
Teaching Native American resilience and resistance with *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee*

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***The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee* (Young Readers Adaptation): Life in Native America**

By David Treuer

Penguin Young Readers

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Recommended for grades 9-12.

Book summary

Written as a “counternarrative to the story that has been told about us,” (p. 6), *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee* is Ojibwe author David Treuer’s account of Native American history since 1890 (Treuer, 2023). Treuer opens his work by recounting the horrific events of the Wounded Knee Massacre on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, before outlining how the last major armed conflict between the US government and Native Americans distorts contemporary Americans’ view Native American people and their history today. In short, Treuer believes that subsequent acts of genocide and dispossession, as well as Native resistance and resilience in the face of these forces, are missing from dominant narratives in United States history. *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee* is dedicated to telling the story of Native Americans since 1890 in a way that helps the reader to understand current conditions and issues in modern Native American life. Topics detailed in the text include boarding schools, land allotment, the American Indian Movement, struggles for citizenship and sovereignty, the evolving reservation system, and protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline. Through these events and more, Treuer emphasizes resistance and resilience amongst Native American individuals and communities to repel colonial efforts. With these stories in mind, readers can better contextualize recent movements within Native communities, such as Land Back or language revitalization. Ultimately, the perspectives provided in this text have enormous potential in social classrooms to raise critical consciousness about Native America, both past and present.

Lesson overview

This multi-part lesson uses inquiry-based learning to examine the key themes of *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee*. The compelling question is: *How have Native Americans encountered and resisted colonialism since 1890?* First, teachers will read the text’s prologue with their students to better understand the Wounded Knee Massacre and the author’s aims. Next, student reading will focus on three of the book’s seven chapters, “The Indian Problem,” Becoming Indian, and Digital Indians, which best illustrate resistance to colonialism. Guiding questions for these chapters are provided to focus student attention on key events and concepts related to the learning objectives (Appendix 1). Next, students will follow the Inquiry Design Model (IDM) created to extend their learning on the content of each selected chapter (Appendix 2). Inquiry-based practices have been tied to “deep learning” in social studies instruction, whereby learning



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is more engaging and transformational (Grant *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, inquiry-based practices promote perspective-taking, which is especially important when discussing sensitive or controversial historical themes (Selwyn, 2014), including Native American history (NCSS, 2018). Central to this lesson, the IDM contains supporting questions, performance tasks, and resources to support the themes of the text and scaffold responses to the compelling question. Nine videos have been curated for the IDM to bring Treuer's text to life. Enrichment activities investigate the occupation of Alcatraz by Second Wounded Knee (1973), boarding school testimonials and primary sources, reservation system maps/explainers, legal histories, and Cherokee language revitalization efforts. The lines of inquiry and media in the IDM are aligned with National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (NCSS) standards position statements, as well as the Civics, Geography, and History dimensions of the C3 Framework. After synthesizing the information in the text and enrichment videos, students complete one (or both) of the culminating tasks for this lesson. First, students create a Zine to answer the compelling question. Associated with underground communities or minoritized groups, Zines are often utilized for creative expression about issues of power (Scheper, 2023). This medium uses images and written text to tell a story, which in this lesson's case are the counternarratives promoted themes of resistance and resilience. Second, students write a five-paragraph essay that addresses the compelling question. The IDM has been structured to support the traditional five-paragraph essay format (Appendix 3), whereby the supporting questions are answered in each body paragraph.

NCSS themes

- (1) Culture
- (2) Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- (3) Power, Authority, and Governance

NCSS position statements

- (1) Toward Responsibility: Social Studies Education that Respects and Affirms Indigenous Peoples and Nations (NCSS, 2018)
- (2) Powerful Teaching and Learning in Social Studies (NCSS, 2023a, b)
- (3) Racial Literacy (NCSS, 2023a, b)

C3 framework

D2.Civ.5.9–12. Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.

D2.Geo.5.9–12. Evaluate how political and economic decisions throughout time have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics of various places and regions.

D2.His.5.9–12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

D2.His.14.9–12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

Materials

- (1) *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee (Young Readers Adaptation): Life in Native America*, by David Treuer.

- (2) Guiding Questions: Colonial Efforts and Resistance since 1890 ([Appendix 1](#)).
- (3) Inquiry Design Model ([Appendix 2](#)).
- (4) Internet access.
- (5) Supplies to make a Zine (or make a digital Zine).
- (6) Five-paragraph essay template ([Appendix 3](#)).

Objectives

Students will:

- (1) Evaluate efforts to colonize Native American people and their land since 1890.
- (2) Analyze the role of racism in U.S. government policies towards Native Americans.
- (3) Understand the intent and legacies of boarding schools.
- (4) Examine Native American resistance to attempts to undermine their sovereignty.
- (5) Understand current efforts by Native American tribes to revitalize their languages.
- (6) Analyze the contemporary reservation system, including its evolution since the Dawes Act and rushes for “surplus land.”

Lines of inquiry

Compelling question:

- (1) How have Native Americans encountered and resisted colonialism since 1890?

Supporting Questions:

- (1) What is the “Indian Problem,” and how has the US government attempted to “solve” it?
- (2) How have Native Americans resisted efforts to undermine their sovereignty?
- (3) What issues do Native American communities currently face in maintaining their culture and unity?

Procedure

Exploration: teacher-led activities (60–90 min)

- (1) The teacher introduces *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee*, the compelling question, and the learning objectives for the lesson.
- (2) The teacher leads a “popcorn” reading of the Prologue.
 - A PBS video on Sitting Bull and Wounded Knee is included in the IDM to reinforce the foundational events from which Treuer builds his narrative and references throughout the text.
 - The teacher highlights Treuer’s perspective as an Ojibwe member raised on the Lake Leech Reservation in Minnesota.

- (3) The teacher previews the Guiding Questions ([Appendix 1](#)) for the three focus chapters, The “Indian Problem,” Becoming Indian, and Digital Indians.
- (4) Guided class, group, or independent reading of Chapters 2, 5, and 7.
 - Students answer the Guiding Questions while reading each chapter (answers appear in order). The teacher may want to discuss student responses to each chapter (one at a time), since every chapter has a clear theme.
 - The illustrations in these chapters provide age-appropriate visual representations for the content. The teacher may want to probe student thoughts on the images while reading. The land allotment advertisements, before and after photos of boarding school students, and the “Trail of Broken Treaties” poster are particularly illustrative of the colonial process and resistance to it.
- (5) Formative Assessment: Guiding Questions. The teacher checks student answers to the Guiding Questions once all chapters have been completed, allowing time for further discussion of the content or building background knowledge.

Development: inquiry activities (60–90 min)

- (6) IDM-centered segment of lesson:
 - Students will be divided into small groups of approximately four members.
 - The teacher will review the compelling question before introducing the supporting questions and culminating tasks for the lesson.
 - As a group, students will revisit the content of chapters 2, 5, and 7 with a focus on the compelling question.
 - The teacher introduces the performance tasks and their alignment with the enrichment resources (labeled as Featured Sources in the IDM). Students should view each video, summarized below, with attention to how it addresses the corresponding supporting question:
 - What is the “Indian problem,” and how has the US government attempted to “solve” it?
 - Video 1: Describes the Dawes Act and its role in upending communal land stewardship by Native Americans on tribal lands. It details how the social and cultural fabric between and within Native American nations was damaged by forcing individual land ownership, which was contrary to many of their cultural practices. Sovereignty was further diminished when “surplus land” previously allotted to Native nations was sold to White Americans, particularly in Oklahoma.
 - Video 2: Summarizes the boarding school system and underlying ideologies of White supremacy and cultural assimilation. Documents how Native children were forced into these schools and the legacy of this system.
 - Video 3: Explains the origins and status of Native American reservations across the United States. Provides a long historical view of the migration and displacement of Indigenous peoples in North America (U.S. and Canada), including current information about reservations in the U.S.
 - How have Native Americans resisted efforts to undermine their sovereignty?

- Video 1: Examines the occupation of Alcatraz Island from 1969–71 by the American Indian Movement (AIM), as well as the accomplishments of AIM during the civil rights era.
- Video 2: Describes the protests on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1973 by AIM and the occupation of the town of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, emphasizes diverse perspectives within Native communities for confronting oppression and pursuing social justice.
- What issues do Native American communities currently face in maintaining their culture and unity?
 - Video 1: Illustrates the importance of language to Native cultures, with a focus on current efforts by members of the Cherokee nation to revitalize their language. The centrality of oral traditions to many Native American cultures is also emphasized.
 - Video 2: Examines the legacy of boarding schools, with an emphasis on intergenerational trauma. Outlines how Native youth are working to reclaim lost cultural traditions.
 - Video 3: Describes recent legislation and judicial rulings related to Native American sovereignty on reservations in Oklahoma. Given the oil-rich land on which many of these reservations sit, the economic stakes for tribal governments (pitted against state/local governments) are high.
- Students will have completed the IDM when they have answered all supporting questions and completed all performance tasks.
- (7) Formative Assessment: Supporting Questions. The teacher checks student answers to the three Supporting Questions in the IDM. If the students have synthesized the information above, they are ready to address the compelling question.

Expansion: summative assessment and extension opportunities (60 min)

- (8) This lesson plan provides two options for a culminating assessment, though teachers could choose to have students complete both summative activities. These assessments ask students to address the compelling question:
How have Native Americans encountered and resisted colonialism since 1890?
 - Option 1: Students create a [Zine](#) (details in IDM) that answers the compelling question with relevant evidence from *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee* and the enrichment sources. Zines are effective, culturally responsive teaching and assessment techniques that allow for creative expression about issues of power, especially by marginalized groups ([Du Laney et al., 2022](#); [Scheper, 2023](#)). Student work should demonstrate understanding of the learning objectives and content required by the supporting questions. Furthermore, the Zine should use images and written text to illuminate acts of resistance and illustrate themes of resilience in Native American history since 1890.
 - Option 2: Students write a five-paragraph essay that answers the compelling question. This question forces students to directly engage with concepts related to colonialism, which are at the core of David Treuer's text. The essay provides an additional opportunity for students to grapple with the legacies of colonialism in contemporary Native American society. [Appendix C](#) provides a basic template for writing a five-paragraph essay. It is recommended that students answer the three supporting questions in the IDM in each of the three body paragraphs of the essay to thoroughly address the compelling question.

Closure

All class members will return to a whole group setting to discuss their experiences with the assignment. Students can review new perspectives on Native American history gained from the lesson, share their Zines, or describe the content of their essay. The teacher may also ask students if they have any lingering questions about the assignment's content or share opportunities to learn about local Native American history/culture.

Supporting and supplemental sources

Exploration

- (1) Guiding Questions: Resistance & Resilience (Chapters 2, 5, 7).
- (2) Introduction: [Sitting Bull & Wounded Knee](#)

Development

- (1) Land Dispossession: [Dawes Act & Allotment](#)
- (2) Cultural Genocide: [How the US stole thousands of Native American children](#)
- (3) Forced Relocation: [Native American reservations explained](#)
- (4) Resistance by AIM: [Occupation of Alcatraz](#)
- (5) Resistance at Pine Ridge: [Wounded Knee, 1973](#)
- (6) Protests at Standing Rock: [Dakota Access Pipeline](#)
- (7) Cultural regeneration: [Cherokee language preservation](#)
- (8) Colonial legacies: [Boarding schools & Native youth today](#)
- (9) Current controversies: [Fight over Native sovereignty In Oklahoma](#)

Expansion

- (1) Zine directions: [Zines 101](#), [How to make a Zine](#)
- (2) Zine examples: [How to: Zines](#), [Cherokee Nation Zine](#)

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Appendix 1

Guiding questions: resistance and resilience

Chapter 2: The “Indian Problem”

- (1) Who was Ely Parker and why was he the first Native American to lead the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)?
- (2) How did Ely Parker's resignation from the BIA and the Indian Appropriations Act change the relationship between the U.S. and tribal governments?
- (3) How did Chief Joseph lead Nez Perce resistance to colonization? What was his message to Congress when he traveled to Washington, D.C.?

- (4) What happened to the Ponca tribe after they left Indian Territory for their ancestral homeland in Nebraska?
- (5) Why was the Carlisle Indian Industrial School established, and what was the plan of its founder, Richard Henry Pratt?
- (6) Describe daily life, including classroom routines, for Native American children at Carlisle and other boarding schools.
- (7) What evidence of boarding school abuse was exposed by the Meriam Report?
- (8) Explain the General Allotment Act, also known as the Dawes Act, and its effects on land ownership amongst Native Americans.
- (9) Describe the consequences of federal law enforcement (Indian police) on reservations.
- (10) What bargaining and legal strategies helped the Ojibwe and Menominee retain much of their land in present-day Minnesota and Wisconsin?

Chapter 5: Becoming Indian

- (1) Describe the origins and work of the National Congress of American Indians.
- (2) Why was the American Indian Movement (AIM) founded, and how was this organization inspired by the NAACP and Black Panthers?
- (3) Explain the importance of AIM's occupation of Alcatraz to the Civil Rights era.
- (4) Describe the purpose and strategy of AIM's "Trail of Broken Treaties."
- (5) What happened to Raymond Yellow Thunder and how did his death cause unrest on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation?
- (6) Explain the causes and consequences of the siege at [Wounded Knee in 1973](#).
- (7) Describe the positive effects of the Indian Education Act and American Indian Religious Freedom Act on Native American students across the United States.

Chapter 7: Digital Indians

- (1) Describe current healthcare concerns and barriers for Native communities.
- (2) Explain the problem of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, and activism by people like Nicole Matthews to advocate for Native American women.
- (3) What is the Dakota Access Pipeline, and why was its construction controversial?
- (4) Describe the protests on the Standing Rock Reservation in 2016, including the arguments by the Standing Rock Sioux against the pipeline.
- (5) How are Native Americans currently engaging digitally and/or politically to advance initiatives for their people?
- (6) How did COVID-19 disproportionately affect Native communities?

Source(s): [Appendix 1](#) Author's own creation

Appendix 2

Table A1. IDM: Scaffolded inquiry and enrichment resources

Inquiry design model (IDM) Blueprint™		
Compelling question Standards and practices	How have Native Americans encountered and resisted colonialism since 1890? C3 Framework, Dimension 2 D2.Civ.5.9–12. Evaluate citizens’ and institutions’ effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level D2.Geo.5.9–12. Evaluate how political and economic decisions throughout time have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics of various places and regions D2.His.5.9–12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives D2.His.14.9–12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past	
Staging the question	(1) Teacher-led reading of Prologue (Wounded Knee Massacre and background).Supporting video: Sitting Bull & Wounded Knee (PBS, 2023) (2) Read Chapters 2, 5, and 7 (3) Answer and review responses to Guiding Questions (Appendix 1)	
Supporting question 1	Supporting question 2	Supporting question 3
How has the United States government attempted to solve the “Indian Problem?”	How have Native Americans resisted efforts to undermine their sovereignty?	What issues do Native American communities currently face in maintaining their culture and unity?
Formative performance task 1 (chapter 2, the “Indian Problem”)	Formative performance task 2 (chapter 5, becoming Indian)	Formative performance task 3 (chapter 7, digital Indians)
Analyze the effects of the Dawes Act and allotment policies on Native American land ownership, including the reservation system Examine the aims, functions, and legacies of boarding schools	Describe the role of AIM in the occupation of Alcatraz and the siege at Wounded Knee (1973) Analyze the Dakota Access Pipeline protests and their effect on modern Native American activism	Explain the importance of tribal language preservation Understand Native youth perspectives on boarding schools Evaluate the importance of <i>McGirt v. Oklahoma</i> for tribal sovereignty
Featured sources	Featured sources	Featured sources
(1) Dawes Act and Allotment (Origins at Ohio State University, 2024) (2) How the US stole thousands of Native American children (Vox, 2019) (3) Native American reservations explained (Geography Now, 2023)	(1) Occupation of Alcatraz (Retro Report, 2024) (2) Wounded Knee, 1973 (Native American History Channel, 2022) (3) Dakota Access Pipeline (Vox, 2016)	(1) Cherokee language preservation (For Our People, 2023) (2) Boarding schools and Native youth today (Above the Noise, 2021) (3) Fight over Native sovereignty In Oklahoma (Vice News, 2024)
Summative Performance task	<i>Argument</i> Construct a Zine that discusses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from the text <u>and</u> enrichment sources Zine resources: https://guides.library.cornell.edu/zines101/make (Cornell, 2025)	
Taking informed action	<i>Extension</i> Write a five-paragraph essay that answers the compelling. The three supporting questions in this IDM should be used as topics for each body paragraph Understand: The need for critical perspectives on Native American history, and its relationship to the visibility of perceptions of Native communities today Assess: Opportunities for additional counternarratives about Native American history not chronicled in <i>The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee</i> Act: Propose a new social studies standard that teaches about an event detailed in the text that demonstrates the importance of increased awareness of Native American history	
Source(s): Appendix 2 Author’s own creation		

Appendix 3

Five-paragraph essay template

Paragraph 1: Introduction

Background Information:

Thesis Statement/Main Argument:

Paragraph 2: First Body Paragraph

Topic Sentence:

Supporting Details:

Paragraph 3: Second Body Paragraph

Topic Sentence:

Supporting Details:

Paragraph 4: Third Body Paragraph

Topic Sentence:

Supporting Details:

Paragraph 5: Conclusion

Summary of Arguments and their Implications/Importance

Source(s): [Appendix 3](#) Author's own creation

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