

TOGETHER WE WILL FIND THEM: SPECIAL INTERLOCUTOR FOR MISSING CHILDREN AND UNMARKED GRAVES AND BURIAL SITES ASSOCIATED WITH INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Introduction

In June of 2022, Canada announced the appointment of Kimberly Murray as the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites Associated with Indian Residential Schools in Canada. The mandate was outlined, in part, as follows:

“The Special Interlocutor will work to identify needed measures and recommend a new federal framework to ensure the respectful and culturally appropriate treatment of unmarked graves and burial sites of children associated with former residential schools. This work will be done in collaboration with First Nations, Inuit and Métis governments, representative organizations, communities, Survivors, and families, other departments of the Government of Canada, provinces and territories, and other relevant institutions such as church entities and record holders.

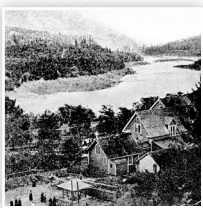
The Special Interlocutor will begin a dialogue between parties that is trauma-informed and culturally safe. She will work toward a collective approach and develop a path forward to address the legacy of unmarked graves and burial sites.

The Special Interlocutor will function independently and impartially, in a non-partisan and transparent manner to achieve the objectives of her mandate.”

The mandate for the Special Interlocutor includes the following responsibilities:

- Engage with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis governments, representative organizations, communities, Survivors and families to discuss issues of concern around the identification, preservation, and protection of unmarked graves and burial sites, including the potential repatriation of remains.
- Examine the existing federal, provincial, and territorial laws, tools, and practices that apply/have been applied to protect unmarked graves and burial sites connected to former residential schools, as well as any applicable Indigenous laws and protocols.
- Identify areas of improvement in Canadian law and make recommendations for a new federal legal framework to identify, protect, and preserve unmarked burial sites connected to former residential schools and lands associated with the schools.

For more information and the full text of the mandate, visit the Department of Justice [website](#) on the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites associated with Indian Residential Schools.



TOGETHER WE WILL FIND THEM: SPECIAL INTERLOCUTOR FOR MISSING CHILDREN AND UNMARKED GRAVES AND BURIAL SITES ASSOCIATED WITH INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Focus Questions

What is the mandate of the Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites Associated with Indian Residential Schools? What are the Interlocutor's responsibilities, who does she work with, and why is her job so important to this country? What are the potential impacts that the Special Interlocutor can have in creating a major shift in Canada's institutions?

Time

60-90 minutes

Grade Level

9-12

Learning Goals

- Students will learn about the mandate of the Special Interlocutor.
- Students will learn about the work of the Special Interlocutor.
- Students will brainstorm ideas for how to build trust between Indigenous communities and the government.
- Students will research the first national gathering on unmarked burials.

Materials Needed

- Electronic device with internet access
- Paper
- Writing utensils

Lesson Implementation

Minds on

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada identified the need for action to address the fact that many Indigenous children who had attended residential schools were still unaccounted for — children who never returned from residential school. In 2015, TRC Commissioners noted specific actions that they saw as necessary in their Calls to Action 71-76.

Have students review the report on the [TRC Calls to Action](#), paying close attention to 71-76. Ask them to reflect on the following questions:

- Who did the Commissioners call upon to take action to find the missing children?
- What actions did they identify as important?
- Do you know if there has been any action taken to address Calls to Action 71-76 since they were issued in 2015?

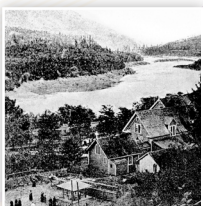
Working in small groups or independently, have students research the meaning of the term "Special Interlocutor" (a person who takes part in a dialogue or conversation or someone who arranges a deal or agreement between two organizations/groups/speakers on behalf of another group of people). Facilitate a class discussion about the role of the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites Associated with Indian Residential Schools in Canada. Invite students to consider what type of experience and background a person in this role might need to be able to carry out this difficult and important work, treating this task with respect and dedication. As a class, brainstorm a list of qualifications that students would consider relevant or important.

Next, have students explore the following websites:

- Department of Justice Canada - Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites associated with Indian Residential Schools
- Office of the Independent Special Interlocutor

Once students have had sufficient time to read through the websites, facilitate a class discussion using the following questions:

- Who is the Special Interlocutor? Why was she chosen to do this work?
- What is her mandate? Why is this work so important?
- Who called for this work to become a reality?
- What is the timeline for the Special Interlocutor's mandate to be carried out? Why do you think this timeframe has been set?



TOGETHER WE WILL FIND THEM: SPECIAL INTERLOCUTOR FOR MISSING CHILDREN AND UNMARKED GRAVES AND BURIAL SITES ASSOCIATED WITH INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Connection to the Canadian Geography Framework

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Spatial significance
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective

Inquiry Process

- Interpret and analyze
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Reflect and respond

Geospatial Skills

- Spatial representations

Action

Upon deeper review of the mandate of the Special Interlocutor, students will note a heavy emphasis on integrating Canadian legal frameworks with Indigenous laws and protocols. Have students find specific examples of these requirements within the mandate of the Special Interlocutor. Ask students: Why do they think the government has finally moved to recognize Indigenous laws, protocols, practices, and traditions in this work? What will this mean for Indigenous individuals, families, and communities?

More than once in the mandate of the Special Interlocutor there is mention of her responsibility to build and strengthen trust between Canada and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. Facilitate a class discussion about whether or not this has been important to the government in the past and why it might be important now.

Have students work in small groups to generate lists of possible approaches or methods to build trust between the government of Canada and Indigenous communities. Once students have created their lists, have them share their ideas with the class.

Conclusion and Consolidation

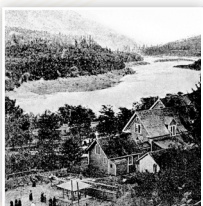
The Office of the Special Interlocutor held the first national gathering on unmarked burials in Edmonton, Alta., in September 2022. The name of the gathering was Supporting the Search and Recovery of Missing Children.

Invite students to review the [agenda](#) for that gathering and have them identify themes that emerged in that gathering. Challenge students to choose one of the themes or a specific speaker or panel of speakers to research. Encourage students to share their findings with the class to better understand the encompassing responsibilities of the Special Interlocutor.

Conclude your learning by visiting the Paths to Reconciliation website. *Canadian Geographic* is collaborating with the Office of the Special Interlocutor on an [online, interactive map](#) to document actions taken by Indigenous communities to recover their missing children from unmarked graves and burial sites. Examine the map and discuss the three categories of sites noted in the legend for the map. Facilitate a discussion with your students about why there is a separation between graves recovered before 2021 and those recovered after.

Extensions

- Have students start a journal and revisit the map at a later time to document any changes or new information that they see on the site. In the journal, ask students to focus specifically on three concepts: Do they think this is fair and justified? Why or why not?
- Who are the experts that the community is relying on for guidance in the search and investigation?

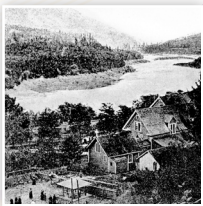


TOGETHER WE WILL FIND THEM: SPECIAL INTERLOCUTOR FOR MISSING CHILDREN AND UNMARKED GRAVES AND BURIAL SITES ASSOCIATED WITH INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

- How is the community reporting, sharing, or keeping the information about their progress in the search and investigation?
- What protocols, legal and ceremonial, is the community following that is unique to this search and investigation?
- Have students explore The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation website for more information on non-IRSSA recognized residential schools.
- The mandate of the Special Interlocutor references examining the possible return of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis land that have been taken up by churches. Discuss this with your students using the following questions: How probable is it that churches and religious orders will return lands to First Nations, Métis, or Inuit communities? Do you think some church groups would be more likely than others to return lands? Why or why not?
- Have students research section 35 of the Constitution Act and ask them to provide a summary as to why they think section 35 is referenced in the mandate of the Special Interlocutor.
- In the additional notes for the mandate of the Special Interlocutor, point 3 states: "The Special Interlocutor will perform their functions independently according to their own skill and judgment, without influence from the federal government about the conclusions to be reached, or the recommendations to be made." Invite students to discuss why it was important to make it clear that the Special Interlocutor operates independently and without interference from the government. Have students share their thoughts with the class.
- For younger students, discuss the meaning of the term Special Interlocutor in the context of facilitating resolutions to contentious issues within their school or classroom. Conduct a mock intervention by a pretend special interlocutor in the class. Have students consider why the role of a Special Interlocutor might be important in this country in the pursuit of healing and reconciliation.
- Bringing in a local Elder to speak about healing practices, song, and/or ceremony could be a good way for students to understand the importance of traditional and ceremonial practices within these investigations and legal frameworks.

Modifications

- For younger students, discuss the meaning of the term Special Interlocutor in the context of facilitating resolutions to contentious issues within their school or classroom. Conduct a mock intervention by a pretend special interlocutor in the class. Have students consider why the role of a Special Interlocutor might be important in this country in the pursuit of healing and reconciliation.
- Bringing in a local Elder to speak about healing practices, song, and/or ceremony could be a good way for students to understand the importance of traditional and ceremonial practices within these investigations and legal frameworks.



TOGETHER WE WILL FIND THEM: SPECIAL INTERLOCUTOR FOR MISSING CHILDREN AND UNMARKED GRAVES AND BURIAL SITES ASSOCIATED WITH INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Assessment Opportunities

- Teachers can assess students' participation in class discussions.
- Teachers can assess students' brainstorming and ideas for how the government of Canada can build trust with Indigenous communities.
- Teachers can assess students' research about the themes in the first gathering, Supporting the Search and Recovery of Missing Children.

Sources and Additional resources

- [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation - Reports](#)
- [Department of Justice Canada - Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites associated with Indian Residential Schools](#)
- [Office of the Independent Special Interlocutor](#)
- [Paths to Reconciliation](#)
- [TRC Calls to Action report](#)