**Teaching Notes**

**Is diversity a mask or a bridge? The Indian mascot debate**

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**:

1.) To explore the impact of sports symbols on society and culture and schools in particular.

2.) To understand the ways Indian mascots portray Native Americans and the impact this has.

3.) To explore issues of cultural understanding, cultural exploitation, racism, prejudice and stereotyping.

4.) To develop a balanced perspective on historical misperceptions of Native American culture and ways these might be addressed.

5.) To explore how organizations, especially school boards, deal with conflict about Native American mascots and make and change policies.

6) To explore how the media shapes heated community debates about controversial issues.

7) To develop the ability to deal constructively with conflict.

**AUDIENCE:** This case is suitable for students in high school or college classes and appropriate for classes in Native American studies, history, geography, civics, education, communications, sociology, law, political science, and media.

**RELATED CASES**: There are several other cases on the web site that relate to this case: “Waiting Patiently 500 years” (the process of writing and passing legislation to include tribal history in the schools) and “Whose history should be taught?” (a teacher meets with conflict from colleagues while attempting to include tribal history), and “Since Time Immemorial: Implementing Tribal Sovereignty Curriculum into Washington Schools,” and “Should Indian Sports Mascots Be Repealed?”

**IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS**: This case is versatile and can be taught in a variety of ways including small groups, debates, role playing, and research. It can also be taught as an interrupted case which uses progressive disclosure where each part is read and discussed separately with discussion questions sharply focusing on each stage of the case’s evolution.

The teaching approach described below uses thematic discussion questions and small groups. Each group is given different discussion questions. In our initial field test we did the case in one three hour session looking only at Part 1. In the next three hour class we did formal training in dispute resolution led by an expert from the community dispute resolution center.

**TEACHING THE CASE WITH DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND SMALL GROUPS:**

Students read the case in advance. Students are randomly divided into small groups of 4-7 people. Each group is assigned a different group of questions to discuss and report on. Students take about 40 minutes to discuss their questions and prepare a poster of their conclusions to present to the class. Concluding comments are often made by the instructor. To assess individual learning, students are then asked to write individual responses to several questions about the case. These “reflections” are handed in at the end of the class.

**Group one:** **Sports symbols and society**

1. What is a symbol and why are they important?
2. Should mascots and other symbols “fit” a community? What does this mean?
3. How does the language and the meaning of symbols evolve and change over time? Is it important to look at the impact of the present day context? Why?
4. How do Indian mascots represent or misrepresent Native Americans?
5. Why is this subject so emotional for different people?
6. Describe how each of the major characters in the case sees this issue.
7. What role does the media play in this situation? What is their appropriate role and responsibility? What journalistic ethics should apply?

**Group Two:** **Resolving different kinds of conflicts**

1. Some theorists argue that there are different kinds of conflicts which need to be handled in different ways. *Resource conflicts* involve competition over material and territorial interests and usually lead to concrete compromises eventually. *Identity based conflicts* are more complex and abstract since they involve issues of personal identity and strike at the core of who we are. Often rooted in history and culture, they evoke dialogue about needs, values, dignity, and recognition. Do you agree with this distinction between resource and identity conflicts? Why or why not? Is the mascot issue an example of identity based conflict? What does this mean in this situation from the standpoint of the advocates and opponents? How can this conflict best be resolved?
2. In thinking about how to structure the discussion about this issue, what is the best approach? Outline the process used in this situation and evaluate the choices made about who should be involved in the formal process, what topics needed discussion, and how decisions would be made. Where were the critical turning points in the discussion? What aspects of the process were good in your opinion? What aspects, if any, might have been better done in a different way? Jennifer James Wilson said that she hoped this would be a respectful learning process that moved beyond black and white towards deeper understanding of all sides. Did it? Explain your answer. What do you think will be the long term consequences?

**Group Three:**  **The Aftermath**

You represent the superintendent and chair of the local school board. You have just decided to retire a long time native mascot. Describe what steps you will take in retiring the mascot. How will a new mascot be chosen? Who should be involved? What are the possible issues that might arise? How will you deal with the opponents? What steps would you take to educate the community concerning Native American Awareness in the school system? How will you refocus the community on the other important educational issues and needs ? In your presentation, you might consider role playing this set of questions as a dialogue between the superintendent and the chair of the school board as they strategize about moving ahead.

**Group Four**: **Larger critical issues at stake.**

The controversy about Indian mascots raises many issues about identity, local control, freedom of speech, entitlement, prejudice, stereotypes, education, privilege, and conflict resolution. It also has political, educational, cultural, economic, and social dimensions. In the case identify where you see each of these dimensions. Discuss how each of these issues arises in this debate and how they are best dealt with.

**Group Five:** **Understanding multiple perspectives and coming together**

Your group has been assigned the task of looking at actual quotes in the case from various people about Indian mascots. Building on the information in this case, discuss these different viewpoints and present an overall analysis of what was at stake for each of these people. Look at three or four people who are advocates and opponents as well as several individuals in more neutral leadership roles on this issue. Where is the middle ground of compromise for each? What actions might promote compromise and deeper understanding vs. anger, gridlock, and bad feelings in the short run and the long run? Why?

**Group Six: The decision and policy making process**

1. Draw a timeline of the decision making process, critical actors, and turning points in this case.
2. What are the pros and cons of the decision making process and rules used to consider the mascot that are described in this case? Alternatives?
3. Is this case a mini-lesson in democracy? What does effective democratic practice require and presume?
4. This case offers a detailed description of a complex, long term issue and the decision making process. What do you see as the major lessons of this case? Discuss at least 5 big lessons.

**Additional research sites:** One of the most comprehensive sites for information on the Indian mascot issue is [www.aistm.org](http://www.aistm.org). Another excellent site is [www.americanindiantah.com](http://www.americanindiantah.com).

This site includes detailed lesson plans. See also the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and Media at [www.aics.org/NCRSM](http://www.aics.org/NCRSM). Another good website is [www.indianmascots.com](http://www.indianmascots.com), a website of the Wisconsin Indian Education Association, which gives a good and detailed picture of how one state has approached this issue. This website, like the others listed here, also has good short videos on the subject.

The website for Washington’s tribal sovereignty curriculum is [www.indian-ed.org](http://www.indian-ed.org). This website is a robust resource for teaching with detailed curriculum units articulated with state standards.

Conflict resolution websites are another good resource to use with this case. See, for example, the University of Arizona Udall Institute website at www.ecr.gov.