



Assimilation into Mainstream Society

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- History
- Lifeways
- Language

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will be able to analyze a letter written to the Office of Indian Affairs regarding the behavior and actions of the Native Americans on the Grand Ronde Reservation.
- Students will be able to define the term assimilation.
- Students will be able to give examples of how Indians were assimilated into mainstream culture.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES

- Connecting to the lives of students
- Higher level thinking: creating
- Preserving and honoring cultural history
- Student talk, working together and individually

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed on their participation in classroom discussions, the proficient completion of the Assimilation worksheet, and the completion their Identity Posters.

Overview

Ever since the mid 1800's when tribes were moved to reservations they have been pushed and forced to leave behind their culture and adopt the settlers' way of life. Assimilation caused many tribal languages to become extinct and their traditional life ways to become nonexistent. Over time many tribes lost their culture all together, as well as their identity.

MATERIALS

- [Letter to the Office of Indian Affairs](#)
- [Assimilation Worksheet](#)
- Internet Access
- Various Magazines
- Scissors
- 11x8 paper
- Glue
- Writing utensils for drawing and/or decorating

LOGISTICS

- Where does this activity take place?
Classroom
- How are the students organized?

Whole Class Teams: 3-5

Pairs

Individually

TIME REQUIRED

2, 50-minute class periods

STANDARDS

Oregon Common Core State Standards: ELA-Literacy

7.RI.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

7.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

Oregon Social Sciences Academic Content Standards

Social Science Analysis 7.27 Critique and analyze information for point of view, historical context, distortion, propaganda, and relevance including sources with conflicting information.

Social Science Analysis 7.28 Draw on multiple disciplinary lenses to analyze how a specific problem can manifest itself at local, regional, and global levels over time, identifying its characteristics and causes, and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address the problem.

Social Science Analysis 7.29 Assess individual and collective capacities to take informed action to address local, regional, and global problems, taking into account a range of possible levers of power, strategies, and potential outcomes.

Social Science Analysis 7.30 Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources and diverse media while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of the arguments

Background for Teachers

- [HS.ELA. Coming To Story - Smoke Signals Article.pdf](#)
- [Indian Boarding Schools](#)
- [Boarding Schools - Indigenous History of Oregon - LibGuides at Pacific University](#)
- [Chemawa History](#)
- [How Boarding Schools Tried to 'Kill the Indian' Through Assimilation - HISTORY](#)
- [Understanding the Origin of American Indian Boarding Schools | Antiques Roadshow | PBS](#)
- [Schools tried to forcibly assimilate Indigenous kids. Can the U.S. make amends?](#)
- [The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition](#)
- [Wearing Orange to Heal, to Remember, and Build Collective Power: NDN Collective Honors Orange Shirt Day](#)
- Book: [Indian No More](#)
- Book: [My Name Is Not Easy](#)

VOCABULARY

- **Assimilation**- the process Native peoples go through when having to adapt to mainstream society.
- **Mainstream** - ideals, values, behaviors, and social norms that are accepted by the majority of people.
- **Boarding Schools** - schools where Native children were sent away from the reservations. The Native children were forcibly sent to the schools and were made to live at the school throughout the year, rarely visiting home. These children were forced to wear mainstream clothing and eat mainstream foods. There were not allowed to practice their cultural customs or speak in their Native languages.
- **Identity** - who you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by others, and the characteristics that define you.
- **Cultural** - the ways in which a group of people live; the customs and lifeways a group of people exhibit
- **Custom** - a traditional practice or usual way of doing something followed by a social group
- **Reservation** - land held in trust by the federal government for Native American tribes to live
- **Suppression** - the act of keeping something from happening

Opening

Begin the lesson by asking students what the word assimilation means. Read them the sentence: “The goal of Indian education in the 1800’s was to assimilate children into mainstream society.”

Discuss with students what this term could mean. Have students write down their initial definition of assimilation on a piece of paper, or create a word cloud on the whiteboard using their definitions. Save this for the end of the lesson.

Activity

Lesson Steps: Day 1

1. Discuss the vocabulary words students will see in this lesson. Allow student the opportunity to define the vocabulary on their own before presenting the provided definitions.
2. Allow time for student exploration: Students will need to research how Native Americans were assimilated into mainstream society. Give students 15 minutes. This can be done using books, the internet, or teacher-provided resources.
 - a. Guide students to look at boarding schools, such as Chemawa in Salem, OR.
3. Have students share with the class what they learned through their brief research.
4. Once students have been introduced to the word “assimilation” and what boarding schools are, read the letter written to the Superintendent of the Grand Ronde School and Agency.
5. Distribute the Assimilation worksheet and discuss the questions on the worksheet.
6. Allow time for students to write in their answers on the worksheet.

Lesson Steps: Day 2

7. To resume the lesson, pose the question: What makes up your identity? Is it your hair, your clothes, your possessions, where you live, what you eat, etc? Remind students that they previously learned what the term assimilation means and how Native Americans were stripped away their identity to become more “civilized”.
8. Have students make a list of 15 or more characteristics or traits that help make up who they are.
9. Explain to the students they will be making a poster board that will include various images on it that make up their identity.
10. Students will be given magazines to cut images out and glue onto their poster boards. Students may also print pictures from a computer or bring pictures from home. Encourage students to bring in outside materials to put on their boards to make more personal, thoughtful and creative.

Closure

Once students have finished their poster boards hang them up for everyone to see.

Differentiation

- Teachers can provide source material for students to research assimilation and boarding schools.
 - Chemawa Smoke Signals Article: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hEiQiMLESNTCSpm3mMe9QqVxHs4a7T1G/view?usp=share_link
 - Indian Boarding Schools: https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/indian_boarding_school/#.Y2vx_ezMK3l
 - Indigenous History of Oregon | Boarding Schools: <https://pacificu.libguides.com/c.php?g=1050460&p=7625226>
 - Chemawa Indian School: <https://chemawa.bie.edu/history.html>
 - How Boarding Schools Tried to 'Kill the Indian' Through Assimilation: <https://www.history.com/news/how-boarding-schools-tried-to-kill-the-indian-through-assimilation>
 - Understanding the Origin of American Indian Boarding Schools: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/roadshow/stories/articles/2020/4/13/early-years-american-indian-boarding-schools>
- Students can work in groups or pairs when completing the Assimilation worksheet.
- Students can present their identity in a variety of formats - video, slideshow, writing, etc.

Extension

- The discussion of identity can be taken further by asking students questions such as:
 - Who determines what mainstream is?
 - What is civilized and what is not?
 - Does the media determine what is mainstream?
 - Are there outside influences that determine their identities?

Notes/Other

Jan Michael Looking Wolf's or Grand Ronde Canoe Family audio tracks can be played as background music while students are working. These audio tracks can be found on Spotify or Apple Music.

Jan Michael Looking Wolf: [Spotify](#) and [Apple Music](#)
Grand Ronde Canoe Family: [Spotify](#) and [Apple Music](#)

Appendix

- Letter to the Office of Indian Affairs: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fgzyXc7ruYKzEDwUp3vJyxDLxCeSlZhO/view?usp=share_link
- Assimilation Worksheet: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FcwwrVsqjnsJBauUo2xOnhUMH2knyY8S/view?usp=share_link
- Assimilation Worksheet Answer Key: https://drive.google.com/file/d/12_GxbEP1eeOYnw_C9OD6956tHu2UgBSh/view?usp=share_link