

Bringing Native American Culture to Life in your Classroom

Thank you so much for your interest in this important topic! I know we just touched the tip of the iceberg at this AMS session. But you will find more free information on my website, www.MINASIllinois.org, including free downloadable lesson plans on Thanksgiving and Columbus Day, as well as an archive of newsletters. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or comments. I look forward to hearing from you!

Recommended Children's Books

Begay, Shonto. Ma'ii and Cousin Horned Toad. *This entertaining Coyote-as-Trickster story is wonderfully retold by a Navajo author.*

Bruchac, Joseph and Gayle Ross. The Story of the Milky Way. *This traditional Cherokee story, told by its Abenaki and Cherokee authors, depicts the importance of corn to the people with stunning illustrations.*

Brynjolson, Rhian. Foster Baby. *This book fills an important gap in children's literature by sensitively describing a Native American baby in a loving foster home that is also Native American.*

De Coteau Orié, Sandra. Did You Hear the Wind Sing Your Name? *Wonderfully illustrated, this is a celebration of the circle of life and spring rebirth by a noted Oneida author.*

Erdrich, Louise, The Birchbark House, The Game of Silence, The Porcupine Year and Chickadee. *Wonderful read-aloud or reading group selections for Elementary students, these books tell a powerful story of a family's survival in the upper Midwest in the late 1800s, based on the Ojibwe author's own family history. They are full of joy, sorrow, mischief and Ojibwe culture and language and are not to be missed!*

Hucko, Bruce. A Rainbow at Night: The World in Words and Pictures by Navajo Children. *This beautiful book is a compilation of the paintings, drawings and written reflections of children from the Navajo (Dine) Reservation.*

Keeshig-Tobias, Lenore. Emma and the Trees. *This wonderful story is written in both Ojibway and English!*

Kusugak, Michael Arvaarluk. My Arctic 1,2 3. *This book gives young children an opportunity to count animal inhabitants of another part of the world.*

Students of G. T. Cunningham Elementary School. We Are All Related: A Celebration of Our Cultural Heritage. *This book documents how the students in this Vancouver school explored their heritage through interviews with their parents and elders from their Native community.*

Swamp, Chief Jake, Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message ISBN 1880000547 *This is a special children's version of the Thanksgiving Address, a message of gratitude that originated with the Native people of upstate New York and Canada and that is still spoken at ceremonial gatherings held by the Iroquois, or Six Nations.*

Tapahonso, Luci and Eleanor Schick. Navajo ABC: A Dine Alphabet Book. *The colorful illustrations here show materials from the Dine culture of the southwest.*

Tappage, Mary Augusta. The Big Tree and the Little Tree. *Told by a Shuswap and Metis author, this book sends a powerful message about the interdependence of us all.*

Thompson, Shelia. Cheryl's Potlatch. *This book describes a naming ceremony and potlatch given in honor of a young girl of the Caribou Clan of the Carrier Nation in Canada.*

Welsh-Smith, Susan. Andy, An Alaska Tale. *This book bridges differences by building on similarities by introducing children to an Inuit community through the antics of a large English sheepdog.*

Wheeler, Bernelda. Where Did You Get Your Moccasins? *Using the "add-on" style of text to help beginning readers predict what will come next, this story focuses on a modern Native child whose family maintains important cultural traditions.*

If you're unsure about any book, especially those older ones written by non-Native authors, please look it up on Debbie Reese's blog, americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blog.spot.com/. She is Nambe Pueblo and teaches at the University of Illinois at Champaign, and writes highly respected analyses of children's literature from the Native perspective.

Some Must-Have Reference Books (and some non-Amazon suppliers)

⊕ Ajmera, Maya and Arlene Hirschfelder, Children of Native America Today ISBN 1570919658 *This book invites readers to explore Native nations, focusing on the children who live, learn, and play in tribal communities throughout the United States. These children celebrate a proud heritage, a rich culture, and a close-knit society. They participate in cultural activities such as totem pole carving, storytelling, and dancing at a powwow, as well as enjoying video games, going to school, and other contemporary pastimes.*

⊕ Bigelow, Bill and Bob Peterson, Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years ISBN 0-942961-20-X *An essential resource for teachers providing a balanced look at the myth of Columbus.*

Rethinking Schools
1001 East Keefe Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53212
(414)964-9646
www.rethinkingschools.org

⊕ Harvey, Karen D. Teaching About Native Americans ISBN : 0879860731 Published for the National Council for the Social Studies, this is a clear, concise look at the rationale

⊕ Harvey, Karen D. and Lisa D. Harjo, Indian Country: A History of Native People in America ISBN 1-55591-428-4 *Written for teachers, parents and students, this book retells Native American history through essays, stories and speeches. Lesson plans, activities and supplemental reading for grades 6-12 are included.*

⊕ Dennis, Yvonne Wakim and Arlene Hirschfelder, A Kid's Guide to Native American History: More than 50 Activities (A Kid's Guide series) ISBN-10: 1556528027 *Hands-on activities, games, and crafts introduce children to the diversity of Native American cultures in nine geographical areas and teach them about the people, experiences, and events that have helped shape America, past and present.*

⊕ Jones, Guy W. and Sally Moomaw, Lessons From Turtle Island: Native Curriculum in Early Childhood Classrooms ISBN 1-929610-25-4 *Written by educators, this wonderful book*

offers unique perspectives on including authentic learning experiences about Native Americans in early childhood classrooms.

✦ Kerner, Kathy and Carole Durham, They Taught You Wrong: Raising Cultural Consciousness of Stereotypes and Misconceptions about American Indians *A wonderful compilation of the misconceptions adults and children face about Native Americans, as well as a list of stereotypical books to be avoided at home and in the classroom.*

Contact Carole Durham at
1016 Woodhaven Drive
Lynchburg, VA 24502
(804)239-7496 or ribonshirt@aol.com

✦ Krull, Kathleen and David Hautzig, One Nation Many Tribes: How Kids Live in Milwaukee's Indian Community (A World of My Own) ISBN 0525674403. *Chronicles the lives of young Thirza Defoe, a half Ojibwa and half Oneida Indian, and Shawnee Ford, another Native American, offering readers an introduction to Native American life among the tribes of southern Wisconsin.*

✦ Loewen, James W., Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong ISBN 0-684-81886-8 *This award-winning author surveyed 12 leading high school history texts and examines the myths and misinformation they present. Fascinating reading.*

✦ Russell, George, American Indian Facts of Life ISBN 1-811933-05-9 *A fascinating and sobering demographic profile of today's Native tribes and reservations.*

Russell Publications
American Indian Data Resources
9027 North Cobre Drive
Phoenix, AZ 85028-5317
(800)-835-7220

✦ Slapin, Beverly and Doris Seale, A Broken Flute: The Native Experience in Books for Children ISBN 0759107793. *A great collection of reviews of more than 100 children's books by and about Native peoples and a guide for evaluating children's books for anti-Native bias.*

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Some Favorite Native Web Sites

<http://www.mitchellmuseum.org/education/links-resources.html> Evanston's Mitchell Museum of the American Indian's education page offers a variety of downloadable resources, including a comprehensive K-12 curriculum guide with links and bibliographies to guide your studies.

www.manataka.org is a Native organization with wonderful, downloadable stories, recipes, creation stories, histories, tribal links and much more.

<http://nativeauthors.com> Books of Native authors online

www.nativeculture.com/lisamitten/general.html Links to general Native-oriented sites

www.nativeculture.com/lisamitten/nations/html Listings and links to Native nations throughout the country

www.nativeculturelinks.com/ailabib.htm must reading for any school librarian, this site is a selected bibliography of books compiled by the American Indian Library Association. It reviews books about Native people and presents a list of books to avoid, and why.

www.nativetech.org/bookpages/ gives a list of books on Native topics, many of which can be ordered directly from Amazon.

www.nativeweb.org is a treasure trove of information—how-to's of traditional crafts, recipes, stories, technology and art. Make sure to bookmark this one!

www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/resource_library/american_indian_resources.html this is another treasure trove of virtual exhibits, encyclopedia resources, lesson plans and educational resources.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR TOUCH BOXES

Make outside label for box in color of map's cultural area (based on Hello Wood puzzle map.) Back the information cards and labels for each object with same color.

Northeast Woodlands (green)

Pieces of birchbark

Birchbark canoe

3 sisters: squash, corn and bean replicas

Replica of strawberries

Dream catcher

CD of music, Book of photos

Cattail leaves (used for mats)

Cattail fluff (used for stuffing, diapers)—make sure it's in sealable container!

Piece of buckskin (for clothing)

Piece of deer hide with hair

Piece of bear hide (for robes)

Tobacco (sacred plant used in ceremonies)

Porcupine quills (used in decorating)

Plastic models of deer, bear, wolf, trout, etc. --important woodland animals

White cowrie shells—used as money

Plains (orange)

Piece of buffalo hide (robes)

Piece of buckskin (clothing)

Onion bulb replica (representing camas bulb dug for food)

Corn replica

Sunflower replica

Small cradleboard

Buffalo horn beads

Plastic models of buffalo, deer, pinto pony

Tiny drum

Toy buckskin horse

CD of music, Book of photos

Northwest Coast (purple)

Small wooden mask replica
Piece of bear hide (for robes)
Piece of buckskin (for clothes)
Piece of fishing net
Replica of grapes
Cedar leaves
Balls of cedar wood
Plastic models—bear, salmon, deer
Totem pole book
CD of music, Book of photos
CD of teaching stories—“The Third Ear”, by Johnny Moses
Northwest Coast art magnets

California (red)

Rabbit fur
Piece of buckskin (clothing)
Piece of deer hide
Tule (reed) doll
Shell necklace
Acorns
Stalks of reeds
Reed purse
Postcards of baskets
Plastic models—jackrabbit, deer, antelope
Abalone shell (used for decoration)
Conch shell pendant
Fishing net
CD of music, Book of photos

Southeast (pink)

Snapping turtle foot
Alligator head
Postcards—Cherokee alphabet, Cherokee seal, Cherokee clans
Piece of buckskin

Small Seminole doll
Small painted gourd
Plastic models—deer, fox
Replicas of corn, beans, squash, strawberries, fern
CD of music, Book of photos

The Great Basin (brown)

Pinon cone (pine nuts)
Pine nuts in jar
Coiled yucca fiber
Rabbit fur
Sage (sacred plant)
Plastic models—fox, jackrabbit
Toy buckskin bear
Shoshone rattle
CD of music, Book of photos

Southwest (yellow)

Male and female Navajo dolls in traditional dress
Rabbit fur
Replicas of corn, beans, squash, pepper and sunflower
Saguaro cactus stem
Small Burden basket
Small Navajo rug
Small southwestern clay pot
Small sandpainting
Piece of real cotton
Piece of turquoise
CD of music, Book of photos

Plateau (grey)

Piece of buffalo skin
Onion bulb (representing camas bulb)
Piece of bear hide
Piece of deer hide

Elk teeth
Buffalo teeth
Gold Sacagawea dollar
Buckskin bear toy
Shoshoni rattle
Plastic models—elk, wolf, deer, buffalo, trout, bear, Appaloosa horse
CD of music, Book of photos

Touchbox Resources

Hello Wood--makers of the Cultural Areas puzzle map on which the color coding is based:
www.HelloWood.com; (931)498-2432

Museum stores --check out the Mitchell Museum in Evanston, the Field Museum in Chicago, or any others with a Native American exhibit for gift shop goodies.

Online Native craft stores for smaller replicas—check out the Christmas decoration section!

Online animal parts stores (do a Google search for hides, teeth and bones!)

Michael's or Joanne's craft stores—usually have fruits and veggie replicas, and many have animal models

Canyon Records has great compilations of traditional music you can use for your CDs. Choose 6 songs or so that represent different dances and copy them onto your own CD.

I use shoebox-sized Rubbermaid containers—make sure the tops are easily removable—buy 8 so they all match. I also found 8 similarly-colored 3 x 5 photo albums to include and I made my own template for CD labels.

Please feel free to contact me if you're unsure what to include, what to write for your information cards or have any questions!

Teaching Respect for Native Peoples

DO

- ➊ Present Native peoples as appropriate role models with whom a Native child can identify.
- ➋ Look for books and materials written and illustrated by Native people.
- ➌ Read and discuss good poetry, suitable for young people, by contemporary Native writers.
- ➍ Use primary source material—speeches, songs, poems, writings— that show the linguistic skill of peoples who came from an oral tradition.
- ➎ Avoid arts and crafts and activities that trivialize Native dress, dance or ceremony.
- ➏ Present Native peoples as separate from each other, with unique cultures, languages, spiritual beliefs and dress.
- ➐ Talk about the lives of Native peoples in the present.
- ➑ Make sure you know the history of Native peoples, past and present, before you attempt to teach it.
- ➒ Teach Native history as a regular part of American history.
- ➓ Use materials that put history in perspective.
- ➔ Use materials that present Native heroes who fought to defend their own people.

DON'T

- ➊ Single out Native children, ask them to describe their families' traditions, or their people's cultures.
- ➋ Do or say anything that would embarrass a Native child.
- ➌ Assume that you have no Native children in your class.
- ➍ Use books in which "Indian" characters speak in either "early jawbreaker" or in the oratorical style of the "noble savage."
- ➎ Make "Indian crafts" unless you know authentic methods and have authentic materials.
- ➏ Have children dress as "Indians," with paper-bag "costumes" or paper-feather "headdresses."
- ➐ Speak as though "the Indians" were here only for the benefit of the colonists.
- ➑ Encourage children to do Indian "dances" or let children do "war-whoops."
- ➒ Teach "Indians" only at Thanksgiving.
- ➓ Use materials that manipulate words like "victory," "conquest" or "massacre" to distort history.
- ➔ Use materials that present as heroes only those Native people who aided Europeans.

DO

- 🕒 Discuss the relationship between Native peoples and the colonists and what went wrong with it.
- 🕒 Use materials that show respect for, and understanding of, the sophistication and complexities of Native societies.
- 🕒 Use respectful language in teaching about Native peoples.
- 🕒 Invite Native community members to the classroom. Offer them an honorarium. Treat them as teachers, not as entertainers.
- 🕒 Use materials that show the continuity of Native societies, with traditional values and spiritual beliefs connected to the present.
- 🕒 Portray Native cultures as coexisting with nature in a delicate balance.
- 🕒 Use materials that show Native women, elders and children as integral and important to Native societies.

DON'T

- 🕒 Use materials that stress the superiority of European ways, and the inevitability of European conquest.
- 🕒 Make up Indian "legends" or "ceremonies." 🕒 Sing "Ten Little Indians."
- 🕒 Use insulting terms such as "brave," "squaw," "papoose," "Indian givers," "wild Indian," "blanket Indians" or "wagon burners."
- 🕒 Assume that every Native person knows everything there is to know about every Native nation.
- 🕒 Refer to Native spirituality as "superstition."
- 🕒 Portray Native peoples as "the first ecologists."
- 🕒 Use books that portray Native women and elders as subservient to warriors.
- 🕒 Make charts about "gifts the Indians gave us."
- 🕒 Use picture books by non-Native authors that show animals dressed as "Indians." Use ABC books that have "I is for Indian" or "E is for Eskimo," or use counting books that count "Indians." 🕒 Use books that show Native peoples as savages, primitive craftspeople, or simple tribal people, now extinct. 🕒 Use story books that show non-Native children "playing Indian."

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The Art of Appropriate Arts and Crafts Activities

Well-meaning teachers may unwittingly perpetuate stereotypes through their choice of crafts activities. A good number of the choices in such books as More Than Just Moccasins or The Kids' Multicultural Art Book are inappropriate because they are culturally insensitive, perpetuate stereotypes and even demean Native cultures.

Here are some of the activities to pass up:

Making feathers, headdresses and "warbonnets": To Native people, feathers are sacred and making headdresses is highly offensive. Feathers are used in ceremonies to carry prayers to the Creator and in many American Indian cultures, were given as a gift after an extraordinary accomplishment, not cut out of construction paper. As a comparison, teachers would not have children make yarmulkes as a strategy to learn about Jewish people!

Totem Poles: When teachers ask their children to make totem poles out of toilet paper rolls, they take away their deep meaning. Totem poles are still carved to preserve important teachings and communicate them to future generations, and they are used in ceremonies.

Peace Pipes: The Pipe is considered sacred by every Native culture and is brought out only for significant occasions. American Indians believe it is highly inappropriate for students to make peace pipes out of toilet paper rolls or any other material.

Drums: To Native people, the drum is sacred and represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth. It is treated with great respect and to be the "drumkeeper" is a high honor. Indian children do not make drums, and for other children to make drums is considered disrespectful.

Sand Paintings: Navajo sand paintings are created for religious or healing ceremonies, and though some designs have been manufactured for the tourist trade, many others are so sacred even photograph taking is not allowed. Suggesting that students make sand paintings "in the Navajo way" is inappropriate. Likewise, Kachinas and Power Shields (or War Shields) are also to be avoided.

Fetish Necklaces: The animal fetishes in traditional Hopi necklaces were given to families and individuals and carry special significance. Some Natives feel that having children carve fetish animals out of soap to make necklaces shows a lack of respect.

Brown bag "vests", breechclouts and other articles of clothing that encourage children to "dress up like Indians" should be avoided not because they are sacred but because they reinforce the stereotype that all Native people are the same. This type of activity also conveys the notion that children can become Indian by dressing up.

OK...so what does that leave?

Many Native educators suggest creating art activities that anchor to historic events. For instance, use the NMAI poster of Lone Dog's Winter Count to show how Nakota historians kept track of their yearly events through symbolic painting on the back of a buffalo hide. Students can create their own personal timeline through this activity and it can be tied into other calendar studies.

Link the craft to an artform study. For instance, discuss the roots of ledger art, which evolved from prisoners incarcerated during the wars that forced Natives from their Western lands. When given ledger books to keep their hands busy, these artists drew detailed battle scenes and scenes of their pre-reservation lives. Or examine the styles of contemporary Native artists and ask students to create their own works in the same style.

Tie the craft to literature: Making corn husk dolls would be an appropriate activity during times of harvest; accompany the craft with the Oneida story of the “no face” doll. Likewise, introduce a Dreamcatcher-making activity with the legend of how the dreamcatcher came to be.

You can also tie in math to craft activities. Ask students to create geometric patterns on graph paper that can then be translated to beadwork—or compare the geometric patterns of the Plains to the more floral patterns of the Eastern Woodlands. Geometric patterns are also found in Seminole patchwork of the Southeast and Eastern Woodland applique work. Incorporate sewing skills to re-create Lakota star quilts, as well. Younger students can replicate patterns while stringing beads, or use pony beads to create beaded keychains.

Arlene Hirschfelder and Yvonne Beamer Wakim have written two wonderful resources to guide teachers in choosing appropriate craft activities and we urge you to follow their suggestions: [Native Americans Today: Resources and Activities for Educators Grades 4-8](#) (some of the crafts can be simplified for younger students) and [A Kid's Guide to Native American History: More than 50 Activities](#). We also suggest that you contact Native-themed museums as the Mitchell Museum in Evanston and the Schingoethe Center for Native American Studies in Aurora for additional ideas.

Thank you for making the extra effort to provide your students with meaningful and culturally appropriate experiences!

This is just the tip of the iceberg! Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me with any questions or to share what worked for you (and also what didn't work!)

Please check out my website for previous issues of my informative newsletter, the Pathfinder.

Migwetch (thank you),

Linda Bechtle

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