



# **Critical/Courageous Conversations on Race**

**WHAT YOUR CHILD IS  
LEARNING AT SCHOOL AND  
HOW YOU CAN HELP**

# Manitoba Education and Training Indigenous Inclusion Directorate

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Available in alternate formats upon request.

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The bear is highly respected by Indigenous peoples across Canada. Its physical strength and the ferocity with which it protects its young make it a natural symbol of courage. In the Seven Teachings, courage is represented by the bear. The bear's head on the cover is intended to inspire courageous conversations, and the circles within represent harmony between the four races of humanity.

# INTRODUCTION



Critical conversations about racism at home are an important aspect of addressing racism in schools, communities and in society. All of us—children and youth, parents, grandparents, teachers and caregivers—are responsible for finding ways to address racism wherever we see it. Even if racism doesn't affect you or your family directly, there is still a need for you to act.

Over the last several decades, Manitoba has become much richer for its diversity. The province has undergone many changes as a result of the considerable growth of Aboriginal communities and the increasing numbers of new Canadians from around the world. There have also been changes in people's awareness of equality and human rights. As a result, Manitobans have a deeper understanding of the importance of social justice and equity in our province, nation and world.

These developments in Manitoba and in our contemporary world have raised our awareness of human interdependence and the importance of active and meaningful participation as citizens at the local, national and global level. This document provides a vision of how parents and grandparents can help prepare their children to meet the challenges of an increasingly diverse society while creating local and international communities that are characterized by diversity, justice and equity.

## DEFINITIONS

**INCLUSION** is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members.

**DIVERSITY** means understanding that each individual is unique and recognizing our individual differences. These differences can be along the lines of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs or other ideologies.

**RACIAL DISCRIMINATION** is when people are treated less favourably than other people in similar situations because of their race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin or immigrant status.



# A LAND OF DIVERSE PEOPLES

## What Your Children will be Learning in School

The effects of rapidly growing and increasingly youthful Aboriginal, immigrant and visible minority populations are having more and more of a significant impact on the K-12 educational system in Manitoba.

Manitoba's population was originally a unique tapestry of Indigenous peoples. Immigrants from around the world then came to this land over the past several centuries and were woven into this tapestry. Many of these immigrants were seeking freedom from the ravages of religious, political and economic oppression, as well as natural disasters and war. Human diversity has been a constant and ever-evolving characteristic of Manitoba's peoples.

It is conceivable that, within less than a decade, the percentage of Aboriginal and visible-minority students in Winnipeg's schools will approach or exceed 50%.

Manitoba's population has been changing in many ways. There are many more languages, religions and cultures than there were before. This is not only because of increased immigration but because of a growing First Nations, Métis and Inuit population. The impact of both of these trends has been significant for Manitoba.



## RACISM AND FNMI PEOPLES

Historical accounts of the community lives, governance, beliefs and customs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people have lacked accuracy. Sadly, most of the history that has been written has been based on stereotypes or misconceptions that reinforced the definitions and descriptions of “Indians” in legislation such as the Indian Act.



Together, it is important for each of us to keep learning about how racism continues to affect our schools and communities.

Many Canadians don't know or haven't been taught how the racism experienced by Aboriginal people is different from other forms of racism. Equally important, many First Nations, Métis and Inuit people may not be aware of how systemic racism continues to affect them.

# THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF CANADA

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) had a mandate to collect stories and learn the truth about what happened in residential schools, and to inform all Canadians of its findings. The TRC guided and inspired First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and Canadians to continue the process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation and renewed relationships based on mutual understanding and respect.

The TRC Calls to Action recommendations that are specific to education include the following:

- Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation
- Improving education attainment levels and success rates
- Developing culturally appropriate curricula
- Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses
- Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children

Through the “It Matters to Me” initiative, the TRC challenges ALL Canadians to engage in reconciliation and to work together to confront the challenges we face, as “the time has come to bring reconciliation into the discussion.” Schools also need to be fully engaged in the reconciliation process and dialogue.





# WHAT FORMS DOES RACISM TAKE?

Racism can take many forms. It can be obvious when it happens between two or more people, and it can also happen in less visible ways through systemic racism.

It is often easy to recognize **INDIVIDUAL ACTS OF RACISM**, such as:

- making fun of the clothes, food or physical appearance of people from different cultures
- telling jokes at the expense of people from particular groups
- using insulting language about particular cultural groups
- making fun of people's accents or names
- refusing to work or play with or sit next to people who are from a different culture or who speak a different language
- not including people from particular backgrounds in activities

Identifying **SYSTEMIC RACISM** can be more difficult because it includes the policies and practices entrenched in established institutions. Systemic racism is much less visible and happens in ways that we often take for granted and assume to be normal.

Examples of systemic racism include:

- low representation of FNMI people in school boards, divisional and school administrations, teaching staff, and parent councils
- Lower expectations of children, youth and families from certain groups
- Lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate programming and materials in schools and community organizations

Fortunately, individuals can challenge systems and institutions that are systemically racist by having critical and courageous conversations with family, friends, colleagues and school staff.



# WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF RACISM ON YOUR CHILDREN?

Racism can be experienced by everyone—children, youth, teachers, parents, maintenance staff, office staff, canteen staff and casual workers—and it can be embedded in the school culture and practices. Social media also plays a role in contributing to racist views and values. Song lyrics, twitter posts and news reports can all reinforce negative stereotypes.

The following are some ways in which racism might affect children and youth in your community:

Children and youth who **EXPERIENCE** racism might:

- have trouble focusing and concentrating
- have trouble making friends
- get lower results on assignments and tests
- reject their own culture and parental values
- be aggressive or disruptive

Children and youth who **WITNESS** racism might:

- feel stress and anxiety and not know how to respond
- feel a sense of unfairness
- feel powerless to make things better
- feel that it is okay to be hurtful if they see others doing it
- become desensitized to the issues after witnessing these situations

**EFFECTS ON THE COMMUNITY** might include:

- conflict and fights in playground/community centres between children from different cultural or linguistic groups
- conflict between parents and children from different backgrounds
- parents not having confidence in the school and education system
- parents and children feeling unwelcome and undervalued in the school system
- a general desensitization to the effects of racism

# CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACISM

Critical conversations about racism at home are an important aspect of addressing racism in schools and communities and in society. Everyone has a role to play, and by working together we can have an impact on how our children learn about racism and how they react to seeing it.

## Supporting Critical Conversations

### Things to consider:

- Racism and stereotyping are topics that raise a range of thoughts and emotions
- Racism blinders affect our experiences and approaches to solutions
- Race-related power dynamics might exist in homes and communities
- Creating safe learning environments to discuss racism is needed
- Discussions begin with good will and unbiased judgments
- Sensitive talks with children who might have firsthand experience of racism
- Honest acknowledgement of our own limitations (e.g., not having personally experienced what it is like to be a target of racism)
- Some familiarity with the terminology and concepts involved with anti-racism education
- What I see and how I understand the world will reflect in the way I approach solutions to how the world treats people as members of racial groups

Having critical and courageous conversations with your children and family is a very effective way of achieving a better understanding of the effects of racism on people.

## Important Critical/Courageous Conversation Questions with **YOUNG CHILDREN**

- 1** Why do people have different-coloured skin, wear different clothes or eat different foods?
- 2** Why do people have different languages, holidays and cultural activities?
- 3** Can you think of a time when all of the children in your school played together?
- 4** How do you feel when you are left out of things with your friends?  
How do you think others who are left out feel?

## Important Critical/Courageous Conversation Questions with **OLDER CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

- 1** Can you think of a situation where you may have witnessed some form of racism? How did that affect you?
- 2** What are some ways of responding to witnessing discrimination?
- 3** How does social media create/reinforce negative stereotyping?

## Important Critical/Courageous Conversation Questions with **ADULTS**

- 1** How does our school community demonstrate inclusivity? How can we do better and build on our successes?
- 2** How do we as a family talk about racism with each other and our children? How can we improve how we talk?
- 3** How do we demonstrate inclusiveness with our family and friends and community?
- 4** What opportunities exist for people to participate and have full inclusion in society? How do we measure inclusion?

# EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

## Links

*United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2008)

[www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)

*Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations, 1948)

[www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR\\_Translations/eng.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf)

*Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, n.d.) [www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca)

*How to Be an Anti-Racist Parent: Real-Life Parents Share Real-Life Tips* (New Demographic, n.d.)

[www.newdemographic.com/Ebooks/How\\_To\\_Be\\_An\\_Anti-Racist\\_Parent.pdf](http://www.newdemographic.com/Ebooks/How_To_Be_An_Anti-Racist_Parent.pdf)

## Books for Younger Children

*Shin-chi's Canoe* by Nicola I. Campbell (House of Anansi Press, 2008)

*Shi-shi-etko* by Nicola I. Campbell (House of Anansi Press, 2005)

*Kookum's Red Shoes* by Peter Eyvindson (Pemmican Publications, 2015)

*Red Parka Mary* by Peter Eyvindson (Pemmican Publications, 2015)

*Arctic Stories* by Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak (Annick Press, 1998)

*As Long as the Rivers Flow* by Larry Loyie (Groundwood Books, 2005)

*From Far Away* by Robert Munsch (Annick Press, 1995)

*Fatty Legs: A True Story* by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton (Annick Press, 2010)

*When We Were Alone* by David A. Robertson and Julie Flett (HighWater Press, 2016)

*Hiawatha and the Peacemaker* by Robbie Robertson (Harry N. Abrams, 2015)

*Yamozha and His Beaver Wife* by Vital Thomas (Theytus Books, 2007)

## Books for Older Children/Youth

*Stranger At Home: A True Story* by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton (Annick Press, 2011)

*No Time to Say Goodbye* by Sylvia Olsen (Sono Nis Press, 2011)

*My Name Is Seepetza* by Shirley Sterling (Groundwood Books, 1992)

*We feel good out here* = Zhik gwaa'an, nakhwatthaiitat qwiinzii (*The Land is Our Storybook*) by Julie-Ann André and Mindy Willett (Fifth House Publishers, 2008)

*April Raintree* by Beatrice Culleton Mosionier (HighWater Press, 1984)

*In Search of April Raintree* by Beatrice Culleton Mosionier (HighWater Press, 1999)

## Books for Adults

*The Comeback: How Aboriginals are Reclaiming Power and Influence* by John Ralston Saul (Penguin Canada, 2015)

*The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* by Thomas King (Anchor Canada, 2013)

*Indians Wear Red: Colonialism, Resistance, and Aboriginal Street Gangs* by Elizabeth Comack, Lawrence Deane, Larry Morrisette, and Jim Silver (Fernwood Publishing, 2013)

*Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Metis and Inuit Issues in Canada* by Chelsea Vowel (HighWater Press, 2016)

