

The Acculturation of Native American Children Through Midwestern Indian Schools

Fellowship Lesson 2009

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Abstract: As part of the United States government's conquest of American Indians, it developed a policy of creating schools to indoctrinate young American Indians into white culture across the country. Critics have accused school officials of mistreatment of Indian children in these facilities. In this series of lessons, students will examine several of these schools across the Midwest.

Essential Questions:

- What were some of the ways that the United States government indoctrinated American Indian children through the U. S. Indian schools in the Midwest?
- How did the curriculum of the Indian schools in the early 1900s serve the government's goals and how did it serve the needs of American Indian students?
- What are some examples of the power and influence that the Bureau of Indian Affairs held over American Indians in the Midwest in the early 1900s?

Assessment: Students will write a persuasive essay articulating the nature of American Indian boarding schools by answering the question, "What was the experience of children attending Indian schools in the Midwest in the early years of the 20th century?"

Setting the Purpose: This set of lessons fits in with a study of the early 20th century, and explores issues of racism, multiculturalism, and the fate of Native Americans. Students should understand how the Indian wars of the late 19th century were the culminating blow of centuries of oppression of Indians by white newcomers. This lesson will explore how the U.S. government acculturated American Indian children and address the question of to what extent the U.S. government was continuing its centuries-old policies of victimizing Native Americans versus trying to help Indians find agency in the early 20th century.

Anticipatory Set: To begin this lesson series, students should examine Alice Davenport's 3rd grade Civics, Manners, and Right Conduct exam from June 10, 1919. Ask students to discuss this exam in small groups and then share with the larger group. Guiding questions should include some of the following:

- What is an example of an easy question?
- What is an example of a hard question?
- What, if any, is an example of a question that demonstrates critical thinking or problem solving?
- What is a question of questions seem most unusual on this exam?

As students reflect upon this exam and discuss Alice Davenport's responses, they should note her answer to question #IV, where she correctly responds that she is not a U.S. citizen. This is

not because she is ineligible to vote due to her age and gender, which were both prohibitive factors in 1919. Congress would not grant Native Americans citizenship until 1924.

Lesson 1:

Students should examine the following photographs of the facilities at the Tomah Indian School and two traditional Native American structures ([Architecture Photo Page](#)), documenting the differences between these structures and images of traditional Indian buildings in this area in a [feature analysis chart](#).

After discussing the differences in size, materials, permanence, and other points of contrast in small groups, students should summarize their ideas in a short essay focusing on the main cultural differences between Indian and white societies.

Lesson 2:

Students should look at the entire [1919-1920 calendar for the Lac du Flambeau Indian school](#). They should work together in small groups to complete a [feature analysis chart](#) delineating parts of the calendar that preserve American Indian culture and parts that promote white culture.

Lesson 3:

Students should begin this lesson by reading one of the two copies of the Mesquakie Booster newsletters of November and December 1916. As they read, they should complete a [double T-chart](#) to identify statements in the newsletter that seem to serve government interests, those that seem to serve Indian interests, and those that seem to serve both.

[Mesquakie Booster November 1919](#)

[Mesquakie Booster December 1919](#)

Lesson 4:

Students should read the [teacher's weekly report](#) from October 1916 and the [start of school](#) letter from August 1925. Students should identify examples of racism and acculturation through a think-pair-share discussion activity. Students should notice that while the teacher used the word "excused" for children helping their families to make winter wickiups and pick corn, she described the four-day dance as spoiling the attendance record. In the letter from the assistant commissioner of Indian Affairs to the superintendent of the Sac and Fox reservation schools, the government refused to allow the school year to change in order to accommodate a pow-wow. Students should then summarize their discussion in a written paragraph answering the question, "Why did the U.S. government discourage traditional Native American pow-wows?"