



Below are four questions that are intended to help you write your submission to Aboriginal Arts & Stories. Each question has its own topic, ways to engage with the topic, writing activities and online resources. The topics covered are storytelling, historical photographs, historical significance and residential schools. The questions are suggestions to help guide your writing. You are not required to write your submission on these topics. Moreover, each question is designed to provide you with several options for the style, content and form of your written piece. On page 4, you will find links to online resources that will assist in the research for your piece.

Your entry into the Aboriginal Arts & Stories competition must include a 200-400 word writer's statement that explains how your piece explores Indigenous heritage and culture and tells us a little about yourself. The prompts in the Writer's Statement section are guidelines; you may choose to express yourself differently.

You may enter online at our-story.ca or by mail.

Keeper of the Voice, Nicole ►
Paul, Métis from Prince
Albert, Saskatchewan.
Aboriginal Arts & Stories
Senior Art Winner, 2014.

PROJECT 1: Storytelling

Canada's Indigenous peoples have a strong storytelling tradition. Stories are passed down through generations as a way to share a community's origins, history, spirituality, morals and life skills. This is your opportunity to interpret and engage with this tradition.

ACTIVITY 1: Find a story that you connect with.

The story can be an ancient legend or myth you are already familiar with, or you can find a new story. Choose a story that speaks to you in some way. Consider the story's central message. What is the story trying to communicate? To find a new story, consider asking an Elder or selecting a story from a collection.

ACTIVITY 2:

Present your story as a written piece.

You can present your story in any format you see fit. Check out style options in the *Alternative Writing Styles* section. See our-story.ca/teachers.

Below is a list of suggested starting points:

- Incorporate new elements into the story to show how it relates to you or your community. For example, you can present both an original myth and a personal account and show how the two are connected.
- Present a personal experience of your own (or of someone you know) as a modern-day legend. Imagine that this story will be told to future generations. What is this story's message? What is your story trying to communicate? What would you like future generations to take from your story?
- Translate your story into another form: a poem, a TV script, a newspaper report, or a play.
- Take a key piece of dialogue from the story and construct a new story around it.
- Choose three key words from your selected story – an object such as a hawk, a character like a child and a place such as a river – and write a new short story built around them.



PROJECT 2:

Historical Photographs

Historical photographs are a rich source of inspiration for writing. Analyzing a historical photograph and asking yourself a series of questions about its content can provide much greater insight into its subject matter.

ACTIVITY 1: Find a Historical Photograph

The photograph can be from a family collection, a photograph you see in your everyday life or an image of an important person or event in Canadian Indigenous history. You don't need to know the identity of the people in your historical photo, or where it was taken. Instead, you will explore the relationships between the people inside and outside of the photograph, focusing on the **gaze**.

ACTIVITY 2: Analysis

Your analysis should consider:

a) The gaze of the photographer.

Determine the perspective of the photographer.

- Where was the camera lens located in relation to the subject depicted? What was included or excluded in the frame? Why?
- In your opinion, was the photograph commissioned or was the subject asked to pose?
- Given the perspective of the photograph, what can we infer or imagine about the photographer? What does the gaze suggest about the relationship between the subject and the photographer?

The **gaze** refers to the view or perspective someone has in relation to a photograph.

PROJECT 2: Historical Photographs

Continued

b) The gaze of the photographed subject(s).

- How would you characterize the gaze of the people in the photograph, i.e., does the subject(s) appear hostile, uncomfortable, confrontational, friendly, curious, ambiguous, etc?
- Is the pose formal?
- In your opinion, do you think the photographer or the subject chose the pose?
- What kind of impression is offered to you, the modern spectator, by the given pose?

c) The gaze of the spectator/reader.

- Who would be looking at this photograph? What would they think of it?
- Is their gaze different from your own? If so, how?
- Can you speculate about the eventual destination of the image? Where do you think this image might have first appeared, e.g., in a magazine, an official government report, a family album or a newspaper?

d) The gazes within the frame between the subjects photographed.

- What can you infer about the nature of the relationship between the subjects within the photograph? Is there friendship, ambivalence, intimacy, etc.?
- What is the power relationship between them? Are they equals?

Topek (summer house), kayak and an Inuit person, Peel River, Northwest Territories, 1901. C.W. Mathers / Library and Archives Canada / PA-124050. ▶



Suggested starting points:

- Use your newfound insight into the image as inspiration for a piece of creative writing.
- You may wish to write a character sketch of the photograph's subjects and present them in a fictional biography. For example, who were these individuals? Where did they come from?
- Describe the events that led up to this photograph being taken.
- What do you think happened to these individuals after the photograph was taken?

PROJECT 3: Historical Significance

For this activity, write a piece that assesses the historical significance of key events in Indigenous Canadian history. Assessing historical significance can be a difficult task. There is no single correct answer. Often something is important to one person but not to another. This question requires you to familiarize yourself with several historical events and to exercise your judgment as to whether or not these events are historically significant.

Activity Questions:

- In your opinion, what is the most historically significant event in Canadian Indigenous history? **or**
- If you find selecting a single event too difficult, consider expanding your list to include three historically significant events in Canadian Indigenous history. To help assess the historical significance of an event, you can choose to consider the following criteria:

Profundity: How deeply did this event affect people?

Quantity: How many people's lives were affected?

Durability: How long lasting were the changes?

Research:

Research events that you are interested in and which you believe hold significance for Indigenous Canadian history. Find out as much as you can about these events in order to make the best argument possible.

Suggested starting points:

- Begin your research by heading to *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and searching for historically significant events by using keywords such as Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.
- Choose an event you believe is significant, applying the criteria previously discussed.
- Discuss the event you have chosen with a small group, a friend or a teacher. Explain why you think this event is significant. Keep this explanation or message in mind as you get ready to write.
- Once you have selected an event, think about which writing format is best to demonstrate the significance of the event. Will you write a newspaper article reporting on the event? A personal letter from a participant? A journal entry? A script for a play?
- You may want to consider whose perspective (or perspectives) you want to voice when choosing a format.

PROJECT 4: Residential Schools

While the historical roots of residential schools go back to the 1600s, the Canadian government, in partnership with the nation's churches, established a formal residential school program in the 1870s. Over 130 schools were established, and the last school closed in 1996. In total, 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children were removed from their communities and forced to attend residential schools.

The objective of the residential schools was the **assimilation** of Indigenous children and the elimination of any sense of their Indigenous culture, language, and relationships. Many children experienced physical, sexual and mental abuse at the schools, which has resulted in lasting intergenerational trauma (the transmission of the negative consequences of this historical oppression to subsequent generations) in Indigenous communities across Canada. The experiences of Survivors varied dramatically from schools to school, with some noting that they gained useful skills. Overall, however, the legacy of residential schools is overwhelmingly negative.

On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized on behalf of the Canadian government for past governments' policies of assimilation of Indigenous peoples in Canada, including an apology for the Canadian government's role in the development and administration of the residential school program, stating: "Indian residential schools were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language." (See the Prime Minister's apology and read the transcript [here](#).)

Reflect on the history of residential schools. As members of the generation of Indigenous students who did not attend a residential school, what importance does this chapter in Indigenous Canadian history hold for you? Has the legacy of residential schools had an impact on your life?

Research:

There are several sources to help you learn more about residential schools. Check out the online sources listed below to explore life at a residential school through images, maps and video testimonies. You can also speak to Elders, mentors, and even family members to hear about their experiences, if they are comfortable talking about it. Interacting with these resources will further enhance your understanding of this aspect of Canadian history and perhaps serve as a source of inspiration for your written piece.

Writing:

Before writing, consider what format you want your submission to be in. Your piece can be a historical narrative, a short story, a letter, a dialogue, a poem, a one-act play or any other format. Writing in different creative formats provides the freedom to write about subjects, emotions and experiences that are sometimes difficult to express.



▲ *Great Great Grandfather*, Gabriel Uqaituk, Montreal, Quebec, Kuukuaq Community. Aboriginal Arts & Stories Finalist, 2011.

Assimilation refers to the social process of absorbing one cultural group into another. In the residential school system, a policy of forced assimilation of Indigenous children was based on the belief that European cultures were superior to Indigenous cultures. The Government of Canada wanted to eradicate Indigenous culture, and tried to force Indigenous children to adapt to mainstream Canadian society by adopting Christianity and speaking English or French. Students were prohibited from speaking their native language or practicing their cultural traditions, and were subject to harsh punishment if caught doing so.

Activity:

Create a series of written pieces (diary entries, letters, poems, etc.) from the perspective of participants in the residential school experience. You may choose to speak in the voice of one or several individuals, e.g., as a student, a teacher, a superintendent, a parent or a politician.

- When was your piece written - the past, the present or the future?
- What is the relationship between each of these individuals and the residential school?
- How does the school environment make them feel?
- What are their memories of the experience?
- Have their feelings about their experience changed over time or have they remained the same?
- How do these participants view each other?



◀ *In Memory of My Grandfather*, Victoria Ransom, Akwesasne, Ontario. Aboriginal Arts & Stories Finalist, 2012.

For more resources on teaching about residential schools in the classroom, visit [Historica Canada's Education Portal](#).

ONLINE RESOURCES

PROJECT 1: Storytelling

Heritage Minutes: "The Peacemaker"

historicanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/peacemaker

Watch the episode "The Peacemaker" from the acclaimed *Heritage Minutes* series. To find more *Heritage Minutes* related to Indigenous history, search the videos and the Radio Minutes.

PROJECT 2: Historical Photographs

The Canadian Encyclopedia

thecanadianencyclopedia.com

The *Canadian Encyclopedia* is a comprehensive source of information for students, readers and scholars across Canada and throughout the world. To find images, do a keyword search on your chosen topic and limit your search to photos. You can also check out exhibits on TCE for more historical photos.

Photographs from the North: Library and Archives Canada Collections

collectionscanada.gc.ca/inuit/020018-1300-e.html

A collection of photographs of the Inuit people of Canada's north. As the site indicates, this collection draws from the "Navy personnel and topographers on Arctic expeditions [who] were among the first photographers to document the people and the landscape of the Northwest Territories, or what is now Nunavut."

Canada in the Making: Images – Aboriginals: Treaties and Relations

canadiana.ca/citm/images/images_e.html#ab

This collection contains a variety of images, organized chronologically, that detail the history of Canadian Indigenous treaties and relations.

CBC Digital Archives: Native Issues

cbc.ca/archives

A collection of television and radio clips organized by topic on variety of significant individuals and events from Canadian Indigenous history. Use the term "Native Issues" in your keyword search.

PROJECT 3: Historical Significance

The Canadian Encyclopedia: Significant Events in Canadian History

thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/timelines/100-great-events-in-canadian-history

This unique resource includes more than 6000 events from Canadian and world history. It can be searched by era, subject, keyword or date. More timelines, some focused solely on events in Indigenous history, can be found under 'Related Resources' at the end of this timeline.

Heritage Minutes

historicanada.ca/content/videos

The *Heritage Minutes* portray exciting and important stories from Canada's past. Search by theme or by keyword and watch depictions of important figures and events from Canadian Indigenous history. You can also search Radio Minutes for more content.

Canada in the Making: Aboriginals; Treaties and Relations

web.archive.org/web/20150219015549/http://www.canadiana.ca/citm/themes/aboriginals_e.html

This website is an extensive online resource outlining the major and minor treaties that played a significant and important role in charting the course of European-Indigenous relations within the country. Covers the period 1492-2003.

PROJECT 4: Residential Schools

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

trc.ca

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has a mandate to learn the truth about what happened in the residential schools and to inform all Canadians about this dark chapter in our history.

The Canadian Encyclopedia: Residential Schools

thecanadianencyclopedia.com/en/article/residential-schools

This entry outlines the history of residential schools in Canada. It also provides links to suggested readings and related entries.

Heritage Minutes: "School Days"

historicanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/school-days-radio

This 60-second radio piece gives insight into the type of interactions and attitudes that existed in residential schools.

CBC Digital Archives

"A Lost Heritage: Canada's Residential Schools"

cbc.ca/archives

The CBC Digital Archives offer a wide variety of television and eight radio clips from 1955-2008 documenting residential schools in Canada.

Where are the Children?

Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools

wherearethechildren.ca

This impressive website was created by the Legacy of Hope Foundation in conjunction with several governmental agencies. It aims to promote awareness among Canadians about residential schools and the effect they have had on Indigenous life as well as to bring about reconciliation between generations of Indigenous peoples, and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The website is an excellent learning tool and contains the following sections:

- Blackboard: an 11 chapter interactive history of residential schools, viewed in either HTML or Flash, with audio narration of the text, photographs and other primary and secondary sources, and oral histories from survivors of the residential school experience.
- Interactive Map and Timeline: The map outlines the locations of residential schools across Canada and the timeline situates this history in a greater national and international context.
- Bookcase: Textbooks for all secondary grade levels as well as lifelong learners. It also includes a dictionary and a teacher's guide.
- School: Explore the Mohawk Institute residential school in a 3D tour.
- Exhibit: An extensive virtual exhibition consisting of a large collection of photographs from residential schools from the 1880s to the 1960s, video clips of shared stories of the residential school experience and more.