Native Cultures Lesson Plan
School & Library Programming Unit
By Diane Daly for IRLS 521, Summer 2010

FOCUS

The focus of this lesson is to accurately represent Native American cultures as living, modern cultures for children in grades 1 through 3.

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- Compare and contrast the stereotypes of American Indians today with more realistic Native American customs and lifestyles
- Understand that the terms “Native Americans” and “American Indians” refer to many diverse peoples and cultures
- Identify several native North American tribes by name

SETTING

This single-session presentation would take place in an elementary school or public library with students from grades 1 through 3, Ages 6 through 9. The bibliography listed here covers all of those ages, but can be limited to more age-appropriate material if students are of a more limited age group.

This lesson is designed to be accompanied by the VoiceThread presentation created to go along with it, URL listed below. Words in purple on this document deal with screen advancement and headings for the VoiceThread presentation. Ideally, the instructor’s computer screen would be projected for students to view throughout the lesson, as the instructor fills in the VoiceThread presentation with their input. Note that I have added a comment on each book screenshot that gives information on the book, for instructor information more than student entertainment.

Please note that the kernel of this lesson was found on the National Endowment for the Humanities’ excellent EDSITEment website, also cited below. That kernel has been modified liberally here to contain multimedia elements and to fit the needs of a library instructor teaching a single-session course.

REQUIREMENTS:

- Computer with internet access
- Digital Projector with Audio
- Copies of all or most of the books listed in the Bibliography
Alternative formats:

- **Limited technology:** This lesson could work with no projector, provided the video is visible and audible to the whole group. The VoiceThread presentation could be replaced with a large blackboard/whiteboard, and in-hand copies of all the books. The video is located on YouTube at the URL cited below.
- **Reading a different book:** This plan involves the reading of Joy Harjo’s *Good Luck Cat*, but another book in the Bibliography may be substituted.
- **Virtual Interaction:** For classes solely of students aged 8 and older in a setting with enough computers, or for virtual interaction, students could be invited to participate through VoiceThread comment boxes and the instructor’s part of the lesson could be prerecorded on the VoiceThread.

**PRESENTATION**

The words in bold can be used either as a script, or as a general guideline.

*VoiceThread Page 1:* Name some **Cultures** you know about.

*VT Page 2: What about **Native American cultures**? **American Indians**? What do you know? Write down their ideas in the left column under the heading **Original Ideas**.

Now I’m going to show you a **video** about Native American cultures. *(Advance to Page 3, the Nvision video.)*

What did you learn? Go back to page 2’s left column list of their ideas about American Indian cultures. In the right column, under the heading **New Ideas**, write a few of their ideas of the young people in the video. Leave space for more New Ideas later, as this list will be returned to throughout the lesson.

Native American cultures are cultures of living people, and not just one culture. There are over 500 different American Indian cultures in our country today. These cultures are also called tribes.

Do you know the names of any **Native cultures**? Add to the New Ideas any names the students already know. As we learn about these cultures, try to remember their names to add to this list later.

In American Indian cultures, many members are young people like you. American Indian cultures are like one another in some ways and different from one another in other ways. They are also like other parts of American culture in some ways and different in other ways.
Now I want to share with you some books that take place in some of today’s Native American Cultures.

First I’m going to read aloud from this one, Joy Harjo’s *The Good Luck Cat*. Read aloud. After the story, be sure to read the back cover that tells of Joy Harjo’s membership in the Muskogee-Creek tribe.

After the reading, write their ideas of the girl in the story in the New Ideas. Also prompt them and then add Muskogee-Creek to the list of tribes.

Here are some more books. As I show them to you, remember the names of some of the American Indian tribes. Also try to remember things for our list of Parts of Life in Indian Cultures.

*Scroll through the remaining Voicethread slides, which have a screen shot of each book.* As each is shown, ask the students if they have read it. If any has, invite them to record a comment on that book’s VoiceThread page. These comments can ideally be carried over to future instances of this workshop.

At the end of the book showings, students can raise hands and add parts of life or Tribe names to the Page 2 list. The books they learned about will then be available for checkout or reserve. Students can also be invited to comment directly onto the VoiceThread presentation, individually or in groups.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

  This book was created by the students, teachers, and elders of Ducharme Elementary School in La Loche, Saskatchewan. Dene culture past and present through the four seasons is present in the story of Grandfather Jonas and his grandson Byron.
  Renowned poet and Muskogee-Creek nation member Joy Harjo tells this simple tale of a cat’s many lives and mystical possibilities. That the Native American culture of the protagonist is only the focus in passing makes this a valuable tool in teaching children of any culture that an American Indian child may live very much like other American children, yet celebrate different customs.
  Navajo “code-talkers” were those who worked for the American Marines during WWII by developing a code based on the Navajo language, which was never
written down or known outside of the Navajo tribe and was therefore impossible to crack. The true story of the code-talkers is told here as a lesson in courage and the treasure of Navajo heritage to John, a Navajo youth frightened to move off of the reservation to a new town, by his grandfather.

  Polly is a young Ojibway, or Chippewa, who has trouble at school when she won’t play cowboys and Indians. As her mother and sister comfort her they also teach the reader lessons about cultural understanding and the Ojibway language.

  Esther is a “First Nations” girl of the Cree tribe and also a modern American girl. When she receives two pairs of shoes for her birthday, each a product of one of the cultures she comes from, she learns from her grandmother about choosing which shoes to wear each day.

  Borrowing a row of jingles for her dress for the Powwow dance from each of the four women on her contemporary suburban street, Jenna’s story of the tradition of Ojibwe jingle dances and intertribal community was written by a mixed-blood member of the Muscogee (Creek) nation.

- **Tapahonso, Luci.** (1999). *Songs of Shiprock Fair*. Kiva (Grades: P-3).
  Nezbah is a young Navajo girl who treasures the annual Shiprock fair in this colorful tribute to the oldest fair in Navajo tradition, written by the poet Luci Tapahonso.

  In three episodes, “Morning,” “Noon,”, and “Night,” the Ojibway cultures relationship with nature and animals is presented through the narrative of a boy as he spends the day outdoors with his grandfather.

  Allie and Alex, two Ojibway sisters, meet animal spirits on their snowy journey toward wisdom and the Northern Lights.

  Show-and-tell among contemporary young children in a modern classroom leads to a rhythmic lesson in native language (“Kookum” for grandmother) and customs that is meant to be read aloud.

**SOURCES**

[http://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com](http://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com)

http://oyate.org/ 

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fksJLEbVN4


Book cover screen shots not listed above are from http://amazon.com

The accompanying VoiceThread presentation URL is http://voicethread.com/share/1244488/

This document is located online at http://www.u.arizona.edu/~didaly/daly_nativeculturelp.pdf

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