



Orange Shirt Day

Every Child Matters: Orange Shirt Day, September 30

On Wednesday, September 30, communities across the United States and Canada wear orange to honor the Indigenous children taken from their families and sent to boarding and residential schools. We remember the children who never came home, and we stand with the survivors, families, and nations who carry that history today.

In the United States, September 30 is also observed as the National Day of Remembrance for U.S. Indian Boarding Schools. At Native Pathways, we see this day as part of our everyday work: Native languages, arts, and ways of knowing are still here, carried forward by the communities these schools tried to erase.

Why Orange?

In 1973, six-year-old Phyllis Webstad of the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation arrived at St. Joseph's Mission residential school near Williams Lake, British Columbia. She was wearing a bright new orange shirt her grandmother had bought for her. It was taken from her on her first day, and she never saw it again.

When Phyllis shared her story publicly in 2013, the orange shirt became a symbol of everything these schools took from children: their families, languages, cultures, and sense of belonging. The movement's message is simple: **Every Child Matters**. Canada has observed September 30 as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation since 2021.

The U.S. Boarding School Era

Orange Shirt Day began in Canada, but the United States ran its own vast system. From 1819 to 1969, federal policy removed Native children from their homes and placed them in schools designed to strip away their languages, cultures, and identities.

In 2024, the U.S. Department of the Interior released the final report of its Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative. It found:

- **417** federal Indian boarding schools across 37 states or then-territories
- At least **973** American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children who died while attending them
- At least **74** marked and unmarked burial sites at 65 school sites

In October 2024, the President of the United States issued the federal government's first formal apology for the boarding school system. The work of truth and healing continues: advocates are still calling on Congress to create a Truth and Healing Commission on U.S. Indian boarding school policies.

How You Can Observe

- **Wear orange** on September 30, and share why. When buying an orange shirt, choose one designed by a Native artist or sold by a Native-owned business.
- **Listen to survivors.** The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition shares survivor stories and resources at boardingschoolhealing.org.
- **Learn the local history.** Visit the Sherman Indian Museum in Riverside, or read about St. Boniface and Sherman through tribal and regional archives.
- **Support Native language and culture.** Explore our Luiseño-Payómkawichum resources, join a Native Pathways workshop, or [donate](#) to keep Native-led programming free for our community.