



2023 Education Toolkit for **ORANGE SHIRT DAY** A Parent and Educator Guide to Learning and Teaching about Government and Church-Run Indigenous Boarding Schools



ALASKA
NATIVE
HERITAGE
CENTER

List of Some of the Boarding Schools in Alaska

This list is from the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition

Anvik Mission (Christ Church)
Bethel Regional High School and Dormitory
Copper Valley Boarding School
Covenant High School
Douglas Island Friends Mission School (Mayflower School)
Eklutna Industrial School
First Mission House (Bethel Indian School)
Fort Wrangell Tlingit Industrial (Wrangell Training Academy)
Friends High School (Kotzebue Friends School)
Galena Interior Learning Academy
Haines Mission and House
Holy Cross Boarding School (Kosoreffsky)
Jesse Lee Home for Children
Kanakanak Hospital, Orphanage, and School
Kodiak Aleutian Regional High School
Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School
Nenana Student Living Center
Nunapitsinghak Moravian Children's Home
Our Lady of Lourdes Orphanage and Mission
Russian Bishop's House
Seward Sanitarium
Sitka Industrial Training School (Sheldon Jackson Institute)
St. Mark's Episcopal Mission
St. Mary Mission School St. Pius X Mission
Victory High School (Victory Bible School)
White Mountain Boarding School
William E. Beltz Boarding School (Nome Beltz)
Woody Island Mission and Orphanage (Longwood School)
Wrangell Institute

Did you know...

The Alaska Native Heritage Center has identified over 100 boarding schools that operated in Alaska. That number continues to grow with continued research.

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

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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

CONTENT WARNING

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 work 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 only now finally receiving widespread attention.

Boarding School History

WHAT WERE BOARDING SCHOOLS?

Beginning in 1819, 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 1877 by Sheldon Jackson at Fort Wrangell. In the decades that followed, boarding schools opened across Alaska. According to the Alaska Native Heritage Center research, over 100 boarding schools have been identified in Alaska so far and that number is still growing as research continues. 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

1877: Boarding Schools Established

The first Native boarding school in Alaska was opened by Sheldon Jackson during the establishment of Fort Wrangell. It was the first federally funded off reservation Indian boarding school.



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

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 of separate but unequal treatment for students that operated into the 1980s.

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



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).

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?

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 Lingít mother whose son attended the school, lost a similar suit. The judge in the case ruled that the school needed authority to carry out its educational mission.

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.



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 for 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 abuses in boarding schools. The Apology was edited and rewritten by an Alaska Native with stipulations leading to "land back" opportunities through the Presbyterian church.

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 & Healing

TRUTH

Teach the truth of what happened at boarding schools

Teach the truth of why it happened

HEALING

For survivors and descendants: prioritize your healing. Southcentral Foundation frequently offers talking circles on the topic.

For others, work to understand the intergenerational impacts of residential schools on children and adults

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

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, healing, 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 Tooyey 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?

HEALING

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.

HEALING

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

Objective:

Students will use primary source photographs to understand the aims and impacts of the boarding school system.

High School Lesson Plan

Introduce the topic

If you have not yet discussed boarding schools with your students, introduce the topic with [this video](#) from PBS (10 min), featuring Interior Secretary Deb Haaland on the history of Indigenous boarding schools and forced assimilation.

Use the "Boarding Schools and Identity" notes below to explain the context of the photographs the students will be investigating.

Explore the role of primary sources

Ask the students what the term "primary source" means to them - use the "Primary Source" notes below to explain the concept. Ask the students why historians use these sources. What are the benefits of using primary sources? What are the challenges?

Investigate primary source photographs

Explain to the students that they are going to view primary source photographs taken at the Carlisle Industrial School. The photographs depict students "before" and "after" entering the school.

Divide the students into groups of four. Assign each student group a set of photographs and distribute the Student Worksheet - "Before and After"

Discuss findings

When students are finished with the worksheet, ask each group to share their findings with the larger class. Ask the students if their perceptions of the images have changed as a result of the conversation.

Boarding Schools and Identity

Students were stripped of their identities almost immediately upon entering boarding schools by:

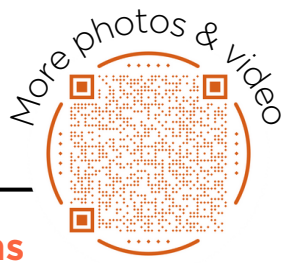
- Removing students' traditional clothing and belongings and forcing them to wear a uniform;
- Cutting students' hair;
- Assigning students new "Christian" names or, in some cases, numbers;
- Prohibiting students from speaking their Native languages.

Primary Sources

Primary sources are the raw materials of history. They are first-hand records of historical events or topics created at the time that these events occurred. Examples of primary sources include letters, diaries, photographs, artifacts, interviews, and sound or video recordings



BEFORE & AFTER



Primary Source Photographs

These images were taken at Carlisle School, a federally-funded Indigenous boarding school modeled after Fort Wrangell in Alaska.

The school was founded in 1879 by Captain Richard Henry Pratt, and more than 10,500 students studied there before it closed in 1918. In one speech, Pratt said that his goal was to "Kill the Indian... and save the man." This statement reflected his desire to eliminate Native culture by assimilating Native children into white culture.

Pratt commissioned John N. Choate to take before and after photographs of the children at Carlisle. They were sent to officials in Washington, potential charitable donors, and reservations to recruit new students.



Look closely at the above photographs. What stands out? What are the differences between the "before" and "after" photos?

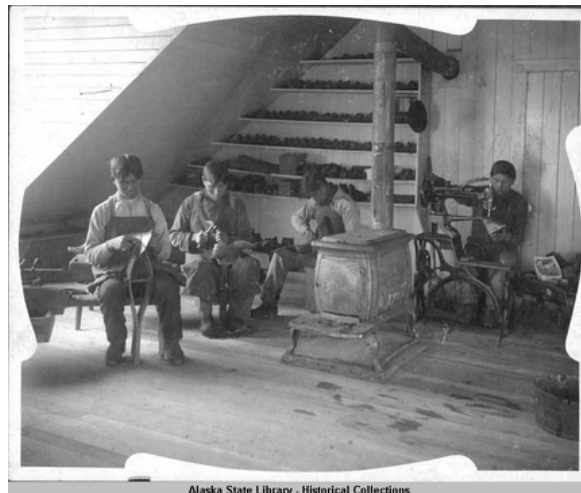
Though the below Alaska photos are not "before and after" photos like those above, what can you deduce about how students' lives may have changed based on their activities and dress? What do you think the goal of relocating children from their homelands was?



St. Marys Boarding School Dec. 1969

Source:

Alaska's Digital Archives. Henry S. Kaiser Jr. papers, circa 1919-1994. UAA-HMC-1148



Boys working in shoe shop, Sitka Industrial Training School

Source:

Alaska's Digital Archives. William A. Kelly. Photographs, ca. 1885-1904. ASL-PCA-427

BEFORE & AFTER

Student names:

Primary Source Photographs

1. What do you observe in the photographs? What are the similarities and differences between the "before" and "after" portraits?

2. Based on the photographs, what can you infer about the attitudes of the photographer?

3. What purpose might these images have served? What details of the photographs help you interpret the photographs' intended purpose?

DID YOU KNOW...

that there were Alaska Native children at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School? The Carlisle Indian Industrial School website estimates that 130 Alaska Native children attended the school.



"I Lost My Talk" Poem & Lesson

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

Download free truth and healing [curricula](#) suitable for middle and high school students from the National Native American Boarding School Coalition. Please note, this curricula does not yet include Alaska-specific information.

OTHER EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Land Acknowledgements

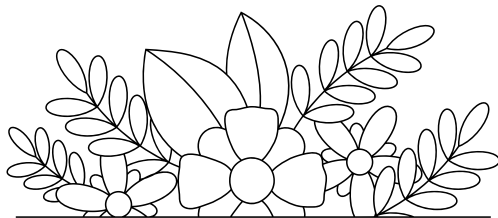
Use the [Native Land website](#) to explore the Indigenous peoples of the place we now call Alaska. See the [Native Land Teacher Guide](#) for more on using this tool in class.

Art Projects

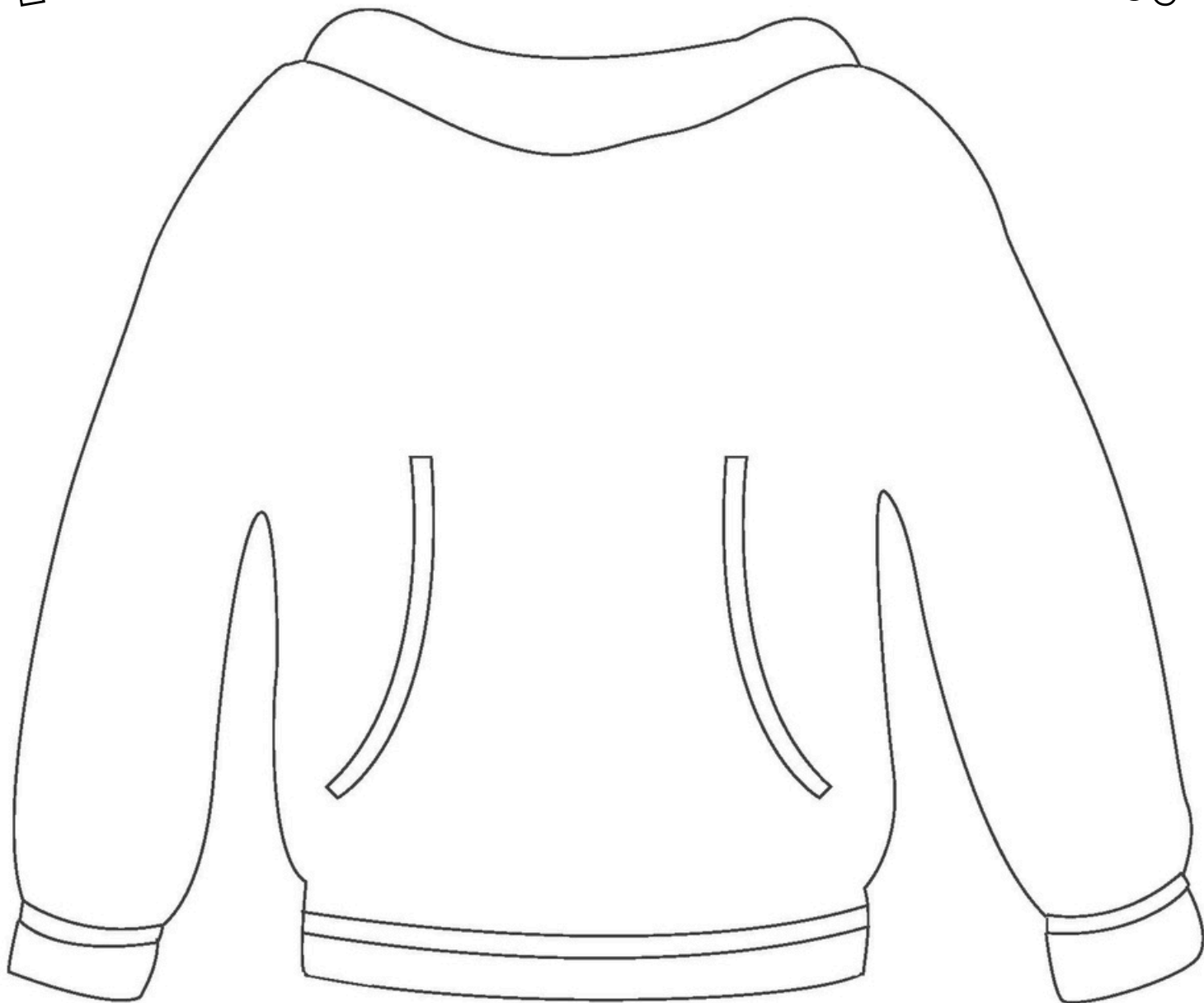
Ask your class to brainstorm how children should feel at school. Cut out paper feathers (included) and have students write their ideas on them to make a class collage.

At school, children should feel...

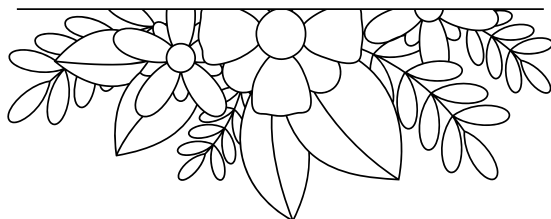


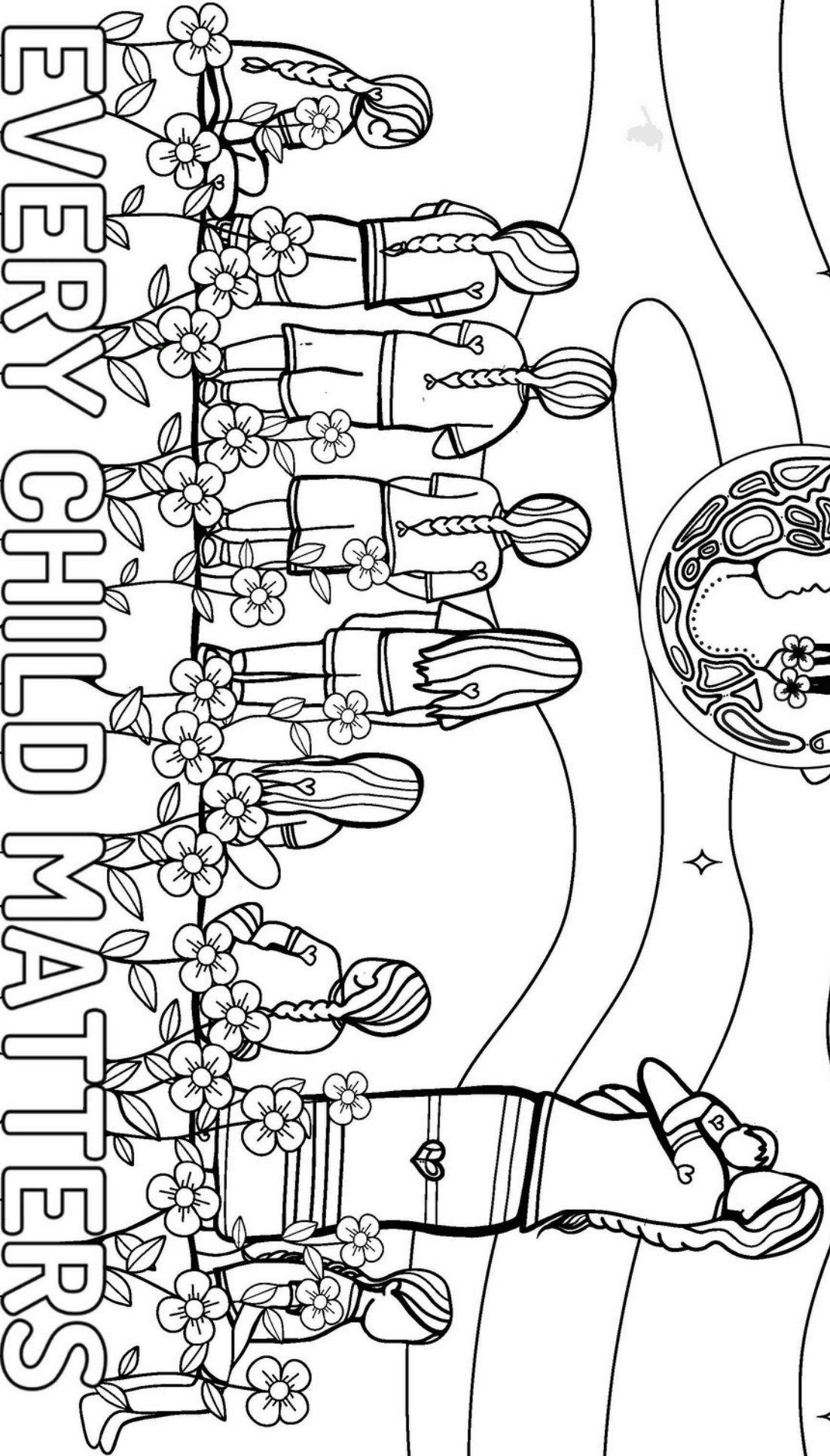
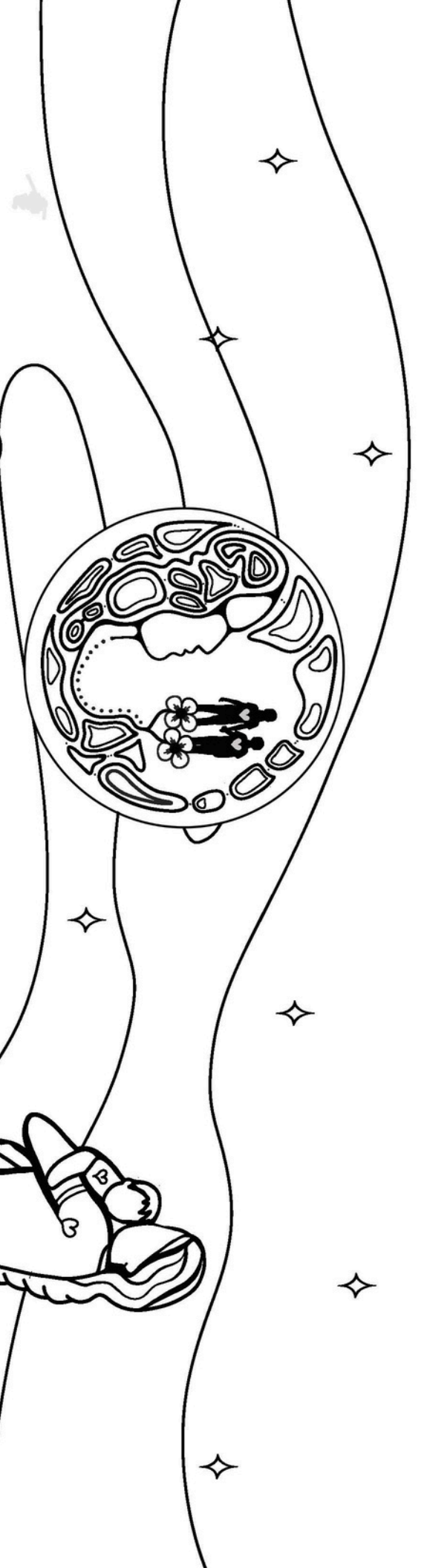


I wear orange because...



ORANGE SHIRT DAY





EVERY CHILD MATTERS

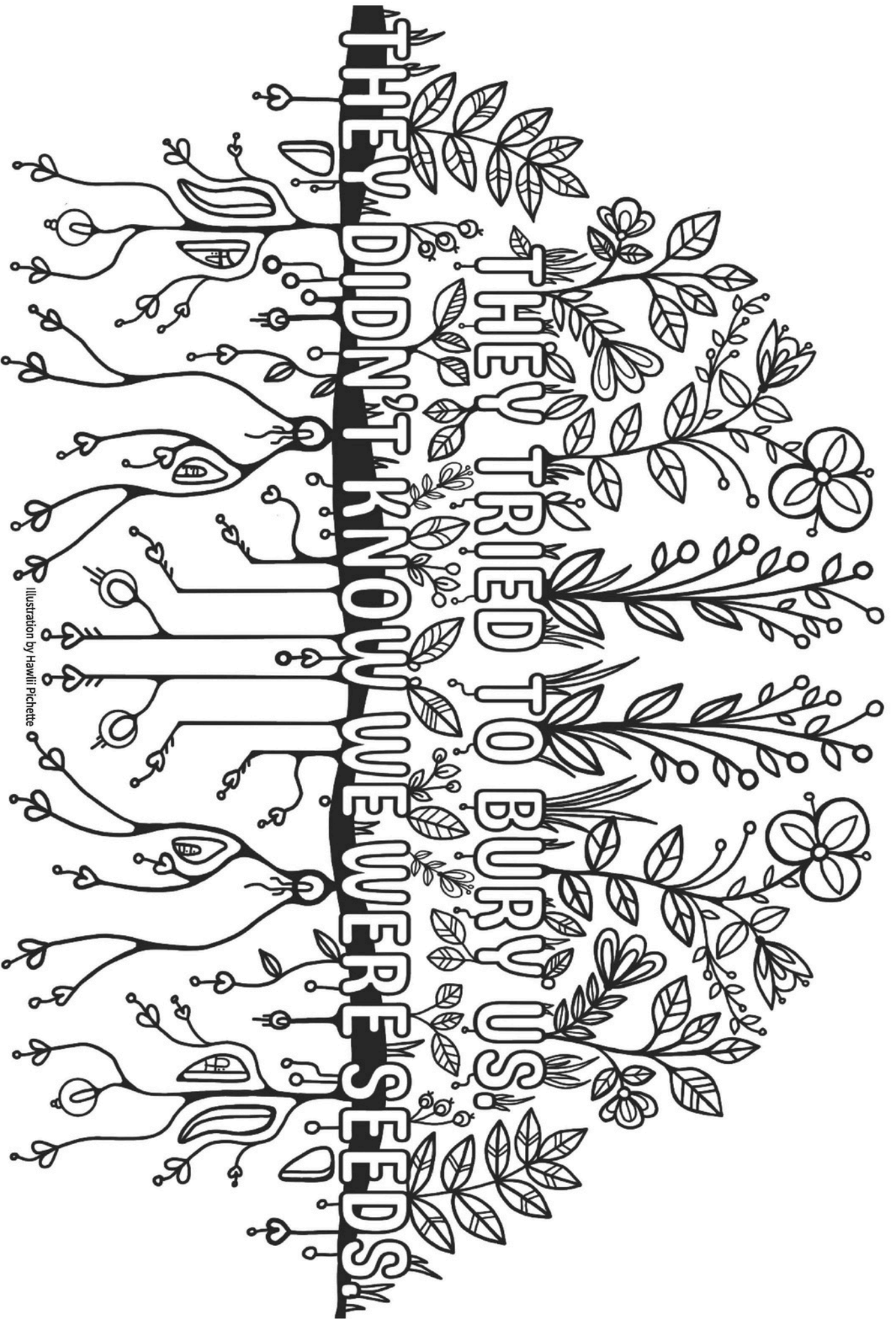


Illustration by Hawilit Pichette



Artwork by Hawlii Pichette



Orange Shirt Day

2023 Education Toolkit

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



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.

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

Reach out to researcher Benjamin A. Jacuk ThM, MDiv, Unguwat Programs Manager at the Alaska Native Heritage Center. He can be reached at: bjacuk@alaskanative.net



Thank you, quyana, gunalchéesh, and chin'an to the Alaska Native Heritage Center for their research and leadership in boarding school history and healing. This booklet was created through a collaboration between ACT and ANHC.



