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## Native American Boarding Schools: Understanding an Issue from the Past and Remixing It for the Present

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## Native American Boarding Schools: Understanding a Conversation from the Past & Remixing it for the Present



*Healing tiles created by Turtle Mountain teens after a visit to Fort Totten Boarding School*

### Overview of Instructional Resource:

While many mini units in the College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP) ask students to join a conversation in progress and use current nonfiction texts to support an argument about a contemporary issue, this unit does something different, yet still builds on many of the same skills in previous instructional resources. This unit invites students to use disciplinary strategies to understand a variety of texts--historical photos, graphics, videos, individual narratives, and historical articles--about an issue from the past and then remix them to create a multimodal text that makes an argument about the issue under study. As Andrea Lunsford shows us in her best-selling book, *Everything's an Argument*, arguments appear not only in the form of academic essays, but all around us, in the form of ads, websites, and, increasingly, in online spaces.

In chapter 2 of [Rewriting: How to Do Things with Text](#), Joseph Harris serves as a host to Kenneth Burke's metaphorical parlor, carefully introducing the idea that academic writing is a kind of conversation made in relation to others. Harris welcomes a writer to join a conversation in progress this way, "You read a text, you talk about it, you put down some thought in response, others respond to your comments, and so on (35)." Sassi and Stevens (2019) re-envision this traditional metaphor for the digital age:

This Burkean parlor describes well an academic conversation that is long-lived, such as the theme of spiritual growth in the *Odyssey* or the role of invention in the writing process. However, in today's world, where ideas are shared in kairotic moments via social media, the scene for

discussion or debate may more resemble a pop-up shop than a parlor--here today, gone tomorrow, but often returning and cycling around” (45).

C3WP's ultimate goal for student argument writers is the self-driven exploration of an issue that is important to them. To engage in such a sophisticated exploration, a writer needs to step into a conversation among different sources, take a position on the topic of discussion, and join the ongoing conversation.

When an issue has taken place in the past, concepts for working with historical texts are important for understanding. Sometimes issues were suppressed in the past, misrepresented by the dominant culture, and/or positioned as “in the past” to further silence a group of people. Such is the case with the United States’ history of Native American Boarding Schools, which is the central focus of the text set for this mini unit. Joining the conversation can be especially complex with issues like this.

*Understanding a Conversation from the Past* provides an instructional process that invites students to a metaphorical talking circle to explore the issue and then discuss with classmates how each source’s contribution influenced student thinking. As teachers facilitate conversations, students work in small groups to gather their thoughts, process information, and learn how to contribute their own voices to a multi-modal argument. The [Talking Circle](#) is an indigenized version of the Atwoodian Table or Burkean Parlor, differing from them in that we remove the hierarchical designation of “experts” and recognize that “everyone’s contribution is equally important.” Speakers express themselves in any way they want, not necessarily in ways accepted by White dominated culture. It expands the field of argument writing to something that takes place not only in academic contexts, but also in other spaces and places, including online spaces. [Georgina Barton](#), an Australian researcher advocates the use of multimodal texts thus:

It seems strange then, that assessment practices in schools largely remain focused on traditional written texts such as essays and reports. These texts often involve only language mode despite there being other modes that can be effectively used to express meaning. By other modes I mean communication including things like images, sounds, signs and gestures. When a text uses two or more modes we call it a multimodal text.

Opening up argument writing to multimodal texts is important because it connects with youth literacies. Just because this unit embraces other modes and literacies, does not mean that it is not important to develop an understanding between the individual reader and a text. In addition, this unit relies on C3WP practices like iterative and layered reading, conversation, and writing help build student understanding of the issue. The unit culminates in students remixing texts to create an original multimodal argument.

*(Teacher note: The length of class periods, instructional days, and days in a school week vary across the nation. This resource’s lesson sequence takes approximately five 45-minute instructional periods. Teachers should use professional judgement when deciding how to pace and “chunk” the lessons in the resource.)*

### **Skill Emphasis**

- Understand an issue from the past
- Use disciplinary understanding to engage in conversations with historical texts and understand how multiple texts intersect - corroborating, contradicting, or building on another.
- Describe a conversation among different kinds of sources
- Understand and analyze multimodal texts
- Create a multimodal argument

### **Culminating Product: The Remixed Argument**

Once students have developed an understanding of several texts related to the issue from the past, they will make an argument about this issue in the form of a multimodal text that remixes elements from the text set, additional research, and/or their experiences with the issue.

Merriam-Webster defines “remix” as “a variant of an original recording (as of a song) made by rearranging or adding to the original,” but its meaning is evolving. The online urban dictionary includes this meaning of remix: “to take different pieces of media (images, audio, or video) and process them through a computer (or other machine) into new pieces of media.” On the website remix theory, Eduardo Navas states, “Generally speaking, remix culture can be defined as the global activity consisting of the creative and efficient exchange of information made possible by digital technologies that is supported by the practice of cut/copy and paste.”

**\*Teacher Tip:** Teachers might want to read Chapter 6 of Joseph Harris’s book about Remix.

### **Duration of Instruction:**

5 instructional days depending on the length of the class period

### **Sample Text Sets:**

[Boarding School Text Set](#)

### **Classroom Resources**

- [Writer’s Notebook](#)
  - In routine writing resources, students interact with texts and do informal exploratory writing in their notebooks. This instructional resources continues that practice, allowing students to capture their thinking as they engage with multiple points of view.

### **Digital Resources**

[Instructional PowerPoint](#) (*Teachers who prefer to use slide decks can download and customize this resource.*)

### **Additional Resources**

Example of a rich multimodal text, "[Pre-occupied](#)" created by Ojibwe poet Heid Erdrich.

Example of a student video poem (combines a written text with visual images) "[Hope](#)" by Colin Thomas

### **Overview of Lesson Sequence**

Opening the Conversation on a Topic (Slides 2- 4)

1. Build knowledge of topic
2. Writing to explore background knowledge of topic
3. Pair share on topic
4. Large group discussion on topic

Getting Informed: Who is already in a conversation about the topic (Slides 5-11)

1. Reading short excerpts from multiple texts with multiple perspectives
2. Using a Writer's Notebook to gather information
3. Learning about a some voices already in a conversation about the topic

Learn what others are saying and respond to information insources (Slides 12-20)

1. Introducing the Talking Circle, an indigenous model for hearing all voices
2. Model the annotation of a short source
3. Work in student pairs to annotate additional short sources
4. Engage in a student conversation mingle
5. Return to Writer's Notebook and add what has been learned from sources

Join the Conversation in Progress (Slides 21-26)

1. Create a claim on the topic, using inquiry questions developed throughout the lessons.
2. Add new evidence to Writer's Notebook

Create a multimodal argument draft by remixing texts (Slides 27-28)

1. Compose a claim that reflects evidence from the sources
2. Share drafts.
  1. As a class discuss the defensible claims in the kernel drafts.
  2. Discuss why the claims are defensible and how the evidence may have informed their claims.

### **Lesson Sequence**

- **Opening the Conversation (Slides 2-5)**

Hold a brief discussion with students about the talking circle image on the opening slide. Introduce argument as a conversation among people who may have differing perspectives but also have evidence and reasons for their perspectives. Explain that the talking circle is round because “*everyone’s contribution is equally important*” and should be respected. No one holds the final answer to a particular problem. Explain to students that they will be doing a lot of reading, writing, and talking about the topic over the next four days in order to learn what others have said about it.

Before beginning to track the research on the topic, model for students how to set up a page in their Writer’s Notebook. This will become their Writer’s Notebook for this topic. Explain to students that their thinking about the topic should grow and deepen as they do their research. Teachers may want to develop an organizational system for students to use in their Writer’s Notebook. This may be the use of multi-color tabs or the use of dividers or some other organizational structure.

Invite students to respond to the topic on slide 3 in their writer’s notebooks and then discuss what they wrote. The purpose of this conversation is to assess students’ background knowledge of the subject and to spark a class discussion about the topic of Native American boarding schools.

- **Understanding the Past and Becoming Aware of the Issue (Slides 5-10)**

Trigger warning: The topic of Native American boarding schools can be emotionally fraught for students. Therefore, we have included a slide about historical trauma. When we visit the Fort Totten boarding school site, we bring a counselor with us to support students. One could also invite a counselor to class when discussing this topic. Here is how Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart defines historical trauma to describe the specific trauma that Native people experienced in the United States: “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations including one’s own lifespan.” While historical trauma is the result of centuries of colonization and abuses, Brave Heart highlighted the effects of the separation of families and forced assimilation of the boarding school experience. The reaction to this wounding, which she calls the historical trauma response, often includes survivor guilt, depression, PTSD symptoms, physical symptoms, psychic numbing, anger, suicidal ideation, and fixation to trauma, among other features and behaviors. ([Brave Heart](#))

The use of short excerpts from complex texts allows students to focus on understanding perspectives before they engage with longer resources in later instruction. Next, facilitate a class discussion on the key words and images found in the excerpts. Calling attention to key words helps students understand that the topic has been a topic of conversation among others.

In slide 7 we are introducing the idea that “texts” can mean more than just words. Use these guiding questions to discuss the quote by Pratt (“Kill the Indian, save the man”) and the photo of Pratt together:

Text questions: Have you heard this phrase before? What does it mean? What does it say about the purpose of Native American boarding schools?

Photo questions: Describe what you see in the photograph. Who is in the photograph?

Both texts: What is the connection between the photo and the quote? What questions do you have about this slide?

Use the guiding question on slide 6 or a similar question to introduce students to the fact that there is already some debate about the topic. Help students understand that complex topics merit doing some research in order to learn more about an issue.

In slides 8-9 students first write about their own day, then they read a document from the US archives with a boarding school schedule, then they compare their own school schedule with a boarding school schedule.

In Slide 10, students pause to write about how their thinking is changing based on their understanding of the text.

In slide 11-12, students respond to a quote by Laura Tone. This quote both acknowledges the past and also demonstrates an attitude of resilience, so it is important to highlight. Some guiding questions for discussing this with students are the following:

What does it mean that the phrase “binds” Pratt “to the attitudes that were already in place in your time”?

What is cultural genocide? What does writing mean to this author? How would you characterize the tone? What makes you say that? What does it mean that the writer is no longer invisible?

- **Responding to evidence found in sources (Slides 13-20)**

Explain that students will meet the people who are in the Talking Circle as they read through the sources on a topic. This is where students will “hear” the conversation that authorities are already having about the topic. Facilitate a brief conversation about the names of the “authorities” who are already seated at the table. Discuss credibility what makes their contribution to the topic important to know. Help students begin to internalize why effective arguments draw on information from authorities.

- **Introduce the Talking Circle, a process for interacting with sources**

Model the talking circle on a large chart clearly visible to students. Draw the “circle” and add word balloons for each person represented in the text set. As a full class focus on just one person/source “at the table” to model the process of determining what the person is “saying”

about the topic. Introduce the first authority in the sources and ask student to read the excerpt from the text in which the authority “speaks out” on the topic.

- **Model annotation for the purpose of paraphrasing for the first source.**

The teacher models the practice of condensing a source by finding some key words and phrases that encapsulate the key points of the statement. The teacher engages in a think-aloud to help students understand the thinking behind which words to note.

Use professional judgment to determine whether or not you need to model filling in the word balloon for another text excerpt before releasing the task to pairs of students who will complete the filling in of word balloons. It is important that the students have an understanding of the task before they attempt to work in pairs.

You may wish to pair strong readers with weaker readers or jigsaw texts so that weaker readers first work with texts at their level and then jigsaw into groups with higher texts. As students complete the task, circulate among them to assess the accuracy of their summation of each text. Each student will need to experience success with adding information to the word bubbles in preparation for the upcoming Conversation Mingle.

Student pairs will then annotate the additional excerpts, marking some key words and phrases to help them paraphrase each source.

- **Conversation Mingle**

The directions for the Conversation Mingle are on slide 20 on the slidedeck for this resource. After reviewing the directions, model what the conversation among students might sound like. Then ask the student pairs to mingle with other pairs and compare their “tables” with the tables of others. This conversation among students provides an opportunity for the teacher to formatively assess student learning, as does the “table” itself. After the mingle, ask student to revisit the Writer's Notebook to record changes in their thinking on the topic. This entry requires them to use text evidence from the new readings. After writing, students share their writing in pairs or threes.

- **Join the Conversation in Progress (Slides 21-26)**

Explain that students are going to enter the conversation they have been learning about in the sources. Students have now explored multiple perspectives on the topic and are ready to make their own claim about Native American Boarding Schools. Ask students to join the talking circle and enter the conversation. Model this for students by drawing a word balloon with your name and encouraging them to do the same on their own graphic. Explain that you are going to enter the conversation by writing a claim on the topic. Students benefit from seeing sample claims about the topic. This can include the teacher’s current claim.



Discuss each claim shown on Slide 23. Encourage students to make their own claim, though some may choose to use a claim from the slide. This is not unusual for young writers and is acceptable since one of the claims may in fact match the student's own assertion about the topic.

Explain that writers seldom use all of their sources when writing an argument. Students need to learn to choose their sources based on their own claim; effective argument writers choose their sources with purpose and intention. The teacher models this with the teacher's own claim. Now, encourage students to choose three or four of the sources, including at least one "opposing" source, to pull a chair beside. Ask students to write what they would say to some part of the source.

- **Remix multiple modes to create an argument about the issue in the form of a multimodal text (Slides 29-30)**

Discuss multimodal texts in the [instructional powerpoint](#) with students. Tell them they will need to consult their Writer's Notebook and the text set as they plan and write. The "First I thought" portion of the essay will be informed by the first Writer's Notebook entry on Day 1 of the instructional sequence. This is a somewhat informal argument. Your analysis of the multimodal text they create will enable you to assess your students' strengths and weaknesses writing claims and using evidence in a remix style. Your formative assessment will inform your next steps for instruction and help you to determine your next [C3WP cycle of instruction](#).

Engage students in sharing drafts with others. Choose a sharing protocol that works for your class: pairs, small groups, Author's Chair, Gallery Walk, etc. Listening in on this sharing provides another opportunity for formative assessment.

Finally, help your students to celebrate their learning and their writing in some way. Perhaps a community event or website would be a way to share the multimodal texts they create.