

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



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY FILMS

SUGARCANE

“A MUST-SEE FILM...
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"
MUSIC BY MALI OBOMSAVIN EDITED BY NATHAN PUNWAR AND MAYA DAISY HAWKE DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY CHRISTOPHER LAMARCA CINEMATOGRAPHY EMILY KASSIE
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS CAROLYN BERNSTEIN BILL WAY ELLIOTT WHITTON JENNY RASKIN GERALYN WHITE DREYFOUS TEGAN ACTON EMMA POMPETTI GRACE LAY SUMALEE MONTANO
SABRINA MERAGE NAIM DOUGLAS CHOI ADAM & MELONY LEWIS MEADOW FUND JANALEE CHERNESKI & IAN DESAI DAVID & LINDA CORNFELD MAIDA LYNN
ROBINA RICCIHELLO NINA & DAVID FIALKOV CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS KELSEY KOENIG LAUREN HABER MERYL METNI JENNIFER PELLING PRODUCED BY EMILY KASSIE AND KELLEN QUINN
DIRECTED BY JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT AND EMILY KASSIE



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educating for global understanding

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NOTES TO THE EDUCATOR



Notes to the Educator

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.

Historicization

This guide uses historicization as an organizing framework. Historicization means that, rather than treating present-day social norms, values, or objects as universal and eternal, it reveals them as contingent, temporary, and shaped by distinct historical and political contexts. In 2026, these materials were curated and created by members of Journeys in Film. At this time, people in their 40s and older experienced life before artificial intelligence, social media, Zoom meetings, asynchronous online education, smart phones, 9/11, cell phones, home internet, 24-hour news cycles, and on-demand entertainment. These technologies have changed our way of life — how we learn, think, and communicate with the world and those who matter most to us.

Scaling and Usage Guidance

Sugarcane contains challenging subject matter. These materials and worksheets invite learners to engage with primary sources with minimal context, to look at media and source material with fresh eyes, to be in dialogue with those materials, and to ask their own questions, thereby embarking on a lifelong practice of consuming and producing information responsibly.

You know your learning space the best. Use all the materials or pick and choose, adapt them for your discipline, or let them become a springboard for creating your own assignments and learning resources.



DIGITAL DEEP DIVE

Resources

[Americans - A Dialogue Toolkit for Educators](#)

[Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center](#)

[Dawes Records of the Five Civilized Tribes | National Archives](#)

[Digital Collections - Indian Removal Act: Primary Documents in American History - Research Guides at Library of Congress](#)

[Infinity of Nations: Art and History in the Collections of the National Museum of the American Indian - George Gustav Heye Center, New York](#)

[Native American Boarding Schools | Classroom Materials at the Library of Congress](#)

[Native American | Immigration and Relocation in U.S. History | Classroom Materials at the Library of Congress](#)

[Native American Primary Sources - Native American and Indigenous Studies * - Research Guides at University of Southern California](#)

[An Overview of the Congressional Record and Its Predecessor Publications](#)

[Primary Source Sets | DPLA](#)

[National Indian Boarding School Digital Archive](#)

[Smithsonian NMAI YouTube Channel](#) (The National Museum of the American Indian)

[Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct \(updated 2023\)](#)

[Tribal Leaders Directory](#)

[What Does It Mean to Remove a People? - Teacher Materials - Full Lesson](#)

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.

INTRODUCTION TO 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.

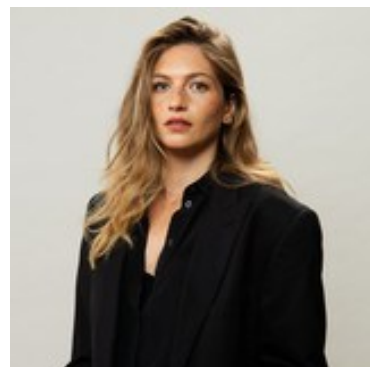
Sugarcane premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, where Julian and Emily won the Directing Award in the U.S. documentary competition. It has since been honored with more than 50 nominations and over 30 wins, including two Critics Choice Awards, the National Board of Review award for best documentary,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



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.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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)



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>



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 15th 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.



CONTEMPORARY CROSS MEDIA CONNECTIONS



Active Viewing Activities

Option 1:

Before watching the film, distribute **Handout 1: Active Viewing** and **Worksheets 1-3** to students. Review the handout together first. Then review **Worksheet 1** so learners have focus areas for engagement. While watching the film, learners should have **Worksheet 2** out for light notetaking that you can refer to after watching the film as they complete **Worksheet 1**.

Option 2:

Have learners complete **Worksheet 3** after watching the film. If you think it will be helpful, go over it before watching the film to give learners focal points as they watch the film. If they would like to have note paper out while viewing the film, this can be helpful for some learners.



ACTIVE VIEWING OF A DOCUMENTARY FILM

Documentaries are an important and exciting way to experience narrative. The evolution of documentaries from hard news, nature films, and travelogues to dynamic storytelling experiences has taken place over time so that the documentary can be experienced and critiqued in much the same manner as the fiction film.

The filmmaker's point of view

The first questions an active documentary film viewer should ask are:

- What is the filmmaker's point of view on the subject of the film?
- How does that influence your engagement and experience of the film?
- How would the film differ if a different person was making the film and their point of view was centered instead?

Opening ourselves to new possibilities and new information

If we have determined that the conscious intentions of the filmmaker are genuine, perhaps even noble, we can begin to watch the film with a high degree of confidence in its message. We may, however, notice a clash between the beliefs offered by the film and our own. Or we may find ourselves being presented with information that is new to us and may feel hard to believe, but is factual and important for us to consider. This new information may call into question previously held "certainties." It is up to the viewer to be as aware as possible of any conflicting biases in order to think critically about the film, its point of view on the subject, and the information presented. We may also find ourselves wanting to learn more about a topic.

Calling to mind the fact that others may disagree with the conclusions we reach is a good way to try opening ourselves to the possibility that there is more to be considered on any given subject than we had previously thought.

TECHNIQUES AND FILM DEVICES TO WATCH FOR



1. Reminders to the audience that there were real persons making this film.

Since the filmmaker and co-director Julian Brave NoiseCat is also a key subject in the film, his presence and narration serves as a very clear reminder that this film tells a story centered on the real lives of a wide array of individuals working with another set of real people to bring this film to life.

Write down the names of real people or places that make an impression on you. Note a key detail or select a symbol to remind you of that person or place.

2. Using montage as storytelling technique

Montage is a film editing technique in which a series of short film shots or sequences are pieced together to show a movement through time or space. As you watch, look for these moments. Reflect on how they move the story along or how they convey the emotional experiences of someone in the film.

Refer to the notes you took regarding each montage in the film. Compare your assessment with that of others. Did you find this to be challenging or easy? If montage is something you've noticed in the past in other films, write down a note about the film and the montage and why it was memorable.

3. Highlighting relationships

Julian Brave NoiseCat's relationship with his father lies at the heart of this film. As you watch, note the various film techniques used to underscore and highlight this relationship, including moments of reconciliation, as well as moments of tension and strain between them.

Write down the names of individuals or entities that seem to impact Julian. Reflect on his relationships with them. What was most memorable about those relationships or entities? How did the filmmaking underscore this?

4. Repetition and Returns

As the story unfolds, there are various moments of repetition and return — themes that come back, places that are revisited, present-day moments that interplay with memories and/or images from the past.

Why do you think the filmmaker returned to certain places or memories? What was the effect of the repetition for you as an audience member?

5. Performance and Art

In addition to being a writer and director, Julian Brave NoiseCat is a seasoned performer who has won prizes and accolades for his dancing. His father is also a professional artist. The film highlights their artistic endeavors and work as it explores intergenerational trauma and highlights opportunities for repair.

Reflect on the filmmaking techniques used when Julian is dancing and the techniques used to showcase Julian's father's art. How are these techniques similar and different? What impact did they have on you?

VIEWING NOTES



Real People and Places

Montage Tally/Notes

Relationships

Repetition and Returns

Performance and Art



CORE QUESTIONS ABOUT MEDIA

Directions: *Read and answer the following questions carefully, making sure you understand what each question means.*

1. Who created this?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract (and keep) my attention?
3. What values and/or beliefs are being promoted? What is missing?
4. How might different people understand this message differently than I do?
5. Why is this message being sent?
6. What new things did I learn from the film?
7. How did the film make me feel? What creative techniques were used to evoke these feelings?

SECTION 1: ORIGIN STORY — A PROJECT BEGINS



“Nonfiction is, at its core, about how one chooses to live and observe life.”
— Julian Brave NoiseCat

A couple months after I signed the contract for my first book, *We Survived the Night*, I took a call from my friend and colleague Emily Kassie. Ground-penetrating radar had just detected what appeared to be over 200 child-sized graves on the campus of an Indian residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia. Emily wanted to know if I’d be open to codirecting a documentary with her about the topic.

At first, I was hesitant. I had no clue how to start the book I had just received an advance to write. And I had never made a film of any length in my life, not even a TikTok. Emily didn’t know this, but my kyé7e (grandmother) was sent to the Kamloops Indian Residential School, where she finished high school and studied nursing. She has said little about what she endured there and at the other school she was sent to — St. Joseph’s Mission, where my father was born and found minutes later in a trash incinerator by the nightwatchman who told the local paper his cries sounded like a cat. (Noise-Cat, get it?)

After considering Emily’s offer to codirect for two tortuous weeks, I called her back and told her I was open to the idea. It was then Emily told me that she had identified a second First Nation leading an investigation, this one at St. Joseph’s Mission — yes, that St. Joseph’s Mission. As you might imagine, there was a long pause on my end of the line. Because I could not believe Emily had just uttered the name of the Indian school — one of 139 across Canada — where my father’s life began and nearly ended.

From that moment on, I wrestled with a question that had my head, my heart, and my guts in a half nelson: How far was I willing to follow this big, painful story — one that gets at the heart of what happened to Native people across Canada and the United States? What it means to have survived centuries of efforts to eradicate us as people? And what it means to be Indigenous today? How many of my family’s secrets did I really want to know and potentially reveal? There was only one way to find out: live the story.

Because here’s the thing. When you write a scene, you don’t have to have been present at that scene. With a little research, reportage, and imagination, a writer can recreate something they were not present for, maybe even in a place they’ve never been with people they’ve never met. Writers do not have to live our stories.

Not so in documentary, or at least not so in cinema vérité, the observational filmmaking style we used in *Sugarcane*. In cinema vérité, the filmmaker witnesses and records events unfolding in real-time, then crafts a film from that footage. Emily and our director of photography, Chris LaMarca, shot for over 1,000 hours. Emily, Chris, and I spent more than 100 days on the ground in Williams Lake and in the surrounding Secwépemc communities — my people’s homelands — living alongside our subjects, including my own family on the Canim Lake Indian Reserve. In other words, I started to live a much more Indigenous life than I had before.

How far was I willing to follow this big, painful story — one that gets at the heart of what happened to Native people across Canada and the United States?

Because I did not grow up in Canim Lake. In fact, I grew up over 1,000 miles and a country away in Oakland, California. But because I was making *Sugarcane*, I spent a huge chunk of the last four years in my community with my family. I even moved in with my dad, a man who left my mom and me when I was just six years old. We lived together under the same roof in a little Navy town in Washington State for the better part of two years, cooking each other breakfast, hanging out, making art, smoking weed, and telling stories.

Nonfiction is, at its core, about how one chooses to live and observe life. After living far away on the East Coast in New York and Washington, D.C., after attaining degrees from two of the oldest most imperial educational institutions in the world — Columbia University and the University of Oxford (a Master’s in “Global and Imperial History,” no less) — my documentary *Sugarcane* and then my book *We Survived the Night* brought me home to my family and our people. It led me to live a more Indian life.

A life where I used our Secwépemc language more in conversation and on the page — a good thing, because the only remaining fluent speakers on our reserve are my kyé7e and her sister, both in their mid-80s. A life where we fish salmon out of a deadly rushing river all night long just so we can give all our fish away to our loved ones the next day. A life where we are, at times, called upon to carry the coffins of family members to the frozen ground of our community cemetery to shovel dirt, tears, and stories atop their graves. A spiritual life that led me to take up new ceremonial responsibilities in my nation. That’s why, every summer solstice for the last four years, I have sat out in the woods near the Secwépemc community of Esk’et with no food and no water, praying, fasting, seeking spirit power, and asking for protection for my relatives. So that the hard and painful stories I have been called to tell fall easy on them.

When I finish my prayers with the words “xwexwéyt te kwseltkten!” (all my relations) I think about how wonderful and complicated it is to be related. The love and pain that comes from being so intertwined with your kith and kin, many of whom are suffering because of all the awful things that were done to Indian people in all those attempts to make us die and disappear. Because that’s what it means to be Indian, to love, and to be related.

Julian Brave NoiseCat



Julian Brave NoiseCat is a writer, Oscar-nominated filmmaker, champion powwow dancer, and student of Salish art and history. His writing has appeared in dozens of publications, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New Yorker*. NoiseCat has been recognized with numerous awards, including the 2022 American Mosaic Journalism Prize and many National Native Media Awards. He was a finalist for the Livingston Award and multiple Canadian National Magazine Awards, and was named to the TIME100 Next list in 2021. His first documentary, *Sugarcane*, was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary. Directed alongside Emily Kassie, *Sugarcane* premiered at the 2024 Sundance Film Festival, where NoiseCat and Kassie won the Directing Award in U.S. Documentary. NoiseCat is a proud member of the Canim Lake Band Tsqéscen and descendant of the Lílwat Nation of Mount Currie. *We Survived the Night* is his first book.

That's why about a year and a half into directing a documentary about the system that nearly wiped our Indian way of life off the face of this earth, I decided to write *We Survived the Night* in the style, structure, and tradition of a Coyote Story, a narrative form from my people's culture that tells the story of the creation of the world and the way things are through the adventures and misadventures of our trickster ancestor. Coyote who died and resurrected so many times the Indians lost count. Not a messiah, but a survivor, like my dad, my kyé7e, myself, and so many other Indians I know and am related to.

The Indian way of life was very nearly wiped out by colonization and schools like St. Joseph's Mission. But it is a good and beautiful way of life. It endures through each and every Indian's words, actions, and lives. The way we choose to see and experience truth. The stories we live, the stories we tell, and how we tell them.

Julian Brave NoiseCat on How Directing a Documentary Shaped His Memoir. This essay first appeared in [Lit Hub's Craft of Writing newsletter](#).

DRIVING QUESTION

What makes nonfiction stories (essays, documentaries, etc.) powerful?

Personal Reflection

1. Reflect on the stories of your family, community, circle of friends, etc. Are there any that are often told and retold and hold a place of importance for your community and/or caregiving spaces?
2. Now consider stories that may be untold, empty spaces, gaps in histories, or silences that may exist in your family, community, circle of friends, etc. Imagine the courage it might take to embark on a journey like writer and director NoiseCat did. Write a short letter or note to him — perhaps words of encouragement or advice or additional questions about the experience.

Discussion Questions

1. In the essay, NoiseCat discusses the differences between writing a memoir, in which the story is on the page, and a documentary — especially this documentary — in which he is an active participant in the story. What are the advantages for each medium? How might a memoir offer the audience more insight into what NoiseCat experiences? How might it take away from the audience's understanding? What power does cinema offer that a book does not?
2. How can individuals and communities reclaim power by telling their stories?
3. What other ways could NoiseCat have told this story? (E.g., graphic novel, comic strips, social media reels, narrative film, fictional rewriting.) How would a different format change the story and the audience's experience of it?



Extension Activities

1. Essay Analysis Activity

Worksheet 4: Essay Analysis can be helpful in preparing learners before they write their own essay or can be used on their own to improve literacy and textual engagement. It can also be helpful for learners to look at the focus of each paragraph to analyze the flow of the essay and inform their own writing.

2. Essay Writing Assignment Options

- a. Write an essay about an experience in your life that felt risky or new or required a level of vulnerability and personal discovery on your part. Consider the individuals who encouraged you or partnered with you in the process. Include the driving questions or desires that motivated you to embark on this new and/or challenging thing. Include details about your approach and the outcome as well. Focus on personal growth and/or community support.
- b. Write an essay about a moment in your life that was highly personal but overlapped with a larger historical event. Focus on the interplay between the personal and the public. How were you personally changed? How was the larger world changed?

3. Alternate Writing Assignment

Write a film review of *Sugarcane*. **Worksheet 5: Film Review** can be useful in preparing learners to write their film review. (**Worksheets 1-3** might also be useful.) Alternatively, learners could also do a TV/social media-style review of the film in a live presentation for their peers. **Worksheet 5** or **Worksheets 1-3** may also be useful for that activity. (The additional resources include written film reviews for reference.

Additional Resources

[“Indian Names” by Julian Brave NoiseCat. The Paris Review. September 17, 2025.](#) (This is an excerpt from *We Survived the Night*.) Accessed May 2026.

[Julian Brave NoiseCat](#) (Author/Creator Website)

[A Minecraft Movie Review by Brian Tallaerco. Roger Ebert, April 2, 2025.](#) Accessed May 2026.

[Billie Elish – Hit Me Hard and Soft: The Tour \(Concert Tour Movie Review\). Roger Ebert, May 7, 2026.](#) Accessed May 2026.

[Mr. Nobody Against Putin Reviewed by Jacob Oller. Paste Magazine, March 5, 2026.](#) Accessed May 2026.

[Sinners Review by Peter Bradshaw. The Guardian, April 10, 2025.](#) Accessed May 2026.

[The Devil Wears Prada 2 Review by Rahul Menon. Script Magazine, April 29, 2026.](#) Accessed May 2026.



SECTION 2: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

INDIAN.	ENGLISH.
Wa Myhe.....	Louis Sitting Bull.
Eaton Sopa.....	Peter Black Hawk.
Cheskika.....	Suspenders.
Ohakte.....	Lawrence.
Poghe.....	Meinrad.
Minnigo.....	Isadore.
Itaizipo.....	Cloud.
Oksita-ska.....	Emerau.
Wahoinashini.....	Manrose.
Tamahica.....	Wm. Burke.
Pute Karsa.....	Charles Manning.
Mazakaha.....	Samuel Godereau.
Tuweya.....	Joseph.
Kekta Keye.....	Backwards.
Wasicuncinca.....	George Pleats.
Pyo Hata.....	Medicine.
Ok Sita.....	The Boy.
Tacaupi Sapa.....	Edward.
Wawican Cinca.....	George Pratt.
Wakela.....	Chas. Marsha l.
Chado.....	Samuel Halsey.
Wakeya Mouni.....	Stephen.
Indian.....	English.
Hohoboja Wi-asta.....	Narcis Benivier.
Cotca.....	Andrew Ohaka.
Cetau.....	Hawk.
Catka.....	Left Hand.
He Yuha.....	Has Horns.
Ishta Caniya.....	Pouting Eyes.
Wa na Kiteti.....	Helper.

A September 1883 article in the St. Paul Globe lists Native kids' names and then English ones given to them. The children were taken from their home in the Standing Rock Reservation.

Indian Residential Schools in Canada and Indian Boarding Schools in the United States shared a goal of forced assimilation and systemic separation of First Nations/Indigenous/Native American children from their families, communities, cultures, and languages. Essential to this process was the practice of renaming children. Through this process children were given English/Anglo/European names. Sometimes these names were drawn from significant political figures or, in U.S. cases, from donors supporting the schools where the children were brought to live. In one case, a student was given the name "Boston Record" after a newspaper in Boston that financially supported the boarding school.

Co-Director of *Sugarcane* Julian Brave NoiseCat writes about his own last name/surname in his memoir *We Survived the Night*:

The night watchman who found my newborn father in the dumpster said his cries for life sounded like a cat. But that was pure, if darkly ironic, coincidence. Because our last name, NoiseCat, originally had nothing to do with noises or cats.

Instead, "Noiscat," as it was once written, is a missionary's bastardization of our ancestral name, Newísket. My family was colonized so hard we don't remember what Newísket means.



His father's history ties back to Indian Residential Schools. The lost meaning of his family's name reflects the colonialism that created these schools in Canada and the United States. NoiseCat's words underscore the power and importance of names or language, and of reclamation possible through the power of stories (told through poetry, film, memoir, narrative, and more). Through the process of reclamation and reconnection that is present in both his memoir and the film, multiple potential meanings for Newísket are brought to life, as are the stories of the people surrounding Ed Archie NoiseCat (father) and Julian Brave NoiseCat.

Julian and the two poets referenced here share a commitment to language. Their careful word choice can act as both recovery or reclamation and connection to the past.

The poem by Nick Metcalf references Metcalf's *two-spirit* identity. There is complexity to the term two-spirit as it is a relatively modern term used by some Indigenous peoples. It is a pan-Indigenous term that may not resonate with all LGBTQ Native Americans/First Nations/Indigenous peoples.

Poem by Nick Metcalf

Our stories tell us. They remind us.
We begin from awe and wonder.
Divine.
And, we come from the stars...

In a time before now,
We were known by many names.
In Lakota / Dakota / Nakota – Winkte
In Anishinabe – Niizh manidoowag
Many more names amongst many more tribes.
Our people know us.

Now, in this place of our own, in English, we are known by
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two Spirit, IndigiQueer...

Our whereabouts never changed.

Two Spirit.
A statement. A reclaiming. An embodiment.
A declaration in a language not our own.
A calling. Two Spirit.

Our people remember us,
They know us. Those who remember.
Beyond the destruction.
We are a gift of the Creator.
Unique. Sacred. Special. Honored.

Our understanding...Still thrives

We are known by many names, amongst our people,
We are known...

Our stories tell us...
They remind us...
We begin from awe and wonder...
Divine...
And, we come from the stars...Two Spirit.

[*Poem by Nick Metcalf, as published on the Native American
Community Development Institute website*](#)



... Bee

By Eric Gansworth

I stood in a longhouse
with a woman who may or may not
be Mohawk. Some shift their opinions
about her like meteorologists, as if
her blood were a storm system tracked
in its comings and goings. But the father
of her two sons was, without question, Seneca.

We knew that, in Haudenosaunee country, a father
is to some degree irrelevant, that her own
shifting identity would impact her sons' lives
like a gene vulnerable to betrayal, causing
certain, terminal conditions. She waited
on an elder she called Steam (warning I was not
to call the elder woman by that name). Steam
(not Steam) would observe the boys, understand
their natures, give them their Creator names defining
their lives during the next ceremony. I confessed
my namelessness, confessed my longhouse- and fluency-
deficient community, and confessed that my clan
mother, three hours away, did not know me well
enough to give me a name, confessed my community followed
a more casual ceremony. You find your name after a social
misstep,
a dubious facial feature, a birth defect. Names offer
the name-givers comfort, that your challenge is harder
than theirs, no matter the truth.

Our names are a convoluted toughening of our skins. My name
is not like Steam (no one is forbidden to use it). No one
calls me Batman because of my status, my utility

belt, my impressive batpole, my agility, my muscles,
my profile in spandex, my virtues, but because I wore
the cape to an older age than I should have, and could
continue to wear it now, as that shit is not going away
any time soon. Even kids who only know Christian Bale
or Michael Keaton, lurking in latex and leather hood,
still think Batman is my name.

And this is why I have no memory for when or how you became
the Bumblebee, what it means, beyond the literal.
You soar in gardens, spend days ensuring growth,
and if metaphors are at work here, this one seems true
enough to keep you in amber wings, fuzzy yellow rings,
black lacquer torso, and sensitive antennae.

What metaphor suits the night I left on the Amtrak
for Chicago, past 1:00 a.m., while you stood
on the platform, watching those cars pull out,
the night I wanted to leap from the train, stay?

I cannot invent new names for the ways we slow,
struggle, attempt to maintain the illusion of futures
without measure, defy actuary numbers and because I have
gone closer to the light than you have, the story is
easier to craft and finesse than it should be.

Pollination trails are smaller than those I'm forced
to fly in, and lying in Little Rock, Santa Fe, Manhattan,
Minneapolis, Seattle, hotel rooms, the ellipse of your name
trail winds me home, waiting, dusted in pollen and history.

[...Bee by Eric Gansworth, as published on the
poetryfoundation.org website](http://poetryfoundation.org)

Meet the Poets

Nick Metcalf

Poem



Nick Metcalf is Sicangu Oyate – Burnt Thigh People – Rosebud Sioux Tribe. Nick has lived in the Twin Cities for 30 years where they’ve made a life filled with lots of friends, family, and community.

Nick is a proud Parent and Grandparent. Nick is a Poet and Writer. Nick is participating in the Loft’s 2024 year-long Poetry Apprenticeship with Heid E. Erdrich.

*Photo of Nick Metcalf from
<https://nacdi.org/news/pride-is-indigenous-featuring-nick-metcalf/>*

Eric Gansworth

...Bee



Eric Gansworth, S-ha-weñ na-sae’ (Onondaga), born and raised at Tuscarora Nation, works at Canisius College. He has published eleven books of poetry, prose, and visual art, most recently *Give Me Some Truth* (Scholastic, 2018).

*Photo of Eric Gansworth from
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/eric-gansworth>*



DRIVING QUESTION

What's in a name?

Personal Reflection

1. What is the importance of names, not only for humans, but also in regards to the names we give to groups, to streets, cities, rivers, streams, etc.? What power do they hold?
2. What is the power of language? How does language impact you?
3. What nicknames were you given, either as a child or perhaps more recently? How do these names make you feel? Are some only for certain people in your life and not others?

Discussion Questions

1. What happens when we give up our power by letting others (including technology) speak for us?
2. What happens when our power/agency is removed from us through renaming or misnaming or through other acts of erasure and exclusion? How can we use language to reclaim our power?
3. What literary devices are the authors using in their respective works to amplify their message?
4. How does Metcalf use repetition in his poem? What effect does this have on the reader?
5. What different communal names is Gansworth referencing in his poem? Why do you think the poet, whose nickname was Batman, has selected the Bumblebee as a companion subject in this poem?
6. What is the relationship between identity and language? How can poetry underscore the relationship between identity and language? How do identity and language interact in your own life?

Extension Activities

1. Poetry Writing Activity

Handout 1: Name Poem

After learners complete their poems, they could be encouraged to type up or write out the poem by hand for display. Learners could incorporate images, either graphically on a computer using images, or by hand, through drawings or printed photos. A group display of the poems is a possible culminating activity. Educators can assign a certain style of poem for this activity or types of poetic devices to be used. Educators could also encourage learners to consider referencing either Metcalf's or Gansworth's poetic styles. For example, Metcalf opens and closes with the same words, but with different punctuation for those words. Gansworth opens with a mirror and connects and focuses on a nickname and its origin while also recalling a more recent naming experience and connecting his name to that of an insect.

2. Essay Writing Activity

Both Metcalf and Gansworth are using poetry in service of reclamation. Have learners explore the theme of reclamation as it is presented in the poem(s) you read in class through a short essay-writing activity, perhaps done in class (pre-class discussion could be helpful). Encourage learners to weave in a personal experience related to reclamation that they might have had or an imagined experience of reclamation that could be meaningful to them.

3. Glossary/Lexicon Activity

In a second reading of one or both poems, have learners make a list of words that are new to them or whose definitions may not be clear to them. In small groups, have learners share their word lists with one another and work together to write up definitions of the words based on context clues and shared understandings. Once those definitions are complete, learners can then look up definitions of the words and compare their definitions with those in the dictionary. As a large group, share a selection of words and definition comparisons. This exercise highlights the aliveness of language and the power and beauty of language and is a reminder that meaning is made by readers and through conversation and community.

4. Cross-Media Activity

As a group, read [Gansworth's essay](#) about his approach to poetry and the importance of names and about his own family's history with Indigenous boarding schools. Discuss the significance of the name he is eventually given at a naming ceremony. Examine how Gansworth is using language to reconcile his family's past regarding Indian Boarding Schools and the resultant language loss and the reclamation process of recent generations. As a group, discuss how Gansworth's process, shared in this short essay, and NoiseCat's, shared through *Sugarcane* (offering a more in-depth look at his experience) differ and what aspects feel similar.

Further Learning

["What's in a Name?" Nature, Culture, and Conservation Activity from EO Wilson Foundation](#)

Additional Resources

[Dances With Words and Images](#), Essay, Eric Gansworth, Poetry Foundation. Accessed May 2026.

[Department of the Interior Releases Investigative Report, Outlines Next Steps in Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative](#). May 11, 2022. U.S. Department of the Interior. Accessed May 2026.

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[She Struggled To Reclaim Her Indigenous Name. She Hopes Others Have It Easier](#) by Emma Brown. *NPR*. July 5, 2021. Accessed May 2026.

[Understanding the Term Two-Spirit, Wabanaki Two-Spirit Alliance](#). Accessed May 2026.

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SECTION 3: THE POWER AND IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

“A Poem to Get Rid of Fear”

by Joy Harjo, National Poet Laureate

I release you, my beautiful and terrible fear.
I release you. You were my beloved
and hated twin, but now, I don't know you
as myself. I release you with all the
pain I would know at the death of
my children.
You are not my blood anymore.
I give you back to the soldiers
who burned down my home, beheaded my children,
raped and sodomized my brothers and sisters.
I give you back to those who stole the
food from our plates when we were starving.
I release you, fear, because you hold
these scenes in front of me and I was born
with eyes that can never close.
I release you
I release you
I release you
I release you
I am not afraid to be angry.
I am not afraid to rejoice.
I am not afraid to be black.
I am not afraid to be white.
I am not afraid to be hungry.
I am not afraid to be full.
I am not afraid to be hated.
I am not afraid to be loved.
To be loved, to be loved, fear.
Oh, you have choked me, but I gave you the leash.
You have gutted me but I gave you the knife.
You have devoured me, but I laid myself across the fire.
I take myself back, fear.
You are not my shadow any longer.
I won't hold you in my hands.
You can't live in my eyes, my ears, my voice
my belly, or in my heart my heart
my heart my heart
But come here, fear
I am alive and you are so afraid
of dying.

[View a YouTube performance of
Harjo reciting the poem.](#)

[A Poem to Get Rid of Fear by
Joy Harjo, as published on the
All Poetry journal website](#)

“Álastsii’ Dah Deidiijaa”

by Nia Francisco

Niha hastsoí, nihidzanii
‘álastsii’ nihich’j’ dah deidiijaa’
bíłák’ee naazhjaa’go
nihich’j’ dah deidiijaa’.

Our elderly men, our elderly women
seeds to us they offered
in their palms in pieces they were placed
toward us the pieces they offered.

Niha hastoí ‘álastsii’ bił danílih,
t’aa íiyisí bił danílih.
Bii néí yee dayoosáńí,
bee iina’ éí éí ‘álastsii’ ‘áté.
‘álastsii’ tááłta’í sí’ąą ndi
bee ‘iina’ ‘át’é,
éí bił danilíigo
‘álastsii’ nihich’j’ dah deidiijaa’.

Our elderly men seeds they wholly respect
utmost they wholly respect
their spirit with that they nurture
their subsistence is the seeds as it is
a single seed only one though it may be
with it sustains life it is so
as it is with their respect
seeds toward us the pieces they give.

‘álastsii’ éí doo ninit’i’ ígíí ‘áté.
Tązhii hastiin
éí ‘álastsii’ nihookáá diné’é yeiníłá jini
‘ako ‘álastsii’ éí áyoo’ooni’ bił holó.
dínoóseeł, dínoót’j’j’ł, áko
áko táhdídiin hólqó doh.
‘ákóteégo nihahastoí dóó nihidzanii
‘álastsii’ bił dah nilih.

Seed it is does not end as it exists,
Turkey male being
as it is seeds he gave earth surface beings
he endowed them it is said.
Therefore seeds it is compassion it has with it.
It grows, it matures, corn pollen it will have.
Elderly men and women that way seeds they respect.

‘álastsii’ nihich’i dah deidiijaa’.
nihí ba’da’átchiní niidliinii,
nihí bitsookéh, nihí bináli niidliinii,
‘áwée’ dóó ‘átchini niidliinii,
ch’ikéí dóó tséłkéi niidliinii,
‘asdzaní dóó dinééh niidliinii,
hastsoí dóó saánii niidliinii,
t’áá ‘áłtsq̣h ba’átchiní niidlj̣h
‘álastsii’ dóó nínit’i’ii niidlj̣h.

Seeds to us they each offered
we their offsprings we are
we grandchildren paternal grandchildren we are
babies and children we are
teenage girls and teenage boys we are
ladies and young men we are
elderly men and elderly women we are
all their children we are
seeds that does not cease we are.

*‘Álastsii’ Dah Deidiijaa’ by Nia
Francisco, as published on the
poetryfoundation.org website*



I Am Dressed in My Language

(Essay) by Laura Tohe

Oh, see Sally. Oh, see Dick. Oh, see Jane. These repetitive sentences introduced me to reading. I learned that putting the sounds of the alphabet together made a word, made a sentence, made a paragraph, made stories, made poetry, made a book. My parents dressed me with two languages — Navajo and English — and sent me to school with new clothes and an American name. My brothers were there already, and I wanted to be a part of what seemed like fun. One day I walked to the stone Indian School building and peeked into the window of my brother's classroom. I saw students moving around, and in the back of the classroom were toys and a play kitchen. I wanted to go to school so I could play with those toys. My brother saw me peeking in the window and motioned me away, like he was embarrassed of me, or maybe he knew something I didn't know.

The next year I was put in a classroom without the play kitchen and toys. For the first few days the teacher gave us pictures to color, which was fun until a dark undercurrent struck. My classmates were Diné and most only spoke Diné bizaad, The People's language. Our language had been used for thousands of years for teaching, stories, songs, prayers, and healing ceremonies. My father was a Code Talker who used it as a secret weapon against the Japanese combatants during WWII. Slowly our language was to be erased — in the classroom, on the playground, in the places where we ate and slept. The "Indian" in us was to be killed (figuratively and sometimes literally) in the government and parochial schools. Our senses of who we are — our identity and our language — were to be sacrificed to meet the government's policy of coerced assimilation. I was five years old and was bearing witness to the punishment inflicted on my monolingual classmates when their tongues struggled to pronounce English words. Silence took over and covered them like a blanket; better to remain silent than speak our mother language and risk getting punished. I'm still haunted by the smack of the teacher's yardstick that broke on my friend's back in third grade, even though he didn't remember it years later.

English became my shield and my passport inside and outside of school. I used it to translate for my classmates

to protect them from the teacher's rules and ruler. I used it in the border towns where my family and many of the surrounding Native communities shopped and were subjected to racism in the restaurants and businesses because speaking Navajo was a sign of "backwardness." Having an accent was thought of as shameful. My grandmother, who was one of the first Diné teachers on the Navajo Nation, said to me, "ayóo hwiní yu" — speaking more than one language is a powerful ability. My family never forbade my siblings and me to speak Diné bizaad like some of my friends' parents did. I'm grateful to my parents and extended family who taught me Diné bizaad as my first language and English as my second.

In school it was English-only, but tribal languages were everywhere outside the classroom. I was surrounded by Diné bizaad, English, Zuni, and Spanish languages. Navajo and Zuni DJs code-switched on the AM radio station that brought us "Navajo Hour" and "Zuni Hour." They played our tribal songs and advertised products. On Sunday mornings the preacher punctuated his Navajo sermons with "diyin gaad," followed by the congregation singing Navajo hymns that drifted throughout the little community where I lived and attended school. All this took place during the boarding school's erasure and suppression of Native languages. Outside the schools, Navajo and English languages coexisted without repercussions. Navajo speakers still thought in Navajo, dreamed in Navajo, spoke Navajo. English hadn't taken over yet; our tongues still belonged to us. Our sense of who we are as Diné is grounded in the land, language, culture, and our relationships to the human and nonhuman world. I observed and learned this from my family.

Recently, a Native speaker of her Chinook language said to me, "I didn't know poems could be written in your Native language." Her sudden realization that poems can be written in any language surprised me and echoed memories of how I didn't write poems in Navajo for many years. When I wrote my first poems secretly in college I wrote only in English because I thought poems were supposed to be written that way due to my boarding school English-only indoctrination. During the Civil Rights movements, Vietnam War, and the American Indian Movement era, I read Chicano

and American literature and marched against border town injustices, including the killing of a young Diné activist. I attended talks and poetry readings by Indigenous thinkers and poets that left a profound impression on me. They made me reflect on my internalized colonization and its effects on my Native community. That I could write as a witness of injustice — as a few Native poets and writers were doing at that time — was a powerful revelation that appealed to me. I was always surrounded by the oral tradition. My ancestors passed on traditional stories to my mother who passed them on to me in her car stories, which stimulated my first fiction piece. We were always telling and listening to stories about what happened at a particular place as we drove past it: what happened to a relative, all the ordinary and unusual incidents that occurred. From those oral stories came my earliest writing, but not until much later.

After I learned to read, my dear mother saw my interest in books and took me to the little border-town library where I checked out many books that I enjoyed reading. They were all written by non-Indigenous authors and none were stories about my community or similar to the stories my family told. In college, I sifted through the course offerings, and none focused on indigeneity except for the Navajo language class. I was looking to claim my language, and I was searching to find my place, one that spoke of my history, my existence, my epistemology. In 1969, N. Scott Momaday became the first Native writer to win a Pulitzer Prize, for his novel *House Made of Dawn*. Only a few Native authors and poets were getting their work published around that time. Erasure and invisibility became the twin impetuses for my first tentative steps to write.

I wanted to become literate in Navajo, so I enrolled in a Navajo language class and wrote my first poem in Diné bizaad. My poem found its own form. Instead of writing lines layered on top of one another, my words floated freely on the page, breaking Western constructs of poetic form, or at least I thought they did since I didn't read much poetry then. I don't remember what I wrote but there seemed to be an airiness to it, like words were feathers. My Diné instructor commented positively on my experimental poetry assignment. I had thought my poem into existence with Navajo thought. Using Diné bizaad to write my poem freed me to express my cultural identity. I was not a minority, not an Indian, not the colonizer's stereotype. Poetry freed me from the mold of English-only. I returned to my Bitter

Water clan grandmother who told me stories about male and female rain, my mother's story about how a brother and sister transformed into prairie dogs because their parents neglected them, my father singing a riding song as we rode our horses home, and to all the voices, stories, and the land that surrounded me at home and at the Indian School where I once lived. My mother said I used to tell stories in Navajo about an imaginary family and she would make me perform them for our relatives.

I wrote only in English for many years, but English doesn't center me the way the Navajo language centers me. English is a borrowed language from the colonizer and is a useful language to write and speak. When I write in Diné bizaad the sounds come from the center of what it means to be Diné. Diné bizaad bee yashti. Diné bizaad bee hadínisht'é. I speak in The People's language. I am dressed in The People's language. Poetry is built into the Navajo language. Diné bizaad is a spiritual language useful for stories, songs, prayers, and poetry. It is useful for healing and telling jokes. My mother's scoldings always felt more severe in Navajo, while English felt more like a light scolding.

Some of the most beautiful poems in The People's language are songs about entering a spiritual space where the speaker aligns herself with powerful features in the natural world. The word for mountain is *dził*, a natural land feature that is powerful and aesthetically beautiful. *Jini*, it is said, that in Diné stories of time immemorial, mountains were placed intentionally in this world to give guidance and protection to Diné. When one has strength, one is said to have the characteristic of a mountain. *Ashkii ayóo bidziil*. The boy possesses much strength. The Western mind doesn't make these kinds of comparisons where the "I" is the subordinate. I think Diné closely and carefully studied the earth and sky and observed form, pattern, and stability in their interpretations. They interpreted the world through verbs, because life is always in motion. They sang songs and recited prayers as part of ceremonial healing from their astronomical observations. Looking at the world through this lens changes how we see the Earth — not as something to be sold and exploited, but giving and enriching, to be respected and cared for.

I put writing poetry in Navajo aside when I entered graduate school in the Midwest. I wanted to read the Western masters and learn their style and their techniques. Influenced by the oral tradition, I wrote prose poems. My creative writing instructor



wrote in red ink on my poem, “There’s no room for metaphor in this poem.” I was homesick and thinking about home in the Southwest and spending the day with my family in the mountains picking piñons. I took the instructor’s comment to mean that I was not writing in the preferred Western poetic format. I was discouraged and could have dropped out, but I had been raised by independent women who didn’t let roadblocks stand in their way. Despite many challenges, I earned my doctorate, and my thesis became my first full-length book of poetry.

I’m interested in the intersection between Navajo and English languages. As a bilingual Native writer, I still write primarily in English, although Navajo words and expressions have greater meaning and depth in poetry which I can use. I’m at a point where I’m writing about my family’s stories, not because I’m nostalgic for the past. Much is still invisible. Accessing my family’s stories can be imagined using Diné bizaad. My mother was always telling me stories. When I was homesick, my grandmother sent me piñons, and my mother gifted me with a spiral notebook written in beautiful longhand, filled with stories about our ancestors who lived through some of the most turbulent Diné history — the Long Walk in the nineteenth century, the Livestock Sheep Reduction Program in the thirties and forties — and I add my own history with colonization in the Indian boarding schools, and the wars that sent my grandfathers, father, and brothers into combat. In my earlier work I wrote poems about place and oral history. Putting pieces together to discover the whole story, or part of it, is kind of like doing detective work. One of my mother’s stories is about a great-grandmother who left her husband with her newborn baby and walked forty miles home to her mother. Why did she do this? What was her journey like through the rugged terrain as she carried her baby? Imagining and writing her journey makes her story real and present. In a way, I’m trying to catch up to the past. I am rewriting my family’s history to leave a footprint for my children and grandchildren to know who their relatives were and what they did, that we were always present. Diné bizaad bee yashti. Diné bizaad bee hadínisht’é.

Note to educators/group leaders regarding this essay:

We recommend either reading this essay in full or in excerpt with your learners/group, or sharing the essence of it with your learners/group before reading the poems.

[I Am Dressed in My Language \(essay\) by Laura Tohe,](#)
[as published on the poetryfoundation.org website](#)

Meet the Writers

Joy Harjo “A Poem to Get Rid of Fear”



Photo of Joy Harjo from
www.poetryfoundation.org
 © Karen Kuehn.
 Courtesy of Blue Flower Arts.

Joy Harjo is an award-winning poet, musician, playwright, and author, and a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. She made history in 2019 as the first Native American to serve as United States Poet Laureate, holding the position for three consecutive terms through 2022.

Harjo’s poetry explores themes of identity, memory, nature, justice, and the enduring strength of Indigenous cultures. Blending Native storytelling with vivid imagery and lyrical language, her work often reflects the interconnectedness of people, history, and the natural world. Some of her best-known collections include *She Had Some Horses*, *An American Sunrise*, and *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*. In addition to her writing, Harjo is an accomplished saxophonist and performer who frequently combines music with poetry. Today, Joy Harjo is widely recognized as one of America’s most influential contemporary poets, using her work to celebrate Indigenous voices, preserve cultural memory, and inspire readers to see the world with compassion and deeper understanding.

Nia Francisco “Álastsii’ Dah Deidiijaa”



Nia Francisco is Tł’ááshchí’í, born for the ‘Áshjłhi. Her maternal grandfather is Kinyaa’áanii and her paternal grandfather is Ta’neeszahnii. She has published two books of poetry, *Blue Horses for Navajo Women* (Greenfield Review Press, 1988) and *Carried Away by the Black River* (Yoo-Hoo Press, 1994). Navajo is her first spoken language, but English is her first written language. She lives and writes from the Navajo reservation.

Photo of Nia Francisco from
<https://www.blueridgejournal.com/poems/nf-poems.htm>

Laura Tohe “I Am Dressed in My Language”



Laura Tohe (Diné/Navajo) is a poet, writer, librettist, and educator whose work explores the intersections of language, history, memory, and Indigenous identity. A citizen of the Navajo Nation, she grew up near Crystal, New Mexico, and writes in both English and Navajo, often weaving traditional stories and cultural knowledge into her work. Tohe is Professor Emerita at Arizona State University and has received numerous honors for her contributions to Native American literature and education.

Photo of Laura Tohe from
<https://www.lauratohe.com/>



DRIVING QUESTION

How does language function in your life?

(Consider both written and spoken language. Spoken language includes ASL and may include other forms of nonverbal communication that function in ways that are similar to spoken language.)

Personal Reflection

1. What do you fear? How might language and/or art help free yourself from that fear?
2. Reflect on a time when language felt powerful for you, or perhaps a time when language was used to hurt you.
3. Reflect on your own experiences of codeswitching or language shifting or experiences you have moving between formal and informal language. What power comes from these experiences? What pain is associated with them, if any? Alternatively, write a short poem that incorporates words from the various languages you speak or that reflects code switching or formal and informal language interwoven for effect.
7. What is the impact of Francisco's poem, which is written in two seemingly very different languages? Why do you think Francisco chose to do this? How does it affect you as a reader? How would it affect Navajo readers and Navajo writers?
8. How significant are our words? How powerful can they be?
9. Which poem resonated with you? What lines or aspects of the poem connected to you most effectively?
10. How are both authors engaged in acts of reclamation through their work?

Discussion Questions

1. Why is poetry a powerful tool for self-expression?
2. How does poetic language support storytelling?
3. How does poetic language convey emotion?
4. Why do you think Harjo used repetition in "A Poem to Get Rid of Fear"? What effect does this have on the reader? How does Harjo's poem read like a spell that she is casting for herself?
5. Why do you think Francisco uses repetition in "Álastsii' Dah Deidijaa"?
6. What is the impact of repetition in both poems?

Extension Activities

1. Erasure Activity

Francisco writes about the erasure of culture, language, community, and identity that was central to the goal of Indigenous boarding schools. She also references the role erasure played in her choice to write: "Erasure and invisibility became the twin impetuses for my first tentative steps to write." Erasure is also a poetic form and style used to reclaim power and to comment on oppression. It has long been used by poets, but is also now used on Instagram as a mode of resistance and attack. Erasure can be transformative. In the spirit of reclamation, have learners select a poem as their base text for an erasure poem. Learners can type up or use a printout of the poem as a starting point and literally black out words on the document to create a new poem. Or they can look at the existing poem and handwrite a new poem using select words from the poem in order or in a new order.

2. Research/Presentation Activity

In the additional resources below, we included Poetry Foundation listings for numerous Indigenous/Native American poets. These can be shared with learners to select or assign them one to research. Other poets can also be included for consideration or researched by learners, including First Nations poets and poets from other Indigenous nations around the world. Learners should read at least 2–4 poems by that author and then either write a poem inspired by that author’s work or create a presentation to introduce others to that poet. Learners could also select one poem to memorize and recite as part of their presentation or learners could select a poem or two and create an illustration to accompany the poem(s).

Additional Resources

[“Ancestors: A Mapping of Indigenous Poetry and Poets.”](#)

Lecture delivered by Joy Harjo at Poets Forum in New York City. October 9, 2015. Accessed May 2026.

“‘Seeds to us they offered’: Diné Poets on the Indigenous Language of Poetry” by Kimberly Blaeser, Poetry Foundation. Accessed May 2026.

[20 Poets to Explore for Native American Heritage Month, New York Public Library.](#)

[Indigenous Nations Poets](#)

[Native American Poetry and Culture. Poetry Foundation](#)

[Arielle Taitano Lowe, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Denise Low, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Duane Niatum, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Eric Gansworth, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Heid E. Erdrich, Poetry Foundation](#)

Additional Resources *(continued)*

[James Welch, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Joy Harjo, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Karenne Wood, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Kimberly Blaeser, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Laura Da, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Laura Tohe, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Layli Long Soldier, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Leslie Marmon Silko, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Linda Hogan, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Louise Erdrich, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Marilyn Dumont, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Natalie Diaz, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Nicole Gonzalez, Poetry Foundation](#)

[N. Scott Momaday, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Orlando White, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Roberta Hill Whiteman, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Sherwin Bitsui, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Simon J. Ortiz, Poetry Foundation](#)

[Tanaya Winder, Poetry Foundation](#)



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[Teaching Resources: Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center](#)

Library of Congress Classroom Materials

[Digital Collections - Indian Removal Act: Primary Documents in American History - Research Guides at Library of Congress](#)

[Native American | Immigration and Relocation in U.S. History | Classroom Materials at the Library of Congress](#)

Pedagogy Resource

[National Council of Teachers of Mathematics on Teaching About Indigenous Boarding Schools](#)

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Film and Podcast Resources

[Native America Calling \(Radio Show, Podcast, etc.\)](#)

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JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT ON HOW DIRECTING A DOCUMENTARY SHAPED HIS MEMOIR



Directions: Please read [Julian Brave NoiseCat's essay](#) and answer the questions below to the best of your ability.

1. Who is the primary audience for this essay? How do you know?
2. In the fourth paragraph of the essay, NoiseCat writes: "From that moment on, I wrestled with a question that had my head, my heart, and my guts in a half nelson: How far was I willing to follow this big, painful story — one that gets at the heart of what happened to Native people across Canada and the United States? What it means to have survived centuries of efforts to eradicate us as people? And what it means to be Indigenous today? How many of my family's secrets did I really want to know and potentially reveal? There was only one way to find out: live the story."

What does "live the story" mean to you? What does it mean to NoiseCat, according to this essay? How nervous do you think NoiseCat was as he embarked on not only a new creative challenge, but also a personal journey with so much pain? What motivated him to do so? Who helped him along the way?
3. Regarding NoiseCat's memoir, he shares that he decided to write the book *We Survived the Night* in the style, structure, and tradition of a Coyote Story, which is a creation story passed down by his Indigenous people. Why did he make this choice, according to the essay? What other origins is he recounting in this essay and in the film referenced in the essay?



4. At the end of his essay, NoiseCat writes: “The Indian way of life was very nearly wiped out by colonization and schools like St. Joseph’s Mission. But it is a good and beautiful way of life. It endures through each and every Indian’s words, actions, and lives. The way we choose to see and experience truth. The stories we live, the stories we tell, and how we tell them.” Even though it was certainly emotional and, at times, painful for NoiseCat to tell his story through words and the film, why do you think it was important for him to do so? What do you think he gained in the process?

5. What did you learn after reading this essay that you did not know before?

6. What passage or sentence of the essay felt most important to you? Why?

WRITING A FILM REVIEW



Directions: Use the following questions to collect your ideas for the film review you are going to write. (Learners may want to refer to their Activity Viewing Worksheets if they were completed.)

1. Make preliminary observations about what you remember about one important theme in the development of the movie. Why is this a primary theme and how does it affect the film and the viewer?

2. Identify character contributions. What are a few ways that character traits and/or actions contribute to the expression of this theme in the film?

3. Create connections. Identify ways in which you feel your theme could connect to current issues in society.

4. Identify moments in the film when your theme is evident. Closely review those moments and focus on details.

5. Pinpoint related topics that need additional clarification and conduct relevant research.



NAME POETRY PRE-WRITING WORKSHEET

This worksheet is designed to support your creation of a name poem.

Make a list of names that you go by. Consider your full name, shortened versions, different linguistic variations of your name, nicknames, etc.

Research, record, and reflect on the meanings of these names. Consider asking relatives and/or community members or elders where your name came from and what it means.

Write down the name(s) of your parent(s), guardian(s), sibling(s) or a few close friend(s):

Make a list of memorable things (literal or figurative, like a life lesson or special memory) that these individuals have given you.

Write down the name(s) of a community or place that you are a part of or feel connected to.

Make a list of memorable things (literal or figurative) that the community and/or place have given you or descriptive words related to that community and/or place.

Write three adjectives that describe you or three adjectives that are aspirational for you.

Use this research as a reference for a name-inspired poem.
Consider different poetic forms as you work on your poem.



SUGARCANE PRIMARY SOURCES



CHIEF JOSEPH: REPRESENTATION, TRANSLATION, AND INTERPRETATION



Read: [6.2: Primary Source- Chief Joseph on Indian Affairs \(1877, 1879\) - Social Sci LibreTexts](#).
(This speech was translated and interpreted into written English.)



Representation, Translation, and Interpretation

Answer the following questions:

- 1.** In the speech, what is Chief Joseph's main criticism of the "good words" spoken by the U.S. government?
 - A. The words are spoken in a language the Nez Percé do not understand.
 - B. They are spoken without any sincere intention of being backed by actions.
 - C. The government promises to provide horses, but only provides cattle.
 - D. They contradict the treaties drafted by General Miles.

- 2.** Which persuasive appeal is Chief Joseph using in this quotation: "If the white man wants to live in peace with the Indian he can live in peace. There need be no trouble. Treat all men alike. Give them all the same law."
 - A. *Pathos* (Emotional appeal)
 - B. *Ethos* (Appeal to authority/ethics)
 - C. *Logos* (Appeal to logic and reason)
 - D. *Kairos* (Appeal to time-sensitivity)

- 3.** What rhetorical purpose is served by Chief Joseph's repetition (anaphora) of the phrase "Good words" throughout his address?
 - A. It highlights the vast difference between empty government promises and the harsh realities of Native American life.
 - B. It shows his agreement with the U.S. policy regarding reservation management.
 - C. It acts as a tribute to the missionaries who taught his people to read.
 - D. It serves as a respectful greeting to the Congressmen in the audience.

- 4.** Chief Joseph states, "All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers." What is he arguing through this comparison?
 - A. That Native Americans and white Americans should have equal political, legal and human rights.
 - B. That the Nez Percé and the U.S. military share the same religious beliefs.
 - C. That the government has a divine obligation to assimilate tribes.
 - D. That white settlers should surrender their land to the tribes.

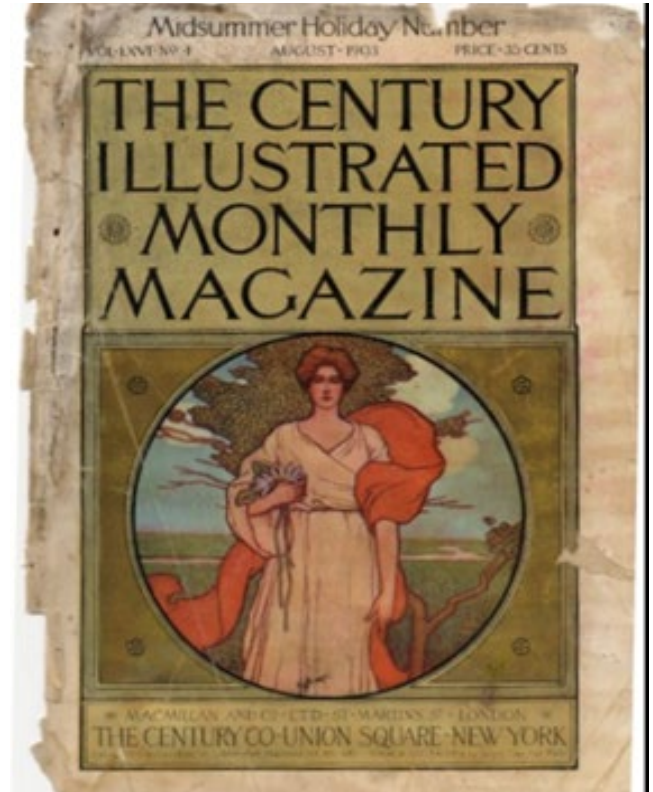
5. Identify one quote from the speech where Chief Joseph utilizes *pathos* (appeal to emotion). Explain how this specific quote would have influenced the white, American political audience he was addressing. (Short essay answer)

Representation, Translation, and Interpretation

View and Read [Chief Joseph, the Nez-Percé](#), written by Charles Erskine Scott Wood (1852–1954) published in 1884 in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* (often called *Century Magazine*), one of the most prominent and influential American periodicals of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Charles Erskine Scott Wood was a U.S. Army lieutenant who was present at Chief Joseph's surrender in 1877. Though Wood is credited with transcribing Joseph's famous "I will fight no more forever" speech, historical consensus suggests Wood likely embellished and shaped the eloquent text based on a rough translation.

1. How do you think translation and interpretation of the same event (Chief Joseph's translated speech and C.E.S. Wood's account) landed differently on literate Euro-American audiences?



2. What is the advantage of telling a story in your first language to others who share your culture?



3. Are there advantages to hearing a story told from someone outside your culture?

4. What obstacles to understanding arise when reading or hearing an account of a culture you are not intimately familiar with?

5. What strategies, tools, or attitudes would you employ if your goal were a peaceful, mutually beneficial resolution to a culture clash?

6. Native American policies were controversial across the United States throughout its history, but ideas of “civilizing” people and the United States being a “melting pot” became part of the U.S. fabric. What do you think about these ideas today?

Representation, Translation, and Interpretation

1. In the speech, what is Chief Joseph's main criticism of the "good words" spoken by the U.S. government?
 - A. The words are spoken in a language the Nez Percé do not understand.
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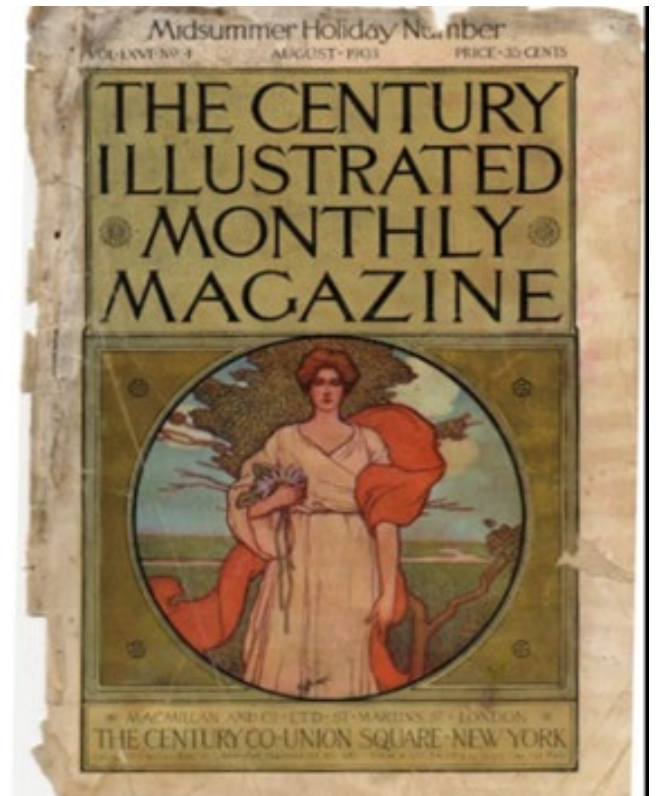
Short Essay Analysis: Answer will include:

1. Students pull a quote from the speech that resonates with them emotionally. The quote likely includes emotional language, perhaps emphasizing hope, suffering, grief, desperation, exile, or the moral pain of betrayal (for example, describing broken promises or loss of home/people).
2. Students hypothesize or infer how the quote (in the context of the larger article and the geopolitical situation) might have affected a Euro-American settler reader. In other words, the student explains how they believe Chief Joseph used pathos to strengthen his argument for that specific audience.

Representation, Translation, and Interpretation Answer Key

View and Read [Chief Joseph, the Nez-Percé](#), written by Charles Erskine Scott Wood (1852–1954) published in 1884 in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* (often called *Century Magazine*), one of the most prominent and influential American periodicals of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Charles Erskine Scott Wood was a U.S. Army lieutenant who was present at Chief Joseph’s surrender in 1877. Though Wood is credited with transcribing Joseph’s famous “I will fight no more forever” speech, historical consensus suggests Wood likely embellished and shaped the eloquent text based on a rough translation.



1. How do you think translation and interpretation of the same event (Chief Joseph’s translated speech and C.E.S. Wood’s account) landed differently on literate Euro-American audiences?

Expected points (in any combination):

- A translation/interpreter can shift tone, word choice, and emphasis, especially when there is no one “literal” English equivalent (or the literal equivalent is not known to the interpreter/translator).
- C.E.S. Wood’s account was written for a Euro-American magazine audience and may therefore have been styled specifically to fit Euro-American literary expectations in the late 1800s.
- Because Wood was a United States officer present at the surrender, his version may have seemed more credible to some readers.
- Even if the core meaning remained similar, the version that reads as “more eloquent” can influence how audiences *emotionally* and *morally* interpret the event (sympathy vs. condemnation, respect vs. dismissal) depending on their cultural framework or expectations.

2. What is the advantage of telling a story in your first language to others who share your culture?

Possible points:

- Greater emotional accuracy and cultural nuance (ability to use idioms, shared values, and culturally specific relational terms).
- Shared understanding of context (history, social norms, references, humor, spiritual meanings).
- Stronger community ownership and authenticity — your audience already understands much of your worldview and recognizes your “right” to an opinion.

3. Are there advantages to hearing a story told from someone outside your culture?

Advantages may include:

- The story may reach a wider audience who might not otherwise hear (in this case) Native voices directly.
- It may foster cross-cultural awareness, motivate empathy, and draw political attention, potentially bringing a local issue to a broader audience and bridging connections across time, space, and culture.
- (Potential disadvantage) Misunderstandings and misinterpretations can also occur, so it's a mixed benefit and requires the listener to be engaged in critical thought.

4. What obstacles to understanding arise when reading or hearing an account of a culture you are not intimately familiar with?

Obstacles may include:

- Missing cultural context (history, relationships, legal structures, spiritual meanings).
- Translation problems (words with no direct equivalent, differences in language structure/grammar/tone that are not easily conveyed).
- Stereotypes or preconceived beliefs shaping interpretation.
- Power imbalance affecting the interpretation of information (i.e., the dominant culture may treat its version as "official" truth or create justifications for not giving credibility to another culture's experience or value structure).

5. What strategies, tools, or attitudes would you employ if your goal were a peaceful, mutually beneficial resolution to a culture clash?

Strategies, tools, or attitudes may include:

- Active listening and patience. Avoid assuming "one" correct worldview and give adequate time to work through issues.
- Seeking multiple sources and opinions, including voices from the affected community.
- Mutually define (and use) respectful communication and confirm understanding (clarify terms).
- Prioritize fairness, shared decision-making, and the well-being of all parties.
- Focus on actionability and accountability when creating agreements (treaties/contracts) based on current and anticipated human needs.

6. Native American policies were controversial across the United States throughout its history, but ideas of "civilizing" people and the United States being a "melting pot" became part of the U.S. fabric. What do you think about these ideas today?

Answers will vary, but student may discuss:

- Positive and negative connotations of the term "civilizing" and "melting pot."
- Complications between intention and impact when these ideas were written into implicit and explicit American values, and government and educational policy as they relate to languages, beliefs, and identities.
- A more modern/ethical view: cultural pluralism — people can contribute while keeping their identity.

Take It Further

Check out current Native American creators and influencers:

[How comics change mainstream narratives about Native Americans](#)

[Celebrate Our Heritage with These Twenty Native American Heroes | DC](#)

[Indigenous personalities are taking on social media | InFocus](#)

[Unrooted Podcast — The Indigenous Foundation](#)

[Comics by Indigenous Creators - A Reading List](#)

[Indian Day School by Thomas Edison, 1898](#)

[Century Magazine, Vol. 6 - 1884B](#)

[Land of the Spotted Eagle](#) by [Luther Standing Bear](#)

[© 2012 The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History www.gilderlehrman.org Speech Excerpts Excerpt 1: Tecumseh Quotation](#)



ZITKÁLA-ŠÁ: ART AND ACTIVISM

Zitkála-Šá (“Red Bird”), aka Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, was born on the Yankton Indian Reservation in South Dakota on February 22, 1876. Zitkála-Šá was part of a broader movement of Indigenous leaders, writers, artists, and activists working to protect Native cultures and advocate for Native rights.

Her mother was of Sioux Dakota heritage, and her father was of French descent. When she was eight years old, she convinced her mother to send her to a Quaker-run boarding school in Wabash, Indiana, after being recruited by missionaries from the White’s Manual Labor Institute. After Zitkála-Šá graduated from White’s Manual Labor Institute, she enrolled in a teacher-training program at Earlham College and, by 1900, was teaching music and speech at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Zitkála-Šá left the position at Carlisle within two years and worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) at Standing Rock Indian Reservation as a clerk while continuing to write. After marrying Captain Raymond Talephause Bonnin, she moved to Utah, lived on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation for 14 years, and had a son, Raymond Ohiya Bonin. A talented musician and violinist, she wrote the libretto and songs for *The Sun Dance Opera* (1913), and wrote about Dakota history and culture, as well as government corruption regarding the reservation system and U.S. policies concerning Native Americans, including *American Indian Stories* (1921) and *Oklahoma’s Poor Rich Indians* (1927). Her essays and short stories appeared in national magazines such as *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper’s Monthly*.

She joined the Society of American Indians (SAI) in 1911, an organization founded for and by Native Americans to challenge the wardship status of Native Americans and their lack of U.S. citizenship, and became its secretary in 1917, moving to Washington, D.C. A vocal advocate, she spoke at the National Women’s Party headquarters in 1918. When the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920, at least one-third of Native adults lacked U.S. citizenship and therefore still could not vote. Zitkála-Šá urged white American women who now had the vote to help support an Indian citizenship bill. In 1924, in part due to Zitkála-Šá’s advocacy, Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act, which granted full citizenship rights to all native-born people in the country.

In response, some states began to adopt strategies to disenfranchise Native people (similar to Jim Crow laws). Zitkála-Šá and her husband traveled across the country to register voters, connecting the political activism of Natives to advocate for rights and representation in the U.S. government by forming the National Council of American Indians in 1926. She died on January 26, 1938, and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery, sharing a headstone with her husband.



**Zitkála-Šá
 (“Red Bird”)/Gertrude Simmons Bonnin)**

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/zitkala-sa>

Abridged from Marisa Mathia, National Women’s History Museum

THE CUTTING OF MY LONG HAIR.

This excerpt from American Indian Stories was taken from a collection of largely autobiographical pieces by Zitkálá-Šá first collected and published in 1921. [The entire ebook is available on Project Gutenberg](#). This section uses period-specific language that reflects the power dynamics of the time.

The first day in the land of apples was a bitter-cold one; for the snow still covered the ground, and the trees were bare. A large bell rang for breakfast, its loud metallic voice crashing through the belfry overhead and into our sensitive ears. The annoying clatter of shoes on bare floors gave us no peace. The constant clash of harsh noises, with an undercurrent of many voices murmuring an unknown tongue, made a bedlam within which I was securely tied. And though my spirit tore itself in struggling for its lost freedom, all was useless.

A paleface woman, with white hair, came up after us. We were placed in a line of girls who were marching into the dining room. These were Indian girls, in stiff shoes and closely clinging dresses. The small girls wore sleeved aprons and shingled hair. As I walked noiselessly in my soft moccasins, I felt like sinking to the floor, for my blanket had been stripped from my shoulders. I looked hard at the Indian girls, who seemed not to care that they were even more immodestly dressed than I, in their tightly fitting clothes. While we marched in, the boys entered at an opposite door. I watched for the three young braves who came in our party. I spied them in the rear ranks, looking as uncomfortable as I felt. A small bell was tapped, and each of the pupils drew a chair from under the table. Supposing this act meant they were to be seated, I pulled out mine and at once slipped into it from one side. But when I turned my head, I saw that I was the only one seated, and all the rest at our table remained standing. Just as I began to rise, looking shyly around to see how chairs were to be used, a second bell was sounded. All were seated at last, and I had to crawl back into my chair again. I heard a man's voice at one end of the hall, and I looked around to see him. But all the others hung their heads over their plates. As I glanced at the long chain of tables, I caught the eyes of a paleface woman upon me. Immediately I dropped my eyes, wondering why I was so keenly watched by the strange woman. The man ceased his mutterings, and then a third bell was tapped. Every one picked up his knife and fork and began eating. I began crying instead, for by this time I was afraid to venture anything more.

But this eating by formula was not the hardest trial in that first day. Late in the morning, my friend Judéwin gave me a terrible warning. Judéwin knew a few words of English; and she had

overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting our long, heavy hair. Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!

We discussed our fate some moments, and when Judéwin said, "We have to submit, because they are strong," I rebelled. "No, I will not submit! I will struggle first!" I answered.

I watched my chance, and when no one noticed, I disappeared. I crept up the stairs as quietly as I could in my squeaking shoes, — my moccasins had been exchanged for shoes. Along the hall I passed, without knowing whither I was going. Turning aside to an open door, I found a large room with three white beds in it. The windows were covered with dark green curtains, which made the room very dim. Thankful that no one was there, I directed my steps toward the corner farthest from the door. On my hands and knees I crawled under the bed, and cuddled myself in the dark corner.

From my hiding place I peered out, shuddering with fear whenever I heard footsteps near by. 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. Some one 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.



Art & Activism: Zitkála-Šá (“Red Bird”)/Gertrude Simmons Bonnin)

Read “The Cutting of My Long Hair” and Zitkála-Šá’s abridged biography and answer the following questions.

- 1.** Which Native American tribe was Zitkála-Šá born into?
 - A. Navajo Nation
 - B. Yankton Dakota Sioux
 - C. Cherokee Nation
 - D. Ojibwe

- 2.** At what age did Zitkála-Šá leave her reservation to attend a missionary boarding school?
 - A. 5
 - B. 8
 - C. 12
 - D. 15

- 3.** In addition to being a political activist, in which artistic field(s) did Zitkála-Šá excel?
 - A. Painting and sculpture
 - B. Music and literature
 - C. Filmmaking
 - D. Ballet

- 4.** What was the name of the assimilationist boarding school she first attended in Wabash, Indiana?
 - A. Carlisle Indian Industrial School
 - B. White’s Indiana Manual Labor Institute
 - C. Hampton Institute
 - D. The Chilocco School

- 5.** Zitkála-Šá was a passionate advocate for which major civil rights movement of her era?
 - A. Women’s suffrage (voting rights)
 - B. The abolitionist movement
 - C. Labor union laws
 - D. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s

Respond to each question in 2–4 complete sentences.

1. Why do you think Zitkála-Šá used both her Dakota name (meaning “Red Bird”) and her European-American name (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin) throughout her life and career?
2. How did Zitkála-Šá use the arts (such as co-composing the Native American opera *The Sun Dance*) to challenge the forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples?
3. Read the following quote and write a short paragraph in response (5–7 sentences) supporting your position with examples.

“The melancholy of those black days has left so long a shadow that it darkens the path of years that have since gone by. These sad memories rise above those of smoothly grinding school days. Perhaps my Indian nature is the moaning wind which stirs them now for their present record. But, however tempestuous this is within me, it comes out as the low voice of a curiously colored seashell, which is only for those ears that are bent with compassion to hear it.” — Zitkála-Šá

Reflection Question: Based on this quote and your understanding of her activism, how do you think her experiences at assimilationist boarding schools shaped her later writings and activism? For the quote above, who do you think is Zitkála-Šá’s intended audience? Why?



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Respond to each question in 2–4 complete sentences.

1. Why do you think Zitkála-Šá used both her Dakota name (meaning “Red Bird”) and her European-American name (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin) throughout her life and career?

Answers will vary. Possible answer:

Access to dual identities: Zitkála-Šá used both names to navigate and bridge two distinct worlds. Her Dakota name honored her heritage, while her European-American name allowed her to communicate effectively with white audiences and institutions to advocate for Native American rights.

2. How did Zitkála-Šá use the arts (such as co-composing the Native American opera *The Sun Dance*) to challenge the forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples?

Answers will vary. Possible answer:

*Cultural preservation: She used European artistic mediums like literature and opera to showcase the depth, beauty, and validity of Native culture. By co-composing *The Sun Dance Opera*, she brought culturally specific sounds and themes to mainstream audiences, defying government bans on Indigenous religious practices.*

3. Read the following quote and write a short paragraph in response (5–7 sentences) supporting your position with examples.

“The melancholy of those black days has left so long a shadow that it darkens the path of years that have since gone by. These sad memories rise above those of smoothly grinding school days. Perhaps my Indian nature is the moaning wind which stirs them now for their present record. But, however tempestuous this is within me, it comes out as the low voice of a curiously colored seashell, which is only for those ears that are bent with compassion to hear it.” — Zitkála-Šá

Reflection Question: Based on this quote and your understanding of her activism, how do you think her experiences at assimilationist boarding schools shaped her later writings and activism? For the quote above, who do you think is Zitkála-Šá’s intended audience? Why?

Answers will vary. Key elements may include:

- Defining her audience as any people who are compassionate and paying attention.
- Acknowledgment of sadness and persistent memories that have not been resolved.
- Curiosity around the origins of her Indian heritage is the motivation for needing to share her memories/stories as a means of advocating for change.
- Specific connection/references pulled directly from the biography handout or her autobiographical writing.



Take It Further: Current Connections

[Ruth H. Burns on Historical Trauma as a Native Woman | Atmos:](#)

Ruth H. Burns discusses the experience of being notified that hair clippings from her dead relatives were being reclaimed from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University as part of repatriation efforts by the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate tribe. The clippings were likely connected to the forced hair cuttings at boarding schools. *“This is the sacred hoop of life being mended. This is a mighty wrong, being set right.”*

[My Son’s Hair is Part of a Thousand-Year-Old Tribal Culture. His School Called it a ‘Fad.’ | American Civil Liberties Union:](#) Ashley Lomboy discusses being told by her son’s school that his hair violates the school’s “grooming standards” for boys. As a member of the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe of North Carolina, her son wears his hair in accordance with his cultural and spiritual traditions.

[Letter to School Board Trustees | American Civil Liberties Union](#)

[Legacy of Trauma: The Impact of American Indian Boarding Schools Across Generations:](#) Dr. Denise K. Lajimodiere of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa in Belcourt, North Dakota, discusses both the personal and broad cultural implications for families affected by Indian Boarding Schools. She is one of the founders of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (N-NABS-HC) and was named a North Dakota state Poet Laureate. At the end of the article is an extensive “Additional Resources” list.

RUTH MUSKRAT: PRIMARY RESOURCE IN A SECONDARY FRAME



Ruth Muskrat presenting *Red Man in the United States* to President Coolidge.

<https://alumnae.mtholyoke.edu/blog/ruth-musk rats-speech-to-president-coolidge-december-13th-1923/>

Ruth Muskrat's Speech to President Coolidge, December 13, 1923

"This volume of the *Red Man in the United States* is presented to the 'Great White Father' in behalf of the many Indian students of America. It is a book which bears the best we have to offer — the story of our struggles and our tragedies, of our victories and our developments. The volume presents the results of an exhaustive investigation made under the auspices of what is now known as the Institute of Social and Religious Research. It gives, for the first time, a comprehensive account of the social, economic, and religious conditions among my people as they are today. It is the only study of its kind that has ever been undertaken, and it will perhaps remain unique in this respect since we may reasonably hope that when the time would ordinarily be ripe for another such study, what is known as 'the Indian problem' will have ceased to exist.

"Back on the Cheyenne reservation in Oklahoma, Indian women have worked with loving and painstaking care to make this gift worthy for the 'Great White Father,' weaving into this beaded

cover the symbolic story of our race — the story of the old type of Indian, greeting with the hand of friendship the founders of this great nation, and the story of the new Indian emerging from his semi-barbaric state, tilling the soil, and building for citizenship under the guidance of school.

"There have been so many discussions of the so-called Indian problem. May not we, who are Indian students of this generation, who must face the burdens of that problem, say what it means to us? You know that in the old days there were mighty Indian leaders — men of vision, of courage, and of exalted ideals. History tells us of Chief Powhatan, who met strange people on the shores of his country, and called them brothers: Massasoit, who offered friendship, and shared his kingdom. Then appeared another type of leader, the war chief, fighting to defend his home and his people. The members of my race will never forget the name of King Phillip, of Chief Joseph, of Tecumseh. To us they will be revered as great leaders who had the courage to fight, 'campaigning for their honor, martyrs to the soil of their fathers.' Again the order changes, and we have other leaders coming forth to find new paths. Cornstalk, the great orator; Red Jacket of the Senecas; and Sequoyah of the Cherokees. It was not an accident that these leaders were great. There was some hidden energy, some great driving inner ambitions, some keen penetration of vision that urged them on.



“What made these older leaders great still lives in the hearts of the Indian youths of today. The same potential greatness lies deep in the souls of the Indian students who today must become the leaders of the new era. Our old life has gone. A new trail must be found, for the old one is not good to travel farther. We are glad to have it so. But these younger leaders who must guide their people along new and untried paths have perhaps a harder task before them than the fight for freedom our older leaders made. Ours must be the problem of leading this vigorous and by no means dying race of people back to their rightful heritage of nobility and greatness. Ours must be the task of leading through these difficult stages of transition into economic independence, into a more adequate expression of their art and awakened spiritual vigor. Ours is a vision as keen as any penetrating as any vision of old. We want to understand and to accept the civilization of the white man; we want to become citizens of the United States and to share in the building of this great nation that we love. But we want also to preserve the best that is in our own civilization. We want to make our own unique contribution to the civilizations of the world — to bring our own gifts to the altar of that great spiritual and artistic unity which such a nation as America must have. This is the Indian problem which we who are Indians find ourselves facing.

“In order to solve it, we must have schools; we must have encouragement and help from our White Brothers. Already we have many schools, but the number is pitifully inadequate. And already the beginnings toward an intelligent and sympathetic understanding of our needs and our longings have been made through efforts as this book represents. For reasons today, as never before, the trail ahead for the Indian looks clear and bright with promise. But it is yet many long, weary miles until the end.

“It is out of gratitude for the opportunities for education and culture which have been afforded us by the interest of the white man, and our love for this nation to which we are eager to contribute our best, that this book is presented to our ‘Great White Father’ in behalf of the Indian students of America.”

[Mt. Holyoke’s Presentation of Ruth Muskrat’s Speech to President Coolidge, December 13, 1923](#)

Analyzing Mt. Holyoke's Presentation of Ruth Muskrat's Speech

As you read the text of [Ruth Muskrat's Speech to President Coolidge, December 13, 1923 – Alumnae Association](#), look at the webpage layout and the images embedded on the webpage. Think like a historian to analyze the speech text as a **primary source** and the webpage presentation of the information as a **secondary source**.

Write down questions and ideas of what primary documents you could search for to create a more complete picture of the people, places, and times brought up in the original speech, and do the same for the creators who are contextualizing the information. In the blank column, jot down your notes as you view and read. This section uses period-specific language that reflects the power dynamics of the time.

What school's webpage is hosting Ruth Muskrat's speech?	
What details about who Ruth Muskrat is and where she comes from are in her speech?	
What questions about her are unanswered?	
What does the speech reveal about her history and point of view?	
Who do you believe was the intended audience for Ruth Muskrat's speech?	
Who do you believe is the intended audience for this webpage?	
What do you already know about Calvin Coolidge's policies regarding Native Americans?	
Which Native American leaders does Ruth highlight in her speech?	
What is Ruth's call to action in this speech?	
If you were a prospective student of this school, what assumptions would you make about it based on this webpage?	



IMAGE ANALYSIS: EVIDENCE OR POLITICAL THEATER?

Part 1: First Impressions

Look at all five images on the **Handout: Evidence or Political Theater?** Imagine you are seeing this group of images in a mass media format (on a TV show, film documentary, magazine, textbook, social media platform, or video game). For each image, in a short paragraph or using bullet points, describe the story these images tell about the relationship between the United States government and Native Americans.

Part 2: Image Focus

Choose one image from the **Handout: Evidence or Political Theater?** Use the [Photo Analysis Worksheet](#) created by the National Archives and Records Education staff to capture your impressions of the image.

Reset Form		Photo Analysis Worksheet	Print Form
Step 1. Observation			
A. Study the photograph for 2 minutes. Form an overall impression of the photograph and then examine individual items. Next, divide the photo into quadrants and study each section to see what new details become visible.			
B. Use the chart below to list people, objects, and activities in the photograph.			
People	Objects	Activities	
Step 2. Inference Limit response for each question to 5 lines of text			
Based on what you have observed above, list three things you might infer from this photograph.			
Step 3. Questions			
A. What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?			
B. Where could you find answers to them?			
Reset Form		Designed and developed by the Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408	Print Form

Image Analysis: Evidence or Political Theater?



On an 1870 cover of *Harper's Weekly*, President Ulysses S. Grant is shown greeting the Oglala Chief Red Cloud who came to visit him in Washington, D.C. Library of Congress

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/ulysses-grants-failed-attempt-to-grant-native-americans-citizenship-180971198/>



Charles Curtis with a Native American in 1929.

Harris & Ewing/Library Of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division;

<https://www.kcur.org/history/2020-11-09/the-countrys-first-vice-president-of-color-was-a-native-american-from-the-kansas-territory>



(Original Caption) Meeting the President. Washington: President Kennedy met with representatives of 90 American Indian tribes at the White House today and was presented with the Declaration of Indian Purpose. During the ceremony, Kennedy described the American Indian as the “First Citizen” and said all Americans have a strong obligation to improve the living conditions of the Indians. (Left to right) Eleanor Red Fawn Smooth, Mohawk-Cherokee Tribe, Connecticut; Kennedy; and Calvin W. McGhee, Atmore, Louisiana, representing the Creek Nation east of the Mississippi.

Image provided by Getty Images.

https://photos.com/featured/president-kennedy-with-native-american-bettmann.html?product=art-print&srlti-d=AfmBOorOsoqTUUxuCBi_01O7iFq7qiuDA9nbBhDrSA7os13RrhMrHaFA



President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama attended the Cannon Ball Flag Day Powwow in Cannon Ball, North Dakota, on June 13, 2014. Official White House Photo by Pete Souza
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2014/06/20/president-and-first-ladys-historic-visit-indian-country/>



President Donald Trump listens with Navajo Code Talkers in the Oval Office of the White House during an event to honor Native American code talkers who served in World War II, on Nov. 27, 2017 in Washington, DC. Brendan Smialowski / AFP - Getty Images
<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/trump-calls-warren-pocahontas-event-honoring-native-americans-n824266>



LAWS AND VALUES

Gaswéñdah: The Two Row Wampum, The Great Law of Peace (Kaianere'kó:wa), and U.S. Concurrent Resolution 28

Gaswéñdah: The Two Row Wampum

The Two Row Wampum, or *Gaswéñdah*, is one of the oldest foundational treaties between Indigenous and European peoples in North America. While the Dutch recorded the treaty on paper with silver chains, the Haudenosaunee preserved it orally and visually through the wampum belt. Established in 1613 between the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and the Dutch, it outlines a relationship of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and strict non-interference. Today, it remains a vital philosophical and legal framework for Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and nation-to-nation relations.



<https://www.onondaganation.org/culture/wampum/two-row-wampum-belt-guswenta/>

The Symbolism

- The Purple Rows represent two separate vessels traveling down the River of Life side-by-side. One vessel is a canoe carrying Haudenosaunee culture, laws, and ways of life. The other is a European ship carrying the newcomers' laws, culture, and religion.
- The Principle of Non-Interference is represented by two paths that do not intersect, symbolizing that neither group will attempt to steer, control, or assimilate the other.
- The Three White Rows: Symbolize peace, friendship, and forever.

To explore more about the history and protocols of this living treaty, and to further understand its ongoing significance, visit the [Onondaga Nation Two Row Wampum](https://www.onondaganation.org/culture/wampum/two-row-wampum-belt-guswenta/) page or the [Canadian Museum for Human Rights](#) overview.

The Great Law of Peace (or Kaianere’kó:wa)

The Great Law of Peace (or Kaianere’kó:wa) is the oral constitution and foundational governance of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy. Established well before European contact, it united original Indigenous nations — the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca — under a shared vision of peace, justice, and democratic principles.

Some historians believe the Great Law of Peace served as a major structural inspiration for the United States Constitution, with figures like Benjamin Franklin drawing heavily on the Confederacy’s model of federalism and balance of power.

Key Principles and Mechanics:

- Democratic governance: It established one of the world’s oldest participatory democracies, featuring a Grand Council with checks, balances, and a division of powers among the member nations.
- Role of women: Haudenosaunee society is matrilineal. Clan Mothers hold the power to select or impeach male leaders (sachems) and exercise veto power over any council decisions regarding war.
- Fundamental rights: The law codified core societal rights, including freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the right to collective consensus in decision-making.
- Wampum records: Instead of being written, the law was historically recorded and taught through intricate beaded wampum belts, which served as mnemonic devices to recall the Confederacy’s history and laws.
- Tree of Peace: The Confederacy is symbolized by an Eastern White Pine called the “Tree of Peace,” where the nations symbolically buried their weapons to maintain harmony.

To learn more about the oral traditions and continuing legacy of the Confederacy, you can read about it on the [Oneida Nation](#) or explore educational resources provided by the [Britannica](#) entry on Haudenosaunee society.

IMAGE: [Oren Lyon’s painting of the Tree of Peace](#), under which the Haudenosaunee Confederacy was formed many hundreds of years ago. The painting now appears in the brochure for Syracuse University’s new Certificate in Iroquois Linguistics for Language Learners brochure.





Concurrent Resolution

A Concurrent Resolution is an official document or statement passed by both chambers of Congress (the House of Representatives and the Senate). It is used to express the “will” or sentiment of Congress on a certain issue, handle internal business, or create a temporary joint committee. It does not have the force of law and does not need the President’s signature.

A High School Analogy

- A Bill = A New School Rule: Needs approval from the Principal (President) and applies to everyone. If broken, there are consequences (it becomes law).
- A Concurrent Resolution = A Student Council Statement: Both the junior and senior classes vote to agree on something. (E.g., “We think the dress code should be updated.”) It shows where the student body stands, but it doesn’t actually change the official school handbook.

Read [Concurrent Resolution 28](#) and review the handouts “*Gaswéñdah*: The Two Row Wampum” and “The Great Law of Peace (or *Kaianere’kó:wa*)”

Answer the following questions:

1. What cultural values are expressed in Concurrent Resolution 28?
2. In what ways is Concurrent Resolution 28 similar to the Two Row Wampum or The Great Law of Peace?
3. In what ways is Concurrent Resolution 28 different?
4. Reflect: In what ways do laws shape culture? In what ways does a culture shape its laws?

Take It Further

Explore these details on the [Indian Boarding School Commission Bill](#) from The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, which offers an update on both the House of Representatives Resolution and the Senate Bill being put forth to address the history and legacy of Indian Boarding Schools in the United States. It includes links to both the House and Senate documents as well as an advocacy toolkit.

Visit [September 30 – National Day of Remembrance for U.S. Indian Boarding Schools – NABS](#).

Visit [Close Up Washington D.C. – Indian Boarding Schools: The Truth and Healing Commission](#).



IMAGE ANALYSIS: RESPONDING TO PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

In “Before-and-After Portraiture: Photography and Time at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School,” María Beatriz H. Carrión analyzes before-and-after portraits to discuss the legacies of Indigenous boarding education. She argues that while the photographs themselves were tools used to construct and deconstruct Native American “otherness,” a careful viewer will also find subtle signs of Native American resistance.

Before reading:

1. Quickly scan the photos. Jot down your initial impressions.
2. Now look more closely at each image. List the people, objects, and activities you see. What do you notice about their expressions, clothing, hairstyles, and posture?
3. Why do you think these photos were taken? Who might they have been for (e.g., government officials, charitable donors, other tribes)?
4. What *can't* you learn about a student (like Tom Torlino) just by looking at the photos? What other sources could a historian use to get a more complete picture of a moment captured in time?

Read

[“Before-and-After Portraiture: Photography and Time at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School” by María Beatriz H. Carrión – Rutgers Art Review](#)

After reading:

For each image analyzed by Carrión, ask and answer these two questions:

1. Do I see what she sees? (I.e., In what ways do I agree with her analysis?)
2. What do I disagree with or find confusing about her analysis?

“THE ADVANTAGES OF MINGLING...”



Close Read: “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites”

by R.H. Pratt



Richard Henry Pratt (1840–1924) was a United States Army officer best known as the founder and longtime superintendent of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. After fighting in the American Civil War, Pratt commanded African American “Buffalo Soldiers” on the western frontier during the Red River War. In 1875, Pratt was placed in charge of Native American prisoners of war at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida. He implemented strict military protocols — including cutting men’s hair, enforcing English-only education, and requiring uniforms — believing this forced assimilation was a path to “saving” Indigenous people from extinction. Using his experience at Fort Marion, Pratt founded the Carlisle School in 1879. It was the first off-reservation, government-funded Native American boarding school in the U.S. and served as the model for dozens of similar institutions. His philosophy demanded the total erasure of Native languages, traditions, and family ties in order to assimilate Indigenous youth into Euro-American society.

Learn more here: [Richard Henry Pratt, His Family, and Teachers, 1901](#) | [Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center](#)



The National Conference of Charities and Correction (NCCC) was a premier American social welfare organization formed in 1874 to address systemic poverty, crime, and mental illness. It served as a vital forum for early social reformers to debate policies and professionalize the field. The NCCC was foundational in shaping modern social work, social policy, and the scientific approach to human relations. It pioneered the application of evidence to social problems and helped transition social assistance from informal, localized charity to organized, systemic social work as a recognized profession. Topics included prison and police reform, child welfare, mental health and disability, and urban poverty.

The organization evolved over time, eventually dropping “Charities and Correction” from its name in 1917 as the profession pivoted toward modern social work, becoming “The National Conference on Social Welfare.”

Archival collections on the [Social Welfare History Project](#) or search through the [University of Michigan Library Digital Collections](#).

Pratt’s worldview reflects a dominant assimilation/settler-colonial ideology of the time. Similarly, the work of NCCC also reflected the social and racial theories of this time period, including the way that social warfare often reinforced racial bias, settler ideologies, white supremacy, and classism.



Close Reading

As you read [“The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites” by R.H. Pratt in Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, at the ... Annual Session held in ...](#), answer the following questions, pulling direct quotes from the document:

1. List the anecdotal evidence R.H. Pratt gave regarding how he saw individual Native Americans change after interacting with settler-colonial culture.
2. What does Pratt mean when he says “Kill the Indian in him, and save the man”? Based on the text, what specific cultural traits or practices does he want to erase?
3. How did Pratt characterize George Washington’s approach to Native Americans?
4. How did Pratt characterize Thomas Jefferson’s approach to the Native Americans?
5. Pratt cites Samuel Milroy’s (an agent for the Miami Indians, who then numbered about 700) reporting to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1839. At the time of Pratt’s writing in 1892, what was the population of the same group of Miami Indians?
6. What sorts of documents could you research to check Pratt’s assertions?
7. What does Pratt, through his Osage graduate, say is the reason for population decline amongst the Osage?
8. Which Constitutional amendment does Pratt use to bolster his argument?



9. How does Pratt characterize white culture's hypocrisy when characterizing Native American scalping as inhumane?
10. What reasons does Pratt attribute a "chronic condition of helplessness"?
11. How does Pratt describe the reservation system? Why does he believe it is detrimental to both the Native peoples and the United States government?
12. What does Pratt give as solutions to the "chronic condition of helplessness"?
13. Pratt emphasizes how the environment shapes an individual and opposes segregation, two views widely accepted today. What parts of Pratt's argument make a modern audience cringe? What do you think American society has learned since this was written in 1892? How do you think we learned it?
14. How does Pratt describe the economic advantage of bringing Native Americans into the dominant culture of 1892?
15. How do the lived experiences shared in *Sugarcane* directly challenge Pratt's arguments?
16. According to Pratt, why does he argue that segregated "Indian schools" are counterproductive? What is his vision for integrating Native youth into white society?
17. In what ways does Pratt's argument seem logical, and in what ways does it rely on racial prejudices or flawed assumptions about Native cultures?
18. Pratt genuinely believed he was helping Native Americans. How does his speech reflect a "paternalistic" attitude? How do you reconcile good intentions with destructive outcomes?

“INDIAN NAMES” BY JULIAN NOISECAT



Media Studies: Broken Links, Digital Fragments, and Lost Context in a Digital Age

“Unlock this article after an Ad”

“This could be because the link you clicked was not formed properly
or because the page has been deleted”

404 - File or directory not found.

**The resource you are looking for might have been removed, had its name changed,
or is temporarily unavailable.**

We looked high and low. But alas! Page not found.

“You are not connected to the internet”

“Gain unlimited access, Subscribe here”

Current technological advances make it easy to believe that any information we seek is at our fingertips. However, along with sheer information overload, there are now digital fragments and broken links, paywalls, and being directed to misinformation via algorithms, as well as poorly cited or uncited works that students and professionals must investigate and put into context using either bias or best practices.

Sugarcane tells Julian Brave NoiseCat’s personal story of investigating his father’s origins, and connects it to the broader history of Canada’s residential schools. Researchers, investigators, anthropologists, and historians conduct fieldwork to preserve and pass on physical evidence and culture for present use and future generations. The film highlights how much can be lost within one generation due to internal and external acts of suppression.

As you engage with the history and legacy of Indian Boarding Schools, it is important to hone your research and critical thinking skills and understand how much time it takes (for you) to give a document your full attention.



Read

“Indian Names” by Julian Brave NoiseCat

As you read, fill out the graphic organizer to pull quotes, or add your own ideas and questions as they relate to the **Media Studies Key Terms Handout**.

Remember

Each person/student will take different amounts of time to do quality work and there is no expectation that you will finish the article within the time allotted for the assignment.

Pro Tip

Don’t worry about doing this “right” or if some parts of the article are more difficult to understand. Remember that learning is a creative process. Use this as a space to take notes if it helps you connect to Julian’s narrative and to identify what elements of this piece connect with you.

Representation	Audience	Institutions

Representation	Audience	Institutions



MEDIA STUDIES KEY TERMS

Institutions

The organizations and industries that produce media. This covers ownership (e.g., conglomerates), distribution methods, commercial factors (advertising), and government regulation.

Academic integrity

The commitment to act honestly, ethically, and responsibly in all educational and research activities. It is the foundation of the learning process and ensures that all ideas, research, and academic work are fairly represented and properly credited.

Cultural humility

A term borrowed from social work. For our purposes, we will define it as an ongoing practice of self-reflection to recognize one's own biases, honor others as experts of their own lived experience, and remain open to collaboration, correction, and updating one's beliefs when new information or experiences warrant it.

Cultural competence

Another borrowed term that for our purposes means (1) acknowledging that it is impossible to understand every aspect of someone else's culture and lived experience, (2) that cultural identity (whether one's own or another's) is ever changing and evolving, (3) that a single person often (if not always) has intersecting identities that make up their culture, and (4) committing to learning about and from others without an attitude of cultural superiority.

Cultural pluralism

(As defined by [oxford-review.com](https://www.oxford-review.com)) A societal framework in which multiple distinct cultures coexist harmoniously, each maintaining its unique identity while participating equally in the broader society. Unlike assimilation, which often expects minority groups to conform to the dominant culture, cultural pluralism celebrates diversity, promoting mutual respect and inclusivity. In a culturally pluralistic society, no single culture is seen as superior; instead, all cultures are recognized and valued for their contributions.

Media studies

An interdisciplinary field that examines how information and entertainment are produced, distributed, and consumed. The discipline is anchored by four fundamental pillars: Representation, Audience, Institution, and Language.

Media language

The tools and codes used to construct meaning (e.g., typography, camera angles, color theory, audio design, and narrative structure).

Representation

How media texts portray specific events, places, or groups of people. This concept explores the creation and reinforcement of stereotypes and power dynamics within society.



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Educating for Global Understanding

JOURNEYS IN FILM **RESOURCES AND SERVICES**

We create educational resources that spark community discussions and/or promote proactive learning for youth, parents, educators in K-12 and higher education, home-schoolers, and other learning communities. We also **create impact materials for libraries and community organizations.**

We leverage our established educational relationships to **promote materials in active outreach** to these audiences. We **extend the reach of a film and its lifespan** in the educational marketplace and beyond.

We work with a wide array of partners (non-profit organizations, educational institutions, educators, museums, teacher training institutes) to **develop resources tailored to the individuals and communities we work with and the audiences they seek to reach.**

Our resources focus on cultivating human empathy and compassion, developing a deeper knowledge of global issues and current challenges, and encouraging civic engagement.



Journeys in Film is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the use of film to promote a richer understanding of our diverse and complex world.

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