

The Complexities of Apache History: Western Apachean Peoples After the “Apache Wars”

Building a Future: How Western Apache Clans Lived and Thrived After the Wars

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## Topic & Context

For the past several years, I have had the privilege of teaching on the Apache Reservation. Though I am not Apache myself, I have great respect for the rich history and culture of the people I work with every day. This curriculum unit, *Building a Future: How Western Apache Clans Lived and Thrived After the Wars*, is designed to guide my 7th graders through a deeply meaningful exploration of a challenging chapter in Apache history, one that shaped the lives of their ancestors and continues to influence their communities today.

The unit understands historical trauma from displacement and cultural suppression and military defeat (Deloria, 1969; Fixico, 2003) yet it devotes equal attention to survival mechanisms alongside cultural survival and renewal processes. This framework bases its foundation on Western Apache clan systems because these organizations maintain social structure while passing knowledge and supporting cultural identity (Goodwin, 1942; Basso, 1996). The unit requires students to study clans by exploring their nature and historical evolution together with their present-day importance as well as their ability to preserve strength in challenging circumstances. After the Apache Wars came to an end in the late 1800s, the Western Apache people faced many hardships. Forced onto reservations, dealing with loss of traditional lands, and adjusting to new ways imposed by the U.S. government, they had to find ways to rebuild their lives. This period was not just about survival, but about resilience, adaptation, and the determination to carry forward their culture and identity.

One of the most important lessons in this unit is that even in the face of loss and forced change, Western Apache people did not give up their cultural values or their spirit. Leadership within the clans, including both men and women, helped guide their communities through these times. Students will discover stories of courage, creativity, and unity that might not be widely known but are vital to understanding Apache heritage.

My goal as a teacher is to bring this history alive for my students, so it feels relevant and personal. I want students to see their ancestors as active agents of change, people who built a foundation for the present-day community. Whenever possible, I encourage students to share their own family stories and invite local elders to speak, enriching the learning experience with real voices and perspectives from the reservation.

The unit will run through the fall semester spanning from mid-September until early November which coincides with Apache storytelling seasons according to traditional Apache practice (Basso, 1996). The curriculum gains additional cultural significance because it matches with traditional Apache storytelling periods. The unit establishes its position as a core introduction to explore Arizona and U.S. history topics about settler colonialism and sovereignty and Indigenous resistance and non-Western historical memory epistemologies (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006).

This unit is not just about facts or dates. It is about honoring the journey of the Western Apache clans and recognizing how the past shapes who we are today. By learning this history, students can take pride in their identity and feel empowered to contribute to their community's future.

## Rationale

I view cultural responsiveness in curriculum development as both a professional obligation and a personal cause that emerges from my work as an educator together with my experiences in living in the community and continuous learning journey. The development of this curriculum unit about Apache identity and clan knowledge within San Carlos Reservation stems from my prolonged community involvement and deep respect along with my genuine commitment to serve students by recognizing their true nature and ancestral background.

I have spent eight years teaching Apache students at the reservation. The eight years of service have brought significant transformation to my work. The initial teaching assignment evolved into a transformative experience that deepened my understanding of Apache culture while forming strong bonds with the community. The Apache people received me with open hearts when I moved into their community thus making me feel like both an educator and a member of their community. The people in the community started calling me a "Filipino-Apache" after some time which signified their deep acceptance and respect for me. The nickname represents the strong bonds I have formed with the community and the trust they have placed in me. This recognition means a great deal to me. The trust that students place in me pushes me to establish meaningful educational content.

The San Carlos Unified School District provides students with strong cultural heritage but faces the challenge of connecting their heritage to the world that does not support its validation. The most concerning pattern I have witnessed in recent years involves students gradually losing their connection to their clan heritage. The Apache people use clan knowledge as their basis to establish community relations and determine traditional roles and maintain cultural continuity. Modern students face the challenge of identifying their clan affiliations and understanding their importance. The lack of connection between students and their clan identity results in major consequences that impact both cultural heritage preservation and student self-esteem and identity development.

The development of this curriculum unit focuses on relearning the culture, language and identity. I designed this social studies curriculum for middle school to help students feel proud about their heritage by strengthening their connections with family and community leaders and their clan identities. The purpose goes beyond educational facts because it involves bringing back ancestral ties and revitalizing cultural self-assurance.

My foundation of knowledge includes both my strengths and weaknesses which guide my decision-making process. With 17 years of teaching experience and several years of curriculum development and contextualization work in the Philippines I have established a solid foundation to create content which combines academic excellence with cultural relevance. I finished my degree in Education major in Mathematics as well as my master's in special education. Also, I am pursuing my master's in administration and Supervision to enhance my leadership skills. Through my experience as a curriculum trainer and writer I learned how to merge educational standards with local realities and Indigenous knowledge systems. The knowledge I gained through my teaching experience proves essential as I create this curriculum unit for San Carlos students.

I understand that I have certain boundaries. I was not born into the Apache tribe. My understanding of Apache language along with their deep cultural rituals and traditional governance systems continues to evolve. My experience in the community has provided me with valuable knowledge yet I still maintain many unknown aspects. The students along with their families and broader community members will serve as my main instructors for this learning process. The educational goals of this curriculum reach beyond student education because I want to involve community members as equal creators and knowledge protectors. The lessons will bring local elders and cultural leaders and family members to share their expertise as guest speakers and sources of oral history and providers of real-world examples. Through this approach we enhance both culturally sustaining pedagogy and community pride and ownership of educational processes.

The San Carlos Middle School belongs to a district which announces its mission to educate students for becoming a culturally responsive global Nn'ee. The school's mission to produce culturally competent graduates supports the goals of this curriculum unit. This unit focuses on the Apache clan system to both restore a fundamental aspect of student cultural heritage and meet state and national social studies standards.

The development of this unit stems from professional responsibility yet it emerges from genuine affection. The program emerges from my direct observation of this requirement throughout seven years of Apache Reservation residency. My personal knowledge and professional background together with my commitment to Apache history and strength create an educational environment that celebrates students through reflections and respect and empowerment.

The fundamental purpose of this curriculum rests in the idea of belonging. The objective of this program is to guarantee each student at San Carlos Middle School knows their origin and understands their cultural heritage and develops confidence in their identity for future success.

## Instructional Guide

The objective I have pursued as a teacher has always focused on enabling students to encounter historical content that is frequently overlooked or incorrectly portrayed. While studying the Western Apache history I became aware that their narrative together with many Indigenous stories receive presentation only through the perspective of war. The documentation of Apache community survival and cultural preservation and innovation after the Apache Wars remains absent from traditional educational materials.

The curriculum unit Building a Future: How Western Apache Clans Lived and Thrived After the Wars emerged from my dedication to showcase Native perspectives that are commonly absent from conventional historical accounts. The goal of this project became to help students shift their understanding from war-focused accounts to explore the resilience and cultural diversity of Western Apache clans during the period after 1886.

### ***What We are Learning and Why It Matters***

Through this educational program students will discover Western Apache communities as current participants in maintaining their cultural heritage. Through studying Apache family clans we understand how they preserved their life traditions by using their ancestral territory and linguistic practices along with social customs and community networks.

The initial unit addresses the false notion known as the “Myth of the Vanishing Indian.” The misconception about Native peoples being non-existent or frozen in time exists within the unconscious knowledge of numerous students. We challenge this belief by presenting evidence of Western Apache communities that build their present and future.

We proceed to analyze clan structures and matrilineal descent because this part of the unit proves especially fascinating. The organizational structure of Apache society through matrilineal clans typically surprises students who learn about how clans shape identity and influence land use and social duties. The ethnographic work of Goodwin (1935) forms the basis of this section because he documented clan systems as essential social structures which kept Western Apache communities united despite relocation efforts.

A primary emphasis of this unit focuses on understanding the relationship between land-based knowledge and identity which Apache people describe as Ndé Bikéyaa. Through his study Keith Basso (1996) demonstrates how Western Apache place-names serve as a fundamental tool to teach students about this topic. My students remember his phrase "wisdom sits in places" as an enduring truth. The approach makes students view the land as a dynamic representation of cultural heritage and ancestral footprint instead of vacant space. Through examination of

placenames we discover how each location shares stories which teach lessons that maintain Apache cultural connections to historical past and collective heritage.

Oral storytelling stands as a highly effective method of education and cultural value preservation despite common mistaken beliefs about its nature. Students develop new perspectives about storytelling because they understand it serves both educational purposes and survival needs and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

### ***Reason Behind this Curriculum Unit***

The curriculum bases its foundation on culturally responsive and sustaining practices. I consider this goal to be more than theory because it represents my fundamental duty. The educational principles of Geneva Gay (2010) and Paris and Alim (2017) have guided my teaching approach because they stress incorporating cultural perspectives into all educational aspects and promoting authentic community knowledge and respect.

The unit has been designed to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing as its main priority. Although Basso does not originate from Indigenous roots his work demonstrates deep respect through its strong connections with Western Apache knowledge sources. The teaching content integrates community-based resources and I attempt to include digital storytelling segments and guest speaker appearances when available so students can directly hear from Indigenous voices.

Through this unit Indigenous students find validation when they observe their historical narratives take center stage for honor. Through this learning experience non-Indigenous students can build empathy skills while gaining historical accuracy and understanding how Indigenous cultures maintain their impact on American society.

### ***How I Teach This Unit***

My teaching methods combine multiple approaches because I want students to develop profound understanding and critical thinking abilities while building strong connections with the subject material. The unit starts with inquiry-based exercises that use open-ended questions to help students discover concepts through collective work. Students examine primary sources such as oral histories and excerpts from Apache community narratives while using visual and auditory materials which include maps, photographs and videos that present Indigenous perspectives.

#### ***The lesson sequence builds intentionally:***

1. Intro to Western Apache Peoples & Lands – busting myths, setting the stage.
2. Clan Systems & Identity – mapping out matrilineal structures and cultural roles.
3. Post-War Resilience – looking at reservation life and how people adapted.

4. Place-Names & Story Maps – exploring how the land holds memory. The present Apache way of life involves language restoration efforts alongside sovereignty preservation alongside traditional cultural practices.

### ***Assessment for Learning***

Student learning in this unit is assessed through a thoughtful combination of formative and summative approaches that support both the process and the final product of learning. From the beginning, students are invited to choose a topic that personally matters to them—something they care about or are curious to explore more deeply. This sense of ownership helps drive engagement and meaningful inquiry as they work toward developing either a written paper, a presentation, or a creative project that reflects their understanding.

Throughout the two-week unit, formative assessment is woven into the daily classroom experience. Informal check-ins, group discussions, reflective journals, and one-on-one conferences offer opportunities to gauge student progress and provide timely feedback. These moments are not just about evaluating—they’re about listening, guiding, and helping students think more deeply about what they’re learning and why it matters.

As the unit progresses, students also participate in regular group meetings, where they share updates, ask questions, and receive peer feedback. These collaborative spaces help students refine their ideas, clarify their thinking, and support one another as they work through challenges.

The unit culminates in a series of summative assessments that allow students to demonstrate their learning in varied and meaningful ways. These include a place-name analysis essay, where students explore the cultural and historical significance of a location, and a clan system diagram that illustrates their understanding of social organization within the Western Apache context. In addition to these structured components, each student also completes a final research project or creative assignment—tailored to their chosen topic—that brings together their critical thinking, cultural understanding, and personal perspective.

This approach honors multiple ways of learning and gives students the space to show what they’ve learned in ways that are authentic to them. It’s not just about what they produce at the end, but how they grow in their thinking, voice, and connection to the content throughout the unit.

## ***Standard Alignment with Arizona Standards***

The curriculum unit *Building a Future: How Western Apache Clans Lived and Thrived After the Wars* is thoughtfully designed to engage 7th grade students in meaningful exploration of Arizona's diverse histories and landscapes. It aligns closely with several Arizona Social Studies Standards, particularly 7.G1.1, 7.G2.1, 7.G3.1, and 7.G3.4, which focus on geographic thinking, human-environment interaction, and the cultural and spatial patterns that shape our world.

Through this unit, students examine how Western Apache clans adapted to and thrived in the Southwest following the Apache Wars, drawing connections between historical events and the ways communities sustain identity, language, and sovereignty through relationships with the land. By incorporating Apache perspectives, place-names, and story maps, the curriculum encourages students to think critically about how memory is tied to geography and how Indigenous communities have preserved culture despite profound challenges.

Rather than approaching history as a distant or abstract subject, this unit brings it to life by grounding learning in real places, stories, and experiences. It empowers students to see how geography is not just about maps and borders, but about people, stories, and resilience. In doing so, it offers a powerful model for culturally responsive teaching that honors Indigenous knowledge and fosters deeper understanding of Arizona's rich and complex history.

## **Lesson Planning**

This curriculum unit is intended to unfold over the course of two weeks, providing a thoughtful pace for meaningful engagement with the material. However, the lesson plan is designed with flexibility in mind. We recognize that every classroom is different, and that teachers know their students best. Educators are encouraged to adapt the lessons, whether that means extending certain activities, modifying them for different learning styles, or substituting alternative resources that better reflect the needs and goals of their students and school community. The structure provided here is meant to serve as a foundation, not a prescription. Use it as a guide, but feel free to make it your own in ways that support deeper connection, cultural relevance, and student-centered learning.

### ***A. Topic: Intro to Western Apache Peoples & Lands***

**Grade: 7th Grade**

**AZ Standard:** 7.H1.1 – Analyze interactions between cultures and societies, including blending, conflict, and change.

#### **A. Learning Objectives:**

Students will be able to evaluate and analyze the historical and cultural

significance of the Western Apache peoples and their lands, dispelling common myths while recognizing the impact of social structures.

**B. Key Points:**

1. The history and traditional lifestyle of the Western Apache peoples.
2. Common myths and misconceptions about Native American cultures.
3. The importance of land and environment in Apache culture and identity.
4. The impact of migration and social mobility on the Apache community.

**C. Opening:**

1. Begin with a thought-provoking question: "What do you think you know about the Apache people?"
2. Conduct a quick brainstorming session where students can share their ideas.
3. Introduce a short video clip that shows aspects of Apache culture to capture interest.

**D. Introduction to new Materials:**

1. Present key facts about the Western Apache peoples using a mix of storytelling and visuals.
2. Use a slideshow to showcase images of Apache lands, traditional clothing, and artifacts.
3. Introduce a common misconception: "All Native Americans live in tipis." Explain how different tribes have diverse cultures and living arrangements.

**E. Guided Practice:**

1. Divide students into small groups to discuss assigned myths about the Apache peoples.
2. Provide each group with resources (articles, videos) to research and find factual information.
3. Scaffold questions to guide their discussions, such as "What evidence disproves this myth?" and "How does this myth affect perceptions of Apache culture?"
4. Monitor group discussions, providing support and ensuring they stay on topic.

**F. Independent Activity:**

1. Assign students to create a visual project that illustrates their findings about the Apache peoples.
2. They should include at least three myths they've researched, along with facts that dispel those myths.
3. Encourage creativity in their projects—students may use digital tools, art supplies, or other materials to enhance their presentation.

**G. Closing:**

1. Have students present their projects to the class in a "gallery walk" format, allowing peers to view and discuss each other's work.

2. Summarize key takeaways about the importance of understanding and respecting diverse cultures.

#### **H. Assessment:**

Students will create a project that includes a presentation and a visual representation (e.g., a poster or digital slideshow) that illustrates their understanding of the Western Apache peoples, addressing common myths and facts.

#### **I. Homework:**

Assign students to write a reflection about what surprised them the most about the Apache culture and how it differs from common stereotypes.

### ***B. Topic: Clan Systems & Identity – mapping out matrilineal structures and cultural roles.***

#### **Grade: 7th Grade**

**AZ Standard:** 7.H1.2 – Explain how cultural elements (e.g., language, beliefs, customs, traditions) shape identity and unite or divide groups of people.

#### **A. Learning Objective:**

Students will be able to explain how cultural elements, such as language, beliefs, customs, and traditions, shape identity and unite or divide groups of people.

#### **B. Key Points:**

1. Cultural elements include language, beliefs, customs, and traditions.
2. Matrilineal systems define inheritance and lineage through the female line.
3. Cultural identity can unite or divide groups based on shared or differing beliefs and practices.
4. Understanding clan roles helps students appreciate diverse cultural perspectives.

#### **C. Opening:**

1. Start with a thought-provoking question: "How does your family shape who you are?"
2. Engage students in a brief discussion about their own family structures and cultural backgrounds.
3. Introduce the concept of matrilineal systems with a quick video clip or visual aid.

#### **D. Introduction fo the Materials:**

1. Present key concepts through a short lecture or interactive presentation.
2. Use visuals to illustrate matrilineal structures and roles within various cultures.
3. Encourage students to take notes and ask questions for clarification.
4. Anticipate the misconception that all cultures have the same family structures and roles.

#### **E. Guided Practice:**

1. Divide students into small groups to discuss examples of matrilineal societies.
2. Provide guiding questions that start with simpler concepts (e.g., "What does matrilineal mean?") and progress to more complex ideas (e.g., "How does this system affect community decisions?").

3. Monitor group discussions, circulating to provide support and ensure understanding.

**F. Independent Practice:**

1. Assign students to create their own clan map, including at least five roles and how they relate to one another.
2. Students should write a reflection connecting the roles in their map to cultural identity.
3. Set clear expectations for creativity and depth of understanding.

**G. Closing:**

1. Have students share one thing they learned about clan systems and identity with a partner.
2. Conduct a quick class discussion to summarize the lesson's key points.

**H. Assessment:**

Students will create a visual map of a matrilineal clan system, illustrating the roles and relationships within the clan. They will also write a short reflection on how these cultural elements impact identity.

**I. Homework:**

Assign students to interview a family member about their cultural traditions and write a short paragraph on how these traditions shape their identity.

**C. Topic: Post-War Resilience – looking at reservation life and how people adapted.**

**Grade: 7th Grade**

**AZ Standard:** 7.H1.1 – Examine how the perspectives of individuals and societies impact historical and current events.

**A. Learning Objective:**

Students will be able to examine how the perspectives of individuals and societies impact historical and current events, focusing on life in reservations after the war.

**B. Key Points:**

1. The impact of historical events on current societal structures.
2. Various perspectives of individuals living on reservations.
3. Adaptation strategies used by communities to overcome post-war challenges.
4. The role of culture and identity in resilience.

**C. Opening:**

1. Start with a compelling question: "How do you think people adapt to major changes in their lives?"
2. Facilitate a brief discussion about major changes students have experienced and how they coped.
3. Introduce the topic of post-war resilience in reservation life through a relevant video or story.

**D. Introduction to the Materials:**

1. Present key concepts through a mix of lecture and multimedia resources.
2. Use maps and visuals to highlight reservation locations and their histories.
3. Foster active engagement by encouraging students to take notes and ask questions.
4. Anticipate the misconception that all reservations have experienced similar post-war challenges.

**E. Guided Practice:**

1. Organize students into small groups to research different reservations and their unique adaptations.
2. Provide guiding questions that start with simple inquiries (e.g., "What challenges did they face?") and lead to deeper discussions (e.g., "How did these adaptations influence their community identity?").
3. Monitor group work, offering assistance and ensuring comprehension.

**F. Independent Practice:**

1. Assign students to create a presentation that reflects different perspectives on life in a chosen reservation post-war.
2. Students should incorporate at least three different viewpoints (e.g., elders, youth, community leaders) and how each perspective influenced adaptations.
3. Set clear expectations for research and presentation style.

**G. Closing:**

1. Have students share one key insight from their presentations with the class.
2. Conduct a class discussion to summarize the diversity of perspectives and adaptations discussed.

**H. Assessment:**

Students will create a presentation that highlights different perspectives on post-war life in reservations, illustrating how these perspectives have shaped community adaptations.

**I. Homework:**

Assign students to interview a family member about their experiences with change and adaptation, writing a paragraph about how those experiences relate to what they've learned.

**D. Topic: Place-Names & Story Maps – exploring how the land holds memory. The present Apache way of life involves language restoration efforts alongside sovereignty preservation alongside traditional cultural practices.**

**Grade: 7th Grade**

**AZ Standard:** 7.G1.1 / 7.G2.1: Use maps to explain spatial patterns of cultural/environmental characteristics—story maps with place-names spotlight Indigenous cultural landscapes

**A. Learning Objectives:**

Students will be able to use maps to explain spatial patterns of Indigenous cultural landscapes and articulate how land holds memory, particularly through the lens of Apache culture.

**B. Key Points:**

1. Understanding the concept of cultural landscapes and their importance in Indigenous cultures.
2. The role of language in preserving cultural identity and memory.
3. Analyzing how place-names reflect environmental characteristics and cultural heritage.
4. The impact of language restoration on community sovereignty and identity.
5. Exploring the Apache way of life and traditional practices.

**C. Opening:**

1. Begin with a thought-provoking question: "How do places in our lives hold stories and memories?"
2. Show a short video clip or image gallery of Apache landscapes and cultural sites.
3. Engage students in a brief discussion about places that hold special meaning to them.

**D. Introduction to the Materials:**

1. Introduce the concept of cultural landscapes through a discussion of what they are and why they matter.
2. Explain the significance of place-names in preserving cultural heritage, using examples from Apache culture.
3. Discuss the importance of language restoration efforts in maintaining cultural identity.
4. Common Misconception: Students may think that place-names are just geographical labels, not realizing their deep cultural significance.

**E. Guided Practice:**

1. Divide students into small groups and provide them with maps of Apache cultural landscapes.
2. Ask groups to identify key place-names and discuss their meanings and significance.
3. Facilitate a whole-class discussion, prompting students to share their findings.
4. Scaffold questions from simple (e.g., "What is the name of this place?") to complex (e.g., "How does this place-name reflect Apache cultural values?").
5. Monitor student discussions to ensure understanding and engagement.

**F. Independent Practice:**

1. Assign students to create their own story map using a digital tool or paper.
2. They should choose a specific place-name from Apache culture and research its significance, incorporating visuals and explanations.

3. Set expectations for completing the assignment, emphasizing creativity and attention to detail.

**G. Closing:**

1. Have students share their story maps in pairs or small groups.
2. Conduct a brief class discussion to reflect on what they learned about the cultural significance of places.

**H. Assessment:**

Students will create a story map that highlights significant place-names in Apache culture and explains their cultural and environmental significance.

**I. Homework:**

1. Assign a reflection paper where students write about a place that holds personal significance for them and how it connects to their cultural or family history.

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