



# NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

*Whether lessons addressing Native American heritage are focused in November or throughout the year, it is important that educators provide related instruction that is factual, accurate, respectful, and responsible. I have included 2 resources here to guide instruction to meet these goals. MT*

First, the **National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)** drafted *Toward Responsibility: Social Studies Education that Respects and Affirms Indigenous Peoples and Nations* in 2018. Included in this important document are 7 principles to guide social studies education.

## **Toward Responsibility: Social Studies Education that Respects and Affirms Indigenous Peoples and Nations – NCSS, 2018**

1. **Commit to responsible representations.** Educators must challenge racist stereotypes, misrepresentations and caricatures of Indigenous life, emphasizing the diversity of Indigenous peoples and nations, offering diverse representations of Indigenous life, using specific names of Indigenous Peoples and Nations, and focusing on contemporary people and issues.
2. **Teach current events and movements.** There are many Indigenous Nations fighting to protect their lands and resources; use this as an opportunity to provide students with lessons based on the environment/science, government, history, economics, cultural studies and civics.
3. **Teach tribal governance and sovereignty as civics education.** Indigenous Peoples have dual citizenship as citizens and descendants of tribal nations. Teach about dual citizenship, governance, self-determination and sovereignty; teach about treaties and legislation that has resulted in positive or negative results.
4. **Challenge Eurocentrism.** Curricula often reinforce Eurocentric perspectives as neutral or universal truths. Reconsider how units of study, holidays, and literature reinforce false perspectives. Incorporate critical thinking and multiple perspectives when discussing topics related to *discovery, exploration* or *expansion*.

5. **Affirm Indigenous Knowledges.** Indigenous Knowledges are diverse, complex, localized systems and are often misrepresented and/or narrowly discussed in mainstream curricula. Utilize the perspectives of local tribal leaders, elders and communities to counter Eurocentric perspectives and foster *new perceptions* and *new possibilities*.
6. **Learn from long standing Indigenous advocacy for curriculum reform.** There are a number of states including Washington, Montana, Hawaii, and Oregon that have passed social studies legislation that supports greater responsibility for Native American curricula. Educators should also seek partnerships with local Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous educators.
7. **Foster relationships and engage in meaningful consultation.** Educators should reach out to local tribe leaders; districts and states can hire liaisons to improve social studies curriculum.

A second helpful resource is *Do's and Don'ts When Teaching about Native Americans* from *Oyate*, a Native American/American Indian advocacy and education organization. Created over 2 decades ago, this list has been cited on numerous blogs focusing on teaching about Native Americans in schools. The list is one of the most comprehensive I have reviewed in my research.

#### **Do's and Don'ts When Teaching about Native Americans – Oyate, 1998**

- *Do present Native peoples as appropriate role models with whom a Native Child can identify.*
- *Don't single out Native children, ask them to describe their families' traditions, or their people's cultures.*
- *Don't assume that you have no Native children in your class. Don't do or say anything that would embarrass a Native child.*
  
- *Do look for books and materials written and illustrated by Native people.*
- *Don't use ABC books that have "I is for Indian" or "E is for Eskimo". Don't use counting books that count "Indians." Don't use story books that show non-Native children "playing Indian." Don't use picture books by non-Native authors that show animals dressed as "Indians.". Don't use story books with characters like "Indian Two Feet" or "Little Chief."*
  
- *Do avoid arts and crafts and activities that trivialize Native dress, dance, and ceremony.*
- *Don't use books that show Native people as s\*v\*ges, primitive craftspeople, or simple tribal people, now extinct.*
- *Don't have children dress up as "Indians with paper bag "costumes" or paper-feather "headdresses."*
- *Don't sing "Ten Little Indians."*
- *Don't let children do "war whoops."*
- *Don't let children play with artifacts borrowed from a library or museum.*
- *Don't have them make "Indian crafts" unless you know authentic methods and have authentic materials.*
  
- *Do make sure you know the history of Native peoples, past and present, before you attempt to teach it.*
- *Do present Native peoples as separate from each other, with unique cultures, languages, spiritual beliefs, and dress.*
- *Don't teach "Indians" only at Thanksgiving.*
- *Do teach Native history as a regular part of American history.*
  
- *Do use materials that put history in perspective.*

- *Don't use materials which manipulate words like "victory," "conquest," or "massacre" to distort history.*
  - *Don't use materials which present as heroes only those Native people who aided Europeans.*
  - *Do use materials which present Native heroes who fought to defend their own people.*
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- *Do discuss the relationship between Native peoples and the colonists and what went wrong with it.*
  - *Don't speak as though "the Indians" were here only for the benefit of the colonists.*
  - *Don't make charts about "gifts the Indians gave us."*
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- *Don't use materials that stress the superiority of European ways, and the inevitability of European conquest.*
  - *Do use materials which show respect for, and understanding of, the sophistication and complexities of Native societies.*
  - *Do use materials which show the continuity of Native societies, with traditional values and spiritual beliefs connected to the present.*
  - *Don't refer to Native spirituality as "superstition."*
  - *Don't make up Indian "legends" or "ceremonies." Don't encourage children to do "Indian" dances.*
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- *Do use respectful language in teaching about Native peoples.*
  - *Don't use insulting terms such as "brave", "squ\*w", "papoose," "Indian givers," "blanket Indians," or "wagon burners."*
  - *Do portray Native societies as coexisting with nature in a delicate balance. Don't portray Native peoples as "the first ecologists."*
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- *Do use primary source material – speeches, songs, poems, writing – that show the linguistic skill of peoples who come from an oral tradition.*
  - *Don't use books in which the "Indian" characters speak in "early jawbreaker" or in the oratorical style of the "noble savage."*
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- *Do use books which show Native women, Elders, and children as integral and important to Native societies.*
  - *Don't use books which portray Native women as subservient and Elders as subservient to warriors.*
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- *Do talk about lives of Native peoples in the present.*
  - *Do read and discuss good poetry, suitable for young people, by contemporary Native writers.*
  - *Do invite Native community members to the classroom. Do offer them an honorarium. Treat them as teachers, not as entertainers.*
  - *Don't assume that every Native person know everything there is to know about every Native Nation.*