

BOOK 1

The KAIROS Blanket Exercise



Assembly of First Nations

Plain Talks

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to The Kairos Blanket Exercise

This chapter will provide background information on the Kairos Blanket Exercise to help facilitators prepare for the activity.

1

Introducing the Kairos Blanket Exercise

2

Terminology to review before conducting the Kairos Blanket Exercise

Introducing the Kairos Blanket Exercise

The Kairos Blanket Exercise is an interactive teaching tool designed to raise awareness and deepen understanding of the denial of Indigenous peoples' nationhood in Canada, the historic relationship between Europeans and Indigenous nations, and the impact of colonization. The Blanket Exercise reveals the historic ways First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples lost access to their land, what impact this loss had on their communities, and how Indigenous people have resisted, and continue to resist, assimilation. Since its creation in 1997, thousands of Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups have participated in the Blanket Exercise as a means of opening or continuing a conversation about decolonization.



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Why do the Kairos Blanket Exercise

Historical issues concerning Indigenous peoples are typically taught from a Western European perspective. It is important that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people also be presented an Indigenous perspective. An Indigenous perspective includes the celebration and acknowledgement of Indigenous peoples as vibrant, economically self-sufficient nations. An Indigenous perspective recognizes the destructive effect of federal policies and programs on Indigenous nations. The Blanket Exercise provides an opportunity for people of all ages and backgrounds to undergo a factual and emotional experience of historical events from an Indigenous perspective, and to learn about our shared history and to form a common understanding.

“Quote about blanket exercise.”

— Author of quote



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Concepts to review before conducting the Kairos Blanket Exercise

[Introduction]

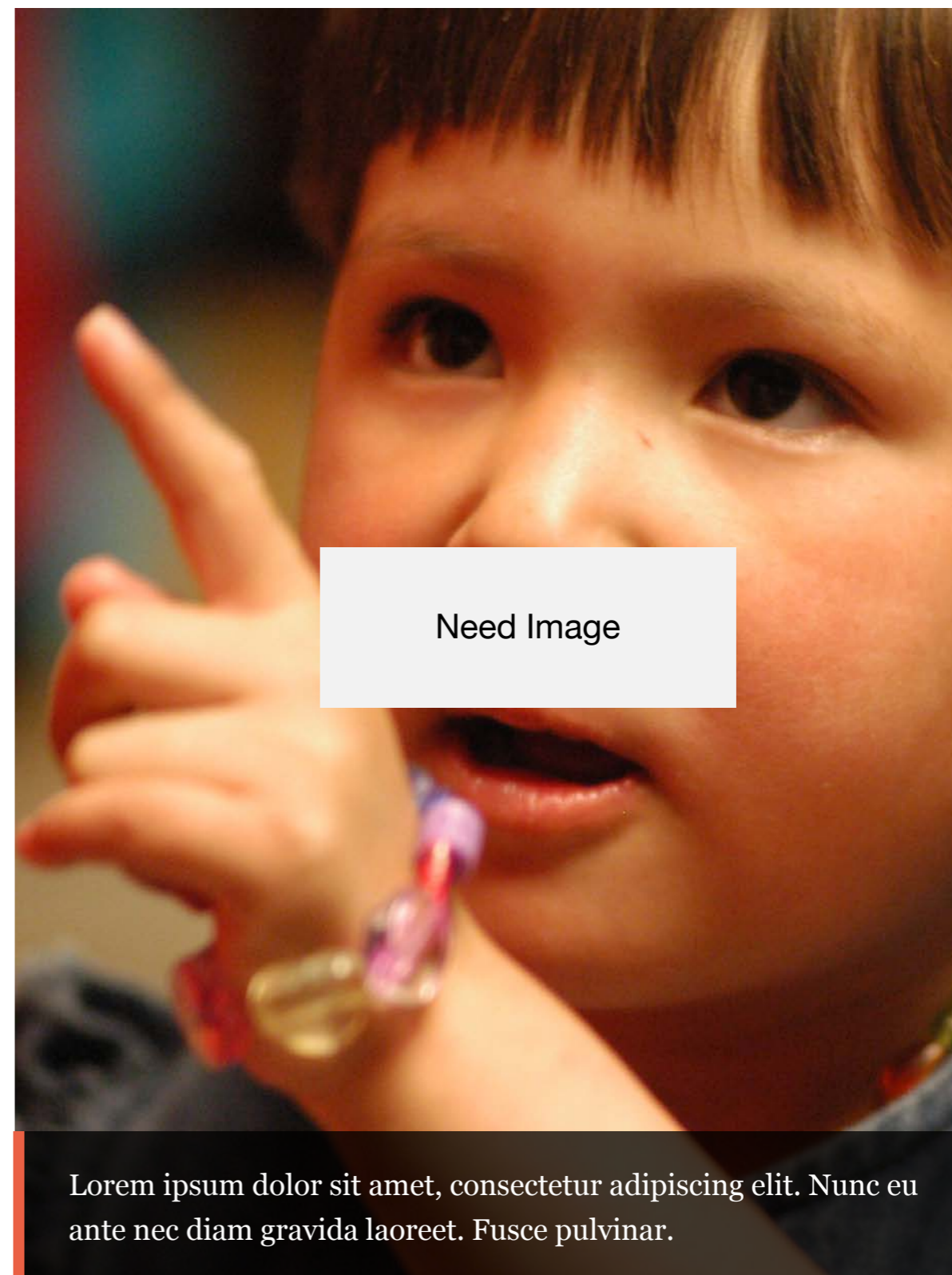


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What does it mean to be a sovereign nation?

A sovereign nation enjoys the right to self-determination and has a governance structure and territory that is recognized by other nations. While European nations focus on the protection of individual rights, Indigenous nations focus on collective rights to land, language, spiritual traditions, and self-governance, to name a few.

Indigenous individuals rely on strong nations for their well-being. Nations protect and nurture the collective rights through which an individual finds cultural meaning and identity. The Indigenous struggle for sovereignty is a struggle for nationhood, and many believe that the recognition of Indigenous nationhood will enhance, not diminish, Canadian sovereignty.



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What is a Treaty?

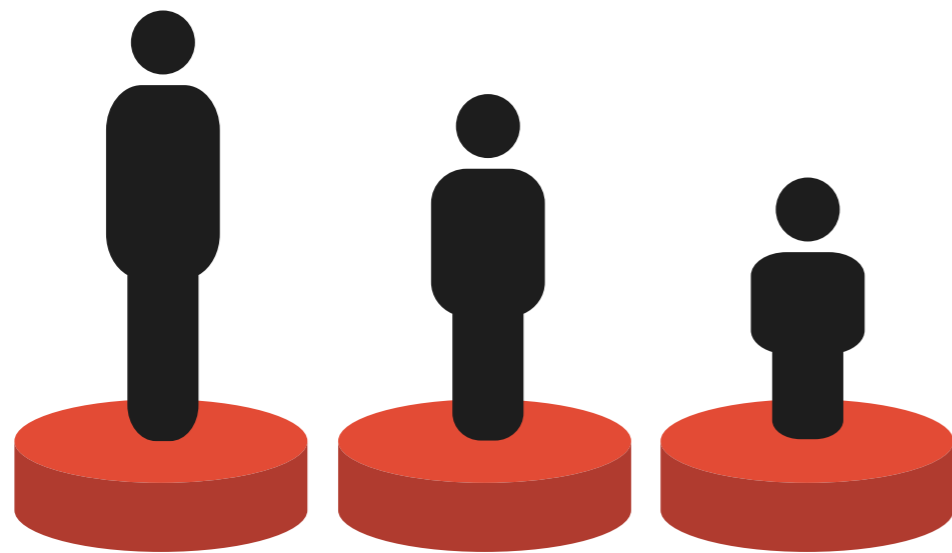
Treaties are internationally binding agreements between sovereign nations. Hundreds of treaties of peace and friendship were signed between the European settlers and First Nations during the period prior to Confederation.

These treaties promoted peaceful coexistence and the sharing of resources. After Confederation, the European settlers pursued treaty-making as a tool to acquire vast tracts of land. The numbered treaties 1 through 11 were signed between First Nations and the Crown after Confederation.

For Indigenous peoples, treaties outline the rights and responsibilities of all parties to the agreement. In the traditions of Indigenous treaty-making, these are oral agreements. In addition, they are “vital, living instruments of relationship” that involve all Canadians.

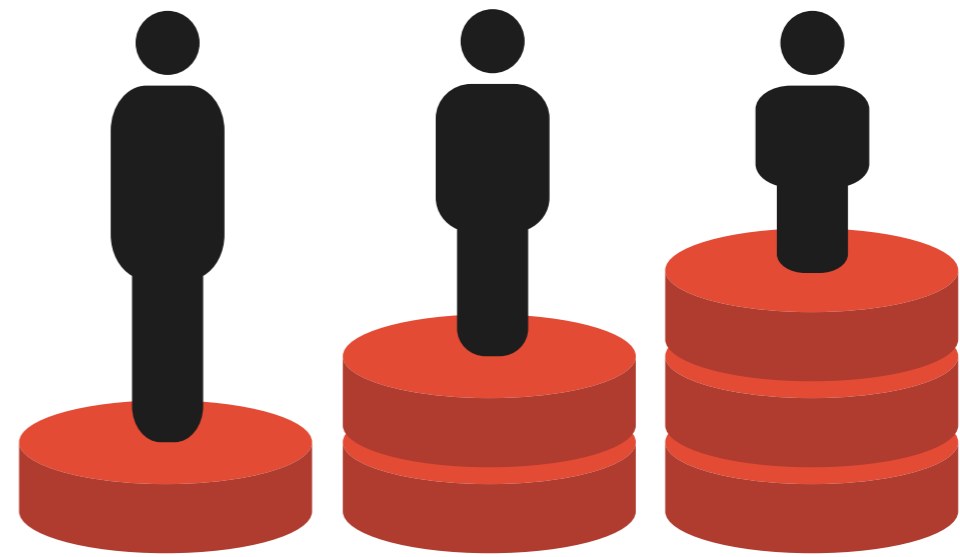
What is the difference between equity and equality?

Equality means each person gets the same treatment or the same amount of something. It involves systematically dividing something into equal parts. Equality aims to promote fairness, but it requires everyone to start from the same place.



Equality

Equity, on the other hand, recognizes that not everyone has the same needs. Equity is about justice and a fair process that leads to an equal outcome. It takes into account the injustices of the past and how they have placed some in positions of privilege while others face significant barriers to achieving well-being.



Equity

Terminology to review before conducting the Kairos Blanket Exercise

This list of terms provides a brief overview of key concepts introduced during the Kairos Blanket Exercise. Depending upon the knowledge level of the group, some facilitators may want to review this terminology with participants before beginning the activity.

⊕ Indigenous peoples

⊕ Aboriginal peoples

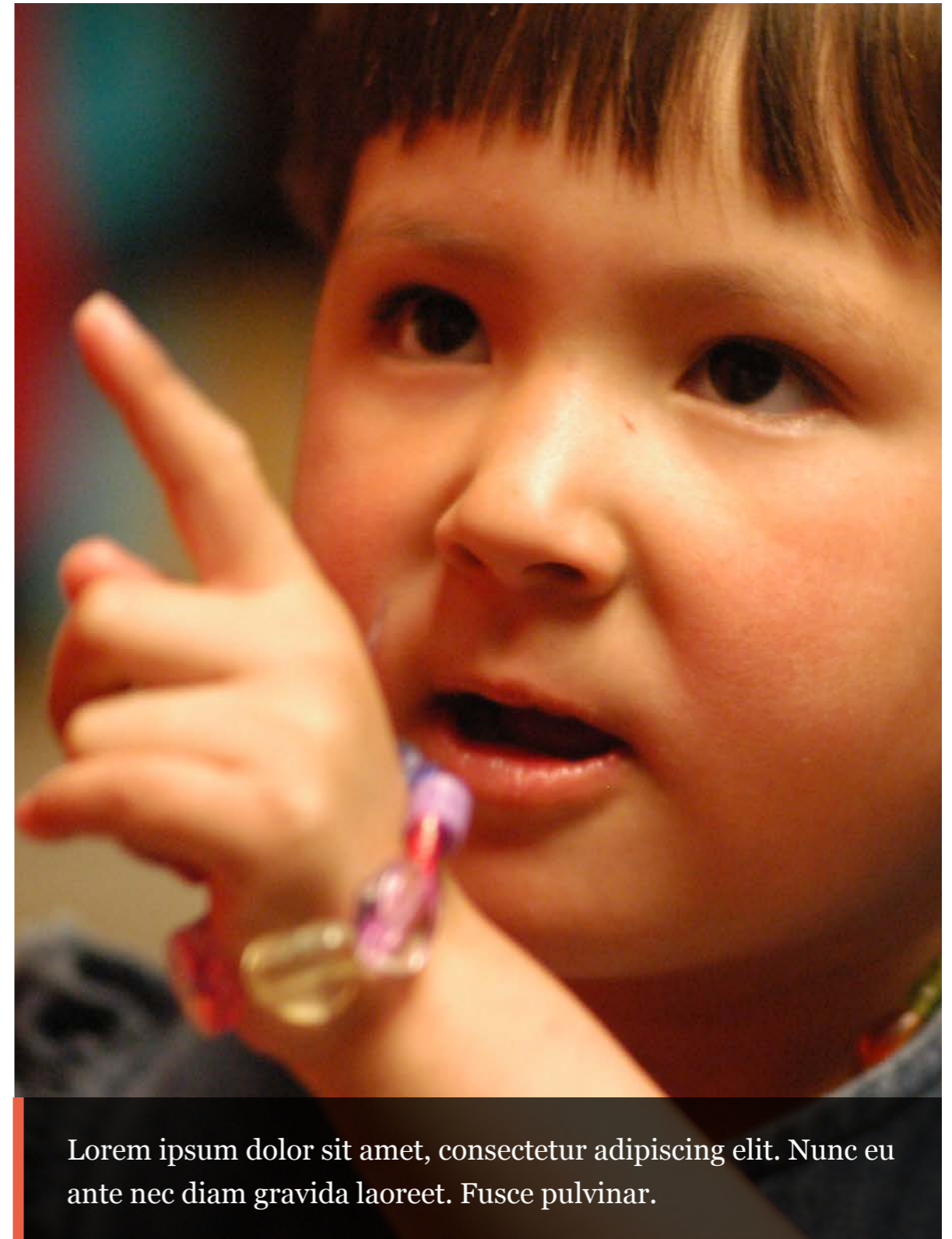
⊕ First Nations

⊕ Indian

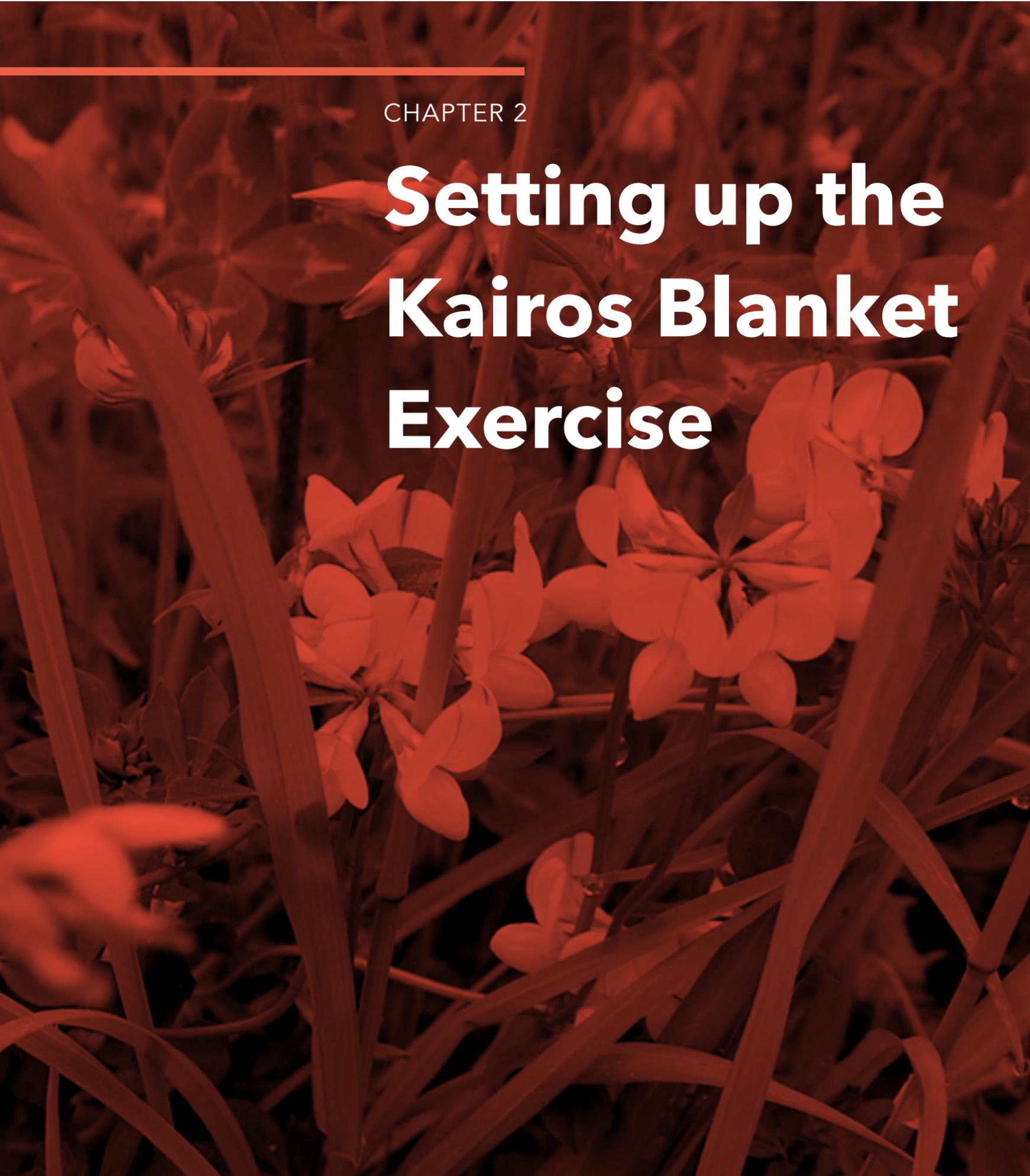
⊕ Inuit

⊕ Métis

⊕ Assimilation



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CHAPTER 2

Setting up the Kairos Blanket Exercise

This chapter provides facilitators with planning materials and tips for preparing to conduct the Kairos Blanket Exercise for a group.

1

Setting Up

2

Enhancing the experience

Setting Up

Need intro



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Coordinating the number of participants

Number of participants: The Blanket Exercise works best with anywhere between 15 and 60 people, although 25 to 30 people is ideal. With fewer participants, the challenge is to ensure not too many people leave the blankets, so you will want to hand out slightly fewer than the suggested number of white and yellow index cards. The larger the group, the more difficult it is to have a good discussion or debrief at the end. See [Section 3](#) for more information on how to choose the right number of resources for your group.

Volunteers: The facilitator will need to coordinate with a few volunteers to run this activity. The roles are flexible. At a minimum you will need two volunteers - one to facilitate and be the Narrator (usually the teacher or someone in a leadership role), and at least one to play the role of the European.

Ideally, up to six volunteers can be used by dividing up the script and having more than one Narrator and European, and by incorporating the role of the Church.



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Ensuring you have enough time

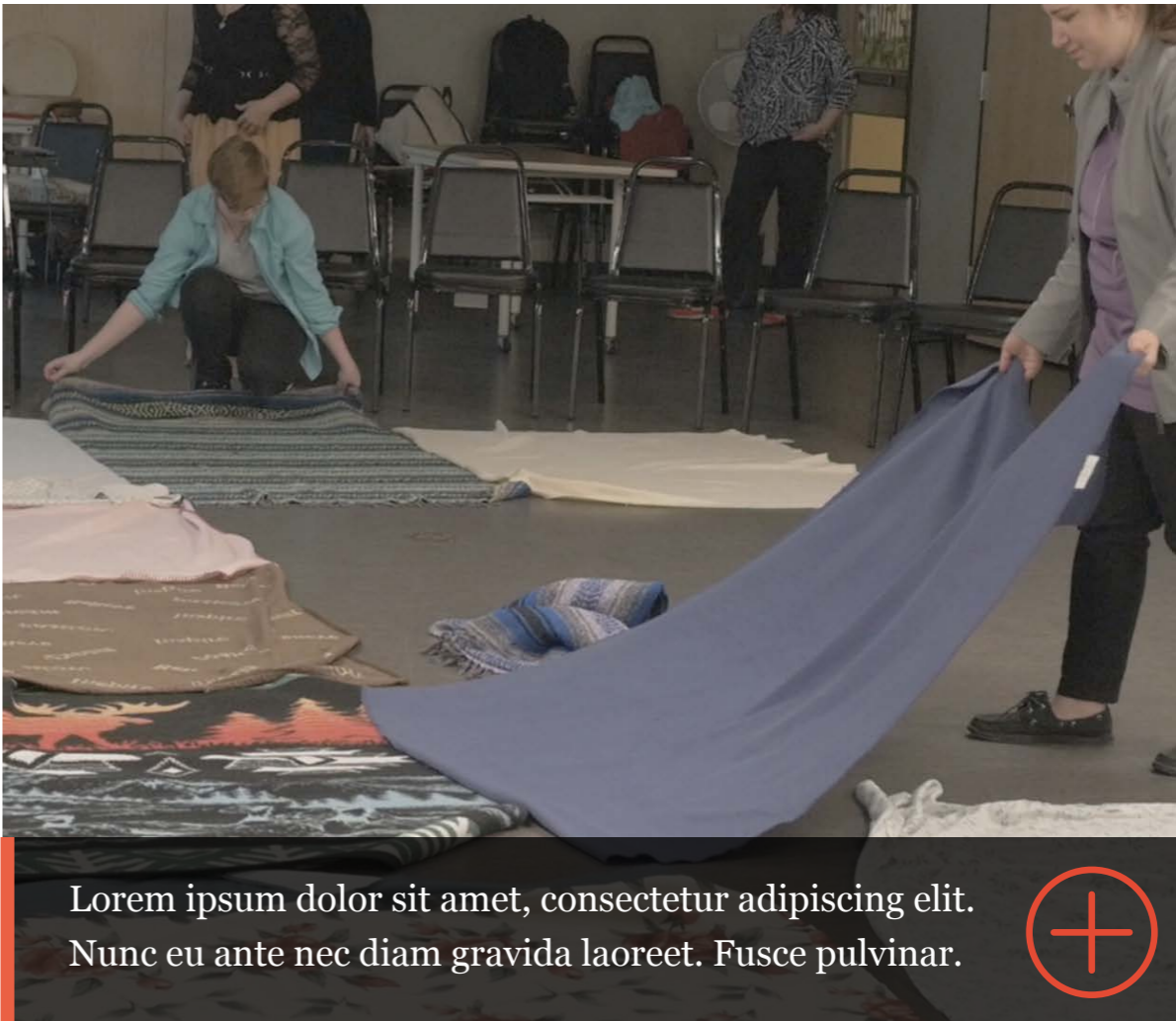
Conducting the Blanket Exercise may take a total of two to three hours. Doing the Blanket Exercise itself is about 50 minutes or so, plus time for the opening with Elders. Wherever possible, invite First Nations, Inuit or Métis individuals or representatives to attend, to honour the traditional territory, to teach, and to begin to build a relationship. Following the Blanket Exercise, an in-depth discussion or talking circle—which can easily last another hour—is encouraged.

Therefore, the Blanket Exercise realistically requires about two hours to ensure adequate time for debriefing and reflection at the end, which is critically important. It is also recommended to end with a feast, or at least a snack, and so time must be factored in for that as well.



Gathering your resources and materials

The Kairos Blanket Exercise can be run minimally with few props if you are constrained by resources or time. Ideally the facilitator should plan for the most enriching experience possible by ensuring adequate time for the activity, by planning well and gathering resources and support people, and confirming space ahead of time.

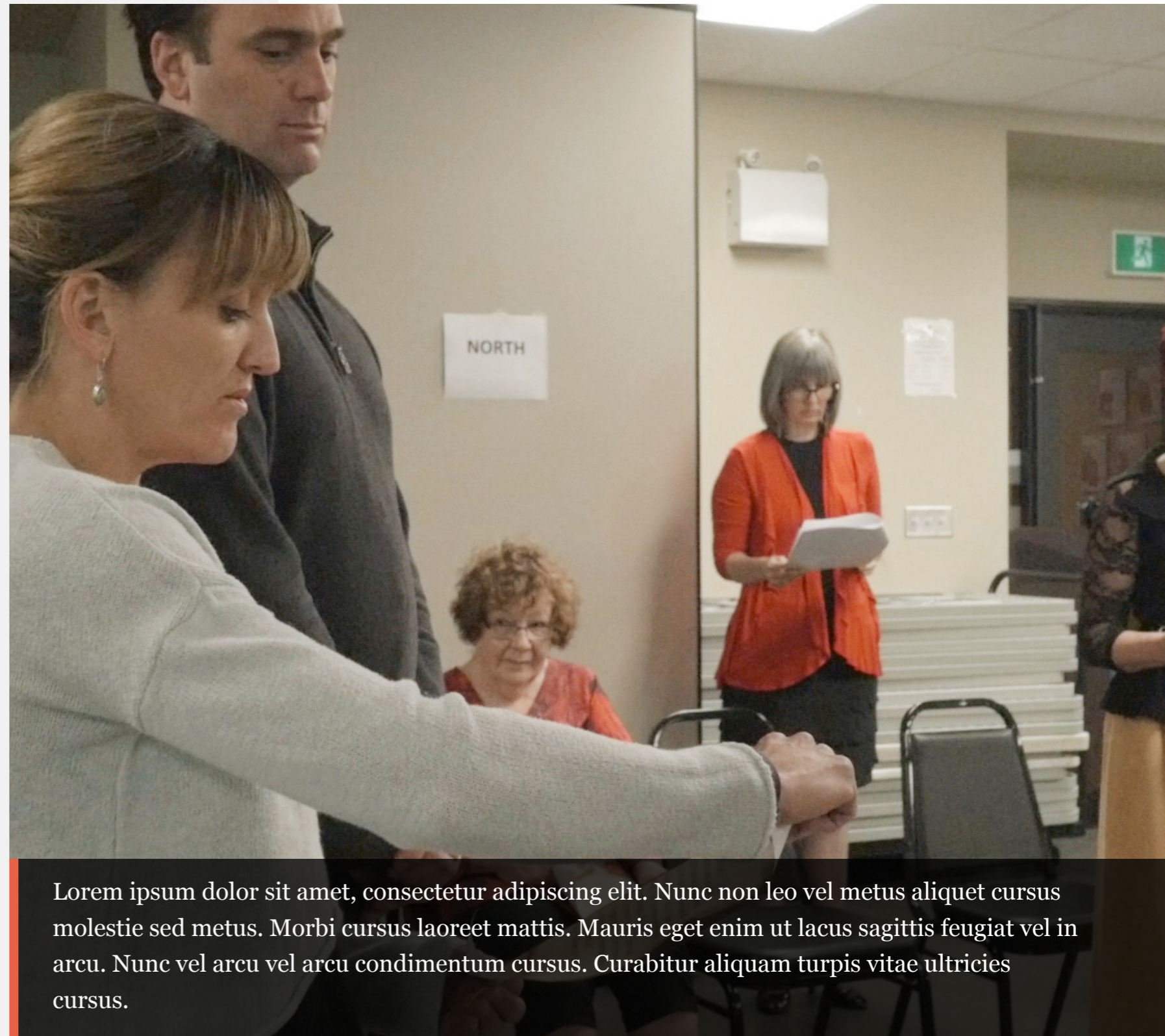


Enhancing the experience

To create a rich and meaningful experience, facilitators are encouraged to consider enhancing the activity with the following ideas and suggestions.

“Quote about blanket exercise experience.”

— Author of quote



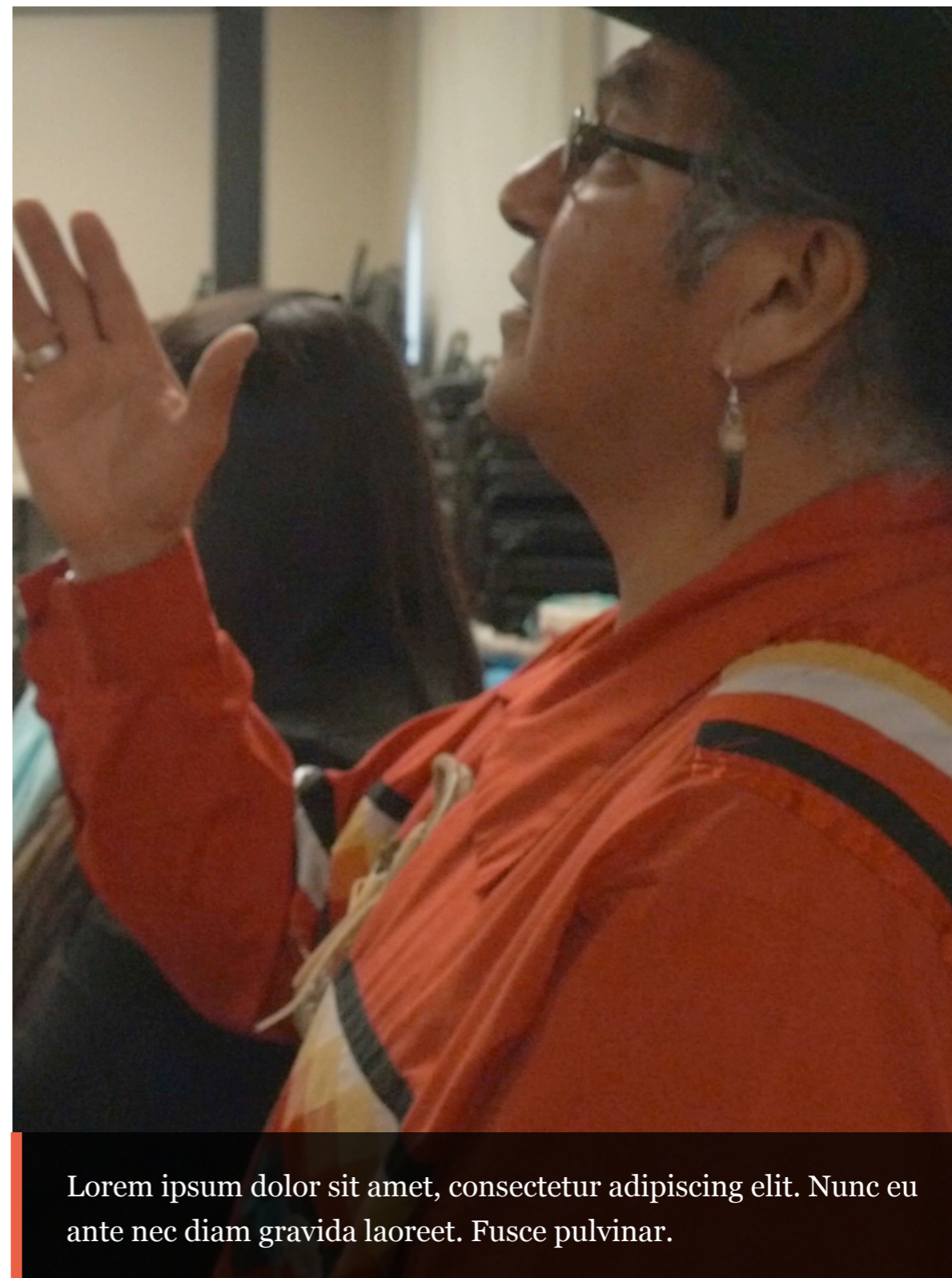
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Indigenous Elder Support:

You are encouraged to invite an Indigenous Elder from the area to open and close the workshop, lead or support the Talking Circle, and speak about how the content of the Kairos Blanket Exercise resonates with them and their community. This will greatly enrich the learning experience for the participants and help them make connections between what they are learning and the area where they live. Since the Blanket Exercise can cause emotions to surface, it is important to provide participants with an opportunity to voice their feelings in a supportive and safe environment and to provide emotional and cultural support to participants throughout the process. Whenever possible, this is very strongly recommended.

“Quote from elder about participating in the blanket exercise experience.”

— Author of quote





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Additions to the script:

We encourage you to make the Blanket Exercise script specific to the territory where your school or group is located by researching and writing scrolls or additions to the script with information about the local history or current situation. For example, in the part of the script that refers to residential schools, a scroll could be added about a residential school that operated nearby.

Please be respectful when doing this. If the additions you are making are not part of your own story, be sure to work in collaboration with the appropriate people. If you do not know who the appropriate people are, locate your nearest First Nation, Metis, or Inuit community or organization and make a phone call and ask them.

An example of an addition to a script:

Example of what an addition to the script could look like.
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Traditional items:

Consider using traditional items at the beginning of the Blanket Exercise to represent the richness and diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples throughout Turtle Island. Participants can use these to barter and interact with one another. These could include clothing (mitts, mukluks, gauntlets, hats, etc.), carvings, baskets, utensils, art pieces, medicines, furs, uluit, etc. It is a great way to “break the ice” and get people engaged and interacting early. Later, after the arrival of the Europeans, you can include Métis items like sashes as well.

Dolls or Pictures:

You can hand out dolls to all participants when they step onto the blankets to represent Indigenous children and families. This can really humanize the Blanket Exercise. You can then have the European take away some of the dolls when residential schools are discussed and again for the sixties scoop. If you do not have dolls, you could have participants write the name of a loved one under the age of 16 on a pink card and then share information about their loved one during the trade portion of the activity at the beginning of the exercise.



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Costumes:

It is always more powerful when the roles are clearly identifiable through a hat or costume worn by the person doing the role play. The Narrators can wear big hats and old British or French military jackets. Be creative. Even a tri-corner hat made from newspaper will do.



The Role of the Church:

Some variations of the activity have incorporated the role of the Church. Someone can dress as a nun or priest, and mingle amongst the participants sharing the unkind messages that were typically said to, and/or about Indigenous people across Canada. The Church can take a prominent role in removing the children (dolls or pictures) from the participants at the appropriate times, and setting up the residential school blanket.



CHAPTER 3

Conducting the Kairos Blanket Exercise

This section gives facilitators an understanding of how the Blanket Exercise is designed to unfold. To conduct the actual Blanket Exercise, it is important to review the videos and ensure that all of the materials have been gathered and the preparations completed.

- 1 How the Kairos Blanket Exercise is designed to work
- 2 What is a Talking Circle and how does it work?

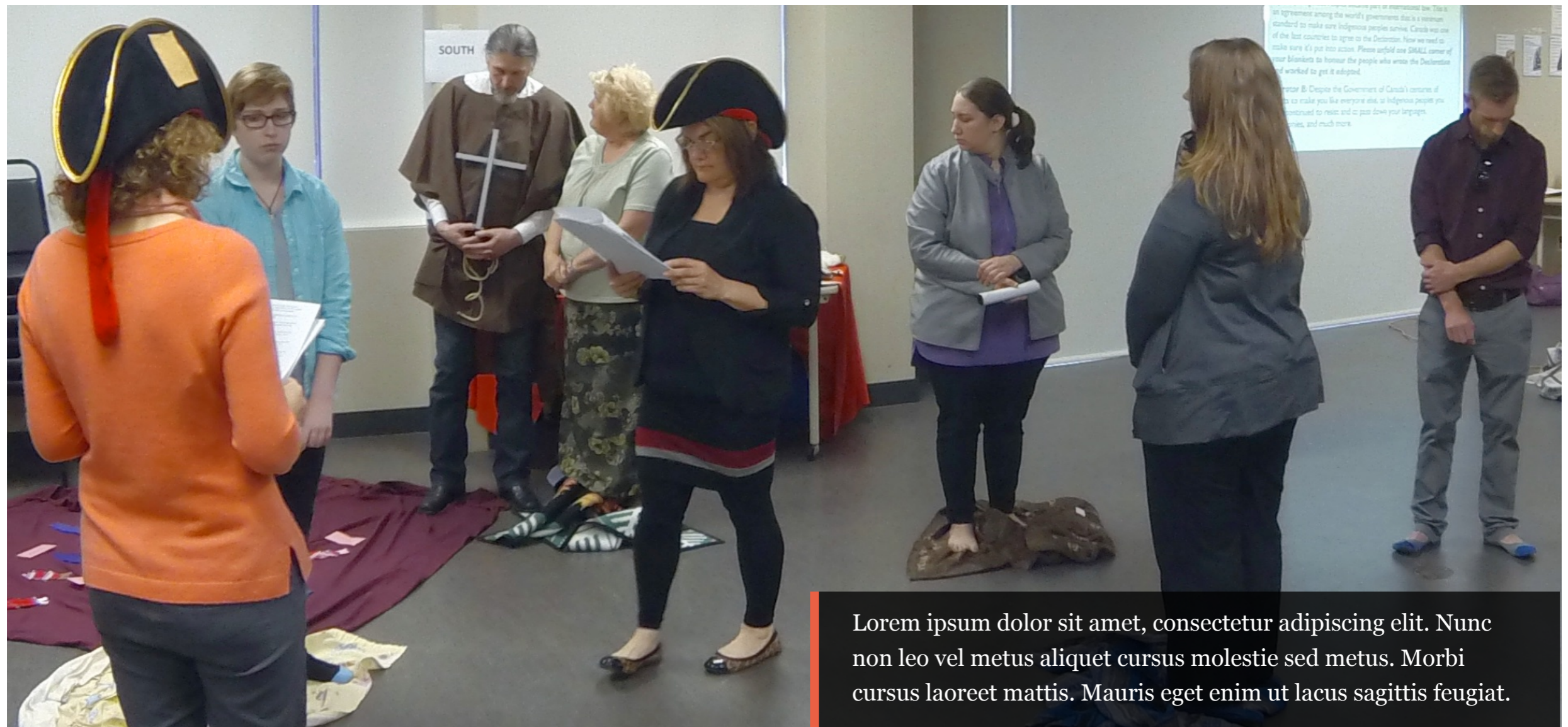
How the Kairos Blanket Exercise is designed to work

The activity begins with blankets arranged on the floor to represent Canada before the arrival of Europeans. Participants representing Indigenous peoples move around on the blankets, as if they are using and occupying the land. A narrator(s) reads from a script while someone playing the role of a European(s) joins and interacts with those on the blankets.



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As the script traces the history of the relationship between Europeans and Indigenous peoples in Canada, participants respond to various cues and read prepared scrolls. At the end of the Blanket Exercise only a few people remain on the blankets, which have been folded into small bundles and cover only a fraction of their original area.

Created in 1997, the Kairos Blanket Exercise is a succinct overview of Indigenous rights in Canada that explores the major themes and findings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. You are strongly encouraged to use the exercise as part of a larger unit with pre- and post-activities to support the learning.

What is a talking talking circle and how does it work?

Talking circles are a traditional First Nations way of communicating, and a striking example of demonstrating respect for others. Following the Blanket Exercise, the facilitator will invite participants to sit in a circle to discuss and reflect upon the activity. In a circle, everyone is equal, and has a voice. There is no hierarchy. Each individual is given an opportunity to talk about his or her opinions and feelings without being interrupted.

The facilitator and/or Elder will open and close the circle, and will generally use a talking stick (or an object like a feather or stone) during the circle to pass to each person who speaks. The group understands that the person holding the talking stick and speaking should be listened to with courtesy and respect. A person may disagree with another's opinion, but they must express themselves during their turn to speak only. When the speaker passes the talking stick to another person in the group, it is a signal for that other person to express their thoughts and ideas. With the Blanket Exercise, it is always a good idea to ensure that you have an Elder present to provide support as the circle can become emotional, especially if residential school survivors are participating. It is important to be mindful of your audience and ensure that you create a safe and supportive space for people to share their feelings.



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References


Credits:

The creators of the original KAIROS Blanket Exercise, 1997:

Ed Bianchi, Suzanne Doerge, Chris Hiller, Dr. Rose-Alma J. McDonald.

Recent contributors to the script: Sara Anderson, Ed Bianchi, Caroline Foster, Julie Graham, Linda Cree, Gayadowehs Lu Ann Hill-MacDonald, Mike Hogeterp, Katy Quinn, Shannon Monk Payne, Priscilla Solomon, Steve van de Hoef.

Special thanks to the hundreds of KAIROS Blanket Exercise participants who over the years have taken the time to offer feedback and ideas about how to improve the workshop. It is because of these individuals that this teaching tool has become so effective and popular.



For more information about the KAIROS Blanket Exercise -

www.kairosblanketexercise.org

KAIROS Canada is an ecological justice and human rights organization of eleven Canadian churches and religious organizations that deliberates on issues of common concern, advocates for social justice, and joins with people of faith and goodwill in action for social transformation. In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) concluded that public education is key to realizing a renewed relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples – one based on sharing, respect and the mutual recognition of rights and responsibilities. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) echoed this sentiment when it identified education as the key to reconciliation. Through creative and innovative public education initiatives and campaigns such as the Blanket Exercise, KAIROS works towards reconciliation and a just, peaceful and respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that recognizes Indigenous peoples' rights, including the right to self-determination.

Blanket

This is the deffinition of a blanket

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