

Teacher's Corner: *From The Inside Out*, A Documentary Film

by Jennifer Lacroix



[Editors' Note: Documentary Educational Resources (DER) is a non-profit educational organization in Watertown, Massachusetts, dedicated to producing and distributing anthropology films and videos for the purpose of fostering cross-cultural understanding. Written texts and study guides accompany many of the films, which have been used in anthropology classes throughout the U.S. and abroad. DER's collection includes John Marshall's series on the !Kung San, which will be the focus of a forthcoming *AnthroNotes* article.]

From the Inside Out. 2003. April Chabries, W. Grant Williams, Dan Fredley (27 minutes). For all ages. Classroom lesson plans for K-12. Visit <http://www.der.org/films/from-the-inside-out.html>

The Ethnographic documentary film, *From the Inside Out*, explores the evolution of basket weaving in Navajo cul-

ture, as told by Navajo basket weavers living in Utah. As the basket weavers go through the complex process of basket construction, they share their oral histories, revealing the important contribution baskets make to the balance, harmony, and beauty of Navajo life. Once produced for purely functional purposes, baskets gradually became integrated into various Navajo ceremonies, elevating them to sacred and symbolic significance.

This film is informative and easily accessible to many audiences and ages. It is also well-paced, moving quickly from one participant to the next as it serves as "a story board of information." *From the Inside Out* would be of particular interest to teachers and students of geography, social studies, anthropology, sociology, and U.S. history.

As cultural objects, baskets reflect the adaptations of a people who experienced a turbulent history and had to adapt in order to survive. The influences of cultural oppression, trade, and technology over time led to a diminished number of basket weavers in Navajo society, but in the 1970s Navajo culture experienced a renaissance in basket making, for both ceremonial and secular purposes, initiated by a group of families from the Douglas Mesa region of the Utah reservation. This



From the film, *From the Inside Out*

renaissance led to a thriving trade in Navajo baskets, which is still seen today. *From the Inside Out* clearly demonstrates how basket making is integral to the culture and livelihood of the Navajo.

Accompanying this engaging 27-minute film are lesson plans particularly relevant for grades 3-12. These can be found at the Documentary Educational Resources' website (www.der.org). Below are some examples of lesson plan objectives and questions relating to the film.

Lesson Plan Objectives

Students will:

- Examine what role tradition plays in societies.
- Explore issues of representation, particularly of Native Americans.
- Reflect on the value of oral history and storytelling.
- Analyze the role of the arts as a form of communication and response to tradition and change.
- Explore issues of identity and land rights within minority groups.
- Evaluate documentary film for its insider/outsider view points, events (visual, sound, editing), and/or anthropological uses.

Before the Film

Reflect on one or all of the following:

- What do you know or believe to be true about the Navajos and how they live?
- What are some similarities and differences between their lives and yours?
- What are some of the ways in which you could discover the answers to these questions?
- What kinds of rituals or significant experiences do all workers go through as they move from novice to expert in their field?
- If you could pick a craft for yourself, what would you pick and why? What would this art form represent to you and/or others?
- How would you describe America to someone who has never been here? What material items or objects represent your cultural experience of America?
- In order to consider yourself successful, what must you have, do, or achieve?

- Have students write five to ten questions that reflect what they might want to know about the Navajo people specifically or American Indians in general.

During the Film

The film begins with an older generation of Navajo basket weavers speaking in their native language. Then a younger English-speaking member of the Navajo tribe, Lorraine Black, describes the ancient Navajo way of basket weaving. Discuss with your students this cultural transformation from older to younger generation, especially as it pertains to the concept of "cultural change." What do surface indicators such as dress, jewelry, or long hair tell you about Lorraine, her identity, her lifestyle, and her history? What are your expectations for the rest of the film, as based on this first scene? The teacher may choose to stop the tape when Charlie Todachinnie, the Medicine Man, appears to discuss this first question.

After watching the rest of the film, address the following questions:

- What is your initial impression of Lorriane when she first explains the process of basket making versus when you hear all of the various stories about Navajo life by the end of the film?
- What messages are the Navajo in the film trying to convey to a larger audience?
- American history students might explore the deeper representations within the artistic designs of the baskets while drawing connections to such issues as exploration, conquest, land rights and uses, and environmental sustainability.

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