The Truth We Carry: Residential schools and the texts that hold the truth

NBE3U, Unit 1: Where We Stand, Lesson 10. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

The truth about residential schools has been carried in many kinds of texts: survivors' testimony, a commission's report, poems, a child's orange shirt, a national day. Listening to those texts is part of how truth comes before reconciliation.

What students do: Students prepare with care routines, learn the history of residential schools through an original overview, examine the different text forms that carry this truth (testimony, the TRC report and Calls to Action, poems by survivors, Orange Shirt Day), listen to teacher-chosen survivor testimony with clear listening purposes and active-listening norms, and reflect in writing.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
A1.3	identify and explain diverse themes, ideas, and issues related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit identities, as reflected in various Indigenous text forms, and, as appropriate, in relevant non-Indigenous texts
B2.1	identify the purpose of a range of listening tasks, with a focus on listening to oral texts from and/or related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, and set goals for specific tasks
B2.2	select and use the most appropriate active listening strategies when interacting in a range of oral communication contexts related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures

From The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies (2019), English: Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Voices, Grade 11, University Preparation (NBE3U). A = First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Perspectives and Text Forms in Canada, B = Oral Communication, C = Reading and Literature Studies, D = Writing, E = Media Studies.

Learning goals and success criteria

Learning goals	Success criteria
• We are learning the truth about residential schools. • We are learning how to listen to testimony with purpose and respect.	• I can describe the purpose and effects of residential schools. • I can name text forms that carry this truth. • I can set a respectful purpose for listening to testimony. • I can listen actively and respond with care.

Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** The Truth We Carry deck.

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- **Handouts:** Texts That Carry Truth (page 1), Listening Reflection (page 2).
- **Media:** Teacher-chosen survivor testimony from a trusted source, such as the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (nctr.ca). Choose a short, non-graphic excerpt and preview it.
- **Poem:** Optional: a teacher-chosen poem by a survivor (for example, Rita Joe's “I Lost My Talk” or a poem by Louise Bernice Halfe – Sky Dancer), read from the book.

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–8	**Care**	Before we begin.	Listen.	
8–22	**The history**	Overview.	Note.	
22–35	**Texts that carry truth**	Forms.	Sort.	Forms named.
35–55	**Testimony**	Listen with purpose.	Listen.	Respectful listening.
55–75	**Reflect**	Write; care.	Write.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** Overview with key terms highlighted.
- **ELL:** Captioned testimony; glossary.
- **Challenge:** Read the TRC's Calls to Action on education (62 to 65) and choose one our school could act on.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Texts That Carry Truth and Listening Reflection	Identities (A1.3), listening purposes (B2.1) and active listening (B2.2)

The truth: key points

- **Purpose:** Government- and church-run schools aimed to assimilate Indigenous children by separating them from their families, languages and cultures.
- **Scale:** Over 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children attended; the last federally run school closed in 1996.
- **Effects:** Many children faced neglect and abuse, and thousands died; effects on families, languages and communities continue across generations.
- **Texts that carry truth:** Testimony, the TRC's final report and 94 Calls to Action, survivors' poems and memoirs, the orange shirt, and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.
- **Listening to testimony:** Listen to understand, not to judge; let silence happen; take care of yourself and others.

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Teacher notes

- This course discusses colonization, residential schools and their effects. Some students and families carry this history personally. Support: Hope for Wellness Help Line (for Indigenous people across Canada, 24/7, by phone or online chat at hopeforwellness.ca; English and French, with Cree, Ojibway and Inuktut on request at certain times), 1-855-242-3310; Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868 or text 686868; 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline (call or text 988); National Indian Residential School Crisis Line, 1-866-925-4419.
- Prepare students the class before. Contact families in advance if your school's practice suggests it. Do not show graphic content. Some students may need to step out; check in afterward. Do not ask students to evaluate or critique testimony.
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2008–2015) heard from more than 6,500 witnesses and issued 94 Calls to Action; Calls 62 and 63 address education. Over 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children attended residential schools; the last federally run school closed in 1996. Orange Shirt Day began in 2013, inspired by Phyllis Webstad; the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation was September 30, 2021.
- Louise Bernice Halfe – Sky Dancer, raised on Saddle Lake Reserve and a survivor of Blue Quills Residential School, was Canada's Parliamentary Poet Laureate for 2021–2022, the first from an Indigenous community.
- Do not ask Indigenous students to speak for their communities, to share personal or family histories, or to act as experts. Every student's participation in sharing is optional.
- We strongly recommend reviewing this unit with your board's Indigenous education lead and, where possible, inviting a First Nations, Métis or Inuit Elder, Knowledge Keeper or guest speaker following your board's protocols (including offerings and honoraria). Local Nations' own sources come first.

Coming up

Lesson 11, Building the Brief.

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