



VSB – INDIGENOUS EDUCATION SAFE AND CARING SCHOOLS

RAISING
AWARENESS

CULTURE IS NOT A COSTUME

HOW NOT TO CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE HALLOWEEN

The autumn season is upon us, and soon it will be Halloween. This time of year brings with it decisions on costume choice. While dressing up is meant to be fun and exciting, it also runs the risk of offending others with costumes that are offensive to other cultures. 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.

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.

Examine your own practices

Are you wearing a costume during Halloween? 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?

Be an advocate

If you see a costume that doesn't sit right with you, start a conversation with that person. 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.

LINKS (Click on headline)

CBC : Teacher finds teachable moment about cultural stereotypes

Huffington Post: Student group takes a stand against racist costumes

My Culture is NOT a Culture

