

What Were Residential Schools?

Grades 3-6

A long time ago in Canada, the government offered schooling for Indigenous children but since they lived in remote locations, many had to leave their homes and families to go to school. These schools were called **residential schools**. They were run by churches and operated from the 1870s until the 1990s. In 1920, it was mandated that all children between the ages of 7-16 had to go to school.

At these schools, Indigenous children were not allowed to speak their own languages or practice their traditions. They were told to speak English or French and follow European ways of life.

The children were often lonely or scared. Some children were treated badly at these schools. Today, many adults who went to residential schools as children—called **survivors**—have shared their stories. These stories are important because they help us learn what happened and how it made people feel. Many people believe these schools tried to erase Indigenous cultures, which caused great pain.

Some people say we should look at all parts of the story and life for all children, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, in this time frame. Many children across Canada lived hard lives. Schools were very strict, many children got sick from diseases like tuberculosis and many immigrants who came to Canada for a new life lived in very poor conditions without good housing or enough food. This helps us realize that life was very hard for many children in the early days of Canada.

It doesn't mean we ignore the hurt that was caused in residential schools. We can care about survivors' feelings while also trying to understand all the facts. We should always ask good questions and look for real evidence when we hear new things.

Not every residential school was the same. Some children learned useful things, and some teachers were kind. But many children were deeply hurt, and that must be remembered.

Learning about residential schools helps us understand what went wrong and how we can do better in the future. We must listen to survivors, respect different voices, and always look for the truth with kind and open hearts.