

# The Blanket Exercise

English Montreal School Board - Laurier MacDonald High School CLC, Montreal QC



In collaboration with Solidarité Milton—Parc and KAIROS Canada, 430 secondary 3 and 4 students participated in this experiential learning activity, giving them valuable knowledge about the history of Canada's Indigenous peoples.

The activity was animated by Indigenous and non-Indigenous facilitators and began with the entire floor covered in blankets. Each student was assigned a role and narrated a part of the history of Indigenous peoples. The blankets represent their land.

This picture shows the blankets, representing all the nations of Indigenous Peoples who lived on 'Turtle Island' before the Europeans came. People were free to move from one territory to another, wars were fought and peace achieved through talk and respect.

Teachers worked with students before the activity and followed up with additional discussions and activities to solidify their learning.

During the activity participants learn about treaty-making, colonization, and resistance and, as the activity progresses, history advances in time.

Throughout the activity, the students were active participants, often representing the casualties of disease and war. Their empathy increased as they read out loud from scrolls and learned more about the history of Canada's Indigenous People.

Immediately following the activity, students were invited to reflect, share, and ask questions about their experience. The Blanket Exercise created a safe environment for them to talk and learn without fear of judgment.

Students were engaged in all aspects of the activity and on the whole, the sentiments, emotions, and knowledge they experienced and shared helped create a valuable bond between them.

The activity, originally created by Kairos Canada, provided support to teachers on a part of our past that may be lacking in the new history curriculum, especially for those teachers who may not have had the depth of knowledge to address issues about Indigenous peoples of Canada.

Comments from participants:

“I was so angry! It wasn’t fair!” -First student who received the diseased blanket and ‘died’.

“It was a good way to learn what really happened because you don’t get that same experience in a book.” -Student

“This was something that we can’t get them to feel in a class lecture. They experienced history today; they didn’t read or hear about it.” -Teacher



This picture shows what was left after centuries of Europeans rule.

Territories diminished or were completely overtaken, populations decimated or even obliterated. Reservations today represent less than 1% of lands that Indigenous Peoples lived on originally.