

# Orange Shirt Day Lesson

Suggested in 4 parts leading to **Orange Shirt Day**

**Orange Shirt Day** is held yearly on September 30th.



Lesson created by Natalie Lauchlan Werklund Alumni, 2020  
Title page image drawn by Nehiyawak Student in Calgary, age 6.

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<p>Resources used and possible concerns</p>	<p>Picture book, <a href="#">Phyllis's Orange Shirt</a> by Phyllis Webstad, illustrated by Brock Nicol.</p> <p>Youtube Online Videos: The Calgary Public Library has an Indigenous Language Learning video series focusing on the Indigenous Languages of Treaty 7. They are useful for the language lessons, particularly if your classroom may not have many multilingual students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Indigenous Language Lesson: Blackfoot Siksika <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZgduiX-Ojw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZgduiX-Ojw</a></li><li>- Indigenous Language Lesson: Stoney Nakoda Nation <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmCm_cV0EMQ&amp;list=PL40rQpwLkfOFHpK-bqkNo5UXdp2Bte_tl">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmCm_cV0EMQ&amp;list=PL40rQpwLkfOFHpK-bqkNo5UXdp2Bte_tl</a></li><li>- Indigenous Language Lesson: Tsuut'ina Nation <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuoUF0n90iU&amp;list=PL40rQpwLkfOFHpK-bqkNo5UXdp2Bte_tl&amp;index=4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuoUF0n90iU&amp;list=PL40rQpwLkfOFHpK-bqkNo5UXdp2Bte_tl&amp;index=4</a></li></ul> <p><i>Possible concerns: this lesson deals explicitly with residential school, this lesson may be triggering for students who understand the complexities of the history.</i></p>
<p>Author/creator and/or literature background</p>	<p>Phyllis Webstad is Northern Secwepemc, from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tam First Nation, on land colonially known as Shuswap in British Columbia. Phyllis is a residential school survivor. This story is her personal experience. Phyllis is the creator of Orange Shirt Day, which believes that Every Child Matters and aims to raise awareness about the history of residential schools and work towards a better future for all children in schools (Orange Shirt Day Society).</p> <p>Brock Nicol is a settler living on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnabe Nation, in what is now called the city of Ottawa. Brock is an illustrator of many children's books (Brock Nicol Art).</p>

<p>UPE course connections (not exhaustive)</p>	<p>EDUC 435 - Literacy, Language and Culture Focusing on culturally responsive pedagogy and literary resources that reflect the diversity of our colonial history of Canada. Celebrating and acknowledging linguistic diversity. Exploring and learning about individual students' prior knowledge and ways of knowing.</p> <p>EDUC 450 - Diversity in Learning Developing an emergent understanding of the historical experiences contributing to the current complexity of colonization in Canada. Celebrating and acknowledging linguistic diversity. Exploring and learning about individual students' prior knowledges and ways of knowing.</p> <p>EDUC 551 - Comprehensive School Health and Wellness Developing classroom culture of acceptance and celebration of linguistic and cultural diversity. Exploring and learning about individual students' prior knowledges and ways of knowing.</p>
<p>K-12 connection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Target age range: Kindergarten - Grade 2. This book is written in simple language, and is supported by reading and discussing in a group setting. The supporting classroom experiences connected to the book are targeted for a younger learner.</li> <li>- Teaching Quality Standard: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Using the programs of study to provide opportunities for all students to develop a knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, the histories, cultures, languages, contributions, perspectives, experiences and contemporary contexts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit — supporting the learning experiences of all students by using resources that accurately reflect and demonstrate the strength and diversity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit.” (Teaching Quality Standard 2017)</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Language Arts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Understanding language as ... being a defining feature of culture, language is an unmistakable mark of personal identity and is essential for forming interpersonal relationships, extending experiences, reflecting on thought and action, and contributing to society.” (English Language Arts, 2000, p.1)</li> <li>- “They may come to school speaking more than one language or learn another language in school. It is important to respect and build upon a child’s first language.” (English Language Arts, 2000,</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

p.1)

- Grades K-2 specific outcomes:
  - “participate in shared listening, reading and viewing experiences, using oral, print and other media texts from a variety of cultural traditions and genres, such as poems, storytelling by elders, pattern books, audiotapes, stories and cartoons” (English Language Arts, 2000, p.30)
  - “relate aspects of stories and characters to personal feelings and experiences” (English Language Arts, 2000, p.30)
- Social Studies:
  - “Central to the vision of the Alberta social studies program is the recognition of the diversity of experiences and perspectives and the pluralistic nature of Canadian society... which reflect the country’s Aboriginal heritage, bilingual nature and multicultural realities. A pluralistic view recognizes that citizenship and identity are shaped by multiple factors such as culture, language, heritage, environment, gender, ideology, spirituality and philosophy.” (Social Studies, 2005, p.1)
  - “Appreciate how stories and events of the past connect their families and communities to the present: recognize how diverse Aboriginal communities are integral to Canada’s character” (Social Studies, 2005, p.5)
  - “For historical and constitutional reasons, an understanding of Canada requires an understanding of Aboriginal perspectives and Aboriginal experiences.” (Social Studies, 2005, p.4)
- Health:
  - “...opportunities for students to accept and appreciate diversity and the uniqueness of self and others in our global society. This program emphasizes healthy interactions and values, such as integrity, honesty and trust that underlie safe and caring relationships.” (Health and Life Skills, 2002, p.2)
  - “Demonstrate inclusive behaviours regardless of individual differences or circumstances; e.g., physical, emotional, cultural, economic.” (Health and Life Skills, 2002, p.17)

*This lesson has been worked with successfully in a Complex Needs Classroom of Grade 1/2 students with ASD and other atypical cognitive disabilities.*

Materials

- Phyllis's Orange Shirt book
- student personal show + tell objects/stories
- Indigenous Language Lesson: Blackfoot Siksika  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZgduiX-Ojw>
- Indigenous Language Lesson: Stoney Nakoda Nation  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmCm\\_cV0EMQ&list=PL40rQpwLkfOFHpK-bqkNo5UXdp2Bte\\_tl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmCm_cV0EMQ&list=PL40rQpwLkfOFHpK-bqkNo5UXdp2Bte_tl)
- Indigenous Language Lesson: Tsuut'ina Nation  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuoUF0n90iU&list=PL40rQpwLkfOFHpK-bqkNo5UXdp2Bte\\_tl&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuoUF0n90iU&list=PL40rQpwLkfOFHpK-bqkNo5UXdp2Bte_tl&index=4)

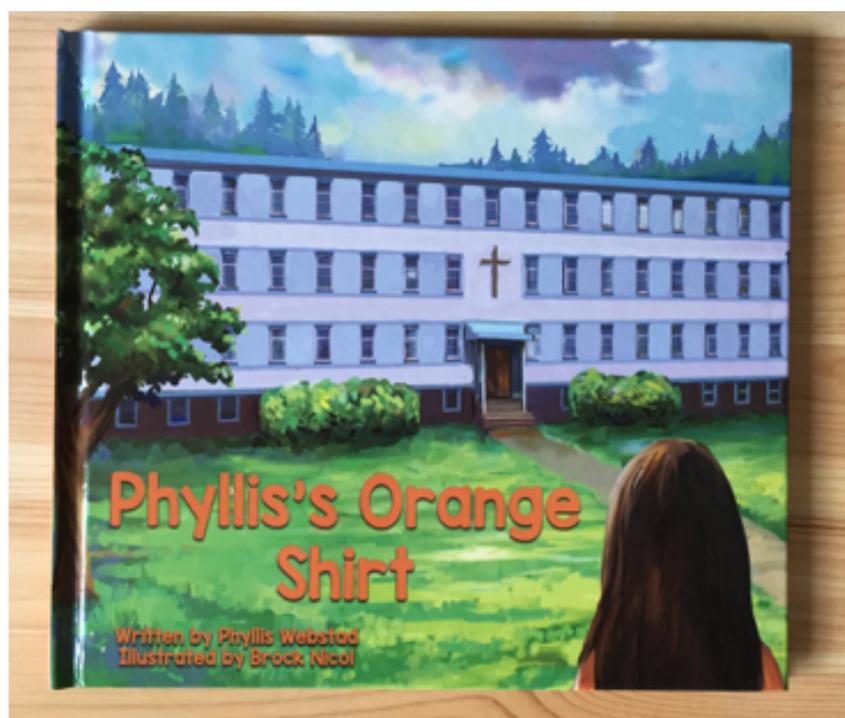


Image:  
Phyllis's Orange Shirt by Phyllis Webstad, illustrated by Brock Nicol, photographed on classroom table, Calgary.

Rationale

Big idea: Build a classroom community of understanding and emotional awareness reflecting on the history of residential schools in colonial Canada and experiences of students attending, in an age appropriate introduction to the subject.

Purpose: Students engage with the experiences of children in residential schools through the lens of their own personal histories of significant objects to them, important stories or memories, and their own languages.

Lesson/activities

Suggested in 4 Parts:

Pre-Lesson considerations: This lesson focuses on students' own languages, personal histories and family connections. Students will be sharing their memories, personal objects, and languages with their peers. In planning this series of lessons to support Orange Shirt Day on September 30th, consider which day you would like to do the Show+Tell activity and support students with reminders to ensure they bring in what they would like to share. Students may also want to share a memory or a story with the group instead, this is equally important and to be celebrated.

Depending on the classroom, discussing home languages may be a challenging concept to understand for students who speak the same languages at home and at school. Support this cognitive leap with discussions around what it might be like to not use their language to communicate, imagining it might be against the rules, etc.

*This series of lessons can be very difficult for some students who may have experiences or understandings of residential schools, or personal experiences with cultural loss. Others who understand the complexities of, or are deeply empathetic, may also be deeply emotionally impacted.*

1. Introduce the story [20-30 minute lesson during, could be adjusted shorter or longer based on student verbal engagement]
  - 1.1. Begin with a class discussion with students, or a Sharing Circle if this is part of your classroom routine, exploring and brainstorming important or special objects to us, and why they might be special. Teacher might lead the discussion with an example from their life.  
*Ex.: I have a necklace given to me by my grandmother. It was given to her from her grandmother. It's important to me because it helps me feel connected to my family and the people I love.*
  - 1.2. Read the story, Phyllis's Orange Shirt by Phyllis Webstad. *Support student learning and engagement for your group by pausing to explain key words, or storyline if needed.*
  - 1.3. After reading, support students in a group discussion about their impressions from the story. Prompt and support students in identifying *What was the special object for Phyllis?, Why was it so special to her?, How did Phyllis feel when her shirt was taken away?* It is useful to document student ideas on a whiteboard or chart paper to help support future conversations, or potential student writing.
  - 1.4. OPTIONAL: Depending on the written literacy level in your classroom, this might be an excellent journaling and reflection opportunity for students. Add additional time to your lesson to support independent writing time.

2. Show & Tell (Be sure to provide students enough advance notice to reflect on a meaningful object to bring and reminders to bring it on planned day) [45-60 minutes depending on class size and student verbal engagement]
  - 2.1. Using a Sharing Circle, or your preferred presentation method, have students take turns to share their special object with the class . Depending on the social needs of your class, this could be done in small groups of peers, or with a whole class. It often helps students to have some guided talking points to support discussion, for example: *What am I showing? Why is it special to me?*
  - 2.2. After students have a chance to share their special things/stories. Remind students of the story of Phyllis' Orange Shirt, include students in remembering the key parts of the story. Then ask students, *How might it feel if you had your special show+tell thing taken away from you like Phyllis had her shirt taken away from her?*
  - 2.3. Using chart paper or the whiteboard, record some of the answers students generate about how it might feel to lose something so special to them.

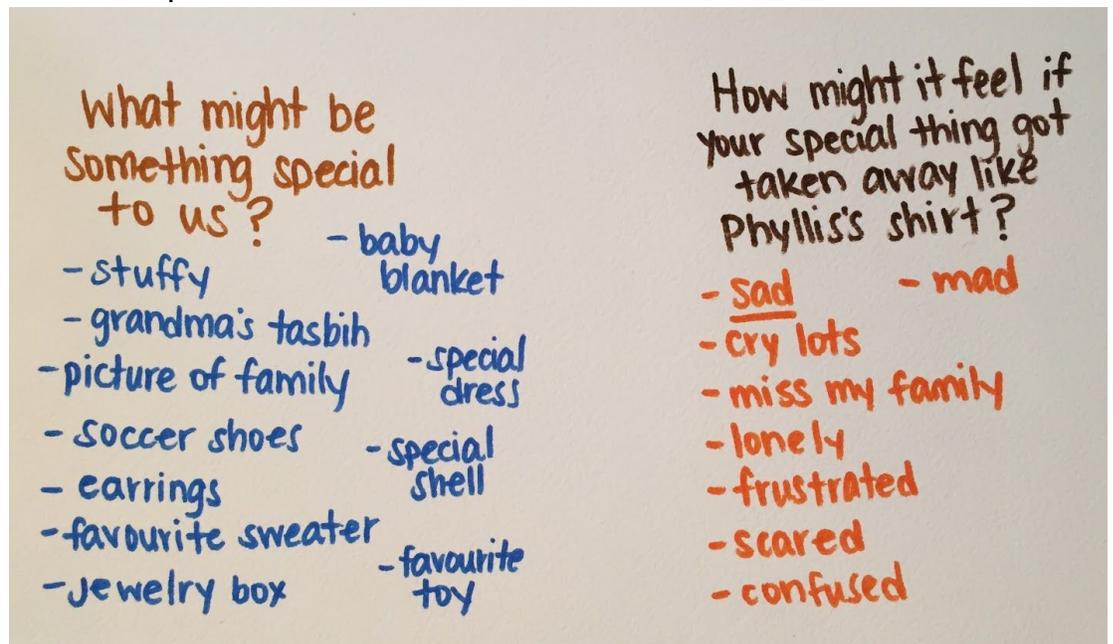


Image: Conversation documentation from Grade 1/2 classroom in Calgary, transcribed by teacher.

3. Residential School and Language [30-45 min - it may be adjusted for the needs of your room] [It is helpful to do this lesson before recess, or lunch to support emotional needs for students individually if needed, and to give students a change of

scenery and space after a difficult conversation]

3.1. Using a smartboard, or other presentation method, show students one or all of the Indigenous language lesson videos by the Calgary Public Library. Have students try some of the words, have fun with the shared learning experience. If any students in your classroom speak any of these languages, they might be excited to share, (be careful not to have them speak or share if they do not volunteer to.)

Share with students that these languages are the Indigenous languages spoken in Treaty 7, the land where we all live and go to school. You may pull up a map of Treaty 7 if you feel it necessary:

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/treaty-7>

3.2. In a class discussion format, ask students if any of them speak another language at home with their families. Using chart paper, write a list of the languages spoken in your classroom. Lead students through a discussion in what languages help us do, prompt students to think about how their lives might be different if they couldn't use their language (even English), *How might we talk to our families? How might we share what we need? How would it feel to go home today and not be able to talk to our family?* Use chart paper or whiteboard to record their answers.

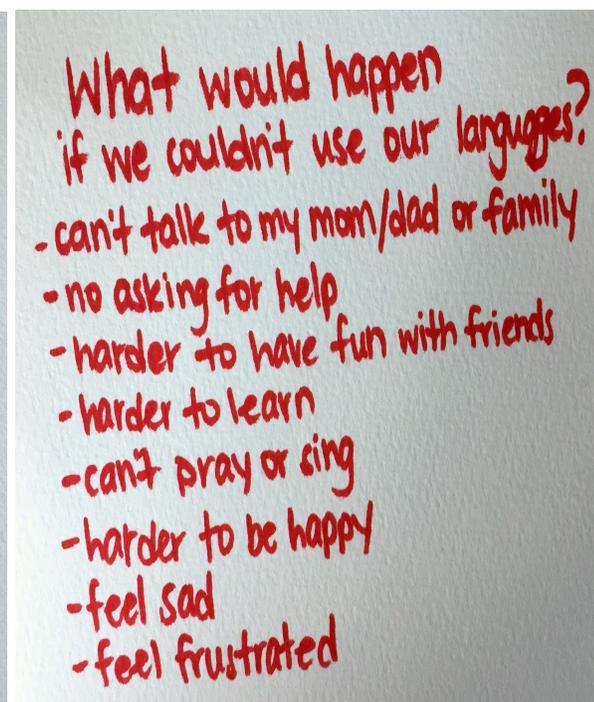


Image: Conversation documentation from Grade 1/2 classroom in Calgary, transcribed by teacher.

3.3. Remind students of the book, Phyllis's Orange Shirt, how Phyllis wasn't allowed to speak her language. *What might that feel like for Phyllis?* Using the book, and students' own connections with language and their families, explain to students that Phyllis' school was something called Residential School, a system that we had in Canada for more than 160 years. These schools didn't let Phyllis, and other Indigenous children, speak their language, sing their songs, wear their clothes, and made many other parts of their lives against the rules. These schools took more than 150,000 children away from their families to go to a school they weren't allowed to leave (Royal Canadian Geographical Society). Phyllis lost her Orange Shirt, but she and the other students lost much more than that. Responding carefully to the dynamics of the classroom, students may have a lot of questions or feelings to share throughout this discussion; remind them that their feelings are valid. *(Understanding how long 160 years is might be really challenging for younger students. Supporting them with visuals, or adding up the collective number of years of the combined student ages in the classroom are some ways of supporting that understanding.)*

4. Orange Shirt Day

4.1. Using what you have shared as a class so far, lead students in a class discussion to remind students what Orange Shirt Day is about, using the book to prompt memories, review previous days discussions with chart paper notes. Review with students examples from their own brainstorming about what residential school might have been like *(what they mentioned for losing their language or favourite objects)*. Using this as a starting point, as students *What should school feel like?* Record students answers, this can be done by crossing out the negative emotions they previously listed to record the new feelings, or adding a comparative list.

## What should school feel like?

- happy
- safe
- with friends
- fun
- asking questions
- playing games
- good for eating
- belonging
- learning new things
- sharing
- singing
- dancing

Image: Conversation documentation from Grade 1/2 classroom in Calgary, transcribed by teacher.

- 4.2. Next, using this as a starting point, have students go for a walk around your classroom, or your school, to look for things that make them feel any of the words from the list (*for example: this is my artwork on the wall, it makes me feel special and included*). Depending on the abilities of your classroom, students can go in small groups to look for examples to talk about in a whole group, or moving as a full class to different spaces might be best.
- 4.3. Once returned to the classroom, students can share their examples and ideas. Some students might have ideas of things they saw that *didn't* make them feel safe, these are also important and can be validated.
- Using this conversation, remind students that Orange Shirt Day is about making sure that every student feels safe at school, and that every child should matter to their school community. We can all work together to make that happen.

Supporting Sources (APA):

Alberta Education. (2017). Teaching Quality Standard, Edmonton: Alberta Government. Retrieved from: <https://education.alberta.ca/professional-practice-standards/teaching-quality-standard/everyone/teaching-quality-standard-document/>

Alberta Education. (2000). English Language Arts K-9 Program of Studies. Retrieved from: <https://education.alberta.ca/media/160360/ela-pos-k-9.pdf>

Alberta Education. (2002). Health and Life Skills K-9 Program of Studies. Retrieved from: <https://education.alberta.ca/media/160196/health.pdf>

Alberta Education. (2005). Social Studies K-3 Program of Studies. Retrieved from: <https://education.alberta.ca/media/159594/program-of-studies-k-3.pdf>

Brock Nicol (2020), About. *Brock Nicol Illustration*. Ottawa: Brock Nicol Art. <https://www.brocknicolart.com/about>

Calgary Public Library. (2019). Indigenous Language Lessons *Siksika Nation, Stoney Nakoda Nation, Tsuut'ina Nation*. Calgary: Indigenous Services at the Library. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmCm\\_cV0EMQ&list=PL40rQpwLkfOFHpK-bqkNo5UXdp2Bte\\_tI&index=2&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmCm_cV0EMQ&list=PL40rQpwLkfOFHpK-bqkNo5UXdp2Bte_tI&index=2&t=0s)

Orange Shirt Day Society. (2020). Phyllis's Story. Williams Lake: *Orange Shirt Day*. <https://www.orangeshirtday.org/phyllis-story.html>

Royal Canadian Geographical Society, et al. (2018). Truth and Reconciliation: History of Residential Schools. *Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*. Ottawa: Canadian Geographic. Also available: <https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/history-of-residential-schools/>

Webstad, Phyllis. (2019) Phyllis's Orange Shirt. Medicine Wheel Education.

For Teacher Learning:

Learning more about Orange Shirt Day: <https://www.orangeshirtday.org>

When beginning to understand the complexities of Residential Schools, one might start here with Historica Canada's Timeline of Residential Schools: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFgNI1Ife0A>

There are many resources about Residential Schools, this TEDtalk by Ginger Gosnell-Myers, of Nisga'a and Kwakwaka'wakw heritage, explains her personal experience of intergenerational trauma, as well as her research as a policy expert, researcher, and activist on focusing on removing barriers between Indigenous peoples: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1EDbbse2BM>

When beginning to understand the importance of language this introductory lesson about Indigenous languages produced by the Calgary Public Library. It is available here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kTusynxoW0&list=PL40rQpwLkOFHpK-bqkNo5UXdp2Bte\\_tl&index=5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kTusynxoW0&list=PL40rQpwLkOFHpK-bqkNo5UXdp2Bte_tl&index=5)