

Weaving the Future, Confronting the Past

Mini-Lesson 2: Native Healing and Resistance Through Art

LESSON OVERVIEW

Time: 1 Class Period (50 minutes)

Content Level: Grades 8-12

Aligned Standards: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6-12.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.4,6,9

Summary: *This lesson is meant to supplement Lesson 1: Introduction to the California Indian Genocide.* In this mini-lesson, through an interactive analysis of Native art pieces, students will explore Native Art as a form of healing and resistance against erasure as a result of the California Indian Genocide.

Essential Questions:

How do Native artists use art to respond to the California Indian Genocide?

How does their work symbolize acts of resistance?

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will begin to comprehend how art can serve as a form of resistance, preserving culture, challenging dominant narratives, and advocating for justice.
2. Students will compare and contrast different artistic responses from various Native communities or tribes, understanding the diverse ways in which they addressed the genocide.
3. Students will reflect on the emotional depth and resilience depicted in the artwork, fostering empathy and a deeper appreciation for the lived experiences of Native communities.

Materials:

- California Native Arts [Google Slides](#) OR large sticky poster paper and printed images
- **About the Artists** packet
- Personal computers
- Internet access

TEACHER BACKGROUND:

Preparing to Teach: Understanding Resistance through the lens of California Native Art

Central to understanding the significance of Native art in the aftermath of the California Indian Genocide is recognizing its role in challenging and rewriting dominant narratives. Dominant narratives are the stories told and retold by the majority or those in power, often overshadowing and sometimes even distorting minority voices. In the context of the California Indian Genocide, the dominant narrative might have painted a picture of 'progress', 'expansion', or the 'taming of the wild west', while in reality, it involved grave atrocities, cultural erasure, and forced assimilations.

Art has historically been a potent medium to counter such narratives. Through vivid visuals, symbolic motifs, and emotion-laden compositions, Native art brings forth the raw truths, lived experiences, and profound resilience of Indigenous communities. These artworks serve as a window into the heart and soul of a community that has experienced unspeakable pain yet has risen with undying spirit.

By exploring these art pieces, students can discern the stark contrast between the sanitized or glorified versions of history that are often found in textbooks and the visceral, intimate truths portrayed by the Native artists. Every piece of art is a declaration, a voice that says, "We are here, we remember, and this is our story."

As educators, when introducing students to this art, it is essential to frame it not just as counter-narratives but as integral narratives. These are not 'alternative' histories but are as central to understanding California's history as any other account. Through this lens, students learn to question, critically analyze, and most importantly, listen to multiple voices, fostering a more inclusive, holistic, and empathetic understanding of history.

As you introduce your students to each art piece, encourage them to not only analyze the art from an aesthetic standpoint but also to understand the emotion, history, and message behind each stroke, color, and motif. Remind them that each art piece is not just an object of beauty, but a testament to the spirit of a people who refused to be silenced. Through this lesson, the aim is not just to educate students about a historical event but to cultivate empathy, understanding, and a deep appreciation for the resilience of California Natives and a rich cultural legacy.

By examining this art, you and your students will be able to witness firsthand the narratives that were almost lost to the history textbooks due to the attempted

extermination of California Indians. The art pieces featured in this lesson directly challenge dominant narratives, offering an authentic recounting of experiences that mainstream history often overlooks.

Here are some additional resources for you to explore as you prepare to teach this lesson:

- [When I Remember I See Red](#): An online exhibition at the Autry Museum of the American West featuring Native California artists who have used their work as a means of cultural resistance and renewal.
- Read more about the power of Native art in a [blog](#) on “The Iridescence of Knowing,” an exhibit at Oxy Arts in Los Angeles, CA.
- Check out Redbud’s blog on local community art, [Positive Native Visibility: Pomo Project and Artstart Mural at Elsie Allen High School](#).
- Facing History’s [Art, Imagination, and the Quest for Racial Justice](#) mini-lesson

LESSON DIRECTIONS

Part 1

Native Art “Big Paper” Activity

TIME FRAME: 35 minutes

1. **PREP:** Make a copy of the CA Native Arts Google Slides for each class session that you teach this lesson.
NOTE: Alternatively, you can print out these [images](#) and glue them onto big sticky paper. Read more about the [“Big Paper” Activity](#) on Facing History and Ourselves’ website.
2. Provide students with their class period’s link to the California Native Arts Google Slides.
3. Break students up into 5 groups and assign each group an art piece.
4. In groups, have students discuss the following questions:
 - a. What do you notice? What are your initial reactions, feelings, thoughts?
 - b. What aspects of this art piece stand out to you?
 - c. What do you think is the focal point of the piece?
 - d. Why do you think the artist wanted to draw your attention there?
 - e. What do you wonder about any of the details included in this piece?
 - f. What historical event might have influenced this piece?

5. Then, provide students the **Native Art Descriptions packet** and instruct students to read the background information provided on their piece (also located in the speaker notes of **Slides 9, 11, 13, 15 and 17 of the Google slides**)
6. Have students record their responses to the following questions (also located on **Slides 10, 12, 14, 16, and 18**):
 - a. How has your initial response changed now that you have a little more context?
 - b. How might the personal experiences of the artist contribute to this piece?
 - c. Why might this piece have significance to California Native communities today?
 - d. In what ways can this piece of art be seen as an act of resistance against the attempted genocide of California Indians?
7. Come back together as a class and give each group time to share their assigned piece and final analyses.
8. Allow other students to interact by sharing their thoughts and asking questions about each piece.
9. Students should use their analyses to compare and contrast the various Tribal responses to the genocide through each piece of art.

Part 2

Reflection

TIME FRAME: 15 minutes

10. Write up on the board the following quote by Nompitom Wintu artist Frank LaPena:
"I believe that art is one answer to preventing the emptiness that the loss of culture or the indifference of society will impose. We are still alive."
11. Think-Pair-Share on 3-5 of these questions:
 - What do you think the author means by "art is one answer"?
 - How can art play a role in preserving or rejuvenating a culture?
 - In what ways might the loss of culture lead to "emptiness"?
 - How does this quote highlight the resilience and resistance of the California Indian communities?
 - Why might it be significant for the author to state, "We are still alive"?
 - How does society's indifference affect a community's culture and identity?
 - In what ways might creating art have provided a form of healing or coping for Native individuals and communities?

- Are there elements in the artwork that suggest hope, renewal, or rebirth?
- Can you think of other ways communities have used art or other forms of expression to cope with trauma or loss?
- How does creating or appreciating art help you connect with your own heritage or culture?
- How can one help to prevent the erasure of important cultural memories and histories?
- How might this quote relate to other events or situations, either historically or in contemporary times?

Extension ideas:

1. Pair this lesson with Redbud's Native Art Curation video. For teaching tips check out this [blog!](#)
2. Have students create their own piece of art as a mode of resistance to violent [settler colonialism](#), **OR**
 - a. Personal reflection: Have students think about a cause they're passionate about and create their own piece of resistance art.
 - b. Hold a Gallery Walk or Presentation Day!
3. Music as resistance art: Have students research songs written by Native artists and present their findings to the class.
4. Memes as resistance: Have students research memes created as Native responses to modern day injustices and present findings back to the class.
5. Memory Boxes: Using small wooden or cardboard boxes, students can fill them with symbols, small artifacts, and written words that represent the stories and experiences of the California Indians.
6. Interactive Timeline: Co-create a large mural-sized timeline where students contribute illustrations, quotes, and artifacts at specific dates, showing the progression and impact over time.

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