

SENSITIVITY GUIDELINES

Religions

Define religious terms in a neutral way, and do not make assumptions that students will be familiar with or understand various terms, concepts, and ceremonies.

To Native Americans, what others call creation myths are part of their religion. Christians and Jews would be offended if Bible stories were called biblical myths. Use *creation stories*, *medicine stories*, and *folk tales*. Decisions may be made on a case-by-case basis.

Use the name Jesus alone, not Jesus Christ.

Islam is the name of the religion. *Muslim* (noun) is the name of an adherent of the Islamic faith. *Muslim* (adjective) is the name used to describe the culture, art, institutions, works, and acts of Muslims. *Islamic* applies only to what pertains directly to the faith and its doctrines. Human acts should not be denoted as Islamic. *Quran* is the preferred spelling for the holy book of Islam; *Qur'an* is the alternate spelling.

Geography

Avoid using *New World*, *Old World*; use *the Americas*, *the Western Hemisphere*, *the Eastern Hemisphere*.

Do not use *the Orient*, *the Far East*; use *Asia*, *East Asia*, etc.

Africa is a continent, not a country; do not use in lists of countries.

Avoid redundancies with foreign terms. Do not add the word *River* to *Rio Grande* because *rio* means “river” in Spanish; do not add the word *Mountains* to *Sierra Nevada* because *sierra* means “mountain” in Spanish.

The land on which Native Americans lived was not *unexplored*. Do not use *frontier* or *wilderness* in this context. Use *settler* and *settle* carefully in discussing the Anglo or English settlement of North America.

In discussing history, use a qualifying construction, such as *present-day*, with a modern country name.

For coverage since the breakup of the USSR on December 25, 1991, don't use the new nation of Russia synonymously with the former Soviet Union or the USSR. Don't use the Commonwealth of Independent States synonymously with the former Soviet Union, because all 15 republics did not join the Commonwealth.

Current Preferences for References to Groups of People

Be aware of sensitivities of some people regarding terms used to identify groups. Do not use a hyphen when combining the name of an ethnic group with the word *American*. *African American* (no hyphen) is now a commonly accepted term for Americans of African descent. *Black* can be used, but mainly in quoted material or in such phrases as *black nationalism*. The term *black American* is acceptable but not preferred. Use *Native American*, not *Indian*, when referring to native peoples. If possible, use *Jewish people* or *Jewish leaders*, not *Jews*, where context supports these terms. Do not use the terms *Blacks*, *Indians*, or *Jews* in heads or captions.

Use of the word *slave* is viewed by many as a dehumanizing term. By referring to pre-Civil War African Americans only by the word *slave*, they are considered as property and not as people to whom terrible things were done. It is preferable to add *African slave* or *African American slave*, depending on the time frame, to indicate that a person is involved. A better solution is the use of *enslaved African* or *enslaved African American*. *African* should be used before 1776. The general purpose of these guidelines is to avoid overuse of the term *slave* and not to imply that *slave* and *African American* are interchangeable terms. Avoid the use of *freedmen*.

Latino/Latina is preferred over *Hispanic* for those people whose roots lie in Spanish-speaking lands in Latin America. The term *Hispanic* is not derived from Spanish; it is a term that was given official sanction when it was used by the U.S. Census Bureau. Use *Hispanic* when highlighting connections with Spain, not with cultures developed in the Americas. *Chicano/Chicana* is preferred by some Mexican Americans in the Southwest.

Undocumented resident or *undocumented worker* should be used instead of *illegal alien*.

Avoid using metaphorical language that implies national, racial, or gender-specific characteristics, such as *Dutch treat*.

Do not refer to Puerto Ricans as immigrants. They have been U.S. citizens since 1917.

Do not refer to Native Americans in the past tense; they exist today. If possible, use the nation or name of the people involved. Preferred spellings are Anasazi, Navajo, Shoshone.

Japanese people have recently objected to references to “relocation centers” or “relocation camps” to which Japanese Americans were sent during World War II. The “internment camps” were camps where enemy aliens were kept during the war. “Concentration camps” were the German extermination camps. WRA camps, for the Wartime Relocation Agency, is the correct term for the places where Japanese Americans were held. *Internment* may be used to describe their situation, but not the camps.

Third World is no longer applicable. Use *developing* or *emerging nation* or *newly industrialized nation*.

The preferred spelling for the Muslim terrorist group is *al Qaeda*.

Sexist Language

Don't use *mankind*; use *humankind*. Do not use *man* generically. If quoted material does this, add a disclaimer.

Don't use the generic *he, him, his* when both men and women are involved.

Incorrect: Each citizen casts his vote.

Correct: Each citizen casts a vote. or Each citizen votes.
or Citizens cast their votes.

Don't use feminine pronouns for ships, nations, etc.

Don't use *female* as a noun. Don't use *woman* as an adjective. *Girl* is appropriate only for those 17 years of age and under.

Don't use gender unless it is pertinent.

Occupations should be gender-neutral:

firefighter

police officer

author

letter carrier

flight attendant

Observations

Ageism: Depict older persons making active contributions; reflect a broad range of lifestyles and cultural backgrounds. Do not include stereotypes such as canes, drab clothing, etc.

Brand Names: Mentioning brand names is no longer prohibited, but avoid any representation that might look like advertising or corporate endorsement. If the proper name of a product or service does appear in our products, we do not need to include a symbol next to the name. Only the owner of the product or service has a vested interest in doing so to announce that the name is his or her property. Just capitalize the name; e.g., Coke or Jell-O. To avoid using a brand name, use the generic name; e.g., soft drink or gelatin.

Environmental Issues: Reflect respect for plants and animals. Regulations regarding endangered species should be observed.

Food and Health: Use caution when referring to tobacco, alcohol, and drugs.

People With Disabilities: A physical disability is defined as "a physical or mental condition that 'substantially limits' a major life activity." A developmental disability is a limiting condition that occurs before the age of 22.