



Teaching about Native Americans and Thanksgiving

By Educator Barnes – November 22, 2021

It is that time of year again. It is time for some teachers somewhere to completely botch incorporating Thanksgiving and Native Americans into the curriculum. However, this does not need to occur. Teachers can take the time to research and plan to avoid being the next teacher to go viral for missteps in the classroom.

Teaching starts with the state standards. Teachers should first look at their state standards to determine which skills they want to teach and then identify the content they would like to use to teach the skills. Next, teachers should realize that Native Americans should not only be talked about in November during Native American Heritage Month or the days leading up to Thanksgiving.

Reading stories is one way teachers share information about a topic as well as a way to cover some academic skills. We all know responding to a text verbally or in written form is a literacy skill students need to master. I was asked to review some Thanksgiving books. Not only did I review those books, but I also picked up the first books I could locate on Thanksgiving at my

local library and reviewed them, too. I created a spreadsheet. On one tab of the spreadsheet, I pulled out standards that could potentially be covered for literacy and social studies. These Indiana standards are based on the grade level of the teachers I was helping. On the second tab, I included a review which had these categories: the author, year of copyright, concerning content, highlights, and a final recommendation.

There were factors I used to drive my recommendations. These same factors should be used to drive lesson plan choices. First, I considered the perspective told and if it was truthful. The Pilgrims did not invent the concept of Thanksgiving. Dinners of thanks have been happening around the world and included in various Native American tribes. Any talk about Thanksgiving should include native perspectives. It is even better if the author is Native American.

Moving outside of Thanksgiving to learn about Native Americans is also important. Native Americans aren't only in the past. They are still here so modern-day Native American life should be included. When Native Americans are learned about teachers need to understand that Native Americans are not a monolith. Teachers should teach about specific tribes and the specific information that goes with those tribes. Teachers should start with the Native Americans who lived on the land, both past and present, in the state where they teach. It is important to note that it is not necessary for students to dress up as Native Americans to learn about them. When we know more, we can do better. Teachers do better this year.

"Ms. _____, I have noticed that you seem to be absent every other Friday. I also noticed that you either call in Friday morning or the Thursday before. Let's talk about the impact of your absence, and I would also like to know if there is any context, I need to know to better support you." People do what they want to do when they know you will not address them individually. What happened? Most people magically stopped being absent. The Friday flu and Monday malady were cured. A few found another job. The other few had real issues going on and we planned for their absences in advance and got them the support they needed.

Schools need teachers to be present so other staff members do not have to cover their roles. When the support staff can't support students that impacts the teachers who do show up. If you are a school administrator, pull up to those chronically absent teachers' classrooms and have a direct conversation with your data about their attendance in hand. Your students deserve better and need you to address the situation.