



Teaching Tips for Learning with Native American Students



In this document, you will find information on evidence-based instructional strategies for educators serving Native American students.¹ These strategies help ensure Native American students have access to high quality instruction to meet the state's academic standards. Following the ten tips, you will find a list of hyperlinked resources to extend and deepen your learning and practice.



1. Connect academic content to the lives and cultural contexts of students and **2. collaborate** with cultural and subject-matter experts

Cognitive science tells us meaningful learning happens when students can connect new content to prior knowledge and experiences. Teachers can contextualize their curriculum by integrating Indigenous perspectives (i.e. histories and current events). Across content areas, teachers can connect academic content to stories that reflect local community practices, events, or individuals. Tribal newspapers or libraries are two great places to begin learning about your students' communities. Educators can build authentic and meaningful relationships with existing organizations and community connections, such as tribal education departments and leaders, cultural experts, and parent committees associated with Title VI and Johnson-O'Malley Program funding. Additionally, working with families to identify local knowledge keepers such as elders is a great way to value and incorporate students' cultural strengths into instruction.

¹ Culturally Responsive Practices to Support American Indian English Learners' Success. Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest, published November 2021.
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/southwest/pdf/infographics/RELSW-Infog-AICRP-508.pdf>

3. Use modeling and demonstrate techniques and **4. incorporate** culturally-specific American Indian communication styles and structures



Indigenous communities have always had intentional processes and structures for sharing knowledge. Looking towards traditional Indigenous education approaches shows us that communities often use pedagogical approaches that value storytelling and deep listening. Traditional Indigenous ways of knowing and being promote learning through observation and experiential activities often rooted in relationships to land and the larger community. Teachers can acknowledge and leverage these longstanding skills in the classroom as well. For example, teachers can use manipulatives to aid in modeling thought processes in mathematics or think aloud when reading a text to model comprehension skills. Using communication styles that align with Indigenous ways of knowing, such as expert-apprentice modeling, is another way teachers can be culturally responsive to the strengths of their Indigenous students.



5. Develop language and literacy skills across content areas and **6. Use** content related dialogue

Heritage languages are one of the many cultural and community strengths that Native American or Indigenous students bring with them into the classroom. Unfortunately, Indigenous languages in the United States continue to be lost at alarming rates due to historical policies and practices such as Federal Indian boarding schools. Educators who serve Indigenous students should focus on supporting Native American students in two crucial areas: 1) Native (heritage) language acquisition, development, and preservation, and 2) English language acquisition and development. Teachers can leverage the oral traditions used in Native communities to help students in both areas. For example, academic discourse or dialogue can be used in any content area to foster English language proficiency. Schools can also work directly with elders and tribal education and culture departments to promote Heritage language learning.

7. Allow students to direct small group activities and **8. Uncover** knowledge in partnership with students



Traditional Indigenous education approaches value and foster the agency of all learners. Learning in many Native communities is related to the land and rely on demonstration, observation, and real-life applications of knowledge. Teachers can foster student agency in the classroom by using small group activities that promote information sharing among peers and independent or interdependent learning. Centers or stations are one example of this. Teachers can work to uncover knowledge in partnership with students by creating opportunities for students to apply their learning to practical or real-world problems and scenarios. Problem, place, or project-based learning are three similar but distinct approaches that provide opportunities for teachers and students to learn together.



9. Engage students in cognitively challenging activities and **10. participate** in professional development and implementation support

Sometimes considered simply an engagement strategy, culturally responsive teaching and learning practices require teachers to hold their students to high expectations in order to meet academic standards. Teachers can participate in professional development and implementation support to ensure culturally responsive practices are accompanied with rigorous cognitive tasks. Professional development should support a cycle of continuous improvement and ongoing reflection and be both intentional and data driven. School leaders can identify professional development opportunities that are specific to meeting the unique academic and cultural needs of Native American students. The Office of Indian Education aims to both provide and elevate such professional learning opportunities for educators across Arizona.

Want to Learn More?

Explore the resources and links below aligned with the teaching tips. All underlined text is hyperlinked and will take you directly to the resource.



Resources for Teaching Tips 1 & 2

- Find contact information for Tribal Education Departments of the 22 federally recognized tribes in Arizona on ADE-OIE's website: <https://www.azed.gov/oie/22-federallyrecognized-tribes-arizona>
- Read this Edutopia article "[Doing Life in the Community Where You Teach](#)" for more ideas about learning more about your students and their communities
- Explore resources for integrating Indigenous perspectives into your social studies instruction: <https://bit.ly/OIESSResources>
- Get guidance on selecting Indigenous literature to use in your classroom from ASU Library's Labriola American Indian National Data Center: <https://libguides.asu.edu/k12IndigenousEducation>

Resources for Teaching Tips 3 & 4

- Learn more about literature circles here: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/21/11/literature-circles>
- Learn more about Indigenous storywork and storytelling here: <https://indigenousstorywork.com/>
- Explore resources for integrating Indigenous perspectives into your ELA instruction: <https://bit.ly/ADELlinks>

Resources for Teaching Tips 5 & 6

- Watch this 10-minute mini documentary, Walking in Both Worlds, to learn more about the context of language acquisition and development among Native American students https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7V4TG_IRv-I
- Visit the Office of English Language Acquisition at the U.S. Department of Education's Native American Language Resource Center (NALRC) <https://www.ed.gov/teaching-and-administration/supporting-students/special-populations/native-american-language-resource-center-nalrc>
- Explore this slide deck from OIE's 2022 Changing the Narrative: K-12 Indigenous Literacy and Literature Symposium about Leveraging Oral Traditions to Support Academic Language and Literacy: https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2022/10/Session%205_Presentation%20OIE%20Symposium%205%20of%206.pdf

Resources for Teaching Tips 7 & 8

- Watch a webinar from the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) - their culture based webinars speak to project and problem based learning with Native students <https://www.niea.org/webinars>
- Check out this lesson plan about tribal sovereignty that promotes student-driven small group and project-based learning https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/articles/yl_3101012.pdf
- Explore resources from the Indigenous STEAM website that includes resources for families, teachers, and communities <https://indigenousteam.org/>

Resources for Teaching Tips 9 & 10

- Consider whether the long-term professional development opportunities from NAU's Institute for Native-serving Educators (INE) make sense for your learning needs <https://in.nau.edu/ine/>
- Watch recordings from UArizona Indigenous Teacher Prep Program's (ITEP) Indigenous Pedagogies Speaker Series for an asynchronous learning options <https://itep.education.arizona.edu/resources/indigenous-pedagogies-speaker-series>
- Explore past recordings and future virtual PD opportunities from the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/professional-development/upcoming-webinars>

Join the OIE email list to stay up to date on all of our professional learning opportunities!

Contact us at **IndianEducation@azed.gov**



Access the digital version of this document on OIE's website at:
<https://www.azed.gov/oie/professional-learning-resources>



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