

INDIAN STEREOTYPES

Source: <http://www.rethinkingschools.org/>

- Don't assume you have no Native Students, clients, colleagues, neighbors, etc.
- Don't talk about Indians as though they belong to the past. (e.g., "When Indians lived here....")
- Don't regard as heroes only those Native leaders who are believed to helped Europeans, e.g. Pocahontas, Squanto, Sacajawea.
- Don't think of all Native Americans as one monolithic group. (e.g., "Indians were nomadic.")
- Don't expect any Indians to look like Hollywood movie "Indians".
- Don't let the TV and movie stereotypes go unchallenged.
- Don't assume all Indians are well acquainted with their own heritage or that of other Native nations, or that they are "one with nature."
- Don't let people think that Native ways of life have no meaning today.
- Don't regard it as an honor to Native people to name sports teams or mascots or consumer goods for them.
- Do look for books and materials written and illustrated by Native people.
- Do look for materials which show Native women, Elders and children as integral and important to Native societies.
- Do talk about Native People in the present.
- Do focus on the positive contributions Native People are making and have made to the American Society

Remember that intercultural sensitivity can be a difficult skill to learn. We all must remember that the development of this ability demands careful, honest examination of one's own awareness and attitudes.

HOW TO BRING NONINDIANS UP TO DATE

1. Consider using times besides November to focus on Native people, since many Indians do not regard the Pilgrim's first "Thanksgiving" with great warmth. It also tends to be prime time for transmitting offensive stereotypes about Indians.
2. Be aware of how often the references made to Indians use the past tense. You will probably find yourself and others doing this on a regular basis.

FOR TEACHERS:

3. If you're not very sure about the meaning and appropriateness of an activity, do your homework! Know thoroughly what it is you are teaching about before you get the students involved. Then ask yourself, "How would I feel if a teacher did a similar activity with my own culture or religion?" For example, kachinas are very sacred to the Hopi people. Before you institute a "fun" activity involving kachina masks, ask yourself how you would feel if a teacher had children perform a "fun" pretend Communion service to teach about Christian culture.
4. Use role play to help students put themselves in situations that Native People have faced, and talk about their reactions. How would they feel? What would they do? (eg., you see your house set on fire; everything that is yours is stolen by strangers who come to their house, school, community, claiming it for their own.) Be very sure you know the history and traditional Native values you are conveying and that you want the class to understand.

5. Plan current Indian activities for multicultural day assembly programs. (Other cultures don't present activities from past centuries.) e.g., students can construct a display of traditional and modern houses (including apartment houses) or a display of how Native nations fought back against colonialism from Columbus to the present. You might want to have the class demonstrate a PowWow. This is very tricky to do in an accurate and respectful way. "Indian" art activities are often limited to replicating simplistic and even ridiculous stereotypes, such as construction paper feather headbands and cardboard tomahawks. There is a danger that having nonNative children attempt to perform Native dances without accurate instruction will simply be one more of those distorted misrepresentations. Some Native people don't believe it's acceptable at all. If you do decide to do it, taking the class to a PowWow, or at least going to one yourself, is a good place to start gathering information and meeting local Native people who can help you.
6. After students have learned about the current lives of Native people, help them answer questions like: where do Indian people live today, and what types of houses do they live in, etc.? What are the problems Indian people have now? Don't forget the local Indian people. Sharing our Worlds, produced by the united Indians of All Tribes Foundation, is a good book to use. (Available from Oyate books to avoid. <http://www.oyate.org/main.html>)
7. Look for materials that have modern pictures of Indian people in books, newspapers, magazines and PowWow snapshots.

WHEN SELECTING A SPEAKER

8. Invite several speakers to the class. Remember: not all Indians know about their own history. Those who know about their history may be unable to answer questions about other nations.
 - Ask the speaker if there is a charge, and if there is not, do offer an honorarium if you can.
 - Be sure to remind the adult(s) of the age and attention span of the audience.
 - Ask them to tell about the experiences he and his people or she and her people have undergone, especially in areas such as education. Tell them about what your class has been learning.
 - Don't ask speakers to "dress up Indian" for the group. This feeds the Hollywood stereotype. The speaker may wish to dress in dance regalia and even dance for you, but he or she may not be comfortable doing this. It would be better to leave this decision to the speaker. Ask him/her to bring items of interest.
 - Be sure to check with other people who have used speakers for their feedback on the quality of the talk.
 - Don't forget to ask the speaker what he or she would most like others to know.
 - Realize that the extent of discrimination which this person and his or her people may have gone through could be beyond your imagination. The speaker may still harbor negative feelings toward the dominant society.
 - Encourage the class to give a gift when the speaker is introduced.
 - Write a thank you note and encourage the class to include drawings or writings about what they learned.

CHECKLIST FOR ACCURACY AND APPROPRIATENESS

1. Does this book or idea tell the truth? Is it free of misleading oversimplifications or factual errors? Does it give insight into the complexity and diversity of Native cultures and Native peoples?

2. Is this book, idea, or activity respectful of the People? Would it help a nonnative child accept that "Indians are people, like me"? Would it make a Native child proud of his/her heritage?
3. Is this book, idea or activity free of anything that would foster stereotypical thinking in a nonNative child? (Note: a good source on line is Paula Giese book review)
4. If you are considering a book, were Native people involved in the writing, illustrating or production?
5. Is this book or activity free of anything that would embarrass or hurt a Native child?
6. Can this material be used to enhance a variety of themes, not just "Native studies?"
7. If I substitute my own religion, ethnic background, culture, customs, etc. for those in this activity, would I feel respected? Or would we find ourselves making construction paper crucifixes and "playing Catholic"?
8. Are contemporary Indian people portrayed or are the stories, pictures, clothing, etc. used only historical?
9. Is the material free of the following: demeaning vocabulary? Indians talking like Tonto? Indians who belong to the "Feather Bonnet Tribe?" Comic interludes built upon firewater and stupidity? Indians portrayed as an extinct species? Indians who are either noble or savage? Patronizing tone?
10. IS INDIAN HUMANNES RECOGNIZED?

Compiled from: "Rethinking Columbus",; Jack Weathford's "Indian Givers" and "Native Roots" and Tehanetoren's (Ray Fadden's) "They Lied to you in School" (video).