

Residential Schools: The Devastating Impact on Canada's Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Findings and Calls for Action

Examining historical causation

- A. Identify the various underlying and immediate causes of a particular event.
- B. Determine the three most important contributing factors to the event.

Key topics

In exploring the immediate and underlying causes related to the residential schools and Canada's assimilation policies relating to Aboriginal peoples, the following events are most important:

1. Causes of conflict between Aboriginals and the British/Canadian governments from 1600s to 1900s: pp. 14–15, 20–21, 37, 38–47.
 - a. The government wanted to expand its control over the land owned by Aboriginal peoples.
 - b. In order to reduce the potential strength of the First Nations peoples, the government sought to assimilate Aboriginal peoples into the general population. One way they did this was by offering Aboriginal peoples citizenship in exchange for giving up their land rights.
 - c. The government negotiated land treaties with various First Nations and created reserves where the bands could live. Many of the promises agreed upon in the treaties, such as education, were not kept.
 - d. The government banned some very important First Nations' cultural practices, such as potlatch.

2. Causes of the government's decision to open residential schools for First Nations children (and eventually Inuit children) and then make attendance mandatory in 1920: pp. 38, 42–45.
 - a. Societal and government-sanctioned racism. Europeans generally felt that they were superior and had the right to impose their culture on the Aboriginal populations.
 - b. A policy of assimilation that aimed to extinguish Aboriginal cultures in Canada. The idea was to take young Aboriginal children away from their parents and communities and totally immerse them in a white Canadian culture, thereby eliminating their own culture.
 - c. A desire to create a labour force for Canada's growing industries. Initially the children were being taught in the classroom part time and trained as labourers the rest of the school day.
 - d. Political opportunism. If the children could be assimilated and the Aboriginal cultures slowly eliminated, the government would not have to deal with First Nations and Inuit rights in the future.
3. Causes of the government's decision to acknowledge the terrible tragedies and long-lasting impacts caused by the residential school system: pp. 94–95, 98–105.
 - a. A few prominent individuals, such as Phil Fontaine, went public with their stories of the abuse they suffered while at residential schools.
 - b. Pressure from individual Aboriginals and organizations.
 - c. Growing public awareness of the abuse that took place in the schools.
 - d. Apologies from the Anglican and United Churches.
 - e. A new public attitude about multiculturalism and a commitment to a society that ensures equality and justice for all.

Identifying consequences

- A. Identify the obvious and less obvious direct and indirect consequences resulting from the historic injustice for the featured group(s).
- B. Rate the severity of the collective impact on the featured group in each of the following categories: political, social, economic, psychological/emotional.

Key topics

1. Obvious and less obvious direct and indirect consequences of residential schools.
 - a. Direct consequences: pp. 54–81.
 - b. Indirect consequences: pp. 86–93, 96–97, 106–109, 112–115.
2. When determining the severity of the collective impact of the consequences of the residential schools, consider the following areas:
 - a. Psychological and emotional consequences.
 - b. Social and cultural consequences.
 - c. Economic consequences.
 - d. Political and legal consequences.

Tracking continuity and change

- A. Identify the similarities and differences between the experiences of Aboriginal groups and other groups over two time periods.
- B. Identify the most important similarity and differences between the compared groups or time periods.

Key topics

When tracking continuity and change between the experiences of Aboriginal peoples and one or more groups, consider the following topics:

1. Racism experienced by First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples in Canada since the arrival of Europeans: pp. 10, 38–47, 54, 56, 68, 82.
2. Experience of those who attended residential schools (forced to leave their home and confined to a government-sponsored institution or community): pp. 48–81, 86–93.
3. Consequences of assimilation policies: direct consequences: pp. 44–81; indirect consequences: pp. 86–93.
4. The fight of individuals and Aboriginal groups to obtain an apology and seek justice: pp. 94–95.
5. Government acknowledgement of historic injustice and apology to First Nations and Inuit peoples: pp. 98–103.
6. Government action following the apology, including the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: pp. 106–115, 119.

When comparing Aboriginal peoples at two different time periods, consider the following topics:

1. Life for Aboriginal children before attending residential schools and after residential schools became mandatory: pp. 8–37 (pre-residential schools), pp. 48–81 (after residential schools were mandatory).
2. Family relationships before attending residential schools and after leaving residential schools: pp. 11, 24–28, 32–35 (before residential schools), pp. 53, 68–71, 86–93 (after leaving residential schools).
3. Political activism within Aboriginal communities prior to when residential schools became mandatory compared to after the schools closed: pp. 15, 36–37, 39 (before schools), pp. 82–85, 94–97, 117–119 (after schools closed).

Offering ethical assessments

Write a letter to a public official assessing the adequacy of the official response to the call for an apology for the government's role in the residential school system.

Key topics

Consider the following areas when assessing the adequacy of the official response of the federal government to the residential school system:

1. Experiences during, and consequences of, the residential schools: pp. 48–81, 86–93.
2. Government action following Survivors' lobbying for an apology for residential schools: pp. 94–95, 98–103, 106, 119.
3. Government response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Report: pp.116–117.

Adopting historical perspectives

- A. Draw historically plausible conclusions about the experiences and attitudes of a featured group regarding some aspect of a historical injustice.
- B. Write a letter from the point of view of a teenage member of the group explaining the specified situation or event.

Key topics

Consider one or more of the following topics when adopting a historical perspective related to the residential school system.

- Aboriginals' attitudes towards arrival of Europeans before 1800s: pp. 11, 13, 15, 20–23, 30–31, 36–39.
- Government attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples before residential schools: pp. 38–47.
- The school authority's attitudes towards Aboriginal students at residential schools: pp. 54–81.
- The attitudes of Aboriginal students at residential schools: pp. 48–79.
- Life for residential school Survivors: pp. 86–93.
- Political activism in the Aboriginal community prior to residential schools: pp. 15, 36–37, 39.
- Political activism in the Aboriginal community following the closing of residential schools: pp. 82–85, 94–97, 117–119.
- Reasons offered by government officials and politicians to justify the residential school system: pp. 42–45, 111.
- Attitudes towards the federal government's apology: pp. 97, 99–101.
- Attitudes towards the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings: pp. 111, 116–117.

Determining historical significance

- A. Identify the historically significant aspects of dimensions of your assigned event.
- B. Design a commemorative piece (e.g. coin, collage, museum exhibit, statue, video, memorial epitaph, poem, song) featuring the most significant aspects of the historical injustice.

Key topics

When identifying historically significant aspects of Canada's residential schools, consider the following criteria:

1. Recognition of an assimilation policy for Aboriginals: pp. 42–47, 54–57, 102, 110–111.
2. Direct consequences of the residential school system: pp. 54–81; indirect consequences: pp. 86–93, 96–97, 106–109, 112–115.
3. Consequences of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings: pp. 106–117.
4. Iconic status and insights about the past: pp. 110–117; how residential schools have been memorialized by different groups: pp. 118–119.