

2021 Native American and Indigenous Peoples Day Symposium
Student Learning Activities and Resources

“Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People:
From Awareness to Action”

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S) is an issue which is among the most urgent and devastating facing American Indian/Indigenous Peoples. TCU’s fifth annual Native American and Indigenous Peoples Day symposium will, therefore, address a serious, complex, and difficult topic. The symposium will begin on Monday, October 4, 2021, but there will be events throughout the week, including two virtual presentations by one of the preeminent leaders in the MMIWG2S movement, a virtual panel discussion among tribal leaders about how MMIWG2S is affecting their communities, and a film screening hosted by Women and Gender Studies. For a list of events and registration information, see: <https://bit.ly/TCUnativeamericanday>.

Our keynote speaker will be Annita Lucchesi (Cheyenne), executive director of [Sovereign Bodies Institute](#), an organization which “builds on Indigenous traditions of data gathering and knowledge transfer to create, disseminate, and put into action research on gender and sexual violence against Indigenous people.”

We are very excited about this year’s symposium and hope you will participate by attending sessions, requiring or offering extra credit to your students for attending, or teaching about MMIWG2S. There are many aspects related to MMIWG2S, too many to cover here. The following Student Learning Activities, however, can help prepare students for what they will learn during the symposium, as well as help them process the information and experiences. Feel free to modify these activities to better fit your classes. In keeping with our theme, they are centered on either raising awareness or motivating to action.

It is important to remember and to lead students to understand that for American Indian/Indigenous Peoples and communities, the MMIWG2S crisis is not merely a topic of study. It is sacred and should be treated with utmost respect and sensitivity.

Please also be aware that the topics of sexual violence, gender violence, violence against women and Two-Spirit People, and racialized violence may be triggering to some students in your courses and must be handled carefully. Please read to the end of this guide for resources to support students as they encounter this topic.

Terminology

You may need to define the term, “**Two-Spirit People**,” for your students. In short, the term, “Two-Spirit,” refers to Indigenous People who have been gifted with both a male and female spirit and, therefore, have certain responsibilities and talents that strengthen their communities. As noted in a recent [article](#), “To be of service to our elders and youth with our very particular

medicine is paramount.” Using modern terminology, it is an umbrella term referring to Indigenous gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, although these categories should be understood from Indigenous perspectives.

Do not assume that “Two-Spirit People” and similar Western categories and terminology are identical. It is important to keep in mind the [admonition](#) of two Indigenous scholars, “The term/identity of two-spirit does not make sense unless it is contextualized within a Native American frame.” While Two-Spirit People have always been present in Indigenous communities, the term itself is relatively new, gaining widespread usage in the 1990s. Most tribes, however, have their own terms for Two-Spirit People, and it is important to recognize and respect individual tribal cultural traditions and avoid over generalizing. There can also be a variety of views among contemporary Indigenous Peoples and communities regarding Two-Spirit People, often influenced by degrees of assimilation to Western/colonized society, culture, and academia, and certain forms of Christianity. You can find more resources at the end of this document.

American Indian/Indigenous/Native American identities and terminology are quite complicated, diverse, debated, and have a long history. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) has a very helpful guide, *Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction*, that succinctly addresses a variety of topics. It can be downloaded at <https://www.ncai.org/about-tribes>. This guide defines the terms, “American Indian and Alaska Native” as, “Persons belonging to the tribal nations of the continental United States (American Indians) and the tribal nations and villages of Alaska (Alaska Natives),” and “Native American” as “All Native people of the United States and its trust territories (i.e., American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, Chamorros, and American Samoans), as well as persons from Canadian First Nations and Indigenous communities in Mexico and Central and South America who are U.S. residents” (see page 11).

The Bureau of Indian Affairs explains that it is appropriate to use the terms, “American Indian and Alaska Native,” and that the term, “Native American,” gained widespread usage in the 1970s (some would say the 1960s) as an alternative to “American Indian,” but has been gradually expanded to encompass all Indigenous peoples in the Americas (“[Why are American Indians and Alaska Natives also referred to as Native Americans](#),” BIA FAQs; NCAI’s guide also follows these uses and definitions). See also, “[Reporting and Indigenous Terminology](#),” developed by the Native American Journalists Association. *As this guide points out, when possible, using the specific names of tribes, nations, or communities is best practice.* For a discussion from a Canadian context, see [What's in a name: Indian, Native, Aboriginal or Indigenous?](#) (CBC News, October 2, 2014). It’s good to remember the National Museum of the American Indian’s guidance: “The best term is always what an individual person or tribal community uses to describe themselves” (“[The Impact of Words and Tips for Using Appropriate Terminology: Am I Using the Right Word?](#)”).

Other brief video introductions to a few of the related issues include, [You took a DNA test and it says you are Native American. So what?](#) (NPR, November 24, 2016); [A Conversation With Native Americans on Race](#) (*New York Times*, August 15, 2017); [Who Is Native American, And Who Decides That?](#) (NPR, November 1, 2012); and [A few things to know about why treaties matter](#) (NPR, November 22, 2017).

AWARENESS

1. **Self-Awareness and Personal Context:** It is important that students begin to think about what they know and don't know about American Indian/Indigenous Peoples and the nature of their relationships with them. Beginning this basic process of self-awareness is a significant step in understanding MMIWG2S. To help with this, have students complete an American Indian/Indigenous Peoples Knowledge Reflection by answering these questions:

- Describe your understanding of who American Indian/Indigenous Peoples are and what makes a person American Indian/Indigenous. Your description could include discussion of what American Indian/Indigenous Peoples look like, where they live, their lifestyles and beliefs, and so on.
- Describe your experiences and encounters with American Indian/Indigenous Peoples, cultures, and histories. How did you get your knowledge and impressions of them (school, tv, movies, personal encounters, etc.)? For example, have you ever participated in or attended a summer camp, or Scouting or Indian Guides type program that included activities about American Indians? What were you told about the cultures and what did you learn? Be sure to explain how each of the sources of your knowledge contributed to your understanding and impressions of American Indian/Indigenous Peoples.

If you are comfortable sharing, please include whether you are an enrolled member/citizen of an American Indian nation, and if so, which one. If you are not an enrolled member/citizen, but have any American Indian/Indigenous ancestry/descendancy in your background, please briefly describe it.

- Briefly describe the descriptions and representations of American Indian/Indigenous women you have seen and heard in films, television, literature, sports, advertising, and other contexts. Also, explain what you know about American Indian/Indigenous Peoples who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. How have they been portrayed and described?
- What is your understanding of the relationship of the United States to American Indian/Indigenous Peoples? What is your understanding of the relationship of Christianity to American Indian/Indigenous Peoples?

- What is your relationship to American Indian/Indigenous Peoples?

We all are in some way in relationship with American Indian/Indigenous Peoples, although we may not be aware of it. Your answers to the preceding questions will help you describe your relationship. So, will the following: Think about where you grew up or where you are currently located. Which American Indian/Indigenous nations lived there as part of their traditional homelands? Where are they now? If you do not know on which American Indian/Indigenous nations' homeland you live, why is that? How did the current non-Indian populations living there come to own and possess these lands? How did you and your family come to this place; what factors made it possible? Hopefully thinking about these and other kinds of questions will help you express your relationship to American Indian/Indigenous Peoples.

- If you are not American Indian/Indigenous, what kinds of privilege do you possess that American Indian/Indigenous Peoples do not, and how does that affect your relationship with them?

Depending on the context, almost everyone possesses some sort of privilege that others do not. This privilege can emerge from a variety of factors, including religion, education, socio-economic status, gender, race/ethnicity, language, social and cultural knowledge, land occupation or ownership, multi-generational residence in a certain place, and more. Think about the kinds of privileges you have and the power it gives you in relationship to American Indian/Indigenous Peoples.

2. History and extent of the crisis: Share with your students some of the following statistics related to the MMIWG2S crisis:

- More than four in five American Indian and Alaska Native women (84.3%) have experienced violence in their lifetime, and more than one in three (39.8%) experienced violence in 2015. ([National Institute of Justice 2016 Study](#)) University of Kansas Professor Sarah Deer says the rate of Native women who have experienced sexual violence is higher—one in two (56%). ([March 2019 lecture](#), “Historical Resilience”)
- 56.1% of Native women have experienced sexual violence, 55.5% experienced physical violence by an intimate partner, 48.8% experienced stalking, and 66.4% experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner. ([National Institute of Justice 2016 Study](#))
- American Indian and Alaska Native women are 1.2 times as likely as non-Hispanic white-only women to have experienced violence in their lifetime and 1.7 times as likely to have experienced violence in the past year. ([National Institute of Justice 2016 Study](#))
- Of those American Indian and Alaska Natives who have experienced violence, 97% of females have been victimized by at least one non-Native perpetrator (interracial) in their lifetime, while 35% of females have been victimized by an American Indian or Alaska Native perpetrator (intra-racial) ([National Institute of Justice 2016 Study](#))

- Nearly 30% of Native Two-Spirit People have been victims of a hate crime. (Sarah Deer, [March 2019 lecture](#), “Historical Resilience”)
- The rate of Native adults who have experienced post-traumatic stress syndrome is 4 ½ times greater than the national average. (Sarah Deer, [March 2019 lecture](#), “Historical Resilience”)
- Under the Violence Against Women Act 2005, a national study authorized by the U.S. Congress found that between 1979 and 1992 homicide was the third leading cause of death among Native females aged 15-34, and that 75% were killed by family members or acquaintances. ([Missing and Murdered](#): No One Knows How Many Native Women Have Disappeared. *Indian Country Today*, September 13, 2018)

After sharing these statistics, ask students to write a brief reflection explaining why they think these rates of violence against American Indian/Indigenous women and Two-Spirit People are so high.

Then have students view Professor Sarah Deer’s lecture on “[Historical Resilience: The Story of Violence Against Native Women](#)” (given on March 21, 2019 at the Safety for Our Sisters: Ending Violence Against Native Women Symposium, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian; Professor Deer is a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma and a University Distinguished Professor at the University of Kansas). Ask students to compare their explanations with those given by Professor Deer. Which factors mentioned by Professor Deer are most surprising to them and why?

Before listening to Professor Deer’s lecture, point out that she argues, “To understand the story of these numbers (i.e., the high rates of violence against Native women and Two-Spirit People) we must understand the story of tribal nations, tribal nations who have been here for thousands and thousands of years.” She connects the MMIWG2S crisis to tribal sovereignty (for a brief explanation of tribal sovereignty, see the National Congress of American Indians’ [statement](#)). Assign particular students to listen for answers to these questions: Why is it imperative to understand tribal sovereignty in order to adequately address MMIWG2S? Given that American Indian/Indigenous Peoples experience the highest rates of violence in the nation, what factors explain the disproportionate amount of violence in the lives of American Indian/Indigenous Peoples in the United States? How have sexual and other forms of violence against American Indian/Indigenous women been expressed throughout the centuries? What does Professor Deer mean by Historical Resilience and how does it differ from [Historical Trauma](#)? Answering these questions should lead to a rich discussion!

3. **Underlying causes and current challenges:** There are many underlying causes and current challenges related to MMIWG2S. Introduce your students to a concise overview of the MMIWG2S crisis and some of its causes and challenges, by having them read the introductory text of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe’s [virtual exhibit](#) on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls (the accompanying videos are helpful, but can be difficult to hear).

Next, have your students view the documentary, [Silent No More](#). It will expose students more deeply to some of the personal stories of American Indian/Indigenous women who have gone missing or been murdered, and how this traumatizes families and communities (make sure your students continue watching the video past the credits). After viewing the documentary, ask your students to identify and explain some of the causes of MMIWG2S and challenges to responding to this crisis that are reflected in the documentary. You might also ask them to explain the following statements made in the documentary and how they reflect particular causes and challenges:

- “The first step is recognizing and acknowledging this issue exists in the United States.”
- “There is a difference when a Native woman goes missing and a non-Native woman goes missing.”
- “It’s not only a women’s issue.”
- “We’re less likely for anyone to come in and intervene and doing anything about it unless there is something that comes out that is very tragic which will then bring awareness.”
- “We all rely on the law enforcement and if they’re not going to do it, they’re not going to do it for the next one or the next one. Especially when it comes to our Native people, it’s like nobody cares.”

ACTION

Each of these action activities will especially require students to be knowledgeable about MMIWG2S. So, consider requiring students to attend at least two of the symposium’s sessions, as well as do some research beyond the symposium.

1. **Create an anti-oppression map about MMIWG2S:** To do this, students should listen to a recent presentation given by Annita Lucchesi as part of the Digital Storytelling Colloquium at the Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Kansas: [Mapping for Social Change: Decolonial and Anti-Oppression Mapping: Annita Lucchesi](#). Students should carefully consider Ms. Lucchesi’s “Considerations for Cartographers” and “Reminders: Breaking Conventions,” as well as her answers during the Q&A for help with design and technical issues. Following Ms. Lucchesi’s guidance can result in creating powerful maps that inform and motivate for change on particular aspects related to MMIWG2S. Consider having students present and explain their maps in class or some other setting.
2. **Raise awareness in a group in which you are a member:** Have students research some aspect related to MMIWG2S and then create an infographic, powerpoint presentation, work of

art, or some other artifact to raise awareness about this aspect. Students should design their artifact to be appropriate for one of the following: their socio-economic, racial/ethnic, religious, or professional/business group. Students should also write a brief narrative that explains the information in their artifact. Presenting and explaining their artifact in class and asking for feedback from the class can lead to an even stronger presentation before the group for which the artifact was designed.

- 3. Organize an observance at TCU:** May 5th is National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Have students design a potential observance of this day that would be appropriate for TCU and respectful to American Indian/Indigenous Peoples and the MMIWG2S movement. Consider carefully how American Indian/Indigenous Peoples would be involved in the observance and what roles they would play, as well as what would be communicated about MMIWG2S. Students should write an accompanying narrative that explains the overall goal of the observance and how each part of the observance will either raise awareness about MMIWG2S or lead to action.
- 4. MMIWG2S Local Context Assessment:** Investigate the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of MMIWG2S in the student's hometown, current place of residence, region, or state. This should include an identification of the American Indian/Indigenous Peoples who historically and currently reside there. Assess the level of awareness and action of the community by considering the following: How have the local media, governments, law enforcement agencies, or medical and social work agencies addressed MMIWG2S? What is their level of awareness and knowledge about MMIWG2S? What underlying causes that contribute to MMIWG2S are present in the community? What resources are available to help American Indian/Indigenous communities combat and heal from MMIWG2S? What avenues for possible action are available for addressing MMIWG2S?

RESOURCES

1. An updated version of a guide to resources and information related to MMIWG2S can be found on the Women & Gender Studies website at: <https://sis.tcu.edu/wgst/initiatives/mmiw/>. While not exhaustive, this guide includes numerous references to valuable resources.
2. We are partnering with Fort Worth's Amon Carter Museum to provide resources and educational opportunities. The Carter has extensive resources of artworks by white artists portraying American Indian/Indigenous subjects, particularly historical photographs. These works do not directly address the issues taken up by this year's MMIWG2S symposium, however the Carter's collections and staff are well positioned to provide support for the symposium by telling a critically informed story of the role of white representations of American Indian/Indigenous Peoples within the context of imperial expansion. Many of these images can be found through the collection portal on the Carter website (<https://www.cartermuseum.org/carter-collection>). With advance notice, artworks from the collection can be viewed by individuals or groups in the museum's Study Room. Use of the Study Room should be scheduled with museum staff with a minimum of two weeks' notice,



preferably more. To arrange an appointment, contact <https://www.cartermuseum.org/research-carter/research-request>.

You might choose some images from the Carter’s collection, invite a curator to speak with your class about the images, and then have students write or discuss how the images reflect stereotypes and misinformation about American Indian/Indigenous Peoples, in general, and especially about women and Two Spirit People, that contribute to or underlie the MMIWG2S crisis.

For example, the watercolor, “[Sun Worship in Montana](#),” (see left) done in 1907 by renowned artist Charles M. Russell reflects stereotypes, romanticization of American Indian/Indigenous Peoples, misinformation (American

Indian/Indigenous Peoples do not worship the sun), and the power of images to shape attitudes and evoke emotions (pity, abhorrence, etc.), to name a few. The image reveals more about colonized thinking than it does about American Indian/Indigenous Peoples, powerfully shaping non-Indian attitudes and actions. Another Russell watercolor done at about the same time, “[When East Meets West](#),” (see below) conveys similar attitudes and actions. The Carter’s collections are filled with many other images and under the guidance of a Carter curator a rich discussion could be had, raising students’ awareness of how historic attitudes and actions underpin the MMIWG2S crisis.



3. Understanding the status and roles carried out by Two-Spirit People in American Indian/Indigenous communities is important. Indian Health Service has a good, brief overview that includes links to other resources. See [Two-Spirit](#). See also the following helpful resources:

[A Spotlight on Two Spirit \(Native LGBT\) Communities](#) (a guide produced by the National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center)

[Two-Spirit People: Sex, Gender & Sexuality in Historic and Contemporary Native America](#) (PowerPoint presentation by Harlan Pruden and Se-ah-dom Edmo)

[Pride Month 2020: Perspectives on LGBTQ Native Americans in Traditional Culture](#) (*Smithsonian Magazine*, National Museum of the American Indian, June 16, 2020)

[8 Things You Should Know About Two Spirit People](#) (*Indian Country Today*, September 13, 2018)

[For Two Spirits, An Opportunity To Reclaim Acceptance Across Indian Country](#) (National Public Radio, KLCC.org, November 29, 2018)

[2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations](#)

[5 Two-Spirit Heroes Who Paved the Way for Today's Native LGBTQ+ Community](#) (KQED, November 20, 2018)

[Names and Roles of Two Spirit People: An Historical Perspective](#) (John Molloy Gallery, New York)

4. The topic of MMIWG2S can be difficult to process and even triggering. Make sure your students are aware of the many counselling resources they can access through TCU. The Counseling & Mental Health Center is now located on the 2nd floor of Jarvis Hall. Please check out and direct your students to the website for more information and updates: <https://counseling.tcu.edu/>. These services include:
- The TCU Counseling and Mental Health Center has a 24/7 counseling helpline that offers telephone counseling to all TCU students anytime, day or night, and even during semester breaks. Students can call the helpline at any time (even when Center is open) to speak with a trained counselor who is familiar with the resources at TCU. If you feel the need to talk with a counselor, please call 817-257-7233.
 - TCU's Let's Talk mental health consulting program is available on campus in Tucker 003E, 10:00 am – 3:00 pm, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Let's Talk also offers phone and zoom options for students. These phone or zoom services are available 10:00 am – 3:00

pm, Monday, Thursday, and Friday. Anyone wishing to utilize Let's Talk by phone or zoom can email at lets.talk@tcu.edu with suggested times to schedule a meeting.

This program is a good option for students who want to consult with a professional but may not feel a need for an actual counseling appointment. Faculty and staff members are also welcome to use Let's Talk for consulting about how to best serve students who may be dealing with relevant issues. This Let's Talk service is done on a drop-in basis — no appointments are made.

- Crisis Care Counseling is available Monday through Friday, 9:00am – 4:00pm. During this time, students can come to the Center and be seen by one of the drop-in/crisis response counselors. Students can also call the 24/7 phone counseling helpline at 817-257-7233 to speak with one of the phone counselors.

If a student is experiencing an urgent mental health crisis outside of the Center's crisis counseling hours, they can call the 24/7 phone counseling helpline at 817-257-7233 to speak with a counselor. Students can also call the TCU Police at 817-257-777, visit a local behavioral health treatment center, such as Mesa Springs, or the county Emergency Room at John Peter Smith Hospital.