

Six Things I Wish My Teachers Knew Upset Me as an Indigenous Student

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1. I like to be referred to by my Tribal identity rather than Indigenous or Native American. I am a member of a sovereign nation with our own culture, government, and language. Native American and Indigenous are acceptable terms but using them to refer to me individually ignores my unique identity.
2. I felt silenced when non-native students were allowed to take up too much space or even talk over me on subjects related to Native American issues.
3. I really dislike when I was called on without warning to share Native American history or knowledge with the class. More times than not the subject would be too painful, I did not know the answer, or I felt too overwhelmed by being thrown into answering a complex question.
4. I was annoyed when teachers pulled me aside to apologize for a recent event that has negatively impacted Native Americans or my Tribe. If you would like to bring attention to this issue then educating the class and encouraging them to stand up against whatever it is, would have been a better way to “apologize”.
5. I dreaded my history classes because I never knew when we would be discussing a potentially triggering topic on Native American history. I wish my teachers would have warned me individually and provided me the agency to step outside when and if I felt overwhelmed.
6. I felt falsely accused when teachers would pull me aside after class to check in with me after another student made a racist comment. It is important to check in with the hurt student but the teacher needs to first call out the student who said the racist comment. Instead, I was singled out and pulled aside, not the offending student, which made it seem like I was being punished.