



National Day for Truth and Reconciliation / Orange Shirt Day

A guided learning journey

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**Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
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Guided learning journey on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

September 30 is recognized as the [National Day for Truth and Reconciliation](#), also known as [Orange Shirt Day](#), inspired by the story of Phyllis Webstad, a residential school survivor whose orange shirt was taken from her on her first day of school. This day is more than just a day of commemoration; it is a powerful reminder of the truths that continue to shape this land and the lives of those who live on it. For many Indigenous communities, the day marks a time of collective mourning and continued survival. For settlers, it is a call to listen, unlearn, and take responsibility.

This guided learning journey offers a hands-on and immersive approach to engaging with the legacy of residential schools and the broader movement to return Indigenous lands and decision-making to Indigenous communities. This journey invites participants to interact with the land, listen to survivors, and reflect deeply on what decolonization can look like in practice. At its heart is the understanding that truth and reconciliation are not moments, but lifelong and developing processes.

The legacy of residential schools and the movement for land back are not separate, they are deeply interconnected. To help make this connection, this guide highlights land back initiatives that center Indigenous stewardship, governance, and healing, all of which are integral to reconciliation that goes beyond symbolism.

Understanding the legacy of residential schools is not the end of this learning journey, it is the beginning of a lifelong commitment to change. If truth is the seed, reconciliation is the work of nurturing something new to grow. Indigenous communities are actively reclaiming, healing, and rebuilding. Reconciliation means supporting these efforts and upholding Indigenous leadership.

Woodland Cultural Centre: Virtual tour of the Mohawk Institute Residential School

The Woodland Cultural Centre (WCC) stands as a powerful site of memory, learning, and cultural preservation. Located on the former grounds of the Mohawk Institute Residential School, one of Canada's oldest residential schools, WCC plays a vital role in truth telling, education, and reconciliation.

Save the Evidence

WCC'S [Save the Evidence](#) campaign is a restoration initiative to preserve the Mohawk Institute building. This project ensures that the stories of survivors are not erased and provides future generations with a space to learn from Canada's colonial past. Their final goal is to create a fully realized Interpretive Centre that will be the definitive destination for information about the history of residential schools in Canada, the experiences of survivors of the schools, and the impact that the residential school system has had on Indigenous communities.

[Truth and Reconciliation presentations](#)

Through custom presentations, WCC facilitates meaningful dialogue on residential schools, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls to Action. These sessions help individuals and organizations understand the impacts of colonization and take steps toward informed reconciliation. It follows an in depth understanding of TRC's final report, its 10 Principles, and 94 Calls to Action. It also provides insight into the Progress Report, Examples of Implementations, Personal Acts of Reconciliation, Barriers to Reconciliation, and an explanation of what Reconciliation is not.

[A space of experience](#)

The WCC offers a variety of tours, education programs, and workshops that offer the opportunities to learn about the past, present, and future of Southern Ontario's First Nations peoples.

Whose Land – Interactive territorial acknowledgment platform

[This digital map](#) helps users identify the Indigenous Nations and treaties connected to the land they live, work, and gather on. The map also has educational videos that are available to give you a better understanding of why land acknowledgements are important, and the way Indigenous people view their relationship to land.

It is a starting point for understanding whose land you occupy, and how that land came to be occupied.

Importantly, this interactive digital map is a tool to reflect on histories of displacement and the structures that supported them. This includes the Residential School system, and the map is intended to be used as an educational tool to create dialogue around reconciliation.

By learning whose land you are on, you are also learning the context in which systems such as the residential schools operated.

- Search by postal code or zoom in on the map to explore the different Indigenous territories, treaty relationships, and First Nations, Inuit, Métis communities.
- Learn about the ongoing significance of land acknowledgments, and why they should be connected to meaningful action.
- Use the platform as a tool to localize reconciliation efforts and recognize your own relationship to Indigenous land.

Yellowhead Institute – Land Back: A Red Paper

The [Land Back: Red Paper](#) by the Yellowhead Institute is a landmark Indigenous-led report that reframes reconciliation by placing land return and Indigenous jurisdiction at the center. This resource challenges readers to move beyond symbolism and into the structural work of decolonization.

Produced through the leadership of Indigenous scholars, policy experts, and community organizers, the report outlines how Indigenous lands were taken, not just through historic acts of violence, but through ongoing policy, bureaucracy, and legal manipulation. It also outlines what restitution can and should look like when grounded in Indigenous law and governance.

The Red Paper:

- Traces the mechanisms of dispossession through land surrenders, the Indian Act, environmental exploitation, and bureaucratic control. It shows how colonialism is not just a past event, but an ongoing structure.
- Highlights community-led solutions, including land trusts, conservation strategies, land buybacks, and assertion of jurisdiction as pathways to land back. These are examples of Indigenous resurgence in action.

This resource is especially powerful for educators, policymakers, and organizations looking to make deeper commitments to reconciliation that go beyond education and into reparation and restitution. It is an accessible guide to what land back can mean, and why it matters.

Land back as cultural, emotional, and intergenerational

To deepen your understanding of the movement, the article “[Land Back: What Do We Mean?](#)” offers an accessible perspective on what land back means to Indigenous youth. It is a reminder that land back is about restoring language, culture, kinship, and reciprocal relationship to the land.

Additionally, the poem “[Beyond ‘Thank You for the Real Estate’](#)” invites the reader to sit with the discomfort of platitudes and symbolic gestures. The poem is a refusal, a mourning, and a call to responsibility. It challenges each person to ask: what are you really willing to give back?

These pieces, alongside the *Red Paper*, show that land back is not a single strategy, but a movement rooted in community. It is as much about restoring Indigenous futures as it is about confronting colonial pasts.

From residential schools to land back

The violence of the residential school system was not only about removing children from their families, but it was also about severing Indigenous People from their languages, worldviews, and land. The same colonial system that created residential schools also enabled the theft of Indigenous territories and the dismantling of Indigenous governance.

In recent years, increased public awareness of the residential school system has opened the door for broader conversations about the ongoing impacts of colonialism. This has created space to call attention to the root issue: the systemic denial of Indigenous self-determination and self-governance. Land back is a movement to confront and change this root issue.

As you engage with this guide, ask yourself:

- What does reconciliation mean to you?
- What are you willing to return?
- What are you willing to change?