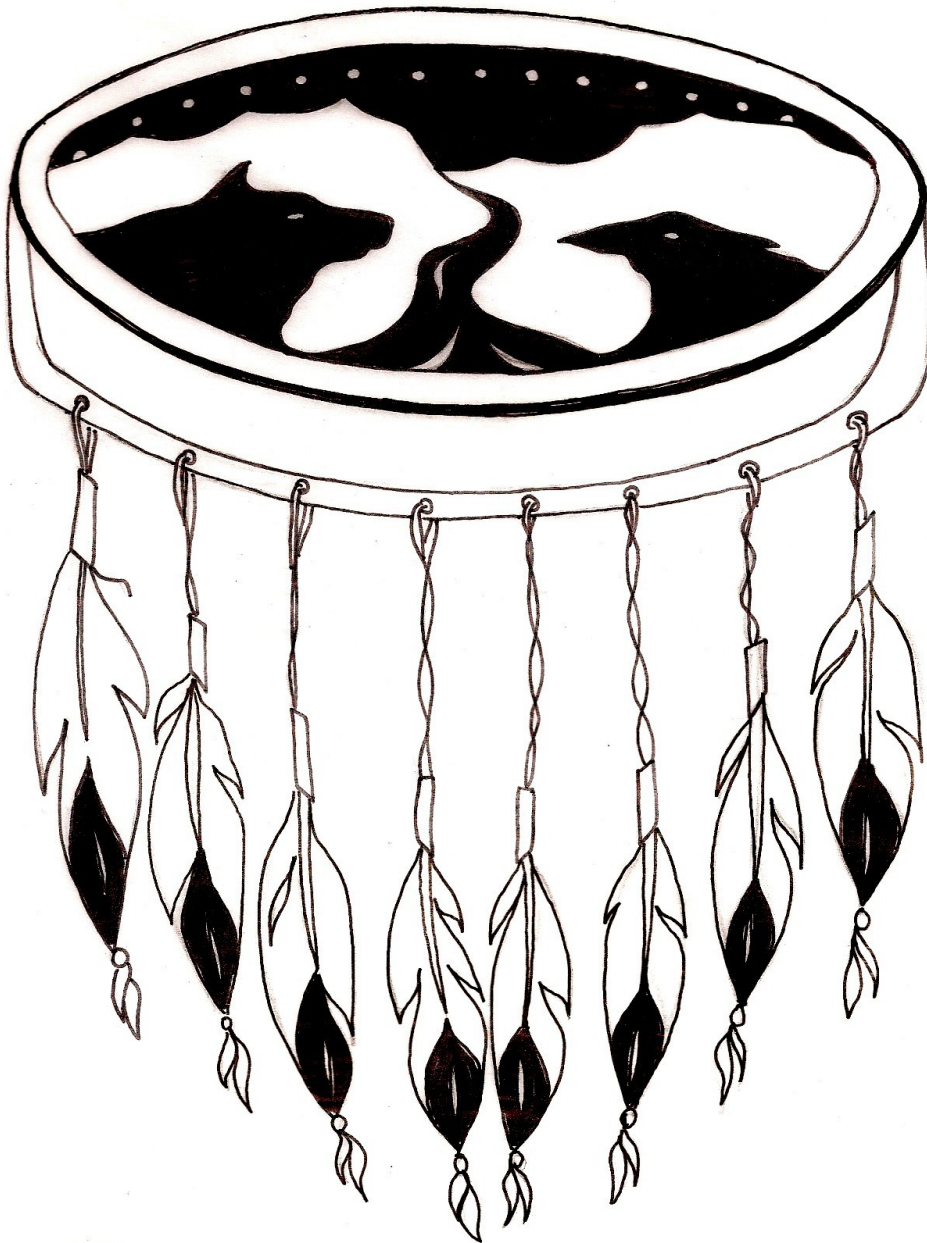


# A Handbook

*OF*

**YUKON FIRST  
NATIONS  
EDUCATION  
RESOURCES  
FOR  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**2013/2014**



**FIRST NATIONS PROGRAMS AND  
PARTNERSHIPS UNIT,  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

This handbook provides introductory information about Yukon First Nations and some of the Yukon First Nations' education programs, services and resources that are available. It is intended to foster the integration of Yukon First Nations' culture, history and languages into the classroom. This teacher handbook is a complement to the *Yukon Teacher Handbook 2013-2014* published by the Department of Education.

# A Handbook *of* Yukon First Nations Education Resources for Public Schools 2013/2014

## DEDICATION



Sandy Anderson (Alexander Charles Anderson) was a member of the Yan Yeidi (Wolf) Clan of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation. He was the second son of Mary and Richard Anderson, and was born in 1954. His traditional name was Khatgwexgh.

Sandy grew up in Whitehorse and attended residential school in Lower Post for the first two years of his formal education. He graduated from F. H. Collins in 1973. He received his B.A. in Anthropology at the University of Victoria in 1980. In 1982 he received his teaching certification at University of B.C. Sandy taught in B.C. for several years. He began his teaching career at the two-room DIA school in Fort Babine. He taught both secondary and elementary school in the Smithers School District, and he taught at the band-operated Maaqtusiis School in Ahousat on Vancouver Island.

He returned to the Yukon in 1991, when he was offered an instructors position in the Yukon Native Teacher Education program. Sandy promoted his love of Social Studies and Language Arts to upcoming teachers. He was one of the few staff hired that had First Nations ancestry, and he led the way in providing First Nations perspective, and ways of knowing and doing in this post-secondary institution. Sandy was a caring teacher and provided detailed responses to students work to support them in their teaching careers. He was a very generous man, and, with his connection to the coast, he was able to share her-ring eggs for special dishes at the College. Sandy is remembered for his quick wit and his great sense of humour, and previous YNTEP graduates were encouraged by his wonderful smile.

Sandy also worked at the Department of Education as a curriculum and resource material developer. He was part of the team that developed the Yukon First Nations resources for Social Studies grade 5 units that focus on clans, traditional governance, language and citizenship.

We would like to dedicate this teacher resource to the late Sandy Anderson. He had an extensive career in education, as a teacher, as an instructor of teachers and as a curriculum materials developer. He was a kind and gentle First Nation's role model, and he was a teacher you would have wanted for your own children. Gunałchîsh Khatgwexgh!

*Màhsi' choo (Gwich'in)*  
*Màhsi' cho (Hän)*  
*Máhsin cho (Northern Tutchone)*  
*Tsin'j̥j choh (Upper Tanana)*  
*Sógá sénlá' (Kaska)*  
*Shàw níthän (Southern Tutchone)*  
*Gunat̓ch̓ish (Tlingit)*  
*Gùnètch̓ish (Tagish)*  
*Thank you*

to the Council of Yukon First Nations, Yukon Native Language Centre,  
Alyce Johnson, Sara Davidson and  
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First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit  
for their help with this handbook. Translations courtesy of the  
Yukon Native Language Centre.

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Front cover: First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit logo  
Artist: Vernon Asp  
**Drum:** Represents passing down culture and language  
**Mountains & River:** Represent part of the land, part of the water  
**Wolf & Crow:** Represent the two clans in the Yukon  
**14 Mini Circles:** Represent the fourteen First Nations in the Yukon  
**8 Feathers:** Represent the eight Yukon First Nations languages  
Back cover: First Nations Graduation, Class of 2012

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## **2. YUKON FIRST NATIONS**

First Nations people have lived in the Yukon since time immemorial. In fact, evidence of what may be the oldest remains of human habitation of North America has been found in northern Yukon. During traditional times, First Nations people lived off the land, traveling on a seasonal round of fishing, hunting, trapping and gathering. This forged a connection to the land and its resources that continues to be vitally important.

The territory's First Nations people have a profound connection with their culture and language. In recent years there have been extensive initiatives to record traditional place names, learn and preserve First Nations languages, and ensure that stories, songs and dances are passed down to the next generation.

First Nations people make up approximately 25 percent of the total Yukon population, according to the 2011 Census. There are 14 First Nations in the territory:

- Carcross/Tagish First Nation;
- Champagne & Aishihik First Nations;
- First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun;
- Kluane First Nation;
- Kwanlin Dün First Nation;
- Liard First Nation;
- Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation;
- Ross River Dena Council;
- Selkirk First Nation;
- Ta'an Kwäch'än Council;
- Teslin Tlingit Council;
- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in;
- Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation; and
- White River First Nation.

Today, Yukon First Nations people look to the future while continuing to honour their past. Like other Yukoners, they adapt to the challenges of living in the north. Land claim agreements have brought new opportunities in education, economic development, resource management and governance.



*Kwanlin Dün First Nation  
hand game tournament, 2008*

It is not certain when and with whom hand games originated. However, pretty much wherever you go in the North, hand games are a well-known cultural activity. The rules stay the same between different cultural groups, but the hand signals and drumming vary.

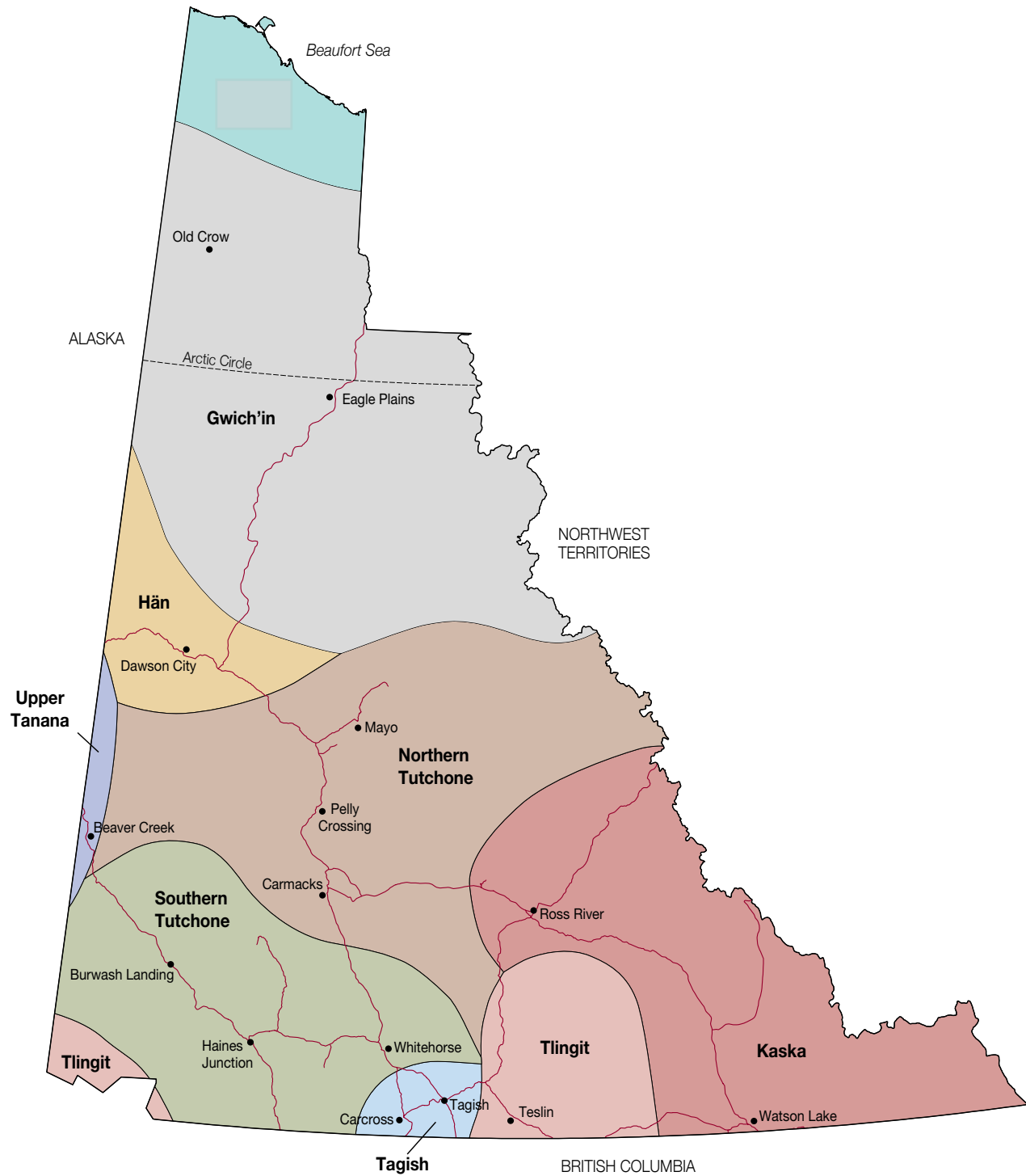
The songs and drumming are motivational for the players, and they get the audience involved as well.

There are a variety of skills and values being demonstrated while playing hand games. Skills, such as counting, observation and memory, are important when playing. Team playing, honesty and positive competition are values that are emphasized during a game.<sup>6</sup>



## Map 2. Yukon First Nations languages (within the Yukon)

Source: Department of Education





## YUKON FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGES

There are eight First Nations languages spoken in the Yukon. Each language group has distinct dialects, and many have more than one community residing within its larger nation.

- Gwich'in
  - Old Crow
  - Chandalar (Alaska)
  - Fort McPherson, (NWT)
- Hän
  - Dawson City
  - Arctic Village (Alaska)
- Kaska
  - Ross River
  - Watson Lake
  - Lower Post (BC)
- Northern Tutchone
  - Big Salmon
  - Carmacks
  - Fort Selkirk
  - Mayo
  - White River
- Southern Tutchone
  - Kluane
  - Kloo Lake
  - Aishihik
  - Hutshi
  - Klukshu
  - Champagne
  - Laberge
- Tagish
  - Carcross
  - Tagish
- Inland Tlingit
  - Carcross
  - Teslin
  - Atlin (BC)
- Upper Tanana
  - Scottie Creek

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

*Learn some common phrases in the language of the people within whose traditional territory you are.*

*“The loss of a language is the loss of an enormous wealth of knowledge.”<sup>38</sup>*

Culture Camps for Language Learning

Of these eight languages, seven (Gwich'in, Hän, Kaska, Northern Tutchone, Southern Tutchone, Tagish and Upper Tanana) are from the Athapaskan family. Inland Tlingit is the only Yukon language that does not belong to this language family. Inland Tlingit is spoken in parts of British Columbia and the southern Yukon. There are no distinct boundaries between neighbouring language regions, and some communities — particularly Whitehorse — have First Nations people from a number of different language groups.

Today, all Yukon First Nations languages are at risk for extinction. There are fewer fluent speakers than there were in the past. Very few First Nations children — if any — can speak a Yukon First Nations language fluently. Even though most First Nations children and teenagers study their traditional languages at school, few of them go on to become fluent speakers.

Language is a vital part of Yukon First Nations culture. A Yukon First Nations language has many layers of meaning that do not translate into English.

“Each language contains an immense system of cultural knowledge including philosophy and spirituality, oral history, songs and dances, art, environmental systems and biodiversity, technical skills for survival, fishing, hunting and plant use, medical expertise, and significant cultural practices. The loss of a language is the loss of an enormous wealth of knowledge.” Through the oral tradition, lessons, stories and songs were handed down to the next generation. In this way, traditions and culture were maintained. Teaching through oral tradition requires learners to develop strong listening and retelling skills.

Teachers can invite speakers of First Nations languages into the classroom to encourage students to hear and learn their languages. They can host language-speaking events such as speeches, songs and dances and invite parents and grandparents into the classroom to participate in these events. They can also incorporate First Nations languages in lessons and unit plans by consulting and collaborating with First Nations Language teachers.

## SOCIAL ORGANIZATION



Traditional Yukon First Nations social and political organization is based on two moieties which are often referred to as clans. The two clans in the Yukon are Wolf and Crow. Clan membership is matriarchal throughout the Yukon which means that a child belongs to the clan of his or her mother.<sup>5</sup>

Historically, the Yukon moiety system followed many traditional laws to ensure peace and balance in everyday life. Many of these traditional laws continue to be emphasized today. Although there are similarities among the laws of most Yukon groups, there are also distinctive differences. All traditional laws set out specific rights and responsibilities for individuals and their families. Some of the traditional laws include<sup>5</sup>:

- Wolf and Crow people have to marry people from the opposite clan.<sup>5</sup>
- Clan members hold the rights to stories, songs, crests, regalia, objects, art, and any other forms that express its clan systems.<sup>2</sup>
- The oldest member of the family carries the right to grant permission for use of stories and songs, and in some cases, a whole family discussion occurs prior to making a final decision.<sup>2</sup>
- Crow people take Crow family names; Wolf people take Wolf family names.<sup>2</sup>
- A Wolf or a Crow cannot tell stories or songs that rightfully belong to the opposite clan.<sup>2</sup>

*The cultural protocol that guides all Yukon First Nations is that clans own the rights to family stories, songs, crests, regalia, ceremonial objects, icons, and symbols, as well as representation in any form until time immemorial.*

- If somebody wants to hunt, fish, pick berries or gather medicine on another clan's traditional territory, he or she must first seek permission. This is out of respect for the fact that another clan owns the rights to use that land. They have the responsibility of taking care of the land, and all other people have to report to them before using it.<sup>5</sup>

- During potlatches (i.e. funerals, naming, ceremonies), the opposite clan is responsible for certain procedures during a potlatch. For instance, when a Crow clan hosts a potlatch, they are responsible for gifts to the Wolf clan (blankets, sewing, money) because the Wolves have to do the groundwork for the hosting clan.<sup>2</sup>
- People from the opposite clan may be asked to witness and to be mediators during important events.<sup>2</sup>
- Clans must reach a consensus before proceeding with decision-making.<sup>2</sup>
- Clans must train their children in the responsibilities for carrying the stories, songs, dances, crests, regalia, and family practices.<sup>2</sup>

The Inland Tlingit people in the Carcross/Tagish and Teslin areas have a more complex clan system which divides the Wolf and Crow clans into smaller groups.



### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

*Invite an Elder into your classroom to share their knowledge about traditional social organization.*

## TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

Traditionally, Yukon First Nations children grew up on the land. They traveled with their parents and learned how to hunt, fish, trap, gather, and make clothing and build shelters. They learned these keys to survival by watching and practicing and then doing whatever they needed to do on their own.

*Stories are  
told and retold  
to present a  
“spiral of  
learning.”  
Each time a  
story is heard,  
the listener can  
get a different  
lesson from it,  
depending on  
the time and  
situation.*

Education was the responsibility of the mother’s side of the family. However, children had many teachers. Fathers, uncles and grandfathers taught young boys the skills they needed to become good trackers and hunters. Mothers, aunts and grandmothers taught girls how to prepare and preserve food, sew and help make the many things needed to travel and live on the land. Children were expected to learn by watching carefully and trying to do things on their own.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

*Contact your local First Nation to see if you can visit a fish camp.*

Elders showed children everything from how to make and set snares to where to find the best berry patches. Children also learned from the stories of Elders. From these teachings, they learned about First Nations legends, history and lessons about how to live correctly. Children were encouraged to learn and eventually retell these stories themselves.

Yukon First Nations were able to educate their children about history, songs, dances, stories, artwork and methods for hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering according to what their clan believed in. Traditional education is still practiced in some Yukon First Nations families today.<sup>5</sup>



*Taneshia and Autumn  
Jules, at a fish  
camp located by  
Johnson’s Crossing,  
traditionally a  
Dakhl’awèdì (Eagle  
Clan) fish camp*



## RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

As the first European governments began to arrive, they were faced with the dilemma of what to do about the Indigenous peoples. They felt it was in their own best interest and in the best interest of the First Nations people that First Nations people become ‘civilized,’ educated and Christian. Unfortunately, the newcomers were ignorant of the many sophisticated and complex systems and laws that the First Nations people already had in place to govern themselves, educate their children, and live peacefully with each other. A number of mission schools were established in the Yukon where church missions were located. Often they only operated during the summer months, when children returned from their winter trapping grounds. By 1911, however, the Choulta School, the first residential school, was opened in Carcross. It was followed by the Baptist Mission School in Whitehorse, the Lower Post Indian Residential School in Lower Post, and the Catholic and Anglican Hostels in Whitehorse. In 1920 it became mandatory for Status First Nations children to go to residential school.<sup>7</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW?

*The last residential school that Yukon First Nations children attended closed in 1975.*

Conditions at the schools were, for the most part, appalling. The schools were racked with poverty as the government failed to allocate proper funding levels to the schools. The teachers were frequently unqualified, textbooks were few and outdated, and supplies were sadly lacking. The schools experienced shortages of food, so the students often went hungry or were malnourished. Illnesses spread quickly among the students because of overcrowded conditions. The children were required to provide much of the labour necessary to run the schools: cleaning, doing laundry, supervising younger children and preparing food. Perhaps what is remembered most vividly by the former students is the harsh disciplinary conditions at the schools — children were beaten for speaking their language although they knew no other. They were frequently punished for breaking stringent rules or for talking, laughing and playing with other children. Punishments included strappings, beatings, groundings, and imprisonments or isolation. Children were deprived of the love and affection of their parents, grandparents and siblings throughout their childhood.<sup>7</sup>

When students began to return home, the difficulties that they experienced adjusting to home life, as a result of their experiences at residential school, became immediately apparent. Many of the students had spent eight years or more away from home, and when they returned it was often to people they saw as strangers. Many could no longer communicate with their grandparents and Elders because they had lost their language. With the loss of their language and culture, and with no way to re-learn them, many of the students suffered a profound loss of identity. These impacts have been intergenerational; children and grandchildren of residential school survivors continue to suffer from this loss of identity.<sup>7</sup>

*Children and grandchildren of residential school survivors continue to suffer from the effects of residential school.*

*While this recent past continues to greatly impact First Nations people, we have refused to abandon our traditional ways, and are working hard to revitalize our languages and traditions.*

Today, there are many sensitive topics that are rooted in this near past. The majority of the social problems, such as low self-esteem, eroded parenting skills, FASD, alcohol and drug addiction, and sexual abuse, stem from the residential school experience. Become aware of these topics in your community and find out the correct ways to work with them. Some communities are taking a proactive approach and welcome support, while others are not ready to discuss many of the issues. Take time to learn about the sensitive issues affecting your students and their community. Find appropriate ways to approach them. Be sensitive.<sup>5</sup>

While this recent past continues to greatly impact First Nations people, we have refused to abandon our traditional ways and are working hard to revitalize our languages and traditions. On a national level, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada is working toward putting the events of the past behind us in order to be able to work toward healing, reconciliation and a positive and healthy future. “The Commission was established as part of the Settlement Agreement on Indian Residential Schools, Canada’s largest class action suit. They are tasked with telling Canadians what happened in the Indian Residential Schools, honouring the lives of former students and their families, and creating a permanent record of the Indian Residential School legacy.”

The national Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Council of Yukon First Nations hosted an event at the Kwanlin Dun Cultural Centre January 14-15, 2013.<sup>39</sup> The event provided an opportunity for residential school survivors to share their stories, and for the community to learn more about the legacy of the Indian Residential School system.<sup>39</sup>

For more information on The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada go to their website: <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=26>

A number of communities in the Yukon are also working towards a better future. In 1998 a group of residential school survivors in Dawson City began meeting regularly in order to support each other in their healing journey. They became known as The K’änächá (Taking Care of Ourselves) Group. In 2009 they released *Tr’ëhuhch’in Năwtr’udăh’q: Finding Our Way Home*, which is a book that was created to help residential school “survivors” in their healing and to help educate others about the legacy of residential schools.<sup>8</sup>



*Crocuses, fireweed, lupin, arnica, river beauty*

## LAND CLAIMS

Before the arrival of Europeans, all First Nations across Canada were independent self-governing nations. They had specific structures of governance: ways to select leaders, sets of laws to govern the lives of the people, rules of protocol that governed their relations with other nations and ceremonies that formalized the institutions within society, such as marriage and death.<sup>5</sup>

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

*Acknowledge the traditional territory on which you gather for formal celebrations, meetings and school assemblies.*

The negotiation of Yukon land claims officially started in 1973 when Yukon First Nations people presented the document *Together Today For Our Children Tomorrow* to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Before that time, there had been no treaties between Yukon First Nations and government.

An agreement in principle was reached in 1989 after 16 years of negotiations, and the Umbrella Final Agreement (UFA) was signed in 1993. The UFA provides a framework for Yukon First Nation Final Agreements. First Nation Final Agreements are complex and wide-ranging, and include financial compensation, land, harvesting rights, heritage resources and governance structures, among other things. Each First Nation Final Agreement is a modern-day treaty recognized in Section 35 of the Federal Constitution Act, 1982.

## Self-Government Agreements

A First Nation Self-Government Agreement (SGA) is negotiated at the same time as the First Nation Final Agreement. The Self-Government Agreements, which are unique in Canada, set out the powers of the First Nation government to govern itself, its citizens, and its land. These powers include land and resource management as well as local bylaws and zoning.

Self-Government Agreements provide Self-Governing First Nations (SGFNs) with law-making authority in specific areas of First Nation jurisdiction, including education. The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in SGA provides for program delivery, and design and administration of certain education components to be divided and shared between the Yukon government and the First Nation. Several other Yukon SGFNs have expressed interest in amending their SGAs, so they may acquire these same provisions.



Ross River School students at year end celebration, 2007  
Photographer Fran Etzel

At the present time, 11 of the 14 Yukon First Nations have finalized their land claims and their Final and Self-Government Agreements are in effect: Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Champagne & Aishihik First Nations, First Nation of Na-cho Nyak Dun, Kluane First Nation, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation, Selkirk First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, Teslin Tlingit Council, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation. Three First Nations have not settled land claims: Liard First Nation, Ross River Dena Council and White River First Nation.

*"Together Today For Our Children Tomorrow"*