General World Cultures

Chapter 5- Native Americans

**descendant**- a person born later in a family line

**long house**- a large wooden dwelling

**constitution**- the basic laws that set up the rules of government for a nation

**tipi**- a cone-shaped, portable dwelling made of poles and animal skins

**pueblo**- a dwelling with many rooms made of stone or clay

**igloo**- a dwelling made of sod, wood, rock, or domed ice

**treaty**- an agreement between nations or peoples

**reservation**- a piece of public land set aside by the government for use by a certain group of people; called a reserve in Canada

\* Native Americans migrated to North America from Siberia, a place in Asia. Today, Alaska is separated from Siberia by a strip of water called the Bering Strait. Long ago, during one of the Ice Ages, much of the world’s water was “locked” into glaciers. The water level of the oceans sank. The floor of the Bering Strait was above sea level. People could walk from Asia to North America.

\* No one quite knows when the first people came to North America over the Bering Strait. It might have been as long as 48,000 years ago or as recently as 20,000 years ago. These people were the first Americans. Their **descendants** are the Native Americans of today.

\* The first Americans were nomadic hunters. As wild animals thinned out in one area and there was a lot less food, they would move in search of more. By 9,000 B.C. these first Americans had spread all across North and South America. By that time, they had branched into thousands of different bands, clans, and tribes. In time, in Mexico and farther south, great Native American cities began to be built.

\* In 1492, the European explorer Christopher Columbus landed on an island near Florida. He thought he had arrived at the East Indies, so he called the people he met there “Indians.” Today, Native Americans are often still called American Indians. The name goes back to Columbus’s mistake.

**Traditional Native American Cultures**

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* There are many different Native American cultures. More than 2,000 languages
* were spoken in America when Columbus arrived. The native cultures were as
* varied as the ones in Europe. Each culture was shaped by its natural surroundings.
* Four of the many traditional American Indian cultures are the Iroquois, the Sioux,
* the Pueblo, and the Kwakiuti.
* \* The Iroquois lived in the forests of what is now the northeastern part of the United
* States. They built large wooden dwellings called **long houses**. In each long house lived an extended family.
* Test your recall. What is an extended family? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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* Iroquois men were hunters, and the women were farmers. The men often shaved their heads, leaving only a comb or spike of hair. Both men and women wore deerskin clothes and soft deerskin shoes. In New York, five large Iroquois tribes joined together to form a nation called the Iroquois League, which had a democratic system of government. Some of the ideas in the United States **Constitution** may have been borrowed from the Iroquois.
* \* The Sioux lived in the Central Plains. By the 1700s, they had become nomadic hunters who did no farming but followed the buffalo migrations. The Sioux lived in cone-shaped, portable dwellings called **tipis**, which were made of poles and buffalo skins. Both the men and the women grew their hair long. They wore colorful clothes decorated with feathers and quills. Most Sioux lived in small bands. Within a band, leaders could give only advice, not orders.
* \* The Pueblo also lived in what is now the southwestern part of the United States. They built stone or clay dwellings also called **pueblos**- which were like apartment buildings. The pueblos had many rooms, sometimes four or five stories high. However, a pueblo was not just a building. It was a community. In fact, to the people who lived in one, a pueblo was the world. Life was tightly organized, and only the group mattered. Other pueblos were like foreign countries. The pueblos were farmers, who grew corn and squash on irrigated lands. They were also skillful potters and weavers. The most important thing in their life was religion. Their priests were their rulers.
* \* The Kwakiuti lived along the Pacific Coast near what is now the border of the United States and Canada. They did not farm but built their lives around fishing. The Kwakiuti were fine woodworkers. They lived in large wooden houses. They carved canoes out of single logs (one canoe could be as much as 60 feet long). They also constructed huge wooden **totem poles**. A totem pole is a column of carved figures, both human and animal, that stands for events in a family’s history. We will now complete a Google search for totem poles. You will create your own afterwards.
* \* Although the Kwakhiti admired wealth, they did not care how much a person had but rather how much he or she gave away. Is money important to you? Explain.
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* Are material possessions important to you (phones, games, etc). Explain. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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* Is it important to give things to those less fortunate than you? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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* At a great feast is called a potlatch, the host would give wealth away. The more the host gave away, the more important the host became.
* \* The Iroquois, Sioux, Pueblo, and Kwakiuti are four traditional American Indian cultures. Each can also be considered one of the ten North American Indian “culture areas.”
* **Native People of the Arctic**
* \* The Inuit and Aleut are native people of the far north. They are not usually called “Indians,” but like the American Indians, their ancestors came from Asia. They came much later, however, and may even have arrived as recently as 3,000 years ago. They also came by boat rather than land. The Inuit have been called Eskimos by other people, but their own name for themselves has always been Inuit.
* \* In the far north is an area called the Arctic. This area is covered by snow most of the year. How might life be different for the Inuit compared to American Indians?
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* No crops can be grown here Human life is very difficult, yet Inuit and Aleut have lived in this environment for thousands of years.
* \* Traditional Inuit culture has been shaped by the harsh environment. In winter, for example, the Inuit live in **igloos**. These dwellings are built from sod, rocks, or domed ice. Because the entrances are below ground, igloos are warm inside- even in a blizzard.
* \* The Inuit are nomadic hunters by tradition. Some live inland. They move around on sleds pulled by teams of dogs. They hunt animals such as caribou, a type of reindeer. Why is it important for them to hunt an animal like the caribou rather tha a rabbit or squirrel? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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* Other Inuit live on the coast, as do most Aleut. Coastal Inuit travel in small, covered canoes called kayaks. They also build bigger boats called umiaks. In these boats, the Inuit hunt seals and whales. Why would a larger boat be necessary for this type of hunting? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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* \* In the 1950’s, white people began moving into the Arctic. They brought them such things as snowmobiles, television, and alcohol. White culture began to change Inuit way of life. How would your life be different without TV and technology? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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* The Canadian government has tried to make nomads settle down, ordering the Inuit children to go to school and learn English.
* \* The Canadian government decided that a large portion of the Northwest Territories should be given to the Inuit to govern themselves. The new territory, called Nunavut, was formed in 1999.
* **Native American Religions**
* \* While Native Americans have many differences, they also have some things in common. Most American Indians, for example, focus on nature. The American Indians believe that rocks and trees have spirits. They teach that people are connected to all other living things. Most of all, American Indian cultures hold a deep respect for the Earth.
* \* In general, American Indians believe that people cannot own land. They believe that people belong to the Earth and not vice versa. This idea, as you might guess, brought them into fierce conflict with the Europeans.
* **The European Impact on native American Life**
* \* In 1492, at least 8 million Native Americans lived in what is now Canada and the United States. Many diseases common in Europe did not exist among them. When the Europeans can into contact with Native Americans, the Native Americans’ bodies had no defense built up against the diseases. Many American Indians dies.
* \* The survivors ended up at war with the European settlers. These settlers killed many of the American Indians in the northeastern United States and drove most of the others west and north. In the 1830’s, U.S. President Andrew Jackson had the American Indians of the southeastern U.S. move to what was then called the Indian Territory and is now Oklahoma. The American Indians were forced to walk, and many dies on the long marches. Today Oklahoma has the largest American Indian population of all the United States.
* \* In the late 1800’s, the U.S. Army fought fierce battles with the Plains Indians. The Plains Indians won some battles, but the United States won the wars. The settlers pushed west. They built railroads across the continent, killing whole herds of buffalo along the way. By 1890, they had wiped out most of the buffalo. The native people of these plains depended on the buffalo to survive. They used every part of these animals. They ate the meat, made clothing and shelter out of the skins, and made tools and weapons out of the bones. Groups such as the Blackfoot saw their whole way of life destroyed. They and other groups began to starve.
* \* By 1900, only about 220,000 Native Americans remained in the United States. Perhaps half that many lived in Canada. Then, in 1910, the pattern began to change. The population of Native Americans began to rise again. Today, nearly 2,000,000 Native Americans, including Inuit and Aleut in Alaska, live in the United States. Over 500,000 live in Canada.
* **Reservations and Reserves**
* \* Throughout U.S. history, American Indians fought the U.S. government and lost. Each loss led to a **treaty**, and each treaty pushed the Indians off more of their lands. In the end, they were left with just a few areas to call their own. These areas are known as **reservations**. Canada has similar areas called reserves.
* \* There are about 300 reservations in the U.S. Almost all of them are west of the Mississippi River. The largest is the Navajo reservation, located mainly in New Mexico and Arizona. About 200,000 people live on this reservation.
* \* Reservations are run by a federal government agency called the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Yet Native Americans are supposedly free to live any way they wish on the reservations. They can speak their own languages, practice their own religions, and raise their children according to their own customs.
* \* A reservation belongs to an entire American Indian nation, not to individuals. A tribal council usually helps run schools, where children learn such subjects as math and science. They also study their group’s history and language.
* Which subject(s) do you feel are most important in school? Defend your answer.
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* \* Most of the land set aside as reservations in the United States is now barren. They are the lands the white settlers did not want. Often they have dry, rocky soil, and there is little or no way to make a living farming the land in these areas. Those who do live in reservations- about 400,000 Native Americans in the United States- have struggled to earn a living and to make a better life for themselves and their families.
* **Native American Life Off the Reservation**
* \* Native Americans who do not live on reservations may also find life difficult. Many cannot find jobs. In fact, the jobless rate for American Indians is seven times that of other ethnic groups. Also, the American Indians are surrounded by a culture that is not their own. This makes it difficult for them to follow their own customs and traditions.
* \* American Indians have been struggling for years with how to keep their culture alive. The struggle has led them to reach out to one another. In the early 1900s, some groups began to unite and form political organizations.
* *Read the Celebrations article on page 65 and answer the Critical Thinking.*
* \* The largest of these is the National Congress of American Indians, founded in 1944. It continues to work to change laws that have to do with American Indian treaty rights.
* \* The Native American Rights Fund is a legal group that tries to settle American Indian land claims in courts of law. One of many such cases was settled in Maine in 1980. It involved several nations such as the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot. These nations were paid millions of dollars for lands they had lost to white settlers.
* \* Another organization is the American Indian Movement (AIM). AIMS was founded in 1968 to promote American Indian culture. By organizing marches and demonstrations, it tries to draw attention to problems facing Native Americans.
* \* Gambling casinos have been a feature on many American Indian reservations since 1988, when a federal law allowed American Indian nations to open casinos. Some nations started other successful businesses. One Chippewa community in the upper Midwest gathers and sells wild rice. A Sioux community in the Central Plains runs a successful pencil company. Such successes have inspired other Native American groups to work toward building their own businesses in their region.
* *Complete Geography in Your Life Understanding Inset Maps on page 67*