

Aboriginal Perspectives Unit Guide for the Theme Colonialism and Racism

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Overall Objective

This theme focuses on Colonialism and Racism. The pain of the past provides strength for the present and wisdom for the future. Films grouped under this theme document the darker moments of the relationship between Aboriginal people and government agencies in Canada. (Note: Many sensitive issues covered in this theme; teacher discretion advised.)

Grade level

Grades 7 – 12

Content Areas

Native Studies
History
Media Literacy
Social Studies
Language Arts
Citizenship

Films (and excerpts used)

Mother of Many Children, 1977

Excerpt 2 (11 min 21 s – 13 min 50 s)

Excerpt 4 (29 min 9 s – 31 min 20 s)

If the Weather Permits, 2003 Excerpt 1 (7 min 23 s – 10 min 15 s)

The Other Side of the Ledger, 1972

Excerpt 2 (9 min 14 s – 12 min 52 s)

Excerpt 3 (33 min 10 s – 35 min)

Forgotten Warriors, 1997 excerpt 1 (26 min – 28 min 55 s)

Kanehsatake 270 Years of Resistance, 1993 excerpt 5 (51 min 56 s – 52 min 46 s)

My Name Is Kahentiiosta, 1996 excerpt 2 (23 min 39 s – 25 min 57 s)

Uranium, 1990 excerpt 1 (10 min 58 s – 14 min 10 s)

NB: Excerpts and related films can be viewed online free of charge at
<www.nfb.ca/aboriginalperspectives> in the Colonialism and Racism

Materials Required

Access to a computer lab, Internet connection, Web camera, data projector, flip chart paper or whiteboard, drawing paper and pencils.

Summary

This theme documents the Courage and strength of Aboriginal people to overcome the detrimental effects of colonialism and racism. Unfulfilled treaty obligations, denial of culture, the formation of residential schools, along with the failure to recognize the sacrifices of Aboriginal war veterans are a few of the many challenges, past and present, faced by Aboriginal people. Discussion around this theme is a crucial step in facilitating the healing process and working towards the goals of peace and harmony for all people s in Canada. The films selected under this theme will take students on a journey into the past when values of equality did not extend to Aboriginal people. Specific focus will be on residential schools and their broad sweeping affects, along with an examination into the current living conditions at many of our First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities.

Introduction Activity (10 minutes)

Ask students if they have ever been denied a basic human right, the right to speak a language, the right to practise spirituality or the right to move freely from place to place. This was the reality for the Aboriginal people of Canada. Ask students to define freedom and reflect if there is truly freedom when it is achieved for some at the expense of others. This mindset will help prepare students for examination of the issues related to this theme. Define the term *Colonialism*; this will help students to understand the historical context that shaped in part the situation of today.

ACTIVITY 1: Residential Schools - Impact and Recovery (2 x 50-minute periods)

Step 1: View the film *Mother of Many Children* (excerpts or in its entirety)
View the film *If the Weather Permits* (excerpt 1)

- Ask students to place themselves in the situations depicted in each of the films and record their feelings as they share the experiences of the people in the films. These feelings that students will write down are the basis for the role-exchange exercise proposed later in this activity.
- Have students write a journal entry as if they have just spent their first day and night away from their families at a residential school.

Step 2: The excerpt from the film *If the Weather Permits* describes the situation where sled dogs were massacred; explain to students the purpose behind such an action and draw the connection between undermining one way of life as a means for justification of another. The loss of mobility and a way of life prompted the government of the day to mandate the re-education of Aboriginal people, thus prompting the establishment of faith-based residential schools.

Step 3: Display or distribute the Map of Residential Schools in Canada (see resources for the link). Note the vast distances between the location of the schools and the home communities of the students. Challenge students to place themselves in the position of these residential school students and have them try to empathize with how devastating this reality would have been.

Step 4: Role Play and Role Exchange. This drama-inspired activity is intended to help foster a degree of empathy that will for a moment place students in a situation similar to that experienced by the students of residential schools.

- Teacher in Role (see teacher notes for explanation). Inform students that they will no longer be allowed to write or converse in their first language; that there will be no celebration of any spiritual holidays; and that they will be severely punished if they speak

their first language or participate in any of their traditional ceremonies or rituals. Inform them that they will not be permitted to contact their families until the end of the school year and that some will not be permitted to return home until they have completed their entire education. Instead they will learn a new language and practise a new religion while working and learning the skills deemed valuable and important by the school.

- Carefully gauging the anxiety level of the students, proceed with the role-playing and exchange until the students have clearly grown uncomfortable or have refused to carry on.
- Debrief with students their feelings during the role-playing. Do they think they would have changed in any way had they actually experienced life in a residential school? What do they think would have been the impact on the families left behind in the home communities who lost contact with their children and grandchildren?

Step 5: Display or distribute a copy of the *Statement of Reconciliation* written by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (see resources for link). Discuss with students the importance of this document and have them share their views on how this promises to impact on Aboriginal people's future relationships with one another. Have the students now write another journal entry or personal response to the experience they have just had. These responses can be the basis for assessing whether there has been a shift or change in attitude regarding the students' views on the impact residential schools had on Aboriginal peoples.

ACTIVITY 2: Eliminating Racism – Framework for Action (2 X 50-minute periods)

Step 1: View suggested film excerpts for *The Other Side of the Ledger*, *Forgotten Warriors*, *Kanehsatake, My Name Is Kahentiiosta*, and *Uranium*.

- As part of their active viewing of the film excerpts have students write down examples of racism they observe in each of the films.
- Explore the historical context for each of the films in an effort to deconstruct and understand the conditions that existed at this time of history.

Step 2: Compare the differing worldviews of Aboriginal people and the Canadian government (ex: Stewardship vs. Ownership or Being a part of Nature rather than apart from Nature). Explain how opposing views can lead to misunderstandings. Describe the causal relationship between misunderstanding and ignorance, then make the link between ignorance and prejudice. Finally, make the connection between prejudice and racism, and when students recognize the cycle of racism they can work to correct the imbalance.

Step 3: Ask the students to work in groups and share their examples of racism written down from the films. It is one thing to identify racist actions or policies; it is quite another to find solutions that work towards eliminating them. Challenge the students to brainstorm solutions for each of the examples they have written down.

Step 4: Action plan (see teacher's notes). Focus on the issue of Aboriginal veterans and the failure of the government to fairly compensate the veterans for their wartime contributions. Invite students to write a letter to their Member of Parliament asking for immediate action regarding this matter. (Note: The urgency of such an action is clearly based on the fact that Aboriginal veterans are seniors and cannot afford to wait any longer for this matter to be fairly resolved.) A link has been provided to facilitate the forwarding of student letters (see resources for link).

This action is another example, beyond voting in an election, of how Canadians can actively participate in their democracy.

Closure Activity (10 minutes)

Invite students to continue the discussion held in class in their homes. Ask them to explore the understandings and insights of their parents or guardians on the specific issues raised in class (this is an additional action step in the elimination of racism from our society: taking the discussion outside the walls of the classroom).

Check for Understanding

Leave students with the question of whether or not they believe Colonialism still exists in any form in Canadian society today.

Evaluation rubric

Rubric for Group Discussion

Criterion	1	3	5
Participation	Off-task; distracting; inappropriate responses or contributions.	Shares some ideas; requires encouragement; sometimes needs redirection; may need prompting.	Actively participates, paraphrases; encourages others; is patient; is enthusiastic.
Critical Thinking	Demonstrates little comprehension of the problem; comes to hasty conclusions; little or no consideration of others' viewpoints.	Identifies the problem through restating main points, showing a general understanding; some/limited application of ideas.	Clearly identifies problem; considers others' viewpoints; formulates conclusions, makes comparisons and contrasts; applies extended learning.
Communication of Ideas	Vague positions; judgmental; confrontational; shares own point of view in a negative fashion or is non-committal/withdrawn.	Demonstrates ideas in a general way; limited paraphrasing and questioning; passive interaction.	Has a well-defined position; uses questioning; paraphrasing and clarifying; uses positive body language (eye contact; posture; voice); supports others and is convincing
Use of Knowledge	Refrains from contributing any knowledge or denigrates others' knowledge.	Shares a general knowledge of the issue.	Shares in-depth knowledge; applies knowledge to past; present and future issues.

References and Resources

[Royal Commission On Aboriginal Peoples](#)

[Residential Schools Map](#) (bilingual)

[Native Soldiers](#)

[Contacts for Members of Parliament](#)

Appendix

Teacher's notes

Residential Schools – Impact and Recovery

Teacher in role is a powerful instructional strategy in which the teacher asks students to momentarily suspend disbelief and engage in a scenario where a whole host of issues can be explored. The teacher assumes a specific role that helps create a believable set of circumstances leading to a heightened awareness in the minds of students on the issue(s) raised in the role-playing. With practice a skilled teacher can slip in and out of role as a means of emphasizing or drawing attention to emotionally charged issues with no offence or harm brought to the parties involved.

Eliminating Racism – Framework for Action

Active participation by its citizenry in the democratic process is an important measure of the health and effectiveness of that democracy. Empower the students to take actions that will help improve their lives in the society they are a part of.