BEYOND THE GENDER BINARY



OVERVIEW

Students will learn about the origin of the term Two-Spirit and incorporate Native American/First Nations/Indigenous gender terminology into their understandings of gender and gender identity.



OBJECTIVES

Students will define the term Two-Spirit.
Students will analyze videos showing Two-Spirit identified people.
Students will discuss systematic oppression in relation to Two-Spirit people throughout history.



THINGS TO PREP & TOOLS NEEDED

Computer/smartphones, Internet access, GLSEN's Native American Heritage Month Timeline (Note: Native American Heritage month is in November, yet this timeline can be used year-round.)



TIME

55 minutes.

ALL ABOUT THE ACTIVITY

1. (5 minutes) Welcome students and explain to everyone that today's meeting will focus on the understanding the term Two-Spirit and hearing the stories of Native American individuals who identify as Two-Spirit.

Example: "Hello, everyone. Today we're going to learn about the term Two-Spirit and take in firsthand accounts of Native people who identify that way. Two-Spirit is an umbrella term used to describe Native and Indigenous people whose gender identity encompasses both male and female energies. Within the Native community it is recognized as a third gender since it falls outside of the two-gender binary. They may or may not be LGBTQ-identified. Please note that most Indigenous communities have their own unique words for describing people who defy gender norms and distinct places of honor for those folks in their communities."

2. (25 minutes) Play ***Two Spirit People from Frameline***.

3. (15 minutes) Ask students the following:
   - First impressions of the film.
   - What did you learn about the term Two-Spirit? What surprised you?

- In what ways does the term reflect gender and sexuality?

4. (5 minutes) Ask students to review ***GLSEN's Native American Heritage Month Timeline*** and find instances where Two-Spirit folks are honored.

5. (10 minutes) Engage in a group discussion around the following questions (example answers are in italics):
   - **Question 1: If the term Two-Spirit was unknown before this activity, ask the group why that might be. Why haven't they been taught about this in school?**

     Possible Answers:
     - *What is often considered "history" and what is often taught as "history" in schools is predominantly white and from a white perspective.*
     - *There are few examples of Two-Spirit people being shown in the media and in history books.*
     - *European colonization has erased examples and representation of various sexual and gender identities and expressions among the Indigenous people in the United States.*
     - *Native history is often taught or portrayed with the arrival of Columbus to the continent, and the Pilgrims and the first Thanksgiving. This ignores Native history before colonization.*

   - **Question 2: How might systems of oppression play a part in keeping this part of history out of the classroom?**

     Possible Answers:
     - *Two-Spirits have been recognized in Indigenous culture pre-European colonization. The identity is a reclaiming and preservation of the culture and traditions. The erasure is rooted in racism and white supremacy.*
       - *Racism: Prejudice towards people of another race + power.*
       - *White Supremacy: The belief, theory, or doctrine that white people are inherently superior to people from all other racial groups, especially Black people, and are therefore rightfully the dominant group in any society.*
     - *This history veers away from the European white narrative of Native and Indigenous history.*
     - *Two-Spirit people were honored as caretakers, performing sacred ceremonial, spiritual functions, medicine givers, and interpreters, which could be seen as stereotypical feminine roles.*
     - *Two-Spirit falls outside of the accepted gender and sexuality binary, which enforces heterosexism and sexism.*
   - **Question 3: Can anyone identify as Two-Spirit? How might it be problematic for someone outside of the Native culture to identify as Two-Spirit?**

     Possible Answers:
     - *Two-Spirit is first and foremost to be Indigenous and is rooted within Native culture. The term is not meant for anyone outside of those with Native heritage.*
     - *If you are not Native, claiming this identity is cultural appropriation, since it comes with history, traditions, and cultural resistance that is sacred to Native folks.*

FOLLOW-UP/EXTENSIONS

1. Before or after this activity, reach out to a local Indigenous LGBTQ/Two-Spirit organization and ask if they'd be interested in speaking to the students on Two-Spirit identities and other important topics related to Indigenous LGBTQ and Two-Spirit-identified people.

2. Watch Our Families: ***LGBTQ/Two-Spirit Native American Stories*** and be proactive about incorporating diverse stories from all LGBTQ-identified folks into larger days of actions.

3. To learn more about how to avoid cultural appropriation when engaging with Two-Spirit identities and the history of colonization against LGBTQ Indigenous people, read ***A Letter to White People Using the Term Two-Spirit*** from ConspireForChange.com.

4. There is a growing visibility of trans and gender nonconforming identities in the media. However, Two-Spirit identities have been around since before colonization in America. Research the history of gender and discuss how the gender roles that we consider "traditional" were brought to America by white colonization.

TAGS

LGBTQ History, Two-Spirit, gender, genderbinary, trans.

HANDOUTS

GLSEN's Native American Heritage Month Timeline.

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THIS ACTIVITY? TELL US HOW IT WENT AND WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER!
EMAIL US AT **STUDENTS@GLSEN.ORG** OR **EDUCATORS@GLSEN.ORG**.