

# *The Blanket Exercise* Fourth Edition

**An experiential teaching tool for grades 4 – 12 and adults that helps participants understand the historic and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.**





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Canadian Roots Exchange Facilitator Training, 2014.  
Photo: KAIROS

# Welcome to the KAIROS Blanket Exercise

This one hour participatory workshop will help participants understand how colonization of the land we now know as Canada has impacted the people who lived here long before settlers arrived. Through this exercise participants will explore the nation-to-nation relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, how this relationship has been damaged over the years, and how they can work toward reconciliation.

## HOW IT WORKS:

The activity begins with blankets arranged on the floor to represent Canada before the arrival of Europeans. Participants representing Indigenous peoples move around on the blankets, as if they are using and occupying the land. A narrator reads from a script while someone playing the role of a European joins and interacts with those on the blankets.

As the script traces the history of the relationship between Europeans and Indigenous peoples in Canada, participants respond to various cues and read prepared scrolls. At the end of the exercise only a few people remain on the blankets, which have been folded into small bundles and cover only a fraction of their original area.

Created in 1997, the Blanket Exercise is a succinct overview of Indigenous rights in Canada that explores the major themes and findings of the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP). You are strongly encouraged to use the exercise as part of a larger unit. At the end there is a list of resources and learning activities that complement this workshop.

## WHAT YOU NEED:

- **Blankets:** One blanket for every 3-4 participants as well as one to be used as a smallpox blanket and one that will represent a residential school. Some people have used sheets or fabric that has been decorated. Others have asked participants to bring blankets from home – this can heighten and intensify the impact when blankets are taken away during the exercise.
- **Scrolls:** The text for the scrolls is part of the script but you can download printable scrolls off the KAIROS website at [www.kairosblanketexercise.org](http://www.kairosblanketexercise.org).
- **Index Cards:** White, yellow and blue.

### Counting out the cards

You need **white cards** for **a little less than half** the participants.

Important: with a small group (less than 22 people), give white

cards to one-third of participants. With a very small group (12 or less), give only 2 white cards.

You need **2 blue cards**. For a small group (less than 22 people) give only 1 blue card.

You need **3 yellow cards**, one with an "X" on it. For a large group (more than 40 people) give 6 yellow cards. For a small group (less than 22 people) give only 2 yellow cards.

- **Volunteers:** One to be the narrator (usually the teacher or someone in a leadership role), and at least one to play the role of the European. Note that you can divide up the script and have more than one narrator and European.
- **Maps:** Three **maps** from the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, "Turtle Island", "Treaties" and "Aboriginal Lands Today". These are available for download off the KAIROS website.

### Time required:

Doing the Blanket Exercise requires at least one hour. Depending on whether you are using the youth or adult script, it lasts 35-50 minutes. It is important to have at least 15 minutes to debrief. An in-depth discussion or talking circle following the Blanket Exercise – which can easily last another hour – is encouraged. Since the Blanket Exercise can cause emotions to surface, it is helpful to provide participants with an opportunity to voice their feelings in a supportive environment.

### Number of participants:

The Blanket Exercise works best with anywhere between **15 and 60 people**. With fewer participants, the challenge is to ensure not too many people leave the blankets so you will want to hand out slightly fewer than the suggested number of white and yellow index cards. The larger the group, the more difficult it is to have a good discussion or debrief at the end.

### Support during and after:

The Blanket Exercise can cause emotions and difficult memories to surface. Think about what kind of support you can provide during the workshop and what type of follow-up you can make available. You may want to have one person present whose role it is to support anyone in distress. Consider how you will close off the session in a way that is affirming and uplifting so that people leave in a good way. Give a thorough explanation at the beginning of what is about to take place and let participants know that they can leave or step back if they do not feel ready to delve into those parts of the exercise that resonate with their own experience.



Top to bottom:

1) Blanket Exercise with Grade 6 in Mississauga, 2010.  
Photo: KAIROS

2) Blanket Exercise with Grade 6 in Mississauga, 2010.  
Photo: KAIROS

3) Blanket Exercise at Roland Michener Public High School, Ottawa. Photo: Carol Montgomery





*Students at the Education Day Blanket Exercises, Quebec National Event of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Montreal, April 2013. Photo: KAIROS*

## BLANKET EXERCISE ENHANCEMENTS – DEEPENING THE LEARNING

**Additions to the script:** We encourage you to make the Blanket Exercise script specific to the territory where your school or group is located by researching and writing scrolls or additions to the script with information about the local history or current situation. For example, in the part of the script that refers to residential schools, a scroll could be added about a residential school that operated nearby.

Please be respectful when doing this; if the additions you are making are not part of your own story, be sure to work in collaboration with the appropriate people.

**Inviting an Indigenous elder:** You can invite a First Nations, Métis or Inuk elder to open and close the workshop, lead a talking circle, and speak about how the content of the Blanket Exercise resonates with them and their community. This will greatly enrich the learning experience for the participants and help to build relationships. It will also help to create a safe space for participants, particularly for Indigenous participants.

**Traditional items:** Consider using traditional items at the beginning of the exercise to represent the richness and diversity of First Nations and Inuit peoples throughout Turtle Island. Participants can use these to barter and interact with one another. These could include clothing (mitts, mukluks, gauntlets, hats, etc), carvings, baskets, utensils, art pieces, medicines, furs, uluit etc. It's a great way to "break the ice" and get people engaged and interacting early. Later, after the arrival of the Europeans, you can include Métis items such as sashes as well.

**Dolls:** You can hand out dolls to all participants when they step onto the blankets to represent Indigenous children and families - this can really humanize the exercise. You can then have the European take away some of the dolls when residential schools are discussed and again for the sixties scoop. Note that because this intensifies the experience it can trigger participants.

### PREPARATION:

- Read over the script carefully.
- Ask one or two people ahead of time to play the role of the European and give them a copy of the script to review.
- Print out and fold or roll the scrolls, identifying them on the outside by number.
- Count out the necessary number of coloured cards: if the group is large, give white cards to slightly less than half the participants but if the group is small (24 or less) only one third of participants should receive white cards; yellow for one sixth (one with an "X" on it) and blue for two people.

**Video introduction:** A good way to introduce participants to the content of the Blanket Exercise is by showing the Public Service Alliance of Canada video "Justice for Aboriginal Peoples - It's time" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5DrXZUIinU>.

## CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGY TO REVIEW WITH YOUR GROUP BEFORE DOING THE BLANKET EXERCISE:

### *What does it mean to be a sovereign nation?*

A sovereign nation enjoys the right to self-determination and has a governance structure and territory that is recognized by other nations. While European nations focus on the protection of individual rights, Indigenous nations focus on collective rights to land, language, spiritual traditions, and self-governance, to name a few.

Indigenous individuals rely on strong nations for their well-being. Nations protect and nurture the collective rights through which an individual finds cultural meaning and identity. The Indigenous struggle for sovereignty is a struggle for nationhood and many believe that the recognition of Indigenous nationhood will enhance, not diminish, Canadian sovereignty.

### *What is a treaty?*

Treaties are internationally binding agreements between sovereign nations. Hundreds of treaties of peace and friendship were concluded between the European settlers and First Nations during the period prior to Confederation.

These treaties promoted peaceful coexistence and the sharing of resources. After Confederation, the European settlers pursued treaty making as a tool to acquire vast tracts of land. The numbered treaties 1 through 11 were concluded between First Nations and the Crown after Confederation.

For Indigenous peoples, treaties outline the rights and responsibilities of all parties to the agreement. In the traditions of Indigenous treaty making, these are oral agreements. In addition, they are “vital, living instruments of relationship” (RCAP) that involve all Canadians.

### *What is the difference between equity and equality?*

Equality means each person gets the same treatment or the same amount of something. It involves systematically dividing something into equal parts. Equity, on the other hand, recognizes that not everyone has the same needs.

Equity is about justice and a fair process that leads to an equal outcome. It takes into account the injustices of the past and how they have placed some in positions of privilege while others face significant barriers to achieving well-being.

## Terminology

**Indigenous peoples** is a term for which there is no one definition because it is up to each Indigenous person to define themselves, something that for far too long has been done by others. Cree lawyer Sharon Venne suggests that being Indigenous means being “descendants of the people occupying a territory when the colonizers arrived.”

Indigenous is a word that has come into widespread use through the recognition that those people who are the original inhabitants of a place, and who have been marginalized by ethnic groups who arrived



Top and bottom: Blanket Exercise at Nunavut Sivuniksavut, Ottawa. Photo: KAIROS





Top and bottom: Blanket Exercise at Roland Michener Public High School, Ottawa. Photos: Carol Montgomery

later, have much in common with other peoples worldwide with the same experience.

Not only does the word speak to global solidarity amongst these peoples, but it has important legal significance as well. Indigenous peoples' rights have been recognized at the international level in various ways but most importantly in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007.

When we speak of peoples, as opposed to people, it is a recognition of collective rights; that each Indigenous people is a distinct entity with its own cultural and political rights.

**Aboriginal peoples** refers to the original peoples of North America who belong to historic, cultural and political entities. Canada's *Constitution Act, 1982* recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples: First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

There are a number of synonyms for Aboriginal peoples, including Indigenous peoples, First Peoples, and original peoples. None of these terms should be used to describe only one or two of the groups.

Because Aboriginal peoples is the term used in Canada's constitution, it has specific importance within a Canadian legal context.

First Nations is not a legal term but replaces "Indian" in common usage. There are many First Nations in Canada: Innu, Cree, Salteaux, Ojibwe, Haida, Dene, Mohawk, Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Blood, Secwepmec etc., each with its own history, culture, and traditions.

You can discuss with participants which First Nations are close by and whose traditional territory you are on. Some areas are the shared jurisdiction of more than one First Nation.

**Inuit** are the Indigenous Circumpolar people of Canada and other northern countries. They were formerly called Eskimo, which the Inuit consider a derogatory term. In Canada, the Inuit live in Nunavut, Northwest Territories, northern Quebec, Labrador and, in recent years, southern Canadian cities as well.

**Métis** are the mixed-blood descendants of Cree, Ojibwe, Saulteaux and Assiniboine women and French and Scottish fur traders and other early settlers. They have their own culture and history. As is the case with many Aboriginal languages, the Métis language, Michif, is endangered. Métis society and culture were established before European settlement was entrenched.

This term is sometimes used more generally for someone who is of mixed ancestry, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

**Assimilation** is the process of absorbing one cultural group into another. This can be pursued through harsh and extreme state policies, such as removing children from their families and placing them in the homes or institutions of another culture. Forcing a people to assimilate through legislation is cultural genocide—the intent is to eradicate a culture.

# Beginning:

Lay the blankets next to each other on the floor. Put the smallpox and residential school blankets aside. Invite participants to take off their shoes and gather around. Distribute the three maps, 'Turtle Island', 'Treaties' and 'Aboriginal Lands Today', and look them over as a group. Explain that they will learn how we went from a time when Indigenous peoples used all the land we now call Canada (what some Indigenous peoples refer to as "Turtle Island"), to a time when land reserved for Indigenous peoples is only a very tiny part of Canada. Note: reserves below the 60th parallel make up less than one half of one per cent of Canada's land mass.

Tell participants that for some this exercise may bring up difficult feelings and that at the end there will be an opportunity for them to share their feelings in a respectful way.

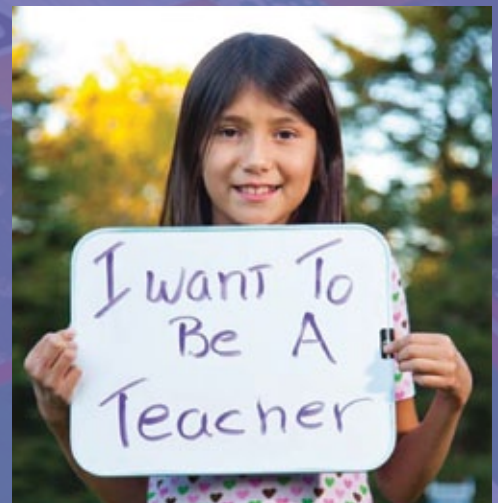
**IMPORTANT:** People can be triggered by the Blanket Exercise, especially if they have been personally impacted by the laws and policies described in the script. It is important to explain what is about to take place – that the experience includes information about residential schools, the 60s scoop, loss of status and missing and murdered Indigenous women. Give participants permission to leave or to simply observe. Make sure there is someone who can offer support.

Ask participants to set the maps aside and step onto the blankets. Tell them that by doing so, they are stepping into the roles of First Nations, Inuit and later Métis peoples. Ask them to move around on the blankets – to use and occupy the land – as if they were living on it. Tell participants that once they step onto the blankets they must not step off unless they are asked to do so.

Have your "European" standing by with a copy of the script and the right number of coloured cards.

Hand out the numbered scrolls to participants who are comfortable reading aloud. With a small group it is okay for people to read more than one scroll.

If you are using traditional items and dolls hand these out as well at this time.



Top: KAIROS staff member Katy Quinn introduces the Blanket Exercise to the Nation to Nation Bike Tour participants. Photo: Kerry Marsh

Bottom: Students participating in the Shannen's Dream project. Photos: Liam Sharp/ First Nations Child and Family Caring Society



Blanket Exercise at the launch of the Nation to Nation KAIROS/ Otesha Bike Tour, Akwesasne Mohawk Territory, July 2013. Photo: Kerry Marsh



# Youth Script:

**Narrator:** These blankets represent the northern part of Turtle Island, or what we now know as Canada, before the arrival of Europeans. You represent the Indigenous peoples, the people who have been here for at least 10,000 years. Long before the arrival of Europeans, Turtle Island was your home, and home to millions of people like you. You lived in hundreds of nations. You fished and hunted and farmed. Each community had its own language, culture, traditions, laws and governments. As communities you often worked together and cooperated with one another. Like with all people, sometimes there was conflict. Before the newcomers arrived, one of the ways in which you, the original peoples, ended disputes was by making treaties.

**Narrator:** The land is very important to you. All of your needs – food, clothing, shelter, culture, your spirituality – are taken care of by the land, which is represented here by the blankets. In return, you take very seriously your responsibility to take care of the land.

**If you are using traditional items, take some time for participants to trade and share their items with one another.**

**Scroll 1:** “One of my favourite things about my culture is how we’re taught that everything on the Earth is to be respected. It’s an important part of the culture and covers everything. That includes respecting yourself. Respecting yourself is one of the most important things my culture has taught me. Also, the land, water, plants, air and animals are all very important to our culture and need to be respected. Without any of it, what would we be?”

—Kateri, a Mohawk youth from a community in Quebec

**Optional question: In what ways do you think that Indigenous peoples’ needs were met by the land?**

**Introduce the volunteer(s) representing the European settlers.**

**Narrator:** Things were happening in Europe at the end of the 15th century that would mean a huge change for you. European explorers had just quote-unquote “discovered” you and your lands. This started a fierce competition between European nations.

**European in a loud, pompous voice, striding around the blankets:** *Without even consulting you, we made deals amongst ourselves and divided up control over you and your lands. Usually, whichever nation discovered your land first, took control with the blessing of the Christian church. This practice is now called the “Doctrine of Discovery.”*

**Narrator:** And so began the so-called European “discovery” of Turtle Island.

**European:** *enter from the east. Step onto the blankets and begin shaking hands, moving around and handing out the index cards.*

**Narrator:** When the Europeans first arrived on Turtle Island there were many more Indigenous people than Europeans. The newcomers depended on you for their survival, and you helped them to understand how you did things – how you taught your children, how you took care of people who were sick, how you lived off the land in a way that left enough for future generations, and how your governments worked.

In the beginning there was lots of cooperation and support between you and the settlers. The settlers and their leaders recognized you, the First Peoples, as having your own governments, laws and territories. They recognized you as independent nations. They made agreements or treaties with you. These treaties explained how you were going to share the land and the water, the animals, and the plants. These agreements were between you and the kings and queens of countries in Europe. The Europeans understood they could not force their laws or way of life on the people who were here long before they ever arrived. They understood that you had rights.



**European [speaking in a loud voice]:** In the Royal Proclamation of 1763, King George the Third said Indigenous nations own their lands. The King said that the only legal way newcomers could gain control of those lands was by making treaties between the two nations. The year 2013 marked the 250th anniversary of the Royal Proclamation.

**Narrator:** Later on, the Government of Canada was formed, and the Royal Proclamation became part of Canadian law. For you, the Indigenous peoples, the treaties were very special and sacred agreements. They were statements of peace, friendship, and sharing, and they were based on respect and honesty. Sharing was very important to you. The hunters shared their food with everyone and the families helped one another raise the children. In the treaties, you tried to help the Europeans understand what you meant by sharing.

**European:** *Begin to slowly fold the edges of the blankets, making the blanket space smaller and smaller. When blankets are empty you can take them away and put them in a pile outside the activity. Very gradually fold and remove blankets until the middle of the exercise when the Indian Act is introduced and participants are placed on reserve.*

**Narrator:** *Remind participants that they must NOT step off the blankets. The goal is to stay on the blankets, even as they get smaller. The Narrator should also remind everyone that Indigenous people have always resisted when someone tried to take the land away.*

**Narrator:** But the Europeans didn't see it that way anymore. They now had a different view of the treaties. For them, land was something that could be bought and sold, and treaties were a way of getting you, the Indigenous peoples to give up your land.

**Scroll 2:** "Where common memory is lacking, where people do not share in the same past, there can be no real community. Where community is to be formed, common memory must be created."  
—Georges Erasmus, Dene Nation, co-chair of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

**Narrator:** This means that it is important that everyone knows the same history. Without having this common understanding, it is hard to build relationships.

After a while, you didn't get along very well with the Europeans. When the War of 1812 ended, the Europeans no longer needed you to help them with the fighting. As the fur trade dried up, the European newcomers turned more and more to farming and started looking for more land.

Before too long, there were more Europeans than Indigenous peoples. One reason for this was the diseases the Europeans brought with them: diseases such as smallpox, measles and tuberculosis. You, the Indigenous peoples, suffered badly from these diseases because you had never had them in your communities before. Millions of you died. In fact, some people believe that half the Indigenous people alive at the time died from these diseases. In some communities, nine out of ten people died.

**European:** *walk up to a person who does not have a yellow or blue card, hand them the folded blanket and read - Blankets infected with the deadly smallpox virus were given or traded to the Indigenous people by military leaders such as Lord Jeffrey Amherst. You represent the many Indigenous people who died from small pox after having come into contact with such blankets. Please step off the blanket.*

**Narrator:** *ask those participants with white index cards to step off the blanket as they represent those who died of the various diseases.*

Please be silent for a moment to remember those who died from the diseases.

**European:** *walk up to one person in the “east” who does not have a card and tell them –* You represent the Beothuk, one of the original people of what is now the island of Newfoundland. You also died from diseases you had never seen before. Because the Europeans overhunted some of you starved. Some of you died in violent encounters with the settlers trying to take your lands. Some of you were hunted down and killed. In 1829, the last person recognized by the Europeans as your people, Shanawdithit (Shanna-deet-dee), died in St. John’s. Your language and culture became extinct. Please step off the blankets.

**European and Narrator** *walk to the “south” and choose two people who are standing close together.*

**Narrator:** You represent the First Nations that were divided when the border between the United States and British Canada was created. This border divides communities and cuts you off from each other. Please move to separate blankets.

**Narrator:** *guide each person to a separate blanket, and then walk to the “west” and read the following to one person who does not have a card -* Construction of the railway opened up the Prairies to settlers. Land was needed for farming and the Government of Canada bought a huge piece of land from the Hudson’s Bay Company. This was very hard for some of you who were already living there, such as the Métis, Cree and Blackfoot. You, the Métis, fought for your land during the Red River Rebellion and the North West Resistance. You won some of these battles, but in the end you were defeated by the government’s soldiers. You represent those Métis leaders who died in battle, were put in jail, or were executed. Please step off the blankets. **One person only.**

**European and Narrator** *walk to the “north” and choose a small group of people.*

**Narrator:** In the High Arctic, Inuit communities were moved to isolated, unfamiliar, and barren lands, often with very bad results.

**European:** You represent people like the Inuit and the Innu at Davis Inlet, along with many other Indigenous communities who suffered and sometimes died because you were forced to move to an unfamiliar place. Please move one of the blankets away from the others, fold it small and stand on it.

**European:** *help them to move their blanket.*

**Narrator:** Those with **blue** cards, step off the blankets. You represent those who died of hunger after being forced off your original land and away from your hunting grounds.

**Optional Question for students:** *Why would moving to a different place be so difficult for people who live off the land?*

**European:** As more of us arrived, we needed more land. Many of us as Europeans thought we were better than other kinds of people, including you. Soon, we didn’t think of you as friends and partners, but as a “problem” to be solved. We started ignoring or changing our laws to make it easier for us to take your land. Some land was taken in war. Some land was taken after you died.

**Narrator:** As Indigenous peoples, you lost more than just your land. Because the land is so important to you, when it was taken away some of you also lost your way of living, your culture and, in some cases, your reason to live.

**Scroll 3: Terra Nullius (TER-ah NOO-lee-us).** The idea of Terra Nullius, which in Latin means “land belonging to no-one”, meant European countries could send out explorers and when they found land, they could claim it for their nation. These were often lands we were using.

**European:** The land wasn’t empty and we the Europeans knew it so we changed the idea to include lands not being used by quote unquote “civilized” peoples, or lands not being put to so called “civilized” use. It was us who decided what it meant to be “civilized”, and we decided that because you and your people were not using the land in a “civilized way”, we could take it and it was almost impossible to stop us.



**Scroll 4: The BNA (British North America) Act.** The BNA Act, also known as the Constitution Act, 1867, put “Indians and Lands reserved for Indians” under the control of the federal government. When this happened, we lost our rights and control over our lands.

**Narrator:** This law gave control of your lands to the Government of Canada, which at that time was made up of only people from Europe. You, the Indigenous people, were not involved in the creation of this law that would have such a big impact on your lives. More and more, the plan was to try and make you like the Europeans.

**Scroll 5: Indian Act.** In 1876 all the laws dealing with us were gathered together and put into the Indian Act. The Indian Act completely changed our lives. As long as our cultures were strong it was difficult for the government to take our lands so the government used the Indian Act to attack who we were as peoples. Hunting and fishing were now limited and our spiritual ceremonies like the potlatch, pow-wow and sundance were now against the law. This didn’t change until the 1950s.

**European: [In a loud voice]:** Now hear this! According to the Indian Act of 1876 and the British North America Act of 1867, you and all of your territories are now under the direct control of the Canadian federal government. You will now be placed on reserves. Please fold your blankets until they are just large enough to stand on.

**Narrator:** You went from being strong, independent First Nations, with your own governments, to isolated and poor “bands” that depended on the government for almost everything. You were treated like you knew nothing and like you couldn’t run your own lives.

You became the responsibility of the federal government. Through the Indian Act, the federal government continues to this day to deny you your basic rights. These rights are things that most Canadians take for granted, such as healthy schools, proper housing and clean running water.

**European: [walking slowly around the blankets]** Also, you may not leave your reserve without a permit. You may not vote. You may not get together to talk about your rights. You may not practice your spirituality or your traditional forms of government. If you do any of these things, you may be put in jail.

**Scroll 6:** “I know what the government did in the past; they said where we had to live. I know that we’re not treated equally now, because I can feel it. We’re all Canadians and we should all be treated equally.”

—Cassie, a Mi’kmaq youth from a community in Nova Scotia

**Narrator:** The Indian Act also tried to stop Indigenous peoples from fighting to keep their land. For example, under the Indian Act, it was against the law to raise money to fight for land rights in the courts until the 1950s.

**Scroll 7: Enfranchisement (en-fran-CHISE-ment).** Under this federal government policy, all First Nations people who became doctors, teachers, lawyers, soldiers or who went to university lost their legal Indian status. This was called being granted “enfranchisement”.

**Narrator:** In other words, the government would no longer legally recognize you as a First Nations person. This cut you off from your communities, including First Nations soldiers returning from war or First Nations lawyers who were not allowed to fight for the rights of their people.

**European: [choose one person who does not have a yellow card and ask them to leave their blanket and stand somewhere nearby on the floor]:** You were enfranchised – you’re a First Nations teacher, lawyer, doctor or veteran so you’ve lost your Indian status and have left your community.

**Scroll 8: Assimilation (ah-sim-ill-EH-shun).** The government thought the “Indian problem” would solve itself as more and more Indigenous people died from diseases and others became part of the larger Canadian society. As one government employee said, the government’s goal was “to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and that there is no Indian problem and no Indian Department.”—*Indian Affairs deputy superintendent Duncan Campbell Scott*

**Narrator:** You had to become more like the Europeans by giving up your rights, farming, going to school and praying in church like them.

**European:** *place the residential school blanket on the floor at a distance from the others.*

**Scroll 9: Residential Schools.** From the mid-1800s until the 1990s, the federal government took First Nations, Inuit and Métis children from our homes and communities and put them in boarding schools that were run by churches. The official partnership between the federal government and the churches ended in the 1970s but some churches continued to operate schools until the 1990s. As parents we didn’t have a choice about this. Sometimes the police arrived to take our children away. These schools were often very far from our homes and our kids had to stay at them all or most of the year. Mostly they were not allowed to speak our languages and were punished if they did. Often they weren’t given enough food. The last Indian residential school closed in 1996.

**European:** *If participants have dolls, take some of them away at this time.*

**Narrator:** All people with yellow cards, raise your hands. You must now move to a separate, empty blanket. You represent those who were taken out of your communities and placed in residential schools far from your homes.

**European:** *take the kids to the residential school blanket.*

**Narrator:** While some students say they had some positive experiences at the schools, most of you say that you suffered from very bad conditions and from different kinds of abuse. Many of you lost family connections and didn’t learn your language, culture and traditions. Because you grew up in the schools and rarely went home, many of you never learned how to be good parents. Some students died at the schools. Many of you never returned home or had trouble reintegrating if you did.

**European:** The person with the yellow index card marked with an “X”, please step off the blanket. You represent one of the thousands of children who died at the schools or who died later as a result of your experience.

**Pause for the person to leave the blanket.**

**Next, choose someone who was not alone on their blanket and ask them to return to their community. Say to them:**

You can go home, but please sit down on the edge of the blanket while those in the community remain standing to represent how difficult it was to learn to fit in again once you went home.

**Pause while this takes place.**

Everyone else with yellow cards, please find a spot on the floor nearby. You represent those whose connection to your family and community was broken and you never made it home. Some of you ended up in cities, others ended up in prison due to your experience at residential school.



**Narrator:** Please be silent for another moment to honour those who died, had trouble returning home or who lost connection to their family and community because of residential schools.

**Scroll 10:** “You have to remember that the Canadian government has done a lot to Aboriginal people that was meant to make us become like Europeans. For example, in residential schools, my grandmother told me you couldn’t speak our language or you’d get beaten; you couldn’t see your parents – things like that. We didn’t have voting rights for a long time. We also lost a lot of our culture.”  
—Heather, a Cree youth from a community in Saskatchewan

**European:** Thanks to the courage of survivors, Canadians started to find out about residential schools. In 2008, the Prime Minister apologized for the residential schools. Here is an excerpt: “To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions... and we apologize for having done this. ... Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.”

**Narrator:** But apologizing means you have to change what you’re doing. Many people are still waiting to see if Canada will change how it treats Indigenous children.

The residential schools are not just part of our history. Children and grandchildren of people who went to the schools feel the impacts. Many former students are alive today and some have had a chance to tell their story to Canadians through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But Indigenous children are still treated differently. Your schools don’t get as much money. Today you are even more likely to be taken from your communities but this time you are being placed in foster care.

**Scroll 11:** From the 1960s to the 1980s, thousands of First Nations and Métis children were forced illegally from our homes and adopted or fostered, usually by non-Aboriginal people. This period is known as the 60s scoop. Many of these kids experienced violence, racism and abuse and lost connection to their identity and culture. Like residential schools, the purpose of the 60s scoop was assimilation.

**European:** - go up to someone who is still on their blanket and ask them to find a spot on the floor nearby. **Say to them** - You represent a child taken from your community during the 60s scoop. You were not able to return to your family and territory, leaving you with a sense of loss.

**Scroll 12:** Shannen Koostachin of Attawapiskat First Nation had a dream: safe and comfy schools for First Nations children and youth, and classes that respect First Nations cultures. She worked tirelessly to convince the federal government to give First Nations children a proper education and fair funding.

**Scroll 13:** Shannen said “I want to tell you what it is like to never have the chance to feel excited about being educated....It’s hard to feel pride when our classrooms are cold, and the mice run over our lunches and when you don’t have proper resources like libraries and science labs. You know that kids in other communities have proper schools. So you begin to feel as if you are a child who doesn’t count for anything... We want our younger brothers and sisters to go to school thinking that school is a time for hopes and dreams of the future. Every kid deserves this.”

**Narrator:** Shannen passed away in a car accident when she was 15 but the movement she started lives on. It’s called Shannen’s Dream. Please unfold one corner of your blankets and give yourselves a round of applause for the young Indigenous leaders like Shannen who are bringing about positive change.

**Scroll 14: Broken promises.** Over the years, more than 70 per cent of the land set aside for us in the treaties has been lost or stolen and big companies are allowed to make lots of money from Indigenous lands and natural resources. We, the Indigenous peoples, get little but the pollution from any of the companies that don't respect the Earth and future generations are left to clean up the mess.

**European:** In 2007, a step was taken to improve the way Indigenous peoples are treated - the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* became part of international law. This is an agreement among the world's governments that is a minimum standard to make sure Indigenous peoples survive and thrive. Canada was one of the last countries to agree to the Declaration. Now we need to make sure it's put into action. Please unfold one SMALL corner of your blankets to honour the people who wrote the *Declaration* and worked to get it adopted.

**Narrator:** Despite the Government of Canada's centuries of efforts to take away your identity, as Indigenous peoples you have continued to resist and to pass down your languages, ceremonies, and much more.

**Scroll 15:** We are healing ourselves and our communities. Out on the land, skills are being passed on to our youth. Mothers and grandmothers are bringing back ceremonies that honour women. Our leaders are using the courts to have our rights recognized and many of our nations are growing. We see treaties as living agreements that, if respected, will allow people from all backgrounds to share the land peacefully and respectfully. We are strong, having survived centuries of efforts to make us disappear.

**Narrator:** But the violence of colonization has left a lot of pain. All across Canada, the relationship between Indigenous people and newcomers is often broken. We don't need more broken promises. We need to repair the relationship and to do this, we need real change. We have lots of children, youth, adults and elders to inspire us. Let's join our efforts together.

**Ask everyone to look around. At this point, there should be a few people standing on very small areas of blankets and a few more standing in areas where there are no blankets. Ask them to remember what it looked like when they started the exercise and what it looks like now. Ask them to hold these images in their minds. Then invite everyone to take a seat, and continue with a talking circle, debrief or discussion.**



# Adult Script:

**Narrator:** These blankets represent the northern part of Turtle Island, or what we now know as Canada, before the arrival of Europeans. You represent the Indigenous peoples, the people who have been here for at least 10,000 years. Long before the arrival of Europeans, Turtle Island was your home, and home to millions of people like you. You lived in hundreds of nations. You fished and hunted and farmed. Each community had its own language, culture, traditions, laws and governments. As communities you often worked together and cooperated with one another. However, like all people, you sometimes experienced conflict amongst yourselves. Before the newcomers arrived, one of the ways in which you, the original peoples, ended disputes was by making treaties.

**Narrator:** The land is very important to you. All of your needs – food, clothing, shelter, culture, your spirituality – are taken care of by the land, which is represented here by the blankets. In return, you take very seriously your responsibility to take care of the land.

***If you are using traditional items, take some time for participants to trade and share their items with one another.***

**Scroll 1:** “One of my favourite things about my culture is how we’re taught that everything on the Earth is to be respected. It’s an important part of the culture and covers everything. That includes respecting yourself. Respecting yourself is one of the most important things my culture has taught me. Also, the land, water, plants, air and animals are all very important to our culture and need to be respected. Without any of it, what would we be?”

—Kateri, a Mohawk youth from a community in Quebec

***Introduce the volunteer(s) representing the European settler(s).***

**Narrator:** Things were happening in Europe at the end of the 15th century that would mean a huge change for you. European explorers had just quote-unquote “discovered” you and your lands. This started a fierce competition between European nations.

**European - in a loud, pompous voice, striding around the blankets:** Without even consulting you, we made deals amongst ourselves and divided up control over you and your lands. Usually, whichever nation discovered your land first, took control with the blessing of the Christian church. This practice is now called the “Doctrine of Discovery.”

**Narrator:** And so began the so-called European “discovery” of Turtle Island.

**Scroll 2:** “At contact with Europeans, each of the hundreds of Indigenous Peoples of Indigenous America possessed all the elements of nationhood that were well-established by European settlers: territory, governing structures, legal systems and a historical continuity with our territories. Nothing since the arrival of Columbus has occurred to merit any reduction in the international legal status of Indigenous Peoples. The recognition of Indigenous Nations and our rights pose no threat to non-Indigenous Peoples.”

—Sharon Venne, Cree

**European: step onto the blankets from the east. Begin shaking hands, moving around and handing out the index cards.**

**Narrator:** When the Europeans first arrived on Turtle Island there were many more Indigenous people than Europeans. The newcomers depended on you for their survival, and you helped them to understand how you did things – how you taught your children, how you took care of people who were sick, how you lived off the land in a way that left enough for future generations, and how your governments worked.

In the beginning there was lots of cooperation and support between you and the settlers. The settlers and their leaders recognized you, the First Peoples, as having your own governments, laws and territories. They recognized you as independent nations. They made agreements or treaties with you. These treaties explained how you were going to share the land and the water, the animals, and the plants.

These treaties were very important because they were agreements between you and the kings and queens of countries in Europe. They made these agreements with you because you were here first, the land belonged to you, and you had your own governments. The treaties officially recognized your power and independence as nations.

The Europeans understood they could not force their laws or way of life on the people who were here long before they ever arrived. They understood that you had rights.

**European [speaking in a loud voice]:** In the Royal Proclamation of 1763, King George the Third said Indigenous nations own their lands. The King said that the only legal way newcomers could gain control of those lands was by making treaties between the two nations. The year 2013 marked the 250th anniversary of the Royal Proclamation.

**Narrator:** Later on, the Government of Canada was formed, and the Royal Proclamation became part of Canadian law. For you, the Indigenous peoples, the treaties were very special and sacred agreements. They were statements of peace, friendship, and sharing, and they were based on respect and honesty. Sharing was very important to you. The hunters shared their food with everyone and the families helped one another raise the children. In the treaties, you tried to help the Europeans understand what you meant by sharing.

**European:** *Begin to slowly fold the edges of the blankets, making the blanket space smaller and smaller. When blankets are empty you can take them away and put them in a pile outside the activity. Very gradually fold and remove blankets until the middle of the exercise when the Indian Act is introduced and participants are placed on reserve.*

**Narrator:** *Remind participants that they must NOT step off the blankets. The goal is to stay on the blankets, even as they get smaller. The Narrator should also remind everyone that Indigenous people have always resisted when someone tried to take the land away.*

**Narrator:** But the Europeans didn't see it that way anymore. They now had a different view of the treaties. For them, land was something that could be bought and sold, and treaties were a way of getting you, the Indigenous peoples to give up your land.

**Scroll 3:** "Where common memory is lacking, where people do not share in the same past, there can be no real community. Where community is to be formed, common memory must be created."  
—Georges Erasmus, Dene Nation, co-chair of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

**Narrator:** After a while, you didn't get along very well with the Europeans.

When the War of 1812 ended, the Europeans no longer needed you to help them with the fighting. As the fur trade dried up, the European newcomers turned more and more to farming and started looking for more land.

Before too long, there were more Europeans than Indigenous peoples. One reason for this was the diseases the Europeans brought with them: diseases such as smallpox, measles and tuberculosis. You, the Indigenous peoples, suffered badly from these diseases because you had never had them in your communities before. Millions of you died. In fact, there are some people who believe that half the Indigenous people alive at the time died from these diseases. In some communities, nine out of ten people died.



**European:** *walk up to a person who does not have a yellow or blue card, hand them the folded blanket and read* - Blankets infected with the deadly smallpox virus were given or traded to the Indigenous people by military leaders such as Lord Jeffrey Amherst. You represent the many Indigenous people who died from small pox after having come into contact with such blankets. Please step off the blanket.

**Narrator:** *ask those participants with white index cards to step off the blankets telling them that they represent people who died of the various diseases.*

Please be silent for a moment to remember those who died from the diseases.

**European:** *walk up to one person in the “east” who does not have a card and tell that person* - You represent the Beothuk, one of the original people of what is now the island of Newfoundland. You also died from diseases you had never seen before. Because the Europeans overhunted some of you starved. Some of you died in violent encounters with the settlers trying to take your lands. Some of you were hunted down and killed. In 1829, the last person recognized by the Europeans as your people, Shanawdithit (Shanna-deet-dee), died in St. John's. Your language and culture became extinct. Please step off the blankets. **One person only.**

**European and Narrator** *walk to the “south” and choose two people who are standing close together.*

**Narrator:** You represent the First Nations that were divided when the border between the United States and British Canada was created. This border divides communities and cuts you off from each other. Please move to separate blankets.

**European:** *guide each person to a separate blanket, and then walks to the “west” and choose one person who does not have a card, tell them* - Construction of the railway opened up the Prairies to settlers. Land was needed for farming and the Government of Canada bought a huge piece of land from the Hudson's Bay Company. This was very hard for some of you who were already living there, such as the Métis, the Cree and the Blackfoot. You, the Métis, fought for your land during the Red River Rebellion and the North West Resistance. You won some of these battles, but in the end you were defeated by the government's soldiers. You represent those Métis leaders who died in battle, were put in jail, or were executed. Please step off the blankets. **One person only.**

**Narrator:** After these rebellions, the Métis people entered a period of dispersion. Fearing for their lives, Métis people changed their names and fled in all directions, some moving to the United States while others went back to their First Nation families and became treaty “Indians”. Others denied their native heritage altogether. These were dark times for the Métis, a time of persecution and extreme poverty due to their landlessness and general lack of education.

**European and Narrator** *walk to the “north” and choose a small group of people standing together on a blanket. Read to them the following two paragraphs:*

**Narrator:** In the High Arctic, Inuit communities were moved to isolated, unfamiliar, and barren lands, often with very bad results. One of these results was tuberculosis (TB) epidemics, which reached northern communities in the 1950s. By 1956 one-seventh of the entire Inuit population was being treated for Tuberculosis while one-third of the population overall was affected. Many children were removed from their homes to be sent down south for treatment in TB sanatoriums, some never to return. A large number of infected individuals passed away from the disease. Currently, the rate for TB among the Inuit is 185 times higher than for Canadian-born non-Aboriginal people.

**European:** You represent people like the Inuit and the Innu at Davis Inlet, along with many other Indigenous communities who suffered and sometimes died because you were forced to move to an unfamiliar place. Please move your blanket away from the others, fold it small and stand on it.

**European:** assist in moving their blanket, folding it small and directing the group to once again stand on it.

**Narrator:** Those with **blue** cards, step off the blankets. You represent those who died of hunger after being forced off your original land and away from your hunting grounds.

**European:** As more of us arrived, we needed more land. Many of us as Europeans thought we were better than other kinds of people, including you. Soon, we didn't think of you as friends and partners, but as a "problem" to be solved. We started ignoring or changing our laws to make it easier for us to take your land. Some land was taken in war. Some land was taken after you died.

**Narrator:** As Indigenous peoples, you lost more than just your land. Because the land is so important to you, when it was taken away some of you also lost your way of living, your culture and, in some cases, your reason to live.

**Scroll 4: Terra Nullius (TER-ah NOO-lee-us).** The idea of Terra Nullius, which in Latin means "land belonging to no-one", meant European countries could send out explorers and when they found land, they could claim it for their nation. These were often lands we were using.

**European:** The land wasn't empty and we as Europeans knew it so we changed the idea to include lands not being used by "civilized" peoples, or lands not being put to "civilized" use. It was us who decided what it meant to be "civilized", and we decided that because you and your people were not using the land in a "civilized way", we could take it and it was almost impossible to stop us.

**Scroll 5: The BNA (British North America) Act.** The BNA Act, also known as the Constitution Act, 1867, put "Indians and Lands reserved for Indians" under the control of the federal government. When this happened, we lost our rights and control over our lands.

**Narrator:** This law gave control of your lands to the Government of Canada, which at that time was made up of only people from Europe. You, the Indigenous peoples, were not involved in the creation of this law that would have such a big impact on your lives. More and more, the plan was to try and make you like the Europeans.

**Scroll 6: Indian Act.** In 1876 all the laws dealing with us were gathered together and put into the Indian Act. The Indian Act completely changed our lives. As long as our cultures were strong it was difficult for the government to take our lands so the government used the Indian Act to attack who we were as peoples. Hunting and fishing were now limited and our spiritual ceremonies like the potlatch, pow-wow and sundance were now against the law. This didn't change until the 1950s.

**European [In a loud voice]:** Now hear this! According to the Indian Act of 1876 and the British North America Act of 1867, you and all of your territories are now under the direct control of the Canadian federal government. You will now be placed on reserves. Please fold your blankets until they are just large enough to stand on.

**Narrator:** You went from being strong, independent First Nations, with your own governments, to isolated and poor "bands" that depended on the government for almost everything. You were treated like you knew nothing and like you couldn't run your own lives.

You became the responsibility of the federal government. Through the Indian Act, the federal government continues to this day to deny you your basic rights. These rights are things that most Canadians take for granted, such as healthy schools, proper housing and clean running water.

**European: [walking slowly around the blankets]** Also, you may not leave your reserve without a permit. You may not vote. You may not get together to talk about your rights. You may not practice your spirituality or your traditional forms of government. If you do any of these things, you may be put in jail.



**Scroll 7:** “I know what the government did in the past; they said where we had to live. I know that we’re not treated equally now, because I can feel it. We’re all Canadians and we should all be treated equally.”

—Cassie, a Mi’kmaq youth from a community in Nova Scotia

**Narrator:** The Indian Act also tried to stop Indigenous peoples from fighting to keep their land. For example, under the Indian Act, it was against the law to raise money to fight for land rights in the courts until the 1950s.

**Scroll 8: Enfranchisement (en-fran-CHISE-ment).** Under this federal government policy, all First Nations people who became doctors, teachers, lawyers, soldiers or who went to university lost their legal Indian status. This was called being granted “enfranchisement”.

**Narrator:** In other words, the government would no longer legally recognize you as a First Nations person. This cut you off from your communities, including First Nations soldiers returning from war or First Nations lawyers who were not allowed to fight for the rights of their people.

**European:** choose one person who does not have a yellow card and ask them to leave their blanket and stand somewhere on the floor. Tell them - You were enfranchised – you’re a First Nations teacher, lawyer, doctor or veteran so you’ve lost your Indian status and have left your community.

**Scroll 9: Assimilation (ah-sim-ill-EH-shun).** The government thought the “Indian problem” would solve itself as more and more Indigenous people died from diseases and others became part of the larger Canadian society. As one government employee said, the government’s goal was “to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and that there is no Indian problem and no Indian Department.” [Indian Affairs deputy superintendent Duncan Campbell Scott]

**Narrator:** You had to become more like the Europeans by giving up your rights, farming, going to school and praying in church like them.

**European:** place the residential school blanket on the floor at a distance from the others.

**Scroll 10: Residential Schools.** From the mid-1800s until the 1990s, the federal government took First Nations, Inuit and Métis children from our homes and communities and put them in boarding schools that were run by churches. The official partnership between the federal government and the churches ended in the 1970s but some churches continued to operate schools until the 1990s. As parents we didn’t have a choice about this. Sometimes the police arrived to take away our children. These schools were often very far from our homes and they had to stay at them all or most of the year. Mostly they were not allowed to speak our languages and they were punished if they did. Often our children weren’t given enough food. The last Indian residential school closed in 1996.

**European:** If participants have dolls, take some of them away at this time.

**Narrator:** All people with yellow cards, raise your hands. You must now move to a separate, empty blanket. You represent those who were taken out of your communities and placed in residential schools far from your homes.

**European:** take the children to the residential school blanket.

**Narrator:** While some students say they had positive experiences at the schools, most of you say that you suffered from very bad conditions and from different kinds of abuse. Many of you lost family connections and didn’t learn your language, culture and traditions. Because you grew up in the schools and rarely went home, many of you never learned how to be good parents. Some students died at the schools. Many of you never returned home or had trouble reintegrating if you did.

**European:** The person with the yellow index card marked with an “X”, please step off the blanket. You represent one of the thousands of children who died at the schools or who died later as a result of your experience.

**Pause for the person to leave the blanket.**

**Next, choose someone else who was not alone on their blanket and ask them to return to their community. Say to them:** Many of you were welcomed back but had difficulty fitting in. Some of you experienced lateral violence when you returned. One person in the community please turn your back on the person to represent the family ties that were damaged because of intergenerational impacts.

**Pause while this takes place.**

Everyone else with yellow cards, please find a spot nearby on the floor. You represent those whose connection to your family and community was broken and you never made it home. Some of you ended up in urban centres, others ended up incarcerated due to your experience at residential school.

**Narrator:** Please be silent for another moment to honour those who died or who never made it home because they lost connection to their family and community.

**Scroll 11:** “You have to remember that the Canadian government has done a lot to Aboriginal people that was meant to make us become like Europeans. For example, in residential schools, my grandmother told me you couldn’t speak our language or you’d get beaten; you couldn’t see your parents – things like that. We didn’t have voting rights for a long time. We also lost a lot of our culture.”  
—Heather, a Cree youth from a community in Saskatchewan

**European:** Thanks to the courage of survivors, Canadians started to find out about residential schools. Former students negotiated a settlement agreement that included the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In 2008, the Prime Minister apologized for the residential schools. Here is an excerpt: “To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions... and we apologize for having done this... Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.”

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The residential schools are not just part of our history. Children and grandchildren of people who went to the schools feel the impacts. Many former students are alive today and some have had a chance to tell their story to Canadians through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But Indigenous children are still treated differently. Your schools don’t get as much money. Today you are even more likely to be taken from your communities but this time you are being placed in foster care.

**Scroll 12:** From the 1960s to the 1980s, thousands of First Nations and Métis children were forced illegally from our homes and adopted or fostered, usually by non-Aboriginal people. This period is known as the 60s scoop. Many of these kids experienced violence, racism and abuse and lost connection to their identity and culture. Like residential schools, the purpose of the 60s scoop was assimilation.

**European:** go up to someone who is still on their blanket and ask them to find a spot on the floor nearby. Say to them - You represent a child apprehended from your community during the 60s scoop. You were not able to reintegrate into your extended family and territory, leaving you with a sense of loss.

**Also, if participants have dolls, take some of them away at this time.**

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**Scroll 15: Broken promises.** Over the years, more than 70 per cent of the land set aside for us in the treaties has been lost or stolen and big companies are allowed to make significant amounts of money from Indigenous lands and natural resources. We, the Indigenous peoples, get little but the pollution from any of the companies that don’t respect the Earth and future generations are left to clean up the mess.

**Scroll 16:** “First Nations are nations. First Nations (treaty people) signed over 300 treaties with the Europeans during the 1700s and 1800s. The treaties agreed to share the lands and resources with the immigrants. ... Under existing legislation, treaty people are “sovereign” nations. ... The Indians surrendered over 9.9 million square kilometres of their land to the immigrants. Today, the sons of the immigrants have the largest treaty rights in Canada. The Indians have become the poorest peoples in Canada.”

—Chief Pascall Bighetty, Pukatawagan [Pu-ka-ta-wa-gan] First Nation

**European:** One way the Canadian government pressures Indigenous peoples to leave their lands and assimilate is by failing to provide enough funds for basic services:

- Over half the drinking water systems on reserve pose a significant risk to human health. —Office of the Auditor General, 2011
- There are 85,000 new housing units needed on reserve and 60% of existing houses are in need of repair. —Assembly of First Nations, 2012
- Rates of suicide are high in some First Nations communities and are even higher in many Inuit communities. Among First Nations communities, suicide rates are twice the national average, and show no signs of decreasing. Suicide rates among Inuit are even higher than among First Nations, at 6 to 11 times the Canadian average. —Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011



**Scroll 17:** For many of us, women are the carriers of culture. By targeting women, you target the heart of the nation. Indigenous women have been targeted through federal legislation and policies that try to wear down our communities and in so doing, make it easier to take our lands. Residential schools have left a legacy of violence that contributes directly to abuse, especially abuse directed at women and children. And in wider society, everyday racism causes wounds that are both visible and invisible.

- Indigenous women are at least 3.5 times as likely to experience violence as non-Indigenous women in Canada. —*Statistics Canada 2009*
- Over 1000 Indigenous women have gone missing or have been murdered since the 1970s, and these are only the cases that have been documented. The real number is certainly much higher.—*2014 report by the RCMP*

**Narrator:** Gender inequality in the Indian Act meant that Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men, lost their legal Indian status but a non-Indigenous woman who married an Indigenous man gained status. Amendments have been made but gender discrimination has not been fully removed from the Indian Act. In addition, if the father is not listed on the birth certificate, he is presumed by the Canadian government to be non-Indigenous.

**European – approach someone (a woman if possible) who is still on the blankets and say to them:** You represent one of the women stripped of your status because of this gender inequality in the Indian Act. As a result, you have had to leave your community, please find a spot nearby on the floor.

**Narrator:** In 2007, a step was taken to improve the way Indigenous peoples are treated - the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* became part of international law. This is an agreement among the world's governments that is a minimum standard to make sure Indigenous peoples survive and thrive. Canada was one of the last countries to agree to the *Declaration*. Now we need to make sure it's put into action. Please unfold one SMALL corner of your blankets to honour the people who wrote the *Declaration* and worked to get it adopted and give yourselves a round of applause.

Despite the Government of Canada's centuries of efforts to take away your identity, as Indigenous peoples you have continued to resist and to pass down your languages, ceremonies, and much more.

**Scroll 18:** We have language immersion programs and healing initiatives based on our traditional values. Our elders are passing on land-based skills to our youth and mothers and grandmothers are working to address violence in our nations by reinstating ceremonies that honour women. Our leaders are using the courts to have our rights recognized and many of our nations are growing. We see treaties as living agreements that, if respected, will allow people from all backgrounds to share the land peacefully and respectfully. We are strong and resilient having survived centuries of efforts to make us disappear.

**Scroll 19:** "To us the answer is not about incremental change, it is not about just concrete action, it is also repairing the relationship. And the way to repair the relationship between us and Canada is to have this country acknowledge that its richness and its wealth come from their one-sided interpretation of the treaties. There has to be henceforth a double understanding of what those treaties represent."—*Ovide Mercredi, Crown-First Nations Gathering 2012*)

**Scroll 20:** The role of culture within the reconciliation process, I think, is that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures alike must respect one another in light of their historical experiences—they have to see eye to eye on healing, so to speak. By this, I mean that there needs to be maximized understanding and trust built between the cultures involved.  
—*David Joanase, from the Kinngait (Cape Dorset) Inuit Community*

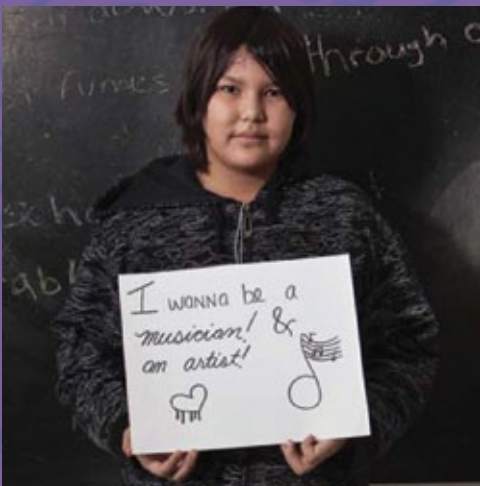
**Scroll 21:**

Despite direct assimilation attempts  
Despite the Residential School Systems  
Despite the strong influences of the Church in Métis communities to ignore and deny  
our Aboriginal heritage  
Despite not having a land base  
And despite our own diversity in heritage  
We are still able to say we are proud to be Metis  
We are resilient as a weed, and beautiful as a wildflower  
We have much to celebrate and be proud of  
—Christi Belcourt, Métis artist

**Scroll 22:** “Our leaders need to show the way, but no matter how many deals and agreements they make, it is in our daily conversations and interactions that our success as a nation in forging a better place, will ultimately be measured. It is what we say to and about each other in public and in private that we need to look at changing.”  
—Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

**Narrator:** The violence of colonization has left a lot of pain. All across Canada, the relationship between Indigenous people and newcomers is often broken. We don’t need more broken promises. We need to repair the relationship and to do this, we need real change.

**Ask everyone to look around. At this point, there should be a few people standing on very small areas of blankets and a few more standing in areas where there are no blankets. Ask them to remember what it looked like when they started the exercise and what it looks like now. Ask them to hold these images in their minds. Then invite everyone to take a seat, and continue with a talking circle, debrief or discussion.**



Top: Children at an Indigenous children's rights rally, Halifax. Photo: Cindy Blackstock

Middle and bottom: Students participating in the Shannen's Dream project. Photos: Liam Sharp/ First Nations Child and Family Caring Society

# Resources and Learning Activities that Complement the Blanket Exercise

## *The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada*

With your students, join a youth driven movement calling for First Nations children to have the same chance as other Canadians to grow up safely at home, get a good education, be healthy, and be proud of their cultures. Young people join their efforts together throughout the year but especially on **February 14 for Have a Heart Day** and on **June 11 for Our Dreams Matter Too**. To sign up your class, to participate and for countless other ways to get involved visit [www.fncaringsociety.com](http://www.fncaringsociety.com).

**Project of Heart** is an award-winning initiative that commemorates the lives lost at Indian residential schools. Students hear testimony from a survivor and decorate a wooden tile in honour of one of the thousands of children who died at the schools. The final step is for students to take action together for social justice. The project focuses on the learning that takes place at the level of the spirit and heart and not just the mind. All the information to receive a kit can be found at [www.projectofheart.ca](http://www.projectofheart.ca).

**The 100 Years of Loss Edu-kit** has been developed by The Legacy of Hope Foundation. It is designed to support educators and administrators in raising awareness and teaching about the history and legacy of residential schools. It is for Canadian youth aged 11 to 18 and includes six multi-layered lesson plans, a wall-mounted timeline, and survivor videos, as well as teacher resources and extension activities. You can order your free edu-kit by going to the Foundation's website [www.100yearsofloss.ca](http://www.100yearsofloss.ca).

## **Videos**

There are many good video resources on Indigenous rights, communities and people.

Check out the National Film Board's **Aboriginal Peoples Channel**: [www.nfb.ca/channels/aboriginal\\_peoples\\_channel](http://www.nfb.ca/channels/aboriginal_peoples_channel)

**Hi-Ho Mistahey!** is an inspiring film on Shannen's Dream and the struggle for a new school in Attawapiskat, Ontario.

**Wapikoni Mobile** provides a wealth of short films made by Indigenous youth, mostly in Quebec – available in French and in English: [www.wapikoni.ca](http://www.wapikoni.ca).

The CBC series **8th Fire** is a good overview of contemporary Indigenous issues and can be viewed over several classes: [www.cbc.ca/8thfire/](http://www.cbc.ca/8thfire/)

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or feedback!



## SEEDS OF HOPE ACTIVITY:

After participating in the Blanket Exercise, it is important to move on to a dimension of hope. This can be done by acknowledging and honouring examples of Indigenous resistance and resilience over the centuries. This exercise will take 15-30 minutes, depending on group size:

1) **Prepare in advance 4-6 hopeful images involving Indigenous peoples.** These can be pictures of First Nations, Inuit or Métis children on the land, in a classroom, participating in cultural events and more. They can be pictures of Indigenous elders, leaders, teachers, artists, athletes, professionals, etc. If you are being hosted by an Indigenous community or are working with Indigenous resource people ask them for advice on the photos in advance and use local photos if possible.

2) **Lay the photos on the floor within the circle.** Ask the European, or another volunteer, to hand out corn or sunflower seeds (or another seed native to North America if corn is not available), to each participant. Hand out as many seeds to each person as there are photos. Explain each photo briefly. Then, ask each participant to come forward one at a time (if they are willing) to place a seed or seeds on the picture or pictures that they find hopeful. Participants can place all their seeds on one photo, or on more than one. They do not need to place a seed on all photos, just those that speak to them.

3) Ask the participants to explain in a few words why they chose their photos, and how they are hopeful.

4) If there is still time in your session together, ask participants to reflect on how Indigenous peoples and cultures have helped shape Canada. What are some of the contributions Indigenous cultures and people have offered Canada and Canadians?



Blanket Exercise hosted by KAIROS Belleville, ON in spring 2012. Photo: KAIROS



Top to bottom: Blanket Exercise at Roland Michener Public High School, Ottawa. Photo: Carol Montgomery

# Case Studies

## JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE:

Jordan River Anderson of the Norway House Cree Nation died in hospital at age five despite having been able to move to home care at age two. The reason he was never able to go home was that the different levels of government could not agree on who should pay for Jordan's home care.

Jordan's Principle sets out that no child should be caught in the middle of a dispute over funding. Rather, the government of first contact is responsible for initial payments that are in the best interest of the child. Disputes over reimbursement can be worked out separately between governments so they don't prevent a child from accessing health care services. Although

this principle was adopted by the House of Commons as a private member's bill in 2007, it has never been put into action.

The following article is from the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which was endorsed by Canada in 2010. Jordan's Principle is a good example of why this article was written. Article 24(2) says, "Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right".

### For more information on Jordan's Principle:

<http://www.fncfcs.com/jordans-principle>

## SHANNEN'S DREAM:

The school in Attawapiskat First Nation in northern Ontario was condemned because the land it was built on was contaminated by 50,000 liters of diesel fuel. For more than ten years the students used run-down portables that were freezing in winter, fire traps, and infested with mice. According to a 2007 internal Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada document, "existing portables are in need of extensive repair" and there is "student overcrowding in classrooms."

Starting in 2001, at least three federal Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs promised the students of Attawapiskat a new school. By 2008 the students were still waiting and the grade eight students had had enough of the broken promises and the deplorable condition of their classrooms. Led by 13 year old student Shannen Koostachin, they travelled to Ottawa to ask for a new school, but then-Minister of Indian Affairs Chuck Strahl said it was not possible. Finally, in 2014, after more than a decade of political pressure a new school was opened in Attawapiskat. Across Canada, almost one in two First Nation communities are in a need of a new school.

Shannen's goal of becoming a lawyer meant she had to leave home to attend high school in a community hundreds of miles away. Tragically, while away at school, she died in a car accident. She was 15. Before her death she was nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize. She also spearheaded a campaign that continues to gain momentum and has been re-named "Shannen's Dream" in her honour.

On February 27, 2012, the Parliament of Canada voted unanimously in favour of a private member's motion that "All First Nation Children Have an Equal Right to High-Quality, Culturally-Relevant Education". It was the result of work by thousands of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and youth who support "Shannen's Dream", which calls for "safe and comfy schools and culturally-based and equitable education" for First Nations students. This motion should be a huge success for all those seeking equity for Indigenous peoples in Canada but it needs to be put into action. To learn more about Shannen's Dream and what you can do as a group or as individuals, please visit the *First Nations Child and Family Caring Society* website: [www.shannesdream.ca](http://www.shannesdream.ca)



# About KAIROS:

KAIROS unites eleven Christian churches and religious organizations in a faithful ecumenical response to the call to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). We deliberate on issues of common concern, advocate for social justice, and join with people of faith and goodwill in action for social transformation.

## HOW TO ORDER:

Email [orders@kairoscanada.org](mailto:orders@kairoscanada.org), call us toll-free at 1-877-403-8933, or see our website [www.kairosblanketexercise.org](http://www.kairosblanketexercise.org). The Blanket Exercise is available as a PDF or in print for a minimal cost, and free supplementary online resources are available.

## CREDITS:

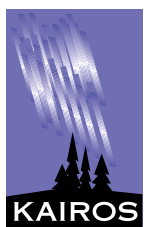
### ***The creators of the original Blanket Exercise, 1997:***

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***Recent contributors to the script:*** Sara Anderson, Ed Bianchi, Caroline Foster, Julie Graham, Gayadowehs Lu Ann Hill-MacDonald, Mike Hogeterp, Katy Quinn, Priscilla Solomon, Steve van de Hoef.

Special thanks to the hundreds of Blanket Exercise participants who over the years have taken the time to offer feedback and ideas about how to improve the workshop. It is because of these individuals that this teaching tool has become so effective and popular.

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*The members of KAIROS are: the Anglican Church of Canada, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Canadian Religious Conference, the Christian Reformed Church in North America (Canada Corporation), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and the United Church of Canada.*

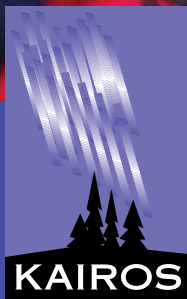


*Top to bottom: Blanket Exercise at Roland Michener Public High School, Ottawa. Photos: Carol Montgomery*



# The Blanket Exercise:

the Indigenous rights history we're rarely taught



**"The Blanket Exercise is an excellent means of educating Canadians about the history of this land. The AFN is proud to partner with KAIROS Canada to heighten awareness and reconciliation through this very important and powerful activity."**

*—Assembly of First Nations*

KAIROS' Blanket Exercise, with versions for youth and adults, is a hands-on way to explore the nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous peoples...to work toward reconciliation...to empower people to build bridges of understanding and respect.

As the name suggests, the Blanket Exercise begins with blankets arranged on the floor to represent Canada before the arrival of Europeans. The participants represent Indigenous peoples. They respond to various cues in a script read by a narrator, and interact by reading prepared scrolls. At the end of the exercise only a few people remain on blankets which have been folded into small bundles and cover only a fraction of their original area.

**"I learned that you should be treated with respect no matter where you come from, what you look like, and what your culture is."** — Grade 5/6 participant, Cornwall, ON

**To order a copy, or for more information about training opportunities, contact KAIROS at 1-877-403-8933 or [www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org) or [www.KAIROSblanketexercise.org](http://www.KAIROSblanketexercise.org)**