



## **Stereotyping and Racism Curriculum**

### ***Current Events in Stereotypes and Racism- Stockton Springs***

**Grades 8-9**

## **The Abbe Museum**

*Promoting understanding and appreciation of Maine Native  
American cultures, history, and archaeology.*

*Bar Harbor, Maine*

In 2007, the Abbe Museum and Rhonda Frey (Penobscot/Passamaquoddy) partnered to create two new units for use in the classroom on issues of stereotyping and racism facing Maine's Native American communities today. The units are meant to build on each other, and can be used in combination with discussions of racism faced by other communities in the United States, or to stand alone, as a means of meeting LD 291 and Maine Learning Results. Each unit is written by Rhonda based on her experiences, and addresses tough issues, yet offers hope and guidance for students today.

The goals of these units is to 1) educate students that prejudice is real and ongoing 2) empower students to recognize their ability to change not only themselves, but our communities and society and 3) to provide materials for use as a guide to further conversations about stereotyping and racism in the classroom and beyond.

Each unit includes a narrative for students to read, along with a series of questions for discussion. At the end of each unit is an activity for the entire class to participate in together, so students can learn from each other, and make the information presented more personal, applying to each individual's life.

In February 2009, Rhonda passed on. Her dedication to Native issues, her strength, and her generosity will be sorely missed. A special thanks goes out to her son for allowing the Abbe Museum to continue Rhonda's work and publish these units.

### **Maine Learning Results:**

A1 Social Studies Researching and Developing Positions on Current Social Studies Issues

A2 Social Studies Making Decisions Using Social Studies Knowledge and Skills

B1 English Language Arts Interconnected Elements

B3 English Language Arts Argument/Analysis

E1 English Language Arts Listening

E2 English Language Arts Speaking

## **Grades 8 – 9 Current Events in Stereotypes and Racism – Stockton Springs**

I dedicate this work to all those who can't talk about what I am going to share with you. I hope my words will help enlighten you and will in turn give voice to all who can't speak out.

I think it's great to start having these conversations about stereotypes and racism because sometimes it's so subtle, that I've had to point it out to other people. I was with a non-Native friend, talking to one of the guidance counselors at a Hampden school. I noticed she was talking to my friend a lot differently than she was to me. This woman knew I was Native and knew the other person was not. She would "speak with" the person I was with and would "speak down" at me. My friend didn't see it until I pointed out the differences. My friend was quite astounded. I wasn't because I've been subjected to this sort of treatment many times, so I picked right up on it. But it is truly difficult for anyone to see the subtleties if they personally have not had to deal with prejudice. I am hoping my stories will begin your journey to a greater awareness and understanding, and will help you to become more attuned to it.

- Rhonda Frey (Penobscot/Passamaquoddy) 2008

In 2000, Maine passed legislation adding the word "squaw" to the list of offensive names, and prohibited its use by the State to designate place names. In the fall of 2006, a resident of the town of Stockton Springs asked me to suggest an alternative name for Squaw Point Road. I had a name in mind, but I said I would have to get back to them. I then met with a former neighbor of mine on Indian Island, Patrick Almenas. Pat lost his daughter the year before in a car accident. Sixteen year-old Lindsey was picking up her boyfriend, Ryan Worcester, 17, before school at his home in Old Town.

The sun on that fall day was bright and Lindsey and Ryan were also filled with sunshine when they left his mother's house. Shortly after, Ryan's mom heard a loud crash. Lindsey didn't see the cement truck coming down the road; the truck hit them. They were both rushed to the hospital in Bangor. Pat was horrified when he found out his little girl, the one he raised from infancy, may be ending the journey they had been on together and may begin another journey without him, into the spirit realm with all of our ancestors. Lindsey was his baby and he was so proud of her. It was said Lindsey would have been a leader had she lived.

In our culture, when someone suddenly or violently dies, especially a young person, the loss and pain hits the whole tribe. There is shock and a void is left in the tribe. The loss of two lives so young always seems senseless and it takes many years for the people to heal. The pain is still felt in the community to this day.

Lindsey's Native name "Manakwane" was the first name I thought of as an alternative to the word Squaw. Her name means, "she is like a rainbow." Pat was honored to hear that I wanted to suggest using her name, later telling me that she was proud of her Native American heritage, sang in the girls drumming group "Sukulis", worked for the Boys & Girls Club and had many friends from difficult cultures and backgrounds. Pat told me he thought this seemed like a great

alternative because it would give remembrance and honor to someone who was very special to many people. Friends of Lindsey's from Old Town were very happy to hear of the suggestion as well. I asked for a picture and a write-up about her so the people of Stockton Springs would know who she was, which Pat provided

I called my Stockton Springs contact back and emailed the handout. The Town of Stockton Springs and the homeowners association in which the road was located met about the suggested name, "Manakwane." A resident of the town challenged the suggested name, saying that traditionally the tribe does not name anything after tribal members. I told this person about the fact that there was an island named Teddy Bear Island in honor of my grandfather's birth, there was a cemetery called the Lucy Poolaw Cemetery, and a street named Val Ranco St. There are also buildings named after tribal members. He was right in a way; for a long time the tribe did not name anything after tribal members, but in the last 100 years we have changed, and we do now.

The homeowner's association suggested the word "Squapoint" as an alternative. Penobscot Tribal Chief Kirk Francis agreed to sign a letter recommending they not use "Squa" as an acceptable alternative and to support my recommendation of Manakwane. The memo explained why he felt Squa was not acceptable. I called the Chair of the Town Selectmen, Sara Bradford to let her know I had a letter from the Chief that I would hand deliver. Armed with the handout and the letter from the Chief, I attended my first meeting with the Town of Stockton Springs on January 4, 2007.

The following is a brief account of what happened once the homeowner's association members knew I was a member of the tribe,

- Some of the homeowner's association members were advocating the name "Squapoint," stating that that they were going by "the letter of the law." I responded, "You'll be taking out a letter, not the connotation." I didn't want them to use a band-aid to fix the problem by keeping a variation of the name.
- At the very first meeting, I felt I was being called on the carpet, so to speak, as the homeowners became more aggressive. One of the town selectmen expected me to answer for other places names in Maine such as "Squapan". I told them I didn't know the explanation for that name. I was asked about a place in Nova Scotia that had the name Squaw Point Cemetery. I said I couldn't answer that question since it was a different country; he looked rather confused by that.
- A woman from the association (I was later informed she was a teacher) asked me, "So what do we call them if we can't use the name?" I said "What?" not quite believing what I had just heard. She said, "What do we call Native American Indian women if we can't use the name?" I looked at her in amazement and wondered why she felt the need to be

so sarcastic, and I responded, “How about Native American Indian Women, or...Women.”

- I was told “Why are you just bringing this up now, why didn’t anyone say anything before?” I said, “Do you realize that it took recent legislation, *getting a law passed* just to get the schools in Maine to include information about the tribes in their classrooms?”
- Over three different meetings I was told that the word was not offensive to members of the homeowners association, “We don’t mind it, it doesn’t bother us, so it doesn’t matter.” The Town Manager was quoted as saying the homeowners didn’t want the changes, and that they had deep pockets –inferring a fight was at hand.
- At one point, I made a comment that I suspected people would still call it “Squaw Point Rd” even if the name were changed. There was a letter to the editor of the local newspaper stating that I was right in my comment that people would still call it Squaw, the homeowners liked the name. The person also wrote that I needed to get over it.
- There were people who did come to the tribes’ defense at the meetings, recommending the association change the name, “Why offend our neighbors in the north?” The homeowner’s group ignored any “opposing” comments. In the months I attended the meetings, the group expanded from four to about eight and became more vocal.
- I was told at one of the meetings that the woman who worked in the Town Office claimed to be from a western tribe – I think it was Sioux. She said she didn’t mind the name Squaw, that it didn’t offend her. Later, her comment was used in a news piece by the Town Manager. I was a little angry that they asked someone who isn’t from the area to comment on the name, and it didn’t bother her. Not only that, the Penobscot tribe had sent a letter asking the Town and homeowners not to use the name, were they going to dig their feet in because one woman was okay with it?
- One man brought a dictionary, which was published in 1945 and asked the Chair of the Selectmen to read the definition of Squaw. I asked if a Native American wrote the dictionary, the Chair said, “I’ll check,” and then told me she didn’t think so. The man went on to say that he didn’t mind the word so it didn’t matter. The man shouted loudly, the place was named “Squaw” when he bought it and if “they” wanted to change it, “they would have to pay for it.” He said the costs were high.
- One of the Selectmen said, “I checked the dictionary and in the small one I had, ten words began with “Squa.” I don’t think they can have a problem with all ten words.” I thought “Wanna bet? Here they are, clearly showing they are planning to use the alternative word “Squa” after they have been asked not to. I think we can really justify the racial aspect in this.” I never reacted nor responded; I just listened.

- I was asked what I thought of the name squall, because they were thinking about this as an alternative. They asked me twice, I told them both times I wasn't going to comment. My thought was I would let the Maine Tribal State/Commission know about it and they can comment on it.
- By the next meeting the town officials had met with the Maine Human Rights Commission and the Maine Tribal/State Commission and they were persuaded to change the name to something else, instead of playing off the name "Squa."
- At this same meeting I was told that I didn't need to come back; the homeowners didn't want my suggestions. This only spurred me to go back to the next meeting. I really wasn't planning on going back until I was told not to. In fact, the next day I told my Tribal Chief and the director of the Maine Indian Tribal/State Commission I was planning to go to the next meeting no matter what.
- At the last meeting, one of the members of the housing association stood up and said, "The Human Rights Commission said they (the Tribal/State Commission) accused us of being racist. We're not racist, we care." This was the same woman who asked what term could be used to refer to Native American women, if not squaw.
- Shortly after the last meeting, during which the name was changed to "Defence," I received a copy of a memo sent to the members of the homeowners association from their officials in the organization. They claimed that the "Indian Reporter" had known about the sudden decision of the Town Council to rename Squapoint and all places with the name Squaw or Squa to Defence. That, right after the vote, I left, proving this theory. Indian Reporter, me? – Wow – who knew? I wondered for whom I was a reporter? I assumed they were referring to me since I was in only Native in the room. Of course I left after the vote, did anyone really think I would stay and listen to the complaints? – I did contact the news media because none were present at this meeting; I wanted this to be in the news so the people of Maine would know about the decision the Town Selectmen made. I am a journalist, but not a reporter. And, no, I knew nothing of the decision before hand, I was as surprised as they were, but I was probably the only attendee delighted with the decision. I just wouldn't show any emotion when I was there.

I have to say, the town officials treated me with great respect. The town manager had the police on stand-by during the last meeting just in case someone tried to hurt me. The town manager even took me out to the road after the name was changed to Defence so I could get pictures for the Maine Tribal/State Commission and the tribe of a hand-painted sign that read "Squaw Point Road," which still hung on one of the poles. I also forwarded the photographs to Indian Country Today newspaper.

**NOTE:** It is very important to take time to discuss the issues brought up by Rhonda's story, as students will have strong reactions that need to be discussed.

### **Activity:**

Many Native American communities today use something called a "talking stick" as a courtesy, to help designate whose turn it is to speak. The stick represents respect for each other's opinion and the importance of letting everyone have a say. Rhonda says that "Native people believe that the wood is a living being with its own spirit, and each time it's passed from one person to the next, a little part of his or her essence and intentions flow into that living object, making it more empowering." Outside of Native communities, this concept has been incorporated by many groups, especially groups of children or adults who need help preventing discussions from degenerating into cacophonies. The stick helps to make sure that people listen to what is being said and can help keep an interesting discussion focused.

As a class, design and create a talking stick that reflects the values and personalities of the class as a whole. The stick should be easy to hold and pass, durable so it won't break as students pass it between hands, and large enough so that it can be seen in the arms of the person talking. To start: make a list of the values and personality traits that are known to exist in the class (humor, honesty, strength, etc.). From this list, identify the traits you think best fit the concept of the talking stick (honesty, strength, etc.). From this narrower list, brainstorm ideas of images, objects, or colors that represent those values and traits. Once this list has been agreed upon, create a poster to hang in the classroom to remind students what the items on the talking stick stand for. Finally, create the stick and try using it for the following discussion, asking questions about the text students have read. Teachers are encouraged to continue use of the talking stick for other conversations in the classroom.

### **Questions:**

After reading the narrative to themselves, ask the class to sit in a circle, so everyone can see each other. Use the following questions to help get the discussion going, however, please feel free to follow up on students' comments and let the conversation move freely. Teachers should act as a moderator, and ask the following questions when there is a lull in conversation, however students should be encouraged to share and respond to each other.

Please ask students to follow these rules to ensure a safe and productive dialogue:

- 1) The person holding the stick is the only person in the room allowed to speak.
- 2) The stick must be passed to the next person in the circle, not to the next person who wishes to speak.
- 3) No one is right or wrong, everyone's opinions are important and based on their personal experiences.
- 4) Students should feel free to disagree, however, disagreements must not be personal, heated, or

make the students feel attacked or uncomfortable.

5) Always listen and speak with respect.

6) No student should feel forced to share. This is a very personal and often times painful topic, and students may opt to listen without sharing and know their decision is respected. However, teachers should encourage each person to participate (for example, ask everyone to share something at least the first time).

- ❑ How did this narrative make you feel?
- ❑ Were you aware that such issues of prejudice still existed in Maine?
- ❑ Can you think of a time in your life when you have felt alienated or attacked for your race, gender, religion, or other lifestyle? How did it make you feel?
- ❑ Will stereotypes, racism, and/or prejudice always be a problem in our society, or can you think of solutions for these problems?
- ❑ Can you cite other examples of stereotypes, racism, or prejudice you've seen in media, heard from adults/friends?

**Activity:**

Research the word “squaw”- how has it been used over time, how is it used today? In what ways is this word derogatory toward Native American women? Write a reaction paragraph summarizing your research, how this project has made you feel, and what you think of the use of the word “Squaw.”

**Activity:**

Many emotions can be difficult to express, especially if feelings seem to conflict with one another. Art can be used as a form of healing or expression in ways that words often fall short. Take some of the themes expressed in this story and create an art project that expresses how it made you feel, or how you plan to deal with this issue in the future. Or, if you prefer, think of an event from your own life that has made you feel marginalized, discouraged, or uncomfortable, and create a work of art that addresses that event. After the work is complete, take some time to reflect on this process- how do you feel now that the art project is complete? Was the process cathartic, did it open old wounds or provide a sense of healing? Did this process help you identify feelings you didn't know you had about this event? What will you do with your project now?