

History Perspectives: Voices from the
Native American Boarding School Experience
1879-Present



Greenville Indian School Picnic circa 1900– Decoration Day (Memorial Day) Indian Students--Annie Morgan, Edith Peconom, Alice Piazzoni, and Lizette "Pansy" Mason in photograph. *Photograph Courtesy of Special Collections, Dorothy Hill Collection, Meriam Library, CSUC.*

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Introduction

With the adoption of new national K-12 Common Core educational standards, a renewal of social studies inclusion in the daily curriculum is once again possible. The emphasis on critical literacy in these standards emphasizes reading as a tool for content decoding from multiple sources, not merely a skill unto itself. Pairing historical fiction and primary documents, known as the twin text model, further supports the understanding and teaching of moments in history. Too often students are only exposed to the digested product of historical inquiry, thus missing the interpretive process. History and social studies are human stories that evolve as our society bravely re-evaluates its relationships with other groups of people. Further, a brief survey of elementary school textbooks reveal that American Indian Boarding School experiences are left out of the Nation building narratives. Omitting and sanitizing this chapter of American history contributes to the heroes and holidays model of teaching about minority populations. By designing a curriculum that uses *Home to Medicine Mountain* paired with primary documents from the Boarding School Era to teach about The United States intention to systematically eradicate and assimilate American Indian cultures, students will begin to realize that Native Americans have not vanished from the landscape. This process will build empathy and critical literacy skills to better understand the forces that shape history, while emphasizing that Indian peoples are still here; joined in the past and the present with the American experience.

**Common Core Standards for Literacy
as Applied to History and Social Studies for 6-8 Grades**

Concept/Purpose	Standard	Description
Key Ideas and Details	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1	Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2	Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
Craft and Structure	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.3	Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies
	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.5	Describe how a text presents information
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6	Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7	Integrate visual information with other information in print and digital texts.
	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.8	Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text
	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.9	Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.10	By the end of grade 8, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Unit Overview

Native American Boarding School Period began in 1879 with the first boarding School built to eradicate Indian cultures and force assimilation of Indian children into the workforce and American culture.

These lesson plans are meant to accompany the text *Home to Medicine Mountain* written by Chiori Santiago and illustrated by Judith Lowry,(Santiago, 1998). This book tells the story of the illustrator's uncle and grandfather at the Sherman Institute Indian Boarding School in Riverside, California during the 1920s. The story is a perfect elementary school age introduction to critical literacy and the interpretive paradox. The book softens the harsh discipline characteristic at these institutions, but very deftly captures the cultural disruption that occurred for the young children ripped from their families and forced into assimilation.

The book is paired with primary documents to help situate the students learning and meet Common Core standards.

Critical Literacy and Twin Text Model

Pairing an historical fiction book with a primary or secondary source is commonly referred to as the twin text model. Bringing together these types of texts begins the process of unraveling how history is interpreted and retold, thereby, making ordinary lives more accessible. In this decoding process students begin to see that an individual person's life, for example, might be affected by a law or a historic time period. Steven Wolk (2003) discusses the purpose for teaching critical literacy in social studies when he states, "Connecting critical literacy to the lives of children situates the skill in their everyday existence and helps them to understand its relevancy." (p.103). Further, multiple individuals' perspectives may shape a society's response

to a given moment in time. Jennifer Soalt describes her use of historical fiction in elementary school to help flesh out the bare bones of traditional social studies texts. She says, “Units of study that contain fictional and informational texts on the same topic address both of these instructional concerns: Exploring informational texts prior to reading fictional texts on the same topic activates background knowledge for students with prior knowledge of the topic and builds it for students without prior knowledge...” (Soalt, 2005 p.).

Historical Overview and Background

After the Civil War and in the midst of Reconstruction, the United States turned its attention toward expanding and controlling its borders from coast to coast. This meant once again that the Native American question needed to be resolved. The era of Indian Wars was over. The remaining Indians lived on reservations committed to preserving their cultures in any way possible, while others were quietly and covertly living in urban areas. Though the American legislative bodies and gentrified urban culture had no more palate for war, there was broad agreement that American Indians could not be left to their own devices. The drumbeat of assimilation came in two important phases. The passage of The General Allotment Act, aka The Dawes Act, in 1887 allowed the US to cleverly disguise their final land grab from American Indians by dividing reservations into small family parcels. Few reservations remained free of its reach, (Child, 1995). The idea behind this legislation was to civilize American Indians by making them reliant on farms not tribes, meaning that self-reliance and capitalism would instill American values and finally civilize the Indian people. Besides, in the process more land for the burgeoning White American populace was made available. Boarding Schools represented the second aspect of forcing remaining American Indian tribes to submit to the dominant culture’s

way of life. These schools were one more systematic approach to “Kill the Indian to Save the Man,” the slogan coined by General Richard Pratt, founder of the Carlisle School in Pennsylvania in 1879, the first Indian Boarding School by which subsequent schools were modeled,(Prucha, 1990; Archuleta,Child, Lomawaima, 2000). In 1891 the government passed a compulsory attendance law for American Indian children, (Child, 1995). Boarding Schools around the nation were built hundreds of miles from Indian family homes, forcing children to take trains to foreign destinations, where parents could not follow. Historian Henry David Adams puts it this way: “Only by attending boarding school could Indian youth, stripped bare of their tribal heritage, take to heart the inspiring lessons of white civilization,” (Adams, 1997, p. 59). Brenda Child (1995) reports that, “rations, annuities and other goods were withheld from parents who refused to send children to school,” (p.13).

Textbook Silence Does Not Equal Political Neutrality

This governmental campaign of acculturation to convert savage to citizen is completely left out of textbooks. In so doing schools continue to silence the voices of Indian people and perpetuate the preferred *First Thanksgiving*, dominant-culture narrative of cooperation between settlers and Indian people, belying 400 years of systematic and pervasive conquest, genocide and domination. Steven Wolk (2003) addresses this concept of silencing head on when he defines it by omitting and camouflaging content. He goes on to recommend that, “teachers need to seek out those silenced voices and perspectives and bring them into the classroom,” (p.103). Brenda Child (1995) talks about being “heartened” at the prospect of finding archives of primary documents that would “reflect Indian opinions” and promised to tell the “new Indian history,” (p. xiii). Indeed, the Heard Museum’s Exhibition and companion book, *Away From Home: American Indian Boarding School Experiences* (2000), expresses that the students stories from

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attending Indian Boarding Schools is “as diverse as the students themselves,” (p.16). Examples of this complex picture emerge in Kevin Whalen’s article about a symposium on Indian Boarding School experiences with scholars and American Indians. While anthropologists frequently focus on the cultural devastation, some Native Americans speak of being finally able to find productive or even meaningful work because of their educations. “While Levi knew he made less money than a White person might have, he remained thankful for the opportunity to work and earn money. Bahr noted that while Viola Martinez felt incredible homesickness and cultural loss while at Sherman Institute, she came to excel academically, eventually serving as a social worker in Los Angeles during the late 1930s and 1940s,” (Whalen, 2013. p.3). Showing the wide variety of experiences and opinions on any topic reinforces the critical thinking necessary for a democratically educated populace and supports the new ideas for teaching and learning stressed in the Common Core Standards.

The Curricular Unit Overview

First, students will read as a class the *Home to Medicine Mountain* book and answer the discussion questions.

Further, there will be archival photographs to compare before and after images of Native Americans attending boarding schools. It was customary in the beginning for school officials to take photographs of “the blanket children”(Collins, 2004) when they arrived at the schools and then one year later to prove their assimilation was working. Today these images are heart-wrenching testimonials to the purposed tyranny of one culture over another. Next, a sample school schedule from Chehalis Indian School will be provided for children to compare their own school schedule with. The *Home to Medicine Mountain* text conveys the distinction in the

Western cultural ways of regimenting time from the Native American style of tracking the passage of time. Providing a school schedule from the Indian boarding school, which is much stricter by modern standards, for students to compare with their own will help show the perspective of Indian children who were subjected to this overly regimented schedule. Additionally, there will be letters and journal entries included in the curriculum packet, representing the varied voices of early boarding school experiences. The documents are as follows: 1. A journal from a 15 year old student riding a train 750 miles to school, expressing her worries. 2. A letter from a parent concerned about harsh treatments of her son. 3. A journal entry from the superintendent who has what he thinks is a simple and humane plan to make Indian children comply with the English only rules at school. Students will be given a series of discussion questions and activities to examine and consider the meaning of these documents and how they compare with the narrative of *Home to Medicine Mountain*.

In part two of the Unit, students will be asked to weigh the past history of cruelty and harshness of the treatment of Native Americans by the United States government with the resilience and survival of the many Native American cultures throughout the United States. Students will investigate the recent transformation of American Indian Boarding Schools from a place of forced assimilation to that of reclaiming traditional Indian values and a source of strength in the community. In this manner intermediate and middle school age children will be exposed to past and modern Native American voices telling their experiences in a chapter of American history that has at best been forgotten, at worst suppressed for a more palatable and less critical version of history.

References

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Lessons Section

Discussion Questions for *Home to Medicine Mountain*.

Lesson One:

Comparing Schedules and Ways of Knowing Time from Native American to European American

In this section we will examine the idea of time. Notice how the author describes time in the book. She compares and contrasts Native American Perspective of keeping time with Western European American schedules. At boarding school time unfolds by the clicking clock and bells that tell you what to do next. At grandmother's house, the author tells us, time unfolds in a different way; by stories, activities, and seasons. This is an alternative way of knowing when and what to do next. Use these questions to guide a group discussion in class:

- 1. Where does time come from? Is it a human invention?
How in the past have cultures marked this idea of time?**
- 2. Is there only one way to tell time?
Are there other ways to know what time it is without a clock? Name some.**
- 3. Write down your daily school schedule. (You may use the template provided.)
Do you have a bell at your school that tells you what comes next on your schedule?**
- 4. Now look at the student schedule from Chehalis Indian School in 1883-1889 as reported by the Superintendent (principal), Mr. Edwin Chalcraft, (Collins, 2004).**
- 5. Compare and Contrast your school schedule with that of the Chehalis Indian School.**
 - A. How is it the same as your schedule? How is it different?
What time does the day end for them?**
 - B. How old are the "smaller pupils" who have two hours of recess, do you think?
Breakfast and supper are listed on the schedule. Do you think there was no formal midday meal at the school, since lunch is not listed? How many meals do you eat at your school?**
 - C. What do you think is meant by "chapel exercises" on the evening schedule?
Do you think all children regardless of age go to work between 1-5pm?
Since "smaller pupils" are not excluded from the work schedule, what education do you think the Indian School valued more, academic or industrial jobs and sewing?**
 - D. When you leave school at the end of school, do you still have a schedule?
Is it the same every day?**
 - E. What about the weekends? Do you follow a schedule on the weekend?
Do you eat lunch at the same time on Saturday as you do on Monday?
Is anything the same on the weekend schedule as the weekday?**

Lesson Two:

Photographs Capture the Moment in History

Look at the before and after photographs taken of Zie-Wie Davis in 1878 upon arriving at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, an Indian Boarding School, and again in 1879 after one year at the school.

Look at the before and after photographs taken of Tom Torlino in 1879 upon arriving at Carlisle Indian Boarding School.

Photographs were a way to prove to the government that Indian children were becoming more European American in their behavior. The schools also wanted to prove that students were now more productive, because they did not view Native American cultures as productive nor value their cultural ways of life.

List three differences between the before and after pictures of either Zie-Wie Davis or Tom Torlino.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Why would the US government want Indian children to stop wearing their normal clothing?

What props in the Zie-Wie's second picture are meant to symbolize productivity?

Do you ever wear clothing from another culture? Why or why not?

Do you have any experience wearing a uniform to school? Do you like to be told all the time what to wear?

What other places or jobs in our society do people wear uniforms every day?

Look at the picture of the classroom from the book Home to Medicine Mountain. Compare it to the picture of children from the Carlisle School. What is written on the chalk boards? What are things that are the same in the classroom? What are different? What things are similar to your classroom? What things are different?

Lesson Three:
Diaries, Journals, and Letters.

Everyone has a point of view. A point of view is the place from where one sees the world. Historians and anthropologists can interpret and analyze people's point of view by reading diaries, journals and letters from a particular time period to learn about the many points of view in the past. The passages in the documents section show the points of view for three different people at Indian Boarding Schools.

Children got homesick, parents worried about their kids living so far away, and the superintendent or principal had to solve problems. Read in their own words about the daily struggles they experienced. What do you think about their feelings? Who do you feel more connected to? Whose point of view can you understand the best?

1. Like the boys in *Home to Medicine Mountain*, Indian children traveled long distances by train to attend boarding schools. Esther Burnett Horne, Essie, was born in 1909 on the Shoshone Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. She attended Haskell Boarding School in Lawrence, Kansas at age 15 in 1924. She tells this story of her mother putting her and her siblings on the train to travel 754 miles.

See document section for journal entry.

2. Similar to the story in *Home to Medicine Mountain* of the brothers who run away from the boarding school to visit their families, many Indian children attempted to leave or runaway the difficult and often harsh schedules and discipline at most of the Indian Boarding Schools across the nation. Here is a note that a mother sent in the fall of 1913 on behalf of her son, Charlie, who ran away several times from Flandreau Indian School in South Dakota because of the harsh punishments and he wanted to study a trade instead of farming classes. Charlie did not want to be a farmer. His mother tried to reason with the School staff about these problems so Charlie wouldn't run away again.

See document section for letter.

3. Edwin Chalcraft, the Superintendent of Chehalis Indian School in the state of Washington from 1883-1889, writes about "the problem" of Indian children speaking their native languages in his journal. One of the goals of the Boarding Schools was to stop Indians from speaking in their languages. This superintendent writes proudly about how he punished children for not speaking English.

See Document Section for journal.

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See Document Section for journal.

Documents Section

Students may handle these document replicas to investigate and conduct their research on boarding School perspectives.

These documents accompany the questions included in this curriculum.

Copies may be made for classroom use.

The Ten-Month Daily Schedule of Chehalis Indian Boarding School from 1883-1889

5:30a.m. — Morning bell, for all to rise.

6:30a.m. — Breakfast.

8:00 a.m. — School bell. All pupils go to school-rooms.

10:00 a.m.— Fifteen minutes recess. Smaller pupils play until noon.

12:00 noon— Dismiss school for day.

1:00p.m.— Work bell. Boys go to Industrial Teacher ready for work; and the girls to sewing room.

5:00p.m.— Quit work and prepare for supper.

6:00p.m.— Supper

8:00p.m.— Chapel exercises in the school room, after which pupils retire to their dormitories.

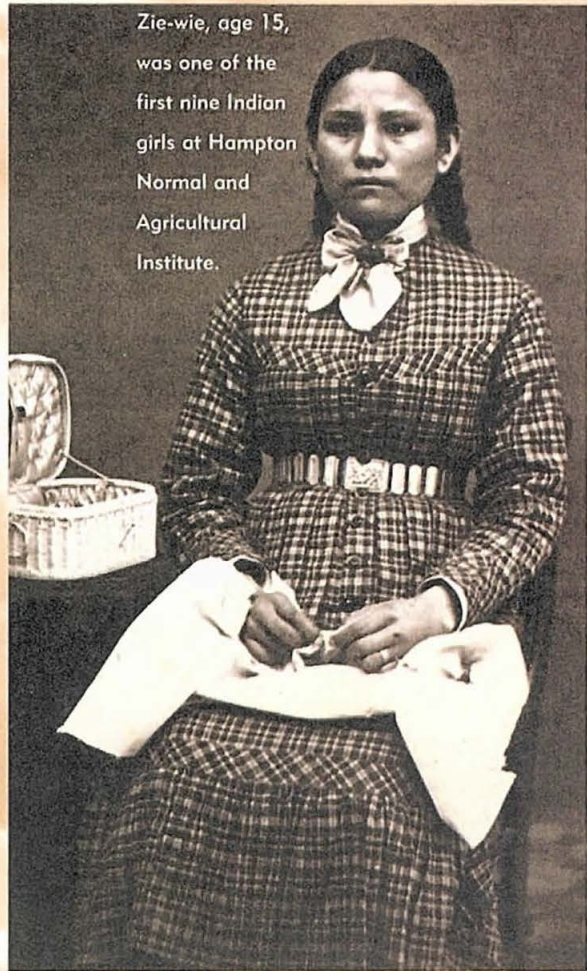
Schedule Courtesy of : Assimilation's Agent: My Life as a Superintendent in the Indian Boarding School System edited by Cary Collins, 2004. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press.



Tom Torlino, Carlisle Industrial School, 1882



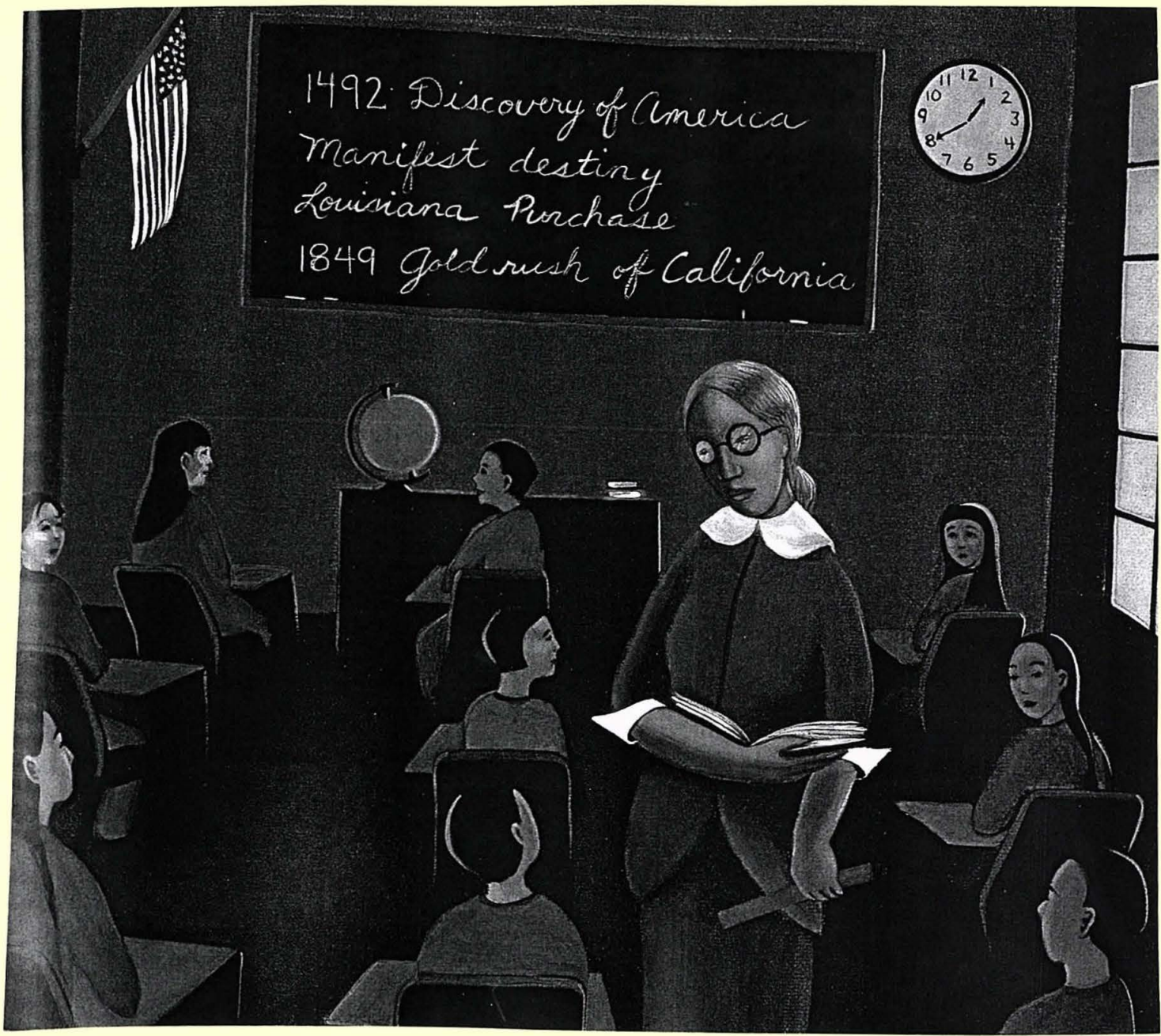
Zie-wie, age 15,
was one of the
first nine Indian
girls at Hampton
Normal and
Agricultural
Institute.



Carlisle Indian School, Pennsylvania
ca. 1890



1492: Discovery of America
Manifest destiny
Louisiana Purchase
1849 Gold rush of California



Journal Entry # 1

by Esther "Essie" Burnett

As we clung tearfully to our mother, she reminded us, "If you run away from school, you'll go back faster than you came home." It must have been heart-wrenching for her to say this, but it was her way of protecting us from the dangers that she knew we would encounter if we ran away. It sounded harsh to us, but she had our best interest at heart. We knew she meant what she said because it was a rule in our family to keep your word. Bernice, Gordon and I boarded the train to Haskell. I remember that it was a long, long way. The conductor attended to our needs and remarked, "Missie told me to take good care of you kids, and I will." Mother knew most of the trainmen because of her job with the Union Pacific Railroad.

Excerpt from *Essie's Story* by Esther Burnett Horne and Sally McBeth, 1998.(p.31) Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press.

#2 Letter sample from parent of runaway

If Charlie is found and taken back to the school please do not be too hard on him as I cannot help but think there must have been something that was very hard for him to do or he would not have run away. . . . I don't know if it will be of any good to say it but I can do so much more with Charlie by talking to him in the right way.

Excerpt from Boarding School Seasons by Brenda Child, 1998.(p.88) Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press.

#3 Journal Entry Edwin Chalcraft, the Superintendent of Chehalis Indian School in the state of Washington from 1883-1889.

The best thing I can think of for you to do, if you say anything in Indian between now and dinner time, is to push your plate back and say to the waiters, 'bread and water please.' This will cause you to remember not to talk Indian while at school. . . . At dinner, about three fourths pushed their plates back and had bread and water. A small number tried to cheat, but for each of these there was one or more of their playmates who pointed them out . . . and back went their plates. . . . We had no further trouble about Indian language.

Courtesy of Assimilation's Agent: My Life as a Superintendent in the Indian Boarding School System edited by Cary Collins, 2004.(p.26) Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press.

Music pervaded boarding school campuses. Boarding schools were organized along military lines, and so it was quite natural that their music programs took the form of marching bands that accompanied the uniformed student bodies in marches, drills, and parades. As the talents of the students in these bands and choral groups were honed and recognized, the organizations transcended their original goals of imposing martial order on "undisciplined" Indians.

Patriotic pageant,
Sherman Indian
School, Riverside,
California, n.d.



Columbia's Roll Call,
1892. This pageant
was presented
before Senator
Henry L. Dawes and
other visitors on
Indian Citizenship
Day. Back row, left
to right: Frank
Bazhaw, Potta-
watomie, as
Captain John Smith;
Ebnezer Kingsley,
Winnebago, as John
Eliot; William
Moore, Sac and
Fox, as the Herald

of Fame; Frank
Hubbard,
Penobscot, as
George Washington;
Adam Metoxen,
Oneida, as William
Penn; Joseph
Redhorse, Sioux, as
Taminend, a friend
of William Penn.
Middle row, left to
right: Harry King-
man, Sioux, as the
White Mingo, a
friend of Kenernal
Washington; Laura
Face, Sioux, as

Pocahontas; James
Enouff, Potta-
watomie, as
Columbus; Juanita
Espinosa, Piegan,
as Columbia; Addie
Stevens, Winne-
bago, as pilgrim
Priscilla Alden; Lucy
Trudell, Sioux, as a
Quakeress. Front
row, left to right:
Thomas Last, Sioux,
as Samoset; David
Hill, Onondaga, as
Miles Standish.