

# **RCtv: Honouring Truth and Reconciliation**

**Lesson Plan**

**Grades 9 – 12**



**REEL CANADA**

## Rctv: Honouring Truth and Reconciliation

Grades 9 – 12

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### About the Film

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## HONOUR TO SENATOR MURRAY SINCLAIR

Documentary | 2021 | 29 min.

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### Themes and Concepts

- history
- legacy
- colonialism
- national mythology
- law & justice
- truth & reconciliation
- community
- relationships
- Indigenous rights
- racism
- self-determination
- healing
- collective action

### Film Synopsis

Murray Sinclair, chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, outlines what he sees as the path towards a true reconciliation.

# FOREWORD

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## Lesson Plan Overview & Objectives

This lesson plan is designed to use the documentary short film *Honour to Senator Murray Sinclair* as a text for instruction in high school (grades 9 – 12) courses.

Teachers will find activities and ideas to:

- engage students to explore and reflect on the story, themes and other elements of the film.
- implement & assess curriculum expectations for their courses.

### Learning Objectives

Students will understand:

- The concepts and processes of Truth & Reconciliation and their significance as they apply to Canada.
- Murray Sinclair’s role in the Truth & Reconciliation Commission and in promoting broader understanding of these topics among the Canadian public.

### Assessment

Students can:

- Identify and explain some key terms and concepts related to Truth & Reconciliation and their importance to Canadian society.
- Describe the purpose of a Truth & Reconciliation Commission and explain some historical reasons why Canada’s TRC was created.
- Explain how colonialist policies in Canada (e.g., Residential Schools) have affected Indigenous ways of life.
- Understand and demonstrate values such as respect and empathy in conversations with classmates, and reflect on how these values relate to Truth & Reconciliation in Canada, with specific connections to the film.
- Make connections between the film and their own lives and relationships.
- Contribute to and participate in group discussions respectfully.

## Curriculum Connections

This lesson plan can be used to fulfill curriculum expectations in a variety of high school (grades 9 – 12) courses in subjects such as:

- |            |           |   |
|------------|-----------|---|
| • English  | • History | • First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies |
| • Civics   | • Health  | • Family Studies                          |
| • Politics | • Law     | • Social Sciences                         |

# Introductory Note

## Before Getting Started

The findings and Calls to Action of the **Truth & Reconciliation Commission** have implications for all Canadians. In learning about the history of Canada, we have opportunities to reflect on the country's historical and ongoing legacy of colonial policies and anti-Indigenous racism, and to witness and honour the stories of residential school survivors and the many children who did not survive. In doing so, we open doors to imagine and work towards futures of meaningful, equitable and respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

*Honour To Senator Murray Sinclair* and this accompanying lesson openly address the painful experiences and the resulting intergenerational traumas of these harmful policies. These topics are approached through the first-hand accounts of Indigenous residential school survivors and the Truth & Reconciliation Commission. While the film ultimately expresses a message of hope and unity, the film may be upsetting or difficult to watch for some students and staff.

REEL CANADA has [developed](#) a detailed list of best practices, guidelines and resources for [discussing sensitive issues in the classroom](#). Prior to teaching, please consult the [document for teachers](#) and share the [guidelines document](#) with students, which will help in establishing a foundation for safe, respectful and meaningful discussions on difficult topics.



Crisis and support resources for students are available [on our website](#).

For more information on best practices for having difficult conversations, see the [National Centre for Truth & Reconciliation](#) teacher resource for [Every Child Matters: Reconciliation through Education](#) (2020).

## Activities Overview

The lesson contains the following activities:

### Pre-Viewing

- **Honour:** An introduction to Murray Sinclair and his role in the TRC, and an exploration of the concept of *honour*.

### Viewing

- **Truth:** A series of questions based on the film exploring the theme of *truth*.

### Post-Viewing

- **Reconciliation:** An examination of the TRC Calls to Action and the process of *reconciliation*.
- **Also includes:** Guiding questions and extension activity ideas.

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Reconciliation is a process of healing relationships that requires public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms.

All Canadians, as Treaty People, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.

—Interim Report of the Truth & Reconciliation  
Commission of Canada  
Guiding Principles Numbers 3 & 6

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# PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

## Honour

**Premise:** This activity introduces students to Murray Sinclair and his role in the Truth & Reconciliation Commission, and to the context of the film — a speech given by Sinclair in recognition of his service. Students explore the concept of *honour*, what it means to *honour*, and the role of honour in the Truth & Reconciliation process.

**Materials:** None **Time:** ~20 – 30 minutes

### Getting Started

**Taking the pulse:** How familiar are students with **The Honourable Murray Sinclair**? You may ask them to express what they already know about Sinclair and his life and work or introduce him by reading the [profile](#) from the **Centre for Truth & Reconciliation** website.

### Minds On

“The film we are going to watch is a short documentary called *Honour to Senator Murray Sinclair*. Based on what you know of Murray Sinclair, what do you think this title means?”

**Brainstorm!** What do we mean when we use the word “honour?”

Write the word **HONOUR** on the board. Ask students for examples of different meanings/ways the word can be used (*See table below*). Write these examples on the board.

HONOUR can be...		
<p><b>A QUALITY</b> great respect, admiration, privilege, distinction, integrity or morality <i>(noun)</i></p>	<p><b>A TITLE</b> <i>(noun or adjective)</i> for a judge or political representative</p>	<p><b>AN ACTION</b> to respect, recognize, award or commemorate to fulfill a commitment <i>(verb)</i></p>
<p>Something you... <b>HAVE or EXPERIENCE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• guest of honour</li> <li>• maid/matron of honour</li> <li>• an honour to be invited</li> <li>• defending one’s honour</li> <li>• a badge of honour</li> <li>• a man of honour</li> <li>• have you no honour?</li> <li>• honour among thieves</li> </ul> <p><b>GIVE or RECEIVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to show honour to someone</li> <li>• do the honours</li> <li>• in honour of someone</li> <li>• bestow an honour</li> <li>• graduate with honours</li> </ul>	<p>Something you... <b>ARE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the honourable member</li> <li>• your honour</li> </ul>	<p>Something you... <b>DO</b></p> <p>To honour...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• someone's memory</li> <li>• someone's achievements</li> <li>• with one's presence</li> <li>• an agreement</li> </ul>

## Discuss

Building on the examples provided, explore the concept of honour further using the guiding questions below.

### Guiding Questions:

1. As we can see, there are several ways to use the word 'honour.' What do these various uses and related terms & concepts have in common? (E.g., They are all *good qualities*)  
What do you think the opposite of honour — that is 'dishonour' — might look like?
2. How do we make decisions about *who* to honour as a society? What are some ways and reasons we honour these people?
3. What kinds of honours has Murray Sinclair received? What do these honours suggest about his reputation and legacy?
4. The film *Honour to Senator Murray Sinclair* is focused on a speech Sinclair gives when receiving a World Peace Award. How do you think this title reflects different meanings of 'honour' we've discussed.
5. What are some ways we show honour in relationships of all kinds? How do you think honour (or the lack of it) might affect these relationships? What kind(s) of conflict might arise when people have different ideas about what is *honourable*?

## Conclusion

Watch the film trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCqaArYCKw>

Discuss the following questions as a class, or have students reflect on them in writing.

**React & Reflect:** Based on what you know about the Truth & Reconciliation Commission, how do you think it relates to the idea of honour? What role might honour play in that process, and what does it mean to honour what happened in our history?

## Preparing to view the film

Distribute the film questions (PAGE 12) to students before viewing, so they know what to watch for. You may want to read through the questions together.

Instruct them to keep in mind the theme of **honour** as they watch, to consider ways it is demonstrated or discussed in the film, and how it might relate to **Truth & Reconciliation**.

# VIEWING ACTIVITY

## Truth

- Premise:** Students will answer questions around the theme of “truth”.
- Setup:** Give students the film questions to fill out while watching the film.
- Materials:** Printed questions worksheet (PAGE 12)
- Time:** ~30 min. film runtime + ~15 – 20 min. post-film discussion

### Getting Started

Write the following quote from Murray Sinclair on the board:

**“To know the truth, we must begin by telling it.”**

### During the Film

Students will fill in the answers to the questions on the worksheet. You may have them do this individually, in small groups or, alternatively, divide the questions up so each student or group focuses on one of the question boxes.

You may also opt not to use the questions during the film, and to discuss them afterwards. During the film, students can jot down their reactions to the film and the themes of honour and truth. If any students need to revisit parts of the film after watching, it is freely available to stream on the [National Film Board website](#).

After the film ends, take up answers to these questions together. *Answers are on page 13.*

### Discuss / Debrief

Revisit the quote you wrote at the start of the film. What is the significance of this quote now that students have seen the film? Use the guiding questions below to explore this topic further.

#### Guiding Questions (for after viewing):

1. What are some ways ‘honour’ and ‘truth’ are demonstrated or discussed in the film? How does the film suggest these concepts are related?
2. When Murray Sinclair and the other commissioners took over the TRC in 2009, why do you think they faced resistance to the process from survivors, and how did the Commission convince these survivors to participate?
3. What was Canada’s reaction to UNDRIP? Why do you think they had this response?
4. What are some of the examples expressed in the film of how Indigenous people have experienced long-term intergenerational effects of residential schools?
5. Sinclair also says that education and schooling have played a role in preventing non-Indigenous people in Canada from knowing and accepting the truth of our own history. What are some of the messages or **untruths** that have been taught about Indigenous people and history? How might these have made it difficult for Canadians to talk about the truths of what happened in our history?
6. How do you think the TRC might play a role in helping Canadians to unlearn these?
7. Why do you think truth is important in resolving conflicts and in relationships?

### Extensions

Read the text of [UNDRIP](#): What does the document suggest about how to accomplish reconciliation? Look at [Canada’s commitments](#) to implement UNDRIP and assess how much progress has been made.

# POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

## Reconciliation

**Premise:** In this final section, students will examine ways truth and honour can provide foundation for reconciliation to occur. They will respond to the challenge given by Murray Sinclair in the film, examining the TRC Calls to Action and reflecting on the role of individuals and institutions in the reconciliation process.

**Time:** ~50 – 70 minutes

**Materials:** Copies of/access to TRC Calls to Action (PAGE 10); Large chart paper *\*optional\**



### Getting started

Write the following quote from Murray Sinclair on the board next to the previous quote:

**“Getting to the truth was hard. Getting to reconciliation is going to take generations.”**

**React & Reflect:** Based on what we’ve seen and discussed so far, what do you think is the significance of this quote?

Students’ responses can be a jumping off point to further discussion of the theme of reconciliation. The guiding questions on page 7 can be used at any point during the activity.

### Activity

Students will respond to the challenge issued by Murray Sinclair late in the film. Start by presenting students with the following quote:

“My challenge to you is: look at what you can do. Look at the **Calls to Action** and pick one. Do what you can to make it happen. They’re not all huge, complicated processes. Talk to your bosses, colleagues, those with whom you might have even a little bit of influence. Help them understand that you believe in this. Because if they don’t hear from you, they will assume that you don’t care. Stand up. Be noticed. Take action. You can do that. The only way that change ever occurs is when the citizens of this country make it happen. And you are the ones who will do that.”

Students will look at the list of [Calls to Action](#) developed by the Truth & Reconciliation Commission. Each student will choose **one** call to action (or you can assign them at random) and explain in their own words:

- what it means
- who it is directed to (e.g., governments, educators, newcomers, etc.)
- how it promotes reconciliation
- how any individual (such as themselves) could contribute to this Call to Action (e.g., by contacting their MP or School Board Trustee)



**Note:** You may need to allow students time to investigate the rationale behind the call to action and formulate their responses before gathering as a class.

Go around the class allowing each student to share.

## Modification

Another way to do this is to have students paste their Call to Action onto chart paper or a digital bulletin board and write in their response. Students can then view each others' posts and write their own thoughts or ideas in a graffiti or gallery walk format.

## Debrief

In closing, ask students to reflect on everything they've seen, heard and discussed in this lesson. Allow for sharing in the form of a brief discussion or exit ticket so students can express outstanding questions, feelings or thoughts on these topics. You may revisit past guiding questions or any that haven't yet been used.

### Guiding Questions:

1. When making the government apology for residential schools, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said in 2008 that the belief system on which residential schools were based has "caused great harm and has no place in our country." Do you think these beliefs are still active today? What steps have the government taken to promote reconciliation, and what further steps do you think they should take going forward?
2. Why do you think reconciliation is so difficult to achieve? What are some obstacles to reconciliation?
3. Whose responsibility is reconciliation? What does reconciliation mean for Canada as a whole? What actions would contribute to reconciliation on national, local, and individual levels?
4. How does Murray Sinclair describe the relationships between people who are making active efforts towards reconciliation?
5. Murray Sinclair says that "Education is what got us into this mess, and education will get us out." What do you think he is saying about the role of Canada's educational system in creating problems and solutions?
6. Murray Sinclair says that "Children are inherently going to be the battleground for reconciliation going forward, and they are going to grasp this quickly if we give them the opportunity to learn." Why do you think he sees children and education as so important to reconciliation?
7. What do you think Sinclair means when he emphasizes reconciliation as an ongoing, intergenerational process? Why is it important to Indigenous peoples generally to consider the future generations? How is this related to what he calls "transitional justice"?
8. Why do you think Murray Sinclair sees reconciliation as not just important but necessary for the future in Canada? What does he warn could be the effects of failing to address conflicts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians?
9. Why do you think concepts like **truth** and **honour** are important to reconciliation? How do we see these concepts in some of the public reconciliation efforts (e.g., the public TRC events, slogans like "Every Child Matters" and initiatives like Orange Shirt Day) and Indigenous sovereignty movements (e.g., in slogans like "Land Back" and "Honour the Treaties")?
10. What are some ways you might find out more about reconciliation events happening in your local community?

# Activity Extensions

## Pillars of Reconciliation

When discussing Calls to Action, have students contextualize them according to Sinclair’s four pillars of reconciliation outlined in the film:

- I. **REVIVE** those things that were damaged.
- II. **RETURN** those things that were taken.
- III. **REBUILD** those things that were destroyed.
- IV. **RENOVATE** the relationships that were hurt.

How does each Call to Action contribute to one or more of these pillars?

## Seven Sacred Teachings

In the logo for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, each of the seven flames in the circle represents one of the [Seven Sacred Teachings](#) that underlie Indigenous spiritual life for some First Nations, such as the Anishinaabe and Cree: **Truth, Humility, Honesty, Wisdom, Respect, Courage and Love.**



Discuss how:

- each of these teachings can guide the reconciliation process.
- they offer a model for community and “Nation-to-Nation relationships” in Canada.
- they are demonstrated by various people seen in the film.

## In their words...

(Consider showing these short videos discussing Truth & Reconciliation.)

Featuring Chief Robert Joseph



[Namwayut: we are all one. Truth and reconciliation in Canada | Canada is ...](#)

YouTube [4:20] (18 Dec. 2017).  
CBC.

Featuring Justice Murray Sinclair



[Conversations with Leaders – Every Single Person Is A Leader](#)

YouTube [2:47] (9 Nov. 2018).  
Wilfrid Laurier University

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS & LINKS

### Murray Sinclair Profile

#### The Honourable Murray Sinclair



The Honourable Sinclair served the justice system in Manitoba for over 25 years. He was the first Aboriginal Judge appointed in Manitoba and Canada's second.

He served as Co-Chair of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry in Manitoba and as Chief Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). As head of the TRC, he participated in hundreds of hearings across Canada,

culminating in the issuance of the TRC's report in 2015. He also oversaw an active multi-million dollar fundraising program to support various TRC events and activities, and to allow survivors to travel to attend TRC events.

The Honourable Sinclair has been invited to speak throughout Canada, the United States and internationally, including the Cambridge Lectures for members of the Judiciary of various Commonwealth Courts in England.

He served as an adjunct professor of law at the University of Manitoba. He was very active within his profession and his community and has won numerous awards, including the National Aboriginal Achievement Award (1994) and the Lifetime Achievement Award (2017) from Indspire, the Manitoba Bar Association's Equality Award (2001) and its Distinguished Service Award (2016). He most recently received the President's Award from the Canadian Bar Association (2018), the SSHRC Impact Award (2019), the Symons Medal (2019), Humane Canada Leadership and Innovation Award (2020) and the Adrienne Clarkson Prize for Global Citizenship (2020).

The Honourable Sinclair has received Honorary Doctorates from seventeen Canadian universities. The Honourable Sinclair was appointed to the Senate on April 2, 2016.

While in the Senate, he has served on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, as Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Rules, Procedures and Rights of Parliament and as Chair of the Senate Ethics and Conflict of Interest for Senators Committee.

*Source: [National Centre for Truth & Reconciliation — "TRC Commissioners"](#)*

#### Other Murray Sinclair resources

Leger, Joseph. [A champion of Indigenous rights: Murray Sinclair awarded 2022 Loyola Medal](#). Concordia University (21 June 2022).

## Truth & Reconciliation Resources



Truth and  
Reconciliation  
Commission of Canada

- [Calls to Action \(English\)](#). (2015).
- [Calls to Action \(French\)](#). (2012).
- [Reports](#)



National Centre for  
Truth and Reconciliation  
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Website: <https://nctr.ca/>

## Additional Resources: History, Politics & Culture

### 7 Grandfathers Teachings

Uniting Three Fires Against Violence. [The 7 Grandfathers Teachings](#).

### Residential Schools

CBC. [Namwayut: we are all one. Truth and reconciliation in Canada | Canada is ...](#) YouTube [4:20] (18 Dec. 2017).

### Royal Proclamation of 1763

Hall, Anthony J., Gretchen Albers & Andrew McIntosh. [Royal Proclamation of 1763](#). *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (30 Aug. 2019).

The University of British Columbia | First Nations & Indigenous Studies. [Royal Proclamation, 1763](#). *indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca* (2009).

### United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Blackstock, Cindy. [Know your rights! United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for Indigenous adolescents](#) [PDF]. UNICEF. (2013)

Government of Canada. [Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#). (2024).

The United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs. [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). (2022).

## Film Resources

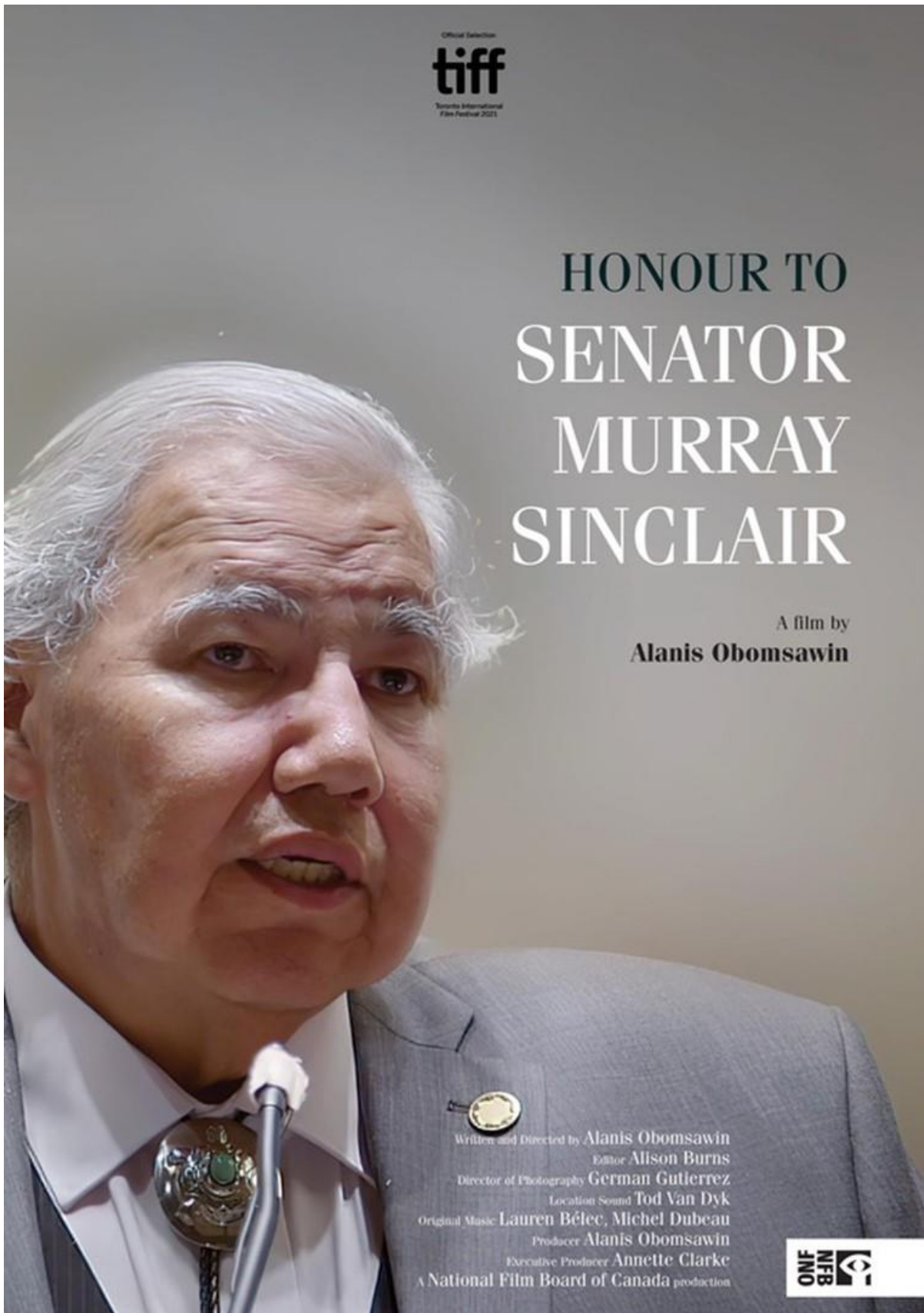
[Honour to Senator Murray Sinclair](#). Directed by Alanis Obomsawin. National Film Board. (2021).

### Reviews

Nicoll, Doreen. [Alanis Obomsawin's tribute to Murray Sinclair is a national treasure](#). *Rabble* (5 Sep. 2021).

Pardy, Brett. [TIFF Review: Alanis Obomsawin's Honour to Senator Murray Sinclair](#). *Seventh Row* (16 Sep. 2021).

## Movie Poster



## Honour to Senator Murray Sinclair film questions

What was the basis for creating Canada's Truth & Reconciliation Commission?

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On what **TWO** principles is the model of the TRC based?

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By the time the first public TRC event happened in Winnipeg, who were some of the groups who had gotten involved, and what was the importance of their involvement?

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Sinclair says that the most important question left after the TRC is: *"What can we do about it?"*

What document does he say should be the framework for answering that question, and what does this document outline?

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Identify one result of the **Royal Proclamation of 1763** and explain its significance.

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What were some of the ways Canada used new laws to restrict the rights of Indigenous people following Confederation?

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What were the intended effects of the Indian Residential School System on Indigenous children and parents?

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The Commission estimates that around 40% of children who attended the schools experienced abuse directly. What were the effects of the schools on the other children?

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What are some of the emotions expressed by survivors in the film as a result of attending the schools?

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## Honour to Senator Murray Sinclair film questions (ANSWERS)

What was the basis for creating Canada's Truth & Reconciliation Commission?

The TRC was created as part of the settlement agreement for the federal government to compensate Residential School survivors.

On what **TWO** principles is the model of the TRC based?

Fairness

Justice

By the time the first public TRC event happened in Winnipeg, who were some of the groups who had gotten involved, and what was the importance of their involvement?

The Commission had sought involvement from leaders in government and churches —institutions who had operated the schools —because they were able to speak to their members about the importance of the Commission. Survivors themselves were involved in the process, giving testimony about their experiences. 20,000 people attended the event to hear survivors' stories.

Sinclair says that the most important question left after the TRC is: "What can we do about it?"

What document does he say should be the framework for answering that question, and what does this document outline?

Sinclair says we should look to the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous People. UNDRIP details the rights of Indigenous peoples, including their right to protection from discrimination, and how to apply this retroactively in the service of reconciliation.

Identify one result of the **Royal Proclamation of 1763** and explain its significance.

This document outlined King George III's promise that the British Crown would respect Indigenous peoples' rights to govern themselves and their territories under the King's protection.

This was a major factor leading to the American Revolutionary War, as colonists wanted the reserved Indigenous land for themselves.

Indigenous leaders were assured that their sovereign rights were part of English law and understood themselves to be equal partners with the English in the signing of early treaties (e.g., Niagara, 1764). Following Confederation (1867), the treaty process continued with Canada, who subsequently ignored the Royal Proclamation's protections and undermined Indigenous sovereignty through legislation.

What were some of the ways Canada used new laws to restrict the rights of Indigenous people following Confederation?

They passed laws making it difficult, dangerous, or illegal for Indigenous people to protest, speak against the government, hire a lawyer or sue the government. They restricted their right to vote by classifying them as not "persons." They opened residential schools to keep children from their parents. [There are others not mentioned in the film.]

What were the intended effects of the Indian Residential School System on Indigenous children and parents?

The schools allowed the government to separate children from their parents and cultures. This could make the children easier to assimilate, and discourage Indigenous parents from going to war against the government.

The Commission estimates that around 40% of children who attended the schools experienced abuse directly. What were the effects of the schools on the other children?

The others often reported living in constant fear—this itself is a form of emotional and psychological abuse.

What are some of the emotions expressed by survivors in the film as a result of attending the schools?

Disgust, fear, sorrow, desperation, shame, confusion, loneliness, loss, etc.