

AIH-17: American Indian Influences on the Constitution

Summary

Students will understand American Indian influences on the Articles of Confederation and Constitution.

Group Size

Individual

Background for Teachers

This is the first of three lessons in the Eleventh Grade American Indian History Lesson Plan Unit:

- AIH-17: American Indian Influences on the Constitution
- [AIH-18: US Policies that Relate to American Indians](#)
- [AIH-19: French and Indian War](#)

Student Prior Knowledge

Introduction:

People walked upon the face of the land known as the United States of America long before it was a country. Some archeologists estimate that the first inhabitants arrived 40,000 years ago, and others 13,000 years, before the present day. Many American children are taught about Christopher Columbus discovering America and the First Thanksgiving at Jamestown. Yet, this is not the correct history. As so the history now unfolds.

The Indians that inhabited the lands of the Americas learned of this great land by experience. They were eclectic biologists and scientists in their own right. They knew of the waters, the trees, and the various animals. They tilled the earth, grew food, and walked the paths through this great land. It was their homeland. They were the first people to inhabit this land. Their history is one of pride, sacredness, and knowledge of the land. Learning this history requires a look into their past, their trials, and the story of the days when others came to their land and began to change the face of their world forever. However, some of their traditional cultural values, ethics, and sacred beliefs exist to this day.

This unit is an attempt to help children understand the first people of this land and develop an even greater appreciation for their diversity, culture, and the generations whose hands helped forge this land and were pivotal in the building of this nation.

Some general information about American Indians:

Today there are many terms that describe the people who first inhabited this land. There is conflict about what to call these people. Part of the problem is that they are not one people, but many. Traditional names translated from their native languages generally mean "the People." Yet, they are called Native Americans, American Indians, First People, aboriginal and Indigenous People, and by a very general term "Indian." The word "Indian" is wrongly used, in its application as a term, which collectively designates tribal groups as "one people." Christopher Columbus' erroneous geography and impression that he had landed among the islands off Asia led him to call the peoples he met "los Indios." His casual use of the term "Indios" in his letters introduced the New World to European populations; thus, similar words in other European languages evolved, such as the French "Indien," the German "Indianer," the English "Indian." Subsequent usage of the term "Indian" for the New World's inhabitants evoked descriptive words as "savages," "infidels," and "heathens." However, Europeans had limited contact with groups of people with such diverse cultures and languages. Initial establishment of the imagery of the "Indian," like the word itself, came from the pens of

Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci. Such imagery and stereotypes have prevailed to the present through inaccurate written accounts and Hollywood movies. Each Indian tribe has its own language, which is different from those of other tribes; its own history and origins; its own customs (social and spiritual); its own traditional dances; its own styles of clothing; its own foods; its own values; its own culture; its own spiritual beliefs and practices; its own life styles; and its own tribal governments. Most tribes also have an extended family system.

Indian tribes are not one people, although many tribal philosophies and concepts are similar—e.g., nearly every tribe's beliefs have reference to a Supreme Being; refer to the earth as "Mother Earth" and sky as "Father Sky"; have a belief that all things in creation must have balance and harmony; and have respect for all animals, sea life, and birds, and for all things.

There were 560 federally recognized Indian tribes and bands, as of January 2000, in the forty-eight mainland United States of America. Alaska has the Aleuts, Eskimos, and Athapaskan tribal groups that number 229. But there are perhaps 300 more Native Entities in Alaska which, while eligible to receive services, are not federally recognized as tribes/nations.

Indian tribal groups also exist in Canada, Mexico, Central America, and South America. Tribes of the Caribbean were mostly destroyed by diseases that the Europeans brought, and the remaining Caribbean tribal peoples intermarried with the French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and black slaves.

There are 378 treaties which the U.S. government entered into with Indian tribes, the first being the treaty with the Delawares (September 17, 1778) and last the agreement with the Columbia and Colville (July 7, 1883).

There are 292 reservations, rancherias, and pueblos. These land areas are held in trust under the United States Department of Interior.

Today there are many new findings about the Indians. Science is linking peoples and their migrations as far away as Siberia. Someday these links to the past may open up explorations of where the native peoples really came from. Does the theory of the Bering Strait link peoples of two continents? Do the glaciers of Alaska hold secrets? What about connections with the people of South America? We are now in the process of interweaving cultures, people, and evidence that in the near future might establish these connections.

Instructional Procedures

Essential Question 1: How did American Indian tribes' forms of government influence the foundation of the United States' political system?

Lecture and discussion on materials provided. Students will list five evidences of American Indian influence on the Articles of Confederation and five on the U.S. Constitution.

Sources :

Excerpts from Jerry Mander's *In the Absence of the Sacred* Sierra Club Books, 1991.

Bruce E. Johansen *Forgotten Founders* Harvard Common Press, 1987.

Jack Weatherford *Indian Givers* Ballantine Books, 1988.

- *American Indian Contributions to the World: 15,000 Years of Inventions and Innovations* by [Kay Marie Porterfield](#), [Emory Dean Keoke](#) Checkmark Books, 2003. Especially Pg 281.
- [Q/A regarding Senate resolution](#)
- [Iroquois Constitution](#)
- [The White Roots Reach Out](#)
- [Tribal Treaty Rights](#) (pdf)

Bibliography

Utah State Office of Education
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