

Unit 9, Lesson 2: Their Culture, My Culture- Our Culture



Maryland Social Studies Standards and Framework

Standard: Social Studies Skills and Processes

Topic: Organize Social Studies Information

Standard: Social Studies Skills and Processes

Topic: Read to learn and construct meaning about Social Studies

MCCR Grade 4

MCCR Standards: RI.4.1, W.4.1

Objective:

Students will:

- Find relationships between gathered sources.
- Make connections to the text from prior knowledge and experiences

Essential Questions:

How important is it to break away from stereotypes?

How can stereotypes negatively impact how we view a culture?

Grade Level:

3rd – 5th

Overview:

This lesson directs students to use a text and personal experience to build a discussion on the similarities and differences between their lives and the life of a student who is Native American, Naiche. Students will understand that while certain cultural beliefs may be different, the day-to-day life of most any Native American child is quite similar to that of any other child in Maryland.

There is also an Extension Activity that will help students understand that Native American culture plays a large role in their own lives, with a brief discussion on food and an activity on Maryland place names and their origin.

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 and 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 many 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 man with nothing more to communicate than a war whoop and a "how?" Perhaps a noble savage?

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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:

1. Poll students with the following question:
 - a. Are there Native Americans living in Maryland today? [*Many may think that Native Americans only lived in Maryland “a long time ago.” In reality, there are Native Americans in all walks of life in Maryland today. Some are members of the same tribes who were living in Maryland when Europeans colonists arrived, while others are from tribes from all around the country.*]

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2. Read *Meet Naiche* by Gabrielle Tayac. The book can be read by the teacher to the class or can be read in small groups as a part of reading activities. Once everyone has read about Naiche, discuss his life as a class. Use a graphic organizer to list and track student response. How is Naiche's life the same as yours? How is it different?
3. Once a list of similarities and differences is complete, ask students to look at the list. Are there more similarities or differences? Students will likely find that Naiche's life is very similar to their own. Write an ECR on what similarities and differences in the cultural background of Naiche and the students exist and how that may be different from what they understood before the lesson.

Extension Activity

We can easily see the influence of Native Americans on our daily life simply by looking around us. Discuss with the students the types of food that were eaten by the American Indians and became a part of the diets of the European Colonists. For instance, the inclusion of corn in our diet is a Native American introduction. English colonists tried to grow European grains such as wheat and barley before they were introduced to corn by Native American tribes. Corn grew much better in the hot Mid-Atlantic summer than the European crops did. Native American words have also become a part of our vocabulary, some as names of food such as succotash, or the names of animals such as raccoon or opossum. Other words have become the familiar names of places that we all use today.

With a map of your county, and Hamill Kenny's Book *The Placenames of Maryland, Their Origin and Meaning*, work together as a class to identify what placenames in your county may derive from Algonquin words that describe those places. Sometimes you may have to look carefully. In St. Mary's County, Tippy Witchy Island derives from an Algonquin word for Venus Fly Trap.

Materials:

Book - *Meet Naiche* by Gabrielle Tayac

Meet Naiche Worksheet

Extension Activity

- Kenny, Hamill. *The Placenames of Maryland, Their Origin and Meaning*
- A map of your County

Related Resources:

U. S. Ad Council – Out of Many, One. http://www.adcouncil.org/campaigns/historic_american/

Smithsonian Museum of Natural History's AnthroNotes, a guide to teaching Anthropology – Fall 2004 issue discussing Native American Languages.

http://www.nmnh.si.edu/anthro/outreach/anthnote/anthronotes_2004fall.pdf