

Your Stories: Anti-Racism

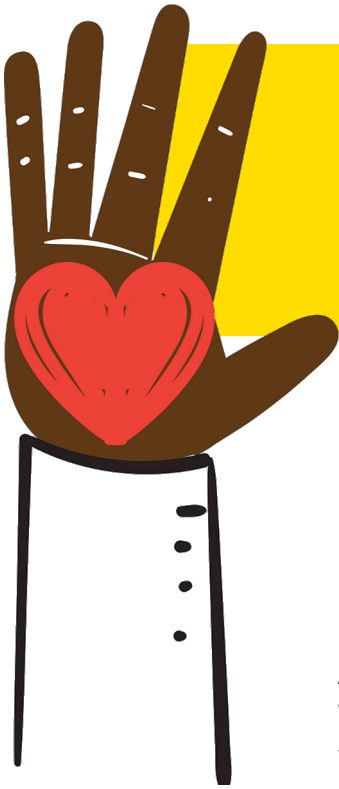
With the guidance of the BCPVPA Ad Hoc Anti-Racism Committee, the BCPVPA Board of Directors is exploring ways in which the BCPVPA can support effective school leadership for racial equity and anti-racism, and support our members with tools and knowledge to deal with issues of racism in their schools.

This story series is a regular feature of *Principl(ed)* magazine, and we invite our members to share the stories of the anti-racism initiatives taking place in their school communities.

In this issue, we share stories from SD 23 (Central Okanagan), and SD 38 (Richmond), and we look forward to hearing more from our members and their teams — send your stories and high resolution photos to:

sandra@bcpvpa.bc.ca





Melissa Harris

Teacher

SD 23 (Central Okanagan)

Rutland Middle School in Kelowna embarked on a transformative journey for reconciliation through their initiative Walk for Wenjack, held from November 1 to 3, 2023. The school, committed to fostering a culture of understanding and reconciliation, participated in this meaningful event as part of their dedication to the legacy of Chanie Wenjack.

As a Legacy School, Rutland Middle School utilizes resources provided by the Downie Wenjack Fund through legacyschools.ca. This initiative aims to incorporate the tragic yet impactful story of Chanie Wenjack, highlighting the importance of addressing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization on Indigenous communities.



The call to action is spearheaded by a dedicated group of teachers who are passionate about bringing the pedagogy of decolonization into the school community. Their approach is encapsulated in the catchphrase, "Learn with your head, lead with your heart, and speak your truth with respectful approaches." This ethos emphasizes a holistic understanding of reconciliation, encouraging students to engage intellectually, empathetically, and respectfully with the issues at hand.

The Walk for Wenjack event not only symbolizes Rutland Middle School's commitment to reconciliation, but also serves as a tangible expression of solidarity with Indigenous communities. By actively engaging with the legacy of Chanie Wenjack, and embracing the Downie Wenjack Fund's resources, the school is taking significant steps towards creating a more inclusive and culturally-aware learning environment.





Andrea Phillpotts & Hayley Valliquette

Teachers

SD 38 (Richmond)

Andrea Phillpotts and UBC Teacher Candidate Hayley Valliquette co-planned and launched this unit during Hayley's spring 2023 practicum. Hayley is now a Teacher Teaching On-Call (TTOC) with SD 38.

Touching the Past with Archival Gloves

It was in between watching basketball games at Richmond High that I took to walking the halls and examining the graduate photo composites on the wall. "1941, 1942 ... 1943. What a change!" While the early war years included many graduate portraits of Japanese Canadian students at RHS, starting in 1943 those images disappeared until the 1950s. Wow. As a Social Justice 12 teacher at McMath Secondary, I was



aware of Japanese Canadian Internment and its impact on Richmond’s population, but I had never seen it illustrated so poignantly as a primary source.

When I looked at the smiling, optimistic faces of these young people in their grad photos, it was hard to imagine what lay ahead for them: dispossession, relocation, and internment, when 22,000 people of Japanese Canadian heritage were forced into camps across Canada.

From this moment, a teaching idea began to develop. In order to make Richmond history more relevant and interesting to students, why not get each Social

Justice student to research the lives of one of these Richmond graduates: their high school lives, their families' contributions prior to internment, the personal consequences of internment, and their contributions to Canadian society following internment?

But how to do this?

In addition to connecting with members of the Steveston Japanese Canadian Community Centre, our school district resource centre, the Richmond High Alumni Association, Landscapes of Injustice, and the Richmond Museum, one of our first big breakthroughs came through connecting with the



Richmond Archives. A world of discovery was before us.

With the expert and meticulous guidance of Richmond archivists, myself and UBC Teacher Candidate Hayley Valliquette gently perused documents in the care of the archives – yearbooks, photos, newspaper articles, books, school board minutes, and so much more. The wealth of resources was mind boggling.

We went down a delightful wormhole of historical research, tracking the Richmond students' journey through the early 1940s to the present day. The Richmond Archives had myriad resources on internment, from the Sakata family's donation of personal photos and documents, to Richmond Review articles tracking the local response to wartime policies, to the historical wartime posters that were put up around Steveston.

Our favourite resources were the Richmond High yearbooks. Class photos, poetry, grad writeups, and valedictory speeches brought the devastating internment to life. "We are graduating at the height of men's cruelty to one another ... Our Japanese classmates will have to translate to their mothers and fathers the reason for the sudden upheaval of their daily lives," writes valedictorian Roy White in 1942.

A poem by student David Naruse entitled "To My Radio" mourns the confiscation of his radio by the Canadian government: "Such numerous things I heard before/ No longer can my ears receive / It shouldn't be for evermore! / So, fare they well, you must now leave." David, a future Ontario doctor, ended up in Westmount, Quebec for internment.¹

Rather than reading from a textbook or watching a canned video, our students would now be able to consult primary sources and come up with their own connections and conclusions through individualized research and inquiry. To support us, archivists digitally scanned fragile paper books and provided archival gloves with which to gently touch other heartier tomes.

The project launched in spring 2023. In addition to making personal connections with Richmond's history, students are learning about the importance – and delight! – of archival research. From this, they can learn about the resilience of Richmond's Japanese Canadians, and the importance of making sure injustices like internment never happen again.

We are grateful that our McMath students are now able to take out those archival gloves and touch history.

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www.landscapesofinjustice.com/

Leader Life Stories

Every leader has a story: what's yours?

The Leader Life Stories series in *Principled* magazine brings together member voices from across the province on a variety of topics.

We want to hear from you!

Do you have an idea for a theme for an upcoming article?

Contact sandra@bcpvpa.bc.ca

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"Diverse Women in Leadership"



Read the June 2023 Leader Life Stories
"The Family Balance"

