

**Native American Boarding Schools:  
An Exploration of Ethnic and Cultural Cleansing in North America**

**A Background Building Lesson as Part of a Year-Long Thematic Unit:  
“The Struggle for Equal Rights in North America and the World”**

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Designed for Students in Grade 8 -10**

**“We study the past to understand the present and predict the future.”**

**My demonstration is meant to support my contentions that:**

1. Students must be given the time, choice, and opportunity to become experts on their chosen topics for inquiry when studying history.
2. Upon completion of their research, students must be given the opportunity to present their findings to an authentic audience.
3. Best practice in social studies instruction demands creating a collaborative, classroom community where students feel safe and inspired to take on the role of historians.
4. Authentic primary and secondary sources can inform, provoke, enlighten, encourage, inspire and, most importantly, engage our students.
5. The texts we choose for our classrooms, like all the other decisions we make as teachers, are political choices. Each choice we make in building our curriculum or classroom community is rooted in our beliefs. This includes the way we arrange the furniture, create our classroom norms for behavior, organize small groups, and assess students' work.
6. Powerful texts and authentic primary resources can lead to powerful personal writing and set the stage for building curricula that immerses students in social action, critical literacy, rich interpersonal relationships, and deep self-awareness.
7. Teaching students how to “read like a writer” and inviting students to notice what authors do to engage and inform their readers is a best practice in writing instruction. The first step to learning how to craft a story, poem, or essay is learning how to recognize the craft in a mentor text.
8. Teachers must write and research side-by-side with their students and share their writing and research process with their students.
9. Learning is social and we must immerse students in writing invitations and genres that support collaborative thinking, learning, and sharing.

## Essential Question of this Big Picture Lesson:

*How do people survive and thrive when their own government attempts to cancel, kill, annihilate, assimilate, or eradicate their Indigenous culture?*

The following article is an excellent start for teachers to build their own background knowledge. <https://www.theindigenousfoundation.org/articles/us-residential-schools>

## Step-by-Step Directions:

This is one example of several lessons presented as part of a year-long or semester-long thematic unit of study: **The Struggle for Equal Rights in North America and the World**. Students will be selecting their own areas of study depending upon their interests. Students will be required to use multiple primary and secondary sources to inform their research.

Each student historian will keep notes in their History Logbook (either electronically or in their paper Logbook.) Early in the year, students will engage in a whole group skill building lesson on evaluating sources for accuracy and authenticity.

We will engage in several foundational “Big Picture” lessons to introduce the many groups of people who have struggled for equal rights throughout the colonization of North America.

Within the first several weeks of school, students will engage in lessons focused on historical events and people including, but not limited to:

Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Immigrants to North America (Irish, Italian, Jewish, Chinese), Women, People of Appalachia, People in Poverty, the LGBTQ+ Community, Latinos, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, Arab and other Middle Eastern Americans, Alaska Natives, and Haitians. <https://minorityrights.org/country/united-states-of-america/>

1. This lesson is one of the foundational “Big Picture” lessons that introduces students to critical events in American and global history. This lesson addresses “American settler colonialism” and the systematic, generational destruction of Indigenous culture and families.
2. To launch the lesson, the topic of Native Boarding Schools will be introduced to the class through 3 short YouTube videos which students will view and briefly discuss in small, temporary working groups.
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTm479tr2jo>  
National Big Picture

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVt5bio21FI>  
Mt. Pleasant, Michigan
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CaAeKhK2fw>  
Harbor Springs, Michigan
3. I highly recommend teachers listen to this 4-minute NPR piece to see if they want to include it as part of their classroom content background:  
<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2021/08/28/1031398120/native-boarding-schools-repatriation-remains-carlisle>
  4. Students will be asked to use the lens of critical thinking questions as they discuss each film text and the duplicated primary and secondary resources in the next part of the lesson:

### **Thinking Critically About Print and Film Text**

- **For whom was the text written/created?**
- **Whose perspective and narratives are omitted or silenced by this text?**
- **What are the cultural meanings, possible readings, or interpretations that can be constructed from this text?**
- **What is the text trying to do to me? Or, how is the text positioning me as the reader or viewer?**

(Adapted from Haddix, M., & Rojas, M. A. (2011). (Re)framing teaching in urban classrooms: A post-structural (re)reading of critical literacy as curricular and pedagogical practices. In V. Kinloch)

5. Each student will also be given a reminder of the difference between primary and secondary resources.  
(This opening viewing and discussion will take 20 -30 minutes)
6. After time for a brief group discussion, followed by a brief whole group reporting out of their “noticings,” students will be given different short texts to read and analyze with a pair share partner. (These texts are identified here in the references; we have also included them in a PDF on our Top of the Mitt website at: <https://www.topofthemittwriting.org/demonstration-lessons.html>)
7. Students will have 20-30 minutes to read and discuss their text with their partners and to answer their critical questions on post-it notes that will be published on class chart paper. Students should be able to articulate if their assigned text is a primary or secondary resource.
8. After each pair reports out to the class what they noticed through their critical thinking lens, students will write a personal reflection about Native Boarding Schools answering the prompts:
  - a. Where do we go from here?

- b. What next steps should our local Harbor Springs community take after engaging in this generational assault on Indigenous culture and families?
  - c. How should the U.S. and Canada deal with this traumatic history from the last century?
  - d. What new questions have emerged for you?
9. Students should also indicate if this is a topic of interest that appeals to them for further, self-selected research. For example, students who find this topic compelling may wish to research: “Indigenous People and the Struggle for Equal Rights.” This could be a global investigation looking at the original peoples of many continents. Please remember there are numerous picture books available about almost any group your students select.
10. As students complete a series of foundational lessons on the different groups of citizens and immigrants that have had to struggle for their equal rights in our nation and the world, **each student is required to select one group that they wish to research more thoroughly.** At the end of the semester or school year, students will be expected to share their learning with their peers. This is an opportunity to put students in the role of “expert” as they research their individual cultural group of interest.

- **Invitations to write embedded in this unit include:**

- Students will be expected to take notes on their self-selected topic and show the sources of all information. Students **may** use a sturdy notebook as a Social Studies Logbook **or** set up a Google Doc for electronic note taking.
- Students will compose a personal essay about their learning and prepare to present their new understandings and questions to the class.
- Students are encouraged to share short primary texts they found impactful as part of their presentation.
- Like all historians, students must share their primary and secondary sources to support their conclusions and insights into their topic.
- Students with the same topic may choose to present their personal research in a “panel presentation” for the class.
- At the end of the semester or school year, students will be expected to share their learning with their teacher and peers. This is an opportunity to put students in the role of “expert” as they research their individual cultural group of interest. (As noted in #10 above in the step-by-step outline.) Students may choose to use original text, existing primary source images, and music to compose a digital story of their learning.

- **Outside Influences:**

- **Social Justice Standards:**

- Social Justice 13: Students will analyze the harmful impact of behaviors and unjust practices, laws, and institutions that limit the rights and freedoms of people based on their identity groups.
- Diversity Standard 8: Students will be respectful of other peoples' history and respond empathetically. Students will express curiosity about the history and lived experiences of others.
- Diversity Standard 10: Students can explain how the way groups of people are treated today, the way they have been treated in the past, and how that shapes their group identity and culture.
- Action Standards 16: Students will express empathy when people are excluded or mistreated because of their identities.

- **Common Core Standards for Reading Informational Text**

- Reading Standards for Informational Text Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7. Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- SS Dimension 3: Includes the skills students need to analyze information and come to conclusions in Inquiry. Skills focus on gathering and evaluating sources, and then developing claims and using evidence for support.
- RI.2-Summarize complex concepts.
- RI.6-Analyze author's purpose.
- RI.7-Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media.
- CCSS: W9.11-12 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

- **Extensions and Adaptations**

- A deep dive into Library of Congress primary resources on multiple topics.
- Research family sources for family histories; interview a primary source.
- Draft songs/ballads on topics.
- Locate/research poetry or other creative texts connected to different groups studied.
- Turn interviews into broadcasts or podcasts.
- Research ways to take action to address topics.
- Study law and legislation connected to topics/ trace historical timelines.
- Present dioramas at public events/multi-genre presentations.
- Adopt the persona of someone from the material/ living history presentation.
- Include visual content from the era of early period text (satirical cartoons /comics /graphics etc.)

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**How do we, as teachers, monitor the impact of exploring such challenging and often distressing topics of study with our adolescent students?**

First, and foremost, I stress with my students that knowledge is power. Studying history helps us understand our world and our society. History helps us understand change and how the society we live in came to be.

"Because history gives us the tools to analyze and explain problems in the past, it positions us to see patterns that might otherwise be invisible in the present – thus providing a crucial perspective for understanding (and solving) current and future problems." (University Wisconsin-Madison Department of History) ([history.wisc.edu](http://history.wisc.edu)) "History builds empathy through studying the lives and struggles of others."

Stressing the “why” of studying history helps students understand how their own lives fit into the greater human experience. I stay mindful of the stress that students might encounter by sharing my own experiences with the traumatic parts of my own cultural / family history. (Family Holocaust survivors.)

I also create a daily “safe” space for classroom discussions of what we are noticing, learning, or wondering about the topics we are investigating them. As Goldy Muhammad reminds us in *Cultivating Genius* (page 150) we must ask how our “curriculum engages students” thinking about power and equity and the disruption of oppression?”

Additionally, I recommend integrating uplifting and resilient poetry from multiple perspectives and cultures, along with reflective invitations like journaling and “heart maps” to balance the heavier, or distressing parts of the historical research.

And lastly, giving students the opportunity to share their learning publicly and to create a plan of action answering, “Where do we go from here?” This gives students agency and confidence to inform and instruct others for the greater good.