



# Reach Out with Respect

By Andrea Hope

Imagine that your teacher asks everyone in class to present a special item from their family. Your friend, Winona, brings in a large feather headdress decorated with beads and ribbons. Winona is from the Dakota tribe of the midwestern U.S., and the headdress was worn by her great-grandfather. It was given to him for his bravery in service to his tribe. When Winona needs courage, she thinks of the headdress and her great-grandfather's example.

Kids at school talk about the headdress. Some think it's cool, but some say it looks funny. Winona seems annoyed, so you whisper, "The headdress is awesome. Just ignore them."

The next day, a classmate shows up wearing a fake paper headdress. He jokes that he's the "chief" of class, and others laugh. Winona runs out of the room. A symbol of courage and honor for her family is just a joke for them. You tell your classmate that what he did was not cool, and in fact, it was disrespectful. You go with Winona to talk to your teacher about it.

This story shows an example of **cultural appropriation**. It's when a symbol or tradition of one culture is used by someone from another culture without respect or understanding. This is even more harmful when the culture it's borrowed from has been treated unjustly. When a student dresses like a Muslim imam in a program about world religions, this can be inspiring,



But when a person makes a costume out of a Muslim person's robe to be silly or get attention, this is harmful.

Cultural appropriation also happens when we separate people from their culture. When a director creates a movie about Egypt and chooses not to hire people from that country as writers, actors, or producers, this is hurtful. It doesn't

show respect toward people of that culture.

If we don't want to hurt others with cultural appropriation, can we still enjoy parts of another culture? Sure! Cultural *appreciation* is the key. If you want to make ramen from Japan, ask a Japanese friend to teach you, or watch videos by a Japanese chef. If you're celebrating a holiday from a cultural or religious group, learn about its history.

Many times, it can be hard to know if what you want to do is respectful. That's a great thing about having friends from different cultures. You can consult with them about your questions. Not everyone will have the same opinion or knowledge, but you can listen and learn. When you appreciate people of all cultures, you can make more friends and have a lot more fun!

## True Appreciation

Here are some ideas for honoring diversity.

- ☐ What cultures fascinate you? Read books about them by knowledgeable people from those cultures or other trusted authors.
- ☐ Celebrating another group's holiday? Find out its real history and how it's observed in that culture or religion.
- ☐ Learn about the Indigenous people of your country. What are some of their customs?
- ☐ Watch out for stereotypes of people in TV shows and movies. Talk with family and friends about why they're harmful and how they could be changed.
- ☐ Ask elders about your family's culture. What traditions are important to them?

