

Native American Studies: Learning about stereotypes and reading with new cultural considerations.

Introduction

This lesson familiarizes students with the stereotypes of Native Americans perpetuated by American popular culture —what the stereotypes are, how they developed, and how far from the truth many of them are. Students will work independently and collaboratively to explore their prior knowledge about Native Americans and to reflect upon new knowledge acquired through research and classroom resources. From the activities and the texts, your students will see that there is not a singular Native American culture or identity and that a specific Native American writer is not representative of all Native American writers.

Essential Questions

1. What are stereotypes? From where do they come and how are they perpetuated?
2. Why is it important to identify and examine stereotypes when trying to understand ourselves and other cultures?

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

Develop an awareness of stereotypes of Native Americans and have discussions that are informed by cultural considerations.

Read informational texts and multi-media texts about stereotypes of Native Americans in order to rebuke incorrect prior knowledge and stereotypes.

Work independently and collaboratively, reflect upon and evaluate prior knowledge, and acquire new knowledge through research and discussion.

Close read a work of Native American literature informed by cultural considerations.

Resources for Teaching about Native American Culture

1. Annenberg Learner guide to teaching *The Way to Rainy Mountain*:
<https://www.learner.org/workshops/hslit/session6/aw/work1.html>

2. *Reel Injun*. Documentary film directed by Neil Diamond. National Film Board of Canada (2009)

From PBS: “*Reel Injun* traces the evolution of cinema's depiction of Native people from the silent film era to today, with clips from hundreds of classic and recent Hollywood movies, and candid interviews with celebrated Native and non-Native film celebrities, activists, film critics, and historians.” <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/reel-injun/>

Reel Injun: On the Trail of the Hollywood Indian teachers’ guide:
http://dragonflycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Reel_Injun.pdf

3. *Smoke Signals*. Feature film directed by Chris Eyre. Miramax (1998).

Smoke Signals teachers’ guide: <https://www.press.umich.edu/pdf/0472031678-ch1.pdf>

4. Lakota Winter Counts teachers’ guide, Smithsonian Museum of Natural History:
http://wintercounts.si.edu/html_version/html/learning_teachers.html

5. “American Indian vs. Native American: A Note on Terminology,” by Kathryn Walbert. Provided by The North Carolina Humanities Council: <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nc-american-indians/5526>

Activity 1: KWL

Know—Want to Know—Learned is an activity that provides structure for students to recall prior knowledge, identify additional information to learn, and then reflect upon what has been learned.

Part One: Introduction

1. Hand out a KWL chart: <https://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/pdf/kwl.pdf>
2. Starting independently, ask students to write down in the K column everything they know about Native Americans. You can prompt them with categories such as culture, dress, where they live, what they do, etc.
3. Ask students to pair up with a partner and share their K columns. Then have students fill in the W column with things they want to know about Native Americans.

Part Two: Have students complete Activity 2: Jigsaw

Part Three: Reflection

1. As a reflection or closure activity, ask students to review their K and W columns, fill in the L column, and discuss what they have learned.
2. Ask them to consider such questions as:
 - How correct were their original assumptions?
 - What is the most important thing they have learned?

- How can this activity be applied to other cultures and people?

Activity Two: Jigsaw

Jigsaw is a cooperative learning activity in which group members become “experts” on one part of the lesson. Students from each original group divide up, meet with members of other groups, and then return to the original group to share new knowledge.

1. Divide students into groups and give each member in the group a different letter; then, regroup all of the A’s together, all of the B’s together, and so forth.
2. Give each of the newly formed groups a resource to examine. Possible resources might include:
 - *Reel Injun*. Documentary film directed by Neil Diamond. National Film Board of Canada (2009)
 - *American Indians: Stereotypes and Realities*, Devon Mihesuah (1996) Excerpts available on WHM Website.
 - List of 24 stereotypes and realities adapted from *American Indians: Stereotypes and Realities* by Devon Mihesuah
<http://nwindian.evergreen.edu/curriculum/Stereotypes.pdf>
 - Centenary College of Louisiana PowerPoint presentation adapted from Devon Mihesuah’s *American Indians: Stereotypes and Realities* by Devon Mihesuah.
www.centenary.edu/academics/religion/dotto/rel283/Stereotypes.ppt
3. Students in each expert group should write up a summary of what they have learned, including the 5 W’s (who, what, why, where, and when), as well as an evaluation of the writer or filmmaker’s ideas.
4. Students return to their original groups and share their newly discovered expert information.

Activity Three: Close reading a work of Native American literature

In this activity, students will use their new knowledge about Native American stereotypes and realities to inform their reading of N. Scott Momaday’s text *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. They may also use secondary source materials to augment their understanding of the text.

1. Have students read the preface to *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and Chapter XIII (pp. 46-47). In the preface, Momaday explains that the text is written in three distinct voices: that of myth, history, and memoir. After students read, have them identify the three different voices in Chapter XIII and answer following questions:
 - What differences do you notice between the three descriptions of Kiowa arrowmakers? What similarities do you notice?
 - Why is speaking and understanding the Kiowa language so important to the arrowmaker in this chapter? How is language important to Kiowa identity and survival?

- Have students read and consider Excerpt #1 from the Secondary Source Materials list.
2. Have students read Chapter XV (pp. 52-53). In this chapter, Momaday describes the warrior Quoetotai.
- Ask your students to read the first passage closely and consider the relationship between Quoetotai and one of Many Bear's wives. Why is Many Bears the first man to welcome them back?
 - Ask your students to read the second and third passages and consider how Kotsatoah is described. Momaday writes, "I should like to have seen that man, as Catlin saw him, walking toward me, or away in the distance, perhaps, alone and against the sky."
 - Have students read Excerpt #2 from the Secondary Source Materials list and ask them to consider how Catlin's paintings may have created and perpetuated stereotypes about Native Americans.

Secondary Source Materials

Excerpt #1

Brígido-Corachán, Anna M.. "Wordarrows: The Performative Power of Language in N. Scott Momaday's Non-Fiction Work." *Language Value* 4.2 (2012): 56-69. Web. 2 Jul. 2016.

Speaking and understanding the Kiowa language work here as a symbol of recognition of one's own clan as well as a weapon to challenge one's enemy. The arrowmaker's pronouncement "is also a question and a plea" (Momaday 1997: 11), and an acknowledgement of Kiowa identity through language. The "arrowmaker ventures to speak because he must: language is the repository of his whole knowledge and experience, and it represents the only chance he has for survival" (ibid). Intellectual resourcefulness and survival are encoded in the arrowmaker's words, just as his teeth have left an oral imprint in his story-arrow. As Momaday explains: "The point of the story lies not so much in what the arrowmaker does, but in what he says – and, indeed, that he says it. The principal fact is that he speaks, and in so doing, he places his very life in the balance" (1997: 10). Momaday's arrowmaker thus establishes an intrinsic connection between language and literature and he is, as Robert Warrior points out, "a necessary stopping place in situating (Momaday's) relationship to language, literature, and the natural world" (2005: 171). (65)

Excerpt #2

Watson, Bruce. "George Catlin's Obsession" *Smithsonian Magazine*. Smithsonian Institution, Dec. 2002. Web. 2 Jul. 2016.

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/george-catlins-obsession-72840046/?all>

If Catlin alive stirred controversy for his championing of Native Americans, today he is as likely to be seen as an exploiter of them. "A native person is challenged, I think, not to feel on some level a profound resentment toward Catlin," says W. Richard West, director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian and himself a member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes. "His obsession with depicting Indians has an extremely invasive undertone to it." As for Catlin's relentless promotion of his gallery, West adds, "There's no question . . . he was exploiting Indians and the West as a commodity. On the other hand, he was far ahead of his time in his empathy for Indians. Catlin swam against the tide to bring to light information about the Indians that depicts them accurately as worthy human beings and worthy cultures. Catlin's reputation remains as mixed today as ever. "He may end up being regarded as a B painter," says co-curator Gurney, "but his best portraits contain a vitality and directness that equal almost anyone's." His greater contribution, undoubtedly, was his signal role in helping to change the perception of Native Americans. "Art may mourn when these people are swept from the earth," he wrote, "and the artists of future ages may look in vain for another race so picturesque in their costumes, their weapons, their colours, their manly games, and their chase."

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.