

Residential Schools

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What is a boarding school?
2. Why is it important for children to learn their own native language and culture?
3. Do you know anything about Canada's residential school system? Share your background knowledge about today's lesson topic.



B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.

Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. objective | a) a group effort to take legal action |
| _____ 2. assimilate | b) lack of care and attention |
| _____ 3. denomination | c) to try to make the same as the mainstream or majority |
| _____ 4. amendment | d) a branch of a faith (e.g., Roman Catholic or Anglican) |
| _____ 5. compulsory | e) to take legal action against a person or group |
| _____ 6. mortality rate | f) the main goal |
| _____ 7. unmarked grave | g) an expression of regret, the act of saying "sorry" |
| _____ 8. heritage | h) a burial site with no information about the identity of the remains |
| _____ 9. neglect | i) a formal change to a law or document |
| _____ 10. sue | j) a person's inherited background (culture, language, faith, etc.) |
| _____ 11. class-action | k) the rate of death for a certain population or location |
| _____ 12. apology | l) required by law or a formal rule |

Reading

1. Residential schools were a part of Canadian history for over 150 years. From the mid-19th century to the late 20th century, over 150,000 Indigenous children were removed from their homes and sent to boarding schools. The **objective** of the residential school system was to **assimilate** children of First Peoples (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) into European-Canadian mainstream society.
2. Christian churches of many **denominations** had been running day schools for First Peoples in Canada since the 17th century. In the 1840s, the government began funding boarding schools for assimilation purposes. This practice became commonplace by 1884. An **amendment** to the *Indian Act* in 1920 made residential schooling **compulsory**. First Nations children aged 4–16 were torn from their families and sent to boarding schools across the country. The children were taught English, French, and Christianity, and were punished for using their own language or practising their own customs.
3. Residential schools had a high **mortality rate**. In addition to at least 3,000 recorded deaths, many attendees went missing. They died from tuberculosis, school fires, and labour-related accidents, or they froze to death after running away from abuse. Many were buried in **unmarked graves** and are still not accounted for. Tens of thousands of other Indigenous children suffered physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse in the program. Survivors describe childhoods filled with anxiety, hunger, and loneliness.
4. The Canadian government began to close residential schools in the 1970s, though the last school remained open until 1996. Survivors of the program say they will never get their **heritage** back. They can't speak their native language and have no spiritual faith or connection to elders. Some call this dark period in Canadian history "a cultural genocide." Indigenous people who grew up in an institution also have limited parenting skills, and many have passed down the abuse and **neglect** they experienced.
5. In 2006, the Indian Residential School Survivors Society **sued** the Canadian government for loss of language, culture, and family connections. This was the largest **class-action** lawsuit in Canadian history. In 2007, \$1.62 billion dollars was paid to approximately 80,000 former students. In addition, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to focus on healing the past and building a brighter future for First Peoples in Canada. The Canadian government made a formal **apology** for the residential school system on June 11, 2008.

"Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country."

—Prime Minister Stephen Harper
(June 11, 2008)

Terminology

Using outdated names for **First Peoples** can be hurtful. The term "**Eskimo**" is no longer acceptable in Canada. The term "**Inuit**" is the modern term for First Peoples from the Arctic. The term "**First Nations**" is the acceptable replacement for the word "**Indian**." First Nations does not refer to all First Peoples. First Nations is one of the three Indigenous groups in Canada. "First Peoples," "Indigenous Peoples," and "Indigenous people" are synonyms. The word **peoples** can be used to emphasize reference to many different groups.

Comprehension

A. Timeline

Place the following in chronological order (1–8).

- _____ The Canadian government decided to assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream society.
- _____ The last residential school closed.
- _____ Canadian churches offered day school to First Peoples.
- _____ Residential schools became mandatory for First Nations children.
- _____ Thousands of Indigenous children were torn from their families and forced to go to residential schools.
- _____ Thousands of Indigenous people sued the Canadian government in a class-action suit.
- _____ Canada's prime minister made a formal apology for the residential school system.
- _____ Indigenous children suffered mental, physical, and sexual abuse in the residential school system.

B. Ask & Answer

Practise asking and answering the following questions with your partner. Then write your answers in complete sentences in your notebook.

1. Why did Canada's government set up the residential school system?
2. When did residential schools become compulsory for First Nations children in Canada?
3. What forms of abuse did children experience at the residential schools?
4. What significant event happened in 1996?
5. What is the objective of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

The Indian Act

The *Indian Act* is a collection of Canadian federal laws concerning First Nations peoples and their land and rights. Many amendments have been made since its adoption in 1876. The *Indian Act* does not apply to Inuit and Métis people.

How to Apologize

A. Reference

An apology is an expression of regret for causing harm, trouble, or pain. It is also an acceptance of responsibility.

- In the 1990s, churches of many denominations began to apologize for the residential school system. In 2008, the government finally offered its public apology.

The person on the receiving end may *accept* or *disregard* an apology.

- In 2008, Indigenous leaders publicly accepted the Canadian government's apology in the hope that healing could begin.

Apology	Formality	Possible Use
Oops. Sorry!	informal (spoken)	use if you bump into someone
I'm (so/really) sorry. It was my fault.	informal (spoken or written)	use if you forget an appointment or are responsible for an accident
I owe you an apology.	informal (spoken)	use when you haven't seen someone for a while and you have an outstanding regret
I hope you can forgive me. Please forgive me.	intimate (spoken or written)	use when trying to repair a personal relationship
I offer you my/our sincere apologies.	formal (usually written, sometimes spoken in a speech)	use in business or government

B. Discussion

When in history did *your* government owe its people an apology?

Vocabulary Review

Choose the word or phrase that best sums up the sentence.

1. The government wanted First Peoples to have the same language, religion, and behaviour as mainstream society.
a) regret
b) amendment
c) assimilation
2. Young children went to bed cold, hungry, and lonely.
a) sue
b) neglect
c) apology
3. They regretted their actions and admitted responsibility.
a) apology
b) objective
c) class-action
4. Together, the survivors sued the government and received a settlement package.
a) heritage
b) class-action
c) amendment
5. The number of deaths in the residential school system is horrific.
a) anxiety
b) mortality rate
c) tuberculosis
6. They lost their native language, spiritual faith, and customs.
a) graves
b) hunger
c) heritage

Discussion

1. Does it surprise you that this system of assimilation was established in Canada?
2. Which other countries have mistreated Indigenous people?
3. A government official once said the goal of residential schools was to “kill the Indian in the child.” Why do you think the Canadian government had this goal?
4. Do you agree that the residential school system was “cultural genocide”?
5. One-third of Canada’s female prison population is Indigenous, even though Indigenous women only represent 4% of Canada’s female population. How does this statistic relate to the residential school system?

Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students read about a dark period of Canadian history. Students learn about and discuss the residential school system and review how to apologize in English.

LEVEL: Int – High Int

TIME: 2–2.5 hours

TAGS: First Peoples, Indigenous, First Nations, Indian, residential schools, schooling, children, Canada, natives, history, apology, apologize, government, Canadian, school

Pre-Reading

A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

Answers will vary.

B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

- | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1. f | 3. d | 5. l | 7. h | 9. b | 11. a |
| 2. c | 4. i | 6. k | 8. j | 10. e | 12. g |

Comprehension

A. TIMELINE

- 2 The Canadian government decided to assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream society.
- 6 The last residential school closed.
- 1 Canadian churches offered day school to First Peoples.
- 3 Residential schools became mandatory for First Nations children.
- 4 Thousands of Indigenous children were torn from their families and forced to go to residential schools.
- 7 Thousands of Indigenous people sued the Canadian government in a class-action suit.
- 8 Canada's prime minister made a formal apology for the residential school system.
- 5 Indigenous children suffered mental, physical, and sexual abuse in the residential school system.

B. ASK & ANSWER

1. Canada's government set up the residential school system in order to assimilate children of First Peoples into mainstream society.
2. Residential schools become compulsory for First Nations children in Canada after an amendment was made to the Indian Act in 1920.
3. Children experienced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse as well as neglect.
4. Canada's last residential school closed in 1996.
5. The objective of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is to help First Peoples heal from the past and build a better future.

(continued on the next page...)

Answer Key cont.

How to Apologize

Go over the different ways of apologizing, and discuss other historic events that have required government apologies. Help your students understand the pronunciation differences between *apologize* and *apologies*. You may also want to discuss how to respond to an apology:

- No worries. (*informal*)
- It was no problem. (*informal*)
- Don't even mention it. (*informal*)
- It's okay. / I'm okay now. (*intimate*)
- I forgive you. / I understand. /
I appreciate your apology. (*intimate*)
- I accept/appreciate your apology (on behalf of...). (*formal*)

Vocabulary Review

1. c 2. b 3. a 4. b 5. b 6. c

Discussion

Answers will vary.