

FROM DIRECTORS JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT AND EMILY KASSIE AND ACADEMY AWARD®-NOMINATED PRODUCER KELLEN QUINN



DOCUMENTARY  
FILMS

# SUGARCANE

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BREATHTAKING”

The New York Times



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY FILMS PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH IMPACT PARTNERS AND FIT VIA VI A KASSIE FILMS AND HEDGEHOG FILMS PRODUCTION “SUGARCANE”  
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SABRINA MERAGE NAIM DOUGLAS CHOI ADAM & MELONY LEWIS MEADOW FUND JANA LEE CHERNESKI & IAN DESAI DAVID & LINDA CORNFELD MAIDA LYNN  
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DIRECTED BY JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT AND EMILY KASSIE



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# *SUGARCANE*

## Discussion Guide

### CONTENT NOTE

The United States has a parallel history of Indian Boarding Schools and other assimilationist policies directed at Indigenous peoples. This resource was adapted from a Canadian learning and dialogue guide and created to support the education of learners in the United States. Its goal is to foster understanding of and respect for the experiences of survivors, Indigenous families, communities, and nations. Please note that some of the content may be upsetting or emotionally challenging for some readers.

If you require immediate support and are in Canada, please contact the following:

The Indian Residential School Survivors Society's 24/7 Crisis Support line: **1-800-721-0066**

The 24-hour National Indian Residential School Crisis Line: **1-866-925-4419**

For individuals in the United States, the [StrongHearts Native Helpline](#) is available at 1-844-7NATIVE (762-8483) for 24/7 confidential support for Indigenous individuals.

Call or text 988 or visit [www.988lifeline.org](http://www.988lifeline.org) to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Visit the [National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition \(NABS\) website](#) for U.S.-focused healing resources.



# Table of Contents

| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>                                                     | <i>Click the lesson title to be taken to that page</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Facilitation Guidelines                                                 | 4                                                      |
| Supporting Learners Without Access to Biological Family Histories       | 5                                                      |
| Notes to Educator/Discussion Leader                                     | 6                                                      |
| About the Film                                                          | 7                                                      |
| Directors' Statement                                                    | 8                                                      |
| Getting Started                                                         | 9                                                      |
| The Origins of Indian Residential Schools and Indian Reserves in Canada | 12                                                     |
| The History of Indian Boarding Schools in the United States             | 13                                                     |
| Government Perspectives                                                 | 15                                                     |
| Survivor Perspectives                                                   | 17                                                     |
| Timelines and Maps                                                      | 19                                                     |
| Useful Terms                                                            | 22                                                     |
| Discussion Questions                                                    | 26                                                     |
| Action (Community Service Learning)                                     | 29                                                     |
| Bibliography                                                            | 32                                                     |
| Film Credits                                                            | 33                                                     |
| <i>Journeys in Film Credits</i>                                         | 34                                                     |

# Facilitation Guidelines

Filmmakers use immersive storytelling to produce intense thoughts and emotions in the viewer. **Journeys in Film** uses this powerful medium as a springboard for meaningful dialogue around humanity's most pressing issues. In this guide, you will find suggestions for leading productive conversations that broaden perspectives, increase global competency, encourage empathy, and build new paradigms for education.

- When watching a film or having a powerful discussion, normalize taking breaks and exercising bodily autonomy. Acknowledge that conversations around complex topics can be vulnerable, complicated, and challenging. Encourage members to voice and do what is right for them without needing to explain or apologize.
- People do their best when they know what to expect. Start and end your meetings on time.
- Share or co-create your intentions for the meeting.
- Create your space. If possible, share snacks or find other ways to create an inviting, comfortable atmosphere.
- Create a trustworthy space. Maintain confidentiality and only speak to your own experience.
- Minimize distractions while you are together. Silence cell phones and devices so you can give your full attention to the conversation.
- Practice whole-body listening. Listen to words, tone, body language, and the feeling in the atmosphere.
- Acknowledge voices that may be absent. Is there a lived experience that isn't represented in your group? Who are the bridge people who might be able to connect you with other people in your community who might bring new perspectives to the table?
- Adopt an attitude of positive intent. If someone says something that bothers you, assume positive intent and ask for more information.
- Ignite your curiosity around other people's views and opinions. Listen to understand, not to respond. You don't need to agree with others in your group or make it known that you are "right" to have a worthwhile conversation.
- Words matter. Be open to learning and practicing new ways to communicate with others.
- Be clear, direct, and kind in your communication. Nobody benefits when you bottle your opinions.
- Everyone has blind spots and biases; cultivate a space of grace as you enter into new territory together.
- If a conversation gets heated, practice acknowledging the tension, pausing as a group, and taking a collective breath together before diving back in or taking a longer break to reset.
- Privilege your relationships with others over the content or agenda of the meeting. Show each other kindness.
- Create a closing ritual that celebrates the time you've spent together and either gives closure or gives members something to think about before your next meeting.

# Supporting Learners Without Access to Biological Family Histories

Some lessons center on genealogical research, family history, and ancestral memory. However, educators should be mindful that not all learners have access to information about their biological families. Some may be adopted, in foster care, estranged from family members, displaced by migration, or lacking records due to war, incarceration, or historical trauma. Others may simply not feel comfortable discussing family matters.

To ensure an inclusive learning environment:

## 1. Broaden the definition of “family history.”

Instead of focusing solely on biological lineage, invite learners to explore:

- chosen family
- cultural or community traditions
- important adults in their lives
- neighborhood or local histories
- community archives or public records
- collective identities they participate in

## 2. Provide multiple entry points into genealogical inquiry.

Students may:

- research local historical sites
- interview a mentor or community elder
- analyze a cultural practice meaningful to them
- reflect on stories from their community, school, or neighborhood
- explore a historical event connected to their identity

No learner should be required to disclose personal or sensitive information.

## 3. Offer alternatives to sharing personal stories.

Include options such as private journaling, fictionalized narratives, archival exploration, or creative projects that do not require personal family details.

## 4. Avoid assumptions.

Use inclusive language such as “people who influence you,” “stories connected to your community,” or “a tradition that shapes your identity” to prevent placing learners in uncomfortable positions.

## 5. Build psychologically safe environments.

Genealogical and historical inquiry can evoke strong emotions. Offer opportunities to opt out, step away, or choose a different activity. Normalize diverse family experiences and emphasize that identity is shaped by many forces, not only ancestry.

By creating flexibility, honoring privacy, and recognizing diverse lived experiences, educators can ensure that all learners can engage meaningfully with the film’s themes of memory, identity, justice, and repair.

# Notes to Educator/Discussion Leader

This guide supports engagement with the film *Sugarcane*. It was created to support teachers and students in understanding both the structural and deeply personal impacts of the Indian Residential School systems that were prominent in North America (in both Canada, which is the focus of the film, and the United States).

This guide is intended to provide historical context and varied perspectives, and to prompt constructive dialogue in educational settings. Before watching or assigning the film, we encourage teachers to be aware of their students' backgrounds and connection to the subject matter. All North American Indigenous people are impacted by colonization and the residential school system, and many have direct family experience of intergenerational trauma. It is also important to be cognizant that non-Indigenous students may have been impacted by some of the issues presented in the film, including physical and sexual abuse.

## Grade Levels

Though we defer to educators and communities to determine readiness to engage with this material, we recommend teaching with the film for high school students and above, noting that the content and discussions may trigger trauma responses in people of any age. It is important that educators/discussion leaders watch the film *before* sharing it with their learners in order to be prepared to use these materials effectively and support learners as they navigate this content.

## Health Supports

We recommend that educators contact mental health or guidance counselors in the school or community in advance of the screening, and that they be available to learners afterwards. We also recommend, if possible, inviting an elder or a member of the local Indigenous community to offer prayer, song, or smudge before and after the screening. After the film, we encourage educators to give learners a short break to process. With discussion components, personal journal reflection may be an appropriate alternative to discussion if that feels more effective for learners.

## About the Film



A stunning tribute to the resilience of Native people and their way of life, the Oscar-nominated documentary *Sugarcane*, from directors Julian Brave NoiseCat and Emily Kassie, is an epic cinematic portrait of a community during a moment of international reckoning.

In 2021, evidence of potential unmarked graves was discovered on the grounds of an Indian residential school in British Columbia run by the Catholic Church. After years of silence, the forced separation, assimilation, and abuse many children experienced at these segregated boarding schools was brought to light, sparking a national outcry against a system rife with abuse, designed to assimilate and disempower Indigenous communities. Set amidst a groundbreaking investigation, *Sugarcane* illuminates the beauty of a community breaking cycles of intergenerational trauma and finding the strength to persevere.

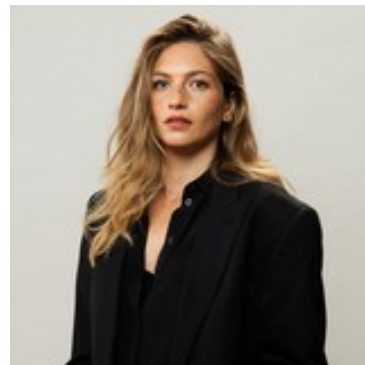
*Sugarcane* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, where Julian and Emily won the Directing Award in the U.S. documentary competition. It has since been honored with more than 50 nominations and over 30 wins, including two Critics Choice Awards, the National Board of Review award for best documentary, and an Academy Award nomination.

## Directors' Statement

This film was born of haunting truths and mythic forces. It was made through the combined perspectives of insiders and outsiders.

From the outset, we knew that *Sugarcane* needed to convey how the past is present for the survivors of residential schools and their descendants, and how the death toll from a century-long colonial effort by the Church and government continues to rise. So, for nearly three years, we lived alongside participants, feeling the rawness of their pain and bearing

witness to the bravery in their resilience, while documenting a vibrant world in a moment of historic reckoning.



*Sugarcane Directors Julian Brave NoiseCat and Emily Kassie*

Throughout, we were drawn to the contradictions we saw in the lives of our subjects: of faith and culture; of the beauty and weight of home and family, when those things have been so fundamentally broken; and of the pursuit of truth, which can both liberate and kill. But we also connected to the parts of this experience that transcended: of the humanity that called the film's participants to a greater, lasting purpose at the moment it mattered most; of the connection between departed ancestors and loved ones and the people they left behind; and of the forces that, for some reason, brought us together to tell this story.

To tell that kind of story, our filmmaking aimed to be at once intimate and epic. We took time to revere the awe-inspiring mountains, lakes and rivers of British Columbia and the dusky history of the Vatican — the Indigenous homelands and the imperial metropole that besieged them. We were alongside the film's participants as they dug graves for their friends, searched for painful truths in the recesses of their memories, and mustered the courage to confront representatives of the Church, the government, and their own families. You can feel their hesitation, the twitch of their fingers, the catch in their breath as they struggle to confront their deepest secrets and give voice to their shame.

We approached this project with common values and a shared vision — based as much on heart as intellect, and on vulnerability as much as experience. At many turns, making this film was the most significant experience of our lives. It brought us closer to Creation and whatever that thing is that is beyond and greater than ourselves.

Residential schools nearly annihilated the Indian way of life — a life imperiled by the pain and injustices of colonialism, yes, but also, overwhelmingly, a beautiful life full of family, culture and love. Our film aims to transform these dark truths into powerful legends that can endure and be remembered by future generations.

Julian Brave NoiseCat and Emily Kassie

# Getting Started

## Preparing the Setting

Creating a space for diverse perspectives and knowledge-sharing without fear will promote dialogue and critical thinking. In addition to the facilitation guidelines already included in this guide, we are sharing two additional resources that educators/discussion leaders might find helpful: [Center for Innovative Teaching's "Establishing Community Agreements and Classroom Norms"](#) and [Psychology Today's "The Five-Step Path From Rupture to Repair."](#) The aim is to cultivate a respectful group dynamic in which all students' contributions are encouraged and valued, regardless of racial, religious, political, and socioeconomic differences.

We recommend the following for a post-screening dialogue:

- Adopt a shared set of principles and guidelines for the group.
- Arrange seats in a circle or horseshoe so participants can see each other.
- Provide tissues, water, and quiet breakout areas for those who need space.
- Have a support person available if possible.
- Remind students that there is no place for derogatory comments or any disparagement.
- Invoke Chatham House rules: What is said in the space remains in the space.
- Encourage "I" statements.

## Indigenous Community Engagement

While this guide uses the term "Indigenous" broadly, perspectives, protocols, and knowledge differ among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities in Canada. In the United States, the terms *Indigenous* and *Native American* are commonly used to refer to the original peoples of this land. These terms encompass hundreds of distinct nations, cultures, and communities and should not be understood as describing a single, monolithic group. It is preferable to call them by their nation name if it is known. Today, there are more than 570 federally recognized Tribal Nations in the United States, in addition to many Tribal Nations that are not federally recognized. Educators and group leaders are encouraged to engage with the Indigenous community local to their classroom and, where possible, invite them to participate in the screening and discussion. When inviting local members of the Indigenous community, it is important to provide them context on what will be covered in the presentation and to not expect them to speak on behalf of all Indigenous peoples or recount family histories if they do not feel comfortable doing so. Within the local Indigenous community, there may be organizations that focus specifically on this type of community engagement and outreach. It is important that in educational settings, Indigenous learners are not singled out and expected to share their experiences or be seen as a representative of such a diverse group of peoples and nations.

While *Sugarcane* focuses on the Williams Lake First Nation, St. Joseph's Mission Indian Residential School, and the Secwépemc, Chilcotin, and Dakelh children who were forced to attend, its lessons resonate across North America, including among Indigenous communities in the United States. This history is also relevant to non-Indigenous people. It is a history that continues to shape individuals, communities, and societies in different ways.



## **A Note on Numbers — Canada and the United States**

Across the United States and Canada, hundreds of thousands of Indigenous children were separated from their families and forced to attend government- and church-run boarding and residential schools. These systems were designed to suppress Indigenous languages, cultures, and identities and to assimilate Indigenous children into settler society. Similar

assimilation policies existed in Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and elsewhere, reflecting a broader global pattern of separating Indigenous children from their families and communities.

For more than 150 years, Canada's Indian Residential School system forcibly removed tens of thousands of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis children — some as young as four — from their families and communities. The federally funded system operated from the early 1830s until the last school closed in 1996. A 1920 amendment to the Indian Act made attendance

compulsory, vastly expanding the network of schools. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police enforced this mandate as truant officers. The federal government currently recognizes 140 Indian Residential Schools.

Earlier iterations of these institutions predated Confederation, with some dating back to the 1620s. Sixty-two additional schools were excluded from the 2006–07 Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) due to factors such as their operating dates, the authorities that ran them, their locations (including within Indian hospitals), or their funding structures. The last IRSSA-recognized residential school, Kivalliq Hall, closed in 1997.

In the United States, 526 federally funded Indian Boarding Schools operated from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century through the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. These institutions removed tens of thousands of Indigenous children from their families and communities. The period during which the federal government most aggressively pursued boarding school education as part of its assimilation policy is often referred to as the Allotment and Assimilation Era (1887–1934), which coincided with the Reservation Period. However, Indian Boarding Schools continued to operate long after this period, and the last federally operated boarding school closed in 1996.

Even before the establishment of Indian Boarding Schools in the United States, many Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and placed with white families through a system now known as captive schooling.

Two important predecessors to the Indian Boarding School system in the United States, which informed the creation of this system, were plantation schools in Hawaii and a Native American Prisoner of War camp in Florida run by General Pratt, who would go on to establish and run the Carlisle Indian Boarding School, the first Indian Boarding School in the United States.

## **A Note on Denialism**

In 2021, after Canadian ground-penetrating radar (GPR) surveys, several First Nations announced the discovery of probable graves at former residential school sites across Canada. GPR cannot identify bodies; it registers soil disturbances that may indicate graves. These findings aligned with decades of survivor testimony, archival evidence, and Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) research showing that many children died at residential schools and were buried onsite — often in unmarked or neglected cemeteries, or without their families’ knowledge. Few sites have been excavated, largely due to cultural protocols, trauma, mistrust, and the complexity of investigating historic burials.

Some early media coverage in Canada used terms like “mass graves” or “bodies found,” even as Indigenous communities used more precise language such as “suspected graves” or “anomalies.” The gap between what GPR can detect and what the media sometimes implied generated public confusion and fuelled a denialist movement that argues the absence of exhumed remains disproves the graves’ existence or minimizes the harms of the residential schools. Denialists often seize on technical uncertainty to dismiss a well-documented historical reality: Thousands of children died at residential schools. Cemeteries were neglected or destroyed. And survivors consistently recounted stories of classmates who disappeared or never returned home.

We encourage reframing these conversations away from disputes over “unmarked graves” and toward the deeper truths of the residential school system itself — the forced separation of children from their families, the cultural eradication the system sought to impose, the widespread abuse and neglect within these institutions, and the profound intergenerational impacts that persist today.

# The Origins of Indian Residential Schools and Indian Reserves in Canada

The residential school system in Canada emerged from early colonial efforts to assimilate Indigenous peoples and control their lands. Beginning with church-run mission schools in the 17th century, these institutions were formalized in the 19th century through partnerships between Christian churches and the federal government.

The system developed alongside broader assimilation policies — most notably the Indian Act of 1876, which granted the government sweeping authority over Indigenous life and sought to erode Indigenous governance, languages, and cultural practices. By the 1880s, residential schools had become a central tool of this project, explicitly designed to separate Indigenous children from their families and “civilize” them according to Euro-Canadian norms. Rooted in colonialism, racism, and beliefs in settler superiority, this ideology shaped the system and the profound harms it inflicted for more than a century.

The residential school and reserve systems were interconnected components of the same colonial strategy aimed at dispossessing Indigenous peoples, controlling their movements, and enforcing assimilation. The reserve system confined Indigenous nations to small parcels of land, opening vast territories to settlement and resource extraction while making communities easier for government agents to monitor.

Residential schools relied on this structure: Compulsory attendance could be enforced only because the state had direct authority over reserve families, and Indian agents used that authority — along with threats, ration withholding, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police — to compel parents to surrender their children.

Both systems operated through isolation. The reserve system isolated communities from settler society and, in some regions, restricted mobility through the pass system, an administrative policy requiring Indigenous people to apply for a pass from the local Indian agent to leave the reserve. The pass would note their destination and time of return, and failure to obtain one could lead to detention. Residential schools isolated children from their families, languages, and cultural knowledge. Together, they aimed to weaken Indigenous identity and disrupt cultural transmission between generations.

Many scholars, Indigenous leaders, and international human rights bodies have concluded that Canada’s residential school system meets the definition of cultural genocide — policies intended to destroy the political, social, linguistic, and cultural foundations of a group.

Abuse was widespread across residential schools, where children faced physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological harm. Many suffered malnutrition, neglect, overcrowding, and disease, while sexual abuse by priests, brothers, and staff was pervasive. Children were also forced into work that frequently replaced schooling.

Survivors began pursuing litigation in the 1980s and 1990s, leading to the landmark 2006 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), which provided compensation to survivors. Criminal prosecutions also occurred, though unevenly: Some priests, brothers, and school staff were charged and convicted, while many others escaped accountability due to secrecy, destroyed records, the deaths of perpetrators, or the barriers that survivors faced in coming forward.

# The History of Indian Boarding Schools in the United States

For thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans, Indigenous peoples across what is now the United States maintained diverse nations, governments, languages, cultures, and educational systems. Children learned from parents, grandparents, elders, and community members through traditions and knowledge systems that had sustained Indigenous societies for generations.

The Indian Boarding School system emerged during a period of rapid U.S. expansion, warfare, and the forced displacement of Indigenous peoples. In 1824, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was established within the U.S. War Department, reflecting the close relationship between federal Indian policy, military campaigns, and territorial expansion. Although the BIA was transferred to the Department of the Interior in 1849, federal policies toward Indigenous peoples continued to link education with broader efforts to control Indigenous lands, cultures, and communities.

Long before the creation of federally operated boarding schools, Indigenous children were separated from their families through mission schools, military institutions, captive schooling, and other forms of coerced education. By the late 19th century, federal officials increasingly embraced boarding schools as the preferred method of educating Native children. Policymakers believed that removing children from their families, languages, cultures, and Tribal Nations would accelerate their assimilation into American society.

Indian Boarding Schools were not simply educational institutions. They were one component of a larger federal project that included military campaigns, treaty violations, land allotment policies, and restrictions on Indigenous governance. By separating children from their families and communities, government officials hoped to weaken Indigenous nations, undermine cultural continuity, and facilitate the transfer of Indigenous lands into non-Indigenous control.

Attendance at boarding schools was frequently coerced. Federal agents, missionaries, and local authorities pressured families to surrender their children, often using threats, withholding rations, restricting access to resources, or other forms of coercion. In some cases, children were forcibly taken from their homes, and parents who resisted faced arrest, imprisonment, or other penalties. Many Indigenous families went to extraordinary lengths to protect their children, hiding them in remote camps, mountains, and forests to avoid school authorities.

In 1879, Captain Richard Henry Pratt founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, widely recognized as the first off-reservation Indian Boarding School in the United States. Carlisle became the model for hundreds of schools that followed. Pratt's philosophy was summarized in the phrase "Kill the Indian, and save the man," reflecting the belief that Indigenous identities, languages, and cultures should be eradicated and replaced with dominant Euro-American values and ways of life.

Over time, the boarding school system expanded across the country. The U.S. Department of the Interior has identified 526 federally supported Indian Boarding Schools that operated throughout the United States. By 1900, an estimated 75 percent of school-age Native children were enrolled in boarding schools or other federal educational institutions. By 1926, that figure had risen to more than 80 percent.



Life in the schools was highly regimented. Children were prohibited from speaking their Indigenous languages, practicing their cultures, or maintaining traditional forms of dress and appearance. Hair was cut, Indigenous names were replaced, military-style discipline was imposed, and students were expected to adopt Euro-American cultural and religious practices. Many schools operated on a labor-based model in which children spent substantial portions of their day performing agricultural, industrial, or domestic work rather than receiving academic instruction.

A central feature of the system was the “outing” program, first developed at Carlisle. Through this program, students were placed in white households, farms, and businesses, where they worked as domestic servants, laborers, and farmhands, often for little or no compensation. Supporters described the program as educational, but it also supplied nearby communities with a source of inexpensive labor and further separated children from their families and cultures.

Abuse was widespread throughout the boarding school system. Survivors have documented physical, emotional, psychological, cultural, and sexual abuse, as well as chronic neglect, overcrowding, malnutrition, and inadequate medical care. Students were often punished for speaking their languages, practicing their traditions, or maintaining connections to their communities. Disease spread rapidly in many schools, and thousands of children died from illness, malnutrition, neglect, accidents, violence, and other causes. Children had few avenues to report mistreatment or seek protection.

Despite these conditions, Indigenous children, families, and communities continually resisted. Students spoke their languages in secret, practiced their cultures underground, ran away from schools, maintained connections to their communities, and later used their education to advocate for Indigenous rights, sovereignty, and cultural survival. Indigenous resilience helped preserve languages, traditions, and identities that federal policy sought to erase.

The last federally operated Indian Boarding School closed in 1996, but the effects of the system continue to be felt today. The forced separation of children from their families disrupted the transmission of language, culture, parenting practices, and community relationships across generations. Survivors and their descendants continue to experience the impacts of this history, while Indigenous communities continue efforts to revitalize languages, recover cultural knowledge, locate missing children, and support healing.

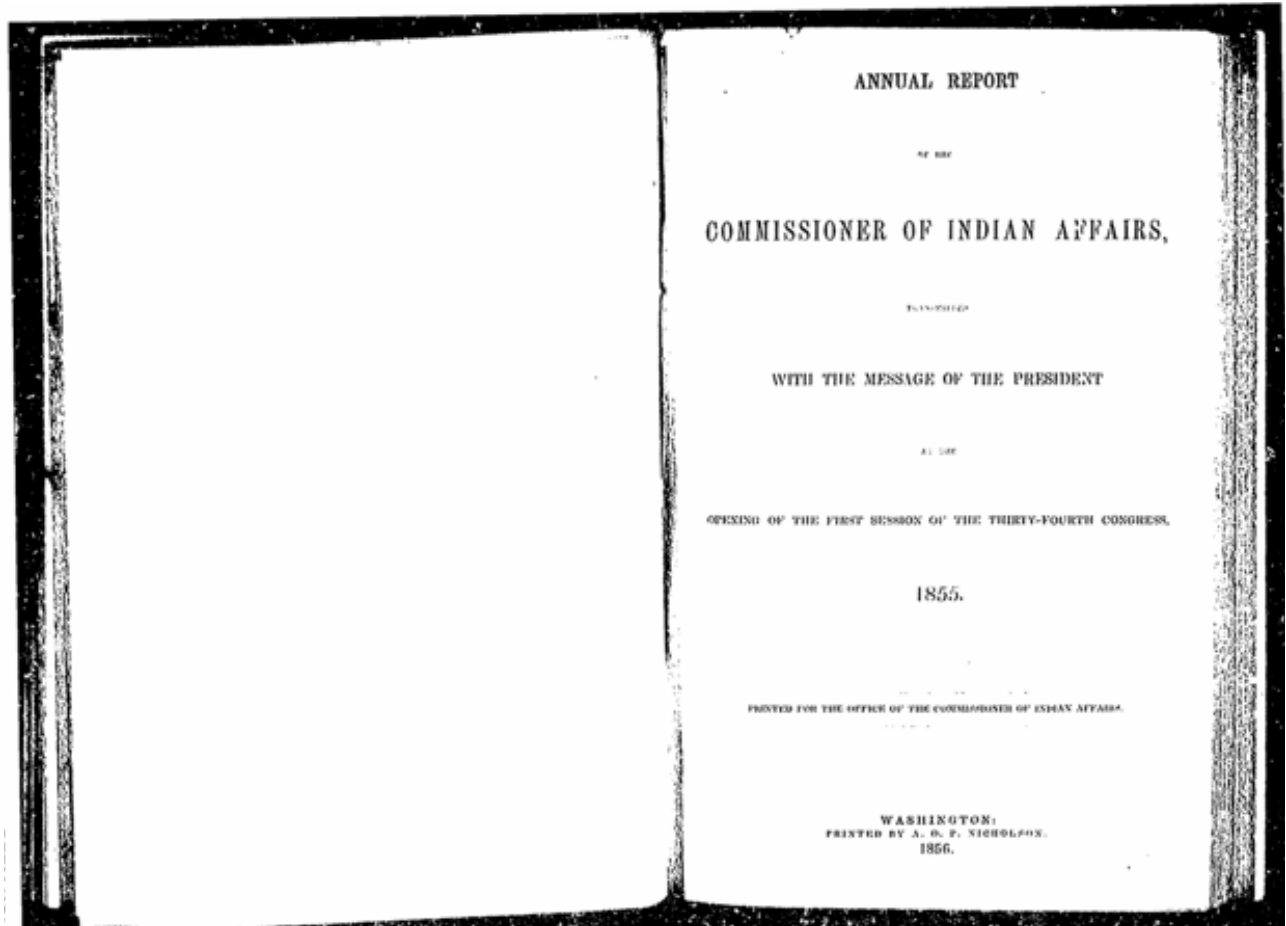
In recent years, investigations have identified marked and unmarked burial sites at former boarding school locations, prompting renewed public attention to the history and legacy of the system. The U.S. Department of the Interior’s Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative has documented thousands of student deaths and continues to investigate the full scope of the boarding school system and its impacts.

Efforts to address this history are ongoing. Tribal Nations, survivors, descendants, researchers, educators, and community organizations continue to document boarding school experiences, recover the names of children who never returned home, protect burial sites, and advance truth-telling and healing initiatives. Across the United States, communities are working to confront this history and its lasting consequences while supporting Indigenous-led efforts toward remembrance, accountability, and healing.

We also recommend the [Historical Context of Indian Boarding Schools](https://pubs.nctm.org/view/journals/jrme/57/1/article-p8.xml?print) published by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. It provides rich historical context and resources through the context of mathematical education in the United States, but this information is applicable for understanding the impact of Indian Boarding Schools on education more broadly in the United States. <https://pubs.nctm.org/view/journals/jrme/57/1/article-p8.xml?print>



# Government Perspectives



<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/T-21890.pdf>

“In the present of our country one of two things seem necessary: either the sons of the forest should be moralized or exterminated. Humanity should rejoice at the former, but shrink with horror from the latter.”

— **1818 House Committee on Indian Affairs** (<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/T-21890.pdf>)

[Speaking of Indigenous children] “...separated from their people young, they are as docile and as susceptible of improvement as any other children.”

— **Indian Agent Thomas S. Williamson, 1848** (<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/T-21890.pdf>)

“We are told that it costs little less than a million of dollars to kill an Indian in war. It costs about one hundred and fifty dollars a year to educate one at Hampton or Carlisle. If the education of Indian children saves the country only one small Indian war in the future, it will save money enough to sustain ten schools like Carlisle.”

— **Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz (1877-1881)**

(Carlisle Indian Boarding School was the first residential boarding school in the United States.)



“As a savage we cannot tolerate [the Indian] any more than as a half-civilized parasite, wanderer, or vagabond. The only alternative left is to fit him by education for civilized life...The nation learned by costly experience that ‘it was cheaper to feed than to fight the Indian,’ and the same common sense teaches ‘it is cheaper to teach than to feed them.’”

— **1881 report of the United States Board of Indian Commissioners**

“The Secretary of War shall be authorized to set aside, for use in the establishment of normal and industrial training schools for Indian youth from the nomadic tribes having educational treaty claims upon the United States, any vacant posts of barracks, so long as they might not be required for military occupation, and to detail one or more officers of the Army for duty in connection with Indian education, at each such school so established.”

— **Congressional Act, 1883**

“We are going to conquer the Indians by a standing army of school-teachers armed with ideas, winning victories by industrial training, and by the gospel of love and the gospel of work.”

— **Merrill Gates, President of Amherst College in a speech at the Lake Mohonk Conference in 1891**

“A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres...In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.”

— **1892 speech given by Richard H. Pratt, founder and superintendent of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, the first Indian Boarding School in the United States.**

“They [parents of Indigenous children taken to boarding schools] oppose every effort made to civilize them, and will not permit their children to be taught in school and oppose very decidedly any missionary work among them. They adhere tenaciously to their old customs and religion.”

— **Indian agent George L. Davenport, Annual Report of the Commissioner, 1895**

“When they [Indigenous students] were once inside the school, scarcely a week passed without some group attempting to run away. . . .They were brought back by a Navaho policeman and, as punishment, were dressed for weeks in girls’ clothes. In their free time, they had to carry heavy logs round and round the parade ground of the old fort as punishment.”

— **Ruth Underhill, supervisor of Indian education, 1942–1948**

(Source: *Original Sins: The (Mis)education of Black and Native Children and the Construction of American Racism*  
Eve L. Ewing. One World, 2025)

# Survivor Perspectives



[https://films.nationalgeographic.com/sugarcane?image\\_id=sugarcane\\_hd\\_004\\_f716bfc5&#photo-gallery](https://films.nationalgeographic.com/sugarcane?image_id=sugarcane_hd_004_f716bfc5&#photo-gallery)

“First they cut my hair, then they made me eat soap and then they beat me for speaking my language.”

— Joe Wheeler, survivor, Riverside Missionary School

“From time to time through the winter we had these nocturnal banquets, taking turns in going to the village for our supplies... We laughed heartily at the mishaps of Ish-té-ne-ke, a comical character that figures in the folktales of the Omaha, as they were vividly portrayed in language and gesture.”

— Francis La Flesche (Omaha), writing about student resistance and cultural persistence at boarding school in *The Middle Five: Indian Boys at School* (1900)

“From my hiding place I peered out, shuddering with fear whenever I heard footsteps nearby. Though in the hall loud voices were calling my name, and I knew that even Judéwin was searching for me, I did not open my mouth to answer. Then the steps were quickened and the voices became excited. The sounds came nearer and nearer. Women and girls entered the room. I held my breath and watched them open closet doors and peep behind large trunks. Someone threw up the curtains, and the room was filled with sudden light. What caused them to stoop and look under the bed I do not know. I remember being dragged out, though I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of myself, I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair.

“I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward’s! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder.”

— Zitkala-Ša (“Red Bird”), Yankton Dakota Sioux, writing in late 1910s and early 1920s



“When I went East to Carlisle School, I thought I was going there to die. . . .I could think of white people wanting little Lakota for no other reason than to kill them, but I thought here is my chance to prove that I can die bravely. ...We expected something terrible would happen. We held our blankets between our teeth, because our hands were both busy hanging to the seats [of the train], so frightened were we. ...The big boys began to tell us little fellows that the white people were taking us over to the place where the sun rises, where they would dump us over the edge of the earth.”

— **Luther Standing Bear, Lakota.**

“Dear Sir Capt. Pratt: I write this letter with much sorrow to tell you that I have spoken one Indian word. I will tell you how it happened: yesterday evening in the dining-hall Alice Wynn talked to me in Sioux, and before I knew what I was saying I found that I had spoken one word, and I felt so sorry that I could not eat my supper, and I could not forget that Indian word, and while I was sitting at the table the tears rolled by cheeks. I tried very hard to speak only English.”

— **Nellie Robertson, age 7, Sioux, letter written in the 1890s**

“It has been with us like a tree dropping its leaves. ...They fall one by one to the ground until finally the wind sweeps them away and they are gone forever. ...The parents of those children who were taken away are crying for them. ...I do not know whether my boy is alive or not.”

— **Diné parent speaking of children being seized to attend an Indian Boarding School**

# Timelines and Maps



<https://amin.las.iastate.edu/historical-timeline/>

## Brief Timeline of Federal Indian Policy and Indian Boarding Schools in the United States

### Colonization and Early U.S. Expansion (1492–1871)

European colonization and the expansion of the United States resulted in the displacement of Indigenous peoples, warfare, land dispossession, treaty-making, and efforts to assimilate Native peoples into settler society.

### Treaty-Making Era (1778–1871)

The United States entered into hundreds of treaties with Tribal Nations. During this period, many Indigenous communities were forcibly removed from their homelands, including through the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Congress ended treaty-making with Tribal Nations in 1871.

### Reservation, Allotment, and Assimilation Era (1870s–1934)

Federal policy increasingly focused on confining Indigenous peoples to reservations and assimilating Native peoples into Euro-American society. Indian Boarding Schools became a central tool of this policy.

### Carlisle Indian Industrial School Opens — 1879

Founded by Richard Henry Pratt in Pennsylvania, Carlisle became the model for the federal Indian Boarding School system and hundreds of schools that followed.



### **Compulsory Boarding School Attendance Authorized — 1891**

Congress authorized federal officials to compel Native children to attend school and withhold rations from families who resisted, significantly expanding the reach of the boarding school system.

### **Allotment and Assimilation Period — 1887–1934**

The Dawes Act of 1887 authorized the division of communally held Tribal lands into individual allotments. During this period, Indian Boarding Schools reached their greatest extent. By 1926, more than 80 percent of school-age Native children were enrolled in boarding schools or other federal educational institutions.

### **Indian Reorganization Act — 1934**

The Indian Reorganization Act marked a shift away from allotment and encouraged limited Tribal self-government, although many assimilationist policies remained in place.

### **Termination and Relocation Era (1953–1968)**

Federal policy sought to terminate the government-to-government relationship between Tribal Nations and the United States and encouraged Indigenous people to relocate from reservations to urban centers.

### **Self-Determination Era (1975–Present)**

Federal policy increasingly recognized Tribal sovereignty and supported Tribal control over education, health care, and other governmental services.

### **Closure of the Last Federally Operated Indian Boarding School — 1996**

The final federally operated off-reservation Indian Boarding School, Intermountain Indian School in Utah, had closed earlier, but the boarding school era is generally considered to have extended into the late 20th century, with the last federally operated boarding school closing in 1996.

### **Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Announced — 2021**

The U.S. Department of the Interior launched a nationwide investigation into the history and legacy of the federal Indian Boarding School system.

### **Truth, Healing, and Accountability Efforts — 2022–Present**

Federal, Tribal, state, and local initiatives continue to investigate boarding school histories, identify burial sites, document survivor experiences, and advance truth-telling and healing efforts.

### **Truth and Healing Commission Legislation Advances in Congress — 2025–2026**

Bipartisan legislation to establish a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the United States was reintroduced in Congress, reflecting growing national attention to the history and legacy of the boarding school system.

### **Extensive Historical Timeline of Documents:**

An overview of significant events, policies, legislation, and documents in the history of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations in what is now the United States.

<https://amin.las.iastate.edu/historical-timeline/>

## Maps

Interactive Time-Lapse Map Shows How the U.S. Took More Than 1.5 Billion Acres From Native Americans

(Source: [Slate Magazine](#))

National Atlas, Indian Tribes, Languages and Cultures (Source: [Library of Congress](#))

[Indian Boarding School Map](#) (Source: Boarding School Healing)

[Interactive Map of Indigenous Boarding Schools in the United States](#) (Source: Boarding School Healing)



# Useful Terms

## Note on Language

Language shapes how people understand history, identity, and relationships. Words and terms can influence how individuals, communities, and events are perceived, and their meanings often change over time. Different communities, scholars, institutions, and governments may use the same terms in different ways.

The history of Indigenous peoples in North America is often described using terminology that reflects particular historical, legal, political, or cultural perspectives. For this reason, it is important to consider how terms are defined, who is using them, and the context in which they are used.

The definitions in this guide are intended to support learning and understanding. Readers are encouraged to engage thoughtfully with the language they encounter and to recognize that terminology can carry different meanings in different contexts.

## Assimilation

Assimilation is a process through which individuals or groups adopt the language, cultural practices, values, or social norms of another society, often the dominant society. In discussions of Indigenous history, assimilation commonly refers to policies and practices intended to encourage or compel Indigenous peoples to abandon aspects of their cultural identities and adopt those of the broader society. When these changes are imposed through government policies or institutions, the process may be described as forced or coerced assimilation.

## Captive Adoption

Captive adoption refers to practices in which captives are incorporated into a family, community, or nation and may assume social roles and responsibilities within that group. Such practices existed in a variety of societies, including some Indigenous nations in North America, and differed significantly across cultures and historical periods. Captive adoption should not be confused with later government-directed child removal policies, which often separated Indigenous children from their families and communities through schools, foster placements, or adoption programs.

## Cultural Genocide

Cultural genocide is a term used by scholars, Indigenous communities, and some commissions of inquiry to describe policies or practices intended to destroy the cultural foundations of a group, including its language, traditions, institutions, cultural practices, and the transmission of knowledge between generations. The term is often used in discussions of Indigenous boarding and residential schools because these institutions sought to suppress Indigenous languages, cultures, and identities.

## Dispossession

Dispossession refers to the loss of land, property, resources, or access to traditional territories through government actions, legal policies, forced removal, settlement, or other forms of coercion. In Indigenous history, dispossession is often used to describe the processes through which Indigenous peoples were deprived of lands and resources that had sustained their communities, economies, and ways of life.

## Doctrine of Discovery

The Doctrine of Discovery refers to a set of legal and religious principles developed by European powers beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. These principles were used to justify claims to lands inhabited by non-Christian peoples on the basis of “discovery.” Over time, the doctrine influenced colonial policies and legal concepts concerning land ownership and sovereignty. In the United States, its influence can be seen in legal decisions such as *Johnson v. M’Intosh* (1823), which helped establish federal doctrines regarding Indigenous land rights and titles. Many Indigenous nations and organizations continue to challenge the Doctrine of Discovery and its influence on law and policy.

## First Nation

A First Nation is an Indigenous nation or community in Canada that is distinct from Inuit and Métis peoples. First Nations have diverse cultures, languages, histories, governance systems, and traditional territories. The term *First Nations* is commonly used in Canada to refer collectively to many of the Indigenous peoples who are neither Inuit nor Métis, while recognizing that each First Nation is a distinct people with its own identity and traditions.

## Genocide

The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) defines genocide as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group: (a) killing members of the group, (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, (c) deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group’s physical destruction in whole or in part, (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, or (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

## Ground-Penetrating Radar (GPR)

Ground-penetrating radar is a non-invasive geophysical technology used to identify and map subsurface features. GPR can detect anomalies and buried structures beneath the ground, but it cannot by itself confirm the presence of human remains.

## Indian Reserve

An Indian reserve is a tract of land set aside by the Canadian federal government for the use and benefit of a First Nation. Reserves were established through historical treaties, government policies, and other processes that shaped relationships between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state.

## Indian Boarding Schools / Indian Residential Schools

Indian boarding schools (primarily in the United States) and Indian residential schools (primarily in Canada) were government-supported residential education systems that removed Indigenous children from their families and communities. These institutions sought to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-American or Euro-Canadian society by discouraging or prohibiting Indigenous languages, cultural practices, and traditions.

## Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous peoples is a collective term for the original peoples of a region and their descendants who maintain historical, cultural, and social connections to those lands and territories. In Canada, Indigenous peoples include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. In the United States, the term includes Native American, Alaska Native, and other Indigenous peoples, each with distinct nations, cultures, languages, and systems of governance.



## **Inuit**

Inuit are a distinct Indigenous people whose homeland, Inuit Nunangat, encompasses the Arctic regions of Canada. Inuit have their own cultures, languages, histories, and systems of governance that are distinct from those of First Nations and Métis peoples.

## **Intergenerational Trauma**

Intergenerational trauma refers to the ways in which the effects of trauma experienced by one generation may influence subsequent generations. This transmission can occur through family relationships, community experiences, cultural disruption, social conditions, and other psychological and social factors. Researchers continue to study the mechanisms through which trauma may affect future generations.

## **Manifest Destiny**

Manifest Destiny was a 19th-century belief that the expansion of the United States across North America was justified, inevitable, or divinely ordained. The idea influenced U.S. policies and westward expansion, often at the expense of Indigenous peoples and their lands.

## **Métis**

Métis are a distinct Indigenous people with their own histories, cultures, communities, and governance traditions. The Métis Nation emerged from the historical relationships between Indigenous and European peoples in what is now Canada and is recognized as one of Canada's three Indigenous peoples, alongside First Nations and Inuit.

## **Natal Alienation**

Natal alienation is a concept used by historians and sociologists to describe the forced separation of individuals from their family, kinship networks, ancestry, and cultural inheritance. The term is often used in discussions of slavery, child removal policies, and other systems that disrupt the transmission of identity, community, and belonging across generations.

## **Powwow**

A powwow is an Indigenous gathering that may include dance, song, celebration, and community activities. Powwows vary across Indigenous nations and communities and serve as important spaces for cultural expression, social connection, and the sharing of traditions.

## **Reconciliation**

Reconciliation refers to efforts to address the impacts of past harms and improve relationships between individuals, communities, or institutions. In Indigenous contexts, reconciliation may involve truth-telling, acknowledgment of historical injustices, accountability, education, healing, and actions intended to strengthen relationships and support Indigenous rights.

## **Reparations**

Reparations are measures intended to address harms caused by past injustices. They may include financial compensation, restitution of property or land, official apologies, memorialization, rehabilitation programs, policy reforms, or other actions intended to acknowledge and remedy historical harms.

### **Residential School Survivor**

A residential school survivor is a person who attended a residential school and lived through that experience. The term is commonly used to recognize both the experience of attending the school and the lasting impacts that residential schools have had on individuals, families, and communities.

### **Settler Colonialism**

Settler colonialism is a form of colonialism in which settlers establish permanent communities on Indigenous lands. Scholars use the term to describe the systems, institutions, and policies through which Indigenous peoples were displaced and settler societies were established. The concept is frequently used to analyze the historical and ongoing relationships between Indigenous peoples and settler states, including Canada and the United States.

### **Settler Schooling**

Settler schooling refers to educational systems established or supported by settler governments, religious institutions, or colonial authorities. In Indigenous history, the term is often used to describe schools that sought to integrate Indigenous children into the dominant society, including mission schools, Indian boarding schools, and residential schools.

### **Trauma**

Trauma refers to the emotional, psychological, physical, or social effects of experiencing or witnessing distressing events or circumstances that overwhelm an individual's ability to cope. The effects of trauma vary widely and may be short-term or long-lasting.

### **Tribal Nation**

A Tribal Nation is an Indigenous government with inherent political authority that predates the establishment of the United States. Federally recognized Tribal Nations maintain government-to-government relationships with the U.S. federal government and exercise authority over their citizens, governments, and internal affairs as recognized through treaties, federal law, and court decisions.

### **Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was a national commission established to document the history and impacts of the Indian Residential School system. Between 2008 and 2015, the commission gathered testimony from survivors, produced a historical record of the residential school system, and issued 94 Calls to Action aimed at advancing reconciliation in Canada.



# Discussion Questions

## Pre-Screening Discussion

We recommend sharing the “For Students and Teachers” and Useful Terms sections of the guide with students before screening the film. We also recommend advising students that the film contains accounts of sexual, physical, and psychological abuse that may be triggering and reminding them of what supports are available to them.

1. What do you already know about the residential/boarding school system in North America, and how do you think that schools, media, or government narratives have shaped that knowledge?
2. When did you first hear about Indian Boarding Schools?
3. What was the intent of these schools?
4. Why do you think this history wasn’t documented or taught?
5. Who gets to write history? Whose perspectives are included and why?
6. What do you not know that you want to know about this history?

## Screening Note:

Encourage students to approach the film as an immersive experience. Setting aside cell phones during the screening can help viewers fully engage with the film’s imagery, sound, and storytelling. Pen and paper may be useful for recording observations, questions, and reflections that can enrich discussion after the screening.

## Post-Screening Discussion Questions/Focus Areas

We recommend giving students a brief break after the screening to allow them a few minutes to process. These selections of questions can be approached through open discussion or through journal response writing.

### Personal Impact (English Language Arts, Media Literacy, Social Emotional Learning)

1. What is one moment of the film that resonated with you and why?
2. What surprised you? Is there anything that you believed before that you think about differently now?
3. What character did you most connect with and why?
4. What are the different ways that people coped with their pain?
5. What was your biggest takeaway?
6. What was one image that stuck with you and why?
7. What questions or emotions are you still sitting with now that the film has ended?
8. What is the role of hope in the film? Did you experience any?

### Narrative and Storytelling (English Language Arts, Media Literacy)

1. What did you notice about the way the film tells the story?

2. How should history be written and who should write it?
3. What is truth? How do we know that something is true? Are there different kinds of truth (factual, emotional, spiritual)?
4. How did the film challenge you to rethink your own assumptions about Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples? How does this film connect to the United States' relationship with Indigenous peoples?
5. The film shows both trauma and resilience. How did you see these two forces interacting in the community's response?
6. How did the filmmakers use storytelling, imagery, or pacing to convey the gravity of the investigation?
7. One of the directors of the film is an Indigenous Canadian who also lived part of his life in the United States, and the other is a non-Indigenous Canadian. What role do you think the perspectives of the filmmakers played in the film? How did their identities shape the storytelling?
4. What did Charlene and Whitney's relationship demonstrate?
5. How did you feel about Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's response?
6. Is what happened at Indian Residential Schools a genocide?
7. What did the film reveal about institutional responsibility — government, church, police — and how those systems responded to evidence?
8. Who is responsible for what happened at the residential schools?
9. Are apologies enough? Do they help?
10. How do legal settlements, apologies, or institutional investigations address — or fail to address — the deeper emotional and cultural impacts passed through generations?
11. What do you think the Catholic Church should do?
12. What do you think the government of Canada should do?

#### **Accountability (Government, Legal Studies)**

1. What should justice look like? How would the film's participants imagine justice? How might it look different for Ed than it does for Charlene?
2. How did the film complicate or deepen your understanding of what "truth and reconciliation" means? How are those things different, and how do they relate to each other?
3. Is reconciliation possible? What does it look like?
13. What responsibilities, if any, does the United States have in addressing the history and legacy of Indian Boarding Schools? What actions might support greater understanding, accountability, healing, or education?
14. What are examples of denial in the film?
15. Why do you think people still deny what happened at residential schools? How can we address denial?
16. What should we do? What is our role? Why should we care?



### **Faith (Religious Studies)**

1. What is the role of faith in the film?
2. How did the film show spiritual resilience, and where did you see individuals or families drawing strength from cultural teachings or ancestral connections?
3. How do you think survivors and communities navigate the difference between faith as a personal, meaningful practice and the actions of church institutions that caused harm?
4. What did you make of Rick's relationship to the Catholic Church?
5. What did you think of the oblate priest's response to Rick in the Vatican?
6. What did you think of Pope Francis's response?
7. Did the film challenge any assumptions you had about the relationship between Indigenous spirituality and Christianity, either historically or today?
8. How might faith-based organizations contribute to accountability, truth-telling, or reparative actions, and what would meaningful participation look like?
9. What questions does the film raise about forgiveness, whether it is possible, and who has the right to offer or withhold it?

### **Intergenerational Trauma (Psychology, Sociology, Social Work)**

1. How did *Sugarcane* illustrate the ways trauma from residential schools continues to affect children, grandchildren, and entire communities today?

2. Which moments in the film showed how trauma can be passed down not just through stories, but through behaviors, family dynamics, or community experiences?
3. What did Julian and Ed's relationship tell you about intergenerational trauma? Were there any other examples of it in the film?
4. What is the role of silence in the film? What does it tell you?
5. How do you think the loss of language, culture, and connection to family contributed to long-term impacts across generations?
6. What do you think are the impacts of residential schools today?
7. What did the film suggest about the difference between individual trauma and collective, community-wide trauma?
8. In *Sugarcane*, what forms of resilience or strength did you notice that also get passed down through generations alongside pain?
9. How does intergenerational trauma shape relationships — with self, with family, with land, and with culture?
10. What responsibilities does society have to understand the ongoing effects of trauma rather than viewing residential schools as "in the past"?
11. How did the film portray the role of truth-telling — within families or public spaces — as a step toward breaking cycles of harm?
12. What challenges arise when younger generations try to learn about or confront traumatic histories that elders may find painful to speak about?

## Action (Community Service Learning)



[https://films.nationalgeographic.com/sugarcane?image\\_id=sugarcane\\_hd\\_018\\_b06cd36e&#photo-gallery](https://films.nationalgeographic.com/sugarcane?image_id=sugarcane_hd_018_b06cd36e&#photo-gallery)

### Why should this matter to me?

The history shown in *Sugarcane* is not just a story about the past — it continues to shape the present. The impacts of residential schools are still felt in Indigenous families and communities today through loss of language, culture, land, health, trust in institutions, and more. Understanding this history helps us recognize how systems of inequality were created and why they persist. It encourages us to question the narratives we've inherited, to listen with care to those whose voices were suppressed, and to acknowledge the responsibilities we share in building a more truthful and equitable society. Even if you are not directly connected to this history, the film invites you to consider how colonial policies have influenced the country you live in, the privileges you may benefit from, and the relationships we all hold — with land, culture, and community.

### What can I do?

In seeking to learn more about the history and lasting impact of Indian Boarding Schools, and about Indigenous nations more broadly, it is important for individuals to understand that it is not the responsibility of their Indigenous peers to offer education. The responsibility for education is on the learner, and learning can happen in many different ways.



Here are some appropriate examples.

For younger students:

- You can start by learning more about the history shown in *Sugarcane* and listening to the voices of survivors and Indigenous communities. Pay attention to whose stories get told — and whose have been ignored — and ask respectful questions when you want to understand more. Visit cultural sites that provide opportunities for additional learning.
- If you hear misinformation or stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, speak up or share accurate information.
- Get to know the Indigenous nations whose land your school or community is on, and explore their culture, history, and languages through books, videos, events, or community resources. Seek out resources that are written/created by Indigenous people.
- Support Indigenous creators, businesses, and organizations whenever you can.
- Most importantly, approach this history with empathy: treat the stories you hear with care, honor the people who lived through these experiences, and think about how your choices, big or small, can help create a more respectful and honest relationship with Indigenous peoples today.

For older students:

- Continue learning about the history of residential and boarding schools and their lasting impacts on Indigenous individuals, families, and communities.

- Listen to survivors' stories with respect, recognizing that sharing these experiences can be deeply personal and emotionally difficult.
- Seek out Indigenous-authored and Indigenous-led sources, including books, films, organizations, museums, artists, and scholars.
- Learn about the Indigenous peoples whose traditional territories are connected to the place where you live, study, or work.
- Examine how historical events continue to influence contemporary relationships, institutions, and policies.
- Reflect on your own assumptions and consider how different people may understand this history in different ways.
- When invited to attend Indigenous cultural events, exhibits, lectures, or community programs, attend with an emphasis on respect and understanding.
- Explore efforts to preserve and revitalize Indigenous languages, cultures, and traditions.
- Engage respectfully in conversations about Indigenous history and contemporary issues in classrooms, workplaces, and community settings.
- Learn about current research, commemorative projects, and community initiatives related to residential and boarding school histories.
- Explore a variety of perspectives on topics such as reconciliation, healing, Indigenous sovereignty, and the preservation of cultural knowledge.
- Approach this learning with curiosity, humility, and a willingness to continue expanding your understanding over time.

The story told in *Sugarcane* is part of a much larger history, one that continues to shape families, communities, and this country. *Sugarcane* reminds us that the truths of the residential school system are not distant history but living realities carried by survivors, families, and communities today. The stories shared in the film and the conversations that follow ask us to sit with complexity, to listen with care, and to recognize how these histories continue to shape the present. As you conclude this guide, we invite you to continue asking questions, listening to survivors and their families, and learning from Indigenous communities. This history does not end with a single film, lesson, or discussion; it is an ongoing process of learning about the experiences, perspectives, and resilience of Indigenous peoples, and of recognizing how the past continues to shape the present. We hope this guide encourages thoughtful reflection, meaningful dialogue, and a deeper understanding of this shared history.

Thank you for sharing *Sugarcane* with your classroom or community.

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