
Sample Lesson 28: Native American Mascots

Theme: Identity

Disciplinary Area: Native American Studies

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 1–6

Standards Alignment:

CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: RH.11–12.1, 2, 7; WHST.11–12.1, 4

LESSON PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW:

Students will examine past and present portrayals of Native American iconography and culture used as mascots for major US sports teams. Students will explore and discuss how mascots can be viewed as negative or prideful. Students will have an opportunity to read and analyze various articles and sources on the topic and determine whether the use of Native American mascots should be continued or banned.

Key Terms and Concepts: stereotypes, colonialism, disenfranchisement, hegemony

Lesson Objectives (Students will be able to ...):

- Understand the historical context of Native American iconography and symbolism used in American sports and popular culture
- Compare and contrast differing arguments around the debate on the use of Native American iconography and symbolism within American sports
- Analyze why some sports teams have opted to change their mascots or nicknames from Native American figures, and why others have not. Students will document potential social, economic, legislative, and historical factors that have contributed to these decisions

Essential Questions:

1. How have Native Americans in the US historically been portrayed by non-Indigenous peoples?
2. How has the use of Native American iconography, imagery, and culture by non-Indigenous peoples impacted Native Americans today?
3. Should sports teams continue to use these mascots? Use evidence from the texts and documents you have analyzed to support your claim.

Lesson Steps/Activities:

Day 1

1. Show public images of American Indians returned by an internet search. How might these images portray public opinion of American Indians?
2. Introduce the lesson by writing the following on the board: “Why are Native American mascots considered offensive by some but considered prideful to others?” Have students respond to this question on a sheet of paper. After they complete their written responses, have each student share their work with a neighbor. After allowing about three to five minutes for the pairs to share, have a whole-class discussion responding to the question.
3. Ask two students to come to the board and list sports teams that use Native American imagery, iconography, or cultural traits as part of their mascots, team names, or nicknames. Below is a sample list in case students struggle to identify teams:

- Atlanta Braves
- Kansas City Chiefs
- The former Washington Redskins
- Florida State Seminoles
- Chicago Blackhawks
- The former Cleveland Indians
- San Diego State Aztecs



4. After drafting the list, project images of the mascots, logos, and other icons used by the teams on the other side of the board. Feel free to use the images provided in this lesson. Again, ask students whether they find the images to be disrespectful.

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5. Ask students whether they are aware of the Washington Redskins name change. Ask students to share what they have heard about the decision to rename the team, including the reasons for the change, how people responded to the change, and what events preceded and coincided with the decision (for example, BLM, the decision to remove Confederate statues, the decision to remove statues of Christopher Columbus and the push to rename the city of Columbus, Ohio, as well as other relevant events). If time permits, a news clip, article, or headlines can be shown to students.
 6. After projecting the images, show the following video clip of the Florida State Seminoles pregame ceremony performed by Chief Osceola on his horse Renegade, as well as a clip of the Kansas City Chiefs and Atlanta Braves tomahawk chop. Ask that students take notes on the videos and reflect on the earlier questions.
 - a. Florida State Seminoles: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link321>
 - b. Kansas City Chiefs tomahawk chop: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link322>
 - c. Atlanta Braves tomahawk chop: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link323>
 7. Hand out a copy of the NPR article “Are You Ready for Some Controversy?” and have students read it in class. Then ask students to respond to the following questions:
 - a. What do those who refuse to say the name “Redskins” call the team?
 - b. What media outlets have protested the use of the name Redskins?
 - c. When was the term “redskin” first recorded, and whom was it used by? Why was it used?
 - d. How did Earl Emmons’s book, “Redskin Rimes” portray Native Americans and the name redskin?
 - e. What did the Washington Redskins owner say about the possibility of changing the name?
 8. Provide students with two additional NPR articles, “After Mounting Pressure, Washington’s NFL Franchise Drops Its Team Name” and “Washington NFL Team’s Sponsor FedEx Formally Asks for Team Name Change,” and have students respond to the following questions. If there is not enough time in class, this can be assigned for homework.
 - a. How long after the first article was the second article written? The third article?
 - b. What events took place during that time? What prompted the decision to change the name? How have attitudes about the name changed over time?

Day 2

1. Start the second day of the lesson by asking students to take out their homework. Ask students to discuss their answers with a neighbor. After about five minutes of discussion be sure to collect the homework assignment.
2. First play the video “Proud to Be” (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link324>). Next, play “Redskins Is a Powerful Name” (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link325>).
3. Ask students to identify the differences between these two videos. Discuss in pairs and then as a whole class. Also ask students, “Is there a difference between what Chief Osceola does at the beginning of the Florida State University games and what occurs at the Kansas City Chiefs and Atlanta Braves games?”
4. If time permits, have student research the Florida State University’s relationship with the Seminole tribe. This can also be assigned as homework. As a starting point, have students review the websites listed below:
 - a. Seminole Tribe of Florida <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link326>
 - b. Florida State University “Relationship with the Seminole Tribe of Florida” <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link327>
 - c. National Congress of Indian Americans “Anti-Defamation and Mascots” <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link328>

Day 3

1. Start the day by having students report back to the whole class what they learned from the homework assignment.
2. Show images of mascots from Indian schools like Haskell University and Sherman Indian High School. Students are asked to use the information given on day 2 to analyze and write in letter form why these mascots are acceptable or not acceptable.
3. Ask students whether there are any sports teams that have removed/retired Native American mascots or names. If students are unable to respond to the question, emphasize that the following teams and institutions have removed or retired the use of Native American imagery from their sports team marketing: Stanford University, the University of Illinois, Golden State Warriors, the University of Oklahoma, Marquette University, Dartmouth College, Syracuse University, Coachella Valley High School, and Fremont High School in Sunnyvale. Provide some images of the retired mascots for additional reference. Here are two examples:



4. Show an excerpt of the film *In Whose Honor* <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link329>
5. After they watch the film, have students complete the handout provided at the end of the lesson.
6. After they complete the handout, have students share their answers with each other in pairs.
7. Students will go beyond sports to evaluate other uses of American Indian images in popular culture. Show images of products and Halloween costumes that use Native American imagery. Students are asked to write an essay providing a critical analysis of the use of these images.

Making Connections to the *History–Social Science Framework* and the *California Arts Education Framework for Public Schools (Arts Framework)*

The *History–Social Science Framework* (chapter 20) and the *Arts Framework* (chapter 7) both include a discussion of culturally responsive pedagogy. These sections could add insight to this lesson, which is about how cultural symbols can be appropriated by an outside culture without regard for the potential impact upon those affected by that appropriation.

Possible discussion questions that you can use to explore this topic include:

- How has your culture been portrayed in the US media? How is that similar or different to the portrayal of Native Americans?
- How has the use of your culture's iconography, imagery, and culture impacted your community or culture?
- How can we combat the perpetuation of stereotypes and cultural appropriation in today's media?

Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection:

- Students will conduct research on the history of Native American iconography, culture, and imagery used in the marketing of US sports teams.
- Students will engage in class dialogue and debate around Native American tribes using or allowing use of their tribe as a mascot. This can take the form of a Socratic seminar where the teacher asks open-ended questions and invites students to react to their peers' responses. Students should be given questions and resources ahead of time to allow them to prepare relevant notes to support the discussion. The teacher should reiterate that the focus of the discussion is ideas and evidence. This activity can also be done using philosophical chairs or a fishbowl discussion to allow students to work in pairs or groups.
- Students will have several opportunities to reflect on the differing positions of Native American tribes related to this topic.
- Students will analyze and evaluate the impact of Native American imagery beyond sports in a five-paragraph essay on social, economic, legislative, and historical factors.

Materials and Resources:

- "Anti-Defamation and Mascots" <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link330>
- "Sports Teams That Retired Native American Mascots, Nicknames" <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link331>
- "Redskins Is a Powerful Name" <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link332>
- "Proud to Be (Mascots)" <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link333>
- "The Final Chop at Turner Field" <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link334>
- "Kansas City Chiefs Tomahawk Chop – Loudest Crowd in the World (Guinness World Record)" <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link335>
- "FSU Football Chief Osceola and Renegade at Doak Tomahawk Chop" <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link336>
- "Are You Ready for Some Controversy? The History of 'Redskin'" <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link337>
- "Washington NFL Team's Sponsor FedEx Formally Asks for Team Name Change" <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link338>
- "After Mounting Pressure, Washington's NFL Franchise Drops Its Team Name" <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link339>

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- “Relationship with the Seminole Tribe of Florida”
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link340>
 - “Two Years Later, Effect of California Racial Mascots Act Looks Diminished”
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link341>

“In Whose Honor” Video Questions

This documentary profiles Charlene Teters, a Native American activist who tries to educate the University of Illinois community about the negative impact of the “Chief Illiniwek” mascot, which is an inaccurate, stereotypical portrayal of a Native American.

1. Why is Charlene Teters upset?
2. Why does she find the use of Native American iconography and imagery in mascots offensive?
3. What forms of resistance does she use against the university?
4. What is the reaction from the community?
5. What is the university’s response to Charlene’s protest?
6. What resolution is made?
7. What is your opinion of the university’s use of the mascot?