

Orange Shirt Day Every Child Matters

The Government of Canada has designated September 30th, as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. But what is the significance of this day and what do the words truth and reconciliation mean? Let's take a look.

Truth: Truth means something that is in accordance with fact, is reality and accepted as true.

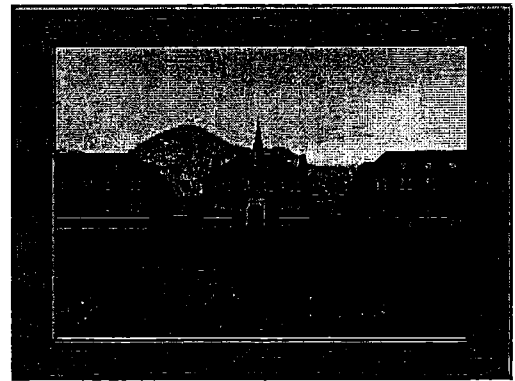
Reconcile: Reconcile means to bring back friendly relations between two or more parties. It means to settle a dispute.

Reconciliation: Reconciliation means the action of reconciling.

Truth

For 100+ years, residential schools were in operation in Canada. They were created by different church organizations, and later funded by the Government of Canada, with the goal of assimilating Indigenous children by separating them from their families and communities and teaching them simple trades and European ways. At the time, Indigenous people were seen as inferior because their culture and traditions were poorly understood. In 1920, under the Indian Act, it became mandatory for all Indigenous school-aged children to attend residential schools. Children were taken away from their families and forced to attend these schools where they had to learn English or French, and adopt foreign religious beliefs and traditions.

The legacy of residential schools is one of fractured families and communities. Children had to endure long separations from their families, as well as, trauma and abuse, often at the hands of those who were put in charge of caring for them. When children returned to their families, many felt they had lost their identities and their sense of belonging. Some moved away from their communities and some never made it home. Also, because successive generations of children were required to attend residential schools, the family and community structure was stolen from them and destroyed, children being voided of them. The feelings of separation, hurt and trauma was passed on. As a result, Indigenous communities were forever changed.



Reconciliation

Due to a class action lawsuit, in 2008, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper formally apologized to the Indigenous peoples on behalf of the Canadian government for its role in the residential school system. As part of the settlement agreement, there was an agreed upon monetary settlement for survivors of residential schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created. They gathered evidence, such as pictures and records and traveled to communities to conduct interviews. The TRC also compiled a report with ninety-four Calls to Action to support reconciliation.

This past year, the confirmation of unmarked graves on the sites of former residential schools has renewed public attention to the horrors of the system. Sadly, more than 1 000 graves of children and adults have been revealed, but it is estimated that the true number is far greater.

The recent findings are in line with what residential school survivors and their families have known for years. Many survivors recalled having endured poor conditions and abuse, while some families have searched in vain for answers regarding their lost or missing family members. Recently, the government has pledged additional funds to Indigenous communities, to search for burial sites and to provide support for survivors and their families.

What You Can Do

Wearing an orange shirt shows you think residential schools were wrong, you stand with Indigenous people, and you are committed to learn the truth and to help make sure this never happens again. On Orange Shirt Day, all Canadians can wear an "Every Child Matters" orange shirt and continue to learn more about Indigenous communities, honouring their rich history and culture, and listening to the stories of survivors.



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. Today, the orange shirt has come to symbolize the residential school system and how "Every Child Matters."

Truth and Reconciliation: Questions

1. What is the significance of September 30th in Canada? _____

2. What does the word reconcile mean? Provide an example. _____

3. How many Indigenous children attended residential schools? _____

4. What was the purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)? _____

5. What does reconciliation mean to you? What will you do to honour the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation? _____
