Native American Heritage Month 2026

9-12 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 texts on this list are written by Native authors, and they explore Native culture and identity in a variety of ways. Search for them at your local library!

Legendary Frybread Drive-In: Intertribal Stories, edited by Cynthia Leitich Smith, is a collection of stories about Native teens connecting over food and shared events.

Surviving the City (Volume 1), by Tasha Spillett, is a coming-of-age graphic novel about two Indigenous best friends and what happens when one goes missing.

Rain Is Not My Indian Name, by Cynthia Leitich Smith, is a novel about a Native teen navigating forcing new friendships after the passing of her best friend.

The Ghost Collector, by Allison Mills, is a story drawing on Cree beliefs about spirits as a girl helps her grandmother catch ghosts and guide them onward.

© Miaplaza, Inc. For MiaPrep, Miacademy, Always Icecream, and Clever Dragons All Rights Reserved

Read the information below. Then, complete the activity on the following page to show what you learned about lacrosse and the Haudenosaunee Nationals.



A field stretching for a mile. Hundreds of players sprinting across it simultaneously. No scoreboard, and no guarantee the match ends before nightfall, or the next day. This was lacrosse as it existed for centuries before a single European set foot on the continent.

Lacrosse is widely considered North America's oldest organized sport, with roots extending back at least 900 years. It was developed by several Indigenous nations, most notably the **Haudenosaunee** (ho-dee-no-SHO-nee), originally five united nations in the Northeast that expanded to six with the addition of the Tuscarora in 1722, as well as the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw nations in the Southeast.

The word "lacrosse" is not Indigenous in origin. It was coined in 1636 by French missionary Jean de Brébeuf, who thought the players' curved sticks resembled a bishop's ceremonial staff, or *la crosse*. The game already carried its own vocabulary: the Onondaga called it *dehuntshigwa'es*, "they bump hips," while the Cherokee called their version *da-nah-wah'uwsdi*, "little war," reflecting its role training young men in strength and courage. Beyond competition, it held spiritual and diplomatic weight, played to honor the Creator, promote healing, and resolve disputes between nations without armed conflict.

That history has direct bearing on the present. The Haudenosaunee Nationals compete internationally on Haudenosaunee passports, a reflection of their status as a sovereign nation, and World Lacrosse, the sport's own governing body, has recognized them as a full member nation since the 1980s.

The International Olympic Committee hasn't extended that same recognition. IOC rules generally require a National Olympic Committee to represent a UN-recognized independent country, a rule tightened in 1996. A few places that already had Olympic recognition before then, like Puerto Rico, kept competing under their own flag, but no new group outside that rule has been added since. The Haudenosaunee are asking for a one-time exception to this rule to compete under their own flag at the 2028 Los Angeles Games. The IOC has resisted, in part out of concern that granting one exception could open the door to other groups without UN recognition making similar requests, turning a single decision into a much larger precedent.

That leaves a genuinely open question, one without an obvious answer: When a sport's own governing body and the Olympic movement disagree about who counts as a nation, whose definition should decide who gets to play?

© Miaplaza, Inc. For MiaPrep, Miacademy, Always Icecream, and Clever Dragons All Rights Reserved

Read the information on the previous page about lacrosse and the Haudenosaunee Nationals. Then, complete the activity below to show what you learned.

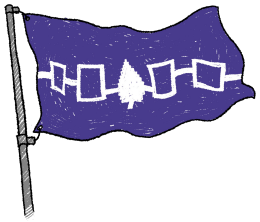
Choose Your Task: Break the News
Imagine you're a sports reporter covering the biggest debate in lacrosse: should the Haudenosaunee Nationals get to compete in the 2028 Olympics under their own flag? Choose how you want to share your report.

Your report must answer these three questions:

1. Who created lacrosse, and how old is the sport?
2. What is the big debate between the IOC rules and the Haudenosaunee Nationals?
3. What is your professional opinion on how the problem should be solved? Use at least one specific detail from the reading (like the Puerto Rico exception or World Lacrosse's recognition) to explain why you think so.

Pick one way to present it:

- Record it: Make a video or audio clip, about 60 seconds long, speaking clearly into the microphone.
- Write it: Write your report as a short news article, about eight to 10 sentences.
- Draw it: Turn your report into a comic strip or illustrated news page with three to four drawings that show your story in order, on your own paper. Add a caption under each drawing to explain what's happening.



In your report, you should...

- Use at least two facts from the reading
- Clearly answer all three questions above

Planning: **Use this space to help answer the three questions before you begin your report.**

1. Who created lacrosse, and how old is it?

2. What's the big debate?

3. My opinion, and the detail from the reading that backs it up:

© Miaplaza, Inc. For MiaPrep, Miacademy, Always Icecream, and Clever Dragons All Rights Reserved

Native American nations are making a difference by protecting wildlife and caring for the environment. In this activity, you'll explore how three different Native nations identified problems and found ways to help.

1. Below and on the next few pages, read about three Native nations and how they each helped solve a problem.
2. Review the takeaways and answer the reflection questions that follow.
3. Write a letter to one of the nations thanking them for their positive impact.

Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians

In Odawa tradition, eagles hold a sacred role: It's believed that when tobacco is offered in prayer, an eagle carries that prayer up to the Creator. Eagles aren't just admired from a distance; they're a living connection between people and something greater.



"DSC_7319" by Jim Sorbie is licensed under CC BY 2.0.
https://www.flickr.com/photos/78833582@N00/3069488563

Rebecca Lessard holding an eagle

That belief is the reason the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians built the Migizi Eagle Aviary and Rehabilitation Center in Michigan. Built through a more than 20-year partnership with wildlife rehabilitator Rebecca Lessard, it became the first tribal eagle aviary and raptor rehabilitation center east of the Mississippi River. The aviary gives a permanent home to eagles and other raptors that were injured or orphaned and can never be released back into the wild.

One Takeaway: The Odawa people cared deeply about protecting eagles, so they took action as a group to find a solution.

Reflect: What's something that means a lot to you, your family, or your community? What are some ways you could show that you care about it? Draw or write about it!

© Miaplaza, Inc. For MiaPrep, Miacademy, Always Icecream, and Clever Dragons All Rights Reserved

Ute Mountain Ute Tribe

The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe's biology program monitors big game animals, including mule deer, elk, pronghorn, and gray wolves across tribal land, but tracking wild animals accurately is difficult and expensive. Standard methods like aerial surveys and GPS collars are often unaffordable, which often means less frequent, less reliable data.

The tribe partnered with Wildlands Network to test a different approach: using low-cost tools like drones and hidden trail cameras to gather footage that would provide more accurate animal population data without the high price tag. The information they collect is used to set hunting regulations that keep animal populations healthy long-term.



Two red wolves caught on a Wildlands Network camera in 2015

One Takeaway: The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe had to be creative to solve their difficult tracking problem.

Reflect: Think of a time you solved a problem creatively. What was the problem, and how did you respond to it? Draw or write about it below.

© Miaplaza, Inc. For MiaPrep, Miacademy, Always Icecream, and Clever Dragons All Rights Reserved

White Mountain Apache Tribe

The Apache trout is a fish species that only exists in the cold streams of Arizona's White Mountains. By 1955, so few Apache trout remained that the species was in serious danger. The U.S. government didn't federally recognize the species as endangered until 1967, but the White Mountain Apache Tribe didn't wait for the government to intervene. They closed fishing on their own tribal waters to protect the remaining fish.

Once the crisis was recognized more widely, the tribe helped form the Apache Trout Recovery Team in 1975. Partnering with the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Forest Service, they worked for decades to replace old, broken stream barriers so nonnative fish couldn't invade Apache trout habitats, and they bred Apache trout in captivity to release them back into restored streams. After nearly 70 years of sustained effort, the Apache trout population recovered and was officially removed from the endangered species list in 2024.



"Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland traveled to Arizona, where she joined the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to announce the delisting of the Apache Trout from the Endangered Species list in September 2024 - 4," U.S. Department of the Interior, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Secretary_of_the_Interior_Deb_Haaland_traveled_to_Arizona,_where_she_joined_the_U.S._Fish_and_Wildlife_Service_to_announce_the_delisting_of_the_Apache_Trout_from_the_Endangered_Species_list_in_September_2024_-_4.jpg#/media/File:Secretary_of_the_Interior_Deb_Haaland_traveled_to_Arizona,_where_she_joined_the_U.S._Fish_and_Wildlife_Service_to_announce_the_delisting_of_the_Apache_Trout_from_the_Endangered_Species_list_in_September_2024_-_4.jpg

Politician Deb Haaland, the first Native American Secretary of the Interior, announces that Apache trout have been removed from the endangered species list.

One Takeaway: The White Mountain Apache Tribe noticed a problem early and did not wait to take action.

Reflect: Draw or write about a time when acting early to solve a problem made a positive difference.

© Miaplaza, Inc. For MiaPrep, Miacademy, Always Icecream, and Clever Dragons All Rights Reserved

Choose one of the following tribal-led conservation efforts:

- Blackfeet Bison Project
- Nez Perce Tribe Wolf Reintroduction
- Yurok Condor Restoration Program

Research your chosen topic, using the space below to take notes on what you learn. Then, write a newspaper-style article detailing that nation's role in solving an environmental problem.

The Problem: What was at risk, and why?
The Nation's Role: What did they specifically do? When?
The Outcome: What is the situation today?

© Miaplaza, Inc. For MiaPrep, Miacademy, Always Icecream, and Clever Dragons All Rights Reserved

Read about the four people featured in this section. As you read, think about…

- What field or career each person is known for
- How their background, culture, or identity shaped their path
- What kind of impact they've had

On the next page, you'll create your own profile, connecting your future impact to a real issue or cause you care about.



"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 is passionate about cooking with traditional ingredients. Growing up on the Pine Ridge Reservation, he learned to hunt and gather food from the land. Sherman opened a restaurant and food truck that serve Indigenous dishes and started a nonprofit organization that works to make Native foods more accessible. Sherman's work has inspired a larger movement to celebrate and preserve Native food traditions across the country.



"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 known for her vibrant artwork in children's books. She incorporates bold colors and patterns inspired by Native art into her illustrations. Goade illustrated *We Are Water Protectors*, which won the Caldecott Medal, one of the most prestigious awards in children's literature. She also wrote and illustrated her own book, *Berry Song*. Goade's work has helped bring greater visibility to Native stories and artists within children's publishing.



"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 professional mixed martial arts fighter. She later earned a law degree and worked as a lawyer on issues affecting Native American communities. In 2018, Davids became one of the first Native American women elected to Congress. Her election has encouraged greater Native American representation in government and politics.



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

John Herrington is a member of the Chickasaw Nation and a retired astronaut. He became a pilot in the United States Navy before joining NASA. In 2002, Herrington became the first Native American to fly in space, serving as a mission specialist aboard the space shuttle *Endeavour*. During the mission, he carried the Chickasaw Nation flag and performed three spacewalks. Herrington's achievements have inspired greater interest in STEM careers among Native American youth.

© Miaplaza, Inc. For MiaPrep, Miacademy, Always Icecream, and Clever Dragons All Rights Reserved

Using the profiles you read on the previous page, **create** your own profile about your future self and the impact you hope to have.

- ❏ **Identify** a real issue or cause you care about within your community or culture.
- ❏ **Research** the issue you chose. Learn about what's causing it, who it affects, and what's currently being done to address it.
- ❏ Imagine a future version of yourself working to address this issue. **Complete** the table, then choose one of the options below to present your profile.

Make a Connection The issue or cause you chose, and a brief summary of what you learned through your research	
Who You Are Your name and the career or job you imagine yourself doing that connects to the issue or cause you chose	
What You Do What your imagined work looks like day to day and how it connects to the issue above	
Your Impact The difference you hope to make in your community	

Now, choose one option to create your own profile about your future self:

- ❏ **Interview:** Write four to five short questions and answers as if someone were interviewing your future self, including one question about the issue you care about.
- ❏ **Video or Audio Segment:** Record yourself presenting your future profile, like a news segment or podcast.
- ❏ **Slide Deck:** Create a short slide presentation that includes information about your future accomplishments and the issue you're addressing.

© Miaplaza, Inc. For MiaPrep, Miacademy, Always Icecream, and Clever Dragons All Rights Reserved

There's a good chance that your town or state, or one near you, has a name with Native origins! 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 locations and what their names mean. Please get a trusted adult's permission to answer the questions that require online research.



A town name with Native American origins

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. Once Europeans began colonizing North America, they often learned these names from Native groups and took them, or in some cases, Europeans simply referred to the areas by the Native groups that lived there. Hundreds of these names stuck, and we still use versions of them today. Over time, many have changed spelling or pronunciation, but their origins remain rooted in Native languages.

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

© Miaplaza, Inc. For MiaPrep, Miacademy, Always Icecream, and Clever Dragons All Rights Reserved

What do these names mean?

Some towns are named directly after a Native nation that is or was located there, 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.

Choose three towns on the map, or pick ones of your own, to research. Fill in the table with what you learn. One example has been done for you.

Town Name	State	Native Nation	Meaning
Punxsutawney	Pennsylvania	Lenape	Often translated to “town of sand flies” or “mosquito town”

Did you know that 27 out of 50 states have names with Native origins? Research three examples and fill in the table.

State Name	Native Nation	Meaning

© Miaplaza, Inc. For MiaPrep, Miacademy, Always Icecream, and Clever Dragons All Rights Reserved