

## Anti-Stereotype Curriculum: All Ages

This activity comes directly from Bob Peterson’s article “Columbus and Native Issues in the Elementary Classroom” in *RTC*, pp. 35-41. The following is an extended direct citation (*RTC*, pp. 36-38) from the *RTC* article, with the exception of the italicized notes which have been added as elaborations. The article in its entirety is a great resource, and highly recommended.

### Process

1. Show the DVD “Unlearning “Indian” Stereotypes”. This is approximately 12 minutes and comes with a teacher’s guide. It was originally produced by the Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1977, as a film strip. *It was re-released as a DVD in 2008. The cost for the DVD and Teacher’s Guide is \$19.95 from Rethinking Schools website.*
2. Ask students if they know any “Indian” person and what that person is like. *Note: This part is up to the discretion of the teacher. The purpose is for students to vocalize stereotypes that they may have, but don’t realize are stereotypes (yet). It may also serve to show that many students think “Indian” is synonymous with the past, or cartoons, as they won’t be able to share about a person they know. In schools/classrooms where there is a Native population and there are Native students in the class, this activity may need to be re-framed or omitted depending upon how students may react to this.*
3. Explain the word “stereotype” as a mistaken idea about how a whole group of people think, behave, or dress. Give an example that does not relate to American Indians, such as the view by some that girls can’t be good baseball players, or boys can’t cook.
4. Explain what’s wrong with stereotypes—that they are not only factually wrong, but that they’re hurtful. Talk with students about why they are harmful. Give examples such as a coach having a stereotype about girls: that they can’t play baseball well. That could easily lead to the coach discriminating against and not letting them be on the team. It can also prevent girls from having the opportunity to play and practice, making the stereotype self-fulfilling.
5. Concretely explain some stereotypes, and try to make analogies with children’s own experiences. For example, explain that some native nations used feathers for ceremonial purposes, but that many others did not. Ask the children how their family dresses for special occasions and ceremonies, such as weddings. Point out that it’s a stereotype to think that all people of their ethnic background always dress as if they were at a wedding. Likewise, it’s a stereotype to think that all Indians dress with feathers all the time.
6. As part of a class discussion, list common stereotypes about Native Americans. Have children identify the stereotypes as they are used in Thanksgiving greeting cards, alphabet and counting books, history books, or children’s books on Columbus. *In RTC p. 36 Peterson provides a stereotype checklist that can be used as a guide for a list your class could create.*
7. Explain how these stereotypes are used to make Indians seem inferior or less than human. Don’t limit your critiques to textbooks. Some of the most common stereotypes are in alphabet books that have “I for Indian” or in children’s favorites such as “Clifford’s Halloween” by Normal Bridwell in which Clifford uses a feather head dress to dress up as in Indian; or Maurice Sendak’s “Alligators All Around,” in which the alligators are “imitating Indians” by wearing feather headdresses, carrying tomahawks, and smoking pipes. Also look at the stereotypes in society at large, such as in the names of sports teams or cars or mascots for schools. Talk about the Cleveland Indians, or the Jeep Cherokee, or Winnebago motor homes. Ask if the children know

other cars or sports teams named after nationality groups. If not, why are Indians singled out? Have students reflect on how such stereotypes hurt Indians and distort other people's images of them and their rich cultures.

8. Use the article "Human Beings Are Not Mascots" (*from RTC, p. 131*) about people fighting against Indian "mascots" to start a discussion on what people can do to fight stereotypes.
9. In books that children bring to class, whether from home or library, consistently point out and discuss any stereotypes. As we model such thinking and give children the opportunity to think on their own—"Did you notice any stereotypes in that story?"—children will improve their ability to think critically.
10. Videotape a Columbus or Thanksgiving special from TV or choose most any Thanksgiving or Columbus filmstrip or videotape from a school curriculum collection. Watch it with your students and critique it together.
11. Have students make posters about common stereotypes of various groups of people. Have the children explain how the stereotypes hurt people. I have found that as children start learning about stereotypes, they often generalize and think everything is a stereotype: that all pictures of native people in traditional dress or any picture of a woman as a nurse are stereotypes. One way to deal with this is to get children to teach others about stereotypes—by explaining their posters, doing short presentations or skits.
12. Use quality books to show how contemporary native people live and look.
13. Invite Native American adults into your classroom to talk about their jobs and family and how they feel about how Native Americans have been treated.
14. Have children think about a time in their lives when they fought against something that wasn't fair. Explain how native peoples have fought for what is "fair"—their land and way of life.