

Storytelling and Indigenous Continuance

Overview

How does social change happen? How do people survive under harsh conditions of oppression and deprivation? What is decolonization? Using the film, *Frontera! Revolt and Rebellion on the Río Grande* (2014), an animated documentary about the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, as a starting point for exploring these questions, this lesson plan focuses on how storytelling can be a mode of empowerment that recovers the missing to history. Pueblo scholars call the Pueblo Revolt the "first American revolution." This is a radical idea because it challenges the dominant narrative of the origins of the United States. In the film, *Frontera!* a missing history is recovered through different modes of storytelling. For the Pueblo people of New Mexico and parts of Arizona, the Pueblo Revolt is a living history that is still remembered and commemorated every year in August. Resistance is one of many survival strategies that Pueblo communities and other indigenous people have used to survive under European colonization. But they did more than just survive. They recovered, revitalized, and renewed their cultural traditions and worked together to assert their right to self-determination. Today, Native American communities continue to thrive, struggle, and also heal. This process is called **indigenous continuance**.

Objectives

This lesson introduces students to the concept of **decolonization** and **indigenous continuance** through contemporary expressive forms such as rap, animation, and spoken word poetry.

To understand how people can change their conditions of existence through social movements and collective action.

To learn about how histories of resistance can continue to live as a source of remembering, healing, and decolonization.

Seminar Activities

1. View the film *Frontera! Revolt and Rebellion on the Río Grande* (2014)
2. Give students a copy of the written lyrics of rap song, "Ojo por Ojo" by Duce Eclipse that is featured in film. In groups of 3 - 4, have students read the verses aloud and underline any unfamiliar words. Students who speak Spanish can volunteer to help as translators.

Sample Lesson Plan

Grades 9 – 12 + (undergraduate)

Materials

This lesson will take two 50-minute class sessions but can be adapted for one 75-minute class period.

1. Hand out of the lyrics to the rap song, "Ojo por Ojo," by Duce Eclipse.
2. Construction paper, markers, scissors, crayons, writing materials, paints, prints, decorations, tracing paper, pictures, collage material...be creative!
3. Notebook paper or computer for recording group seminar notes, and group discussions.
4. A method of recording interviews on video or to create a podcast.

3. Discuss the Hopi word, *Koyaanisqatsi*. The term means, "life out of balance." How was life out of balance for the Pueblo people under colonialism? Have you experienced a time when your life felt out of balance or in chaos? Is the world in *Koyaanisqatsi* today? How do you think we can create a community where balance, equality and mutuality are highly valued?
4. Define decolonization. Decolonization is the process of learning how to think outside of the categories that we have been given. It is about change and empowerment. There are many ways in which we can engage in a decolonial practice. For example how do terms like Hispanic, Latina/o or even Mestiza/o erase our indigenous and African heritage? How do they reinforce gender binaries? What other ways can we begin to decolonize our ways of thinking, living, and being in the world?

Assignment: Telling an Untold Story

1. Have students investigate another missing story that needs to be told. In groups or as a class, research this untold or undertold story and bring it to light in a creative way. Students can produce a short play, write a poem or rap song, create a mural or painting, make a comic book or 'zine. Using *Frontera!* as an example, tell the story in an accessible way using your local cultural resources.
2. Students can do an oral history project as part of this assignment. They can interview family members, elders, and friends who participated in a social movement in which people came together to demand recognition and rights or change an oppressive situation. Students can document what they learned in a creative way and share it with the research participants in the form of a short video or podcast.
3. Is there a problem that needs to be solved in your community or at your school? How can we work collectively to make a positive change? In groups or as a class, start a campaign to bring attention to the problem. Organize students and/or community members to discuss how to solve the issue or problem. Document the campaign in a blog post, newspaper article, short film, or other medium that is accessible to diverse audiences.

Evaluation

At the end of this lesson students will understand the concept of indigenous continuance as a decolonial practice that can be realized through alternative modes of storytelling or by making our communities and our histories more visible. Telling our stories can also reveal issues and problems in our communities that need healing. Together we can find ways to heal, thrive, and create. At the end of this lesson students will have a documented story

that can be told in a diversity of ways. Students will be evaluated by how well they engaged decolonial approaches.

Suggested Readings

Alexie, Sherman, and Ellen Forney. 2007. *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*. New York: Little, Brown.

Leanne R. Simpson. "Anticolonial Strategies for the Recovery and Maintenance of Indigenous Knowledge." *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 3/4 (2004): 373-84

Silko, Leslie Marmon, and Ellen L. Arnold. 2000. *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 1999. *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books.

Villarreal, Aimee, and John Jota Leaños. "Animating Resistance." *Anthropology News* website, June 5, 2017. doi: 10.1111/AN.468
<http://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/2017/06/05/animating-resistance/>

TEKS Alignment: Mexican American Studies (Grades 9-12)

Essential Knowledge and Skills:

b. (1): Students explore history and culture from an interdisciplinary perspective. As such, students have opportunities to interact with relevant film, literature, art and other media.

c. (2): The Student understands causes and impact of interaction between early Amerindian societies and Europeans from 1248 – 1800.

A. Explain the significance of selected years and events as turning points relevant to Mexican American History, such as Indigenous resistance to colonialism.

6. Geography: A

12. Social Studies Skills: A, B

13. Social Studies Skills: A, B, C, D

Rap Song Lyrics

“Ojo por Ojo”

I open my eyes 1675
Los padres abusando las madres del Pueblo
Mataron el curandero
Mi vida le vale huevo

The Spanish Inquisition
The murderous mission
Destroyed by a vulture
A gun sounds like thunder
Indigenous accused
When the Kachina Dances
Revolt in secret, rebellious we get
We're gonna make you regret.
Revolution is the solution
Inquisition power position

And the people made decision
And break free from this prison
We must uplift the race

And don't leave one *detalle*
Se derrama por la calle
Nunca me corro!

My people we wonder
Through droughts and hunger
Will wash us again
Survival is tribal
We can stand up to any type of challenge!

Tewa, Tiwa, Tano, Towa, Zuni and Hopi
Together we refuse!

The hands of the Creator
We like this, so that our people can see
Our spirits are priceless
Through the centuries
To the ancestors gone and disrespected

El Río Grande in crisis, abuse of lives
Miro pa' arriba y veo sangre en el cielo
Quemaron mi kiva
But I was born a rebel.
El Conquistador,
The Cities of Gold
Can't practice my culture
Forced into hunger

Now how long will this last?
Are viewed as witchcraft
Massacre my people

No oppression, freedom's the lesson
But we are blessed in the ways of the legends.
Po'pay had the vision
We must unite the tribes
Churches ablaze with the warrior face
No matter what's the case.
We gonna take back what's ours
Van a ver que la sangre
Hasta que gritan axilio, socorro

How we survive to stay alive
The thunder and rain

A union is vital
And one day again we'll see our lives are in balance.
Koyannisqatsi we raise a posse
We won't be beaten and abused
Revolution with a fist, you lose!
Culture is critical, rise of the spiritual
Are strong and invincible
Through the darkest crisis

We remain connected.
It's time to learn a lesson!
Revolution is the solution

*No oppression, freedom's the lesson
But we are blessed in the ways of the legends.
Ojo por ojo, diente por diente
Mi gente firme y resistente*

*Inquisition power position
Mi gente firme y resistente
Ojo por ojo, diente por diente*