



Lesson Plan – Assimilation

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Overview

This lesson will ask students to review sections in *A Seat at the Drum* and *Spiral of Fire* where assimilation is a predominant concern for Native people. Students will eventually be asked to pick valuable objects, symbols of beliefs, people, places, languages, religions, etc., that they feel accurately represent who they are. Students will concentrate on why these ideas/possessions/people or "items" are important to them. Then, all these "items" will be taken away, and they will be given new "items" to deal with. Students will be asked to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper of their choice stating how these "new items" have enhanced or harmed their self-esteem, economic status, family, etc.

Grade Level 9 - 12

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain assimilation as it relates to Native American people
- Recognize assimilation as a discrimination tool used against Native American people
- Analyze assimilation as it relates to each student's situation in the mock assimilation trial

My name is Nicole Menard. I was born in Gordon, Nebraska and I am Oglala Lakota. It is with honor that I speak of my family who are from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Most of my immediate family now live in Denver, Colorado.

I recently received a Master of Arts degree in American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona. I am an English teacher who is currently working with high school expelled students in the Lincoln Public Schools District. It is my life's passion to share my experiences and assist at-risk youth in achieving the gift of life long learning.

An Anglo family adopted me at birth, so I personally relate to many of the topics presented in *Indian Country Diaries*. I have used the following activities and lessons with my students over the years. I hope they will help other educators and students explore and understand Native American culture.

Football Carries the Pride of the Cherokee Nation



INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES



National Standards [All standards are from McREL's compendium of national standards, <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/index.asp>.]

Understand the impact of territorial expansion on Native American tribes (e.g., the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole removals, the significance of the Trail of Tears, the original lands held by various tribes of the Southeast and those held in the Old Northwest Territory) (Standard 9, Level 2, 4)

Understand how early state and federal policy influenced various Native American tribes (e.g., survival strategies of Native Americans, environmental differences between Native American homelands and resettlement areas, the Black Hawk War and removal policies in the Old Northwest) (Standard 9, Level 3, 2)

Understand the shifts in federal and state policy toward Native Americans in the first half of the 19th century (e.g., arguments for and against removal policy, changing policies from assimilation to removal and isolation after 1825) (Standard 9 Level IV, 3I)

Understand influences on economic conditions in various regions of the country (i.e., affects of the federal government's land, water and Indian policy) (Standard 16, IV, 3)

Understand the challenges diverse people encountered in late 19th century American society (Standard 17, Level IV, 4)

Understand the interactions between Native Americans and white society (e.g., the attitudes and policies of government officials, the U.S. Army, missionaries and settlers toward Native Americans; the provision and effects of the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 on tribal identity, land ownership and assimilation; the legacy of the 19th century federal Indian policy; Native Americans responses to increased white settlement, mining activities, and railroad construction) (Stand 19, Level III, 1I)

Estimated Time

Four days, depending on time allotted for research, organization and construction



Necessary Materials

- Computers with Internet access
- Printers
- Scanners
- Video segments on this web site or DVD copies of the *Indian Country Diaries* films
- Selections of books and web sites listed in Recommended Resources below
- Magazines for cutting out symbols and "items"
- Construction paper
- Glue
- Colored Pencils
- Poster Board
- Student notebooks

Teaching Procedure

1. To prepare for the lesson, the lesson, the teacher will need to cut pictures or "items" from magazines or write the names of "items" out on small pieces of paper. Make sure there are enough pictures or items from each bullet for all your students (for example, 25 students, 25 written religions other than Christianity). These items should include:
 - Symbols of specific religions other than Christianity, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islamic, Taoism, etc.
 - Specific languages other than English, such as Spanish, French, Arabic, Vietnamese, Chinese, etc.
 - Land areas other than the United States, such as rural China, Afghanistan, Nepal, Turkey, Morocco, etc.
 - Older conservative styles of clothing, such as ankle length dresses/skirts, trousers, top hats, or traditional clothes from other countries (example: burkas)
 - Traditional music from other countries, such as music from Indian, China, Iraq, Mexico, Peru
 - Pictures of different hair styles (hand out pictures of hair styles that a student would view as out-of-date or the opposite of what particular student is wearing, such as long hair vs. short hair, curly hair vs. straight hair)
 - Anything else you can think of that is the opposite of what students will value

Do **NOT** include any pictures, written words or "items" of the following:

- No modern technology: no cell phones, televisions, cable, cars, etc.
- No make-up
- No money

INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES



2. Students will view segments of the *Indian Country Diaries*. Students will write down in their notebooks their initial reaction and thoughts about the *A Seat at the Drum* and *Spiral of Fire*. Students will write what they believe assimilation is and give two to three specific examples of assimilation. Have a class discussion about their questions or concerns. If students do not have any topics to discuss, items three and four contain questions that will get them thinking about the main topics of these films.

3. *A Seat at the Drum*: Choose one or more segments to watch from *A Seat at the Drum*. Below are questions and ideas that students should watch for when they view the program or view the video segments on this web site. Students will need to take notes.

What to watch for:	On the <i>A Seat at the Drum</i> DVD	On this web site
<p>Background for Teachers: Sherman Indian School is struggling to be a college prep high school for Native Americans, in part to prepare students to function in the mainstream culture while honoring their own. Sherman was part of the Indian Boarding School system where the motto was "kill the Indian, save the man."</p> <p>Questions for Students: Do you think Indian Schools are beneficial to urban Native youth?</p>	Chapter One "Living in LA"	<u>Indian Boarding Schools</u>
<p>Background for Teachers: In the 1950s Relocation Program sequence, Paula Starr says Indians came to the city for jobs in the urban areas. In the process, they were supposed to assimilate or be absorbed by the mainstream culture. Some adapted to the urban environment; some didn't.</p> <p>Questions for Students: Have urban Indians lost their identity if they do not know their language or traditions?</p>	Chapter Two Relocation	<u>1950s Relocation Program</u>
<p>Background for Teachers: Prompt students to watch for how pow wows got started in LA. Also watch for how, at today's Orange County Pow Wow, Mark Anthony Rolo runs into a fellow</p>	Chapter Three Pow Wow Culture	<u>Pow Wow Culture</u>



<p>Ojibwe doing silver work rather than his tribe's traditional quill work. Tribes that never had pow wows are adopting traditions from plains tribes. Watch for Paula Starr's assessment of that.</p> <p>Questions for Students: How do you answer narrator Mark Rolo's question, "Have we traded the depth and uniqueness of tribal identity for a pan-Indian stereotype?"</p>		
<p>Background for Teachers: Mark says, "Christianity has been a very effective tool of assimilation in the cities." The pastor at the Indian Revival Center says, "I love Indians. I like to be around Indians. I just don't like some of the cultural things that attend that."</p> <p>Questions for Students: Do you think Christianity has been "a tool for assimilation?" What do you think about the clash between Christianity and traditional Indian spirituality?</p>	<p>Chapter Four Assimilation</p>	<p><u>Spirituality</u></p>
<p>Background for Teachers: Using a formula to figure out how much "Indian blood" someone has is a confusing system for deciding who belongs in a tribe. Mark says, "[Blood quantum] is a trap created by a century of policy designed to wipe out the tribes."</p> <p>Questions for Students: Should blood be used or another system of identity?</p>	<p>Chapter Five Politics of Identity</p>	<p><u>Identity and Assimilation</u></p>

4. *Spiral of Fire*: Choose one or more segments to watch from *Spiral of Fire*. Below are questions and ideas that students should watch for when they view the program or view the video segments on this web site. Students will need to take notes.

<p>What to watch for:</p>	<p>On the <i>Spiral of Fire</i> DVD</p>	<p>On this web site</p>
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<p>Background for Teachers: Chief Henry Lambert dresses in the feathers and regalia of a plains Indian because that's what the tourists want to see.</p> <p>Questions for Students: Has Chief Henry been assimilated into mainstream culture? Does he know who he is?</p>	<p>Chapter One "The Journey Begins"</p>	<p><u>Stereotypes</u></p>
<p>Background for Teachers: The mother of one of the Cherokee football players, Lynn Taylor, says, "We Indians here feel that they don't treat us equal."</p> <p>Questions for Students: Can a football team carry the self-esteem of a whole tribe on its backs?</p>	<p>Chapter Two "Competition"</p>	<p><u>Identity & Assimilation</u></p>
<p>Background for Teachers: Amy Grant says, "I began to realize the pain that we Native peoples have and carry. Several of the local churches were getting ready to acknowledge what the church as the Christian churches had not done over the years -- to recognize the Native spirituality that we have. In trying to force us to be Christians and to not allow us to continue to have our own traditional ceremonies and to discredit it."</p> <p>Questions for Students: Do you think Christianity was a tool to assimilate Native Americans into white culture?</p>	<p>Chapter 9 "Spirituality"</p>	<p><u>Spirituality</u></p>



5. After students have finished viewing these segments and examining their notes, brainstorm all that students know about assimilation and display those ideas on a board.
 - A. What is assimilation?
 - B. What exactly encompasses Native assimilation according to the Native people in *Indian Country Diaries*?
 - C. Why does assimilation take place among Native people?
 - D. How has the government encouraged assimilation?
 - E. What do students think the government had in mind when it encouraged Natives to relocate to larger cities?
 - F. Why can assimilation be bad for Native people?
 - G. How can assimilation be good for Native people?
6. Individual work: Have students cut "items" from magazines – words, ideas, pictures, symbols of values, religions, etc.—that reflect what is very important to each student's identity. Ask each student to make a collage complete with explanations on the back of the collage that clarify why those pictures, words, ideas, values, religions, etc. are important to them. Have a few students share their collages with the class.
7. Next, physically walk around the room and take the students' collages from them. Tell them that this is no longer who they are. Make sure that students know that they can no longer keep what they value with them. For instance, many students will more than likely say that their cell phones are very important to them. For the purposes of the lesson, tell the students that they can no longer talk on their cell phones. Meanwhile, take the "items" that you have cut from magazines earlier and hand them to the students. Tell the students that a new government has come to the United States and that they are forced to have to convert their lifestyles to the "items" that you have handed them. This new government will arrest and detain anyone who does not cooperate with the new culture. (Obviously, this is a mock scenario of what happened to Native people when white people came to this continent. Do not discuss how students are feeling at this point. Just explain what they will need to do next.)
8. Ask students break into small groups. The purpose of the small group exercise is to have students discuss what is happening to them. Designate a secretary for each group to record how they are feeling, if they are planning resistance, or are they willing to adjust to their new culture. Each group should discuss their situation for about five to 10 minutes. Have the groups report to the class what their feelings are at this point. Be sure to discuss how this specific assimilation is tied to the *Indian Country Diaries*.



9. Invite students to imagine each is a new refugee from another country coming into the United States. Students will be asked to write a letter to the editor of a local or national newspaper of their choice that will describe their assimilation into the new culture. Students should include how they are feeling and explain themselves by using concrete examples from the mock assimilation lesson and from the *Indian Country Diaries* series to support their positions.

Assessment Recommendations

Students will be assessed on the following:

1. The final newspaper editorial to a newspaper. This will be assessed using the Six Traits Writing Rubric. Information about the rubric can be found at <http://www.webenglishteacher.com/6traits.html>
2. Class participation and appropriate behavior towards other cultures.

Extensions/Adaptation Ideas

Not all urban Indians have had bad experiences with assimilation or acculturation. This is evident in *A Seat at the Drum* when Judy Two Two explains how her family came to LA. Judy has loved living in LA and seems to be happy where she is. It should be discussed in classroom conversations that modern Native people living in urban areas don't have to be "invisible." There is a thriving Native culture in urban environments and many Native people are proud to live in urban places. See the Recommended Resources section for some positive reading on the urban experience for Native people.

Recommended Resources

The *Indian Country Diaries* DVD chapters and web pages listed above.

Lobo, Susan and Peters, Kurt. *American Indians and the Urban Experience* Altimira Press, 2001.

Lobo, Susan. *Urban Voices: The Bay Area American Indian Community* University of Arizona Press, 2002.

Oyate is a source for Native American education and culture resources at <http://www.oyate.org>.