Residential schools

* A main tool of colonialism where the values and the language of the colonizing culture is taught to the youngest generation through educational institutions
* Residential schools were set out to assimilate First Nations people
* Students were taken out of their home environment and placed in an isolated environment
* Education was a partnership between churches and the Dept. of Indian Affairs
* Even though many students were eager to learn, these schools gave little opportunity beyond the most basic academic and practical skills
* Students were required to maintain the institution as well as produce the food that they were to eat
* Many people who attended residential school saying that they were like slaves, having to perform tasks that would otherwise have been done by paid employees
* People with Indian status were not allowed to go to public schools until the Indian Act was revised in 1951
* Residential schools have created several extraordinary for several generations who have lost their language and their normal childhood
* Many look back on residential school as a nightmare due to the physical, emotional and sexual abuse
* Forced attendance at residential schools shattered the traditional notion of families in First Nations communities
* Boys and girls were kept apart and not allowed to talk to talk to one another, even if they were siblings
* It becomes cultural genocide – the act of completely destroying the culture of a people – “killing the Indian with the child”
* By 1910, there was 60 government sanctioned and supported residential schools; about 150000 Aboriginal and Metis children were forced to attend these schools
* Young children were removed from their homes by RCMP or Indian Agents
* An amendment to the Indian Act in 1884 made it mandatory for Aboriginal children to go to some sort of school, mainly residential schools
* The last residential school closed in 1996 and one of the closest residential schools to us is LeJac near Fraser Lake
* The Canadian Family Allowance Act was only eligible to Aboriginal families if their youth continued to go to residential schools, they were cut off if the students stopped attending

Life in residential schools

* One of the greatest wedges used to drive out culture was not permitting the youth to use their own language, the English language was enforced
* If they used anything other than English, they would often be physically punished
* Culture in transmitted through language therefore imposing English language will impose English culture
* Many healthy children who were sent to residential schools soon contracted tuberculosis due to the unhealthy conditions found in the schools, where large groups of children lived in close quarters and when they returned home, they carried the bacteria with them, in one school up to 69% of the students had died
* Children had no contact with their families for up to 10 months at a time, sometimes years
* In some schools, more than 50% of the children died as a result of the terrible living conditions, poor diet and inadequate medical care
* The discovery in 2008 of many unmarked graves around a former school is a testament to the tragedy of these lost children.
* Malnourishment was an issue with the children for example, having to eat at times spoiled meat, soups consisting of boiled potatoes
* A report indicated that some residential schools were experimenting on children the effects of vitamin/nutritional deficiencies
* Many children had died from diseases within residential schools, whereas many children died trying to run away and return home from residential schools

Effects of residential schools

* Shifting ideologies of gender relations
  + Tsimshian traditionally valued both male and female labour as crucial to the well being of the family and community
  + It was eventually changed to the internalization to the notion of the “male breadwinner” even though many women continued to work
* In a society built on the whole village raising the children, the separation was terrible
  + Imagine the fear of a young child being taken away from his or her family, not knowing why and not knowing when you will ever see them again
* Children missed the opportunity to grow up in their own families and culture
  + They did not experience the daily love of their parents and had no opportunity to learn parenting skills
* Children lacked the skills to fully participate in their own communities, yet were not prepared for life in Euro-Canadian society
* Emotional, physical and sexual abuse has left lasting impressions on their victims for generations. Most remain silent about their shame, hiding shame and guilt
* There were reported cases of sterilization amongst the youth