

ESLCO/ EO

People in Canada: The Dark History of The Residential School System



Artist: Kent Monkman, *The Scoop*, 2018, acrylic on canvas

Before You Read- Look carefully at the image above. Spend 10 minutes thinking about what you see. Write your thoughts. What is happening? Who are the people? Where are they? Why is this scene happening? How does the picture make you feel?

Read the article below. When you have finished, complete one of the following activities.

A. Write a summary of the article, that can be understood by a 10-year-old. Include the most important details. Remember that your summary should use your own words.

OR

B. Write a personal reflection about what you learned and what you think about the topic.

The Difficult Truth About Residential Schools

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Why Residential Schools?

In the 1880s, the government started taking Indigenous children away from their families and sending them to Indian Residential Schools. These schools were paid for by the government and run by churches. The last Residential School closed in 1996 in Regina, Saskatchewan. There were about 130 Residential Schools across the country, except in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick. Around 150,000 children attended these schools.

The goal of Residential Schools was to educate, convert, and integrate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian society. The government believed it would be easier to assimilate them if they were taken away from their parents and community and kept in school for most of the year. This policy was based on the belief that Euro-Canadian society and Christian religions were superior to Indigenous cultures. Today, the government acknowledges that this policy was wrong and that Indigenous children should never have been taken from their families. The government should never have tried to erase Indigenous cultures.

Life in Residential Schools

Residential Schools were not like regular schools. They were more like violent prisons for the children. The students were bullied and abused. If they spoke their Indigenous languages, they were harshly punished. They were not allowed to write letters home in their

own language, which made it difficult for their parents to understand. When the students returned home, they often felt like they didn't belong anymore. The schools were overcrowded, dirty, and cold. Many children died there from diseases like smallpox, measles, flu, and tuberculosis.

There are many **heartbreaking** stories from Residential School Survivors. Michael Cachagee was sent to a Residential School when he was four years old. He spent 12 years there and *never celebrated a birthday*. He was never shown love or praised, but instead, he was beaten and abused. It took him a long time to **come to terms with** what happened to him. His younger brother, who arrived at the school when he was three, never recovered from the trauma and struggled with alcoholism for the rest of his life. Ken Young was taken from his home at the age of eight and experienced public beatings at the Residential School he attended. Children who tried to go home had their heads shaved and their legs shackled. The school felt like a prison to him. It took a long time for him to let go of his anger and realize that the treatment he received was wrong.

The Impacts of Residential Schools on Children and Families

The experiences at Residential Schools had a **lasting impact** on Indigenous people. Many students felt worthless, angry, and resentful. Some turned to addiction to cope with their pain, while others got into trouble with the law. These problems have also affected later generations. Indigenous youth who were not raised in their own homes didn't have the opportunity to learn how to be caring and responsible parents. As a result, Canada's Indigenous population faces **high poverty rates, unemployment, poor health, and higher death rates** compared to the rest of the population. Despite the damage caused by years of injustice, Indigenous people are resilient. Many Survivors are strong and courageous, determined to heal and move forward.