



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1991 Volume IV: Recent American Poetry: Expanding the Canon

Finding New Voices: Native American Poets

Guide for Curriculum Unit 91.04.01
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"Finding New Voices: Native American Poets" is a curriculum unit designed to teach eighth-grade students about Native American culture. The unit provides an opportunity to explore parallels with the American Indian who, in a struggle of epic proportions, has managed to preserve a unique personal and cultural integrity. The goal of the unit is to learn from the Native Americans how the individual establishes personal and collective identity within the multi-ethnic spectrum of modern American society. In the process, students will learn to research the history, geography, and arts as well as the literature of the Indian culture.

The renaissance of American Indian literature that began in the late 1960s offers a gateway to understanding. The present generation of Native American poets address many of the identity issues uppermost to the universal teenager who is beginning to ask the questions "Who am I? How do I find out? How do others?" The poets selected for this unit answer these questions by exploring issues of family, tribe, place, history and tradition. The five major themes for the structure of this unit are: 1) the voice of quest, as the poets begin their personal journeys of individuation; 2) the voice of exile, as they express a sense of alienation and loneliness; 3) the voice of the tribe, as they turn to their roots; 4) the voice of the heart, as they recognize their place in the tribe and; 5) the voice of the world, as they acknowledge their role in the larger community.

The strategies for this unit are shared inquiry and cooperative learning. This approach parallels the Indian Medicine Wheel in which all members of the tribe contribute to the creative process. This unit has been designed for eighth-grade students at Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School, but it can be adapted for students from grades 6 - 12.

(Recommended for English and Reading, grades 6-12)

Key Words

Native American History Literature Poetry

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