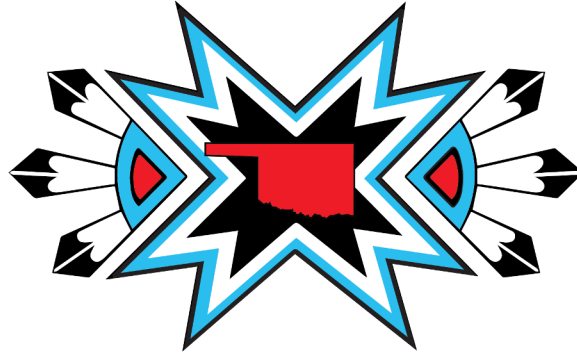




# BACK THE BRAID

PRESENTED BY  
NATIVE AMERICAN  
STUDENT SERVICES  
Oklahoma City Public Schools

NATIVE  
KNOWLEDGE  

## NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENT SERVICES

A product of Oklahoma City Public Schools Native American Student Services.  
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- Cortney Yarholar (Sac & Fox, Creek, Pawnee, Otoe)

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Artist: Ric Gendron

# 1819

Civilization Fund Act

Two hundred years ago, on March 3, 1819, the Civilization Fund Act ushered in an era of assimilationist policies, leading to the Indian boarding-school era, which lasted from 1860 to 1978.

(About one-third of the 357 known Indian boarding schools were managed by various Christian denominations.)



## Boarding School Era

**(1860 - 1978)**

When the United States government forced Native American children into western education, boys and girls had their hair cut off in an effort to strip them of their culture, language and identity. Schools cut Native children's hair as a way to assimilate and control Native American children.

We call this time period the Boarding School Era. This was a traumatic and horrific time for all of our Native people and the effects of this historical trauma are felt in families and individuals today.

**Education was something that was done to us, not something that was provided for us**

Novelist and Historian: David Treuer

David Treuer is Ojibwe from the Leech Lake Reservation in northern Minnesota.

Many schools and classrooms will have a handsome Native American boy with long hair or a long braid in their classrooms. However, many students, staff, teachers, coaches, and districts are not aware of the importance of long hair in the Native American community. While our Native students are proud of their hair and learn to take care of it, they often face challenges related to their hair length like bullying.

Many of the boys are made fun of, get mistaken as female, and are made to feel uncomfortable at their school. As Educators, it is our job to make sure all students feel included and respected. We want our boys to build a strong identity, advocate for themselves, and have confidence in who they are.

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Native Knowledge has provided you with some quick facts and information on how to address your class and become a champion for our Native American Students.



**Lead by example.  
Don't let other  
people's opinions  
run your life or  
choices. Be proud  
of your heritage  
and ancestors.**

**- Greg Marris,  
Choctaw, Chickasaw &  
Mississippi Band of  
Choctaw Indians**

1. Many cultures around the world believe that hair has a special significance. For Native Americans, both men and women are encouraged to grow their hair long.
2. Our hair is considered sacred and significant to who we are as an individual, family, and community. Every tribe has their own beliefs and customs about a boy and girl's long hair.
3. It is said that single strands of hair are weak when tugged on. However, when you pull all of the hair together in a braid, the hair is strong. This reinforces the value of the family and tribes along with our connection to all creation.
4. Many are taught their hair is an extension of their thoughts, prayers, dreams, aspirations, experiences, and history.
5. Long hair for both Native American males and females is an expression of their identity as a Native person. It binds them to their culture, their tribe and their ancestors.
6. If a child has long hair and suddenly cuts their hair it may be due to a great loss. Such as death in their family, traumatic event, or significant life changes. It is an outward visual of mourning, sadness, and eventually new growth and beginning.

It is important to note that because of the boarding school/ residential school era, Native American programs are proactive in ensuring our students are being treated with fairness and kindness. In summary, Native people have always valued hair length in both boys and girls and it has significant meaning in our culture.

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## Suggestions on how to address your class:

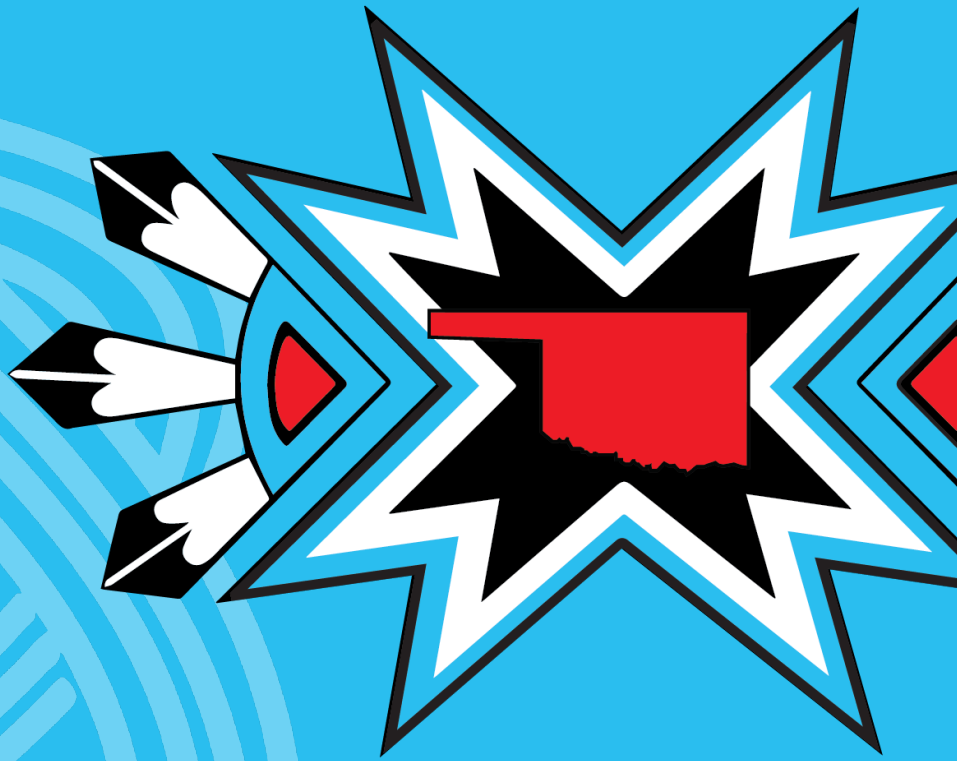
- Invite Native American cultural presenters and elders willing to share their teachings surrounding the meaning of hair.
- Utilize the tools and presentations provided by the OKCPS Native American Student Services Department.
- Set and reinforce expectations with your classrooms:
  - Respect each others cultures
  - Do not touch, pull, and play with student's long hair
  - Go over the suggested facts with your students.
- Research different tribes and how they fix their hair
- Show pictures of men and women with long hair, Native and Non-Native.



**Be proud of who you are and don't let people try to tell you what to do. They don't understand and that's not your fault.**

**- Torin Goodbear, Northern Cheyenne & Ponca**





# NATIVE KNOWLEDGE



Stand solid in your feet.  
It's part of who we are.  
We are strong people  
who have amazing  
resiliency. Much of our  
strength lives in our  
hair. Always be proud.

- Sena Harjo,  
Seminole, Muscogee,  
& Choctaw