

READ THE SUMMARY SECTION AT  
[HTTP://UPSTANDERPROJECT.ORG/FIRSTLIGHT/BOARDING](http://upstanderproject.org/firstlight/boarding) AND  
THEN CONTINUE BELOW

## COMPELLING QUESTION

*What role did the Indian Boarding Schools play in assimilation of Native peoples and attempted annihilation of their cultures?*

Excerpt from Zitkala-Sa's article, "An Indian Teacher Among Indians," pp. 381-386.

*Zitkala-Sa was born to a Sioux mother and white father in the Dakota Territory in 1876. She attended a Quaker Indian School in Indiana and then Earlham College, and she worked as a teacher at the Carlisle Indian School in 1898 and 1899. After leaving the Carlisle School, she wrote about her experiences as an Indian living in white America, and helped found the Society of American Indians, an early civil rights organization devoted to Native American causes. In the excerpt from her autobiography below, she reflects on the shortcomings of Indian education as she experienced it at the Carlisle School and similar institutions.*

"Leaving my mother, I returned to the school in the East. As months passed over me, I slowly comprehended that the large army of white teachers in Indian schools had a larger missionary creed than I had suspected...

Alone in my room, I sat like the petrified Indian woman of whom my mother used to tell me. I wished my heart's burdens would turn me to unfeeling stone. But alive, in my tomb, I was destitute!

For the white man's papers I had given up my faith in the Great Spirit. For these same papers I had forgotten the healing in trees and brooks. On account of my mother's simple view of life, and my lack of any, I gave her up, also. I made no friends among the race of people I loathed. Like a slender tree, I had been uprooted from my mother, nature, and God. I was shorn of my branches, which had waved in sympathy and love for home and friends. The natural coat of bark which had protected my oversensitive nature was scraped off to the very quick."

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## Discussion questions

- What barriers do you think she may have faced in communicating her personal experiences to a white audience? In what ways do you think she was successful?
- To what degree was the goal of assimilation met in her case?