



# Ethnic Studies Lesson 2H: Native American Sovereignty and Government

**TOPIC:**

NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY

**GRADE LEVELS:**

11-12

**TIME:**

1½ HOURS

## California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Themes, Values, and Principles Alignment

***Themes:***

1. Identity
2. History and Movement
3. Social Movements and Equity

***Values and Principles:***

1. Cultivate empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially Native People/s and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).
2. Celebrate and honor Native People/s of the land and communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by providing a space to share their stories of success, community collaboration, and solidarity, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth.
3. Center and place high value on the precolonial ancestral knowledge, narratives, and communal experiences of Native People/s and people of color and groups that are typically marginalized in society.
4. Critique empire building in history and its relationship to white supremacy, racism, and other forms of power and oppression.
5. Challenge racist, bigoted, discriminatory, and imperialist/colonial beliefs and practices on multiple levels.
6. Connect ourselves to past and contemporary social movements that struggle for social justice and an equitable and democratic society, and conceptualize, imagine, and build new possibilities for a post-racist, post-systemic-racism society that promotes collective narratives of transformative resistance, critical hope, and radical healing.

## California English and Social Science Standards Alignment

***English Language Arts Standards (11th and 12th Grade):***

**Reading**—Informational Text (RI.11-12)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (RI.11-12.4).

**Writing**—(W.11-12)

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence (W.11-12.1).

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience (W.11-12.5).

***Social Sciences Standards (11th and 12th Grade):***

History-Social Science Content Standards—(Grades 9-12)

## Lesson Purpose

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Students will explore the concept of sovereignty and how that applies to Native American tribes, their governments, and their relationship to state governments and the US federal government.

## Essential Questions

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*When did Native American tribes become sovereign nations?*

*What do tribal governments look like?*

*What was and is the role of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in tribal governments?*

*How has life changed for American Indians in the United States over the last 350 years?*

## Materials

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[PBS: Indian Pride 102: Treaties & Sovereignty](#)

[PBS: How Does Tribal Government Work? Wyoming's Native Americans](#)

[Bureau of Indian Affairs: History](#)

[BIA Kevin Gover's Historic Apology for the Bureau of Indian Affairs](#) (video 11 minutes, 58 seconds)

[KWL Chart](#)

## Vocabulary

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sovereignty

trustee

citizenship

## Lesson Steps

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**Step 1:**

- As a whole class, ask students to prepare for an interview with a tribal official who can answer questions about tribal nation sovereignty and their forms of tribal government. Record their interview

questions. Play the PBS [Indian Pride 102: Treaties and Sovereignty](#) video (from minute 4:40 to 14:42). Pause the video frequently as the students' questions are answered. If these questions aren't asked, be sure to address the issue of when sovereignty starts, how US treaties with Native American tribes are different from treaties with foreign countries and how they are the same, and where the basis and authority for tribal government came from.

**Step 2:**

- As a whole class, have students watch PBS: [How Does Tribal Government Work? | Wyoming's Native Americans](#) (video 8 minutes, 30 seconds). Pause the video frequently to see if any of the students' interview questions from earlier have been answered. Ask students what new, follow-up interview questions they have formed now.

**Step 3:**

- Print a copy of the Bureau of Indian Affairs history page (found [HERE](#)) and ask students to read in pairs. Students should underline unfamiliar words, circle key terms and vocabulary, and highlight the main points of the article. Ask students to consider these questions while they read:
  - What was the role of the BIA in treaty negotiations during the 18th and 19th centuries?
  - How is that role the same or different today?
- As a class, have students watch ["Never Again" Kevin Gover's Historic Apology for the Bureau of Indian Affairs \(September 8, 2000\)](#). When students watch the video, have them make notes of why an apology by the BIA was needed. When the video is complete, ask students why the director of the BIA needed to make an apology. Do they believe that words make a difference in the role of the BIA now? What else have we learned so far that the BIA was a part of?

**Step 4:**

- Add what they have learned to this unit's KWL chart. As a whole group, ask students to answer the questions from this unit—"When did Native American tribes become sovereign nations? What do tribal governments look like? What was and is the role of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in tribal governments?"—and this unit's question, "How has life changed for American Indians in the United States over the last 350 years?"

## Essential Question Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

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As time permits and for homework, have students research a tribal court judge in the state of their choosing and write the draft of a follow-up letter or email asking additional questions or for clarification. Tribal court judges are often very willing to inform the public on questions of what sorts of cases they hear, whether non-Natives can be tried in tribal court, what powers the tribal court has, and whether a non-Native can sue a tribal member in tribal court. As time permits, the class may decide to send these letters and use the responses to add to their understanding. The letters or emails can be evaluated for the proper tone and form of a professional letter.

## Additional Readings and Resources

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Bernstein, David E. *Classified: The Untold Story of Racial Classification in America*. Bombardier, 2022.

Cornell, Stephen, and Joseph P. Kalt. "Two Approaches to the Development of Native Nations: One Works, the Other Doesn't." In *Rebuilding Native Nations: Strategies for Governance and Development*, edited by Miriam Jorgensen. University of Arizona Press, chap. 1, 3-33. [Kalt, Rebuilding Native Nations, chap. 1 PDF](#)

Interview with Russell Means. [https://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip\\_224-257d81km](https://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip_224-257d81km)

**NOTE TO EDUCATORS REGARDING ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES:** America is a pluralistic country, ethnically. It is also a pluralistic country politically—left, right, and center. Ethnic studies educators have ready access to resources from the left-of-center in the [2021 California Model Curriculum](#) and in the [Liberated Model Curriculum](#). This Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum favors teachers exposing students to views from across the political spectrum. Educators often lack guidance to materials from outside the left-of-center. Therefore, in the sections on Additional Readings and Resources, the Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum alerts educators to credible resources that provide an alternative to the other Model Curricula. In doing so, this curriculum encourages educators to acquaint students with evidence-based views from left, right, and center.

### Ethnic Studies 2A: KWL Chart

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**KNOW**

**WONDER**

**LEARNED**

<i>What do we think we already know about this topic?</i>	<i>What do we wonder about this topic? Write your questions below.</i>	<i>After the research is completed, what did we learn? Make sure to cite your source.</i>