LESSON PLAN: Purpose of Orange Shirt Day

Activity: An Interactive Lesson on Truth and Conversation

Grade Level: 4–8

Overview

This lesson uses a short video clip and a hands-on role-playing activity to help students understand the purpose of Orange Shirt Day and practice the skills needed for respectful conversations about residential schools and Truth and Reconciliation.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to explain the purpose of Orange Shirt Day as a tool for remembering and having conversations about residential schools. They will also practice active listening, empathetic responses, and respectful communication in a teacher-led, in-person setting.

Materials

- **Video Clip:** The specific video clip from Justice Murray Sinclair's challenge.
- **"Conversation Corner" Sign:** A simple sign to designate the role-play area (e.g., printed or written on a whiteboard).
- **Two chairs:** To define the "conversation corner" space for each small group.
- **Scenario Cards:** Printed cards with the conversation prompts (one set per small group).

Duration

Approximately 35-40 minutes.

Lesson Steps

Part 1: Setting the Stage with a Shared Story (10 minutes)

1. **Introduction and Framing (2-3 minutes)**
   - **Teacher Script Suggestion:** "Hello everyone. We know that Orange Shirt Day is an important day for remembering, but what is its deeper purpose? We're going to watch a short clip that explains the purpose of the day directly from the person who helped create it. As you watch, I want you to listen for the key reason why Orange Shirt Day was created."

2. **Video Viewing (2 minutes)**
   - Show the video clip to the whole class.

3. **Discussion and Thematic Introduction (5 minutes)**
   - After the video, facilitate a brief class discussion.
   - **Teacher Script Suggestion:** "Based on the clip, what is the main purpose of Orange Shirt Day? Why did Justice Murray Sinclair want Canadians to 'keep the conversation happening'? That's right—to **have conversation, to talk, to listen with an open mind and an open heart**. We've all been learning a lot about the

history of residential schools and the stories of Survivors. Today, we're going to practice how we can participate in these important conversations with respect and empathy. We'll be focusing on a few key tools to help us."

- Introduce the four key conversational tools: **The Listening Heart**, **The Truth Compass**, **The Respectful Voice**, and **The Patient Pause**. Briefly explain each one, linking them directly to the video's message.
  - **The Listening Heart:** "This reminds us to 'listen with an open mind and an open heart, without judgment,' just like the video said."
  - **The Truth Compass:** "This helps us remember to share truthful facts in a kind way, grounded in what we know."
  - **The Respectful Voice:** "This tool helps us use a calm, understanding voice, even when a conversation feels difficult."
  - **The Patient Pause:** "This reminds us to give others time to think and respond, or to take a moment for ourselves if we need it."

Part 2: Conversation Corner Role-Plays (20 minutes)

1. **Group Formation & Setup (5 minutes)**
   - Divide students into small groups of 3-4.
   - Explain the role-play activity, emphasizing that it's a **safe space to practice**.
   - **Teacher Script Suggestion:** "Now, we're going to set up 'Conversation Corners' around the classroom. This is a chance for us to try using The Listening Heart, The Truth Compass, and our other tools in a practice conversation. It's not about being perfect, but about being brave enough to try."
   - Designate the "Conversation Corner" spaces and provide each group with a set of the **Scenario Cards**.

2. **Role-Play Rounds (15 minutes)**
   - **Round 1 (5 minutes):**
     - Groups choose one scenario card.
     - One student is the "questioner" (reading the card), and another is the "responder."
     - Give them 3-4 minutes to role-play the conversation.
     - Afterwards, have each group briefly share: "What was one 'tool' you used in that conversation?"
   - **Round 2 (5 minutes):**
     - Students switch roles and choose a new scenario card.
     - Repeat the role-play and brief group share.
   - **Teacher Circulation & Coaching:** Circulate among the groups, offering quiet, specific feedback. Guide them toward using the conversational tools. "That was a great use of The Patient Pause!" "I notice you used your Truth Compass to share a fact—that's perfect."

Optional (If there is time):

- Student pairs could rotate through the stations to practice responding to the different scenarios.

Part 3: Debrief & Connection to Reconciliation (5-8 minutes)

1. **Whole Class Reflection**
   - Bring the class back together and lead a debriefing discussion.
   - **Teacher Script Suggestion:**
     - What did you learn from the conversations you had today? What was most challenging for you?
     - "Thank you for all your hard work! That takes a lot of courage. Let's come back to the video we watched at the beginning. We heard that Orange Shirt Day is 'a day to remember Survivors, because one day there will be no Survivors left in Canada.' How do you think practicing these conversations helps us continue to remember and honour their stories? How does being able to have these conversations help us achieve Truth and Reconciliation? Remember, it's about being able to respectfully share truths and listen to others with a focus on learning—that's a key part of our collective responsibility."

Sample Role-Playing Scenario Cards (Print & Cut)

Scenario Card 1: Misconception
- **Questioner says:** "Orange Shirt Day is just about feeling guilty for what happened in the past."
- **Your task (Responder)**: How do you respond to help them understand without shutting down the conversation?

Scenario Card 2: Personal Discomfort
- **Questioner says:** "I feel uncomfortable talking about residential schools; it's too sad."
- **Your task (Responder):** How can you respond in a way that is supportive, but also encourages continued learning?

Scenario Card 3: Basic Understanding
- **Questioner says:** (A younger student pointing at an Orange Shirt Day poster) "What is Orange Shirt Day really about?"
- **Your task (Responder):** What's the best way to explain its purpose clearly and kindly?

Scenario Card 4: Historical Relevance
- **Questioner says:** "Residential schools happened a long time ago. Why do we still need to talk about them?"
- **Your task (Responder):** What's the most helpful response that explains the ongoing importance of this conversation?

Scenario Card 5: New Idea
- **Questioner says:** "I want to do something for Orange Shirt Day, but I don't know what. Do you have any ideas?"
- **Your task (Responder):** How can you suggest a way to show respect and remembrance, and, perhaps, invite them to learn more?

Teacher Resource: Possible Responses for Scenario Cards
Use these as a guide or to prompt students if they are struggling. For example, they could be available on a central table for those students who need them.

Scenario 1: Misconception

- **Possible Responses:**
- "It's not about feeling guilty, but about listening to the stories of Survivors and learning from the past. It's a day for remembering."
- "The goal is to learn and to make sure this history doesn't happen again. It's a day for Truth and Reconciliation."

Scenario 2: Personal Discomfort

- **Possible Responses:**
- "It is sad, and it's okay to feel that way. We can listen to the stories and remember the children in a quiet way, and that's an important step."
- "I understand. Talking about hard things is tough, but remembering the truth is how we show respect to Survivors."

Scenario 3: Basic Understanding

- **Possible Responses:**
- "It's a day to remember the children who went to residential schools and to honour Survivors. It's about remembering their stories so we can learn."
- "It all started with a story from a woman named Phyllis Webstad, who had her orange shirt taken away at a residential school. We wear orange to remember all the children and to show that 'Every Child Matters'."

Scenario 4: Historical Relevance

- **Possible Responses:**
- "Even though they closed a while ago, the impacts are still felt today by Survivors and their families. It's not just history; it's still affecting people."
- "Justice Murray Sinclair asked all Canadians to keep the conversation going because it's a step toward building a better future together."

Scenario 5: New Idea

- **Possible Responses:**
- "The most important thing is to just learn more by listening to Survivors' stories. You could also find a book by an Indigenous author or read more about the 94 Calls to Action."
- "Just wearing an orange shirt and being willing to have these conversations is a good start. That's a way of showing you remember."

Circle of Learning