

# Front Runners Background Notes



## PAN AMERICAN GAMES

The Pan-American or Pan American Games, or more simply, the Pan Am Games, are an international sporting event at which thousands of athletes from Latin America, South America, the Caribbean and North America compete in over 36 different sports. The Games include athletes from the 41 member nations of the Pan American Sports Organization (PASO, [paso-odepa.org/en](http://paso-odepa.org/en)) and are held every four years during the summer, in the year before the Summer Olympic Games. In 1990, there was a winter edition of the Pan Am Games held in Las Leñas, Argentina, and there was another winter Games planned for 1993 in Santiago, Chile, but it was cancelled due to lack of support. Since 2007, Pan American host cities must also hold the Parapan American Games, in which athletes with physical disabilities compete against one another.

The first Pan American Games were to be held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1942, but because of World War II the Games did not take place until 1951. The inaugural Parapan American Games were held in Mexico City in 1999.

The Pan Am Games have been hosted in many countries over the years, but Canada has had the honour of playing host twice—in 1967 and 1999—both times in Winnipeg, Manitoba. In 2015, the Games will be held in Canada for the third time. Toronto, Ontario, will be the host city, making Canada the most prolific host country to date!

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM IN CANADA\*

Although in the film *Niigaanibatowaad* the narrator tells us that 100,000 children were taken from families and sent to residential schools, we know now that the number is closer to 150,000.

Colonization is the imposition of one nation's culture and way of life on another's. It has its roots in the physical occupation of a nation's territory, but is effected by conquering the nation's hearts and minds and assimilating its peoples. In Canada, colonialism is a force whose impact is still being felt today. It began before Canada became a nation and was enforced by a series of acts and laws that were designed to eliminate the rights of Indigenous People; to move Indigenous people off of desirable farmlands and contain them on reserves; and to school Indigenous children so that ultimately they would be assimilated and no longer part of a distinct culture and society.

The practice of removing Indigenous children from their homes and sending them to residential schools began as far back as the 1600s—at first contact with the colonizers. Jesuit schools were set up to prepare young Indian men for a life in the priesthood. The churches were instrumental in establishing

and running the residential school system, which would later be funded by the government of Canada. It was believed that by “civilizing” the children and converting them to Christianity, they were saving the Indigenous people of the land from a miserable and backward way of life.

The Indigenous people of this land began to be thought of as an obstacle to the spread of “civilization”—that is to say, the spread of European, and later Canadian, economic, social, and political interests. Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, summed up the government's position when he said in 1920, “I want to get rid of the Indian problem. [...] Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department.”

In 1844, the Bagot Commission produced one of the earliest official documents to recommend education as a means of assimilating the Indian population. The commission proposed implementing a system of farm-based boarding schools situated far from parental influence—the separation of children from their parents being touted as the best means by which to sustain their civilizing effects. The document was followed in successive decades by others of similar intent, such as the *Gradual Civilization Act* (1857), *Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians* (1869), and the Nicholas Flood Davin publication titled *Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds* (1879), which noted that “the industrial school is the principal feature of the policy known as that of ‘aggressive civilization.’” This policy dictated that “the Indians should, as far as practicable, be consolidated on few reservations, and provided with permanent individual homes; that the tribal relation should be abolished; that lands should be allotted in severalty and not in common; that the Indian should speedily become a citizen [...], enjoy the protection of the law, and be made amenable thereto; that, finally, it was the duty of the Government to afford the Indians all reasonable aid in their preparation for citizenship by educating them in industry and in the arts of civilization.”

A product of the times, Davin disclosed in this report the assumptions of his era that “Indian culture” was a contradiction in terms, Indians were uncivilized, and the aim of education must be to destroy the Indian in the child. In 1879 he returned from his tour of the United States' Industrial Boarding Schools with a recommendation to Canada's Minister of the Interior, John A. Macdonald, to implement a system of industrial boarding schools in Canada.

Before long, the government began to hear many serious and legitimate complaints from parents and native leaders: the teachers were under-qualified and displayed religious zeal, religious instruction was divisive, and there were allegations of physical and sexual abuse. These concerns, however, were of no legal consequence because under the *Indian Act*, Indians were wards of the state. School administrators were assigned guardianship, which meant they had full parental rights over the students.

# Front Runners Background Notes



The complaints continued, and school administrators, teachers, Indian agents and even some government bureaucrats also started to express their concerns—all of them called for major reforms to the system.

Attendance at residential schools was mandatory for Indigenous children across Canada, and failure to send children to residential school often resulted in the punishment of parents, including imprisonment. Many children were taken from their homes, often forcibly removed, and separated from their families by long distances. Others who attended residential schools near their communities were often prohibited from seeing their families outside of occasional visits.

The Indian Residential Schools were chronically underfunded, suffered from little oversight, and were influenced by assumptions that Indigenous Peoples were an inferior race. Survivors describe a loss of identity, as they were forbidden to speak their own languages and practise their cultural traditions. Often upon entry into the school, students underwent a humiliating delousing treatment, had their hair cut, and had clothing and other personal items taken from them. Some were assigned numbers or a different name if their original names proved too unusual or difficult to pronounce. Many suffered physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual deprivation, as well as physical and sexual abuse. The death rate in the schools was high in the early 1900s, due largely to tuberculosis and other contagious diseases, which were easily spread in the often poorly ventilated dormitories.

Most Survivors remember their time at the schools as negative, though some have fond memories, and still others speak positively of their education. However, the high rates of violence, alcoholism, crime, incarceration, unemployment, sexual abuse, post-traumatic stress, depression, and suicide among Indigenous communities and subsequent generations are often attributed to the residential school legacy. Being raised in an institutional environment prevented many Survivors from acquiring parenting skills and the ability to show affection to their children and families. As a result, thousands of Indigenous children were removed from their families and adopted “out,” mainly into non-Indigenous homes. This is often referred to as the 1960s and 1970s “scoop,” and while it may have been undertaken with the best of intentions, thousands of children were removed from their families, culture, and communities, thus perpetuating the paternalistic, assimilative policies that led to the creation of the residential school system and negative impacts on individuals and communities.

The Indian Residential School System (IRSS), as defined by the federal government, was limited to 139 schools that operated across Canada between 1831 and 1996. This definition is controversial and excludes provincially administered schools, as well as hostels and day schools. Residential schools existed in almost all provinces and territories, and in the North also took the form of hostels and tent camps. The earliest recognized and longest-running Indian Residential School was the Mohawk Institute, in Brantford, Ontario, which operated from 1831 to 1962. The last federally run Indian Residential School, Gordon’s School in Punnichy, Saskatchewan, closed in 1996, and was subsequently demolished, marking the end of the residential school era.

*\*With credit to the Legacy of Hope Foundation.*

# Front Runners Activities



## **A NOTE TO TEACHERS**

The subject matter of this film is challenging and may give rise to strong feelings and emotions in some viewers. There are scenes in which physical and sexual assault are implied that may connect viewers to their own experiences. Before watching the film, have a plan in place so that students can take a break and leave the classroom if they need to do so. Talk to your class about the difficult nature of the film and remind students that they need to be supportive and respectful of one another as they learn together. Although the material is difficult, it can also inspire meaningful conversation.

## **CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

**Name of Main Course of Study** – Social Studies, Native Studies, Aboriginal Studies

**Cross-Curricular Opportunities** – Language Arts, Media Literacy, History, Citizenship and Community Life and Moral Dialogue

**Estimated Time Allotment** – Two one-hour periods

## **GUIDE OBJECTIVES**

To examine the injustice experienced by the 10 Indigenous torch-bearers during the opening of the 1967 Pan American Games in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and how their treatment was emblematic of a prevailing attitude of the era—an attitude that was inculcated and preserved in Canada’s residential school system.

To gain an understanding of the resultant degradation and erosion of identity that students experienced in the residential school system and how that legacy continues to affect Indigenous individuals and communities today.

The students will:

- Examine the injustices presented in the film.
- Study the impact of residential schools on Indigenous people in Canada.
- Learn what social-justice activities they can undertake to further the rights of Indigenous peoples.

## **OUTCOMES AND EXPECTATIONS**

### **1. Knowledge and Understanding**

Students will gain an understanding of how attitudes of racial superiority led to loss of cultural identity and self-worth for students in residential schools and how this mistreatment of the students has had lasting effects on Indigenous individuals and communities.

### **2. Skills and Process Outcomes**

#### **Critical and Thinking Skills**

Students develop these skills by weighing all the facts and taking context into account, by considering multiple perspectives on an issue or an event, by using logical arguments, by allowing for and accepting ambiguity, and by weeding out preconceptions. Students will learn to go beyond prejudices and intuitive assumptions, and to replace unconsidered opinion with judgment.

#### **Historical Thinking Skills**

Students develop the ability to work with historical data, empathize with people of the past, understand how the past differs from the present, and use historical knowledge to explore contemporary problems.

#### **Active Democratic or Citizenship Skills**

Students develop good relations with others, and work in co-operative ways toward achieving common goals. Students focus on co-operation, conflict resolution, taking responsibility, accepting differences, building consensus, negotiation, collaborative decision-making, and learning to deal with dissent and disagreement. Students take part in the democratic life of the class or the school and develop an attitude of openness to the world and a respect for diversity.

#### **Communication Skills**

Students listen respectfully to others; evaluate and respond to their perspective; read for comprehension; understand cause and effect; heighten visual literacy through viewing films, still pictures and artifacts; and identify perceptions and biases.

#### **Information Technology Skills**

Students use technology for communicating, gathering, identifying and classifying information; representing; exploring and inquiring; making decisions; and solving problems. Students produce media documents that respect individual and collective rights.

## **ABOUT THE FILM**

***Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners***  
2008, 47 minutes

At a special ceremony during the opening of the 1999 Pan Am Games in Winnipeg, Manitoba, seven First Nations men in their fifties entered the stadium in war canoes. One of them held the Games torch.

In 1967, when Winnipeg first hosted the Pan American Games, 10 outstanding athletic teenage boys were chosen to run 800 kilometres over an ancient message route with the Games torch. When the runners arrived at the stadium, they were not allowed to enter with the torch. Instead, a

# FrontRunners Activities



non-Aboriginal runner was given the honour. Thirty-two years later, the province of Manitoba issued an official apology. Nine of the 10 young men chosen for the 1967 Pan Am Games torch run were from residential schools. **Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners** is about the segregation of the Aboriginal athletes and the despair and abuse suffered in the residential school system. It is a story of survival, hope, reconciliation and a dream for a new beginning that transcends hatred and racism.

## TEACHER PREPARATION

Read the Background Notes section included in this guide and any of the suggested resource materials. You may want to photocopy the Notes for the students or present the material orally.

Preview **Niigaanibatowaad**. The movie is based on Survivor accounts as told to playwright and filmmaker Laura Robinson by the FrontRunners of the film's title. The narrator, Thomas, is a residential school Survivor now in his fifties. In 1999, he was invited to finish the run he participated in for the 1967 Pan Am Games, which was cut short outside the stadium gates. This invitation brings to light painful, long-forgotten memories that Thomas must face in order to embark on another journey—this time to healing.

### ACTIVITY 1

#### Introduction

As an assessment exercise, ask the class the following questions. Record answers on a smartboard or blackboard.

1. What is a residential school?
2. What do you know about the residential school system in Canada?
3. Have there been times when you felt as though you'd been discriminated against? Describe this situation and how you felt.

Contextualize the film by presenting the Background Notes material orally or as a photocopied handout.

#### Developing Understanding or Skills Activities

Show the film **Niigaanibatowaad** and have students record their initial reactions to it. Ask them to take notes to answer questions below that they will discuss and present in groups of three or four.

After the film, have students share their individual, initial reactions. Divide students into groups of three or four and have each group share their responses to the following questions:

1. What injustices did Thomas, Mike and Rose experience?
2. What does the film reveal about perceptions of Indigenous people in the 1960s?
3. Do you think society views Indigenous people differently today?

#### Application Activities

Students can choose to do one of the three following activities:

1. Working individually or with a partner, students will compare contemporary Indigenous involvement in multinational sporting events such as the Pan Am Games and the Olympics with the treatment of the FrontRunners at the 1967 Pan Am Games. The final product can be a paper-format project, video, Prezi, or PowerPoint presentation. Students will present their projects to the class.
2. Working individually or with a partner, students will research the history of a particular residential school and highlight if possible the biography of a former student. The final product can be a report, video, Prezi, or PowerPoint presentation. Students will present their projects to the class.
3. Students may choose to write a brief report on a historical or contemporary Indigenous person or event of significance. The final product can be a report, video, Prezi, or PowerPoint presentation. Students will present their projects to the class.

### ACTIVITY 2

#### Introduction

Write the word “identity” on a smartboard or blackboard and ask students to define the word. Write the students’ definitions on the board.

Identity may be tied to appearances, family, possessions, family traditions, location, and ethnicity. There really are no incorrect answers.

#### Developing Understanding or Skills Activities

Ask students to consider whether there is a difference between how we identify ourselves internally and how the rest of the world sees us. What elements might change how we see ourselves or how others see us?

Using this question as a starting point, have students explore what identity means for people like the characters introduced in the film: Thomas, Mike, or Rose. How do they appear to others versus how they feel about who they are?

Ask students to describe some differences between the life of a residential school student and their own.

# Front Runners Activities



## Application Activities

Students can choose to do one of the two following activities:

1. Working individually or with a partner, students will search the Internet or archives for before-and-after images of a student or students at residential schools. After examining the images, students will describe what elements of identity may have changed and what changes in the residential school students' circumstances or day-to-day life may have brought about these changes. The final product can be a paper-format project, video, Prezi, or PowerPoint presentation. Students will present their projects to the class.
2. An individual student will create a personal-identity collage or mind map incorporating a self-portrait. This project can take the form of a paper-format project, video, Prezi, or PowerPoint presentation. Students will share their projects with the class.

## Extension Activities

- Have students read a book from the resources listed below and prepare a book report to share with the class.
- Contact your local Friendship Centre to invite an Indigenous person to your class to share their experience of being a residential school or intergenerational Survivor.
- Invite a young Indigenous person who has achieved success in sports or academics to share their accomplishments with your class.
- Research the history of a local residential school.
- Watch the NFB film *We Were Children* and lead your class through the activities in the Facilitator's Guide found here: [nfb.ca/sg/100732.pdf](http://nfb.ca/sg/100732.pdf).

## ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Let students know that they are to be assessed on participation and that the individual or partner Application Activities will be marked for completion and presentation. Participation records should be kept throughout the course of the unit.

### Get Involved!

Our Dreams Matter Too is a walk and letter-writing event supporting culturally based equity for First Nations children.  
[fncaringsociety.com/our-dreams-matter-too](http://fncaringsociety.com/our-dreams-matter-too)

The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada has listed seven ways to make a difference.  
[fncaringsociety.com/7-free-ways-make-difference](http://fncaringsociety.com/7-free-ways-make-difference)

Share your projects at:  
[missinghistory.ca](http://missinghistory.ca)

## RESOURCES

### WEBSITES

**Aboriginal Healing Foundation:** This organization is no longer operational, but many excellent resources are available as downloads from their website.  
[ahf.ca](http://ahf.ca)

**Health and Wellness:** List of resources plus lesson plans for elementary and secondary levels on residential schools and their impact on First Nations peoples.  
[edukits.ca/aboriginal/health/teachers/school\\_intro.htm](http://edukits.ca/aboriginal/health/teachers/school_intro.htm)

**Residential Schools:** Artifacts from residential schools.  
[uregina.ca/external/communications/feature-stories/current/fs-01082015.html](http://uregina.ca/external/communications/feature-stories/current/fs-01082015.html)  
[witnessblanket.ca](http://witnessblanket.ca)

**Living Traditions Writers Group:** A list of plays dealing with residential schools.  
[firstnationswriter.com/Myhistory.htm](http://firstnationswriter.com/Myhistory.htm)

**Truth and Reconciliation Commission:** The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an independent commission established as a result of the 2007 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.  
[trc.ca](http://trc.ca)

***We Were Children:*** In this powerful film, the profound impact of the Canadian government's residential school system is conveyed through the eyes of two children.  
[nfb.ca/film/we\\_were\\_children/trailer/we\\_were\\_children\\_trailer](http://nfb.ca/film/we_were_children/trailer/we_were_children_trailer)

***We Were Children Educator's Guide:***  
[nfb.ca/sg/100732.pdf](http://nfb.ca/sg/100732.pdf)

**Where are the Children?** The Legacy of Hope Foundation's website, with many resources on the residential school system.  
[wherearethechildren.ca/en](http://wherearethechildren.ca/en)

### BOOKS

*All the Way: My Life on Ice*, Jordin Tootoo and Stephen Brunt

*As Long as the Rivers Flow*, Larry Loyie with Constance Brissenden

*Behind Closed Doors: Stories from the Kamloops Indian Residential School*, Jack Agnes

*The Circle Game: Shadows and Substance in the Indian Residential School Experience in Canada* (revised edition), Roland Chrisjohn

*The Comeback*, John Ralston Saul

*Fatty Legs: A True Story*, Christy Jordan-Fenton, Margaret Pokiak-Fenton

# FrontRunners Activities



*Finding My Talk: How Fourteen Canadian Native Women Reclaimed Their Lives After Residential School*, Agnes Grant

*FrontRunners Niigaanibatowaad*, Laura Robinson

*Healthy Choices, Healthy Schools: The Residential Curriculum*, Louis M. Crosier

*The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*, Thomas King

*Indian Horse*, Richard Wagamese

*Inside Out: An Autobiography of a Cree Indian*, James Tyman

*The Lesser Blessed*, Richard van Camp

*Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community After Residential School*, Sam McKegney

*A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System* (Manitoba Studies in Native History), John S. Milloy

*Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School*, Celia Haig-Brown

*Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools*, J.R. Miller

*They Called Me Number One*, Bev Sellars

*Three Day Road*, Joseph Boyden

*Victims of Benevolence: The Dark Legacy of the Williams Lake Residential School*, Elizabeth Furniss



## A MINI-GLOSSARY OF TERMS\*

### **Aboriginal Peoples**

In the *Constitution Act, 1982*, three peoples are recognized as “Aboriginal”: Indians, Inuit, and Métis.

### **First Nation(s)**

This term replaces “band” and “Indian,” which are considered by some to be outdated, and signifies the earliest cultures in Canada.

### **Indian**

The term “Indian” collectively describes all the Indigenous peoples in Canada who are not Inuit or Métis. There are three groups of Indians in Canada: Non-Status Indians, Status Indians, and Treaty Indians. The term “Indian” is often used in historical and legal documents.

### **Indigenous**

The following is an excerpt from [firstpeoples.org/who-are-indigenous-peoples](http://firstpeoples.org/who-are-indigenous-peoples):

*There is no rigid definition of what makes a group Indigenous, but the United Nations and the International Labour Organization have outlined a few characteristics that usually define an Indigenous group:*

- *We are descended from the pre-colonial/pre-invasion inhabitants of our region.*
- *We maintain a close tie to our land in both our cultural and economic practices.*
- *We suffer from economic and political marginalization as a minority group.*
- *A group is considered Indigenous if it defines itself that way.*

*Each Indigenous group is unique. We speak thousands of different languages, and our traditions are as diverse as our lands. However, there are basic principles that all Indigenous communities share. These principles are the foundation of all Indigenous practices, and it is because of them that our economies and our societies are equitable, balanced, and sustainable.*

### **Inuit**

In Canada, Inuit are the culturally distinct Aboriginal peoples who live primarily in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, northern parts of Quebec, and throughout most of Labrador.

### **Métis**

Historically, the Métis are the descendants of First Nations women, largely (but not exclusively) from the Cree, Saulteaux, Ojibwa, Dene, and Assiniboine nations, and fur traders, largely (but not exclusively) of French, Scottish, and English ancestry. The Métis developed distinct communities based on their

economic role, and it was their sense of distinctiveness that led them to develop their own political institutions and cultural outlook by the early 19th century. The Métis nation today is composed of people who descend from the early Métis. Today, although they may or may not share a connection with the historic Métis nation, a growing number of Canadians of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry self-identify as Métis.

### **Non-Status Indian**

Non-Status Indians are people who consider themselves Indians or members of a First Nation, but who are not recognized by the federal government as Indians under the Indian Act. Non-Status Indians are not entitled to the same rights and benefits available to Status Indians.

### **Status Indian**

Status Indians are people who are entitled to have their names included on the Indian Register, an official list maintained by the federal government. Only Status Indians are recognized as Indians under the Indian Act and are entitled to certain rights and benefits under the law.

### **Survivor**

An Indigenous person who attended and survived the Indian Residential School System in Canada.

### **Treaty Indian**

A Status Indian who belongs to a First Nation that signed a treaty with the Crown.

*\*With credit to the Legacy of Hope Foundation.*