

Making Sense of Sovereignty: Student Scenarios and Discussion Prompts



Scenario 1: Driving a Car

Ask students:

Why can a 16-year-old with a driver's license legally drive a car, but a 14-year-old cannot?

The answer isn't that one person is "better." It's because the law recognizes a different status and grants different rights and responsibilities.

Connection:

Tribal citizenship is a legal status. Certain recognitions and government programs exist because of that legal and political relationship, not because one student is considered more important than another.

Scenario 2: Voting

Ask students:

Why can an 18-year-old vote while a 17-year-old cannot?

Again, it is not about favoritism. It is about a recognized legal status under the law.

Connection:

Membership in a federally recognized tribal nation is also a legal status that carries certain rights, responsibilities, and recognitions.

Scenario 3: Tribal Membership vs. Club Membership

Ask students:

Can a student simply decide:

"Today I'm going to join Student Council and vote on school business."

There are eligibility requirements and recognized membership.

Connection:

Tribal citizenship is not simply identifying with a culture. It is membership in a sovereign tribal nation with its own citizenship criteria.

This helps students see the difference between cultural interest and actual citizenship.

Scenario 4: State Residency

Ask students:

Why does an Arizona resident pay a different tuition rate at an Arizona public university than someone from another state?

The difference is based on a legal relationship and recognized status.

Connection:

Governments often provide certain benefits or recognitions based on specific legal relationships. Tribal nations have their own government-to-government relationship with the United States.

Scenario 5: Having a Passport

Ask students:

Why is a person carrying a U.S. passport allowed to enter certain places or receive certain services that others cannot.

Because the passport represents citizenship and a legal relationship with a government.

Connection:

Tribal citizenship similarly reflects membership in a governmental entity, not merely a cultural group.

Scenario 6: Military Base Access

Ask students:

Can anyone walk onto a military base?.

Some people can because of:

- *military service*
- *dependent status*
- *official authorization*

Those privileges are tied to recognized relationships.

Connection:

Some recognitions connected to tribal citizenship exist because of a recognized governmental relationship, not personal preference.

Scenario 7: Student ID Cards

Ask Students:

Why can students enter certain school events for free while non-students must pay?

Because they belong to a recognized group with a defined status.

Connection:

Laws and policies often recognize membership, citizenship, or affiliation when determining certain rights and benefits.

Simple Educator Talking Points

One explanation that tends to resonate with high school students is:

"In everyday life, people receive different rights, responsibilities, and recognitions based on legal status, citizenship, membership, or official affiliation. Tribal citizenship is one of those recognized legal and political relationships."

Or even more simply:

"Tribal sovereignty is easier to understand when you think about citizenship rather than culture. Citizenship often comes with rights, responsibilities, and recognitions that don't apply to everyone else."