

## Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Social Studies Instruction for Indigenous Students

Here are some ways to make your social studies instruction more culturally responsive and sustaining for Indigenous students:

- Teach from a multicultural perspective, incorporating authors and worldviews from diverse cultures.
- Ensure historical accuracy when teaching events related to Native peoples.
- Dedicate sufficient time to Native American history and culture.
- Highlight Native American contributions to society.
- Teach about tribal governments.
- Emphasize both historical and contemporary perspectives.
- Cover both general Indigenous history and culture as well as the unique histories, cultures, and contemporary contexts of specific local tribal nations.

*(Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Klug & Whitfield, 2003)*

Swisher and Tippeconnic (1999) state:

“Negative stereotypes coupled with inadequate and inaccurate information about this nation’s Indigenous peoples, particularly in social studies curriculum, damages the self-concepts and subsequent behavior of our youth.”

When teaching about Indigenous peoples, it is essential to focus on both the past and present. In a study of state social studies standards, Sarah Shear and her colleagues found that 87% of references to Native Americans in academic standards across all 50 states depict them in a pre-1900 context. This framing relegates Native peoples to the distant past, ignoring their continued presence and significance. Shear also found that none of the 50 states include references to current Native events or challenges.

In an *Indian Country Today* article, Alys Landry quotes Shear, who states that state standards contain:

“Nothing about treaties, land rights, water rights... Nothing about the fact that tribes are still fighting to be recognized and determine sovereignty” (Landry, 2015).

As such, educators and schools must take proactive steps to ensure these topics are included in social studies curricula.

## References

Landry, A. (2015, May 21). *Indian history absent from US education standards*. Indian Country Today. <https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/indian-history-absent-from-us-education-standards>

Castagno, A. E., & Brayboy, B. M. J. (2008). *Culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous youth: A review of the literature*. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(4), 941–993. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308323036>

Klug, B. J., & Whitfield, P. T. (2003). *Widening the circle: Culturally relevant pedagogy for American Indian children*. Routledge.

Shear, S. B., Knowles, R. T., Soden, G. J., & Castro, A. J. (2015). *Manifesting destiny: Re/presentations of Indigenous peoples in K–12 U.S. history standards*. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 43(1), 68–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2014.999849>

Swisher, K. G., & Tippeconnic, J. W. III (Eds.). (1999). *Next steps: Research and practice to advance Indian education*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.