

Contemporary American Indian Issues

Fast Facts

Curriculum Area: Social Studies
Grade Level: High School
Suggested Duration: 3 – 5 class periods

Stage 1 Desired Results

Established Goals - Montana Social Studies Standards

(4) The history content standards for ninth through twelfth grade are that each student will:
(c) identify ways in which people and groups exercise agency in difficult historical, contemporary, and tribal contexts;
(d) analyze multiple, and complex causal factors that have shaped major events in US and world history, including American Indian history;
(e) explain events in relation to both their intended and unintended consequences, including governmental policies impacting American Indians.

Understandings

- Students will develop an understanding regarding contemporary American Indian issues and how the issues relate to the seven [*Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians*](#).
- Federal law and policies often benefit those who wrote them. Students will understand how difficult it can be for tribal governments and the US government to work through contemporary issues.
- Culture is ever-changing and evolving in order to thrive and persist over time. American Indian people are continuing to navigate the legal system to ensure their people are thriving.
- Federal Indian policies and treaties are constantly being reviewed and challenged as tribes exert their inherent sovereignty.
- Not all contemporary issues are the same among tribes.
- There is no “pan-opinion” or belief regarding certain contemporary issues, as all American Indian people are individuals with their own morals and opinions.

Essential Questions

- What are some of the major challenges facing tribal nations? A few examples include language and cultural revitalization, economics, and education.
- What are some tribally specific examples of how these challenges are being met?
- Why is it important to look at issues from multiple perspectives?
- How have tribes navigated contemporary issues by using traditional belief systems?



Indian Education for All Unit

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Students will be able to...

- research and analyze a specific contemporary issue that impacts American Indian people in relation to tribal specific contexts.
- identify and use credible on-line resources to conduct their research.

Students will know...

- American Indian people face some unique challenges.
- traditional cultural practices and beliefs are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs
- Native language and cultural revitalization are essential components of how tribes solve the contemporary challenges they face.

Suggested Research Topics

- Native Language Revitalization
- Tribal Sovereignty
- Climate Change
- Jurisdiction
- Treaty Rights
- Indian Mascots
- Bison Restoration

Stage 2 Assessment Evidence

Performance Tasks

1. Research a specific contemporary issue/event pertaining to American Indians.
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

Suggested Learning Activities

To introduce the lesson consider using the [Buffalo Should Be Everywhere film clip](#), which provides a great perspective regarding tribal connections to buffalo. The film is referenced in the IEFA lesson [Bison Restoration: Resources for Learning about Contemporary American Indian Issues](#), which helps students learn about restoration of the bison to several Montana reservations and the importance to American Indians. It is appropriate for grades 6-12.

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.

Next, have them read the Great Falls Tribune June 3, 2019 article [Blackfeet welcome the return of bison to Montana Reservation](#). Once again ask them to take notes using a 3-2-1 prompt and then facilitate a class discussion. What were the main issues put forth in the video and article? What did you know about this topic already? Where might you go to find other Native American perspectives regarding bison restoration? Do they know of any individuals or groups that might have a different viewpoint about this issue? Let them know this topic could be one of the issues they research.

Now tell the class they will be conducting research into contemporary American Indian issues.

Have students identify a contemporary American Indian issue to research. Use the topics mentioned in the video and newspaper article about bison as a starting point for potential ideas. Have each student or team clear their topic with you first in order to ensure a broad coverage of topics.

Have students use the following questions to help guide their research:

- What is the issue (redefine it in their own words)?
- What do you currently know about this topic? List out a brief answer (save to compare with information gathered as the lesson progresses).
- What are some particular questions you have regarding this particular topic?
- What are some of the multiple perspectives surrounding this topic?
- Has your perspective changed as a result of your research or do you feel more informed about this particular issue?
- What resources did you use to reach your conclusions?

Materials/Resources Needed

Online Indigenous News Sources - Make sure to familiarize yourself with these websites prior to the lesson for more research topic ideas and for developing your own understanding about the diverse range of contemporary issues.

- ✓ Have students regularly access free online resources such as [ICT News](#) and [Indians.com](#). Students can practice their listening skills by the Native American produced radio program – [Native America Calling](#).
- ✓ National organizations such as the [National Congress of American Indians](#) and the [National Indian Education Association](#) have a wealth of information on their websites pertaining to contemporary issues all across Indian Country.
- ✓ Indigenous news sources are ideal resources for conducting research projects concerning contemporary American Indian issues. Students can develop their critical literacy skills by comparing and contrasting how other news outlets report similar stories as well. Consider assigning students to research as a team or in small groups with assigned roles.

Several new IEFA remote learning lesson plans from the Montana Office of Public Instruction cover a wide range of contemporary issues:

- [*Ancient Islands in the Sky - Archaeology in the Beartooth Ice*](#) This lesson is appropriate for grades 7-12.
- [*Bison Restoration: Resources for Learning about Contemporary American Indian Issues*](#) This lesson helps students learn about restoration of the bison to several Montana reservations and the importance to American Indians. It is appropriate for grades 6-12.
- [*Crazy Mountain Cathedral*](#) This lesson is appropriate for grades 7-12.
- [*Learning about Tribal Sovereignty*](#) This lesson will provide students with important information regarding tribal sovereignty. This is for grades 9-12.
- [*Preserving the Sacredness of the Badger-Two Medicine*](#) This lesson will help students understand a little more about the remarkable ceremonial and legal history of the Badger-Two Medicine region and the Blackfeet Nation. It is appropriate for grades 8-12.

Additional online resources:

- [*American Indian Responses to Environmental Challenges*](#), Native Knowledge 360, National Museum of the American Indian
- [*American Indians 101 - Frequently Asked Questions*](#), Montana Office of Public Instruction
- [*Essential Understandings Key Concepts*](#), Montana Office of Public Instruction
- [*Montana Tribes Digital Archives Website*](#)
- [*The Ways*](#), PBS Wisconsin Education Stories on Culture and Language from the Central Great Lakes