



HEALTH

Cultural Bias, Stereotypes, and the Effects of Boarding Schools

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- Identity
- History
- Genocide, Federal Policy and Laws

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students can articulate the value of cultural diversity and describe some examples of cultural bias and stereotypes.
- Students can describe how Indian boarding schools were used to suppress Native cultures and to force Native American children to assimilate into mainstream culture.
- Students can display an understanding of the continued presence of Native Americans in Oregon, despite decades of cultural suppression and forced assimilation.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What are cultural bias and stereotyping?
- What is an Indian boarding school and what role did they play in the forced assimilation of Native Americans in Oregon?

Overview

Children’s literature, movies, and other media often perpetuate stereotypes, whether positive or negative, in their representations of Native American people. This lesson encourages students to begin thinking about and questioning those stereotypes.

The lesson includes three activities, each of which explores a challenging but important topic related to the experience of Native Americans in Oregon. These topics touch on issues of history but are presented in the context of health because of their tremendous impact on the physical, mental, and emotional health of Native people, past and present.

The first activity introduces students to the concepts of bias and stereotyping. The second activity uses primary source photographs to explore what it means to be “civilized” and how Euro-Americans used this concept to dehumanize Native people. The third activity explores the Indian boarding school system and the impact of cultural assimilation.

The United States has a long-standing tension between the desire to preserve the cultural heritage of its diverse population and the desire to create a homogenous “American” culture, often referred to as a “melting pot.” Native populations, however, have been outside such consideration.



LOGISTICS

- Where does the activity take place?
Classroom
- How are the students organized?
 - Whole class Teams: 2 – 4
 - Pairs Individually

TIME REQUIRED

Two hours

STANDARDS

Oregon health standards

HE.2.4.8 – Compare positive and negative ways friends and peers can influence various relationships.

HE.2.4.9 – Describe potential impacts of power differences (e.g., age, status or position) as they relate to personal boundaries.

Indians have weathered repeated attempts to replace their cultural traditions and beliefs with those sanctioned by the U.S. government, such as federal programs removing them from their lands and the destruction of their livelihoods and ways of life. This lesson introduces students to these difficult but important topics.

Background for teachers

Most young children are familiar with stereotypes of Native Americans. Stereotypes are perpetuated by television, movies, and children’s literature when they depict Native Americans negatively, as uncivilized, simple, superstitious, bloodthirsty savages, or positively, as romanticized heroes living in harmony with nature (Grant & Gillespie, 1992).

The Walt Disney Company presents both images in its films for children. For example, in the film “Peter Pan,” Princess Tiger Lily’s father represents the negative stereotype as he holds Wendy’s brothers hostage, while in the film “Pocahontas,”

MATERIALS

What materials are needed for students to engage in this activity?

- Classroom meeting area where they can pair-share their thoughts, feelings, and wonderings about the topic.
- Smartboard or LCD projector with which to project primary source photographs of boarding school students.
- Easel or chart paper to record student ideas.
- Student journals.



the title character represents the positive stereotype who respects the earth and communicates with the trees and animals.

Stereotypes are damaging, regardless of whether they are seemingly positive or negative because they fail to convey the full complexity of Native cultures and individuals. Stereotyping is a form of dehumanization that can lead to cultural bias, cultural suppression, forced assimilation, demonization, or even genocide.

In the late 1800s, the United States supported an educational experiment that the government hoped would change the traditions and customs of Native Americans. Special boarding schools were created in locations all over the United States with the purpose of “civilizing” Native American youth. Thousands of Native American children were sent far from their homes to live in these schools and to learn the ways of Euro-American culture, such as farming, land ownership, Christian beliefs, and the concept of rugged individualism.

While some students made lifelong friendships and managed to persevere, many struggled with loneliness, fear, and depression. The physical, mental, and emotional strain of being involuntarily cut off from one’s language, family, community, home, and cultural and spiritual traditions is impossible to overstate. In addition, many students lost their lives to the influenza, tuberculosis, and measles outbreaks that spread quickly through the boarding schools, while others endured physical and sexual abuse. The Indian boarding school system persisted well into the 1950s, and its repercussions are still felt in Native communities across the country.

VOCABULARY

Stereotype – A generalized picture of a person, created without considering the whole person; to make such a generalization. Context: When we stereotype a group of people, we depict all individuals within that group as having the same characteristics.

Bias – Attitudes or behaviors based on stereotypes of people.

Context – When we omit people of color in our history lessons, we display a bias that suggests that their contributions are not important.

Perspective – Similar to point of view. The mental vantage point from which a person, place, or idea is viewed.

Cultural assimilation – Cultural assimilation is the process in which a minority group or culture comes to resemble a dominant group or assume the values, behaviors, and beliefs of another group.

Indian boarding school – Also known as Indian residential schools, these schools were established in the United States during the late 19th to mid-20th centuries. Their primary objective was to separate Native American children and youth from their families, communities, and cultural traditions in order to assimilate them into Euro-American culture.



What teachers should do or review prior to delivering the lesson

- Teachers should watch the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) documentary “Unspoken” so that they have foundational knowledge to help students contextualize why Indian boarding schools existed and how stereotypes of Native people as “savages” contributed to a policy of assimilation: <https://www.pbs.org/video/unspoken-americas-native-american-boarding-schools-oobt1r/>
- This brief *New York Times* video explores the concept of implicit bias: <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000004818663/peanut-butter-jelly-and-racism.html&sa=D&ust=1561317015577000&usg=AFQjCNHtunolPDyUzO81EnZ-PznbpuhpnYg>
- Another resource: <http://nativeappropriations.com/>

Resources

The following resources provide more context about bias, stereotyping of Native Americans, and Indian boarding schools in Oregon and other states:

- **Oregon Historical Society’s Oregon Encyclopedia Project entry about Indian boarding schools** https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/indian_boarding_school/#.XQWbTcR7mMo
- **Discovery Education in Canada provides grade-level lesson planning that focuses on anti-bias and anti-racist education** <https://www.discoveryeducation.ca/teachers/free-lesson-plans/understanding-stereotypes.cfm>
- **The Library of Congress teacher resource on boarding schools** http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/assimilation/pdf/teacher_guide.pdf

Considerations for teachers

Assessment

Students will engage in a substantial amount of discussion with partners and groups. The teacher should actively monitor student discussion for correct understanding and should intervene when there are misconceptions or biases that could inhibit authentic engagement with this topic.

Students should be assessed both formatively and summatively. The formative assessment will consist of teacher observation of student participation in discussion and critical analyses that are produced through written journal entries and students sharing their writing.

Practices

- The teacher must understand how bias and stereotypes of Native people as “savages” contributed to the assimilationist education policy of mandatory boarding school education for Native youth.
- The teacher must be prepared to activate engagement strategies, such as think-pair-share and group discussion.

Learning targets

- I can explain how cultural bias influences stereotypes.
- I can explain how Indian boarding schools were designed to culturally assimilate Native children and youth by separating them from their families, communities, and cultural traditions.
- I can explain how Native Americans have persevered despite assimilationist policies and how they are working to maintain their languages and traditional cultures today.

Appendix

Materials included in the electronic folder that support this lesson are:

- PowerPoint
- Worksheet for think/write/share

Activity 1

Understanding Cultural Bias and Stereotypes

Time: 20 minutes

Say:

Today we're going to discuss cultural biases and stereotypes. What do those words mean? How do they show up in our everyday lives? What kind of consequences can they have?

Discuss the key vocabulary words with students, as necessary.

One thing that's important to understand is that we all have some biases, but we're not always aware of them or how they shape our actions. It's natural to notice differences between ourselves and other people, but how we feel about those differences—and how we act as a result—can take us to very different places.

Do we embrace those differences? Do we appreciate them? Do we see diversity—those differences between us—as a source of strength? Does the fact that we don't all look the same, talk the same, eat the same foods, like the same music, and see things the same way make our lives richer and more meaningful? Or, are we afraid of those differences? Do we see those who are different from us as somehow “wrong” or even scary or threatening? What kind of biases might we have toward those who are different from us?

Right now, we're going to participate in an activity that will help us look more deeply at our own biases.

Lead students through the following anti-bias activity from Discovery Education: <https://www.discoveryeducation.ca/teachers/free-lesson-plans/understanding-stereotypes.cfm>

Say:

OK, now we're going to play a game called “Find the Common Trait.”

Explain the following directions: Ask students to mingle around the room slowly, until the teacher says a number between two and five. Upon hearing

Activity 1 *(Continued)*

the number, the students should quickly join into groups of that number. (If the teacher says “three,” then the students should form groups of three, and so on.)

In the groups, students should talk among themselves until they find something that all group members have in common. This may be something physical, such as eye color or type of shoes, or it may be something related to an interest, a practice, or their family. When they find a commonality, they should raise their hand and tell the teacher. When the teacher hears from all the groups, the students mingle again. Repeat the process based on a different number of group members. Encourage students to choose unique group members each time, if possible.

After playing two or three times, debrief with the class. Ask them if it was difficult to find things in common with their fellow group members.

Discuss why it is easy to find differences with others. Then ask them how finding things in common between diverse people might help resolve conflicts. Ask students: *Did finding something in common with the others in your group feel good? Why?*

Tell students that they are all diverse individuals with different perspectives. Our experiences, the places and families we grow up in, the culture that surrounds us—these things become part of our identities and help shape the way we see the world.

Review the word *bias*. [A bias is a point of view influenced by experience.] Tell the students that we all have biases, but we are not always aware of them. Since people have different experiences, we all develop different biases. Tell the students that the following example shows how a bias can create an unfair situation.

Read or have a student read the following paragraph:

When a big-city symphony wants to hire musicians, they do not judge the applicants on their appearance; they judge them only on their musical ability. That seems fair, doesn't it? But that hasn't always been the case. At one time,

Activity 1 (Continued)

more men than women were hired to play in symphonies. For some reason, the judges preferred male musicians. Today, however, most symphonies listen to the musician applicants from behind a screen so they can't see what they look like. Sometimes the musicians even have to take off their shoes so the judges can't get hints from their footsteps about whether they are listening to a man or woman. Although that may seem unnecessary, it has been proven to be the fairest way to hire. Now, because of the practice of "blind auditions," the balance of men and women is more equal. This is how the symphony overcame a bias. It wasn't enough just to be aware they had a bias; they had to guarantee it with a "blind audition" so they wouldn't let their bias against female musicians influence their decisions.

Ask the students to identify what it is that makes blind auditions a fairer, less biased way to hire musicians.

Have students think about and describe in their journals a bias that may not be fair to others. For example, they may form unfair opinions of people based on their looks, interests, dialect, clothing, neighborhood, or what music they listen to. Tell them to write about why they have the bias and what they can do to make sure they do not treat others unfairly because of their bias. Tell them to use some of the words and concepts explored in this unit to guide them as they form a plan.

Activity 2

How Do We Define Civilized?

Time: 25 to 40 minutes

Say:

In this activity we're going to examine a very difficult topic. Throughout U.S. history Native American people have often been represented as uncivilized or even as savages, which is like comparing a person to a wild animal. This representation is another example of cultural bias and stereotype, so I think it will be useful to look at it a little closer. How do we define what is civilized and what isn't? And how is that definition determined by the biases of the people who are doing the defining?

Think about this: When Europeans first came to this continent, they thought the Native American people they met were uncivilized because they didn't dress the same, eat the same foods, or live in the same kinds of structures as Europeans did. They didn't listen to the same kinds of music. They didn't have written languages.

What they failed to see was that Native Americans had very sophisticated cultures of their own. They had rich traditions related to food, clothing, and shelter. They had beautiful and powerful music. They had a complex oral tradition in which language, stories, and history were passed down from generation to generation. What's more, those cultures were developed over thousands of years and were shaped by and adapted to the physical environments in which the various tribes lived. Their idea of what was civilized was shaped by this need to live in harmony with the natural world—to not destroy the earth and sky and waterways that we depend on for life.

Here's something to think about: Is it more civilized to live in a way that destroys the environment in which you live or to live in a way that maintains the long-term health of that environment? That's one example of how your definition of "civilized" can change depending on your perspective [define perspective, if necessary, using the definition in the vocabulary list]. I want you to keep that in mind as we look at some photographs now.

Activity 2 (Continued)

Show the historical “before-and-after” photos of Native American children and youth at the Chemawa Indian School. Explain that these photos are primary sources, as they are pieces of information that were created by someone who witnessed history firsthand. Compare this with a secondary source, which is written by or gathered from someone who was not present at the historical event.

Say:

If a primary source means that we’re seeing or reading something that was witnessed firsthand, then that means these photographs were obviously taken by a real human being, right? There was someone behind the camera. Maybe someone else asked the photographer to take the pictures, such as the principal of the school, but in any case, they appear to have been taken for a reason. They are a formal group portrait, like a class picture. They’re not just snapshots that you might take of a friend. The photographer took the first one and then later they very deliberately took the second one of the exact same children. These are what we call “before-and-after” shots. Here are these children “before” and here are these children “after.” What do you notice about the difference between the two photos?

Gather student responses and provide feedback as appropriate to keep the discussion on track.

Say:

OK, so we’ve identified some of the differences between the two photos. Now I want you to think about this: Do you think the students are more “civilized” in the “before” photo or the “after” photo. Why or why not? How might your own cultural

Activity 2 (Continued)

biases shape how you see the two photos?

Ask students to respond in their journals to the following:

- *What does it mean to be civilized?*
- *How are civilized persons different from uncivilized persons?*
- *Who decides who is civilized and who is not?*

Pair/share student responses.

Activity 3

The Effects of Indian Boarding Schools: Cultural Bias in Action

Time: 45 to 60 minutes

Say:

In the late 1800s the U.S. government created a system of boarding schools designed especially for Native American children. A boarding school means you live at the school site in a dormitory-type environment. That means that Native children were taken away from their families and communities and sent to these schools to live. In many cases these students were sent against their will and against the will of their families. In other cases, the families were living in extreme poverty and the parents were made to believe that their children would be better off at these schools.

These schools had one main purpose: to remove Native children from their cultural traditions, beliefs, and ways of living and to turn them into useful and productive citizens who dressed, spoke, and lived like Americans who came from a European background. In the previous activity, you saw pictures of Native students who were sent to one such boarding school. You saw pictures of how they looked before and how they looked after. Their hair was cut and they were made to wear different clothes, but this was only the beginning.

There is a famous quote from one of the founders of an Indian boarding school. He said the purpose of these schools was to “kill the Indian,” in order to “save the man.” What do you think he meant by that?

Ask for student responses and direct a whole-class discussion.

There are other important facts that reveal what it meant to “kill the Indian” in these students. For example, in the late 1800s and early 1900s many Native students spoke their own language—the language of their tribe. When they entered a boarding school, however, they were forbidden to speak any language other than

Activity 3 (Continued)

English. Right away they were cut off from something that connected them to their culture, their family, and their Native identity. Students were also forbidden to pray or sing songs in their traditional ways or to participate in any of the ceremonies they were used to.

By 1893, this type of education had actually been made mandatory for Native children. The students and their parents did not have a choice. It wasn't until the 1920s that the U.S. government stopped supporting these schools. Complaints about high costs, poor living conditions, a lack of medical care, and bad teaching practices all led the U.S. government to end its strict mandatory program, although many boarding schools continued to operate without government funding.

Sometimes the best way to learn something is to hear about the personal experience of someone who lived through it or who had a family member live through it. Right now, we're going to watch a short video that is based on a poem written by a Native American woman in Oregon about her family's experience at an Indian boarding school in Washington state. It's titled after the quote you heard earlier: "Kill the Indian, save the man." I want you to watch and listen closely. Afterwards, I'm going to ask you a series of questions that will help us all reflect on what we've been learning today.

Show the 4:30-minute video "Kill the Indian, Save the Man," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6PU7eNrJnE>.

Engage the students in the following questions:

- *What do you think motivated the narrator who wrote this poem and created this digital video clip?*
- *Do you think the education practices explained in this video clip were effective in getting Native American people to adopt Euro-American ways of living? Why or why not?*



Activity 3 (Continued)

- *What did you learn about Indian boarding schools?*
- *Is it difficult to integrate into a culture that is different from your own?
(Topical questions: Why did the Indian boarding school model fail?
To what extent can a person's cultural identity be taken from them?)*
- *Do you think the boarding schools were an attempt to erase Native
American cultures?*