

# CLARA CLARE: ORAL HISTORY AND GENOCIDE

## Focus Questions

What is history? Whose stories are told in history books? Whose stories are left out? What is oral history? What can we learn from oral history that we can't learn from other sources? Was the genocide against Indigenous children at Indian Residential Schools limited to residential schools (that were included in the IRSSA) or did the genocide go beyond that? Who else was impacted by the genocide and how wide was its scope? What can I do to contribute toward truth and reconciliation using either oral history or interviewing techniques?

## Time

120 minutes (two classes)

## Grade Level

10-12

## Learning Goals

- Using primary and secondary sources of information, research and explain a range of lived experiences of students who went to residential schools.
- Draw conclusions about whether there was a difference between Indian Residential Schools and the schools not included in the IRSSA.
- Explain that oral histories help us learn about the attitudes, experiences and behaviours of ordinary people in contrast to the political and military histories we generally learn.
- Research and prepare for an interview (or an oral history).
- Identify biases of the interviewer and interviewee.
- Undertake a project in the spirit of truth and reconciliation that uses

## Introduction

Oral history research was key to bringing forward and revealing the stories of lived experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students who attended Indian Residential Schools when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission gathered the testimonials of more than 6,000 survivors of these schools. Those survivors had the chance to have their testimonial heard and recorded. They also received acknowledgement of their experiences, an apology in the House of Commons, with assurances that this would never happen again, as well as some compensation for what happened to them.

## Lesson Implementation

### Minds on

Explain to your class that they will be undertaking an investigation into the lives and stories of three individuals (Clara, Mike and Leah) who went to three different schools. The residential schools they attended were excluded from the 2006 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.

Explain that history is more than just the stories of famous people or people in power. Inform students that oral history is one tool for uncovering information about the lives, experiences, attitudes and behaviours of ordinary people that is not typically captured in history textbooks.

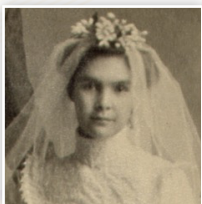
Tell students that they will begin their inquiry by “writing their way into the lesson.” This involves students writing nonstop for five minutes on a prompt,. If they get stuck for what to write next, encourage them to write down their own questions about history until they think of more to write on the subject. This exercise is meant to get as many ideas down on paper as possible about a topic. For the teacher, this will help you gauge the student's comprehension of the topic, and you can adjust the lesson to build from what they already know.

Provide students with the following prompts: What is history? Whose stories are told in history books? Whose stories are left out? Tell them to start writing and not to stop for five minutes.

When the time is up, discuss student answers. Poll the class to see how many students wrote down topics such as prime ministers/presidents, wars, explorers and fur traders, government activities, famous people or famous inventions.

Now, poll students to find out how many thought of topics such as family life, recreation, work, clothing, education, racial discrimination, injustice and abuse? These are the things that affect us on a day-to-day basis.

Tell students that in this lesson they will learn how they can inquire into these lesser-known and less understood areas of history to reveal new information that can change the way we understand our history as Canadians and support reconciliation with our collective past.



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either interviewing or historical research about someone's life.

### Materials Needed

- The survivor stories, photos and audio clips available on the [Paths to Reconciliation](#) website\* including short stories, photographs and audio clips.

\*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

#### Action

Point out that different kinds of historians look at different topics within history. While many history textbooks deal almost exclusively with political and military history, historians also spend a great deal of time studying the lives and activities of ordinary people. The history of ordinary people is often called *social history*. It is as important as political or military history, but it is the part of history we know the least about.

Ask students what types of sources there are that we can use to learn and understand history? Develop a list together.

Define a primary and secondary source of information. Primary sources were created at the time of an event or recorded as a recollection of an event later in time by someone who experienced it. Secondary sources were written after an event by someone who did not have that experience personally. Secondary sources may also consist of summaries or analysis of data compiled from several primary and/or secondary sources.

Ask students which of the items in the list you have made are primary sources and circle them. For example, photographs, diaries and journals, census data, vital statistics, letters, legal documents, newspaper articles from the time, artifacts, and oral history interviews would be considered primary sources.

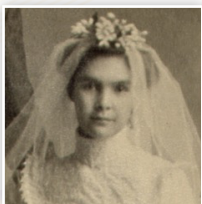
Together, underline all of the secondary sources on the list. For example, books, articles, documentaries, current newspaper articles about the past, and movies would be considered secondary sources.

Ask students: Which is more accurate, a primary source or a secondary source? Why? After some discussion, tell them that it is not always easy to determine accuracy. Although many people reflexively think primary sources are more accurate, primary sources often give only a small piece of the story and one person's perspective. Primary sources have more value when corroborating all the individual stories in primary sources with each other to determine if what happened was only one individual's experience or whether something was a broader, shared experience and what those individuals had in common.

Have students come up with an example from their own lives to illustrate this point. Prompt them if necessary. Consider, for example:

- A story your sister told to get you into trouble versus a collection of stories from you, your other siblings or friends that might contradict or corroborate what your sister said.
- A single TikTok video versus a collection of videos that could provide the greater context of the relationship between the individual and their social circles.

How might a primary source distort a historian's understanding of a person, place or event? How may a secondary source distort a historian's understanding of a person, place or event?



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To create secondary sources, historians typically look at many primary sources to arrive at their conclusions.

Ask students: Does that mean that secondary sources are more accurate? Again, it depends. In both cases, we need to look for bias/point of view. For secondary sources, we also need to look at the extent and quality of the research. Did the historian only choose to present facts that advanced their argument? How many sources did they examine? Because they are writing so long after the event, how can they really know what happened? How much information was lost to time?

Both primary and secondary sources can be extremely useful for different reasons when trying to piece together and understand the past, but all sources, whether primary or secondary, need to be examined carefully for biases to better understand the big picture.

Look back over the list of sources you developed earlier. Ask students: Whose story is more likely to be preserved in these sources, the rich or the poor? The famous or the ordinary? The powerful or the oppressed? How can we add the voices of everyday people back into history? And why might we want to?

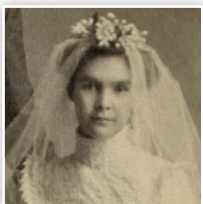
One way is through oral history. Ask students to define oral history.

Oral history is the study of history through the gathering, preserving and interpreting of people's voices and memories regarding past events.

What can we learn from oral history that we can't learn from other sources?

- How people experience something or make sense of their own lives
- Oral history may come from people who would not otherwise be involved in the writing of history or who are ordinary when compared to politicians, inventors, military leaders, etc.
- The emotions associated with particular events (most often conveyed through the voice, tone, and inflection of the interviewee and what the interviewee chooses to share or not to share, such as silences)

Share the following fact with students: The Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) is an agreement that ended the largest class-action lawsuit in Canadian history by former students of residential schools against the federal government and the various church-based organizations that operated these schools in partnership with the federal government. The decision by the Supreme Court of Canada confirmed that the government was negligent in upholding its responsibilities to First Nations, Inuit and Métis children in the residential school system. The 2006 IRSSA was agreed upon by the organizations representing the interests of survivors, a number of Indigenous organizations, the church organizations, and the government of Canada. The claims of former students from about 130 schools were included in the 2006 agreement. However, this number is misleading. Requests were made to add 1,532 more schools/institutions to the list, but most of these applications



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were rejected (about 9 schools were added to the list afterward). Students who went to the schools excluded from the IRSSA still await justice.

Check-in with students for understanding. Proceed to read students the following quotes from the three stories they will be examining later in the lesson:

*"I started to cry again. I thought then that if I ever return to my family and visited Pond Inlet, which had been so scary to me before, it would never be as frightening as the C.D. Howe. I felt a huge lump swelling in my throat and an emptiness in my heart. I had never felt so alone before."* - Leah Idlout

*"We've been neglected, mistreated. We attended the le-a-la Crosse Boarding School, they called it. It's basically a residential school, no different than the one in Beauval, which was the sister residence for our treaty cousins."* - Mike Durocher

*"She lived the European ideal of an Aboriginal student who married a white man and became, for all intents and purposes, completely anglicized, yet privately, she retained her native customs and skills."*— Irene Bjerky, great grand-daughter of Clara Clare

Have a class discussion about the difference between firsthand accounts and the statement of facts. (The firsthand accounts from former students of these schools help us understand what it felt like to be in their shoes, to experience it.)

Before getting into the readings, ask students to prepare themselves emotionally, since some of the facts they will learn in these stories are disturbing and can trigger an emotional response. Teachers should let students know in advance what they can do if they are triggered and what resources are available to them.

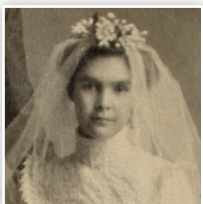
Divide the class into three groups. Assign Clara to the first group, Mike to the second and Leah to the third. Explain to students that their task is to investigate all the materials that were collected on each person (such as the photos, documents, and audio recording).

Note: see the Sources and Additional Resources section of each lesson plan included in this resource for more documents about Clara's, Leah's and Mike's lives.

When doing their research and building their presentations, ask students to keep the definition of genocide in minds. The definition of genocide, according to the United Nations [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#), Article II, states:

*In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:*

1. Killing members of the group;



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2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
5. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

In order for the crime of genocide to have been committed, any one or all of the above must have been committed.

Ask students to find a quote from their research that they feel illustrates a larger theme from their survivor's life. Students should also investigate whether the Indian Residential School System could be considered to meet the definition of genocide laid out above. They will take a position in response to the following question, using their survivor's story as a case study:

Did the Indian Residential School System constitute genocide?

Give students time to build a presentation in a style of their choosing (e.g., PowerPoint, sharing circle, skit, art exhibit) about their survivor, using their chosen quote as the overarching theme of their presentation.

### Conclusion and Consolidation

Give each group time to present. Each student in the group should contribute in some way to the presentation of the information as well as the research.

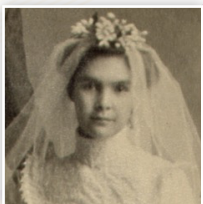
Ask students: With the evidence you have examined, and in light of the definition of genocide, do you think that the genocide against Indigenous people in Canada went beyond the schools included in the IRSSA? (See [here](#) for more information on the definition of residential schools used for the Settlement Agreement.)

After discussing this question as a class, have students complete an exit ticket with the following prompt: "Today I am leaving the class trying to understand..."

### Extensions

- Have students choose a school identified on the [Paths to Reconciliation](#) website. Once they have selected a school, their project will be to conduct research online to identify a former student and anything they can find out about that person. Students may choose to develop an essay, collage, multimedia project or another resource that includes all of the primary and secondary sources of information they were able to locate online for that person to try to piece together a biography, timeline and explanation of that individual's residential school experience. Debrief with students after their projects are returned about the challenges they encountered in conducting their research.





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### Modifications

- Students could choose which survivor they would like to study.
- These projects could be done independently as a summative assignment over the course of the semester.

### Assessment Opportunities

- Assess students' oral presentations.
- Have students hand in a written draft for assessment.
- Students can be assessed on their teamwork.

### 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 Hallows' in the West digest
- [Mention of Clara written by Althea Moody](#) in the All Hallows' in the West digest
- [Reference to Clara getting married](#) in the All Hallows' 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](#)