

## The New York Times

### Lesson of the Day: ‘Rural Montana Had Already Lost Too Many Native Women. Then Selena Disappeared.’

*In this lesson, students will learn about the crisis of missing Native American women and the response from communities, law enforcement and politicians. Students will then create their own visual response to what is happening.*

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#### Lesson Overview

*Featured Article: “Rural Montana Had Already Lost Too Many Native Women. Then Selena Disappeared.”*

In the featured article, Jack Healy covers the ongoing crisis of Native American women who have gone missing or been found murdered in southern Montana. The article states that in 2019, “5,590 Indigenous women were reported missing to the F.B.I.’s National Crime Information Center, but advocates say the staggeringly high rates of violence suffered by Indigenous people are still not fully reflected in official accounting.”

In this lesson, you will learn about the disappearance and community-led searches for Native American women, and the activism to create awareness and hold law enforcement accountable for locating those women. Then, we will ask you to respond artistically to what you have read, both to process your own reaction and to educate others.

**Note to Teacher:** The articles linked below contain statistics and detailed information about violence, sexual abuse and disappearances of Native American women. Teachers should review the articles in advance before assigning or presenting the lesson to students.

#### Warm Up

In the April 2019 article “Native American Women Are Facing a Crisis,” Maya Salam highlights data from various sources on abuse and disappearances of Native American women. Choose one of the statistics below and then answer the questions below:

##### **84 percent**

That’s how many Indigenous women have experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence in their lifetime, according to the National Institute of Justice.

##### **1 in 3**

That’s how many Native American women have been raped or experienced an attempted rape, according to the Justice Department, more than twice the national average.

##### **13 percent**

That’s how many sexual assaults reported by Native American women result in arrest, according to the Justice Department, compared with 35 percent for black women and 32 percent for white women.

## 506

The number of Indigenous women and girls who have disappeared or been killed in 71 urban American cities in 2016, according to a November report by Urban Indian Health Institute.

## 116

In 2016, 5,712 Indigenous women and girls were reported missing, but only 116 were logged by the U.S. Department of Justice's federal missing persons database, according to the National Crime Information Center.

- Now, respond to the following questions about the statistic you selected:
- What was your first reaction to the statistic? Why did it stand out to you?
- How does the statistic make you feel emotionally?
- What more do you want to know? What questions are you left asking after reading the statistic?

As you read the article, see if your questions are answered or if new ones are generated.

### Questions for Writing and Discussion

*Read the article, then answer the following questions:*

1. How would you summarize the situation in southern Montana and in Big Horn County? What facts or numbers in the first several paragraphs stood out and helped you to understand the issue?
2. What are some of the reasons that violence and disappearances of Native American people have not been accurately or effectively documented?
3. How do law enforcement officials and families differ in their understanding about why these cases have not been adequately investigated? What are some of the things that families are doing to encourage law enforcement officials and politicians to more aggressively respond to the cases of missing women?
4. The article states, "At 16, Selena already knew the toll of violence too well." What does that statement mean in the context of the article? What does Selena's family's experience with violence illustrate about the larger issues that many Native American communities are facing?
5. Why did Jay Harris, the county prosecutor, declare a state of emergency? Why were some families disappointed about the timing of his declaration?
6. Why have the stories of Kaysera Stops Pretty Places and Selena become intertwined? What were some of the questions and concerns that Kaysera's family wished law enforcement had asked?

## Going Further

After reading the article, take a moment to reflect and respond emotionally to what you read. Individually, respond with this Color, Symbol, Image activity from Facing History and Ourselves. Choose one idea, concept, quote, statistic or image from the featured article and respond artistically:

- Choose a color that you think best represents what you selected.
- Choose a symbol that you think best represents what you selected.
- Choose an image that you think best represents what you selected.

If you are in a classroom, take a moment to do a gallery walk around your classroom and, without responding verbally, look at the different colors, symbols and images that your classmates selected. Are there any similarities to what you created? Does your classmates' work evoke an emotional response in you or make you think of any part of the article differently?

Now, look at the artwork on the left side of this photograph from the Times article "Illuminating the Plight of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women."



Cannupa Hanska Luger, *Every One*, 2018, 4,000 ceramic beads, dimensions variable.

Use these questions from Visual Thinking Strategies to engage with the hanging artwork on the left side:

- What is going on in the artwork?
- What do you see that makes you say that?

Now, we'll let you know a little more: The piece is called "Every One" and was created by Cannupa Hanska Luger, an artist who was raised on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. Each hanging clay ball is meant to represent one of the missing Native women. The article explains that Mr. Luger's idea for his artistic creation "came as he contemplated the statistics on the murdered and missing women. 'I was trying to figure how to humanize that data,' said Mr. Luger, who lives in Glorieta, N.M. 'That number of 4,000 is really impersonal.'"

Now that you know why Mr. Luger created the piece, do you see the message he was trying to convey through his artwork? Does the artwork carry any additional meaning for you now?

If you still have time, transform your Color, Symbol, Image piece into a piece of art that could be used to educate people about the issue of the missing Native American women. See if you can rely solely on images and symbols to communicate your message. If you think your message would be stronger with words, you can add some as well, but be intentional about how much text you include. See if you can communicate your message to someone who does not know a lot about the situation through artwork, similar to what Mr. Luger has done.