



Native American Art and Culture
Research and Writing Project & Presentation Assignment
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Due Dates:

First draft: **November 23, 2009**

Final paper: **December 14, 2009**

Format instructions: The paper must be word processed, have a standard 10 to 12 point font and one inch margins. You may submit both draft and final papers in digital form if you choose, to sshort@cva.edu. If you submit digitally, MS Word or Acrobat .pdf will work. Also, use your CVA email account; mail from it is less likely to find its way to the "junk" folder. The length of the paper is your decision; about 5 - 8 pages will be typical. All reference sources and images used in the paper must be cited in proper MLA format, and a list of sources cited must be attached to the paper, also in MLA format.

You will have several choices for a research and writing project in this course. One will be to read and write a response paper to a book by a Native American author. Another will be to visit a museum, identify a Native American artifact or art object that intrigues you, do research about that object, and write a paper about the properties, meaning, and significance of the object in the culture in which it was created.

Option #1: Autobiography

You may write a response paper about one of the following Native American books. These are autobiographies, but some may have co-authors. All present a detailed picture of the lives and cultural ways of Native American people. Some of these books are out of print, but all are available either as new or used books at the academic books web site www.powells.com. All also may be borrowed from public libraries.

Dyk, Walter. *Son of Old Man Hat: A Navajo Autobiography*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1967. (Diné/Navajo).

Eastman, Charles A. *Indian Boyhood*. New York: Dover Publications, 1971. (Lakota/Sioux)

Simmons, Leo. *Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian*. New Haven: Yale U.P., 1970. (Hopi).

Underhill, Ruth. *Papago Woman*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1979. (Tohono O'odham/Papago).

In your written response, identify two or three important issues raised in the book, summarize the key points, and respond critically to those issues. Some possible issues to address would include the experience of childhood as described by the author and manner of child-rearing in that culture, cultural practices of kinship and marriage, political leadership and decision-making roles, gender roles and relationships, medicine and healing activities, ceremonies and religious beliefs before and after European influence on that culture, and important events relating to that tribe's land holdings, warfare, and political sovereignty.

You will formulate a **reasoned response** centering on the issues that you select. The following are some possible elements to incorporate in your response:

- ⊕ Who is the author of the work? Is this genuinely the voice of a Native American person, or an interpretation by someone else? What are the author's qualifications, through education and experience, to make authoritative claims on the topic?
- ⊕ Are there any indications that the author's bias or prejudice interferes with his or her objectivity in addressing the issues? Is this a problem or strength, given the purpose of the book?
- ⊕ Is adequate factual and logical evidence presented to support the author's claims?
- ⊕ What are the important cultural and social implications of the issues the book addresses? Do these questions have implications today? Are there lessons for contemporary life here?

You must generate a thesis statement of your own, but blunt statements of agreement or disagreement on the points are not required and would be too simplistic for the kind of response that is envisioned here. You should focus on the **strengths** and **weaknesses** in the reasoning of the author and the implications of the main points you have identified. Assume that your audience is college-educated, but not necessarily expert in the subject matter. Assume that your readers have not previously read the material to which you are responding. Avoid a “table of contents” approach, in which you merely recite what is included in the book. You need to dig beneath the surface and respond to the ideas and content, not merely report what the book covers.

Option #2: Artifact research

Visit the Minneapolis Institute of Art and view the various artifacts and objects that are on display in the Native American collection. The MIA web site has a good online catalog of items with information about each object, but do examine the object that you choose to write about in person, in addition to looking at the online photo and information.

After choosing an object as your focus, research its use, significance, and meaning in the culture in which it was created. You may identify your own questions and issues for discussion as appropriate for the object that you select, but here are some suggestions of questions and issues that might get you started:

- ⊕ Is this object primarily associated with either men or women? Who made it? Who used it? Does it have symbolic significance in the culture that relates to gender identity or gender role in that culture?
- ⊕ What are the materials used in making the object? What significance does this choice of materials have in the culture? Did the materials used in making similar objects change after European conquest?
- ⊕ Does the object have designs or colors that have symbolic meaning within the culture? What is that meaning, and how did it influence life in that culture?
- ⊕ Does the object have a utilitarian role in the culture? What does that role indicate about the way that the people who created the object made a living and survived in the world? Does the item combine utilitarian and symbolic features?
- ⊕ Does the object signify family relationships or kinship in any way? What was the importance of those connections in that culture?
- ⊕ Does the object have any ceremonial, spiritual, or religious significance in the culture? Was it – or were objects like it – considered “powerful?” What role did those ceremonies or beliefs have in the culture?
- ⊕ Does the object have any significance as a symbol of political control or political relationships in the culture?
- ⊕ Do modern day members of tribes descended from the makers of the object have any objection to European/American display of the object, or objects like it? If so, what are the considerations that museums should consider in deciding whether or not to display objects of this type?

Support the information you provide about the object with citations to at least three (3) scholarly-type sources that you have consulted. You will want to focus on articles in journals that publish articles about Native American art and culture. These might include *American Indian Quarterly*, or *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, as examples. Use the CVA library online databases to search for materials. You may want to use sources like *Wikipedia* for general background information, but rely on scholarly sources as support for your factual points. Cite sources and the images that you place in the paper in accordance with the MLA rules (visit <http://www.shortstreet.net/mlacites.htm> for citation information and examples).

You must generate a thesis statement that clearly establishes your perspective on the object, and develop that thesis fully with description, explanation, interpretation, and evaluation of the information you have learned about the object and its meaning and significance in the culture in which it was created. Assume that your audience is college-educated, but not knowledgeable about either the object you are writing about or the culture in which it was created and used.

Both Options: Class Presentation

Near the end of the semester, each student will make a ten-minute presentation to the class about the project. Students who choose option #2 will likely want to include visuals in the presentation. PowerPoint is probably the best choice for displaying images in class.