

Journal #4812

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Smithsonian Voices National Museum of the American Indian

Five Ideas to Change Teaching about Thanksgiving, in Classrooms and at Home

November 14th, 2020, 11:00AM / BY Renée Gokey



Theresa Secord (Penobscot, b. 1958). Ear of corn basket, 2003. Maine. 26/1694.

By looking at Thanksgiving in the context of living cultures, we can make the holiday a more meaningful part of teaching and learning, in school and at home.

As a mother of elementary-aged children and an Indigenous educator at the National Museum of the American Indian (and now at home), I know that it can be challenging for parents and teachers to sort through books, Pinterest images (I highly suggest you not get your teaching ideas there), and online lesson plans about Native Americans. How do you know what is appropriate? And where can you find more accurate and authentic resources?

Added to this good challenge of bringing more Native perspectives to your teaching is the need to move past overused and simplistic curriculums for teaching about Native cultures. One common approach in early elementary classrooms during a “Native American Unit” is to center lesson plans around food, clothing, and shelter—what I call the trilogy approach to learning about Native Americans. These topics seem like simple ways to teach about Native American cultures. But would you want your home to be called a shelter? The word suggests “primitive” cultures that did not have complex and sophisticated ways of life that varied immensely in diversity.

The National Museum of the American Indian has a guide called the [Essential Understandings](#) that provides key concepts and language to frame your thinking about Native Americans before you get started. The specific strategies below build on those concepts to help deepen your

teaching and bring more meaningful content about Native Americans to your current education setting—be that a dining-room table or a classroom—during Native American Heritage Month and throughout the year.



Jade pendant representing the maize god, AD 300–900. Classic Maya. Palenque, Mexico. 4/6276 (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian)

Food is a great place to start. A worksheet that asks, “What did the Indians eat?” isn’t.

Instead of a long list of foods—and, when we’re talking about the Americas, that list is lengthy indeed, with about 60 percent of the world’s foods originating in Native agriculture throughout the Western Hemisphere—explore just one or two foods in depth.

Questions you might ask yourself to begin include, Where did a food originate? And how long has it been grown by that specific tribal community? For some cultures, oral traditions say the people come from the food itself, as in this [Maya corn story](#). What might that say about the longevity and importance of the relationship between the Maya people and their mother corn?

Instead of a nameless and generic “Indians” approach, explore the ways that people of a specific culture adapted agriculture for their environment. The museum’s teaching poster [Native People and the Land: The A:Shiwí \(Zuni\) People](#) looks at the community’s reciprocal relationship with the land in the semiarid climate of New Mexico and especially at a centuries-old farming technique known as waffle gardens.

Finally, when teaching about Native cultures, change the language of your questions and discussion from past tense to present. For more ideas on how to get started, check out [Native Life and Food: Food Is More Than Just What We Eat](#), one of the museum’s Helpful Handouts: Guidance on Common Questions. For the youngest children, make an easy corn necklace and learn more about the rich corn traditions of Native peoples. You’ll find an [activity sheet](#) and



[video demonstration here](#).

Annie Little Warrior (Hunkpapa Lakota, 1895–1966). “Buffalo Herd and Mounted Men,” date unknown. Standing Rock Reservation, South Dakota. 25/1117 (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian) [Smithsonian Voices](#) [National Museum of the American Indian](#)

Make sovereignty a vocabulary word in your classroom.

In relation to food, sovereignty is the ability to feed yourself and your family in keeping with

your history and culture. Teaching about food sovereignty and understanding how Native food cultures were systematically destroyed gives us several key understandings to American history and to touchpoints already in the curriculum. “Westward Expansion,” for example, can be explored through Lakota perspectives when students are learning about the importance of bison to ways of life, clothing, and cultural values. You’ll find guidance for teachers and students in the section Connecting to Native Histories, Cultures, and Traditions on [this webpage](#).

For grades 4–6, explore the rich tradition of clothing and the meaning inherent in the prolific work of women in the museum’s teaching poster [A Life in Beads: The Stories a Plains Dress Can Tell](#). Or show [this video](#) on the Native peoples and cultures of the Pacific Northwest to share the many ways that the foods we eat matter.

Students in grades 9–12 grades can learn about a landmark court decision and the civil rights era for tribes of the Pacific Northwest in their efforts to maintain their treaty rights in this [powerful lesson](#).

And, use the museum’s Native Knowledge 360° [resource on food sovereignty](#).

Supporting websites from beyond the museum include [North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems](#). Led by Sean Sherman, this organization reinvigorates and connects Native chefs and other people working in food sovereignty. The [White Earth Land Recovery Project](#) is another example of Indigenous food revitalization happening around the country in Native communities and how you can support the effort. You can also follow the example of the museum’s award-winning Mitsitam Native Foods Café and research shopping from Indigenous growers and ranchers.



Camilio Tafoya (K'apovi, 1902–1995). Seed jar, 1973. Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico. 26/6128 (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian)

Bring Native voices into your teaching.

Students can hear Native people’s perspectives on their history and experiences by reading books and articles by Native authors or listening to programs like the [Toasted Sister podcast](#). If you’re looking for books, a very good place to begin is the list of [titles recommended by Dr. Debbie](#)

[Reese](#) (Nambé Pueblo). Dr. Reese created, and co-edits with Dr. Jeanne Mendoza, the online resource [American Indians in Children's Literature](#).

Share more about Native Peoples' vibrant, ongoing traditions of giving thanks throughout the year with the museum's teaching poster [American Indian Perspectives on Thanksgiving](#). Or read about the [Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving](#) address, a tradition spoken at important gatherings year round.

For younger children, read the picture book *We are Grateful* by Cherokee author Traci Sorell. Sorell wrote her story, which shows the full year of Cherokee gratitude, in Cherokee and English so that kids can see the Cherokee writing system.



Odawa maple feast bowl carved with an animal figure, ca. 1880. Michigan. 16/9037 (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian)

Attend an online program.

For teachers, the museum's next professional development program is this Tuesday, November 17, from 7 to 8 p.m. Eastern time. We'll be talking about [Giving Thanks: Telling More Complete Narratives about Thanksgiving](#). Please [register in advance](#), then [join our email list](#) for news on future educator workshops and other museum programs online.

This Thursday, November 19, from 4 to 5 p.m. Eastern time, [Youth in Action: Conversations about Our Future](#), the museum's outstanding new webinar series for middle- and high-school students, focuses on Indigenous food sovereignty. The displacement of Native peoples from their lands and federal policies that introduced unhealthy foods substantially different from traditional diets have disrupted Native food systems and agricultural practices. Native communities today see many young people returning to traditional food sources and sustainable ways of living through political action and sustainable practice.

Have your students [register to take part](#) in a Zoom conversation with young Native foodies working to decolonize their diets and restore balance in their bodies and communities. Videos of [earlier months' programs](#) are archived online.

A couple of years ago, PBS featured the museum's professional development workshop around teaching Thanksgiving. You can see the short video [How Teachers are Debunking Some of the Myths of Thanksgiving](#) on the PBS Newshour website.

And for families, try [this cooking show](#) from Aicha Smith-Belghaba, a Haudenosaunee and Syrian chef from the Six Nations of the Grand River in Canada.



Ernest L. Spybuck (Absentee Shawnee, 1883–1949). "Pumpkin Dance," 1910. Shawnee, Oklahoma. 2/6928 (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian)

See Thanksgiving as a chance to share your family's unique history and traditions, too.

Talk about the actual 1621 event that's been come to be known as Thanksgiving, rather than the mythical one. Did you know that the First Thanksgiving between the Wampanoag and the Pilgrims may have actually had more to do with diplomacy than a simple feast? Learn more about the actual event in this [impassioned short essay](#) by a museum intern, published by Smithsonian Voices. Use our study guide [Harvest Ceremony: Beyond the Thanksgiving Myth](#) as a teaching resource.

Honor your students' and your own family's food traditions. Story Corps' [Great Thanksgiving Listen](#) is a terrific guide to collecting your family's oral history. Interview family members on the phone or over the Internet if that's the best way to keep everyone safe.

And think about traditions you may take for granted. Pumpkin is a traditional Shawnee food. There is a Shawnee pumpkin that some families still grow—it's smaller than most orange pumpkins, and a light grayish blue—and our Shawnee communities in Oklahoma still have a Pumpkin Dance. Historically, pumpkin was cut into rings and smoked over the fire for the winter.

Some Shawnee families won't a carve pumpkin, in order to show it greater respect. Our family doesn't follow that practice, but we don't let any part of the pumpkin be wasted. We roast the seeds with olive oil and salt, and boil or bake the pieces cut away during the carving for pumpkin bread or pie.

All of us have food histories worth exploring. During this year when so many things look different, take a new perspective on your family's history and traditions through food. Try a family recipe together and have your children write it down to share. Or make a short video to send to family members you can't see in person.

Above all, remember to give thanks for each and every day, a gift that is not guaranteed to any of us.

Renée Gokey (citizen of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma) is the teacher services coordinator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.

[University of Oregon College of Education](#)



Sapsik'^walá Alumni Profiles | Roshelle Wieser-Nieto Entering a Conversation

Roshelle Weiser-Nieto, who is Modoc and Yahooskin Paiute of the Klamath Tribes, always knew she wanted to pursue a doctoral degree someday. A professor recently shared that research is “entering into a conversation” that includes many contributions and perspectives. She wants to make sure, however, that those conversations include members of the community, and that research is driving change outside of academia as well as within.

Roshelle earned her bachelor's degree in Ethnic Studies at University of Oregon. While she knew she wanted to teach, and even took a few Education Foundations courses, she was drawn to Ethnic Studies, saying “if I'm going to be the best teacher I can be for communities of color, I'm going to spend my time and focus learning what it means to be well-versed in ethnic studies. I feel if I have a good understanding of other cultures' experiences, then I can be a better teacher for all students.” She wrote her senior thesis on the effect of forced boarding schools on Indigenous oral traditions. “If we understand the value of oral tradition, and we recognize the impacts of boarding schools, and the historical trauma that that's led to, how can we move toward a place of historical healing? I really see that as my life's work.”

It was a natural transition from Ethnic Studies to the Sapsik'^walá program, where she graduated in 2010. She said, “during my second year of Sapsik'^walá, I was in the largest cohort that we've ever had, there were seventeen of us. And it was just so spiritually powerful to walk into our classes and have seventeen Indigenous people strong, to feel like we weren't alone. It felt magical. If it wasn't for Sapsik'^walá I probably wouldn't have become a teacher and I certainly wouldn't be in my PhD program.”

Roshelle is now in her second year of the Critical and Sociocultural Studies in Education PhD program, and working as a Graduate Employee for the Sapsik'^walá program, coming full circle.

She says, “part of my job working for Sapsik^wálá is to attend the seminars. We're with the students in the current cohort, students who we get to serve as mentors. It's really interesting to hear the things that they're thinking about, because I've been out of Sapsik^wálá for ten years. These future teachers think about things in different ways than we did and they're just so innovative and inspiring. And so those mentoring conversations go both ways. They teach me just as much, if not more. When you're talking about education you need to understand the importance of relationships, and you need to understand the importance of reciprocity in those relationships.”

“The thing about being Indigenous is we're relational, and there is no word for ‘I’ in a lot of our tribal languages. It's always ‘we’, or the word for what we call our people. That really resonated with me in thinking about my work. It’s a whole movement, and I'm blessed to be able to contribute to the conversation.”

We’re celebrating an important milestone for the Sapsik^wálá program - 100 alumni! You can support Indigenous students by giving to our DuckFunder during Native American Heritage Month.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has been America's most important conservation funding tool for nearly 50 years.

Since 1964, the fund has preserved millions of acres in all 50 states, and almost every U.S. county. This includes conservation of national parks, local trails, national recreation areas, wildlife refuges and more. States can also earn matching grants for open spaces, parks and recreation areas. Yet, the clock is ticking for the LWCF because the current anti-conservation Congress is threatening not to re-authorize this successful program.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is truly a brilliant idea, costs taxpayers nothing. It works by using royalties from offshore oil and gas leasing to buy and conserve pockets of private land within national parks, known as "inholdings," and other lands around national forests, refuges and recreation areas. Such lands are then conserved and protected from nearby development. Places like Grand Canyon National Park, Ariz., Rocky Mountain National Park, Colo, Antietam National Battlefield, Md., and Cape Hatteras National Seashore, N.C., have all benefited from the fund.

If the Land and Water Conservation fund is not renewed, hundreds of needed conservation projects will have no funding. Special wild areas that are at risk of being developed will be threatened, and our nation's ability to conserve lands for future generations will be undercut.

The projects on this map show how valuable the Land and Water Conservation Fund is to Americans. Explore the map to see nearly every project funded in each state over the history of the fund.

Map: Explore county by county to see nearly every state & national LWCF project

- *National projects are pin drops (approx. location)*

- To view state matching grant projects, click a county.
- Data available in "show related records" (Data thru 2014)

To see this really cool map:

https://www.wilderness.org/articles/article/mapping-land-and-water-conservation-fund-lwcf?fbclid=IwAR11CFejFOSpuXHuBDc3k7EuK1SUNz6tEimThuevLSUCPaha8VIb0_9bbhw#



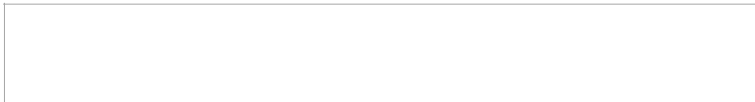
Foundation for an Independent Tomorrow launches technology program with Findlay Toyota

Charitable organization, Foundation For an Independent Tomorrow (FIT) announces its partnership with Findlay Toyota, with its four-month Automotive Technology class. The nonprofit's mission is to help the underemployed and unemployed in Southern Nevada to gain vocational education, job training and to receive a well-paying job.

Dark Skies, Tourism Threatened in Gerlach

Ormat is proposing to develop geothermal plants just outside of Gerlach along County Road 34. **Comments due to the BLM by November 30. For more details and to leave your comment, please view the official release statement [here](#).**

Friends of Nevada Wilderness will be fighting this project that would be wedged between the Black Rock Desert NCA and the lower eastern slopes of the proposed Granite Banjo Wilderness. It would directly impact the region's dark skies, the Granite Banjo Wilderness Proposal, the Americana Art installation of Guru Lane, water sources, and international tourism in Gerlach and the Black Rock Playa. [click on box](#)



The Kapor (pronounced KAY-por) Center aims to make the technology ecosystem and entrepreneurship more diverse and inclusive. We are particularly interested in positive social impacts for communities that have historically been on the periphery of access to opportunity, participation and influence in the United States.

We believe that when the community of tech leaders reflects the diversity of the United States, tech will play an integral role in closing gaps and disparities that exist in this country. Via proven and experimental methods from the for-profit and nonprofit fields, we work in partnership with a diverse set of stakeholders to maximize social impact.

We Work To:

- **01**
Advance the body of knowledge about the leaky pipeline by conducting, disseminating and evangelizing action oriented research that leads to more effective, evidence-based solutions.
- **02**
Address the pipeline problem by fixing all of the leaks along the pipeline for underrepresented populations, with an emphasis on African Americans and Latina/os.
- **03**
Be a catalyst for others in the tech world to match or exceed (in time, attention or money in proportion to their resources), so that a decade from now tech will look more like America.
- **04**
Align strategies and efforts between three organizations – the Kapor Center, SMASH and Kapor Capital – to provide a comprehensive approach to expanding tech inclusion.

Priorities

- Increasing diverse tech entrepreneurship.
- Increasing access to capital.
- Increasing access to tech and STEM education.
- Building strong community and community institutions to promote a more diverse tech ecosystem in the Bay Area, with a special focus on Oakland, our home.
- Leveraging our Oakland HQ as a gathering place for learning and leadership opportunities that help build/expand the startup ecosystem of gap-closing companies, especially in Oakland.\
-

[One Indian state is preserving its century-old trees with heritage tags](#)

Heritage trees have great ecological value as they tolerate heavy clays and infertile, provide shade, pastures, and roadsides, serve as windbreakers, stabilise the soil and are a food source for animals with long necks.

Quartz

FOCUS: Anti-Nuclear Pacifists Get Federal Prison Terms for Nonviolent Protest

Elise Swain, The Intercept

Excerpt: "The most dedicated peace activists you've never heard of are headed to federal prison amid a deadly pandemic." **READ MORE**

“It shouldn’t be that the court is trying to deter people from acting according to their sincerely held religious beliefs,” Daloisio told The Intercept. “In terms of rehabilitation, I think everyone agrees that there’s no rehabilitating people from the position that human beings have the right to live, not under the threat of nuclear annihilation, not under the threat of the destruction of the whole planet.”



17th Annual University of Nevada, Reno

Student World Water Forum

***Wednesday Nov 18, 4pm - SWWF Keynote Presentation in
conjunction with the Geography Department***

Dr. Sophia Layser Borgias

Public interest, Indigenous rights, and the Los Angeles Aqueduct

-- zoom meeting ID: 928 1561 0458, Passcode: GeoSpeak

<https://unr.zoom.us/j/92815610458?pwd=R0t6cThVNG10RmJlalo2Qm9ETDBRQT09>

***Thursday Nov 19, 5pm - Feature film, Upriver,
followed by a panel discussion***

-- zoom meeting ID: 898 4763 5539, Passcode: 315222

<https://unr.zoom.us/j/89847635539?pwd=aVgzNVUrbzJLUFNndVA4VngyZVBRZz09>

Friday Nov 20, 8:30am to 5:30pm - Student poster presentations

-- zoom meeting ID: 834 7049 3731, Passcode: 720656

<https://unr.zoom.us/j/83470493731?pwd=ZVNBdk9OWWFHaXRidmkwR1FIOUZCQT09>

Session 1	8:30am	Impacts from Water Quality
Session 2	9:10am	Proposed Solutions to Water Conflicts
Session 3	9:50am	Ecosystem Health and Water
Session 4	10:30am	Groundwater
Session 5	11:10am	Approaches to Alternative Water Supplies
Session 6	11:50am	Wildlife, Fisheries and Water
Session 7	12:30pm	Drought and Climate Change
Session 8	1:10pm	Public Health and Water Supplies
Session 9	1:50pm	Challenges with Islands and Water
Session 10	2:30pm	Mountain Hydrology
Session 11	3:10pm	Dams
Session 12	3:50pm	Water Infrastructure
Session 13	4:30pm	Irrigated Agriculture
Session 14	5:10pm	Responses to Water Quality

Please visit unrwater.com for more information

