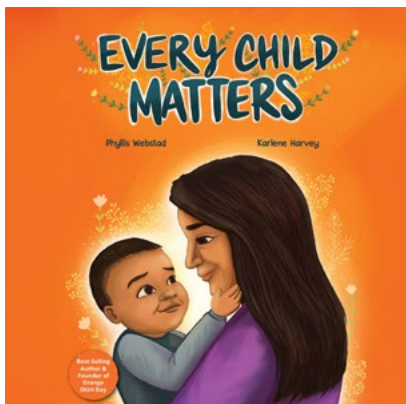

Children's Books on Truth and Reconciliation

With the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation coming up on September 30, we wanted to share some of our favourite picture books about residential schools and reconciliation. These books help introduce young children to the meaning behind Orange Shirt Day and residential schools, reconciliation, and the importance of remembering and honouring the experiences of Indigenous people in Canada. All books are by Indigenous authors and have been recommended by librarians and Indigenous educators.

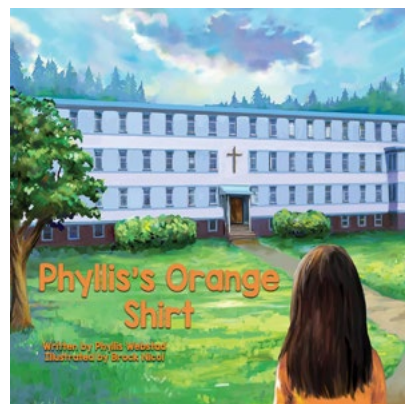
Barbara Johnston



Every Child Matters
by Phyllis Webstad, illustrated by
Karlene Harvey

This beautiful and empowering picture book shares the meaning behind the phrase “Every Child Matters.” Phyllis Webstad, the founder of Orange Shirt Day, has an important message: “If you’re a Residential School Survivor or an Intergenerational Survivor—you matter. For the children who didn’t make it home—you matter. The child inside every one of us matters. Every Child Matters.”

Recommended for ages 4 and up



Phyllis's Orange Shirt
by Phyllis Webstad, illustrated by
Brock Nicol

This book tells the story of Phyllis Webstad, who, as a young girl, wore a brand new orange shirt from her grandmother on her first day at a residential school, only to have it taken away from her. Her story is the inspiration behind Orange Shirt Day, which honours the Indigenous children who were sent away to residential schools in Canada. This book was adapted from Phyllis's book *The Orange Shirt Story*, which was written for older children.

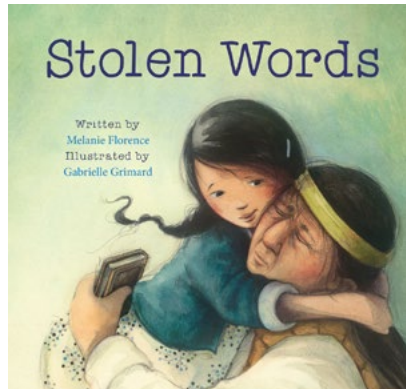
Recommended ages: 3–6 years



When We Were Alone
by David A. Robertson, illustrated
by Julie Flett

Through the eyes of a young girl and her grandmother, this book delicately explains the history and impact of residential schools. The grandmother shares stories with her granddaughter about her past, highlighting how Indigenous children were taken away and how they found ways to hold on to their identity. The story is both sensitively told and beautifully illustrated. This book is also available in a bilingual Swampy Cree/English edition.

Recommended ages: 4–8 years



Stolen Words

by Melanie Florence, illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard

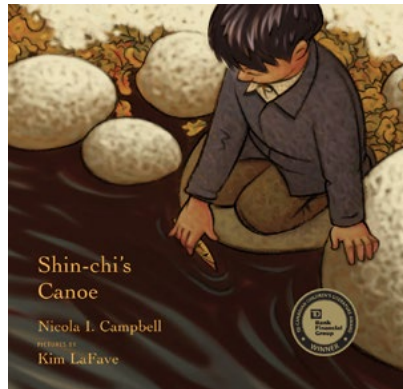
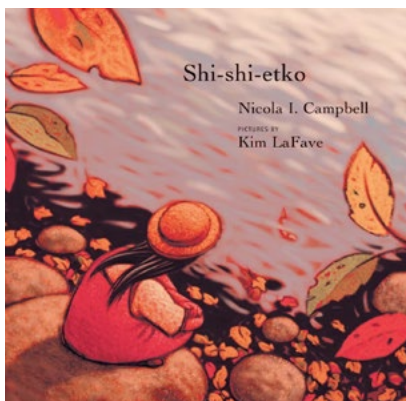
This book tells the story of a little girl who helps her grandfather regain his lost Cree language, which was taken from him during his time at a residential school. It's a gentle introduction to the impact of residential schools and the importance of language and cultural preservation.

Recommended ages: 5–7 years

Shi-shi-etko

by Nicola Campbell, illustrated by Kim LaFave

Shi-shi-etko is a young girl who has four days before she leaves home for residential school. Her family has many teachings to share with her, about her culture and the land. The story follows Shi-shi-etko as she absorbs the world around her and collects a “bag of memories” at



the instruction of her grandmother. But she doesn't take the memories with her. Instead she buries them under a tree, for safekeeping while she is gone.

Also by Nicola Campbell is the follow-up book *Shi-chi's Canoe*.

Recommended ages: 4–8 years

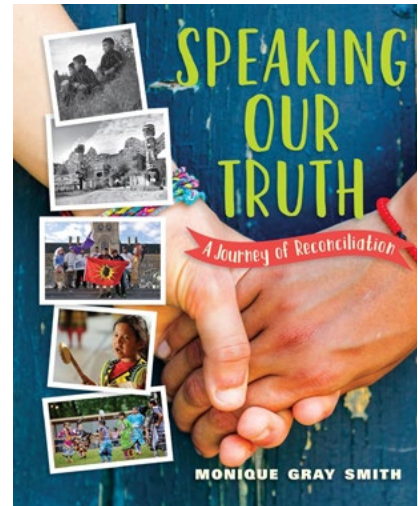
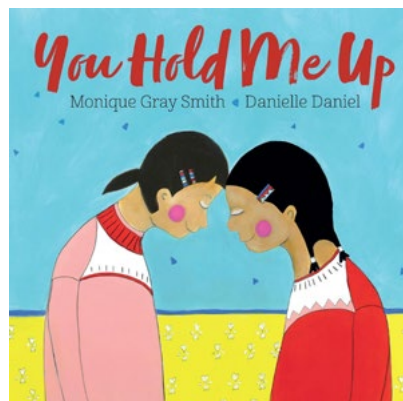
You Hold Me Up

by Monique Gray Smith, illustrated by Danielle Daniel

This book focuses on themes of reconciliation, building relationships, and supporting one another. It encourages children to show love and support for each other and consider each other's well-being in their every day actions.

Recommended ages: 3–5

Barbara Johnston is the managing editor of The Early Childhood Educator and a partner with West Coast Editorial Associates.



Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation by Monique Gray Smith

While this non-fiction book by Monique Gray Smith is recommended for ages 9 to 12, I think it's also a great resource for educators. The book examines the residential school system and explains their traumatic and lasting impact on Indigenous people. It gives the topic a human face with stories of adults and children who have been affected by the residential school system in a variety of ways. Written in a very engaging way, the book has many photos and illustrations, along with text boxes that explain complex terms and ideas. The book also explores paths to allyship and reconciliation, and it addresses themes of healing, resilience, and the importance of understanding and acknowledging historical injustices. It ultimately emphasizes the need for empathy, respect, and dialogue in the journey toward reconciliation.

Ages 9 and up.