

# Buffalo Hide Academy:

## January 2021

### *A New Semester, A New Curriculum*

After going around the room during a staff meeting in early January and talking about student engagement and progress, the teachers, counselors, and administrator of BHA decided that a new approach to 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester class offerings was necessary. This is not to say that there weren't several students who had success during the first part of the year – in fact, there were many that passed the majority of classes, as well as recovered every class needed to be on track to graduate. But allowing the space for student voice is one of our foundational pillars, and through the feedback we were receiving from students (as well as from the work NOT being completed), it became evident that we needed to pivot from offering coursework primarily through Google Classroom to providing bite-sized, no-technology-needed paper work. So, the staff of BHA spent the next couple of weeks discussing a philosophy and creating a template for our 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester coursework. The driving force behind what was settled on is the following:

- All assignments need to be heavy on writing (ranging from the essay format to persuasive writing to creative storytelling);
- The “answers” to the questions/prompts we pose should all come from the students’ heads and hearts, as well as of those of their family members and friends;
- Whenever possible, allow students to use the expressive arts to tell their stories and share their feelings/thoughts/ideas;
- Through the assignments, we want to offer the space for students to reflect on the last year of their lives, assess their current situation, and look toward the future;
- NO internet is necessary for students to complete ALL assignments.

With that framework in mind, BHA staff has begun creating new, original curriculum that we have started rolling out to our students. Below are the “cover pages” of three courses, with more to come in the upcoming weeks and months.

### ***The Power of Music and Poetry***

Music and the natural poetry found in it allows us to connect with the thoughts, feelings and experiences that are often universal and inspiring. This course allows students to explore and discuss how and why music and poetry are often powerful influences and inspirations in our lives.

- ***Section 1: Essay Writing***

Music can play a huge role in peoples’ lives, often serving specific purposes at different times. Different genres are often listened to for different purposes, such as relaxing or getting fired up, or even as coping mechanisms to help manage stress and anxiety. Music is also appreciated for its complexity, both instrumentally and lyrically. In the first section of this class you will be asked to Describe the 3 genres you like the best and why.

- **Section 2: What is the Music You Love: Interview**  
Students cultivate the voice(s) of family members and friends by interviewing someone about the songs, albums, bands and musical artists they love. In this part they will discuss how they feel about music and how it has influenced and affected their lives.
- **Section 3: Creative Storytelling**  
Allows students to express themselves in a non-writing way. Students will create artwork that they feel coincides with the themes and ideas the songs they love convey. Musical artists often incorporate art with their music usually on the album cover, posters for concert tours and in collaborations with visual artists. In this part of the assignment students will be able to create their own interpretations and representations of the art they envision and feel when listening to their favorite music.
- **Section 4: Health and Wellness**  
Music can often connect us with both inner feelings and emotions that we experience in ourselves, as well as in the world around us through common experience, emotions or views we share with bands and musical artists. The lyrics and melodies can create or convey a shared feeling that lifts us up or allows us to see that there are others there who “get it”, “understand what I’m feeling or seeing”, and/or inspire new views or understandings of the world around.
- **Section 5: Bump My Jams!**  
In this section you will attempt to persuade your audience that your 3 favorite music genres are THE BEST music genres of all.

### **Overcoming Challenges – Past, Present, and Future**

The past year has been one of the most trying periods in the history of the world, the country, our community, and in all of our lives. However, there have always been (and will always be) times that challenge us. In this Social Studies course, you will be reflecting on the past, discussing the present moment, and looking towards the future. The following is what to expect and what you will need to do to pass this course.

- **Section 1: Essay Writing**  
The beginning of this year saw one of the most infamous events in US history take place - the insurrection of the US Capitol. In the first section of this course you will be asked to write an expository essay explaining the facts of that day.
- **Section 2: Interview**  
In this section you will interview a family member and have them tell about a time in their life when Browning has faced challenges and their thoughts and opinions about that period.
- **Section 3: Creative Storytelling**  
Let the creative juices flow! In this part of the course you will get to choose between either writing a short story or creating a work of art based on utopia (a perfect society).
- **Section 4: Health and Wellness**  
Part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle is doing some personal reflection and assessment. You will be asked to look back on the past 10 months and create a photo essay reflecting on how life has changed during that time.

- **Section 5: Looking Towards the Future**

Every community has issues that affect the daily lives of the people that live there. Take a few minutes and think about life on Blackfeet Nation... If you were able to improve one thing about living here, what would it be? In the final section of this course you are going to write a persuasive paper convincing us **what** needs to change, **who** would benefit, **why** it needs to change, and **how** you will go about making that change.

### **Cultivating a Healthy Lifestyle**

As young adults you are at an age in which you have more control over how you live your life - the people you surround yourself with, the way you spend your time, the food you put into your body, etc. - the list goes on and on. In this course you will be looking at some of the health issues common on Blackfeet Nation, as well as focusing on some positive changes you and your family members/friends have made in order to live a healthier life. Below is a brief description of each of the sections.

- **Section 1: Essay Writing**

Native Americans are 2.5 times more likely to get type 2 diabetes than non-Native Americans. Using the handout on the last page of this document you will write an expository essay about type 2 diabetes. You can include what diabetes is, things that increase the likelihood you could get it (risk factors), and how it has affected you, your family, and your community.

- **Section 2: Interview**

Interview a family member or a friend about a positive change they have made in their life and how that has affected their health/lifestyle. After conducting the interview, write a reflection paper focusing on what you found interesting and the benefit this has had on that person's life, as well as how/if you could do something similar.

- **Section 3: Creative Storytelling**

People have the ability to make positive changes in their lives that can affect their future. You will create a poster (kind of like an advertisement) about the importance of making a positive change in your life and the effects that may happen because of this change. If the idea of creating a poster doesn't sound fun, there will be other ways to complete this section of the course.

- **Section 4: Health and Wellness**

The types of calories we put into our bodies has a major effect on our overall wellness, including our physical health, mental awareness, and emotional well-being. It can be hard to believe that what we eat and drink can do all that, but it's true. This section of the course will ask you to create and reflect on a 1-week meal plan.

- **Section 5: Looking Towards the Future**

Write a persuasive essay on a health problem that affects your community and come up with some possible ways of dealing with the problem. You can write about diabetes, or any other health problem that affects your community.

## **The Continuation of Learning and Teaching About Mindfulness**

The week before the world changed and COVID-19 shut down in-person learning in Browning, BHA was fortunate to host a two-day workshop with three world-renowned meditation teachers who brought their years of knowledge, expertise, and compassion to BPS employees and other community members that were fortunate to attend. It was a powerful two days in which tears were shed, laughs were shared, and the realization emerged that mindfulness – the ability to be fully present and aware of where we are and what we are doing – was something that could not only benefit adults, but the students and children of BPS as well. Although the world has looked considerably different since those two days in early March 2020, BHA continues to learn and cultivate our own practice, so when the time does come for students to participate in in-person learning, we will do so in a more “present” manner.

With that said, Jason Krane is currently enrolled in an 8-week course titled “Healthy Minds at Work: A Master Class” which is put on by the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This course focuses on the 4 areas of well-being that are trainable and measurable: awareness, connection, insight, and purpose. The focus through the first two weeks has been on that of awareness, or the “heightened, flexible, attentiveness to your environment and internal cues such as bodily sensations, thoughts, and feelings.” The science behind this first area has shown that people with higher levels of awareness have higher levels of well-being and positive emotions. In fact, being distracted (or the opposite of awareness) “can impair executive function, and increase stress and anxiety, ADHD symptoms, and depression symptoms” – all of which students in our community (and around the world!) experience on a daily basis.

There are still six weeks left in the course which will focus on the other three areas of well-being (connection, insight, and purpose). But Jason has already begun creating a student-friendly course that will introduce these same concepts, along with activities for students to complete individually as well as with friends and/or family members, in the hopes of increasing well-being and mindfulness in our student population.

