

ORANGE SHIRT DAY

CURRICULUM FOR K-12



Tailored Lessons in Truth, Healing, and
Reconciliation for Every Grade



Christian
Reformed
Church



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Dear Educators, Leaders, and Friends,

Welcome to this curriculum resource for Orange Shirt Day. Whether you are guiding a classroom, leading a youth group, or discipling children in a church setting, we are grateful for your commitment to walking alongside young people in the important work of truth and reconciliation as an expression of our shared calling to follow Christ. Educating future generations about the history and ongoing legacy of the Indian Residential School system is both a sacred responsibility that the CRC has committed to in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action #59-60, and an opportunity to cultivate Christlike empathy, justice, and listening hearts.

This curriculum was thoughtfully developed with Orange Shirt Day (September 30th) in mind, offering ready-to-use materials to help your community mark this day of remembrance and honouring survivors through prayer, reflection, and action. However, the pursuit of reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual journey, not confined to a single date on the calendar. We have intentionally designed these materials with flexibility at their core—they can be used as-is for a dedicated Orange Shirt Day focus or adapted seamlessly for any time throughout the school year as part of your ongoing justice and history education.

To help every learner participate meaningfully, we have created tailored, age-appropriate content spanning from Kindergarten all the way through Grade 12. For our youngest students, the lessons focus on foundational concepts of belonging, love, and care as image-bearers of God, gently introducing them to the story of Phyllis Webstad. As students grow into middle and high school, the curriculum expands into deeper engagement with primary sources, intergenerational trauma, systemic impact, and active, faith-rooted reconciliation grounded in the gospel call to love our neighbours and seek restorative justice.

As you explore these pages, we encourage you to adapt the activities to fit the unique culture and pace of your learning environment. May these tools serve as a blessing to you and your students as we honour the children who never came home, stand in solidarity with survivors and their families, and reflect God's love by reaffirming together that *Every Child Matters*.

A Note from the CRC's Indigenous Ministry

The Haudenosaunee word for future generations means “faces coming from the ground.” Each face is a story that emerges from the earth and one day returns to the embrace of Our Mother the Earth. Your face is a story. It is an important story and those who love you know and get to know your story. The face of every Indigenous child who lived in the Indian Residential Schools of Canada is an important story—some brief, some horrific, but all filled with the image of God.

Every school-age child from Kindergarten to Grade 12 needs to hear how important they are—the story of their face. This curriculum tells a huge story that was silent for too long. Too many stories disappeared before they could be shared. This curriculum is an invitation into the world of Indigenous children whose faces came from the ground, more than half who have returned to the loving embrace of the ground or Mother Earth.

Jesus showed us how important little children are. He invited them into his embrace. He paid attention to them. He listened, learned from the children, and told his followers that one day a child will lead them. The survivors of the Indian Residential Schools have invited all Canadians to learn their story in order that the bad things that happened to them would never happen to any other child in this country. Along the way, you will see the beauty of their faces that came from the ground, some whose bodies have returned to the ground and their souls to the Sky World.

Adrian Jacobs
Senior Leader for Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation

A Special Thank You

This curriculum is the fruit of collaborative wisdom, prayer, and dedication. We offer our heartfelt thanks to all the educators, staff, and leaders who helped shape these pages—with special gratitude to Marlene Wolters for her original content and vision.

Our sincere thanks to: Marlene Wolters, Arn Boonstra, Dave Wonder, Cindy Stover, Kristen Parker, Adrian Jacobs, and The Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee (CIMC).

A Note from a Former Christian School Teacher and Principal

A couple of years ago, I was privileged to participate in the Hearts Exchanged program through my church. Created by the Christian Reformed Church, Hearts Exchanged is an eight-month adult learning and action course that encourages participants to thoughtfully consider meaningful ways to pursue reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

As a former teacher and principal in a Christian school, I found the information and concepts presented through [Hearts Exchanged](#) compelling and believed they could also be meaningfully shared with children and young people. So, when I learned that the CRC's Indigenous Ministry had developed a curriculum specifically for Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) School Day, loosely based on the Hearts Exchanged model, I was delighted.

When I was invited to preview the curriculum, I was very impressed. The TRC School Day curriculum has been thoughtfully designed for primary, junior, intermediate, and high school students, with age-appropriate learning goals and engaging activities for each level. The lessons present important concepts while also providing students with specific, practical opportunities to take action.

I am confident that teachers who use these curriculum packages on TRC School Day will help foster greater awareness, understanding, and reconciliation among their students. At a time when our society continues to wrestle with issues of justice and reconciliation, this curriculum provides an important opportunity for young people to learn, reflect, and make an impactful difference in the lives of Indigenous peoples and in our communities.

Arn Boonstra

Former Christian school teacher and principal

PRIMARY CLASSROOM CURRICULUM (JK – GRADE 2)

While this content is designed with Orange Shirt Day in mind, teachers and leaders are encouraged to adapt and use these materials at any time throughout the year.

“Every Child Matters: We Are God’s Family”

- **Theme:** Orange Shirt Day, kindness, listening well, and sharing Jesus’ love.
- **Core Question:** *How does Jesus want us to care for someone who feels sad or left out?*

BIBLE VERSE TO MEMORIZE (With Actions)

“Let us love, not just with words... but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:18)

Teacher Tip: Have children make a heart with their hands for "love," stomp their feet for "actions," and point up to heaven for "truth."

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, students will:

- Know that they are uniquely made in God’s image and deeply loved by Him.
- Understand that Orange Shirt Day is a day to be kind, listen to stories, and remember that every child matters.
- Practice Christ-like love by noticing when others are left out and including them.

DISCOVERY SECTION: Listening to Phyllis’ Story

Recommended Book: [*Phyllis’s Orange Shirt* by Phyllis Webstad](#) (This is the specific adaptation written for children ages 4–9).

The Story Circle: What Happened to Phyllis?

Gather students on the carpet and share this simplified truth:

"Long ago, a little Indigenous girl named Phyllis was six years old! When we say *Indigenous*, we mean the First Peoples of this land, who have their own languages and cultures, and lived here long before people arrived from across the ocean—and their families still live here today. Phyllis’ grandmother saved up her money and bought Phyllis a bright, beautiful orange shirt to wear to her new school. Phyllis felt so happy and special in her shirt.

But when she got to her school, the adults there were not kind to Indigenous children. They took her favourite orange shirt away, and she never got it back. It made Phyllis feel very sad, small, and lonely. She felt like her feelings didn't matter to them.

Today, we wear orange shirts to say: Phyllis matters. You matter. Every single child matters to us and to God!"

Circle Time Chat

1. How do you think Phyllis felt when her special shirt was taken away?
2. If you see someone sitting alone on the playground at recess, what can you do to show them that they matter to you and to Jesus?
3. How did Jesus treat children when he walked on earth? (*Read Matthew 19:14: "Let the little children come to me."*)

UNDERSTANDING SECTION: God Sees and Loves You

Classroom Interactive Activity: The "God Sees Me" Mirror

Pass around a small, safe hand mirror or have students look at their classmates.

- **The Lesson:** "Look at your hair, your eyes, and your beautiful skin. God created Indigenous people, in fact God created people from all over the world. He loves every culture, every language, and every single face. Sometimes, people make choices that hurt others or don't value what makes them special. But Jesus teaches us a better way: we celebrate how God made each of us!"

PRACTICE SECTION: Living Our Faith with Kindness

Goal: To move little hands and feet into action. Choose two of the following activities for your classroom:

- **Option 1: The Orange Shirt Parade:** Invite everyone to wear an orange shirt to school to mark September 30th. Take a walk through the school hallways holding a banner made by the class that says, "*Jesus says: Every Child Matters!*"
- **Option 2: Creating a Classroom Heart Garden:** Cut out large hearts from orange construction paper. Have each student color theirs and decorate it. Paste them onto popsicle sticks and "plant" them in a large flower pot filled with soil in the classroom or along the school's front walkway as a visual promise to always be kind and listen well.
- **Option 3: The Gift of Listening:** Play a quiet game where children practice looking at a partner, keeping their hands still, and listening to their partner share what their favorite toy is. Talk about how listening with our eyes and ears is a way to say, "*You are important to me.*"
- **Option 4: The Take-Home Promise:** Have each child color a small paper heart that says, "Every Child Matters." Ask them to take it home, give it to a parent or guardian, and share one simple thing they learned today about how they can show love and be a kind, listening friend to others.

SERVING SECTION: Sharing God's Love

Helping children see service as making friends, not just a project.

- **Option A: Colouring Pages:** Have students choose and print a coloring page from the beautiful, free Indigenous-designed collection by artist Hawlii Pichette at [Urban Iskwew](#). After the students colour their page in class: encourage them to bring the artwork home and share at least one thing they learned about Indigenous culture or history with a parent.
- **Option B: The Inclusion Challenge:** As a class, challenge the students to find one person from a different classroom or grade at lunch or recess and invite them to play a group game (like tag or duck-duck-goose) so nobody feels forgotten.

WRAP UP

Before closing in prayer, bring the students back together on the carpet to connect your action back to Scripture:

1. Say the Memory Verse Together:
 - "Let us love, not just with words... but with actions and in truth."* (1 John 3:18 — with actions)
2. Ask the students:
 - How does Jesus want us to care for someone who feels sad or left out?
3. Student Share:
 - Invite 2–3 students to share one practical action they can do today (e.g., Invite them to play tag, listen to a friend, share a smile). Remind them that when we do these things, we are showing that Every Child Matters!

CLOSING PRAYER

Have children copy your hand actions as you pray together.

"Dear Creator God, **(reach arms up high)**

Thank you for making every child so special. **(hug yourself)**

Help our ears to listen to others. **(touch your ears)**

Help our hands to be kind and helping. **(hold your hands out)**

Help our feet to walk like Jesus did. **(stomp feet gently)**

We love you, Lord. Amen."

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM LIBRARY BOOKS

- [Phyllis's Orange Shirt by Phyllis Webstad \(JK–Grade 1\)](#)
- [With Our Orange Hearts: Every Child Matters by Phyllis Webstad \(Grade 2\)](#)
- [You Matter by Christian Robinson](#)
- [Why Sept. 30 is a holiday in Canada](#) | CBC Kids News (Video)
- [Orange Shirt Day founder Phyllis Webstad answers kids' questions](#) | CBC Kids News (Video)

JUNIOR CLASSROOM CURRICULUM

(GRADES 3–5)

While this content is designed with Orange Shirt Day in mind, teachers and leaders are encouraged to adapt and use these materials at any time throughout the year.

“Every Child Matters: Caring for God’s World and His People”

- **Theme:** Orange Shirt Day, historical honesty, and practicing Christ-like empathy and justice.
- **Core Question:** *How does our faith call us to respond with humility and action when we learn that people have been hurt?*

BIBLE VERSE TO MEMORIZE

“Let us love, not in words or speech, but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:18)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, students will:

- Understand that every human being is an image-bearer of God (Genesis 1:27) and inherently valuable.
- Articulate why Orange Shirt Day matters in Canada and explain the basic mechanics of how residential schools operated.
- Define humility as choosing to listen with an open heart rather than assuming we already know everything, and respect as treating every person as a valuable image-bearer of God.
- Recognize that Christian love requires listening to hard truths, practicing humility, and taking active steps toward healing broken relationships.

DISCOVERY SECTION: Relating to Others Like Jesus Would

Step 1: Learning the Story

Read aloud *Every Child Matters* by Phyllis Webstad, or watch her video testimony as a class:

- **Video Link:** [Phyllis Webstad's Orange Shirt Day Story](#)

Step 2: Vocabulary & Comprehension Check

Provide the following text and word bank to students as an independent or guided worksheet:

Word Bank

voice, forced, home, lonely, entire, listen, Orange Shirt Day, important, children matter, residential, night, humility, respect

Key Definitions for Our Class:

- Humility means admitting that we do not know everything, choosing to put others first, and having a soft heart that is willing to listen and learn from someone else's story.
- Respect means recognizing that every person is created in God's image and treating their stories, culture, feelings, and voices as deeply valuable.

Why is Orange Shirt Day a very important day for all children? It reminds us that all **children matter**. All children have an important **voice** that deserves to be heard and treated with **respect**. It also is a time to practice **humility** as we learn about **residential** schools and the Indigenous children who were **forced** to attend them.

What were residential schools? They were not like regular schools. If you went to a residential school, you could not go **home** at the end of the day. You had to stay there all **night**, too. Even worse, you had to stay for the **entire** school year! Lots of children felt tired and **lonely**. They weren't allowed to speak their own language or wear the clothes they brought from home. They wanted to go back to their families, but no one would **listen**. They were made to feel like they were not **important** enough for people to listen to their voices.

Thankfully, all residential schools are closed now. No one is forced to go to places like that anymore. Now, we observe **Orange Shirt Day** to remind us that every child matters.

UNDERSTANDING SECTION: Truth, Empathy, and the Gospel

Circle Time Discussion

Gather the students to process the emotional and spiritual layers of the history. Use these prompts to guide a mature, Christ-centered conversation:

1. **Unfairness:** What does it feel like when you are treated unfairly or don't have a voice? How much harder would it be if you were separated from your family while it happened?
2. **Practicing Humility and Respect:** How do we show humility when we hear about sad or hard parts of history? What does it look like to show respect when someone is sharing a story of being hurt?
3. **The Way of Jesus:** How did Jesus respond to people who were pushed aside or ignored by society? (*Look up Luke 18:15-17 where Jesus stops his disciples from dismissing the children*).

Reflective Journaling

Have students complete the following prompts in their learning journals:

- **Draw/Journal:** "What does it mean to you that God sees, knows, and loves every child completely, and how can we show respect to everyone God created?"
- **Letter Prompt:** "If Phyllis Webstad was a guest in our classroom today, what would you want to say to her?"

PRACTICE SECTION: Living Our Faith

Goal: Moving from head knowledge to active, visible discipleship. Have students select and complete two of the following tasks:

- **Option 1: Wear and Share:** Invite students to wear an orange shirt on Orange Shirt Day. Prepare a simple, polite, one-sentence explanation to share with anyone who asks you why you are wearing it (e.g., *"I'm wearing orange to honor residential school survivors and remember that every child matters to God."*).
- **Option 2: Map Your Place:** Learn what a "land acknowledgment" is and read about why it is a way to respect the history of the land God placed us on. Use resources like [CBC Kids: What is a Land Acknowledgment?](#) to look up the traditional territory where your school sits.
- **Option 3: Plant a Heart Garden:** Read [Spirit Bear: Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams by Cindy Blackstock](#). Following the reading, decorate paper hearts with commitments to kindness and reconciliation, attach them to wooden garden markers, and plant a temporary "Heart Garden" in the school's green space or flower beds.
- **Option 4: The Kitchen Table Conversation:** Have each student write down two important things they learned about Orange Shirt Day or the local land history on an index card. Ask them to bring this "conversation card" home to share with a parent or guardian over dinner, and invite their family to discuss one practical way they can work together to be welcoming, respectful neighbours to everyone in their community.

SERVING SECTION: Walking the Way of Reconciliation

Teaching students that biblical service is about relationships, not pity or charity.

- **School-Wide Witness:** Have the class collaborate to design posters or an interactive hallway bulletin board under the banner *"Let us love with actions and in truth."* Use the board to teach the younger grades (JK–2) about why Orange Shirt Day matters.
- **Intercessory Liturgy:** Write a collection of classroom prayers focused on healing, comfort for families affected by residential schools, and wisdom for Canadian leaders. Bind them into a class prayer booklet to be read during morning announcements or chapel.

WRAP UP

Before closing in prayer, bring the students back together on the carpet to connect your action back to Scripture:

1. Say the Memory Verse Together:
 - "Let us love, not just with words... but with actions and in truth."* (1 John 3:18 — with actions)
2. Revisit the Core Question:
 - Ask the students: "Think back to our core question today—How does our faith call us to respond with respect, humility and action when we learn that people have been hurt?"
3. Student Share & Reflection:
 - Invite 2–3 students to share one practical way they can put "truth and action" into practice this week (e.g., "Listen carefully when others share their story," "Speak up when someone is being treated unfairly," "Have a conversation with my family about what I learned today").

CLOSING PRAYER

"Creator God, thank you for creating and loving every child with a perfect love. Help us to keep our hearts soft so we can listen even when we learn hard truths. Fill us with the courage to love not just with words, but with real actions. Teach us to walk humbly in the way of Jesus, acting justly and loving mercy every single day. In Jesus' name, Amen."

RECOMMENDED CLASSROOM RESOURCES

- [*Every Child Matters* by Phyllis Webstad](#)
- [*Beyond Orange Shirt Story* by Phyllis Webstad](#)
- [*Spirit Bear: Honouring Memories. Planting Dreams*](#) (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society)
- National Centre for Truth & Reconciliation - [Educational Resources for Grade Levels](#)
- [Why Sept. 30 is a holiday in Canada](#) | CBC Kids News (Video)
- [Orange Shirt Day founder Phyllis Webstad answers kids' questions](#) | CBC Kids News (Video)

INTERMEDIATE CLASSROOM CURRICULUM (GRADES 6–8)

While this content is designed with Orange Shirt Day in mind, teachers and leaders are encouraged to adapt and use these materials at any time throughout the year.

“Truth, Lament, and Action: Repairing the Community of Creation”

- **Theme:** Structural assimilation, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and practicing corporate repentance and restorative love.
- **Core Question:** *How does the Church practice true, humble repentance when historical actions have caused systemic harm?*

BIBLE VERSE TO MEMORIZE

“Let us love, not in words or speech, but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:18)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, students will:

- Define the concept of **cultural assimilation** and identify how residential schools systematically targeted Indigenous language, family structures, and traditions.
- Acknowledge the role that various Christian institutions played in operating these schools, recognizing that following Christ requires historical honesty.
- Apply the biblical framework of **Lament** and utilize the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action as a practical roadmap for contemporary justice.

DISCOVERY SECTION: Confronting Systemic Injustice

Document Analysis: Understanding Assimilation

Provide the following text to students to read independently or in small peer groups, answering the critical thinking questions below:

In Canada, the residential school system was created by the government with the goal of **assimilation**—this meant forcing Indigenous people to give up their own culture and adopt the culture of the dominant group. The government’s main goal was to stop Indigenous children from learning their own traditions, languages, and ways of life from their parents and grandparents.

Over 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children were taken away from their families by law. They were sent to residential schools that were often hundreds of kilometers away from their homes. At these schools, children were strictly forbidden

from speaking their native languages, practicing their traditions, or keeping in touch with their families.

These schools were run by various Christian churches in partnership with the Canadian government. Because these schools did not respect the basic human rights and cultural dignity of the children, generations of families experienced deep emotional, spiritual, and physical pain. The final residential school closed in 1996.

Critical Analysis Questions

1. **Define Systemic Harm:** How did residential schools differ from a normal school system? What made this a "systemic" or structural issue rather than just a few individuals making poor choices?
2. **The Impact on Identity:** Why was targeting language and family connections such a devastating method of cultural destruction? What happens to a community when children can no longer speak to their parents and grandparents, or are taught that their family's traditions are wrong?

UNDERSTANDING SECTION: The Biblical Theology of Lament

The Theological Pivot: What is Lament?

Teach the following concept directly to the class:

"When we learn about historical tragedies—especially ones where the visible Church was involved—it is tempting to look for a quick fix or try to defend the past. But scripture models a different way: **Lament**.

Lament is a form of prayer where we speak honestly to God about suffering, injustice, and sin. It means slowing down to mourn with those who are mourning (Romans 12:15), confessing corporate mistakes with humility, and recognizing that saying 'sorry' requires a complete change in direction (repentance)."

Scriptural Reflection Circle

Open Bibles and read **Psalm 13** and **Lamentations 5:1-5, 21**.

- How do these biblical writers talk to God when things are broken or unjust?
- How can our school community use the language of lament during Orange Shirt Day, rather than treating it like a standard, everyday holiday?

PRACTICE SECTION: Researching the TRC Calls to Action

Goal: Connecting history to active, contemporary citizenship and faith. Have students (individually or in partners/groups) select and complete one of the following research projects:

- **Option 1: The Church and the Calls:** Research the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action. Focus specifically on **Calls 58 through 61** (which are directed explicitly at church parties and religious leaders). Write a 100-word summary explaining what these specific calls are asking Christian communities to do today.
- **Option 2: Language Reclamation:** Research a local initiative focused on the preservation or revitalization of an Indigenous language in your province (such as Cree, Anishinaabemowin, or Mohawk). Write a brief report outlining why protecting language is an important part of Christian justice work.
- **Option 3: The Spiritual Covenant Concept:** Review the concept of a "[Spiritual Covenant](#)"—a localized, long-term relational partnership between a Christian church community and local Indigenous neighbors. Design an infographic mapping out three qualities a church needs to bring to the table to build a friendship based on mutual respect rather than charity.
- **Option 4: Share a Story:** Find a short video, article, or podcast episode about Indigenous language revitalization or a local church partnership. Watch or listen to it with a parent or guardian, and discuss one surprising thing you both learned about why preserving this history matters to your family.

SERVING SECTION: Active Advocacy & Classroom Witness

Transitioning from passive learning into community accountability.

- **Liturgy of Lament:** Collaborate as a class to write a formal "Liturgy of Lament and Hope" for Orange Shirt Day. The litany should include moments of silence, historical truth-telling, corporate confession, and specific commitments to justice. Arrange to have this liturgy read during a chapel service or shared with the broader school staff and parents.
- **Educational Outreach:** Have students work in pairs to create an informative, historically accurate display or digital presentation for the school library. The display must clearly explain the connection between **1 John 3:18** and Canada's ongoing journey toward truth and reconciliation. Pairs can create a physical poster divided into three sections: one detailing 3–4 key historical facts about residential schools, one featuring 1 John 3:18 alongside practical ways to show Christ-like love today, and one showcasing local land territory information and student commitments. Alternatively, pairs can build a slideshow, featuring a title slide, a brief summary of the residential school system, a 2–3 sentence explanation connecting biblical justice to active love, and three concrete actions students can take to practice inclusion.

WRAP UP

Before closing in prayer, bring the class together to integrate the historical, theological, and practical insights of today's lesson:

1. Recite the Memory Verse Together:
"Let us love, not in words or speech, but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:18)
2. Revisit the Core Question:
Ask the class to reflect deeply on our driving question: *"How does the Church practice true, humble repentance when historical actions have caused systemic harm?"*

The following questions may prompt more reflection:

Moving beyond words: How do we transition from making formal written apologies to engaging in ongoing, long-term relational partnerships?

Listening and learning: How do we practice active humility by sitting down with Indigenous elders, survivors, and local leaders to listen to their experiences without offering excuses or self-defense?

Structural change & resources: What does repentance look like when it involves concrete actions—such as funding Indigenous-led community programs, advocating for clean drinking water, or returning land and resources?

Daily habits: How can we weave truth-telling and treaty accountability into our regular prayers, litanies, and education throughout the year?

3. Guided Reflection & Student Discussion:
Invite 2–3 students to share key insights from today's discussion or activities:
 - How does practicing biblical lament (slowing down to mourn, confess, and listen) change the way we approach Orange Shirt Day compared to standard holidays?
 - What is one concrete step our school community can take to move from "empty words" toward real, relational action?

CLOSING PRAYER

"Holy Creator God, we sit with the heavy truth of our history, acknowledging that choices made by Christian institutions caused deep pain and division within your community of creation. Give us the courage to look at the past with total honesty, the humility to practice true biblical lament, and the soft hearts required to listen well to survivors. Do not let our faith be a matter of empty words or speech, but transform our hands and feet to walk the path of restorative justice, acting mercifully and walking humbly with you every day. In the name of Jesus, who reconciles all things, Amen."

RECOMMENDED CLASSROOM RESOURCES

- [*The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* \(Official Document\)](#)
- [*The Survivors Speak: A Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*](#)

- [*Spirit Bear's Guide to the TRC Calls to Action* \(First Nations Child and Family Caring Society\)](#)
- National Centre for Truth & Reconciliation - [Educational Resources for Grade Levels](#)
- [Heard about the 94 calls to action? Here's what they are](#) | CBC Kids News (Video)
- [Why Sept. 30 is a holiday in Canada](#) | CBC Kids News (Video)
- [Orange Shirt Day founder Phyllis Webstad answers kids' questions](#) | CBC Kids News (Video)
- [Indigenous land acknowledgements, their purpose, and how to make them meaningful](#) | CBC Kids News (Video)
- [Beyond 94: Truth and Reconciliation in Canada](#) - Interactive website outlining the progress of the TRCs CTAs
- Additional Spiritual Covenant Resources:
 - [Spiritual Covenant | Mennonite Church](#)
 - [A Spiritual Covenant with churches and First Nations](#)
 - [A Spiritual Covenant with Churches and First Nations by Adrian Jacobs](#)

HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM (GRADES 9–12)

While this content is designed with Orange Shirt Day in mind, teachers and leaders are encouraged to adapt and use these materials at any time throughout the year.

“Ministers of Reconciliation: Covenant, Justice, and Cultural Transformation”

- **Theme:** Intergenerational systemic trauma, structural accountability, and developing long-term spiritual covenants.
- **Core Question:** *What does it mean for the next generation of Christian leaders to actively embody Christ’s work of restorative justice within a wounded society?*

BIBLE VERSE TO MEMORIZE & DISCUSS

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:18)

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: CREATION, FALL, REDEMPTION, & TRANSFORMATION

To understand reconciliation from a Reformed Christian perspective, we aim to understand this history through the four-fold arc of God’s Story:

- **Creation:** God created a diverse world filled with distinct nations, cultures, and languages, declaring all image-bearers inherently valuable (Genesis 1:27, Revelation 7:9). [Culture-making](#) is part of our original calling as human beings.
- **Fall:** Sin fractured individual hearts *and* societal structures and systems. Human pride led to a false theology of cultural supremacy—confusing the spread of the Gospel with the imposition of European cultural dominance. This brokenness manifested in legal tools like the *Indian Act* and the Residential School system.
- **Redemption:** Through Christ’s cross and resurrection, God reconciled us to Himself and broke down the dividing walls of hostility (Ephesians 2:14, 2 Corinthians 5:18). Jesus calls us to follow Him—by practicing intentional daily liturgies of love, justice, and truth-telling.
- **Transformation / Reconciliation:** As “Ministers of Reconciliation,” our calling is to join God’s ongoing work of restoring broken relationships. Following Jesus in Canada today means honouring treaties, standing against systemic injustice, and walking alongside Indigenous neighbours in ways that reflect God’s kingdom.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, students will:

- Analyze how specific historical laws—specifically the *Indian Act*—laid the groundwork for the residential school system and subsequent intergenerational trauma.

- Deconstruct historical theological missteps (such as cultural supremacy) and contrast them with a biblical theology of stewardship, diversity, and restorative justice.
- Evaluate and design a framework for a local Spiritual Covenant between a church/school and local Indigenous communities based on mutual respect, treaty accountability, and self-determination.
- Engage in active civic responsibility and liturgical leadership through advocacy letters, restorative practices (sharing circles), and public chapel leadership.

DISCOVERY SECTION: Analyzing the Infrastructure of Assimilation

High school students will examine the legal and historical framework that mandated Residential schools, shifting the understanding from a "failed educational experiment" to a deliberate legislative system.

Primary Document Analysis: The Indian Act & Legal Mandates

Provide students with the following historical excerpts and text to analyze independently or in seminars:

In 1876, the Canadian parliament passed the **Indian Act**, a sweeping piece of federal legislation that gave the government total control over Indigenous legal status, land rights, and traditional governance structures. In 1894, an amendment to the Act made attendance at residential schools **legally mandatory** for First Nations children.

Under this law, parents who refused to surrender their children to the schools faced heavy fines or direct imprisonment by the North-West Mounted Police. This legal infrastructure remained active for over a century, formally criminalizing traditional family structures and ceremonies (such as the Potlatch and Sun Dance).

Seminar Discussion Questions and Modern Context

1. **Modern Issues Discussion:** Before analyzing history, hold a class brainstorm about the contemporary challenges facing Indigenous families today (e.g., ongoing drinking water advisories, disproportionate child welfare apprehending, loss of native languages, systemic inequities in housing and health care).
2. **The Legal Framework:** How does understanding that residential schools were legally mandatory change how we view the responsibility of the Canadian government and the churches that operated Residential Schools?
3. **Intergenerational Trauma:** The final residential school did not close until 1996. How does this recent timeline help explain the modern issues faced by Indigenous families and communities today? (for example, high incarceration rates for Indigenous people, challenges within Indigenous children in child welfare systems, systemic underfunding for on-reserve infrastructure and resources like schools, drinking water, etc.) What does healing look like when the survivors are your parents or grandparents? What does

healing look like when your community continues to be marginalized by ongoing systemic barriers?

UNDERSTANDING SECTION: Ensuring the Gospel is Good News

Theological Case Study: Misusing the Gospel vs. Restorative Justice

Deliver this lecture or distribute it for small-group analysis:

Historically, many church leaders justified their participation in assimilation by misapplying biblical commands like the Great Commission (Matthew 28). They confused the spread of the Gospel with the spread of European culture, operating under a false theology of cultural supremacy.

These false ideas have a name - the Doctrine of Discovery - based on 500-year-old decrees from the Catholic Church, that allowed European monarchies to claim any land that was not inhabited by Christians. European explorers "discovered" already inhabited islands and continents, claiming ownership as they arrived, while completely ignoring the sovereignty, cultures, and land ownership of the Indigenous peoples who had lived there for millennia. This doctrine dehumanized non-Christian populations, served as the legal justification for European colonization, enforced the assumption of Euro-centric cultural superiority, and led to the forced displacement, assimilation, and oppression of Indigenous communities worldwide—the impacts of which are still felt today.

The bible teaches a different doctrine, that God creates and loves diversity (Revelation 7:9) and that Christ's death and resurrection break down systemic walls of hostility (Ephesians 2:14). Following Jesus in Canada today means acting as **Ministers of Reconciliation**, where we stand against injustice, honor the treaties made on this land, and walk alongside our neighbors in concrete ways."

PRACTICE SECTION: Policy, Treaties, and Action

*Goal: Moving from passive intellectual assent to systemic action and civic responsibility. To honor varied learning styles and course streams (academic, open, technology, arts), students may select **one** of the following topics and present their findings in any of the creative formats listed below.*

- **Option 1: The Spiritual Covenant Project:** Research the concept of a modern [Spiritual Covenant](#)—a formalized, long-term relational commitment between a local church congregation/school and a neighboring Indigenous community. Outline how a local community can move past symbolic apologies into concrete economic, social, and spiritual partnerships.
- **Option 2: Legislative Evaluation (UNDRIP):** Examine the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (specifically clauses on language, education, and

land). Evaluate how Canada's historical policies violated these international standards, and identify where modern gaps still exist.

- **Option 3: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG):** Research the National Inquiry into MMIWG and review its 231 Calls for Justice. Map out how the historical breakdown of family units caused by residential schools connects directly to contemporary safety crises facing Indigenous women today, highlighting which specific Calls for Justice aim to address these systemic issues.
- **Option 4: TRC Calls to Action in the Home:** Select one of the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (focusing on education, language, or church responsibilities). Research its current progress and draft a 3-question discussion guide to lead a dialogue at home with a parent or guardian.

Approved Presentation Formats (Student Choice):

1. **Written Proposal / Brief:** A formal 3-page research paper or proposal.
2. **Digital Presentation / Slide Deck:** A fully structured presentation with visual artifacts and speaker notes.
3. **Class Magazine Contribution:** A written feature article, interview script, or investigative Q&A designed for a compiled class publication.
4. **Whiteboard / Explainer Video:** A 3–5 minute recorded video breaking down the policy or issue using illustrations, commentary, and visual aids.
5. **Infographic / Poster Collection:** A series of 3 interconnected posters combining data, policy breakdown, and biblical analysis.
6. **Artistic Response & Statement:** An original piece of artwork (painting, digital art, sculpture, poem) accompanied by a 500-word Artist Statement connecting the work to the biblical narrative of restoration.

SERVING SECTION: Systemic Advocacy & Liturgical Leadership

*Reconciliation requires more than good intentions; it demands active, living witness. High school students are uniquely positioned to lead both our school community and the broader public in meaningful action. Choose **any or all** of the following options to put your learning into practice and serve as voice, ear, and hands in God's ongoing work of justice:*

1. Classroom Sharing Circle Protocol

Incorporate a restorative sharing circle to build empathy, active listening, and open dialogue.

- **Circle Principles:**
 - Only the person holding the talking piece speaks.
 - Listen with an open heart and without judgment; no cross-talk or interrupting.
 - What is shared in the circle stays in the circle.
- **Open-Ended Discussion Prompts (Choose 1 or 2):**

- "When you reflect on the history of residential schools in Canada, what feeling or question stays with you the most?"
- "How can our school community move beyond wearing an orange shirt once a year to practicing daily, long-term reconciliation?"
- "Where do you see light, hope, or resilience emerging in Indigenous communities today?"

Teacher Resource: Download or copy the [Sharing Circle Slide Deck](#)

2. Civic Advocacy: Letter Writing to Government Representatives

Write a formal letter to (MP) or provincial representatives. In the letters, ask for specific legislative updates regarding the implementation of the TRC Calls to Action (specifically those dealing with the preservation of Indigenous languages or the protection of child welfare). Ensure your letters reflect a mature, Christ-centered appeal for justice.

Teacher Resource: Download or copy the [Example of Letter to MPP](#)

3. Chapel Leadership

Design and execute a full school chapel service for Orange Shirt Day. Students will curate the liturgy, lead responsive prayers of corporate confession, select scriptural readings focused on restorative justice (Micah 6:8, 2 Corinthians 5), and share insights from their research with the student body.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Sovereign Creator God, you have called us to be ministers of reconciliation in a deeply fractured world. We confess that our history includes chapters where your name was used to strip your image-bearers of their family, language, and cultural dignity. Grant us the intellectual honesty to confront this history, the moral courage to dismantle ongoing systemic injustices, and the profound humility required to listen and learn from Indigenous survivors and leaders. Transform our faith into a living witness—not of empty words or superficial speech, but of bold actions and radical truth. May your church become a true agent of healing, walking humbly alongside our neighbors as we seek your kingdom on earth. In the powerful name of Jesus, Amen."

RECOMMENDED CLASSROOM RESOURCES

- [The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada \(Volumes 1-6\)](#)
- [The Indian Act \(R.S.C., 1985, c. I-5\) - Selected Historical Amendments](#)
- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#)
- [21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act](#)
- National Centre for Truth & Reconciliation - [Educational Resources for Grade Levels](#)
- [Heard about the 94 calls to action? Here's what they are](#) | CBC Kids News (Video)

- [Why Sept. 30 is a holiday in Canada](#) | CBC Kids News (Video)
- [Orange Shirt Day founder Phyllis Webstad answers kids' questions](#) | CBC Kids News (Video)
- [Indigenous land acknowledgements, their purpose, and how to make them meaningful](#) | CBC Kids News (Video)
- [Braiding Accountability: A Ten-Year Review of the TRC's Healthcare Calls to Action](#) - Yellowhead Institute
- [Beyond 94: Truth and Reconciliation in Canada](#) - Interactive website outlining the progress of the TRCs CTAs
- [Residential School Survival Stories](#)
- [The Survivors' Secretariat](#) was established in 2021 to organize and support the investigation into missing children and unmarked burials associated with the Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School located in Brantford, ON.
- [Honour to Senator Murray Sinclair](#) - TRC Commissioner Murray Sinclair speaks about the TRC/IRS.
- Additional Spiritual Covenant Resources:
 - [Spiritual Covenant | Mennonite Church](#)
 - [A Spiritual Covenant with churches and First Nations](#)
 - [A Spiritual Covenant with Churches and First Nations by Adrian Jacobs](#)

SUCCESS CRITERIA & ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Success Criteria ("I Can" Statements)

- [] **I can** analyze how legal tools like the *Indian Act* created systemic intergenerational trauma.
- [] **I can** explain the difference between cultural assimilation and a biblical theology of diversity and restorative justice.
- [] **I can** communicate my research clearly using a format that matches my strengths and learning style.
- [] **I can** articulate a constructive, Christ-centered appeal for justice to public leaders using appropriate civic channels.

Rubric

Criteria	Developing (1)	Proficient (2)	Advanced (3)	Exemplary (4)
Historical & Legal Analysis	Identifies basic facts about residential schools; misses connection to legislative roots (<i>Indian Act</i>).	Explains the legal framework of the <i>Indian Act</i> and its connection to residential schools.	Analyzes how legal infrastructure mandated assimilation and caused intergenerational trauma.	Evaluates the systemic, multi-generational impacts of legislation with depth and primary source evidence.
Theological Reflection	Mentions faith generally without connecting scripture to justice or reconciliation.	Explains how scripture calls believers to be "Ministers of Reconciliation."	Contrasts historical theological misuses (cultural supremacy) with biblical justice and diversity.	Integrates a Reformed Christian worldview into concrete modern actions.
Application & Choice (Project)	Project lacks completeness or required components for the chosen format.	Completes project requirements clearly using the chosen creative format.	Communicates complex ideas effectively using creative tools, thorough research, and clear structure.	Produces Work demonstrating mastery, depth of insight, and high artistic or academic polish.
Civic Engagement & Advocacy	Letter or chapel contribution is vague, incomplete, or lacks respectful tone.	Letter follows the basic template and addresses an MP/MPP respectfully.	Letter articulates a clear, informed request linked to TRC Calls to Action with strong biblical grounding.	Demonstrates mature, persuasive public witness; letter shows deep civic engagement and policy analysis.

Next Steps on the Journey of Reconciliation

Learning is just the beginning of walking well together. If your school, classroom, or church community is interested in taking further steps, [CRCNA Indigenous Ministries](#) is here to walk alongside you. Whether you are interested in hosting a [Kairos Blanket Exercise](#) (KBE), bringing [Hearts Exchanged](#) or the [On-the-Land Learning](#) experiences to your group, or arranging an educational tour of the former Mohawk Institute Residential School, we can help facilitate meaningful next steps.

To learn more or connect with a regional ministry leader, visit us [online](#) or contact us at cimc@crcna.org