

## WHY TEACH INDIGENOUS HISTORY?

Indigenous history teaches students to think critically about history, see Indigenous peoples with empathy as equal members in the historical timeline, and grants the students a cultural understanding of tribes as distinct nations of people. The breadth and depth of Indigenous history is filled with cross-cutting educational concepts that can be woven into many subjects.

The curriculum that most current teachers learned in their own education prioritizes the perspective of the European settlers over that of the Native Americans. This treatment tends to flatten cultural differences between tribes and whitewash the atrocities of colonization and dispossession. The students of tomorrow will have the opportunity to see the world differently, with a focus on equitable, empathetic, and culturally inclusive history.

## INQUIRY QUESTION

**What are the benefits and challenges of teaching Indigenous curriculum and history in an elementary classroom?**

## TPEP CRITERION 4

**Providing clear and intentional focus on subject matter content and curriculum.**

## RESEARCH FOCUS

Examining a perspective that is rarely emphasized in contrast to the viewpoints of the dispossessing settlers and invading governments is an opportunity for students to develop a nuanced view of history and of the land on which they reside. With this understanding comes an appreciation for the continuity of Indigenous histories into the tribes and reservations that persist today. Within the topic of teaching Indigenous history in elementary school, I look primarily at cultural understanding, cultivating empathy for marginalized groups, and developing respect for Indigenous history and historical injustices.

## WHITEWASHING AND BENEVOLENT INTENT

The “California Mission Project” is a common project in which students construct a historic Catholic mission. Mission structures were designed to “destroy Indigenous lifeways and convert Indigenous peoples to Catholicism,” among other crimes. California’s missions are emblems of a gruesome history and yet remain celebrated and defining. **Whitewashing** this history into an appealing crafts project for elementary students is an example of the all-too-common **ritual avoidance** we see in historical curriculum. **Benevolent intent** can minimize Indigenous suffering as “collateral damage,” incidental in the progress of the colonizing nation’s history.

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

This year I designed and taught a 3-day “mini-unit” to a class of 4th graders. We explored the 1863 Treaty Council of the Lapwai between the US Government and the Nez Perce tribe. We:

- Observed changes to Native lands during period of settlement using a map
- Read original Nez Perce speeches from the council transcript
- Acted out an analogy for the Nez Perce's land dispossession using desks

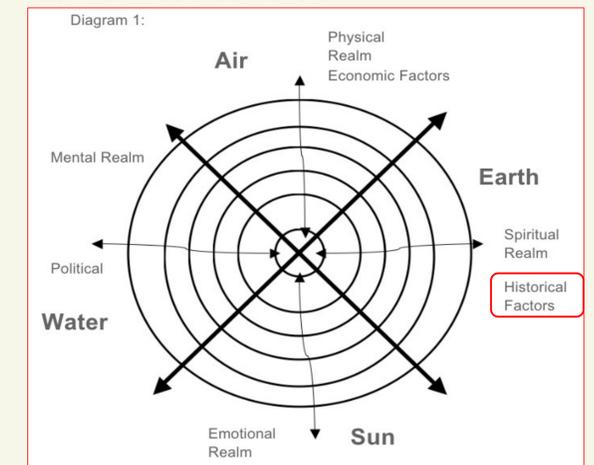
I witnessed engagement, empathy, critical thinking, and cultural learning. Students don't just want to learn Indigenous history; they care about what it means.

## CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ABOUT VIOLENCE/ATROCITIES

Teaching historical violence to children presents its own challenges. “Intellectually honest” teaching of colonial history (as in that of the Americas) must confront the topic of violence. There is no scholarly consensus on when or how students should be introduced to violent histories. In teaching about Indigenous histories, it becomes a teacher’s choice of how to present or omit this violence. What is crucial is *honesty*. Whitewashing history is harmful in equal measure.

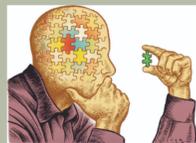
## INDIGENOUS WHOLISTIC THEORY

Indigenous Wholistic Theory is focused on interconnectedness as a view frame for personal growth. At the center of the theory is a balance described by a “Medicine Wheel.” About the wheel are the Indigenous elements of the whole. Absalon’s research of wholistic practices does not include **history** by coincidence – historical factors closely relate to the whole. History is part of each of us and affects our whole.



## 4 Benefits of teaching INDIGENOUS HISTORY

1 Builds **EMPATHY** and **UNDERSTANDING**



2 Teaches **CRITICAL THINKING** skills

3 Promotes **MULTICULTURAL INCLUSION**

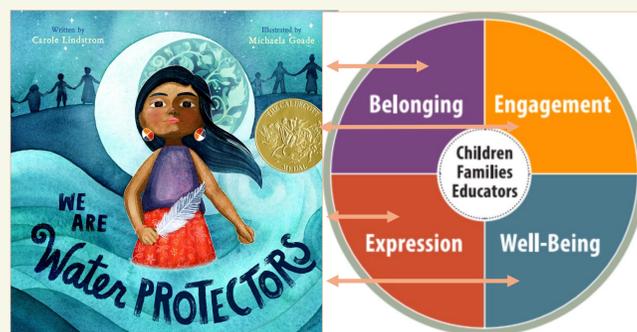


4 Empowers **INDIGENOUS STUDENTS**



## WITH STORIES: PRIMARY EDUCATION

- Models what Indigenous culture looks like and sounds like
- Allow young students to engage with “play, dialogue, and experiential opportunities”
- Depicts Indigenous peoples historically and contemporarily (*We Are Water Protectors*)



“CELEBRATION,  
NOT ASSIMILATION”

SCAN ME  
FOR  
BIBLIO-  
GRAPHY



## IN WA: SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL

“Since Time Immemorial” curriculum is designed to integrate the history, culture, and governance of the Native American tribes in the region into K-12 public education. It has been endorsed by all 29 federally recognized tribes of Washington State. STI curriculum represents a significant step toward inclusive education, acknowledging the importance of Native American contributions to the state’s history and ensuring that all students gain a more accurate and respectful understanding of the state’s cultural diversity.

