



Students Together Against Negative Decisions

CULTURE AND TRADITION

Activity Purpose: To recognize the importance that culture and tradition have in the lives and well-being of Native youth.

Youth will:

- Describe traditional Native American healing practices used to promote healing and wellbeing.
- Describe the role elders play in Native American culture.

Activity Outline	Core Content Components	Instructional Method	Timing
1 Welcome & Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Previous Session • Question Box • Introduce Today's Session • Words of Wisdom (WOW) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mini-Lecture • Q&A • Mini-Lecture • Cultural Teaching 	5 minutes
2 Sacred Circles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Sacred Circles • Native Culture Brainstorm • Sacred Circle Concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mini-Lecture • Brainstorm • Large Group Discussion 	10 minutes
3 Medicine Wheel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medicine Wheel Activity • Reflecting on the Medicine Wheel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small Group Activity • Large Group Discussion 	10 minutes
4 Traditional Healing and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Healing & Wellbeing • Balance & Wellbeing Discussion/Brainstorm • Storytelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mini-Lecture • Large Group Discussion/Brainstorm • Storytelling 	10 minutes
5 Learning from Our Elders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Elder Concept • What is an Elder? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mini-Lecture • Storytelling/Small Groups 	10 minutes
6 Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question & Answer • WOW Review • Preview Next Session 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q&A • Cultural Teaching 	5 minutes

Materials:

- Question Box (QB)
- Group Agreements
- Flip Chart Paper
- Colorful Markers
- Masking Tape
- Scissors
- Basket

Handouts:

- Student Handout 4.0: Medicine Wheel
- Facilitator Resource 4.0: What is an Elder? Discussion Prompts

Preparation:

- Print Handouts.
- Review Question Box Questions and prepare answers.
- Cut “elder quotes” into strips and place them in a basket.
- Write the WOW on the board or on a flip chart.

1. Welcome & Introduction



5 minutes,
Large Group

Review Previous Session

- Review Session 3: Acting Out.

Question Box

- Answer any questions in the QB.

Introduce Today's Session

- Introduce session: Traditional Native American healing focuses on balancing mind, body, and spirit. Contrary to the “Western approach” to health and healing, Native healers don’t isolate one part of a person and only try to heal that part.
- Traditional healing practices center on benefits to the emotional, spiritual, psychological, and cultural aspects of the tribe.¹ Each tribe has their own practices, but there are also some commonalities across many tribes.
- Today we are going to learn and discuss some aspects of Traditional healing and staying in balance. Some of you may have a strong understanding of this already and others might not know as much, but that’s ok! We’re going to learn together and share with each other.

Words of Wisdom

- Ask for a volunteer to read today's WOW.



Elders are not born, they are not appointed, they emerge as the sum total of the experiences of life, they are a state of being.

- First Nations Elder, unknown

¹ Source: Stiegelbauer SM. What is an Elder? What do Elder do? First Nations elders as teachers in culture-based urban organizations. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 1996; *VXI*(1):37-66. Available at: <http://www2.brandonu.ca/library/cjns/16.1/Stiegelbauer.pdf>



2. Sacred Circles

10 minutes,
Large Group

- Explain: The symbol of the circle is very important to Native people. Although specific interpretations and meanings of the circle vary from tribe to tribe, it generally represents wholeness, health, and harmony with one's self, family, community, nation, and universe. It represents the cycle of things in nature and life, like seasons and stages of life.
- Ask: "What are some things in Native American culture or in your Tribe that are round or circular? Ask students who offer ideas to give a brief explanation, so all students know and understand. Write answers on a sheet of flip chart paper. Answers could include:

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Medicine Wheel | • Cultural Dances |
| • Kiva | • Conch shells |
| • Drums | • Bowls, pottery |
| • Hogan | • Sun, planets,
moon, stars |
| • Shields | • Turtle shell |
| • Teepees | • Rattles |
| • Sweat lodges | • Igloos |
| • Fire pits | • Arm bands |
| • Round houses | • Zia sign |
| • Hoops | • Pipe bowl |
| • Sand paintings | |
| • Talking Circles | |

Facilitator Note

Some students in your group may be very connected and knowledgeable about their cultures and other may not be. Create a safe space for all students to explore their and others culture by reminding them that because of colonialism some things remained strong while others are being reclaimed. Wherever they are at, is just right!

- Ask students what other circles they can think of within their culture as a school, community, and social groups. Record these on the flip chart too. You can provide a few examples from your own culture or even youth culture when you were a young person.
- Explain: Native people refer to circles by many names, including the Sacred Circle, the Circle of Life, the Sacred Hoop, and the Medicine Wheel.
- Ask: What are some concepts represented by the Sacred Circle or the Medicine Wheel? Answers could include: (provide a few examples, if necessary)
 - Four cardinal directions (e.g., east, south, west, north)
 - Four seasons (e.g., spring, summer, fall, winter)
 - Four phases of our lives (e.g., child, adolescent, adult, elder)
 - Four elements (e.g., fire, water, earth, air)
 - Four colors of humans (e.g., yellow, black, red, white)
 - Four aspects of our nature (e.g., physical, mental, emotional, spiritual)



3. Medicine Wheel

10 minutes,
Small Group Work

- Divide the participants into four groups and assign each group one of the four cardinal directions (east, south, west, north). Refer them to the Medicine Wheel 4:0 handout that describes the significance of the wheel's components. Each group should read the section that corresponds to its assigned cardinal direction.
- The Groups should select 1-2 things per direction to draw about on the chart paper you give them to illustrate on a chart paper without using letters or words (encourage them to be creative and colorful). Provide each group with a set of colorful markers, crayons and supplies to be creative with. Tell students they have 10 minutes to work on this activity before we come back to the large group.
- Reconvene the groups and have them sit according to their cardinal directions. Beginning with the East and moving counter-clockwise, have a spokesperson from each group present their work.
- Select 1-2 of the Discussion Questions below:
 - What is the relationship between the four directions?
 - How does the direction and movement around the Medicine Wheel represent situations in their own lives?
 - When have you used this in your own life or how might you use it in the future?

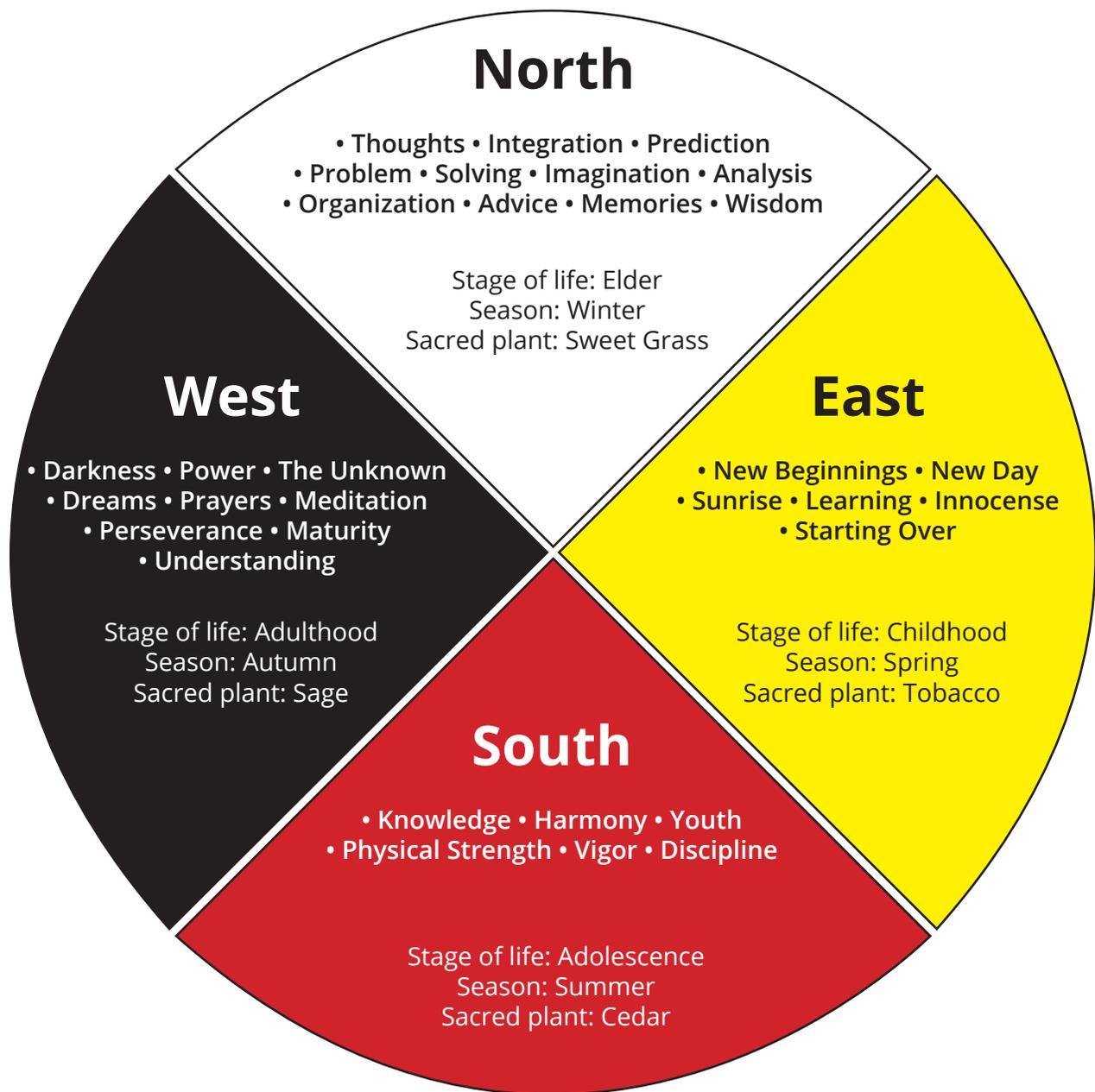
Facilitator Note

If your or a nearby tribe uses the Medicine Wheel, consider adapting it by using the name, the look and information. This will help youth connect to their or another tribe's Medicine Wheel.

Student Handout 4.0: Medicine Wheel

Activity Directions:

Think about what images come to mind for each direction, and with your team, create an image that represents each section.





4. Traditional Healing & Wellbeing

10 minutes, Large Group Discussion

Introduce Topic

- As we just learned, the circle represents wholeness, balance, and wellness. Wellness occurs when there is balance and harmony of the mind, body, spirit, social emotions, and natural environment in relation to all things.

Ask

- What does it mean to have balance between our mind, body, spirit, social emotions and the natural environment?
- What does it look or feel like to be in balance? (e.g., rest, nutrition, exercise, meditation, western medicine, traditional medicine).
- What are some ways that you maintain balance in your life?
- Ask participants to name some traditional healing practices used to promote healing and wellbeing. Write answers on chart paper. These may include:
 - Dances, dancing
 - Songs, singing
 - Sweat baths/sweat lodge
 - Herbal remedies
 - Smudging
 - Vision quests
 - Ceremonies
 - Sand paintings
 - Storytelling
 - Offerings
 - Drumming
 - Talking circle
 - Stargazing
 - Fasting
 - Running
- Ask: What are some other ways to promote healing? (examples may include: yoga, meditation, mindfulness exercises, deep breathing activities, art, poetry, music).



5. Learning from Our Elders

10 minutes

Introduce Topic

- Traditionally, elders have held unique and honored positions in their communities. An elder is not necessarily an older person, but can be seen as a positive person who has life experience or advice to share. Elders can be our older siblings, aunts/uncles, parents, grandparents, teachers or community members.
- Their greater life experience, historical perspective, spiritual knowledge, and closer ties to the cultural ways of tribal ancestors make them a valuable resource for younger people.²
- Next, we are going to be getting back into our groups and reading quotes about Elders. Each quote is going to have a reflection question for the group to discuss and answer. Then we'll share the stories with the large group and our answers to the reflection questions.
- Take out basket with pre-cut strips with quotes and have youth pull one quote per group.
- In the groups, they will read their story aloud and discuss the reflection questions. Give each group 5 minutes to read and discuss. Provide a 1- minute warning and ask each group to select someone to share from their group.
- In the large group, ask each group to share their quote and some of their reflections to the question.
- Ask the students:
 - Think about an elder in their life and something that person taught them about health and wellbeing.
 - Based on your discussions, the quotes, and the sharing of the groups, how does this connect to teachings from your own elders?
 - What are some of the ways that you (as peer advocates) can serve in an elder role to your peers and people younger than you?

²Source: <http://www.montana.edu/conors/research/grasslandsproject.htm>.

Facilitator Resource 4.0: What is an Elder? Discussion Prompts

“You see, the elder, the concept for me is like if you go into a strange land and you don’t know the country and you’re swamped and there’s (bad places to travel) and there’s good places to travel. So the ones who have been longer are the good guides because they know how to get around the swamps, who know where to go, and so on. It doesn’t matter if there’s a trail. They know that country . . . So there are in fact guides who have been there who have each individually lived through their own hell and have found their way and they are in fact guides. So if you are going into a strange land, and God knows, it’s strange to so many young people. And they can avoid all that and ensure you a good trip.”

- **How has an elder guided you in your life?**

“It is not surprising that many of the people recognized as ‘Elders’ have lived through difficult times, both personally and politically. Some have had problems with the law, with alcohol, with family separation; some have seen such things happen to others. What they have in common is the fact that they learned something from those experiences, that they turned to the traditional culture for understanding, support and healing, and that they are committed to helping others, especially those of similar background.”

- **How has culture influenced how your elders help/ teach you?**

“When you ask an elder for advice about tradition, you are also asking for a kind of honesty and purity and the best of tradition itself which was the spiritual as well as the everyday. Elders are practical, they have practical situations to attend to. You can confide in them and just ask for direction and help yourself.”

- **Who is the elder you seek when you need help in a practical situation and how do they help you?**

“Aside from the issue of age, a person becomes an ‘Elder’ in the ‘eyes of the community.’ That in itself is a process, as one Elder said, ‘part of the process of life’. Elders, however, are also practical people—people who live and make choices within an everyday life. Being an Elder requires a certain quality of person. It is also informal and something in tune with the cycle of life, with the natural way that things work.”

- **What qualities should an elder have?**

“Through the process of accumulating knowledge and experience, some individuals begin to show an aptitude for talking to people and helping them in ways that contribute to a better life. This aptitude is acknowledged by the community in seeking them out, for discussions, for teaching, for public lectures. This in itself is a process as it happens slowly overtime so that by the time a person reaches the age of Eldership, the community begins to ‘recognize’ them as an Elder, as one who is able to communicate the teachings in a meaningful way.”

- **How do you see yourself as a future elder in your community?**

“So an elder is a very high quality of person and someone who never asked to be called an elder but is deserving of that title and of that respect, and it’s other people who recognize that person. There’s no process that I know of where you can make someone an elder. It’s a term of respect and recognition given by the people because a person has lived that life, has followed it, given those teachings from birth, has followed them through life, has lived it and practiced it and now he can give that back, with the understanding. So that makes it even less in number how many elders we have.”

- **If age or number of years is not a factor, can you be considered Elders? Why or how?**

“Approaching an elder is a little bit like going swimming. The first time, some people are scared of water, but after they get used to it, it becomes natural to them. And so, we have to do as much as we can to get rid of the artificial barriers that are there. People are shy to go—reluctant to show their ignorance, that they don’t know how to do it.”

- **What are some of the artificial barriers that may hold someone back from connecting with their Elders?**

“The Elder I approached said that all you have to do is start talking to the Elder and things will happen—that starting the conversation, establishing the relationship is what is important, not judging the seriousness of what might be said. She said that was the nature of this kind of guidance and encouraged me to come again to talk, informally, that the conversation would take care of itself. My perception of approaching an Elder, before this discussion, was that it had to be done in the ‘proper way’, within a traditional framework, and I wasn’t sure what this was. This perception is likely one shared by many people, Native or non-Native, who have not had previous experience with working with Elders. In reality, the most difficult part was beginning, then the Elder helped with the rest.”

- **What are some of the proper ways and the informal ways to reach out to Elders in your home community?**

“Native elders are living links to the past. Their vivid memories have the vitality, immediacy and authenticity of those who have experienced the transition from traditional ways to the new. In the short space of two generations, they have gone from travelling the coast in canoes to flying in floatplanes...Not even the social upheaval of losing nine out of every ten people to raging epidemics in the nineteenth century, not even the disorientation of changing to new, cash economy with a more complex technological base, not even the acceptance of a new cosmology and religion, none of these broke native pride in the past or native ties to ancestral lands and waters. This is remarkable continuity. This is what the elders are about.”

- **What are ways you have learned from the past and how do they apply to the present and future?**

“Elders are the people who are the cornerstone of our culture as they are the keepers and teachers of traditional teachings. They are the link with our past, our present and our future. They are spiritual leaders and teachers but also have the wisdom and the experience to provide very pragmatic guidance and advice on how best to improve and ensure the physical, mental and spiritual health of our community.”

- **How can we engage with elders to improve and insure our physical, mental and spiritual health in our home community?**

³ Stiegelbauer SM. *What is an Elder? What do Elder do? First Nations elders as teachers in culture-based urban organizations. The Canadian Journal of Native Studies, 1996; XXI(1):37-66. Available at: <http://www2.brandonu.ca/library/cjns/16.1/Stiegelbauer.pdf>*



6. Closing

5 minutes

- Ask students what questions they have. Answer any questions from question box if time permits.
- Ask a student to read the WOW again and how it connects to the lesson.



Elders are not born, they are not appointed, they emerge as the sum total of the experiences of life, they are a state of being.

- First Nations Elder, unknown

- Preview next session - Next time we meet, we will be learning and discussing how we can honor diversity and respect our differences.
- Adjourn.

Native STAND

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