

ISSUE: Language and Cultural Retention

BACKGROUND: Many indigenous peoples including Native Americans struggle to keep the values and practices of their ways of life from giving way to more pervasive and dominant cultures. Much as parents you may know fear that the “youth culture” and its values may have damaging effects on their children, Native peoples fear that values from other cultures may replace the things that are important in their societies and that are the foundations for effective social and domestic functions. The Reservation Era attempted to assimilate American Indians into European ways of thought and living, but Native peoples were not easily torn from their traditional lifestyles. Today many tribes struggle to maintain their languages and traditional cultural practices and many of them are heavily investing in language and culture retention and revitalization projects.

EXAMPLE LESSONS:

Title: Language Immersion

Standard: 1.) describe major changes in a local area that have been caused by human beings and analyze the probable effects on the community and environment. 2.) analyze how human settlement patterns create cooperation and conflict which influence the division and control of the Earth. 3.) describe and compare how people create places that reflect culture, human needs, government policy, and current values and ideas as they design and build. 4.) interpret how selected cultures, historical events, periods, and patterns of change influence each other. 5.) apply ideas, theories, and methods of inquiry to analyze historical and contemporary developments, and to formulate and defend reasoned decisions on public policy issues.

Grade Level: can be adapted for 4th, 8th, or 11th grades.

Lesson: The students will listen to an audio program aired on Nation Public Radio that presents a journalists report of the Blackfeet immersion programs taking place in Browning, Montana. It would be wise, especially for younger classes, to do a class dictionary search for a couple of key words such as immersion, eradicate, and other words (per grade level) that you feel may be unfamiliar (preview audio program). The effectiveness of the lesson might also be enhanced by having a short class discussion about ideas such as traditions, values, language retention programs, identity, and/or assimilation.

1. Go to <http://discover.npr.org/features/feature.jhtml/wfld=1034682>. This will take you to the audio program “All Things Considered” which aired the program “Blackfeet Immersion” on June 19, 1998. The broadcast lasts about 7 minutes.
2. Encourage students to take notes on the program. For younger students teachers might consider developing a few headings to help students organize their notes in web or outline formats. OR possibly a better option for focusing students’ attention might be to provide questions in a quiz format prior to beginning the audio segment, allowing them to listen for the answers as the program is being aired.

3. After the program is aired engage the class in a discussion about how immersion programs like this have affected the lives of the children they heard on the program. What do the children at the immersion school get out of their special classes? Why do their parents want them to participate in the immersion school? What do people in the community hope for the students who attend the immersion school? What possible effect could 19 kids have for this tribe?

Assessment: Notes and/or quiz can assess students listening and comprehension. Class discussion can be used to assess student analysis and processing methods.