

Topic:	The Witness Blanket Project
Audience:	UFV students from various departments
Snapshot:	Introduce students to the Witness Blanket (WB), a national monument. The blanket stands to honour the children through acknowledgement of the Indian Residential School era. It is an important symbol of the reconciliation process that creates an entry point for witnesses to contribute further.
Project link:	Consider the impact of the WB in relation to BRP-200.05 – Board Policy on Fulfilling Our Commitment to Aboriginal Peoples.
Learning Objectives:	<p>Arts: L.O. 1 – Relate the WB to learning in Arts courses L.O. 2 – Synthesize personal meaning in relation to the social injustice the WB represents L.O. 3 – Envision my personal role in reconciliation</p> <p>Professional Studies: L.O. 1 – Articulate the social Injustice embodied in the WB L.O. 2 – Integrate the WB teachings into the social justice lens of my practice L.O. 3 – Envision my personal role in reconciliation</p> <p>Science: L.O. 1 – Recognize the impact of residential school on the well-being and wellness of all communities L.O. 2 – Synthesize reconciliation with my positive contribution to society and the workplace L.O. 3 – Identify the environmental footprint left by residential schools</p> <p>Applied and Technical Studies: L.O. 1 – Identify the social structures of on-reserve life L.O. 2 – Recognize the impact of residential school on Canadian society</p> <p>Health Sciences: L.O. 1 – Recognize the impact of residential school on the well-being and wellness of all communities L.O. 2 – Synthesize reconciliation with my positive contribution to society and my professional practice L.O. 3 – Envision my personal role in reconciliation</p> <p>Agriculture of Excellence</p>

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| | L.O. 1 – Identify the circumstances of Aboriginal people in relation to residential schools
L.O. 2 – Examine the impact of residential school on Aboriginal people and others in Canada
L.O. 3 – Envision my personal role in reconciliation |
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Setting the stage for viewing the Witness Blanket

Understandings

- Historically, the relationship between First Nations and other Canadians have been unequal and damaging
- Today, Canadians have the opportunity to build a new relationship through the reconciliation process
- There needs to be an understanding and acknowledgement of the injustices of the past, and a commitment to build a relationship of mutual understanding to renew relationships between First Nations and other Canadians
- The Witness Blanket's sole purpose: stand in eternal witness to the effects of the Indian Residential School era – the system created and run by churches and the Canadian government to "take the Indian out of the child."

Essential Questions

Big Questions

- How can the effects of the Indian Residential School system on today's society be addressed in meaningful and respectful ways? How is this accomplished in the Witness Blanket Project?

Focus Questions

- What does it mean to be a witness?
- What is the significance of a blanket? Its importance in First Nations culture?
- What actions need to be taken to forge a new relationship between First Nations and Canadians?
- How will you take part in the recognition process?

Suggested Pre-viewing Activities

- **Explain How to Bear Witness**

Discuss from the webpage <http://witnessblanket.ca/#!/bear-witness/> the bear witness section. It reads: To bear witness, or to show existence that something is true, is to pay tribute to all who have been directly or indirectly affected by Canada's Indian Residential Schools.

- Discussion questions
- What does it mean to be a witness?
(The term witness references the Aboriginal principle of witnessing, which varies among First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.)

Witnesses are called to be the keepers of history when an event of historic significance occurs. Partly because of the oral traditions of Aboriginal peoples, but also to recognize the importance of conducting business, building and maintaining relationships in person and face to face. Through witnessing the event or work that is undertaken is validated and provided legitimacy. The work could not take place without honoured and respected guests to witness it)

- What is the responsibility of a witness?
(Those who accept the invitation to bear witness have a responsibility to remember and to take the story forward. Witnesses are asked to store and care for the history they witness and most importantly, to share it with other people when they return home. Many of us didn't experience residential school firsthand, but are able to witness through learning and active participation in the reconciliation process. We share a collective responsibility to make things better. To act. Because if we do nothing, nothing will change)

- **Explain the Significance of A Blanket/The Blanket**

Discuss from the webpage <http://witnessblanket.ca/#!/blanket/> the project section. Listen to RCI's Wojtek Gwiazda interview the artist Carey Newman about the project, and why he started it at <http://www.rcinet.ca/en/2014/10/06/witness-blanket-recalls-tragic-chapter-of-canadian-indigenous-history/>

- Discussion Questions
- What is the general importance of a blanket?
(A blanket is intended to keep the us warm, especially while sleeping or lying down. A blanket traps the radiant heat from our body, and instead of dissipating into the air, it warms the user. It also protects against heat being lost by convection. A blanket is a universal symbol of protection. A security blanket is a blanket or other familiar item carried especially by a young child to provide reassurance and a feeling of psychological security. It can also be a thing or person that provides someone with a sense of safety and emotional comfort)
- Did you/do you have a blanket that had/has importance? Explain why it was/is important to you.
- What is the importance of a blanket in First Nations culture?
(For First Nations people, it identifies who they are and where they are from. They are worn in ceremony and given as gifts. <https://prezi.com/njzloy2dp6-1/the-meaning-of-a-blanket-is-a-complicated-story-it-can-repr/>)
- What is the significance of 'the blanket?'
(The Witness Blanket was inspired by a woven blanket. It is a large-scale art installation that is made out of hundreds of items reclaimed from Residential Schools, churches, government buildings and traditional and cultural structures

including Friendship Centres, band offices, treatment centres and universities, from across Canada. See <http://witnessblanket.ca/#!/project/> and watch the Witness Blanket Documentary Trailer 2015. See <http://witnessblanket.ca/#!/pieces-of-history/> that explains the individual and collective importance of each piece)

Suggested viewing activities

- **Download the Witness Blanket App**

Once downloaded, click on any piece to identify what the piece is and where it is from. Click the description box again to reveal who contributed the piece, sometimes a story, as well as a map that marks the place where the item is from on a map. You can also choose to search a list view to retrieve information on each piece. Both viewing options allow the user to add pieces to their personal collection on the app.

[Itunes witness blanket app](#)

- **Questions to ask when analyzing art**

- *What can I see just by looking at this art work?*
- *How was this art work made?*
- *When was it made, and what was happening in art and broader history at that time?*
- Why did the artist create this work and what is the meaning to them, and to us now?
- How does this art installation make you feel about the fundamental question of justice?

- **Answer Reflective questions**

Answer the following questions while viewing the installation:

- What are you witnessing?
- How are you impacted as a witness?
- Having witnessed the art changed your view of the value of ethics and morality in your field of study?
- What in your opinion is the greatest controversy of this aspect of Canadian history?
- How will your awareness of this history and art installation positively impact society?
- What is the significance and value to having the UFV host this art installation?
- How did your understanding of Indian residential schools differ before and after the witness blanket visit?
- Describe the importance of the place of learning in this chapter of Canadian history.
- Does the art installation make you want to know more about Indian Residential Schools?

- If you had one story to tell the world about Residential schools what would that be?

Answer the following questions after your viewing:

- How would you feel if someone came and took your child?
- What if that child was you?
- What does it mean to have your cultural identity suppressed?
- How has witnessing this art impacted your understanding of Canadian history?
- As a witness, you now have the responsibility to share what you have witnessed and be a part of the reconciliation process, how will you do this?
- Explain how witnessing can positively influence your chosen field of study.

- **Share Your Witnessing Experience on Social Media**

Take part in the reconciliation process by spreading the word, sharing the project, #witnessblanket #UFV.

Post viewing activities

- **Class Discussion**

Lead a class discussion asking students to share their experience witnessing the blanket and answering a question or questions that were asked in the Suggested Viewing Activities section.

- **View the Video “The Day of the Apology”** *available online at aadnc:*

<https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015657/1100100015675>. Share your thoughts on the apology after viewing the Witness Blanket.

- **The Reconciliation Process**

As a witness, you now are presented the honour of reshaping the history of the Residential School Era by taking part in the reconciliation process. How are you going to spread the word about residential schools and the Witness Blanket Project? Idea: Complete a Quick Draw

Suggested Resources

- The Project of Heart is an excellent resource that integrates education, reconciliation and social justice as a mechanism to create awareness about the residential school era. For further information, please see the following website: <http://projectofheart.ca/step-1->

[investigation-into-the-history-and-legacy-of-indian-residential-schools-in-canada/](#)

- This website gives a thorough historical foundation to the creation and destruction of the residential school era. It is visually stimulating to connect the reader to the lives of the children who attended. The website gives recommendations on how to further one's knowledge. For further information, please see the following website: <http://100yearsofloss.ca/en>
- This interactive website provides extensive historical information about the residential school era. It contains pictures, audio recordings and videos depicting the lives of those who were forcefully taken to the schools. For further information, please see the following website: <http://wherearethechildren.ca/en/exhibition/>
- This video contains first hand experiences of residential school survivors. The stories highlight the negative affects the schools had on their personal lives due to various forms of abuse. For further information, please see the following website: <http://www.cbc.ca/8thfire/2011/12/painful-legacy.html>
- This website highlights various activities and events that have occurred throughout Canada. It provides extensive educational opportunities to learn about the residential school era. For further information, please see the following website: <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=9>
- This film was produced by the National Film Board. It explores the experiences of two residential school survivors. Lena Hart and the late Glen Anaquod share some of their experiences as young children attending residential schools in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. For further information, please see <https://www.nfb.ca/search?csrfmiddlewaretoken=LM7RZ24t2ggAVJIdU7CXUXDksodSLMuP&q=We+were+children>
- This video is a CBC news update on the statistics of the deaths of children attending the Indian residential schools <http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2428753273/>
- This is a propaganda video for Canadian Residential Schools https://youtu.be/s_V4d7sXoqU
- "Kill the Indian Save the Man" this video is about the story of the experience of going to a residential school created by Annie Smith <https://youtu.be/L6PU7eNrJnE>

- This award winning documentary reveals Canada's darkest secret - the deliberate extermination of indigenous (Native American) peoples and the theft of their land under the guise of religion. This never before told history as seen through the eyes of this former minister (Kevin Annett) who blew the whistle on his own church, after he learned of thousands of murders in its Indian Residential Schools.
<https://youtu.be/0brD50DIv5Q>
- 20 minute history of Canada and the Indian Residential School system. To provide historical context and intended as a prequel to the video Murray Sinclair Truth and Reconciliation.
<https://youtu.be/6-28Z93hCOI>
- Truth and Reconciliation: Stories from Residential School Survivors
<https://youtu.be/VmjrVfsLRBE>
- 1000 conversations, a website and initiative by the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation (a department of the Native Counselling Services of Alberta) and the Legacy of Hope Foundation, supported by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
http://1000conversations.ca/?page_id=46 which includes resources and conversation starters http://1000conversations.ca/?page_id=54