

Unit Essential Questions:

1. What is cultural erasure and how does it impact communities?
2. Who should tell our stories, and why does it matter?

Lesson 3: Historical Case Study: Ishi

LESSON INTRODUCTION

Time Frame: 90 minutes

Materials: Slideshow, CIMCC Ishi reading packet

In this lesson, students explore a specific case study that highlights the **erasure** of Native people. Specifically, students learn about the ways in which settler bias has shaped the way that non Native people perceive Native people.

For centuries, academics in the Western world went to great lengths to dehumanize Indigenous peoples. Comparing indigenous people to animals, or even to children in need of “saving”, became a way to justify the violence inflicted on Native communities. In this lesson, students explore the way in which Ishi, a Yahi man, was treated by anthropologists from UC Berkeley as well as journalists, in the early 20th century, and compare the Native perspective to the dominant, settler narrative.

To learn more about Ishi, in preparation for teaching this lesson, visit: [CIMCC ISHI EXHIBIT](#)

ENGAGE

Teacher Directions: Ask students to complete a journal entry, answering the questions featured on **slide 4**:

1. What does the word “civilization” mean? What does it mean to be civilized?
2. Is there only one way to be civilized?

Discussion Tips:

Try to challenge students’ perception of being “civilized.” In the United States, many people assume that living a life that reflects the cultural norms of the dominant group is “civilized.” Additionally, many tend to favor the cultural norms of settler/colonizer communities over Indigenous communities in general, without much thought over the intrinsic value of settler culture as opposed to Indigenous culture.

EXPLORE

Teacher Directions:

Review the definition of **erasure** and **cultural erasure** on **slide 5/slide 6** with students.

You may want to tap into students' prior knowledge by asking what they remember from Lesson 2: What were some movements and decisions that were made by settlers in order to assimilate and/or erase Native peoples?

Erasure: The act of removing something from a place.

Cultural Erasure: When an entire community's existence, culture, values, and voice are absent or not recognized by the general public.

Explain that cultural erasure also happens when people from one culture misunderstand or mischaracterize another culture. This mischaracterization is a form of cultural erasure because it presents cultures in ways that are inaccurate, and potentially rooted in stereotypes.

Introduction to Ishi: **Slide 7**

With students, read **pg. 3 of CIMCC's introduction to Ishi's life.**

Discuss:

1. What surprised you?
2. What questions do you have?

Additional questions:

1. Why do you think academics said that Ishi was the last Yahi"? Is this true?

Photo Timeline:

Show students each photograph of Ishi, on **slide 8.**

Discuss:

1. What do you notice as you look at these photos?
2. What questions do you have?

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3. Do you notice any signs of cultural erasure?

Discussion Tips:

Students will note that Ishi's style and clothing change throughout his life. They might ask whether he was comfortable, or whether he wanted to change his looks and behavior. It is important to note that Ishi did not have the ability or power to reject the settler anthropologists who wanted to study him. Because he was alone, Native, and vulnerable, he did not have a real choice.

EXPLAIN

Teacher Directions:

Ishi: A Man of Dignity: **Slide 9**

1. Read **pg. 4-9 of CIMCC's introduction to Ishi's life.**

Discuss:

1. How was Ishi treated by settlers in California?
 - a. Was he treated like a human? Like an animal? What does this tell us about how Native people were understood by settlers?
2. Why were settlers interested in Ishi?
3. Are there any connections to the "Myth of Inevitable Extinction?" from **Lesson 2**
4. What does Ishi's story tell us about power? What does his story tell us about the ways in which humans justify violence against others?

ELABORATE

Teacher Directions:

Who Tells the Native Story: **Slide 10**

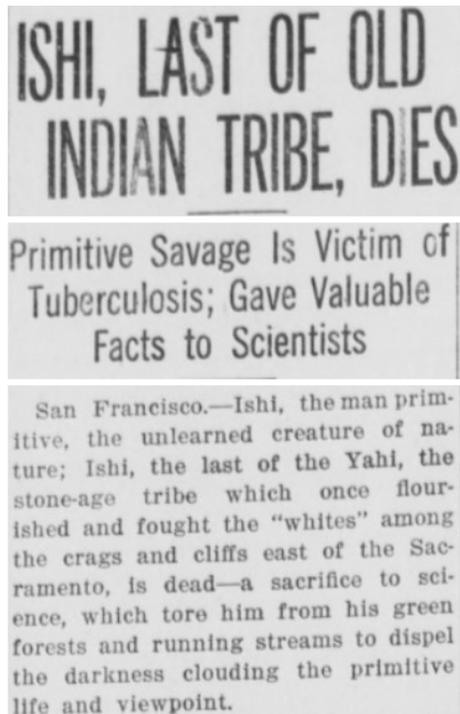
Explain to students that they will have the chance to compare Native and non Native perspectives on Ishi's life, noticing the differing purposes, bias, and impact of each.

As students compare the examples, ask the following questions:

1. Who is the target audience of the source?
2. What is the tone of the example?
3. What message is the example sending about Native peoples?
4. What do you think the impact of the source is on Native and non Native communities?

Slide 11:

Example 1: Sausalito News, Volume 32, Number 14 April 1, 1916



Text:

ISHI, LAST OF OLD INDIAN TRIBE, DIES

Primitive Savage Is Victim of Tuberculosis; Gave Valuable Facts to Scientists

San Francisco.- ■ "Ishi. the man primitive, unlearned creature of nature; Ishi, the last of the Yahi, the stone-age tribe which once flourished and fought the "whites" among the crags and cliffs east of the Sacramento- is dead- a sacrifice to science, which tore him from his green forests and running streams to dispel the darkness clouding the primitive life and viewpoint."

Slide 12:

Example 2: Native community members, California Indian Museum and Cultural Center, Ishi: A Story of Dignity, Hope and Courage

<http://cimcc.org/education-center/audio-visual-materials/>

Slide 13:

Example 3: California Newspaper Chico Record, May 19, 1914

ISHI RETURNS TO NATIVE WILD WITH MODERNS AS PUPILS

"Ishi. the one-time uncontaminated man, who has sojourned long at the Affiliated Colleges In one capacity and another, has returned to the wilds, says the Oakland Tribune. With the primitive man. into the unsettled space of Tehama county went two highly evolved moderns, men of science. The trio will hunt game, large and small, over the rock-strewn and brush-grown hills and through woodland regions once roamed by Ishi's ancestors when the lost tribe was numerous. In the wilds to which they have gone, Ishi is to become the instructor....

The two men of science aspire to become the peers of Ishi in the use of bow and arrow, the shaping of flints and the building of fires without the aid of the convenient little sulphur stick or patent lighter. Into the former haunts of his lost tribe, of which he supposed to be the sole surviving member. Ishi will lead the two students of wild life, whom he is to teach the ways of the world of ancient ages, and which Ishi's people never outgrew. Just how primitive the two men of science expect to become has not been revealed."

Slide 14:

Example 4: Native community members, California Indian Museum and Cultural Center, Ishi: A Story of Dignity, Hope and Courage

<http://cimcc.org/education-center/audio-visual-materials/>

Slide 15:

Synthesis questions:

1. How can an author's point of view change the message of a text?
2. What are some differences in the way Native people describe Ishi, as opposed to western anthropologists? Why do these differences exist?
3. Is it important for communities to be able to tell their own stories? Why or why not?

Discussion Tips:

It is important to let students explore the power dynamic that existed between anthropologists and Native people during this time. Likewise, students will be able to make connections between the Myth of Inevitable Extinction and the anthropological sources provided. These observations can be used to facilitate a conversation about the dehumanization of Native people, and the lengths that settlers might go to in order to characterize Natives as "uncivilized."

Slide 16:

Extra:

Watch the following Ted Talk and discuss the benefits of having Natives tell their own stories.

b. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JcKbN_GjCE

EVALUATE

Teacher Directions:

Ask students to write in their journals, reflecting on the following questions:

1. How can telling our own stories help combat **erasure**?

VOCABULARY

bias- prejudice; favoring one person or point of view more than others

point of view- a particular way of considering a matter; the position from which an event or topic is observed

implicit- suggested or assumed but not obvious or explicitly stated

anthropology- the academic study of cultures and their development over time

settler- a person who lives in a place other than their ancestral homeland

dehumanize- deprive of positive human qualities.

STANDARDS

Common Core:

Essential Understanding 5 - There were many federal policies put into place throughout American history that have affected Indian people and still shape who they are today. Many of these policies conflicted with one another. Much of Indian history can be related through several major federal policy periods: Colonization/Colonial Period 1492 – 1800s; Treaty Period 1789 – 1871; Assimilation Period - Allotment and Boarding School 1879 – 1934; Tribal Reorganization Period 1934 – 1958; Termination and Relocation Period 1953 – 1971; Self-determination Period 1968 – Present.

Essential Understanding 6 - History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from an Indian perspective frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

SOURCES

Native American Almanac

Ishi in Two Worlds, Theodora Kroeber

UCR: Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research

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Sausalito News, Volume 32, Number 14, April 1916, Edition 02

Chico Record, Number 118, 19 May 1914

CIMCC Exhibit: <http://cimcc.org/education-center/audio-visual-materials/>

Ted Talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JcKbN_GjCE

Calisphere.org- Photo Archives