



SOCIAL SCIENCES

Keeping Culture – Artifacts, Repatriation, and Indigenous Sovereignty

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- **Sovereignty**
- **Identity**
- **History**
- **Genocide, federal policy, and laws**

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Discuss the meaning and importance of repatriation.
- Identify social and historical factors that have led to the removal, theft, and damage of Indigenous cultural resources.
- Describe the relationship between the protection of cultural resources and the survival of living traditions for Indigenous communities.
- Examine the impact of repatriation on the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- **What is the connection between the repatriation of cultural artifacts and the preservation of cultural heritage for Indigenous communities?**

(Continued on next page)

Overview

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce students to the global movement to repatriate Indigenous artifacts and sacred objects obtained—often illegitimately—by museums and private collectors over past centuries. This lesson will also cover the role that repatriation plays in supporting the survival of living traditions and cultural preservation for Tribes today.

This lesson is intended to take multiple class sessions. Students will first build background knowledge by comparing two news articles that introduce the repatriation of cultural resources (human remains, sacred objects, funerary objects) as an ongoing and global issue. Next, students will explore the connection between access to cultural artifacts and the survival of living traditions and cultural practices by viewing and discussing a short video about the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. Through a short presentation and a video analysis activity, students will consider how repatriation is connected to the health and well-being of Native communities. To conclude the lesson, students will demonstrate their



LOGISTICS

- Where does the activity take place?
In the classroom, online, or in an outdoor setting if possible.
- How are the students organized?
 - Whole class Teams: 2 – 4
 - Pairs Individually

TIME REQUIRED

Four or five one-hour class periods

understanding of key concepts by writing a one-page reflection citing evidence from primary sources (news articles and video).

Background for teachers

Repatriation is the act of returning someone or something to its place of origin. For centuries, human remains and cultural artifacts from Indigenous communities across the globe have been removed, damaged, or stolen by academics, museums, collectors, and treasure hunters based primarily in Europe and North America. Today, after decades of advocacy, Indigenous people are leading a global movement to repatriate many of these cultural resources to their home communities—sparking a larger reevaluation of the relationship between Native people and institutions of learning.

¹ Oregon is in the process of revising its social sciences standards. This document references the draft 2018 standards for high school.

STANDARDS

Oregon social sciences standards¹

HS.1 - Analyze the positive and negative implications of the U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights and Amendments, Supreme Court decisions, Federal Laws, and executive orders, for political, legal, economic, and social equality for all, including traditionally marginalized groups.

HS.59 - Analyze and explain the history of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians in Oregon and the U.S. regarding their culture, Tribal sovereignty, and issues of concern, past and present.

HS.65 - Identify and explain strategies of survivance, resistance, and societal change by individuals and traditionally marginalized groups confronting discrimination, genocide, and other forms of violence based on race, national origin, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and gender.

HS.74 - Analyze an event, issue, problem, or phenomenon, critiquing and evaluating characteristics, influences, causes, and both short- and long-term effects.

HS.75 - Evaluate options for individual and collective actions to address local, regional, and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy identification, and complex causal reasoning.

Oregon English language arts standards

11-12. RI.7 - Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats to address a question or solve a problem.

The current movement for repatriation is a reaction to centuries of exploitation in which hundreds of thousands of sacred artifacts, recordings, and other precious cultural objects created by Indigenous communities have been taken and placed in museums and private collections. Much of this transfer has been driven by greed. For hundreds of years, private collectors and amateur archeologists have made lucrative profits pillaging sacred sites and Indigenous graves for objects to sell on the antiques market. Although academics and museums often express more scholarly motivations, in practice, academics have often played an equally extractive role—acquiring cultural objects and knowledge under the idea that Native people were a “vanishing race” to be cataloged and examined by western scholars. This process was not limited to knowledge or artifacts, but often included the theft of the human remains of Tribal ancestors for study and display. Until very recently, neither researchers nor private collectors have given much thought to the impact their actions have on Native communities.

Tribes and Native activists have led the way in getting larger society to consider the impact of collecting sacred objects from Tribal communities and pushing for state and federal legislation to protect, preserve, and repatriate cultural resources. One major success came in 1990 when the U.S. Congress enacted the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), federal legislation that protects Indian burial sites on

MATERIALS

- Slides (PowerPoint slide deck)
- Classroom writing surface (blackboard, whiteboard, smartboard, or chart paper and markers)
- Classroom audiovisual technology to display PowerPoint slides
- Warm-up handout
- News article comparison handout for reading analysis (student and teacher copy)
- Reading 1: “We were horrified: Fights to repatriate Indigenous ancestral remains continue worldwide”
- Reading 2: “Native American Graves Repatriation Act turns 30”
- Video analysis handout
- Pens/pencils or computer

federal and Tribal land and requires institutions that receive federal funding to publish inventories of human remains and cultural items they possess, so that lineal descendants, Tribes, and Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian organizations can request repatriation. While this legislation created a formal process to request repatriation of cultural resources, large quantities of ancestral human remains, sacred objects, and artifacts from Native American communities still reside in museums and private collections all over the world. In recent decades, Tribal leaders and activists have begun to push museums and other collectors to move beyond the requirements of NAGPRA and reconsider the future of holdings collected from Indigenous communities.

The repatriation of Indigenous artifacts is connected to Tribal sovereignty, identity, and the survival of living traditions. Many Indigenous people view human remains and funerary objects as ancestors deserving proper burial, not as specimens to use to study the past. Similarly, for most Native communities sacred objects and ceremonial artifacts are meant to be used as part of the cycle of practices that sustain generations and contribute to a healthy, balanced world. Many Indigenous cultures see objects as having a spirit of their own that is damaged by being removed from the ceremonial life of the community. Having access to and control over these cultural resources is an act of Indigenous survival, perseverance, and continued existence in the modern world. Tribal

VOCABULARY

Repatriation – The act of returning someone or something to its place of origin. For example, the return of Indigenous ancestral remains, their burial belongings, and other sacred and cultural objects to their original Tribal nations or descendants.

Cultural artifacts – Objects created by a person or group of people that hold significance for people of that group. Examples might include everyday things that are associated with heritage and community life, or things of deep importance like those used in religious ceremonies or buried with a deceased loved one.

Sovereignty – The inherent authority of a nation to govern itself. Tribal sovereignty is the inherent right of a Tribal nation to create its own constitution, governance structure, and laws, and to negotiate government-to-government treaties and other legal agreements with other sovereign nations.



nations and Indigenous communities have come to play an expanding role in collecting, preserving, and studying cultural artifacts and advocating for repatriation, and many museums have returned large parts of their collections to Tribes while working with contemporary Native artists to design exhibits that celebrate the persistence of Native peoples.

To prepare for this lesson teachers should review the following resources:

- Hamilton, W. (2020, March). 'We were horrified': Fights to repatriate Indigenous ancestral remains continue worldwide. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/indigenous-remains-repatriation-efforts-1.5489390>
- Pember, M. A. (2020, November). Native American Graves Repatriation Act turns 30. *Indian Country Today*. <https://indiancountrytoday.com/news/native-american-graves-repatriation-act-turns-30>
- Wilkinson, C. (2010). Chapter 16. *The people are dancing again: The history of the Siletz Tribe of Western Oregon*. University of Washington Press. (See appendix)
- Lincoln County Historical Society. (2020). *The Copeland Collection: Original artifacts from the Siletz Indian Reservation* [Video]. <https://vimeo.com/694162930/1fc60ebd4d>

ADAPTATIONS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING



The lesson is primarily structured around group discussion and exploration, but much of it can be adapted for distance learning or independent learning purposes. A suggested sequence follows. Be sure all students have either print or electronic access to the materials described.

Activity 1. Warm-up

Invite learners to respond to the reflection questions independently rather than in pairs.

Activity 2. Repatriation of cultural resources

Assign half the students to read one article and half to read the other. Have them complete the first reading individually, then assign them to breakout groups of four students to discuss their reflections. Each group should have two students who read the first article and two who read the second.

Activity 3. Significance of repatriation

Present the slides in a virtual format and either share the video clip as a screenshare and facilitate the discussion virtually or assign it as homework.

Activity 4. Reflection/closure

Assign the final reflection as homework.

References

Association on American Indian Affairs. (n.d.). *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)*. <https://www.indian-affairs.org/nagpra.html>

Dickinson, E. E. (2021, July 12). The endless robbing of Native American graves. *Washington Post Magazine*.

Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. (2008). *Returning the past: Repatriation of First Nations property*. <https://moa.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/TeachingKit-Repatriation.pdf>

Repatriation and NAGPRA in Oregon. (n.d.). *Culture of collection*. <https://oregonnagpra.wordpress.com/culture-of-collection/>

National Museum of the American Indian. (n.d.). *Repatriation*. <https://americanindian.si.edu/explore/repatriation>

Vizenor, G. (1999). *Manifest manners: Narratives on Postindian survivance*. University of Nebraska Press.

Considerations for teachers

Assessment

The activities in this lesson are primarily built around student discussion and engagement with reading material. Teachers can assess student learning by monitoring student pairs and small-group discussions and by reviewing the content of written reflection products.

Practices

- *Small group* – Small group activities allow students to share and analyze ideas with one, two, or three other people. This practice can be good for students who do not want to share their ideas with the whole class and/or who may be afraid of others' reactions. The teacher should monitor group discussions to determine the degree to which students are understanding the concepts.

- *Classroom discussion* – Large group, whole class discussion allows students to express their thoughts and hear the thoughts of others. For the instructor, this practice is a good way to take the pulse of the group and see what general themes are emerging. For students, large group discussion can be a way to express themselves or to hear differing perspectives from others.

Learning targets

- I can discuss the meaning and importance of repatriation.
- I can identify factors that have led to the forced removal, deliberate theft, and damage of Indigenous cultural resources.
- I can describe the relationship between the protection of cultural resources and the survival of living traditions for Indigenous communities.

Appendix

Materials included in the electronic folder that support this lesson are:

- Slides_Significance_of_Repatriation.pptx
- Activity 1_Warm-up handout
- Activity 2_News article comparison_Student Copy
- Activity 2_News article comparison_Teacher Copy
- Reading 1_We were horrified
- Reading 2_Indian Country Today
- Activity 3_Video analysis handout
- Chapter_16_The_People_Are_Dancing_Again.pdf

Activity 1

Warm-up

Time: 20 minutes

Step 1

Review learning targets and introduce lesson topics. Write the word “repatriation” on a whiteboard or in a place where all students can see it.

Say:

Repatriation is the act of returning someone or something to its place of origin. For example, many museums around the world hold objects and artifacts that were created by communities in other countries. Returning an object or work of art back to its country of origin is an example of repatriation. In this lesson, we are going to explore Native American repatriation and the return of cultural artifacts to Indigenous communities.

Step 2

Invite students to think about the difference between a cultural artifact and a personal possession. Ask them to reflect silently and then quickly record a few reflections on a copy of the “Warm-up” handout or on scratch/journal paper.

Say:

What is the difference between a cultural artifact and a personal possession?

Step 3

After two minutes, invite a few students to share their reflections on the difference between a cultural artifact and a personal possession. Then, clarify the difference.

- *Cultural artifact:* Objects created by a person or group of people that hold significance for people of that group.
- *Personal possession:* An object or item that is the property of an individual.

Activity 1 *(Continued)*

Step 4

Next, ask students to turn to a partner and consider the following questions. Give students five or six minutes for discussion.

Say:

Has anyone been to a museum where cultural artifacts created by Native Americans were on display? What kind of things did you see? When you viewed those items, did you consider how those objects came to be in a museum? Why or why not? This will be a central question during this lesson.

If time allows, share additional background information:

Most museums today try to collect ethically, but this was not always the case. There are many ways that museums have acquired the objects in their collection. Some items were stolen from graves or Tribal people by collectors and sold to museums. Many were collected by academics without consent or approval of Native communities. Some were sold to collectors or academics by Indigenous people facing desperate circumstances to survive. In modern times, some museums are working to correct past wrongs and have built relationships with Tribal communities. Some Native people even offer to make items especially for museum exhibits or are happy to loan museums some of their art or cultural objects.

Activity 2

Repatriation of cultural resources

Time: 45 – 50 minutes

Step 1

Ask students to stay with their discussion partner from the warm-up. Assign reading 1 to half the pairs and reading 2 to the other half. Provide each pair with a copy of the “News Article Comparison” handout.

Step 2

Introduce the “News Article Comparison” handout. Ask students to read their assigned article carefully and answer the questions provided in the handout. If students do not have time to finish reading during the class period, assign the reading as homework or provide additional time during the next class period.

Step 3

After approximately 15 minutes, ask each pair to form a group of four with another pair that was assigned the other reading. Instruct students to teach back what they discovered (using the notes they took on their handout) to the other group. All students are responsible for completing notes about both articles.

Step 4

As a whole class, review the sections of the “News Article Comparison” handout and invite students to share their findings for each article. As they share, record responses on a whiteboard or another place where all students can see it. A teacher’s copy is provided with suggested answers.

- Where is this article from?
- What is being repatriated? Are there important details about where the item came from or how it was taken or stolen?

Activity 2 *(Continued)*

- What is the significance of repatriation according to this article?
- How does this article describe attitudes about ownership of cultural property?
- What words did you flag that you did not know?

Activity 3

Significance of repatriation

Time: 60 – 80 minutes

Instructions

Share a short presentation connecting the importance of repatriation to Indigenous survivance and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Slide 2 | Say

Repatriation is the act of returning someone or something to its country and people of origin. In this lesson, when we refer to repatriation, we are talking specifically about returning Indigenous ancestral remains, their burial belongings, and sacred and cultural objects back to their original Tribes and lineal descendants.

Slide 3 | Say

American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian peoples have been working to protect, access, and control their cultural resources for decades. Tribal advocacy during the 1970s and 1980s led to Congress passing the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, or NAGPRA, which protects Indian burial sites and established a process for Tribes to request the return of human remains and cultural artifacts from museums and other institutions that receive federal funding.

Slide 4 | Say

To help us discuss repatriation, we're going to explore two important concepts. The first is sovereignty, or the inherent authority of a nation to govern itself. Tribal sovereignty is the inherent right of a Tribal nation to govern itself—to create its own laws and legal agreements with other sovereign nations. In Oregon, there are nine federally recognized Tribal nations. When a Tribe requests the return of human remains or cultural artifacts, this request is not about returning personal property to an individual—it is a sovereign nation requesting the return of cultural resources that belong to them and that preserve their heritage and identity.

Activity 3 (Continued)

Slide 5 | Say

Second, repatriation of cultural artifacts supports the health and vitality of Indigenous communities today. For many years, museums, movies, and popular culture have portrayed Indigenous peoples and cultures as primitive—something from the past. But Native people continue to exist and thrive in the world today, both as individuals and as Tribes. Indigenous people remain connected to their ancestral teachings, cultures, and languages, and assume responsibility for the spiritual and cultural health of their communities. Repatriation supports Native people and communities by:

- *Validating the persistence of Indigenous knowledge and expertise.*
- *Supporting Native people learning and teaching about their cultures.*
- *Helping Indigenous communities recover from the cultural and spiritual disruption caused by colonization.*

Slide 6 | Say

Consider this quote from Kalpana Nand, Education Officer of Fiji Museum: “Culture is a living, dynamic, ever-changing and yet ever-constant thing—it is a story, a song, a dance performance, never a ‘dead thing’ to be represented in the form of an artifact to be looked at through glass.” Repatriation of cultural artifacts helps Tribal nations and Indigenous communities preserve and revive cultural practices that others attempted to erase or suppress through colonization.

Slide 7 | Say

The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians has worked for decades to care for cultural artifacts from their ancestors. Like many Tribal nations, they have a dedicated cultural resources program that works to protect, promote, learn, and teach their cultural heritage within the Tribal community and with the broader public in appropriate and considerate ways. This includes researching language and traditional practices (such as dance, basketry, ceremonies); reclaiming cultural artifacts; and supporting Tribal members learning and practicing Tribal culture.



Activity 3 (Continued)

Slide 8 | Say

We are now going to watch a video clip about the Copeland Collection—a collection of artifacts from people on the Coast (Siletz) Reservation that were part of the Lincoln County Historical Society collection but have since been loaned back to the Tribe with plans to eventually permanently return them to the Tribe. As you watch the video, consider these three questions:

- How are the regalia and other cultural artifacts described by the Siletz Tribal members in the video? What is their purpose?
- What is the significance of having access to these cultural materials for the Siletz people in this video?
- What impact do you think the decision to return materials to the Tribe had for Tribal people?

Instructions

Play the video “The Copeland Collection: Original artifacts from the Siletz Indian Reservation” from 0:00–13:46.

As a large group, ask students to share their reflections from the video in response to the provided questions. Make sure the following key points are discussed:

How are regalia and other cultural artifacts described by the Siletz Tribal members in the video? What is their purpose?

- In the Athabaskan language, there is no word for art—cultural artifacts are described as the work of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians (5:00).
- Regalia is made for a purpose—it is made to be used (11:20).

Activity 3 (Continued)

What is the significance of having access to these cultural materials for the Siletz people in the video? How do Tribal members handle and talk about the objects in the collection?

- For the people of Siletz, regalia ownership is a high honor (12:00).
- Regalia and other cultural artifacts have a spirit and need to be used (13:25).
- The Tribe has been able to use regalia and other traditional artifacts in ceremonies and activities.
 - In particular, use in dance ceremonies.
- Regalia and other cultural artifacts are handled with care and reverence.

Activity 4

Reflection/closure

Time: 45 – 50 minutes

Instructions

To wrap up the lesson, ask students to draft a one-page response to the reflection prompt they considered at the start of this lesson. This can be completed in class or assigned as homework. Ask students to cite evidence from the readings or from what they watched in class.

Question prompt

Consider cultural artifacts that have been stolen from Indigenous communities that are now on display in museums or private collections. How is loss of personal property different than the loss of cultural artifacts for a community?

Extension activity

Have students visit a local museum, historical society, or other institution that has collections of artifacts from Indigenous communities. Have the student research:

1. What types of items are in the collection.
2. What the significance of those items is to the communities that created them.
3. What policies the institutions have in place to repatriate items.
4. What is involved in those repatriation protocols (or lack of protocols).

Have students report on their findings, either as a short presentation to the class or as a written report.