

# INDIGENOUS MUSIC: FROM WOUNDED KNEE TO THE BILLBOARD CHARTS

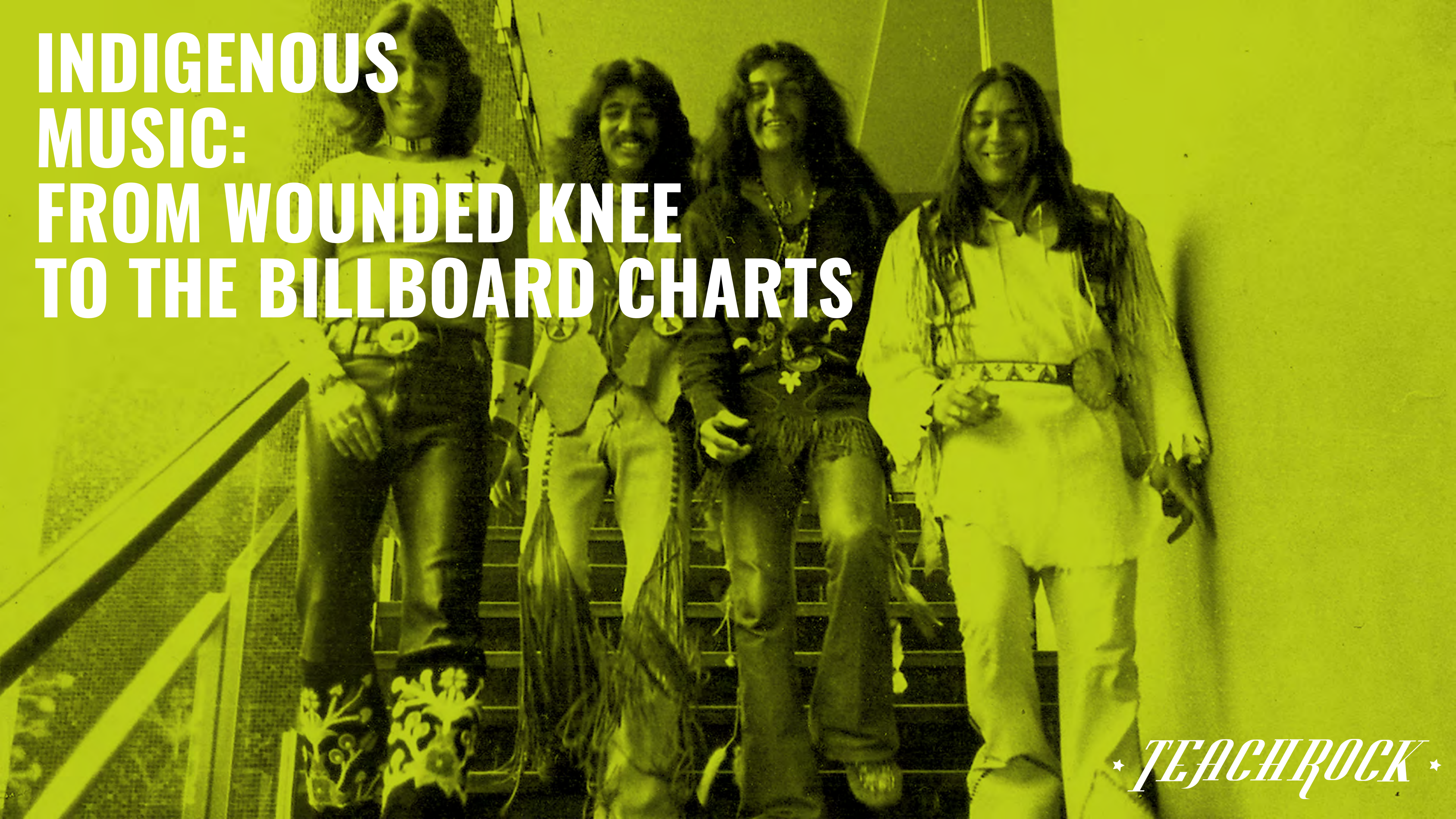
Est. Time: 90 - 120 minutes

Subjects: History/Social Studies

Age Range: Middle & High School

View the classroom lesson version [here!](#)

★ *TEACHROCK* ★




**INDIGENOUS  
MUSIC:  
FROM WOUNDED KNEE  
TO THE BILLBOARD CHARTS**

★ *TEACHROCK* ★



Why was the success of the 1970s band Redbone historically significant?

In this lesson you will:

- Learn about Pat and Lolly Vegas and their band Redbone
  - Find out about the steps taken by the Federal Government to “civilize” Indigenous People in the late 1800s
  - Consider how the trauma of those acts continues to affect the lives of Indigenous People today by examining poetry written by Native Americans
  - Think about the importance and implications of Redbone’s success
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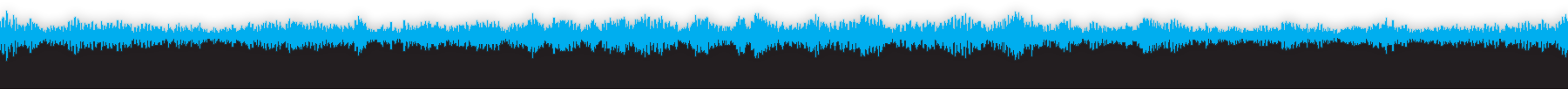
Think about some music that holds great importance for you.

Are there ideas or events that these songs help you to remember?

Are there songs that are sung at special celebrations that hold significance for you?

Share these songs with a family member or friend and ask them to share a song that they feel is deeply important.

Then consider the ways songs can carry meaning and significance that goes deeper than just their melody and lyrics.



Musicians Pat and Lolly Vasquez came to Los Angeles in 1959. On the advice of their manager, the brothers changed their last name to Vegas and performed music as the “Vegas Brothers.”

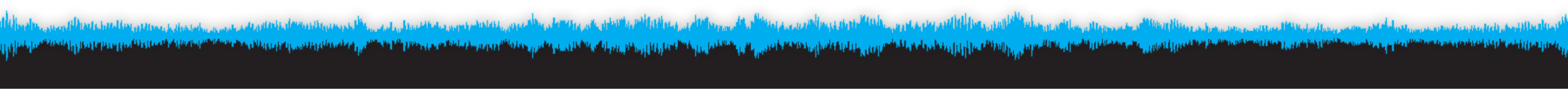
Later they started the band Redbone, after a Cajun term which refers to people of mixed race. The Vasquez brothers were proud of their Yaqui, Shoshone, and Mexican Heritage.

Watch [this video](#) to learn more about Redbone.





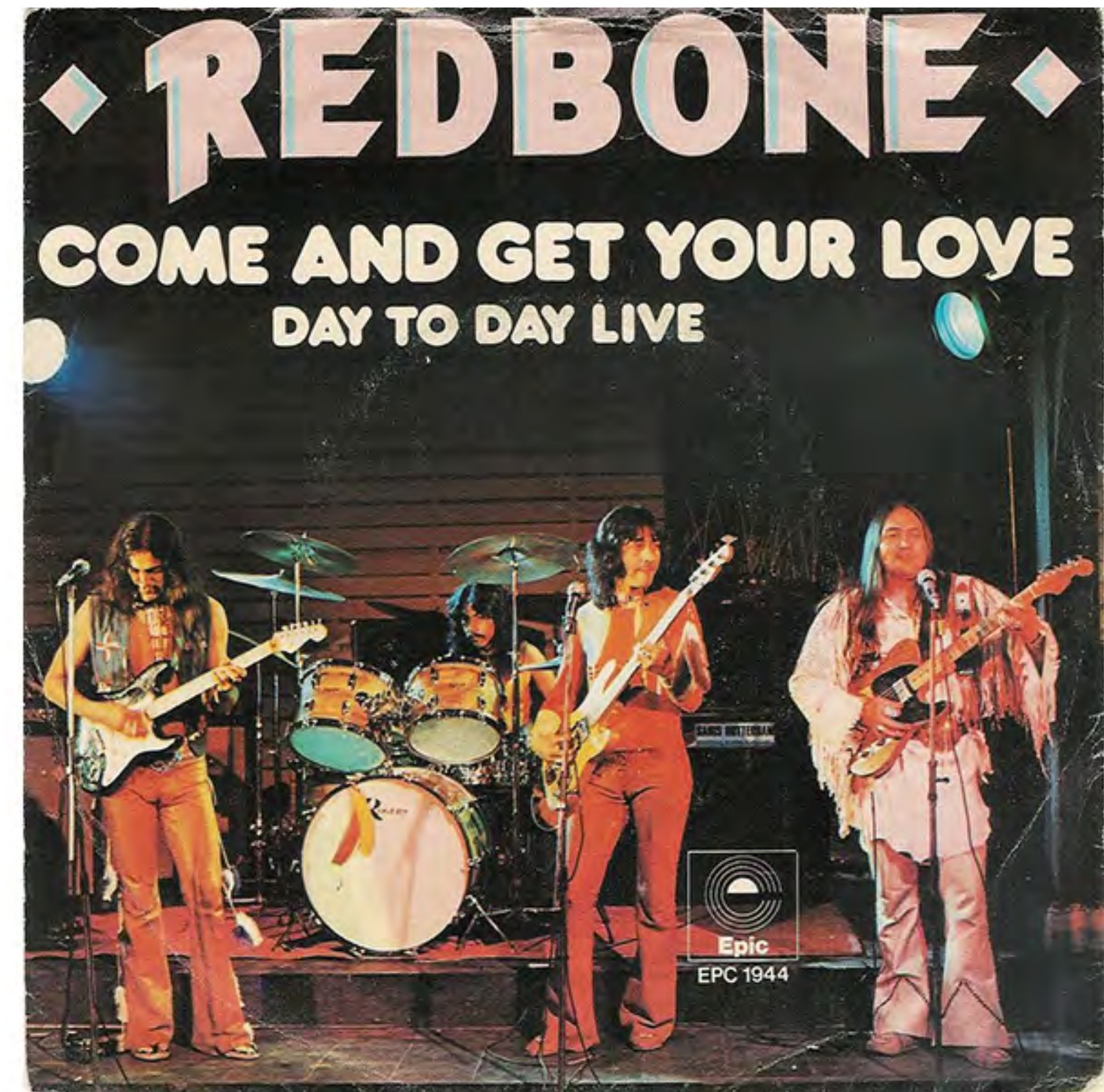
Consider or talk with a friend:

- Why do you think Pat and Lolly changed their last name from Vasquez to Vegas? Do you believe that this is something that performers would do today?
  - What do you think that audiences thought of Redbone's drumming, chanting, music and clothing?
  - Why do you think that the song "Come and Get Your Love" is still so popular today?
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Redbone was particularly significant in popular music history for being a Native American band that achieved both widespread critical acclaim and commercial success.

Their 1974 single “Come and Get Your Love” was on the Billboard charts for 23 weeks.

But why was this even more important in the context of the historical treatment of Indigenous People?



The injustices against Indigenous Peoples can be traced back to the founding of the United States of America.

By the mid 1800s, the United States enacted several measures to “Americanize” Native People.





The Dawes Act of 1887 broke up the treasured and traditional lands of Indigenous Peoples and sold off that land to white settlers.

**Read excerpts** from the Dawes Act and think about how your family would feel about being forced to abandon your home and your community.

## INDIAN LAND FOR SALE

GET A HOME  
OF  
YOUR OWN

EASY PAYMENTS



PERFECT TITLE

POSSESSION  
WITHIN  
THIRTY DAYS

### FINE LANDS IN THE WEST

IRRIGATED IRRIGABLE      GRAZING      AGRICULTURAL DRY FARMING

IN 1910 THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR SOLD UNDER SEALED BIDS ALLOTTED INDIAN LAND AS FOLLOWS:

Location.	Acres.	Average Price per Acre.	Location.	Acres.	Average Price per Acre.
Colorado.....	5,211.21	\$7.27	Oklahoma.....	34,664.00	\$19.14
Idaho.....	17,013.00	24.85	Oregon.....	1,020.00	15.43
Kansas.....	1,684.50	33.45	South Dakota.....	120,445.00	16.53
Montana.....	11,034.00	9.86	Washington.....	4,879.00	41.37
Nebraska.....	5,641.00	36.65	Wisconsin.....	1,069.00	17.00
North Dakota.....	22,610.70	9.93	Wyoming.....	865.00	20.64

**FOR THE YEAR 1911 IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 350,000 ACRES WILL BE OFFERED FOR SALE**

For information as to the character of the land write for booklet, "INDIAN LANDS FOR SALE," to the Superintendent U. S. Indian School at any one of the following places:


CALIFORNIA: Hoopa.	MINNESOTA: Ojibwa.	NORTH DAKOTA: Fort Totten.	OKLAHOMA—Con. Shawnee.	SOUTH DAKOTA: Cheyenne Agency.	WASHINGTON: Fort Simcoe.
COLORADO: Ignacio.	MONTANA: Crow Agency.	OKLAHOMA: Adair.	Wyandotte.	Crow Creek.	Fort Spokane.
IDAHO: Lapwai.	NEBRASKA: Macy.	OREGON: Astoria.	Klamath Agency.	Greenwood.	Teha.
KANSAS: Horton.	Neosho.	Colony.	Lower Brule.	Tulsa.	Tulsa.
Nevada: Winnelago.	Muskogee, W. P.	Darlington.	Pine Ridge.	WISCONSIN: Oneida.	Oneida.
	Pawnee.	Roseburg.	Sisseton.		

**WALTER L. FISHER,**  
Secretary of the Interior.

**ROBERT G. VALENTINE,**  
Commissioner of Indian Affairs.



Consider or talk with a friend:

- Why do you think it was important to the Federal Government that Indigenous People become “True Americans”? What do you think “True Americans” meant to the Federal Government at that time?
  - Was it just that the ancestral lands of Indigenous people were sold to white settlers?
  - What do you think the requirement for “habits of civilized life” refers to? Who is defining what “civilized life” might mean in this situation?
- 

Beginning in the late 19th century, the Federal Government actively forced Indigenous Children to participate in a program of “assimilation through education.”

Federally-run schools such as the Carlisle Indian Schools were established and Indigenous children were required to attend. Between the 1890s and 1920s, thousands of young Indigenous Children attended such schools, some as far as 1,500 miles from their homes.



Established by Colonel Richard Pratt, the Carlisle Indian Schools forced Native Children to “assimilate” to erase Native Culture. Students’ hair was cut, their traditional clothing was confiscated, they were required to speak only English, and their musical traditions were forbidden.

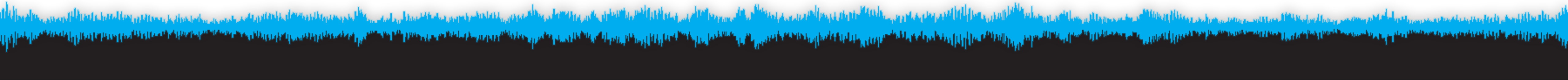
**Read the writings** of Richard Pratt and **read the letters** that Indigenous Children wrote to their parents from these boarding schools.




WOUNDED YELLOW ROBE      HENRY STANDING BEAR      CHAUNCY YELLOW ROBE  
SIOUX BOYS AS THEY ENTERED THE SCHOOL IN 1883.      THREE YEARS LATER.




Consider or ask a friend:

- What is your reaction to these primary source documents?
  - What stands out to you about Richard Pratt's writings about mixing Whites and Indigenous People?
  - Compare the two letters that children forced into boarding school wrote to their families. What differences do you notice in the two letters? Do you think that it is possible that the second child was forced to write a positive letter?
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In the 1880s, the tradition of the Ghost Dance emerged after a Paiute Tribal Leader, Wodziwob, had a vision that this dance would bring ancient spirits and ancestors to help Native Peoples to regain their land and culture. The Ghost Dance was outlawed by the Federal Government.




Why would the Federal Government outlaw the Ghost Dance? How do you think that Native People reacted?

**Watch this video** to learn more about how the Federal Government suppressed the musical traditions of Indigenous People, and to learn about the tragedy that occurred at Wounded Knee.






Consider or talk with a friend:

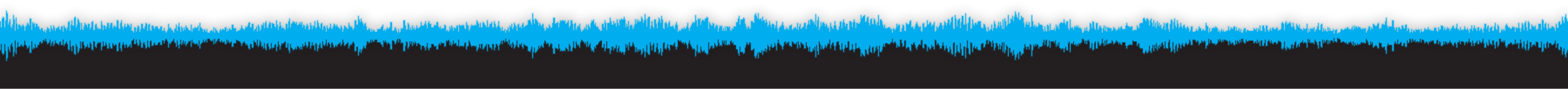
- Why were Lakota People massacred for dancing the Ghost Dance?
  - Why was the Federal Government fearful of these Native People?
  - How would you feel if the Federal Government outlawed a tradition that is a part of your culture or upbringing?
- 






The cruel and discriminatory policies that banned cultural and spiritual expressions of Native life and that removed Native Children from their tribal homes to send them to faraway boarding schools have resulted in deep trauma among Indigenous Americans.

**Read this collection** of three poems by Native Americans recounting their experiences with Native schools, and consider the questions on the following slide.





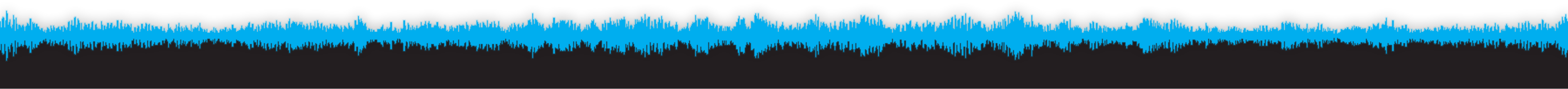
Consider or ask a friend:

- Each poem offers a different perspective. What sort of character is speaking in each poem? What is their relationship with the Indian School?
  - What imagery is used to describe indigenous culture in the three poems? What imagery is used to describe white “western” culture?
  - How is repetition used in the poems? What effect might it have?
  - In what ways might these three poems speak to how Native Americans experienced trauma in these Indian Schools?
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In August 2020, Pat Vegas was interviewed when an official video for “Come and Get Your Love” was finally released.

*“Back then, we did what we had to do onstage to show our heritage. We were always fighting for recognition through our music. Bringing our sound and our culture was the way to fight the good fight. The song has a deeper meaning of a spiritual, religious and universal love. When we say in the song ‘Come and get your love, get it from the main vine,’ that connects to Mother Earth. We are all longing for love.”*





Consider or ask a friend:

- What might Pat Vegas mean when he says “We were always fighting for recognition through our music.” What kind of recognition might he be referring to?
  - After learning about the historic treatment of Native Americans in the United States, why might Vegas be framing his cultural expression as a “fight”?
  - Why was Redbone’s success historically significant? In what ways might have Redbone “won” the fight Vegas is referring to?
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# SUMMARY

- Redbone achieved critical acclaim and commercial success as a Native American band that broke many barriers with their music and innovative performance style
- The Federal Government enacted cruel and discriminatory policies that banned cultural and spiritual expressions of Native life and removed Native children from their tribal homes to send them to faraway boarding schools
- The policies of the U.S. Government towards Native Americans has resulted in generational trauma, which has been expressed and articulated by indigenous artists and poets



# BE CREATIVE

- Create an infographic that describes why the success of Redbone was so important to Indigenous People in The United States.
- Record yourself singing the song “Come and Get Your Love”. You may want to do this virtually with some of your friends using Zoom or Google Classroom



# BE CURIOUS

**Watch the official Redbone video** for "Comment and Get Your Love" and **read** about the imagery used in the video.

**Listen to firsthand accounts** of Indian Boarding Schools.

Read about **13 Native People** who made significant contributions to our world.

**Learn about Frank Buffalo Hyde**, the Indigenous Artist whose influence is reflected in the artwork for Redbone's new official "Come and Get Your Love" video.

Check out from your local library the visual novel **Redbone: The True Story of a Native American Rock Band**. If it's not available, talk to the librarian to see how to request it.



# CONNECT

Share with us! Either you or an adult in your life can share your Infographic or Recording of “Come and Get Your Love” with TeachRock on **Instagram** or **Facebook**, email to **info@teachrock.org**, or Tweet it to **@TeachRock**





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Please check back to [teachrock.org/distancelearning](https://teachrock.org/distancelearning) frequently as we will update the material weekly!