

Autumn lament

by [Sarah Klassen](#) in the [September 23, 2020](#) issue

Orange Shirt Day is celebrated across Canada on September 30 to remember children who died while attending residential schools and to honor survivors like Phyllis Webstad, who wore an orange shirt on her first day at an Indian Residential School. The shirt was forcibly removed.

On the last day of September everyone wore orange,
kids in their classrooms, tellers at my bank, the bus driver,
news anchor.

Leaves fell, yellow and red. From weeds beside the trail
a common sparrow flew up and settled on the branch of a birch,
grey, bedraggled, cold.

Every thistle is part of the planet and every moth. Every
pinion and shadow. Even the tiny egg of the cabbage butterfly
and the scruffy coyote who howls a lamentation.

Today's paper carried the names of children in my province
who weren't permitted to grow old. Who were buried
far from their mothers, grandmothers,

in unmarked graves. Column after column marching down
the front page and over to the next. To this enormity,
though I wear orange, I will not be reconciled.