



Capuano Early Childhood Center - Teaching About Indigenous People

Written and compiled by Heidi Given. Adapted from the Boston Children's Museum's Native Voices Resource, American Indians in Children's Literature, and Rebekah Gienapp's blog

The Context:

The Capuano Early Childhood Center has been awarded a Somerville Arts Council grant to host a cultural residency with the Wampanoag Nation Singers and Dancers during the spring and fall of 2021. As we welcome the Wampanoag Nation Singers and Dancers, we work to do so in deeply respectful and educational ways.

Through this work our goals are to:

- inspire appreciation and the desire to learn more about Native people, perspectives and histories;
- Provide accurate information and challenge stereotypes;
- develop appreciation for the ways in which Indigenous people have informed and influenced our society, and have sustained and adapted their cultural traditions.

The Wampanoag Nation Singers and Dancers come to us from the tribal communities of Mashpee on Cape Cod and Aquinnah on Martha's Vineyard. They perform eastern social songs and dances, as well as share artifacts and traditional stories. During their presentations, they may dress in traditional regalia and use a variety of instruments.

There is an accompanying video, to share with students before seeing the Wampanoag Nation Singers and Dancers, developed with the consultation and participation of local Native people - Jesse Clingan, Grace Kessenich, Orpheo Speer, Julie Washek and Kitty Miller; and with the collaboration of Annie March, Joan Duffy, Cheryl Piccirelli, and Heidi Given.

As we work with young children to broaden their understanding of human diversity, we must confront the many stereotypes of Indigenous peoples perpetuated in books, movies, mascots, holidays, and elsewhere. Our goal, through this project, is to provide children with authentic, contemporary experiences with Native neighbors and members of Wampanoag Nation. Below are some ideas and resources to keep in mind as you expand your own learning and talk with your students about Indigenous people.

Indigenous People, also called Native People, are the people who have always lived on this land, whose ancestors first lived on this land. Some people use the term First Nation People, because Native people lived here first, before there were ships and planes for others to immigrate to the Americas. Indigenous People have been living here for tens of thousands of years and continue to do so. Now, there are many diverse people living here, we live among First Nation People.

Best Practices

Indigenous Cultures are Contemporary Cultures - Many portrayals of Indigenous cultures focus only on traditions and the past, reinforcing the idea that Indigenous people only lived in the past. There is a tendency to talk, speak, and write about Native peoples in the past tense. You can help change that misconception by using *present tense verbs* when teaching talking about Native people.

Indigenous Cultures are Unique, Indigenous People are Individuals - Many portrayals homogenize Indigenous people into a generic and stereotypic image. Today in the U.S. over 500 different Native cultures exist, each with their own distinct lifestyles, languages, traditions and regalia. Showing our students only one experience runs the risk of planting a 'single story'.

- Present images that counter stereotypes and reflect Native children and families represented in our community. Remember that Latinx students and families may also identify as Indigenous, and that you may have Native students in your classroom.
- As you share more books, images and songs with your students be sure to show images of the authors and illustrators, speak the names of Native Nations, and highlight what makes each one unique and special. Also, avoid using the word "Indian."
- Watch this video for a model of appropriate First Nation language - [The Word Indigenous Explained](#)

Integrate Native Resources into Content You Already Teaching Throughout the Year - Instruction and stories about Native people are often limited to Indigenous Peoples' Day, Native American Heritage month, or Thanksgiving. Native peoples are Native all year long and their contributions should be included year-round.

- Look for books, images, art, music, etc. created by Indigenous people and build connections to on going curriculum and to students' lives.
- Teach Accurate Information - particularly about Indigenous Peoples Day and Thanksgiving.
- Recognize the contributions of Native people in our lives

- **Native Languages have contributed many words to our vocabulary** - Massachusetts, kayak, chocolate, chipmunk, moose, avocado, squash, and hammock are just a few.

- **Native people have made many contributions to science and technology** - Native peoples developed canoes, snowshoes, rubber, syringes, and raised planting beds. Before the arrival of Europeans, there were Indigenous cities, transportation routes, advanced agricultural practices and complex trading systems. Indigenous understanding of medicine, the environment, plants and animals has been instrumental in forming our modern world, and will be instrumental moving forward. There are numerous Native engineers, doctors and scientists to study.

- **Indigenous societies are key to our modern system of government** - Many of the founding ideas of American democracy were taken from the Iroquois Confederacy. Many tribes have tribal government institutions, and Native people work in all levels of government, including in Somerville.

Young Children Construct Knowledge by Building Connections with Experiences - As you engage your students with the various experiences and resources, discuss what you see and work to make connections to children's lives. What are people doing? What are people wearing? Teach the words 'regalia' or 'traditional clothing,' and avoid the word 'costume'. When Native people wear regalia they are dressing for a special occasion. Are there special occasions in your family for which you wear special clothing or sing special songs?

TEACHING RESOURCES

Picture Books Available at Capuano (in classrooms or through Cheryl or Heidi)

The Fall Gathering
Giving Thanks
We Are Water Protectors
We are Grateful
Encounter
Clambake
Jingle Dancer
Bowwow Powwow
Thanks to the Animals
You Hold Me Up
My Heart Fills with Happiness
Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story
First Laugh Welcome Baby

Links to Children's Books Read- Alouds:

Multiple Indigenous Read-Alouds for kids:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLe939wSHN014tva5uGJhGoKgByqQDiZXv>

[Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story](#)
by Kevin Noble Maillard
[Bowwow Powwow](#) by Brenda Child

[We Are Water Protectors](#) by Carol Lindstrom
and Michaela Goade

Videos

["Grandpa's Drum" Molly of Denali Episode FOR KIDS](#)
[Wampanoag Singers and Dancers](#)
[The Water Song](#)

Additional Book Lists

<https://socialjusticebooks.org/booklists/american-indians/>
<https://seattle.bibliocommons.com/list/share/606674457/725561467?page=2>
<https://www.rebekahgienapp.com/native-americans/>
<https://babylibrarians.com/10-ownvoices-native-american-childrens-books/>

DEEPENING YOUR OWN KNOWLEDGE

Videos

[NYT - A Conversation with Native Americans on Race](#)

Print Resources

Claudia Fox Tree's [List of Resources to support learning and teaching about Indigenous history and culture.](#)

[How to Tell the Difference: A Guide for Evaluating Children's Books for Anti-Indian Bias \[revised\]](#)

[All the Real Indians Died Off and 20 Other Myths About Native Americans](#) by Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz
and Dina Gilio Whitaker

[An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States \(or the For Young People version\)](#) by
Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz