
Native Americans: Myths & Realities

Video Length: 4:52

Lesson Description:

Were Native Americans truly peaceful? Did they live in perfect harmony with nature? This video challenges some of the myths often taught about Native American history, explores how misconceptions have spread through textbooks, social media, and popular culture, and reveals a balanced, more complex reality of Native American history.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- identify common myths about Native Americans
- evaluate how romanticized narratives have influenced perceptions and understanding of Native American history and culture
- discuss the importance of teaching a more balanced perspective of Native American history

Concepts & Key Terms:

Atrocity: an extremely cruel or violent act, often involving physical harm.

Cult-like: having excessive admiration or devotion to an idea, similar to the way followers of a cult behave.

Jingoistic: excessive bias in judging one's own country; extremely patriotic in a way that is aggressive and often favors war or conflict.

Myth: a widely held but false belief, often used to simplify complex truths.

Romanticize: to present something in an idealized or overly positive way, ignoring its flaws or complexities.

Preview Activity:

Use Think, Pair, Share to have students answer and discuss these two questions:

1. How do you think textbooks shape our understanding of history?
2. Why might it be important to question the way history is presented to us?

OR

Distribute copies of the K-W-L worksheet to the class. Have students fill in the K and W sections. After showing the video, have students complete the L section and answer the questions at the bottom of the worksheet.

Viewing Guide:

We recommend that teachers show the video twice: first to allow students to view the video and focus on the issues presented, and second to allow them time to complete the viewing guide. After they complete the viewing guide, allow students a few minutes to work in pairs to share and verify answers.

Answers to Viewing Guide

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1. use | 3. skulls | 5. poverty |
| 2. slaves | 4. unique | |

Native Americans: Myths & Realities

Viewing Guide

Name _____ Date _____

Class _____ Per _____ Teacher _____

Directions: As you watch the video, fill in the blanks with the correct words.

1. Native Americans lived in harmony with nature. There was love of every form of life. They didn't kill anything they couldn't _____.
2. Today students are rarely taught that Natives also took _____ and considered them "objects of wealth."
3. In the Aztec capital, there were ninety-foot towers of human _____ that were brought back from their defeated enemies.
4. I think the people who teach these myths mean well. They want minorities to feel included, but teachers should at least also teach that America's sins were not _____, that just about every society had slavery, cruel wars, environmental destruction.
5. Most of the world is getting better! And the much-maligned capitalist countries now are largely responsible for lifting people out of _____ and protecting the environment. They ought to teach that!

Take a few moments to reflect on the video and answer these questions.

Why might the idea of Native Americans living in harmony with nature appeal to people today? _____

Why is it important to question the way history is presented to us? _____

Discussion and Analysis

1. What are some of the myths about Native Americans mentioned in the video? What else about Native Americans do you recall hearing?
2. How did the video describe the way Native Americans interacted with the environment?
3. Why do you think people believe the romanticized version of Native American history?
4. How did social media contribute to spreading myths about Native Americans?
5. How does the video challenge the idea that Native Americans were perfect stewards of nature?
6. Why might the idea of Native Americans living in harmony with nature be appealing to people today?
7. How did the government's curriculum guides contribute to false ideas about Native Americans?
8. How do the myths about Native Americans compare to myths about other historical figures or cultures?
9. What impact could these myths have on our understanding of Native American history?
10. How might teaching a romanticized version of history affect the way we see Native Americans today?
11. What arguments does the video present against the idea that Native Americans were always peaceful and harmonious?
12. Why is it important to have a balanced understanding of history, including Native American history?
13. How can we ensure that the history students are taught is accurate and fair to all cultures? What constitutes "fair"?
14. What lessons can we learn from this video about questioning historical narratives?
15. Who decides what history is and what it isn't? How is it decided?
16. Who owns history—that is, to whom does it belong?

Discuss These Lines from the Video:

We've gone into almost this cult-like romanticization of the Natives who were great warriors and poets but who hunted buffalo by driving the herds of them off of one-hundred-foot tall cliffs.

Native Americans lived in harmony with nature. There was love of every form of life. They didn't kill anything they could not use.

Textbooks ignored Columbus's brutality and enslavement of Indians.

Today students are rarely taught that natives also took slaves and considered them "objects of wealth."

Giant forest fires. You're burning alive hundreds of thousands of small animals, slower running deer. You're probably killing members of other tribes. You're modifying the environment more bluntly.

But teachers should at least also teach that America's sins were not unique, that just about every society had slavery, cruel wars, environmental destruction

The much-maligned capitalist countries now lead the world in lifting people out of poverty and protecting the environment.

The morality of today didn't exist anywhere in the world until about 60 years ago.

Quotes for Discussion:

History is a narrative; it's a collection of stories sanctioned by the ruling power and reinforced through words and images that suit them. – Ken Monkman

That hand is not the color of yours, but if I prick it, the blood will flow, and I shall feel pain. The blood is of the same color as yours. God made me, and I am a Man. – Standing Bear

The past in the hands of historians is not what it was. – Lynn White, Jr.

Education has failed in a very serious way to convey the most important lesson science can teach: skepticism. – David Suzuki

If you want the present to be different from the past, study the past. – Baruch Spinoza

If history belongs to the winners, legend belongs to the losers. – Mark Bulik

The antidote to feel-good history is not feel-bad history but honest and inclusive history. – James W. Loewen

Skepticism is a virtue in history as well as in philosophy. – Napoleon Bonaparte

I would encourage us all, African Americans, Asians, Latinos, Whites, Native Americans to study history. I long for the time when all the human history is taught as one history. I am stronger because you are stronger. I am weaker if you are weak. So we are more alike than we are unlike. – Maya Angelou

Activities:

1. Have students complete the K-W-L chart in class or for homework. (Recall that the K and W sections are to be completed before watching the video and the L section after watching the video.)
2. Have students complete the political cartoon activity in class or for homework.
3. Have students complete the PMI chart in class or for homework.
4. Have students complete the CER (Claim, Evidence, Response) graphic organizer in class or for homework.
5. Have students complete and submit the Exit Ticket as they leave class.
6. Have students work individually or in small groups to create a two-column chart, listing myths about Native Americans on one side and the corresponding realities from the video on the other.
7. In pairs, have students choose one Native American tribe and research their real history, and compare it with the romanticized version often taught. They should report their findings to the class via a poster or slide show.
8. Conduct a classroom debate. Divide the class into two groups. One group argues that romanticizing history is harmful, while the other argues that it serves a positive purpose. This allows students to evaluate different perspectives critically.
9. Have students research to fact-check one of the myths discussed in the video, and then write a short essay that using at least two credible sources.
10. Have students write a brief essay comparing how Native Americans were portrayed in a popular movie, book, or textbook, with the information presented in the video, highlighting differences and similarities.
11. In small groups, have students discuss the provocative lines from the video. Students should take turns sharing their thoughts, ensuring that everyone has a chance to participate and voice their opinions.
12. Have students choose one of the vocabulary words from the lesson and write a short paragraph about how it relates to the video's content, reinforcing their understanding of key terms.
13. Have students work in groups to analyze how different forms of media (movies, TV shows, books) portray Native American history. Then, they should create a presentation highlighting the inaccuracies they find and suggesting ways to improve the portrayal.
14. In pairs, students should select one of the provocative lines from the video and analyze what it means, why it's controversial, and how it relates to the larger themes. They should then present their analysis to the class.

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

Native Americans: Myths & Realities PMI Chart

P = Plus: What might be some positive effects of romanticizing the history of Native Americans?

M = Minus: What might be some negative effects of romanticizing the history of Native Americans?

I = Interesting: What is interesting about romanticizing the history of Native Americans?

+ Plusses +	- Minuses -	I

How might teaching a romanticized version of history affect the way we see Native Americans today? _____

Is it important to have a factual, balanced understanding of history, including Native American history? _____ Why / Why not?

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

Native Americans: Myths & Realities K-W-L Chart

Directions: Complete the **K** and **W** sections prior to watching the video. After you have seen the video, complete the **L** section and answer the questions below the K-W-L chart.

K	W	L
What I know about myths relating to Native Americans...	What I want to know about myths relating to Native Americans...	What I've learned about myths relating to Native Americans...

Why do you think people believe the romanticized version of Native American history? _____

How do the myths about Native Americans compare to myths about other historical figures or cultures? _____

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____

Teacher _____

Native Americans: Myths & Realities

Claim-Evidence-Reasoning Activity

Claim: What is the claim from this video you are evaluating?

Evidence: What evidence is presented (or can you find) in support of the claim?

Reasoning: How does the evidence support or dispute the claim?

5 Steps to Verify Information

1. Evaluate the Source

- Check the credibility of the source. Is it a well-known and respected outlet? Look for information about the author and the organization's reputation.



2. Cross-Check Information

- Verify the facts by comparing them with multiple reputable sources. See if other reliable sources are reporting the same information.



3. Check for Bias

- Assess the content for any potential bias. Look for loaded language or one-sided arguments. Consider the source's potential motives or interests.



4. Examine the Evidence

- Look for supporting evidence, such as data, expert quotes, and references. Reliable information will be backed by verifiable facts and sources.



5. Verify Dates and Context

- Ensure the information is current and relevant. Check the publication date and consider the context in which the information was presented.

Name

Admit One

What's the harm in teaching romanticized versions of history?

Admit One

EXIT TICKET

Name

Admit One

What's the harm in teaching romanticized versions of history?

Admit One

EXIT TICKET

Name

Admit One

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Admit One

EXIT TICKET

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

Native Americans: Myths & Realities

Political Cartoon Activity

Directions: Use the political cartoon to answer the questions.



How does this cartoon challenge the romanticized idea that Native Americans were always peaceful and harmonious? _____

Why might some people find this cartoon controversial or uncomfortable, and how does that relate to the myths addressed in the video? _____

How does the cartoon help us understand that Native American societies, like all societies, had both positive and negative aspects? _____
