



## AMERICAS AND ITS PEOPLE (2-5)

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will be able to...

- Identify that humans have lived in the Americas for over ten thousand years and developed thousands of distinct cultures.
- Describe the diversity of Native American cultures and ways of life across different regions of North America before European contact.
- Recognize that Native American societies developed complex systems of agriculture, trade, and governance.
- Explain some initial impacts of European arrival on Native American populations and cultures, including disease and the Columbian Exchange.

**STANDARDS:**

- **2.SP1.2** Understand how events of the past affect students' lives and community.
- **2.SP3.4** Gather relevant information from one or two sources.
- **2.SP3.6** Present a summary of an argument or explanation using print, oral, or digital technology.
- **2.G4.1** Identify different physical and cultural regions in the world.
- **2.H1.2** Using primary and secondary sources, compare civilizations and/or cultures around the world and how they have changed over time in a place or region studied.
- **2.H1.3** Examine developments from the civilization and/or culture in place or region studied.
- **3.SP1.3** Generate questions about individuals and groups who have impacted history.
- **3.SP3.6** Construct arguments and explanations using reasoning, examples, and details from sources.
- **3.SP3.7** Present summaries of arguments and explanations using print, oral , and digital technologies.
- **3.C3.1** Describe the origins, functions, and structure of the Arizona Constitution, local governments, and tribal governments
- **4.SP1.2** Compare life in specific historical time periods to life today.
- **4.SP3.5** Construct and present arguments and explanations using reasoning, examples, and details with relevant information and data from multiple sources.
- **4.SP3.6** Present summaries of arguments and explanations using print, oral, and digital technologies.
- **4.C1.1** Analyze civic virtues and democratic principles or lack thereof within a variety of government structures, societies, and/or communities within the Americas.

- **4.E3.1** Compare different industries, occupations, and resources as well as different forms of income earned or received that have shaped the Americas.
- **4.G2.1** Compare the diverse ways people or groups of people have impacted, modified, or adapted to the environment of the Americas.
- **4.H1.1** Utilizing a variety of multi-genre primary and secondary sources, construct historical narratives about cultures, civilizations, and innovations in the Americas.
- **4.H3.1** Examine how economic, political, and religious ideas and institutions have influenced the development of individual rights, freedoms, and responsibilities in the Americas.
- **5.SP1.2** Explain how events of the past affect students' lives and society.
- **5.SP1.3** Generate questions about individuals and groups who have shaped significant historical changes and continuities.
- **5.SP3.6** Construct and present arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources.
- **5.SP3.7** Construct and present explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples and details with relevant information and data.
- **5.G3.1** Use key historical events with geographic tools to analyze the causes and effects of environmental and technological events on human settlements and migration.
- **5.H4.1** Use primary and secondary sources to describe how diverse groups (racial, ethnic, class, gender, regional, immigrant/migrant) shaped the United States' multicultural society within the historical timeframe.

#### CIVICS EXAM QUESTIONS:

- Who lived in America before the Europeans arrived? **A:** Native Americans or Indigenous Peoples

**TIMELINE:** After an introduction to world geography, as students begin to explore the history of North America. It provides essential context before learning about European exploration and colonization. This lesson plan is best used during the Design the Process phase of your SPB process. It's an excellent opportunity to review existing support structures within your school community and/or past SPB phases and rules, and how your steering committee can use or learn from these lessons. You can then discuss any changes or new adoptions your current SPB steering committee wants to make this year. As an option, students can create their own SPB flag or symbol for the current school year.

**APPROXIMATE LESSON LENGTH:** 60-75 minutes

#### SUPPORTING MATERIALS:

- [Geographic Regions of North America Map](#) highlighting different geographic regions (e.g., Southwest, Eastern Woodlands, Pacific Northwest, Plains)
- [Americas Gallery Walk Images](#) Images of Native American sites and artifacts (e.g., Cahokia, Mesa Verde Cliff Palace, khipu, totem poles)
- Simplified excerpts from "[1. Indigenous America | THE AMERICAN YAWP](#)" Sections I and II

- [Exploring Diverse Societies Chart](#)
- Video: [Iroquois Confederacy: The Birth of Democracy](#)
- Drawing materials (optional, for extension activities).

## VOCABULARY:

- **Indigenous:** People who are the original inhabitants of a land.
- **Culture:** The shared way of life of a group of people, including their language, beliefs, traditions, and art.
- **Diverse:** Showing a great deal of variety; very different. Native Americans spoke hundreds of languages and created thousands of distinct cultures.
- **Community:** A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. Native Americans built settled communities and followed seasonal migration patterns.
- **Agriculture:** The practice of farming, including growing crops like corn, beans, and squash, also known as the Three Sisters.
- **Trade Network:** A system of connected routes used for exchanging goods and resources.
- **Confederacy:** A league or alliance of people, like the Iroquois Confederacy.
- **Columbian Exchange:** The global exchange of people, animals, plants, and microbes that occurred after Europeans arrived in the Americas, bringing both new resources and devastating diseases.

## INSTRUCTIONS:

### 1. Engage

- Visual Exploration & Initial Observations: Begin by displaying a large *Geographic Regions of North America Map* (North and South). Ask students to think-pair-share: “When we talk about the history of ‘America’ (meaning North, Central, and South America), who do you think lived here first, long, long ago?”
- Activity: Image Discovery: Distribute various images (or set up stations with *Americas Gallery Walk Images*) showing different aspects of Native American life and civilizations across both North and South America before European contact. Examples could include: a depiction of Cahokia, Mesa Verde cliff dwellings, an illustration of Aztec Tenochtitlán, a photo of Machu Picchu or an illustration of Inca farming terraces, a totem pole from the Pacific Northwest, a drawing of Eastern Woodlands “Three Sisters” farming, or examples of khipu.
- Prompt for Observation: As students view each image, ask them to write down or discuss their observations:
  - “What do you notice in this picture?”
  - “What do you think these people did to get food?”
  - “What kind of homes or buildings did they create?”

- “What does this tell us about how they lived?”
- “Do these pictures show people living in the same ways, or differently?”
- Share Discoveries: Bring the class back together. Have students share their observations. Highlight the variety they noticed in housing, food sources, and community structures. “Did everyone live in the same kind of home? Did they all eat the same foods? What does this tell us about the ‘First Americans’?”
- Introduce Key Idea: Explain that for over ten thousand years, millions of people lived in the Americas (both North and South), developing thousands of distinct cultures and speaking hundreds of languages, far before Europeans arrived. Emphasize that there was no single “Native American culture” but incredible diversity across the hemisphere.

## 2. Explore

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- Activity: Exploring Diverse Societies
- Introduction to Diversity: Reiterate that Native American cultures were incredibly diverse, “as varied as the geography”, speaking hundreds of languages and creating thousands of distinct cultures. There was “no single American Indian culture or language.”
- Group Investigation: Divide students into small groups. Provide each group with materials (images, short descriptions/summaries from *Simplified excerpts from “1. Indigenous America | THE AMERICAN YAWP” Sections I and II*) focusing on Native American societies from different regions of the Americas before European contact. Each group will become “experts” on one or more of these regions/groups.
  - Eastern Woodlands (e.g., Lenape, Mississippian/Cahokia):
    - How they got food: Many engaged in permanent, intensive agriculture using hand tools, growing “Three Sisters” (corn, beans, squash), which provided necessary nutrition. They also managed forest resources by burning underbrush to create hunting grounds. Lenape women planted tobacco, sunflowers, and gourds, harvested fruits and nuts, and used medicinal plants. Men typically hunted and fished.
    - How they lived: Some lived in large, complex cities like Cahokia, which rivaled European cities in size and was centered on earthen mounds. Others, like the Lenapes, lived in smaller, dispersed communities, organized to take advantage of growing seasons and animal migration patterns.
    - Social/Political Organization: Cahokia was politically organized around hierarchical, clan-based chiefdoms, where leaders held both secular and sacred authority. Lenape communities were loosely bound by kinship networks, oral histories, and consensus-based political organization, with women wielding authority over households and agriculture.

- Southwest (Puebloan):
  - How they got food: They practiced sophisticated agricultural methods, and some even domesticated animals like turkeys.
  - How they lived: They constructed “highly defensible cliff dwellings” and massive residential structures from sandstone blocks and lumber, some housing hundreds of people, like Pueblo Bonito, which rose five stories and had six hundred rooms. They also built small dugout rooms called kivas for ceremonies.
  - Social/Political Organization: Their communities had extensive trading networks. Puebloan spirituality was deeply connected to the earth and the heavens, and they charted stars and designed homes aligned with the sun and moon.
- Pacific Northwest (e.g., Kwakwaka’wakw, Tlingits, Haidas):
  - How they got food: They depended heavily on salmon for survival, treating it with spiritual respect and ensuring its sustainability through practices like the First Salmon Ceremony. Men used nets, hooks, and tools, and used massive cedar canoes for ocean fishing.
  - How they lived: They built elaborate plank houses from abundant cedar trees, some over five hundred feet long. Food surpluses supported dense populations.
  - Social/Political Organization: Their unique social organization included elaborate feasts called potlatches, which lasted for days and were used to celebrate events and determine social status. Hosts demonstrated wealth and power by giving away food, artwork, and performances; the more given, the more prestige was gained.
- Mesoamerica (e.g., Aztec, Maya) and Andes (e.g., Inca) (if additional student groups are needed, these civilizations may be separated out):
  - How they got food: Mesoamericans relied on domesticated maize (corn), which was high in calories and easily stored, and sometimes harvested twice a year. The Aztecs in Tenochtitlán grew crops on artificial islands called chinampas. The Incas cut terraces into mountainsides for farming.
  - How they lived: They developed the hemisphere’s first settled populations. The Aztecs built awe-inspiring cities like Tenochtitlán on islands in Lake Texcoco, with 70,000 buildings housing hundreds of thousands of people, connected by causeways and canals, featuring massive pyramid temples. The Incas managed a vast mountain empire from their capital of Cuzco, with a thousand miles of roads tying together millions of people.
  - Social/Political Organization: These were “massive empires” and “complex civilizations”, with advanced mathematics, accurate calendars, and written languages (Maya), and recording systems like khipu (Inca).

- *Exploring Diverse Societies Chart*: As groups learn about their assigned societies, they will fill in a simple comparison chart or graphic organizer (e.g., “Region,” “Food Sources,” “Type of Settlement/Housing,” “Social Organization/Key Practices,” “Notable Technologies/Art”). This activity reinforces that “Native Americans spoke hundreds of languages and created thousands of distinct cultures.”

### 3. Explain

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- Share Discoveries: Have each group briefly share key findings about how their assigned group(s) organized and functioned, highlighting the distinct ways they lived and adapted to their environments.
- Teacher-led discussion:
  - Long History & Complex Societies: Reiterate that Native Americans had long histories, spoke hundreds of languages, and developed thousands of distinct cultures. They built settled communities, engaged in trade, cultivated art, and had spiritual values. They had complex governments and systems of rule.
  - Agriculture’s Impact: Discuss how agriculture (like corn in Mesoamerica) led to population growth and allowed some people to specialize in roles other than food production, like religious leaders or artists.
  - Kinship and Society: Explain that kinship ties were very important, binding communities together, and many cultures were matrilineal (identity through mothers), giving mothers significant influence at local levels.
  - Trade Networks: Highlight the extensive trade networks that connected communities across the continent, allowing goods and ideas to travel long distances.
  - European Arrival: Introduce the concept that Europeans called the Americas “the New World,” but it was already home to millions. Discuss how the arrival of Europeans brought centuries of violence and the “greatest biological terror the world had ever seen” due to diseases like smallpox. Mention the Columbian Exchange as a global exchange of people, animals, plants, and microbes, which transformed both the Old and New Worlds.

### 4. Elaborate

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- Connecting Past to Present:
  - Iroquois Confederacy Example: Briefly introduce the Iroquois Confederacy as an example of a complex Native American government, which was founded long before Europeans arrived and united five (later six) nations. Explain that it was based on peace and consensus, and its constitution held concepts familiar today. Mention that Benjamin Franklin referenced the Iroquois model. Sophisticated governmental structures existed among Native Americans and Indigenous tribes.
  - Watch *Iroquois Confederacy: The Birth of Democracy*

- Impact on the World: Discuss how Native American crops (like corn and potatoes), the way they lived, and Social/Political Organizations revolutionized the way we live today. How does this knowledge continue to inform solutions to contemporary issues?
- Activity: Have students draw a picture or write a short paragraph about one aspect of Native American life they found interesting before European contact, or one way Native American cultures have influenced the modern world.

## 5. Evaluate

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- Exit Ticket: Distribute an exit ticket or ask students orally the following questions:
  - Who lived in North America before Europeans arrived?
  - Name one way Native American cultures were diverse before Europeans arrived.
  - What is one important thing you learned about the first Americans today?

### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Research Project: Assign students to research a specific Native American tribe from Arizona (or another region) and present their findings on their culture, history, and current community life.

Art Project: Have students create artwork inspired by different Native American art forms discussed in class (e.g., a simple “wampum belt” design, or an animal drawing in the style of Pacific Northwest art).

**SPB Classroom Constitution/Norms:** Discuss with students how communities, like the Native American groups, had rules and ways of living together. Work as a class to create a “Classroom Compact” or “Our Classroom Norms” that reflects principles of respect, consensus, and working together, drawing parallels to the complex societies and governance of Native American peoples. This could include an amendment process.

### RESOURCES:

- National Museum of the American Indian, Native Knowledge 360, Smithsonian, <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360>
- The American Yawp: A Massively Collaborative Open U.S. History Textbook, Edited by Joseph L. Locke and Ben Wright, Stanford University Press, <https://www.americanyawp.com/index.html>
- Untold History, Iroquois Confederacy: The Birth of Democracy, Jul 22, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DviK0NdTlf0>