MIDDLE SCHOOL · AGES 11 TO 14

The School

The Mohawk Institute: the school that was promised, what it became, and what the Nation keeps of it.

Read

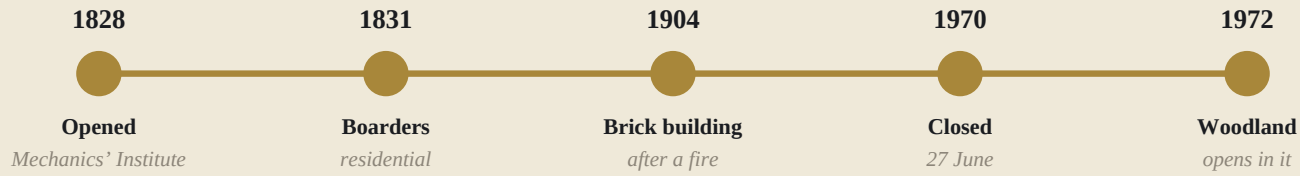
Joseph Brant wanted a school where Mohawk children could learn English without losing their own language. In 1828 the New England Company opened the Mechanics' Institute in Brantford. From 1831 it took boarders, and from 1834 girls as well.

It became the Mohawk Institute, the oldest and longest-running residential school in Canada. Children were taken from their families and forbidden their languages. They called it the Mush Hole. Fifty-four deaths are recorded, and the records are incomplete. It closed on 27 June 1970.

In 1972 the Woodland Cultural Centre opened in the building. The Save the Evidence campaign restored it as a site of conscience, and a ground search began in 2021. Today the community's own schools teach in Mohawk and Cayuga from the first day. The Mohawk Nation of Grand River opened its own investigation in 2011.

Look

How to read it: the school's history along one line.



today: a site of conscience, and schools in Mohawk and Cayuga

Words to know

Word	What it means here
Residential school	A school where Indigenous children were made to live away from their families.
Survivor	A person who lived through a residential school.
Site of conscience	A place kept so people remember and learn from what happened.
Boarder	A student who lives at the school.
Language revitalization	Bringing a language back into everyday use.
Truth and Reconciliation	Telling what happened, and working to set relations right.
Calls to Action	The 94 actions the TRC asked of Canada in 2015.

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Work with a primary source

> *"... the Mush Hole ..."*
>
> What the children called the Mohawk Institute, after the food they were given; recorded in survivors' accounts.

Ask the source	Your answer
What did the children call the school?	
What does the name tell us about their lives there?	
Why do survivors' own words matter?	
What can a name not tell us?	

Three points of view

What the school means today, described three ways. Read each, then explain why they differ.

Who	What the school means today
Survivors and their families	A place of loss and survival, whose truth must be told.
Canada	A residential school, part of a history Canada has apologized for (2008).
The Mohawk Nation of Grand River	The second of three promises, broken; its record kept under the Nation's own seal.

Claim, evidence, reasoning

Choose one claim the poster makes, for example "the records are incomplete". Then fill in the table.

Claim	Evidence	Reasoning

Answer

1. **Historical significance.** Why does it matter that this was the longest-running residential school?

2. **Evidence.** Why are survivors' own accounts important evidence?

3. **Cause and consequence.** How did forbidding languages at school affect families and communities?

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4. **Continuity and change.** What changed when the building became a cultural centre?

5. **Historical perspective.** How might a survivor, a teacher of the time and a student today see the school differently?

6. **Ethical dimension.** What do we owe to the children who went to this school?

Think about it. What is one thing you can do to learn more, or to support language learning in your community?

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Performance task: Remember and learn: a respectful message

Show what you have learned by explaining it respectfully to others. Take care: this is a real history that affected real families.

Choose one

A letter	Write a one-page letter to your Member of Parliament or to the King explaining the Mohawk Institute: what was promised, what it became, and how it is remembered today.
An infographic	Design a one-page poster that explains the Mohawk Institute: what was promised, what it became, and how it is remembered today, with a drawing that puts a person in the picture.
A short talk or podcast	Record or give a two-to-three-minute talk explaining the Mohawk Institute: what was promised, what it became, and how it is remembered today to someone your age.

What your work must include

- At least three facts with their dates.
- One quotation from the primary source, What the children called the Mohawk Institute, after the food they were given; recorded in survivors' accounts, in quotation marks.
- At least three of the "Words to know", used correctly.
- One point of view other than the Mohawk Nation of Grand River's, explained fairly (Survivors and their families, Canada).
- Your own claim, with the evidence and reasoning behind it.
- A list of the sources you used.

Steps

- Day 1: reread the poster and this sheet; choose your format; write your claim in one sentence.
- Day 2: gather your facts, your quotation and the other point of view; plan your work.
- Day 3: make a first draft; trade with a partner and give each other one compliment and one suggestion.
- Day 4: improve your draft, check the success criteria, and hand it in.

Success criteria: check before you hand it in

☐	My claim is clear.
☐	My facts and dates are correct.
☐	I quoted the source exactly and said where it is from.
☐	I explained another point of view fairly.
☐	I used at least three new words correctly.
☐	I listed my sources.

Due: About four class days from the start. Marked with the Achievement Chart on the teacher's page.

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For the teacher: standards met

Universal competencies	Identify key facts and claims; Understand perspective and point of view; Make connections, personal to community to larger systems; Analyse and evaluate evidence. The same everywhere, whatever the curriculum.
Curriculum	Ontario History, Grade 8, Strand A (residential schools), and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Canada, Grade 10 (NAC2O).
Specific expectations	Teachers choose which specific expectations to assess. The sheet supports the overall expectations named above.
Historical thinking	Each question names its concept: significance, evidence, cause and consequence, continuity and change, perspective, ethical dimension.
Reading level	Flesch–Kincaid grade 6.4 (reading ease 69)
Plain language	Written to ISO 24495-1; new words taught in “Words to know”.
Balance	Three views, each in its own words; survivors first.
Time and materials	Two periods of 40 to 50 minutes. Prepare first: preview the material, and plan support.
Accommodations	Allow students to step away; offer journaling instead of discussion. If this topic is hard for you or someone you know: the Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line, day and night, 1-866-925-4419.

Assessment: the Achievement Chart

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Knowledge and Understanding	Names some facts with help	Names the main facts and dates	Explains them accurately	Explains them and how they connect
Thinking	Answers with little use of the source	Uses the source in part	Uses the source to support answers	Weighs the points of view against the source
Communication	Ideas are unclear	Some ideas are clear	Clear, with the new words	Clear, precise, new words used well
Application	Makes few connections	A simple connection to today	Connects the past to today	Explains why it still matters

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Answer key

	A good answer includes
1	It shaped generations, from 1828 to 1970.
2	They tell what records left out, in the words of those who lived it.
3	Children lost their languages, and families and communities lost the chance to pass them on.
4	A place of harm became a place of remembering, learning and culture.
5	A reasoned answer showing different experiences.
6	A reasoned view: truth, remembrance, support, and the return of language.

Sources: the Woodland Cultural Centre; the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action; the Secretariat's mandate of 12 April 2011. This sheet explains the Mohawk Nation of Grand River's position beside others. If this topic is hard for you or someone you know: the Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line, day and night, 1-866-925-4419.

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