

# SHOULD SCHOOL DISTRICTS BAN NATIVE AMERICAN IMAGERY, NAMES, AND MASCOTS?

*THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 90 MINUTES. IF LEARNERS ARE ABLE TO REVIEW MEDIA PRIOR TO THE LESSON, ACTIVITY TIME SHOULD BE 45 TO 60 MINUTES.*

## INVESTIGATE

Read, watch, and listen to the three media resources on the Thinkalong module. Learners can use the Investigate graphic organizer to summarize each piece of media and record new information. Below are summaries of the three pieces of media curated in the Thinkalong module.

### HE ACTED AS HIS HIGH SCHOOL'S 'INDIAN.' 50 YEARS LATER, HE CALLS FOR ENDING NATIVE AMERICAN MASCOTS

Wisconsin Public Radio | January 22, 2020 | Audio

4:04 minutes

In 1968, Richie Plass dressed up as his high school's Indian mascot. Today, he's built an exhibit that demonstrates the harms of stereotyping and reducing Native Americans to cartoons.

- At home games, Richie and the mascot were cheered, even from Native athletes, classmates, friends, his family, and members of the Native community. But at away games, Richie was subjected to insults, taunts, derogatory and racist comments, and even items thrown at him.
- Plass says that his experience shows the psychological toll that using Native American mascots can take - they allow people to reduce Native people to stereotypes.
- Protestors and activists in Wisconsin have brought attention to Native mascots at every level, from the NFL to local school districts.
- Tricia Zunker, a Ho-Chunk woman and Democratic candidate for Congress, says that research shows that offensive mascots can do psychological and educational harm to both Native and non-Native students, saying it affects perceptions and affects educational experiences outside of the classroom.

### CONNECTICUT SCHOOL BOARD REINSTATES MASCOT NATIVE AMERICANS CALLED DEMEANING

WNPR | February 2, 2020 | Audio

3:17 Minutes

Killingly High School in Killingly, CT started the school year as the Red Hawks, but the Killingly School Board, with new members this year, voted to reverse the 2019 decision to remove the previous mascot "Redmen" and "Redgals."

- Sophomore Jessica Long, a student athlete, is embarrassed to be associated with the name, refusing to wear sweatshirts and athletic gear from previous seasons with the name. She's worried she'll be forced to wear the name on her uniform in the future.
- Norm Ferron, one of the recently elected board members who voted to reverse the Red Hawks name change, says that he felt the whole thing was rushed and decisions riddled with misinformation. He says the change was an "emotional knee-jerk reaction" instead of a fact-based inquiry.
- The change was prompted after a suggestion from the local Nipmuc Nation Tribal Council, who released a statement that decried the use of Native American mascots as demeaning and stereotypical.

*Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help learners to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.*

- Students and alumni fall on both sides of the decision, with some saying the name helps them be connected to the school's history, and others saying the name doesn't honor Native Americans as some argue.

## A TIPPING POINT FOR WASHINGTON, D.C. FOOTBALL TEAM'S NAME

PBS NewsHour | July 3, 2020 | Video

6:20 minutes

This segment from *PBS NewsHour* brings the debate about native imagery and mascots to a national level, as Washington, D.C.'s NFL team looks to change its name and mascot.

- Washington, D.C.'s NFL team has been the center of decades of controversy over its mascot, which has largely been condemned as a racial slur toward Native Americans.
- Kevin Blackstone, a Washington Post columnist and documentary producer, pushed back on statements from the team's ownership and coaches that connected the team's offensive mascot to military honor and leaving out Native Americans from the conversation.
- The video points out that the team is financially incentivized to change the name by sponsors like FedEx and Nike.
- Blackstone thinks this move will ripple through other professional leagues, like the MLB and NHL, and through colleges and high schools.

## KEY WORDS

Look out for these important keywords in the news stories. Discuss the definitions with your learners and see how they affect the understanding of the story.

- Imagery
- Symbolism
- Perception
- Colonialism
- Stereotype

## CONTEMPLATE

Learners will use media literacy questions to critically engage with news by thinking about its purpose, searching for bias and discussing missing perspectives. They will answer the 5 Key Questions of Media Literacy created by the Center for Media Literacy, which are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

A graphic organizer is included in this guide and the Thinkalong website to help learners answer these five questions about each piece of media.

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## DEBATE

Use the debate tool on the module webpage to help form evidence-based responses to the debate question.

Thinkalong is designed to help learners engage with real issues that are relevant to their lives. [Structured discussions](#) allow learners to practice their critical thinking skills through evidence-based debate with their peers. Discussions are designed to take about 30 minutes. Educators are encouraged to modify aspects that work best for their learners.

To encourage civil discourse, please review the [Code of Conduct](#) with your learners.