

## Unit 9, Lesson 1: Stereotypes of Today



### Maryland Social Studies Standards and Framework

Standard: Peoples of the Nations and the World

Topic: Cultural Diffusion

Standard: Social Studies Skills and Processes

Topic: Acquire Social Studies Information

MCCR Grade 4

MCCR Standards: RI.4.1, RI.4.2, SS.6.1, SS.6.5

### Objective:

Students will:

- Identify and describe the similarities and difference of religious, ethnic, and economic groups in Maryland today.
- Gather and read appropriate print sources such as: journals, textbooks, timelines, trade books, and web sites.
- Read and obtain information from texts representing diversity in content, culture, authorship, and perspective

### Essential Questions:

How can negative stereotypes affect our views of different cultures?

What can we learn from the origins of some stereotypes?

### Grade Level:

3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>

### Overview:

This lesson directs students to examine the racial stereotypes present today concerning Native Americans and how those stereotypes, knowingly or unknowingly, influence their own understanding of Native American culture as it exists today. Through literature, discussion and research, students will investigate the stereotypes of Native Americans in our shared culture. Using this information, students will begin to break down some of the incorrect understandings of what Native American culture was historically and is today.

### Teacher Background:

There are approximately 2 million people in the United States who identify themselves as Native Americans. Approximately 20,000 people of Native American descent live in Maryland today. Unfortunately, Native Americans represent a very small percentage of the state's population. They must struggle for the power to influence legislature on Native American issues due to a lack of political control. This has been and continues to be the case with minority groups. Despite their efforts, no tribe has gained federal recognition in Maryland, yet. Even tribal groups that have gained a level of autonomy through federal recognition still face the subtle effects of racism and bias every day.

Picture in your mind an image of a Native American. What do you see? Perhaps a lone brave on a horse with a feather headdress and a tomahawk? Perhaps a cigar store Indian? Perhaps the images from an old television western? Perhaps the mascot of your favorite sports team? Perhaps a stoic

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man with nothing more to communicate than a war whoop and a “how?” Perhaps a noble savage? None of these images represents a true picture of a modern Native American. They are mere stereotypes, some of which have plagued the Native American community for hundreds of years.

The truth is that there is no one picture of a Native American, in Maryland or elsewhere. Native Americans can be found in all types of jobs, lifestyles, and communities. They are lawyers, teachers, congressmen, athletes, engineers, soldiers, and scientists. They live in cities, towns, and in the country. What distinguishes them is a connection to a heritage that can be traced back for thousands of years. Many Native Americans work very hard to keep the culture of their ancestors alive by participating in powwows and other tribal gatherings, by listening to and performing the music and dances of their people, by trying to save the traditional languages of their people, and by keep their tribal festivals and other traditions alive. Despite these facts, Native Americans have largely failed to escape the negative stereotypes that have followed their culture since European colonization.

The first step to overcoming this negative view of Native American culture is to understand why these images and stereotypes exist. Some are as old as the first contact between Native American and European colonists. Colonists saw the Native Americans they met upon their arrival as backward and uncivilized. They were pitied as uncultured and unchristian, while at the same time, vilified as savages and monsters. Many early European writers praised the “pure” lifestyle of the Native Americans, claiming that their “simple” lifestyle and “moral restraint” reflected a lost European golden age, uncomplicated by the stresses and vices of “modern” life. It is from this viewpoint that the idea of the Noble Savage was born. The European conception of Native Americans thus became a dichotomy; those who praised the Noble Savage and those who condemned the Savage Monster.

Other stereotypes were widely disseminated through the work of the entertainment industry. Whole generations grew up on spaghetti westerns with a narrow view of the “Indian.” They wore feather headdresses, played loud drums, shouted war whoops and wielded tomahawks and were without a doubt, the enemy. While a new generation of films has attempted to portray Native Americans in a more honest light, the old images persist. Even children who have never seen an old western recognize the war whoops of the “Indian.”

How then do we begin to correct these biases and recognize the covert racism in our society? The first step is for us to attempt to put ourselves in the shoes of Native Americans and try to understand how stereotypes can be hurtful and damaging. The second step is to look for the small and subtle ways that we all endorse and perpetuate these stereotypes. The final step may be to teach our children to embrace and celebrate that which makes us all unique and special—to appreciate our differences and celebrate all that brings us together as people.

### **Lesson Procedure:**

For the purpose of the discussion occurring later in the lesson, the teacher may assign students the task of gathering informative materials on the NCAA Native American mascot debate. Students may choose to include any information on the Native American Mascot movement in general, professional sports teams, and high school teams as well.

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1. Read the background information and the article from *Lessons from Turtle Island* included in the trunk. Share with the students the information in the teacher background section of the lesson. Ask them the same question posed above:
  - a. Picture in your head an image of a Native American. What do you see?
    - i. [Students may have a wide variety of answers; some may come from other lessons, some from their own experiences. At least a few are likely to be less than flattering.]
2. Ask the students to consider where these images come from.
  - a. Did they see it in a movie?
  - b. Did they read it in a book?
  - c. Did they learn it from someone else?
3. Ask students to consider the negative stereotypes that are mentioned.
  - a. How would it make you feel if it was a member of your family being described in that way?
  - b. What if it was you?
  - c. How might it affect Native Americans when they see or hear a negative stereotype of members of their culture or family?
4. Share with the students some of the visual representations of Native Americans from the trunk. Bring up the following questions with the students:
  - a. Are these positive or negative images of Native Americans?
  - b. What makes them positive or negative?
  - c. Are they accurate representations of Native Americans?
  - d. How do you think members of the Native American community react to these images?
  - e. What if the images were of members of your family or community or ethnic heritage?
  - f. Would that change your impression of them?
5. Consider one form of negative image that is a concern for the Native American community— mascots of sports teams (e.g. the Washington Redskins, Atlanta Braves, Florida State Seminoles, etc.). This issue is particularly timely due to the NCAA's 2005 decision to bar some schools with Native American mascots from post-season games. There are multiple views on this issue – see Florida Seminole Tribe's support of Florida State's use of Indian mascot, Osceola.
6. Conduct a discussion of the issue either as a group or in a debate-type format. A debate would be pro-con, for or against the use of Native American symbols and tribal names as sports mascots. Students can be asked to do background research as part of media time or can be given copies of the articles included with this lesson. Students can also be asked to write a defense of their opinion in an ECR as a homework assignment.

### Materials:

Excerpts from *Lessons from Turtle Island*

Background articles on mascot issues and/or other modern issues, **see related resources**

Visual representations of Native Americans, advertisements, brand name symbols, etc.

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These can include everything from a Land O'Lakes box to the Cleveland Indians mascot.

### **Related Resources:**

U.S. Ad Council – Historic Pollution Public Service Announcements, “The Crying Indian”

[http://www.adcouncil.org/campaigns/historic\\_campaigns\\_pollution/](http://www.adcouncil.org/campaigns/historic_campaigns_pollution/)

FSU news story on the support of the Seminole Tribe of Florida

<http://www.fsu.edu/news/2005/06/17/seminole.support/>

Press releases on the NCAA ruling concerning stereotypical “Indian” mascots

[http://www2.ncaa.org/media\\_and\\_events/association\\_news/association\\_updates/2005/august/0803\\_exec.html](http://www2.ncaa.org/media_and_events/association_news/association_updates/2005/august/0803_exec.html)

[http://www2.ncaa.org/media\\_and\\_events/association\\_news/ncaa\\_news\\_online/2005/07\\_04\\_05/association\\_wide/4214n21.html](http://www2.ncaa.org/media_and_events/association_news/ncaa_news_online/2005/07_04_05/association_wide/4214n21.html)

NCAA Minority Opportunities and Interests Committee report on

mascots [http://www1.ncaa.org/eprise/main/membership/governance/assoc-wide/moic/2003/mascot\\_report/mascotreport.htm](http://www1.ncaa.org/eprise/main/membership/governance/assoc-wide/moic/2003/mascot_report/mascotreport.htm)

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign report on Lewis and Clark exhibit, the exhibit webpage

and the webpage of a leading American Indian scholar at UIUC – looking at historical images of American Indians <http://www.news.uiuc.edu/news/05/0927lcexhibit.html>

[http://www.history.uiuc.edu/fac\\_dir/hoxie/hoxie/images/index.htm](http://www.history.uiuc.edu/fac_dir/hoxie/hoxie/images/index.htm)