



LEAH IDLOUT: LONELINESS

Focus Questions

What is loneliness? Who is Leah and what kind of loneliness did she experience? Why was Leah lonely? How did Leah combat her loneliness and isolation to survive? What can we do to feel better when we feel lonely? Why did this happen to Leah? What is the difference between a sense of loneliness and being alone?

Time

60 minutes

Grade Level

K-6

Learning Goals

- Students will be able to describe loneliness.
- Students will generate lists of what caused loneliness in Leah's life as well as in their own life.
- Students will create a list of things they can do to help themselves feel less lonely.
- Students will describe the meaning of neglect.
- Students will understand that Inuit children were treated far differently than non-Indigenous or white children.
- Students will take action in support of truth and reconciliation and develop a sense of empathy.

Materials Needed

- My Top Five Worries card (2 copies per student)
- Loneliness Scenario cards
- Whiteboard or easel (or another surface to write on)
- Leah's story on the [Paths to Reconciliation](#) website*, available

Introduction

Survivors of genocide often speak of the loneliness that they feel for the rest of their lives after their experiences. Many studies have also shown that this loneliness can be passed down intergenerationally so that children and grandchildren also experience similar feelings. Survivors may experience: echoing thoughts of traumatic memories such as separation from family, instances of hunger, or abuse; the feeling of not belonging, such as the experiences of not being understood by others, of not being able to understand others; feelings of failure and loss, such as not being able to pass along your language to your children or not knowing your language or culture; social comparison to others; and a numbing detachment in relationships that comes from having been neglected or having received no caring or love.

We all need to feel that we are loved and cared for and that we belong. When people are excluded and segregated, they feel isolated from the rest of the world and can feel hopeless. These are basic human needs that First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were denied in residential schools. Since only some schools were included in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, these feelings of hopelessness are being exacerbated. As such, there are many other survivors and intergenerational survivors of residential schools that were excluded who continue to seek justice.

Lesson Implementation

Minds on

Start the lesson by writing the word "loneliness" on the board or on chart paper. Say it aloud and then have students repeat it back to you. Instruct students to turn to a partner beside them and talk about what they know about loneliness, what it means, and what it feels like. Give them a couple of minutes to discuss. After they have had a chance to discuss, ask for volunteers to share what they talked about. While discussing, write down relevant definitions or feelings associated with loneliness around where you have written the word on the board.

Action

Explain that students will now learn about the story about a little girl who experienced extreme feelings of loneliness when she was taken far away from her family for four years, from the age of 12 to 16. Ask students to listen carefully to the story and think about how they can relate to her feelings.

As a class, review Leah's short story on the [Paths to Reconciliation](#) website and examine the photos of her journey on the C.D. Howe and her time in the hospital. Facilitate discussion using the following questions:

- What was Leah's life like before the boat came to Pond Inlet, Nunavut?
- How did Leah feel at the beginning of the story?
- Did Leah's feelings change throughout the story?



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in the following formats:

- Photos of Leah Idlout
- Inuktitut magazine biography of Leah Idlout
- Photos of Parc Savard hospital
- Photos of Mountain Sanatorium hospital
- Video interview with Leah
- Video interview with Paul, Leah's brother
- Leah Idlout in the news
- Optional: Post-It Notes

*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
- Geographical perspective

Inquiry Process

- Ask geographic questions
- Communicate
- Reflect and respond

Geospatial Skills

- Spatial representations

- Does this story remind you of a time when you were worried or lonely? What sorts of things were you worried about or made you feel lonely?

Be sure to share with your students your own experiences with loneliness in the discussion. Explain that everyone feels lonely from time to time and that for the most part, most of us are never truly alone. Explain that most of the time, even when we have feelings of loneliness, we can find ways to comfort ourselves.

Hand out two My Top Five Worries cards to each student. On the first card, students are to answer the following: What were Leah's top five worries while she was away from her family?

On the second sheet, they are going to answer the following: What are your top five worries?

Draw a chart either on the board or on chart paper with the following columns:

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What could Leah do when she felt lonely?	What can I do when I feel lonely?	What can I do when someone else feels lonely?

Ask students to turn and talk with a neighbour about what Leah could do when she felt lonely. Have each pair share one idea on a sticky note and add the student responses to the chart. Next, with the same neighbour, ask them to do the exercise again but this time to think about what they can do when they feel lonely. Follow the same process as before and place the sticky notes under the appropriate columns on the chart. Discuss with the class things that you can do for someone else when you think they might be feeling lonely, and complete the third column of the chart.

Conclude with a discussion:

- What is the difference between being alone and being lonely? Share stories about a fun time you had while being alone, and suggest that being alone can be fun and that some people prefer to spend some time alone. Call on students to share some of their stories about having fun alone. Next, explain that feeling lonely is different than just being alone. We can choose to be alone and have fun, but make it clear to students that feeling lonely is different. Leah did not have a choice in spending time alone because she was forced to be away from her family, which meant that she was lonely.



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- What is the difference between being alone and being neglected (such as how Leah was treated in her case)?

Conclusion and Consolidation

Divide students into small groups. Distribute a Loneliness Scenario card to each group of students. Explain that each group has been given a different scenario where someone is experiencing loneliness. Their job is to put on a skit acting out the scenario. Their skit should include how not to act in this situation as well as ideas for how to improve the situation.

Give the students 15 minutes to come up with a short skit. Once the time is up, have students perform their skit. Have a brief discussion as a class after each scenario to check for understanding.

Extensions

- Introduce the concept of art therapy as an extension to talking about emotions. This may be helpful for students who better express themselves visually. Have students draw a heart and choose different colors to represent their emotions. What colour would they choose for loneliness? Have them color in the heart to show how they felt that day. The result should be a heart filled with patches of different colours of varying sizes that communicate how they feel, without using words. For more information read [this article](#).
- Help students make an Inuit doll for themselves or someone else that might be suffering from loneliness. Examples can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Modifications

- When reading Leah's story, have students take turns reading sections. Hearing it in a young voice might allow them to better connect to the story.
- Write the discussion questions on the board.
- Have the students answer questions in writing rather than a class discussion.
- Instruct students to make the chart in their notebooks to write down their ideas or take notes on the discussion.
- Vary the lengths of the skits depending on students' ages.
- Make sure that students are able to read and understand the scenario they have been given.
- Challenge your students to create their own scenarios about loneliness to create a skit on.



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Assessment Opportunities

- Anecdotal notes can be taken throughout the different discussions.
- Collect the My Five Top Worries worksheets for assessment.
- Oral communication can be assessed during the loneliness skits.
- Learning skills, such as responsibility, organization, collaboration, and initiative, can be assessed.
- Repeat the art therapy exercise and record and compare results.

Sources and Additional resources

- [Land of the Long Day](#), a film by Doug Wilkinson of the Idlout family's life in Pond Inlet. Leah is in the first 10 minutes of the film.
- *The Long Exile: A Tale of Inuit Betrayal and Survival in the High Arctic* by Melanie McGrath.
- *Contesting Bodies and Nation in Canadian History* by Patrizia Gentile and Jane Nicholas