



Ten Cultural Respect Guidelines For Teachers/Parents Of Young People

- 1) Avoid talking about Indians only in the past tense. American Indian history is interesting, but Indians are still alive today, too.
- 2) Indians from different tribes and nations may have some things in common, like a reverence for family and nature, but they do not all speak the same language, have the same traditions, or wear the same clothes, any more than all European people do. Use the Internet or some good [books about Native Americans](#) to learn about the tribe you are studying. Not all Indians lived in tepees. Not all Indians wear the same traditional clothes or headdresses. As much as possible, learn about one complete culture, not a hodge-podge.
- 3) Be sensitive to the difference between learning about a culture and mocking it. Every culture has some aspects which are fun and acceptable to copy, and others which are rude and racist. If you had a Chinese club, for example, you might learn some Chinese words, listen to Chinese folktales, have a stir-fry, or wear some old-fashioned wooden Chinese shoes. But you would not tape your eyes to be slanted, talk in broken English like "Me likey flied lice!", and mimic Buddhist religious rituals. For American Indians, cultural activities which are fun and not offensive include: reading books about Indians, learning an Indian language, listening to Indian music, attending Indian dances and cultural festivals, making Indian food (such as frybread), making non-religious Indian crafts (such as beadwork), reading, listening to, or telling Indian stories and legends, playing traditional Indian games. Cultural activities which are hurtful and inappropriate include: painting faces, mimicking Indian traditional dances (most of which are religious in nature), making war whoops, war dances, or playing at war, using broken English for "Indian Talk" ("me likeum frybread"), or pretending to BE Indian. We know it is a fine distinction, but if you teach your child to say "I'm a Cherokee" when she is not, you will confuse her and devalue what it means to be Cherokee. You wouldn't tell your child in the French club that she was French. Instead, teach her to say "I'm a Y-Indian Princess from the Cherokee chapter. We learn all about Cherokees."
- 4) Plains Indian Sign Language is fun to learn, and many Indian people could understand this sign language. However, each tribe had a normal, spoken language as well. Learn a little about this language. (You can look at our site, [Native Languages of the Americas](#), for a starting point for Indian languages.) It's easy and fun to learn to say "Hello,"

"Goodbye," and "Thank you" in any Indian language, and it's more authentic and less insulting than saying "How How." For older kids, the Lord's Prayer has been translated into most Indian languages. Some languages, like [Cree](#) and [Cherokee](#), have their own interesting writing systems, which are fun for kids to learn. Audio and video tapes of many Indian languages are also available, such as the [Arapaho](#)-language version of Disney's [Bambi](#).

5) Find the tribal office of the Indians whose name you are using and ask them for information or if they are interested in a cultural exchange program. Many tribes will provide you with information, free or for a small charge. If you are nearby, a reservation makes a very good outing. If you are not, you may be able to arrange a penpal for your children on the reservation of your tribal namesake. This is a fun way to learn about another culture!

6) If you are arranging an event with Indians from a tribe other than your namesake tribe, discuss differences between the two tribes with the children in advance. Before you meet any Indians, talk to your kids about modern Indian life so that they do not go into the meeting asking Indians if they know how to use toilets or something similarly offensive! (Laura's "tribe" was very rude to an older Lenni Lenape woman who came to talk to her group when she was a girl because the chapter parents didn't do this.)

7) When you choose special nicknames for fathers and daughters, avoid naming yourselves after historical Indians. In many Indian traditions, it is disrespectful or even sacrilegious to use a name that belongs to somebody else without permission. Invented names like "Princess Pretty Rainbow" or "Chief Falls-Off-His-Horse" may not be very authentically Indian, but neither are they cultural thievery, as "Sacagawea" or "Crazy Horse" would be.

8) Avoid making comments implying that Indians are less intelligent, more violent, or less civilized than white Americans. Comparing "wild Indians" with sophisticated modern Americans is not fair--white frontiersmen of the past were pretty wild, too, and modern-day Indians use computers and go to school just like your kids do. Avoid talking broken English to "imitate" Indians. Avoid the word "squaw," it was a frontier word for a prostitute and is not a good way to refer to any Indian woman *or* to your children's mothers!

9) If you have a website, encourage visitors to learn more about the real Indians by putting up a page with information on your namesake tribe's culture and history (a good project to involve your children in,) and/or links to your namesake's tribal homepage and other informative sites.

10) When you do charity events, consider an event that will raise money for the American Indian College Fund, or for a charity benefiting poor people in your namesake tribe--you can write to them and ask for suggestions. They are helping you--help them back!



Further reading:

Here are a few good books to help kids learn about Native Americans in appropriate and respectful ways:

- [Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes](#): Excellent reference book of past and present information about the culture groups of native North America.
- [Of Earth and Elders](#): A wonderful collection of photographs and interviews from Native Americans.
- [The Birchbark House](#): Well-written kids' historical fiction about an Ojibway girl growing up in Laura Ingalls Wilder's time.
- [Jingle Dancer](#): A wonderful picture book for younger kids about a Creek girl preparing for a traditional dance.
- [Echoes of the Night](#): Audiotape recording of traditional Native American tales by an Abenaki Indian storyteller.