



HEALTH

Cultural Appropriation

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- Identity
- Lifeways

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson students will be able to:

- Provide a definition of “culture”
- Discuss various definitions of “cultural appropriation”
- Describe the debate regarding the validity of the concept of “cultural appropriation”
- Describe specific instances in popular culture that have been labeled as “cultural appropriation”

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is culture?
- What is cultural appropriation and how does it affect Native American communities?
- What influence do stereotypes have on cultural bias and cultural appropriation?

Continued on next page

Overview

This lesson asks students to examine the concept of cultural appropriation and the impact that contemporary acts of cultural appropriation may have on Native Americans in Oregon and across the country. Students will participate in two activities. First, they will engage in a whole-class discussion about cultural appropriation, led by the teacher using the accompanying PowerPoint presentation. The presentation shows several contemporary examples of how Native culture has been generalized and appropriated by media and advertising. Second, students will engage in structured academic controversy—an instructional strategy that requires them to argue one side of an issue, then change sides and argue the opposing view.

The background section of this lesson offers a brief overview of how Native American cultures have been appropriated by the media, advertising, entertainers, artists, writers, and others. The following definition of cultural appropriation may be useful for both teachers and students:

Cultural appropriation is the adoption of the elements of another culture (often a minority group) by members of the dominant culture. It is an unequal exchange in that the appropriators often use these stolen elements for monetary gain or prestige, with-



LOGISTICS

- Where does the activity take place?
Classroom
- How are the students organized?
 - Whole class Teams: 2 – 4
 - Pairs Individually

TIME REQUIRED

One and a half hours

out regard for the value, respect, or importance paid to these images and traditions in the original culture.

Source: Yang, R. (n.d.). *A project to help teach your students about appropriation.* The Art of Education University. Retrieved from <https://theartofeducation.edu/2018/04/20/a-project-to-help-teach-your-students-about-appropriation/>

Background for teachers

The cultural appropriation of Native American imagery, songs, stories, clothing, hairstyles, arts, crafts, and spiritual practices remains widespread in mainstream American culture, despite several decades of controversy and discussion. Those who continue to participate in it often attempt to justify it as a form of homage—a way to “honor” Native culture—or they attempt to brush off criticism by arguing that “imitation is the highest form of flattery.”

For many Native people, these arguments ring hollow. The appropriation of Native culture by the dominant Euro-American culture rarely preserves

STANDARDS

Oregon social studies standards

8.25 – Evaluate the influence of the intersections of identity, including but not limited to gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, and class on the experiences of peoples, groups, and events.

8.28 – Identify issues related to historical events to recognize the power, authority, and governance as it relates to systemic oppression and its impact on ethnic and religious groups, as well as other historically persecuted individuals in the United States in the modern era (bias, injustice, discrimination, and stereotypes).

8.32 – Critique and analyze information for point of view, historical context, distortion, bias propaganda and relevance including sources with conflicting information in order to question the dominant narratives in history.

Oregon health education standards

HE.8.8.3 – Advocate for the promotion of empathy for individual differences.

HE.8.8.6 – Work cooperatively to advocate for respect of diversity of individuals, families, and schools that fosters safety in learning and achievement.

HE.8.8.7 – Advocate for school policies and programs that promote dignity and respect for all.



the meaning and value of the original source nor does it acknowledge the diversity of the 570-plus Indian Nations in North America. It is not flattery. It is often simply a matter of exoticizing elements of another culture for personal gain. Native clothing and hairstyles, for example, are all too often co-opted with no regard for meaning.

For many Native people, cultural appropriation is simply another form of colonization. It exists alongside land theft, genocide, cultural suppression, and other federal policies whose sole purpose was to eradicate Native American people and cultures.

In her book, *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law*, Susan Scafidi notes that cultural appropriation is “most likely to be harmful when the source community is a minority group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways or when the object of appropriation is particularly sensitive, [such as] sacred objects.”

One example that is very relatable to students is that of Halloween—a time of fun, excitement, and, too often, cultural appropriation. While most Halloween costumes are harmless, some are not. The conversation around Halloween costumes and cultural appropriation has been happening for at least the last three decades. For example, in 2011, Ohio University conducted a poster campaign called We’re a Culture, Not a Costume https://www.ohio.edu/orgs/stars/Poster_Campaign.html (see PowerPoint slide) that quickly took off in social media and has been updated by the university a few

MATERIALS

What materials are needed for students to engage in this activity?

- Laptop to show videos at activity station
- Large butcher paper
- Chemawa Boarding School Worksheet
- PowerPoint with visual examples of cultural appropriation
- Structured Academic Controversy instructions
- Handouts for the structured academic controversy activity

VOCABULARY

Culture – The social behavior and norms found in human societies.

Cultural appropriation – The adoption of the elements of another culture (often a minority group) by members of the dominant culture.

Exploitation – Using another person or group (or their culture) for profit or advantage.

Assimilation – The process of a person or group’s culture, language, and/or customs resembling those of another person or group.

times since. This campaign highlights the importance of understanding how wearing a costume for just one night can have a negative impact. In 2012, the poster read, “You wear a costume for one night. I wear the stigma for life.”

In your classroom, you may want to begin your exploration of this topic by discussing common Halloween costumes and whether they represent acts of cultural appropriation, however unintentional. The next step is to not shy away from the challenging conversations that may result. Discussions of cultural appropriation are often politically charged, as they can challenge long-standing traditions and unexamined cultural biases. Encourage students to move the conversation forward by striving to find active solutions.

References

- National Conference for Community and Justice. (n.d.). *What is cultural appropriation?* (Blog post). Retrieved from <https://www.nccj.org/blog/what-cultural-appropriation>
- Scafidi, S. (2005). *Who owns culture? Appropriation and authenticity in American law*. Rutgers University Press.
- Yang, R. (n.d.). *A project to help teach your students about appropriation*. The Art of Education University. Retrieved from <https://theartofeducation.edu/2018/04/20/a-project-to-help-teach-your-students-about-appropriation/>

Resources

- Cultural appropriation in Oregon: <https://www.terraincognitamedia.com/features/appropriation-and-colonialism-at-the-oregon-country-fair2018>
- Oregon Humanities Curriculum: Cultural Identity and Belonging: <https://www.oregonhumanities.org/curriculum-guides/your-cultural-attire-culture-identity-and-appreciationappropriation/>
- Short video clip about Native American stereotypes: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?313037-1/native-americans-common-stereotypes>

Key ideas

- Teachers should review the resources suggested above and familiarize themselves with the terms defined on page 3.

Considerations for teachers

Assessment

Through textual analysis of divergent viewpoints on cultural appropriation, students will be able to evaluate both sides of the debate and then employ research-based evidence in the statement of their own beliefs about the issue.

Students will summarize the structured academic controversy activity by writing to the following prompt: *Having taken both sides of this debate, how do you now feel about cultural appropriation? Is there a “yes” or “no” answer to its existence? Does it concern you? Is it always the same, or do you feel differently about some instances of cultural appropriation?* Teachers should make sure students can define cultural appropriation in the context of Native American stereotypes.

Practices

Structured academic controversy – This is a teaching approach that requires students to consider—and argue for—both sides of an argument, with the goal of achieving a balanced and factually based opinion. (A direction sheet is provided in the materials for this lesson.) It typically follows this pattern:

1. Break students into small, even-numbered groups (ideally groups of four). Divide each group into side A and side B.
2. Give the groups a specific question to argue.
3. Let them know that over the course of the activity, sides A and B will switch positions, arguing both in the affirmative and the negative.

Learning targets

- I can define cultural appropriation in the context of Native American stereotypes.
- I can employ textual analysis of divergent viewpoints on cultural appropriation.
- I can evaluate both sides of the debate and then employ research-based evidence in a statement of my own beliefs about the issue.

Options/extensions

Have students look up the term “Hollywood Indian.” Ask students to write a short essay that uses two examples of the “Hollywood Indian” to address the idea of cultural appropriation in American cinema and television. How have Native Americans been portrayed? What does the portrayal of Native Americans suggest about the mostly Euro-American producers and directors who have created these films and television shows?

Appendix

Materials included in the electronic folder that support this lesson are:

- PowerPoint with visual examples of cultural appropriation
- Structured Academic Controversy instructions
- Handouts for the structured academic controversy activity
- Chemawa Boarding School Worksheet

Activity 1

Defining Cultural Appropriation

Say:

Today, we're going to examine the concept of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation is the adoption or use of elements of one culture by members of another culture. It may be perceived as controversial or even harmful, especially when the cultural property of a minority group is used by members of the dominant culture without consent. And that's what we're going to talk about today.

Throughout American history, Native Americans have been stereotyped and have faced bias and discrimination. But they have also faced another challenge: They have been subjected to cultural appropriation. The dress, hairstyles, crafts, music, dances, oral traditions, and spiritual practices of many diverse Native American tribes have been borrowed or outright stolen by non-Native artists, musicians, writers, and others. Corporations have used tribal names and imagery to sell everything from cars to butter.

With cultural appropriation, the original meaning of these cultural elements, objects, or images is often lost or distorted. Members of the originating culture—in this case, Native Americans—see such displays as disrespectful or as a desecration. For example, cultural elements such as clothing and hairstyles that have deep meaning for Native American tribes are often turned into so-called "exotic" fashion with no respect or regard for tribal culture. We're going to examine a few examples of this today.

Show PowerPoint slide 2. Then show the C-Span video clip on slide 3, followed by the video clips on slide 4.

Using PowerPoint slides 5 and 6, conduct a whole-class discussion by pointing out some of the more egregious examples of cultural appropriation that students may encounter. Within the conversation, encourage students to offer



Activity 1 *(Continued)*

other examples of cultural appropriation, including but not limited to fashion, speech accents, vocal inflections, music, and art. Ask students to speak about their own experiences and their own cultural identities—not those of others. If appropriate, also offer examples from your own experience and cultural identity.

Say:

Looking at the image on the left [of slide 5], I want you to think about this question: Why might corporations and businesses appropriate other cultures?

Give students a minute to think and then take volunteer responses.

Say:

In many schools and classrooms, cultural art forms are only addressed during holiday celebrations. This devalues the way artistic traditions are infused throughout a culture. Halloween is another example of a time when cultural appropriation often takes place in an insensitive and offensive matter.

For example, let's talk about the other image on this slide [slide 5]. Do you think these people are showing respect for Native American culture? Do you think they even considered the possibility that their costumes might be inappropriate and offensive? Why might that be?

Take volunteer responses.

Say:

In America, we have the concept of "the melting pot," which seems to imply that despite the diversity of cultures we have in America, we are all the same—or should be—and that everything in the "pot" belongs to everyone else. Do you think that's true? Why or why not?

Take volunteer responses.

Activity 1 *(Continued)*

Ask students to write down their reflections on the following questions:

What does it mean to truly appreciate a culture that you are not a part of?

Is that possible?

Wrap up this activity by reminding students that even if someone has developed a deep understanding and appreciation for a culture, it does not give them the right to claim it as their own.

As a lead-up to activity 2, ask students to write down their reflections on a final question:

- *Are there right and wrong ways to use imagery from other cultures?*

Activity 2

Structured Academic Controversy

Say:

Now, we're going to look at cultural appropriation using a technique called structured academic controversy.

Explain the basic outline of structured academic controversy. (See handout in the materials for this lesson.)

Give students the overarching question for this activity: *Does cultural appropriation negatively affect Native American communities and should it be regulated by law?*

Show students Slide 7: "Pharrell Williams, Elle UK Cover." Inform students that the cover was deeply offensive to some Native people and that Williams later issued a heartfelt apology about it. Ask Side A to consider the following questions as they form their argument:

- What about this photo do you think was so offensive to many people? Why? How do you feel about it?
- Is there any tradition in your life that you feel might be out of place on the cover of a fashion magazine?

Ask Side B to consider the following excerpt from a New York Times op-ed in defense of cultural appropriation (handout provided).

Kenan Malik, New York Times, June 14, 2017:

Campaigns against cultural appropriation reveal the changing meaning of what it is to challenge racism. Once, it was a demand for equal treatment for all. Now it calls for cultures to be walled off and boundaries to be policed. But who does the policing? Every society has its gatekeepers [whose role is to] protect certain institutions, maintain the privileges of particular groups and cordon off some beliefs from challenge. Such gatekeepers protect not the marginalized but the powerful. Racism itself is a form of gatekeeping, a means of denying racialized groups equal rights, access and opportunities. In minority communities, the gatekeepers are

Activity 2 (Continued)

usually self-appointed guardians whose power rests on their ability to define what is acceptable and what is beyond the bounds. They appropriate for themselves the authority to license certain forms of cultural engagement, and in doing so, entrench their power.

Ask Side B to consider the following question as they form their argument:

- How does this argument sit with you?

After students have argued their first side of the issue, have them switch sides and argue the opposing view.

Wrap up the lesson with a whole-class discussion about the experience of participating in the activity and how their views on Native American cultural appropriation may have changed.