

This conversation guide is designed for use by instructional leaders and learning communities or as a self-paced study. It is designed to give each reader parts of “truth’ that will lead individuals and groups in the direction of reconciliation. This guide is not a substitute for engaging in meaningful conversations with the indigenous community. Consult the *Advancing Reconciliation Conversation Guide*.

## References

The Inuit Way

<http://kugluktukhighschool.ca/the-inuit-way-a-guide-to-pdf>

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

<https://www.itk.ca/about-canadian-inuit/#nunangat>

Essential Terminology

<https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Human-Rights-Issues/Terminology%20%20%28PD-WT-16a%29.pdf>



Inuit and their ancestors have survived through several centuries and the various Inuit groups of Canada have created rewarding lifestyles.

Prior to contact with Europeans, Inuit lived in small, autonomous, nomadic groups, dependent upon hunting, fishing and gathering for survival and for all their physical needs. Inuit were hunters and gatherers and moved seasonally between summer and winter camps in varying family groups that ranged from 30 to over 150 people. The Inuit had adapted to the challenges of the Arctic, including limited vegetation, snow and ice and long periods of darkness during winter. The land and the animals provided all that was necessary to survive, including food and fuel as well as the bone, teeth and skin used to make clothing, shelter, weapons, tools and utensils. Inuit technologies included the igloo, kayak, *ulu* (women’s knife), *quilliq* (small stone stove that was the only source of heat and light during the long winter), fur clothing and toggle-head harpoons. Early explorers were impressed by these advanced engineers of the North. Inuit were extremely self-sufficient and creative with what the land had to offer.

## Shelter

Snow houses (*igloo*) were made by cutting large rectangular blocks of snow and ice with a man’s snow knife (*pana*). These beautiful structures were usually erected within an hour. They provided protection from the cold, wind and snow during the winter. During the late autumn, before the snow was deep enough to build an igloo, a rectangular icehouse with skin roofs was built. Tents made of sealskin were used as homes for the summer months. Northern Quebec Inuit lived in homes made of wood due to their ability to access the abundance of trees located in that region.



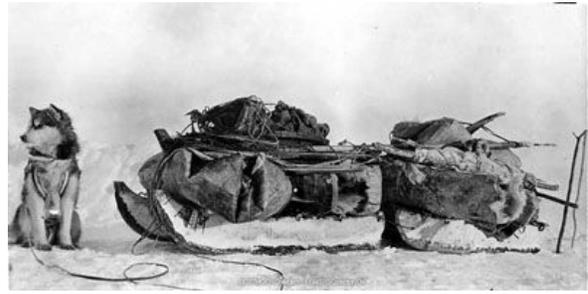
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## Travel and Relocation

Community members carried their possessions, including tools and clothing, when travelling from camp to camp. Unnecessary items were never carried, as each person was responsible to transport his or her own family belongings.



Sleds were highly effective for travel. This practical invention was used to haul a family's belongings during a move. The sleds (*Komoti*) were made of driftwood, found along the shores, or with seal skin made into thin strips to bind the sled runners. Wood sleds were hauled by dogs or Inuit themselves.

## Raising Children

Inuit parents did not often hit or spank their children. They traditionally just spoke or gave their children a “look” of reprimand. They did not want the child to become angry within themselves. This is similar to today’s rearing of children.

## Naming

Inuit naming is an extremely important aspect of the Inuit culture. Names are sometimes chosen before the baby is born, and can be something as simple as a body part, an animal, what is in the sky or a spiritual name. Naming a child after a family member, or someone the family respects, ensures that person lives on in life. Normally, Inuit do not call the person by their “given” name. Usually the person is identified with a name such as “my daughter, my nephew, my grandmother.”



Photo Source:  
[https://www.flickr.com/photos/glenb\\_owmuseum/5665925939](https://www.flickr.com/photos/glenb_owmuseum/5665925939)

## Education

Traditionally, Inuit children learned by observing and following the examples of their elders. An older person would spend time with a young person and show them how to master various skills. In traditional Inuit education, there was no particular time set aside for this education to take place.

Teaching occurred when it was convenient and lasted as long as the child’s interest held. The focus of Inuit education was learning by individual effort and observation. Teaching in most Aboriginal cultures is continual and ongoing. There was no specific schedule for instruction. Parents and community members constantly shared their knowledge.

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## Elders

Elders are listened to and respected for their teachings, information and knowledge. They are willing to share and offer their advice and assistance to help youth comprehend and retain Inuit traditional knowledge. The only way these teachings was passed down to the children and young people was orally. With no paper and a nomadic lifestyle, it was impossible to document and record stories, history, place names and all other information. Today, Inuit are documenting oral information with the technology available in remote locations and recording traditional Inuit oral history.

## Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit

Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit* in Inuktitut means “Inuit traditional knowledge” or way of knowing. This is a celebrated way that Inuit history and knowledge is specifically shared and taught to younger people by elders. It is incorporated into schools, government offices and other facilities. It is a body of knowledge and unique cultural insights of Inuit into the workings of nature, humans and animals. It is meant to encompass the Inuit way of doing things – the past, present and future knowledge, experience and values of Inuit society.

## European Contact

Archeological evidence shows human inhabitation of the north about 12,000 years ago. In the tenth century, Erik the Red’s Icelandic voyage to Newfoundland and Labrador resulted in Inuit’s first encounter with Europeans.

During the late fifteenth century, European explorers began to arrive on the Northeast coast of North America, searching for gold and the Northwest Passage.

Commercial whaling began in the Arctic in the late eighteenth century. By the late nineteenth century, fur traders started to move deeper into former whaling regions. They established posts and encouraged Inuit to barter and trade their skins, whale bones, ivory tusks, dogs and fish for metal knives and needles, summer clothing, sugar and tobacco.

The Hudson’s Bay Company arrived. The Northwest Mounted Police and missionaries followed soon after, establishing Canadian law and order, religion and churches regionally throughout the north.



*Photo: Mission Station  
Hebron, Labrador, ca.1860*

*Courtesy of Hans  
Rollmann. From a  
lithographic reproduction by  
Leopold Kraatz, Berlin.  
Original drawing by  
Moravian bishop Levin  
Theodor Reichel  
(1812-1878).*

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## Illness

The arrival of the Europeans meant significant changes for the Inuit. Over time, they were exposed to various diseases, including tuberculosis. Many children and adults were sent to the now closed Charles Camsell Hospital in Edmonton, Alberta.

Tuberculosis is highly contagious and isolation is an important part of curtailing its spread. As the disease began to ravage northern communities, the government decided that it would be best to isolate and treat patients in larger centres with hospitals. Government agents and medical staff flew into northern communities, x-rayed residents, and (sometimes) forcibly removed those with tuberculosis. They were flown to hospitals like the Charles Camsell in Edmonton and in other southern communities.

The Charles Camsell Hospital became a home for patients – often for years. Babies were born and baptized, children grew up, friendships were started and patients were cured. Unfortunately, not everybody made it home. Some families from northern communities are still looking for their loved ones in hospital records across Canada. Some of the Charles Camsell's former patients are buried at the Aboriginal Cemetery in St. Albert.

Patients began arriving late in 1945; the hospital officially opened in August 1946. The original building was used until 1967.



*Harry Anaglik strums guitar as Roger Avrana listens on January 3, 1950 (Courtesy of Edmonton City Archives, EA-600-3574a)*

## Timeline of the Inuit in Northern Canada

**1939, 1940** Inuit relocations start in 1939. RCMP conduct census of Inuit populations.

**1944** Starting in 1944, every Inuk receives an identification disk or “tag” that carries information about themselves and where they lived. The disks were roughly 2.5 cm in diameter, burgundy in colour, and made of pressed fibre or leather. The edge of the disk read “Eskimo Identification Canada.” Each tag had an identification number. On the tag was either an “E” for “East Arctic” or “W” for “West Arctic,” followed by a number representing one of the 12 geographic locations of the Arctic. The last portion was a personal set of identification numbers used to reference individuals. For example, former Commissioner of Nunavut Ann Meekitjuk Hanson’s number was E7-121. The Inuit were expected to keep this tag on at all times. Most Inuit either sewed the tag onto their parka or wore it as a necklace.



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**1945** “Indian Health Services” is transferred from the Department of Mines and Resources to the Department of National Health and Welfare. Eskimo Health Services is also transferred from the responsibility of the Northwest Territories Division of Lands.

**1950** Inuit officially qualify to vote in Canadian federal elections; yet, because most Inuit lived in remote isolated communities, they were completely unable to vote. There were no ballot boxes placed into communities until 1962, resulting in a twelve-year delay before Inuit were afforded their right to vote and be treated equally to other voting Canadians.

**1951** The first residential school opens in Chesterfield Inlet for Inuit children. Families who met with government officials stated clearly they would like their children educated, but they wanted a teacher to come to the community and teach. The parents were ignored and children were pulled out of their communities and placed onto planes. They arrived in schools with large halls and were surrounded by unfamiliar people who only spoke French or English. These schools were often far away from the new Inuit settlements. All of their Inuit upbringing and culture was removed and they were forced to succumb to the English ways, wear their clothes and speak English only. All Inuit children were required to attend Residential Schools or federal hostels. *For more information, see Conversation Guide: Residential Schools.*

**1953-55** The High Arctic Relocation Program is created by the government. Seven Inuit families (eighty-seven people in total) are relocated further north. Inuit from Inukjuak (then known as Port Harrison), a community in northern Quebec (see picture), are moved to Grise Fiord and Resolute in what is now northern Nunavut. Another three families from Pond Inlet, Nunavut are also moved north to help the Inukjuak families adjust to their new surroundings.

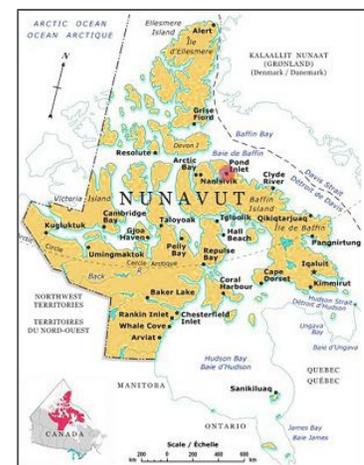
The Inuit families were promised that they would remain in one community. They were promised that they could leave and return to their home communities after two years if they were unhappy. The government failed to honour both of those promises. The relocated families had to survive in unfamiliar conditions and with little government support. They were taken from the lush tundra of northern Quebec to the High Arctic, where they found a colder climate, unfamiliar terrain, constant cold and darkness and limited wildlife to hunt. The relocated families spent their first winter in tents with insufficient food and supplies.

A trust fund worth ten million dollars was allocated to the families who were affected in 1996, with a formal Government apology finally provided in 2010.



(Above): Showing movement from Inukjuak to Grise Fiord and Resolute

(Below): Showing location of Pond Inlet



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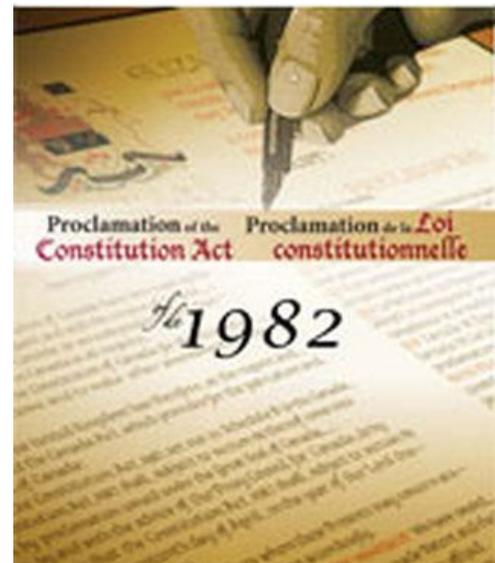
**1955** Jean Lesage, minister of Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, incorporates a new policy for the administration of the Inuit and the north due to the “almost continuing state of absence of mind” under which Inuit had previously been administered. He made it clear that Inuit were Canadian citizens and should enjoy the same rights, privileges, opportunities and responsibilities as all Canadians.

**1970** Project Surname is implemented by Stuart Hodgson, the Commissioner of the North West Territories. He hires Abe Okpik to meet with Inuit to remove the Eskimo “tag” and replace the tags with surnames. Most Inuit selected the name of their family ancestors, again influenced by European ways as traditional Inuit culture does not have surnames. Inuit were required to provide a name. If a family was not home, they returned only to discover a name had been assigned to them. Although voluntary, the meetings only took place with men, which greatly upset women when they came home only to find their identity overturned and reassigned.

**1971** Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, formally Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, is founded by seven Inuit community leaders as a national representational organization to protect and advance the rights and interests of the Inuit of Canada. These leaders agreed that the formation of a national Inuit organization was necessary to voice their concerns about Inuit-related issues. Inuit Tapirisat of Canada means the “Inuit will be united.”

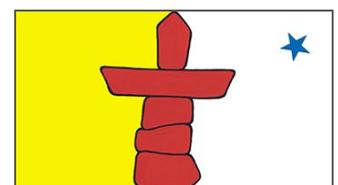


**1982** Section 35 of the *Constitution Act* is born. It provides constitutional protection to the Aboriginal and treaty rights of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The section, while within the Constitution of Canada, fell outside the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Aboriginal rights referred to the activities, practice and traditions of the Aboriginal peoples in Canada integral to the distinctive culture of Aboriginal peoples. It was put into place to protect fishing, logging, hunting, the right to land (cf. Aboriginal title) and the right to enforcement of treaties.



**1996** “High Arctic Exiles” compensation agreement – Inuit who had been forced to relocate were recognized and compensated for the difficulties caused by their relocation.

**1999** The newest territory in Canada is established. It is called Nunavut.



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## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Reflect on and discuss the following questions after reading this conversation guide.

- **What new information did you learn from this conversation guide? What resonated with you?**
- **What important lessons can we draw from learning about Inuit People?**
- **What messages should be conveyed about Inuit People?**

Take turns sharing your thoughts and building upon your ideas.

### *Government Policy*

In the Inuktitut language, *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* refers to the Inuit way of knowing, or traditional knowledge. *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* has been adopted as an official policy of the Government of Nunavut, through its commitment to develop practices and policies that are consistent with the culture, values and language of the Inuit majority. By embracing *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*, the Government of Nunavut successfully ensures that Inuit cultural values are an important element in the daily life of government employees.

**How does our political government use Indigenous values in their own policies? How is this similar in education? Does Alberta have a similar policy?**

### *Traditional Naming*

The process of naming a child in the Inuit culture was about who the child was, who they represented and who they will become.

**Think about your own name and the story that it carries. How would you be affected if it were instantly changed? What implications would this have on your life, family or identity?**

## For More Information

The Story of Resolute Bay

[http://www.qtcommission.ca/sites/default/files/community/community\\_histories\\_resolute\\_bay.pdf](http://www.qtcommission.ca/sites/default/files/community/community_histories_resolute_bay.pdf)

Inuit Cultural Online Resource

<http://www.icor.ottawainuitchildrens.com/>

Education

<http://pauktuutit.ca/abuse-prevention/residential-schools/>

The Inuit Experience of Residential Schools

<http://weweresofaraway.ca/>

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

<https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ab>eng>

Matthiasson, John S., *Living on the Land*

Broadview Press, 1996

Forced Relocation

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/inuit-get-federal-apology-for-forced-relocation-1.897468>

Project Surname

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/project-surname/>

Map of Modern and Historical Inuit Settlements, Canada

<https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100016900/1100100016908#chpiv>

The Story of the Canadian \$2 Bill

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/human-flagpoles-dark-story-behind-inuit-scene-on-2-bill-1.2632380>

Balikci, Asen, *The Nestsilik Eskimo*

Waveland Press Inc, Long Grove Il, 1970

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