

Pacific Islander

History

This group is comprised of several distinct cultures and nationalities. Our current population in Portland Public Schools includes immigrants from Tonga, Palau, Samoa, Fiji, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and Micronesia.

Tonga is the only remaining Polynesian monarchy and was never colonized, though it became a British protectorate in 1900. Tongans represent 98% of the population and are predominantly Christian. State schools are compulsory and free from the ages of 6 to 14, and the dominant languages are Tongan and English, with a 98.9% literacy rate. Population density is increasing and already too great for each male to receive the constitutionally mandated 8.25 acres plot of land due him at 16. A high proportion of

Palau was initially settled 4000 years ago by migrants from what is today Indonesia, then beginning in the 18th century was under the control in succession of Britain, Spain, Germany, Japan and finally became a US Territory in 1947 before gaining independence in 1978. It entered a compact of association with the US in 1993. It is a democratic republic and experienced several instances of political violence in the 1980s. Their dominant language is English and they have a 92% literacy rate, the dominant religion being Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Modekngai, an indigenous religion. They are one of the wealthier Pacific island states and is dependent on tourism and agriculture, but their main challenge is to ensure economic viability by reducing reliance on US financial assistance.

Samoans are the second largest Polynesian group and retain their traditional way of life. Contact with Europeans began in the 1700s but the two island groups remained independent until 1904, when the eastern islands became a US territory and the western islands passed from German control to New Zealand, regaining independence as the state of then Western Samoa in 1962. Their dominant languages are Samoan and English and they have a 98.6% literacy rate the dominant religion being Christian.

Fiji is comprised of two main ethnic groups, the indigenous Polynesians and a South Indian population originally brought over in the late 1800s to work in the sugar cane fields. Fiji was colonized by Britain in 1874 and became independent in 1970, which was followed by a period of coups and political unrest until a democratic government was established in 1990; however, starting with a coup in 2006, the country remains in political unrest. Their dominant languages are English, Fijian and Hindi, and they have a 93% literacy rate, with their dominant religions being Christian (Roman Catholic and Methodism), Hindu and Muslim. Fiji's economy is one of the more developed of the Pacific island economies but remain developing with a large subsistence agriculture sector and a large trade deficit.

Guam was ceded to the US by Spain in 1898, briefly controlled by Japan in 1941 and regained by the US in 1944; it remains one of the most important US military bases in the Pacific. The main ethnic groups are Chamorro, Filipino and Polynesian. The dominant languages are English, Chamorro and Philippine languages, and they have a 99% literacy rate, with the dominant religion being Roman Catholic.

The Northern Mariana Islands was a US territory but decided to establish a commonwealth in political union with the US rather than seek independence in 1972, its democratic government going into effect in 1978. The main ethnic groups are Asian, primarily Chinese brought in to work in the garment factories, and Polynesian. The dominant languages are Philippine languages, Chinese and Chamorro, and they have a 97%

literacy rate, the dominant religion being Christian, majority Roman Catholic with some remaining elements of traditional taboos and beliefs.

Pacific Islanders in the USA/Portland

As of this writing, 4% of Portland's population, or approximately 21,500 people, are Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Immigration to US appears to be impacted primarily by economic factors. A significant proportion of Tonga's food is imported from New Zealand, contributing to a trade deficit. Privatization of the Tongan economy, which is dependent on agriculture and tourism, and migration have led to the breakdown of the traditional extended family, leading to an increase in poverty. Samoa's economy is reliant on tourism and agriculture, and has been impacted by natural disasters in the 1990's, the near collapse of Polynesian Airlines and a regional economic downturn. Fiji's economy is one of the more developed of the Pacific island economies but remains developing with a large subsistence agriculture sector and a large trade deficit. The economy of Guam is expanding, depends on US military spending, tourism and agriculture, and benefits from US financial assistance, though tourism was impacted by Japan's financial difficulties. Further information on Pacific Islander immigration trends does not appear available at this time.

Values

Pacific Islanders represent a diverse population, incorporating peoples from hundreds of islands in the Pacific. They include people of Polynesian, Melanesian and Micronesian backgrounds. The largest group is Polynesian, which includes Hawaiian, Samoans, Tongans and Tahitians. The second largest is Micronesian, which includes Guamanians (or Chamorros), Paluan and Micronesian. The Melanesian group is comprised mainly of Fijians.

Generally, Pacific Islanders place great importance on cultural heritage, valuing and honoring their traditional knowledge and customs. A disclaimer is that Pacific Islander students who have been in the United States for three or more generations are more acculturated by Western norms and may reflect a more Western perspective to family/community relationships and instructional/home practices. Extended family plays an important role in island cultures, where reverence is given to elders in the family structure. The notion of sharing and using rather than owning things in kind is a common practice. Stinginess and hoarded are discouraged, as are laziness, sponging and gluttony. Many Pacific Islander family structures are multigenerational within the same household, and there are often generational norms in a village structure in which there are village chiefs and wisemen. Time orientation is past-oriented in that children who misbehave impact the reputation of their entire family, who may then be required to give a public apology to the entire village for the child's misdeed. Honor is very important and reflects generationally upon the family.

Dos

- Be aware that students often exhibit more informal physical contact with both peers and adults, which reflects a more informal "village" structure of community (all adults are parents and may instruct or correct).
- Include opportunities throughout the curriculum to apply concepts and skills to authentic situations.

Experiential and relational learning is the preferred learning style and reflects the more hands-on learning that takes place in many of their village communities.

- Some students from Pacific Island nations may not have received any formal education in their native country. Solicit natural examples of content to help them make connections to instruction. For example, a student might be asked what kinds of natural materials were used to learn math concepts, or the teacher might invite the student to share a favorite story to teach a concept. In addition, cultural information may be shared regarding favorite foods, music, dance, etc.
- Consider including more informal furnishings and grouping arrangements in your classroom organization. Informal classroom organization with soft lighting and furnishings is preferred to more formal environments such as single desks in straight rows.
- Be aware that students interact with adults consistently with adults cross-generationally. Student may take a more informal stance with their instructors as they perceive every adult as a teacher.
- Scaffold expectations for participation to avoid shaming the students, for example forewarnng the student they may be called on and making sure the question is one the student can answer.
- Be aware that when contacting parents, student misbehavior is often severely dealt with in order to allow the family to save face.

Don'ts

- Avoid insisting the student meet a teacher's eyes which can cause significant discomfort for the student. Students often practice a "no direct eye contact" protocol in interacting with adults. In many island cultures, it is deemed disrespectful and a sign of defiance for a child to meet the eye of an adult when being asked a direct question or given an instruction or reprimand.
- Don't forget to include authentic application opportunities. Students do not tend to respond well to artificial scenarios such as lecture and context-reduced learning dominated by textbooks and worksheets as it is missing the application piece.
- Avoid direct questioning as it may be perceived as an attempt to shame the student who may not have the answer. Provide opportunities to have the student share on their own terms when trying to make connections.

Bibliography

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- U.S. Census Bureau. "State and Country QuickFacts." <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/41/4159000.html>.
- U.S. Department of State. www.state.gov/.

Resources

- Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO). Contact at 922 N. Killingsworth Ave., Portland, 97217, 503-289-7775, <http://apanopac.wordpress.com>. Facilitates community forums and speak-out sessions between Asian and Pacific Islander communities and Portland Public Schools for parents to voice concerns, expectations and collaborate about their children's education.
- Asian & Pacific Islander Community Improvement Association (APICIA). Contact at 503-790-7540 or www.apicia.org. Assistance available to Asian and Pacific Islander communities with home-buying and other housing-related issues.
- Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO). Asian Family Center at 4424 NE Glisan St, Portland, 97213, 503-235-9396, www.irco.org. Youth services include the Schools Uniting Neighbors (SUN schools), Supplemental Education Services, Upward Bound, Young Women's Equity Project, Youth Employment Services, the Workforce Investment Act and Youth Gang Prevention Services.
- Pacific Island Council of Oregon (PICO). Contact through Island Sports Entertainment, 236 SE 24th Ave, Portland, 97214, 503-680-1905, www.picocamp.com. Summer sports camp educates youth on leadership and team-building skills and enhances their athletic skills, primarily football.