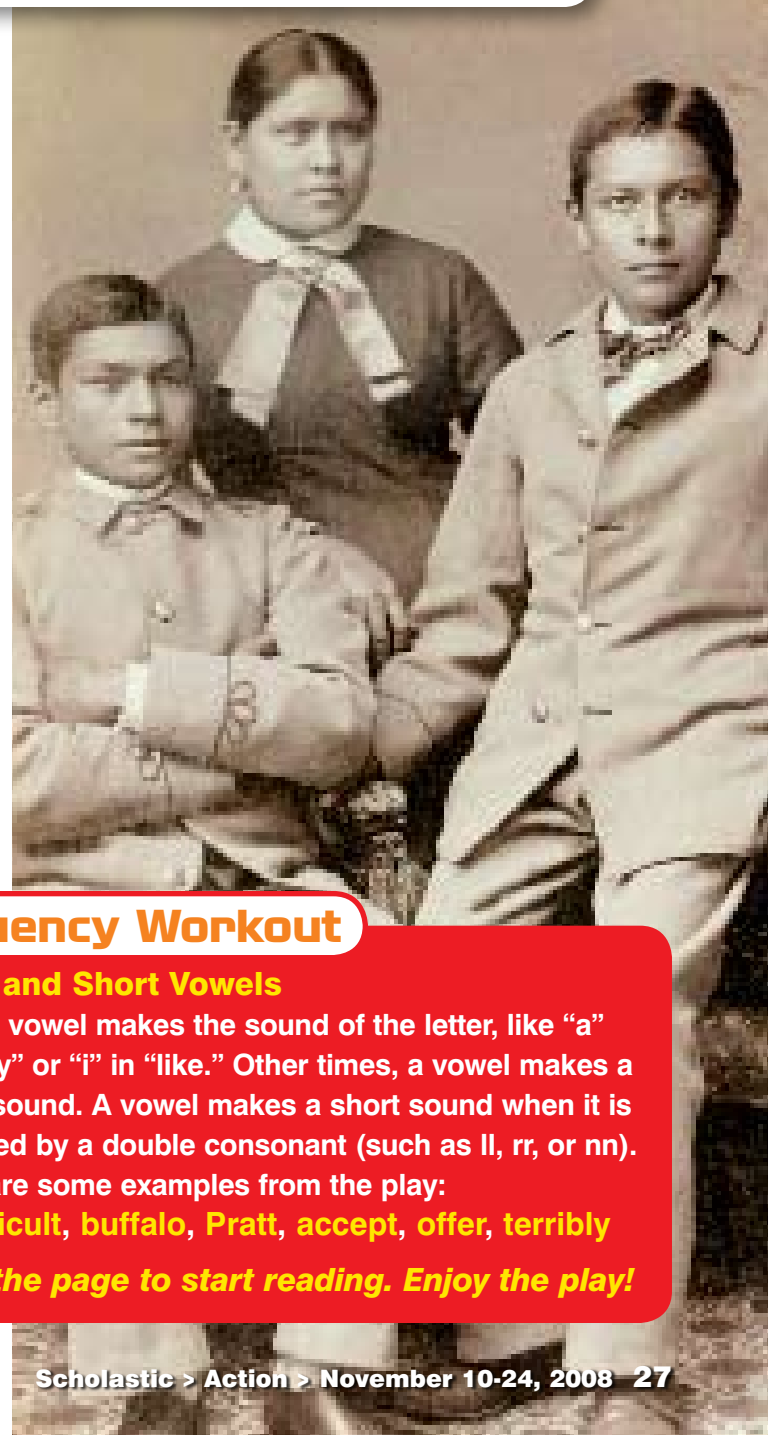
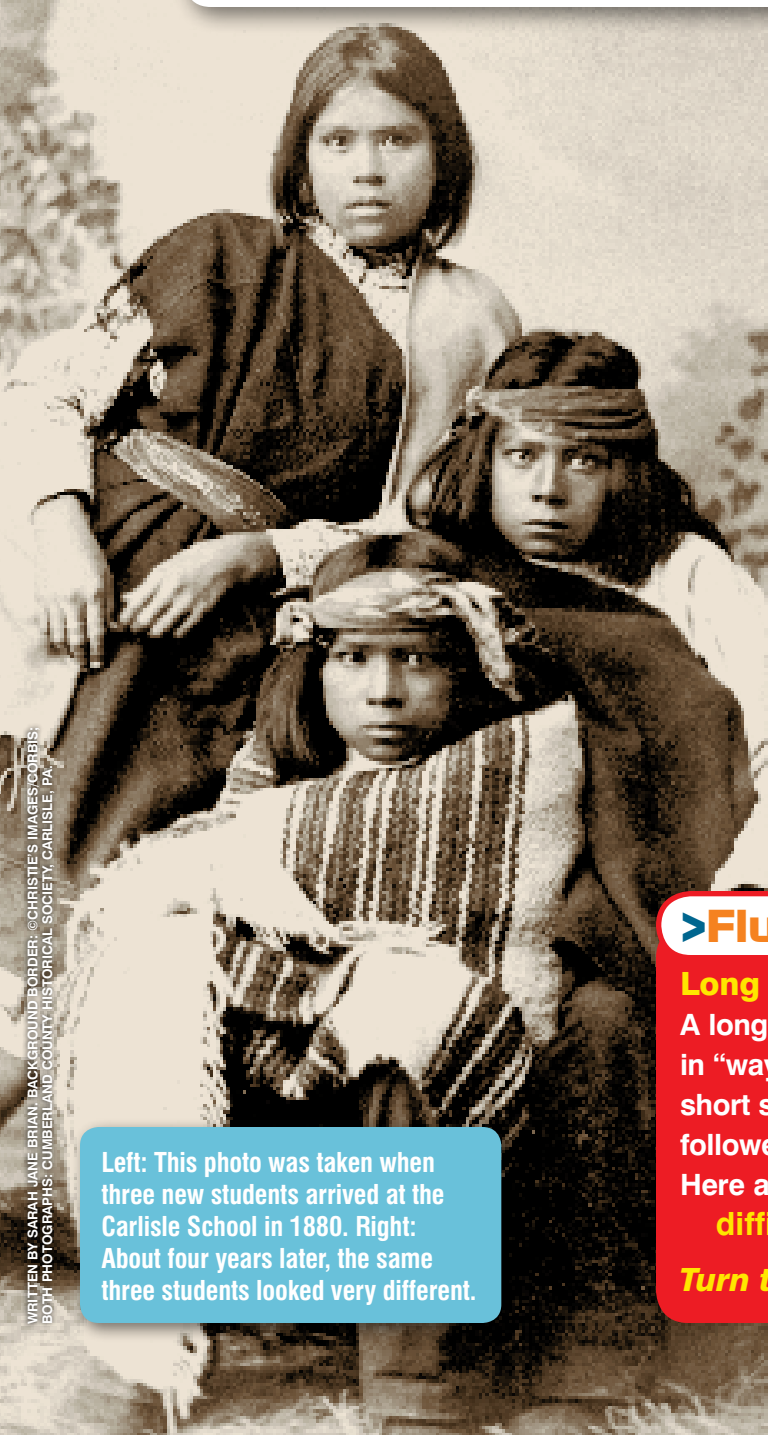


# Far From Home:

## The True Story of Indian Boarding Schools

Thousands of Native American children were once sent away to learn “the white man’s way.” Often they didn’t see their families again for months or even years.



Left: This photo was taken when three new students arrived at the Carlisle School in 1880. Right: About four years later, the same three students looked very different.

### > Fluency Workout

#### Long and Short Vowels

A long vowel makes the sound of the letter, like “a” in “way” or “i” in “like.” Other times, a vowel makes a short sound. A vowel makes a short sound when it is followed by a double consonant (such as ll, rr, or nn). Here are some examples from the play:

**difficult, buffalo, Pratt, accept, offer, terribly**

**Turn the page to start reading. Enjoy the play!**

WRITTEN BY SARAH JANE BRIAN, BACKGROUNDBORDER ©CHRISTIE IMAGES/CORBIS, PHOTOGRAPHS: CUMBERLAND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, CARLISLE, PA

## >Characters

Sign up for the character you're going to read. \*Starred characters are major roles.

\*Narrator 1 (N1)

White Thunder, a Sioux chief

\*Narrator 2 (N2)

Ota Kte, a Sioux boy

\*Narrator 3 (N3)

\*Ernest White Thunder, Chief White Thunder's son

\*Narrator 4 (N4)

Maggie Stands Looking, a Sioux girl

\*Richard Henry Pratt, a U.S. Army Captain

Teacher

Spotted Tail, a Sioux chief

## Scene 1

**N1:** It is September 1879 on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota.

**N2:** This is a difficult time for the Sioux (SOO) people. The tribe has recently lost land due to broken **treaties**, and the large herds of buffalo they depend on are disappearing.

**N3:** One day, a U.S. soldier named Captain Richard Henry Pratt comes to meet with the Sioux chiefs.

**Pratt:** I'm here to tell you about a great opportunity—a new Indian School. I ask you to send your children with me. I will teach them to speak English, to dress and act like white people, and to do jobs that whites do.

**N4:** The Sioux don't speak English. A translator repeats Pratt's words in the Sioux

language. When the Sioux speak, she repeats their words in English so Pratt can understand.

**Spotted Tail:** White people are **thieves** and liars. You will teach our children to steal and lie, too. I will not send them with you.

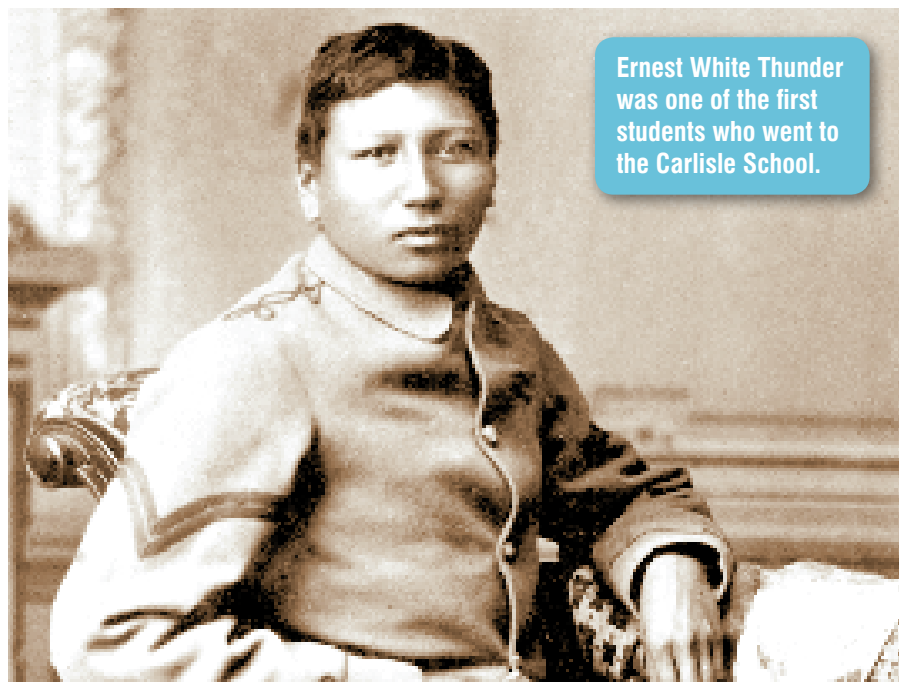
**Pratt:** Chief, you are a great leader. But you cannot read, write, or speak English. Because of this, you have lost much of your land. Times are changing. If you do not accept the education I offer, the problems of the Sioux will get worse.

**N1:** Pratt leaves. The chiefs talk about what to do.

**Spotted Tail:** If our children go to this school, they might forget our Sioux traditions.

**White Thunder:** But if we don't learn the white people's ways, we might not **survive**.

**N2:** The chiefs decide to send their children with Pratt. A few days later, the tribe gathers by the Missouri River.



Ernest White Thunder was one of the first students who went to the Carlisle School.

**Spotted Tail** (*sadly*): Goodbye, my children.

**N3:** As more than 80 young Sioux board a ship, **tearful** parents watch them go.

## Scene 2

**N4:** The boat takes the Sioux kids and teens to a train. None of them has ever ridden on a train before. An 11-year-old boy, Ota Kte, talks with Ernest White Thunder.

**Ota Kte** (*scared*): Where is Pratt taking us? He must want to kill us, the way the soldiers kill our warriors in battle!

**Ernest:** An older boy said they are going to throw us off the edge of the Earth.

**N1:** The train carries the children hundreds of miles. In October, the students arrive at the new Carlisle School in Pennsylvania. They are more than 1,000 miles from home.

## Scene 3

**N2:** Soon after they arrive, a barber comes to the school. All the boys and the younger girls must have their hair cut short.

**N3:** Long hair is **meaningful** to the Sioux people. Cutting it is a sign of sadness or shame. Students cry as their hair is cut.

**N4:** The children must also give up traditional leggings, moccasins, and blankets. Boys are given **military** uniforms to wear. Girls get dresses with long rows of buttons.

**N1:** Some of the students like their new clothes. Others find them terribly uncomfortable.

**Ota Kte** (*proudly*): Look at me—a real suit with pockets! And just listen to my boots squeak!

**Ernest:** Are you kidding? These boots are so heavy and

stiff, I can barely walk.

**N2:** The school is very strict, and it is run like the Army. Bells ring to wake students up early in the morning. Children march like soldiers to classes and meals. The food is unfamiliar to them.

**Maggie:** This food tastes awful! Everything is all mixed together—they call it “hash.”

**Ota Kte:** The drink is even worse.

**Maggie:** I know. It’s called “tea.” Just the smell of it makes me sick!

## Scene 4

**N3:** It is the first day of classes.

**Teacher:** Children, the first thing you must learn is English. From now on, no one is allowed to speak any Indian languages.

**N4:** Since the students only



Children in a Carlisle classroom. Indian schools had students of all ages. There were very young kids, teens, and even 20-year-olds.

## WORD WORKOUT



**tre**•**ties**: agreements for peace | **thieves**: people who steal | **sur**•**vive**: stay alive  
**tear**•**ful**: crying | **mean**•**ing**•**ful**: important, special | **mil**•**i**•**tar**•**y**: of the armed forces (such as the Army and Navy)



Students gave up traditional clothes, like these Sioux moccasins and dresses. Below: Students wearing their new clothes at school.

speak Sioux, the teacher uses hand signals to try to make them understand.

**Teacher:** If you are caught speaking your language, you will be punished.

**N1:** She walks up to Ota Kte.

**Teacher:** I hear that your name means “Plenty Kill.” That is the name of a savage, and you are here to become **civilized**. From now on, you will have a new name: Luther.

**N2:** The teacher assigns new English names to all the students.

### Scene 5

**N3:** The school grows quickly as Captain Pratt brings more students from other tribes.

**N4:** The children follow a strict schedule. They spend many hours each day working. Girls do laundry, cook, and clean. Boys work on the school’s large farm.

**N1:** In the spring of 1880, some of the chiefs from the Rosebud Reservation come to visit. They



are shocked at what they find.

**White Thunder:** Our children are dressed like soldiers!

**Spotted Tail:** My son told me they are **forbidden** to speak Sioux. This is wrong!

**Pratt:** Your children must learn the white man’s ways. It’s not easy, but it will mean a better life for them.

**N2:** Pratt talks most of the chiefs into leaving their children

at Carlisle. Only Spotted Tail does not agree.

**Spotted Tail:** My children are coming home, where they can be proud to be Sioux.

**N3:** The chiefs and Spotted Tail’s children turn to leave.

**Ernest:** Father! Take me too!

**White Thunder:** No, son. Pratt is right—your best chance for a good future is here.

**N4:** The group leaves Ernest

behind. But he is desperate to go home. Ernest sneaks onto their train.

**N1:** White Thunder finds Ernest on the train.

**Ernest:** Please don't make me go back! I can't survive so far from home!

**White Thunder:** I'm sorry, son. You must return to school.

## Scene 6

**N2:** As the months pass, homesickness gets worse. Some students can't eat or sleep. Ernest is miserable. He gets sick.

**Pratt** (*writing to a school official*): White Thunder's son is very sick. I don't think he will recover—he seems to want to die.

**N3:** On December 13, 1880, Ernest passes away. Pratt writes a sad letter to White Thunder.

**Pratt** (*writing*): Your son died quietly. We have dressed him in his good clothes, and tomorrow we will bury him.

**N4:** Ernest is buried at the same time as Maud, a Sioux girl who also died on December 13. By the time Carlisle closes its doors in 1918, 190 children have been buried at the school's **cemetery**. Many more die after they become sick at school and are sent home.

## Epilogue

**N1:** Carlisle was the first Native American boarding school. By 1900, there were 25 schools like it across the country.

**N2:** U.S. government officials created the schools because they wanted the students to give up tribal ways. Said one official, "We must either **butcher** them or civilize them." People like Captain Pratt believed they were giving the children better lives by educating them.

**N3:** Parents sometimes refused to send their children away. But not every child wanted to stay home—some were curious about life off their reservations.

**N4:** Some Indian school students went on to make great use of the education they received. Charles Eastman and Susan La Flesche graduated from medical school and became two of the first Native American doctors.

**N1:** Indian schools were famous for their sports programs. Jim Thorpe, who went to Carlisle as a teen, is known as one of the best athletes of the 20th century. Thorpe **excelled** at football, baseball, and track, and he won two gold medals at the 1912 Olympics.

**N2:** Most students returned to their tribes after they finished school. Though coming home was often difficult, they did not forget their heritage or their families.

**N3:** Today, there are still some Indian schools. But they no longer try to teach "the white man's way." Most of the schools are run by Native Americans. These schools celebrate the important history and traditions of their students.



### > Think About It

Why do you think Chief White Thunder wouldn't let his son Ernest leave school?

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## WORD WORKOUT



**civ•i•lized:** polite, well-behaved | **for•bid•den:** not allowed | **cem•e•ter•y:** area where the dead are buried | **butch•er:** kill | **ex•celled:** did extremely well