



SMALL GROUP LESSON

for youth 11-13

A K'amksiiwaa guide to bringing Orange Shirt Day to your middle school kids.

Orange Shirt Day can feel like a daunting topic to discuss with our pre-teen students - which is one reason Creator wants us to do exactly that. Orange Shirt Day began in 2013, designed to educate those in this country we call Canada around the truths of the residential school system. It is daunting because it brings to awareness the impact of the cultural genocide that began with indigenous children and the impacts that resonate today. We hold this day on September 30th, and you can use any ideas from this document around that date.

Perhaps as a youth leader you are thinking, maybe it's best to just wear an orange shirt and leave it at that. There aren't any indigenous youth at your church, so maybe it's not necessary. Or maybe there are indigenous youth at your church and discussing residential schools could get awkward or worse you might say something offensive. My prayer is that we can all pray for courage and recognize that those reasons are not acceptable. Ignorance does make us part of the problem. So, let's swallow our fear and pride and spend some time with our middle school kids sharing around a very real injustice.


This content won't make for a light and easy night. You know your youth best and can adapt any part of this, as well as only use pieces of this. You might pair this type of sharing with a meal together as it might be difficult to transition into a throwing marshmallows game after this sharing. Or maybe not, you know your kids best.

BEGINNING

We begin in a circle. Circles are important symbols and ways of being in many indigenous nations. As we sit in the circle, share that circles remind us of our togetherness. They put us facing all those we are spending time with. No one is left out. Everyone belongs. Everyone is on the same level and has a voice to contribute.

If you are comfortable, you can use a talking stick to direct the sharing. It would be helpful if an elder from your community could share any protocol around the use of a talking stick. If that isn't possible, you can still use an object to pass around as a communication tool. This helps facilitate respect and patience as youth come to learn that it is their turn to share when they have the talking stick.

You may then open your circle with prayer as well as a land acknowledgment. Acknowledging the land we stand on is an important first step in recognizing truth on the way to reconciliation. If you don't know whose land you stand on, this is a great opportunity to find out!



[THIS](#) is a link to a map that can show you where you live. You can share this with the youth in the circle if you would like. There is even an app that can travel with you on your cell phone, so you always know where you are standing. For best practice, when possible invite elders from your area to share about their nation. Otherwise a land acknowledgement doesn't need to be overly complicated. It is not meant to be an eloquent token, but something that will actually be impactful for you and your youth. [This link](#) can help you see examples, but you are encouraged to create your own.

Next in the circle, we introduce ourselves. With middle school kids you might want to direct this a little. Perhaps asking them for 3 facts about themselves. Or maybe asking specific questions: name, where your family is from, favourite dessert etc.

We also want to do a check-in during the circle. This is where each person shares a number between 1 and 10 describing how they are feeling. 1 being really anxious, or bored, 10 being very very happy, relaxed and engaged. Youth can also answer 50 which means, unsure. This can be done several times to help guide your discussion and let you understand when kids need more support.

Finally in the circle piece, ask youth to talk about an animal or plant that means something to them. This can be a pet, a favourite tree in their yard, or just an animal they love to see or draw. This acknowledges our connection or kin-ness with all creation and welcomes all that God has made into our circle.

ORANGE SHIRT DAY

Now we talk about Orange Shirt Day. As a community we have become ready to venture there. You can move out of the circle or remain. Begin by asking youth what they know about Orange Shirt Day.

Phyllis Webstad wrote a picture book called "The Orange Shirt Story". It is available through Amazon, or if you have a local bookstore, go there and have it ordered. I really enjoy reading picture books to my middle school, pre-teen students. While they aren't usually written for that group, there is something special about sharing a story that way with them.

Alternatively, you can visit www.OrangeShirtDay.org and share the video of Phyllis Webstad telling her story.

Now is another great time for a check-in to see how everyone is doing. With that check-in complete, we can now ask our kids to share something they learned from the story or video. A great way to do this is hand out paper and have them write their learning anonymously. Then collect all the pages. Remind kids that spelling does not matter here. Read out all of the kids' learning. Sometimes with this age group it is helpful to guide them to remember their learning. You might want to ask "What does Orange Shirt Day symbolize the loss of?" They can write these ideas down for you to share instead.

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

Split kids into smaller groups. Give each group a map of your local area. This should be fairly easy to print from the internet. Have each group locate your town or building on the map. The challenge is to guess a place on the map that is 85km away from where they are right now. Give kids 5 minutes to decide on their guess and then have them share. Congratulate any correct students.

Discussion: Have you ever been to (place that is 85km away)? How did you get there? Share that some residential schools were that far away from home, many were even further. And many children, some as young as 6 and 7 missed their families so much that they tried to walk that distance to get back to them. Some died trying to do that.

ALTERNATE GROUP ACTIVITY

Return kids to the circle and ask them what they will be doing 300 sleeps from now. Share the poem/song "[300 sleeps](#)" by Jennifer Wiffin. A great listening exercise is to have youth sketch or draw while they listen to a poem or song. This would work well with this poem. Give them paper or a sketch book and allow them to doodle as they listen.

Discussion: It is hard to imagine exactly what we will do in 300 sleeps because it feels so far away from now. What is the longest amount of time you have ever spent away from your family? Orange Shirt Day recognizes that many young indigenous children were forced to spend a lot of time away from their families. I think we can imagine how hard that would be even though our families annoy us sometimes.

SCRIPTURE TIME

Luke 10:25-37

Read the scripture and ask the youth how this story connects to Orange Shirt Day. Show [Brooke Prentis](#) sharing her thoughts on this well-known scripture. She is an Aboriginal woman from Australia.

CLOSING CIRCLE

How can we be better neighbours now that we know more about Orange Shirt Day? How might Phyllis Webstad's story help others share?

Close the circle with a round of hope. Give everyone a turn with the talking stick and allow them to share what they want, but they must end their turn with something that makes them hopeful.

(resource written by Erica Azak, Gitwinksihlkw Corps, BC)

