

Exploring Our Past – Native Americans of the Southwest

Program Overview and Objective:

For thousands of years, Native Americans called the desert areas of the southwest home. They relied on their resourcefulness to sustain life with very little water, no trees, and a desert landscape. These people retained a deep sense of spirituality evidenced in their artwork and in the shelters they built with adobe.

The activities in this guide will enhance students' understanding of the culture and customs of Native Americans in the southwest. Critical thinking activities, along with small group and class discussions complement art projects that encourage an extension of learning. Students will gain a respect for the culture and customs of the Native Americans of the Southwest, along with an understanding of the importance of resourcefulness and spirituality among the southwest tribes.

Whole Class Activity #1

Objective: Archaeologists have learned about Native American culture (and other cultures) by studying artifacts. This exercise gives students the opportunity to make inferences about other people based on important artifacts, giving students a sense of how archaeology works and a sense of the importance of artifacts left over from other cultures.

Ask students to collect a few items that they believe tell something about themselves (e.g. sports trophy, favorite book, etc) and bring them to class for an activity. During class time, have students share their “artifacts” with a small group or partner (this can be more of a game, if the “artifacts” are buried in a box of packing popcorn). Each group or partner should study the “artifacts” and try to learn something about their fellow student. Ask students to think about what these “artifacts” tell them about this person, what is important to him/her? What kind of person is he/she? etc. Note: this activity works best if the partners/groups are not made up of students who are already close.

Whole Class Activity #2

Objective: The Southwest Native Americans were a peaceful people. If we all emulated their beliefs in loving all animals, plants, and people, our world might be a better place. This activity is designed to give students a day in the life of this loving people, and to gain an appreciation for their attitude toward all living things.

Ask students to imagine for one day that they are part of a community of Southwest Native Americans. They believe in loving all people, plants, and animals. Remind them that cruelty was not tolerated in these communities. Encourage students to remind each other throughout the day to embrace this belief. At the end of the day (or the following day, if students extend this behavior at home), ask students to reflect on how they felt throughout the day, how others reacted to their attitude, and whether or not they have been changed by the experiment.

Whole Class Activity #3

Objective: After living in the Southwest for thousands of years, Native Americans were uprooted as American settlers discovered their manifest destiny. This comprehensive

group discussion encourages students to view different perspectives of the same event and to determine if a different outcome might have been possible under different circumstances.

Divide class into 5 groups – Hopi, Zuni, Apache, Navajo, and American settlers. Small groups should meet first and discuss the impact of American settlers on the Southwestern tribes. Ask students to consider their role as either Native Americans or American settlers on the re-location/destruction of Native American culture. Students should also consider how the peaceful culture of these tribes contributed to their demise. In addition, students should consider what they would have done differently, considering what we now know. After small groups have discussed these items, the teacher should lead the class in a free discussion, including role-play and debate.

Independent Activity #1

Objective: When Native Americans first came to the land that is now The United States, they settled in areas where they could find resources to support life. In the Southwest, that included deserts, canyons, and land with few trees. This activity provides an anticipatory set for understanding the settlement patterns of Native Americans and their ability to adapt to different environments.

Teacher should hand out map of the United States (worksheet #1 – a blank map of the U.S. as it stood when Native Americans crossed the Bering Land Bridge). Before watching the video, ask students to study the map and determine where they would choose to live if they had just discovered this new mass of land. Encourage students to consider the geography of the place and the types of resources that might be available. Following the video, have students reassess the work they've done, make changes that they deem necessary, and discuss their choices with a partner or a small group.

Independent Activity #2

Objective: When Native Americans first settled in the southwest, they lived in caves. Eventually, they learned to make adobe bricks from clay and grasses. This activity gives students an appreciation for the resourcefulness of the Southwestern tribes, and an opportunity to create their own shelters using what they find in nature.

Ask students to recall that the Native Americans of the Southwest had limited resources in terms of lumber for shelter. They had to be much more resourceful than their counterparts in other parts of North America. Students should be given the choice of re-creating their own pueblo using clay and grass or using the natural resources in your area to build a model of a shelter. Instruct students only to use natural resources. Once constructed, students should share their shelters with the class and describe where they found and how they utilized natural resources.

Independent Activity #3

Objective: The Navajo people lived in shelters called Hogans. This independent activity encourages students to study the two different Hogans and make assumptions about the symbolism behind the male and female hogans. Furthermore, students are encouraged to do more research to confirm or rebuke their assumptions.

Give each student the Hogan handout (this handout should have a sketch of the two different types of hogans, with a brief description of each). Ask students to study both the

female and male Hogan. Students should reflect on why there were two types of hogans and what the significance of each type or Hogan was. Ask students if they can make assumptions about the types of materials used to build the hogans. Encourage students to take this exercise a step further and read more about hogans in the library or on the Internet to see if their assumptions were correct.

Independent Activity #4

Objective: Southwestern tribes believed in many kachinas, or gods. They made kachina dolls to teach children about these gods. This hands-on activity allows students to create their own kachina dolls and to ascribe a lesson they believe is important to convey to other children. By presenting their kachina dolls, students will have the opportunity to develop their speaking and presentation skills.

Have students create Kachina dolls using classroom materials. Ask students to decorate their Kachina dolls and to develop a personality and story to convey a lesson. Students should present their kachina dolls and stories to the class.

Small Group Activity #1

Objective: A custom is a special way a group of people does things. The Native Americans of the Southwest shared a custom – a respect for nature. This activity encourages students to think about their own customs and compare them to those of the Native Southwesterners and to think about how they will change in the future.

Have students work individually to brainstorm some customs in their family, in their community, and in our country. Next, have students collaborate in small groups to compare the different customs that they brainstormed on their own. Compare these customs to those of the Southwestern Native Americans. Ask groups to consider these questions in their discussion: How have our customs changed over time? How do you think customs will continue to change in the future?

Small Group Activity #2

Objective: At the bottom of every pueblo was a special round room called a Kiva. Kivas were used for special ceremonies. This activity allows students to replicate a Kiva using their imaginations and symbols from their own culture.

Have students work in small groups. Ask students in each group to imagine that they are part of a Southwest tribe. If they lived in pueblo, there would be a kiva at the bottom where they would hold special ceremonies. Have each student work on a piece of artwork to decorate the walls of the kiva. Each student should explain to the group the meaning of their artwork. When all students in a group are done, connect their papers together in a circle with the pictures facing inward. This will resemble the circular shape of the kiva.

Small Group Activity #3

Objective: Like many other groups of Native Americans, the people of the southwest had a clear division of labor between men and women. This small group activity helps students to review those roles and to consider why chores were divided in this way. Students are also able to discuss how these roles would be reflected today and why they might be different now.

Divide class into small groups. Have each group compile a list of chores that needed to be done in the Southwest tribes. Next, have students identify how those tasks would be divided in today's world. Then, have students recall from the program which chores were done by women, which were done by men, and which were done by children. Ask students to consider why chores were divided the way they were, and to consider how and why those roles might be different today. If some groups are done early, a fun activity is to brainstorm how many different ways they can think of to prepare corn (can they beat the Southwestern tribes?)

Small Group Activity #4

Objective: Because of the dry climate, Native Southwesterners had to conserve what little precipitation they had. This activity helps students appreciate how difficult it would be to live in a desert climate. They should be encouraged to be creative in determining ways to adapt to the desert areas of the Southwest.

Working in small groups, students should imagine that they are dropped in the desert together. Remind students about the dry desert climate. Their first priority would be to find water. How would they find and conserve water. Reflect on how the Southwestern Native Americans conserved water. Ask students how different tools and levels of technology might change their ability to thrive in the desert.