APPROPRIATE METHODS TO USE WHEN TEACHING ABOUT NATIVE AMERICAN PEOPLES

~ source: www.Ableza.org ~

- Understand the term "Native American" includes all peoples indigenous to the Western Hemisphere.

- Native American students should not be singled out and asked to describe their families' traditions or their peoples' culture(s).

- Avoid the assumption that there are no Native American students in your class.

- Use books and materials which are written and illustrated by Native American people as primary source materials: speeches, songs, poems, and writings, which show the linguistic skill of a people who have come from an oral tradition.

- When teaching ABC's, avoid "I is for Indian" and "E is for Eskimo."

- Avoid rhymes or songs that use Native Americans as counting devices, i.e. "One little, two little, three little..."

- Research the traditions and histories, oral and written, of Native Americans before attempting to teach these.

- Avoid referring to or using materials which depict Native Americans as "savages," "primitives," "The Noble Savage," "Red Man," "Red Race," "simple," or "extinct."

- Present Native American Peoples as having unique, separate, and distinct cultures, languages, beliefs, traditions, and customs.

- Avoid materials that use non-Native Americans or other characters dressed as "Indians."

- Avoid craft activities that trivialize Native American dress, dance, and beliefs, i.e. toilet-paper roll kachinas or "Indian dolls", paper bag and construction paper costumes and headdresses. Research authentic methods and have the proper materials. Realize that many songs, dances, legends, and ceremonies of Native American Peoples are considered sacred and should not be "invented" or portrayed as an activity.

- If your educational institution employs images or references to Native American peoples as mascots, i.e. "Redskins", "Indians," "Chiefs," "Braves," etc. urge your administration to abandon these offensive names.

- Correct and guide children when they "war whoop", use "jaw-breaker" jargon or employ any other stereotypical mannerisms.

- Depict Native American peoples, past and present, as heroes who are defending their people, rights, and lands.

- Avoid manipulative phases and wording such as "massacre," "victory," and "conquest" which distort facts and history.

- Teach Native American history as a regular part of American history and discuss what went wrong or right.

- Avoid materials and texts which illustrate Native American heroes as only those who helped Europeans and Euro-Americans, i.e. Thanksgiving.

- Use materials and texts which outline the continuity of Native American societies from past to present.

- Use materials that show respect and understanding of the sophistication and complexities of Native American societies. Understand and impart that the spiritual beliefs of Native American Peoples are important to the structure of their societies and are not "superstitions" or "heathen."

- Invite a Native American guest speaker/presenter to your class or for a school assembly. Contact a local Native American organization or your library for a list of these resources. Offer an honorarium or gift to those who visit your school.

- Avoid the assumption that a Native American person knows everything about all Native Americans.

- Use materials that show the value Native American peoples place on our elders, children, and women. Avoid offensive terms such as "papoose", and "squaw." Use respectful language.

- Understand that not all Native American Peoples have "Indian" surnames, but familiar European and Hispanic names as well.

- Help children to understand that Native American Peoples have a wide variety of physical features, attributes, and value as do people of ALL cultures and races.

- Most of all, teach children about Native Americans in a manner that you would like used to depict YOUR culture and racial/ethnic origin.

Ableza is a Native American Arts and Media Institute in San Jose, CA. The organization is dedicated to promoting, preserving and protecting traditional and contemporary arts by Native American peoples. Through education, especially of Native American youth, Ableza promotes self-esteem and an awareness of "who we (Native peoples) are." Additional information can be found at www.ableza.org.