Historical Background

For many years, history books began America’s history with Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America, a land that was rumored to be sparsely populated. Illustrations like this, helped perpetuate the myth that America was void of any kind of history before Columbus’s arrival. Contrary to this myth, tens of millions of American Indians, living in many distinct communities, called this land home before Columbus arrived. Each of these indigenous groups had their own unique history and culture.

American Indian history is an important component to the history of America. The relationship between American Indians and the United States government has always been complex, and one full of conflicts, controversy, heartbreaks, successes, and failures. Whether examining the various conflicts between the two or looking at various treaties and policies, it is undeniably evident that the two histories are intertwined with each other, and one cannot be told without including the other.

Additional Links:

- Rivers, Edens, Empires: Lewis & Clark and the Revealing of America (exhibit)
- American Indians of the Pacific Northwest
- Omaha Indian Music
- Curtis (Edward S.) Collection
- Native Americans (contains links to exhibitions and presentations)
- Indian Land Cessions in the United States, 1784-1894
- Native Americans and the Vote
- Primary Source Analysis Tool
- Cartoon Analysis Guide

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS:

The Library of Congress Web site is a great place for students to find primary sources dealing with many aspects of American Indian history. This primary source set contains a collection of sources on several topics involving American Indians:

- p. 2 Material Culture
- p. 3 Notable Individuals
- p. 4 Conflicts, Battles & Wars
- p. 5-6 Diplomacy & Policy
- p. 7 Education & Assimilation

Within the source set are artifacts, photographs, cartoons, paintings, and documents that involve various American Indian groups throughout the United States. Each page of sources can be used to discuss the specific topic it represents, or you can assign each student in the class a different source from any one of the pages. Have students research the historical context of the source at the local library or on the Internet. Students should be able to answer the basic questions of, who, what, where, when, and why about their source. If the source is a drawing, painting, or cartoon, then does it contain any historical inaccuracies? If so, what are they? Why is the person or event represented in this way?
Material Culture

Buffalo effigy pipe (Sioux) [pre-1872]


Indian baskets [1900]

Hand-beaded cap which belonged to Chickasaw Chief George Colbert in the Tennessee Valley Museum of Art in Tuscumbia, Alabama [2010]

Winter Count, 1230-1907 [c. 1907]

Washakie war robe (Shoshone) [pre-1897]

Buffalo effigy pipe (Sioux) [pre-1872]
Notable Individuals

Pocahontas [c. 1900-1912]

John Ross, a Cherokee chief [1843]

Ascola, a Seminole leader / drawn, printed, & coloured at J.T. Brown’s lithographic establishment [c. 1842]

Hiawatha’s arrival [c. 1904]

Geronimo, whom Gen. Miles named the "Human Tiger" [1903]

Will Rogers

Death of Tecumseh: Battle of the Thames Oct. 18: 1813 [1846]
Conflicts, Battles & Wars

- **A bivouack in safety or Florida troops preventing a surprise** [c. 1840]
- **Battle of Tippecanoe** [c. 1889]
- **Incident in Cherry Valley - fate of Jane Wells** [c. 1856]
- **Consistency** [1891]
- **General Custer's death struggle. The battle of the Little Big Horn** [c. 1878]
- **Diagram of the Situation at the Battle of Wounded Knee at the time the Indians opened fire** [1891]
Diplomacy & Policy

The reason of the Indian outbreak General Miles declares that the Indians are starved into rebellion. [1890]

Group of Pueblo Indians photographed at the U.S. Capitol today. This is the first time since the Lincoln Administration that the Pueblo Indians have sent a delegation to Wash. They appeared before the Senate Lands Committee [1923]

Pueblos bring first protest since Lincoln [1923]

Historical caricature of the Cherokee nation [1886]


An Act to provide for an exchange of lands with the Indians residing in any of the states or territories, and for their removal west of the river Mississippi [1830] (2 pages)
Trading with the Indians. [1912]

[Speech of the] "Osages, Missouri, Otos, Panis, Kansas, Ayowais, & Sioux Nations to the president of the U.S. & to the Secretary of War, January [4], 1806"

Thomas Jefferson peace medal [1801]

Pipe tomahawk (Shoshone) [1800s]

Treaty between William Penn and the Indians
The Lord's Prayer in the Cherokee language [1940-60]

Se-Quo-Yah [1836]

The Indian tepee, Then and now. [1908]

Chiricahua Apaches four months after arriving at Carlisle [1886]

Col. Richard Henry Pratt on horseback, founder and superintendent of the Carlisle Indian School, Carlisle, Pa. [1901]

Indian School, Cherokee, N.C. [1909]
Teachers: Providing these primary source replicas without source clues may enhance the inquiry experience for students. This list of citations is supplied for reference purposes to you and your students. We have followed the Chicago Manual of Style format, one of the formats recommended by the Library of Congress, for each entry below, minus the access date. The access date for each of these entries is 2/19/19.


CITATIONS, cont.


“The reason of the Indian outbreak General Miles declares that the Indians are starved into rebellion.” Lithograph. December, 20, 1890. From Library of Congress: *Miscellaneous Items in High Demand*. [https://www.loc.gov/item/95522197/](https://www.loc.gov/item/95522197/).

National Photo Company, photographer. “Group of Pueblo Indians photographed at the U.S. Capitol today. This is the first time since the Lincoln Administration that the Pueblo Indians have sent a delegation to Wash. They appeared before the Senate Lands Committee.” Photograph. January 15, 1923. From Library of Congress: *National Photo Company Collection*. [https://www.loc.gov/item/2004669814/](https://www.loc.gov/item/2004669814/).


