



Orange Shirt Day Every Child Matters

Truth and Reconciliation

Did you know? September 30th is Orange Shirt Day. In Canada, it is formally known as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Truth refers to what happened to Indigenous children at residential schools, and reconciliation refers to what can be done to right those wrongs.

Residential Schools

Residential schools were boarding schools for Indigenous school-aged children. At the time, Indigenous people and their way of life was looked down upon and these schools were created to teach the children to live a European way of life. Church organizations created and ran these schools and later they were funded by the Canadian government. Residential schools were in operation for 100+ years between the 1830s to 1990s.

Many residential school survivors have spoken out about the poor conditions at these schools. Separated from their families and communities, the children often felt lonely and scared. Sadly, some children were also abused by the people in charge of caring for them and some died.

The Government of Canada's Indian Act had made it mandatory for all Indigenous children to attend residential schools. The long separations caused families a lot of hurt and trauma. When the children returned home, many felt like they no longer belonged. They had been taught a different language, culture and way of life. Then as adults, they in turn, also had to send their children to residential schools. As a result, Indigenous communities were forever changed.



Kamloops Indian Residential School, 1930

Thoughtful consideration has been taken to ensure we pay respect to Indigenous peoples in our resources, with Truth and Reconciliation as our mission.

Apology

In 2008, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper formally apologized to Indigenous people on behalf of the Canadian government for its role in the residential school system. As part of the settlement agreement, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to hear the truths of the survivors of residential schools and to outline steps to support reconciliation.



Next Steps

Recently, unmarked graves were revealed on the sites of former residential schools across Canada. This has brought back many painful memories for survivors, and also for those who have missing family members. The government has pledged to help Indigenous communities search for burial sites and to provide support for survivors.

What You Can Do



On September 30th, Canadians are encouraged to learn about the Indigenous people, culture and listen to their experiences. Many schools and students participate in Orange Shirt Day, organizing activities and assemblies. Wearing an “Every Child Matters” orange shirt shows you think residential schools were wrong, you stand with Indigenous people, and you want to learn more.

Orange Shirt Day

Orange Shirt Day is based on the experiences of Phyllis Jack Webstad, a residential school survivor. When she was six years old, she wore her brand new shiny orange shirt for her first day of school but it was taken away from her. Today, the orange shirt brings awareness and spreads the message that “Every Child Matters.”

Truth and Reconciliation: Questions

1. What is the official name for Orange Shirt Day?

2. What does the word reconciliation mean?

3. How long were residential schools in operation?

4. What were residential schools like for Indigenous children?

5. In what year did the Government of Canada apologize for residential schools?
