

Should Washington's NFL Team Change Their Name?

Grade Level		Time	Standards/Competencies	
K-2	3-5	45–60 Minutes	Common Core Anchor: Reading: R1, R2 Writing: W1, W4, W5, W6 Speaking & Listening: SL1	SEL: Self-Awareness Social Awareness Relationship Skills Responsible Decision-Making
MS	8-12			



Web Related Connections

Lessons

[Lewis and Clark: The Unheard Voices](#)
[Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples Day](#)

Table Talk

[Sports, Mascots and Bias](#)

Other Resources

[ADL Welcomes Patent Office Decision Deeming Redskins Name 'Disparaging' to Native Americans](#)
[Letter to More than 2,700 Football Players Asking Them to Speak Out Against the Washington Football Team's Name](#)

Key Words

(See ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).)

bigotry
 controversial
 perspective
 public
 debate
 disparage
 slur
 sovereignty
 epithet
 identity
 stereotype
 symbolic
 merchandise
 Native American
 trademark

LESSON OVERVIEW

There has been a decades-old controversy over the Washington Redskins' name. The Washington Redskins, a National Football League (N.F.L.) team, has had their name for more than eighty years and has been criticized for using the term "redskins," which is a derogatory term for Native Americans. Over the years, there have been various advocacy efforts to pressure the football team to change their name. In early July 2020, FedEx, Nike and other major sponsors of the N.F.L. football team asked the team to change its name. In addition, several Native American leaders and organizations wrote to N.F.L. Commissioner Roger Goodell, demanding that the name be changed. As a result, in July 2020, the team announced: "In light of recent events around our country and feedback from our community, the Washington Redskins are announcing the team will undergo a thorough review of the team's name."

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the controversy, understand different perspectives about the use of Native American mascots in sports and reflect on their own points of view through activities and writing.

[Note to Teacher: It is important to reflect on and consider that you may have students in your classroom who are Native American and/or whose family members are Native American. Sometimes students feel relieved to discuss a topic that is relevant to their lives while others might feel awkward or embarrassed. This does not mean you should not discuss the topic; however, be careful not to name them, point out who is Native American or put specific students on the spot to speak for Native American people. In addition, because "redskins" is considered a slur, we have minimized the use of the term in the lesson.]

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand why the Washington D.C. football team's name is controversial and in the news.
- Students will explore different perspectives on the controversy regarding the Washington football team's name.
- Students will reflect on background information and the different perspectives in order to determine their own point of view.
- Students will express their opinion through an argumentative writing assignment, using evidence from various sources to convey their point of view.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- Background Information on the Controversy about the Washington Redskins' Team Name (for teacher)
- Washington Redskins Helmet with Logo (one for each student or project on board)
- 5–6 copies of each of the following articles:
 - “50 senators sign letter urging Redskins to change team name” (*USA Today Sports*, May 22, 2014, <http://ftw.usatoday.com/2014/05/senators-washington-redskins-team-name-letter>)
 - “Washington Redskins' Trademark Registrations Cancelled” (NPR, June 18, 2014, www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/06/18/323205099/u-s-patent-office-cancels-washington-redskins-trademark-registration); print out article and the Redskins letter
 - “National Congress of American Indians slams Redskins” (*USA Today*, October 11, 2013, www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/redskins/2013/10/11/national-congress-american-indians-report-redskins-name/2965075/)
 - Choose either the “Letter from Washington Redskins owner Dan Snyder to fans” (*The Washington Post*, October 9, 2013, www.washingtonpost.com/local/letter-from-washington-redskins-owner-dan-snyder-to-fans/2013/10/09/e7670ba0-30fe-11e3-8627-c5d7de0a046b_story.html) or the shorter article without letter “Dan Snyder defends Redskins name, cites ‘heritage’” (*USA Today*, October 9, 2013, www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/redskins/2013/10/09/dan-snyder-letter-respect-name/2953115/)
 - “Poll: Local Redskins Fans Reject Name Change, Won’t Buy Merch with New Name” (CBS DC, July 23, 2014, <http://washington.cbslocal.com/2014/07/23/poll-local-redskins-fans-reject-name-change-wont-buy-merch-with-new-name/>)
 - “A survey explores how Native Americans feel about the name Washington Redskins. No, it’s not that survey. This one is new.” (*The Washington Post*, August 9, 2019, www.washingtonpost.com/local/a-survey-explores-how-native-americans-feel-about-the-name-washington-redskins-no-its-not-that-survey-this-one-is-new/2019/08/09/e38553bc-b581-11e9-8949-5f36ff92706e_story.html)
 - “Native Youth to NFL: We are not your mascot” (The Z, July 8, 2020, www.indianz.com/News/2020/07/08/native-youth-to-nfl-we-are-not-your-masc.asp)
- Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer (one for each student)
- *Proud to Be* video (2014, 2 mins., National Congress of American Indians, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mR-tbOxlhvE&feature=youtu.be)

PROCEDURES



Information Sharing

1. Ask students: *What do you know about the Washington Redskins? Have you heard anything about the Washington D.C. football team in the news recently and if so, what?*
2. Briefly share the [background information about the controversy over the Washington Redskins' team name](#). Explain to students that they will learn more during the reading activity.
3. Project a picture of a [Washington Redskins Helmet with Logo](#) so that students can clearly see the logo or distribute a copy of the handout to each student.



Jigsaw Reading Activity: Different Points of View

1. Explain to students that they will read and discuss articles about the controversy using a jigsaw strategy. The jigsaw strategy provides an opportunity for students to learn about different aspects of a topic and then teach each other. The reading can be assigned for homework the night before which will give you more class time to discuss the articles.

- The following are links to seven articles that contain different perspectives on the Washington team name controversy, including pro and con arguments, opinion polls and letters. Divide the articles evenly among the students.

Article 1: [50 senators sign letter urging Redskins to change team name](#) (print article and letter)

Article 2: [Washington Redskins' Trademark Registrations Cancelled](#)

Article 3: [National Congress of American Indians slams Redskins](#)

Article 4: [Letter from Washington Redskins owner Dan Snyder to fans](#) (or shorter article that does not include the whole letter: [Dan Snyder defends Redskins name, cites 'heritage'](#))

Article 5: [Poll: Local Redskins Fans Reject Name Change, Won't Buy Merch with New Name](#)

Article 6: [A survey explores how Native Americans feel about the name Washington Redskins. No, it's not that survey. This one is new.](#)

Article 7: ["Native Youth to NFL: We are not your mascot"](#)

To manage the jigsaw, as you distribute the articles, assign a different letter (A, B, C, D, etc.) to everyone who has the same article. For example, if there are four students reading article #1, designate one student "A," one student "B," one student "C" and the last student "D" (so that later they can be distributed correctly). You can write the letter on the article to make it clear. Give students 10 minutes to read their articles silently.

- After reading the articles, divide students into letter groups so that each of the seven articles are represented in each group. For example, Group A will have someone who read article #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. When the groups are formed, give each student two minutes to explain the point of view represented in their article.
- After small group discussion, reconvene the group and engage them in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
 - Was it easy or difficult to summarize the information in your article and share with others?
 - What new information did you learn about the Washington Redskins and the controversy?
 - Based on the article you read, how has the perspective of the person been shaped by their experience and their relationship to the Washington team?
 - After hearing the different viewpoints, did your opinion shift at all? How so?
 - What was the advantage of doing the jigsaw?

Here I Stand Activity

- Explain to students that they will listen to some statements and decide to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement. They will be indicating their opinion about each topic by positioning themselves along an imaginary line, depending upon how strongly they agree or disagree with a statement.
- Select a large open space and indicate the position of an imaginary line with the farthest right point representing a STRONGLY AGREE response and the farthest left point a STRONGLY DISAGREE response. In between, place AGREE, IN BETWEEN/NOT SURE, AND DISAGREE along the continuum. Create signs with these words and hang them up on the wall.
- Read each statement below, requesting students to take a few minutes to decide where they stand in the continuum and have them walk silently to that place and observe where others choose to stand.
 - Sports and professional athletes have a strong influence over the American public and therefore have a responsibility to do the right thing.
 - Using the Redskins name and mascot of a Native American does not hurt anyone.
 - The term "redskin" is offensive.
 - If some Native American people are not offended, we shouldn't be.

- What the fans and general public think about the Washington team name should not matter nor should it impact the outcome of the controversy.
- Sports team owners should be able to name their teams whatever they want.
- The Washington DC football franchise should change its name.

After everyone has chosen their spot, have students spend 2–3 minutes talking amongst themselves about why they are standing where they are.

4. After the activity, lead a whole group discussion using the following questions:

- Was it easy or difficult to decide where to stand? Were some statements easier to decide and some more difficult?
- How did it feel when most people had the same response as you? How about when most people were standing somewhere else?
- Did you ever feel you needed to explain where you chose to stand? If so, why did you feel this way?
- Did you ever decide to change your position when you saw you did not agree with a majority of the group, or after hearing others' points of view?



Writing Activity: Argumentative Essay

Now that students have learned about different perspectives about the controversy, they will decide on their own point of view and write an argumentative essay about it. This will include the process of picking a “side” or position and writing a five-paragraph essay that includes their position with evidence. You can have students start the essay in class by having them work on the [Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer](#) and then complete the rest for homework over the next days or weeks. They can use any of the articles and data shared in class as well as additional research they conduct online. The overall steps in the process should include:

- a) Decide on your position.
- b) Consider three reasons for your position.
- c) Gather evidence such as examples, statistics, quotes, polls, facts, etc.
- d) Organize opinion and evidence using the Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer.
- e) Write your essay and include the following five paragraphs:

Paragraph 1: Description of the issue or controversy and your opinion statement (You may also include the counter-argument)

Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4: Each paragraph should include one reason for your opinion with supporting evidence (examples, historical information, statistics, polls, quote, facts).

Paragraph 5: Restate your opinion, summarize your three reasons and state your call to action or summary position

Closing

Play the 2-minute video [Proud to Be](#). After watching the video, ask students the following questions:

- How did you feel watching the video?
- What was the message of the video?
- Was the video effective in conveying the message?
- Did it have an impact on your point of view? How so?

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [“Washington Redskin Name Change Gains Momentum”](#) (DiversityInc.com)
- [“Racist Stereotypes and Cultural Appropriation In American Sports”](#) (*IC Magazine*, February 23, 2013)
- [“Are You Ready for Some Controversy? The History Of ‘Redskin’”](#) (NPR, September 9, 2013)
- [“A slur or term of ‘honor’? Controversy heightens about Washington Redskins”](#) (CNN, October 13, 2013)
- [“The Real History of the Word Redskin. It’s Not What You Think”](#) (*Slate*, December 18, 2013)
- [“A Leadership Lesson for Goodell, From Goodell”](#) (*The New York Times*, June 21, 2014)
- [“Youth leagues also wrestling with controversial Redskins nickname”](#) (*Sports Illustrated*, October 2, 2014)
- [“Report: Indian booster for Washington Redskins is not an Indian”](#) (*The Washington Post*, October 10, 2014)
- [“American Indian activists seek to rekindle debate on Redskins nickname”](#) (*The Washington Post*, December 13, 2017)
- [“Goodell doesn’t see Washington Redskins nickname changing”](#) (ESPN, January 30, 2018)
- [“Washington NFL team says it will retire Redskins name, logo”](#) (ESPN, July 13, 2020)
- [“Washington’s NFL team to retire Redskins name, following sponsor pressure and calls for change”](#) (*The Washington Post*, July 13, 2020)
- [Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian](#)
- [Race Ethnicity and Education](#) (June 2020)
- [Americans Exhibition and Dialogue Toolkit for Educators](#) (Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian)

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development, summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
Writing
W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
W4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

Background Information on the Controversy about the Washington Redskins' Team Name

- The Washington Redskins are an N.F.L. team that has had their name since 1933. They started in 1932 as the Boston Braves, changed their name to the Boston Redskins the following year and moved to Washington D.C. in 1937. Every major English dictionary describes the term “redskin” as derogatory and Native American people and others consider it an offensive epithet. There is debate over whether the term “redskin” originates from the scalped head of a Native American, red body paint or the red color metaphor for race. Regardless of origin, since the mid-19th century “redskin” has been a slang word white people used for Native American people.
- In the 1940s, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) started to advocate for eliminating negative stereotyping of Native American people in the media. Over time, they focused on Native American names and mascots in sports. The NCAI says that teams with mascots such as the Washington D.C. football team perpetuate negative stereotypes of Native American people and demean their native traditions and rituals. In addition to the names and images, Native Americans opposed to mascots point to the oversimplification of their culture by fans “playing Indian” with no understanding of the deeper meaning of feathers, face paint, chants and dancing.
- Terms such as “redskin” have almost disappeared from common usage except for sports teams. Even with sports teams, there used to be more than 3,000 teams with Native American names and mascots. That has been steadily in decline; currently there are fewer than 1,000 high school, college and professional teams that use Native American mascots. One other NFL team, the Kansas City Chiefs, has a Native American-themed name. Major League Baseball has two Native American named teams: the Atlanta Braves (known for their “Tomahawk Chop” at games) and the Cleveland Indians. There is also one National Hockey League team, the Chicago Blackhawks.
- Proponents of using these names and mascots believe that Native American mascots pay respect to the people and help promote a better understanding of Native Americans. Many say that Native American mascots focus on bravery, courage and fighting skills rather than anything derogatory.
- The controversy over the Washington team name has come back into the news lately, although there have been protests about the name for decades. In 2014, fifty United States Senators signed a letter asking the N.F.L. to push for a name change. Later the same year, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) revoked the trademark of the NFL’s Washington Redskins for the second time because it is “disparaging to Native Americans.” In October 2013, President Obama said, “If I were the owner of the team and I knew that there was a name of my team—even if it had a storied history—that was offending a sizeable group of people, I’d think about changing it.” In 2015, California became the first state to ban public schools from using “Redskins” as a team name, nickname or mascot.
- The [Editorial Board of *The Washington Post*](#) decided they will no longer use the term “redskin” in their editorials. According to the [Pew Research Center](#), at least 76 news outlets and journalists have publicly stated their opposition to the Washington Redskins name or moved to restrict or ban its use.
- The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) revocation of the Washington, D.C. team trademarks were appealed by the team. However, in 2015, the ruling was upheld by a district court judge. The legal fight of more than 25 years ended in January 2018 with the ruling of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit vacating decisions that had canceled the team’s federal trademark registrations. The Washington Redskins viewed this ruling a victory. Despite the Native American petitioners’ loss, they still believe they won because the rulings by the PTO and the district court judge declared the use of the Redskins name to be disparaging.
- In early July 2020, FedEx, Nike and other major sponsors of the N.F.L. football team asked the team to change its name. In addition, several Native American leaders and organizations wrote to N.F.L. Commissioner Roger Goodell, demanding that the name be changed. As a result, in July 2020, the team announced: “In light of recent events around our country and feedback from our community, the Washington Redskins are announcing the team will undergo a thorough review of the team's name.”

Washington Redskins Helmet with Logo



Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer

Paragraph 1: INTRODUCTION

Attention-grabbing opening:

Background of Issue:

My position:

(May include counter-argument)

Paragraph 2: Reason #1

Supporting Evidence:

- ✓
- ✓
- ✓

Paragraph 3: Reason #2

Supporting Evidence:

- ✓
- ✓
- ✓

Paragraph 4: Reason #3

Supporting Evidence:

- ✓
- ✓
- ✓

Paragraph 5: CONCLUSION

Restate opinion:

Summarize your three reasons:

State your “call to action” or summary position: