

Teacher's Guide *Fall in Line, Holden!*

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About the Book

Fall in Line, Holden! takes place inside a Navajo boarding school. The school is characterized by order and discipline, and children are expected to move in silence and obedience. As the students march through the halls past the art room, custodian's closet, gym, cafeteria, computer lab, and music room, they are repeatedly reminded to "fall in line." The rhythm of the rhyme mirrors the rhythm of their daily routine, creating a sense of sameness and predictability.

Holden, however, sees the world differently. His imagination and playful spirit allow him to break away from the rigid routine of the boarding school. While his classmates remain confined by the rules of conformity, Holden "falls out of line," demonstrating courage, individuality, and creativity in a setting designed to suppress those very traits.

Although the text reads like a simple rhyme, its deeper meaning connects to the history of U.S. Indian boarding schools. For many generations, Indigenous children, including Navajo children, were taken from their families and required to attend schools where they were forbidden to speak their language, practice their culture, or show their individuality. These schools emphasized discipline, uniformity, and obedience, often at the cost of identity and community ties.

Daniel Vandever wrote *Fall in Line, Holden!* both to promote creativity and to begin age-appropriate conversations about this history. For Navajo teachers, the story provides an opportunity to acknowledge the painful past of boarding schools while also celebrating the resilience of Diné culture and encouraging students to see creativity and imagination as strengths.

The illustrations in *Fall in Line, Holden!* are essential to the book's meaning. Vandever uses color and contrast to distinguish conformity from imagination. Repeated images of students lined up in orderly and muted ways are set against Holden's imaginative scenes, which burst with color, energy, and movement. This visual contrast reinforces the difference between strict discipline and creative expression.

The illustrations also weave Navajo culture into the school setting. In the cafeteria scene, for example, students are served mutton stew, a traditional Navajo food. These cultural details ground the story in Diné life even as it critiques the boarding school system. Visual humor, such as the smiles of custodial staff or playful moments in the gym, lightens the story for younger readers and shows that joy and imagination can persist even in controlled environments. The school layout at the end of the book resembles a maze, symbolizing how children had to navigate strict institutional structures while imagining their own paths forward.

Fall in Line, Holden! is particularly valuable as a read-aloud for grades one through three. The rhyme and repetition in the text make it engaging and easy to follow for young listeners. At the same time, the illustrations provide strong visual scaffolding that helps children make sense of the story's deeper themes.

For Navajo students, the story offers both cultural familiarity and an introduction to important historical realities. They will recognize familiar foods, school routines, and perspectives that reflect their community. Teachers can use the story to gently introduce the history of boarding schools while emphasizing that today, Navajo children are encouraged to use creativity and language as sources of strength. Holden's choice to "fall out of line" demonstrates that individuality and imagination are not weaknesses but powerful ways of celebrating resilience and culture.

Readability:

Intended Use: Read-aloud for Grades 1-3

5-Day Grade 1-3 Social Studies Unit Plan: Navajo Boarding Schools through Fall in Line, Holden!

Standards Alignment (Arizona Social Studies Standards, Grades 1–3)

Standard Code	Standard Description
1.SP1.1 / 2.SP1.1 / 3.SP1.1	Place important events in the order they occurred using timelines.
1.SP1.2 / 2.SP1.2 / 3.SP1.2	Use context clues to understand historical settings.
3.H2.1	Describe the cultural characteristics of groups in the past.
3.H3.1	Explain why individuals and groups from the past are remembered.

Day 1 – Introducing the Story and Context

SWBAT: Students will be able to explain that Holden’s story takes place in a boarding school and identify how schools have rules.

- Vocabulary:
 - o Boarding school – A school where children lived and studied, often far from home.
 - o Rule – Something you are told to follow.
 - o Line – Standing one after another, in order.
- Activity: Discuss lining up at school today. Introduce the concept of boarding schools in age-appropriate terms. Begin read-aloud of *Fall in Line, Holden!* (first half).
- Assessment: Oral responses connecting their school rules to Holden’s school.

Day 2 – Completing the Read-Aloud

SWBAT: Students will be able to recall key events from the story and describe Holden’s choice to “fall out of line.”

- Vocabulary:
 - o Conformity – Everyone doing the same thing in the same way.
 - o Obedience – Doing what you are told to do.
 - o Imagination – Using your mind to think of creative or different ideas.
- Activity: Finish reading the book. Ask students to join in repeating the phrase “We all fall in line.” Pause to discuss illustrations. Ask: “What makes Holden different from the other students?”
- Assessment: Exit ticket drawing: one picture of Holden in line and one of him imagining something different.

Day 3 – Comparing Schools Then and Now

SWBAT: Students will be able to compare life in Holden’s school to life in their own school today.

- Vocabulary:
 - o Then – A time in the past.
 - o Now – The time today.
 - o Strict – Very serious rules that must be followed.
- Activity: Create a large classroom T-chart labeled “Schools Then” and “Schools Now.” Add examples from the book and from students’ own experiences.
- Assessment: Students will complete a mini “then/now” worksheet (matching or drawing activity).

Day 4 – Creativity and Culture

SWBAT: Students will be able to explain how creativity and culture helped children in boarding schools stay strong.

- Vocabulary:
 - o Culture – Traditions, language, and ways of life shared by a group of people.
 - o Tradition – Something important passed down from parents and grandparents.
 - o Creativity – Using your ideas to make or imagine something new.
- Activity: Revisit the cafeteria illustration (mutton stew) and gym/music scenes. Discuss how Navajo culture still appeared in the story. Students will create their own drawing of “a school where we can be creative.”
- Assessment: Students share their drawing and describe one way creativity makes school better.

Day 5 – Remembering and Reflecting

SWBAT: Students will be able to explain why it is important to remember Navajo boarding schools and how Navajo students show resilience today.

- Vocabulary:
 - o Remember – To think about something important from the past.
 - o Resilience – Staying strong and hopeful, even when things are hard.
 - o Community – A group of people who live and work together.
- Activity: Read the Author’s Note (simplified for Grades 1–3). Discuss why Holden’s story matters. As a class, create a “We Can Be Creative” poster with student handprints or drawings.
- Assessment: Students will orally share one thing they learned about Navajo boarding schools.

Culminating Assessment

Students will complete a portfolio page that highlights their own creativity and imagination, inspired by Holden's choice to "fall out of line." The page will include:

1. A drawing of Holden imagining something different from his classmates.
2. A drawing of themselves imagining something creative or unique about their own school or community.
3. A short sentence (or oral dictation for younger students) that begins with:
 - o "I imagine..." or
 - o "When I use my imagination, I can..."

Resources for Teachers

- Campbell, N. I. (2005). *Shi-shi-etko* (K. LaFave, Illus.). Greenwood Books.
In the days before leaving for residential school, a young girl spends time with her family learning and remembering her traditions. The short, lyrical text and gentle tone make it an effective introduction to the topic.
Themes: Family, memory, cultural preservation.
Use: Read-aloud for Grades 1–3 to introduce the emotional context of leaving home.
- Campbell, N. I. (2008). *Shin-chi's canoe* (K. LaFave, Illus.). Greenwood Books.
Sequel to *Shi-shi-etko*. Shin-chi and his sister attend a residential school, holding onto hope through a small canoe.
Themes: Hope, resilience, family bonds.
Use: Compare with *Fall in Line, Holden!* to discuss siblings, courage, and imagination in hard times.
- Dupuis, J. K., & Kacer, K. (2016). *I am not a number* (G. Newland, Illus.). Second Story Press.
Based on a true story of a young girl forced to attend a residential school.
Themes: Identity, resistance, truth-telling.
Use: Grades 2–3 read-aloud with teacher scaffolding; support discussions on personal voice and dignity.
- Edwardson, D. D. (2010). *My name is not easy*. Marshall Cavendish.
A middle-grade novel about Iñupiaq children sent to boarding school in Alaska.
Themes: Survival, friendship, loss, resilience.
Use: Select short excerpts for Grade 3 to connect historical fiction with *Fall in Line, Holden!*'s themes of individuality.

- Robertson, D. A. (2016). *When we were alone* (J. Flett, Illus.). HighWater Press.
A granddaughter learns about her grandmother's experiences at residential school through gentle metaphors and warm illustrations.
Themes: Loss and renewal, cultural identity, family connection.
Use: Excellent for Grades 1–3 to compare how illustrations convey emotion and memory.
- Vandever, D. W. (2017). *Fall in line, Holden!* Salina Bookshelf.
Through rhyme and vibrant illustrations, Holden resists conformity in a strict boarding school by using imagination.
Themes: Creativity, individuality, resistance, cultural pride.
Use: Anchor text for unit. Use daily for read-aloud, illustration study, and social-emotional learning.
- Vandever, D. (2021). *Herizon*. Rise Home Stories.
- Vandever, D. (2024). *We weave*. Rise Home Stories.
- Vandever, D. (2025). *High desert treasure*. Rise Home Stories.

Digital and Video Resources

- National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. (n.d.). *Unspoken: America's Native American boarding schools* [Video resource page]. Boarding School Healing. Retrieved September 24, 2025, from <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/resource-database/unspoken-americas-native-american-boarding-schools-2/>
Overview of the documentary series with background articles and teaching resources.
Themes: Truth, memory, healing.
Use: Teacher background reading and community discussion guide.
- PBS. (n.d.). *Native American history documentaries about residential schools and forced adoptions* [Web page]. PBS. Retrieved September 24, 2025, from <https://www.pbs.org/articles/native-american-history-documentaries-about-residential-schools-and-forced-adoptions>
PBS compilation of educational documentaries and classroom-ready materials.
Themes: Historical awareness, intergenerational impact.
Use: Provide teachers with historical context and media links for discussion.
- PBS Utah. (2017). "Unspoken: America's Native American boarding schools, part two" [Video]. PBS Utah. <https://www.pbsutah.org/pbs-utah-productions/shows/unspoken/part-two/>
Continuation of the PBS Utah series.
Themes: Voices of survivors, community healing.
Use: Extend inquiry for advanced students or teacher background.

- WETA. (2017). Unspoken: America's Native American boarding schools [Video]. WETA PBS. <https://weta.org/watch/shows/unspoken-americas-native-american-boarding-schools>
Companion broadcast of the Unspoken series emphasizing personal testimonies.
Themes: Memory, testimony, resilience.
Use: Background for educators or high-level Grade 3 reflection.
- YouTube. (2017, November 7). Unspoken: America's Native American boarding schools [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OtfBPE4u1U>
Accessible version of the Unspoken documentary for classroom viewing.
Themes: Cultural survival, historical truth.
Use: Clip selections to introduce the history behind Fall in Line, Holden!.
- Vandever, D. W. (n.d.). Author talk: Inspiration behind Fall in line, Holden! [Video]. Salina Bookshelf. Retrieved September 24, 2025, from [insert updated URL here]
Navajo author Daniel W. Vandever shares how imagination, humor, and history shaped the book.
Themes: Creativity, cultural continuity, author's purpose.
Use: Play before or after reading Fall in Line, Holden! to connect students to a living Navajo author.