

What Can I Contribute to Meaningful Reconciliation?

Teaching and Learning about Residential Schools with A New Resource

What can I contribute to meaningful reconciliation? This is a question we want everyone asking themselves since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation's 94 Calls to Action in June of 2015. But, what does it mean? And, how do I engage in this work in a culturally safe way? Teachers' greatest fear as of late is teaching about residential schools: How do I do so without creating further harm?

Within the Grand Erie School Board's boundaries, only minutes from our board office, is a daunting laneway lined with trees and secrets, leading to a building full of truths to be heard, stories to be told, and voices to be honoured. On these grounds stands the Mohawk Indian Residential School, a large and looming reminder of all the work that still needs to be done for all students within our board. Our complex local history, so personally affected by this legacy, called for a local, context-specific response to guide Grand Erie educators and students on the path to reconciliation.

The Grand Erie team, working with The Critical Thinking Consortium, heard these concerns from teachers and took it to heart. There is so much information out there, how do we bring this into the classroom and create critical thinkers who can become agents of change in the future? In partnership we produced a unit of study for students in Grade 6 which does just that. The *What Can I Contribute to Meaningful Reconciliation?* document explores the causes and consequences of residential schools in Canada: tc2.ca/en/creative-collaborative-critical-thinking/resources/reconciliation.

Partners from the Six Nations of the Grand River and The Mississaugas of the Credit came together with the Grand Erie District School Board's Indigenous Education team, the Woodland Cultural Centre, and TC2. It was important for our teachers to know that the community supported this resource and they could feel secure knowing in the community encourages them to use this in the classroom.

The resource, a set of 11 lessons framed around rich, collaboratively developed critical inquiry questions, focuses on the development of intercultural understanding, straight from the 94 Calls to Action. Students explore relationships,

both past and present, and how two people move forward in relationship to one another when trust is broken. Students learn about the Two Row Wampum, and how the relationship between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people was intended to be, further exploring the question: How do we move forward, and can we?

Secondly, students explore the history of residential schools in Canada, including the causes and consequences. They are encouraged to examine their own bias, and the bias of media and popular texts. Students engage in ongoing reflection using a thought book that allows them to see that their opinions and bias can change over time with information, discussion and empathy. In the end, students take on an agent of change perspective and begin to analyze the question: How can I contribute to meaningful reconciliation. This is a question all Canadians should be asking themselves moving forward on this journey.

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Our intention is not only to teach the history, but also to engage our learners in the critical thinking process so it is no longer just the sharing of information, but the critically thinking about what led us to this point in time, and intentionally planning for where we want to go in the future as we walk along the path to reconciliation. Reconciliation is both an individual journey as well as a collective journey. Our hope is that this resource will support our students in learning the history present within our community, create intercultural understanding of our complex communities, and help build the unknown future ahead.

To quote Senator Murray Sinclair: Education is what got us into this mess. Education will be what leads us out. ■