

# Examining the Evidence: Understanding Daily Life in Residential Schools.

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**Grade level:** 5-12

## **Overview:**

These activities encourage students to investigate conditions at Residential Schools and to consider how the schools disrupted traditional Indigenous ways of learning. Through an investigation of Quarterly Return reports, which were documents completed by staff at Residential Schools, students will work together to come to understand the conditions at the schools. They will then reflect on the consequences of these conditions.

Teachers should review the primary sources in advance before sharing them with students, as they may contain sensitive content. It is also important to remind students that many of these records may relate to children who have died, or they may be the records of Survivors, or the records of family members of intergenerational Survivors. It is important to maintain respect for each individual and their experience.

## **Activities:**

### **Part 1: Introduction and background**

Prepare yourself to lead a discussion with your students on traditional Indigenous knowledge. First Nations, Métis and Inuit groups in Canada have complex and varied knowledge systems and it is important not to generalize. Where possible, use regional sources or invite a local speaker or Elder into your classroom for this discussion.

For example, in British Columbia, the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) has developed the [First Peoples Principles of Learning](#), which has been incorporated into much of the province's curriculum.

Explain to students that they will be learning about different Residential Schools and some of the experiences at specific schools. Encourage a discussion about what the word "school" means. Ask: Would Residential Schools be considered schools by today's definition? How do Western education systems differ from Indigenous approaches to learning? What were the intentions behind Residential Schools? How are those intentions different from the ones behind the school you attend today?

Remind your students that each student who attended Residential School had their own unique experience. Each school was different and operated in its own way. The schools also changed throughout the more than 100 years that they were in operation. It is important not to generalize the experiences of Residential School attendees.

## Part 2. Reading and Comprehension

Distribute copies of the article “Remembering their Journey,” by Lisa Jane Smith, which starts on page 8 of *Remembering the Children*. Place students into seven groups, one for each of the Residential Schools discussed in the article. Remind students that as they read the article, they should make notes about the condition of the schools and the details of some students’ experiences in the Remembering Their Journey chart (see Handout: Remembering their Journey). Older students are encouraged to supplement the article with additional research.

Have each group share what they learned about the specific Residential School they read about. Ask the class: Were there similar experiences at the schools? Were there different experiences? Can you imagine if your school was like any of the ones in the article? How would you feel?

## Part 3. Primary Document Analysis

Provide students with a copy of a Quarterly Return Report, available online through the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation’s archive. There are several reports that correspond with the schools discussed in the “Remembering their Journey” article, or you can look up the Quarterly Return for a former Residential School in or near your community. The NCTR archive also contains a school narrative for each Residential School, which provides important information and context. These documents were created by the federal government as part of the Residential School class action settlement process. The school narratives may be supplied to older students for supplementary research.

Kamloops Residential School:

[School Narrative](#)

Quarterly Return: [1943-03-31](#)

Quarterly Return: [1945-03-31](#)

Quarterly Return: [1947-03-31](#)

Shubenacadie Residential School:

[School Narrative](#)

Quarterly Return: [1944-06-30](#)

Quarterly Return: [1949-03-31](#)

Beauval Residential School:

[School Narrative](#)

Quarterly Return: [1945-03-31](#)

Shingwauk Residential School:

[School Narrative](#)

Quarterly Return: [1949-03-31](#)

Blue Quills Residential School:

[School Narrative](#)

Quarterly Return: [1945-03-31](#)

Quarterly Return: [1950-09-30](#)

Give students time to read the report and decipher its contents. Teachers may prompt discussion by asking questions such as:

- What do you think this document is?
- Who prepared it?
- Who was it for?
- What information do you see recorded?
- What questions do you have?

Following a discussion, explain the different parts of the report using the supplied annotated return (See Teacher Handout: Annotated Return) and contextual information (See Teacher Handout: Reading a Quarterly Return).

Have students use a digital or printed map to record the location of the Residential School they have been researching using their Quarterly Return. Then, using the details in the report, record the location of students' home communities or territory. Together or independently, encourage students to reflect on the distance between the school and the children's home communities. Ask:

- Have you ever been separated from your family? How did you feel?
- How would you feel if you couldn't see your parents at the end of your school day?
- Have you ever been somewhere where your surroundings were unfamiliar?

Older students can go deeper into their research by analyzing more information on the Quarterly Return. Have students note additional details about the school, such as dates of operation and who ran the school. Students may need to do external research to fill out this section. Have students record their information on the Examining Quarterly Returns worksheet (See handout: Analyzing Quarterly Returns).

#### **Part 4: Drawing Conclusions**

Ask students to respond to the questions below. Remind them that they are making inferences based on the information in the report and their map.

- What do you think the impact of being separated from a home community was? What would it have been like to be the only child from a community attending a school?
- Are there any specific remarks about a student's progress or reasons for absence? What do you think these comments potentially reveal?
- How would you describe the conditions that children faced at this specific Residential School?
- What can you learn from reviewing Quarterly Reports? What information does it reveal about how Residential Schools were operated?
- What aspects of Indigenous ways of learning were disrupted when children attended Residential Schools?

#### **Part 5. Reflecting and Taking Action**

As a class or in groups, choose a Residential School to commemorate. Design a plan for your commemoration – is it a building, a park, a piece of art? Include a rationale for your decision and prepare a short piece of text that describes the history and significance of the Residential School.

#### **Part 6. Extension – Listening to Survivors**

First-hand accounts enrich the potential for discussing the legacy of the Residential School policy. Ideally, teachers are able to reach out to their community for potential speakers, such as an Elder from a local First Nation, or a Survivor. Be sure to research appropriate protocols and allow plenty of time if you are developing a new relationship. If it is not possible to arrange an in-person speaker, you can show videos of the sharing circles that took place as part of the TRC's statement gathering process. These are available through the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation archive](#). You can also find oral interviews through the [Legacy of Hope Foundation](#) website.

## Remembering their Journey

As you read the article, write down detailed information about the conditions of the Residential School and experiences of students who attended.

School name: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

| Physical space                               | Conditions  | Food  | Transportation   | Subjects taught                        | Extra activities                                    | School culture  | Community connections  |
|--|---|---|--|--|---|---|--|
| What buildings and areas were at the school? | How was the school kept clean? Who did the work? How often? | What types of meals were served to students? How often? | How far did children have to travel to get to school? How did they get there? How did they get home? | What subjects and courses were taught? | What extra activities were available at the school? | Were culture and Indigenous ways of learning considered to help students feel included? | How did the school administration interact with families and Indigenous communities? |
|  |   |   |  |  |   |   |  |

# Annotated Quarterly Return

The Indian Act made residential school compulsory for children ages 7 to 15; however, quarterly returns show that children outside of this age range sometimes attended the schools.

This column shows the student's home community. Sometimes staff left this column blank or used a treaty number for identification.

Most residential schools did not offer high school classes until after the Second World War.

Students spent about half of their day working and doing vocational training. Girls would learn domestic skills, like cooking, cleaning and laundry. Boys were often taught agricultural skills.

Staff would use the final column to record notes related to student illness, absence, injury, transfer, or death.

Student names could take the form of their maternal surname, paternal surname or traditional Indigenous name. Names and spellings could be inconsistent from return to return.

Students were given a registration number, which was used in records and put on their personal belongings.

Girls' numbers begin with a 0 and boys' numbers do not.

Schools received funding from the federal government based on the number of students in the school and their average attendance.

| INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL QUARTERLY RETURN |                     |             |     |                    |                 |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   |                            |             |      |   |  |
|--|---------------------|-------------|-----|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|----|---------------------------|----|----------------|----|-------|----|---|----|-------------------|------|-------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|------|---|--|
| SADDLE LAKE Agency                         |                     | Blue Quills |     | School at St. Paul |                 | on             |    | Reserve for Quarter ended |    | September 30th |    | 19-50 |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   |                            |             |      |   |  |
| REGISTER NUMBER                            | NAMES OF PUPILS     | AGE         | BOY | GIRL               | BAND OR RESERVE | CLASS OR STUDY |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    | STANDING IN CLASS |      |             | TRADE OR OTHER INDUSTRY | Number of Days Trained in Quarter | DATE OF ENTRANCE TO SCHOOL | ATTENDANCE  |      | REMARKS AS TO PROGRESS, ETC., REASON FOR ABSENCE DATE OF ABSENCE, WHETHER AUTHORIZED OR NOT |  |
|  |                     |             |     |                    |                 | Grade 1        | 2  | 3                         | 4  | 5              | 6  | 7     | 8  | 9 | 10 | 11                | 12   | High School |                         |                                   |                            | Very Good   | Good |   | Fair   |
|  | Brought Forward     |             | 86  |                    |                 | 23             | 24 | 14                        | 12 | 17             | 6  | 14    | 1  | 1 | 65 | 21                | 4915 |             |                         |                                   |                            | 6319        | 1065 |   |  |
| 0318                                       | CARDINAL Mary Irene | 16          |     | x                  | Saddle Lake     |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | Sept.30.40                 | -           | -    | Discharge Asked for.  |  |
| 0326                                       | CARDINAL Emma Alice | 14          |     | x                  | do              |                |    |                           |    | x              |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | Feb. 17.41                 | -           | -    | 15 Day School only.   |  |
| 0329                                       | PAUL Gladys         | 15          |     | x                  | Long Lake       |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | Sewing and Cooking 1/2 day | Sept. 3.41  | 92   | 15  |  |
| 0332                                       | McGILVERY Caroline  | 15          |     | x                  | Saddle Lake     |                |    |                           |    | X              |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | March 15.41 | 92   | 15  |  |
| 0340                                       | CARDINAL Elizabeth  | 16          |     | x                  | do              |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    | X                 | X    |             |                         |                                   | do                         | March 14.41 | 92   | 16  |  |
| 0347                                       | CARDINAL Albina     | 17          |     | x                  | do              |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Sept.11.42  | 92   | -   | Manual training all day.   |
| 0348                                       | CARDINAL Sophie     | 15          |     | x                  | do              |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         |             | 92   | 16  |  |
| 0351                                       | MAKOKIS Eva Jane    | 13          |     | x                  | do              |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Aug.31.42   | 92   | 7   | Hosp. Oct.20 to 25.  |
| 0352                                       | CARDINAL Eva        | 15          |     | x                  | do              |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Oct.10.42   | 92   | 9   |  |
| 0353                                       | PICHE Ophnie        | 13          |     | x                  | Cold Lake       |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Oct.19.42   | 62   | -   | Disch. asked for. 1/9/50   |
| 0355                                       | CRYER Olivine       | 13          |     | x                  | Saddle Lake     |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Dec. 6.42   | 92   | 15  |  |
| 0356                                       | CRYER Annie         | 11          |     | x                  | do              |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         |             | 92   | 12  | Hosp. Sept.16 to 30.   |
| 0357                                       | MOOSWA Mary Cecile  | 13          |     | x                  | do              |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Jan. 2.43   | 92   | 10  |  |
| 0358                                       | CARDINAL Joyce      | 15          |     | x                  | do              |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Jan.9.43    | 62   | -   | Disch. asked for. 1/9/50   |
| 0362                                       | JANVIER Elsie       | 13          |     | x                  | Cold Lake       |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Aug.31.43   | 92   | 12  |  |
| 0363                                       | MINOOSE Edna        | 14          |     | x                  | do              |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Jan.14.44   | 92   | 26  |  |
| 0364                                       | REDCROW Eva         | 12          |     | x                  | Saddle Lake     |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         |             | 92   | 18  | TOTAL number of days in Quarter.....   |
| 0365                                       | LAMEMAN Florence    | 11          |     | x                  | Beaver Lake     |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Jan.18.44   | 92   | 15  |  |
| 0367                                       | JOHN Ella           | 14          |     | x                  | Long Lake       |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Sept. 1.44  | 25   | 14  | AGGREGATE number of days pupils in Residence during Quarter.....   |
| 0368                                       | LAPATAK Margaret    | 11          |     | x                  | Saddle Lake     |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Sept.1.44   | 92   | 15  | Re-Admission (Sept. 5. 1950....)   |
| 0370                                       | MOOSWA Genevieve    | 12          |     | x                  | Do              |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Mar.9.45    | 92   | 15  | AVERAGE attendance of pupils during Quarter.....   |
| 0372                                       | BUGLE Emilia        | 12          |     | x                  | Beaver Lake     |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | Sept.1.45   | 92   | 10  |  |
| 0374                                       | McFEETERS Aldina    | 13          |     | x                  | Cold Lake       |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | do          | 92   | 15  | AMOUNT of per capita grant due for Quarter.....\$  |
| 0375                                       | DION Maggie         | 13          |     | x                  | Long Lake       |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | do          | 62   | -   | (a) If this a church-owned residential school shall state the number of: (i) non-Indian children who are boarders..... (ii) non-Indian children who are day school pupils..... |
| 0379                                       | WHISKYJACK Violet   | 15          |     | x                  | Saddle Lake     |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | do          | 92   | 15  |  |
| 0380                                       | CARDINAL Lydia      | 13          |     | x                  | do              |                |    |                           |    |                |    |       |    |   |    |                   |      |             |                         |                                   | do                         | do          | 92   | 9   |  |
| TOTALS                                     |                     |             | 86  | 26                 |                 | TOTALS         | 23 | 24                        | 14 | 12             | 17 | 6     | 14 | 1 | 1  | 65                | 21   |             |                         |                                   | TOTALS                     | 8370        | 1349 |   |  |

NOTE—Additions to be correctly made and entered at the foot of column.

## **Reading a Quarterly Return**

### **What is the NCTR?**

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) is the permanent safe home for all statements, documents and other materials gathered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). The Centre works with a network of partners and supporters to continue to expand this collection and promote ongoing research and learning about residential school history and its legacy.

### **What is the NCTR archive?**

The NCTR has a collection of more than five million items including statements from Residential School Survivors, families and others from sharing circles and TRC hearings, as well as documents from government departments and church entities.

The full collection at the NCTR contains police files, RCMP files and Indian Agent files; hospital and medical records; transportation records; memos and invoices; letters; student records; newsletters; cemetery and death records; photographs; religious records; and 2,500 physical objects such as artifacts and art pieces.

### **What is a Quarterly Return?**

A Quarterly Return is a financial document that lists all the students in a Residential School for that quarter. Residential School staff completed these forms four times per year and sent them to the Government of Canada to keep track of the number of students attending each Residential School. This information would help determine how much funding a school received.

Funding received from the government was expected to be used to pay for maintenance, salaries and expenses (food, clothing, etc.) for the school. The Residential School system operated on low grants because it paid staff poorly, relied on donations from missionary societies, and relied on labour from the students themselves.

### **How do I access a Quarterly Returns?**

You can access these records by visiting the NCTR database.

NCTR database: <https://archives.nctr.ca/>

Quarterly Returns: <https://archives.nctr.ca/Quarterly>Returns-1>

There are 2,901 Quarterly Returns available on the NCTR database. Most of the Quarterly Returns are from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario.

### **How do I read a Quarterly Return document?**

The design of a Quarterly Return can differ depending on the time-period.

A Quarterly Return typically has a front page with instructions of how the residential school staff were to complete the document.

It will also include the school's name, date of the end of the quarter, the principal's name, the date the document was completed, the name of the Indian agent who received it, and the date and location it was received.

The remainder of a Quarterly Return's pages is devoted to the list of students in the school for that quarter. There are columns to document their student / registration number, name, age, sex, band or reserve, class or study, standing in class, trade or other industry and how many days spent at the trade, the date they were entered into the school, the number of days in residence and in class and finally, remarks related to progress and reasons for absence.



## Analyzing Quarterly Returns

School name: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) of report: \_\_\_\_\_

Background information (years of operation, who ran the school, etc.)

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

|   |  |
|---|--|
| How close was the nearest home community to the school?                   |  |
| How far was the farthest home community to the school?                    |  |
| How many boys attended?   |  |
| How many girls attended?  |  |
| What age was the oldest child?  |  |
| What age was the youngest child?  |  |
| What was the average age of the children?                                 |  |
| What was the greatest number of days spent in residence?                  |  |
| What was the smallest number of days spent in residence?                  |  |
| What was the greatest number of days a student attended in the classroom? |  |
| What was the least number of days a student attended in the classroom?    |  |
| How many children got sick and went to the infirmary?                     |  |
| Did any children die? How many?   |  |