So You Wanna Be an Actor?

By Anna Lambe

Students examine Indigenous representation in film and television, study stereotypes and their harmful effects, then analyze Indigenous-produced media.

Overview

Throughout this lesson, students will learn about the evolving role of Indigenous people in film and tv from stereotyped caricatures in movies and television produced by non-Indigenous people, to Indigenous-produced media today. Students will be exposed to various examples of Indigenous stereotypes in movies and television throughout history while discussing the harmful effects of these stereotypes. Next, students will learn from Anna Lambe while comparing media written, produced and acted by Indigenous people.

Duration

2-3 Hours

Materials

- Computer and Projector to show the class video clips
- "Self-Assessment Rubric" Handout
- "Editorial Rubric" (optional)

Activate: Indigenous Representation in the Media Historical Review

To begin this lesson, inform students that they are going to watch a series of tv and movie clips (past and present) showing stereotypical portrayals of Indigenous people. These shows were mainly created by non-Indigenous writers and in some cases even have non-Indigenous actors playing the roles of Indigenous peoples. After each clip is shown, ask the class the following questions:

1. Who do you think the target audience is? *Target audience refers to a particular group at which a film or tv series is aimed. Example: Young Children
2. What stereotype of Indigenous people is being portrayed?
3. How could this stereotype affect the treatment of Indigenous people?
4. Is any other group negatively portrayed? How so?
5. What is your overall reaction to this clip?

Video Clips:
Examples of Indigenous Misrepresentation in Children's Movies (tip: stop to discuss after each example)

- Native Americans Through the eyes of My Children
- A Look at Bugs Bunny's Racist Past
- The Simpsons
- Family Guy
- Native American Actors Walk Off Film Set

Acquire: "So You Wanna Be an Actor" by Anna Lambe

Have students read "So You Wanna Be an Actor" by Anna Lambe, found on pages 142-156 of the Create to Learn textbook. Alternatively, students can watch her lessons here: https://www.createtolearn.ca/tutorial/be-an-actor

To debrief the reading, ask the class the following questions:

1. What tips does Anna give for getting involved in the film industry?
2. What are Anna's audition tips?
3. Why does Anna say self-care is important in the film industry? How does this relate to the video clips we watched?
4. What questions does Anna ask herself relating to self-care?
5. What is an agent and what are the benefits of having one?

Apply: Small Group Discussions

Divide students into small groups. Inform them that they are going to watch a couple more video clips of tv and movies about Indigenous people, acted by Indigenous people. They will then engage in small group discussions comparing these clips to the clips previously watched at the beginning of the lesson.

Remind students of the importance of discussion etiquette, including being respectful to all group members, ensuring that all members have a chance to speak, and staying on topic. Remind them that the goal is to engage in high-level discussions about Indigenous representation in media and that they will be self-assessing their participation at the end.

Video Clips:

The Grizzlies Trailer (Anna Lambe plays Spring)

After showing the class the clip, read the background information below.

Background: "The filmmakers included Inuit people in every aspect of the making of The Grizzlies. That way, the film would not only represent the Inuit experience, but it could provide a training ground for Inuit and Indigenous filmmakers who could go on to make their own films. A paid mentorship program invited Inuit actors, crew, musicians and other creative collaborators to participate, and in the end, more than 91 percent of the cast and more than 33 percent of the crew were Inuit or Indigenous"

Source: "The Grizzlies Trivia". IMDB. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6365796/trivia?ref_=tt_trv_trv

1. What is your overall reaction to the clip?
2. Who do you think the target audience is for this film?
3. How are the Inuit portrayed? Is it stereotypical? Complex? Both?
4. How is the relationship between the non-Indigenous teacher and the Inuit population portrayed?
5. The writer of this film is non-Indigenous. How did the filmmakers give back to the community and why is this so important? (See: Background)

Trickster Trailer (Anna Lambe plays Sarah)

1. What is your overall reaction to the clip?
2. Who do you think the target audience is for this tv series?
3. How are Indigenous people portrayed? Is it stereotypical? Complex? Both?
4. What cultural and spiritual elements are incorporated?
5. What differences do you notice between this authentic Indigenous story and all the others we viewed in class? (Trickster was originally a novel written by Indigenous author Eden Robinson).

Read the background information below:

Background: Trickster premiered on Canada's CBC back in October 2020 and scored an early Season 2 renewal before premiering on The CW on January 12, 2021, but TVLine reported two weeks later that CBC cancelled the series after controversy surrounding co-creator and director Michelle Latimer, who falsely claimed to be Indigenous for 20 years. A representative from CBC addressed the decision to cancel in a statement, saying: "We have had many conversations over the last few weeks with a view to continuing production on a second season of Trickster. Those conversations included producers, writers, actors, and the author of the books on which Trickster is based. Fully respecting everyone's perspective, season two will not move forward as planned unfortunately."

6. Why do you think it was so detrimental to the show that Michelle Latimer pretended to be Indigenous? Do you agree with CBC's decision to cancel the show? What course of action do you think would have been the most appropriate?

Assess: Group Discussions Self-Assessment

While groups are discussing, the teacher should engage in formative assessment, walking around the room and checking for understanding while answering any questions students might have.

Once groups are finished discussing, have each student complete a self-assessment using the "Self-Assessment Rubric". Inform students that they will grade themselves and write an explanation as to why they gave themselves the marks they did. They will then write a few sentences about how they can improve their participation next time.

Self-Assessment Rubric

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS ETIQUETTE	MY ASSESSMENT GRADE AND EXPLANATION
Contributed to the discussion (3 marks)	

Demonstrated respect for others' opinions (3 marks)	
Maintained attentiveness throughout the discussion (3 marks)	
Invited others to speak in the discussion (3 marks)	

Total: (out of 12 marks) My Total: /12
Next time, I will improve by:

Take Student Learning Further

Activity: Appropriation of Indigenous Identity

Have students explore the phenomenon of non-Indigenous people pretending to be Indigenous and capitalizing off Indigenous stories and culture. Have students read the following opinion pieces, annotating the main points presented in each. Then have students write their own editorials highlighting their own perspectives.

Nagle, Rebecca. "How 'pretendians' undermine the rights of Indigenous people". High Country News. 2 April 2019. https://www.hcn.org/articles/tribal-affairs-how-pretendians-undermine-the-rights-of-indigenous-people

Kay, Jonathan. "The cancellation of Michelle Latimer has become (another) disgrace to the CBC". National Post. 13 May 2021. https://nationalpost.com/opinion/jonathan-kay-the-cancelation-of-michelle-latimer-has-become-another-disgrace-to-the-cbc

Talaga, Tanya. "Joseph Boyden's identity crisis opens up questions on who is part of a community". The Star. https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/01/14/joseph-boydens-identity-crisis-opens-up-questions-on-who-is-part-of-a-community.html

Use the "Editorial Rubric" to assess.

Editorial Rubric

CRITERIA	EXCELLENT	GOOD	SATISFACTORY	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT / MISSING
Clear Opinion	Author states a clear opinion and issues a call to action through arguments based on evidence.	Author states an opinion and issues a call to action through arguments based on evidence.	Author states an opinion using evidence.	Author is missing a clear opinion and/or evidence.
Use of Evidence	Author uses compelling evidence to support the opinion and cites reliable sources.	Author uses strong evidence to support the opinion, using reliable sources.	Author uses some evidence to support the opinion.	Author does not use evidence to support the opinion.
Analysis and Persuasion	Editorial convincingly argues point of view by providing relevant background information, using valid examples, acknowledging counterclaims, and developing claims -- all in a clear and organized fashion.	Editorial argues point of view by providing relevant background information, using valid examples, acknowledging counter-claims -- all in a clear and organized fashion.	Editorial attempts to providing relevant background information but is missing one of the following: using valid examples, acknowledging counterclaims; developing claims; all in a clear and organized fashion.	Editorial is missing 2 or more of the following: Providing relevant background information; using valid examples; acknowledging counterclaims; developing claims; clear and concise language.

Grammar and Mechanics	The editorial is error-free.	Minor errors found in grammar, capitalization or punctuation.	Major error found in grammar, capitalization or punctuation.	Many errors throughout that interfere with meaning.

Curriculum Connections

Alberta, Northwest Territories and Nunavut

- English Language Arts 10-1
- English Language Arts 20-1
- English Language Arts 30-1

British Columbia and Yukon

- Composition 10
- New Media 10
- Composition 11
- New Media 11
- Composition 12
- English Studies 12
- New Media 12

Ontario

- English, Grade 10, Academic and Applied
- English, Grade 11, University and College Prep
- English, Grade 12 University and College Prep

Grade 9 and 10 Technology and Skilled Trades

Strand B: Technological Development, Impacts, and Careers

- B1.3 investigate and describe contributions to technological innovations made by Canadians, including women, and members of diverse groups and communities in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit
- B3.1 explore a variety of roles, responsibilities, and opportunities related to current and emerging careers in technological fields, including a variety of broad-based technology areas, and the skilled trades
- B3.3 compare a variety of pathways leading to careers in technological fields and the skilled trades, including their structure and the educational and financial requirements for them