

Indigenous peoples and climate change

Created by: Kristen Mcdermott (Centaurus High School) and Patrick Chandler (CIRES)

Setting the Stage

In this lesson, students will learn more about native peoples in their region, what climate change means to different indigenous groups, and how to support native groups.

Lesson Overview

- Part 1 – (20 min.) Students will learn about which indigenous land they live on by exploring a map of their area and the tribes associated with it.
- Part 2 – (20 min. minutes) Students will watch a TED talk on the interconnection between human trauma and climate trauma for native peoples.
- Part 3 – (20 min.) Students will read about and create an action plan to support native peoples in their region.

Instructional Overview	
Grade Level	Middle/High School
Instructional Time	60 min.
Driving Question	How can we support indigenous peoples, who are often frontline communities, during climate change?
Standards	Essential Understandings standards included, see the “Standards” section at the end of this lesson for details.



Concepts	• Nearly all lands in the United States were previously territories of native peoples. • Indigenous people often live in frontline communities experiencing immediate consequences due to climate change. • Most communities in the United States are located near tribes and can find ways to be allies.
Outcomes	By the end of this lesson, students will be able to: • Identify which indigenous land they live on. • Provide examples of how some indigenous communities are experiencing climate change. • Create an action plan to support native communities in their area.
Materials	• Computers or tablets and an internet connection for students to do work online and a projector to show a video to the class.



Vocabulary	Read and discuss this note on indigenous peoples from the United Nations before this lesson: Considering the diversity of indigenous peoples, an official definition of "indigenous" has not been adopted by any UN-system body. Instead the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following: ● Self- identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member. ● Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies ● Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources ● Distinct social, economic or political systems ● Distinct language, culture and beliefs ● Form non-dominant groups of society ● Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.
DEI/human rights connections	Indigenous people around the world are experiencing some of the worst consequences of climate change and have done the least to cause it. The trauma from climate change is often intertwined with previous cultural trauma.

Activity flow:

Which indigenous land are we on? (15-20 min)

Begin by reading the note in the vocabulary section above with the class and discussing what it means. Spend time with any questions students may have.

Ask students if anyone has connections to indigenous groups and if they would like to discuss them with the class (it's okay if they would prefer not to).



As a class or individually read the following article: “Which Indigenous lands are you on? This map will show you”- https://www.npr.org/2022/10/10/1127837659/native-land-map-ancestral-tribal-lands-worldwide

Explore the map that accompanies the article to find out which indigenous lands you live on. Learn how to use the map here: https://native-land.ca/about/how-it-works/

Link to the map: https://native-land.ca/

Click on the links for the tribes in your area and learn more about them.

An Indigenous perspective on climate change and trauma (20-25 min)

Watch this TEDx talk by Sheila Watt-Cloutier, “Human Trauma and Climate Trauma As One” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nn-awZbMVo

In pairs, small groups, or as a class discuss the following questions:

- What does Sheila Watt-Cloutier mean when she says that for her and her tribe human trauma and climate trauma are one and the same?
- How might Sheila’s experience be shared by other native peoples across North America and the world?
- What questions do you have about this talk?

Share questions and answers in groups or as a class.

III. Create an action plan to provide support

The following resource describes why it's necessary to go beyond a land acknowledgment to show solidarity with native peoples. Read the introduction and follow the instructions to create a class plan for action: https://nativegov.org/news/beyond-land-acknowledgment-guide/

Consider what you can do as a class rather than individuals to support equity. Your action plan will likely look considerably different than the examples shown here. Focus



on accomplishable steps, which may begin by reaching out to local tribes and asking what you can do to provide support.

If creating an action plan does not fit with your class or school due to resources, politics, or other reasons, discuss what a land acknowledgment is and what it does and does not do to provide support for indigenous peoples.

Extension:

Work to connect with the natural world in your area through the Drawdown Ecochallenge project (https://drawdown.ecochallenge.org/challenges/land-sinks):

Explore My Area

Sometimes protecting nature requires feeling connected to nature. I will invest (___) minutes in exploring and appreciating a natural area in my region, whether a forest, wetland, coastal area, or somewhere else.

Standards:

For this lesson, standards are taken from the Essential Understandings, as described below:

Essential Understandings

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) Native Knowledge 360° Essential Understandings about American Indians is a framework that offers new possibilities for creating student learning experiences. Building on the ten themes of the National Council for the Social Studies' national curriculum standards, the NMAI's Essential Understandings reveal key concepts about the rich and diverse cultures, histories, and contemporary lives of Native Peoples. These concepts reflect a multitude of untold stories about American Indians that can deepen and expand your teaching of history, geography, civics, economics, science, engineering, and other subject areas.

https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/about/understandings

This lesson focuses on category one: American Indian Cultures.

From the Essential Understandings



Culture is a result of human socialization. People acquire knowledge and values by interacting with other people through common language, place, and community. In the Americas, there is vast cultural diversity among more than 2,000 tribal groups. Tribes have unique cultures and ways of life that span history from time immemorial to the present day.

Key Concepts

- There is no single American Indian culture or language.
- American Indians are both individuals and members of a tribal group.
- For millennia, American Indians have shaped and been shaped by their culture and environment. Elders in each generation teach the next generation their values, traditions, and beliefs through their own tribal languages, social practices, arts, music, ceremonies, and customs.
- Kinship and extended family relationships have always been and continue to be essential in the shaping of American Indian cultures.
- American Indian cultures have always been dynamic and changing.
- Interactions with Europeans and Americans brought accelerated and often devastating changes to American Indian cultures.
- Native people continue to fight to maintain the integrity and viability of indigenous societies. American Indian history is one of cultural persistence, creative adaptation, renewal, and resilience.
- American Indians share many similarities with other indigenous people of the world, along with many differences.

Find more curriculum from the Right Here Right Now Global Climate Summit here: https://cires.colorado.edu/outreach/programs/right-here-right-now-global-climate-summit