Culture In Our Own Land: Native Americans

Purpose
Participants will learn about the cultural practices of Native Americans. This lesson fits under the 4-H Citizenship program priority.

Iowa CORE Skills
- Understand the concept of culture
- Understand that peoples’ values and behavior are shaped by their culture
- Understand that a large society may be made up of many groups, and these groups may contain many different subcultures
- Understand the influence of perception, attitudes, values, and beliefs on personal identity

Time
2 hours

Group Size
10 – 20, but can be flexible

Age Group
9 – 13

Materials
- Drawing materials (pencils, markers, paper, etc.)
- Means for showing video clips
- Visual Communication activity
  - Brown grocery bags
  - Copies of the Picture Dictionary and Symbols (located in Appendix A)
- Totem Pole Craft
  - Empty towel paper rolls
  - Feathers, beads, misc. decorations
  - Printed animals, magazines or blank paper for drawing

Background
The goal of this lesson is for youth to understand the concepts of culture and develop an appreciation for cultures different from their own. This begins with acknowledgement of their
own culture’s values, beliefs and traditions, which will provide a foundation to build upon when discussing and analyzing the ways of other cultures from around the world. It is suggested that facilitators utilize the Who Am I? lesson to create a strong foundation of cultural knowledge while examining the practices and beliefs of their own culture before learning about others.

In this lesson, youth will examine the common cultural practices of Native Americans. We will look at the history, way of life, and present day practices of the Native American tribes. It is important to teach our youth about the history of our country and who occupied it before Christopher Columbus stumbled upon North American land. Because they will have preexisting beliefs based on their experiences, they should be reminded to keep an open mind – there is no one way or right way of doing something.

**Vocabulary**
Culture: goes beyond characteristics, customs, traditions, artifacts and institutions. It is also a collective way of being, thinking, valuing the past, present and future, reasoning, problem solving, and relating to others (Mestenhauser, 1998).

**Procedures**
**Pre-Activity** (optional)
There is a Native American word search in Appendix A that you can use as participants arrive or if there is any down time.

**Overview** (5 minutes)
Open with an overview of the workshop and introduce the key vocabulary word: culture. Ask participants to brainstorm and share with the group what they already know or think about culture before you give them the formal definition. Emphasize that culture is not always tangible items like art, jewelry, artifacts, etc. Culture is also in our thinking, including what we believe and value. Be sure to explain that when talking about culture, we often group members of a geographic location together, but not all individuals within a society share the same culture. For example, it is easy to group all individuals living in the United States together in one overarching culture. However, we know that there are many different cultures in the United States; we do not all have the same values, beliefs or ways of living. One example of a very distinct culture that lives in the United States is the Native Americans, which this lesson will examine further.

**Opening Activity** (15 minutes)
Ask the participants who discovered the land of which we live in today. Chances are, they’ll almost immediately respond with “Christopher Columbus in 1492.” If this is their response,
explain to them that while he did come to this land in 1492, there were people who had been living here for thousands of years before he came. Now ask the participants if they can think of what we refer to this group as. Hopefully they will respond with “Native Americans” or “Indians,” though the latter is not necessarily politically correct.

Explain that when we think of Native Americans, we often think of the very unique names they used to call themselves; for example, Red Cloud, Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, etc. At this point, the participants can begin thinking of things that describe them (i.e. quiet, courageous, kind, determined, outgoing, etc.). Have them choose one and then pair it with an animal or part of nature. This will be their Native American name for the day. Have them write it on a nametag and decorate accordingly. If time allows, go around the room and have the participants explain their reasoning behind their name. The purpose of this name activity is for youth to understand why and how names were chosen for Native American individuals in the past and present.

**Native American History** (10 minutes)
To learn about Native American History, you can show the following video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLpAMTZROFY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLpAMTZROFY)

**Visual Communication** (20 minutes)
Today, we use letters to make words and sentences to tell a story or write a letter. Native Americans did not have written communication in the same way as we do today; instead, they used symbols and drawings to tell a story.

Participants will develop their own story and then use symbols and drawings to tell that story. Depending on the age of the group, you may want to provide examples of short stories that they can use for inspiration or use as their story. Once they are ready to create the final visual representation of their story, have them draw it on a brown grocery bag or brown piece of paper. You can even crinkle it to make it look authentic.

Examples of symbols are located in Appendix B. However, feel free to do a Google search of “Native American picture symbols” and you will come up with several examples. Youth should be encouraged to be creative; therefore, they could even come up with their own pictures representing their story.

If time allows, have a few participants share their story.

**Native American Rain Dance** (10 minutes)
(Activity adapted from Olivieri, 2016)
When Native Americans, especially those in the Southwest United States, experienced drought or long periods without any rain, they would sometimes perform a rain dance which was believed to summon the gods to send rain. Participants can gather around in a quiet circle and perform their own rain dance.

1. 1st person begins by rubbing thumb and two fingers back and forth. This is creating a "mist" sound. The next person then begins doing the same thing creating a domino effect. Each person needs to wait his or her turn to PASS the "mist."
2. When the mist returns to the first person, he/she changes to "drizzle" by rubbing palms back and forth. This is passed around the circle the same way.
3. When the "drizzle" comes back, they change to "rain" by patting thighs.
4. When the "rain" comes back, they change to "storm" by stomping feet.
5. After that round, it goes back down the list in reverse order until the storm ends.

**Hunting and Gathering Way of Life** (20 minutes)

Take a few minutes to explain that Native Americans used to live as hunter-gatherers. This means that all of their food was either hunted or gathered. They also moved often. When food ran out in their current location, they would pack up everything and move to a new area to obtain the food there.

Have the participants get into groups of two or three. Their objective is to create a menu that they could serve as a hunter-gatherer. But, here’s the catch: it has to be a balanced meal using the MyPlate criteria. Therefore, there has to be something in each food group.

When they are finished, have them explain their menu and why they chose certain foods. Ask them questions like “In what part of the United States would you need to live to be able to hunt or gather these foods?” and “What would you do in the winter months when food was especially scarce?”

**Totem Pole** (30 minutes)

You can begin this activity by asking the participants if they have ever seen a totem pole. Also ask if they know the reasoning behind why totem poles are created.

Totem poles are symbols and mark the important spirit animals that have great meaning for the individual or group. These spirit animals are thought to guide the person(s) and help them through life. The animals are chosen because of their characteristics or their abilities.

The participants will now get to make their own totem pole that represents them or their family. Have the participants begin making a list of some of the characteristics and traits that
describe them. Have them try to come up with at least five and then choose an animal to match each of the traits. If they describe themselves as smart or intelligent, they may think an owl would be a great representation of that trait as it is believed to be wise.

Depending on their age, they can draw the animals or you may want to provide magazines or printed pictures for them to cut out.

They can then glue the animals onto their empty paper towel roll and add feathers, beads or anything else available to make it even more unique. Once everyone is finished, have a few people share why they chose the certain animals on their totem pole.

**Present Day Life** (5 minutes)
Have the participants watch this short documentary, which looks at the lives of two Native teens and their struggle to choose between the life outside the reservation and the cultural ties they have to their fellow Natives: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u50SGDJce2E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u50SGDJce2E)

**Reflection** (5 minutes)
Take some time to allow the participants to digest the information and reflect on their experiences today. Some questions you may ask are listed below.

**Group Reflection and Application**
1. What did you learn today about Native Americans?
2. What new questions do you have about yourself or others?
3. What did you learn about your own skill in communicating with others?
4. How will you act differently in the future as a result of learning about the Native American culture?

**References**

Developed by Rachel Wonderlich, Iowa 4-H Global Citizenship Intern 2016
Appendix A

Name_____________________________________________________________

Native American Tribes Word Search Puzzle

DIRECTIONS: Look at the list of Native American tribe names below. The list shows the names of 20 of the largest American Indian tribes in the United States today. How many of the 20 American Indian tribe names listed below can you find in the word search puzzle?

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<th>Tribe Names</th>
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C G P G O I L U M B E E E O S V
C H E Y E N N E E K O R E H C
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Appendix B

Google “Native American Symbols” to find many more examples.