

Exploring Our Past – Comparing the Lives of Native Americans

Program Overview and Objective:

For thousands of years, this land we call America was home to many native people whose respected nature, had their own culture and beliefs and who used natural resources to survive and thrive. This program gives students an overview of the Native American tribes in different regions of North America.

The activities listed in this guide are designed to increase students' knowledge and understanding of the culture and customs of the native people of this land, and the important impact they have made in our history and culture.

Whole Class Activity #1

Objective: Native North Americans all shared a deep respect for nature. This activity gets students out into a natural setting to explore and examine the world from the perspective of these first settlers. Students should be given the freedom to explore their surroundings and to make connections between their experience and the experience of Native Americans.

As a class, visit a local nature center or nature preserve. Ask students to bring a pencil and paper with them to record their observations. Ask students to explore this natural area and to write down their thoughts about the things they see, hear, smell, and feel. Ask students to imagine that they are transported back to a time when Native Americans lived on the land and write down how they imagine that life. Encourage students to write freely and to share their thoughts with the class.

Whole Class Activity #2

Objective: Men and women had very distinct roles in most Native American tribes. This activity allows students to organize the roles of men and women in different tribes and compare and contrast them with each other as well as with modern gender roles.

After watching the program encourage a class discussion about the roles of men and women in different Native American tribes. Ask students to organize information on a whiteboard or overhead projector, in different columns for different tribes. Students should also add a column to show how they perceive modern gender roles. Encourage an honest and active discussion about why men and women had such defined roles in Native American tribes, and how and why these roles might have changed over time.

Whole Class Activity #3

This teacher led activity encourages students to consider the overall impact of European settlement on Native Americans from every region of the country. Students should be encouraged to think about how differently each group was affected. This critical thinking discussion also encourages students to re-create the experience of European settlement and make educated guesses about things might have been different under different circumstances.

Assign roles to different groups of students. Some students should represent each region of Native Americans and one group of students should represent European settlers. Starting with the easternmost tribes, examine the effect of European settlers on each group of Native Americans. Encourage students to think about how things might have been different if there were more camaraderie between different tribes, better modes of communication and transportation, a written language, etc. Allow students to hypothesize how our country might be different today if Native American tribes had not been removed from their lands.

Independent Activity #1

Objective: When Native Americans first came to the land that is now The United States, they settled in areas where they could find resources to support life. This activity provides an anticipatory set for understanding the settlement patterns of Native Americans and their ability to adapt to different environments.

Before watching the program, ask students to create a physical map of the United States. Students should then determine where they would live, if they were just discovering North America. After watching the video, students should color in the areas where each group of Native Americans settled. Students should also write a description of each area and examine why it was a good place for Native Americans to settle. Students should compare their original impressions of better places to settle with the real settlement patterns of Native Americans.

Independent Activity #2

In many Native American tribes, customs and culture were carried down from generation to generation using storytelling. This activity allows students to reflect upon this custom and to write their own story symbolizing a custom or a piece of their own culture that they would like to pass down to the next generation.

After watching the video, ask students to think about the customs and culture of Native Americans. Encourage students to think about their own culture and customs and to write a fable to extend their culture to future generations. Students' fables should be illustrated using symbols from their own lives.

Independent Activity #3

Objective: Native Americans across North America were very spiritual. Most tribes created artwork inspired by this spirituality. This activity is designed to get students to extend their creativity. Instead of re-creating artwork from the program, students should use the examples of spirituality as a springboard for their own artistic creativity.

After watching the video, ask students to think about the different ways spirituality was manifested in different groups of Native Americans. Encourage students to choose one god or one aspect of spirituality to either emulate or inspire a piece of artwork. Students should then use their Native American inspiration to create a piece of art to share with the class. Students should not merely re-create a piece of artwork from the video, but be creative in using Native American spirituality as their inspiration for their art.

Independent Activity #4

While some Native American tribes were very peaceful, others were prepared to fight to defend their villages. This activity allows students to compare the different tribes and different regions and to draw some conclusions about why there are such differences in tribes from different regions.

Following the program, ask students to compare the level of preparedness each group of Native Americans had in terms of defending their tribe and land. Some tribes were very peaceful, some were prepared to fight, and some protected their villages with palisades. Ask students to come to some conclusions about why there were such differences in tribes based on their region. How effective was any of their preparedness against enemies?

Independent Activity #5

Native Americans no longer live in tipis or hogans; nor do most live on reservations. Native American people are teachers, mail carriers, executives, and athletes. This activity encourages students to acknowledge the important roles Native American people play in our modern world and to take an interest in the heritage of people in their community.

Ask students to become observers of their surroundings. Now that they have learned something about different groups of Native Americans, they might be able to observe Native Americans in their own community. Remind students that Native Americans today do not look like Native Americans from long ago. Ask students to look around their classroom, their neighborhood, and their community for Native American people, symbols, culture, etc. Encourage students to start a dialogue with people of Native American descent to find out about their heritage. Students should record any observations and/or conversations they have and share them with the class.

Small Group Activity #1

Objective: When Native Americans first settled in North America, different tribes settled in different areas and adapted to the climate and resources of those regions. This activity gives students a chance to compare the climates of these different regions, to consider how these groups of people made their homes in different climates, and to hypothesize about how different tribes would assimilate to different climates. Further, students are encouraged to think about the parallel between survival hundreds of years ago and today.

Have students break into small groups. Encourage students to discuss the different climate conditions in North America. How did climate affect the lives of Native Americans in different regions of North America? What do you think would happen if people from the different tribes switched places? Does climate affect how people live today? How does it affect people today to move from one climate to another?

Small Group Activity #2

Objective: Different Native American groups lived in different types of shelter. These different types of shelter served the purposes of the community in which they were created. This activity helps students make the logical connection between each tribe and the type of shelter and gives them a creative outlet for learning and retaining the important similarities and differences between Native American tribes.

Divide the class into small groups. Ask each group to discuss the various types of shelter each Native American tribe lived in. Students should then create a game (board game, riddle game, etc.) to help other students understand why different tribes used different types of shelter. Once each group has completed their game, groups should exchange games and play them. Following game time, discuss Native American shelters as a class.

Small Group Activity #3

Objective: Children played an important role in most Native American tribes. This activity gives students an opportunity to consider the roles of their Native American peers and to decide and defend the tribe they would most like to join.

Working in small groups, students should discuss the different roles of children in the different Native American tribes. Students should discuss which tribes expected the most of their children, which tribes best prepared their children for their roles as adults, and which tribes they would most like to be a part of. All students should share their thoughts in their small group. If there is time, small groups should come together to discuss as a class.