



ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

# Indigenous Peoples' Day as an Act of Sovereignty Part I

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- Sovereignty
- Identity

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will understand the term "sovereignty"
- Students will be able to understand that tribal sovereignty and self-governance are inherent rights of tribes in the United States. As such, they cannot be erased. By establishing an Indigenous Peoples' Day, there is growing validation of Native Americans in this country.
- Students will analyze primary documents related to Indigenous Peoples' Day.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be a sovereign nation?
- What is the role of a sovereign nation in protecting individual rights?
- How is the establishment of an Indigenous Peoples' Day an example of the active presence of Native Americans in this country?

*(Continued on next page)*

## Overview

Throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries tribal nations and Indigenous communities have continued to assert their right to self-governance and sovereignty despite numerous efforts to force them to assimilate. By extension, the purposeful erasure of Indigenous peoples as a living and thriving presence in the current, modern-day world also remains a reality.

Tribal sovereignty predates the existence of the U.S. government and the state of Oregon. Tribal governments are separate and unique sovereign nations with the power to execute their self-governance to protect the health, safety, and welfare of their citizens and to govern their lands, air, and waters. One of the ways Indigenous communities have been embodying their right to sovereignty is through the establishment of an Indigenous Peoples' Day. Indigenous Peoples' Day serves as a reminder of the contributions, both past and present, of Indigenous communities and tribal nations.

In this lesson, students will explore the concepts of tribal sovereignty and self-determination and learn about efforts by tribes and other entities to promote and support the celebration of Indigenous Peoples' Day. This lesson is meant to be used with its companion lesson: Indigenous Peoples' Day as an Act of Sovereignty Part II.



### LOGISTICS

- Where does the activity take place?  
*Classroom*
- How are the students organized?
  - ☒ Whole class    ☒ Teams: 2 – 4
  - ☐ Pairs    ☒ Individually

### TIME REQUIRED

90 minutes

## Background for teachers

- Teachers should understand that tribes have sovereignty, which is the inherent right to govern themselves. Tribal sovereignty means tribes have a government-to-government relationship with the United States. Tribal sovereignty is federally recognized in the U.S. Constitution and is considered “Supreme Law,” meaning it is above state or county laws.
- Learn about national efforts by tribes, Indigenous communities, and other entities to establish and recognize Indigenous Peoples’ Day.
  - [https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/2015/10/portland\\_joins\\_indigenous\\_peop.html](https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/2015/10/portland_joins_indigenous_peop.html)
  - <https://www.powwows.com/indigenous-peoples-day-history-and-future/>
  - <https://time.com/4968067/indigenous-peoples-day-columbus-day-cities/>

### STANDARDS

#### Oregon social sciences standards

**Civics and Government** – HS.5; HS.10

**Multicultural Studies** – HS.11; HS.42; HS.60; HS.61; HS.63; HS.66

**Geography** – HS.41; HS.42; HS.46; HS.47; HS.49; HS.53

**History** – HS.60; HS.63

**Social Science Analysis** – HS.72; HS.74; HS.76; HS.77

#### Oregon English language arts standards

**Informational Text** – 9-10.RH.1; 9-10.RH.2; 9-10.RH.5; 9-10.RH.10

**Writing** – 9-10.WHST.4; 9-10.WHST.7; 9-10.WHST.8; 9-10.WHST.9

**Speaking and Listening** – 9-10.SL.1

### MATERIALS

#### What will be needed for students to engage in this activity?

- PowerPoint: What Is Sovereignty?
- Handout 1: Sovereignty Vocabulary Worksheet
- Handout 2: Poem *1942*, by Taté Walker, Mniconjou Lakota storyteller; used by permission
- Handout 3: Indigenous Peoples’ Day KWL
- Handout 4: Indigenous Peoples’ Day: Rethinking American History



- <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/national-museum-american-indian/2024/10/11/indigenous-peoples-day-a-day-to-honor-and-recognize-the-first-peoples-of-america/>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/04/learning/should-columbus-day-be-replaced-with-indigenous-peoples-day.html?searchResultPosition=1>
- It is important to understand that while this lesson uses Columbus Day as a proxy for understanding sovereignty, this is only one example of assimilative practices. The United States has used many different methods to try to assimilate and destroy Native American cultures.
- Decide how to group students. Students working in small groups of two to three is ideal.

## Considerations for teachers

### Assessment:

- Teachers should review the Vocabulary worksheet for completion and correction.
- Students will engage in a substantial amount of discussion with partners and groups. The teacher should actively monitor student discussion for correct understanding.
- Students will complete a proclamation that will allow the teacher to assess overall understanding of the learning outcomes.

### KEY VOCABULARY

**Tribal sovereignty** – Tribal governments are separate and unique sovereign nations with powers to protect the health, safety, and welfare of their enrolled members and to govern their lands. Tribal sovereignty predates the existence of the U.S. government and the state of Oregon.

#### Self-determination –

- The Self-Determination and Education Act of 1975 (PL-93-638) allowed tribal governments to contract for programs such as police, maintenance, education, social services, timber management, health clinics, and more.
- Native American self-determination refers to the social movements, legislation, and beliefs by which the Native American tribes in the United States exercise self-governance and decisionmaking on issues that affect their own people.

**Assimilation** – The process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society. Attempts to compel groups to assimilate have occurred frequently in world history. Examples of forced assimilation are policies in which students are punished for speaking a language other than English; students aren't allowed to wear traditional clothing; and students are forced to learn and celebrate in schools holidays and traditions that they do not practice.



## Practices

*Vocabulary routine* – This is based on Robert Marzano’s six steps for direct vocabulary instruction. Teachers introduce the term and definition aligned to content and possible common experiences, and students define each term in their own words, develop a non-linguistic representation, make connections to other known terms or non-examples, and discuss and practice the word with others in multiple experiences over time.

*What Would They Say?* – This discussion strategy asks students to infer how the author of a text would respond to specific questions. Students must defend their conclusions using evidence from the text. This strategy requires students to use higher order thinking skills. Analyzing how two or more texts address a similar theme or topic helps students build knowledge and compare ideas.

## Learning targets

- I can explain the term “sovereignty” and provide specific examples.
- I can discuss how the movement to remove and replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples’ Day is an act that supports sovereignty and self-determination.
- I can analyze primary documents related to Indigenous Peoples’ Day.

## Options/extensions/anticipatory set/differentiation

- Have students select another state and research how Native and non-Native residents in that state have advocated for an Indigenous Peoples’ Day.
- Students can create a poem from one of their perspectives and present it to the class.
- Research other work by the poet [jstatewalker.com](http://jstatewalker.com).
- Conduct research on the history of Indigenous Peoples’ Day. Create a timeline that summarizes key dates.
- Research ways to see if the holiday can be changed in their city if it isn’t already.



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## Activity 1

# What Is Tribal Sovereignty? What Is Self-Determination?

*Time: 20 minutes*

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This activity introduces students to the meaning and history of tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

### Step 1:

Distribute Handout 1: Sovereignty Vocabulary worksheet

### Step 2:

Show slide 1

### Say:

*Sovereignty is a recognized way that a group of people govern themselves. European nations, before the United States came to be, developed treaties with tribal nations because they recognized that tribes had an established government system and sovereignty. The United States also used treaties with tribal nations as a means of establishing its own national identity and right to self-government, which was not yet recognized by other nations. However, they subsequently used treaties to take land and resources away from tribes and then sought to assimilate Native American people and eliminate tribal sovereignty.*

### Step 3:

Show slide 2

### Say:

*The images on these slides help me put a visual representation to the word sovereignty. The picture on the left is an overhead view of the Burns Paiute Tribal Government offices and the Health Services center. It's not a city, county, state, or federal government, it is in fact their own location for self-determination or tribal decisionmaking. The picture on the right shows several tribal flags, which reminds*

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## Activity 1 (Continued)

*me that flags are a symbol of identity for a group of people with their own laws and ways of being. These tribal flags remind me that there are many tribal governments, because each tribe is different and has its own authority to govern its people.*

### Step 4:

Show slide 3

### Say:

*You will hear Harlan McKosato (Sac and Fox), the former host of Native American Calling, a radio call-in show, and others talk about the meaning and importance of tribal sovereignty and the right to self-rule. As you watch, I want you to think about how you would define sovereignty, as well as some examples and images that could represent the term. You will hear Native American people in Oregon talk about the importance of Senate Bill 13: Tribal History/Shared History and how it can impact all of Oregon.*

### Step 5:

After students watch the video, show Slide 4 and have them work with a partner to define sovereignty, provide examples, create a drawing or visual representation, and write a sentence correctly using the term. The teacher may ask students "What are some reasons a group of people would want to ensure their sovereignty?"

### Step 6:

While partners are discussing their work, walk around the room and answer student questions.

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## Activity 2

# Rethinking Columbus Day<sup>1</sup>

*Time: 20 minutes*

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This activity provides students the opportunity to analyze a poem about rethinking the significance of Columbus Day as a national holiday. Students will need to respond to questions using evidence from the text.

### Step 1:

Review for students briefly review what is generally taught about Columbus in schools. You can reference your school's history books. Distribute hand-out 2: Poem "1942" by Jonnie Walker Tate (Mniconjou Lakota and an enrolled citizen of the Cheyenne River tribe in central South Dakota) to students and read the poem aloud or ask a student to read it aloud. Ask students to visualize the description.

### Step 2:

Ask students to read the poem independently, then have them listen to it here: <https://walkerwrackspurt.wordpress.com/2014/10/05/1492-0-a-poem-to-abolishcolumbusday/>

As they read and listen, students should highlight or underline the words and phrases that create emotion and feeling for them.

### Step 3:

Once students have read and listened to the poem, assign them to small groups. Task each group with discussing the following questions:

1. How does the poem make you feel? Why?
2. Is the author angry, sad, hopeful? Highlight key words and phrases from the text to justify your answer.

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<sup>1</sup> Activity adapted from Teaching Tolerance <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies/community-inquiry/what-would-they-say>

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## Activity 2 *(Continued)*

3. Why do you think the author wrote this poem?
4. Create a list with your group members about what you think is left out of the school curriculum about Columbus.

### Step 4:

Conduct a whole-class discussion in rounds, sharing group responses to one question at a time. Record group responses on a large piece of butcher paper or a whiteboard.

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### Activity 3

## Say Something

Time: 30 minutes

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Remind students of the definitions of sovereignty and self-determination. Then post the following question and facilitate a classroom discussion:

*How is the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' Day an act of sovereignty and self-determination by tribal nations?*

**Say:**

*Yesterday we learned how Indigenous Peoples' Day relates to the definitions of sovereignty and self-determination. How is creating Indigenous Peoples' Day an example of that? And how does this day contribute to the image of tribes in the United States?*

**Step 1:**

Facilitate a 10- to 15-minute classroom discussion. Provide the following key points to help students understand context.

**Say:**

- *Indigenous Peoples' Day serves as reminder of the contributions, both past and present, of Indigenous communities and nations.*
- *Indigenous Peoples' Day is a day set aside on the calendar to serve as reminder of these contributions.*
- *Some tribes, states, cities, and counties are choosing to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples' Day.*

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## Activity 4

# What Would They Say?<sup>2</sup>

Time: 30 minutes

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### Preparation:

Determine ahead of time how to have students work in pairs. Make multiple copies of the primary text.

*Statement 1: Cities/counties/states should rethink their formal recognition of Columbus Day.*

*Statement 2: Indigenous Peoples' Day is the act of a sovereign nation to protect its individual rights.*

### Step 1:

Ask each group to take on the point of view of the author. This will require them to set aside their own feelings and interests and develop a firm understanding of the text's central idea(s), and the author's message.

### Step 2:

Conduct the discussion in rounds, posing one question or statement at a time. Instruct teams to work together to discuss how they think their author would respond. Teams must highlight at least one piece of text to support their responses.

### Step 3:

Next, have one representative from each team report what their group's author would think about the question or statement.

### Step 4:

Conclude the discussion by having students share which of the authors or characters they feel makes the most persuasive argument.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Teaching Tolerance <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies/community-inquiry/say-something>

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## Wrap Up Activity

*Time: 10 minutes*

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- Ask students to return to their K-W-L chart and add any new information to the "L" column
- Facilitate a classroom discussion