

# WHAT IS CULTURAL APPROPRIATION?

Est. Time: 60 - 90 minutes

Subjects: ELA, History/Social Studies, SEL

Age Range: Middle & High School


View the classroom lesson version [here!](#)

★ *TEACHROCK* ★



*What is cultural appropriation and why is it an important issue?*

In this lesson you will:

- Understand the term “cultural appropriation”
  - Learn about specific examples of cultural appropriation
  - Consider the ways certain Native American musicians and poets have responded to cultural appropriation
  - Think about how you feel about the idea of cultural appropriation and how you might respond to cultural appropriation in the future
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A Tribe Called Red is a Canadian DJ collective currently made up of First Nations DJs Bear Witness and Zoolman. Their work regularly samples traditional Indigenous Music, and their video presentations often satirically critique images of Native Americans found in popular culture.





In 2013, A Tribe Called Red **tweeted this** to their fans.

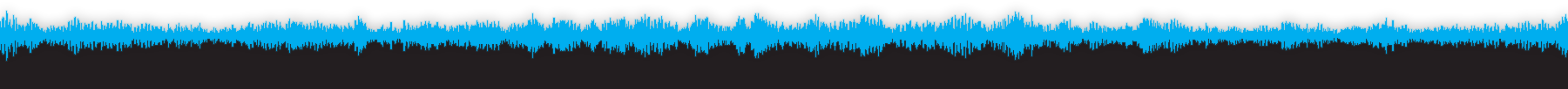
Consider or ask a friend:


- Why might fans of A Tribe Called Red be coming to their shows in headdresses and warpaint?
  - Why does A Tribe Called Red consider this practice insulting?
  - Why is the group only speaking to the Non Natives in this tweet?
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The group further **clarified their position** later on Twitter by responding to comments.


Consider or ask a friend:

- Why might wearing headdresses and warpaint at A Tribe Called Red performance be considered racial stereotyping?
  - How does A Tribe Called Red further defend their position?
  - What might A Tribe Called Red mean by using the phrase “cultural appropriation”? What is cultural appropriation?
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Read Fordham law professor Susan Scafidi's **definition of “Cultural Appropriation.”**

Then consider or ask a friend:

- Can you think of any examples of cultural appropriation? Do you think that it is an issue that should concern people?
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Indigenous culture has been a source of fascination since European colonizers first came to the Western Hemisphere.


From Hollywood movies to sports to comic books, non-native companies and institutions have profited from Indigenous culture.






**Read this poem** by Chrystos, a Menominee writer and activist.

Consider or ask a friend:

- What is Chrystos describing in this poem?
  - For you, what emotion of feeling is Chrystos getting across in this poem?
  - In what ways might Chrystos be connecting the sale of figurines with the treatment of Native Peoples in the United States?
  - What is Chrystos doing in the final stanza? What new idea are they introducing?
  - How might the final line, “I want to live somewhere where nobody is sold,” have a dual meaning within this poem?
  - What might this poem say about cultural appropriation?
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Partially due to the commercialization of Native Culture, people in the United States have often appropriated the image of Native Americans - especially those images presented in films, TV shows, and other forms of popular culture.

Watch [this video](#) on the popularity of Indigenous culture in 1960s America.





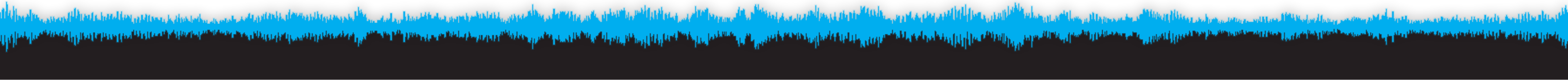
Consider or ask a friend:

- The clip refers to the Woodstock Music Festival, a well-known open air concert that occurred in 1969? Why do you think “Indians were in” at the Woodstock Music Festival?
  - What do you think the elements of Native American fashion you saw in this clip might have meant to the people who wore them?
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**Read this poem** by Marcie Rendon, an Anishinaabe poet, playwright, and activist.

Consider or ask a friend:

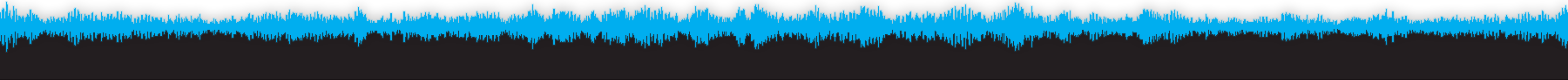
- What is Rendon describing in this poem?
  - For you, what feeling is Rendon conveying in this poem?
  - Do you think Rendon's message in this poem is directed at any audience in particular? Who?
  - Do you see any connections between this poem and Chrystos' poem? If so, what might be the connections?
  - What might this poem be saying about cultural appropriation?
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In October 2014, students from Ohio University launched a campaign to bring awareness to cultural appropriation in Halloween costumes. The campaign, “We’re a Culture, Not a Costume” generated nationwide attention.





Consider or ask a friend:

- Have you ever seen a Halloween costume that fits the definition of cultural appropriation?
  - How do you feel about the idea of wearing a costume that depicts another culture?
  - Are you surprised at the idea that cultural appropriation extends beyond Native American Culture?
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# SUMMARY

- The term “Cultural Appropriation” refers to the taking of intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else’s culture without permission
- Examples of cultural appropriation can be found everywhere; in magazines, movies, fashion shows, and Halloween Costumes
- Companies and institutions have appropriated Native American culture throughout history, and make money selling and producing Native American stereotypes, which is rarely distributed to Native Americans
- Native and Indigenous musicians and poets have used their artwork to describe the effects of cultural appropriation



# BE CREATIVE

Cultural appropriation is an important, but also complex issue. The line between appropriating, borrowing from, or paying homage to a particular culture can at times be hard to define.

Analyze one of these document packs. Then, create a journalistic piece that objectively tries to describe the controversy and the positions of both sides.

- Cultural Appropriation Arguments **Documents**
- **Music** - Mardi Gras “Indians” in New Orleans Documents, “Big Chief Boudreaux” **video**, and “Ancestry” **video**
- **Sports** - The Washington Redskins Logo (Warning: this handout includes racial slurs and racist imagery that may be considered offensive.)
- **Fashion**

# BE CURIOUS

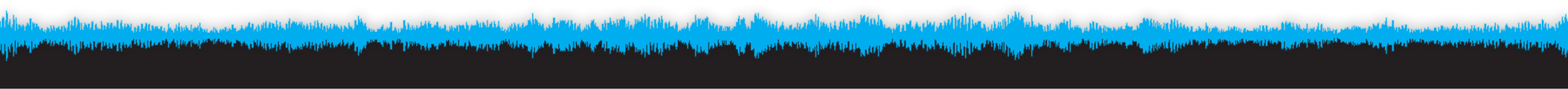
- Watch this **PBS Video** to learn more about cultural appropriation
- **Read this article** to learn about cultural appropriation in Music





# CONNECT

Share with us! Either you or an adult in your life can share your journalistic piece with TeachRock on **Instagram** or **Facebook**, email to **info@teachrock.org**, or Tweet it to **@TeachRock**





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