

**From *Reclaiming Culture: Indigenous People and Self-Representation* by J. Hendry**

*The Rabbit-Proof Fence* explains the rationale behind the late-nineteenth-century policy of assimilation that underpinned the school program. In a nutshell, the idea was that taking young children away from their Native parents and bringing them up within the education system developed for white children would assimilate “problem natives” into the wider society within just a couple of generations. Schools that were initially set up by overseas missions to educate local children, often in their own languages, were exhorted to implement this assimilation policy by becoming residential and by only using English. The pupils were sometimes taken by force from their communities, they were rarely, if ever, allowed to return home, and they were forbidden to use their native tongues. Indeed, to make it more difficult for children to escape and to discourage them from using languages other than the dominant English, they were often sent to schools far from their homes, where they were mixed with children from many other linguistic groups. Hence the long journey of the three little girls in *Rabbit Proof Fence*.

Reflection Prompt:

What is your reaction to this practice? Why do you think assimilation was so widely desired?

As we have discussed, a very similar practice took place here in the U.S. Do you think the goals were likely the same? Could such a program ever be “successful”? Why or why not?