

National Indian Education Association (NIEA)



WHY RESPONSIBLE TEACHING MATTERS

Recently, our nation has experienced an increase of public awareness and outcry regarding inconsistencies and misrepresentation in how the American public education system teaches about the history and resiliency of American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiians. Despite this increase and continued advocacy, our Native communities continue to see egregious stereotypes and mistruths shared in classrooms and media. To accomplish equity and a safe learning experience for all students, including Native students, NIEA is committed to supporting educators, parents, and community stakeholders by providing guidance, training, and resources, such as this document, for responsible and respectful teaching and representation in the classroom. This is by no means a comprehensive list, but rather a starting place.

IT STARTS WITH LOOKING INWARD

Before selecting or teaching Native history, culture, or present-day experiences, it is important to first look inward. It may feel uncomfortable to be self-reflective, but before anyone can begin to teach students responsibly, they must examine the lens with which they view the world. Environments, beliefs, culture, and social experience shape the many mistruths and misconceptions, which are deeply rooted in worldviews. It is important to ask:

- What biases do I carry?
- In what social and historical narratives do I participate?
- What assumptions do I make without thinking?
- What experiences have shaped my beliefs about certain people?

Educators, school leaders, and stakeholders must reflect inward to confront biases or misunderstandings of others. Willingness to engage in this potentially uncomfortable space and confront bias is a critical foundation in demonstrating a commitment to respectfully and responsibly teaching. We must avoid being stagnate but instead connect education to the lived experiences and lenses of the communities in which we teach and provide services

SEEKING TRUTH AND KNOWLEDGE

At the date of this publication, there are 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Each Native nation has its own distinct government, practices, language, stories, ceremonies, and social norms and values. Educators can avoid perpetuating stereotypes or misinformation by highlighting specific tribal nations and their particular and unique cultural aspects rather than portraying Native people as one homogenous group. A critical step in seeking truth is to ensure that the information, texts, and sources used in instruction are authentic and vetted sources. Historically, textbooks and widely published curricular materials are written from a settler colonial viewpoint. To best teach with truth and knowledge, it is imperative to access resources in which tribal nations are telling their own stories and determining which information is shared. Reach out to local tribes or Native organizations to ensure their voices are elevated and that instructional resources are truthful and authentic.



WE ARE STILL HERE

Despite years of Federal Indian Policy that sought to eradicate Native nations through forced removal, relocation, termination, the reservation system, and boarding schools, American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian people are still here. Resiliency and self-determination even through the generations of trauma must be the central focus of representation in the classroom. American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian people are thriving and reclaiming the languages and culture that settler colonialism and Federal policy hoped to erase. Although Native American, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians comprise only 2% of the US population (2020 US Census), their rich culture, history, and continued contributions are influential, and should not be marginalized.



National Indian Education Association (NIEA)

Teaching Culturally, Teaching Responsibly

RESPECTFUL AND RESPONSIBLE TEACHING

NIEA promotes culture-based educational practices for all students. It is imperative that all educators and students engage in learning about Native history and present across all content areas and beyond Native American Heritage month. However, if not careful, educators can perpetuate stereotypes and mistruths. These tips for responsible teaching can help educators become more culturally responsive:

- **The Past and Present:** Teaching historical events with the Native lens beyond the typical lessons of Thanksgiving or Trail of Tears. Native nations have been here since time immemorial and their contributions are evident in all aspects of our nation: agriculture, engineering, governance structures, economics, and more.
- **Traditional knowledge:** Each Native group has their own unique beliefs, culture, history, language, and values. Recognize and teach the value of traditional systems of knowledge such as science, wellness, community, food systems, land/water protection, sacredness of ceremonies and place.
- **Contributions & Expertise:** Let Native voices tell their story (textbooks, literature, media). Native people are veterans, soldiers, political leaders, authors, inventors, professors, doctors, scientists, writers, artists, teachers.
- **Activism:** Highlight and promote: Past and present advocacy for policies that effect Native American land and natural resources, i.e. fishing, hunting, & water rights, voting rights, and treaties.
- **Balancing joy and pain:** Recognize and bring awareness to the historical traumas suffered by Native people that have lasting impacts today. Support the healing and reconciliation work in Native communities especially the effects of boarding schools in Native education. Balance the conversations of trauma, with the recognition of resiliency and joy of Native people.
- **Cultural Relationships:** Effective learning starts with a relationship of trust and understanding between teacher and student.



VETTING & DECOLONIZING RESOURCES FOR THE CLASSROOM

NIEA strongly supports culturally based education and resources. As there are many rich Native-authored texts, there are also curricular resources that still reflect deeply rooted biases and mistruths. How can you determine if a resource is appropriate to put before students? Here are a few questions for vetting resources.

Do the materials...

- recognize individual tribes or promote a Pan-Indian or generic view of Native people?
- only focus on historical representation rather than emphasize modern resilience?
- present a one-sided or conqueror-centered point-of-view?
- perpetuate stereotypes or misconceptions about Native people?
- reference Native authorship or sources?
- gloss over the harm or genocide inflicted by the US government or settler colonialism?
- promote tribal sovereignty and the upholding of treaties?
- portray Native people, past and present, as intellectual, complex, and community-oriented people?
- accurately and respectfully depict Native people such that Native students can feel represented and follow role models?
- encourage the respect of Native lands, rights, languages, and ceremonies?

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT NIEA:

niea@niea.org | 202-847-0042

Visit us at www.niea.org