

Moral Courage

What's Behind the Hoodie?

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Author's Note:

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Introduction

“What’s Behind the Hoodie?” is a unit plan for my tenth grade English class at San Carlos High School on the San Carlos Apache Reservation. I’ll be teaching this unit for the second quarter of the school year from October to December. In this unit, the students will read *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, which is a coming-of-age novel reminiscent of *The Catcher in the Rye*. The main character, Charlie, writes letters addressed, “Dear friend,” in which the reader gets to see him grow as a “wallflower” and become someone who pursues friendships, processes through trauma, and slowly discovers the sort of person he wants to be. As we read the novel, we will begin having discussions and writing about how Charlie develops some healthy habits in his life, such as reading books that make him more open-minded, “participating,” (as he calls it, which is when he pushes himself to be brave enough to engage with others), and gaining wisdom from a trusted teacher and sharing it with the people in his life who need it most (Chbosky, S., 1999).

During these discussions and writing assignments, we will begin transitioning from focusing on Charlie to focusing on a common lifestyle choice amongst our students: hiding behind their hoodies. Most of my students can be seen with their hoodies up at any given time of day, even in 100 degree Arizona weather. There’s a lot these students are “hiding” from, and with good reason. The circumstances the majority of my students face are deeply traumatic. My challenge to them will be to consider the following idea: When is there maybe one (or more!) time per week in which the hoodie can come off? Where do they feel safe and comfortable enough to develop a healthy habit? Developing healthy habits is much easier in intention than indeed, so we will choose one practical action step that will lead to creating a healthy habit, and the goal for this habit will be to improve our character, thus giving us a sense of identity and accomplishment, and can even push us to be more morally courageous people, when the going gets tough. And it inevitably will.

To document this experience, the students will write a series of, “Dear friend,” letters just like Charlie. In their letters, they’ll write about Apache concepts that could help them in this journey, such as n̄t’eehi hishaa doleet (nutrition), ni’ida’ nildzil (physical fitness), ídagoch’idzaaní (etiquette and social skills), yadowoyaah (personal and community hygiene), and bil chi’ idagolaah (discipline). These are all terms I learned in an Apache seminar taught by our parent educators on the reservation in a professional development training in 2019, and all of these concepts here are values of the Apache people pre-colonization (Goyééhí Biyi’ Gozhóó, 2019). In the students’ letters, they may also bring up what else is going on in life as Charlie does, or they can stay more objective about their goal to let the hoodie come down once a week (or more!). At the end of this unit, the students will give their series of letters (anonymously, if they would like) to a peer.

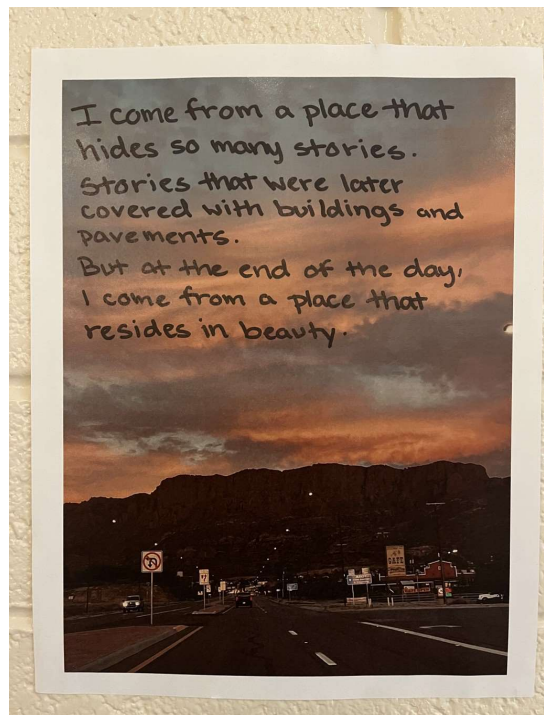
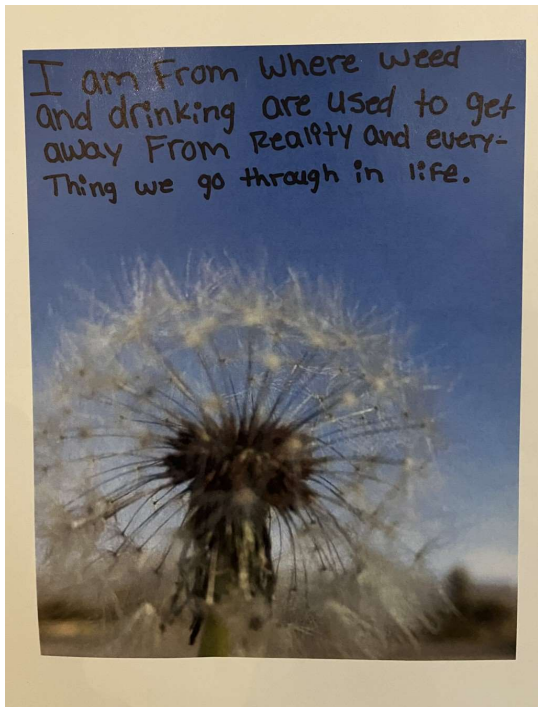
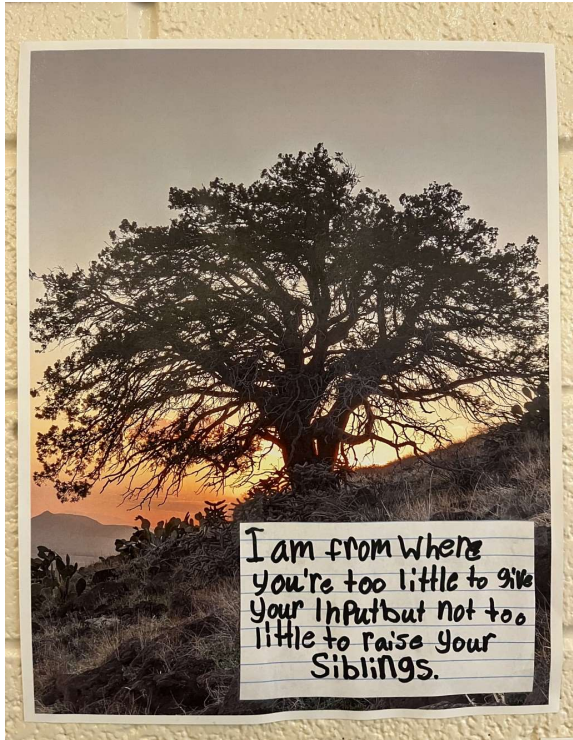
In these discussions and writing assignments, we’ll also be analyzing our school brand of “Shilgozóó,” which means “I am happy,” in Apache. However, in one of our seminar meetings this semester, an Apache woman taught our group that this word for happiness can also be translated to mean harmony. We will talk and write about finding enough harmony in our lives during this unit to prioritize time to build a habit that could lead to better health and moral

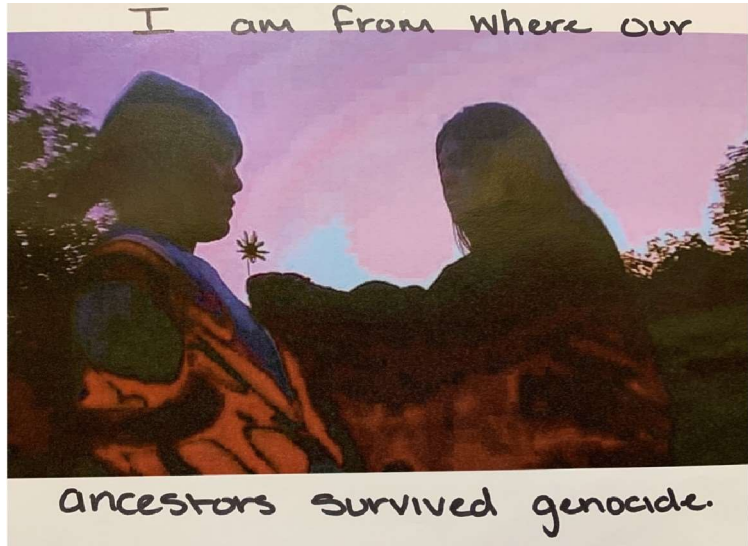
courage in each of us. I can't wait to do this project alongside my students and see what they write about and discover this coming school year!

Context

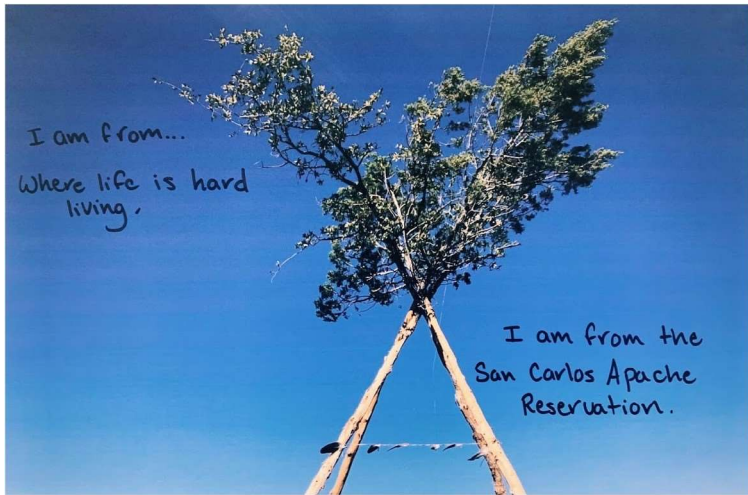
I love having the opportunity to teach tenth and twelfth grade English at the public high school on the San Carlos Apache Reservation. I moved to the reservation from the east coast in the summer of 2019 upon receiving my undergraduate degree in secondary English education. I heard a lecture at my university that explained the detrimental effects of Native American boarding schools on Indian country still today, and I made a decision that day to deeply consider starting my career on a reservation. The summer going into my senior year of college I got to go to the Blackfeet reservation in Montana with a program at my university, really engage with the community as a listener and learner, and connect with high school students there who had an interest in creative writing. After coming back from Montana, I was eager to find a teaching job on a reservation, and things fell into place quickly with San Carlos. As an outsider to this community and as a white educator, I try to take the posture of a learner and a listener with my students and other community members as much as possible.

During the first month of school the students and I participate in a unit in my class called, "Where I'm From." The driving question for the project is, "How do our histories shape our stories?" They write poems that describe their experiences as being from here and put their best lines on photographs they take of the reservation. To give some context to what sort of circumstances are present in my classroom, I'd love for the students to get to speak for themselves through these poems below. If you'd like to see more of their impressive work from this unit, visit this webpage here: <https://curdswords.weebly.com/they-are-from.html>.





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If you were to teach on any reservation, there are implications that come with it. There are circumstances that are just statistically true. The majority of my students come from homes with substance abuse and/or violence in the household. Just last week I sat with a group of my coworkers who are all Native, and they each went around the table and told stories about their grandparents' experiences with boarding schools. That history of assimilation, colonization, and cultural genocide has led to circumstances being the way they are today.

For instance, the information in the "Demographic Analysis of the San Carlos Apache Tribe Using 2010 Census and 2010 American Community Survey Estimates" is indicative of the realities that are present for the students in my classroom. Taking information from the 2010 Census, the numbers show that the median age in the state of Arizona is 47.9, while the median age in San Carlos is 25.7. Many of my students have family members die young. I have several students who are orphans. The life expectancy on reservations is significantly less than that of the rest of the state and country for several reasons, including health issues and addiction. Households run by single mothers for the state of Arizona are at 12%, whereas here in San Carlos, the numbers lie at 40% (Arizona Rural Policy Institute, 2010).

As I previously described in my introduction, most of my students can be seen on any given day dressed in all black and wearing a hoodie, hood up. When I first came to teach here, my principal told me that I would get a lot of blank stares. I don't think that's true. When I see the looks on their faces, I see the stories through which many of them are surviving.

The Apache people are known as the warrior tribe; they were the last tribe to surrender during the Indian Wars. Despite what has been lost, the heart of the Apache people is still there, in many ways. I have been invited to attend their ceremonies. I have heard their songs, the drums. I have been given the opportunity to see some of what has survived. And they are a people with a story to tell.

Rationale

I saw the movie *Speak* based off of the novel by Laurie Halse Anderson for the first time right before going into high school. The story is about a girl who is raped before entering her freshman year of high school, and as a result of the trauma, she doesn't truly "speak" to anyone for the entirety of that school year. Knowing what I do now about child psychology, I was just developing the ability to really empathize with others, and seeing this film really moved me. Now, I try to incorporate reading young adult literature that my students may be interested in into my personal reading list, and I saw *Speak* at my local library this semester. I read it a few months back, and the entire time I was thinking of my foster daughter from the reservation.

Is this how she thinks? I kept asking myself as I read. My foster daughter is eighteen years old, and she kept to herself for most of high school. When I had her in class she sat away from the other students. I had another student in class who was in the foster system on the reservation, and I never heard the sound of her voice. Silenced. I found myself devouring the book, because it felt like a window into my foster daughter's brain. Upon finishing the book I asked her to watch the movie with me. We both really enjoyed it.

There was one scene in which I had to stop myself from gasping. Melinda, the main character, is white, and she comes from a middle-class family; she doesn't particularly *look* like any of my students. But there was one scene after a particularly bad day for her where she comes into school wearing a hoodie, hood up. Hiding. A question entered my mind, "I wonder if her teachers questioned what's behind that hoodie?" (Anderson, L. H., 2019).

It reminded me of the first and only time I've ever seen my foster daughter with her hoodie up in my house. It was right after her biological mother had caused some chaos in our otherwise safe and peaceful environment in our home. It was all over the phone, but still, the presence of peace, safety, and home felt fragile to her. She came upstairs for dinner with her hood up that night. It's a place to hide when everything else feels unpredictable.

At that moment I decided to teach a unit called, "What's behind the hoodie?", because I thought this was a topic worth exploring. However, I didn't want this to be a time for students to feel pressured to trauma dump about what may be wrong in their lives. So, I started thinking about my foster daughter's habits.

Anytime she goes anywhere, she has to take a nap directly after. After school, if we go out to dinner, if we spend time with friends, if we take a day trip to Phoenix, if we go to a sporting event... She has to nap. Her counselor told me that this is a result of the body's response to naturally trying to fight depression. It's an attempt to create more "happy" hormones, but it doesn't work. When my foster daughter isn't sleeping, though, she's almost always scrolling. She doesn't spend time with friends. She doesn't do much of anything.

What's behind that hoodie eats her alive. And what's so scary to me is that my foster child is in the top of her class. She's really involved at school compared to most of the other kids; she's achieving compared to her peers. And she's barely living.

My own counselor has told me that it's very unlikely that she'll attach to us due to her own level of trauma she's endured, but if I were able to try to get her to connect in a way that's not too intimidating, I'd love to do this unit with her, even, if I could make it a little less school-ish. I love the idea of challenging the students to remove the hoodie around once a week to do something *good*. To do something for *them*, that they really enjoy.

I wrote before about a professional development training I got to attend at the high school taught by an Apache parent educator titled, "Goyééhi Biyi' Gozhóó (Finding Beauty During Hard Times)." Again, there was a list of pursuits that the Apache people really valued before colonization: nlt'eehi hishaa doleet (nutrition), ni'ida' nildzil (physical fitness), idagoch'idzaaní (etiquette and social skills), yadowoyaah (personal and community hygiene), and bil chi' idagolaah (discipline). The phrase, "Ídagoch'idzaaní Ádił Ch'ígót'aah," in Apache means, "One is teaching oneself self-control" (Goyééhi Biyi' Gozhóó, 2019). This is what these values are really getting at. It's having the ability to prioritize these hard things.

This really connected with something my professor mentioned in one of our seminar meetings this past month; she said that actions lead to habits, and habits lead to character. This got me thinking about my own habits in my life: reading, walking in nature, keeping up with friends

who build me up, prioritizing my spiritual life, etc. It really occurred to me how much my habits impact my own character. Then, I thought of my foster daughter and how her habits drain her of life. I found myself thinking about how out of control many of my students most feel at home... that they can't stop the brokenness around them, so they either, inevitably, fall into fight, flight, or freeze.

I want them to try to find one time in their week where the hoodie can come off and where they can feel safe enough to build a habit for themselves. This could be during the school day. It could be at home. Right before bed. First thing in the morning. During this unit, they'll document their experiences just like Charlie in Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. I love the idea of them building upon their literacy skills in such an organic way.

Throughout all of this, we'll be having all kinds of conversations about how these habits could have the potential to affect their lives deeply. We'll talk about how our actions lead to our habits, and our habits lead to our character. We'll discuss people who have exemplified moral courage and building healthy habits in their own lives, and we'll read some of their works, such as Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and excerpts from Yeonmi Park's memoir, *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom*.

This unit will be great to do directly following the "I Am From" unit. It's important to recognize the past and the situations we come from, but we can't dwell there. This unit will bridge the past to the present, and I hope for it to motivate the students to take hold of their present and take off the hoodie when they feel safe enough to do so.

Content Objectives

During our first in-person seminar class, there were tears in my voice as I shared with my professor and colleagues, "If we're actually going to ask our students to be morally courageous, we have to understand that we're asking them to make impossible decisions." Earlier this year I had asked a student how her birthday had gone. She told me that her dad had beaten her brother and her so badly that they both ended up in the hospital. The abuse was reported, and the student asked me, "Do I tell the truth in court?" She doesn't want to potentially separate her family. Another student of mine cries anytime her younger sisters are brought up in conversation, because she ran away from an abusive home, and she feels that she abandoned her two younger sisters. Almost if not every student in my desks has faced decisions like these. When our professor Dr. Piering brought up the concept of actions leading to habits and habits leading to strong character, I latched onto it. My kids can build healthy habits! That's attainable. The pursuit of moral courage instantly became less intimidating.

In our philosophy seminar we've been grappling with the concept of happiness, and many ancient philosophers argue that happiness is rooted in virtue. An ancient Greek word for happiness referenced in our class is, "eudaimonia," which means to flourish. It involves a depth of quality of life and flourishing which leads to happiness. It's a sense of peace and tranquility and a knowing of what makes one excellent. For example, I seek and aim to have this sort of happiness in my connection to God, my marriage, family, friendships, work, and other passions, such as reading, singing, and writing. I try to pursue excellence in each of these areas of my life,

because they deeply matter to me (Piering, J. [n.d.]).

I want this sort of passion for my students. I want to see them seeking this sort of flourishing. I don't want to see them merely surviving, hoodie up. Something simple and yet so profound that was said during one of our philosophy sessions was that people are good who work at being good. So, the aim for this curriculum unit is for my students to work at being good. A practical way to do this is by choosing a healthy action they can commit to doing that will become a habit throughout the nine weeks (and hopefully beyond!). Another concept I think my students could sink their teeth into from our seminar is as follows: "All pleasure feels good, but not all pleasure should be pursued. All pain feels bad, but not all pain should be avoided." Impassivity is not virtuous. To build a virtuous and truly happy, harmonious lifestyle, they must *work* for it.

A definition for virtue we were given in our seminar is as follows: excellence in the soul attached to reason. A huge buzzword in education right now is engagement. Educators are advised to reach their students' hearts. Get them to care. If they can be persuaded to pursue something virtuous, it will be soul-connecting. It will involve a pursuit of excellence. They will see the reason as to why it should be pursued. It will matter. It will (hopefully) make the hoodie come down.

So, how do we get them to do that? My English teacher answer: reading, of course! I had the pleasure of reading a book with my homeroom students for fun during my first year of teaching in 2019. I chose for them to read *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky. This is the first and only time I've ever had students read independently in my class. We had some discussions about the book, but most of this was done for fun during a twenty-minute homeroom class period. The students *loved* it. The reason I had my students read this book is because when I myself was sixteen years old, I read *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* for the first time, and it left me feeling validated and inspired as a teenager. It's a classic coming of age story that brings up significant topics which ought to be addressed. What drew me to this text for the curriculum unit specifically is that the main character Charlie is dealing with post-traumatic stress after being in an abusive situation in his childhood. His best friend has also just killed himself as he transitions into high school. Charlie has a hard time socializing with others; in fact, he doesn't really talk to anyone. He makes a goal to try to "participate" while he's in school. He wants to socialize some, which is something that doesn't come naturally to him (Chbosky, S., 1999). When I thought about this element of the plot in correlation to my students, I immediately thought of the Apache values I've listed before in this curriculum unit plan. One of those Apache values is etiquette and social skills (Goyéehí Biyi' Gozhóó, 2019).

Something that I'm sure affects all teachers on reservations is the lack of knowing what Native peoples' cultures were really like pre-colonization. This is a delicate balance; there is some or perhaps even much of Native culture is meant to be kept in secret, and we'll never know that if approached with dignity and respect what all would have been shared with those of us from a different culture. We'll never get to know what that outcome would've really looked like because of an irreversible and deeply harmful history. In reality these five principles are from a PowerPoint made by an Apache elder, but when I showed those five values to another Apache elder out of my excitement for my curriculum unit, she gave me a confused look. She's fluent in Apache, and she's the Apache language teacher at our school. She's deeply immersed in her

culture. The closer I get to the Apache people, the more I realize that many of the youth aren't being taught about their culture. Some of them don't know things like the Apache creation story.

This unit is my best shot at giving information and wisdom provided by an Apache elder that I think would help my kids benefit in their daily lives and rooting it in what's available of their culture for their teachers to know. I've actually reached out to the man who presented this PowerPoint multiple times asking for a copy of it. One of my sources is my personal notes from the presentation because he still hasn't gotten it to me regardless of how many times I've asked. He isn't the one who created the PowerPoint, and I'm not even sure he remembers giving this specific presentation, because this was three years ago now, before the pandemic. There is a general lack of resources for information even that's already been shared due to a lack of organization with the systems in place on the reservation. This is a problem all over Indian country.

In general resources about specific Native people groups are scarce, especially if they're not one of the larger tribes, like the Navajo people. I've looked for literature about the Apache people, and there are only a handful of texts that I've found. My colleagues and I were bursting with excitement when we discovered that there was an entire row in the stacks in Cline Library at NAU of Indigenous texts with titles specifically involving the Apache people, and even more specifically about the White Mountain Apache and the San Carlos Apache people. Living on the San Carlos Apache Reservation, there are only about 15,000 people. That's the population size of a small university; it *is* about the population of the small university I attended. I knew most of the faces on campus when I was a student; I know that's not a big number.

My favorite book I found in the stacks at the library is called *The Apache Continuum: An Analysis of Continuity through Change in San Carlos Apache Culture and Society* by Harvard graduate Richard John Perry in 1971. Though outdated, this is the published journal of a white man who went to the San Carlos Apache Reservation to study the culture and society there. The book is a bound publication of his dissertation, and it provided a lot of really valuable information about the reservation that was helpful for me as a teacher and outsider of the community. I learned about the way things functioned during the 1960s and 70s, and this was valuable to be able to understand a lot of the ways the reservation functions as well as how it's changed in the last several decades.

Something else worth noting in this book isn't necessarily connected to the exact content of my unit involving these Apache values, but it shows me a lot of how I need to tread as a white person teaching and discussing sensitive topics with Apache people. There is so much history that needs to be acknowledged, one of these things being an awareness of how and why Apache people and Indigenous peoples in general may be closed off toward white people. One moment in the book addresses this concept directly when Perry writes, "... the basic tone of Anglo-Apache relationships had crystalized and become an important aspect of Apache culture. Even in 1970 the Apache word for Anglos is *indá*, which means "enemy." Stories of injustices suffered at the hands of whites such as the incarceration of children in barbed-wire pens in government schools had become folktales to be told in the evenings to new generations of Apache children" (Perry, R. J., 1980). Just look at the relationship between Apache children and

school, as well as Apache people and Anglo society.

I am a white person attempting to build relationships with my students and ask them to grow in a significant way—in a way that is virtuous, and in a way that genuinely reaches them. I learned when I moved to the reservation that earning trust is everything to the students. It is such an important reminder, and it's so validating to me to take that specific part of my job *so* seriously. I have a coworker who has told me that she's never going to do a personal writing prompt with her students ever again, because it was just too much. The responses were heartbreaking. I'm not trying to judge her at all; there are all kinds of valuable skills in English that students can know outside of writing about their personal lives and experiences, but if teachers want to go there with them on a personal level, we *have* to know what sort of posture is appropriate to have with them.

When I think of how important it is to have an empathetic and understanding posture I'm reminded of something I read in Theresa DeLeane O'Neil's, *Disciplined Hearts: History, Identity, and Depression in an American Indian Community* regarding colonialism. She references Frantz Fanon's claim, "Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: 'In reality, who am I?'" O'Neil adds, "... the negation of one's humanity is the key feature of the experience of oppression." This leans into my thought about being the race of the oppressor in a classroom filled with the oppressed. But even more importantly, this idea rings true when considering just how significant it is to teach units like this that reference Apache culture and history in real reverence. It needs to be done because their culture matters. It matters infinitely. To have the confidence to know that their culture deserves to be addressed not only in the hidden corners of the reservation during ceremonies but also in the classroom, in their writing... It's worth acknowledging and pursuing (O'Neil, T. D., 1996).

In our seminar class we talked about the importance of knowing and understanding one's identity. I asked a question to spark a conversation to see if others thought it was a good strategy to read books in English class like *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*—bringing up topics that coming of age stories do, addressing deeper topics rooted in the search for identity, etc. Our professor Dr. Piering and the rest of us came to a conclusion that an understanding of self is interwoven with virtue. In order to pursue excellence with the self, we must first have a sense of self. That's something that makes being a teenager so special (Piering, J. [n.d.]).

Another text I want to use with my students during this unit is an excerpt from Yeonmi Park's memoir *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom*. Park writes, "I almost felt like giving up before I started. I never knew freedom could be such a cruel and difficult thing. Until now, I had always thought that being free meant being able to wear jeans and watch whatever movies I wanted without worrying about being arrested. Now I realized that I had to think all the time—and it was exhausting. There were times when I wondered whether, if it wasn't for the constant hunger, I would be better off in North Korea, where all my thinking and all my choices were taken care of for me" (182). Though my students aren't escaping from any place like North Korea, and I wholeheartedly want to emphasize that, they are being challenged to think for themselves and take ownership over their actions. Our students' test scores are

extremely comparable to Park and her fellow refugees who have escaped from North Korea. My jaw dropped when I saw how similar the numbers were to my own data I had seen in our own data in the schools here in San Carlos. Almost none of my students keep jobs, let alone pursue and stay in higher education, because they don't have a work ethic. We see it over and over again. My husband and I celebrate when we hear that a student's worked at the grocery store or the fast food restaurant at the end of our street for more than a couple months, because that means they're doing more than sitting at home, not thinking, and arguably not fully living. I want to gently and carefully bring up this subject matter with my students, because it's significant, and it connects to how important it is to pursue healthy habits (Park, Y., 2016).

And the way to pursue these habits, again, is through the Apache values that I've referenced again and again. Something in my research excited me deeply when I thought about intertwining content matter like this in with my curriculum. In "Decolonizing Strategies for Mentoring American Indians and Alaska Natives in HIV and Mental Health Research" by Karina L. Walters, PhD, MSW, and Jane M. Simoni, PhD, they share that "American Indian/Alaska Native communities are in the process of reclaiming rights to their own knowledge production and to science, which has been part of their communities for millennia. This global Indigenous scientific renaissance can be attributed to Indigenous peoples' linking their liberation and wellness to the recovery and reaffirmation of Indigenous ancestral knowledge. Indigenous scholars insist that the regeneration of Indigenous knowledge not only improves behavioral science for all but also is the vital link to improving the health and wellness of tribal communities." The ultimate goal Aristotle and these other philosophers have been wanting to achieve for all this time is "the good life," as our professor has reminded us time and time again in our seminar lectures. Pursuing wellness and virtue through the lens of values that are present in the heart of the Apache people is what I want to happen in my classroom, and I am so excited to see this unit get put into action come fall. I want to see healing and wholeness in my students. I want to see them connect to the same words their ancestors uttered and believed in. I want to see them connect those words and values to own stories, to other literature, and especially to their own stories. I want to see them developing their sense of identity in light of their traditional values. I want to honor and care for these students well.

Teaching Strategies

To first explain how I want to get my students to sink their teeth into this unit, I want to explain the context of my classroom environment and objectives for the entire academic year. My entire first semester is dedicated to identifying the students' sense of identity and exploring it. Something I mentioned earlier in this paper is that in order to pursue excellence with the self, we must first have a sense of self. This is why I teach the sort of books I do, like *The Perks of Being a Wallflower!* During the first days of school, it is of the utmost importance that I capture the students' attention and far more importantly, the intrigue of their minds and in some cases their hearts.

On the first day of school, the students receive what I call a daybook. This is pivotal to the curriculum unit which this paper is about as well as to my class in general, so I want to iterate the style in which the class is taught overall as well as how it will be conducted as this unit is

taught. I learned about the concept of a daybook from Donald M. Murray's text *Write to Learn*. When I first read about his daybook concept years ago, I was swept into it, and now I've implemented it in the classroom as well as in my personal life for the last several years. Even some of my close friends have adopted the daybook piece, and I'm very proud of that! The concept is freeing. Murray describes that a daybook is more like a closet than a desk. By this analogy he points out that you know that a desk, especially a teacher or student desk, will be seen by many. If not logic and organization, there needs to at least be a justification for what you keep on your desk. Someone may ask what a certain artifact is doing there. In a closet, however, we can store the things we wouldn't necessarily display for others to see. There's a reason the objects are being kept; if there wasn't one we would only have trash bins and no closets. But there is significance to having a place to store the things that we don't have to display so openly. Comparing this concept to writing, this idea is liberating. We can get so scared to write that we become paralyzed at the thought of it. It is so beautiful to see many of my students find solace in their daybooks (Murray, 2005).

After receiving their daybooks on the first day of school, I have the students write an initial entry. Everything that goes in their daybooks is low-stakes writing, and this activity starts the journal on a good note. The students have freedom of choice, but the blank page isn't as intimidating because there's a direction for what they will write about. I have them get up out of their seats and view what I call my "visual syllabus." I have this collage of pictures on display all year, and I tell them that these are some of the lessons I want them to take with them when they someday leave Room 401 for the last time. They choose a quote they like, dislike... one that intrigues them, etc. and write a response about it. They can trail off to any other thoughts that come to mind as a result of reading one of the quotes. Here is a picture of my visual syllabus for reference.

The reason I share this is because it's absolutely vital to have created an authentic and secure space to explore these kinds of thoughts when diving into a unit like this one. I repeat again, in order to pursue excellence with the self, we must first have a sense of self. This leads us right into the content for the start of the second quarter, which is this: "What's behind the hoodie?" The teaching strategy here is a real sense of exploration, understanding, and developing the self in a way that is often personal. All that said, a strategy I like to implement especially amongst my students who like to keep things more lighthearted or on the surface (which is not a bad thing; in fact, it can often be so much fun!) is the power of choice. You do not have to explore the depths of yourself in order to make a plan to go walking or on a run three times a week, but you can still write about your experience developing that habit. For instance, some of the most interesting, "I Am From," poems have to do with the students' connections to their favorite sports. I often get a, "I can write about that?!" And you can see the spark of interest, opportunity, and potential on their faces when I respond, "You can write about *anything*. Anything that's important to you. Anything that matters."

The strategy going into our, "What's Behind the Hoodie?" unit involves taking what we may have learned through self-discovery to apply in the practical day to day to become better individuals and to perhaps become more connected to Apache culture than they may have before. By pursuing these ancient Apache values, they will answer the driving question for this unit: "How can we build healthy habits that will create true *shįgozóó* (happiness *and* harmony) in our lives?"

The reservation is ridden with poverty, addiction, and abuse, and the hope with this unit is to try to motivate the students to find at least one time each week in which that hoodie can come down. In (hopefully) creating a space that inspires expression and exploration of self and a deeper, richer experience of the world through reading and writing, I am eager to see what the students come up with! If it's anything like what I see with their poetry, it will surely be profound.

A practical strategy with the writing here is consistency. They will already be doing their "k'e'ishchijj [write] into the day" entries at the start of each class, and they will be used to journaling in some capacity. This will bleed more into classroom activities in the next section of the paper, but I want to mention beforehand that we will also discuss and do activities centering around their time management, figuring out what activities may be worth their time to begin with... And each of these activities will involve communicating through writing. Definitely one of the most strategic uses of time in producing effective student writing is by reading.

The way my class is set up is that we write on Mondays and Wednesdays, we read and analyze a class text together on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and our Fridays are flexible, sometimes involving independent reading, developing writing skills, or finishing up aspects of our quarterly writing projects. The kids respond well to this structure; I've learned that in seeing the confusion and "shakiness," one could say, when I tell them there's no "write into the day" for a day for the sake of time or something. I'm learning not to disrupt the routine at all costs, because it is almost always better that they have the security of knowing what's coming and being able to be in the right headspace for it.

I start the year off with the students' desks being arranged in a circle. This works great for get-to-know-you games, learning names, creating a sense of community, and especially for reading together. The first book we read is Sherman Alexie's *Flight*, which is some of the most real literature I've ever read and by far my favorite Native American novel. It's about a homeless Native foster kid who "travels" through Native American history to discover many of the reasons there is so much brokenness across Indian country today. The book begins with the boy running away from a frustrating foster home situation, and it is genuinely one of the funniest scenes I've ever read in my life. I do all of the reading for chapter one to set the tone for how seriously we're going to take reading this book. It's an *experience*, and it sets the tone for how we'll read for the rest of the year. By the end of the first chapter, the students are cracking up, and I along with them. The first time reading through the book, there was a day where I was crying laughing with the students over the content of the book. Those are some of the memories I cherish in my classroom the most. Sitting in that circle we get immersed in a story together, and it really is meaningful.

Starting with this book sets the tone for the class. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a serious book. It brings up a lot of issues that can be hard to talk about, and that are sometimes met with immaturity when it's not presented in the right environment. *Flight*, too, is a heavy read, but its heaviness is accompanied by an immense amount of humor—humor that the students understand due to a shared Indigenous experience. I'm hopeful that reading *Perks* in a large group will have a similar response. As long as I'm teaching on the reservation, I cannot see myself *not* starting the year with *Flight* and the "I Am From" unit. It's created a sense of community in my classroom every year so far. It builds excitement and anticipation, and it gets kids' noses in the books. When I taught *Perks* before, it was received really well by the homeroom group of kids I had before, but we didn't do anything with the novel besides enjoy it. I'm hoping it's received as well by reading it and analyzing it together as a class.

So, on Mondays and Wednesdays we will work on building their habits. We'll talk about pre-reservation San Carlos and the role these values may have played in their daily lives. For instance, in *The Apache Continuum* by Richard John Perry, he discusses the physical training young people underwent in San Carlos during their youth to prepare them for their roles in their gotás (family clusters). These stories inspired me as a non-Apache, and I hope there will be beautiful connections found for these kids to their history, to their culture, and to beautiful values that ought to be preserved (Perry, R. J., 1980).

One worry I have is that there is no guarantee that the students will actually pursue their habits outside of school. The hope is to find some time, work on time management, etc., but in many of their homes, it simply may not be realistic. In combating this fear I want to be as flexible and as understanding as possible, and so the unit may be adjusted as time goes along to accommodate for that. We are technically not even supposed to really give homework at my school. The rare times I've tried doing a five-minute *weekly* homework assignment, most of the kids failed the assignment every week. I'll have to have flexibility with what developing these habits will look like realistically depending on what happens this year. The hope, obviously, is that they will *want* to make time to pursue these healthy habits. For instance, I had a student write a lot this past year about how much he enjoyed lifting weights outside at sunset while he looked at the Triplet

mountains on the reservation. Another student wrote about how much she liked gardening and growing sunflowers during quarantine. I have hope, but I also know that it may not be well-received no matter how much enthusiasm they show during class. And that's *if* they're won over to be invested in the project.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays we'll read *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, and we'll discuss Charlie's (the main character's) pursuit of social well-being. We may bring in some other texts briefly, such as Park's memoir *In Order to Live* that I've mentioned before. We'll also be connecting the text as well as their writing to the state's standards; the hope is to build writing and close reading skills organically as the kids take on these larger projects like this long-term writing over the quarter about their habits and reading an entire class novel. For most of my students this is running an intellectual marathon, because they're not used to reading and writing so much. Nonetheless, it's so beautiful when they discover that they're already such storytellers and lovers of stories; it's just a matter of channeling that intelligence into these skills and hopefully enjoying it!

This is connected to what guest speaker Vanessa Stevens discussed about using students' power languages. One strategy I implement in my classroom for students who "don't know what to write" is providing what I call "the beautiful essay formula," which proposes that a claim plus evidence plus analysis equals a beautiful essay. We go over a pretend texting argument and texting "mushy" conversation between my husband and me, identifying the claims made as well as evidence and analysis provided. Asking, "Who in here has ever sent or received a *long* text message that made your stomach drop?" and seeing almost every hand fly into the air never gets old; we naturally write out arguments all the time! Giving them this avenue of journal writing for a long term project reflecting on their healthy habits will hopefully be a way to sneakily teach some deep writing skill.

I could write about exciting ideas and tried and true strategies in the classroom for pages upon pages, but the bottom line is reaching the students on their level, in their hearts and minds, in a way that makes sense to them. I am looking forward to exploring ways to do that here with, "What's Behind the Hoodie?"

Classroom Activities

I will write about six classroom activities that will serve as a framework for this nine week unit. Two assignments will be higher stakes and over a longer period of time: "Dear Friend" letters and the "Movie Moments" activity. Two activities are a vital part of my English class either every day or every week, the daily "K'e'ishchijj [Write] into the Day" and weekly "Get 'Lit'-erature" reading responses. And lastly, there will be a couple lectures and discussions that will set us up for success for the quarter, being the "Goyééhí Biyi' Gozhóó (Finding Beauty During Hard Times)" presentation and "The Beautiful Essay Formula." I'll give a brief description of the purpose and function of each of these activities in the unit plan.

"Dear Friend" Letters

I've explained what the students will do in these letters in previous sections of the paper, but put

simply, these letters will serve as the primary form of processing for the students as they dedicate time to building healthy habits. On this same front, I'm also going to try to provide class time in which the students can either work on their habits or plan some real time to develop their habits on their own time. It will take time to build up to that for the students to be invested in the project, though, or this time could easily turn into a joke, and then they'll have nothing to write about in the "Dear Friend" letters.

In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, the main character Charlie processes through his freshman year of high school through a series of letters addressed, "Dear Friend." He writes about how much he wants to "participate," which means putting himself out of his comfort zone to socially interact with others and build friendships. The students will work on their writing skills by writing similar letters about whatever habit they choose to build.

"Mixtape"

The students are going to make a mixtape (playlist) that goes with the theme of the habit they want to build. For instance, if they want to write more, this would be a writing playlist that would get them in the mood to write or to play in the background while they write. Or the same for running, lifting, exercising, etc. They will then think of a name for their mixtape that represents the theme and then provide evidence from the lyrics of the song that explains how it goes with the theme. The characters in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* make a lot of mixtapes throughout the book, and Charlie makes them for friends, which goes with the healthy habit he's working on, which is about building social skills and a sense of community with friends as he's starting high school.

"K'e'ishchijj [Write] into the Day"

Every day the students come into class and do a journal entry to "write into the day" and set the tone for class. It often activates prior knowledge or gets them on task/"in the zone" with what we'll be doing in class.

"Get 'Lit'-erature" Reading Responses/Get "Lit" Slips

"Get Lit" slips serve to make sure the students are comprehending the class text and can analyze it well. Our two standards that the English department has chosen to focus on for this semester are citing evidence and analyzing theme in texts, so the questions usually revolve around that.

Atomic Habits excerpts and activities

We will be using some resources and brief excerpts from the book *Atomic Habits* to determine the habits they want to pursue this quarter, keeping track of them, and learning helpful strategies to stay on task with their habits, even when it gets hard.

Student Assessment Plan

I'm really excited about how I'm going to assess what the students learn! One of the biggest grades of the quarter will be their "Dear Friend" letters about their pursuit of their healthy

habit(s). They will practice how to write a detailed “Dear Friend” letter and have all kinds of examples from reading our main character Charlie’s letters about him making friends in the book *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and then finally write their own letters, as well! Once they have written a good series of letters, I’m going to have them exchange letters with someone else. They can choose to leave their letters anonymous or to share who they are with whoever gets their letters. I’m going to try and have them exchange with someone who had a similar habit they were building as them. After completing their letters and turning them in, I’ll decide which student is going to receive whose letters. Once they’ve exchanged, the students are going to write an analysis of their peers’ habits. They’ll choose a theme that they say present in their letters and then provide evidence from the letters about it. This will serve as the summative assessment for the project.

A smaller lesson that will be a part of the overarching project are the mixtape they’ll create! The student who receives their letters will also get a picture of their mixtape. This part of the assignment is mostly for fun while building on the skills of determining theme and citing evidence. They’ll choose a name for their playlist that reflects its theme and put it on an image of a cassette tape that will be attached to their letters. On the back of the cassette tape they’ll list the songs that go on the playlist. The entire mixtape has to be relevant to the habit they’re trying to build. For instance, if they’re wanting to build a habit to work out more, a playlist of pump-up music would be great! Or if they’re wanting to pursue a certain kind of art, they can make a playlist that gets them in the mood to pursue that habit or get them inspired.

Aside from that, I will assess the students will a variety of smaller assignments, as well. They will complete their “write into the day” entries and “get lit”-erature slips, which are a routine part of our classroom. The “write into the day” entries are their bellwork, and they complete a journal entry answering a question each day. These questions have to do with the assignments they’re doing, and they usually activate prior knowledge, spark a thought that will tie in to the lesson later in the period, or give them an opportunity to reflect on something we learned the day before. They will also track their habits on a habit tracker each day at the start of class during their “write into the day” time taken from James Clear’s *Atomic Habits*. In addition to that, their “get lit”-erature slips are reading response slips that go with the assigned class readings to monitor comprehension and give them a chance to analyze the text for meaning.

The summative assessment will be worth the majority of the grade, the mixtape won’t be worth too much but will be a nice “brain break” for the kids, and the write into the day prompts and “get lit”-erature slips are each worth a small grade, but they add up over time.

Alignment with State Standards

Our school is under new administration this year, and they are implementing some new strategies concerning which standards we teach. In the past we taught three standards per quarter and spent three weeks focusing on each one. This year, the goal is for students to really, genuinely master just two or three standards in total. We’re calling them “essential standards.” The three that I’ve chosen are as follows:

RL.1, Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says

explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RL.2, Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

The students are going to exchange their Dear Friend letters with each other, read about what healthy habits their peers are pursuing, and then analyze those letters. They're going to determine themes in their peers' letters and cite evidence from the letters that points to the theme they choose. This will be called the "Dear Friend Analysis." This follows a very similar pattern to the other assignments we've done this year. For example, last quarter when the students wrote their "I Am From" poems, they had to come up with a theme to go with their poem. Then, they cited evidence from their poem that went with that theme. We'll also be following this pattern with smaller assignments for the quarter, such as their "get lit"-erature slips; for that, they have to determine themes in the book and provide evidence to back it up.

This unit also follows many of the "Core Principles of Culturally Responsive Schooling with/in Indigenous Communities." I'll list the ones that are applicable below:

- Encourages students to build and sustain relationships
- One of the Apache values they can choose to focus on this quarter is *ídagoch'idzaaní* (or social skills). Relationships within the classroom are strong
 - It involves a lot of trust to let someone else read your personal writing. It is an expectation in the class to be respectful of peer work. The content of the assignment is also relevant to their everyday lives, so it encourages them to discuss their daily routines and habits with one another.
- Traditional and/or cultural knowledge is included
- Norms, values, traditions, interests of local/regional Indigenous community are leveraged for learning opportunities
- Local/regional context is leveraged for learning opportunities
- Local Indigenous language(s) is valued
- Local Indigenous language(s) is integrated
 - The above five principles are relevant to this unit, because the whole basis of the unit is from a presentation I got to attend about Apache values pre-colonization. The point of the talk emphasized how the Apache people have gotten away from these values due to cyclical addiction and poverty and that it would be really healthy for this people to return to them. The purpose of this unit is to shed light on those values and see if the students can return back to them in practical ways.
- Indigenous people are represented as contemporary (not only historical)
 - This unit applies these ancient values to modern day. They are definitely just as applicable and relevant now as they were pre-colonization. In fact, if the Apache people as a whole were to prioritize these values, the reservation would function a lot better as a result.
- Indigenous people are represented as diverse (not a monolithic "they")
- Local/regional Indigenous community is reflected

- Clear reference and/or integration of local/regional Indigenous context
 - The above three principles are relevant because the values presented in the unit are not simply “Native American values.” They are specific to the Apache people.

Resources

Teacher Background Reading

O'Neil, T. D. L. (1996). *Disciplined Hearts: History, Identity, and Depression in an American Indian Community*. University of California Press.

- This article is helpful in getting an understanding of the research that's been done about the behaviors I see affecting the students in my classroom.

Walters, K. L., & Simoni, J. M. (2009). Decolonizing Strategies for Mentoring American Indians and Alaska Natives in HIV and Mental Health Research. *American Journal of Public Health, 99*(S1). <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2008.136127>

- This article is helpful because it brought up how the conjunction of pouring into students in an intentional way and incorporating culture through it is vital for impacting Indigenous youth.

King, M. L., Jr. (2018). *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. Penguin Books.

- This was one of the first texts our group discussed together in this seminar and got the ball rolling to think about injustice and how it affects people in this country.

Anderson, L. H. (2019). *Speak*. Macmillan Children's Publishing Group.

- This book first gave me the idea for the concept, "What's Behind the Hoodie?" and helped me process through the fact that when students are going through trauma, they tend to hide. The goal for this unit is to provide the students a time where they don't have to hide, and without this book I don't know if I would've gotten to that idea.

Perry, R. J. (1980). *The Apache Continuum: An Analysis of Continuity Through Change in San Carlos Apache Culture and Society*. University Microfilms.

- This book inspired me deeply! I can't wait to use it in future years. For this project, the book gave me context for what the reservation looked like decades ago and showed me how it's changing more even now.

Arizona Rural Policy Institute. (2010). *Demographic Analysis of the San Carlos Apache Tribe Using 2010 Census and 2010 American Community Survey Estimates*. Northern Arizona University. Retrieved from [file:///C:/Users/s.curd/Downloads/san_carlos_apache_tribe_0%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/s.curd/Downloads/san_carlos_apache_tribe_0%20(2).pdf).

- This source provided demographic data for me to get a better understanding of what the students in my classroom are going through.

Murray, D. M. (2005). *Write To Learn*. Thomson/Wadsworth.

- Core Principles of Culturally Responsive Schooling with/in Indigenous Communities (n.d.)

Student Reading/Materials for Classroom Use:

Chbosky, S. (1999, February 1). *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Gallery Books.

- This is the primary text my students will read during the project, and they're modeling the letters they write after the epistolary style of the novel.

Clear, J. (2021). *Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones*. CELA.

- This book is providing some inspiration and resources for how the students can plan and keep track of their habits.

Park, Y., Vollers, M., & Gilkes, J. (2016). *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom*. Penguin Books.

- We will use some excerpts of this book to see how someone pursued healthy habits as a way to overcome their trauma.

(2019). Goyééhí Biyi' Gozhóó (finding beauty during hard times).

- This presentation provided the ancient Apache values that we'll be focusing on for the project.