



To: MSC Member Camps

From: MSC Native American Working Group

Re: Indigenous Appropriation Assessment for Summer Camps

Since March 2021, MSC has been working to address concerns raised by representatives from the Wabanaki Tribal Nations regarding cultural appropriation in member camps. Shortly after, the full MSC Board participated in a transformative training session to learn about our Native American neighbors' history and culture and offered similar opportunities to MSC members. Current efforts have us offering educational resources to member camps; among these is the Indigenous Appropriation Assessment available here.

Some background:

Maine's territory has been home to Indigenous peoples for millennia—with only the four Wabanaki Tribal Nations—the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot—surviving the violence of settler colonialism. Our camps operate on this land, and we all have the responsibility to learn, teach others and reconcile this history with our Indigenous neighbors, particularly because the harm inflicted continues to impact their communities to this day.

One of the legacies of settler colonialism is Cultural Appropriation. Cultural Appropriation occurs when members of a dominant culture take cultural elements from people who have been historically mistreated without those people's consent. A relevant example might be a non-Native summer camp making use of Indigenous people's language or traditions as part of its programming, without consent or teaching from these Indigenous people.

Through our conversations with citizens of the Wabanaki Tribal Nations in what is now Maine, we learned that this dynamic is unethical and harmful. We heard, for instance, from Maulian Dana, the Penobscot Nation Tribal Ambassador, that as a child she felt confused and hurt when she encountered school mascots such as "the Indians." As an adult she was instrumental in making such school-team appropriation illegal in Maine. Not only did her efforts support the needs of her people, but they also educated her non-Indigenous neighbors about the continued presence of Native people in Maine and their rich history and culture.

With deep conviction, MSC feels that it is vital for camps to proactively address the camping movement's historical practice of appropriation. Some elements of this pattern may be obvious to us. Other habits—many based on caricatures and assumptions we absorbed as children—may require more examination to assure that we've got it right. A cultural assessment allows us to do just that.

This Assessment was developed by camp directors who have recently taken stock of their camps' traditions and representations of Indigenous people and cultures. It was then presented to members of the Wabanaki community so that we could benefit from their perspectives. Approved by the MSC Board, it is ready for you!

Remember that this is a first step and a significant one. As campers, parents, staff, alums and others take note of progress in our camps, we'll have further opportunities to provide education for all community members. We all have much to learn.

MSC Native American Working Group

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