



That  
happened  
in the **past**.

That's an  
**Aboriginal**  
problem.

Our Home  
and **Native**  
Land.

What am I  
supposed to do  
about it?

I don't have any  
**Aboriginal** kids  
in my class.

Just **get**  
**over** it!

**Natives** get  
everything for  
free!



# WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD?

An Introduction to the Indigenous Peoples of Canada



This resource is designed to introduce ETFO members to First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) people, the legacy of Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples and the move to reconciliation by addressing common misconceptions and statements that exist in our society. It is our hope that this resource, filled with many hyperlinks (in coloured text) will encourage our members to take steps to learn more about Indigenous peoples in Canada for the benefit of learning about our nation's history and to gain knowledge to share with young people in our classrooms.

**Please note:** The terms [Aboriginal Peoples](#) and [Indigenous](#) of Canada, refer to the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) people and nations in Canada. These will be used interchangeably in this resource.



You may be very surprised! [Aboriginal peoples](#), like all Canadians, come in different shapes, sizes and colours and may possibly look very much like you. As well, Aboriginal parents or students don't always self-identify. Some individuals may choose not to disclose their Aboriginal heritage as they may not associate with the terms Aboriginal, Indigenous or First Nation. [Aboriginal identity and terminology](#) can be a personal or collective preference. Some people can be more inclined to identify with the name of their cultural group, while others choose not to self-identify for personal or political reasons related to [assimilative policies](#), like the [Indian Act](#).

While there are similarities across cultures, worldviews and histories, there is much [diversity within First Nations, Métis, and Inuit](#) (FNMI) nations. All students, no matter their cultural or ethnic background, have a unique identity and will express it in whatever way makes sense to them. How one identifies is a personal choice. For families and students, it is confidential and voluntary.

Approximately 1.4 million people in Canada have self-identified as Aboriginal, according to Statistics Canada's [2011 National Household Survey](#). About 46 percent of this number were under

"We don't need you  
to feel that you are  
connected to this history.  
We need you to feel  
that you are part of the  
future and that you're  
part of the solution, and  
therefore we have to  
talk about what your  
role is going to be going  
forward . . .".

Justice Murray Sinclair  
(May 2015)



the age of 24. Although you may not know it, Aboriginal peoples are the fastest growing population and Aboriginal students are in public elementary classrooms. You don't need to be an expert in Aboriginal studies to teach the histories of Aboriginal peoples. We are all learning about a history that wasn't appropriately authentic and reflective of Aboriginal people's perspectives and presence. Teach what you're learning to all your students, regardless of how your student body self-identifies.

Many educators in Canada are already [allies in Aboriginal education](#). Being a [culturally relevant educator](#) and recognizing the rich, diverse cultural mix in your classroom, school or community ensures all children's identities are reflected in the learning environment.

There are a variety of [strategies](#) that you can use to integrate Aboriginal content into your instructional practice. Ultimately, doing so contributes to the success of all students, including [Aboriginal students](#). Moreover, you'll be teaching student's knowledge and tools to [address racism](#).



Our Home  
and **Native**  
Land.

The First Nations, Métis and Inuit people of Canada are the original Indigenous inhabitants of this vast and beautiful country. As our national anthem highlights, Canada is now the “home and native land” for all Canadians who live here, whether they have been here for a hundred years or are newly arrived.

Each Indigenous group has its own culturally unique and specific identity, livelihood, worldviews, [spiritual ceremonies](#), [pedagogies and storytelling](#), governance, language and [relationship to the land](#), including [experiential learning](#). Learning about the [history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada](#) is a good start for learning about the relationship between the Government ([Crown](#)) and the different Indigenous people of this land.

[Six Aboriginal cultural groups](#) exist within the geographical confines of present day Canada. There are also more than [50 Aboriginal inherent languages](#). These groups, which were in existence before Europeans came to the Americas, lived in societies with complex governments, social structures and trade systems. The struggle to maintain these cultural identities is at the heart of the struggle that Aboriginal people have experienced with their relationship with Canada.

No matter where we live in Canada, the land has historic and current connections to Indigenous peoples. Check out the [interactive maps](#) identifying the First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities in Canada. What indigenous group or groups are in your area? You may wish to read the [ETFO FNMI Statement](#) with your students to acknowledge the traditional territories of Aboriginal peoples in the area you work and live in. Learning about the Indigenous people of Canada and the history of this country can provide you with information you didn’t learn about and can also apply to your instructional practice.

**Natives get everything for free!**

The fallacy of this title is just one of many common misconceptions and stereotypes in circulation about Aboriginal peoples. [What is stereotyping?](#) It's a bias or belief that can be shaped by a variety of factors including: [media](#) that provides only one side of a story, misrepresents or excludes information; popular [movies](#) that portray Indigenous peoples negatively; [racist attitudes](#) that are learned; or a general [lack of information](#) about Aboriginal peoples.

The reality is that most adult Canadians did not learn the whole [history of Canada](#) which includes oppressive, assimilative practices that were inflicted upon First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. This information was omitted from learning environments and curriculum. The resulting general lack of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal peoples and Canada contributes to why some people stereotype or hold [negative perceptions of Aboriginal people](#).

You may have learned a bit about historical legislation. Typically, however, most people learned about this subject through the lens of a single-perspective. Here are a few things about which you may not have been informed:

[1763 Royal Proclamation](#) was the first legal document outlining the sovereignty of Aboriginal nations in Canada and their title to the land. It was also used as a guide in the treaty making process, and has even been termed the "[Indian Magna Carta](#)". The [British North America Act](#) (BNA) of 1867, which would later become Canada's Constitution Act, created the Dominion of Canada. In section 91(24) of the BNA Act, the government assumes legislative responsibility over Aboriginal peoples and the lands. This Act also took the first steps toward an assimilation policy that saw children forcibly removed from their families and sent to residential schools. Sir John A. MacDonald authorized this policy; later, Duncan Campbell Scott, a deputy superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs in the early 20th century, would ensure that it was enforced. Later, the [Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#) was created and so was [Section 35\(1\)](#) of the Constitution Act acknowledging Aboriginal rights.

The [Indian Act](#) is another policy developed by the Crown in 1876 to control and govern Aboriginal people. The Act is considered one of Canada's most [oppressive legal documents](#). It was designed to control and govern Aboriginal peoples as well as to specify who can and cannot be identified as Aboriginal. This Act remains in effect today and there is no other comparable policy in Canada that is imposed on a group of people.

[Treaties](#) were developed to acknowledge the distinct relations and exchanges between the Crown and those Aboriginal nations which shared lands that Europeans wanted for settlement and economic reasons. Considered legal and binding agreements between two nations, the treaties were either written or oral, or came in the form of a [Wampum belt](#). There are [differing perspectives](#) on what the parties actually agreed upon. Nonetheless, it is clear that the treaties as well as the policies inflicted upon Indigenous people without their consent, created major economic and social imbalances.

Now, to get back to the fallacy, "Natives get everything for free!"

Understanding history from an Aboriginal perspective and making connections between the present and past will confirm that Indigenous people never received anything for free. The exchanges that were agreed upon through treaties or policies that were written - like the [Status Card](#) - by the Canadian Government to control Aboriginal peoples include certain provisions that may exempt an Aboriginal person from paying provincial or federal taxes, when on- and off-reserve. The exchange? Well, that would be access to the land and all its natural resources. These exemptions however, do not apply to all First Nations, Métis or Inuit people. Please read and check out these links to see how this and other misconceptions are addressed: [Top Misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples](#), [4 Facts about Aboriginal People and Taxes](#) and [CBC Radio ReVision Quest](#).

As an [Aboriginal educational ally](#) or [anti-racist educator](#), you can effectively challenge this and other damaging stereotypes. To assist you to do so, consider accessing ETFO's 1.5 hour afterschool workshop for locals, [Deconstructing Stereotypes of Aboriginal Peoples](#). You may wish to contact the president of your ETFO local to set up this workshop for you and your colleagues.







That  
happened  
in the **past.**



Imagine that you don't know anything about your own identity, your family or the history of your people. Imagine that nobody can tell you about these things. Imagine a community with no children, with no one who can carry the stories forward.

Now, imagine if we were all to learn about the [residential schools](#) and about our shared Canadian history. A collective acknowledgement of our history and compassionate recognition for those who have been wronged, gives all of us hope that we can create a better future.

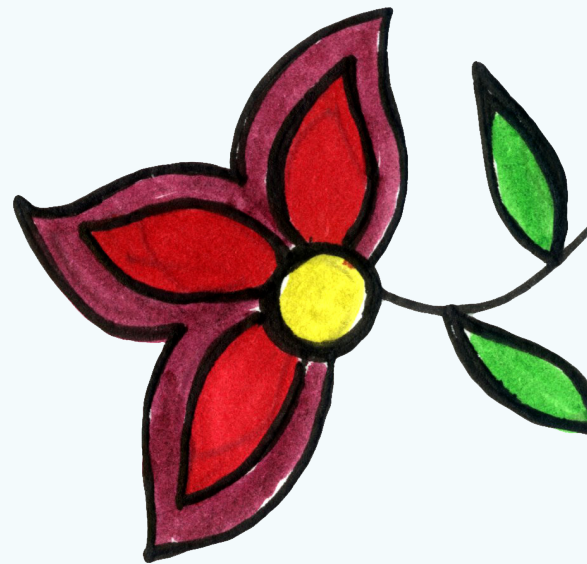
The [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) (TRC) provides a comprehensive look at residential school history in Canada. The issues relating to European education of Aboriginal children actually started almost 400 years ago, when French missionaries tried unsuccessfully to introduce boarding schools. Church-operated schools appeared in the early-to-mid 1800s. In 1883, Sir John A. MacDonald, Canada's first prime minister [authorized legislation](#) to create government-funded and operated residential schools. By the early 1930s, 80 schools were in operation. Almost 200,000 children were forced to attend these schools. A [timeline of residential schools](#) shows these federally run facilities continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the last one closing its doors in 1996.

MacDonald's policy on residential schools was designed to assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream society by systematically destroying children's relationships with family and community. The attack on the cultural identity of Aboriginal children was described by the TRC as "[cultural genocide](#)," (TRC Findings, 2015, p. 1). The testimonies of survivors compiled by the TRC reveal many shared experiences of physical, emotional, spiritual and sexual abuses.

Further, the TRC found that many [thousands of children were never returned home](#), went missing or died while attending residential schools, and often their families were not notified. The [Aboriginal Healing Foundation](#) also provides information on addressing [misconceptions held about residential schools](#).

If the residential school system wasn't enough to assimilate and oppress Aboriginal peoples, the government removed children from their families again in a phenomena called the [Sixties Scoop](#). From the 1960s through to the 1980s, [thousands of children](#) were removed from their families and adopted or put into foster homes of non-Aboriginal families. Their parents and communities didn't know where their children were; parental permission was not sought and families were given no opportunity to reclaim their children. Today, First Nations, Métis and Inuit survivors of this system are filing a [class action lawsuit](#).

In order for us to be fully present in the now, we must embark on a journey into the past. We can't change history but we can acknowledge the impact it had on people's lives and the wounds that need to be healed. This is how we can shape the future for the children of all Canadians.



The relationship between Canada and the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples included assimilative policies and practices that, as mentioned earlier, have had a hugely detrimental impact on the quality of life for Aboriginal people today. [Social conditions](#) including [racism](#), poverty, unemployment and poor health are directly caused by the [colonial](#) systemic practices. It's all too easy for people who have not experienced the same history to tell those who have suffered to "just get over it."

The residential school system and the Sixties Scoop targeted the overall well-being of families, communities and the identities of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. Survivors and their descendants continue to be profoundly affected by [intergenerational trauma](#).

The [resilience of Aboriginal peoples](#) in Canada and North America reflects the strength and unity among the diverse Aboriginal groups in Canada. [Building resilience within Aboriginal communities is a healing](#) process that requires individual and collective action. It includes reconnecting with cultural teachings, knowledge, worldviews and practices. Aboriginal peoples have resisted systemic and colonial encroachments through [political action and activism](#) for hundreds of years. Groups such as the [Assembly of First Nations](#) (formerly known as the National Indian Brotherhood), [Idle No More](#) and [Walking With Our Sisters](#). There are also individuals like Shannen Koostachin ([Shannen's Dream](#)) and Sheila Watt-Cloutier among others, who are committed to social justice, equity, sovereignty, environmental and human rights.

In the 1990s, the Canadian government set out to renew its relationship with Aboriginal peoples and established the [Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples](#) (RCAP). In 2008, the Indian Residential Schools [Statement of Apology](#) was released and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRCC) was created. Fast forward to 2015-2016: The [TRCC publicly released its report](#), [Canada officially adopted](#) the United Nations Declaration on [Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), Ontario issued a [statement of commitment to reconciliation](#) and today the journey into reconciliation continues.

The history of Canada is a collective history. Our country's historical and colonial practices have left their mark on Aboriginal people and erasing the past is not an option. However, in the now, we can do our part to advance the process of reconciliation in a learning environment. Understanding the impact of the historical and current relationship between Canada and the First Peoples is a step in the right direction.

So, how could someone or a group just "get over it?"





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The [Royal Proclamation](#) (1763), the [British North America Act of 1867](#) and later the [Canadian Constitution Act of 1982](#) recognize and protect the rights of Aboriginal peoples of Canada including [Treaty Rights](#) and [Aboriginal Rights](#). This history signifies a nation-to-nation relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the federal government. As Canadians and Indigenous peoples, we share a rich history of negotiation that is codified in documents such as [written](#) agreements/treaties and the [Two-Row Wampum](#) belt signifying peace and friendship.

Our nation shares a history that includes economic, political and social relationships between Indigenous peoples and Canadians. These relationships have been co-operative at times but they have also been negatively affected by the structures of colonialism. To honour the spirit and intent of the Two Row Wampum, all people of North America must learn about our shared history to work towards a prosperous future for all inhabitants.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRCC) was created to acknowledge and bear witness to the experience of Aboriginal children who were removed from their homes and sent to Indian residential schools. The [testimonies by survivors](#) of this system were given at great emotional cost to the individuals and to the groups and communities from which they came. Still, survivors hoped that by sharing their stories they could help secure a better life for their children and grandchildren. The testimonies of this dark period form a permanent record of the shared history between Canada and the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

As well as hearing testimony, the TRC was tasked with recommending next steps for reconciliation to begin. In 2015, the TRC completed the six-year process of hearing from survivors of this residential school system and published [Calls to Action](#). This report lists 94 recommendations that speak specifically to rectifying the wrongs committed against First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in Canada. The scope of the recommendations includes all aspects of citizenship: child welfare, education, language and culture, health and justice. The TRC strongly urged that Canada adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In the Calls to Action, the Commission also advocates for teaching appropriate, accurate content about Canada's history with Aboriginal peoples, with recommendations that include improvements to [education for teachers](#) regarding [FNMI content and perspectives integration](#) into their classroom, and adding the history of treaties and the Indian residential school system into the curriculum.

Justice Murray Sinclair states, "[Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem – it involves all of us.](#)" As Canadians and educators, we can address this shared problem by doing the work which the reconciliation process asks of us in our classrooms. Let's use this strength to make a better future for all of our students and ourselves.



## What can I do?

In the final report, [Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future](#), the "Commission defines reconciliation as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. A critical part of this process involves repairing damaged trust by making apologies, providing individual and collective reparations and following through with concrete actions that demonstrate real societal change (TRCC, p. 16)."

As educators in Ontario, it is our responsibility to provide a safe and [inclusive](#) learning environment for all students. Students from marginalized groups tend to face more challenges engaging in learning and achieving academic success, due to a variety of barriers that they may encounter. [Culturally responsive pedagogy](#) involves understanding ourselves (i.e., perspectives, attitudes), our institutions, our student body and our community. It's a good way for educators to gain new knowledge and understanding.

Aboriginal content should be included whether or not students self-identify as Aboriginal. Teaching Canada's historical and current realities and relationships is valuable for everyone. Creating a welcoming learning environment that is culturally inclusive and aims to [engage FNMI learners](#) promotes [student success for all](#).

So what can you do as an ETFO member? You may already be taking the important first step of creating an open and inclusive environment for all your students. As an ETFO member and person interested in being a culturally responsive educator, one of the next things you can do is learn about FNMI histories, perspectives, ways of knowing and ways of being. This could include learning about the legacy and layers of [colonialism](#) including [systemic racism](#), [institutional racism](#) and how [racism](#) impacts Aboriginal peoples and the broader community.

Here are a few tips for what you can do:

- ensure an open, inclusive learning environment for all students,
- assume that your class includes FNMI students,
- teach FNMI content because it will benefit all learners,
- integrate Aboriginal perspectives, histories and worldviews across the curriculum,
- get to [know the traditional territory](#) on which your school sits, and
- continue to challenge misconceptions and stereotypes by learning the facts and the interconnectedness of history today.

You are not on this journey alone. Along with ETFO's endorsement of the TRC Report, the Government of [Ontario is also committed to reconciliation](#).

ETFO is committed to providing supports, tools and resources for ETFO members to become more aware and culturally inclusive in their practice. Check out some of the FNMI resources that have been compiled for your learning at [www.spirithorse.ca](http://www.spirithorse.ca) and on the last page of this resource.





## Terminology

The following terminology has been taken from the [Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada Terminology](#) webpage.

**Aboriginal peoples:** The descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people — Indians, Métis and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

**First Nation:** A term that came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the word “Indian,” which some people found offensive. Although the term First Nation is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. Among its uses, the term “First Nations peoples” refers to the Indian peoples in Canada, both Status and non-Status. Some Indian peoples have also adopted the term “First Nation” to replace the word “band” in the name of their community.

**Indian:** Indian people are one of three cultural groups, along with Inuit and Métis, recognized as Aboriginal people under section 35 of the Constitution Act. There are legal reasons for the continued use of the term “Indian.” Such terminology is recognized in the Indian Act and is used by the Government of Canada when making reference to this particular group of Aboriginal people.

**Indian Act:** Canadian federal legislation first passed in 1876 and amended several times since. It sets out certain federal government obligations and regulates the management of Indian reserve lands, Indian moneys and other resources. Among its many provisions, the Indian Act currently requires the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to manage certain moneys belonging to First Nations and Indian lands and to approve or disallow First Nations by-laws.

**Innu:** Naskapi and Montagnais First Nations (Indian) peoples who live in Northern Quebec and Labrador.

**Inuvialuit:** Inuit who live in the Western Arctic.

**Inuit:** An Aboriginal people in Northern Canada, who live in Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Northern Quebec and Northern Labrador. The word means “people” in the Inuit language — Inuktitut. The singular of Inuit is Inuk.

**Métis:** People of mixed First Nation and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis, as distinct from First Nations people, Inuit or non-Aboriginal people. The Métis have a unique culture that draws on their diverse ancestral origins such as Scottish, French, Ojibway and Cree. The Métis (and non-status Indians) are also now included in section 35 of the Constitution Act and are considered “Indian.”

## ETFO Statement of Definition and Equity

It is the goal of the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario to work with others to create schools, communities and a society free from all forms of individual and systemic discrimination. To further this goal, ETFO defines equity as fairness achieved through proactive measures which result in equality, promote diversity and foster respect and dignity for all.



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## ETFO FNMI Local Workshops and Resources

The following resources and professional learning opportunities were designed by ETFO staff and members. You'll find culturally relevant approaches and practices to use in your professional practice and personal learning.

### ETFO Local Workshops

Deconstructing Stereotypes of Aboriginal Peoples Workshop

Engaging Aboriginal Families and Communities Workshop

### ETFO FNMI Resources

[Aboriginal Histories and Realities in Canada K-8 Resource](#)

[First Nations, Métis and Inuit Statement](#)

[FNMI Growth Chart](#)

[FNMI Online Book Clubs](#)

[FNMI Growth Chart Literacy Prompt Sheets](#)

[Spirit Horse website](#)

[Truth & Reconciliation Webinars](#)

[Twenty-one Inspirational FNMI Women in Canada Poster](#)

### Where to Purchase FNMI Resources:

[Gabriel Dumont Institute](#)

[Goodminds](#)

[Iroqrafts](#)

[Kidsbooks](#)

[Ningwakwe Learning Press](#)

[Strong Nations](#)

Keep your eyes open for many FNMI professional learning opportunities for ETFO members. For more information, please contact ETFO's Executive Staff in FNMI Education, Rachel Mishenene at [rmishenene@etfo.org](mailto:rmishenene@etfo.org) or 1-888-838-3836 extension 2256.

## Hyperlinked First Nations, Métis and Inuit Resources

[Aboriginal Lesson Plans and Activities](#)

[Assembly of First Nations](#)

[BCTF's Aboriginal Education Resources](#)

[Beyond Shadows: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Student Success](#)

[Chiefs of Ontario](#)

[Directory of First Nations in Ontario](#)

[First Nations, Métis & Inuit Education Association of Ontario](#)

[Haudenosaunee Confederacy](#)

[Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators](#)

[INAC's Aboriginal Education Classroom Resources](#)

[Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.](#)

[Infusing Aboriginal Perspectives into Your Teaching Practice](#)

[Interactive map of First Nations in Ontario](#)

[Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami \(ITK\)](#)

[Legacy of Hope Foundation](#)

[Métis Education Kit](#)

[Métis Nation of Ontario](#)

[National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#)

[Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre](#)

[Our Words, Our Ways: Teaching First Nations, Métis and Inuit Learners](#)

[Project of Heart](#)

[ReVision Quest](#)

[Speak Truth To Power \(STTP\) Canada](#)

[Statistics Canada - Aboriginal Peoples in Canada](#)

[Tungasuvvingat Inuit](#)

[Walking Together: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum](#)



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