Grades: high school  
Subjects: U.S. History, English  
Time Required: Two 50-60 minute class periods  
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**OVERVIEW**

In this lesson, students will analyze photographs and documents related to American Indian assimilation through education. By examining these primary sources, students will understand how assimilation through education contributed to the myth of the vanishing race, as well as the importance of incorporating multiple viewpoints into research. Then, students will examine the work of two photographers of American Indians, Edward Curtis and Adam Clark Vroman, to understand how photography contributed to the myth of the vanishing race.

**GOAL**

Students will
- Learn how to write text supported by images
- Analyze a series of primary sources to understand viewpoint and intended audience
- Understand how different primary sources supported the “myth of the vanishing race”

**OBJECTIVES**

The learner will
- Analyze primary sources to understand a specific viewpoint
- Construct a narrative based on primary sources
- Analyze photographs to understand intended purpose

**INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION**

What is the myth of the vanishing race and how was this myth perpetuated?

**MATERIALS & RESOURCES**

Included here:
- Lesson plan, pp. 1-5
- Background Information sheet on Adam Clark Vroman and Edward Curtis, p. 6
- Excerpts from “The Myth of the Vanishing Race,” by David R. M. Beck (full essay available here), pp. 7-8
- Primary Source Set 1 with accompanying worksheet, pp. 9-10
- Primary Source Set 2 with accompanying worksheet, pp. 11-12

Available by links:
- “The Myth of the Vanishing Race: Adam Clark Vroman, Edward Curtis & The American Indian” PowerPoint
- Primary Source Analysis Tool
- Teacher's Guide, Analyzing Photographs & Prints
**CURRICULUM STANDARDS**

**High School U.S. History**
- US.02 Examine federal policies toward American Indians, including: the movement to reservations, assimilation, boarding schools, and the Dawes Act.

**English**
- 9-10.RI.KID.1 Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; cite the strongest, most compelling textual evidence to support conclusions.
- 9-10.RI.KID.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development; provide an objective or critical summary.
- 9-10.RI.IKI.7 Evaluate the topic or subject in two diverse formats or media.
- 9-10.W.TTP.3 Write narrative fiction or literary nonfiction to convey experiences and/or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRIMARY SOURCES**
- [Carlisle Indian School, Carlisle, Pa. Carriage shop], [1901]
- [Carlisle Indian School, Carlisle, Pa. Clothes mending class], [1901]
- Vanishing race – Navaho  [c. 1904]
- Kopeli, Snake priest (Walpi), [c. 1900]
- Three Horses, [c. 1905]
- Turquois driller (Zuni) [working, Acoma, San Juan, New Mexico], [c. 1900]
- A Moki potter (Oraibe), [c. 1900]
- Oglala war-party (The North American Indian; v.03), [c. 1907] Oglala war party  [c. 1907, detail]
- The mealing trough – Hopi,  [c. 1906]
- In a Piegan lodge (The North American Indian; v.06), [c. 1910]
- In a Piegan lodge [c. 1910]

**DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY PRIMARY SOURCES**
- Chiricahua Apaches four months after arriving at Carlisle  [1886]
- Chiricahua Apaches as they arrived at Carlisle from Fort Marion, Florida  [1886]
- Thos. Torlino tribe (Navajo)  [1886] Before attending Carlisle
DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY PRIMARY SOURCES (CONTINUED)

- Thos. Torlino (Tribe) Navajo, Arizona [1886] After attending Carlisle

OTHER PRIMARY SOURCES

- “The School Days of an Indian Girl” [1921]
- The American Missionary, Volume 35 (“Letters from Indian Boys.”) [1881]
- The American Missionary, Volume 40 (“Letter from a Little Indian Girl.”) [1886]

PROCEDURE

DAY 1:

Step 1: Before class begins, read the excerpts from the article, “The Myth of the Vanishing Race” by David R.M. Beck on the provided handout. In addition, print out copies of the Primary Source Sets and accompanying worksheets. Summarize the article, “The Myth of the Vanishing Race” for the class.

Step 2: Allow students time to ask any questions they have about the article (the photographer mentioned in the article, Edward Curtis, will be incorporated later in this lesson). What is the myth of the vanishing race? Why is it important in understanding this time period?

Step 3: Divide the class into two groups. Give each group a different Primary Source Set and accompanying worksheet (provided). Have the students examine their Primary Source Set and complete their worksheet (Primary Source set 1 contains contrasting photographs of American Indians “before arrival” at Carlisle Boarding School and “after arrival.” It also contains a quote from a Sioux girl, who had a negative experience. Primary Source set 2 contains two photographs of Carlisle Indian School and quotes from two American Indians that offer a more positive experience at the school).

Step 4: Have each group explain what types of sources were in its Primary Source Set to the class, and ask a member of each group to read the diary entry that his/her group created.

Step 5: Compare and contrast the diary entries as a class. How do these sources contribute to the myth of the vanishing race? Why is it important to have a variety of primary sources, including a variety of personal experiences when interpreting the past? How has this exercise changed your thinking about evaluating different primary sources that contain different viewpoints? As a class, construct a new diary entry of a fictional American Indian student. Be sure to take into consideration that students had both positive and negative experiences.
PROCEDURE

DAY 2:

Step 6: Print out a copy of the Background Information on Adam Clark Vroman and Edward Curtis and two Primary Source Analysis Tools for each student.

Step 7: Have students read the provided background information on Adam Clark Vroman and Edward Curtis.

Step 8: Show the students the selected images taken by Adam Clark Vroman in the accompanying PowerPoint, and have them fill out the Primary Source Analysis Tool. Use the Teacher’s Guide: Analyzing Photographs & Prints to prompt discussion. How did Vroman portray the American Indian? Is his portrayal a truthful representation?

Step 9: Show the students the selected images taken by Edward Curtis in the accompanying PowerPoint, and have them fill out the Primary Source Analysis Tool. How did Curtis portray the American Indian? How are Curtis’s images different from Vroman’s?

Step 10: Have the students read the next PowerPoint slide about Curtis’s methods of photographing American Indians. Then show students the next two slides. The first is an example of Curtis’s methods of retouching. The other challenges students to compare Vroman’s and Curtis’s methods. What do you think of Curtis’s photos now? How did Curtis’s photos illustrate the myth of the vanishing race? Why should you always understand the context that a photo was taken in? What can you still learn about American Indian culture from the photographs? How will this activity help you analyze photographs in the future?

Step 11: Divide the class in two groups. For homework, have one group write a journal entry from the viewpoint of Curtis. Have them pretend they are Curtis, and that they have just spent a day photographing a group of American Indians. The journal entry should explain the activities of the day. Did you move anything? Did you dress up anyone? If so, why did you? For homework, have the second group write a journal entry from the viewpoint of an American Indian that has just been photographed by Curtis. What did Curtis make you do? Did you have to dress up? How did it make you feel being photographed?

The mealng trough – Hopi, [c. 1906]
PROCEDURE, DAY 2 continued

Step 12: The next day, have students from each group read their journal entries to the class. Discuss the differences in viewpoint. Have a class debate answering the questions: Was Curtis ethical? Why or why not? Did Curtis’s images play into stereotypes of American Indians? Is Curtis suggesting that only "real" or "authentic" Indians wear elaborate headdresses and live in tipis? In other words, does he have a contrived notion of what an American Indian should look like? Why or why not?

EXTENSION

Print out a copy of the Cartoon Analysis Guide for each student to help them analyze political cartoons. Then, show the students the following cartoons:

- The Indian tepee. Then and now [c.1908, see right]
- Educating the Indians—a female pupil of the government school at Carlisle visits her home at Pine Ridge Agency [1884]

How do the cartoons illustrate the myth of the vanishing race and the U.S. government’s policy of forced assimilation?

EVALUATION

90-100 Thoroughly fills out the Primary Source Analysis Tools, frequently participates in group and class discussions, completes a carefully written journal entry that answers all of the questions and uses proper punctuation and grammar.

80-89 Fills out most of the Primary Source Analysis Tool, participates in group and class discussions several times, completes a journal entry that answers all of the questions but has a couple of punctuation and grammar mistakes.

70-79 Fills out some of the Primary Source Analysis Tool, participates at least once in group and class discussions, completes a journal entry that answers some of the questions and has several punctuation and grammar mistakes.

69 and below Only writes one or two items under each category on the Primary Source Analysis Tool, does not participate in group discussions, completes the journal entry but does not answer most of the questions, has poor punctuation and grammar in the journal entry.
Teaching with Primary Sources Across Tennessee

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There were two main photographers, Adam Clark Vroman and Edward Curtis, who took images of American Indians in the early 20th century.

Who is Adam Clark Vroman?

Adam Clark Vroman was a photographer and bookseller between 1895 and 1904. Today, he is best known for his photographs of American Indians in the Southwest. Vroman traveled throughout California, New Mexico, and Arizona documenting the landscape, missions, and American Indians with his camera. “To Vroman the Indians of the Southwest were a living people whose way of life he admired and was privileged to share,” argued historian Beaumont Newhall. Vroman’s attitude and viewpoint was in sharp contrast with another photographer, Edward Curtis.

Who is Edward Curtis?

Edward Curtis became famous for his twenty volume photographic series, The North American Indian, which was published from 1907-1930. Curtis traveled across America to document “the old time Indian, his dress, his ceremonies, his life and manners.” His work is often considered controversial, since Curtis bought into the notion that American Indians were a “vanishing race.” He was a firm believer that it was his mission to record the traditional life of many American Indian groups before they “vanished.” For more information on Edward Curtis, read “Edward S. Curtis (1868-1952) and the North American Indian” by Mick Gidley. This article can be found here: https://www.loc.gov/collections/edward-s-curtis/articles-and-essays/edward-curtis-and-the-background-of-the-collection/
Excerpts from “The Myth of the Vanishing Race” by David R.M. Beck, Associate Professor, Native American Studies, University of Montana, 2001

By the early 20th century, when Edward Curtis began the work on what came to be the twenty-volume publication featured on this website, American Indian nations and people were largely viewed by scholars, government officials and the public at large as a vanishing race…

By Curtis’s time American Indians had endured a highly destructive, centuries-long assault on their homelands, their societies, and their cultures in physical, spiritual, and emotional terms. Under the guise first of religion and then science, Euro-American invaders had stripped the indigenous communities of this continent of nearly all of their land and resources, and carried forth an all-out attack on their languages, religions, educational systems, family structures, and systems of governance. For centuries missionaries, soldiers and government officials led this assault. By Curtis's time, humanitarian reformers, social and physical scientists, and artists lent their authority to these efforts as well.

Rapid population decline followed, and sometimes preceded, Euro-American invaders, caused not only by warfare and capture for slavery, but by diseases which Europeans had brought to this continent. The combination of violence and disease caused some tribal communities to lose as much as ninety percent of their member populations. As wave after wave of disease hit at times of early contact, communities might lose a quarter to a third of their populations time and again. This type of population loss continued well into the nineteenth century, as western tribes had first contact with Euro-Americans, and as eastern tribes were forced one after another to remove from their homelands to west of the Mississippi, with conditions weakening old and young alike, making them more susceptible to starvation and disease. All in all, a land that may well have held seven to ten million American Indians at the time of Columbus's arrival contained approximately a quarter of a million by 1900.
Policy of Forced Assimilation

Under the guise of Richard Henry Pratt's famous dictum to "kill the Indian and save the man" the federal government, through an aggressive policy of forced assimilation, attempted to destroy Indian cultures and arts, tribal societies and governments, and Native religions and families in order to "help" Indians join what was at the time believed to be the melting pot of American culture and society...The all-out assault on Indian communities was accomplished in part by taking children from their families and placing them in schools, on and off reservations, where they were forced to lose their own languages and learn the English language and American customs and manners...Indians who stayed on reservations were largely believed by the dominant society to be representatives of a rapidly passing way of life, while those who left the reservations became largely invisible in American society.

Nostalgia for an "Almost Extinct Civilization"

All of this fed into a nostalgic market in American culture that was adapted into popular entertainment systems...Wild west shows portraying re-enactments of the recent wars on the plains, with Indians in full regalia galloping against the Cavalry, reinforced the notion that tribal cultures were more part of America's past than its present...At the 1893 Columbian World's Exposition held in Chicago, for example, an Indian village set up on the Midway was meant to remind visitors of times past rather than times future. One guidebook to the fair refers to "the aborigines of this country" as an "almost extinct civilization, if civilization it is to be called"... Indian displays were placed in "natural" settings in many of these museums, in which Indians were to provide the third leg of a triad--wild plants, wild animals and "wild" people. These displays left observers with the dual perception that Indians were a part of the natural world, that they were somehow "exotic," and that they were becoming extinct...Railroad barons also used imagery of Indians as a vanishing race to sell tourist vacations to the west. Both the Santa Fe and Burlington Northern railway companies created tourism campaigns around these types of images. National Parks such as Grand Canyon and Glacier National Park displayed Indians in traditional regalia as haunting reminders of the past as part of their tourist attractions...
“Late in the morning, my friend Judéwin gave me a terrible warning. Judéwin knew a few words of English; and she had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting our long, heavy hair. Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!

We discussed our fate some moments when Judéwin said, “We have to submit, because they are strong.” I rebelled.

“No, I will not submit! I will struggle first!” I answered.

I watched my chance, and when no one noticed I disappeared…On my hands and knees I crawled under the bed, and cuddled myself in the dark corner…I remember being dragged out, though I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of myself, I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair.

I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit.”

-Zitkala Sa/Gertrude Bonnin

“The School Days of an Indian Girl” [1921]

Chiricahua Apaches as they arrived at Carlisle from Fort Marion, Florida [1886, above left]

Chiricahua Apaches four months after arriving at Carlisle [1886, bottom left]
Answer the following questions:

1. Examine the two pairs of photographs. Each pair contains a “before arrival” and an “after arrival” look at American Indians attending the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. What can you learn from these photographs about the Carlisle Indian School?

2. What questions do you have that the photographs cannot answer?

3. Read the excerpt from Zitkala Sa, a Sioux born on the Pine Ridge Reservation who was sent to a boarding school. As a group, using both the pictures and the excerpt, create a fictional character and write a diary entry about a typical day in a boarding school from an American Indian perspective.
I want to speak English. Hampton boys I like very much and colored man massachusetts I staye very good I like very much very nice eat bread caks butter tea coffee milk and sweet apples and sweet potatoes and meat and chicken. I back my home I think take again work hard. I like work I like shop very much I know how make wheels. Mr. williams show me. I like him very much I think good to make wheels I back my home very glad so see my friends Indian boys and my father and sister and mother and brother. I like very much white man and colored man and colored woman and white woman. I stayed in Boston four day very good time. I went to christmas day very nice.

Went I was Indian, I use to water my father horse. I used to hunt deer, I bring home my friend all eat. I use scout with white men. I fight Indian some no like white people they fight. dont fight now I come away my home to be like a man so I throw Indian ways. I like Hampton I work study I don't know I think like wild Indian have blanket and leggings I like Hampton I learn about God I like very much I make cart and shopse I like to work very much I do not know English talk or write I know little your friend

-Almka

The American Missionary, Volume 35 ["Letters from Indian Boys."] [1881]

“I am going to write to you. I am a Indian girl, and my Dakota name is Winona, and my English name is Fannie Frazier I am 12 years old. I stay here five years. I like to go to school. I read in the Second Reader and Dakota Bible, and White’s Arithmetic. I go to school in the morning and we sew in the afternoon.”

-Fannie Frazier

The American Missionary, Volume 40 [“Letter from a Little Indian Girl.”] [1886]
Answer the following questions:

1. Examine the two photographs of the Carlisle Indian School. What can you learn from these photographs about the school?

2. What questions do you have that the photographs cannot answer?

3. Read the two excerpts, in which two American Indians share their opinions of boarding school. As a group, use both the pictures and the excerpt to create a fictional character and write a diary entry about a typical day in a boarding school from an American Indian perspective.