Native American Heritage Month 2026

K-5 Activities



This packet includes...

- Game On, Nation On
- Helping the Earth
- Future Feature
- Native Names Across the U.S.

Native American Heritage Month honors the rich histories, cultures, and contributions of the hundreds of distinct Native nations across the United States. It is a time to learn about and celebrate the ongoing cultures of Native peoples today, not just their history. This month's activities invite students to learn more about how Native Americans continue to shape this country.



Reading List

The books listed below are all created by Native authors and show appreciation for the Native experience. Search for them in your local library or for read-alouds online!

Chooch Helped, by Andrea L. Rogers, is about a Cherokee girl whose brother makes lots of messes.

Berry Song, by Michaela Goade, is about a girl giving thanks to the land.

We Are Water Protectors, by Carole Lindstrom, is a story about a girl protecting clean water.

Bud Finds Her Gift, by Robin Wall Kimmerer, is about giving back to nature.

This Land, by Ashley Fairbanks, considers the Native people who lived on this land before us.

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Read the information below. Then, choose one of the two activities on the following pages to show what you learned about lacrosse and the Haudenosaunee Nationals.



Have you ever seen a lacrosse game? Players scoop up a ball with long sticks and dash down the field! Long before Europeans came to North America, Native nations invented this amazing game. One of the nations is the **Haudenosaunee** (ho-dee-no-SHO-nee), who called it "they bump hips." Far to the south, the Cherokee nation called the game "little war" because it helped young men practice being strong and brave.

So how do you play? Each team tries to score by getting a small ball into the other team's goal, using a long stick with a small net on the end called a crosse. Players aren't allowed to touch the ball with their hands; they have to scoop, carry, pass, and catch it with their stick instead! The field can be very long, and players run fast, dodge other players, and work together as a team, trying to score more goals than the other side.

But for the Haudenosaunee and other nations, the game was about more than winning. It was played to say thank you, to heal sick people, and to settle arguments peacefully. Some games had hundreds of players and lasted for days! Later, a French visitor thought the stick looked like a church staff called a crosse, so he named the game **lacrosse**.

Today, the Haudenosaunee Nationals are one of the best lacrosse teams in the world. Because they are their own nation, they proudly travel using their own special passports. Now, they have a huge goal. Lacrosse is coming to the 2028 Olympic Games! The team is working hard to play under their very own flag. Next time you see a lacrosse stick, remember — you are looking at a history-making game that started right here in North America!

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Choose Your Task: Tell the Story

Choose one of the two options below to share what you learned on the previous page about lacrosse and the Haudenosaunee Nationals. Templates for both choices can be found on the following pages.

Choice 1: Postcard from the Stands

Imagine you're watching a lacrosse game played by the Haudenosaunee Nationals. Write a postcard to someone back home telling them what you saw, and use what you learned in the reading to tell them something true about the game.

Your postcard should...

- Start with a friendly greeting (like "Dear Mom" or "Hi Sam")
- Say where you are and what you're watching
- Include at least one fact from the reading (for example, how the game is played, how old the game is, or why the game was first played)
- Include a small picture on the front

Choice 2: Comic Strip: Then to Now

Draw the story of lacrosse using all four boxes. Use what you learned in the reading to show the game's journey, from long ago to today.

Need ideas? Here are some scenes to choose from if you'd like, or you can come up with your own:

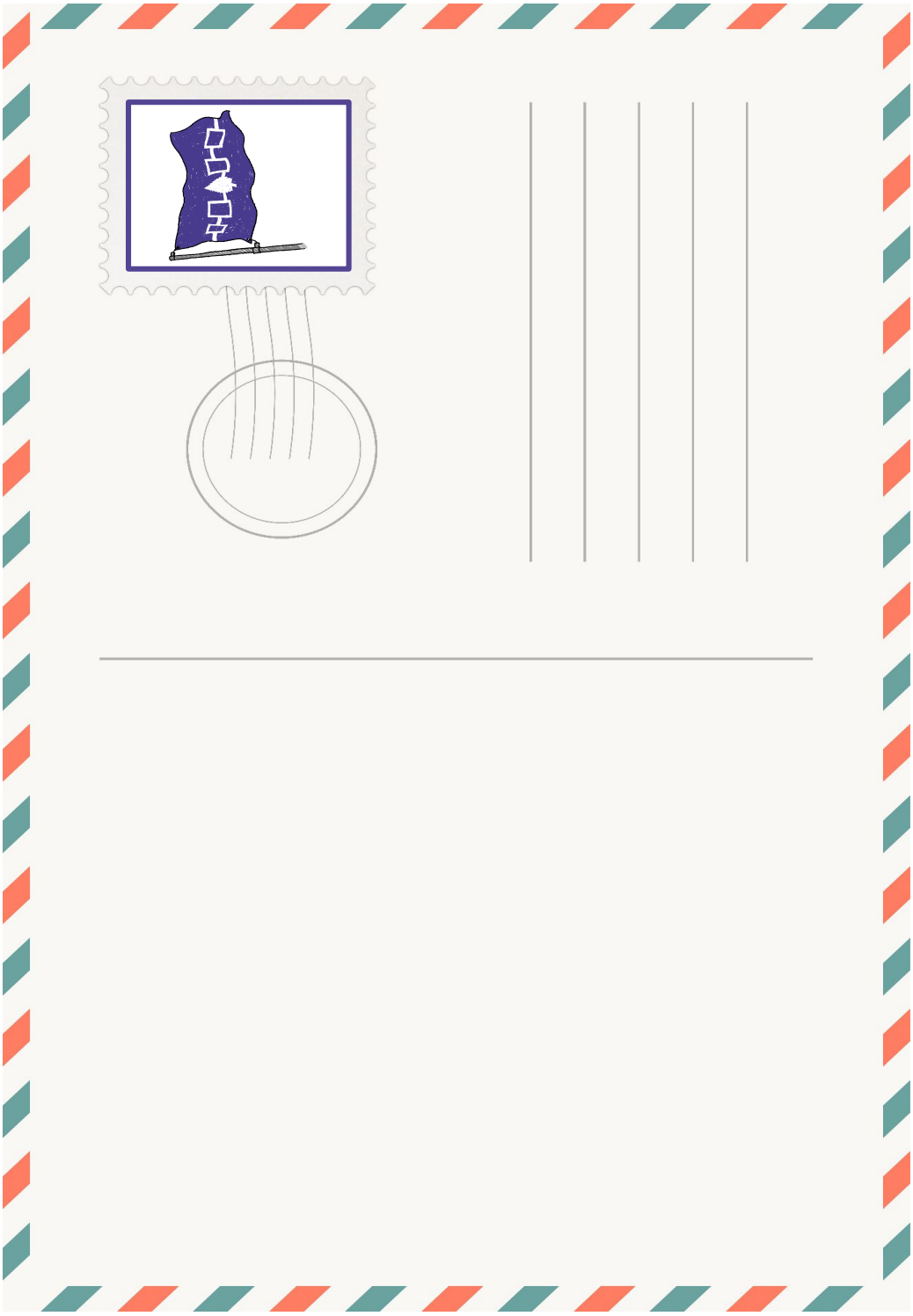
- A lacrosse stick and a ball
- A lot of players on one big field
- A player scooping up the ball and dashing down the field
- The Haudenosaunee Nationals playing today
- The team fighting for a spot in the 2028 Olympics

Your four boxes are up to you, but each one needs a short caption to help tell your story!

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Choice 1: Postcard from the Road

Imagine you're watching a lacrosse game played by the Haudenosaunee Nationals. Write a postcard to someone back home telling them what you saw, and use what you learned in the reading to tell them something true about the game.



*Artwork inspired by an official Haudenosaunee symbol, hand-drawn for this activity and not an official or licensed reproduction

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Choice 2: Comic Strip: Then to Now

Draw the story of lacrosse using all four boxes. Use what you learned in the reading to show the game's journey, from long ago to today.

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Many Native nations and tribes care for the land, water, and animals around them. Read about four nations below to see how each one helps. Then, on the next page, answer the question: How can you help your environment?



The **Cherokee Nation** takes care of over 67,000 acres of land! They plant native plants, help prevent wildfires, and even raise their own herd of bison. Everything they do follows an important Cherokee idea: taking care of the Earth not just for today, but for "the next seven generations." That means they're also taking care of people who haven't even been born yet!



A fish called the Apache trout only lives in the cold mountain streams of Arizona. It isn't found anywhere else in the whole world! By 1955, there were only a few Apache trout left. The **White Mountain Apache Tribe** stepped in to help scientists save the fish, years before the government called them endangered. They built special paths in streams to help the fish swim to new places safely. Today, the Apache trout is no longer considered an endangered species!



The **Ute Mountain Ute Tribe** works hard to take care of the animals on their land. They count deer and elk every year to make sure there are enough of them. Since counting animals in the wild can be tricky, the tribe uses clever low-cost ways to do it, like using cameras hidden in nature and flying small drones to help spot the animals! What they learn helps the tribe make good decisions to keep the animals safe for a long time.



In Odawa tradition, eagles are very special. That's why one Odawa community, the **Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians**, built a safe home for eagles called the Migizi Eagle Aviary. Eagles that are hurt and can't fly again get to live there safely, cared for by people who see them as important members of the community, not just birds.

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You just read about four nations helping their land, water, and animals. Now it's your turn!



Think about your local community. Which of these could you help? (Circle one.)

An animal **A plant** **The water** **The land**



How could you help? Draw or write your answer in the space below.

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What do you want to be when you grow up? **Read** about these four people to learn about different types of jobs and the difference they made. Then, on the next page, write and draw about the job you want to have when you grow up.



"Sean Sherman at the Tatanka Truck 2021-10-09" by August Schwerdfeger, CC BY 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sean_Sherman_at_the_Tatanka_Truck_2021-10-09.jpg

Sean Sherman is an Oglala Lakota Sioux chef who loves cooking with Native American foods. Growing up on the Pine Ridge Reservation, he learned to hunt and gather food from the land. He cooks with traditional ingredients like wild rice, corn, beans, and bison. Sherman opened a restaurant and a food truck that serve traditional Native foods. He also started a nonprofit group that helps make Native foods easier for people to learn about and enjoy.



"Michaela Goade 2022 Texas Book Festival" by Larry D. Moore, CC BY 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Michaela_Goade_2022_Texas_Book_Festival.jpg

Michaela Goade is a Tlingit and Haida illustrator who creates artwork for children's books. Goade uses bright colors and patterns inspired by Native art. She illustrated the book *We Are Water Protectors*, winning the Caldecott Medal, a top award for picture books. She also wrote and illustrated her own book, *Berry Song*. Goade has won many awards for her work, and her books help young readers see Native stories and culture reflected on the page.



"Sharice Davids" by Kristie Boyd; U.S. House Office of Photography, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sharice_Davids.jpg

Sharice Davids is a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation and represents Kansas in the United States House of Representatives. Before running for office, she trained and competed as a mixed martial arts fighter. She later went to law school and worked to help people in her community. In 2018, Davids became one of the first Native American women elected to Congress. She believes everyone deserves a voice in decisions that affect their lives.



"Herrington" by NASA, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Herrington.jpg

John Herrington is a member of the Chickasaw Nation and a former astronaut. He grew up loving airplanes and later became a pilot in the United States Navy. In 2002, Herrington became the first Native American to fly in space. During his mission, he carried the Chickasaw Nation flag with him and did a spacewalk to help build the International Space Station. Herrington believes exploring space can inspire kids to dream big, no matter where they come from.

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Draw a picture of yourself doing your dream job.
Think about the following questions:

- ❏ What are you wearing?
- ❏ What tools or objects are you using?
- ❏ Where are you working?

Now, **write** about it.

When I grow up, I want to be a _____.

I want this job because _____

_____

_____.

Someday, I hope to make a difference by _____

_____

_____

_____.

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There's a good chance that your town or state, or one near you, has a name with Native origins! That means they are named after a Native nation or mean something in a Native language. Some examples are on the map below, but there are many more all over the United States.

In this activity, you will learn more about these Native names. **Before you begin, color in the state that you live in!**



A town name with a Native American meaning

Why do so many towns and states have Native names?

Since Native people were the first to live in many places on this land, they were usually the first to name them! When European settlers arrived, they often used the same names the Native people came up with or named areas after the Native nations that lived there. Over the years, some names have changed spelling or how they're pronounced, but their origins remain rooted in different Native languages.

Learn more!

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Look at the map. Which town with a Native name is closest to you?

What do these names mean?

Some towns are named directly after a Native nation that used to live there or still does, like Cherokee, North Carolina, or Waco, Texas. Other places have names that mean something in a Native language. Usually, they describe the area in some way, like the examples below.

Town Name	State	Native Nation	Meaning
Punxsutawney (PUNK-suh-TAW-nee)	Pennsylvania	Lenape	This word is often translated to “town of sand flies” or “mosquito town.”
Tallahassee (TAL-uh-HASS-ee)	Florida	Muscogee	This word is often translated to “old town” or “old fields.”
South Lake Tahoe (TAH-hoh)	California	Washoe	“Tahoe” comes from a phrase that is often translated to “edge of the lake.”

Did you know that 27 out of 50 states have names with Native origins? With a trusted adult, look up which Native nations these names come from and what they mean.

1. The name **Texas** comes from the _____ Native nation. The word means _____.

2. The name **Massachusetts** comes from the _____ Native nation. The word means _____.

3. The name **Mississippi** comes from the _____ Native nation. The word means _____.

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