



Ventura County Indian Education Consortium

Title VII Federal Project – Serving Public School Districts in Ventura County Since 1974

November is National Native American Heritage Month

The Ventura County Indian Education Consortium is here to support staff. Below, please review guidance points regarding common concerns. In addition, links to digital teaching resources are provided. Please contact Lindsay Smith, Program Coordinator, if you have concerns or need further guidance (lindsay.smith@venturausd.org) (805) 641-5000 ext 1193).

Did you know Native American Heritage Month was designated in 1990? In November, we are called to celebrate “significant contributions the first Americans made to the establishment and growth of the U.S.” <http://nativeamericanheritagemonth.gov/>. How is Native American Heritage Month celebrated at your school site? Allow children to see Native American culture through history *and* in the present. Strive to serve, honor, respect and strengthen local Native American cultures and communities.

California is home to more American Indians than any other state in our nation. California’s native population in 2013 was 709,952. “There are 14 states with more than 100,000 American Indian and Alaska Native residents...as of 2013.” <http://www.diversityinc.com/american-indian-heritage-month-facts-figures> “As a general principle, an American Indian is a person who is a descendant of recognized native groups and an enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe or village. For its own purposes, the Bureau of the Census counts anyone as an Indian who declares to be such. By recent counts, there are currently more than two million American Indians, including Native Alaskans and Native Hawaiians.” <http://www.nevadaindianterritory.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/255-4018-IT-BROCHURE-ONLINE.pdf>

1. Which is best, the term Native American or American Indian?

"What term is most appropriate for talking about North America's first people? The term Indian comes from a mistake ... (but is used) intentionally and with full knowledge of its shortcomings as a misnomer that gives some people offense. The terms native, indigenous, First Nations person, and aboriginal are often ambiguous, equally problematic, and in some cases more cumbersome" (Anton Treuer, [Everything You Wanted to Know about Indians But Were Afraid to Ask](#)). Simply put, "American Indians" is a term used to refer to the people displaced by colonization and the eventual treaties that were established by the United States government. During the occupation of Alcatraz (1969-1971), a group self-titled as the "Indians of all Tribes" called their protest the "American Indian Movement." This civil rights movement has helped solidify the accepted use of the term Indian. Use of the word "Indian" has also been institutionalized as a way to refer to the many tribes of our nation. Indian Education is a Title VII federal project operated by the Office of Indian Education, and the tribes of our nation are assisted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Sensitivity is critical, and assuming one term is correct or preferred is impossible. Many families of native heritage actually do not prefer the term Indian but would rather be referred to as Native American or as the name of their tribe. I use the terms interchangeably, doing my best not to offend. It also helps to generate critical thinking and discussions with my students who ask the same question. If you have a native student, a dialogue on the subject will likely be welcomed. In discussing Thanksgiving with students, the use of the following terms (used interchangeably) is best: American Indians, Native Americans, the Wampanoag people.

2. How to avoid perpetuating stereotypes at Thanksgiving celebrations.

As teachers lead students in Thanksgiving celebrations, it is important to address the topic of cultural sensitivity. Many teachers’ well-meaning traditions may be considered offensive and perpetuate stereotypes. Indian Education at its very basic level should include an understanding of the different regions of the United States and an understanding of how tribes differed from region to region. Not all tribes wore feathers or lived in tepees, etc. Unfortunately, Thanksgiving celebrations tend to leave this topic out of the lesson, and many students grow to have a skewed understanding of native people. The images presented (including the student costumes) often create a misconceived notion that all native people were the same. At the very least, any teacher leading a Thanksgiving celebration should be careful to provide the students with an understanding of the Wampanoag tribe’s region and how it affected their style of dress, diet and home structures. I then suggest presenting a contrast of how different the first Thanksgiving celebration might have been had it been on the west coast with the Chumash tribe. Such an exercise would challenge teachers to provide a more accurate image and help decrease stereotypes perpetuated through "cute" ideas shared between teachers, such as on Pinterest.

3. Make a study of Thanksgiving an opportunity to discuss sociology issues related to Native American studies.

Digging deeper, Indian Education should help students understand the challenge of two cultures living together. A study of Squanto's life and his role in the first Thanksgiving will lead teachers to begin important dialogues than can be revisited each year as students' cognitive levels increase and deeper understandings can be comprehended. Squanto's story is truly amazing; he is an American hero whose name should be remembered, yet is often forgotten at Thanksgiving. People want to have a rose-colored image of Thanksgiving, especially when including young children, but these social issues are relevant at an early age, and conversations about the challenges can be made age appropriate.

Finally, Indian Education should include an understanding of the continued plight and prosperity of American Indians today. We should be careful to ensure students are aware that the image presented in history books is not reflective of American tribes today. American Indians are still striving to maintain their culture and coexist with the prevailing mainstream culture which began around the time of that first Thanksgiving. I encourage teachers to look up the Wampanoag tribe on the internet. There are two different bands with web pages as follows:

http://www.wampanoagtribe.net/pages/wampanoag_acc/who

<http://mashpeewampanoagtribe.com/>

Online Resources to Further Equip Classroom Teachers

Native American Culture Lessons for Native American Heritage Month (National Education Association)

<http://www.nea.org/tools/lessons/native-american-and-alaska-native-heritage-month-grades-k-5.html>

National Native American Heritage Month Teacher Resources (Contributions from: The Library of Congress,

National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service, Smithsonian Institution and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum join in paying tribute to the rich ancestry and traditions of Native Americans.) <http://nativeamericanheritagemonth.gov/for-teachers/>

National Archives

<http://www.archives.gov/education>

National Native American Historical Timeline

<http://www.diversityinc.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Native-American-Heritage-Month-Timeline.pdf>

National Native American Facts & Figures

<http://www.diversityinc.com/american-indian-heritage-month-facts-figures>

Five Ways to Celebrate Native American Heritage Month

<https://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/11/20/5-ways-celebrate-native-american-heritage-month-152298>

National Museum of the American Indian

http://nmai.si.edu/sites/1/files/pdf/education/thanksgiving_poster.pdf

<http://nmai.si.edu/sites/1/files/pdf/education/>

[NMAI_Harvest_Study_Guide.pdf](http://nmai.si.edu/environment/pdf/01_02_Thanksgiving_Address.pdf) http://nmai.si.edu/environment/pdf/01_02_Thanksgiving_Address.pdf

Sensitivity Memo with Strategies from Salt Lake City School District

<http://www.slcschools.org/departments/educational-equity/language-and-culture/documents/AmericanIndianSensitivityMemo.pdf>



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