

Carlisle Indian Industrial School Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question

What was the purpose of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School?

Materials:

- Carlisle Indian Industrial School PowerPoint
- Copies of Documents A-D
- Copies of Guiding Questions

Note: Prior to this lesson, students should have studied nineteenth-century Native American history. In particular, students should be familiar with federal Native American removal policies, the reservation system, and the American Indian Wars. It is important that students are familiar with these policies because they will be asked to consider how the Carlisle Indian Industrial School was similar to and different from previous federal policies regarding Native Americans.

Plan of Instruction:

- 1) Carlisle Indian Industrial School PowerPoint Presentation.
 - a. Slide 1: Title Slide. Explain to students: *Today you will be studying the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Carlisle was one of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' leading Native American schools and the first off-reservation boarding school operated by the federal government. The Bureau of Indian Affairs went on to open more than two dozen more off-reservation boarding schools, and churches operated over four hundred on-reservation schools with government funding. These schools were part of a long series of federal government policies, such as Removal and the Indian Wars, that attempted to remove Native Americans from their lands.*
 - b. Slide 2: Richard Pratt. *Founded by Richard Henry Pratt, the Carlisle School operated from 1879 until 1918. Pratt, a Civil War veteran, had served as a captain in the cavalry in the Southern Plains and had supervised the imprisonment of Native Americans during the Indian Wars.*
 - c. Slides 3, 4, & 5: The Carlisle School. *Over 10,000 Native Americans attended the Carlisle School between 1879 and 1918. To recruit students, school officials and students traveled to reservations, appealing to tribal leaders to send children from their tribes to Carlisle. Some tribal leaders saw the school as an alternative to the difficulties of life on reservations, while others were reluctant to send students.*
 - d. Slides 6 & 7: The Carlisle School. *Only 158 people graduated from the school. Of these graduates, several went on to college and became educators, professional athletes, and community leaders. The Carlisle*

football team became one of the best teams in the nation, and the acclaimed Carlisle Indian Band performed around the world.

- e. Slides 8, 9, 10, & 11: The Carlisle School. *Life at Carlisle was very hard. Students were subjected to strict military-style training and were disciplined severely for breaking the school's strict rules. Living conditions were stark. Students stayed in barracks and were forced to discard their native languages, dress, foods, and religions. Hundreds of students ran away from the school to return to their tribes, and hundreds of other students died at Carlisle, many from infectious diseases.*
- f. Slide 12: Central Historical Question. *Today we are going to further explore the Carlisle School. To do so, we are going to use historical thinking skills to analyze four primary source documents. In particular, we are going to explore this question: What was the purpose of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School?*

Note: Several of the documents in this lesson use derogatory language to describe Native Americans and Native American societies. Similarly, there are upsetting descriptions of life at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. We recommend that you prepare students for this content before reading the documents.

2) Hand out Document A.

- a. In pairs, students read the document and answer the Guiding Questions.
- b. Share out responses.
- c. Ask students: *According to the newspaper, what was the purpose of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School?*

Students should note that the newspaper article identified several purposes for the school. First, it was intended to serve as a model for additional schools for Native Americans. It was also supposed to “save” Native Americans by breaking the “tribal relation.” Strong answers will reason that breaking Native American students’ connection to their tribes could have also served the purpose of removing them from their land, which was a central goal of federal policy towards Native Americans. According to this article, the school also sought to create Native American leaders who would lead Native American tribes towards new occupations.

3) Hand out Document B.

- a. In pairs, students read the document and answer the Guiding Questions.

- b. Share out responses.
- c. Ask students: *According to Pratt, what was the purpose of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School?*

If students do not bring it up, use the Pratt document to define assimilation: the process by which the culture of a minority group – including their language, religion, dress, and food – comes to resemble those of the dominant culture. Point out that Pratt’s notion of “civilizing” Native Americans is an extreme form of cultural assimilation. According to Pratt, this was the purpose of the school. He indicated that such assimilation was the only way to save Native Americans from extermination at the hands of settlers and from what he considered Native Americans’ uncivilized ways of life. His calls to transfer Native American children from their tribes “to the surroundings of civilization” and to “move them out” of their communities would also have served the purpose of removing Native Americans from their land. He also suggested that graduates of Carlisle could serve as proof that Native Americans were deserving of similar rights as other Americans.

4) Pass out Document C.

- a. Have students source the document and answer Questions 1 and 2 of the Guiding Questions. Share out responses.
- b. In pairs, students read the document and answer the remaining Guiding Questions.
- c. Share out responses.

Students should identify that, in some ways, this document corroborates Pratt’s paper. However, students should question its reliability because Childers wrote the article for the *Carlisle School News*. It is likely that the article was subject to review from school leaders and that it was published with the purpose of promoting the school. Moreover, given the strict rules of the school and the potential consequences for breaking them, it is unlikely that Childers would have wanted to criticize the school in the newspaper. Childers may also have come to hold these beliefs as a result of the instruction he received at Carlisle.

- d. Ask students: *According to Childers’s article, what was the purpose of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School?*

Childers’s article also suggests that cultural assimilation was a primary purpose of the school. According to the article, students would be “civilized” and thus better equipped to be part of American society.

5) Pass out Document D.

- a. Have students source the document and answer Question 1 of the Guiding Questions. Share out responses.
- b. In pairs, students read the document and answer the Guiding Questions.
- c. Share out responses.
- d. Ask students: *According to the Standing Bear document, what was the purpose of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School? How does this document compare to the others?*

Students should note that Luther Standing Bear's account corroborates the other documents' description of the school's objective of assimilating Native Americans. However, Standing Bear provides a very different perspective on the process than any of the other documents, highlighting the costs and brutality of this process.

6) Final discussion.

- a. *After reading all of these documents, what do you think was the purpose of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School?*
- b. *What does the Carlisle School tell us about the United States at the end of the nineteenth century?*
- c. *How were the school's policies of assimilation and removal similar to other American policies towards Native Americans? How were they different?*
- d. *What might have been the impact of the Carlisle School on Native American cultures?*
- e. *What other types of documents and artifacts would you want to explore to continue learning about the Carlisle School?*

- 7) Final writing assignment. Ask students to review the Guiding Question for each document that asked "Based to this document, what was the purpose of the Carlisle School?" After students have reviewed their answers, have them write a paragraph explaining the purpose of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. They should compose a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph and cite specific evidence from at least three of the documents in their response.

Documents

Document A

“A New School for Indians: Carlisle Barracks Converted into an Indian School,” *New York Herald*, August 22, 1879. Retrieved from

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1879-08-22/ed-1/seq-4/>

Document B

Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction (1892), 46–59. Reprinted in Richard H. Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites,” *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880–1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260–271; original document retrieved from: goo.gl/v2THUR

Document C

Ellis B. Childers, “*School News*,” (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.) vol. 2, no. 11 (April 1882). Reprinted in Peter Nabokov, ed., *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492–1992* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991), 218–220; original document retrieved from: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/37/>

Document D

Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, 1933).