

20th Century and Contemporary Native North American Art
“The History and Progress of the Navajo People” through Mural Art

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Diné Institute for Navajo Nation Educators (DINE)

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Context and Rationale

Introduction

This curriculum is connected to twentieth-century and contemporary Native North American art with a focused emphasis on today's contemporary Native American art. This curriculum will emphasize how understanding contemporary Native American art can promote cultural pride and self-identity, further preservation of heritage, honor cultural ancestry, and aid in remembrance of the history and events of a group of Native American people through modern and contemporary art. This curriculum will further an understanding of how contemporary art and artists like Gerald Nailor (Navajo) have created a window of vision to our early culture, providing a connection to our ancestors, and how their work illustrates and tells the important history of an indigenous group of people, in this curriculum specifically the Navajo (Diné) people.

This curriculum will focus specifically on mural art. "The History and Progress of the Navajo People" is a set of eight murals painted by Gerald Nailor during the years of 1942 to 1943 on the walls of the Navajo Nation Council Chambers in Window Rock, Arizona. This mural art masterpiece is the focus of this curriculum. Fortunately, as of 2019, seventy-seven years after their completion, Nailor's murals remain preserved on the building's walls. These special paintings on the interior walls of the octagonal Navajo Nation Council Chambers are the main source and inspiration of this curriculum. The importance and the history of the Navajo people portrayed on these eight walls is so vital to help form an understanding of the historical significance and the endurance of a tribe of Native American people's experience over an extended period of time. Students learning about Navajo history through this pictorial mural will acquire knowledge of the historical events the ancestral Navajo people endured. Such exposure to the stories of experiences and events of a historical group of people will help the learners who participate in this curriculum to form an underlying understanding of events, will form cultural historical empathy, and gain knowledge of five important Navajo historical events.

This curriculum can be implemented and taught any time of the school year. As the creator of this curriculum, I decided to teach this curriculum for the first time in the month of November of this school year. On August 3, 1990, the former United States President George H. W. Bush declared November National American Indian Heritage Month. Then later it became commonly referred to as Native American Heritage Month. This observance was founded and the first annual celebration of it was sponsored by Pale Moon Rose, an indigenous individual of Cherokee-Seneca descent. November is the time of year that Indian Wells Elementary School celebrates and annually schedules special events in a designated time frame of Native American Week. To end the week's celebration, Indian Wells Elementary School plans a special family night event called Native American Night to celebrate our Native American Heritage. During this special event the students, teachers, and families come together to celebrate Native American culture through cultural presentations, Native traditional fashion, Native contemporary fashion, and the sharing of cultural knowledge by the students.

Demographics

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This curriculum will be implemented in a third grade classroom at Indian Wells Elementary School (IWES) in Indian Wells, Arizona. Indian Wells Elementary School is a public school that is a part of the Holbrook Unified School District (HUSD) located in the southwestern part of the Navajo Nation reservation in the northeastern part of Arizona. The Indian Wells community is located 30 miles north of Holbrook, Arizona on the corner of Highway 15 and Highway 77 off of Interstate 40. Indian Wells Elementary School is a preschool through sixth grade elementary school. Serving approximately 430 students, IWES has a 99.5% Native American student population, according to the 2017-2018 Holbrook Unified School District website demographics. There are two to three classes of each grade level at IWES. For third grade, there are currently two third grade classrooms. There are about 24 student learners that make up each third grade class. This curriculum is designed to be taught to students in grade three but could also be modified to be used at any elementary level.

Almost all of the students enrolled at IWES are members of the Navajo tribe, and others are of other tribal affiliations. A majority of the student population is transported to and from school by bus, with the exception of some students who are dropped off and picked up by their families. The students enrolled at IWES come from the surrounding communities of Indian Wells, Greasewood Springs, Whitecone, Dilcon, Castle Butte, Teesto, Seba Dalkai, Na'a'diih Canyon, Jeddito, Steamboat, and the other residences leading up to the reservation line along Highway 77. Indian Wells Elementary School operates on a four-day school week (Monday through Thursday). IWES is one of six schools within the Holbrook Unified School District. In operation since 2002, Indian Wells Elementary School is one of the newer schools in the district.

IWES offers the following sports programs for the fifth and sixth grade students: Cross Country, Football, Volleyball, Basketball, Softball, and Soccer. Currently, in addition to being offered to fifth and sixth graders, Cross County is the only sports program that is offered to the younger students in kindergarten through fourth grade. Our school sports program participates within the Navajo Hopi Area Junior High League (NHAJHL). In addition to our instructional Common Core curriculum, IWES offers special classes for 30-minute sessions for PE (twice a week), Music (once a week), and Navajo language/culture (once a week).

Reasons for this Curriculum

A major influence in the choice of this topic for a curriculum unit is that Indian Wells Elementary School does not have an art program or offer art as an instructional special. Our large population of Native American students, specifically the Navajo (Diné) students, would greatly benefit from learning about many forms of art, specifically Native American art. There are many schools like IWES that have a limited focus on art due, but not limited to, lack of art educators, financial means for an art program, instructional time structure, and state standards and curriculum mandates. Nevertheless, how perfectly ideal it would be to implement a Native American art curriculum to a large population of Native American learners. Therefore, implementing a curriculum like this one is academically and culturally fitting. Implementation of a Native American art curriculum will contribute significantly to the learner's knowledge and will have a beneficial impact on the student's cultural knowledge and the school culture of all Native American learners.

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There are many art forms that historical and ancestral Native Americans have created which have influenced contemporary Native American art and artists. The connection to the past has had a significant influence on today's contemporary art. Native American art forms, such as basket making, rug weaving, jewelry making, sand painting, sculpture, contemporary Native American clothing, paintings, illustrations and mural art, are all creative artistic expressions with underlying connections to earlier Native American culture and people. Through the topic of Native contemporary art, this curriculum is fully intended to promote knowledge of the wider realm of Native North American art. The curriculum will promote culture and pride and celebrate the diversity of Native Americans. Equally important, it will promote a form of preservation of Native American history and knowledge of events that have impacted the lives of Indigenous people. In conjunction, it will offer a unique opportunity for students to learn about the cultures of Indigenous people through a variety of art works while connecting and maintaining the learning to the Arizona State Standards and Diné Curriculum Standards.

In our neighboring state of California, “Teachers in a number of districts... are using classic works of art to inspire some of the youngest students to observe closely, think critically and discuss respectfully-all key elements of the Common Core approach to learning” (S.Frey, 2015). This same concept model can be replicated and utilized with Native American art for our Native American student population. Doing this will encourage a locally and culturally responsive learning connection to Native American art and artists.

With this curriculum, students will have the opportunity to view Native American art by observing the art, thinking critically about it, and discussing the art with their scholarly peers. In *Art Appreciation Helps Young Children to Think and Express Ideas*, Susan Frey explains,

This approach for K-12 students was developed about 20 years ago by the co-founders of Visual Thinking Strategies, a nonprofit based in New York that provides training in the method to schools and art museums.

Research studies on the method have shown that students in classes where the visual thinking program was used had a better understanding of visual images, exhibited stronger growth in math and reading, and showed better social-emotional growth than students in classes that did not use the program. The approach was particularly effective for English learners. The visual thinking method asks three questions of young students: What’s going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find? This approach teaches students how to take the time to observe closely, describe what they see in detail and provide evidence for their observations, Gulden said, “the kind of skills that Common Core asks for” (p. 2-3).

In a research paper on talking about art with young people, David Bell, an associate professor at the University of Otago in New Zealand, says that “children are less inhibited than many adults in their engagement with artworks.” (p.7) (S.Frey, 2015)

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Viewing Native American art will allow the students to formulate thoughts and ideas. It will allow students to express language and use vocabulary to explain their thinking as well as listen to other student's opinions and perspectives about the art. Another important reason for the creation of this curriculum and its implementation is the connection to Indian Wells Elementary's school mission "to set high goals for themselves (students) and to reach their full potential without leaving their cultural identity behind." With multiple curriculum mandates, meeting the requirements of state standards and the following of academic school calendars can be challenging. The challenge of implementing culturally relevant curriculum in addition to the local and state standards can be a new way to incorporate culturally relevant curriculum. The art lessons in this curriculum are designed to help maintain a connection to cultural identity. The curriculum is designed to benefit the learner in making a connection to the past, helping them come full circle in understanding from whom and where they historically originate. This will assist the students to reach their full potential in today's modern living. Therefore, the ultimate reason for the overarching theme of this curriculum will be to promote Native American roots, preserve heritage, honor ancestors, and remember the history of Native American people and events through modern and contemporary art.

Content Objectives

This curriculum is designed with a focus on Native American art. It will offer students the opportunity to view Native American mural art, attain background knowledge regarding the time frame of the art, and learn about this particular art form. It will also provide them with time to think about, discuss, and write about the art. The use of technology for some of the activities designed into this curriculum will be incorporated to fulfill the connection to today's technological society.

This curriculum will focus on mural art, specifically the set of murals "The History and Progress of the Navajo People," painted by Gerald Nailor in 1942-1943 in the Navajo Nation Council Chambers in Window Rock, Arizona. It will help students gain an appreciation of how contemporary art and artists like Gerald Nailor have created a window of vision to our early culture and ancestors and how illustrating the important history of indigenous people has been preserved for future generations. Students who participate in this curriculum will confidently gain knowledge about mural art and how mural art conveys and narrates a story in pictorial form on a large scale for all to see. For that reason, this curriculum will also expose how Native American art has an impact on our Native American society today.

This curriculum will not only teach the student learners about mural art but will help form an understanding of the perspective of the artist and the reasons the artist took the time to create and display his art. After understanding the art, students will make connections to themselves and people of the past. The students will form an understanding and build empathy regarding cultural lifestyles and historical events that involved indigenous groups of people. In "American Indian Art Teaching and Learning," M. Herzog and S. Stolte significantly stated:

In Teaching Native American art, perspective matters. Students need to grapple with the political, spiritual, social, and economical effects of

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colonialism for indigenous peoples--and the discursive resonance of colonialism across academic disciplines, including art history--and they need to understand how postcolonial discourse might reverberate within these materials and intellectual contexts. As well, students must become aware of ways in which colonial and postcolonial narratives inform the production of knowledge about Native and non-Native art, including how art has been studied, written about, and exhibited. . . It is our task as educators to facilitate students' exploration of new ways of thinking about art, and to help them learn to interrogate the historical exigencies and theoretical bases of these perspectives. Whether Native or non-Native, as educators we all need to center Native perspectives in our teaching as we design and instruct courses that look at the interconnections in Native art among aesthetics, materials, function, meaning, social relations, and social practices, and the historical circumstances within which these works of art are produced (M.Herzog and S. Stolte, 2012, p. 87-88).

Keeping in mind this important concept, students will write about their feelings and discuss their thoughts about challenges the Navajo people have encountered in terms of cultural survival, lifestyle, traditions, and customs. Through this curriculum, students will be introduced to significant Navajo historical events that have shifted, shaped, and changed the Navajo people over time throughout today. Understanding the historical culture of Indigenous people like the Navajo people will truly help Navajo students understand who they are and where they come from. Students will observe and explore Gerald Nailor's mural, "The History and Progress of the Navajo People," while learning about the history of the Navajo people. The curriculum will have an instructional focus on these historical events portrayed in the mural:

The Way of Life of the Early Navajo People

The Long Walk of the Navajo People

The Signing of the Treaty of 1868

The Stock Reduction

The Navajo Students and Boarding Schools

Teaching Strategies

This curriculum will be designed to include different types of learning methods to meet the needs of a variety of different learners. Since this is an art curriculum, a number of visuals will be utilized. Pictures of a variety of murals will be viewed in computer or Smartboard presentations. Students will view murals from local places and cities common to our school community so they

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will gain an understanding of the variety of different mural creations and styles created by current local artists.

The curriculum is also designed to include **direct instruction** from the teacher. The teacher will give information about mural art by focusing on Native American mural art. In the mural, *The History and Progress of the Navajo People*, by Gerald Nailor, the majority of the historical information pertains to the Navajo People. Much of the historical information will be carried out through direct instruction with levels of **scaffolded** information so students with different learning levels will have an understanding of what the artist portrayed in the art work. The historical information will also be configured into a timeline for the class to understand five events portrayed in the murals.

The teacher will also use a **technological approach** by using a variety of technology resources like the Internet, Smartboard and short videos. The students will use Chrome books and Google Classroom to participate in the work designed into the curriculum.

The curriculum will also be designed with **kinesthetic learning**, in which the students will create their own mural of significant times and events in their life. They will illustrate their murals on paper (8 x 11) and then transfer their designs to larger paper for a mural-type display.

Through the technological devices and reproductions of the pieces of art, integration of the ELA components of the AZ Common Core Standards will all be interwoven into this curriculum. Students will learn about the art through a designated focus through: Listening, Thinking, Speaking, Reading, & Writing skills. Students will be given the opportunity to think-pair-share about the art pieces and write about them.

Writing about art will be a significant component of this curriculum. Students will write about their observations of the art. They will write about what they see in the art and why they think the artist painted and included the images in the mural. Students will write what they think about the art. Last but not least, students will write about how the art makes them feel. The infusion of art and writing was used by teachers in Maine with Native American students. As explained in Kelly A. Hrenko's "The Intersection of Indigenous Cultures, Visual Arts, and Creative Writing", teachers and researchers found in their study and observation that:

For many students, the use of the visual images along with writing provides a link to engaging them more thoughtfully, and creatively, as well as provides multimodal forms of comprehending, processing and understanding the various and complex ideas of art and culture (Childers, Hobson, & Mullin, 1998, p.11-12).

It was realized both art and writing provided meaningful opportunities to heighten perception, engage emotions, deepen thought, and broaden one's understanding of the world. This work showed that if students are provided regular opportunities to work in the expressive mode with new and challenging subject matter, they could improve their critical abilities significantly (K.A.Hrenko, 2014, p. 17).

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Classroom Activities

Different forms of classroom activities will be integrated with the art pieces, and information about art and artists will be utilized. Students will learn about the art through a designated focus through ELA skills: Listening, Thinking, Speaking, Reading, & Writing skills. The activities listed below are organized into seven activities. As the curriculum instruction is implemented, some of the activities might need more than one activity session to complete.

Activity 1:

The teacher will introduce mural art to the students in the class, beginning with the showing of a short video about mural painting. To begin the lessons, the teacher will have the students view and analyze the mural art that was painted in the Indian Wells Elementary School front hall created and painted in 2009 by Navajo artist, Chester Kahn. In an article about the IWES 10-year celebration, Susan Hayden wrote:

Indian Wells Elementary School operates with a purpose that is clearly reflected in its mission statement: 'In a safe environment at Indian Wells, we will encourage and challenge all students to be committed to lifelong learning and reaching their full potential without leaving their cultural identity behind.' As an exhibit supporting this purpose, a 6 X 16 foot mural by renowned Navajo artist Chester Kahn graces the wall outside the school library. Kahn painted this mural over a six month period in 2009. He said it will be his final mural and called it a labor of love for the Navajo children. Students often sat across the hall, quietly observing as the Navajo elder worked his design in stages on the wall. Mr. Kahn, renowned for his series of murals in Gallup, N.M., has been honored at the Heard Museum and is a recipient of the 2011 Arizona Indian Living Treasures Award (S.Hayden, 2009).

To incorporate the Arizona State Standards, students will read a biography adapted by the teacher from internet resources and research about Chester Kahn. The teacher will conduct the introduction to mural art in the hallway of the Indian Wells Elementary School where this mural is located. In addition to introducing mural art, the teacher will show the students pictures of different murals from local areas that are familiar and commonly known places to Indian Wells Elementary School students like Holbrook, Winslow, Window Rock, Gallup, and Flagstaff. Pictures will be captured by the curriculum creator and shared with the students. Students will view the pictures from the Smart board and or Google Classroom. They will think about the art, discuss the art, see the details in the art, and write about the art.

Activity 2:

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The teacher will introduce and display pictures of the mural art, “The History and Progress of the Navajo People” created by Gerald Nailor. Teacher will show students pieces of the murals painted in the Navajo Nation Council Chambers. The representation of five historical events in the murals will be focused on to achieve an understanding of what is portrayed in the paintings. In addition, students will learn about Gerald Nailor’s life through a written biography adapted by the teacher found in internet resources and research done by Dr. Jennifer McLerran. In “The History and Progress of the Navajo People: Dual Signification in Gerald Nailor Navajo Council House Murals” Jennifer McLerran explains:

Navajo artist Gerald Nailor’s council chambers murals, completed in 1943, were part of a federal effort to gain support for New Deal Indian policy. This eight-panel mural, titled *The History and Progress of the Navajo People*, represented Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier’s efforts to implement a policy of indirect administration toward Native Americans-- i.e. their activities should be coordinated locally by community members but administered by the federal government. (McLerran, 2012, p.43).

Students will read a biography of the artist to incorporate and practice the ELA skill reading for information. Students will focus on the main idea and key details in this activity lesson. During this activity students will get an understanding of the artist and his life as a muralist and his life in art school. They will also read about some of the other murals he painted in Washington, D.C. before the work created in the Navajo Nation Council Chambers.

Nailor was born in 1917 in Pinedale, New Mexico, on the Navajo Reservation, and attended boarding school at the Phoenix Indian School in Phoenix, Arizona, where he studied with Cherokee artist Lloyd Kiva New. He also studied art at the Santa Fe Indian School in Santa Fe, New Mexico, working with teacher Dorothy Dunn, and learned the art of *fresco secco* mural painting under the tutelage of Swedish artist Olle Nordmark. As McLerran explains, “In this technique, line drawings, or ‘cartoons,’ are transferred to a dry plaster surface by punching holes in the paper on which they are sketched and then pouncing chalk through the holes. The mural is then painted with pigments with glue or casein base” (McLerran, 2012, p. 43).

Nailor’s career as an artist was cut short when he died at the age of thirty-five. However, through his mural projects in Washington, D.C. and Window Rock, he gained significant recognition during his lifetime and is now well-known as an important Indigenous artist who painted compelling scenes of Navajo life (McLerran, 2012).

Activity 3

After Nailor’s biographical information is introduced and read, students will compare and contrast the two artists Chester Kahn and Gerald Nailor. Students will compare and contrast the two different artist’s biographies. They will find things in common and things that are different between the two artists by using a Venn diagram graphic organizer. The Arizona State Standard

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that will be implemented is 3.R.RI.09 - The Highly Proficient student can use evidence from the text to compare and contrast the most important points and key details in two texts on the same topic. In this activity the students will be comparing and contrasting two Native American mural artists.

Activity 4:

Students will learn about the Navajo Nation Council Chambers. Students will learn about the Council Chambers' location in Window Rock, Arizona and its purpose to the Navajo People. They will learn that the octagonal Council Chambers building, which was completed in 1935, was designed to resemble a Navajo hogan. Students will then be introduced to the murals inside of the Council Chambers.

The foundation of the historical information that informed the murals' content will be explained to the students. Students will view and read about certain sections of the walls to gather information about the events and the history of the Navajo people. Students will be given the opportunity to read pieces of information and learn about the portrayal of art in the murals through a timeline. The teacher will show the events in the timeline so the students will have a visual of the events in Navajo history that Gerald Nailor painted in the murals in the Navajo Nation Council Chambers. Students will learn about these five events portrayed in the murals:

The Way of Life of the Early Navajo People

The Long Walk of the Navajo People

The Signing of the Treaty of 1868

The Stock Reduction

The Navajo Students and Boarding Schools

Activity 5:

To apply the understanding of a timeline, students will create a timeline of important times and events in their individual lives that they are willing to share with the class. They will include important events in their life on the timeline. These important events in the student's life will be written in a timeline that will be used to create a mural of their life in a large scale in Activity 7.

Activity 6:

The students will take a class field trip to the Navajo Nation Council Chambers to view the murals by Gerald Nailor in Window Rock, Arizona. Students will be given the opportunity to travel to Window Rock to visit the Council Chambers and view the art on the walls of the

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building. Students will prepare a question for the Navajo Nation tour guide who gives the tour and explains the imagery and historical references of the murals in the Council Chambers. As the students see and view the art, they will experience first-hand what they have been studying and learning about in class. Students will be given the opportunity to make connections to the classroom, learning about the murals and learning the history of the Navajo People.

Activity 7:

Students will create murals of their own. Students will use large, white pieces of paper to create a picture and paint the picture on a larger scale for display. Their mural piece will pertain to cultural, historical, or personal events in their life. Students will create a mural by drawing, painting or coloring, and display the artwork in the Indian Wells Elementary School hallways. Students will come up with titles for their artworks. Students will write a paragraph about their art explaining their work. Hrenko explains the benefits of this approach:

Others translated pieces of their lives into parallel understandings from a current context that culminated into personal narratives. These multiple perspectives illustrate the depth of understanding students developed as learners, writers, and art-makers (K.A. Hrenko, 2014, p.17).

Student Assessment Plan

As an assessment for the projects, the teacher will use a rubric assessment to grade the activities listed. Students will earn a certain number of points for the different activities created for this curriculum. Rubrics can be altered to scale as needed to meet the students' academic needs. Students will be expected to learn about the different types of mural art created by Native American artists presented in this curriculum. Students will specifically have a focused learning goal to learn about Gerald Nailor's mural art in the Navajo Nation Council Chambers. While learning and forming an appreciation of mural art, students will additionally learn about the history of the Navajo people through Nailor's "The History and Progress of the Navajo People" murals.

Alignment with Standards

Dine Standards

Concept 2 – I will practice and maintain the sacredness of self identity

PO 2. I will recognize teaching self-identity.

Concept 4 – I will understand and appreciate all things.

PO 4. I will express and value my grandparent's way of life teaching.

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Arizona Common Core State Standards

Reading Standards

3.R.RI.02 - The Highly Proficient student can determine the main idea of a text when implicitly stated; recount and paraphrase the key details and explain how they support the main idea.

3.R.RI.09 - The Highly Proficient student can use evidence from the text to compare and contrast the most important points and key details in two texts on the same topic.

3.R.RL.07 - The Highly Proficient students can draw conclusions about the text based on the illustrations in a story.

Writing Standards

3.W.01 - The Highly Proficient student can formulate an opinion and support it with details.

3.L.01def - The Highly Proficient student can apply concepts of conventions when writing and speaking.

3.L.02 - The Highly Proficient student can prove proficient knowledge of conventions including capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

3.L.06 - The Highly Proficient student can apply concepts of third grade language when they speak.

Social Studies Standards

3.G3.1 Describe the movement of people in and out of Arizona over time. (Key concepts include but are not limited to factors contributing to settlement, economic development, growth of major cities, major economic activities, and land use patterns).

3.SP1.2 Compare life in specific historical time periods to life today.

3.SP1.1 Create and use a chronological sequence of related events to compare developments that happened at the same time.

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Art Standards

VA.PR.6.3 - Identify and explain how and where different cultures record and illustrate stories and preserve history through art.

VA.CN.11.2 - Compare cultural uses (such as honoring people, remembering events, etc.) of artwork from different times and places.

VA.CN.11.3 - Recognize that responses to art change depending on knowledge of the time and place in which it was made (by using a t-chart to compare initial responses to those formed after study of the context, for example).

VA.PR.5.3 - Identify appropriate exhibit space and prepare works of art for presentation (such as a counter space, bulletin board, display case, media center, etc.) and write an artist statement (such as a descriptive sentence).

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