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The Origins of Orange Shirt Day

The Story Behind Orange Shirt Day

"I went to the Mission for one year. I had just turned 6 years old. We never had very much money, and there was no welfare, but somehow my granny managed to buy me a new outfit to go to the Mission School in. I remember going to Robinson's store and picking out a shiny orange shirt. It had eyelets and lace, and I felt so pretty in that shirt and excited to be going to school! Of course, when I got to the Mission, they stripped me, and took away my clothes, including the orange shirt. I never saw it again, except on other kids. I didn't understand why they wouldn't give it back to me; it was mine! Since then, the colour orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing. I finally get it, that the feeling of worthlessness and insignificance, ingrained in me from my first day at the mission, affected the way I lived my life for many years...I want my orange shirt back!"

Phyllis (Jack) Webstad, Dog Creek

The orange shirt taken from one child is a **symbol of the many losses** experienced by thousands of Indigenous children, and their families and communities, over several generations including: **loss of family and traditional parenting skills, loss of languages, loss of cultures, stories, songs, loss of medicinal knowledge and engineering skills, loss of personal and intellectual and religious freedom, loss of self-esteem and self-worth; and of the painful experiences of mental, physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuses and neglect, and more.** Wearing an orange shirt allows participants to take a stand against cultural genocide and to show Indigenous Allyship with Indigenous Survivors and their families. Every Indigenous person in Canada is either a Survivor, a child of a Survivor, a Grandchild of a Survivor. Every single one.

Adapted from : <http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/firstnations/pdf/15-16/orangeshirt.pdf>



CBC Kids offers a description and background of Orange Shirt Day with kid-friendly, accessible language, visuals, and Phyllis Webstad's video.

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Ideas for the Primary Classroom

Years ago, the Canadian government believed that Indigenous children should dress and speak and act like settler children. In order to make this happen, Indigenous children were forcibly taken from their families and sent to live in schools where they could only speak English (or French), and where they had to dress and act like “proper English children.” Indigenous children missed their families all across Canada and were punished for speaking their Indigenous languages at these schools. Today, we, as Settler Canadians, acknowledge this wrong-doing, and we wear orange to remember those children, and to remind us that it is important to know and learn about other cultural traditions and languages and worldviews, especially about the First Peoples of this land.



Phyllis's Orange Shirt, by Phyllis Webstad

This is Phyllis Webstad's true story written for a younger audience. Phyllis' story inspired the movement of Orange Shirt Day.



When We Were Alone, by David A. Robertson

A young girl asks her grandmother about her culture, and is told about life in a residential school a long time ago, where so much was taken away.

Possible activities:

1. Cut out shirts from orange construction paper (or white paper which can be coloured). Students can decorate the shirts with images or mottos that reflect the message, “Every Child Matters”.

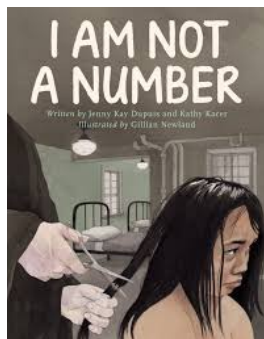
Other ways to use shirt templates: make shirts and include student names and/or Indigenous community names, e.g. Musqueam First Nation Matters, Squamish First Nation Matters, etc. Have children brainstorm things related to Indigenous culture that matter, e.g. Language Matters, Culture Matters, Taking Care of the Land Matters, Stories Matter, Songs Matter, Medicine Knowledge Matters, Hunting Skills Matter, Respecting the Air Matters, Respecting the Water Matters, Every Indigenous Youth Matters, etc.

2. Trace hands on orange construction paper. On each hand, students may write an action which we can do to help show every child matters.

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Ideas for the Intermediate Classroom

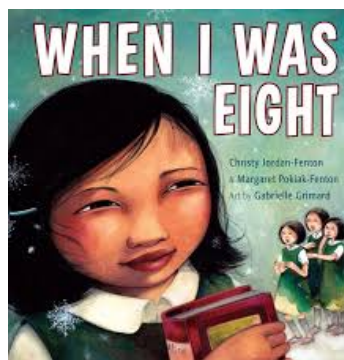
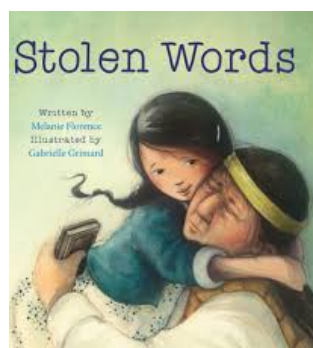


I am Not a Number, by Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer

Irene goes to live in a residential school where she is confused, frightened and terribly homesick. When she goes home for summer holidays, her parents decide never to send her away again, but where will she hide and what will happen when her parents disobey the law?

Stolen Words, by Melany Florence

A little girl helps her grandfather regain the language taken



When I Was Eight, by Christy Jordan Fenton

The story *Fatty Legs* for younger readers. Based on the true story of Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, Olemaun is an eight year old girl who knows a lot of things. Because she does not know how to read, she ignores her father's warnings, to travel from her Arctic home to Residential School to learn.

Fatty Legs, Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton

The moving memoir of an Inuk girl who emerges from a residential school with her spirit intact.



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Activities:

1. Show and discuss the short live-action video of *Shi-Shi Etko*, with live actors.
2. In addition to the activities suggested for primary students (reading the picture books and creating T-shirt, hand or button designs), students could design bookmarks, recreate their own version of stories in comic book form, act out sections of the books to create short video clips (with green screen for backgrounds), use stop-motion photography to make an animated short, or make posters on the theme of “Every Child Matters.”
3. Use or adapt ideas from the *FNESC Indian Residential Schools and Reconciliation Teacher Resource Guide*, depending on grade level, for example making memory bags.
4. Use or adapt ideas from *Project of Heart* (for example, a fundraising project), or *The Gladys We Never Knew* (also available in French) or the *BCTF Project of Heart ebook* (also available in French), depending on grade level.

Info for the Secondary Classroom

What is a Residential School?

The Residential School System was a Canadian government-created system run by various Christian churches between 1883 and 1996 with the intentions of assimilating Indigenous children into Western culture and expunging the children’s Indigenous cultures and languages. **Some 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were forcibly taken from their homes to attend residential schools. Not only were Indigenous children physically, emotionally, and sexually abused at the schools, thousands of them died and were buried unceremoniously and anonymously; the victims of malnutrition, beatings, preventable fires, or tuberculosis spreading rapidly through overcrowding.** In 2008 the Canadian government established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate abuses at the schools, and listened to over 6,000 Survivor accounts until 2015. In 2008 Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued a formal apology for the harm caused by the Canadian Residential School System, at 11am on a Wednesday morning. **For in-depth info for learning, watch We Were Children free on NFB, https://www.nfb.ca/film/we_were_children/ and visit The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation website <https://nctr.ca/>**

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NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION



Carey Newman (2018), Coast Salish/Kwagiulth

Background Information

Heritage Minister **Steven Guilbeault** tabled a new bill on September 29, 2020, proposing Orange Shirt Day become a national statutory holiday. The new holiday would be officially named the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. On May 28, 2021, the day after it was reported that the remains of **215 bodies** were discovered in an **unmarked** cemetery on the grounds of the former **Kamloops Indian Residential School**, all parties in the House of Commons agreed to fast-track the bill, which passed in the House by **unanimous consent**. The bill passed the **Senate** unanimously six days later and received royal assent on June 3, 2021. (Adapted from Wikipedia)

The Day for Truth and Reconciliation is meant to be for learning about the Legacy of Residential Schools and the devastating traumas inflicted on generations of First Peoples' children for over 100 years.

The road we travel is equal in importance to the destination we seek. There are no shortcuts. When it comes to truth and reconciliation, we are all forced to go the distance.

—Justice Murray Sinclair

For an award winning production about Truth and Reconciliation:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We_Know_the_Truth:_Stories_to_Inspire_Reconciliation

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Whole School Possibilities

As Staff, personally and collectively, consider your knowledge and relationship with Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and your Role in Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Find ideas for whole school activities and projects for Orange Shirt Day, and Truth and Reconciliation Day at:

[https://orangeshirtday.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/](https://orangeshirtday.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/bctf_orangeshirtdayactivities.pdf)

[bctf_orangeshirtdayactivities.pdf](https://orangeshirtday.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/bctf_orangeshirtdayactivities.pdf)

<https://brainnijas.ca/orange-shirt-day-every-child-matters/>

<https://facingcanada.facinghistory.org/orange-shirt-day>

<https://creativeclassroomcore.com/activities-for-orange-shirt-day/>

Honouring the Children Resource from FNEESC:

<https://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/6.-BC-First-Peoples-12-Teacher-Resource-Guide-2022-final-R-Honouring-the-Children.pdf>

To purchase Orange Shirts: [Native Northwest](#) will donate proceeds above the manufacturing costs to organizations that work to undo the inter-generational trauma caused by Residential Schools.

Critically Reflective Educator Questions

- How does Canada's Residential School System reflect the larger context of power, and relationship with Indigenous Peoples in Canada?
- Why have the stories of Residential Schools been silenced for so long? What has contributed to the movement toward greater understanding of Indigenous histories in Canada?
- What does Reconciliation mean to you? How are the concepts of Truth and Reconciliation connected to your practice, your family, your community?
- What evidence of reconciliation can we see in our communities? How might I personally contribute to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada?

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Learning Opportunities and General Resources

EVERY CHILD MATTERS: TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION-REFLECTING ON OUR PRACTICE



For the morning of the district-wide September 22nd Non-Instructional Day, Dr. Dustin Louie of the Dakelh First Nation in northern BC, will come in and share an Indigenous perspective of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. He will speak about how to Decolonize our Thinking and Practice. You will be invited in to hear the stories he shares and the knowledge he has to help support all educators in how to do this work within your classrooms. So please come and join us as we walk alongside Dustin in this work.

Dr. Dustin Louie uses his voice to support Indigenous Education through research. He is Director of the Native Indigenous Teacher Education Program at UBC.

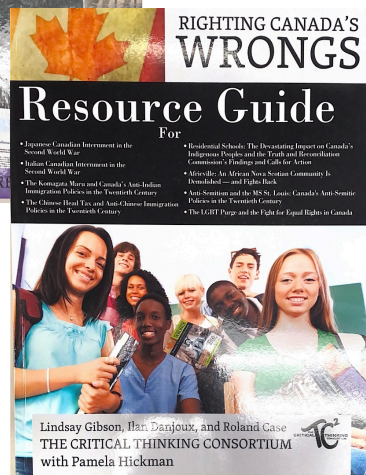
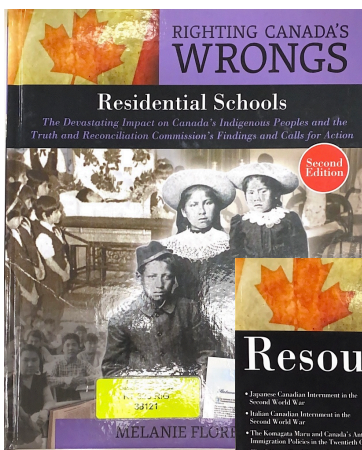


NFB educational playlists are selections of films on themes that tie in with Canadian curricula and address the important issues of the day. This [Orange Shirt Day playlist](#) includes a variety of films related to residential schools that can be used for background information.

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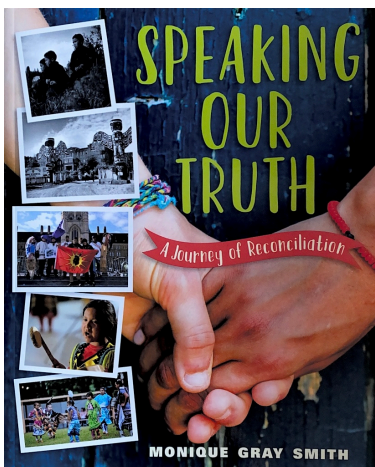
Truth and Reconciliation Week (Sept 26 to 30) is a FREE national program open to **all** schools across Canada. This year, the theme is “Remembering the Children,” and includes age-appropriate material for students in Grades 1 through 12. **Registration is required** to stream live, view pre-recorded sessions and to participate in the Q & A segment. See the [website](#) for more details. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED FOR ALL.**



Righting Canada's Wrongs and Righting Canada's Wrongs: Resource Guide

While these texts are compiled by non-Indigenous educators, they do offer extensive collections of historical photographs, documents and first-person narratives from people who survived residential schools.

Righting Canada's Wrongs: Residential Schools offers an account of the injustice of the residential school system in Canadian history. It documents how institutionalized racism was confronted and finally acknowledged. *Righting Canada's Wrongs: Resource Guide*, includes lessons connected to historical injustices in Canada and their ongoing legacies.



Speaking our Truth, by Monique Gray Smith

Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples has suffered as a result of both the residential school system and the lack of understanding of the historical and current impact of those schools. Healing and repairing that relationship requires education, awareness and increased understanding of the legacy and the impacts still being felt by survivors and their families. Guided by acclaimed Indigenous author Monique Gray Smith, readers will learn about the lives of Survivors and listen to allies who are putting the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission into action.