

Reprinted from the 1977 Teaching Guide for:

Unlearning “Indian” Stereotypes

Before showing the filmstrip, there are only three simple things to do:

1. Explain to the children that before Columbus arrived there were hundreds of different Native nations on this continent. Each has its own language, clothing, customs and territory. The people never called themselves “Indians,” but each had a national name. The nationalities of the children in this filmstrip are Pawnee, Osage, Shinnecock, Choctaw, Lenni Lenape and Mohawk. (You might write these names on the board and pronounce them for the class.) Other nations mentioned in the filmstrip are Sioux, Seneca, Apache, Taos, Wichita, Mandan and Ojibway.
2. Explain that a “treaty” is a promise made by two or more nations and signed by their leaders. The United States signed 371 treaties with various Native nations.
3. Explain that when Indian nations made treaties with the United States, they gave parts of their lands to the U.S. and kept — and or reserved — the rest for themselves. Even though a lot of this land has since been taken from them, the lands that remain are called “reservations.”

Filmstrip Discussion Pointers

ABOUT THE FILMSTRIP

The children in the filmstrip all participate in the Native American Education Program, a Title IV funded program of the New York City Board of Education. Their names and nationalities are all as indicated in the filmstrip script.

The script was written by staff of the Council on Interracial Books for Children, based on audio tapes made while the children were discussing the books with their teachers. The staff of the Native American Education Program made important corrections and additions to the script.

ABOUT THE CHILDREN

Should children viewing the filmstrip question the appearance of some of the children — saying that, “They don’t look like Indians” — you might counter with, “Well, what does an Indian look like?” You can explain that when the Europeans first arrived on these shores there were hundreds of Native nations having a wide range of difference in skin color, features, hair, physical structure and so forth. There *never* was any single physical description that fit *all* Native peoples. During the last few hundred years there has been much intermarriage of Native and non-Native peoples. Naturally, this results in still greater variety of appearance.

ABOUT THE USE OF “NATION” NOT “TRIBE”

The word “nation” is used instead of “tribe” in the filmstrip. Indian nations were and are separate, independent nations with their own lands, cultures, and governments at the time European colonization began. The United States recognized their nationhood by signing hundreds of formal treaties with them. As Chief Justice John Marshall wrote in a still standing 1832 case:

The term “nation” so generally applied to them, means “a people distinct from others.” The constitution, by declaring treaties already made, as well as those to be made, to be the supreme law of the land, has adopted and sanctioned these previous treaties with the Indian nations, and, consequently, admits their rank among those powers that are capable of making treaties. The words “treaty” and “nation” are words of our own language, selected in our diplomatic and legislative proceedings, by ourselves, having each a definite and well understood meaning. We have applied them to Indians as we have applied them to the other nations of the earth. They are applied to all in the same sense.

And the leading struggle of Native American nations today is recognition of their treaty rights, and independence and right to self-determination.