



Grade Level: 9-12
Subject: ELA

Exploring Native American Poetry

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- History
- Identity
- Lifeways
- Language

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will be able to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the rich tradition of verse that exists within Indigenous cultures across North America.
- Students will be able to identify and analyze poems from a variety of tribal nations to gain insights into the unique perspectives and experiences that shape these communities over time.
- Students will be able to demonstrate critical reading and analysis skills through an annotation and reflection activity.
- Students will appreciate and respect Native American culture and traditions.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES

- Higher level thinking: analyzing
- Preserving and honoring cultural history
- Student talk, working together and individually

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed on their participation in the class discussion and their written response to the poetry.

Overview

In this lesson, students will explore the rich tradition of verse that exists within Indigenous cultures across North America. By examining poems from a variety of tribal nations, students will gain a deeper understanding of the unique perspectives and experiences that have shaped these communities over time. Through an annotation and reflection activity, students will not only deepen their appreciation of Native American culture, but will also develop their critical reading and analysis skills.

MATERIALS

- [Native Poem Examples](#)
- [Poem Annotation Guide](#)
- Writing Utensils
- Whiteboard and Markers (optional)
- Paper

LOGISTICS

- Where does this activity take place?
Classroom
- How are the students organized?

Whole Class Teams: 3-5

Pairs **Individually**

TIME REQUIRED

~90 minutes

STANDARDS

Oregon Common Core State Standards: ELA-LITERACY

9-10.RL.1 Analyze what the text says explicitly as well as inferentially; cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support the analysis.

9-10.RL.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details. Provide an evidence-based summary of the text.

9-10.RL.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze word choice and the impact on meaning.

9-10.RL.5 Analyze the impact of author's choices concerning how to structure and develop a text, such as how to order events within it to advance the plot or theme, manipulate time, and situate within a social, cultural, and/or historical context.

9-10.RL.6 Analyze a perspective, point of view, or cultural experience in works that draw on a wide range of world literature across time and location, including consideration of which perspectives are represented and which are absent.

9-10.RL.7 Compare and contrast the representation of a subject or a key scene in multiple artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each.

9-10.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

11-12.RL.1 Analyze what the text says explicitly as well as inferentially, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain; cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis. Identify areas where the text leaves ideas unclear or unexplored.

11-12.RL.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account. Provide an evidence-based summary of the text that includes analysis.

11-12.RL.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative, connotative and technical meanings; analyze the impact of word choice on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings.

11-12.RL.5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

11-12.RL.6 Analyze a case in which grasping point of view, or understanding a perspective or cultural experience requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant.

11-12.RL.9 Demonstrate knowledge of a range of texts within the same time periods by authors from the Americas, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics from multiple perspectives.

11-12.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Background for Teachers

- [Native American Heritage Month | Academy of American Poets](#)
- [Native American Poetry and Culture](#)
- [Native American Heritage Month: Poems for Kids](#)
- [Celebrating Native American Heritage and Culture | Poetry Out Loud](#)

Opening

- Begin by asking students if they have ever read or heard any Native American poetry.
- Encourage discussion and ask if they can remember any of the literary devices or themes used in the poetry.

Activity

1. **Introduction to Native American Poetry (10 minutes):** Provide a brief overview of Native American poetry and its significance in Native American culture. Introduce some examples of Native American poetry and display them on the board.
 - a. Show students a quote by Joy Harjo, "*The literature of the aboriginal people of North America defines America. It is not exotic. The concerns are particular, yet often universal.*"
 - b. Ask students - What do you think Joy Harjo means by this quote? Discuss student responses.
 - c. Read the following overview to students:

"Each Native American tribe has its own unique language and traditions. However, some aspects of Indigenous culture are shared among tribes in North America. These include a deep reverence for the land, prioritizing the importance of family and working together to provide for basic needs, and participating in ceremonies to connect with the spirit world and celebrate life's cycles. These themes are reflected in the poetry of Native American writers and offer an insight into the rich cultural heritage of indigenous communities that have inhabited North America for thousands of years.

Native American poetry often represents a unique blend of art, culture, and language that is distinct and different from other types of literature. The importance of these poems can be seen in their ability to tell stories, express the pain and struggles of Native American history, and celebrate the beauty of their traditions and cultures. Through these works, students can learn about the traditions and beliefs of these communities, and appreciate their contributions to literature and society. Studying Native American poetry is a crucial part of understanding the diverse perspectives and cultures that make up our global community.

Poetry has been a part of Native American culture for centuries and continues to evolve today. Contemporary Native American poets are influenced by both their traditional poetry and culture as well as modern issues and experiences. Traditional Native American poetry was usually spoken rather than written. It included songs like lullabies, love songs, and war cries, as well as poems embedded in storytelling. Ritual poems were also used during ceremonies for healing, political purposes, or to appeal to a deity."

Activity cont.

1. **Guided reading and analysis of poetry** (45 minutes): Provide students with handouts of the selected Native American poetry. Have them read and annotate the poems, looking for recurring themes, literary devices, and any historical or cultural references.
2. **Class discussion** (15 minutes): Facilitate a group discussion about the poems. Encourage students to share their own interpretations and ask questions about the themes and literary devices. Ask students to identify any similarities or differences between the different poems. Students can answer aloud or using whiteboards.
3. **Writing activity** (20 minutes): Have students write a response to one of the poems. They can choose to focus on the themes, literary devices, or historical context. Encourage them to use evidence to support their claims.

Closure

- As a class, summarize the key themes and literary devices found in Native American poetry. Remind students of the importance of understanding and appreciating diverse cultures through literature.

Differentiation

- Provide support for non-native English speakers and students with learning disabilities by providing a simplified version of the poems and vocabulary terms.
- Allow students to work in pairs or small groups to discuss the poems and share their interpretations.

Extension

- **Research Project:** Students can choose a specific Indigenous poet and research their life and work. They can then create a presentation or write a paper to share their findings with the class. This activity would allow them to delve deeper into one poet's life and work and gain a better understanding of the complexities of Indigenous identities.
- **Cross Cultural Comparison:** Students can compare Indigenous poetry to poetry from another culture, such as African American, Latino/a, or Asian American. They can analyze the similarities and differences in themes, style, and representation, and explore how these poetic traditions interact with each other. This activity would allow students to gain a broader and more complex understanding of the intersection of cultures.

Notes/Other

Jan Michael Looking Wolf's or Grand Ronde Canoe Family audio tracks can be played as background music while students are working. These audio tracks can be found on Spotify or Apple Music.

Jan Michael Looking Wolf: [Spotify](#) and [Apple Music](#)

Grand Ronde Canoe Family: [Spotify](#) and [Apple Music](#)

Appendix

- Native Poem Examples:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WnKTXRFQJicVQTnuwKuMY7fszrSzQ6q0/view?usp=sharing>
- Poem Annotation Guide:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Dpd72fbWM7ysFoBvF0k7puSPITebABCn/view?usp=sharing>