

## Negotiating Native Identity through Art, Poetry and Music

### OVERVIEW

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How have Native American musicians, poets, and visual artists negotiated their identity, and what role does physical space play in these negotiations?

#### OVERVIEW

*In this lesson, students begin by examining the ways their sense of identity might be affected by social pressures associated with different spaces. By watching clips from RUMBLE, students then discover how musicians Robbie Robertson, Stevie Salas, and Taboo have negotiated their Native identities, and compare these musician’s journeys with those of earlier Native Americans. Students then participate in a gallery walk activity, exploring how some artists have negotiated their “Native” and “American” identities visually. Students will also investigate how Native American poets have express their sense of identity, analyze some traditional Native American perspectives on space, and compare Native and European American concepts of land and property. Finally, students view Jimi Hendrix’s performance of “The Star Spangled Banner” from the Woodstock Music Festival in 1969 and consider ways the guitarist might have celebrated his proclaimed multiethnic identity through an instrumental rendition of the song.*



In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson sent a letter marked “unofficial and private” to Indiana Territory Governor (and future president) William Henry Harrison. In the letter, Jefferson provides “information and instructions as to our Indian Affairs,” and outlines the Federal Government’s plans to encourage tribes to leave their hunter-gatherer societies and take up agriculture. This, Jefferson and others hoped, would result in Native Americans then selling off vast tribal forestlands to the American government. “In this way,” Jefferson concludes, “our settlements will gradually circumscribe and approach the Indians, and they will in time either incorporate with us as citizens of the United States, or be removed beyond the Mississippi.”

Many Native Americans, however, wished neither to “incorporate as citizens” or depart from lifestyles their communities had practiced for centuries. Among the most vocal dissenters was Tecumseh, a Shawnee leader who traveled widely and amassed a sizable following from dozens of tribes that opposed Jefferson’s vision. Tecumseh aligned his large, pan-tribal force with the British during the War of 1812, and, despite several early military victories, was ultimately defeated. Following this loss, treaty after treaty resulted in Native Americans being forced west of the Mississippi. Those who remained were expected to “incorporate as citizens,” or “assimilate”—i.e.

## OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

“bring into conformity”—with the European American public that surrounded them.

“Assimilate,” leave, or face the consequences—Native Americans have grappled with these choices for over two centuries.

Just how Native Americans were to “bring into conformity” with the 19th century American public was an issue of much debate. To some, it meant that Native Americans should adapt to the farming and factory jobs that might occupy one with darker skin. To others, “conformity” within the European American U.S. could only be achieved by a complete abandonment of all things “Indian”—communal living, the pooling of resources, native languages, religious practices, and music. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, this movement to “civilize” Native Americans resulted in measures such as the banning of song and dance, and the forced enrollment of thousands of Native American children in Federal Indian Boarding schools designed to “Americanize” them in both body and mind.

By the early 20th century, Native American heritage could be both dangerous and shameful. To all but the proudest it had become something to hide. As several musicians recall in *RUMBLE: The Indians Who Rocked The World*, such feelings became deeply embedded in future generations. Guitarist, vocalist, and songwriter Robbie Robertson recalls his elders advising him in the 1950s, “be proud you’re an Indian, but be careful who you tell.” Elsewhere in the film, guitarist Stevie Salas discusses coming to terms with his heritage only as a young adult in the 1980s, and the Black Eyed Peas’ Taboo admits to intentionally privileging his Hispanic heritage over his Shoshone ancestry in the multiethnic Los Angeles of the early 1990s. Each of these musicians, however, ultimately returned to their cultural and geographical roots and found personal strength.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

### 1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- Ways Native American artists have struggled with revealing or promoting their indigenous ancestry
- How Native Americans have been historically forced to negotiate their identities
- The structure and guiding motivation of Indian boarding schools in the early 1900s
- The artwork of Fred Kabotie, Wendy Red Star, Teri Greeves, Jeffrey Gibson, Diego Romero, and Brad Kahlhamer
- The poetry of Native American writers Diane Burns and b: william bearhart
- The relationship between identity and physical space
- Native American conceptions of land and space, and how it differs from European American ideas about property
- How music might serve as a vehicle to express identity

### 2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- By discovering how Native American musicians and visual artists have grappled with their identity, students will be able to better empathize with the historic struggles that Native Americans have confronted in the United States.

## ACTIVITIES

### MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

**Note to teachers: materials in this lesson mention alcohol abuse. Please review lesson to determine if it is appropriate for your class.**

1. Pass out **Handout 1 - Community Circle** to students, and have them complete the exercise. Then, have students share part or all of their completed handout with the class. (*If the activity is unclear to students, feel free to show **Image 1, "Example My Communities Chart."***)
2. Ask students:
  - Do you behave or present yourself differently among various communities and spaces? Why?
  - Are all "spaces" physical? Can you think of any communities in which you participate which are not bound by geography? (*Encourage students to consider their online lives.*)

- Do any of the quadrants you labeled better represent you? Do you feel you are being “more true to yourself” in some places versus other places? Could you be “true to yourself” no matter who you were with and where you were? Why or why not?

## PROCEDURE:

1. Tell the class that you’ll now be looking at how Native American musicians and visual artists have struggled with identity, and the way different spaces might allow them to “be themselves.” Play **Clip 1, “Fitting In,”** and ask:

- Why might Robbie Robertson have been told, “Be proud you’re an Indian, but be careful who you tell?” What might his elders have been worried about?
  - Why did Robbie Robertson’s peers doubt the possibility that he could become a successful musician outside of the reservation he visited? What do you think might have made them feel that way?
  - Why do you think Stevie Salas might not have wanted to be seen as an “Indian rockstar?” (*Encourage students to consider how Native Americans had been treated previously, the lack of successful Native musician role models, and the possibility that he might have been stereotyped if he promoted his Apache heritage. Did he think there was such a thing as an “Indian rockstar”?*)
  - Why did Salas feel he needed to create an “identity” to fit into the Los Angeles scene, and why did he feel like he didn’t fit in to that space? (*Encourage students to think about the ways musicians and entertainers who appear on stage might need to promote an identity.*)
- What inspired Taboo to recognize his Native ancestry?
2. Pass out **Handout 2- Excerpts from *Sure You Can Ask Me a Personal Question*, Diane Burns.** Individually, in groups, or together as a class, read the poem. Then ask students:
- How would you describe this poem?
  - Who might Diane Burns be having a conversation with in this poem?
  - Do you get the sense that Burns is enjoying this conversation or not? Why?
  - What kind of assumptions are being made about Burns in this poem?
  - How might this poem relate to the comment Robertson received “Be proud you’re an Indian, but be careful who you tell?” Why might Burns be reluctant to admit her heritage after having the conversation represented in the poem?
3. Pass out **Handout 3 - Profile of Artist Fred Kabotie** and read it aloud as a class. Ask students:
- What do you think federal authorities were trying to accomplish by sending Native American children like Kabotie to English-only, military-style boarding schools?
  - What were authorities trying to accomplish by prohibiting traditional Pueblo dances?

- In the reading, P.T. Lonergan states that military-style Indian schools were needed to make Native Americans more “efficient.” What do you think Lonergan meant by “efficient?”
  - What do you think Horton means when she says the military-style schools for Indians led to “bodily forgetting”? (*Encourage students to think about whether forming military-style lines everyday would lead Native Americans students to forget about how they moved and positioned their bodies in traditional dances and ceremonies.*)
  - What role do you think painting served for Kabotie while at the Santa Fe boarding school? How might it have helped him with his situation?
  - How did painting allow Kabotie to represent his Hopi identity?
4. Tell students they will now be looking at more contemporary artwork to see how recent Native American artists have presented their identity in their art. Break students up into groups for a Gallery Walk activity. Post the **Gallery Walk Images** throughout the classroom, then give each group **Handout 4 - Gallery Walk Questions** and have them follow the prompts. Once the groups have finished, have them share their ideas with the class.
5. Pass out **Handout 5 - *When I Was in Las Vegas and Saw a Warhol Painting of Geronimo, b: william bearhart***. Individually, in groups, or together as a class, read the poem. Then ask students:
- How would you describe this poem?
  - What kind of thoughts is bearhart having while looking at the painting of Geronimo?
  - How does he identify with Warhol? How does he identify with Geronimo? Are the connections he’s making sincere?
  - How might this poem represent a process of understanding one’s cultural identity?
6. Tell students they will now analyze the relationship between land and Native artists’ struggles with identity. Play **Clip 2, “Indian Country,”** and ask:
- In *RUMBLE*, Salas mentions that his friend, Apache and Pueblo drummer Randy Castillo took him on a retreat to “Indian Country” in New Mexico. What might have Randy noticed in his friend that inspired him to go to Indian Country? What do you think Randy might have hoped the result of that trip would have been?
  - In the clip you just viewed, John Trudell says the secret of Indian Country is, “Losing the part of your mind that needs losing.” What part of Salas mind do you think Randy thought “needed losing”? Was that part of his identity? What part of your mind might Trudell suggest you lose?
  - What might it have been about “Indian Country” that ultimately affected Salas? How might you compare the scenes you see in New Mexico with your images of cities such as Los Angeles? How might people behave differently in each place? Why?
7. Pass out **Handout 6 - Native Perspectives on Land**, and read as a class. Ask students:
- Based on what we read, how would you summarize the traditional Native American viewpoint on land? Would you say it is more practical or spiritual?

- How might this viewpoint differ from the Western European viewpoint of land? (*Encourage students to think about the Western idea of land as property, owned by an individual to live or produce resources.*)
- Thinking back to the clip you saw previously, in what ways might have the Native American conception of land helped Salas recover his identity?

8. Play **Clip 3, “Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock.”**

*(Note to teacher: Jimi Hendrix was known to identify with both his Black heritage and, according to some sources, Cherokee ancestry. While he embraced aspects of Native American culture in his personal style, definitive evidence validating his Cherokee identity has remained elusive. It’s important to acknowledge his multifaceted identity with respect and sensitivity,*

*recognizing the complexities and nuances of his background.)* Ask students:

- Do you think Jimi Hendrix expressed his multiethnic background through this version of the “Star-Spangled Banner”? Why or why not?
- How might a song like the National Anthem relate back to the ideas about land you discussed previously? Why might the song be a particularly poignant one for someone such as Jimi Hendrix?
- Why do you think Jimi Hendrix’s sister expressed concern over the reactions to his performance of the “National Anthem”? How might this relate to more recent discussions of the “National Anthem” at major public events?

### SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Have students to return to the “My Communities” handouts they completed at the beginning of class, then ask:
  - Imagine you are an artist or a public figure. Which aspects of your identity would you want to present, and which would you want to keep private? Why?
  - Still pretending you are a public figure, what sort of obligations might you have in presenting yourself a certain way? What sort of pressures would you feel, and what risks would you take in presenting other aspects of your identity to the public? What kinds of issues were Native American social movements addressing in the 1960s and 1970s?

### EXTENSION ACTIVITY

1. See Extension Activity: “Contemporary Musicians Promote their Native Heritage.”

## STANDARDS

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

#### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (K-12)*

Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Reading 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Reading 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Reading 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Reading 8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

Reading 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

#### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (K-12)*

Writing 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Writing 7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Writing 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

#### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (K-12)*

Speaking and Listening 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Speaking and Listening 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.



## **SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)**

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 9: Global Connections Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION**

Core Music Standard: Responding

Analyze: Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or performers' expressive intent.

Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

*Core Music Standard: Connecting*

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

## **NEW JERSEY STATE LEARNING STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS**

Reading

NJSLSA.R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences and relevant connections from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

NJSLSA.R6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

NJSLSA.R8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

NJSLSA.R9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.



## Writing

NJSLSA.W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

NJSLSA.W7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects, utilizing an inquiry-based research process, based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

NJSLSA.W9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

## RESOURCES

### VIDEO RESOURCES

- Rumble – Fitting in
- Rumble – Indian Country
- Rumble – Jimi Hendrix and the National Anthem

### IMAGE RESOURCES

- Community Circle Example

### HANDOUTS

- Handout 1 - Community Circle
- Handout 2- Excerpts from *Sure You Can Ask Me a Personal Question*, Diane Burns
- Handout 3 - Profile of Artist Fred Kabotie
- Handout 4 - Gallery Walk Questions
- Handout 5 - *When I Was in Las Vegas and Saw a Warhol Painting of Geronimo*, b: william bearhart
- Handout 4: Native Perspectives on Land
- Gallery Walk Images
- Extension Activity: Contemporary Musicians Promote their Native Heritage