Learning About Residential Schools: A Resource List from Winnipeg Public Library

The Library is here to help provide access to many different kinds of information about residential schools.

Whether you:
- need to learn the history of a specific school;
- want to find records related to your school experience or that of a family member;
- are looking for resources to help teach others;
- are learning about this part of Canadian history for the first time,

we want to help.

This list has suggestions of just some places to start your research:

- The Library’s online guide to Residential School resources
- The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation website and research database
- to borrow from the Library:
  - Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada publications
  - fiction and non-fiction books for adults, teens and children films and documentaries

If you have any questions, visit your nearest Library branch, submit your question to our website or phone us at 204-986-6450.

www.winnipeg.ca/library
Start Your Research With Us

winnipeg.ca/library ➔ Info Guides ➔ Residential Schools Info Guide

Winnipeg Public Library maintains an extensive online guide of residential school resources in our Residential Schools Info Guide, including information from the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. The Guide is an excellent place to start.

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

Website: nctr.ca
The website of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) provides access to an immense database of primary resources related to the operation of residential schools. You will find government, church and Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada records and reports.

Please note that a National Residential School Crisis Line exists to provide support to former students. It operates 24 hours a day. 1-866-925-4419.

Tracking progress on the TRC’s Calls to Action
The NCTR website has a section for monitoring progress on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Call to Action. Look for this information under the “Research” menu on the site. You will find a list of any concrete actions taken, listings of organizations and other bodies who are supporting a Call to Action and related work and background information about the topic that each Call to Action addresses.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission publications at the Library

Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
Released in 2015. All volumes of the Final Report are available to borrow.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Interim Report
Released in 2012, this 30-page report provides an overview of the Commission and its activities to that date.

They Came for the Children: Canada, Aboriginal peoples, and Residential Schools
This report takes the form of a book that examines the “history, purpose, operation, and supervision of the residential school system” in Canada.
Books for Adults or Teens - Non-Fiction, Memoirs & Poetry

Broken Circle: The Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools
Theodore Fontaine

The book looks at the inter-generational effects of residential schools and is based on the author’s life experience.

The Education of Augie Merasty: A Residential School Memoir
Joseph Auguste Merasty with David Carpenter

The Education of Augie Merasty offers a courageous and intimate chronicle of life in a residential school.

Finding My Talk: How Fourteen Native Women Reclaimed their Lives after Residential School
Agnes Grant (editor)

These stories share fourteen women’s experiences of surviving residential school and overcoming obstacles to become strong members of their communities.

From Lishamie
Albert Canadien

The author tells the story of his childhood living in a traditional Dene camp in Lishamie and the shock of being placed in a Catholic residential school in Fort Providence.

Indian School Days
Basil Johnston

This is the autobiography of scholar and author Basil Johnston who was forced to attend a Jesuit residential school in northern Ontario.

Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community after Residential School
Sam McKegney

The legacy of residential schools has been written about by a number of Indigenous writers in Canada. This book is the first major examination of these writings.

Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian residential school
Celia Haig-Brown

This is a collection of stories from survivors of residential school with a focus on the movement for the First Nations communities’ control and autonomy over their education.

Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools
J.R. Miller

This is an extensively researched book on the history of residential schools in Canada.
They Called Me Number One: Secrets and Survival at an Indian Residential School  
Bev Sellers  

*Written by a Xat’sull chief, this is a heart wrenching memoir of three generations of women forced to attend residential school in Northern British Columbia.*

This Benevolent Experiment: Indigenous Boarding School, Genocide and Redress in Canada and the United States  
Andrew Woolford  

*This book analyzes the history of Indigenous boarding/residential schools and the question of genocide in North America.*

Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada  
Paulette Regan  

*This book is an account of the author’s experience as a residential school claims manager and her call to non-Indigenous Canadians to undergo their own processes of decolonization.*

Up Ghost River: A Chief’s Journey Through the Turbulent Waters of Native History  
Edmund Metatawabin  

*A powerful, raw and eloquent memoir about the abuse former First Nations chief Edmund Metatawabin endured in residential school in the 1960s, the resulting trauma, and the spirit he rediscovered within himself and his community through traditional spirituality and knowledge.*

Poetry  

calling down the sky  
Rosanna Deerchild  

*A book of poetry sharing Deerchild’s mother’s residential school experiences and its intergenerational effects.*

Burning in this Midnight Dream  
Louise Bernice Halfe  

*A book of poetry recounting residential school experiences and their ongoing impact, including inter-generationally.*

The Red Files  
Lisa Bird-Wilson  

*A book of poetry about the history and effects of residential schools informed by the writer’s family and archival sources.*
Books for Adults or Teens – Fiction

7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga (graphic novel)
David Robertson and Scott Henderson

7 Generations is a series of 4 graphic novels (available separately or bound together) telling one family’s story from the early 19th century to the present day. Book Three in the series addresses the subject of residential school, specifically. Also available as a Book Club Kit.

Indian Horse
Richard Wagamese

Structured as the reflections of a dying man, this novel tells the story of Saul Indian Horse - a boy who began his life on the land but was taken to residential school where the game of hockey becomes his escape.

Kiss of the Fur Queen
Tomson Highway

This is a novel about two boys who are taken from their home in Northern Manitoba and placed in residential school. The story follows the boys as they leave the school behind and follow their destiny to become artists.

Secret Path (graphic novel)
Gord Downie and Jeff Lemire (illustrator)

Chanie, misnamed Charlie by his teachers, was a young boy who died on October 22, 1966, walking the railroad tracks, trying to escape from the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School to return home. Chanie’s home was 400 miles away. He didn’t know that. He didn’t know where it was, nor how to find it, but, like so many kids--more than anyone will be able to imagine--he tried.

Song over Quiet Lake
Sarah Felix Burns

Being taken from home at age 12, surviving residential school and working to retain and pass on traditional values are all part of this story of a relationship between an elder and a young student.

Sugar Falls (graphic novel)
David Robertson and Scott Henderson (illustrator)

Based on a true story, this book tells the story of one woman’s residential school experiences as told to two children.
Wenjack
Joseph Boyden

An Ojibwe boy runs away from a North Ontario Indian School, not realizing just how far away home is. Along the way he’s followed by Manitous, spirits of the forest who comment on his plight, cajoling, taunting, and ultimately offering him a type of comfort on his difficult journey back to the place he was so brutally removed from.

Books for Children and Young Readers

Arctic Stories
Michael Kusugak

This trio of stories about a 10-year-old girl named Agatha is based on the childhood experiences of beloved Inuit author Michael Kusugak. The book begins with a tale of Agatha ‘saving’ her community from a monstrous flying object. The book also includes the story of Agatha being sent away for school, ”The nuns did not make very good mothers and the priests, who were called fathers, did not make very good fathers,” Kusugak writes.

As Long as the Rivers Flow
Larry Loyie

Cree author Larry Loyie writes about his last summer with his family before going to residential school, in Northern Alberta in 1944.

Goodbye Buffalo Bay
Larry Loyie and Constance Brissenden

This book tells the story of a boy trying to make it through his last year of residential school. After he is finally able to leave school he confronts a struggle to learn where he belongs.

I am not a Number
Jenny Kay Dupuis

A picture book based on a true story about a young First Nations girl who was sent to a residential school. Based on the life of Jenny Kay Dupuis’ own grandmother, I Am Not a Number brings a terrible part of Canada’s history to light in a way that children can learn from and relate to.

Kookum’s Red Shoes
Peter Eyvindson

An elderly Kookum (grandmother) recounts her experiences at residential school - a time that changed her forever. Throughout the story Kookum reveals what was lost in her life, and how goodness persisted.
Fatty Legs: A True Story
Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton

Margaret, an 8-year-old Inuvialuit girl, wants to learn how to read so badly that she's willing to leave home for residential school to make it happen. When she gets there a mean-spirited nun known as the Raven is intent on making Margaret's time at school difficult. But Margaret refuses to be defeated.

My Name is Seepeetza
Shirley Sterling

Written in the form of a diary, My Name is Seepeetza recounts the story of a young girl taken from home to attend the Kamloops Indian Residential School in the 1950s.

No Time to Say Goodbye: Children's Stories of Kuper Island Residential School
Sylvia Olsen

This collection of fictional stories of five children sent to residential school is based on real life experiences recounted by members of the Tsartlip First Nation in B.C.

Shin-chi’s Canoe
Nicola Campbell

This award-winning book tells the story of six-year-old Shin-chi as he heads to residential school for the first time with his older sister. It is the sequel to Campbell's Shi-shi-etko.

Shi-shi-etko
Nicola Campbell

Shi-shi-etko is a young girl who has four days before she leaves home for residential school. Her family has many teachings to share with her, about her culture and the land.

A Stranger at Home: A True Story
Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton

In this sequel to Fatty Legs, Margaret Pokiak is now 10 years old and can hardly wait to return home from residential school. But her homecoming is not what she hopes for. "Not my girl," is what her mother says when she arrives.

These are my Words: The Residential School Diary of Violet Pesheens
Ruby Slipperjack

Twelve-year-old Violet Pesheens is taken away to Residential School in 1966. The diary recounts her experiences of travelling there, the first day, and first months, focusing on the everyday life she experiences— the school routine, battles with Cree girls, being quarantined over Christmas, getting home at Easter and reuniting with her family.
When We Were Alone  
David Robertson and Julie Flett (illustrator)  

When a young girl helps tend to her grandmother’s garden, she begins to notice things about her grandmother that make her curious. Why does her grandmother have long braided hair and wear beautifully coloured clothing? Why does she speak another language and spend so much time with her family? As she asks her grandmother about these things, she is told about life in a residential school a long time ago, where everything was taken away.

Films and Documentaries

The Fallen Feather: Indian Industrial Residential Schools and Canadian Confederation  
Directed by Randy N. Bezeau  

This documentary works to examine the origins of residential schools and provide an analysis of their lasting effects for Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Niigannibatowaad: Front Runners  
Directed by Lori Lewis  

This film tells the true story of a group of young men, who attended residential schools, who were chosen to undertake an 800 kilometer torch run as part of the lead up to the 1967 Pan Am Games in Winnipeg. Despite completing the run they were denied the opportunity to carry the torch into the Games’ stadium – an honour which was given to a non-Indigenous runner.

Muffins for Granny  
Directed by Nadia McLaren  

This documentary is made up of interview with individuals who attended residential schools. The personal motivation for the director was the trauma her own grandmother experienced at residential school and the lasting effects for their family.

We Were Children  
Directed by Tim Wolochatiuk  

In this film the impact of the Canadian government’s residential school system is conveyed through the eyes of two children who were forced to attend the schools.