

**MANITOBA INDIGENOUS
CULTURAL EDUCATION CENTRE**

CENTERING SURVIVOR VOICES
ON THE NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION
ORANGE SHIRT DAY



**A GUIDE TO MEANINGFUL DISCUSSION AND
OBSERVANCE**

FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

PROJECT FUNDED BY
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Canada



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INTRODUCTION

A decorative graphic featuring a central five-petaled flower with a circular center, flanked by two stylized leafy branches. The entire graphic is rendered in a light orange color against the darker orange background of the page.

Welcome to this special workbook designed for children ages 4-12 and their families to learn about and commemorate Truth and Reconciliation Week, with a focus on age-appropriate activities and discussion prompts. This workbook was created by the Manitoba Indigenous Cultural Education Centre Inc. and we are a provincial non-profit charitable organization mandated to promote an awareness and understanding of Indigenous cultures to all interested people.

HISTORY OF THE DAY

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation - also commonly referred to as Orange Shirt Day - is a significant day of observance in Canada that commemorates the experiences of Indigenous children in the residential school system and raises awareness about the intergenerational impacts of these harmful institutions. The history of Orange Shirt Day is closely tied to the experiences of Phyllis (Jack) Webstad, a residential school survivor who attended St. Joseph Mission Residential School in British Columbia.

The story behind Orange Shirt Day dates back to 1973 when Phyllis Webstad, a young Indigenous girl from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation in British Columbia, started her first day at a residential school. Her grandmother had gifted her a bright orange shirt to wear on her first day of school. Unfortunately, upon arriving at the school, her orange shirt was taken from her, and she was forced to wear a uniform provided by the school. The traumatic experience of having her clothing taken away, along with the harsh conditions and abuse she later endured during her time at the school, had a lasting impact on Phyllis.

In 2013, Webstad shared her story at a residential school commemoration event, and her experience inspired the creation of Orange Shirt Day as a way to honor the survivors of residential schools and remember those who did not survive. The color orange was chosen because it was the color of the shirt that Phyllis had worn on her first day of school, symbolizing the loss of identity and culture experienced by Indigenous children in the residential school system.

Since then, Orange Shirt Day has grown into a nationwide movement in Canada. It is observed annually on September 30th to acknowledge the pain and suffering endured by Indigenous children and their families in the residential school system. The day also serves as an opportunity for education and reconciliation, with various events, ceremonies, and activities taking place across the country to promote awareness, understanding, and healing.

The discovery of unmarked graves at former residential school sites in Canada in recent years has further emphasized the importance of the need to confront the dark history of these institutions. In 2021, the day was elevated to a statutory holiday for federal workers and workers in federally-regulated workplaces by the Parliament of Canada, officially named the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The day continues to be a reminder of the ongoing journey toward truth and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This workbook contains activities and discussion topics to help parents, teachers, and caregivers engage in meaningful conversations with children about this important topic.



TALKING TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH ABOUT ORANGE SHIRT DAY



When addressing the topic of residential schools in Canada with children, adults should approach the subject with empathy, honesty, and age-appropriate language. For example, a good place to begin is explaining that these schools were places where Indigenous children were taken, often far from their families, in an attempt to make them forget their own culture and traditions. Emphasize that what happened was wrong and caused pain to many children, families, and whole communities for generations. When discussing Orange Shirt Day, explain that it's a day we remember those children and show our support for Indigenous communities. Next, explain how Orange Shirt Day and the subsequent Truth and Reconciliation Day came to be. Emphasize that by wearing orange on this day, we acknowledge the past wrongs, show our commitment to learning the truth, and take steps toward healing and reconciliation. Parents should encourage open dialogue, allowing children to ask questions and express their feelings, ensuring they understand the importance of respect and empathy for all cultural histories.

ANSWERING IMPORTANT QUESTIONS



Responding to children's questions about residential schools is a delicate task, but it's essential for fostering understanding and empathy. Here are some examples of possible questions children may ask along with sample scripts parents, teachers, and other trusted adults might use to answer them in an honest yet age-appropriate way:

"What were residential schools?"

Response: "Residential schools were places where Indigenous children were sent, far away from their families, to learn the ways of people who came from other countries. These schools tried to make them forget their own culture, language, and traditions."

"Why were the children taken from their families?"

Response: "The people in charge at that time thought that their way of life was better and wanted Indigenous children to be more like them. It wasn't the right thing to do, and it hurt a lot of people."

"Was it a long time ago?"

Response: "The first residential schools started a very long time ago, but the last one closed in 1996, which is not that long ago. That's why many people still remember them and are affected by what happened."

"Why do people wear orange shirts?"

Response: "Orange Shirt Day is a special day to remember the children who went to these schools and to show that every child matters. The day is named after a girl named Phyllis, who had her new orange shirt taken away on her first day at one of these schools. Today we call this day the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation."

"Did the children do something wrong?"

Response: "No, the children didn't do anything wrong. They were just being who they were. It's important to understand that everyone should be respected for who they are and where they come from."

"How do Indigenous people feel about it now?"

Response: "Many Indigenous people feel pain and sadness when they think about residential schools because of what their families went through. But they also want to teach others about it, so we can all understand, learn, and make sure such things don't happen again."

"Will anyone try to take me away from you?"

Response: "It's understandable that you might feel worried after hearing about residential schools. When you see so many people commemorating Truth and Reconciliation Day by wearing orange, it's a sign of how many people care about what happened and want to make sure it never happens again. Everyone wearing an orange shirt is showing that they believe every child should be safe and loved. Today, we're all more aware and protective of children's rights. It's true that some Indigenous children still face challenges because of the long-lasting effects of these schools. But remember, our community, our family, and many others will always work to protect and support children like you. We're here for you, and you're safe with us."

It's crucial to maintain an open and safe space for dialogue, allowing children to process the information, ask further questions, and express their feelings. Moreover, parents should regularly educate themselves about the topic to provide accurate and empathetic answers.



CHILD AND YOUTH-FRIENDLY ACTIVITY IDEAS



ACTIVITY STORYTIME

Read a children's book about Orange Shirt Day, residential schools, Indigenous history, or culture. For example, **Shi-shi-etko** by **Nicola I. Campbell** is a great choice for young children.



Synopsis: In just four days young Shi-shi-etko will have to leave her family and all that she knows to attend residential school. She spends her last days at home treasuring the beauty of her world -- the dancing sunlight, the tall grass, each shiny rock, the tadpoles in the creek, her grandfather's paddle song. Her mother, father and grandmother, each in turn, share valuable teachings that they want her to remember. And so Shi-shi-etko carefully gathers her memories for safekeeping. Richly hued illustrations complement this gently moving and poetic account of a child who finds solace all around her, even though she is on the verge of great loss -- a loss that native people have endured for generations because of the residential schools system.

PHYLLIS'S ORANGE SHIRT

BY PHYLLIS WEBSTAD (AUTHOR), ALLISON PARKER (EDITOR), BROCK NICOL (ILLUSTRATOR)



Synopsis: Phyllis's Orange Shirt is an adaptation of The Orange Shirt Story which was the best selling children's book in Canada for several weeks in September 2018 (Book manager). This true story also inspired the movement of Orange Shirt Day which could become a federal statutory holiday. When Phyllis was a little girl she was excited to go to residential school for the first time. Her Granny bought her a bright orange shirt that she loved and she wore it to school for her first day. When she arrived at school her bright orange shirt was taken away. This is both Phyllis Webstad's true story and the story behind Orange Shirt Day which is a day for us all to reflect upon the treatment of First Nations people and the message that 'Every Child Matters'. Adapted for ages 4-6.

WITH OUR ORANGE HEARTS

BY PHYLLIS WEBSTAD (AUTHOR), EMILY KEWAGESHIG (ILLUSTRATOR)



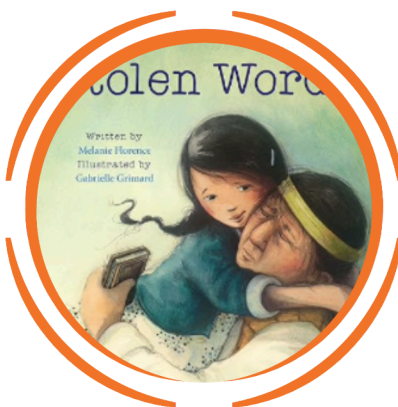
Synopsis: "Every child matters, including you and me. With our orange hearts, we walk in harmony." As a young child, your little world can be full of big emotions. In this book, I, Phyllis Webstad, founder of Orange Shirt Day, show that sharing my story with the world helped me to process my feelings. My true orange shirt story encourages young children to open their hearts and listen as others share their feelings, and to be more comfortable sharing their own feelings too. Listening is a first step towards reconciliation. It's never too early to start

WHEN WE WERE ALONE
BY DAVID A. ROBERTSON (AUTHOR), JULIE FLETT (ILLUSTRATOR)



Synopsis: A young girl notices things about her grandmother that make her curious. Why does her grandmother have long, braided hair and beautifully coloured clothing? Why does she speak Cree and spend so much time with her family? As the girl asks questions, her grandmother shares her experiences in a residential school, when all of these things were taken away. This book is also available in a bilingual Swampy Cree/English edition. Download the free teacher guide on the Portage & Main Press website.

STOLEN WORDS
BY MELANIE FLORENCE (AUTHOR), GABRIELLE GRIMARD (ILLUSTRATOR)



Synopsis: The story of the beautiful relationship between a little girl and her grandfather. When she asks her grandfather how to say something in his language – Cree – he admits that his language was stolen from him when he was a boy. The little girl then sets out to help her grandfather find his language again. This sensitive and warmly illustrated picture book explores the intergenerational impact of the residential school system that separated young Indigenous children from their families. The story recognizes the pain of those whose culture and language were taken from them, how that pain is passed down, and how healing can also be shared.

GAAWIN GINDAASWIN NDAAWSII / I AM NOT A NUMBER
BY DR. JENNY KAY DUPUIS (AUTHOR), KATHY KACER (AUTHOR),
GILLIAN NEWLAND (ILLUSTRATOR),
MURIEL SAWYER (TRANSLATOR), GERALDINE MCLEOD (TRANSLATOR)



Synopsis: The dual language edition, in Nishnaabemwin (Ojibwe) Nbisiing dialect and English, of the award-winning *I Am Not a Number*. When eight-year-old Irene is removed from her First Nations family to live in a residential school she is confused, frightened, and terribly homesick. She tries to remember who she is and where she came from, despite the efforts of the nuns who are in charge at the school and who tell her that she is not to use her own name but instead use the number they have assigned to her. When she goes home for summer holidays, Irene's parents decide never to send her and her brothers away again. But where will they hide? And what will happen when her parents disobey the law? Based on the life of co-author Jenny Kay Dupuis' grandmother, *I Am Not a Number* is a hugely necessary book that brings a terrible part of Canada's history to light in a way that children can learn from and relate to.

**SPIRIT BEAR'S GUIDE TO THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION
OF CANADA CALLS TO ACTION**

FIRST NATIONS CHILD AND FAMILY CARING SOCIETY

AVAILABLE FOR FREE HERE:

[HTTPS://FNCARINGSOCIETY.COM/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/2023-05/
SPIRIT%20BEAR%27S%20GUIDE%20TO%20THE%20TRUTH%20AND%20RECONCILIATION
%20COMMISSION%27S%20CALLS%20TO%20ACTION%20.PDF](https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/2023-05/SPIRIT%20BEAR%27S%20GUIDE%20TO%20THE%20TRUTH%20AND%20RECONCILIATION%20COMMISSION%27S%20CALLS%20TO%20ACTION%20.PDF)

Synopsis: This booklet is written by Spirit Bear as a youth guide to the TRC's 94 Calls to Action. Spirit Bear was born in a huckleberry patch in the Carrier Sekani Territory in British Columbia but he spends most of his time on the lands of the Algonquin people in a city called Ottawa. Ottawa is also where the Government of Canada lives. Governments makes laws and provide the services that everyone needs, like clean water, education, and health-care.

DISCUSSION STORYTIME

1. After reading, ask questions like "How did the story make you feel?" and "What did you learn about Indigenous culture, history, or residential schools?"
2. Ask, "what lesson can we learn from the story?"



ACTIVITY

ORANGE SHIRT CRAFT

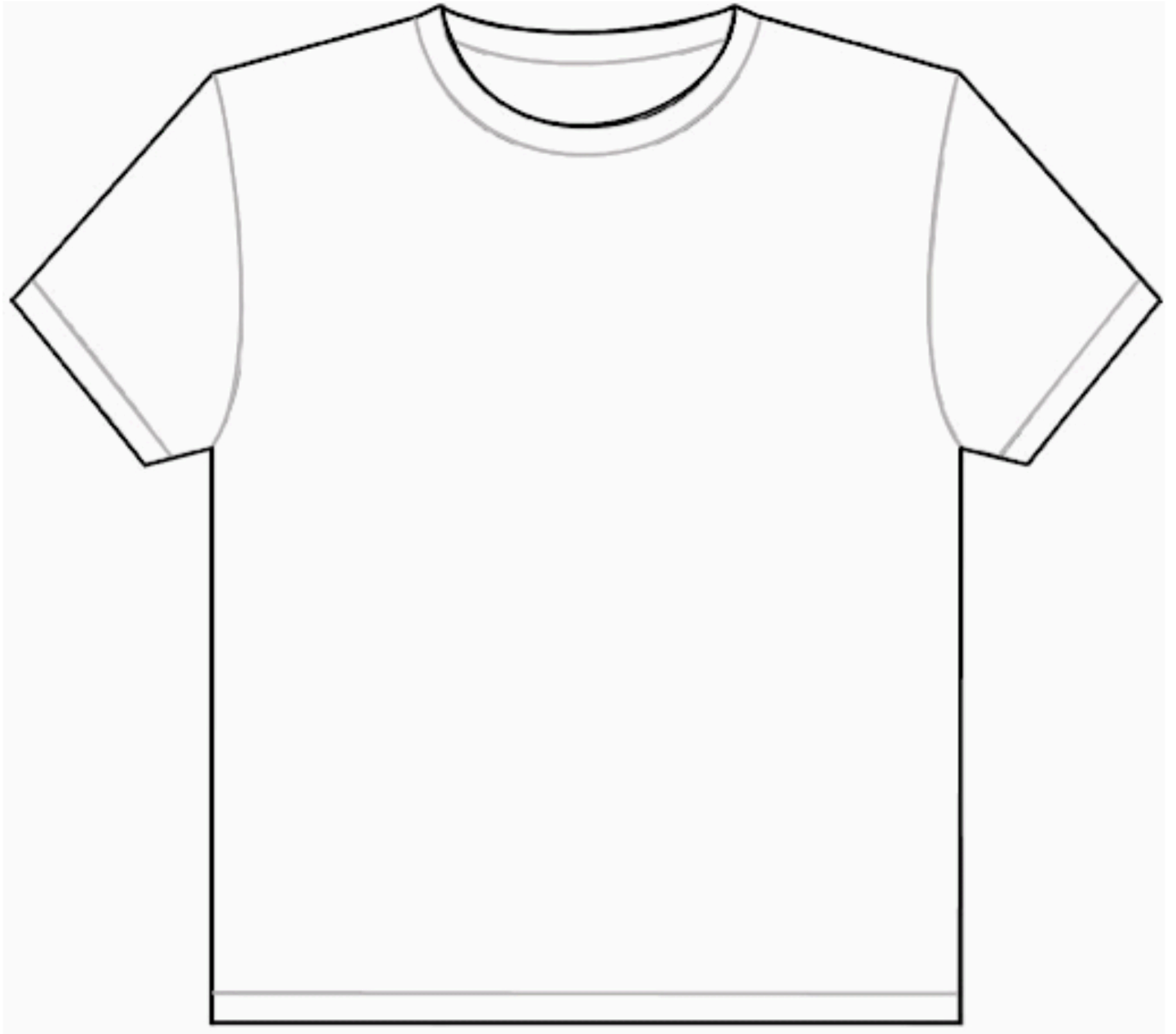
Provide children with a coloring page of an orange shirt, or a blank t-shirt cut out, such as the one provided on the next page. Ask them if they know the story behind the orange shirt, and if not, share Phyllis Webstad's story which can be found here: <https://orangeshirtday.org/phyllis-story/#story>

Encourage children to color the shirt, including any written messages they wish to share with a residential school survivor and/or their families. Hang the orange shirt in your window so people who pass by can see and read the messages.



DISCUSSION

1. Explain that Truth and Reconciliation Week is a time when we remember and learn about the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada and their experiences in residential schools. Ask, "why do you think knowing this information is important?"
2. Emphasize that it's a time to show respect, empathy, and support for Indigenous communities. Ask: "Can you think of a time when you were shown respect, empathy, and support? How did it make you feel?"





ACTIVITY

EVERY CHILD MATTERS CRAFT

Have children trace their hand on the next page, then write in the hand something they can do to help others feel like they matter.

DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the concept of Every Child Matters. Ask “why do you think every child in the world matters?”
2. Ask, “what can children and adults do to show that every child matters?”
3. Ask, “what is your message to other children?”



EVERY CHILD MATTERS CRAFT





ACTIVITY

CAMPAIGN TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Choose a campaign to make a difference for First Nations children and their families. Visit the Spirit Bear website and choose one of the following campaigns: I am a Witness: Human Rights Case, Jordan's principle, Shannen's Dream, Touchstone of Hope, or Reconciling History.



DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the concept of Every Child Matters. Ask "why do you think every child in the world matters?"
2. Ask, "what can children and adults do to show that every child matters?"
3. Ask, "what is your message to other children?"



ACTIVITY

TREE OF UNDERSTANDING

On a poster board or large piece of paper, draw a large tree with many branches but without leaves. Label this drawing "The Tree of Understanding". Set up a comfortable space where the children can sit around the tree. Begin by explaining the purpose of Truth and Reconciliation Day in simple terms. For instance: "It's a special day when we remember and learn about how some children, a long time ago, were taken away from their families and weren't treated kindly. It's also a day when we think about how we can be kinder and more understanding to each other." Invite the children to think about what they've learned or any questions they might have. Hand out sticky notes or small pieces of paper. Ask the children to write or draw something they've learned, a feeling they have, or a question they want to ask.

One by one, have the children come up and place their "leaf" on the Tree of Understanding. They can share what they've written or drawn if they feel comfortable, or they can choose to keep it private.

DISCUSSION

1. Ask "How did it make you feel to see all the different 'leaves' on the Tree of Understanding? Did any 'leaf' make you think or feel differently about Truth and Reconciliation Day?"
2. Ask "If our Tree of Understanding could talk and share a message with everyone about Truth and Reconciliation Day, what do you think it would say?"
3. Does anyone want to share some possible answers to the questions posed on our tree?





ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

"100 Years of Loss - The Residential School System in Canada" - Produced by the Legacy of Hope Foundation, this education program is designed for youth ages 11-18.

<https://legacyofhope.ca/english/education/>

"Where are the Children?" - An online resource by the Legacy of Hope Foundation that includes timelines, personal stories, and photographs.

<https://legacyofhope.ca/wherearethechildren/>

Many local museums, Indigenous cultural centers, and community organizations offer workshops or public programs that delve into the history and legacy of residential schools.

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) - Offers a digital archive of survivor testimonies and various educational materials, plus educational resources for preschool - university.

<https://nctr.ca/education/>

Project of Heart - This is an educational resource aimed at educating young Canadians on the history of Indian Residential Schools.

<https://projectofheart.ca/>

The 24-hour Residential School Crisis Line:
1-866-925-4419

The Orange Shirt Society - Website offers Phyllis's story in her own words, and features a "Reconciliation Hub" including videos by Phyllis herself.

<https://orangeshirtday.org/reconciliation-hub/resources/>





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