OCTOBER 2026

VSB - INDIGENOUS EDUCATION
SAFE AND CARING SCHOOLS

Raising Awareness

CULTURE IS NOT A COSTUME

HOW NOT TO CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE HALLOWEEN

Autumn is upon us, and soon it will be Halloween. This time of year brings decisions about costume choices. While dressing up is meant to be fun and exciting, it also runs the risk of offending others with costumes that are offensive to other cultures and lived identities. Halloween offers the opportunity to discuss costume choices with both colleagues and students. It is important not to inadvertently mimic culture by culturally appropriating from racial or ethnic groups.

What is CULTURAL APPROPRIATION?

- The taking from a culture that is not one's own - of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and knowledge (Ziff & Rao, 1997).
- Any instance commonly associated with and/or perceived as belonging to another which is used to further one's own means (Shugart, 1997).
- To take parts (symbols, artifacts, dress, words, practices, etc.) from a culture that is not your own. This can happen in a variety of forms, but often around Halloween, it involves wearing 'costumes' referencing regalia or traditional clothing having significance to other cultures.
- A particular power dynamic in which members of a dominant culture take elements from the culture of people who have been systematically oppressed by that dominant group.

Engage in dialogue

Bring up subjects like cultural appropriation with your colleagues and students. See what their views are and share your own knowledge and experiences. Dialogue is collaborative and about people working together to find a common understanding rooted in respect. It is about exploring, listening, and re-examining your positions, values, and assumptions.



This is not a costume!

Examine your own practices

Are you wearing a costume during Halloween?
Ask yourself some critical questions about your costume:
Why am I choosing this costume?
Is my costume based on someone's race, ethnicity, or culture? Am I reinforcing stereotypes with the image I am portraying? Is my costume exploiting another culture?

Be an advocate

If you see a costume that doesn't sit right with you, start a conversation with that person. Begin a respectful dialogue with that person at an appropriate time and place. Ask them about their costume choice. Your conversation should be about having the person think through their choice, not about right and wrong.

Resources:

My Culture is NOT a Costume, Teen Vogue
Let's Talk About Halloween Costumes and Cultural Appropriation, PBS, 2022
Navigating Cultural Appropriation vs Appreciation this Halloween, UBC, 2025
Statement on Halloween, Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2023