

## DESCRIPTION

Although American Indians—long before the country was called “The United States of America” or the term “indian” was used here—are the first residents of the North American continent, European settlers quickly took over the land and killed or removed the majority of all indigenous people. Well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century there was widespread, legalized discrimination against American Indians. In fact until, 1924 with the passage of the Snyder Act, indigenous people were not even considered citizens of the U. S. Even after being made citizens, *de facto* discrimination existed; the first civil rights law passed in the U. S. was passed in 1945 in Alaska to protect the rights of the indigenous people there.

This lesson plan uses the story “I Am Indopino” by Gene Tagaban, a noted Tlingit storyteller, actor, dancer, musician, trainer, and speaker whose heritage is Cherokee, Tlingit, and Filipino. This story brings together Tagaban’s personal story, the history of discrimination against American Indians in Alaska, and the story of Elizabeth Peratrovich, who helped pass the 1945 Anti-Discrimination Act in Alaska, the first of its kind in the country.

This two-day lesson plan offers an accessible way to talk about issues related to indigenous peoples, especially the ongoing consequences of the invasion of their land, the importance of knowing and claiming all of who we are, and the necessity of knowing our history and our heroes.

"I Am Indopino" is meant to be told and heard aloud rather than read. While we have done our best to locate the proper spellings of names and phrases, in some cases the complexity of the language made it difficult to transcribe except in phonetic form. We apologize for any inconsistencies or misspellings and welcome corrections.



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# I AM INDOPINO:

OR, HOW TO ANSWER THE  
QUESTION, "WHO ARE YOU?"

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While this lesson plan is designed to take two 45-minute class periods, it could be completed in one class period if students read and/or listen to the story on their own. Students can read and listen to "I Am Indopino" by going to [www.racebridgesforschools.com](http://www.racebridgesforschools.com) and choosing "I Am Indopino" under the "Lesson Plans" heading. There they can download the story excerpts in PDF format and listen to the audio excerpts. Make sure students have access to computers that can open PDF and audio files. This lesson can be extended into a longer unit completed over three to four days.

**Recommended Method:** *Although this will take more time, the best way to complete this lesson plan is to listen to the excerpts in class, stopping after each excerpt to allow students to answer questions and discuss their responses to the story.*

## **PURPOSE**

- To expose students to the history and resilience of American Indians/indigenous people
- To examine the importance of telling and learning about personal and cultural history
- To equip students with skills to make critical judgments about history and how it has been taught

## **OUTCOMES**

By the end of this lesson, each student will

- Be familiar with some of the history of American Indian resistance to discrimination
- Understand the importance of knowing one's own story
- Respond to the issues and themes of the story
- Relate their own experience to the story

## **MATERIALS**

- Teacher Instructions
- Handout #1: Excerpts from "I Am Indopino" by Gene Tagaban
- Handout #2: Discussion Questions



# **I AM INDOPINO:** OR, HOW TO ANSWER THE QUESTION, "WHO ARE YOU?"

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## **LESSON PLAN**

### **SESSION ONE**

1. Introduction and Summary of "I Am Indopino" (5 minutes)
2. Excerpt #1 and Pair Share (19 minutes)
3. Excerpt #2 and Pair Share (16 minutes)
4. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

### **SESSION TWO**

1. Review and Introduction to Excerpt 3 (5 minutes)
2. Excerpt #3 and Pair Share (20 minutes)
3. Wrap Up Discussion (20 minutes)



## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

### DAY ONE

#### **I. INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY OF THE STORY "I AM INDOPINO: OR, HOW TO ANSWER THE QUESTION, "WHO ARE YOU?" (5 minutes)**

Place students in pairs; students will discuss story excerpts #1 and 2 with their partner and excerpt #3 with their partner and another pair. Begin with students in pairs so that they can begin discussing excerpts as soon as they finish listening to and/or reading them. Do not let students choose their own partners; either have them count off into random pairs or place them in pairs you believe will be most productive.

Introduce your students to the real-life story "I Am Indopino" by Gene Tagaban. Explain that they will have the chance to discuss each of the excerpts after listening to and/or reading them.

**Today we're going to begin listening to [and/or reading] excerpts from the story "I Am Indopino" by Gene Tagaban, a Tlingit, Cherokee, and Filipino storyteller. In this story, Tagaban tells multiple stories: his own experience in 21<sup>st</sup>-century United States, a Tlingit creation story, and the story of a Tlingit civil rights activist.**

**Tagaban weaves together historical and personal stories to explore larger themes and questions. Tagaban explores the complexity of personal identity in light of his own multi-ethnic background while extending the question "Who am I?" to all of us. He illuminates the stereotypes that still surround indigenous people, in particular American Indians, and how those stereotypes get in the way of seeing people for who they are in particular. Tagaban also demonstrates how our histories—whether historical events, folk tales, or heroes—help shape who we are and how we understand ourselves.**

**Today, we will listen to [and/or read] the first two of three excerpts from this story. After each excerpt, you will have the chance to share briefly your reactions and thoughts. Tomorrow, we will finish the last excerpt of the story, and we will end with a longer time to share your own experiences.**



## **2. EXCERPT #1 & PAIR SHARE (19 minutes)**

**I'm going to give you a handout with an excerpt from "I Am Indopino" and a handout with discussion questions. We will listen to the story aloud and you can follow along if you like. After we listen, I will ask you to jot down a few of your thoughts and then share them with a partner.**

Hand out the excerpts and discussion questions; play excerpt #1. Give students two to three minutes to respond on their own in writing to the questions associated with the excerpt (they should choose the ones they find most interesting). Then ask students to discuss their answers with their partner; each person should take 60-90 seconds to share his or her answer. Ask a few pairs to share their answers with the class; take no more than two to four minutes for this. Be sure to keep students moving so that there is time to get to the next excerpt.

## **3. EXCERPT #2 & PAIR SHARE (16 minutes)**

Play excerpt #2. Give students three to four minutes to answer the questions associated with the excerpt (again allowing them to choose the ones that attract them). Then ask them to share their answers with their partner; each person should take 60-90 seconds to share his or her answer.

## **4. CLASS WRAP UP (5 minutes)**

Have pairs share their general reactions to the excerpts with one another and then with the whole class. Or you may want to focus their responses by having the class brainstorm some lists together, such as what they found most surprising in the excerpts, what the themes of the story are so far, the connections they can make between this event and more recent events, and so on. Or you might want to get them thinking about the last excerpt they will listen to and/or read during the second day of the lesson plan and have them forecast what they think will happen next in the story or share their hopes for how the story will end.

## **DAY TWO**

### **I. REVIEW & INTRODUCTION TO EXCERPT #3 (5 minutes)**

Review with students what you heard, read, and discussed during Day One. Consider having a student summarize the readings and discussions that took place during that class to include students who were absent during the lesson and to get everyone "on the same page" for the



second half of the lesson. Let students know that they will listen to the last excerpt and have more time for small group and whole class discussion and that they will have the opportunity to share experiences of their own that relate to the story "I Am Indopino." Ask students to get together with their pair share partners so that they are ready to begin discussing as soon as the excerpt ends. Be sure to find partners for the students who were absent on Day One; you may want to place those students with already formed pairings so they can catch up quickly.

### **3. EXCERPT #3 and SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (20 minutes)**

Listen to the final excerpt and then ask pairs to join another pair to make a group of four. You may need to have one group of six if there is not an even number of pairs. Ask students to identify a time keeper for this activity to make sure they do not exceed the time allotted for discussion.

### **4. CLASS DISCUSSION and WRAP UP (20 minutes)**

Call students back together and have each group share one major concept, impression, or feeling that they will take away from the story and their discussion. Ask students to share something from their own personal experiences that relate to this story; this might be about their own multi-ethnic background, pride in their own ethnic history, an elder who told them stories from their own culture, and so on. Consider asking students to do some writing on this topic for homework or extending the lesson with one of the ideas below.

## **LESSON EXTENSION IDEAS**

1. Split the class into groups and have them research the following topics:
  - Ways in which American Indians were systematically discriminated against in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - The fight for civil rights for American Indians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Heroes in the civil rights movement for American Indians.
  - Current trends in political movements among American Indians.
2. Split the class into groups and have them do research into the different nations that Tagaban identifies in his story (see p. 1). How are these nations distinct from one another? What do they have in common? How are they each maintaining and developing their cultural and political power and identities today?
3. Bring in or have students find visual images of American Indians throughout the history of the United States (be sure to include the "crying Indian" used in the



1970s ad for Keep America Beautiful (Google "crying Indian"). Post the images in chronological order around the classroom. Have students walk around the room and look at each image, taking notes on the following:

- How does this portray American Indians?
  - How does this image portray American Indians in relation to the United States?
  - What distinguishes the person or people in this image as American Indian(s)?
  - How do the images change over time?
  - If the only thing you knew about American Indians came from these pictures, how would you describe them?
4. Supplement the above with the short video "How Hollywood Stereotyped the Native Americans" on YouTube.
  5. Gene Tagaban calls himself "Indopino" as a way to capture his indigenous/Indian and his Filipino heritage. We have heard famous figures recently describe their multi-ethnic backgrounds in various ways: Tiger Woods has referred to himself as "Cablinasian" to describe himself as Caucasian, Black, Indian, and Asian, while President Barack Obama has referred to himself as a "mutt" to describe his coming from a white American mother and black African father. Have your students do research comparing census data from the most recent year before the category "multi-ethnic" was used and the last census that used the category "multi-ethnic." Have them create charts using the different racial categories to track how they changed. Have students interview their parents and grandparents to find out how many different ethnicities, races, and/or nationalities are in their own background. As a class, define what "multi-ethnic" means and discuss whether it is a category that we should use, whether it is helpful, harmful, or neutral and why.
  6. Buy a copy of the curriculum *Kaleidoscope: Valuing Difference and Creating Inclusion* (listed in the resource list below) and teach diversity in a more in-depth way.
  7. Watch one of the videos or read one of the books listed in the resource list below and discuss it in class.



### **SOME THOUGHTS ON LANGUAGE**

The words that we use to talk about different groups change over time, and it is important that teachers help their students understand the importance of language and its nuances. Sometimes language is in flux, and we have to use it as sensitively as we can even when there isn't consensus on "correct" usage. For example, "Indian" has long been the term used in the United States to refer to people from the First Nations.

As most of us know, however, "Indian" is a label that was thrust upon indigenous people and is not an accurate. The term "Native American" has its own problems as indigenous people were on this continent long before it was "American." Some current terms that are in use are "indigenous," which means any group of people who are originally from a place, and "First Nations," which indicates that there are people who were nations on this continent long before the nations of the United States of America or Canada came into being.

"Indigenous" and "First Nations" also have the advantage of linking people with others around the world who are indigenous, allowing for connection and some greater political power. While "indigenous" and "First Nation" are better terms, they still have the drawback of acting as umbrella terms that tend to erase differences among people. Among First Nations there are many nations, such as Chippewa, Lakota, and Navajo; referring to someone who is from the Apache nation as a "Native American" or "American Indian" or "First Nations' person" is similar to calling someone from the United States a "North American" and then assuming that person is the same as a Canadian!

Take the time to discuss these differences with your students while making clear that this is meant to make them more aware of the richness of and diversity among people who come from First Nations not to paralyze them or to make them feel they can say nothing at all!



## RESOURCES

### BOOKS

Kivel, Paul. *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*. Philadelphia: New Society, 1996. Written primarily for a white audience but useful for people of all backgrounds.

Loewen, James W. *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. New York: Touchstone, 1996. Loewen critiques the way that history has been taught in American classrooms, focusing on its bland, Eurocentric bias. He urges educators to focus on real, diverse stories that make up our history. Eye opening for teachers and students alike. Very good sections on the history of the First Nations.

O'Halloran, Susan. *Kaleidoscope: Valuing Difference & Creating Inclusion*. Available at [www.susanohalloran.com](http://www.susanohalloran.com). A two-level curriculum for schools about diversity, race and dealing with difference. O'Halloran approaches diversity, race, and racism in a way that makes an often intimidating subject approachable and even fun. O'Halloran avoids blame and empowers students to uncover their own biases and to recognize institutional racism and to work for both personal and societal change.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*. New York: Basic Books, 1997. Written by a professor of psychology for a diverse audience. Focuses specifically on race, racism, and the construction of racial identity among adolescents.

Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995. Zinn presents American history from the perspective of those who do not traditionally write history—women, people of color, working class people, and so forth. He provides a more thorough explanation of the interaction between white immigrants and indigenous people in the U. S., from first contact through the creation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, than most history textbooks.



## **VIDEOS**

Berhaag, Bertram (Producer/Director). *The Complete Blue Eyed*. Available at [www.newsreel.org](http://www.newsreel.org). This edition contains multiple versions of the "blue-eyed/brown-eyed" experiment that demonstrates how swiftly prejudice affects people. Originally used with grade school students, this exercise has been used with adults with the same results. This edition comes with a facilitator's guide. 93 minutes total; can be watched in shorter segments.

Four Worlds International Institute for Human and Community Development. *Healing the Hurts*. 2004. Available at [oyate.org](http://oyate.org). Viewers join Native American participants from Canada and the US, during a four-day culturally-based healing process for understanding and recovering from this type of traumatic experience. (NOTE: This is a very emotional and provocative film, powerful in so many ways.)

Lucasiewicz, M. (Producer). *True Colors*. Northbrook, IL: MTI Film & Video, 1991. An ABC video with Diane Sawyer that follows two discrimination testers, one black and one white, as they look for jobs and housing and try to buy a car. A good look at institutional racism. 19 minutes.

## **ORGANIZATIONS and WEBSITES**

<http://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com>. This site focuses on teaching about First Nations through literature, but the web site is maintained by a professor who is registered at Nambe Pueblo in New Mexico and who entertains all kinds of issues related to respectful teaching about and engagement with First Peoples. Many links to resources and thoughtful evaluations of resources by and about First Peoples.

[www.cradleboard.org](http://www.cradleboard.org). Buffy Sainte-Marie's educational website with lesson plans and resources. Also the site to find the full text of her story "Making Things Better".

[www.dreamcatchers.org/fpty](http://www.dreamcatchers.org/fpty). First Peoples TV. Contains documentaries by and for indigenous people.



[www.oyate.org](http://www.oyate.org). Oyate is a Native organization working to see that our lives and histories are portrayed honestly, and so that all people will know our stories belong to us. For Indian children, it is as important as it has ever been for them to know who they are and what they come from. For all children, it is time to know and acknowledge the truths of history. Only then will they come to have the understanding and respect for each other that now, more than ever, will be necessary for life to continue (description from the website). Great resources for teachers of all grade levels.

A Recollection of Civil Rights Leader Elizabeth Peratrovich (1911-1958). An on-line article about Elizabeth Peratrovich that includes the history of "settling" Alaska and treatment of its indigenous people.

[http://www.alaskool.org/projects/native\\_gov/recollections/peratrovich/Elizabeth\\_1.htm](http://www.alaskool.org/projects/native_gov/recollections/peratrovich/Elizabeth_1.htm)

**Title VII Indian Education Program.** A page on the website of the Anchorage School District that includes general resources related to American Indians in Alaska as well as resources about Elizabeth Peratrovich.

<http://www.asdk12.org/depts/IndEd/resources/Peratrovich>

If you would like to learn more about Gene Tagaban or engage him to perform at your school, go to [www.genetagaban.com](http://www.genetagaban.com).

**Note to Teachers:**

The **bolded** text can be read out aloud and followed word for word; however, you may want to read over the material a few times so that you are comfortable putting these ideas into your own words, in the way in which you normally talk to your students.

# I AM INDOPINO: OR, HOW TO ANSWER THE QUESTION, "WHO ARE YOU?"

with Storyteller Gene Tagaban



## Handout #1: Story Transcript Story #1

I walked into a Starbucks in Los Angeles, California.

And as I walked in, everyone closed their laptops, put their movie scripts underneath their seats. They turned off their blackberries, blueberries, cranberries, whatever they call them nowadays, you know.

And they watched me as I went up to the counter.

And as I approached the counter, the young lady behind the counter, she raised her hand, as if she is swearing on the Bible, and she said, "How."

And I thought to myself, "How? How come they're always asking Indians 'How?' We know how, just give us a chance."

So I ordered my drink. "I'll take a four-pump, tall, soy Chai, no water, no foam, extra hot, please."

And as I was standing there waiting for my drink, all the people in the Starbucks, they gathered together and they sent up a representative to come and talk to me.

He came and asked me, he said, "Excuse me, sir. Sir. Are you an Indian?"

"Am I an Indian? Well, that really depends. I'm from Alaska, so I could be Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Inupiat, Yupik, Chukpik, Athabascan, Aleut, Eyak.

From Canada, I could be First Nations, blood Metis. I could be Northwest Coast, Southwest Coast, Plains, East Coast, Southeast.....but since I'm here in Los Angeles, California, am I an Indian? Yes."

And he asked me, "Are you a *real* Indian?"

And I turned, showed him my profile. And I said, "Look at that profile. That's a *real* Indian profile."



And then he crumpled up some paper. Threw it in front of me. Took an empty paper coffee cup. And tossed that in front of me. And he looked at me *r-e-a-l* close.

And I said, "What 'cha doin'?!"

He said, "If you're a real Indian, where's your tear?"

And I thought to myself, "I'm not that kinda Indian. I'm not the crying Indian."

He looked up at me, and he says, "I bet you have a real Indian name, like 'Runs With Horses,' 'Wind in His Hair,' 'Dances With Wolves.'"

"What's your name?" he asks.

"My name is Gene."

"Gene? What kinda Indian name is that?"

Then he asked me, "Are you a Shaman?"

Am I a Shaman?! You been to too many new-age gatherings, reading too many new-age magazines, new-age books, watching too many Hollywood movies. Am I a Shaman?!

I paused. And I turned, and I looked at him. And I said, "Yeah, I'm a Shaman."

And he looked up at me, and he says, "Can you heal me?"

Can I heal you?! Can I heal you?! (*sigh*)

So I threw my head back. Let my long, dark hair down. And I said, "Touch my hair..... One more time.....There you go. You're healed. That'll be fifty bucks."

And he asks me, "Who are you? Who are you?"

I took my four-pump, tall, soy Chai, no-water, no-foam drink, and I sat down at the table with all the other people there. And I told them, "My name, my Tlingit name is Gaay Yaaw. I'm of the Tak`deintaan Clan, the Raven Freshwater Sockeye Clan from Hoonah, Alaska. I'm the child of a Wooshkeetaan Eagle Shark Clan of Angoon in Juneau, Alaska. The grandchild of a Thunderbird. I'm Cherokee, Tlingit, and Filipino. You ask me, 'Who am I?' That is a question so many people are asking today, "Who am I? Who am I?"



You see, I'm reminded of my grandmother when you ask me that. I'm reminded of my Tlingit grandmother, my great-grandma. I remember sitting at her house watching television, eating berries, smoked salmon and pilot bread crackers. Sometimes, we would watch the hummingbirds out her window. She told me, "Son, I sure do love hummingbirds. They're really little fairies watching after you. I sure do love hummingbirds."

One day, we were looking out the window and we saw a rainbow. And she says, "Son, look at that rainbow. Every time you see a rainbow, you think good thoughts, and you'll get your pot of gold. Me, I already gave all mine away."

My Tlingit grandma, who would sit by the window as she sewed otter and seal skin moccasins. She made button blankets and vests, or she would bead eagle or raven designs for friends and family.

As she sewed, she told me stories. She told me stories about Raven, how Raven was walking along the beach. It was the beginning of time, the world was dark. The stars, the moon and sun were kept in boxes by a wealthy old man. Raven went to the house of this old man, and it was there Raven tricked the old man into giving him the boxes.

Raven opened the boxes, and freed the stars, the moon and sun into the nighttime sky forever. And then he took the last box, the one that is called the box of daylight. Raven, walking along the beach, he opened that box and he freed daylight into the world. And the people were able to see the world clearly for the first time, and they marveled at the beauty of it. This is how Raven brought daylight to the world.

She told me stories about how Raven was walking along the beach and he looks far out to sea, and he sees an island of fire throwing flames into the nighttime sky.

Raven's brother, Hawk, comes walking along the beach. Raven asks him, "Can you help me?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to get that fire for me."

"How am I going to do that?"

Raven puts a branch in Hawk's beak, and put some pitch at the end of that branch. And he says, "Now, fly. Fly out there and get me that fire."

And he says, "Yax̱ x̱'wán. That means have courage, be brave. What you are doing is for all the people."



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So, Hawk flies out there. Flies once. Twice. Three times. Four times he flies to the fire and he gets it. He flies back to shore. He's been flying a long time. He's tired. That flame burns at his beak. Melts it down to the curved beak it is now. Although Hawk is suffering and is in much pain, he hangs on to that fire. Because he knows it's for all the people.

Hawk makes it back to shore. And Raven takes that fire and he throws it into the rocks. He throws it into the trees, into the water, into the mountains. Raven throws that fire into the animals. He takes that fire and throws it into the human beings. Now we all have that fire. But more important, we all share that spirit. That spirit.

My grandma, she says, "Son, you are the light of the world. You are the light of the world."



## Story #2

Who are you?

My name is Gene Tagaban. I'm Cherokee, Tlingit, and Filipino. I'm an Indopino.

My grandmother. My great-grandmother. My Tlingit grandmother. She told me stories about the time the world was dark. About how people came and took the land, took the drums, took our spirit. They treated our people, the native people, badly. They had signs up on businesses, stores on the doors that read, "No natives allowed." We catered to whites only. No dogs, no natives.

My Tlingit grandmother. She told me about the times native people could only sit in the balcony of the movie theaters. They were not allowed to sit downstairs with the white peoples. She said, "Those balcony seats are the best seats anyways." We would accidentally drop things on them. I guess they didn't mind because they kept us up there anyways.

My Tlingit grandmother. She told me stories about how the native peoples were forced to live in run-down shacks along the water. The natives sold their artwork on the docks, and those people would walk by and laugh and spit on them. If they wanted something, they would be nice about it, but any other time, they were ugly.

Many natives faced unemployment and poverty due to segregation and discrimination based on their race. My grandma said times were hard, sad. But there was one. There was one. She was strong. Strong, beautiful Tlingit woman. She was of the Lukaax.ádi Clan. She was of the Raven Clan. She was born in Petersburg, Alaska. Her name was Elizabeth Peratrovich, she says. She says Elizabeth Peratrovich. Elizabeth, she went to school, she got her education in Western Washington University. And she met a man by the name of Roy Peratrovich. And when they went back up to Alaska, they wanted to get a home in Juno, but nobody would lease her a home because she was native.

And so Elizabeth and Roy, they said this is enough. This is enough. They said, "No more signs. We need better housing, good jobs, and good education for the people. And the right to sit wherever we wanted."

Ah, my Tlingit grandmother, when she talked about Elizabeth, she just smiled. She just smiled. It was as if she was looking past me. It was as if she was living it right now in the moment, as she talked about Elizabeth.



She says, "Elizabeth and Roy are, they are good people. They fought for the anti-discrimination bill." At first, they turned it down. They turned it down. But it was one day where everyone gathered at the city center there. Everyone. The place was packed.

The bill passed the House and went into the Senate. And it was in the Senate where there was a heated discussion. One of those Senators who opposed the bill said, "Who are these people barely out of savagery who want to associate with us whites with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind us?"

Elizabeth, she just sat there quiet. Respectful, she listened.

Finally, when it was her turn to speak, she spoke these words that would change history. "I would not have expected that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind gentleman with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind them of our bill of rights."

Elizabeth went on to say, "There are three kinds of persons who practice discrimination. First, the politicians who want to maintain an inferior minority group so that he can always promise them something. Second, the Mr. and Mrs. Jones who aren't quite sure of their social position and who are nice to you on one occasion and can't see you on another, depending on who they are with. Third, the great superman who believes in the superiority of the white race."

"Oh," my grandma said, "the hall was silent. You could hear a pin drop."

And then they asked Elizabeth if she thought that the proposed bill would eliminate discrimination. Elizabeth said, "Do your laws against larceny and even murder prevent these crimes? No. Laws will not eliminate crimes, but at least you as legislators can assert to the world that you recognize the evil of the present situation and speak your intent to help us overcome discrimination."

When she was finished, there was a wild burst of applause. When I looked at my grandma, my great-grandma, my Tlingit grandma as she was telling me this story, tears were running down her cheek. That anti-discrimination bill passed February 8, 1945, twenty years before that beautiful black woman, Rosa Parks, refused to sit in the back of the bus.

My grandma, my great-grandma, my Tlingit grandma she told me that story like, as if it were yesterday. She says, "Son, you be proud of who you are. You are Tlingit. You're Tlingit. You be proud of who you are. You be like that Raven. You let your light shine. You have a special gift, and it lives in your heart. You let your light shine. You open your box, and let your light shine throughout the world. Light the fires in the hearts of the people, son, and you will see their spirit shine. You are Tlingit."



### Story #3

Who are you?

My name is Gene Tagaban. I'm Cherokee, Tlingit, and Filipino. I'm an Indopino.

So I sat in that Starbucks, and I was telling the people about my grandma as they asked the question, "Who are you? Who are you?" And I told them, I am Tlingit. But I am also Filipino, I'm Filipino.

You see, my grandma, they had an arranged marriage for her. But being the strong woman that she is, she had nothing to do with that. And so she ran away. And it was one day when she was picking berries that she met a man. A young man, her same age. A Filipino man. That man became my grandfather.

You see, my grandfather, he left the Philippines when he was a young man, a young boy. He made his way over to Hawaii, and it was there that he worked in the fields. Worked in the fields of the sugar cane, the pineapples. And he made enough money so that he can bring his brother over. And they worked in the fields, and they made enough money so that they could bring their other brother over. And they made enough money in the fields, and they brought their other brother over.

The four brothers, they worked in the fields together, and they made enough money so that they can go over to the United States. California, San Diego. And that is where the brothers separated.

My grandfather and his younger brother. They made their way up the coast. They jumped on the trains, they were hobos.

But how did they make their money? They boxed.

You see, there is the boxing circuit, the Filipino boxing circuit going up the west coast. And my grandfather, he was a boxer. He was a good boxer. He was a Filipino warrior, as he made his way up the coast, up to Washington. And it was there that he, he jumped onto a boat. And he made his way up to Alaska. They found him, and they kicked him off in Ketchikan or somewhere.

And he worked in the canneries, he made his way through Alaska. And it was one day that this Filipino warrior was picking berries in the field. And he met a Tlingit woman. And they fell in love, and they had a family. And they made babies.

Can you imagine that? My grandfather, fighting his way up. My grandfather was tough, you know, he had to be tough because he had to deal with my grandma. And if you know anything about the Tlingit woman, oh leh, they're tough people.



So I am Tlingit and Filipino, but I'm also part Cherokee.

And I know you're asking the question, "How did a Cherokee get up there to Alaska?"

Well, you see, my father the Tlingit-Filipino, he met a Cherokee woman. My mom, she's full-blood Cherokee. *Real* Cherokee. Not the wannabe type of Cherokee that everyone says they are. She is *real* Cherokee.

But she was going to nursing school in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and her roommate was my auntie. My father, he was on leave from the military, and he went to go see his sister – my auntie.

And on a blind date, they got together, and they fell in love. At least that's how my father says. My mom, she didn't want anything to do with him at first. So he went back, sent letters to her. And she eventually fell in love.

He came and got her, and they went up to New York City and got married. And then from New York, they went to Chicago where I was born.

I know you're asking the question, "If you're a real Indian, wouldn't you have been born in a village on a reservation?" Well I tell you what, before Chicago was there, I'm sure there is an Indian village there.

And so, my parents got together. And soon after I was born, we were moved up to Alaska, where my father came from. When I look at my mom, my Cherokee mom, and I wonder where did she get that strength, that spirit. And I go back, I go back to the homeland of the Cherokee people. North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee. But the Indian people would thrive.

But in the 1830's, they were invaded by the United States government. They made the Indian Removal Act, and they gathered up the Cherokee people. Fifteen-thousand of them, in the middle of winter, were marched 800 miles. From North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee to Oklahoma. Four thousand of them died. The women, the children, the elderly, and the brokenhearted.

But my mama, my Cherokee mother, *my* ancestors survived. They lived and they thrived. And that spirit was passed on to my greats, my great-greats. All the way to my mother. That spirit was passed on to me. I feel that spirit today.

So you ask me the question, "Who am I? Who am I?"

I am Cherokee, Tlingit, and Filipino. My native name is Gaay Yaaw. I'm an Indopino.

My ancestors survived many things, and they are alive today. Just like you, sitting here now.



# I AM INDOPINO:

OR, HOW TO ANSWER THE  
QUESTION, "WHO ARE YOU?"

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It doesn't matter if we're white, black, red, or yellow. We have all gone through similar experiences, similar historical experiences. But we are here today. We are alive. And that spirit still lives in us today.

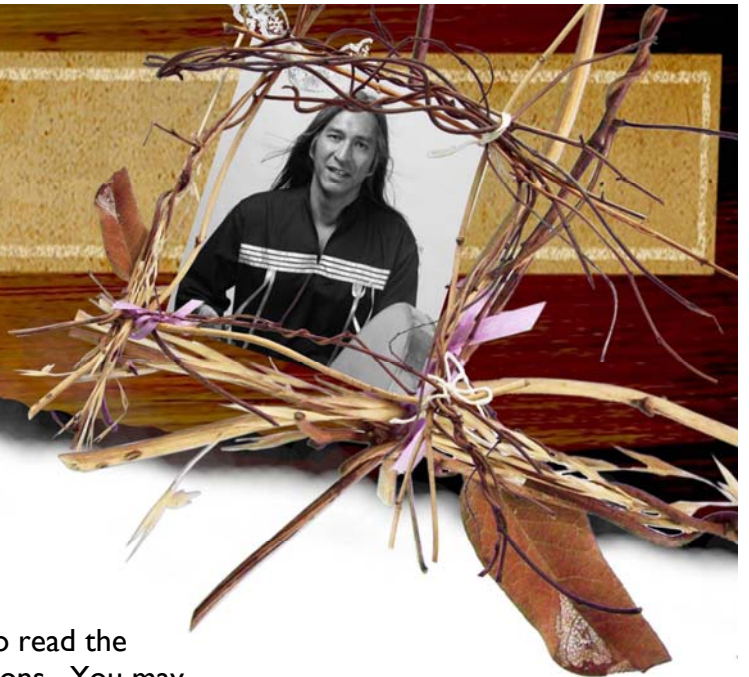
So I ask you the question, "Who are you? Who are you? Who are you?"

And I walked out of that Starbucks, and the sun was shining down on me. I felt this cool breeze and thought to myself, "It's a beautiful day."



# I AM INDOPINO: OR, HOW TO ANSWER THE QUESTION, "WHO ARE YOU?"

with Storyteller Gene Tagaban



## Handout #2: Discussion Questions

### Directions

After listening to each excerpt, take a minute to read the following questions and write down your reactions. You may not have time to address all the questions; focus on those that grab your attention. Then share your answers with a partner.

### Excerpt #1

Gene recounts a representative experience of being tagged as the stereotypical Indian when he goes into a very modern Starbucks to order his standard “four-pump, tall, soy Chai, no water, no foam, extra hot.” With his tongue firmly in cheek, he tries to answer some of the misguided questions and accusations that other lay at his feet. Here we here the first time the question “Who are you?” appears. By way of an answer, Gene then describes his grandmother and tells the Tlingit creation story about Raven that she used to tell him. This story recounts how the world got light from Raven and Hawk and how this light animates and connects all of life from trees and mountains to animals and humans.

1. Why do you think Gene juxtaposes his contemporary experience in a Starbucks with the ancient stories of his Tlingit heritage?
2. Gene spends some time distinguishing among all the different nations and communities from which he could come in Alaska and Canada. What do you know about the differences between and among the larger group that we lump together under terms like “Native American,” “Indian,” and “American Indian”



# I AM INDOPINO:

OR, HOW TO ANSWER THE  
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3. One of the people questioning Gene in the Starbuck's throws garbage on the floor and asks, "If you're a real Indian, where's your tear?" This refers to a famous ad put out by the organization Keep America Beautiful that shows an American Indian in stereotypical dress canoeing in polluted waters, walking in streets strewn with garbage, and shedding a tear at the way we have mistreated the environment. This ad is still credited for being an important inspiration for the environmental movement. So why do you think Gene says "I'm not that kinda Indian. I'm not the crying Indian"?
4. How does Gene answer the question, "Who am I?" How do you?



**Excerpt #2**

In this excerpt, Gene recounts his grandmother's experience of growing up with discrimination and the story of Elizabeth Peratrovich, a Tlingit woman largely responsible for passing the 1945 Anti-Discrimination Bill in Alaska, the first of its kind in the United States. Gene's grandmother connects the story of the heroism of Peratrovich to the story of Raven filling the world with light and fire.

1. How is the discrimination against and the fight for civil rights for American Indians and that of African Americans similar, given the information you read/heard in this story?
2. Elizabeth Peratrovich says "there are three kinds of persons who practice discrimination." Do you agree with her characterization? How would you define those types today?
3. Gene tells the story of Peratrovich and how his grandmother would tell that story like it was yesterday. He then tells us that his grandmothers would say, "be proud of who you are. You are Tlingit. . . .You be like that Raven. You let your light shine. . . ." Why do you think Gene's grandmother connected those two stories?



**Excerpt #3:**

**Directions**

For this final excerpt you and your conversation partner should join with another pair to discuss any of the following questions that interest you. Assign one of you as a timekeeper so that you finish in the time allowed (10 minutes).

In this final excerpt, Gene defines himself as "Indopino," a mixture of Indian (Cherokee and Tlingit) and Filipino. He tells the story of his Tlingit grandmother's marriage to his immigrant Filipino grandfather. Then he explains how his father married a Cherokee woman. This leads to a short history of the decimation of the Cherokees through the Indian Removal Act. But, Gene emphasizes, his family survived and even thrived, and that is part of who he is, too. Gene ends his story optimistically, walking out of the Starbuck's and thinking "It's a beautiful day."

1. Why do you think Gene waits until the end of his story to reveal his Filipino and Cherokee heritage? How do you relate to his multi-ethnic background?
2. When Gene answers the imagined question about being born in a village or reservation, he says, "before Chicago was there, I'm sure there is an Indian village there." What point do you think Gene is trying to make?
3. Gene says that the Cherokees were "invaded by the United States government." Have you thought about the history of the U. S. government and American Indians in terms of invasion before? How does it make you feel to hear the word "invasion" used? What questions does that raise for you?
4. Gene suggests that "We have all gone through similar experiences, similar historical experiences. But we are here today. We are alive. And that spirit still lives in us today." What do you think Gene's ultimate message is? Do you agree that we all have something in common? If so, what? If not, what separates us?
5. Gene turns around the question people keep asking him to ask his listeners, "Who are you? Who are you? Who are you?" How would you answer that question after listening to this story? Does that answer differ from how you might have answered it before hearing the story?

