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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2016 Volume I: Contemporary American Indian History

Code-Switching: From Indian Boarding Schools to Urban Classrooms

Guide for Curriculum Unit 16.01.10, published September 2016

by Stephanie Zavacky

In this unit, I question the practice of requiring students to culturally and linguistically code-switch in urban classrooms as a form of assimilation. Students will examine the detrimental effects and legacy of American Indian boarding schools, particularly at the Carlisle Indian School run by Richard Henry Pratt. Students will analyze the recent efforts of tribal schools to infuse and encourage culture in their students' educational experience at the Rough Rock Community School and the Oneida Nation High School. Students will also examine the need for American Indians to code-switch when attending a non-reservation school using the novel, *The Absolutely True Story of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. Students will make observations about when and where they must code-switch to "fit in." To conclude, students will participate in the current debate surrounding student use of slang and African American English (formerly known as Ebonics) in the urban classroom.

(Developed for Civics, grade 9; recommended for U. S. History, U. S. Government, Sociology, and English/Literature, grades 9-12)

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