

# Indigenous Peoples in Toronto

## An Introduction for Newcomers



Funded by / Financé par:



Immigration, Refugees  
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés  
et Citoyenneté Canada

**OCASI**  
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

# ***Indigenous Peoples in Toronto: An Introduction for Newcomers***

Authors: Kiera Brant-Birioukov, Gail Brant-Terry, Anton Birioukov-Brant, Karissa Maracle and Mark Currie

We are grateful to the many project partners who provided their invaluable input and support.

Copyright © 2023 City of Toronto

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**..... i

**CHAPTER ONE**..... 02  
Introduction

**CHAPTER TWO** ..... 04  
Indigenous Peoples of the Toronto Region

**CHAPTER THREE**..... 14  
Indigenous History in Toronto

**CHAPTER FOUR**..... 31  
Contemporary Indigenous Lives

**CHAPTER FIVE**..... 37  
Cultural Awareness

**CHAPTER SIX**..... 42  
Building Relationships

**APPENDIX A**..... 54  
Additional Resources

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

You may have heard or read a “Land Acknowledgement.” They are becoming common in workplaces, educational institutions, and public events.

A Land Acknowledgement is a statement that recognizes the history and achievements of Indigenous Peoples to this land. For thousands of years Indigenous Peoples have lived and continue to live on, learn from, and care for the land we are on. Land Acknowledgements respect and honour this history and current vibrant Indigenous cultures. They recognize Indigenous Peoples’ ongoing connection to this land.

The City of Toronto has its own Land Acknowledgement:

The City acknowledges that all facets of its work are carried out on the **traditional territories** of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. These territories are currently covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands. We are eternally grateful for Indigenous stewardship of these lands and waters.

Gchi Miigwetch, Niawen, Marsi, Nakummesuak, Quannamiik

For many Indigenous Peoples, the land is the keeper of stories. Many Indigenous nations consider the land to be the first mother, often calling it Mother Earth. Knowledge and stories have been passed down through the relationship with the land. Creating a relationship with the land means you are creating a relationship with all who lived here before and all who will come after. The Natural World is the only constant life force.

When you listen to or are asked to give a Land Acknowledgement, reflect on your relationship to this land, how you came here, and how you live your life. All non-Indigenous peoples are on Indigenous lands. Land Acknowledgements provide an opportunity to reflect on this fact and its significance to your life in Toronto.

## Traditional Territories

Ancestral land an Indigenous group has lived on and maintains connection to.

## Treaty

There are different types of treaties. Some friendship treaties were established between Indigenous nations and early settlers. Later, colonial treaties forced Indigenous peoples to sell their land to settlers.



Métis flag waving in the wind.  
Photo by JE Whyte

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

— *Boozhoo* (bow-zho).

*Yiheh!*

*Kwe:*

*Tekwanonhwerá:tons. (day-gwa-noon-weh-ra-dos)*

Welcome to Turtle Island (North America). This land has been home to Indigenous Peoples for thousands of years. Indigenous Peoples lived here for centuries before the arrival of European settlers in the 1600s. Indigenous Peoples are the original population of what is now known as Canada and Toronto.

Indigenous Peoples are an incredibly diverse group of people. There are more than 50 Indigenous nations in Canada. Each nation has their own language, traditions, and culture. There are Indigenous Peoples in every part of what is now known as Canada.

Indigenous Peoples live and thrive in what is now known as Toronto. It is home to the original Indigenous inhabitants of this area (Wendat, Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee). It is also home to many Indigenous Peoples from other parts of Turtle Island. Toronto is where many Indigenous Peoples live and work, participate in ceremonies, and share their cultures with each other and non-Indigenous Peoples. Toronto has a rich Indigenous history. It also has a vibrant contemporary Indigenous community.

The relationships between Indigenous Peoples and settlers in Canada have not always been positive. The arrival of settlers in Canada had a terrible impact on Indigenous Peoples. Countless thousands died because of war, diseases, and starvation caused by the settlers. As more settlers came, they demanded Indigenous Peoples give up their land. When Indigenous Peoples refused, their land was stolen. Indigenous Peoples were often forced off their land or they strategically chose to leave. Indigenous Peoples experienced and continue to experience harm from the colonisation of their lands. Indigenous Peoples in Canada have been marginalised in their own lands for generations.

Indigenous Peoples are not passive victims. They have fought against colonialism for centuries. The stories in this guide show the incredible diversity, resilience, and strength of Indigenous communities. They continue to protect their languages, identities, and cultures from repeated attempts to destroy them by the Canadian government.

Some of what you read may upset you. This guide discusses themes of racism, discrimination, colonialism, child abuse, and sexual violence. Taking care of yourself during this time is important.

If needed, you can contact Crisis Services Canada 1-833-456-4566 or text 456454.

*The stories in this guide show the incredible diversity, resilience, and strength of Indigenous communities.*

*Learning the truth is the first step in making positive changes.*

The mistreatment of Indigenous Peoples by the Canadian government and wider society has been hidden from public view for decades. It is only recently that Canadians are learning this history and its ongoing effects. It is an important time for newcomers to join these discussions. Learning the truth is the first step in making positive changes.

This guide will help you become familiar with the Indigenous Peoples in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and beyond. You will learn about some of the cultures, histories, and contemporary realities of Indigenous Peoples. You will learn about the importance of building relationships with Indigenous Peoples. Places to find more information are also shared.

## A Good Mind

As you read the guide, we encourage you to have a *Good Mind*. Haudenosaunee teachings say that a Good Mind (*Ka'nikonhrí:yo /gah-nee-goohn-ree-yo*) is interacting with people with good thoughts and intentions.

Having a Good Mind is important for learning from people and connecting with people. Having a Good Mind means being open to hearing other people's perspectives. It means seeing other people's contributions to be valuable knowledge. When people do this, they open their hearts and minds to learning. Only then can people truly learn from each other.



Participants in an Indigenous round dance.  
Courtesy of the City of Toronto.



Gary Sault, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (Toronto, Ontario)  
Photo by Yelena Rodriguez Mena



# CHAPTER TWO

## INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE TORONTO REGION

There are three groups of Indigenous peoples in what is now Canada. They are **First Nations**, **Métis**, and **Inuit**.

There are more than 630 First Nations communities spread throughout Canada, which represent more than 50 distinct nations. Using the term “nation” means that First Nations were fully independent nations before settler colonisation. Each First Nation community has its own history, culture, and worldview. The Métis people are the descendants of Indigenous women and early European settler men who intermarried in the 1600s. The Métis have a distinct identity, culture, and language. The Inuit are Indigenous peoples from the Arctic of Canada, referred to as Inuit Nunangat (*Ee-noo-eet Noo-nung-uht*). There are differences among the 53 Inuit communities across Canada, but they have cultural and linguistic similarities. Some Indigenous peoples have family lines going to more than one Indigenous nation.

### First Nations

Toronto is located on the traditional territory of three separate alliances of culturally and linguistically related First Nations. These are the three groups mentioned in the City of Toronto Land Acknowledgement: **Wendat**, **Anishinaabe**, and **Haudenosaunee**.

#### Wendat:

Wen-daht  
(wɛndæʔ)

#### Anishinaabe:

Ah-NI-shi-NAH-beh  
(æ.nɪʃəˈnəbe)

#### Haudenosaunee:

hoh-DEE-noh-SHoh-nee  
(hɔdɪnəsɔni)

### First Nations

Referring to the original nations in Canada. The members of these nations and their descendants have existed across Canada for thousands of years.

### Métis

A person who self-identifies as Métis is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry, and is accepted by the Métis Nation.

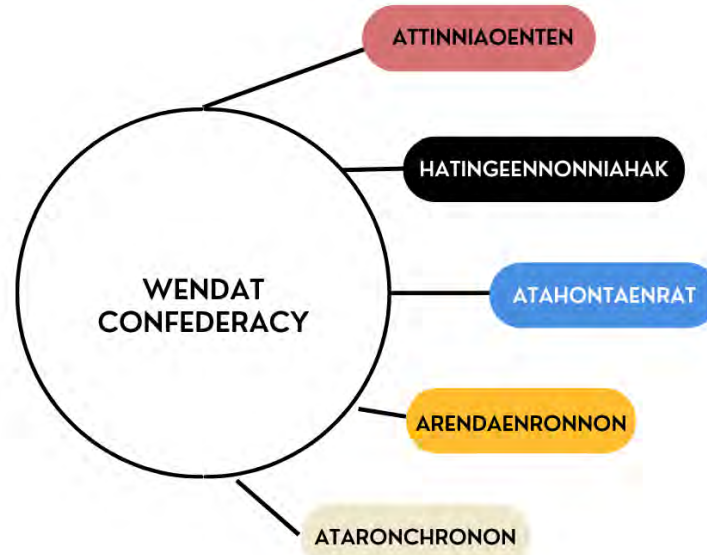
### Inuit

A distinct Indigenous people of the north. Inuit means “people” in the Inuit language of Inuktitut.

## Wendat (Wen-daht)

The **Wendat**, also known as the Huron-Wendat, call Ontario "The Homeland."

The Wendat Confederacy was an alliance of several First Nations: The Attinniaonten ("People of the Bear"), the Hatingeennonniahak ("Makers of cords for nets"), Arendaenronnon ("People of the Lying Rock"), Atahontaenrat ("People of the two white ears," i.e., "Deer People") and Ataronchronon ("People of the Bog"). The Wendat nations were separate political and territorial entities. However, the Wendat had similar cultures and ways of life, a common history, and similar languages.



The name Wendat means "The People." Originally, the Wendat territories included the north shore of Lake Ontario. They later moved north to Lake Simcoe and the Georgian Bay area. Both the Wendat and Haudenosaunee lived in longhouses. Wendat villages could be large. Some had up to 3,500 people. They were a matrilineal people, meaning their lineage and clan families were passed down through women. Women also held important positions of responsibility and made many decisions within their communities.

As horticulturalists, the Wendat have ancestral knowledge of exceptionally effective crop growing techniques. The Wendat grew the Three Sisters (corn, beans, and squash). They grew these plants together in a crop growing technique called companion planting. The three vegetables offer one another the nutrients they need to thrive. This growing technique is so effective it served as the primary diet for Wendat communities. It is still practised today. The Three Sisters teach about the interdependence of all things. Among other things, the Wendat were known for their durable and light canoes. These canoes made travel and trade an important part of the Wendat's success in the Great Lakes region.

Sketch of a braid of corn.  
Artwork reproduced with  
permission from artist  
Frankie Warner (Six  
Nations, ON).



Travel and trade in early Canada was important due to the fur trade. Beaver fur became very fashionable in Europe in the 1600s. Many French traders came to what is now known as Ontario to trade with First Nations peoples. First Nations Peoples would trade beaver furs for European items like muskets, fabric for clothing, cooking pots, and cooking pans.

The French had established trading forts around Lake Ontario in the 1600s. The fur trade had a negative impact on First Nations. It created competition amongst First Nations. In the 1600s the Wendat were attacked by the Haudenosaunee. The Haudenosaunee were competing with the Wendat for trade with the French. Many Wendat people also died during this time due to disease brought to Turtle Island by the Jesuit Missionaries and other Europeans. After these losses, the Wendat strategically moved to different parts of Ontario, Québec, and the United States (U.S.). This movement caused the breakup of the Wendat Confederacy.

The Wendat Confederacy no longer legally exists. However, the Wendat people reaffirmed the confederacy in 1999 in Ontario. The current Wendat Confederacy includes La Nation Huronne-Wendat, the Wyandot of Anderdon Nation (U.S.), the Wyandot Nation of Kansas (U.S.), and the Wyandotte Nation (Oklahoma, U.S.).

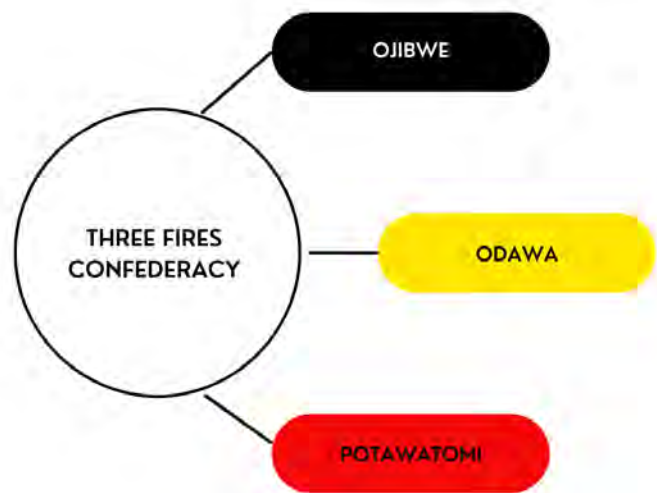
In Canada, currently more than half of the Wendat Nation lives in the village of Wendake, near Québec City. The Wendat languages were sleeping but are being reawakened and preserved by Wendat Peoples. Scholars have been working with Wendat communities to capture their significant history. There are many historical Wendat village sites and ossuaries (i.e., burial sites) in Toronto and Ontario.

## Anishinaabe (Ah-NI-shi-NAH-beh)

— One of the original peoples living in what is now Toronto are the **Anishinaabe**. The Anishinaabe are culturally and linguistically related First Nations around the Great Lakes region.

The Anishinaabe include the Ojibwe (*Oh-jib-way*), Chippewa (*Chi-peh-wah*), Odawa (*Oh-dah-wah*), Potawatomi (*Pot-tah-wah-to-mee*), Algonquin (*Al-gon-quinn*), Saukteaux (*Sew-toe*), Nipissing, and Mississauga nations. Sometimes Oji-Cree (*Oh-jeh – Cree*) and Métis Peoples also identify as Anishinaabe. The Three Fires Confederacy is an alliance of Anishinaabe nations comprised of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi nations.

In Land Acknowledgements in Toronto, we might hear both the Anishinaabe and the Mississauga mentioned separately. This is sometimes done to highlight the unique significance of Toronto to the Mississauga in particular, but this is not to confuse them as two separate Indigenous Peoples. All Mississauga are Anishinaabe, but not all Anishinaabe are Mississauga.



Anishinaabe territories span across Manitoba, Ontario, and Québec. Toronto has been a particularly significant place for the Anishinaabe Peoples. Toronto was an important intersection for accessing the Great Lakes for trade and seasonal migration.

The Anishinaabe Peoples were excellent in adapting to the various landscapes around the Lake Ontario region. Anishinaabe families lived in *wigwams*. These are cone shaped domes made of tree bark. These were sometimes covered with animal hides and moss to protect from wind and rain. The wigwam is a genius design because it is sturdy enough to withstand the extreme weather of the region. It is also lightweight enough to be quickly taken down and moved when needed for hunting and travel. The wigwam could fit up to 10 or 12 people. Most wigwams were used for shelter, eating, sleeping, and socialising. Some were built for specialised ceremonial purposes, such as a **sweat lodge**. Today wigwams are used for ceremony and gathering spaces for Anishinaabe Peoples. The wigwam supported the Anishinaabe lifestyle of living off the land in a sustainable way. Hunting, fishing, and gathering were done in one area until the seasons changed, or the land needed time to renew itself.

Like many Indigenous nations, Anishinaabe Peoples use the Medicine Wheel teachings to bring balance to life. The Medicine Wheel reminds us that all life moves in cycles – everything happens in a circle. Life is full of opposites. They must be balanced for us to have a good life. Much like the Korean Yin and Yang shows the balance of opposites, the Medicine Wheel shows the connection of different parts of our lives.

## Sweat Lodge

A heated dome-shaped building. Water would be poured on hot rocks to create steam. The heat encourages sweating, which is seen as purifying the body and soul.



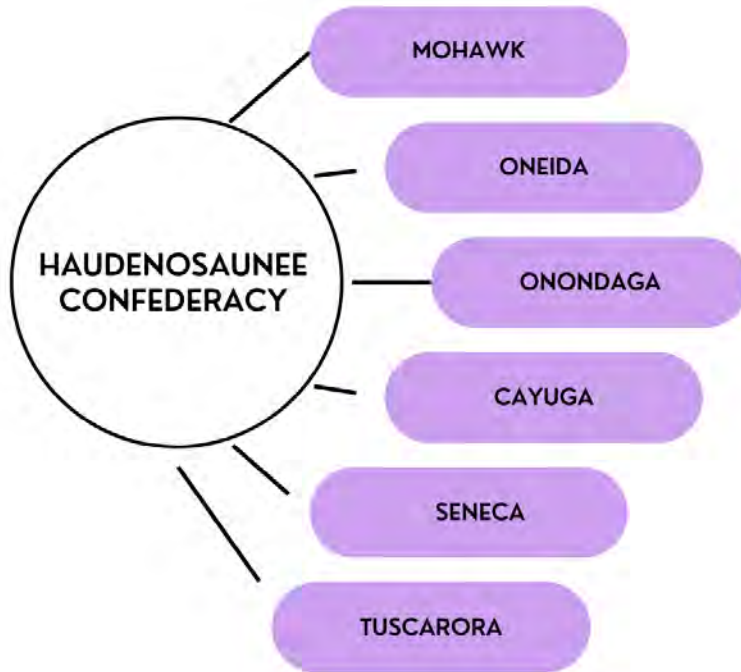
One example of a Medicine Wheel, with colours black, white, yellow, and red.

## Haudenosaunee (hoh-DEE-noh-SHoh-nee)

Significant in the trade and treaty history of Toronto is the **Haudenosaunee Confederacy** (also known as the Six Nations Confederacy or the Iroquois Confederacy). The Haudenosaunee Confederacy is made up of six allied First Nations. They are the Seneca (*sen-uh-ka*), Cayuga (*kai-oo-gah*), Onondaga (*on-on-dah-ga*), Oneida (*oh-nye-duh*), Mohawk (*mow-hawk*), and the Tuscarora (*tuh-ska-roar-ah*) nations.

The ancestral territory of the Haudenosaunee was in what is now northern New York State (U.S.). Haudenosaunee trade, travel, and hunting routes depended upon access to the Great Lakes, including Toronto. The Haudenosaunee are known for their warriors and warfare tactics. The Haudenosaunee democratic system, known as the Great Law, was the foundation for democracy in the United States of America. The United States constitution was inspired by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The Onondaga nation, part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, urged the 13 American colonies to establish a union of colonies who were stronger together.

The Haudenosaunee use a metaphor that many arrows bundled together cannot be as easily broken as a single arrow by itself. You can see this metaphor represented in the United States of America seal where a bundle of 13 arrows represented the original united 13 colonies.



Homes were large and very long wooden structures known as longhouses. These larger homes were built for extended families. Between 20-100 people lived in one longhouse. Haudenosaunee families no longer live in longhouses. Longhouses continue to serve as significant cultural meeting places for the Haudenosaunee.

One of the most important features of Haudenosaunee culture is the **Thanksgiving Address** or “words that come before all else”. This speech is told at every ceremony and gathering of Haudenosaunee people. In the Thanksgiving Address, the speaker acknowledges every element of the natural world including the water, plants, fish, animals, and stars. The speaker thanks each element for what they provide to humans.



"Longhouse in Winter."  
Courtesy of the Woodland Cultural Centre.

Through this speech, the Haudenosaunee acknowledge that we are dependent on the natural world for our survival. The Thanksgiving Address is how Haudenosaunee people give thanks to and acknowledge the natural world. This is done to ensure the earth continues to provide for all people.

There are five Haudenosaunee communities in Ontario. Six Nations of the Grand River is a Haudenosaunee community located approximately 100 kilometres away from Toronto. It is the largest Indigenous community in Canada, with more than 12,000 residents. Many Haudenosaunee people live in Toronto for school and work.

## Métis (mey-tee)

- The Métis are a distinct Indigenous People made up of communities with their own unique history, identity, culture, language, and territory. The ancestral Métis language is Michif (*mih-chif*).

The Métis emerged in what is now Ontario and Western Canada long before Canada became a country. As European traders moved further west into what is now Ontario and Western Canada, they made frequent contact with First Nations. These European traders often intermarried with Indigenous women, creating the Métis people. Over generations, the Métis people developed their own unique and distinct identity separate from First Nations. Although started during the fur trade, this identity has much more than its historical origins.

### Aboriginal

Used in the *Constitution Act* (1982) to refer to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada. It is also used in government documents of that period. The term is outdated and should only be used when referencing the *Constitution Act*.

The Canadian government's approach to Métis rights claims was to deny and ignore them. The Métis people consistently pushed back against these denials. For example, the Métis people actively resisted the Canadian government's oppression during the Red River Resistance in 1869-70. The Métis people organized themselves and opposed the colonisation of their lands.

When the Canadian government did make agreements with Métis communities, those agreements were quickly broken by the government. Even with these broken promises, Métis communities remained resilient and stayed together.

The Métis people fought for decades to be recognised as a distinct Indigenous people by the Canadian Federal Government. This Métis resilience drove their fight for the recognition of their rights in the Supreme Court of Canada. The *R. v. Powley* Supreme Court case recognised the Métis as being a distinct **Aboriginal** group. The Métis people were recognised as one of the three distinct Aboriginal Peoples in the *Canada Constitution Act, 1982*.

Currently, the Métis people are governed by provincial Métis governments from Ontario westward. These Métis governments represent Métis people within their respective provinces. They fight for Métis Peoples' rights. They provide support to Métis people. These Métis governments come together at the national level to make up the Métis National Council (MNC). The MNC is the national and international voice of the Métis Nation.

Historically, the Métis people spoke many languages, but they also have their own language, Michif. It is an endangered language, but it is still spoken today. Likewise, the Métis have a rich and unique culture. Métis beadwork is recognised as one of the most complex beadwork styles across Indigenous communities. It is a blend of European embroidery and First Nations beading. Perhaps the most recognised aspect of Métis culture is the Métis sash. It is now mostly used in ceremonies and celebrations. In the past the Métis sash was used for many different practical reasons by fur traders. For example, they would use it to haul heavy gear, transport wood, or as a blanket, towel, and rope. The sash has a specific colour pattern. The colours have meaning behind them. Although the colours stay the same, the meaning given to them varies from community to community.

## Inuit (I-nyoo-uht)

Inuit are the Indigenous Peoples of the far north. "Inuit" means "the people" in Inuktitut (*e-NOOK-ti-toot*), which is the language of the Inuit.

The Inuit live in over 53 communities in the north (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, northern Quebec, and Labrador). Traditionally, the Inuit people lived along the coastline in communities of 30-150 people in the northern regions of what is now Canada. They survived mainly on hunting marine animals and gathering other food.

## *The Colours of our Sash*

- **Green** runs through the sash and represents the gardens, ravines, and forests throughout Toronto and York Region. It also represents the future through Métis youth.
- **Purple** honours the 2SLGBTQ+ Métis community.
- **Grey** honours the concrete and the urban communities we call home.
- **Blue** represents the sky, the water, and the Métis flag. The three blue stripes represent the three rivers that connect Toronto and York Region – the Humber, the Don, and the Rouge.
- **White** honours the wisdom of Métis Elders, Senators, and Knowledge Keepers, and exemplifies the infinity symbol and that our culture will live on.
- **Red** represents our heritage and our blood. It also honours Métis veterans.
- **Yellow** honours Métis women and honours those committed to ending violence and abuse.
- **Yellow, Red, Black, and White** represent the four directions, the diversity of the region, and the acknowledgement that we are on the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples.

Provided by the Toronto & York Region Métis Council.



The Inuit moved to different camps in the different seasons. Sleds were used to move a family’s belongings from one camp to the next. They created incredibly warm clothing from caribou hides. These clothes kept them warm during the cold winter months. The Inuit built snow houses known as igloos by cutting large pieces of snow and ice. These buildings could be built in an hour and provided shelter from the ice and snow. In the warmer months, the Inuit lived in tents made of sealskin.

*Traditional Inuit education involves children learning by watching and following examples of adults.*

Names are very important in Inuit culture and a lot of thought is given into the name of a child. Much like other Indigenous nations, traditional Inuit education involves children learning by watching and following examples of adults. Over time and with practice, they learned the skills needed to survive in the north.

Inuit societal values guide the way of life for many Inuit people. They outline how people should behave and their responsibilities.



**Inuuqatigiitsiarniq**  
***E-noo-ka-ti-gheet-see-ah-nik***  
Respecting others, relationships and caring for people.



**Tunnganarniq**  
***Toong-a-nung-nik***  
Fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive.



**Pijitsirniq**  
***Pee-yit-sing-nik***  
Serving and providing for family and/or community.



**Qanuqtuurniq**  
***Ka-nook-two-nik***  
Being innovative and resourceful.



**Aajiiqatigiinni**  
***Aah-yee-ka-ti-geen-nik***  
Decision making through discussion and consensus.



**Pilimmaksarniq**  
***Pee-leem-muk-sung-nik***  
Development of skills through observation, mentoring, practice, and effort.



**Ikajuqtigiinni**  
***Ee-ka-you-ka-ti-ghee-nik***  
Working together for a common cause.



**Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq**  
***Ah-vah-tit-tin-nik***  
***Ka-mutt-see-ah-nik***  
Respect and care for the land, animals and the environment.



Many Inuit people continue to live in the north. Inuktitut is one of the strongest and most widely spoken Indigenous languages in Canada. Most Inuit people can speak Inuktitut. Many Inuit people speak Inuktitut as their first language. The Inuit have a rich culture and Inuit carvings are famous throughout Canada. Throat singing is popular artform of the Inuit. Throat singing is usually done by two women who make a wide range of sounds and vibrations from deep in their throat and chest.

Although originally from the north, many Inuit people have moved south to Toronto. There are Inuit organisations, like Tungasuvvingat Inuit (*Toong-ah-soo-bing-aht Ee-noo-eet*), around Toronto who help Inuit people become used to life in Toronto. Life in Toronto is very different from life in the north.



## REFLECTION QUESTION



What are the similarities and differences between your culture and some of the Indigenous cultures in this chapter?

## TO DO ACTIVITY



Explore Indigenous art murals in Toronto either virtually or in person **using this map**, in the search bar on the left, type in the word Indigenous to narrow your search.



Street**ART**Toronto



CN Tower lit up orange to honour Indian residential school Survivors (Toronto, ON)  
Photograph reproduced with permission from photographer Jonathan Gazze

# CHAPTER THREE

## INDIGENOUS HISTORY IN TORONTO

According to **oral histories**, Indigenous peoples have lived on this land since the beginning of time.

However, settler accounts of “Canadian history” often begin in 1867 with the Confederation of Canada as a new country. Canadian history is often confused with the arrival of Europeans to Turtle Island and the accomplishments of White, male settlers. The history of this land is thousands of years old, not hundreds.

Even the name Canada is an Indigenous word. It is believed that “Canada” is an Anglicised version of the Wendat or Haudenosaunee word *Kanata* (*gah-nah-da*). This word meant “village” or “settlement.” When interacting with Europeans, Indigenous Peoples were trying to explain how to find the way to their village (Kanata). The Europeans assumed the word Kanata applied to all the land and began to call this land “Kanata” and later “Canada.”

The name “Toronto” also comes from an Indigenous word. There are a few possible origins for the name “Toronto.” One theory is that the word *Toronto* was adapted from the Mohawk Peoples’ word *Tkarón:to* (*tah-kah-ron-to / duh-gah-ron-do*) (“tree in the water there”) to describe a fishing technique. The Wendat Peoples also have a very similar word, *Karonto* (“log lying in the water”) and the Wyandot have a word *Torotō* (“plenty”). The placing of trees in the water was a popular fishing technique called *fishing weirs*. Fishing weirs use tree logs placed in the water to block the path of fish forcing them to swim into one narrow opening. There is archaeological evidence of fishing weirs being used in Ontario over 4,600 years ago. As the French also began using these waterways, they used the Indigenous place names for their maps. As the

### Oral History

The passing of knowledge through spoken word. Historians had to be talented storytellers because they were required to pass on thousands of years of history in great detail.

English slowly replaced the French as the dominant European settlers in the Toronto region, they also began to use these names. Thus, the name Toronto is an English version of the French pronunciation of an Indigenous word.

The City of Toronto was briefly known as York from 1793 to 1834. You can still see the old name around the city, such as at Fort York. In 1834, after much debate, it was decided the name Toronto would be used because maps already used this name. It was believed that Toronto sounded more “musical” and pleasing to the ear. Additionally, it was hoped that using “Toronto” would mean the city would not be confused with any other places in the world that also have the name York (e.g., New York City).



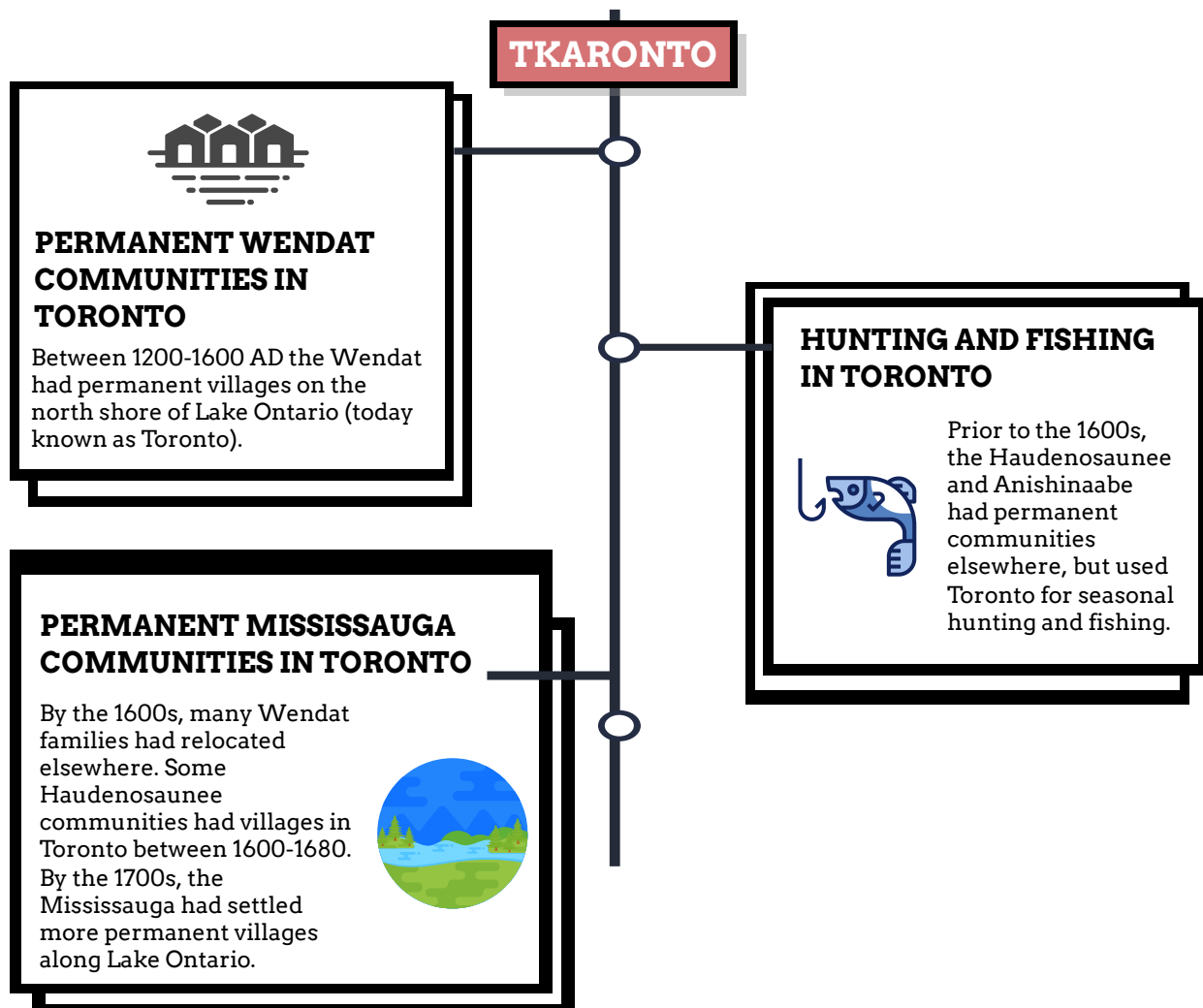
# Pre-Contact History

Toronto has been a significant place of history and transformation for many Indigenous nations. Toronto's access to the **Great Lakes** is one of the reasons it has an incredibly rich history of bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples together over generations.

## Dish with One Spoon: Sharing this Land

Long before Canada was founded, the area that is now Toronto was a busy place. The Wendat Peoples had permanent settlements in the Toronto area. Other Indigenous Peoples including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe used the land mainly for hunting, fishing, and access to trade routes with the Great Lakes.

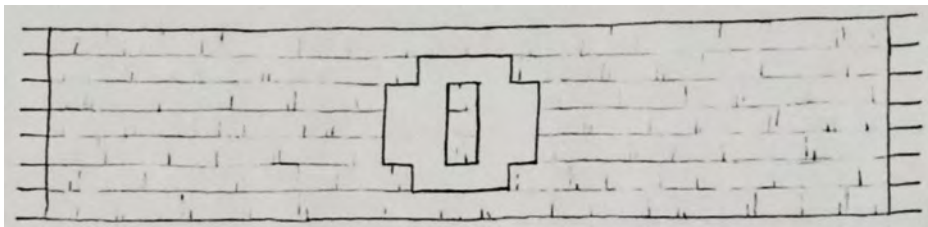
Such busy waterways and shorelines created concerns over rights and responsibilities to use this region. The Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant was negotiated by the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee. This agreement was made to ensure the sustainability of the Great Lakes region. The agreement outlined how all Indigenous Peoples today and tomorrow could continue to benefit from using this land. It is an agreement to share the lands of the Great Lakes region peacefully and respectfully.



“Dish with One Spoon” is a symbol for a group of people coming together to share a bowl of food. There is only one dish for everyone to eat from. When people share one dish of food together, they must be mindful of how much they take. They need to consider how much is left for others. The “dish” represents the land. The “spoon” represents the people taking nourishment from the land. Importantly, there is no knife. It was believed that a knife could be used as a weapon, and it was left out. Haudenosaunee historian Richard Hill shares some of the oral history teachings of this treaty:

*The idea was that this beautiful earth that was given to us is like a dish and inside that dish is everything for us to be healthy and to be fed. So, all the plants, all the animals, the birds... And the concept was: we're all going to share from the dish with the same spoon. Everybody gets their equal share; everybody gets an opportunity to take that. So, it's about sharing the resources of this land. But in order to share it, there are some simple rules. One is you only take what you need right now. Feed yourself, make yourself well. You always leave something in the dish for other people so they can enjoy it as well. And you keep the dish clean. You don't pollute your kitchen; you don't pollute where the food comes from.*

You can watch the entire video with Rick's teachings on the [Canadian Encyclopedia "Voices from Here"](#) series.



Sketch, "Dish with One Spoon (Sewatokwà:tshera)", 2023.  
Reproduced with permission from Haudenosaunee artist Summer Hill

The Dish with One Spoon agreement granted access to the Haudenosaunee to use the Great Lakes for hunting, fishing, and travel. The Haudenosaunee had to have the permission of the Mississauga to use the land. The agreement became particularly important when non-Indigenous settlers arrived, and the fur trade caused conflict over who has access and rights to these lands. The Dish with One Spoon continues to guide how Indigenous Peoples view the sharing of the land. It includes all who live on this land, including newcomers.

## Visitors and Changing Landscape in Toronto

— The Great Lakes have been occupied by Indigenous Peoples since the beginning of time. The Toronto region became an important place for Indigenous Peoples between 7,000 and 2,000 years ago.

Toronto became a shortcut for those travelling between Lake Ontario and Georgian Bay. This shortcut is called the Carrying Place Trail. Between the 1300s and 1600s Wendat communities in the Toronto region began leaving Toronto to join their Wendat Confederacy relatives in Georgian Bay. The Wendat continued to use Toronto as hunting grounds. Without permanent villages in Toronto the land was given time to

rejuvenate and heal itself. By the mid-1600s, the Haudenosaunee were moving from their ancestral homelands in New York state and sought Toronto as a new village site. The Seneca (one of the First Nations in the Haudenosaunee Confederacy) established two villages in Toronto between the 1660s - 1680s. One village was called *Taiiako'n* and was located on the east bank of the Humber River.

The second village, *Ganatsekwyagon* was located on the present-day site of Bead Hill in Scarborough. The Anishinaabe Three Fires Confederacy - composed of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi First Nations - fought back against the Haudenosaunee moving onto this land. They were successful in pushing back the Haudenosaunee from establishing permanent settlements in the Toronto region. The land was controlled by the Mississauga. The Mississauga became strong allies to the newly arrived French settlers.

## Settlement & Rapid Change

French fur traders and settlers began travelling the Great Lakes in the early 1600s. The French quickly set up settlements along the waterways. The Carrying Place Trail became particularly useful to the French, and the first French store was established in 1720 near the Humber River.

Canadian beaver fur was very valuable in the European fashion industry. First Nations and European newcomers established the fur trade industry across North America. Some of the finest furs were exported from northern Canada. The fur trade created new settlements made up of both First Nations and European fur traders. Many First Nations women and European men intermarried. Sometimes they married for love and sometimes to create alliances for the fur trade. Through some of these intermarriages a new Indigenous nation was created: the Métis.

The fur trade changed the balance of power among Indigenous Peoples. The Indigenous nations who participated in the fur trade gained new economic and political connections with European allies. The Mississauga of the Toronto region were considered people of "good credit" in their relationships and transactions with the French fur traders. They came to be known as the Mississauga of the Credit. The local Mississauga community still uses this name today. The Wendat First Nation also evolved and shifted due to the fur trade. Toronto served as the primary travel route for trade with Europe. Because of this, many rival First Nations and especially the Haudenosaunee, wanted to claim this territory from the Wendat Confederacy.

The Wendat Confederacy thrived on the fur trade but contact with Europeans also cost many lives. Approximately 45% of the Wendat population died because of foreign European diseases in the 1630s and 1640s. Weakened and tired from such immense loss, in 1648 and 1649 the Wendat Confederacy was defeated by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. This defeat meant that the Wendat People had to leave their traditional territories. Some Wendat People fled east into Quebec to be protected by their French allies from the Haudenosaunee. Today, most of the Wendat community is in Wendake, Quebec, but their ties to Toronto remain strong.

Sketch of a Haudenosaunee woman dancing in traditional regalia, 2023. Reproduced with permission from artist Imani Mitten (Six Nations, ON).



## Need for New Alliances

Before many Haudenosaunee communities moved into what is now Ontario and Québec in Canada, they occupied a vast territory in northern New York state. In the early 1600s, Dutch settlements were growing quickly in New York, and the Haudenosaunee knew the importance of negotiating an alliance on their own terms. As the Dutch and Haudenosaunee learned more about how the other lived, they saw immense differences in their values, practices, languages, and politics. The Dutch viewed the land as both a wilderness that must be tamed and as a resource. The Haudenosaunee saw the land as a relative. The Dutch values were based on capitalism and seeking profit for the individual. The Haudenosaunee shared their wealth and worked together.

The Haudenosaunee wished to live differently but peacefully alongside the Dutch. It was agreed that neither the Haudenosaunee or the Dutch would tell the other what to do or how to govern their people. They entered into an agreement, agreeing to three principles to form a treaty: 1) they will live alongside each other in *friendship*, 2) there will be *peace* between their people, and 3) this agreement will last *forever*. The Haudenosaunee called this the **Two Row Wampum** - sometimes referred to as *Kaswentha* (*gus-wen-ta*) - and the Dutch call this agreement the **Silver Covenant Chain of Friendship**.



Replica wampum belts signifying the Silver Covenant Chain of Friendship (top) and the Two Row Wampum (Bottom). Dates between 1910-1921. Courtesy of Library Archives Canada (item #: 5378283).

The Haudenosaunee represented this Two Row treaty with a wampum belt. Wampum are purple and white beads made from shells. The beads are attached together by strings. Wampum beads can be made into jewellery and belts which symbolise teachings of treaties and alliances. The Two Row Wampum is represented by a background of white beads with two parallel rows of purple beads. One row of purple represents the Dutch in their ships. The other row of purple represents the Haudenosaunee in their canoes. The Two Row Wampum reminds us that both boats can travel down the same path in friendship alongside one another, but neither boat should interfere with the other.

*The Two Row Wampum reminds us that both boats can travel down the same path in friendship...but neither boat should interfere with the other.*

The Dutch share this same message in their Silver Covenant Chain of Friendship. They represent this agreement with the Haudenosaunee with three silver chains (one chain for each of the three principles of the treaty). It was important the chains were not iron because iron can rust and break over time. Instead, they used silver because silver must be polished, renewed, and preserved for a lifetime. This was meant to symbolise that the agreement was not meant to be a one-time contract. It was an ongoing relationship that has no ending. The Haudenosaunee and Dutch agree that their descendants must continue to meet often to “polish the chain” and continue to agree to the treaty forever. When the Dutch were defeated by the English in 1667, it was the responsibility of the English to take over the Two Row/Silver Covenant Chain. The Haudenosaunee-Dutch Covenant Chain then became known as the Haudenosaunee-English Covenant Chain alliance. This agreement still exists today.

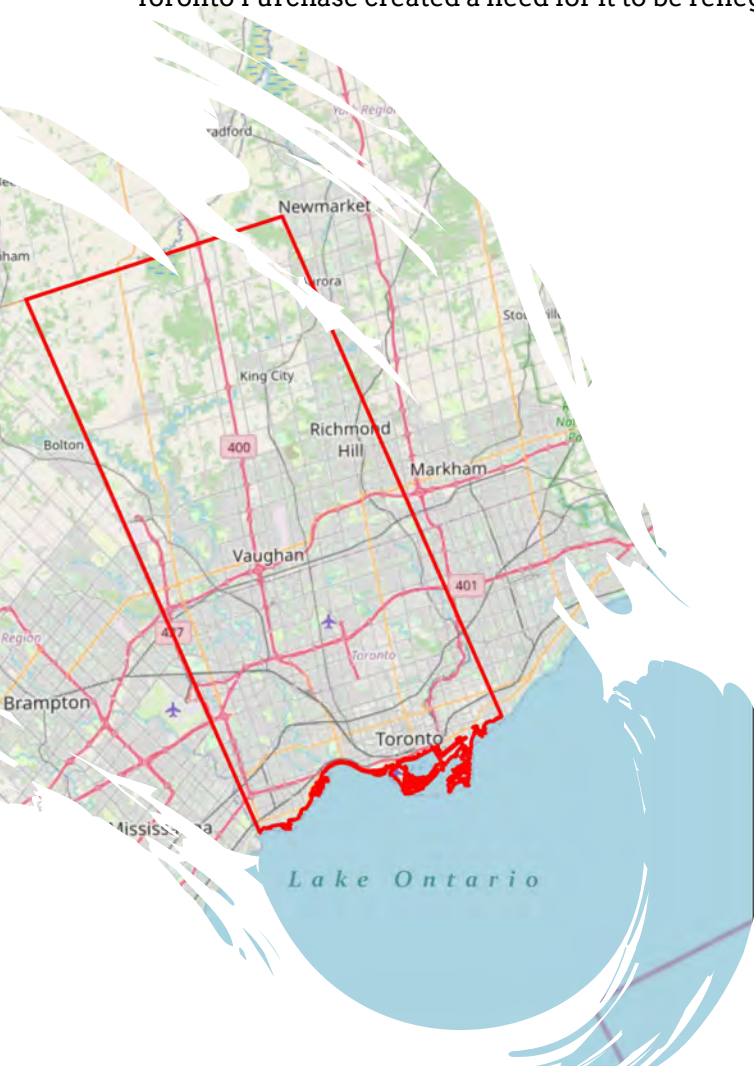
## Toronto Purchase

In 1787, representatives of the Mississauga nation were given gifts from the British in exchange for the use of their lands on the Humber River. There is a difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous views on gifts. The Mississauga saw these gifts as the *start* of a new relationship. This was seen as the start of a relationship because the Mississauga believed they would share the lands together. However, the British saw these gifts as the *end* of a relationship. They viewed the gifts as the price for the sale of the land. It was unclear if the land had been sold to the British or if the British could only use the land with the permission of the Mississauga. It was also unclear how much land the agreement included and where the boundary lines of the agreement ended. Although the sale of the lands was unclear, the British did guarantee that the Mississauga would never live in poverty. The British also promised that the Mississauga could continue to hunt and fish on their lands as they had always done. The lack of clarity and confusion about the 1787 Toronto Purchase created a need for it to be renegotiated.

In 1805, the Toronto Purchase was agreed upon again. The new agreement was meant to officially define the boundaries of the Toronto Purchase. However, the conditions for the Mississauga had deteriorated since the first agreement in 1787. The Mississauga had lost 30% of their population due to disease. They also lost access to their hunting and fishing territories, despite being promised this by the British.

On the first day of discussing the new agreement, the British acquired the land between Etobicoke Creek and Ashbridge’s Bay. This agreement became the new Toronto Purchase (also known as Treaty 13). The next day, however, the Mississauga were pressured into surrendering the land west of Etobicoke Creek to Burlington Bay (Hamilton, ON). This became known as the Head of the Lake Agreement (also known as Treaty 14).

To the **left** is a map of the 1805 Toronto Purchase treaty (Treaty 13), as provided by the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.





In exchange for the land, the Mississauga were to be paid 10 shillings (about \$60 in 2021) and received 2,000 flints, 24 kettles, 120 mirrors, 24 hats, 96 gallons of rum and a bale of flannel (sourced from *Treaty Guide for Torontonians*, 2022). The boundaries of Treaty 13 and Treaty 14, however, remained unclear.

In the decades following, the Mississauga continued to speak out against the injustice and inconsistencies in the Toronto Purchase. Toronto continued to grow and expand. People began settling on land that was never formally included in the Toronto Purchase. This process continued for decades.

In 1986, the Mississauga filed a lawsuit against the Canadian government over the Toronto Purchase. The Mississauga argued that the British took more land than agreed upon and that the payment was not equal to the land's actual worth. In 2010, a final agreement was reached. The Mississauga of the Credit First Nation received \$145 million, which is equal to the value of the lands sold in 1787. This is one example of modern-day treaty claims across Canada. Treaties are not things of the past. Many treaties are still being made between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian Government. Indigenous communities have been protesting for the injustice of illegal land purchases and takeovers by the British in the 1700-1900s.

## Shifting Powers and Legacy of Colonisation

Early relationships between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous settlers were based on needing to understand one another. Settlers in Canada were vulnerable in this new climate. They heavily depended upon Indigenous allies for survival. Indigenous Peoples knew that if these new settlers planned to stay, it would need to happen on Indigenous Peoples' terms. English and French settlers had to learn multiple Indigenous languages. They had to study the complex political structures of diverse Indigenous nations. They also had to honour Indigenous ways of living in balance with the land.

Within a few generations, however, this delicate balance of power shifted immensely. In 1759 the British defeated the French in the Seven Years War. The victorious British King George II signed the *Royal Proclamation Act of 1763* into law. The Act laid the foundation for British rule in North America. This Act transferred French-controlled lands to the British. It placed all Indigenous Peoples and their land under the "protection" of the British Crown. Previously, the relationships between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous settlers were always done as equals. The *Royal Proclamation* changed this. It was forced on Indigenous Peoples without their consent. This Act allowed the British Crown (i.e., government) to make decisions for Indigenous Peoples. This was done even though Indigenous nations always remained sovereign and independent.

The British took control over what would become Ontario and Québec. The British Empire wanted to quickly expand across North America. It wanted to claim as much land and resources as possible. Indigenous nations did not consent to becoming the minority population on their own lands. They had no desire to lose their cultures, languages, or ways of life. Indigenous nations were actively resistant to British growth and expansion.

Because of Indigenous resistance and activism, the *Royal Proclamation* recognised Indigenous Peoples' ownership over their lands. This meant only the British Crown could "purchase" Indigenous land through a treaty. This laid the foundation for the treaty making process which is still used today. However, once the British realised that Indigenous Peoples did not have any intention of surrendering their land, the British government created many aggressive assimilation policies to destroy Indigenous Peoples and their ways of life.

*Indigenous nations did not consent to becoming the minority population on their own lands.*

## Indian Act, 1876

The **Indian Act** is the primary law which governs First Nations rights and lands in Canada today. While the *Indian Act* provides some rights to First Nations Peoples, it also limits and denies other rights.

The Act grants status and privileges to Status First Nations Peoples in Canada. First Nations people who are "Status" are recognised as legal "Indians" under the *Indian Act*. "Status Indians" are registered with the Canadian Federal Government. They are given a card with their number and picture. "Status Indians" are given some special rights (e.g., treaty rights), but these rights are often difficult to get.

The *Indian Act* also limits Indigenous rights because the legislation is not controlled by Indigenous Peoples but by the Federal Government. The original intent of the *Indian Act* was not to protect Indigenous rights but to assimilate Indigenous Peoples. This was done to clear the land for European settlement across North America. The *Indian Act* forcibly stripped Indigenous Peoples of their cultures, identities, lands, and ability to self-govern.

In many ways, it became illegal to be an Indigenous person. For example, speaking an Indigenous language was illegal. Indigenous Peoples were also not allowed to gather in groups of more than three people. Between 1885 and 1951, the *Indian Act* became more racist and restrictive. The **reserve system** in Canada was created by the *Indian Act*. The reserve system assigned small pieces of land reserved exclusively for First Nations Peoples. These small pieces of land were often provided by the Federal Government as part of signing treaties with First Nations. Reserves are usually only tiny portions of the lands the First Nation previously occupied. There are 3,394 reserves in Canada and approximately 50% of First Nations people today live on a reserve.

### Indian

An outdated and offensive term, often used to describe First Nations (and sometimes Métis) Peoples. It is a legally recognised identity for Status and Non-Status "Indians" under the *Indian Act* in Canada. It is not appropriate to use the term unless one is referring to the legal definition.

The *Indian Act* removed traditional governance structures, where they banned traditional leaders from governing their people. Traditional leadership was replaced with a forced election system which is still in place today with the elected representatives governing a reserve.

The Act made it illegal to practise Indigenous religious and cultural ceremonies. By 1895 all ceremonies and cultural dances were banned. In 1925 any Indigenous dancing of any kind was banned. Indian Agents were agents of the Federal Government. They were sent to First Nations reserves to enforce restrictions and report any violations to the Canadian Government. First Nations Peoples could not leave their reserve without permission from an Indian Agent. When Indigenous Peoples looked to fight this injustice through the Canadian courts, the *Indian Act* made it illegal for First Nations Peoples to hire legal representation (i.e., lawyers) between 1927 and 1951.

### Reserve

A designated piece of land the Federal Government has given a First Nation to use. Many First Nations Peoples were forced onto reserves when colonial treaties were signed. Not all First Nations have reserves.

To make the process of assimilating Indigenous Peoples in Canadian society faster, the Federal Government targeted children. A 1951 amendment to the *Indian Act* gave the provinces legal right to take over Indigenous child welfare. This granted them power to remove thousands of Indigenous children from their families and place them in non-Indigenous homes. This tragedy resulted in what is known as the "Sixties Scoop." The longest standing practice of removing Indigenous

children occurred through the Indian residential schooling system which operated from 1831 until 1996 across Canada.

## Indian Residential Schools

*Please be aware the following information may be especially disturbing to some, as it covers themes of displacement, starvation, child abuse, and death.*

For nearly 170 years Indian residential schools operated under the Federal Government of Canada. The day-to-day operations of the schools were handled by different churches (such as the Catholic and Anglican churches). The policies and funding came from the Canadian Government. The objective of Indian residential schools was not to provide an education or benefit for Indigenous children. The purpose of residential schools was to remove Indigenous children from their families and assimilate them into the White, Christian, colonial Canadian society. The first Prime Minister of Canada, John A. Macdonald said that Indigenous children should not receive an education in their communities, because then a child “is simply a savage who can read and write.” Instead, children were forcibly removed from their families and placed in schools away from their communities. Sometimes these schools were hundreds of kilometres away from home. Children as young as 4 years old were taken away and were expected to remain in school until 16 years old. The families were not allowed to visit their children or take them out of the school. The children who ran away and the families who hid their children were arrested. Approximately 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children went to the 130 residential schools that operated throughout Canada.



Kent Monkman, *The Scream*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 84 in. x 126 in. Collection of the Denver Art Museum. Image courtesy of the artist.

Indigenous children who attended these schools faced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. This abuse was most often done by the school staff. Indigenous children who attended residential schools were separated from their families at a young age. Upon arrival at the school, the children were stripped of their traditional clothing. Their hair, which is a sacred part of Indigenous identity, was cut. Many children were given new Christian names. Some children were not given a name at all and were simply referred to by a number.

## Key Facts about Indian Residential Schools

<p><b>What were residential schools?</b></p>	<p>Residential schools were mandatory for Indigenous children, funded by the Canadian Government, and run by churches. Indigenous families did not have a choice in sending their children.</p> <p>These schools were mostly run by the Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches.</p>
<p><b>When did residential schools operate?</b></p>	<p>Churches ran residential schools for Indigenous children as early as the 1600s, but these first schools were mostly done with support from Indigenous families.</p> <p>In 1831, the first residential school was opened by the Canadian Government in Brantford, Ontario - just outside of Toronto.</p> <p>By 1885, the <i>Indian Act</i> made it illegal for Indigenous families to keep their children out of the schools. The Act gave the Federal Government permission to take children away to a residential school. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) were given permission to forcibly enter the houses of Indigenous families and remove their children.</p> <p>The last residential school closed in 1996 in Punnichy, Saskatchewan.</p>
<p><b>What was the purpose of residential schools?</b></p>	<p>The objective of residential schools was not to give Indigenous children a valuable education, but to remove them from their community and force them to assimilate into a settler Canadian society. Residential schools were designed to destroy Indigenous identities by forcing young children to adopt a settler identity. The schools were part of a national strategy to get rid of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.</p>
<p><b>How many children attended residential schools?</b></p>	<p>Approximately 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children across Canada attended the schools.</p>
<p><b>How many children died?</b></p>	<p>An estimated 6,000 children died at residential schools. The exact number is unknown due to incomplete records. Gravesites are still being uncovered at residential school sites.</p> <p>Disease, abuse, neglect, malnutrition, and abortions contributed to these horrific childhood deaths. Some schools had cemeteries built into their architectural design because death was so common.</p>

<p><b>What did a typical day in the school look like?</b></p>	<p>Until the 1950s, the schools ran as “half day” schools. Only half of the day was spent in the classroom. The other half was spent doing manual labour. The schools were underfunded by the government. The children were forced to work to keep the school running. Girls would cook, clean, sew, and do laundry. Boys would farm, as well as do construction and maintenance.</p> <p>Schools had strict schedules. Children were not allowed to speak their traditional languages. If siblings and family members were sent to the same school, they were not allowed to talk to each other.</p> <p>Some children were subjected to government-endorsed experimentation. The children were purposefully not fed enough for prolonged periods of time and were not given dental services.</p> <p>Before the 1960s, the children were not allowed to return home for holidays. Many Indigenous families did not see their children for many years.</p>
<p><b>What type of education did the children receive?</b></p>	<p>The children did not receive a proper education. Many teachers at residential schools were not qualified to teach. Children were forced to learn English or French, convert to Christianity, and become ashamed of their Indigenous identity.</p> <p>Very few children left school with the skills and education they needed to get a job. Some children in residential schools received a good education and had successful careers, but this was not the experience of most children.</p> <p>Residential schools were not designed to provide Indigenous children with an education.</p>




Main building of the Mohawk Institute farm in Brantford [Ont.]  
Source: Library and Archives Canada/JohnBoyd fonds/a071300

Many Indigenous families wanted to provide their children with an education. They advocated for building schools in their communities. Indigenous families wanted their children to receive an education while remaining at home. Instead, residential schools ripped Indigenous children from the arms of their families. Residential schools denied Indigenous communities the joy, love, and laughter of their children for many generations.

The longest operating residential school in Canada is close to Toronto. The Mohawk Institute residential school is located in Brantford, ON (pictured above). Approximately 15,000 students attended the Mohawk Institute.



The residential school system in Canada continues to have devastating impacts on Indigenous communities today. The loss of Indigenous languages, cultures, and identities is directly linked to residential schools. The children who died at residential schools are still mourned and loved by their families and communities. Someone who attended a residential school and survived is often called a “Residential School Survivor”. The term Survivor acknowledges the horrific conditions the children had to endure at residential schools. It also honours the thousands of Indigenous children who never came home from these schools.

TO DO



ACTIVITY

Take some time to honour and reflect on the stories of residential school Survivors by watching this **Heritage Minute video** on the death of Chanie Wenjack.

HERITAGE  
MINUTES

## Seeking Justice

Indigenous Peoples have and continue to fight for justice. Families spoke their ancestral languages and held ceremonies in secret. They risked being sent to prison if caught doing this by the Indian Agent. The reason these languages and ceremonies are practised today is because of those who risked punishment to keep them alive.

Indigenous peoples spent decades advocating for their rights through protests, court cases, and political action. Indigenous war veterans were also advocates for Indigenous rights. Thousands of Indigenous Peoples served in the Canadian military in World War I and World War II, and many serve today. Despite not having rights as Canadian citizens, Indigenous veterans risked their lives in hopes of breaking down social and legal discrimination.

The struggle for Indigenous rights to be recognised by the Canadian Government was finally recognised in 1982. The *Canadian Constitution Act of 1982* recognised the treaty rights of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples in Canada. This was the first time Métis and Inuit rights were guaranteed by the Canadian Government. There have been many recent advancements in Indigenous rights in Canada. However, there are still many issues that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples face. What continues to stand the test of time, however, is the Indigenous relationship to land that has never wavered.

# Ancient Landmarks in Toronto

The land is a symbol of identity and connection to Ancestors for Indigenous Peoples. Therefore, Toronto has many culturally and spiritually significant places for Indigenous Peoples.



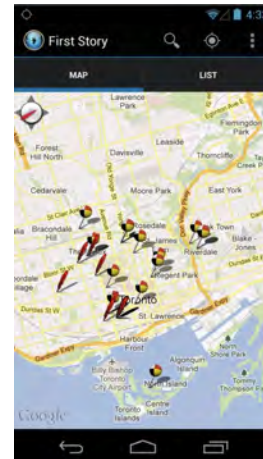
## Alexandra Site

A 600-year-old Wendat village was in what is now the L'Amoreaux North Park in north Scarborough. Unfortunately, the original name of the village is no longer known. A large archaeological dig in 2000-01 revealed this village was 2.6 hectares in size. It was a large village for its time. Sixteen longhouses would have stood on this site, housing approximately 800-1000 people. Between the years 1400 and 1650 the members of this community moved out of the Toronto area north to Georgian Bay. The reasons for this move were likely environmental (depleted resources) and political. The land needed time to rejuvenate. There was also growing pressure for the smaller communities to join the larger Wendat Confederacy for protection from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

**TO DO**  
**ACTIVITY**

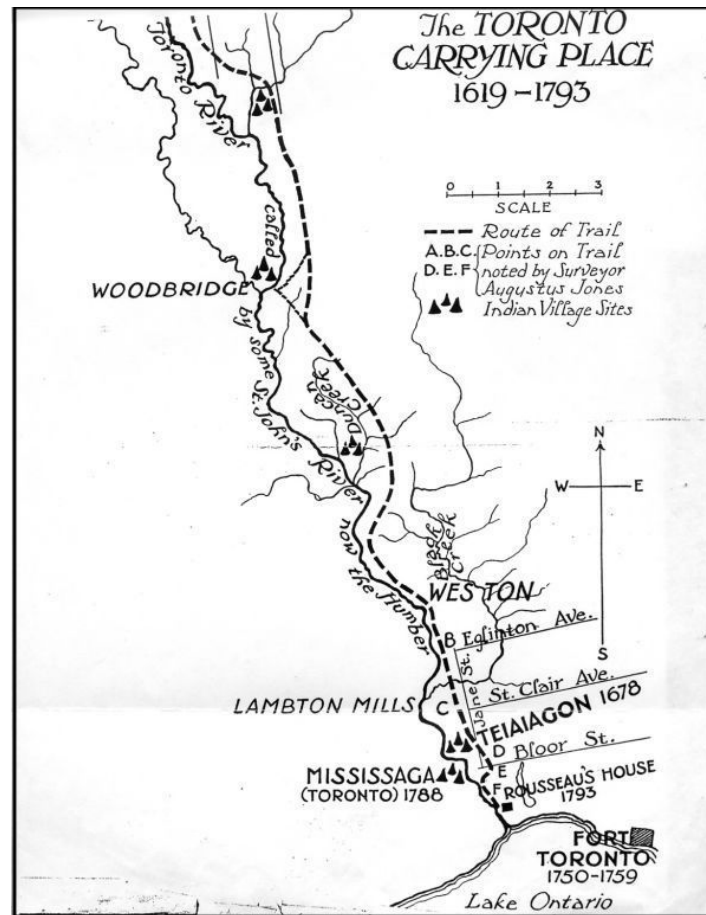


Download the **First Story app** and plan your own Indigenous walking tour.



## Toronto Islands

The Toronto Islands are sacred lands the Mississaugas call *Mnisiing* (*Min-eh-sing*) which means "on the islands". The islands served as a place of healing, ceremony, childbirth, and burial. The islands were also important for food harvesting, hunting, and fishing.



Map of the Lower Humber River and the Toronto Carrying Place trail, showing First Nations villages.



## Carrying Place Trail

The Carrying Place Trail was a 46-kilometre trail that was a shortcut from Lake Ontario to Lake Simcoe. The trail was an alternative to navigating the difficult Humber River, also known as the “Niwa’ah Onega’gaih’ih” or “little thundering waters.” The river was filled with obstacles for traditional canoe paddling. For example, the Humber River was difficult to navigate because of beaver dams that blocked the route. Sometimes the waters were too swampy to paddle through. Much of the trail involved *portaging*, which is carrying a canoe over land. The Humber River was known as *Cobekhenonk* by the Mississauga First Nation, which translates to “leave their canoes and go back.” The Carrying Place Trail was well marked by its use over hundreds of years. It was described as “worn deep, sometimes a foot, almost always six inches into the earth.” Upon the arrival of the French, the Wendat showed their French allies the trail. This trail made trade in and out of Lake Ontario possible, laying the foundation for Toronto.

The Carrying Place Trail was used by Indigenous, French, and English travellers until Yonge Street was built in 1794. The trail has been destroyed by development, but there are city streets that follow the ancient route such as Islington Avenue. There are also markers and plaques commemorating this history. For example, Fort Rouillé was a French trading post built in 1751 along the Carrying Place Trail. This post stood where the Toronto Exhibition Place is today.

You can walk part of this history by following the [Shared Path Trails Guide](#) created by the City of Toronto.





## Tabor Hill Ossuary

Located in Scarborough, the Tabor Hill Ossuary holds a large burial of Wendat Ancestors. There are nearly 500 individuals buried there. This sacred site dates to the 13th century. Large gravesites such as this one were common for both the Wendat and Haudenosaunee Peoples. Initially the land was cleared for the building of a subdivision and for Highway 401. Once the gravesite was found the construction was stopped. The Haudenosaunee and Wendat Peoples were invited to hold a ceremony to honour the site and respect their Ancestors buried within.



## Spadina Road

Spadina Road is a central north-south road running through downtown Toronto. The name Spadina is taken from the Anishinaabemowin word *ishpadinaa* (Ish-pah-dee-naa). It means "high hill" or "going up the hill."

## ihati'indouhchou - Clan Totems / Energetic Signatures

If you find yourself on Queen Street West, be sure to keep your eye on the ground. There are 22 Clan Markers and 5 descriptive plates in the sidewalk pavers of Queen Street W. (between Spadina and McCaul, on the north side).

Message from artist Catherine Tamaro (Wyandot of Anderdon Nation):

The 22 Bronze Totemic markers in bronze are my interpretations of the symbols of the Indigenous, Inuit and Métis Peoples. Clans are important for kinship connections, and community responsibilities. A Clan's totem, or a symbol reflects their relationship to the Natural World in which we live.

This project was done in collaboration with the Queen West Business Improvement Associon, PMA Landscape Architects and Scott Eunson (Metal Artist) and in consultation with the appropriate Communities.



*yändia'wich*, Wendat Turtle Clan  
Reproduced with permission from artist  
Catherine Tamaro ©  
Photo by Scott Eunson

## Modern Indigenous Presence in the City

There are many historic landmarks of Indigenous history throughout Toronto. Importantly, there are also many modern-day landmarks and places of significance in the city. As you explore the city keep your eyes open to the many unexpected places Indigenous people reclaim this space, such as murals, art installations, and protest.

### TO DO ACTIVITY



Go to Queen West Street, between Spadina and McCaul on the north sidewalk. Find and read the descriptive plaques. Consider how these words deepen your understanding of Indigenous relationships to Toronto.

### TO DO ACTIVITY



Visit Indigenous sites located on or close to the Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) campus.



Inuit throat singing with Charlotte Qamaniq and Alexia Galloway-Alainga  
Photograph by Rudolf H. Boettcher

# CHAPTER FOUR

## CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS LIVES

Ontario is home to more than 400,000 Indigenous Peoples. The Indigenous population is growing at a much faster rate than the rest of Canada.

Approximately 72% of Indigenous Peoples in Ontario live in urban areas (Our Health Counts, 2016). Toronto has the largest Indigenous population in Ontario. There are 45,000-60,000 Indigenous Peoples living in the city. Many Indigenous Peoples move to Toronto for school or work. Many Indigenous Peoples maintain close ties to their home communities. Others identify as an urban Indigenous person. Urban Indigenous Peoples have closer connections to Toronto than an ancestral community. Most of the Indigenous population in Toronto are First Nations people (85%). The Métis represent 14% and the Inuit about 0.4% of Toronto's Indigenous population (Our Health Counts, 2016). Most First Nations Peoples in Toronto are Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee. Ojibway and Cree are the two most common Indigenous languages spoken in Toronto. Toronto is also home to a large and diverse **Two-Spirit** community.

Over the years, some Indigenous Peoples intermarried with newcomers to this land. This created a group of people with Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritages. For example, Toronto is home to a large Afro-Indigenous community. This community has family roots to African and Indigenous Peoples. Some African Peoples were forcibly brought to Canada through slavery, which was legal in Canada for 200 years until 1834. After slavery was made illegal in Canada others fled slavery in the U.S. by coming to Canada. Over the generations, people of African origins intermarried with Indigenous Peoples. This created a distinct Afro-Indigenous identity.

### Two-Spirit

Someone who has both masculine and feminine qualities and often identifies with the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Indigenous Peoples are important members of the vibrant urban community of Toronto. Indigenous Peoples hold their ancestral traditions close. They are also part of modern everyday life in Toronto. Indigenous Peoples in Toronto are students, business owners, professionals, and more. Indigenous Peoples work in all employment sectors. Indigenous Peoples live in all areas and neighbourhoods of Toronto. There are several Indigenous organisations throughout the city (more information in Chapter 6) which host community events and cultural celebrations. Indigenous cultures are not a thing of the past. They are thriving in both urban and rural communities in Canada.

Some Indigenous Peoples and communities continue to experience many challenges due to the colonisation of their lands.



# Issues Indigenous Communities are Facing

Due to the ongoing legacy of colonialism, some Indigenous Peoples experience economic and social challenges.

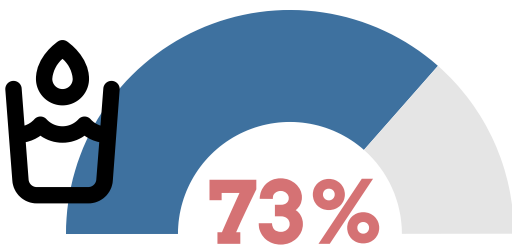
Canada was built upon **settler colonialism**. This means that Canada’s original purpose was to bring immigrant settlers from a colonising state (primarily Great Britain) to settle on Indigenous lands. The settlers then claimed this land as their own. Settler colonialism attempts to destroy Indigenous ways of life. However, it is often shown as “progress” in Canadian history books. Canadian history made it seem like it was a good thing that Canada was developed and re-settled by non-Indigenous Peoples. There is little discussion on how this “development” benefited settlers at the expense of Indigenous peoples.

Settler colonialism places European values as being the most important. It forces these values on all others in Canada.

## Settler Colonialism

A form of colonialism where Indigenous populations are replaced by an invasive settler society. Over time, the new colonial society claims ownership and control of the colony.

We might think of the colonisation of Canada as something that happened in the past, but settler colonialism continues today. Some Indigenous Peoples in Canada live in conditions that may seem unimaginable in Canada. For example, Canada has one of the best clean water systems in the world, and yet many First Nations communities continue to lack access to clean and safe drinking water. In Toronto, Indigenous Peoples experience issues related to affordable housing, mental health, and job insecurity. Up to 90% of Indigenous Peoples in Toronto are considered low-income. Approximately 30% of Indigenous Peoples in Toronto have experienced unstable housing situations, including homelessness. Some Indigenous Peoples live in lower income neighbourhoods and are more likely to be arrested and be victims of a crime.



*73% of First Nations communities have medium to high risk of contaminated water.*

**28 years**  
*Canada’s longest water advisory is in the Neskantaga First Nation, where residents experience health complications from their water.*



**1 in 6**

*Indigenous people in Canada live in crowded housing (houses not suitable for the number of people who live there). This is double the national average for non-Indigenous people.*



**3.5 times**

*Indigenous women are 3.5 times more likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous women.*

Issues such as these are made worse by the common myths and stereotypes which some people in Canada hold about Indigenous Peoples. Stereotypes are oversimplified and inaccurate representations of a group of people.

## Myths & Stereotypes

Many Canadians are unaware that some information they hear about Indigenous Peoples is inaccurate and harmful. This harmful information is often presented as a myth or stereotype.

There are myths and stereotypes about Indigenous Peoples, just like there are myths and stereotypes about immigrants, which are wrong and offensive. Some of the common myths and stereotypes about Indigenous Peoples are explained below.



**MYTH**

**+ All Indigenous Peoples live on reserves.**



**FACT**

**+ Only Status Indians can live on a reserve.**  
Approximately 40% of status Indians live on reserve. 51.8% of all Indigenous Peoples in Canada live in urban settings.



**MYTH**

+ **Indigenous knowledge, cultures, and languages were only used in the past.** Indigenous knowledges are not relevant today.



**FACT**

+ **Indigenous ceremonies and traditions continue to be practised today.** The Government of Canada made Indigenous cultural practices illegal from 1854 until the 1950s. Residential schools were designed to destroy Indigenous languages and cultures. However, the revitalization of Indigenous languages is happening across North America. Indigenous Peoples continue to keep their culture and languages alive because this ancient knowledge is very important to the health and wellbeing of all people.

Indigenous knowledge has always offered important information to help us better understand how our natural world provides for us and how we need to take care of the natural world.



**MYTH**

+ **Indigenous Peoples do not pay taxes.**



**FACT**

+ **Some First Nations people do not have to pay income tax. However, this is a very small minority (8%) of Indigenous Peoples.**

The Indian Act states that a First Nations person must be 1) a Status Indian, 2) live on a First Nations reserve, and 3) also work on a First Nations reserve to not pay income tax. Even Status Indians working off a reserve must pay income taxes.

All Métis and Inuit people pay taxes.



**MYTH**

+ **Indigenous Peoples get more benefits than everyone else.**



**FACT**

+ **Indigenous rights in Canada are structured differently than the rights and privileges of other Canadians.** Canadians receive support and services from both the federal and provincial governments. Indigenous Peoples, however, have historic treaty agreements with the British Crown. These agreements are now the responsibility of the Federal Government. While education and healthcare are responsibilities of the provincial and territorial governments for Canadians, the Federal Government is responsible for First Nations education and healthcare.



**MYTH**

+ **All Indigenous Peoples look the same and have the same beliefs and practices.**



**FACT**

+ **There is a lot of diversity in the appearance and beliefs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.** Each Indigenous nation, community, and family have diverse histories, cultures, and traditions. As a result, there is no one way to “look” or “be” Indigenous.



**MYTH**

+ **All Indigenous Peoples value and carry cultural teachings.**



**FACT**

+ **Indigenous Peoples are a diverse group of people.** Each Indigenous person has a variety of unique experiences. Some people grew up surrounded by their traditional language and culture. Others have never had the opportunity to access cultural knowledge or do not have interest in incorporating culture and language into their lives.

It is important to understand that not every Indigenous person you meet will have knowledge of their culture and language. Those who do, may not be interested in sharing or discussing cultural teachings for a variety of reasons.





**MYTH**

+ **Indigenous Peoples need to get over residential schools because it happened a long time ago.**



**FACT**

+ **The last residential school closed in 1996. This is a very recent event.** These schools operated for more than 150 years. Indigenous children were removed from their communities over many generations - some children never returned home at all. The trauma and impact of residential schools continues to significantly impact Indigenous families today.

Many Indigenous Peoples alive today attended these schools. Many more Indigenous Peoples are the children and grandchildren of these Survivors. The mental health of many families was severely affected. Indigenous languages are endangered as a direct result of residential schools. The trauma and events of residential schools are felt every day for many Indigenous Peoples.

For generations stereotypes have been used to discredit and dishonour Indigenous Peoples' ways of knowing, being, and living on this land. Full of inaccuracies, stereotypes show a distorted and dishonest picture of who Indigenous Peoples are.

**REFLECTION QUESTION**



Has anyone ever stereotyped your community? What impact does stereotyping have on a person's identity?

As you transition to your role as a Torontonians, be mindful of the histories and contemporary realities of Indigenous Peoples. Be careful not to believe myths and stereotypes. Further your understanding of Indigenous Peoples and build your cultural awareness. Cultural awareness teaches us about how to interact with other people in a respectful way. It is an important first step in building relationships with Indigenous Peoples.



Haudenosaunee baby playing with traditional Mohawk horn rattle (Toronto, ON)  
Photo reproduced with permission from photographer Khrystyna Riazantseva

# CHAPTER FIVE

## CULTURAL AWARENESS

— A lot of work needs to be done to heal and repair Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in Canada.

As a newcomer, you may feel overwhelmed. You may be unsure of what to do next. This chapter will help you start developing cultural awareness. Cultural awareness is a set of skills to assist you in respectfully interacting with people of different cultures (in this case, Indigenous Peoples). It will help you strengthen your relationships with Indigenous Peoples and contribute to the larger movement of **reconciliation**.



*yänionyen'*, Wendat Bear Clan  
Reproduced with permission from artist  
Catherine Tammaro ©  
Photo by Scott Eunson

### Reconciliation

Building, restoring, and renewing respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

## Ethical Conduct

— Thousands of Indigenous Peoples call Toronto home. You are likely interacting with Indigenous Peoples in your daily life without knowing it.

It is important to interact with Indigenous Peoples appropriately and respectfully. Much like you would want people to treat your culture and history with respect, you must give the same respect back to Indigenous Peoples.

Some practical considerations for ethical conduct:

# 1 STEREOTYPING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Do not hold stereotypical assumptions about what Indigenous Peoples look like. Indigenous Peoples look very different from one another. They are a diverse group of individuals. They are not a racial category. They may or may not look like a person of colour. It is inappropriate to make comments whether someone “looks” like an Indigenous person. This type of comment is based on a stereotype of what an Indigenous person looks like.

# 2 PROPER PRONUNCIATION

Take the time to learn how to pronounce the Indigenous names of the local Indigenous nations. This shows your commitment to calling these nations by their own names, rather than the ones imposed by European settler colonisers.

## Wendat:

Wen-daht  
(wɛndæt)

## Anishinaabe:

Ah-NI-shi-NAH-beh  
(æ.nɪʃəˈnɑbe)

## Haudenosaunee:

hoh-DEE-noh-SHoh-nee  
(hɒdməsɔni)

# 3 RESPECTING CEREMONY AND TRADITIONS

Do not take pictures at a cultural event and/or ceremony. Many Indigenous ceremonies are deeply spiritual and hold great significance. When Indigenous Peoples choose to wear their traditional clothing (i.e., regalia) it is not a costume. It is a representation of their ties to their history and culture. Public events are an opportunity for you to watch and listen when Indigenous Peoples are sharing the gift of their cultures. In return, you have a responsibility to honour and respect this gift.

# 4 ASSUMPTIONS IN KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Indigenous Peoples are more than their culture and history. Just like everyone else, Indigenous Peoples are complex individuals with their own histories, experiences, and perspectives. Some Indigenous Peoples are working to relearn their own history and culture. Others might have this knowledge but wish to protect it by not sharing it with unfamiliar people. Do not assume Indigenous Peoples will wish to discuss their culture and history with you.

# Roles and Responsibilities of Newcomers

This land has been taken care of by Indigenous Peoples for countless generations before the country of Canada was formed. Indigenous Peoples have welcomed newcomers to these lands for hundreds of years.

Newcomers have been welcomed with the understanding that they will honour the relationship and history Indigenous Peoples have with this place. Some ways you can honour this relationship and history are by:

- Learning about the Indigenous history and Indigenous Peoples of Toronto.
- Taking care of and protecting the land.
- Joining Indigenous-led causes to correct the wrongs of the Canadian society and create a shared path for moving forward.

Newcomers to Toronto bring their own stories and journeys to this new place. Many newcomers have made immense sacrifices to come here. Some may have also experienced immense loss before arriving in Toronto. Many people around the world have suffered the impacts of colonialism. This land welcomes newcomers to share these stories and heal together with Indigenous peoples. Newcomers and Indigenous peoples must work together to build lasting and balanced relationships.

## REFLECTION QUESTION



As a newcomer, what do you believe your responsibility is to this land and the original inhabitants? If someone asked you how you care for the land and water in your new community, what would you tell them?

## TO DO ACTIVITY



Take a walk around some parks and by the water. Now that you have learned about the history of this place, does this change your relationship to the parks and waterfront in Toronto?



First Nations teepee erected in downtown Toronto (Toronto, ON).  
Photo reproduced with permission from City of Toronto Archives.

# CHAPTER SIX

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

— First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples in Canada have been tireless advocates for their rights.

They have invited others to learn the real history of what is now Canada and to learn more about Indigenous worldviews. Today there are hundreds of local and national projects aimed at helping all Canadians to learn more about Indigenous Peoples and to make an impact on creating a fairer society.

### Revitalization

— Although the Canadian government has tried to assimilate Indigenous Peoples for centuries, they continue to thrive. Indigenous Peoples have never been passive victims. Instead, they have actively resisted colonisation for generations.

Many Indigenous communities are undergoing a period of cultural renewal. Many young Indigenous Peoples are connecting with their community's teachings, dances, stories, and language.

Language is extremely important to all cultures. Indigenous Peoples in Canada are actively working to protect and preserve their cultures and languages. 75% of Canada's Indigenous languages are endangered. There are efforts underway to protect the more than 70 distinct Indigenous languages in Canada. Most Indigenous language speakers are elderly and risk taking the language with them when they pass away. However, youth and young adults have prioritised the reclamation of their languages. The number of Indigenous language classes and schools is growing across Canada. Within a few years of Indigenous immersion classes, many young adult language speakers are moving from student to teacher. They will ensure the survival of their language.

Toronto is a particularly central place for Indigenous advocates, artists, leaders, and educators. Many Indigenous leaders have created Indigenous-led organisations in the city to promote the health and wellbeing of the Indigenous community. For example, the Toronto Birth Centre is an Indigenous-led space in the city for women and families to deliver babies. It is a place where Indigenous traditions of childbirth and midwifery are practised.

Other contemporary spaces where Indigenous leaders are reclaiming culture include the Native Theatre for Performing Arts, Red Music Rising record label, and the Spirit of Toronto radio station.

*Indigenous  
communities are  
undergoing a  
period of cultural  
renewal.*

## REFLECTION QUESTION



How do you keep your language and culture alive in your home? How is this similar to, or different from, how Indigenous Peoples fight to keep their languages alive?

## Indigenous Initiatives

In the late 20th century, the Canadian Federal Government finally acknowledged the great damage done to Indigenous communities through colonisation. The Canadian Federal Government launched several research studies to learn more about the truth and the legacy of residential schools and colonialism. There have also been several projects established to honour and respect Indigenous histories, cultures, and traditions.

On August 19, 2022, Toronto Mayor John Tory issued an apology to the Métis nation. The apology was for the City of Toronto's support and celebration of the Canadian military's victory over the Indigenous-led Northwest Resistance in Saskatchewan 1885. The Resistance was organised by Métis and First Nations people. They were fighting against the Canadian government's attempts to settle and control their traditional territories. The Canadian government responded by sending the army to Saskatchewan to put down the Resistance. The City of Toronto provided money to supply the troops. When the troops returned, they were celebrated and a statue to honour them was built. The apology marked the City's recognition that it was wrong to support and celebrate the destruction that occurred during this military action.

## United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

In 2007 the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#) was adopted by 143 countries, except Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. UNDRIP contains 46 articles outlining the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Some basic rights included are the right to protect and promote Indigenous cultures, the right to self-govern, and the right to meaningful participation in the democratic process. Canada feared it could not uphold the rights outlined in the Declaration. It was not until 2021 that Canada adopted the Declaration. UNDRIP is a significant document because it outlines the rights of Indigenous Peoples around the world.



## Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Calls to Action

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 2009 to gather and document stories from residential school Survivors. The launch of the TRC began with a formal apology to Indian residential school Survivors from then Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper. The TRC heard over 6,000 witnesses share their stories of attending residential schools. The TRC learned that Indigenous children attending residential schools experienced trauma and abuse (physical, sexual, and emotional). The Survivors spoke about the many deaths that occurred in these schools. The Survivors reported many more deaths than the government and churches. Many First Nations communities including Six Nations of the Grand River (100 km southwest of Toronto) are currently searching for unmarked graves of children who attended residential schools.

Released in 2015, the TRC's *Final Report* confirms Canada engaged in cultural genocide in its continued and focused attempts to assimilate Indigenous Peoples through forced attendance at residential schools. The report also identified *94 Calls to Action* for the various branches of government and settlers to undertake to reconcile the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

## Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

*Orange Shirt Day* is held each year on September 30th to honour residential school Survivors. It gained its inspiration from Phyllis Webstad. She is a residential school Survivor of St. Joseph's Mission Residential School in Williams Lake, B.C.



Participants holding a vigil wearing orange shirts to honour children who did not return home from residential schools (Toronto, ON).  
Photo courtesy of the City of Toronto.

When she was six Phyllis Webstad was sent to a residential school. Her grandmother and mother had both attended a residential school as well. Phyllis' grandmother bought her an orange shirt to wear to school. Phyllis was very proud of this shirt. When she and the other children arrived at St. Joseph's Mission Residential School, their clothing was taken away. They were forced to wear clothes provided by the school. Phyllis never saw her orange shirt again.

Phyllis shared:

*When I got to the Mission, they stripped me, and took away my clothes, including the orange shirt! I never wore it again. I didn't understand why they wouldn't give it back to me, it was mine! The colour orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared.*

Orange Shirt Day was created to encourage people to talk about the legacy of residential schools. It is a day to support healing and reconciliation efforts. All people in Canada are encouraged to wear an orange shirt to honour the children who attended residential schools. To respect Orange Shirt Day and ensure it is never forgotten, the Federal Government made September 30 the *National Day for Truth and Reconciliation*.

**TO DO  
ACTIVITY**



Hear Phyllis Wabstead share her story of the orange shirt in [this video](#). Consider looking for Orange Shirt Day events throughout Toronto on Sept. 30.



## National Indigenous History Month and National Indigenous People's Day

Summer Solstice is the longest day of the year. It falls around June 21 each year. For many people it is a day of spiritual significance. Many Indigenous Peoples honour and celebrate this day. In 1996, after consulting with many Indigenous communities, the Governor General of Canada declared June 21st *National Aboriginal Day* (later renamed *Indigenous Peoples Day*). In 2009, the House of Commons declared the month of June as *National Indigenous History Month*. During June there are many learning opportunities and ceremonies held in the GTA and across Canada to honour the rich and diverse histories, cultures, traditions, contributions, and resiliency of Indigenous Peoples.



Sketch of the slogan "Every Child Matters" associated with National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Artwork reproduced with permission from artist, Daelynn Doxtater.

## Idle No More

The women-led movement known as *Idle No More* began in 2012. It was started by four Indigenous women who were opposed to a government Act that would make it easier for businesses to damage the environment. The name "Idle No More" means that people should do something about protecting the rights of the environment and Indigenous sovereignty. The movement has united Indigenous and non-Indigenous supporters nationally and globally. The movement is important in starting conversations about climate change and protecting the environment. It supports Indigenous sovereignty over their lands by advocating for sustainability.

### TO DO ACTIVITY



Participate in an event or ceremony on June 21. Explore the City of Toronto's site **National Indigenous Peoples Day** and **National Indigenous Peoples Month** to learn more and find out what is happening across the City.

## Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

For many years Indigenous communities expressed concern about the violence Indigenous women and girls experience. They called for the government to do something. However, the government did nothing and many Indigenous women and girls went missing or were murdered.

In 1992, the first Women's Memorial March was held in Vancouver to remember Indigenous women who have been murdered or gone missing. In 2005 Indigenous women formed *Sisters in Spirit* which is a research, education, and policy program focused on raising awareness on violence directed at Indigenous women, girls and Two-spirit people.

In 2015 the Federal Government established the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* to investigate the high levels of violence Indigenous women experience. A final report, published in 2019, documented a system of violence, racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ (Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and others) people operating in Canada. It brought to light how Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people were much more likely to be a victim of violence. May 5 is *Red Dress Day*, and it is meant to bring awareness to this cause.

## Two-Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQIA+ Celebration and Awareness Day

Held in March, this day is dedicated to recognising and celebrating the rich cultures of Two-Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQIA+ Peoples. It is also a day to acknowledge and discuss the challenges affecting these communities. Two-Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQIA+ Peoples are often marginalised in Canadian society. Some experience challenges related to poverty. Started in 2022, the Two-Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQIA+ Celebration and Awareness Day is an important opportunity for everyone in Toronto to celebrate Two-Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQIA+ communities, but also to work with them to lessen the challenges they are experiencing.

## Events

There are many exciting events happening all around Toronto where you can meet and learn about Indigenous Peoples. Attending events in the community allows you to build lasting relationships with Indigenous Peoples. It also further develops your own learning.

Some events are held exclusively for the Indigenous community. For example, High Park has medicine gardens, full moon ceremonies, and drumming circles for the Indigenous community. Other events are open to the public. Events open to the public such as Pow Wows celebrate the rich cultures of Indigenous communities. Indigenous friendship and cultural centres are excellent places to get more information about different events (e.g., Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, Native Canadian Centre of Toronto).

## Pow Wows

Pow Wows are large gatherings of many First Nations, Métis, and non-Indigenous peoples. Not all Indigenous nations traditionally had Pow Wows, but many different Indigenous nations participate in them today. Pow Wows are centred around Indigenous dancing and drumming as a form of ceremony. Dancers wear traditional dress - known as *regalia*. There are also many small Indigenous-owned businesses selling food, crafts, traditional artwork, and more. Pow Wows are usually held outside in the warmer months. People come together to share food, honour sacred traditions, and maintain a sense of community. Pow Wows welcome all people to come and celebrate Indigenous cultures.

Some popular Pow Wows around Toronto are: the Na-Me-Res Traditional Pow Wow, 2-Spirit Pow Wow, and the Native Child and Family Services Pow Wow.

## Events in the City

There are events highlighting Indigenous cultures, arts, and education. These events are open to the public. They encourage people to learn more about Indigenous Peoples.

*Pow Wows are centred around Indigenous dancing and drumming as a form of ceremony.*



**Film + Media Arts Festival** showcases the work of diverse Indigenous artists and filmmakers.

**Fashion Arts** highlights Indigenous-designed fashion, crafts, includes a fashion runway featuring Indigenous clothing. It marketplace to purchase some Indigenous-designed clothing

**Legacy Gathering** is hosted by the Toronto Council Fire Centre every September. During the two-day event there speakers, workshops, as well as vendors selling items. The around honouring residential school Survivors and celebrating Indigenous cultural diversity and resilience.

## National Indigenous Peoples Month Events

There are also several events happening across Toronto during National Indigenous Peoples Month. These events are excellent opportunities to learn more about Indigenous Peoples.

**Sunrise Ceremony** is a marker of celebration for Indigenous Peoples Month.

**Indigenous Arts Festival** is held every June at the Fort York National Historic Site.

**Indigenous History Month Celebration** takes place at Yonge-Dundas Square, with local Indigenous vendors selling different items and Indigenous agencies sharing information about their work.

## Places to Learn About Indigenous Peoples

There are many organisations doing wonderful work to bring together newcomers and Indigenous Peoples. These organisations welcome all people to come and learn about Indigenous Peoples. You can learn more about Indigenous cultures, art, music, food, and much more by visiting one of these organisations.

### Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT)



For over 50 years, the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto has been a leader in the building of a healthy and vibrant urban Indigenous community in Toronto. Serving over 2,000 clients a year, it works to provide culturally centred services and programs to increase the economic, social, cultural and health outcomes of Indigenous Peoples.

[16 Spadina Road, Toronto, M5R 2S7](#)

**Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre**



Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre is an autonomous, vibrant cultural agency that involves and serves the Indigenous community with confidence for and commitment to their well-being.

439 Dundas Street East, Toronto, M5A 2B1

**Native Child and Family Services of Toronto**



Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) is a multi-service urban Aboriginal agency providing holistic, culture-based programs and services for Aboriginal children and families. NCFST strives to provide a life of quality, well-being, healing, and self-determination for children and families in the Toronto urban Aboriginal community. They do this by implementing a service model that is culture-based and respects the values of Aboriginal people, the extended family and the right to self-determination.

Several locations across Toronto

**The Indigenous Network**



An Indigenous Friendship Centre committed to providing a culturally safe and respectable environment for Indigenous people to engage in their spirituality, culture and community.

208 Britannia Road East – Unit 1 Mississauga, L4Z 1S6

**Tungasuvvingat Inuit - Toronto**



An Inuit gathering place providing Inuit specific programming.

203-145 Front Street East, Toronto, M5A 1E3

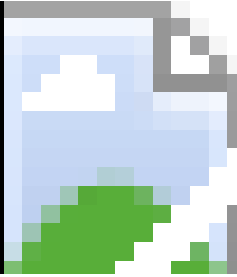
## Toronto Public Libraries



Toronto Public Library provides free and equitable access to services which meet the changing needs of Torontonians. The Library preserves and promotes universal access to a broad range of human knowledge, experience, information and ideas in a welcoming and supportive environment. Use your library card to sign out a free family Museum and Art pass to various museums, art galleries and other venues.

100 Libraries Across Toronto

## Toronto History Museums



Toronto History Museums are a collection of 10 historic sites owned and operated by the City of Toronto with the mission to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance the understanding of Toronto's diverse stories through engaging and exciting experiences. Admission is free to all Toronto History Museums.

10 Locations Across Toronto

## Art Gallery of Ontario



The Art Gallery of Ontario is one of the largest art museums in North America, attracting approximately one million visitors annually. The AGO Collection of more than 120,000 works of art ranges from cutting-edge contemporary art to significant works by Indigenous and Canadian artists and European masterpieces. The AGO presents wide-ranging exhibitions and programs, including solo exhibitions and acquisitions by diverse and underrepresented artists from around the world.

317 Dundas Street West, Toronto, M5T 1G4

## McMichael Canadian Art Collection



**McMichael**  
CANADIAN ART COLLECTION D'ART CANADIEN



Located on 100 acres of forested land along the Humber River, the McMichael is a major public gallery uniquely devoted to collecting the art of Canada.

The McMichael Canadian Art Collection is located on the original lands of the Ojibwe Anishinaabe and Wendat People. It is uniquely situated along the Carrying Place Trail which historically provided an integral connection for Indigenous people between Ontario's Lakeshore and the Lake Simcoe-Georgian Bay Region.

The McMichael's permanent collection consists of over 7,000 artworks by Tom Thomson, the Group of Seven, their contemporaries, and First Nations, Métis, Inuit and contemporary artists who have contributed to the development of Canadian art.

10365 Islington Avenue, Kleinburg, L0J 1C0

## Native Earth Performing Arts and Aki Studio



Native Earth Performing Arts is Canada's oldest professional Indigenous performing arts company. Currently, in its 40th year, it is dedicated to developing, producing, and presenting professional artistic expressions of the Indigenous experience in Canada.

Through stage productions (theatre, dance, and multidisciplinary art), new script development, apprenticeships, and internships, Native Earth seeks to fulfil a community of artistic visions. It is a vision that is inclusive and reflective of the artistic directions of members of the Indigenous community who actively participate in the arts.

585 Dundas Street East, Unit #250, Toronto, M5A 2B7

## Righting Relations



**RIGHTINGRELATIONS**  
Adult Education for Social Change

Righting Relations strives to support and build capacity amongst adult educators and community organisers to provide space and resources for them to connect, reflect on, and organise for heart-led social change.

Greater Toronto Area



## YWCA Toronto



The YWCA Toronto helps women and girls flee violence, secure housing, find jobs, establish their voices, enhance skills and develop confidence. They offer a range of community support programs, girls' programs, and family programs. They also engage in systemic advocacy.

87 Elm Street, Toronto, M5G 0A8

## North York Community House



North York Community House (NYCH) is committed to building strong, vibrant communities – serving over 15,000 residents in northwest Toronto every year. They help transform lives by working with people, understanding their needs, and supporting them in achieving their goals. For over 30 years, NYCH has been opening doors for new Canadians; supporting youth, parents and seniors in becoming active, engaged citizens; and creating opportunities for residents to improve their lives and lead positive change in their neighbourhoods.

255 Rane Avenue, Suites 4 & 5, North York, M6A 2E3

## OCASI



OCASI champions equity and human rights for immigrants and refugees through advocacy, collective action, collaborative planning, research, capacity-building, and information and knowledge transfer.

Ontario

## Circles for Reconciliation



Circles for Reconciliation aims to establish trusting meaningful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples through small dialogue circles. Each circle has an equal number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants and are guided by a trained facilitator.

Greater Toronto Area

Any of these organisations are excellent places to further your learning about Indigenous Peoples in Toronto. These organisations can also help you learn about ways to become involved in reconciliation projects.



## Conclusion

---

Indigenous Peoples have and continue to thrive on their ancestral lands. Their connection to this land is ancient and still felt today. The arrival of newcomers to these lands is just a small part of the history of this land.

The arrival of settlers and newcomers has greatly impacted Indigenous Peoples. Often these impacts were negative. These impacts are still felt in Indigenous communities today. Yet, Indigenous Peoples have persevered. Indigenous Peoples are proud of their ability to hold close both the past and the present. They continue to protect their cultures and languages. They fight for their rights. And above all, they protect the land, which we all need for survival.

Newcomers in the process of creating a future in Toronto must remember the Indigenous history of Toronto. Newcomers need to recognize that their new lives in Toronto are made possible by the colonial theft of this land from Indigenous Peoples. This recognition should motivate all newcomers to guarantee that Indigenous rights, histories, cultures, traditions, languages, and knowledge are protected and honoured.

We cannot undo the past, but we can make a new future. Perhaps the most important part of the story of Indigenous and newcomer relations is yet to be told. Welcome to this story.

# APPENDIX A

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Courses

**University of Alberta – Indigenous Canada Course**

<https://www.ualberta.ca/admissions-programs/online-courses/indigenous-canada/index.html>

### Resources

**Bridging Indigenous and Newcomer Communities - Surrey LIP**

<https://www.surreylip.ca/our-projects/bridging-indigenous-and-newcomer-communities/#1620163584818-450f0e8e-03e8>

**City of Toronto's Reconciliation Action Plan**

<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/long-term-vision-plans-and-strategies/reconciliation-action-plan/>

**Fostering Safe Spaces for Dialogue and Relationship-building Between Newcomers and Indigenous People**

<https://spcw.mb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Fostering-Safe-Spaces-for-Dialogue-and-Relationship-building-between-Newcomers-and-Indigenous-Peoples-Report-English-Web-View.pdf>

**First Peoples Guide for Newcomers**

<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/first-peoples-a-guide-for-newcomers.pdf>

**Indigenous Peoples of Manitoba: A Guide for Newcomers**

<https://mcccanada.ca/sites/mcccanada.ca/files/media/common/documents/indigenousguide2017-web.pdf>

**Vancouver Dialogues**

<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/dialogues-project-book.pdf>

### Books

***21 things You May Not Know About the Indian Act*** by Bob Joseph

***A Treaty Guide for Torontonians: Talking Treaties Collective*** by Ange Loft, Victoria Freeman, Martha Stiegman, and Jill Carter

***Indigenous Toronto: Stories That Carry This Place*** by Denise Bolduc, Mnawaate Gordon-Corbiere, Rebeka Tabobondung, Brian Wright-McLeod

***Reconciliation Manifesto*** by Arthur Manuel

***Speaking our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation*** by Monique Gray Smith

***Treaty Words: For As Long As the River Flows*** by Aimee Craft

***Unsettling Canada*** by Arthur Manuel

## Other

**[23 Tips on What Not to Say or Do When Working with Indigenous Peoples](https://www.ictinc.ca/23-tips-on-what-not-to-say-or-do-thank-you)**

<https://www.ictinc.ca/23-tips-on-what-not-to-say-or-do-thank-you>

**[Digging Deep: Understanding “Other” Ways of Knowing for Effective Collaborations and Engagement](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxGqRDEvI9w)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxGqRDEvI9w>

**[Indigenous Ally Toolkit](https://www.segalcentre.org/common/sitemedia/201819_Shows/ENG_AllyToolkit.pdf)**

[https://www.segalcentre.org/common/sitemedia/201819\\_Shows/ENG\\_AllyToolkit.pdf](https://www.segalcentre.org/common/sitemedia/201819_Shows/ENG_AllyToolkit.pdf)

**[Native Land - Interactive Map](http://www.native-land.ca)**

[www.native-land.ca](http://www.native-land.ca)

**[Toronto Public Library, Read Indigenous](https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/books-video-music/books/booklists/read-indigenous.jsp)**

<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/books-video-music/books/booklists/read-indigenous.jsp>