

# **Native American Contributions**

## **Number 1**

Did you know that Native Americans have contributed many things to the American way of life today? Things that you use or do now, many Native Americans have been using and doing for many, many years.

Many times, the only thing people remember about Native Americans are the negative things-but they contribute many positive things and should be remembered for them. A lot of time, we only think about things we can readily identify as representing Native Americans, such as their fine art work. Yes-the people of the Southwest are known for their beautiful silver and turquoise jewelry. The people of the Northwest Coast are known for their fantastic woodcarvings. The Plains Indians are well known for their beautiful beadwork.

But other than art, the Native Americans have influenced many areas of American living. Some of these things were begun long before the arrival of the European settlers on North American land.

**DID YOU KNOW THAT ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF NATIVE AMERICAN LIFE IS ECOLOGY?** People of today have just begun to think about this. The Native Americans have always had a deep respect for the land. There was a love of every form of life. The Native Americans did not kill anything they could not use. They never killed an animal or a fish for the sport of it. Fishing and hunting were a way to survive. The Native Americans lived in harmony with nature and did not abuse the natural world. Native Americans were ecologists long before they were ever used. The Anishinaabe people do not have a word for "Conservation", because it is an assumed way of life, it did not have to have a special word.

**DID YOU KNOW THAT MANY OF THE FOODS WE EAT TODAY WERE FIRST GROWN BY NATIVE AMERICANS?** Native Americans learned to grow and use many different kinds of food that many people eat today, never considering that they first came from Native Americans: potatoes, beans, corn, peanuts, pumpkins, tomatoes, squash, peppers, nuts, melons, and sunflower seeds. They also helped the European settlers survive in the New World by sharing their farming methods with them.

**DID YOU KNOW THAT MANY OF THE GAMES YOU PLAY TODAY CAME FROM NATIVE AMERICANS?** Canoeing, snowshoeing, tobogganing, lacrosse, relay races, tug-of-wars, and ball games are just a few of the games early Native Americans played and still enjoy today. Many youth groups such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Campfire and YMCA Guides have programs based largely on Native American crafts and lore.

**DID YOU KNOW THAT THE IDEA FOR THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WAS ADOPTED FROM THE NATIVE AMERICANS?** Benjamin Franklin said that the idea of

the federal government, in which certain powers are given to a central government and all other powers are reserved for the states, was borrowed from the system of government used by the Iroquoian League of Nations.

**DID YOU KNOW THAT MANY WORDS WE USE EVERY DAY CAME FROM NATIVE AMERICANS?** Countless Native American words and inventions have become an everyday part of our language and use. Some of these include: barbecue, caribou, chipmunk, woodchuck, hammock, toboggan, skunk, mahogany, hurricane, and moccasin. Many towns, cities and rivers have names of Native American origin. Just a few of these include: Seattle, Spokane, Yakima, Pocatello, Chinook, Flathead Lake, Milwaukee, Ottawa, Miami, Wichita, and Kalispell.

**DID YOU KNOW THAT NATIVE AMERICANS DEVELOPED AND COMMUNICATED WITH SIGN LANGUAGE?** A system of hand signals was developed to facilitate trade and communicate between different tribal groups and later between Native Americans and trappers and traders. The same idea is used today for communicating with those who are deaf and unable to speak. The signs are different, but the idea is the same.

**DID YOU KNOW THAT MANY NATIVE AMERICANS SERVED DURING WORLD WAR I, WORLD WAR II AND OTHER CAMPAIGNS?** Even though many of them were not even citizens, more than 8,000 Native Americans volunteered and served during World War I. Well over 24,000 served during World War II. One of the most notable contributions during World War II was the service of the Navajo Code Talkers, a special group of volunteers who did top-secret work using a secret code in Navajo that could not be broken.

**DID YOU KNOW THAT INDIANS AS INDIVIDUALS HAVE EXCELLED IN MANY FIELDS?** Jim Thorpe (athlete), Billy Mills (athlete), Johnny Bench (athlete), Charles Curtis (vice president of U.S.), Maria Tallchief (ballerina), Johnny Cash (entertainer), Buffy St. Marie (musician) and Will Rogers (entertainer)... these are just a few. With some research, the list could be extended to include someone in every area and walk of life.

# Native American Contributions

## Number 2

Many Students, as well as adults, do not know of the contributions made by the American Indian. The contributions cover a wide spectrum of American culture. It is most important that children be made aware of such information not only to erase generalizations, but also to make them aware of the importance of the Native American in the historical and contemporary settling of American.

### FOODS

Corn  
Popcorn  
Wild rice  
Bean (14 varieties)  
Squash  
Pumpkins  
Cranberries  
Maple sugar and syrup  
Potatoes (white and sweet)  
Turkeys  
Clam bakes  
Pemmican  
Jerky  
Tomatoes  
Pineapples  
Avocado  
Tapioca (Manioc)  
Chocolate (Cacao)  
Peanuts  
Chewing gum  
Vanilla  
Wild rice

### PRODUCTS

Canoe  
Tobaggan  
Snow shoes  
Moccasins  
Tipi  
Kayak  
Fringed buckskin jacket  
Coonskin caps  
Mukluks  
Lacrosse  
Cradle boards (baby carriers)  
Tomahawk  
Tobacco  
Cigars  
Pipe smoking  
Cotton  
Rubber  
Quinine

60% of the present world's food supply comes from the American Indians' agriculture, primarily consisting of corn and the so-called "Irish" potatoes. Thousands of American Indian names dot our maps in states, cities, counties, lakes, mountains and rivers, and hundreds of Indian names are used as trade names for modern manufactured products, etc.

Indian art, designs and styles have strongly influenced modern design, architecture and music.

Modern youth groups such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Campfire Girls and the YMCA Indian Guides, all include programs based largely on Indian lore, arts and crafts, character building and outdoor campcraft and living.

Past American Indian civilizations (Inca, Mayan and Aztec) plus the Iroquois Confederacy have influenced our very form of democratic government, the Iroquois Confederacy being copied by Benjamin Franklin when he drafted our Federation of States. Truly, we may state our form of government is "American."

Besides the recognized contributions such as corn, squash, etc, the most important contribution is the Indian's value system. They placed emphasis and importance on:

Respect for Mother Earth (Ecology),  
Respect for Fellow Man ( No Prejudice),  
Respect for the Great Spirit (God), generosity, sharing (no material acquisitions),  
honest leadership selection, bravery, courage,  
respect for the aged, family tradition,  
no religious animosity,  
no major wars (no Indian nation destroyed another),  
also there were thousands of years of peace (before 1492);  
no tranquilizers, drugs, alcohol, ulcers,  
no poor, no rich,  
no insane asylums,  
no jails, prisons, lawyers, taxes, borders or boundaries,  
no germ warfare (smallpox infected blankets),  
and no complete annihilation weapons (Hydrogen bomb).

The Native American has influenced many areas of the American way of life, from art and music, to law and government. Some other areas are:

1. Indians served as guides in the early exploration of this hemisphere. Their Trails became the roads and railroads over which the settlers advanced in search of new homes.
2. The log cabin was an adaptation of the Indian log or longhouse.
3. Sites of Indian villages advantageously located on waterways and trails became trading posts, then villages. Later they became the modern cities of Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Pocatello, and countless others.
4. Fur traders visited Indian villages and held rendezvous. Their reports encouraged the land hungry and adventurous people to move farther and farther inland.

5. The Indians assisted the English, French, Spanish and peoples of other European countries in the struggle for control of the new country.
6. The Indian has been immortalized in song, painting, art and sculpture.
7. Symbols such as the totem pole, thunderbird, sun and tepees, as well as the Indian's love for color have had a prominent place in developing modern design.
8. Indian Knowledge of areas where fine clays, used in making pottery and china, has been passed to the white man and this was the beginning of the manufacturing of fine porcelain ware.
9. Indians cultivated and developed many plants that are very important in the world today. Some of them are white and sweet potatoes, corn, beans, tobacco, chocolate, peanuts, cotton, rubber and gum. Plants were also used for dyes, medicines, soap, clothes, shelters and baskets.
10. Many places in the United States have names of Indian origin. Approximately half of our states have Indian names.
11. Some Idaho names of Indian origin include: Pocatello, Tendoy, Bannock, Camas, Lemhi, Shoshone, Inkom, Kamiah, Potlatch, Nez Perce, Oneida and Minidoka.
12. Countless Indian words have become a part of the English language. Some sample words are: barbecue, cannibal, caribou, chipmunk, chocolate, cougar, hammock, hurricane, mahogany, moose, opossum, potato, skunk, squash, toboggan and woodchuck.
13. Games and recreational activities developed by Indians include: canoeing, tobogganing, snowshoeing, lacrosse, cat's cradle and bull roar.
14. Indians also have contributed a great deal to farming methods. The white settlers in colonial America might have starved if they had not copied Indian farming methods. At least one tribe, the Pima, had a well-developed irrigation system.
15. Benjamin Franklin said that our idea of the federal government, in which certain powers are conferred on a central government, and all other powers reserved to the states, was borrowed from the system of government of the Iroquoian League.
16. Indians were loyal in supporting the United States as shown by the high ratio of enlistment during the wars. Their work with the Signal Corps during World War II is an outstanding example.

17. Listed below are the names of our states which are of Indian derivation.

ALABAMA	From the Alibamu, the name of Muskogean tribe, meaning "those who clear land for agricultural purposes."
ARIZONA	From the Papago word, Airzonac, which probably means "small springs."
ARKANSAS	From Akansea, a tribe whose name means "downstream people."
CONNECTICUT	Meaning "river whose water is driven by tides or winds."
DAKOTA	(North and South) Tribal name of the Sioux meaning "Allies."
ILLINOIS	Meaning "Men," the name of a confederacy of Algonquian tribes.
IOWA	The name of a tribe meaning "Sleepy Ones."
KENTUCKY	Said to be derived from the word "Kenta," meaning "Field" or "Meadow."
MASSACHUSETTS	Name of an Algonquian tribe meaning "At or About the Great Hill."
MICHIGAN	From the Indian word "Michigamea, meaning "Great Water."
MINNESOTA	A Dakota word meaning "Whitish or Sky-tinted water."
MISSISSIPPI	Algonquian word "misi" meaning "Great," and "sipi," meaning "water."
MISSOURI	From the name of a tribe meaning "Great Muddy," which refers to the river.
NEBRASKA	From an Oto word meaning "Broad Water."
NEW MEXICO	Name of an Aztec god, "Meritili."

OHIO	Iroquois word meaning "Beautiful River."
OKLAHOMA	A Choctaw word meaning "Red People."
TENNESSEE	The name of Cherokee settlement, the meaning unknown.
TEXAS	The name of a group of tribes meaning "Friends," or "Allies."
UTAH	From the tribal name of the "Ute," meaning unknown.
WISCONSIN	The name of a group of tribes living on the Wisconsin River.