

Engaging Minds and Hearts: Learning from Indian Boarding Schools to Foster Culturally Responsive Practices & Policies

Dear Participants,

When examining historical experiences, it is crucial to emphasize to all audiences that colonization remains a pervasive and ongoing reality. Educators must recognize that colonization is not merely historical - it persists through modern policies, practices, and institutional structures that can marginalize Indigenous peoples and perspectives.

When working with Native students and families, understand that:

- Educational institutions have historically been tools of forced assimilation, making trust-building not just beneficial, but essential for healing and authentic partnership.
- A trauma-informed approach is not optional; it is our professional responsibility to acknowledge and address the intergenerational impacts of historical and ongoing colonial practices.
- Indigenous communities often center collective well-being and relationships - building genuine, respectful connections with tribal families and communities should be prioritized over bureaucratic processes.
- Creating safe, culturally affirming learning environments is both an act of educational best practice and a step toward restoration and reconciliation.
- Meaningful engagement requires moving beyond surface-level inclusion to actively centering Indigenous voices, wisdom, and ways of knowing in our educational spaces.

Remember, each tribal community has its own unique history, culture, and contemporary reality. Building authentic relationships requires time, cultural humility, and a genuine commitment to understanding and respecting these distinctions.

Sincerely,

Office of Native Education, OSPI
nativeeducation@k12.wa.us



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Self-Care Guide for Watching Sugarcane

About the Film: “SUGARCANE premiered at the 2024 Sundance Film Festival where it won the Directing Award: U.S. Documentary, garnering over a dozen awards. Acquired by National Geographic Documentary Films, SUGARCANE is in theaters now and streaming on Disney+ and Hulu.” (quoted from “About the Film” website linked above)

Before Viewing

- **Reflect on Your Readiness:** This documentary addresses heavy and potentially triggering topics related to boarding schools and historical trauma. Take a moment to assess your emotional preparedness.
- **Create a Supportive Space:** Watch in a safe and comfortable environment where you feel grounded. Previewing the [trailer](#) may help you prepare.
- **Have Resources Ready:** Keep trusted contacts (colleagues, friends, or a mental health professional) available for support.

During Viewing

- Take breaks if needed; it's okay to pause and process what you're seeing and hearing.
- Keep a notebook nearby to jot down reflections or emotions to process your thoughts.
- Practice grounding techniques (deep breathing, mindfulness) if you feel overwhelmed.

After Viewing

- Reflect on the documentary's impact. Consider journaling or talking to someone you trust about your thoughts and feelings.
- Engage in self-care activities: go for a walk, connect with nature, or participate in a calming activity you enjoy.
- Reach out to your network or community for conversation and support.
- If needed, access mental health resources or counseling services. Understand this is not your fault.

Activity: Exploring Sugarcane to Deepen Understanding of Culturally Responsive & Trauma Informed Practices

Purpose

This activity centers around the *Sugarcane* documentary, offering insight into Indian boarding schools, historical trauma, and the resilience of Native communities. It encourages reflection and connection to culturally responsive and trauma-informed educational practices.

This activity is designed to:

- Spark meaningful dialogue about Native student experiences.
- Inspire actionable steps to create culturally affirming & inclusive learning environments.
- Equip leaders with the tools to foster trust, build meaningful connections, and create spaces where every student feels valued, supported, and academically challenged.

Objective

To engage school leaders in understanding the historical and cultural context of Native students' experiences through the lens of Indian boarding schools, fostering culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices in education.

Intended Outcomes

By completing this activity, school leaders will:

- Develop a deeper understanding of Native students' historical, cultural, and contemporary contexts.
- Strengthen teaching methods and pedagogy through culturally responsive and trauma-informed approaches.
- Reflect on how this knowledge honors the resilience and brilliance of Native students and informs supportive policies & practices.
- Create actionable steps to promote Native Student Success and expand inclusive supports for all students.

Additional Information and Support

- For more resources and professional development on trauma-informed and culturally relevant practices, contact the [National Native Children's Trauma Center](#).
- For support or questions related to this activity, reach out to the **Office of Native Education** at NativeEducation@k12.wa.us.

5 Steps to Complete the Activity

1. Review the Self-Care Guide

- Familiarize yourself with the self-care recommendations to prepare emotionally for engaging with the documentary.
- Plan for breaks, processing, and support as needed to navigate the content with care.

2. Review the Study Guide

- Read through the key questions and discussion topics to orient yourself to the themes and goals of the activity.
- Reflect on how the documentary's content connects to your role as a school leader.

3. Watch the Documentary *Sugarcane*

- View the documentary in a safe and comfortable space.
- Use the self-care strategies during and after viewing, taking breaks as needed to process emotions and reflections.
- Take note of key moments, themes, and personal reactions to inform your reflection and action planning.

4. Engage with Reflection Questions (see below)

- Reflect on the study guide questions individually or discuss them with a peer/colleague.
- Identify connections between the documentary and your role in supporting Native students and others who may be experiencing trauma.
- Begin drafting a plan to share insights and engage other educators in discussions about Native history, resilience, and culturally and trauma-informed practices.

5. Action Planning

- Develop a concrete action plan for integrating your learning from *Sugarcane* into your school's policies and practices.
- Consider how to:
 - i. Integrate the [John McCoy \(luliláš\) Since Time Immemorial Curriculum](#) into mainstream curriculum.
 - ii. Partner with local Tribes or Native communities to amplify Native voices and perspectives.
 - iii. Provide professional development for staff on culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices.
- Identify immediate next steps and set measurable goals to support Native Student Success.

Study Guide for Sugarcane

Key Questions for Reflection:

1. What emotions did this documentary evoke, and why?
2. How has the boarding school system impacted Native communities, families, and cultures across generations?
 - How do these impacts manifest in the current circumstances and conditions affecting Native students and families in schools today?
3. What roles do resilience, resistance, language, and cultural preservation play in the stories shared in *Sugarcane*?
4. How can educators and administrators support Native students and families today while acknowledging the visible and invisible lasting impacts of boarding schools?
5. What lessons does this film offer about the importance of Indigenous cultures, languages, traditions, and perspectives in schools?
6. Where are Native students being positively or negatively impacted by current school policies?
 - After watching the documentary, what enhancements or updates might be needed to ensure policies are culturally responsive and supportive?

Discussion Topics for Educators:

Understanding Historical Trauma and Educational Inequities

- Explore how historical trauma, including the legacy of Indian boarding schools, continues to affect Native students and families today.
- Discuss the role educators can play in addressing these inequities and fostering healing through culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices.

Authentically Teaching Native History

- Examine the importance of teaching Native history authentically, respectfully, and comprehensively.
- Highlight how aligning instruction with the *John McCoy (lulilaš) Since Time Immemorial* curriculum ensures accurate representation of tribal histories, cultures, and sovereignty.

Creating Culturally Affirming and Trauma-Informed School Environments

- Share strategies to cultivate school environments that affirm Native students' identities, promote well-being, and foster belonging for all students while maintaining academic rigor.
- Discuss specific practices that center on relationship-building, respect, and understanding the cultural and emotional needs of Native students.

Notes:

Action Planning

Evaluate School Policies and Practices

1. Review current policies to ensure they honor and support Native students' histories, identities, and communities.
2. Identify areas where policies could be updated or enhanced to reflect culturally affirming and trauma-informed principles.

Use the Film as a Professional Learning Tool

1. Incorporate *Sugarcane* into staff training or professional learning communities to foster discussions about trauma-informed practices and cultural responsiveness.
2. Provide reflection opportunities for educators to connect the film's lessons to their classroom and school environments.

Partner with Local Tribes

1. Collaborate with Tribal leaders, elders, and community members to amplify Native voices and perspectives in educational spaces.
2. Create opportunities for Native leaders to engage with students and staff, sharing cultural knowledge and experiences that enrich learning.

Notes:

Additional Information and Resources

[Healing-Informed Resources for Self-Care - The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition](#)

- A resource hub focused on supporting healing from the intergenerational trauma caused by boarding schools through education, advocacy, and community support.

[National Native Children's Trauma Center](#)

- Provides training, resources, and tools to address trauma in Native communities with culturally grounded and evidence-based practices.

[Resources | Swan Innovations LP](#)

- Offers guidance and solutions for implementing culturally responsive and healing-informed practices in education and community work.

[Tribal Boarding School Toolkit for Healing](#)

- A toolkit designed to support Tribal communities in addressing the legacy of boarding schools through healing and education initiatives.

[AG Ferguson creates Indian boarding schools Truth & Reconciliation Tribal Advisory Committee | Washington State](#)

- Highlights Washington State's efforts to establish a truth and reconciliation process for Indian boarding schools, led by Tribal advisory input.

[Being Trauma and Healing Informed](#)

- Explores practices and approaches that integrate trauma-informed care with Indigenous ways of healing and knowing.

[U.S. apologizes for federal Indian boarding schools, a key moment in Tribal-U.S. relations - Native American Rights Fund](#)

- An article examining the U.S. government's apology for Indian boarding schools and its significance in Tribal relations and healing.

[Washington works to reconcile its history of Indigenous boarding schools - High Country News](#)

- Details Washington State's initiatives to confront and address the history and impacts of Indigenous boarding schools within the state.

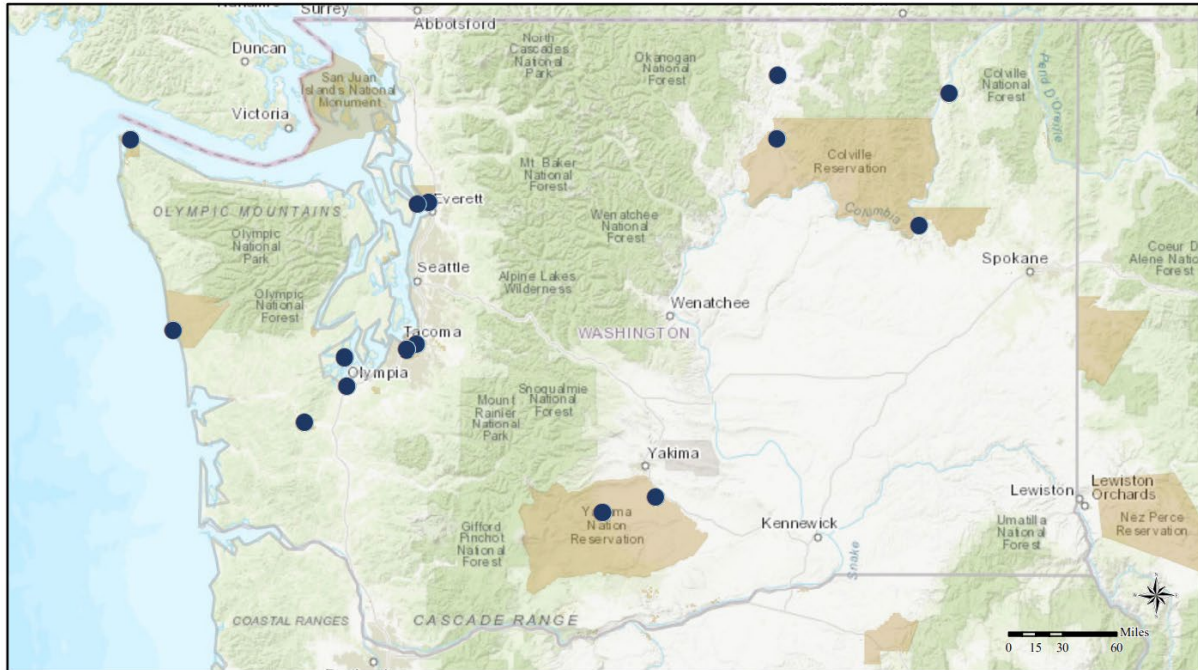
Contact Information

Office of Native Education-Contact Information

For questions, support, or assistance, please complete the ONE [Request Assistance Form](#).

Federal Indian Boarding School Sites Identified In Washington

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U.S. Department of the Interior Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative

Number of Federal Indian Boarding School Sites - 15

Note: An individual federal Indian boarding school may account for multiple sites as some schools changed locations over time. This map represents federal Indian boarding school sites identified as of April 1, 2022.

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