

THE AMERICAN INDIAN
Some Observations by Teachers

1. A teacher should be aware of the cultures, habits, etc., but not expect all children in a setting to do the same things or to believe the same things.
2. Be prepared for all types of behavior—including some which you saw back home and some which are unique.
3. You cannot expect to see everything you read or hear. All people are different and perceive differently, and no author has described any given community with total accuracy.
4. Realize that students may appear "modern" in some respects, but still may be "traditional" in many ways.
5. Teachers should work on vocabulary in a unit first, defining words that students may not know.
6. Teachers should spend more time on explicit and precise examples of explanation—especially when talking about abstract ideas.
7. Constantly check the class to see if they understand the concepts within the words they are saying.
8. If necessary, repeat questions in a different way: give hints, and so forth. Translating is hard to do. Wait time is important. If you do not give students time to translate, you may never get an answer. Do not talk too much or too fast. We all have to watch ourselves on this.
9. Indian students do not like to be the focus of attention. Avoid teaching lessons that require children to stand out.
10. Do not try to hold large-group discussions or question-answer sessions. Instead, work with small groups or individuals.
11. Do not push a child for an answer. Often he/she knows it, but does not want to say it.
12. Allow children to call out answers from the group and perhaps gradually work up to questioning individuals. Try not to ask for oral readings or reports immediately.
13. Use student teams as much as possible for motivation and competition.
14. Do not praise children in front of others directly because most prefer not to appear better than their brothers. Do it individually.
15. Very few try to outdo the others. Most prefer to remain equal in status.
16. Indian students tend not to compete against each other in class as much as Anglos do. After all, isn't the basic goal of education just to learn?
17. Often, allow students to help each other on practice exercises. This seems to take some of the pressure off.
18. The teacher must find a way to motivate the students. The use of non-competitive sub-group methods is often effective.

19. Teachers should not be discouraged by the absenteeism of the students; many times parents take children out of school for several days for culturally relevant ceremonial occasions.
20. Because of spotty attendance by some students, the teacher must make a definite attempt to help them make up work missed. You cannot hold absences against a student. If you do, he/she will probably quit coming altogether. Be glad that they care enough to come at all.
21. Be prepared to review often. Give make-up tests, so forth.
22. Don't put your hopes in structured learning sets and prerequisite exercises that must be mastered in an unbroken sequence. Plan how and when you will reteach each unit, and have extra sets of materials on file for make-up.
23. Try not to be upset when children return late from weekends.
24. Traditionally, Native Americans do not like to operate on a strict time schedule. Some Indian students remain unconcerned about this which can create problems for teachers regarding assignments.
25. Try to stick to short-term assignments. However, some long-term assignments and deadlines are necessary because students must learn to cope with the values of the outside world also.
26. It would be more effective to penalize students for what they have not done assignment-wise rather than to penalize them for not doing it when you asked them to.
27. Children may have trouble switching quickly from the Indian concept of time to the Anglo concept. Make loose schedules and discuss why we need schedules in school.
28. It means a lot to the students if you can speak with them about their homes and weekends there.
29. Understanding what goes on at home is beneficial and necessary.
30. Talk about home life, work they do, games they play, and so forth.
31. It is important for teachers to learn about activities that take place in the children's' homes and try to work them into teaching and counseling. This shows the students you really care about them.
32. It is a tradition not to ask someone his/her name directly. In order to make a student more comfortable, learn his/her name from a friend.
33. Don't be too casual, and don't take things for granted. Inquire before bringing any animals into the classroom. Some animals are not to be touched or looked upon for various reasons.
34. Some of the people believe in reincarnation. All forms of life are to be treated with respect.
35. Death is not a subject to be discussed in the classroom.
36. Do not attempt to plant seeds in the classroom as a science project. The people of the community may believe that the earth provides enough room for growing things.

37. When preparing foods in the classroom, you should find out the proper way in their culture in which to prepare and serve them foods in order to avoid scaring some of the children.
38. The teacher should not offer the children strings to play with or introduce any activities with strings during the season when string games are not to be played.
39. Family ties are very strong, and the children call their cousins brothers and sisters. This tie is as strong as true sibling ties in the Anglo culture. Respect this custom, and do not tell them they are not brothers and sisters.
40. Remember, there are no set rules for working with Indian children because of different tribal backgrounds. It would be wise to find out about the tribal background by doing some research before approaching the child. Use a slow approach. The child's response is apt to be slow. Indian people have a lot to contribute, but they have learned to be careful in dispensing any knowledge.