

## Native Americans — That’s My Chair!

**CONCEPT:** *Different cultures value things in their environment differently. This lesson introduces students to the concept of differing value systems. It features a clash in value systems that illustrates historical and cultural perspectives that are at odds.*

*This activity is meant to be provocative. Its inclusion here is important since the future of the salmon in the Northwest is a topic of current interest and debate. Also read the student orientation that follows this exercise to the class.*

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the attached orientation to the students while they sit in groups at their tables. Have each group create a name for themselves using the first two letters of their names. (Kim, Jon, LaMar, and Dao might become Kijolada.) The Kijolada group makes up a history in the form of a myth or legend that tells of their arrival in their native land, the landscape, and the uses of their area. Native American students may be able to relate stories they know or have heard from their ancestors.

**EXAMPLE:** *Our people searched for 100 years for the signs contained in the dreams of the first Kijoladas. When they finally found the Wapato flowers by the lakes that steam in the winter, they made their winter homes. They made their summer homes near the waterfall where the salmon rested. Here we have lived for 5,000 years.*

Each group shares the above information with the other groups. Students can include a history of conflict as various boundaries were worked out and also a history of alliances with trading partners.

*The Kijoladas were friends with the Jipecheds, and they traded dried salmon for obsidian and cedar wood.*

Label each of four chairs: Foods, Sacred Places, Winter Homes, and Summer Homes. Students stand at the chair or chairs with one student sitting to show that this area is in use. At least one of the four chairs will remain unoccupied at all times. Food and home sites are seasonal and the people move about through their land use areas. If time permits, a group could reassemble two or three times to show the different configurations of seasonal land use patterns.

The students need to understand that they cannot and do not sell the land that provides them food, they will not sell or rent the land where their ancestors are buried, and they could not sell the places where they live. Even though an area is not occupied or being used at a particular time, it is not “empty.”

The teacher represents the technologically advanced European American newcomers, who bring diseases that will decimate the Native Americans. They intend to own the “New World,” which they believe to be their “Manifest Destiny.” Walk from table to table, ever westward, and “discover” the unused empty lands and resources. Declare them New Lands and name them “New Portland, New Salem, New Gresham”, etc.

As each group protests that it was using a particular chair—that it contains the group’s food, seasonal homes, or contains their ancestors’ graves and sites of religious celebrations—repeatedly ask them to prove “ownership,” not “usership rights.” Regardless of what the group members respond, remind them they lost the war fought with you and your soldiers. Tell them the number of their people has been reduced by 90 percent due to disease, and that your people have already started to live on the lands. The settlers now “own” the lands and will not sell them.

As you “explain” this to your students, remove the labels from more chairs and replace them with signs like Kijolada Lake Hotel, Steaming Hot Springs Ranch, Wapato City, etc. Place one or two of the students representing the 10 percent that have survived war and disease in a chair without a label and hand them a treaty writer in another language, which gives up their claims to their land. Allow the students to write one important clause at the bottom that they will be allowed to fish at their accustomed places. The teacher then signs the treaty.<sup>2</sup>

A variation on this encounter that involves less emotional involvement is to have the students write their history and explain their culture, then listen to three historical models that Northwest Native Americans faced. One, disease wipes out 90 to 100 percent of the group. Two, before disease weakens the group, the group goes to war with the European Americans. Historically, this meant many battles could be won, but *in every case*, a war with the European Americans was lost, often leading to the slaughter of many Indian women and children. Three, either before armed conflict or after armed conflict, the group decides to surrender. The teacher can interpret what the settlement terms have generally meant. Most obvious is surrender of most, if not all, of their lands. What impacts does this have on the culture?

**INQUIRY:** How did the students react to this simulation? Did this experience affect their view of honoring provisions of the treaties? If Native Americans are present in the class, how do they view the reactions to these simulations?

**CONCLUSIONS:** Native Americans have unique historical experiences and value systems. Salmon have a very important place in Native American cultures. Native American concerns over the salmon will affect decision making, theirs is an important voice in deciding the future of the salmon and of the Northwest itself.

<sup>2</sup> The United States entered into some 800 treaties with Indian nations. The United States Senate refused to consider 430 of them for ratification. Provisions of every one of the 370 treaties that were ratified have been violated (see Senator Daniel Inouye’s Guest Editorial in Issue Three of Wana Chinook Tymo, published by the Columbia River Inter Tribal Fish Commission, 1992). Four of the 370 ratified Treaties involved Northwest Indian Tribes.