



CLARA CLARE: LOSS OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Focus Questions

Who am I? When I describe who I am to others, what do I tell them and why? Where do these parts of my identity come from? How did I get these characteristics?

What happened to Indigenous children at residential schools? Why were First Nations, Métis and Inuit children forbidden from speaking their language or expressing their culture at school? What was the goal of residential schools? What happened to the identities of Indigenous children? Why was this system wrong and what can I do to contribute to truth and reconciliation?

Time

60 minutes

Grade Level

K-6

Learning Goals

- List important elements of “identity”, such as name, language, culture and where you are from.
- Recognize that these elements of identity are different for each person.
- Explain that what makes up each person’s identity is either passed down to us from previous generations or reflects our individual choices, likes or dislikes.
- Understand that students who went to residential school had parts of their identities taken away from them (even for the few students who say they had a good experience).
- Empathize with how this made First Nations, Inuit and Métis children

Introduction

While First Nations, Métis and Inuit children’s experiences in residential schools range from student to student and place to place, one common experience among them is a sense of loss, in particular of their language and culture. Indigenous children were not allowed to speak their mother tongue and were required to only speak English or French where they went to school. Often, students felt they did not belong, and were not understood by others or were unable to understand others.

When these students became parents later in their lives, many of them experienced feelings of failure, such as not being able to pass along their language to their children and grandchildren, or not knowing their language or culture. Many experienced a numbing sense of detachment in relationships, which came from having been neglected or having received no care or love while in the residential school system, making it difficult for them in turn to show love.

The colonial era is marked by intolerance, segregation and attempts to assimilate and eradicate Indigenous Peoples from this land. The residential schools era was the single largest contributor to the loss of Indigenous languages in Canadian history. Today, many Indigenous communities are involved in language and culture revitalization efforts to reclaim their stolen identities.

Lesson Implementation

Minds on

Tell students that there are two main questions they need to think about for this lesson: who am I and what makes me who I am?

Have students sit in a circle and tell them that they will each take their turn describing what makes them who they are. Ask students to pretend as though they have never met each other before. Have them answer the question: Who am I? Accept all student answers.

Ask students: What do we think of when we ask ourselves this question? Usually, our name, our family, our culture; our language; the place we come from, and our religion are the answers we give. We might also mention things we prefer or our favourite things to do or even things we dislike.

You can model for students how you would answer the question yourself:

“Hi everyone! My name is _____. My parents’ names are _____ and _____. I have _____ siblings. Their names are _____. We come from _____ and speak _____. We are _____. One of my favorite things is _____. One of my least favorite things is _____.”

You can support students by writing this prompt on the board before sitting down and/or by prompting them as you go around the circle according to their needs. Remind students that if they don’t know how to answer the questions that’s okay and they can share whatever they do know for now.



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feel and why it is wrong to take those things away from people.

- Identify ways to contribute and take action towards truth and reconciliation.

Materials

- A big enough space to make a sit-down circle with the whole class
- A board to write on
- One photocopy per student of the Human Being with Categories card
- Optional: One photocopy per student of the Blank Human Being card
- Clara's Biography Card
- Clara's story on the [Paths to Reconciliation](#) website*, available in the following formats:
 - Photos of Clara Clare
 - Audio interviews
 - Photos of All Hallows school

*Note: to access survivor stories, click on "Legend," then "Survivor Stories," and choose a survivor from the map view.

Connection to the Canadian Geography Framework

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Spatial significance
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective

Inquiry Process

- Ask geographic questions
- Acquire geographic resources
- Interpret and analyze
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Reflect and respond

Geospatial Skills

- Spatial representations

Explain that how we answer this question will be different for each of us. For example, someone may not have any siblings or may live with only one parent or with their grandparents. Someone may come from far away and others close by. Some may speak the same language as us or speak multiple languages. For example, someone might be French-Canadian and speak French at home, or be Chinese-Canadian and speak Cantonese, or be Anishinaabe and speak Anishinaabemowin, and so on.

Sharing your personal story with students will not only motivate them to share their stories but will help them understand what you are asking them to share and will encourage them to share their stories with pride in who they are.

The circle discussion is not meant to be rushed. This exercise is intended to have students explore a deeper sense of one another as human beings, each with their own sense of identity that is associated with various things like their name, language, culture, religion, preferences and where they are from so that they may come to respect and appreciate each other's similarities and differences.

If there are students in the class for whom English is not their first language, encourage them to share in their first language if they wish to do so. Then, before having them repeat it in English so that everyone can understand what they said, ask: Did anyone else here understand the language they were speaking? This could also be an entry point to introduce the concept of residential schools to students if they are learning about it for the first time. You can explain that after the circle, the class will read or listen to the story of a young First Nations girl by the name of Clara Clare, who went to a residential school a long time ago. Explain that a residential school is a type of school where you lived at the school during the years you were studying there.. Indigenous students, like Clara, who attended residential schools were not allowed to speak their language when they got to school. Students at residential schools did not understand what their teachers were saying to them in either English or French for a long time until they learned the language. Often, they were punished if they spoke in their language or got things wrong. Imagine how frustrating that would be and how lonely that would make you feel that nobody could understand you or help you.

Before beginning, remind students what the rules are when sharing in a circle: be respectful and listen when others are speaking so they listen to you when you are speaking (do not speak unless it is your turn), and, when it is your turn share, be mindful of the time so everyone gets a turn. It can help to use an object to maintain order and respect so that only the person holding the object is allowed to speak and then pass it from person to person.

Begin the circle with your own answer to the question: who am I? Then, move to the next person on the left and so on. Give each student the time they need to get through their answer. Prompt students who might need help.

After everyone has had a chance to share, ask students if they had any follow-up questions for anyone. Take a few minutes to wrap up the discussion by explaining that the things they have used to describe themselves are all parts that make up their "identity" —who they are.

Tell students they will now take some time to discuss their identities.



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Have students return to their desks. Write “human being” at the top of the board and explain to students that we are all human beings. Copy the Human Being card on the board, leaving space to fill in the circles. Review again with students the various things you just discussed in the sharing circle. As students call out answers to the following questions, write them in each circle.

- Among the key elements of identity that we have discussed, which ones are those that are passed down from generation to generation in our families? Highlight those on the human being (e.g., name, language, culture).

Which ones are not passed down but are individual to you (e.g., our personal preferences, our likes and dislikes, choices)? You may want to note that these elements of identity can also be influenced by your culture, language, etc.

Summarize with students that our personal identities include a lot of things that were given to us or passed down to us through the generations and some things that are all our own (such as our individual talents or preferences).

Action

Distribute to each student a copy of the Human Being with Categories card, which will represent Clara.

Explain that you will be reading and/or listening to Clara’s life story. Tell students that their task is to listen carefully. Each time they hear mentioned any one of the things identified on their card, they are to cross it off on the paper. Review Clara’s story using the Clara’s Biography Card and the short story, photos and audio files available on the [Paths to Reconciliation](#) website. Note: see the Sources and Additional Resources section for more documents about Clara’s life.

Ask students if they have any questions about Clara’s story. Ask students what they crossed off of their cards. By the end of the activity, all of the parts of Clara should be crossed out, except perhaps her preferences or likes and dislikes.

Ask students which of the parts of Clara’s identity were removed or changed. For example, was her religion or culture changed? Did her language change? What else changed?

In discussing the answers to these questions, how many parts of Clara’s identity were left intact (that you did not cross out)?

Discuss with students the fact that Clara says she had a good experience there. If she had a good experience, why was the residential school system wrong? Most students that attended residential schools had horrible experiences, but there are some who say they had a good experience, which is why some people dismiss that residential schools were wrong. However, we learned today that while Clara had a good experience, many parts of who she was were still taken away from her. Break down for students that even though Clara said her residential school experience was



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good, she still experienced being far away from her family and community and the safety and love she had there.

Conclusion and Consolidation

Review with students:

- Her name: from Kesutetkwu to Clara Clare
- Her family: from being together to being apart (the girls and teachers became her family which is one of the reasons her experience was better than most)
- Where she was from: Spuzzum (her community) to Yale (where the British mission school was established)
- Her language: language of the NLaka'pamux people to English (they only spoke in English at the school and Clara always struggled with the language)
- Her religion: spirituality of the NLaka'pamux people to Anglican Christian like the British (Clara did convert to Anglicanism and worked for the church, helping others her whole life)
- Her culture: culture of the NLaka'pamux people hidden with British culture prominent
- Her history: her family history and the history of the NLaka'pamux people were changed by colonialist practices
- Preferences, likes and dislikes, choices: Influenced by her experiences in a colonial system and society

Ask students how all those losses made them feel about Clara's story. Some students may conclude that this system was unfair and that it should never have happened because it is wrong to take those things away from someone, while other students may conclude that Clara seemed happy and therefore it could not have been all that bad. Use this opportunity to point out how this example illustrates that all children who attended residential schools lost parts of themselves forever, whether their experiences were "good", like Clara's, or bad (like it was for the great majority of Indigenous kids who suffered abuse and trauma from their experiences). When we lose parts of who we are, we are not a whole person and we are suffering in one way or another from not being able to fully be who we are.

Ask students what needs to happen for residential school survivors to get better (to heal) from the losses they have experienced, which they have also passed on to their children and grandchildren? It should be obvious for students by this point that the way for a person to become whole again is to reclaim those things for themselves.



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Extensions

- Provide students with a copy of the Blank Human Being card. Tell students to try to fill in as much of it as they can. Give them five minutes to do this. Students can take it home and have a discussion with their parents to help them with this exercise.
- Make a [heart garden](#). Have each student make a heart on a stick and plant them in an open space in your schoolyard. Each heart represents a residential school student who lost some parts of who they are as a result of having gone to residential schools. Let the garden be a reminder that we can never let this happen to Indigenous children or any children in Canada ever again. Let it also act as a reminder of the things that make us whole.
- Invite students to bring something to school the next day that is an important part of who they are. Students can discuss their item in a show and tell.

Modifications

- Students can write down words throughout the activity that remind them of who they are.
- Students can work in partners to identify traits that make them who they are.
- This activity can be completed in small groups to ensure understanding.

Assessment Opportunities

- Human Being cards can be collected to assess understanding.

Sources and additional resources

- [Across the bright continent](#), a story about Althea Moody, who taught at All Hallows School (the school that Clara Clare attended)
- [All Hallow's in the West school digest](#) from 1906
- [Reference to Clara having a little boy](#) in the All Hallow's in the West digest
- [Mention of Clara written by Althea Moody](#) in the All Hallow's in the West digest
- [Reference to Clara getting married](#) in the All Hallow's in the West digest
- [Colourful Characters in Historic Yale](#) - First Peoples of Yale and Spuzzum (written by Clara Clare's great granddaughter)
- [The Diocese of New Westminster and the Indian Residential Schools System](#)