**Residential Schools in BC**

One of the few ways open for children to protest being sent to residential schools was to run away. In 1901 and 1902, there was sudden increase of children running away from the Williams Lake Residential School, also known as St. Joseph’s Industrial School. Children were repeatedly escaping, trying to get back to their homes. Finally, the principal expelled nine students to set an example. Ellen Charlie was one of them.

Still the runaways continued. In February 1902 nine boys escaped from the school. Eight of them were caught and brought back, but one boy, Duncan Sticks, managed to stay hidden from the staff members who were looking for him. At first, Duncan’s disappearance was not immediately reported, as the staff at St. Joseph’s presumed he would come back on his own. However, the eight year old boy died in the freezing winter weather.

An inquest was held into Duncan’s death after local citizens pressured school and government officials. Hearings were held at Alkali Lake (where Duncan and his family lived – 50 km from the school) and in 150 Mile House before the coroner and six jury members. Several people testified at the hearing and the jury concluded that the boy died of exposure, but also commented on the considerable evidence about the punishment the children received, and the poor quality and quantity of their food. The recommended that ”these questions should receive some independent inquiry from the government.” As a result, the government sent out Indian Superintendent Vowell to investigate what was going on at St. Joseph’s school.

Historical Notes…

Johnny Sticks was the father of Duncan Sticks. He was a survivor of the Small Pox epidemic that had spread through BC in 1862, killing more than 60% of the first Nations people that lived here. He died on 20 May 1942 at the age of 86.

“Rancherie” During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, First Nations communities who lived on Indian Reserves often referred to as “Rancheries”, This name came from the Spanish word *Rancheria,* referring to small settlements in California. The word came north during the Fraser River gold rush.

Arthur W. Vowell was the Indian Superindendent for BC from 1898 to 1910. He was the head of the Department of Indian Affairs in BC.

S.E. Moystyn Hoops was the local doctor at 150 Mile house. He acted as the coroner in the inquest into Duncan Sticks death.

S.L. Brophy was fired from the staff at St. Josephs. He was the person responsible for the discipline of the boys. He was also one of the people who were calling for an investigation after Duncan Sticks death.

150 Mile house is 17 km east of William’s Lake and nearly 70 km northeast of Alkali Lake.

Questions…answer on a separate piece of paper, using full and complete sentences.

1. What was Johnny Sticks’ attitude about the residential school before the incident? What evidence is there in his testimony to help you to answer?

2. What reasons did the children give for running away?

3. What reasons does Supt. Vowell give for the increase in runaways? Do you think there is any truth to his reasons? What are his attitudes towards these reasons?

4. What types of things were children punished for?

5. Consider the offences which Vowell listed in his report. Why do you think these were considered serious enough to deserve strapping? What do they show about the staff’s attitudes and beliefs?

6. What evidence is there that shows students were protesting their treatment in the school, and not just showing bad or foolish behaviour?