



LEAH IDLOUT: INJUSTICE AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

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

Two 60-90 minute classes

Grade Level

7-9

Learning Goals

- Students will be able to identify basic human needs.
- Students will be able to describe Leah's life up to age 12 and explain how her life changed afterwards.
- Students will be able to connect to Leah's story and show compassion towards her.
- Students will be able to identify how Leah's basic human rights were abused and violated.

Materials Needed

- Whiteboard or easel (or another surface to write on)
- Leah's story on the [Paths to Reconciliation](#) website*, available in the following formats:
- Photos of Leah Idlout
- Inuktitut magazine biography of Leah Idlout
- Photos of Parc Savard hospital
- Photos of Mountain Sanitorium hospital
- Video interview with Leah

Introduction

Inuit, Métis and First Nations survivors have often reported being neglected and abused while they were at residential school and how horrible this made them feel throughout their lives. Their basic human needs were not met by those who ran and funded the schools (the church and the state). Examples of this included: always feeling hungry, being isolated and/or separated from family, not feeling safe, being made to feel that they did not belong or needed to be changed, not getting good medical attention or care, getting emotionally, physically, verbally and sexually abused, and being made to work while at school to underwrite the cost of their education and care. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) most people and countries of the world would agree that this kind of treatment of children constitutes violations of their human rights. These are rights that we are all supposed to have by virtue of being human, but they were denied to First Nations, Inuit and Métis children for generations.

Leah Idlout, who lived to be 74 years old, was taken away from her family to be treated for tuberculosis. Many Inuit did not survive treatment in the south, have since passed away, or are getting on in age, and have been denied restitution for what they experienced when they were taken from their families. The only thing they have received is an apology from the prime minister for the mistreatment of Inuit during the tuberculosis outbreaks in the Arctic during the 1940s to the 1960s. The federal government has created a program to help Inuit families find their long lost relatives' who passed away from tuberculosis while down south and whom they never saw again. This is a start, but more needs to be done to ensure justice for what happened.

Lesson Implementation

Minds on

Start a discussion with your students by asking what they know about the basic things that all human beings need to live, and feel happy and safe. Accept and discuss all answers. Introduce the following basic needs:

They are:

1. A person's **physical** needs are met when they have food, water, clothing, shelter, air, sleep, and whatever else a person might need to survive (but, as humans, our lives are about more than survival).
2. A person's **safety** needs are met when: they are with family or people they know, love or trust; they live in a safe home or place where there is no danger of being hurt; and they have a job and/or enough to live a good life.
3. A person's **social** needs are met when they feel loved, feel affection and



LEAH IDLOUT: INJUSTICE AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

- Video interview with Paul, Leah's brother
- Leah Idlout in the news

*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
- Geographic perspective

Inquiry Process

- Ask geographic questions
- Communicate
- Reflect and respond

Geospatial Skills

- Spatial representations

connected to others, share friendships and are accepted by a group, or have a feeling of belonging, care and community.

4. A person's **esteem** needs are met when: they feel confident in themselves; they feel appreciated; they have respect for themselves and others; they feel they have the approval of those they care about; they are proud of who they are, their language and culture; and they are clear on and secure in their own identity, no matter their identity.
5. A person's need to **contribute** is met when they are given a chance to be part of things and to contribute their ideas, skills and talents to improving the world (each and every one of us has our own gifts to give to the world that makes us feel good about ourselves).
6. A person's need for **autonomy** is met when: they are able to make decisions for themselves and for what is best for them; they are able to thrive and develop their abilities to the fullest of their potential; and they have the opportunity to learn.
7. A person's need for **purpose and significance** is met when they feel important, special, or that they matter to others and that they have a role to play in the world.

*Please note, there are different theories about the basic human needs that range in number and categories of needs. Please ensure you are using the basic needs that best suit your students.

As a class, discuss what needs are more important than others. Most students should come to the realization that our physical needs are the most important. You can reference [Maslow's hierarchy of needs](#) to explain the different levels of needs. Explain to students that many children in the world, in the past and today, do not have their basic needs met on a daily basis. Many Indigenous children in Canada do not have the basic things they need to feel loved, happy and safe. Inform students that they will be reading a story about a young girl whose basic needs were not met.

Action

Explain to students that you will be reading a difficult story today that involves basic human needs. The story is about what happened to an Inuit woman when she was a little girl and got sick with a disease called tuberculosis. 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.

Return students to the discussion by asking if they believe Leah's basic human needs were met based on the experiences she wrote about. After learning about Leah's experiences on the boat and her year in the hospital, ask students what questions this story raised for them. Students are likely to ask: Why did this happen to Leah?



LEAH IDLOUT: INJUSTICE AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Invite students to examine a definition of the word “neglect” with you. Explore together what the word neglect means.

“Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child’s basic needs and the most common form of child abuse. A child might be left hungry or dirty, or without proper clothing, shelter, supervision or health care. This can put children and young people in danger.” (Source: [Neglect | NSPCC](#))

Make a T-chart, with a list of words that define neglect on one side, and, on the other side, a list of things that Leah mentions in the text that aligns with the definition of neglect.

With the T-chart created, ask the students if they think that the way that Leah was treated was fair.

Explain to the class that in Canada and many other parts of the world, there are laws in place that are supposed to protect children and adults from this kind of treatment. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a human rights treaty that many countries around the world, including Canada, signed to protect children.

A few of the basic rights all children are supposed to have include:

1. **Protection** (from abuse, exploitation, harmful substances)
2. **Education**
3. **Adequate health care**
4. **Adequate living conditions**
5. **Having their views heard** and respected as they grow and learn

Unfortunately, in all parts of Canada, Indigenous children, like Leah, were often mistreated. Have a class discussion based on what students have learned so far. Discussion questions can include the following:

1. Which of Leah’s human rights were denied and which were provided for?
2. Who do you believe was responsible for what happened to Leah and other Inuit (e.g., government of Canada, hospital staff)?
3. Should we just forget that this happened since Leah is no longer alive? Why or why not?
4. What could those who are responsible do to try to make this right?

On March 8, 2019, for the first time ever, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized on behalf of the government of Canada for the mistreatment of Inuit with tuberculosis. Watch the [apology](#) together as a class.



LEAH IDLOUT: INJUSTICE AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Unfortunately, not only is tuberculosis still an issue in the North today due to crowded living conditions, but tuberculosis hospitals and hospital schools like Parc Savard, Hamilton and Edmonton were not included in the original apology the government made for harm done to First Nations, Métis and Inuit in residential schools, even though the students' experiences were similar to those that had attended residential schools.

In this [next video](#), listen to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaking about what the government will do moving forward, promising to continue closing gaps. Ask students:

- What do you think about this response?
- What else can we do, as individuals, to redress the harms done to Inuit in the spirit of telling the truth and working toward reconciliation?

Conclusion and Consolidation

Based on everything you have discussed as a class, have students take action toward truth and reconciliation in any way they choose. In groups, give students the option to write a letter, make a video/documentary, create an online platform, or take action.

After students have finished creating their project, have them share their action initiative with the class by either presenting or having a gallery walk around the class.

To complete this lesson, ask the students to share how they felt while learning about Leah's story.

Extensions

Additional options for the action project:

- Share students' projects with the school or post them to a community website.
- Have students continue to study the different types of schools that were not recognized by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by learning about Mike's and Clara's stories.
- Have students complete a response writing activity to express their feelings throughout the lesson.

Modifications

- Instead of providing students with a choice on their final action activity, choose one for the whole class to complete.
- Have students read Leah's story individually or in small groups to discuss it prior to starting any group discussions.



LEAH IDLOUT: INJUSTICE AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

- Have students use computers or tablets to do research on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child rather than providing them with the information.
- This lesson can be turned into a research project.

Assessment Opportunities

- Assess students' final projects.
- Take anecdotal records throughout the different conversations.

Sources and Additional resources

- Visit the [Project of Heart website](#) to review an example of a project that works toward truth and reconciliation and inspire students to come up with their own projects.
- [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