

Orange Shirt Day

Honouring and Remembering



Why do we wear Orange Shirts?

The “orange shirt” in Orange Shirt Day refers to the new shirt that Phyllis Webstad was given to her by her grandmother for her first day of school at St. Joseph’s Mission residential school in British Columbia.



When Phyllis got to school, they took away her clothes, including her new shirt. It was never returned. To Phyllis, the colour orange has always reminded her of her experiences at residential school and, as she has said, “how my feelings didn’t matter, how no one cared and I felt like I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared.”

<https://www.cbc.ca/kidscbc2/the-feed/what-is-orange-shirt-day>

What is Orange Shirt Day?

On Orange Shirt Day (September 30th) we wear orange shirts to honour the First Nation, Metis and Inuit children who were taken from their families and communities to be sent away to residential schools in Canada. The days surrounding Orange Shirt Day are an important time to learn more about the history of those schools.

We are providing this information because learning about residential schools in Canada and their continuing effects felt by Indigenous communities today is new learning for many people.



Key Facts About Residential Schools

- Residential schools were government mandated, church-run schools where approximately 150,000 Métis, Inuit and First Nations children were forcibly sent between the 1830s and the 1990s.
- The schools harmed Indigenous children by removing them from their families, forcing them to speak English or French instead of their traditional languages, disconnecting them from their culture and traditions and forcing them to adopt Christianity in order to assimilate into Canadian society.
- Many children suffered unspeakable abuse at the hands of the priests, nuns and other staff at the schools.
- An estimated 6,000 children died while attending residential schools, but records are incomplete.
- The first residential school in Canada opened in Brantford, Ontario in **1831**.
- The last residential school in Canada closed in Punnichy, Saskatchewan in **1996**

For children, life in these schools was lonely and alien. Buildings were poorly located, poorly built, and poorly maintained. The staff was limited in numbers, often poorly trained, and not adequately supervised. Many schools were poorly heated and poorly ventilated, and the diet was meagre and of poor quality. Discipline was harsh, and daily life was highly regimented. Aboriginal languages and cultures were demeaned and suppressed. The educational goals of the schools were limited and confused, and usually reflected a low regard for the intellectual capabilities of Aboriginal people. For the students, education and technical training too often gave way to the drudgery of doing the chores necessary to make the schools self-sustaining. Child neglect was institutionalized, and the lack of supervision created situations where students were prey to sexual and physical abusers.”

-Truth and Reconciliation Report, “What We Have Learned” 2015

SOURCES/FOR MORE INFORMATION

CBC Kids: What is Orange Shirt Day? <https://www.cbc.ca/kidscbc2/the-feed/what-is-orange-shirt-day>

The Canadian Encyclopedia Residential Schools In Canada

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools>

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation <http://nctr.ca/reports.php>