



Now Let Me Tell My Story: American Indian Community Struggles in Contemporary U.S. History

Curriculum Unit 15.01.04
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Introduction

This unit has been developed with the intention of showing the American Indian, a history so unique that to not share its distinctiveness of heritage makes the study of American history hollow. To only talk about the arrivals and not those who made this their home would be greater than a simple omission by the powers that be. To ignore the question of identity as these tribes are forcibly moved and removed from their ancestral lands and stripped of the resources they need for survival as individual American Indian communities would be equivalent to talking about the Civil War with only the whispered mention of slavery. The urgent need to talk about Native American history is due to the number of cultural communities that have suffered at the hands of “modern” internationally recognized governments and associated agencies. The stories, narratives and most importantly the wisdom and truths as told by the natives themselves hold the power to heal many societally displaced communities. In order for our students to fix what they perceive to be injustices of society, they have to be exposed to the historical injustices of their own nation as told by those who have suffered and their descendants.

The unit attempts to humanize the experience of American Indians with the recognition that their diverse cultural distinctions were erased by the Europeans who viewed them with insignificant culturally-distinguishable features and felt comfortable in labeling them as all the same. In doing this, hundreds of geographically, linguistically and religiously separate Indian nations became monolithic groups of people. In this “history as written by the victors” worldview, the natives were so different from the European arrivals that they were seen as souls ripe for the saving, labor free for the using, and unenlightened owners of raw materials that squandered the lands potential.

Throughout the United States history course primary subjects and related secondary subjects will identify the experiences of Native Americans. Initially were addressed as political equals, natives were replaced by the motives for a Protestant Republic—a republic that over time became more confident of its place in the world

and outnumbered the original inhabitants. In addition to the idea of Manifest Destiny, the influx of Western European immigrants and tensions between the North and South over its economic future may have turned away at a pivotal moment in Native American history that would further fuel a cultural genocide.

Students will evaluate the concept of agency (advocating for sovereignty and recognition as a foreign yet domestic nation), and how the Department of the Interior and the Department of Indian Affairs have put the hundreds of tribes in the United States through a gauntlet of legal issues. As tribal citizens of the United States become more aware of their rights, the sovereignty of Indian nations became supported but the political landscape in which the modern U.S. government has to act responsibly to these nations has been uneven. Through plays like Mary Kathryn Nagle's "Sliver of a Full Moon" students will see the reenactment of modern Indian activists. Finally in using Sherman Alexie's *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and other works of fiction, we will evaluate the issues of modern American Indians and their lack of opportunities and what happens as a result of generational poverty on their reservations.

Background

The Cooperative Arts and Humanities Magnet High School is a public school that draws students from New Haven and the Greater New Haven region to study their chosen art. Through their study of art, which could be theatre, dance, music (strings, band and choir), creative writing or visual arts, students have a unique lens in which to apply lesson learned to their core classes. The building is located in a busy, up-and-coming downtown area which is less than a block away from one of the most famous stages in New Haven: the Shubert Theatre. This proximity allows for a unique relationship in which students can gain internship experiences; perform in exhibitions, and even cross the stage for graduation.

With the population of 650 students ranging in different socioeconomic statuses, academic abilities, sexual orientation and identifications, races and ethnicities, teachers have to be very aware of the most obvious demographic imbalance--our heavily female population. About 60% of the school is female (which is a national trend for some colleges). When looking at my own classes, there are no more than 5 males in each class "honors" level class, and it becomes more even in my one "college" level class. This imbalance may be due to the arts that are offered, such as choir and dance and the lack of sports (like football or baseball).

With all of these factors considered, it made more sense to talk about Native Americans in my first unit next year because they lost the most after the arrival of Europeans. The theme of struggle for existence is one that resonates with the population of students we have where some are given an opportunity that no one in their family's history can come close to. It also picks up where they would have ended with World History—European Exploration. With our American History textbooks use only little boxes on the sides about Native Americans, the need was created for curriculum to fill in the mysteries. There seemed to be times that Indians would disappear and then reappear a few chapters later. This unit would address that issue by heavily dealing with this issue upfront.

Rationale

In studying the Native people of North America, one has to understand the process in which the power has shifted from Native Americans to the United States government. In this process native people have challenged, obeyed, or in some cases been indifferent to these decisions due to a sense of helplessness. The American Revolution exposes this cycle well in Howard Zinn's *A Young People's History of the United States*. After examining the episode in which the British gave the Indians blankets from a hospital infected with small pox, Zinn demonstrates the resolute nature of New England area tribes such as the Iroquois : "...the British could not destroy the will of the Indians, so in 1763 they made peace." (Zinn 77) After the loss of their French allies and establishing a peace treaty with the British, the American colonists were confused and hurt that their colonial overseer would limit their ability to grow for the sake of peace with the native people. It is this distress that might explain the slow cultural genocide that would occur for generations to come.

But despite such continued atrocities, there are also moments that, as Charles Wilkinson's *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations* demonstrates, American founding fathers understood the needs of the Native Americans and could command the political machinery to oblige to their needs as well. Understanding the changing world of the New England area as "five centuries of European settlement eliminated many Eastern tribes", Cornplanter (a legendary Seneca Chief) decided to meet with President George Washington in Philadelphia. (Wilkinson 114) Cornplanter received a letter promising he would continue to own the land of his people and four years later would formal do so in the Seneca-United States treaty which states that the United States would "never claim[Seneca lands] nor disturb the Seneca Nation, nor any of the Six Nations...in the free use and enjoyment thereof." (Wilkinson 114). Unfortunately, despite the clear language of the treaty, thousands of Seneca graves, including Cornplanter's, were exhumed and moved because the building of the Kinzua Dam. One of the reasons the dam gained support was because the alternatives would harm a key constituent group of which the Senecas or any of the Six Nations are part of. "Flooding the Conewango Valley would provide more water for Pittsburgh but it would flood out white folks! They vote." (Wilkinson 115)

In the 20th & 21st century, we find that there are more and more tribes that are claiming state and national recognition because they are actively seeking to be recognized and treated equally in a legal sense. Students need to feel the predicament that has been created through the legal maze of treaties and agreements with Native American Tribes. This unit discusses the idea that Native Americans are not just one people but an amalgamation of dozen tribes spanning the distance of the North American continent. From this conclusion, students can discuss how these divisions led to events such as the French and Indian War (which involved Native Americans who fought on both sides but not for their benefit). Although these wars may not have been started by them, they quickly realize that their livelihood as farmers, hunters and/or traders was in jeopardy if they faltered in their support of either France or England (and to a lesser extent Spain).

The political agencies that have been the arm used to provide assistance to Native American tribes in the United States are the Department of Interior and Department of Indian Affairs. Depending on the motivations of individual department heads and the political climate of the day, these organizations have determined the type and amount of federal assistance that they have provided to different Native American tribes that are federally recognized. There are tribes that can exist without federal recognition but federal recognition of a tribe is coveted as it can circumvent application of state laws on gaming right and privileges.

The United States government's role in the support of American Indian affairs has been a spectrum of actions

that collectively make up the landscape of those who live on reservations today. Through analysis of policies that were developed by the Department of the Interior and the Department of Indian Affairs that removed them from their land, forced them to lose parts of their tribal lands, reallocation of federal funds, and other bureaucratic measures, the evidence would suggest that modern tribal leaders have been forced to be more active in pressing our federal government with the responsibility of recognizing tribal sovereignty (treating them as a foreign nation) while also recognizing that because they are part of the nation they will have to make some sacrifices to truly return each Indian nation as close as it can to its original status of operation. Students will discover the complications in attempting to do this as there are very few full-blooded tribal members who can claim to be “citizens” of each tribe. Students will understand that time is also a key element that makes tribal rights an issue of the day. Through use of excerpts from *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations* by Charles Wilkinson, we can begin to frame our conversations and research around facts to be able to describe how Indian nations and activist groups began to gain political clout in the 21st Century.

To conclude the unit, students will read excerpts of Sherman Alexie’s *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and Mary Kathryn Nagle’s play “Sliver of a Full Moon”. In order to have students gain historical empathy toward the plight of Native Americans in their sovereignty movement, they will use these texts for their ad-campaign on how to best help Native American communities that struggle to exist. Through designing the ad campaign posters and mock proposals to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Department of Interior, students will truly understand the importance of civic engagement in attempt to help a notoriously marginalized group of people.

Specific Objectives

- 1) Students will be able to experience the life of Native Americans before and after European arrival through primary and secondary sources
- 2) Students will be able to identify and describe the struggles the Indian nations had in attempting to get the United States recognize and keep up treaties in the late 18th & 19th Century
- 3) Students will be able to research how Indian nations and activist groups began to gain political clout in the 21st Century in preparation for a mock trial against the BIA and DOI held by the United Nations
- 4) Students will be able to design an argument on why it is important to learn about Native American history through stories, poetry, and movies by Native Americans
- 5) Students will be able to create fictional proposal and ad-campaign on what should be done to help the Native Americans gain control of their tribal communities and public perception of cultural identities to get them as close to their pre-European arrival status

Lesson Plans

Overview of Phase One: Who are the players and why do they matter?

In the beginning of the unit there will be a series of role plays in which students will have many opportunities to understand the characters involved in the formation of modern American Indian policy both old such as Seneca Chief Cornplanter, and new such as John Collier. He used the Brookings Institute's resources to investigate and create the 1st comprehensive report on the needs of American Indians and made recommendations for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to follow up on. Then, students will begin learning the story of Native American Indians from pre-European contact to the protest at the Wounded Knee in the 1970's. By doing this students will have an understanding of the impact of their character in the American Indian History. Students will create a timeline of events and identify which characters interact during each event. In doing this activity students will understand that there were eras of support for American Indians and as the political willpower shifted with American History, so did support for their initiatives. This is important for students to gain empathy for understanding the see-saw of American political will but also the challenge that American Indians faced in trying to keep land that was promised to them despite the feelings of "Americans". Students will also begin to realize that American Indian history is not a footnote in American history and that they don't disappear after Chief Joseph's last stand. Students will be able to use this information to create arguments in support of Native American history from their perspective while also using it to create their ad-campaign and proposals that help students in 6th-8th grade understand the complicated and dramatic nature of American Indian History. This presentation would be debuted ideally in November in honor of Native American History month.

Overview of Phase Two: What and how do documents affect American Indian lives?

The next phase of the unit students will evaluate treaties, laws, and organizations that the different tribes had to operate under to continue to have some existence of their communities. By doing this students will understand the responsibilities that a tribal leader has never really changed but the tools at their disposal to protect their people and their land has changed. In this curriculum unit, students will be exposed to the painful cycle that caused many tribes to sell land or be forced off of it into relocation. Students will also evaluate the responsibilities of the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) as they apply to Native Americans. They will wrestle with the question of whether or not the agencies should be trusted and what issues continue to persist after their involvement. Students will conclude that as time goes on the BIA does not have the best interests of American Indians at heart at all times. Students may also realize that the organizations politics, by it's nature of being a government agency, cannot and will not succeed in the same way a not-for-profit or grassroots organization can serve the American Indians. Upon closer inspection they will realize the secondary motives and uses of the BIA in American History particularly when it comes to the policies of termination and relocation. The culmination of this phase will be a mock trial in which students will put both government agencies (the BIA and Department of Interior) on trial in the famous United Nation's city, Hague, Netherlands. Students will attempt to see if either agency has failed to comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as created by the United Nations. If violations are found, students will create an appropriate remedy on how the organizations should change to correct their violations. This will give students a chance to see how even the United States government is not above the laws of humanity.

Overview of Phase Three: What role does Native Art, fiction, and cinema play in telling their stories?

Native American tribes have used oral tradition as a way to pass down important cultural information. As a result of the disruption of cultural traditions, aspects such as language and storytelling have been critically damaged. It has only been within the last century that true efforts have been made to tell the stories of American Indians as they lived it, as they perceived it, and as they felt it. Students will have the opportunity to examine fictional writings and excerpts from Sherman Alexie, artwork (including lithographs and paintings), and Mary Kathryn Nagle's "Sliver of a Full Moon" and use them to develop their mock ad-campaign which would include a proposal to address the issues of a reservation of their choice (a list of reservations and issues will be listed for them to choose from).

Lesson 1

Objective: Students will be able to experience the life of Native Americans before and after European arrival through primary and secondary sources

Estimated time to complete lesson: 1-2 class periods

Main Idea: Religious beliefs influence culture in very deep and real ways. For the Native Americans who believed in animism, they were open to the ideas the Europeans had. The Europeans on the other hand were not as open and believed they had a mission to spread Christianity.

Do Now: Where does your morality come from? How do you know when you're doing something wrong? Why?

Connection: Many times religion or philosophy helps us to make decisions for us by giving us a set of guiding principles.

Activity: Teacher will initiate the lesson by illustration the difference between Animism and Christianity's basic tenets. The teacher will then ask which religious belief seems to affect the land more and which religious belief seems to affect the people more. Pointing to this difference will help in future lessons when students learn about land claim treaties. Students will then look at a series of maps that show geographic differences between Native American tribes. The teacher will then point out the resources available in each region and how the land that certain American Indian tribes occupy determine the lifestyle they will have. They will also be looking at early European land claim maps for comparison. While looking at these maps the teacher will point out resources that were of interest to European traders and investors and how these resources shaped the lifestyle of the newcomers.

Students will then be broken into two groups: one group focusing on the American Indian maps and the second group focusing European explorer and colonization maps. Students will answer questions about their maps and then jigsaw to talk to members of the other groups. One of the major questions they should discuss during the jigsaw activity is how does the pattern of land division between the two cultural groups mimic their religious values? The question is designed for students to describe how the American Indian maps are broken up based on their geographic regions, which are tied to certain animals they hunt, they style of home they live in, and that multiple tribes live within each geographic regions. The lands divided by the Europeans were

based more on political and nationalistic claims of resources. Access to water routes, establishments of towns and cities that were near these water routes, and the clearing away of resources to build these towns and cities with little regard for natural habitat.

Closure: After discussing the differences between Animism and Christianity, how does the religious views affect what happened on the maps?

Differentiation: Students that are advanced will look at both sets of maps and have a group of their own to evaluate the maps in pairs. Students that have trouble analyzing the maps will be paired with students in the room to help them with the activity.

Lesson 2

Objective: Students will be able to identify and describe the struggles the Indian nations had in attempting to get the United States recognize and keep up treaties in the late 18th & 19th Century

Main Idea: Native Americans have to constantly be aware of their legal rights but political and social situations take away from their ability to be treated equally.

Do Now: Describe a situation in which you have a responsibility that you have to do but you can think of reasons why you don't have to but know that you really should. (Eg. Flossing or respecting sibling's boundaries)

Connection: Keeping ups with treaties with Native Americans becomes more complicated as the nation grows and changes.

Activity: The students will be broken up into three groups: Group 1 will study Cornplanter of the Seneca tribe, Group 2 Cherokee Indians that were removed during the Trail of Tears, and Group 3 will be the Nez Perce Indians of the Southwest.

Each group will be responsible for identifying recall information such as where the tribe is located and what European group initially made contact with them. Then they will identify the treaty, the struggle faced to honor the treaty, and describe what events and/or outcomes of the struggle.

Closure: What conclusions can we make about the U.S. government in terms of honoring treaties with foreign nations within its borders?

Homework: Students will complete an activity where students are evaluating a Native American tribe of the Pacific Northwest

Lesson 3

Objective: *Students will be able to research how Indian nations and activist groups began to gain political clout in the 21st Century in preparation for a mock trial against the BIA and DOI held by the United Nations*

Estimated time to complete lesson: five class periods

Main Idea: Research how Indian nations, tribal leaders, and activist groups began to gain political clout in the 21st century; Use the findings in a mock trial (U.S. B.I.A. & D.O.I. vs. the United Nations)

Do Now: Why is it important for people who have been wronged to be able to seek justice?

Connection: In the mock trial students will use the evidence they have found to determine if the B.I.A & D.O.I. are negligent in their care for sovereign American Indian tribes despite their activist activities.

Activity: (Day 1) Students will break up into groups: Prosecution team will include A.I.M., tribal leaders, and other activists and the Defense team will be the B.I.A. & D.O.I. A third team of students will act as the U.N. Panel that will make the final decision. They will review documents that are given to all the groups to make sure they have the facts. The U.N. Panel team needs to be 3 or 5 people to make sure that a decision is reached. On this day students will review the documents provided to show that the U.S. government is guilty or not guilty of negligence to care for a sovereign nation within their borders.

(Day 2-3) Students will continue collecting facts and review procedures for mock trial; graphic organizer provided for them to complete.

(Day 4) Students will conduct a mock trial and complete an assessment based on the activity.

Homework: Based on the U.N. Panel teams decision were the American Indian nations given justice?

Lesson 4

Objective: Students will be able to design an argument on why it is important to learn about Native American history through stories, poetry, and movies by Native Americans

Estimated time to complete lesson :5 class periods

Main Idea: History is directly tied to culture and by using stories, poetry and movies by Native Americans it helps share the multitude of experiences that native people have had.

Do Now: Name a fictional or non-fictional hero that you have learned about in history. What culture or region of the world does the story come from? How does this story of this fictional or non-fictional character help you to better understand the culture of the people from which the story originates? (eg. Hercules/Greek...Thor/Norse-German...Mahatma Gandhi/India)

Connection: Fictional or non-fictional heroes allow learners to gain understanding of language, cultural values, and have a place of comparison of their own cultural values.

Activity: Students will recall a previous lesson in which we analyzed songs from Disney's *Pocahontas*. They will then be asked if they believed that the songs were written by Native Americans. Students will write the reasons they believe or don't believe it was written by Native American on a t-chart. After analyzing these features, the teacher would ask if the songs had more culturally appropriate language would the songs have been better. The teacher should explain that the power of the story and its purpose is in the hands of the storyteller: the decision to keep in details versus excluding others is in their hands. Disney has taken the story of Pocahontas and used it to make money, so as a result they have told the story in such a way that is authentic enough to be perceived as culturally aware but not so historically detailed to lose their younger audience members who are the targeted audience.

Students will then work with a partner to read excerpts of Sherman Alexis's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, poems from Siobhan Senier's *Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing from New England* and the class will view video clips from the movie *Skins* (2002) and *Smoke Signals* (1998). I will model for them the process of filling in their Literary Document Analysis form. Each time students are exposed to text or source they will be responsible for identifying who the hero(es) are, what they believe the storyteller's intended purpose of the writing or movie was and what details enhanced the story by being told by the American Indians themselves.

At the end of each text student will be responsible for writing their reactions to the sources in a reflection that can later be used to help write their essay.

After looking at all of their sources they will then take their compiled evidence to formulate a response on why it is important to teach Native American history with authentic writings and images by the natives themselves. Students will be provided a graphic organizer and time to complete their first draft of their essay in future classes.

Differentiation: Students can choose 1-2 texts and one video clip to use as evidence for their essay. In the case of students who prefer analyzing the video clips, you can allow them to use the in-class example as their literary text. For students who might be stronger in literary analysis, the teacher or student can identify a theme in two or three poems to analyze and focus on texts versus the video clips for analysis.

Lesson 5

Students will be able to create an ad-campaign on what should be done to help the Native Americans gain control of their tribal communities and public perception of cultural identities to get them as close to their pre-European arrival status

Estimated time to complete lesson: 3-4 class periods

Main Idea: Groups like the Ad Council, create public service announcements as a platform for addressing a wide range of issues around family, community, education, health, safety and issues of discrimination. By taking the information they have learned over the course of the unit they will develop an advertisement

campaign as a class that identifies falsehoods, misconceptions, and stereotypes about American Indians and replaces them with truth.

Do Now: What are some things that you see on television, the internet, or hear on social media that you know is not completely true, reinforce a stereotype or provide a misconception about a group of people? How would a person or group go about addressing these issues?

Connection: By being consumers of media we have a choice in what we choose to consume but if all of the choices are skewed in the ways they represent our world then we also carry that bias knowingly or unknowingly.

Activity: Students will watch a series of Ad Council videos and then look at some posters around different social issues including Vince and Larry (the crash test dummies) and Smokey the Bear. The teacher will ask what makes them successful in presenting their message and record their responses on the board. Then students will look at some posters of unsuccessful ad campaigns. The teacher will ask what makes them unsuccessful in presenting their message and record their responses on the board. The teacher will then ask students to brainstorm what American Indians would want the public to know about them and how the public can support them in continue to keep their land. Students will then begin designing a poster with a teacher approved message. Understanding the difference between successful and unsuccessful ad campaigns, students will design a series of posters that can be displayed publicly as part of a showcase. Once the posters are complete, students can begin designing proposals to send to the B.I.A. or D.O.I. to address issues of specific tribes relating to federal recognition of sovereignty, land use, or other perceived injustices. Using evidence from primary and secondary sources, reflections of how they have felt during the course of the unit and what they believe is going to give American Indian tribes justice, they will design arguments that support their claim and address counterclaims of law makers and unsupportive citizens.

Differentiation: Students who don't feel comfortable drawing can choose to print and cut out images that they would like to use in their poster. The images chosen must have a theme that corresponds to the issue. Students can also choose to use the computer to design their poster. Advanced students can create more than one poster to create a theme of images or slogans. They can also develop a character like Smokey the Bear who would have a slogan that challenges the current public perception of Native Americans.

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