



LEAH IDLOUT: PROPAGANDA, RESISTANCE AND TRUTH

Focus Questions

What is propaganda? What can propaganda look like in images and in the media? How and why did the Canadian government use images of Inuit as propaganda? What is resistance? Do any of these images express resistance? How can we use images (still and moving) to gain a better picture of the truth about what happened to Leah, her family and community? What did (does) colonial oppression look like in an Inuit context? What can I do to work toward truth and reconciliation?

Time

Two 60-90 minute lessons

Grade Level

10-12

Learning Goals

- Students will be able to list some of the different forms of colonial oppression and violations of human rights experienced by Inuit.
- Students will be able to explain the meaning and use of propaganda by the government or others, particularly in the case of Inuit, as a tool of oppression and control and understand its harmful effects over time.
- Students will be able to differentiate between the images that the public saw (from the 1940s to present) about the North and Inuit versus images of their actual experiences, uncovered in archives many years later, and how these both conceal and reveal the truth about what happened.
- Students will identify forms of resistance by Inuit in multimedia

Introduction

As the *Qikiqtani Truth Commission: Community Histories (1950-1975)* points out: “Much Canadian writing about the North hides social, cultural, and economic realities behind beautiful photographs, individual achievements, and popular narratives...As communities in the Baffin region face a new wave of changes, these community histories describe and explain events, ideas, policies, and values that are central to understanding Inuit experiences and history in the mid-20th century.” (See qtcommission.ca/en/communities/resolute-qausuittuq)

Inuit are among some of the most photographed people in the world. Leah Idlout's family was no exception. Her father Joseph was indeed known as the most famous Inuit of his time. In looking at the photographs and films taken of Leah, her family, and her community in the 1950s and available in the public record, it could be easy for one to conclude that Inuit were the happiest people in the world and that absolutely nothing was wrong. However, it was during this period that Inuit suffered from policies implemented by the federal government of Canada. Inuit were being taken away by the RCMP in ever greater numbers from their communities in the North for treatment of tuberculosis in southern cities such as Hamilton and Québec City.

When Leah returned to her home in Pond Inlet, Nunavut, her family then experienced relocation to Resolute Bay in the High Arctic, where it was practically impossible to live and there was starvation in the new settlement. It was also during this period that healthy schoolaged Inuit children, such as Leah's siblings, were being taken far away to residential schools such as Fort Churchill. The photographs included on the website are from government records that would not have been available to the public back then and tell a very different story of how Inuit were impacted by colonization.

Lesson Implementation

Minds on

Read the following with students:

Beginning in the late 1940s, increasing numbers of Inuit were transported to southern hospitals for medical care, usually for the treatment of tuberculosis. These large-scale transportations inundated hospitals and hospital schools with people who differed in significant ways from the Indigenous people who had been taught in southern hospital schools up to this point. They were also, in the eyes of the Canadian government, from a different bureaucratic universe.

In *A Long Way from Home: The Tuberculosis Epidemic Among the Inuit*, Pat Sandiford Grygier wrote that, while smaller numbers of Inuit had been silently included in classes offered at various hospital schools, when larger numbers of Inuit began to arrive, the Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, who were responsible for “Indian” patients, began refusing to accommodate Inuit patients in the hospital schools. They insisted that the Northern Administration



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(including video, music, and visual art).

- Students will examine current media to expose propaganda against Indigenous people today.

Materials Needed

- Reality Check card (a copy for each pair or group of students)
- 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
 - 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

- Patterns and trends
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective

Inquiry Process

- Ask geographic questions
- Acquire geographic resources
- Communicate
- Reflect and respond

Geospatial Skills

- Spatial representations
- Foundational elements

and Lands Branch, the branch of government that was responsible for Inuit affairs (from 1951 to 1959) took responsibility for hiring and paying for additional teachers. It was not until 1957 that the issue of modifying curriculum to better fit Inuit students was broached by the Sub-committee on Eskimo Education. However, the degree to which Inuit students were accommodated in the hospital schools during this period is difficult to determine.

Grygier reports that in 1952, the 88 Inuit patients at Parc Savard Sanitarium had no teacher, while the Sub-committee records 45 Inuit students registered at that institution's school for that year. (Leah was at this hospital during this time.) It is possible that this number reflects the two weeks of education James and Alma Houston gave that spring in knitting and carving. By November, there were 12 Inuit children attending classes in the hospital school. The Northern Administration and Lands Branch had apparently managed to find funds to employ a teacher for the hospital who was expected to start mid-month. In 1954, the branch added a handicraft teacher to the school's staff.

Explain to students that you will be reading a specific example of an Inuit woman who got sick with tuberculosis when she was a little girl. 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.

Ask students: What questions do you have after reading her story? Give students five minutes to discuss with a partner what questions are raised. (Students will likely point out the horror of her experience and their disbelief and disgust that this kind of treatment happened in Canada.)

If time permits, you can show a 37-minute film called [Land of the Long Day](#) (Leah is in the first 10 minutes of the film). Note: There is a hunting scene in the beginning of the film, so consider beforehand if the imagery is appropriate for your students. One important detail to share with students before they look at the images and watch the film is to know that these were all taken either during or after Leah's four years south for tuberculosis treatment and schooling. When *Land of the Long Day* was released, Leah's father became known as "the most famous Inuit in the world." For additional context, read the [National Film Board's socio-historical context](#) about their collection of films about Inuit.

Ask students what they notice about the photos and what do they notice about the film *Land of the Long Day*? Does Leah look happy? Does her family look happy? Do the other families with them look happy? Do the smiles in these photos align with Leah's story? Why or why not?

These images and the film give a false impression of what was going on at the time.



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Action

Reveal to students that Leah's brothers, sisters and cousins went to an Indian Residential School in Fort Churchill, Man., while they were growing up, so that it wasn't only Leah who was taken far away but her siblings and relatives as well. In fact, the family was apart for much of their childhood. Leah's sister Susan Salluviniq, who was still a baby when Leah was taken, was told she had other siblings who were far away.

In addition to this, Leah's family was relocated by the government of Canada from Pond Inlet to Resolute Bay shortly after her return home. Their dogs were put to death by the RCMP. The promises made to the families were not kept by the government and they suffered greatly from this experience. Leah's sister Susan says that she and her family have since embraced Resolute Bay as their home. Before settlement though, it was a harsh, desolate place where no Inuit lived. There was very little food, so people starved. Compared to Pond Inlet which had plenty of resources, life in Resolute Bay was almost impossible. The relocation to Resolute Bay was a government experiment to assert sovereignty in the North during the Cold War against the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R., today Russia). Show students the [government of Canada's apology](#) for this relocation.

In addition to the history surrounding relocation, starting in the 1950s all Inuit were identified by the government of Canada using something called an E-Number or E-Disc Number instead of their name. They were required to have them on them at all times and it reminded many Inuit of dog tags. Leah's number was E5-770. Her daughter Lucie Tatanniq Idlout [wrote and performed a song about it](#).

Despite all this sadness, separation, mistreatment, disease, isolation, starvation and death, Leah and her family survived.

Now, ask students to tell you what they know about propaganda. Write their answers on the board. To prompt discussion, ask students the following questions:

- What form might propaganda take?
- What are some of the common themes that characterize propaganda?
- What is the core intent behind producing propaganda?
- Can you think of historical cases where propaganda played an important role in cultural or social events? Can you provide examples?
- Can you think of modern-day examples of propaganda?

The brainstorming session should arrive at a definition that resembles the following: propaganda is the sharing and spread of information (whether it be factual, truthful, biased, false, or entirely made up) in order to influence or change public opinion. Propaganda is often employed to either help or harm a person/group and can vary from being suggestive to outright aggressive in the information it presents.



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Relate the discussion of propaganda to the photos and videos that students have just examined. Have them carefully consider the different photographs and what they present. Ask them:

- Which of the photos you have seen would you consider to be propaganda and why?
- Which of the photos seem neutral or more realistic of the time period? Why?
- What are some of the common themes that characterize propaganda based on the content they have read and viewed?
- Do you think these images were intended as propaganda or do these images merely reflect the ideas of the dominant society of the time?

Explain to students that to answer these questions properly, we need to investigate and analyze the data we have much more closely and ask critical thinking questions to determine if what they are viewing would really constitute propaganda. As an example, use the Reality Check card to work through critical thinking questions with students on an image of your choice.

Working individually or with a partner, have students select one photo or a series of photos from the cards in this lesson, and/or by searching for photos online of Inuit people in the 1950s. Have students work through the Reality Check card for the images they choose to decide whether or not they are viewing propaganda. Next, have students find images online of Inuit today and complete the same exercise.

Conclusion and Consolidation

Have students share their image(s) and Reality Check card analyses with the class and start identifying common ideas that emerge from the discussion. Ask students to explain their answers and reasoning.

Remind students that propaganda can be distinguished from other forms and genres of communication by some distinctive properties. Explain that propaganda generally:

1. evokes strong emotions;
2. appeals to audience needs;
3. simplifies information and ideas;
4. and attacks opponents.

Close with a discussion by asking students the following questions:

- Why is it important to recognize propaganda?
- Propaganda can sometimes originate from sources that we are used to trusting. Can you think of some examples? (Answers may include: governments,



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educational institutions, entertainment industry, media outlets.) How can this propaganda influence people and society?

- What can we do to engage with propaganda responsibly and be critical of the information we consume?

Extensions

Use this [Project Naming article](#) to learn about the history of the Inuit two-dollar bill. Have students compare this Inuit artwork, or similar artwork in museums and other public spaces, to the way Inuit were depicted in the past. How far have we come in terms of eradicating propaganda and respectfully depicting Inuit societies and culture?

Modifications

- Either read aloud Leah's story together as a class or assign it to students for homework in preparation for this lesson.
- Students can do independent research on propaganda to determine a definition, and they can relate it to Canada specifically or to world history in general.

Assessment Opportunities

- Students can be assessed throughout discussions during the lesson.
- While students are presenting their images and arguments for/against propaganda, assess their oral presentation skills.

Sources and Additional resources

- The World Health Organization has information on [tuberculosis](#).
- This [video](#) shares information on how to recognize propaganda and what to do about it.
- [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