



Observing the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation:

Guidance and Resource Document for Kindergarten to Grade 12

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Purpose

The purpose of the Guidance and Resource Document is to outline the Ministry of Education's expectations for school boards in observing the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation annually on September 30.

The Ministry of Education is committed to advancing reconciliation through education. To further this, the ministry is providing learning resources and guidance on activities and practices that emphasize remembrance, reflection, action and learning to:

- observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation,
- encourage learning and action throughout the year.

Observing the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation provides students and educators with dedicated time during the school year to collectively learn about the history and enduring legacy of residential schools and the Indian Residential School System.

The Guidance and Resource Document is intended to complement existing work school boards are currently leading to build the awareness of all educators and students of Indigenous knowledges, histories, perspectives and contributions. This document is intended to serve as an additional resource for school boards as they observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and advance learning and action related to truth and reconciliation. School boards are encouraged to build on this document to deepen, expand, and tailor their efforts in partnership with local First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities to meaningfully advance reconciliation within their local contexts.

Materials are provided to support educators in creating meaningful and respectful learning opportunities for students that are safe, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse learning needs of all students.

School board Indigenous Education Leads are responsible for guiding school boards and schools in building strong relationships with communities, supporting

Indigenous education planning, sharing information, identifying promising practices, and enhancing collaborative work to support First Nation, Métis and Inuit student achievement and well-being. Many school board Indigenous Education teams have developed resources that educators can utilize to support learning related the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and Indigenous Education more broadly. Schools are expected to work closely with their school board Indigenous Education teams and Lead to align their learning with the broader school board initiatives for Indigenous education, and relationships with local First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities.

This work reflects a broader commitment to ensuring that reconciliation is not limited to a single day but embedded throughout the school year as an ongoing practice of learning, reflection, and collective responsibility. Observing the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation provides an opportunity to reflect on how we can work together to advance reconciliation and build a better future for all.

Context

The Indian Residential School System operated across Canada for 165 years. In 1831 the first church-run Indian Residential School opened in Brantford, Ontario – the Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School. The last government funded, church-operated residential school in Canada closed its doors in 1996. As part of a larger project of assimilation policy, residential schools were created to separate Indigenous children from their families and communities, and to systematically strip away their traditions, cultural practices and languages.

Survivors across Canada have long told stories of the abuse and deaths that took place at these institutions. These experiences have been documented through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is observed annually on September 30. It is a day to reflect and honour Survivors, their families and communities, to remember the children who never returned home, to learn about the history and lasting impacts of the Indian Residential School System, and to advance efforts toward reconciliation.

Observing the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is a direct response to the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission \(TRC\) Calls to Action](#) #80, which called for a federal statutory holiday to honour Survivors of Indian Residential Schools, their

families and communities and to ensure public commemoration of the history and legacy of the Indian Residential School System.

September 30, 2021, marked the first official observance of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, following the identification of potential unmarked burial sites at the former Kamloops Residential School in British Columbia. The announcement from the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation has galvanized nationwide efforts by Indigenous communities to locate their missing children.

September 30 is also recognized as Orange Shirt Day, an Indigenous-led grassroots commemorative day inspired by the story of Indian Residential School Survivor Phyllis Webstad.

Phyllis was 6 years old when she wore her new orange shirt for her first day at Indian Residential School. Her shirt was immediately taken from her by school staff.

To honour the children who survived Indian Residential Schools and remember those who did not, many Canadians across the country wear an orange shirt, reinforcing that "Every Child Matters."

To honour truth-telling shared by Survivors and Intergenerational Survivors, it is important to understand the lasting impacts and ongoing challenges faced by First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals and communities, as a result of residential schools. This includes but it's not limited to: family separation and breakdown, intergenerational trauma, cycles of family violence and substance abuse, poverty, loss of intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledge and languages and enduring physical and mental health issues.

Observing this day to honour Survivors, their families and communities and to increase understanding of the history and legacy of the Indian Residential School System is one step in a long journey towards truth-telling and meaningful reconciliation.

Implementation Guidance

Timing of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is on September 30 each year. School boards are expected to observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30 or, if September 30 is a Saturday or Sunday, the preceding Friday.

Where possible, the ministry expects school boards to avoid scheduling the following on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation:

- professional activity days,
- examination days,
- a test required under the *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act, 1996*,
- the financial literacy assessment required to graduate secondary school,
- school athletic games or competitions during the school day,
- cultural activities (plays, concerts) not pertaining to the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

School boards are expected to communicate planned events to observe the day two weeks in advance to the school community, including students, parents, and educators.

Observing the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation may cause strong emotions in students. Where possible, schools should have student support and well-being staff on site on the day the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is observed (e.g., guidance counsellors, Indigenous Graduation Coaches or other members of the school board Indigenous Education Team). Schools should also provide a safe place that is supervised by supportive staff and students should be made aware of the availability of this room.

Criteria for selecting resources and activities

To observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, schools are expected to engage in activities that:

- emphasize remembrance, reflection, action and learning,
- are trauma-informed,
- are fact-based with appropriate historical context setting,
- honour Survivors, their families and communities,
- reflect the diversity among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples,
- are developmentally/grade appropriate to support the participation and learning of all students,
- include First Nation, Métis and Inuit student voice in all activities during the school day.

Where possible, schools are expected to have their school board Indigenous Education Lead support developing the approach to the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to ensure consistency across the board. Indigenous Education Leads

can also support in identifying resources that are reflective to regional relationships and context. Indigenous Education Leads are responsible for engaging with their Indigenous Education Councils when co-developing these initiatives to include local, experienced and knowledgeable First Nations, Inuit and Métis voices. Also provide an opportunity for Indigenous staff and students to be included in the planning of the day and the approach.

Conducting National Day for Truth and Reconciliation activities

Activities to mark the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation will take place during school hours. These activities should be planned and undertaken in alignment with other ministry policies, including the ministry's guidance on Guest (Third Party) Speakers and Presentations in Ontario Schools.

Schools should work closely with their school board Indigenous Education Lead / Team to get their guidance when selecting resources and activities, and when engaging with local Indigenous partners and organizations. Consider the opportunity to build collaborative and culturally responsive relationships with local First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities to collaborate on National Day for Truth and Reconciliation activities and learning throughout the year. The school board Indigenous Education Council is a great place to start building relationships.

Schools have discretion to choose the activities that they will carry out, provided they are conducted in alignment with these guidelines and the school board's broader priorities for Indigenous education. The following are examples of activities that schools may wish to undertake for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation:

- school assemblies,
- field trips,
- guest speakers,
- in-class learning,
- independent and/or group student projects,
- online virtual tours,
- school announcements within the classroom or other opportunities for discussion.

Expected Outcomes

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation provides an opportunity for schools to honour Indian residential school Survivors, their families, and communities, and to

increase understanding of the history and legacy of the Indian Residential School System. While this day is a focal point, the ministry expects school boards to embed learning and action toward reconciliation throughout the school year as a sustained practice of learning, reflection, and collective responsibility.

The Ontario curriculum also offers many opportunities to extend learning throughout the year. Educators may find that resources and ideas developed in preparation for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation can be leveraged across multiple subjects and learning activities throughout the school year.

It is the ministry's expectation that activities to observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation work toward the following outcomes:

- Increased knowledge about the history and enduring legacy of the Indian Residential School System
 - Foster understanding of the diverse experiences, by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, of the Indian Residential School System and its legacy.
 - Expose students to stories of strength, survivance, cultural continuity and resurgence of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals, communities, and nations,
 - Develop an age and grade appropriate understanding of intergenerational trauma and current realities many communities and families endure. (e.g. Loss of identity, loss of kinship, and social challenges)
- Safe, inclusive, and culturally responsive learning environments
 - Ensure learning environments uphold the dignity, identity, and well-being of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.
 - Embed reconciliation efforts into school culture, creating spaces where all students feel welcomed, represented, and supported.
- Deepened relationships with Indigenous partners
 - Strengthen collaboration with local First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities through consistent engagement and relationship building.
 - Encourage ongoing collaboration and co-development of activities, resources, and approaches that reflect local contexts and priorities.
- Meaningful student engagement in reconciliation
 - Create opportunities for students to engage in age-appropriate exploration of truth and reconciliation in ways that promote empathy, critical thinking, and civic responsibility.
 - Encourage student-led initiatives, inquiry, and local action toward reconciliation as part of the school culture.

Appendix A: Tips and Leading Practices

Tips for creating space for learning, listening, and reflection on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

Key considerations when engaging students in activities:

- When adapting or localizing learning opportunities or resources, take care to consider how First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, families, communities, and staff may experience the content, as well as how all learners and their communities may engage with it.
- Lead conversations by using prompts and guiding questions that encourage ongoing dialogue and shared learning (see Appendix B for examples).
- Highlight how First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities each have their own distinct histories, cultures, traditions, and perspectives. Explain how the Indian Residential School System may have affected different communities differently. Use grade-appropriate primary sources and materials created by diverse Indigenous individuals and groups (e.g., Survivors) to explore related themes.
- Avoid debate or role-playing, as these approaches can trivialize the harm caused by the Indian Residential School System and potentially force students into experiences that may be triggering.
- When including Indigenous perspectives and experiences, also look for narratives that celebrate stories of strength and cultural continuity of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals, communities, and nations.
- Provide time for ongoing reflection through activities such as group discussions, journaling, arts-based responses, or other activities to engage students.
- Provide learning activities that go beyond a single day. Continue to connect learning to the curriculum throughout the year, including in Social Studies, History, Language Arts, English, Science and Technology, and other curriculum areas to deepen understanding in grade-appropriate ways.

Key considerations for supporting students:

- Recognize that some First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and families may choose not to share cultural knowledge or personal experiences or may not have this knowledge due to historical loss; provide opportunities for students to explore ideas without feeling expected to speak on behalf of their community. First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and families should not be called upon to or relied on to share personal/cultural knowledge.

- Consider the opportunity to build collaborative and culturally responsive relationships with students' families and communities, whenever possible, and encourage open conversations about student supports that may be available.
- Provide safe, confidential, and accessible pathways for students to report concerns regarding harmful speech and actions (e.g., residential school denialism; anti-Indigenous racism).
- Use trauma-informed teaching strategies and response protocols, ensuring educators are equipped to offer support in a way that is compassionate, non-judgemental, and focused on student safety and well-being (e.g., prepare students for sensitive content; allow quiet participation; offer students the choice to take breaks or opt out when appropriate).

How to respond to residential school denialism:

- Truth-telling is foundational to reconciliation. Make clear that the history of the Indian Residential School System is well established through the stories of Survivors, through government and church records, through findings of national commissions and inquiries, and through the ongoing work of Indigenous communities.

Tips for welcoming Survivors, Elders, Métis Senators, Knowledge Keepers and knowledgeable members from communities into the school or classroom:

It is best to seek guidance from school board Indigenous Education Leads on who to invite and how to respectfully welcome community members into the school or classroom. Creating and building relationships with local First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and organizations is a critical component of respectful inclusion. Some general guidelines are offered below.

- Prepare ahead by reaching out early.
- Seek guidance about specific protocols they would like followed.
- Seek guidance related to cultural or ceremonial needs.
- Provide a warm, respectful welcome.
- Prepare students and parent/guardians in advance (share who the guest is, why they are visiting, what protocols to follow).
- Remain fully attentive to the experiences and stories being shared, alongside observing student engagement.
- Avoid tokenism or asking for trauma narratives.

- Express gratitude.
- Provide traditional foods or snacks, teachers should seek direction on the kinds of food to provide.
- Provide a quiet room where supports can be made available to students or staff.
- Offer Honoraria¹

Tips for choosing appropriate resources:

- Prioritize resources created by First Nations, Inuit, or Métis authors and educators; Survivors of Indian Residential Schools; Elders, Senators, Knowledge Keepers; Indigenous organizations from your area when possible.
- Schools are encouraged to engage with local First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities to collaborate on National Day for Truth and Reconciliation activities and resource selection.
- Use materials that reflect the diversity among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.
- School board Indigenous Education Councils are partners to help identify localized resources.

¹ School board Indigenous Education Leads can provide more information on offering honoraria.

Appendix B: Example Activities, Conversation Prompts and Guiding Questions

When planning activities for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, it is important for educators to pause and reflect:

- Why are we doing this activity?
- How will it support students to engage meaningfully with the histories and impacts of the Indian Residential School System and today's realities?

Activities should create opportunities to guide these discussions and support building understanding of these histories, encouraging students to think critically about the past and its ongoing impacts. Conversation prompts can be powerful tools to guide these discussions, deepen understanding, and foster empathy.

Purpose of the conversation prompts

These sample conversation prompts and activities are designed to support thoughtful dialogue and reflection. They support students to explore First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories, cultures, and perspectives, while providing educators with practical examples for integrating these conversations into learning activities across various subjects and grades.

Why conversations matter

- They help build students' knowledge and understanding of the Indian Residential School System and its impacts.
- They provide opportunities to close gaps in understanding and seeking to address any misunderstandings and misconceptions.
- Reflection activities allow students to express their reactions to the legacy of Indian Residential School System and seek further clarity about related learnings and wonderings.
- Activities may conclude by inviting students to further their learning and engage in meaningful acts toward reconciliation.

Use in the classroom

Conversation prompts and activities are organized by division (Kindergarten, Primary (Grades 1-3), Junior (Grades 4-6), Intermediate (Grades 7-10), and Senior (Grades 11-12)), and may be adapted to suit a variety of grades and in ways that reflect students'

identities, experiences, prior learning, fluency in the language of instruction, and the supports available. The following prompts and related activities are intended as examples only.

Kindergarten:

- Invite students to wear orange or invite students to colour or paint or create an orange shirt design in class to wear (e.g., a paper cut out, button). Explain that the colour orange has become an important symbol connected to September 30th, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, which coincides with Orange Shirt Day. This day honours the histories and impacts of the Indian Residential School System and serves as a reminder that “Every Child Matters”, a phrase coined by the Orange Shirt Society. Educators can share how wearing orange is one way to honour the Survivors, their families, and communities, and show support for a commitment to learning, remembering, and taking action toward reconciliation. Students can share their creations and one way to remember and care for others in their school or local community. Students can identify a list of new words and symbols to be added to a classroom chart.
- Engage in a pre-reading strategy where students look through illustrations in a grade-appropriate children's picture book and use simple sentence starters, or prompts such as, “What do you notice?” “What do you wonder?” “How do you think the character might feel in this picture?”, “What questions do you still have?”. Books may focus on the Indian Residential School System and community members reviving or strengthening their languages, traditions, and identities. Following the read aloud, provide students with some loose parts, arts and crafts items, and small pieces of paper with familiar and caring words. Invite them to create a visual representation that shows their feelings about the read aloud. Encourage them to think about how the materials, colours, and words can represent specific ideas or understandings, emotions, and connections. Educators might ask questions like: “Why did you choose these materials and colours?” “What do the materials, colours, shapes, or textures you used make you feel?” “What story does your art piece tell?” “What do you hope others feel when they look at your creation?”.
- Create word walls and word flash cards as a strategy for helping learners learn new words and their meaning (e.g. care, listen, hope).

Primary (Grades 1-3):

- Have a class conversation using an age-appropriate, trauma-informed image selected in partnership with the Indigenous Education Lead, connected to remembrance, truth, and reconciliation as a conversation starter. Educators may also refer to the Criteria for Selecting Resources and Activities (pg. 5) in the main section of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation Guidance and Resource Document. Ask students: "What do you think this image is trying to tell us?" "How do the people, objects, and/or settings in the image connect with the idea of truth and reconciliation?" "Does this image remind you of anything you have learned about earlier?" "If you could add one thing to this image to show remembrance or reconciliation, what might it be?" "What are some ways we can show respect for different traditions and cultures and help support everyone in our community feel they belong?". Examples of images may include:
 - National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation logo,
 - a group of children dressed in orange shirts at a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation gathering,
 - an illustration from a previously read Indigenous picture book, such as an image of a grandparent sharing residential school memories, surrounded by cultural symbols, showing their present-day connection to cultural identity.
 - reconciliation artwork that explores interrelationships and connections with the land and the revival and strengthening of community cultural connections.
- Engage in picture book read alouds that support students in understanding some of the challenges that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals and communities faced because of Indian Residential Schools and shows how community members are working to preserve, protect, and maintain their languages, traditions, and identities. Use simple sentence starters or prompts such as: "What do you notice?" "What do you wonder?" "How do you think the character felt when they were forced to lose a part of their culture or identity?" "How does the character connect to their culture?" "What are some things that connect you to your family or community?" "What questions do you still have?"

Junior (Grades 4-6):

- (Grades 4-6) Engage in a read aloud activity featuring short stories, poetry, or song lyrics by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit creators. Have students use a digital

tool to create a word cloud that includes words and ideas that stand out for them and lessons learned related to the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Use conversation prompts such as: "How does this story connect to what you already know?" "What do you notice?" "What do you wonder?" "What are our shared responsibilities to each other and to the land we live and learn on?". Teachers should allow sufficient time for students to access and connect their prior knowledge to new learning.

- (Grades 5–6) Make a class list of rights that children should have. Ask: "If you could make a list of rights for children, what would you include?" Introduce the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, focusing on specific areas like the right to education or culture, and identify which rights were not respected through the Indian Residential School System. Then, show a news clip of how one of the TRC Calls to Action has been implemented (e. g., through an urban Indigenous language nest program) to provide opportunities for children and families today and into the future. Students can create statements to show their commitment to one of the calls to action in their school or community. Use some prompts, such as, "Why does this matter for reconciliation today?" "What steps could be taken to protect Indigenous languages and cultures today?". This activity may be spread out over a few days or part an integrated activity.

Intermediate (Grades 7-10):

- Engage in conversations about the variety of ways in which historical colonization, assimilation policy and the Indian Residential School System disrupted customary practices and impacted well-being (e.g., forced relocation, removal from families and communities, prohibited ceremonial practices, loss of language, change of diet/limited nutrition). Educators may consider using excerpts in consultation with their Indigenous Education Lead from books, news articles, video clips, podcasts, or other culturally appropriate and accurate resources to support conversations. Prompt questions may include: "In what ways were languages and the related cultural knowledges important, and what might have been lost when they were prohibited?" "How might the loss of languages and related knowledges continue to impact First Nations, Métis, and Inuit today?" "In what ways can we acknowledge and celebrate contributions by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals and communities in various sectors today (e.g., healthcare, science and technology, business, education, law) while understanding the historical and ongoing impacts of the Indian Residential School System today?"

- Include the word “reconciliation” in Tier 2 vocabulary instruction. Explore its meaning and word structure. Use a prompt such as: “Looking at the middle of the word, ‘reconcile’, how might it support your understanding of the meaning of reconciliation and what processes are needed for reconciliation?”. After learning about the term ‘reconciliation’, invite students to engage in a discussion on what they think acts of truth and reconciliation might look like, and research an example of what actions or initiatives have already been taken to repair relationships and promote healing, in their local community, across Ontario, or in Canada. Some supporting prompts may include: “What steps were taken?” “What impacts might they have, and why are those impacts important?” “What is something new you learned about reconciliation, and how might this understanding shift the way you act going forward?”.

Senior (Grades 11-12):

- Engage in conversations about the impacts of the Indian Residential School System and the removal of children and youth from communities. Invite students to consider how these impacts continue to shape relationships and opportunities today between Indigenous (e.g., First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) and non-Indigenous communities. Encourage connections to the subject area. Educators may consider using excerpts chosen in consultation with their Indigenous Education Lead from books, news articles, video clips, podcasts, quotations, maps, or other culturally appropriate and accurate resources to support conversations. Some prompts may include: “How does this information connect to what you already know?” “How do the impacts described in the article influence current issues?” “What actions could help build new and stronger relationships moving forward?” “What suggestions might you have for additional learning?”.
- Select one of the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that directly relates to the subject area. Encourage students to read it and consider its overall intent and meaning. These prompts may help guide the conversation or a student inquiry: “What is the main goal?” “What progress has been made towards implementing it?” “If not implemented, what limitations or factors have prevented it from full implementation?” “How might these challenges be addressed to advance acts of reconciliation today?” “What new perspectives or understandings does this give you?”.