

WITH STRINGS ATTACHED: HOLLYWOOD'S GIFT TO A NAVAJO FAMILY

Grade Levels 9–12

Subject Areas History, English

California State Standards <http://www.cde.ca.gov/board/>

Historical Research, Evidence and Point of View

Grades 9 through 12

Students identify bias and prejudice in historical interpretations.

Reading

Grades 9 and 10

2.8 Evaluate the credibility of an author's argument or defense of a claim by critiquing the relationships between generalizations and evidence, the comprehensiveness of evidence, and the way in which the author's intent affects the structure and tone of the text.

Grades 11 and 12

2.4 Make warranted and reasonable assertions about the author's arguments by using elements of the texts to defend and clarify interpretations.

Writing

Grades 9 and 10

2.3.a. Marshal evidence in support of a thesis and related claims, including information on all relevant perspectives.

National Standards www.mcrel.org

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/Standard.asp?SubjectID=7>

- Gathers and uses information for research purposes
- Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=22&StandardID=1>

- Contributes to the overall effort of a group

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=7&StandardID=7>

- Uses reading skills and strategies to understand a variety of informational texts (for example, textbooks, biographical sketches, letters, diaries, directions, procedures, magazines, essays, primary source historical documents, editorials, news stories, periodicals, catalogs, job-related materials, schedules, speeches, memoranda, public documents, maps)

Overview

The Clys, a Navajo family living in Monument Valley in Utah, received an unexpected gift. The gift was a film entitled **Navajo Boy**, which was made in the 1930s. It featured various members of the Cly family. **The Return of Navajo Boy** chronicles the Cly family's reactions to the gift they had been given. In this lesson students explore issues of culture and identity and learn about Navajo culture by examining the perspectives of those portrayed in the film.

Learning Objectives

This lesson's objectives are for the student to

- develop an understanding of the relationship between culture and identity.
- learn how media can function as a tool to examine social and political mechanisms for change.
- be able to analyze and critique the ways in which American Indians are portrayed in literature.
- learn about and be able to summarize their knowledge of Navajo culture.

To assess students' achievement of the above learning objectives, teachers may rate students on the quality of their written summarizations, their presentations and their participation in group discussions.

Time Two to three 40- to 50-minute class periods

Materials and Teacher Prep

Videotape **The Return of Navajo Boy**

Internet access

Drawing and writing supplies

Bookmark the following Web sites:

<http://waltonfeed.com/peoples/navajo/culture.html>

<http://www.americanarts.com/nlifcult.htm>

<http://www.dana.edu/~dwarman/adm.htm>

www.nativeweb.org

<http://www.fdl.cc.mn.us/~isk/>

www.isomedia.com/jomes/jmele/homepage.html

http://www.kstrom.net/isk/books/all_idx.html

<http://www.kstrom.net/isk/books/baddies/badmenu.html#menustart>

<http://www.oyate.org/books-to-avoid/index.html>

PREVIEWING ACTIVITY

The purpose of this activity is for the class to develop background knowledge on Navajo culture prior to viewing the film.

1. Divide the class into small groups. Tell the students that each group is responsible for collecting eight to 10 facts about Navajo life.

The following Web sites are good places to begin researching Navajo life:

www.nativeweb.org
<http://waltonfeed.com/peoples/navajo/culture.html>
<http://www.americanarts.com/nlifcult.htm>
<http://www.dana.edu/~dwarman/adm.htm>
<http://www.fdl.cc.mn.us/~isk/>

2. Use the information the students collect to create a class mural that portrays Navajo culture.
3. Post the mural in a visible place in the classroom to use as a resource throughout the remainder of the lesson activities.

FOCUS FOR VIEWING

This film chronicles the experiences of a Navajo family and describes the impact the return of a family film has on their lives. Encourage the students to think about how **The Return of Navajo Boy** affected the various members of the Cly family and how this relates to larger issues of culture and identity.

Some important questions to discuss prior to viewing the film include the following:

- What role does one's heritage play in developing identity?
- What role does language play in culture?
- What role does family play in developing culture?
- What struggles do people face in trying to retain their cultural heritage in the United States?

Media can function as a mechanism for social and political change by providing an opportunity to explore issues in a variety of different ways. By exploring the impact this film had on the Cly family, students gain firsthand knowledge of the power of story to effect change in the world. Encourage students to think about the effect this film had on larger societal and political issues.

Tell the students to think about the following overarching question as they watch the production:

- What was the real essence of the gift that was given to the Cly family?

POSTVIEWING ACTIVITIES

In the Postviewing Activities, students explore issues portrayed in the film surrounding identity and culture. These include the importance of the role of family in nurturing identity, the impact of the loss of the Navajo language, respect for the earth and a desire to preserve family traditions. Students are asked to create a presentation that represents a critical analysis and understanding of these key issues.

Activity One

The purpose of this activity is for students to examine, through an exploration of the impact of Navajo Boy on members of the Cly family, the importance of identity and culture.

1. Read and discuss with the students each of the following quotes from the film:

"The images show us as we were but we never got to say anything."

—Elsie Mae Cly Begay when discussing Navajo Boy

"I wonder how much money they got."

—Elsie Mae Cly Begay when discussing the fact that her family never received any money from the sale of postcards that pictured Cly family members

"I wonder what it would be like if there were no tourists."

—Lorenzo Begay when discussing the groups of tourists in Monument Valley

"Like all Navajo women, my mom is strong and independent."

—Lorenzo Begay when describing his mother

"The government penalizes us for our traditions when they reject our claims."

—Bernie Cly when discussing his health and government compensation

"I lost culture, language and a way of life... ."

—John Wayne Cly when talking about his life away from his Navajo family

"This summer some White people came. They told me that they were returning my pictures. It was as if I were lost and finally found."

—Jimmy Cly when describing how he felt upon the return to the family of **Navajo Boy**

2. Ask the students to imagine that they are one of the members of the Cly family and have them write a letter describing their feelings. They may use the above quotes, or their own ideas based on the film.

3. Create a presentation in which each student has a turn reading his or her letter aloud to the entire class.

4. Provide time to discuss students' reactions to each other's work and to the issues raised.

Activity Two

The purpose of this activity is to encourage students to critically examine cultural assumptions that authors make when telling a story and the impact such assumptions have on culture and identity.

1. Have students work in pairs or small groups. Ask the students to choose a book on American-Indian culture to read. This can be a picture book, a myth or a work of historical fiction, and it may be for any reading level. Have the students read the book and describe how American Indians are portrayed in it. The following Web site is an excellent source for books:

www.isomedia.com/jomes/jmele/homepage.html.

2. After the students have written their descriptions, have them go to the following Web sites, which provide critiques of how American Indians are portrayed in literature:

http://www.kstrom.net/isk/books/all_idx.html.

<http://www.kstrom.net/isk/books/baddies/badmenu.html#menustart>

<http://www.oyate.org/books-to-avoid/index.html>

If the students are unable to find the exact book they have chosen, have them choose one that has similarities to the book they have selected.

3. Ask the students to write a second description of their book based on what they have read in the various critiques. Have them compare and contrast their first and second descriptions, highlighting new knowledge.

4. Provide time for students to share what they have learned.

5. Create a class collection of students' work that shows both the initial student descriptions and those written after reading the critiques.

6. Have the class create a presentation for younger students that illustrates key points regarding the portrayal of American Indians in literature.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

1. Share with the students the following statement written by a 16-year-old Native-American girl:

- "I have many dreams. If I could change anything in the world, Columbus would never have found America."

2. Research and discuss how American Indians have been treated in the United States.

3. Ask each student to prepare a response to the following question:

- In your opinion, what was the gift that was given to the Cly family?

This response may be a drawing, an essay, a poem, a videotape or any other appropriate format.