



National American Indian and Alaska Native

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network  
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A Teacher's Guide to

# CELEBRATING NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Celebrating Our Culture through Our People,  
Food, Language, and Traditions



# What is Native American Heritage Month?

Native American Heritage Month is celebrated every November to recognize the many sacrifices, contributions, and achievements of Native American people. The month is dedicated to honoring Indigenous peoples, culture, and learning and understanding the true history of Natives in America as well as celebrating their rich and vibrant cultures.

## Celebrating Our Culture through Our People, Food, Language, & Traditions

Find an example of a month long celebration broken down by each week below. We have provided an example activity and lesson for each week. On the following page, you will find additional ideas for activities and lessons you can do with your students throughout the month to celebrate.

### November 1-5

#### Passing Down Our Heritage!

- Invite community elders to come and share about culture and traditions.
- Ask students to discuss and write about their family traditions at home. Come together and have students share with the class.

### November 8-12

#### Celebrate Our Native Food!

- Have a food festival making and serving traditional foods.
- Ask students to discuss their favorite traditional foods to eat. Share the importance of 'food as medicine' with the students.

### November 15-19

#### Applaud Native American Authors!

- Have a 'book fair' celebrating the works of Native American authors.
- Ask students to share a family story about their traditions and culture.

### November 22-26

#### Native American Gaming!

- Talk about and demonstrate traditional games.
- Have several traditional games set up and give students the opportunity to rotate through and play them.

### November 29-30

#### Grand Entry Time!

- Celebrate the month with a Powwow event for all.
- Ask students to wear their regalia or mocs and invite their family to come celebrate through song and dance.

## Examples of additional activities:

**Visit a Native Museum** Native American museums are one of the best opportunities to experience and appreciate Native American history and culture. There are numerous AI/AN museums across the United States that have opened their doors to the general public to educate them about our history, beauty, artifacts, and art. Make a reservation for a free virtual field trip to the [Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian](#).

**Host a Native American Educational Event** A great way to start is by contacting a nearby reservation or Native Community and ask how you can collaborate or if they have any recommendations on expert presenters or tribal members willing and able to visit your school. If you have a budget, there are numerous AI/AN speakers, geologists, and even comedians.

**Host a Powwow** Even if you have only a few AI/AN students, this is a great way to get involved, celebrate, and honor the heritage of these students.

**Read a Book by a Native American Author** Visit [The First Nations Development Institute's NA Children's Reading List](#) for recommendations for different education levels.

**Watch Videos on Traditional Native Storytelling** View the National AI/AN ATTC Native American Storytelling: Culture is Prevention series [here](#).

**Make Respectful Native Crafts** Contact a local expert/community member or visit [TeachersFirst](#) for ideas.

**Have Students Write About Historic Native American Leaders** These leaders can be past or present, male or female. A few examples include Sitting Bull, Wilma Mankiller, Crazy Horse, Deb Haaland, Squanto, Jim Thorpe, and Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte.

**Learn About and Cook a Traditional Native Meal** Contact a local expert/community member or visit this [site](#) to learn more.

**Teach About Native American Boarding Schools** Watch a movie such as Education of Little Tree (K-6th grade), Indian Horse (7th-12th grade), or Unspoken (7th-12th grade). Visit [The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition](#) for additional information and resources.

**Teach the Accurate History of Native Americans** Help students understand that there were and are many different AI/AN tribes and cultures and their rich contributions to society. Visit [PBS](#), [TeachersFirst](#), or [The Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian](#) for resources, information, and lessons.

**Learn About and Play Traditional Games** A few examples include the Navajo Shoe Game, Ojibwa Butterfly Hide & Seek, Navajo String Game, Squaw Dice, Ojibwa Moccasin Game, Iroquois Snow Snake Game, and Apache Toe Toss Stick. Visit [The Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian](#) for a free virtual field trip.

**Celebrate with a Native American Veteran or Code Talker** Learn about their stories and contributions to World Wars I and II.

# Sample Activity

On the following two pages you will find eight sets of boxes. The boxes are equipped with a question and its respective answer. Cut out the boxes and fold along the dotted line and then glue/tape together to create a flashcard style product. We have provided you with eight cards; however, we encourage you to create additional ones.

Some examples of questions you might include are:

- What contributions did Indigenous peoples make in shaping the United States?
- What is a Land Acknowledgement and why is it important? Does your area have a Land Acknowledgement?
- Why do we have Indian Reservations?
- What is the Trail of Tears?
- What is the Battle of the Little Bighorn known for?
- What was the first Native American Boarding School? Where was it? Why was it created?
- Define colonization and assimilation.
- What is the Wounded Knee Massacre? How many Native Americans were killed?
- What is the Indian Civilization Act?



Question:

How many different Native Americans, tribes, and languages occupied North America prior to the 1500s?

Answer:

It is unknown for sure, but some estimate that there were around 60 million Native Americans prior to 1492<sup>1</sup>. There were estimated to be over 300 languages.<sup>2</sup>

Question:

Define the Indian Removal Act.

Answer:

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed into law the Act which allowed for the President to grant land west of the Mississippi in exchange for Native land in the existing state borders.<sup>3</sup>

Question:

When were Native Americans first considered US citizens? By what Act?

Answer:

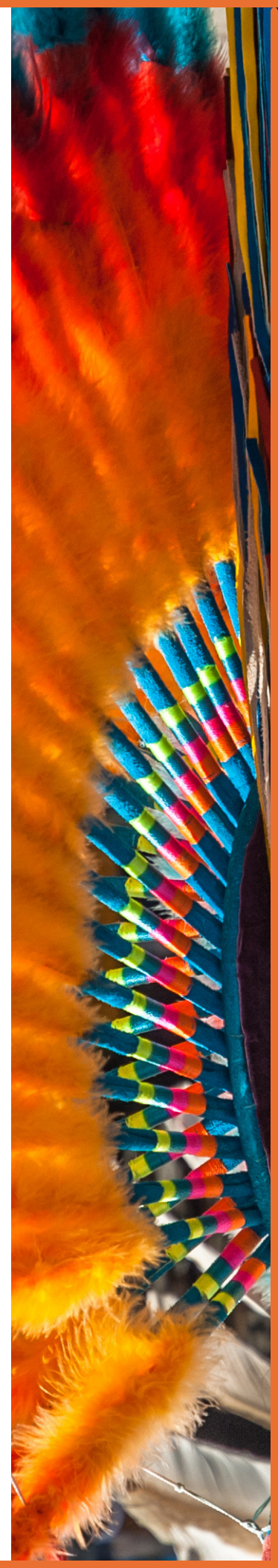
The Indian Citizenship Act was passed in 1924.<sup>4</sup>

Question:

How many states observe Native American Day instead of Christopher Columbus Day and why?

Answer:

In 2020, 17 states and D.C. observed Native American or Indigenous Peoples Day instead to recognize and teach the true history of America and celebrate the survival and resilience of Native peoples.<sup>5</sup>



Question:

Who was Sacagawea?  
What were her  
contributions?

Answer:

Sacagawea was a Shoshone woman who accompanied Lewis and Clark on their expedition to study land and geography and how it could be developed. She shared her knowledge and was an invaluable member of this expedition.

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Question:

Who were the first  
Native American United  
States senators?

Answer:

Robert Owen and Charles Curtis were both elected to the Senate in 1907.

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Question:

What is a Native code  
talker?

Answer:

Native code talkers were Native soldiers in WWI and WWII that spoke in their Native languages as code to communicate without the enemy being able to break the code.

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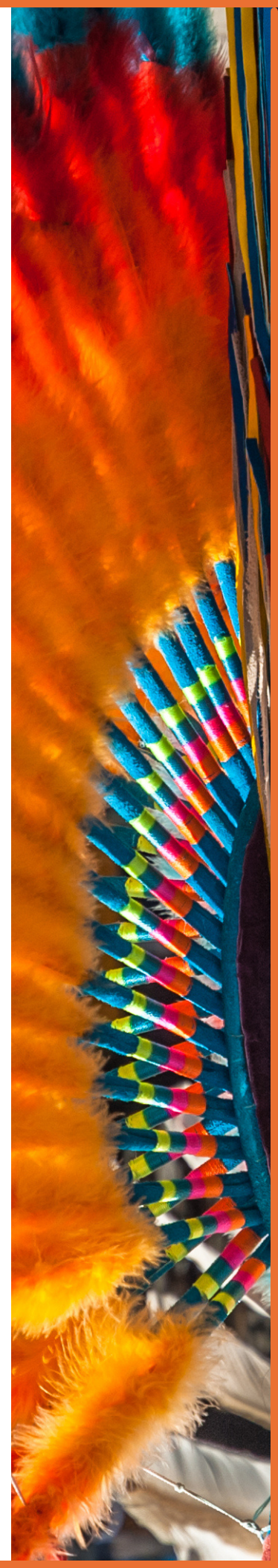
Question:

Who is Deb Haaland?

Answer:

In 2018, she was one of the first two Native American women elected to Congress. In 2021, she became the first Native American cabinet secretary.

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## Most Important Things to Remember:

1. You do not need to wait until Native American Heritage Month! You can incorporate Native American learning in many ways, every day.
2. If you are not an expert in Native American Culture, please reach out to someone who is! Otherwise, good intentions can be harmful. This is also a great way to get involved with your Native community and show respect.
3. The information provided throughout this guide are just examples. We encourage you to visit your local Native community or speak with a Native expert for additional information, ideas, or presentations.

## References:

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