

When We Were Alone: Every Child Matters



Lesson Summary

- © Gently explore the history and experiences of Native American children who attended boarding school.

Lesson Plan and Procedure

Teacher Instructions

Please read through the entire lesson plan, and prepare the list of essential materials (found below), before you begin teaching.

This lesson was written with great love for all children, past and present. Every child matters. The subject matter is difficult to address. Teach it with sensitivity, respect, and compassion. We desire to focus on ways to empower children in navigating their own difficulties and challenges with resilience, hope, and courage. They can look to the wisdom keepers in their own lives to teach, guide, and support them. We hope that gentle truth-telling, through the sharing of *When We Were Alone*, will invite empathy and understanding and allow students to discover their own personal connections. Every child matters.

Lesson

Upload [Orange Shirt](#), [Day of Remembrance Lesson: Slideshow](#)

Pantomime activity

Slide 1: Elders, Wisdom Keepers

Teacher: *In Native American culture, the Elders of a tribe are highly regarded. An Elder may be a cherished grown-up, a parent, an aunt or uncle, a grandparent, a leader, a storyteller, etc. Elders are looked to as the "wisdom-keepers". The Elders pass on their cherished traditions, language, and culture. This provides tribal members with deep connections to their timeless personal heritage and identity. Native American children look to their Elders for guidance, for teaching, and for learning.*



Slide 2: Ask: Who do you look to as a "wisdom keeper" in your life?
(allow time for student response)

Teacher: *Think for a moment of something your personal "wisdom keeper" has taught you. Picture it in your mind. I am going to pantomime something one of my personal wisdom keepers has taught me. Watch and see if you can guess what I learned...*

Lesson Key Facts

- © **Grade(s):** 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
- © **Subject(s):** Drama, English Language Arts, Health, Social Studies, Native American
- © **Duration of lesson:** 30-45 minutes
- © **Author(s):** Yvette Ward May

Pantomime one of your own personal memories. Here are some examples:

- ☉ My grandmother taught me how to carefully wash and dry the dishes. She would say, “The drier gets what the washer misses.”
- ☉ My dad taught me to look for ways to help my neighbors, like mowing their lawn or raking their leaves.
- ☉ My big sister taught me how to sew my own clothes using a sewing machine.

Invite children to guess what you were doing. Then share what you learned and who taught you.

Teacher: *I'm looking for a few volunteers. Who would be willing to pantomime for us, something you have learned from an elder or “wisdom-keeper” in your own life?*

Select 3 or more children to participate. Invite each of them to pantomime, one at a time. The class will watch and then try to guess what they're doing. After that, the volunteer children will share what they learned, and who taught them.

Thank each of the participants and those in the audience.

Teacher: *We can learn so much from the wisdom-keepers in our own lives. They were children like us once. They have made the journey of life through good times and difficult times. Many of the children who attended Native American Boarding schools are now grown-up Elders and wisdom-keepers. They have important stories and memories to tell. Some memories are good. Some are hard to share. Let's learn more.*

Every Child Matters, Orange Shirt Day Puzzle.pdf



Teacher: *I have placed four orange puzzle pieces (underneath some chairs, around the room) If you find one, hold it in your hand.*

When the pieces are all found. Invite #1- #4 to come to the front of the class and read their paragraphs in their “stage” voice, which is a full voice. So that everyone can hear. Then they can stick up their puzzle pieces on the front board, and work together to place the pieces where they think they should go. (The orange t-shirt side facing forward, to spell the message, “Every Child Matters”)

Slide 3: About David Robertson and *When We Were Alone*

Read the book *When We Were Alone*. If you don't have a copy of the book, you can also use: *When We Were Alone, read aloud* (5:33).

Class Conversation

Teacher: *What are some of the true events that happened in this book?*

(Student answers will vary. E.g: They went to a school far away from home; Their clothes were exchanged for uniforms; Long hair was cut off; Children could not speak in their native language; They had to learn and speak English; Boys and girls were separated; Siblings were not supposed to be together.)

Teacher: *What did No'kom teach No'sisim about how she was able to create and feel happiness at boarding school, and preserve her identity as a grown-up?*

(Student answers will vary. E.g: She cherished her Native American heritage. To remember the beautiful colors of her home and community, No'kom and her friend covered themselves in colorful autumn leaves and when she grew up, she wore colorful clothes all the time because it made her feel happy. No'kom and her friend braided blades of grass into their short-cut hair, and No'kom grew her hair long because this showed strength and pride in her heritage. She whispered with her friend in their native language, Cree, where no one could hear, and spoke it freely when she was a grown-up. No'kom held her brother's hand outside when no one was watching. Later, she surrounded herself with family.)

Teacher: *We can learn so much from our own “wisdom keepers” about how to find beauty and happiness, no matter our circumstances. We can learn by simply asking them questions, hearing their stories, and listening deeply, just as No'sisim did with her grandmother.*

Activity: Remembrance and Affirmation Circle

Teacher: *The Native American children whom we honor and remember on Orange Shirt Day, went through hard times. In order to get through, they had to endure loneliness, find hope, and be courageous in honoring their personal identity and in creating happiness like No'kom did.*

Move chairs and desks as needed to create a reader's remembrance and affirmation circle. When the classroom is prepared, invite all of the students to sit or stand together and make a large full-class circle.

Note: Circles are important in Native American culture as they represent the life cycle, the sun, the moon, the changing seasons, and often healing. Coming together in a circle is a very old way of bringing native people of all ages together in unity in a respectful manner for the purposes of teaching, learning, celebrating, and sharing. The circle is important because everyone can see each other. Everyone is equal. No one is in front of or behind another. Yes, every child matters.

Teacher: *Welcome to our circle. Every child matters. All of us can see and hear each other.*

Pass out scripts.

Teacher: Each of you has received a script. Everyone will need to follow along closely. There will be parts that we will read all together. Those lines say "Everyone", and each person will have at least one or two lines of affirmation to share. You will take turns speaking a line as we go around the circle in this direction, from start to finish. You may keep this script to remind you of things you can think of and do in difficult, happy, and ordinary times. When reading, please use your stage voice, which is a full-voice. So that your words can be heard.

Important preparatory note: Teachers, please be the leading voice, when "Everyone" speaks together. Invite students to read-along with you on these parts. So, that you can be as one voice.

Read through, then perform the script together: [Affirmations- Empowering Every Child Script.pdf](#)

When finished, express appreciation for student efforts and participation. Ask students to find one affirmation that was meaningful to them to speak and review in their minds, during the next week.

Teacher: *As your teacher, I am a kind of wisdom-keeper in your lives. I have something important to share with you. Please receive it as a gift. It is my wish for you.* (You may read the following slide, or use your own words to convey your wish for your students.)

Slide 4: My Wish for You

Concluding Activity: Orange Shirt Day Remembrance

[Orange Hearts Template](#) (Print on orange paper or cardstock and cut into four square pieces. Print as many as needed for one heart per student)

Invite students to write something they learned or want to remember about Orange Shirt Day on an orange heart, and stick them up around the room, or in a chosen location in your classroom.

Learning Objectives

- Ⓞ Students will gain a gentle understanding of true historical events that deeply affected Native American children who attended boarding schools.
- Ⓞ Students will contemplate these experiences and find connections to their own lives, through dramatic improvisation, reading, and discussing the book *When We Were Alone*.
- Ⓞ Students will grow in empathy, understanding, and honored remembrance.
- Ⓞ Students will participate in a reader's theatre circle. . .giving voice to words of affirmation and empowering ideals that can be used to strengthen their minds, choices, and actions.

Utah State Board of Education Standards

This lesson can be used to meet [standards](#) in many grades and subject areas. We will highlight one grade's standards to give an example of application.

Health Grade 4

- Ⓞ **Standard 4.HF.2:** Describe how choices can have positive and negative consequences and give examples of how a person's decisions can be positively or negatively influenced by others, including peers.
- Ⓞ **Standard 4.HF.3:** Recognize and accept that reasonable people can have differing opinions.
- Ⓞ **Standard 4.HF.4:** Distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Ⓞ **Standard 4.MEH.3:** Define empathy and practice demonstrating empathy with peers.

English Language Arts: Grade 4

- ⊙ **Standard 4.SL.1:** Participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations, using age-appropriate vocabulary, on topics, texts, and issues.
 - a. Respectfully acknowledge and respond to comments and claims.
 - b. Participate in conversations by asking questions, acknowledging new information, connecting responses with reasoning and elaboration, and keeping the discussion on topic.
- ⊙ **Standard 4.SL.3:** Use age-appropriate language, grammar, volume, and clear pronunciation when speaking or presenting.
- ⊙ **Standard 4.R.6:** Read a variety of text types, including those from diverse cultures to determine a theme or main idea and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize texts using textual evidence. (RL & RI)
- ⊙ **Standard 4.R.7:** Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text. (RL) Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text. (RI)
- ⊙ **Standard 4.R.8:** Determine the meaning of words, phrases, figurative language, academic and content-specific words within a text. (RL & RI)

Drama: Grade 4

- ⊙ **Standard 4.T.CR.1:** Develop imagination to create artistic ideas and work.
- ⊙ **Standard 4.T.CR.2:** Arrange the physical playing space to communicate mood, time, and locale.
- ⊙ **Standard 4.T.CR.5:** Create character through imagination, physical movement, gesture, sound and/or speech and facial expression.
- ⊙ **Standard 4.T.P.2:** Demonstrate the ability to work effectively alone and cooperatively, with a partner or in an ensemble.
- ⊙ **Standard 4.T.P.4:** Communicate meaning using the body through space, shape, energy and gesture.
- ⊙ **Standard 4.T.P.5:** Communicate meaning using the voice through volume, pitch, tone, rate, and clarity.
- ⊙ **Standard 4.T.P.6:** Use imagination to support artistic choices.
- ⊙ **Standard 4.T.R.1:** Demonstrate audience skills of observing attentively and responding appropriately.
- ⊙ **Standard 4.T.CO.1:** Identify similarities between story elements and personal experiences in dramatic play or guided drama experiences.
- ⊙ **Standard 4.T.CO.2:** Read, listen to, and tell stories from a variety of cultures, genres, and styles; identify the characters, setting, plot, theme and conflict in these plays and stories; and identify historical, global, and social issues connecting them through a drama/theatre work.

Social Studies Grade 4

FOURTH GRADE STRAND 3: EXPANSION (1847-1896)

Compelling Questions:

- ⊙ How did Native American life change as settlement continued?

Equipment and Materials Needed

- ⊙ Upload: [Orange Shirt, Day of Remembrance Lesson: Slideshow](#)
- ⊙ Print: [Orange Shirt Day Puzzle. pdf](#)
 - ⊙ Print 1 copy, on both sides, on orange paper or cardstock.
 - ⊙ Cut puzzle into 4 pieces, and tape the numbered pieces under student chairs, or on your walls, where students will find them during the lesson.
- ⊙ Book: [When We Were Alone](#), by David A. Roberts and Julie Flett, available on Amazon, or upload the video-book for students to watch: [When We Were Alone, read aloud](#).
- ⊙ Preparatory note: For accurate reading pronunciations, please refer to [this version](#), read by the author.
- ⊙ Print, collate, and staple: [Affirmations- Empowering Every Child Script.pdf](#)
 - ⊙ 1 copy for each student to keep
- ⊙ Print [Orange Hearts Template](#)
 - ⊙ Print on orange cardstock or paper, enough copies so that every student can have a heart to write on.
 - ⊙ Cut the papers into 4 equal pieces.
- ⊙ Familiarize yourself with this vocabulary:
 - ⊙ **Truth-telling:** telling the facts openly, honestly, and accurately.
 - ⊙ **Reconciliation:** the act of coming to an understanding and putting an end to hostility. The process of comparing and resolving apparent differences in historic records. Reconciliation, as an outcome, is an improvement in the relations among parties formerly at odds with one another.
 - ⊙ **Cree:** (Nēhiyaw, Nēhiyawak, Nīhithaw, Nēhilaw, and Nēhinaw; or Ininiw, Iliiw, Innu, Iyyu) The Algonquian-speaking First Nations people of Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. The Cree tribe is one of the largest American Indian groups in North America.
 - ⊙ **Dormitory:** a large room, especially at a school or institution, containing many beds.

- © **Indigenous:** the people inhabiting or existing in a land from the earliest times, or from before the arrival of colonists.
- © **Boarding School:** a school where pupils live within premises while being given formal instruction.

Additional Resources

- © **Additional optional activity:** Following the reading of your wish for the students, found on Slide 4, invite students to work in groups to plan and improvise some of the following scenarios: [Improvisation Scenarios. pdf](#). Print this PDF and cut it into strips.
- © Optional extension activity: For enhancing positivity, growth-mindset, and forward progress, relate this activity to ways we can use art to express our feelings, create beauty, and navigate difficult times in our lives. Divide the class into smaller groups. Give each of them a copy of a poem or quote from this collection: [6 Inspiring Poems and Quotes](#). Invite students to read and create an artful presentation of their poem or quote and share it with the class. (Ex: Choral and solo reading, movement and sound effects added, one student reads aloud while others act it out)
- © <https://teambuilding.com/blog/indigenous-heritage-quotes>
- © For teachers only: [Voices from the boarding schools: Direct quotes from superintendents, teachers, students, the Supreme Court, and special reports to the Secretary of the Interior | Memories of the People](#)
- © For teachers only: [These quotes from residential school Survivors can help kids \(and parents\) understand their experiences](#)

This lesson is sponsored by the [National Endowment of the Arts](#) and the [Utah Division of Arts & Museums](#).

Image References

- © Image 1: Canva, Senior Native American Grandmother with Teenage Granddaughter, by: grandriver
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