

Identity, Blood Quantum, and Fractions

Sydney A. Holiday

Culturally Responsive Schooling with/in Indigenous Communities Professional Development  
Program

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Author note:

Sydney Holiday, is a 3rd grade teacher that teaches on the Tohono O'odham Nation at Indian Oasis Primary School which is located in Sells, Arizona in Southern Arizona. Contact:

[sholiday@busd40.org](mailto:sholiday@busd40.org)

## **Context and Rationale**

### **Classroom Demographic**

I am an educator on the Tohono O’odham Nation at Indian Oasis Primary School. I have been teaching at Baboquivari Unified School District for three years, much more if you include my fieldwork in college. We have an approximate total of 480 students with a majority of these students being Indigenous. Sells, Arizona, where the school is located, is a little more than an hour west from Tucson. Also, thirty minutes north of the United States/Mexico border. Within this small town there are two gas stations, a grocery store, a healthcare center, many family programs provided by the Nation, and plenty of small family-owned food businesses. However, there are a total of eleven other villages/districts (Baboquivari, San Lucy, Chukuk Kut, San Xavier, Gu Achi, Schuk Toak, Gu Vo, Sells, Hickiwan, Sif Oidak, Pisinemo) that our students reside in which is often quite a drive from Sells. Our school district serves students from all over the Tohono O’odham Nation which is approximately 4,460 square miles. It is the second largest nation in the United States. A handful of our students make a daily trip of more than an hour one way. For the 2021-2022 school year, there were a total of one-hundred and one third grade students and five teachers. Four of these teachers are in person. One of these teachers is virtual. Prior to teaching in Sells, I attended the University of Arizona. As I was attending college, I found the Indigenous Teacher Education Program. This program has instilled the importance of teachers as nation builders, justice-centered education, Indigenous knowledge, values and language, and critical Indigenous theories and pedagogies. I’m a huge advocate for testing the safety zone (Lomawaima, K. & McCarty, 2002), critical thinking, and truth telling our history. For this reason, I plan to teach on Indigenous Nations most of my life.

### **Importance of Knowing Blood Quantum**

I strongly feel that knowing about blood quantum is important. I have two main reasons why I think it is important: One reason is identity and ancestry is important. Second reason is that there is a lot of history and injustices surrounding the topic. Often I feel that when we think about our identities and ancestry it should be automatically known. However, I don't feel that this is taught to our students and it's more of an expectation for them to know. For example, when I was younger I moved away to the Northern Ute reservation. In this area they practiced their own ceremonies. I often wanted to take part in these ceremonies. But I was often refused. I couldn't understand why until I got older and realized that it wasn't my culture to learn. Although I'm not saying it is our job as educators to teach them their identity. But it is our job as educators to educate on the history of Native peoples, in this case blood quantum. It is bringing to light an injustice among Native communities that is not discussed. As stated in Culturally Responsive Schooling for Indigenous Youth, do not teach the culture but teach with familiar concepts and ideas known by the students (Castano & Brayboy, 2008). In this case we will be using blood quantum to help students understand fractions.

### **Topic Summary**

As I write much of this curriculum I consistently reflect on “The Safety Zone” Theoretical Framework that is discussed in To Remain an Indian (Lomawaima, K. & McCarty, 2002), In

western society much of Native American history has been suppressed. As stated in *To Remain and Indian*, “Native and non-Native, has competed and cooperated to determine where and when Indigenous cultural practices might be considered benign enough to be allowed, even welcomed, within American life...the outcome has been not to welcome but to marginalize, repress, or even criminalize Native life (Lomawaima, K. & McCarty, 2002). Although I am not discussing Native ceremonies and songs, I am expressing how this also correlates with Native history. The purpose of this lesson is to bring awareness to the injustices that Native peoples face with blood quantum. I would also like to shed light onto my students' own heritage and lineage. Very often I feel that there is racism among our own tribal communities. Stemming from the idea that if you are not a “full” tribal member you are “less than” those that are. I would love to teach them to be proud of who they are and where they come from, no matter what the colonial mindset of blood quantum says. I hope to help them develop pride and honor in their identities. There are many different lessons that can be learned from this unit. But the main thing I hope they takeaway is being proud of their heritage and yearn to learn more about it. Through this lesson I hope they continue to dig and learn about their identity. I will also continue to do my best to support them in this process through Culturally Responsive Schooling.

### Blood Quantum and Fractions

When thinking about creating Indigenous based lessons, I often utilize English Language Arts for them. For example, I created a lesson using the book, *Frybread* written by Kevin Noble Maillard. In this lesson, we discussed comparing and contrasting by reflecting on their ideas of frybread and how it compares or contrasts to the book. Personally, it is a lot easier to do. However, for this unit I wanted to challenge myself and utilize math instead. In the beginning, I had my mind set on multiplication and division. However, my mom and I were recently having a conversation about my lesson plan. I told her that I wasn't confident with it and wasn't sure it was the right choice. After our conversation, blood quantum came up and we began having a conversation about it. My mom then stated, “That should be your lesson.” My brain did a 180, and I immediately changed my mind and knew that this was something I could work with. I feel that blood quantum and fractions is a huge injustice and misunderstood in the Native community. It is also something very unique that I'm sure my students will understand. I have talked with a few Native coworkers and they have all mentioned that even at such a young age they knew how their blood quantum worked in terms of if they were full Native or half Native or whatever their lineage might be.

### The Dawes Act

This is a policy that was implemented from the 1870's-1900's. “The law authorized the President to break up reservation land, which was held in common by the members of a tribe, into small allotments to be parceled out to individuals. Thus, Native Americans registering on a tribal "roll" were granted allotments of reservation land. ‘To each head of a family, one-quarter of a section; To each single person over eighteen years of age, one-eighth of a section; To each orphan child under eighteen years of age, one-eighth of a section; and To each other single person under eighteen years now living, or who may be born prior to the date of the order of the President directing an allotment of the lands embraced in any reservation, one-sixteenth of a section (The Dawes Act, 1887). This is the beginning of tracking our lineage. In order for Natives to be

eligible for land given by the government they had to first be enrolled. This process was also an approach to colonize each tribe.

### What is Blood Quantum?

In simple terms, blood quantum is the amount of “Indian blood” a Native American has according to their lineage. For example, if both of your parents are Native American then you would be Full (4/4) Native American. But, if you have one Native parent and one Non-Native parent then you would be half (1/2) Native American (Spruhan, 2006). The United States Government keeps track of lineage through what is known as a Certificate of Indian Blood or may be called something else depending on your tribe. When a baby is born, their parents should go to the tribal office to apply for tribal enrollment which will state your fraction of blood. Or in blatant terms suggest, “how Indian you are” according to the federal government. The child is also only allowed to enroll with one tribe. According to the Navajo Nation Enrollment office website the process of enrolling a child into a tribe is as follows: “Have a notarized letter requesting for enrollment, (must include reason for the request, include applicants full name, date of birth, place in the family [ex. 1st, 2nd, 3rd child] Parent 1 and Parent 2 full names, date of birth, enrollment #, Paternal and Maternal Grandparents' full names, mailing address and phone number), original birth certificate (which will be returned), copy of applicant's mother and fathers birth's certificate and driver's license/ID, non-enrollment letter from other tribe (if applicable), certified Guardianship or custody Court Order (if applicable).” It also states that the criteria eligibility is that “The Navajo Nation requires at least one biological parent to be enrolled with the Navajo Nation, the applicant must meet the minimum 1/4 Navajo Blood requirement.” As well as the only person who shall enroll the applicant is a, “Biological Parent named on the applicant's birth certificate or Legal Guardians (with final court order, each order is unique and needs careful attention to determine who will have access to the minor child(ren) records.)” Although this is what the process looks like for the Navajo Nation, it can vary from tribe to tribe. However, this process can also be very long for families. In a sense when criteria eligibility to enroll in a tribe is determined it becomes a form of tribal sovereignty because the tribe decides who is eligible to enroll.

### The Injustices of Blood Quantum

To put in perspective, as Native Americans we have a piece of paper or card that proves our Native American blood. As stated in the video, *A Conversation with Native Americans on Race*, there isn't another race that has to prove their identity like dogs or horses. As we move forward through life, this blood will begin to “wash out” as stated in the video. Which will provide the government with access to our land and resources which they have been trying to gain access to for millennia. As you can tell, as we continue to create biracial children, we may also place our tribal nations at risk. Which, as a result, can interfere with who we would like to marry and/or have children with. Therefore, this idea of tracking your blood quantum can be a demeaning concept because how can anyone say if a person is Native American or not.

### Student Engagement

This unit has been created in a course over seven days. I'm sure that it can be extended further and more in depth. In creating these lessons, it is my hope that students will be able to learn about the history of their family and be able to share with others, as well as be proud of who they are and where they come from. At the same time, the students will learn about Native American history.

Day	Activity
Day 1	<p>I will introduce the term “identity” to the students. We will do a KWL (know, wonder, learn) chart. I will begin to explain my identity to the students focusing on my Diné identity specifically. I will provide examples like clothing, ceremony, blessings, traditional values, etc. Then we would engage in discussion about the traditional things they do as Tohono O’odham (or other tribal affiliation) and create a list of them. At the end of the discussion I will provide students with their homework of finding 3 items that describe their identity. (Side note: Do some research on their tribe to provide support when listing traditional things they do.)</p>
Day 2	<p>Teacher will show the 3 items they think describe their identity. Then, students will present their 3 items. They will answer the following questions when presenting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What is your item?</li> <li>-Why did you pick this item?</li> <li>-What does it mean to you?</li> <li>-Why is it so important?</li> </ul>
Day 3	<p>We will engage in discussion about a family tree. I will show what my ancestry looks like. Then, students will complete a research project on their ancestry. In this document, I'd include a family tree that will have the relatives name, relation and tribal affiliation. Also provide some interview questions like: Where does your family come from? What tribe are you? What tribes am I? What was it like when you were younger? Did anyone speak the language? If not, why not?</p>
Day 4	<p>Students will engage in discussion in groups about what they learned about their ancestry and who they are. Afterwards, they will tell:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What they learned about themselves.</li> <li>-Something that shocked them.</li> <li>-Something that made them proud of who they are.</li> <li>-Something they want to learn more about</li> </ul>
Day 5	<p>I will teach students about the Dawes Act and what this did for Indigenous Communities. Then tie in blood quantum and have them reflect on the fractions portion of the work. I'd have them use manipulatives to create a pie graph of their ancestry using the knowledge of their family tree.</p>
Day 6	<p>After students find out their ancestry, I'd engage the community by having a speaker from the census/enrollment office come and do a presentation. I'd have them introduce what census is, why we do census and why it's important. As well</p>

	as a discussion surrounding enrollment as a tribal member.
Day 7	Assessment: Poster

### **Assessment**

On the seventh day, I will have students create a poster. It'll be a poster split into different sections. Each section can have a given criteria to meet using words and/or pictures. I'd provide the students with 5 different sections. The criteria I'd have on my poster are:

- Draw a picture of themselves.
- Write their name/names.
- Identify their ancestry using pictures/words.
- Write about what they learned about themselves.
- Draw a pie graph about their personal identity.

### **Considerations**

When working with Indigenous students there are many things to be mindful of. I will be sharing a handful to keep in mind when working with this guide. First, be mindful of the potential of frustration from students because some may be adopted and/or not know their lineage. In these cases it might be a good idea for students to do research on an Indigenous person instead. Another thing to be cautious of is that this work can be heavy. Allow students time to express their thoughts and feelings. Next, I'd make sure that as a teacher, the research is done on your tribal community. So that support can be given to students in case they do not know about their identity.

## Resources

- Castagno, A. E., & Brayboy, B. M. K. J. (2008). Culturally Responsive Schooling for Indigenous Youth: A Review of the Literature. Retrieved October 3, 2022, from <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308323036>
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Appendix A

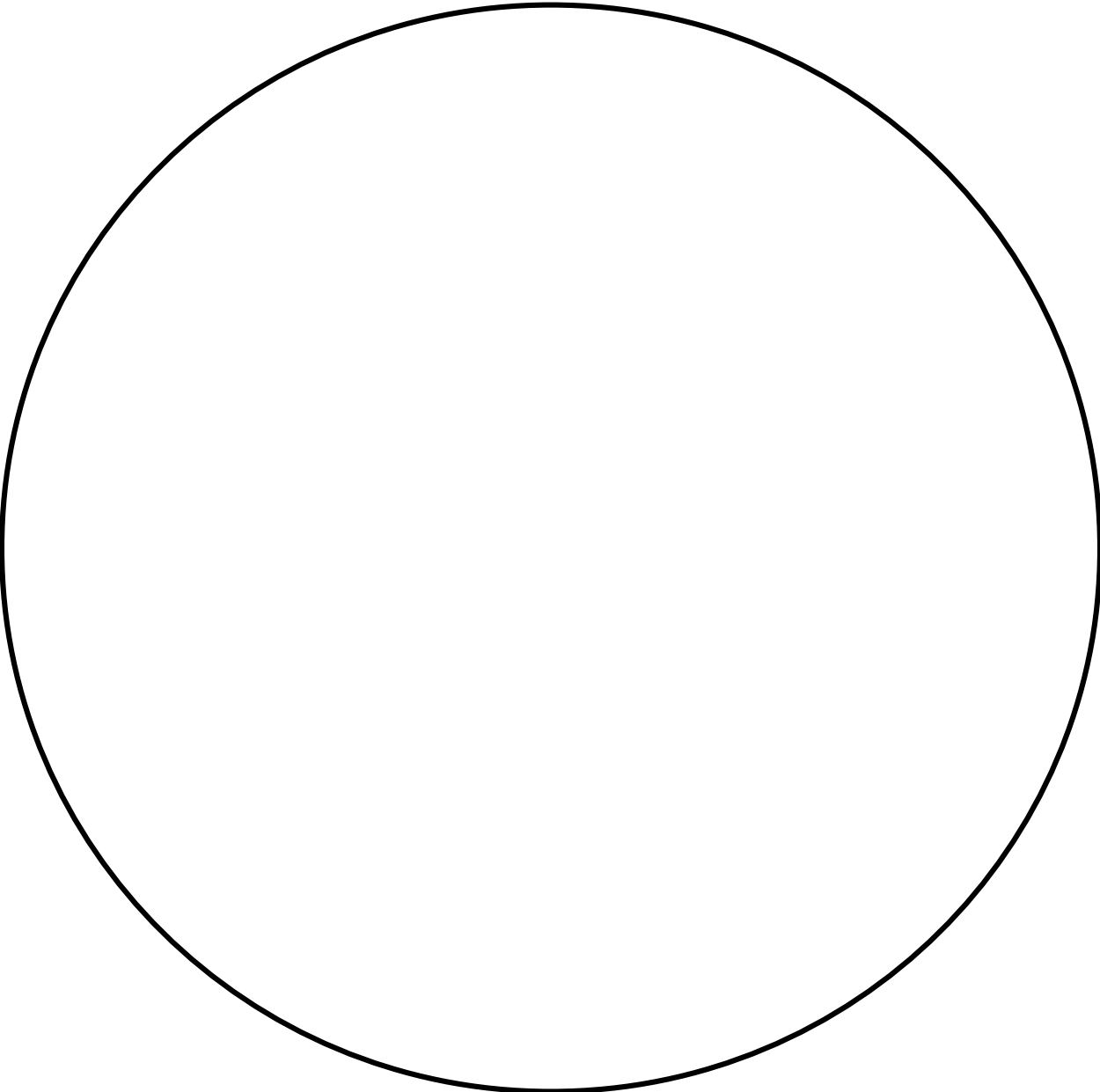
KWL Chart

Know (What do you <b>know</b> about it?)	Wonder (What do you <b>wonder</b> about it?)	Learn (What do you want to <b>learn</b> about it?)



Appendix B

Pie Chart



Appendix C

Poster


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Appendix D  
Item Questionnaire

What is your item?
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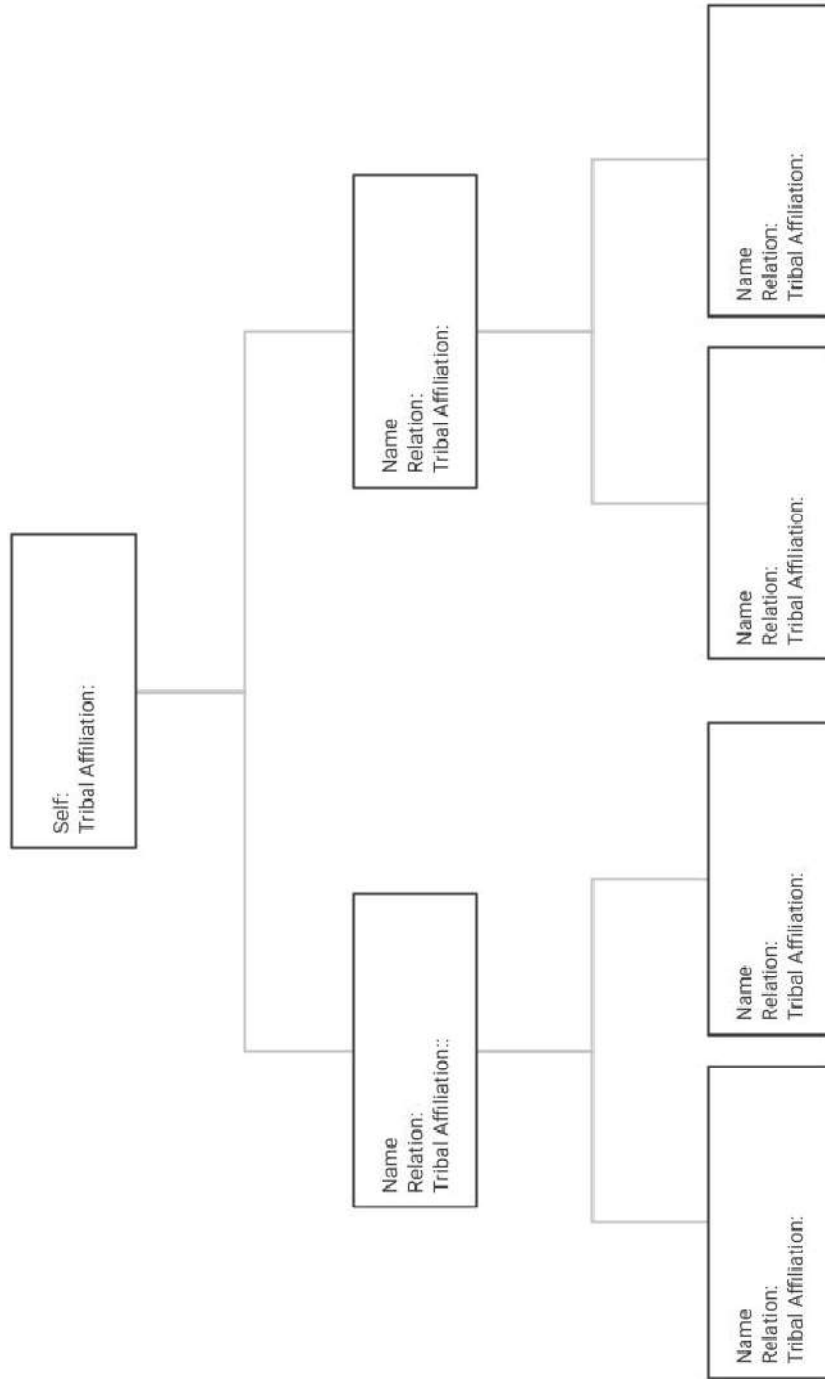
Why did you pick this item?
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What does it mean to you?

Why is it so important?

Appendix E  
Ancestry Tree

# Ancestry Tree



Family Interview Questions:

1. Where does your family come from?

2. What tribe are you?

3. What tribes am I?

4. What was it like when you were younger?

5. Did anyone speak the language? If not, why not?