

September 30: Orange Shirt Day and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation - Classroom Learning Resources

What is Orange Shirt Day?

In 1973, six-year-old Phyllis Webstad was excited to wear her new orange shirt for the first day of school. Phyllis says of the shirt, “it was so bright and exciting - just like it felt to be going to school!” When she arrived at St. Joseph’s Mission Residential School her shirt was taken from her and was never given back. For Phyllis, “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. All of us little children were crying and no one cared.” (quotations from [orange shirt day.org](http://orange-shirt-day.org))

Established in 2013, [Orange Shirt Day](http://orange-shirt-day.org) recognizes the legacy of the Indian residential schools system for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families and communities. By wearing orange shirts, we acknowledge the truths of residential schools in Canada, honour Survivors, and remember the thousands of children who died in these schools, many who were buried in unmarked graves.

In addition to being Orange Shirt Day, September 30th, 2024, is also the 4th annual [National Day for Truth and Reconciliation](http://nctr.ca/). The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation hosts events honouring this day. You will find information and classroom resources on their website, <https://nctr.ca/>.

Wear orange and engage with some of the resources below to participate in Orange Shirt Day.

For more information, visit the [Urban Indigenous Education Centre website](http://www.urbanindigenouseducation.ca/) or visit the [UIEC's Resources Site](http://www.urbanindigenouseducation.ca/resources) for this and other K-12 Indigenous Education resources. We will also share information about upcoming events on the Urban Indigenous Education Centre's Resources Site.

If you have any questions, please contact one or both of the Instructional Leaders, Indigenous Education:

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Background information on Orange Shirt Day – *Every Child Matters*:

- What is Orange Shirt Day? - <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/what-is-orange-shirt-day>
- Orange Shirt Day Inspired by a Girl Who Couldn't Wear Hers - https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/what-is-orange-shirt-day-annual-event-inspired-by-a-girl-who-co_n_12250652
- ETFO Orange Shirt Day Campaign - <https://ett.ca/orange-shirt-day-2020/>

A note about responsible use of this resource package: Before you share a suggested resource with your students, it is your responsibility to preview it and be prepared to support your students to understand it in responsible, safe ways. If you have questions or concerns about a particular resource, please contact one of the Instructional Leaders named above.

Below are a number of links that may be appropriate for your classroom:

- NEWS ARTICLE - Lanella, Mike. Sept 30, 2016. *Orange Shirt Day: How Phyllis Webstad's 1st day at residential school inspired a movement*. CBC <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/orange-shirt-day-1.3785597>
- VIDEO - *Every Child Matters* (**Note:** Secondary classrooms or adult content)- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riSgg53AJb8&feature=share>
- LESSON PLANS - Orange Shirt Day Lesson Plans <https://www.mbteach.org/mtscms/2016/09/10/national-day-for-truth-and-reconciliation-lesson-plans/>
- SHORT VIDEO (4mins) - *Namwayut: We are all one. Truth and Reconciliation in Canada* - Chief Robert Joseph (Gwawaenuk First Nation) shares his experience as a residential school survivor and the importance of reconciliation in Canada. (**Note:** Joseph uses the word "Aboriginal" to describe all Indigenous Canadians. "Indigenous" is now the preferred general term.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zuRQmwaREY>

Classroom resources that can be used in facilitating discussions about searching residential schools for unmarked graves.

- MAGAZINE ARTICLE - Smith, Marie-Danielle. August 18, 2021. *Murray Sinclair on reconciliation, anger, unmarked graves—and a headline for this story*. MACLEAN'S. <https://www.macleans.ca/longforms/murray-sinclair-on-reconciliation-anger-unmarked-graves-and-a-headline-for-this-story/>
- STORYMAP - Carina Xue Luo (Leddy Library, Univ. of Windsor). Sept 6, 2022. Missing Children of Indian Residential Schools. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/cfe29bee35c54a70b9621349f19a3db2>
- NEWS ARTICLE - Austen, Ian. June 7, 2021. [*How Thousands of Indigenous Children Vanished in Canada*](#). The New York Times.

- NEWS ARTICLE - APTN News (Cdn Press). June 16, 2023. *How Ground Penetrating Radar is used To Find Unmarked Graves*
<https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/how-ground-penetrating-radar-is-used-to-find-unmarked-graves-at-residential-schools/>
- STATEMENT - Ontario Human Rights Commission. June 24, 2021. *Statement on unmarked graves found at former Saskatchewan residential school site: Growing number must lead to action.*
http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/statement-unmarked-graves-found-former-saskatchewan-residential-school-site-growing-numbers-must

Curriculum Focused Resource Suggestions:

Kindergarten – Grade 3

- Read a book that talks about the feeling of hope, wisdom, or new beginnings. *I Hope* by Monique Gray Smith, *All Are Welcome* by Alexandra Penfold, *Amik Loves School* by Katherena Vermette and Irene Kuziw.
- “Have students talk about their feelings about the first day of school or when they were courageous/brave.” (from [Manitoba Teachers Society](#))
- Read Phyllis’s story - *Phyllis’s Orange Shirt* by Phyllis Webstad
- Have students draw images or write messages for Phyllis on a two-sided orange shirt template.
- Invite students to use Loose Parts to share their feelings about the story, and/or messages for Phyllis.
- Create a class book illustrating Phyllis’ story with photographs of student work and student illustrations.
- See the [Manitoba Teachers Society](#) website for activities for *When I was Eight* by Margaret Pokiak-Fenton
- After reading *When We Were Alone* by David A. Robertson (also available [read aloud](#) on Youtube), the educator can lead a discussion with the students; “Think about something you love! How would you feel if someone took it away from you? How would you feel about the person who took it from you?” Invite the students to share their answers verbally, in writing (using words and/or pictures), and/or using Loose Parts.

Grades 4-8

- See the [Manitoba Teachers Society](#) website for activities for the books:
[Shi-shi-etko](#) by Nicola Campbell
[Fatty Legs](#) by Christy Jordan-Fenton

Possible Student Activity

1. Start by having students think about an article of clothing that is meaningful to them, something that they enjoy wearing and/or has memories attached to it. Students can write about it, draw it and/or talk about the article of clothing and why it is special. You may ask students to share this in small groups or the whole class.
2. Next, tell students to imagine that they can no longer wear this article of clothing in class (virtually or physically), and starting today all students will wear the same thing - a uniform. Give students a few moments to reflect upon how they feel, their thoughts and why they feel this way. This can be done through journal prompts, drawings, think-pair-share, and/or (small) group discussions.

3. Read and watch videos about Phyllis Webstad (see above) with students. You can also read the book the *Orange Shirt Story*.
4. Afterwards, students consolidate their learning through choice of activity:
 - ❖ Students will write a journal entry about what they learned about *Orange Shirt Day*, and why we should acknowledge it. They can also add questions about what they want to know more about.
 - ❖ Students create a poster (paper or digital) that teaches about *Orange Shirt Day*.
 - ❖ Students write/draw about how to make their classroom inclusive for all.

Grades 9-12

- Share this recording of Dennis Saddleman reading his poem "[Monster](#)" at a May 2013 hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Students could respond to the recording in a variety of ways. Students could have a group discussion about what they think is effective about Saddleman's poem or create art inspired by "Monster." This could be tailored to meet curriculum expectations for a variety of courses, including NAC10 and NBE3.
- Students could read and discuss the "Preface" to [Honouring the Truth, Reconciling For the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#). Or they could read Prime Minister Stephen Harper's "[Statement of Apology--to former students of Indian residential schools.](#)" Students could compare and contrast the language in each of these documents or interact with and respond to them in a variety of ways, including generating questions about Canada's residential school legacy, researching Canada's Indian residential schools legacy, or using blackout poetry or cut and paste to create pieces of writing about their relationship to truth and reconciliation as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit individuals or as Settler Canadians.
- Students could reflect on the relationship between their identity and what they wear. Then students could read or listen to the story of [Phyllis Webstad's orange shirt](#). They could then respond to this story in group conversations or by generating art or writing.

Other Online Resources:

- [Forgotten: The Métis residential school Experience](#)
- [Stolen Children: residential school Survivors Speak Out](#) (YouTube) This short documentary, produced by CBC, consists of a series of interviews with Residential school survivors about their experiences attending school.
- [RIIS from Amnesia](#) (Youtube) is a short documentary on the Regina Indian Industrial School (RIIS), its descendants and legacy. Run by the Presbyterian Church of Canada, the school opened its doors in 1891 and was located on the outskirts of Regina, Saskatchewan.
- [Finding Heart](#) (Youtube) is a short documentary on the life of Dr. Peter Bryce who as a Chief Medical Officer worked to highlight the mistreatment of Indigenous students within the Indian residential schools system and advocate for improved treatment and environmental conditions
- [48 books by Indigenous writers to read to understand residential schools](#)

Print and Ebook Resources to Purchase;

- [I Am Not A Number](#) by Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer (also in French) - Grades 3 to 6
- [The First Day: A Story of Courage](#) by Katherena Vermette - Kindergarten to Grade 4
- [Residential schools : with the words and images of survivors](#) by Larry Loyie - Grades 7 to 12
- [As Long As the River Flows](#) by Larry Loyie - Grades 4 to 7 (also in French)

- [A Stranger At Home](#) by Christy Jordan- Fenton & Margaret Pokiak-Fenton (also in French) - Grades 3 to 6
- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Reports](#) (4 volumes)
- First Nations Caring Society - [Spirit Bear's Guide](#) to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action

