BIMAADIZIWIN: “A Healthy Way of Life”

Teaching and Research Viewer Guide

PBS eight’s landmark series, Ojibwe/Waasaa-inaabidaa: We Look In All Directions, celebrates an extraordinary Native American culture of the Great Lakes region. We hope the Ojibwe/Waasaa-inaabidaa: We Look In All Directions television series and the teaching and research guides for each program will reflect the richness and resiliency of past, present and future Ojibwe life. These guides were constructed for use in middle school and high school social studies classes, but they are very usable and appropriate for adult viewers as well. The series illuminates a vibrant, important, indigenous culture of the Great Lakes region with much to share and teach.

Episode Four, Bimaadiziwini, “A Healthy Way of Life” examines the Ojibwe’s holistic approach to good health and the role of traditional medicine and spiritual healers. To live a good and healthy life, the Anishinaabe-Ojibwe people received knowledge, instructions, and help from the Creator which taught the importance of maintaining a balance between their mental, physical, and spiritual health.

In recent years, a worldwide regard for holistic approaches to health has developed. As in other areas examined by the Waasa Inaabidaa series, the Ojibwe offer a remarkable model that can inform other cultures less attuned to the spiritual and physical world. To the Ojibwe, the holistic approach to good health includes traditional medicines, ceremonies and stories, and spiritual healers. One must always be aware of the interrelationship between all beings to ensure Bimaadiziwin, the healthy way of life. This includes balancing one's relationships with the surrounding environment, surrounding beings, and the inner physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs of the human condition.

The traditional Ojibwe framework that honors the individual and the collective groups to which the individual belongs: the family, the clan, the community, the universe, all have input into this holistic approach to Bimaadiziwin, and each has resources to help meet human needs. This truth was passed on to Ojibwe children from the moment of conception. As an example, a stomach ailment might be a physical response to something eaten, an emotional reaction, an intellectual response, or a spiritual matter that requires attention. Proper guidance is required to determine the correct avenue of treatment. Traditional medicines, including a vast knowledge of plants and their healing properties, are important, but maintenance of a proper balance in one's life is the most significant preventative measure. This balance was maintained by a vigorous physical lifestyle dominated by hunting and gathering activities, active social activities like dancing and games, healthy food, and the integration of spirituality into most of life's facets.
The European contact, however, brought significant changes to this balanced life style and, as a result, to the holistic approach to Bimaadiziwin. Foreign disease, like small pox, was introduced to the region with devastating results. The food supply changed as European and later United States immigration into areas populated by the Ojibwe accelerated and the land base of the Ojibwe was decreased. As the Bimaadiziwin was eroded by these conditions, less-healthy practices were introduced, including the use of alcohol.

The Anishinaabeg responded to the erosion of Bimaadiziwin with a strong resurgence of interest and participation in traditional practices. Once again, teachings of the mide, big drum, dances, etc., were heard across Turtle island. The United States government, responding to what it perceived to be the threat of strong Indigenous culture, discouraged and, in 1892, made illegal, traditional rites and ceremonies like medicine practices, dancing, and feasting. Punishment for these activities included imprisonment and the withholding of government rations. In spite of these restrictions, traditional practices were still conducted, although they had to be done in secret.

Bimaadiziwin was further eroded by the U.S. government's attempt to assimilate and control the Indigenous population through the Indian boarding school. The unhealthy, overcrowded, and oppressive conditions of the boarding school bred illness and disease. Smallpox, tuberculosis, and trachoma afflicted many Ojibwe in these schools and, when the children returned home, they often carried these diseases to the larger community. The Allotment Act of 1887, which was another attack on Ojibwe Bimaadiziwin encroached on tribal territory and limited treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather off the reservation. A statistical fact that underscores the negative impact of foreign contact with the Ojibwe Bimaadiziwin is that 1917 was the first year since foreign contact began that indigenous births exceeded the number of deaths.

The teacher guide for Bimaadiziwin consists of:

- Discussion questions and related activities to engage students and other viewers with program-specific concepts prior to viewing the program.
- Guide questions to help focus the viewing experience.
- Discussion questions and related activities to reinforce or extend learned concepts following the student viewing experience.
- Assessment suggestions for learning activities.

The following themes are central to using Bimaadiziwin as a learning activity:

- The Anishinaabeg developed a holistic approach to healthy living that incorporated physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual components.
- Cultural contact with foreign groups significantly altered this traditional approach as land use, diet, and life style all changed as a result of the contact.
- Legal attempts to assimilate the indigenous population, resulted in an erosion of both traditional practices and Ojibwe health.
**Suggested Discussion Questions and Activities Before Viewing the Program**

1. Class discussion on what students know about alternative medicines: chiropractic, herbs, acupuncture, hypnosis, etc. The responses should be posted on the chalkboard. The idea is that many people routinely accept a variety of health options as valid and significant.
2. Students divide into small cooperative groups (4 or 5 people) and brainstorm what they know/think they know about the health situations on area reservations. The groups initial responses will be kept and used for a project following the viewing of the program.

**A partial glossary of words, terms, and names significant to the program include:**

- Wenaboojo
- Great Manitou
- Three Fires Confederacy
- Sits Ahead
- Rules for Indian Courts (1892)
- Boarding school
- Allotment Act of 1887
- Snyder Act (1921)
- 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act
- 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act
- Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council

**Guide Questions to Focus Viewing**

1. What were the main elements of *Bimaadiziwin* before contact with Europeans?
2. How and why did European and later U.S. contact alter *Bimaadiziwin*?
3. Why and how did the U.S. government attempt to assimilate the indigenous population?
4. How did the Ojibwe maintain cultural identity when confronted with the legal and military pressure to assimilate into the general population?

**Discussion Questions and Activities Following Viewing the Program**

1. Using the brainstormed ideas about health on the reservation, students working in small, cooperative groups of 4 or 5 people decide, after viewing the program, which ideas are still accurate and which do not reflect the truth. Once this is determined (and the program itself must be used as a primary source for this determination), each group takes one problem on the reservation (a specific health issue, alcoholism, poverty, education, etc.) and does a short group research project on this problem. Area reservations and county and state health agencies are resources for this research. The final part of each group's research project are suggestions about what could be done to alleviate the problem.
2. Invite a representative from a reservation health organization to share facts with the students and to answer questions. If this is done, the student suggestions for alleviating specific problems on the reservations could be shared and discussed.

3. If available, invite a traditional healer to the classroom to speak with the students about *Bimaadiziwin*. Ceremonies cannot be performed in this setting, but information can be transmitted and culture can be observed.

**Assessment Suggestions**

1. Research projects are done in groups, but each individual within the group is responsible for a specific part of the research and, also, of the construction of the paper or project.

**RESEARCH PROJECT RUBRIC**

5  The paper/project is clear and focused. A central theme is clearly identified and supporting details demonstrate the purpose of the research. Grammar and form are correct and appropriate. All required components have been meaningfully included in the paper/project.

4  The paper/project is clear and focused. A central theme has been identified and some supporting details help to demonstrate the purpose of the research. Grammar and form are correct and appropriate. All required components have been meaningfully included in the paper/project.

3  The paper/project has a central theme with some supporting detail. Grammar and form are correct and appropriate. All required components have been included in the paper/project.

2  As yet, the paper has no clear sense of purpose or central theme. Grammar and form are basically correct. Most required components have been included in the paper/project.

1  The paper/project is incomplete and unacceptable.

**COOPERATIVE GROUP SELF-SCORING RUBRIC**

1. To what extent did other members of the group listen to, respond to, and include your ideas in the group’s work?

   (not at all)  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  (completely)

2. The group worked well together and produced a good product?
3. To what extent are you satisfied with your group's performance?

   (Very dissatisfied) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (Very satisfied)

4. How much did you learn about the issue under discussion?

   (nothing at all) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (A great deal)

5. Write two adjectives describing the way you feel about your group's work.

   ____________________  ____________________