

NATIVE AMERICAN EDUCATION FOR ALL RESOURCES

Partnership of IllumiNative and the National Indian Education Association



ILLUMINATIVE



Grade Level

6-8

Subject

Social Studies

Lesson Title

**Addressing Historical Trauma:
The Indian Boarding School Era**

Activity Description: General Pratt’s infamous statement of “Kill the Indian, and Save the Man” summarizes the premise of the Indian Boarding School Era. As thousands of Native children were forcibly sent to learn the ways of Western European civilization in an attempt to eradicate tribes and their culture. Though boarding schools declined after the Civil Rights Movement the effects are still felt today. This activity shares the history and trauma of the Boarding School Era through a learning series by the Public Broadcasting Station. This activity is best if done as a family or class so that young people are supported as they understand more about a controversial and painful topic.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- WiFi (required)*
- Pencil & paper (optional)
- Digital access to PBS Utah series [Unspoken: America’s Native American Boarding Schools](#)

*To view the videos and images for this activity, a smartphone, tablet, or computer device is required.

STEPS

American history has many silent pieces and these are usually the “ugly truths” that paint a grim picture for certain groups of people. Indian Boarding Schools tend to be one of these silent pieces of history that many people do not know about or assume are not that important to remember. However, for the thousands of Native children who suffered in these schools and lost valuable knowledge of their language and culture, the Boarding School Era caused a lifetime of historical trauma. This activity explains the history and impact of the Boarding School Era. Because this is a traumatic issue that still impacts Native communities today, it is best to do this activity with parents or elders.

Activity Steps:

PBS Utah presents an in-depth look at the history and impact of Indian Boarding Schools. This series is in **two parts**. Part 1 talks about what led to the founding of these schools and presents a documentary film about the century of abuse caused by these boarding schools.

1. Read the informational article [Unspoken: America’s Native American Boarding School](#) and give attention to the pictures and short video clips. Then, watch the [one hour documentary film](#) at the top of the page for Part 1.
2. The purpose of these boarding schools was assimilation, the process by which one group or race of people become like another group by using their language, beliefs, clothing, customs, etc. How successful were these boarding schools at assimilating Native children. How are these effects still seen today?
3. After watching the film, move to the [next page for Part 2](#). This part discusses the impact the Civil Rights Era on the decline of boarding schools and how some tribes are working to take back control of educating their young people.
 - a. What key events in the 1960s and 1970s helped decrease the amount of boarding schools?
 - b. How did these schools impact the academic skills and attendance of Native students? How has this added to the current issues tribes have today?
4. The PBS series on boarding schools will take time to view all the material and discuss what you are learning with your parents or elders. For a shorter learning session, read this [article on boarding schools](#) from the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian educational series on Code Talkers.

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HELPFUL TIPS

Parents and caregivers: Though the history of boarding school can demonstrate the resilience and perseverance of Native Americans, the traumatic events and the effects of historical discrimination continue today. While it is important to share this reality with your children, it can also cause feelings of pain, confusion, and anger. If you or your family have been directly impacted by the boarding school era, reach out for support through an organization such as The [National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition](#)

For parents or elders who want more information, read this article from The Atlantic, "[Death by Civilization](#)," that includes some first hand information and a more personal look at boarding school life.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Families and educators: The effects of historical trauma are very real for Native American communities today. Educators must not shy away from teaching about boarding schools because these effects are still felt in classrooms across the nation. It is important for healing to address the trauma while also being sensitive to the emotional needs of young people. Here are resources to help with teaching about boarding schools:

- For help with teaching traumatic topics such as boarding schools, access this resource: "[Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom](#)" by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- For additional lesson plans and instructional support, the Library of Congress provides a teaching guide "[Assimilation Through Education](#)" as well as a collection of primary sources such as photographs, maps, and original documents to support the lessons.
- History.com also provides an educational page "[How Boarding Schools Tried to Kill the Indian](#)" with primary sources, videos, and information.

Activity Resources:

- PBS Utah series Unspoken: America's Native American Boarding Schools <https://www.pbsutah.org/whatson/pbs-utah-productions/unspoken-americas-native-american-boarding-schools>
- "Boarding Schools" by Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian <https://americanindian.si.edu/education/codetalkers/html/chapter3.html>

Additional Resources:

- The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/>
- "Death by Civilization" by Mary Annette Pember in The Atlantic <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/03/traumatic-legacy-indian-boarding-schools/584293/>
- "Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom" by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/PDFs/FINAL-Race-and-Trauma-in-the-Classroom-Factsheet.pdf>
- "Assimilation Through Education" by the Library of Congress <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/assimilation/>
- "How Boarding Schools Tried to Kill the Indian" by History.com <https://www.history.com/news/how-boarding-schools-tried-to-kill-the-indian-through-assimilation>