



September 23, 2024

Dear Families,

From September 23-27th, we will be observing a week of learning leading up to the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation on September 30th. First known as "Orange Shirt Day," wearing an orange shirt on September 30th began in Williams Lake, BC in 2013 at the St. Joseph Mission (SJM). At this residential school commemoration event, survivor Phyllis Webstad told the story of her shiny new orange shirt being taken away from her on her first day of school at the Mission. Wearing an orange shirt in early Fall is symbolic as it is the time of year when children were removed from their families and forced to attend residential schools.

There were 140 federally run residential schools that began in 1831, with the last school closing in 1998. More than 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children attended these schools. While this may feel like something that took place hundreds of years ago, the impacts of these "schools" continues to take its toll on the lives of Indigenous peoples today. There are an estimated 80,000 survivors living today supported by their families and communities. Sadly, many children did not make it home and unmarked graves continue to be identified in the areas surrounding former residential school sites.

Survivors of residential schools advocated for recognition and reparations and demanded accountability for the intergenerational impacts of harms caused. One of the responses was the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that operated from 2008-2015. This Commission provided those directly or indirectly affected by the legacy of the residential school policy with an opportunity to share their direct stories and experiences. The Commission released its final report detailing 94 calls to action. The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is a response to Call to Action 80, which called for a federal statutory day of commemoration.

At Golden Ears Elementary, we will be embarking on many activities and experiences throughout the school year to learn more about Indigenous cultures, reflect on the profound injustice of residential schools and ensure that the intergenerational trauma suffered by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families is not forgotten. All students, parents and staff are invited to wear something orange every day this week.

As adults, many of us did not learn about Indigenous cultures of Canada, residential schools or the history of the land we live on when we were in school. If you would like to learn more about the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, Orange Shirt Day, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, please visit the websites below:

<https://www.orangeshirtday.org/>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/national-day-truth-reconciliation.html>

I have also been engaging in my own learning and recommend the following books:

- 21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act by Bob Joseph
- Highway of Tears by Jessica McDiarmid
- The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America by Thomas King
- The Truth About Stories by Thomas King
- Seven Fallen Feathers by Tanya Talaga
- From the Ashes by Jessie Thistle
- Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations by Richard Wagamese
- Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- Unreconciled: Family, Truth, and Indigenous Resistance by Jesse Went

If you are interested in learning more about the Indigenous cultures of Canada, please contact me at laura_brandon@sd42.ca

Sincerely,
Laura Brandon
Principal/Directrice
École Golden Ears Elementary

