



## Global Voices Information Sheet

### Aboriginal Child Welfare



Maurina and Jeremy Beadle of the Pictou Landing First Nation in Nova Scotia. The Canadian Government won't provide enough funding for Maurina to care for Jeremy at home. (Photo: The Canadian Press/Andrew Vaughan)

#### Background Info

- Starting in the 1840s, tens of thousands of Aboriginal children in Canada were taken away from their families and put into “residential schools” so they could be taught white European-Canadian culture.
- About 27,000 Aboriginal children are currently in foster care – three times more than the number of children taken away in 1949, at the peak of the residential school system.
- The reasons children are taken away from their families can include poor living conditions – very dirty and unhealthy houses, if they are not getting enough nutrition, drug or alcohol abuse by their parents or caregivers, and physical or sexual abuse of the children.
- When she was Auditor General, Sheila Fraser investigated and found that Aboriginal children are taken from their families by social workers six to eight times more often than non-Aboriginal children.
- These children are then placed in group homes with other foster children, with other Aboriginal relatives, with other non-related Aboriginal families, or sometimes with non-related families who are not Aboriginal.
- Some social workers like Cindy Blackstock believe that it is very traumatic for children to be removed from their families, and it is better to try and fix the problems in the home. It is especially traumatic for Aboriginal children who are put in non-Aboriginal homes because they are being taken away from their culture.
- A National Policy Review report in 2000 found that there is 22 per cent less funding for Aboriginal child welfare than non-Aboriginal child welfare, especially for programs that would help children stay with their families.

#### Key terms

- **Foster care** – Temporarily placing a child in the care of people who are not their immediate family.
- **Group home** – An institution where children who have been taken away from their families live together when, for any reason, they cannot go to another individual family for foster care.
- **Social workers** – People whose job is to help children and families. Some social workers can take children from their families if the social worker thinks the home is not healthy for the children.
- **Residential schools** - Residential schools were boarding schools believed to be the best way to prepare First Nations youth for life in mainstream European society

## Global Voices Elementary Educator Resources

### Note to Educators:

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. Activities are structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Extension and conclusion activities are included to challenge students and finally, encourage them to reflect on the issues at hand.

Since these activities are designed as discussions rather than formal lessons, assessment strategies are not included.

### Themes and Course Connections

- Themes: Family, culture, tradition, child welfare, foster care.
- Course Connections: Language and Social Studies.

### Materials

- Chart paper or blackboard
- Computer and internet
- Paper and pencil crayons
- Global Voices column

### Specific Expectations and Learning Goals

Students will:

- Develop and express responses to issues and problems.
- Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information.
- Participate in active group work and class discussions.
- Communicate effectively in written and spoken language or other forms of expression.
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically.
- Develop, express, and defend a position on an issue and explain how to put the ideas into action.

### Knowledge and Understanding

1. All kinds of families (estimated time: 10 minutes)
  - a. Explain to students that they are going to read an article about family environments and circumstances that cause children to separate from their families.
  - b. As a class define 'family'. Write the definition on the board.
  - c. Next ask students to brainstorm the different types of families that exist in society (e.g. single parent families, multi-generational families, etc.). Write students' ideas on the board, around the definition of family.
  - d. If no one has mentioned it, explain to students that there are other kinds of families called "adopted families," that are made up of parents who are not biologically related to their children. Some kids also live in foster homes, which

involves “care of children on a full-time, temporary basis by persons other than their own parents.”

- i. Teacher Note: It may be worth it to read out the full definition to the class, from <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/foster+home>

## Thinking

1. Guided Reading: The Global Voices Column (estimated time: 20 minutes)
  - a. Have students sit in a circle and distribute one copy of the Global Voices column to each student.
  - b. Pre-reading steps:
    - i. Make predictions: ask students to read the title of the column and view the pictures. After doing so, ask them to make predictions as to what the column is going to be about.
    - ii. Introduce vocabulary from the column.
    - iii. Assess prior knowledge: ask students to discuss what they already know about these topics.
  - c. Reading steps:
    - i. Go around the circle and have each student read a section of the column to the class, so that everyone gets a turn to read.
    - ii. As students are reading, offer guidance and coaching by providing prompts, asking questions, and encouraging attempts at reading strategy application.
  - d. Post reading steps:
    - i. Encourage students to provide a summary of the column in order to ensure they have understood the series of events.
    - ii. Ask questions about the text to judge comprehension.
2. Discussing the Global Voices column (estimated time: 10 minutes)
  - a. Ask students the following suggested questions about the column, encourage them to use evidence from the Global Voices column to support their answers:
    - i. What is the message in this column?
    - ii. What perspectives are presented in this column? Which ones are left out?
    - iii. What are some of the reasons given in the column for why a child would be taken away from home?
    - iv. What are some challenges faced by First Nations kids in foster care?
    - v. What are some challenges faced by social workers who work with First Nations children in foster care?

## Communication

1. Homesickness and culture shock (estimated time: 30 minutes)
  - a. The Global Voices column states: “Most of us are probably familiar with that uncomfortable feeling of staying in a stranger’s home, perhaps being billeted for a sports event or while on vacation. We don’t know the rules, the expectations, or the way things work there.”
  - b. Hold a class discussion around homesickness, by asking students to recall and share stories about how they felt when they were staying over at a friend or relative’s house, at a summer camp etc.
  - c. Now, ask them to imagine that they are separated from their families in a brand new cultural environment. For example, different kinds of foods, different language etc. Explain to students that many First Nations children in foster care experience both homesickness as well as culture shock.
  - d. For the remainder of the class, ask students to write a one-paragraph reflection on one of the following:
    - i. A time when they were separated from their family and felt homesick and/or culture shock.

- ii. A reflection from the perspective of a First Nations child who was taken away from his/her family and placed in foster care.
- e. Completed reflections can be handed in for grading.

### Application

1. Residential Schools (estimated time: take home assignment)
  - a. Explain to students that the Canadian government used to operate residential schools for First Nations children. Residential schools were boarding schools believed to be the best way to prepare First Nations youth for life in mainstream European society.
    - i. Teacher Note: Residential schools were managed by religious organizations. Students were forced to live away from their families in substandard conditions, many suffering physical and mental abuse. Students were not permitted to speak their languages, nor were many allowed to visit their homes until leaving the schools as teenagers. The last residential school, located in Saskatchewan, was closed in 1996.
  - b. Explain to students that they will be conducting more in depth research about these schools at home, and answer the following suggested questions:
    - i. What are residential schools?
    - ii. When was the first residential school started in Canada?
    - iii. Why were they built? What purpose did they serve?
    - iv. Why were these schools stopped?
    - v. Why did the government recently issue an apology for residential schools?
  - c. Students can hand in their assignments for grading.

### Additional Resources

In addition to the above lesson plans, you may want to share some additional resources with your students. Listed below are some links to useful online resources:

Free The Children – [www.freethechildren.com](http://www.freethechildren.com)

We Day Teach - <http://www.weday.com/teach>

First Nations Family Caring Society - <http://www.fncfcs.com/>

Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal - <http://www.cecw-cepb.ca/infosheets/comparison-first-nations-and-non-aboriginal-2003>

Cindy Blackstock - <http://www.extension.ualberta.ca/research/faculty-members/blackstock/>