

# Orange Shirt Day

## 2022 Education Toolkit



Developed by Alaska Children's Trust



Online version available:  
[alaskachildrenstrust.org/orange-shirt-day](http://alaskachildrenstrust.org/orange-shirt-day)

## Boarding Schools in Alaska

identified by the National  
Native American Boarding  
School Healing Coalition

### Anchorage

Anvik Mission (Christ Church)  
Bethel Regional High School  
Chooutla  
Copper Valley  
Covenant High School  
Douglas Island Friends  
Mission School  
Eklutna (Tyonek)

### Fairbanks

Friends High School

### Galena

### Holy Cross

Jessee Lee  
Kanakanak (Dillingham-  
Kanakanak)  
Kodiak Aleutian Regional  
High School

### Kosorefsky

Mt. Edgecumbe

### Nenana

Nenana High School  
Nunapitsinghak Moravian  
Children's Home

### Palmer

Palmer House  
Pius Tenth Mission  
Seward Sanitarium  
Sitka Industrial Training  
School (Sheldon Jackson)  
St. Mark's Mission  
St. Mary's

Victory Bible School

### Wasilla

### White Mountain

William E. Beltz School  
(Nome-Beltz)  
Woody Island Mission and  
Orphanage  
Wrangell Institute

Did you know...

The National Native American Boarding School  
Healing Coalition has identified 33 boarding schools  
that operated in Alaska from the late 1800s through  
the 1970s.

Alaska Native students also attended boarding  
schools outside of Alaska, including the Chilocco  
Indian School in Oklahoma and the Chemawa Indian  
School in Oregon.

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Speak the  
truth about  
our history

Remember the  
children



01.

# UNDERSTANDING OUR HISTORY

"We are the descendants of grandparents, aunts, uncles and parents who were stolen from their homes and from their families so that their cultures, traditions, and languages could be wiped away from their memories...

We are still here. The will to survive is engrained in us - passed down through the generations by our ancestors."

- US Secretary of the Interior  
Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo)



**"The color orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared."**

- Phyllis Webstad, boarding school survivor and founder of Orange Shirt Day

#### NOTE

This toolkit discusses abuse and trauma. We encourage all readers to practice self-care strategies and seek help if needed. A list of grounding exercises and free, confidential help lines can be found [here](#).

# WHAT IS ORANGE SHIRT DAY?

Wear orange to remember boarding schools on September 30.

Orange Shirt Day was started by Phyllis (Jack) Webstad, who left her home on the Dog Creek reserve in Canada in 1973 to attend boarding school. When she got to school, she was stripped and her clothing, including her favorite orange shirt given to her by her grandmother, was taken away. Phyllis started Orange Shirt Day (also called National Day of Remembrance for US Indian Boarding Schools) to raise awareness of the impacts of the residential school system.

On this day, we recognize the damage the residential school system did to Indigenous children, lifeways, and cultures. Indigenous people across the continent are in mourning. In recent years, over a thousand children's graves have been uncovered at residential schools in the US and Canada. At the Alaska Children's Trust, we firmly stand with Alaska Native people, and all Indigenous peoples, as they go through the pain and start the long healing process that will follow this and future discoveries – discoveries that were already known by Native communities but are finally receiving widespread attention.

## Boarding School History

# WHAT WERE BOARDING SCHOOLS?

Beginning in the late 1800s, the US government and various church groups began establishing boarding (or residential) schools for American Indian and Alaska

Native children. These schools were intended to "civilize" Native children and assimilate them into white culture. This amounted to cultural genocide.

The first boarding school in Alaska was established in 1878 by Presbyterian missionaries, and in the decades that followed boarding schools opened across Alaska. According to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Movement, 33 residential schools operated in Alaska. Alaska Native children were also taken from their homeland to schools across the US.

## WHAT WERE THESE SCHOOLS LIKE?

Alaska Native children were forcibly removed from their families and communities and compelled to attend boarding school, where they were prevented from speaking their Native languages, practicing their religions, and engaging in cultural practices and traditions. They were often assigned numbers instead of names and forced to wear Western clothing.

Boarding school rules were enforced through corporal punishment including solitary confinement, flogging, withholding food, whipping, and slapping. Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as disease, neglect and malnourishment, were rampant at these institutions. When children died at school as a result, they were often buried in unmarked graves far from home. Their families were not always informed of what had happened to their children.



Class photograph, Sitka Industrial Training School.  
Elbridge W. Merrill photographs, ca. 1897-1929

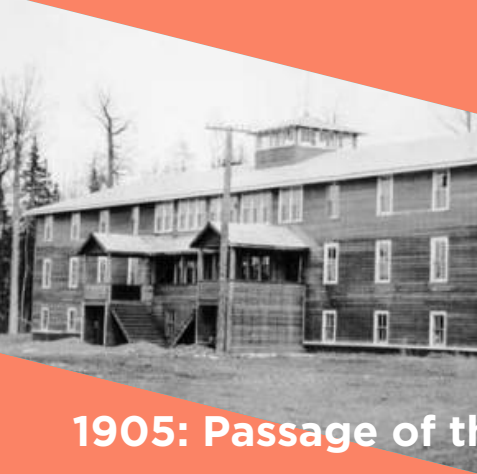
# Alaska's Boarding School History

Use this in class: pick an important event and conduct additional research. Answer these questions:

What happened? When? Who was involved? What impact on education in Alaska did this event have?

## 1878: Boarding Schools Established

The first Native boarding school in Alaska was opened by Presbyterian missionaries in Sitka in 1878.

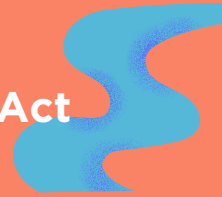


Main school building at the Eklutna Boarding School, photographed ca. 1930-1932, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, UAF



## 1885: School Court Cases

In 1885, a Lingít family sued Sheldon Jackson, claiming their children were being held against their will by the Presbyterian Boarding School, which claimed legal custody of the children. The court ruled in the family's favor and allowed the children to return home. However, in 1886, Can-ah-couqua, a Tlingit mother whose son attended the school, lost a similar suit. The judge in the case ruled the school needed authority to carry out its educational mission.



## 1905: Passage of the Nelson Act

In 1905, the US Congress passed the Nelson act. The legislation stated that funds for schools are for "white children and those of mixed blood who lead a civilized life." This resulted in a dual school system that operated into the 1980s.



Wrangell Institute (a boarding school in Wrangell, AK), photographed in July 1965, Consortium Library, UAA



## 1934: Johnson-O'Malley Act

The Johnson-O'Malley Act of 1934 authorized the Secretary of the Interior to negotiate contracts with state, territorial, and local agencies to provide federal funds to help fund the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives. After the passage of the Act, the Alaska Territorial Department of Education and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) began negotiations to transfer control of federally-run BIA schools to the territory (later the state) of Alaska.



## 1959: Alaskan Statehood

Alaska became a state in 1959. At the time of Alaskan statehood, the state and federal school systems were still a dual presence in rural Alaska, meaning there were schools operated by the new state of Alaska and schools for Native students operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).



Boarding school at St. Marys, undated photograph, Consortium Library, UAA

## 1976: Molly Hootch Case

Alaska Legal Services filed *Tobeluk v. Link*, a class-action lawsuit on behalf of rural children for failing to provide local high schools in predominantly Alaska Native villages. The case became known as the "Molly Hootch" case, after the first named plaintiff. Before the case, Alaska Native students who wanted to attend high school had to attend a BIA-operated residential school. The case was settled in 1976, resulting in the *Tobeluk Consent Decree*, which committed the state to providing high schools Alaska Native villages. In the year after the settlement, 30 new high schools were established in Alaska villages.



Molly Hootch Hymes, who was the first named plaintiff in *Tobeluk v. Link*, Anchorage Daily News

## 1994: Alaska Natives Commission

In 1994, citing the poor outcomes of Alaska Native students in the educational system, the Alaska Natives Commission, a federal and state task force, called for future efforts related to Alaska Native education to be initiated by Native communities. This led to a variety of Alaska Native educational projects, including the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, which helped develop the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools.

## 2016: Presbyterian Church Apology

In 2016, the Presbyterian Church apologized to the Alaska Federation of Natives for its treatment of Native people and especially for abuses in boarding schools. Rev. Curt Karns, the administrator of the Presbytery of the Yukon, told AFN, "we offer you our most sincere apology. You did nothing wrong; you were and are the victims of evil acts that cannot under any circumstances be justified or excused,"

Alaska Native students prepare to leave for school from Shungnak, AK, photographed ca. 1945-1968, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, UAF



## 2021: Federal Boarding School Initiative

In 2021, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland announced the creation of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative to recognize the legacy of residential schools and shed light on the abuses perpetrated at these institutions. [Volume I](#) of the initiative's report was released in May 2022.

Deb Haaland (center) at her swearing in as Secretary of the Interior in 2021, the *New York Times*

Secretary Haaland is the first Native American to lead a cabinet-level agency



# 02. TEACHING OUR HISTORY

## Truth & Reconciliation



### TRUTH

"That which corresponds to reality"

Teach the truth of what happened at boarding schools

Teach the truth of why it happened

### RECONCILIATION

"Restoring positive relationships"

Teach about how the history of boarding schools still impacts Native communities today

Listen empathetically to Native voices - ensure your teaching materials include Native sources

Take positive action for the future

### ACTION

Participate in Orange Shirt Day with an activity to recognize boarding school survivors, remember the children who never came home, and work to create an Alaska that celebrates and honors Native children and communities

Keep reading for ideas on how you can teach truth, reconciliation, and action with students of all ages this year for Orange Shirt Day





# YOUNGER STUDENTS: MOLLY OF DENALI

**[Watch "Grandpa's Drum" - an 11 minute clip from Molly of Denali - to find out why Grandpa Nat no longer plays his drum.](#)**

In this clip from the PBS Kids show Molly of Denali, Molly and Tooye go on an adventure to learn why Grandpa Nat no longer sings or plays his drum.

Along the way, they meet Shyahtsoo, who explains that she, Grandpa Nat, and many other Alaska Native children attended boarding schools where they weren't allowed to sing their traditional songs and had to speak English.

After learning about what her grandpa and his friends endured, Molly gives Grandpa Nat back his drum, and together they sing a song in their native language, Gwich'in.

"Grandpa's Drum" introduces younger audiences to the history of boarding schools in an age-appropriate manner that still highlights the trauma children suffered as a result of the loss of culture and identify they endured at boarding school.

Watch the clip, then use the questions and activities to the right to spark discussion!

## TRUTH

Molly learns her grandpa and other children were not allowed to sing their songs or speak their language at school.

**How do you think this made Grandpa Nat feel?**

**How has Grandpa Nat's time at school impacted his life?**

## RECONCILIATION

**What happens when Molly returns Grandpa Nat's drum?**

**How is Molly's experience different than Grandpa Nat's when he was her age?**

**How is Grandpa Nat's experience in school different than yours?**

## ACTION

Phyllis Webstad, founder of Orange Shirt Day, has a similar story to Grandpa Nat.

Explain the Orange Shirt Day story and have students color their own orange shirts and write a sentence about what Orange Shirt Day means to them. Coloring pages included in this toolkit!



# OLDER STUDENTS: MOLLY OF DENALI

**Molly of Denali is a kids show, but there are plenty of ways to use this short clip with older students.**

## TRUTH

Molly learns her grandpa and other children were not allowed to sing their songs or speak their language at school. In one scene, Shyahtsoo's doll is taken away and replaced with another doll.

Think about the difference between the two dolls.

### **What does the difference between the dolls reveal about boarding schools and what they taught Native students?**

After students have had the chance to share their thoughts, use the before & after lesson to further explore the impact of boarding schools through visual imagery.

## RECONCILIATION

Think about the type of doll Shyahtsoo's granddaughter is seen playing with.

### **What does this show about how things have changed since Shyahtsoo was a child?**

## ACTION

Preserving and celebrating Native culture today is one of the best ways to reverse the cultural assimilation and genocide of the boarding school era. What are some ways Alaskans can protect, preserve, and honor Alaska Native culture today?

## IMPORTANT TERMS

### **Cultural Assimilation:**

The process through which an individual or community takes on the values, beliefs, and behaviors of another group. Assimilation can be voluntary or forced.

### **Cultural Genocide:**

A particularly extreme form of cultural assimilation that involves the deliberate and systematic destruction of a culture. The goal of cultural genocide is to eliminate the culture entirely.

### **Colonialism:**

The domination of a people and/or territory by another group in order to exploit the colonized group's labor, land, or resources.

# BEFORE & AFTER

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## High School Aged Lesson Plan

### Overview

Students will learn about the history of US Indian boarding schools. They will use primary sources to understand the purpose and impact of these institutions.

### What is a primary source?

Primary sources are the raw materials of history! They are documents, photographs, objects, first person accounts, etc. that were created at the time that we are studying.

Why do historians use primary sources?

What are the benefits of using primary sources? What are the challenges?

### Part 1: Introduce the topic - US Indian boarding schools



Introduce the topic of US Indian boarding schools with [this video](#) from PBS (10 min), featuring Interior Secretary Deb Haaland discussing the history of US Indian boarding schools and their role in the forced assimilation of Native children.

### Part 2: Examine primary source photographs - before & after at Carlisle



Give students the handout with two sets of before & after photographs taken at Carlisle.



Before you ask students to review the photographs, introduce the concept of primary sources. Define a primary source (or ask your students to define it) and ask your students to brainstorm reasons why historians use primary sources to study historical events.

For more on discussing primary source photographs with students, see [this resource](#) from the US Library of Congress.



Give students time to review the before & after handout. Ask students to record their answers to the questions independently, then discuss the answers as a group.

### Part 3: Expand your study - additional primary source exercises



Investigate Alaskan boarding schools: use [Alaska's Digital Archives](#) to discover images of Alaskan boarding schools. Ask students to choose a photo and list two things they can infer about boarding schools from the image.



Investigate a written primary source: read [this excerpt](#) from Henry Pratt's (the founder of the Carlisle Indian School) speech on Native education. **Note: this speech contains racist language that can be triggering.** Ask students to choose a sentence from the speech and write a short statement about what it reveals about the mission of US Indian Boarding Schools.



Before: Three Sioux students as they arrived at the Carlisle Indian School in 1883.



After: The same three students after three years at Carlisle, wearing cadet uniforms.

# BEFORE & AFTER

Here are two photographs from the Carlisle Indian School, the first US Indian Boarding School.

They were taken by John Coate, who photographed many Carlisle students.

Take a look at the photographs and answer the following questions:



Group of Eskimo Students, 1897, Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections

**What do you observe in these photos?**

**What are the differences between the before & after photographs?**

**What do you think happened in between these two photos?**

**What do you think the purpose of these photos was?**

**What do these photos convey about the purpose of US Indian boarding schools?**

## DID YOU KNOW...

that there were Alaska Native children at the Carlisle Indian School?

The Carlisle Indian School website estimates 130 Alaska Native children attended the school. The photos to the left were also taken by Coate and show a group of Alaska Native children upon arrival at the school in 1897 and then again wearing Western clothing.

## **"I Lost My Talk" Poem & Lesson**

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Indigenous author Rita Joe's poem "I Lost My Talk" discusses the impact of boarding schools on Native culture. Introduce the history of boarding schools and use [this guide](#) to walk students through analyzing the poem.

## **National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition Curriculum**

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Download free truth and healing [curricula](#) suitable for middle and high school students from the National Native American Boarding School Coalition.

# **OTHER EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**

## **Land Acknowledgements**

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Use the [Native Land website](#) to explore the Indigenous peoples of the place we now call Alaska. See the [Native Land Teacher Guide](#) for more on using this tool in class.

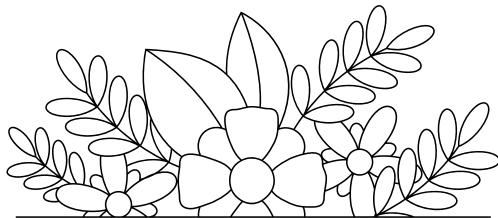
## **Art Projects**

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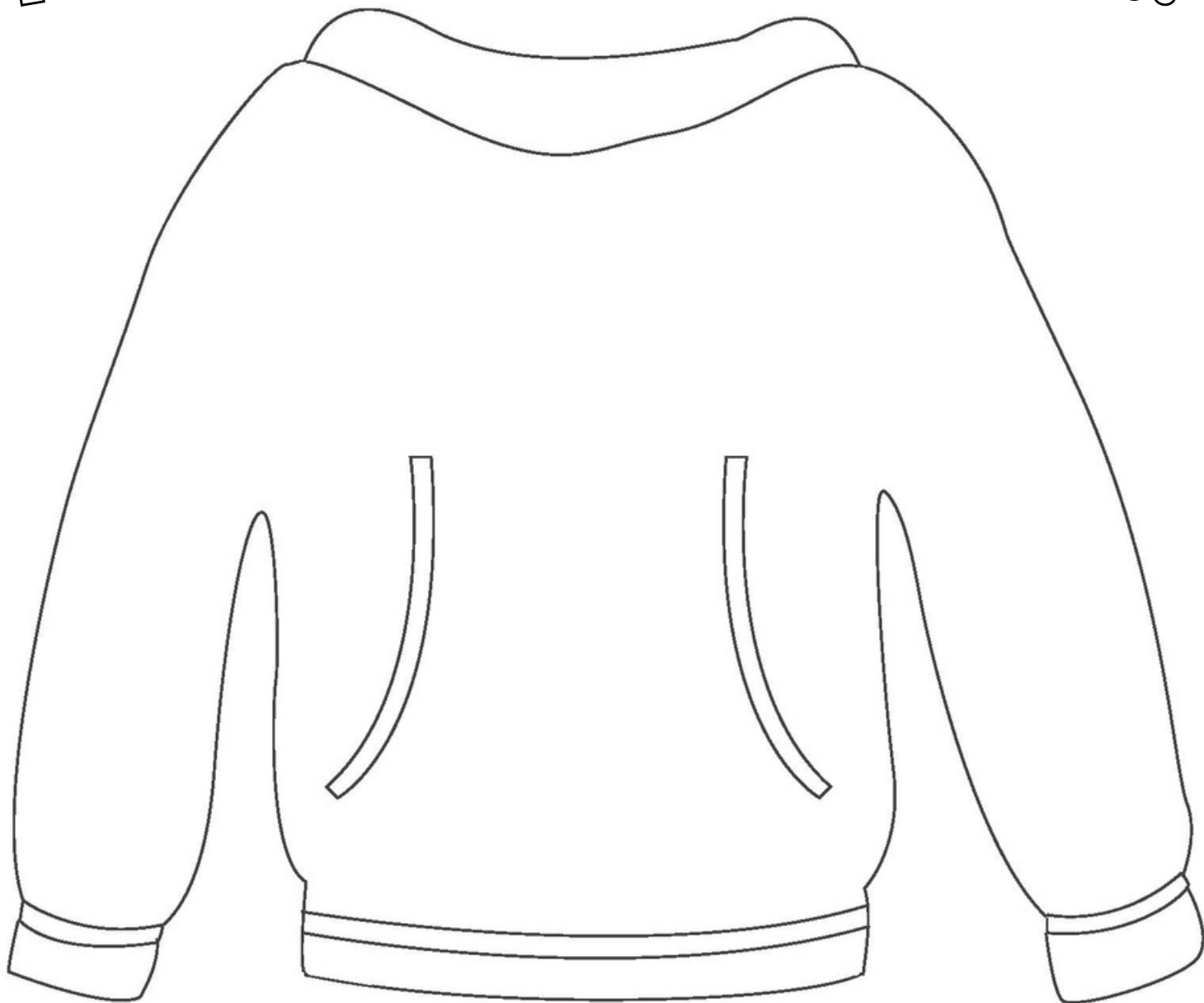
Ask your class to brainstorm how children should feel at school. Cut out paper feathers (included) and have students write their ideas on them to make a class collage.

**At school, children should feel...**

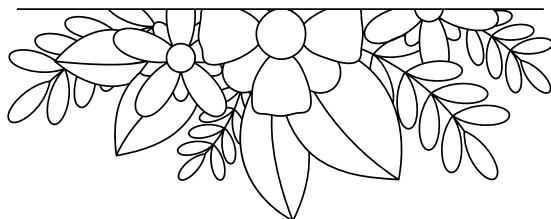


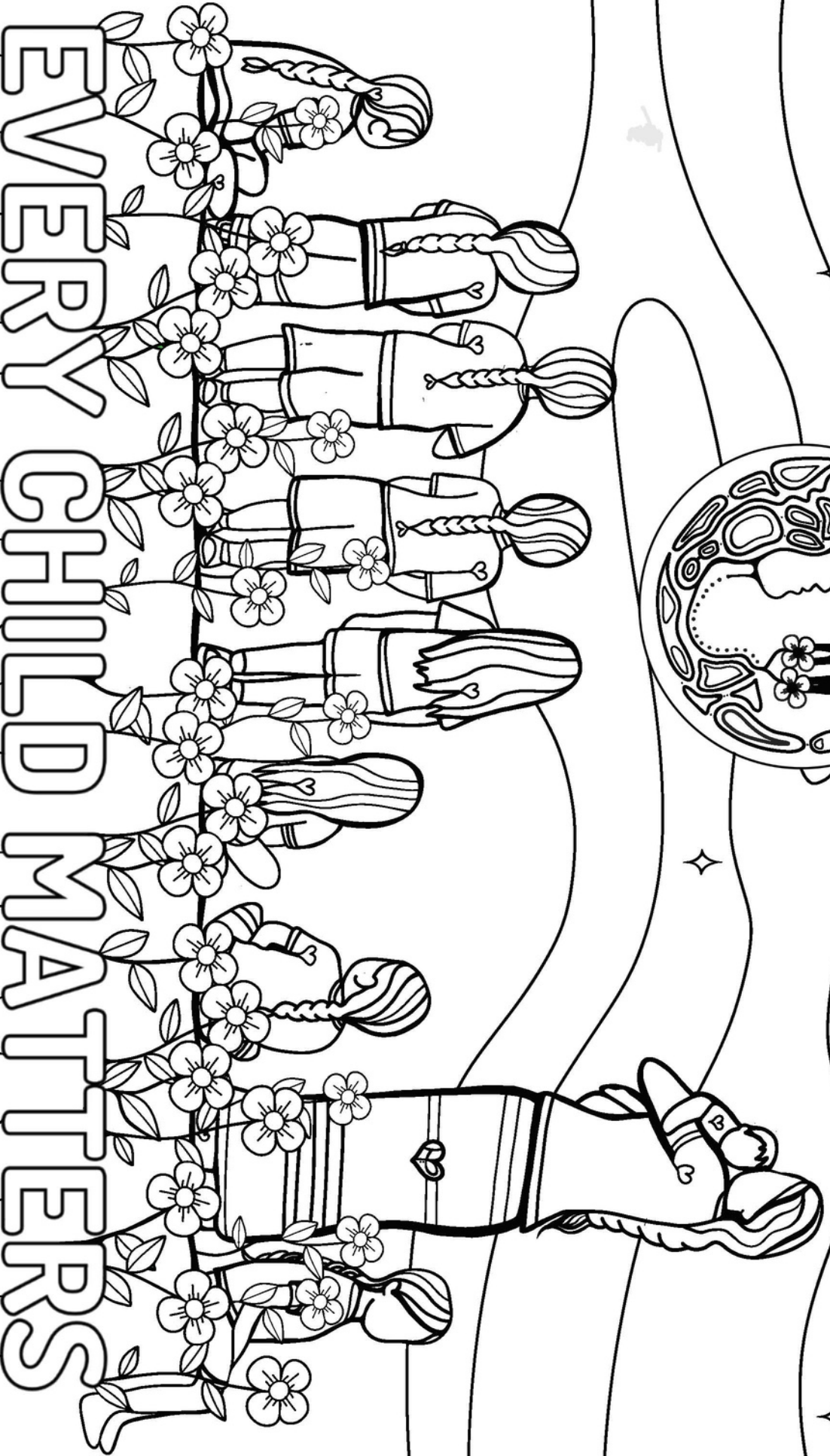
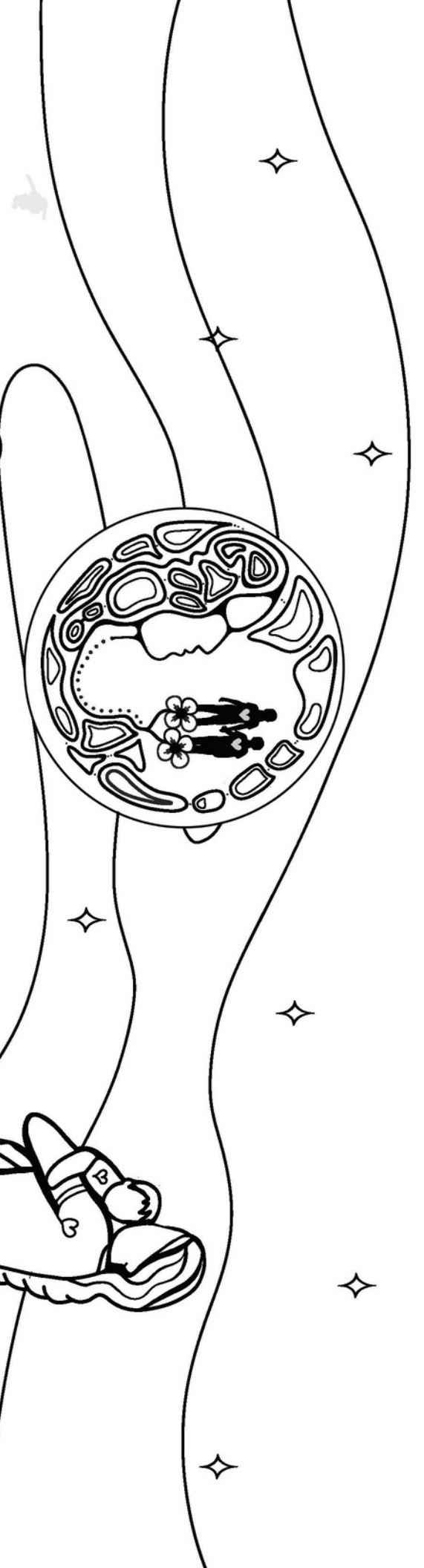


I wear orange because...



**ORANGE SHIRT DAY**





EVERY CHILD MATTERS



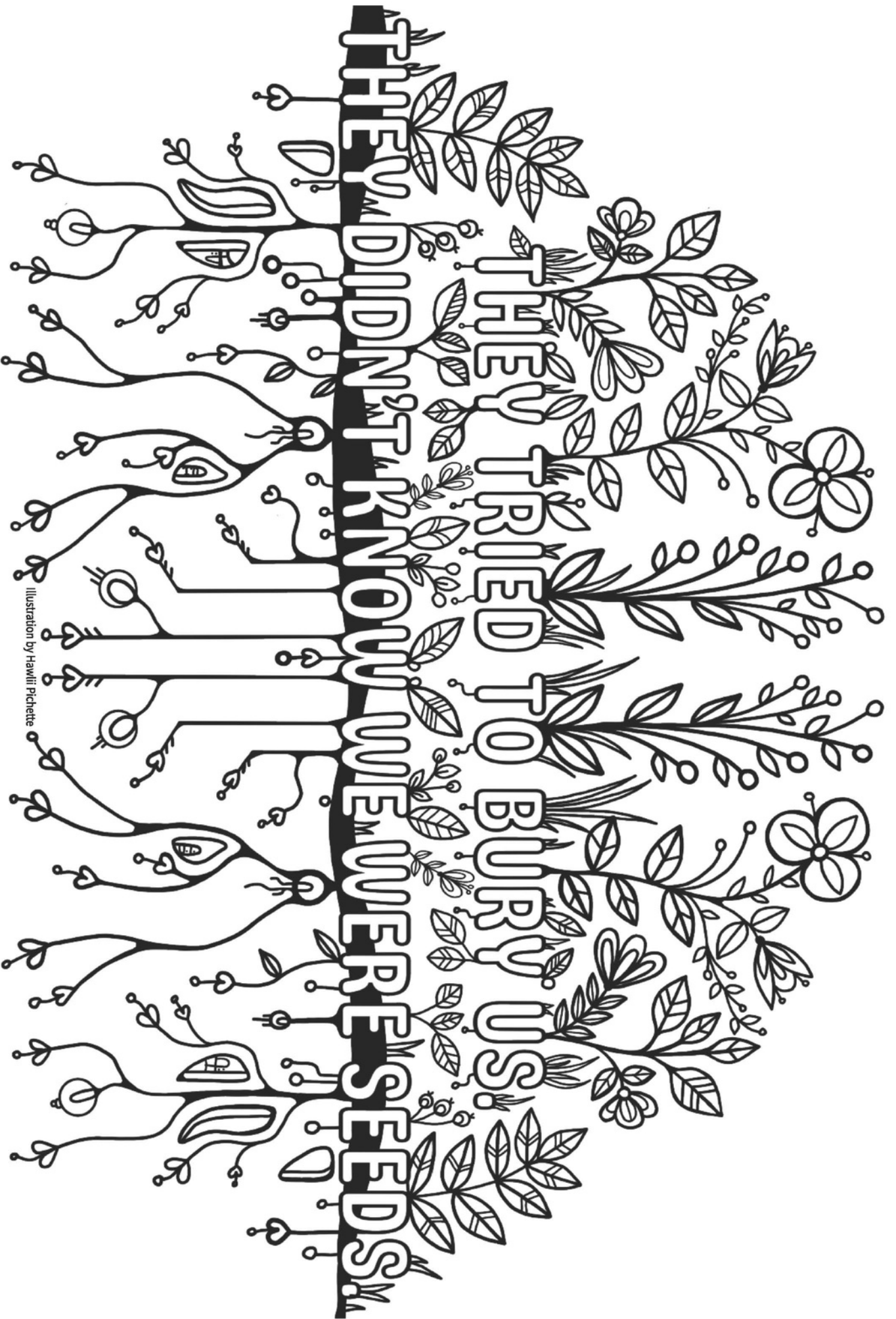


Illustration by Hawilit Pichette



Artwork by Hawlii Pichette

# Orange Shirt Day

## 2022 Education Toolkit

On behalf of Alaska Children's Trust, thank you for taking the time to learn more about boarding school history.



Recognition is the first step to reconciliation. To heal from the past, we must first acknowledge the harm that has occurred. By learning about Orange Shirt Day, you are helping to create a better Alaska for all children.



Access the online version of this toolkit at [alaskachildrenstrust.org/orange-shirt-day](https://alaskachildrenstrust.org/orange-shirt-day)