

# Cross-cultural Relations

## **Purpose**

Students will be able to compare some differences between Native American and mainstream American values. Students will begin to recognize where differences and conflicts might arise and develop some possible solutions. The following lessons are designed to help students begin to understand cross-cultural communications and relationships. Emphasis should be given to helping students remain flexible and open to a variety of values, behaviors and ways of looking at things.

## **Background Information**

What happens when two groups from different cultures meet? These interactions can be positive (cultural enrichment, understanding and appreciation) but they can also be very confusing, difficult, and very negative (displacement, war, murder).

Native American cultural norms are quite different from mainstream American society's norms. Differences in styles of communicating, behaviors and beliefs exist that may not be understood, making adjustment from one culture to another difficult.

In most Native American cultures there is great emphasis placed on the family or group, therefore the needs of the family come before that of the individual. The influence of the family and one's obligation to the family is significant, even for young people. This family orientation does not always encourage individuality and putting one's self before the family. This can interfere with the great amount of time needed to train for sports, such as running. Additionally, because many reservations and tribal communities are economically depressed, opportunities and resources to train may be minimal.

Native American runners and other athletes often have to move away from their home communities to train. Leaving family and community is more difficult for someone who's been raised in a culture that values the closeness of the group throughout one's lifetime than for someone who's been raised with the expectation of someday "leaving the nest" and becoming independent. Leaving their Native American communities, they may need to learn a new set of values and behaviors. Some may feel they have to give up their traditional cultural values, in order to make it in the outside world.

However, the existence of cultural differences and conflicts can be surmounted and is requisite for continued personal growth and development. It is important to recognize that the uncertainty and unfamiliarity of interacting with others who are different from oneself are a natural part of cross-cultural relations, but with continued interaction, these tensions can be lessened. We can all learn to function in more than one cultural setting if we understand the rules and what is

expected of us. This doesn't mean we have to give up our own culture, but it does mean having to look outside of ourselves to learn new and more ways of looking at the world. It may mean that some values need to be suppressed or at least not emphasized. It isn't always easy, and people need support while they are making the adjustment.

**Major Concepts:**

1. Values are those beliefs we or our culture hold near and dear to us.
2. Native American and mainstream American values can and do differ and these differences need to be recognized.
3. Some cultural values may conflict but can be dealt with.
4. Understanding the values of a particular culture can aid in adjusting behaviors and help avoid alienation and conflict.
5. Anyone can learn to adapt his/her behaviors to fit the situation without giving up our culture.

**Objectives:**

1. Students will be able to identify some Native American values.
2. Students will be able to identify some mainstream American values.
3. Students will be able to compare the values between the cultures.
4. Students will be able to identify those values they agree/disagree with.
5. Students will be able to identify possible conflict areas.
6. Students will be able to generate some solutions to conflicts.

**Activity 1:**

1. Have students generate a list of mainstream values. Pose a question like; "If someone walked up to you and said they just got here from (France, Germany, Italy or wherever), and asked you what were some of the most important things he/she needed to know in order to get along in America, what would you tell them?" Or simply as "What do we really value as Americans?" Record values on board or overhead as they are identified.
2. Ask students to brainstorm a list of Native American values (if they have knowledge of this) or offer the list of Native American values See Values Comparison Chart.
3. In large or small groups have students compare and discuss similarities and differences.
4. Have students identify some of the values they like or agree with from each culture.
5. Have students identify some of the values they dislike or disagree with from each culture.
6. Have student brainstorm how Native American runners such as Andy Payne, Billy Mills, and Jim Thorpe might have felt when trying to adjust to new and unfamiliar surrounding and culture. What conflicts might

they have experienced? How do you think they may have dealt with them?

**Activity 2:**

1. Break students into small cooperative groups.
2. Have students imagine they moved from their home community to a Native American community. Ask them to brainstorm (10-15 minutes) how would they learn about the community, the culture, and learn to adapt their behaviors to better fit into the community where they are now living.
3. Each group should record their responses.
4. Each group should discuss their responses with the class.

**Materials needed:**

Film: Great American Footrace

Values Comparison Chart

## VALUES COMPARISON CHART

**Native American  
American**

**Mainstream**

**Extended family important**

**Nuclear family important**

**Emphasis on group**

**Emphasis on individual**

**Interdependence valued**

**Independence valued**

**Direct eye contact disrespectful  
expected**

**Direct eye contact**

**Cooperation**

**Competition**

**Wealth shown in giving  
acquiring**

**Wealth shown in**

**Materialism is deemphasized  
emphasized**

**Acquiring is**

**Modesty/humbleness valued  
self valued**

**Assertiveness/promoting**

Adapted from Shangreaux, V. *Teaching Bi-Cultural Competence to Native American Youth: a Training Manual for Service Providers*. Lincoln, NE. Indian Center, Inc., 33.