

Activity 10 Worksheet

Stories of Resistance

Use this worksheet to support Option 2 of Activity 10, **Residential Schools: Historical Perspective**, located on page 12 of Historica Canada's *Indigenous Perspectives* Education Guide.

Most Residential Schools restricted any form of expression that was connected to students' Indigenous heritage, including but not limited to clothing, toys, languages, dancing, religious practices, and contact with families and communities. Students sometimes found ways to resist oppression by holding onto their identities, customs, and cultures. It was not always possible to resist, and harsh (often corporal) punishments were handed out to those found breaking the rules. Despite this, many Survivors remember the comfort of secretly holding on to their traditions.

The following excerpts are from The Survivors Speak: A Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. In each of the stories below, look for instances in which survivors defied their oppressors, fought back, held on to their language, broke the rules, etc.

Answer the following questions:

- **What acts of resistance were common?**
- **How did children find ways to hold onto their cultures?**

Share your observations in a circle, and discuss as a class.

The following excerpts include sensitive material, including references to physical and sexual abuse.

Monique Papatie said that at the Amos, Québec, school, students “went to a corner to speak our language, even if we weren't allowed to do that. We kept our language, the Anishinabemowin language, and I speak it very well today, and this is what I want to teach the children, my mother's grandchildren and great-grandchildren.” (53)

When she returned to the Qu'Appelle school after being sexually abused by a fellow student the year before, Shirley Brass decided to run away. She did not even bother to unpack her suitcase on the first day at the school. “I took it down to the laundry room [...] I hid it there and that night this other girl was supposed to run away with me but everybody was going up to the dorm and I went and I asked her, ‘Are you coming with me?’ And she said, ‘No, I'm staying.’ So I said, ‘Well, I'm going.’ So I left, went and got my suitcase and I sneaked out. I went by the lake. I stayed there for I don't know how long. I walked by the lake and I sneaked through the little village of Lebret, stayed in a ditch. I saw the school truck passing twice and I just stayed there. I never went back. I hiked to—I had an aunt in Gordon's Reserve so I went there. I had a brother who was living—a half-brother who was living with his grandparents in Gordon's and he found me and somehow he got word to my mom and dad where I was and they came and got me. My dad wouldn't send me back to Lebret so I went to school in Norquay, put myself back in Grade Ten.” (133-4)

Arthur Ron McKay said he was able to hang on to his language at the Sandy Bay school. “Or else you'd get your ears pulled, your hair or get hit with a ruler. Well anyway, I just kept going and I couldn't speak my language but then I was speaking to boys in the, 'cause they came from the reserve and they speak my language. We use to speak lots, like behind, behind our supervisors or whatever you call it. That's why I didn't lose my language; we always sneak away when I was smaller.” (53)

Activity 10 Worksheet (Continued)

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At the Kamloops school, Julianna Alexander was shocked by the difference between the student and staff dining room. “On their table they had beautiful food, and our table, we had slop. I call it slop because we were made to eat burnt whatever it was, you know, and compared to what they had in their dining room. You know they had all these silver plates, and beautiful glass stuff, and all these beautiful food and fruits and everything on there, and we didn’t even have that. And so I, I became a thief, if you want. You know I figured a way to get that food to those hungry kids in intermediates, even the high school girls, the older ones were being punished as well.” (76)

Megan Molaluk lived at both the Anglican and Catholic hostels in Inuvik. As was the case with many students, her loneliness led her to engage in behaviour intended to get her kicked out of school. “I missed camping, I missed having country food. There are so many things I wanted to say, all right, but I really wanted to go home. It was bugging home, and bugging, bugging, bugging. I guess they got tired of me bugging them, so they moved me to Grollier Hall. I didn’t know nobody over there. So I start [mis]behaving, I asked Mr. Holman if I could move back. I’m tired of being with strangers everywhere. So I started doing bad things in Inuvik, drinking, sneaking out. I hated doing those things, but I really wanted to go home.” (115)

John B. Custer learned to rebel at residential school. The only things he took away from his years at the Roman Catholic school near The Pas, Manitoba, were a guilty conscience and a bad attitude. “So instead of learning anything in that residential school, we, we learned just the opposite from good. We learned how to steal, we learned how to fight, we learned how to cheat, we learned how to lie. And to tell the truth, I thought I was gonna go to hell, so I didn’t give a shit. I was sort of a rebel in the residential school. I didn’t listen, so I was always being punished.” (119)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, [The Survivors Speak: A Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#) (2015).

Extension Activity:

Watch one of the videos provided on the website for the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#) or from the online counterpart to the touring exhibition called [Where are the Children? Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools](#), and complete the above questions.