



LESSON PLAN 2: Fashionably Indian: Fetishizing, stereotyping, and appropriating Indigenous traditions

TRADITIONAL TERRITORY STATEMENT: We would like to acknowledge that Dawson College is located on the traditional territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk) people. Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples.

This series of lesson plans aims to familiarize students with First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities in Canada. Each lesson explores a different facet of contemporary Indigeneity, and includes resources by Indigenous voices. Students are invited to confront and unpack stereotypes and develop a clearer understanding of what it means to be Indigenous and an Indigenous ally in this country. The lessons in this series recognize and honour the histories, traumas and strengths of today's Indigenous communities, presenting them in accessible, engaging ways. They are meant to be an inspiring starting point that encourages educators and students to ask more questions and explore different hands-on learning activities that can put the lessons' information into practice. The possibilities are endless.

While exploring the topics in these lesson plans, some students may be triggered. Indigenous students along with other classmates who have experienced genocide and oppression may require support. Please ensure that there are proper measures in place to take care of their feelings.

★ The goals of these lessons are for students to:

- Grasp and develop their knowledge of the topics presented
- Understand the multi-generational impacts of colonialism
- Question and reframe cultural biases
- Discover how Indigenous people are reclaiming their power and identity
- Understand contemporary issues and policies that impact both Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada

LESSON PLAN 2: Fashionably Indian: Fetishizing, stereotyping, and appropriating Indigenous traditions

Our world today is fascinated by Indigenous traditions, cultural practices, fashion and ceremony. It has become trendy to sport beadwork and headdresses at music festivals, and to connect with one's 'inner Indian' by attending spiritual gatherings that may or may not be authentic.

At the same time, Indigenous communities continue to face harsh racism and inequalities. For centuries, they have had to fight to keep their customs, languages and beliefs. Today's generation of young Indigenous people is determined to reclaim what is theirs and to protect what is sacred. Their clothing isn't costumes, and their connection to the land can't be bought or sold.

“Even when the claim is being made that it is somehow an appreciation, what it's actually doing is reproducing stereotypes and degradations of the people that they claim they're paying homage to.”

Rinaldo Walcott, University of Toronto Professor

***Read more about this person at the end of this lesson plan**



Via www.ebay.com

It is important to look beyond the small boxes in which society has often placed Indigenous people: Pocahontas or Squaw, Stoic Chief or Homeless Drunk. Authentic Indigeneity exists in many forms, and respecting them all is essential to Canada's goal of reconciliation.

LESSON PLAN 2 GOALS:

To unpack harmful cultural stereotypes and explore how we can appreciate rather than appropriate Indigenous fashion, beauty and ceremony.

- **What are the stereotypes we impose on Indigenous people, and what sort of damage do they cause?**

WATCH: *Rebel with a Cause* (from WIOT3 TV series) episode 7:

<http://aptn.ca/workingitouttogether/full-episodes/season-3/> (22 minutes)

READ: *Not Pocahontas, not a super-Indian, not a drunk and not a slut:*

<https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/12/06/>

not_pocahontas_not_a_superindian_not_a_drunk_and_not_a_slut.html

WATCH: *Searching for Winnetou:*

<http://www.cbc.ca/cbcdocspov/episodes/searching-for-winnetou>

- **Inappropriate practices: What happens when we turn ceremonial clothing into Halloween or music festival attire?**

READ: *We Are Not Costumes:*

<http://www.metronews.ca/news/toronto/2017/10/20/racist-halloween-costumes-still-abound-in-toronto-stores.html>

WATCH: *Native Americans Try On "Indian" Halloween Costumes:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frX69E9pkf8>

- **The sealskin debate: Why is seal hunting important to Inuit people, and what is their message to animal rights activists?**

READ & WATCH: *'Angry Inuk' Explores the Inuit Fight to Protect the Seal Hunt:*

http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2016/11/19/angry-inuk-film_n_12527482.html

READ: *The Inuit Women Behind ‘Sealfies’:*

https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/3b47x8/we-spoke-to-the-inuit-women-behind-sealfies

- **Appreciation vs. appropriation: How can we support Indigenous fashion and traditions without being offensive?**

READ: *Threads of Change:*

<http://workingouttogether.com/content/threads-of-change/>

READ: *Wearing the Truth:*

<http://workingouttogether.com/content/wearing-the-truth/>

Suggested class activities:

1. Identifying current perceptions and biases around Indigenous issues:

-Teacher poses a question/statement (ex. “Isn’t it time for Indigenous people to get over what

happened to them?”).

-Pair up students or put them into small discussion groups.

-After discussing, invite each group to report back to class with key thoughts.

-Invite students to write their take-aways and further questions.

2. Sealskin debate:

-Students debate the issue from both the Inuit and the animal activist perspectives.

Suggested homework assignments:

1. Research and report on materials traditionally and currently used in Indigenous fashion (ex. beaver fur, whale bone, deer hide). How are they used, and what purpose do they serve?

2. Select a favourite designer featured in WIOT’s *Otahpiaaki* issue (www.wiotmag.com):

-Respond to these questions:

- What do you like about this designer’s pieces?

- How do you think they differ from the stereotypical ‘look’ of Indigenous fashion?

- What role do you think fashion can play in reconciliation?

Additional literature and videos:

Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto: <http://ifwtoronto.com/>

Otahpiaaki Fashion Week: <https://otahpiaakifashionweek.com/>

Angry Inuk: https://www.nfb.ca/film/angry_inuk/

Who is Rinaldo Walcott?

Professor Rinaldo Walcott is the Director of the Women & Gender Studies Institute. As an interdisciplinary scholar Rinaldo has published on music, literature, film and theater and policy among other topics. All of Rinaldo's research is founded in a philosophical orientation that is concerned with the ways in which coloniality shapes human relations across social and cultural time.

