INDIGENOUS EDUCATION & EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Happy Hallowe'en!

CULTURE IS NOT A COSTUME

HOW NOT TO CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE HALLOWE'EN

Halloween involves important decisions on costume choice. While dressing up is fun and exciting, it also runs the risk of offending others. Halloween offers the opportunity to discuss costume choices with both colleagues and students. It is important not to inadvertently mimic culture by culturally appropriating racial or ethnic groups.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

1. The taking- from a culture that is not one's own- of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge (Ziff & Rao, 1997).
2. Any instance which means commonly associated with and/or perceived as belonging to another are used to further one's own ends (Shugart, 1997).
3. To take parts (symbols, artifacts, dress, words, practices, etc.) from a culture that is not your own. This can happen in a variety of forms but often around Halloween it involves wearing 'costumes' that may have some significance to other cultures.
4. A particular power dynamic in which members of a dominant culture take elements from a culture of people who have been systematically oppressed by that dominant group.

"OUR CULTURE IS NOT A COSTUME,"
said Calgarian Michelle Robinson. "We are real people with a real culture and depicting it incorrectly just adds to negative stereotypes and adds to violence we face."

Adapted from the VSB Indigenous Education "Culture Is Not A Costume" Resource 2020

my culture IS NOT a costume

Source:
Baylor University,
Diversity & Inclusion
https://www.baylor.edu/diversity/index.php?id=956798

appropriation:
the action of taking something for one's own use, typically without the owner's permission

cultural appropriation:
the act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture

Examine Your Own Practices

Ask yourself some critical questions about your costume.

- ***Is my costume based on someone's race, ethnicity, or culture?***
- ***Am I reinforcing stereotypes with the image I am portraying?***
- ***Is my costume exploiting another culture?***
- ***Could this costume harm someone?***

Engage in Dialogue

Bring up subjects like cultural appropriation with your colleagues and students. See what their views are and share your own knowledge and experiences. Dialogue is collaborative and about people working together to find a common understanding. It is about exploring, listening, and re-examining your positions, values, and assumptions.

Be an Advocate

If you see a costume that may harm someone, begin a respectful dialogue with that person at an appropriate time and place. Ask them about their costume choice. Your conversation should be about having the person think through their choice, not about right and wrong.

BOARD OF EDUCATION BURNABY SCHOOL DISTRICT 41

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION & EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

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Reflection Questions:
Racially, Ethnically and Culturally Based Hallowe'en Costumes

For many people in our school communities the fun and magic of dressing up is an important tradition. Part of creating a safe school community for **ALL** students on Halloween is making sure racially, ethnically, and culturally
based costumes are **not** part of our festivities. We invite you to reflect on the following questions:

1. Is the costume racially, ethnically, or culturally based?
If so, it will make most folks from those racial/cultural/ethnic group feel unsafe and disrespected.

2. Does the person (staff or student) belong to this group of people?
If the answer is no, this is not okay. Reflect on what it means to borrow someone else's culture, race or religion for a day- because for many people it is not a costume, it's their everday lives.

3. If the costume is meant to be funny, why is it funny?
A costume that is meant to be funny because it is making light of a religious, cultural, ethnic, gender or racial group is a caricature and hurtful.

4. How would everyone feel if someone wore the costume around this group of people?
If the impact is harmful on any given day, then Hallowe'en is no exception.

5. Is the costume treating gender as a novelty?
The very idea that being a woman (or a trans woman) as a costume is really damaging. That femininity on males should become a novelty, or something humourous, is a toxic idea that is not okay.

Adapted from Emi Ito @little_kotos_closet, and from an article by Kat Lazo

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