



Teachings Of Our Elders

Discovering the North Dakota Native American Essential Understandings

“This is about improving what we do in schools for all students.”

-Dr. Scott Simpson, Learning Specialist,

North Dakota Native American Essential Understandings



DID YOU KNOW that North Dakota is home to five federally recognized Tribes, but that seven tribes originally called this territory home? Can you name them?

DID YOU KNOW that each of the five federally recognized tribes are considered sovereign nations and that the reservations they currently call home were not “given to them?”

DID YOU KNOW that Native Americans make up almost 5% of North Dakota’s population (a little more than 43,000), and that 40% are under the age of 20? *DID YOU KNOW* that North Dakota’s Native American citizens pay more than \$57 million in taxes each year?

DID YOU KNOW that traditional songs and stories contained information essential for centuries of survival without the benefit of written language?

DID YOU KNOW that some of the most effective farming technologies emerged from traditional Native American agricultural practices?

And finally, *DID YOU KNOW* that a wealth of materials and resources is already available for use in your classroom?

These are just a sample of the kinds of information shared with 30 educators from the Fargo and West Fargo Public Schools who attended a one-day training on the North Dakota Native American Essential Understandings this summer. These ‘essential understandings’ provide resources for lesson planning to increase cultural awareness and sensitivity with emphasis on how Native American history and culture is taught in our schools, and is supported by both the Fargo and West Fargo school districts. In addition, the lessons and associated training opportunities draw attention to the potential benefits of using these understandings in *any* classroom setting. During the training, educators from a variety of backgrounds were taught about North Dakota’s Native American Essential Understandings that include: Sacred Relatives, Learning & Storytelling, Sharing & Generosity, Sense of Humor, Tribal Policies, Treaties, & Sovereignty, Native Contributions, and Native Identity. It is these teachings that provide us with opportunity not only enrich the lives of all of our students, but also to reflect on our own identity and values. I am glad to have been a part of the planning committee and to have heard the personal stories shared with regards to the struggles of educating our children on these matters. I also appreciated the positive nature of this effort along with the reminder that the goal is “not about shaming or embarrassing” for lack of knowledge, but for the benefit of all students and staff (Simpson 2017). And because the intention is to provide support and resources for teachers regardless of their current knowledge of historical and contemporary issues, the Indian Education staff will provide additional resources and support for the Implementation of the NDNAEU as needed.

I would like to extend an invitation to check out the following websites for more information on the teacher training and elder interviews from which it is based:

ND: <http://teachingsofourelders.org>

SD: <http://wolakotaproject.org>

Please feel free to contact me with any related questions or concerns,
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