



An initiative of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue  
[crcna.org/EducationTogether](http://crcna.org/EducationTogether)

## Education Together Teacher Resource Package

In this package:

- Instructions and background information for using the postcards
- A lesson plan: The Marshmallow Activity

### **What are the gaps that Indigenous students face?**

Despite years of promises, there's still a gap: today, far fewer First Nations kids graduate from grade 12 than other kids in Canada because they aren't receiving the proper funding and support needed for a quality education.

There have been some big commitments made, and the federal government has promised to live into the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But change has been slow, and we're not where we should be. A generation of Indigenous kids is waiting for justice and equity and that's not okay. Now is the time for follow-through on promises.

### **How can we learn more?**

Short Videos:

- [Watch this End the Gap video to learn more, and to hear from Indigenous kids about their education dreams.](#)(5 mins).  
Extended videos from the End the Gap campaign can also be found on their [youtube page](#).
- [Or, watch this shorter End the Gap video, which is more suitable for younger viewers.](#) (1 min).

Reading:

- Older youth/adult audiences can learn more by reading this [Report Card](#) on Canada's progress on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations for Indigenous Education in Canada.

Documentary:

- Older youth/adult audiences can learn more by watching [Hi-Ho Mistahey!](#) (1hr 39 minutes) a documentary that tells the story of Shannen Koostachin and her dream to have equal education in her First Nations community of Attawapiskat. (Note: video must be rented or purchased for download).

### What can we do?



**Speak up together!** - Let your Member of Parliament know that you think that First Nations kids deserve better education. It's only right! Fill out the postcards provided with your personal messages and name, signature, and postal code written out on the back. Then put them in the mail, no stamps needed, as it's free to send mail to Parliament in Ottawa!

We'd love to see how you are standing up with Indigenous kids! Share pics of your group and your signed postcards by tagging #EducationTogether #EndtheGap @cpublicdialogue

### Marshmallow Activity

#### Objective:

This activity is designed to help participants understand how systemic inequalities can lead to some groups being privileged while others are not only disadvantaged, but then face real barriers to reaching equality because of those disadvantages. This should then help participants see how 'righting wrongs' requires more than simply 'equal rights', but rather addressing the deep, historic, and cyclical issues of inequality that marginalized people still wrestle with today.

*Note: This activity is designed to be book-ended by viewing one of the 'End the Gap' videos or other resources before the activity, and then by signing and sending the postcards at the end of the activity.*

#### Age Group:

This principles of this activity can apply to a wide age range - children, youth, and adults. However, if the participants vary greatly in age, they will need to be broken up into groups that have equal numbers of adults, youth, and children so that there is no perceived advantage between the groups based on age. Language may be adapted for younger children (eg. "unfairness" instead of "injustice"; "poor people" instead of "disadvantaged people").

#### Materials Needed:

- Paper bags
- Marshmallows, large and small
- Toothpicks
- Wooden popsicle sticks
- Ruler
- Clock or watch for timekeeping

#### Time estimate:

Approximately 30 minutes. (10 mins intro, 10 mins activity, 10 mins discussion).

#### Preparation:

Estimate the number of participants and create bags as described below for every 2-3 people.

First Round: Fill one third of the paper bags with 10 large marshmallows and 10 wooden popsicle sticks. Fill two thirds of the paper bags with 10 small marshmallows and 10 toothpicks.

Second Round: Fill all of the bags with 10 large marshmallows and 10 wooden popsicle sticks.

### **Introduction:**

As we've learned, schools in Indigenous communities receive less funding than the rest of the schools in Canada. This means that Indigenous kids don't have the same access to education that the rest of Canadian kids do, and that many Indigenous communities that are already working hard to overcome generations of injustice have to do so with fewer educational resources. This isn't fair.

The Bible tells a story about a group of people who also weren't treated fairly. When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, they were forced to do back-breaking labour, making bricks by mixing mud and straw together. The Israelites were crying out for freedom, and Moses went to the Pharaoh to ask for them to be set free. [Read Exodus 5:4-18.](#)

The Israelites were already oppressed by being enslaved by the Egyptians, and so it was an even greater injustice to force them to find their own straw to make bricks, as it was almost impossible to find the straw and still make enough bricks each day. In a similar way, Indigenous kids are dealt a great injustice when their schools do not receive equal funding, because without access to quality education, their communities are missing out on one of the most powerful tools they can use to overcome the injustice that they have experienced.

For those of us who haven't experienced a lot of injustice in our lives, it can be hard to understand what it's like not to have the resources we need to succeed. This can cause us to think that if disadvantaged people just worked as hard we do that they'd have an equal chance of succeeding. This activity will help us understand why having fewer resources makes a big difference to disadvantaged communities, and can become a big obstacle to their success.

### **Activity:**

Break up the participants into groups of 2-3 people. Tell the groups that they will each have the exact same amount of supplies and their task is to create the tallest structure. Distribute the first round of bags. Set a time limit (approx. 4-5 mins, depending on time allowance), and tell the groups to open the bags and begin.

*(Many groups will see the obvious disparity in 'building supplies' and complain during the process. Remind them that technically they have the same number and type of supplies, and encourage them to do the best they can with what they have.)*

Give a one minute warning to complete the structures. At the end of the time limit, measure and record how tall each structure is. Do not let the groups tear down their structures after measuring, tell them they aren't allowed to touch them until the next part of the activity.

When all structures are measured, announce who won. Ask the groups why they think that group won. *(They will likely answer that the groups bigger marshmallows and sticks were clearly favoured to win. You can agree with them.)* Ask the participants what they noticed about how different it was to build with the bigger supplies than the smaller ones, and how they felt when the groups with smaller marshmallows and sticks were told they had 'equal' supplies.

Ask one final question of all participants. **"How could this activity be made more fair?"** *(They should obviously suggest that all the groups should have the same sized marshmallows and sticks.)* Agree with them, and distribute the second round of bags to each group. Tell them that now that they have equal supplies it should be a real competition! Let them get excited!

Set the same time limit, and then just before they begin, tell them that there's only **ONE** rule for the second round: each group must build the new structure **on top of (or using)** the existing structure from the first ground. Let them begin.

*(Typically, the smaller marshmallow groups will give up quite quickly knowing they can't win. Don't push them to keep working, but allow them to constructively voice their frustration. Usually the bigger marshmallow groups will be excited because they know they're going to win and may not notice the smaller groups because they're so focused on building a winning structure. If this happens, give them direction to notice what is happening with the smaller groups.)*

Call time, and measure all the structures again. Announce the winner, and tell everyone their reward is to eat their own group's marshmallows.

**Discussion:**

- Ask the group what they think happened in this activity. Were all the groups really 'equal'? Why?
- Ask members of the smaller marshmallow group to share why they gave up (if they did). (For adults, 'How does this relate to the myth of 'lazy marginalized people' or a 'bootstrap mentality'?)
- How does this activity relate to the story of the Israelites making bricks?
- Did this activity help you understand why groups that are already disadvantaged have an even harder time succeeding, even if they're given 'equal' supplies? (For adults, 'How does this exercise relate to the myth of 'meritocracy'?)
- Did this activity help you understand why it's especially unfair that Indigenous schools receive less funding?
- How does this activity change the ways we think about groups that have experienced injustice? (For adults, 'How could it change the ways we think about benevolence and charity?')

*Note: This activity was originally created by Dr. Cheryl Matias, with adaptations by Kim Radersma and Cindy Stover.*