

The main character, Matt, at one point feels that he is being watched and thinks the watchers might be Indians. What stereotype about Indians is contained in this thought? [Chapter 2 - sneakiness, moving silently in the woods, maliciousness]

7. As students read *Sign of the Beaver*, have them add specific references to the chart. Sample entries have been given. Encourage them to refer back to the essay.
8. When all are done, students should compare and share charts.
9. As a class, read the last page of the novel, beginning with the word *Neighbors*.
10. Conclude the novel study with a discussion of **Worldview** (Indians vs. settler).
11. After reading the novel, have students read **Section 2** of the essay. This is probably best done in class, with teacher guidance. Highlight or list the specific positive criticisms made by the author.
12. **Ask** students:
  - a. Do you agree with the evaluation of the novel by the author of the essay?
  - b. Do you think the novel is "fair" in its portrayal of Native Americans? (**Guide** students to review the negative stereotypes as identified in the Seale article in addition to those they have identified on their own).
  - c. If this were the only book about Native Americans you ever read, what misperceptions would you take away from it?

**Assessment:**

1. Have students write a **letter** to Lisa Cellucci in response to her essay. In the letter, they should talk about specific examples of stereotyping they have identified in the novel and the effects these have on young readers (themselves).
2. Write and record a **book review** for one of the following audiences:
  - a. Middle School teachers & librarians
  - b. Middle School students
3. Write a letter to the publisher of the novel, giving good reasons why the book should be withdrawn from publication OR published with a good stereotyping lesson plan.

# Indian Stereotypes: The Sign of the Beaver - What do you think?

for Middle School – grade 7/8

Elizabeth Sky-McIlvain  
Freeport Middle School  
[betsy\\_sky-mcilvain@coconetme.org](mailto:betsy_sky-mcilvain@coconetme.org)

This lesson can be used as a Local Assessment for an Indian Stereotyping unit. The lesson is designed specifically for the widely-read *Sign of the Beaver*, but would work equally well with any young adult novel in which Native Americans are main characters. It can be adapted for selections from longer novels such as *The Last of the Mohicans* (<http://www.americanliterature.com/LM/LMINDX.HTML> ).

**Objectives:** After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify and explain stereotypical elements in a young adult novel
- Generalize about the impact of these stereotypes on the reader

**Resources:**

- Speare, Elizabeth George. *The Sign of the Beaver* (activity can be used with any edition)
- Positive – Negative Stereotypes Chart
- Reprint: "Race as Seen in Children's Books" – note: this article was posted on the Internet. It is by a college student. The grammar and syntax is not perfect. Students should understand that it represents **one person's conclusions**, not fact.
- (teacher resource): Avoid the Sign of the Beaver - <http://www.oyate.org/books-to-avoid/signBeaver.html> - short excerpt of a book by Doris Seale
- Background materials for a study of Indian Stereotypes: <http://www.leastern.com/Wabanaki/WabanakiStereotype> - Negative Indian Stereotypes, Look Out for Stereotypes, All Cultures Chart, An Indian Quiz

**MLR: ELA – B11, HISTORY – C5**

**Lesson:**

1. Students should have completed one or several of the Introductory Indian Stereotype lessons (see link above). They should be familiar with the Indian Stereotypes categories and with specific examples, especially from visual sources (cartoons, the slide show).
2. Distribute copies of the essay **Race as Seen in Children's Books – Section 1**.
3. Have students highlight specific stereotypical labels, actions, ideas or inferences named in **Section 1** of the essay.
4. Review these as a class – provide examples in the margin (see teacher guide).
5. Assign students to read *Sign of the Beaver*. The book is short enough to be read quickly. However, this lesson works equally well if students read designated chapters only. In this case, the first two chapters should be read aloud so that all students have the story background. The last two chapters should not be assigned. Entries should be made into the chart by the class. This is a good use of Thinking Outloud as a teaching/modeling technique.
6. Distribute copies of the **Positive – Negative Stereotypes Chart**. Review the two categories and the way the chart "works." Explain that some entries in the chart will represent **inferences** made from the actions or thoughts of characters. Provide this example: