

# Analysis of American Indians as Sports Mascots

## Fast Facts

Curriculum Area: Social Studies  
Grade Level: High School  
Suggested Duration: 3 – 4 Class Periods

## Stage 1 Desired Results

### Established Goals

(4) The history content standards for ninth through twelfth grade are that each student will:  
(g) analyze how historical, cultural, social, political, ideological, and economic contexts shape people's perspectives;  
(j) analyze perspectives of American Indians in US history;  
(k) evaluate the limitations, biases, and credibility of various sources, especially regarding misinformation and stereotypes.

### Understandings

- Beliefs change, one person at a time; the process begins when the learner actively seeks to change his/her perceptions. Being aware of a discriminatory practice, bias, and/or stereotype is basic to changing your perception and point of view.
- Discrimination, stereotypes, and biases originate from misinformation, misperception, omission, and the distortion of information and ideas.
- Understanding the origin of discrimination, biases, and stereotypes is essential in your comprehension of what causes conflict and provides information you need to counter the specific bias.
- Discrimination, stereotyping, and biases end when people learn the origin of the misinformation/distortion and actively participate to prevent it from continuing.
- Be aware of how American Indians have been misrepresented in American culture through the use of Native mascots and imagery
- Students will further their knowledge of the [\*Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians\*](#).

### Essential Questions

- What are some general stereotypes and biases regarding American Indians?
- How have American Indians been discriminated against in past? Does this still occur? If so, what types of discrimination currently occur?
- What purpose does a sports mascot serve?
- Why might someone (may not necessarily have to be an American Indian) be offended by the use of American Indians as mascots? What actions might be considered offensive?
- Do some American Indian mascots perpetuate stereotypes?



Indian Education for All Unit

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Students will be able to...

- critically examine contemporary and historical portrayals of American Indians as sports mascots.
- utilize classroom social skills and protocols as the class discusses misperceptions, acts of discrimination, stereotypes, and biases; the teacher should discuss the conduct expected before discussions begin and remind students as needed about the hurtfulness that results from intended and unintended remarks made.
- define stereotypes, bias, discrimination, and tolerance and use correct information in discussions.
- state instances of conflicts, issues specifically linked to continued discrimination, stereotyping, and biases.
- apply criteria to evaluate the origin, authority, accuracy, bias, and distortion of information and ideas pertaining to mascots.

Students will know...

- discrimination, stereotypes, and biases originate from misinformation, misperceptions, and distortion of information.
- that understanding the origin of discrimination, biases, and stereotypes is essential to comprehension of what causes conflict and provides information you need to counter the specific bias.
- beliefs change, one person at a time; the process begins when the learner actively seeks to change his/her perceptions. Being aware of a discriminatory practice, bias, and/or stereotype is basic to changing your perception.
- discrimination, stereotyping, and biases end when people learn the origin of the distortion or misinformation, and actively participate to prevent it from continuing.
- how American Indians have been misrepresented in American culture through the use of Native mascots and imagery.

## Stage 2 Assessment Evidence

### Performance Tasks

1. Research, analyze, and evaluate multiple issues and perspectives regarding American Indian stereotypes and the issue of sports mascots. Students will research the mascot issue and give examples of how stereotypes, biases, and misinformation are perpetuated by the use of American Indians as sports mascots.
2. Gather evidence and present findings. Suggested assignments to gauge student understanding include a formal research paper, virtual poster presentation, participation in on-line discussion forums, or multimedia presentation formats such as a video or podcast.

## Stage 3 Learning Plan

### Learning Activities

One class period is to introduce the topic. The next class period is for research. A third class period is for presentation of arguments/discussion. If necessary, a fourth class period may be added.

## **Building Students' Background Knowledge**

Show the following [video from the National Congress of American Indians](#) as a way to introduce the topic. Ask students to write down a few notes regarding the clip utilizing a 3-2-1 prompt: three things you saw in the video that caught your attention, two questions you have about information presented in the video, and one thing you really enjoyed. Facilitate a brief class discussion. Define stereotypes, bias, discrimination, and appropriation.

## **Key concepts to share regarding the multiple issues and perspectives surrounding Native American mascots and Questions to Guide Class Discussion and Student Research**

National examples of mascot change: Washington Redskins (name changed), Cleveland Indians (eliminated Chief Wahoo logo), University of North Dakota Fighting Sioux (name changed).

Local/state examples of mascot change: Red Lodge changed mascot from Redskins to Rams. Hot Springs changed their mascot from Savages to Savage Heat.

- ✓ Ask students if they are familiar with the controversy surrounding the use of American Indian imagery as sports mascots. Mention both national and local issues, i.e., professional sports and college and high school sports. Brainstorm a list of teams with American Indian mascots.
- ✓ Why might someone (may not necessarily have to be an American Indian) be offended by the use of American Indians as mascots? What actions might be considered offensive?
  - Examples: tomahawk chop, various team cheers/mock tribal chants, "Hollywood" drum beat, fans dressing up as Indians, opposing teams with signs that say "beat the Indians."
- ✓ What should the purpose of a mascot be?
- ✓ If schools do use Indian mascots, should they also have an obligation to educate their student population and community in regard to that particular mascot? What about professional organizations? College teams? Do they also have an obligation to represent American Indians in a respectful manner?
- ✓ Schools with American Indian mascots usually do not intend to demean or belittle a culture but actually perceive themselves as honoring American Indian people. The historical context is an important thing to consider. When was the mascot chosen?
- ✓ Does it truly honor or is it just another stereotypical representation of American Indian people? What might schools with American Indian mascots do to ensure a more accurate representation of American Indian people and cultures?
- ✓ Can someone with good intentions actually be perpetuating stereotypes?
- ✓ Other issues/topics that often arise when discussing American Indian mascots: e.g., Fighting Irish, Minnesota Vikings, Dallas Cowboys.
  - How are these groups different from American Indian mascots? Mention that Notre Dame is a Catholic controlled institution with a great deal of Irish representation within the college. It is a name that Irish Catholics chose for themselves.

- Pose these questions for discussion. Would the Irish people be upset if an all Indian school were to adopt the Fighting Irish as their mascot? What about if they were representing all Irish people in very stereotypical manners and unintentionally mocking Irish culture?
- Vikings are not Indigenous to North America and they are not an intact, distinct cultural group still practicing long held ceremonial traditions. There are indeed descendants of Viking cultures still alive but are Viking ceremonies still commonly practiced? Vikings are not an oppressed minority.
- Cowboys can be from any racial/ethnic group – It is a broad category as opposed to using a distinct racial/ethnic group such as American Indians.
- ✓ Issue of schools on/near reservations with significant American Indian student populations. Is it different for these types of schools to have an American Indian mascot as opposed to a school with no American Indian students?
- ✓ Could mascots be an opportunity for a positive force for change? For schools on/near Montana reservations with high percentages of Native youth, the school mascot might be a way to express and reclaim tribal identity through language. For example, instead of the Browning Indians, a term in the Blackfeet language could be used instead of the generic term “Indian”. Another good example is the Lodge Grass Indians, could they use a term from the Crow language? Utilizing local Indigenous languages may help ensure a greater sensitivity from non-Native schools and enhance cultural pride and identity for the Native American school.

Close out the class period by having students read the following statement from the US Commission on Civil Rights. Ask students to summarize key points from the statement.

**[STATEMENT OF U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS ON THE USE OF NATIVE AMERICAN IMAGES AND NICKNAMES AS SPORTS SYMBOLS \(2001\)](#)**

**Assessment Suggestions**

- ✓ Students could debate the issue of mascots at multiple levels; professional teams, college teams, high school teams.
- ✓ Assign three groups: For Mascots, Against Mascots, and Rethinking Mascots. In addition, a fourth group could research historically inaccurate and stereotypical portrayals of American Indians in media to help provide a historical context.
- ✓ Give students one-two class periods to gather background information. Require students to find at least five different resources.
- ✓ Have students check out websites for teams that use American Indian mascots. Do they acknowledge the issue? Is there a history regarding the mascot? What is their rationale for having an American Indian mascot?
- ✓ Each group will be provided an opportunity to present their side of the issue using supporting evidence.
- ✓ Students will demonstrate an understanding and awareness of the issue through in-class presentations.
- ✓ Students could write a brief essay on the issue. Where do they stand and why?

- ✓ Students could interview representatives from schools that do have mascots. What are their perceptions?
- ✓ Before introducing the topic, you could conduct an anonymous pretest regarding student attitudes/knowledge of the issue. After the various presentations you could administer the same survey to see if attitudes/knowledge has changed.
- ✓ Sample questions could include:
  - Are you familiar with the mascot issue?
  - Do you think American Indian mascots perpetuate stereotypes?
  - What is the purpose of a sports mascot?
- ✓ If your school has an Indian team name or mascot, find out when the image was adopted, who selected it, and why. What was the Native American population of your school and community then and what is it now? What tribes were and are represented?
- ✓ Inventory and describe the imagery and behaviors associated with your school's Indian mascot. What do these things mean to you and to your classmates?
- ✓ Research stereotypes about your own racial or ethnic group and imagine a sports mascot based on those stereotypes. How would you feel about the public use of such images?
- ✓ Write letters to school, city, and media officials to start a community dialogue on Indian mascots. If this issue does not apply to your local schools, choose a college or professional team as the focus of the letters.

Background Information, News Articles, and Resource Suggestions for Student Research

[National Congress of American Indians](#)

[U.S. Commission on Civil Rights](#)

[National Indian Education Association](#)

[The psychosocial effects of Native American mascots: a comprehensive review of empirical research findings](#) – Race, Ethnicity and Education

[Civil Rights and the Impact of Native American Names, Symbols, and Imagery in School Mascots](#) – A briefing report of the Nebraska Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

[It's Past Time to Eliminate Racist Native Mascots](#) – Teach for America

[Where pride meets prejudice](#) – NCAA Champion Magazine

[Colorado is latest to weigh ban on Native mascots](#) – Indian Country Today

[Bill would bar offensive mascots, place names](#) – Indian Country Today

[Cleveland bans headdresses, painted faces at games](#) – Indian Country Today

[Mascots honor an Indian who never was](#) – Indian Country Today