

# Changing the Legacy of Residential Schools – pp. 22–25



**Summary:** This selection teaches us about the legacy of residential schools and how communities are healing from that legacy.

**Reading Level:** 🍷🍷+

**Vocabulary:** legacy, forbidden, spirituality, substandard, stereotypes, assimilate, heal

**Minds on Reflection (Before Reading):** How are residential schools different from the school you attend?

**Understanding the Page:**

- 1 The title of this selection is “Changing the Legacy of Residential Schools.” What do you know about the term *legacy*? Is legacy a positive word or a negative word, or is it neutral? Discuss with a partner.
- 2 In this selection, we learn about how students were forbidden to speak their languages, or practise traditional customs and spirituality. Consider how this would feel if it were you and your family who were forbidden to practise your traditions. How do you think you would respond to this?
- 3 Why do you think it is so important for students and all of Canada to be aware of residential schools, their legacy, and to talk about what happened?
- 4 In 2008, the federal government apologized to Survivors of residential schools. Is a simple verbal apology enough?

What has the government been doing to make things right with Survivors and their ancestors? What more should the government do?



**Social Studies** - On page 22, we learn that in residential schools children were forbidden to practise traditional customs and spirituality. What do you think were some of the impacts of forcing children to give up their traditional customs and spirituality? Revisit Norman Yakeleya’s interview on page 24 in considering your answer. How was Yakeleya affected by not learning the traditional customs and spiritual practices of his people? Research some of the traditional customs of Indigenous communities where you live. What are Indigenous communities doing to ensure that these practices are passed on to the next generations?



**Language Arts** - On pages 22 and 23, there are two images showing children in residential school. Using these images to help you think, write down the keywords of any questions you have about these images. How do the images make you feel? Using your notes, write a poem about the images. Share your poem with a partner.



**Health** - Indian Residential Schools impacted the health of individuals and communities in a large way. With a partner, make a list of the ways that residential schools impacted the physical health of Indigenous Peoples, and the mental health of individuals. Brainstorm some ways that the health of Indigenous Peoples is being supported today.



**Health** - On page 22, we learn that when some Indigenous children returned home after residential school, they felt like they didn’t belong in their own communities. Norman Yakeleya expresses the same idea on page 24 when he says, “... I was locked out by my own people” and “There was a price to pay.” What price did Yakeleya pay? Imagine feeling that you do not belong in your own family and community through no fault of your own. What effect do you think these feelings had on the spiritual, mental, emotional, and even physical health of former residential school students? Discuss your thoughts in a small group.

**Changing the Legacy of Residential Schools**

**22**

Children in class at Birtle Indian Residential School in Manitoba, c. 1957.

For over 100 years, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children were removed from their homes and communities by the Canadian government and forced to attend residential schools. They were forbidden to speak their languages, or practise traditional customs and spirituality. They lived in substandard conditions and experienced abuse. They did not see examples of normal family life.

When Indigenous children left the schools, they often felt that they did not belong in their own communities. They didn't have the traditional skills to help their parents, and they had been taught to feel ashamed of their Indigenous identity. Racism and stereotypes meant they also did not feel welcome in Canadian society. Many residential schools did not provide good quality education, so those who attended the schools were often unable to succeed in higher education or the workplace.

**23**

**Taking Action**

**Orange Shirt Day**

When Phyllis arrived at her residential school at the age of six, all of her clothes were taken, including the orange shirt her grandmother had bought her for the first day of school. Phyllis has spoken publicly about how the colour orange reminded her throughout her life of how the school taught her that she and the other kids didn't matter. She started a national movement, Orange Shirt Day, to acknowledge residential school Survivors and to show that every child matters. Orange Shirt Day is recognized all across Canada every year, on September 30th. What will you, your class, or your school do to honour Survivors next September 30th?

“We need to speak about it; we need to learn about it.”

—Phyllis Webstad, founder of the Orange Shirt Day movement



**Taking Action**

On page 23, we learn that Phyllis Webstad began the Orange Shirt Day movement to honour the Survivors of residential schools. Find out more about Orange Shirt Day. What are schools across the country doing on September 30th to honour residential school Survivors and to show that every child matters? What does your school community do, or could be doing? What ideas do you have for getting your school community involved?



**Media/Art** - Make a poster sharing important information about Orange Shirt Day, and encouraging people to participate. Start a poster campaign in your school to make sure everyone participates on September 30th!



**Social Studies** - Assimilation is when one group begins thinking and acting like another group. For First Nations peoples, this happened through being forbidden to speak ancestral languages and to practise cultural and spiritual traditions. What is the situation like in Canada today? Research the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s *Calls to Action* and see if you can find anything that addresses assimilation.



**Language Arts** - Using what you have learned in this selection, any questions you might have, and current events relating to truth and reconciliation, write an opinion article giving your perspective on the current state of truth and reconciliation in Canada today.

