

SEATTLE
REP

BETWEEN TWO KNEES



BY The 1491s

DIRECTED BY Eric Ting

PLAY GUIDE

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A NOTE FROM ARTS ENGAGEMENT

When I taught 7th grade Social Studies way back in the 2010s, I once had a student walk in and triumphantly smack a heavy book on my desk. “Look what I found in the library!” he shouted. Just satisfied that he’d been in the library, I picked up the book. It was *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, a text I had read in grad school and liked a lot. “Have you been LYING to us!?!” the student continued. I assured him that I hadn’t, and that his textbook had one telling of history, and that it is important to gather multiple sources for perspective, and to examine bias, blah, blah, blah.



But the truth is, many times, I wasn’t exactly lying...but because of the pace and pressure of the school year, married with the requirement to adhere to curriculum, I wasn’t providing the space to digest the traumas of our history. There’s a creative empathy required to read history. It is most effective when we can imagine ourselves into the stories of the past. This is where Art steps in: storytelling, humor, poetry, and of course, theater. Art is the space to explore the fullness of the pain and victories of our people, and of the people around us.

In Lies My Teacher Told Me, James Loewen writes, “Native Americans are not and must not be props in a sort of theme park of the past, where we go to have a good time and see exotic cultures. ‘What we have done to the peoples who were living in North America’ is, according to anthropologist Sol Tax, ‘our Original Sin.’” Through humor and storytelling, *Between Two Knees* allows audiences the space to creatively empathize with and process a piece of this Original Sin. Rather than being mere consumers having “a good time” and seeing “exotic cultures,” the audience is asked to reckon with the past, even through laughter or tears.

I’m so grateful to partner with so many teachers, parents, and students who are interested in learning and growing. It is an honor to provide opportunities to examine history and contemporary life beyond the textbook here at Seattle Rep.

If you would like to learn more about the opportunities we have available for our community, please visit seattlerep.org/audience-programs.

Deanna Martinez

Associate Director of Arts Engagement, Youth & Community

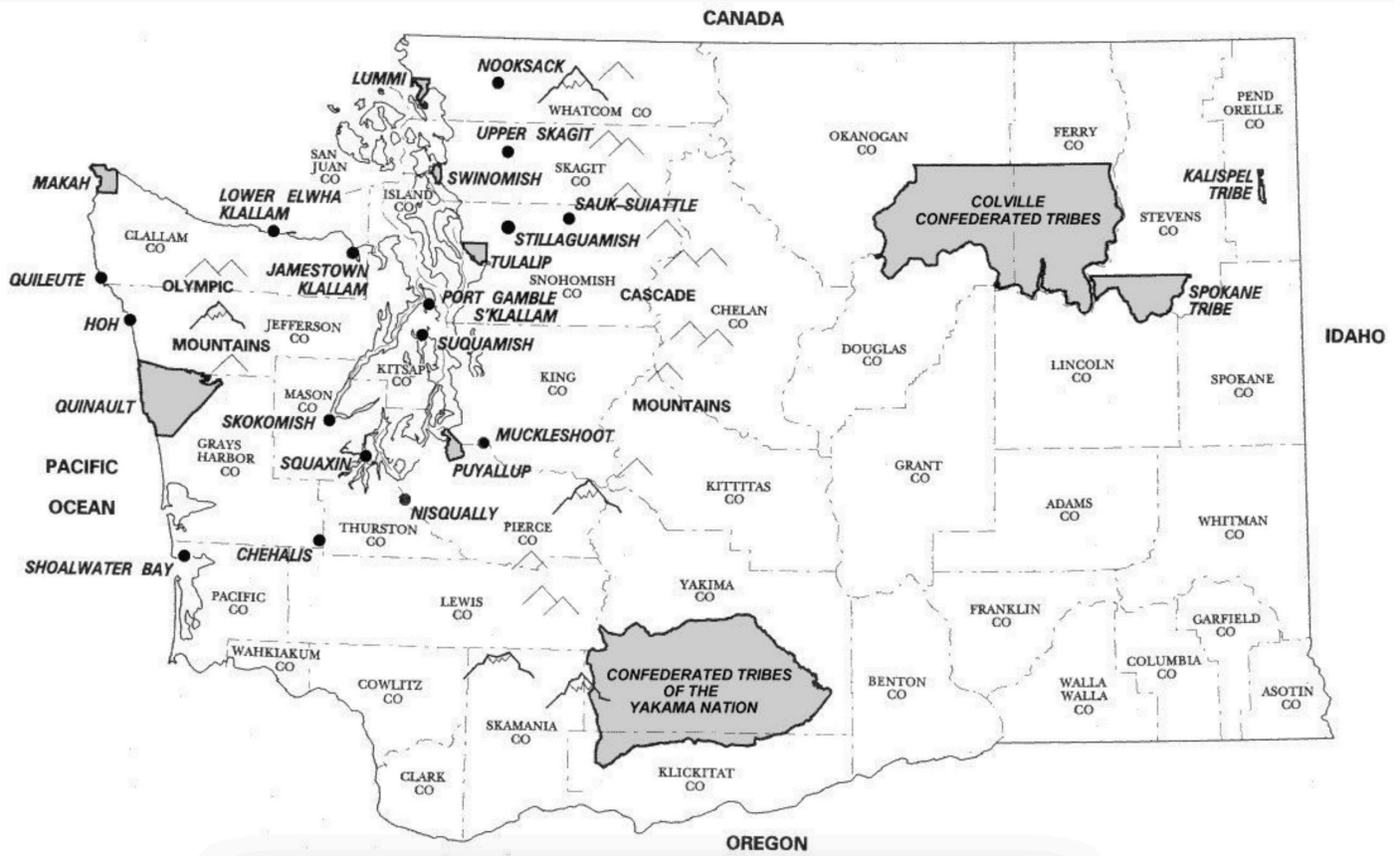
INTRODUCTION

Between Two Knees is a wonderful and hilarious show that reflects on serious topics within the history of the United States. Seattle Rep continues to spotlight Indigenous narratives in powerful ways by providing further public spaces for these communities to share their voices. This show brings forth the history of violence against Native American children in boarding schools, and the violent wars and invasions of Native land and territories. These are important subjects as many boarding school children have still not been found or their remains returned to their families and homes, and lands have not been fully restored or respected as homes to those before settlers colonized.

Articles by Bri Olson, Youth Engagement Apprentice

OUR LOCAL WASHINGTON TRIBES

Seattle Rep acknowledges that we are on the traditional land of the Coast Salish people, including the Duwamish People past and present. We honor with gratitude the land itself and the Duwamish Tribe. This acknowledgement does not take the place of authentic relationships with indigenous communities but serves as a first step in honoring the land we are on.



Map of some of the Indigenous tribes of Washington.

Washington is home to 29 federally recognized tribes-and many other tribes that are still unrecognized by the U.S. federal government-spread across the state. They continue to work to ensure that their communities flourish with art and culture through creating organizations, museums, and cultural centers to share their cultures with all inhabitants of Washington. Through these layers of creation they are improving the lives of the people within the tribes and protecting natural and cultural resources. Check out [Homepage - Washington Tribes](#) for more information on the tribes around us to stay connected and help support.

The language of several Indigenous tribes of the Pacific Northwest is Lushootseed. You can learn more about the Lushootseed Language [here](#) and by watching Seattle Rep's recent [panel with local experts](#).

You can also learn more on Seattle Rep's [Native Resources page](#).

BOARDING SCHOOLS



For many years throughout U.S. history, Native American children were forced into boarding schools to “rehabilitate and learn” the ideals of the white settler. Many of these children were abused, neglected, starved, and killed within these boarding schools. These children were then buried at the school sites, known as “Indian Cemeteries.” Some children have been identified and returned to their families and communities, yet so many still have not been found. In recent years, the

Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative has furthered the search in these burial sites to safely locate the missing children.

An example of how complex the search for missing children can be took place in what is now the state of Wyoming. In 2017, several coffins containing the remains of boarding school children were returned to the Wind River Reservation, one of which was said to contain the remains of a little boy named Little Plume. Instead, in that coffin were two sets of children’s remains of different ages, so the family of Little Plume was left without their child’s true remains. There are countless examples like this of misidentification, continued grief, and lack of closure for families.

We can only hope these children are returned to their families soon, although this will never repair the hurt and pain so many generations have faced.



WAR AND VIOLENCE

BRIEF TIMELINE

(Table from War and Genocide in Childrens Literature)

1816–18 • First Seminole War

Seminole fight Andrew Jackson's force, Jackson failed, but forced Spanish to relinquish territory.

1817 • Battle of Claremore Mound

Cherokee Indians wipe out Osage Indians.

1832 • Black Hawk War

Last Native conflict in the area. Unsuccessful attempt to move back to their homeland in Illinois.

1832 • Battle of Bad Axe

300 Indian men, women, and children are killed by white soldiers.

1835–42 • Second Seminole War

Seminole resume fighting for land in Florida. Seminoles nearly eliminated.

1836–75 • Comanche Wars

U.S. Military instituted official campaigns against Comanche tribes.

1839 • Cherokee War

Culmination of tension between Cherokee, Kickapoo, and Shawnee Indians and the white settlers in Texas.

1848–55 • Cayuse War

Conflict between Cayuse and white settlers that was caused in part by influx of disease.

1849–63 • Navajo Conflicts

Persistent fighting between Navajo and U.S. Army in Arizona and New Mexico. Led to expulsion and incarceration to a reservation.

WAR AND VIOLENCE

1854-90 • Sioux Wars

Conflict between the Sioux and white settlers in South Dakota and Wyoming.

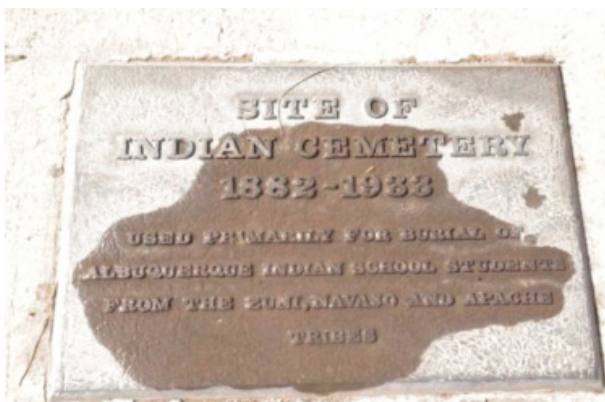
1855- 58 • Third Seminole War

Final stand against the U.S. in Florida. Seminoles deported to Indian Reservations in Oklahoma.

1867-75 • Comanche Campaign

Major General Phillip Sheridan's campaign to root out elusive Indian tribes scattered throughout the West.

This timeline does not go in-depth into the violence many Native tribes have faced across the United States. It hardly scratches the surface of the number of wars that occurred on this continent between the Indigenous people and settlers. Some of the wars that are mentioned and explored in *Between Two Knees* include the **Pavonia Massacre**, the **Battle of Little Bighorn**, and the **Wounded Knee Massacre**. Native tribes suffered great losses in many of these battles. Indigenous communities, and other communities of color, continue to face violence, injustice, and racism on a daily basis. This makes hearing the accurate story of United States history important so that we can work to change these issues.



GLOSSARY

- **Agent Orange:** A sprayed toxin used to destroy plants.
- **Battle of Little Bighorn:** A battle near Little Bighorn River between the United States Cavalry and several Native American Tribes, in which the Sioux and Cheyenne people won.
- **Bemidji:** A town located in Minnesota.
- **Boarding School:** A private school where students live while getting their education, many Native American students were forced to go to be "re-educated". (See Further Resources)
- **Creator:** This is referring to the Christian God.
- **Decolonization:** People leaving colonization, becoming independent.
- **Hoka:** Native Americans who speak the Hokan languages.
- **Lakota:** Lakota people are part of the Teton Sioux; located in the Dakotas.
- **Meadowlark:** A songbird.
- **Moccasin:** Soft leather shoes.
- **Papoose:** An infant. However, this word is considered offensive to many Native Americans whose tribes do not use this word.
- **Pavonia Massacre:** On February 25, 1643, Dutch soldiers attacked the Lenape people while they were sleeping, over 80 of their people were killed.
- **PTSD:** Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; an anxiety related disorder caused by traumatic events.
- **Sacred:** Dealing with one's religion and beliefs, worthiness of respect and dedication.
- **Shaman:** Spiritual practitioners in healing.
- **Wounded Knee Massacre:** A massacre in 1890 that took the lives of up to 300 Native Americans. White settlers had banned the traditional Ghost Dance, and murdered Sioux chief Sitting Bull, which escalated tensions. When the U.S. Army confronted a band of Ghost Dancers near Wounded Knee Creek, a gun went off which led the U.S. Army to open fire on the entire group gathered there, including hundreds of women and children.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- [Homepage – Washington Tribes](#)
- [A century of trauma at U.S. boarding schools for Native American children \(nationalgeographic.com\)](#)
- [How Boarding Schools Tried to 'Kill the Indian' Through Assimilation – HISTORY](#)
- [Secretary Haaland Announces Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative U.S. Department of the Interior \(doi.gov\)](#)
- [Remembering Pavonia – The Public History Project](#)
- [Battle of the Little Bighorn – Location, Cause & Significance – HISTORY](#)
- [American Indian Wars: Timeline – Combatants, Battles & Outcomes – HISTORY](#)
- [Wounded Knee Massacre](#)
- [Native Americans and Aboriginals – War and Genocide in Children's Literature \(weebly.com\)](#)

OSF STUDY GUIDE

The following articles are courtesy of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

THE 1491s



Founded in 2009. The 1491s is comprised of Dallas Goldtooth, Sterlin Harjo, Migizi Pensoneau, Ryan RedCorn, and Bobby Wilson. They are popular for live sketch comedy shows and YouTube videos. They have also appeared on “The Daily Show” with Jon Stewart. OSF commissioned The 1491s to write their first full-length play as a part of OSF’s American Revolutions program to commission and develop new plays on subjects related to moments of change in American history.

SOVEREIGNTY

Sovereignty is the concept of a nation’s right to hold supreme power over itself and its laws, without the pressure or interference of an outside power. It supposes the right of a people to enact and enforce their own laws without being policed or incarcerated by an outside force.

The indigenous Nations that reside on reservations within the United States have achieved a partial, but not a complete, sovereignty. The court case *Washington v. Confederated Tribes of Colville Indian Reservation* (1980) established that native nations are not subject to the laws of the states that surround them, but they are still subject to U.S. federal law. Although Native nations can manage some internal tribal affairs, their residents are also considered U.S. citizens and are not exempt from federal law.

Tribal rules and internal policing vary from Nation to Nation and reservation to reservation. Some have no police forces of their own and call on state police to assist in criminal cases, while others have strong police forces of their own and resist the interference of outside law enforcement under the rules of sovereignty. In general, a state police officer cannot come onto reservation land to pursue or arrest a tribal member, but the F.B.I. can in the case of serious federal crimes.

OSF STUDY GUIDE

BEFORE SEEING/READING THE PLAY

1 What is satire? What is the effect of telling a serious story in a satirical fashion? This and other websites provide information: <https://www.britannica.com/art/satire>

2 Who are The 1491s? What is the significance of their name? These and other websites provide information: www.1491s.com <https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/on-the-cutting-edge-of-native-comedy-with-the-1491s-QRb1WwqeHUma9d-e0oW1mQ/>

3 What is Turtle Island? This and other websites provide information: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/turtle-island>

4 Research the Oglala Sioux of the Lakota Nation. These and other websites provide information: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oglala> <https://www.truesiouxhope.org/single-post/2015/01/27HISTORY-OF-THE-PINE-RIDGE-UGLALA-LAKOTA-SIOUX>

5 What is a Ghost Dance? This and other websites provide information: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ghost-Dance>

6 What were the Indian Wars? This and other websites provide information: <https://amhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/printable/section.asp?id=6>

7 Research the Wounded Knee Massacre. This and other websites provide information: <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/u-s-armymassacres-indians-at-wounded-knee>

8 Research Indian Boarding Schools. This and other websites provide information: www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc_hist_boardingschools

9 Research Native American involvement in World War II. This and other websites provide information: <https://nativeamericannetroots.net/diary/609>

10 Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, led to the formation of the American Indian Movement in 1968. What events did AIM participate in in the late 60s and early 70s? What is the trail of broken treaties? These and other websites provide information:

- <http://www.onthisdeity.com/28th-july-1968-%E2%80%93-the-founding-of-the-american-indian-movement/>

- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/American-Indian-Movement>

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trail_of_Broken_Treaties

- <https://www.framingredpower.org/narrative/tbt/>

11 Research the Wounded Knee Incident of 1973. This and other websites provide information: <https://libcom.org/history/1973-siege-at-wounded-knee>

12 What does the wolf symbolize in some Native American cultures? This and other websites provide information: <https://alltotems.com/spirit-animals/wolf-symbolismmeaning/>

OSF STUDY GUIDE

BEFORE SEEING/READING THE PLAY

1 Refer to your research on questions 7 and 11 in the “before” section. What is the reason or reasons the play is called *Between Two Knees*?

2 Refer to your research on satire. What elements of satire are present in *Between Two Knees*? How does the satirical nature of the play inform and affect the storytelling?

3 Larry says at the beginning of the play, “This is not a story about death, it is a story about life.” In what ways is this true, given all the death that takes place during it?

4 What different things represent home to the characters in the play? What different homes has Isaiah had before he ever learns where he was born?

5 What qualities does Irma possess that draw Isaiah to her? What does he see her as representing for Native peoples?

6 Why does Eddie pick a fight in the bar? What has he been raised not to be, and in what ways is he struggling with that?

7 What battles, both literal and internal, are fought in the play? What are Irma’s battles? Isaiah’s? Eddie’s? Irene’s?

8 Refer to your research on the Ghost Dance. What things were supposed to come about as a result of the Ghost Dance? How are those things achieved and expanded on at the end of *Between Two Knees*?

“We wash his ears so that he will not hear people lecture him on what should be considered racist or offensive when they themselves have only a minimal understanding of how uncensored humor borne from trauma is actually beneficial to community healing!”

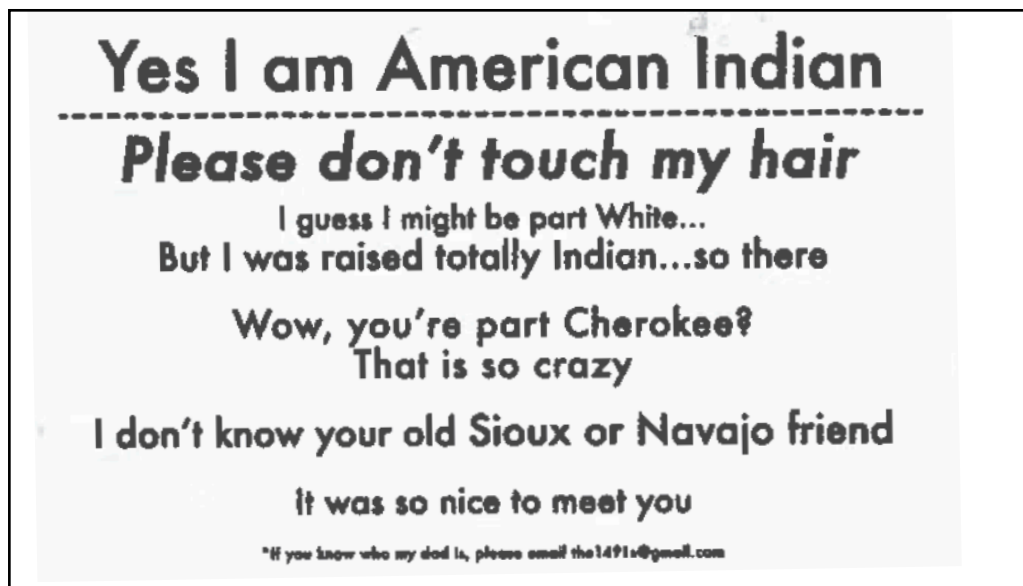
- Irma Jean Snake, *Between Two Knees*

ALTERNATIVE SKETCH COMEDY

Sketch Comedy is a series of short vignettes that utilize a structure or sequences for jokes and storytelling. Unlike improvisation, sketch comedy is material written and rehearsed prior to the performances.

Alternative Sketch Comedy does not utilize the structure or rules of mainstream sketch comedy. Instead, it uses the element of surprise: having the audience members not know what to expect. It often uses hot button or sensitive subjects as the source of the material, exaggerating them to the point of ridiculousness, but with an underlying message. The goal can be to get the audience to laugh at a serious matter, while having them reflect and spark a dialogue about the content. For example: stereotypes, especially in regards to race, are often explored (by people belonging to said race) to make a point about how demeaning racist stereotypes are.

Sketch Comedy vs. Skits: Skits are a single idea for a joke or a “bit” that has been heightened and dramatized, whereas sketches are the exploration of comedic content through an idea or a character.



The 1491s business card.