RETURN: Native American Women Reclaim Foodways for Health and Spirit

FILM SYNOPSIS

A short expose following the food sovereignty movement happening across the country through the stories of Native American women from different tribes. The film features the charismatic Roxanne Swentzell from Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico, whose Pueblo Food Experience project is transforming lives in her community and across the continent by Tlingit, Muckleshoot, Oglala Sioux, Menominee, and Seneca women. Through personal, character-based storytelling, RETURN offers examples of alternative pathways to health and wellness for American Indians and demonstrates how returning to ancestral food sources can strengthen cultural ties to each other and to one’s heritage.

Additional support of the NFI Film Club is provided by Vision Maker Media, AMPAS, and the Missoula Federal Credit Union and the Montana Office of Public Instruction.
Karen Cantor

Karen Cantor has been at the helm of three acclaimed documentary films over the last 15 years: *The Danish Solution* (2003) about the rescue of the Danish Jews in 1943; *Last Rights: Facing End-of-Life Choices* (2009) follows four families as they recount grappling with the final days of beloved family members; and *Invitation to the Muse* (2011) looks at artists’ inner journeys.

Known for her industrial and artistic photographs her career paths included marketing for high-tech firms, teaching photography and entrepreneurship at Elon College and American University, and making her first full-length documentary film after becoming a grandmother. Her eclectic experiences have each made significant contributions to her skills and worldview as an established filmmaker.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- To understand the great diversity of tribal diets across North America through the ways of Oglala Sioux, Tlingit, Muckleshoot, Santa Clara Pueblo, and Menominee
- To identify the contemporary issues that come with straying from traditional tribal diets
- To identify how foods can be more than just what we eat
- To identify the current state of reservation food systems of Native American Reservations in Montana
- Show how demographics connect with food access and security for Montana tribes
- To identify the importance of telling this story within the context of a documentary film

**GUIDING QUESTIONS**

- What is the history of the land and its climate in relation to the foods it produces?
- What is food sovereignty, and how does this come into play with tribal sovereignty?
- Why do the foods we eat matter?
- In what ways does your community practice food sovereignty and what would happen if you could not access those foods?
- What might be the costs and benefits of food-sovereignty movements? Are there any points of compromise between these two perspectives?
BY THE NUMBERS:

- Santa Clara Pueblo, or Kha’p’oo Owinge, are located in north-central New Mexico, with roughly 1500 reported as recognized tribal members.
- Santa Clara is a Tewa-speaking Pueblo situated along the Rio Grande north of Santa Fe and is known for its rich-legacy of pottery-making and hand-crafted blackware and redware.
- Located in located in south-east Alaska between Icy Bay and Ketchikan, the Tlingit make up about 16,000 people in an area that’s been occupied almost 11,000 years. Living near the sea, fish caught with harpoons, nets, and bone fishhooks, are commonly seen in contemporary Tlingit dishes.
- Made up of descendants from the Duwamish and Upper Puyallap, Muckleshoot speak a dialect of Puget Salish, or whulshootseed. The tribe’s name is derived from the prairie on which the reservation was established.
- The Menominee Tribe’s history is unique because the origin/creation of the tribe begins at the mouth of the Menominee River, 60 miles east of the present Menominee Indian Reservation. The Tribe’s members enjoy pristine lakes, rivers, and streams, over 219,000 acres of rich forests, and an abundance of plant and animal life.
- Situated in southwestern South Dakota along the Nebraska state line, the Oglala Sioux tribe land includes 11,000 square miles and has almost 39,000 enrolled member with 20,000 speaking the traditional language Lakota language. Traditional foods include wild game, fish, fruits, vegetables (such as corn, squash, and beans), and herbs.
- Over 15% of Indigenous American have Type II Diabetes - a rate double that of other Americans.
- Life expectancy of American Indians and Alaska Natives is 4.4 less than other Americans.

FILM SUBJECTS/INTERVIEWEES:

- Roxanne Swentzell (Santa Clara Pueblo, NM) - Sculptor & Founder of Flowering Tree Permaculture Institute. Re-introduced a pre-contact diet.
- Kibbe Conti (Oglala Sioux, SD) - Nutritionist, heads up efforts to directly confront the diabetes epidemic with tribe-specific guidelines for healthy eating.
- Jennifer Gauthier (Menominee, WI) - Community Development Educator, focuses on returning to gardening as complementary to reinstituting the Menominee language.
- Desiree Bergeron Jackson (Tlingit, AK) - Nutritionist, focuses on readily available traditional foods for every age – starting with pregnant mothers.
- Andrea John (Seneca Nation, NY) - Exercise Specialist, uses her training to encourage her community to be more active and eat a diet rich in fruits, grains, and vegetables.
- Valerie Segrest (Muckleshoot, WA) - Nutritionist, is reviving fishing and berry-picking endeavors in the context of government – tribal, state, and national – policy.
- Chastity Sandoval Swentzell (Santa Clara Pueblo, NM) - Coordinator of Pueblo Food Experience.
- Marian Naranjo (Santa Clara Pueblo, NM) - Founder/Director of Honor Our Pueblo Experience (HOPE).
- Porter Swentzell (Santa Clara Pueblo, NM) - Historian.
Montana Common Core Standards

This unit addresses Montana Core Literacy Standards and offers a variety of teaching techniques to encourage teachers to meet the needs of students from grade 6-12. All activities meet a variety of MCCS curriculum requirements, as well as National Core Standards and assist in engaging students in active engagement with nonfiction film!

Writing

CCRA.W.2
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCRA.W.3
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCRA.W.4
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCRA.W.5
Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

CCRA.W.6
Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

CCRA.W.9
Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Speaking & Listening:

Speaking & Listening

CCRA.SL.1
Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCRA.SL.2
Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCRA.SL.4
Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
National Core Standards

Media Arts

MA: Cr. 1.1.I
Use identified generative methods to formulate multiple ideas, develop artistic goals, and problem solve in media arts creation processes.

MA: Cr. 2.1.I
Apply aesthetic criteria in developing, proposing, and refining artistic ideas, plans, prototypes, and production processes for media arts productions, considering original inspirations, goals, and presentation context.

(MA:Re8.1.I)
Analyze the intent, meanings, and reception of a variety of media artworks, focusing on personal and cultural contexts.

(MA:Re9.1.HS.I)
Evaluate media art works and production processes at decisive stages, using identified criteria, and considering context and artistic goals.
TYING INTO ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS REGARDING MONTANA INDIANS
As developed by Montana Office of Public Instruction’s Indian Education for All

Essential Understanding 1
There is great diversity among the twelve sovereign tribes of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories, and governments. Each tribe has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

Native American tribes discussed in the film:
- Santa Clara Pueblo
- Muckleshoot
- Tlingit
- Oglala Sioux
- Seneca Nation
- Menominee

The tribal nations identified in the film are excellent examples of the diversity among tribes and the unique issues they face with health and diet. For example, how might Alaska Native foods of the Tlingit differ from that of Santa Clara Pueblo?


Essential Understanding 3
The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its own oral histories, which are as valid as written histories. These histories predate the “discovery” of North America.

RETURN highlights the deep spiritual connection with food and how that reconnection with food is helping to revitalize cultural traditions and practices regarding food. Have students list a few examples within the film
Essential Understanding 4
Though there have been tribal peoples living successfully on the North American lands for millennia, reservations are lands that have been reserved by or for tribes for their exclusive use as permanent homelands. Some were created through treaties, while others were created by statutes and executive orders. The principle that land should be acquired from tribes only through their consent with treaties involved three assumptions:

I. Both parties to treaties were sovereign powers;
II. Indian tribes had some form of transferable title to the land;
III. Acquisition of Indian lands was solely a government matter not to be left to individual colonists or states.

Essentially Understanding 5:
There were many federal policies put into place throughout American history that have affected Indian people and continue to shape who they are today. Many of these policies conflicted with one another. Much of Indian history can be related through several major federal policy periods:

- Colonization/Colonial Period, 1492-1800s
- Treaty-Making and Removal Period, 1778-1871
- Reservation Period – Allotment and Assimilation, 1887-1934
- Tribal Reorganization Period, 1934-1953
- Termination and Relocation Period, 1953-1968
- Self-Determination Period, 1975-Present

Attempts to assimilate indigenous peoples into Euro-American society included considerable efforts to change their diets and their methods of food procurement or production. In turn, these changes altered Native peoples’ relationship to foods, initiated new ways of interacting with the natural environment, and undermined their ability to maintain sustainable food practices and systems.

The introduction of new foods — as trade goods, rations, or through the dominance of European dietary preferences — has damaged the health and well-being of indigenous peoples, while increased dependency on commercial food systems has undercut indigenous food security and even their ability to function as sovereign entities.
Essential Understanding 6:
History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from American Indian perspectives frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

KEY CONCEPTS
- History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller.
- Much of America’s history has been told from the Euro-American perspective. Only recently have American Indians begun to write about and retell history from an indigenous perspective.
- A huge amount of political capital is involved in the telling of history; history is never innocent storytelling.
- History is a primary vehicle through which power is distributed and used; thus, the whole notion of political identity and ideology and who the United States is as a nation plays into how the story is told, and who has been privileged to tell the story.
- It is critical that history curricula include the stories and experiences of individual men and women of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious groups.
- Providing students with textbooks, primary source documents, and surviving oral traditions allows them to gain an objective view of history and provides them with a historical context in which to situate and understand the experiences and perspectives of these groups in American society today.
- By giving students the opportunity to view our past through the eyes of many, they can begin to create their own view of our collective history, understand the present, and become better prepared to engage the problems of the future.

Essential Understanding 7
American Indian tribal nations are inherent sovereign nations and they possess sovereign powers, separate and independent from the federal and state governments. However, under the American legal system, the extent and breadth of self-governing powers are not the same for each tribe.

Current efforts by indigenous peoples to address poor nutrition, ill health, and food insecurity often necessitate confronting the underlying and intertwined issues of colonization, food sovereignty, and identity. Exercising food sovereignty strengthens indigenous cultures and reinforces indigenous value systems, and is a key part of maintaining political sovereignty.
PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

- Show students the trailer for RETURN: Native American Women Reclaim Foodways for Health and Spirit and have students identify film themes and ideas addressed in the trailer.
  - Who is being interviewed?
  - What is the conflict/issue presented? In a larger group have students discuss the effectiveness of the trailer as a hook to the story the film presents.
  - What does the title, RETURN, seem to suggest just by viewing the trailer?

- Trailer link here: https://vimeo.com/277398501

START A CONVERSATION AROUND FOOD:
Ask students: What are your favorite foods? Why? Are there foods that you associate with particular holidays, memories, celebrations, or events? What is the significance of these foods?

VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Expository Writing Practice with RAFT Activity (Worksheet on Page 13)
Expository writing exercises help students understand the construction of reality/stories told through nonfiction film. RAFT, an acronym for Role Audience, Format, and Topic (an activity from John Golden’s book Reading in the Reel World) helps students understand how audience, purpose, and mode of expression affect word choice and crafting story structure.

RAFT Components:
- ROLE--This is the persona taken on as you compose or deliver your piece (student, historian, parent, inanimate object, animal, etc.)
- AUDIENCE--This is who will receive your piece (fellow student, a teacher, a lawyer, tribal member, etc.)
- FORMAT--this is the form you’ve chosen to use to communicate your ideas (letter, pamphlet, poem, diary entry, social post, etc.)
- TOPIC--this if the topic or purpose of your piece (to inform, to sell, to convince, to protest, to warn, etc.)

- EXAMPLE:
RETURN
  - Role: Expository film
  - Audience: Individuals unfamiliar with the role food sovereignty plays in cultural revitalization
  - Format: Documentary Film
  - Topic: To inform viewers on the value of traditional tribal diets
DOUBLE ENTRY CHART + DISCUSSION
*Worksheet attached (Page 13)
As students watch the film have them take notes in the attached Double/Entry Chart provided to have students remember specific moments in the film. After watching, ask students what they wrote down:

• What moments stood out to them?
• Was there anything in the film that changed what you knew or what you thought you knew?
• Many documentaries are also narrative, meaning they tell stories! How do we articulate certain histories through a good story?
  - (Bring this back to the film. From which perspective is the film’s story told? Do they narrate? How much time are watching versus listening? Make a list!)

SUPPORTING AN EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION:
To most effectively track learning throughout viewing and discussion, have students reflect on what they know about the issues being presented in the films. With their Double Entry viewing chart they will have written down observations and inquiries. The following is a short list of keys terms and vocabulary to help students articulate their analysis:

KEY TERMS (to sound like a professional):

EXPOSITION: the information that grounds you in a story (Who, What, Where, When, and Why). Exposition gives us the tools to follow the story as it unfolds.
  • Questions to ask students:
    • What information is given away?
    • What still don’t we know?
    • Who are we hearing from/who is interviewed (who is not?)?
  • Examples of Expository Information:
    • Shot of a place/location and its landmarks
    • Headlines/printed materials
    • Voice over
    • People getting upset over something
THEME: A recurring idea that illuminates an aspect of the human condition. The theme is the most basic lifeblood of a film, it tells you what the film is about. This differs from the subject, which is the topic of the film. A theme gives a story/subject focus and depth and brings out universals from the subject of a complex/simple film subject. A good theme should have multiple layers: personal level, political level, or spiritual level

· Questions to ask students:
  · What are the universal ideas behind the film?
    - Ex: History told from American Indian perspectives frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell. With RETURN this film addresses that histories can be rediscovered and revised, especially when those histories are often often-sided in their telling.

SUBJECT: the topic/focal point of the film
· Questions to ask students:
  · What is the general subject of this film?
    · Ex: The history of traditional tribal diets and incorporating them back into modern day practices

ARC: the ways the events of the story transform the subject/character
Story arcs can be hard to find in documentary film, there is not always an obvious beginning, middle, and an end (as in life!)
· Questions to ask students:
  1. What does the protagonist/subject learn about themselves as they pursue a goal?
  2. How has the film challenged your assumption about the film’s subject? Did you have preconceived notions of who the characters were/where they came from? Did this film change your opinion on this subject matter?

PLOT + CHARACTER:
· CHARACTER-DRIVEN: film where the action of the film emerges from wants and needs of the characters

· Questions to ask students:
  1. Who is this film about? Is it about a person or an event?

· PLOT-DRIVEN: characters are secondary to the events that make up the plot
  · Questions to ask students:
    1. Who is this film about? Is it about a person or an event?
TRIBAL DIET BACKGROUND

HISTORY

- In the mid-19th century, Native Americans were forced onto reservations and deprived of their traditional foods. Instead they ate the little they were rationed by the government—bleached flour, unhealthy fats in the form of lard, and sugar with few alternative and healthy options for cooking. Today, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, Native American and Alaskan Natives adults are twice as likely as non-Hispanics to struggle with diabetes and with the associated maladies of heart disease and stroke. Health experts along with research attribute the higher disease rates in Indigenous communities to cultural disruption, poor education, poverty, inadequate access to health services, and economic adversity.

- Through personal, character-based storytelling, RETURN offers examples of alternative pathways to health and wellness for American Indians. Featuring Native American women from New Mexico, South Dakota, Alaska, Washington, New York, and Wisconsin, the film highlights efforts to return to ancestral practices for healthier eating and living. Have students provide examples from the film with the pilot project that is mentioned!

WHY FRY(BREAD)?

A History on Fry Bread:

- To prevent the indigenous populations from starving, the government gave them canned goods as well as white flour, processed sugar and lard—the makings of frybread
- Frybread is a fried dough—like an unsweetened funnel cake, but thicker and softer—but it’s often revered by some as a symbol of Native pride and unity

- Something to note: None of the ingredients of frybread are indigenous to this hemisphere

- Examples of Frybread’s Ubiquity:
  - Indian rocker Keith Secola celebrates the food in his popular song “Frybread.”
  - In Sherman Alexie’s film Smoke Signals, one character wears a “Frybread Power” T-shirt. Bothmen call frybread today’s most relevant Native American symbol. They say the food’s conflicted status—it represents both perseverance and pain—reflects these same elements in Native American history. “Frybread is the story of our survival,” says Alexie
    - The food has a central role in powwows, intertribal fairs, food vendors, etc.

- Frybread varies from tribe to tribe, in thickness, shape, and diameter
WHERE WE’RE AT TODAY:

- The food’s conflicted status represents both perseverance and pain, reflecting the similar elements in Native American history. And yet, the cultural unifier is also blamed for contributing to high levels of obesity and diabetes on reservations.¹

- It is important to recognize that not all ‘traditional’ foods fits into a neat category. As Devon Mihesuah, the Cora Lee Beers Price Professor at the University of Kansas mentions, in his writings on frybread, “how people define traditional depends on the extent of connection to their tribe and how that tribe confront colonialism and its myriad of socioeconomic forces, such as forced education, relocation, Christian influences, and economic pressures.”

- For further readings on the history of fry bread and its role in Native American cuisine, visit: http://www.aihd.ku.edu/documents/Frybread.pdf

DISCUSSION:
- Though frybread is not traditional in many ways, it still holds cultural significance to many Native families. Ask students, if they feel comfortable, is their families make frybread and to share their own stories of the role it plays in social gatherings.

EXERCISE:
Argument: Why do the foods we eat matter? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, graphic, presentation, or essay) that addresses how access to cultural foods relates to tribal sovereignty using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical and contemporary sources, while acknowledging competing views.

Mapping Informed Action: The unique characteristics and challenges of community organizing, and how community groups, such as the Flowering Tree Permaculture Institute and, take informed action by planning, organizing, and carrying out actions in order to rectify injustices and strengthen cultures.
WHAT IS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY?

According to the First Nations Development Institute, food sovereignty is defined as ‘the inherent right of a community to identify their own food system.’ This means that as a community Native tribes have the power to choose the food on their tables.

- Food sovereignty can be incredibly difficult to define, to conceptualize, and to create. It means different things to different people, encompasses different concepts in different places, and necessitates different changes and different points in time. For tribal nations, food sovereignty is not just the right to nutritious, culturally appropriate foods, but more so, the right to define and participate in one’s own food system.¹ Valerie Segrest, Muckleshoot - WA, mention that the first conversation around sovereignty (in 1855) is centered around food. Specifically she says, “A Muckleshoot person without a plate of salmon doesn’t exist.” What does she mean by this?

Many consider the concept of food sovereignty on Native American reservations to describe tribes that:

- Have access to healthy food
- Have food that is culturally appropriate
- Grow, gather, hunt, and fish in ways that are sustainable over the long term
- Distribute foods in a way so that people get what they need to stay healthy
- Adequately compensate people the people they provide the food for
- Utilize tribal treaty rights and uphold policies that ensure continued access

FOCUSING ON MANY DIFFERENT CHARACTERS TO TELL A LARGER STORY

EXERCISE
This film focuses on many different subjects to tell a larger story about food sovereignty. On a U.S. map have students map out where Tlingit, Oglala Sioux, Santa Clara, and Muckleshoot are on the map. Pick one of the focused tribes and make inferences about how threats to a food source might impact Native cultures and communities in that area? Do they have access to waterways? Is it a landlocked area? Which foods grow well there?

- Example: In the film, they mention the Lakota, Cheyenne, and the Crow are hunter-gatherer tribes because of where they are on the plains/prairie.

Ask students what the word agency means (agency means the ability to act or use power). As needed, help students define the word in their own terms. Students might brainstorm examples of agency in their own lives.
CONNECTIONS TO MONTANA
Current state of food systems, as reported by the Hope Radford Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO)

- The average percentage of food insecure people on Native American reservations within Montana was near 17% compared to a state and national average of 14%. In regards to food access, the percentage of reservation populations with limited access to healthy foods was nearly twice that of the Montana average (Montana reservation at 17.52%, Montana as a whole at 9.5%). These metrics help define the current state of food sovereignty on Montana’s reservations by quantifying the aspects of the system most in need of repair.

- Key factors to note when looking at specifics areas are:
  - Demographics - Who makes up the area?
  - Food Access - Are there grocery stores accessible? Fast Food restaurants?
  - Food Security - What’s the average cost of a meal? How easy is it to get access to healthy meals? What kind of diversity of foods are made available? Is it locally grown or does it need to be imported?
  - Agriculture - Is the land farmable? What livestock is available? Is it reservation land? What is the percent of the population that is employed in agriculture, hunting, fishing, or mining?

- Where do we see this in our state with our twelve tribes?
  - Assiniboine
  - Blackfeet
  - Chippewa
  - Cree
  - Crow
  - Gros Ventre
  - Kootenai
  - Little Shell
  - Northern Cheyenne
  - Pend D’Oreille
  - Salish
  - Sioux

Examples might include student initiatives that change policies at a high school or college. Transition to the concept of agency as it relates to this inquiry:
How do Native Nations use agency in order to address the challenges they face maintaining their identities, practicing their cultures, and exercising sovereignty? In the film, Roxanne mentions, “Seeds are genetically adapted to culture. We are too!” What does she mean by this?
## Double Entry Viewing Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOTICE</th>
<th>WONDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write down details, or quotes from the film that stand out to you.</td>
<td>What does this make you think? Write down observations, questions, or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who’s being interviewed? Are there animations? Is this happening</td>
<td>comments you might have related to what you wrote down in the NOTICE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>now or is it recounting something in the past?</td>
<td>column.</td>
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</tbody>
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RETURN
## Role Audience Format Topic - Expository Writing Exercise

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<th>Original</th>
<th>New Text 1</th>
<th>New Text 2</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Audience</td>
<td>Individuals unfamiliar with the tribal food sovereignty</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Documentary Film</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>To inform viewers on the value of traditional tribal diets</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Endnotes


2. Ibid.

Additional Resources


- Gladstone, Mariah. Pre-Contact Native American Food With Mariah Gladstone. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ylv4gxAMUPw

Special Thanks to

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