

“The Road” a Teacher’s Guide

This lesson plan was developed in response to a call by the girls of Stardale Women’s Group in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Specifically the 7th call to action stating:

“We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.”

We aimed to develop age-appropriate educational materials that provide Canadians a deeper understanding as to the nature of Indigenous societies, and the history of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

The colonial foundations of our country resulted in a relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that was always unbalanced and unjust. The example highlighted here is that of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The time is overdue for a strengthening of the relationship between Indigenous and non- Indigenous people, and this can only be accomplished by a full and truthful understanding of the history of the relationship as well as its permeation into today’s current events.

Before Viewing

[Dealing Sensitively with the Topic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#)

It is important to deal with this topic with sensitivity. A great deal will depend on the age, maturity and family background of students, and teachers will be the best judge of how to approach the material.

In presenting these issues, teachers are not expected to be experts on the history and legacies MMIWG, rather their role is as guides and facilitators. When discussing sensitive and controversial topics it is important to set ground rules to ensure a safe environment for sharing ideas and opinion:

- Always respect and value what others bring to the discussion
- Discussion should protect diverging views among participants
- It is okay to feel discomfort

For some students the topics discussed will be sensitive, especially if they have personal connections with a missing or murdered person. For others, the topics may be controversial, particularly if they feel they have no connection with the issues. Also, in some schools with new

Canadians, teachers should be aware that some topics may echo feelings that are part of the immigrant experience.

Some considerations for making sure the topic is presented fairly and with sensitivity include the following:

- These topics are best taught through discussion rather than instruction
- A teacher is responsible for ensuring exploration of the issue so the discussion promotes understanding and is not merely an exchange of intolerance
- Allow time to deal with students' concerns and questions
- Be aware of issues that may arise for students both in formal discussions and informal conversations in and around the classroom; close conversations appropriately; play a role in ensuring potential conflict is dealt with in the context of the classroom
- Try to give students the tools and skills to discuss these topics rationally in the school and community

Campbell, K. (2003). Overview: Dealing with Controversial and Sensitive Topics . In *B.C. First Nations Studies teacher's guide*. preface, B.C. Ministry of Education.

Question 1: What is Reconciliation?

A dictionary definition of “reconciliation” is the “reestablishment of a broken relationship, or forging positive accord where there was discord”.

In the words of Reconciliation Canada, it is “based on the idea of restoring friendship and harmony – about resolving differences, accepting the past and working together to build a better future.”

Question 2: What do we know about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls? Or the Trail of Tears?

Missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada (MMIWG) refers to a human rights crisis that has only recently become a topic of discussion within national media.

Indigenous women and communities, women’s groups and international organizations have long called for action into the high and disproportionate rates of violence and the appalling numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada.

Some facts:

- In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada supported the call for a national public inquiry into the disproportionate victimization of Indigenous women and girls. The National Inquiry’s *Final Report* was finally completed and presented to the public on 3 June 2019, only 2 and a half years ago.
- The RCMP acknowledged in a 2014 report that there have been more than 1,200 missing and murdered Indigenous women between 1980 and 2012.
- Indigenous women’s groups, however, document the number of missing and murdered to be over 4,000.
- Indigenous women 15 years and older were 3.5 times more likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous women

- Violence against Indigenous women and girls is not only more frequent but also more severe. Between 1997 and 2000, the homicide rate for Indigenous women was nearly seven times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous women.

These facts give a sense of the extent of the violence that Indigenous women and girls face across this country, but they fail to tell the stories of the deep trauma that this violence has on entire communities or the stories of children who have lost their mothers to senseless violence. The statistics cannot reflect the experiences of the families and communities who have lost a loved one. The missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls were mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, cousins and grandmothers. This ongoing tragedy affects all Indigenous women and girls from all walks of life and throughout many communities and cities across Canada.

Brant, J., Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada (2020). In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-and-girls-in-canada>

Introduce the Video

The Road is an award-winning short film starring the Indigenous girls of Stardale Women's Group. It explores various themes pertaining to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the legacy and inter-generational impact of colonialism in Canada.

[Watch "The Road"](#)

After Viewing

[Question 3: Thoughts and Feelings on the video?](#)

Offer time for students to reflect before answering, perhaps they can write their initial thoughts/feelings down before sharing verbally with the class.

The Way Forward

While it is important to acknowledge the past and present oppression of Indigenous communities in our society, it is also important to focus on taking action.

In the words of Justice Murray Sinclair, the Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

["Education brought us here, education will help us get away from this."](#)

On one hand, generations of First Nations children have been damaged by an inferior education system. On the other hand, public school systems frequently taught that First Nations people and cultures were inferior. "Because that was taught in the public schools," Sinclair has said, "generation upon generation of non-Aboriginal children in this country have been raised to believe that Aboriginal people have been, were, and are inferior."

Sinclair, M. (2015, June 2). For the record: Justice Murray Sinclair on residential schools. <https://www.macleans.ca/politics/for-the-record-justice-murray-sinclair-on-residential-schools/>. Retrieved November 3, 2021.

Question 4: How does the teaching of a people being inferior impact the violence towards said people?

Question 5: How can education help decrease violence? What can we do to decrease the violence against indigenous women and girls?