



Native Ed

LESSON PLAN

LACROSSE IN NATIVE CULTURE

High School and Middle School

AIM

In what ways can sporting games contribute to a culture?

GUIDING QUESTIONS

After watching the Native Ed Lacrosse video, in what ways was this game part of the Haudenosaunee culture? Does the fact that indigenous Americans invented this game give them the right to compete in this sport in the Olympics? Why or why not?

COMMON CORE STANDARDS AT END

ACTIVITY

1. Tell students you are going to be showing them a brief video about a sports game. Tell them that while they are watching, you want them to try to notice any ways that the game affects their culture beyond being just entertainment or exercise.
2. Show the Native Ed video on Lacrosse
3. Have students read "[The Indigenous roots of a revived Olympic sport](#)" from bbc.com written by Karin Gardiner, either as a class, in groups, or independently.
 - a. Alternatively, the adapted version below, which is shorter, can be used.
4. Have a brief discussion on how the sport impacted Haudenosaunee culture
 - a. Builds community and national identity, helps those in need by providing "medicine" (the "Medicine Game")
5. After the discussion, do an activity that is opinion based on whether or not the Haudenosaunee should be allowed to compete or not. Brief additional research may or may not be suggested. Options include:
 - a. Students write a brief essay/opinion piece
 - b. Students are put in groups and have to come up with 3 strongest arguments for and against inclusion.
 - c. Students are put into groups and prepare to debate another group on the issue. Can have each group member speak for 30-60 seconds, alternating between groups. Encourage students speaking first or second to prepare remarks, students speaking later to respond to other team's points.
 - d. Students write a letter to the IOC expressing their view as to whether or not the Haudenosaunee team should be allowed to compete in the LA Olympics.
6. After activity is complete, have a brief discussion, asking students which side they personally favor.

EXIT TICKET

Students briefly write what they predict will happen regarding Haudenosaunee participation and why.



Adapted from BBC.COM, July 29, 2024 by Karin Gardiner

The fastest growing team sport in North America, lacrosse is headed back to the Olympics. But the game's creators may not be invited.

When First Nations Haudenosaunee people say that someone was born with a lacrosse stick in their hand, it's not far from the truth. "We have these little cradle sticks," says Lewis Mitchell, a lacrosse stick-maker and lifelong player. "Parents who want their children to play lacrosse, they take that stick and they put it into the cradle with the baby."

Lacrosse has deep roots here. The game is said to have been invented around 1,000 years ago by the Haudenosaunee – the confederacy made up of the Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora nations of north-eastern North America.

Lacrosse's already fast growth recently received another boost: in 2028 lacrosse will be competed at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles for the first time in more than a century – in the compact sixes format.

To many Haudenosaunee, it's more than just a game. Many believe that lacrosse was a gift from the Creator for enjoyment and healing, and it appears in Haudenosaunee creation stories. The wooden stick, traditionally made from natural materials (wood and sinew) has its own spiritual significance. To this day lacrosse is played as both competition and ceremony – during times of difficulty, "medicine games" are called to lift the spirits of communities in need, Mitchell explains.

It's because of this deep reverence for lacrosse that the recent Olympic announcement has been met with both excitement and concern. It's unclear if the Haudenosaunee, the game's creators, will be permitted to play lacrosse at LA 2028.



The Haudenosaunee Nationals team was founded by a group of players including Oren Lyons (Onondaga) and Richard Hill and Wes Patterson (both Tuscarora) in 1983 as the Iroquois Nationals. In 2022, the team changed its name from the once-prevalent but derogatory Iroquois. The men's team was officially recognised by the World Lacrosse organization in 1988, and the women's in 2008.

Despite drawing from a far smaller pool of players than other nations, the men's and women's teams are among the world's best – currently third in the men's field rankings and eighth in the women's. But because the Haudenosaunee do not have a National Olympic Committee – or a government recognized by the United Nations – they're not recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). So Haudenosaunee players are left with the choice of playing for the US or Canada, or not at all.

But they do have support. Notably from President Biden who said: "Their ancestors invented the game. They perfected it for a millennium... they should be granted an exception to field their own team at the Olympics."

And there is precedent for the IOC to make an exception: the Refugee Olympic Team was created in 2015 to, as the IOC states, send "a message of hope and inclusion... and to inspire the world with the strength of their human spirit".

Not being recognised, Lyons says, "is beyond our control. We travel on our own [Haudenosaunee] passports. We're sovereign... we're still operating on original treaties and we were sovereign long before our European brothers stumbled onto our shores."

Abenaki scholar Christine O'Bonsawin writes that the IOC "forces Indigenous athletes to assume the identity of the colonizing settler citizenry." In 1904, a lacrosse team made up entirely of Mohawk players competed at the Olympics, but under Canada's flag. An Indigenous team has not yet competed under its own flag. Individual players who hold



dual passports could qualify for the US or Canada squads, but that's not really the point. To many Haudenosaunee, competing as a nation means as much as competing at the Olympics.

Having played for the Nationals and followed its evolution, Mitchell has seen first-hand how having a national team has affirmed Haudenosaunee identity and place in the world. He recalls traveling to Australia to play with the team and seeing the Haudenosaunee flag raised on an equal level alongside those of other countries. "That was just something I had never seen in my life: to have our flag up there with these other nations. It was just amazing."

Mitchell believes that the existence of a national team has been transformative. "I look around our communities today and see more and more pride in the Haudenosaunee flag," he says of the flag that was designed for the national team and has since been adopted as a Haudenosaunee symbol. "I think it's helped to bring us all together and give us a sense of who we really are."

For now, Lyons says the Nationals are focused on putting their "ducks in a row, so that when we actually submit for Olympic inclusion; we have a very strong position." Although the IOC has issued discouraging statements over recent months, Lyons remains optimistic, saying that once they "get some information about who we are," the IOC will understand that Haudenosaunee participation at LA 2028 would be "a win-win for everybody."

"The IOC can really hang their hat on this, because they're using such language as 'diversity, inclusion'... we check a lot of boxes."

Lyons also points out that a Haudenosaunee mantra is "peace, friendship and healing through sport". That sounds a little like the Olympic movement's ideals.



"We don't have to choreograph any of this. This is who we are," says Lyons. "Can you imagine the opening ceremony of the Olympics?" he asks, then paints a picture of the team entering the stadium in full regalia: "Very colorful – we're dancing and we uplift the spirit. Because that's what lacrosse is for: to lift the human spirit."

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

1. History

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1 / RH.11-12.1**
 - **Key Ideas and Details: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.**
 - **Application: Students would use evidence from the video and the article "The Indigenous roots of a revived Olympic sport" to support their analysis of how lacrosse has influenced Haudenosaunee culture and identity.**
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 / RH.11-12.2**
 - **Key Ideas and Details: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary.**
 - **Application: Students will summarize how lacrosse is not only a sport but a deeply rooted cultural and spiritual practice for the Haudenosaunee people.**



2. Civics/Government

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9 / RH.11-12.9**
 - **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.**
 - **Application: Students would analyze different perspectives on Haudenosaunee participation in the Olympics, such as the historical exclusion, the President's support, and the IOC's stance.**
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6 / RH.11-12.6**
 - **Craft and Structure: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.**
 - **Application: Students will assess the perspectives presented in the article and video and discuss the political, social, and cultural implications of the Haudenosaunee's exclusion from the Olympics.**

3. Cultural Awareness & Understanding

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7 / RH.11-12.7**
 - **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.**
 - **Application: The video on lacrosse, along with the reading material, offers students a multimodal approach to understanding the cultural significance of the sport to the Haudenosaunee, integrating video and written text.**



4. Critical Thinking and Debate

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 / SL.11-12.1**
 - **Speaking and Listening: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues.**
 - **Application: During group debates or essay writing, students will use evidence to support their opinion on whether or not the Haudenosaunee should be allowed to compete in the Olympics.**
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4 / SL.11-12.4**
 - **Speaking and Listening: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically.**
 - **Application: Students will present their research, essays, or debate arguments on the inclusion of the Haudenosaunee in the Olympics, ensuring clarity and coherence.**

Additional Standards (Social Studies Specific)

1. Cultural Understanding

- **Standard 5: Culture**
 - **How culture is expressed through the arts, recreation, and other forms of human expression.**
 - **Application: Lacrosse as an example of a cultural expression that builds community and promotes healing within the Haudenosaunee culture would tie into this standard.**



2. Citizenship and Government

- **Standard 3: The Role of Government in American Society**
 - **Examine the role of government and the relationship between the state and the individual.**
 - **Application: The lesson's debate on Haudenosaunee participation in the Olympics touches on sovereignty, recognition of Indigenous rights, and the role of government bodies (e.g., IOC) in governing such decisions.**