

POW!

TEACHER TOOLS



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Joey Clift

Pow! was written and directed by Joey Clift, a Los Angeles-based comedian, Peabody and Emmy nominated TV writer and an enrolled member of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe. Growing up, Joey aspired to become a local TV weatherperson because he didn't see Native American comedians on screen and thought a career in comedy was off-limits. He has since proven otherwise, with his comedy featured in The Washington Post, CNN, Dropout, Pitchfork, NPR, Dead Meat, and Comedy Central. As a television writer Joey has written for shows such as Spirit Rangers (Netflix), Molly of Denali (PBS), New Looney Tunes (Cartoon Network), and Paw Patrol (Nickelodeon). Pow! was made as a collaborative project between a largely Native team, an all Native voice cast and Non Native allies working together with comedy and authentic representation at the forefront.



Andrew Slack

This teaching tool was designed by Andrew Slack, pioneer of pop culture storytelling for social change. As co-founder of the Harry Potter Alliance, Andrew spent a decade inspiring millions of young people to become activists. His campaigns have fostered grassroots movements in over 30 countries, earning him fellowships at Ashoka and Civic Hall. Andrew has spoken at hundreds of venues including Harvard, Yale, MIT, and TEDx. Featured in The New York Times, The New Yorker, LA Times, CNN, and The Hollywood Reporter, he recently co-authored a cover story with Nobel Prize-winning journalist Jose Antonio Vargas. As a narrative strategist, Andrew has mobilized A-list celebrities to champion Indigenous rights and produced videos seen 100+ million times. He is co-author of Save Santa's Home, a children's book inspiring young people to advocate for climate action.





WHEN YOU REALIZE YOU DON'T HAVE TO CHOOSE!

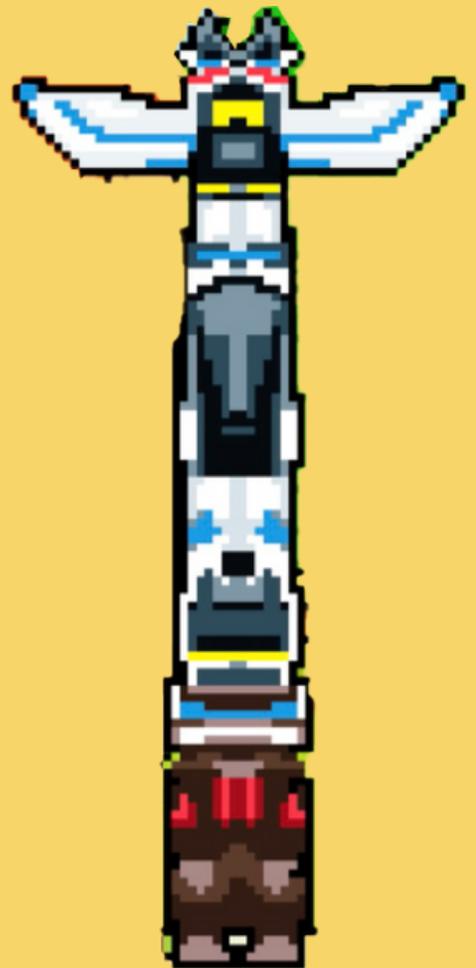
45-60 Minutes

Timing note for teachers

This lesson is designed for Native American Heritage Month (November) but works year-round.

Suggested framing for November:

“November is Native American Heritage Month—a time to learn about and celebrate Native cultures, past and present. Today we’re watching POW!, an animated short by Cowlitz filmmaker Joey Clift. It’s about a Native kid who loves gaming and discovers he doesn’t have to choose between his culture and his interests. After we watch, we’ll think about places in our own lives where we feel like we have to choose between parts of ourselves.”



THE HEART OF THIS LESSON

Jake sits at a powwow, totally absorbed in his Nintendo Switch. The powwow feels like his parents' thing, not his. But then his battery dies, and after many failed attempts to charge it, he ends up talking to his grandmother, who survived an Indian boarding school that tried to erase her culture and joined movements to protect it. She helps him see that gaming and powwow dancing aren't at odds. By the end of the film, he's dancing with his parents and grandmother, her Switch in his pocket for later.



This lesson is about realizing you might not have to choose.

Students will reflect on how different parts of who they are, such as hobbies, family traditions, cultural identities, and personal interests, can all exist together. This lesson encourages students to see that it's okay to be a complex human being. You don't have to choose one part of yourself over another.

WHAT STUDENTS WILL DO



Watch Jake's journey and recognize their own



Name something they love or really enjoy (no matter how "random")



Identify a space where those loves feel unwelcome



Explore whether the barrier is real or imagined



Commit to one small experiment in being whole

MATERIALS

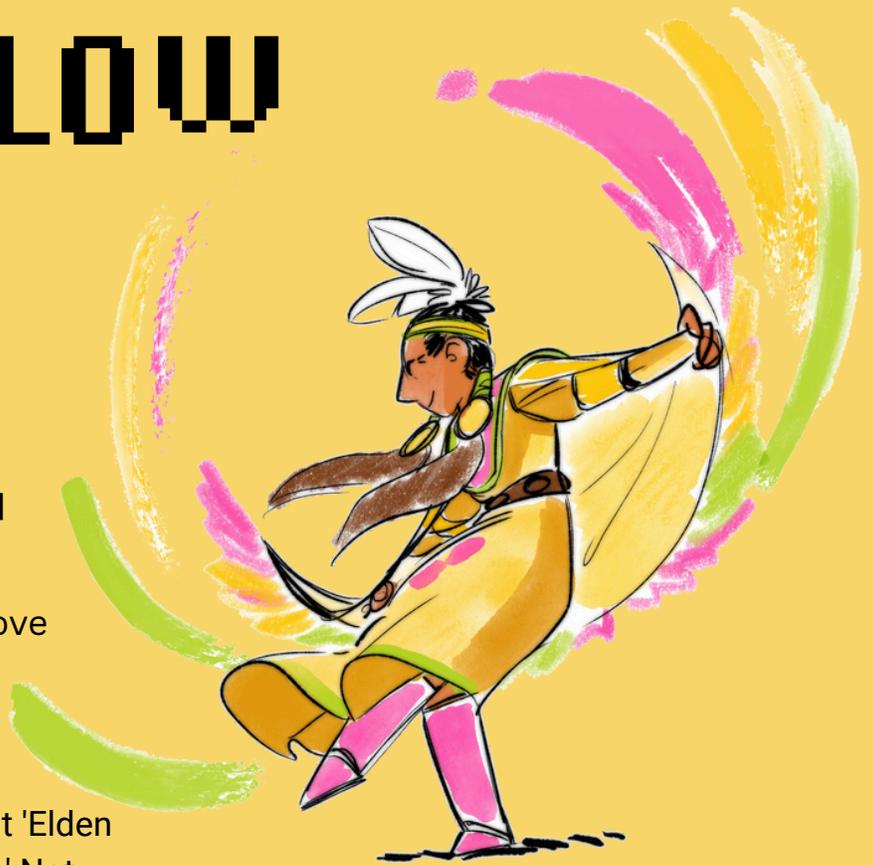
- [POW! film \(9 minutes\)](#) 
- Paper and markers
- Exit ticket slips or index cards
- Optional: Sticky notes (for gallery walk feedback)
- Your genuine curiosity about what students care about

THE FLOW

1 What do you actually love? (5 min)

Make a list. “What do you actually love doing? Playing, watching, making, collecting—whatever.”

Be specific. Not 'video games' but 'Elden Ring' or 'speedrunning Mario Kart.' Not 'music' but 'making beats on GarageBand' or 'K-pop dance covers.'



Give them 3-4 minutes to brainstorm.

This isn't about school-appropriate interests. This is about what actually lights them up.

Then: "Circle your top 3-5. The ones you could talk about for an hour."

Teacher note: *This is important. When kids start with their actual passions, they can't help but engage.*



2 Watch POW! (9 min)

Frame it simply:

"Jake loves gaming. He's at a powwow with his family. Watch what he thinks at the beginning and what changes by the end."



3 What Changed for Jake? (7 min)

Simple Questions:



What's Jake into?

(His Switch, his game)



Where is he?

(Powwow—big cultural gathering)



Does he look torn?

(No—he's clearly choosing gaming)



What happens?

(Battery dies, talks to Grandma, joins dance)



What's in his pocket at the end?

(His Switch)

The key insight:

Jake thought traditional Native culture and gaming were opposites. Like if you're into powwows, you can't be a gamer. And since he saw himself as a gamer, he wrote off the powwow. But then his grandmother—the boarding school survivor, the activist—reveals she's also a gamer and hands him her own Switch. That's when Jake realizes: the either/or was never real. His grandmother helped him see he could value both, even if he can't do them at the exact same time."



4

The Four Questions (20 min)

Draw four boxes. Work through them in order.

BOX 1: Where I Don't Feel Fully Welcome? (5 min)

"Think about the things you circled—what you actually love. Now name a space you have to show up in regularly where those things you love feel... wrong. Unwelcome. Out of place."

Could be anywhere:

- Family dinners where you can't talk about your interests
- Friend group where you hide certain passions
- School where your skills don't count
- Team where you can't be your full self

"Be specific. Not 'at home' but 'Sunday dinners with extended family.' Not 'school' but 'math class' or 'lunch table.'"

BOX 2: Where I Can Be My Full Self? (3 min)

"Where DO your loves show up fully? Where do you not have to choose?"

Examples:

- "Online with my Discord friends"
- "Art class where Ms. Martinez gets it"
- "At my cousin's house"
- "4am when everyone's asleep and I'm making music"

"What makes that space different?"



BOX 3: What If the Barrier Is Me? (7 min)

"Here's the thing about Jake: His Native elders weren't actually rejecting gaming. Jake just assumed they were. He created the either/or in his head. So honest question: In Box 1, that space where you don't feel welcome—where did that message come from? A specific person? A specific moment? Or more of a general sense?

Three questions:

1. Why do I hold back sometimes?
2. What would happen if I tried to bring my full self into these spaces?
3. Can you commit to trying to do so at least once?

"Write one tiny thing you could do this week that's within YOUR control.

Not changing the space—changing how you show up."

Examples:

- "Mention anime to one person on the basketball team"
- "Connect my music production to physics project"
- "Ask one family member a question about their interests, then share one of mine"

BOX 4: What If the Space Actually Needs to Change? (5 min)

"With Jake, the powwow didn't need fixing. But maybe your Box 1 space actually does.

If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing about that space so people like you could breathe easier—what would it be?"

Dream a little. Be specific.

Could be:

- "If school encouraged TikTok"
- "If we could talk about real stuff sometimes"
- "If the teacher understood speedrunning takes strategy"
- "If my language counted as real language"

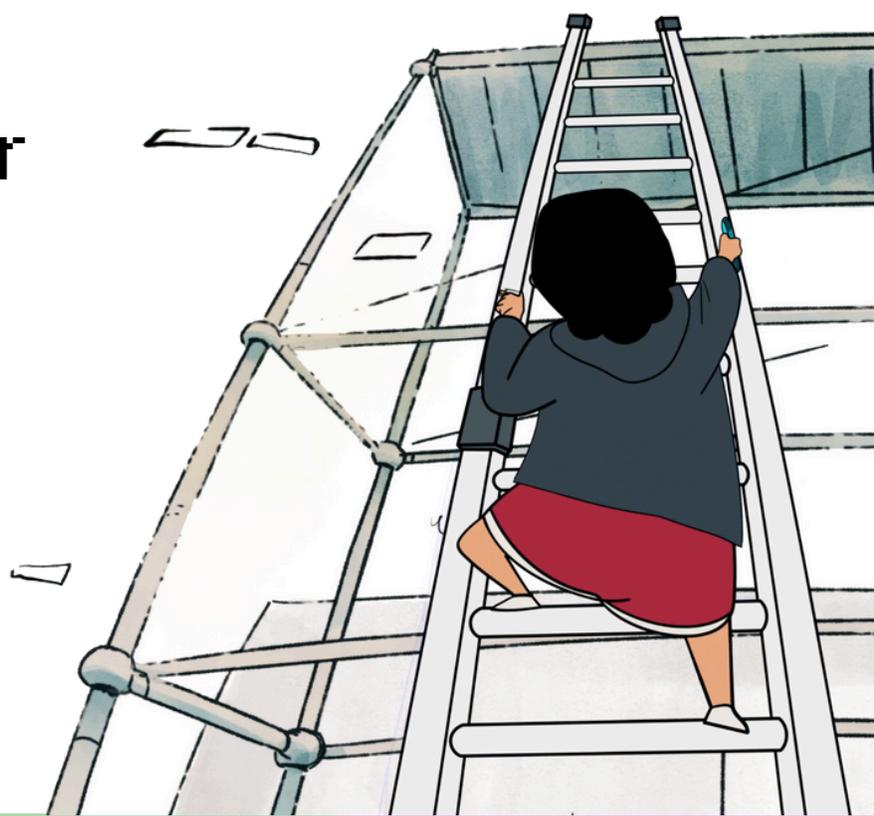
5

Design your Both/And

(12 min)

Create three panels showing your journey from either/or to both/and.

You can draw, write, or combine both. Stick figures are perfect—this is about the idea, not art skill.



Panel 1: The Split

Show yourself with two parts of your life that feel separate.

Jake's example:

Draw Jake holding his Switch on one side, the powwow dance on the other, with a wall or gap between them.

Your version:

Draw yourself with the two things from Box 1. What keeps them apart? A physical space? A voice in your head? Other people's expectations?

Panel 2: The Question

Show the moment you start to realize you might not have to choose.

Jake's example:

Jake sitting with Grandma, listening to her story. Maybe draw a lightbulb, or show his face changing as he realizes something.

Your version:

What or who helps you see differently? A conversation? A realization? A moment when both worlds accidentally collided and it worked?

Panel 3: The Experiment

Show yourself bringing both parts together.

Jake's example:

Jake dancing with his family, his Switch visible in his pocket. He's fully present in the powwow AND still a gamer.

Your version:

What does it look like when you stop choosing? Draw yourself doing/being both. Who's surprised? What changes?

Remember: Jake can't literally game while dancing, but he doesn't have to hide or reject his gamer identity to participate. Same with you—both/and doesn't mean doing everything at once. It means refusing to treat parts of yourself as enemies.

6

Commit & Share

(7-10 min)

If you have time (60 min): Gallery walk—post them, view silently, leave encouraging sticky notes.

Exit reflection (everyone):

Three things on a card:

- The either/or I've been believing: _____
- My Box 3 experiment this week: _____
- My Box 4 dream: _____

Collect these. Read them. They'll tell you everything about your students.



TEACHER NOTES

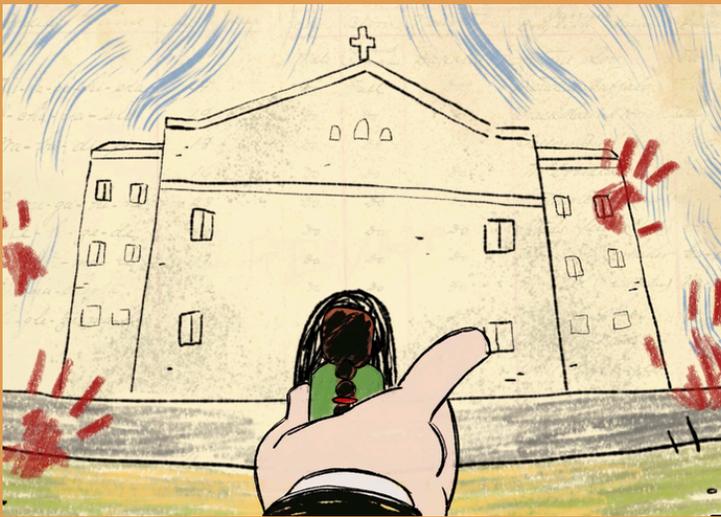
Jake can't literally game and dance simultaneously. That's not the point. The point is he doesn't have to reject his gamer identity to participate in the powwow. He can be both/and even if he can't do both/and at the exact same moment.

Same with students. They might not be able to bring everything everywhere all the time. But they can stop treating their identities as mutually exclusive.

Box 3 and Box 4 both matter. One is about taking personal initiative and the other's thinking more about civic engagement

CULTURAL CONTEXT FOR TEACHERS

If students ask about elements in the film:

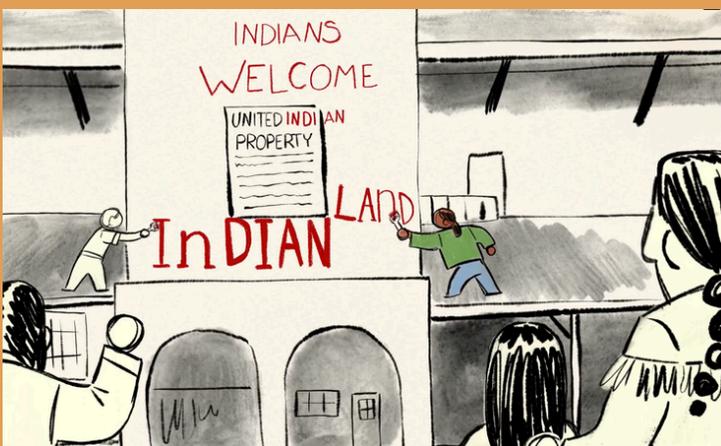


Indian Boarding Schools (1860s-1978):

- Government-run schools that forcibly separated Native children from families
- Designed to erase Native languages and cultures
- Last one closed in 1978 with the passing of the Indian Child Welfare Act; survivors and their families still healing
- Grandma's flashback references this history

Powwows:

- Intertribal gatherings combining cultural celebration and competition
- Modern powwows developed in the 1920s as a way to gather publicly when ceremonies were banned
- Include dance competitions, food, vendors, and yes—kids with devices
- Living culture, not museum pieces



Ledger Art:

- Historical practice where Native artists drew over Army accounting ledgers
- Transformed documents meant to track/control into declarations of culture
- POW! animates this technique in Grandma's flashback sequences

The Film's Message: Jake discovers he doesn't have to choose between gaming and culture—he can value both.

WHEN STUDENTS STRUGGLE



"I don't hide anything" "Okay—where are you most yourself? Where do you hold back a little?"

"Everything I love is welcome everywhere" "That's amazing. Who in your life doesn't have that? What would you want for them?" Or if they are more comfortable, "name a fictional character who doesn't have that."

"My family would never accept ___" "That's real. For today, let's focus on something smaller you can control. What's one space where you could experiment?"

"This is stupid" "Fair. What would make it not stupid?"

DIFFERENTIATION

Time crunch (45 min): Skip gallery walk, streamline to 3 questions instead of 4

Younger students (K-5): Focus on "things I love that adults think are silly"

Older students (9-12): Add "where did this message come from?" to each box

Private processors: Everything can stay private. Sharing optional. Can design for "a friend."

ASSESSMENT

Don't grade this. Just notice:

- Can they name what they genuinely love?
- Can they identify where they feel split?
- Do they distinguish between assumed barriers and real ones?
- Can they imagine one small experiment?
- That's enough.



THE POINT

Most barriers are in our heads—inherited assumptions about what belongs where. This lesson gives students permission to test those assumptions.

Some will discover the space was ready for them all along. Others will discover real barriers that need real change. Both realizations matter.

Start with Box 1: What do you actually love?

Everything else follows from there.



BOTH / AND STUDENT WORKSHEET

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

WHAT I ACTUALLY LOVE

List 5-10 things you genuinely love doing—be specific:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Circle your top 3-5—the ones you could talk about for an hour.



THE FOUR BOXES

BOX 1: Where I Don't Feel Fully Welcome

Name a space where the things you love feel out of place:

Be specific (not "school" but "math class" or "family dinners"):

BOX 2: Where I Can Be My Full Self

Where DO your loves show up fully?

What makes that space different?

BOX 3: What If the Barrier Is Me?

Why do I hold back sometimes?

What would happen if I tried to bring my full self into these spaces?

Can you commit to trying to do so at least once?

One tiny thing I could do this week (within MY control):

BOX 4: What If the Space Needs to Change?

If you could change one thing about Box 1 so people like you could breathe easier, what would it be?



MY BOTH/AND DESIGN

Draw or describe your three panels:

Panel 1: The Split (Two separate worlds)



Panel 2: The Question (The realization moment)



MY BOTH/AND DESIGN

(continued)

Panel 3: The Experiment (Bringing both together)



EXIT REFLECTION

The either/or I've been believing:

My Box 3 experiment this week:

My Box 4 dream:



LEARNING MORE ABOUT POW!'S CULTURAL CONTEXT

For teachers or students interested in deeper exploration:

[Boarding Schools](#)

[Powwows](#)

[Ledger Art](#)

[Pow! Making-Of Featurette](#)

