investigation into possible unmarked student graves at the [former Mount Elgin Industrial Residential School](#), just outside of London. At the request of leaders from *Deshkaan Ziibing Anishinaabeg*, Western University is humbled to support the investigation with its expertise, and Western's Office of Indigenous Initiatives is helping to coordinate the University's involvement. Communication about the search will be at the discretion of *Deshkaan Ziibing Anishinaabeg*.

There are also many Western scholars involved in national and provincial organizations investigating the Residential Schools, such as Dr. Rebekah Jacques, who serves on the National Advisory Committee on Missing Children and Unmarked Burials.

Read news coverage here:

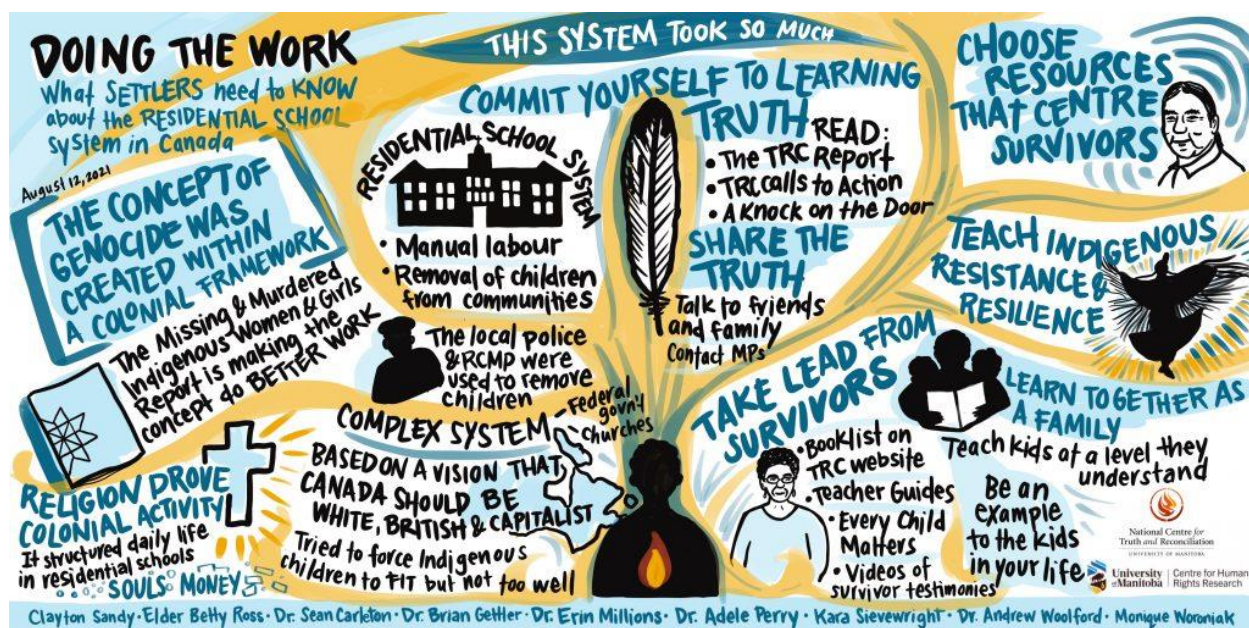
[First Nation getting clearer picture of who attended Mt. Elgin residential school](#) (*Simcoe Reformer*, 2022)

[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)

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 how Canada came to be. While Indian Residential Schools were not the direct wish or order of every Canadian, the last school closed in 1996. The schools were effectively created to “kill the Indian in the child” under the government established by Sir John A. McDonald. Duncan Campbell Scott, who managed Residential School systems and policy from 1913 to 1932, notoriously said:

“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.” ([Canadian Encyclopedia](#))

This statement clearly expresses the intent of the schools. Under the Indian Act, the Canadian government designates who is and is not an Indian through “Indian Status.” Once all “Indians” were assimilated into the body politic of Canada, Treaties would cease to have effect—and thus the schools, and this policy, were intended to eradicate Indigenous nationhood.

Upon release of the Truth and Reconciliation final report in 2015, Justice Murray Sinclair outlined the work the Commission had done, thanked the Survivors, and [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 (Maclean's Magazine, June 2, 2015).

It is in this spirit of reconciliation that every Canadian is invited to reflect upon the legacy of Residential Schools and to work together to ensure that this part of Canada's history is never forgotten and that the damages are repaired.

More suggestions on how to engage in Reconciliation can be found in this guide from the University of Manitoba's Centre for Human Rights "[Doing the Work: Truth Before Reconciliation](#)," which emerged from a panel discussion held in collaboration with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. The graphic above comes from the panel.

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

It is possible that some people may feel uncomfortable about participating in NDTR events or not view them as a significant priority. That is OK, as that is where they are in their learning journey. All you can do is encourage staff, faculty, and students to attend events, and offer as much background information as you can to help them navigate protocols and appropriate ways to commemorate and honour Indian Residential School survivors, their families, and those who did not make it home.

- Some of the barriers to participation in Indigenous learning opportunities can be not having enough time or staff not being compensated in their contracts for participation. Consider how to make space for staff and faculty to engage, in alignment with Western's Strategic Plan for Building Relationships with Indigenous Peoples and Communities.
- Some students may not be aware of NDTR or may not view attending NDTR events as a priority. By building participation into their syllabus and/or providing reflection assignments, faculty might encourage engagement.

A Trauma-Informed Approach

Bear in mind when engaging anyone on this topic how the conversations around Indian Residential Schools and their legacy will impact Indigenous people with lived experiences in your classroom, office and on campus. While every educator has a responsibility to facilitate learning experiences through generative discussion and debate, conversations around the severity or impact of the Schools, or whether the Schools constitute an instrument of genocide, will have impacts far beyond the classroom; such discussions should focus on fostering a sense of belonging for Indigenous people and promoting Reconciliation on campus and in our society. The topic of Indian Residential Schools and the TRC should be treated with care, as Indigenous communities are living with the extensive impacts of the Schools today—in everything from

education, child welfare and incarceration, to mental, physical, and emotional health, culture, and spirituality.

Tips for Teaching this topic with care:

When discussing or providing information on Indian Residential Schools, **please provide a content warning in advance of the lecture, materials, or discussion.** The purpose of providing content warnings is to ensure that anyone opening or seeing content that might upset them or trigger a trauma/emotional response, be prepared to navigate the content or forego it. Allowing Indigenous students to avoid content on topics that may be disturbing or triggering for them is one possible compassionate approach to teaching this material. Anyone, regardless of who they are, could be upset by what they learn in this context. Offer space and time for students to reflect, sit with the stories and impacts they hear, and process the emotions evoked.

Content warnings could include language around: genocide, suicide, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Indian Residential Schools, sexual abuse, violence against Indigenous Peoples (e.g., *Content Warning: Indian Residential Schools, sexual abuse*).

- [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, films, resources or messaging around Indian Residential Schools to your students, staff, and faculty:

- Elders and cultural supports [from the Indigenous Student Centre](#) may be accessed by students via virtual and in-person appointment; contact the Centre by phone (519 661 4095), [email](#) or by connecting with Mandy Bragg at the Centre
 - 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](#) before reaching out. Please contact OII's Administrative Assistant, Hallie Abram at habram2@uwo.ca with your course, or event, reason for seeking to invite an Elder, and applicable dates. We will review your request and respond within one business week – however we'd appreciate at minimum two-weeks notice to make arrangements on your behalf. Please note we may not be able to accommodate everyone.
- Crisis Health & Wellness supports (including Mental Health Support) is available via [Western's Student Crisis Contact Information](#).

- Off-campus support is also available via [Atlohsa's Family Healing Services](#) and the 24-hour Crisis Line at [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
- The National Indian Residential School crisis line is available to provide 24/7 support to Residential School survivors and others who are affected: 1-866-925-4419
- Hope for Wellness Helpline is available 24/7 to all Indigenous people across Canada. Online chat function is available ([Home - Hope for Wellness Helpline](#)) as well as their phone line: 1-855-242-3310.

Learning Opportunities

Indigenous Learning Honour

Western's [Indigenous Learning Honour](#) recognizes students' engagement for their efforts towards Truth and Reconciliation during their time at Western.

Once completed, the Honour will appear on the student's official transcript upon graduation. The structure of this program requires students to incorporate both curricular and extracurricular activities. Students awarded this Honour will graduate with some of the perspectives and tools necessary in navigating and supporting Truth and Reconciliation efforts on a personal, professional, and collective level. While academic coursework will allow students to build their understanding of Indigeneity on global, national, and local contexts, extracurricular activities will primarily focus on a Canadian context.

This Indigenous Learning Honour was created in response to a recommendation of Maamwi Gzikewag: *Indigenous Curriculum & Learning Report* and based on the initial work of a Head & Heart Fellowship project by Camille Di Iulio, both in 2021. The name and logo are both inspired by this initial work; *memegwaanh* is the Anishinaabemowin word for butterfly and "represents the transformative potential that Indigenous ways of knowing offer students in terms of its deep epistemological and paradigmatic shifts" (Di Iulio, 2021). The colour of the butterfly in the logo represents the Learning Honour's relation to Western but includes Woodland-style florals to depict its distinctly Indigenous nature. The medicine wheel, a symbol recognized by many Indigenous peoples in Canada, represents the holistic learning and healing that is possible as students complete this honour.

Faculty members and administration interested in promoting the Learning Honour to students can reach out to [Sara Mai Chitty, OII Pedagogy & Curriculum Advisor](#) for a slide deck and other promotional materials.

Students [can enroll through Western Connect](#):

- ◆ On the left sidebar, Indigenous Learning Honour is listed under “Recognition”
- ◆ Click ‘Enroll Now’ beginning on September 30, 2022
- ◆ Complete the intake questionnaire

Online Learning Resources

Western Libraries and the Office of Indigenous Initiatives have collaborated to procure licensing for the use of two online learning courses, created by external organizations, to give staff, faculty, students and leadership foundational context on Reconciliation and Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Both resources live on OWL, and the files can be imported into OWL course sites. 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. [To embed them, access them here](#). Do not enroll students using this link.

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

Suggested in-class or group discussion activities:

Have participants review the Truth and Reconciliation Report and the Calls to Action.

- Invite them to identify calls that are relevant to their discipline/field. How have Calls been implemented? If they haven’t been, what are some ideas towards addressing them?
- Have participants review the Calls to Action and reflect in groups on ways individuals can contribute, or on things they need to do to build their own capacity to engage meaningfully in Reconciliation
- Using CBC’s [Beyond94](#) Resource, have participants explore the progress of various levels of government on the TRC Calls to Action – discuss what are the factors delaying action. How could these barriers be addressed?
- Have participants explore how Western and/or Affiliates have contributed towards relevant TRC Calls to Action
- Read the Yellowhead Institute’s [Calls to Action Accountability Report 2022](#) and discuss the key questions posed:
 - Seven years after the released TRC’s Calls to Action, what kind of “value” do Canadians see in Reconciliation?
 - Every year we note that the progress on Call to Action implementation is slow. It continues to be. How can we explain this?
 - What does this rate of progress, and which Calls get addressed, say about Reconciliation in Canada?
- Instructors: have students participate and attend in NDTR events and write a reflection as part of a course assignment
- Leadership, Instructors: Have staff, faculty, students enroll in the [4 Seasons of Reconciliation Modules](#) to complete on Friday, September 29

Creating Accountable Spaces

Learning and unlearning challenging topics such as genocide, oppression, abuse, and state violence can be an uncomfortable process. Taking a holistic approach to these conversations allows us to account for emotions, alongside evaluating facts and differing opinions. A helpful practice can be to create “Accountable Spaces” in lieu of “Safe Spaces” and “Brave Spaces.” Read Elise Ahenkorah discuss the differences [here](#).

“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.” (Ahenkorah, 2020).

Creating a safe space can be difficult, because we can’t promise that people won’t think or say harmful things – we can only control how we respond to them. As well, by placing the onus on “brave people” to bring up difficult nuances, it often leaves people, especially people with a direct relationship to the topic at hand, open to re-traumatization. As educators, as well as staff and leadership in an educational institution, we have a responsibility to provide accountable learning environments for ourselves, and our students.

It is also important to note that peoples’ complex identities are a part of these conversations and they do need to be considered, especially when people have been directly impacted by the events being discussed. Consider invoking humility by acknowledging bias as a person who has never experienced what is being discussed.

Building Accountable Space Guidelines

(adapted from Elisa Ahenkorah adapting UCLA)

For Facilitators/Event leaders:

- Establish the parameters of the learning environment with everyone present. Explain these guidelines, or ones that work for you, the event and the space.
- Acknowledge that we are all learning and this can be a contentious space
- Ask your audience if there are other guidelines needed to support them to ensure the conversation does not create further trauma
- Ask your audience what can 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 accountable space guidelines in your event’s registration process, so attendees know these guidelines before entering the space
- Offer content warnings
- Have support people at your event, such as an Elder, or counsellor, to support

For Participants:

- Come with a learning mindset, ready to listen with an open heart and mind

- Please do not interrupt others
- Listen actively, instead of just waiting to speak. Use a pen and paper to record your thoughts, if necessary
- Be mindful of your total talk time and, if you are comfortable, contribute to the conversation, ask questions
- Give everyone a chance to speak, without unnecessary pressure
- If you said something offensive or problematic, apologize for your actions or words being offensive — not for the person feeling insulted
- Recognize and embrace friction as evidence that multiple ideas are entering the conversation — not that the group is not getting along.
- Give credit where it is due. If you are echoing someone's previously stated idea, give the appropriate credit. Attribute stories and anecdotes
- Ask for clarification — try not to assume or project. If you find yourself doing this, keep listening and reflect on what assumptions or projections you are making and interrogate what they are rooted in.
- 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, as well as others.
- Words and tone matter. Be mindful of the impact of what you say, and not just your intent. If you are hurt by someone's tone and/or words ask for accountability in a kind way. Consider your own positionality.
- If you attend as an ally of the community, please allow space for diverse and marginalized communities to share their experiences

Beyond NDTR



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

Wearing orange, and creating opportunities for commemoration is important—but the legacy will not be healed simply by putting on a T-shirt. The Yellowhead Institute Report on Calls to Action Accountability 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)

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](#)

Appendix

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?	- 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 political environment surrounding topics of Reconciliation, alongside Anti-Racism and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, is as complex as ever. 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.

More Information and Resources:

- [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

National Contexts:

- [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#)
 - o [Reports](#)
 - o [NCTR Archives](#)
- [Orange Shirt Day official website](#)
- [Indian Residential School Survivors’ Society](#)
- [The Path, Module 3](#) (can be embedded into your course on OWL)
- Yellowhead Institute’s [Calls to Action Accountability: A 2020 Status Update on Reconciliation](#) and [Calls to Action Accountability: A 2021 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](#)



Suggested citations:

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Indigenous Initiatives
1151 Richmond Street
London, Ontario, Canada N6A 3K7
Tel: 519.661.2111 x83240
indigenousinitiatives@uwo.ca