A Note from Principal Ben Ostrom

Happy New Year! Welcome back! Hope everyone took plenty of time to get away (even if that means staying home) with friends and family and renew yourselves over winter vacation.

While working over break in addition to digging out from under piles, I reflected on building an anti-bias school. To eliminate opportunity gaps (and create more equitable communities) requires building multi-cultural content and perspectives into our curriculum. We also need to facilitate critical thinking and discussion regarding the racism embedded in schools and society. All students need to experience anti-bias education.

Prior to winter break STEM K-8 put on an incredible display of acting, singing, and choreography in Peter Pan. Our middle school tech theatre class provided great sets, lighting, and technical production. However, from an anti-bias stance, the performance of an adapted Peter Pan also perpetuated common stereotypes and misrepresentations of Native Peoples. We failed to alter or create a critical context to view the representation of Neverland natives as child-like Indians using simple language with stereotypical dress and traditions. Mistakes are opportunities for learning, so we need to step back and explore both more accurate understandings of Native Peoples' history and culture and the damaging effects of stereotypes (even positive ones).

The text below was excerpted from the essay "10 Things You Don't Know About Native Americans," by Braudie Blais-Billie.

I look forward to working together as a school community to build an actively anti-bias and multi-cultural school environment.

Happy 2018!

Ben Ostrom
Principal
Louisa Boren STEM K-8

1. We exist today and live contemporary lives.

Being type casted or dismissed is a problem American Indians face daily. Hearing, “Do you live in a teepee?” is like a rite of passage. We are so marginalized that references to shaman, “Redskins,” and dream catchers are all that certain people think of when they hear “Native American.” We’re represented as artifacts in a museum, a few chapters in a history book. A group of people frozen in time. I’ve had experiences with people who didn’t even know American Indians were still alive!

So I’m here to say yes, we do exist today. We drive cars, tweet about Game of Thrones, listen to Beyoncé. Though some of us may choose to stay in touch with our traditions, Native Americans aren’t “mystical” or “savage” people from the past. We go to college, write books, become doctors, run businesses.
2. **There are multiple ways to address Native America.**
Native Americans, Natives, American Indians, Indians, Indigenous peoples, First Nations peoples, Aboriginal, Indian Country. The list can go on. It's ideal to use the name of a specific tribe or nation, like Sicangu Lakota or Comanche. It's the difference between asking a Japanese person “how's Japan?” as opposed to “how's Asia?” With whichever term you use, be cognizant of your relationship to whom you're addressing, where you are, etc. Context and respect are everything.

3. **We don't all look the same.**
Some Natives are tall, some are short, some are fair-skinned, some are dark. We have varying highness of cheekbones, varying weights, varying hair lengths and hair color.

Native American is not so much a “racial” identity. It’s more of a political one. We share the same relationship to the United States government in that we are indigenous, but are distinct nations from one another across North America.

4. **There are more than 560 federally recognized tribes in the U.S.**
To be federally recognized means to be legally recognized by the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs. Even still, there are thousands of tribes, bands, nations, and peoples throughout the U.S. that are not recognized on a government or legal level. They self-identify as American Indian. Tribes are separate entities from the United States, are self-governing individuals with tribal courts and elected leaders. “Domestic Dependent Nations.” Though not entirely sovereign, like a foreign country, American Indian sovereignty continues to be pushed and expanded.

5. **And each tribe has its own identity as a nation, independent from one another.**
I can’t stress it enough: *Natives aren’t a unanimous culture across North America*. We don’t all hunt buffalo or wear buckskin. *Every tribe has its unique languages, traditions, histories, politics, economies, religions, and overall ways of life.*

Of course, there are overlapping practices and characteristics because of complicated histories. Still, each nation remains individual. Southeastern tribes are totally different than Northwestern ones. I can’t speak for totem poles because Seminoles don’t practice that tradition, but my friend from the Shuswap nation can. There are countless nuances between nations. It can be hard to keep up with, but it’s what makes Indian Country so intriguing and beautiful.

6. **Some Natives live on reservations, some don’t.**
Reservations are areas of land owned and managed by Native nations. Not every tribe has a reservation. With the Dawes Act in the late 1880s, there are only ~300 reservations in the U.S. today. Reservations vary in size and location. The Navajo nation has territory equivalent to the size of West Virginia.

Then there are Natives who, due to the Indian Relocation Act of 1956, come from families that were encouraged by the government to move off of reservations and into cities to “assimilate.”

7. **A genocide was enacted upon Native America.**
Did you know that Adolf Hitler was inspired by the indigenous genocide in North America when he created concentration camps? Manifest Destiny and the Third Reich are creepily synonymous. 80-90% of the American Indian population was killed between Columbian contact and today. The Trail of Tears, San Creek Massacre, Wounded Knee Massacre, the Camp Grant Massacre, the list goes on. When the years of Indian wars came to an end, a new kind of violence emerged. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the Bureau of Indian Affairs founded American Indian boarding schools. For decades, the establishments literally kidnapped children from their homes and families. The children were physically, sexually, and mentally abused in order to “kill the Indian and save the man.” They were coerced into becoming English-speaking servants and laborers.

*Genocide can be physical or cultural.* Today, remnants of these alarmingly recent tragedies surface in the forms of racism, poverty, drug abuse, and historical trauma. Colonialism is an ongoing system, not an isolated event.
8. Native America is changing the world.

It’s empowering to think that every indigenous person living today is descendent of fierce survivors. And we’re not only surviving, we are making strides. There’s Winona LaDuke, Anishinaabe activist, environmentalist, economist, and author of three books. She’s even run as Vice President alongside candidate Ralph Nader on the Green Party ticket. Adrienne Keene’s honest blog Native Appropriations has amassed over 50k followers on Facebook, and grabbed the attention of companies such as Paul Frank for their problematic behavior. There are also musicians like A Tribe Called Red, hailng from the Cayuga Six Nations and Nissiping Ojibwe Nation, representing Native expression.

Though there are still huge issues to overcome before Indian Country can rest, Indigenous Resistance is alive and well. With the advantage of the Internet and greater opportunities for education, each generation is getting louder and louder. We are beginning to portray ourselves in the media on our own terms.

In the famous words of Native movie Smoke Signals, “It’s a good day to be indigenous.”

--Braudie Blais-Billie

The Internet resources below explore the culture, histories, and effects of racism on Native Peoples. Links contained within them and a little research will yield many more.

Information/Resources:
10 Things you Don’t Know about Native Americans and Common Native Stereotypes debunked
Breaking Stereotypes: Native Americans Fight On (You Tube Video)
Native Culture Link: Website with listing of North American Tribes and Information
Native Americans: Negative impacts of media portrayals, stereotypes
Teaching Tolerance: A center for a variety of anti-bias resources and plans

Lesson Plan ideas:
Primary Social Studies Unit and Lessons: Native Americans—Reality vs. Fantasy
Grades 6-8 Lesson Plan: Stereotypes and Tonto

Global Reading Announcement

Who? Interested 4th & 5th grade students that pledge to read at least 4 Global Reading Challenge Books by Feb. 16


Where? STEM Library.


Why? To engage in an academic Team and have FUN reading.

All 4th and 5th grade classes are invited to attend the In-School Global Reading Challenge on the morning of February 16 about 9:15! It usually lasts just under an hour. Parents are also invited to attend and cheer on all the STEM Global Readers!

GLOBAL READ! GLOBAL READ! GLOBAL READ! GLOBAL READ! GLOBAL READ!
Seeking Guides to Lead School Tours

Love STEM and want to talk to prospective families about the school? If you have some time in January or February, we are seeking guides willing to lead tours of the elementary and middle school. Dates and times are as follows:

**School Tours—Elementary:** all elementary tours take place from 8:55–10:25 am
- 1/23/18
- 1/26/18
- 1/30/18
- 2/2/18
- 2/6/18

**School Tours—Middle School:** all middle school tours take place from 10:15–11:45 am
- 1/26/18
- 1/30/18

Tour leads will be provided with training and a FAQ sheet to help discuss the school. Please contact Christine with available time and dates that you can help.

Middle School Basketball Schedule

**Saturday, January 6**

**K-8 Varsity Boys**
STEM vs Pathfinder
11:30 am Franklin HS

**K-8 Varsity Girls**
STEM vs Pathfinder
11:30 am Franklin HS