

Native Americans

November is National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month, a time to honor the history, culture and contributions of the first people to live in America. The theme for the 2001 celebration is "Our children, our nations, our future." Begin your study of Native Americans with this cross-curricular two-part unit!

Note to parents: The main goals of this two-part unit are to introduce children to some Native American tribes, to provide some learning activities about Native American history and culture, and to encourage further student research about Native Americans. Part I of this unit focuses on tribes from the eastern part of the United States. Part II of this unit focuses on tribes from the Plains, Plateau, Great Basin, and the Southwest regions of the United States.



Northeastern Native Americans

Tribes of the Northeast lived in the region that extended from the Atlantic Ocean, to about the Mississippi River, to just north of the border of Canada and to just south of the Ohio River. This area included the coasts of northern North Carolina and Virginia. Most of the region was forests and woodlands. The northeastern tribes faced warm summers and cold winters.

Some Northeastern Tribes

- Iroquois Confederacy. Perhaps the most famous Native American federation of tribes was the Iroquois Confederacy. By the early 1600s, five tribes formed this coalition: Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida and Onondaga. In the early 1700s, a sixth tribe, Tuscarora, joined the federation, which became known as the Six Nations. The Tuscarora originated in North Carolina. The other five tribes lived in what is now central and upper New York State.
- Narragansett. Some historians say that the Narragansett are one of the oldest tribes in North America. The Narragansett lived in what now the state of Rhode Island.

- **Abenaki.** The Abenaki people were a coalition of tribes that were grouped by eastern and western divisions. The eastern Abenaki lived in Maine, in the northeastern corner of New Hampshire and in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The western Abenaki lived in what is now most of Vermont, New Hampshire and the northern area of Massachusetts.
- **Wampanoag.** The Wampanog lived in northern Rhode Island, on the southeastern coast of Massachusetts. They also lived on the islands now called Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket off the Massachusetts coast.
- **Powhatan.** The Powhatan were a tribe and a coalition of about 40 tribal groups. The Powhatan lived along the coastal plain region of eastern Virginia.
- **Pequot.** The Pequots lived in an area that covered the southeastern part of Connecticut to the border of Rhode Island. Today, the Pequots own one of the largest casinos in the world.
- **Mound Builders.** In parts of Ohio, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana and several other states lived native people who built mounds. Some of the mounds were shaped like animals such as bears and snakes while others were shaped like cones or flat-topped pyramids. The mound builders were named for the areas where the mounds and remains were found, such as Adena and Hopewell.

Languages

Most of people of Northeastern tribes spoke an Iroquoian or Algonquian language. The tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy used the Iroquoian language. The Abenaki-speaking tribes included the Abenaki and Narragansett.

Food

Tribes obtained food by hunting and fishing local animals and fish, gathering wild plants, nuts and berries, and farming. Corn, squash, and beans were important farming crops. Other crops included tomatoes, potatoes, and tobacco. Some tribes, especially those in New England, collected the sap from maple trees.

When the Northeastern Native Americans planted crops, they first cut down some trees and burned them. Then they planted the crops among the trunks of the trees and used the ashes to fertilize the crops. This was known as the slash-and-burn farming method.

Shelter

Many Northeastern tribal villages and built dome-shaped buildings or wigwams covered with bark. The Iroquois lived in buildings made of wood called longhouses. Families and relatives of up to 50 people lived in one longhouse. Many tribes built tall fences called palisades around their villages to protect the people from their enemies.

Clothing

The Northeastern Native American Indians made much of their clothing from deerskin. Items of clothing included dresses, leggings, and breechcloths or loincloths. Many of these native tribes put bear grease on their hair to make it glossy. In some tribes, such as the Mohawk, the men shaved off the hair on their head to just a small tuft on top.

Government

Some Northeastern tribes formed groups called federations, such as the Iroquois Confederacy. Leaders of the federations were called sachems. Only men could be sachems; however, only women could select a sachem. In council meetings, the sachems gave speeches about positions on certain issues. At times, discussions continued for hours or days until an agreement was reached.

Culture

Religion was an important part of Northeastern Native American culture. Many tribes believed that animals and forces of nature had spiritual powers and could appear in visions as guardian spirits. Many tribes had shamans or medicine men that tribal members believed had powers to invite spirits to cure diseases. Many tribes also had sacred songs, dances and rituals. Some groups made medicine bundles that were used in specific ceremonies. Medicine bundles were bags of objects, such as dried herbs and animals as animal skins, pipes, dried herbs, and tobacco. Some tribes, such as the Iroquois, also made brightly painted wooden masks for certain rituals.

Southeastern Native Americans

The tribes of the Southeast lived in the region that extended from just south of the Ohio River to the Gulf of Mexico and from the Atlantic coastline of southern North Carolina to just west of the Mississippi River. The topography of the area included the Appalachian Mountains, pine forests, coastal plains, swamps and rolling hills. The southeastern tribes enjoyed warm, humid summers and mild winters.

Some Southeastern Tribes

European settlers called five southeastern tribes the "Five Civilized Tribes". Those tribes were:

- Cherokee. The Cherokee initially lived in parts of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.
- Choctaw. The Choctaw lived mostly in what is now east central Mississippi.
- Creek. The Creek lived areas of Florida, South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama.

- Chicasaw. The Chickasaw lived in the northeastern region of Mississippi and in parts of eastern Arkansas and western Kentucky and Tennessee.
- Seminole. The Seminole were members of the Creek tribe who initially lived in Georgia and Alabama. In the 1700s, some tribal members moved to Florida to escape the colonists and conflicts with other tribes.

Languages

Members of the Southeastern tribes spoke a number of different languages, including the Algonquian, Muskogean, and Siouan language groups.

Food

The moderate southeastern climate, sufficient rainfall and long growing season gave the Native Americans of this region a plentiful food supply. Corn was an important crop, along with squash, beans, pumpkins, and sunflower seeds. They also raised turkeys. The women planted the crops and gathered wild plants, such as nuts, berries. The men hunted and fished and cleared the land for farming.

Shelter

The southeastern tribes lived in villages with houses constructed with wooden frames covered by reed mats that were coated with a plaster spread. Many villages had a public square with a ceremonial ground and a council house. Like the Northeastern Native Americans, palisade fences protected many southeastern tribal villages.

Clothing

Like the Northeastern tribes, the Southeastern Native Americans made clothing such as shirts, dresses, and leggings, from deerskin. Some of the women wore skirts of woven cloth made from woven plant fibers. In very warm areas, some people wore little clothing and painted and tattooed their bodies. Hairstyles for men varied. Like the Mohawk of the Northeast, men in some southeastern tribes, such as the Chickasaw and the Creek, shaved their hair to just a small tuft on top while the Choctaw men grew their hair long.

Government

In many Southeastern tribes, the position of chief was inherited from the mother's brother. There were orders or ranks of chiefs. Depending on his rank, a chief might be the leader of one village, region of villages or a whole tribe. Chiefs received help and guidance from councils of shamans, advisers and assistants.

Culture

Religion was also an important component of Southeastern Native American culture. Some tribes worshipped the sun. When people died, tribal members held elaborate funeral ceremonies to honor the dead. Many believed in an afterlife and buried their dead with objects such as pottery, that they might use in the next life.

At harvest time, some Southeastern tribes gave thanks with a celebration that lasted several days. One ceremony held during the celebration was the "green corn dance." It was believed that this dance would bring purity and harmony to the land. The celebration also signaled the start of a new year when a communal fire was lit and a woman from each family took some of the fire for her hearth.

Learn More!

General Resources about Native Americans

Online Resources

- [Native Tribes of the U.S. and Canada](#)
Links to names and contact information for federally recognized tribes.
- [Native American Indian Resources Main Menu](#)
In-depth resource with links to more than 300 Web pages about Native Americans.
- [First Nations Histories](#)
Short histories about numerous tribes plus links to a bibliography and location list of Native American tribes in the United States and Canada.
- [Nativeculture.com](#)
Portal for Native American resources on the Internet.
- [Native American Theme Page](#)
Links to lessons and Web sites about [Native Americans from Education World](#).
- [Traditional Stories, Myths and Legends](#)
Links to the texts of many Native American stories.
- [Native American Lore Index Page](#)
Links to Native American legends.
- [National Museum of the American Indian](#)
The Web site for a national museum devoted to Native American culture.
- [Tribes-by-States Map Index](#)
Interactive map of tribes in the United States.
- [Native Americans Documents Project](#)
Research historical documents about Native Americans on this site.
- [Native American Languages](#)
Long list of links to numerous Native American languages with summaries.

- [Native Americans](#)
Long list of links for Web sites, lessons and a bibliography of children's and young adult books about Native Americans.
- [Special Collections in the Library of Congress, Edward S. Curtis Collection](#) Great historical Native American photographs by tribe.
- [A Critical Bibliography on North American Indians, For K-12](#)
Links to lists of books with descriptions about Native Americans for children and teenagers from the Anthropology Outreach Office of the Smithsonian Institution.

Books

Note: There are many books for children and young people about Native Americans. Here are a few to start.

- Ansary, Mir Tamim, Eastern Woodlands Indians. Heinemann Library, 2000. ISBN: 157572930X. (Ages 4-8)
- Ciment, James, PhD. Encyclopedia of the North American Indian, Scholastic, 1996. ISBN: 0590227904. (Ages 9 -12)
- Griffin-Pierce, Trudy. The Encyclopedia of Native America. Viking Childrens Books, 1995. ISBN: 0670851043 (Ages 12-18)
- Malinowski, Sharon, Sheets, Anna, and Schmittroth, Linda, editors. U.X.L Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes: Vol. 1 -- Northeast, Southeast. U.X.L, 1999. ISBN:0787628387. (Ages 9-12)
- Wolfson, Evelyn. From Abenaki to Zuni: A Dictionary of Native American Tribes. Walker and Co., 1988. ISBN: 0802767893. (Ages 9-12)

LESSON 1: Oral Tradition: Storytelling



Concepts:

You will learn about Native American legends from eastern tribes and storytelling.

Lesson:

Explain that the oral tradition of telling stories to explain events is an important tradition in Native American cultures. Have the children read some Native American myths, legends and folktales from tribes of the Northeast and Southeast. Start with the resources noted below.

Have family members participate in a family storytelling celebration using some of the Native American stories read by the children. Let the children choose the stories for

the event. Encourage family members to be dramatic as they tell the stories. If you have a tape recorder or camcorder, record the activity.

Extension: Have the children write a short play based on one Native American story.

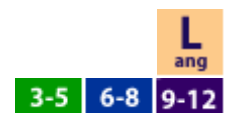
Resources for stories from tribes of the Northeast and Southeast:

- [Mi'kmaq Indian Cinderella and the Invisible One](#)
- [Why Possum has a Large Mouth: A Choctaw Folk Tale](#)
- [Why the Possum's Tail is Bare: A Cherokee Folk Tale](#)
- [Men Visit the Sky: A Seminole Tale](#)
- [How Bear Lost His Tail: An Iroquois Tale](#)
- [How Fire Came to the Six Nations: An Iroquois Tale](#)
- [Iroquois Legends](#)
- [Traditional Stories, Myths and Legends](#)

Books

- Cohlene, Terri. Little Firefly: An Algonquian Legend. Troll Associates, 1991. ISBN: 081672363X. (Ages 9-12)
- Cohlene, Terri. Dancing Drum: A Cherokee Legend. Troll Associates, 1991. ISBN: 0816723621. (Ages 9-12)
- Gates, Freida. Owl Eyes. Lothrop Lee & Shepard , 1994. ISBN: 0688124720 (Ages 4-8)

LESSON 2: Meanings of Tribal Names



Concepts:

You will learn about the meanings of the names for tribes of the Northeast and Southeast.

Lesson:

Explain that each Native American tribal name has a specific meaning. Have the children fill out **the attached worksheet** about Northeast and Southeast tribal names. Check the children's answers on the namesans answer key

Have the children practice spelling the names.

Additional Resources:

- [Tribal Names and Their Meanings](#)

LESSON 3: Growing Corn



Concepts:

You will learn about the importance of corn in the Native American diet and how to grow corn.

Lesson:

Have your children read through the following Web site:

Corn was an especially important food in the diet of Native American tribes in the Northeast and Southeast. Discuss the information about Native American foods for Northeastern and Southeastern tribes presented at the beginning of the unit. Have the children grow corn following the steps below.

Materials

- small clay or plastic pots
- corn seeds
- soil
- water
- old newspaper
-
- lined chart paper
- markers or crayons
- ruler or tape measure
- tape

Procedure

- Spread old newspaper over a table or work area.
- Put some soil into the pot.
- Put a 2 to 3 seeds into the soil. Add water.
- Put the pot in a warm, sunny area.
- Tape a sheet of lined chart paper to a wall.
- Write the growth progress of the corn plant each day for month on the chart. Use a ruler or tape measure to monitor its growth.

Extension activities:

- Have the children draw a picture of their corn plant and label its parts.
- If the weather is warm enough in your area, transplant the corn outside at the end of the month.
- Have the children decorate the pots using designs from tribes of the Northeast or Southeast.

LESSON 4: Trail of Tears



Concepts:

You will learn about the history of the Trail of Tears.

Lesson:

In the 1830s, thousands of Native Americans in the Southeast were removed from their homelands. They were forced to walk over a thousand miles to what are now Arkansas and Oklahoma. Many cried along the way. This sad journey became known as the "Trail of Tears."

Have the children review the following sites about the Trail of Tears:

[Trail of Tears Timeline](#)

[Trail of Tears Overview, National Historic Park](#)

Then have the children complete **the attached worksheet** about the trail. Check the children's answers on **the attached answer key**.

Extension for ages 12 -18: Have the children write a report about the [Indian Removal Act of 1830](#) that led to the Trail of Tears.

Additional Resources:

- [The Removal Act: 28 May 1830](#)
- [Indian Removal Act of 1830](#)

LESSON 5: Eastern Native American Activities



Concepts:

You will learn about the history and culture of Native American tribes of the Northeast and Southeast

Lesson:

Your children can learn about the rich history and culture of some tribes from the eastern regions by completing the activities described in the lesson plans at the following Web sites:

- [Baltimore Curriculum Project Draft Lessons: Wampanoag](#)
Activities about Native Americans with emphasis on the Wampanoag. (Ages 9-12)
- [Native American Culture](#)
Writing and map activities about Native Americans. Under Task #1, have the children choose tribes of the Northeast and Southeast. (Ages 10-13)
- Activities comparing the [Iroquois Constitution](#) and the [United States Constitution](#). (Ages 14-18).
- [The Native American: Through the Eyes of His Mask](#) Activities about Native American tribes in Connecticut. (Ages 10-13)
- [The Iroquois](#) Cross-curricular study of Iroquois people geared for homeschoolers.

Additional Resources:

- [The Iroquois Constitution](#)
- [The Constitution of the United States](#)

Article by Lois Lewis Curriculum Development



Homeschool Learning Network

Native Americans Part 1 Worksheets

Name _____

Date _____

TRIBAL NAMES AND THEIR MEANINGS

Directions: Use the information from Tribal Names and Their Meanings <http://www.snowowl.com/namemeaning.html> to find the names of the Eastern tribes that match the meanings below. Write the names on the lines.

1. Cave people _____
2. Real adders _____
3. Eastern people _____
4. Long water country _____
5. Falls in a current of water _____
6. People of the small point _____
7. Those living at the sunrise _____
8. People at murky land _____
9. Fox people or destroyers _____
10. The possessors of the flint _____
11. The shirt wearing people _____
12. Separatist _____
13. Wild rice men _____
14. Place of stone _____
15. People on top of the hills _____



Homeschool Learning Network Native Americans Part 1 Worksheets

Name _____

Date _____

TRIBAL NAMES AND THEIR MEANINGS ANSWER SHEET

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Cave people | CHEROKEE |
| 2. Real adders | IROQUOIS |
| 3. Eastern people | WAMPANOAG |
| 4. Long water country | QUINNIPIAC |
| 5. Falls in a current of water | POWHATAN |
| 6. People of the small point | NARRAGANSETT |
| 7. Those living at the sunrise | ABENAKI |
| 8. People at murky land | CAYUGA |
| 9. Fox people or destroyers | PEQUOT |
| 10. The possessors of the flint | MOHAWK |
| 11. The shirt wearing people | TUSCARORA |
| 12. Separatist | SEMINOLE |
| 13. Wild rice men | MENOMINEE |
| 14. Place of stone | SENECA |
| 15. People on top of the hills | ONONDAGA |



Homeschool Learning Network

Native Americans Part 1 Worksheets

Name _____

Date _____

TRAIL OF TEARS

Directions: Use the information from The Cherokee Trail of Tears Timeline at <http://www.rosecity.net/tears/trail/timeline.html> to fill in the blanks below. Write the words or dates on the lines.

December, 1838 _____

_____ Cherokee adopted a constitution

_____ Cherokee build homes and begin to rebuild their tribe

April, 1838 _____

January, 1839 _____

_____ About 13,000 Cherokee people were jailed in military stockades

_____ First overland groups reach Fort Gibbs

July, 1839 _____

September, 1838 _____

_____ Chief Ross' wife dies near Little Rock, Arkansas

November, 1838 _____

On the lines below, write the above events in chronological order, starting with the earliest event.



Homeschool Learning Network Native Americans Part 1 Worksheets

Name _____

Date _____

TRIAL OF TEARS ANSWERSHEET

Part I. Suggested phrasings for answers; accept similar phrasings.

December, 1838	Trail of Tears begins for most Cherokees.
September, 1839	Cherokee adopted a constitution.
April, 1839	Cherokee build homes and begin to rebuild their tribe.
April, 1838	Congress tables memorials protesting the removal of the Cherokee.
January, 1839	First overland groups reach Fort Gibbs.
July, 1838	About 13,000 Cherokee people were jailed in military stockades.
July, 1839	Cherokee Act of Union joins together its western and eastern tribes.
September, 1838	Drought breaks as Cherokees leave from Oklahoma Territory
February, 1839	Chief Ross' wife dies near Little Rock, Arkansas.
November, 1838	Thirteen Cherokee groups cross Kentucky, Tennessee and Illinois.

Part II.

April, 1838	Congress tables memorials protesting the removal of the Cherokee.
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