

Wabanaki Studies in Maine Classrooms: Resources and Tools



Abbe Museum

Agenda

- LD291 and Maine Learning Results
- What resources are out there?
- Abbe Museum resources, programs and tools
- How can I evaluate resources?
- Cultural appropriation
- Integrating Wabanaki content

LD291

- LD 291: *An Act to Require Teaching of Maine Native American History and Culture in Maine's Schools*
- “Maine Native American history and culture must be taught in all elementary and secondary schools, both public and private.”
- “Maine Native American history and culture must be included in, but is not limited to, the areas of social studies and modern and classical languages.”

LD29 I

[T]he commissioner shall adopt rules to incorporate Maine Native American history and culture into the standards and performance indicators of the 8 content standard subject areas that comprise the system. In adopting these rules, the commissioner shall amend the standards and performance indicators in the content standard subject areas of social studies under the headings of civics and government, history, geography and economics that address the following topics:

- A. Maine tribal governments and political systems, and their relationship with local, state, national and international governments;
- B. Maine Native American cultural systems and the experience of Maine tribal people throughout history;
- C. Maine Native American territories; and
- D. Maine Native American economic systems.

Maine Learning Results

- Wabanaki (Maine Native) Studies component included in Maine's *Learning Results: Parameters for Essential Instruction*
- Maine DOE has suggested curriculum integrations for Social Studies Standards B, C, D, and E
- <http://www.maine.gov/doe/wabanaki/index.shtml>
- Integrate rather than do separate Wabanaki units

Existing Resources

- *The Wabanaki of Maine and the Maritimes*
- [Teaching About the Mi'kmaq](#)
- [Penobscot Nation curriculum](#)
- Tribal websites
- [American Indians in Children's Literature blog](#)
- [First Light Learning Resources](#)
- NMAI resources
 - [Education Resources page](#)
 - [American Indian Perspectives on Thanksgiving](#)
 - [Harvest Ceremony: Beyond the Thanksgiving Myth](#)
- More being collected on an ongoing basis

Abbe Resources

- Vetted resource lists
- Curriculum and lesson plans
- Online exhibits
- Field trips and classroom visits
- www.abbemuseum.org
- julia@abbemuseum.org

Evaluating Resources

- Word choice
- Illustrations
- Actions of the characters
- Author's perspective
- Oyate website, <http://oyate.org/>
- An example: [Examining Multicultural Picture Books for the Early Childhood Classroom: Possibilities and Pitfalls](#)

Evaluating Resources

If the information you're looking for is not on tribal websites, then you're going to have to critically think about what you're reading. We recommend paying particular attention to the author's word choice, illustrations, actions of the characters, and also the perspective of the author.

Word Choice

- Culturally insensitive words: buck, brave, savage, squaw, redskin, primitive, unclean
- While people get into rather contentious debates over the origins of words such as redskins and squaw the vast majority of Native people consider these terms offensive. If you happen to be looking for literature for your students to read it is best to steer clear of book which use these terms. However, depending on the age of your students this might be a good way to talk about Native American stereotypes in literature. Words such a primitive and unclean impart value judgements based on another cultures societal beliefs.
- Are Native people left in the past and made to sound as if they no longer exist?
- There are 562 diverse tribal communities across the United States. Native communities are modern thriving culturally distinct groups of people who's culture continues to adapt and change overtime and is not something which has ceased to exist.
- Are the author's descriptions of events too general, making it hard to paint an accurate picture of the events that took place?

Word Choice

- Avoid: Maine's Tribes
 - The “s” denotes possession
 - Wabanaki people are not something which can be owned by a Maine.
 - Wabanaki traditional homelands spans well beyond the geographical boundaries of Maine
- Use: Wabanaki people residing in Maine or Native Americans in Maine

Word Choice

- **Avoid: Costume** (When showing students pictures of people in traditional dress)
 - Implies that by wearing this clothing people are merely pretending to be a member of that group
 - Gives the impression that this clothing is not a part of their identity
 - Suggests that anyone who puts on the same clothing can become part of that culture
- **Use: Regalia**
 - Regalia denotes a traditional style of clothing worn at certain times. This clothing and ornamentation are often passed down from generation to generation and change as the person gets older.

Word Choice

- Avoid: Myth, legend When you are talking about Koluskap stories or events which are passed down orally from one generation to the next.
 - Implies these are events or people who can not be proven to exist, there is no factual basis, and purely made up.
- Use: Stories, traditional stories, oral traditions, or oral histories
 - Oral Traditions are a method of passing on history, spiritual beliefs, and cultural norms and behaviors which can often be embodied in one single story.

Illustrations

- Unnaturally red skin color
- Tipis
- Nonnative characters dressed like Indians
- Men, women, and animals wearing headdresses

Illustrations

- Illustrations especially in children's books can be problematic as they often reinforce stereotypes
- Native people span all the range of human coloration from dark skinned to fair skinned.
- Tipis are a dwelling made by Plains Indians from bison skins. Wabanaki people make domed and conical structures covered in birchbark called wigwams.
- Regalia, traditional ceremonial dress, is often passed down from generation to generation and has great significance to the person wearing it. It is not something a person put on to play native it is part of their identity.
- Headdresses carry great spiritual significance and are passed on mainly to men who have proven themselves through actions and deeds to be worthy of wearing a headdress. In plains Indian culture it is offensive for a woman to be wearing a war bonnet style headdress. Also, having animals wear headdresses degrades the cultural significance of the regalia to costume status.

Illustrations



Specific to Wabanaki place and material culture, shows Native people as contemporary, but engaged with accurate cultural traditions (also is an illustration from a Wabanaki-authored book)



Unrealistic, draws on multiple problematic stereotypes, does not support understanding of Native people as diverse, contemporary people.

More about Headdresses and Princesses



For those of you have seen pictures of Lucy Nicolai (left), a Penobscot woman, known by many world wide by her stage name Princess Watahwaso, or Molly Dellis Nelson (right), known as Molly Spotted Elk, you maybe understandably confused. During the late 1800s and early 1900s traveling wild west shows were very popular and many non-Plains cultures started to adopt the practice of wearing Plains style



headdresses and using tipis because that was the image of the Indian tourists expected to see. This stereotype remains so prevalent that Plains style headdresses and the use of tipis continue to be used by non-Plains cultures.

The same is true for the title “Princess.” Traditional and contemporary Wabanaki social organization does not include kings, queens, princes, and princesses. A number of Wabanaki women performers used the term “Princess” as part of their stage names, again as part of how they marketed themselves to stereotypical expectations. The term is also sometimes used in modern Pow-wow competitions.

Portrayal of Characters

- Do Native characters have to complete some daring feat but non-native characters get to lead a seemingly normal life?
- Are non-native characters ultimately the savior of Native characters?
- Do women do all the work while men loaf about?

Academic Literature & Background Resources

- Historical thinking, critical thinking
- When was the piece written?
- Are their conclusions drawn solely from Euroamerican historical documents?
- Is the author Native?
- Does the author's culture and perspective shape how they present Native content?
- Does the Native community the author is writing about support their writings?

Framing Wabanaki Content

- There have been a number of high profile events surrounding Wabanaki people in recent years and students will naturally want to discuss these events. Teachers should be mindful not to let students devolve the conversation to a debate on what sovereign rights Wabanaki people should or should not have. From the day the first European stepped on this continent they treated the Native people they met as sovereign nations. It has only been since the United States began to force all Native people to assimilate that they have created laws to strip Native people of their sovereign rights.
- Media outlets don't always report impartially on a story, so have students research what Wabanaki community members are saying and compare it to what the media is reporting.

Framing Wabanaki Content

- Discussion of local and national news events
 - Avoid:
 - Debating what kinds of sovereign rights Wabanaki or any Native people should have.
 - Consider:
 - A discussion on misunderstandings of what sovereignty is on a government and individual level

Framing Wabanaki Content

- Consider:
 - Having the students research all sides of the issue
 - Recognize that the lack of information in textbooks about Wabanaki people's contributions to the success of the United States is an ongoing form of colonization

Wabanaki Students

- Don't single-out your Wabanaki students
- Don't ask for the "Wabanaki perspective"
- Along with realizing implications certain words carry it is also important to understand how Native students in your classroom might be affected by classroom conversations. If through the course of a discussion a student self identifies as being Wabanaki, allow them the space to do so—however, it is never appropriate to single out students who may have Wabanaki ancestry. By identifying them as Wabanaki in front of the rest of the class, whether you intend to or not, you are automatically telling your class "this student is different from the rest of you." More importantly, you are telling that student "you are different from your peers." While it is not your intention to other your student, the impact if your actions can be alienating and greatly affect the learning experiences of all of your students.
- While it can be tempting to ask your student to shed light on a certain issue, it is also important to never ask a student for the "Wabanaki perspective." First of all, there is no such thing; just as in dominant society, there are an infinite amount of perspectives and opinions that come from Wabanaki people, so a "Wabanaki perspective" actually doesn't exist. Furthermore, each tribe within the Wabanaki Confederacy has it's own distinct culture and history, only adding to the infinite number of Wabanaki perspectives. Finally, in addition to unintentionally othering your student, you are also placing an incredible weight on their shoulders by asking them to speak on behalf of thousands of people. If a student chooses to share how they practice aspects of their culture, then thank the student for sharing--but they shouldn't be asked to do so.
- Would you introduce your students from other minority groups the same way? "This is Angela. She is black. Angela, can you please tell the class what Dr. King's "I have a Dream" speech accomplished for you and other black people? Would you or anyone in your family be able to come in and teach the class how to rap?" As ridiculous as this sounds, Wabanaki students in non-Indian schools have experiences like this one every single day.

Cultural appropriation vs. cultural appreciation

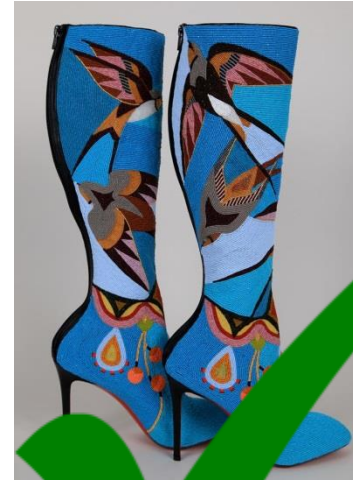


Decoded: 7 Myths about Cultural
Appropriation DEBUNKED!

Cultural appropriation vs. cultural appreciation



Victoria's Secret



Jamie Okuma,
Native designer

Appropriation or Appreciation?

- Cultural appropriation is the adoption of aspects of a culture that is not your own
- Power dynamics and systematic oppression: context matters
- Neither cultural exchange nor assimilation
- What does appreciation look like?

Appropriation or Appreciation?

- Cultural Appropriation is simply defined as borrowing or adopting aspects of a culture that is not your own. In current conversations, cultural appropriation is often discussed in reference to a power dynamic between dominant and oppressed cultures; specifically, that cultural appropriation occurs when members of the dominant culture adopt cultural aspects from a minority group that has been systematically oppressed *by said dominant culture*. This is why it is so important to consider the historical context within contemporary instances of cultural appropriation.
- It is also important to consider that people from systematically oppressed cultures cannot appropriate aspects of the dominant culture which has been forced upon them. For example, some might argue that Indigenous people that speak English are participating in cultural appropriation; however, marginalized groups do not have the luxury of deciding whether or not they want to “try on” aspects of the dominant culture, and do not have the power to decide whether or not they prefer to practice their own customs.
- “Appropriation occurs when a style leads to racist generalizations but is deemed cool or funny when the privileged take it for themselves. It occurs when the appropriator is not aware of the deep significance of the culture they are partaking in.”-Amanda Stenberg, Youtube
- It is important to note the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural exchange—a cultural exchange happens when two groups mutually share with each other *without* the imbalanced power dynamic. It is also important to note the difference between appropriation and assimilation, as assimilation involves the adoption of aspects of the dominant culture as a tool for survival by marginalized peoples.

Why does it matter?

- Trivialization of violent history
- Love for cultural aspects; disrespect for people
- Perpetuation of stereotypes and historical lies
- Marginalized groups were often punished for maintaining certain cultural practices
- Intent vs. Impact
- [Native Appropriations blog](#)

Why does it matter?

To explain the harmful effects of cultural appropriation, we will look at the example of the use of Indian imagery as mascots by sports teams. While there are many examples of these harmful effects, Indian mascots are a current issue that easily relates to each of these damaging by-products of appropriation.

In the case of the word “redskin,” this term originated with the scalping proclamations—bounties placed on the heads of Indians which paid high amounts for the bloody red scalps of Indigenous peoples. Now, Washington Redskin supporters say that the term “honors” Native people.

People love to dress up as Indians, war-whoop and pretend to scalp their friends; no one loves to talk about the genocide, intergenerational trauma, and socio-economic conditions that Native people today live through.

Indians were once prohibited from practicing traditions—songs, ceremonies, rituals, etc.—yet New Age/Esoteric Shops are able to make a profit.

Intentions are often honorable, but with negative psychological impacts for all children.

Appropriation Gut Check

Would this activity still be appropriate if I were talking about another culture or ethnic group?

**Adding more
Wabanaki content to
your classroom
discussions**

Shared History

- Fosters personal connection
- Encourages empathy
- Creates deeper understanding
- Discourages appropriation

Shared History

- An easy way to work Wabanaki content into your curriculum is to focus on the shared history of Wabanaki and non-Wabanaki students. Encouraging the students to find a personal connection to a historical event can help to foster empathy, and empathy for other people creates a deeper and more lasting impression on students—by focusing on shared history, you are more likely to create cross-cultural exchange than cultural appropriation.
- However, fostering empathy can have a negative side; for example, if you encourage your students to write historical fiction from the perspective of a Wabanaki person during the Revolutionary War, you risk crossing the line into cultural appropriation. However, students can research Wabanaki involvement in the American Revolution, who they allied with, and even complete biographies about Wabanaki soldiers—all with relatively low risk of imposing their own cultural perspectives onto their findings. It is important that students learn about Wabanaki culture while not making assumptions about what Wabanaki culture was or is.

Places to Integrate Wabanaki Content

- The Contact Period: early Wabanaki-European interactions
- 18th and 19th century Maine history
- Revolutionary War
- Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s
- Climate change
- Invasive species
- Environmental movement

Questions?

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