Residential School Shame: The TRC Report (Duration: 18:20)
In the 19th century the Canadian government set up the residential school system as a way to teach English and Christianity to Aboriginal children. Successive generations were taken from their families and put in boarding schools run by churches. Over the years, many of the children suffered physical, mental and even sexual abuse. Many died. In 2008 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created to look into the legacy of this dark chapter in our history. Its report was released in June 2015.

News in Review Study Modules
Residential Schools: Truth and Healing, September 2010
Canada’s Residential School Apology, September 2008
Saving the Native Children, February 2003

Related CBC Programs
8th Fire, 4-part series
Aboriginal Education Then and Now: Issues, Controversies and Concerns (Collection)
Residential Schools: A Sad Chapter in Canadian History (Collection)

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News in Review is produced by CBC News
Resource Guide Writers: Marc Keirstead
Resource Guide Editor: Sean Dolan
Host: Michael Serapio
Packaging Producer: Marie-Hélène Savard
Associate Producer: Agathe Carrier
Supervising Manager: Laraine Bone

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Note to Teachers

The classroom must promote a safe place for students to discuss sensitive issues such as violence and death. Prepare students for the topics that will be discussed. Allow for individual reflective time in addition to small group activities where students can safely process their thoughts and emotions.

MINDS ON

There have probably been times in your school career where you have been victimized or bullied. After the event you were likely angry and ashamed — and you wanted to try and make sure it did not happen again. If you were to meet your abuser, what would you say? What would you want your abuser to say? How could both of you avoid future conflicts and move on?

For over a hundred years, many Aboriginal families had their children removed and sent to residential schools to become “civilized.” Students were regularly abused at these schools — an experience that went on for generations. Over the years, the victims have expressed anger, suffered depression, and spiraled into addiction. Now they are seeking reconciliation.

Which leaves us with the question: How does one segment of society reconcile with another?

Reconciliation is the act of restoring a relationship by helping a person or group change their perspective and understand a situation in a spirit of compassion and trust.

From top to bottom: Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, chair of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC); Former N.W.T. premier Stephen Kakfwi, a residential school survivor, attending the release of the TRC report with his granddaughter; Nellie Carlson, a residential school survivor from the Saddle Lake Cree First Nation and long-time activist for the equal rights of Aboriginal women and children; Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde
VIDEO REVIEW

Before viewing

1. Before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (2015) was issued there had been earlier studies and recommendations:
   - The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996)

How does the title of the 2015 report differ from the previous ones? What might the 2015 report stress that would be different from the previous reports? Be mindful of your perspective while you watch the video.

2. The report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) accused the Canadian government of cultural genocide, which the TRC defines as:

   "...the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next."

As you watch the video, determine whether you think the government’s actions resulted in cultural genocide as defined by the TRC.

Viewing

1. Previous government-commissioned reports advocated for financial compensation as the main means of addressing the issues and concerns facing Aboriginal peoples. How does the TRC’s report differ from those reports?

2. Kathleen Mahoney, lawyer to the Assembly of First Nations, says that Canadian students have not been taught about residential schools.
a) Have you heard about residential schools? If so, how did you hear about them?

b) Why does Mahoney feel it is important for all students to learn about residential schools?

3. a) How might individuals participate in the reconciliation process?

b) How does your answer compare to the TRC’s definition of the reconciliation process?

“...The Commission 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. Establishing respectful relationships also requires the revitalization of Indigenous law and legal traditions. It is important that all Canadians understand how traditional First Nations, Inuit, and Métis approaches to resolving conflict, repairing harm, and restoring relationships can inform the reconciliation process.”

c) After reading this definition, what would you add to your answer to question 3a?

4. Many children who died in residential schools were never named in the official record. What does that tell you about the attitude of those in charge of these institutions?
After viewing

1. In 1883, Canada’s first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, told the House of Commons:

   "When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men."  

   Should Macdonald be condemned for his views? Is he a racist? Use the Understanding Ethical Dimensions of History template from the Historical Thinking Project to help you determine how to judge the past: historicalthinking.ca/historical-thinking-concept-templates

2. Why do you think it took until 1996 to close the last residential school?

3. As the conditions in residential schools became public there were a few people who felt that the schools were not all bad. Examine the two sources below and determine whether or not the arguments they present are valid. Record your conclusions below:

   - Go to news.nationalpost.com and find Paul Russell’s “Could it be that residential schools weren’t so bad?”
   - Go to www.northcountrypublicradio.org and find “In defense of Indian residential schools.”

Sources:

THE STORY

Honouring the truth
In 2007, the largest class action suit of its kind was settled in The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. One clause of the agreement called for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Their mandate was to acknowledge and promote awareness of the history and impact of residential schools on Canada with a primary focus on Aboriginal Canadians. The agreement also laid out recommendations on how to begin the process of reconciliation.

Chilling statistics
Why was there a need for reconciliation? The truth can be expressed in a few chilling statistics:

- With the goal of taking the “savage” out of Aboriginal children, residential schools were a tool of the Canadian government from 1883 to 1996.
- 150,000 First Nations, Metis and Inuit children were uprooted from their homes and sent to residential schools.
- 6,000 Aboriginal children are believed to have died in residential schools. Many thousands more were physically and sexually abused at the hands of residential school staff.

And then there’s the terrible social legacy of residential schools. Aboriginal Canadians are a community struggling to come to terms with life in the post-residential school era:

- While 4.3 per cent of women in Canada identify as Aboriginal, 11.3 per cent of missing women are Aboriginal and 16 per cent of murdered women in Canada are Aboriginal.
- The suicide rates per 100 000 Aboriginal males is 126; while the non-Aboriginal rate is 24. Among females, the Aboriginal rate is 35 for every 100 000 Canadians versus the non-Aboriginal rate of five in 100 000.
- While 3.8 per cent of Canadians identify themselves as First Nations, Metis or Inuit, 23.2 per cent of the inmate population is from these Aboriginal communities.

Clearly these appalling, cold and depressing facts demonstrate the need for reconciliation between Aboriginal Canadians and the government that imposed their will on them not very long ago. Therefore, as part of the class action lawsuit decision in 2007, the Canadian government established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to begin the process of building a new relationship between Canada’s Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.
Unfathomable abuse
The TRC heard from survivors who put a human face on the terrible legacy of residential schools.

Archie Hyacinthe compared the experience to that of being kidnapped and taken into captivity:

"That’s when the trauma started for me, being separated from my sister, from my parents, and from our, our home. We were no longer free. It was like being, you know, taken to a strange land, even though it was our, our, our land, as I understood later on."

When she first went to the Amos, Québec, school, Margo Wylde could not speak any French:

"I said to myself, ‘How am I going to express myself? How will I make people understand what I’m saying?’ And I wanted to find my sisters to ask them to come and get me. You know it’s sad to say, but I felt I was a captive."

Bernard Catcheway recalled about the Pine Creek School in Manitoba the 1960s:

"We had to eat all our food even though we didn’t like it. There was a lot of times there I seen other students that threw up and they were forced to eat their own, their own vomit."

Fred Brass said about his years at the Roman Catholic school in Kamsack, Saskatchewan:

"They were] the hellish years of my life. You know to be degraded by our so-called educators, to be beat by these people that were supposed to have been there to look after us, to teach us right from wrong. It makes me wonder now today a lot of times I ask that question, who was right and who was wrong?"

How could teachers and caregivers act in such brutal ways? Surely they knew that their actions would deeply wound the psyche of the children who were entrusted to them.

A generational legacy
The legacy of residential schools was generational. Not only were the students affected but parents and children of survivors felt the impact as well.

Alma Scott of Winnipeg told the Commission:

"[As] a direct result of those residential schools...I was a dysfunctional mother. I spent over twenty years of my life stuck in a bottle in an addiction where I didn’t want to feel any emotions so I numbed out with drugs and with alcohol. That’s how I raised my children, that’s what my children saw, and that’s what I saw."

By the 1960s, residential schools were slowly being closed, but the government replaced one form of abuse with another in a policy initiative that came to be known as the “Sixties Scoop.” Instead of sending Aboriginal children to residential schools, they were removed from their families by child welfare agencies and placed in non-Aboriginal foster homes.

Government policy continues to marginalize and foster mistreatment of First Nations communities and people in many parts of the country. According to Perry Bellegarde, the National Chief for the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), there are 120 Aboriginal communities under boil water advisories. The advisories have been in effect for varying periods of time. The people who live in the Neskantaga First Nation have had to boil their water since 1995. How can Canadians be denied the basic right of clean drinking water?
Reconciling for the future

After the TRC outlined the horrific conditions faced by the students of residential schools, the commissioners turned their attention to reconciliation. Through reconciliation they hoped to establish a relationship with Canadians and governments that established mutual respectful and encouraged both parties to treat each other as equals. The commissioners stressed that reconciliation would benefit all Canadians, not just Aboriginal Peoples:

“Reconciliation is in the best interests of all of Canada. It is necessary not only to resolve the ongoing conflicts between Aboriginal peoples and institutions of the country, but also in order for Canada to remove a stain from its past and be able to maintain its claim to be a leader in the protection of human rights among the nations of the world.”

The TRC’s report included a “Calls to Action” listing of 94 recommendations. These recommendations included making Canadian students aware of the history of residential schools in all provincial curricula. They also outlined the importance of improving health care, rethinking child welfare, and establishing a framework for future discussions with governments. The report also stressed the need for all Canadians to participate in the process of reconciliation:

“Reconciliation must become a way of life. It will take many years to repair damaged trust and relationships in Aboriginal communities and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Reconciliation not only requires apologies, reparations, the relearning of Canada’s national history, and public commemoration, but also needs real social, political, and economic change. Ongoing public

education and dialogue are essential to reconciliation. Governments, churches, educational institutions, and Canadians from all walks of life are responsible for taking action on reconciliation in concrete ways, working collaboratively with Aboriginal peoples. Reconciliation begins with each and every one of us.”

On June 2, 2015, the TRC report was released in a formal ceremony. Videos of survivors were played for those in attendance and First Nation elders spoke of the need to acknowledge the past and move forward in a spirit of pride and reconciliation. Representatives of various churches who had run many of the residential schools apologized for the abuse and neglect committed by their clergy. The chair of the commission, Justice Murray Sinclair closed the session by calling on governments to implement the commission’s recommendations, stating that the report was a living document and would not be allowed to sit on shelves to gather dust. The day included tears but also vibrant chants and drumming, signaling a chance for a new start in relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

Reconsidering ratification

One recommendation of the report is that the Canadian government ratify the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The federal government has refused to ratify the declaration because one of the clauses requires Indigenous people to give free, prior and informed consent to projects that impact their land and rights. The federal government fears this will give indigenous communities a veto over such projects.

Do you feel agree with the federal government’s decision? Why or why not?
Reflecting deeper

1. In this News in Review report, AFN National Chief Perry Bellegarde addresses the issue of stereotyping as an impediment to reconciliation:

> Those images of Indigenous people as being substandard and pagan and savage, rid yourself of those racial stereotypes of Indians and Indigenous peoples being dumb and lazy and drunk and on welfare. Rid yourself of those things so new things can come in. And the new things to come in are the respect for our languages, our customs and our traditions, that we are equally as important as human beings.

Why does the kind of stereotyping described by the chief hinder opportunities for reconciliation? How can these stereotypes be eliminated?

2. On August 24, the Ontario government signed a political accord with the First Nations in the province. It was described as a turning point in relations between the government and Aboriginal communities in Ontario. Examine the highlights of the accord and determine if you feel it meets the criteria for reconciliation as laid out in the TRC report. Go to:


3. What were some of the Ontario accord’s recommendations and what do they tell us about conditions — past and present — endured by Aboriginal individuals and communities?

Sources:

trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Survivors_Speak_2015_05_30_web_o.pdf

trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Exec_Summary_2015_05_31_web_o.pdf

Combatting stereotypes

You can find many examples of Aboriginal artists and leaders whose accomplishments contradict the negative stereotypes directed at Aboriginal people. Here are just a few of these individuals:

- **Wab Kinew** – a hip-hop artist, musician and broadcaster
- **Gerald Taiaiake Alfred** – author and professor at the University of Victoria
- **Pam Palmater** – Mi’Kmaq lawyer and professor at Ryerson University
- **Tanya Tagaq** – Juno Award winner, internationally recognized throat singer from Nunavut
- **Bear Witness, Ian Campeau, Tim Zoolman, Dan General – A Tribe Called Red** – a musical group that combines electronic music with elements of traditional Aboriginal singing and drumming
- **Drew Hayden Taylor** – playwright and broadcaster who has written for programs aired on CBC
- **Lisa Charleyboy** – writer and entrepreneur, founder of Urban Native Magazine, which highlights Aboriginal success stories

Select one or two of these role models (or consider individuals from your own community). Learn more about their work and success. Examine how they have refuted the negative stereotypes Aboriginal people can face.
TRC REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

On the following pages, you will examine some of the 94 recommendations of the TRC report (see Calls to Action 2015). Complete the organizer below to help you understand their purpose. Review the various recommendations and infer the conditions that have made the recommendations necessary. In the last column you are to determine if the recommendations can be implemented immediately or if they will take a longer period of time to be accomplished.

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Calls to Action 2015: TRC Report Recommendations

The following is an abridged version of the 94 recommendations from the report the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released in June:

**Child welfare**
We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to commit to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care.

**Education**
We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.

ii. We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

iii. We call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.

**Language and culture**
We call upon the federal government to appoint, in consultation with Aboriginal groups, an Aboriginal Languages Commissioner. The commissioner should help promote Aboriginal languages and report on the adequacy of federal funding of Aboriginal-languages initiatives.

We call upon all levels of government to enable residential school Survivors and their families to reclaim names changed by the residential school system by waiving administrative costs for a period of five years for the name-change process and the revision of official identity documents, such as birth certificates, passports, driver’s licenses, health cards, status cards, and social insurance numbers.

**Health**
We call upon the federal government to provide sustainable funding for existing and new Aboriginal healing centres to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms caused by residential schools, and to ensure that the funding of healing centres in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories is a priority.

**Justice**
We call upon law schools in Canada to require all law students to take a course in Aboriginal people and the law, which includes the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

We call upon federal, provincial, and territorial governments to commit to eliminating the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in custody over the next decade, and to issue detailed annual reports that monitor and evaluate progress in doing so.

We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to recognize as a high priority the need to address and prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), and to develop, in collaboration with Aboriginal people, FASD preventive programs that can be delivered in a culturally appropriate manner.
We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to work with Aboriginal communities to provide culturally relevant services to inmates on issues such as substance abuse, family and domestic violence, and overcoming the experience of having been sexually abused.

We call upon the federal government, in consultation with Aboriginal organizations, to appoint a public inquiry into the causes of, and remedies for, the disproportionate victimization of Aboriginal women and girls. The inquiry’s mandate would include:

i. Investigation into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.

ii. Links to the intergenerational legacy of residential schools.

**National Council for Reconciliation**

We call upon the Government of Canada to provide multi-year funding for the National Council for Reconciliation to ensure that it has the financial, human, and technical resources required to conduct its work, including the endowment of a National Reconciliation Trust to advance the cause of reconciliation.

**Church Apologies and Reconciliation**

We call upon the Pope to issue an apology to Survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools. We call for that apology to be similar to the 2010 apology issued to Irish victims of abuse and to occur within one year of the issuing of this Report and to be delivered by the Pope in Canada.

**Missing Children and Burial Information**

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.

**Commemoration**

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.

**Sports and Reconciliation**

We call upon all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, sports halls of fame, and other relevant organizations, to provide public education that tells the national story of Aboriginal athletes in history.