

Creating My Story: My Journey to College and Career

Lesson Three – Building Positive Identity and Expectations in Students

Guiding Question: *What can I learn about myself from the stories of others?*

Short Summary of Lesson

This lesson will present a panel of successful Native Americans in various careers who will tell the story of how they got where they are in the world. Panelists will discuss their journey of self identity and worth in their lives. The students will be able to ask questions, then follow-up by interviewing a family member/tribal elder, or research an historical figure whose story influenced others.

Lesson Goals

Students will understand that by listening to the stories of others they can learn more about themselves as they consider their college and career goals.

Skills Emphasized

- Note-taking
- Listening skills
- Interview skills
- Research skills
- Writing reports

Materials needed

- Panel of 3-4 Native American professional people
- Note-taking guide available on CNE web site

Background

Prepare the members of your panel by assigning questions in advance such as the following:

1. Briefly discuss your chosen career and why you decided to enter your field. Be sure to point out times/events/people from your childhood that had a direct impact on your decision.
2. Tell the class about personal characteristics you possess and the expectations you demand of yourself that made you successful in college.
3. Think back to the classes you took in high school and college. What courses were most important to you? How did they help you pursue your future goals? What advice would you give to middle school students regarding their high school and college careers?
4. What successes have you realized? What challenges did you face as a Native American person in college? In the work world? How have you overcome those obstacles?
5. What would your life be like if you hadn't gone to college?
6. If you were to write your life's story, who would you want to read it and what important lessons would you want them to learn?

Lesson Design

Begin the lesson by reminding students that everyone has a life story and that by listening to others we can learn and add to our own future goals. Read this short excerpt from *Our Story Begins: New and Selected Stories* by Tobias Wolff.

A river runs deep in my memory, as it once ran deep in my life - the Skagit River, in northern Washington. As a boy I lived in a small village right on the Skagit. My bedroom faced the river, maybe 100 yards away, and for many years I fell asleep to the deep, steady sigh of its flowing, as much a physical sensation as a sound.

In the light of day, the river took on a dark emerald tint borrowed from the spruces, pines, and firs that bristled down the slopes of the Cascades to its very banks. Though not much given to aesthetic reflection, I thought even then that it was beautiful. My friends and I fished it for steelhead and trout, but left the salmon alone as they fought their way upstream to spawn. The bald eagles were less compassionate. They congregated just upstream from Marblemount, where we changed buses on our long drive to school, and we sometimes played truant for a day to watch them hunt - skimming just inches above the water, then lifting their thrashing prey to the topmost branches of a tree.

It was beautiful, the river, but no ornament. We were constantly warned of its dangers, and inevitably a boy from our village drowned. This added a deeper shade to its color, a darker timbre to its voice, but I loved it no less. When I finally left, I had trouble sleeping. Nights without that breathing presence seemed so hollow, airless. I still miss it.

Tell students that Tobias Wolff grew up to become a famous writer and teacher, now on the faculty at Stanford University. Ask them how they think his childhood experiences influenced his career. (ideas for stories, etc.).

Introduce the panel by telling students that they have been asked to think back to their teenage years and talk about what they learned that was most important to their success. Have students take notes and be prepared to ask questions of panel members.

*** Hand out the Panel Note-Taking Guide (available on the CNE site) to accompany the panel discussion.*

Finally, ask students to write a reflection to add to their portfolio by answering the guiding question: “What can I learn about myself by listening to the stories of others?” and continue to add a symbol to the graphic that represents their learning.

Follow-up

Have students interview a tribal elder or family member using the same questions the panel answered. Students can present their interview notes to the class.

Have students research a famous Native American’s story. Write a brief report highlighting how their subject’s life story influenced others.