

Reading and Understanding Émilie Lebel’s “We became invisible minorities’: Childhood Development and the Government as Parent”

This series of activities aims to support students in their reading of the article series Residential Schools and the Destabilization of the Social Determinants of Health by Émilie Lebel. Each activity will tackle some key points touched upon in one of the articles in order to help students understand them.

Learning Goals:

- Understand the Sixties Scoop,
- Understand the connection between the Sixties Scoop and the government’s failure to support early childhood development in Indigenous communities,
- Understand how the Sixties Scoop affected the presence and visibility of Indigenous populations, and
- Explain events and their consequences through acquired knowledge.

SUGGESTED GRADES

9 - 11 / Sec V

SUGGESTED SUBJECTS

This activity can be used in a variety of subject-specific courses such as History or Healthy Active Living, and/or in the context of interdisciplinary studies.

An Ongoing Tragedy for Indigenous Communities

First came the residential schools, and then the Sixties Scoop—a continuation of problematic policies which further destabilized Indigenous communities.

Dr. Jacqueline Marie Maurice is an expert in Indigenous health education and serves as the chief executive officer of **the Sixties Scoop Healing Foundation**. [...] Dr. Maurice explains the Sixties Scoop as a period during which child welfare authorities removed Indigenous children from their families, alleging “inadequate parents” and “socially disorganized” communities. Removals occurred from the 1950s until the 1980s, and they were frequent. Approximately 20,000 Indigenous children across Canada were taken from their homes during this period.

According to this excerpt, what event followed the peak of residential schools? What was the reasoning behind it?

Use this space to answer the question.

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Watch the video



Separating children from parents: The Sixties Scoop in Canada.

According to the video and the excerpt above, use your own words to explain the Sixties Scoop. What did it consist of? Who was impacted?

Use this space to answer the question.

In fact, a majority of survivors report experiencing various forms of abuse during formative years spent in residential schools or in care. As detailed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, "survivors reported experiencing one or more of the following types of abuse in the schools: sexual abuse (32.6%), physical abuse (69.2%), and verbal or emotional abuse (79.3%). The majority (71.5%) reported that they had witnessed the abuse of others." With the knowledge gained through her research and work, Dr. Maurice can attest to the unfortunate similarities among Scoop survivors. She also recognizes this pattern from her own experiences. "Young girls that become self-destructive may have experienced sexual violence or abuse and that certainly was my case, you know, in terms of some of the traumas."

In addition, growing up in these circumstances deprived many Indigenous children of positive role models, resources, and opportunities. For example, notes the TRC's report, "the lack of positive strategies for dealing with inter-personal conflict may have led to high rates of family breakdown and problems that youth carry with them into their adult lives." In Dr. Maurice's case, she was asked to leave her home after speaking out against her abuse; so, at 15 years of age, she faced the realities of life on her own.

According to this excerpt, what kinds of trauma did those impacted, such as Dr. Maurice, suffer from? What negligence affected the children who were part of the Scoop?

Use this space to answer the question.

The Government as Parent

In addition, growing up in these circumstances deprived many Indigenous children of positive role models, resources, and opportunities. For example, notes the TRC's report, "the lack of positive strategies for dealing with inter-personal conflict may have led to high rates of family breakdown and problems that youth carry with them into their adult lives." In Dr. Maurice's case, she was asked to leave her home after speaking out against her abuse; so, at 15 years of age, she faced the realities of life on her own. "I dropped out of high school in Grade 10 because basic survival became important," she explains, referring to the need for income and housing. In addition, she emphasizes the hardships of being alone. "I had no family in my life," she stresses. "No one. The built-in natural social safety net did not exist. Those ties were

severed... Foster care was and still is a great bootcamp for becoming homeless because you don't really have home nor family. You can't go back and have a soft place to land." [...]

The cumulative effects of abuse, neglect, decreased opportunities, and limited resources held back many Indigenous children. "It takes a lot of energy to persevere and to journey forward," states Dr. Maurice. "A sense of powerlessness and helplessness, and then hopelessness become really important." These overwhelming emotions take root and ground many in environments and patterns which continue to affect their health into adulthood.

**According to this excerpt, what effects does family have on child development?
What could the children have benefited from by growing up with their own family?**

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Consider the impacts of the Sixties Scoop on Indigenous children from what you've read and answered above. What social determinants of health (SDH) do these consequences affect?

You can use the same SDH more than once in your answers.

Reminder—here is the list of SDH:

- Income and social protection
- Education
- Unemployment and job insecurity
- Working life conditions
- Food insecurity
- Housing, basic amenities and the environment
- Early childhood development
- Social inclusion and non-discrimination
- Structural conflict; and
- Access to affordable health services of decent quality

Impact	Affected SDH

According to the excerpt above, are there some social Determinants of health that are especially impacted by the Scoop? Explain your reasoning.

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Childhood circumstances set the stage for our lives. They have influence over many enduring aspects of our future selves – including our health.

Consequently, childhood experiences and early childhood development are key social determinants of health (SDH). "Early childhood is a crucial time of physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and language development," notes the Pan-Canadian Health Inequalities Reporting Initiative (2018). To grow, we interact with and use the resources of our environment, and so we are limited by what those resources are.

After reading this excerpt from Lebel's article, explain in your own words why early childhood development is so important. **How might it influence an individual's adult life?**

Use this space to answer the question.

Based on what you've learned and inferred so far, can you explain Dr. Jacqueline Marie Maurice's declaration:

"We became invisible minorities,"

that titles this article? **What does she mean by this statement?**

Use this space to answer the question.

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Use this space to answer the question.

This topic and article contain information and terms you still might not know and/or understand.

Do you have any remaining questions or reflections about vocabulary (and topics) that you're still unsure about?

TEACHER NOTE:

Take this time to answer questions that might not be answered at the end of the series.

If you, or a person you know, need support because of a similar experience, you can contact **the Sixties Scoop Healing Foundation** at the following address:



<https://www.sixtiesscoophealingfoundation.ca/contact>

Reference List

- CBC News. "Separating Children from Parents: The Sixties Scoop in Canada." YouTube. YouTube, June 22, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_nmd6HXKXYU.
- Lebel, Émilie. "We Became Invisible Minorities': Childhood Development and the Government as Parent." Defining Moments Canada, March 17, 2023. <https://definingmomentscanada.ca/bryce100/series-residential-schools-and-the-destabilization-of-the-social-determinants-of-health/series-we-became-invisible-minorities/>.