

# The Boarding School Period – American Indian Perspectives

## Fast Facts

Curriculum Area: Social Studies  
Grade Level: High School  
Suggested Duration: Three – Four 50-minute class periods

## Stage 1 Desired Results

### Established Goals

- (4) The history content standards for ninth through twelfth grade are that each student will:
- (c) identify ways in which people and groups exercise agency in difficult historical, contemporary, and tribal contexts;
  - (d) analyze multiple, and complex causal factors that have shaped major events in US and world history, including American Indian history;
  - (e) explain events in relation to both their intended and unintended consequences, including governmental policies impacting American Indians;
  - (j) analyze perspectives of American Indians in US history.

### Understandings

- Boarding schools and other federal policies of assimilation brought disruptions to the traditional transference of knowledge in tribal communities and have had wide-ranging and lasting impacts on American Indian individuals and communities. (EU 2)
- Federal policy periods, particularly The Boarding School Period beginning in 1879, have affected Indian people and still shape who they are today. (EU 5)
- Much of America’s history has been told from the Euro-American perspective. Only recently have American Indians begun to write about and retell history from an indigenous perspective. (EU 6)

### Essential Questions

- To what extent does the boarding school experience directly impact tribes today?
- Why is it important to understand the historical background regarding the education of American Indian people?

### Students will be able to...

- understand and explain the basis for the establishment of Indian boarding schools.
- understand how boarding school experiences still impact American Indian people.

### Students will know...

- the historical context in which decisions were made regarding the education of American Indians and the subsequent negative consequences.



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## Stage 2 Assessment Evidence

### Performance Tasks

1. Research and analyze issues and events associated with the boarding school period.
2. Students will gather evidence and present their findings in the form of a brief essay and oral presentation.

## Stage 3 Learning Plan

### Learning Activities:

#### Day One

Begin the class period by showing the following clip [Hidden History: Native American Boarding Schools](#). This video provides a brief overview of Native American boarding schools. Have students use a 3 – 2 – 1 prompt to review the video.

Write down three things in the video that caught your attention, two questions about the information presented in the video, and one thing you would like to learn more about

Facilitate a class discussion based upon their notes and have students share at least one question they have about information put forth in the video.

Next, distribute a copy of the boarding school reflections from Luther Standing Bear (Lakota) and Lone Wolf (Blackfeet) to each student. The statements are at the end of this lesson. Allow at least five minutes for silent reading. Ask them to pair up and discuss their reaction with their partner. Facilitate another class discussion and have each pair of students share their thoughts regarding the quotes.

To provide a historical context show part one (approximately nine minutes) of the PBS documentary [Unspoken: America's Native American Boarding Schools](#)

#### Day Two

Show the remainder of the film Unspoken: America's Native American Boarding Schools and have students answer the following questions as they watch the film.

- What was life like in the boarding schools? Describe a typical day.
- What reactions did some American Indians have to this type of education?
- What were some of the motives behind the movement to educate American Indians in this manner?
- To what extent does the impact of the boarding school era have on American Indian people today?

#### Days Three/Four

For a summative assessment, assign small groups/pairs to utilize the suggested research resources have them prepare a poster presentation to share what they have learned about boarding schools.

## Teacher Resources

Check out these resources for more instructional strategies for teaching about the boarding school era.

[Montana Tribal Histories: Educators Resource Guide](#) – See Chapter Five – *Boarding Schools: The Abduction of Children*

[Slide Show: Archival Photos of Children in Traditional and Montana Indian Boarding School Settings](#)

[Boarding School chapter](#) from Native Words, Native Warriors – curriculum resource from the National Museum of the American Indian

[Exploring the Stories Behind Native American Boarding Schools](#) - Library of Congress. Through primary source documents, students explore the experiences and perspectives of individuals involved in Native American boarding schools.

[American Indian Stories by Zitkala-Sa Model Teaching Unit Language Arts](#)

[Playing for the World: 1904 Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School Girls Basketball Team DVD Model Teaching Unit](#)

## Student Research Resources

[AMERICAN EXPERIENCE: Taken from Their Families](#)

[American Indian Boarding Schools Haunt Many](#) – story from National Public Radio

[Death by Civilization](#) – Article from the Atlantic magazine

[Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians](#)

[From Wind River to Carlisle: Indian Boarding Schools in Wyoming and the Nation](#)

[Hidden History: Native American Boarding Schools.](#)

[History and Foundation of American Indian Education](#)

[Today's Remaining Native American Boarding Schools Are A Far Cry From Their History](#)

[Unspoken: America's Native American Boarding Schools](#) – PBS Documentary

[We won't forget about the children](#)

## Relevant Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians

### Essential Understanding 2

Just as there is great diversity among tribal nations, there is great diversity among individual American Indians as identity is developed, defined, and redefined by entities, organizations, and people. There is no generic American Indian.

#### RELEVANT KEY CONCEPTS

- There exists no universally accepted rule for establishing an individual's identity as Indian. However, as a general rule, an Indian is a person who has some biological Indian ancestry and is recognized as an Indian by a tribe.
- For millennia, individual tribal groups successfully educated their children using highly effective indigenous pedagogies that imbued Indian children with all the knowledge and skills they needed to thrive in their world.
- Boarding schools and other federal policies of assimilation brought disruptions to the traditional transference of knowledge in tribal communities and have had wide-ranging and lasting impacts on American Indian individuals and communities.

### Essential Understanding 5

There were many federal policies put into place throughout American history that have affected Indian people in the past and continue to shape who they are today.

#### RELEVANT KEY CONCEPTS

- The complexity of contemporary American Indian rights and sovereignty can be difficult to decipher; however, this history can be easier to understand when it is divided into major federal policy periods.
- Early in American history, Congress exerted extensive power over Indians and since has enacted over four hundred treaties and statutes dealing with Native Americans. Regulations and guidelines implementing these laws are even more numerous, making American Indians the most regulated population in the US.
- Federal Indian policies have fluctuated between respecting tribal sovereignty and terminating tribes' sovereign status altogether.
- Although the history of federal Indian policy is long and complex, understanding its main legislative pieces and outcomes helps provide context for the contemporary experiences of Indian students and communities.

### Essential Understanding 6

History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from American Indian perspectives frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

## RELEVANT KEY CONCEPTS

- History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller.
- Much of America's history has been told from the Euro-American perspective. Only recently have American Indians begun to write about and retell history from an indigenous perspective.
- It is critical that history curricula include the stories and experiences of individual men and women of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious groups.
- Providing students with textbooks, primary source documents, and surviving oral traditions allows them to gain a more objective view of history and provides them with an historical context in which to situate and understand the experiences and perspectives of these groups in American society today.
- By giving students the opportunity to view our past through the eyes of many, they can begin to create their own view of our collective history, understand the present, and become better prepared to engage the problems of the future.

## Luther Standing Bear (Oglala Lakota) remembered his educational experience at Carlisle

*Although we were yet wearing our Indian clothes . . . one day when we came to school there was a lot of writing on one of the blackboards. We did not know what it meant, but our interpreter came into the room and said "Do you see all these marks on the blackboards? Well, each word is a white man's name. They are going to give each one of you one of these names by which you will hereafter be known." None of the names were read or explained to us, so of course we did not know the sound or meaning of any of them. Each child in turn walked to the blackboard with a pointer and selected his future Anglo name.*

Source: Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013, 138-139.

## Lone Wolf (Blackfeet) was taken from his family in 1890 and placed in the Fort Shaw boarding school near Great Falls, Montana. He describes his experience.

*School wasn't for me when I was a kid. I tried three of them and they were all bad. The first time was when I was about 8 years old. The soldiers came and rounded up as many of the Blackfeet children as they could. The government had decided we were to get White Man's education by force.*

*It was very cold that day when we were loaded into the wagons. None of us wanted to go and our parents didn't want to let us go. Oh, we cried for this was the first time we were to be separated from our parents. I remember looking back at Na-tah-ki and she was crying too. Nobody waved as the wagons, escorted by the soldiers, took us toward the school at Fort Shaw. Once there our belongings were taken from us, even the little medicine bags our mothers had given us to protect us from harm. Everything was placed in a heap and set afire.*

*Next was the long hair, the pride of all the Indians. The boys, one by one, would break down and cry when they saw their braids thrown on the floor. All of the buckskin clothes had to go and we had to put on the clothes of the White Man.*

*If we thought that the days were bad, the nights were much worse. This was the time when real loneliness set in, for it was then that we were all alone. Many boys ran away from the school because the treatment was so bad but most of them were caught and brought back by the police. We were told never to talk Indian and if we were caught, we got a strapping with a leather belt.*

*I remember one evening when we were all lined up in a room and one of the boys said something in Indian to another boy. The man in charge of us pounced on the boy, caught him by the shirt, and threw him across the room. Later we found out that his collar-bone was broken. The boy's father, an old warrior, came to the school. He told the instructor that among his people, children were never punished by striking them. That was no way to teach children; kind words and good examples were much better. Then he added, "Had I been there when that fellow hit my son, I would have killed him." Before the instructor could stop the old warrior he took his boy and left. The family then beat it to Canada and never came back.*

Source: Paul Dyck, "Lone Wolf returns to that long ago time," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1972, 24.