

TRUTH BEFORE RECONCILIATION

— m i n o - p i m a t i s i w i n —



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National Centre for
Truth and Reconciliation
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

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Foreword by Madelaine McCracken

Dear Educator,

This guide was designed to accompany the publication [*Mino-pimatisiwin: Living the Good Life*](#), produced in collaboration by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and Canada's National History Society. Through the publication and guide, teachers and students will explore their rights and responsibilities for living a good life.

Teachers may also access the publications and guides from previous years:

- [Listening to Survivors \(2023\)](#)
- [Remembering the Children \(2022\)](#)
- [Truth and Reconciliation Week 2021](#)
- [Every Child Matters \(2020\)](#)

Teaching students about Canada's historical and contemporary treatment of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples is crucial and meaningful work. Content should be delivered in age-appropriate ways and with care. Conversations will need to consider the legacy of the ongoing harms of the Indian Residential School System and the child welfare system in Canada. It will also be imperative for educators to review the Final Report findings from the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and ensure they are teaching Canada's history and ongoing colonialism in safe and action-based ways. We must balance honesty with hope, assuring students that new laws and attitudes will prevent something like Residential Schools from happening again. We all have an active role to play in reconciliation.

Many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis organizations have outlined how educators can do this work in meaningful ways. The [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#) and their annual [Truth and Reconciliation Week](#) provide resources and learning opportunities for people of all ages. The [First Nations Child & Family Caring Society](#) (Caring Society) host youth-led campaigns and events like [Shannen's Dream](#), [Jordan's Principle](#), [I am a Witness](#), and [Have a Heart Day](#). The Caring Society outlines ways that everyone can take action alongside Spirit Bear with resources specifically made for educators. Finally, the [Orange Shirt Society](#) provides resources for learning about the Indian Residential School System and for commemorating the children who died and the Survivors who experienced loss or trauma.

These resources are an excellent first step to ensuring your lessons are taught in age-appropriate and ethical ways. Ethical teaching practices also consider ethical spaces. Ethical spaces can be made in your classroom by co-creating a class guideline of engagement at the beginning of the year. This discussion is about accountability, responsibilities, respect, kindness, equity, and how to take care of each other and the spaces you share. It may also consider the capacity of students for big topics in Canada's history (like discussing the Indian Residential School System as an example) and ensuring that Indigenous students and their guardians and families know when such subjects are upcoming so students can create a plan to take care of themselves in holistic ways. To learn more about creating ethical spaces and how to create your own with your students, look towards Dr. Willie Ermine, Dr. Dwayne Donald, and Dr. Marie Battiste's work. Not only do our students get to learn every day, but so do we!

As a key consideration, it is deeply important to teach Canada's ongoing colonialism in child-focused, trauma-informed, and ethical ways. ***If you are doing this work alone, you are doing it wrong.*** As such, please work with the Indigenous education team at your school board to develop your pedagogies and honour your practices in these ways.

Residential School Survivor Support Line 1-866-925-4419

Contributors

Madelaine McCracken (she/her) is Red River Métis (her families are Chartrand, Bruce, Pangman, and Larance) and she holds settler Scottish/Irish heritage. Madelaine is a PhD candidate and part-time professor at the University of Ottawa. At the university, she teaches the course *PED 3138: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education: Historical Experiences and Contemporary Perspectives* to teacher candidates in Ontario. Her work primarily focuses on Métis perspectives within Truth, and Then Reconciliation Education research and how First Nations, Inuit, and Métis rights, perspectives, and values can be respectfully represented in the field. Madelaine also hosts the podcast [Research Time](#), which aims to make research accessible through conversations. She is passionate about uplifting community voices to make a difference toward reconciliation. Learn more about Madelaine's work by following her on X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram @EducateTheEarth.

Anne Tenning is a member of the Stz'uminus First Nation on Vancouver Island. She is of Coast Salish ancestry on her mother's side and of European and Japanese ancestry on her father's side. Anne's late mother, Elizabeth Tenning, attended Kuper Island Residential School. Anne has been an educator in British Columbia's K-12 education system for 24 years, specializing in Indigenous Education. She has worked as a secondary teacher (SD44, SD61), a district principal of Indigenous Education (SD67, SD68, and SD83), and is currently the Senior Manager of Curriculum for the First Nations Education Steering Committee. Anne recently started a PhD program at the University of British Columbia – Okanagan, this September. She plans to focus her research on the experiences of First Nations leaders in the K-12 public education system. Her personal website is annetenning.com.

Tara Jacklin is a white settler from Alberta. They are a graduate from Western University with an MA in public history and are the 2024 Nobleman Scholar with Canada's History Society. They specialize in interactive educational opportunities through exhibition and public programming. Their portfolio can be found at tdjacklin.ca.

Lesson: Residential Schools and the Rights of Children

By Anne Tenning

Overview:

Students will learn about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). They will learn about Residential Schools through age-appropriate stories and consider which rights children were denied through this system.

Grade Level: Grades 3 to 6

Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

- Familiarize themselves with the rights outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Identify the difference between a right being upheld versus denied or broken
- Identify instances in literature about Residential Schools and which of the rights of children were denied
- Surmise the impacts of these rights violations on the children, their families, and their communities
- Reflect on their responsibilities and potential for upholding their own rights, as well as the rights of other children, particularly the rights of Indigenous children in Canada

Resources:

- [*Truth Before Reconciliation – Mino-pimatisiwin: Living the Good Life*, 2024.](#)
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([full text](#))
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([child-friendly version](#))
- [Shannen's Dream – First Nations Child & Family Caring Society](#)
- [Jordan's Principle – First Nations Child & Family Caring Society](#)
- [Timeline of Residential Schools – National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#)
- Your school or school division's code of conduct, or similar document that outlines rights and responsibilities (optional)

Background Information:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international treaty that outlines the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children. Adopted by the United Nations in 1990, the Convention recognizes children as individuals with their own rights and entitlements, rather than merely as dependents of their parents.

The UNCRC covers a broad range of rights, including the right to education, health care, protection from abuse and exploitation, and the right to participate in cultural and recreational activities.

Canada signed the UNCRC in 1991, committing to uphold and implement the rights of children as outlined in the Convention. However, Canada has faced criticism for not fully addressing issues related to Indigenous children, children in poverty, and children in the criminal justice system.

Lesson Activity:

ACTIVATING

As a class, read the message from Elder Harry Bone and Elder Florence Paynter on pages 4-5 of *Mino-pimatisiwin: Living the Good Life*. Explain that, through this message, the Elders have shared an important teaching. Have students reflect on the meaning of *Mino-pimatisiwin* and what it might mean for them to follow a good path.

Have students read page 10 of *Mino-pimatisiwin* and lead a conversation about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Brainstorm the rights you believe all children should have. Share a copy of the child-friendly version of the UNCRC from UNICEF. Have students determine how many of the articles are on this list from your brainstorm.

ACQUIRING

Assign one or two of the UNCRC articles to each student or group and ask them to change the wording to “I statements” (for example, “I have the right to...”). We have suggested some articles in **Appendix I** that could be relevant and accessible for young learners. Students could make their statement into a poster or a slideshow, adding their own art or pictures. The teacher can first create and share a few as examples.

- Discuss the statements with your students. Are there any that they do not understand?
- As a class, think of times when you saw a child's right either being protected or not being upheld. This could be a fictional example from a story or movie. Lead a conversation to explain the difference between a right being upheld and a right being denied. Encourage students to share their feelings and to pay attention to the role of the adults around the child in each example.

Share some age-appropriate information about the history of Canada's Residential School System. Some key points can include:

- Residential Schools were government- and church-mandated institutions for Indigenous children operating from 1831 to 1996, created for the purpose of cultural assimilation.
- Indigenous children nationwide were forced to attend and taken away from their families.
- Many children suffered from abuse, neglect, malnutrition, and disease.
- Children were not allowed to speak their own language or practice cultural traditions.
- In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada published its final report and recommended 94 Calls to Action to advance reconciliation.

APPLYING

Explain to students that the UNCRC was created after Residential Schools were established in Canada. You can look at the timeline provided by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and show where the UNCRC fits in.

Recognize that this activity requires applying a contemporary lens to a historical event. We are looking at Residential Schools, which existed in the past, through our "glasses" of today and with our understanding of the UNCRC and the extent to which these institutions were founded on racist ideas and goals. Our ideas about human rights have evolved since the Residential School System was founded, in large part due to the actions and efforts of individuals who worked to expose the system and affect change. It is important to understand and recognize past injustices, so we can prevent similar mistakes in the future.

Divide the class into small groups and give each an age-appropriate book about Residential Schools. (There is a list of suggestions below.) As each group reads their story, have them use a chart to record which of the rights of the child were denied as evidenced in the story. Encourage students to also look for examples of the rights of the child being upheld or protected (by the children's family, for example, and only if applicable).

- Have the groups report their findings back to the larger group.
- Lead a discussion with the students. Explain that while the stories are works of fiction, they are based on true events and true experiences. In thinking about the children who attended Residential Schools, what do you think the impacts of having their rights denied would have been on them, their family, and their community?

Have students reread the Elders' message on pages 4 and 5 of *Mino-pimatisiwin: Living the Good Life*.

- Ask students how the concept of *Mino-pimatisiwin* is relevant to understanding and upholding the rights of children.
- Have students return to the UNCRC articles they investigated at the beginning of the lesson.
- Have students make a new poster titled "Mino-pimatisiwin," with an image showing how they can uphold the rights of children in Canada.

Extension:

- What are Indigenous people, families, communities, and organizations doing to heal from the impacts of residential schools?
- How are Indigenous peoples fighting to ensure greater rights for children? (For example, Shannen's Dream)
- Identify the rights that you have in your school and community by looking at policy statements, like a Code of Conduct. Turn these into "I statements" (for example, "As a student in this school, I have a right to..." or "As a child in this community, I have a right to..."); articulate steps you can take if one of your rights has been denied or broken.

- Research places in the world where children's rights are not being protected. What can you do to help or raise awareness? Be sure to do this work alongside your students and ensure you are sharing age-appropriate information, as some content may be disturbing.

Suggested Publications about Residential Schools:

Ages 4-8:

- *Amik Loves School: A Story of Wisdom* by Katherena Vermette and illustrated by Irene Kuziw
- *Muinji'j Asks Why: The Story of the Mi'kmaq and the Shubenacadie Residential School* by Shanika MacEachern and Breighlynn MacEachern (Muinji'j), and illustrated by Zeta Paul
- *Phyllis's Orange Shirt* by Phyllis Webstad and illustrated by Brock Nicol
- *Shi-shi-etko* by Nicola I. Campbell and illustrated by Kim LaFave
- *Stolen Words* by Melanie Florence and illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard
- *The Train* by Jodie Callaghan and illustrated by Georgia Lesley
- *When I Was Eight* by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, and illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard
- *When We Were Alone* by David Alexander Robertson and illustrated by Julie Flett

Ages 7-10:

- *I Am Not a Number* by Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer, and illustrated by Gillian Newland
- *Shin-chi's Canoe* by Nicola I. Campbell and illustrated by Kim LaFave
- *The Secret Pocket* by Peggy Janicki, and illustrated by Carrielynn Victor

Ages 9-12:

- *As Long as the Rivers Flow* by Larry Loyie and Constance Brissenden, and illustrated by Heather Holmlund
- *A Stranger at Home* by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, illustrated by Liz Amini-Holmes
- *Fatty Legs* by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, and illustrated by Liz Amini-Holmes

- *No Time to Say Goodbye: Children's Stories of Kuper Island Residential School* by Sylvia Olsen with Rita Morris and Ann Sam, and illustrated by Julia Bell and Connie Paul

Ages 12 and up:

- *My Name is Seepeetza* by Shirley Sterling
- *Secret Path* by Gord Downie and illustrated by Jeff Lemire

Lesson: Having Your Voices Heard: Participating in Matters that Directly Concern You!

By Madelaine McCracken

Overview:

This multi-part lesson plan will help students understand the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and explore historical and contemporary injustices against First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples in Canada. Students will engage in activities that encourage them to consider the government's treatment of Indigenous Peoples, learn about Indigenous-led movements, and take action in support of reconciliation.

Grade Level: Grades 6 to 10

Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

- Understand the responsibilities and rights outlined by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People ("UNDRIP" or "the Declaration").
- Learn about historical and contemporary injustices against First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples in Canada.
- Determine whether the Government of Canada treats First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples fairly.
- Question to what extent the Government of Canada has addressed past and/or current injustices against Indigenous Peoples. What have been the results of these efforts?
- Learn about Indigenous-led movements in Canada and how students can participate in them.

Teacher will:

- Learn alongside their students and let them lead in participating in matters that concern them.
- Ensure that if they do not know an answer to a question, they do meaningful research and/or speak with their school board's Indigenous Education Team or other experienced and knowledgeable colleagues within their learning community.

- Facilitate conversations in trauma-informed ways and consider holistic teaching pedagogies throughout the instruction of the lesson and those thereafter.

Resources:

- [*Truth Before Reconciliation - Mino-pimatisiwin: Living the Good Life*, 2024.](#)
- [The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People](#)
- [Shannen's Dream - First Nations Child & Family Caring Society](#)
- [Jordan's Principle - First Nations Child & Family Caring Society](#)
- [Timeline of Residential Schools - National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#)

Background Information:

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 13, 2007. UNDRIP is a framework that recognizes the rights of Indigenous Peoples worldwide, including the right to self-determination, cultural preservation, education, health, and land. The Declaration sets out a universal framework for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous Peoples.

In its 2015 report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission centred the Declaration in the 10 Principles of Reconciliation, calling UNDRIP, "the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of society."

The Government of Canada initially opposed the Declaration but eventually endorsed it in 2010 as an aspirational document. In 2016, the Government of Canada announced its full support for the Declaration and committed to its implementation. In 2021, the Government of Canada passed Bill C-15, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, which began the process of ensuring Canadian laws and policies are aligned with the principles of UNDRIP. However, the implementation of UNDRIP in Canada remains a complex and ongoing process.

Lesson Activity:

PART I

This lesson introduces students to human rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Students will research and learn more about the rights that this international agreement protects.

- Share this definition of human rights with your students: **Human rights are the rights and freedoms that all people have. They can be considered rules for how we should treat one another. Human rights help keep people safe and help make sure everyone is treated fairly.**
- Explain to students that while human rights have always existed, they have not always been protected. However, since the Second World War, important laws and international agreements have been created to protect human rights. In addition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (UDHR), there is also the 1990 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Have students read about UNDRIP on pages 18-19 of *Mino-pimatisiwin: Living the Good Life*.

- Begin a conversation with students to have them develop an understanding of how they can honour what is outlined in UNDRIP. Share some of the articles protected under UNDRIP – we have suggested some you can use in **Appendix II**, but you can expand or condense this list based on your classroom.
- For each UNDRIP article, share what it means and brainstorm with your students some examples of that right being upheld in Canada. You can make this conversation engaging by co-creating a concept map of the different rights they learn about, examples of what those rights mean, and including definitions of words that may be new.

PART II

In this lesson, students will come to understand that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples' rights have not always been respected and honoured in Canada. They will learn about some past and contemporary examples of unfair treatment towards First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. They will also learn about role models who have worked hard to enact and uphold Indigenous rights in Canada.

- Have students look at their concept maps and remind them of what they have learned about human rights.
- Introduce the idea that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples' rights have not always been upheld in Canada. Individually or as a class, have students read pages 11 and 16 of *Mino-pimatisiwin: Living the Good Life*, which provide some examples of moments when rights were not protected and also of efforts that have since taken place to ensure that rights are protected.

- Discuss with students historical and contemporary violations of Indigenous Peoples' rights in Canada. This can include examples from *Mino-pimatisiwin: Living the Good Life* or others that they have previously learned about or actively researched for this activity. Have students connect each issue to a specific article of UNDRIP.
- Initiate a conversation with students about the historical significance of UNDRIP. You may wish to do some additional research with your students to explore one of the following questions:
 - Why was UNDRIP necessary for Indigenous Peoples globally and in Canada?
 - Why did Canada initially reject UNDRIP? What events or influences had the biggest impact on the federal government's decision to adopt the Declaration?
 - What articles do you think will make the biggest impact on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples' rights in Canada?

PART III

In this lesson, students will discover movements that work to uphold the rights of Indigenous children and consider how they can act against various forms of discrimination.

- Let students know that despite there being past and current examples of Indigenous Peoples' rights being violated, there are also lots of individuals and groups who are speaking out against injustices and working to make change. Students can discover some of these role models throughout *Mino-pimatisiwin: Living the Good Life*.
- Play all of the following videos for your students to learn about the ways that others are taking action in Canada:
 - [Autumn Peltier](#) addressing the United Nations about protecting water (CBC News).
 - [Shannen Koostachin and Serena Koostachin](#) at the Ontario Federation of Labour Convention about the right to a good education
 - The [I Am a Witness campaign](#) by the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society on discrimination against First Nations kids.

As noted in this guide's introduction, some of the videos share big discussion topics, so ensure that Indigenous students in your class are supported. Consult with the Indigenous Education Team at your school board on how to do this in a good way.

After showing each video to your students, lead a whole-class discussion. You may explore the following questions. Some may require additional research to answer:

- What is the movement about? What right is being protected? Who is involved? What is their message? How does it make you feel?
- How does this issue highlight the unfair treatment of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples in Canada?
- How have the different levels of government responded to the movements? Have their actions been sufficient?
- How can individuals make a difference toward ending discrimination against First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples in Canada?

End the conversation by highlighting the key takeaways from your collective conversation.

- After learning about specific examples of movements in Canada, ask your students to create a list of the different ways that people can take action by asking, “What does taking action look like?” Answers may include:
 - Listening to speeches, attending presentations or hearing testimonies
 - Educating others; sharing their learnings with their friends, family, and school community
 - Attending Indigenous cultural events or visiting Indigenous-run museums
 - Participating in movements (online or in-person), phoning or writing letters to elected officials/decision-makers in Canada and the world
 - Donating to Indigenous charities or organizations
- Ask students to consider which actions have the most impact and are the most meaningful. Which actions are considered more passive and require less engagement? Why? Have students create class-based criteria for assessing these actions and rank them from least effective to most effective.

PART IV

Now that the students know more about UNDRIP and the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, they can practice participating in matters that concern them. You may continue to explore the youth movements introduced earlier or investigate other issues that are pressing in Canada such as (but not limited to) land disputes, resource

extraction, Indigenous children in care, or language revitalization.

To begin, read aloud the message from Elder Harry Bone and Elder Florence Paynter on pages 4-5 of *Mino-pimatisiwin: Living the Good Life*. Through this message, the Elders have shared an important teaching. Have students reflect on the meaning of *Mino-pimatisiwin* and how they can follow a good path in taking action toward reconciliation in Canada.

- Ask your students to form groups of three or four and select a movement from those discussed in which they would like to participate. Multiple groups can work towards the same movement, honouring *Mino-pimatisiwin*.
- Have students decide which articles from UNDRIP will be honoured as they respond to their selected movement. (Encourage students to limit their selection to five articles – we can't respond to everything as much as we want to!)
- Now that the students have selected the relevant articles, it is time for them to research each of their movements. Students will be encouraged to respond to the following questions in their research:
 - What is the issue about? What is the historical context for the issue?
 - What is the movement about?
 - Who are the leaders in the movement? Is there youth participation?
 - Who are the individuals, organizations, or governments that are responsible for this issue?
 - What are ways everyone living in Canada can make a difference and take action toward this movement?
 - What are the ways we have chosen to participate in the movement?
- After the students answer the questions from their research, they can now mobilize what they have learned! There are lots of ways students can apply what they have learned, such as creating a podcast or video, making a public service announcement, creating a letter template for others to complete and send to their elected officials/decision-makers, making posters for their school or community, performing a song, or writing a report to share with their peers or to send to influential groups. You may also use the template in **Appendix III** below to create a social media campaign.

- Each campaign should include the following elements:
 - Introduction to the issue, including specific information, historical context, and compelling data or statistics
 - A connection to the relevant articles of UNDRIP
 - A clear message about how people can get involved and make a difference toward reconciliation
 - How they are honouring the concept of *Mino-pimatisiwin* in their efforts, and how they will plan to honour *Mino-pimatisiwin* every day

Assessment:

Teachers can prepare a summative assessment for this collective work. We encourage you to co-create assessment rubrics with your students as this honours the ethical space you are creating with them. To do this, dedicate a class to discussing with your students what successful learning looks like. Assessments can also change based on each assignment the students decide to complete, which also honours differentiation. As such, be sure to work with your students in good ways to co-create these rubrics!

Extension:

As a collective participation, students can host a school assembly (much like [Have a Heart Day](#)). Have the students share what they have learned and how the whole school can take action together.

Closing Statement from Author:

Teachers and students must use Indigenous-made/co-created resources and/or ensure they work with Indigenous Education Teams at their school boards when taking on these topics. As we noted earlier, *if you are doing this work alone, you are doing it wrong!* Reach out to folks as needed and know that you're never alone. This experience is also meant to ensure that students know that their voices ought to be heard and CAN be heard! Be sure to use this lesson alongside other conversations you have with your students. You are also encouraged to ask your students if they want to form a social justice club to keep these dialogues going and to keep your school community accountable. Participation in these movements must be ongoing because the work of reconciliation is every day.

Lesson: Promises of Reconciliation: Exploring the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Bentwood Box

By Tara Jacklin

Overview:

Students will learn about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and explore items placed in the Bentwood Box as part of the national gatherings as commitments to reconciliation. Students will consider how the items relate to our responsibility to uphold human rights, particularly with respect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. Students will consider their own their promise of reconciliation.

This action is an expression of understanding their role in reconciliation, which is best done in the context of a larger journey. We encourage teachers to help students find achievable actions to uphold human rights and to revisit and reflect on their commitments regularly.

Grade Level: Adaptable for grades 5 to 12

Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

- Understand the purpose and significance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada.
- Explore the items placed in the Bentwood Box during national gatherings.
- Learn about a diversity of individual and organizational human rights actors and understand that there are many ways to uphold and defend human rights.
- Articulate a personal commitment to reconciliation and revisit the commitment in an ongoing way.

Resources:

- [*Truth Before Reconciliation – Mino-pimatisiwin: Living the Good Life*](#), 2024.
- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission reports](#), National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.
- [The Bentwood Box](#), National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.
- [Imagine a Canada contest](#), National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.
- [Have a Heart Day](#), First Nations Child & Family Caring Society.
- [Project of Heart](#)

Background Information:

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 2007 as the result of the Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which was a class action settlement between Survivors, the Government of Canada, the Assembly of First Nations and Inuit representatives, and the church bodies that had run Residential Schools. The settlement provided monetary compensation to the Survivors and also established funds to support educational and commemorative activities and provide emotional and psychological support to Survivors. The TRC was established as part of the settlement to document the history and legacy of the Residential School System, primarily through the oral testimonies of Survivors of the system. For six years, the TRC travelled the country and gathered testimonies from more than 6,500 witnesses. In 2015, the TRC issued its final report, which made 94 recommendations for advancing reconciliation in Canada. The 2015 report, and supplementary reports, can be accessed on the website of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR).

At the TRC's national events, individuals and organizations were invited to contribute an item to a Bentwood Box, created for the TRC, as a personal symbol of their commitment to reconciliation. Items were gifted from hundreds of individuals and organizations, including Survivors and inter-generational Survivors, government bodies and agencies, cultural organizations, religious organizations, universities, not-for-profit organizations, and many more.

"What's actually in there are deep and sincere promises to make this country a better place and address past wrongs," explained Ry Moran in a 2015 CBC article, who was the Director of Statement Gathering for the TRC.

Bentwood boxes are a craft of First Nations on the west coast of North America. A single piece of wood is steamed and bent to shape. The boxes are used for storage, ceremonies and even cooking. The TRC's Bentwood Box has a ceremonial purpose. Here is how the NCTR describes it:

"The Bentwood Box is a lasting tribute to all residential school Survivors. The sacred box and the items in this collection are deeply personal symbols of their experience... Commissioned by the TRC in 2009, the Bentwood Box travelled with the TRC to its eight national events throughout Canada, where people placed personal items into the box to symbolize their journey toward healing and expressions of reconciliation."

Coast Salish artist Luke Marston of Stz'uminus (Chemainus) First Nation carved the Bentwood Box. To do so he steamed, bent and carved the box in from a single piece of sold-growth red cedar. The artistic styles and imagery throughout the Bentwood Box represent those of different First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples.

The NCTR has created digital versions of the items that were submitted to the Bentwood Box. They can be viewed at archives.nctr.ca.

Lesson Activity:

This lesson is best once students have a good understanding of the history and legacy of the Residential School System in Canada and know how they can take action toward reconciliation today. Students should understand the individual and collective responsibility that all people in Canada have for addressing past injustices and building respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in this country. Students should also have an understanding of human rights and the concepts behind the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Introducing the Bentwood Box

Have students read pages 13 and 14 of *Mino-pimatisiwin: Living the Good Life* to learn about the Bentwood Box. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights has an interactive version of the Bentwood Box available on its app, which you could download and show to students.

Share an excerpt from an interview with artist Luke Marston explaining the images on the box from the NCTR website. Have students explore photos of the box, looking for the images and symbolism that Marston discusses in his interview.

Inside the Bentwood Box

As a class, explore some items that were placed in the Bentwood Box. You can explore the full collection through the NCTR website, or begin with the items suggested in **Appendix IV**. Click on the item names to access more information through the archive's catalogue.

The items placed in the Bentwood Box each carry deep significance. These objects are personal commitments and they represent the histories, cultures, and experiences of the people and communities who contributed them. It is important to remember that their meanings are not fixed or universal. Instead, the meaning is created and shaped by the owners and the cultures to which they belong and ought to not be recreated.

The items highlighted in **Appendix IV** represent commitments to upholding human rights and Indigenous rights in Canada. They can be used to spark conversation about reconciliation and how everyone can play a role in defending and protecting human rights.

As you explore the items, have students consider some of the following questions:

- What is this item? What can you find out about the individual or organization that contributed it?
- How does this item make you feel, and why?
- How does this object relate to human rights? To Indigenous rights? To the rights of the child?
- How does this object relate to our responsibility to uphold and defend human rights? Can you make connections to specific articles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child or the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People?
- Who is responsible for upholding and protecting human rights? What kinds of actions can be done to protect human rights? Who can do these actions?
- What can you find out about the status or progress of this commitment, if applicable?

You can also search the NCTR database for an Expression of Reconciliation from a city, community or organization that connects with your local context. Conduct follow-up research or reach out to community members to learn more about the item. If appropriate and applicable, think of ways you and your students can help fulfill the commitment.

The Future of the Bentwood Box

The NCTR says that “submitting an item to the Bentwood Box is a sacred ceremony involving the individual committing themselves to the process of reconciliation.”

As a respectful way to honour the legacy of the Bentwood Box, have students think of an item that reflects their commitment to reconciliation and personal action. It could be a written statement, a poem, a song, or an object, for example.

Have students share their promises and reasoning with the class through conversation. Together, decide a way to honour the legacy of the Bentwood Box by sharing your commitments with your broader community. You may consider participating in a larger initiative like Project of Heart or Have a Heart Day, hosted by

the First Nations Child & Caring Society, or the Imagine a Canada contest by NCTR.

Schedule time later in the year to revisit their promises and reflect on their progress, and potentially set new promises and commitments with them.

Appendix I: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 2

You have rights no matter who you are, where you come from, your gender, religion, culture or language, if you have a disability or how much money you have. You deserve to be treated fairly.

Article 3

All grown-ups should act in your best interest. This means they always do what is best for you, and make sure you are always well taken care of.

Article 12

You have the right to voice your opinion and to be listened to.

Article 19

You have the right to be protected from violence and to be safe at all times.

Article 24

You have the right to the best health care possible: places to help you if you're sick, medication if you need it, things like safe drinking water and food that is good for you.

Article 27

You have the right to have your basic needs met, which means having access to food, clothing, and a safe place to live.

Article 28

You have the right to a good education, and to be encouraged by grown-ups to keep learning as long as you can.

Article 30

You have the right to practice your own culture, language and religion.

Article 42

You have the right to know your rights as a child. It is the responsibility of grown-ups to know your rights and make sure that you know them too.

*Adapted from the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society information sheet [Child-friendly Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

Appendix II: The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Article 3

Indigenous Peoples have the right to self-determination. This means that they have the right to decide what is best for them and their communities.

Article 8

Indigenous Peoples have the right to not be assimilated. This means that they cannot be forced to take up someone else's culture and way of life, or for their culture to be destroyed.

Article 10

Indigenous Peoples may not be removed or relocated by force from their lands.

Article 11

Indigenous Peoples have the right to practice and revive their culture and traditions.

Article 12

Indigenous Peoples have the right to practice their spiritual and religious traditions.

Article 13

Indigenous Peoples have the right to recover, use and pass on to future generations their histories and languages, oral traditions, writing systems and literature and to use their own names for communities, places and people.

Article 15

Indigenous Peoples have the right to their cultures and traditions being correctly reflected in education and public information.

Article 18

Indigenous Peoples have the right to take part in decision-making in all matters affecting them.

*Adapted from the UN publication [*Adolescent-Friendly Version of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*](#).

Appendix III: Social Media Campaign Template

Students can use this Instagram template to plan a social media campaign. Have students identify one compelling photo to represent their topic and write a short caption that captures the most important message they want to share. They can think about hashtags or other creative details to include. Other guidelines to consider:

- Images should be appropriate and specific to the topic
- Images and statistics should be sourced properly
- Captions should be no more than five sentences
- Content should be original and not use AI
- Content should be appropriate and not include anything exploitative, triggering, or abusive

Once complete, hang up the posts throughout your school to educate other students. If you have a classroom Instagram account, you can create real posts to share online. Be sure to never include the faces of your students without signed permission from their parents / guardians.



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Appendix IV: Bentwood Box Items

This list features just a few of the hundreds of items that were placed in the Bentwood Box during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's national events. Click on the item names to view a digital copy of the item. Please consult the NCTR archives for any requests related to the usage of the records.

Please review the items and their information in advance and ensure that your students are prepared for the topics that may be discussed. Ensure they have any necessary background knowledge and are alerted for anything that may be triggering.

When browsing the NCTR archive, remind students that the items placed in the Bentwood Box each carry deep significance. The meaning of each item is not something we can fully understand from the outside. It is a meaning that is lived, experienced, and passed down within the communities from which they come.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Archival Description</i>
Banner in memory of Mrs. Nora Bernard [English]	Banner in memory of Mrs. Nora Bernard presented at the Atlantic National Event. The tribute recognizes Nora Bernard as an Indigenous activist and residential school Survivor whose campaign for Indigenous rights inspired nationwide Indigenous class action litigation that lead ultimately to the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement.
Beechwood Cemetery Statement of Reconciliation [English]	A Statement of Reconciliation from Beechwood Cemetery stating that the work done by Doctor Peter Henderson Bryce and his report titled "The Story of a National Crime Being an Appeal for Justice to the Indians of Canada" embodies the spirit of reconciliation. The statement also mentions that the Cemetery will erect a Great Canadian Profile Marker near Bryce's grave.
The Government of Canada's Residential Schools Apology [Bilingual]	John Duncan, Federal Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, submitted these items to the Bentwood Box during the Atlantic National Event on October 29, 2011.

Name	Archival Description
Expression of Reconciliation from Carolyn Bennett [Bilingual]	Bentwood Box submission includes a copy of Private Members' motion No. 402 which called for the implementation of the TRC's Interim Report recommendations concerning education about residential schools. Dr. Carolyn Bennett placed this motion before the House of Commons on June 21, 2012 and it was explained that the Government of Canada denied consent for the item to proceed as a motion so it will not be debated in the House of Commons.
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Mohawk	Helen Gabriel and Hilda Nicholas submitted these items to the Bentwood Box during the Quebec National Event on April 27, 2013.
Expression of Reconciliation from the Sikh Community of Canada [English]	Items submitted by the Sikh Community of Canada at the British Columbia National Event on September 21, 2013.
Expression of Reconciliation from National Association of Friendship Centres [Bilingual]	Representing The National Association of Friendship Centres, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the Winnipeg Boldness Project, Community Foundations of Canada, Inspirit Foundation, Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, Vancouver Island University, and SmartSaver, Stephen Huddart and Diane Roussin submitted these items to the Bentwood Box during the Ottawa Closing Event on June 1, 2015 at Ottawa, Ontario.
Letter from "We the Elders" [English]	Document states: "We the elders of Long Plains First Nation request chief and council to fight for loss of use and take all necessary action to receive our rights to land claims." The first and second page contain the signatures of elders. <i>2 pages, photocopied.</i>
Documents on "Window to the Future" Stained Glass [Bilingual]	Descriptions in French and English of the Giniigaaniimenaaning or "Looking Ahead" stained glass window by artist Christie Belcourt. This window is located in the Parliament building and depicts Canada's relationship with Indigenous people.
Letter of intent from Librarian and Archivist of Canada, Guy Berthiaume [Bilingual]	A framed letter of intent dated June 1, 2015 from Guy Berthiaume, Librarian and Archivist of Canada, addressed to the Director of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Berthiaume acknowledging the role played by Library and Archives Canada by contributing records to the commission, to continue to facilitate access to its holdings in the future, and to work with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

Name	Archival Description
Assemblée nationale du Québec Statement of Support [French]	A framed copy of a motion adopted unanimously by the Assemblée nationale du Québec on Tuesday, April 23, 2013 in support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
Young Women's Christian Association Canada's Framed Statement of Reconciliation [Bilingual]	A framed copy of Young Women's Christian Association Canada's commitment to reconciliation. Statement lists YWCA Canada's commitments which include strengthening partnerships with Indigenous communities and organizations, developing succession plans for leadership positions, working to end violence against Indigenous women, develop programs for Indigenous girls and young women, and working to end homelessness of Indigenous girls and women.
Statement of Reconciliation from Canada's Big City Mayors [Bilingual]	A framed copy of the "Statement of Reconciliation from Canada's Big City Mayors" outlines this organization's commitment to reconciliation.