

## Identity and Stereotypes: Why Do Representations Matter?



"You - the colonizer, the media...those multi-generations of the stripping away of our culture, just to say...I could have a plastic feather on my cap and make it my own...That's not the reality of what the culture is - so it becomes something of a caricature of itself when it is utilized in an inappropriate manner."

- **Sage T. LaPena** (Nomtipom Wintu) speaking in a film still from *Diversity Among Identity - Essential Understanding #2*.

A learning resource from the California Indian Museum and  
Cultural Center and the California State Archives



**Description:**

This activity guide will help students explore the problematic representations and stereotypes of Native Americans in past and present visual culture. Students will analyze images of Native Americans that were used to sell products at the turn of the twentieth century from the California State Archives' Trademarks and Service Marks collection, listen to current Native perspectives on the misrepresentations that they still encounter today in videos from the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center, and complete a series of related activities focused on Native American stereotypes in mass media in the U.S. This resource invites students to think critically about historical and contemporary issues concerning Native American stereotypes, representation, and identity.

**Advisory:** Please note that some material and linked resources in this guide contain graphic and distressing content (including violence and sexual assault) that is impactful to individuals and California tribal communities with historical trauma.

**Grade Levels:**

High School (9-12)

**Time:**

Approx. 3.5 hours total - activities may be completed in several sessions.

**Table of Contents:**

Title Page: Identity and Stereotypes: Why Do Representations Matter? .....	1
Description and Advisory.....	2
Grade Levels.....	2
Time .....	2
Curriculum Standards.....	3
Learning Activities: .....	4
A) Review Images of Native Americans on Trademarks.....	4
B) The Waves of Genocide in California: Spanish, Mission, and Gold Rush .....	5
C) Essential Understanding #1 - Great Diversity Among Tribes .....	6
D) Essential Understanding #2 - Diversity Among Identity.....	7
E) The 6 P's of California Indian Curriculum .....	8
F) Videos: Contemporary Native Perspectives on Stereotypes.....	9
G) Reading: Historical Trauma and its Connection to Imagery .....	10
Reflection Questions.....	11
Definition Key for Activities C - E.....	12

**Curriculum Standards:****7 Essential Understandings for California Indian History and Culture (Grades K-12)**

1 & 2

**The 6 P's of California Indian Curriculum (Grades K-12)**

2 & 3

**Historical and Social Science Content Standards (Grades 9-12)**

Analysis Skills: Chronological and Spatial Thinking, 1; Historical Research, Evidence, and Point of View, 1; Historical Interpretation, 1

**California Arts Content Standards (Grades 9-12)**

Visual Arts: Perceive and Analyze an Artistic Work, Prof. VA: Re 7.1; Relate Artistic Ideas and Works with Societal, Historical, and Cultural Context to Deepen Understanding, Adv.VA: Cn11; Organize and Develop Artistic Ideas and Work, Acc.VA: Cr2.2

**California History Social Science Framework (Grade 10)**

P. 337: How did Native peoples respond to colonization?

**Common Core for History/Social Science (Grades 9-12)**

Key Ideas and Details (9-12): 2; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (11-12): 7; Research to Build and Present Knowledge (9-12): 9

**College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards (By end of Grade 12)**

History: D2.HIS.2.9-12; Perspectives: D2.HIS.4.9-12, D2.HIS.5.9-12, D2.HIS.7.9-12, D2.HIS.14.9-12

## **Learning Activities:**

### **A) Review Images of Native Americans on Trademarks**

**Directions:** View [the trademarks depicting Native Americans from the Trademark and Service Mark collection at the California State Archives](#) and answer the questions below.

1. What are some adjectives you would use to describe the depictions of Native Americans in these trademarks? Why do you describe them that way? Use specific details from the images to support your answer.
2. Why do you think companies portrayed Native Peoples like this to sell their products? How might they have benefited?
3. Why are these images harmful?
4. What do these images represent?

**B) The Waves of Genocide in California: Spanish, Mission, and Gold Rush**

**Directions:** Read [“Untold History: The Survival of California’s Indians”](#) from KCET to gain an understanding about the different waves of genocide in California. Once you have read the article, identify and explain below the differences within the three waves of genocide that impacted California tribes (Notice: This article contains distressing content).

### C) Essential Understanding #1 - Great Diversity Among Tribes

**Directions:** Read [Essential Understanding #1 - Great Diversity Among Tribes \(pages 2-6\)](#) from the 7 Essential Understandings. Based on the reading, define each of the terms below in your own words and then check them with the definitions provided in the Definition Key on pages 12-13. Then complete the questions and activities below.

**Resilient:**

**Cultural heritage:**

**Doctrine of Discovery:**

**Historical bias:**

1. In 1-2 sentences, summarize the main idea of Essential Understanding #1 in your own words:
  
2. Examine this [map of federally recognized tribes](#) in different regions of the United States from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. What do you notice about the diversity of California tribes compared to other regions in the United States?
  
3. **Imagery vs. Substance Activity:** Review the [Imagery vs. Substance slide on page 6 of the Essential Understanding](#) booklet. Answer the questions by referring to the specific images presented on the slide.
  - a. Do the images present vibrant and resilient communities?
  - b. Do the images present stereotypes?
  - c. Do they represent the continuity of tribal cultures?
  - d. Are native youth able to take pride in having these images represent their families and communities?

## D) Essential Understanding #2 - Diversity Among Identity

**Directions:** Read [Essential Understanding #2 - Diversity Among Identity \(pages 7-11\)](#) from the 7 Essential Understandings for California Indian History and Culture developed by the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center. Based on the reading, define each of the terms below in your own words and then check them with the definitions provided in the Definition Key on pages 12-13. Then complete the question and activity below.

**Identity:**

**Rancheria:**

**Diversity:**

**Romanticized:**

**Cultural appropriation:**

**Boarding schools:**

**Entitlement:**

**Misappropriating:**

1. In 1-2 sentences, summarize the main idea of Essential Understanding #2 in your own words:

### **2. Identifying Historical and Contemporary Native Stereotypes Activity**

Watch this [short video on Native stereotypes](#), then consider the stereotypes you have seen represented in mass media and the trademarks you viewed in Activity A. List 5 stereotypes of Native Peoples you have seen in older and current mass media below.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## E) The 6 P's of California Indian Curriculum

**Directions:** Read [The 6 P's of California Indian Curriculum, focusing on #2 and #3](#).

Based on the reading, define each of the terms below in your own words and then check them with the definitions provided in the Definition Key on pages 12-13. Then answer the question below.

**Stewarded:**

**Federally recognized tribe:**

**Non federally recognized tribe:**

**Tribal sovereignty:**

**Genocide:**

1. In 1-2 sentences, summarize the main ideas of #2 and #3 in your own words:

#2:

#3:





**G) Reading: Historical Trauma and its Connection to Imagery**

**Directions:** Read [this short article from the American Psychological Association on American Indian Mascots](#). Based on the reading, summarize below why negative Native American imagery is harmful to Native communities.



## **Definition Key for Activities C - E:**

- **Resilient:** overcoming a difficult situation/circumstance/condition quickly and becoming strong after it has happened
- **Cultural heritage:** ways of living passed down from generations, it includes: traditional values, traditional customs, traditional homelands, and traditional practices
- **Doctrine of Discovery:** Basis of settler land claims to lands in the Americas, Europeans believe that tribes only had the right to occupy the land whereas they have the right to claim discovered land. This idea derives from The Papal Bull "Inter Caetera," issued by Pope Alexander VI on May 4, 1493 but made its way into federal law in the United States. In the case Johnson v. McIntosh in 1823 the US Supreme Court supported "that the principle of discovery gave European nations an absolute right to New World lands."
- **Historical bias:** The Western bias that narrates how historical events have taken place in the United States, generally only the perspectives of settlers/colonizers are presented.
- **Identity:** a core component of an individual
- **Rancheria:** Small tracts of land purchased by the federal government in the early 1900s to address the issue of landless California Natives due to the federal government not ratifying 18 treaties and robbing tribes of 7.5 million acres of land. The small tracts of land acquisitions are the Rancheria system in California. Source: [Who We Are | Indian Affairs \(bia.gov\)](http://www.bia.gov/who-we-are/indian-affairs)
- **Diversity:** a wide varieties of representations
- **Romanticized:** idealizing a group of people or historical events, leads to unrealistic understandings of a culture
- **Cultural appropriation:** inappropriate use of another culture's elements (such as clothing, sacred items, etc.), typically utilized for the gain of the dominant culture or to exploit a minority culture
- **Boarding schools:** Government run boarding schools, set up in the 1800s onward, were responsible for removing Native American children from their families and forced violently to assimilate to American culture.
- **Entitlement:** The feeling of having a right to something
- **Misappropriating:** Taking something from another person or culture and stripping it of its original meaning for one's own purpose
- **Stewarded:** Purposefully managing nature

- **Federally recognized tribe:** “A federally recognized tribe is an American Indian or Alaska Native tribal entity that is recognized as having a government-to-government relationship with the United States, with the responsibilities, powers, limitations, and obligations attached to that designation” (BIA). Source: [Frequently Asked Questions | Indian Affairs \(bia.gov\)](#)
- **Non federally recognized tribe:** A tribe that the federal government does not recognize as having a government to government relationship with the United States.
- **Tribal sovereignty:** “Tribal sovereignty is limited today by the United States under treaties, acts of Congress, Executive Orders, federal administrative agreements and court decisions, what remains is nevertheless protected and maintained by the federally recognized tribes against further encroachment by other sovereigns, such as the states. Tribal sovereignty ensures that any decisions about the tribes with regard to their property and citizens are made with their participation and consent” (BIA). Source: [Frequently Asked Questions | Indian Affairs \(bia.gov\)](#)
- **Genocide:** “Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:
  - Killing members of the group;
  - Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
  - Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
  - Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
  - Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

Source: United Nations Genocide Convention, Article II