Unit 4

Title: The First Americans

Suggested Time: 3 – 4 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RI.8.1, RI.8.3, RI.8.4; W.8.2, W.8.4, W.8.7, W.8.9; SL.8.1; L.8.1, L.8.2, L.8.4, L.8.5

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

Students should learn that there has been bias in the portrayal of Native Americans in mass culture (white culture). The words used to describe both whites and Indians dictate the cultural perspective we have of both groups.

Synopsis

This speech, presented as an address in 1927 to the mayor of Chicago, William Hale Thompson, sought to reform the stereotypical image of American Indians in history textbooks and classes. To support the opinion that school history books – and white Americans – are unjust to the original Americans, the writers cite facts and examples of distorted diction. They then provide some concrete suggestions for redressing prejudice. The conclusion of the speech is an ethical appeal: Present a full and fair history of the “First Americans.”

1. Read the entire selection, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire selection independently.
2. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other. Depending on the text length and student need, the teacher may choose to read the full text or a passage aloud. For a particularly complex text, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| The council says, “We are the only ones, truly, that are one hundred percent.” What does the Council mean by “one hundred percent”? | The council quotes the mayor as saying “America First” (p. 499). This, coupled with the title, allows the reader to infer that the council means that the Native Americans are the only ones who a truly 100% American. |
| At the end of the first paragraph, what is the Council asking of the mayor? | The council is asking the mayor to teach school children the truth about Native Americans. |
| According to the Council, what words do white people use to describe American Indians? How does the Council address these claims? | American Indians are described as *treacherous*, *thieves*, and *murderers*  Against the claim of murder, they ask, “Is it murder to fight in self-defense?” Against the claim of treachery, they say, “It is true that we had our own small battles, but in the main we were peace loving and home loving.” And against the claim of thievery, they say, “we lived in frail skin lodges and needed no locks or iron bars.” |
| What are the facts about the Indians that the Council wants children to be taught? | American Indians made beautiful blankets and baskets, useful and beautiful pottery, sang songs expressing reverence for nature, American Indian statesmen were brilliant orators, played sports, created moral proverbs and legends, and they killed animals only for food, not for sport. |
| Based on context clues, what does the word *treacherous* mean? | It states “White men call Indians treacherous-but no mention is made of broken treaties on the part of the white man.” Based on this statement, the reader can infer that the term *treacherous* means untrusting or unreliable because the Council refers to the white man breaking treaties their and not living up to their promises as a response Native American’s being “treacherous”. |
| How does the Council respond to being called “savages”? | They ask the rhetorical question, “What is civilization?” and then note that the Indian culture possesses, “noble religion, philosophy, art, music, story, and legend” which are marks of a civilization. |
| Explain what the authors mean by, “We do not ask you to overlook what we did, but we do ask you to understand it”. | The Native Americans are requesting an educational program that reflects the truth, which includes the positives and negatives from their side as well as from the white person’s perspective. They say, “A true program of America First will give a generous place to the culture and history of the American Indian”. |
| To whom does the council refer as “Chief” in the last line? What is the purpose and effect of this address? | The mayor is referred to as the “Chief.” The purpose and effect of this is that it levels the playing field by addressing the mayor by a native term; at the same time, the Council is also recognizing that the mayor does have power and a position of respect as they try to work with him to achieve their goals. Also, use of the term “Chief” can be seen as an attempt by the Native Americans to show camaraderie or friendship with the mayor. |
| How does the Council use literary devices to further their argument? | They use irony to debunk the idea that they are murderers, thieves, and use treachery. For example, they say, “History books teach that Indians were murderers – is it murder to fight in self-defense? Indians killed white men because white men took their lands, ruined their hunting grounds, burned their forests, destroyed their buffalo.” They use personification to describe nature: “the running of waters, the sighing of winds, and the calls of animals.” |

Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **These words require less time to learn**  (They are concrete or describe an object/event/  process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part  of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | pro  massacre  incidents  frail  treaties  acquainted  proverbs  sacred  handicrafts | unjust  treacherous \*  sound  wholesome |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | skin lodges  quills  statesmen | noble  motifs |

Culminating Writing Task

* Prompt

*Explain how the Council suggests their memory should be preserved. How does the use of literary devices affect their argument for this preservation?*

* Teacher Instructions

1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided.
2. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should remind students to use any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| “They call all white victories battles and Indian victories massacres…We ask that this, as well as other incidents, be told fairly. If the Custer battle was a massacre, what the Wounded Knee?” | Going forward, as children are educated about America’s history, the Council is requesting that battles be told in a more balanced light. By labeling battles, a bias is created and that bias is transferred to the learner. By discussing these battles more “fairly”, the American Indian memory is preserved in a more equal lens. |
| “White men to who rise to protect their property are called patriots – Indians who do the same are called murderers.” | Here the Council is using irony (a literary device) to further their point to the Mayor. Though their behaviors are the same, White men are revered and American Indians are shamed. This supports the Council’s argument that American Indians have been unfairly referenced in schools. |
| “It is true that we had our own small battles but in the main we were peace loving and home loving.” | To combat the idea that American Indians are treacherous or dangerous, the Council is highlighting that American Indians are a peaceful group by nature and only choose to fight when needing to defend themselves. Thinking otherwise perpetuates the unfair view of American Indians. |
| “White men call Indians savages. What is civilization? Its marks are a noble religion and philosophy, original arts, stirring music, rich story and legend. We had these. We were not savages but a civilized race.” | Again, the Council his using a rhetorical question (literary device) to make the point that American Indians have been viewed falsely. The Council reminds the Mayor that their community has been civilized for many years which is not a quality of a savage or savage-like society. |
| “Why not make schoolchildren acquainted with the beautiful handcrafts in which we were skilled?” | Here the Council suggests that schoolchildren learn about the craft work/skills of the American Indian as a way to preserve their memory and honor their culture. |
| “We sang songs that carried in their melodies all the sounds of nature…Teach these to your children that they come to love nature as we love it.” | The Council uses a different literary device, personification, within their songs to highlight the importance of nature. As a way to preserve the American Indian memory, the Council suggests that children learn these songs; not only how they are sung but what they mean. |
| “We played games…we told stories…we killed game only for food, not for fun.” | Once again the Council is highlighting the positive aspects of the American Indian culture, aspects that are often left out when discussing Indians. |
| “Tell your children of the friendly acts of Indians to the white people who first settled here.” | Further evidence to support the Council’s claim that the American Indian is a peaceful group and should be remembered as that. |
| “Put in your history’s books the Indian’s part in the World War. Tell how the Indian fought for a country of which he was not a citizen, for a flag to which he has no claim, and for a people that have treated him unjustly. The Indian has long been hurt by these unfair books.” | Another example of irony. These acts would be considered heroic by anyone standards yet because they are acts of an America Indian; they are not mentioned in any history book. |
| “We ask only that our story be told in fairness. We do not ask you to overlook what we did, but we do ask you to understand it.” | Here the Council closes their argument by acknowledging that the American Indian has made mistakes or brash choices; however, as we preserve their memory going forward, we also need to acknowledge the motivation behind those mistakes and what the causes are/were. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to review students’ evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
3. Students complete final draft.

* Sample Answer

Throughout their speech to the Mayor of Chicago, the Council highlights the misrepresentation of the American Indian and asks that going forward, we honor the American Indian culture and preserve their memory more justly. The Council uses a variety of literary devices to propel their argument and support their request of a fair preservation.

The reader is first introduced to the Council’s argument when they reference the irony in which battles are remembered. “They call all white victories battles and Indian victories massacres…We ask that this, as well as other incidents, be told fairly. If the Custer battle was a massacre, what was Wounded Knee?” The Council is asking the Mayor to acknowledge the disproportionate nature in which battles are retold and going forward, the Council asks that as children are educated about America’s history, battles be told in a more balanced light. By labeling battles using terms such as massacres, a bias is created and that bias is transferred to the learner. By discussing these battles more “fairly,” the American Indian memory is preserved in a more positive lens, which contributes to an understanding of the American Indian as an equal in society.

To combat the idea that American Indians are “treacherous” or dangerous, the Council highlights that American Indians are a peaceful group by nature and only choose to fight when needing to defend themselves, “It is true that we had our own small battles but in the main we were peace loving and home loving.” Thinking that the American Indian is “treacherous” only perpetuates the unfair view of American Indians.

The Council uses a rhetorical question to make the point that American Indians have been viewed falsely. “White men call Indians savages. What is civilization? Its marks are a noble religion and philosophy, original arts, stirring music, rich story and legend. We had these. We were not savages but a civilized race.” The Council reminds the Mayor that their community has been civilized for many years which is not a quality of a savage or savage-like society.

The Council uses another literary device, irony, to further their point to the Mayor. “White men to who rise to protect their property are called patriots – Indians who do the same are called murderers.” Though their behaviors are the same, White men are revered yet American Indians are shamed. This supports the Council’s argument that American Indians have been unfairly referenced in schools. The Council furthers their claim by stating that the American Indian is a peaceful group who is noble enough to stand and fight alongside their white brother when asked to do so. “Tell your children of the friendly acts of Indians to the white people who first settled here…Put in your history’s books the Indian’s part in the World War. Tell how the Indian fought for a country of which he was not a citizen, for a flag to which he has no claim, and for a people that have treated him unjustly. The Indian has long been hurt by these unfair books.” These acts would be considered heroic by anyone’s standards yet because they are acts of an America Indian; they are not mentioned in any history book.

The Council then suggests how the American Indian can be remembered by highlighting their rich culture. “Why not make schoolchildren acquainted with the beautiful handcrafts in which we were skilled…We sang songs that carried in their melodies all the sounds of nature…Teach these to your children that they come to love nature as we love it…We played games…we told stories…we killed game only for food, not for fun.” These examples further the Council’s point that the American Indian is more than this “treacherous” or “savage” like individual. Would a “savage” have such respect for nature as American Indians often do? The Council points out how the American Indian personifies nature through song and that should be appreciated. These songs, along with the Council’s other examples, support their request to preserve the American Indian memory and culture and that children should learn more about these culture-rich examples and see the “civilized” life that the American Indian has.

The Council closes their speech by acknowledging that the American Indian has made mistakes and brash choices however as we preserve their memory going forward, we also need to acknowledge the motivation behind those mistakes and what the causes are/were. “We ask only that our story be told in fairness. We do not ask you to overlook what we did, but we do ask you to understand it.”

Additional Tasks

* *Research Mayor Thompson’s response. Has treatment of Native Americans changed? Are there points from the Grand Council’s speech that are still relevant today? Respond in 1 – 2 paragraphs.*
  + Answer:

There is no readily available evidence that Mayor Thompson responded to the Grand Council. His “America First” pitch was aimed at weakening what he viewed to be pro-British textbooks, which is why the council says, “We do not know if school histories are pro-British, but we do know that they are unjust to the life of our people,” in favor of information that would be more flattering for Irish and German immigrants, in an attempt to gain voters from these ethnic groups. The Grand Council saw his “America First” platform as a good means to also advocate for a more balanced treatment of Native Americans in U.S. society and culture.

History textbooks still unfold the story of European colonization from the perspective of the Europeans and then the white settlers who were those Europeans descendants. Because of this, clashes between the colonists and the natives are framed such that the natives appear to still be the “murderers” the council discussed who rely on the “treachery” they also felt was a biased representation.

* *Look at your social studies textbook, songs, films, and artwork and locate portrayals of Native Americans. Explain how Native Americans are portrayed in at least 2 different works. Are there points from the Grand Council’s speech that are still relevant today? Respond in 1 – 2 paragraphs.*
  + Answer:

My social studies textbook uses the first two sections of Chapter 1 to teach about Native American peoples before European conquest. It includes very little about Native Americans once Europeans are an established group in North America. There is a short piece about Squanto helping the Pilgrims, and it does speak of him respectfully, but the passage is short and does not tell us the extent to which natives and Pilgrims interacted or just how much the Pilgrims relied upon native assistance.

A Google search for “Native Americans in art” provided many search results. The images shown do represent a shift from what the Grand Council was concerned about. There were not images of killing, thievery, treachery, or other pieces with negative connotations. The images often had a peaceful theme, with Native Americans in the foreground against of backdrop of natural beauty. Equally well represented were the pottery and blankets that the Grand Council wanted to be highlighted. Based upon the images in this internet search, I would say that there has been a growth in the representation of Native Americans and that the Council’s concerns have been addressed in the artistic realm.

Note to Teacher

* In the last sentence of the speech, the mayor is referred to as the “Chief.” This is a salient point for discussion about how the Grand Council sees the mayor as not only an equal but acknowledges the power he holds.
* The last question asks students to identify the usage of literary devices. This is a good opportunity to point out to students how literary devices are used effectively in argumentative writing.

Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**“The First Americans”**

1. The council says, “We are the only ones, truly, that are one hundred percent.” What does the Council mean by “one hundred percent”?
2. At the end of the first paragraph, what is the Council asking of the mayor?
3. According to the Council, what words do white people use to describe American Indians? How does the Council address these claims?
4. What are the facts about the Indians that the Council wants children to be taught?
5. Based on context clues, what does the word *treacherous* mean?
6. How does the Council respond to being called “savages”?
7. Explain what the authors mean by, “We do not ask you to overlook what we did, but we do ask you to understand it”.
8. To whom does the council refer as “Chief” in the last line? What is the purpose and effect of this address?
9. How does the Council use literary devices to further their argument?