

# Indian/Native American Boarding Schools: Their History, Harm and Impact

*Compelling Question: What impact did the Indian Boarding Schools have on individuals and the Native American community?*

Grade Level		Time	Standards/Competencies	
K-2	3-5	60–90 Minutes (2-part lesson)	<b>Common Core Anchor:</b> Reading: R1, R3, R9 Writing: W1, W2, W4 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL2, SL3 Language: L4, L5, L6	<b>SEL:</b> Self-Awareness Social Awareness Relationship Skills Responsible Decision-Making
MS	HS			



### Web Related Connections

#### Lessons

- [Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples Day?](#)
- [Lewis and Clark: The Unheard Voices](#)

#### Other Resources:

- [Native American Heritage Month](#)
- [Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism](#)
- [The History and Impact of Child-Family Separations When We Were Alone](#) (children’s book)

### LESSON OVERVIEW

In 2021, an Indigenous community in Canada found evidence of a mass grave that contained the remains of 215 children on the grounds of a former Indian boarding school. In the aftermath of and inspired by this discovery in Canada, Deb Haaland, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and first Indigenous Cabinet Secretary in the U.S., announced the “Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative.” The initiative’s purpose is to investigate the loss of human life and lasting consequences of the Federal Indian boarding school system in the U.S. The first part of the report was issued in May 2022. It revealed that between 1819 and 1969, the U.S. operated or supported 408 boarding schools across 37 states (or then-territories), including 21 schools in Alaska and 7 schools in Hawaii.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about Indian boarding schools, reflect on personal narratives about the experience and examine recommendations contained in the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative.

[Note to teacher: The term “Indian Boarding School” is used throughout the lesson plan because this is the term that was used to describe these schools historically. However, when referring to people of Native American descent, we name the specific tribe or nation or use the terms Native American or Indigenous. If appropriate, you can share this information with students at the beginning of the lesson.]

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand the history, purpose and impact of Indian boarding schools.
- Students will explore personal narratives of people who attended the Indian boarding schools.
- Students will analyze the official report about the boarding schools and subsequent recommendations.
- Students will reflect upon the differences, limitations and opportunities presented by both personal narratives and data/statistics.

### Key Words

- abuse
- appropriations
- assimilation
- boarding school
- coerced
- compelled
- comprehensive
- dispossess
- eradicate
- expansive
- generations
- genocide
- identity-alteration
- induced
- intergenerational trauma
- militarized
- preservation

## MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- [Background Information on Indian Residential Schools and their Impact on the Lives of Indigenous Children](#)
- “Survivors of Native American Boarding Schools Discuss Dark History in the US” (2021, 20:41 min., NBC News, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0V6ewzenbk4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0V6ewzenbk4)). Or, if there are time constraints “Native American Boarding School Survivors Share Their Stories” (2021, 4:40 min., MSNBC, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kfpz8Jn8ZQM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kfpz8Jn8ZQM))
- For each of the following, make copies for a third of the class:
  - “Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report” (U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, May 2022, [www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi\\_investigative\\_report\\_may\\_2022\\_508.pdf](http://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf), pages 91-95)
  - “Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report” (U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, [www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi\\_investigative\\_report\\_may\\_2022\\_508.pdf](http://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf), pages 95-99)
  - “Interior Secretary Deb Haaland on the Dark History of Indigenous Boarding Schools” (The Washington Post, June 25, 2021, [www.washingtonpost.com/podcasts/please-go-on/interior-secretary-deb-haaland-on-the-dark-history-of-indigenous-boarding-schools/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/podcasts/please-go-on/interior-secretary-deb-haaland-on-the-dark-history-of-indigenous-boarding-schools/))

## Key Words (cont.)

reckoning  
reclamation  
re-education  
reparations  
repatriation  
resilience  
revitalization  
trauma  
vilify

## PROCEDURES

### Part 1.



#### Information Sharing: What are Indian Residential Schools?

1. Ask students: *Have you heard or learned anything about Indian (Native American) boarding schools? What have you heard or learned about? If you haven't heard anything, what do you think “Indian boarding schools” might be, based on their name?*
2. Share some or all the [background information on Indian Residential Schools and their impact on the lives of Indigenous children](#).



#### Video Viewing

1. Watch the video, “[Survivors of Native American Boarding Schools Discuss Dark History in the US.](#)” While watching, have students take notes on words, quotes, ideas and thoughts expressed that are memorable, meaningful, important or impactful—or ones they have questions about.

**Note:** If time does not permit you to watch the whole video during class time, watch this shorter version, “[Native American Boarding School Survivors Share Their Stories](#)” (4 minutes). Another option is to have students watch the longer version for homework the evening before teaching the lesson.

2. After watching video, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all the following questions.
  - As you watched the video, what did you notice? What did you wonder?
  - What thoughts and feelings came to mind while watching?
  - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
  - What is your biggest takeaway from the video?
  - What words, images and quotes stood out to you?

- What happened to the identity of the Indigenous people featured in the video who attended the Indian boarding schools?
  - What were some of the short and long-term impacts on children and families who experienced the Indian boarding schools?
  - What impact did the boarding school on the Indigenous people? What is the impact on our society?
  - Why is important to know what happened and educate others about the Indian boarding schools and their impact?
  - What are some of the next steps to educate, acknowledge and hear were explored? What are your thoughts about the most important steps?
  - What questions do you have or what do you want to know more about?
3. In the film, the concept of “assimilation” or forced assimilation is discussed. To understand the concept in regard to the Indian boarding schools, first elicit/explain the following definition of culture.
- Culture:** The patterns of daily life learned consciously and unconsciously by a group of people. These patterns can be seen in language, governing practices, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, relationships, family roles, communication style, clothing, etc.
4. Ask students: *Based on how you heard the term used in the video, what is assimilation, or forced assimilation?* Have students use online and print dictionaries to provide various definitions of assimilation. Britannica’s dictionary definition is “to cause (a person or group) to become part of a different society, country, etc.”
5. Ask students: *How does the term assimilate relate to what happened at the Indian boarding schools?* Explain that one of the main goals of the Indian boarding schools was to force children to assimilate to the dominant white culture in the U.S. and for their Indigenous culture, language, heritage, and beliefs to be erased and disappear. **“Forced assimilation”** is an involuntary process of cultural assimilation of religious, racial or ethnic groups where they are forced to adopt language, identity, norms, customs, values, etc. of the dominant culture by the government.

Ask: *What are your thoughts and feelings about this? Does this resonate with you and if so, how?*

## Part 2.

### Jigsaw Reading Activity

1. Explain to students that through a reading activity, they will learn more about the Indian boarding schools, their scope and their impact. Explain to students that they will use a jigsaw learning strategy to read and discuss one of three pieces of writing. Two of the readings are excerpts from the “Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative” report and one is a personal narrative written by Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior, about the Indian boarding school experience.

Explain that the jigsaw strategy provides an opportunity for students to learn about different aspects of a topic and then tell/teach each other about the parts they read.

**Note:** You may also choose to first read the introduction to the [report](#) on pages 3-4 together as a class, either silently or aloud.

2. Divide students into three evenly sized groups and designate them Groups A, B and C. Distribute to each student the reading for their designated group as specified below, and give them 10-15 minutes to read their articles silently.

Group A: [“Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report,”](#) pages 91-95

Group B: [“Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report,”](#) pages 95-99

Group C: [“Interior Secretary Deb Haaland on the Dark History of Indigenous Boarding Schools”](#)

3. After reading, instruct students to remain in their groups and take 5-7 minutes to discuss what they've read and respond to the following questions:
  - What did you learn?
  - What are your main takeaways from the reading?
  - What questions do you still have?
  - What information is the most important to share with others?
4. Following the discussions in their groups, divide students into new groups of three students each, making sure that there is one student from each of the original groups (A, B, C) in the new groups. When the new groups are formed, give each student 3-4 minutes to share information about what they read and their reflections. In this way, all students get to learn from each of the three readings.
5. After the small group discussion, reconvene the class and engage them in a class discussion by asking the following questions.
  - How was it to summarize the information in your article and share it with others?
  - What did you learn from your reading? What did you learn from the other groups' reading?
  - What did you learn about the experience and impact of Indian boarding schools?
  - What do you think should be done in light of the information that was revealed in the report?
  - What is the advantage of reading a report that includes data and statistics?
  - What is the advantage of reading and watching personal narratives and stories?
  - To what extent are both (statistics/data and personal narratives) important and why?
  - What questions do you still have? How would we go about answering those questions?
  - What do you think individuals, communities and should do about the Indian boarding schools?

[Note to Teacher: If you have a [Newsela](#) account and would prefer to use a reading selection with different lexile/reading levels, you can use their article, "[First Pope Francis, now U.S. churches face reckoning with Indigenous boarding schools.](#)"]

### Writing Activity

1. Engage students in a writing activity by first writing or projecting the following three prompts on the board/smartboard. Have students turn and talk with a student sitting near them, responding briefly (2 minutes each) to one of the three prompts.
  - What is your biggest takeaway from learning about Indian boarding schools?
  - What do you think are the most important next steps or recommendations to educate, acknowledge the harm, repair the harm, and heal?
  - As you listened to the narratives of people who attended the boarding schools or whose family members did, what were your strongest thoughts and feelings?
2. Explain to students that they will choose one of these prompts and engage in a writing assignment around that prompt. Have students choose one of these options to respond to their chosen prompt: (1) essay, (2) speech, (3) persuasive letter or (4) poem. Additional research may be needed to complete the assignment.
3. Provide 15-20 minutes in class for students to get started and then assign the completion of the writing for homework over one or a few days.
4. When the writing assignments are complete, have students share their writing aloud. Consider having students record them and make them available on your school or class website and/or social media channels.

## Closing

Have students share one thing they learned during the lesson that they didn't know before.

## ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [“A report on Native American boarding schools shows their horrors”](#) (*The Economist*, May 14, 2022)
- [“Death by Civilization”](#) (*The Atlantic*, March 8, 2019)
- [Deb Haaland: My grandparents were stolen from their families as children. We must learn about this history.](#) (Washington Post, June 11, 2021)
- [“‘Horrible History’: Mass Grave of Indigenous Children Reported in Canada”](#) (*The New York Times*, October 5, 2021)
- [“How Boarding Schools Tried to ‘Kill the Indian’ Through Assimilation](#) (History, November 1, 2018)
- [Indian Boarding Schools](#) (National Indian Child Welfare Association)
- [“Interior Secretary Deb Haaland on the dark history of Indigenous boarding schools”](#) (*The Washington Post* Podcast Please Go On, June 25, 2021)
- [“Lost Lives, Lost Culture: The Forgotten History of Indigenous Boarding Schools](#) (*The New York Times*, November 17, 2021)
- [“Native American Children Endured Brutal Treatment in U.S. Boarding Schools, Federal Report Shows”](#) (*Education Week*, May 11, 2022)
- [Struggling with Cultural Repression](#) (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian)
- [The U.S. history of Native American Boarding Schools](#) (The Indigenous Foundation)
- [Unspoken: America's Native American Boarding Schools](#) (PBS Utah)

# Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
R9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Writing
W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
W2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
W4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
SL3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
Language
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

## CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

## Background Information on Indian Residential Schools and their Impact on the Lives of Indigenous Children

- For decades, starting in the late 1800's and ending in the 1970's, most Indigenous children in Canada were removed from their family homes and forced into Indian boarding schools (as they were referred to), and a large number never returned home. Indian Boarding Schools were also owned and operated in the U.S.
- In 2021, an [Indigenous community in Canada](#) found evidence of a mass grave that contained the remains of 215 children on the grounds of a former Indian boarding school. Since May 2021, the remains of more than 1,000 people, mostly children, have been discovered on the grounds of three former residential schools in two Canadian provinces.
- The Canadian discovery inspired the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland, to announce the "Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative." This initiative directed the Department of the Interior to undertake an investigation of the loss of human life and lasting consequences of the U.S. Federal Indian boarding school system. (Secretary Deb Haaland made history when she became the first Native American person to serve as a U.S. Cabinet Secretary. She is a member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe.)
- The report, issued in May 2022, revealed that between 1819 and 1969, the U.S. operated or supported 408 boarding schools across 37 states (or then-territories), including 21 schools in Alaska and 7 schools in Hawaii.
- The Federal Indian boarding school system attempted to assimilate Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children through education that involved the use of military practices and identity-alteration methods including but not limited to the following tactics:
  - Changing Indigenous children's names from Native American to English names.
  - Cutting the hair of Indigenous children (long hair is a significant aspect of Native culture and pride).
  - Discouraging or preventing the use of Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian languages, religions, and cultural practice.
  - Organizing Native American and Native Hawaiian children into units to perform military drills.
- The Federal Indian boarding school system discouraged or prevented the use of Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian languages or cultural or religious practices through punishment, including corporal punishment, which is physical force intended to inflict physical pain.
- The creation of the U.S. Indian boarding school system was part of a broader policy to acquire Native territories and erase and eliminate Native identity.
- By the 1920s, one group estimates, nearly [83% of Native American children](#) attended these boarding schools.
- The investigation has identified marked or unmarked burial sites at approximately 53 different schools across the Indian boarding school system. As the investigation continues, they expect the number of identified burial sites to increase. It is possible that thousands or tens of thousands of Indigenous children died at Federal Indian boarding schools.